



Downtown Bloomington: What's to Become of You?

This, I believe, is a pivotal time in the evolution of downtown Bloomington. As we emerge from the Great Recession, the commercial center of our town is undergoing profound change and it's going to change even more in the next couple of years.

Right now Bloomington looks like a little Shanghai. In every direction apartment complexes are going up and most have commercial space on their ground floors. Even more buildings will soon be on the rise, including a couple strictly for businesses. New retail space is available on West Hillside and along the B-Line Trail. Plus, on and around the downtown Square there are more than the usual number of storefronts waiting for occupants.

What kinds of businesses are going to move into all this retail space?

Mayor Mark Kruzan and City Council want to impose strict guidelines that might deter or disqualify chain restaurants from opening downtown. Those who oppose the idea say it's a solution to a nonexistent problem and to let the free market rule. Those in favor worry about childhood obesity and a glut of minimum wage jobs, and fear that if a P.F. Chang's were to open on West 4th Street, it would wipe out every Asian restaurant in the vicinity.

Many citizens have expressed concern regarding the number of bars and restaurants downtown and worry that the area around the square might become Kirkwood Avenue 2.0.

There are Bloomingtonians who lust for an Anthropologie, a Restoration Hardware, a Whole Foods, or a Trader Joe's — thus saving a road trip to Indy. And there are those for whom the very idea of more national chains moving into the downtown is abhorrent.

I've heard people say they want a hardware store on the downtown Square, or a drugstore, a small food-and-flower market, an upscale linen-and-bath shop, a phone store, a movie theater, a Chinese restaurant, a meat market, or any place that sells gum. Retailers on the downtown Square want businesses that won't compete with them and that draw more people downtown.

The businesses that ultimately occupy this cornucopia of retail space will, in large measure, define our downtown for years to come.

Tell me, what kind of businesses do you want?

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