

## ***Summary of Interviews with Historic Downtown Core Stakeholders***

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## Project Memorandum

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To Courtney Knox, City of Salem

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Subject Summary notes: September 16, 2010 meeting/interviews with Historic Downtown Core Stakeholders

Project No. 5048

## Summary of Meeting Notes

### OPENING DIALOGUE

- Salem hasn't had a clear vision for Downtown in many years. Downtown Salem's identity should reflect the beauty and uniqueness of the Willamette Valley, our unique, distinctive history and local climate.
- "Revitalization" strategy infers that Salem is not vibrant. It's a term that insults the many successful businesses Downtown. "Enhancement" strategy is preferable.
- In the past Downtown Salem was more vibrant. People used to shop downtown on the weekends.
- Over the years Downtown hasn't changed that much. It's the other areas around Downtown that have grown. There are many more options now. Downtown hasn't done anything wrong.
- Downtown buildings/stores haven't changed or been updated to reflect how people's shopping and lifestyle choices have changed.
- Two-hour parking limits are wrong! Bad for the environment and an inconvenience that is bad for business. (2)
- Parking is not a big issue. You pay a lot more to park in Downtown Portland. Salem's loss of the uniqueness and availability of an interesting and unique shopping experience is the biggest challenge. There is lots of duplication in stores today and it's hard to find a unique shopping experience. People don't think there are unique places to shop Downtown – so they travel to Portland.
- Would like to see more than coffee shops and bars Downtown. We don't want to be like everyone else, with all the same chains.
- There should be a limit on the number of franchises in Downtown (e.g., two Starbucks on the same street). We need to attract more unique, independent stores.
- It might not be good to limit or exclude certain franchises.
- People are looking for something different.

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- You need to find ways to support small businesses Downtown – businesses that can't afford to market/brand like the larger chains and franchises.
- We don't have an organization that bands small businesses together. No joint marketing effort in place.

## PROJECT IDEAS

- Work with the City to get rid of the code that permits parking lots on the ground floor. This creates a dead zone.
- Develop more pocket parks – small parks that serve as green spaces and places for people to drink coffee, dine, etc.
- Develop a venue like Seattle's Pike Street Market, a permanent facility with indoor and outdoor vendor spaces. It's got to be more than your typical farmer's market.
- Install more benches, street furniture, drinking fountains and other streetscape amenities (x 4).
- Nonprofits could enhance the vibrancy of Downtown. Involve nonprofits in planning/hosting of events on weekends and after hours, and at times when it is difficult for small shop owners to be involved. They could also provide important education and social services.
- Nonprofits have a hard time paying Downtown rents. Is there a way to subsidize rents so that nonprofits can have a stronger presence Downtown?
- Would it be possible to create a facility that houses multiple nonprofits under one roof – a one-stop shop of sorts?
- Create a streamline permitting process to enable rapid entitlement and promote the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized second floors. Create a guidebook to educate property owners on how to get through the permitting process.
- To encourage growth, widen streets and increase sidewalks widths. Create an environment where people want to visit/live/work.
- Signage: identify different districts/sub districts and connect them with signage (e.g., the cultural district, the North End, etc.).
- Create and enhance connections to adjacent neighborhoods. Focus on linkages - common design features, multimodal access improvements and bike/ped amenities.
- Two-way streets are important for retail.
- A new community boat/dock facility would enhance connections to the Riverfront and appeal to a variety of community groups (dragon boats, Willamette University, etc.).

## OTHER THOUGHTS

- Mixed feelings about the kiosks that used to be Downtown.
- There used to be a more coordinated effort (including a tax imposed) to fund the upkeep of flower boxes, kiosks and other streetscape features.
- The City has not been very helpful about planning Downtown.
- The City has good intentions and wants to improve Downtown.
- Parking meters are not conducive to business activity.
- The City's decision to close one of the entrances to the Riverfront Park (near Boise Cascade site) will create negative economic growth and have a negative impact on

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Downtown businesses, especially those in the historic core (concern echoed by several stakeholders).

- The City has closed (or is planning to close?) the connection to Riverfront Park at the Carousel and needs to keep that connection open.
- The City doesn't care about the negative impacts that the closure of the park entrance and moving of the access point will impact Downtown businesses.
- The City prevents a lot of good things from happening because of codes that are too complicated.
- Downtown needs to be the center of the most dense activity center. The cultural core should be more vibrant than it is today.
- There is huge potential to draw students to Downtown. Students have dollars to spend. Focus on projects that enhance the "Town/Gown" connection.
- There are not many connections to the African American cultures, although African Americans played a significant role in the development of the State of Oregon and major cities such as Portland and Salem. There is a group working to open an African American cultural center and museum in Downtown Salem, to share the history of African Americans in Oregon. The facility would ideally be a multi-use facility. No site has been identified yet.
- There is a dysfunctional relationship between the City and Downtown businesses. So, perhaps it is not a good time to spend urban renewal dollars until the relationship becomes more functional. The City should take the time to create a more meaningful dialogue with business owners before moving ahead with major public investments.
- The Downtown Action Plan is viewed as a placating of small businesses by the City.
- We need a true organization that represents Downtown businesses.
- Most business owners don't believe Go Downtown represents their interests.
- Don't forget about the core. Even though it may be easier to redevelop the North Downtown area, it's important that investments be made in the historic core, too.
- Salem has no community radio station. It would be create if the City could find a way to create a space that could house small nonprofits on a limited budget.