

BEYOND THE BIG CITY: SOLUTIONS FOR TOWNS AND SMALL CITIES

William J. de St. Aubin

Presented at CNU VII: The Wealth of Cities

JUNE 4, 1999

CONGRESS
FOR THE
NEW
URBANISM

Rebuilding the American Dream through Public/Private Partnerships with our Cities and Towns: A Summary

In 1988, a National Geographic article labeled Smyrna, Georgia the “redneck capital of the South.” The label infuriated the City’s leaders.

So they assessed their needs and established a vision. Their assessment included a need for a new library and community center. They also identified some undesirable and dilapidated areas. Instead of planning the two new facilities on two separate sites with separate parking, front yards, and infrastructure typical of sprawl growth, the sites were combined by Sizemore Floyd to create a new town center. The Firm orchestrated input from the community and master planned a mix of building types and uses — all tied together within a five minute walk including a (city hall, library, office, retail, housing, and community center) with street lined, brick sidewalks and greenery, focusing on a "town green."

The city leaders knew they had to take the first step in order to get others to invest in their exciting new public/private development. So with great political risk, they issued bonds without a public vote to build the library, town green and community center. Because of the quality of planning and design in this first phase, a residential and office/retail developer partnered with the City to implement the next phase. The housing developer built single family housing with alleys to reduce curb cuts and to be interconnected with the city. The City of Smyrna provided land for the housing and brick sidewalks on the land saved by combining the community center and library. All the houses sold in six months — even before the developer had a chance to advertise.

The office retail developer bought a dilapidated federal housing development acquired by the City and moved his headquarters to the new Town Center. With the funds from the sale of the property, the City of Smyrna built a new City Hall then issued bonds approved by the voters for a new police headquarters. The current phase involves building a connected retail level with condominiums and offices above. The City took the initiative in land acquisition and planning the retail/office/housing facilities. They are currently under negotiations with developers to deliver this next mixed-use phase. Shared parking with an adjacent church improved the feasibility of the mixed-use project.

Two years ago, the Urban Land Institute recognized Smyrna, Georgia as their National Award of Excellence winner for a public project — the only project in the last eight years to win the

"public" or "special" category award. The keys to our process were: 1) Assure public input, 2) Integrate planning and design to create a pedestrian friendly, mixed-use Town Center, 3) Produce a strong vision and 4) Manage multiple fund sources to align spending with resources. We believe this combined public/private approach is a critical tool in rebuilding the American dream in our cities and towns.

*William J. de St. Aubin, AIA
Principal at Sizemore Floyd, LLC
Phone: (404) 605-0690
Email: bila@sizemorefloyd*