

Downtown Redevelopment Efforts in Selected Midwest Cities

By Meghan Leahey*

A number of recent downtown revitalization efforts in larger cities may provide examples useful to smaller cities. While not all of the examples are transferable, they do demonstrate the variety of ideas being used to serve three important market downtown segments: residents, office workers, and tourists. In addition, the examples illustrate how downtowns can serve these multiple segments in dynamic, mixed-use environments. Examples by market segment follow.

Downtown Residents

Cincinnati - The West End area is being redeveloped with a balance of housing opportunities, including affordable units. The construction of new housing in the West End is attracting new families to the community and raising the value of residential properties. City supported low interest loans will be made available to assist existing homeowners in maintaining and improving their properties. (17)

Cleveland - Officials here recently announced a major development plan to transform the city's 14-acre Flats East Bank area from a "rough & tumble" setting into an upscale urban waterfront community that is to include high-end residential units, trendy retail, and entertainment venues (6). A waterfront district plan was also adopted by the city and is intended to reconnect Lake Erie with the lakefront neighborhoods and "shape the lakefront as the most vital element in the transformation of Cleveland." (6)

Columbus - The Arena District is a 95-acre master-planned urban village; it has a grid pattern of streets, mixed-use buildings, a public park, and a pedestrian orientation. It is anchored by Nationwide Arena, home to Columbus' NHL team and the venue for other events such as concerts. The Arena has had a large economic impact by putting more than 18,000 people downtown after 10 p.m. The District also has a 40,000 sq.ft. cinema, which draws approximately 750,000 people to the area each year. (7)

Indianapolis - Fall Creek Place is a 160-acre redevelopment of almost 26 inner-city blocks that were severely blighted

into a new residential area including approximately 300 new home-sites and 46 rehabilitations of existing homes. The development is diverse and mixed-income, with 51% of the ownership by low and moderate-income households. Also, the low/moderate income homes cannot be distinguishable from market-rate homes in order to reinforce the mixed-income nature of the project. (12)

Memphis - A project called Uptown involves redeveloping 125 city blocks into mixed-income residential housing, with 1,100 for-rent and for-sale units. The project is also intended to provide more equity to lower-income residents in the downtown area. (9) The old Central Station in downtown Memphis also underwent a \$25 million conversion into a modern Amtrak and public transportation facility, with 63 market-rate apartments above it. (10)

Minneapolis - The Near North Development is built on the site of two former housing projects. It is a mixed-income urban neighborhood of 900 homes with features such as new nearby retail stores, an elementary school, a public library, two community centers on site, and a future cultural center. (5)

Pittsburgh - The City has developed a Citywide Bicycle Plan. This plan outlines a strategy for improving bicycling conditions in Pittsburgh, while raising the profile of bicycling as a mode of transportation. Through strategic capital improvements, programming, and better internal coordination, bicycling will become safer, more convenient, and more accessible to Pittsburghers citywide. (18)



Trolley in downtown Memphis

Photo Source: <http://www.pbase.com/stfchallenge/image/578907>

Office Workers

Chattanooga – In 2004, the city announced a job growth strategy intended to attract high-paying jobs by encouraging entrepreneurial activity. To do so, the city is using a three-pronged approach involving initiatives to support expansion by existing businesses, encourage local startups, and recruit new businesses. The City has also implemented the WorkSmart program, which identifies qualified applicants ready to be employed by businesses entering the area to take advantage of the federal tax credits offered due to the city's status as a renewal community. The program also offers residents training to remediate skill gaps. (13)

Columbus - The Columbus Downtown Office Incentive Program was created to help stabilize and strengthen the market of downtown office space as well as increase employment opportunities in downtown Columbus. Businesses may be eligible to receive an Office Incentive if they plan to relocate from outside Columbus city limits to downtown and will employ ten or more people or if a company that is presently located within the city and/or downtown hires ten or more new employees. (16)

Memphis – The city has installed a five-mile downtown trolley system that moves more than a million employees, residents, and visitors annually around Main Street, Beale Street, the Civic Center and sites along the river. (10) A new public elementary school was also built for children living downtown and those of downtown employees. (10)

Minneapolis - A U.S. Bank facility anchors the mixed-use redevelopment of the West Side Flats, a model for urban neighborhoods. The facility will house 1,000 employees and will be set in an urban village with 750 housing units of various types, offices, retail space, parks, and possibly a school. U.S. Bank leaders hope that a better work environment for their employees will enhance their ability to attract and retain those employees. (5) The city also completed the \$675m Hiawatha Light-Rail Transit Line, which offers fast, quiet light-rail service to 17 stations between downtown, the airport, and the Mall of America. (5)

Tourists and Visitors

Chattanooga - The Tennessee Aquarium opened as the largest freshwater aquarium in the country and attracts more than one million visitors annually. (6) Major downtown riverfront developments include an expansion of the Aquarium, the Hunter Museum of American Art, and a renovation of the Creative Discovery Museum. (6)

Indianapolis – The city has recently seen the construction of the \$175 million Conseco Fieldhouse, home to the city's NBA/WNBA teams. It is also the headquarters and hall of

fame for the NCAA. (1) A \$10 million cultural tourism initiative was launched in 2001. The project involved entertainment additions such as the Indiana State Museum in its new location in White River State Park, an IMAX theater, Conseco Fieldhouse, the Colonel Eli Lilly Civil War Museum, the Grand Hall Conference Center at Union Station, Victory Field, and the renovated Murat Centre. (15)

Memphis - The 18,400 seat FedEx Forum in downtown Memphis was built to house the city's NBA team, and to unify the arena district, the downtown area, and Beale Street. (9) The Riverfront Development Corporation is working to develop five miles of Mississippi River frontage. The plans include a downtown harbor with a boat landing which will accommodate a variety of watercraft, as well as new hotel rooms, residential units, civic space, and retail space. (9) Peabody Place, an entertainment and retail center, with a 22-screen cineplex, restaurants, and entertainment and shopping venues, is another development appealing to Memphis visitors. With office space, apartments, stores, and parking facilities, Peabody Place is one of the largest mixed-use historic restoration projects in the US. (10)

Minneapolis - The Block E redevelopment project was designed to fill gaps between city's central business district and neighboring entertainment district. It is a mixed use project with businesses including Gameworks, Hard Rock Café, Crown Theaters, Borders, and a Marriott Hotel. The project also provides skyway links from the downtown office core to the Target Center (sports complex), as well as commuter parking ramps. (1)

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