



Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation: Corporate records

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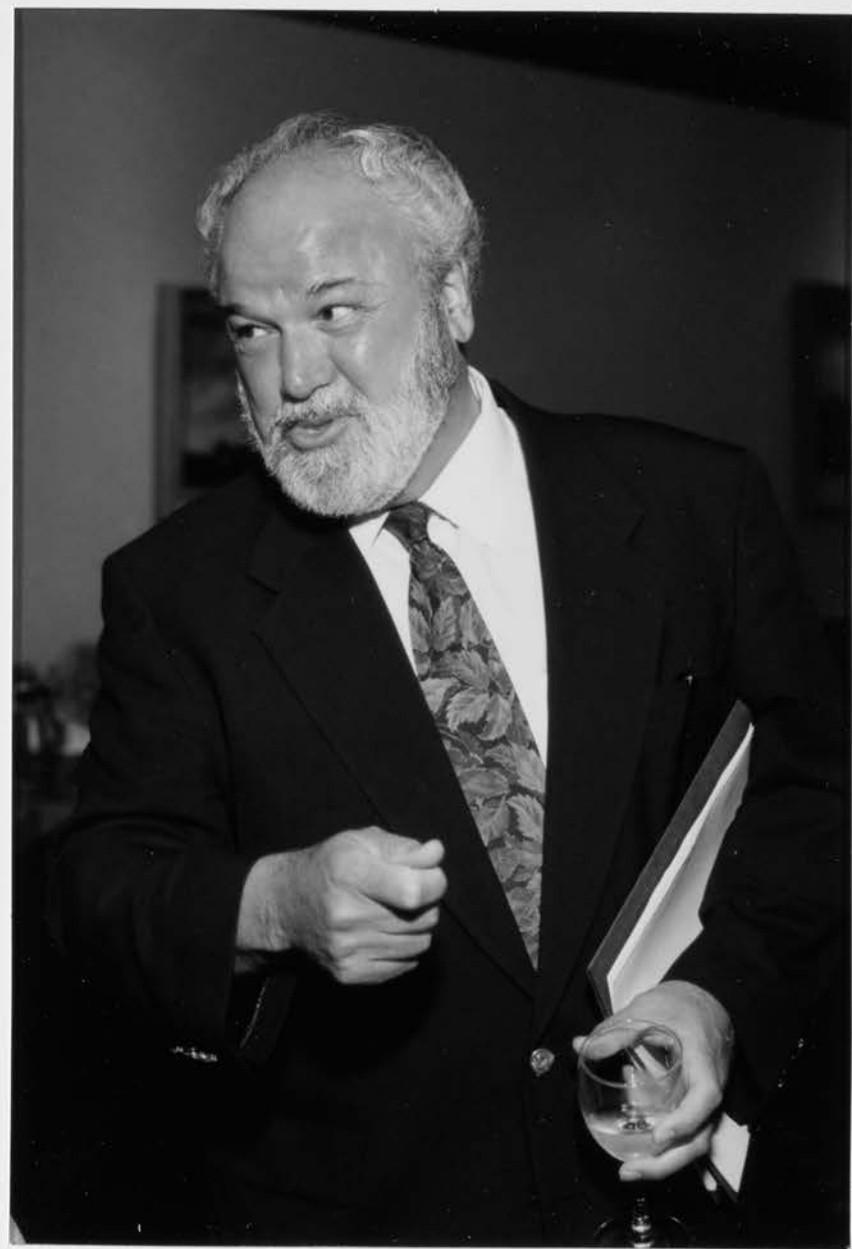






















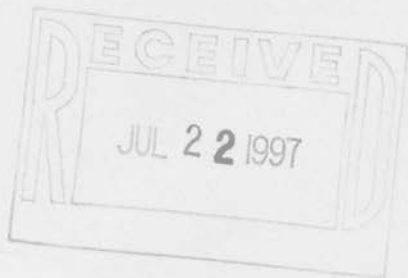








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Peter Brink



Draft

7/13/97

Urban Successes and Preservation

By Peter H. Brink

On June 9-10 a small group of urban preservation leaders and resource experts shared examples of what is working in revitalizing central cities, relevant trends, and a possible vision for cities in the future.

Sponsored by the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation and the National Trust, city participants included nonprofit preservationists Arthur Zielger and Howard Slaughter of Pittsburgh, preservation developers Dana Crawford of Denver and Art DeMuro of Portland, OR., City Council member Mai Bell Hurley of Chattanooga, neighborhood coalition director Larry Schmidt of New Orleans, foundation leader Michael O'Keefe of St. Paul, Chris Burdick, chair International Downtown Association, and Robert Engstrom Urban Land Institute. Weiming Lu and Bob Hess, president and chair of St. Paul's Lowertown, hosted the workshop; George Latimer, former Mayor of St. Paul, facilitated. Neil Peirce, syndicated columnist, and experts on technology and economics participated. President Richard Moe, Programs Vice President Peter Brink, and Main Street Director Kennedy Smith represented the National Trust.

Neil Peirce opened the workshop with his list of "the nice, the necessary, and the obnoxious" for city success. Examples included: Nice - urban empowerment zones and big-scale inner-city retailing. Necessary - competition in public services and schools, new policing techniques, information age for all, multi-purpose inner-city entities, patient funding, and historic preservation tax credits. Obnoxious - subsidies to attract businesses to one city rather than another.

Richard Moe elaborated on the crucial nexus between healthy cities and preserving countryside. Strategies to curtail disinvestment from cities to sprawl development must include both revitalizing existing communities and state-level land-use management, such as the Smart Growth initiative in Maryland. A key to this is reinventing downtowns, with the type of successes represented at this workshop.

Participants noted that 20 years ago we wondered if downtowns could succeed at all, now we have some good successes, including Lower Downtown in Denver, Lowertown in St. Paul, Portland (Oregon's) downtown, and Pittsburgh neighborhoods. The freight train is slowly moving.

Yet, Arthur Ziegler noted that some success may be deceptive. Thus, Cleveland has made great progress in mega attractions, image, and tourism. Yet public school graduates there continue to lack basic skills, businesses are importing employees from elsewhere, and areas of tremendous poverty remain. Similarly, Pittsburgh is considering \$ Billion investment in a new stadium, while

lousy education continues. Mega projects, subsidized retail, and new expressways are not the answer.

Dana Crawford concluded that the key is an environment for individual initiative, small entrepreneurs rather than mega projects. That's why historic preservation is good. For example, in Denver the resale price of lofts in old warehouses has doubled; in fact, developers are now building new "old lofts".

Participants also recognized that, clearly, large numbers of people like living in suburbs. They do not see the costly subsidies that underly the things they like. Thus, research and education are critical to give people the facts so that they can choose more wisely in spending public dollars. Preservationists need to be part of this effort.

A further obstacle is the bureaucracies that dominate many public school systems and other public services in cities. We need to support competition and innovative approaches such as charter schools and voucher systems to attract people to cities. Among other things, the vested interests of bureaucrats, school architects, engineers and contractors have established guidelines to ensure demolition of valuable school buildings in order to spur new construction.

A number of key trends offering opportunities and obstacles were identified.

- * Growing spread in income: need to reverse and have mixed-income neighborhoods for cities to thrive.
- * Housing becoming more affordable and home ownership among African Americans increasing. Thus, the median price of houses is less now than in 1979. The danger is rising trend to make financing more difficult, including threats to the Community Reinvestment Act.
- * Demographic trends offering new markets. Next year an American will turn 50 every 7 seconds; potential for return to cities? Generation x are those under 20 years; they will be an equally important buying segment.
- * Era of extremes: for much of the past, marketing has focused on the mainstream. Now have more market segments, more extremes, and technological ability to reach each.
- * Technological changes: for example, molecularization...government can deal with each neighborhood and individual, not general groups; schools with each student. For example, greater information and complexity means that even small firms, regardless of location, can access detailed records; in retail, customer at home can select exact product and have delivery next day, as alternative to WalMart centers.

Participants concluded that, as businesses and individuals are free of the usual locational factors, we need to address the range of other factors that they will use to decide whether they live and work in a city or not. Some factors are within the domain of preservationists, but most are issues such as crime and education where preservationists need to be part of the solution with many other partners.

Participants also discussed the draft, A New Urban Vision, prepared by Weiming Lu. Among other things, it set forth important components for successful cities in the future. These include: A diverse neighborhood; a cyber village; an arts community; a sustainable neighborhood; a distinctive place; an accessible city.

The draft also stresses key ingredients for success, including job creation, availability of soft financing, and strengthening a city's identity with preservation and good contemporary design. Finally, it sets forth effective implementation strategies.

Perhaps most important, all recognized that a vital ingredient to success is what preservationists are good at: using little dollars in ways close to the market to produce successes and developing solutions out of one's own city, rather than cookie cutter approaches from outside. Most helpful in doing this, however, are visits and exchanges to understand what is working and not working for fellow grassroots urban leaders and developers, and then deciding if that strategy fits one's own community.

Next steps include work by the National Trust, International Downtown Association, and Urban Land Institute to complete the vision and implementation statement. Partners are also exploring further ways to share experience relevant to success in revitalizing and sustaining cities.

Forum members may obtain the draft statement by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Suggestions for further exchanges are most welcome; please address to Peter Brink, National Trust.