

PLANNING ISSUES—COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

Objectives

1. To provide an adequate supply of commercial goods and services throughout Kane County.
 2. To encourage agriculturally related businesses in farmland areas.
 3. To encourage commercial development that is compatible with surrounding land uses as well as functional, safe, and well designed.
 4. To encourage redevelopment of older commercial centers and structures.
 5. To encourage the principles that create gathering places, community landmarks, and a sense of place.
 6. To eliminate county spot commercial zoning where it is not being utilized.
 7. To encourage the appropriate use of smart growth design principles and techniques in county and municipal planning in the Critical Growth Area, as an alternative to conventional commercial development.
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Chapter Focus

Commercial development provides jobs, tax revenue, and sources of goods and services for the county’s growing population. Historically, much of the county’s commercial development has been located in the downtowns along the Fox River. The location of intense commercial uses in the municipalities was appropriate because this is where the population, transportation facilities, and infrastructure to support commercial uses were found. More recently, growth trends and location shifts, particularly in the retail goods and services sector, have moved commercial investment westward to the Randall Road corridor. This westward shift in commercial development creates an increasing challenge for municipalities to strengthen older commercial areas. Examining the changing preferences and lifestyles of the residents, workers, and visitors that the retail area serves can revive older commercial areas. Design techniques can be used to build on the area’s unique identity and character as well as to ensure compatibility with the surrounding area.

Support of the Agricultural and Rural Village area is essential. Appropriate commercial categories and locations have been established for agribusiness and crossroads commercial.

This chapter examines:

- Commercial development
 - Commercial design
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Commercial Development



More than 80% of commercial development in Kane County is found in the Fox Valley area, primarily within the municipalities. These occur in many forms: traditional downtowns, regional malls, sub-regional shopping centers, strip centers and small neighborhood conveniences. The county has two regional malls with more than one million square feet of space: Spring Hill Mall in West Dundee and Carpentersville, and Charlestowne Mall in St. Charles. The municipalities are an appropriate location for intensive commercial uses because of existing infrastructure and population. The municipalities also desire this land use because it generates tax revenues without increasing school population. The county will continue to steer intensive commercial uses toward the municipalities. Traversing the county from north to south, the Randall Road corridor is one of the largest and fastest growing commercial areas in the region.

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In unincorporated Kane County, commercial uses totaled just 5% or 1,195 acres of land uses in 2001, occurring predominately within the unincorporated villages of the central townships. This small amount of commercial land use in unincorporated Kane County is partly due to the County Board's practice of steering commercial development towards cities and villages where it is more appropriate. Further, in unincorporated areas where commercial zonings have outlived their usefulness or are inappropriate, the county has taken steps to revoke and eliminate "spot" commercial zoning. This is not to be confused with the agribusiness in the central and western townships and villages, which supports the agricultural community.

Kane County identifies seven types of commercial uses which fulfill various functions:

- 1) Downtown Cores
- 2) Urban Arterial Commercial
- 3) Rural Commercial
- 4) Neighborhood Centers
- 5) Crossroad Commercial
- 6) Agricultural Businesses
- 7) Office, Research and Industry

1) **Downtown Cores**



The historic downtown cores of Kane County municipalities and villages are indispensable to the economy and viability of the communities and the county. The downtown centers contain many beautiful, older buildings with historical significance and architectural integrity. Many downtown centers are linked to the Fox River through riverwalks and greenways. Kane County will continue to support downtown revitalization programs such as main street programs and other preservation programs building on the existing infrastructure and a strong sense of place.

2) **Urban Arterial Commercial**



Urban Arterial Commercial is an important land use in the Fox Valley. Commercial land uses along major arterials in the Fox Valley provide a variety of goods and services and comprise the majority of new commercial development in incorporated areas of Kane County. This location is a result of proximity to sewer and water, residential population, and well-traveled transportation routes.

Examples of urban arterial commercial uses are: Meadowdale Shopping Center in Carpentersville, Charlestowne Centre in St. Charles, Windmill Place in Batavia and Geneva Commons. Urban

commercial uses are especially concentrated along stretches of Randall and Orchard Roads. Pressure for commercial development along these major highways will continue.

Kane County should continue to discourage commercial development along the unincorporated stretches of these major roads. The only commercial uses that will be considered along these arterials will be properties with access to municipal services and consistent with municipal plans. Such development must be coordinated with county road access policies. Compatible and aesthetically pleasing building and landscape design as well as traffic management are key factors to consider in approving commercial uses. Poorly designed strip commercial development should be strongly discouraged.

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Kane County and the municipalities should limit the expansion of commercial development westward into the Critical Growth Area. Commercial development in the Critical Growth Area should be used to service neighborhood development. New commercial developments should be directed toward the Urban Corridor or town centers. Opportunities for new commercial development in the Urban Corridor will help foster the retrofit of existing commercial strip centers and a renaissance of downtown retail (Refer to Figure 24).

3) Rural Commercial



Pressure for scattered commercial development in central and western Kane County will increase as population grows. Kane County will continue to encourage and guide commercial uses within planned areas of villages where such services have historically been provided and where infrastructure is available or being planned. Villages within this area include Big Rock, Burlington, Elburn, Hampshire, Kaneville, La Fox, Lily Lake, Maple Park, Pingree Grove, Plato Center, Udina, Virgil, and Wasco.

Kane County's Historic Preservation Plan states that new businesses should use available older structures wherever possible and that new buildings should complement the historic character of each rural town. The county endeavors to avoid the blighting effects of incompatible commercial development by assisting the rural villages in maintaining and enhancing existing rural commercial development.

4) Neighborhood Centers



Neighborhood Centers are new commercial uses located on a limited basis primarily within residential development in the Critical Growth Area. Residential growth in the area will increase the need for goods and services. This need can be met without generating strip centers or commercial sites along major intersections. Neighborhood Centers, such as the village center for Mill Creek, are a means of providing goods and services that are compatible with the scale and style of surrounding neighborhoods. These centers are an alternative to the conventional suburban sprawl and perform multiple functions—shopping, services, and community meeting places—and contribute to a strong sense of place. Such centers must be designed as an integral part of the residential development. Design requirements will include cluster

development, access control, efficient traffic patterns, well-planned parking, and pedestrian friendly features. Neighborhood Centers will be an environmental asset to communities by reducing dependency on the automobile.

5) Crossroad Commercial

Crossroad commercial uses are designated at strategic intersections in order to provide basic conveniences for automobile travelers, and in response to location, traffic volume and patterns, accessibility, and existing land use. Examples include the intersections of Illinois Route 47 and Jericho Road, and the intersection of Illinois Routes 47 and Plank Road. The overall function of crossroad commercial land use is to provide automobile-oriented conveniences, such as gas stations and mini-marts, in an efficient, safe, and aesthetically pleasing manner. Development at such intersections should be limited in size and the scope of services. Shopping strip centers are discouraged to avoid competition with commercial services in nearby villages and cities, as well as to avoid sprawl. Efficient turn lanes, setbacks, signage, and landscaping, are measures to achieve auto-related,

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functional, and attractive intersections. Design control creating a countryside character and complementing the existing rural surroundings is highly recommended.

6) Agricultural Businesses



The purpose of this type of commercial use is to provide for the location and expansion of agriculturally related businesses. Agribusinesses are a vital support to the agricultural economy in Kane County, and provide stability and growth in the western villages. These businesses include sales, services, processing, research, warehousing, marketing activities, and other related uses that are dependent upon or closely allied to the agricultural industry. Agricultural businesses are generally located in the central and western portions of the county townships and are encouraged to utilize existing buildings to locate in or as natural extensions of the villages. Agricultural will continue to provide strong economic benefits to Kane County. Encouraging the development and expansion of agribusinesses in appropriate locations will contribute to the economic viability of farming in the central and western townships.

7) Office, Research and Industry



Kane County has started to see large office and research facilities in Aurora and Elgin tollway corridors—the East-West Tollway (I-88) and Northwest Tollway (I-90). Some examples are Matsushita Electronics and First Card in Elgin, as well as Toyota and Farmers Insurance in Aurora. Office and research development in the Aurora area is an extension of what has been taking place in DuPage County between Oak Brook and Naperville since the 1960's. Likewise, the office and research development along the Northwest Tollway in the Elgin area is an extension of similar growth in northwest Cook County between O'Hare Airport, Schaumburg, and Hoffman Estates.

Industrial land uses exist in most Kane County municipalities and account for most of the traditional manufacturing jobs. Major industrial development areas are in Aurora, Elgin, Montgomery, and St. Charles. Kane County's 2001 land use survey of unincorporated Kane County showed 642 acres of industrial use. This relatively low acreage demonstrates that most industry is located within municipalities where sewer, water, and electrical power are readily available. Sugar Grove and Hampshire plan additional new office and industrial areas of significant size.

Commercial Design

Commercial design helps communicate an image and is one element making a place desirable. Design review is the most effective way for municipalities and the county to directly project an impression of livability and economic vitality. Design review goes beyond traditional zoning issues and addresses building and site design details that create gathering places, community landmarks, and a sense of place (Refer to Figure 27).

In David Sucher's book, *City Comforts* he gives examples of, "...small things that make urban life pleasant: places where people can meet, methods to tame cars and make buildings good neighbors. Many of these small details are so obvious as to be invisible." These details can enhance commercial districts and at the same time draw the public to shop and linger in a pleasant atmosphere. Some of these details include:

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- Create public spaces with seats
- Place playgrounds in shopping districts
- Create gateways for neighborhoods
- Soften with green
- Personalize the city with art
- Engage walkers with interesting storefronts
- Provide a place for music
- Encourage public interaction with chess tables
- Identify neighborhood plants
- Allow the corner grocery
- Provide bike racks
- Build close to the sidewalk
- Allow workplaces to be visible
- Use sound (water features) to permit conversation

Increasingly, fast-food restaurants, gas stations, supermarkets, mini-malls, motels, car washes, and other corporate chains are found along major arterials and in neighborhood centers. It is the marketing strategy of these companies to be easily identified and to provide their customers with a sense of familiarity through replicating standardized brand images. Use of standardized buildings and signs has an obvious impact on communities with a well-defined heritage and can be detrimental to communities working toward to establishing a unique sense of place. Establishing and enforcing design review guidelines and ordinances through local design review can help communities achieve design details fitting the respective community's unique style. In *Community by Design*, Kenneth Hall and Gerald Porterfield, demonstrate the importance of paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks in design guidelines. Attention to landscaping, lighting, architectural style and details, and materials also make a positive difference in the way franchises fit in with the community's character. Corporate chain buildings that reflect a community's character help create a sense of neighborhood identity and pride, help create distinctive commercial districts, increase the company's profits by attracting shoppers, and provide for future adaptive uses of the buildings (Refer to Figure 28).



Policies

1. Cooperate with local and regional groups and Chambers of Commerce to foster planned growth and expansion of existing and new commercial activity meeting community needs.
2. Encourage and promote agriculturally related businesses in rural Kane County, including the production, sale, and research of agriculturally related goods and services.
3. Encourage quality design standards, particularly with respect to road access landscaping, signage, and aesthetics for municipal and unincorporated commercial uses.
4. Require that commercial developments preserve and enhance natural features such as vegetation, wildlife, waterways, wetlands, topography and scenic vistas.
5. Prevent scattered, non-agriculturally related commercial uses in the unincorporated rural areas.
6. Support municipalities and villages in preserving and revitalizing downtown centers using historic resources whenever possible.

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7. Coordinate commercial development with local events, visitor information, and county tourism opportunities.
8. Encourage design guidelines for neighborhood centers within master planned developments.
9. Encourage design guidelines for crossroads commercial land uses at designated intersections, including parking, access, lighting, and signage.

Figure 24

Urban Corridor Renaissance Retrofitting Commercial Strip Centers

Retrofitting commercial strip centers through a redesign plan, implemented in stages, could gradually transform strip centers into mixed-use sub-centers. Success with one retrofit could generate momentum for other commercial corridor improvements. The following are a few tools for improving strip commercial centers:

1. Limit existing commercial districts to under a half-mile in length;
2. Fill in fronts of large parking lots with small, closely spaced or attached storefronts to build a street frontage with courtyard parking behind;
3. Place buildings upfront with attractive architecture, wall signs and sidewalks features along the frontage, not parking lots and pole signs;
4. Consolidate entrances along the road to a few main driveways with internal service streets based on a block system to connect businesses in between;
5. Help unify the streetscape and improve the appearance of public right-of-ways with continuous street trees and planted medians, high quality landscaping, decorative pavements, street furniture (benches, trash receptacles), or streetlights.
6. Build sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the area to create connections to shared parking, public transportation, walking between stores and to nearby housing;
7. Encourage a mix of housing and other uses adjacent to the shopping to begin to build a walkable neighborhood rather than a strictly commercial driving district.

Sources: "Tools for Improving Strip Commercial Corridors," Georgia Department of Community Affairs; and "Commercial Strip Redevelopment," Dutchess County Planning and Development, New York, 2003.

Figure 25

Evaluation of new construction or redevelopment projects should address the following:

- Location:** How appropriate is the site within the larger community? Is the project functionally and locationally feasible? Does it complement the existing commercial structure? Are there design features complementing and enriching the surrounding area?
- Time:** Does the commercial project support the day and night routines of the surrounding area as well as the seasonal changes? Does the project provide a sense of continuity within the area?
- Movement:** Is the project equally accessible to the transit users, the pedestrians, and the automobile users?
- Compatibility:** Is the project being evaluated using guidelines that consider: roof pitch, spacing, height/width of buildings, window heights, street frontage, character, building, massing, and material. Is the lighting coordinated with signs, utilities, street trees and location of parking lots and drives?

Source: "Building a foundation to assess the broader social, economic and environmental issues of development," Kinnelon Commons, New Jersey, 2001.

Figure 26

"Design appropriate for a particular locale is simply good business. It is in the self-interest of retailers to conform to community standards as they have been legislated. The notion of retailing for convenience stores and gas stations is fundamentally a neighborhood business; most customers come from within a three-mile radius. It is vital to take into account the wishes of the community. The average person does respond well to good design. In 35 years of retailing, I can't think where we have been seriously disadvantaged by meeting the community's design standards."

—Robert Rosenburg, Former Chairman and CEO, Dunkin Donuts,

Source: Saving Face, APA Planning Advisory Service, Ronald Lee Fleming, 2002.

Figure 27

Design Guidelines—Place Making Tools

- The use of local materials
- Planter walls to define the sidewalk and street
- Extensive landscaping
- Signs or markers made by local artisans
- Pedestrian-oriented features, such as: sidewalks, indirect lighting, and generous landscaping
- Work with companies to individualize and customize their icon to best suit the local streetscape character
- Communities should insist on site-specific customized design
- Have local artists contribute to “relief” art on exterior walls
- Human scale facade and design, which encourages shoppers to make connections between destinations and supports longer periods of visitation and the increased purchase of goods and services
- Bigger and brighter is not always better

Source: Saving Face, APA Planning Advisory Service, Ronald Lee Fleming, 2002.

Figure 28

Service Station Design—An Updated Approach

1. Locate the building so that it fronts onto the street, with the pump island canopy to the rear.
2. Design the architecture of the building fully on all four sides.
3. Provide windows or some equivalent fenestration facing the street.
4. Strongly encourage pedestrian entrances on the street side of the building.
5. Require pedestrian connections to surrounding properties and the street.
6. Design freestanding signage as a monument sign at a human scale, or no larger than five or six feet in height. (Human scale is based upon the average adult height or the height, which does not overpower a person standing next to it.)

Source: A New Urbanism Approach to Service Station Design, American Planning Association, PAS Memo, January 2001.