

Breaking the Chains: a guide to fighting inappropriate chain store development



“Demand better.”

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Many national and international chain businesses have acquired an extremely poor reputation for urban design and architectural quality. Site design for these types of businesses are standardized and replicated just like the products within the buildings. This standardization manifests itself physically in

corporate chain buildings in two very evident ways.

Identifying the Problem

One is branded architecture: the building form, details and colors are standardized and replicated and serve as an easily recognizable trademark, where ever in the world you may happen to be. The standard Pizza Hut roof design has even become the chain restaurant's corporate logo.

The other way in which this standardization has occurred goes beyond a replication in just a single corporation, but is replicated by every competitor in a business type. This is one-size-fits-all site design and building placement on a lot.

You basically have two different arrangements for this, depending on the business type. Restaurants tend to sit in the middle of their site, surrounded by a parking lot, and if it is a fast-food restaurant, rung tightly by a drive-through lane.

In the case of retail, the building sits along one edge or in a corner of the site, and the front door faces the parking lot, which covers the rest of the lot. In both cases, restaurant and retail, the building rarely covers more than 50% of the lot, and often times 30% or less. This branded, one-size-fits-all approach is bad design.

The Ramifications of Repetition

This type of standardized building works for the corporations, but not for the unique communities where they are often built. A bad building and bad site plan can have a serious effect on the building patterns in a community.

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One-size-fits-all design is bad for communities. When people feel it is uncomfortable or unsafe to walk to a store to do business because of the large, flat expanse of unsheltered parking lot that must be crossed, they are forced to drive there. When this construction precedent is set by a large chain business, others will follow suit, in fact they will demand to follow suit, because the transportation patterns support this type of construction.

We've seen that communities begin to look generic as the one size fits all site plans are replicated in town after town.

Towns, like the buildings built in them, are becoming standardized.

Breaking the Chains

The thing is, this isn't the only way to build. Successful models exist all across the country and all around the world. Communities need to be well armed with information when they go into negotiations with a company proposing a standardized store.

Solutions to this problem are laid out in the following articles.

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