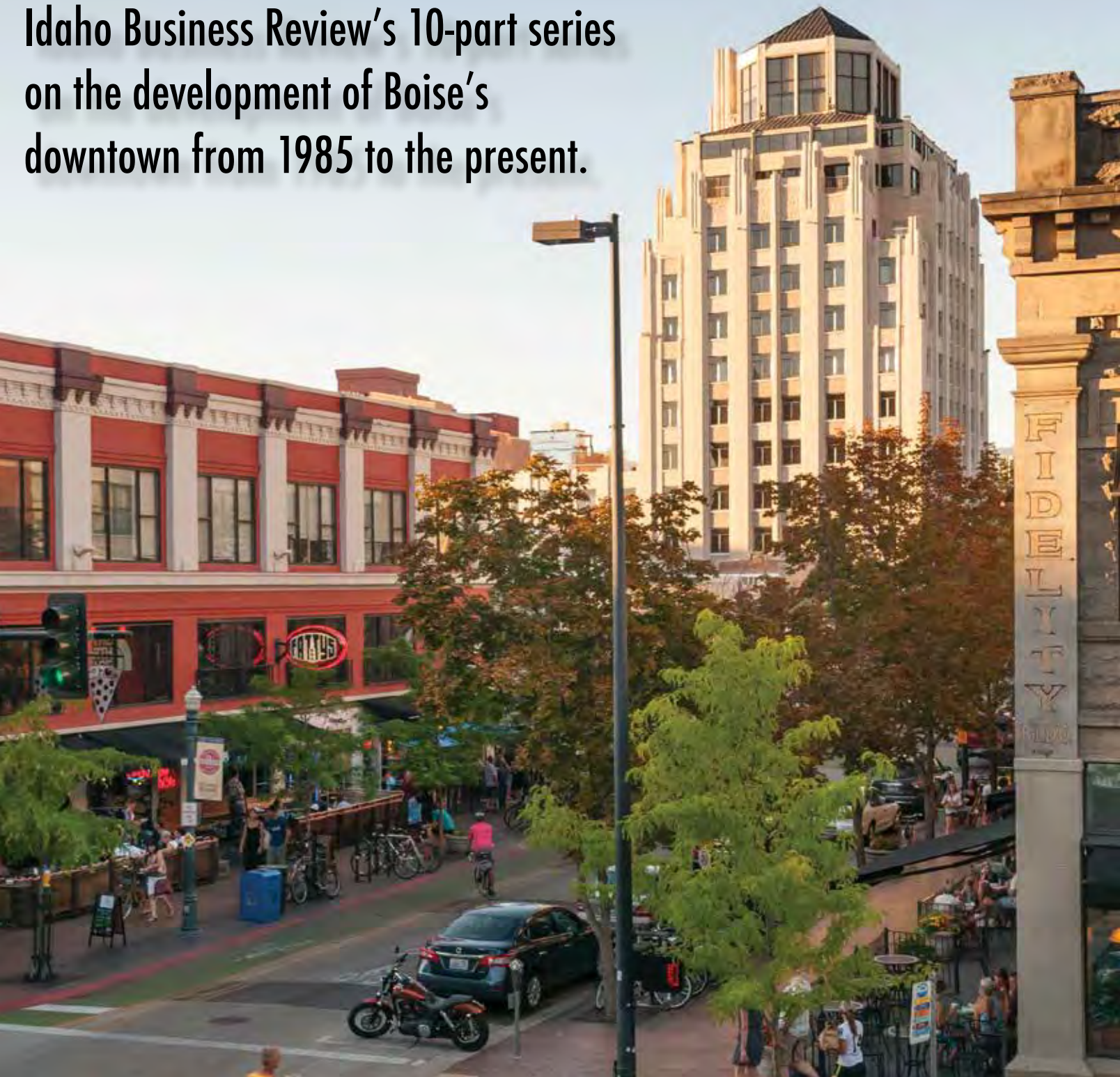
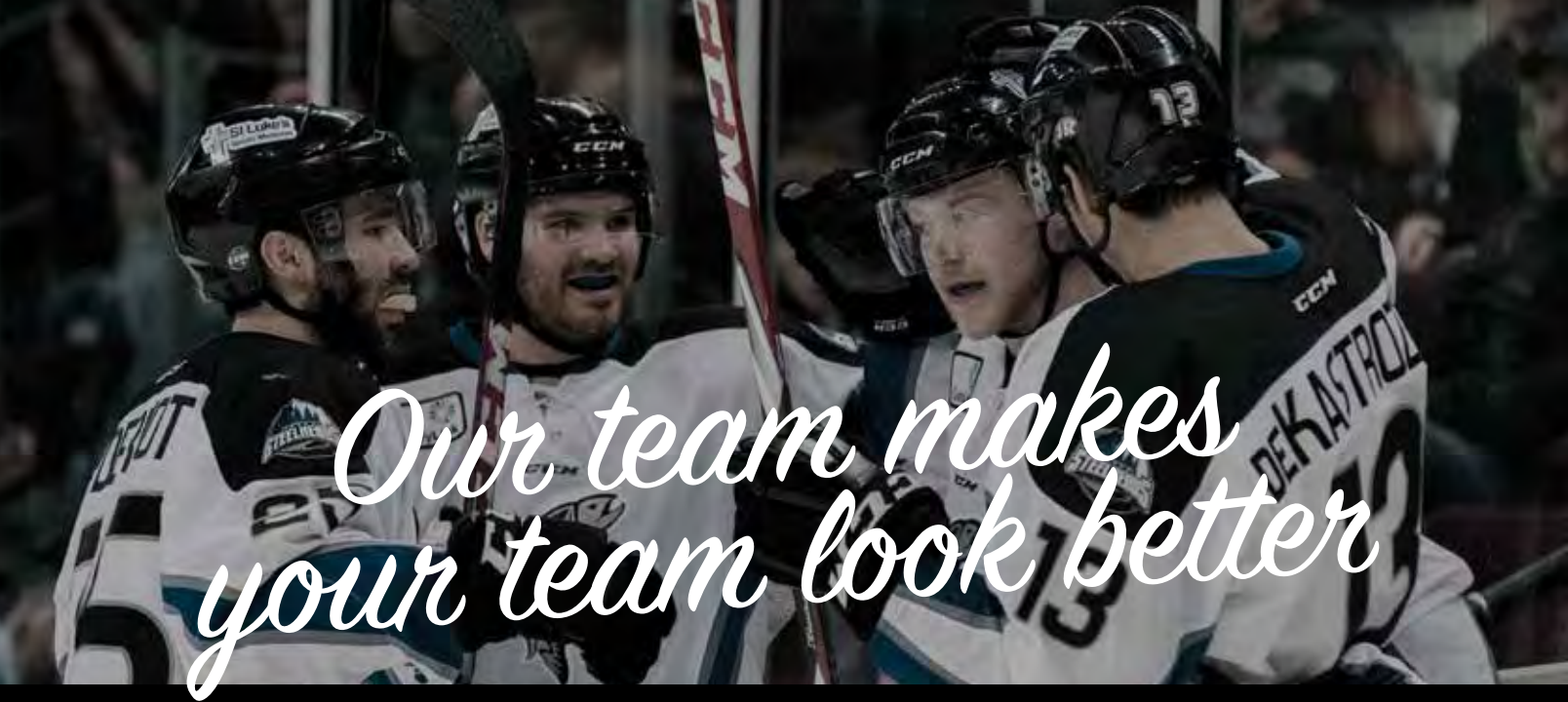


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on the development of Boise's
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Contents

About the Writer.....	1
Editor's Note	2
Modern Downtown.....	3-5
Architect Study.....	6-9
Grove Plaza	10-12
Boise Center	14-17
People	18-19
Hockey.....	20-21
Front Street	22-23
Bodo	24-26
Eighth and Main.....	27-29
Future	30-32

Cover photo by Pete Grady

About the *writer*

Idaho Business Review staff writer Teya Vitu moved to Boise in the summer of 2014 and noticed right away that downtown is a place where it's a pleasure to do business. Vitu, who had just spent more than a decade in Tucson, saw Boise as a source of pride to locals and an important engine for the state's economy.



Vitu set about writing a series that would explain how Boise's leaders came up with a plan to rebuild a downtown that had seen extensive demolitions in the 1960s and 1970s. In bi-weekly installments, he outlined the plan for rebuilding the downtown that was commissioned by the city's prescient leaders in 1985. He described how these leaders, and their successors, closely followed this plan to create a busy, healthy city that is one of the most liveable in the country.

Vitu found the process of learning about downtown Boise illuminating. He quickly met the visionaries responsible for the city's success. Having seen what Boiseans have accomplished from a 1985 plan, he's looking forward to seeing how the next 30 years unfold.

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Editor's Letter

Cooperation paid off



By Anne Wallace Allen
Editor, Idaho Business Review

Former Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, the former Boise mayor who served as Idaho's chief executive from 1998 to 2006, is the first to say that downtown Boise, like

so many city centers around the country, endured an awkward phase.

In the 1960's and 1970's, Boise lost many of its architectural treasures to urban renewal. They include Boise's Gothic and Romanesque City Hall, which opened in 1893, and the 1902 Renaissance Revival First National Bank of Idaho Building. Demolition left large blocks of dusty parking lots, and downtown was a place few cared to venture without a specific purpose.

In 1985, Kempthorne's administration and its partners came up with a plan to revive the modern downtown. Kempthorne went on to become governor and then U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Back in Boise, subsequent mayoral administrations stuck to the plan developed under Kempthorne, and the results are clear. Downtown Boise is a place of busy, shady, welcoming downtown streets with a mix of restaurants, stores, offices and parking garages. Bicycles are being more or less smoothly integrated into the heart of the city, and now Capital City Development Corp. and other groups are working on ways to get people in and out of town easily, whether they're in cars, on foot, or on bicycles.

All this didn't happen by accident. In this 10-chapter series, *Idaho Business Review* writer Teya Vitu outlines the bold redevelopment plan that started in the mid-1980s and continues now.

Vitu's series introduces Portland, Ore. architect

Paddy Tillett of ZGF, who masterminded much of the shape of the modern downtown. He gives a nod to some key characters, from then-Ada County Commissioner Judy Peavey-Derr, former CCDC director Phil Kushlan, and the builders behind the Boise Centre and BoDo; to more recently Gardner Co., which risked starting the 18-story Eighth and Main tower while the local economy was still in the grip of recession.

Kempthorne was elected mayor when local leaders were deeply divided about whether to build a huge mall downtown. He saw some of his work come to fruition before leaving for Washington in 2006 to work as U.S. Secretary of the Interior. He's now president and CEO of the American Council of Life Insurers.

Kempthorne says downtown redevelopment succeeded because parties that had been at odds over how to carry out redevelopment joined forces to come up with a plan that would be best for downtown Boise.

To him, and to many other observers who are watching with interest as Boise moves ahead, the most important element for continued success will be the ability of the different entities that control Boise's streets and buildings to work together. These entities aren't all located in Boise, and they don't always see things the same way. In fact, it's not always clear that they're even speaking to each other. But they're all going to be critically needed if the city is going to move ahead smoothly into a more populated and busier modern era.

"I don't care how talented your architects are," Kempthorne said. "If you don't have political leadership that can put together a coalition of people that share the vision, nothing happens."

Let's hope that the next installment of this important series can describe the steps leaders are taking to make that vision a reality.

A need for renewal, a plan of action

Back in 1985, there was no Boise Centre, no Grove Hotel, no CenturyLink Arena, no Grove Plaza, no Eighth and Main building, no BoDo, no Trader Joe's or Whole Foods or many other modern structures, businesses and street decor that define today's downtown Boise.

There were plenty of surface parking lots, the result of actions taken in the 1960s and 1970s that stripped away much of downtown's history in a vain attempt to lure a regional shopping mall downtown. The mall never came to pass. Instead, 2015 marks the 30th anniversary year of the work that has gone into assembling a successful modern downtown.

"I've been in 100 towns in the West. There's nothing has diverse and exciting and safe as downtown Boise, Idaho, today. Most cities have just offices downtown," said Larry Leasure, whose contributions to the modern downtown include the Eighth Street Marketplace, Grove Hotel and Century Link Arena.

Downtown was a wasteland 30 years ago. But 1985 also saw the preparation of the R/UDAT study, an analysis of the future for Boise's city center by a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team assembled by the American Institute of Architects. The Boise Redevelopment Agency (today's Capital City Development Corp.) brought in R/UDAT to jump start the future after city leaders finally abandoned the downtown mall.

"That was the Bible," said Phil Kushlan, who was CCDC's executive director from 1999 to 2011. "It said, 'Stop tearing things down. You have a nice historic urban environment.'"

The modern downtown sprung from two visionary teams: R/UDAT and ZGF Architects of Portland, Ore. ZGF took the R/UDAT study and from it created the pedestrian-oriented Eighth Street between Bannock Street and Myrtle. The



Pedestrians walk down Eighth Street in downtown Boise in July 2015. The pedestrian-friendly corridor was created through careful planning 30 years ago.

Photo by Pete Grady.



The Boise Hole at the corner of Eighth and Main Streets in 2011, looking eastward toward Eighth Street. The foundation hole sat empty until 2012, when the Gardner Company started construction on its new 18-story retail and office building there.

study also resulted in the creation of six public garages.

Eighth Street and the garages comprise two of the four pillars identified by Kushlan that set the groundwork for the modern downtown. The others are The Grove Plaza and, still a work in progress, downtown housing.

The foundation pieces for the modern downtown were the two pronounced areas of blight that Leasure described as “torn up Beirut” and Harper’s magazine famously termed “an exceedingly tidy bombing raid” in a 1974 article lambasting Boise’s urban renewal demolitions. The areas were the four-block Ninth-Capitol-Front-Main area, which had been cleared away for the phantom mall, and the Boise Hole at Eighth and Main, a large foundation hole that came to represent the problem of stalled development.

Though the urban renewal had gone seriously awry in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s, The R/UDAT study was translated into golden opportunity. It helped that Mayor Dirk Kempthorne was pushing downtown



Right now, the city is in its newest phase, one that perhaps for the first time edges Boise toward amenities comparable to those in Portland and Seattle with the arrival of Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, and the Eighth and Main building.”

toward a mall-free new future.

Ten of the 15 tallest buildings in Boise were built after 1988 with the triangular Wells Fargo Center (originally First Interstate) leading the way that year. It joined the U.S. Bank Plaza (just then in transition from its original Idaho First Plaza moniker to West One Plaza) and One Capital Plaza as the only downtown towers topping 180 feet at that time.

With Eighth Street and five public parking garages in place in the 1990s, 21st century downtown modernization looked to Front Street and specifically the former Union Pacific Railroad yards that dominated the southern and eastern edges downtown. Today's BoDo, JUMP, Ada County Court House, Civic Plaza Apartment Homes and University of Idaho Water Center all were railroad yards into the 1980s. Front Street also became grocery central, starting with WinCo in 1998.

Right now, the city is in its newest phase, one that perhaps for the first time edges Boise toward amenities comparable to those in Portland and Seattle with the arrival of Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, and the Eighth and Main building. The Gardner Co's City Center Plaza is in the works across from where the Boise Hole once yawned. The Simplot family's \$70 million JUMP project is under construction just a few blocks southwest of that, with the Simplot world headquarters close behind. And some 220 miles of bike lanes are in place, with more bike and pedestrian features under discussion by local planners.

"This is a new phase," said Tommy Ahlquist, chief operating officer at Gardner Company, which owns Eighth and Main and the US Bank Plaza. "Taking empty blighted blocks and turning them into something is a big deal."

Observers see the next chapter for the modern downtown largely playing out on the west end, the realm of 11th to 14th streets and Myrtle and Main/State streets. This involves the Linen District and the dirt parking lots just west of JUMP and the future Simplot world headquarters, sectors that essentially have remained untouched.

"Eventually, downtown will expand to the west," said Paddy Tillett, the ZGF architect who master-minded much of the shape of the modern downtown. "It's automobile land west of 10th. I think there's more to be done with Main and Idaho and Bannock to broaden the pedestrian area of downtown."

So, how did all this happen, the creation of the modern downtown, starting in about 1985? The Idaho Business Review has explored this theme in ten parts. We hope you enjoy learning about the characters that went into Boise's creation.



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Architects' 1985 study set the stage for Boise's downtown

When Portland, Ore. urban planner and civic designer Paddy Tillett arrived in Boise in 1986, he found a downtown that had faced the worst of urban

renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. The city had cleared a space bordered by Capitol Boulevard, Front Street, and Main Street for a mall that was never built, leaving a huge gravel parking lot at its center with a scattering of office buildings.

"The only building was the very suburban-looking U.S. Bank building," said Tillett. "It was really a no-man's land."

Tillett was part of a team hired to help recreate a vibrant downtown in that empty space and around it. City leaders had commissioned a study the year before that became the template for the work done then, and for the busy downtown core that exists now. The 1985 study came from the American Institute of Architect's Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team, or R/UDAT. Its recommendations opened:

"Boise is a city in search of its identity, sense of place and purpose. It is a city with parking lots where a vibrant business, entertainment and residential core - its 'heart' - should be." The team of architects pledged to build a better Boise, "renewing a sense of civic pride" in Idaho's capital city. They focused on an eight-block area at the city's core, but their study also

outlined how work on that core could integrate the advantages of the entire downtown area.

Thirty years later, the results of that team's work can be seen in the busy car, foot and bicycle traffic downtown and in the local retail, offices and restaurants that fill the core.

The infusion of energy into the downtown core helped the area east of the core flourish as well, leading to the more recent construction of the Ada County Courthouse low-income housing and the University of Idaho Water Center. Just west of the core, the Banner Bank tower was built in 2006, the historic Owyhee Hotel was remodeled for offices and apartments in 2014, and the Simplot family's JUMP project and a new Simplot corporate headquarters were under development this year.

Thirty years ago, the Boise City Council hired Portland architectural

firm, Zimmer-Gunsul-Frasca (ZGF Architects), where Tillett still works, to bring the recommendations in the R/UDAT study to fruition. Another R/UDAT study had resulted in the Pearl District, Portland's successful conversion of warehouses, light industry and rail yards into upscale shopping, dining and living.

"That was the trigger," said Tillett, an architect who also worked on the Boise State University Master Plan. "The R/UDAT was very good, very clear. One thing it talked about was connecting downtown



Boise is a city in search of its identity, sense of place and purpose. It is a city with parking lots where a vibrant business, entertainment and residential core - its 'heart' - should be.

—R/UDAT

(Boise) to the river.”

R/UDAT called for mixed-use, urban density and a pedestrian-oriented approach, with lively streets oriented toward human uses and a focus on Eighth Street as the heart of the shopping area. The team prescribed a downtown business organization, and the city created the Downtown Boise Association in 1987.

ZGF followed the recommendations of the R/UDAT study closely, Tillett said. The firm directed some of its efforts toward the block to the north of the empty space, known as Block 44. It had been spared the urban renewal wrecking ball, and today the block enclosed by Eighth, Bannock, Ninth, and Idaho Streets is a showcase for local retail.

The modern downtown gained a foothold 30 years ago because the retailers who remained at the time were convinced not to flee to the suburbs, Tillett said.

“They knew they were on the way out,” Tillett said. “We got them together. Why don’t you coordinate your opening hours? Stay open late one evening a week?”

Small retailers would eventually become downtown’s entire retail presence. Department store JC Penney ended its century-long tenure in 1988, and The Mode shut down in 1991. Bon Marche became a Macy’s in 2004, but eventually was the last downtown Boise department store to leave when it closed its doors in 2010.

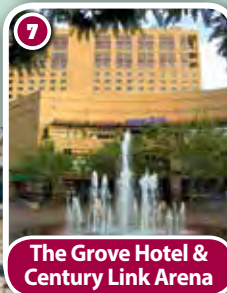
Tillett also credited long-time Bogus Basin general manager Bob Loughrey for starting the Alive After Five concert series in 1987, an important catalyst for a new way of looking at the downtown area.



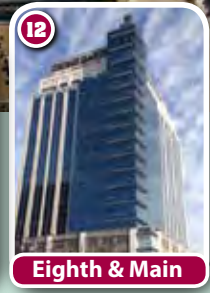
Pedestrians cross Eighth Street in downtown Boise. The street is busy with foot traffic all through the year.

1985 - 2015: BUILDING A MODERN DOWNTOWN

This infographic shows what downtown Boise looked like in 1985, and what buildings have been added since then.



1985



Infographic by Jason Jacobsen.

"People thought no one would go," he said. "The first one got 800 people, the second one 1,200 people."

Tillett and his partners also talked to restaurant owners about staying open later on Wednesdays. They tried it, and diners came.

"It was sort of a morale booster to keep them where they were. It was a renewal effort that wasn't physical," he said.

One of the central tenets of the R/UDAT study was redesigning Eighth Street to make it the primary pedestrian connection between the Idaho Statehouse and the Boise River. The Capital City Development Corp., Boise's downtown redevelopment agency charged with investing public funds to revitalize defined business and residential districts, now owns Eighth Street from Bannock to Front streets. The tell-tale clue is the blue rather than green street signs, which indicates that a street does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ada County Highway District.

ZGF redesigned Eighth Street with wider sidewalks between Bannock Street and River Road. The Bannock-to-Grove Plaza segment became the thoroughfare for the Capital City Farmer's Market in 1994, downtown's largest weekly gathering of people for most of the year. R/UDAT had also recommended replacing surface parking lots with parking garages. CCDC has since built six public garages with 2,561 spaces through 2006.

Eighth Street's Capitol Terrace parking garage was designed to adhere to the R/UDAT recommendations, with restaurants on the upper level and retail at the street level.

"You can't have an inactive building frontage on 8th Street," Tillett said. "There really had to be lots of activity at street level."

Tillett has returned regularly to Boise over the past 30 years.

"It's come so far. I was there a few weeks ago," Tillett said in mid-October. "I was watching people promenading. People were riding bikes. (Back in the 1980s), I got withering looks. 'You're not from here. Nobody's going to sit outside.' These tables were absolutely crammed with people (in 2014). I thought of the scads of bicycles I saw."

Parking garages are a pillar of the modern downtown

Phil Kushlan, executive director of the Capital City Development Corp. from 1999 to 2011, labels parking garages as one of the four pillars of the modern downtown. Garages by no means have the same public appeal as the Grove Plaza, the restaurant/retail frontage on Eighth Street

or downtown living. But none of those would have been feasible without the CCDC garages, he said. The first to go up was the Capitol Terrace Garage, which was built in 1988. It didn't go over well. "People said 'nobody's going to use that garage' and they didn't for the first six months," Kushlan said. But then the garage caught on, as did the Eastman, Boulevard, City Centre and Myrtle garages when they were built from 1990 to 2006. CCDC has lured parkers with a free first hour.

The establishment of the Basque Block

Later on, once Kushlan came on board as CCDC boss, the first thing he turned his attention to was the Basque Block, which had not achieved its present decorative streetscape yet in 1999. "There was this concept of building a festival street," Kushlan said. "It was half completed. It needed a champion." CCDC, the city, the Ada County Highway District and the Basque community collaborated in 2002 to renovate Grove Street with street pavement displays, light posts, and sidewalks etched with Basque song lyrics and surnames of local families. "Nobody has had a bad word to say about it," Kushlan said. "It gave downtown another gathering space and a cultural identity. This put the Basque culture out there in a public way and that is a big deal."

Parking regulations shape the environment

Cities across the country have come to cripple their downtowns with parking requirements that don't differ much from suburbia to downtown, that is, businesses must provide a certain number of parking spaces per business square footage. Typically, general commercial in Boise has to provide one parking space per 250 square feet of gross floor area. CCDC and the city combated this with parking reduction overlay zones: Buildings within 300 feet of a public parking garage have to provide no parking spaces – a "100 percent reduction in code required parking." This includes everything between Fifth and 11th streets and from Jefferson street to roughly Julia Davis Park-Battery-Myrtle plus the Front Street corridor from the Ada County Courthouse to the Idaho Water Center. This freed all businesses within the zone from having to scramble to find dedicated parking spaces to open a downtown business, a huge incentive to convince businesses to take a chance on a downtown in the early stages of rebuilding, Kushlan said.

Downtown Boise was built around the lonely Grove Plaza



The Grove Plaza is “kind of where things happen in Boise,” said Phil Kushlan, the former executive director of the Capital City Development Corp.

Downtown Boise has seen a number of innovative, even daring, touches, such as a privately owned arena attached to the Grove Hotel and two public garages incorporated into the Grove and Hampton Inn hotels. Perhaps none was more daring or innovative than building the Grove Plaza on a massive four-block vacant lot in 1986, defying all the urban design theories that call for buildings first, and a plaza to follow.

“The first Christmas they put a big Christmas tree there,” said Paddy Tillett, the ZGF architect from Portland, Ore. who largely masterminded the basic foundation of the modern Boise downtown.

“It was probably not a good idea to build a plaza before the buildings came,” Tillett continued. “I think they took a risk in building it ahead of everything else.”

The risk paid off handsomely. The plaza is a popular gathering place and host to many public events.

“It’s kind of where things happen in Boise,” said Phil Kushlan, who became executive director of the Capital City Development Corp. a dozen years after the Grove Plaza was built. “The Salt Lake City Olympic torch came through the plaza and 15,000 people showed up. Weddings happen there. Big events happen there.”

Kushlan said the plaza-first mentality was rooted behind the thought that the public space would serve as an incentive to build major structures around it. Kushlan regards the transition of Eighth Street into a pedestrian friendly shopping and dining area, and the construction of Grove Plaza into a public gathering place, as two of the four pillars under the foundation of Boise’s modern downtown. The other two pillars are the development of parking garages and the construction of downtown housing.

The plaza, like so much that defines the modern downtown, was prescribed in the in the 1985 R/UDAT recommendations on how to resurrect downtown Boise. The Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team, which was assembled by the American In-

stitute of Architects, spelled it out: “A major civic open space is proposed to be provided at a central location along the 8th Street Pedestrian Mall.”

“It certainly organized the energy,” Kushlan said.

Not long after the Plaza was in place, the triangular 11-story First Interstate (now Wells Fargo Center) tower emerged in 1988, and the Boise Centre, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, became the Plaza’s anchor in 1990.

Skip Oppenheimer was already a pioneer of what would become a modern downtown a full decade before today’s downtown started taking shape. Oppenheimer Companies built One Capital Plaza in 1975 and it has served as the J.R. Simplot Corp. headquarters since. Mountain Bell (now CenturyLink) occupies a bit more than half the building.

A decade later the R/UDAT study and its interpretation by ZGF Architects piqued the interest of Oppenheimer, First Interstate Bank and the Hawley

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Skip Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer Companies built One Capital Plaza, the home to the J.R. Simplot Company headquarters, in 1975. Oppenheimer, First Interstate Bank, and the Hawley Troxell law firm teamed up to build the First Interstate Center. “We wanted to be part of the first phase,” said Oppenheimer.

Troxell law firm. The three teamed up to build the First Interstate Center, with the bank and law firm filling a little more than half the building.

“The tone at that time, through R/UDAT and ZGF, there was a much clearer vision of what downtown could be,” Oppenheimer said. “We had a strong feeling that the fundamentals were very strong for the economic future. We wanted to be

part of the first phase.”

The Grove Hotel and its Bank of America (today CenturyLink) Arena gave the Plaza its third edifice (along with the pre-existing U.S. Bank Plaza) in 1997, and today the nine-story City Center Plaza and Boise Centre expansion are poised to complete the encircling of the Grove Plaza.

The Grove Plaza became the heart of the Eighth Street corridor and its restaurant row and the 8th Street Marketplace and its enlarged successor, BoDo.

“That’s one of the factors of the Eighth Street success,” Kushlan said. “It creates opportunities for the chance meeting. That’s where people go to see and be seen.”

More than 14,000 personalized engraved bricks surrounding the plaza fountain helped fund the Grove – and give it a sense of public ownership.

As much as ZGF’s Tillett questioned the Boise Redevelopment Agency’s “let’s just build it” philosophy behind the Grove Plaza, ZGF ultimately designed the plaza with Boise native Brian McCarter. McCarter was then and still is a ZGF landscape architect in Portland who is behind the brick paving, fountain and trees that define the Grove Plaza. McCarter also designed the Denver 16th Street Mall Extension and the Portland Mall revitalization.

“It was an immediate hit,” Tillett said.” People were so thrilled to see something positive and forward-looking. I think what we created was a sort of civic self-respect.”



People were so thrilled to see something positive and forward-looking. I think what we created was a sort of civic self-respect.”

—Paddy Tillett

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Boise Centre development triggered 30 years of large-scale downtown construction



Guests enter the Boise Centre for the College of Idaho's Scholarship Gala in February 2015.

The Boise Centre – 25 years old this January – was the focal point for the modern Boise downtown that has emerged since redevelopment flattened a four-block area along Eighth Street in the 1960s and 1970s.

The convention center, opened in 1990, was an important step in attracting the community to a newly stimulated downtown. The Grove Plaza, which was already raising curiosity, had opened four years earlier just outside what would be the future Boise

Centre.

The Boise Centre also drew developer interest, notably the First Interstate (now Wells Fargo) Center built two years before the convention center and the Grove Hotel and its attached arena, which came eight years later.

The Boise Centre was still in the planning stages when developer Skip Oppenheimer committed to building the First Interstate Center on the plaza. The planned convention center, however, played a role in Oppenheimer's decision to move forward with

downtown's first of 10 post-1985 towers that make up Boise's 15 tallest buildings.

"The Boise Centre was an indication that other things would be happening around us," Oppenheimer said. "ZGF set a road map. We felt it would happen and would add to the fabric of downtown."

ZGF Architects of Portland drew up the urban design plan for downtown Boise. They based it on the 1985 recommendations prescribed by the American Institute of Architects' Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team or R/UDAT. Boise has largely followed R/UDAT/ZGF suggestions to the letter for 30 years.

What Phil Kushlan, former executive director of the Capital City Development Corp., describes as the four pillars of the modern downtown already had a foothold in 1990. Those were the pedestrian-oriented Eighth Street, its adjoining Capitol Terrace Garage, the Grove Plaza and some housing. But the Boise Centre provided an energy that offices by themselves don't.



There would be a big hole in the community if we didn't have the Boise Centre."

—Don Knickrehm

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Guests at the College of Idaho's Scholarship Gala in the Boise Centre in February 2015.

“There would be a big hole in the community if we didn’t have the Boise Centre,” said Don Knickrehm, recently retired counsel to the Greater Boise Auditorium District after five years service. He served as its board chairman in the early 1980s. “The Boise Centre has become a gathering place for the community. The Festival of Trees is a great example. The home and garden show is a surprisingly big event. It began to bring people back downtown.”

The realization of the Boise Centre was no easy matter. In essence, it was 30 years in the making, from the day the Greater Boise Auditorium District was established by state statute in 1959. Fifty-six years later, the Boise Centre remains the only facility GBAD owns.

“Almost from the day it was open, it was successful,” Knickrehm said. “Then development started to happen around us. It created a marketing organization in cooperation with the chamber – the visitors bureau.”

Community leaders banded together to revitalize the downtown, Knickrehm said.

“It’s the realization of the business community,” Knickrehm said. “What do we want to be? We want a core that is vibrant, a place where the sidewalks don’t roll up at 5 o’clock. It’s a fun place.”

Convention center leaders acknowledge the 1990 Boise Centre can accommodate only 20 percent of the conventions and trade shows held in the country with its 50,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space. The \$26 million expansion now underway will allow the Boise Centre to market the center to many more groups, and to host several groups at once.

GBAD’s future, however, is not locked into Grove Plaza. The district in 2000 acquired the dirt parking lot

known as Parcel B at between Myrtle and Front streets west of 11th Street. Across 11th Street, JUMP is in its finishing phases of construction and work on the new corporate headquarters for J.R. Simplot Co. is underway.

“I want to be careful to say this is not the last expansion,” Knickrehm said. “With the Simplot world headquarters and Block B, you’re now going to see (development on) the west side of downtown. I think this Simplot world headquarters is a much bigger deal than most people realize.”

The Greater Boise Auditorium District was in place two decades before today’s convention center was introduced at the end of the 1970s.

A business task force pushed for a convention center, Knickrehm said, and the GBAD board coalesced behind the idea to move forward. The first site GBAD considered, with Knickrehm newly installed on the board, was on the south side of Front Street, where JUMP and the Simplot corporate headquarters are now under construction. A deal could not be worked out.

“We were focused on something in the downtown area that might become available through CCDC,” Knickrehm said about the Capital City Development Agency. “The existing location came through CCDC.”

“We had this gaping hole downtown,” Knickrehm continued. “We ought to have a convention center. At that time the only significant meeting space was BSU Student Union -- and it wasn’t that significant at that time -- the Riverside and the Red Lion. The Red Lion opposed us tooth and nail.” Construction on the convention center didn’t start until 1988. A look at the

hotel room tax that GBAD imposes on hotel and motel guests reveals why the project languished through much of the 1980s. The room tax was 2 percent in 1979, boosted to 3.3 percent in 1980 and 5 percent in 1981 as the first wave of convention center enthusiasm crested. But state constitutional wrinkles stymied GBAD efforts to sell bonds to finance a convention center. That led the GBAD board to scale back the room tax to 2 percent in 1982. It stayed there for the next four years. Dirk Kempthorne became mayor of Boise in 1986, long before he gained national attention as Idaho's governor and much more as U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Kempthorne quickly coordinated meetings among the city, GBAD, Boise Redevelopment Agency, lending institutions and developers. The result: GBAD acquired the convention center property from BRA in April 1988 for \$100 plus a condition that a convention center be built. At the same time, GBAD's fate was in voters' hands in November 1986.

"The (convention center) opened to great fanfare, but only after some hard-fought, contentious battles over competing visions of our city's future and, in particular, downtown Boise," present GBAD Chairman Jim Walker said at Boise Center's 25th anniversary celebration in January 2015. "It took people coming

together, pulling in the same direction toward a shared vision of downtown vibrancy and economic development."

A petition drive forced an election seeking the dissolution of the auditorium district, which encompasses nearly everything east of Eagle Road. Business leaders headed by attorney Phillip Barber established the Boise Economic Support Team that promoted the convention center as "probably the most important economic issue this city has ever faced."

Idaho Rep. Phil Childers, a Boise Republican, opposed the convention center with the belief it would "serve only a few special-interest people," according to contemporary accounts in the Idaho Business Review.

A 69 percent vote confirmed keeping GBAD and building a convention center, according to an auditorium district history compiled by GBAD.

The next year, 1987, the room tax went to 3.2 percent as the GBAD board moved to build the convention center. As construction started in 1988, the rate was locked in at 4 percent until it was increased to 5 percent in 2007.

The room tax funded the \$10.5 million construction cost of the Boise Convention Center, now the Boise Centre. It was paid off in four years.

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People make the modern downtown come alive



Photo courtesy of Capital City Development Corp.

Bicyclists and pedestrians fill the Grove Plaza in July 2015 for an Alive after Five concert, part of a series held all summer.

Skylines build civic pride. So do edgy architecture and a proliferation of public art. But without the people using the streets, the modern downtown Boise assembled over the past 30 years would have no vibrancy.

That was precisely the case in the mid-1980s, when downtown cleared out at 5 p.m. There was even a Boise After Dark T-shirt available. It featured a big black block.

Straight from the beginning of the concerted effort to recreate a downtown Boise in 1985, drawing people to the town center played large in the plan.

The recommendations from the Boise Region-

al/Urban Assistance Team called for an entity to manage, market and promote the new downtown as it emerged.

Downtown property and business owners followed up in 1987 by establishing the Downtown Boise Association before any of the modern downtown was in place, save for a brand new Grove Plaza sitting in the center of a four-block vacant lot.

The same year, the DBA launched the summer concert series Alive After Five, an idea credited to Bob Loughrey,



Karen Sander



A crowd enjoys the winter sunshine at 10 Barrel Brewing in downtown Boise in March 2015. City leaders have worked purposefully to build an environment that attracts people to the downtown area. Key to that goal are the Eighth Street corridor, the Grove Plaza, parking garages, and downtown housing.

Right: A busy intersection in downtown Boise. The Downtown Boise Association holds the city contract to manage a 60-block Business Improvement District, where property owners are taxed to pay for cleaning, maintenance, marketing, advocacy and staging events.



Photos by Patrick Sweeney

at that time executive director of the Boise Redevelopment Agency (today's Capital City Development Corp.) Alive After Five has returned every summer ever since with typical crowds of 3,000 spending a Wednesday evening on Grove Plaza from June through August.

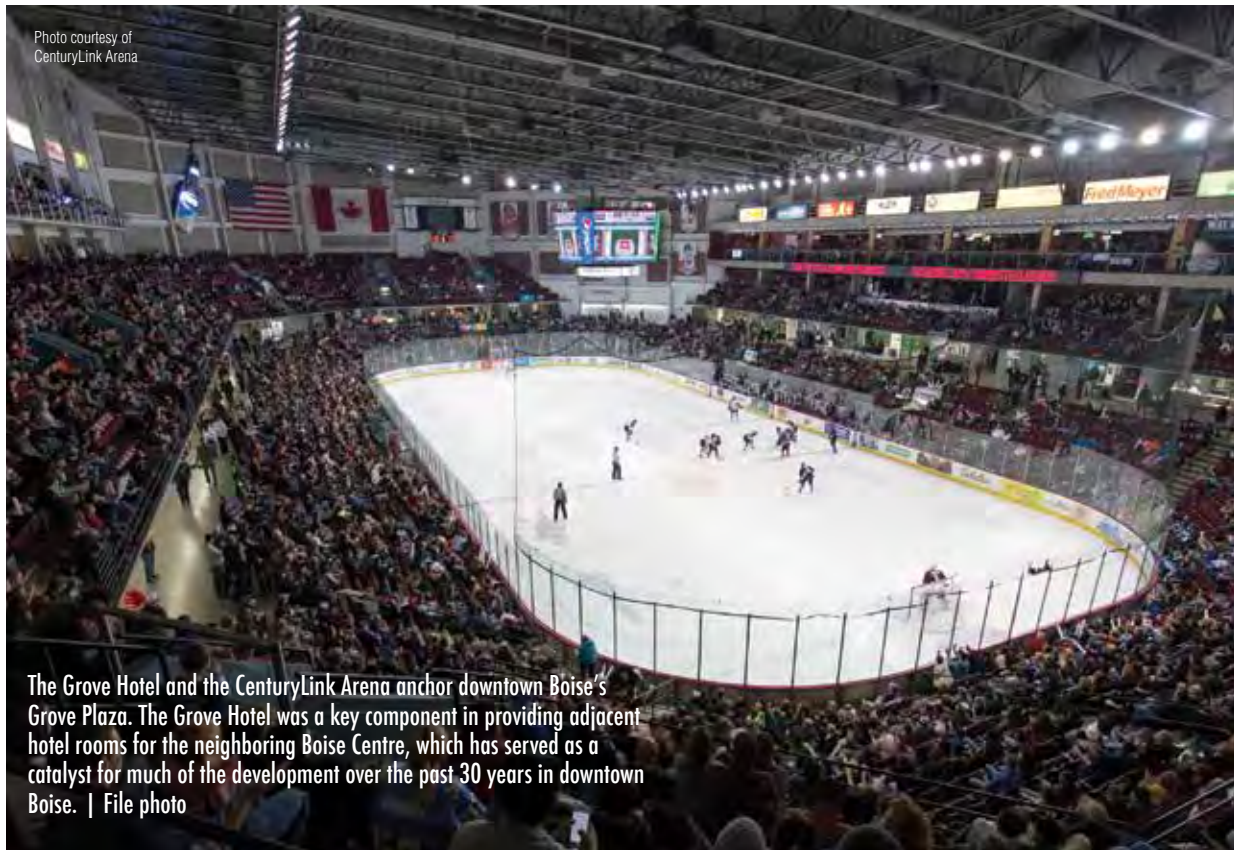
Alive After Five has kept up with the robust growth across the Treasure Valley. The concert series for more than a decade featured local bands. But when more events with local bands emerged across the valley, DBA shifted to regional bands

nine years ago, said Karen Sander, who was DBA's executive director for nearly 11 years.

A few years later, the DBA and downtown gallery owners collaborated to add First Thursdays to the mix. That monthly fixture has remained popular for 25 years now with an estimated 1,000 people wandering the streets and stopping by the roughly 70 participating galleries, shops and eateries.

"It's a great dining-out night," said Sander, a native of South Africa who has lived in Idaho for 26 years. "What a great excuse for date night."

Grove Hotel development started with hockey



Larry Leasure's Grove Hotel, built in 1997, has an attached privately owned arena with two professional sports teams. Hotel suites look down on the arena.

The arena almost was built at the mall, said Leasure, chairman of White-Leasure Development Co. A group had approached him seeking a 5,000-seat venue. And Leasure at one time owned the land that now holds the Boise Towne Square mall, as well as the large tracts that make up Westpark on the other side of Milwaukee Street.

But building an arena near the mall didn't interest Leasure. He asked the group, called Diamond Sports Management in the 1990s, if they would consider building downtown.

"They said, 'We don't care. If you build it, they will come.' They told me it would bring 500,000 people a year at night to downtown," Leasure said. Diamond Sports Management ultimately launched

the Idaho Steelheads at Leasure's arena.

"My real interest was downtown redevelopment, to bring people downtown at night," Leasure said.

The Grove Hotel and CenturyLink Arena anchor downtown Boise's Grove Plaza, along with the Boise Centre, the Wells Fargo Building and the U.S. Bank Plaza, the block's only structure that pre-dates the Grove Plaza.

The Grove Hotel was a key component to provide adjacent hotel rooms for the neighboring Boise Centre, which has served as a catalyst for much of the development over the past 30 years to create the modern downtown Boise. The hotel was also the final piece for the Grove Plaza, created in 1986 as the focal point to rebuild a downtown that had been decimated by demolition in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The Capital City Development Corp. first negotiated with the Oppenheimer Companies in the early 1990s. Oppenheimer had responded to a CCDC

request for proposals to develop a hotel at the corner of Front Street and Capitol Boulevard. Oppenheimer had planned to build an Embassy Suites, but that fell through when hotel developer John Q. Hammons pulled out of the project.

Leasure responded to a second CCDC request for proposal after teaming up with J.R. Simplot, A.J. Balukoff, Diamond Sports, Micron's Steve Appleton and West Coast Hotels as Block 22. They decided to fit a 17-story hotel and arena on 84,000 square feet, about 2 acres.

The only way a hotel and 5,000-plus-seat arena would fit on the postage-stamp lot was to paste the two of them together. The result was that 40 of the hotel luxury suites (19 of them sleeping rooms) looked onto the arena. The suites are leased for periods of three, five and nine years, Leasure said.

The arena hosts the Idaho Steelheads ECHL team and the Idaho Stampede NBA Development League basketball team. Additional revenue comes from a handful of concerts. But Leasure said the partners

knew the arena wouldn't financially benefit the hotel.

"We knew of the cost: \$29 million," he said.

"We've had to subsidize that (with) lot of equity. Diamond Sports had to put in their money for 20 percent, Balukoff-White/Leisure, West Coast for 40 percent, Simplot for 40 percent."

The other partners have since bought out Diamond Sports.

The hotel/arena together cost \$65 million. The partners didn't have to beg for funding. Bank of America came to Leasure.

"Bank of America CEO of Idaho was a friend of mine," Leasure said. "He told me 'We want to be a player. We want naming rights. We'll be a lender. Give me first shot at this.' They financed about 60 percent."

A 10-year agreement resulted in the Bank of America Center. Then, the name passed to Qwest Arena, now CenturyLink Arena.

On the hotel side, the Grove is Boise's only AAA 4-Diamond hotel with 254 room and 17 condominiums on the top four floors.

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The evolution of Front Street

Today, Judy Peavey-Derr serves on the Greater Boise Auditorium District board of directors. But on two separate occasions, she was an Ada County commissioner, and it was in one of those periods that she made the decisions that helped modernize Front Street and Myrtle Street.

Through most of the 20th century, Front Street was home to the Union Pacific Railroad. Front Street was the last street at Boise's southern edge to be established as the city was platted in 1863. The railroad arrived some 20 years later.

For years, Union Pacific rail yards rendered both ends of Front Street off-limits. Even after the railroad left downtown in 1984, the infrastructure remained.

The Connector came into downtown in August 1992, while the area along Front Street was still largely Union Pacific Railroad territory. Ninth Street was the dividing line on the east and 3rd Street on the west. The Connector from Chinden to 13th Street follows the former railroad alignment.

A circuitous route carried drivers from the I-184 terminus at Chinden Road through downtown to Broadway. Inbound traffic traveled on Fairview and then continued on Front, turned left on Fifth Street and continued on Main. Outbound traffic started on Idaho Street, turned left on Sixth, then continued on Grove until linking up to Main for the final run to I-184.

When the Connector opened in 1992, U.S. 20 and U.S. 26 traffic shifted to the widened and extended Front and Myrtle streets. Front changed from one-way east to one-way west, carrying people rapidly through the downtown area.

"It was designed to be a high-speed, high-capacity roadway," said Charles Trainor, principal planner at COMPASS since 1987 until his retirement at the end of October 2014. It's still serving that function.

Until 1992, Front ran only from Main Street near 16th street until it dead-ended at the UP facility at Fifth Street. Pre-Connector Myrtle ran from Broadway and dead-ended at the UP yards at Ninth Street.

Downtown was railroad-dominated deep into the Reagan/Bush Administrations. If nothing else more acutely

Photo by Patrick Sweeney



While she was an Ada County commissioner, Judy Peavey-Derr assembled the acreage that became the Ada County Courthouse, Civic Plaza Apartments and the University of Idaho Water Center.

defines the modern downtown vs. pre-Boise Centre downtown, it is the complete absence now of downtown railroad tracks.

Back in 1985, nobody lived at the railyards, and few worked there.

Then came the 1990s.

With a real estate agent's eye, Peavey-Derr in February 1990 could visualize a new county courthouse where vacated railroad facilities still stood at Third Street. At the time, the county faced jail overcrowding, the public defender's office was across the street from the Old Ada County Courthouse and the prosecuting attorney's office was "squeezed like sardines," Peavey-Derr said.

"I drove around town wondering what old houses could we tear down for a courthouse?" Peavey-Derr recalled in November. "I pulled up to the corner of Broadway and Front. There were a whole bunch of old warehouses and railroad tracks. The study said the courthouse should be 4 acres and there was bare land just sitting there."

Peavey-Derr set the purchase of the railroad land in motion, and private development followed. Now, much of the downtown area's large-scale construction touches

on the full 1.5-mile length of Front Street. Front Street is claimed by the Boise Centre (1990), Grove Hotel (1997), CenturyLink Arena (1997), BoDo (2005-07), Trader Joe's (2014), WinCo (1998), Whole Foods (2012) and several multi-story office buildings. It's also dominated by the Ada County Courthouse, Civic Plaza Apartments, the University of Idaho Water Center, the JUMP construction site and the future world headquarters for J.R. Simplot Co.

With the Ada County Courthouse and county administrative offices, hundreds of people work near Front and Third streets.

"The courthouse corridor is a big deal. It kept 2,000 employees downtown," noted Phil Kushlan, former executive director of the Capital City Development Corp. "It's more people than most cities in the state."

The land deals that shaped a central corridor

Railroad infrastructure and property ownership had to be dealt with before a large share of the modern downtown could unfold along Front Street. Three major events started the transformation of railroad territory into nearly 2 million square feet to live, work, play and serve jury duty in the corridor between Myrtle and Main streets.

On her first stint with Ada County Board of Commissioners from 1987 to 1991, just months before losing a re-election bid, Peavey-Derr arranged the county acquisition of the 14.3 acres of Union Pacific property for today's county courthouse. While looking for a place to build a new courthouse, Peavey-Derr opened an assessors map book and saw the UP property added up to 14.3 acres. She knew Union Pacific Railroad's real estate director Raleigh Niehus from her days as GBAD's executive secretary in the early 1980s.

"I had Raleigh's number. I called him on a Friday afternoon. 'This is Judy Peavey. I'm interested in finding out more about the 14.3 acres you have in downtown Boise,'" Peavey-Derr said. "Then there was dead silence. Did I say something wrong? He said: 'I just walked out of a meeting where we took a vote to sell that land.' 'You're kidding. How much is it?' He said \$4 million. 'I want you to hold it off the market for two weeks.' I had work to do. Then we sell the county building to the city. Right there we have the money to do this," Peavey-Derr said. "Over the next two weeks. I took the administrative judge and everybody I could think of and showed them the property.

"The UP property wasn't on the market yet, but developer Larry Leasure, whose property became Boise Towne Square and who later built the Grove Hotel and its arena, was taking a look at the railroad property. "His daughter knows my daughter," Peavey-Derr said. "I called him: 'Larry, I need you to stay away from that property.'" Ada County became owners of Union

Pacific's 14.3 acres in October 1990, though construction of the new courthouse did not start until January 2000, and the judiciary and other county offices did not take occupancy until February 2002. Then, three years later, J.R. Simplot bought all the remaining Union Pacific land between Front and Myrtle streets in 1993. These are known as Parcels A, B, C and D. Parcel C is where the Simplot Foundation is building JUMP and J.R. Simplot Co. is building its new corporate headquarters.

Parcel A is a loading ramp for JUMP/Simplot construction. Simplot sold Parcel B to the Greater Boise Auditorium District in 2000. That property serves as a dirt parking lot at Front, Myrtle and 11th streets, but GBAD, the Capital City Development Corp., and the city of Boise are collaborating on development for the site. Simplot also sold Parcel D at Front and Broadway, now occupied by Jack in the Box and Carl's Jr. The county facilities required only 4 acres. Ada County sold the rest of the land for development of the 299-unit low-income Civic Plaza Apartments and the University of Idaho for its Water Center.

Almost 3 million square feet of business space

Over the past 20-plus years, private development has also flourished within and on either side of the Front-Myrtle corridor.

A report from Alliance Title & Escrow determined that from 1994 through 2012, some 2,827,443 square feet were built downtown, with half dedicated to offices and the remainder fairly equally distributed among medical, apartment/condos and hospitality. Medical involved 616,777 square feet, apartments and condos 600,697 square feet and hospitality 555,385 square feet.

Alliance prepared the 2012 report for Bill Beck, founding principal at Tenant Realty Advisors, who had looked at an aerial photo of downtown and asked Alliance to detail all the buildings built in the past 20 years.

The Myrtle-Main corridor, according to this analysis, saw 23 buildings with 1 million square feet go up from 1994 through 2012. This does not include the 325,000-square-foot Ada County Courthouse and neighboring Civic Plaza Apartments.

More tellingly, it's not just the downtown core that has flourished in the past 20 years. River Street has also come to its own with a different office environment, one with abundant trees and surface parking. The Alliance study revealed 14 buildings of 594,000 square feet have gone up in the River Street vicinity between Ninth Street and the Connector since 1994.

"There are high visibility projects, like Eighth and Main," Beck said. "Then there are all the other areas, infill and under the radar, where there's activity happening and people don't realize it."

BoDo's beginnings



Photo by Peter Grady

Walkers cross Front Street. The street is a wide, one-way thoroughfare that separates BoDo from Boise's Grove and the rest of the downtown area.

BoDo, the downtown area at the crossroads of Eighth and Broad streets, was developed in two chapters.

In the first chapter, Treasure Valley developers Larry Leasure and Winston Moore created the Eighth Street Marketplace in 1976 amid vacated railroad tracks and warehouses.

The two were working with the 1960s school of redevelopment, which called for clearing away all history in the block within Front, Myrtle, and Ninth streets and Capitol Boulevard, and for building something grand and modern, like a shopping mall.

“At the time, I was naïve. I was told there would be a big regional mall across the street,” said Leasure, chairman of White-Leasure Development Co. “We stupidly went ahead and built Eighth Street Marketplace.”

They filled some 200,000 square feet of historic space with retailers, restaurants, shops, and banks.

“We finished all that in 1984-85,” said Leasure. “I felt good that something was going to happen here even if it wasn't the mall.”

The second chapter began in 2003, when developer

Mark Rivers built up the north side of the block. Rivers bought the existing four-block expanse known as Eighth Street Marketplace, consisting of the century-old Mercantile and Northrup buildings along Myrtle Street. Then he added the Sycamore and Capitol Gateway buildings plus the Hampton Inn & Suites – and called it all BoDo, short for Boise Downtown.

Part of the plan

Boise's traditional downtown area had been dismantled in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1985, a city-funded study from a group called Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team, or R/UDAT, had prescribed a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented and densely urban approach to redevelopment, oriented around Eighth Street.

The Eighth Street Marketplace is the one major player in today's downtown that predates the R/UDAT study, which even now serves as the template for downtown's continuing evolution.

At the time of the study, Capital City Development Corp. Executive Director Phil Kushlan deemed Eighth

Street, the Grove Plaza, parking, and housing as the four pillars of Boise's redevelopment.

BoDo rests on those four pillars. Eighth Street runs through the center of BoDo, which is an extension of Grove Plaza. The Hampton Inn & Suites partly rests atop one of six CCDC garages. And the Aspen condos came more recently to add 75 condos in a "thin rise" tower, adjacent to a second CCDC garage.

A new chapter

Combined, the two chapters of BoDo redefined the railroad sector into an area of office and retail.

CCDC contributed \$8 million into the \$65 million BoDo project to restore Broad Street, which had been abandoned between Capitol and Eighth Street in the late 1970s; to add a pedestrian-friendly streetscape; and to supply a second parking structure in the quadrant.

"What it did, it brought the theater downtown and created more dining," Kushlan said. "It provided a retail foothold. It brought national retailers downtown and then North Face, Chico's and Anthropologie looked at downtown."

Moore looked in the opposite direction and built Forest River, a series of three-story office buildings along the Boise River. Today, one holds the Cottonwood Grille.

Leasure and Moore sold Eighth Street Marketplace in 1991 to S-Sixteen, a Simplot family business. Simplot entities at that time owned all the land between Myrtle and Front from the Eighth Street Marketplace to The Connector. Leasure said they leased the marketplace back from S-Sixteen and continued to manage it.

Rivers' good timing

BoDo's development happened at the right time. The dot.com bubble had faded away by the time Mark Rivers came to town in 2003. Five years later, in 2008, the economy went downhill, rewriting the rules for real estate and retail. By then, Rivers had built and sold BoDo to Las Vegas-based TREC Investment Realty, which continues to own the Sycamore and Capitol Gateway buildings that Rivers built on the north side of Broad Street.

Rivers had not taken part in the 18 years of downtown revitalization that preceded him in Boise. In fact, to Rivers, Boise was nothing more than data he monitored in Arlington, Va., as executive vice president of strategic operations for Arlington, Va.-based Mills Corp. which owned about 40 malls until the company was bought out in 2007.

"I was tracking high-growth markets that were underserved. Boise always popped up in my radar,"

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City Center Plaza tops out

By Tim Van...
PHOTO: BOB LANGRISH

Four months of heavy lifting wrapped up Sept. 22 as the structure of City Center Plaza in downtown Boise...



Retief says a rafter is raising the final steel beam at the City Center Plaza building in downtown Boise.

Downtown hotel is slated for Nampa

By Tim Van...
PHOTO: BOB LANGRISH

Nampa intends to bring back a downtown hospitality to make it a more vibrant and walkable community...

Popeyes chicken will span Idaho west to east and maybe south to north

By Tim Van...
PHOTO: BOB LANGRISH

All six of the Popeyes franchises in Idaho are owned by the same family...



Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen will open in Idaho for the first time in Boise.

Business Viewpoint, Table of Contents, Public Notice, and other sidebar information.



Photo by Peter Grady

A four-block section that includes the century-old Mercantile and Northrup buildings along Myrtle Street is now known as the Eighth Street Marketplace.

Rivers said in March. “I made an offer on the entire BoDo-Front property sight unseen. The property was for sale.”

The Simplot family entity S-16 had acquired Eighth Street Marketplace in 1991, but it had been struggling. Rivers acquired the mix of historic buildings, a new garage and plenty of surface parking in January 2003.

Rivers had big plans for his \$65 million project. He proposed 108,000 square feet of upstairs office space, 80,000 square feet of retail, a 10-screen movie theater, and a hotel with public garage – all of which happened, except the theater ended up with nine screens.

P.F. Chang was in the discussions at the outset. Ann Taylor Loft, Jos. A. Bank, Office Depot and Edwards Cinemas have been tenants of BoDo for nearly 10 years.

“I came to Boise with national retailer relationships in my pocket,” Rivers said.

Downtown was unknown to national retailers at that time. Rivers was able to sell retailers on the notion of high-density shopping in a non-mall setting.

“A lot of retailers were looking for growth and were looking at tertiary markets,” Rivers said. “The reason BoDo worked was it was a large footprint, a large tapestry. You usually don’t find a footprint that large in a downtown. It created synergy. They felt comfortable signing leases.”

Rivers sold BoDo in 2007, just four years after buying the four-block plot.

“We hit the peak of the real estate market in 2006 into 2007. It was an opportunity to unlock the investment value,” Rivers said.

He sees housing as his one piece of unfinished business regarding BoDo. “The biggest mistake or missed opportunity was I really wanted to do residential,” Rivers said. “I didn’t see anybody else doing residential. I couldn’t substantiate whether the market was there for residential.”

The market might not have been there then, although downtown housing appears to be in high demand now. BoDo opened in fall 2005, and developer Scott Kimball built the 17-story The Aspen tower from 2006 to 2009 on a thin 5,940-square-foot sliver of land. He couldn’t sell all 75 units until 2014.

BoDo, though partly separated from the rest of downtown by the wide Front Street, helps tie the city together using the original nexus of development, Eighth Street.

“What I think about BoDo as is one of several nodes downtown for food, entertainment, offices,” said Wali, executive vice president of downtown developer Gardner Company. “It’s getting close to the completion of our spine, which is Eighth Street.”

Eighth and Main caps 30 years of downtown regrowth

For years, the Boise Hole served as a stark reminder that rebuilding the downtown was a work in progress.

The burned-out hulk of the Eastman Building had been torn down in 1987. A Seattle developer started work on another building in 1997 before halting it, creating the foundation hole at a critical downtown intersection. Murals went up on plywood nailed around the hole; trees grew inside it.

After a nearly 30-year journey, the hole has been filled with the Eighth and Main building, a structure that makes total sense in the Boise skyline.

Eighth and Main was completed in 2014. Just over

two years ago, people were still scratching their heads, wondering what Tommy Ahlquist was thinking when he decided to build Boise's tallest office building in the notorious Boise Hole with no guarantees of filling the 18-story tower.

"I had people laugh me out of their office. 'Really, you're going to do this?'" Ahlquist repeats nearly any time he talks about Gardner Company's potential grand folly.

Ahlquist is chief operating officer at Gardner. As a 15-year Boise resident, he has been in town just long enough to still get a taste of downtown Boise when it was severely struggling. An economy that had bounced



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The Gardner Company's 390,000-square-foot Eighth and Main building took the place of a foundation hole that had sat empty for decades.

from one recession to the next for the past 30 years didn't make it any easier for a modern Boise to emerge from a 1985 R/UDAT study that spelled out how Boise could craft a modern downtown.

But downtown did emerge, and now the Eighth and Main, Idaho's tallest building, overlooks the results of three decades of continuous redevelopment. Eighth and Main joins the Wells Fargo building, Grove Plaza, Boise Centre, Grove Hotel/CenturyLink Arena, and Gardner's own City Center Plaza construction site.

Slowed by the recession

"The ebbs and flows of the economy is what drives this," Ahlquist said. "You got BoDo and Banner Bank and then things stopped," said Ahlquist of the downtown shopping area that underwent important work in 2003, and of the 11-story LEED-certified bank building that was completed in 2007.

After the national economic meltdown in 2008, launching projects became a struggle. Phil Kushlan, who was the executive director of the Capital City De-

velopment Corp. at the time, remembers it well.

"Vacancy rates were higher than people were willing to risk the capital (to build big)," Kushlan said.

But Gardner had a different perspective, said Kushlan.

"They had access to greater resources than many others had," he said.

A slow recovery was underway in 2011, when Ahlquist decided to build a 300-foot tower in the Hole. He was prompted in part by the fact that CCDC's downtown redevelopment district was going to expire in 2017. The 34-acre downtown redevelopment district, which had been established in 1965, brought with it tax increment financing that would return \$4 million in taxes Gardner paid on the Eighth and Main construction.

"It was just a race to the finish," Ahlquist said. "We wouldn't have done it without (the TIF)."

Ahlquist was proposing 390,000 square feet of office space and didn't have many leases locked in.

"It was stressful," Ahlquist said. "You had to figure



Gardner Company CEO Tommy Ahlquist. Ahlquist was prompted to build the Eighth and Main building in 2011 by the fact that CCDC's downtown development district would expire in 2017. The 34-acre downtown district, established in 1965, brought with it tax increment financing that would return \$4 million Gardner paid on the Eighth and Main construction.

out how big to make it. Less than 50 percent was leased when we started building. There were failures before you. People didn't believe you would succeed. You're going to do something impossible. How do you solve that?"

A partner

Ahlquist solved it with Zions Bank.

"You've got to have a partner, a user," he said. "We had Zions Bank. They wanted to be there. When the timing was right, they said let's go for it. They helped drive it."

Zions had outgrown its space in the Alexander Building by 2011. There was no room left in space the bank had recently leased at the McCarthy Building, a block to the north.

"In some cases, we had two employees in an office," Zions' Western Idaho Region President Toni Nielsen said. "We had to halt our hiring because we had no space."

Zions had been mulling a consolidated downtown Boise location before Nielsen joined the bank in 2006. Its decision to join Eighth and Main came about when Ahlquist and Zions Bank CEO Scott Anderson were at an April 2011

groundbreaking for the St. Luke's Nampa Medical Plaza, which Gardner built.

"Scott was telling me, 'We don't have enough space downtown,'" Ahlquist recalled. "We jumped in the car right there and I showed him the Hole. We were chased away by the meter person who told us to move the car."

At that moment, the idea to build Eighth and Main was born. Less than three years later, the Zions Bank-branded tower opened in January 2014. Zions owned 83,000 square feet on the first, sixth, seventh, 10th and portion of the 17th floors.

John Brunelle, CCDC's executive director, said the development of Eighth and Main was the catalyst for several other projects that have been launched in its wake. In the 16 months since it opened, J.R. Simplot Co. has started construction on a new corporate headquarters, Gardner just a few months later started on City Center Plaza, and this spring three large downtown hotel projects were announced.

"That whole project fortified the confidence of the downtown business community," Brunelle said. "It re-empowered developers that anything is possible."

The future of downtown Boise

Derick O’Neill and John Brunelle, the head of the Capital City Development Corp., know that city leaders have created a modern, liveable landscape from a downtown core that was largely flattened in the 1980s.

But in their eyes, the work is just starting.

Brunelle wants the 34-acre Central District to go out with a bang with a new Grove Plaza and maybe offices above the Eighth Street retail block as the designated urban renewal district expires in 2018. The district includes Capitol Boulevard, Eighth Street and Ninth Street from Front to Bannock streets.

“We want to finish strong. We’re not going to walk. We’re going to sprint,” Brunelle said.

Brunelle also predicts a rejuvenated future for the West Side, today a land of block-sized parking lots and remnants of light industrial activity from the first half of the 20th century. He also sees potential for the Myrtle-Front corridor between The Connector and Whole Foods.

Brunelle would like to include the so-called Parcel A, a small triangle off 13th Street wedged between the ramps of the Connector.

The lettered parcels are all former Union Pacific Railroad yards. The Simplot family

The Gardner Company’s City Center project is rising rapidly in downtown Boise.

Photo by Pete Grady





John Brunelle (left), the CEO of the Capital City Development Corp., and Derick O'Neill, Boise's Planning and Development Services director. O'Neill sees land use, urban design, transportation, and sustainability as core elements in Boise planning.

owns Parcel A and is using it as a staging ground for JUMP/Simplot headquarters construction on Parcel C. In between, the Gardner Company recently announced plans to build a roughly 300-room convention center hotel on Parcel B and possibly a soccer stadium.

Hardly anyone warms up to Parcel A, but Brunelle believes it has potential.

"Something iconic can go there," Brunelle said. "If (Parcel B) is a stadium, this could be a sports- and entertainment-related entity. It could be parking. It could be a fun area for nightlife like a stadium district with a lot of action."

Brunelle then strings the parcels of the future together. A pedestrian could walk from Parcel A, through the potential stadium and hotel properties, across the urban park planned for the JUMP and Simplot HQ property, through BoDo and then continue into whatever the Central Addition evolves into and eventually get to WinCo and Whole Foods.

"You can have a superblock Parcel A to BoDo even all the way down to WinCo or Whole Foods," Brunelle said. "You don't have to deal with Front and Myrtle. I see Parcel A as part of the larger picture that can be a lot of fun."

A former college quarterback, Brunelle sees himself and CCDC more as the linemen and ball carriers moving the ball down the field. He prefers to yield to O'Neill on visions of the future.

Downtown still seeks a cohesive identity

O'Neill, director of the Boise Planning and Development



Hardly anyone warms up to Parcel A, but John Brunelle believes it has potential.

Services Department, is waiting for the day when Boiseans stop referring to the building they live in, and start talking about their neighborhood by name.

"The perfect example of how we get to that next level is the Central Addition," said O'Neill. "A year ago, there was no plan for the Central Addition. We created a Central Addition Master Plan with property owners and stakeholder. The basic vision is to have it a distinct, vibrant neighborhood with jobs, housing and an easy way to get through. We installed a geothermal line. We're seeing it transitioning right in front of us."

Downtown Boise is in O'Neill's blood. His father, Peter, was chairman of the Boise Redevelopment Agency (today's CCDC) in 1985, and O'Neill now heads the

city's planning department.

The city's Build Boise document is "our version of making (the 2012 Blueprint Boise comprehensive plan) a reality," O'Neill said. He'd like to strengthen the link between land use, urban design, transportation and sustainability. These are the core elements of Build Boise, the planning document designed to inspire a shared vision for the future downtown.

"I think we have a good downtown," O'Neill said. "I don't think we know how great it can really be. We haven't shown how to put those elements together. If we can put them collectively together, it will be phenomenal."

What is downtown?

Boise does not have a clear-cut downtown. O'Neill's downtown starts as far west as Whitewater Parkway (the former 30th Street, now at a potential College of Western Idaho campus), includes Boise State University, stops at St. Luke's Medical Center on the east and stays south of State Street.

"When we talk about redefining downtown, you can talk to 10 people and get 10 different answers of where it is," O'Neill said. "Redefining downtown is a very key goal."

The next prime target for redevelopment

Downtown's West Side, from Ninth Street westward, has Idaho Power and Boise Plaza towers standing in isolation among parking lots. To its south, the Linen District is filling up nicely with artists and small businesses. This is an urban renewal district in place from 2003 to 2026.

"There are full blocks of space that could be better utilized with smart development," Brunelle said. "The artists in the Linen District, that's a good sign for all of us. The one thing we deal with is Eighth Street is active, Ninth Street is fairly active, 10th Street is fairly quiet."

Many bustling, new, thriving, downtown districts that emerged across the country in the last 10 or 15 years started as versions of Boise's West Side. Right now, the demand is for downtown housing, said Brunelle.

"We need to go with market demand," Brunelle said. "Right now is a great opportunity for a mix of housing types that would appeal to all kinds of markets, not just high end. That would demand essential services."

CCDC owns the Watercooler property at 14th and Idaho streets and on May 18 selected an apartment proposal for the site. Linen District pioneer David Hale in May announced intentions to build townho-

mes at Idaho Street and 16th Street.

CCDC owns only six plots, all but one just a fraction of an acre and awkwardly located. The objective is to redevelop all these properties. Two are on the verge of housing projects: The Afton and 14th and Idaho.

"We're always looking on the West Side and in the River District (to acquire more property)," Brunelle said.

Better living, working and playing is in the cards for downtown's future

O'Neill's Build Boise vision revolves around an active downtown touching on living, working, learning, staying healthy, enjoying and exploring. Downtown's largest private-sector employer with 3,148 employees, St. Luke's, has a master plan calling for an additional 680,000 square feet at its downtown campus.

"How do we integrate St. Luke's into being part of our downtown?" O'Neill said. "It's a really big deal. There are lots of employees, lots of potential residents downtown, folks frequenting restaurants and retail. It's a combination of all of those things going on. They're just another piece of the fabric."

Grove Plaza 2.0

Back at the very beginning of the modern downtown in 1985, the first thing built was The Grove Plaza, surrounded by dirt lots. CCDC has worked with the Gardner Company (U.S. Bank tower), Oppenheimer Companies (Wells Fargo building), Block 22 (Grove Hotel and CenturyLink Arena) and the Greater Boise Auditorium District (Boise Centre), which own the structures around the plaza, to come up with a vision for a new Grove Plaza. The vision was presented to the boards of GBAD and CCDC and the Boise City Council in April 2015.

"We're calling it Grove Plaza 2.0," Brunelle said. "We want to make sure it's designed for maximum enjoyment of place. Are we using it enough? Should we have more programming?"

The revamped Grove Plaza would open in fall 2016 along with the new City Center Plaza buildings.

Brunelle also wants to extend three levels of the Capital Terrace Garage on Eighth Street over the Eighth Street retail frontage owned by the Roper family. This is where Rediscovered Books, the Taj Mahal and other retailers are located.

He envisions offices or apartments above the garage.

"We're just at the front end of studying this," Brunelle said. "It might be a non-starter."



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