

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: COMMUNITY CATALYST: REINVENTING
THE URBAN SHOPPING MALL

Elisabeth Helena Erenkötter Smith, Master of
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Thesis Directed By: Lecturer Daniel Curry, School of Architecture,
Planning and Preservation

Over the past decade, shopping malls across the United States have been on the decline, many left abandoned and deserted. However, some urban shopping complexes have not yet been uninhabited, due to their proximity to city centers and established community space. This thesis proposition aims to alter and improve the paradigm of the urban shopping mall by redeveloping the existing single use format. The community space will serve as the foundation for several different programmatic functions that will be inserted into an existing mall, thus serving as a uniting agent at the heart of the building.

These strategies will be applied to Stamford Town Center, a shopping mall located in the city of Stamford, Connecticut. This thesis will evaluate the opportunities for refining the existing mall and propose a more sustainable place-making solution, reinforcing this urban icon as a destination for culture and innovation.

COMMUNITY CATALYST: REINVENTING THE URBAN SHOPPING MALL

by

Elisabeth Helena Erlenkotter Smith

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Advisory Committee:

Lecturer Daniel Curry, Chair

Professor Brian Kelly, Committee Member

Professor Steven Hurtt, Committee Member

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the American mall mogul, the reality is clear: rethink what it means to be a mall, or die.¹

- Natasha Geiling Esri (2014)

The shopping mall is a place and destination that most Americans know, and is a place that is rooted in our culture. The mall provides a variety of appealing offers, as it serves as a convenient place for people to shop at many stores in one place and can serve as a meeting place for people to socialize and gather. However, over the past several years, the shopping mall has been in decline. Little to no new malls are being built, and more malls are shutting down every year due to declining sales and aging infrastructure. The mall typology as whole has not changed since its inception in the 1950's, and as a result it is not able to keep up with the ever-changing consumer trends, shopping habits, and shifting demographics. For mall owners, it is a critical time to consider the future of the shopping mall, and how these buildings can be updated to create a more sustainable business model. Finally, shopping malls in urban environments could benefit from connecting to surrounding resources, rather than remain an isolated entity in a larger environment.

¹ Geiling, Natasha Esri. "The Death And Rebirth of the American Mall." Smithsonian.com. November 25, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2017. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/death-and-rebirth-american-mall-180953444/>.

This thesis will first study the foundation and theory behind the creation of the first shopping malls in the U.S., while also studying the factors behind why the first malls began to fail. Then, this thesis will delve into examining shopping malls located in urban environments, including utilizing the Stamford Town Center mall as a case study for redesign. I will examine several different precedents and methods for adaptively reusing the Stamford Town Center mall, and propose several urban and design strategies to create a sustainable ecosystem of activity in the mall, while also connecting the mall to the surrounding context and reestablishing the mall as a destination in downtown Stamford.

Chapter 2: The American Shopping Mall

“Only if we have large demands can we expect large production. Therefore...ever-increasing consumption on the part of our people [is] ... one of the prime requisites for prosperity. Mass consumption is essential to the success of a system of mass production.”²

- Robert R. Nathan, Economist

Suburban Sprawl

The post-World War II suburb is thought to have had direct influence on the rise of suburban shopping centers, and subsequently the establishment of the first shopping malls. As World War II was winding down, many economists recognized that a period of mass consumption was necessary to make a successful transition from wartime to peacetime.³ This mass consumption theory relied on an increase in housing construction, and to provide jobs for returning veterans. As a result, a period of rapid suburbanization occurred in the United States. The post-World War II explosion in housing construction increased the number of Americans owning homes from 44% in 1940 to 62% in 1960, the largest jump in homeownership rates ever recorded.⁴ In turn, the expansion of housing created new transportation needs for

² Cohen, Elizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

³ Cohen, Elizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

⁴ Cohen, Elizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

homeowners as the suburban lifestyle was dependent on mobility. Thus, the boom in suburban construction saw an increase in the use of automobiles and the construction of highway systems, and an overall abandonment of public transportation.⁵

The increase in the American suburban population created an entirely new consumer-driven culture. While many Americans were encouraged to spend less during World War II, the new postwar order of mass consumption deemed enthusiastic spenders “good citizens”.⁶ The newly developed suburbs required commercial districts to oblige the spending habits of the growing population. The new suburban shopping centers also provided a shopping alternative to urban downtowns, which most suburbanites found inconvenient.⁷ In a way, these new centers became a new form of the community marketplace.

The first malls were built in strips along the new highways, designed to resemble the storefront layout of downtown commercial districts, but were easily accessible by car. The next phase of shopping centers sought to resolve and perfect the concept of downtowns, while still catering to the suburban population.⁸ Eventually, the shopping mall transformed into an inward oriented building that offered a climate controlled space for year-round shopping.

⁵ Bruegmann, Robert. *Sprawl: A Compact History*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

⁶ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

⁷ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

⁸ Bruegmann, Robert. *Sprawl: A Compact History*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

The first true “shopping mall” was the Southdale Shopping Mall, built in 1954 in Edina, Minnesota and designed by Victor Gruen. The design of the mall differed from previous shopping malls, as Gruen reevaluated the principles of the extroverted orientation, and chose to place the entire complex under one roof. The traditional storefronts facing outward towards streets and parking lots was replaced with an inward oriented plan, focusing on one central court, seen in figure 1.⁹ Ample parking was provided around the perimeter of the mall to make the space an automobile friendly destination. Figure 2 presents the footprint of the Southdale shopping mall. The interior court (1) lies at the center of the complex, with surface parking (2) surrounding the entire building.

Victor Gruen’s new vision for the shopping mall typology created a climate controlled setting for shopping and entertainment, with all activity focused on the interior of the mall. Furthermore, Gruen enhanced the efficiency of the building layout by creating a two-story building, connected by escalators in an effort to prevent the long walkways found in traditional shopping centers. The design of the Southdale mall revolutionized the way designers thought about the shopping experience, and ultimately changed the way shopping malls were designed going forward.

⁹ Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Terrazzo Jungle." *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2004. Accessed October 21, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/15/the-terrazzo-jungle?currentPage=all>.



Figure 1: The Garden Court in the Southdale Shopping Center (Source: Minnesota Historical Society)



Figure 2: Redrawn plan of the Southdale Shopping Mall (Source: Author)

Suburbs to Downtown

*“In recent years, people have become discouraged from using the ‘city core’ for cultural and civic gatherings.”*¹⁰

- Victor Gruen (1960)

While Victor Gruen focused his earlier career on creating a new suburban shopping experience, he later saw an opportunity to bring his shopping mall designs to the downtown. Overall, the goal was to re-create the hustle and bustle of the suburban shopping center, while also bringing the middle class back to the downtown.¹¹ Gruen argued that the inhabitants of the anti-city “are not exactly happy with their lot...they have sacrificed all those things which are summarized in the term “urban culture”.”¹² As a result, many of Gruen’s proposed strategies for revitalizing downtown districts drew from the success of the suburban shopping center, stating “the lessons learned and the experience gained in the planning of regional shopping centers will contribute immeasurably to the successful carrying out of this task.”¹³ In order to entice the targeted suburb population, it was necessary to provide ways to drive and park downtown. Freeways and large parking structures were instrumental in creating a new downtown solution, as seen in figure 3.

¹⁰ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

¹¹ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

¹² Gruen, Victor. *The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964.

¹³ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.



Figure 3: The Stamford Town Center parking garage. The garage spans the entire length of the city block, providing an ample amount of parking, and shielding the mall from the downtown “urban blight” (Source: Jason Rearick via The Stamford Advocate)

Gruen hoped to re-create the liveliness of a mall in the downtown setting, however, the solution was not as easy as simply transplanting a suburban shopping mall to the city center. Many developers and store owners wanted to ensure their new space excluded undesirable urban elements, including vagrants, prostitutes, and the poor.¹⁴ Careful consideration was put into the site selection of new shopping complexes, with the most important criteria being to identify prosperous areas to target the suburban middle-class clientele.

In the late 1950’s and 1960’s, many media outlets noted that malls were becoming central to the nation’s culture, and by the end of the 1960’s, regional

¹⁴ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

shopping centers became the distinctive public space of the post war landscape.¹⁵

Overall, people looked to the shopping mall, in both suburban and urban settings, as a new kind of community center.



Figure 4: Retail Trends Chronology (Source: Author, Lizabeth Cohen)

The Fall of the Shopping Mall

For the American mall mogul, the reality is clear: rethink what it means to be a mall, or die.

- Natasha Geiling Esri (2017)

¹⁵ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

By 1973, Americans of all ages spent more time in shopping centers than anywhere else, besides work, school and home.¹⁶ The success of the shopping mall typology continued until the 1990s. However, at the end of the 1990s, the vibrant culture once associated with malls started to drastically change.¹⁷ It was at this time that shopping malls started to show their age, as many had not been renovated since their initial construction. Additionally, consumer spending habits changed during this time, as many Americans, especially middle-class shoppers, pulled back on spending. The rundown buildings, and the economy, thus discouraged shoppers from going to malls, and turned the buildings into ghost towns.¹⁸ The changing climate in the late 1990's significantly contributed to the start of the downward spiral of the shopping mall.

Since 2010, more than two dozen enclosed shopping malls have been closed, and an additional 60 are on the brink, according to Green Street Advisors.¹⁹ This thesis considers a “dying” shopping mall as one that has a vacancy rate of 40%.

¹⁶ Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003.

¹⁷ Geiling, Natasha Esri. "The Death And Rebirth of the American Mall." Smithsonian.com. November 25, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2017. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/death-and-rebirth-american-mall-180953444/>.

¹⁸ Geiling, Natasha Esri. "The Death And Rebirth of the American Mall." Smithsonian.com. November 25, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2017. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/death-and-rebirth-american-mall-180953444/>.

¹⁹ Schwartz, Nelson D. "The Economics (and Nostalgia) of Dead Malls." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 03 Jan. 2015. Web. 22 Oct. 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/business/the-economics-and-nostalgia-of-dead-malls.html?_r=1

“Unhealthy” shopping malls are between 10 to 40% vacant, while “healthy” malls have a vacancy of 10% or less.²⁰

There are a number of other reasons that shopping malls- both urban and suburban- began to fail, one being the recent demographic shift in urban and suburban areas. Over the last decade, “new urbanism” and the migration back to city centers has changed the suburban culture and population altogether.

According to Ellen Dunham Jones, professor of architecture and urban design at Georgia Institute of Technology, many millennials grew up in the suburbs, but now desire to live a more urban lifestyle.²¹

²⁰ Schwartz, Nelson D. "The Economics (and Nostalgia) of Dead Malls." The New York Times. The New York Times, 03 Jan. 2015. Web. 22 Oct. 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/business/the-economics-and-nostalgia-of-dead-malls.html?_r=1

²¹ Inskip, Steve. "Here's What's Becoming Of America's Dead Shopping Malls." Npr.org. September 10, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347132924/heres-whats-becoming-of-americas-dead-shopping-malls>.

NUMBER OF SHOPPING MALLS IN U.S.

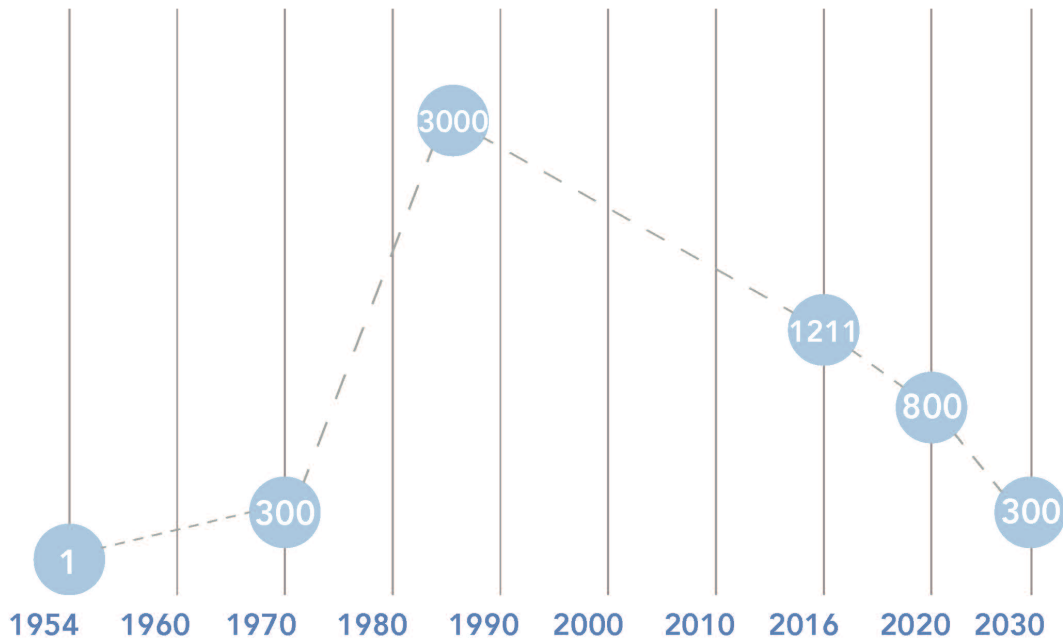


Figure 5: The Rise & Decline of Enclosed Shopping Malls in the United States

(Source: Author, Nelson Schwartz via The New York Times)

The eagerness to build so many shopping malls has led to a glut of stores throughout the nation. The “over-retailed” issue has made it hard for retailers to fill all of the available space, thus leaving a staggering quantity of vacant spaces in shopping malls. At 7,567 million square feet of gross leasable area, the United States has 40% more shopping space per capita than Canada, five times more space than the U.K., and 10 times more than Germany.²²

²² Thompson, Derek. "What in the World Is Causing the Retail Meltdown of 2017?" The Atlantic. April 10, 2017. Accessed October 23, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/04/retail-meltdown-of-2017/522384/>.

Finally, the rise in online shopping has significantly impacted the health of shopping malls. In fact, the aging and vacancy rates of shopping malls is driving consumers to turn to online shopping even more. A report by Credit Suisse finds that as malls close, online sales will grow from 17% of retail sales today to 35% by 2030.²³ A 2016 survey of 5,000 online shoppers found, for the first time, that consumers bought more stuff online than they did in stores.²⁴

The Importance of Mall Culture

“As a result, what happens to the mall may ultimately define what happens to the community.”²⁵

-Urban Land Institute (2006)

Just as Victor Gruen was the pioneer in designing the first shopping mall, his vision was also important in changing the way customers interacted with retail stores. Gruen envisioned a destination where the shopping environment could entertain customers better than any other exhibition. In many of his designs, Gruen used visual surprises to entertain consumers. The theory behind the new entertainment experience

²³ Isidore, Chris. "Malls Are Doomed: 25% Will Be Gone in 5 Years." CNNMoney. Accessed October 29, 2017.

<http://money.cnn.com/2017/06/02/news/economy/doomed-malls/index.html>.

²⁴ Stevens, Laura. "Survey Shows Rapid Growth in Online Shopping." The Wall Street Journal. June 08, 2016. Accessed November 01, 2017.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/survey-shows-rapid-growth-in-online-shopping-1465358582>.

²⁵ Beyard, Michael D., Mary Beth Corrigan, Anita Kramer, Michael Pawlukiewicz, and Alexa Bach. "Ten Principles for Rethinking the Mall." Urban Land Institute. 2006. Accessed November 2, 2017. https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Tp_MAll.ashx_.pdf.

was that the more people enjoyed their time in the commercial experience, the more money would be spent.²⁶ Therefore, Gruen not only designed the shopping mall for retail stores, but also created a “town square” in the center of the mall.²⁷ The town square served as a gathering space for mall-goers, and the first mall at Southdale included a garden court with a fishpond and large sculpted trees.

Originally, Victor Gruen planned for the Southdale Mall to be an important piece of a larger masterplan for Minneapolis. His original design placed the shopping center at the heart of a development including houses, apartment buildings, schools, a medical center, and a park.²⁸ However, Gruen’s larger plan was never realized, and the mall complex & parking lot were the only elements of his design that were built.

Gruen’s original concepts for creating shopping malls can be harnessed and applied to creating a solution to reinvent the mall typology. There are several fundamental elements of a shopping mall that can be repurposed. For example, many shopping malls, including Stamford Town Center, include a central “court” or gathering space. This centralized space was essential to create a town square within the retail spaces, and served as a destination within the mall. The public amenity space provided by the central court could be useful as a supplement to office space or community space.

²⁶ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

²⁷ Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Terrazzo Jungle." *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2004. Accessed October 21, 2017.

²⁸ Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Terrazzo Jungle." *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2004. Accessed October 21, 2017.

Next, urban shopping malls could benefit from their proximity to the amenities and services of a city. Cities not only provide a wide potential customer base for malls, but also provide the opportunity for malls to become a part of a network of public buildings for the community. Harnessing these opportunities for improvement and innovation can create a more meaningful place to fit the needs of the community, and serve the demands of the competitive retail market.

Chapter 3: Stamford Downtown Redevelopment

Around the mid-1950's, Victor Gruen set out to solve many of the issues that downtown cities faced. Many American downtowns, including Stamford, CT, faced significant developmental problems that made the areas undesirable. Since the 1920's, there had been little construction occurring in cities, and the existing buildings, especially apartments and housing had received little attention.²⁹

As a result of the downtown blight, planners and politicians across the U.S. started to focus on remaking and revitalizing downtowns. Planners and city officials pushed for more downtown planning, an effort that Gruen believed would be a way to “stimulate civic pride”.³⁰ It was at this point that Victor Gruen remade himself into an urban planner, and Stamford began to reinvent its downtown district.

F.D. Rich Company

In 1960, F.D. Rich Company was selected to head downtown Stamford's 130 acre redevelopment.³¹ Downtown Stamford, like many other cities, suffered from a lack of upkeep and development for several decades, especially after the end of World War II. F.D. Rich Company in turn partnered with Victor Gruen & Associates in order to create a masterplan for Stamford's redevelopment. At this point in time,

²⁹ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

³⁰ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

³¹ "Urban Renewal." F.D. Rich Company. Accessed October 22, 2017. <http://fdrich.com/urban-renewal/>.

Victor Gruen was adept at creating large scale urban renewal plans, having worked on several redevelopments including one in Fort Worth, Texas.³²



Figure 6: Map of Stamford's Urban Renewal Area, created by the City of Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission (Source: Stamford Historical Society)

³² Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Rich was chosen from among nine applicants because the others were only general contractors without expertise in city planning. While the partnership was eventually dissolved, the city approved the plans in 1963 and awarded Rich got the construction contract.³³

The deal made between the City of Stamford and the F. D. Company was a unique agreement. The risk of creating a successful development project was placed squarely on Rich, sparing Stamford from additional expense. On the other hand, the agreement also gave Rich a virtually free hand in redesigning the city's downtown."³⁴ Consequently, the company was able to apply its vision for the downtown with little opposition from outside parties, including the community.

Creating a New Downtown

After F.D. Rich Company was selected as the designated redeveloper, the company worked with the Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission to identify the new vision for downtown Stamford. One of their main goals was to make the downtown more business friendly. Edith Sherman, chairman of the Urban Redevelopment Commission from 1974 to 1984, described the downtown's initial bleak state, stating "In the 70's, downtown Stamford was a slum," she said. "There

³³ Charles, Eleanor. "Stamford Acts to Humanize Downtown Renewal." *The New York Times*, December 14, 1986. Accessed November 11, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/14/realestate/stamford-acts-to-humanize-downtown-renewal.html>.

³⁴ Atwan, Robert, Mike Barlow, Kenneth H. Brief, William F. Buckley, Ernest A. DiMattia, Barry Hoffman, William Hubbell, Renee Kahn, and Don Russell. *Stamford: 350 Years, 1641-1991*. Stamford, CT: Advocate and the Ferguson Library, 1991.

was no reason for companies to come here.”³⁵ The development team concluded that creating a network of streets and parking was essential to creating an ideal destination for businesses. Robert Rich, co-owner of F.D. Rich noted “the corporations demand parking galore. If they are going to move from New York, they want a suburban, campus-like setting. And if they are coming to downtown Stamford, they want access by automobile and only automobile.”³⁶ The result was a network of new office buildings, hotels, condominiums and a shopping mall.

With an increase in the number of workers commuting and moving to downtown Stamford, planners saw new opportunities to enhance the entertainment and retail options in the downtown. A big-city office building boom would enhanced the potential for attracting downtown workers into shops.³⁷ Therefore, the shopping mall, later named Stamford Town Center, would serves as a retail destination in the city. Additionally, developers believed that the mall could serve residents outside of the city center. The model of the traditional suburban shopping mall design was moved into the urban city, and as a result, downtown interests found a promising new formula for bringing white suburbanites back [into the downtown].³⁸ Ultimately,

³⁵ Charles, Eleanor. "Stamford Acts to Humanize Downtown Renewal." *The New York Times*, December 14, 1986. Accessed November 11, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/14/realestate/stamford-acts-to-humanize-downtown-renewal.html>.

³⁶ Lueck, Thomas J. "F.D. Rich At Center of Downtown Boom." *The New York Times*. March 10, 1985. Accessed November 19, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/11/nyregion/fd-rich-at-center-of-downtown-boom.html>.

³⁷ Isenberg, Alison. *Downtown America: a History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

³⁸ Isenberg, Alison. *Downtown America: a History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Stamford Town Center opened in 1982, and has functioned as a successful shopping mall since.



Figure 7: Stamford Town Center site prior to construction (Source: The Stamford Historical Society)

The original redevelopment masterplan sought to bring jobs and companies back to downtown Stamford, while also establishing an urban mall to encourage retail growth. Ultimately, the masterplan became a jumping point for much of the future development and improvements in Stamford through today. Since the early 1970s, the

downtown has seen the construction of more than 8 million square feet of office space, 1.5 million square feet of retail space, 2,500 units of housing, several dozen restaurants, a branch of the University of Connecticut and many arts and entertainment venues.³⁹

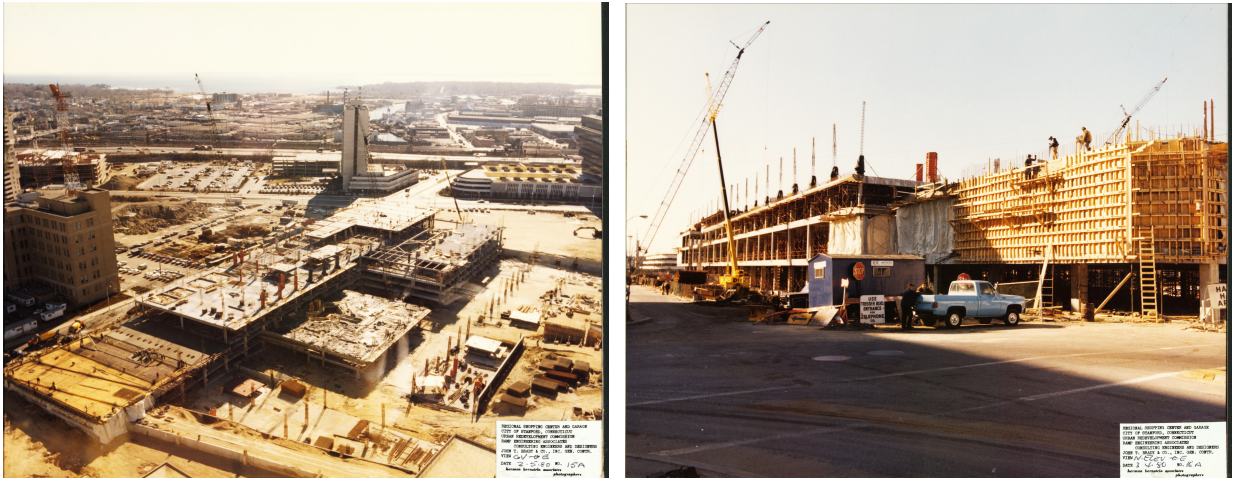


Figure 8: Stamford Town Center under construction. The large parking garage and Macy’s anchor store (right) occupied an expansive portion of the city block. (Source: The Stamford Historical Society)

Stamford Today

Today, Stamford has grown to become the third largest city in Connecticut, with the downtown serving as the heart of the city and its primary activity center.

Looking forward, the Stamford masterplan aims to continue growing the downtown

³⁹ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017. https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

district. This support is essential to attracting and retaining its dynamic and growing population of new residents and the entertainment, culture and jobs in emerging sectors that are bringing them to Stamford.⁴⁰

According to the 2015 master plan, Stamford's leading growth sectors are retail, accommodation and food services, information services and healthcare services, and education. Growth in these sectors is translating into demand for retail and restaurants, high-tech office space, classroom and vocational training space, and high-quality, well located commercial space.⁴¹

An important step in creating a dynamic downtown culture is creating a more walkable, pedestrian friendly destination. While the original urban redevelopment stimulated the growth of the downtown sector, many of the buildings constructed were not built with the community in mind. In 2002, Stamford adopted a master plan with the goal of creating a "vibrant, seven days a week, pedestrian friendly Downtown".⁴² The new goals clearly showed that city planners had learned from the urbanistic mistake in the last boom of setting new buildings atop parking garages, which created a barren, fortress-like streetscape.⁴³ Additionally, the original urban

⁴⁰ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

⁴¹ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017. https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

⁴² United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017. https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

⁴³ Dunlop, David W. "Stamford Reinvents Its Downtown Once Again." *The New York Times*, January 5, 1997. Accessed November 11, 2017.

renewal in the 1970's and 1980's favored a separation of land uses. This division created a challenge for pedestrian connectivity with the various attractions and transportation options. Therefore, the 2015 master plan promotes an improved version of Stamford, where a mixed-use, transit-oriented Downtown will have a strengthened connection with the Stamford Transportation Center.⁴⁴

LIVE: People & Community

During the city's redevelopment, which occurred between 1980 and 2010, Stamford's population steadily increased from 102,453 to 122,643, with an average annual growth rate of 0.6 percent, Stamford's population gain has exceeded that of both Fairfield County and the State of Connecticut as a whole.⁴⁵

As of 1985, approximately 150,000 people commute into Stamford primarily by automobile.⁴⁶ Today, a significant amount of Stamford's commuters now travel by rail, with many traveling up from New York City. According to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the number of peak-time riders from New York City to

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/05/realestate/stamford-reinvents-its-downtown-once-again.html>.

⁴⁴ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017.

⁴⁵ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017.

https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

⁴⁶ Lueck, Thomas J. "An Office Boom Transforms Once Ailing Connecticut City." *The New York Times*, March 10, 1985. Accessed November 19, 2017.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/10/nyregion/an-office-boom-transforms-once-ailing-connecticut-city.html?pagewanted=all>.

Stamford has increased by nearly 150% since 1990.⁴⁷ Over 13.2% of Stamford's workers use public transportation, up from 11.9% in 2010.⁴⁸

Many city officials and organizations have worked to make downtown Stamford an ideal place for new residents to live. One of these groups, the Stamford Downtown Special Services District (DSSD), was established in 1992 with the mission to manage, enhance and promote the Downtown experience.⁴⁹ Over the years, the DSSD has introduced entertainment events, including a summer concert series, outdoor dining opportunities, and other amenities to lure new residents and visitors. As a result, downtown Stamford has become a popular place for well-educated millennials to live and visit. According to Sandy Goldstein, president of the Stamford DSSD, the downtown sector now has over 12,000 apartment units, and approximately 65% of them are rented by millennials.⁵⁰ The increase in the millennial population not only brings in a college educated workforce, with a 13% increase between 2000 and 2010, but a financially stable one too.⁵¹ As a result, this is an important demographic that must be understood, especially in terms of redeveloping the Stamford Town Center to appeal to the downtown community and workforce.

⁴⁷ Prevost, Lisa. "Now Arriving: Reverse Commuters." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2007. Accessed November 19, 2017.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/realestate/12wczo.html>.

⁴⁸ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

⁴⁹ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

⁵⁰ Goldstein, Sandy. "The Downtown Stamford District." Telephone interview by author. December 6, 2017.

⁵¹ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017.

https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

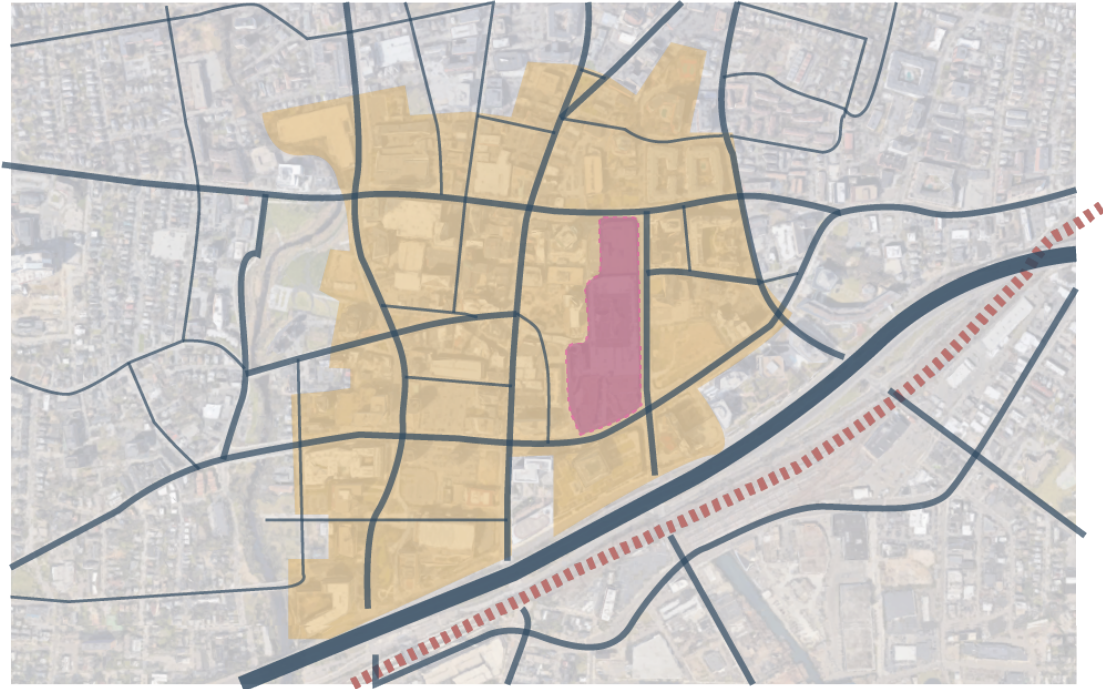


Figure 9: Downtown Special Services District, highlighted in orange. (Source: Author)

WORK: Corporate Presence & Retail Space

The 2015 masterplan encompasses an initiative by the Planning Board to make downtown the center of retailing, instead of sprawling south of Interstate 95 and elsewhere. Property owners in the 15-square block area controlled by the Special Services District.⁵² Currently, there is 768,000 square feet of retail space at Stamford

⁵² Charles, Eleanor. "In the Region/Connecticut; Using Stamford's Master Plan to Steer Development." The New York Times. November 01, 2003. Accessed December 03, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/02/realestate/in-the-region-connecticut-using-stamford-s-master-plan-to-steer-development.html>.

Town Center, and an additional 986,900 square feet on retail streets throughout the Downtown. The DSSD estimates that 95 percent of this retail space is occupied.⁵³

While the retail market in Downtown Stamford, including in the mall, has thrived in recent years, many city officials have recognized the need to innovate in order to create a sustainable market in the future. According to Dan Stolzenbach, General Manager of Stamford Town Center, “people are bored with the typical retail experience.”⁵⁴ This observation is especially true for Stamford Town Center, as the mall has traditionally only offered retail and some dining options. Therefore, this thesis aims to create strategies for creating a sustainable retail market in combination with other functions and attractions to be incorporated in the mall.

The corporate presence in Stamford is another important demographic that drives the success of the downtown district. Today, Stamford boasts more corporate headquarters than any other similarly sized city in North America. This includes companies such as NBC Sports, Indeed.Com, and GenRe.⁵⁵ Additionally, Stamford is seeing an increase in the number of start-up and innovator companies relocating to the city. Consequently, the city hosts an average daytime population of over 210,000 people.⁵⁶ Many of the corporate headquarters and office spaces are located within the downtown district.

⁵³ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017.

https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/u358/final_draft_12.16.14_0.pdf.

⁵⁴ Stolzenbach, Dan. "Stamford Town Center." Telephone interview by author. December 1, 2017.

⁵⁵ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

⁵⁶ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

Innovation District

In recent years, Stamford has become a model of a successful and prosperous city, principally through growing the downtown district. In an effort to encourage more innovators and entrepreneurs to move to Stamford, city officials and organizations drafted the “Innovative Stamford” initiative. According to Randy Skigen, former President of the Stamford Board of Representatives, the Innovative Stamford plan was created in response to the State of Connecticut’s call to spur job growth and innovation throughout the state.⁵⁷ The result is a plan that combines visions and aspirations for the city into an innovation district in the heart of Stamford.

The concept of an innovation district is one that is popping up in other major cities around the United States. These districts are geographic areas where leading-edge anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with start-ups, business incubators, and accelerators. They are also physically compact, transit-accessible, and technically-wired and offer mixed-use housing, office, and retail.⁵⁸ A rising number of innovative firms and talented workers are choosing to congregate and co-locate in compact, amenity-rich enclaves in the cores of central cities.⁵⁹ While Stamford offers an ample amount of office space, it lacks office spaces that can host a variety of different amenities and functions that can be tailored to the needs of innovative companies.

⁵⁷ Skigen, Randy. "Downtown Stamford: Insight & Innovation." Interview by author. November 21, 2017.

⁵⁸ Katz, Bruce, and Julie Wagner. “The Rise of Innovation Districts.” *The Brookings Institution*, 28 Sept. 2016, www.brookings.edu/essay/rise-of-innovation-districts/.

⁵⁹ Katz, Bruce, and Julie Wagner. “The Rise of Innovation Districts.” *The Brookings Institution*, 28 Sept. 2016, www.brookings.edu/essay/rise-of-innovation-districts/.

Stamford has chosen to focus its innovation district development in the city's downtown and South End districts. These two districts will serve as the hub of activity dedicated to collaboration, creativity and opportunity. The plan aims to create a sense of place where residents can live, work, play, and learn within walking distance to transportation and acts as a catalyst for job, business and product creation as well as economic development.⁶⁰

A key proposal in the Innovative Stamford initiative is creating a collaborative environment between various companies to create a network of shared resources. The three components that will provide this ecosystem are working space, mentorship and capital. Within the innovative district, affordable spaces are necessary for companies to start, incubate, and grow.⁶¹ Next, creating a mentorship network is essential to propel companies from the startup phase into growth. Thomas Madden, Stamford's Director of Economic Development, highlighted this aspect of the plan, stating:

“we have people come in and start companies, but they're not good at every aspect of that company. They might be good at writing code, but may not be good at the HR function, or the advertising function. So what we want to do is start up the mentorship and those resources from all the different organizations around us to help out. So they'll always have someone to rely on.”⁶²

⁶⁰ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

⁶¹ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

⁶² Madden, Thomas. "City of Stamford Economic Development." Telephone interview by author. December 5, 2017.

Finally, providing access to capital will create the opportunity for companies to secure funds to start companies in Stamford.

The Innovative Stamford initiative includes Stamford Town Center in its plan to a certain extent. The initiative states that having a physical facility focused on retail will provide two key economic advantages to Stamford— new boutique retail concepts and an additional marketing opportunity for consumer facing products invented throughout Connecticut. A retail incubator can significantly cut down on a start-up's overhead.⁶³ While Stamford's innovative district plan mentions Stamford Town Center as a component of retail incubation, this thesis proposes that the mall could serve as more than a destination for retail, and instead could serve as a catalyst for many of the ideas and proposals presented in the Innovate Stamford plan.

Conclusion

The Stamford Town Center originated as a component of the Stamford downtown redevelopment to bring new retail opportunities to downtown Stamford. Since then, the mall has remained relatively unchanged, even as the rest of Stamford has grown and innovated. At a time where many people recognize that shopping malls must innovate and adapt to survive, Stamford Town Center has the unique opportunity to become a catalyst for innovation. Additionally, a reimagining of Stamford Town Center could align with the Innovative Stamford initiative, which

⁶³ *Innovative Stamford*. PDF. City of Stamford: The Stamford Partnership, June 2016.

could provide support and opportunities for the mall to fit in with the initiative's visions and projects.

Chapter 4: Anatomy of a Mall

Why are shopping malls no longer a desirable destination for consumers?

Many of the reasons shopping malls are struggling can be attributed to architectural design failures. This thesis explores the changing demographic of people utilizing shopping malls, and also the relationship of the mall building in the urban context. Finally, this chapter addresses the exterior and interior failures of many urban shopping malls, including Stamford Town Center, and proposes potential solutions to mitigating these problems.

The Users

The profile of the shopping mall user has drastically changed over the past 50 years. Throughout the 1960's, shopping center owners competed to capture more and more of their white, affluent suburban market.⁶⁴ Subsequently, urban shopping malls were designed with the intention of bringing business professionals and white middle-class shoppers downtown. In Stamford, the shopping mall's proximity to the I-95 corridor was considered an essential element to draw in suburban consumers to the downtown area.

Today, Stamford Town Center is focusing on attracting the new wave of residents moving to Stamford. Recent trends indicate that many of the City's new residents will be young professionals attracted to urban living in the Downtown and

⁶⁴ Hardwick, Jeffrey M. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

South End.⁶⁵ Additionally, the demographics of the Stamford Town Center users has changed, reflecting the diverse community in Stamford and the surrounding region. According to Dan Stolzenbach, general manager of Stamford Town Center, the mall has a large number of international clients, and is working to better serve this increasing demographic.⁶⁶

Urban Scale

At the urban scale, the shopping mall exists as a large fortress that is disengaged from the surrounding context and community. Oftentimes, urban shopping malls were designed with the same principals as suburban shopping malls, meant to exist as a sole entity, rather than fit into the rest of the block typology or scale. In the case of Stamford Town Center, the mall occupies about five square blocks of the downtown business district, and has fronts on three major thoroughfares in Stamford. Consequently, the mall's location provides the opportunity for the land ownership to dominate the block. Next, urban shopping malls, including Stamford Town Center, remain auto-oriented, often with large parking garages accompanying the mall. As seen in figure 10, the Stamford Town Center parking garage occupies the span of Greyrock Place, creating an automobile entrance that discourages pedestrian access.

⁶⁵ United States. City of Stamford. Land Use Bureau. *Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025*. December 16, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2017.

⁶⁶ Stolzenbach, Dan. "Stamford Town Center." Telephone interview by author. December 1, 2017.



Figure 10: Stamford Town Center façade facing Greyrock Place (Source: Stamford Historical Society)

Exterior Failures

Most shopping malls share the same poor design features that are meant to shut off the mall from the outside world. First, the facades of malls are designed as blank walls, revealing little information about the retail ecosystem within the building. Stamford Town Center has received a considerable amount of criticism about its street presence, with one critic comparing the mall structure to a “World War II bunker”, and another critic stating it was the “biggest mall I ever saw is an inner-city fortress that should be out in a swamp.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Charles, Eleanor. "In the Region/Connecticut; Using Stamford's Master Plan to Steer Development." *The New York Times*. November 01, 2003. Accessed December

Furthermore, the character-less facade makes the mall stick out from the rest of the streetscape and surrounding downtown, and does little to promote pedestrian access into the building. The approach to entering the mall can be described as “a big wall with a little mouse hole.”⁶⁸ Originally, most mall developers refused to use the true outside world in any significant way, one fearing that this may encourage the shopper to want to leave the mall and go elsewhere.⁶⁹ Stamford Town Center offered few pedestrian access options until 2014, when the mall demolished one of the anchor stores to make a public plaza with a pedestrian entrance. However, the mall still lacks prominent main entrances along Greyrock Place and Broad Street.

Finally, parking was considered an essential element for creating a successful shopping mall. The result was the creation of vast parking lots and towering parking garages, and serve as the first interaction consumers experience with the mall. While the mall experience is meant to be an entertaining and enjoyable experience, many customers find the aspect of parking stressful. The parking garage at Stamford Town Center is especially troublesome, as it has a vast amount of square footage, with some areas containing 7 stories of parking space. The result is a confusing maze of parking for consumers to navigate. One could drive around the building several times without arriving at a true main entrance to the mall.

03, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/02/realestate/in-the-region-connecticut-using-stamford-s-master-plan-to-steer-development.html>.

⁶⁸ Underhill, Paco. *The Call of the Mall*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

⁶⁹ Moss, Mark. *Shopping As An Entertainment Experience*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007.

Interior Failures

Just as the shopping mall exterior boasts many design issues, the interior of the shopping mall demonstrates several design problems that need to be addressed. As malls aim to shut out the blight and influences from penetrating the mall, the inward orientation of the buildings cuts off the users from the outside. This design strategy can be seen in the planning of Stamford Town Center. As described by Jack Condlin, a former director of the Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission, “wholesale demolition was replaced by buildings of an introverted design - not to flow to the rest of downtown.”⁷⁰

Orienting oneself inside a shopping mall, especially one as large as Stamford Town Center, also presents an issue for users. Being lost is stressful, and the stress is exacerbated in a mall. As a result, effective wayfinding is essential to creating an enjoyable shopping experience within the mall. Shoppers negotiate spaces better if they have fixed points to guide them, like “Shoes over here” or “Escalator there.”⁷¹

Finally, many shopping malls suffer from monotonous interiors, both in terms of space and available commodities. Enclosed malls are homogenized and boring, and fail to spark intrigue or even pause.⁷² In fact, the interior streets were designed to with the premise that we customers should wander, and that the longer they hold us the more money we’ll spend.⁷³ Consequently, creating visually stimulating spaces

⁷⁰ Charles, Eleanor. "Stamford Acts to Humanize Downtown Renewal." *The New York Times*, December 14, 1986. Accessed November 11, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/14/realestate/stamford-acts-to-humanize-downtown-renewal.html>.

⁷¹ Underhill, Paco. *The Call of the Mall*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

⁷² Underhill, Paco. *The Call of the Mall*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

⁷³ Underhill, Paco. *The Call of the Mall*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

was not factored as highly as encouraging consumers to wander within the walls of the shopping center.

While most malls contain some sort of food court, the mall in general is designed as a single use facility focused on retail. The single use factor limits the use of the mall to shopping focused, and draws away from creating a place for gathering and community.

Conclusions

It is evident that the user of the shopping mall has changed over the past 50 years, but malls themselves have not innovated to keep up with trends and market demands. As a result, many malls cannot afford to exist within such outdated framework. To solve this issue, this thesis proposes several design solutions that aim to help shopping malls create a sustainable typology for the 21st century.

First, malls need to diversify their programmatic functions to provide customers with a wide range of uses in one destination. “Shopping centers need to be about place, experience, and convenience,” says David Chilinski, AIA, Partner with architectural firm Prellwitz Chilinski Associates.⁷⁴ Implementing more experience-based functions in mall settings can help draw in millennial age consumers. Hybrid malls or variations on the traditional covered mall have proven to be both successful and resilient. These outdoor arcade-like structures harness the appeal of traditional

⁷⁴ Caulfield, John. "5 Ingredients of Successful Mall Design." Building Design Construction. May 26, 2015. Accessed December 03, 2017.
<https://www.bdcnetwork.com/5-ingredients-successful-mall-design>.

pedestrian areas with the glamour and prestige of history. When they are successful, they draw urban dwellers, tourists, and visitors from the suburbs.⁷⁵

Malls would also benefit from improving communal and community space within the boundaries, an improvement that could potentially draw more customers and community members to the building. According to Dan Stolzenbach, Stamford Town Center already serves as a downtown cultural destination in Stamford. However, this opportunity could be better executed if the mall were easier to access from the pedestrian level, and from public transportation.

Finally, humanizing the exterior of the mall is an important step to encouraging a more inviting spirit with the mall. In Stamford, many stores have demonstrated their understanding of the importance of pedestrians, and have taken steps to create a more pedestrian friendly street presence. For example, several stores including Target installed street level windows and facades that are designed to be compatible with surrounding structures.⁷⁶ Maintaining access to the street level, while also blending into the surrounding city context has been beneficial for business.

⁷⁵ Moss, Mark. *Shopping As An Entertainment Experience*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007.

⁷⁶ Charles, Eleanor. "In the Region/Connecticut; Using Stamford's Master Plan to Steer Development." *The New York Times*. November 01, 2003. Accessed December 03, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/02/realestate/in-the-region-connecticut-using-stamford-s-master-plan-to-steer-development.html>.

Chapter 5: Site & Building Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will explore Stamford Town Center's physical presence within the urban context of Downtown Stamford. The building is located at 100 Greyrock Place, and has a street presence on Broad Street and Tresser Boulevard. Stamford is located in Fairfield County in Connecticut, and has direct connections to Westchester County to the north, and Long Island Sound to the south. The city is approximately 55 minutes from New York City, 50 minutes from New Haven, and 90 minutes from Hartford, the state's capital. As of 2014, the population of Stamford

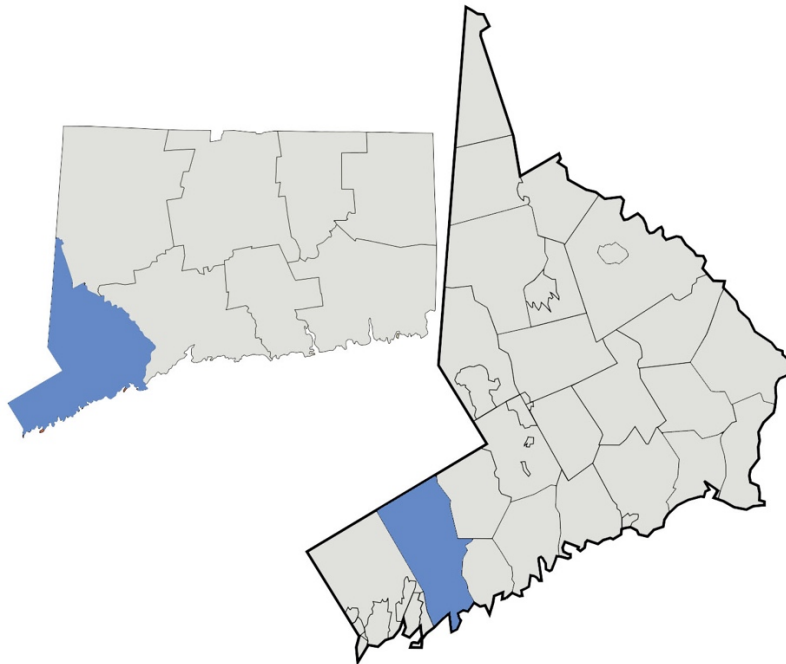


Figure 12: Location of Stamford in the State of Connecticut. (Source: Author)

is 122,643 people. The city belongs to the Stamford-Norwalk-Bridgeport metro area, which a part of the greater New York Metro area.



Figure 13: Location Analysis (Source: Author)



Figure 14: Stamford Town Center Aerial (Source: Google Earth)

Transportation

There are several transportation thoroughfares that run through Stamford. First, I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, two major highways, connect the city to surrounding cities and towns. Additionally, the Metro North New Haven line has a stop in Stamford, which is the second most popular stop on the line after Grand Central Station, with over 2 million boardings per year⁷⁷. This Amtrak also connects the city to the rest of the cities, such as Boston and Washington DC, on the northeast corridor metro line. Stamford Town Center is located two blocks north of I-95, and about ½ a mile from the Stamford Train Station stop (Figure 4). These two modes of transportation are vital to Downtown Stamford and Stamford Town Center, as they deliver visitors and commuters directly into the downtown district.



Figure 15: Transportation Analysis (Source: Author)

⁷⁷ "Stamford Town Center." Stamford Town Center | Taubman Properties | Taubman. Accessed December 13, 2017. <http://www.taubman.com/taubman-properties/stamford-town-center/>.

Site Description

Stamford Town Center was opened in 1982, and was built on a site that previously hosted the Main Street business and retail district. Consequently, the mall's city block bisects Main Street, as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 16: Stamford Town Center Site Orientation (Source: Author)

The 853,000 square foot shopping center has three anchor store sites and approximately 130 interior tenant spaces and restaurants. The gross leasable area of the mall is 762,000 square feet, and the mall tenant space totals 439,000 square feet. The mall also includes seven floors of parking, including three levels of parking underground, and three levels of roof parking (Figure X).

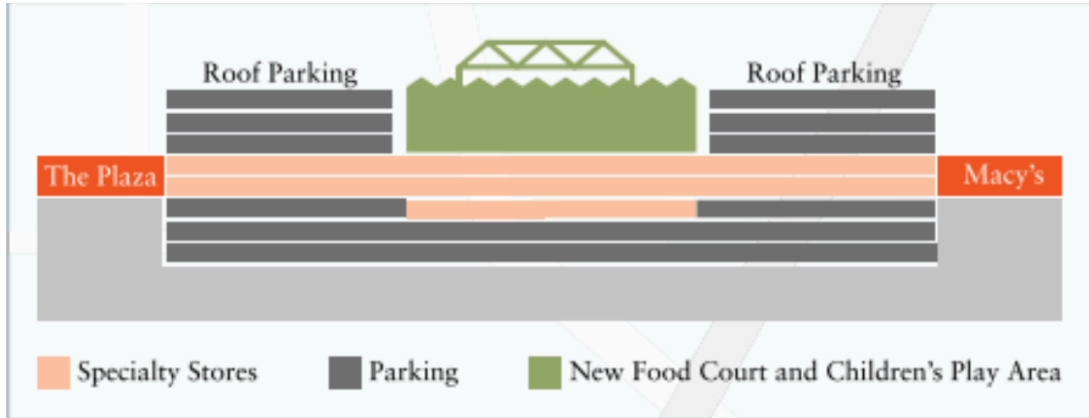


Figure 17: Diagrammatic Section of Stamford Town Center, showing the various levels of parking below and above the mall. (Source: Taubbaum Inc)

Stamford Town Center occupies the largest city block in the greater Downtown Special Services District, sitting on 11 acres of the city block. Adjacent to the mall is the Landmark Square office tower, an iconic building in the downtown. Additionally, there are several other street level retail spaces and Veteran’s Memorial Park. The Downtown Stamford district hosts a mix of residential, commercial/office space, civic buildings, entertainment venues and retail options (Figure X). At the moment, the mall is the largest generator of retail commerce in the district and the city as a whole.

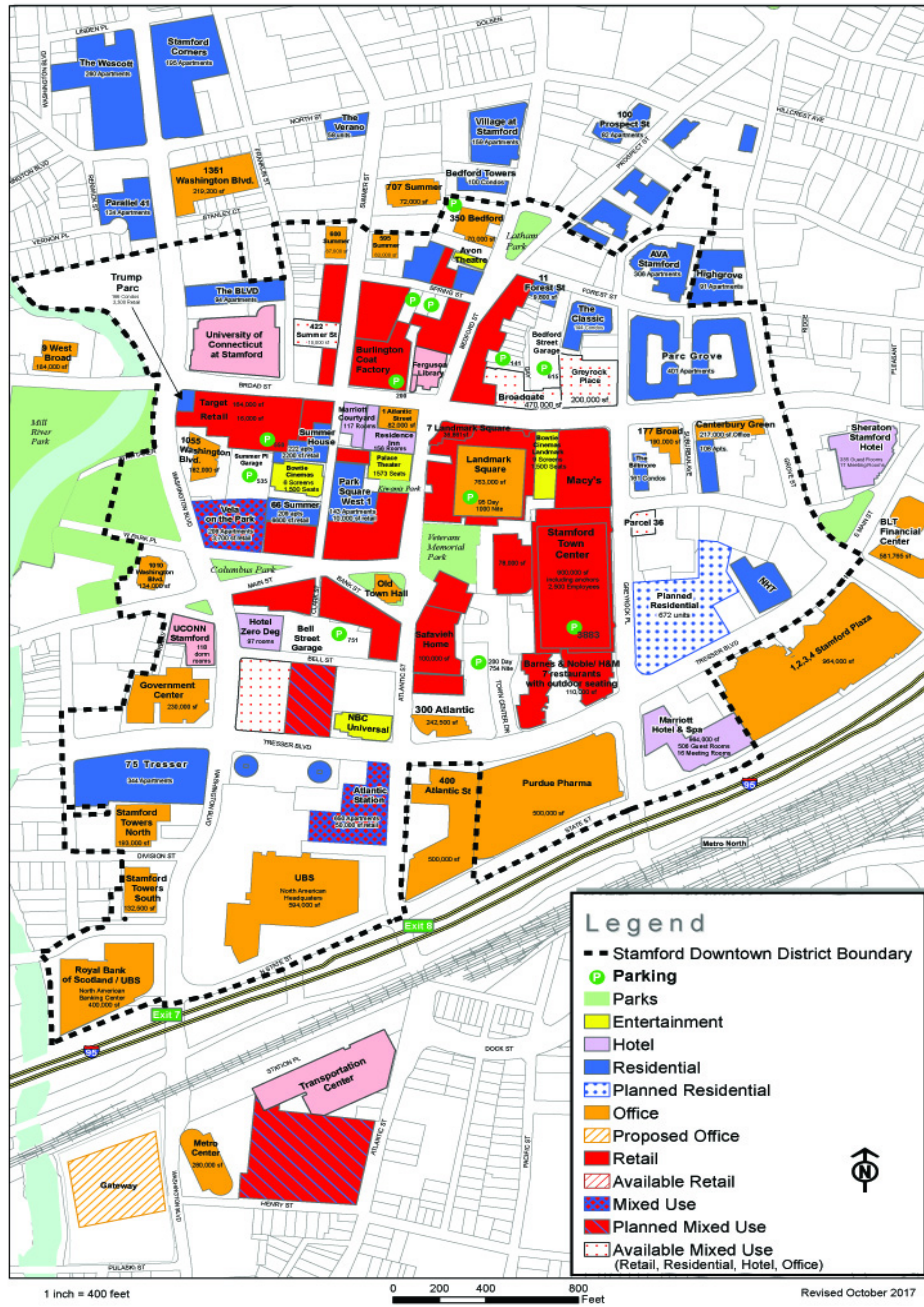


Figure 18: Stamford Downtown Special Services District Zoning



Figure 19: Notable Landmarks in Stamford (Source: Author)

Access

The downtown district has become a more walkable community over the years, achieved in part through many planning efforts by the city. While the overall walkability score of Stamford is 54, the downtown district walkability score is 95, reinforcing the district as a pedestrian oriented location.⁷⁸

In recent years, efforts have been made to make Stamford Town Center more pedestrian friendly, including the addition of the “plaza” on the south side of the mall. The plaza was built in 2007, replacing the Filene’s anchor store after the company left the mall for financial reasons. The result was a new front entrance for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. There are three additional street level pedestrian access points into the mall. First, there is an entrance on Greyrock Place that provides elevator access to the retail levels. Next, there are two entrances on Broad Street: one entrance leads

⁷⁸ "Stamford Neighborhoods on Walk Score." Walk Score. Accessed December 13, 2017. <https://www.walkscore.com/CT/Stamford>.

into the Macy's department store, as seen in figure 20. Another entrance is through the Bowtie Cinemas Theater attached to the mall, as seen in figure 20. Finally, the mall has an entrance into the Sak's Off Fifth department store, accessed through Veteran's Memorial Park (Figure 20).



Figure 20: Pedestrian entrances to Stamford Town Center (clockwise from top left) Macy's entrance, Bowtie Cinemas entrance, Plaza entrance, Greyrock Place entrance (Source: Author)

The design of Stamford Town Center was oriented towards the automobile, and thus provides ample parking for customers. Currently, the mall has 3,645 parking spots.



Figure 21: Pedestrian and vehicular access to Stamford Town Center (Source: Author)

The Stamford Town Center site can also be accessed by public transportation and by bicycle. Currently there are 5 bus stops adjacent to the mall, and several located throughout the rest of the city block. The busses provide connections to other spots in the downtown district and the rest of the city, the Stamford Train station, and other local cities, including White Plains and Bridgeport. The most popular bus stop is on the corner of Broad Street and Greyrock Place, where 6 different bus lines stop.

In recent years, Stamford has made efforts to make its streets more bike friendly. The downtown district does not have dedicated bike lanes, but has sharrows. The sharrows are visual markers painted in the lane to indicate that it is a shared traffic lane. Additionally, the city has several bike racks and storage spaces throughout the downtown. However, there is only one bike rack on the Stamford Town Center site, located in Veteran’s Memorial Park.



Figure 22: Bus stops and bike paths near the Stamford Town Center site.

(Source: Author)

Competitive Landscape

Stamford Town Center competes with other shopping centers in the region, including several malls that offer high end retail options. The Westchester Mall, located 15 miles away in White Plains, NY, is the closest mall to Stamford Town Center. Additionally, there are two other regional malls in Fairfield County, including the Westfield Trumbull Mall 29 miles northeast, and the Danbury Fair Mall 30 miles north.

In the coming years, another regional mall will be constructed in nearby Norwalk, a city 9.5 miles northeast from Stamford. The new mall is projected to appeal to appeal to the same high end customers as the Westchester Mall. However, it

is expected that the Norwalk mall will also pull shoppers from the malls in Stamford, Danbury and Trumbull.⁷⁹

Building Space Analysis

The mall is comprised of a mixture of 3 anchor department stores, retail stores, restaurant spaces and a central court that serves as a communal space in the center of the mall (Figure 23). The central court is also one of the few locations in the mall that brings in natural light to the mall interior, provided by skylights. (Figure 24).

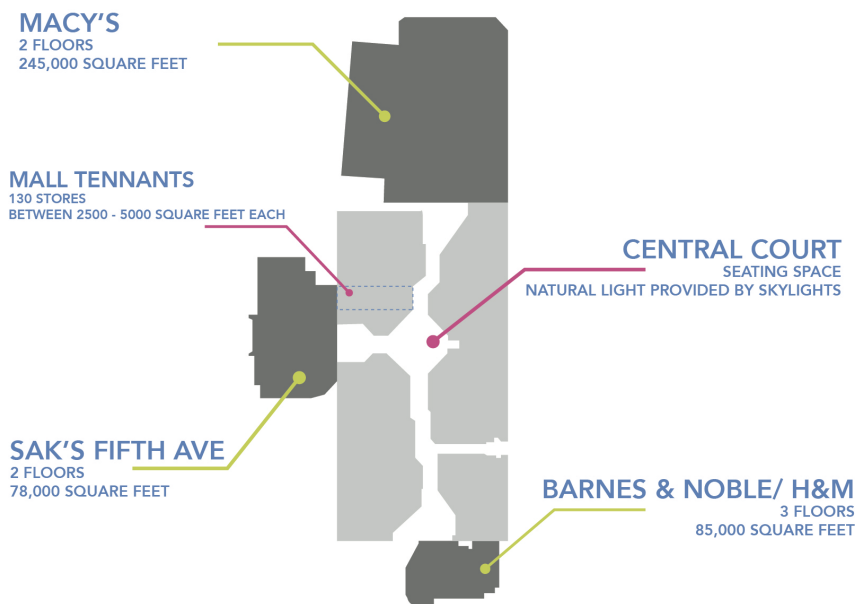


Figure 23: Stamford Town Center retail spaces. (Source: Author)

⁷⁹ Kapner, Suzanne. "Big Mall Operator Does the Unthinkable-Builds a Mall." The Wall Street Journal. October 24, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-mall-operator-bets-that-america-needs-a-new-mall-1508842802>.



Figure 24: Natural light, provided by skylights, in the central core of Stamford Town Center. (Source: Author)

The existing mall has an intricate network of circulation spaces, both for public use and for servicing the retail tenants. There are four main loading docks, one solely dedicated to the Macy's anchor store. The primary loading spaces are on the west side of the building (figure 25). Zones of service elevators connect the loading docks at street level with the shopping floors, levels four and five.

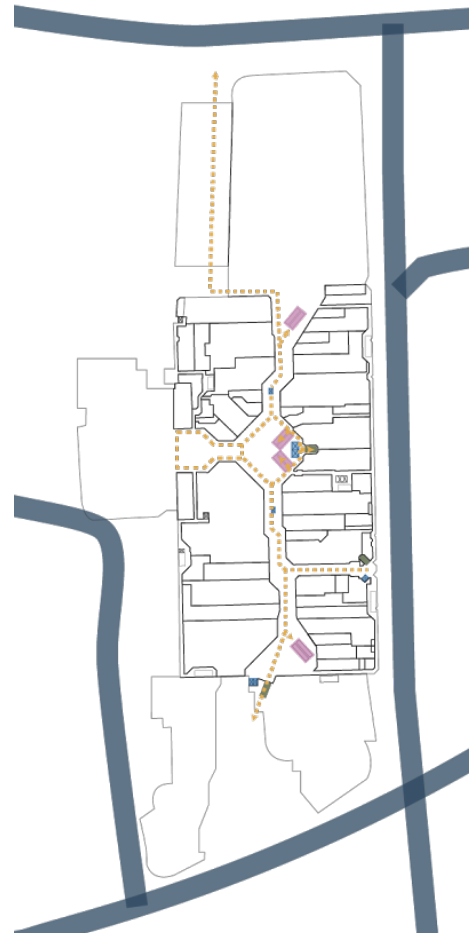


Figure 25: Stamford Town Center circulation. (Source: Author)

The interior circulation of the mall was designed to keep the customers inside the mall, and limit the number of exits to the outside world. There are three main zones of public circulation- one at the north end of the mall near Macy's, one core in the central court space, and one zone at the south end of the building near Barnes & Noble and H&M (Figure 23).

Conclusions

Stamford Town Center has ample opportunities to become more connected to the surrounding urban context. Creating more connectivity and access to the building will integrate the building with other amenities and businesses in Downtown Stamford, but can also provide better access for customers wishing to visit the mall.

Addressing the transportation options and access to the mall is one significant factor that could improve connections to the mall. Moving forward, this thesis proposes that the mall should shift its focus from accommodating vehicular traffic, to creating a better public transit oriented place. At the moment, the mall has an overabundance of space for parking, but does little to incentivize visitors to utilize the various public transportation options that are available in Stamford.

Chapter 6: Precedents & Program Analysis

The current model for the traditional shopping mall creates a single use facility, which has proven to be problem over the past few years. This model is not sustainable, as it fails to adapt mall spaces to fit in with the surrounding context. As a result, consumers are abandoning malls for other retail experience options.

This thesis proposes that a shopping mall can create an array of ecosystems meant to not only enhance the retail experience, but provide the space and means for other programmatic functions to coexists and share resources. This chapter will present several programmatic options for creating an innovative ecosystem. Analysis of the various synergies between programs will lead the investigation into appropriate and sustainable site program.



Figure 26: Programmatic concept diagram (Source: Author)

WORK: Co-Working Offices

Providing collaborative office space for new start-up businesses can be essential to creating an innovative ecosystem. This thesis will investigate the co-working office model, an emerging office typology that is becoming popular throughout the U.S., especially in urban environments. Co-working space has become increasingly popular over the past decade, especially with the millennial generation. The space itself is defined as membership-based workspaces where diverse groups of freelancers, remote workers, and other independent professionals work together in a shared, communal setting.⁸⁰

While co-working spaces can appeal to professionals of many different demographics, trends have shown that this office typology is very popular among the millennial generation. Several polls have confirmed that millennials want a “fun and social” workplace, flexible work hours and place value on lifestyle and traveling. They are less interested in buying property, but are willing to spend money on experiences and events. Increased mobility and the rise of the sharing economy are not only changing the way younger generations live, work and travel but also transforming our physical environment.⁸¹ Consequently, co-working spaces offer a

⁸⁰ Spreitzer, Gretchen, Peter Bacevice, and Lyndon Garrett. "Why People Thrive in Coworking Spaces." *Harvard Business Review*. August 06, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2017. <https://hbr.org/2015/05/why-people-thrive-in-coworking-spaces>.

⁸¹ Grozdanic, Lidija. "How Coworking and Coliving are Redefining Space as a Service." *ArchDaily*. April 14, 2016. Accessed November 28, 2017. <https://www.archdaily.com/785550/how-coworking-and-coliving-are-redefining-space-as-a-service>.

flexible and dynamic environment for businesses and millennial professionals to innovate.

The first co-working precedent is the CLOUD Co-working Space, located in Barcelona, Spain. The office has 8000 square feet, and offers a network of open and private office spaces, shared conference and meeting spaces, and a large communal amenity space.

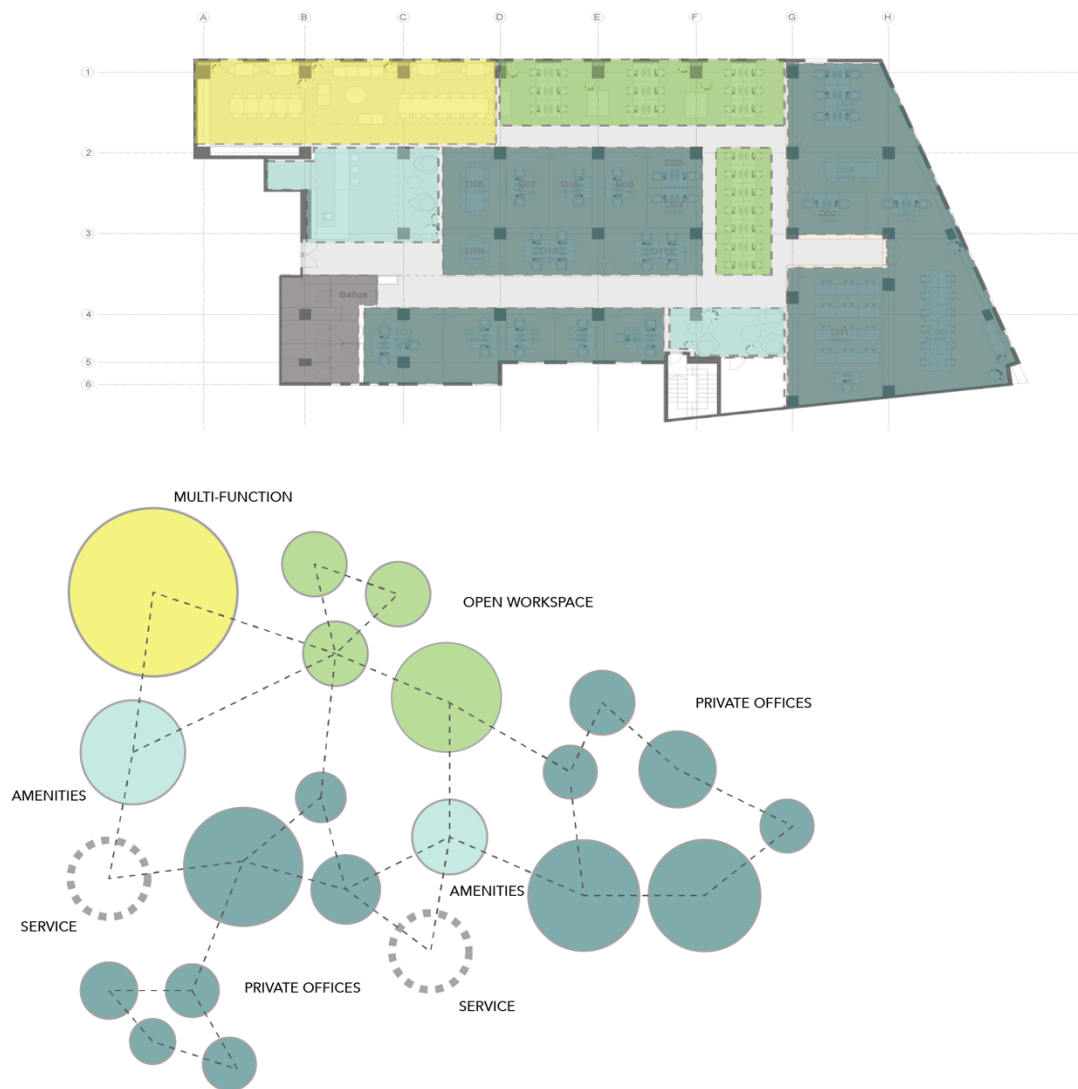


Figure 27: Floorplan and spacial diagram of the CLOUD Co-working Space in Barcelona, Spain (Source: Author)

Next, the WeWork Dallas, Texas office serves as an example of co-working space applied at a larger, corporate scale. WeWork provides co-working offices in several locations across the United States. The Dallas office totals 25,000 square feet of office space.

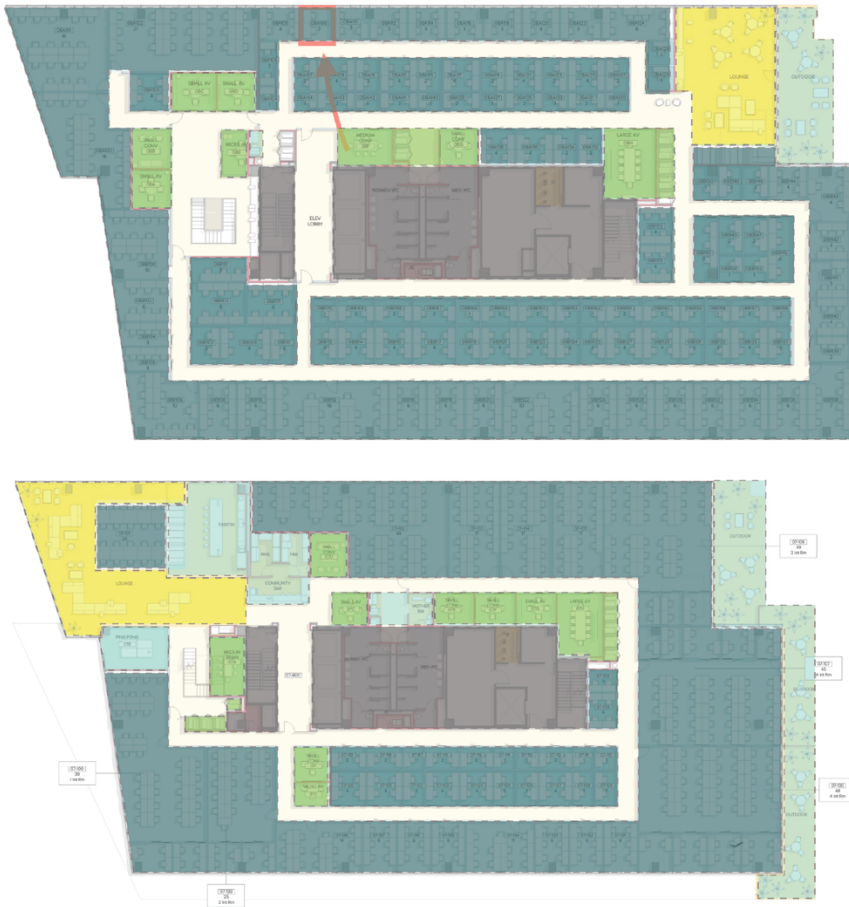




Figure 28: Floorplan and spatial diagram of the WeWork Co-working Space in Dallas, Texas (Source: Author, WeWork)

In the United States the average employee needs between 60–100 square feet of office. The typical executive’s office is around 150 square feet—the typical CEO’s office is around 400 square feet. However, at WeWork the individual office is just 36 square feet—a third of what is typically provided to an employee of a standard office building.⁸²

Currently, there are a few co-working offices in Stamford, and city officials plan to encourage companies set up co-working offices to meet the goals of the Innovative Stamford initiative. As there are no co-working offices in Downtown Stamford, the Stamford Town Center could serve as a prime location for this collaborative office model.

⁸² Muse, Alexander. "Is WeWork a good deal for startups? – Startup Muse – Medium." Medium. October 21, 2016. Accessed November 28, 2017. <https://medium.com/startup-muse/is-wework-a-good-deal-for-startups-171b89ed4453>.

MAKE: Collaborative Maker Spaces

“Makerspaces”, or shared workshop spaces, are another space typology that fosters collaboration and sharing between individuals. The makerspace model was created in response to the maker movement, a term used for independent inventors and designers.⁸³ According to industry professionals, when individuals across the globe — and workers across industries — are given the opportunity to contribute to and revise manufacturing processes, power dynamics shift and people are empowered to create.⁸⁴

The A/D/O makerspace, located in Brooklyn, NY, provides a collaborative working and showcase environment for the creative community. The complex, which was an adaptive reuse project of an old warehouse building, combines workshop spaces, a restaurant, and a retail store for selling inventions. These functions are

⁸³ Lee, Christopher. "How makers democratize the manufacturing industry." Mic. December 14, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. <https://mic.com/articles/186760/how-makers-democratize-the-manufacturing-industry#.QEJVLW6Ai>.

⁸⁴ Lee, Christopher. "How makers democratize the manufacturing industry." Mic. December 14, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. <https://mic.com/articles/186760/how-makers-democratize-the-manufacturing-industry#.QEJVLW6Ai>.

connected by a communal presentation space (figure X). The program space is 23,000 square feet.

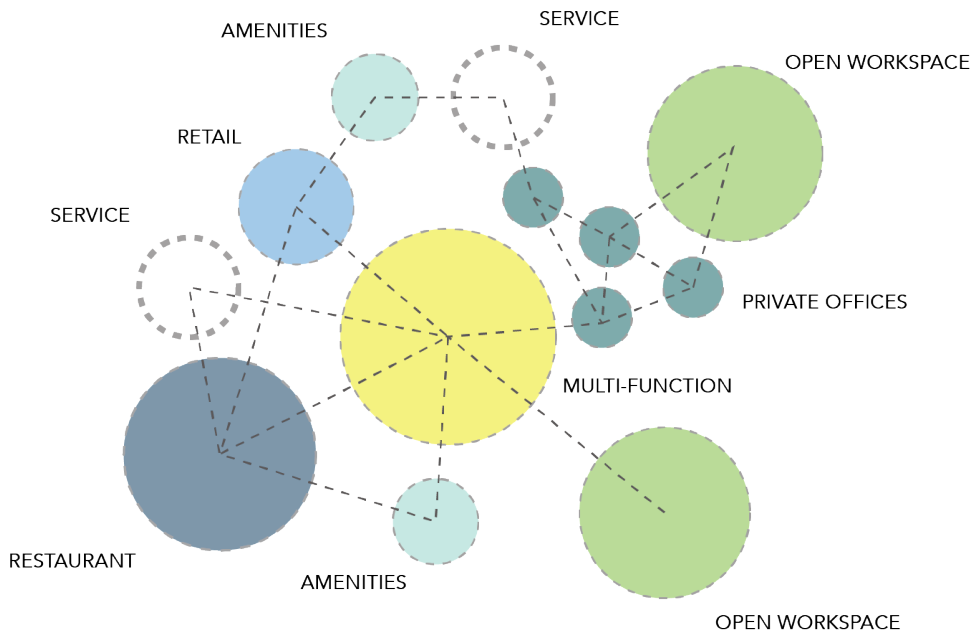
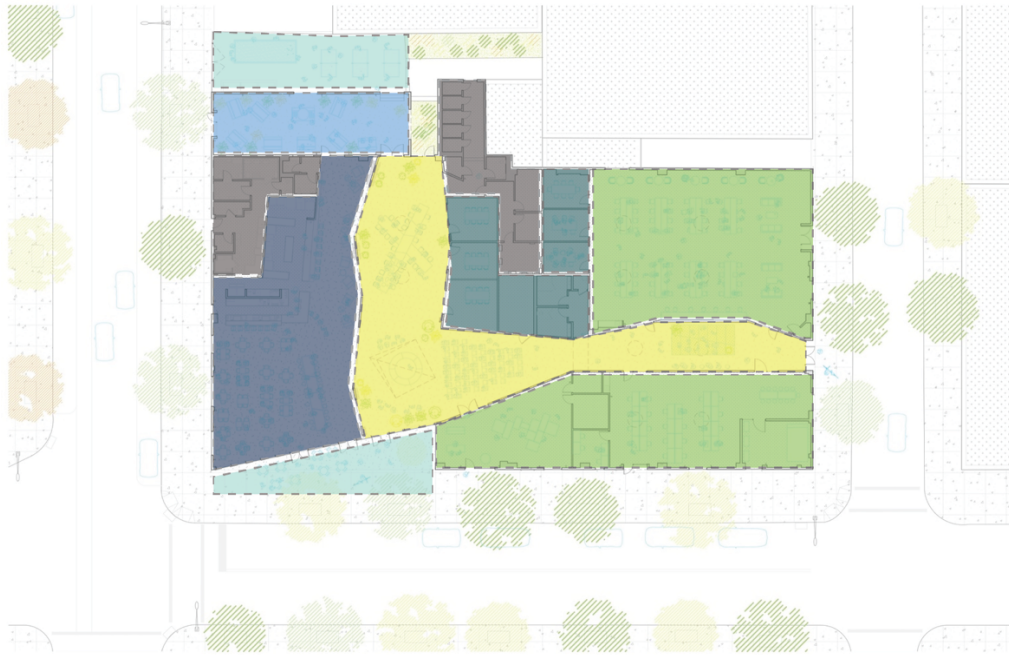


Figure 29: Floorplan and spatial diagram of the A/D/O Makerspace in Brooklyn, New York (Source: ArchDaily, Author)

LEARN: Co-Learning Environments

Education and mentorship, especially for professionals and businesses, is an important component of the Innovative Stamford plan. One of the fundamental goals of the plan is to provide access to a mentor network to help businesses start and grow. The co-learning model could provide the space and opportunities for fostering mentorship within businesses.

Co-learning spaces often borrow the model of the co-working office space to provide shared and open workspace. This typology is relatively new and still developing, but is emerging in the professional and academic worlds. The demand for co-learning spaces was born out of the emerging need for students and professionals to learn several different skills sets in order to remain competitive and innovate in their respective fields. For example, the Detroit City Study was established in Detroit to work with the University of Michigan to conduct research and share skills among students participating in research. The co-learning space is meant to operate as a collaborative workplace for place-based research with a direct pipeline toward public pedagogy, engaging urban researchers, students and community members.⁸⁵

In the business community The Factory, a combined co-working and co-learning, serves to integrate shared working space with learning opportunities for professionals (Figure X). The Factory is located in Grand Rapids, MI, and offers gathering areas, conference rooms, and a learning center in addition to office space.

⁸⁵ Bolster, Lucas. "About." Detroit City Study. Accessed December 15, 2017. <http://www.detroitcitystudy.org/about/>.

The Factory also offers 12 week instructional classes in various technology and design subjects, such as product design, UX design, and introduction to programming.⁸⁶



Figure 30: Office and learning space offered at the co-working and learning facility The Factory (Source: The Factory)

LIVE: Apartments

Introducing opportunities to create a live/work environment at Stamford Town Center could provide professionals to live in close proximity to their workspace and the downtown Stamford district. One instance of integrating apartments within a retail mall occurs in the Providence Arcade mall, located in Providence, Rhode Island.

⁸⁶ "Work The Factory." The Factory. Accessed December 15, 2017. <http://workthefactory.com/colearning/>.

Designers were able to adaptively reuse the struggling mall to include micro apartments on the top two levels of the mall, while keeping retail stores on the ground floor (Figure X). In recent years, micro apartments have grown in popularity in recent years as more people cram into urban areas and housing prices escalate.⁸⁷

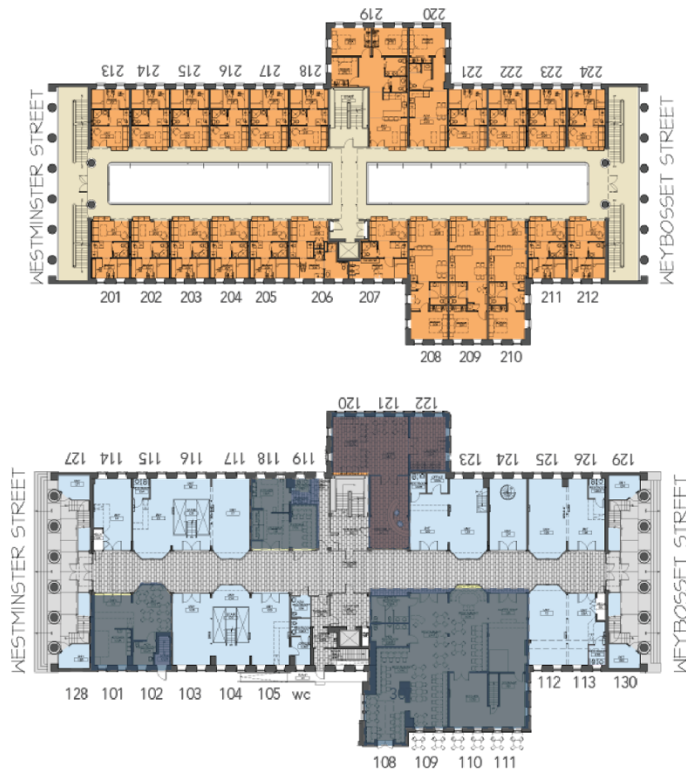


Figure 31: Analysis of the Providence Arcade mall adaptive reuse project. (Source: Curbed)⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Berger, Chris. "America's First Shopping Mall is Now Stuffed With Micro Homes." Curbed. August 29, 2014. Accessed December 15, 2017.

⁸⁸ Berger, Chris. "America's First Shopping Mall is Now Stuffed With Micro Homes." Curbed. August 29, 2014. Accessed December 15, 2017.

<https://www.curbed.com/2014/8/29/10054364/americas-first-shopping-mall-is-now-stuffed-with-micro-homes>.



Figure 32: Analysis of the Providence Arcade mall adaptive reuse project.

(Source: Curbed)⁸⁹

In recent years, Stamford has seen a boom in apartment development in the downtown district. City officials estimate that approximately 95% of these apartments are occupied, which speaks to the demand for living opportunities in Downtown Stamford.

Conclusions

There are several emerging typologies that could bring new businesses and innovative spaces to Stamford Town Center. A common denominator among these program functions is a community oriented space that could serve the individual function itself, or the larger community network.

⁸⁹ Berger, Chris. "America's First Shopping Mall is Now Stuffed With Micro Homes." Curbed. August 29, 2014. Accessed December 15, 2017. <https://www.curbed.com/2014/8/29/10054364/americas-first-shopping-mall-is-now-stuffed-with-micro-homes>.

Chapter 7: Architectural Design Response

An essential first step in determining program options is to understand the needs of each typology. The program matrix (Figure X) starts to evaluate the needs of the different spaces found in the program typology. Therefore, the matrix can be used to determine how the program can fit into the various spaces in Stamford Town Center.

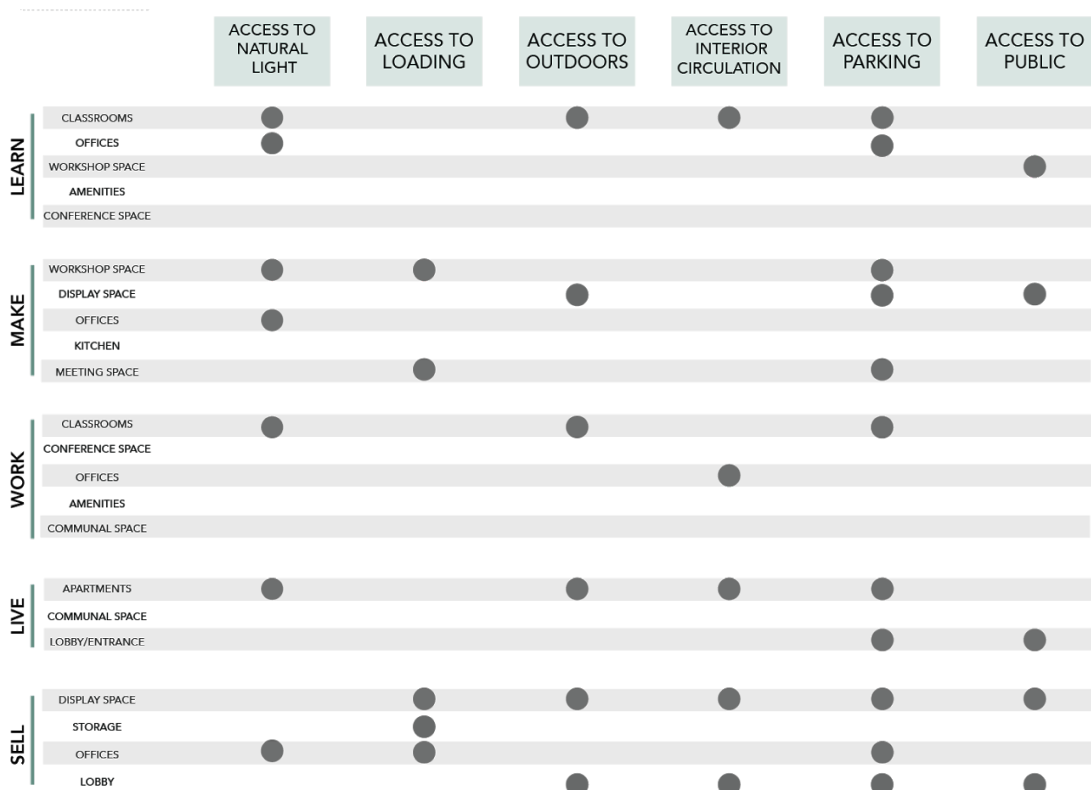


Figure 33: Program Matrix (Source: Author)

Scheme 1: Incubator Model

The first design scheme proposes creating a collaborative ecosystem for businesses and innovators. The office, maker space and learning environments then can feed into the retail spaces in the mall, allowing businesses to create, make and sell products all in one atmosphere.

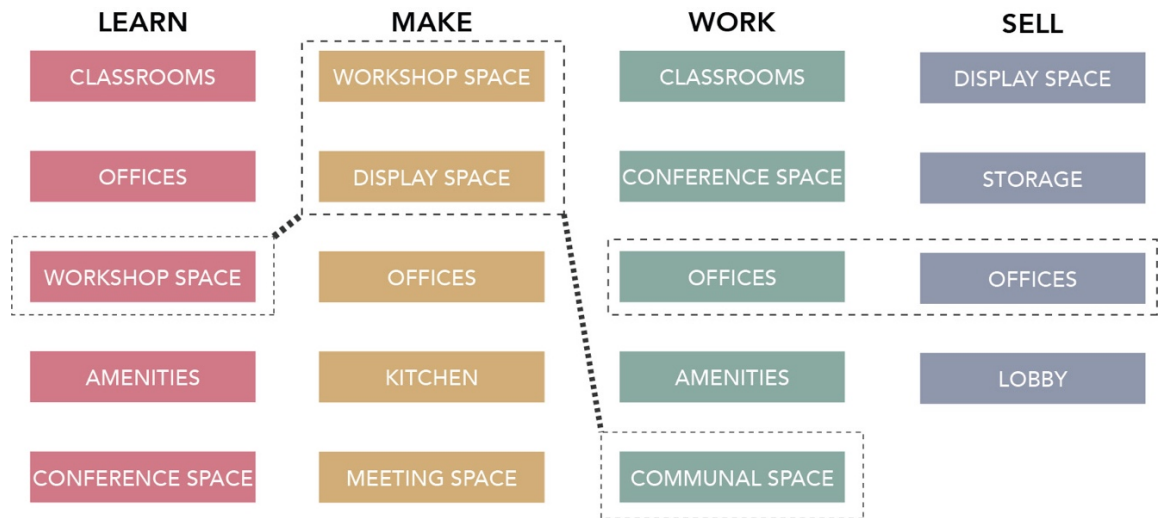


Figure 34: Scheme 1 space diagram. (Source: Author)



Figure 35: Scheme 1 space diagram. (Source: Author)

This scheme responds to many of the goals in the Innovative Stamford initiative, as it provides opportunity for innovation and collaboration directly in the downtown district. Additionally, this scheme helps to better integrate Stamford Town Center into the bigger vision of the innovate plan.

Scheme 2: Live/Work Model

The second design scheme proposes a live-work model that could appeal to both businesses and professionals moving to Stamford. The residential development addresses Downtown Stamford’s continued need for housing. While the residences could be market rate apartments that cater to professionals, they could also be affordable housing units.

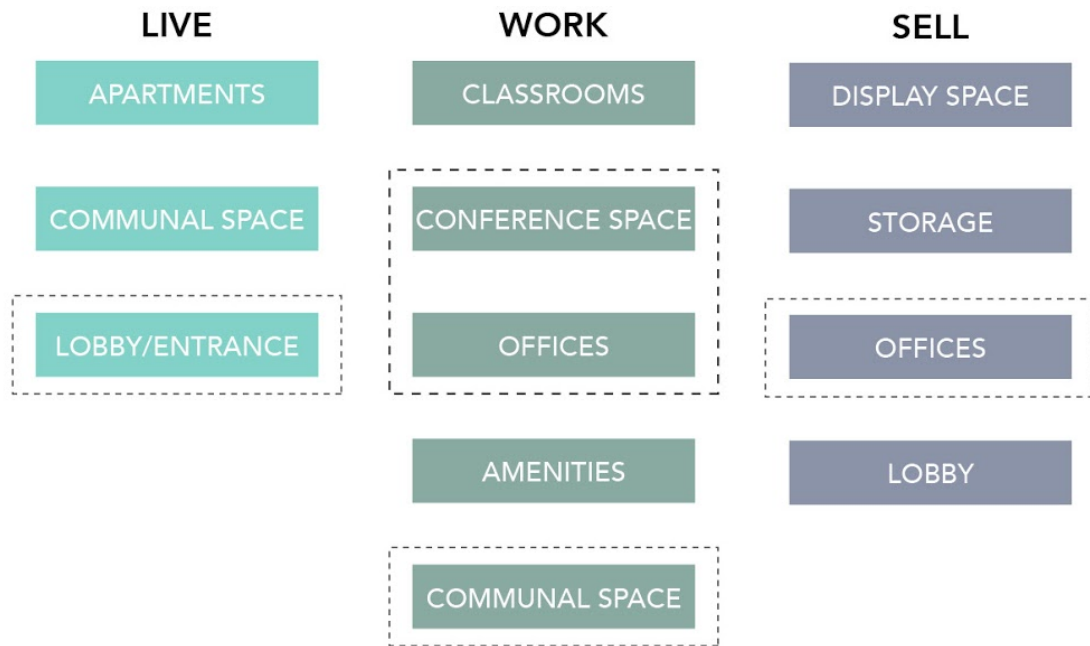


Figure 36: Scheme 2 space diagram. (Source: Author)

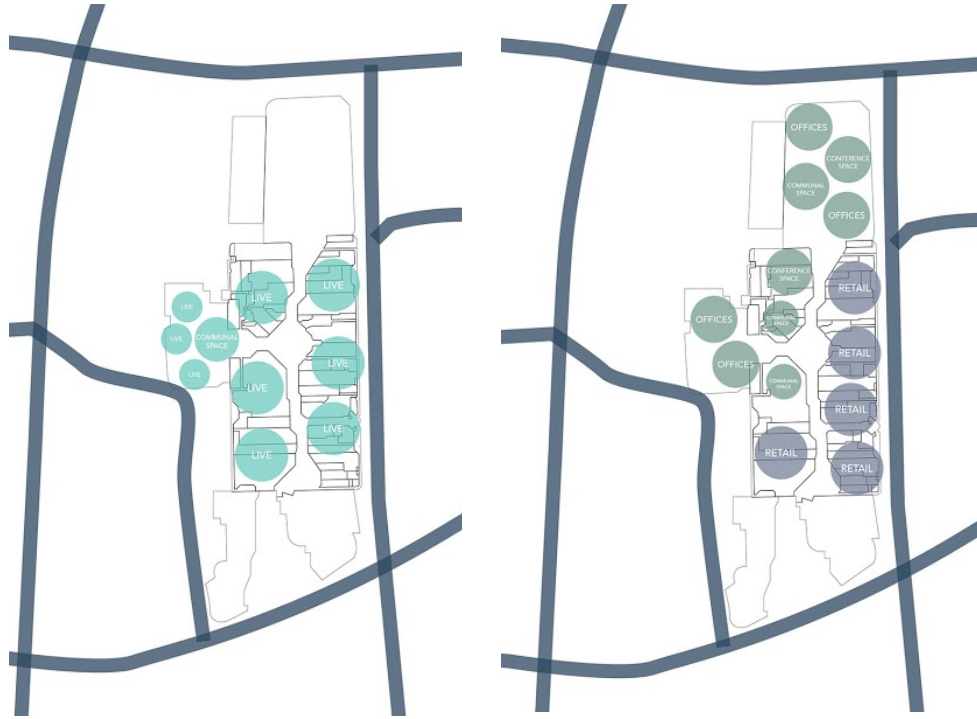


Figure 37: Scheme 2 space diagram. (Source: Author)

Scheme 3: Start-Up Model

The third design scheme is modeled after The Factory, as it combines a working and learning environment for start-up businesses. The scheme also reintroduces the residential component to the mall, as seen in the Providence Arcade precedent. Finally, the scheme addresses the Innovative Stamford’s goals of attracting start-up companies to the city, and providing mentorship opportunities for these companies and businesses.

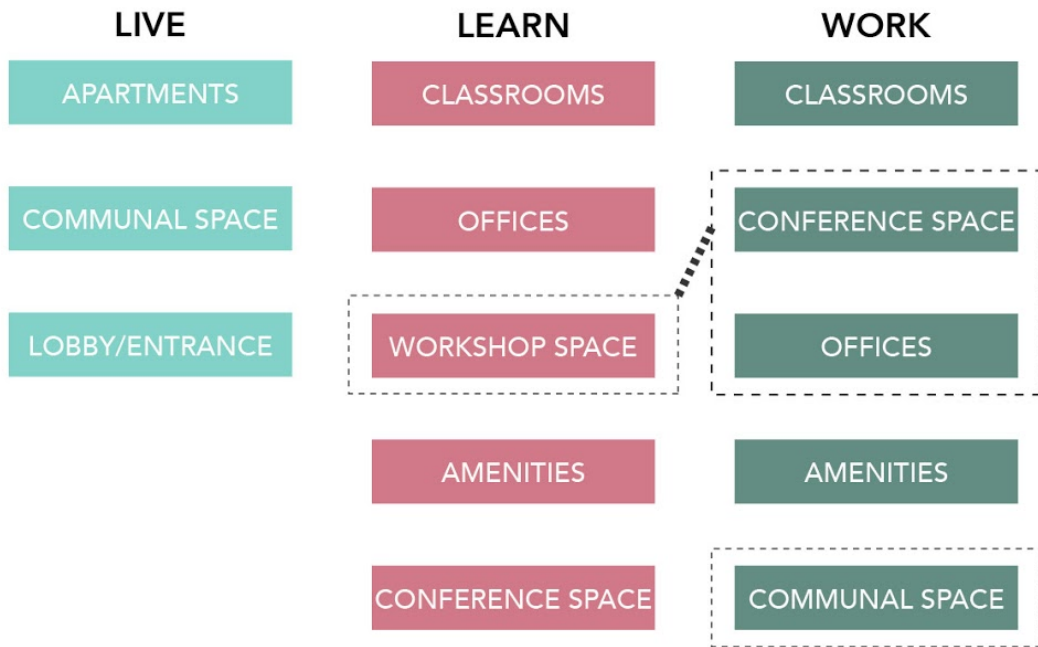


Figure 38: Scheme 3 space diagram. (Source: Author)



Figure 39: Scheme 3 space diagram. (Source: Author)

Scheme Selection

Based on the scope of this thesis, a combination of the above schemes will bring together the right elements to make an ecosystem of innovation within the new design of the mall. The coworking element will serve to bring flexible and adaptable working space for new innovative businesses, and can be reconfigured over time. The coworking space will be supplemented by maker space and learning space. As a result, workers can have the opportunity to make and test out products and ideas, while also having space available to learn new skills and marketable ideas. Finally, retail space will occupy the ground floor of the mall footprint, with part of it being dedicated to creating a food market for the downtown residents and users of the mall.

Urban Design Solutions

One of the most important goals of this thesis project is to reconnect the Stamford Town Center shopping mall with the surrounding context of downtown Stamford. Therefore, it was important to investigate how this connection between the building and the city could be made with a few urban design interventions. Before the mall was built in the 1980's, Main Street ran through the site to connect the west and the eastern portions of the city. However, this connection was severed once the mall was built, creating a huge blockage in the center of the city. As a result, one of the main urban interventions was to recreate this connection at the pedestrian level by carving out part of Stamford Town Center (figure 40). In order to foster this

connection, it was decided that the existing Saks Fifth Avenue Department store would be eliminated (figure 41).

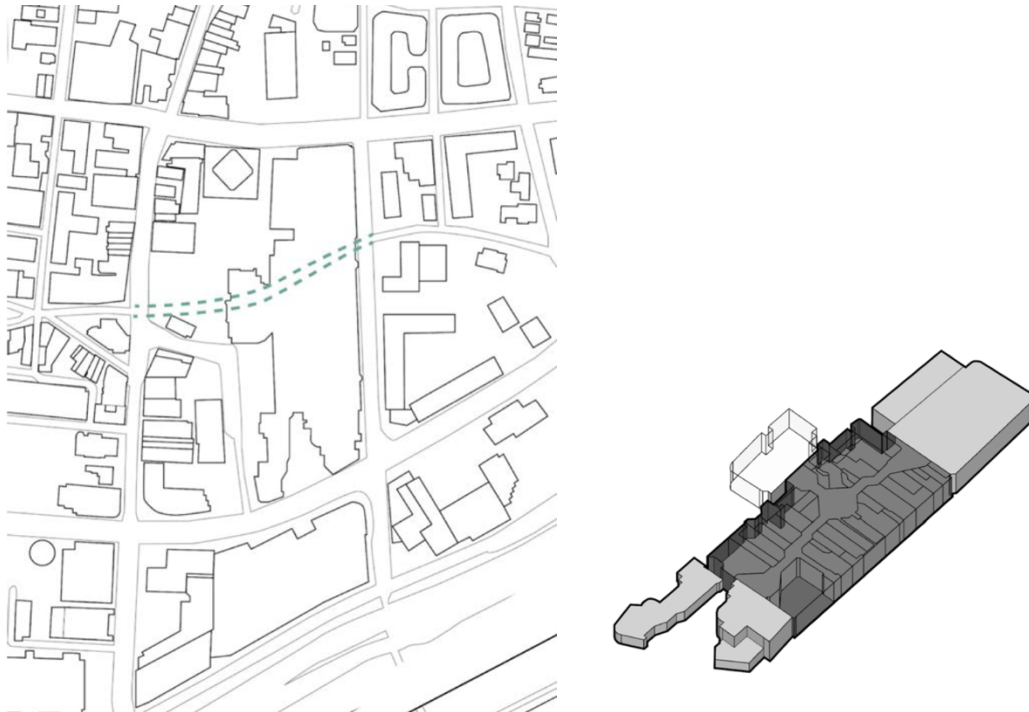


Figure 40: Main Street Reconnection (Source: Author)

Figure 41: Department Store Elimination (Source: Author)

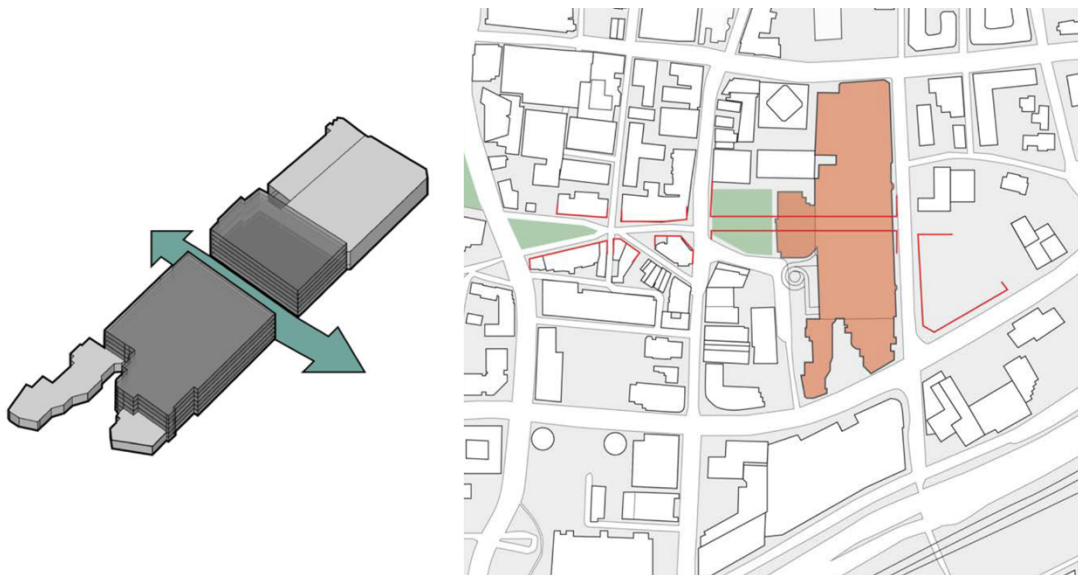


Figure 42: Creation of East-West Site Connection (Source: Author)

Creating an opening in the mall would now allow for a series of urban edges to be implemented to break up the huge superblock created by the original mall (figure 42). Subsequently, this east-west connection was designed into a pedestrian promenade, cementing the connection as one that benefits residents of the city, while also providing greater access into the mall (figure 43).

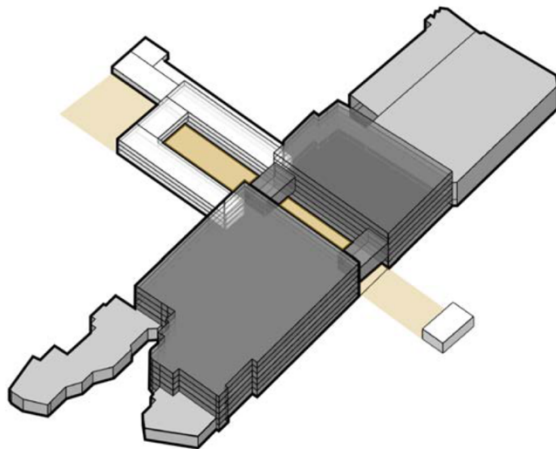


Figure 43: Creation of the Pedestrian Promenade (Source: Author)

Architectural Design Approach

After creating greater access into the mall, and identifying the new programs that would be implemented into the building's ecosystem, a series of design approaches were taken to redesign the Stamford Town Center mall. In conquering the project, four target intervention areas were identified, including redesign the Macy's

Department Store, redesigning the Greyrock Place Streetscape, reimagining the Veteran's Park space, and reprogramming the body of the shopping mall (figure 44).

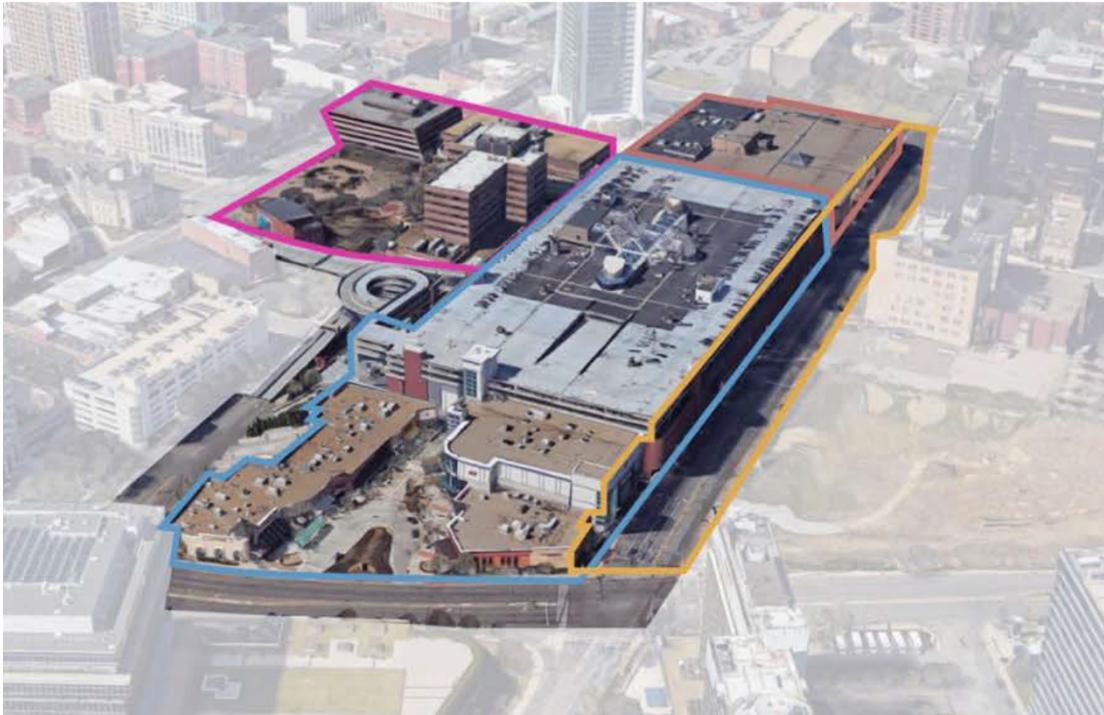


Figure 44: Thesis target intervention sites (Source: Author, Google Earth)

One of the first approaches to redesign the mall was to eliminate the compartmentalized stores that existed on the second and third floor of the building to create a more flexible layout. Therefore, many of the interior walls were eliminated, and the building was stripped down to the existing structural system. This structural grid would later be utilized to allocate space for the different programmatic functions. Next, the ground floor of the mall needed to be reconfigured to bring retail stores down to the street level. Therefore, 80% of the ground floor parking was eliminated to allow for retail spaces to face the new pedestrian promenade and the new Greyrock Place Streetscape. It was decided that the three parking levels on the top floors of the mall were to remain in place, as it provided a solution for parking for the new

residents and users of the site, and was located in a place that would not interfere with the urban design.

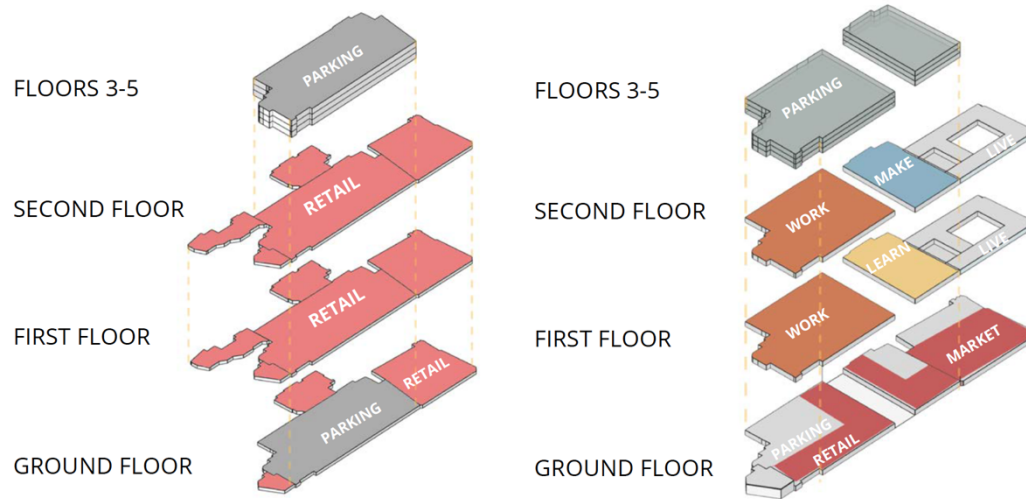


Figure 45: Existing Versus Proposed Program Breakdown (Source: Author)

Design Solution

The final design solution for Stamford Town Center creates a pedestrian promenade on the ground level of the building, while also providing ample spaces for all of the programmatic insertions throughout the building. On the ground level, a 75 foot wide walking promenade is created to make an inviting retail street. In addition to the new retail stores that line the promenade and Greyrock Place, the food market is located on the ground floor of the Macy's Department Store. Finally, a new mixed use building was added onto the Veteran's Park site, in order to emphasize the form of the promenade, and further foster the connection into the mall. The new building has retail spaces on the ground floor, and 5 levels of market rate apartments on the upper floors (figure 46). The approach from Main Street to the new mixed use building and pedestrian promenade can be seen in figure 47.

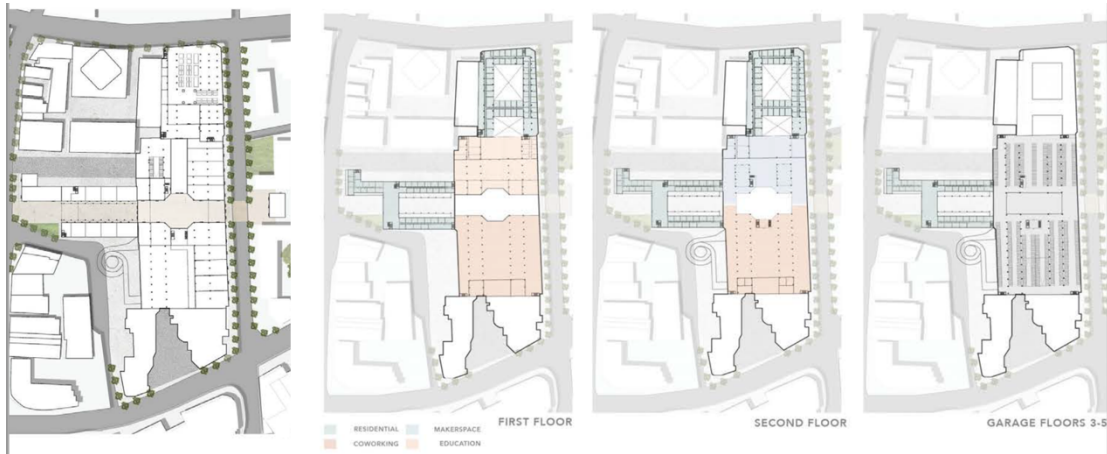


Figure 46: Final Design- Floorplans (Source: Author)



Figure 47: Perspective- Approach from Main Street (Source: Author)

Inside the mall, the interior street creates an inviting and warm atmosphere that is lined with stores. The upper levels of the atrium allow for light into the coworking spaces on the upper levels, and views from the offices out into the retail street (figure 48).



Figure 48: Mall Interior Perspective (Source: Author)

Finally, the Greyrock Place elevation was redesigned to break down the “wall like” existing façade. The new design allows for more light and fenestration into the building, and brings the building down to the human scale at the pedestrian level (figure 49).

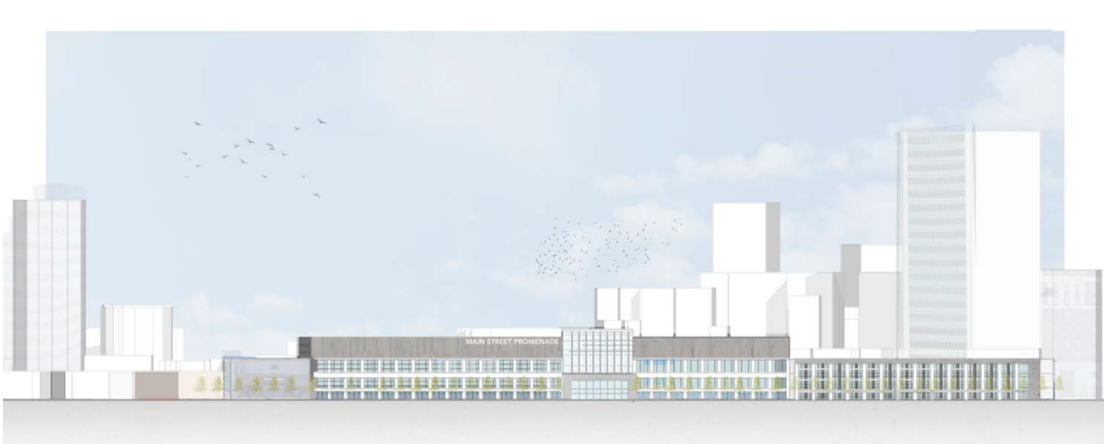


Figure 49: New Greyrock Place Elevation (Source: Author)

Chapter 8: Conclusions

With many shopping malls projected to fail within the next 10-20 years, it is imperative to address this emerging issue. By addressing the mall's single use design and inward orientation, there are opportunities to reinvent urban shopping malls into a vibrant asset within the surrounding community.

The goal of this thesis was to take a traditional mall, namely Stamford Town Center, and redesign the mall to create a sustainable ecosystem that will bring more people and innovative businesses to the downtown, while also creating a true town center in the heart of Stamford. Creating sustainable, walkable and connected spaces within the urban environment were important objectives to achieve throughout the design process, as these principles can combat the unattractive qualities of the current mall design.

The final design concept brings together the activities of work, eat, live, make, and learn, all within the body of the existing mall. The architecture of the mall would be stripped down to create a more flexible plan that can be adapted over time to different uses and markets. These components not only create the sustainable ecosystem that this thesis originally sought to create, but also creates a new draw for the residents of downtown center to walk to. Additionally, the new design brings a higher density of people to the site, which helps contribute to sustaining the ecosystem of happenings created within and around the mall (Figure 51).

One “activity” that could be added to this mix is the concept of play or adding more entertainment features to the new mall design. This could further increase the appeal of the shopping mall and bring in new target audiences to the site.

While the existing conditions of the Stamford Town Center mall are somewhat unique to the location and building, many of the strategies and design interventions could be applied to other shopping malls that exist in urban contexts.



Figure 50: Promenade Plaza Perspective (Source: Author)

EXISTING

Residential Units | **N/A**
Retail Square Footage | **762,000 SF**
Parking Spaces | **4000**



PROPOSED

Residential Units | **250 Units**
Retail Square Footage | **400,000 SF**
Parking Spaces | **2500**



Figure 51: Final data results (Source: Author)

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