

Duplicate

Preferred location for a jewelry trade center is downtown Providence

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WHEN the state of Rhode Island determined that a new court facility was needed in the Providence area in the late 1970s, a strong case was made to locate it on state land near the Adult Correctional Institution in Cranston. A site there would have adequate space for parking, easy access off of Route 95 and a proximity of court to jail that would seem to make it a natural choice, given our propensity to site buildings and functions with deference to cars rather than people.

Recognizing the potential economic impact of having the proposed court in downtown Providence, the Providence Foundation, an arm of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, quickly put together a proposal with five possible downtown sites to be considered. It took time to convince au-

thorities of the logic of having a court near an existing court and a location where poor people who relied on public transportation could have easy access to it. Wisely, the choice was made to build the J. Joseph Garrahy Judicial Complex in the southern part of the city center. The results of that 1981 construction have had a significant and visible impact on the downtown.

It is important that people working in the courts be located near them, and this one locational decision has served to retain members of the legal profession and their support groups in the city center rather than near a court house in Cranston. Further, old buildings that might have been razed over time have been refurbished and now house law offices and other court-related activities around the Dorrance Street court site. Inconsequential as some might think, this one locational decision has been very influential in restoring the strength of the central business district.

On such decisions, be they public or

private, rest the fate of cities and their downtowns. Relocation from cities to suburbs of residents, retailing and jobs has sapped the strength of central cities, so future locational choices, especially of jobs, will determine what the future of our cities is to be.

Right now there is an important private sector locational decision being considered. Two developers have proposed building a jewelry trade center, something that has been studied before. One, The 295 Group, from Woonsocket, would build a center at the junction of Routes 146 and 295 in the Lincoln suburbs while a second has proposed a facility in the existing Foundry development of the Providence downtown.

So here we have a classic locational decision for the jewelry trade — suburban site with acres of parking, easy access off of major highways and a new hotel and restaurants. It works for the malls, so why not for a jewelry trade center?

By contrast, the city site at the

Foundry incorporates existing buildings with good access off of Route 95 under construction and parking provided. But here we have narrow streets and congestion.

The real question is where does such a center belong? Providence claims to be the jewelry center of this nation and all aspects of the trade are in the city, so what would be a more appropriate setting than former factories of this industrial community.

Ambience and history are worthy of consideration in site decisions just as rental versus condominium spaces are necessary points to consider. Further, when the jewelry trade show is held twice each year it means that visiting business men and women have a variety of offerings in accommodations, restaurants and evening entertainment. And this is done best in a variegated environment as opposed to a quiet, suburban setting.

Convention and exhibit areas need to be concentrated with already exist-

ing central functions found in the city so that a critical mass of people and activities are available to increase the marketing potential of Providence and ensure the success of ventures, such as a Providence Place. And since this decision is a private one, the city of Providence would be well advised to work with the Foundry officials and jewelry trade to ensure its proper location in the capital city.

When the jewelry trade group is winned and dined soon by The 295 Group as they explain their project, the jewelry people should remember their origins and their potential contribution to a better capital city for Rhode Island, as the Garrahy Complex has demonstrated. The 295 Group has an excellent available site for some type of activity, but a jewelry trade center is not one of them.

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