

Objectives

1. Understand that land-use decisions may not always be carefully thought through.
2. Recognize that most types of land use may have unwanted or negative environmental results.
3. Understand the relationship between the development of shopping centers and the decline of central business districts.

Safety considerations: There are no specific safety considerations in this exercise.

Introduction

Shopping centers are frequently constructed with inadequate total planning. Communities are quick to see the potential positive economic spinoff of a shopping center being developed but tend to downplay potential negative impacts of such development. Environmental considerations are not always properly addressed and thus surface later as problems. To understand what environmental problems may arise from the construction of a shopping center, it is necessary to analyze an existing or proposed facility.

Procedures

1. Design a questionnaire to be administered to neighboring residents of a local shopping center.
2. Administer the questionnaire.
3. Undertake an on-site evaluation of the shopping center.
4. Discuss and evaluate the data compiled from the questionnaire and the on-site evaluation.

Questionnaire Design

In developing the questionnaire, the class should address such questions as the following:

1. Did you live in this area before the shopping center was constructed? If so, what was the area like before the shopping center was built?
2. What problems do you notice associated with the shopping center (noise, traffic, etc.)?
3. What do you like about having a shopping center nearby?
4. Is the shopping center aesthetically pleasing (interior, exterior)?
5. Do you feel crime in your neighborhood has changed with the construction of the shopping mall?
6. Were you consulted in any way before the shopping center was built? If so, in what way and by whom?

Shopping Center Evaluation

The evaluation conducted by the students should include such information as the following:

1. An estimate of the total area of impervious surfaces (any surface where water cannot seep through, such as buildings and parking lots)
2. The number and average sizes of trees in the shopping center
3. How the trees or shrubs are planted: in boxes, in areas filled over with wood chips, or in beds
4. An estimate of the parking area used at one time
5. A survey of the drainage, sewers, ditches, holding ponds, or nearby stream. Where does all the water that falls on the impervious surfaces drain?
6. Is the area aesthetically pleasing or not, and why?
7. Were the roads leading to the shopping center there before construction, or were they widened or constructed because of the shopping center?
8. What kinds of stores are at the shopping center? Are there any small shops or unique stores, or just large chain stores?
9. Is there evidence that the shopping center was constructed where a farm, residential area, or open fields used to be?
10. Is there evidence that large trees were removed for the shopping center? If so, how could they have been incorporated into the shopping center complex rather than having been removed?

