

DESIGNING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CENTER BY FOSTERING RETAIL DIVERSITY



As the retail environment continues to adapt to modern development trends, it finds itself central to mixed-use community centers. Rather than relying on a large grocer or food tenant to drive occupancy rates, many new developments are taking creative approaches to attract a mixed tenant base and to complement the surrounding community. Current trends show greater results when the center has a strategic mix of uses, such as restaurants, services, amenities, hospitality, and healthcare. This holds true for the ambitious redevelopment of Woodward Corners in the heart of Royal Oak, Michigan. Beaumont Health System secured the parcel, adjacent to its main campus and worked with Hobbs+Black Architects to create a design that activates the busy intersection and extend services, amenities, and the hospital brand to the iconic Woodward Avenue corridor.

The 15-acre piece of property has a long history spanning from farming to generations of layered redevelopment. In 2015, the site consisted of a three-parcel tract separately zoned for general business and multiple family housing. The largest tract consisted of a retail strip center while the smaller tract had two multi-family buildings tucked behind the retail section. The poor vehicular circulation, inefficient parking field, lack of tenant diversity, and isolation from the

adjacent hospital campus created property hardships that eventually led to tenant vacancies and an unsuccessful development.

DEVELOPING GOALS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Beaumont Health Systems worked with their development and design teams to navigate the complexity of combining the parcels, and re-zoning with the City of Royal Oak. After an extensive site preparation, the newly created parcel provided an opportunity for the team to maximize potential and achieve the ownership's goals. During the concept design phase the project team collaborated to provide the most holistic approach to achieving the goals. The design objectives for the project included:

- > Provide services and amenities for the hospital campus and its broader community
- > Design the center as an extension to the hospital campus's existing walking trails
- > Incorporate a hotel with small meeting rooms for seminar opportunities and suite units for the extended stay of patient families and visiting specialists



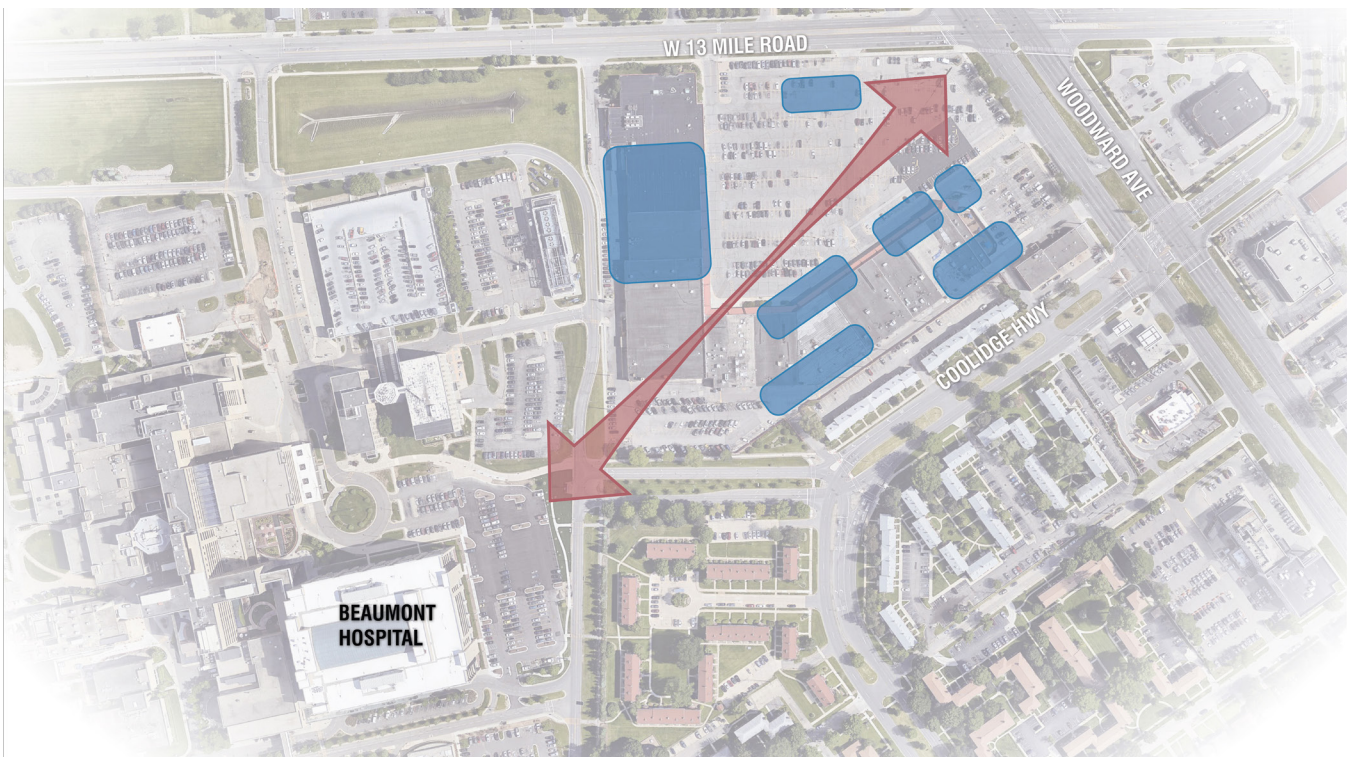
- > Plan buildings to create a “sense of place” and capitalize on mixed synergies
- > Integrate exterior program spaces for special events and community activities
- > Dedicate a viewing area along Woodward Avenue for the Woodward Dream Cruise event
- > Be a valued destination for the community
- > Extend the Beaumont branding from the hospital to the intersection of Woodward Avenue and 13 Mile Road with strategic view corridors and circulation paths
- > Reinvigorate the pedestrian experience along the busy intersection of Woodward Avenue and 13 Mile Road

With strong project objectives defined, the team worked to develop concepts. The size and scope of the project were balanced against a refined pro forma and a public survey that was solicited to the surrounding community. It was important to promote the goals of that community as the continued success of the project relies on both the hospital campus and the community’s use of the facilities.

SITE DEVELOPMENT

Being a prominent site along the Woodward Corridor, the design team continually engaged the City of Royal Oak to align strategies, define the process for approvals, and seek a Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning classification. Reserved for these types of cases, the PUD zoning classification would allow the project design team some flexibility in the site design, building size and type, parking allocation, and signage design criteria. The city saw this as an opportunity to provide a mixed-use community center that wouldn’t otherwise be allowable under current zoning.

To facilitate communication amongst the stakeholders during the initial site concepts, Hobbs+Black Architects used massing models, to focus on the balance of leasable area and public amenity space as well as the distribution of the tenant uses throughout the site to create associations with adjacent site features. Beaumont’s request for a clear line of site established a view corridor that bisected the site and created boundaries for mass and void. The two ends of the view corridor would be anchored by the branded hospital tower and a redeveloped plaza at the main intersection.



Two of the building masses were justified to the street edge to engage the intersection. As the largest building, the hotel was strategically located to avoid visual obstruction to the hospital campus while maintaining a presence on the project “main street.” The design features of the main street connect individuals from the hospital campus through the new center.

The first community oriented amenities along the extension from the campus walking trails are the healing gardens. Their designs include a 25-foot-wide tree-lined paved walkway, free-form landscape seating, and the first of many rain gardens. The proximity of the healing gardens to the hospital campus was strategic to serve as an amenity for patients, visitors, and staff.

An internal street connects the trails to the new complex and organizes the building masses. It creates a second site view corridor that links the hospital campus to the main entry. The street section provides comfortable proportions and safely ushers the pedestrians to the many other amenities distributed around the site. Lines of building canopies/awnings, benches, street trees, and inlaid pavers compliment the architecture and provide some visual interest. Combined with a line of parallel parking spaces, they also isolate pedestrians from the vehicular circulation. In addition to a couple of plazas adjacent to various food tenants and a central hardscaped plaza capable of hosting food trucks and local farmers markets, the team dedicated a landscaped zone on the east end of the site to allow for temporary seating during the annual Woodward Dream Cruise. Combined together, all these individual plazas complement the building tenants, create community engagement, and provide an income opportunity for ownership.

Infrastructure amenities such as plazas with dedicated power and data provisions support the center’s flexibility for special events. Diverting cross traffic from the central plaza, converts it into an event space. The permeable pavers of the plaza offer a textured separation from the adjacent streets while also contributing to ground water recharge. A variety of sustainable features across the site, such as permeable pavers and rain gardens, provides natural pockets of growth and ornamentation to complement the building architecture, appealing to sustainable-minded tenants while meeting the design team’s expectations.





OPTIMIZING TENANT DESIGN FEATURES

The distribution of the tenant types and the conceptual leasing plans were developed in partnership between Hobbs+Black Architects and the leasing agents, AF Jonna and Schostak Brothers. The balance of offering retail, restaurant, and commercial occupancies was strategic in that each had different parking ratios and pulled from the overall provided on the property. Additionally, pursuing the PUD classification gave relief to the standard parking ratios and allowed for negotiated parking quantities. The argument for a reduction in the required parking included: increasing use of ride share technologies such as Uber and Lyft, addition of a public bus station on the property, varying tenants that balanced peak and off-peak parking demands, and distributing parking around the site to eliminate the inefficiency of a single large parking field. The last argument was to promote walkability with safe hardscaped pedestrian paths throughout the property and connectivity to the hospital and neighboring paths.

The center's most prominent space was earmarked for a boutique grocer, dedicating over 40,000 square feet of gross leasable area with prime visibility and unique architecture. With 20-foot-wide sidewalks and corner entry the tenant was encouraged to open up the facade and merchandise outdoors. The entry element and signage is visible from vehicles entering at all three points of the site in addition to being connected to the main pedestrian artery to the hospital.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS

The arrangement of the several buildings, required a design for four-sided pedestrian access with possible multiple tenants on two sides of the buildings. Each building had to independently respond to flexible leasing arrangements while also providing a common character across the property. The buildings have a consistent storefront height, canopy mounting elevations, accent and signage banding and parapet heights. Where buildings flank major entrances to the property, corner tower features act as beacons and allow for larger signage opportunities. The relationship between material color choices, light fixture selections and accent styles were carefully organized to create a design language that caters well to both the leasing and construction teams.

Creative layout design solutions optimize leasing conditions while providing long term benefits to both tenant and owner. Column grids were organized to allow flexibility to each space while using economic structural members. Storefront mullions with a four to five foot rhythm allow for flexibility in entry door placement and maximize glazing size for display. The distribution of the tenant utilities provide service taps at regular intervals to guarantee future flexibility.



PURSUING TENANT DIVERSITY

A mixed-use community center thrives on services and experiences that bring sustained daily traffic throughout the day. Providing tenant diversity and complimentary services generates reciprocal and synergetic use. For example, a fitness center pairing with a healthy, fast-casual restaurant or a grocer pairing with an urgent care facility. While tenants benefit from energized pairings, the owner profits from maximum occupancy rates and a strong negotiation position for determining rent rates.

The strong surrounding demographics and the proximity to the hospital assisted the diversity of tenants at Woodward Corners. Within the healthcare sector an urgent care facility, affiliated with Beaumont Health Services, a dental facility, and a chiropractor office were leased. Within the fitness sector a yoga studio, a cross-training gym, and a high intensity cardio gym were incorporated. The retail services include a bank branch, salon, barbershop, and vet. Food options include a variety of seating options (takeout, fast-casual, and dine-in) supporting a range of taste serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The successful diversification of tenants placed Woodward Corners in a position for sustained performance while simultaneously meeting the expectations of the stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Woodward Corners by Beaumont provides a balanced mixed-use community center with successful local, regional, and national offerings in retail, hospitality, healthcare, and food services. The synergy and partnership with the hospital campus contributes to increased daily use and long-term occupancy rates. As a comprehensive developed site, it serves both customers arriving on foot and by vehicle with convenient access and connectivity through natural vegetation, plazas, and architectural features. The choices made in building architecture and utility design allow for flexibility in future decision making while the choice to blend traditional and modern materials creates a backdrop to attract perspective tenants into the future. The combined effort of the participating stakeholders delivered a comprehensive product that will bring positive impact to the Beaumont Health System hospital campus, the City of Royal Oak, and the surrounding community.

For more information contact
Wayne Chubb, AIA
Senior Vice President
wchubb@hobbs-black.com

