



Downtown Needs Theater, Mall Plan

February 8, 2004

Urban planners George Crandall and Don Arambula weren't afraid of saying what they really thought of Knoxville's downtown area during a briefing on their redevelopment plans with City Council members.

"Your former mayor (Victor Ashe) was right when he said you need a headquarters hotel," Crandall told the officials when the subject of the convention center came up. The planners said that, in the midst of any other downtown plans, curing the convention center of its red ink should be a priority.

The consultants - who are now wrapping up their contract with "Nine Counties. One Vision." - also recommended separating the current plans for a cinema-transit center that's still waiting for federal funding.

"The transit center is important, but it shouldn't compromise the cinema," Crandall said. "At this point, you need to de-couple the two."

If city officials hope to attract retailers back to Gay Street, the cinema is the better selling point, he explained, and offers businesses the promise of consistent customers beyond the downtown's 9-to-5 office hours.

"Nobody wants to be out there by themselves," Arambula added.

And, despite the city's recent renovation of Market Square, it still has no on-street parking, and pedestrian-only retail zones don't work, Crandall said. "It'll work for certain things, but it'll never be a primary retail area," he said. "That's the reality across the country."

Focus on Gay Street instead, they advised, where shoppers can stroll the sidewalks like they were in a mall.