Sprawl repair prototypes

As communities seek to fix broken real estate economies, new building prototypes that can both repair damaged urban fabric and garner financing are needed. The Incremental Sprawl Repair (ISR) working group recently came up with new models from Fayetteville, Arkansas, architect Robert Sharp and Chico, California, designer/developer John Anderson. The group focuses on low-cost, small-scale, rental-based buildings for reforming automobile-oriented environments. (See September 2011 *New Urban News* for another article and prototypes).

Sharp's Trenton Donut, designed to fit a half-acre lot, is a three-story building plan with 16 rental apartments and five micro retail/office units. It is supported by 23 parking spaces in the rear and on the side, and the building hugs the corner of an intersection along a commercial strip state highway.

Total direct and indirect construction costs for the 12,000 sq. ft. building are $1.4 million (about $101/sq. ft.). Land, at $180,000, brings the total cost up to $1.58 million. A 20 percent down payment on a FHA loan would amount to a $317,000.

The five commercial units all have street frontages and shopfronts, yet can rent for about $350-$500/month, according to Sharp. The residential units will rent for more, but are still affordable. The overall building yields an 8 percent cash return in the first year — assuming 95 percent occupancy.

The building includes a quiet inner courtyard that is protected from traffic, wind, parking lots, and strip commercial buildings, so that outdoor living is possible in harsh automobile-oriented environment. "The building can be used on the corner or mid-block, Sharp says. "It is designed to be aggregated with similar buildings over time." For example, he says, "two of the buildings could be built with the commercial frontages facing each other across a pedestrian passage or a narrow street to create a double-loaded retail environment."

All of this means that the Trenton Donut can be a first step in humanizing a commercial strip corridor. Build a number of similar buildings and improve the streetscape and (voila!) the drivable road becomes a walkable center.

The Trenton Donut is designed for simple, low-cost construction. The variety of window types is limited, as are balconies and exterior walkways and stairs. Apartments stack for simplicity of construction, and the roof pitch is shallow with a consistent eave. A brick veneer is used here for durability, but materials can be modified for local conditions, Sharp says. The overall density is 32 units/acre, plus commercial space.

SINGLE-STORY OFFICE LINER

Anderson, of Anderson|Kim architecture+urban design, contributes a 3,328 sq. ft. commercial building on a parcel that is less than a quarter acre. At $525,040, including land costs, the one-story building is inexpensive and easy to construct. The roof is a simple shed, leading up to a 16-foot cornice line that creates a sense of enclosure for pedestrians.
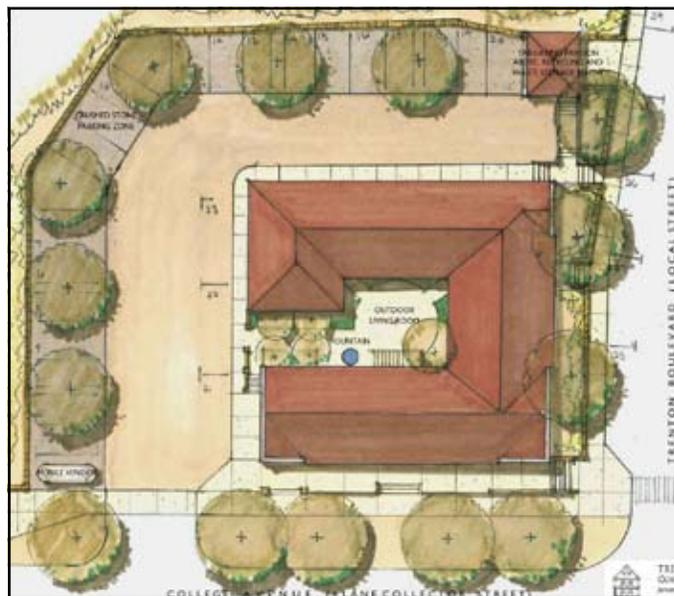
The shopfronts are wide and shallow, offering substantial light and presence on the street. Meanwhile, the 128-foot-long building hides a lot of parking lot.

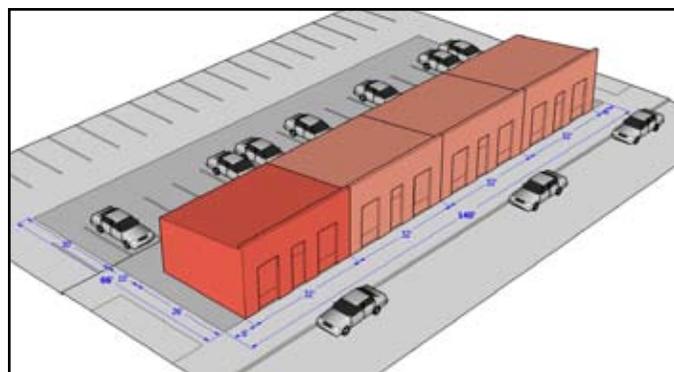There are three commercial units — one larger — although

The Trenton Donut, above, includes five micro commercial spaces with shopfronts, topped by residential. The building includes a central court — a haven of outdoor living in a commercial strip environment.

A simplified aerial rendering of the single-story office liner

that number could easily be converted to two or four of equal size.

The office units are designed to accommodate firms with 5-8 employees, and rents ranging from about $1,100 to $2,200 per month, offering a cash yield of 15.7 percent in the first year.

By blocking a large parking lot and creating a pedestrian-friendly streetwall on a short block, this building does its job of incremental sprawl transformation.

To get more details on these and other building prototypes, including pro-formas, go to isrworkinggroup.posterous.com. ◆