THE REBIRTH OF DOWNTOWN BOISE:
How it was Accomplished and
the Lessons Learned
by
Matthew Cooley Smith

Bachelor of Business Administration
Brigham Young University, 1998

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Real Estate Development

at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
September 2000

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Abstract

Downtown Boise, Idaho is a vibrant, safe, and pedestrian friendly city to work, shop, live
and play. However, Boise has not always enjoyed its current state of well being. For
many years downtown Boise was a desolate wasteland. Very few people frequented
downtown, and nearly no one resided downtown.

From the late 1960s to the mid 1970s nearly eight city blocks of Boise’s Central Business
District were demolished with money from Federal Urban Renewal Grants. Thereafter,
the redevelopment of downtown Boise was stopped for 15 years due to the supposedly
imminent arrival of a downtown, enclosed, retail mall. Thanks to the vision of a few
politicians and the actions of a couple of agencies Downtown Boise recovered.

This thesis analyzes the mistakes and wisdom of Boise’s urban renewal efforts as well as
the actions of politicians and agencies in making downtown Boise into a successful
mixed-use downtown. In particular, this thesis focuses on what went wrong during
Boise’s first downtown urban renewal attempt and the actions and practices put into place
to ensure the same mistakes did not occur during the second renewal period.

I will conclude by highlighting the lessons learned through the process of rejuvenating
downtown Boise. This thesis is intended to aid cities that find themselves in the desolate
situation Downtown Boise found itself 15 years ago. By understanding both the process
by which downtown Boise was changed and the lessons learned throughout the first and
second urban renewal endeavors, it is my hope that cities will gain ideas to assist them in
the rebuilding and improving of their own downtowns.

Thesis Supervisor: William Wheaton, Professor of Economics
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Chapter One: Introduction

The story of downtown Boise, Idaho is indeed unique. Until the 1960s downtown Boise was a thriving traditional mixed-use city. During the 1960s downtown Boise began losing some of its retail shopping activity as well as some of its employee base to the surrounding suburbs. By the late 1960s the City of Boise and its redevelopment agency had become actively engaged in federally funded urban renewal programs.

Boise’s first urban renewal efforts did not succeed. For over 15 years eight city blocks in the center of downtown Boise lay practically desolate. However, today no one would know that downtown Boise experienced such a long and difficult struggle. The downtown Boise of today is a vibrant traditional mixed-use city with many businesses, pedestrian friendly retail, restaurants and regularly programmed events.

This thesis explores what happened to downtown Boise through a historical case study approach. The thesis first researched the City of Boise’s suburban and downtown development patterns to better understand the stage from which Boise’s downtown revitalization story was played upon. After the background was laid, poignant questions were asked and later analyzed.

The first question asked was, What initially caused downtown Boise to begin deteriorating during the 1960s? Next the first urban renewal plans and motives were analyzed. Third, the methods of the urban renewal implementation programs were
researched followed by an observation of the results produced by the urban renewal efforts. The results of the Boise’s first urban renewal efforts were not good.

The terrible results of the urban renewal efforts created many questions that needed to be addressed. The first question addressed how urban renewal should be practiced. The second question was concerned with what mistakes had occurred during Boise’s first urban renewal efforts from which other cities could learn from and avoid.

That portion of the thesis concluded that although downtown Boise began to show small signs of potential blight during the 1960s, downtown Boise would have fared much better if the first urban renewal methods had never been practiced. Downtown Boise’s urban renewal efforts practiced in the late 1960s and 70s were the catalysts that brought downtown Boise to its knees. Other factors such as political egos, and an extreme case of tunnel vision that engulfed Boise’s redevelopment agency and the city’s politicians led to downtown Boise’s uninterrupted 15-year period of desolation.

The second conclusion is that urban renewal efforts should use layered, parcel demolition, and project by project approaches to revitalize downtowns instead of the traditional bulldozing method. These suggested methods allow blighted locations in an area to be tied back into their original city fabric without having to first relocate and demolish entire city blocks.
The latter part of this thesis explores how downtown Boise was saved. Research was conducted to discover the efforts and struggles of politicians and agencies in reclaiming downtown Boise from its grave. Several questions were posed. The first question was, What occurred that stopped the 15-year standstill? The second questioned tried to discover the differences of practices and implementation between the first and second urban renewal efforts. Lastly, the third question focused on what kinds of agencies and tools were used to revitalize downtown Boise?

The 15-year gridlock finally stopped because of the efforts of dedicated politicians. After the stalemate had ended, Boise’s urban renewal agency was given another chance to revitalize downtown Boise. The second time, Boise’s urban renewal agency practiced layered, parcel demolition, and project by project urban renewal methods in their efforts to revitalize downtown. Also, two agencies played key roles in the redevelopment of downtown Boise. Boise’s redevelopment agency played the role of facilitating development while a newly created agency played the role of maintenance and promotion of downtown. Lastly, a financing tool was created by legislation that allowed the city to use tax increments to help entice and facilitate private development in downtown Boise.

The story of how downtown Boise’s revitalization occurred is indeed filled with many important and applicable lessons. Seven of the most valuable lessons are discussed at the end of the thesis and should be used and applied by other cities trying to revitalize their own downtowns. Only through learning from and studying other cities’ urban renewal experiences and mistakes will downtown revitalization methods improve and advance.
Chapter Two: History of Boise City’s Development

The military post Fort Boise was established in 1863. The town of Boise was established that same year. General George Wright desired to have “a military post at or near Fort Boise on the Snake River. The great necessity for a strong garrison in that quarter [was] daily becoming more apparent. In the very heart of the mining district of the north and on a route by which vast emigration from the East approaches that country, a strong military post can afford protection to all against those wondering bands of Indians which infest that section, and maintain peace between races.”

Approval to build a new army fort arrived on January 14, 1863. The fort began construction and a small city named Boise soon began to follow. The original plat of Boise City, drawn in July 1863, showed Main Street divided into 10 blocks. Each block had an alleyway and 12 lots 25 x 100 feet. Only 725 people resided in the city of Boise at the end of 1863. However, one year later that number had more than doubled to 1,658. Soon after Boise tried to become the territory’s capitol. On December 24, 1864 Boise was granted its wish and was named the territorial capitol by the legislature.

On the 25th of November in 1867 an official Boise City Townsite was recorded. This new plat replaced the old 1863 plat. Boise had expanded from 10 blocks to 140 with a couple blocks reserved for a capitol building and a courthouse. Boise was beginning to grow very rapidly. On August 16, 1864 The Statesman, Boise’s local paper, read,

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“Wagon loads of lumber are arriving every day from the saw mill for building purposes.”² By the end of the 1860’s Boise had over 400 buildings mainly made of wood frame.

Boise was the supply and transportation hub for a vast region.² Boise’s merchants supplied the mining camps of Boise Basin, Owyhee and Alturas counties. Also, “. . . freight teams hauled thousands of tons of supplies from Kelton, Utah, over what was known as the Kelton road, to warehouses in Boise for transshipment to the smaller towns later.”² Boise’s economy was somewhat dependent upon the mining industry; so, when the mining industry slowed after the initial rush to new gold country, the Boise economy also slowed. However, the continued growth of both farming and ranching created by wide reaching irrigation helped bring stability to the young city’s economy. The 1870 census showed the city of Boise as having a population of 1,000.

In the 1870’s the Oregon Short Line railroad was completed. To the dismay of Boise residents, the line was located 15 miles south of the city of Boise. Soon after many small neighboring towns such as Nampa, Caldwell, Middleton, and Kuna began popping up along the new railroad line. The growth of these new towns helped the growth of Boise. At this time Boise had established itself as the wholesale center of the region. This enabled Boise to continue to prosper even though Boise did not have a main line going through its center. In 1887, a branch line from the main railroad line in Nampa was brought into Boise. A main railroad line would not come into downtown until 1925.

The 1880s brought a series of substantial developments to the city of Boise. In 1881 a large three story commercial brick building housing a hotel and several small stores was constructed along with the Ada County Courthouse. Two additional large brick buildings were added in the 1880’s--the Central School in 1883, and the Territorial Capitol building in 1886 (Figure 2-1). Portland’s *West Shore* magazine in October, 1885 wrote the following about Boise, “The public buildings located in the city are numerous, and some of them imposing and ornamental structures. There are many very handsome two and three-store frame and brick dwellings that would reflect credit upon a much older and larger town.”

Figure 2-1: From Left to Right, Boise’s Central School, Territorial Capitol, and County Courthouse
Source: Arthur Hart, *Life in Old Boise*

On July 3, 1890 Idaho was granted its statehood. In 1890 the population of Boise doubled from 2000 to 4000, “an aggressive Board of Trade worked hard to attract people

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and business.” The 1890’s also began revealing the trendy desire to live outside the downtown area. Many wealthy citizens began building along a street just east of downtown Boise called Warm Springs Avenue. This street became popular because the homes on the street could be heated by the natural hot springs that existed in the area. In 1891 Boise’s first streetcar company was nearing the completion of its tracks—one of which was built along Warm Springs Avenue. Many of the Boise residents could now leave their horses at home and ride the streetcar into town for a nickel. It was estimated that 800 people out of a population of 4000 were riding the streetcar each day. Along with the development of Warm Springs Avenue came the development of residences just north of downtown Boise. Wherever the streetcars went development followed.

With the streetcar now providing transportation along Warm Spring Avenue the development of the Natatorium became feasible. The Natatorium was an amusement center. It had “two six-story towers, a 125 foot long pool, a dining room, club rooms, saloon, dance floor, and a variety of card rooms, tea rooms, and baths.” “From 1892-1933 the Natatorium was a center of social and recreational activity.” Another amusement park, White Park, was later developed next to the Natatorium to provide Boise residents with a wider variety of activities. White Park had many activities including a joywheel, a fun factory, a man made lake, ice-skating, an ostrich farm, and a band stand for musicians. “The replacement of streetcars by buses in the late twenties, and the destruction of the “Nat” in 1934 after it had been damaged by a windstorm,

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marked the end of an era. The city has not had a comparable amusement center linked to public transportation since.”

Walter E. Pierce one of Boise’s premier real estate developers started his business in 1890. Walter was one of the first real estate developers in Boise to actively promote new developments with imaginative advertising. Pierce always set the precedence for his new residential developments by building himself a nice home in the development. He would later sell his house and build another home in his next development as soon as the earlier development had become established and had gained momentum. Walter continued to create new development additions to the area most of which were focused close to downtown, but in a northwesterly direction. One of his developments was called The Brumback’s Addition, which covered over 32-city blocks.

Development occurred in a northwesterly direction at first because of the natural geographic boundaries unique to Boise. Downtown Boise is nestled between the Boise River creating a southern boundary and the foothills to the north and northeast creating a natural boundary in those directions. The Boise River runs diagonally from northwest to southeast. The foothills follow this same diagonal direction. To the southeast, where the popular Warm Springs Avenue is located, the foothills and the Boise River begin to merge leaving little of easily developable land. However, northwest of downtown Boise the area between the Boise River and the Foothills remains constant. This naturally made

the residential developments created by Walter Pierce and other contemporary developers in the 1890’s develop in a northwesterly direction.

Though most of the early growth occurred to the west of Boise, in 1892 the construction of a new steel bridge over the Boise River was completed. This began the first southern development of Boise. By 1902 the village of South Boise was established.9 The streetcar completed its construction of tracts across the bridge in 1905. The extension of the streetcar made the village of South Boise an attractive choice for people who worked and shopped downtown.

The streetcar continued to make Boise suburbs popular throughout the new century’s first 20 years. The streetcars typically preceded the development of outlying suburbs especially west of Boise. By 1907 the streetcar had build tracks to the neighboring cities of Caldwell, and Middleton—both about 20 miles west of downtown Boise. Caldwell and Middleton were built on the main railroad line when the railroad first entered the region. By 1910, Nampa a city just south of Caldwell and southwest of Boise, had streetcar access and by 1912 a full loop from Boise to Caldwell, Middleton, and Nampa was completed.9 Most of Ada County was now connected by an electric streetcar network. Many developers followed the streetcars and speculated on the land between the cities, which naturally added to Boise’s growth in those directions.

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By 1905 downtown “Boise definitely had a “big city” look, which was a matter of considerable local pride...” (Figure 2-2). The major intersections of downtown had three to six-story mixed-use buildings on each of them. The downtown was active and growing. By 1913 most of the major city lots in downtown Boise were build out by impressive brick structures; so, dozens of smaller structures began filling in the developable land between the larger buildings. “Between 1912 and 1930, no new tall buildings were erected downtown. The Boise Board of Trade, later the Chamber of Commerce, shifted its promotional emphasis from the skyline to homes.”

Figure 2-2: Downtown Boise During New Years Day 1900
Source: Arthur Hart, Life in Old Boise

“Development of Idaho’s lumber industry, as well as continued expansion of irrigation acreage, contributed to Boise’s rapid growth after the turn of the century. From about 6000 people in 1900, the city jumped to over 17,000 in 1910, then leveled off to about

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21,000 in 1920.”

The ten years between the 20s and 30s were slow times. Farmers in the area had bad times and it was not until the Great Depression brought people from the Midwest that Idaho’s population began to grow again.

The main growth of the suburbs in the Boise area between 1940 to the present day was south and west. By this time, the northern area of Boise had developed to the foothills. The suburbs pushed west and south into the prime farmland. The city of Boise really did not have any control over this growth for most of the growth was occurring outside the city limits. A 1974 Harper’s article describes Boise’s suburban growth as the following:

“Planning came late to Boise. Until the early Seventies, politics in the city was of the time-honored good-ole-boy variety, with the Mayor and members of the city council going about their jobs as a sort of sideline to their private businesses. A few years ago a number of the city fathers stood to make a good deal of money off the way the city was sprawling to the west, out into the best farmland in the county, and they saw nothing wrong with doing so. The Mayor himself was a prominent builder.”

The same article goes on to quote a local official who said:

“They had no notion whatever of what the planning process entails. It was a simple matter of feathering their own nests. I never heard of a place where the vested interests were so blatantly in control. They had no notion whatever of public service, of what being a public servant entails.”

As the population in an outlying area’s population expanded, public sewer became crucial. The city’s charter stated that no areas outside the city limits could be serviced with sewer. In order for the city to annex a portion of land that was outside the city

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limits, the city needed to petition the state’s legislature. This process was fairly burdensome and annexation was not always granted. Therefore, the communities outside the city limits that needed sewer decided to form their own public entity called sewer districts.

If the sewer districts paid for the infrastructure of their sewage systems and piped the sewage to a city treatment plant, the city would treat the water. The popular saying, “development will follow the sewer,” rang true in the Boise area. The growth that occurred in the suburbs was fast. To make things worse, Boise Public Works in 1950 built a sewage treatment facility on the western edge of its city limits. This is a common practice so the plant can treat everyone in the city limits. However, the treatment facilities placement made it much easier and less expensive for outlying sewer districts to get their sewage to the city’s treatment facilities. This of course allowed even more growth and sprawl to occur outside Boise’s city limits.

The same mistake occurred again in the early 1970s when another larger sewage treatment facility was placed out of the city limits. This was done in the anticipation of the eventual annexation of the outlying areas.\textsuperscript{15} The placement of these sewage treatments so far west attracted many residential developers to the area. The developers did not have to pay as much for infrastructure, piped sewage meant a higher allowable density, plus the rural land was worth much less so the cost of development went down. This allowed the developers to sell their homes for cheaper than homes in the city. These

cheaper priced homes attracted many and to this day the main thrust of residential
development continues to the west. There were several sewer districts established south
of Boise, however, sewage treatments plants were not placed in southern Boise.
Therefore, the southern suburbs have grown, but not nearly at the rapid pace
demonstrated by the western suburbs.

From the 1940s to the present day Boise’s population and business community has
basically been growing at reasonably steady to fast pace. Boise’s growth can not be
talked about without mentioning some of the major companies that currently have
headquarters in Boise. Most of Boise’s largest companies having headquarters in the city
have grown up with the city and have been very successful. A local entrepreneur name
J.R. Simplot learned about dehydrating food in 1940. When WWII started the demand
for dried food became enormous. The J.R. Simplot Company supplied one-third of all
the potatoes consumed by the U.S. Armies during the war. Simplot’s success during the
war brought much success to Boise, Idaho. “Potato acreage and production boomed in
the wake of this processing revolution. Processing plants now stretch in towns along the
Snake River from Ontario, Oregon, across the river at its border with southwest Idaho to
Rexburg in eastern Idaho.”16 In 1946 J.R. Simplot started Ore-Ida Foods that produced
frozen french fries. This business eventually boomed in the mid-sixties when Simplot
“struck a deal with Ray Kroc, owner of the McDonald’s chain. He has been supplying
the Golden Arches with fries ever since.”17

Joe Albertsons opened his first store in Boise, Idaho in 1939. He would later grow his one store operation into what is today one of the largest grocery chains in the world. Albertsons grew quickly. By 1945 Joe Albertsons had six stores. By 1960 the company had 8,500 employees and 200 stores that later had grown to 365 stores and 25,000 employees by the end of 1975. Today Albertson has over 220,000 employees and 2,492 stores.\(^\text{18}\)

Also, in 1957 a new rehabilitation center was built in the downtown area just east of the capital and northeast of the eight-block renewal area. This small rehabilitation center would also grow with the city of Boise and eventually become one of the leading treatment institutions in the nation. The construction of the original building cost $556,000. During the late 50s this center brought strength to the northeast section of downtown as well as creating several jobs. In 1972 the center had grown and an additional half-million dollars was invested to create 47,500 square feet and 38 more patient beds.\(^\text{19}\)

In 1957 two small northwestern lumber companies merged to form Boise Cascade. Boise Cascade also grew with the city of Boise. “Today, Boise Cascade is a major producer and distributor of pulp and paper, one of the world’s premiere business-to-business distributors of office products, and a major manufacturer and distributor of building products.”\(^\text{20}\) Trus Joist MacMillian is another company that grew up with Boise, Idaho.

\(^{18}\) Albertsons' Company Website. *Albertsons: Our Heritage.* Albertsons.com

\(^{19}\) *Elks Rehabilitation Center Expanded.* Boise Magazine. Fall 1981. P. 12.

\(^{20}\) Boise Cascade’s Company Website. *Company Info.* bc.com
In 1960 Art Troutner and Harold Thomas started the company. By 1970 the company “...patented laminated veneer lumber and was the first engineered lumber successfully mass-produced by any company in the world.”

Hewlett-Packard is a company that did not start in Boise, but one of its most important manufacturing plants has had great success in Boise. The famous HP Lazer Jet Printer was developed and manufactured in Boise, Idaho making the Boise location a thriving campus. HP moved to Boise in 1974. At that time HP had a small campus housing only 70 employees. Today the firm operates a 150-acre site in west Boise.

There are more stories of successful companies that have their national headquarters in Boise such as Micron Technology and Morrison-Knudsen Company. As early as 1972 Boise had five companies who had their world headquarters in Boise, seven companies having their national headquarters in Boise, 14 companies that had their regional headquarters and 15 companies that had their corporate headquarters in Boise, Idaho. The many strong companies growing in Boise helped keep the local economy robust and strong.

Boise and two smaller neighboring cities make up a county called Ada County. Ada County’s percentage of population growth was compared against counties in the Northwest Region consisting mainly of Idaho, Oregon and Washington Counties and

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21 Trusjoist’s Company Website. TJ Company Information. Trusjoist.com
against counties in the United States. Table 2-1 shows that Ada County’s growth has outpaced the Northwest Region’s and the United States every year between 1940 and 1970.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>N.W. Region</th>
<th>Ada County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>32.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
<td>17.80%</td>
<td>32.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
<td>20.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-1: Ada County’s % Population Change vs. the Northwest and the U.S.
Source: Compiled from U.S. Bureau of the Census.

In the mid 60s downtown Boise began showing signs of slowing and small pockets of blight. The Dateline History of Urban Renewal in Boise, Idaho reads the following about the downtown Boise’s situation in the mid 60s:

“A handful of Boise business leaders held informal meetings in 1964 to discuss their concerns over the spreading blight afflicting downtown Boise. They believed this deterioration was caused by decentralization of government offices, retail operations and other business firms who find areas for expansion away from the central core. They agreed to work for downtown revitalization and set the wheels in motion within a few months.”

By 1965 this small group of businessmen had gotten legislation passed establishing an Urban Renewal Agency for the city of Boise. This agency was named the Boise Renewal Agency (BRA). The BRA was eventually given federal aid money to redevelop an eight-block downtown area. As will be discussed in more detail in future chapters this urban renewal project froze development of the eight-block area for over 15 years. This would have been more acceptable if the other areas of downtown Boise and its suburbs were

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struggling during the same 15-year period. However, Boise’s economy was quite strong through the majority of the 15-year period bringing much development to other areas of downtown Boise and to its suburbs.

While many cities were struggling during the energy crisis of the 70s, Boise continued to grow at a steady pace. In the year of 1971 the value of the newly construction totaled $28,389,627. During that same year an additional 1,148 residential dwelling units were constructed.24 The income of residents of Boise also grew through the 60s and 70s. According to a 1979 Boise Magazine Article, local incomes grew rapidly.

"Boiseans personal income jumped 111 percent during the eight-year period between 1969 and 1977—the fourth greatest increase among the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the nation. Per-capita personal income increased from an average of $3,632 to $7,656, U.S. Dept. of Commerce figures show. That increase moved Boise from 108th in the nation in 1969 to 49th in 1977. Boise’s jump in rank—from 108th to 49th—was the greatest of any city in the top 50."

Table 2-2 shows how Boise’s population, income and employment have grown from its inception in 1870 to 1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Change in Population</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Labor force</th>
<th>Labor force employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>125,738</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>$35,663</td>
<td>69,312</td>
<td>32,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>102,451</td>
<td>36.62%</td>
<td>$20,884</td>
<td>54,623</td>
<td>24,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>74,990</td>
<td>117.48%</td>
<td>$8,012</td>
<td>19,342</td>
<td>12,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>34,481</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>$5,851</td>
<td>9,144</td>
<td>5,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>34,393</td>
<td>31.62%</td>
<td>$3,692</td>
<td>9,908</td>
<td>5,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>26,130</td>
<td>21.29%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,987</td>
<td>3,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>21,544</td>
<td>0.71%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>21,393</td>
<td>23.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>17,358</td>
<td>191.39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>5,957</td>
<td>157.77%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>21.70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td>90.85%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-2: Boise’s Population, Income, and Employment

Source: U.S. Census, selected years.

Boise continued to grow in all areas except in and around the eight-block downtown core. By the late 1978 “The Boise Air Terminal became the second busiest single airport in the Northwest region in the number of aircraft landings and takeoffs. In the number of airline passengers carried, the Boise Air Terminal rank[ed] fourth behind Seattle, Portland and Spokan.”

Boise’s economy in the mid to late 70s was relatively strong despite the eight-block sea of surface parking created by urban renewal. Due to the long awaited retail mall in downtown, no additional office space had been built for some time. Simplot wanted an office building downtown and everything in the eight-block area was zoned for the retail mall. By 1975 Simplot had constructed a 14-story office building to house his companies. His building was one block west of the eight-block area. Even with Simplot’s building adding to the downtown office supply, there was still a strong demand for downtown office space. By the late 70s “The most intense competition in Boise [was] in the area of first-class office space.”

To meet the office demand in downtown Boise a local developer named Winston Moore decided to develop a 125-acre office park. His announcement came in 1976 and the completion date was to be 1982. The key tenant to occupy the first phase was Morrison-Knudsen. This new office development called Park Center would eventually house several hundred key businesses in Boise. Again, due to the downtown core being

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planned and paralyzed awaiting the downtown enclosed retail mall, Winston Moore was forced to move to the western edge of downtown Boise to construct his new office development. To this day, a large percentage of Boise’s downtown office space is located on the western edge of downtown Boise.

Boise’s housing inventory also grew rapidly during the 1970s. Ada County’s, where the city of Boise is the dominating city, total housing inventory grew from 37,138 units in 1970 to 67,785 in 1980. During the 10 year span an average of 3,064 dwelling units were added to the county annually.\(^{29}\) However, this boom did not continue through the early 80s as a recession began to slow construction. An article from Boise Magazine describes Ada County’s housing market in the early 80s:

> "From 1980 to 1983, the number of units added has decreased to an average of 1,216 units per year. This decrease in housing units can be attributed in large part to a weakened national economy in general, and to rapidly rising interest rates in particular."\(^{29}\)

After the early 80s the national economy and the local economy began booming again. In 1983 a large Pavilion for Boise State’s University’s basketball team was constructed. This building was also built to host major performances from celebrities and stars coming to Boise. Also, athletic events such as the NCAA basketball tournament, the Portland Trailblazers and state high school basketball and wrestling championships were held in the Pavilion. Boise State University is located on the southeast edge of downtown just south of the Plaza office park. The construction of the Pavilion project cost $17.5 Million.

\(^{29}\) Hanson, Phil. *Real Estate/Development.* Boise Magazine. Fall 1983. P.47.
An additional cultural center, The Morrison Center, was added to the downtown area in the early 80s. The Morrison Family who started Morrison-Knudsen donated a large amount of the center’s cost. The Morrison Center was built to accommodate the cultural arts and events that come to Boise. Many Broadway musicals, plays, and performers have frequented the Morrison Center over the years.

In 1985 the downtown eight-block urban renewal plan was finally change. This change allowed for a large enclosed retail mall to be built someplace else than in downtown Boise. John Price Realty moved quickly and a new suburban mall was developed in West Boise by 1988. The location was chosen where The Connector, the main feeder road into downtown Boise, and Interstate 84, the main interstate traveling east and west, join together. The new mall was an instant success. The city of Boise and the region were long over due for a large retail mall. JC Penny, The Bon, Mervyns, and Sears all agreed to anchor the mall. All areas surrounding the mall quickly turned into a commercial corridor. Large category killers such as Costco, Home Base, Home Depot, Circuit City, Gap, Staples, Office Depot, Barnes and Nobles and many others built around the mall area to capture the retail traffic generated by the mall.

This huge mall’s retail magnet did pull some retailers out of the downtown Boise area. However, the core of downtown Boise really did not have any major retail to lose because all of the eight-block area was pretty much bulldozed several years prior. Boise’s economy through the 80s and the 90s was quite strong. The recession of the late 80s and early 90s had very little impact on Boise’s local economy. The following two
tables (Tables 2-3, 2-4) give office statistics about Boise’s downtown core area, 19 blocks in the heart of downtown Boise, as well as downtown’s periphery area, which consists of 44 city blocks surrounding the core area.

### Downtown Core Area's Office Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Buildings</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sq. ft.</td>
<td>2,537,824</td>
<td>2,708,341</td>
<td>2,740,993</td>
<td>2,822,589</td>
<td>2,733,978</td>
<td>2,810,031</td>
<td>3,005,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy Rate</td>
<td>10.35%</td>
<td>7.48%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td>3.28%</td>
<td>4.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Downtown Periphery Area's Office Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Buildings</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sq. ft.</td>
<td>2,291,334</td>
<td>1,954,692</td>
<td>2,098,678</td>
<td>2,054,245</td>
<td>1,540,935</td>
<td>1,714,107</td>
<td>1,801,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy Rate</td>
<td>10.91%</td>
<td>7.82%</td>
<td>6.76%</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
<td>6.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Rents</td>
<td>$11.67</td>
<td>$11.84</td>
<td>$11.78</td>
<td>$12.21</td>
<td>$14.67</td>
<td>$15.52</td>
<td>$16.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 2-3, 2-4: Office Statistics for Both Boise’s Downtown Core and Periphery

Source: BOMA Boise, Office Market Conditions & Leasing Guide

In Forbes’ May 2000 magazine article titled “Best Places,” Boise, Idaho ranked fifth. The article showed Boise as having .21 million jobs and many fast growing industries and companies. The following two tables (Tables 2-5, 2-6) show the fastest growing industries and companies in Boise, Idaho between the years of 1997 and 1999.

### Boise's Fastest Growing Industries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Annual Employment Growth Rate 97-99</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Services</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>10.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durable goods wholesaling</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Gov't Education</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1-5: Boise’s Fastest Growing Industries 97-99

Source: Forbes Magazine May 2000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Job Growth</th>
<th>Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSHOA</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRI Advantage</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micron Semiconductor Prods</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Controls</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCMS</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Boise’s Fast Growing Companies**

Source: Forbes Magazine May 2000

Table 1.7 gives statistics about Boise’s downtown retail industry between 1994 and 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Space</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>227,389</td>
<td>251,941</td>
<td>267,907</td>
<td>266,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Space</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>75,694</td>
<td>77,592</td>
<td>92,392</td>
<td>102,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Added (Lost)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>25,786</td>
<td>8,250</td>
<td>11,689</td>
<td>32,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/Other Space</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>690,801</td>
<td>682,047</td>
<td>636,622</td>
<td>629,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sq. ft.</td>
<td>1,020,708</td>
<td>1,007,365</td>
<td>1,019,670</td>
<td>1,019,830</td>
<td>1,008,610</td>
<td>1,030,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Space</td>
<td>113,535</td>
<td>93,535</td>
<td>70,757</td>
<td>51,395</td>
<td>29,692</td>
<td>82,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy Rate</td>
<td>11.12%</td>
<td>9.29%</td>
<td>6.94%</td>
<td>5.04%</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
<td>8.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1-7: Retail Statistics for Downtown Boise**

Source: Downtown Boise Association & Tom Troy, Coldwell Banker Commercial

Today both the City of Boise and downtown Boise, including the eight-block urban renewal area, are growing rapidly and enjoying economic prosperity. The eight-block downtown renewal area was finally mended and woven back into the rest of downtown. Though today everything appears to have worked out ok, it is unfortunate that the eight-block downtown renewal area lay desolate--severely underutilized--for so long while most of Boise’s downtown and its suburbs enjoyed prosperity and growth. The urban renewal chapter of Boise’s development history is indeed a dark chapter in Boise’s history; nonetheless, much can be learned from studying and learning from its pages.
Boise’s Urban Renewal Plan

The Federal Urban Renewal Grants outlined in Title I of the National Housing Act of 1949 played an enormous role in changing downtown Boise. Boise’s Redevelopment Authority (BRA) actively sought after the Federal Renewal Grants and received around $20 Million in the late 1960s.30

“Grant money could be used to acquire improved property at Fair Market Value, relocate tenants, clear acquired parcels and provide improvements to adjacent public rights-of-way. The cleared downtown sites could be sold to redevelopers at the Fair Reuse Value, making them price-competitive with suburban sites.”31

In the beginning Boise had five urban renewal areas. Two projects were approved and received some funding, but in the end the urban renewal area encompassed only eight downtown urban blocks and two additional blocks where new public buildings were to be constructed. Every city receiving the Federal Grants needed to create a formal Urban Renewal Plan. The reasoning and objectives of Boise’s Urban Renewal Plan stated in Boise’s Central Business District’s Amended Urban Renewal Plan of January, 1971 reads:

“Urban renewal action is necessary in Project I to combat problems of physical blight and economic obsolescence.

The Project I Area consists of seven (7) blocks within the Boise Central Business District. The area has a history of declining tax base primarily attributed to: deteriorating structures, inadequate and inconvenient parking, and poorly maintained properties.

This environment contrasts sharply with the growing economic and cultural strength of Boise City and the Ada County region for which the

Boise Central Business District serves as the commercial and cultural center.

Hence, the Urban Renewal Plan for the Project I Area is a proposal for major clearance to provide land for innovative, imaginative, and contemporary commercial facilities; to remove impediments to land disposition and development; as well as to achieve changes in land use. It is further designed to eliminate unhealthy, unsanitary, or unsafe conditions, and otherwise prevent the extension of blight and deterioration.”

“The plan permits sequential development of a major retail merchandising center . . .”

As early as the late 1960s the City of Boise and its business community had decided that if a mall was going to be in Boise, it was going to be located downtown. The Urban Renewal plan called for an 800,000 square foot fully enclosed, air-conditioned retail mall. The mall and its required parking would be built on the majority of the eight-block area.

Boise tried for over 15 years to get an enclosed retail mall into downtown. Some large retail anchors desired to locate downtown, but there were never enough retail anchors that agreed to commit to the downtown mall. There were many issues that kept major retail anchors from committing to the proposed downtown mall. The first issue dealt with parking. Downtown Boise did not have a lot of parking and at that time many large retail department store anchors were committing to suburban malls that offered huge amounts of surface parking. The second major issue was access to downtown Boise. A mall of this size would serve the surrounding region, but access from the surrounding region to

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downtown Boise was very poor. At that time no major interstate connection existed to downtown Boise.33

Though the BRA did not receive enough formal commitments from department store anchors to make the downtown mall feasible, the BRA began the process of acquiring and clearing the Urban Renewal Area anyhow. The process began in the late 1969 and continued into the early 80’s. Just Compensation was assured all owners and merchants within the renewal area that were operating a business or had a tenant occupying their buildings. Money would be granted for relocation or for buying the merchant out of his or her business. Also, if the current tenants agreed to sign a lease to occupy space in the new project, the tenant could remain until he or she could move into the newly constructed buildings, at a higher rent.34 This process did not occur without its problems.

The most well known legal case concerned the Yick Kong family who owned a business downtown and was forced to move by way of imminent domain. This family believed that the BRA was simply a puppet guided by the ego of the city, and that the city had no right to take their land.34 This case went all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court held that the BRA was not acting for the city and did in fact have the right to take the family’s land.34 Boise residents and merchants watched the BRA continue to take land and demolish historic downtown buildings without any thing else being built in their places. Many merchants and residents of Boise began feeling disgusted with the BRA’s

operations and with its members. The majority of the eight blocks in the renewal area were eventually cleared along with two additional blocks for public buildings. Beautiful public buildings were constructed on the two blocks, but the remaining eight blocks became surface parking as the BRA and the City continued negotiating with the retail department stores.

Downtown Boise remained a desolate wasteland for many years. The City stuck to its Downtown Plan and did not allow any significant development on the urban renewal parcels that was not consistent with the retail mall. Developer after developer tried to make the downtown mall work. Four developers failed and millions of the developers’ dollars were wasted in the process. Even after two of the needed department stores swore they would never go into the downtown mall, local politicians and the BRA would not change the plan. Something had to break the gridlock. Finally, a new way of thinking began to spread. Possible signs of progress began to be seen.
Chapter Three: A New Approach

Until 1983 there was not much of any opposition from Boise’s community towards a downtown mall. In 1983 two men, Brent Coles (Boise’s current mayor) and Ron Twilegar, began what at that time seemed a radical movement in Boise.¹ Both men began running for city council proposing the allowance of a suburban mall in Boise and changing The Downtown Boise Plan to reflect a mixed-use traditional downtown. They described a traditional mixed-use downtown as an employment center having pedestrian scaled retail on its street levels while offering restaurants, clubs, convention areas, and many programmed activities to make the downtown streets active. The idea of a traditional mixed-use downtown was not entirely unique. Downtown Boise had mixed-use downtown from its inception until the 1960s. This traditional downtown idea was simply returning back to the use downtown Boise enjoyed before the urban renewal era entered Boise. Plus, by 1983 many cities around America had practiced different urban renewal ideas and the mixed-use idea seemed to be working the most effectively.

By 1983 the Boise Area was well over due for a large retail mall. Both Mr. Coles and Mr. Twilegar understood that a regional retail mall would soon be developed in the neighboring city of Meridian if Boise did not act quickly. Earlier that year both Penny’s and Sears, two of the major retail anchors looking at locating in the Boise area, told Brent Coles, then Boise’s city planner, that they would never locate downtown.¹ Also, at this

time the BRA was continuing to do demolish downtown historic buildings. Both men believed that many of those buildings were what make downtown Boise unique. Ron Twilegar and Brent Coles preached that downtown should not compete with the suburban mall, but rather downtown Boise should be something unique and entirely different from a suburban mall.2

As Ron and Brent started campaigning for city council, Boise’s old and powerful names and money began campaigning against the new boys on the block. The old influential money and power supported the mayor, Mayor Eardly, who was a staunch supporter of the downtown mall, as well as all city councilors who agreed with the Downtown Mall Plan. As Brent Coles and Ron Twilegar continued their platform for city council, a group called “Citizens for Progressive Government” interviewed the men and decided to support them.2 “Citizens for Progressive Government” helped the two candidates reach the populous and convince them that a change needed to occur to bring the downtown development stalemate to an end. Brent Coles mentioned that he and Ron Twilegar went and gathered as much as ten thousand signatures from people who supported a suburban mall within Boise’s city limits.2 In 1983 both Brent Coles and Ron Twilegar won seats on Boise’s City Council.

In 1983 city councilors sat on the Board of Directors for Boise’s Redevelopment Agency. Hours after Ron Twilegar’s and Brent’s election to office, Mayor Eardly, with a majority vote from city council, had both Ron and Brent removed from the BRA’s board.2 Brent

Coles said it was a very frustrating time. "The power to change the very thing I wanted to help improve was taken from me hours after my winning the election."  

Every month for the next two years of 1984 and 85 Tom Twilegar brought the suburban mall discussion before the council and Brent Coles seconded the motion thus forcing a public debate.\(^3\) For two years the suburban mall, Tom Twilegar and Brent Coles were in the headlines of Boise’s newspaper. After the two years of debate over the “suburban mall” vs. the “downtown mall,” three city council members and the mayor’s seat were up for re-election. Four new people entered the race, all of which supported the suburban mall platform. Dirk Kempthorne, Idaho’s current governor, ran for Mayor, and Mike Wetherel, Jay Web, and Sara Baker all ran for city council. Dirk Kempthorne as well as all three of the new city council candidates won their respective offices. In just over two years, Boise had six new city council members and a new mayor.

The new council members, now holding a majority in favor of the suburban mall, asked Brent Coles, now the president of the city council, what he wanted to do with the BRA and the members of its board. The council members and the mayor asked Brent Coles if he wanted to “Sweep the board or mend the community?”\(^3\) Brent Coles agreed to do his part in trying to mend the community.\(^3\) The new city council decided to increase the number of people on the BRA’s board members and slowly have the people not in favor of the suburban mall fall out or leave on their own accord. The stalemate had finally ended.

However, one last major political battle needed to be won before the momentum of the revival of downtown Boise and would be complete. The Greater Boise Auditorium District is a district with elected members from downtown Boise. This district was created around 1975 for the purpose of eventually developing a convention center. An extra tax covering a certain geographic boundary was applied to purchases in the area and revenues from the tax were saved for ten years. In 1987 The Greater Boise Auditorium District had finally collected enough tax revenue to construct a convention center.

Downtown land in the heart of downtown Boise was offered to The Greater Boise Auditorium District for a convention center, but its members decided they did not want to develop a convention center downtown because downtown was "such a mess." Ron Twilegar and Brent Cole were very upset with The Greater Boise Auditorium District and immediately brought it to the attention of the mayor. Mayor Dirk Kempthorne immediately wrote letters to all city council members, the members of The Greater Boise Auditorium District, and the board of Capitol City Development Corporation calling for a closed meeting.

All invited parties spent the majority of a day in private debate. Boise City Council had to eventually threaten The Greater Boise Auditorium District with a press conference that would explain to the public that The Greater Boise Auditorium District was abandoning downtown Boise. Indeed it was abandoning the very tax payers who had paid the taxes over the past ten years to make the convention center development possible. By the end

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of the day, The Greater Boise Auditorium District had agreed to build its convention center downtown. Wayne, Gibbs the director of Planning and Zoning for the City of Boise said the convention center was a crucial element in beginning the momentum in downtown Boise.5

After years and years of no progress, things were finally beginning to move in the correct direction. Indeed, the redevelopment of downtown Boise finally began progressing. Two agencies would play key roles in stimulating and implementing the continuation of downtown Boise’s redevelopment. One of the agencies called Capitol City Development Corporation (CCDC) was already in existence and the second agency, Downtown Business Association (DBA), would soon be formed.

**Capitol City Development Corporation’s History and Actions**

“Capitol City Development Corporation (CCDC) is a public agency formed to administer urban redevelopment projects for the City of Boise, Idaho. Redevelopment activities can include planning, property acquisition, and the construction or rehabilitation of public improvements and facilities under the guidance of an adopted Urban Renewal Plan. The CCDC is legally and financially separate and independent from the City, which allows it to use special financing tools. However, its seven member Board of Directors is appointed and confirmed by Boise’s Mayor and City Council.”1 Every city has the right to create an Urban Renewal District under state law, however, the city designates the boundaries of the district.3

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CCDC is given authorization from the city to create an urban renewal plan for a specific area of land. After the CCDC has created an urban renewal plan for an area, it must submit its plan to the City of Boise for adoption. Once the plan is approved, CCDC then has the right to implement its plan.⁶

CCDC’s primary tool to enable it to implement redevelopment is a financing tool called Tax Increment Financing. After Brent Coles became president of Boise’s City Council, he realized that a financing tool would be needed to help rejuvenate downtown Boise. Brent Coles had seen this Tax Increment Financing used in California; so, he and his team began researching what needed to be done to use Tax Increment Financing in the redevelopment downtown Boise.

Legislation for Tax Increment Financing was soon after written and brought before the Idaho State legislature in 1987. Big government was a bad word in the conservative state of Idaho; however, an influential state senator named Dean Sorensen sat on CCDC’s board and he had a keen sense as to how badly Boise needed a financing tool for redevelopment. That same year legislation was passed to allow the use of Tax Increment Financing in the city of Boise.

This tool is used by freezing the current property taxes of a certain area for a certain length of time and using the increase in property tax or the increased “tax increment” to pay for the public infrastructure to stimulate private development. Bonds are created and

⁶ Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P. 16.

35
underwritten on the future revenues of the tax increments. Streets, utility infrastructure, parking garages, public landscaping, etc. can then be constructed with the bond money. “Once bonds are retired, the increased valuation is returned to the general tax roll, resulting in either additional property tax revenue to the taxing jurisdictions or a lower tax rate for taxpayers, or both.” Also, CCDC typically pays for and operates the parking garages around the developments it helps develop. These revenues are used in addition to the tax increments to underwrite Bonds and help pay the debt service on the already issued bonds.

To begin developing downtown Boise into a traditional mixed-use downtown, CCDC was first asked to create an Urban Renewal Strategy for the eight-block renewal area. Boise’s Framework Master Plan, created by the consulting team Hummel La Marche, Hunsucker Zimmer, and Gunsul Frasca Partnership and late adopted in 1987 by Boise’s City Council, was the map from which CCDC’s Urban Renewal Development Strategy was created. The FrameWork Plan gave guidelines and instructions as to the urban design and land use that should be employed by CCDC in the Urban Renewal Area.

The FrameWork Plan was developed in a very effective manner. The consultants, CCDC, and the City all decided to gather as much feed back and input from the community concerning the plan as possible. Open forums were held where different opinions and ideas were voiced. These opened forums allowed opportunities for the professional consultants to help Boise residents and businesses think critically about their

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7 Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P. 16.
urban environment. The meetings were useful, the consultants had great vision, and the majority of Boise residents felt good about the plan because they helped and were involved in the plan from the beginning.

The Framework Plan called for a “... concentrated, mixed-use design with office, retail, cultural, recreational, and residential component uses within a pedestrian intensive environment. Salvageable historic buildings were to be renovated and developed along with sensitivity designed, contemporary, in-fill structures.” CCDC incorporated the above requirements into their 1987 Development Strategy as well as adding a few additional components to ensure their plan’s success.

- Design guidelines to guarantee quality development that adhered to the Plan’s objectives.
- A parking plan that placed automobiles in structures, eliminated surface facilities, encouraged shared use, and gave priority to downtown customers and visitors.
- Streetscapes and open space improvements to create a pedestrian-friendly street environment.
- Funding for public art, both visual and performing.
- Creation of a constituent organization, the Downtown Boise Association, to oversee the common promotion and maintenance requirements of downtown.¹

In 1987 CCDC’s Urban Renewal Development Strategy—the implementation of The Framework Master Plan for the eight-block downtown area—was adopted by Boise’s City Council. At this time CCDC was given the design review rights for the entire Urban Renewal District.

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¹ Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P.16,17.
Soon after the CCDC’s Urban Renewal Strategy was adopted by city council, CCDC began to lead the way in redeveloping downtown. Dennis Clark, the director of development for CCDC, said Boise needed a heart. “A place where people could gather.” The heart of Boise would soon be constructed. This place would be called The Grove (Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1: View of the Grove Area  
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

The Grove is at the center of downtown Boise where 8th Street and Grove Street intersect. The two streets that bisect at this location have been made into pedestrian only roads for a block going in all directs (north, south, east, and west). At the center of this four-block intersection is a large fountain that is level with the detailed brick paving. Surrounding the fountain are benches, food kiosks, a restaurant, and art sculptures.

Clark, Dennis. Capitol City Development Corporation. Interview. June 28, 2000
CCDC decided to sell bricks to the public to be able to begin constructing The Grove area. Each brick would have the donors name engraved in it. This began real construction downtown, something that had not been seen for many years. CCDC decided early to pay for higher quality improvements in The Grove such as lights, public landscape, art, and benches to set an early precedence for the private development industry\(^\text{10}\) (Figure 3-2). The private industry saw how CCDC was beginning to spend money downtown and private development soon followed after The Grove’s completion.

![Figure 3-2: Picture of Street Improvements and Public Landscape at the Grove](source: Photo by Allyson Smith)

CCDC’s financing tools, enabled it to pay for street improvements and parking structures to help assist private developers with their projects. This subsidy was obviously a great motivation for developers and helped increase the momentum by which private

development occurred. In many instances the subsidy was the very thing that made each project feasible.\textsuperscript{11}

CCDC began developing the eight blocks in a piece meal fashion. For each piece of land, CCDC welcomed proposals from private developers. If the proposal met certain requirements CCDC set for each parcel, the private developer would receive help from CCDC by way of street improvements, parking structures, or the right to park in certain structures. Each deal in the renewal area from 1988 to 1999 has been a little unique. However, in most the deals the private developers bought the land or buildings from CCDC, and CCDC then paid for all street improvements (utilities, lighting, public landscaping, paving, etc.), landscape, and most the time the parking structures or in some cases underground parking. According to CCDC’s 2000 Strategic Plan,

"The financing tool of Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) has allowed CCDC to build quality parking garages. Without the TIF funds, debt coverage would have to be factored into parking rates with the likelihood of making the unsubsidized cost of parking in downtown Boise much more expensive for the public. It should be noted that in the years depicted, [Figure 3-3] Tax Incremental Financing alone was inadequate to cover debt service. However, interest revenues on the investment of the funds and parking revenue were available to help meet the shortfall."

\footnote{Clark, Dennis. Capitol City Development Corporation. Interview. June 28, 2000}
Figure 3-3: Bond Debt vs. Tax Increment Financing Revenues
Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000

Figure 3-4 shows the parking garages CCDC has built since 1987 or is currently in the process of building.

Figure 3-4: Parking Garages Built and Operated by CCDC
Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000
The first private development to occur after The Grove’s completion was what is today called the Wells Fargo Bank Building (Figure 3-5). The Wells Fargo Bank Building is one of the nicest downtown high-rise office buildings with a nice architectural element. CCDC basically gave the land to the bank for nothing and agreed to build the parking to entice the bank to build on The Grove.  

![Figure 3-5: Wells Fargo Bank Building at The Grove](image)

Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

Along with the Wells Fargo Bank building came the development of the Convention Center called the Centre on the Grove (Figure 3-6). The convention center was a great boost to downtown. This convention center really began establishing The Grove Area as the heart of downtown Boise. As mentioned before, the convention center’s land was

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12 Clark, Dennis. Capitol City Development Corporation. Interview. June 28, 2000
given to The Greater Boise Auditorium District to keep the convention center in the
downtown area.

Figure 3-6: Boise’s Convention Center on The Grove
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

In line with the other developments downtown came a great new development called
Capitol Terrace (Figure 3-7) featuring retail, restaurants, and parking. CCDC promised
to build and pay for the parking garage if the developer promised to develop the retail on
the first two levels. Mayor Coles mentioned that they were lighting fireworks off the top
of the parking garage as well as giving away free food to bring people into the parking
structure.13

Next followed the renovation of many downtown buildings--The Broadbent building, The Idaho Building, The Fidelity Building, The Mode Building, The Alexander Building, The Boise City National Bank Building, The Union Block Building, and The McCarty Building (Figures 3-7 through 3-14). Brent Coles and Ron Twilegar's vision of keeping the historic buildings alive and using the nostalgia of the buildings to make downtown unique was beginning to work.
Figure 3-7: The Broadbent Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

Figure 3-8: The Idaho Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith
Figure 3-9: The Fidelity Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

Figure 3-10: The Mode Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith
Figure 3-11: The Alexander Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

Figure 3-12: Boise City National Bank Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith
Figure 3-13: The Union Block Building
Source: Photo by Allyson

Figure 3-14: McCarty Building
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith
As downtown Boise began to become more vibrant and successful, downtown Boise’s first upscale downtown residential project began to be developed—The Washington Mutual Building (Figure 3-15). Again, using Tax Increment Financing, CCDC was able to entice private developers to invest in downtown Boise. The Washington Mutual building would have small retail, a bank, and restaurants on the first two floors and residential condominiums on the remaining eight floors.

Figure 3-15: The Washington Mutual Tower
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith
In 1997 downtown Boise and The Grove Area was able to finish a project that for many Boiseans sealed The Grove Area as the heart of Boise forever. "The Grove Hotel and Bank of America Centre is a 250 room convention hotel combined with a 5,000 seat sports arena and events center adjacent to Boise Centre on the Grove. There are nineteen one and two bedroom residential luxury condominiums and 30,000 sq. ft. full service health facility with a two-level sports bar."14 The Bank of America Centre opened late 1997 and the Grove Hotel opened early 1998 (Figure 3-16). In this large project CCDC participated in collaborating the sale of the land and paying for the parking garage and streetscape improvements.14

Figure 3-16: The Bank of America Center  
Source: Photo by Allyson Smith

Since 1987 CCDC has played a key role in the development of 15 parcels within the eight-block urban renewal area. Plus, CCDC has spent many years on an upcoming project called The Boise Tower to be located within the eight-block renewal area. The Boise Tower is scheduled to be a 25-story condominium building. The building will have 24,000 sq. ft. of retail on the first and second levels, a parking garage, and 110 condo units.\textsuperscript{15}

CCDC has worked hard in its efforts to facilitate development in downtown Boise. However, “it is critical to keep in mind that CCDC’s principal role in many of the above stated actions is that of a facilitator.”\textsuperscript{16} Figure 3-18 shows the eight-block area of

\textsuperscript{15} Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P. 27.
\textsuperscript{16} Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P. 54.
downtown Boise on May of 1995 and Figure 3-19 shows the same eight-block downtown area June of 1999.

Figure 3-18: Downtown Boise's Urban Renewal Area
May 1985
Source: CCDC
1) Grove Plaza; 2) Grove Hotel; 3) Bank of America Centre; 4) Boise Centre on The Grove; 5) Wells Fargo Bank; 6) Capitol Terrace; 7) Washington Mutual Capitol Plaza; 8) Boise City National Bank (renovated); 10) Broadbent Building (renovated); 11) McCarty Building (renovated); 12) Mode Building (renovated); 13) Idaho Building (renovated); 14) Fidelity Building (renovated); 15) Union Block Building (renovated).
Downtown Boise Association's History and Actions

"The Downtown Boise Association (DBA) is an association through which downtown business owners, property owners, governments, and other organizations work to improve the Downtown Boise economy and environment."17 The DBA leads many programs that improve downtown such as Economic Development, Governmental Relations, Marketing & Events, Maintenance, Parking, and Security.17

In 1986, a small group of volunteers identified the need for a formal organization to represent and promote downtown Boise, Idaho. This group of volunteers was called the Downtown Boise Association. This group circulated a petition throughout downtown Boise asking merchants and property owners to agree to form a downtown Business Improvement District (BID). Boise's Business Improvement District was proposed to include 60 downtown city blocks.

To create a BID, over 50% of the local merchants and property owners must vote in favor of the BID. These districts are created when merchants and property owners of a designated area agree to pay an additional annual tax. The money from the taxes is used only in the BID area to help make the area a vibrant, clean, active, and safe environment. This little group called the Downtown Boise Association was successful in persuading over half the merchants and property owners within the proposed 60 blocks that forming a BID would be beneficial.

After a public hearing, the BID was passed and the DBA was designated as the entity responsible for providing services and administration in the Downtown Business District. The Downtown Boise Association currently has more than 400 member businesses who pay annual assessments, and a Board of Directors made up of 21 assessed members elected each year and six ex-officio members representing the downtown business community. The assessment rates and areas are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Area</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ground Floor Retail</td>
<td>.20/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Floor Commercial</td>
<td>.20/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Retail Space</td>
<td>.10/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Commercial Space</td>
<td>.75/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Ground Floor</td>
<td>.06/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theaters</td>
<td>2.00 per seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>15.00 per room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Boise &amp; 8th Street Marketplace</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>.10/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>.05/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outer Zone Property</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Property</td>
<td>.04 per $100 assessed value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Profit</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$125 per year maximum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions and Explanations
Assessment is on the business owner, except unleased vacant space and outer zone property, which is an assessment on the property owner. Minimum assessment is $25 annually. Retail businesses are those oriented to public trade and selling a product. Core area encompasses 19 Blocks (Figure 1-4), outer zone is everything outside of the 19 block core area.

The Downtown Boise Association (DBA) knew that if downtown Boise was going to become a place where people loved to congregate, work, come for evening entertainment, and shop that more needed to be done than was currently happening. This organization,

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19 Downtown Boise Association’s Brochure. What’s Up Downtown?
funded by the businesses and owners of property downtown, began doing many important things that have made a substantial difference downtown.

The DBA began organizing weekly cleaning of downtown sidewalks and gutters. Currently the DBA has a downtown clean team and has partnered with the Ada County juvenile court services program. Also, the DBA began planting and maintaining the sidewalk flower plants. Today there are over 300 beautifully flowered sidewalk planters maintained by the DBA. Another service provided by the DBA was snow removal. Today all sidewalks and The Grove Plaza are cleared of snow by the DBA.\textsuperscript{20}

For several years the DBA has been working with Boise City, and downtown building owners and managers on, and recently has succeeded, approving a new downtown dismount zone for skateboards and in-line skates.\textsuperscript{20} The legislation basically prohibits skateboard riding and in-line skating in certain areas. This is to keep teenagers from loitering as well as ensuring that skateboarders or in-line skaters are not running into downtown workers.

One of the greatest things the DBA has done in its efforts to improve and make Boise a vibrant community is its advertising efforts. The DBA started a campaign called “Downtown Boise, A good time. Anytime,” and it created a very popular jingle that runs on t.v., radio, and in print called “What’s Up Downtown?”\textsuperscript{20} The advertising helped downtown Boise begin to lose its negative desolate stigma.

\textsuperscript{20} Downtown Boise Association’s Brochure. \textit{What’s Up Downtown?}
The DBA also began programming downtown events that brought people downtown. If we can get people use to coming downtown, then it will become natural for them. Each event helps people get use to coming downtown and hopefully the people will see things they hadn’t seen before and will hopefully return. The events the DBA began hosting and continue to host today are Alive After Five, Bite of Boise, First Thursday, Tree Lighting Celebration, and Christmas in the City.

Alive After Five occurs during the summer months on every Wednesday after 5:00p.m. A local musician is invited to play at The Grove and beverages and light food are available. The idea was to keep downtown Boise active even after the working hours. The event has been very successful for many years helping Boise gain more pedestrian activity and vibrancy.

Bite of Boise occurs once a year during The Boise River Festival. This event is programmed at The Grove. Musicians play on stage while people dance on an adjacent dance floor. All the restaurants of downtown Boise are invited to serve a few items from their menus so the citizens attending can get familiar with the downtown restaurants as well as sample some of their cuisine for a discounted price. This event has brought people into downtown Boise as well as it has familiarized residents with the local downtown restaurants. Bite of Boise has been a great event for many years.

First Thursday is a great event created by the DBA where the downtown shops on the

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22 Downtown Boise Association’s Brochure. What’s Up Downtown?
first Thursday of every month stay open until 9:00p.m. Each downtown merchant holds an informal open house where there is typically music playing and some candy in each store. This again has helped draw people downtown as well as it has helped residents discover what kind of fun specialty shops exist downtown.23

The Tree lighting and Christmas in the City are both great events centering on Christmas. These events are again an opportunity for the local retailers to show off their goods and entice the visitors to do more Christmas shopping downtown.

Lastly, the DBA has been a great facilitator of communication between the downtown businesses and owners. The DBA started two councils, the Retail Council and the Special Task Force that meet regularly to keep everyone updated. The Retail Council meets to discuss issues regarding retail in downtown Boise and how the retail sales can be improved. The Special Task Force has discussed and continues to examine and make recommendations regarding parking, city ordinances and issues affecting downtown businesses.24

Both CCDC and the DBA were developed to help downtown Boise better succeed through its rejuvenation process. Both agencies have done a lot of work and downtown Boise has benefited from both agencies’ actions. The best way to determine if these agencies have been successful is to measure the current success of downtown Boise.

24 Downtown Boise Association’s Brochure. What’s Up Downtown?
Chapter Four: Results of CCDC’s and DBA’s Actions

The actions of CCDC and the DBA have had great impacts on downtown Boise. One of the goals of the agencies was to make downtown a safe “smart” mixed-used community. One measure of gauging the success of this goal is by viewing the increase of residents that reside downtown. The number of residential units in Boise’s downtown has increased from 50 units in 1994 to nearly 150 units in 1998 only four years later. (Figure 4-1). Currently the Boise Tower project is preparing to begin construction, which will add an additional 110 residential units to downtown Boise.¹

![Figure 4-1: Change in Downtown Residential Units](image)

Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000.

A second way of measuring success is to identify if residents want to spend their evenings and free time in downtown Boise. This is accomplished by measuring the growth in the number of restaurants and nightclubs downtown. In 1990 downtown Boise had a total of 48 nightclubs and restaurants. In 1998 that number grew to 90 (Figure 4-2).

"Downtown night life has continued to increase as the downtown area has grown and created more opportunities for individuals, couples, and families to enjoy restaurants and nightclubs."² M. Lane Thomas, a Boise resident who in 1979 owned and operated a merchant shop in downtown Boise, is amazed by the change. Thomas said, "Downtown was literally dead, now there is always something going on."³ Sara Baker, a current city council member, said the following about the urban renewal area before redevelopment: "It was bleak. There were no restaurants. No one went down there. It was truly, truly awful. People who haven’t been around just don’t remember. The change is absolutely phenomenal."⁴

![Figure 4-2: Change in Downtown Boise’s Restaurant and Nightclubs](image)

Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000.

One of the CCDC’s primary goals was to make a heart in downtown Boise. The location

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for the heart of downtown Boise was chosen to be The Grove. The question is, Has The Grove become the heart of downtown Boise? Most of the major events in Boise are held at The Grove. Activities such as Alive After Five, The Boise River Festival, Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremonies and many others are centered on The Grove. Also, the recent completion of The Bank of America Center and The Grove Hotel surely secure The Grove as the gathering nexus of downtown Boise. The Grove really was the last piece of the puzzle that has made The Grove the true heart of downtown Boise. 5

By observing office and retail vacancy rates over several years, a good estimate of how the downtown Boise has been doing can be made. Figure 4-3 shows a dramatic decline in retail vacancy from 1994 to 1998, and a reasonable decline in office vacancy over the same period of time.

![Downtown Boise Vacancy Rates](image)

**Figure 4-3: Change in Downtown’s Office and Retail Vacancy Rates**

*Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000.*

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"The Downtown not only has the lowest vacancy rate in the community, but it also has some of the highest rental rates. This indicates that the downtown area is the most desirable office location in the City."⁶ According to CCDC’s 2000 Strategic Plan,

"The history of vacancy rates in downtown retail and office space would support the Agency’s [CCDC] belief that an attractive, safe City core will continue to draw retail and office clientele downtown. This has contributed to the increases in downtown real estate values and sales tax revenue. Activities that include First Thursday, The Gene Harris Block Party, Capital City Public Market, and Christmas in the City attract many visitors and shoppers to the downtown area. Retail vacancy rates have continued to decrease over time. This trend is supported by the continued strong presence of office workers and the increasing number of visitors to Downtown."⁶

As mentioned in the above quote, a good tool for measuring increased activity in a city’s downtown is by keeping track of the downtown short-term parkers. The CCDC has kept a record of downtown parkers since 1994. Figure 4-4 shows the increase in the number of parkers between 1994 and 1998. The number of total short-term parkers has more than doubled over a four-year time span.

![Short-term Parking](image)

**Figure 4-4: Change in Downtown Short-Term Parking**

Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000.

⁶ Capitol City Development Corporation’s Strategic Plan. 2000. P. 32.
To support the above argument concerning the increased number of parkers, Parking Revenues increases can also be tracked. From 1994 to 1998 parking revenues from the garages downtown owned by CCDC have increased from $1 Million to over $1.5 Million (Figure 4-5). This too signals that a substantial increase in activity has occurred in downtown Boise.

In addition to the specific numbers one can use to measure success, both agencies have been active in many tasks where success is difficult to measure. For example both the DBA and CCDC have been very active in working with the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) to turn more downtown roads back into two-way roads. To date at least sections of six roads have been returned to their original two-way origin.\(^7\) Also, both agencies took active roles in making access into downtown much easier. In 1992 the Boise “Connector” was completed making west incoming traffic’s trip into downtown much smoother and quicker.\(^7\)

\[\text{Parking Revenues}\]

\[\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{Revenue} & 1,000,000 & 1,500,000 & 2,000,000 & 1,500,000 & 2,000,000 \\
\end{array}\]

Figure 4-5: Increase in Parking Revenues
Source: CCDC Strategic Plan FY 2000

Both the DBA and CCDC have played huge roles in the improvement of downtown Boise. Both of these agencies working in tandem have created a mix of skills and stewardship that has been effective for downtown Boise. The combination of new development, good maintenance, safety programs, taking an active role on downtown issues, and the promotion of and programming successful downtown events has made downtown Boise what it is today.

Summary

Almost all downtowns across America were affected by HUD’s Federal Renewal Grants. Boise tried to renew its downtown by demolishing many downtown blocks only to later create a gridlock situation as the anticipation of a downtown retail mall froze all downtown development. This 15-year stalemate was later broken only because two very dedicated city councilors continued for two years to create a public debate against the upcoming downtown retail mall. Month after month, over a two-year period, Brent Coles and Ron Twilegar challenged the legitimacy of a downtown mall in City Council Meetings. Eventually, the arguments convinced Boise residents of the wisdom of allowing for the suburban mall to occur and making downtown a traditional downtown. Boise residents made their voices heard by electing a new mayor and three new city councilors all of who were against a downtown retail mall.

Once the stalemate was broken, things began moving again. Consultants were brought in and with the community’s input, as well as input from many local Boise businesses, a
new Urban Design Plan was created for downtown Boise. The new plan, The Framework Plan, called for a traditional mixed-use downtown. However, downtown Boise had a great amount of work to accomplish before The Plan’s vision could become reality.

In The Plan, The Grove was chosen to be the heart of downtown Boise. To ensure The Grove momentum in becoming the heart of downtown Boise, Boise’s Governor and City Council used tough persuasion to convince the Greater Boise Auditorium District to build the convention center on The Grove. During this time, Brent Coles went to work in creating legislation for Tax Increment Financing that would soon after play a key role to downtown Boise’s redevelopment. Lastly, the BRA was reborn with a new mission, purpose and name.

The BRA, now called CCDC, was assigned an eight-block area to redevelop using Tax Increment Financing. This financial tool was used time and time again to entice private development into redeveloping the heart of downtown Boise and its surrounding blocks. Through the use of Tax Increment Financing and engaging in partnerships with private developers, CCDC was able to facilitate the renovation of many historic downtown buildings as well as develop many of downtown Boise’s current prominent structures. In addition to being a catalyst in developing downtown structures, Tax Increment Financing enabled CCDC to make the streetscapes in downtown Boise very attractive and desirable.

Another agency called the Downtown Boise Association was created in 1987 to help with Boise’s rebirth. This agency was created primarily as a promoter and maintainer of
downtown Boise. This agency has done many things to help aid the recovery of downtown Boise especially with the events it has programmed and run. The majority of the DBA’s events have been huge successes. These events have made people familiar with downtown Boise as well as making downtown a favored choice for entertainment, work, shopping, and living.

A lot of energy, time, and money were spent to get downtown Boise into the current condition it enjoys today. Over the past four decades many major mistakes have occurred in relation to downtown Boise’s redevelopment. It is important to analyze why certain mistakes occurred and how the good decisions were eventually implemented.
Chapter Five: Analysis and Conclusion

Analysis

With perfect hindsight it is easy to assign blame, however, federal urban renewal efforts’ and politicians’ intentions at that time were probably fairly sincere. Hud Grants totaling $20 Million were obviously very appealing and Boise’s politicians and the BRA saw the grants as an opportunity to make downtown Boise a stable city center for years to come. However, many mistakes were made in trying to revitalize downtown Boise. The downtown Boise’s story adds to the ongoing chapters of urban renewal and teaches additional lessons as to the best methods of revitalizing downtown areas. Downtown renewal could have been done in a much more effective manner.

The argument for the complete clearing of city blocks was that the areas were so blighted that only a complete and total clearance could make the area better. This was not the case with downtown Boise. A 1970 submission from the City of Boise for the Federal Model City Program reads, “The City is not faced with many of the severe and large-scale problems prevalent in some other communities. There are no large or highly visible slums, though small areas of blight are scattered throughout it.”¹ The BRA bought or relocated many longstanding successful businesses to clear the way for the enclosed 800,000 square foot fully enclosed retail center to be built. Also, many historic buildings were cleared from the area because according to the 1971 Urban Renewal plan, “... the structure[s] were not compatible with the Urban Renewal Plan’s objectives for the area.”²

Some areas in downtown Boise were beginning to show signs of blight. However, some of the eight blocks that were being cleared for the retail mall were reasonably healthy at the time. In fact, there were many other areas in the downtown Boise that were in a lot worse shape than some of the areas in the designated eight-block area. This eight-block area was not chosen because of its conditions of blight, it was chosen because it would make the ideal location for a downtown retail mall.

Three major mistakes occurred during the renewal process. First the city and the BRA got involved in trying to control a private enterprise--a huge retail mall. The city and the BRA should not have tried to control items that were controlled by the economy and out of their hands. “According to the developer (Winmar), start of construction of the Boise City Center is tied to the national economy. Prospective department store anchors are not expected to commit to the project until lower interest rates encourage borrowing for expansion. Then commitments will be forthcoming and construction can begin.”

The city and the BRA were wise in trying to stimulate growth in the downtown core. An effective method of accomplishing this is developing additional public buildings downtown that the public agencies can control. Indeed, the city of Boise and the BRA were successful in constructing very nice new public buildings downtown. However, both the city and the BRA got into a lot of trouble while trying to control the public arena. Instead of trying to force a private retail development, both the BRA and the city of Boise should have tried to work with quasi public agencies such as convention centers.

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and sport arenas to help stimulate downtown Boise. The BRA and the city could have
had much more influence and direction in attracting and developing these sorts of
developments. The city and the BRA were trying to create a market for something that
the private market could not and would not support.

The second major mistake made during the urban renewal process was not learning from
other cities that had previously tried to renew their downtowns. The ironic thing about
this situation is that urban renewal had been tried much earlier than Boise’s attempt. A
track record had already been made leaning away from the practice of vast demolition. A
1974 Harper’s article wrote, “It is not just that total clearance is currently unfashionable;
total clearance is out of favor in most cities because it has never worked.”\footnote{Davis, L.J. \textit{Tearing Down Boise}. Harper’s Magazine. November 1974. P. 40.} The
politicians, the businesses, the BRA, and the residents did not to learn from the lessons of
other cities and continued with a plan that cost residents and businesses of Boise a great
deal.

Boise’s politicians, the federal government, the BRA, and citizens could have been much
more wise by researching cities that had tried the bulldozing of city blocks. These
lessons were free and probably fairly accessible. This mentality that each town is an
island and that the same principles that apply to other towns do not apply to our town is a
dangerous and mindless practice.
The third major mistake was bulldozing eight downtown blocks before commitments were made to redevelop downtown. In a 1974 Harper’s Magazine article L. J. Davis a former residence of Boise wrote:

“...It does not take a great deal of thought to perceive that turning it [downtown] into a temporary prairie of parking lots only increases the centrifugal forces that caused the area to decline in the first place. If the only thing you can do when you come downtown is park you car where the place used to be, most people are pretty much inclined to say the hell with it. They go to the suburban shopping centers instead—not just some of the time, but all the time. Once the megastructure is built—if it is built—there is absolutely no guarantee that these people will suddenly come streaming back.”

The downtown retail mall was the official plan documented in order to receive the federal Hud Grants, but a plan is useless without commitments from the key tenants needed to complete the plan. Somehow the city of Boise, the BRA, and a few influential business owners knew the downtown mall was going to occur; so, relocation efforts along with bulldozing were scheduled and completed without formal commitments from all the anchors. By December 31, 1971, eighty percent of Project I, a seven-block area, was acquired and 40% of the businesses in the area were relocated. Also, at this time 65 residents had been relocated out of the same area.

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These actions are consistent with the theme “If You Build it They Will Come” from the popular movie “Fields of Dreams.” L.J. Davis in his same 1974 Harper’s Magazine article, “Tearing Down Boise,” said:

“... It is hard to shake the feeling that the people at the BRA are affected with a species of tunnel vision. BRA has no fallback position, no alternative plan. As far as BRA is concerned, the megastructure must be built, come hell or high water. Damn the objections, full speed ahead. The objections are many.”

Two retail department anchors showed initial interest in going into a downtown mall, but the third and final anchor would not commit. Also, the other two anchors would not commit if the third anchor did not. If a private developer cannot get the tenants to commit, he or she typically understands that the market it not ready yet and will move on. The city and the BRA would not take no for an answer. From the late 1960s to 1987 the city and the BRA continued to push for the downtown retail mall even after Sears and JC Penny told them they would never go into a downtown mall.

The waiting is what caused the most damage to the Boise’s downtown eight-block core. Nobody knew what was going to happen downtown so nothing was done. Tenants did not want to invest in the properties they were renting because at any given time they could be asked to leave. Building owners did not want to invest in their buildings to entice good tenants in fear that they would not be fairly compensated for the money they

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recently invested in their buildings. The ominous gray cloud of renewal quickly began to kill any life in the downtown core including some life in many of the adjacent blocks. The retail mall was coming so everything else had to leave or be removed.

A layered approach to redevelopment would have worked much better in redeveloping downtown Boise. Instead of total demolition and rebuilding everything from square one, urban-infill could have been practiced. The funds from the HUD grants could have been used to again weave the blighted downtown areas back into the urban fabric of the city. The huge amounts of dollars spent of relocation, and court cases that grew from the relocation efforts could have been saved and spent towards fixing up the deteriorating downtown buildings. Also, many of the historic structures could have been renovated and fixed to compete with new office buildings in the suburbs.

Some structures in the eight-block area needed to be demolished. However, tackling projects one at a time would have allowed current merchants to continue to operate while the area slowly improved instead of completed paralyzing an area for 15 years by total desolation. As the area began progressing owners and tenants would have been more willing to invest in their properties. Momentum would take a little while to build, but 20 Million dollars is a lot of money to help start momentum. Plus momentum would not have had to start from scratch since some patrons already frequented the already existing stores.
Parcel demolition would have worked well. Newer buildings are needed and the larger buildings are more efficient to build. The downtown eight-block core probably could have attracted much large office building users who were building in the downtown area anyway. As mentioned in the history of Boise’s development, Boise is home of several major businesses’ headquarters. During this 15-year period many of the headquarters for these businesses were built in the downtown area, but not in the chief central business district because it was reserved for the downtown mall. Two examples are Morrison Knudsen that built moved into a huge campus just east of the downtown core, and J.R. Simplot’s Ore-Ida Corporation that built its large headquarters one block west of the eight-block area. Also, Hewellet-Packard chose in 1974 not to build in the downtown area at all--HP chose to build in the suburbs on the western edge of the city of Boise. No one knows for sure if any of Boise’s major companies would have built on the eight-block core downtown area, but the downtown core area would have been a natural choice for many of the companies to build their large office towers.

Although Boise’s Urban Renewal Process cost the city and many developers time, energy and millions upon millions of dollars, the process was not completely useless. As is the case with most major mistakes, valuable lessons can be identified and learned from. The mistakes of what went wrong have just been analyzed and discussed, now Boise must reflect on the lessons that can be learned and make them available to other cities.
Lessons Learned

Through the process of rejuvenating downtown Boise seven major lessons were learned. These lessons are:

- Cities must be willing to invest public money to entice private development.
- Cities need a financing tool to assist them in their redevelopment efforts.
- Cities should bring in outside expertise and professionals to help with the redevelopment process.
- Downtowns should not try and be something they are not—let downtowns be unique.
- Cities must program and hold events in their downtowns.
- Cities must create clear and realistic plans with everyone on board from the beginning.
- Place the betterment of the city before politics.

The first major lesson is that the city must be willing to invest public money into downtown. This occurred in the Boise’s downtown improvement story several times. First the city decided to use the rest of the federal grant money to begin building The Grove area to create a heart, a “place” to gather in downtown Boise. The community then followed the city’s lead by purchasing individual bricks to be placed in The Grove area. To add momentum to The Grove, Boise City again showed a willingness to invest public funds in downtown Boise by giving the ground for the future convention center to the Greater Boise Auditorium District for free. There is a long list of examples illustrating the willingness to invest public dollars downtown.
This same type of willingness to help entice private development downtown appears in nearly every one of CCDC's downtown projects. For example, the land for the Bank of America Center and The Grove Hotel was written down more than a half million dollars to ensure the hotel and the events center locate on The Grove. The Capitol Terrace is another example of a project that was able to go forward because CCDC agreed to pay for the parking structure if the developer would cover the costs of the retail development.

Without the investment of public funds, the recovery of downtown Boise would probably have taken much longer and perhaps it would never have recovered. After the original Urban Renewal Plan failed, a bad stigma existed about the eight-block area. Public money was needed to create a subsidy for the private developers so lower rents could be quoted to the market place.⁹ Without the lower rents the competition for downtown office and retail space would have been too powerful.

The second major lesson learned through improving downtown Boise parallels the first lesson. This lesson points out how important it is for a city to have a financial tool to be able to help induce private development in areas of need. In Boise's case Brent Coles had heard of Tax Increment Financing and legislation was later passed allowing the use of the financial tool in downtown Boise. There are other examples of financial tools that cities can use to help stimulate their downtowns such as the Melruse tax that is so popular in Orange County California.

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Tax Increment Financing was used in every deal CCDC worked on that dealt with any major development or renovation. As described earlier, this tool provided an important subsidy to that could entice private developers to the downtown development table. A town must have a tool to stir and create momentum in its downtown area.\(^\text{10}\)

In addition to aiding the stimulation of private development downtown, this financing tool enabled CCDC to make the streetscape improvements nicer than they otherwise would have been. The Tax Increment Financing allowed CCDC to spend a little more money on the benches, lighting, art, public landscaping, and street paving that developers would have been able to spend. These extras have made the streets of many Boise downtown blocks very desirable. The nicer improvements set precedence for the type and feel of adjacent developments as well as the architecture of many nearby buildings.

The third lesson learned is the importance of bringing in outside professionals. Boise brought in professional consultants from Portland, Oregon. These outside consultants were able to look at downtown Boise with fresh, objective eyes. These professionals helped all parties involved think critically about their physical environment. Many Boiseans were naive and uneducated as to the appearance and function of nice downtowns.\(^\text{11}\) Plus, Boise had never experienced the situation it was facing at that time. The consultants brought important lessons already learned by other cities that could be applied to downtown Boise.


Another important element the outside professionals brought to the process was a depoliticalizing effect. Having outside people without the baggage of the bloody battle between the suburban mall and the downtown mall really helped people on both sides seek for a solution instead of thinking about hurt feelings and egos.12

The consultants along with local downtown Boise firms and agencies began writing a new downtown plan called the Framework Plan. This plan was created with design and use at its core.13 The urban design principles described in the plan were the basis upon which CCDC wrote their development strategy for the eight-block renewal district.

Allowing downtowns to be downtowns is the fourth lesson learned while improving downtown Boise. For 15 years Boise’s government and several influential business people tried to make the downtown into a huge enclosed retail mall. This 15 year gridlock was only put to an end when the citizens of Boise decided to elect people into office with the vision and dedication to save downtown Boise. One of those elected officials was Brent Coles who often said during that period of time, “Cities need to focus on what is unique to their city and stop trying to compete with suburban retail malls. Let the market work and allow the mall to be developed in the suburbs.”14 Downtown Boise began doing much better as soon as it was willing to be a traditional mixed-use downtown.

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14 Coles, Brent. Mayor of Boise. Interview. July 9, 2000
Fortunately the coalition for a traditional mixed-use downtown won the majority of Boise’s City Council before all the historic buildings downtown were destroyed. Even though several great buildings were destroyed, Boise has been successful in renovating many historic buildings that currently add a great deal of nostalgia to its downtown. Downtown Boise currently has a thriving office and retail market as well as a growing residential population.

The fifth lesson that helped downtown Boise become a vibrant downtown is actively programming events downtown. It is crucial to have your celebrations downtown. All the major events in Boise are currently held downtown on The Grove. This has brought Boise citizens as well as many people from neighboring communities to downtown Boise. While downtown the people realize how neat downtown is and they often return. The events also make people more familiar with downtown. As people get use to coming downtown for entertainment, downtown becomes a natural choice for people to spend their freetime. Obviously as more people are brought downtown the retail, restaurants, and nightclubs all do better.

The Downtown Boise Association had to proactively create most of the current events now enjoyed downtown. If the events were not first created, there would not exist any events to hold downtown. Downtown Boise did not have many events 15 years ago. The creation of these events was crucial for the promotion of downtown Boise and enabling retail, restaurants and nightclubs to thrive in Boise’s Central Business District.

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The sixth lesson is to have a clear, realistic plan with everyone involved from the beginning. The key to this lesson is inclusion of all parties that will have to live with the plan. It is much easier to have everyone agree with the plan at the beginning than to try to get permission and approvals along the way. Once everyone is on board then it's simply a question of what tools are required to get the plan completed.\(^{17}\)

After the advocates for the suburban mall obtained the majority of Boise’s City Council, consultants were brought in, forums were held and ideas were critically analyzed. Many citizens and businesses took part in the talks and voiced their opinions. The result was a clear and realistic plan that all parties in the community agreed upon. All the advice could obviously not be incorporated into The Framework Plan, but all the ideas were discussed and heard. The community, the businesses, and the governmental agencies bought into The Framework Plan because they were included from the beginning. Once the plan was approved the implementation was much smoother because most of the potential hang-ups had already been discussed.

The last lesson is to put the betterment of the city before politics. There is no magic formula for this subjective lesson, only examples. Probably the most important and influential of all actions throughout the entire process was the choice by Brent Coles to begin to “mend the community.” Ron Twilegar and Brent Coles were victims of hardball local politics in 1983. Both men were ousted from the BRA’s Board by members of the

BRA Board and through a majority vote by City Council hours after their election to office. Two years later Ron Twilegar and Brent Coles had the opportunity to return the favor to the very people who had applied the pain two years earlier. Both men decided not to fight back and “try and begin to mend the community.”

Downtown Boise may look very different today if Ron and Brent had decided to humiliate many people who probably deserved being humiliated. Some residents believe Brent Coles is the person to credit for the way downtown Boise looks today. Egos would have been hurt and the politics could have erupted creating further delays in downtown Boise’s progress. The two men viewed the betterment of downtown Boise more important than revenge. Brent Coles said, “It was a hard thing not to sweep the members of the Board.”

**Conclusion**

Today downtown Boise enjoys pretty much the same types of uses that existed in Boise’s downtown 40 years ago. In a way a full circle has been made and a lot of time, energy, and money has been wasted along the way. One cannot help but think that downtown Boise would have been a lot better off if Urban Renewal Grants never existed. It is completely possible that if urban renewal efforts never existed, downtown Boise’s skyline would be one of impressive structures and envy for its size. However, it is possible that

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downtown Boise could have also continued to get a lot worse if urban renewal was never attempted.

Today’s cities need urban renewal efforts, however, if the efforts are done incorrectly, the damage may be far more severe than not attempting any action. Revitalizing cities is a difficult and sensitive task that should be attempted slowly and on a project by project basis. The key to revitalizing downtowns is to take those things that make the downtowns special and try and weave blighted areas into those successful unique areas.
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