

SHOPPING CENTER BUSINESS – MAY 2007**RETAIL ENERGY FOR URBAN MIXED USE****Seamless accommodation of retail and residential space revitalizes neighborhoods**

By Richard T. Burns, AIA

By 2010, some industry analysts estimate up to 75 percent of U.S. households will have no children at home, according to the National Association of Homebuilders. This growing segment, including singles, childless couples, empty nesters and seniors, has become increasingly attracted to homes that are part of the multi-faceted urban centers around the nation.

What these urban buyers and renters want most — next to a comfortable, quality home — is a community experience, so they can be closely connected to amenities of all kinds. Essential, vibrant retail that is located just steps from one's own front door is foremost on buyers' list of desires.

Properly conceived of, ground level retail can provide energy and appeal for multi-level, mixed-use developments that also include housing and, often, office space. In other words, the right mix and cache of retail spaces can lead to faster selling or leasing of connected residences. As the suburban market continues its slide, developers who turn to urban residential can use key approaches to integrate retail into their loft and condo buildings. Two key lessons include connecting to the surrounding neighborhood, and seamlessly combining retail and residential components. Together, these can ignite a residential development's overall marketability.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Adding ground-level retail to a residential development can energize the surrounding neighborhood. Critical to success is to avoid limiting retail options. A retail feasibility study conducted prior to design can identify which types of retailers would be most interested in inclusion. This allows developers to shape the concept design in anticipation of the retailers' particular needs.

To make retail work effectively in an urban mixed-use development, designers must design retail and residential spaces at the same time. For those residential developers without mixed-use experience, residential-retail integration is most successfully accomplished alongside a team of retail-experienced consultants and architects, who should ideally be assembled at the project's outset.

Seamlessly accommodating a mixed-use development's various, conflicting functions is a fundamental design challenge. For example, larger retailers are often interested in two-story spaces; thus, the project must co-mingle the larger spaces with the smaller, sidewalk-loaded retail tenants. Because of the traffic retail creates, ground-level positioning of

shops, restaurants, and services requires careful integration with the building's residential activities and spaces. The project's street-level retail must also be selected and designed to complement the neighborhood's existing retail.

Connecting a mixed-use project to its host neighborhood requires designers to understand intersection locations and pedestrian activity patterns so as to orient the project's retail. Shops can be integrated into the existing neighborhood by being oriented to the street and provide a range of design functions like awning coverage and café tables which will activate the sidewalk and energize the project.

A well-connected, fully integrated mixed-use project has proven to appeal to residents looking to move into condos, lofts, or apartments with their own nearby gourmet grocery, quality dry cleaners, wine and cheese shop, coffee shop, and other choices.

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

The service, spatial, and structural grid requirements for retail and residential spaces are vastly different. Therefore, the seamless accommodation of these varied uses within a single development is best conceptualized and executed by a design team with deep experience in both residential and retail buildings.

Security is a large part of any residential project. When retail is added, much of its traffic is caused by people who don't live there. While the residential entry must be highly visible, it also must be separate with secure lobby and garage access. It's also essential that residential parking be separated and secured from that of retail. Furthermore, residential and retail service entries must be in separate locations. This is both a security and a logistical issue; services like trash removal and deliveries occur more often for retailers, and at different times of day. Thus, separate service docks must be placed in different areas.

Parking is sometimes below ground, but most often due to economic considerations it is above ground-level retail, and directly below upper level residential. This vertical separation requires a structural grid that is appropriate for each distinct functional use.

In an efficient ground level retail structure, a 30-foot by 30-foot grid will not be appropriate for upper level parking or residential for example. In a typical residential grid, columns are lined up at demarcation lines between units. For parking, a structural grid accommodates cars, often with a three-car-wide dimension. The successful integration of these different grids demands vertically finessing retail, residential, and parking to avoid negative impact.

Finally, issues like noise and odors are always a concern with retail — especially including restaurants and bars — located below residential spaces. Mechanical ventilation systems in retail spaces must therefore have the capacity to eliminate negative impact on the residences. Noise can be controlled through proper acoustic insulation and appropriate location of services.

