



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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The Development Of Outlying Shopping Centers
The National Conference of City Planning, Buffalo, New York.
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The central retail business areas of our cities represent the highest real estate value of the community. Every effort should be made to stabilize these values and promote the further development of these areas. More scientific methods of handling automobile traffic, provision of increased automobile parking areas, the creating of wider streets, the by-passing of unnecessary traffic and the best possible development of trafficways, streets and boulevards to relate these downtown areas to the whole city should receive the most careful consideration of everyone interested in their city's future. These central business areas should forever remain the dominating business section of every city.

There are many factors, however, which are contributing to the rapid growth in number and size of outlying shopping centers in practically all our cities throughout the country. This development not only represents a certain evolution in trade in response to certain changed conditions, but it also denotes progress and growth in our cities. In recognizing the rapid growth in number and size of outlying shopping centers it is well to consider the many factors contributing to this growth. Among these influences are the following:

(First) The congestion of the streets of the central business areas by automobiles. These streets were not, of course, designed to provide for present day traffic needs and regardless of the building of multi-story garages; the use of roofs for parking stations; the use of underground storage; the bypassing of certain traffic; the building of elevated and subway trafficways, it is not likely that this congestion can be fully relieved.

(Second) The increasing volume of suburban and tourist trade entering the city by highway rather than by the railroads naturally concentrates quite a percentage of such trade in the outlying shopping centers. A few years ago practically all this out-of-town trade entered the city through railroad stations and naturally gravitated to the central business district. As a matter of fact in many of our cities, state, county, and national highways are being routed so as to by-pass the central business centers in order to relieve congestion. This very by-passing, however, tends to direct a large part of the trade from such travel into outlying business centers. The great number of outlying transient hotels is evidence of the movement of certain trade into outlying regions of a city.

(Third) The development of aviation will largely have the same influence upon out-of-town trade in that most municipal fields will be located in the outlying area of a

city and the trade from such travel will frequently be more accessible to the outlying business centers.

(Fourth) The advent of picture shows has moved much of the nightlife from the downtown centers to the residential areas. The daytime patronage of such picture shows, influences a large number of the city's population from going downtown to trade. This is evidenced by the large number of shops supplying at least neighborhood trade, which generally springs into existence surrounding an outlying picture show. The legitimate theatres in most cities are not drawing their former large patronage having lost quite a percentage of their patrons to the outlying picture houses.

(Fifth) In most cities a few years ago the large apartment houses, family hotels and kitchenettes were built in sections fairly close-in to the central business areas. Recent years have seen the spreading of much of this character of development to the outlying regions of the city thereby concentrating population in outlying centers and supporting outlying shopping developments.

(Sixth) The rapid and convenient transportation afforded by the use of automobiles has brought about a greater scattering of the city's population often removing the centers of population to distances quite remote from the central business area and thereby contributing to the growth of outlying shopping centers.

(Seventh) The rapid development of chain stores is also gradually promoting the development of outlying merchandising centers. Where formerly in many cities large department and specialty stores enjoyed a very large percentage of the trade of the city, recent developments have spread a certain amount of this trade through chain stores into many locations throughout the city, particularly into the outlying residential areas. While this was at first largely confined to chain neighborhood grocery stores, drug stores and other institutions supplying immediate neighborhood needs, the last few years have seen the introduction into the outlying business centers, of such large retail merchandising institutions as Montgomery-Ward, Sears-Roebuck and stores of the character of Marshall-Field and a great many of shops handling women's wearing apparel, men's furnishings, furniture, and many other general enterprises.

(Eighth) Recent years have seen the spreading of a large population of most cities into the rural areas beyond the city limits and strictly suburban districts. Automobiles, good roads, Delco Electric Light plants, individual sewage disposal systems, electric refrigerators, and other modern day conveniences, are making it possible for people to live many miles beyond the city limits and still work within the city. This is developing a large population whose trade naturally gravitates to the outlying area of the city.

(Ninth) In addition to this movement of institutions doing a retail business to outlying business centers, recent years have seen an outward trend of many office organizations such as insurance companies, engineering firms, oil companies, and also physicians, dentists, and other professional men into outlying business centers.

(Tenth) Where formerly the street car systems of most cities concentrated upon the central business area as their hub we today have a new condition in the widespread use of bus lines, quickly shifting the flow of traffic and in many instances directing this traffic more conveniently into outlying regions.

The rapid growth in number and size of outlying business centers is self-evident in every city and the problem that confronts the planners and students of city growth is the proper direction and control of these outlying centers. In many cities little thought is being given to their development because the growth has come about so gradually it seems inconsequential in the beginning and their ultimate importance is not fully realized. In the beginning there may only be a filling station at the crossing of two important trafficways, followed by a hot dog stand, a tourist park, or refreshment parlor. During the first few years there may only be added a few stores doing a small and neighborhood business. Generally no effort is made to widen the streets in such a center while it can still be done at small cost. These centers spring up at so many scattered points throughout the outlying area of a city that at first generally no one of them promises a growth that commands the attention of municipal authorities. The very character in the beginning of such developments is not usually ambitious and is often characterized only with small, temporary, unsightly one-story frame buildings with a lack of harmony of architecture, height line, or uniform set back from the curb. Gradually better and more substantial buildings are erected, but still with little effort to plan these centers for future needs. As a result throughout the land the present day congestion problem of our central business areas is being repeated in scores of outlying places throughout every large city. While it is still not too late the fore planning of these outlying centers should command the attention of every one interested in proper urban development.

The influences which have been enumerated are increasing rapidly and many outlying centers which are still comparatively small promise to ultimately cover large areas and command trade from wide sections of the city. In many cities the progressive enterprising merchants of the central business sections are recognizing this rapid growth and are meeting the changed conditions by establishing branch stores in these outlying sections. In most zoned cities a far too large amount of land has been zoned for business, permitting a very wide scattering of property for business uses throughout the residential areas, thus depreciating the residence districts and not helping the business. A reasonable balance of business lots and no more is required for the service of the public. The counts of the Regional Planning Commission of Chicago show that there is approximately half of a front foot of land occupied by ordinary business per capita of population. Mr. Cheney's counts of Pacific Coast cities arrive at a similar conclusion. Or he puts it another way in saying that about 5% at the most of the frontage of the city will be occupied by business buildings according to actual counts. It is therefore unnecessary, and particularly inappropriate for high-class residence neighborhoods to establish more than some such percentage of frontage in business lots. In the Country Club District we have set aside very much under this proportion of business area. This naturally increases the problem of planning street widths and size of blocks and lots depths to serve such a widely scattered business use of property.

Certainly the present day conditions under which many central business areas are laboring justify a determined effort to avoid the repetition of these conditions in outlying business areas, and the proper control of these many scattered commercial developments is perhaps almost as important from the general appearance of the city as the proper control of the central business areas. If they are disorderly and unattractive in appearance

it mars the physical beauty of the city as a whole and carries ugliness into the immediate regions of the residential sections of the city.

We must deal not only with the traffic needs within these outlying centers but their rapid growth vitally affects the outlying traffic arteries of the city leading into and from these business centers. In many cases the rapid growth of these intensive outlying shopping areas increases the load on water, gas and sewer mains entailing large expenditures for revamping these public utilities to serve an unforeseen need. The routing of car lines, the location of schools, hospitals, fire departments and many other municipal and public utility services are suddenly found inadequate and entail great cost in readjustment to meet the new conditions. Wise foreplanning would save enormous adjustment costs.

As a striking example of the growth of these outlying business areas we recently made a count of the number of stores and offices in Kansas City's south side residential area, south of a line approximately two miles south of the central business area, where ten years ago there were only approximately 200 stores in this entire region today we found 2,189 retail stores and offices.

Is it not time that this whole problem be given more serious consideration than that afforded by the general zoning law of our cities? Should we not arouse our public officials to planning for the proper development of these outlying centers to better serve future needs.

In the building of a number of outlying shopping centers in the Country Club District of Kansas City we have endeavored to follow certain principles and establish certain rules and regulations. In these neighborhood business centers we have under control a large part of the land involved and the tracts we have sold we have been able to stipulate certain building restrictions as to type of architecture and use of buildings. We have also handled practically all of the leasing of space in buildings erected in this center enabling us to control the type of business, and an appropriate grouping of related shops. On land in or near the centers we have not controlled we have been fairly successful by persuasion and example in securing the cooperation from the other owners. We submit the following for discussion,

(1) Any street in an outlying business center should probably not be less than 100 feet in width, with paving width of at least 60 feet on the minor business streets and not less than 72 feet on the major traffic streets passing through business areas. We have found that 60 feet is about the minimum width for the diagonal parking of cars on both sides of the street and still permitting movement of three lines of traffic between the rear ends of such parked cars. A careful count shows we handle about 22 times as many cars with diagonal parking as compared with parallel parking. We also find that the movement in and out of position with diagonal parking is much more rapid than with parallel parking. There is a possible objection to diagonal parking from cars backing into traffic, but we believe that this disadvantage is much less than the advantage gained by the increased number of cars possible with diagonal parking and the more rapid movement of cars in and out of position. After a number of years experience we believe that the number of accidents has been less in the use of diagonal parking than in parallel parking.

(2) We recommend the provision of interior loading and unloading courts in the interior of the business block wherever possible so as to relieve the front streets from delivery uses. Certain types of delivery trucks are not only of immense size and absorb a large amount of space but they contribute litter and disorder to these streets. Then, too, deliveries at storefronts unnecessarily contribute to the misuse of sidewalk areas and cause danger to pedestrians.

(3) Where blocks are not of sufficient size to create interior loading courts we believe that alleys should be of sufficient width, possibly a minimum of 26 feet, to provide at least one line of traffic with trucks standing on both sides of the alley. Loading trucks should not encroach on this area. We believe in the long run the setting aside of certain space for interior loading courts or wider alleys is more important than using the maximum amount of lot area for building purposes.

(4) We suggest the largest percentage of street area possible in proportion to the land occupied by buildings. In one of our outlying developments known as the Country Club Plaza area we are dedicating approximately 50% of our land for street purposes. This not only increases the percentage of land available for streets but reduces the percentage of land available for building occupation and to that extent tends to solve the parking problem. Shorter blocks make quicker movement of trade from one part of the center to the other and gives greater percentage of curb area for parking cars. Many developers question the introduction of so many street intersections as injurious to the continuity of trade. We realize there is a grave problem in creating a traffic hazard for pedestrians with increased number of street intersections. We have endeavored to meet this latter objection by the installation of pedestrian aisles of safety about 5 feet by 9 feet in size at these street intersections. These aisles of safety not only afford a chance for the life of the pedestrian in crossing broad streets but also tend to regulate the proper movement of vehicular traffic and slow down the rate of speed of such traffic.

When you break an outlying business development into small blocks it enables you to congregate more harmonious groups and better related stores, each small block affording a better mutual trade pulling power than is obtained in a large block where it is necessary to introduce certain types of enterprises that are not so advantageous to the trade of their neighbors. There is a distinct advantage to merchants on one side of a block in being able to pull trade from the opposite side of a block when the distance is comparatively short as compared with the difficulty of attracting such trade clear around a long block.

(5) In the beginning we thought it advisable to by-pass through traffic as much as possible, leaving our streets available for the cars of the patrons of the business center. We must admit that our experience in this has not been satisfactory. We had hoped that a shop slightly removed from the main-traveled street would have a certain advantage in parking facilities that would more than offset the greater publicity possible to him on the main street. Up to the present time, however, this has not been our experience. It is extremely difficult for many types of merchandising to exist where the shop does not immediately face one of the main traveled arteries. This has been demonstrated over and over again by the immediate increase of trade of a merchant when we moved him from a side street location onto the main street. Personally I am very fearful that some of the beautiful plans that have been suggested for the development of outlying shopping

centers will not prove practical in the light of our experience. For instance, in a number of instances where shops have been grouped around an open park space, even with the main artery of the district passing along one side of the park, we are afraid that many of the shops in the group that do not face the main artery will have a hard time to exist unless the park or plaza be easily and well connected through traffic outlets in every direction possible. We have only come to this conclusion after very long and earnest effort to pull the trade into locations off the main arteries. We recognize the difficulties on many long business streets where traffic moves at a high rate of speed. There is difficulty in pedestrians being able to shop from one side of the street to the other on such congested high speed traffic streets and yet I venture to say that even in such cases that many types of shops located on such a high-speed trafficway would probably in most instances have an immediate falling off of its trade if it removed to even one location removed from the main artery. We suggest that the solution in such instances is an effort to slow down the rate of speed by the use of safety islands and the frequent use of stop and start signal lights. If you can send your traffic through such streets with alternating movement of groups of cars and periods of sufficient gaps in such movement so that the pedestrians can get from one side of the street to the other we feel quite certain of the advantage in doing business on the important street. We realize, of course, that in many instances there could be an exception to this rule. This would be the case in a large amount of truck traffic going to and from industrial districts or any kind of traffic, which would not carry possible patrons of the adjoining shops, but we question the desirability of by-passing any form of traffic which has the possibility of carrying patrons by the front display window of a shopkeeper.

(6) We believe wherever possible it is wise to severely limit the height of buildings in an outlying shopping center. At the present time we have established a maximum height of two stories and really favor one-story structures even though they do not present as dignified and commanding appearance architecturally. Our experience over nearly ten years has shown that our income on one-story shops is much better than on two story shops. We have studied the business centers in many of our large cities and have been astounded to find the large amount of vacant second story space even in the 100% retail sections. We also found that as soon as any established business area begins to decline in any way that the second and third floors are often the first to suffer even in tall buildings. The majority of enterprises having large office organizations generally prefer an upper floor on account of light, air, sunshine, leaving the second or third floors available for retail or semi-retail institutions. We find it very difficult for merchants to pull the trade to the second floor even in a well-established center.

We also seriously question the desirability of tall office buildings within an outlying business center. As a matter of fact we have recently refused to permit a 10-story office building in one of our outlying centers believing that the disadvantages would far outweigh the advantages. Many of our merchants in this center such as restaurants and drug stores and five-and-ten-cent stores are exceedingly desirous of seeing us permit a large office population in the neighborhood to give them trade from people employed in the neighborhood. On the other hand we realize the loss of light, air and sunshine by the introduction of tall buildings. We realize the disorderly skyline that would be created, and more than that we feel that the all-day parking that would result from the occupants of such a building would immediately cause us traffic congestion and

take away one of the main advantages obtainable in a carefully planned outlying business center. A careful count in one of our shopping centers shows that the average time that a patron's car is parked in our district is 20 minutes per patron. Assuming that the car of an office employee parked throughout the day would occupy street space for a period of eight hours, we calculate that every such all day parked car would absorb the space that otherwise might be used by 24 possible patrons of the shopping center.

It simply results in balancing the possible trade available from the employees of an office building as against that obtained from the patrons of the business center's trade territory. We feel that large office organizations should not be housed directly within the retail center but if possible should be placed well apart where their all day parking needs would not conflict with the patrons' cars. Certainly if tall buildings are permitted, even with all the planning that may be provided, the time will soon come that traffic congestion will seriously menace the trade of the center.

(7) We believe that the massing of trade in closely associated blocks tending to radiate from one common center is better than the string street type of development of retail stores extending for a long distance on both sides of one street. As a matter of fact the central business centers of most cities demonstrate this theory where the main retail trade of the town spreads over several closely related streets and does not confine itself to one street alone. It is much easier for a merchant to draw trade from customers visiting other stores a few blocks in all directions than it is to pull business from customers visiting a store half a mile further down the same street. Then, too, we suggest there is far less injury to surrounding properties where several blocks of land devoted to business uses are massed together as a group as nearly square or circular in shape as possible than there is in the introduction of stores for a distance of a mile or more along one street creating offense and injury by the generally unsightly appearance of the rear of such stores in view of the adjoining residential properties.

(8) In the development of outlying shopping-centers every effort should be made to group shops, which are naturally related. A hardware store is not conducive to helping the trade of jewelry stores. A garage adjoining a restaurant tends to drive trade from the restaurant. A tinshop or plumbers shop does not help the trade of a ladies wearing apparel shop. Whenever possible women's and children's shops should be grouped together. Building materials and supplies should be put in another group. Shops handling heavy merchandise should be placed elsewhere.

Personal service shops such as barbershops, beauty shops, and shoeshining shops, should be placed together. If possible, produce markets, meat markets, and all provision shops naturally fall together. However, here again there is considerable question. A cash and carry grocery, for instance, draws a great many customers to a trading center while a furniture store draws comparatively few. For example, if you group a large number of enterprises such as furniture stores and piano stores together in one block you would have a comparatively dead area, while if you would place a cash and carry grocery store in a group such as this you would probably increase the trade getting possibilities of the furniture and piano stores in the block.

(9) And now to come to a thought which we believe to be one of the most important. Even though a business center be planned with wide streets, small blocks,

diagonal parking, safety islands, low height buildings, exclusion of high office buildings and all the other things which I have suggested it is still a serious question as to whether you have provided for the growing needs of auto parking space. Wherever possible we suggest that ample lands be set aside for the parking of cars. We have recently built two parking stations in our Country Club Plaza development for the parking of some 500 cars. We expended \$26,000 in only the beautifying of these stations. They are sub-drained, paved, lighted with underground conduits, and surrounded by a low stucco wall with tile copies of Spanish design. In every parking station there is, of course, considerable dead area in the corners and other places around the boundary of the station where cars cannot be parked. We have endeavored to utilize these spaces for planting and for the introduction of ornamental features, it being our thought that the parking stations should be made so attractive as to appeal to the public.

We realize that the habit of mind of every patron is already well established in using curb space for the parking of cars. We have made this parking space free to the public and still we must admit that people generally will not use the parking space until the street space is all occupied. As soon as the curb space is full they immediately use the station.

One of the main advantages, however, of the parking station comes from the use by all-day-parked cars. In every lease that is made in this center a stipulation is written into the rental contract by which every employee and employer must park his car in the parking station. We retain the right to cancel the lease in the event any tenant fails to enforce this regulation. We feel that every time a tenant or employee parks his car in the parking station it frees curb space for 24 possible patrons of shops in the center. Our experience has proven that there are less accidents to cars in the parking station than at the curb. Our picture theatre crowds at night use the station in large numbers. The merchants in the center think the greatest factor in building business has been the ease with which people can park their cars. Customers will come to the center to trade rather than patronize another center nearer at hand because they feel sure of a place to park their cars in our Plaza Section.

We suggest the introduction of such free parking stations in business centers in place of setting aside areas within the center for park purposes. We have endeavored to give these stations a park-like appearance from the outside by setting the walls sufficiently back of the street line to provide for the planting of trees and the placing of shrubbery. From a distance they look like parks. We believe that it is a practical combination of the utilitarian and the beautiful which is worth consideration. All the business houses grouped around such a parking station gain a wide view of their display windows and of course a greater amount of light, air and sunshine are afforded such shops. It gives a certain feeling of openness and attractiveness to the whole center. These parking stations perhaps have done more to give identity, and identity is almost as important as a good location in a shopping center, than any one feature we have incorporated in the development of this particular shopping district. We are not obligating ourselves to permanently maintain these stations free to the public although we hope that we may increase rentals sufficiently as a result of the benefit of these stations that they may be maintained free or perhaps in future years they may be converted into multiple story garages when the demand is sufficiently great.

(10) In the building of these new shopping centers, reasonable regulations as to the placing of billboards, of dangerous and unsightly overhanging signs, elimination of screaming advertising placards, hideous combinations of color, great scrawling, flaming advertising lettering across an otherwise pleasing store front or plate glass window should be carefully considered. Their direct value to a merchant is highly questionable. Their injury to a neighboring shop is frequently great, and in the long run, the general good to any new shopping center preventing such unsightly, ugly appearance, will give far greater value to each unit in the shopping center than any sacrifice suffered by a merchant in foregoing such practice. Storefronts should be attractive with maximum amount of plate glass. Your merchant must prosper and he should not be sacrificed too greatly to the demand of the architect for wide piers and large masonry areas, greatly reducing the window display space.

(11) Streets and sidewalk spaces in new shopping centers should be kept free of unnecessary obstruction. Popcorn stands, signboards, newsstands, and other stealing of city streets and sidewalk should not be permitted. This not only assists in handling pedestrian traffic but gives a more orderly appearance and is more appealing to the patrons.

(12) Too great a uniformity in storefronts perhaps may bring dull monotony. Sufficient variety can well be applied to give interest to a street scene and building fronts.

It may be well, wherever possible, to follow a general type of architecture in each group, one group having harmonizing Colonial types, another Spanish, another English, another French, and other good, general architectural designs. In this way, good appearance is given to a city's picture as a whole. Careful restrictions should be made as to changing of color schemes or building design of these buildings. Control of design of buildings and the use of buildings erected in such shopping centers should be as carefully safeguarded as is being done by restrictions on residences in high-class subdivision today.

(13) Street lighting and storefront lighting should be studied in advance and given much more attention than has been the custom heretofore.

(14) There should be groups of shops for immediate local and daily neighborhood needs, in contrast to larger outlying shopping centers comprising stores of general needs to serve a larger territory. The center providing a few neighborhood units, such as retail grocery, meat market, bakery, drug store and beauty parlor, can well be placed approximately half a mile or more apart in densely populated districts to a mile or more in sparsely settled areas. From two miles or more apart, larger general groups should be provided, giving desirable locations for stores that can only prosper by serving a larger territory. Many enterprises can succeed with a comparatively small number of customers, if they supply constant daily needs. Other types only supplying the occasional need of their customers must draw from a very wide area. As a matter of fact even in shops providing purely neighborhood needs we find it is quite difficult for many merchants to succeed until there are at least 15 or 20 lines of merchandise represented in the center so as to give a combined trade pulling power for each merchant.

(15) Reasonable regard should always be had as to the appearance of the sides of shop buildings on side streets, the views of the roofs and even the rear of buildings where viewed from the store fronts or second story windows of adjoining buildings.

(16) Transition from outlying shopping centers to single house residence areas should be carefully studied and wherever possible a belt of park or playground areas, public libraries, churches, apartments or groups of attached houses should be introduced to gradually step up the character of the neighborhood and create less injury to the single home residence areas.

(17) The provision of certain very small open squares or plazas, or space for fountains or a piece of statuary will add attractiveness and appeal to a shopping center as well as add civic beauty and adornment to the city as a whole. Grass, trees, flowers, shrubbery and garden ornaments can be made an integral part of new business centers as is so well exemplified in many European cities.

(18) Any outlying business center is influenced by the ease with which customers can come to and from such a center to trade. Certainly it is unwise to develop a well-planned outlying group of shops and give no consideration to the approach from the surrounding areas. Every effort should be made to develop the proper arterial approach from all directions. A large outlying shopping center greatly increases the amount of traffic on certain through streets and every municipality should give consideration to the future needs of such streets where traffic will be greatly increased by the rapid growth of one or more outlying shopping centers served by such streets. Before the cost becomes excessive these streets should be widened to meet future demands of traffic leading to and from such outlying business center.

American cities have a great opportunity in this growth of outlying shopping centers. It is possible to make them distinctive and appealing in appearance, individualistic and attractive in design and layout, affording character and color to the general appearance of the city. Cleanliness and good order, a reasonable uniformity and harmony of design, height and elevation, will go far to make our American cities more attractive, more appealing and more of unquestioned value to the people that live in these cities. Out of this order and cleanliness will come a practical beauty of great intangible value upon the spirit, patriotism and well being of any community.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN019

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911-), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.