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Home > Business

Past week: Wed | Thu | Fri | SPO

D.C. team to study downtown

Urban Land Institute to offer ideas on development

Todd Grady
Staff Writer

(June 4, 2005) — A team representing the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C., arrives here Sunday for a weeklong visit. Its mission: Recommend redevelopment strategies for the struggling Midtown Plaza area of downtown.

"We need to understand what our potential next steps could be and how we put them into motion," said Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, president of the Rochester Downtown Development Corp.

Members of the Urban Land Institute will interview a diverse group of more than 120 people — including business leaders, government officials and college students — before finalizing a roadmap for redeveloping Midtown Plaza, the Sibley Centre and the two-block sections north of Sibley and the proposed Renaissance Square project.

They'll also have a conference call with Moshe Safdie, the chief architect for the Renaissance Square project, and meet with other people involved in that complex. The project would include an underground bus terminal, a performing arts center and a new downtown campus for Monroe Community College.

Recommendations will be shared at a 9 a.m. presentation Friday at the Riverside Convention Center, 123 E. Main St. A question-and-answer session will follow.

Alex J. Rose, vice president of development for Continental Development Corp., a suburban office developer in El Segundo, Calif., will chair the panel.

"We never leave without telling you what in our opinion we think is necessary to do the job," he said.

However, Rose added, ultimately it's the community that decides what actions to take.

In 2002, Rose chaired a Urban Land Institute panel requested by Jersey City, N.J., to make recommendations for turning a historic warehouse area into an arts district. The city adopted a

Who's coming

These people are part of Friday's Urban Land Institute panel:

- Alex J. Rose, vice president of development for Continental Development Corp., El Segundo, Calif.
- Ray Brown, president of Ray Brown Consulting, Memphis, Tenn.
- Allen K. Folks, principal at EDAW Inc., Sacramento, Calif.
- Donna Lewis, planning director for Mercer County, Trenton, N.J.
- Christopher B. Lopiano, senior vice president of community development, Bank of America, Washington, D.C.
- Zane Segal, president of Zane Segal Properties Inc., Houston.
- Edward Shriver Jr., principal at Strada Architecture, Pittsburgh.
- Alex Bond, associate in policy and practice at the Urban Land Institute.
- Jason Bell, panel coordinator in the advisory-services program for the Urban Land Institute.


Friday's session, which starts at 9 a.m. at the Riverside Convention Center, 123 E. Main St., is open to the public, but reservations are required by Wednesday. Call (585) 546-6920 or e-mail rddc@rddc.org.

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redevelopment plan that incorporated 85 percent to 90 percent of the panel's recommendations, Rose said.

He's been preparing for his visit here by reading about the area. Rose hasn't come across anything that is atypical for older, central urban areas.

"One of the comments that I will typically use in a presentation on an assignment like this is kind of conveying the notion that hey, you're not alone," he said.

A public-private consortium of downtown stakeholders, including the city and Monroe County, are funding the \$110,000 Urban Land Institute research. Its members include real estate developers and investors.

The stakeholders are searching for ways to develop the core of downtown Rochester while other development springs up around it.

They are also looking at what works in other center cities in midsize communities such as Rochester.

The downtown development group estimates that a minimum of \$500 million is being invested in downtown, led by \$230 million in the Renaissance project and \$57 million in market-rate housing.

The housing projects include Corn Hill Landing, a \$20 million mix of retail and luxury apartments, and The Sagamore on East, a \$15 million luxury condominium project on East Avenue that also has some retail space.

"The core has been either seeing deterioration or has tremendous challenges in the marketplace and has not developed the way surrounding properties have, so we have a lot of investment at stake," Zimmer-Meyer said.

In the urban planning business, that's known as the "proverbial hole in the doughnut," Rose said.

The key will be to take the Urban Land Institute Panel's recommendations, evaluate them and see whether any public-private partnerships can be proposed to achieve them, Zimmer-Meyer said.

"What we want to see is a platform for the community to develop a set of action steps," Zimmer-Meyer said.

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Background

The Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit research and education organization supported by more than 25,000 members worldwide. Its advisory-services arm was founded in 1947 when it convened its first panel to offer recommendations for redeveloping the downtown in Louisville, Ky. Since then it has done work in more than 400 areas, such as Pittsburgh; Milwaukee; Cincinnati; Akron, Ohio; and Little Rock, Ark.

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