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You want to know: is there a future?

Answer: Oh, yeah.

The driver will be the market itself, which comes down decidedly on the "side" of multifamily rental demand exceeding single-home sales. The growth end of the market is younger professionals - an upwardly mobile, and significantly, transient, group that is not actually living in their parents' basement. Nor are they looking to be burdened by the immobility of a house with a picket fence, nor are they looking to live in places likely to have picket fences.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is the strong force that correlates highly with the market. This environmentally conscious group isn't swayed by the \$2 gallon of gasoline - they are well aware of the high cost of cheap gas and continue to ride bicycles, buses and the rail. They have some clear priorities: when they need a car, there is Zipcar. If they need a ride, Uber.

This isn't to say they will all forego wheels, but those that buy wheels will be environmentally conscious about their decision. Architects are sympathetic to this commitment, so a good option for engaging in meaningful social change would be to create some limited parking places with electric charging stations. And, of course, this parking should be covered and underground - eliminating the heat island, and the almost insurmountable difficulty of maintaining a car in a Northern New England and Boston winter (something we know about, here).

So what about the other half of the mixed-use equation?

Of course, on the first floor, you want a Panera or a Starbucks, and the attendant row of storefronts that reflect local market tastes.

But consider adding a row or floor of spare office space or apartments. There is growing demand for the "urban village" office space, which is far more affordable than the glass towers downtown, and to younger buyers more attractive than an office in the aforementioned leafy (or snowy) suburbs.

The younger entrepreneurial class is attuned to workspace often circumscribed by the term "incubator," which can be as simple as a wide open office with a whiteboard, ample outlets, power drops for computerized equipment, and thoughtful WiFi placement. Reserving some space for the occasional server room may enable some small startup to turn into a global powerhouse without their ever having to leave the premises.

This isn't to dissuade from conventional uses for office space, such as professional and medical offices, which can be ideally suited to a mixed use urban village. Unlike incubator space, there are interesting and challenging fit-out requirements, as these workplaces will want to be of a more polished appearance, and will need more complex floor plans.

Context-aware design - whether you are paying homage or designing for contrast - adds the most

value. A timeless, high-quality design appropriate to its surroundings gives the development durable equity value. This is also true of a mixed re-use project, if the existing facility is of sufficient quality, and adaptable to 21st century purposes. Some sixties-era steel-and-concrete facilities can be converted from quasi-brutalist eyesores to something visually exciting and dynamic, and since the shell is likely to be all that needs to be retained, a complete digital-era overhaul is well within the realm of possibilities.

For the designer and developer alike, this is an opportunity to integrate sustainable design - including alternative energy. Various hydrocarbon energy forms may be "cheap" now, but given that the largest supplies of the stuff still lie beneath the most unstable geopolitical region in the world, the current conditions are a mirage.

So get out your sketchbook (or your 21st century Wacom Cintiq) and get started!

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