Food Access & Community Development

Urban Commercial Revitalization graduate course

VCU Workshop on Sustainable Food Access
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Background: Planning Commercial Revitalization

• Bringing commercial life back to downtowns, neighborhoods, small towns, corridors & rural areas in the wake of economic change.

• A *spatial* approach to development

• Primarily in low-wealth communities
Causes of Economic Change in Low-Wealth Communities *include* (but are not limited to)

- Retail *sector*
  - Increasing economies of scale in production, logistics, & merchandising
  - Increasing corporate concentration domestically, but also increasing globalization, and global competition

(*drivers include technological change, public policy, etc.*)
Forces of Economic Change in Low-Wealth Communities include (cont’d)

• Population
  • Outmigration of population with more wealth into less dense, automobile-dependent suburbs
  • Polarization of incomes into more wealth and more poverty, exacerbated by racial discrimination
  • Increasing segmentation of consumer markets
Community-Based Development

- Does not solve the structural & sectoral causes of change
- But community & proximity are vitally important
  - The world is not really flat, although it is increasingly digitally connected (especially for those with wealth)
  - Geographic proximity & social cohesion are essential for human health and quality of life. We still live in through spatial communities
  - Spatial community is a “third place”
• Easy access to goods & services for daily needs is essential for well-being
Graduate Urban Commercial Revitalization Course

• **One** aspect of community-based development *(current form since 1989)*

• Pedagogical purposes *include*
  
  • Learn how to conduct retail market analyses & create innovative solutions in challenging situations
  
  • Understand some of the larger sectoral problems, but still act to improve communities today
  
  • Develop skills in melding quantitative analyses with up-close community engagement to produce implementable, action-oriented strategies
Approach

• Invitation by local government, close collaboration with neighborhood & civic associations, non-profits, churches, etc.

• Usually one district, sometimes one site, sometimes one city -
  
  • Last fall:
    • King & Queen County identified one site
    • Petersburg asked us to consider northeast quadrant of city

  • This fall:
    • Hopewell asked us to consider five sites throughout city
3 Essential Analytical Components

• Site & Neighborhood & Surroundings

• Demand Side - what do people want, what dollars are available

• Supply Side - what’s there now, what could possibly work there

• Quantitative & qualitative analyses - wide range, such as
  • government stats, GIS drive-time analyses, trade area mapping, store revenue threshold analyses,
  • surveys, observation, face-to-face interviews & focus groups w/ residents,
  • interviews w/ existing stores and w/ operators of potential new stores, etc.
Goal

• Potential New Uses - What new or enhanced suppliers could meet unmet demand and what, if anything, must be improved (by public sector) to enhance site and surroundings?

• Development Concept - Building upon new & existing uses, how can this site become a more complete place that enhances the community?

• Self-Sustaining - Public sector & foundation $ may be needed to set it up. Can it become self-sustaining?
Food Supply is Now Primary Course Focus

• Until recently, focus was all potential new retail & services, including food

• Now primarily food
  • Complicated enough on its own & requires detailed analyses
  • In most communities food anchors other retail and services

• PowerPoint Presentations from last year’s class and previous classes available; this year’s will be ready in December
Some Issues for Discussion?

• Housing density and retail food supply

• Income polarization, market segments & retail food store viability

• Dollar stores as a possible solution??!!
Thank You