



ParkingP

By June Williamson

Parking has been an essential part of suburban development in North America since the Ford Model T was introduced in 1911. More than a century has passed, and it is high time for parking needs to be rethought, just as automobiles themselves and the fuels they run on have been radically re-conceived.

Rethinking parking is part of a broader project to incrementally retrofit conventional suburban development types—products of the 20th century such as shopping malls, office parks, and the acres of asphalt that surround them—to the challenges, opportunities, and constraints of meeting the needs of 21st century urban populations. What better place to do it than on Long Island, considered by many the birthplace of suburbia ever since the little ranch houses of Levittown sprouted on former potato fields an hour from midtown New York City.

Recently the Long Island Index, a project of the Rauch Foundation, unveiled designs that resulted from the ParkingPLUS Design Challenge. The challenge was initiated to encourage transformative thinking about parking structures in suburban downtowns and how they could be re-imagined to better address downtown needs and desires. The Long Island Index project was launched a decade ago to track various indicators in this populous-but-dispersed suburbanized region of 2.9 million people and cut through an often less-than-

productive political atmosphere of highly localized discourse. The mission was to provide and disseminate solidly researched, unbiased information directly to policymakers and residents.

My previous consulting effort with the Index in 2010 produced *Build a Better Burb*, an open-ideas urban design competition. That project spawned a companion website that is now an award-winning online journal of suburban design, ably edited by Long Island Index staff. In addition, I published a book in 2013 titled *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb*.

The ParkingPLUS Process

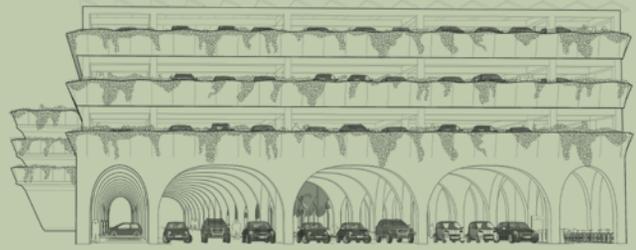
Serving as consultants to the sponsors of ParkingPLUS, Kaja Köhl of Brooklyn-based youarethecity and I conducted a national search for four prominent, innovative architectural firms with a track record of interest in the suburbs to commission unique designs specific to parking

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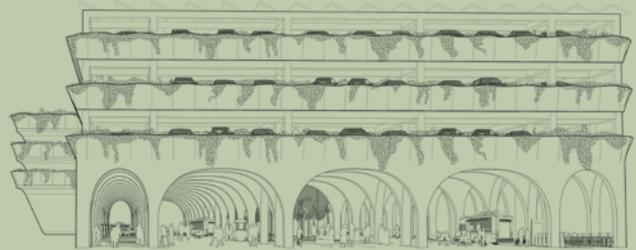
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LUS



Weekday Use



Weekend Use

Iconic Arches for Rockville Centre, by Utile, Inc.

A commuter rail line with high ridership runs through a busy suburban downtown. Numerous surface lots monopolize and divide the village center. Can parking structures fix this problem and provide a missing public gathering space?



The Village of Rockville Centre, a transit-served suburban community, has a thriving scene of restaurants and shops but lacks a significant civic gathering space. The Utile, Inc. team, led by Tim Love and Elizabeth Christoforetti and including consultants Eran Ben-Joseph of MIT, Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, Buro Happold, and Simon Design Engineering, designed a garage prototype with monumental ground-floor arches, which would function as parking during the week and a welcoming public plaza on weekends.

The prototype is designed with an innovative structural system of ground-floor arches built of tilt-up concrete panels with economical precast concrete components on the levels above. It is designed to be flexible; it can be adapted to variously configured sites, different “PLUS” uses can be plugged into it, and with flat floor plates and open lightwells, it is suitable for future adaptive reuse.



lot sites in four Long Island communities: the villages of Rockville Centre and Westbury in Nassau County and the village of Patchogue and the hamlet of Ronkonkoma in Suffolk County.

The architectural design teams were chosen from dozens invited to submit qualifications through a highly competitive search process. Each was paired with one Long Island community where civic leaders expressed interest in exploring new solutions for integrating beautiful, high-performance parking structures into their transit-served downtown areas. Parking garage feasibility analysis expert Gerard Giosa of Level G Associates was engaged as an advisor to all four teams, some of which also had their own parking consultants.

The four firms we selected are Utile, Inc. Architecture + Planning of Boston, whose Civic Arches was designed for Rockville Centre; dub Studios of New York, Toronto, and Los Angeles, which proposed Main Street Brackets: Shared Parking in Patchogue; Roger Sherman Architecture + Urban Design (RSAUD) of Los Angeles, whose scheme Parks and Rides: a Horizontal Skyscraper was designed for Ronkonkoma; and LTL Architects of New York, which designed Train Terraces: Incubating Urbanism in Westbury.

During an intense six-week design period in the fall of 2013, the architects were challenged to explore the premise that good design of parking facilities—in this case, “boring” parking garages—can be economically,

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Ronkonkoma Parks and Rides, by RSAUD

Thirty-acre surface parking lot abuts a busy regional commuter rail station, and is also adjacent to a regional airport. What other uses and markets can this land support, in addition to lots of parking?

Roger Sherman Architecture + Urban Design's super-scaled, family-focused, all-season recreational park is designed to insert a slice of center-city energy, density, and intensity into exurban Suffolk County at the intersection of its planes (MacArthur/Islip Airport), trains (Long Island Rail Road), and automobiles (the Long Island Expressway).

The scheme, developed by a team that includes market analysis from MR+E, transit oriented devel-

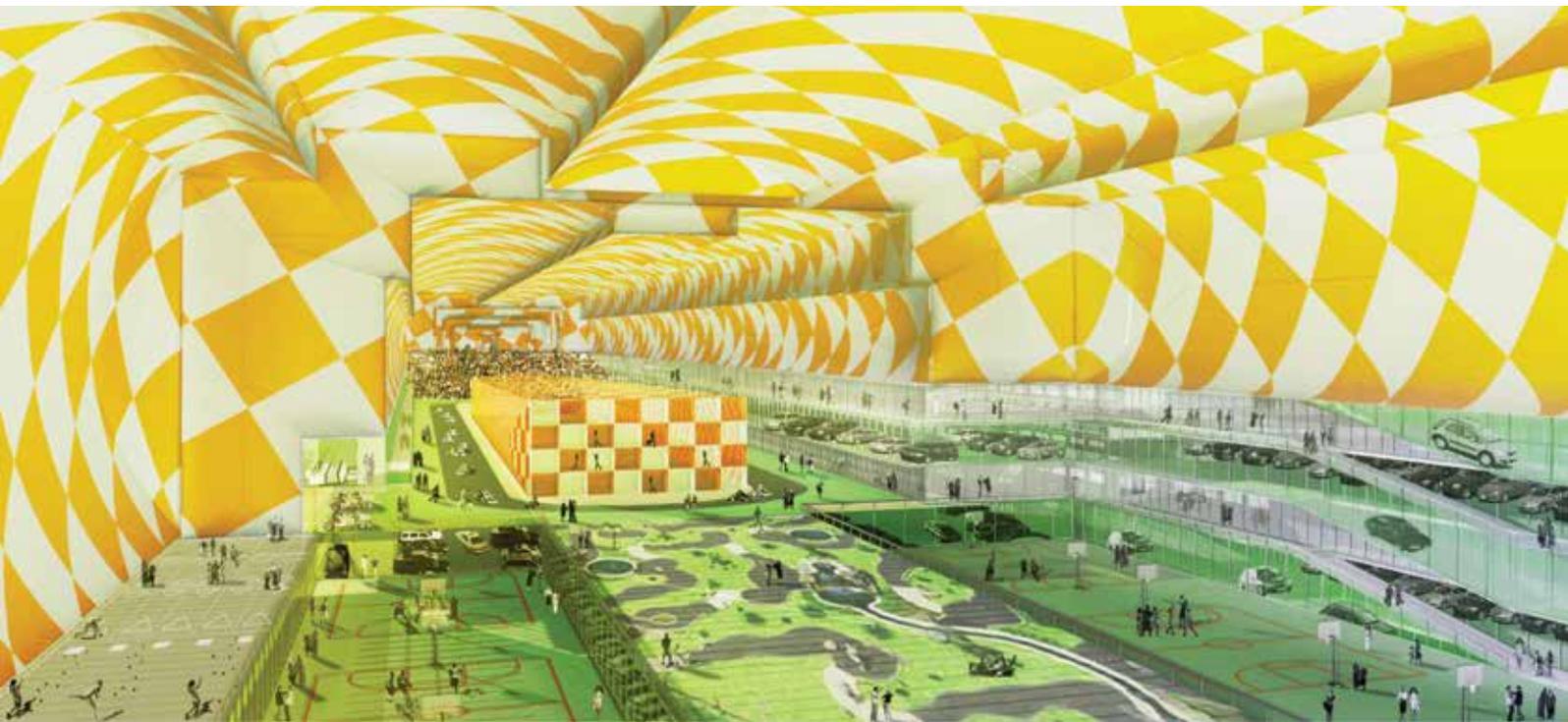
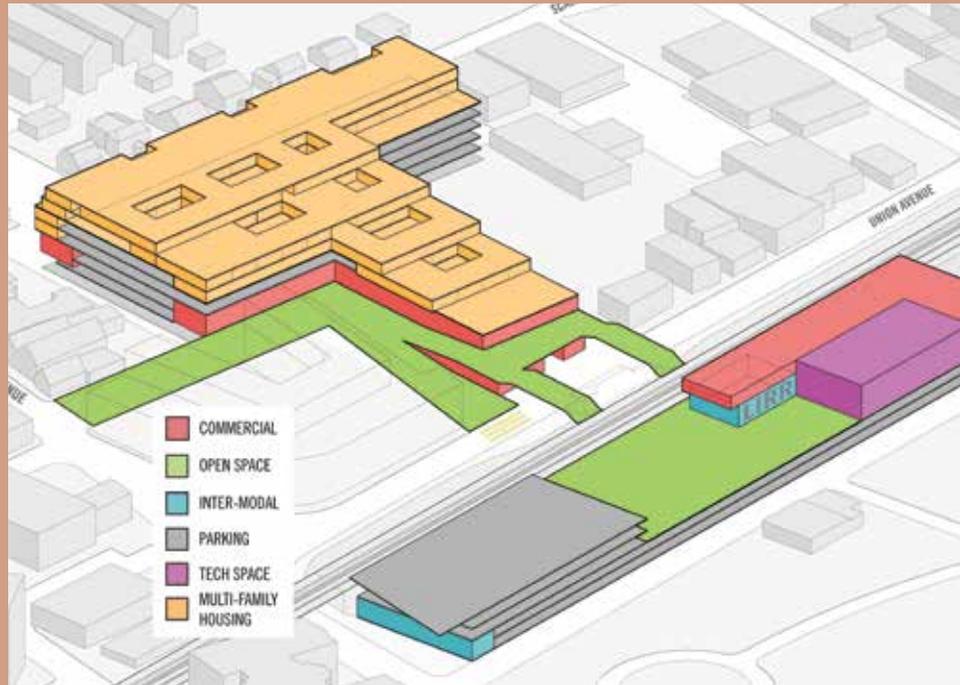


Train Terraces: Incubating Urbanism in Westbury, by LTL Architects

Two surface parking lots straddle the commuter rail station in a suburban village's downtown. Can redevelopment of these lots support both significantly increased parking capacity and a synergistic mix of new uses?

The scheme of LTL Architects, led by principals Paul Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki, and David J. Lewis, is phased, designed with multiple terraces that bridge under, over, and along the Long Island Rail Road, intensifying connections within the Village of Westbury. The design produces a dynamic interchange between transportation, commerce, culture, and living in place of single-use surface parking.

The number of spaces would be doubled on both sides of the tracks in parking decks enveloped by compatible transit-oriented uses, all wrapped in an elegantly-designed façade: It includes small retail shops, terraced apartments, a bike shop and bus shelter, "new tech" incubator space, and a civic terrace at track level, where the public can gather in a space with a great view.



development programming from author Greg Lindsay (Aerotropolis), and mobility consulting from Kati Rubinyi (The Car in 2035), proposes a pair of gigantic open spaces, one a park and one for rides. The "rides" portion of the scheme features a covered outdoor space sheltering the train platform and airport shuttle stop with a parking structure. Its bubble-wrapped counterpart—the park—contains soccer fields, a hockey rink, mini-golf and a driving range, a go-kart track, and a cricket field stadium with seating for 9,000 spectators.

Main Street Brackets: Shared Parking in Patchogue, by dub studios

A village downtown is at risk of becoming a victim of its own success in attracting new businesses, arts venues, and apartments. Can innovative design add to the parking stock while helping residents and visitors make more efficient use of existing parking lots?

To make better use of the parking Patchogue already has, dub studios Principal Michael Piper and colleagues designed a parking deck

as part of a shared parking system called brackets. Brackets comprise a new mid-block parking deck, designed to be airy, open, and easy to access, as well as a wayfinding system of automated signs that direct drivers to lots with free spaces. The network of pedestrian pathways, signage, and landscape improvements would make it easier to find available parking and more pleasurable to walk through the lots and alleys that link parking lots to Main Street.



PHOTO CREDIT



Parking garages, when exceptionally well designed, can contribute to downtown revitalization. Also, structures for parking can incorporate desired local amenities—they can be so much more than just parking.

environmentally, and socially transformative to their settings. They were also asked to envision “PLUSes,” which are additional uses that would enliven these structures, provide amenities for their respective locations, and suggest potential financing strategies for maintenance and operation of parking. The challenge also included analyses of costs to build and maintain each of the parking structures, how to finance them, and economic benefits.

Effects

The selected architects and their consultants were asked to imagine how these suburban communities could address issues of downtown vitality and potential for growth by focusing on how and where they park their cars. This might seem counterintuitive to some, especially urbanists who champion cities and harbor disdain for suburban car dependency. However, we felt strongly that reforming parking and people’s attitudes about it are essential early steps toward achieving any other changes.

Each of the selected places contains a fairly large supply of downtown surface parking lots. And yet, the

general perception is that there is not enough parking, for residents, commuters, or shoppers. These downtowns were previously identified in GIS-based research sponsored by the Index and conducted by the Regional Plan Association as “Places to Grow.” More than 150 other downtowns on Long Island were similarly identified, and more than 4,000 acres of surface parking lots were mapped. These mapped areas, located within a half-mile walking radius of Main Streets and commuter rail stations, are viewable on the Long Island Index’s Interactive Map of the region.

By re-imagining parking, Long Island can turn acres of asphalt into vibrant places, and the region can begin to capitalize on the enormous potential of its downtowns. Parking garages, when exceptionally well designed, can contribute to downtown revitalization. Also, structures for parking can incorporate desired local amenities—they can be so much more than just parking. The Parking-PLUS challenge asked designers to integrate new uses that would benefit local downtowns, from civic plazas and recreation space to apartments, office space, and biking and transit infrastructure. These “PLUSes” can be added to parking decks or they can be sited on land currently occupied by surface parking that would be freed up by structured parking.

We intended the Design Challenge to spark a vibrant conversation on Long Island and nationally about new ways of thinking about downtown parking structures and their relationship to downtown suburban settings. And so, while the designs are custom-designed to particular locations, they are also designed as prototypes and intended to help generate a broader discussion about the ideal attributes of future parking structures.

The Design Challenge brief was to develop—and graphically communicate to a predominantly lay audience—innovative designs for structured parking solutions that support downtown revitalization and transit-oriented development. The designers were asked to demonstrate how structured parking supports a larger strategy that encourages better land utilization, promotes transit accessibility, and improves the downtown experience.

The goal of this initiative is to help promote new thinking about Long Island’s mass transit-served downtown and transit hubs by using the power of good, innovative design and the visualization of fresh ideas. The work was conceived and presented in a manner intended to connect the dots about land use, transit, financing, public space, and parking in ways that professionals, elected officials, and the general public may not have seen before.



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