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REINVENTING DOWNTOWN

> There should be, in every life, a place . . . where you could come and visit your past, and the past of your people, and know that whatever happened outside, here timelessness lived.
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> —Anne Rivers Siddons, *Colony*

Many people who used to go downtown have few reasons to go there anymore. Others avoid downtown simply out of fear: fear of strangers, fear of a breakdown in civic order. For some, even the common suburban subdivision is not safe enough. Seeking reassuring environments, an estimated 4 million Americans have retreated behind walls into housing complexes where access is restricted by a gate. Ironically, Americans are moving into a form of settlement that gave rise to urban cores themselves.

Lewis Mumford argued that fear above all else spawned the birth of cities in the Western world a millennium ago. Terrorized by bandits and barbarians during the anarchy that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire, feudal lords holed up in castles perched atop defensible hills while commoners in valleys took refuge behind wooden stockades. Safety within the stockades made possible sustained face-to-face contact. Strangers became neighbors. They relaxed their fear, developed trust, formed mutual alliances, and became citizens of the medieval town.

To be a citizen of the town carried civic responsibilities, and to go outside the town was to go beyond the "pale," or "fence post," the boundary of the commonly protected jurisdiction. Over time, as the permanence of settlement was assured, wooden stockades gave way to walls of stone, and what grew up behind the walls can be summarized in a word: civilization. According to Mumford, "The population flowed into these protected centers, built and rebuilt them, and in a few centuries created perhaps the highest type of urban civilization that had been known in Europe since the fifth century in Greece."[1]

Size alone did not distinguish a great city. Such a place was marked by the maturity of its civilization. In addition to providing protection from external enemies and from internal conflict, through self-government and law, the city was home to the marketplace, the cathedral, the university, the public forum, and a variety of other places to sustain the culture and life and attention of the community as a whole.

In America today, the ingredients of a city are less likely to be concentrated in a downtown, within walking distance of one another as they have been for centuries elsewhere. We have busy metropolitan areas, but we have emptier downtowns. Many older metropolitan areas have lost their downtowns to urban sprawl; newer metropolitan regions never had them to begin with.

When the New Jersey Devils hockey team won the 1995 Stanley Cup championship, the franchise had no obvious location for a victory parade, so the team celebrated with fans outside the stadium in a parking lot. "It's too bad to have to rally in a parking lot, but there's no town to go to," one fan told a reporter from the *New York Times*. Syndicated columnist Calvin Trillin seized on the event as symbolic of the placelessness of contemporary American culture. "Like a lot of people in New Jersey and Long Island and Westchester County, N.Y., the Devils aren't exactly from anywhere," Trillin wrote. "They represent a market rather than a place—a certain number of people with a certain amount of disposable income living within a certain radius drawn on a map around the Meadowlands. If sports teams were named accurately, the new Stanley Cup champions would be called the Suburban Sprawl Devils."

In 1992, Governor Bill Clinton's presidential campaign sent the candidate on a trip through places where presidential candidates no longer journeyed. Clinton, his running mate, Senator Al Gore, and their wives hopped aboard a bus and traveled through the heartland, stopping at tiny towns and crossroads along the way. All summer long, their campaign aides, under the tutelage of Hollywood producer Mort Engelberg, had found historic settings as picturesque backdrops for the traveling entourage: the county courthouse in Wilmington, Ohio, the 1836 Greek Revival statehouse where Abraham Lincoln served as a state legislator in Vandalia, Illinois, as well as public squares in downtown St. Louis, Columbus, and Cleveland. But when their aides got to Youngstown, a declining city of steel mills in eastern Ohio, they found no public site in the downtown suitable as a setting for a large public event. Youngstown was still home to tens of thousands of people, downtown was still full of wonderful old buildings, but windows in the buildings were boarded up. Sidewalks were empty. The campaign wound up staging its rally in the parking lot of a suburban shopping mall. Its was an appropriate choice, for Youngstown, as it turned out, was the home of Edward J. DeBartolo, America's largest regional shopping mall developer, whose developments had displaced the centers of communities nationwide.

Not every American city has lost its downtown to the extent that Youngstown has. But people in most cities would agree that America's downtowns are not what they used to be. Does all this matter? Why should anyone care about the disinvestment that afflicts the downtown core? The health of a downtown is an important indicator of the economic health of the entire metropolitan community, affecting everything from property values in surrounding locations to a community's ability to attract investors to its economy. A number of studies have shown that the health of an entire region is tied to the economic health of its core. In other words, the image of downtown determines the image of the region as a whole. Ask someone to describe metropolitan Detroit, for example, and chances are they will never mention places like Oakland, a prosperous suburb.

The smallest of cities have major investments in their downtowns, in the structures themselves as well as in the infrastructure. In a time of fiscal austerity it is irresponsible to let them go to waste. Downtowns are important incubators for new small businesses, most of which are started in older buildings, where space is less expensive to lease. Downtowns tend to be home to independent, family-oriented businesses, which, unlike national chains, reinvest a large portion of their profits in the local economy, and support local civic institutions, schools, charities, and community projects.

The importance of downtowns, however, goes well beyond economics. With increasing density at the heart of a community, cities are made more livable and thus centrifugal pressures for sprawl are reduced. Downtown holds together the most varied mix of economic, civic, and social functions. It is the place where everyone can meet and interact, where monuments are located, where speeches are made, where parades are held and crowds are entertained. More than anyplace else, downtown gives a community its collective identity and thus its pride. It is the keystone that keeps the other pieces of the city in place. Downtown is the heart and soul of the metropolis.

Like other organisms, cities evolve and, with them, their downtowns. Old functions disappear, and new ones either replace them or move elsewhere. As we shall see, downtowns reinvented by creative thinking and entrepreneurial leadership are not leaving this evolution to chance.

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Denver's history is a story of booms and busts, of prospectors, speculators, and liquidators, from the discovery of gold in 1858 to the collapse of savings and loans a century and a quarter later. Like the landscape, where the Front

Range of the Rocky Mountains meets the Great Plains, Denver's economy has risen to lofty peaks in one cycle only to fall flat in the next.

At first glance, there is no natural explanation for a metropolis of 2 million people to be here. Denver's South Platte River is neither wide nor widely used. Water is scarce, and the land is dry. Laying the first railroad tracks between the East and San Francisco, the Union Pacific Railroad bypassed tiny Denver in favor of Cheyenne, Wyoming. But Denver's business leaders bought their way onto the map. Digging into their pockets, they raised enough money, in only a matter of weeks, to build a railroad spur into town in 1870. Then commerce really flowed. By 1876, Denver was the capital of Colorado, a young state that grew rich quickly from the mining of silver.

During the great silver boom, Denver exploded, becoming the "Queen City of the Plains," the largest city in the West after San Francisco and Omaha, a busy railroad junction. But Denver's pace of growth was unsustainable. The federal repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893, along with a national financial panic and economic depression that year, brought construction in Denver to a halt. Building permits sank by 95 percent within a year. Only then did the city finally pause to discover it was a mess. "Private dreams, schemes and greed [had] shaped the city's growth," wrote Denver historian Thomas J. Noel and preservationist Barbara S. Norgren. "The frontier of rugged individualism prevailed; there was little sense of community. Commercial buildings were thrown up recklessly."[2]

At the peak of the Progressive era's reactions to the ills of industrial urbanization, Mayor Robert Walter "Boss Bob" Speer, elected in 1904, asked the city's leadership to make Denver "the Paris of America."[3] Assisted by architect Edward Bennett, Daniel Burnham's assistant at the Chicago exposition in 1893, planner Charles M. Robinson, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Speer proposed the construction of a monumental civic center at the foot of the 1888 state capitol building steps, where a marker notes the exact altitude of 5,280 feet above sea level. With its monumental civic structures, formal public gardens, and gathering space for public events, the civic center's "ornamental value for the future cannot be measured by dollars," Speer said. The project would achieve the unmeasurable goal of making "our people proud of Denver."[4]

Investing huge sums in the city once again, Denver built its civic center, culminating with the completion of the City County Building in 1932, a new replacement for the old city hall. Launched in 1924, the "marble municipal palace" was plagued for years by highly publicized cost overruns, alterations, and construction delays. The fiasco cost Denver the public's confidence in large-scale physical improvements. It also cost Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton his job after the *Denver Post* called him "the most incapable and utterly incompetent and extravagant mayor this city has ever had." For a generation at least, the age of the megaproject was over.[5]

In the bust that followed the early-twentieth-century boom in city building, Frank Lloyd Wright delivered a speech in Denver in 1948 and called his host city a "pig pile." According to Noel and Norgren, Wright "urged Denverites to decentralize and called for 'the obliteration of the great clusters of humanity we call cities.'" By the time of Wright's visit, Denver's oldest sections had not aged well. When the city's trolley system came to a complete stop in 1950, the oldest commercial thoroughfare in town, Larimer Street, had become skid row. Before the war, "concerned merchants formed the Larimer Street Improvement Association [and] persuaded the city to install bright new ornamental street lights that only illuminated the continuing decline."[6] By the mid-1950s, respectable businesses on Larimer Street had migrated elsewhere, leaving a low-rent district behind. The effort to clean up Larimer Street then shifted to more drastic measures. The city's power brokers decided that tearing down the street's old structures was not too great a sacrifice to rid the downtown of its "skid row bums," who were fed, clothed, and sheltered by religious missions. So Denver prepared to demolish thirty downtown blocks for urban renewal, the equivalent of cutting down old trees to rid your yard of squirrels.

Sifting through the ruins on Larimer Street like a prospector panning for gold was Dana Crawford, a pioneering preservationist in this land of pioneers. Born in Kansas and educated at Radcliffe in the early 1950s, Crawford focused on the 1400 block of Larimer Street, home to a few antique stores in a row of Victorian buildings. Dating to the silver boom, the ornate three- and four-story buildings had suffered damaging alterations, but Crawford had no trouble imagining them renovated for shops and restaurants. When Crawford had arrived in Denver, "there was no gathering place here," she recalled. Her goal, she said, was to give Denver the kind of attraction it did not have. Digging into the location's history, Crawford learned that the block was actually the birthplace of downtown Denver, the home of its earliest saloons, boardinghouses, banks, dry goods stores, blacksmith shops, and corrals. On one corner was the very site where Denver's founder, William Larimer, had built a log cabin using coffin lids as doors. As Larimer's wooden frontier town gave way to more-permanent masonry buildings after a fire in 1863, Larimer Street's Victorian grandeur earned Denver the nickname Queen City of the Plains. "I'm always attracted to good architecture," Crawford said, "and where you find good architecture, you find history." But others did not share her affection for the relics of Denver's past. "There was no preservation ethic," she said. To the officials in charge at city hall, Larimer Street's run-down structures didn't seem very historic at all. They were just shabby.

Crawford, however, was a contrarian, and like all smart contrarians with good timing, she found value selling at a discount. To gather inspiration for her Denver project, she traveled to St. Louis in 1963, to a place similar to Larimer Street called Gas Light Square. Like Crawford's spot in Denver, Gas Light Square was in "a ragged neighborhood," she said, but blessed with wide sidewalks and distinctive buildings that housed antique stores and restaurants. But Gas Light Square became "a victim of its own success and the ignorance of its management," she said. Rents rose so fast they drove out existing retail tenants and with them their daytime customers. Nighttime attractions developed a rowdy reputation, and safety was not managed well. As the location declined, establishments folded one by one until all of them were gone. "From Gas Light Square, I learned what not to do," Crawford said. To achieve better results, she decided to rule her Larimer Street buildings with more skill and discipline, learning from suburban shopping center managers how to organize independent specialty retailers and gain clout with public officials. After forming a partnership with investors and earning the support of Mayor Thomas Currigan, Crawford began work on the buildings in 1965, removing decrepit signs, uncovering historic storefronts, and undoing alterations to make the buildings more presentable. She got the city to narrow the traffic lanes for cars and widen the sidewalks for pedestrians. She enhanced the streetscape with period-style lampposts, gaslights, trees, and hanging baskets. To lease the buildings to specialty retail tenants quickly, she offered flexible rents (based on a percentage of sales as opposed to fixed amounts) until the block was half occupied. Lacking an anchor retail tenant, Crawford made the block's unique atmosphere the magnet, relying on the grouping of stores to draw customers, following what she called "the law of cumulative attraction." With expertise gained from a career in public relations, she organized special events and threw public parties to fill the place with crowds. "I promoted the hell out of that block," she said. Renamed Larimer Square, the district opened shortly after a new urban marketplace opened in San Francisco's rehabilitated Ghirardelli chocolate factory. Like Ghirardelli Square, Larimer Square reminded people how cities could be exciting, clean, safe, and fun, and that historic sites, if adaptively reused and managed well, could become unique assets too valuable for any city to throw away.

Crawford's success with Larimer Square, along with the city's pursuit of demolitions in the surrounding Skyline Renewal area, created momentum for the preservation of Denver's historic places. In 1967, the city created its landmark commission. In 1971, the local preservation group, Historic Denver, formed to rescue a Victorian house that once belonged to local philanthropist Molly Brown, who survived the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912.

Larimer Square became the first district in the city added to the National Register of Historic Places, and at the same time, the city began to notice a much larger historic district just beyond Larimer Square called Lower Downtown.

A twenty-five block district of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century warehouses and commercial buildings, the district was Denver's downtown in the age of rail, before horse-drawn streetcars and electric trolleys shifted the city's business district uptown. Around the rail yards sprang up foundries, factories, meatpacking plants, flour mills, breweries, cigar makers, saddle shops, western clothiers, and other wholesalers. After a fire in 1863 cleared the district of its original wooden structures, replacements were built in "warm orange-red brick, characterized by repetitive round, arched windows and bays, with simple brick cornices and arched brick facades," as Denver preservationist Barbara Gibson described them. After 1870, the railroad "brought new building materials such as pressed and cast metal, used for cornices, storefront columns, and window hoods, adding decoration to the plain facades of Denver's commercial buildings."[7] Steel reinforcements and new "vertical railways," as the elevator was first called, increased the size of structures and the storage space under one roof, leading the way for a new class of industrial warehouses. During the Gilded Age, the style of warehouses went from plain to prestigious after architect H. H. Richardson designed an elaborate warehouse for Marshall Field in Chicago in 1887. "Unlike industrial plants designed by engineers, most warehouses were the work of architects. Warehousers wanted prestigious buildings because they combined storage facilities with their corporate offices," wrote Noel and Norgren.[8] But the district's best days were numbered, as horse cars and then electric trolleys shifted the downtown several blocks away. When trolleys began to disappear from the city in the 1930s, Lower Downtown began to fade along with the painted advertisements on its brick warehouse walls. Trucking and new warehouse technology sent the district into decline, making some of the old industrial buildings obsolete. Streets grew emptier as the number of passenger trains arriving at Denver Union Terminal dwindled from scores each day to less than a handful.

Following Dana Crawford's preservation success at Larimer Square, the Lower Downtown was rezoned from an industrial area to a mixed-use district in 1974. This allowed the conversion of empty warehouses to office space and other uses. But the act stimulated little dramatic improvement in the area. Instead, Lower Downtown suffered a blitzkrieg of demolitions. When the energy crisis made oil extracted from Colorado shale a competitive alternative to oil from the Middle East, new money flowed into banks on Seventeenth Street, nicknamed the "Wall Street of the West." Speculators chasing sudden fortunes built high-rise office towers, doubling in a decade the space downtown Denver had built in the previous century. To accommodate all the automobiles driven into the city by occupants of the new high-rise towers, developers bought obsolete properties in the old Lower Downtown and demolished them for surface parking.

Worried that Denver's historic warehouse district was threatened with eventual destruction, preservationists began looking for strategies to save it from the building boom's demolition derby. A consultant for the National Trust for Historic Preservation went to Denver in 1981 and discovered a "limitless market for office development" that threatened to wipe out Lower Downtown's small historic structures. A visionless public sector gave little thought to the placement of new downtown office towers and parking lots. Private interests dictated the city agenda, and "unless substantial segments of the business community embrace preservation soon, there won't be much left," the consultant warned.

In 1982, the district was rezoned again with incentives for property owners who preserved the antique structures in the shadows of the high-rise buildings, but plans didn't work the way they were intended. The oil boom soon went bust. Caught with unmarketable old properties, some owners sought to demolish them rather than pay for upkeep and the taxes. The district would not be preserved without some stronger form of protection.

As early as 1981, preservationists had campaigned for the city to designate Lower Downtown a local historic district. Lisa Purdy, a former Historic Denver staffer, was one of the visionaries who imagined Lower Downtown revived as a vibrant mixed-use historic district, similar to Larimer Square, but on a larger scale. Purdy recalled that the constituency for new housing in Lower Downtown was particularly vocal—"people who believed that the key to making a vibrant city is that people have to live there to make it work." Skeptics saw little appeal in Lower Downtown's aging industrial buildings, with their dusty windows and crumbling facades. But, Purdy said, others "could see a gold mine if the buildings were protected from demolition. You could envision a great mixed-use district if the buildings could be used."

Denver's preservationists found support among the city's business leadership, which, according to Purdy, understood the concept "that Lower Downtown is what separates us from the suburbs. It is a great unique asset. If it gets wiped out, we've got nothing. We're like anywhere else." Business leaders told preservationists to make their case broad, that if they hoped to put together a wide coalition of allies the issue had to be about the future of Denver rather than the potential of one small area. Their chance came in 1984, when a new city administration, under Mayor Frederico Peña, began to compile a plan to guide changes to the downtown and the city's inner neighborhoods over the next fifty years. Coordinated by a twenty-eight-member committee of business and civic leaders, the plan called for, among other things, the construction of a new convention center and a new international airport, and the enhancement of the city's historic areas, especially the Lower Downtown and historic neighborhoods close by. The plan gave new energy to the movement to declare Lower Downtown a local historic district, to create protection for its landmarks, and to devise a review process to ensure that new development would be compatible.

Supported by city business leaders and a broad coalition of civic groups, the historic district designation was virulently opposed by a majority of Lower Downtown property owners. The most influential of them was Dana Crawford. After transforming the 1400 block of Larimer Street into Larimer Square, Crawford in 1980 had become a co-owner of the 1891 Oxford Hotel, in the heart of Lower Downtown, one block away from Denver's historic railroad station. Legendary in its early days, the hotel by the 1970s "was really just a flophouse," Crawford said. "But we thought it could be the cornerstone of development down here." After a three-year, $12 million restoration, the Oxford had reopened in 1983, drawing more attention to the district's other historic gems that awaited restoration.

Crawford plunged into Lower Downtown expecting the dormant area to blossom once again. "I had seen what Seattle had done in Pioneer Square, and other cities were willing to put money into historic areas to leverage private investment," she said. Pioneer Square was a run-down historic district of some forty blocks that grew more valuable after Seattle gave it local historic district protections in 1970. But Crawford opposed the creation of any district in Denver that would give others authority to review her projects, particularly the Ice House, a massive, prominent brick warehouse that Crawford intended to convert into a center for artistic designers. When preserving Denver's historic landmarks, she preferred to do things her own way, true to the regional culture of rugged individualism. She was more of a preservation-minded developer than a development-minded preservationist. She did not believe in preservation for preservation's sake, but as a means to other ends—in her case, her business, which was real estate. When speaking before audiences of preservationists, Crawford tells them that preservation is about real estate, and if they don't understand real estate, they don't belong in preservation.

Because of the absence of any national corporate headquarters in the city, decision making in Denver is influenced less by corporate power than by individuals with large egos and big dreams. "They think they're going to get lucky. They like the high-stakes game. And they believe if they are the ones who build it, they can fold it any time they please," said Kathleen Brooker, Historic Denver's president.

Once labeled the most powerful woman in town by a cover piece in the *Denver Post* magazine, Crawford was a powerful foe of the historic district's designation. She was admired, loved, and feared, all at the same time. "She has style. She has smarts. She has drive," the profile explained. "She is combative. She has a nasty streak. She is devious. She is self-serving. And she has made a difference in Denver."[9]

In opposing the designation, Crawford contributed her chutzpah, but other property owners provided the hysterics, predicting nothing but doom and gloom. A petition circulated by the Development Association of Lower Downtown, Incorporated, called the district a "depressed area in a depressed marketplace." With a districtwide vacancy rate of 40 percent in Lower Downtown, property owners had lost a bundle in the oil bust and feared new restrictions on development in the district would push them toward further losses. "These restrictions can only reduce the chances for new investors to inject new capital into the area," they said. "This can only result in some investors abandoning their property . . . decreasing the District tax base, having the buildings go into disrepair and potentially having them become derelict and condemned."

One Lower Downtown property owner who took a different view was Jerry Glick, a real estate developer and entrepreneur who had converted a 1903 seed warehouse to office space in 1985. Glick recalled that at one public hearing on the designation, "someone stood up and said every property owner is opposed to this, that if it goes through, it will be absolute disaster. It will hurt property values. Nothing good will ever come of it." Glick stood up and replied, "Wait a minute. I'm not sure that's true. In all likelihood, it could be good for the city and good for me economically. There's real character here that needs to be preserved."

A decade later, Glick professed, "I'm not really a preservationist," adding that he got his start in real estate "doing suburban stuff." But Glick said he was attracted to Lower Downtown because he admired the materials and the details in the old warehouses, especially when compared to new construction. "I liked the floors, the bricks, and the beams, and I thought if I liked it, then others would like it, too." Promoting the protection of the historic district, Glick appealed to Denver's entrepreneurial culture. He spoke of profits in Lower Downtown waiting to be mined. But the city council was still not sold.

Jennifer Moulton, an architect then working for the Downtown Denver Partnership, the downtown business lobby that supported the designation, collected stories of successful precedents in other cities to bolster the case in Denver. Studying several local historic districts across the country, Moulton and her allies gathered economic data, looking at property values over the five years before each designation and five years after. "In every single case property values went up," Moulton said. She used the data to challenge property owners who predicted losses in Denver. "You show us one district in the country where the story is different," she said. "They didn't come up with a single one."

To further impress the city council, proponents of the designation produced visual displays, including three-dimensional models that showed undesirable changes to the district allowed by the city's zoning laws. City councillors could see for themselves the need for guidelines on the design of new buildings. But a process to review demolitions in the district, a sticking point for property owners, enjoyed less political support. Demolition review "was the hardest part to keep," said Lisa Purdy. "We absolutely would not give up on that. We said that if we don't have that in there, it's not worth getting. You can have design control all you want, but if the buildings go, you don't have the district, its history, its whole reason for being."

In a show of support for that position, Mayor Peña signaled that he would not sign legislation to create the historic district unless it included demolition review. At a crucial moment in city council deliberations, Peña's aide Tom Gougeon reportedly told councillors that the issue was more important to Denver's identity than even the convention center and the new airport: "I've never told you any of those is the single most important issue for the city, but I'm telling you that historic district designation for Lower Downtown is."[10]

Studying the components of Denver's long-term comprehensive plan, Mayor Peña knew the convention center and the airport could be achieved eventually. "But the most difficult challenge we had before us was how to revitalize downtown Denver," Peña said during an interview while serving as the Clinton administration's first secretary of transportation.

Soon after Peña became mayor of Denver in 1983, the oil boom went bust and the city's economy went into a tailspin. The downtown vacancy rate soared to 31 percent, the highest of any major city in America. In one year, more people moved out of Colorado than moved in. Locally, a suburban high-technology employment center was pulling workers out of downtown, while competition from suburban malls was draining downtown's retail sector. "I felt that if we couldn't keep the downtown vibrant, the city was basically going to implode," Peña said.

"We looked at other cities that had preserved their historic structures and saw how they had become economic engines. History is what makes one place different from another," the former mayor explained, "and I didn't want our downtown to be developed to look like every other in America."

Denver had just gone through a building boom, Peña noted, "and some people had criticized our buildings downtown. They said they looked like Houston."

Pointing Denver's development in a new direction, Peña led the city to capitalize on its past and its historic "ambience"—for economic development and as a boost to local morale. Looking at the unique historic assets of the city, Peña said, "we saw Lower Downtown as the best opportunity to kick off the revitalization of downtown Denver."

In 1988, the city council finally agreed and declared Lower Downtown a local historic district, with the condition that the economic impact of the designation be evaluated every two years. During the seven years it took to get the district designated, one-fifth of its historic structures had been demolished.

As it turned out, the landmark ordinance did not depress or inflate Lower Downtown's real estate market. It stabilized it, giving investors certainty and confidence to go ahead with plans, signaling what buildings would be saved and what buildings could be demolished, and reassuring every investor that neighboring properties would have to be developed to equally high standards. The oil bust turned out to be a savior, too, allowing the district to evolve slowly, in incremental steps. The relatively small historic buildings on small lots offered entrepreneurs manageable rehabilitation projects to undertake. The depressed market kept rents down, attracting a variety of professional office tenants and specialty retailers, especially art galleries. However, the unorthodox projects made conservative lenders nervous, especially proposals that combined commercial and residential space in a single building, presenting too many variables for their rigidly simplistic accounting formulas. After the crash of the oil boom, followed by the crash of the savings and loan industry, Denver's lenders were in no mood for risks.

"In Colorado, there were more bank examiners around than bankers," Crawford said over breakfast in her restored Oxford Hotel. "But bad times present a great opportunity to get things going, because the best friend of preservation is poverty. Preservation in Savannah and Charleston would not have happened without bad times."

To jump-start investment in the district, the Downtown Denver Partnership established a Lower Downtown Business Support Office. The office marketed the area to potential investors and managed a loan fund, capitalized by money from the city, downtown business interests, Historic Denver, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The loans covered gap financing, facade improvements, and upgrades required by building codes. On top of federal rehabilitation tax credits, Colorado offered state tax credits for reinvestment in historic properties, even residences. Colorado also offered credits for investments that led to job creation in state-designated enterprise zones.

One of the first adaptive reuse projects after the district's designation, John Hickenlooper's conversion of the 1899 J. S. Brown Mercantile Building on Wynkoop Street into a brew pub and restaurant, and apartments upstairs, "was done with seven layers of financing," said Bill Mosher, president of the Downtown Denver Partnership, the business lobby whose staff administered the fund. Dana Crawford's early successful conversion of a warehouse into loft condominiums, partially financed by a $948,000 bridge loan from city Community Development Block Grants, inspired other lofts to follow. "I always knew there was a market here" for lofts, she said, "because when I was doing Larimer Square, people were always coming up to me saying, 'Do you have any place to live?' " Lofts in the district turned out to be so popular that every unit in her next project was spoken for before construction began. "The values just continue to increase," she said in 1996. "The success of the projects assured the lending community that this was not a crapshoot, not a fly-by-night kind of thing, and that the market was adequate to sustain it," said Diane Blackman, an accountant who owned property in the district and served as the first president of Lower Downtown District Incorporated, the nonprofit association of district property owners and residents.

When the city reviewed the economic impact of the historic district designation in 1990, Lower Downtown had prospered better than downtown Denver as a whole. The study reported a "significant" increase in building renovations and "substantial" increases in new businesses and new housing units. Preservationists who had pushed for the designation felt vindicated. All through the 1980s, "we waited for the market to come to Lower Downtown and it never came," said Lisa Purdy. "It wouldn't have happened without the regulations to protect" the historic structures, she said. After more good economic news in 1992, the city council decided that the economic review every two years was no longer necessary. Even Dana Crawford, who had vigorously opposed the designation, called it a beneficial decision at a public forum in subsequent years.

Diane Blackman, the accountant who watched the value of her buildings in the protected district rise, said, "No one can call preservation here a 'taking' of private property. If anything, preservation has been a giving." From the designation in 1988 through 1995, vacancy rates fell from 40 percent to 10 percent, as $75 million in private investment poured into Lower Downtown. Jerry Glick, the one prominent property owner who supported the designation in public hearings, said he knew the district would eventually improve, but he admitted, "I never believed for a second that it would happen as quickly as it did."

Accelerating trends was the 1995 opening of Coors Field, Denver's new baseball park built at the district's edge for the Colorado Rockies, the expansion team awarded the city in 1991. Instead of building the park in a remote location along an interstate highway, Denver put the park downtown, at the

very edge of Lower Downtown, within walking distance of offices and other cultural attractions on an accessible site with plenty of adjacent space for parking.

When architects from the firm of Hellmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum of Kansas City presented Denver with their initial design for the new stadium, citizens objected. The firm had given Denver a model similar to Chicago's new Comiskey Park, a white stadium that sits like an island in a sea of parking lots. Denver pleaded for a ballpark more like the firm's design for Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore, where a redbrick exterior complements surrounding historic brick buildings. Kathleen Brooker, president of Historic Denver, said, "Talented local architects gave very compelling suggestions, and, fortunately, they took the input pretty well." Similar to the park in Baltimore, Denver's Coors Field is a gem tucked inside a four-story brick box exterior that evokes Lower Downtown's industrial era. In a guide to the historic district, resident Barbara Gibson pointed out features of the ballpark that mimic details found on other Denver landmarks. A prominent clock above the stadium's entrance behind home plate is similar to a clock on Union Station down the street, as well as another clock atop downtown's signature landmark, the 1909 Daniels and Fisher Tower. Gibson also noted that bricks to build the park were supplied by Robinson Brick & Tile, a local firm in business since the silver boom of the nineteenth century.[11]

Had Coors Field opened before Lower Downtown's landmark protections were put in place, it could have had devastating consequences for the district, encouraging owners of neighboring properties to demolish their old brick buildings for lucrative parking lots. Instead, the new $215 million stadium stimulated more adaptive reuses of the district's historic buildings. With a seating capacity of fifty thousand, Coors Field drew into Lower Downtown thousands of people who had yet to see the changes that had taken place, the new art galleries, restaurants, and loft apartments, all in an inviting location in the process of becoming restored, renovated, and inhabited.

With the ballpark at one end and Larimer Square at the other, Lower Downtown was poised to benefit from activity in both locations. It also benefited from millions in public improvements. The city redid the district's streetscape, installing new street crossings, sidewalks, curbsides, street lighting, benches, signs, even new manhole covers stamped "Lower Downtown Historic District" with an artistic flair. Old viaducts, elevated streets that carried auto traffic over the rail yards and into the district on the way downtown, were removed, flooding streets with light for the first time in decades. City and state funds helped to restore prominent landmarks such as Union Station, where tourists during ski season board trains en route to ski towns to the west. Lower Downtown was no longer the dusty, empty district of a decade before. It had become "LoDo," an abbreviated nickname tagged on the trendy area by Dick Kreck, a columnist at the *Denver Post.*

Gritty survivors from the industrial era have become fashionable reminders of the district's past: cobblestone alleys and rail tracks between buildings; outdoor loading docks now used as porches; and second-story doorways that once opened onto the elevated streets. One elaborate second-story doorway survives above the street-level entrance to the new Tattered Cover Bookstore at 1628 Sixteenth Street, in the 1888 C. S. Morey Mercantile Company Building.

The bookstore is part of a $20 million multiproperty project called Mercantile Square. In addition to the bookstore, the place will hold a restaurant as well as ninety-four housing units, seventy-six of which are set aside for low-to-moderate-income residents. The project was financed by a range of local, state, and federal incentives, including a grant from the public share of Colorado gambling revenues. Casinos in historic Colorado mining towns contribute a portion of their profits to a state-administered fund that provides $7.5 million annually, up to $100,000 per grant, to worthy historic preservation projects. Towns that once mined silver for currency now employ slot machines to mine coins in their finished form. "Another extraction industry," quipped Kathleen Brooker.

Mercantile Square also received tax increment financing from the Denver Urban Renewal Authority, the city's redevelopment agency, created in 1958 to clear the city of run-down structures. The agency that once robbed Denver of its history now leads in the preservation of historic structures that remain. The agency's 1996 promotional brochure, for instance, highlights eight major projects in the city; all but two of them involve the rehabilitation of historic buildings. As of 1996, the agency had played a critical role in thirteen major rehabilitations that totaled $174 million.

DURA's experience with preservation began in 1988, when the May Company department store chain of St. Louis abandoned the six-story redbrick Denver Dry Goods Building that had stood in the heart of downtown's retail district for a century. Covered with thirty coats of paint that masked its elegant exterior, the building was still an important, if much neglected, landmark. To rescue the building from demolition, the authority assumed ownership and rehabilitated it in separate phases for new stores, offices, and apartments. In 1994, the authority moved into the fourth floor of the building from its former offices on the twenty-seventh floor of a modern high-rise office tower. Now, the city agency uses a detail from the landmark as its logo, symbolizing DURA's new preservation focus under Executive Director Susan Powers and its chairman, Jerry Glick, the property owner who pushed for the designation of the Lower Downtown district.

In many cities, urban redevelopment authorities have yet to see the preservation of historic places as part of their mission. If the Denver authority had not found itself trying to solve the dilemma of the Dry Goods vacancy, Glick said, "I'm not sure we wouldn't be where other cities' renewal authorities are today." Glick said the agency had to endure public criticism when it initially took over the Dry Goods Building. "People were asking us, 'How come the city took this turkey of a building?' " In time, however, the city not only restored an eyesore, it also brought new life to a declining section of the downtown retail district. After the experience, Glick said the agency decided, "This makes sense. There are some wonderful buildings downtown, and that's where we ought to be."

The preservation of historic Denver is enjoying momentum not felt since the years that followed Dana Crawford's creation of Larimer Square. Downtown office buildings from the early twentieth century are being converted to housing and hotels. In LoDo, so many landmarks are already restored or renovated that public attention has shifted from preserving individual structures to preserving the unique and fragile identity of the district as a whole.

With over fifty bars and restaurants, LoDo has become Denver's largest entertainment district. But it also remains a residential neighborhood. The number of apartments and condominiums in the district has grown to four hundred, with another three hundred planned. Lofts have sold well. Only 5 percent of Denver's downtown workforce lives downtown, well below the national average of 20 percent, so LoDo should gain more housing. But the proliferation of nightclubs, especially sports bars at the end of the district adjacent to Coors Field, has led to growing pains. Residents complain about noise levels when nightclubs shut down. A new stadium for football and other venues planned for a nearby site could generate even more crowds for entertainment, as could a reconstructed sixty-eight-acre amusement park, Elitch Gardens, behind Lower Downtown in the Central Platte Valley. Entrepreneurs are capitalizing on the potential. Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who owns a block of buildings in Lower Downtown near the ballpark, has plans to fill them with a Planet Hollywood restaurant and bar and an "eatertainment" marketplace.

Some fear that the balance between housing and entertainment in LoDo will be thrown off if nightclubs intrude too heavily on residential life. "As the quality of residential life declines, the ability to market residential space will decline," said Kathleen Brooker. Arguing for a "Good Neighbor Policy" as a balance between interests, Diane Blackman, past president of the district association, said newcomers "knew this was a mixed-use district when they came here. People are going to have to tolerate a level of noise. The question is, what is that level of noise?" Debates over liquor licenses have kept some retail space in the district empty, as property owners wait for chances to lease space to higher-profit establishments. Residents, on the other hand, want more tenants like dry cleaners and grocers who will cater to residential needs. What could be even trickier to balance, however, is LoDo's retail variety, including the more than two dozen art galleries. "Traditionally, the galleries pioneer in less developed areas, and as the area is developed, they get squeezed by rising rents because their margin is so low," Blackman said. So far, only one national retail chain, an upscale casual clothier, has opened an outlet in the district, but more could be on the way as the district's rising popularity increases demand for its limited space.

The increase in residents has also increased objections about high volumes of traffic running through the district between downtown and outlying neighborhoods. The city's road improvements not only enhanced the appearance of the district, they invited more traffic, as they were designed to do. Conflicts have arisen between traffic engineers, who want cars and trucks to move unimpeded through the district, and district advocates, who want to make streets more hospitable to pedestrians.

Another important issue for LoDo's future is how to ensure that new buildings complement the district's distinctive character. A quarter of the district's land is currently used as surface parking; another quarter of the district comprises buildings unworthy of historic district protections. Thus, fully half of the district's real estate—more than half of all highly visible corner lots—is potentially developable. While the historic district protections require new structures to be compatible with existing historic buildings, most of which are two to six stories tall and none of which is over 85 feet high, zoning laws allow new buildings up to 130 feet high, or about thirteen stories tall. Many people in the district are concerned that tall buildings would intrude on LoDo's traditional scale.

If Denver has a history of booms and busts, it also has a history of "height fights." In 1909, when Denver businessman William Daniels began to build a downtown department store based on St. Mark's Palace in Venice, complete with a bell tower 330 feet tall, not everyone in the city was pleased. "I am not a sentimentalist at all," said William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, the western showman born in 1846, but "every time I see the new massive steel frames of skyscrapers springing into the air, I cannot but think of the time when a view of the foothills could have been obtained—and a good one, too—from any point in the city."[12] The Daniels and Fisher Tower was Denver's tallest building until 1953. Modernism and the oil boom took the fight to new heights.

"The subsequent hodge-podge of heights culminating in the 56-story Public Plaza (1983) overshadows much of the downtown, creates wind tunnels, and blocks the mountain view from residential areas," wrote Noel and Norgren.[13] With the tall towers came growing concerns about their effect on the downtown at ground level. Though the high-rises lit up the city's skyline at night, one critic said they made people on the sidewalk feel inconsequential. Early skyscrapers, such as the Daniels and Fisher Tower, had followed traditional design principles: a base at ground level defined the sidewalk for pedestrians, a middle section defined the street wall, and an ornamental top defined the skyline. In place of traditional bases, new towers withdrew from the sidewalks, recessed into empty plazas, and had no ornamental caps, just blank walls from top to bottom. When the city's housing authority built three apartment towers in this style, detractors called them the "three ugly sisters." Like the oil-boom office towers built on a speculative basis, the three buildings stood half empty when the boom went bust, monuments to overbuilding, not to mention just plain poor buildings to begin with.

The new poverty of Denver's public built environment stemmed not from a poverty of investment but a poverty of general will. As Noel and Norgen wrote in their 1987 book, "In our own less ambitious age, when cities struggle to maintain their 'infrastructures' and even to survive, it is remarkable that a much smaller, poorer city of fifty years ago could not only keep up with urban needs, but also build with an eye to aesthetics."[14]

"In previous years, we let the private sector develop the quality of the downtown," said Jennifer Moulton, who went from posts with the Downtown Denver Partnership and Historic Denver to become director of the city planning department. Downtown landlords, she said, were not as concerned with the quality of downtown as much as the quality of their rents. "We said, 'Y'all come down here and build what you want, this is free-enterprise land.' We were not very sophisticated about it." After getting poor results from that process, Moulton said Denver learned that "we needed to take charge of our own lives and not look to others. We realized that our destiny is in our hands and nobody else's. . . .

"Coors Field looks as good as it does because of huge public participation," she said. "If we don't demand the quality of development of the public realm we want, we're going to get the kind of private development we deserve."

"Character is hard to build new," said preservationist Lisa Purdy over lunch in LoDo's Wazee Supper Club, a restaurant and bar operated by the Karagas family since 1954. "There is a scale here that people feel comfortable with. You don't sense that when you walk down a street of high-rise buildings or are out in the suburbs with its wide streets and parking lots. People's attitudes change when they spend time in a historic area like this one."

To set guidelines for future development in Lower Downtown and resolve outstanding controversies over sports bars, traffic, and height limits, the district association won a one-hundred-thousand-dollar grant from the state historic preservation office to formulate a long-range district plan that all interests could agree upon and the city council could approve. But the association repeated a mistake often made by public authorities. It hired planning consultants from out of town to draft the plans and then circulated a document for review. Jerry Glick, the property owner and chair of the city's urban renewal authority, called the draft a "planner's vision," not the vision of local interests brainstorming together. In trying to preserve the district, the neighborhood association had followed the same expert-driven kind of planning process that neighborhood preservationists had fought against for years. Starting over, the district association brought all major interests to the table and formed committees to handle certain issues. The committees and the consultants conducted interviews and focus groups, tested ideas, refined them, and tested them for feedback once again. The result was a district plan that incorporates a broad spectrum of viewpoints, one that achieved a remarkable amount of consensus. Crawford, who has rubbed elbows with district advocates in the past, called the experience "a wonderful process because it was so inclusive. In this case, developers were at the table. People who pay the taxes have to be consulted," she said. Glick, who along with Crawford opposed some elements in the planners' first draft, called the exercise a great lesson for everyone on how to work together. "Peña learned that the way to get people to agree on a direction is to bring everyone to the table, then make them talk ad nauseam until they reach a consensus. We'll still have people who won't agree, but today we have more diverse interests than we used to, and we have a lot more consensus."

The plan acknowledges that a balance of residential and entertainment uses is in LoDo's long-term interest. Diane Blackman sees room in the district for sports bars if they remain concentrated near Coors Field. "As long as it doesn't proliferate throughout the district, we'll be all right. We have to recognize that baseball is the gravy," even if it isn't the district's meat and potatoes. On the issue of height limits, the guidelines avoided a districtwide rule of one size fits all for a more flexible policy that respects existing height patterns block by block, allowing the tallest new buildings in three specific locations, while restricting heights in others. As for design regulations, the plan requires new construction to respect patterns set by surrounding significant structures. New buildings must follow the traditional pattern of a distinctive base at street level and a definable middle section capped by a well-defined top that includes a cornice, a common element of LoDo's historic structures. Building materials must be consistent with existing patterns:

masonry exteriors, with other materials allowed for details. New build must respect the street rhythm of facades, prominent centered entryw and vertical window placement, recessed at least one brick deep. Street composition should enhance the attractiveness of streets. Retail activi encouraged at ground level, as is the district's pattern of storefront winc instead of blank walls. The interplay of light and shadows on building fac is emphasized by encouraging traditional details such as arches over d and cornices. Rather than call for repetition of historic architecture, guidelines ask for sensitive and compatible new designs.[15]

At one edge of the district, a new parking garage built on Market St behind Larimer Square lives up to the kinds of standards included in the trict plan. The four-level garage is cleverly disguised behind a restaurar the ground floor and a brick-and-concrete facade that plays off the dist early-twentieth-century industrial look and feel.

Lower Downtown should eventually benefit even more from one of I ver's greatest planning innovations, the Sixteenth Street Mall. After cle automobile traffic from one mile of the busiest retail street downtown, I ver redesigned Sixteenth Street as an outdoor mall where custom-built b pick up and drop off passengers at every corner for free. By concentr pedestrian traffic along Sixteenth Street, the shuttle service encourages walk traffic necessary to sustain retail establishments along the street. shuttle buses stopping every seventy seconds or less, waits are short. Pa gers hop on and off frequently. Denver calls the popular system a "horiz elevator," inverting the original nineteenth-century description of the e tor as a "vertical railway." The shuttle carries passengers from the state tol district at one end of the mall down Sixteenth Street into L Downtown at the other. Diane Blackman said that on days when the Ro play at home, many baseball fans drive into downtown, where they can for little or no money, take the shuttle down Sixteenth Street, and through Lower Downtown on the way to Coors Field. They consider th "part of the experience of getting to a game." To integrate the historic di more with the rest of downtown, the city plans to expand shuttle se three more blocks down the Sixteenth Street Mall to its natural termi LoDo's Union Station. The historic railroad depot will also soon provic service to Denver International Airport, twenty-five miles away.

On the site of former rail yards behind the station, in the Central Valley, Denver is trying to decide how best to develop 4,500 acres of land in the city's downtown. Few cities have Denver's opportunity to b new downtown district entirely from scratch. Denver Urban Renewa thority chairman Jerry Glick said that when the city gauged public rea to photographs of other places, the most preferred model for develop of the site was Lower Downtown. The least preferred model was Denver's High Tech Center, a low-density suburban employment center so dependent on automobiles that traffic there is the most congested in the region. "That's exactly what we don't want in downtown," Glick said.

The rediscovery of Lower Downtown has taught Denver lessons about the kind of environment necessary to make cities work. As a sign that this community takes its built environment seriously, the neighborhood newspaper carried an article by Joslyn Green, managing broker of City Life Real Estate, entitled "Does LoDo Have Great Streets?" The piece was a review of a book, *Great Streets*, by Allan Jacobs, a professor of city planning at the University of California and a former planner in San Francisco and Pittsburgh. After outlining the author's criteria for "great streets," the reviewer concluded that, with more work, LoDo could have them.[16]

Jennifer Moulton, director of the city's Department of Planning and Development, said that as a result of Lower Downtown's revival, "We have begun to look at downtown as more than one place." Denver now sees its downtown as a collection of subdistricts with distinct concentrations of activities: shopping, cultural institutions, government, or private offices. When looking at Lower Downtown, Moulton said, "You know where it begins and where it ends. It's four blocks deep and six blocks long." Pulling out a map of downtown Denver in her office, she said that before the subdistricts were recognized downtown, "the only city that had as large an undistinguished [downtown] area was Atlanta." Learning from downtowns in Milwaukee and Cincinnati, Denver set guidelines for subdistrict heights and densities, hoping to densify the empty areas and create the kind of sidewalk traffic necessary for a safe and vibrant atmosphere.

With a population of just over 2 million, metropolitan Denver ranks twenty-second in the nation in size, but eleventh in terms of its downtown workforce, about 110,000 employees. With 93 percent of job growth happening outside of downtown, however, downtown's share of the metropolitan workforce is "eroding as the suburbs get bigger," said the Downtown Denver Partnership's Bill Mosher. As the suburbs grow, most new retail space is going into suburban shopping malls. Because of decentralizing trends, downtown Denver must look to specialty retailers, nightlife entertainment, and new housing to fill its empty spaces. In Denver, as in cities across the country, from Wall Street in Manhattan to Main Street in Memphis, Tennessee, office space is giving way to living space as historic buildings are converted and marketed as fashionable addresses.

The Downtown Denver Partnership maintains its office in the 1890 Kittredge Building, a stone structure with large Romanesque arched windows overlooking the Sixteenth Street Mall. Historic photos of downtown Denver

line the office walls. The group's logo is the 1909 Daniels and Fisher Tower. All the emphasis on downtown Denver's historic fabric is not accidental, Mosher says. "Downtowns need to be unique and different from the suburbs," he said. "The importance of that is difficult to get across to business interests who feel they have to be *more* like the suburbs. But if part of your advantage is being unique and different, that means capitalizing on your historic heritage."

"A lot of communities are realizing that the characteristics of their built environment are important," Dana Crawford said. "They give a community its own attraction, which is important to tourism and the community itself in a transient society. . . .

"A man came up from Houston recently and said, 'We've torn down our history. What are we going to do?' "

Lower Downtown, Crawford said, has given Denver "a destination and a sense of history," exactly what she gave Denver at Larimer Square, which she sold in 1986. Ten years later, Larimer Square's one-block-long marketplace has continued to mature. The buildings look impeccable. Sidewalks are spotless. Shops are lit brightly at night. Restaurants are full, serving diners on sidewalk tables. Street performers entertain people passing by. Christmas lights in trees lend the place a festive aura, along with banners and planted baskets hanging from the period-stylized lampposts. Music is broadcast throughout the block via outdoor speakers. Walking through Larimer Square is almost like walking inside a mall. The artificiality of the environment is a constant reminder that it exists, above all, to sell something. It's fun. But it's a stage set, unreal.

Judging from Larimer Square, the greatest question for LoDo's future is whether the neighborhood can remain a neighborhood, whether it can remain attractive to residents even as it becomes more of an attraction for visitors. Denver, with its gold rush entrepreneurialism, could wind up extracting every penny of profit from the district until it discovers the place has become too exhausted to give up any more.

"LoDo has all the makings of a great city within a city," wrote David Gottlieb in the *LoDo News* after stepping down as executive director of the district association in 1996.[17] As Gottlieb returned to his hometown of Chicago, he offered a parting warning about the district's future. Lower Downtown will change, he predicted. It will become even more of an "urban watering hole," especially for sports fans, and, as the Platte Valley fills up with new development, "LoDo will find itself more of a walled city than a downtown neighborhood. . . .

"Battles over design and new construction will get more heated," he wrote. "The mall shuttle will go through, so there will be more people on the street. More chain restaurants and retailers will come to cash in on the good times. More than half will fold when the market experiences a sharp downturn in about four years. Then, when the sun comes out again, Mom & Pop shops, homegrown theater companies and small cafes will take over the spaces, and the cycle will start all over again.

"What you'll be left with," said Gottlieb, is "a real live city, and a great one at that."

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Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Twin Cities of Minnesota, are not identical twins. St. Paul, the smaller of the two and older by ten years, looks much more elderly than Minneapolis. In downtown St. Paul, the blocks are smaller, the buildings are closer together, and the skyline is still dominated by early to mid-twentieth-century structures faced with brick and stone. Among them stand dozens of historic commercial buildings and stunning civic landmarks, the Minnesota state capitol, built in 1903, and the 1915 Cathedral of St. Paul, easily one of the most beautiful churches in the world.

While St. Paul drew inspiration from the East, Minneapolis, on the west bank of the Mississippi River, drew its energy from the West, from the plains that supply the grain that still feeds the city's corporate fortunes. "Minneapolis is the beginning of the West, St. Paul the last outpost of the East," wrote one observer sixty years ago in a statement just as true today.[18] Minneapolis has historic landmarks too, but ever since the 775-foot-high IDS Center went up in 1973, the city's skyline has been dominated by shiny towers with smooth glass surfaces. Where St. Paul's landmarks display Old World extravagance, the new landmarks in Minneapolis display no-nonsense Scandinavian simplicity. As Minnesotan Garrison Keillor once described the Twin Cities, "Minneapolis is Wonder bread, St. Paul is pumpernickel."

During the Great Depression, St. Paul's rich flavor went stale. In 1936, a writer for *Fortune* magazine called the city "cramped, hilly and stagnant. . . . Its streets [are] narrow and its buildings small. . . . Its slums are among the worst in the land. . . . Above all, there is the atmosphere of a city grown old. . . . St. Paul is what Minneapolis has been fighting not to become: a city economically obsolete."[19] The insult sent St. Paul scurrying to hide its age. Civic shame over old buildings would not evolve into respect for another thirty years.

In 1945, industrial designer Raymond Loewy, a native of France who launched his career designing clothes, told St. Paul that its old downtown storefronts drove consumers to shop on better-looking streets in Minneapolis. "For decades St. Paul had prided itself on the architectural splendor of its

Queen Anne, Richardsonian, and various historic revival buildings," writ Jeffery A. Hess and Paul Larsen in a history of St. Paul architecture. "I Loewy's eyes, however, this old-fashioned mixture of styles and ornamenta tion was a major stumbling block to a modern marketable downtown." A traditionally ornamented buildings gave way to the sleek and clean designs o the International Style, Loewy advised St. Paul merchants to hide their elab orate facades and remove all "ugly and superfluous architectural detail, sucl as cornices, pediments and rococo ornaments." The designer also promote that "staple of post-war American retailing, the windowless departmen store," Hess and Larsen note. "Playing on the phrase of the great French ar chitect Le Corbusier that a house was a 'machine for living,' Loewy con tended that a department store was a 'machine for selling.'" By the 1950 St. Paul's merchants were transforming Victorian wedding cakes into moder selling machines, hiding traditional storefronts behind "aluminum-frame display windows . . . polished granite . . . and porcelain enamel panels."[20]

In spite of Loewy-inspired modernizations, downtown's share of reta sales eroded. By the mid-1950s, after sales had slipped and property value had declined, planners called downtown "old . . . drab . . . depressing." Th number of pedestrians on downtown sidewalks was down, hurt by the S Paul Housing Renewal Authority's clearance of urban neighborhoods as we as migration of traffic to suburban markets. After the first fully enclose climate-controlled shopping mall opened on the outskirts of the Twin Citi in 1956, the mall's architect, Victor Gruen, worked on plans to redesign S Paul's downtown retail district to make it more competitive with suburba outlets. The lesson of the mall for urban retail districts, Gruen believed, w to separate vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Inspired by the restriction of v hicles from the central precinct of his native Vienna, Gruen advocate pedestrian-only precincts in American cities. In fact, in the 1950s he d signed the first urban pedestrian mall in America in Kalamazoo, Michiga In St. Paul, the Dayton department store chain had Gruen design what He and Larsen call a "giant windowless box, as inward as any suburban shoppi mall," complete with a parking garage served by a spiral ramp. As Hess ar Larsen recall, "To drive into the Dayton's ramp was to drive out of the city."

To encourage shoppers to drive into the city, Loewy had promoted t construction of parking garages equipped with bridges to carry pedestria over streets into the second floors of stores, a concept brought to life in r newal plans of the 1960s. Inspired by Gruen's climate-controlled mall ar Loewy's call for second-story, open-air pedestrian ramps, a team of St. Pa architects working in the mid-1960s designed what came to be called t city's system of "skyways," the fully enclosed, climate-controlled pedestri bridges that link the second floors of downtown buildings. The skyways we ıst one element of a nine-structure urban renewal plan of the 1960s called ;apital Centre, a plan to clear twelve blocks, 108 buildings, and 371 busi-esses, all for new construction.

One developer at the time predicted: "When the skyway program is com-leted, St. Paul will be one of the biggest shopping centers in the world—all nder one roof."[22] But the plans failed to work as intended. In 1963, before kyways were built, downtown was home to 400 stores. By 1975, skyways en-bled pedestrians to walk for two and a half miles without ever touching a idewalk, but the number of stores downtown had fallen to 160. With the ex-reme climate driving pedestrians inside and skyways inviting them upstairs, ffice workers vanished from the sidewalks, denying small retailers the edestrian traffic they needed to survive. A few streets spared skyways re-nained active, even in Minnesota's notorious winter months. But Wabash ;treet, a main artery of the downtown retail district, was transformed into he paralyzed spine of the Capital Centre renewal area. Downtown was dam-ged by its own devices.

When Minneapolis demolished its Romanesque 1890 Metropolitan Build-ng in 1962, the loss of that treasured landmark energized preservationists in he region, particularly in St. Paul. One of them, Georgia Ray DeCoster, a nember of the St. Paul planning board, warned that "American cities are hreatened by a steady dilution of historic character and architectural person-lity." The issue was not simply the loss of landmarks, but the destruction of raditional urban form, the street walls and sidewalk life under assault from nodernist designers and urban renewal authorities. "Today almost everybody grees that landmarks must be preserved," DeCoster wrote in 1966, "but it is ıot generally recognized that the more ordinary older structures have a use-ul role to play in revitalized urban centers."[23]

St. Paul lost a couple of major landmarks before preservationists managed o rescue the threatened Federal Courts Building. It was downtown's most listinctive landmark, a Romanesque limestone building with a tall clock ower and copper-clad turrets, fronting the downtown city square, Rice Park. 'he General Services Administration, the federal agency in charge of federal property, wanted to demolish the grand structure for a parking lot to accom-nodate workers in a new federal building. After neighborhood activists at rvine Park in the West Seventh Street neighborhood fought off a housing uthority clearance program, St. Paul established its preservation commis-ion in 1976—finally bringing to a halt the forty-year-long assault on the city's ıeritage.

That same year, St. Paul elected a new mayor, labor lawyer George Latimer, vho inherited a city in desperate need of new life. When Latimer took office, it. Paul was losing both jobs and people. The city had lost 10,000 jobs in the

early 1970s. The population was in the midst of dropping by 13 percent, from over 300,000 in 1970 to under 270,000 by 1980. Many stores on down-town streets had disappeared. Whole blocks of downtown buildings were demolished for urban renewal, only to be left unfilled. One spot seemed so impossible to fill that citizens called it the "Superhole." By the time he became mayor, Latimer said, "the holes in downtown St. Paul had been there so long they were competing for historic designations." Dick Broeker, Latimer's top assistant at city hall, recalled how "St. Paul was groping for its identity. People were distressed about the condition of the city. A few old-style urban renewal projects had leveled portions of the city for new con-struction, and yet, the city was still losing its vitality."

Until then, the conventional concept of urban redevelopment was for a city to seize control of a blighted spot on the map, level it to the ground, and then seek a developer willing to build on vacant land. But the era for that ap-proach was over. The gush of federal money had slowed to a trickle; rising in-terest rates made new construction hard to justify. St. Paul had to settle for reasonable expectations about its future. A skyline of glass towers was not in the cards. The new interest in St. Paul's historic buildings, meanwhile, called out for the adaptation of old structures to meet new needs. "We realized that we were never going to be a Minneapolis," Broeker said. "Our destiny lay elsewhere."

Elsewhere, it turned out, was Lowertown, "a hodge-podge of warehouses, parking lots, railroad yards and rundown historic buildings" that edged up against the city center and the Mississippi River. Originally known as the "Lower Landing" for riverboat trade in the nineteenth century, Lowertown was the oldest section of St. Paul, a onetime frontier trading post that became Minnesota's capital in 1849. As St. Paul grew into a thriving timber town and distribution center for the Northwest, government offices, along with finance and retail trade, moved to their current downtown location. The old river-front landing became an industrial zone. Lowertown saw a building boom from 1880 to 1920, as wealthy industrialists such as James J. Hill, magnate of the Great Northern Railway, erected massive warehouses out of stone and brick, cast iron and steel. More than merely functional, these warehouses were highly ornamented displays of wealth and power, built to last far beyond the lifetimes of their owners. Most of the warehouses were about six stories high, giving the district of individualized warehouses unity as a whole.

Founded in the age of steamboats and expanded in the age of rail, Lower-town declined in the age of the automobile. Its fortunes faded until Lower-town was but a poor man's extension of more valuable downtown real estate. By the end of the 1960s, Lowertown was home to little more than a few ac-tive industrial sites, low-value businesses, and vacancies. "It was eerily dead

Dick Broeker remembered. Few people worked there. Virtually no one lived there, save for the derelicts who roamed the empty streets. A park in the district's center "was largely unused," Broeker said. "There were no street activities, and the depot was closed," Amtrak having discontinued service to the landmark station in 1971. Though the district abutted the Mississippi River, "Lowertown had no relation to the waterfront. The area was just dead," Broeker said, "but it did not take a genius to appreciate the historic quality to it that made St. Paul a great place."

Though Lowertown's north quadrant had been leveled for I-94, the warehouse district's eleven-block core had been left virtually untouched by the urban renewal bulldozer. Seeing potential in Lowertown's undisturbed turn-of-the-century ambience, St. Paul philanthropist Norman Mears proposed a multimillion-dollar plan for its redevelopment in the early 1970s, but he died in 1974 before his vision could be realized. By the mid-1970s, however, artists had begun to discover the area, attracted to cheap rents in the large industrial buildings, where large floor areas, good lighting, wide doors, and freight elevators made perfect spaces for their studios. Setting up residences in their studios, nearly 250 artists moved into the district, a violation of city regulations, but evidence that Lowertown had potential to become an attractive place to live and work.

The Latimer administration, having formed no strong ties with the city's business leadership in the previous election campaign, looked at Lowertown with an open eye and saw the potential, too, inspired by the adaptive reuse of industrial waterfront districts such as Seattle's Pioneer Square and Georgetown's Chesapeake and Ohio Canal district, in Washington, D.C. In Lowertown, St. Paul officials envisioned an "urban village" for residents, office workers, shoppers, and diners, in addition to workers already employed at the district's existing industrial sites. Plans for the district's rehabilitation placed the greatest emphasis on the creation of new housing, with the belief that it would be easier to attract new residents to the district before attracting customers to patronize businesses in an uninhabited location. Market research, moreover, showed a demand for downtown apartments for couples without children, single professionals, and retirees.

St. Paul's private sector, however, was skeptical of the new city administration's plans. "We were swimming against the current," Dick Broeker recalled. "The private sector then only believed that you either built new—and up—or you were stuck in the dark ages. They didn't understand that historic preservation could be profitable and intriguing and could shape an environment that would offer a city vitality."

Though Lowertown represented a quarter of the downtown area, it held only 10 percent of the downtown tax base. The area had attracted $22 mil-

lion in new investment over the previous ten years, but 75 percent of th: had gone into a single manufacturing plant for Gillette. The district was not location where additional investors were willing to risk large amounts of ca| ital. After studying Lowertown's situation, Latimer's team decided that witl out some form of coordinated effort to stimulate investment in the are: historic structures, the rebirth of Lowertown would never occur in their lif times, certainly not during their time in office. They sought a creative w: for city hall to leverage large amounts of private investment using limite public dollars.

The critical early believer in the vision turned out to be the McKnigl Foundation, established by the family behind the 3M Corporation, the S Paul–based manufacturer of Scotch tape and Post-it notes. Until then, tl McKnight Foundation's mission had focused narrowly on human services. " had never been a bricks-and-mortar organization," Broeker said, "but w knew they were looking for projects large enough to make a dramatic diffe ence in the community." After a year in office, the new mayor went to tl foundation with a proposal requesting $10 million for Lowertown's revita ization, claiming the money would attract $100 million more from private i vestors and public sources. Latimer told the foundation's directoı "Anything less than ten million dollars wouldn't be worth doing because wouldn't be enough to transform the whole area." After weeks of negoti tions, the foundation awarded the full $10 million request as seed capital launch the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, a nonprofit, tax-exem agency independent of city hall. The award stipulated that $1 million cou fund administrative expenses, while the rest would finance Lowertown red velopment projects.

Two decades later, Lowertown has evolved from a fading urban industri area to one of St. Paul's fastest growing neighborhoods. Warehouses ha been converted to offices and loft apartments. Ground-floor spaces ha sprouted restaurants and specialty retailers. In creating new activity alon side downtown's central business district and the riverfront, the rebirth Lowertown has allowed the city to plan redevelopment of the riverfront self. Since 1978, Lowertown has captured $428 million in new investmer more than any comparable-sized area of St. Paul over the same period nearly $43 in new investment for every dollar granted by the McKnig Foundation. Two-thirds of the district's historic structures, many of them v cant and crumbling before the effort began, have been revitalized and put productive use. By 1994, some seventy-three projects involving renovatio rehabilitation, and new construction had created approximately 3,000 ne construction jobs and an estimated 4,600 additional permanent jobs in tl Lowertown area. Property taxes climbed from less than $900,000 to almc

$4 million in the first seven years alone. In 1994, Lowertown retailers, from art galleries to fast-food vendors to upscale restaurants, reported sales of $30 million, contributing $1.5 million in annual sales taxes to the city treasury. The McKnight Foundation's limited funding for administrative expenses has kept the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation small. In fact, since 1982, the agency has been run by one urban planning professional aided by a full-time office assistant and specialists hired for specific tasks.

Weiming Lu, the LRC's executive director, came to St. Paul in 1979 with two decades of urban planning experience in Minneapolis and Dallas, where he helped to install that city's landmark commission. The LRC is also guided by corporate executives who serve on its board of directors, giving the agency public credibility as well as private clout. Though the LRC holds no regulatory powers and owns no real estate, Lu said that his nimble organization serves as Lowertown's development catalyst in three ways: as a marketing agency, a development bank, and an advocate for compatible urban design in the historic warehouse district.

When Lu first tried to attract entrepreneurs to the district, he said, "I went back to Dallas to see if I could get some old friends to invest in Lowertown. They came up here one night in their jet and I was here to greet them. It was dark. The place was still. Looking around, we saw there was nobody else in sight—no cars and no people on the street but those six tall Texans and me." In spite of the empty scene, Lu said, "I showed them the area and told them it was a great place to invest." After the tour, he said, the potential investors from Dallas promptly "went home and never came back."

Lu laughs about the experience now, because in the years since, he has successfully helped to attract investors to Lowertown from as far away as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Montreal. Without an organization like his to market Lowertown's advantages, Lu said fewer investors would have found their way to the district on their own. "These warehouses mean nothing to the investor but risk, danger, and the unknown."

To the pioneering artists, however, Lowertown was home. A year after Latimer launched the city's effort, the Minneapolis Arts Commission founded a nonprofit agency to be a clearinghouse for artists who wanted to move into that city's own warehouse district. Over the next decade, the organization, Artspace Projects, Incorporated, evolved into a development agency that has consulted on the creation of affordable housing for artists in over a hundred communities nationwide, including St. Louis, Galveston, Texas, Shreveport, Louisiana, and Salt Lake City. According to Cheryl Kartes, a former Artspace Projects director, St. Paul officials decided that the cost of rehabilitating industrial buildings for studios and galleries was a good return for the city's relatively small contribution. With a $210,000 loan from the Lowertown Redevelopment Corpora-

tion and $540,000 from the city of St. Paul, Artspace Projects helped Low town artists convert a building for $1.7 million into a limited equity coope tive. The organization then converted two other structures, the 1908 Northe Warehouse and the 1894 Tilsner Building, into living and working spaces, suring permanent enclaves for artists who might otherwise be pushed out real estate speculators and rising rents.

When artists discovered Lowertown, "others didn't think the place cou ever be used again without being leveled," said L. Kelley Lindquist, A space Projects' president. During the 1980s, however, Lowertown was o of the city's few neighborhoods that saw a rise in population. The distric 1,500 new residential units provide housing for a mix of incomes. Rough 70 percent of the housing is market rate, including some luxury condomi ums. The remaining 30 percent is reserved for moderate- and low-incor residents. About 200 units serve as living and working space for artists, gi ing Lowertown one of the highest concentrations of artists of any location the country. Throughout Lowertown, no single class or age group don nates, and the demographic variety helps make the area more vibrant. T social diversity was intended from the beginning, Latimer said, because t city realized "there is a deadening quality to monocultural development As a populist, Latimer wanted the preservation of the district to benefit t city as whole, not a narrow, yuppies-only segment of the population. T former mayor recalled that when his administration converted an aba doned seventy-five-acre rail yard into an energy-efficient industrial park th created five thousand jobs, "It wasn't just the rich who came to look at t converted historic rail barns. It was the kids of guys who had their first job the rail yards. Preservation touches everybody," he said. "It's not elitist, a it doesn't have to be."

As a development bank, the LRC offers gap financing to worthy projec that wouldn't go forward without it, generally up to $200,000, or no mo than 10 percent of a project's total cost, to jump-start proposals that it judg to be economically viable as well as compatible with the historic area. In o case, a loan of $120,000 from the LRC, along with the same amount fro the city, helped to make possible the $3 million conversion of a warehou into sixty units of subsidized housing for elderly tenants. By charging bo rowers interest on loans at market rates, the LRC is able to recoup its admi istrative expenses without draining its principal endowment.

To capitalize on Lowertown's distinctive historic character, the LR helped to get the district listed on the National Register of Historic Places 1983. The designation gives national recognition to the area's history a makes owners of the designated properties eligible for investment tax cred when they restore their buildings to federal standards. Until tax credits we diluted by tax-law changes in 1986, they were a valuable incentive for investors in the critical initial years of Lowertown's rehabilitation. "One of the problems with cities is it's so much easier to get money to build than to maintain what has been built already," said Lowertown developer John Manillo, who converted a century-old warehouse into offices. "But if you maintain your quality, you'll have something over the long run. You'll have something worth keeping."

To protect the district's historic character from adverse impacts, the LRC in 1984 encouraged the city to create the Lowertown Heritage Preservation District, which sets development guidelines for a seventeen-block area of forty-four buildings, all but five of which are judged historically significant. Though the LRC has no official powers to control development in the district, the organization's director and board have not been shy about using their powers of persuasion at city hall. While some in the private sector resent any interference in the development process by public-spirited citizens, John Manillo, who has chaired the city's landmark commission, said that protecting the quality of the district is critical to its ultimate success. "I'm convinced that preservation adds value," he said.

St. Paul has also added value to the district by improving its public spaces, right down to the smallest details, by investing in street improvements, new sidewalks, and period street furniture, lampposts, bus stops, and benches. In the center of the district, Mears Park, Lowertown's "village common," underwent a five-year, $1.5 million redesign that transformed a cold brick plaza into a more inviting space of soft green grass and trees. The renovated park even has a stream of running water, the product of a design process that allowed for considerable input from residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

The Lowertown district designation also provides a process for public input on new buildings, setting guidelines that protect the district's traditional urban scale from the whims of out-of-town developers. For instance, when a national hotel chain wanted to construct a new hotel in Lowertown next to a ramp off I-94, the hotel's plans clashed with the district's existing building patterns. The chain wanted a suburban hotel, set back from the sidewalk in the middle of its parcel, surrounded by a lagoon of parking, as if it were isolated on some lonely suburban highway. Rather than chase the hotel chain away, however, the LRC appealed to its representatives to build the structure in a corner of the parcel, flush along the sidewalk similar to historic buildings in the district, moving parking spaces to the side and rear and reserving unused land on the site for potential development later. The LRC also persuaded the hotel chain to alter its exterior design to make the building more compatible with the district's historic structures. Weiming Lu said the most

but whether new additions are compatible with the district and complementary to surrounding structures. "I am not a design czar dictating to everyone," he said. "Postmodern, modern, I don't care. If they relate to what's here, that's what counts. Design is not just a building, but the streetscape. How we put things together in the public realm is important."

While the LRC's quasi-public status created some friction with city bureaucrats who felt responsible for Lowertown's future, the LRC's independence has allowed the agency to focus its energy and resources on a well-defined location, outlasting the Latimer administration as well as others that have followed it. "I wanted to be sure that this had legs and would outrun my time in office and would be less subject to the pressures of politics," Latimer said. In an era of diminished federal support for urban redevelopment, Latimer also succeeded in kick-starting private action years before others recited the mantra of public/private partnerships.[24] Latimer, who served as an assistant to Secretary Henry Cisneros at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and now teaches urban studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, argues that mayors need to be catalysts, but they also need to step back and allow efforts to grow on their own. "I think mayors make a mistake when they feel they need to have their grubby little thumbprint on everything," he said.

The Lowertown effort's staying power stems also from a long-range plan that takes years to execute, managed diligently by the LRC's executive director of fourteen years, Weiming Lu. "You have to know a city; it's only afte staying awhile that you can make a contribution and have some impact, be effective and be useful," Lu said. Lowertown developer John Manillo credite Lu's long-term outlook as a vital contribution to the district's revitalization "He's concerned with the long term and not next month or next year," Manill said. "Developers are always worried about whether they will be able to pa their bills—what's the least they have to put into a project to make money o it quickly?" That kind of thinking, Manillo said, "goes against the goals of pre serving a district, because the district needs to be there ten years from now o else it will be a flash in the pan. Lowertown hasn't been that."

Urban analyst Neil Peirce made that very point when he visited St. Paul i 1988 on the occasion of the LRC's tenth anniversary. Peirce recalled how te years before, when the LRC was formed, state and local governments years before, when the LRC was formed, state and local governments Pennsylvania coughed up $88 million in low-interest loans, tax incentive and transportation improvements to lure a Volkswagen plant to Westmor land. Less than ten years later, however, the auto plant closed and the jo disappeared. "There's egg all over the face of the Pennsylvania officials wl landed the deal, except that almost all of them are retired and off enjoyi their pensions now," he noted. "All economic-development deals, no matt how glamorous, involve risk. But diversifying risk, forming multiple partnerships and shared responsibilities, husbanding one's resources, looking to indigenous resources for growth—those seem to be wiser policies. And they are precisely what the Lowertown venture has been about."

If the Lowertown effort has ever encountered trouble, it was in breaking from that formula for sustainable growth to construct Galtier Plaza, a pair of high-rise apartment and office towers set on top of a three-story indoor shopping mall in the heart of the historic district. Originally conceived by the Latimer administration as a means to create a critical mass of new development downtown, Galtier Plaza suffered financially from construction delays and cost overruns. In 1989, when Chemical Bank of New York sold the property, the city of St. Paul lost $9 million on the deal, an amount nearly equivalent to the McKnight Foundation's grant for the entire Lowertown revitalization effort.

Galtier Plaza created too much new space in one place at one time. The shopping mall, moreover, was poorly planned. When the initial retail tenants proved to be too upscale to attract enough customers, the mall had to be redesigned for stores, restaurant chains, and other tenants more tailored to local needs. A YMCA in the complex has proven to be a popular, successful addition to the district, but it has taken time for Galtier Plaza to recover from its losses. Time, however, cannot heal Galtier Plaza's disruption of Lowertown's historic environment. The structure's tall towers, one of which is forty-six stories high, are completely out of scale in a district of medium-rise warehouse buildings, and the exterior, which reuses bricks of a demolished warehouse at ground level to partially hide the suburban-style mall inside, is an example of bad facadism, a sorry compromise between historic integrity and new design, with the true benefits of neither.

Galtier Plaza was not inspired by indigenous Lowertown resources, but instead by a similar project in Minneapolis called Riverplace as well as another, much criticized project in downtown St. Paul called Town Square, a two-block complex where towers rise out of a three-level indoor shopping mall. Championed by Mayor Latimer as a device to fill the "Superhole" left empty by urban renewal, Town Square was built to boost the city's psyche, its retail sector, and the downtown real estate market, all of which needed stimulation in the mid-1970s. After a decade and a half, however, it is Town Square's shopping mall that needs help most of all, a victim of suburban competition as well as poor urban design. Though Town Square provided St. Paul with an innovative year-round garden under a glass roof, the mall below the garden has proven less successful. "From the sidewalk it has the appearance of a gray-walled fortress," a team of critics wrote. "No storefronts enliven the street, and the most prominent openings are driveways to the hotel entrance and underground garage. Only a few small doors lead from the sidewalk to the shopping area."[25] Because of its inward orientation, the mall drew fewer shoppers off the sidewalk than intended. According to urban scholars Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, surveys showed that the majority of shoppers at Town Square actually drove from the suburbs to park in the mall's underground garage, but "most people who were interviewed said they preferred suburban malls because they were more convenient and because they offered a larger selection of items to buy."[26] The brutalistic complex was a choice made in economic desperation, in a time when "commerce was leaking out of cities and cities were willing to take the first developer to come along with any project at all," Dick Broeker said. Latimer now describes the structure as "that big, ugly gray building," and candidly calls its design his biggest regret, confessing that he "didn't have the stomach" to send the "aggressive" developers, Oxford Properties of Canada, back to the drawing board. As for Galtier Plaza several blocks away, Latimer readily admits that it "is way too out of scale for Lowertown, which has flourished in spite of it."

Lowertown flourishes most where St. Paul has capitalized on the traditional urbanism that was always there, the city's one-of-a-kind environment. Compared to the Capital Centre renewal area, with its high-rise towers recessed at ground level, its blank walls and windswept plazas, the twelve blocks around Lowertown's Mears Park are lively, a distinctive twenty-four-hour district in a nine-to-five downtown.

If downtown St. Paul has come far in the last twenty years, it still has some distance to go. Locals are the first to say so. Garrison Keillor, who broadcasts *A Prairie Home Companion* over Minnesota Public Radio each Saturday from St. Paul's 1910 Fitzgerald Theater, tells visitors to the city, "We won't be hurt or alarmed if you are underwhelmed. Most of our European ancestors came here expecting to find Eden, which turned out to be false advertising, and if there had been cheap airfare in the nineteenth century, they would have gone right back home."

Lowertown shows no pretensions of striving to become an Eden, just a pleasant "new urban village," as Weiming Lu describes it, a place in the city where people choose to work and live. "It's not finished yet," George Latimer said nearly twenty years after launching the effort to revive the district, "but it has come a long way.

"We've preserved our history. We won that battle. We've lost some little battles and some beautiful buildings along the way, but the historic infrastructure is here for another hundred years."

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San Francisco, Seattle and Portland are likened to three sisters, says Portland historian Terence O'Donnell. "Seattle is the tart, San Francisco the debutante, and Portland is the spinster." Seattle and San Francisco grew thanks to prospectors drunk with gold rush greed. Portland, on the other hand, grew soberly. The pious Yankee families who settled Oregon's Willamette Valley in the mid-nineteenth century brought with them from New England a moralistic culture more concerned with protecting the commonwealth than accumulating personal wealth.[27] To this day, that legacy sets Portland apart in the libertarian West.

If San Francisco is the Manhattan of the West, a place of bewildering density and diversity, then Portland is more like Boston, smaller and more manageable, with a culture more proper than libertine and a compact urban environment remarkably well preserved. Boston, in fact, almost became the city's name. In 1845, pioneers Asa Lovejoy of Boston and Francis Pettygrove of Portland, Maine, each wanted to name the new settlement for his hometown back east. To resolve the matter, they tossed a penny. Pettygrove won two out of three.

As a river city, seventy-eight miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, where the Columbia and Willamette Rivers converge, Portland's topography has less in common with San Francisco by the Bay or Seattle by the Sound than with the river cities of the Ohio Valley: Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis.[28] Topographically, Portland most resembles Pittsburgh, with its three-river junction and its bevy of bridges. Like Pittsburgh, downtown Portland is kept from sprawling by a natural barrier of western hills. And like Pittsburgh, Portland never built an outer beltway, a circumferential highway around its suburbs. If both cities have been contained by topography and transportation, Pittsburgh has done it more by accident, Portland more by design. Portlanders are protective of their region's postcard-perfect scenery. To the east lie Mount Hood, the Columbia River gorge, and the Cascade Range. To the west are the Coast Range and the Pacific shore. To the south is the fertile farmland of the Willamette Valley, the Garden of Eden that awaited eighty thousand pioneers at the end of the Oregon Trail. And for the last quarter century, Portlanders have protected their very traditional downtown, a compact web of tiny blocks only two hundred feet in length. Portland's city fathers mapped out small blocks in order to sell more valuable corner lots. But the numerous interesting corner properties and the short distance between intersections created one of the nation's most walkable downtowns, where the average building is only nine to twelve stories high. Some of them are small Victorian relics; others date from a construction

boom after Portland's Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition of 1905 attracted publicity for the city and new prosperity that lasted until the Great Depression.

Portland's traditional built environment and pedestrian-friendly scale then became a victim of postwar redevelopment. Before World War II had ended, city officials sent for Robert Moses to draw up a plan for Portland's future. Moses arrived with his aides and closed himself inside a room, where he pored over maps and plotted highways, hacking his way through the historic city with his meat axe. When the mayor called on Moses to check on progress, the mighty planner drove him away. "When I want to see the mayor, I'll send for him," Moses said. He emerged from the room with a number of ideas, including one for Harbor Drive, an expressway for fast-moving traffic through the heart of town.

"The Harbor Drive improvements wiped out scores of the handsomest buildings ever constructed in the city," wrote William J. Hawkins III, a Portland architect and great-grandson of pioneer San Francisco foundryman Jonathan Kittredge, whose firm supplied cast iron for some of the structures leveled for Harbor Drive.[29] The expressway removed for all time most of Portland's oldest surviving district, Old Town, the original downtown. Old Town had been in decline since the turn of the century, when downtown businesses moved west with the new streetcar traffic. Although dissenters objected to the demolition of Old Town, few in the city fully appreciated what they were tearing down, the largest collection of cast-iron buildings outside of SoHo in New York, another historic district once targeted by a Moses transportation scheme.

"It is ironic that in 1942 a group of London firemen brought to Portland an appeal for funds to help save and rebuild London's historic buildings," Hawkins noted. "A display of the war-damaged structures was set up in the Meier & Frank auditorium, attended by many concerned citizens. The Londoners would surely have been stunned to learn that the same Portlanders were in the course of destroying the best of their historic structures along the river—with less speed, perhaps, but with the same effect as the blitz."[30] Down the buildings came, block by block. Of some two hundred cast-iron structures that graced the Willamette River at the turn of the century, 90 percent of them disappeared. Only years later, when some of the demolished structures yielded nothing but parking lots, did the city's mood toward the structures shift from one of neglect to nostalgia.

More demolitions would occur before Portlanders realized they were being robbed. The Portland Hotel, the hub of the city's social scene for sixty years, came down in 1951 for a parking lot at the busiest intersection in town. South Portland, forty-four blocks inhabited by low-income Italians and Jews, was cleared for a modern superblock of high-rise housing that increased property values as well as the city's tax base but stole the city's traditional street and sidewalk grid patterns. The more the demolitions continued, however, the more outraged the public became. As Portland planned a new ramp for Harbor Drive, intending to clear away the last survivors in the old cast-iron district, citizens learned of the plan. "This was in the old days before open government, when plans could get to a city council meeting for approval without anyone knowing about it, but somebody did find out, and the whole thing was stopped," said Portland architect George McMath, grandson of architect Albert E. Doyle, whose firm designed many of the city's landmarks during the first three decades of the century.

In 1965, as urban renewal activity moved into downtown from the former South Portland area, the city's urban renewal authority decided to spare a grand old cast-iron structure in its path and slated it for restoration. The *Oregonian*, the city's daily newspaper, published a rendering of the landmark as it would look after restoration. "But that was premature," McMath recalled, "because within two weeks the owner tore it down." Portland was outraged. "If there was a single trigger to spur our preservation program, that was it," McMath said. By 1968, Portland had one of the few historic landmark ordinances in the West.

Because so few cities had landmark protections at the time, McMath said no opponents rallied to defeat the measure. "It was remarkably easy" to pass, he said. "I don't think the city council at the time saw the impact. They saw it as a little old ladies' let's-save-the-nice-old-house kind of thing, and we didn't see it that way at all." Though the ordinance provided ways to review impending demolitions, its greatest value was in freeing preservationists from reacting to every crisis. Instead, it allowed them to identify areas of the city worth saving and to work their priorities into the city planning department's broader agenda. Over the next three decades, the preservation agenda was woven so thoroughly into the city's planning process that McMath could not recall the loss of more than two significant historic structures since the ordinance was passed. "Now, it has become so routine that it doesn't generate any passion anymore. It's just part of the process."

If the first challenge for the defenders of traditional Portland was to protect their city from demolition, the next was to defend its human scale from superhuman schemes, from Le Corbusier's vision of high-rise towers and high-speed lanes.

When Portland's famed architect Pietro Belluschi graced the city with its first modern office building, the thirteen-story aluminum-and-glass-paneled Equitable Building, in 1948, his innovative design still showed respect for

downtown's traditional pattern of short buildings built flush to the side
Belluschi managed to challenge the old order without overthrowing i
gether. Within fifteen years, however, such respect was antiquated. Higl
of the 1960s, beginning with Standard Plaza and the Hilton Hotel in 196
came monuments to corporate egos instead of emblems of civic pride
new generation of buildings towered above their neighbors and blocked
landers' treasured views of the mountaintops in the distance. At ground
their blank walls and empty elevated or sunken plazas showed contem
pedestrians on the sidewalks. Sold as a symbol of urban vitality, th
fortress architecture did not enliven the city as much as deaden it, disc
ing street life while proliferating parking lots on surrounding blocks.
landers tolerated the intrusions for a decade until the construction
forty-story First Interstate Tower in 1972 sent them storming the f
walls. The skyscraper was three times the height of a typical downtown
ing, a corporate complex built on two adjacent blocks—an office tow
squat box joined by a second-story skyway bridge that did even more
courage pedestrians on the street below. Promoted as "a symbol of th
Portland and the new America, . . . a towering challenge to Mt. Hoo
structure was attacked by critics as a "disaster," a "travesty," a "monst
and an "alien." "The dramatic clutch of new Portland skyscrapers is kill
life of the street with parking garages in 'podium' bases beloved by Est
ment architects who successfully isolate their corporate totems from
ban fabric and the city's essential humanity," declared Ada Louise Hu
architectural critic for the *New York Times*. Portland, she said, "was a
the act of destroying itself."

If the outrages of demolition and dubious design did anything for Pc
it was to help its citizens look carefully at their surroundings. Their dov
had been surrendered to the car, to freeways and parking lots. The hi
towers and their empty plazas reinforced downtown's new hostility to
on the street. Urban renewal had cleared away low-income residents,
downtown empty in the evening, a habitat that invited only the occup
skid row hotels. In the city's neighborhoods, middle-class residents
fleeing to suburbia, leaving behind once stable communities and a sh
tax base. Downtown storefronts were increasingly vacant or occup
pawnshops. In spite of the convenience created for the automobil
downtown were decreasing. Portland was fulfilling Lewis Mumford's
that Americans will have every means of getting about their cities
solutely no reason for going there. Portland's private sector felt it, too
words of Gideon Bosker and Lena Lencek, authors of a book on Port
chitecture, "Developers found themselves in the tragicomic position
who had cleared their home for a party to which no one came."[31]

Alarmed by the visible symbols of decay, those with an interest in downtown Portland—public officials, business leaders, neighborhood activists, and other civic boosters—coalesced behind an effort to draw up a long-term plan to guide economic development. With considerable grassroots input and advice from corporate boardrooms, the city cobbled together a broad package of proposed improvements in transportation and urban design and adopted the plan in 1972. Like the old urban renewal schemes, the new plan declared that a revitalized downtown would also infuse nearby neighborhoods, but in a break with the dogma of previous decades, the plan stressed preservation over demolition, transit over traffic congestion, and the improvement of public space over the maximization of profit. Unlike plans drawn on maps two-dimensionally, the plan viewed the city as its citizens would experience it, from the sidewalk. Among its stated goals, the plan sought to "create in downtown an urban setting with a definite sense of place and identity by developing strong boundaries, emphatic focal points, unique physical designs for identifiable areas and by enhancing special views such as the waterfront and historic or architecturally significant buildings."[32]

The new ideas were pushed by a gang of allies, among them a young city councillor, Neil Goldschmidt, who became mayor four days after the adoption of the plan, at the age of thirty-two. With a mandate to preserve the city's neighborhoods and reinvigorate its downtown, Goldschmidt was at the front of a generational change in city leadership. The city's postwar leaders, according to Portland historian Carl Abbott, had been stodgy, cautious, and stingy.[33] The new team was creative, bold, and eager to invest in the city's future. Looking back on that era in 1996, Goldschmidt called it "a revolution of rising expectations" against the ideology "of throwaway cities. A lot of people rose up and said, 'Quit destroying the neighborhoods in this city. If you don't treat your city as having something of value, nobody else will.'

"What happened here starting in 1970, with the elections that sent in a new city government, was a group of young Oregonians, many of us born and raised here, came home from school, home from military service, home from working in other places with the feeling that there was something really quite special about Oregon and that it ought to be taken care of." The preservation movement had already taken hold in Portland, and the environmental movement, which celebrated the first Earth Day in 1971, had plenty of supporters in this coastal state of old-growth forests and fertile farmland. Some of the younger generation of leaders had been in college for the initial publication of influential books by Rachel Carson and Jane Jacobs, on ecology and the ecology of cities. "We also came home with a real appreciation for the best things other people were doing in their communities," Goldschmidt said. "Our goal was to make the city of Portland as terrific as the state of Oregon."

Oregon, with all of its natural wonders, was also attracting a new wave of pioneers, most of whom were abandoning smog in the Golden State for the Great Northwest. Once in Oregon, however, the refugees of urbanization re-created the very urbanization they had left behind. From Portland, sprawling development crept outward into the Willamette Valley, where nut groves, wheat fields, and turkey farms gave way to strip malls, gas stations, and fast-food franchises.

Visit Oregon, but please don't stay was the blunt advice to newcomers from Oregon's Republican governor Tom McCall, one of the most outspoken voices against what critics called the "Californication" of the Oregon landscape. "There is a shameless threat to our environment and to the whole quality of life—the unfettered despoiling of the land," McCall said in 1972. "Sagebrush subdivisions, coastal condomania, and the ravenous rampage of suburbia in the Willamette Valley all threaten to mock Oregon's status as the environmental model for the nation." Pleading for the legislature to manage mindless growth, McCall declared that the "interests of Oregon for today and for the future must be protected from the grasping wastrels of the land."

Just as Portland completed a plan to guide downtown development, McCall signed into law a plan to guide growth statewide. Among the original sponsors was Republican legislator Hector McPherson, a dairy farmer who drove to Portland one day from his place in the Willamette Valley and spotted heavy earthmoving equipment plowing up the ground by the road. Curious about how the farmland was to be used, McPherson got out of his car, walked up to one of the workers, and reportedly asked, "What are you going to grow here?" "Houses," was the reply. McPherson felt that farmland in the valley was too fertile, too rare, and too valuable a resource to waste on subdivisions that could go anywhere. The legislature agreed and passed a landmark measure that remains the most visionary growth-management tool in the nation. Adopted in 1973, it established a state Land Conservation and Development Commission with a mandate to preserve farmland, timber resources, and other undeveloped landscapes by encouraging orderly, efficient, and affordable development in or close to the state's existing communities. The LCDC requires all cities and counties in Oregon to draw up their own growth-management plans as well as an urban growth boundary to contain the spread of sprawl.

In Kentucky, a growth boundary has preserved the bluegrass countryside around Lexington since 1958. In Oregon, growth boundaries around every incorporated municipality have preserved 25 million acres of farmland and forests, an area four times the size of New Jersey. The boundary "is not a device to stop growth or even to slow growth," but a tool to demarcate where urbanization will occur, said Henry Richmond, a public-interest lawyer, who with Governor McCall, in 1975 founded the nonprofit advocacy group 1,000 Friends of Oregon. Created as a watchdog to guard the land-use laws McCall put in place, the organization has cultivated a broad coalition of allies to support growth-management initiatives, teaming up at times with the Oregon Farm Bureau, the Oregon Industries Council, even the home builders' lobby in Portland, which recognize the predictability that growth management has brought to their operations. "Land is the biggest capital input in agriculture," Richmond said. A farmer who leases land year to year within reach of creeping urbanization "does not have a predictable operation," he said, but with growth measures in place, farmers and timber companies gain assurance that long-term capital improvements to their property will not be lost to the "ravenous rampage of suburbia." Home builders benefit from greater certainty, too. Under Oregon's law, any development application within an urban growth boundary must be acted upon within 120 days, freeing developers from costly delays. "Now, developers are not usually happy to see twenty-five million acres of land ruled off limits to development and they are not real wild about the concept of an urban growth boundary," said Richmond, "but they know that without it, with the sort of anything-goes posture of the land-use decision-making process in the past, every project that they put forward is subject to opposition." To reduce opposition to development within the boundaries, Richmond's group allied itself with home builders to take on suburban snob zoning. "It was basically illegal to build housing that was more affordable and was being demanded in the marketplace," Richmond said, so Oregon quadrupled the small amount of land zoned for multi-family housing and tightened by a third the average size of new single-family lots, lowering costs for developers and home buyers as well as preserving open space. "Any strategy to deal with sprawl has to increase housing choice in the suburbs," Richmond said. Because Oregon's law is responsive to private as well as public needs, and because it allows for considerable public participation in the planning process, it has survived repeated challenges by property rights advocates.

Without a statewide growth-management mechanism, land-use planning remains a fractured process that breeds competition among neighboring localities instead of cooperation. In Portland, residents of the metropolitan area also realized that without additional management of development on a *regional* basis, growth at the urban periphery threatened to pave their open spaces, flood their roads with traffic, and drain investment from their urban core, wasting millions of tax dollars to duplicate existing public infrastructure. Voters in metropolitan Portland took a giant step toward solving that problem in 1978, when they approved the nation's first directly elected met-

three counties and twenty-four municipalities in the Portland metropolitan region. The following year, the region drew its official urban growth boundary, encompassing an area of 234,000 acres or 362 square miles, enough land to accommodate new development for the next twenty years. "The boundary has been tested for years. It has stood the test of political will," said Mike Burton, who was elected head of the metropolitan government (nicknamed "Metro" by Portlanders) in 1994. Burton said private sector interests "may have some problems with it, but they've seen the benefits of it over time." John Chandler, an attorney for the state's home builders lobby, told a reporter from Florida, "I speak around the country, and I haven't seen a system I'd swap for. We're treated as partners. I'm not sure we would switch to an unregulated market. I just came back from Houston and it's just horrible."[34]

Conceived initially to preserve Oregon's natural environment from sprawl, the state's growth-management system also enjoys support from urban interests because it prevents investments from leaking beyond the urban edge. In Portland, the measure has helped to direct growth inward, preserving the city's traditional downtown as the hub of the metropolitan region. "The recent history of Portland shows that core city revitalization, neighborhood conservation, and suburban growth management are not separable options," writes Portland historian Carl Abbott. "A metropolis that works, in short, is one that has given equal attention to all of its pieces."[35]

A national leader in regional planning for over a decade, Portland has led the way in downtown redevelopment for an even longer period. Under Mayor Goldschmidt in the mid-1970s, Portland vetoed several highway projects, the most celebrated being the 1975 rejection of the Mount Hood Freeway, intended to give residents of eastern suburbs an easy commute into the city after the demolition of half a dozen Portland neighborhoods. The proposal struck Portlanders as unsensible, not just because of the demolition it would have required, but because the freeway was projected to be congested during rush hours from the day it opened and would require the construction of a new and expensive bridge. The proposal was rejected as bad for the city as well as bad transportation planning. "If the vision here is to buy the kind of mobility that you assume freeways will give you the day they open then evidence shows that they don't work that way," was Goldschmidt's line of argument.

Goldschmidt went on to become U.S. secretary of transportation at the end of the 1970s, an experience that gave him a unique perspective for sizing up the impact of the interstate highway system on America's cities. "When the interstate was done, it promised something for everybody, and sure as hell, everybody expected to get it," he said. "Some of that had to be the rush to grab federal highway funds, cities built highways indiscriminately, against their long-term interests, paving the way toward decentralization, disinvestment, and ultimate decay. "They were basically driving these daggers right into their own hearts. There is so much money involved that the political forces just overwhelm the city." Today, the former mayor and transportation secretary, who went on to serve a term as governor of Oregon, does not see how federal highway planners could have foreseen the full impact of the interstate system on America's cities, "but what was surprising to me," he said, "was how late the cities figured it out." By the time Portland did, "we were having a bloodbath trying to convince this bureaucracy that one formula doesn't fit all cities." When Portland wanted to do things differently with funds allocated for the Mount Hood Freeway, the bureaucracy felt threatened.

"History is going to decide who made the right decision here," Goldschmidt said about the choices Portland made. "It's way too early for anybody to be running around saying they got this thing all figured out, but this community cast its lot with a vision which is very unusual for the West, and that was basically: Save everything of value that's worth saving. Quit devaluing everything that's old just because you can build new in the suburbs. Besides, the things you are going to build in the suburbs aren't affordable to a lot of the people you want to wipe out to convenience yourself. And the invisible network of interrelationships is really what a community stands for; it isn't just the buildings or the streets or the utility poles; it's this connectivity of people looking out for one another. That is the real value in neighborhoods."

During the postwar decades, Goldschmidt said, Portland devalued its neighborhoods until "it had gotten to the point where everybody assumed that anybody's neighborhood is fair game for a speeding car. So we decided to build a community that isn't quite so susceptible to being run over by an automobile. A centerpiece of this entire agenda was not to let the automobile take over Portland."

A year before Portland rejected the Mount Hood Freeway, the city began to reclaim itself from the side effects of auto dependence when it tore up the Harbor Drive expressway and replaced the six-lane expressway with a riverfront park. Portland named the park in honor of Governor McCall, who had urged the city to eliminate the expressway when an interstate highway on the opposite bank of the river made the road unnecessary. For the first time in decades, downtown Portland was reconnected with its riverfront, and dormant districts near the river began to spring to life. "It took downtown Portland almost thirty years to shake off the shadow of Robert Moses," Carl Abbott noted in his history of the city.[36] The Moses-inspired expressway had demolished the city's history and blighted neighboring districts, but the new

park stimulated interest in restoring the century-old cast-iron buildings th remained and catalyzed additional redevelopment downtown. Portland's la est riverfront proposal surrounds the Victorian Union Station, a landma railroad depot with a 150-foot-high clock tower. The city improved the st tion and its environs for $3 million to prepare the site for new housin nearly fifty years after Robert Moses called for the station's demolitio Moses had said any funds spent to improve the familiar landmark "would l wasted and an entirely new station should be built."[37] In the years since Por land rejected his advice, the city has gained a more mature respect for its e isting resources as well as a healthy respect for public participation in tl planning process, a process that has produced better results than dogmat planners acting alone.

When Harbor Drive disappeared, a group of citizens calling themselv the Portland Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, led by architect Bill Hawkin and inspired by SoHo's activists in New York, persuaded the city to establis its first official local historic district near the riverfront around the 1888 cas iron Skidmore Fountain. Property owners who wanted to rescue its rottin structures saw their costs reduced when the state legislature in 1975 passed fifteen-year property tax assessment freeze on rehabilitated historic building That financial incentive, along with others from a city-sponsored urban cor servation fund as well as federal tax credits for historic preservation created i 1976, attracted investors to the district as well as other aging neighborhoods

"Good citizens are the riches of a city," reads the inscription at the base Skidmore Fountain, named for Stephen Skidmore, one of Portland's earl benefactors. If Skidmore was the nineteenth-century citizen responsible fo the Skidmore Fountain/Old Town district's development, then Bill Naito, property owner and developer, was his twentieth-century counterpart. Fo decades, Naito invested his energy and money in old Portland's preservatio Bing Sheldon, president of the local architectural firm that worked on man of Naito's properties, described him as "a hard-nosed businessman who cam up the hard way and didn't believe in throwing things away. He wasn't part the throwaway society.

"When you throw away your history, you throw away who you are. It's im portant for your emotional placement to have a sense of where you've been Sheldon said. Naito, the son of Japanese immigrants, began buying prope ties in Old Town during its down-and-out years, when the district was hom to Portland's Japanese community, adjacent to the city's Chinatown. "Bein Japanese after World War II meant that you had to go to a place where no body else wanted you, and Old Town was a place where nobody else care about," Sheldon said. Old Town's buildings at the time were cheap, but Nait help bring the district to life, Naito donated space to create Saturday Market, a weekend crafts exhibit that showcases the work of artisans, a popular attraction since 1974. By drawing crowds each weekend, Saturday Market helped to reacquaint Portlanders to the historic district within walking distance of downtown's office buildings. In time, Naito's collection of cast-iron-covered landmarks gradually blossomed into an entertainment district of restaurants, bars, and theaters.

Less visionary owners used to demolish such structures for parking lots. Goldschmidt, the former mayor, said that one of his worst memories was of the city being unable to prevent one of those demolitions from taking place. But from that experience, Portland learned that if it couldn't ban a demolition, it could ban the spread of parking lots that encouraged demolitions. "That way you can make sure people don't tear down their buildings until they're ready to put something back up," Goldschmidt said. There is a saying in the real estate business that more buildings are torn down than fall down. Perhaps fewer of them would succumb to the wrecking ball if city officials understood that on average it takes a generation or more to replace a demolished building.

To prevent the surrender of the downtown to parking lots, Portland placed a cap on downtown parking at roughly forty-five thousand spaces. "That actually got a few guys' attention," Goldschmidt said. "They began to wonder if they could beat us legally or just wait until we were gone. But we said, 'You can't beat us legally, and you can't outlast us. We have a downtown plan, an economic study, that says don't have these little, small postage-stamp lots. They're bad for circulation. They're bad for air quality. And they frustrate the parkers who expect to find parking when they get to these lots, but there isn't any there.' "

To ease circulation in the downtown core, the city cleared auto traffic from two of three lanes on two parallel streets running the length of downtown. Rather than turn the streets into pedestrian malls, the city left them open as uncongested one-way routes for buses. This cut bus-trip lengths significantly, and now the buses carry passengers swiftly through the downtown zone—for free. As Goldschmidt described the strategy, "We were pushing in the direction of trying to get people out of their cars—the ones who rode downtown to an office building, parked their car all day, and then left at five o'clock—so we could allocate that street space to people who would come in and use the services that office building provided, or the retail store, or the hotel." Bing Sheldon, who chaired the city's planning bureau in the early 1970s, said, "The development community thought this was communism." Without new parking, the developers said, their new buildings would fail

privately tell you that it was the best thing that ever happened to them. What Portland's planners did, as urban analysts Neil Peirce and Robe Guskind noted, was "to reconceptualize the problem from one of *parking* t one of *access*."[38] As long as people could get downtown, and get aroun downtown easily, the city believed downtown Portland would thrive.

After rejecting the Mount Hood Freeway, which would have flooded th city with cars, Portland instead used federal funds to build a fifteen-mil light-rail line to the eastern suburbs in the 1980s. Like buses on the down town transit mall, the light-rail is free for riders in the downtown zone, wher the private sector ponied up funds to improve the sidewalks and th streetscapes along the route. The downtown route even carries streetcars re produced from vintage models brought back to Portland from Portuga where they were hunted down by Bill Naito. Within fifteen years after open ing, the new bus and rail lines carried almost a third of commuters int downtown Portland, where employment rose from under sixty thousand i 1970 to over one hundred thousand in 1995, while the cap on new parkin spaces remained in effect. In terms of size, Portland's downtown workforce comparable to the one in Minneapolis, where one of America's healthier u ban retail districts thrives along the Nicollet Mall, a street designated fo pedestrians and buses, the original inspiration for the transit mall in Portlan

When Portland adopted its downtown plan in 1972, downtown held 9 percent of the region's top-quality office space, but retailers there soon be gan to feel the pinch of competition from suburban malls. "By having to fig ure out a strategy for parking," Goldschmidt said, "we were able to allocat our attention to the people who were most vulnerable without it, the retai ers." The city worked to convince the retail sector that it could indeed su vive downtown, even as malls were going up in surrounding suburban area "On one of the breakthrough days I can remember," Goldschmidt recalle "I was having a conversation with somebody from one of the retail stores. H said, 'I just sent two of my managers down to look at the Saturday Marke These people are just packing this place in—on Saturday! If they can do i why doesn't our store have more traffic?' " Confident that downtown cou still draw shoppers, Goldschmidt used the city's parking strategy and trans plans to persuade the Nordstrom department store chain to build a store the city's busiest intersection, then occupied by a historic theater. "We hadn had a new store built downtown in fifty years," Goldschmidt said, but Nor strom executives looked at the city's plans and realized "they would be at t center of the retail universe downtown, which is still a bigger core than a mall in the region."

Since adopting the downtown plan in 1972, Portland has added half a mi festival market in historic buildings near the river, failed to draw enough customers to a location without anchor tenants. It was also disturbed by surrounding construction projects at the worst possible time and was eventually overshadowed by a new urban shopping mall, Pioneer Place, the 1990 product of a partnership between the city and the Rouse development company of Baltimore. Spanning two downtown blocks connected by an underground food court and a second-story skyway (one of the city's concessions to the developers), Pioneer Place includes a Saks Fifth Avenue store on one block and a four-level mall surrounding an atrium on the other. To integrate the new structure with the surrounding historic retail district, city planners requested traditional storefront windows on exterior walls. In an era when malls are designed inward to hold shoppers hostage in order to capture sales, Pioneer Place succeeds with a traditional outward orientation aimed at luring pedestrians off the sidewalk. Riding an escalator, shoppers can even gaze through the glass roof to admire the 1912 Meier & Frank Company department store building (rival retail space!) across the street.

"We had a goal in mind of trying to create a very pedestrian-friendly downtown core with a strong belief that if you didn't increase the number of people moving around on the streets, the feeling of public safety wouldn't get better, it would get worse," Goldschmidt said. To make downtown more appealing to pedestrians, the city effectively outlawed the kind of modernist buildings that went up in the 1960s and rewrote the zoning code to emphasize traditional urban principles—no more setbacks away from the sidewalks, no more empty plazas at street level, no more blank facades. New structures are required to come flush against the sidewalk. In the downtown retail district, new buildings must leave ground-floor space for retail tenants. Instead of blank walls, new buildings must include storefront windows of traditional dimensions. And the city discourages the spread of Minnesota-style skyways, a fad of the 1960s that Goldschmidt called "a way to keep people off the streets." Instead, he said, "we wanted street life." Superblocks that gobble the city's traditional grid pattern are banned, as are any buildings over 430 feet high. Height limits are set even lower in most spots to respect the city's traditional scale. Views of Mount Hood to the east and Mount St. Helens to the north are preserved by special height limits within the view corridors. The tallest buildings are allowed along the transit mall, with height limits getting lower as building sites approach the riverfront. "The idea of stepping down to the river was controversial, because in theory you're depriving guys of the idea like they do in Chicago, where they build a wall of tall buildings right across the lakefront," Goldschmidt said, "but we wanted a step down in part because we wanted high density along the transit mall to build the heaviest trip demand close to transit."

One of the greatest improvements to the downtown was the conversion of a low-level parking garage in the heart of the city into a public square. Since the demolition of the old Portland Hotel in 1951, the Meier & Frank department store's ownership had coveted the spot for a multilevel parking garage. But the downtown plan had higher aims for the block. Since its transformation into a park in the 1980s, Pioneer Courthouse Square, as it is called, has been Portland's busiest public gathering place, fulfilling architect Willard Martin's vision to build a "living room" for the city. Built of bricks stamped with the names of donors who contributed money to the cause, the square serves as downtown's amphitheater, with rows of seats for spectators, space for street performers, even clean and safe public rest rooms beneath a coffeehouse. What was once the hub of social activity for the city's elite in the days of the Portland Hotel is now a hub of activity for anyone who chooses to be there.

Fronting the public square is the Pioneer Courthouse, a three-story stone landmark topped by a wooden cupola. Beginning in the early twentieth century, federal bureaucrats tried repeatedly to tear the 1869 building down, but it was saved by the Great Depression, then by a need for work space during World War II, and finally by the bureaucracy itself, when government employees learned the difficulty of getting the General Services Administration, the manager of federal property, to label a building surplus. When a new federal building revived calls for demolition in the 1960s, federal appeals court judge John Kilkenny and district court judge Gus Solomon intervened to preserve the structure. "If anyone can push the GSA, it's the judges," said George McMath, whose firm did restoration work on the building in the early 1970s. "Oh, it was a glorious time," McMath recalled as he walked around the building. "I remember dealing with the GSA's regional office in Seattle. They said, if you keep Judge Kilkenny happy, we'll be happy."

Along another side of the square, in the 1926 Pacific Building, is the Association for Portland Progress, established in 1979 as the lobbying arm for downtown business interests. Ruth Scott, the association's president, looked out a tenth-floor window onto the public square, around which historic buildings faced with cream-colored terra-cotta blocks gleamed in the midday sun. Portland's "historic fabric is important to our identity," Scott said, but she conceded that this importance is not fully appreciated by all of the city's business interests. "I'm not sure how clearly a few other than [the late] Bill Naito really understand the economic value of historic preservation." Scott did, however, mention a downtown parking magnate who has reconstructed an ornate glazed terra-cotta storefront that was stripped from one of his commercial buildings years before. He's not doing it because he's a preservationist, she said, "he's doing it because it's good business."

A revitalized central business district has attracted new residents to the city's neighborhoods, even residents in income levels that were leaving the city before the downtown plan was formalized. Neighborhoods on Portland's east side, the long-neglected stepchildren to the central business district on the Willamette's west bank, have benefited greatly. North of the downtown, the Northwest Triangle, a string of brick warehouses along Thirteenth Avenue in a neighborhood called the Pearl, is fast becoming home to loft apartments for empty nesters who want to live closer to work and friends, among new art galleries and new restaurants, as well as two of Portland institutions on the district's edge: Jake's, a fish restaurant that still maintains its 1892 ambience, and Powell's City of Books, reputed to stock more volumes than any other independent bookstore in America. Farther northwest from downtown, Twenty-third Avenue, the main commercial street in a turn-of-the-century streetcar neighborhood, has become such a trendy spot for restaurants that locals have nicknamed it "Trendy Third." The popularity of these areas, however, has created swarms of traffic that is unable to move through the narrow streets easily. Rather than surrender the neighborhoods to the automobile, Portland intends to build a new streetcar line running from the Portland State University campus in the southwest section of the city, through the downtown and the warehouse district, into the northwest neighborhoods. To keep these neighborhoods functioning as they did in the days of the streetcar, Portland, with help from federal funding obtained by Republican U.S. senator Mark Hatfield, is reviving the streetcar itself. Carl Abbott, the historian of urban planning, calls Portland "the streetcar city in the age of the automobile." In his book on Portland's streetcar era, John Labbe reminds readers that when bicycles became so popular in the 1890s, the city's rail service had to add special cars just to accommodate all the new two-wheeled vehicles.

Improvement in Portland's neighborhoods is not limited to upscale white areas only. Albina, a northeast section that is home to the city's greatest racial and income diversity, as well as a disproportionate share of crime and vacant lots, has improved, too. In the late 1980s, the city developed a plan for the area that called for the rehabilitation of existing houses and new home construction to match the old. Efforts to strengthen the neighborhood shopping district along Martin Luther King Boulevard have produced spotty results, but after seven years, property values in Albina have increased by 350 percent, leading some to worry that longtime low-income residents of the neighborhood could be priced out of their community by Portland's escalating housing market. In 1996, metropolitan Portland was growing at the rate of fifty thousand new residents a year.

"It's pretty easy to live here," said Rob DeGraff, the downtown association's vice president for policy. "I'm a refugee from the New York metropoli-

tan area, and as a kid I never could have had access to the kinds of recreational activities here without a three-hour drive." DeGraff arrived in the mid-1970s and worked for the city on the Main Street revitalization of Hawthorne Boulevard, now a trendy area of southeast Portland near Reed College. DeGraff said he has seen downtown "evolve from a quiet, small town" into an exciting urban environment, especially after light-rail service was completed in the 1980s.

After two decades of saying no to more parking spaces and freeway lanes Portland benefits from one of the country's lowest downtown retail vacancy rates (3.5 percent) and one of the lowest vacancy rates for top-quality office space (7 percent). But downtown interests remain concerned about the suburbanization of the metropolitan region. When the downtown plan was adopted, the city held 90 percent of the region's top office space and 70 percent of its jobs. As suburbs have spread, downtown's share of class A office space in the region has shrunk to just over half, while its share of the region's jobs has fallen to 14 percent, a reflection of both urban deindustrialization and the emergence of postindustrial suburban employers. As Portland's economy has diversified beyond shipping products from western forests and farms, high-technology firms have located in the suburbs, particularly around Beaverton and Hillsboro to the west, a region nicknamed the "Silicon Forest." So many jobs have sprung up in suburban locations that some residents of Portland have begun to make reverse commutes. Newcomers drawn to the new jobs have brought with them suburban preferences. They prefer newly carved subdivisions over Portland's time-tested streetcar neighborhoods. They shop in strip malls instead of Main Street commercial districts. They drive large sport utility vehicles instead of walking or riding mass transit. Living and working in low-density, auto-dependent environments, they drive considerably more than Oregonians drove in the past. Between 197[illegible] and 1990, when Oregon's population grew by 38 percent, the amount of vehicle miles traveled by the state's residents increased by 97 percent. Oregon growth-management laws may have prevented urbanization from creeping beyond the urban growth boundaries, but they have not prevented sprawl within them.

"There is sprawl inside of our urban growth boundary," Mike Burton, the regional metropolitan government's directly elected executive officer, said candidly. Drive south of Portland on State Highway 99, a designated scenic route through the Willamette Valley, and you will pass a junkscape of plastic signs and asphalt lots, the kind of visual pollution found on every commercialized strip in the United States. Such development is typical in suburbs like Tigard, Wilsonville, and Beaverton. Tigard, in the 1980s, "in desperation to get jobs, said, 'Come on down, we'll give you anything,'" Burton said. Toda

Tigard's Main Street is a highway. "They formulated their economy around people driving through it, but they forgot people have to get around downtown, so now they have a moratorium on building." Beyond the regional urban growth boundary, the formerly walkable Main Streets of historically small rural places such as Sandy, Canby, and Newberg have fast dissolved into sprawling strips of roadside development, leapfrog sprawl brought on by people willing to commute great distances to live in places where they perceive the quality of life to be high, where working farms are carved into farmettes of fifteen acres or five-acre mini-estates dotted by McMansions.

To accommodate new residents and new businesses in the region, "we're doing the easy development, California-style growth. But because it was all happening within this ring, nobody cared much about it," said Association for Portland Progress president Ruth Scott. Now, "we're afraid they're going to get gridlocked around us, and that they won't be able to get in." Downtown interests aren't the only ones worried. Suburbanites worry, too. Metropolitan Portland is projected to grow by half a million people by 2010. Metropolitan Seattle and Tacoma grew by that amount in the 1980s alone, resulting in square mile after square mile of the kind of urban sprawl that most Portlanders want to prevent.[39] As traffic grows more congested, as more open land is developed and scenic landscapes disappear, a majority of people in the metropolitan region believe their quality of life to be in jeopardy.

On one extreme of public opinion are the "no growth" advocates who want to close Oregon's gates to new arrivals. They have no desire to pay taxes to build infrastructure to accommodate people who don't yet live here. But if California and Texas can hardly stem the flow of illegal immigrants across their borders, Oregon will never stop the flow of legal immigrants across its own. At the other extreme are "no growth management" advocates who prefer laissez-faire development to Oregon's system of public order. But if development trends were allowed to continue, Portland's metropolitan region would grow at the edges, draining the downtown, leading to more sprawl, less open space, and more congestion all the way to the coast. Portlanders have seen the sprawl scenario play out in so many other cities, and it is not an option most of them are willing to accept. Between the extremes of "no growth" and "no growth management" is a majority of people willing to accept additional growth but eager to protect what the region has carefully preserved. They want to hold the urban growth boundary in place as tightly as possible and find acceptable ways of making room for hundreds of thousands more people inside it. "There is a strong public concern about not destroying natural resources and a concern about density," said Mike Burton, Metro's executive officer. "Nobody wants us to become like Tokyo, but nobody has a vision of this place becoming like Santa Barbara, either." For decades, Americans have run from one extreme to the other, from the congested vertical metropolis of skyscrapers to the empty horizontal metropolis of sprawl. Today, Portlanders are demanding an alternative to either extreme.

In 1988, a group called Sensible Transportation Options for People (STOP) objected to plans for a new Western Bypass highway, proposed to link the rapidly growing western suburbs with Interstate 5, Oregon's main north-south artery. The bypass quickly raised the ire of environmentalists because it would have bisected Portland's Forest Park, a 4,683-acre wilderness set aside by landscape architect John Olmsted for the exposition of 1905. But the plan eventually captured the attention of a broader audience because of its potential impact on the region as a whole. "We built a bypass on the east side in the 1960s and it produced all kinds of sprawl," said Keith Bartholomew, an attorney with 1,000 Friends of Oregon. According to Bartholomew, the proposed Western Bypass would have run outside of Portland's urban growth boundary for two-thirds of its length, paving the way for the development of protected open space into low-density, auto-dependent environments.

"We said this is crazy," Bartholomew recalled. "We've already committed to spend half a billion dollars on a western light-rail system running through enough land to accommodate two-thirds of new households and three-quarters of new jobs projected in the region over the next twenty years, all of it within walking distance of the transit line." When the Oregon Department of Transportation challenged Bartholomew's organization to come up with another plan, 1,000 Friends of Oregon raised $1.5 million to study alternatives and present them to the public. Some funds for the project came from the Federal Highway Administration, which was happy not to fund a new highway if it didn't have to, and some funds even came from oil companies. "We knew they had it, so we decided to ask," Bartholomew said with a grin.

The result, a study entitled *Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality* (called LUTRAQ for short), showed that new highways are not the solution to suburban gridlock but instead its very cause, leading to auto-dependent development patterns that make people prisoners of their cars. With models of alternative development patterns supplied by the San Francisco–based firm headed by community planner Peter Calthorpe, the study showed how to rearrange suburbia in ways that make people less dependent on private vehicles by offering them more walkable environments. If the expected growth could be redirected closer to the planned western light-rail line, light-rail stops could serve as nodes for clusters of offices, services, shopping centers, and apartments, all arranged into new town centers with walkable streets, a contemporary version of the traditional American small town. Beyond the town centers, neighborhoods could sprout within walking distance of those transit stops and within walking distance of parks, schools, and neighborhood stores, contemporary versions of the streetcar suburbs built in the earliest decades of the century. "Too often, neighbors assume new development has to have the negative characteristics of sprawl, more traffic, more asphalt, and more environmental blight," writes Calthorpe in his book, *The Next American Metropolis*. An architect by training, Calthorpe is the most articulate spokesman for the contemporary urban design movement called "New Urbanism," which encourages development based on the old planning wisdom in traditional towns and neighborhoods. "This is not just about going back to our beautiful old villages and towns," Calthorpe insists. "It is actually about how we fashion the next generation of growth."[40]

Calthorpe argues that the expansion of metropolitan highway systems should give way to the expansion of transit, in order to achieve a more compact urban form. He says, "Our ubiquitous single-use zoning should be replaced with standards for mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods." And he urges his peers to design places for people instead of cars, in ways that improve "the public domain."[41] In place of isolated office complexes surrounded by parking lots, we might one day see a village green surrounded by a complex of offices. In Sacramento, for example, at a new, mixed-use, transit-oriented community for ten thousand residents designed by Calthorpe's firm, the Apple Computer Company has already constructed a large facility in what Calthorpe calls "a major shift in the suburban status quo."[42] Such ideas represent a challenge to orthodox suburban zoning, but they are hardly revolutionary. "The village green is just as much an American tradition as the libertarian 'I'll do what I please on my plot,'" says Calthorpe, who calls these kinds of plans convenient and affordable, "simple and appropriate for our times, not utopian and not necessarily the product of some strong-armed regulating transformation." Though new, the early examples of this type of development should encourage, Calthorpe says. "The private sector really seems to be leaning in this direction, and if we can just get the regulations and the financing infrastructure to stop frustrating it, I think you would see an explosion of better environments, both in the city and in the suburbs."

Calthorpe's firm has already written "transit-oriented development" guidelines to shape the expansion of Sacramento and San Diego. Jurisdictions in metropolitan Portland are in the process of writing their own. In 1992, Oregon's voters showed yet more confidence in their ability to manage growth when they amended their state constitution to give Portland's metropolitan government even greater authority over these issues. Two-thirds of voters in the metropolitan region then gave the green light to the compilation of a new fifty-year regional growth plan. The "Region 2040" measure, to be adopted

officially by the end of 1997, will expand the growth boundary only slightly. To make room for another 720,000 residents inside the boundary, Metro's planners are taking aim at sprawl's worst culprits. To cut down on the paving of land for surface parking that stays empty most of the day, especially around isolated office complexes and stand-alone roadside businesses, Metro will encourage the development of regional town centers at light-rail stops, places where jobs and services can be maintained in better balance, in closer proximity, reducing the length of trips between home and work. By allowing developers to build a mix of housing types for an increasingly diverse housing market, the size of the average new single-family lot will drop to less than half of what it was three decades ago. The creation of more compact and walkable mixed-use environments that allow both residential and commercial development could further reduce traffic congestion, as could the replacement of suburban cul-de-sac and arterial road systems with more traditional through-street grids. With a goal of constructing new homes in the suburbs at an average of six units per acre (roughly one-third of the minimum density of fifteen units to the acre required for urban living), metropolitan Portland has a long way to grow before becoming too dense for suburban preferences. In fact, the city of Portland actually has a lower population density than San Diego and almost half as many people per square mile as San Jose, in Santa Clara County's Silicon Valley.[43]

Is greater Portland truly ready to accept such alterations to deeply entrenched autocentric development patterns? Voters have already approved a $472 million bond issue to fund the new $900 million light-rail line that will give the western suburbs an opportunity to grow in more compact ways Beaverton, for instance, a formless home of newly built office complexes will try to use a light-rail stop to develop the kind of compact town center i never had. And rail service to Hillsboro farther west can only reinforce th railroad-era town center that remains there. Mike Burton, Metro's electe executive officer, said these ideas have already won the support of suburban based corporate executives such as Intel's vice president, Keith Thompso "He doesn't know about land use," Burton said, "but what he does know that Santa Clara failed." At Intel's offices in California, Burton said, your employees fresh out of college can't find affordable housing within an ea commute "unless they're millionaires." Employers in the Portland region, l said, don't want to see such failures repeated here. "None of them will t you we need to move the urban growth boundary. They live here, too. Th don't want to screw it up."

"Right now, the suburbs here don't look any different from suburbs el where in America, but we're on the cusp of the challenge of taking the s cess we've had downtown and following that in the suburbs," said 1,C

Friends of Oregon's Keith Bartholomew. "We have a nice downtown, but it didn't used to be nice. It became nice through policy and investment, not by magic or the silver bullet. Going for the silver bullet often leads to failure, and failures breed cynicism. Success comes from consistent efforts that use a variety of approaches." In downtown Portland, civic leaders combined a number of approaches to add variety and vitality to places where it was lacking, to fill holes that were empty, and to give Portlanders a city worthy of their pride. What Oregonians are attempting to do in Portland's suburbs today is every bit as bold.

Some downtown advocates, however, worry that while the suburbs strive to become more urbane, Portland's hard-earned urbanity is eroding. The downtown parking cap was lifted after heavy lobbying by business interests, and the city has approved a parking garage on a downtown block that was identified for park space in revisions to the downtown plan. The site originally belonged to Portland's "park blocks," a street of park space that dates to the city's founding years. Neil Goldschmidt was one who voiced strong opposition to the parking garage proposal. "We have these lots that can just about go anywhere, and this one is going someplace where I don't think it needs to be above-ground parking," he said. "It could be a park, or it could be an office building, or it could be retailing," with parking underground.

"I was in Omaha a month ago," Goldschmidt said in his Portland office in 1996. "I had never spent any time there. Warren Buffett's got his offices in a building in downtown Omaha. Union Pacific Railroad is there. They have more Fortune 500 people in downtown than we do, I'll betcha, and there is no 'there' there. The only place anybody goes to is their old town area, which has some wonderful buildings, but that's all." Goldschmidt said downtown Omaha has benefited from the renovation of a prominent historic building into a new hotel, "but you wouldn't walk on those streets. They're doing what we're doing with this damned garage. They got all the garages God would ever want, all the flat parking lots you'd ever want, and it looks like Berlin after World War II, which is just about the way we looked. I used to have pictures of Portland taken from the air, and it looked like a bombed-out area."

Today, times are good in Portland, and when times are good, "people get lazy and sloppy," Goldschmidt said. The generation that raised Portland's capital beginning with the plan of 1972 is now retired, Goldschmidt noted, "and the question is whether those who are spending the capital that has been built have any real understanding of what it will take to add to it. You don't have a choice of staying where you are. Things will either get better, or they will get worse. There is nothing in between."

Goldschmidt believes that, ultimately, downtown Portland will get better. Others are not so certain. "I don't think we have really visionary leaders,"

said Rob DeGraff, vice president of the Association for Portland Progress. "We continue to live off the vision of the Goldschmidt era." If the current leaders seem less imaginative, perhaps it is because there is less to imagine today than there was three decades ago. On one hand, Portland is lucky to be free of the outrages, the demolitions and bad designs that inspired activism in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, downtown Portland could indeed be witnessing the almost invisible effects of slow erosion.

The question for other places is "Can Portland's success of the last quarter century be followed elsewhere?" A number of factors make Portland unique. Topography in Portland, as in Pittsburgh, has helped to prevent the rampant decentralization that has drained other cities. And like Pittsburgh, Portland has yet to build a highway system of outer beltways that displace central business districts, preferring a hub-and-spoke system, in which most routes lead into the city, rather than around it. From its inception, Portland has benefited from a cultural tradition that places a high value on the public realm, and since the Progressive-era presidency of Teddy Roosevelt, Oregon's state government has valued direct public participation in decision making. Racially, Portland is 85 percent white, the highest percentage of white residents of any large city in the United States. In a city with few distressed neighborhoods, where 90 percent of the city's children attend public schools, Portland suffers from none of the white flight that has decimated cities in the Great Lakes region and along the eastern seaboard. Because of all these factors, downtown Portland has remained politically strong, while its suburbs have remained politically weak.[44] Until now, Portland's economy has been sustained largely by newcomers seeking the very quality of life that Oregon has worked hard to preserve, expanding the constituency for livable places. In fact, quality of life has become such an important ingredient in the region's economic health that is doubtful that regional business interests would seek to destroy it. In 1991, William B. Conerly, a vice president and economist at First Interstate Bank, said, "Portland's growth defies the stereotypes about regional economies." While the region's large industries, such as timber, shrink and large regional employers engage in downsizing, the number of jobs in the region continues to rise. "Right now in Portland, the jobs are following the people who are moving here," he said, adding, "Portland's growth will continue as long as the quality of life is perceived to be better than elsewhere."[45]

The quality of this region has excited travelers and pioneers for almost two centuries. One of them, Lewis Mumford, addressed civic leaders at the Portland City Club in 1938. "I have seen a lot of scenery in my life, but I have seen nothing so tempting as a home . . . than this Oregon country," Mumford told them. "You have the basis here for civilization on its highest scale." Challenging them, he asked, "Are you good enough to have this country in your possession? Have you enough intelligence, imagination and cooperation among you to make the best use of these opportunities? Rebuilding our cities will be one of the major tasks of the next generation. You have an opportunity here to do a job of city planning like nowhere else in the world." By that account, Portland would seem to be unique, a city unlike any other city in the United States. But another account, offered a generation later, is worth repeating.

In 1965, John Painter Jr., a writer for the *Oregonian,* said Portland was then "a city that's going somewhere—but its urban destination is unclear." Although Portland had potential, it suffered from weak civic leadership and unimaginative city commissioners. It had failed to capitalize on amenities such as the riverfront and the empty block in front of the courthouse. Worse than anything, it had failed to prepare a plan to guide the city's future. "If Portland looks at its future needs and plans for them, if it ignores the commercial blandishments of city-destroying speculators and promoters; if it considers people instead of cars and freeways; if it carefully plots its residential, commercial and industrial sprawl; if it puts greenery before parking lots, its future could be unreservedly brilliant," he said. But the writer also offered a warning. "If Portland blunders on until it is clogged with cars and slashed by freeways; until its residential areas are overrun by garish apartment houses; until its parks are hopelessly overcrowded; until its people flee further and further into exurbia; until its back is against the wall of urban disaster, it will have fulfilled the destiny of its Eastern counterparts: to serve as a testament to the frailty of man's will and the weakness of his imagination."[46]

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Downtowns across America are undergoing tremendous transformations, many of them for the worse, some for the better. But it would be a mistake to judge today's downtowns against what they used to be instead of what they might become.

Industrial flight from urban cores has been followed in the information age by the flight of professional service firms dispersed from downtowns by automobiles, fax machines, and computer networks that send offices across the horizon. Few sectors need to be centrally located anymore, with the exception of government, and, in some cases, financial services. A downtown center that cannot hold even these sectors is unlikely to enjoy a prosperous future. Yet any sectors that remain will continue to serve as downtown magnets that hold other uses together.

One powerful magnet will continue to be housing within an easy commute to downtown for urban residents at the high end of the residential market.

These are the executive-level individuals who make decisions about where their companies will locate, and those decisions are determined largely by the length of the executives' commute. If they live near downtown, chances are their offices will remain there. If they live in a new large houses fronting suburban golf courses, chances are that their offices will not be far away.

In the past, the housing that has served this category near downtown has typically been the best-preserved historic residential districts in a city. These are the places that sprang up early nearest the downtown core and have retained their timeless appeal to buyers who are willing to pay extra to live in such a location. The supply of such districts is finite, but cities across America are beginning to see apartments and condominiums created in downtown structures originally built for other purposes: loft apartments in brick warehouse buildings, condominiums in converted historic hotels and even in skyscrapers abandoned by Wall Street firms. Nationwide, demographic changes are driving the trend. Late-middle-aged couples, so called empty nesters, whose children have grown and moved away from home, find themselves with little need or time to maintain large houses and lawns. Some of them also are in search of proximity to vibrant urban nightlife, restaurants, and cultural attractions, and closeness to neighbors who share a similar lifestyle.

For the foreseeable future, entertainment appears to be one of the biggest growth sectors in American downtowns. People still seek exciting places to spend their time, and people continue to be drawn to places occupied by other people.

Reston, Virginia, one of the successful so-called new towns of the 1960s, appeared to have everything: residential structures of all kinds, diversity among its citizens, and plenty of open space and recreational facilities. But it had no downtown, and thus it had no heart. Now, Reston is building one.

Just a few miles away from Reston, the town of Rockville, Maryland, had a traditional downtown—bulldozed in the early 1970s to make room for the Rockville Mall. The mall has been a disaster, both economically and visually. Soon, it, too, will be torn down. The plan is to replace it, according to Rockville's announcement, with something "more closely resembling a city center of yesteryear"—in other words, a traditional downtown—"designed to look and feel pretty much like the bustling village Rockville once was." Hundreds of other communities made the same costly mistake in the 1960s and 1970s and learned the same hard lesson: a mall is not a downtown, and you can't substitute it for one.

An environment that sustains a variety of activities at various hours of the day needs to offer people a variety of ways to get around. A generation ago, architect Victor Gruen, inspired by the downtown pedestrian district in his ing its streets into a giant pedestrian district surrounded at the perimeter by highways and parking garages for commuters. His plan never got off the ground. In the ensuing years, the people of Fort Worth largely abandoned their historic downtown for urban sprawl that spread unchecked across the flatlands for hundreds of square miles. Until a few years ago, there was little in downtown Fort Worth that was worth walking to, but the situation has recently begun to change.

Thanks to large investments by the locally based Bass family, downtown Fort Worth is witnessing a resurrection. Historic buildings have been rehabilitated into apartments or condominiums for professionals who work in downtown offices. New movie theaters and new restaurants and bars in a collection of formerly vacant historic buildings called Sundance Square are giving downtown the nightlife it hasn't had in years. A new concert center will soon fill a prominent but empty downtown block. Downtown Fort Worth is beginning to feel like Fort Worth again, instead of the empty center of just another sprawling metropolis.

Most dramatic is Fort Worth's decision to relocate an elevated highway that divided the downtown, isolating an Art Deco–era government office building and a massive neoclassical post office—two of downtown's most defining landmarks. Like Fort Worth, smart cities are swapping the meat axe of highwayman Robert Moses for a needle that can stitch pieces of the city back into the larger urban fabric. San Francisco has chosen not to rebuild the earthquake-damaged Embarcadero, its waterfront highway along the Bay. Now, the downtown will be reconnected with the water for the first time in decades. Similarly, in Boston, the elevated Central Artery expressway is being buried underground, after divorcing downtown from Boston Harbor for nearly half a century.

Le Corbusier's modernist City of Tomorrow—the city of high-rise towers and high-speed highways—is giving way to a postmodern city more sympathetic to traditional ideas. Instead of finding modernist ways to separate soaring towers and massive complexes, as well as pedestrians and automobiles, the postmodern urban planners are searching for connections. The problem facing most cities today is not congestion, but emptiness—how to fill in the empty holes.

From a transportation standpoint, less room for cars leaves more room for things that attract people. Places where people want to be are generally short on parking, so a shortage of parking is not necessarily a bad thing if people are still eager to get to a location in other ways. Portland, Oregon, for example, added thousands of new jobs to its downtown over two decades without adding a single parking space.

The change from an industrial economy to an information-dependent, service-dominated economy presents older cities with unique advantages and opportunities. The deindustrialization of historic warehouse districts in St. Paul and Denver is also taking place in cities such as Chattanooga and Richmond.

Waterfronts, too, are enjoying new life where heavy industry has left. Land values drop when former economic uses decline, freeing up relatively cheap property for new functions to replace the old ones. "The sight, sound, and feel of water naturally attract people, which is why waterfront developments often prosper," argues Kent A. Robertson of Minnesota's St. Cloud State University. As far back as the 1920s, San Antonio realized how a polluted waterway could become a great local amenity. Today, its Riverwalk is the second most visited attraction in town after the Alamo. Lately, Pittsburgh has discovered postindustrial vibrancy as a river city.

Scholars of urban history have argued that the transformation of aging industrial downtowns into postindustrial service centers and cultural attractions is analogous to the renaissance experienced in European cities from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, when medieval workshops for the production of wealth gave way to the baroque era's "places of display and consumption."

"The central city is no longer a central business district based on maximum accessibility, but rather a center of display based on maximum visibility," writes Larry Ford of the University of San Diego. "Similarly, the inner city—at least in those cities going through this postindustrial transformation—is no longer a place for teeming masses laboring in the workaday world, but rather a place to promenade and seek a style of living."[47] Downtowns are changing from a place where things are made to a place where things are seen, purchased, and experienced.

In the postindustrial economy, a downtown's public realm, its built environment—the public face of buildings and surrounding streets—will take on greater importance as structures become valued as much for how they look as for what takes place inside them. Distinctive places will continue to attract people drawn for the experience of that particular place. Historic districts will only become more vital, both for the city's identity as well as for its economic advantage. Suburbs, after all, cannot manufacture history. Tragically, Omaha, Nebraska, only recently demolished its underutilized historic warehouse district for a new corporate headquarters for ConAgra, the agribusiness giant. The history of a place is a great asset that downtowns cannot afford to waste. Cities that destroy it will have less to offer.

In our impatient age, it is hard to have the patience or vision to remember or imagine how downtowns mature over time and generations. America's downtowns need time to develop—not time measured in decades, but time measured in lifetimes. And they also need guidance on the best ways to develop. Great places are not created by chance but by choice.

There will always be a need for downtowns as a place for people, a destination, a focal point for community life. That need may be difficult for some of us to imagine today in the age of sprawl, but in moments of doubt about the future of downtowns it is helpful to remember that the Renaissance was preceded by the black plague. Ruins, after all, are what give way to rehabilitation.

During the Renaissance, city walls and slow methods of transportation contained urban development tightly in the urban core, forcing people to think carefully each time their city grew. The walls protected the people inside from enemies outside, but the by-products were a cohesive, well-developed core as well as a cohesive and well-preserved surrounding natural environment, a great amenity for the urban population as well as its vital source of food. Think of the walls around the medieval city as a precursor to the urban growth boundaries around Portland, Oregon, and places that choose to follow Portland's lead. Watch these places carefully. As they mature, they will fill in their empty holes and fill their observers with optimism about the future of downtowns.

7

PRESERVATION IN THE AGE OF SPRA

> The preservation movement has one great curiosity. There i never retrospective controversy or regret. Preservationists are th only people in the world who are invariably confirmed in thei wisdom after the fact.
>
> —John Kenneth Galbraith
> "The Economic and Social Returns of Preservation"

New and exciting things are happening in traditional c ties nationwide. Neighborhoods left for dead are being revitalize motivated residents. Small-town merchants are reinvigorating th Street business districts. Entrepreneurs and enlightened public off turning dreary downtowns into places where people want to be. their achievements occur in bits and pieces, however, they often t unnoticed. Most changes in a community happen slowly. Only a reach a cumulative mass do they attract notice.

Places such as Pittsburgh, Portland, Oregon, and Chippewa Falls, sin, are beginning to attract notice because of the work of preserv Yet, the accomplishments of preservationists frequently collide wi perceptions of what "historic preservation" means. In some plac carries the stigma of elitism and indifference to the concerns of ave zens. In the 1850s, when a woman named Ann Pamela Cunningha the nation to save Mount Vernon as a shrine to George Washingto vation was defined for a century. Preservation became a nationwide restore and refurnish historic houses where Americans could pay h their past. That is still what many people think of today when they term "preservation."

Saving, interpreting, and promoting an appreciation of historic a tecturally significant landmarks will always be at the core of the pre movement's mission, but the work of preservation is evolving and ha much more than that. It is still firmly rooted in an appreciation for

for Youngstown, as it turned out, was the home of Edward J. DeBartolo, America's largest regional shopping mall developer, whose developments had displaced the centers of communities nationwide.

Not every American city has lost its downtown to the extent that Youngstown has. But people in most cities would agree that America's downtowns are not what they used to be. Does all this matter? Why should anyone care about the disinvestment that afflicts the downtown core? The health of a downtown is an important indicator of the economic health of the entire metropolitan community, affecting everything from property values in surrounding locations to a community's ability to attract investors to its economy. A number of studies have shown that the health of an entire region is tied to the economic health of its core. In other words, the image of downtown determines the image of the region as a whole. Ask someone to describe metropolitan Detroit, for example, and chances are they will never mention places like Oakland, a prosperous suburb.

The smallest of cities have major investments in their downtowns, in the structures themselves as well as in the infrastructure. In a time of fiscal austerity it is irresponsible to let them go to waste. Downtowns are important incubators for new small businesses, most of which are started in older buildings, where space is less expensive to lease. Downtowns tend to be home to independent, family-oriented businesses, which, unlike national chains, reinvest a large portion of their profits in the local economy, and support local civic institutions, schools, charities, and community projects.

The importance of downtowns, however, goes well beyond economics. With increasing density at the heart of a community, cities are made more livable and thus centrifugal pressures for sprawl are reduced. Downtown holds together the most varied mix of economic, civic, and social functions. It is the place where everyone can meet and interact, where monuments are located, where speeches are made, where parades are held and crowds are entertained. More than anyplace else, downtown gives a community its collective identity and thus its pride. It is the keystone that keeps the other pieces of the city in place. Downtown is the heart and soul of the metropolis.

Like other organisms, cities evolve and, with them, their downtowns. Old functions disappear, and new ones either replace them or move elsewhere. As we shall see, downtowns reinvented by creative thinking and entrepreneurial leadership are not leaving this evolution to chance.

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Denver's history is a story of booms and busts, of prospectors, speculators, and liquidators, from the discovery of gold in 1858 to the collapse of savings and loans a century and a quarter later. Like the landscape, where the Front

Range of the Rocky Mountains meets the Great Plains, Denver's economy has risen to lofty peaks in one cycle only to fall flat in the next.

At first glance, there is no natural explanation for a metropolis of 2 million people to be here. Denver's South Platte River is neither wide nor widely used. Water is scarce, and the land is dry. Laying the first railroad tracks between the East and San Francisco, the Union Pacific Railroad bypassed tiny Denver in favor of Cheyenne, Wyoming. But Denver's business leaders bought their way onto the map. Digging into their pockets, they raised enough money, in only a matter of weeks, to build a railroad spur into town in 1870. Then commerce really flowed. By 1876, Denver was the capital of Colorado, a young state that grew rich quickly from the mining of silver.

During the great silver boom, Denver exploded, becoming the "Queen City of the Plains," the largest city in the West after San Francisco and Omaha, a busy railroad junction. But Denver's pace of growth was unsustainable. The federal repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893, along with a national financial panic and economic depression that year, brought construction in Denver to a halt. Building permits sank by 95 percent within a year. Only then did the city finally pause to discover it was a mess. "Private dreams, schemes and greed [had] shaped the city's growth," wrote Denver historian Thomas J. Noel and preservationist Barbara S. Norgren. "The frontier of rugged individualism prevailed; there was little sense of community. Commercial buildings were thrown up recklessly."[2]

At the peak of the Progressive era's reactions to the ills of industrial urbanization, Mayor Robert Walter "Boss Bob" Speer, elected in 1904, asked the city's leadership to make Denver "the Paris of America."[3] Assisted by architect Edward Bennett, Daniel Burnham's assistant at the Chicago exposition in 1893, planner Charles M. Robinson, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Speer proposed the construction of a monumental civic center at the foot of the 1888 state capitol building steps, where a marker notes the exact altitude of 5,280 feet above sea level. With its monumental civic structures, formal public gardens, and gathering space for public events, the civic center's "ornamental value for the future cannot be measured by dollars," Speer said. The project would achieve the unmeasurable goal of making "our people proud of Denver."[4]

Investing huge sums in the city once again, Denver built its civic center, culminating with the completion of the City County Building in 1932, a new replacement for the old city hall. Launched in 1924, the "marble municipal palace" was plagued for years by highly publicized cost overruns, alterations, and construction delays. The fiasco cost Denver the public's confidence in large-scale physical improvements. It also cost Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton his job after the *Denver Post* called him "the most incapable and utterly