

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Pearl and Center Roads Corridor Plan was prepared for a simple reason: to lay the groundwork for the comprehensive revitalization of Brunswick’s primary commercial areas. As design and construction of the Brunswick Town Center has demonstrated, commercial development can create a high-quality environment for shopping, living and enjoying a vibrant community, if that development is managed and designed to do so. The goal of the Corridor Plan is to identify opportunities and strategies that will extend this vitality to the rest of Pearl and Center roads.

Like most post-World War II commercial strip developments, the development of Pearl and Center roads emphasized unimpeded automobile access, rudimentary commercial buildings, abundant parking and signs that compete for attention. Although many individual properties were well designed and attractively maintained, others did not have this good fortune. As the late 20th century progressed, Pearl and Center roads suffered from a variety of negative impacts, including:

- Progressively more “modern” commercial developments in surrounding areas, offering newer buildings, increased square footage and more contemporary physical appearances.
- The construction of Interstate 71, which removed the developing north-south through traffic from Pearl Road (and with it the traffic volumes that would support most general commercial development types on Pearl Road).
- A lack of investment in the physical appearance of public streetscapes and public spaces, with the notable exception of the Pearl and Center roads intersection.
- Lack of infrastructure, including sanitary sewer that would support more intensive development in specific locations.
- Conflicting zoning and site development standards between the City and Brunswick Hills Township.
- A lost sense of the markets for which the Center and Pearl roads areas are best suited.

Perhaps most significantly, Pearl and Center roads suffered from a lack of identity. Without well-known destinations or other distinguishing features, Pearl and Center roads looked like little more than variations on a theme: two of the many outdated, nondescript commercial strips that can be found throughout Greater Cleveland.

In all of these respects, Brunswick faces the same challenges as communities across the nation. In the words of the Urban Land Institute, Brunswick’s primary commercial opportunities consist of one-dimensional forms of development that lack a distinct sense of place or community and that increasingly are plagued by problems to do with fragmentation, congestion, inconvenience,

inefficiency, deterioration and visual blight.... While a single automobile-oriented shopping center is easily accessible, dozens lined along the same urban arterial are not.¹

As a result, the future of Pearl and Center roads is cloudy unless significant changes are made. Since so many commercial strips are continuing to fail, and since new commercial development in areas surrounding Brunswick has continued to explode, chances are that Pearl and Center roads will not naturally evolve into general retail centers again. Without a sea change in perspective, a conscious commitment to finding this location's best opportunities and a new perception of what can happen, Pearl and Center roads are unlikely to see much improvement.

Rather than continue to accept this decline, it is necessary to re-imagine the Pearl and Center roads corridors. The City of Brunswick actually began that process as early as the mid-1990s, when the *Brunswick Development Policy Plan Update* identified the need for a central commercial location that would give Brunswick a civic identity and a central gathering place. The *Development Policy Plan Update* included a preliminary site concept that showed retail, restaurants, offices and housing in a mixed use development. This development centered on a pedestrian-friendly "Main Street" and a series of formal and informal public gathering spaces, such as parks, restaurants, trails and public facilities. As the Brunswick Town Center project has been pursued by the City throughout the 1990s and 2000s, these fundamental principles have remained in place.

The Pearl and Center Roads Corridor Plan extends the principles embodied by the Brunswick Town Center to the remainder of Pearl and Center roads. The Corridor Plan recognizes that Brunswick has an opportunity for a wide variety of types of businesses, buildings and spaces, and customizes these principles to the scale of each area's existing environment. The Plan reconfigures Pearl and Center roads into a series of development areas that share several characteristics:

- Attractive, well-designed and well functioning environments;
- Formal and informal public spaces and places where pedestrians are welcome;
- Automobile access that is balanced against the needs of people;
- A mix of reinforcing economic activities that fit the character of the locations.

This Plan should be regarded as having an approximately 10 year time window. The analysis and recommendations in this Plan primarily identify opportunities and strategies that may develop between 2004 and 2014. Given the market-driven characteristics of a Corridor Plan, a 10 year window is generally determined to include enough time to permit substantial redevelopment, but a short enough period of time to be able to reasonably anticipate market trends. The City may wish to update this Plan periodically, and may wish to create a new Corridor Plan in approximately 10 years.

¹ *Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips*. Urban Land Institute, 2001, p. v.



The Pearl and Center Roads Corridor Plan not only outlines the Vision for the future of Pearl and Center Roads, but it articulates specific strategies for making that Vision become reality. Much of the success of this Plan will rely on the City's willingness to implement the Plan's zoning, design and economic policy decisions, but a great deal will also rely on the Brunswick community, including its residents, business owners and property managers. Making Brunswick a place where both residents and visitors want to work and shop will require a long-term commitment to excellence in design, public administration and entrepreneurship.

Brunswick has demonstrated overwhelmingly that it can make its visions happen. We are confident that Brunswick's Pearl and Center roads vision will be realized, and we will look forward to seeing that happen.