

**The Retail District and Smart Growth: A Comparative Analysis of Bethesda Row, MD and Oxford Street, London.**

A retail district can play an important role in achieving smart growth objectives in an urban neighborhood by the following. Create opportunities to connect people, catch the attention of both young and old and revive a community's image. There are many benefits in smart growth. Which are they preserve the natural beauty of the environment, strengthen the community's economy and improve people's health. In addition, smart growth usually encourages restoration of neighborhoods and brings in liveliness. Smart growth projects typically mix land uses and take advantage of compact building design. Furthermore, create walk-able neighborhoods, strengthen and direct development towards existing communities, and encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.(epa.gov). In urban settings, the retail and smart growth can be purposefully joined to construct inexpensive spaces for visitors, tourists and locals to use and reinvest. By way of doing this strike reinvestment and redevelopment in neglected neighborhoods. Two such examples of notable success are the fairly new developed Bethesda Row in Maryland and historical Oxford Street, London. This paper discusses and compares some of the aspects of these two retails areas, and examines the role of smart growth concepts.

**Bethesda Row**

Bethesda Row was a five block area built between 1945 and 1975 that was unattractive and was financially unsuccessful. It was an "unremarkable suburban thoroughfare for automobiles, with

outdated and unused shops, low-rise office buildings and surface parking lots”.( Solving Sprawl, 2001. Pg. 87.) It all started with a group of employees from the Federal Realty Investment Trust. They were looking for a pilot project to demonstrate the company’s original approach for purchasing great multiblock locations and spinning them into retail areas. They chose Bethesda Row to revitalize. The result is amazing. The development was built in several phases. They built blooming and pedestrian-friendly streets. The sidewalks were designed and the parking was created to make it a very walk-able neighborhood. It is adorned with brick sidewalks, trees, fountains, plazas, and outdoor seating that all encourage residents and visitors to stroll around and mix with local, regional, and national retailers and restaurants.



*Brick sidewalks, street trees, and store fronts with plenty of windows create an inviting pedestrian shopping experience*



*The street tables for cafes and restaurants are located near the curb so people walking past get the sense of being in the middle of a restaurant where they can see and be seen. Street trees and on-street parking buffer the diners from traffic.*



*A multi-story parking garage is hidden in the center of the block behind the shops restaurants and offices. Parking is easily accessible but is out of sight.*



*A trail made on old railroad tracks runs alongside the development. This provides walkers and cyclists access to neighboring communities*

*(Reference:www.epa.gov)*

There are sidewalk seating's next to the street and public sidewalks next to the storefronts. This creates a sentiment of walking through the restaurants thus making it a place to see and be seen.

The street trees and curbside parking shield the seated café patrons from street traffic.

The majority of the parking is located in a 1,000-space lot that is owned by the county.*(Solving Sprawl)* The public parking garage is located in the middle of the block. The cars are hidden behind the stores and restaurants but are easily reachable from every part of the retails area. The project area is 388,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space. That included 160,000 square feet of office space, and 100,000 square feet of residential space.*(Solving Sprawl)* The location is very accessible by public transport and other modes of transport. The Capital Crescent Trail connects to downtown Washington, D.C . Furthermore, D.C can be reached by bicycle, in-line skate, and by the metro rail.



*This fountain and plaza located at the entrance of a bookstore act as a central meeting and gathering place in Bethesda Row.*

*(Reference:www.epa.gov)*

The smart growth features present in Bethesda Row are:

- Mix land uses.
- Took advantage of compact building designs .
- Very walk-able neighborhoods.
- Have distinctive and attractive places.
- Has development in existing communities.
- Wide variety of transportation choices.
- Predictable and fair decision making.
- A suburban “Main Street”.

### **Oxford Street, London**

My main reason for choosing Oxford Street to compare to Bethesda Row is personal. I have lived in Central London for two years. I wanted to compare a known well developed retail district with one that is fairly new. In addition, I strongly believe that over time Bethesda Row has the potential to be similar to Oxford Street. Moreover, Bethesda Row has strong smart growth features. I perceive that Bethesda Row can come to the same development of Oxford

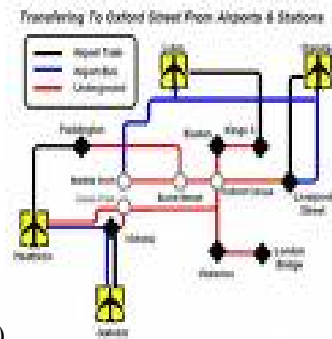
street in less than 75 years or less than half the time it took for Oxford Street to develop. In addition Oxford Street poses a great example that one can learn.

Oxford Street is probably the main shopping street in London and is claimed to be the busiest street in Europe. It has over 300 shops. The street derives its name from being part of the old London—Oxford Road which began at Newgate, City of London. Until 1782, Oxford Street was known as Tyburn Road – after the River Tyburn which ran to the south of Oxford Street and now runs beneath it. The area is about a mile and a half.( [www.wikitravel.org/en/London/Oxford street](http://www.wikitravel.org/en/London/Oxford_street))



*(Pictures taken from Google maps)*

Oxford Street is very accessible by all modes of transport. The Tube is probably the best way to reach Oxford Street; although there are many buses serving the area. There are four subway stations that serve along the length of Oxford Street. They are Marble Arch, Bond Street, Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road.



*(Reference: Google maps)*

There are many cafeterias from the small street café to five course meal restaurants style cafés which are all walk-able. Many hotels, apartments and housing developments also lie on Oxford Street. There are many wide sidewalks and trees.



### Oxford Street in 1875

*(picture taken from [http://wikitravel.org/en/London/Oxford\\_Street](http://wikitravel.org/en/London/Oxford_Street))*

According to Clear London Smart Growth report, Oxford Street which is located in the city of London mixes residential densities and retail offices. In addition, has institutional and recreational land. Moreover the city of London burrow through the community planning process and various policies such as the “small lot development policies and infill development policies” practices density mix. This is targeted through the community planning process. Furthermore,

the City of London preserve the environment through a development method called an official plan that establishes the natural heritage system at the top of the planning hierarchy. Which establishes an ecosystems approach that creates environmental constraints prior to considering development. Finally according to literature from Clear London Smart Growth report Oxford Street has established an urban growth boundary. This is based on a comprehensive land needs assessment. However, due to high traffic there are a few improvements to be made. They need to have wider pavements that will allow larger number of walk-able shoppers. Also have narrower roads to reduce the traffic and cut speed limits of traffic.

The smart growth features present in Oxford Street are:

- Mix land uses.
- Compact building designs
- Very walk-able neighborhoods
- Has distinctive and attractive places
- Has development in existing communities
- Wide variety of transportation choices
- A range of housing opportunities and choices
- Preserved open space with natural beauty found on Hyde Park.

**Similarities in Bethesda Row and Oxford Street**

Has distinctive and attractive places
Has development in existing communities
Wide variety of transportation choices
Very walk-able
Mix land uses
Similar square footage

**Differences in Bethesda Row and Oxford Street**

<b>Bethesda Row</b>	<b>Oxford Street</b>
Started in 1994 (14 years)	Started in 1785( 223 years)
No preserved open parkland	Has preserved open parkland
A suburban main street	An Urban main street
46 Retail shops	Over 300 retail shops
Housing option include apartments and condos only	Housing options include apartments, condos, single and multi family houses
Wide Side walks	Narrow side walks

**Discussion and Conclusion**

These two case studies reveal significant potential for the retail area to be a pioneering start for smart growth in an urban setting. In Oxford Street, not only did the flock of people from all walks of life and tourists come but it reconnects the local community to the area in a small space. In the case of Bethesda Row in Maryland it has revived and reconnects the local community to the district businesses. In addition it

channels ingenious liveliness and vitality back into the community, which has increased the reputation and real estate value of a previously troubled urban area. Together with smart growth principles such as walk-ability, mixed land community and stakeholder collaboration, a community can be reawakened. This is a great way to rebuild our cities into beautiful, active and booming communities.

## References

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