

Mayor's Institute on City Design (MICD)

On March 10, 2010 I travelled to Phoenix, Arizona for a two day conference of Mayors on City Design. The conference was put on by the Conference of Mayors together with the National Endowment of the Arts and Arizona State University.

I was joined by seven other western city mayors, namely:

- Lakewood, Colorado
- Avondale, Arizona
- Newport Beach, California
- Meridian, Idaho
- Olympia, Washington
- Federal Way, Washington
- Bellevue, Washington

In turn, we were joined by urban planners specializing in transportation, architecture, urban design and other disciplines from Arizona State University each of whom had signed an agreement not to solicit business from the attendees.

The conference was held at the conference room of PURL, Phoenix Urban Research Lab, which was located in what used to be the ballroom of an old hotel in downtown Phoenix. We stayed in Sheraton Downtown Phoenix hotel across from the Phoenix convention center. All costs of the trip were picked up by the Institute. Susan travelled with me and I paid for her travel costs. I did not see much of her except for evening dinners.

The selection of participating cities was a little vague, but the criteria seemed to be cities of a similar population size (50k to 150k) that had design projects underway but where design changes could be made. From what I can tell, it is an honor for a city to be selected to present an issue.

I could have presented any project I desired, but we were chosen as a result of the news surrounding the Nugget project and it seemed a good idea to present that project to get a feel what those in the planning community thought and who could look dispassionately at the issues.

Each of the Mayors was given 20 minutes to explain their project or issue under consideration. The presentations were performed using power point. After the presentation, there was a short period for clarification questions and then a discussion of the project by the participants. Additionally, before each presentation, a member of the professional team gave a 20 minute presentation on planning issues going on in that team members discipline.

We will be getting a DVD of the seminar which I hope to put on the City webpage. That DVD should also include a copy of the power point I used and if not, I will add it.

I developed the power point from information provided by our planning and development staff. Much, if not all of the material I used came from the public hearings we have had on this subject although I also used material from Envision 2006 to give some background on our downtown planning process.

I presented the project in what can hopefully be described as a neutral manner. As a general proposition, the response of the seminar attendees was that this was a wonderful opportunity and several of the other mayors said they wished such an opportunity.

At the end, I presented the following questions:

1. What are your observations regarding the proposed balance of uses for this project?
2. What should the physical form of the project look like to function internally and connect to surrounding uses?
3. Is the proposed financing plan reasonable?
4. Will the project promote community sustainability?

On the question of the proposed balance of uses added two subset questions that I thought went to the heart of the of the project, both pro and con. I explained that we had been told that the project was about creating jobs in our community and further, that the library or knowledge and discovery center was a resource to help make that happen. I also advised that I personally was intrigued by the thought of linking our k-12 and college educational systems in Carson with our business community, specifically including manufacturing, while at the same time adding value to our core downtown area—in other words, developing the synergy to create jobs, provide an employment platform for our citizens, and at the same time provide value to our educational resources in Carson City. I wanted to know if that concept was just an amorphous thought or if it was a legitimate vision as others in my community believed that Carson City would be better served by spending its limited resources on a convention center on the Nugget property or indeed, putting a recreation center on that property.

On this issue, the group believed that we were on the right track and in fact said that in their opinion the project represented 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking regarding urban development. Further, it was rather unanimous that we stay away from a convention center as their thinking that convention centers ended up costing more over time than they brought in unless, of course, we were to build a hotel along with a convention center. There was no particular feedback on whether a recreation center would be a good addition to the downtown area.

There was one comment that the project was essentially too big and that we should consider phasing in the development units. When I asked that person what would happen to the financing incentives, there was no ready answer.

The second subset question I raised was the issue of creating more vacant buildings if the state offices were moved.

On this issue, it seemed that they believed this was a judgment call that should be based on the merits of the project. One member responded that we could use satellite business incubators to mitigate the effect on