

# Expert offers tips to give downtown a lift

March 17, 2006

BY JOHN GALLAGHER

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Christopher Leinberger, one of the nation's gurus of downtown redevelopment, told Detroiters on Wednesday that their downtown can become one of the nation's best.

A visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, D.C., as well as a professor of real estate at the University of Michigan, Leinberger suggested several strategies to the annual meeting of the Downtown Detroit Partnership, a civic and business leadership group.

His ideas, and a summary of where each stands in Detroit, included:

- Create a Business Improvement District. BIDs, supported by a small property-tax surcharge, are local, nonprofit management organizations that oversee landscaping, maintenance, marketing and other chores in a downtown area. Most successful cities, large and small, have benefited by creating BIDs. Current status: Resistance by tax-adverse state legislators and the Detroit City Council has scuttled Detroit's hopes for a BID for now, but the effort to create one continues.
- Create light-rail mass transit. Light rail is necessary to enhance the "walkable urbanity" that a revived downtown needs. "Detroit has got to get serious about transit," Leinberger said.

Current status: Aside from the People Mover, the metro Detroit region has been unable to agree on creating a mass-transit, light-rail system.

- Give the market what it wants. A big segment of today's buyers are bored with the suburbs and want a more urban lifestyle with multiple options within walking distance.

Current status: Detroit has taken steps toward this by creating loft residential units downtown and by opening more than 50 shops and restaurants in the past couple of years.

But as George Jackson, president of the Detroit Economic Growth Corp., said at the DDP meeting: "We cannot rest on our laurels. We have a lot of work to do."

- Use the waterfront. Many successful cities, including New York, Baltimore, Chicago, Portland, and Vancouver, have made waterfront redevelopment a cornerstone of their downtown revitalizations.

Current status: Detroit is well on its way toward this goal with construction under way on its planned RiverWalk and several waterfront residential and retail projects announced in recent weeks.

"What city wouldn't die to have your waterfront?" Leinberger told the DDP audience.

Contact **JOHN GALLAGHER** at 313-222-5173 or <https://web.mail.umich.edu/horde/services/go.php?url=mailto%3Agallagher%40freepress.com>