



## Princeton Downtown Redevelopment Project

**To the Borough of Princeton, Nassau HKT Associates, Princeton Future, Princeton University, and the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce** for transforming two downtown surface parking lots into a community destination featuring new retail shops and apartments, a public plaza, expanded library, food market and a municipal garage. In the mid-1990s, Princeton Borough faced two looming crises. The Princeton Public Library, located at an important intersection in the heart of the downtown, had outgrown its building, needed to expand, and was seriously considering moving to a site on the outskirts of town to do so. Additionally, the lack of parking, a chronic problem in town, was hurting the local merchants as shoppers were gravitating to the strip malls - with their ample parking - on the ever-expanding Route 1 corridor. Many feared that the loss of the library, an important civic structure, would continue to drain life from the downtown. Princeton's then-mayor, Marvin Reed, worked with the town council to develop a multi-year public process to preserve the economic vitality of the central business district. After dozens of public workshops and hearings, not only did they manage to keep the library in town, but they also transformed a borough-owned surface parking lot into a parking garage, new housing, shops, and a public plaza; and have agreed on plans to transform a second surface parking lot into housing and retail.

### Events

[Redevelopment Forum](#)

[Smart Growth Awards](#)

[2006 Smart Growth Awards](#)

[2005 Smart Growth Awards](#)

[2004 Smart Growth Awards](#)

[2003 Smart Growth Awards](#)

[2002 Smart Growth Awards](#)

[Members & Friends Series](#)

[Special Events](#)

"In its simplest form, sustainable progress means making sure that our actions today will provide us with the kind of life we want to live in the future."



Using the state's redevelopment law, the Borough declared a 2-acre site of surface parking lots right next to the old library structure as an "area in need of redevelopment," which allowed the town to negotiate with a developer and a contractor instead of going through the normal municipal lowest-bid process to redevelop the site. This allowed the developer to receive low interest rates for the Borough's portion of the project, helped the developer get better financing, and enabled the Borough to retain more control over the development than it would have had it auctioned off the lots. The Borough's actions were challenged by a group of local citizens opposed to the change, but the Borough prevailed in an Appellate Court opinion released in the summer of 2004 that affirmed that municipalities have a wide range of options when designating an area in need of redevelopment. The court relied on smart growth land patterns to substantiate its finding in favor of the town, concluding that surface parking in the heart of a downtown negatively affected the borough by serving as a barrier between shops, which deterred walking. The court also concluded that the structured parking would add to Princeton's appeal by satisfying the need for more parking convenient to the new library. The court stated that the additional retail and housing units would add tax revenue and encourage more private investment. In short, the opinion voiced approval for just the sort of mixed-use, compact development that smart growth is all about.



The borough did not work alone. The borough formed a public-private partnership in 2003 with Nassau HKT to redevelop the two parking lots, and Nassau HKT built the mixed-use building in front of the garage. Princeton Future, a nonprofit citizens' planning group, took a leading role in the conceptual planning process for the site, coordinated the public meetings, and served as a catalyst for change by incubating ideas that helped move the process forward. The Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce funded Princeton Future's initial efforts. Princeton University donated \$500,000 to the library for the new building's construction and \$150,000 for the public plaza. Today, the new library is doing more business than ever. The former borough-owned parking lot boasts 500 new parking spaces in an indoor, automated parking garage that offers shared parking - where residents use the garage at night, and shoppers use it during the day. Shared parking is an innovative and important component to managing the town's severe parking shortage. The face of the garage is hidden by an attached luxury apartment building offering 24 rental units plus retail space on the ground floor. A new public plaza in front of the apartments also connects tenants and garage users to the adjacent brand-new public library building and the rest of the downtown. A second borough parking lot across the street will be redeveloped to offer another 53 apartments - including 12 affordable-housing units - and the first downtown grocery market in a generation.

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