

Neighborhood Cafes, Markets and Restaurants

Critical Components of a Neighborhood Amenities Plan

Background.

Cafes, restaurants, grocery stores and delis nearly became extinct during the Euclidean Era. The idea of commercial activities in close proximity to single family homes was anathema to every city planning principle taught and practiced in the post-War period.

Thankfully, older neighborhood cafes and restaurants survived; and the mood changed such that these intimate third places are now seen as life enhancing amenities. Still, getting a small retail shop, restaurant or grocer properly zoned in an established residential neighborhood is tough. Larger scale mixed-use developments pre-plan these important places, but long-established neighborhoods are resistant.

Issues.

One can suppose that the reason for the resistance has an historic back-story.

- First, it is just not done. The exclusive neighborhoods in town do not have commercial development on the corners; and that is probably true in the older residential enclaves.
- Second, if one business is permitted, more will follow; adjacent single family homes will be converted to commercial or office uses; there are plenty of examples where this has happened.
- Third, the quality of the café may be fine at first but poorly maintained over time, depressing adjacent residential property values; or the initial design may be sketchy and detrimental to the neighborhood.
- Fourth, a successful restaurant or café will draw outside people into the neighborhood. Some may be well-heeled, but some may be “those” people. The well-heeled will create traffic and parking problems and “those” people may hang out at the neighborhood store and become a negative force affecting public safety and property values.

So, prestige and pride in the neighborhood, personal safety and property values are the variables to address when considering the possibility of a new café, restaurant, deli or grocer in an established neighborhood. The prestige factor may be the most difficult to overcome. The older exclusive and expensive neighborhoods generally do not have a neighborhood coffee shop; but many of the newer exclusive areas do have walk-to cafes, grocers and shops. Most are on the edge of the neighborhood, but some are internal. Time and example seem the way to get past this objection. Starbucks is a great help.

In addition to the elusive impact of time, trust is the second aspect necessary for injecting a café or market into an established neighborhood. Neighborhood plans developed with resident participation in the decision-making process improves the odds that non-residential, neighborhood uses can be inserted into the neighborhood environment in a supportive, non-obtrusive way. Trust, backed by a record of city enforcement of agreed-upon performance standards, makes this resident risk manageable.

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Encroachment, insensitive design and poor maintenance are aspects of development that are controllable by the city or town government. The question is – is city hall trustworthy? Can homeowners depend on city hall, over time, to protect their property value for their present and retirement years; and can homeowners depend on city hall to protect the sanctity of the neighborhood that provides protection for families?

Trust is an earned asset. Cities have it or not; it is a transparent civic trait. In trustworthy cities and towns, zoning codes can be trusted to hold the line, design standards can be trusted to produce acceptable buildings and grounds; and code enforcement working with homeowner associations can be trusted to monitor maintenance and respond to neglected situations.

The Neighborhood Amenities Plan.

Neighborhood planning is a well-established planning process that is the mainstay of every credible city planning department. Neighborhoods consist not only of the homes and apartments but also the neighborhood park, the neighborhood school and the neighborhood shopping area. Neighborhood planning generally neglects the linkages, design and program of the neighborhood's parks, schools and shops. They should add to the value of the neighborhood, not be a nuisance or obnoxious intrusion.

Planning for the addition of a neighborhood café, restaurant, market or shop in an established residential area is a two-step process. First, the professional planners need to outline the opportunity in a way that is not immediately rejected. Examples, sensitivity to homeowner issues and surety of a strong planning, zoning and urban design process are the starting point. The second step is for the neighborhoods to envision such an amenity. The neighborhood has to invite the planning department into their neighborhood to discuss adding non-residential amenities that enhance the quality of life, reduce dependence on cars and provide a “third place” for people to meet.

Once invited in, the city then has the opportunity to use some of its trust-based capital and expertise to demonstrate how encroachment, design and maintenance issues will be handled, how public safety issues will be addressed and how property values will be enhanced: all things possible to do. Patience is the key ingredient since the old ways die hard.

The following examples of The Handy Pantry, the 903 Mill's Market and Maxine's-on-Shine are cafes and markets that have been in their neighborhoods for many years. The building design, parking, lighting and hours of operation have been resolved; however. A close and opened relationship between the city, the neighbors and the shop owner is the critical factor.

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THE HANDY PANTRY.

The Handy Pantry in North Eola Heights, Orlando, is completely surrounded by single family homes. Amelia Street is a collector road with modest traffic that traverses the neighborhood. The shop hosts a bike-share rack; and there is no on-site parking. On-street parking serves the café and grocery. Outside seating is present and important. Hours are for breakfast, lunch and dinner are from 8 AM to 7 PM.



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903 MILL'S MARKET CAFE.

903 is a café, a restaurant, a market and neighborhood wine bar. It is located at the corner of Gore Street and Conway Avenue, both collector roads. The café has less than ten on-site parking spaces and has single family homes on all four corners of the intersection and next door on both sides. Hours are from 7 AM to 9 PM weekdays, later on week-ends. Outdoor seating is the predominant seating available.

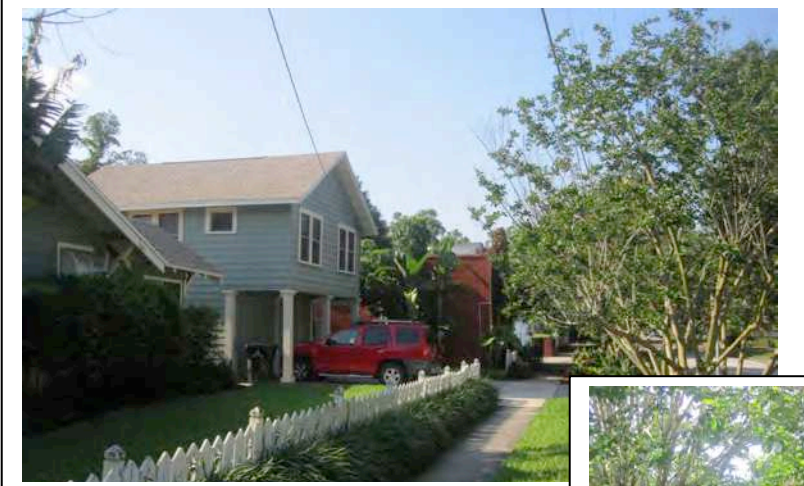


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MAXINE'S on SHINE.

Maxine's is located mid-block on a residential street; unlike 903 and The Handy Pantry that are imbedded in their neighborhoods on corners of collector streets. Maxine's has about 5 parking spaces. Seating is both inside and outside. Dinner is served; hours are from 5 to 10 PM.



The red SUV belongs to the single family homeowner next door. It is viewed from the north showing Maxine's minimum visual intrusion down the sidewalk; the two trees provide shade for diners and visual obscurity for the neighbors.

