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GOING DRY

Water-sensitive
development

debates are likely to dominate.

A Metro report several years ago rated each property for its readiness for development, ranging from those ready to go and already experiencing developer interest, to parcels with market or development problems that would require significant public intervention. In between are typical real estate deals (other than having direct access to transit)—some with potential, some with problems—waiting for the right moment and/or developer. Certainly, with the proper degree of focus, flexibility, and possibly investment, these sites can help provide revenues as well as the new riders needed to help keep the transit system growing.

ROBERT DUNPHY, ULI senior resident fellow, transportation and infrastructure, was a member of the panel appointed by Metro.

Plaza Anchors Mixed-Use Transit Village above L.A. Metro Station

Bringing much-needed open space to a heavily trafficked urban corner in Los Angeles, a mixed-use transit-oriented village with a public plaza has been built on Wilshire Boulevard over an existing Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) subway station, taking up an entire city block.

"This precedent-setting project is one of the first transit portals in Los Angeles to provide a mix of uses—to bring retail, residential, and transit all together in one place—creating what most of us think of as a city," says Calvin Abe, principal of ah'bé landscape architects in Culver City, California, which designed the 28,947-square-foot (2,647-sq-m) ground-floor plaza for the Wilshire Vermont project. "The public plaza is a unique space in that it creates the opportunity for the collision between the public and the pri-

vate—the interaction between the transit users, residential users, and retail patrons."

Because the project is in one of the densest, most urban parts of Los Angeles, this plaza and others at the site fulfill a vital community need for open space. The nearest major public spaces—the 11-acre (4.5-ha) Lafayette Park and the 32-acre (13-ha) MacArthur Park—are located a half-mile and one mile (0.8 and 1.6 km) away, respectively.

The plaza will be used by residents of a new seven-story mixed-use apartment building, as well as by commuters using the subway station and customers of the 30,000 square feet (2,800 sq m) of retail and restaurant space on the ground level.

"The design for the building is largely about the grand gesture that announces the transit station," notes Bernardo Fort-Brescia, a founding principal of Miami-based Arquitectonica, the firm responsible for the design of the mixed-use building. "Its layout takes the pedestrian from the southwest corner through a courtyard to the station."

The ah'bé landscape architecture firm worked with Arquitectonica to devise a stepping-stone motif that leads public transportation riders through the courtyard to the subway entrance. The stones are made of materials that include sparkly paver tiles—concrete pavers embedded with white feldspar and agate-gray silica carbide. Oversized, "Alice in Wonderland"—scale bright red pots, 30 feet (3 m) in diameter and 30 inches (75 cm) tall, planted with giant bird-of-paradise, punctuate the space at intervals and complement the red of the subway entrance portal.

Two large murals on the facade of the building form a threshold for the project. Designed by computer artist April Greiman, the multistory video image of a rice bowl greets residents and visitors.

Public spaces are particularly important in transit villages like the Wilshire Vermont project because



PHOTO: ESTERLIN/PHILIP LINDSAY ARCHITECTS

A public plaza for a mixed-use transit-oriented village located over a subway station on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles is designed to serve as a community gathering spot and urban space for one of the densest parts of downtown Los Angeles. The lighting is hung from overhead cables, as is customary in European town squares, to create a celebratory feel, particularly at night. A stepping-stone motif made of sparkly concrete pavers leads public transportation riders through the courtyard to the entrance to the subway. Oversized bright red pots planted with giant bird-of-paradise are placed around the plaza to help punctuate the space.

they serve as its centerpiece. As such, the village's open spaces serve as important community gathering spots, as well as sites for special events and celebrations. To enhance the feeling of a vibrant urban space, the plaza lights, which are hung from overhead cables as is customary in European town

squares, create a celebratory atmosphere, particularly at night.

In addition to the west plaza, ah'bé landscape architects designed the east plaza, the existing MTA plaza above the subway station, and the private pool plaza and second-floor terrace for use by residents of the 449 apartment units. The first

apartment residents moved in this past August. Eighty percent of the apartments are being rented at market rate, with the rest reserved for affordable housing.

ULI Place Making Conference Explores Ideas for Designing and Building Sustainable Spaces

Creating sustainable places requires designing with people in mind and creating public spaces where people can interact and have interesting experiences. These spaces need to be designed so they can be flexible and change with the times, according to a panel of industry experts assembled by the Urban Land Institute.

"Every time you do a project, start with life and create buildings and public spaces that meet these needs; put people in the center of planning," recommended Helle Soholt, founding partner of GEHL Architects in Copenhagen. "Think of sustainability in social terms, environmental and economic terms. Think of space as a precious resource and create proximity between things," she advised. Urban quality is about diversity in people and spaces—proximity rather than density, Soholt said. "We can do better."

Soholt's comments were part of ULI's ninth annual place making conference, held in Toronto, a vibrant city of 2.5 million people where North America's largest waterfront revitalization is underway, covering 2,000 acres (800 ha) and involving a \$17 billion investment.

"Place making is not about architecture; it's about creating places where people can be together—about feelings you get when being in great cities," remarked Dene Oliver, chief executive of Oliver

EMPTY CHINA CUP?

"For three decades, water has been indispensable in sustaining the rollicking economic expansion that has made China a world power. Now China's galloping, often wasteful style of economic growth is pushing the country toward a water crisis."

From "Under China's Booming North, the Future is Drying Up" by Jim Yardley, *New York Times*, September 28, page A1.