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## What Went Wrong At The Pike?

Panelists Discuss Potential Solutions For Underperforming Retail Center

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What happens when a \$130 million, 369,000-square-foot retail and entertainment complex turns its back on the neighboring waterfront? Well, according to several developers, consultants and urban planning specialists, the result looks a little like The Pike at Rainbow Harbor development, which has been plagued by a lack of pedestrian foot traffic despite a seemingly ideal downtown location (bounded by Pine Avenue, Rainbow Harbor, Chestnut Avenue and Seaside Way) and a 2000 Project Planning Award from the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Planning Association.

A five-member panel, chaired by former Long Beach Planning Commissioner Doug Otto, met on April 10 at the Aquarium of the Pacific to consider the challenges of the Pike and discuss potential solutions for the future. "Long Beach has a storied relationship with the water, but if you look at this development, its relationship with the water is tortured at best," Otto said, citing its uninviting blank walls, parking and access problems, retail vacancies and isolated nature. "What happened to the vision of the Pike?"

Linda Congleton, principal of real estate and retail market consulting firm Linda S. Congleton & Associates, believes the development fails to target the needs of an urban community. "When I look at the Pike project, it's almost like Anyplace, America. It doesn't really reflect the diversity that we have." She suggested leasing to retailers not found in malls and planning for the residents. "If you make a project really exciting for the locals, the visitors will come.

"The city should focus on for-sale housing," she added. "The more you have people living downtown . . . the more they have a stake in their home. We have a saying in the retail business and it goes like this: retail follows residential. Not the other way around."

For Mark Winogrand, former acting executive director of the Los Angeles City Planning Department, the root of the problem is more basic. "[The Pike] got disconnected from its waterfront," he said. "The organic connection to the waterfront in the past was a healthier relationship than a master plan."

The first step, he asserted, is to address the "enormous barriers" created by major arterial streets such as Shoreline Drive, which act as a deterrent to pedestrians. "Many other places have solved this. It can be done." Winogrand pointed out some successful examples of places that have rediscovered their waterfronts, including San Francisco, Chicago and New York. "The discussion about waterfront reconnection is

more important right now. It's partly up to the city to work with the community and find the solutions." Part of the solution is a city that works with its community, he said. "Is there a leadership willing to stand up and attempt to make a difference?"

The answer, according to Long Beach's Director of Planning and Building Suzanne Frick, is yes. Given that the city is currently updating its General Plan, now is an opportune time to plan for the long term, especially with 6,000 residential housing units (4,000 for sale) in the pipeline. "It is too early to tell whether this project is truly going to be a success or a failure," she said. It is absolutely not perfect, but with the construction and development . . . I think there's great potential. Cities evolve over time and one project does not make or break a particular city." As examples, she noted Santa Monica and Pasadena, cities that achieved their visions through incremental changes that occurred over two decades.

"We have to understand how it all fits together," she said, as she unveiled preliminary planning software – unofficially called Downtown Visioning – that will allow city staff to get an integrated, three-dimensional view of proposed projects in the downtown area. Public participation will also be sought, she added. "We have the ability to make a difference and really restore Long Beach."

As president and CEO of The Ratkovich Company – a developer that specializes in urban infill and rehabilitation projects like Edgewater at Ocean – Wayne Ratkovich sees the Pike running counter to urban revitalization and the natural organic growth of a city. "Really great cities come from its [residents]. I wouldn't discard the tourist, but the priority should be the citizens."

And, he said, if it's the best course of action, rebuilding a portion of the project could be a good thing. "Tearing down something won't be the worst thing the city's ever done."

Like the other panelists, Alan Pullman, associate and director of design at Perkowitz + Ruth Architects' urban design studio, recommended an overhaul of what he calls "Styrofoam" urbanism.

"The Pike is an example of good intentions gone bad," he said, pointing out the freeway-like streets as the "biggest" urban design problem. "There are nice things . . . but the streets are treated like blank walls. . . . Shoreline [Drive] should be an urban boulevard – not an extension of the freeway."

Pullman, however, acknowledged that any redesign process would be a lengthy one and proposed several immediate ways of improving the property, including better maintenance, operations and parking management; the creation of larger zones for foot traffic; and aesthetic improvements such as temporary art and more welcoming seating areas. "We just have to reclaim our waterfront from bad planning," he said.

The Pike at Rainbow Harbor opened in 2003, and is currently managed by Cleveland-based real estate firm Developers Diversified Realty, which declined to attend the forum. Anchor tenants include Cinemark Theatres, Borders, GameWorks and Bubba Gump Shrimp Company. The vacancy rate is approximately 17 percent.