

BIG BOX RETAIL BUST: A LAND USE PLANNING CHALLENGE



Land Use Planning Workshop

UP 447, Fall 2018, 4 hours

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Meeting Time: M,W 1:00–2:20 PM
Meeting Location: 223 Temple Hoyne Buell Hall
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This workshop offers you the opportunity to explore a major land use planning challenge that is looming on the horizon for thousands of cities and communities across the country. Big box retail companies are closing stores in large numbers and city planners face the question of what would replace them in the large lots they vacate. The North Prospect Regional Commercial Center (NPRCC) in Champaign is one of the places where this question is like to come up. In this workshop you will carry out urban land use research, first to understand the land use implications of the changing face of retail business and then to explore viable alternatives for what can come up in the place of the big stores when they close. This is a class project and not connected to any current planning projects. However, the staff at the Planning and Development Department of the City of Champaign are interested to see what you come up with.

This is a senior, 400-level planning workshop course. This means that you are expected to work at a professional level, using your own initiative and discretion, with only minimal guidance from the instructor. You will apply concepts and skills from prior courses and work extensively in teams to compile, synthesize, and present information that will aid future planning and development efforts. Because we don't have a client with well-defined needs, your effort will include reviewing and finalizing the boundaries of the study area, defining the priority planning problem, defining the stakeholders and their concerns, and recommending solutions that optimally meet their needs.

Even as you address a specific land use planning problem, you will discover how it relates to a host of other planning issues, spatially and functionally. Given the generic nature of this emerging problem, you will gain insights that will prove useful to you in planning practice, wherever you choose to work.

The Planning Problem

We will consider the Planning and Development Department of the City of Champaign to be the primary client of this project. They are interested in listening to our analysis and our ideas about transforming the land use pattern in the North Prospect Regional Commercial Center considering the possibility of a Big Box Retail Bust.

Identifying the other key stakeholders will be one of the most important tasks. This could include the city's utilities (power, water, sewer, waste managers), CUMTD, real estate companies, Chamber of Commerce and others. The most important ones need to be selected and their stake/ interest defined, so that the proposed interventions could respond to them also.

The land use planning problem presented to you in this workshop is not one that offers the possibility of arriving at an optimal solution within clearly defined parameters. Here we are addressing the issues arising from an uncertain future. Speculation about a major erosion in the market share of big box retail has been around for several years and the evidence to support it has been steadily mounting. However, it is still unclear what forms of retail would replace it and what the physical footprints of these would be. There are emerging business models such as that of the Bonobos clothing store, which provide us an indication of where retail is headed. ([Bonobos has "guideshops"](#) where you can get fitted out and place orders and they deliver the clothes to your address.) Such new retail business models may or may not be able to use the real estate vacated by big stores.

The planner's job in this scenario is to explore a range of possible solutions and identify the pros and cons of each. The land use planning workshop's main objective will be to identify alternate uses for the big box lots. However, a secondary objective could also be to explore the urban planning and design implications of emerging forms of retail.

Course Format and Schedule

The coursework will be performed mostly in teams and 60% of the overall grading is on the outputs produced by teams. The remaining 40% will be based on individual participation and three planning memos to be submitted individually. The method to form groups (self-organizing, draw of lots or instructor-assigned) will be discussed and decided in the first class and group formation completed by the second class.

Different teams are encouraged to take different approaches to the planning program. For example, one group may favor a transition into new land uses with minimal disruption and minimal additional infrastructure investment. Another group may see this as an opportunity to radically transform urbanism in Champaign-Urbana. Yet another group may be concerned about job losses and seek to bring in new development that preserves and expands the employment base. The approach adopted may influence the kind of data collected and stakeholders sought out. A diverse range of approaches will serve the entire cohort in terms of learning opportunity.

The schedule given below is tentative. The specific activity in each class will depend a lot on how the workshop evolves and the level of engagement of all the students. Short readings may be assigned for classes, relevant to the stage of work and each session may start with a discussion, followed by group work. Active participation and collaboration is important to make this workshop useful and exciting. Therefore, attendance of all class sessions is necessary and if you are not able to attend a class session, please notify the instructor via email in advance.

As stated above, because this is a senior workshop, you are expected to take the initiative. You will learn by doing, and you will learn from each other. The instructor will join you in a collective learning process and exploration of a relatively new area of land use planning.

Outputs

Three kinds of outputs are envisaged.

Group Research Reports

The first stage of work in the land use planning workshop will focus on urban land use research including data collection and analysis. The types of research anticipated are outlined in the section titled "Research, analysis and planning." The research reports will be due in Week 7. They will be presented and discussed in class. The schedule given below is tentative. The actual schedule will be based on a work plan collectively produced by the class. If needed, the instructor may ask for intermediate deliverables to ensure progress. A detailed prompt will be provided for writing the Research Report.

Group Plan Reports

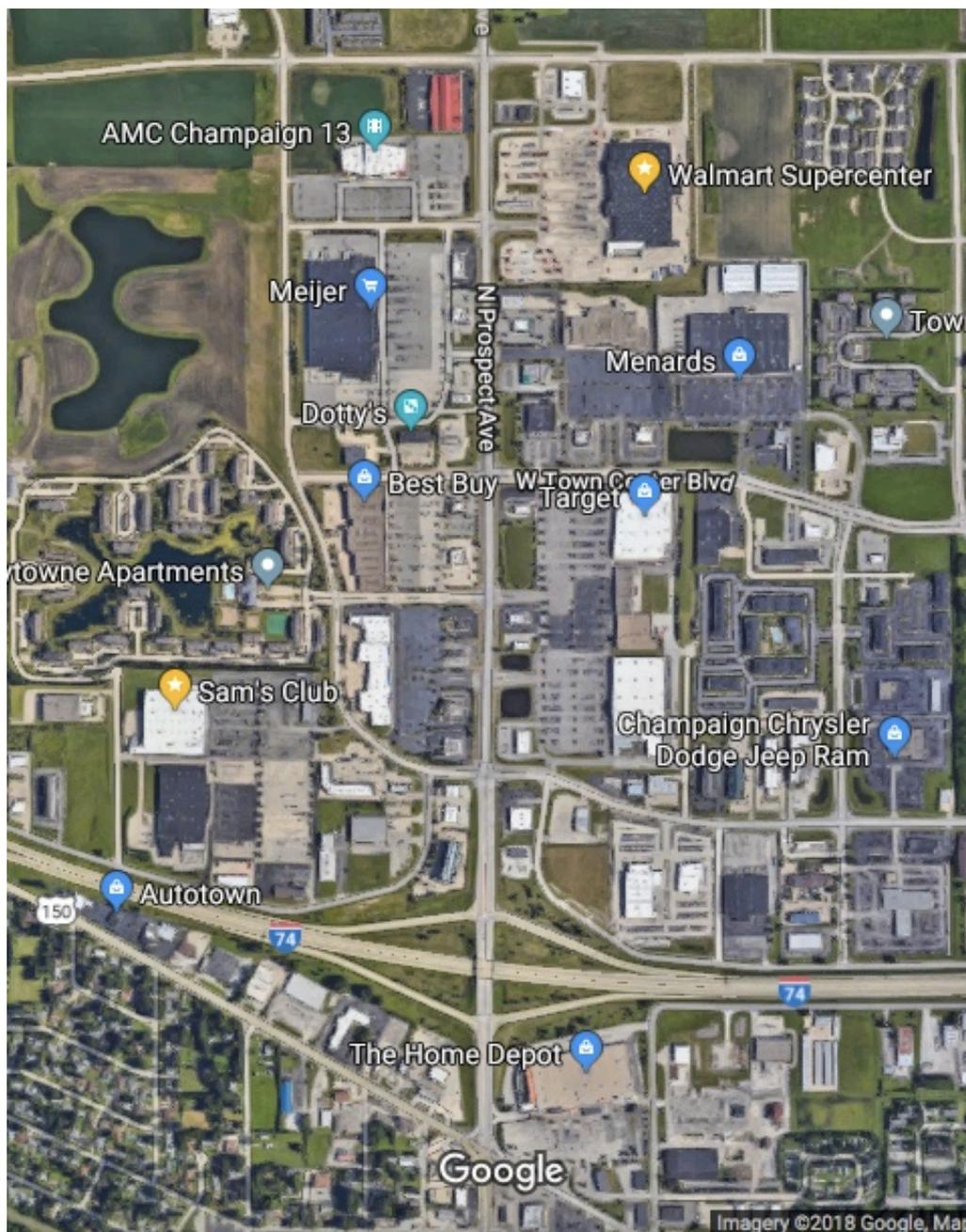
The second stage of work will involve further analysis, strategy and detailing of interventions. Interventions could take the form of land use zoning plans, regulations, policies and proposals for infrastructure investments. Each group will generate one full report and presentation, synthesizing the

research and presenting the proposed interventions in a coherent and complete manner. There may also be intermediate reports and presentations. The final products will be due by Week 15 of the semester. A detailed prompt will be provided for writing the Plan Report.

Individual Planning Memos

During the semester, each student will be required to submit three planning memos. The content of the memo will be drawn from the research, analysis and planning work done as a team. However, the memo itself will be your personal take on the planning problem at three stages – (1) understanding the broad scope of the problem, (2) synthesizing research and analysis, and (3) formulating strategies. There is no right answer – the memos should be reflexive, demonstrating your position and perspective on the planning problem. A detailed prompt will be provided for each Planning Memo.

STUDY AREA: WESTERN PART OF NORTH PROSPECT REGIONAL COMMERCIAL CENTER



For the preparation of Group Research Reports, the broad study area recommended is shown in the figure given above. For the preparation of Group Plan Reports, it is recommended that each group take up a smaller planning area. Suggested planning areas, given below, have different types of big box retail stores and have different mixes of adjacent land uses.

1. The Home Depot block
2. Block including Target and Lowe's
3. Block with Meijer
4. Block with Walmart Supercenter
5. Block with Menards
6. Area covering two blocks with Best Buy, Staples, Red Lobster and Applebees at the corners

Each group should select one planning area, then review and finalize its exact boundaries based on rational criteria (to be discussed in class). With a sound rationale and a viable work plan, you may choose to delineate a planning area other than those listed above.

Schedule and milestones

The schedule given below is tentative. The **actual schedule will be based on a work plan** collectively produced by the class. Lectures by internal or external speakers will include the following topics in the context of the land use planning problem being explored in the workshop:

- Land use, transportation and infrastructure
- Land use and urban economy
- Land use transformation over time

The topics and scheduling of these lectures are open to discussion.

Week	Date	Activity	
1	M, 8/27	Introduction to the workshop, group formation	
	W, 8/29	Groups finalized, work planning, data collection checklists, stakeholder mapping	
2	M, 9/3	Labor Day; no class	Planning Memo 1: prompt issued
	W, 9/5	Meeting at Planning and Development Department, City of Champaign	To be confirmed
	F, 9/7	Field trip	
3	M, 9/10	Research tasks	
	W, 9/12	Lecture by internal or external speaker	
	F, 9/14		Planning Memo 1 due
4	M, 9/17	Progress updates by each team; review of work plan if needed	Research Report: prompt issued
	W, 9/19	Lecture by internal or external speaker	
	F, 9/21	Field trip/ stakeholder meetings, self-organized	
	M, 9/24	Start consolidating research findings	Planning Memo 2: prompt issued
5	W, 9/26	Discussion on how to present the research	
	F, 9/28		
	M, 10/01	Work on research report and presentation	
6	W, 10/03	Lecture by internal or external speaker	
	F, 10/05		Planning Memo 2 due
	M, 10/08	Present research reports	Internal/external review
7	W, 10/10	Present research reports	Internal/external review
	F, 10/12		Research reports due

Week	Date	Activity	
8	M, 10/15	Work planning for second stage	
	W, 10/17	Group work (instructor may not be available)	
9	M, 10/22	Lecture/ Discussion on selected topic	
	W, 10/24	Group work on strategies and interventions	
10	M, 10/29	Lecture/ Discussion on selected topic	
	W, 10/31	Group work on strategies and interventions	
11	M, 11/05	Lecture/ Discussion on selected topic	
	W, 11/07	Group work on strategies and interventions	
	F, 11/09	Field trip/ stakeholder meetings, self-organized	
12	M, 11/12	Review of group work progress: Groups to present status of work and concepts	Planning Memo 3: prompt issued
	W, 11/14	Presentations continue if needed Discussion on final presentation format as well as plan report structure and content	
13	M, 11/19	Fall break	
	W, 11/21	Fall break	
14	M, 11/26	Pre-final group presentations and feedback	
	W, 11/28	Pre-final group presentations and feedback	
	F, 11/30		Planning Memo 3 due
15	M, 12/03	Final group presentations	External review
	W, 12/05	Final group presentations	External review
16	M, 12/10	TBD	Plan reports due
	W, 12/12	Last day of class. Feedback on workshop and open discussion on planning practice.	

Research, analysis and planning

It is anticipated that the urban land use research to be carried out will consist of two parts:

Changing face of retail in Champaign – implications for land use planning

Retail business in Champaign has changed in character over the decades, reflecting changes happening all over the US. In this part of research, you will explore the history of retail in Champaign – the emergence of Marketplace and North Prospect, the decline of downtown Champaign and its revival later as an entertainment district. At a broader level, the exploration will include conditions that led to the emergence of large stores and impact that this had on cities and communities. You will then examine the emergence of online retail and its implications for large stores. The ongoing spate of store closures and the consequences for real estate and infrastructure also need to be examined. If there is a major shift from footfalls to clicks, what would that mean for city planning? For this stage of research, you might consider collecting the following types of data:

- Timelines – development of North Prospect and Marketplace; decline and revival of downtown Champaign; demographic changes and other developments with corresponding timelines that may have influenced the shifts in retail.
- Shifting patterns of retail business in Champaign - Urbana represented on thematic maps
- Detailed current land use inventory in downtown Champaign, Marketplace and North Prospect
- Employment trends in retail businesses
- Changes/ trends in transportation (public and private)

- Changes/ trends in shopping

The future of North Prospect Regional Commercial Center

In this part of the research you will examine existing plans for the NPRCC and start exploring alternatives for the future. You will review the specific proposals for NPRCC in the Comprehensive Plan for Champaign City as well as other proposals that have implications for this area. The regional setting of NPRCC will also need to be examined – how it relates to Champaign, Urbana and other nearby towns.

You will then select your planning area and delineate it precisely using criteria such as predominance of big stores, closed businesses, derelict properties, vacant lots, business likely to close soon, etc. The area should be large enough to demonstrate issues and possible solutions. However, be realistic about how much area you can study and analyze within the time available. You will create a base map of the planning area (preferably in GIS, but other methods are also permissible) and populate it with relevant data such as land use, lot size, building footprints, floor area, tenure (owner-occupied/ rental/ lease), status of operation and likely future (thriving, likely to close, closed, derelict).

To explore alternatives for the future, you will have to analyze the zoning designation and applicable regulations for the planning area. You will also have to analyze the relationship of the local, specific land use with the broad land use pattern of the surrounding area. It may be useful to look at the status of infrastructure in the planning area and its relationship to the specific types of land use.

Having done these studies and analyses, you can then visualize alternate futures for the planning area specifically and the study area in general:

- Explore alternate uses to replace big stores that go out of business
- Explore constraints to redevelopment as well as opportunities
- Perhaps carry out a SWOT analysis
- Explore the real estate market dynamics
- Formulate strategies
- Translate strategies into plans, policies, regulations, proposals for infrastructure investments or other relevant actions

Information sources – preliminary list

The following sources of information are provided to get you started and are by no means exhaustive. You are expected to take cues from this list and explore multiple sources as a team.

<http://champaignil.gov/planning/>

<http://champaignil.gov/planning/long-range-planning/comprehensive-plan/>

<https://gis-cityofchampaign.opendata.arcgis.com>

<https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/jul/retailrealities/>

<https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2018/03/a-ticking-time-bomb-for-suburban-retail/554882/>

During the semester more resources will be made available as required through Compass. However, the emphasis will continue to be on your own creative research skills.

Grading

You are expected to rise to the occasion and be creative and entrepreneurial in seeking new sources of information and new avenues of investigation. Enthusiasm and initiative will be recognized by means of good grades. Conversely, students who just go through the motions and put in minimal effort will be graded accordingly.

The instructor will make the final decisions on grades, but each grade involving group work and class participation also will be informed by peer evaluation.

Grading will be as follows:

Participation - 20%

Group data presentation and report(s) - 20%

Group plan presentation and report(s) - 40%

Memos - 20%

In fairness to all students, ten percent of the grade, per half-week, will be deducted for late assignments. No exceptions can be made without a written medical excuse from a doctor and a proposed new deadline.

Attendance at each scheduled class session is an expectation, unless cleared with the instructor ahead of time. Up to two excused absences will not affect your grade; additional absences will affect your participation grade (2 percentage points off the participation grade for each absence), and significant additional absences may also affect your group project grades.

The general grading rubric is as follows:

- An assignment at the A level demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.
- An assignment at the B level presents acceptable analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Good work.
- An assignment at the C level shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is understandable. Adequate work.
- An assignment at the D level misunderstands or misrepresents the material, or is so poorly written or presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

Course Policies

Disability Resources and Educational Services (<http://disability.illinois.edu/academic-support>)

DRES works with students who have trouble succeeding due to having a learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, psychiatric condition, and/or ADHD and offers more complex support services in addition to academic accommodations, assistive technology, and access. These are offered by their **learning disabilities/ ADHD specialist** who works with student on compensatory strategies in test preparation, test taking, reading comprehension, and written expression and their four **licensed clinical psychologists** and additional **mental health professionals** who provide supports and services to our students with ADHD, acquired brain injury, autism spectrum disorders, and psychiatric disabilities.

Academic Integrity:

The UIUC Student Code (<http://studentcode.illinois.edu>) requires all students to support academic integrity and abide by its provisions, which prohibit cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitation of these and related infractions. According to Section § 1-401, “students have been given notice of this rule by virtue of its publication” and “regardless of whether a student has actually read this rule, a student is charged with knowledge of it.” The provisions of the Student Code are applicable to this course. *In written work, all ideas (as well as data or other information) that are not your own must be cited.*

Diversity:

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) is committed to creating an environment of inclusion and opportunity that is rooted in the very goals and responsibilities of practicing planners. Conduct that interferes with the rights of another or creates an atmosphere of intimidation or disrespect is inconsistent with the environment of learning and cooperation that the program requires. By enrolling a course in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, students agree to be responsible for maintaining a respectful environment in all DURP activities, including lectures, discussions, labs, projects, and extracurricular programs. We will be governed by the University Student Code. Please see the *Student Code Article 1—Student Rights and Responsibilities* for further details (<http://studentcode.illinois.edu>).

Student Assistance Center (<http://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/student-assistance-center/>)

Attending college is an exciting time for students and families; ideally, it is a period of experimentation and exploration, an advancement of one's education, and a step forward toward a career and independence. We also recognize it can be a stressful period. Many students are balancing family, work, financial, and other obligations, which can lead to physical and emotional distress. As members of the Illinois community, students and staff have an obligation and responsibility to care for each other and be concerned for the well-being of others. If you know someone in distress, you may be in a position to offer support or guide the person to an appropriate resource. You are not alone, and the resources discussed on these pages — the Office of the Dean of Students (<http://odos.illinois.edu>), Student Assistance Center (<http://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/student-assistance-center/>), Emergency Dean Program (<http://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/emergency-dean/>), and Behavioral Intervention Team (<http://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/behavioral-intervention-team/>) — are here to help.

Counseling:

The UIUC Counseling Center is available to help students develop coping skills in order to address emotional, interpersonal, and academic concerns. If you have personal issues that are impeding your studies, I encourage you to contact them at <https://counselingcenter.illinois.edu/>.