

Idaho Statesmen

‘Walkable urbanism’ expert to Boise: ‘We need you as a model.’

By BETHANN STEWART - bstewart@idahostatesman.com

Published: 04/22/09

[Comments \(9\)](#) | [Recommend \(3\)](#)

Ranking Downtown Boise third in the nation among metropolitan areas of its size, real estate developer Christopher B. Leinberger said he considered it the best in the Rocky Mountain West.

“This is a remarkable downtown,” he told more than 200 attendees Wednesday morning at the 22nd Annual State of Downtown Annual Meeting at Boise Centre on the Grove.

Leinberger is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He focuses on research and practices that help traditional downtowns provide “walkable urbanism.”

Using clips from “I Love Lucy” and “Back to the Future,” Leinberger dramatized the difference in suburban and walkable urban development strategies.

“The issue for you is to give people a choice,” he told the Boise crowd.

Some of the ideas he’d like Boise to consider in its future development are:

- A focus on residential and neighborhood shopping
- Rail transit to connect Hyde Park and neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown
- Expansion of investment center activities. For example, having one entity manage public and private parking.

“Today’s message from Mr. Leinberger underscores the importance of a Downtown streetcar — both for our livability and our economic vitality,” Mayor Dave Bieter wrote in an e-mail. “By making our downtown more walkable, we can limit our reliance on automobiles, attract new businesses, improve our air quality and create an even greater sense of community.”

TJ Thomson, who attended the event and plans to run for Boise City Council this year, said the city is on the right track but more work needs to be done.

“We need to connect the cities and the neighborhoods with more bike paths and walkable areas,” Thomson said.

According to Leinberger, the reasons for the increased demand for pedestrian friendly urban centers areas are:

- Baby boomers are becoming empty nesters, and many are choosing to live where they can walk to amenities.
- Many people want a yard for their kids, but today, only a third of new households have children, compared to 1950 when 50 percent of new households had kids. Over the next 20 years, only 14 percent of new households will have children.
- Boredom with the driveable suburban model, where more turns out to be less. For example, neighborhood associations form to keep out strip malls, not bring them in.
- The sheer expense of maintaining a household fleet of vehicles.