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TALKING POINTS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT, DOWNTOWN SEATTLE ROTARY, JUNE 11, 1980

As a former mayor and a true believer in downtown as a special part of the American city, I'm please to come here today to visit with a group whose professional lives center on downtown.

Let me begin by telling you just a little about how important I think downtowns are:

- * They are the heart of a city
- * They give a measure of the economic, social, and cultural standards of the city
- * In a unique way, they are the concern of the whole public of the city; a citizen may belong to a neighborhood association where he or she lives, but the downtown is everyone's neighborhood, as well
- * Downtowns are, as well, the only part of the city where the whole of the city comes together--where transportation, housing, commerce, recreation combine to create a living organism.

In Seattle, that organism is a strong, healthy and growing one --one of the most impressive in the country. Here you can take enormous pride in the booming private sector investment in office buildings and hotels and the strong retail performance as evidence of a vital downtown. And, in fact, in view of the strength of your downtown, it is somewhat presumptuous of me to be standing here, offering you my views and my advice on downtown. Instead of telling you what you already know and are putting into exemplary practice, let me offer you some rules on downtown which I think may prove worthwhile over the long-run.

First, take nothing for granted.

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I can remember the shape downtown Portland was in when I took office as mayor in 1972: the prediction was that downtown Portland--like the downtowns of many older, larger cities--was dying; that downtowns were obsolete, replaced by suburban shopping centers.

Soon thereafter, a series of national developments provided a whole new context which turned that prediction on its head:

- Environmental and air quality laws
- The energy crisis and gas costs
- New transit emphasis
- Close-in urban housing rehabilitation.

One after another these waves hit our cities and each washed favorably across downtown. But my point is this: don't depend on these outside forces to keep downtown healthy in the future. When downtown is no longer economically attractive, or when it has lost its social purpose, even the most powerful outside forces won't help.

Now--while downtown is healthy--is the time to forge a working partnership between the public and private sectors to define what you want downtown to look like in the year 2000--and to use your present momentum as the force to carry you forward toward those goals.

Second, I would urge you to remember what downtown is not, as well as what it is. For to try to make downtown into something it should not and cannot become is to do violence to what is special about downtown. Most emphatically downtown is not a suburban shopping center in the middle of the city. It cannot and should not try to become one.

Nor is downtown a 9 to 5 community for office workers.

What makes downtown so special is its ability to meld all of its parts into an integrated whole that is more than the parts. Your vision for the future must embrace all of the parts of downtown and seek to blend and balance them into a harmonious whole.

Third, quality counts.

Economic activity is not, in and of itself, an indicator of health. Downtowns today are in the enviable position of being able to insist on quality. In your buildings, in the amenities that become part of the urban landscape assume that each development is a statement of your values as a community. Do not let a poor development degrade your self-image.

As a corollary I would say to beware of losing your heritage to the forces of wholesale change. Downtown is often the place we come to see not only who we are, but who we have been. In our historical buildings and old sections of the downtown are some of the last remaining statements about our community roots. You should protect them as an irreplaceable part of your heritage.

Fourth, make downtown a place for people.

Perhaps the greatest danger that faces a successful downtown is the threat that too much success will prove harmful: that economic success will gradually push out of downtown the uses that made it most interesting as a place for people in the beginning. Chief among these is housing. Downtown housing is, for me, the true test of a city's commitment to the downtown. For it gives downtown what it must have to succeed in the long run: a full-time, 24 hour resident population--a population committed to the full range of quality of life issues that downtown must concern itself with.

And finally, build strategies and not just projects.

The way to keep downtown healthy is to make each investment a piece of a larger strategy--to weave together a program for downtown that combines transportation improvements, sound economic investments and quality public developments. By seeing projects as pieces of a strategy it is possible to get more out of each investment--to lever air quality and noise improvements out of transit, making possible more housing; to use housing as a lever for recreation and park improvements; to use them in turn, as an incentive for added retailing; and so on.

Conclusion.

This, then, is what I've learned about downtowns from my experience. Here in Seattle you have a rare opportunity--to build a downtown that will set a standard of excellence for the rest of the nation. It is an enterprise worth doing--not just because of the economics of success, but because of what it says about you as a community of people who care deeply about your city.

Good Luck.

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