

PRINCETON: Industrial builder plans 205,000 sq. ft. of store space, convinces community it will not menace property values by an expert plan

KETCHUM, GINA & SHARPE,
Architects

KENNETH C. WELCH,
Market Analysis

SEVERUD-ELSTAD-KRUEGER,
Structural Engineers

Clearview, a suburban shopping project outside Princeton, N.J., is considerable smaller (total store space 205,000 sq. ft., parking for 1,900 cars, anticipated sales of \$10 million) than the Hudson and Allied developments shown on the previous pages. Partly because of its smaller size, architects Ketchum, Gina & Sharpe were able to develop their plan in a way that adds some important new design elements to this emerging suburban building type. These are:

- Location and design of individual buildings so that the whole building group will have the kinds of "showcase" attraction from the approach road that a brightly lit store window has on a downtown street.
- Buildings custom-designed to the needs of most major types of tenancies – supermarket, apparel stores, candy stores, etc. – instead of the standard buildings usually allotted to all tenants save the major department store. This means taking full advantage of the fact that in the suburban shopping center the tenant precedes the building. That is, precise market analysis of the surrounding trade area sets the type and number of tenants required for the financial success of the shopping center. This makes it possible to design from the beginning to the requirements of, say, a shoe store, instead of adapting a piece of a standard building to these requirements after a specific lease is signed with specific shoe merchant Smith.
- A solution for the problem of keeping delivery trucking out of the way of shoppers where the center is too small to justify the expense of an underground delivery road.

- An interior grassy mall architecturally modeled into three separate spaces in relation to the major buildings.
- A building on stilts to bring this mall in view of the driver approaching the shopping center.
- A carefully studied pattern of pedestrian traffic control, which routes all shoppers from peripheral parking space through glass-enclosed ramps up to the central mall onto which all stores front. These glass enclosed ramps are imaginatively exploited – one as a two-level florist shop, others for views into adjacent stores where display is used to pre-sell the shopper before she reaches the actual store entrance.
- An economic system of steel framing, which provides a 20 x 40 ft. bay in most buildings. Specialty stores will each fit into a single 40 ft. wide bay section, thus run depth of building without interruption by columns. In the department store, 60 x 60 ft. bay framing will be used; in the supermarket, 40 x 40 ft. bay.
- A clear-cut separation of stores and services. The restaurant adjoins, but is not in, the department store, making dinner service possible. No stores have been forced into the lobby floor of the office building.

In short, architects Ketchum, Gina & Sharpe gave Theodore Potts, the developer of this shopping center, a first-rate plan. This turned out to be needed. Perhaps no would-be suburban developer ever faced a more formidable array of planning commissioners and interested citizenry. Mr. Potts' tangle with local planners and property owners illustrates, in a fairly exaggerated form, the problem all these suburban retail developments face in fitting into a community. In the first place, Mr. Potts, a contractor specializing in industrial building, confronted a Township Planning Board headed by Jean Labatut, distinguished

architect and planner and professor of architecture at Princeton University. Sitting with professor Labatut on the planning board were several atomic physicists who love to bone up on planning theory in their spare time.

Looking over his shoulder of these commissioners was a highly articulate group of nearby property owners, headed by Bernard Kilgore, publisher of the Wall Street Journal, for whom the prospect of adjacent commercial development had small charm. Potts sweated through a year-long series of meetings with this high powered planning commission. They terminated when chairman Labatut happily informed the Princeton Township Committee, "Mr. Potts has generously offered the community a nine-acre public park. In this case, we are recommending that the committee consider a re-zoning ordinance, which will enable Mr. Potts to build his shopping center." Whereupon the planning commissioners presented a zoning ordinance of an unprecedented character. This ordinance in effect, said that the area might be re-zoned for commercial use provided that plans as prepared by architects Ketchum, Gina & Sharpe were used for the development.

Few planning commissions will probably go quite that far in making sure that the new suburban retail districts fit graciously into the community. But to the degree that they understand sound land use they will insist that the architects responsible for these suburban developments go as far as Ketchum, Gina & Sharpe did in 1) routing traffic to and from the center away from surrounding residential streets; 2) providing adequate off-street parking and unloading space; 3) handling park space and surrounding green belt to give privacy and protection to surrounding houses; 4) providing buildings of a character and design quality that will be welcome in the community. ●