

Smart Growth: Mashpee Commons vs. Bayshore Town Center

Renovations of strip malls sometimes referred to as “greyfields” are being renovated to bring back the nostalgia of the old town centers and Main Streets. Mashpee Commons in Mashpee, Massachusetts and Bayshore Town Center in Glendale, Wisconsin are two examples that will be compared and critiqued with smart growth principles in mind.

Mashpee Commons was a renovation of an old strip mall in Mashpee, Massachusetts starting in 1985 to create a New England village. Renovations of strip malls are occurring throughout the U.S. as many of them age and in many cases see their anchor tenants go bankrupt or merge.

Shopping space per capita in the U.S. grew almost 50% in the 1980s. Does everyone need more space in which to shop? Stuff, stuff, and more stuff. Maybe this contributed to the McMansion craze of the last decade because we need more space to put all that stuff. With the advent of e-tailing there will be less need for physical retail space so the closings of old mall will continue.

These renovations and ones like them are trying to create “town centers” in communities which never had what its citizens would call “downtown”. This is not resurrecting Main Street because Main Street did not exist before. The renovations usually include sidewalks to encourage walking around and mix uses for building space with areas for office, residential, and civic in addition to retail.

Looking at the two towns, Mashpee, Massachusetts and Glendale, Wisconsin the demographics are quite similar (Muninet, 9/20/08): Mashpee has a population of about 13,000 which is 89% white with a median age of 41 and 70% of the households are families (2 or more people), Glendale also has a population of 13,000 that is 88% white with a slightly older median age of 46 and with 61% of the households families. Mashpee Commons is in New England on Cape Cod located 50-70 miles from the major cities of Providence, R.I. and Boston, MA. Bayshore Town Center is in the mid-west a suburb of Milwaukee, WI just 7 miles south.

Mashpee Commons is trying to resurrect a colonial aura on the Cape (NYTIMES, 1987). It was modeled after Nantucket, Marblehead, and Provincetown. The nostalgia for the village green of the typical New England town was what the developer was attempting to create. Instead of just retail, space was provided for a bank, post office, library, and residential. The developer include seven types of buildings and ten street types.

There are many issues to deal with in attempting to promote smart growth replacing what was sprawl. Zoning is probably the number one issue common to most mall to mix renovations. Zoning like politics is local and most towns with zoning divide the town in separate areas for housing, office, retail, and industrial. Parking must be provided for each separate activity not taking into account that the same person might live, work and shop in the same area and does not need three parking spaces to do that. This type of zoning has not only encouraged but dictated sprawl. Massachusetts has recognized this is a problem with most post-World War II zoning. The legislature in an effort to promote smart growth has created a new zoning code, Charter 40 R. However, each town has the option of whether to adopt or not.

Other local issues will usually be involved. In the case of Mashpee, there was the suit brought by the Wampanoag Indian tribe (Robinson et al, 2001). They froze all development in the 1970s when other neighbors were expanding rapidly with vacation homes. The suit was settled in the towns favor in 1983. Mashpee Commons was an early development ready to go in 1984 with the first phase completed in 1988 (Solving Sprawl). Mashpee had a big growth spurt after that in the 1990s growing from 7,900 to nearly 13,000 (Robinson et al, 2001).

Bayshore Town Center had the town of Glendale use eminent domain to acquire addition sites around the old mall. This process almost always leads to complaints unless there is very good community collaboration. Some owners felt they did not get a good deal (WISN, 2003). The Bayshore renovation of 47 acres increased retail space from 500,000 sq. ft. to 1.1 million sq. ft. and the number of retailers from 110 to 180 (Midwest Construction, 2007). Office space went from 25,000 sq. ft. to 275,000 sq. ft. Twelve new buildings were added as well as two new parking structures and 150 apartments.

Alternatives to the automobile mode of transportation are a major challenge for both sites. The infrastructure of these areas is very car-centric. Mashpee Commons is on a peninsula usually primarily as a resort or retirement community. Access to Boston by bus is limited and there is limited bus service from town to town on the Cape. The Bayshore Town Center is located next to a major six lane interstate (I43) at an exit ramp.

Fair, affordable and appropriate housing is a major issue in our suburbs and resort communities. Mashpee has made some progress with the development of affordable housing for seniors and a

mix of various housing types (townhouses, apartments, and single family dwellings). They still only have 5% of their housing stock affordable. State law requires 10% (Vosk, 2007). Bayshore Town Center in Glendale is an upscale suburb of Milwaukee and the 150 apartments provided in the redevelopment are “luxury”. The rental units are priced starting at \$900 for one bedroom, \$1,375 for two bedrooms, \$1,525 for two bedrooms with den, and \$1,950 for three bedrooms. Among the amenities at Bayshore are residence views of the water fountain at Bayshore Town Center, private residential elevators, reserved heated parking, a fitness center and clubroom (liveatbayshore, 9/21/08).

Both sides have their supporters and critics. The Mashpee Commons was described by Bluestone (1992) as feeling too bright, too carefully manufactured. The palette of colors from one storefront to another seems too coordinated. The developers of Mashpee commons have ambitious plans to extend beyond their commercial core and construct all the civic institutions, gathering places and residential neighborhoods for a healthy village. If Mashpee Commons grows this way, a real village center could be born here. Bayshore Town Center is described by Gould (2006) as a mammoth red-brick building with bland precast panels and fake stucco trim, two floors of parking facing the street, row after row of uniform windows and a pastiche of architectural clichés. He goes on to further say that thankfully, the project’s urban planning, with sidewalks, through streets and landscaped plazas, is generally appealing.

Mashpee Commons is frequently cited by other planners and developers in meetings to get approval for their redevelopments. There were at least six occurrences between 2001 and 2007. The first occurred in Dartmouth, Massachusetts were a meeting of planners discussed “big box blight” (Flint, 2001) and the recent closing of Ann & Hope, a 200,000 square foot retail store with four football fields of parking. “Greyfields”, abandoned shopping malls named this in part after the common hue of asphalt, should not be replaced with another big-box retailer but rather build mix-use projects that evoke a feel of a village center like Mashpee Commons.

Unfortunately the director of Planning in Dartmouth, Donald Perry, was quoted as saying “People don’t want to hear it, but the average person loves his car, to drive up to a big box, and get the best price. Urban-village scale is fine if it’s Edgartown (on Martha Vineyard) or your on vacation, but try packing up five shopping bags and walking with them. No one wants to spend

time hunting for a parking space. Americans are fast-paced. That's capitalism: filling a need." As Pogo says, "we have found the enemy and he is us".

The second citing was at a business development board meeting in Westwood, Massachusetts (Smith, 2002). A vision of Mashpee Commons provided the initial inspiration for a development site on Glacier Drive. However the developer has not gone that far and is also running into zoning restrictions for possible senior housing, restaurants and hotels. He also would like to move the MBTA train station closer to the site.

Mashpee Commons was cited for a third time in the development of the Wayland Business Center (McDonald, 2005). This \$80-100 million mixed retail and residential project would bring in more than \$ 1 million in additional property tax revenue. The "town center" concept would bring Wayland a focal point it now lacks not only for shopping but also to socialize. Most of the store would be small and no big-box stores are part of the plan.

Just a few days later another town cited the Mashpee Commons as an example. This was at a Milton, Massachusetts town meeting to discuss a proposed Milton Centre (Carroll, 2005). The planned 133,000 square foot development would look like a New England town common. Two of the Selectmen of Milton said they liked the design of Mashpee commons. The architect is Randall Imai, the lead architect on Mashpee Commons. There is a zoning hurdle to be overcome but the town made favorable comments since this would increase the commercial tax base by 27%.

In Sharon, Massachusetts, where the average residential tax bill is among the highest in the region, local officials are eyeing a 50 acre development by Michael Intoccia as a tax revenue source (Laidler, 2007). Intoccia described the 400,000 square foot development as a lifestyle center similar to Mashpee Commons.

As a last example, in Marion, Massachusetts, the planning board passed a new design bylaw that mandates creating commercial development closer to the street instead of under the former 50-foot setback, a move forcing parking to the rear (Kandarian, 2007). The bylaws were modeled after bylaws established by the Cape Cod Commission that mandates New England-style retail development similar to the popular Mashpee Commons. The apartments on the second floor of the retail complex will be affordable housing units, the first new units of this type in 25 years.

Mashpee Commons and Bayshore Town Center are two examples of the mall to mix attempt at smart growth, so how do the two stack up regarding the principles of smart growth (Smart Growth Online, 9/20/08).

1. *Range of housing.* Mashpee deserves a weak yes since they have added some much needed affordable housing for seniors but they still lack the state mandated level of 10%. Bayshore has not provided anything but luxury apartments and doesn't even attempt a mix of housing types.
2. *Walkable neighborhood.* Mashpee was designed to grow into a New England style village that encourages walking. Bayshore has developed a core which will encourage some walking from apartments to restaurants to office to shops but it is big and isolated not integrated into a town.
3. *Collaboration.* Mashpee developers worked on selling their project to the town. Bayshore just worked with the town to use eminent domain for expansion. Neighbors were only brought into the process when noisy objections were raised.
4. *Distinct communities.* Both have developed this to an extent. Mashpee integrates into the rest of the town whereas Bayshore remains a auto-centric area off a freeway.
5. *Predictable development.* The town of Mashpee has developed a master plan which builds around the village. Bayshore is a one off development isolated from the rest of the upscale town.
6. *Mix land use.* Both have taken a retail mall and made into a mixed-use destination. To do so required overcoming zoning obstacles. Mashpee has developed a wider range of uses. Bayshore was more interested in .
7. *Preserve open spaces.* This doesn't apply to either except that by re-using space that was already converted from farmland they are stopping further sprawl with these projects. Both also developed a more efficient use of space.
8. *Transportation choices.* Unfortunately neither made much headway here but it will take good regional planning and coordinating to improve the situation. These developments can not address the car-centric society we live in. Both provide multi-purpose stops for a single car trip however.
9. *Develop existing communities.* Mashpee and Bayshore used "greyfields" to develop their mixed-use town centers. Both get kudos for not expanding the sprawl.

10. *Compact building design.* Both have compact designs for a liveable town center. More useable space per acre was a factor in both developments.

My conclusion is that both developments have made a positive contribution to smart growth. Mashpee Commons started with a small abandoned strip mall and over nearly 25 years has developed into the model for other Massachusetts town with a similar dilemma. The growth has been integrated into the surrounding area and a village center has developed. Bayshore Town Center on the other hand was a large mall to begin with and needed an overhaul. The recent attempt to develop a town center in the mid-west suburbs is admirable but the expansion of retail space and the number of retailer make this a mega-destination that is not integrated into the surrounding neighborhoods. Maybe we should resurrect the old IBM KISS desk placards but change this to mean “keep it small and simple”.

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