

Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan Update

Mixed-Use Development

What is Mixed-Use Development?



Mixed-use development is development that integrates compatible residential, commercial, office, institutional or other uses within the same structure, or in separate buildings on the project site as a single, unified development. The uses can be integrated horizontally or vertically, depending on the zone and

location, however, a typical mixed-use project often consists of ground floor retail with either housing or office space above.

Some mixed-use projects are not limited to uses within one building and may include entire neighborhoods where different uses are mixed together in close proximity. Many planners see mixed-use projects that have a housing component as an important factor in reviving urban and industrial areas.

Mixed-use is often associated with terms like “smart growth,” “new urbanism,” “transit-oriented development” and “traditional neighborhood development.” Keep in mind, however, that mixed-use is merely one possible component found in these development concepts and can help achieve objectives such as increasing density, reducing the number of vehicles, creating localized employment, gentrification of urban neighborhoods, and providing dynamic living environments.



History of Mixed-Use Development

Mixed-use development was the most prominent style of development during the large majority of the history of cities and towns. Because people walked for daily transportation, it was most convenient to locate the uses in proximity. People often made a living from their own homes. This was particularly true in urbanized areas, where the bottom floor was often devoted to some sort of commercial use, and living space was upstairs.

Mixed-use development fell out of favor during the Industrial Age in favor of more efficient manufacturing in dedicated structures. Many of these buildings produced substantial industrial pollution, detrimental to those who lived nearby. These factors were important in the push for zoning that separated land uses. To protect both public health and residential property values, early zoning focused on separating different uses and buffering them from each other to minimize nuisances.

This separation however, was extended to commercial uses as well, setting the stage for the suburban style of life that is common in America today. This type of single-use zoning was widely adopted by municipal zoning codes. Completely separate zoning created isolated “islands” of each type of development. In many cases, the automobile became a requirement for transportation between vast areas of residential neighborhoods and the separate commercial and office strips.

Throughout the late 20th century, it began to become apparent to many urban planners and other professionals that mixed-use development had many benefits and should be promoted again. As American cities deindustrialized, the need to separate residences from dangerous factories became less important. Many professionals and citizens alike now argue that a mixture of uses is vital and necessary for a healthy urban area.



Mixed-use development is not a new idea. Housing above stores was common in town centers before the advent of zoning, as these turn-of-the-century photos of the Plaza area show.

FACT SHEET

What Are the Benefits of Mixed-Use Development?

Different communities choose mixed-use development for different reasons. Some see it as an excellent way to incorporate a mix of housing types on a small scale while enhancing traditional town character. Others see it primarily as a vehicle for revitalizing struggling areas and spurring economic development. Still others use it to create or enhance downtowns or village centers, particularly when located near transit. Whatever the reason for choosing mixed-use development, it has many potential benefits. Mixed-use development:

- Fosters pedestrian-oriented activity nodes by providing a mix of uses in compact, walkable areas.
- Spurs revitalization of deteriorating urban areas by integrating residential uses and public institutions into the commercial fabric to create an active street scene.

- Increase the viability of local shops and facilities and offers convenience to residents.
- Allows for greater variety of land uses and structures, including adaptive reuse of existing structures and flexibility in site planning.
- Promotes efficient use of land and infrastructure, particularly parking and transit.
- Promotes pedestrian & bicycle travel.
- Reduces auto dependency, roadway congestion, and air pollution by co-locating multiple destinations.
- Increases the area available for residential development and provides more housing opportunities and choices.
- Provides more “eyes on the street” thereby increasing public safety in the area.

- Enhances an area’s unique identity and development potential (e.g., village centers, locations near transit).
- Promotes a sense of community by fostering social equity through a spectrum of housing and jobs.

The Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan Update will consider mixed-use development as a tool to achieve these objectives and help revitalize the area. By carefully identifying potential sites for mixed-use development and allowing mixed-use zoning, the Santa Fe Depot area has the potential of becoming a successful, vibrant and safe neighborhood.



Sources: Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce, National Association of Home Builders, Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council

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For more information about the Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan Update, call Anna Pehoushek, Principal Planner at (714) 744-7228 or Julia Gonzalez, Associate Planner at (714) 744-7227.

