

# *BUILDING BETTER PLACES:*

## *Urban Design Strategies for a Connected Region*

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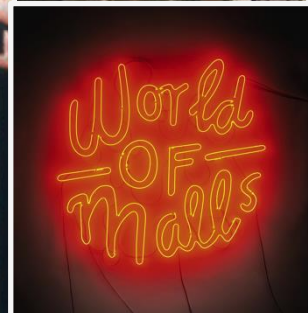
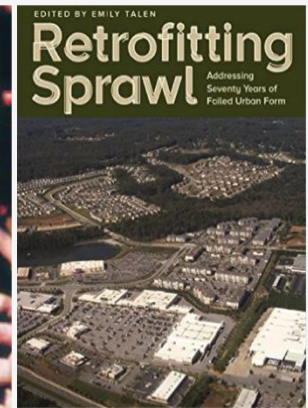
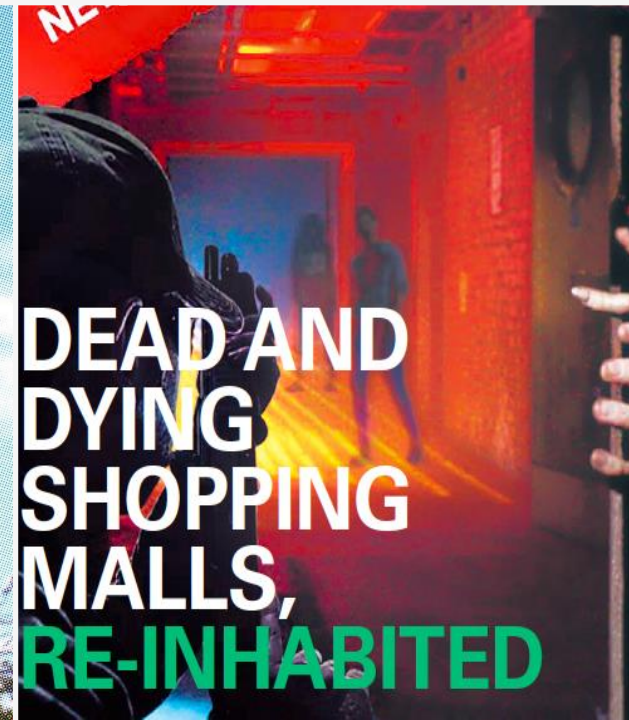
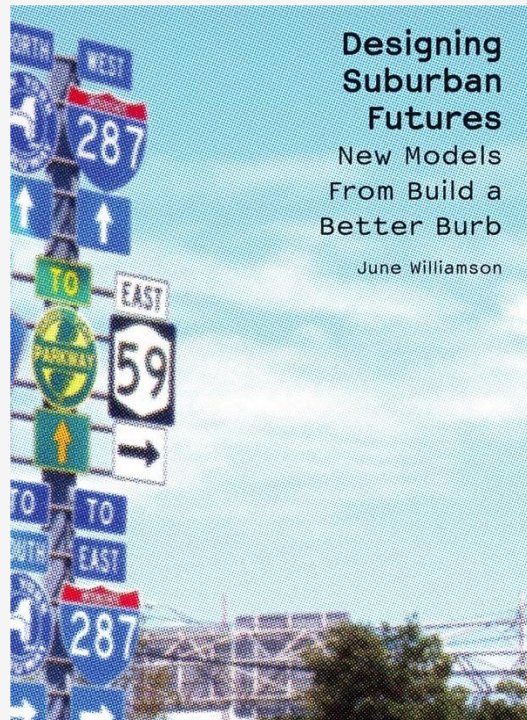
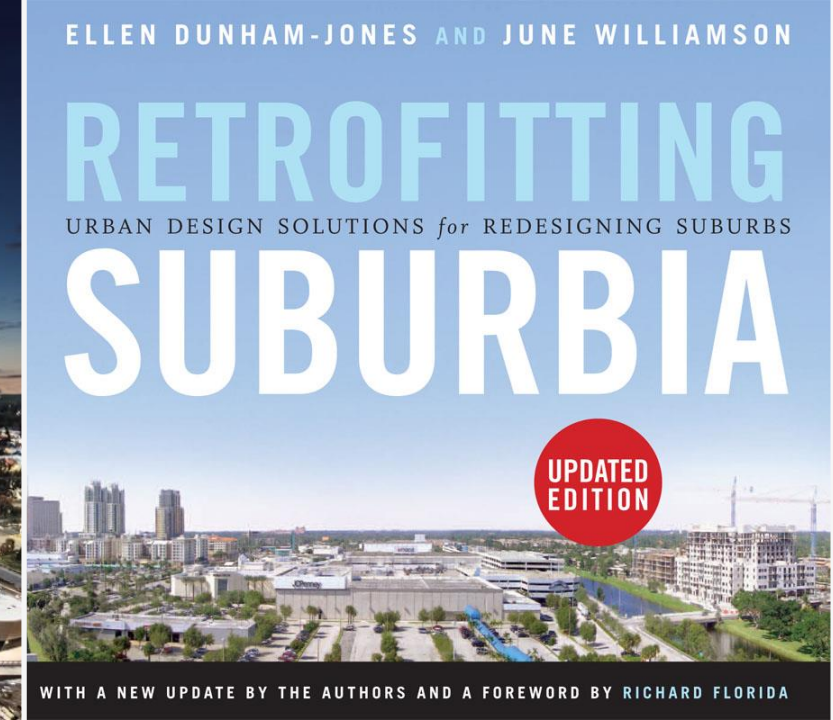
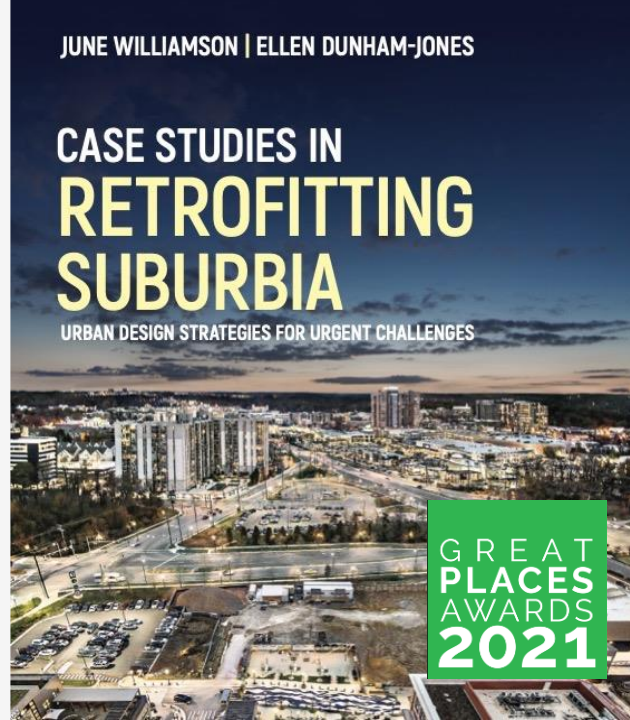
# *Retrofitting Suburbia*

Three strategies for suburban retrofitting:

- Redevelopment
- Reinhabitation
- Regreening

Implementation can lead to *a more connected region*

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What can architecture, planning, and development do to help forge a more resilient, equitable future for suburbs and suburban form?



# OPPORTUNITY

Photo: June Williamson, from *Retrofitting Suburbia* (Wiley, 2009, 2011)

*in the USA*

- 50,000+ strip malls, ~10% vacancy rate
- 350,000+ big box stores, 300 million vacant sf
- Suburban office vacancy rates: 16-24%
- 1500 shopping malls: 1/3 have died, another 1/3 are dying

# An example in Middletown, NY, but it could be Anywhere, USA

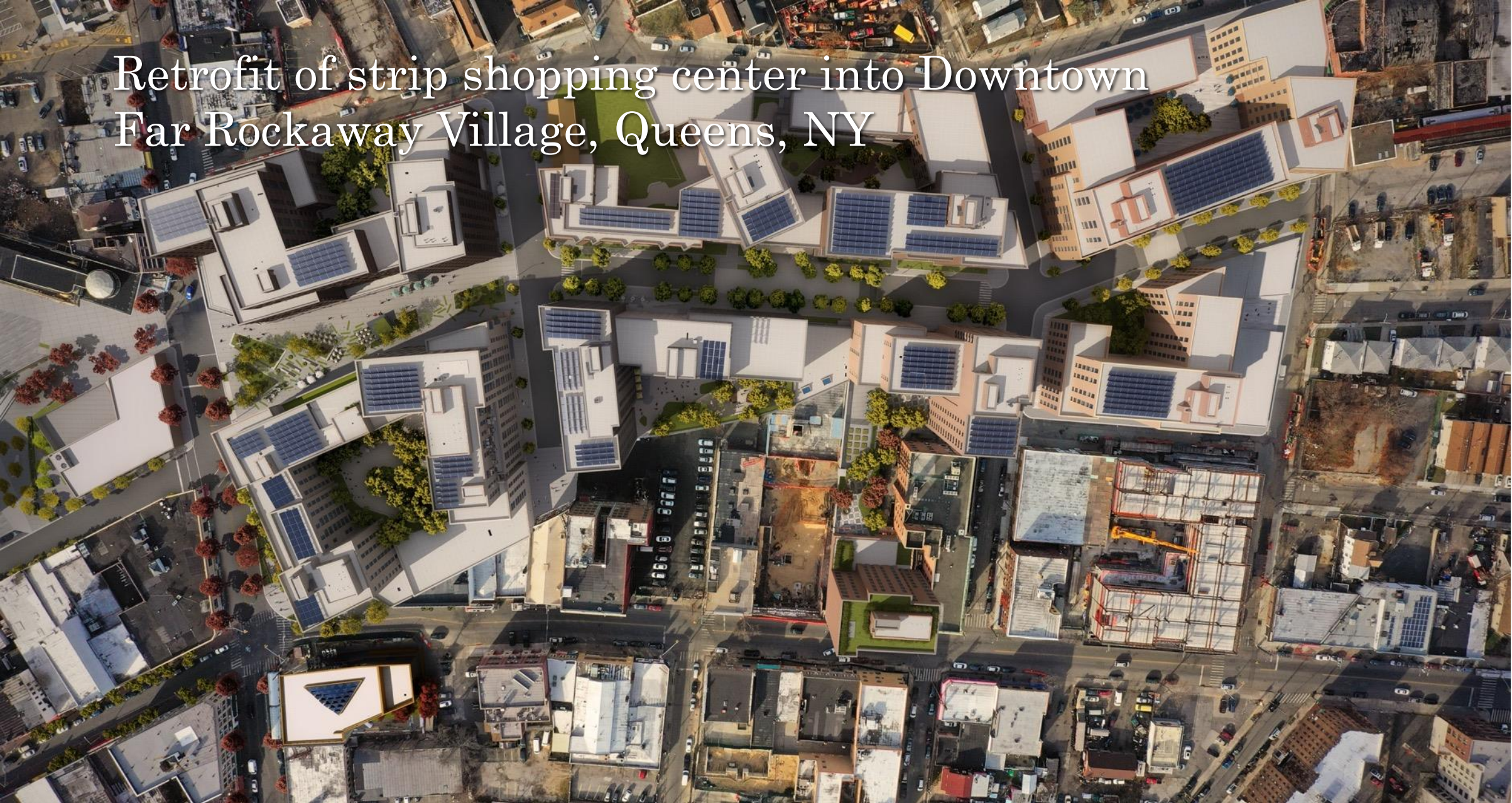


# Retrofit of dead mall into Meriden Green, Meriden, CT



SOURCE: MILONE & MACBROOM

# Retrofit of strip shopping center into Downtown Far Rockaway Village, Queens, NY



SOURCE: MARVEL ARCHITECTS



redevelopment



reinhabitation



regreening

## *Incremental Metropolitanism + Suburban Retrofitting:*

A long term, 50-year project for remaking the metropolis into a more sustainable and resilient multi-centered urban structure, through **systemic transformation** of large, prototypical single-use suburban sites -- including vacant and obsolete shopping malls, big boxes, and office/industrial parks.

strategy:

# *Redevelopment*

Urbanization of select “nodes” by increasing density, walkability, transit readiness, use mix.

DENSIFY  
URBANIZE  
DIVERSIFY

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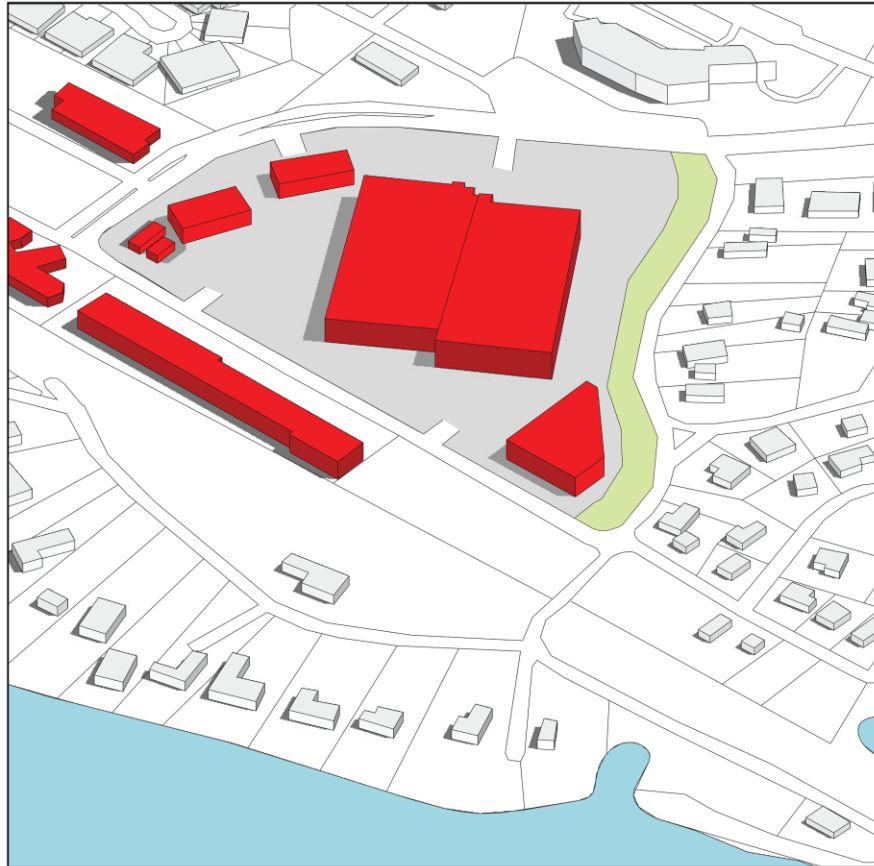
Mizner Park, Boca Raton, FL



*depaaving of  
“greyfields”*

# Promenade of Wayzata, near Minneapolis, MN

Presbyterian Homes & Services, LHB, Inc., InSite Architects, Cunningham Group, City of Wayzata



■ Residential    ■ Commercial    ■ Mixed use    ■ Arts + Culture    ■ Parks + Openspace    ■ Parking + Transit

Image by June Williamson and Ellen Dunham-Jones, *Case Studies in Retrofitting Suburbia* (Wiley, 2021) p.153

From stand-alone boxes on a field of asphalt on filled wetlands, to perimeter block buildings, with green roofs and a great lawn; parking below-grade; and supportive housing for older adults.

# Promenade of Wayzata, near Minneapolis, MN

Presbyterian Homes & Services,  
LHB, Inc., InSite Architects,  
Cunningham Group, City of Wayzata



PHOTOS: DANA WHELOCK

PHOTO: JASON JENKINS



BEFORE (2006)

IMAGE: HISTORIC AERIALS BY NETRONLINE



AFTER (2023)

IMAGE: GOOGLE MAPS

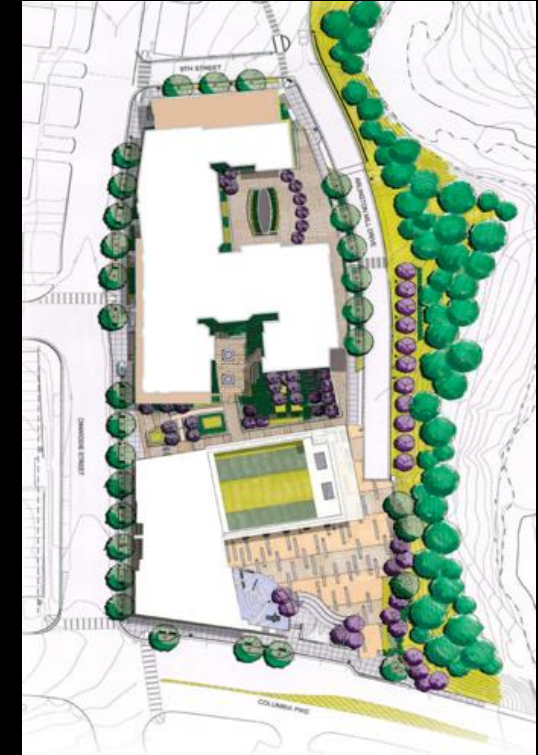
# Arlington Mill Community Center & Senior Center

## Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA

DCS Design; KGD Architecture

From Safeway grocery store to community center node.

The rear part of the site contains a 122-unit, 100% affordable housing building, with 12 barrier-free units.



# The Cottages on Greene, East Greenwich, RI

620 Main St Associates, Union Studio Architects



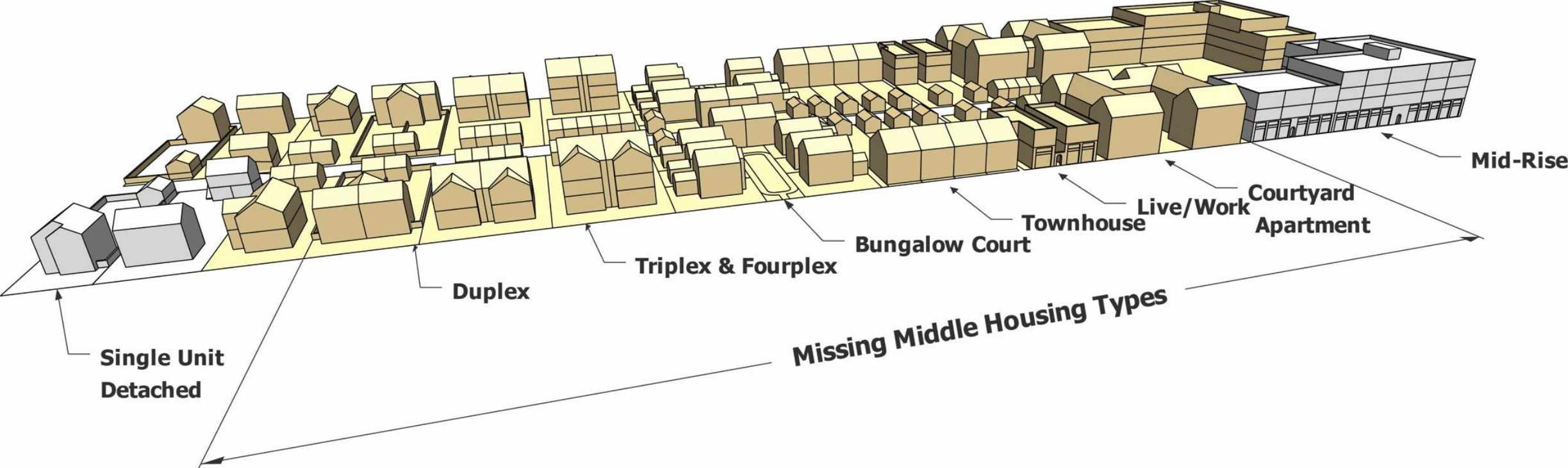
**15-unit "missing middle" cottage court housing on 1-acre auto repair shop site, 33% affordable units (income-qualified).**

**Increased density that fits with existing character.**



IMAGES COURTESY UNION STUDIO

# Models of "Gentle Density"



Missing Middle Housing Diagram  
Dan Parolek, Opticos Design, Inc.  
<http://missingmiddlehousing.com/>

strategy:

# *Reinhabitation*

Space for community-serving uses & entrepreneurs that cannot afford new construction

## RELOCALIZATION

*Former retail spaces lend themselves to:*

- *Small, local service businesses*
- *"Eds & Meds"*
- *Non-profit service providers*
- *In some cases, infill housing*



Maple Hill Senior Living, Maplewood, MN

# Eastern Village Co-housing, Silver Spring, MD

Eco Housing Corp., EDG Architects,  
Lila Fendrick & Associates



before

PHOTOS: EDG Architects



**1950's office building retrofitted into a co-housing  
condominiums, occupied mostly by older adults**



# ACC Highland, Austin, TX

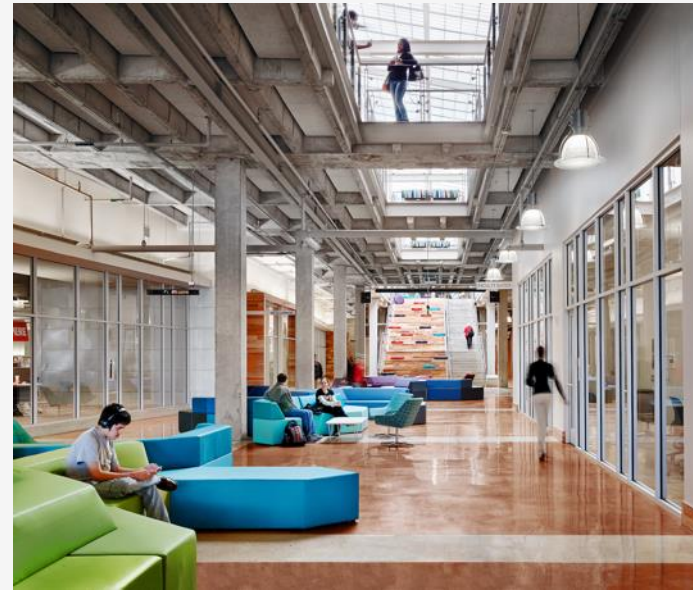
Austin Community College, RedLeaf, McCann Adams Studio, BGK Architects

*Community college reinhabits the mall and partner builds housing + jobs on the parking lot*



after

before



# Lake Grove Village, Lake Oswego, OR

Beam Development, Works Progress Architecture, and Lango Hansen Landscape Architects

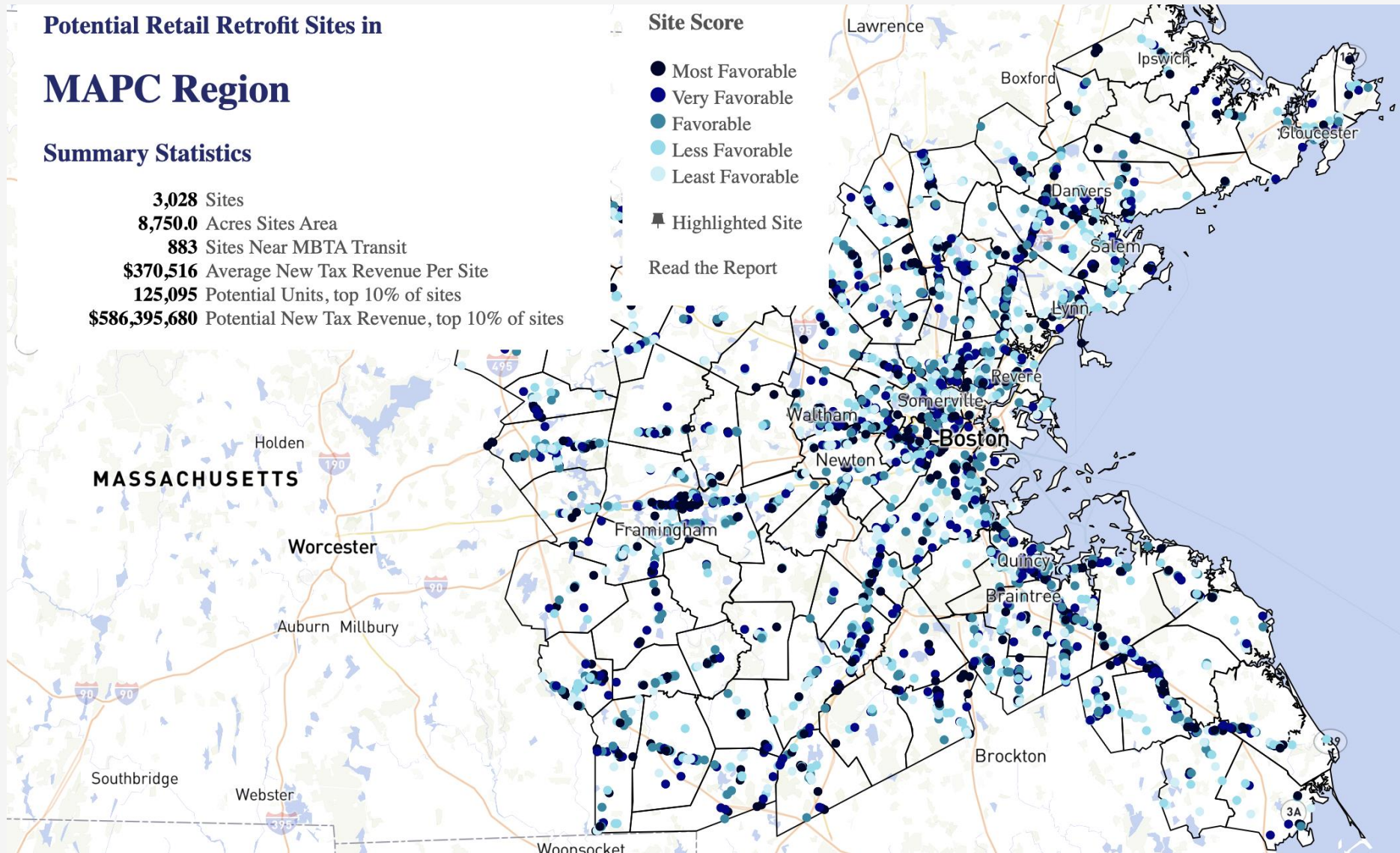
Subtract **PASSAGES** from existing buildings to increase connectivity



The owners of Lake Grove Village removed (and recycled) part of the original strip mall to create covered passages with attractive seating, opening up access to the back side



# “Rethinking the Retail Strip?” Boston Metro Area Planning Council, 2022



“If just 10% were redeveloped into mixed-use projects, 124,000 homes could be created, increasing building values to the tune of \$479 million in extra tax revenue for host communities.”

strategy:

# *Regreening*

Reconstruct local ecology

Well-designed parks increase adjacent property values (and enable density)

Food production and flood protection

*Funding sources: habitat grants, flood protection/resilience, watershed improvements, and CSO mitigation*

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Phalen Village, Phalen, MN

# Meriden Green, Meriden, CT

City of Meriden, State of CT, US EPA, FEMA,  
Milone & MacBroom Inc., AECOM



PHOTO: NICOLAS DIMAIO



Flood, 1992. SOURCE: RECORD-JOURNAL



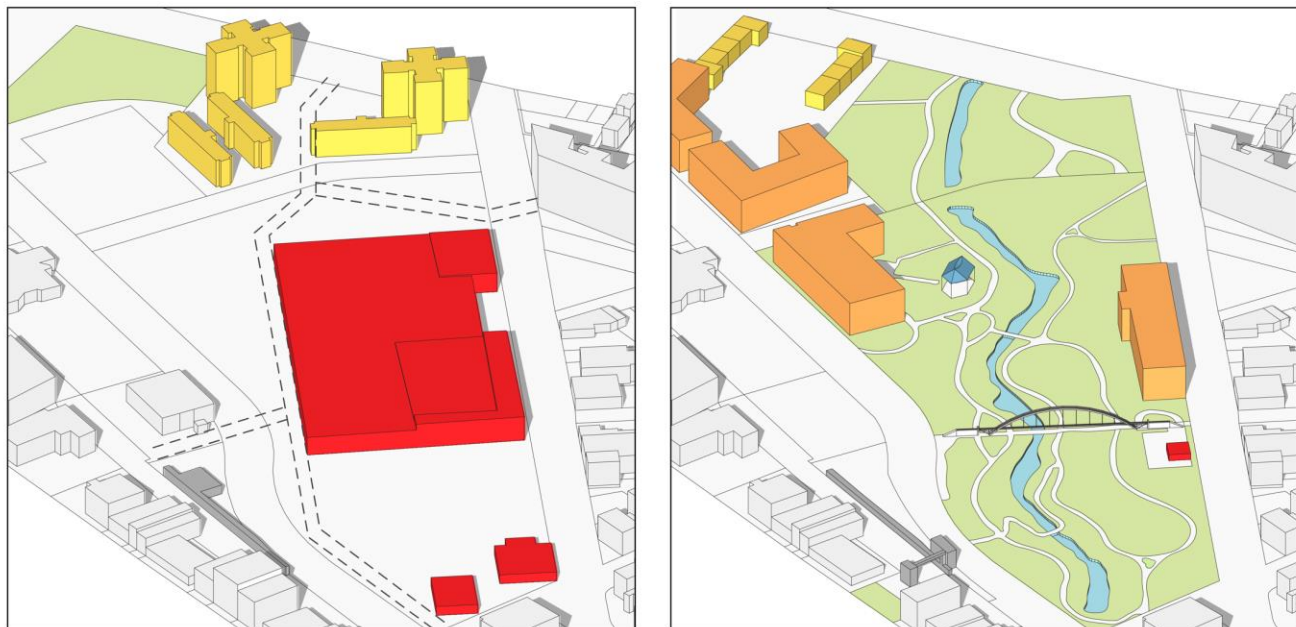
*before*

SOURCE: MILONE & MACBROOM

# Meriden Green, Meriden, CT

City of Meriden, State of CT, US EPA, FEMA,  
Milone & MacBroom Inc., AECOM

*after*



■ Residential ■ Commercial ■ Mixed use ■ Arts + Culture ■ Parks + Openspace ■ Ponds, Creeks or Lakes ■ Parking + Transit

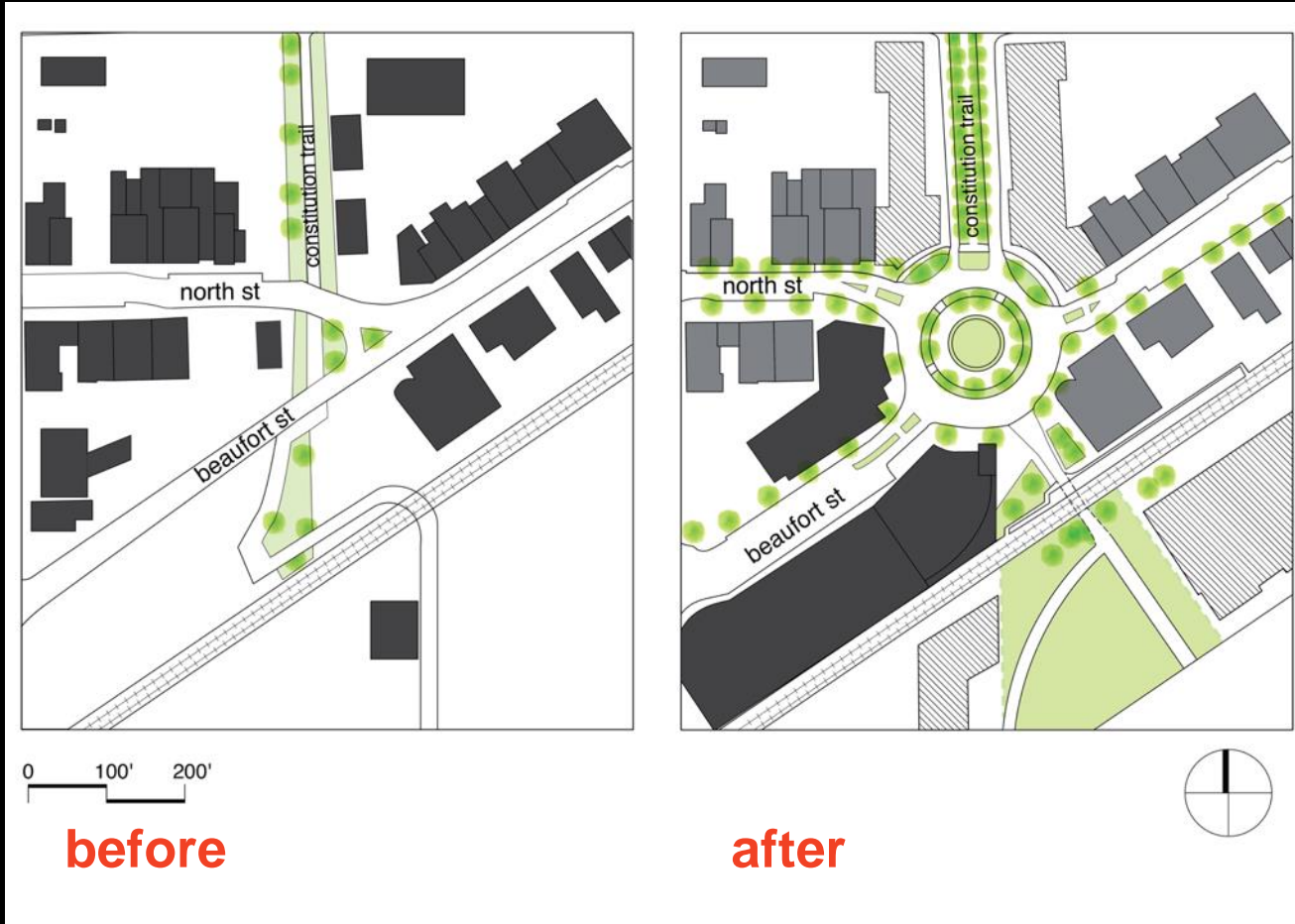
Designed to fill in a major storm, a stormwater park with daylit creek replace shopping mall and paved parking lots, surrounded with new, affordable housing on higher ground.



SOURCE: MILONE & MACBROOM

# Uptown Circle, Normal, IL: Farr Associates, Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Arch, Clark Dietz Engineers

*Intersection retrofit, trail improvement, and public placemaking as redevelopment catalyst*



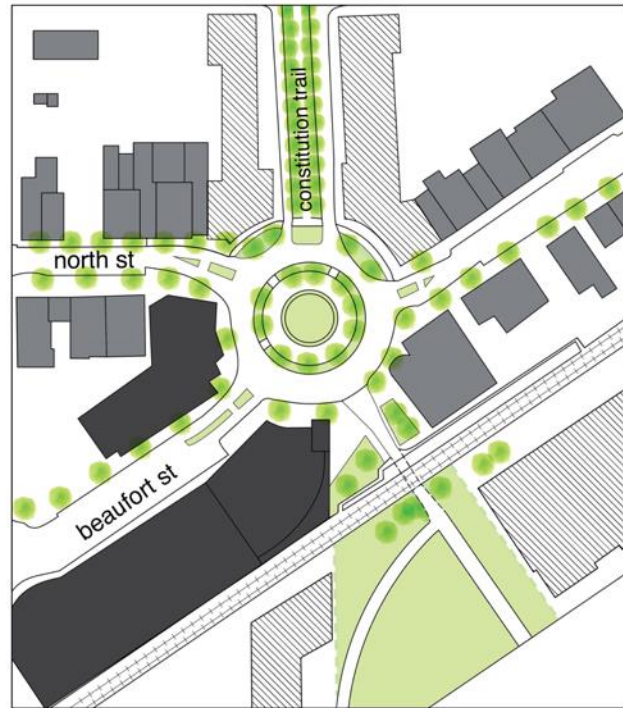
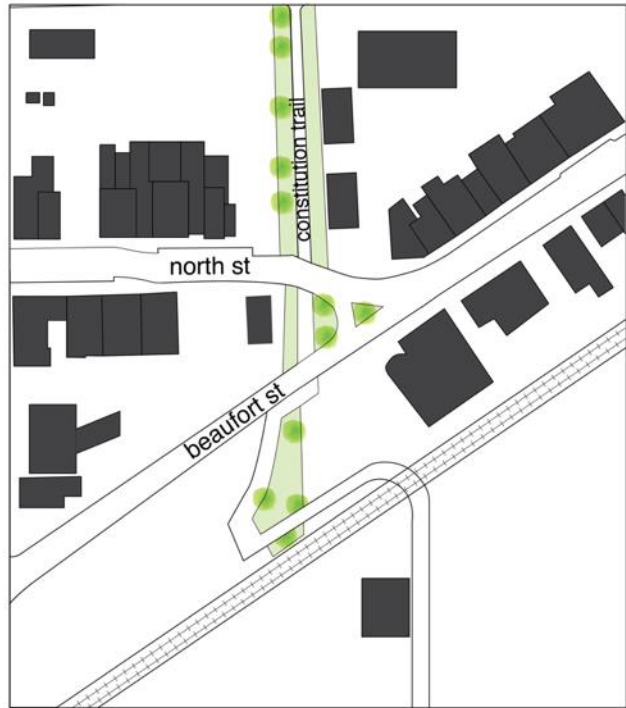
DIAGRAMS: JUNE WILLIAMSON



ILLUSTRATIVE  
PLAN: FARR  
ASSOCIATES

# Uptown Circle, Normal, IL: Farr Associates, Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Arch, Clark Dietz Engineers

*Intersection retrofit, trail improvement, and public placemaking as redevelopment catalyst*



0 100' 200'

**before**

**after**

DIAGRAMS: JUNE WILLIAMSON



PHOTOS:  
HOERR  
SCHAUDT  
LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTS

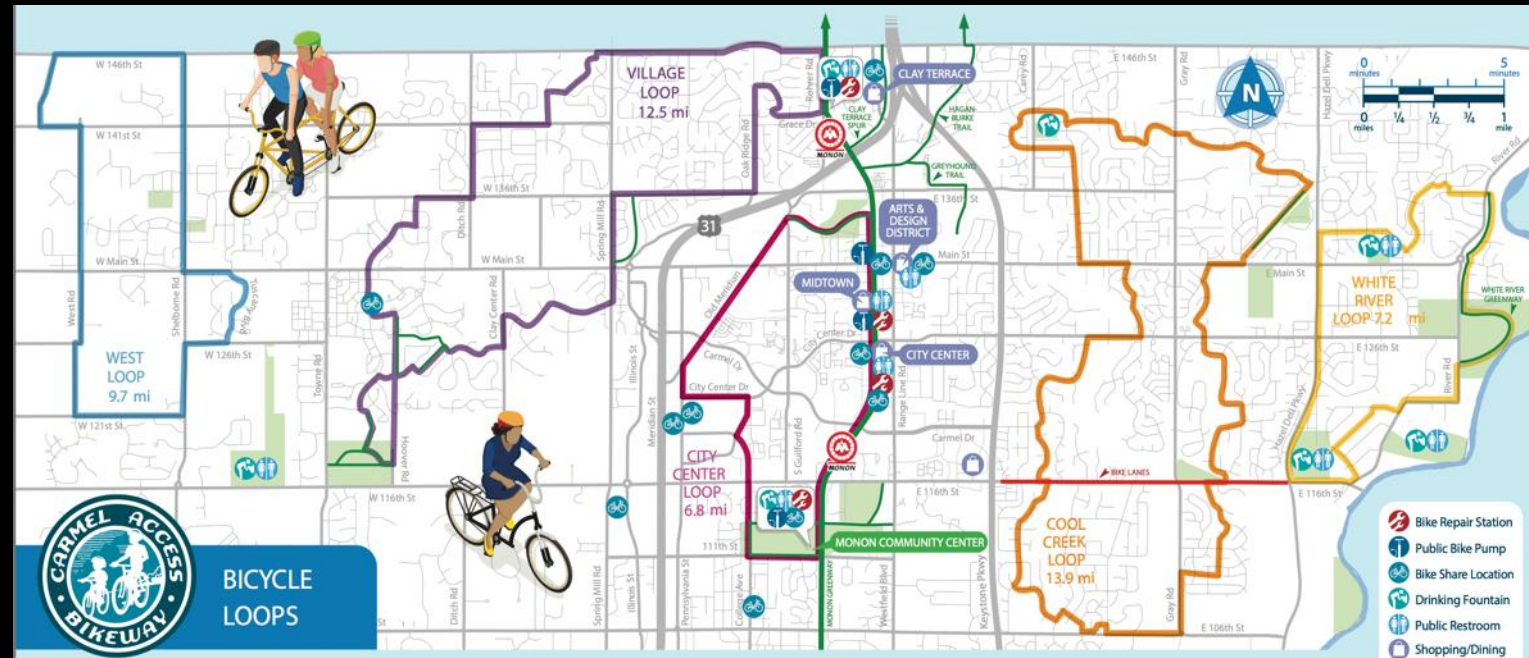
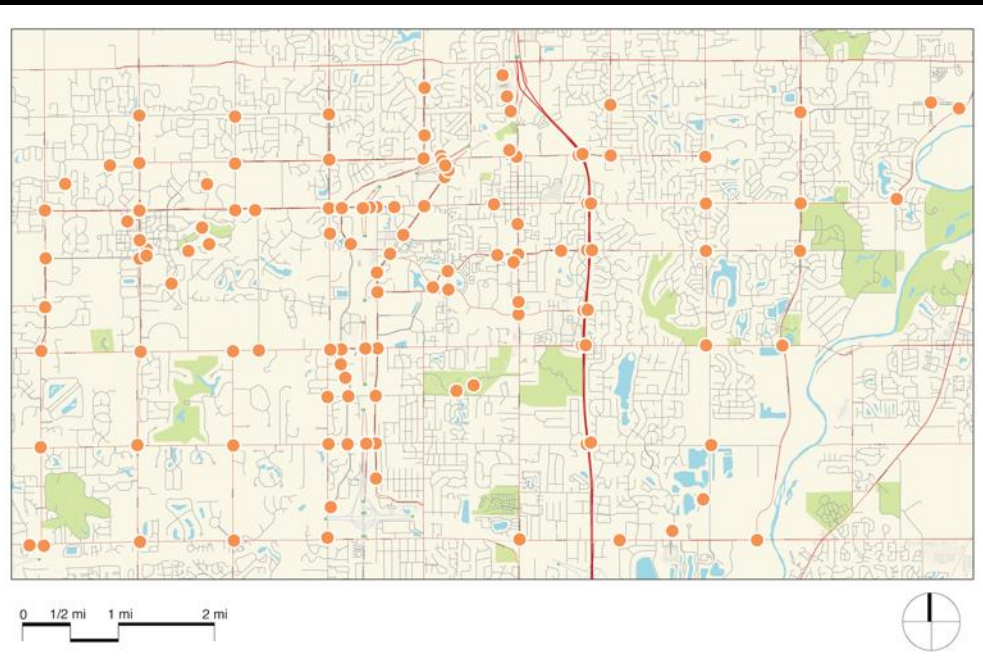
# Roundabouts and Multi-use Trail Network, Carmel, IN

## City of Carmel



Roundabouts at 138 intersections, either new construction or replacing traffic signals, has resulted in:

- 90% fewer fatalities/capita than US average, and 75-89% fewer injuries
- replacement of turn lanes with an extensive off-road bike and ped path
- Reduced idling 50%, GHG emissions, electricity, and stormwater runoff while reducing travel times for pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars

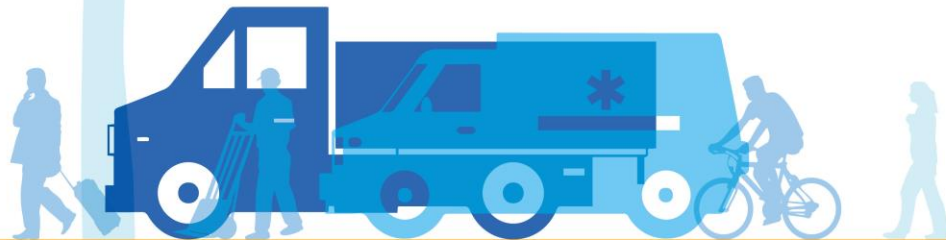


# A Guidebook for Considering Freight in Complete Streets Design

Dr. Alison Conway & June Williamson (CCNY) & Diniece Peters (NYCDOT)



## Complete Streets Considerations for Freight and Emergency Vehicle Operations

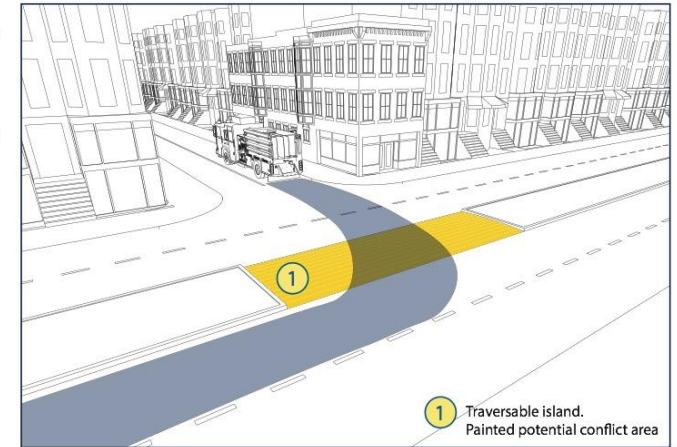


May 2018

NYERDA Project 83178

### 3.5.3 Mountable Medians

On a long block divided by a median, occasional mid-block crossing may be desirable to shorten emergency response times. A mountable median can be installed to allow mid-block vehicle crossing. If a mountable median is installed for emergency use only, signage may be necessary to discourage other drivers from using the crossing. Pavement color or texturing can also be used to designate the median as a primarily pedestrian space.



Top: Mountable median diagram  
Bottom: Mountable median with brick paving



## Some takeaways:

- Recognize that **good design** remains the best way to integrate solutions to complex problems.
- Identify **suitable locations and sites** to retrofit underperforming auto-oriented retail and commercial real estate.
- **Seek and/or provide funding** for social infrastructure and for climate change-related infrastructure.
- **Timescales vary** – be inventive, and flexible!
- **Reconsider rigid zoning** to unlock creative opportunities.
- **Seek to reinhabit** (renew and reuse) tired suburban form; this approach will increase economic and social resiliency.
- Think: meds & eds, local markets, regreening, “missing middle” housing.
- Retrofit suburban form to increase and enhance **connections**.



*raising the  
bar on the  
suburban  
retrofitting  
agenda*

*6 urgent  
challenges*



**DISRUPT AUTO  
DEPENDENCE**



**IMPROVE PUBLIC  
HEALTH**



**SUPPORT AN  
AGING  
POPULATION**



**LEVERAGE  
SOCIAL CAPITAL  
FOR EQUITY**



**COMPETE FOR  
JOBS**



**ADD WATER &  
ENERGY  
RESILIENCE**

# The Retrofitting Suburbia Series

[www.retrofittingsuburbia.com](http://www.retrofittingsuburbia.com)

