Bring Business Back

By Dave Perkins, AIA

Sociologists tell us that the truly efficient city with the most potential for growth is a series of concentric circles: the inner circle, and thus the radiating "Life" of the city, is the downtown area, the central business district, and all other sections of the city around it. In many of our cities today, Lafayette included, business seems to be slowly moving out of the city's core, and the problem affects all of us.

There are many different reasons for the decline of similar areas across the country, but four combined reasons are usually the prime factors. They include incompatible tenant selection, inadequate and-or low quality parking, improper land utilization, and poor management techniques.

Incompatible tenant selection is probably the major cause of the decline. Older tenants, who located in the area many years ago, may not be adapted to such a location today. While office buildings may comprise most of the modern - day space, a building which has not ascended to this higher use will probably depreciate the whole area. For example, rural stores, which were the cornerstone of fledgling cities, may still be in the same location; however, their customers are not as numerous as before, nor are they in a convenient position to patronize the store, as their homes and farms are located much farther from the inner city then they used to be.

Misuse of Space

The retail tenant grouping is also important. In the most desirable locations, obviously the busiest, most up-to-date businesses should be located, but oftentimes business is discouraged by location of unsightly or almost - idle tenants, who misuse the ad space.

Accessibility certainly plays a major part in determining a stores' economic returns. Dividing a city into sectors helps to decide which portions require the most parking, but facilities are not always available at the most strategic places. Relating retail square footage to needed parking area helps. Private parking facilities are by far more numerous than public, but even when well - pleased, neither is always of such a quality as to encourage people to make the journey downtown.

Adequate parking therefore means more than the mere provision of parking space. It also means attractive remodeling, better handling of refuse, and elimination of competition for limited parking spaces by employees and delivery trucks. Proper land utilization is the third factor in attracting business of the central city. Haphazard growth and expansion of stores often results in something less than a homogeneous design. Often, efficient development of a store, or acquisition of additional space for off - street parking, is handicapped by divided ownership of the surrounding space.