

City of Las Vegas

STAFF REPORT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DATE: 07/24/13

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING

ITEM DESCRIPTION: Report by Department of Planning regarding historic and archaeological resources in local media

BACKGROUND

No relevant case history.

ANALYSIS

Please enjoy the attached articles.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

No action required.

BACKUP DOCUMENTS

- “Joe Downtown: Onetime setting for “The Twilight Zone,” The Atomic reopens under new ownership,” www.lasvegassun.com, 06/24/13
- “Will the Las Vegas Community Help Fund The Huntridge?”, www.lasvegasweekly.com, 06/24/13.
- “Nevada State Museum exhibit looks at Mexico’s rich embroidery tradition,” www.lasvegasweekly.com, 06/24/13
- “Joe Downtown: TV star buoys effort to raise funds to save historic Huntridge,” www.lasvegassun.com, 06/24/13
- “Joe Downtown: Gentrification or positive progress? The great downtown debate,” www.lasvegassun.com, 06/24/13
- “Downtown Joe: Inquest to revive the Huntridge, confab reveals interesting historical context,” www.lasvegassun.com, 06/24/13
- “Historic Atomic Liquors reopens on Fremont Street with a prayer,” www.lvrj.com, 06/24/13
- “Historic Huntridge plan taps hopes and fears downtown,” www.lvrj.com, 06/24/13
- “Joe Downtown: Volunteers share load in ‘do-acracy’ to move along effort to save historic theater,” www.lasvegassun.com, 06/24/13
- “Dazzling Las Vegas showgirl, actress takes final bow,” www.lvrj.com, 07/01/13
- “Delivering a New Downtown: How two generations of Las Vegas leaders are reshaping the heart of the city,” www.lvrj.com, 07/02/13
- “Enduring the heat, crews prepare railroad cottage for museum,” www.lvrj.com, 07/03/13
- “Commissioners concerned about Welcome to Las Vegas solar ‘trees’,” www.lvrj.com, 07/03/13
- “Sesquicentennial license plates go on sale this month,” www.lvrj.com, 07/09/13

Joe Downtown: Onetime setting for “The Twilight Zone,” The Atomic reopens under new ownership



STEVE MARCUS

Bartender Ashlea Latham, left, serves drinks during the grand reopening of The Atomic on East Fremont Street Wednesday, June 20, 2013. The bar was originally built in 1945 as Virginia's Cafe but was renamed Atomic Liquors in 1952 when patrons used to go to the roof to watch the nuclear blasts from the Atomic Test Site.

By Joe Schoenmann (contact)

Published Thursday, June 20, 2013 | 10:07 a.m.

Updated Thursday, June 20, 2013 | 3:32 p.m.

The Atomic is officially open.

Three years after the iconic downtown Las Vegas bar closed upon the deaths of longtime owners Joe and Stella Sobchick in 2010, the mayor on Thursday torched a red plastic ribbon to christen the place.

About 100 people stood in the sun in front of the bar at 917 Fremont St. as Deacon Bonnie Polley, Christ Church Episcopal, gave her first-ever

invocation for a tavern. She prayed it would become "a place of hospitality and delight," and that "all who enter these doors find ... conversation, refreshment and joy."



After the invocation, Mayor Carolyn Goodman recited a litany of historic events related to the bar, including stories of customers sitting on the roof, cocktails in hand, to watch mushroom clouds arise from atomic blasts at the Nevada Test Site 90 miles to the northwest. (The United States stopped above-ground nuclear tests in 1962.)

Then, using a blowtorch – a symbolic ode to the bar's fiery name – Goodman cut through the ribbon.

Co-owner Lance Johns said the bar's name and background related to an atomic era that, to a large degree, altered the course of the world. "It's really exciting to have even a tiny part of that," he added.

The bar opened in 1952 as Atomic Liquors with the first packaged liquor license issued in Las Vegas and the seventh bar license issued by the city.

Lane B., a technical writer who lives two blocks away from the bar, predicted he would become one of The Atomic's customers.

"It's the history," he said, adding that Rod Serling's "The Twilight Zone" filmed scenes at the bar. "That says it all."

After the bar gets into full swing, Derek Stonebarger, who with Kent Johns also share ownership of the place, said it would host the nondenominational "Atomic Church" on Sundays. The church will include a short sermon followed by bloody marys that customers will make themselves.

Goodman asked aloud who owned two large, empty lots across the street from the bar.

Everyone else there seemed to know, answering out loud "Downtown Project," or "Tony Hsieh." The downtown revitalization group purchased two lots totalling 2.8 acres as part of a larger property assemblage in September 2012.

In October, the lots will be home to one of two large performance stages for the two-day music, art and food festival, Life Is Beautiful. In the months to come, those lots also will be paved and used for parking.

That's likely to mean a steady stream of customers for The Atomic but will also signal an eastward shift of the "center" of Fremont Street from its current spot near Sixth Street.

Businesses are moving east on Fremont. The multi-outlet Container Park opens later this year at Seventh and Fremont; a restaurant will also be opening at the corner of Maryland Parkway (12th Street) by the end of the year; and The Bunkhouse, just south of Fremont on 11th, is getting a facelift during a 60-day closure beginning July 1.

The Atomic's initial hours of operation will be 4 p.m. - 8 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This weekend, however, after it opens at 4 p.m. Friday, it will stay open through Saturday until Sunday morning.

WILL THE LAS VEGAS COMMUNITY HELP FUND THE HUNTRIDGE?



Photo: Steve Marcus

If Facebook “likes” were \$20 donations, Huntridge Revival, LLC would have raised more than \$120,000 last month, when the Weekly first reported on the group’s plan to renovate and reopen Downtown’s historic Huntridge Theatre. Local enthusiasm soared in those first hours, and the partners behind the project hope to recapture that spirit with their just-launched Save the Huntridge crowdfunding campaign on indiegogo.com. At press time, with 36 of 40 days remaining, the effort had raised \$21,883 of its \$150,000 goal.

That second dollar figure represents just 1 percent of some \$15 million Huntridge Revival hopes to raise (the remainder will come in the form of private investments), but it might be the most critical portion. Should the public reach the \$150,000 threshold, “it will prove that community support exists to justify much larger private investment,” the campaign’s mission statement explains. Or, failure to achieve the goal could doom the project before it begins, leaving the Huntridge in its long-suffering limbo.

Joe Downtown: TV star buoys effort to raise funds to save historic Huntridge



AP

Cast members of the "Criminal Minds" television series, A.J.Cook, center left, and Thomas Gibson, tape a scene Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2007, while on location in Long Beach, Calif. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

By Joe Schoenmann (contact)

Thursday, June 6, 2013 | 1:04 p.m.

"Criminal Minds" star and Las Vegas native Matthew Gubler is lending a hand toward efforts to buy, renovate and reopen the historic Huntridge Theater in downtown Las Vegas.

Gubler plays genius Dr. Spencer Reid on the hit TV series, which debuted in 2005. The multifaceted talent is also a former fashion model who directs and paints. Dozens of his creepy-cool sketches, reminiscent of Ralph Steadman's work for Hunter S. Thompson, with a touch of Timothy Burton thrown in, are viewable at matthewgraygubler.com

Gubler said he had recorded a voice-over for the [Huntridge Theater crowdfunding campaign](#).

Michael Cornthwaite, one of three partners of Huntridge Revival LLC, said Gubler's narration will be part of a crowd video.

Friday makes the start of a crowdfunding campaign for the theater. Cornthwaite and his partners are hoping to raise \$150,000 – 1 percent of the expected \$15 million price tag to buy and renovate the building – in the next 45 days.

The partners want to take in as many donations as possible in amounts as small as \$5 to show potential investors just how much valley residents support the idea of renovating the theater.

For more information, go to [Save the Huntridge's website](#).



[LEILA NAVIDI](#)

First opened as a movie theater in 1944, the Huntridge played host to bands such as Nine Inch Nails and Green Day during its concert venue days.

Joe Downtown: Gentrification or positive progress? The great downtown debate



JOE SCHOENMANN

From his 23rd floor condo, Tony Hsieh points out various targets of redevelopment for his Downtown Project, a \$350 million, multi-year endeavor, to Ed Lantz, CEO of Vortex Immersion Media.

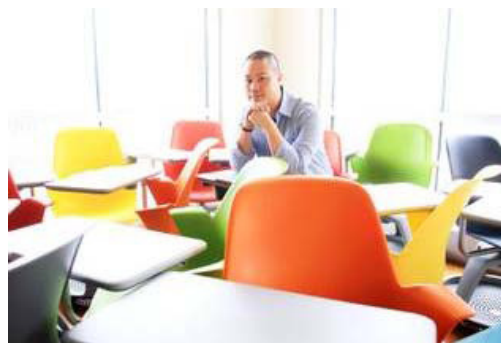
By Joe Schoenmann (contact)

Thursday, June 20, 2013 | 2 a.m.

When a young man with a billion-plus-dollar company comes to town saying he wants to create "community" even as he redevelops a neighborhood infested with crime, you expect what happened to Tony Hsieh.

The Zappos CEO was showered with praise for his plans, which included a \$350 million, multipartner investment in downtown Las Vegas called the Downtown Project, also known as DTP.

Yet, a year and a half later, doubts have arisen. It's almost impossible to find anyone downtown who hasn't developed an opinion about DTP, either for



or against it.

“Gentrification” has become the word of those who say DTP is displacing the poor and replacing them with places suitable only for those with money in their pockets.

On the other side are those like Jack LeVine, a self-described “card-carrying liberal,” who says if renewal downtown doesn’t happen, the same old junkies, hookers and homeless will remain the majority power.

“The whole gentrification issue is: We’re either getting better or getting worse, and if we’re getting better, people call it gentrification,” said LeVine, a real estate agent who has lived downtown longer than most people have lived in Las Vegas. “If it gets worse, poorer people can afford to be there. But people want to make it better, then people with money come in. Sorry, but that’s the way it works.”

LeVine is clearly in the camp that sees the positive in downtown changes. At the same time, he understands those who have a dim view of DTP.

To him, it boils down to public relations and what he sees as a poor job of communication between DTP and the community.

“I’ve been telling them for like a year and a half to include the local community in their process,” LeVine said. “It’s not good for the revitalization of downtown when an independent project trying to bring the local community together is feeling a wave of resistance because of the reputation they’re earning.”

That sentiment, more or less, is becoming clearer in reams of copy being written for and against the Downtown Project in various places on the Internet. Some of it is vicious. Some of it also could be damaging efforts to raise money to help restore the historic Huntridge Theater.

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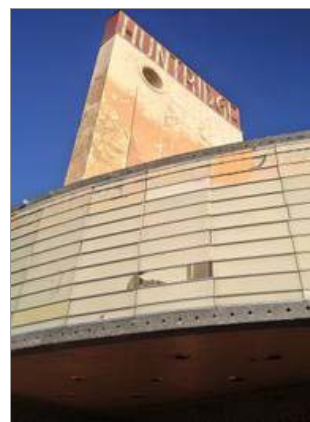
The Huntridge, a 69-year-old theater at Maryland Parkway and Charleston Boulevard, has dropped further into decay in the near-decade since it closed. Three partners/businessmen — Michael Cornthwaite, Rehan Choudry and Joey Vanas — [formed Huntridge Revival LLC and announced a campaign two weeks ago](#).

They want the public to give \$150,000 toward the project. At the [Save The Historic Huntridge Theater campaign on indiegogo.com](#), 12 levels of giving are offered. At the low end, \$5 contributors will receive an “historic digital show poster.” Someone who gives at the highest level, \$25,000, gets a lifetime VIP parking spot, keycard access to a backstage lounge, VIP facilities access, special offers and 250 votes in programming some of the theater’s activities.

Though the campaign seeks to raise \$150,000, Cornthwaite said if it reaches \$50,000, it will allow him and his partners to make their next payment to the Mizrachi family, who owns the building.

“If we get past that, it will likely be possible to fundraise separately for all of the other pre-work costs and/or have services contributed by other [Huntridge lovers who just want to be part of its revival](#),” it says in the frequently asked questions section of [save.thehuntridge.com](#). If not, the partners will ask indiegogo.com to issue refunds.

It’s a unique fundraising plan for an organization that is neither government-connected nor nonprofit. But it’s also part of a fundraising wave called “crowdsourcing,” found nationwide. Churches use it; tech startup companies use it; just about anyone who has an idea they need money for has tried or thought of crowdsourcing. One



JOE SCHOENMANN

The Huntridge marquee is shown Wednesday, May 15, 2013.

man a few months ago tried to raise money to buy [a house in downtown Las Vegas that would be a co-working space and transitional home for techies moving here](#).

It failed, raising just \$455 of a \$125,000 goal.

At the close of business Wednesday, Save the Huntridge had raised more than \$28,000, 19 percent of its goal, from 241 funders, with 29 days left in the campaign.

Even if the Huntridge partners reach \$50,000 by early August, there's a chance they won't go forward, Cornthwaite said. Several factors have to fall into place, including — importantly — their perception of community support.

If it's not there, they might pull the plug on the project.

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The Internet is today's public forum.

Like the rest of the world, Las Vegas residents use the Internet to express their opinions.

[Facebook's Save The Huntridge page](#), which boasts almost 600 members, has become ground zero for a debate between those who like and those who don't like the Huntridge revival plan.

Either for or against, most of the posts are from the same people. In that regard, the number of posts is not a good gauge for calculating how many are on either side of the Huntridge plan.

The posts also get personal and petty, childish, mean, and downright libelous, so it's easy to see why people don't want to add to the discussion. No one likes to get hammered for simply offering an opinion.

Those who support the theater argue about the good it will do for the area, that the three Huntridge partners aren't vultures looking to make a quick buck off the backs of locals, and that if this plan doesn't work, the Huntridge will be demolished and turned into another auto parts/dollar store/check-cashing/pawn shop mall.

In one thread, those against the idea label those in favor of it "gentrifiers." They question the for-profit status of Huntridge Revival LLC. They question where the money will go.

Running through this foggy war of words is a sense that the Huntridge isn't really separate from the Downtown Project. Cornthwaite avows it is. Those who know him say he wants it to be separate since many of his current businesses are heavily tied to DTP.

But then, Vanas also is tied to the Downtown Project, which is his partner in ownership of First Friday Las Vegas. Choudry, too, is partnered with the Downtown Project in his oversight and creation of downtown's [Life Is Beautiful](#) music, food and art festival in October.

Those connections alone are enough to turn off some people.

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On the Save The Huntridge Facebook site, one entry is a blog post critical of [the Downtown Project buying properties and buildings](#) and displacing businesses with leases. Since it was posted on a site about the Huntridge Theater, it led others to wonder if Huntridge Revival's eventual plan was to obtain big funding from the Downtown Project. And that was implied as being a bad thing.

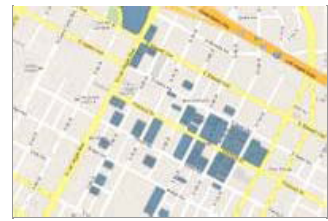
David Anderson is a crowdsourcing veteran volunteering oodles of time to Huntridge Revival. He lives just a few blocks away from the theater in the so-called "startup house." As dedicated as he is to the Huntridge project, he writes about his own qualms about DTP. Then again, he attests, Huntridge Revival is not part of the Downtown Project — whose "brass," he believes, don't like him.

"I don't agree with their methods; I think they're naive in many, many ways, but I do know that they don't claim to be experts on what they're doing ... and I do know that they know very little about anything north of the freeway and very little about downtown proper, as well," he says. "In many, many ways, the whole thing is a huge (expletive), but it's also a fact of life that each of us can either deal with actively or just sit and complain about."

Local writer and computer coding whiz Josh Ellis wrote a 5,500-word diatribe that supported the Huntridge but tore into the Downtown Project.



The Huntridge, during its movie-theater era.



GOOGLE MAPS
Property owned by the Downtown Project and related companies.

“Like a growing number of locals, I am deeply, deeply conflicted about the vision for downtown that’s being laid out by Tony Hsieh and his circle of friends, employees and business partners,” Ellis wrote. “The problem, I think, is how one defines the words ‘community’ and ‘happiness,’ which are words you hear a hell of a lot in Vegas Tech.”

He uses “Vegas Tech” to encompass DTP and the people who work for it.

“‘Community-building’ is the number one activity that Vegas Tech people engage in, with an enthusiasm that often borders on the unnerving. A phrase you often hear muttered around Vegas these days is ‘drinking the Kool-Aid,’ and you often hear Zappos and the Downtown Project — and Vegas Tech at large — compared to a cult.”

While Ellis is known for his writing acumen and his fearless posting of his opinions online, other Las Vegans aren’t touching the everlasting Internet with their opinions of DTP or the Huntridge.

But some, who spoke to the Sun on condition of anonymity, share Ellis’ support for the Huntridge. At the same time, they express frustration with DTP and worry would-be Huntridge supporters might abandon it because of DTP doubts.

“I don’t buy into the Downtown Project,” said one local businessman, adding that he sees its redevelopment to date as “scattershot at best.”

At the same time, he added, he hopes the Huntridge Project works.

“I question whether that building is worth saving, but I’d like to see it happen,” he said.

A real estate broker said he is turned off by the way “Downtown Project is throwing its money around” because of what could result if businesses don’t become self-sustaining.

“People are talking about what if Hsieh gets bored and decides he wants to, instead, save a village in Thailand,” the developer said. “We look at it and admire what he’s doing. But if this thing doesn’t catch, he may be doing more damage to downtown than he knows.”

A local economist said downtown would suffer a mini-recession if the “spigot gets turned off” suddenly and a major contraction of wealth is eliminated from the area.

Those who know Hsieh, however, say he’s in Las Vegas 100 percent. He’s not leaving. He’s been here and in Henderson some 10 years already, and this is his home.

“Well, there you go,” said one developer. “That’s nice to know. But maybe you’re the only one who knows that. We don’t know a thing about what’s going on.”

Then there’s that question: Does it matter what people think about DTP, especially as it pertains to the Huntridge Theater?

DTP employees say they are open. Every month they stage the Downtown Lowdown, during which plans and progress are sketched out for whoever shows up to the speakers trailer on Seventh Street near Fremont Street. They put out pamphlets with profiles of people and stories and updates about different downtown projects.

Since DTP [purchased the Gold Spike](#), the former casino, many DTP employees work there daily out in the open. They aren’t hiding from anyone.

They also pay attention to what’s being written.

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Days after Ellis’ column, DTP contacted him and he met with some representatives, he said, in the Emergency Arts building at Sixth and Fremont streets. Ellis said they had a good talk; the DTP workers disputed some of the information in Ellis’ column; he told them they needed to be more transparent and inclusive.

“What I’d like to believe is that they really can’t keep a handle on what’s going on because it’s growing so fast,” he said of DTP.

Indeed, over about the last 18 months, the Downtown Project has grown from roughly three to well over 100 employees. At the same time, employees say, DTP gets so many emails and calls, responding is an overwhelming task.

However, as someone involved with the business said recently, getting back to people “is one of our weaknesses.”

Jamie Naughton, whose official title is “speaker of the house” for Zappos and Downtown Project – she literally travels the world delivering keynote speeches to a variety of groups – said DTP was taking all of the criticism seriously.

“Every situation is unique and we try to address them as they arise,” she said. “There is a ton of misinformation out there on what we are working on or what we are not, and we realize that we haven’t done a good enough job of communicating this out directly.”

DTP is starting to catch up, however, she added.

“We have spent the past few months meeting with various residents to better understand their concerns,” she said, announcing new ways to reach out to Las Vegas residents.

That includes something she calls “open office hours.”

“This would be when an individual can just drop in and talk with a member of our team,” she said. “These additions are fairly recent and will take time to implement and get posted to our Website.”

Anyone can go to downtownproject.com and find the contact page to be notified of dates and times to be contacted directly with updates.

Mary Hausch, UNLV associate professor of journalism, said Downtown Project might also try doing what “neighborhood casinos” do: market to surrounding neighborhoods.

“I don’t get any marketing material from (Downtown Project),” said Hausch, who lives in the John S. Park neighborhood with her husband, Councilman Bob Coffin. They live a block from Anderson’s startup house. “Coupons or a newsletter. Tell people where to park. Anything.”

As for the Huntridge Theater, a big effort is taking place Thursday night. Several panelists will answer questions about the theater project at 6 p.m. at the Mesquite Club, 702 E. St. Louis Ave. Panelists include Cornthwaite and Bob Stoldal, television news executive and Las Vegas Historic Commission member.

Talking via his cellphone, Ellis suddenly spots Vanas walking by and tells him he fears the Huntridge Theater project is “getting painted with the same brush” that’s painting the Downtown Project.

Cornthwaite, meanwhile, questions whether people with doubts about the Huntridge Theater project are all that numerous. Maybe it’s just a few people online “trolling” under different names and false identities to stir the pot?

“I’m not really sure what there is to take issue with at this point,” Cornthwaite said. “We have been crystal clear about our intentions for the property since the beginning. My instincts tell me that the more vocal a few are against the project – and there are 100 supporters for every naysayer – the better the idea is and the more they really wish *they* were part of the initiative.”

He seems genuinely perplexed at the negativity he’s read online. He said he’s given himself a mandate not to respond to it anymore.

“If all of the negative energy was channeled in a positive direction,” he said, “just imagine what we all could accomplish.”



MONA SHIELD PAYNE / SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Krissee Danger gets excited talking about the Post-it note inspiration wall as she leads attendees through Tony Hsieh’s high-rise apartment in the Ogden Hotel as part of the Downtown Project Tour in Las Vegas Wednesday, March 20, 2013.

Downtown Joe: In quest to revive the Huntridge, confab reveals interesting historical context



CHRIS MORRIS

By Joe Schoenmann (contact)

Friday, June 21, 2013 | 2 a.m.

Some surprising information came out during a meeting Thursday night of some 150 people gathered in a downtown hall to ask questions about plans to buy and revive the historic Huntridge Theater.

The Huntridge is a 69-year-old building at the corner of Maryland Parkway and Charleston Boulevard that has drawn the interest of three partners who want to save the building from the wrecking ball.

A state covenant preventing demolition of the



building runs out in 2017.

Or does it?

Praising the project's intention, Bob Stoldal, a local historian/TV news executive and one of five panelists, pointed to an agreement made between previous owners of the Huntridge and the state of Nevada in 1997.

The agreement grants Friends of the Huntridge Theater Inc. some \$765,000 from the Nevada Commission for Cultural Affairs, but dictates that the owners have to "assume the cost" to keep the building in good shape "so as to preserve the architectural, historical, cultural and/or archeological integrity" of the building.

Currently, the exterior of the building is nothing less than an eyesore to most people, as its paint is peeled or non-existent and its marquee cracked. Though structurally sound, Michael Cornthwaite, one of the three who formed Huntridge Revival LLC to save the building, said inside plumbing fixtures and electrical wiring is torn out, none of the bathrooms work, and pigeon droppings litter the place.

Stoldal termed the current condition "sh--," and added that "you have to squint and think about what it could be."

Other restraints are spelled out including that the building has to "be open to the public no less than 12 days a year." The Huntridge hasn't been open in almost a decade.

The penalty for not fulfilling the bargain, the agreement states, is that the state "shall have the right to file suit ... to cause the applicant to cure said violations or to obtain the return of funds."

Though Stoldal said that it appears terms of the covenant might have been broken, he wasn't sure how that information might help, or potentially hurt, the move to save the building.

He also wondered if the 1997 covenant with Friends of the Huntridge holds true for the Mizrachi family, which purchased it later.

Meanwhile, Huntridge Revival LLC, whose partners are Cornthwaite, Joey Vanas and Rehan Choudry, have made an agreement with the Mizrachi's to buy the building for \$4 million by the end of the year. To reach that point, they are first seeking \$125,000 from public contributors through a fundraising method called crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing uses the Internet to allow people to make contributions for a potential project, with various guidelines, such as time constraints, set out beforehand.

Huntridge Revival LLC needs to collect \$50,000 by the end of their indiegogo campaign in mid-July. That way, they can make their next scheduled payment to the Mizrachi's in August. As of Thursday night, the Save the Huntridge crowdsourcing plan on indiegogo.com had raised more than \$28,000.

The audience applauded when emcee Brian Alvarez told them how much had been raised so far.

Longtime downtown resident Ginger Bruner later asked why Huntridge Revival never formed a nonprofit organization, adding that perhaps that would get people "off their backs." On various websites, some people have made it clear they don't like the idea of contributing money to a for-profit organization.

To answer, Stoldal took the microphone. From his experience sitting as a current member of the Nevada Commission for Cultural Affairs, and knowing how much documentation that group requires before issuing grants, he figured the amount of time, expense and energy needed to obtain nonprofit status



[STEVE MARCUS](#)

An exterior view of the Huntridge Theater on the southeast corner of East Charleston Boulevard and Maryland Parkway Monday, Jan. 16, 2012. Designed by architect S. Charles Lee, the theatre opened on October 10, 1944. It has been closed since January 1, 2002.

would be enormous.

“The reality is, these days when we’re asked for money, we require paperwork that thick,” he said,” holding his index finger and thumb about 3 inches apart.

Cornthwaite ran through a list of potential funding options, from government grants to private investment, that will be pursued once they get through this initial phase.

Then someone in the audience said they work on EB-5 funding — a federal program that grants green cards to foreigners who invest in some projects in the United States — and that might be considered.

Another person wondered if the Huntridge would be a live performance venue, to which he was answered “yes.” Others wondered about the different kind of programming and what might the property hold.

Cornthwaite said it would be a shame if they went through all this, renovated the building, then only opened it a few days a week.

“There’s going to be a lot of days and hours to program there,” he said. “The worst would be to rebuild it, then turn it on Friday and Saturday and keep it empty the rest of the week.”

Historic Atomic Liquors reopens on Fremont Street with a prayer with a prayer



JOHN LOCHER/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

CJ Sinestro puts on his sunglasses after having a smoke during the opening of Atomic Liquors in downtown Las Vegas on Thursday.



abandoned Fremont Street casino, but the owners of Atomic Liquors arranged for some prayers just in case.

Moments before several dozen journalists, neighborhood characters and other assorted gawkers poured through the front doors of the old bar, they listened to a prayer by the Rev. Deacon Bonnie Polley.

The longtime jail chaplain and Episcopalian deacon couldn't recall having previously written a prayer for a tavern.

"By your mighty power vanquish any residue evil from this place, so that all who enter these doors may find refreshment, conversation and joy," Polley said before closing with a hearty "Amen."

Judging by the festive atmosphere inside the Atomic, it appeared any residue evil had, indeed, been vanquished. Also gone were residue cigarette smoke smells, ceiling stains and the layer of dust that once coated the bar, pool tables and old-time jukebox.

The restrooms were so clean they even passed muster with Phil Pruitt, a longtime customer of the Atomic who said his obsessive compulsive tendencies make him generally wary of public facilities.

Pruitt, who said he first set foot in the Atomic around 1981, watched the slow demise of the legendary watering hole as the neighborhood around it deteriorated with the health of Joe and Stella Sobchik, who ran it from 1952 until their deaths in 2011.

"It was a nice little neighborhood bar," Pruitt said. "But the neighborhood changed, it changed."

The bar and package liquor store shut down after the deaths and sat empty for several months until some Las Vegas investors decided to try and reopen it.

Brothers Lance and Kent Johns, sons of an Orange, Calif., bar owner, and downtown theater owner Derek Stonebarger persuaded Ron Sobchik, Joe and Stella Sobchik's son, to lease them the property with an option to buy it.

They then set about catching up on deferred maintenance and installing a new bar, floors, coolers and decor. Not long before the opening Thursday, they exercised the purchase option.

Sobchik, of Fullerton, Calif., said that before the deal with the Las Vegas trio came along, offers had come in from several other potential buyers.

"Two or three of them were just going to bring a bulldozer and level it," Sobchik said. "I didn't think that's what my parents would have wanted."

Had the bulldozers come they could have made quick work of the tiny Atomic. The single-story brick building is little more than a hut compared with the high-rise casinos farther west on Fremont Street and the megaresorts on the Strip.

Much of the area around it has already been flattened or abandoned. To the west is the former Western hotel-casino, an empty husk. To the north, the Ambassador hotel, formerly a source of dependable clientele for the Atomic, was flattened. An RV park to the east has been cleared out.

The most distinctive structure on the block is the Atomic's sign, a relic of the neighborhood's Cold War heyday when the young Sobchiks hosted everyone from off-duty casino workers to celebrities and film industry types who used the property as a setting for movies and television shows.

In the old days, entertainers Barbra Streisand, Burt Reynolds and Tom and Dick Smothers are said to have graced the humble venue.

More recently, the Atomic made cameos in "Casino" in 1995 and "The Hangover" in 2009.

Although the Atomic had more than its fair share of star power, its heart and soul came from the Sobchiks.

They converted it from a restaurant called Virginia's Cafe because Joe Sobchik was tired of cooking.

The cafe was named after Stella Sobchik's mother, Virginia Zasucha, who came by train from Niagara Falls, N.Y., to Las Vegas with her daughter in 1921 to flee an abusive relationship.

Sobchik said she remained in Las Vegas her entire life, save for a couple of years when she returned to Niagara Falls and happened to meet Joe Sobchik, who was raised in a Catholic orphanage in Brooklyn and arrived upstate as part of the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps.

He was assigned to build jetties in the Niagara River.

Ron Sobchik said his parents, who died a few months apart and were honored with services in the bar, would be pleased to know the Atomic lives on.

Polley, the deacon, seemed happy to do her best to put in a good word for the place.

"I don't think He has any problem with bars," she said.

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0285 .

Historic Huntridge plan taps hopes and fears downtown



MARTIN S. FUENTES/LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL

Pedestrians walk past the historic Huntridge Performing Arts Theatre. The theater has housed various businesses since its closure. The Las Vegas Planning Commission will consider a proposal for some kind of flea market to be run out of the old theater. It is now a furniture store.

**By BENJAMIN SPILLMAN
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL**

For nearly seven decades the symbol of the Huntridge Performing Arts Theatre in downtown Las Vegas was the sleek, Streamline Moderne-style tower rising above the marquee.

Now the Huntridge itself has become a symbol in the struggle to revive an area of the city that's deteriorated along with the troubled theater.

The potential price tag of \$10 million or more to acquire and refurbish the property represents the difficulty of breathing new life into blighted, historic

And the discussion about how best to raise the cash has come to symbolize a broader debate about changes washing over downtown Las Vegas as it redevelops.

Much of the larger discussion involves uneasiness in some corners with the redevelopment efforts of the Downtown Project, a \$350 million urban renewal effort backed by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh.

The Downtown Project isn't part of the latest effort to revive the Huntridge. But the people seeking to take on the job — entrepreneur Michael Cornthwaite, First Friday operator Joey Vanas and Life is Beautiful festival creator Rehan Choudhry — have close business and personal ties to Hsieh.

By taking on the challenge of reviving a theater that for many symbolizes happier times, they've tapped into fears that renewal will sand away so many rough edges that downtown Las Vegas would become unrecognizable to people who remember the good days and survived the bad.

"The people who have been asking questions and are suspicious about the motives are transferring those feelings over to these guys," Las Vegas writer Joshua Ellis said.

Ellis said a social media flame war that erupted last week in the wake of the Huntridge proposal was the result of pent-up anxiety about the Downtown Project being dumped at the feet of the group trying to restore the theater.

"I think what they are doing is great but they have to understand why it is they are getting this negative feedback," he said.

Ellis himself wrote a lengthy critique of the downtown scene that referred to legions of similarly dressed Zappos workers pouring into downtown bars as creepy and cult-like.

It's a characterization that Hsieh, who as CEO helped build Zappos from a startup, online shoe-selling website to a \$1 billion Amazon acquisition target, describes as unfair.

"We encourage people to come take a tour of our offices ... and/or actually talk to five random Zappos employees before making any judgments," Hsieh said via email.

The matching T-shirt experience was likely part of a Corporate Challenge event in which companies in Las Vegas compete in myriad sporting events, he said.

As for the Huntridge revival project, Cornthwaite, Vanas and Choudhry appear to be working hard to distinguish their plan as an attempt to improve the neighborhood by bringing to life a venue associated with generations of fond memories.

Baby boomers associate Las Vegas' first integrated theater as a place of affordable Saturday matinees and first kisses. Generation Xers have vivid memories of the theater's revival in the 1990s and early 2000s as a venue for touring acts such as the Smashing Pumpkins, Beck and Green Day.

That unique blend of quality entertainment and community spirit is what Cornthwaite says the group wants to bring back to the area.

"There is only one plan that we have and that is to bring it back to life," Cornthwaite said at a recent community meeting about the project.

In addition to the meeting — which drew a friendly crowd of about 150 people — the trio launched an online crowdfunding drive on the website Indiegogo to raise \$150,000.

They say money from Huntridge enthusiasts would show potential investors there is an audience willing to share more than gauzy memories if the theater were to reopen as a performing arts venue.

In addition to the crowdfunding request, they've posted an account of how much they've spent so far to secure an agreement with the family that owns the property.

It shows the three men have spent \$60,000 of their own money on a non-refundable deposit and need about \$100,000 more for research and feasibility studies.

If that funding comes through, they have until the end of the year to find investors willing to put up \$4 million to acquire the property. Renovations could be another \$10 million.

"This is not an easy project, I think some of the criticism is unfair," said Bob Stoldal, a member of the city's Historic Preservation Commission. "This is a lot of work for these people and it may not work."

Ginger Bruner, a musician and artist who was raised in the Huntridge neighborhood and still owns a house there, said the revival group could assuage lingering concerns by filing for nonprofit status for the project.

Such a move would bolster community spirit and mean tax breaks for people who contribute to the cause, said Bruner, who has extensive nonprofit experience in public and community radio.

"Nonprofits don't mean you don't make money or make a living or do a good job, it just means you don't hand out a whole bunch of money at the end of the year to stockholders," she said.

Cornthwaite said the group isn't opposed to a nonprofit arrangement. But by creating an LLC they were able to move more quickly, which is important given the time constraints. The current owners are obligated to maintain the historic elements of the property until 2017. After that they're free to do with it as they like, including demolish it.

"I just want to keep every possibility, every avenue open," he said. "To me right now the priority is ... bringing it back to life."

Stoldal concurred with the approach, saying the most likely path to success involves creating a project that is economically viable for the long term.

"The right project will be the one that makes good business sense," he said. "So I think these guys are doing it the right way."

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0285 .

Joe Downtown: Volunteers share load in 'do-acracy' to move along effort to save historic theater



STEVE MARCUS

By **Joe Schoenmann (contact)**

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Many times over the past decade or more, taxpayers and individuals have tried to save the Huntridge Theater.

Nevada has given more than \$1 million to, among other repairs, fix its caved-in roof.

Yet, for almost a decade, the place has remained in mothballs and fallen further into disrepair. Even the most stalwart historians seemed to abandon hope of saving the building, for one, because it's so large, and secondly because of the enormous cost to do so.

But then, most historians aren't David Anderson. Or Chris O'Connell, Nicole Sligar, Melissa Clary,



Brian “Paco” Alvarez, Kathleen D’Esposito Kahr or a group of others who have thrown themselves into the thankless task of volunteering their time to bring the Huntridge back to life.

The group gathered Wednesday in what might be called, at least for the next 33 days, “volunteer house,” on Franklin Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets. This is where they meet, sometimes until late in the morning, strategizing and clicking away on laptops in [an effort to get others motivated](#) about renewing the Huntridge.

Wednesday after work they went over plans in the main room of the house where David Anderson lives. Anderson, a veteran of crowdfunding, which is the Huntridge’s early fundraising plan, moved here in December from San Francisco. Raised in tiny Hurricane, Utah, he gravitates to places with a community feel.

“Why am I doing this?” says Anderson, a 30-year-old who maintains a skin-and-bones look despite living on a diet he admits consists mostly of pizza. “Just seeing what this neighborhood could be if the Huntridge really becomes this revered place again and is locally accessible. I came from San Francisco, where people are used to small, awesome venues and communities are based on them.”

Behind him is a 10-foot-long dry erase board filled with assignments, ideas and goals: Site Redo — Publicize Video — Finalize Message — Email Campaign, and so on. It’s a huge list that fills the entire wall.

Anderson calls the form of management used to get things done a “do-acracy,” where someone sees something that needs to be done and they just do it. And they have to get it done by July 17, which will allow enough time for the online crowdsourcing campaign money to be calculated, collected and turned over to Huntridge Revival LLC to meet an Aug. 1 loan payment.

“But it’s becoming clear everyone is getting overwhelmed,” he adds. “We’re lucky, though, because we have one of the most active neighborhood associations in the city working on it.”

D’Esposito Kahr, Huntridge Neighborhood Association president, works as the back-office manager of Casa di Amore, an Italian restaurant at Eastern and Tropicana avenues. He is talking about some of the doubting comments found online.

One question that has been raised is why the three founders of Huntridge Revival LLC — Michael Cornthwaite, Joey Vanas and Rehan Choudry — didn’t form a nonprofit organization before collecting donations. Their goal is \$150,000 because that’s 1 percent of the \$15 million expected to buy and renovate the building. They have said if they can’t draw that degree of public support — believed necessary to show those with deep pockets that the theater is a good investment — they will drop the project.

The three bring a lengthy background in development and event programming to the project. Cornthwaite has been one of downtown’s most important redevelopers, having taken unused space to create the Downtown Cocktail Room, Emergency Arts and the Beat. He is also a partner in Oscar’s, a steakhouse in the Plaza. Vanas and Choudry have extensive experience in venue development, programming and operations.

In previous interviews, Cornthwaite has said to wait a year or more to become a certified nonprofit would mean the loss of valuable time. A covenant with the state prevents demolition but only until 2017.

Anderson says Huntridge Revival LLC is an example of a “social enterprise,” whose motive is toward the social good, not the bottom line.

“Nevada doesn’t have a statute like they do in California to create a social enterprise, but this LLC is the closest thing to doing that,” he says.

Their goal is \$150,000, which will go towards the next deposit, renovation planning and legal work needed for the \$4 million purchase. It’s also 1 percent of the \$15 million expected to buy and renovate the building. They have said if they can’t draw that degree of public support — believed necessary to show those with deep pockets that the theater is a good investment — they will drop the project.

The doorbell rings and someone delivers three large pizzas from D’Esposito Kahr’s employer. For free.

“We should just start making furniture out of our pizza boxes,” jokes O’Connell, the graphics whiz.

Sitting with her 1-year-old, Chloe, Sligar, who doesn’t live downtown but worked at the Huntridge in her early 20s, sits quietly. She’s the volunteer coordinator who, like the others, threw herself into volunteering because of her affinity for the old building.

“For three years, I was there almost every day; sometimes I slept there,” says Sligar, whose background includes a fairly recent stint in a Shaolin temple in China. It was a move made, Sligar says, because she

wanted to learn the ways of kung fu. At that point, someone adds, “and walk the Earth, like Caine.” Sligar chuckles.

“I’m honored to be a part of this, really,” she says. “It’s just so cool we have people here creating this team. It’s like family.”

There’s talk about getting salons involved in something maybe called “Haircuts for Huntridge” to raise money, and a community forum June 20 to let people ask questions of and voice concerns to a panel that can answer them.

Vanas sits and listens, mostly with a smile on his face. He lives across the street and says he’ll sometimes come home early in the morning and see the lights on with people working away inside.

He and his partners released more details about how the theater would be used if renovation happens. Not only would it be used for live music, performing arts and cinema, but Vanas said they were in early discussions about including a music education facility, a permanent exhibit curated by the nonprofit Huntridge Foundation and “flexible-use spaces for community-driven programming.”

“We need both,” he said, when asked what’s more important: numbers of people contributing to demonstrate a real desire for the theater to be renovated or reaching the \$150,000 goal.

“The reality is that we’ve received a ton of excitement and momentum, but we’ve reached a point where we need the additional startup capital required to move forward,” he said. “Without local community buy-in, it just won’t happen.”

More information about how to make monetary or in-kind contributions to the Huntridge effort may be found [online](#).

Dazzling Las Vegas showgirl, actress takes her final bow



JUSTIN YURKANIN/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Kerry Krantz holds a photo Tuesday of his mother, Kim Krantz, who died earlier this month at the family home in Las Vegas. Kim Krantz was a longtime resident of Las Vegas. She was a dancer, appeared in several films about Las Vegas including "Casino" and "The Electric Horsemen" and was a pioneer in the development of Las Vegas.



The Strip restaurant was crowded, but even from across the room it was easy to see the Vegas power couple was fighting again.

She was a reformed chip hustler with a showgirl's figure and a budding drug habit. He was an arrogant numbers genius who ran the gambling joint and secretly reported to the Chicago Outfit.

When their argument boiled over and they started to leave the restaurant, they interrupted the dinner of a striking older woman who expressed her disdain without saying a word.

While I can't recall the names of that warring husband and wife in Martin Scorsese's Vegas gangster epic "Casino," I would recognize the pretty face of Kim Krantz just about anywhere. If you've lived here long enough to remember the Boulevard's pre-implosion era, you probably would have recognized her, too.

In her considerable prime, the showgirl, part-time actress and all-around neon character never missed a party and appeared in scenes in Nevada-based movies ranging from "Casino" to Arthur Miller's "The Misfits." She was often used by directors as window dressing, but as a guy from Vegas Past might say, "Would you get a look at those drapes?"

The Kim Krantz I was acquainted with would have laughed at such a compliment and come back with a story or a joke. She had a million of them in a wild, quintessentially Vegas life that ended recently at age 80.

"I came to Vegas to meet a cowboy or Indian and wound up meeting a wiseguy from the Bronx," she would say of her marriage to the late Flamingo executive and junket manager Danny Krantz. The couple raised four children in Las Vegas.

As Kim's son Kerry Krantz welcomes me into the family home, I see the kitchen table is covered with clippings and photographs of his mother with celebrities and swells, and occasionally in various stages of undress. She was, after all, a star in the lineup of hotties in the "Latin Quarter" show that stormed into Las Vegas 60 years ago during the golden era of the showgirl.

She was a covered dancer, but, well, not very. Kerry, 45, was his mother's caregiver in her difficult final days. But even he can set aside his grief and applaud his mother's amazingly colorful story.

As if to punctuate the point, on the living room hearth stands a larger-than-life cardboard cutout of his statuesque mother strategically wearing a mink during her showgirl heyday. Among her stops: the Desert Inn, Riviera and Dunes. She was one of a group of sequined hall-of-famers whose reunion highlighted the 50th anniversary of the venerable Riviera casino.

Born Delores Kim Dalkowski, she was a Jersey City girl who left school and home in the eighth grade to join the Cole Brothers' Circus. She hopped from horseback to horseback and eventually became the lithe rider of the circus elephant before being discovered by tightrope king Karl Wallenda.

With Wallenda, "she became one of the girls at the end of the tightrope."

From there she negotiated the equally high-wire walk from a New York floorshow in 1953 to mobbed-up Las Vegas. She would become an original Minsky's Burlesque girl.

Although she gave up dancing after marrying the well-connected Danny, the couple opened the King o' the Sea lobster house in 1964, and as a member of the Screen Actors Guild she built a long list of appearance movie and TV credits, including "The Godfather Part II," "The Electric Horseman" and "Smokey and the Bandit." Her last bit part came as a blackjack player next to the about-to-be-dearly-departed guest star on the hit TV series "CSI."

She often played a gambler or the "typical Vegas lady: drink in one hand, cigarette in the other," Kerry says fondly.

Her Las Vegas life was anything but typical. And it wasn't exactly a "Father Knows Best" atmosphere for her kids, either.

"At times it seems wild, but at other times it seems so normal," Kerry recalls. "Like, we would have Thanksgiving dinner in the (Flamingo's) Bugsy Suite. My dad was the convention manager at the Flamingo before the tower, and we would be with all the managers' kids. It seemed quite normal, like 'Don't you have Thanksgiving dinner in the Bugsy Suite?' You just assumed that everyone else was doing the same thing."

Holding the clippings and the photos depicting the adventures of his marvelous mom, whose sexy cigarette-scarred voice was unmistakable, the loving son talks about the doctors' diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and the day they gave her the awful chemotherapy options. After a life filled with dancing and drama, mobsters and movie stars, and a loving family, too, she didn't hesitate.

In her deep voice, she politely told the doctors to get stuffed and declined treatment.

A celebration of her life is set for noon July 6 at Our Lady of Las Vegas Catholic Church. Kerry Krantz, of course, hopes his mother's memory plays to a packed house.

That reminds him of a story. When he got older and accompanied his mother to a Las Vegas casino or Hollywood restaurant, she never failed to turn heads.

"She was like a magnet," he says. "People were drawn to her, definitely."

Kim Krantz had presence on every stage.

She knew how to enter a room, and when to make her exit.

John L. Smith's column appears Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Email him at Smith@reviewjournal.com or call 702-383-0295.

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Delivering a New Downtown:

How two generations of Las Vegas leaders are reshaping the heart of the city

|| Chapter 1: A desire for downtown

Natalie Young was so close to reaching her dream of opening a restaurant she could taste it.

The longtime Las Vegas fine dining chef could even envision the clientele and the menu.

"All my life I've been cooking for the rich; I just want to give people like me and people like you the same experience," said Young, 49. "Why can't you have a nice clean glass and a linen napkin and eat a grilled-cheese sandwich? I say you can."



Natalie Young, chef and owner of Eat: Young was persuaded to open her downtown restaurant, Eat, after she met Tony Hsieh. The Downtown Project, who works with small businesses interested in opening in downtown, provided funding for the restaurant.

Chapters:

[A desire for downtown](#)

[A long, slow decline](#)

[The charmer](#)

[The power of silence](#)

[A new kid in town](#)

[Evolution never stops](#)

["Very, very exciting for people."](#)

[Haves and have-nots](#)

["Is it just?"](#)

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And with a no-interest \$225,000 loan from the Downtown Project, an urban renewal drive backed by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, Young was eager to open a restaurant she hoped to make a social hub in Las Vegas' burgeoning downtown.



But there was a problem. After walking away from a lucrative but soul-sapping job on the Strip, Young was flat broke. With her rent three months behind on, she couldn't afford car insurance and was even running out of food.

Unwilling to touch the restaurant loan for personal expenses and ready to give up her dream and move to New Mexico for work, Young called bar owner [Michael Cornthwaite](#), to deliver the news.

"I'm crying, the whole full-on, snot everywhere," she recalled. Cornthwaite, who with his wife, [Jennifer Cornthwaite](#), owns the [Down Beat Coffeehouse](#), told Young to wait.

About 10 minutes later Jennifer Cornthwaite showed up to calm Young down, write a check for the rent and provide a month's worth of food, long enough to open Eat, now the social hub she envisioned.

"Every time I tell that story I get choked up," Young said. "That is a lesson on humility, and it is also a lesson on how to treat other struggling."

It's also a lesson in how the Downtown Project is supposed to work.

In the past 18 months, the organization's investment team has provided \$350 million to bankroll everything from restaurants to tech startups and real estate developments. Those are all business investments, but they're also much more.

At a recent Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce panel discussion, City Manager Elizabeth Fretwell listed the Downtown Project's investment as an unusual approach.

The organization, she said, has taken responsibility for turning around "a drug-ridden, crime-infested area of our downtown. Before governments did."

Hsieh's people also want others in the community to make their own contributions. That combination of capitalism and communal values separates the Downtown Project from other urban renewal programs. Hsieh and others call it "return on community," a value they put on.

"Part of it is it just becomes self-selecting and growing on its own," said Hsieh, whose evangelism about corporate culture has made him a business and technology figure. "You can just feel it when you are participating in it."

	Interactive Then and Now: The Union Pacific railroad occupies the train station property in 2013. At Zappos, Hsieh and a small group of friends turn the retail superstar. They did so by cultivating a workplace culture.
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on their core product, online shoe sales that made more.

But in taking on the already difficult task of revitalizing American city, Hsieh and his acolytes must deal with an environment. Overlooked, dilapidated and populated by business owners, fixed-income residents and those downtown already has a culture all its own.

Hsieh, however, is undaunted.

"There is the opportunity to help shape the future of the blank-slate feeling in which anything is possible."

Whether Hsieh can build a community the same way he built a company remains to be seen. The effort so far has earned him plaudits and the cover of national magazines.

But the cameras and microphones pointed at Hsieh are available to critics as well, including people who feel shoved aside, not uplifted.

"To hear people from the Downtown Project talking about downtown Las Vegas as a blank slate or as a startup is offensive to the people who live there," said [Michael Borer](#), a University of Nevada, Las Vegas associate professor of sociology.



|| Chapter 2: A long, slow decline

Las Vegas is an American original, but it has one thing in common with all cities. Starting with the economic boom after World War II, it took with them social and economic vitality once concentrated downtown.

A seminal moment for Las Vegas came in 1968, when [Boulevard Mall](#) opened on Maryland Parkway south of Desert Inn Road. It had Ronzone's, JC Penney and Sears away from the Fremont Street business district east of downtown's casinos.

Open spaces south of downtown, toward the UNLV campus and the Strip, proved fertile for new housing.

There was little need or desire for aspiring homeowners to buy or build near downtown.

"It is just cheap land," said historian Brian Paco Alzarez, the son of Argentine immigrants who moved to Las Vegas in the late 1960s.

That land made large, master-planned communities with single-story homes, large lawns and pleasant surroundings attainable for the middle-class.

“The ability to be in a safe area with a wall around it and a gate,” is how Alvarez, [now a cultural curator for Zappos](#), described the appeal of the suburbs.

That suburban growth came at the expense of downtown.

“I wouldn’t walk from Las Vegas Boulevard to the [El Cortez on Fremont Street](#),” Alvarez said. “I would get hit up for drugs, prostitution, seedy characters on the corner. It was rough and tumble.”

The demise had been evident for decades, Alvarez said. As early as the 1960s, city leaders realized tourism was migrating to the Strip and sought ways to keep customers downtown.

Their strategy was to modernize pioneer-era casinos with new neon-and-metal facades, build parking garages behind them and install big signs advertising the “casino center.” But aside from the development of the Sundance, [now the D](#), and of [the Lady Luck](#) in the 1980s, downtown continued to slide.

In the 1990s the Fremont Street casinos and the city closed Fremont Street to vehicle traffic from Las Vegas Boulevard to Main Street and installed the Fremont Street Experience canopy.

The canopy helped keep tourists coming downtown, but did little to attract new residents, jobs or businesses to the city center.

With the economy still running strong in the early 2000s, the bulk of the economic action was on the Strip and in the suburbs. But the economy crashed, leaving downtown Las Vegas to emerge as one of the few spots in the valley with a concentration of new development.

“I have always said that downtown redevelopment is economic development; it is not just about elimination of slums and blight,” said the redevelopment officer for Las Vegas. “It really is at its very core and foundation rebuilding the core of a city and the city’s economy.”

Watch | Delivering a New Las Vegas, Part One: Losing Downtown
Las Vegas was the epicenter of the valley until the 1960s. With the creation and expansion of suburbs, downtown Las Vegas became an afterthought.



Chapter 3: The charmer

It’s easier to learn the history and values of Las Vegas by visiting the Strip or Fremont Street on a Saturday night than by going to a library or museum.

The progression of buildings in the skyline, from the modest Riviera hotel-casino built in 1955 at the north end of the Strip to the massive CityCenter resort opened in 2009, tell the story.

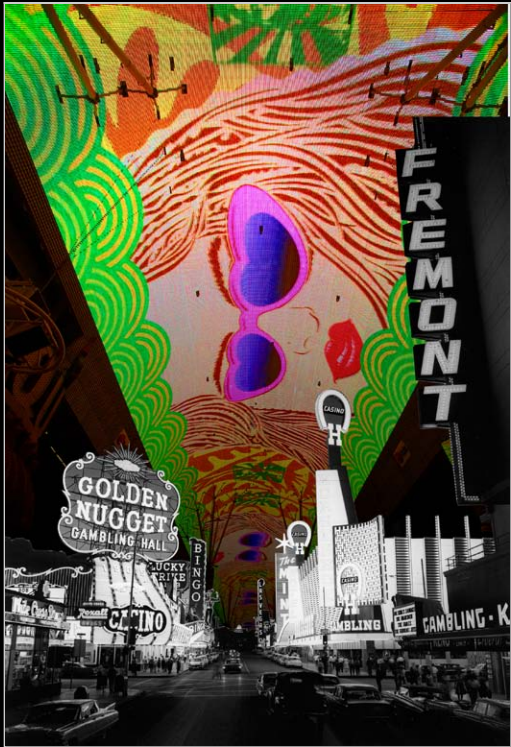
The blaring classic rock under the Fremont Street canopy, throngs of alcohol-soaked tourists gawking at casino facades and mobile billboards advertising “hot girls direct to your room” demonstrate the values.

Interactive | Then and Now: Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard, looking west down Fremont Street as seen on April 1, 1956. Now replaced by the Fremont Experience as seen June 11, 2013.

“Most cities have some sort of connection to an image or an idea or a dominant narrative,” said Borer, who has done academic research on the [18b arts district](#) downtown as well as the role of religion in Las Vegas. “Las Vegas has a very strong dominant narrative, that being sex and gambling.”



Interactive | Timeline: Walk through the history of downtown Las Vegas' development including the recent push to revitalize the neighborhood



A black and white photo of Fremont Street taken by the Las Vegas Review-Journal in Oct. 1, 1961 and a photo taken of the Fremont Street Experience shot on March 1, 2013.



Las Vegas is incorporated

Las Vegas is founded



Gambling long ago went mainstream and corporate, but the city's culture remains shaped by its outlaw past. And if there's a living Mayor Oscar Goodman.

Goodman and his wife, current Mayor Carolyn Goodman, left Philadelphia for Las Vegas in 1964. In the decades that followed, Goodman, a criminal defense lawyer, often representing underworld figures. His flamboyant style made him famous – so much so that he played “[Casino](#),” loosely based on real-life clients, mobsters Frank “Lefty” Rosenthal and Tony “the Ant” Spilotro.

But when he wasn't cracking wise or using the nearest microphone to lash out at critics or rivals, Goodman was making downtown his “hill to die for.”

“The downtowns of cities where I tried cases all over the country became war zones – rubble – and I did not want that to happen here,” Goodman said in a recent interview. “When (tourists) hear Las Vegas, they think of the Strip. And when they read that Las Vegas' downtown went into the toilet, they will equate it with the Strip and it will have a devastating affect on all of us.”

His predecessor, Jan Jones, had overseen creation of the [Fremont Street Experience](#). During his tenure, largely during an unprecedented economic boom, Goodman pushed for more cultural and political monuments around downtown.

Goodman saw opportunity in the 61-acre former Union Pacific rail yard west of the casino center, between Main Street and Interstate 15. Private developers acquired the land in 1996 for a stadium project that never got off the ground. In 2000 the city took over, trading Lehman Bros. Holding Inc. 97 acres near Smoke Ranch Road and Tenaya Way, plus \$2 million, for the land.

Largely working through its redevelopment agency, the city plowed tens of millions of dollars in subsidies and tax breaks into the old rail yard. Private developers built a major outlet mall and the massive [World Market Center](#).

Philanthropist Larry Ruvo, of Southern Wine & Spirits, backed the [Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health](#). The crown

jewel of the new projects, however, was the \$485 million Smith Center for the Performing Arts, which opened in 2012.

The reuse of the rail yard, now called Symphony Park, remains Goodman's proudest mayoral accomplishment. Just ask him.

“Carolyn gets angry at me because I say ‘I’ all the time; she says it should be ‘we,’ ” Goodman said. “Well, no, I was doing this. I was on the phone and I was negotiating, and I'm the guy who went back to New York and spoke to Lehman Brothers.”

Developer Bob O'Neil, one of three partners who invested in the rundown Lady Luck hotel-casino in 2003, saw Goodman's methods first-hand.

O'Neil, whose former partner, Andrew Donner, is now working with Hsieh, said Goodman's powers of persuasion led to a major invest in downtown.

A meeting at a charity event not long after Goodman's election led to an invitation for drinks at the Goodman home, where the mayor laid out his vision for downtown and urged O'Neil to invest.



Above: Former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman talks to his wife and current Mayor Carolyn Goodman outside the mayor's office at Las Vegas City Hall. The Goodmans transformed downtown Las Vegas into a live-work cultural center.



O'Neil responded that he was cutting back on his workload and "had no interest whatsoever in starting up again."

That didn't dissuade Goodman, who launched a kind of good cop-bad cop routine whenever the two met. O'Neil recalls dining at the Palm steakhouse in [Caesars Palace](#) when the mayor came in.

"He kind of says things like, 'I dare you.' " O'Neil said. "Here comes the mayor, calling you a loser and a lowlife, like a football coach."

Yet when entertaining at his home, Goodman was a charmer, a master of the soft-sell.

"You have a martini, he whispers the right word in your ear and all of a sudden you end up pregnant and downtown," O'Neil said. "How the hell did that happen?"

O'Neil's investment in the Lady Luck grew to involve property for bars and restaurants on the west side of Third Street, as well. The hotel, now under new owners, is being remodeled and is expected to open at the end of 2013.

[Mayor Carolyn Go](#)
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|| Chapter 4: The power of silence

Tony Hsieh does things Oscar Goodman cannot. Blend into a crowd, for one.

But soft-spoken and most at home in a Zappos T-shirt and jeans, the 39-year-old entrepreneur is in his own way just as unique as Goodman.

Asked whether he had ever worked with anyone like Hsieh before, Donner said, "It would have been impossible to have worked with anyone like Tony because there is only one Tony."

His first meeting with Hsieh, before the decision to purchase City Hall for a corporate headquarters, "did not go well," Donner said.

Hsieh and his friends had been scoping out downtown, frequenting Cornthwaite's Downtown Cocktail Room after it opened in 2007 at Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard.

In early 2010, Hsieh and Zappos executive Fred Mossler approached Donner, [who is known as a downtown deal-maker](#). Hsieh asked a few general questions about downtown but "said very little." Donner thought little would come of it.

But a couple of weeks later, Hsieh sent a text message asking to meet. This time, as he and Donner walked around downtown, Hsieh asked about the odd-looking building at Stewart Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard.

That, Donner explained, was City Hall for the moment, but it would soon be vacant. A new one was under construction.

"His comment was that it would be a cool corporate office," Donner said.

[Below:](#) Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh sits for an interview at the Downtown Cock
downtown Las Vegas into a live-work cultural center.



Nothing in the Zappos CEO's nonchalant reply told Donner that Hsieh was doing more than making idle conversation.

Fred Mossler, an early Zappos hire and now a Downtown Project partner, said Hsieh embodies understatement.

"Tony always thinks he can learn something from everyone," Mossler said. "So he listens. He listens intently. If you don't know Tony with him, that silence and quietness can be a little intimidating."

Hsieh's approach helped Zappos grow from a startup in 1999 to a company sold to Amazon for \$1.2 billion a decade later, Mossler said.

Much of the success of Zappos is attributed to Hsieh's belief that a positive workplace culture results in good customer service, productivity and growth.

Hsieh developed his approach at [LinkExchange](#), an Internet advertising company he co-founded in 1996 and sold to Microsoft for \$27 million, plus \$27 million from LinkExchange colleagues, created [Venture Frogs](#), a venture capital firm that invested in Zappos.



In his book, "[Delivering Happiness](#)", Hsieh took a pass when Zappos pitched his company in a crowded market.

"To me, it sounded like the best of ideas," Hsieh wrote. But I didn't want to 'delete,' Swinmurn said the industry, and 5 percent of the order.

"I did some quick math and it equal to \$2 billion. It didn't matter was that consumer mattered was that consumer it seemed pretty reasonable day be as big as catalog.

A more personal revelation came from an investment in and re-creation of the company. He realized that selling LinkExchange didn't make him happy.

"I didn't realize it at the time, but it was a turning point for me in my life," he wrote. "I had decided to stop chasing the money, and focus on the company."

His early days at Zappos were rocky, bedeviled by deliveries that failed to meet customer expectations. Running in the red in 2002, he moved the company to a San Francisco apartment to keep the company going. But a year later, with shipping and inventory issues solved, Zappos made \$70 million in profit. In 2004, Hsieh moved the company and its 70 employees to Henderson.

On its surface, Zappos culture appears dominated by extroverts who decorate work spaces with outlandish trinkets and host elaborate parades and parties. But it also leaves room for people like Hsieh, who are soft-spoken and reserved.

"He thinks of it as a greenhouse," Mossler said of the culture. "In a lot of companies the CEO is trying to be the tallest plant. (Hsieh's environment, the perfect greenhouse to grow wonderful plants."

|| Chapter 5: A new kid in town

There was irony in the air at City Hall in late 2010, when Tony Hsieh turned to Oscar Goodman and said, "I think you're sitting in my seat."

Below: Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, passes the "Welcome to Downtown Las Vegas" sign on the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard.

The City Council was set to approve the sale of the old City Hall for \$25 million to developer Andrew Donner, who was already working with Zappos on a lease agreement that could move as many as 2,000 employees downtown.

The quip was more than an unusually saucy departure for Hsieh. It marked a change in both strategy and style in revitalizing downtown. Goodman's bombast and emphasis on powering through building projects would give way to Hsieh's subtle confidence and interest in first cultivating a community.

Despite disparate styles, Goodman and Hsieh each needed to make a deal.

Goodman, nearing the end of his third and final term, wanted to burnish his legacy and leave a rejuvenated downtown in his wake. Yet many of the city's signature projects remained incomplete, and the Las Vegas area was mired in a deep recession that cast doubt over the economic future of the entire region. Economically speaking, it was hard to find a worse place to be in the United States than Las Vegas.

"Although much of the action during the anxious days of late 2008 took place on Wall Street and in Washington, the Las Vegas housing market was in many ways the epicenter of the financial crisis," one analyst wrote in December, 2010.

Times were tough at City Hall. In October of that year, the council cut city office hours to four days per week to save money. The council and Goodman was at odds with employee unions after threatening firings to force pay concessions.

The last thing Goodman wanted was for the pending move to a gleaming [new \\$146 million City Hall](#) to be overshadowed by the old

"It could have been like a house of dominoes or a house of cards and collapsed, but it didn't," Goodman said. "We got lucky because

Hsieh saw Goodman's need to sell as a way to get a greenhouse where he could cultivate an even bigger experiment in culture than

"It really was one of those magical coincidences that turned out almost too good to be true," Hsieh said.

Zappos had outgrown its leased Henderson headquarters and needed a new home. Hsieh considered building a corporate campus and other big, progressive companies.

But Hsieh is a fan of urban thinkers who see hip, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with a cafe culture as incubators where creativity and quality of life will interact, growing new ideas and building a healthy economy.

Cornthwaite's urban vibe appealed to Hsieh, who was beginning to realize a suburban campus could not sate employee demand for and other amenities.

"We started compiling a list and realized we couldn't possibly fit all those things in our own building," Hsieh said.



[Slideshow | From City Hall to Zappos](#): The former City Hall headquarters for Zappos.

That interest in a more urban setting led to an introduction to a Lady Luck partner and owner of the Timberline Tavern. Both Hsieh and Goodman allowed him to broker the deal with the [Gaming Group](#), in the middle.



"I ... got into a contract with the city predicated on ' said. "I didn't have anything. I had no binding deal.

Under the original terms, Resort Gaming Group would have paid \$20 million, with the city doing owner financing. Zappos

The city also had to pay [Cordish Companies](#) \$2.4 million to build an arena there. It was seen as a good deal in light

"I'm getting giddy. I'm so excited," Councilman Steven

"Las Vegas is on the tipping point on being the greatest city in America," Councilman Ricki Barlow added.

Later, after the buyers assessed the condition of the 40-year-old building, the council knocked another \$7 million off the purchase price.

The Zappos deal drove hopes sky high even before Hsieh and friends announced their audacious next move.

|| Chapter 6: Evolution never stops

Aside from a few bars, convenience stores, casinos and the Beat coffeehouse, downtown lacked the amenities Hsieh believed would appeal to the workforce he wants to attract.

"There weren't any people walking around," Michael Cornthwaite said. "You would walk down the street during the day and scary people, just homeless people or whatever, would probably outnumber the average person 30-to-1. At night it would probably be 50-to-1."



Interactive | Then
Museum at 300 Stewart
United States federal
shown in August 1957

(Below): The Las Vegas
Street School, as seen
the City of Las Vegas
Nevada School of Art
Architects offices.



Interactive | Then and Now (Above): The building at 520 E. Fremont St. was the J.C. Penney's department store as shown April 3, 1952. It was then known as the Fremont Medical Center.

The building is now the Emergency Arts building and the Beat Coffeehouse.



If the Zappos move was

needed to change.

So on the heels of the City Hall deal, Hsieh and his investors created the Downtown Project to weave Zappos culture into the city company's headquarters.

"Downtown Project company thinks about downtown much the same way as Tony and we thought about Zappos," said Mossler. "Zappos is a community; the company doesn't want to be the community."

Hsieh, Mossler, Donner and other players in the Downtown Project were willing to spend some \$350 million to speed evolution in the City of City Hall. The project set aside \$200 million for real estate and \$50 million each in funds to aid small businesses, technology start-ups and other downtown businesses.

The effort is influenced by urban scholars such as [Edward Glaeser](#) and [Richard Florida](#).

Florida is best known for tying the economic success or failure of cities to their ability to attract "creative class" professionals, a group that includes everyone from professors and poets to artists and architects.

Glaeser is best known for his book, "[Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier](#)." Hsieh and others often cite Glaeser's observation that half the world's population lives in cities and that productivity increases along with urban density.

"But as companies get larger they typically get less productive. It just made a lot of sense that we should have an urban campus," Mossler said. "We think it is going to be really good for our culture and our employees and continue to make us all more intelligent, more productive and be good for the company."

Mossler says the project is about much more than Zappos or even downtown Las Vegas, considering the global migration of people into cities.

"Having successful cities I think is just super important to the human race," he said.

It's a work very much in progress.

Early on Hsieh spoke of needing residential density of 100 people per acre, a tall order in a downtown with few high-rise apartments or condos.

"We started out with this idea we needed to build residential density and everything would sort of fall into place," said Zach Ware, a technology fund partner and leader of Zappos campus development. "But ultimately how do we guarantee that once the residential is in place the activity is going to happen on the ground?"

The goal shifted to density of activity, and the standard is 10,000 "upwardly mobile" people downtown for any reason.

The group is now pursuing a holistic approach that includes attracting skilled workers, artistic and cultural events, nightlife and other amenities to make downtown a more desirable place to live.

Ware said they would "really try to make the area we focused on the best place to be, day and night. If we do that then residential will solve itself."

The project's most obvious progress so far has been in locking up real estate. The \$200 million property budget has so far bought dozens of properties, including the former Western and Gold Spike casinos; the major intersection between Eighth and Maryland Parkway; at least two full blocks between Fremont and Ogden Avenue; a convenience store at Fremont and Ninth Street now being converted to a speakers venue; a convenience store/car wash at Stewart Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard; and a former parking lot between Ninth and Tenth Street.

The most significant residential acquisition so far is a 300-unit apartment complex at Alta Drive and Shadow Lane.

That's in addition to the old City Hall, an associated parking garage and an option on 10 acres nearby for Zappos.

Interactive | Map: The announcement in 2010 that online retailer Zappos would move its headquarters to the former Las Vegas City Hall sparked a flurry of real estate activity downtown.

The biggest player has been the Downtown Project, a company formed by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh and partners to breathe new life into the city. The Project's real estate partner, Resort Gaming Group, or RGG, was instrumental in helping close the city hall deal. It's also helped DGP subsidiaries acquire dozens of downtown properties, mostly along and around Fremont Street.



Slideshow | First Friday: First Friday, which occurs the first Friday of each month in the Arts District, allows local artists to showcase their work, live entertainment and vendor booths.

Watch | Interview: Zach Ware, leader of the Downtown Project, talks about residential density.



Click below to view the properties affiliated with the Downtown Project, along with their recorded values and transaction dates.

Source: Focus Commercial Group/Clark County Assessor and the Resort Gaming Group



Owning the real estate is considered crucial to the Downtown Project's ability to provide workspace, storefronts and gathering place it recruits and supports.

"What we want to do is kind of be the landlord for the core," Hsieh said. "What you'd call the heart and soul of the community."

After scooping up the available rundown motels, empty lots and small, older buildings, the Downtown Project decided that new construction. The most high-profile example of its approach is the [Container Park at Fremont and Seventh Street](#).

Conceived as an economical, short-term way to house new businesses, the similar developments using disused steel shipping containers in San Francisco. Many Downtown Project ideas, it evolved and grew more ambitious as backers while seeking to appease city officials who couldn't bend building codes to container construction.



Above: Men work on fresh poured concrete at Container Park along Fremont Street and Seventh Street. The \$15 million to \$20 million project, which is backed by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh's Downtown Project, is scheduled to open next summer.

Below: Zappos employees from left, Mikela Lee-Manaois, Audrea Hooper and Loren Becker plan a corporate event with Tom Link of Plan-In Interactive in the Gold Spike. The Downtown Project recently purchased the property from Siegel Group of Nevada. It is used by Zappos employees as a work and play space and is open to the public.



Jacob Bronstein, founder of Flint and Tinder: Las Vegas has inspired countless visitors to overspend, overeat and even get married. It inspired Jacob Bronstein to start an underwear factory.

Bronstein is a "purposeful visitor," someone recruited by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh to spend money and look for inspiration downtown.

Bronstein, from Brooklyn, NY, founded Flint and Tinder, a company looking to break into the premium underwear market.

Not long ago he asked Hsieh to advise the company; Hsieh suggested Bronstein make regular visits to the Stitch Factory, a Downtown Project-sponsored fashion venue.

After mixing with other entrepreneurs, business leaders and creative types, Bronstein decided to make Las Vegas home to a factory that could experiment with products and processes before scaling up for manufacturing. If it works, it

The result: a bigger site on Seventh Street for more people-friendly glass-like shipping containers.

Don Welch, a friend of Hsieh's who moved to Las Vegas to run the small Park is a prime example of the Downtown Project's flexibility and ambition

"It started off as this boutique-y, experimental smaller project, and I literally came back and that project was scrapped and it was quadruple the size," a lot of projects go. When things evolve it makes things difficult, but the end

Another unconventional move involved [buying the Gold Spike hotel and casino](#) bar and restaurant into an informal meet-mingle-work space for laptop-toti

In addition to managing the real estate portfolio and supporting new business making progress with the \$50 million technology fund.

So far the fund has supported more than two dozen companies.

One, consumer robot maker [Romotive](#), moved to Las Vegas and grew from receiving more outside money and relocating to the Bay Area to be closer available in Las Vegas.

Another, [Ticket Cake](#), is making inroads as a marketplace for buying and

Unlike venture funds that focus on a specific sector of technology, such as the [Vegas Tech Fund](#) is for companies that will attract talent to downtown investment.

"There is no set metric on this, but nine out of 10 companies you invest in Ware said. "It works because one out of 10 are generally very, very succe

And even when companies fail or move, as Romotive did, the talent they o others.

will prove Hsieh's belief that when capable and enthusiastic people circulate in a given space, good ideas and new businesses follow.

"It is not formal conversations that come out of that but it is relationships and it is networks and it is ideas," said Bronstein. "I think that is valuable."



|| Chapter 7: “Very, very exciting for people.”



Above: A motion-blurred night scene of a casino on Fremont Street.

Below: The north end of the Strip, between the Flamingo and the Sahara, showing the intersection of Boulevard and Six.



Above: A view of Fremont Street looking east between Las Vegas Boulevard and Sixth Street.



Aside from some newfound street life and creative construction plans, one of the Downtown Project's biggest achievements may be of a corporate idealist trying to create a hipster haven in a downtrodden downtown makes headlines.

[“Zappos CEO gambles on reviving downtown Las Vegas,”](#) reported American Public Media's “Marketplace” program.

[“What happens in Brooklyn moves to Vegas,”](#) is how the New York Times sees it.

The shift of media fascination from the Strip to downtown was a welcome change, considering the area had long been overlooked b

“It wasn’t that things immediately got better. But the articles, the attention that was being given to downtown, but specifically Fremo for people,” Cornthwaite said.

While the spotlight is aimed squarely at Hsieh, decades of spadework by others prepared downtown for his vision to take root.

“I don’t know if a Tony Hsieh would have shown up if all this wasn’t germinating,” said O’Neil, describing the Third Street area whe as “a crooked mess.”

And while the city was focusing most of its attention and public money on Symphony Park, limited help for Fremont East has resulted in some improvement.

In 2002 the city created the Fremont East entertainment district by easing the minimum distance allowed between bars. And in

2010 it waived the \$20,000 tavern license fee in the area. The result: [The Beauty Bar](#), [Insert Coins](#), [the Downtown Cocktail Room](#) and other watering holes were starting to liven up the street when the recession bit hard.

"It is like a neutron bomb exploded. Everyone is still walking around, but everyone wants to know where did it all go," O'Neil said. "It just became pretty apparent you just couldn't get it to go."

After closing the Lady Luck in 2006, O'Neil and Donner's investment group couldn't get financing to remodel, even though they held nearby properties and had developed a restaurant and two bars at street level. The investors considered themselves lucky when [CIM Group](#), a Southern California company that develops upscale urban shopping and lifestyle, long-dormant hotel is scheduled to reopen this year as the Downtown Grand.

The recession also had another, less predictable consequence. It focused city attention on Fremont Street's small businesses, Corn

"Everyone was so desperate at that time," Cornthwaite said. "In prior years it was more about Symphony Park, you know, these \$2 sudden these \$200,000 projects became really important."

Michael and Jennifer Cornthwaite , owners of Downtown Cocktail Room, the Beat

Coffeehouse and Emergency Arts: It's tough to imagine a couple more committed to Fremont East than Michael and Jennifer Cornthwaite. It's even tougher to imagine them leaving Las Vegas.

But that's something they considered in the darkest days of the recession in 2009. Michael opened the Downtown Cocktail Room, which consumed more time and money than planned, just as the economy tanked. He watched as residents of the new luxury high-rises — his customers — packed up and left.

"I heard stories of jobs being lost and people moving back home and foreclosures," he said. "It just got worse and worse."

Adding to his distress was his belief that his bar was an important step to creating an upscale, urban neighborhood in the heart of decrepit downtown. "We thought there was a good chance this might not happen," he said. "We were deliberating what our options were."

He credited Jennifer, then his fiancée, with helping him focus more on making it through the next year, not worrying about the future. The couple soon opened Emergency Arts and the Beat Coffeehouse at Fremont and 6th Streets, and Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh hatched a plan to move his corporate headquarters and 2,000 workers downtown.

"At that time if someone would have opened a shoeshine chair outside the place it would have been a big deal," he said.

Michael is also a partner in Oscar's steakhouse at the Plaza, and the couple is now working with others to revive the historic Huntridge Theater.

But whether attracting the creative class will improve life for people outside Zappos and immediate beneficiaries of the Downtown F

Joel Kotkin, a fellow in Urban Futures at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., and internationally known author of books on urban social trends, said the power of the creative class to revive local economies is greatly exaggerated. He argues that even when a re



Left: Radio City Pizza waiter Nelson Michel delivers pizza on a tray. The restaurant, located at 508 E. Fremont, closed its Summerlin location and re

Right: Crowds gather in Don't Tell Momma at 517 Fremont Street around a year ago.



wealthy and upwardly mobile people to shift activity from the suburbs to the urban core, it's not enough to beat back the creeping threat to cities.

“Yet even accounting for these shifts, cities continue to contain pockets of wealth and gentrification that give way to swathes of poverty,” [Beast article](#). “In Brooklyn, it’s a short walk east from designer shoe stores and locavore eateries to vast stretches of slumscape. The cities, poor people — not hipsters or yuppies — constitute the fastest-growing population.”

|| Chapter 8: Haves and have-nots

They called it [Fremont Family Market and Deli](#) for a reason. Actually, many reasons.

The market in the 600 block of east Fremont Street employed three generations of the Yono family, led by brothers Steve and Manny.

The Yonos moved to Las Vegas from Michigan to follow their dad, an Iraqi immigrant who got into the grocery business in Detroit in the 1960s.

Steve Yono’s daughters worked behind the counter.

And after 15 years in business, even some of the customers were like family. In a recent interview the brothers recalled that after they signed condolences and well wishes on a big white sheet of paper they brought into the store.

“My brother, father and I put our blood, sweat and tears into this,” Steve Yono said of the market, which closed in March.

But not everyone is being invited to be part of the new downtown, even if their businesses appear to fit the criteria set by the Downtown Project: Owner-operated, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the immediate area.

The Yonos’ store, which they said earned about \$1.6 million in annual revenue, was a fixture for more than a decade. It shared a building with a Mexican restaurant, now closed as well.

The brothers said they were able to build a thriving business in a tough part of town because they listened to their customers.

They stocked the store with some basic food necessities to serve people from nearby motels and apartments, things like off-brand cigarettes, beer and wine.

“We have to treat everyone the same that has money in their pocket willing to spend in our business,” Manny Yono said. “If someone needs a cheaper brand of cigarettes, we have to carry that. If someone is looking for Perrier water, we have to have that.”

But as their neighborhood started to fill with young professionals and upscale small businesses, the Yonos started worrying that they no longer fit in.

In mid-2012 they sought a new, five-year lease that would allow them to recoup \$50,000 in planned upgrades that would take advantage of new activity on Fremont and attract the trendy young people moving into the nearby [Ogden residential high-rise](#).

Their landlord offered three years, then stalled before taking even that off the table. They had just four months to get out. The lease went to a Downtown Project entity. What it will do with the place is unknown.

The Yonos reject any suggestion that their business was based on cheap beer and



[Slideshow | The Yonos, co-owners of the Fremont Family Market and Deli](#): Though the deli moved to a new store is again in the path of the Downtown Project.

Watch | Delivering a New Las Vegas
Aside: Several businesses and residents are being displaced by the land the downtown project has acquired over the years.

Their story is often overlooked by the many people who move into downtown Las Vegas.

Delivering a New Downtown, Part 2

cigarettes, and took advantage of low-income shoppers. What comes next, they said, will be worse for those who can least afford it.

“I’m selling you a Pabst Blue Ribbon 24-ounce can for \$1.50,” Manny Yono said. “Because you put up fancy paint and fancy wallpaper and a pretty girl behind the bar, you are going to charge \$6. ... Who is taking advantage here?”

He also noted that downtown’s working class already live the values touted by the Downtown Project.

“What they are doing now was already happening,” he said. “Live, work and play downtown, but they are just not as flashy.”

The Yonos now operate a market at Fremont and 11th streets owned by a family friend, but they aren’t confident it will last. The Downtown Project has scooped up property all the way to 11th Street.

“We’re trying to survive on what’s left,” Steve Yono said. “How long is it before we are out of business or they approach us to get out?”

The Yonos aren’t the only ones nervous about the future.

At A Cut Above The Rest, a barbershop at Carson Avenue near Seventh Street, Tim Wilkinson wonders if his business will be pushed out. The partners have been in business for 20 years, and at the current location since 2000.

Business downtown has been good for Wilkinson, a lifelong Las Vegas who got into the business after his brother, an electrician, got him to learn a trade. Cutting hair helped him put two sons through college and pay private school tuition for a third.

The partners have two years remaining on their lease, but they know that when Downtown Project developers wanted a barber in the retro-style, hipster barbershop Bolt from Los Angeles instead of looking up the street.

“We’re totally for change; we would just like to be part of the change,” Wilkinson said.

A sign on the barbershop wall advertises \$12 shaves, \$14 haircuts and \$18 Afros, among other services like mustache trims and blowouts.

The banter between the barbers, customers and neighborhood visitors on a recent afternoon showed the shop offers more than the haircut.

“It is the headquarters of the community,” Wilkinson said. “We do a lot of counseling, we give a lot of good advice, we do a lot of free to-zeke when it comes to barbering.”

Now he sees that community dwindling, the market, a smoke shop and a beauty salon pushed out, and wonders how much longer he can survive in the path of the Downtown Project.

“It is kind of hard to see it raining on your neighbor’s house and you are right next door and it is not raining on yours,” he said.

Below: Tim Wilkinson, co-owner of A Cut Above the Rest, wants to be given a chance to compete during downtown’s redevelopment.





|| Chapter 9: "Is it just?"



[Slideshow | Hassan "Gino Express Oil & Tune"](#) His everyone knows him as Born in Iran, Massour University of Rome be 1983. A longtime auto downtown auto repair

A friend suggested he European name, so he

"Gino is easy for every

Business was good at shop is across the inte Zappos headquarters. the recession, followe the new City Hall.

Then a company affilia Hsieh's Downtown Prc told Massoumi to catcl

"They want to make b unfortunately, I'm sorry going to be destroyed,

Borer, the UNLV professor who criticized Hsieh's characterization of downtown as a "blank slate," said it's too easy for outsiders ea

overlook an existing culture that has high numbers of people struggling with low incomes, physical and mental disabilities and unen

"You end up implying those lives didn't have value," Borer said. "They don't have the type of economic capital or social capital to be that emerges."

He said viewing downtown as an existing community needing help would be more productive than considering it no community at a room for newcomers while taking into account the lives of people already there.

That's especially important considering the relatively low number of people in the Las Vegas area who fit the highly educated and well-paid definition of the creative class.

In addition, the preservation of existing businesses run by longtime locals would bolster the newcomers' claim they're building an organic community more authentic than the Strip and more desirable than the suburbs.

"If the Downtown Project is supposed to be about putting down roots that might actually be a positive culture (counter to) the dominant narrative of Las Vegas, that remains to be seen," Borer said.

Kotkin, too, is skeptical.

Author of the book "[The Next 100 Million: America in 2050](#)," Kotkin questions using public resources to festoon central cities with amenities for the creative class. He acknowledges this is not a popular stance.

"What you have in the urbanist circle is unanimity of views – 'Let's give money so we can have yuppies living downtown,'" Kotkin said. "I think there has to be some sort of skepticism about that. Is it just?"

In Kotkin's view, downtown revivals largely benefit people who don't necessarily need help while diverting resources away from suburbs that have delivered a lifestyle and jobs that appeal to most Americans.

For example, he points to Phoenix and Los Angeles, cities like Las Vegas that have made downtown the focus of civic ambition.

Between 2002 and 2011 more than \$4 billion was [invested in Phoenix's 1.5 square-mile downtown](#). In Los Angeles, a revitalization and included tax breaks for developers resulted in the [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#), [Staples Center](#) and thousands of new, upscale re

The movement in those cities, Kotkin said, reflects a general trend in urban planning that benefits downtown property owners and urbane residents at the expense of middle- and working-class neighborhoods.

"Do the downtowns and the property owners in the downtowns have a priority over the neighborhoods? I think great cities are made up of neighborhoods," Kotkin said, noting that good schools, parks and jobs are critical to successful cities. "If you have neighborhoods that are desolate they deserve attention, too."

Kotkin said Southern Nevada clearly gained when Zappos moved from the Bay Area in 2004, creating more than 1,000 jobs and continuing to grow.

But the move downtown doesn't necessarily benefit the entire Las Vegas valley, Kotkin said.

"It's not like somebody is coming from Shanghai and building something in downtown Las Vegas," he said. "What you want to do is attract capital and investment

Watch | Interview: Michael Borer, UNLV Sociology





Above: A man smokes a cigarette on Carson Street near Seventh Street. The closed John E. Carson Hotel at 124 S. Sixth St. was forced to move after it was purchased and closed the property, relocating the building's 43 residents to a new location. "They don't care for us anymore," quipped the man, who did not want to move.

from the outside instead of moving things around in your same region."

Moreover, Kotkin said, civic boosters tend to overvalue the benefit of a trendy downtown and underplay the direct and indirect costs of creating one.

The costs of reviving downtown Las Vegas are myriad.

The city's redevelopment agency has bankrolled more than \$100 million in debt to pay for projects, with most of the repayment generated by property tax gains attributed to redevelopment. And in recent years the city's general fund has subsidized millions of dollars to help repay debt, build the new City Hall and fund programs that pay business owners who improve building facades and sewer hookups.

Even the heralded deal that brought Zappos downtown was an expense – the purchase of the old City Hall was largely financed by the city, which agreed to option nearby vacant land at below-market value. Plus the city paid to clear another developer's option on the building.

Kotkin said taxpayers should weigh those kinds of costs against the potential benefit when agreeing to invest public money that might benefit a small swath of the population.

"Would the money be better spent on training programs? Would it be better spent on parks? Local buses? The debate has been so one-sided that no one views it from the other side and nobody raises these issues," he said.

|| Chapter 10: Happiness delivered

For Natalie Young, who has owned a restaurant, there's no question that downtown Las Vegas is better for the community.

[Aerial views of downtown Las Vegas](#)



transformation of downtown

A self-described cynic, Young said she wouldn't have opened downtown she wouldn't have opened and the Cornthwaites wouldn't have opened her open a restaurant.

"You know, people question what is going on in downtown Las Vegas, you, my experience, my perspective, my authentic and community-driven approach."

Yet her journey followed a path that wasn't a sure bet that she would succeed.

Expelled from high school for not earning her degree at an alternative school, she wouldn't pay for art school and opened an antipasto bar in a downtown location.

art out of olives, peppers and cured meats.

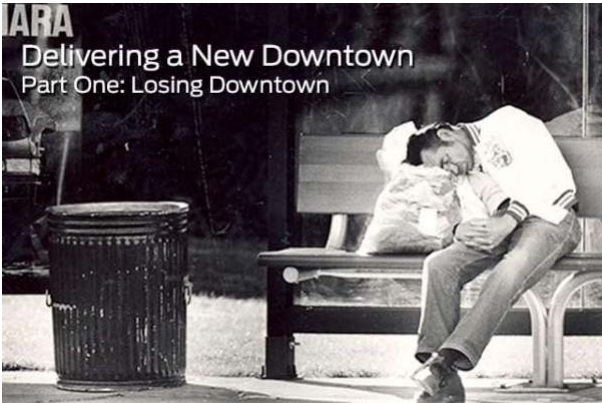
And when she failed as an executive chef in Telluride, Colo., because of drug and alcohol abuse, she entered rehab in Las Vegas, where she stayed more than a dozen years.

Young learned French cooking at a fine dining restaurant on the Strip, ran an off-Strip casino restaurant that made quality food at a low price and covers per day and graduated to a high-paying executive chef position that didn't make her happy.

She credits a decision to spend more time downtown, where she met people like Hsieh and Cornthwaite, for the opportunity to open a restaurant.

"I never thought I would go from being a worker to an owner," Young said. "If this restaurant closed today I'd be happy with my experience, I'd be a millionaire or to be famous or rich, I'm in it to be happy, and I've already achieved that."

|| Video Glossary



Delivering a New Downtown | Watch the 28-minute, full-length piece on the issues surrounding the redevelopment of downtown Las Vegas.

Delivering a New Downtown, Part One: Losing Downtown | Downtown Las Vegas was the epicenter of the valley until the 1960s. With the creation of the Strip and the expansion of suburbs, downtown Las Vegas became an afterthought.

Delivering a New Downtown, Part Two: Hsieh's Influence | Downtown Las Vegas originally was just going to be a continuation of downtown, but that idea was rejected. Now that it will try to revitalize downtown Las Vegas.



Delivering a New Downtown, Part Three: Pushed Aside | Several businesses and residents are being pushed out with the land the downtown project has acquired over the last 18 months. Their story is often overlooked by the many national media stories about downtown Las Vegas.

Zach Ware discusses the evolution of residential density | Vegas Tech Fund partner Zach Ware talks about how the Downtown Project plans to attract people to live in downtown Las Vegas.

Michael Borer on Tony Hsieh's influence | UNLV sociology professor Michael Borer discusses the division between the old and new downtown.

Staff Contributors

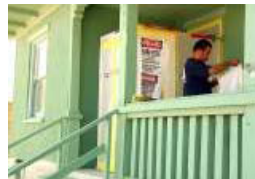
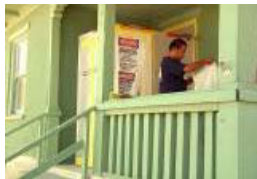
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Enduring the heat, crews prepare railroad cottage for museum



When the restoration work is done this fall, the cottage will be opened to the public.



Donning white hazard suits, gloves and masks this week, crews from A&B Environmental worked to clear out asbestos and lead paint from a early 1900s railroad housing unit expected to open this fall at the Clark County Museum.

The green railroad cottage, moved to the museum from downtown in 2002, has been slowly restored as funding became available and is set to open in September at the museum at 1830 S. Boulder Highway near U.S. Highway 95 and Wagonwheel Drive.

This will be the first railroad housing to be opened to the public. Four other houses were found intact, and are being restored at the Springs-Preserve, according to Mark Hall-Patton, museum administrator for Clark County.

"The whole idea of bringing the house out here is to open it up," Hall-Patton said. "It was the first real housing here."

The 64 houses built by the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, a business owned by the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad -- later bought by Union Pacific Railroad -- were located downtown between Clark and Garces Avenues on 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets.

"It was built between 1911 and 1914," museum administrator Mark Hall-Patton said. "It was part of the earliest mass housing built in Las Vegas. In the early days, this is where you lived if you didn't build your own home and you worked for the railroad. The railroad was the biggest employer."

The concrete building was relocated from 521 S. 3rd St. to the museum's Heritage Street.

It is not well-ventilated, and the restoration crew worked through the heat and the stagnant air to prepare the exhibit.

Living in this heat without air conditioning was a way of life in the early 1900s, Hall-Patton said. "That's before air conditioning, so there is a little reality here," he said.

Before the crew could enter the building, they don a disposable one-piece jumpsuit, covered from feet to head. The suit is made of a light, breathable material. Then they layer on a second jumpsuit. Tape around the ankles, gloves and a mask with a filter finish off their attire.

"We're used to this already, that's the fun part," Joaquin Pineda, the supervisor for the project, said about the heat.

All of the employees of the local environmental company are trained in heat awareness and safety, according to A&B Environmental owner Michael Slough.

The crew starts their day with a five gallon jug of water for three people, and it is empty by the end of the day, he said.

This job is nicer than some for Slough and his crew.

"It's kind of neat. It's a part of history here in Vegas," he said. "This is something we can look back at. A lot of what we do gets demolished and becomes a parking lot."

Contact Rochel Leah Goldblatt at rgoldblatt@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0381.

Commissioners concerned about Welcome to Las Vegas solar 'trees'



RONDA CHURCHILL/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Clark County commissioners are considering using solar energy to power the landmark Welcome to Las Vegas sign.

By BEN BOTKIN
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The lights of a famous landmark — the Welcome to Las Vegas sign — could be juiced with solar power.

First, Clark County commissioners want to make sure the solar panels fastened atop three 25-foot-tall artificial trees that are envisioned don't ruin the view of the famous sign or put a damper on the enthusiasm of millions of tourists who snap photos there.

The diamond-shaped welcome sign was designed in 1959 by Betty Willis and went on to become a symbol for Las Vegas as the city turned into a resort destination.

The proposed solar project, which wouldn't cost the county anything, would showcase the region's potential for solar energy. The Clean Energy Project and Green Chips, two local nonprofit groups focused on renewable energy, want to power the sign with solar energy with a private grant received from the Consumer Electronics Association, a Virginia-based organization focused on consumer technology.

The three faux trees would be painted blue to match the posts of the welcome sign, said Matt Van Note, a project developer with Bombard Renewable Energy, the Las Vegas contractor that would build the project.

Each tree would have 12 solar panels. The initial locations eyed for the artificial trees are on the median just north of the sign, Van Note said.

That location didn't sit well with some commissioners, who worry that the solar panels could mess up the northward view at the sign, which is on Las Vegas Boulevard at the southern edge of the Strip.

"The concern I have is the view line because that is our brand," said Commissioner Mary Beth Scow, stressing she values solar energy's potential.

"It just seems to me when people are going up to take their picture in front of the Las Vegas sign, I don't think they want solar trees in the line of view looking to the Strip. I just have a huge concern with that."

The sign is in her district and the district of Commission Chairman Steve Sisolak. Sisolak also expressed concerns about the aesthetics and safety because the county doesn't want people walking on the north median.

"I can't support having those trees — whatever you're calling them — in the line of the pictures," he said.

"I don't think people want solar panels in the pictures."

That doesn't mean the solar project is out of power. County staff members will work with the organization and plan to bring back options for the commissioners that address those concerns.

Van Note also stressed that the location for the artificial trees is flexible.

Other commissioners were more upbeat about the project.

Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani noted the irony of the presentation, given Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's visits to solar plants in the Las Vegas area Monday. Giunchigliani said the project has good potential as an educational tool.

Commissioner Tom Collins, saying he is supportive of the effort, suggested one way to beautify the project.

"Maybe put Elvis pictures under it," he said.

Contact reporter Ben Botkin at bbotkin@reviewjournal.com or 702-405-9781. Follow him on Twitter @BenBotkin1.

Sesquicentennial license plates go on sale this month



NEVADA DEPT. OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Gov. Brian Sandoval on Monday announced that the 150th anniversary license plates will be available at metropolitan Department of Motor Vehicles offices July 29.

**By SEAN WHALEY
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL CAPITAL BUREAU**

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval on Monday announced that the 150th anniversary license plates will be available at metropolitan Department of Motor Vehicles offices July 29.

The plates will be available at rural offices beginning July 31.

Sandoval also announced that beginning Tuesday, DMV offices will begin accepting orders for personalized 150th license plates.

"The 150th license plate is an important part of recognizing our state's 150th anniversary," Sandoval said. "The proceeds from the plate will go towards supporting the year-long celebration and I am thrilled that at the end of this month, motorists will be able to show their support for our great state."

Nevada's celebration of its sesquicentennial will begin this year on Nevada Day, Oct. 31. Nevada will turn 150 on Oct. 31, 2014.

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