

Distribution of Shopping Centers in a Planned City

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Within the past few years the shopping center has become a more and more familiar part of the American neighborhood scene. There are a variety of reasons for the growth of these shopping centers. Four of the main reasons for this growth will be discussed very briefly here. The first is the rise in buying power. The average per capita figure of disposable income, after taxes, on a 1948 dollar basis, rose from \$979.00 in 1940 to \$1,314.00 in 1950. Secondly, the shifting of population from the central city to either a satellite or an independent suburb that has taken place since 1940 provided a ready market for new enterprise. Thirdly, changes in retail merchandising methods have exerted a considerable influence on the growth of shopping centers. The super-market idea of conducting business has, within ten years, completely transformed the food retailing pattern and sent merchants clamoring for new locations with adequate parking facilities nearby. This brings up the fourth reason for the growth of shopping centers, the increased use of the automobile. The tremendous increase in the number of automobiles on the highways today, coupled with the congestion that this brings about, is an important factor in the location of new business enterprises away from the already overcrowded downtown areas.

Midwest City, Oklahoma, offers an excellent example for the study of the growth and distribution of shopping centers in a planned city. The city itself is phenomenal in the fact that it was completely planned and laid out by competent land planners and architects before the initial building began. It is granted that this situation is by no means typical, but a survey of the results of a more or less ideal community and its development should provide information needed for better urban land utilization in the future.

Midwest City as it exists today is primarily the concept of one man. That man is W. P. Atkinson, former advertising solicitor, teacher, and real estate salesman. In 1942 Atkinson obtained a 160 acre tract of land directly across from the site chosen by the Air Corps for a new installation. This installation, Tinker Field, has played a dominant role in the growth of Midwest City. Atkinson planned from the very beginning a complete, independent, and lasting community, not a wartime housing project that would disintegrate immediately after the war. The original, or "old town" site as it is referred to by city officials, is located eight miles east of Oklahoma City on Southeast 29th Street extension. In the spring of 1942 this land was utilized for agricultural purposes. The United States Geological Survey topographic map for 1938 shows five homes and two ponds as the only cultural features in the entire section that now houses approximately one-half of Midwest City. By 1944 the population had boomed to an estimated 3,000 persons. In 1946 there were approximately 4,500 people residing in Midwest City. The 1950 census gives the population as 10,166. An unofficial estimate based on four users for each of the 4,720 water meters places the 1953 population at 13,880. After the initial area provided for housing proved insufficient, other divisions were planned with the same careful attention to street layout, parks, churches, schools, and shopping centers that accompanied the original town plan. These divisions were added with such rapidity that between 1944 and 1952 there were 24 major divisions incorporated within the city limits. This growth took place partly to the east and west of the original core of the city, but mainly to the north. Tinker Field has checked the city's growth to the south.

When one looks at a map of this new city, its most outstanding feature is the use of a curved street pattern rather than the conventional grid pattern layout, predominant especially in the midwestern part of the United States.

It is not the purpose of this paper to debate the use of the curved street pattern versus the grid pattern layout, but it may be worthwhile to mention that in the eleven years of its existence Midwest City has had no traffic fatalities in the city limits. To facilitate traffic around and past the city, four section line roads are used as major thoroughfares. In the few cases that such routes pass through residential areas, most of the homes do not face them.

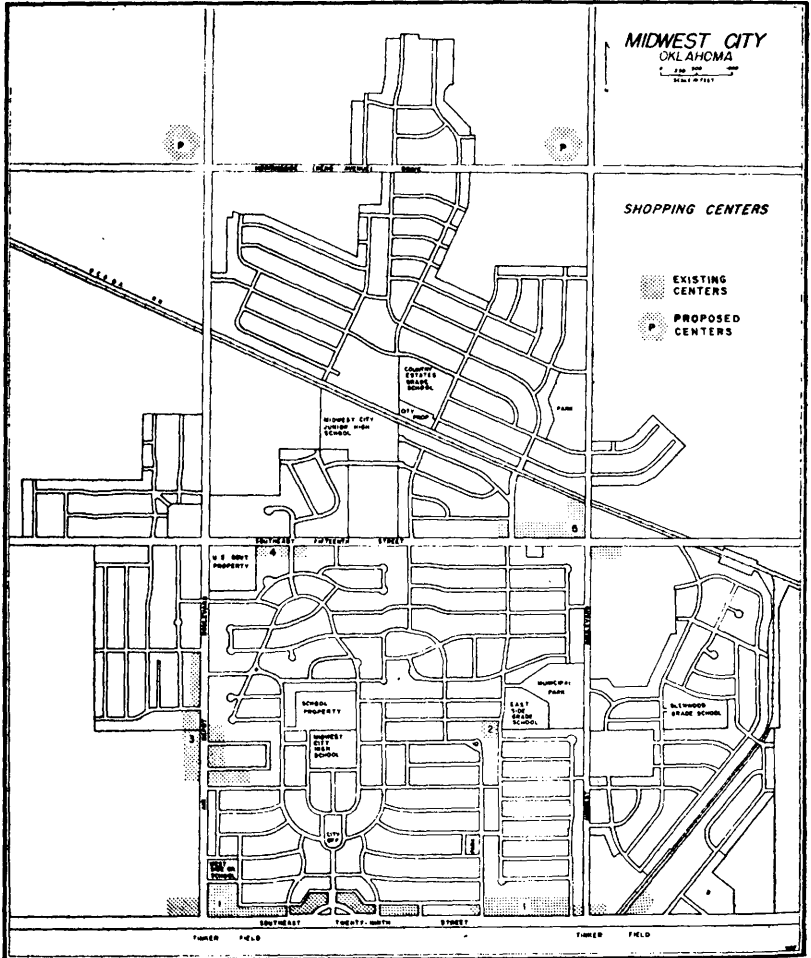


FIGURE 1. Location of Shopping Centers in Midwest City, Oklahoma.

From an urban geographic standpoint Midwest City's function is purely residential. In the spring of 1963 some 42 per cent of Midwest City's working population were employed at Tinker Field. Most of the remaining workers commute to their place of employment in Oklahoma City. Only a small percentage of Midwest City's inhabitants work in the city itself. Its function as an independent residential suburb of Oklahoma City has been increasing within the past few years, and will in all probability continue

to do so. In 1949 approximately 73 per cent of the home owners in Midwest City were employed in Oklahoma City.

The extent of goods and services available in Midwest City's five strategically located shopping centers has kept pace with the spectacular growth of the city. From the beginning all of the shopping centers have been designed to meet local needs. It is possible that once the city reaches a leveling off point in its growth a bid will be made for recognition as a regional shopping center, but at the present time the needs of the immediate community must be coped with.

To meet these needs Midwest City has approximately 130 business establishments dispersed among its first shopping centers. These five centers in order of their appearance on the scene are: the central business core or shopping center number one located on Southeast 29th Street directly across from the main entrance to Tinker Field (1943), shopping center number two located at the corner of Key Boulevard and Jacobs Drive (1944), shopping center number three located in "string" fashion on Air Depot Boulevard (1947), shopping center number four located at Southeast 15th Street and Lockheed Drive (1949), and shopping center number five located at the corner of Southeast 15th Street and Midwest Boulevard (1952). The dates mentioned above are the approximate opening dates of the original units in each development and do not infer that the entire center as it appears today developed at that time. This would hold true especially in the case of the central business core.

The development that has taken place in "string" fashion along Southeast 29th Street is considered here as a portion of the central business core. This development has been gradual over a period of three years whereas most of the development in the central business core took place in a relatively short period. This central business core is laid out in semi-circular fashion around two attractively landscaped islands separating the enclosed parking area from Southeast 29th Street. Sufficient parking facilities are provided in this area and in a supplementary area behind the center to provide a three to one parking ratio, that is ten cars per 1000 square feet of store floor space. There are 67 establishments in this center representing retail merchandising in all of its phases. The service establishments such as cleaners, laundry, shoe repair, barber and beauty shops, and radio and TV repair shops are also well represented. This center also houses a bank, post office, and public utility offices. Medical services are available through one clinic and several doctors and dentists located mainly in second floor offices in this center. This central business core was designed to serve as the main unit in the shopping center system with the other four developments serving as neighborhood centers subordinate to it.

Shopping center number two is a small neighborhood development consisting of two units. Of these two units, one is a grocery and the other is a "serve-yourself" laundry. This is the smallest of the five developments mentioned, but it is useful in providing a nearby grocery for the inhabitants of that particular area.

Shopping center number three developed in "string" fashion for approximately one-quarter of a mile along Air Depot Boulevard. There are 36 establishments in this development with one-half of them falling in the service category. There is a concentration of plumbing shops, electrical appliance stores, radio and TV repair shops, paint stores, laundries, cleaners, automotive repair garages, and a woodworking shop. Along with this concentration of service establishments are the other establishments more common in a neighborhood shopping center such as drug store, supermarkets, and furniture store.

Shopping center number four located at the intersection of Southeast 15th Street and Lockheed Drive is a typical neighborhood shopping de-

velopment. It houses thirteen establishments including the supermarket, drug store, laundry, barber shop, variety store, gas station, and furniture store.

Shopping center number five located at the intersection of Southeast 15th Street and Midwest Boulevard has twelve establishments offering approximately the same goods and services as number four. Nearly one-third of this center consists of a newly constructed row of stores that are partially occupied.

Two proposed centers, one at Air Depot Boulevard and Morningside Avenue (Reno Street) and one at Midwest Boulevard and Morningside Avenue, will complete the pattern. These shopping centers, when developed, will offer essentially the same goods and services as the other neighborhood centers mentioned, possibly with slight variations.

These centers present a uniform pattern. They are designed so that most families are no more than one-half mile from a shopping center which can supply the average day to day needs. They are situated on the through streets and on the periphery of the residential areas. The central business core is designed and situated to accommodate a large volume of traffic and meet the shoppers' needs for almost any type of merchandise or service.
