

**COMMERCIAL ELEMENT**

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## **Commercial**

The Commercial Element seeks to project a functional structure that can effectively accommodate the commercial needs of San Diego residents and visitors. In general terms this structure can be said to incorporate the following key components: continuation of the present decentralized pattern of commercial uses; continuing reliance on shopping centers as the favored form of retail commercial development; a changing, more specialized role for Centre City; and recognition of the increasing importance of commercial recreation to this area.

Commercial and residential areas are mutually supportive; and, to a somewhat lesser degree, so are commercial and industrial areas. The successful functioning of commercial areas is closely keyed to the City's transportation system and the latter, in turn, seeks to effectively serve the former.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Commercial Activity**

#### **General**

San Diego's commercial development prior to the 1940s consisted of the downtown, which was the regional retail and service center; assorted community business districts, such as North Park and La Jolla; and strip commercial developments along major streets. Streetcars and trolleys were the major factors in the development of this commercial pattern, but it was continued when autos and buses replaced trolleys.

After World War II, auto ownership increased enormously, there was a general movement to the suburbs, traffic and parking problems in the existing commercial areas increased, and retailers felt the need for new buildings that were not feasible in existing business districts. All these factors produced 30 years of shopping centers here and throughout the country.

Now, with rising property values, energy shortages, public and governmental concern about environmental issues, and efforts to build a more compact City, current trends all over the country are toward mixed-use complexes which make more efficient and intensive use of both land and the expensive parking facilities.

These newer shopping centers combine housing, shopping, offices, parking facilities, and cultural and recreational uses, usually centering on a pedestrian mall. Ideally they are integrated into a total urban design plan, in order to both contribute to and profit from the larger public environment. They are found both in suburbs and existing downtown areas, with emphasis on accessibility to public transit as well as autos. They typically use multi-story structures and stacked parking, rather than sprawling one-story buildings in a sea of asphalt, and thereby resolve some of the major problems and shortcomings of earlier shopping centers: excessive land use, dependence on auto travel, runoff pollution, visual impacts on their area, and enormous direct and indirect energy requirements.

## **Older Sections of the City**

Strip development normally characterizes the older commercial areas of the City. Because of development prior to current zoning regulations, market trends and urban development patterns, the problems associated with the older commercial strips are a combination of inadequate parking and traffic congestion.

Strip or thoroughfare commercial is a result of the tendency to regard all property fronting on major streets as business property: such business frontage is usually considered the most valuable type of land investment and high-traffic streets are usually considered inappropriate for lower land uses.

Commercial strips made some sense when there was less traffic moving more slowly; the passing motorist could be induced to stop, getting on and off the thoroughfare was not difficult, and driving to a specific address did not entail miles of congested traffic. Now traffic is heavier and moves more quickly, it divides and destroys the strip areas, and at the same time the commercial uses strangle traffic flow. This type of commercial development now is inefficient for everyone concerned. It means inconvenience for the shopper, poor business for the merchant, and poor investment on the average for the landowners. Massed shopping areas are always preferable.

There are a number of business activities that need main street locations for auto access. There are others who are forced to locate there because they are unwelcome or unsuccessful in shopping centers or central business districts. However, these uses extending indefinitely in low-density, unplanned and unregulated strips have undesirable effects on adjacent property and on urban form in general. A particularly undesirable location is across from and around planned shopping centers. They interfere with traffic flow to and from the center, detract from the visual aspect of the center, make use of the shopping center parking, and undermine surrounding property values and the success of the shopping center itself.

Existing business districts in older, built-up areas of San Diego could be upgraded and infilled, to better serve their neighborhoods and to accommodate increased demand arising from the City's growth management policies. Attractive appearance is a factor which draws buyers to a commercial area. Adequate and easily accessible parking facilities are also lacking in most older business districts. Upgrading could also make use of rerouting major traffic flows, landscaping, elimination of non-commercial uses, sign coordination and control, creation of malls and other pedestrian areas, design and provision of street furniture, and coordination with public transportation facilities.

## **Newly Developing Areas**

Most commercial establishments are reluctant to begin operations until there is an assured economic demand. The provision of commercial facilities then in new areas typically lags behind residential development. In some instances the failure to provide commercial facilities on a timely basis has resulted in piecemeal, unrelated development. In still other instances, only minimal facilities are ever provided since the land areas originally intended for

later commercial development have in the interim become diverted to other uses. An interesting contrast is where commercial development has been permitted on land zoned for industrial use. Industrial land is comparatively less expensive than commercial land and it becomes very attractive for commercial uses when, in addition, good freeway access is also available.

### **Centre City**

Prior to the development of the major shopping centers in Mission Valley, San Diego's downtown district was the major commercial area of the region. The same factors that led to the building of outlying shopping centers also are responsible for the decline of the downtown: the decentralization of the housing and population, dependence on automobiles, obsolescence of existing physical facilities in the central business district.

For some time the downtown area has been undergoing a transition from primarily retail to a role as the administrative, financial and more recently the cultural and entertainment center for San Diego. Current studies and plans for redevelopment and rehabilitation, with intense multi-use development, hold considerable promise for revitalization of the downtown area as both a retail center and a residential community.

### **Specialty Retail and Services**

For various reasons, a number of common commercial uses are apparently not favored as tenants by shopping center operators. These "non-shopping center uses" may include photography studios, furniture stores, bicycle shops, automobile parts stores, second hand merchandise stores, and plant nurseries. The locational problems of these establishments are increasingly evident in new areas where shopping centers are often the only kind of commercial facility provided.

Analysis of spending and employment projections indicate that of all the categories of commercial establishments, services will experience the most rapid increase in future popularity and growth. A problem stems from the reality that this trend is not now sufficiently taken account of in the existing commercial structure. That is, many shopping center operators seem almost exclusively intent upon securing retail tenants. Therefore, as services continue to proliferate, their locational problems will undoubtedly become more acute.

### **GOAL**

- TO DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF COMMERCIAL FACILITIES THAT EFFECTIVELY MEETS THE NEEDS OF SAN DIEGO RESIDENTS AND VISITORS AS WELL AS ASSURING THAT EACH NEW DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT IMPEDE THE ECONOMIC VITALITY OF OTHER EXISTING COMMERCIAL AREAS.

**COMMERCIAL STANDARDS**

	<b>Neighborhood Shopping Center</b>	<b>Community Shopping Center</b>	<b>Regional Shopping Center</b>	<b>Commercial Services</b>	<b>Specialized Commercial</b>	<b>Commercial Recreation</b>	<b>Heavy Commercial</b>
<b>Functions</b>	Provides a wide range of necessity goods and personal and repair services; limited business, financial, and professional services.	Provides convenience goods, shoppers' goods, and specialized retail goods; personal, professional, repair, business, and financial services.	Provides variety and depth of shoppers' goods; limited business, financial, and professional services.	Provides business, personal, professional, financial, and repair services.	Offers retail activities as discount and freestanding stores not typically found in shopping centers.	Provides visitor and locally oriented leisure activities, ranging from recreation facilities to tourist shopping areas.	Accommodates activities having characteristics between commercial and industrial users.
<b>Number of Establishments</b>	4 -15	15-50	More than 50	Varies	1 – 10	Varies	Varies
	Supermarket, drugstore, liquor, variety, bank, barber and beauty services, cleaners, Laundromat, real estate, auto service, limited medical and dental services.	Neighborhood center-type establishments, apparel, shoes, banks, professional offices, medical and dental services, auto-related services.	One to five department stores, apparel, shoes, furniture, jewelry, limited professional and business services, auto-related services.	Medical and dental, engineering, architecture, interior design, business and management consulting, accountants, banks, stock and security brokerages, real estate, employment services, repair services.	Automobile dealerships, bicycle shops, appliances, building supplies, discount stores, used merchandise, boutiques.	Hotels-motels, specialized visitor shopping areas, eating and drinking places, theaters, bowling alleys, amuse- centers, golf courses, stadiums, sports arenas.	Truck and bus sales, marine craft, other recreational vehicles, mobile home sales, farm equipment, lumber yards, nurseries.
<b>Distance Apart</b>	1 – 2 miles	3 miles	10 miles	2 – 5 miles	2 - 5 miles	Varies	Less than 10 miles
<b>Driving Time</b>	6 Minutes	8 Minutes	15 Minutes	Less than 15 minutes	Less than 15 minutes	Varies	Less than 20 minutes
<b>Population Served</b>	2,000 – 10,000	10,000 – 25,000	More than 100,000	10,000 – 50,000	10,000 – 50,000	Varies	More than 15,000
<b>Site Area<sup>2</sup></b>	1 – 10 acres	8 – 20 acres	More than 50 acres	1 – 15 acres	1 – 15 acres	Varies	2 – 10 acres
<b>Parking Requirements</b>	3:1	3:1	3:1	2-3:1	Varies	Varies	Varies
<b>Acres/1,000 persons</b>	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.5	1.0	0.3

1. In some instances discount stores in San Diego have evidenced a recent tendency to locate adjacent to, or within shopping centers and, therefore, do not always represent freestanding locations.
2. Site area may not always be the result of multiplying acres per 1,000 persons by population served. Factors capable of altering site areas include the accommodation of convenience centers within the neighborhood center standard, the rising cost of land in the case of regional centers, and the variety of types and the number of uses that may be included in the other categories.

## **GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS**

The standards given in the following table are applicable to new developments. They should not be used as a rigid rule but should be applied only as a guideline. Each development should be geared to the needs of the population to be served. The governmental agency approving commercial development should be concerned with:

- Does the development fit into the environmental structure of the community.
- Parking, where and how is it located.
- The amount and quality of landscaping.
- Do the facilities proposed really serve the community.
- Does the development intrude upon the market area of other commercial activities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Zoning - Comprehensive review of all commercial zones with the intent of simplifying and reducing the number of zones and overlapping requirements. Zones should never be created to serve particular areas of the City, but only amended when a desired particular circumstance does not fit into an existing given zone.
- Strip Commercial - prohibit the expansion of existing strip developments. Encourage consolidated off-street parking.
- Industrial Areas - prohibit the location of commercial uses in designated industrial park areas, with the exception of commercial services needed to serve the industrial park.
- Rehabilitation - encourage the renewal of older commercial centers and areas, recognizing that flexibility may be needed in the enforcement of existing regulations.
- Commercial Development Timing - encourage when feasible the simultaneous development of residential and commercial uses.
- Market Area - review all commercial development projects on a regional level. Review to include the economic impact the new development will have on other commercial activities.
- Landscaping - suggest drought resistant landscaping in all new commercial developments. Encourage landscaping programs in older commercial areas.