WESTERN CENTRAL CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

American Planning Association
Western Central Chapter
Making Great Communities Happen

A Publication of the Western Central Chapter of the American Planning Association

montana • wyoming • south dakota • north dakota

APA

Summer 2009

Malls, the future of housing? *by Lisa Selin Davis*

The mall as we know it today is a mistake.

The lonely box of concrete plopped in the suburban diaspora, outdated and, in many cases, dying, isn't quite what Victor Gruen, the Austrian-born Holocaust survivor largely credited with inventing it, envisioned. Instead, the regional enclosed shopping mall was supposed to be a community center—a little bit of downtown and a car-free haven that would include day care facilities, offices, and, perhaps most importantly, residential living components a stone's throw from the building; the mall was always supposed to have housing nearby.

Perhaps today Gruen would finally be satisfied, because in its newest incarnation, the mall has finally become not just a place to shop, but to live. The mortgage meltdown, shifting demographics and a growing antipathy toward suburban sprawl have caused developers to see malls not as retail dinosaurs but as giant land banks, where going vertical can appease environmentalists, potential buyers and stockholders alike.

The abandoned North Hills Mall located in North Richland Hills, Texas, a suburb of the Dallas-Forth Worth metro area. The mall went from 70% occupancy in 2000 to 20% occupancy in mid-2004. *Photo Credit: Labelscar*.

It's happening slowly, but it's happening all over America, and industry experts expect the trend to grow. If inner cities are starting to see condo projects go rental or remain unsold, and some new suburban subdivisions are settling into modern ghost towns as the foreclosure crisis deepens, the one bright spot in the housing market might just be here: at the mall.

"This is not just a fad," says Anita Kramer, senior director for retail development at the Urban Land Institute. "This is the wave of the future."

More than 2, 000 malls currently stand in America. Back in 2001, when PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Congress for the New Urbanism conducted a nationwide survey of shopping malls, 19 percent of them could be classified as "greyfields"—so called for acres of undeveloped parking lots and piles of underutilized concrete— or vulnerable to becoming them; some of us know these spaces as dead malls.

Despite the obsessive chronicling of such structures on Web sites like Dead Malls (www.deadmalls.com), we still don't know their exact number, but we do know this: some of those greyfields are potential goldmines, and the industry knows it. "There are more renovation/expansions than new malls being built now," says Malachy Kavanagh, vice president of communications for the International Council of Shopping Centers, a trade group for mall makers.

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Inside this issue:

Newsletter Information

This newsletter is published by the Western Central Chapter of the American Planning Association. Circulation is to the APA members of the Western Central Chapter (WCC). The WCC Executive Committee welcomes submission of original articles, editorial letters, and any other information of interest to both professional and citizen planners. Submissions should be made to the newsletter editor:

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2009 WCC Newsletter Schedule
Fall – November 30, 2009
(submittal deadline is October 31)
Winter – January 25, 2010
(submittal deadline is January 11)

Address/Email Changes

If your mailing or email address has changed, please contact the American Planning Association at the address below. You can also edit your information online at https://www.planning.org/myprofile/.

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President's Message *by April D. Getchius, AICP*

Dear Western Central Chapter Members:

In April, a number of folks were fortunate to attend the National Planning Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although the overall attendance was down from approximately 6,000 to 4,500 or so, it was still a vibrant conference. Certainly, the overall tone of concern about the economy and the future's uncertainty continued to be the focus of many conversations. The title of conference sessions such as "When You Have To Lay Off Staff", "Dealing with Foreclosed Homes and Development", or "Using Planning Consultants During Lean Times" certainly reflect the sign of the times. There were however additional sessions that were also innovative and positive in their message. The bottom line, as outgoing APA President Bob Hunter stated, is that this is an opportunity for us all to prove the value of planning, a time we can focus on the long term future of our communities and counties. It is a time for planners to step up and assume leadership in looking to the future so we are ready when the economy recovers.

In addition, I know that many travel budgets have been cut or travel has been frozen completely in many jurisdictions. To that point, it was noted that all requirements for AICP certification maintenance can be met free of charge on the APA website through various training opportunities. In addition, the national conference speakers' materials are also available on the APA website so if you weren't able to attend or want access to various presentations you can obtain that.

In Chapter news, the Executive Board has approved two scholarship programs. The first is for graduate students who's home is in the Chapter region (not necessarily their school) and who are registered in a planning related field. Although the scholarship is limited to $500, it can go a long way to pay for books, pizza, Ramen noodles or other necessities of graduate school life. The second scholarship is intended to off-set attendance costs at conferences for first-time attendees in the Western Central Chapter region. Again, it is limited to $500 and is intended to assist with the cost of registration or travel to an area conference.

The scholarship applications and information are posted on our website. Please contact me if you have any questions.

I hope each of you have a wonderful and safe summer! Please don't hesitate to contact me (agetchius@cityofcasperwy.com) with any ideas or concerns you may have.

Best wishes,

April D. Getchius, AICP
Chapter President

April out of the office.

"It is a time for planners to step up and assume leadership in looking to the future so we are ready when the economy recovers."

Malls *continued from page 1*

"Malls needed to be more than just places to shop, if they were going to survive. They needed to become destinations, dressed up for a new century, with all the architectural and commercial diversity of real towns."

Starting with a destination

Somewhere in the last two decades, enclosed shopping malls started falling out of favor. Department stores were consolidating, making anchor tenants scarcer, and suburban sprawl was becoming the scourge of the environmental world, blamed for traffic, pollution and a kind of suburban malaise. Malls needed to be more than just places to shop, if they were going to survive. They needed to become destinations, dressed up for a new century, with all the architectural and commercial diversity of real towns.

We saw such creations in places like Canada's West Edmonton Mall, which opened in 1982 and includes an ice-skating rink and an indoor bungee jump. Minnesota's The Mall of America includes three roller coasters and a hotel. But those malls were intended to be centers of tourism, not models for your standard regional mall.

So a new style of mall has made its way to the market in the last decade or so, known as the "lifestyle center," a smaller, more upscale grouping of stores hovering around what looks like an actual city street, with sit-down restaurants and theaters, maybe even park benches and streetlights—very much like old-fashioned downtowns, and built near residential areas. Since 2005, only three enclosed shopping malls have been built, and only one, in East Rutherford, New Jersey, is on the docket for 2009. Yet thirty open-air lifestyle centers have risen. Many of these are redeveloped properties—old, enclosed malls either torn down or added to, both for financial and environmental reasons. After all, there just aren't that many 100,000-plus acres of virgin land in good locations to go around anymore.

But adding housing to an enclosed mall—as well as to these re-imagined, mixed-use facilities—is still a relatively novel concept, because malls were originally built far from residential areas, near highway interchanges. There, they'd be accessible from many different suburban communities, in their own commercial-only zones.

"Many of the shopping centers built in last 25 years were built on low cost land at the fringe," says the Urban Land Institute's Michael Beyard, senior fellow for retail and entertainment development. "Now, land is quite expensive, and many of these malls are no longer at the fringe."

Thanks to encroaching residential and commercial development, many of those malls are even now in prime locations, near major roads, housing subdivisions and sometimes even public transit. Suddenly, location, location, location applies to the mall as much as it traditionally has to residential real estate.

Deconstructing the mall, literally

The most common way for a mall to take advantage of its newly desirable locale and become residential is to "de-mall," in the language of the industry: raze the existing structure and start anew as a mixed-use mall.

Demolition of a strip mall. *Photo Credit: Clean Wal-Mart.*

That's what happened at Belmar, in Lakewood, Colorado, in 2003. On the site of an ailing 1.4 million square-foot mall known as Villa Italia on the outskirts of Denver, developers created a 106-acre lifestyle center with various kinds of housing attached. There are 1,300 rental apartments, 200 condos and single-family home units, and 760,000 square feet of office space hovering around them. Currently they have around 60 condominiums in active listings (they have been continually adding housing since units were first placed on the market), ranging from the mid-$200,000s to over $1 million.

According to an article earlier this year in The Atlantic, Belmar's housing "commands a 60 percent

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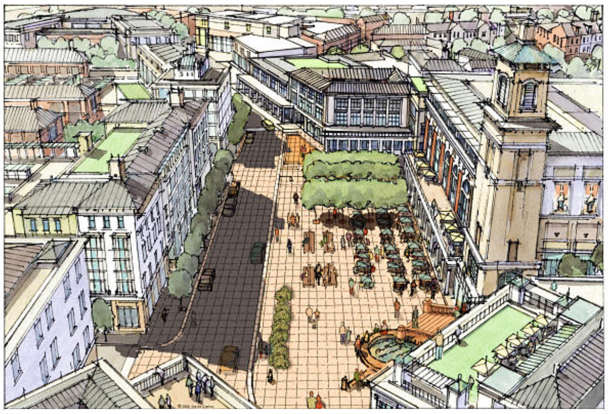
Malls *continued from page 4*



An artist's rendering shows plans for the Cottonwood Mall, in Holladay, Utah, renovation. *Rendering Credit: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co.*

premium per square foot over the single-family homes in the neighborhoods around it."

"There's a strong desire for this type of project," says Belmar's director of marketing, Stephanie Jackson. "It's urban, but it feels like the country. There's a real sense of synergy here."

The project has been lauded by industry groups and held up as a model for how to turn old malls into vibrant, complete neighborhoods. This doesn't mean Belmar is immune, however, from the unraveling of the economy by any means. Jackson says sales have been healthy, but like just about everywhere else in the American housing market, they're starting to feel the pinch. "They're doing okay," she says. "There's been some slow down in traffic."

General Growth, the second largest mall owner, with over 200 holdings, has undertaken similar projects lately, re-evaluating the health and potential of some of their older, ailing properties and deciding that ascribing many of the principles of New Urbanism—walkability, a mix of uses, a variety of housing types—can bring them back to life. In Holladay, Utah, for instance, the old Cottonwood Mall had fallen on hard times, largely edged out by competition from a newer, flashier mall named Fashion Place in nearby Salt Lake City.

"We've made it more of a community asset than a retail asset."

"[Cottonwood] really is the community center of that town, but it was dated and not as popular in recent years," says Aaron Bartels, senior director of development for another General Growth project. Earlier this year, they razed every inch of Cottonwood but the Macy's to create "an inviting residential community within a convenient neighborhood setting. The 57-acre plan aligns the streets and a central square with the vistas of the mountains to the east, creating symmetry with the natural beauty of Mount Olympus and the Wasatch Front," reads a project description.

In addition to a new mall, the project includes condos, townhouses, cottages and single-family homes, each of them above or adjacent to the shopping component. The project is expected to reopen in 2011.

Rethinking community

If razing and rebuilding seems a little less that environmentally friendly, there's another model of life at the mall. At General Growth's suburban Boston property, Natick Mall, they chose to create what the Congress for New Urbanism calls Mall-plus: an adaptive reuse project that takes a traditional enclosed shopping center and adds new components right inside it.

Natick Mall, in an area known as MetroWest, was built in 1966, and got a massive overhaul in 1994. But that makeover occurred while enclosed malls were still in favor, and didn't bring it up to 21st century standards. So last year, after acquiring an adjacent parcel of land once occupied by a Wonder Bread factory, General Growth decided to give the mall a $370 million makeover. Along with the addition of anchor stores like Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom that helped reinvent the mall as a luxury destination called the Natick Collection, they grafted 12 stories of condominiums onto the side of the building, created a 1.2-acre park with wandering, leafy paths on the mall's roof, and added a private club with features like a piano lounge and screening room.

"We've made it more of a community asset than a retail asset," says Bartels. The condominiums,

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Creating Neighborhood Capital from Strip Malls

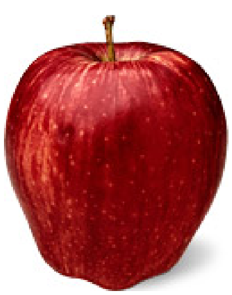
by Nate Berg

EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Planetizen offers a variety of courses covering planning-related topics and taught by experts in the field. These self-paced courses are designed for professionals, students, or concerned citizens looking for quick yet thorough introductions to concepts relevant to their work.

Selected courses are eligible for credits from the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP*) Certification Maintenance program.

For more information on courses currently available, click here.

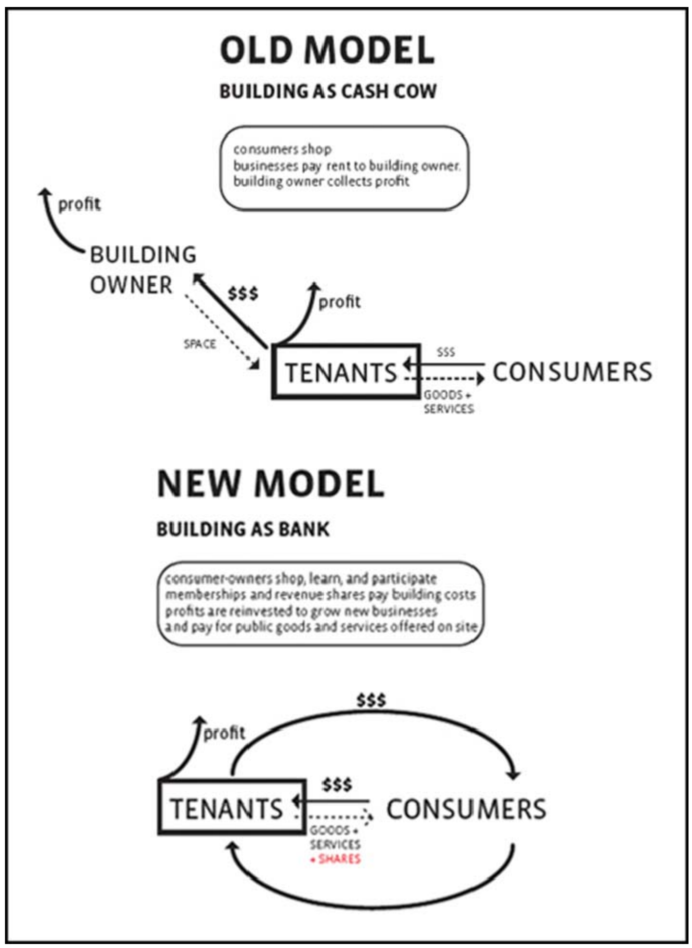


Strip malls are in virtually every American city, but they're rarely an important part of those cities. Ava Bromberg says they can be. Her idea is to turn strip malls into community-owned hubs that generate capital within their neighborhood and keep it there.

Strip malls probably don't fit into the definition of progressive urbanism for most people, but maybe they should. Well, maybe after a little organizational tweaking.

The small retail centers are ubiquitous in American cities, with their generic shops selling donuts or beer, offering dry cleaning or key-cutting. They're a part of many neighborhoods, but not necessarily an essential part. They bring goods and services to the area, but are ultimately of the greatest benefit to their owners – off somewhere cashing monthly rent checks from the moms and pops running the little businesses within. That model can change, according to Ava Bromberg. She's a PhD student in UCLA's School of Public Affairs who is developing a new vision for small retail centers that would transform them into engines of social and economic capital at the neighborhood level.

"It's part mall, part business incubator, part cultural hub," says Bromberg. The idea is to overlay a distributed ownership model on the typical strip mall that enables the value created by this commercial real estate to cycle back and benefit the neighborhood it serves. Consumers are also business owners, property shareholders, and decisionmakers. In this model, the building goes from being a cash cow for one owner to being a bank for the community, into which investments can be made and from which public benefits can be funded.



But it's also about activating disused retail space for more than retail. Bromberg wants the spaces to partner with local institutions like hospitals and universities to create learning environments and job training opportunities on-site. The idea is to retool the existing neighborhood infrastructure to serve unmet needs within the community.

"I'm hoping to hybridize something like the land trust with the co-op and the condominium to create a really viable, flexible but durable institutional structure that allows the value that's generated by users of the space to be able to be reinvested in that space and its programming," says Bromberg. She has been working with architect Paul Schuette to develop the idea.

This "social entrepreneurial model

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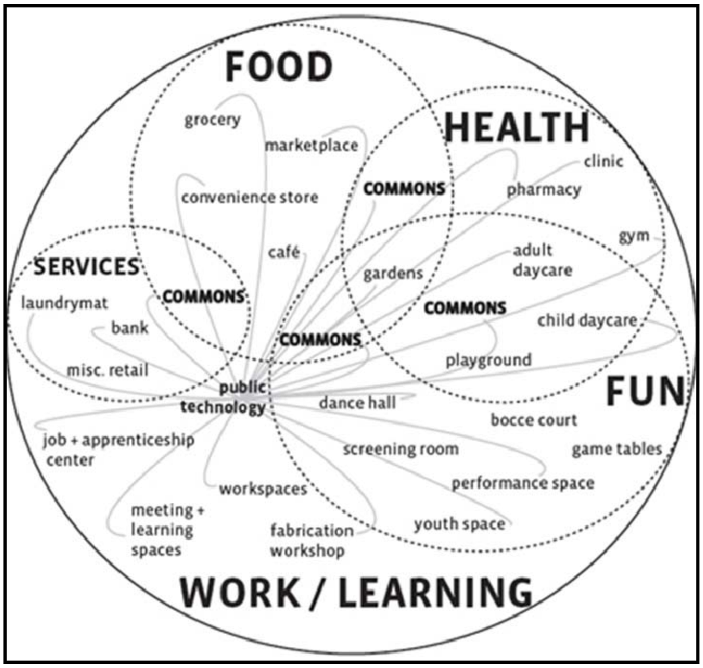
Creating Neighborhoods *continued from page 6*



for commercial real estate" is the basis of Bromberg's PhD research at UCLA. Through co-operatively-owned businesses, community members can both teach and learn business techniques, and use that knowledge to continue the growth of the local economy.

"One of the key issues that continues to plague inner city neighborhoods is a lack of access to capital to do things," says Bromberg. Those things include building new parks and providing public services that are often lacking in lower income neighborhoods -- from fresh grocery stores to financial services. Bromberg says the programming could be tailored to each neighborhood's demographic, based on a template of clustered basic services.

Architect Roger Sherman, who is also a professor at UCLA, recently reviewed the project concept. He says the strength of the idea is that it meets a distinct and widespread community need, especially amid an economic recession.

"It's very clear to me that the rules have changed and that it's very possible for somebody who has a really good idea to create an audience that can sustain that idea if it's really well branded and really cunningly conceived," says Sherman. "But developers, for the most part, are not those types of people. They're in a different silo."

Sherman says Bromberg's idea is a new concept in the realm of commercial real estate, but there are a few examples of existing projects that shift ownership of commercial real estate projects to community members.

One of them is Market Creek Plaza in San Diego. It's a community-owned retail center that is both a venue for local businesses and a cultural hub. The plaza creates a venue for locals to try out their business projects, and the development's collaborative governance structure gives them a voice in the operation and future of the project. A portion of the profits are directed back into a neighborhood-controlled community foundation used to continue economic development within the community.

While the goals are heady, the costs of business are still a factor. Market Creek Plaza was made possible by a $23.5 million contribution from the Jacobs Family Foundation. Bromberg doesn't yet have capital support for this idea, but she's working on getting some seed funding to begin laying out the business plan and organizational structure. Bromberg has been is discussions Newell Lessell of the ICA Group in Boston, which consults and structures worker- and community-owned co-ops and businesses. But beyond the seed funding, Sherman says finding the capital within neighborhoods to continue this process may require some creative outreach to institutional partners or foundations.

"Even though she's kind of ahead of the curve on this, I just don't know whether or not the funding mechanisms are going to be equally ahead of the curve initially," Sherman says. He says the path to

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Creating Sustainable Communities
December 4, 2009

Community Strategies for Dealing with Distressed Properties—LAW CM CREDIT
December 10, 2009

Social Equity - ETHICS CM CREDIT
December 11 , 2009

For more information, and a list of webinar topics planned for 2010, go to http://www.utah-apa.org/webcasts.htm

Creating Neighborhoods *continued from page 7*

true community ownership may end up taking its first steps with one or two starter owners who then transfer ownership to the community over time.

No exact physical location for the first iteration of this project has been selected, but a disused Los Angeles strip mall is seen as the perfect canvas for a pilot run. In the meantime, Bromberg will continue building her team. She hopes to develop the model and policy framework that can transplant this idea to any place with underused retail space and a community seeking more control over their local economy. She hopes such an engine will be able to turn the economic soil of a neighborhood, and develop learning, work, and social opportunities that local residents desire. Bromberg and Schuette have developed a speculative version of the model, which they've titled CoOperating System: Consumer Cooperative Commercial, Cultural, and Civic Center and are using to approach seed funders to formally engage ICA Group to develop the intricacies of the ownership model.

"Obviously there's a lot of complications to be worked out," Bromberg says. As she continues her research, she recognizes the need to nail down the legal and institutional structure that will enable this sort of community-owned commercial enterprise. As those details develop and seed funding is sought, it's likely that the demand for such community-owned concepts will continue to increase -- in L.A. and beyond.

Nate Berg is Assistant Editor of *Planetizen*. This article originally appeared on www.planetizen.com and is reprinted here with permission. Graphics included in original article.

WCC REVISED BYLAWS APPROVED BY MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to the WCC members who voted on the updated Chapter's Bylaws The bylaws were approved and a final version of the document is available on www.wccapa.org under the "Member Services" tab.

Where in the world? *by Allyson C. Bristor, AICP*

Thanks to Chris Brekke for submitting this beautiful picture.

Submit your world pictures to the newsletter editor: abristor@bozeman.net

answer on page 10

Dead Mall Dictionary *by Deadmalls.com*

This a partial listing of the Dead Mall Dictionary from Deadmalls.com. How many names have you used before?

Dead Mall: A mall with a high vacancy rate, low consumer traffic level, or is dated or deteriorating in some manner. For purposes of inclusion on this site, Deadmalls.com defines a dead mall as one having a occupancy rate in slow or steady decline of 70% or less. Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, has a good definition of dead mall.

Anchor: A large store in a shopping center, usually is a highly visible store that is a destination for shoppers. Anchors help draw consumer traffic to a mall.

Primary Store: Usually a store that belongs to part of a large regional or national chain. A primary store usually will construct it's own format storefront when it moves into a mall. You can find primary stores in most thriving malls.

Secondary Store: A store that moves into an existing retail space in a mall, they usually aren't a chain store, but more of a mom and pop location. These stores use existing storefronts, and usually are filling space in an otherwise dead mall.

Mallmanac: A map which lists names of stores and diagrams the layout of a mall. This word is a Sniglet, which is "a word that should be in the dictionary, but isn't".

Kiosk: A store located in the common area of an enclosed mall.

Labelscar: Fading or dirt left behind from a sign on or in a mall. Labelscars leave a readable marking, which is very helpful when identifying former stores.
(The term "labelscar" was brought to the forefront by Peter Blackbird in 1998 and is now widely used to describe this phenomenon)

Sealed: When a mall is locked up, and closed to the public

Shuttered: When a mall is boarded up.

Big Box: A large store that deals in volume.

Category Killer: Another term used to negatively describe a "Big Box", referring to the results when a Big Box opens and an entire category of Mom & Pop stores and/or small retailers in that category go out of business.

Ancillary Mall: A mall that has been supplanted by another shopping center, but is surviving as an alternative to the dominant mall.

Greyfields: Malls where annual sales per square foot is less than $150, or one-third the rate of sales at a successful mall. (this term is used to describe dying malls and was coined by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) and the Center for the New Urbanism after the term "brownfields": old industrial sites).

Mall Categories:

- **first class mall....** regular operating mall
- **second class mall...** high vacancy, or non-traditional store occupancy
- **third class mall...** areas or entire mall sealed from public
- **fourth class mall...** shuttered or slated for demolition
- **fifth class mall...** redevelopment has begun, or is completed

*"**Labelscar:** Fading or dirt left behind from a sign on or in a mall. Labelscars leave a readable marking, which is very helpful when identifying former stores."*

State Director & Western Planner Updates

Montana

MAP Annual Conference: The Conference Committee has started working on getting sessions and other logistics together for the upcoming conference in Red Lodge on September 20 through October 2. If you are interested in proposing a session, there is information on the MAP website www.montanaplanners.org on what to do.

MAP Awards: The MAP Board has created an Awards Committee and they are now accepting nominations in the following categories: Professional Achievement in Planning, Professional Achievement in Journalism, Distinguished Leadership by a Professional Planner, Distinguished Leadership by a Community Planner, and Distinguished Leadership by an Elected Official. The MAP website has additional details and the nomination form.

Legislative Update: The Legislature has adjourned but managed to keep the MAP Legislative Committee busy reviewing LCs, draft bills and re-drafted and amended bills. A complete recap of planning-related bills will soon be available on the MAP website, but until then here are a few bills that passed to look up at http://leg.mt.gov/css/default.asp:

- HB 279: This bill eliminated CTEP projects from the Department of Transportation ICAP charge.
- HB 486: This bill made numerous changes to the Growth Policy statute; Zoning (Parts 1, 2 and 3); and Subdivision and Platting Act (e.g., changes to minor parkland dedication).
- SB 305: This bill created a "mega-major" subdivision, one that has more than 50 lots and gets an extended 80 working day review time. It also made other changes to the SPA and includes a provision for a penalty if review times are not met.

Wyoming

No update this issue.

South Dakota

The South Dakota Planners Association has been busy planning for the 2009 Western Planner Conference, September 8-11, 2009, Spearfish, South Dakota. We encourage all to attend to experience the beauty of the historic and majestic Black Hills of South Dakota. The preliminary agenda is packed with interesting breakout sessions, networking opportunities, and valuable updates on various issues. SDPA will be having a preconference session and arranging mobile tours of interest. Please make plans to "Head for the Hills".

Like many of you, SD Planners are busy dealing with "Stimulus" programs and projects and examining impacts on our communities. Fortunately, South Dakota has many that continue to invest in our communities which stabilizes our local economies and quality of life. However, we are mindful that job losses, housing issues, and consumer spending are today's considerations. Nonetheless, we recognize the need to continue to develop optimistic plans with sound planning principles that provides manageable growth and opportunities.

North Dakota

The City of Bismark, North Dakota is sponsoring a Sustainability Series throughout 2009. The purpose of the Bismarck Sustainability Series is to raise awareness and to initiate a dialogue within the community on the financial, environmental, health, societal, and quality of life benefits and costs of the built environment and to explore alternatives to current building and design practices in the Bismarck area. The series is envisioned to encourage community based discussions and actions to create a more livable community for future generations. In total the Bismarck Sustainability Series will be comprised of four sessions occurring throughout 2009. The following represent the general topic areas of each of the sessions:

1. Smart Growth Strategies at the Regional, Community, and Neighborhood Scales
2. Advancements in Sustainable Building Methods and Designs

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Where in the world? answer:

Skjåk, Norway (May 2004). Skjåk s a municipality in Oppland county, Norway. It is part of the traditional region of Gudbrandsdal. The community is at the meeting point between Gudbrandsdal and the mountains between the eastern parts of Norway and the west coast.

Information obtained from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skj%C3%A5k

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3. Healthy Communities - The Importance of Open Space and Non-motorized Transportation
4. Best Practices.

The dialogue is geared to the community as a whole. Over 100 individuals were in attendance at the February series which was also taped and aired on local Community Access Television in the Bismarck-Mandan metropolitan area.

Western Planner

You will begin to see the hard work paying off for the organizers of the Western Planner-Conference being held in Spearfish, September 9 through 11. In the upcoming issues you will start to see the details come out of what will be happening at the conference and how you can register for this wonderful conference! We show you some great pictures of the Black Hills and some even better history of the area. The Conference Committee is working diligently on providing as many of our sessions with CM credits as possible and as we get them approved we will let everyone know. We hope to see as many of you in attendance as possible.

We will also be seeing one of our own "Western Planners" from Montana, Michele Reinhart as a Featured Planner in an upcoming volume. Watch for it!

AICP Certification Corner *by Pepper McClenahan, AICP*

Six Months Remaining in First CM Renewal Period

Take heart, there is still time to get your require 32 hours of credits to maintain your AICP designation. Even though the first renewal period ends December 31, 2009, there are opportunities to obtain the required educational hours, including **free** hours:

- Tuesdays at APA podcasts
- HIA online course
- EDA telecast
- Stimulus telecast
- Chapter webinars

Check the APA website calendar for listed course information: http://www.planning.org/calendar/, and feel free to contact me (pepper@wlcwyo.com) if you need assistance identifying certification maintenance (CM) opportunities or in logging your hours.

Nationwide, 70% of AICP members have actively logged credits and 30% are at or close to having all 32 required CMs for this renewal period.

If you are just beginning to address the CM requirement, APA has a wonderful Frequently Asked Question sheet to quickly orient you. Access it at the following address: http://www.planning.org/cm/faq.htm.

Here's an example of the type of information available on the FAQ:

I'm retired, and my APA membership type is Retired or Life. Do I have to comply with CM requirements?

Retired members are exempt from Certification Maintenance requirements. Retired members are defined as those who have been an APA or AICP member continuously for 10 or more years, who are 65 or older, retired from profession-related employment, and who are not working full-time for any other employer. This excludes part time non-planning or nonprofessional work. If you meet these criteria then you do not need to apply for an exemption. Planners who do not meet the above criteria or who are practicing part time (and who use the AICP credential in their work) will be required to meet the full obligations of Certification Maintenance, unless granted one of the exemptions described on the APA website.

JOB CORNER

Looking for a job? Several online planning job listings are free to search. Here are just a few:

American Planning Association: http://www.planning.org/jobs/search/

Planetizen: http://www.planetizen.com/jobs

USA.gov: http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Work_for_the_Government.shtml

Montana Association of Planners: http://www.montanaplanners.org/jobs.htm

If interested in posting a job listing in the WCC Newsletter, please contact the newsletter editor by the submittal deadline (as shown on page 2).

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called Nouvelle at Natick, have their own private entrances into the mall, and they've attracted empty nesters and young couples, mall lovers and mall-neutral buyers alike.

Sales of the 215 condos, ranging from $425,000 to $1.7 million and 800 square-feet to more than 2,000 square-feet, began in Sept. 2007. So far, says Bartels, 40 have closed, which may not seem like a home run compared to the speed with which some city condo projects sold during the height of the building boom, but Bartels seems pleased. They're confident about the project due to its location and price point.

"We're priced 50 percent below a comparable product in Boston, about $600 a square foot," says Bartels. "In MetroWest, we're probably 50 percent above a comparable property, and there's nothing else around here with that level of amenities."

Nouvelle at Natick is unique in many ways, and not just because it's the first case of an enclosed shopping mall getting condos directly inside it. Most such condominium projects, offering goodies like swimming pools and wine rooms, are found in the inner city, but this project sits in an older, inner ring suburb (as opposed to new mixed-use mall properties like Time Warner Center, in New York City, where people have long been used to residing above retail). This is urban life for folks who prefer the suburbs, which, according to the U.S. Census, is the majority of us: some 47 percent live in suburbs, and 40 million of the 58 million housing units there are detached.

A new town center model at Coconut Point in Estero, Florida. *Photo Credit: New York Focus.*

Some call this debut creature the new suburbia or "metroburbia," a vertical suburbia that can appease the desire for the best parts of both urban and suburban life. "For the last hundred years that kind of lifestyle"—walkable, dense—"was only available in dense urban environments," says Bartels. "A lot of people are hoping to get out of the cul-de-sac and get into more integrated lifestyle."

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'You'd almost never know you're in the mall'

Such a new town center model can be seen at Coconut Point, in Estero, Florida, where the old residential-above-retain model so common in older urban centers is laid out in their newfangled "city streets." Rows of condos stand above stores like Bebe and the Apple store, with freestanding models surrounding them.

"It's almost like living in the city, where you're above a storefront," says Diane Ivey, director of mall marketing. "You'd almost never know that you're in the mall." Yet the homes hover both above and around 1.2 million square feet of retail space and 32,000 square feet of office condominiums. Some 200 out of 270 units have been sold since they went on the market in 2005. Clearly, though, not all who buy at Coconut Point crave the fully urban experience. As Ivey points out, "The first homes that were bought were not on the main street."

Coconut Point is the offspring of Simon Property Group, the world's largest owner of malls, with 323 holdings. They've been slow to add residential to the mix, as hopeful as they are for the model; only about six of their new open-air centers have residential, and none of their enclosed shopping centers have tried General Growth's tack, adding condominiums to the mix.

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In addition to Coconut Point, Simon's life-at-the-mall properties include Firewheel Town Center, outside Dallas; South Park, in Charlotte, N.C., and The Domain in Austin, Texas, with 390 rental units ranging from $1,025 to $2,300, stacked above retail. It has a wine bar, a couple of steakhouses, a spa and a fancy chocolate shop, among many other stores, with more to come as they finish the next phase. Open for less than two years, the property is 95 percent rented.

Though they would not release demographic information about the residents, they did point out this: The Domain is less than 10 miles from the University of Texas, Austin; chances are, it's reaching a very different market than the Natick Collection or Coconut Point. This actually bodes well for the future of the model. Even the luxury real estate sector has been taking a hit as of late. To reinvent the mall as a series of domiciles, many styles, sizes and price points of housing must be available there.

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Changing perceptions of home

We know that adding residential is the logical next step for the mall, and that there's a desire for it on the market. A study by Jonathan Levine of the University of Michigan and Lawrence Frank of the University of British Columbia of suburban Atlanta and Boston residents revealed that at least a third of them would rather have mixed-use and walkable neighborhoods than big houses on large lots—as long as they were affordable—and another third were at least open to such a shift in lifestyle. Many want to live like they're in a city—emotionally, if not geographically.

We have only a few data to go by about the fiscal health of these projects. At Reston Town Center, for instance, a D.C.-suburb lifestyle center that opened in 1990, Reston's products—apartments, condominiums, and office and retail spaces—commanded as much as 50 percent more rent than nearby condos, malls or office parks, according to a 2006 study by the Brookings Institution. "The anecdotal information is that they are very successful, they are able to get higher rents on all sides, there's a premium for living and doing business in these establishments," says Urban Land Institute's Kramer. And mixed use is clearly a smarter direction for developers now; if one sector takes a serious hit, chances are, the health of the others will help a mixed-use development rebound; it's time to spread the risk around.

A view of the Reston Town Center. *Photo Credit: Jahi Chikwendiu for The Washington Post.*

Whether it will revive ailing malls and help realize the vision Victor Gruen presented some 50 years ago remains to be seen. Malls have seen their vacancies rise perilously in the last few months. The sample of residential experiments is just too small to know if the trend will prove profitable in the long run, and help insulate the mall from the growing financial crisis. Clearly, though, suburbia is going to need some kind of injection to keep it relevant and repair the mortgage meltdown trauma. Many suburban areas have suffered more than their urban counterparts in recent months. Cleveland, Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., for example, saw higher rates of foreclosure in suburbs versus the inner city.

Mall makers are moving in this direction, but very slowly, and slower now that our economy is shaky. Mall makers don't blame it on the malls themselves—it's the economy. "That's not a reflection on the product type," says General Growth's Bartels. "That's a reflection on the mortgage market."

Lisa Selin Davis writes for a variety of publications about real estate and is managing editor of Brownstoner.com. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. This story was featured in the November/December issue of HousingWire Magazine and is reprinted here with permission. There's much more to be read in the magazine. If you'd like to learn about the magazine, go to www.housingwire.com.