

# The Power of Place

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Learning from Addison Circle and Belmar

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ENVS 664 Sustainable Design

## I. Context

There are a number of factors which have amplified the traffic congestion that cripples America's metropolitan areas and have allowed a public realm void of character and amenities to emerge. These effects are typical in the Western United States, where the notion of unlimited room for expansion grew from the real estate opportunities presented by an open landscape.<sup>1</sup> The following discussion will examine two development typologies that have arisen from sprawling growth patterns, the edge city and the greyfield, and how two communities have utilized smart growth principles to reinvent themselves.

An edge city is a concentration of commercial uses outside a traditional urban area. According to Garreau, edge cities have enough office space to house between 20,000 and 50,000 office workers, enough retail space to ensure that the city is a center of, and must be characterized by more jobs than bedrooms. Furthermore, edge cities develop at freeway intersections and airports and their built environment is characterized by nondescript mid-rise office towers [Fig. 1].<sup>2</sup> Fourteen miles north of Dallas on the North Dallas Tollway lies Addison, Texas, a classic edge city that grew explosively in the early 1980s as a result of hotel and restaurant development pressures from Dallas.<sup>3</sup> In 1996, 160,000 people were employed in Addison but the city only had a population of 10,000 residents.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Kirk, Patricia. "Texas Ingenuity Lives Downtown." *Urban Land*, April 2008. pg. 86.

<sup>2</sup> "Edge city." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edge\\_city](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edge_city). See Garreau, Joel, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* and Lang, Robert, "Edgeless Cities: Examining the Noncentered Metropolis." *Housing Policy Debate* 14:3, pp 427-460.

<sup>3</sup> "Model projects: Addison Circle: Addison, TX." [http://www.lgc.org/freepub/land\\_use/models/addison\\_circle.html](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/land_use/models/addison_circle.html).

<sup>4</sup> Benfield, F. Kaid et al. *Solving Sprawl: Models of Smart Growth in Communities Across America*. (Island: Washington D.C., 2001) pg.83.

*Figure 1. Built environment in Addison prior to Addison Circle. Source: Paris Rutherford*

Greyfields have become increasingly common across America as older shopping malls have become obsolete and underperform economically. When these malls shut down, city officials are generally unequipped to deal with the situation and communities are sometimes left with vast seas of parking, abandoned buildings, and wasted infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> In Lakewood, Colorado a regional shopping center known as Villa Italia thrived for over 30 years and became the center of community life in Lakewood [Fig. 2]. However, the suburb of Denver was left with a greyfield when falling revenues and the growth of newer shopping centers led to the demise of Villa.<sup>6</sup>



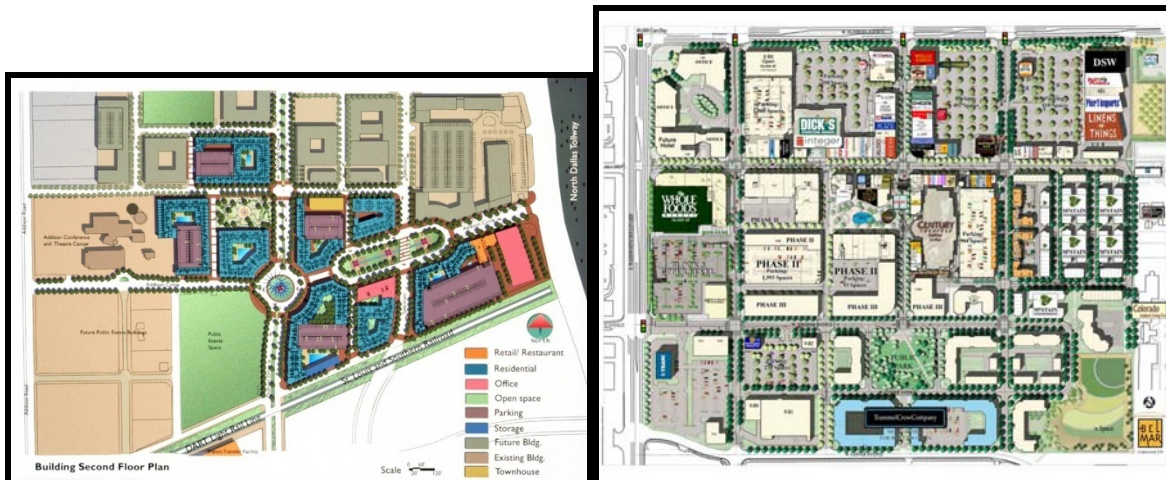
*Figure 2. A thriving Villa Italia, Source: Continuum Partners*

Both Addison and Lakewood were threatened with the decline of a public realm and could have easily been chalked up as two more generic suburbs. Instead, their leaders and residents took action and responded to their conditions by embracing smart growth principles. The result was the development of two multi-million square-foot developments with mixed land uses and compact neighborhood design: Addison Circle, which has completed 4 of its 6 phases since 1996 [Fig. 3], and Belmar, which is expected reach build out by 2010 [Fig. 4]. Using a set of criteria that focuses primarily on the physical aspects of smart growth, an analysis of land use, walkability, opportunities for reuse, transportation accessibility, and the public realm reveals that both Addison Circle and Belmar are prime examples of how sustainable design can be used to reinvent a community and achieve a sense of place.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pg. 80.

<sup>6</sup> “After the Mall.” *Governing*, October 2002. pg. 20.



*Figures 3 and 4. Addison Circle Site Plan (left). Source: David Whitcomb/RTKL, Belmar Site Plan (right). Source: Continuum Partners*

## II. Compact Neighborhood Design: Mixed Uses and Walkability

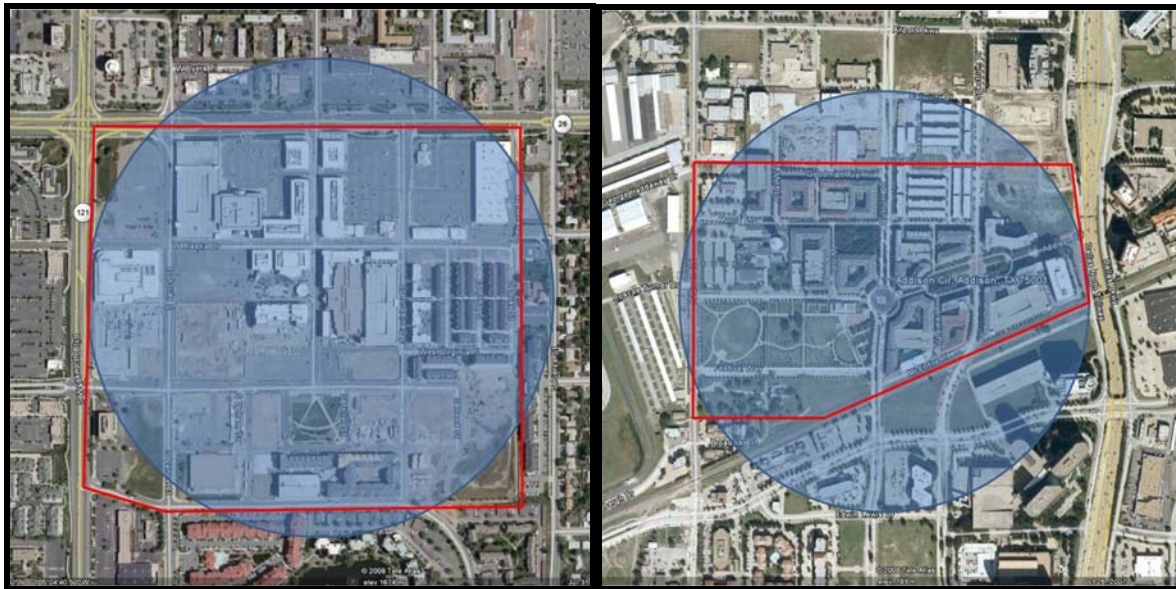
A compact neighborhood that incorporates a mix of land uses and a pedestrian-friendly environment is an essential component of a sustainable design because it improves quality of life through a variety of mechanisms. By mixing uses in close proximity to one another, alternative modes of transportation like walking and biking become available. Mixed uses also promotes the presence of people on the street at a different times during the day, which improves the perception of security and levels of activity, and can raise property values to strengthen the tax base.<sup>7</sup>

The proportions of land dedicated to particular types of uses in Addison Circle and Belmar reflect two unique strategies that have the common goal of establishing a strong identity. At buildout, the 104-acre Belmar will have 26% of land dedicated to residential use, 33% to restaurant, retail and entertainment, 27% to office and hotel, and 12% to public spaces. In contrast, Addison Circle’s 80 acres will be 56% residential, 12% restaurant, retail and entertainment, 15% office and hotel, and 17% public space.<sup>8</sup> This is not surprising, given the fact that Addison was overbuilt with commercial space and had a tremendous void to fill in residential development. This creates a type of downtown area that Addison previously had not existed in Addison. Belmar, on the other hand, uses a slightly more balanced approach but places a slight emphasis on retail use to forge an identity for Lakewood as a revitalized town center.

<sup>7</sup> “Mixed Land Uses Resources.” <http://www.smartgrowth.org/library/byprinciple.asp?prin=1>

<sup>8</sup> Proportions for Belmar were calculated using breakdowns from the project website. See <http://www.belmarcolorado.com/>. Addison calculations used data from “Model projects” and a presentation made by a project designer. See Rutherford, Paris, “Smart Growth Case Study: Addison Circle.” Public space category includes parks and other open spaces.

The other component of a compact neighborhood is its walkability. Walkable communities locate goods and services within an easy and safe walk and create a streetscape that serves a range of users.<sup>9</sup> People that live within a half-mile radius of a major transit stop are five times more likely to walk to that transit stop.<sup>10</sup> After applying this logic to major mixed-use destinations in which there are various goods and services to be consumed, Figures 5a and 5b, which only shows the *quarter-mile* radius surrounding the developments, indicates a very high level of walkability for both residents and visitors to Belmar and Addison Circle.



**Figures 5a and 5b.** Walkability of Belmar (left) and Addison Circle (right). Original analysis.

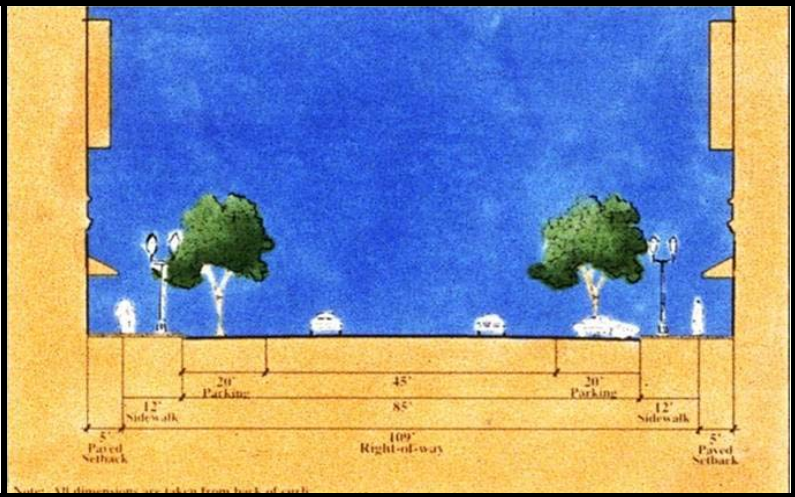
Walkable streetscapes must accommodate pedestrian, vehicles, and bikes. However, the streetscape should be primarily pedestrian-focused so that walking is encouraged and vibrant street life exists. Addison Circle achieves this with a hierarchical street pattern organized by major residential boulevards, traffic collecting streets, primary residential streets, residential mews, special events parkways, and retail streets.<sup>11</sup> The more heavily trafficked boulevards and collecting streets feature 14-foot sidewalks with a 6-foot safety buffer comprised of trees and plantings between the sidewalk and the street. The retail streets provide the all the ingredients of a vibrant, engaging pedestrian experience because it incorporates traffic calming features like bumpouts, a 12' wide sidewalk, and a 5' building setback [Fig. 6]. This small setback helps establish a built environment with a human scale. Furthermore,

<sup>9</sup> "Create Walkable Neighborhoods Resources." <http://www.smartgrowth.org/library/byprinciple.asp?prin=4>.

<sup>10</sup> Zimmerman-Bergman. "What is Transit-Oriented Development and What Does it Look Like?" Powerpoint Presentation. Slide 4.

<sup>11</sup> Rutherford, Paris. "Smart Growth Case Study: Addison Circle." Powerpoint Presentation. Slide 25; RTKL Images.

the designers of Addison Circle seamlessly integrated structured parking into the development [Fig. 7]. These parking structures are shared parking facilities, which mean that there is a more active street life due to the presence of people at different times of day.



**Figure 6.** Addison Circle Retail Street Cross Section, Source: David Whitcomb/RTKL



*Figure 7. Parking Structure at Addison Circle, Source: David Whitcomb/RTKL*

While Belmar doesn't have an extensive hierarchy of streets like Addison circle, it successfully imposes a regular street grid on the sea of parking which previously existed to improve connectivity among its different components and beyond the property. The sidewalks at Belmar have an incredible depth that can accommodate at least two couples walking in opposite directions. Bumpouts contribute to the formation of a sense of security. However, the buffer between the sidewalk and the street is less pronounced than Addison Circle may slightly detract from this perception [Fig. 8]. Belmar also boasts an engaging pedestrian experience because the store fronts, such as the one at The Lab, are eye-catching<sup>12</sup> and open up right onto the street. In addition, Belmar has shared parking facilities like Addison Circle.

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<sup>12</sup> Newberg, Sam. "Town centers open around the US." *New Urban News*, December 2004.

However, there is a greater presence of surface lots and the development is not as successful as concealing parking facilities as Addison Circle.



*Figure 8. Streetscape at Belmar. Source: Continuum Partners*

### **III. Opportunities for Reuse**

The reuse of both site and even construction materials makes large contributions to the sustainability of a project because they direct growth toward existing communities. Infill development, the development of a parcel of land that is surrounded by already developed areas, is a cost effective measure that efficiently uses existing infrastructure, preserves open space and critical environmental areas, and supports a mix of uses.<sup>13</sup> Reuse of building materials is sustainable because it reduces the need for materials to travel a long distance and the energy required to dispose of those materials.

Belmar outperforms Addison Circle in this category because it recycles on three scales: the Villa Italia site itself is reused, one of the department stores was retrofitted as a mixed-use building, and approximately 90% of the construction materials, by weight and volume, from Villa Italia were processed and recycled, mostly on site. It recycled asphalt, concrete, steel, copper, and carpet.<sup>14</sup>

In Addison, the site from which Addison Circle grew was simply an open field that hosted Addison's annual Oktoberfest. However, that was the sole use of the field and it no longer had ecological value because it was fronted by a highway and an airport [Fig. 9]. By choosing to develop this site, Post

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<sup>13</sup> Benfield et al. pg. 190; "Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities." <http://www.smartgrowth.org/library/byprinciple.asp?prin=7>

<sup>14</sup> Steuteville, Robert. "A comprehensive approach to green building." *New Urban News*, April 2006.

Properties and the city mitigated some of this sprawl that was preventing Addison from creating a true place.



*Figure 9. Photo of Addison Circle, predevelopment stage. Source: Paris Rutherford*

#### **IV. Transit Accessibility**

Development around transit was once the norm in urban settings. With the rise of and the planning for the automobile, however, development around transit became the exception.<sup>15</sup> Accessibility to and the use of transit is an integral part of a sustainable community because it reduces congestion through improved connectivity. The less time someone can spend in traffic, the more time they can spend on the activities in which they would like to participate.

Successful use of transit incorporates high densities and the mixing of uses.<sup>16</sup> It has already been established that both Addison Circle and Belmar incorporate a variety of uses into their projects. However, there are certain densities that developments should meet in order for it to take advantage of various transit modes.<sup>17</sup> An intermediate service local bus requires at least 7 dwelling units per acre while a local bus with frequent service requires at least 15 dwelling units per acre. Locations with a minimum density of 9 dwelling units per acre can support light rail and those with a density of at least 12 units per

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<sup>15</sup> Dunphy, Robert et al. “Ten Principles for Successful Development Around Transit.” The Urban Land Institute. 2003. pg. iv.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pg. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Although the density of the employment destination is more important in influencing trips than the density of the residential area where the trips originate, dwelling units per acre at origination location is used because it was a definite number.

acre can support heavy or commuter rail.<sup>18</sup> The densities at Addison Circle, which range between 60 and 80 dwelling units per acre,<sup>19</sup> exceed the recommended minimum densities for all types of transit. It is already home to a Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) bus center and its transit oriented development potential should flourish when DART completes an expansion of the Cottonbelt Corridor, an east-west rail connection in North Texas.<sup>20</sup>

At a density of 12.5 units per acre, Belmar currently supports a local bus with an intermediate level service schedule. Regional bus routes run along Wadsworth Boulevard and Alameda Avenue, two major arterial roads, and buses go right through Belmar to pick up and drop off passengers.<sup>21</sup> In the future, the development at Belmar will have a large enough density to support the Regional Transportation District's (RTD) West Corridor light rail line. Construction began on the route linking downtown Denver and the outlying western areas in April 2008 and is expected to be ready for operation by 2013.<sup>22</sup>

## V. Programming for Civic Use

The public realm of any urban or suburban area is vast and includes streetscapes and transit systems. However, the public realm is not complete without civic uses, which include public art and community gathering spaces. Civic use is critical for the long-term sustainability of a community because it helps to form of a strong sense of place. The concept of place is how public spaces tap into a user's need to belong and feel empowered, and this is what will attract and retain residents and businesses over time.<sup>23</sup>

A combination of public art and public spaces activate the public realm at Addison Circle. At the center of Addison Circle's Rotary is a 133-foot sculpture entitled "Blueprints." The sculpture celebrates the city because art panels were designed using actual blueprints from Addison's public facilities [Fig. 10].<sup>24</sup> The Rotary and the elliptical esplanade connecting to the Rotary are venues for a variety of public functions like community festivals and summer concerts [Fig. 11]. Every courtyard in Addison Circle has a water element and there is a mix of formal and informal seating in the open spaces [Fig. 12].<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid pg. 9

<sup>19</sup> Kirk pg. 92.

<sup>20</sup> See "DART 2030 Transit System Plan." <http://www.dart.org/about/expansion/2030plan.asp>.

<sup>21</sup> *New Urban News*, April 2006.

<sup>22</sup> "Lakewood West Corridor Light Rail." <http://www.ci.lakewood.co.us/index.cfm?&include=/CPD/projects/wclr-planning.cfm>

<sup>23</sup> Kessler, Kristina. "Places of Purpose." *Urban Land*, August 2008, pg. 25.

<sup>24</sup> "Blueprints at Addison Circle." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprints\\_at\\_Addison\\_Circle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprints_at_Addison_Circle)

<sup>25</sup> West, Jim. Personal Interview. 18 September 2008.



*Figure 10. "Blueprints," Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprints\\_at\\_Addison\\_Circle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprints_at_Addison_Circle)*



*Figure 11. Addison Circle's Esplanade Park during fireworks, Source: [www.guidelive.com](http://www.guidelive.com)*

What Belmar lacks in public art it compensates with venues for public functions and social interaction. On Sundays from June through September, West Alaska Drive is closed for a public market. People can watch street performances and play bocce when Belmar takes on the function of a piazza for Festival Italiano every September. At Belmar Plaza, children skate and residents can enjoy concert series [Fig. 13].<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Festival Italiano." [http://www.belmarcolorado.com/sub/event/festival\\_italiano/index.html](http://www.belmarcolorado.com/sub/event/festival_italiano/index.html)



*Figure 13. Nightlife at Belmar Plaza, Source: Continuum Partners*

## **VI. Conclusion**

Addison Circle and Belmar are award-winning examples of how edge cities and greyfields can utilize sustainable design principles as an antidote to sprawling development. Belmar distinguishes itself with its multi-scale commitment to reuse while the defining feature of Addison Circle is an expansive public realm that integrates high quality public spaces with density. Sustainable development is location-sensitive and there is no one template for success. However, a focus on the elements discussed here can enable a community to create a strong and unique sense of place in an increasingly generic suburban landscape.