

Phoenix Downtown

Right Place. Right Time!

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The Context

Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has passed.

Why a Real Downtown?

The time has long since passed for a region as rich and successful as the Phoenix metro to have the dynamic, vibrant, 24 x 7, “happening” downtown it truly deserves.

But, Phoenix doesn’t need a revitalized downtown just because it would be nice to have – a downtown for a downtown’s sake. Nice for tourists. Nice for the Chamber of Commerce hype. Nice to be able to check off and feel good about --that Phoenix can match what other dynamic successful thriving regions possess.

No. A vital, dense, truly urban downtown is not just a “nice to have,” it is a “must have” -- a critical keystone in a much larger, much more important, and much more strategic economic development strategy. And, downtown is not just for the City of Phoenix, it is key to the ongoing economic success of the entire *region*.

The Changing Rules of the Game

*“The bottom line is that cities need a **people climate** even more than they need a business climate. This means supporting creativity across the board—in all of its various facets and dimensions—and building a community that is attractive to creative **people**, not just to high-tech companies”*

Richard Florida
The Rise of the Creative Class
And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life

The rules of the economic development game have been transforming dramatically. As a result, the rules of the urban development game must transform dramatically as well.

In his groundbreaking book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida defines the new “rules of the game” for smart economic development in the knowledge-age. To succeed and thrive, regions must attract, retain, and develop the *Creative Class*. Growing at an accelerating pace, these are the people who make their livings by thinking and adding creative content as their value-add to the work they perform. These are the:

- technology workers and business people;
- artists, performers, writers, musicians, architects and designers;
- professionals (doctors, lawyers, managers, engineers, etc.);
- educators: teachers and professors

Already this *Creative Sector* represents nearly 40 million people, more than 30% of the U. S. workforce, accounting for more than 50% of the payroll (more than the service sector and the manufacturing sector combined!). This is the new “raw material” of the current and future economic engine. And, for the first time in history, the fundamental raw material of economic determinism is *mobile*. This human capital can choose to live wherever it wants.

To compete effectively in attracting, retaining, and developing these mobile, creative sector *people* assets, a region must balance and excel at simultaneously fostering each of the “4Ts”: **Technology** assets **Talent**

assets, **Tolerance** (or diversity and variety) assets, and **Territory** (unique quality of place) assets.

The key here is to recognize that in this new game of economic development, the organizations with the jobs will be attracted to the places where the members of the Creative Class abound just as urgently as creative people will be attracted to where the jobs are. We must focus simultaneously on creating the *supply* and the *demand*. Create the exceptional frying pan, then both the chicken and the egg will show up.

The research is clear, the Creative Class are attracted in increasing proportions to the density, diversity, pulse and amenities that only urban downtowns uniquely offer. So, competing effectively in the age of the Knowledge Economy, means a region must have essential choices and one of the most vital choices a region must offer is a truly urban downtown.

“Creative people have always gravitated to certain kinds of communities, such as the Left Bank in Paris or Greenwich Village. Such communities provide the stimulation, diversity and a richness of experiences that are the wellsprings of creativity. Now more of us are looking for the same thing.

Richard Florida
The Rise of the Creative Class

Right Place. Right Time!

Phoenix is currently enjoying an unprecedented convergence of a myriad of investment and development opportunities focused in its Downtown. The Phoenix Futures’ plan for revitalizing downtown retail and housing. The Convention Center Expansion. Light Rail. The major commitment for an ASU / Downtown. The new 1,000-room hotel. Several significant residential developments and adaptive reuses. The D-PAC plan. The collective energy and enthusiasm for neighborhood preservation and enhancement

Each of these represents an individual opportunity “dot.” But, to effectively make these individual investments work synergistically together, we must effectively connect the dots. And, to connect the dots, we must think creatively beyond the box.

Wisely, Mayor Phil Gordon and City Council Leadership have called for the development of a *Blended Plan* to ensure that these initiatives will integrate in a coordinated fashion. With so much happening, the strategic economic development opportunity for the entire region is unique. Downtown Phoenix is the *right place*. Now, is the *right time*!

Observations and Recommendations

1. **The Phoenix Futures' Plan:**

Because it is important that the Plan's underlying assumptions make good economic sense and can be justified, we encourage the City and the Phoenix Futures teams to develop a working agreement on the size and shape of the potential retail (as well as housing and office) market(s), including the impacts and demand generated by the ASU development.

More attention will need to be paid to the important question of how Downtown Phoenix will differentiate itself from neighboring competitors like Tempe, Scottsdale, Mesa, Glendale, etc. Differentiation and uniqueness will be key

We would like to see the plans combined and overlaid in a way that creates much more synergy. This could be done in a design charrette where the planners from both sides (as well as other stakeholders) would all participate with an objective, third party urban design facilitator. We strongly encourage a collaborative design initiative to more effectively synthesize and integrate the Phoenix Futures and ASU plans.

As the blending process unfolds, particular areas of emphasis with regard to integrating the two plans should be:

- > Combined / Related Retail
- > East – West Connectivity
- > Mixed Uses Adjacent to and Incorporated into ASU
- > Adjacent Residential Uses/Areas
- > Office Uses
- > Shared Spaces and Places (Town/Gown “Mixing Valves”)
- > Potentially Incompatible Uses?
- > Intentional Barriers

Regarding specific components of what we have seen:

- a. **The 2nd Street Connector:** This would seem to make good sense as a North-South connector. The serpentine design may or may not work. It is difficult to say without seeing more detailed sketches and plans regarding the intended treatment here.
- b. **Cooling Towers:** These may or not make sense? The idea should be developed and explored further to determine if it has any real merit. Perhaps these could play a role in the Oasis and Urban Trails concepts? A prototype should be built and evaluated.
- c. **Public Markets:** The notion of developing outdoor public markets is a good one. Both a public arts/crafts and a farm/ranch market have been discussed. Where should these be located? Can they be operated for more than one day a week? Properly done these could add significantly to the granularity and connectivity of adjacent uses and serve to in-fill existing underutilized public open space.

2. [The ASU Plan:](#)

While there is a powerful need to create an “imageable” ASU “signature” that will serve the recruiting functions for prospective students and their parents, we also believe there is an important synergistic opportunity to locate some satellite schools and facilities

dispersed throughout Downtown where these can benefit from and support adjacent uses and development. Both ASU and the City would gain benefits from some dispersion. This would be especially true for the some select graduate programs. A plan for dispersing appropriate ASU components should be explored in greater detail.

We endorse the notion of a “Grand Civic Gesture” as a unifying focal point for the ASU campus. This should be conceived of and actively designed as a shared space with the neighboring Downtown -- as a Grand Civic Space for both the City and ASU (think: Washington Square in New York City or Millennium Park in Chicago). Careful attention should be paid to the actual design of this open space to maximize its positive impact on the whole Downtown Plan. Though it will be a large green space, it should be *urban* in its design, character, and treatments.

We are enthusiastic about the mega-shade structure that has been proposed. And, we really like the idea of its being composed of solar panels, if that proves economically and technically feasible. The boldness of this idea has the potential to create some of the “magic” that will get Downtown Phoenix “on the map” and create some of the critical “repositioning” of Phoenix as a progressive *urban* region in the mind’s of a greater public. And, importantly, this mega-shade structure serves to embrace the reality of Phoenix’ position as a desert city.

Some specific comments:

- a. **Adaptive Reuse:** We would encourage the adaptive reuse of selected buildings as a part of the ASU development wherever this can make practical economic sense. Authenticity and the integration of older structures will be important. Particular candidates are the Post Office and the Westward Ho.
- b. **SkatePark:** We would like to see a world-class urban skatepark as a part of the Grand Civic Space. This could serve as one of the “mixing valves” for combining town / gown uses and as a unique, dynamic focal point venue. Successful examples include Santa Barbara’s Skaters’

Point, Portland's Burnside Skate Park, San Jose's new Watson Skate Park (opening this winter – the first of three), and Newberg, Oregon's Chehalem Skate Park (e.g. see www.dreamlandskateparks.com).

Though liability concerns would seem to present obstacles here, many cities have found creative ways to effectively resolve and overcome potential liability issues; and Phoenix can too.

- c. **Mixed Uses:** There may well be an opportunity to build several of the campus buildings larger than the ASU program, itself, requires. In this way, at-market uses could occupy components of the building and serve to subsidize the rent burden for ASU. This would also add to the desired density and encourage more mixing of uses.
- d. **Good Design is Key:** Careful attention to the details, as the plan morphs into actual designs, will be key. Design of the actual buildings will require creative talent so these do not end up as monolithic, inappropriately scaled and detailed “shoe boxes.” Also, the proactive design of the edges and pathways of connectivity for the entire ASU complex to the surrounding Downtown will be critical.
- e. **Design for Bicycles:** Planning for the safe and effective use and parking of bicycles by students and faculty within the ASU center, as well as in the surrounding Downtown, should be encouraged
- f. **Naming / Branding of ASU:** The naming and branding of the ASU center will be important as a communication vehicle. Instead of calling this the “ASU Capital Center Campus”, we strongly encourage use of “Phoenix” as a part of the brand (e.g. “Intel inside”). Perhaps, “ASU / Phoenix” or “ASU / Downtown Phoenix”

Additionally, to further signal and demonstrate a commitment to an *urban* university, we would

discourage the use of the word “campus” as a part of the name, conjuring, as it does, a sprawling, sylvan setting rather than a vibrant, denser, downtown center.

3. **Housing:**

To achieve the desired objectives, Downtown Phoenix will need many more people and a people-friendly environment – round the clock. It will be important to develop at least the targeted 10,000 housing units as quickly as the market can be demonstrated or generated. To achieve this, a detailed Housing Plan will need to be developed, including appropriate mixes of market, obtainable and affordable housing. The importance of a large and varied mix of downtown housing cannot be stressed strongly enough. This is one of the highest priorities! A champion will need to be identified to ensure effective implementation of the Housing Plan.

Individual components of the Housing Plan should focus separately on the distinct market segments of what one observer has called the “singles, mingles, and jingles.” Each segment has distinctly different financial means, life styles, and resulting needs and wants.

Additionally, the housing impact and market for students who will not choose to live in University-controlled facilities needs to be explored and planned for. This could either turn out to be an asset or a liability for the adjacent neighborhoods as well as Downtown, depending on how much appropriate planning attention it receives in advance.

ASU’s stated objective of envisioning 5% of the ASU faculty residing Downtown seems inadequate. What would it take to achieve 25% or more of the faculty residing Downtown? Other cities like Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania have been very successful at providing incentives for faculty to relocate adjacent to the campus. University faculty are prime candidates for an urban downtown life style and, in sufficient numbers, could help achieve the critical mass necessary to crystallize the attracting of other Creative Class assets to Downtown.

4. [Active Adult Urban Retirement Housing Opportunity:](#)

Given the national reputation of Arizona and the surrounding Valley as a retirement haven, there may well be an opportunity for Downtown Phoenix to pioneer the development of *urban* retirement alternatives for active baby boomers in their later years. (To the “single, mingles, jingles” housing market segments, we would add this as the “tingles” segment.)

This is an emerging national trend in which Downtown Phoenix could potentially have a distinct competitive advantage and leadership role, if it acts quickly and boldly. Significant proportions of aging baby boomers will seek more sophisticated (read: downtown, urban, active, cultural) retirement options than the limited traditional (read: shuffle board and golf-oriented) choices. Playing effectively to this emerging market would serve to increase the density and diversity of the downtown population and help to accelerate the speed of housing development downtown. This potential opportunity should be factored into the Downtown Housing Plan.

5. [The New Hotel:](#)

The new publicly funded hotel that will be built on the 2nd Street site west of Arizona Center should play a key pivotal role in anchoring the 2nd Street Connector as well as fostering east-west connectivity from Arizona Center through to the ASU campus.

Careful attention should be paid to the program and design of the lower levels of this hotel. Clearly, as much street-oriented retail as possible should grace the perimeter. There may even be an opportunity to develop an interior or exterior “alleyway” through the ground floor (east-west) that could provide interesting and practical pedestrian connectivity with Arizona Center to Polk Street; and thereby to the ASU campus.

An example of the form this might take (not literally, but figuratively) is the shaded plaza-connector running west from 1st Avenue towards City Hall just north of the Wells Fargo Building and the extended

west “alley” entrance to City Hall. Imagine this indoor/outdoor corridor full of active retail uses.

[Perhaps the Ramada Inn site could be redeveloped in a synergistic manner.]

Since the City will be the developer / owner of this building, the urban design potential of this facility for seeding the new Downtown should be exploited to maximum advantage. Also, there could well be an opportunity to enlist the support of The Arizona Republic to retrofit street-oriented uses on the ground floor of its adjacent headquarters building.

6. [The Warehouse District:](#)

The Warehouse District is a very important Territory asset that yearns to be effectively exploited. Much investment and renovation is already happening which should be capitalized upon, encouraged, supported and extended. Though it identifies the Warehouse District as a potential focus area, we have not yet seen specific plans or programs for the effective development of this area. We are hopeful that the Phoenix Futures’ Plan will provide concrete recommendations for enhancing the development of the Warehouse District.

Naming / branding can help to ignite the development potential here. We suggest something like *SoJak* (south of Jackson) as a possible contender.

There are many buildings here with the scale and authenticity to crystallize the development of a vital, specialized commercial district. On the ground floors, we would envision restaurant and entertainment uses to naturally link with and support the adjacent sports complex. This should be the place to proactively develop a cluster of live music venues, bars and clubs, and non-chain (locally owned and operated) restaurants. The presence of “nightlife” --a live music and entertainment scene for local residents (as well as tourists) can be key to attracting and retaining young singles to live and play downtown (think Austin, Texas).

On the upper floors, we would recommend encouraging the location of design-oriented business, offices and studios. Architectural and Landscape Architectural Offices, Graphics Design, Interior Design, Designer Showrooms (e.g. lighting, tile, kitchen and bath fixtures, flooring, wall covering, window treatments, etc.) should be targeted. Additionally, Photographers, Advertising Agencies, Dance Studios, Art Galleries, Artist Live/Work Studios, etc. will also likely want to settle here amongst the other design-oriented uses. (One benchmark worth noting in this regard is the transformation of Charlotte North Carolina's South End (e.g. MECA Properties creative efforts.)

For starters, perhaps the OIC and Job Corps facilities could be relocated to everybody's advantage? These uses serve valuable functions and should be continued in more suitable locations, but the buildings, themselves, represent significant renewable structures. Given proper planning and encouragement, coupled with appropriately designed in-fill buildings, the *SoJak* warehouse district could develop into a dynamic differentiating asset for Downtown Phoenix.

A dedicated Warehouse District champion should be designated from within the new Downtown Development Office to focus exclusively on making this a reality early in the planning and implementation process. This too is a high priority.

7. [Connectivity Using Oases and Urban Trails:](#)

We have put forth the concept of viewing the Downtown's many small parks, plazas, public open spaces, and fountain areas as a series of oases that could be linked to achieve greater synergy and connectivity (as well as respite from the sun). Concurrently, the Planning Department has been developing a similar idea. Now, The Urban Trails Subcommittee has offered up a very well thought out presentation for the Roosevelt NIA Steering Committee proposing a system of Urban Trails linking Oases.

The confluence of these several independently developed plans reinforces the notion that this idea has significant merit. This should be pursued and connected to the Public Arts program. Perhaps, local

museums could be persuaded to view these oases as opportunities for outreach exhibits. Think of developing the whole of Downtown Phoenix with a “museum” overlay.

Other cities have mounted programs where individual artists have decorated bulls, cows, dinosaurs, etc. that were scattered throughout the downtown. Phoenix should consider a similar program where artists could adopt Urban Trails and / or Oases. Or, because of the great number of dreadful blank walls downtown, artists might be assigned selected blank walls to “decorate” in a fashion that would make these contributors to rather than detractors from a positive, vibrant urban landscape.

8. **The Westward Ho:**

The legendary Westward Ho is a very special building in a prime location relative to *ground zero* for the new Downtown. A wonderful bit of (all-too-rare) local authenticity. Its current use is clearly not the “highest and best use” for this very significant building in this prime location (and it betrays its historical and architectural significance). [Does the existing radio antenna tower atop the Westward Ho deserve to be the dominant design feature of the Downtown Phoenix skyline, as it is at present?]

This use serves an important function but may well work better elsewhere. We would strongly encourage the City to engage in a creative effort to find a “swap-out” facility that could be more suitably located, equipped, and more effectively laid out to serve the needs of the present occupants. This gem of a building should be adaptively reused as a focal element of the emerging Downtown plan. Hopefully, this could be addressed quickly in the hope that it can be effected before the lion’s share of the current renovation plan and expenditure is implemented.

9. **Talent Development:**

As a critical economic driver in the Knowledge Economy, the ability to attract, retain and develop skilled talent is a vital economic

development resource. Public and private research, knowledge development, and advanced manufacturing enterprises seek to locate where there is an established pool of trained and experienced talent.

Currently, the Phoenix MSA lacks any distinct advantages of “thick job markets” (occupational clusters) in 4 of the 5 key industries it is targeting for economic growth: Aerospace and Aviation, Biosciences, High Technology, and Software. The only targeted industry where there may already be some existing advantage is Advanced Financial and Business Services.

While the 5 industries that have been targeted as strategic focus areas make good economic development sense on the *demand* side, there is significant weakness on the *supply* side of the equation. Without the necessary supporting cast of skilled talent, significant achievement in these areas will be destined to fail.

When viewed in the context of the Morrison Institute’s *Five Shoes Waiting to Drop on Arizona’s Future* report citing the presence of a burgeoning Latino youth population, which is undereducated, there is huge opportunity (and challenge) here.

As the Five Shoes report states: “*The bottom line: Arizona’s (read Phoenix’s) future economic well-being depends heavily on erasing the educational deficits of the state’s young Hispanic population.*” With creative effort, a potential liability can be converted to a promising asset here.

A concerted Workforce Development effort coordinating the activities of ASU, the Community Colleges, and Technical and Vocational Training Programs should be focused especially at developing skilled talent in the 5 key industry target areas. As just one example, for every PhD employed in Bioscience, 3-5 skilled supporting technicians are required. Where will they come from?

10. Phoenix as an International Downtown:

Another potential economic development opportunity which links well with the stated goals of ASU is to focus on attracting more

international economic development assets to Downtown. Phoenix already possesses a strength in Advanced Financial and Business Services which should be exploited as a competitive advantage for such an initiative.

By more aggressively pursuing business connections south of the border, The City Phoenix could be a natural base for an “international economic bridge” (and gateway) between the U.S. and Mexico and Central and South America. What would it take to truly develop this opportunity? Increased diversity too, would contribute much to a more dynamic, economically vital Downtown (think: Toronto, Vancouver or Manhattan, and especially, South Beach in Miami).

11. Neighborhood Preservation and Enhancement:

We strongly endorse the plan to preserve, protect and enhance the residential neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown. In particular, Evans-Churchill, Garfield, and Roosevelt Row should be actively nurtured to protect the current residents and to encourage the blossoming of each neighborhood’s natural character.

The formal plans for these neighborhoods should be revisited with an eye to fostering neighborhood (village) centers. *Protection* should be balanced with *enhancement*. Additionally, appropriate connectivity should be encouraged to Downtown. A minimum target of 20% affordable housing should be maintained in these neighborhoods.

Even beyond being the right thing to do, the all-important sense of community, authenticity, and diversity contributed by the vitality of these adjacent neighborhoods is an essential ingredient of a vibrant Downtown capable of attracting and retaining the full range of creative talent we need.

12. Community Participation in Planning and Implementation:

As evidenced by their commendable report, *DOWNTOWN VOICES: Listening to the People for a Change*, D-PAC (Downtown Phoenix Arts Coalition) and the other involved community organizations have

much of value to contribute to the ongoing planning and implementation process for Downtown. Transcending the rhetoric and ranting, these groups can provide valuable insight, design energy, communication and leadership to inform and energize the planning and implementation process. Wherever feasible and appropriate, the City should partner with these groups to mutual advantage. Continuing effective community participation will be essential to a successful Downtown.

The *DOWNTOWN VOICES* report enunciated nine guiding principals worthy of being summarized below:

1. **Community** - The community should be central to downtown development...
2. **Communication** - Positive change will require constant communication and connection with the downtown community and stakeholders...
3. **Aesthetics** - Design of all aspects of a development project should take into consideration the history of Phoenix and its central position in the metropolitan valley...
4. **Preservation** - Preservation of Phoenix's rich history and diversity should have an important place in the redevelopment of downtown....
5. **Mobility/Accessibility** – Downtown should incorporate a multi-modal system that allows for easy access as well as various types of transportation methods beyond the automobile, including pedestrian friendly streets, bicycle lanes and paths, and bus and rail public transportation...
6. **Diversity** – Downtown should reflect a sensitivity to the diverse ethnic, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds, along with the variation in age groups and sexual preferences, that are an important characteristic of our downtown neighborhoods...

7. **Arts/Culture** - Downtown should incorporate an already existing mainstream and growing grassroots art and cultural environment and support downtown Phoenix as a regional arts and culture center...

8. **Economic Development** - Market information of specific and current economic, social and physical conditions existing in downtown Phoenix should be utilized when discussing and planning the economic revitalization of the downtown core...

9. **Environment** - Downtown revitalization efforts should take the environment into consideration... Institutional acceptance of environmentally friendly development is critical to the preservation of precious natural resources such as efficient use of water or landscaping suitable for the Sonoran Desert climate.

13. **Shifting the Thinking Paradigms:**

A paradigm-shift in planning and development thinking must take place in all future efforts directed at Downtown Phoenix that emphasizes *density, mixed uses, shade, and pedestrian friendly streets and scale*. The design imperatives of the future are very different than the design principles that have governed past planning and development efforts. We must learn to think and build density, density, density (at least in designated cluster focus areas).

A deliberate effort should be made to re-orient and educate the City professionals (especially the Downtown In-Fill Team) who will be responsible for design, planning and implementation processes. For example, there might be an ongoing effort to invite in experienced professional urban mentors for brown-bag luncheon lectures, share case studies, make group field trips, and evolve the benchmarks and design guidelines of the *new paradigm*.

14. **Wi-Fi the Entire Downtown Phoenix:**

Students, young singles, Knowledge Economy workers, just about everyone these days, (even active retired adults) increasingly want to be connected to the Internet. Not just at work, but on a park bench, in

a coffee shop, while waiting for a train, in between classes or meetings, 24 x 7 – anywhere / anytime. A Wi-Fi enabled Downtown could be a great competitive advantage in attracting and retaining Creative Class assets. Downtown Phoenix should be an early adopter of this technology.

There is an important opportunity for Phoenix to demonstrate its progressiveness and to garner national attention by being one of the first urban areas to implement public (free) Internet access on a massive scale by covering all of Downtown. Additionally, this Wi-Fi capability should be extended to cover the entire Light Rail right-of-way from Tempe to Phoenix.

There is an additional big opportunity here. The portal that would serve as the gateway to public Internet access could be maintained by the city as a virtual showcase of what is happening downtown. This could be an effective way of generating buzz and driving markets to foster the economic growth of Downtown. Downtown housing opportunities, the local restaurant and music scene, shopping resources, cultural and sports events, job postings, etc. could all be featured in a creative “virtual interactive billboard and directory” entry portal.

Benchmark cities that are implementing exciting projects which we can learn from and emulate include: San Diego, Auckland, New Zealand, Las Vegas, Austin, New York City (Columbia University, Bryant Park, Union Square and Chelsea Piers Sports Complex), San Jose, and Washington, D.C.

15. [Improving the Schools:](#)

There seems to be general agreement that there is considerable opportunity to improve the School System and its 28-plus districts Phoenix. And commendably, ASU has indicated a significant interest in utilizing its Education Programs to this end. Though it should definitely be pursued, taking on an entire school system is a substantial challenge that will likely take a long time to bear tangible fruit.

In the meantime, we suggest that a single Downtown model school be adopted or built from scratch and that an intensive effort be devoted to creating a highly visible educational “win.” This should be publicly celebrated as a signal that Downtown, at least, can be a good place for young families. This is an important criterion for the family-oriented members of the Creative Class we increasingly want to attract and retain in Downtown.

One model worth benchmarking in this regard is the Penn-Alexander School built by the University of Pennsylvania for the Philadelphia Public School System. In a few short years, this has become a world-class inner-city school with an incredibly diverse student population.

16. [The Architecture of Shade:](#)

In order to create a pedestrian-friendly urban Downtown, shade must play a key role. Natural vegetation, location of buildings, overhangs, and creative shade structures (mega, large, and small) should all be employed to much greater advantage in Downtown Phoenix. Special attention in developing this expanded architecture of shade should be paid to the Urban Trails, Oases, and the connectivity to and around the new Light Rail Transit stations.

Again, it is important for Phoenix to embrace its position as a desert city.

17. [The Positive Virtue of Signage:](#)

Signage plays an important and valuable role in the streetscape of the urban environment. Signs can be a saucy seasoning for the urban stew. They contribute information, texture, richness, variety, and decoration to the visual landscape.

Curiously though, Downtown Phoenix is practically devoid of signs that project perpendicularly toward the street from buildings. Is this some quirky local cultural idiosyncrasy or, perhaps, the work of some extremely rigid signage regulation?

Whatever the cause, Downtown Phoenix needs a 3rd dimension -- signs, banners, kiosks, decorations, marquees, and the like to fight the sterility and boredom of the current streetscape. To add granularity. To generate character and project identity. To foster discovery and surprise. To contribute to the sense of place and to entertain, inform, distract and enliven the view.

The City should encourage retrofit signage for existing businesses and make signage a key design element of all new development activity. This can be a quick and inexpensive way to add important density, diversity and decoration to Downtown. Look at some old photographs of downtown Phoenix from the 1940s and 50s. Downtown wasn't always so neat and tidy -- so straight, sterile and seamless.

We are not advocating a Las Vegas-like approach to signage. Signs can, in truth, be excessive or overdone. We encourage the City to benchmark the best practices in use in other urban areas, and review its sign ordinance, if necessary, to ensure that it is supportive and fosters a wide range of (tasteful, appropriate, creative, diverse) signage. Encourage signs. Make it as easy, fast and inexpensive as possible to secure the necessary permits.

18. Showcase Emerging Galleries and Creative Businesses:

On a related note, we were surprised at how many galleries and studios in both the Warehouse District and, especially in Roosevelt Row, fail to effectively project their identities onto the street. Many have no signs at all and, where there are signs, too often they are understated or very small. Are these stealth art operations run by secret societies? Again, we wonder if there are City practices, prohibitions, or red tape (official or unofficial) that foster this unusual reticence?

There is an important emerging creative commercial scene in Phoenix (incipient though it may be). It deserves to be called out and celebrated. Encourage signs and banners. Foster the achievement of critical mass. Help the studios and galleries to attract attention to themselves and invite newcomers and others to join in. Ideas:

Conduct a sign and banner competition, provide grants or loans, connect designers with business owners, waive the fees for 6 months or more, perhaps, but find creative ways to accelerate the deployment of signs and banners (and other means) to shine the light on these creative businesses.

19. **Some Thoughts on Implementation:**

- a. **Prioritization, Timing and BALANCE:** Inevitably, there will be finite resources and limited staff to carry the planning for Downtown forward. It will be very important to establish priorities and timelines to achieve an effective balance.

Can the City move ahead with deliberate speed on ASU, a major new Retail initiative, a significant housing initiative, preservation and enhancement of adjacent neighborhoods, and the Warehouse District simultaneously? Spreading limited resources too thinly across too many projects may fail to achieve the all-important critical mass needed for success. But, focusing exclusively on the ASU project alone, for example, may squander other essential opportunities that need to be pursued in order to achieve the necessary synergies to make a real, 24 x 7, dynamic Downtown.

Thoughtful game planning, prioritization, staging and (above all) BALANCE will be essential ingredients of the blended Plan. Implementation should be planned in the same creative and thoughtful manner as a successful military campaign.

- b. **A Virtual Developer Role:** To differentiate Downtown Phoenix and create a unique blend of retail business, emphasis should be placed on balancing the (alas, inevitable) national chain retailers with as much **locally-owned, non-chain** restaurants, galleries, and retail uses as possible.

Who can play the role of “virtual” entrepreneur or developer in seeking out the owner-managed businesses in the Valley (and beyond) with which we would want to seed the new entertainment, restaurant, and retail development, and sell them

on the idea of locating Downtown. This role would identify those business “gems” with proven business models who might then “private label” a clone for Downtown Phoenix, relocate completely, or launch a new enterprise as serial entrepreneurs.

For example, can the Phoenix Downtown Partnership play this role and/or should the City of Phoenix secure the services of a free-lance entrepreneur who is familiar with the marketplace and knows the players? Creativity in collecting and connecting the right local people to the right projects and locations can yield enormous potential benefits. The City should consider outsourcing this critical function in a uniquely creative way.

- c. **In-Fill Team:** We understand that a Downtown In-Fill Team has been designated to review and approve all development projects. We endorse this creative restructuring designed to facilitate rapid implementation (fast track) while also ensuring consistent compliance with the overall strategic objectives and the essential emerging design standards.

It will be very important to make it easy and fast for Downtown developers to do business with the City.

- d. **Accelerating the Collecting and Connecting Function:** Timely, accurate information can act as an accelerant for urban and economic development. Knowing where the resources are and connecting decision makers to development opportunities faster can serve to “perfect” market behavior and speed up the organic development process for Downtown. A well-done portal can effectively serve this function at many levels.

An example of one such collecting and connecting service worth benchmarking is Pittsburgh’s Cool Space Locator (www.coolspacelocator.com). We would encourage the development of similar efforts in Phoenix on several fronts to give higher visibility to Downtown development and to accelerate desired market behavior. This could help:

- people locate available Downtown housing opportunities
- developers find available sites

- entrepreneurs find available spaces
- anyone know where the available “Cool Spaces” are

Again, perhaps the Downtown Phoenix Partnership (or another organization like it) could serve this function. No matter who implements these informational services, they should link to the City’s Wi-Fi portal (page 19 above).