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Joe Minicozzi: downtown offers economic opportunity for Stockton

Posted by [David Garcia](#) · July 18, 2012 · [11 Comments](#)

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Driving down highway 99 on a recent trip through the Central Valley, Joe Minicozzi saw a highway sign for downtown Stockton and decided to take a short detour into the city. On his way downtown by way surface streets, Minicozzi witnessed what many Stockton residents deal with on a daily basis: prostitution, homelessness, run-down buildings. Minicozzi sees these kinds of conditions in many of the communities he visits. But instead of judging Stockton based on what he observed on the ground, Minicozzi saw the city's real potential when he looked up, where tall, historic buildings hide a potential economic boon. It's these structures, and a return to valuing downtown development, that offer Stockton a path forward.

"Stockton has a tremendous opportunity with its stock of downtown buildings," says Minicozzi.

"You can see in the architecture that the city was very prosperous. The city's heritage is evident in the historical character of its buildings."

Minicozzi is the principal of Urban3, LLC and formerly the New Projects Director for Public Interest Projects, Inc. In this capacity, Minicozzi specializes in analyzing the economic potentials of downtown development versus sprawling subdivisions and shopping centers located on the edges of cities. I have written about his work before, explaining how his research provides ironclad data proving that infill projects and historic renovations have a much more efficient economic impact than sprawl. Minicozzi took some time to chat with me about his work and how it relates to our situation here in Stockton.

During his latest analysis, Minicozzi passed through Stockton on his way to Modesto, Turlock and Merced to deliver the findings of his latest research on the huge economic impacts downtowns have in those communities. What he found in the Central Valley echoed the results he has seen around the country: On a per acre basis, downtown buildings simply provide a more efficient means of revenue for local governments. Even in smaller cities such as Merced and Turlock, modest downtown structures provided a greater per acre benefit to the city than strip malls and big box stores.

Downtown Stockton's large, historic buildings offer an economic opportunity for the city

“Turlock has just a handful of buildings downtown that are two stories, maybe one three story,” Minicozzi explained. “But even in these modest buildings, we saw a huge economic benefit far outweighing what the city’s mall was providing.”

In Turlock, Minicozzi revealed that the city’s average downtown building brought in 48.6% more tax revenue per acre than the local Wal-Mart. Moreover, the city’s Main Street properties are valued at about \$1.6 million per acre, more than the per acre value of the much larger Monte Vista Crossings shopping center (\$1.2 million per acre). In Merced, Minicozzi found that downtown buildings net 40.5% more in property tax revenue than the city’s mall.

While these numbers paint a fairly clear picture of the stark differences between sprawl and infill, Minicozzi likes to describe this dichotomy in even simpler terms.

“Think of it as a farmer,” Minicozzi explained. “A farmer needs to maximize his profits, so if he can grow weeds or tomatoes, which one is he going to pick? He’s going to pick the crop that brings in more money. It’s the same with cars. We don’t value cars based on the size of the gas tank, we judge them based on the miles per gallon. Why don’t we value land the same way?”

While he has not formally analyzed Stockton, what he has seen from our city leads him to believe that the lessons learned from his analysis of three other Central Valley downtowns could easily be applied to Stockton, especially since our downtown has taller buildings, more space and is built around the water, offering greater opportunities.

“I can almost guarantee that just one of the larger buildings I saw downtown is providing a much greater value to the city than what Wal-Mart brings in,” Minicozzi says. In Stockton, many of our historical buildings have been lost, and with them, their tremendous economic potential. However, what remains downtown most likely still outweighs what we are building on the outskirts, according to Minicozzi’s work. Once leaders understand the wealth that revitalizing older buildings and promoting infill development can bring to the city, the choice should be clear, but getting people to change their perceptions is not easy.

“We know that this sprawl stuff doesn’t work,” Minicozzi says. “There’s tons of data and research out there showing how wrong cities were about sprawl, but most people don’t understand the data. What I try to do is present the facts in a clear, irrefutable way.”

While Minicozzi has traveled the country, opening the eyes of city leaders and citizens alike, all he can do is provide information. It’s up to the decision makers in the cities he visits to realize that the conventional wisdom of sprawling their way to prosperity is critically flawed. The data is clear and straightforward: building up is simply a better investment than building out. While this concept challenges the norm for many, Minicozzi believes that trying times will force Stockton leaders and citizens to rethink their beliefs. Now that we have suffered the consequences of unencumbered suburban development, we can no longer ignore the information provided by individuals like Minicozzi. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. If Stockton hopes to pull itself out of its current situation and build a stronger economic foundation for the future, we cannot continue growing outwardly and expect different results.

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11 Responses to “Joe Minicozzi: downtown offers economic opportunity for Stockton”

1. David:

Without a doubt, urban development is much more preferable than city limits sprawl.

But you and Minicozzi miss a basic point here. Without the appropriate demographics the downtown area can not be turned around. Even if you mothballed the whole city and forbade interaction with the outside world, upon pain of death, you can not direct development in certain areas (even subsidy driven a la redevelopment) because the end consumer is not there.

Of course, downtowns of New York, LA, San Francisco are tremendously valuable places in terms of land price and economic output derived.

But as it exists, given where the demographic pockets of Stockton are there is no way you could redirect towards a flourishing environment downtown.

For that you need exceptional leadership, knowledge and guidance by urban land institutions of excellence like MIT for example, which is THE preferred institution of knowledge on urban design matters.

And you can't just build some apartment downtown to attract such demographic. It takes a sophisticated approach by following a master plan which is lacking at the moment. Instead

Stockton invites every year some low quality presentations by ULI (Urban Land Institute) which are nothing more than story telling of what happened to other cities. Stockton is not “other cities”. Stockton is a unique environment of mostly challenges and unless addressed in an intelligent manner then disjointed efforts in re-creating a viable downtown will fail.

Also keep in mind that there are firms whose entire area of expertise is in downtown redevelopment and those are the players to talk to and follow their lead on what’s needed.

For now Stockton should not allow any further expansion of city limits until and when this critical issue is addressed. Namely how can we get an exceptional environment which will distinguish the city from a tradition of mediocrity. Such can only be achieved when every citizen understands both the economics and population profile needed in redevelopment. To my knowledge such is missing at the moment. What you see downtown is a sick manifestation of the politics of subsidy, which Stockton being a farming community, has grown up with it as being the normal. It’s not.

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 18, 2012, 12:14 pm](#)

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- o Dean,

That is a very fair point. Simply building/renovating structures downtown is not a comprehensive plan. However, I don’t believe we intentionally overlook your point about demographics and the need for dynamic leadership: the point of Minicozzi’s research is to show the efficiency of dense development versus low density development. For instance, the downtowns of Turlock and Merced are not by any means flashy or excessive, yet Minicozzi has shown that they are very valuable to the city on a per acre basis. Despite the incentivization for developers to build low density projects, these modest areas of Turlock and Merced turn out to be the more efficient areas of those respective cities. That is the crux of this kind of research.

During our chat, Minicozzi noted that actually taking the step to reverse the outward trend of growth and revitalizing downtowns the right way are whole other issues. Minicozzi only provides information, what cities decide to do with it is up to them. I agree, bringing downtown back is not as easy as building new projects or revitalizing buildings. It takes a comprehensive approach to accomplish this. Funny you mention the ULI presentation, I am also critical of their reviews. It seems there prescriptions in other cities have always involved sports stadiums/arenas, although several studies have shown that these huge projects do not provide the economic boosts or revitalization promises they often are purported to have (although, Nationals Park in Washington DC seems to be an outlier).

Posted by [Stockton City Limits](#) | [July 18, 2012, 7:27 pm](#)

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- o David:

As we discussed before, commercial land creates the highest and best value. Typically land zoned for office in metropolitan areas, commands the highest value. But in Stockton the highest value land is retail, because office does not have the density seen in New York or

London.

However the value of the land is not universal, even if it zoned the same; it depends on demographics. Demographics in the industry are best described as “college educated”, which is a euphemism for higher incomes. These (higher) are the incomes retailers are going after.

It so happens that downtown Stockton has less than 10% college educated folk. A number such as this does not even get you a hello from retail users and developers.

The area close to 8 Mile and I-5 has almost a 50% college educated demographic. The best of Lodi (which is the western part) has about 47%. For the part of Lodi close to Hwy 99 the demographic drops down to anywhere from 5%-15% (that’s why you don’t see high value development there).

Grupe’s March Lane project west of I-5 has about 50% and east of I-5 about 47%. The area around Lincoln Center has around 35%. Every time you see a college educated demographic above 30%. it’s o.k. for retail development producing higher land values. But all of these areas are already built out minus any redevelopment potential.

Stockton has its largest concentration of retail on Pacific Av. close to Delta college (Weber Point et al). The demographic surrounding that area is about 23% (not good, below the threshold).

So it appears that the highest concentrations of college educated folk in Stockton are along I-5, dropping abruptly towards Hwy 99 (with Morada the only exception). Downtown is even worse.

Therefore the demand in Stockton exists exactly where you are trying to avoid it. It’s completely absent from downtown and it will take a heroic effort to get the chemistry going there.

Outside developers are not going to come to Stockton because they have to be in Stockton (unfortunately such brand value does not exist here). They will come because the demographics are showing them certain areas of high potential. Unless you engineer forcible moves of populations in Stockton such demographics not only they don’t change over time but their characteristics get amplified. Those neighborhoods that are good get even better and those which are lagging behind are left behind even more.

Let me give you an idea of brand value. Here is YouTube video of somewhere in my native Greece. It was no narrative, just pictures. Yet after you watch it you know what the brand is: clean blue waters and cluster vignettes of natural beauty. I challenge you to do the same with Stockton. Grab a vid-cam and take any shots around Stockton trying to convey its brand. You may find it very difficult to be consistent. And that’s the essence of a strong brand. It’s usually consistent and remains unbroken. So, that’s what we have to define first here. The Stockton brand.

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 18, 2012, 8:17 pm](#)

2. Sorry for the typo. Let me restate:

“Here is a YouTube video of somewhere in my native Greece. It has no narrative, just pictures.”

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 19, 2012, 6:31 am](#)

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o Dean,

Regarding demographics, besides Brookside, which sports a 50% college degree rate, the most highly educated segment of Stockton is Midtown, around UOP with a 38% college degree demographic. The tracts in Spanos West and East actually come in at 31%, using 2005-2009 ACS data.

As far as branding goes, I can't argue that Stockton has a great brand. However, I would argue that a brand does not always come before development. I can cite numerous examples of areas that were ridden with blight before they were redeveloped, including Washington DC's Logan Circle and H street corridor, Baltimore's Fells Point, Station North and Federal Hill, Portland's Pearl District, East Liberty in Pittsburgh. Each of these neighborhoods featured demographics that did not seem enticing to developers at the time, yet they are all prime examples of renewal.

Posted by [Stockton City Limits](#) | [July 19, 2012, 1:31 pm](#)

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o David:

My data came from a specific study commissioned from the same source all serious retailers use. In the explanations above I used some rough approximations to make points.

Granted, I haven't updated them for the last 4 years (no need to really do it), but they show the following:

The census tract 0040.22 (which includes both Spanos Park East and West ending on Thornton Rd) contains a 46.55% college educated demographic which is the best for new development areas within Stockton. It also beats handily anything Lodi has.(new or old)

There is a very small UOP census tract 0012.00 of 52.27% college educated, mostly benefiting Miracle Mile but no further than that. Since UOP is within such tract, I am actually surprised that the population is not 80% college educated or something similar of higher magnitude.(Maybe college students at UOP pursue non-educational activities also; I am not sure. In fact, come to think of it for levity purposes, some people I have met sporting UOP degrees have no education at all. One guy whom I met and falls under such category, his name sounded like BestBuy or something).

The Grupe area west of I-5 known as census tract 0031.14 has the highest college educated profile of 58.67% in Stockton. Quail Lakes to the east side of I-5 known as census tract 0031.12 has a 50.67% college educated composition. These two Grupe project areas are both excellent pockets of demographics but since the areas contained within such tracts are completely built out, there are only indirect benefits to be derived for the city in producing higher land values elsewhere within city limits.

The 31% college educated area you alluded to, along 8 Mile road, is further east between Thornton and Davis Rds. Such area is known as census tract 0032.08 and it has a 31.48% college educated population profile.

As far as other cities are concerned, I am sure they have done much better with far worse demographics. But all of these cities you mentioned dwarf Stockton in the greater metro area populations they contain.

The challenge for Stockton is how to brand itself more like a Bay-Area oriented community (through its unique connection with I-5 and Hwy12) and not just another Central Valley town built around Hwy99. Here is the simple formula to follow:

I-5 and Hwy exposure is a harbinger of best Stockton demographics.
Hwy99 exposure is mediocre and gives no competitive advantage to Stockton (other than transportation connectivity).

Therefore the simple, yet very difficult task is how to make all of Stockton demographics resemble its best part. And then introduce the type of infill development towards producing the highest and best values for the City. Aspiring to produce the mediocrity of

other Central Valley towns here, will not do. Stockton needs a brand new bold vision. One which hopefully could produce a sparkling high-rise skyline which would elevate Stockton's downtown to an area wide focal point. The land is so flat around here and the first differentiation point you need is height of at least 10-story and hopefully one day 20-story structures.

But now we are getting into a much larger topic to be discussed in due time.

Posted by Dean Plassaras | July 19, 2012, 2:57 pm

3. (I will also post it on FB as you requested)

David:

Since we already touched on demographics in your downtown Minicozzi piece, let's quickly summarize for the readers:

- Stockton's demographics supporting highest and best value for the city are mostly along I-5. The best demographics are in the two sides of I-5 on March lane (both Grupe projects , west of of I-5 with a 59% college educated demographic and east of I-5 with 52% college educated demographic). The next best area are both sides of I-5 on 8 Mile road (at the time of my measurement standing @ 47% college educated demographic, which by now must have risen above 50%+ since roughly 500 new residential units were added to both sides of I-5 subsequent to the measurement – Pulte, Frontier,KBH et al)). In fact the 8 Mile Rd/I-5 location will continue to gain in college educated % since there are more paper lots approved but not yet built. Therefore expect this location to handily become the best demographic in Stockton because it already bests any demographic in Lodi and because adding another 10-15% college educated ought to be a straight forward proposition based on the units already approved in the area (all of them south of 8 Mile Rd).
- Other than these 2 exceptional areas of Stockton demographics there is also an area of decent college educated % circa 30% around Lincoln Center and another one in the vicinity of UOP of about 52% due to the presence of the university. However such small pocket demographics can only support neighborhood retail (mainly in the Miracle Mile and Lincoln Center areas) but could not be counted for anything more than what already exists there. Finally Morada with a 37% college educated demographic already supports retail @ Hammer Lane/Hwy 99 and vicinity.
- And that's it. The rest of the demographics in Stockton can't support retail high values and the numbers registering in the downtown area are disappointing.

Here are more observations that one has to seriously consider:

1. It appears that the cause of the main dysfunction between downtown Stockton and its best demographics is the contrived design and placement of I-5. For it is abundantly clear that whoever meandered I-5 towards the primary delta area by trying to avoid the city, committed some very serious errors which are directly responsible for the fate of downtown. By placing away from rather than integrating I-5 into the city, a trend of leakage was initiated the end result of which saw the best demographics either migrate over time from the city towards I-5 or fresh new accumulations of Bay Area demographic clusters choosing such locations for obvious

transportation access reasons.

2. And then there was more damage done to Stockton and further waste of land values. For instead of embracing such communities along I-5, the city chose instead a hostile and contentious position by claiming that such new communities stole from the vigor of the city rather than adding to it. The end result of such undeclared warfare is that not even one of the intersections along I-5 was developed according to its highest and best potential. Instead of displaying its best along I-5, thus articulating the city's image to the outside, planning chose to hide class A assets further from I-5 in both directions. As a result permanent windows of display which might have elevated city image and land values were lost to projects of mediocrity, a theme-less mix of small time neighborhood displays rather than statements of identity. As a result March lane retail (which is nothing to write home about), further deteriorated around Ben Holt and really crashed on both sides of Hammer lane along I-5. This regressive trend of undeclared competition for worst retail space was somewhat broken by the 1,000,000 sq.ft. of Park West Place on 8 Mile Rd. Due to the fact that I was directly involved with this project I am not going to present it as special, only just o.k., but the truth is that it's the best organized accumulation of retail/commercial use along I-5. Any attempt to discredit such position would backfire as to the credibility of the person raising it. Plus that it is exceptionally tough to execute retail space at the edge of city surrounded by green fields and only partial rooftops.

Therefore, a magnificent opportunity was lost to Stockton over the years along I-5, opting instead for confusing and contrived manifestations of lesser value.

And then we have the demographic black hole. Namely that as soon as K-12 young people complete their educational cycle and are college bound most of them never return here due to lack of opportunity. We have an exceptionally large geezer population which chooses to retire here but the young dynamic demographic of college educated 30 to 40 year olds – that all retailers crave for – is imported as Bay Area transplants. The “transplant” part denotes lack of loyalty and therefore reliance on such demographic. In other words, the most critical demographic of Stockton is fabricated and its duration in the area most uncertain. For as soon as Bay Area transplants find a better choice closer to the Bay Area are lost to Stockton very abruptly.

Before we turn our attention to downtown let's also agree on the following: There is no need to further expand city limits for quite a long time (say 20 years or so). The current inventory of paper lots approved but not built yet exceeds 20,000 lots which is enough to last the city for 50 years given a modest and reasonable absorption rate. You can even restrict the inventory further if you wish by not allowing more than X number of units per year. So let's break this false association of the fate of downtown with further new development and turn into improving downtown itself.

If downtown is transformed into, say, a high rise(for visual identity) residential community then a fast and reliable transportation connection needs to link it with the Bay Area. In any event everything done to downtown today is basically false beautification and not really intelligent development. And by intelligent we mean breeding synergistic new development. Wood frame apartment construction downtown is absolutely the wrong way to go. It actually produces negative land values as such projects need to be basically subsidized. The expertise needed to fix

downtown Stockton can not be found in Stockton, other than building rehab a la Dan Cort and a select few others. All such expertise exist (a) at an urban land planning level of a leading university (MIT comes to mind) and (b) in groups like Downtown LA's Pershing Square stakeholder groups which specialize in repositioning and redeveloping old buildings. Every large city has them but neither Sacramento nor Central Valley cities are models for such groups. Such expertise simply does not exist around here and needs to be imported.

Since downtown requires an intelligent strategic plan with incremental steps of execution it is difficult to discuss in these pages. One word of advice: keep the local politicians and other manifestations of local mediocrity away from such serious outside groups. Nothing could be more turn offish than a bunch of ignoramuses dictating their "fabricated vision" to some real pros. These specialists know what to do but they need a main liaison devoid of any pseudo-political influence. Locals tempted to be involved in this need to be told in a stern manner that they have no clue what they are talking about and they better stick their noses out of such matters. And then, surprisingly, you would see the new chemistry producing remarkable results in front of your very eyes. But it has to be a strictly "moron-free" environment.

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 21, 2012, 1:57 am](#)

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o Stockton City Limits wrote: "Dean,

As I pointed out last time, it appears we have different demographic numbers, though your general premise is correct: many of the college educated residents reside along the I5 corridor, with a sizeable chunk near the university (which also features a few thousand undergraduate students, I would image they constitute a key retail demographic as well).

*****If they do, they have not been put into productive use in a demonstrative way. And as we know students may be educated but they don't have disposable incomes yet.*****

You mention that I5 sites are not built to their highest and best potential, what would this have looked like? What do you feel would have been the best use for land that was freeway adjacent? And what makes PWP a better example?

***** The type of Weberstown Mall et al should have been brought forward to the March Lane, Ben Holt and Hammer Lane intersections. Permanent windows of display of Stockton's best commercial should have been along I-5 and not inland. What makes PWP a better example is the breaking of this tradition of under-representation on I-5 interchanges. But it only addresses the SW quadrant of I-5/8 Mile Rd. So, it's very important when and if (in say 20 years from now) the NW and NE quadrants are built that the accumulation of such and perhaps better space continues. One quadrant can't do the job. In any event, the point here is that it makes no sense for Stockton to hide its best commercial manifestations inland and instead display marginal stuff along I-5. Because the permanent window of display is along I-5, not inland. Even if you have palaces inland they are misplaced and thus wasted.*****

As far as educational attainment, no argument here. Stockton sits at about 18% college educated, which is better than some big cities (Cleveland, Detroit) but not any better than most Central Valley cities. Personally, I think institutions such as UOP and the expansion of

the local CSU can help stem this tide as they continue to grow as they are big assets to the city. If you look at the cities that survived the recession the best, you will find that they benefited from a number of higher education institutions.

****Agree. I like all institutions of learning and how they define communities.****

I definitely agree, more units are not needed in the near future as we have plenty coming down the pipeline. I am actually going to write something up about this in the next day or so, so stay tuned for that. As far as downtown, I am not sure Stockton needs high rises, but definitely more dense developments are needed. I think transit to the bay area (and other places) with high speed rail offers an absolutely tremendous opportunity for downtown and the entire Central Valley. Transit-oriented development will be key once a high-speed connection between the Bay Area and the valley is established. However, it appears this is a long ways away.

The high rise aspect was an attempt to create a focal point. Outsiders coming to Stockton can't appreciate what they can't see from the freeway. And since the way of main approach is through I-5 an attractive window of display should be created that shouts "you got to visit me". If you think denser but lower rise development can do such, fine; but you got to convince I-5 drivers about it. Signage alone is not enough. Downtown Stockton needs a new label, accentuated visually, that says "exceptional".

I agree, expertise in infill development is not currently present in a big way in Stockton. the only type of development expertise seems to be with the big developers, and they obviously specialize in green field development. Since you have worked with these developers, do you think they could successfully fill the void of infill development? As it stands, Spanos and Grupe were supposed to be a big part of waterfront revitalization before the recession. I am hopeful that they would be good candidates for this, however, I have written before about their questionable design (Grupe's southpointe condos)."

Grupe's projects have an aesthetic facade but I think neither condos nor 4-story wood frame structures are what is needed downtown. The place already looks like ex-barracks due to the military legacy of WWII (in fact all south Stockton was built for such transient and temporary labor housing working the port's naval base). Remember what is the first view of San Fran as you approach on Bay Bridge. A dense articulation of high rises that says "civilization is here". By all means don't use Modesto or other Central Valley mediocrities to define Stockton. If Stockton is to be saved from an image problem it needs to be recast as a peripheral Bay Area place and perhaps even change its name in the process (named after a commodore who never visited the place and who left a legacy of stealing from the first US submarine inventor). Everything that is of any value in California has a Spanish Crown root tradition (San Diego, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Francisco and even Sacramento). But the renaming of Stockton I think is a separate blog on itself. We will save it for another day.

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 24, 2012, 9:31 pm](#)

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- o Let's keep the discussion here instead of on the blog, just to keep things straight. Also, I think FB offers more visibility for readers.

A: as you please. So, let's post here the last transition notice for people who wish to follow.

I must say, you seem to have an affinity for the big, sprawling shopping center. On the other ...hand, you seem to favor large buildings downtown. In both cases, these are meant to show off Stockton to drivers on I5. However, I don't think you can simultaneously have a downtown that supports high rises while also allowing PWP-type developments on every edge of the city. In order to revive an older downtown, you have to change the rules to incentivize retailers/developers to build there. But if that growth is being allowed to develop on the edges, building downtown becomes undesirable. This has been the case in Stockton. We can't have high rises but also mega malls, the city is not big enough to support both. The two ideologies cannot coexist as one saps the other.

A: No I don't have an affinity for either big or sprawling, but when you get these rare opportunities in key intersections you got to execute them well. Look at every key intersection around the country. And it's not about personal aesthetics either. At present the visual experience of Stockton along I-5 is a mild yawn, because such an opportunity to execute per textbook has been lost. BTW, putting retail in other pockets of the city of inferior demographics you simply induce a reliance on a hydrocarbon economy that is both wasteful and polluting. Plus commercial uses on all four corners of arterial intersections is a form of effective buffering. Letting residential uses along such intersections is a form of crime and I think the only appropriate punishment for such would be a "go straight to jail" card. Therefore, I beg you to reconsider.

Also, aesthetically, putting a "Weberstown Mall" at every I5 off ramp seems counterintuitive when trying to display the best of a city. I don't know about you, but personally, when I drive through a city and I see a big shopping center with a sprawling parking lot, I am not then enticed to move that city as, and I think a lot of people would agree, there is nothing remarkable or unique about a big, single story shopping center.

Answer: Again look at precedent and don't make the classic mistake here in Stockton. Which is locals acting as the club of a far west town's "tea and cookie" ladies gathering to dispense moralizing and judgment on among other things aesthetics. This is precisely what has killed Stockton's image; the local interpretation of "aesthetic" preference. It hasn't worked very well for the locals, hasn't it?

As for downtown, I do think high rises would paint a better picture of the city to motorists, but development should be designed for function, not as an advertisement for the city. I am sure people would love to see high rises downtown, but I really don't think Stockton can support development much higher than what is already there. What should be built is more mixed use structures, especially along the waterfront, to create a true sense of place. If done right, this kind of development can serve both as an eye-catcher for I5 drivers and a functional, dynamic new neighborhood for Stocktonians that utilizes existing infrastructure and brings people back into the core. Do you think Grupe/Spanos is up for something like this? Or will this kind of infill work need to be done by an out of town developer?

Answer: Being up to it and being qualified to do it are two entirely different things.

Neither I think has the depth in urban development to do it. As to aesthetics again, you have a substantial “flatness” issue in Stockton you need to compensate for somehow. Nothing will send the message to the world that Stockton has “arrived” than a downtown skyline of minimum 10-20 story structures (mostly office and residential). Of course is not easy and again the locals can’t do it (seriously, don’t even attempt it). As to your mixed-use idea the issue is again land assemblage. None of what is articulated on, say, I-5/8 Mile interchange can be manifested in downtown because you don’t have the 200 acres of contiguous land for such. And most importantly the needed demographics. Retail/commercial uses don’t perform well in dissected formats on sprinkled locations because you deprive them of synergy. Anyway, quit dreaming about downtown retail. You simply don’t have the demographic for it. And once you get it by burning a considerable amount of your land inventory on residential uses needed during the first phase, you then need to come back and re-access what’s left and how to best use it. Finally you need to rid yourself of the punctuated subsidy mentality so pervasive in downtown Stockton. Not even the local developers can subsidise Stockton, because demographics are created and are not fabricated on demand. To my knowledge there is no one in them parts who knows how to create demographics. The only skill locals have is to create artificial and subjective facades but not demographics. As we discussed previously the best demographic is Bay area transplants. The local demographic only gets you just another Central Valley town. So you need to step back from this obsessive need to control Stockton’s image locally, and open it up to your best customer which is 80% from outside the area. These are the people you need to cater too. And please, for once, have some respect for the outsiders. You need to treat the dynamic demographic coming from the outside as the true owners of Stockton and not as slaves to work your version of whatever. It’s all about their preferences not yours.

Lastly, a name change won’t save Stockton from its image and I think running away from a tarnished image by simply trying to change the name is foolish. Plenty of cities suffered from terrible reputations, but still turned their luck around without a new name (i.e. Baltimore, New York City).

Answer: Obviously a name change without changing the substance behind would be useless. I meant a name change (which is a fairly complex issue BTW because every federal and state bureaucracy known to man and then some has to get involved) only in the context of recasting a true and profound re branding of Stockton. As it is any name that has in its root: stock, stockade denotes either a warehousing of goods or an enclosure of palisades and wood walls; both too inelegant concepts if your aim is to promote and advertise a place. Comparing or trying to compare Stockton to either New York or Baltimore or any other place won’t do. Put simply, Stockton will never be or become such other places. Instead of trying to imitate (which only a form of flattery to the objects of imitation) try instead to embrace what Stockton is and work from there. This attitude of “oh, I saw it some place else” needs to be dropped. Because your demographics are what they are, not what do you wish them to be. Once you begin to attract and retain superior demographics then a new energy is created that leads you to new frontiers.

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [July 27, 2012, 10:14 pm](#)

4. Check this out as an idea for downtown Stockton:

<http://www.builderonline.com/construction-trends/Will-Micro-Apartments-Go-Macro.aspx>

Posted by [Dean Plassaras](#) | [August 9, 2012, 3:21 pm](#)

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- I have read a lot about the “micro apartment” trend, and I think it is a great idea for places that have such high demand that young professionals and the like are priced out of the market. I don’t necessarily think this would be the right type of development as Stockton, since rental prices are much, much lower and space in the downtown area is not currently an issue. In New York and San Francisco, rents are astronomically high, so maximizing space in desirable areas with smaller units makes a lot of sense. People want to live in these places, even if they have to sacrifice square footage. In Stockton, the demand for housing downtown is low, so there is not a need to create tiny spaces to reach a population that the market is underserving. Micro apartments are an innovative concept, I think they will do pretty well in those very dense places.

Posted by [Stockton City Limits](#) | [August 10, 2012, 8:08 am](#)

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