

which from the industry's point of view is almost as good as winning passage of its own bill. "We're going to face a huge uphill battle," Burkhalter concedes. "There's no way to pass tough legislation without industry support, and you don't get

that support by holding hands. We need grassroots action."

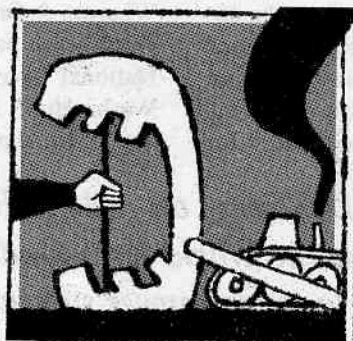
And as Washington debates the matter and the industry seeks half-measures, warlords and guerrillas ring up millions of dollars a day in the sale of conflict diamonds. ■

CITIES THAT SAY NO TO NEW MALLS AND SUPERSTORES ARE ENJOYING REGENERATION.

# Preserving the Urban Dynamic

**ROBERTA BRANDES GRATZ**

New Rochelle may be a small city in just another rich New York City suburb, but with the recent defeat of a proposed Ikea superstore, it symbolizes a significant turning point in the struggle of communities against the intrusion of big-box retailers. A modest neighborhood of homes, small businesses and two churches would have been condemned and demolished by the city in order to turn over the land to a supposedly better use—a 325,000-square-foot store, parking for 2,200 cars and two new ramps off the New England Thruway. Westchester County residents foresaw traffic-clogged roads, displaced homeowners, exacerbated pollution and negative effects on an array of quality-of-life issues. Public resistance was fierce.



EDIEL RODRIGUEZ

Tearing down residential areas for the benefit of a national corporation is a throwback to the long-discredited methods of urban renewal czar Robert Moses. Other big projects that similarly undermine authentic urban places are falling apart in the face of potent civic resistance. Such defeats signal a positive trend in the regeneration of downtowns. Collapsed projects in Pittsburgh, New Haven and Baltimore mark the possible end of decades of highly subsidized, developer-driven, national-chain-based projects replacing forlorn downtowns that are nonetheless rich in local history, character and small businesses.

In Pittsburgh, which had more of its traditional heart left for organic regeneration than most American cities, a plan for a five-acre mall died when, after prolonged community protest, the critical anchor, Nordstrom, pulled out, declining a \$28 million subsidy from the city. Pittsburgh's 1950s-style urban renewal plan called for demolition of sixty-two buildings of varying age, size and architectural style, dislocation of 120 businesses, lost tax revenue on top of enormous city subsidies for the new mall, endless disruption and no assurance of what would be built. This was the classic formula for killing downtown in order to save it, a strategy that has erased rather than rebuilt so much of downtown America.

In New Haven, a 1.2-million-square-foot shopping mall—probably as much retail space as downtown itself, near the waterfront but far from downtown—was permanently shelved, also

because Nordstrom bailed out. State and city subsidies totaled \$60 million. Opponents argued that this mall would undercut downtown businesses. Although New Haven's downtown was almost urban-renewed out of existence decades ago, new innovative economic life has been emerging on a modest but steady basis. Without competition from the mall, that momentum has a better chance to grow.

In Baltimore a plan to raze 150 buildings containing more than 100 small businesses in the city's onetime thriving retail center has languished in the wake of organized resistance to the use of the city's condemnation powers and the need for excessive state funding. In Baltimore's downtown district, modest regeneration has been taking hold. Several catalytic projects now under way create new residential, office, theater and hotel space. The sizable district near both Camden Yards and the University of Maryland has 150 historic buildings—from early-nineteenth-century Federal townhouses to rare post-Civil War cast-iron loft buildings to 1930s Art Deco retail stores, the kind of mix that offers endless potential for innovative reuse. The regeneration process, reflecting trends occurring across the country, combines renovation of existing buildings, often using rehabilitation tax credits, with construction of new buildings. Typically, one or two such projects jump-start revitalization. This rebirth strategy does not depend on budget-busting subsidies and huge outside developers.

In recent years the regeneration of historic downtown areas has led the way to broader revitalization. Even big-box retailers and national chains have discovered the advantages of renovating existing buildings in downtown markets. Downtown is where the retailers want to be. They can be made to come on urban, not suburban, terms.

The common link in the resistance to these proposals, particularly in Pittsburgh and Baltimore, is the presence of strong coalitions of historic preservationists and local business associations. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, long in the forefront of urban regeneration, placed both Baltimore and Pittsburgh on its annual 11 Most Endangered Places list.

Another common link is a clash of visions of what a city is about. Suburbanization of urban centers is about making them white, upscale, owned by national or international chains, car-dependent and homogenized. The alternative celebrates variety in the marketplace. Remnant shops and bargain stores provide

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as important a service as big chain retailers. Upper-story conversions offer low-rent housing and office opportunities. Such uses don't exist in developer-built malls, whether in the suburbs or cities. Urbanism needs this diversity.

Preservationists are invariably on the frontlines. The first things threatened are old buildings that may be functionally obsolete but of great architectural merit, with potential for reuse. When downtowns thrived, the building mix reflected different eras and styles. Those buildings offer spaces appropriate for the already successful and the just-starting-out, the artist and the small manufacturer, crucial ingredients for a mixed economy. This unplanned, unpredictable mix fluctuates over time and economic conditions, creating the urban dynamic. This goes way

beyond historic preservation but frequently starts there, because without the historic mix of buildings, the urban process cannot be sustained. Ultimately, this is about preservation of the city itself.

The difference between an urban downtown and a mall is the difference between a real place and a series of chains that you can find anywhere. Downtown malls, dependent on big developers and big subsidies, have never been about local innovation, local people, local residences or local activity. Enough successes now exist, however, to demonstrate how downtown revitalization really works. Now these cities have a chance to be showcases for downtown rejuvenation with character, quality, cost-effectiveness and equity. ■