

The streets we walk down, the people we encounter—
play a huge role in shaping who we are and how we act
[and] relatively small elements in the environment
can serve as Tipping Points.

— Malcolm Gladwell *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* 2002

Tipping point

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When I lived in Paris, I wished I were there in the 1860s, as the city was undergoing dramatic social and urban transformations that marked its destiny. When I lived in New York, I wished I were there in the 1910s when massive migration and city building were forming its inimitable character. And when I lived in Los Angeles, I wished I had been there in the 1950s, its defining decade. Living in Phoenix over the last seven years, I have felt that I am finally in the right place at the right time.

This is Phoenix's moment. Like Paris, New York, and Los Angeles at their critical junctures, Phoenix is home to an impressive concentration of talent, energy, and vision attracted in large part by the possibilities made available by rapid growth. This is a city on the verge of blossoming. We have lately been sowing the seeds of a vibrant and livable downtown. Those of us who are here now have the opportunity and the responsibility to nurture these seeds so that they flourish, bestowing rich harvests upon us and future generations.

This special section of *Shade* presents proposals from the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at ASU for revitalizing downtown Phoenix. Cities across the country are currently experiencing renaissances. Eight of the ten largest cities are growing in population. Nationwide, crime has dropped precipitously and urban employment, income, and fiscal health are all on the rise. After decades of urban decline and suburban growth, we are witnessing a significant move back to cities by people who were finding suburban life too isolated, inconvenient, or dull. As a result, there has been a flurry of reinvestment in central cities. Over the last decade, Portland (OR), Seattle, Denver, San Diego, Kansas City (KS), Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, Cleveland, Albuquerque, Little Rock (AR), Alexandria (VA), Missoula (MO), and Charlottesville (VA), among others, have made substantial inroads into downtown revitalization.

Phoenix, soon to be the fifth largest city in the United States, is currently poised to join this cadre of urban renaissances.

Arizona Republic columnist Jon Talton wrote 3 ½ years ago: "Phoenix has missed out on much of the national downtown revival that has been a hallmark for the New Economy the past 10 years. And as anybody from Detroit can tell you, a cratered center city is a ghastly liability." The solution, Talton maintained, "isn't about silver bullets. It's about a long march to repair the civic malpractice and economic mistakes of four decades. It's about arriving at a tipping point where capital and experienced companies see downtown as a natural development destination" (3.10.01).

Phoenix seems perched upon that tipping point at this very moment. The proposals that follow aim to tip the scales towards vitality.

While mending the heart of the city, the benefits of downtown Phoenix revitalization also extend to the larger metropolis. Growing at a rate of two acres an hour (48 acres a day!), the Phoenix metropolitan area suffers from urban fragmentation, social isolation, and environmental degradation. Currently, downtown Phoenix provides approximately 1/3 of the region's employment, but a significantly smaller fraction of the region's residences. The required commuting increases traffic congestion, diminishes air quality, and reduces quality time. In addition, the lack of a strong residential base downtown precludes a vibrant urban landscape for those wishing to live or work in one, or simply desiring to visit one. As a result, the call for "urban infill" has been loud and insistent, though we have little to show for it as yet.

The creation of a truly thriving downtown in the largest municipality of this metro area (and the State of Arizona) would offer an alternative to sprawl while contributing to furnish the sense of place, character, and soul currently lacking. It would render Phoenix more attractive to corporate headquarters, talented and enterprising people, and tourists, thereby enhancing economic vitality. It would welcome all who choose to partake of an urban lifestyle, enhancing cultural vitality. And it would become a source of pleasure and pride for the entire Valley.

Building Community... One Relationship at a Time



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Many of the proposals presented here were developed in several classes I've taught on downtown revitalization. In identifying opportunities for bringing more life into the urban core of Phoenix, we initially posed some very basic questions: What are the needs of people in cities? And how might cities better support these needs? In contrast to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs advanced in 1943, our responses would more accurately be described as a network, including the needs to:

**Live/Work, Love, Learn, Laugh,
Breathe, Belong, Appreciate, Practice,
Express, Explore, Exchange,
Connect, Consume, Cultivate, Create, Circulate,
Communicate, Commemorate, Celebrate,
Recreate, Reflect, Remember, ...**

In honoring these needs, our bywords became:

— The 5 qualities of an Integral Urbanism:
**Hybridity, Connectivity, Porosity, Authenticity,
and Vulnerability** (see Ellin, Shade 2003)

— The 4 D's: **Diversity**: Social diversity of income, ethnicity and race, age, physical abilities, sexual orientations, etc.

Density: Of buildings, people, and uses. **Democracy**: Public process and community participation. **Dynamism**: Design for flexibility (change) and the unexpected (excitement).

— The 5 S's: **Simplicity, Slowness, Sincerity, Spirituality, and Sustainability**.

The recommendations that follow are organized along the themes of Nature & the City, Great Civic Spaces, Arts & Culture, The Car & the City, and Education & the City. In addition to imagining **what** might improve the livability of Phoenix, we have also begun asking **how** to get there from here, offering some pointed suggestions for implementation. We hope that this anthology of proposals for Phoenix to flourish — some of which have already begun moving forward — will serve as a source of inspiration to proactively build our community at this pivotal historic juncture. Right here right now.