

# Fostering Neighborhood Business Districts: Some Tentative Rules of Thumb

*(subject to further research and only as adapted to local conditions)*

- A commercial node of 30,000 to 50,000 square feet of retail space is a useful target because such a district can often support a grocery store, serve day-to-day needs, and—under the right conditions—foster walkability and social interaction.
- As a rough starting point, it is useful to assume that a household can, on average, support about 15 square feet of retail space. This means that 2,000 households will support a business district with approximately 30,000 square feet of retail space.
- Establishing goals that provide a large percentage of the required households within a quarter-mile radius (30-75%) will support frequent transit service, reduce the need for parking, and lower vehicle trip miles.
- If local governments wish to foster walkable local business districts, they should ensure that there is sufficient land to accommodate at least 50,000 to 100,000 square feet of ground floor space for retail businesses and associated services. Calculations for commercial land area should include a multiplier to account for the fact that the buildings will not occupy the full site). Additional space for institutional and office uses should be provided. As a general starting point, 3.5 acres is the minimum necessary for the smallest neighborhood node, 6-12 acres should be provided for a full-size neighborhood center with 20 to 50 acres for a community business district that provides enough variety and attractions to be a destination.
- Consider minimum density requirements, but make sure that the regulations are not so aggressive that they discourage development. A mix of small lot single family residences and townhouses along with higher density multi-family development is often desirable.
- Safe and convenient sidewalks are critical to the success of walkable neighborhood businesses. A grid street network with blocks no more than 500 feet long is also recommended.
- Residential and mixed-use development along transportation corridors will require a higher level of amenities and accessibility than is currently typical. Businesses serving local needs should be clustered around nodes with good pedestrian access and transit service.
- Five hundred to one thousand residences within a quarter-mile walking distance to new mixed-use suburban centers appears to be a useful goal that will produce pedestrian activity and the types of businesses not wholly dependent on a sub-regional customer base.

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