

STREETSCAPES

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What's Next for Downtowns

We all tend to focus on the immediate issues facing our downtowns—parking, promotions, financing, and the like. But how often do we step back and look at the long-term picture? How often do we ask ourselves what the hot issues will be 5, 10 or even 20 years from now?

We posed the following question to MDA Board members: What opportunities or threats do you see for downtowns in the next decade—that we aren't talking about right now? Our goal was to get people thinking creatively about the future and hopefully, begin planning for it.

"I think Lifestyle Centers are going to give us all a challenge eventually. Zona Rosa in North KC has started a Farmers' Market and a Concert Series and even markets themselves as a 'walk back in time.' The fact that MODESA is proposed as a tool to help finance a Lifestyle Center (outside of the Historic Downtown area) in Lee's Summit causes many to question the intent of the legislation." *Jeanine Rann, Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street*

"If we lose development tools like Eminent Domain and TIF, downtowns across the state can be substantially held up with regard to important economic development projects. Other issues could include some security issues and the need to have educational and retail options in downtowns for our new and growing residential populations." *Laura Lock, Downtown St. Louis Partnership*

"As housing costs rise in other states and as the nation as a whole becomes more generic

and more detached, I think downtowns are wonderfully poised to address this need for affordability, uniqueness and community. Here in Missouri we've focused mainly on saving our small towns and big cities but it's time for us to figure out how to transform from state of small towns into one with growing metropolitan areas—areas that get national attention as "the next great city." We pay lip service to the idea of the creative class but what are we truly doing on the state and local levels to attract creative individuals who are growing disillusioned with their current cities?" *Carrie Gartner, Columbia Special Business District*

1) TIF's and eminent domain, ensuring the new definitions of blighted areas don't exclude downtowns. This is crucial, especially for us, to take advantage of state economic programs.

2) Understanding the complexities of MODESA and other TIF programs, partnering with other development agencies to streamline and coordinate efforts. Given our organizations are limited in resources and staffing to undertake massive overhauls in streetscapes, business incubators, and marketing to developers." *Tim Arbeiter, Old Town Cape*

"One thought that occurs to me is that downtowns will be greatly impacted by two cultural trends which are on a collision course: the 'graying' of the population and our continued dependence on the automobile. It may be that local downtowns, particularly those with transit connections, will benefit in relation to big regional shopping (continued on page 2)



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How Cool is Your City?

Truly cool cities don't need marketing campaigns—but what if your city isn't cool but wants to be? Take a look at Michigan and see what they're doing about it.

Governor Jennifer Granholm—with the goal of building attractive and vibrant cities that will appeal to twenty-somethings, knowledge workers and the creative class—introduced the state-wide Cool Cities Initiative. This isn't simply a marketing campaign—it's a comprehensive economic development plan designed to get the entire state back on track.

After intensive surveying of residents, cities officials and their potential target markets, the state began developing comprehensive plans that would help give people what they

were asking for. Top of the list? Walkable communities, followed closely by business development, arts and culture, and historic preservation. In 2004, the state began to offer matching grants to cities with plans to address one specific issue in the Cool Cities Initiative—and that contained a “Wow Factor.” Projects ranged from the construction of artist studios to creation of small business incubators to the introduction of diversity lessons in local elementary schools. The projects may be small but Michigan is finding that small projects may just be the best way to a statewide recovery.

For a great overview of the program and some of the pilot projects, go to www.coolcities.com.

What's next?

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areas (even those which seek to imitate the classic ambience of downtowns) as people become less able or inclined to drive in highly congested areas. Also, as people drive less, internet sales will continue to increase, with both good and bad results for downtowns. On the positive side, marginal 'specialty' shops will benefit as internet sales supplement walk-in business. The potential negative is that many such shops may find it less important to be open to the public at all. Downtown can't be vibrant if too many businesses adopt reduced or 'by chance' hours of operation.” *Mark Randall, City of Pleasant Hill*

“For downtowns to be successful over the next 10 years, it is imperative to create a written vision developed through community participation. We all recognize incremental efforts are essential, and most effective. However, we must have the desired end in site. Copying projects from other communi-

ties is not the long-term solution. What is the vision for downtown? What do we want our downtown to be, to serve, to look like as a result of the incremental efforts we undertake on a daily, monthly and annual basis? Plato once said, ‘you don't design the future by what you do now, you do now based on your vision of the future.’” *Randy Gray, Special Place Development*

There are certainly other trends on the horizon. What effect, for instance, will high gas prices have on consumer behavior in the next decade? What did Katrina teach us about our downtowns? What can the Ford plant closings tell us about the types of companies we should be recruiting? As cities grow, how will downtowns interact on a regional level?

We hope these short musings have got you thinking—and given you a head start on planning for the future!

Downtown Idea Bank

Find your tipping point. Malcom Gladwell talks of New York's "Broken Window Theory" in terms of tipping points. Although the city's subway system was plagued by crime, trash and other problems, the city decided to attack just one—graffiti. Instead of trying to solve everything at once, they solved a single, highly visible problem that helped tip the scales on all the other public safety issues. If you're faced with numerous and insurmountable problems, don't try to attack them all. Find the one problem you *can* solve that will help turn the tide.

Know your market. Philadelphia's City Center has made huge strides in the last 15 years by knowing who they were trying to attract downtown. They're continually surveying business and property owners, residents, customers and potential markets to find out what people want and what trends are on the horizon. Their director can cite their target demographic in less than 5 seconds—can you? By the way, it doesn't take a huge marketing budget to make this happen. Try working with your city to add a few questions onto their resident surveys or sign up for inexpensive online surveys at www.surveymonkey.com.

Rethink your college crowd. If you've got a college or university close by, chances are you think of that population in terms of clubbing and bar hopping. But do you let

them simply pack up and move after four years? This demographic—the 25-34 year olds—is the key to downtown revitalization. They want walkable cities that are diverse, unique and vibrant. They want hi-tech offerings coupled with green policies. They're also a third more likely to live downtown. Joseph Cortright of Impresa Consulting calls this age group "The Young and the Restless" and says they are the key to a creative, knowledge-based economy. Does your downtown offer the quality of life this age group is seeking out? Don't worry right now about jobs—employers will go where the talent is. Concentrate on bringing in the people.

Keeping talking. Too often, we get stuck in our own downtowns. We feel far too busy to justify the kind of activities that keep us fresh and offer us new ways of thinking and new solutions. Visit a neighboring town to see how they approach an issue. Check out websites. Attend a workshop with other downtown directors. Ask for a tour of another downtown's housing market, their retail establishments, or their recreational offerings. Even informal chats over coffee in a colleague's downtown can lead to great things. And, of course, become a member of the Missouri Downtown Association—we'll make networking even easier for you. And who knows, you might just enjoy getting out of the office!

Did you know?

25 to 34 year olds are one third more likely to live within 3 miles of downtown.

This age group is also the most willing to pack up and move to a great city.

Hi tech cities are also ones that are high in tolerance and diversity.

People who live in the suburbs weigh about 6 pounds more than those living downtown.

Mark Your Calendars

- The Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation's 2006 Awards Ceremony will be held in the Rotunda of the State Capitol on Tuesday, March 2 at 11:30.
- The City of Pleasant Hill is hosting this year's Missouri Community Betterment Workshop on March 15. Contact Mark Randall at markr@pleasanthill.com.
- Downtown Day at the State Capitol will be this March so watch for our announcement. We'll distribute literature about key downtown issues to all legislators.
- Downtown St. Louis Partnership Spring Housing Tour will be held May 20-21. Contact Laura Lock at llock@dtslp.org.

**Missouri Downtown
Association**

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MDA Needs You!

The Missouri Downtown Association is a non-profit corporation that advocates, supports and promotes leadership in downtown development and revitalization throughout the State of Missouri by providing a forum for members to:

- Share their knowledge, experience and solutions to problems.
- Conduct educational programs on downtown renewal.
- Promote implementation of effective legal and financing development tools.
- Increase awareness about the economic value of downtown businesses, buildings and jobs.

We cannot do this without your participation and your financial support. Please help us continue our work for Missouri downtowns by clipping this form and sending to the address below.

Organizational Membership \$75

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Enclosed is my check for \$_____

Make check payable to:
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