The Rehabilitation of a Central Business District:  
The Richmond (Indiana) Promenade (I)

Kenji K. OSHIRO

The migration of businesses and people from the so-called "downtown areas" (central business district) in American cities resulted from changes in: (1) the social geography of the city, (2) consumer buying habits, and (3) retailing technology. The medium- and higher-income families moved to the suburbs which redistributed the buying power and, along with this redistribution of population, the mobility of the suburbanites increased in terms of distance and flexibility through increased ownership of automobiles. In addition, the growth of real incomes provided the consumers with the means to seek the desired types and kinds of merchandise (Urban Research Associates, 1968, p. 42). As a consequence, retailing was automated to keep pace with the increased demand as well as greater variety of goods and services in the retail outlets and thus, larger retail outlets were necessary to be competitive in this situation.

These factors encouraged the establishment of shopping centers close to the suburban residential areas with easy automobile access. In contrast to the central business district, the shopping centers were designed to handle the automobile traffic in terms of larger volume and accessibility. Most central business districts reflect the needs of an earlier era, but the increasing volume and flow of automobiles caused traffic congestion and parking problems. The traffic congestion and parking difficulties discouraged shoppers from the downtown area and this has contributed further to the decline of downtown area and businesses.

This pattern of relative decline of the central business district was not confined to the larger American cities, but smaller cities also experienced a similar trend. One such city was Richmond, Indiana, a city of 44,000 people located in eastern Indiana (Figure 1). In the early 1960's some of the larger businesses moved to a shopping center on the eastern fringe of the city. In fact, the central business district had assumed characteristics of a blighted area and was in need of redevelopment.

Efforts have been made to reverse this trend in some cities, including the City of Richmond. In this paper, the efforts to revitalize the central business district of the City of Richmond will be examined to illustrate the role of a downtown merchant group in the planning and development. Thus, the efforts between 1965 and 1973 by the downtown merchant association to attract shoppers will be examined briefly. Then, a general description of the changes in the downtown area as a result of the reconstruction will be described in the next section. Some of the results of the redevelopment efforts and its impact on the downtown area will be considered. The role of the city government in the
The process of planning and development of the Richmond downtown area will be discussed in another paper.

1 The Role of the Downtown Retail Merchant Association

As a result of the migration of businesses and shoppers from the downtown area, the remaining merchants were confronted with the problem of attracting shoppers. Their aim was to attract a part of the 250,000 potential customers in the Richmond trade area (Figure 1). The trade area includes an area of about 40 to 48 kilometers from the city (Interview K.E. Paust, August 9, 1974).

The search for a way to attract shoppers started in 1965 when a group of merchants, City Councilmen and interested citizens visited a shopping mall in Michigan. Though this trip generated much enthusiasm, it produced no tangible results. However, an important step was taken by the Downtown Richmond, Inc., a retail merchants association, in 1967. A special committee, Downtown Richmond Tomorrow, was established to study alternative methods for the redevelopment of the downtown area. The objectives of this committee was not accomplished due to unforeseen circumstances. Subsequently, the functions of the committee was re-absorbed into the parent organization in 1968.

The redevelopment of the central business district was thrust to the forefront by a tragic event. On April 6, 1968, a gigantic explosion occurred in the downtown area. The
actual cause of this explosion was not established definitely, but it demolished eighteen buildings, destroyed 25 businesses, and produced 41 deaths (Dayton Daily News, August 21, 1974). This catastrophe instituted a change in the priority of redevelopment for the city government and the retail merchants association (Interview, M. Napote, August 9, 1974).

The explosion forced Downtown Richmond, Inc. to renew its efforts to redevelop the central business district. Eventually, they decided on a shopping mall. After visiting shopping malls in Illinois, Indiana and Michigan in 1969, a plan for a shopping mall was finalized in cooperation with a local architectural firm. These trips provided ideas and insights into the construction, the mall floor characteristic, and physical arrangement of a mall best suited for downtown Richmond as well as the types of businesses which would attract shoppers.

The United States Government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided $56,000 for a feasibility study to the City of Richmond in the aftermath of the April 6 explosion. Based on this feasibility study, the City of Richmond formulated plans for reconstruction of the devastated area. The Downtown Richmond, Inc. was able to contribute directly to the planning because it had developed a plan for a shopping mall. This plan was incorporated into the City's reconstruction plans and forwarded to the HUD Regional Office for review in December, 1969. In January, 1971, the Federal Government agreed to provide a grant of $450,000 for the reconstruction of the downtown area and the merchants contributed $300,000 to this project for a total of $750,000.

2 The Richmond Promenade

Ground-breaking ceremony for the start of construction was conducted on August 24, 1971, and the newly completed mall was dedicated on June 27, 1972. In preparation for the surface construction, the City of Richmond installed a 60-inch sewage line; the gas company re-installed its gas lines; and the Richmond Water Works installed a new watermain (The Palladium-Item, June 25, 1972). This shopping mall was designated as the Richmond Promenade in order to distinguish it from the two other shopping malls in the city.

As the construction started, some merchants expressed concern regarding the fact that the construction would affect their businesses adversely. Construction was undertaken to minimize inconveniences to the shoppers. In fact, people were also invited to watch the construction work while the merchants engaged in promotional activities such as "construction sales" and "sidewalk superintendent sales." As a result of these activities, the merchants who were already back in operation experienced very little disruption in sales during the construction period (Interview, K.E. Paust, August 9, 1974).

The Promenade was designed to create a park-like atmosphere for the shoppers as well as the pedestrians. It covered an area of 390 meters long as 335 meters wide (Figure 2). In the construction of this fourblock long promenade, 300,000 bricks were used in nine different patterns to give the mall floor a look of warmth. A large uniquely designed water fountain was installed on each block (Photo 1). To provide shade and resting areas for the
pedestrians, 46 pedestrian canopies with benches were installed along the mall at various locations (Photo. 2). Other features such as drinking fountains, telephones, trash containers, and urns for cigarette disposal, information boards, and outlets for recorded music were
installed on the Promenade. Planters with small trees and flowers were placed throughout the mall, while large trees were planted on the Promenade floor (Photo 3). In addition, the Promenade was designed with sufficient space for the movement of emergency vehicles. The City of Richmond Maintenance Department has the responsibility for maintaining the Promenade.

The Promenade is illuminated during the evening hours to attract as well as to insure the safety of people on the mall. The fountains are also illuminated by spotlights with various colors. Generally, the lighting of the Promenade appears to be an attractive feature, especially during the summer evenings. In addition, some businesses have extended their shopping hours.

Several rules are enforced to insure the relaxed atmosphere, sanitation and safety on the Promenade. First, no dogs, free or on leashes, are allowed on the Promenade. Second, bicycling is also prohibited.

Since the completion of the Promenade, special activities have been conducted here. Since Richmond is one of the major rose producing and testing areas, an annual Rose Festival is held in the month of June (The Palladium-Item, June 19-23, 1974). Some of the activities associated with the Rose Festival are conducted on the Promenade and have attracted about 10,000 to 12,000 people (Interview, K.E. Paust, August 9, 1974). Another event, Fiesta Days, is held in August and has attracted about an equal number as the Rose Festival events. During the winter holidays, the Promenade is decorated with many colorful displays.

3 The Renovation of Stores on the Promenade

The rehabilitation process of a central business district can be advanced along two lines: (1) by changing the image of the central business district, and (2) by alleviating traffic congestion and parking inadequacies (Gist, 1968, p. 52.) In the former approach, the elimination of drabness, unsightliness, shabbiness and the “facelifting” of structurally sound buildings are undertaken by the area merchants. In the latter approach, traffic and parking bottlenecks are eliminated by the city government. In the case of the Richmond Promenade, both approaches were integrated into the development plan of the city.

To improve appearance of the mall area, the merchants invested $8,586,458 for the renovation and modernization of their businesses between 1968 and 1974. The completion of the mall and store renovation have had a significant impact on the retail sales. Retail sales have increased by 25.6 percent since the completion of the Promenade (Downtown Richmond, Inc., The Promenade: A Fact Sheet). The store occupancy rate is about 99 percent.

4 Summary

The construction of the Richmond Promenade created a new image and atmosphere, which was oriented to pedestrians and shoppers, and thus, a reason to visit the downtown area for the potential customers. In addition, the merchants further enhanced the image of the area by facelifting and modernizing their establishments. Also, the Promenade
provided additional opportunities to attract people through promotional activities. As a result, the pre-1968 trend has been partially reversed.

This paper is dedicated to Professor Toshio Noh on his retirement.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of Mr. Kenneth E. Paust, Executive Secretary, Downtown Richmond, Inc. and Mr. Matt Napote, Head, Department of Redevelopment, City of Richmond, in collecting information for this paper is acknowledged.

References

Dayton Daily News, (Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio)
Downtown Richmond, Inc. (1974): The Promenade: A Fact Sheet, Richmond Indiana
Interviews with Mr. M. Napote, Head, Department of Redevelopment, City of Richmond, August 9 and September 16, 1974
Interviews with Mr. K.E. Paust, Executive Secretary, Downtown Richmond, Inc., August 9 and September 16, 1974
The Palladium-Item (Richmond, Wayne County, Indiana)
Urban Research Associates (May, 1968): Market Feasibility Study: Central Core Area, Richmond, Indiana

CBD の復権——リッチモンドプロムナード

Kenji K. OSHIRO (大城 謙治)