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It's the End of Downtown As We Know It Make Way for Downtown Rising — the 2nd, Second Century Plan

By Lisa Ann Thomson, 3/29/2007 1:50:27 PM MST

With a new vision for downtown, Salt Lake City is seizing the day like there's no tomorrow — and planning for tomorrow like today is old news.

It's 11 a.m. and you are just getting to City Creek Canyon for a bike ride. You hop on the trail and head down. Your destination is the Jordan River.

It's not long before you get into downtown. The trail takes you past a complex of high rises adorned with flags. You immediately recognize it as Utah's World Trade Center and know that's the place to be for businesses that want to be global. The complex is full to capacity.

You pass trolley cars and TRAX stops with people shuttling here and there — to The Gateway, to the City Creek Center, to Central Station. You have your own generous bike path to take you past the throngs as you make your way through town.

Along the way, you cycle through tree-lined streets and pass parks and plazas where people are pushing strollers or working on their laptops. You aren't inclined to stop today, but if you needed a break, you could stop at any number of delis or street vendors to grab a bottle of water or a quick snack.

A large market is coming up. It's a vibrant permanent market where vendors sell almost anything — farmers' produce, art and jewelry, boutique clothing, African imports, cuts of steak. You make a mental list of the things you need to pick up at the market on another day.

Before you leave the downtown core to meet up with the Jordan River trail, your ride takes you past a large marquee and you remember that you need to get home in time to shower and catch TRAX back. Tonight you have plans to dine at your favorite spot in the Broadway District and then catch "Wicked" as the national tour stops at Salt Lake's new theatre.

If the people behind Downtown Rising have their way, this is the downtown you'll experience in the next five, 10 or 20 years. It will be the capital of the state and the heart of the valley. It will also be an economic center that will strengthen every community within hundreds of miles.

"The strength of the town is the strength of the 'burbs," says Curtis Bennett, vice president of retail operations for O.C. Tanner and a member of the committee charged with envisioning downtown Salt Lake's future. "If it's strong here, it's strong out there."

With unprecedented investment slated for downtown and ample precedent of previous generations successfully laying out plans for the city's future, the Salt Lake Chamber, and its affiliate the Downtown Alliance, found the time to be right for another round of long-range planning. With a vision due for release any day, they discovered that this time around it was more than an exercise in intensive goal-setting: It has become a movement.

The Precedent

Salt Lake has always been a master-planned community. The pioneers who settled the Salt Lake Valley made a master plan for the city almost from the day they arrived. That's one of the reasons our city, with its numbered grid system, doesn't resemble London or Boston — cities whose streets were laid where the cows trod. Salt Lake City's growth and development was deliberate as part of a master vision set out by the city's founding fathers.

So it's no surprise that in the 1960s business leaders were motivated to develop a Second Century Plan — named for the second century of the city's existence. The creators of the plan envisioned a city of the 20th century and published their findings as a large two-sided poster that called for a convention center, cultural arts offerings, a farmers market, main street improvements, government complexes, and modern transportation.

In the decades that followed, you can see where the vision led: the Salt Palace Convention Center, Abravanel Hall, Main Street Plaza, the courts complex, a summer farmers market, and TRAX, among other things.

With these obvious successes, the city is ready to set the stage for success in the 21st century. The official name and tagline of the plan is "Downtown Rising: Inspired by the Second Century Plan." But this isn't your father's or



great-grandfather's plan. From the diversity of the committee members to the sophisticated planning tools available, Downtown Rising takes its inspiration from previous successes and embraces the opportunities of a new century.

"Downtown Rising was initially to be primarily about the Second Century Plan, but in the ensuing months, it has become much, much more. It has become a movement — an expression of a downtown on the rise," says Natalie Gochnour, vice president of policy and communications for the Salt Lake Chamber and point person for the Downtown Rising efforts.

The Opportunity

The committee behind Downtown Rising is clear about one thing: Downtown Rising was not conceived of to thwart impending doom. Much the opposite, in fact.

"Over the next five years there will be more investment in downtown than we've ever had," points out Gochnour. "That includes the ramp up to the 2002 Olympic games."

If you've been downtown recently you'll see how obvious that estimated \$2 billion investment already is. First, there's the juggernaut: The City Creek Center being developed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on three city blocks between South Temple and 100 South. The plan is to redevelop 20 acres into retail, business, and living space, and it is expected to be completed in 2011. The project is estimated to cost \$1 billion and will not use any public funds nor church member tithing funds.

"What the LDS Church is doing downtown is quite extraordinary. It's something for all of us to build on," says Clint Ensign, senior vice president of the Sinclair Companies, which owns more than 50 acres of land downtown as well as the Grand America and Little America Hotels.

The building is already happening. The Boyer Company and Fidelity Investments have sponsored The Gateway Tower and Fidelity Investments Building on 400 West. The seven floors will total 230,000 square feet where Fidelity will be the sole tenant. The company expects to move in May.

The Wasatch group of companies and Hamilton Partners have teamed to build downtown's latest high rise. The project, informally called 222 South Main, will add 430,000 square feet of office space on 21 floors to downtown. The project is anticipated to be ready for occupancy by 2009.

Which is none too soon, according to the 2006 Year End Market Report compiled by NAI Utah, a commercial real estate services firm. Class A office space downtown is at an incredibly scant .94 percent vacancy rate, and lease rates for Class A space downtown run at a premium of about \$1.50 per square foot more than similar space in the suburbs. In addition, retail vacancy rates are at a five-year low, and the Wasatch Front is seeing the strongest residential rental market in 10 years.

Other projects downtown include: The Metro Condos, a 117-unit residential development offering condos and live/work units; The Leonardo, an art, culture, and science center to be located in the old main library on Library Square; and Salt Lake's central station, which will be the junction of commuter rail, TRAX, and bus lines.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to determine our destiny," Bennett says. "I don't think any of us going into the project understood the scope of the opportunities — they are even greater than we thought."

The Vision

Official efforts for Downtown Rising began in May 2006. The Salt Lake Chamber spear-headed the process, which organized business, community, and political leaders as well as technical experts into a handful of committees and several subcommittees to study such areas as transportation, urban living, arts and culture, hospitality, business and economic development, and global appeal. The public was also engaged through focus groups, surveys, interviews, and comment solicitation.

With input from so many sectors, the primary committee learned one thing: "There was a hunger for a common vision and a need for it," Gochnour says.

From the innumerable ideas about what the common vision should be, the committee was able to cull through the suggestions and studies to draft a conceptual plan. The draft was publicly released last August through a 32-page newspaper insert and a Web site. The response in the public comment period that followed was overwhelmingly positive and constructive, says Gochnour, pointing out that surveys showed 86 percent liked what they saw.

So with confidence that the plan is striking a chord, the Salt Lake Chamber is ready to release the final vision. The final plan will be released on March 21st and will include a poster, a 32-page booklet, a Web site, artistic renderings, and promotional videos.

The final plan is designed around four building blocks: Beautiful, Green, Prosperous, and Community Focused. Within that framework, Downtown Rising makes specific recommendations for achieving these goals.

For instance, as part of creating a prosperous downtown, Downtown Rising supports the establishment of a World Trade Center building in Salt Lake. There is a network of more than 300 World Trade Centers worldwide, and a

World Trade Center in Utah would connect the state to more than 750,000 private businesses in more than 90 countries.

It would also be a launching pad for further global interaction, which Downtown Rising also recommends, including the development of a global exchange place and expanded international education opportunities.

Community-focused recommendations include the creation of character districts that reflect Salt Lake's unique neighborhoods and encourages clustering of activities. Proposed districts include a Broadway District, located around 300 South, which emphasizes dining and nightlife; the Skyline District on the east side of downtown, which includes many of the city's high rises; and a Salt Palace District, which encompasses the Salt Palace, EnergySolutions Arena, potentially the Global Exchange Complex and hotels.

As part of creating a more green and more beautiful city, Downtown Rising advocates a stronger range-to-river connection, capitalizing on Salt Lake's dramatic natural setting.

"Salt Lake really is what people only think Denver is — a city in the mountains," says Scott Beck, president and CEO of the Salt Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau and cabinet member of Downtown Rising.

Recommendations include creating trails and other range-to-river connections, extending the urban forest onto the streetscape, creating a park that borders the freeway as well as other city parks and plazas, and encouraging environmentally friendly building and development.

The plan also supports more downtown housing, a permanent public market, better accommodations for local foot traffic, a new performing arts center, the cultivation of higher education centers in the downtown core and extensive transportation improvements.

"Downtown Salt Lake City is the historic, welcoming, and naturally beautiful gathering place for the intermountain region and for visitors worldwide," Gochnour says. "The vision of Downtown Rising is to build on and amplify this role as a commercial, cultural, and literal crossroads by enhancing those attributes that make downtown distinct."

The Implementation

If you compare the artistic renderings of the Second Century Plan with what was actually built, you can see that the realization of the specifics were very different than initially imagined. But the big picture was realized in many significant ways, and that's the attitude behind Downtown Rising.

"They planted all the seeds. The tree that grew was very different, but it grew," Gochnour says. That's why some recommendations in Downtown Rising are very specific — like the World Trade Center building and an expanded downtown rail system — and some recommendations are more philosophical — like quality design and environmental responsibility.

The nurture of these seeds, Gochnour points out, will involve the commitment of city and state governments, local businesses and the community at large.

"It takes political will, money and accommodations on the parts of businesses and property owners to make it happen," Gochnour says. "The business community will be a big part of making this happen, but it will require the support of the city and the state as well."

"A lot of things are things that might have happened anyway, but they wouldn't have been done in this framework," points out Brenda Case Scheer, dean of the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Utah. Scheer's students were heavily involved in the design and architectural aspects of Downtown Rising.

To keep the business community engaged, those who served on committees for Downtown Rising have been invited to sign a compact as a statement of their commitment to the vision and their promise of personal efforts to see that it becomes reality. In many cases it will ultimately be up to businesses to decide to pursue projects that fit within the framework — be it opening a restaurant in the Broadway District, developing more office space in the Skyline District, or subsidizing a downtown shuttle system.

"It's already given me useful perspective on other people's vision and expertise and how they view downtown and where they see groupings of things," says Sinclair's Ensign. "All of that is very helpful for us as proposals are brought to us about using our vacant land for various purposes. I have a better feel for what I should recommend and what I shouldn't recommend."

The city and state will also play an important role. For instance, in January the city released its draft proposal of a major transit overhaul to downtown, which was based on a seven-month study that ultimately called for better walking and biking options, a downtown loop for TRAX, and improved parking options. It's up to the city council and the Utah Transit Authority to adopt the proposal, and it will be up to the city and state to fund the improvements.

The Salt Lake Chamber has taken steps to help facilitate the long process of construction and development in the coming years. At the request of the Chamber, the city recently added a requirement that all construction projects use a construction wrap — a covering for construction barricades that clearly features information about the

project, artistic renderings of the finished product, and contact information for the developers. Each site will also be required to have "windows" or openings through which passers by can peek on the progress.

"The whole idea is that as someone moves around downtown during this period of intense investment, they see a downtown that is being recreated," Gochnour says.

In addition, the Chamber has hired an ombudsman to help mitigate construction-related issues businesses around construction may face — from utility problems to transportation and parking issues to signage and access.

But with the momentum and enthusiasm currently surrounding downtown, the creators of Downtown Rising also point out that the ultimate vision will not be achieved in five years or even 10.

"Like the Second Century Plan, some of their visions weren't realized until 30 or 40 years later," Gochnour says. "We think of our visioning work as a 50-year timeline. We plant the seeds for this to happen, and some of them will grow early on and some of them will take several decades to become a reality."

So as many today can't remember life before the Salt Palace, those behind Downtown Rising hope generations to come will think downtown Salt Lake has always had a lush path from City Creek Canyon to the Jordan River; that they've always been called the Gateway District and the Skyline District; that the best way to get through downtown has always been to use TRAX; and that the World Trade Center has always been the best place in Utah to use your language skills and business degree. See more at www.downtownrising.com.

SIDEBAR 1:

Recommendations of Second Century Plan:

- * Main Street improvements
- * State Street improvements
- * Block interiors
- * Convention/Cultural Center
- * Visitors Center
- * Art Museum and Gallery
- * Memory Grove Cultural Area
- * Farmers Market
- * LDS Church improvements
- * City/County government complexes

SIDEBAR 2:

Accomplishments Since the Second Century Plan:

- * Salt Palace Convention Center
- * Abravanel Hall
- * Farmers Market
- * Main Street Plaza
- * City Creek Park
- * Utah Museum of Art and History
- * Visitors Center
- * Courts Complex
- * TRAX
- * Mid-block street crossings
- * Intermodal Hub

SIDEBAR 3:

Key Recommendations of Downtown Rising

- * World Trade Center
- * Character districts
- * Range-to-river connection
- * Performing Arts Center
- * University City
- * Permanent public market
- * Metropolitan sports and fitness center
- * State-of-the-art transportation
- * Excellent urban design
- * Parkways and trails
- * More urban living
- * Economic anchor
- * Environmentally responsible

SIDEBAR 4:

What's Already Happening

- * City Creek Center

- * 222 South Main
- * Metro Condominiums
- * Salt Lake Central Station
- * The Leonardo
- * Federal Court House
- * Transit plan
- * Gateway Office Tower
- * LDS Business College/BYU Salt Lake Center

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