

# Those inner-city 'magnets' are a big draw

## Chester Smolski

His firm was the first to build the enclosed shopping malls that we find scattered throughout the suburbs today. It brought symphony orchestras and art museums into these malls. It was the first to provide extensive landscaping to these regional shopping centers, and which the company strives to make into community centers as well as centers of retail activity. And the most successful new town in this country, built completely with private funds, is the work of this company.

Yet none of their 26 regional shopping centers spread throughout this country and Canada nor their new town of Columbia has generated as much excitement as its recent \$30 million investment in three old, derelict buildings located in the heart of Boston. The Faneuil Hall Marketplace has done more to revive interest and hope in city centers as places that offer new opportunities for increased retail activity than has any recent downtown activity.

James Rouse, Chairman of the Board of the Rouse Company, speaks with conviction and authority on center city revitalization for it is his firm which is bringing business back to central business districts, those cores of the downtowns. His company's Faneuil Hall Marketplace made use of existing buildings to create the "hottest piece of real estate in the country", generating in its first year of operation more than 10 million visitors, a number greater than that which visited Disneyworld.

The other Rouse Company inner city development is in Philadelphia, just six blocks east of City Hall. Here it is a new building, The Gallery, connecting a Gimbels and a Strawbridge and Clothier at four levels, at Market East which opened in late 1977. The Gallery will generate sales of more than \$200 per square foot, twice that commonly found in suburban malls and close to the \$275 per square foot in the Faneuil Hall Marketplace.

These two marketplaces are the generators of increased people traffic into the downtowns, and it is this increase in numbers of people which has spilled over to other retailers in the downtown. This is the key to increased retail activity in city centers, the development of a "magnet" that is unique, lively, exciting, fun and a pleasant place in which to shop. Interestingly, The Gallery has parking available for its shoppers while the Faneuil Hall Marketplace has none, and yet they come,

at the rate of 30,000 per day to the Faneuil Hall.

In speaking to the stockholders of the Associated Merchandising Corporation at their annual meeting held last month James Rouse listed the following requirements for a successful downtown marketplace, based upon the Rouse Company's experience in two cities and which will next be used in Baltimore, Milwaukee and Columbus:

1. The city must take the steps necessary to make the venture possible. It is not enough to be eager and optimistic; more important, the city must face up to its responsibility and, in addition, it must have the organization (few do) necessary to carry out the process.
2. Downtown department stores must be leaders in the commitment to downtown. This includes store improvements, upgraded merchandise and longer opening hours.
3. Planning and design are critically important. Most regional shopping malls would fail badly downtown. A mall would be regarded simply as what it is, another regional center. Therefore, why bother?
4. There must be a searching sensitivity to the city itself and how it sees itself in terms of traditions, needs and personality.
5. The space must be carefully merchandised to produce the mix of uses that fits the need and gives life to the marketplace. In Boston, the Company invented the pushcart, the one page lease and the one week term in order to get the variety and the occupancy required for the opening.
6. It must be financeable. Success in a downtown center is not accepted in advance, as it fairly well is in a regional center with two major department stores. The lenders must be sold and every point of the project must be so good it supports the sale.

The experience of the Rouse Company in city centers should be examined carefully by the City of Providence and its merchants. The proposed Textron development of a mini-Faneuil Hall Marketplace at Union Station could be just the type of magnet that could draw many more shoppers to the downtown and, on a smaller scale, the Providence downtown could experience the same retailing resurgence now evident in Boston.

The well known planner William Whyte reminds us that the city has an identity and is unique: this is not true with shopping malls, which could be in Atlanta, Santa Barbara or Warwick. The city needs to capitalize on its uniqueness. And this is exactly what the Rouse Company has done with its widely hailed Faneuil Hall and Gallery — while who has ever heard of any one of their 26 shopping malls?

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