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FILLING VACANT STOREFRONTS AFTER THE PANDEMIC



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

I am currently in Portland OR on my cross-country journey to evaluate the recovery from the 2021 lockdown. I was deeply impressed by the transformative power of innovative strategies and the strategic use of ground-floor retail. These approaches are not only breathing new life into the towns but also fostering a sense of optimism and advancement.

I thought one of the towns, Demmings, New Mexico, had a model for other small towns. They just offered more space to merchants and combined storefronts. In a way, it was easy to see that they did not need that much space, and the spacing of the inventory required creativity.

This strategy applies only to the owner of a double storefront or a group of stores. In Demmings, I am not sure who owns what, but it looked like it covered most of the storefronts. In many towns, investors do own multiple properties, but in many cases, the properties are not adjacent, so

this strategy will not work everywhere.

I have also seen some towns use theme space like miniature gold and golf instruction that looked like they had a driving range in the building based on size. There were many variations, including large escape rooms and houses with mirrors. People are getting innovative concerning the rental of space.

While in San Francisco Haight Ashbury section, I talked to Ken, a clothing retailer who told me that there was an influx of "vintage" stores.

(Continued on page 40)

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DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from page 38)

Ken and I had a long conversation about the meaning of these stores. He indicated that they were thrift stores to serve the rapidly growing class of people who could not afford new clothes.

Then I stopped and met Tom from the anarchist bookstore. He sold me a few posters and a book about Banksy murals, and we discussed whether he had a new clientele with the unrest in the city. Discussion led to the fact that many of the “people” are being squeezed out of San Francisco.

Reading the news while back in Philly, I was a little concerned about my safety in San Francisco. Someone was reported missing the night before I arrived, and I thought it might be risky. None of that was true. I could walk around taking pictures with a clipboard in hand, and everyone was friendly.

In San Francisco’s Castro area, some of the store owners came out to chat and gave me insights into the street. One realtor and I spoke for about 15 minutes on the real estate market and its ability and impact on investors and the average income person.

Gas was much more expensive in California. There were gas stations selling for \$5.08 per gallon, and across the street, it was selling for \$5.85. There were lines at both stations. I’m not sure how that works, but it gave me something to think about on my way to Portland.

When I got to Portland, I realized there might be a safety issue as I paid \$102 for a top-tier hotel but had to pay \$66 a night to park. But again, my fears were proven false as people were friendly to me in Portland. They were not as nice as they were in San Francisco, but I was never bothered. Almost everyone wears black, and again, I am not sure what that means as I am a blue guy.

There has been lots of construction on the roadways. Massive infrastructure projects are fixing bridges and roads. They have led to driving delays, but it has not been drastic. I think that the infrastructure bill passed by Congress has played a big part in everyone getting on the same page and doing road projects.

Being on the road like this is a challenge for an old man like me. I have about 400 gigs of music on my phone so that I can be



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entertained. The magnetic storm threw my blue tooth off a couple of times in crucial GIS situations, but other than that, personal travel has been uneventful. I am pretty self-contained as I remembered what I did wrong last trip, and I was more familiar with the locales.

Last time, I could not find my documents at a border stop, but this time, I not only had my driver's license handy but also my global entry Homeland Security card. It enabled me to proceed without the dogs sniffing my car. It was an uneventful stop. There are many checkpoints throughout the area

in New Mexico, Arizona, and as you arrive in California.

I am classifying all the store occupants by the North American Industry Classification System and hope to write a more detailed summary when I return home. It takes a little time, but I have the documents for all of the vacancies in the 70 cities I visited and should be able to determine and identify some trends.

I like being on the road but I can't wait to get home again.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.

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