

Vibrant Neighborhood Businesses and Great Communities

Why are Neighborhood Businesses Important to Great Communities?

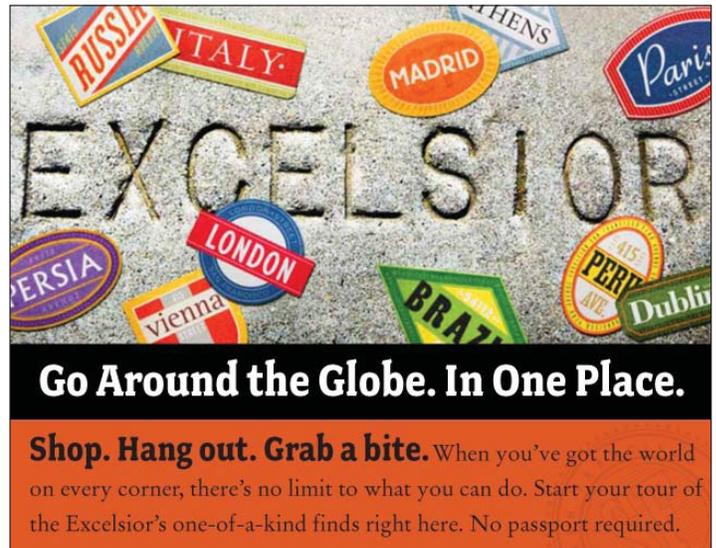
In these days of mega-malls and big box retailers, don't underestimate the importance of neighborhood business districts. The strongest, healthiest neighborhoods offer quality affordable housing, good schools, accessible open spaces and vibrant commercial corridors. If a neighborhood's business district is strong, the surrounding neighborhood benefits. The commercial district is a barometer of the overall level of economic confidence in a neighborhood. A thriving, vibrant commercial district provides economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, much-needed entry level jobs and workforce training opportunities, and convenient access to goods and services.

Why Plan for the Needs of Neighborhood Commercial Districts?

- Cultural heart of the neighborhood
- Neutral venues to bring all neighborhood stakeholders together
- Vibrant commercial districts transform community identity
- Catalysts for community-based stewardship of entire neighborhood
- Need for healthy food and neighborhood serving retail
- Essential component of a Smart Growth Strategy

Neighborhood Marketplace Initiative

Bay Area Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) works in 11 neighborhoods including Richmond's Downtown MacDonal Avenue, Oakland's Fruitvale, and San Francisco's Bayview, Visitacion Valley, and Excelsior. Through this experience they've discovered that the best way to support community commercial districts begins with a Community Action Plan. The plan prioritizes activities for community members, local organizations, and the City to realize their joint vision while also funding a locally based staff person. The staff member connects merchants to the resources and support that they need, works to foster cultural identity of the neighborhood, and supports community members in implementing their priorities for the neighborhood. Together, this unique pairing of resident-driven grassroots initiatives and outside support creates jobs, increases access to neighborhood-serving retail and services, improves appearance and safety, fosters community festivals, and creates a sense of pride in commercial corridors and the surrounding communities.



The Excelsior District in the outer Mission is an organization of local businesses that support each other through the Excelsior Action Group

\$1 Spent at a Local Restaurant Generated 27% More Local Economic Wealth Than a Chain Restaurant

What You Can Study in a Planning Process to Help the District?

To know what kind of retail development is really possible in an community, community members must determine:

- Who lives here
- What do we want
- What makes the community unique
- Define a vision that would make people come to the district
- What are our safety concerns
- What are our spending habits
- What is the physical limitations of the existing buildings and lots
- What is the condition and needs of the streets and sidewalks

Walkable communities need a mix of essential services from grocery stores, clothing shops, hardware stores to banks and restaurants. A Station Area Plan process is a great opportunity to outline specific ways to support neighborhood merchants that provide these essential services or attract new businesses to complement the mix.

Tools for a Thriving Community Commercial District

The following are recommended strategies that should be included in a comprehensive effort lead by a strong community vision. A successful effort should also include a combination of both programmatic and physical bricks and mortar strategies.

COMMUNITY BUILDING An essential component is to have a community led process that results in the community developing a strong sense of ownership over the neighborhood. Make sure to create a funding source for community promotional events centered around neighborhood commercial corridor partners.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS BID's are a mechanism for raising funds for infrastructure improvements. They can and should also fund a staff person who can run a comprehensive program for the community commercial district.

ASSESSING CRIME, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CLEANLINESS In many communities the perception of crime is just as important to address as the actual crime. Work carefully with the police department to identify where and how often vandalism, theft and violent crime happen. All of these have relevant specific

strategies but they need to be accurately assessed to find the right approach. Consider establishing a graffiti abatement program. Additionally Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design CPTED principles and experts should be reviewed and integrated within Design Guidelines.

INVOLVE YOUTH All of these strategies are great opportunities for engaging youth in the community. From murals, community surveys to developing movies and planning community events. Youth in the neighborhood are a great asset to challenge and develop by involving them with the larger community.

OTHER KEY ACTIVITIES:

- Business Attraction and Retention
- Business Outreach and Advocacy for Small Business Needs
- Neighborhood Cleaning Task Forces
- Market Analysis
- Develop a Website and Community Ads for District
- Leasing Assistance and Stabilization
- Pedestrian Safety Improvements
- Storefront Improvement Program - Oakland, San Francisco and Richmond have programs
- Grocery Store Attraction

Neighborhoods Near Transit That Successfully Support Their Local Businesses

EXCELSIOR DISTRICT, SAN FRANCISCO (results from work between 2005 & 2007)



- Attracted over 343 new businesses to fill vacant storefronts in addition to existing businesses.
- Improved night time safety, by working with police department.
- Created over 150 new jobs from new businesses.
- Organized 10 major community events attracting 24,320 visitors.
- Engaged 456 volunteers donating 2,456 hours.
- Increasing city and regionwide visibility of the commercial district via community branding and marking plan.
- Completed 23 storefront improvement projects (initiated by both city & property owners).
- Established a Land Use Committee to work on property owners in the neighborhood.

FRUITVALE MAIN STREET, OAKLAND (results from work between 2005 & 2007)



- Attracted 52 new businesses in addition to existing businesses.
- Developed programs for safety patrols and community cleanups.
- Created 101 new jobs.
- Organized over 144 community events such as Dia de los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo celebrations which total attracted 459,000 visitors.
- Engaged almost 5,000 volunteers providing 245,000 hours of service.
- Created community space improvements which including the creek, plaza and parks.
- Completed 40 storefront improvement projects.