

## Another Aim at Seventh Street

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Los Angeles Downtown News

October 31, 2005

Before World War II, Seventh Street in Downtown Los Angeles was in many respects the L.A. Live of its time, with department stores, eateries, nightlife and hotels along a pedestrian-friendly corridor. The street buzzed with activity.

However, that was more than a half century ago, and in recent decades there have been repeated if unsuccessful efforts to enliven the street. While many of the moves have been fueled by business groups, last week a new player continued its steps into the field.

More than 40 Downtown residents, business owners and community members turned out last Tuesday evening for the second Seventh Street Visioning Workshop, sponsored by the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (DLANC) and the USC Neighborhood Participation Project. The nearly three-hour discussion, which took place in the old Clifton's Silver Spoon Cafeteria at 515 W. Seventh St., offered stakeholders a chance to sound off about what they think the corridor needs. Representatives from six of the 11 DLANC committees made presentations about their plans for the boulevard.

While the discussion touched on a variety of general Downtown issues - such as public toilets, art installations and police cameras - it mainly focused on how to create street-level activity between the 110 Freeway and the Los Angeles River.

Hal Bastian, chair of the DLANC Business Development, Sports, Conventions and Tourism Committee, told the gathering that several retailers, including bookstore Barnes & Noble, have inquired about opening locations on Seventh. He said that the market is growing as more residents move into the area.

"I'd like to see some great regional stores on Seventh," said Bastian, who also serves as vice president and director of economic development for the Downtown Center Business Improvement District. "I think it's happening."

Stakeholders specifically pointed to a need for sidewalk cafes on Seventh. DLANC president Brady Westwater said street-level dining areas are difficult to create due to the city's lengthy permitting process. Another problem is that the sidewalks are too narrow for sitting areas, he said. DLANC secretary Russell Brown said a solution would be to set sidewalk dining areas into buildings, as is the case with the Broadway Bar next to the Orpheum Theatre.

Michael Gagan, co-chair of the Transportation and Public Works Committee, also expressed concerns about bus routes and schedules on Seventh Street. He said that the boulevard was underserved by the city's DASH bus service. "Clearly the DASH system needs to be reconfigured to where people live and where people want to go," Gagan said.

## Reclaiming the Luster

In many ways, DLANC and other groups are looking to recreate many of the elements Seventh Street once had. Before World War II, the street boasted dozens of name-brand stores, first-rate restaurants and even had a network of transportation.

But as the city experienced rapid post-World War II suburbanization, Seventh Street lost its luster. Things only got worse during the Metro Red Line construction, which shut down parts of the street, causing more stores to close.

Although several large, empty structures still remain eyesores, the trend is beginning to shift. The street now has a solid retail base, especially in a small cluster of buildings with jewelry businesses. As of last month, five residential projects and a 4,500-square-foot bar were under construction. Quality of life issues are also getting attention. In June, property owners between Figueroa and Hope streets elected to start taxing themselves to light 32 antique-style lamps in front of their buildings. The lamps had been dark for years, and cost \$9,100 a year to light. (The effort was spearheaded by Bastian and DLANC's Transportation and Public Works Committee.)

With those pieces in place, Bastian thinks Seventh Street can act as a lynchpin in Downtown's development. "Until a couple of years ago Downtown L.A. was a red line. No one wanted to invest here. That's changed," Bastian said. "At the end of the day, we're trying to create a plan where people can come out and maybe go to a comedy club or maybe hear a little jazz."

Westwater thinks DLANC could make that happen by helping link stakeholders with City Hall. "You can come to us and we can act as a middle man," he told the audience.

Westwater said the committees would use the suggestions from stakeholders and take action. "It showed the things we can do in the community," he said after the meeting. "I'm very happy."

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