



CENTER CITY

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Citizens Seek Elaboration of Downtown Plan

by
Carol Coletta

Immediate housing with the necessary amenities, tax breaks for new development, and a comprehensive transportation center for downtown were some of the concerns that emerged in a question and answer session held last week on the Marcou, O'Leary study for proposed downtown redevelopment.

Clay Huddleston, the city's Chief Administrative Officer, Norman Brewer, Downtown Council Manager, and Charles Shipp, project coordinator for Mid-America Mall, fielded questions from members of the Downtown Task Forces. The Meeting in the National Bank of Commerce auditorium was arranged by the River Landing Task Force.

Gerald Dunn, an architect on that task force, opened the discussion questioning whether the proposed projects in the Plan, such as the galleria, would happen if parallel development in the central business district were not taking place. He cited housing as an immediate need and advocated the use of special zoning districts and tax increments to achieve the level of development called for. Huddleston replied that the Plan should serve as a catalyst. He predicted that in the total spectrum, the Plan represents about one-fifth of the development that should occur in the next two decades.

Both Huddleston and Brewer were aware of methods being used in other cities to provide breaks for developers, some of which are now being studied to determine whether under the state's constitution they are legal. They agreed that significant government involvement and commitment would be vital.

The priority given to the Mall was another topic of discussion. The panel reported that in cities where malls have been built retail sales are up in almost every case. Louisville's River City Mall, for instance, had 18 vacancies when it opened. Now, just a year later, there are only four.

"With 37,000 people working downtown, our mall can take advantage of the people who are here daily," Shipp said. "By changing the use of street space and programming activities on the mall, we can hopefully get them out of their towers in mid-day. It could change the whole character of downtown. We also have a Mid-town population that downtown should be serving."

Because transportation is so important to the life of downtown and the city, task force members questioned future plans for Memphis mass transit.

"We don't have anything," Huddleston said. "We are at zero. I think Memphis mass transit should stay on rubber tires. We have \$100 million invested in streets for what is primarily a one-man one-car system. That is a very expensive means of

(continued on the last page)

As the new editor of CENTER CITY I feel obliged to place my editorial policies before you early, so as to permit you to familiarize yourself with me and to better construe what is to follow in the weeks ahead.

It is not the objective of these few pages each week to passively pat the backs of every event, idea and figurehead in this community, in furtherance of their purposes while making the life of your editor easier. Nor do I intend to bite kindly hands and deeds, and the ideas of intelligence and inventiveness, to myself rest comfortably upon the throne of negativism. But I do intend to touch upon views in this little community letter which I may not totally or in part support, as opposed to others, but which I deem valid in some respect and would not expect to otherwise be told or brought to the awareness of readers by the major media.

As audacious as it might sound, I and my staff wish through CENTER CITY to midwife a dependable, if small, Downtown community newspaper. It is our belief at CENTER CITY that the Downtown is destined, with continued efforts, to become the culturally integrated center of Memphis and its surrounding regions. In effect, the distasteful national events of recent years symbolize a faint echoing of the American foundation, as people turn back upon their localities, where in a spirit of reform and encouragement, the peoples of Memphis and other Southern urban centers could project themselves into a prosperous, new experience.

In these quickly altering times it is even more important that a perceptive eye fall upon the planning and development of our city, for in the remedy of deficiencies we may institute the problems of tomorrow. The CENTER CITY, tiny though it is, will be watchful and hopeful that its readership, as well as its quality will improve, and that those with similar interests in this community venture will step forward.

I hope too, and shall seek, while groping for betterment, to keep mine and your humor. Possibly your editor's lack of journalistic expertise will invite even the hands and minds of the most timid to look and to tell others of this community about themselves and downtown Memphis.

If at times we appear lax as to the facts, feel assured that the "facts" lie deep within a file cabinet, a conference room, or recessed in the throats of those Memphians often notorious for cudgeling and selling Memphis into movement. With this in mind let me recount a story printed in the MEMPHIS EAGLE in 1844, touching on the plight of editorship, which I pray shall not describe my fate:

ANOTHER DUEL IN PROSPECT--"We understand that a celebrated foreign sprig of nobility, now on a visit to this country, is en route for Mississippi, to demand satisfaction from the editor of the VICKSBURG SENTINEL for charging the aforesaid sprig with insulting a married lady and making too free with the servants of a well known hotel in New York"--NEW YORK SUN

He will arrive at Vicksburg too late. The Editor of the SENTINEL was killed in a duel last week (*with the editor of another Vicksburg newspaper*). What a pity that editors haven't nine lives, like a cat; they could then render "honorable satisfaction" nine times at least. But alas, sad mishap, they have but a poor, perishable, miserable one; and he who presents the first pistol with sure aim, gets it, provided the editor isn't lucky enough to bore daylight through his gizzard first.

editor's
address

Marcou, O'Leary & the cockroaches



by
Michael Lance

By the time this editorial is published in CENTER CITY, the City Council will have voted on the resolution concerning the Marcou, O'Leary Plan for downtown redevelopment. This plan, costing \$300,000, was paid for by the Downtown Council of the Chamber of Commerce and City Hall. Ironically, though these major representatives of Memphis have sponsored this plan, the plan itself has never been adequately introduced to the people of the city. Only a small group of businessmen advised the Marcou, O'Leary planners and only a handful of task force citizens have been exposed to the plan in depth. Hopefully, Council will have postponed its vote until Memphians are made aware of the scope and full implications of the planned development.

Last week, a special meeting was called to answer questions and hear criticisms of downtown development. Clay Huddleston, Norman Brewer and Charles Shipp, an architect on the advisory board, faced a sparse crowd of fifteen task force members and interested businessmen. Even this group, all with vested or personal interests, did not appear approving of much of the plan, finding it, in general, a glamour project with no practical means of implementation.

In addition, the plan seems to reflect, even less, the sensible needs of the community. If the plan is implemented in full, Memphis will have lost many of its historic monuments-- the Porter Building and the King Cotton Hotel to name but two. One has but to look at the remains of Beale Street to see the mentality at work in much of today's urban "redevelopment." Given this view, our Air Force did little more than "redevelop" sections of Hanoi during the Vietnam War.

Memphis will also lose its most precious natural resource: a public, openly accessible riverfront. This may well be lost to high income housing and a Riverside Drive expressway, which City officials deny while at the same time plan.

To the Marcou, O'Leary Plan, Memphis will lose-- and perhaps this is its most damaging aspect-- the chance for both races, black and white, to live and work together in an integrated community. It is an inescapable conclusion that much of downtown redevelopment-- Marcou, O'Leary included-- is predicated on displacing the presence and economic significance of the black population in the downtown. At last week's meeting, the Chamber of Commerce representative, replying to the need of shifting merchandising practices from an all black emphasis, made the comment, "Cockroaches will not live in a clean kitchen."

I regret, once again, to mention the Chamber of Commerce. They have been sensitive in the past to criticisms of the Expo and CENTER CITY's apparent lack of coverage of Chamber inspired projects. Nonetheless, the statement quoted above seems, once again, reflective of a limited, narrow view of what a community is.

Memphis has the second highest poverty population in the nation, serving 144,000 welfare recipients. Will a new Mall and Galleria inspire more employment, better housing and higher vocational training for the poor? Will a new urban park on Mud Island, costing over a million dollars in mud, stimulate interest in more and better day care centers and schools? Will the riverfront-- for most present downtown dwellers, the only park facility available-- still be available cemented over with tiered apartments for the wealthy? Could not the \$300,000 have been better spent directly on the needs of the present downtown population?

Much has been said about "Downtown For People." If this is true, then let it be all the people-- the affluent, the poor, the black and the white. The day has long passed in the South when one race can live without the other, when a vision of our city-- the Marcou, O'Leary Plan-- favors one segment of the population at the expense of another. Urban developers, like southern politicians of the last decade, must learn the bitter lesson of recent history. Gone are the days of Mint-Julep Power, when a few could make decisions for the many.

If we are to "Believe in Memphis," then we must have a vision of the future which encompasses all of its members. Clearly, the Marcou, O'Leary Plan fails miserably at this.

Elaboration of Downtown Plan cont.

transportation. Eventually, I think two of six lanes on major thoroughfares should be used exclusively as bus lanes, at least during peak hours."

Thinking more specifically about downtown, Huddleston proposed a transportation center on city-owned property west of the convention center. The first floor could service Amtrak, with a bus terminal and an intra-city airport connector also parts of the center, all topped with a hotel.

"Now that, I think, is a saleable product," Huddleston said. "We could finance it with a general obligation bond issue using revenues from leases inside the structure to back the bonds. It's a project we conceivably could get off the ground in two years."

He also strongly denied that the study of the riverfront transportation corridor is just a "public relations effort" to conceal an expressway that will eventually be built.

Updated plans for Mud Island were discussed by the panel. Although the park is primarily for adults, several attractions such as a train running from the garden area of the park to the north end of the island and a carousel have been added that would appeal to children. Task force members suggested a conservatory, and bike rentals and paths for the island plan. Huddleston invited the group to the public hearing of the plan before City Council, and asked them to make their recommendations then.

When asked about his feelings on the work of the task forces, Huddleston said that they had far exceeded his expectations. "Number one," he said, "they keep me and Norm on balance. We've got a plan that is concerned with buildings and structures. The task forces have concerned themselves with people and activities.

"And number two, you've just come up with plain ole good ideas that nobody else thought of."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ARTS IN THE PARK

Overton Park Shell

August 8- Martha Scott presents "The Follies"

August 13- "Music Under the Stars"

Memphis Concert Orchestra featuring Korean Violinist, Dong-Suk Kang

August 15- "The Time of Your Life" featuring the Pat Williams Dancers & the Joe Kincaid Singers

COURT SQUARE NOON CONCERTS

August 9- Olgie Deason, guitarist-singer

CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

Serving from 11:30 to 1:00

First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

Price: \$1.25 per serving, including drink

MENU FOR AUGUST 8-16

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8

Turkey and Dressing, english peas, cranberry sauce and rolls

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9

Meat loaf, potatoes au gratin, lima beans and rolls

MONDAY, AUGUST 12

Salmon croquettes, hash browned potatoes, salad and rolls

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13

Roast Beef, whipped potatoes, english peas and rolls

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14

Spaghetti, cole slaw and french bread

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15

Fried Chicken, rice & gravy, squash and rolls

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16

Ham, potato salad, green beans and rolls

Center City

First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

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