



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember
Raul Peralez

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: May 11, 2015

Approved

Date

5-11-15

INFORMATION

SUBJECT: Summary Report from Councilmember Raul Peralez regarding May 4 - May 5, 2015 Portland Study Tour.

BACKGROUND

I was invited by both the Knight Foundation and 8-80 Cities to attend a two-day comprehensive study tour of Portland, Oregon.

The Knight Foundation recently selected San José as one of their recipients of a Knight Cities Challenge for a project activating the ground level of the San Pedro Street Garage. This study tour was offered to San José and other recipients of the Knight Cities Challenge, and included elected officials, senior staff, and community and business leaders. San José had four representatives, plus our local Knight Foundation representative Daniel Harris. The three other San José participants were: B.J. Sims – Division Manager with Office of Economic Development, Rosalynn Hughey – Assistant Director of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, and Ryan Sebastian – Owner of Treat Bot and Moveable Feast.

The tour engaged us in the process of neighborhood change and demonstrated the role that local businesses play in stimulating place-making. Each day was packed with an intense agenda of both bus and walking tours, including numerous pre-planned stops and engaging conversations with small business owners along the way.

ANALYSIS

I had numerous observations and lessons learned during the trip, but I feel most compelled to share the following reflections:

1) Ease of walkability:

The layout in Downtown Portland is a very walkable grid and I found it most interesting that I never had to push a “walk” button. In the downtown core, Portland has pre-programmed the lights and/or placed sensors so that the pedestrian experience is equally, if not more, enjoyable than driving a car.

2) Mandatory ground floor activation:

Downtown Portland has an ordinance that requires all new developments to create active ground floors. The best example and contrast I drew was that of the public parking garages. In Portland, they had all ground floor retail below their public garage. I think about how great this would have been for a garage in San José such as that of San Pedro Square. Moving forward, this may be an idea we could pursue.

3) Moratorium on surface level parking lots:

Portland wants to be a city that caters to all modes of transportation and has shifted its focus away from vehicles. One such way they have done this is by placing a moratorium on any surface level parking lots in the downtown area.

4) Food truck pods:

Portland is fairly famous for their innovation with food truck pods. These are similar to our very own Moveable Feast, but they are permanent locations, still with moveable vendors. There are several hundred in the city and they have been used to revitalize empty lots and permanently redevelop areas after the pod successfully leases for a year or two. The diversity and community created by these pods was very impressive and I would love to see San José support something similar.

5) Place-making is unique to each community:

One of the best lessons I learned was that we just can't create popular or exciting places with architecture or design. We can't physically build community. People congregate somewhere because of how they feel and based on who else is there. Certainly architecture and design can help, but without a positive experience, people will not likely return or recommend the location to a friend.

Portland has become a city of choice for small business entrepreneurs and progressive urbanites. San José is also a city of choice, but even more unique than Portland and many other cities in that we are quite the diverse mecca of people, culture, landscape, and most recently, we have begun to live up to our slogan as being the Capitol of the Silicon Valley.

Finally, I will add that the tour ended with a challenge. All participating cities were challenged to come up with a plan to implement a lesson learned in Portland in their own community. One winner will be awarded \$100,000 to implement that idea. I believe San José has a great chance to be awarded this grant and I will update the Council once that process is complete.