



Blueprint for the Future

Changing the face of Utah's capital city By Jeremy Pugh

In 1979 New York City's Bryant Park was a den of crime and a haven for drug dealers. The park, in the heart of Manhattan, across the street from the main branch of the iconic New York Public Library, was derelict, adrift in the sea of poor public policy that was drowning the Big Apple. In the early 1980s the city and the Rockefeller Foundation stepped in. The football-field-size lawn was updated with lunchtime kiosks, tables, and chairs. A concert series was created and historical tours highlighting the long life of the park were offered. The events, tours, landscaping, and outdoor dining amenities brought people back to the park, which is the simplest solution to salvaging a forlorn urban space.

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson thinks about Bryant Park often when he passes by our own Pioneer Park.

"Bryant Park was transformed from a dangerous place where the public never ventured to the most popular park in the city," Anderson says. "Pioneer Park could be jammed night and day 12 months of the year but right now it looks like the killing fields most of the time down there. In terms of perception and safety all you have to do is visit the Farmers' Market. Now that's only for a few hours on Saturday for a few months but it provides a really

great example of how when you draw a lot of people there it's perfectly safe. It can be a major gathering place."

Anderson's aspirations for Pioneer Park are just one example of the type of thinking that is coming to the fore in the evolving discussion about downtown Salt Lake City. The Salt Lake Chamber started the talk a year ago with its Downtown Rising effort. This, coupled with the LDS Church's much-needed demolition of the ZCMI Center and Crossroads Plaza to make way for the City Creek Center, is acting as a catalyst that will literally change the face of the city. But creating a livable and exciting urban environment is about more than major developments. It's about vision and identity.

What is Salt Lake? It's the world headquarters for the LDS Church, it's the site of the 2002 Winter Games, it's an outdoorsy and young city nestled amid spectacular mountains. But it's certainly no San Francisco, Chicago, or Boston. And New York? Fughetta about it. Right now it's a city on the verge of growing up.

Because of the strong LDS Church presence (its history is essentially the history of the city) there is a tendency for Utahns to assume that it will always be taken care of. And to a certain extent it will be. The church isn't going to allow its spiritual and organizational center to deteriorate. While that protection has greatly benefited downtown, it also has its downside. The church's indirect influence over public policy, specifically its emphasis on temperance, makes navigating discussions about nightlife and the much sought after "entertainment district" difficult.

Mayor Anderson puts it bluntly: "We

have absurd and anachronistic liquor laws. They drive tourists away and we know the perceptions people have of Utah because of some of these absurd laws. It's going to take the LDS Church saying it's OK to change."

And thus it has fallen on business leaders, government, and citizens to go beyond the church's vision for its own properties and add in the rest of the pieces of the puzzle. But balancing public and private interests along with the concerns of property right-holders becomes a high-wire act all its own. What all concerned need to do, according to Envision Utah planner Ted Knowlton, is forget suburban planning notions primarily built on the convenience for the car.

"Great downtowns across the country all have a unique character," he says. "They're special places and spots people want to be. But most of them are really crappy places to park. They may be inconvenient often but people are happy to put up with it because they're so exceptional."

The unveiled Downtown Rising blueprint is an attempt to bring some a cohesive vision to the fore. Natalie Gochnour, vice president of policy and communications for the Salt Lake Chamber, recognizes that the recommendations are just a starting point but creating a vibrant capital city has ramifications for the entire region.

"There is an under appreciation for the importance of our central city to the economic health of the state," Gochnour says. "People who come and visit here don't remember us for our suburbs. They remember us for our city. We don't want to be a doughnut—vibrant suburbs with a hole in the middle. The worst thing that could happen is that your suburbs are suburbs to nothing."

special foldout section >>

The Big Picture

A look at what's coming and what might be for SLC

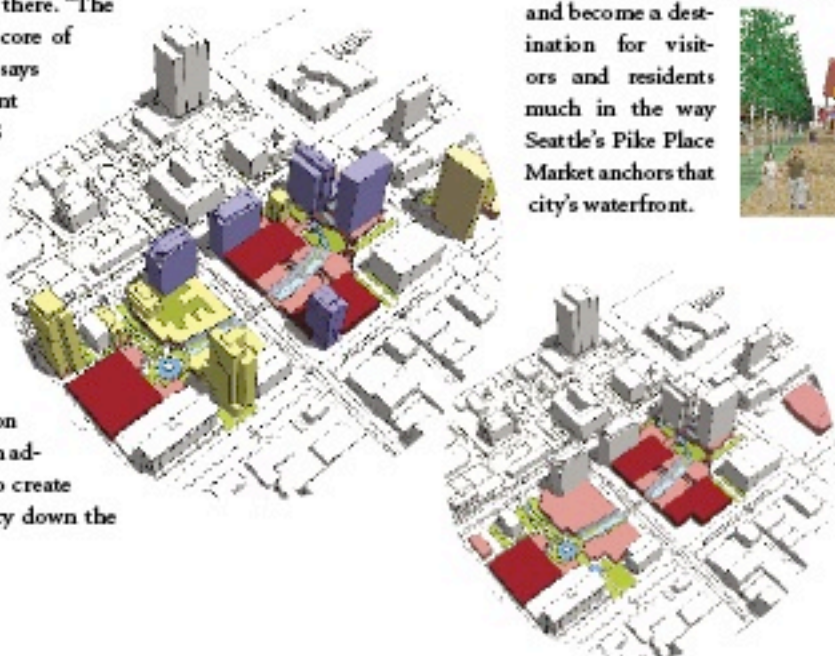
City Creek Center

Last year, the LDS Church began bringing down the Crossroads Plaza and ZCMI Center malls. In their place, it will build a housing and retail center that will include high-rise condos, an outdoor shopping center, a grocery store, and underground parking. The church will also re-establish the legacy streets that used to crisscross the 20-acre area, turning two blocks into eight and "daylight" City Creek, which currently runs beneath the city streets.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' signature downtown properties include: Temple Square, Church Office Building, Joseph Smith Memorial building, Main Street Plaza, Church History Library, Triad Center, the Conference Center and the under construction City Creek Project that will revitalize the area below South Temple where Crossroads Plaza and the ZCMI Center were located.

The church and Salt Lake City are intrinsically intertwined. The church built this city and it is the seat of its international organization. Visitors come from around the globe to see Temple Square and the surrounding city. Keeping Salt Lake City healthy is essential to the church's image and it has shown an unflinching commitment, sometimes controversial as the furor over the Main Street Plaza demonstrated, to maintaining the area around its most important properties. With City Creek Center, the church will revitalize a moribund area to the south of its campus, guarantee vibrant surroundings and will have a deciding say in how business is conducted there. "The importance of vibrancy at the core of a city is absolutely necessary," says William Gibbons, president of Property Reserve, the LDS Church's real estate investment arm. "With Temple Square and the international headquarters of the church here, we obviously have a strong commitment and permanent commitment to this particular location."

Vision for downtown: "Our vision is to have a compatible long-term adjacency to Temple Square and to create a commercial economic vibrancy down the Main Street corridor."



Intermodal Hub/Light Rail

The construction of light rail to the new Intermodal Transit hub began in September of last year. Expected completion for the project is early 2008. The light rail will provide a direct connection to the commuter rail at the Intermodal Hub. Throughout the construction process, pedestrian and vehicular access to businesses located along the construction corridor will be guaranteed, along with access to parking. When complete, light rail, commuter rail, and buses will serve this new Salt Lake station.



Public Market

Planners envision a permanent public market on the northern end of Pioneer Park. Already the summertime Farmers Market has brought bustling activity to the once-moribund park. Creating permanent market space across from the successful Caputo's Deli would ideally build on the success of the Farmers' Market and become a destination for visitors and residents much in the way Seattle's Pike Place Market anchors that city's waterfront.



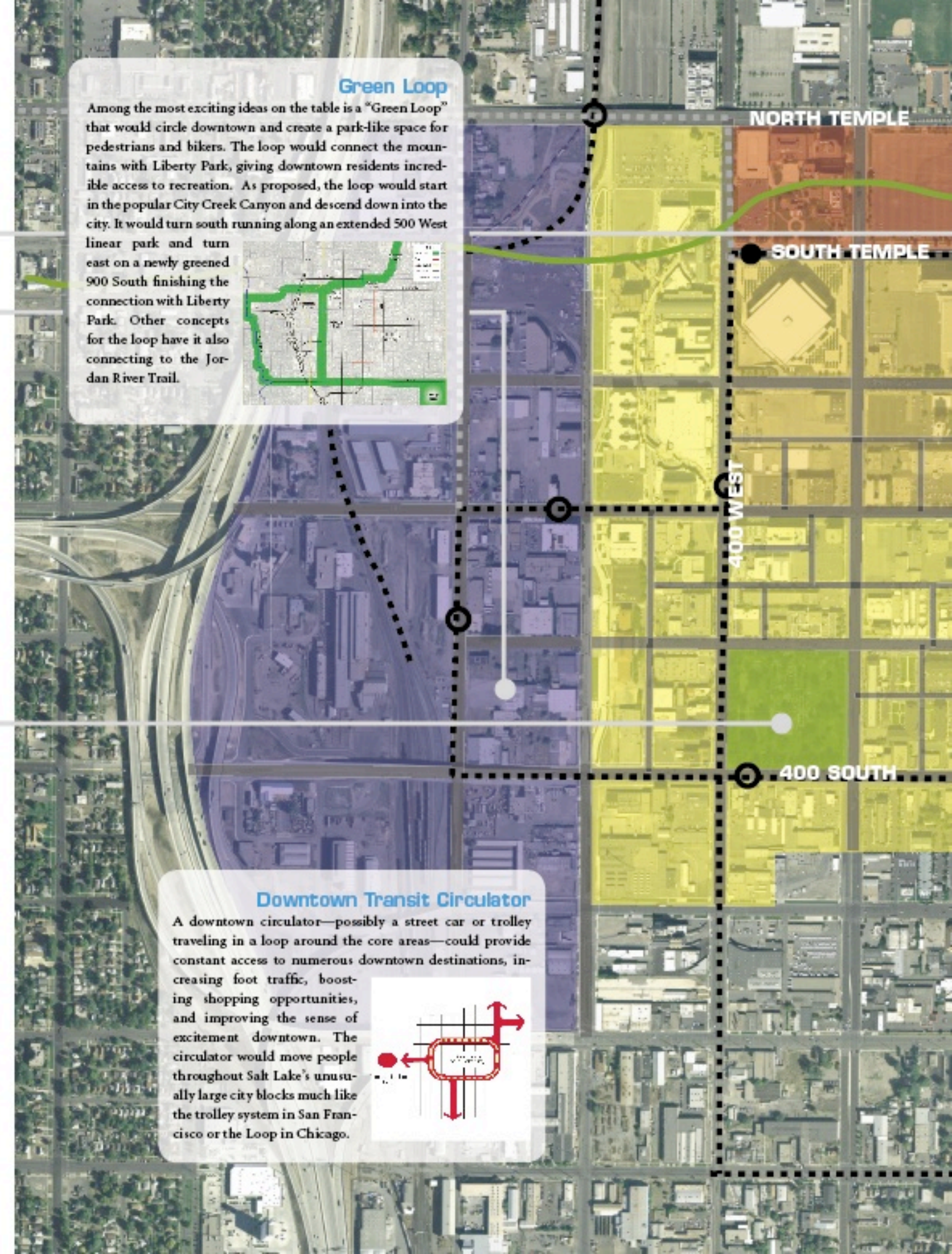
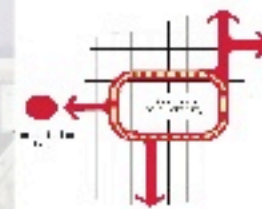
Green Loop

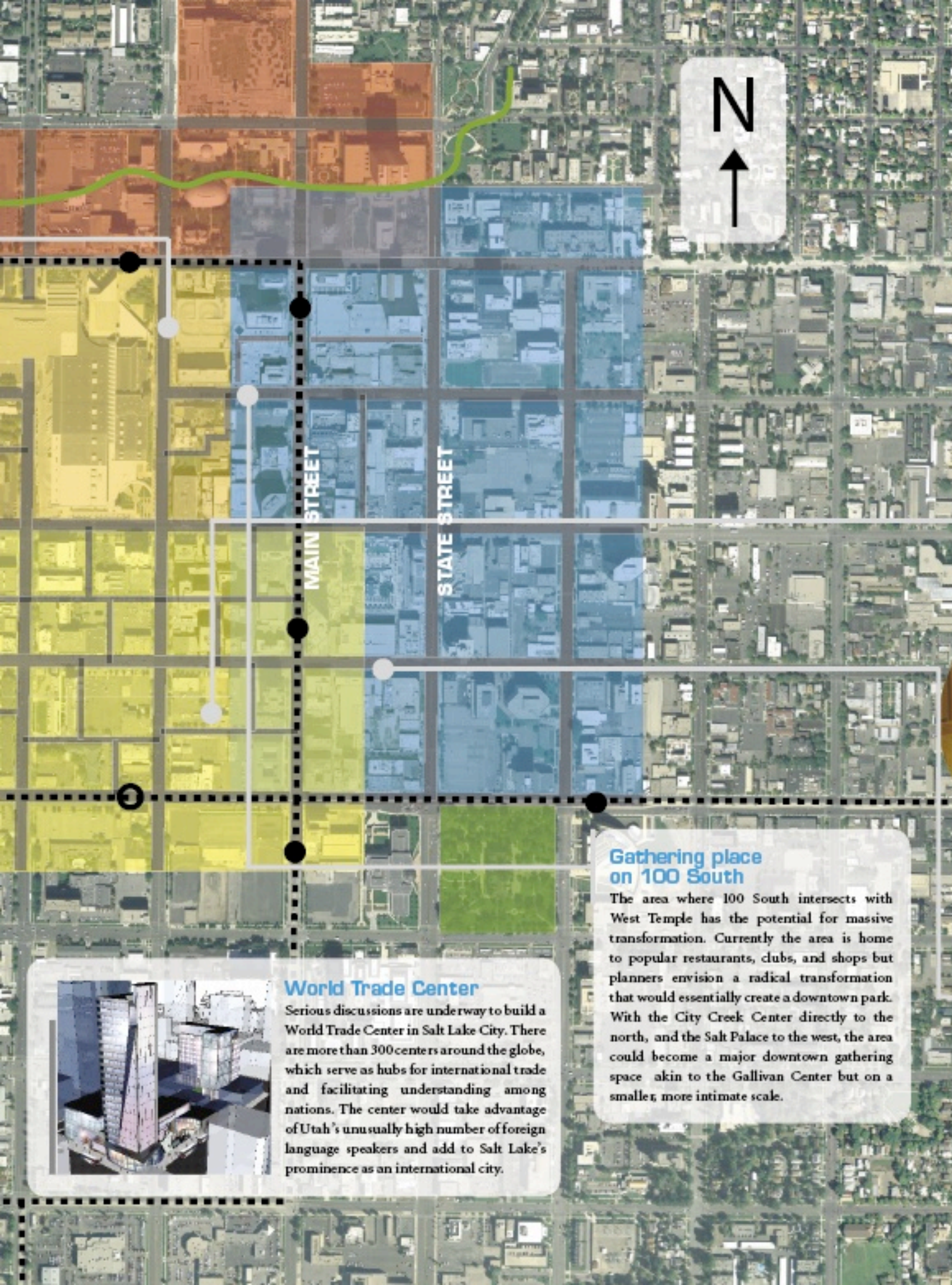
Among the most exciting ideas on the table is a "Green Loop" that would circle downtown and create a park-like space for pedestrians and bikers. The loop would connect the mountains with Liberty Park, giving downtown residents incredible access to recreation. As proposed, the loop would start in the popular City Creek Canyon and descend down into the city. It would turn south running along an extended 500 West linear park and turn east on a newly greened 900 South finishing the connection with Liberty Park. Other concepts for the loop have it also connecting to the Jordan River Trail.



Downtown Transit Circulator

A downtown circulator—possibly a street car or trolley traveling in a loop around the core areas—could provide constant access to numerous downtown destinations, increasing foot traffic, boosting shopping opportunities, and improving the sense of excitement downtown. The circulator would move people throughout Salt Lake's unusually large city blocks much like the trolley system in San Francisco or the Loop in Chicago.





Mapping the city's unique districts

The Hub (purple): Embracing the industrial infrastructure of the western wedge of downtown, this area becomes home to artists, high-tech businesses, and the associated housing. Green space will link these neighborhoods together and provide a buffer against the freeway to the west.

Broadway District (yellow): Third South becomes the vibrant center of pedestrian nightlife for the city. Restaurants, clubs, hotels, and pathways make these blocks a vital part of the downtown experience. Proximity to theaters,

hotels, and the convention center help maintain a steady influx of pedestrian traffic.

Temple Square District (red): The LDS Corridor is extending west, with an educational component, an opportunity exists to link Temple Square with the new LDS Business College and BYU Extension Campuses in the old Triad Center Complex.

Salt Palace District (orange): The district has large-capacity spaces such as the Delta Center, Salt Palace, and the Global Exchange Complex. Hotels

also are an integral component in this area to provide rooms for visitors to the city and, most important, Salt Palace conventions.

The Skyline (blue): This district is home to big corporations, banking, upscale shops, and high-rise living. Financial businesses and developments become the framework for downtown living, dining, and shopping. This is the premier housing, business, and shopping district of Salt Lake City, the most prominent feature in its urban landscape, and downtown's defining element.

Federal Courthouse

The Frank E. Moss Courthouse can no longer meet the needs of the United States Federal Court System and will be replaced by a new courthouse on the same site. The

U.S. District Courthouse will house the U.S. District Court, U.S. Probation, and the U.S. Marshall's service. The site will cover three acres and encompass the entire block between 300 and 400 South, and Main and West Temple. It will be 397,188 square feet and include nine district and five magistrate courtrooms with chambers and office support. The project is scheduled to begin construction in 2009 and be completed in 2011.

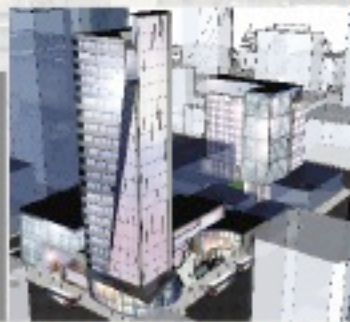


Gathering place on 100 South

The area where 100 South intersects with West Temple has the potential for massive transformation. Currently the area is home to popular restaurants, clubs, and shops but planners envision a radical transformation that would essentially create a downtown park. With the City Creek Center directly to the north, and the Salt Palace to the west, the area could become a major downtown gathering space akin to the Gallivan Center but on a smaller, more intimate scale.

World Trade Center

Serious discussions are underway to build a World Trade Center in Salt Lake City. There are more than 300 centers around the globe, which serve as hubs for international trade and facilitating understanding among nations. The center would take advantage of Utah's unusually high number of foreign language speakers and add to Salt Lake's prominence as an international city.



Dream projects

Many of the concepts under discussion were visualized by a graduate student studio at the University of Utah under Brenda Scheer, Dean of the College of Architecture and Planning. Some of the students' work aimed pretty high. Here's a few of the ideas.

Gym

When the LDS Church, demolished the Desert Gym to make way for its conference center at the corner of Main and North Temple, the city lost a key gathering space. Student designers envision a downtown gym and surrounding athletic fields that would serve the downtown residential population and the students attending LDS Business College and the BYU extension campus.



Park Avenue

New York City is the model for this transformation of 200 East, a low-traffic road in its current state. Building green strips down its middle, the emphasis would be on high-end, high-rise housing to create a beautiful boulevard.

Broadway-style Theater & Performing Arts Center

The Rose Wagner and Capitol Theatre already serve as anchors for the 300 South area of restaurants. There has been much discussion about building a Broadway-class theater nearby. The theater would be up to standards required by touring shows and would provide a world-class performing arts space to attract a new level of talent and performance to Salt Lake City. Comparisons have been made with the Denver Performing Arts Center.

