

Phoenix History: The Imagined Future

By Jessica Scott

The idea of Phoenix having a real “downtown” is something that is being emphasized more and more. Many people know of the revitalization efforts going on if they spend time in downtown Phoenix and since Phoenix was pretty late to the game for downtown revitalization there is a lot that has not been done yet. The efforts now are just the beginning of what is going to happen which leaves a lot of untapped opportunity left for people to start investing into their community.

With efforts from organizations like Local First and Downtown Voices, people are much more interested in supporting local shops over big-box stores, going to public events and being involved in civic life. Another popular topic for future Phoenix is the idea of building up rather than out. Vertical urban growth is also something that is going to be emphasized as more people wish to preserve the natural beauty of Phoenix and the distinct desert environment that is here. The outer regions of Phoenix such as Gilbert, Mesa and Laveen will probably have to start creating city-centers for their residents to become involved in to provide a little piece of the “city life” in their suburban areas. Some of the bigger projects that are going to affect Phoenix the most are the expansion of the light rail, the continued push for educational connections and the challenge of giving Phoenix its own identity.

These three projects will be pivotal in Phoenix future development. The light rail expansion will make transportation to and from downtown Phoenix much more desirable and accessible for people which will keep people and ideas connected. It will also promote public transportation as a safe and easy way to travel in Phoenix in the 21st century. Another key player

in the development of Phoenix will be its connections with the educational campuses as they continue to grow. Making Phoenix an educational hub will offer a lot of opportunity for newly-graduated students to get involved in their growing and strengthening Phoenix community through revitalization efforts.

Keeping new and fresh ideas from the younger generation will be important as Phoenix works through the process of gaining its own unique identity as well. For example, a Phoenix Observation Tower has been proposed, although the location is yet to be determined. This new piece of architecture could possibly include a dynamic viewing and observation space, terrace bar and café, high-end restaurant, event space for catered events, a viewing gallery for special art and cultural exhibits, evening lounge and nightclub. The architects responsible for the design describe the tower as “an architectural emblem worthy of [Phoenix’s] emerging status.”

Other large events like the Super Bowl will be important in bringing people into Phoenix to see improvements and developments. As important as it is to keep people in the community connected and involved in the future development of Phoenix, it will be equally important for people from other cities to see the positive growth happening in Phoenix.

Civic life will have to be majorly emphasized in the development of Phoenix’s new identity. When people are involved they feel invested, and when they are invested they care. A new passion for living in Phoenix will emerge as community building efforts are emphasized and provided more easily for people.

Built environment in Phoenix will get a drastic overhaul in the future. With additions of the new city-centers in neighboring cities and additions of the light rail to reach more people. All of these are important in utilizing what Phoenix already has rather than adding more to the already dense cityscape that exists.

Major community assets for future Phoenix will be its social capital. With the revitalization efforts and major projects like the Hance Park Master Plan, people will be more open and willing to spend time outdoors with other Phoenix residents. Neighborhood associations coming back will offer a support system closer to home for residents also while providing a platform for people to start getting to know their neighbors again. As neighborhoods make these changes they will become more established and people will not use Phoenix as a transitional place, but as a forever home.

Challenges for future Phoenix will be getting people to invest financially in Phoenix again. The economic devastation left a lot of people shaken up and weary to invest in efforts that they do not see to have immediate and positive effects on the Phoenix economy. Social factors such as financial, racial and social inequality will probably surface as well. Integrating all populations into the development of Phoenix's new identity will be absolutely crucial in keeping people involved and invested in what is a great place now and what will be an even better place in the future.