



Congress Street bridge plan

Grand Plans

Exhibit shows 70 years of unrealized development ideas for Downtown Tucson

by Teya Vitu

Rio Nuevo has riled Tucsonans for a decade. Yet Rio Nuevo is just one of some 100 Downtown master plans, comprehensive plans and studies that have continuously bubbled up since 1932.

Perhaps not surprisingly, nearly each of these plans, whether 1941, 1979 or Rio Nuevo of 1999, relish the same ground: more trees, wider sidewalks, a more attractive city, etc.

"Every master plan deals with the same issues," local architect Bill Mackey said.

And, for the most part, these plans remained dreams sitting on a bookshelf or hidden in a box.

"A plan is just a plan: the sense that something will happen with a plan. That doesn't necessarily mean it will," Design Co-op member Kim Eisele said.

Several plans in the 1970s and 1980s suggested ideas for a new main library. Mackey counted seven different proposed sites for what became the Joel D. Valdez Main Library, "not one of them was the site where the library is at."

Since June, Mackey and Eisele have teamed up with graphic designer Julie Ray and artist Rachelle Diaz, both from Pop-Up Spaces, to dust off as many master plans as they could find from more than a dozen sources.

"We've been wrestling with (master planning) for 60 years," Ray said. "There were more plans than we thought."

They will display all these plans in an exhibition called "1932: Downtown Master Plans, 1932-2002" at the McLellan Building, 63 E. Congress St. The soft opening is from 4 to 7 p.m. Oct. 2. The grand opening is from 6 to 10 p.m. Oct. 3. The exhibit will be open on subsequent Saturday evenings from 6 to 10 p.m. Oct. 10, 17 and 24.

"A Guide to the Master Plans of Downtown Tucson" will be available for \$5. It will offer summaries of master plans spanning the decades. A 1943 plan, for example, opened with "Tucson has the opportunity to become one of the most attractive communities in America." Sixty-one years later, just this summer, the Arizona Daily Star be-

IF YOU GO

What: +/- -92: Downtown Master Plans 1932-2002

When: 4-7 p.m. Oct. 2; 6-10 p.m. Oct. 3, 10, 17 and 24

Where: McLellan Building, 63 E. Congress

Info: PopUpSpaces.org

moaned the visually unappealing approaches into Tucson.

The plans will be contrasted with 92 recent Downtown photos "of what a beautiful and unique place Downtown Tucson is." Visitors will be asked to post comments right by the pictures on what they like or don't like. There also will be a timeline setting the plans in relation to events in 20th century history.

Mackey, Ray, Diaz and Eisele will be on hand each evening to interact with visitors, and Eisele will serve as a self-described "apparatchik" to collect and process public input.

"One of the questions I want people to ask is why does it matter?" Mackey said. "Why do we care about Downtown Tucson? There's no other area in Tucson that has as much written about it in planning terms."

Mackey found that master planning in Tucson started in earnest in 1932 with what he describes as "a preliminary investigation to do a plan; if you pay me this much, I'll do it," which resulted in Tucson's oldest comprehensive plan from 1941.

"One of the thoughts I want people to leave with is that planning on a small scale leads to so much more suc-

cess than planning on a large scale," Mackey said.

Ray and Diaz and their Pop-Up Spaces collaboration seek to draw attention to the dozens of vacant Downtown buildings and inspire public input on how to revive these buildings. In spring, they put on a scavenger hunt, where people were given clues to "find" vacant buildings and then write down their thoughts about them. They presented the results at the same McLellan Building hosting the master plan exhibit.

They believe people's opinions about Downtown will change favorably simply by coming Downtown, wandering around and checking out the historic buildings. Parts of the McLellan Building, for example, are home to On a Roll Sushi and a new Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches under construction.

"Getting people into a space and interacting with a space makes a real difference," Diaz said.

Which brings up the question what it will take for Downtown Tucson to be successful?

"There are so many definitions of what is successful for Downtown. That has never been defined in any of these documents," Mackey said. "Since 1943, they have been talking about planting trees in Downtown. Enough. Let's just plant our own trees."

The foursome pondered why have all these plans largely remained paper dreams, never carried out.

"It has to do with the transient nature of Tucson," Mackey concluded, using Ray to illustrate this. "Julie Ray comes to town five years ago, gets real interested in doing something and then burns out or moves away."

"There's a perception that 'they' should do something," Eisele said. "There is no 'they.' It's what do 'I' bring to it." "It's more on an individual level on how you choose to be involved," said Diaz, founder of the Tu Scene blog.

"We want to continue to ask people to look at where they live and what's good about it," Eisele continued. "And if there's something not good about it, what are you going to do about it? What is the relationship between the 'I' and the 'they'?"

"It's a perception," Diaz said. "Why does that perception exist? There is no 'they.'"