

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



THE SPLIT-USE TREND: CREATING AND MANAGING A 24/7 DOWNTOWN

2005-06 SEASON: FORUM #2
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2005
LITTLE FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On November 2, 2005, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit “Communities By Design” hosted the second presentation of the 2005-2006 season of the Forum, with a presentation by **Jim Peters**. Mr. Peters – who is President of the Responsible Hospitality Institute – spoke about “The Split-Use Trend: Creating and Managing a 24/7 Downtown.”

For many cities, the establishment of a vibrant downtown is seen as something of a panacea. Create an active urban core and your problems will be solved, or so traditional wisdom goes. But what few people realize is that lively downtowns create a whole new set of challenges, including issues of policing and security, noise, litter and trash; gentrification and displacement. Mr. Peters’ Forum presentation focused on the trends and issues surrounding the development and more importantly, the maintenance, of active and lively downtowns.

Vibrant downtowns are anchored by what Mr. Peters calls “hospitality zones.” Hospitality zones are not just dining and entertainment districts, they also include the retail, commercial and residential uses of downtowns and the interrelationship amongst these components. Simply put, the function of hospitality zones should be to create safe places for people to socialize.

TRENDS

Bookend Generations

Three generations of people are shaping the future of the country’s downtowns: Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Millennials. Baby boomers and Millennials are shaping society and economy, while Generation X is defining the work place and urban life.

An increasing number of empty nest Baby Boomers are moving to downtowns, opting for a low-maintenance condominium over a large house in the suburbs. Generation X has become the modern urban pioneer. This group broke new cultural ground by returning to cities and forming urban tribes. Mr. Peters noted how this group's tendency to question societal norms gave rise to the unstructured corporate culture of "dot com" businesses. According to Mr. Peters, Millennials (those born after 1980) will shape the future of our country's downtowns. Millennials will also include the class of 2009, the largest graduating high school class in U.S. history.

Split-use Districts

Active downtowns feature a mix of uses that are split amongst different sets of people throughout the day. For example, the same building may have office space that is used during the day, a restaurant that is bustling in the evening and a residential loft that is occupied overnight. The ever-changing uses and crowds of split-use districts make these areas a hub of activity. Mr. Peters described how most dining and entertainment businesses have to manage two distinct customer bases, which do not resemble each other – those before and after 10:00 p.m.

Multi-use Sidewalks

Sidewalks serve a variety of functions in vibrant downtowns. From providing a locale for outdoor seating and public facilities, to creating venues for street vendors and entertainers, sidewalks are the stages upon which urban life is played out. In the words of Mr. Peters, "sidewalks, in and of themselves, are becoming districts." Mr. Peters encouraged the audience to appreciate the value of sidewalks as a necessity for promoting lively and attractive street life.

Displacement

The success of a downtown may often lead to gentrification, a higher cost of living, and displacement of residents. Displacement is a serious concern for downtowns because it can reduce the supply of affordable housing for workers and limit the cultural diversity of an area.

District Life Cycles

As downtown districts evolve, the service needs of the area will change as well. Cities should understand this evolution and respond accordingly. Mr. Peters used the example of Athens, Georgia to highlight a city that adjusted successfully to the changing needs of its downtown. For many years, Athens had a trash service that picked up on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This service was adequate until an increase in the number of restaurants in the downtown left garbage rotting out in the streets. The City of Athens responded to this problem by changing the frequency and timing of its trash service so that it was more appropriate for restaurant uses.

Concierge Government

In many ways, cities serve as a host for the public. Cities would be wise to apply this "concierge government" or "how can I help you" mentality to assisting businesses through the often confusing permitting process. By creating "one stop shops" with all of the regulatory information in one place, cities can simplify the permitting process in order to facilitate new development.

ISSUES

Economic Assessment

Evening and late night dining and entertainment businesses make a significant contribution to the economic health and social fabric of a community. Mr. Peters stressed the importance of assessing these benefits in order to maintain a healthy and sustainable mix of uses. But this evaluation should not be based on numbers alone. As Mr. Peters noted, the impact of 500 people in one nightclub isn't the same thing as 100 people at five different cafes.

Traffic and Pedestrian Safety

Handling traffic and pedestrian safety in hospitality zones is often more complicated during the evening and late night hours as compared with the daytime. Large pedestrian crowds spilling out of clubs and onto the street, drunk drivers, limited transit services, and a shortage of taxicabs combine to create a logistical challenge for cities. Mr. Peters suggested creating educational programs to educate businesses and patrons about responsible hospitality and transportation.

Meeting the Needs of Locals

Tourism can be a great way to support the economy of a downtown. But Mr. Peters warned about abandoning local patrons in favor of tourists and outside visitors. The downtown area should reflect the values and culture of the local community. In Austin, promotional campaigns advertising inexpensive drinks helped to change what was once an attractive hospitality zone into a district dominated by bars that catered only to college-age crowds.