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UM land-use strategist: Detroit poised for downtown redevelopment

By [Robert Ankeny](#)

Detroit is poised to "jump to the front of a long line of cities around the country" that are reviving downtowns, a land-use strategist and developer told the annual meeting of the **Downtown Detroit Partnership** on Thursday.

Christopher Leinberger, director of the graduate real estate development certificate program at the **University of Michigan**, said such revivals are market-driven. He said recent surveys indicate that between one-third and one-half of people in many regions want what he calls "walkable urbanity."

Leinberger said this means generation-Xers want to live where they can find shopping, entertainment and even jobs within a 1,500-foot walk of their homes.

Leinberger, who also is a visiting fellow at the Washington-based **Brookings Institution**, said a redeveloped downtown Detroit also should reflect the region.

"It should become a community living room and dining room — the only place in Southeast Michigan where the area's diverse populations can meet and socialize," he said.

Many other downtowns have made radical turnarounds in the past 10 years, Leinberger said, citing midtown Manhattan, Chicago's Loop area, Washington, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Baltimore. Detroit can learn from these cities, Leinberger said.

But Detroit also should recognize and build on what already has been done, he said. Only Washington, with about \$4.5 billion invested in the past five years, is close to what Detroit has, with between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in recent investment downtown.

Leinberger also said downtown Detroit must adopt a business-improvement district, an area in which businesses voluntarily tax themselves to pay for landscaping, beautification and cleanup work beyond basic services the city provides.

"Downtown is the largest, most complex mixed-use real estate development in the region, and it needs to be managed," Leinberger said.

Ann Lang, the Downtown Detroit Partnership's president and CEO, said creating a BID is high on the group's agenda for 2006.

[Courtesy of Crain's Detroit Business](#)