

Mixed-use Development

VALUE ADDED

Mixed-use development promotes pedestrian activity, transit feasibility, multi-generational communities, and long-term sustainability.

Mixed-Use - Horizontal or Vertical?

Uses can be mixed horizontally in adjacent buildings or vertically in the same building, so long as the uses are well integrated. An example of vertical mixed-use would be apartments occupying the upper floors of a building that has retail on the ground floor. An office building adjacent to restaurants and shops sharing a parking lot with interconnected entrances is an example of a horizontally integrated mixed-use project.

Characteristics of Good Mixed-use

Many uses are candidates, such as residential, office, retail, civic space, entertainment, and even government uses. However, there are several criteria that all good mixed-use developments meet:

- They locate in areas that provide adequate transportation access and utility services.
- They include a combination of functionally related uses in one place.
- They provide a significant proportion of each use within the “mix.”
- They provide convenient and safe pedestrian and bicycle connections both within the development and to places outside the development.
- The uses are compatible. For instance a commercial use that is very noisy, especially at night, or that may produce odor or smoke would not be a good neighbor for a residential use.
- Since mixed-use development should be pedestrian oriented, auto-intensive uses such as



Condos above a mix of service and commercial uses including a dentist and small gym are supported by pedestrian oriented environment with on-street parking, street trees, and a lower level parking deck.

drive-through restaurants or car dealerships are not good candidates for mixed-use development.

- Mixed-use development should be compatible and in scale with its neighbors. If some buildings in a mixed-use development are 6 stories tall, building heights need to step down to meet the height of the adjacent residential structures.
- The feasibility of the retail component of a mixed-use development may depend on the additional rooftops proposed within the development. Therefore, it is useful to allow large-scale mixed-use developments to be phased to allow the residential development first.

Popular Forms of Mixed-use Development

Traditional Neighborhood Development – Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) follows historical, mixed-use patterns prevalent prior to the dominance of the car. Blocks were short and lined with sidewalks and landscaped yards. Streets formed a grid punctuated by a square featuring a public

green surrounded by civic buildings. Local commercial needs were served by small buildings at a residential scale that were located on corners within walking distance of everyone in the neighborhood.

Transit Oriented Development – Transit Oriented Development (TOD) occurs within a certain distance of a transit station (generally ½ mile is considered within walking distance). These areas are increasingly being developed in a mixed-use fashion to create the densities that make transit the preferred way to go to work.

Live-Work – Live-work is a unique form of mixed-use development that provides people with the opportunity to reside and work in the same building. Live-work developments can be large or small scaled and generally include specific regulations based on the context within which they are permitted.

Ordinances Permitting Mixed-use Zoning

Mixed-use development can be introduced in zoning ordinances in several ways.

- *Mixed-Use Districts*: A zoning ordinance can include one or more forms of mixed use suited to different types of situations. Approval would be through a developer-requested rezoning.
- *Mixed-use by Right*: Mixed-use districts or overlay ordinances can be developed from a Sector Plan in a public process, then initiated by the local government in pre-determined places. The specific development details are worked out later in a property-by-property design review process as applications are filed.
- *Floating Zones*: Floating zones allow the property owner or developer to request mixed use at any location that meets a set of criteria that are established in the ordinance



Benefits of Mixed Use Development

From its inception in the early 1900s zoning has been based on the assumption that commercial and industrial uses caused traffic, pollution, noise and other nuisances so they should be separated from residential areas. While well-intentioned, we know that this practice has led to sterile and disconnected communities with worse traffic congestion, reduced civic engagement, and less housing choice. Allowing for mixed-use development can help communities provide for diverse housing needs, reduce dependence on the automobile, and enhance the sense of place. Mixed-use can facilitate the revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and downtown cores and also promote environmentally sustainable development in more rural areas of communities. Other benefits of mixed use include:

- Economic stimulus – Mixing residences and retail brings together buyers and sellers in the same project, resulting in more profitable real estate.
- Shared facilities – A mix of office, retail and entertainment uses can share parking spaces and utility systems.
- Internal trip capture – mixed use projects generate 5 to 25 percent less vehicle trips due to internal trips.

Mixed-use Issues and Concerns

(1) Financing – In some cases, developers may have a difficult time finding financing for mixed-use development. Mixed-use does not fit into pre-set financing formulas and are still an emerging product, which can raise the concern of financial institutions.

(2) Community Opposition – Mixed use developments often increase density, diversity of housing, or otherwise go against the development “norm” in a specified area, which may lead to opposition from community members who are not supportive of change.

Left: Mixed-use development in Midtown Atlanta allows for commercial uses on ground floor below offices.