



Planning, Policy,  
and  
Programming

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National Center for Sustainable  
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## Failing Malls: Optimizing Opportunities for Housing

Identifying distressed shopping malls and conducting analysis of transit accessibility, traffic congestion and government incentives for redevelopment, and the potential for housing development.

### WHAT WAS THE NEED?

The housing deficit in California is estimated at 3.5 million units. At the same time, housing is a growing use for vacant or underutilized malls. In some communities, local policies combine housing and retail space in proposed new mall/shopping center developments.

Redevelopment of failing malls in the context of large housing deficits, especially affordable housing units, present opportunities for sustainable development that addresses such deficits. Some shopping mall owners are explicitly interested in the redevelopment of malls into mixed use centers, with significant housing additions. This presents opportunities for public-private partnerships.

### WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

The goal was to develop a sustainability criterion to redevelop distressed mall sites that incorporate environmental, social, and economic criteria, transit accessibility, and to identify incentives local governments and/or the state can provide to promote housing/mixed use.

### WHAT DID WE DO?

The research involved: 1) identifying distressed malls in California's four largest metro areas; 2) identifying four to six distressed malls with potential for redevelopment; 3) developing case studies for these malls; 4) developing four to six case studies of recent



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or proposed shopping mall redevelopments by owners; 5) developing sustainability criteria to compare and contrast the two sets case studies; 6) applying the sustainability criteria to the case study malls to assess their actual or potential sustainability; and 7) identifying incentives local governments and/or the state can provide to promote housing/mixed use with transit accessibility.

## WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

Results indicated the opportunities for addressing housing deficits through the redevelopment of malls can be very significant. If one-third of housing units in such redevelopments are affordable, then the redevelopment of malls in this study could provide 20% to 54% of the cities' affordable housing targets for the affordable housing planning cycle. Community participation is also important from the government and community side. Mall redevelopment projects require community involvement and close cooperation between the city, its planning department, and the owner/developer. Community participation is also important with the local community. It is vital to respond early to community concerns and to ensure a timely and successful project.

## WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Planning mall conversions with significant new housing can be a win-win if cities involve the community to identify and meet their transportation needs, which can lead to less traffic congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

## LEARN MORE

For more information, see the final report:  
[https://escholarship.org/uc/itsdavis\\_ncst](https://escholarship.org/uc/itsdavis_ncst)

## IMAGE



View of nearly empty parking lot in ParkPlace Mall with Walmart in the background (Google Earth, 10/15/2020).