

City, developer can both benefit by investment in neglected gems



[Yasmina Chavez](#)

Volunteers paint during the BYOB! Bring Your Own Brush community painting party, which is part of the Huntridge revitalization efforts, Saturday, Sept. 28, 2013

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When business acumen and a strong sense of community come together, incredible things can happen. Las Vegas developer J Dapper is proving it with his work in the city's core.

Dapper is the catalyst in an ongoing transformation of the area around Maryland Parkway and Charleston Boulevard, where he resurrected the Huntridge Shopping Center and nearby properties that had fallen into deep decay. With the support of nearby residents, the Las Vegas native restored the shopping center's midcentury modern look and is adding a period-styled building that will house two restaurants. Meanwhile, he took on two other initiatives to benefit the neighborhood surrounding his properties — a mural project and the revival of Huntridge Circle Park.

In an interview last week with the Sun, Dapper said his work in the area was rewarding on two levels.

“I can tell you I have a desire to continue to develop in downtown, because it does make economic sense. There’s no doubt about that — I have proof,” he said. “I’ve developed quite a few different projects that have been financially very successful. But they’ve also been really good for the neighborhood and community, and those two things together, there’s nothing better.”

Now, Dapper is embarking on his most momentous downtown project yet — revival of the historic Huntridge Theater.

He’s working on a deal to purchase the defunct theater and make it the centerpiece of a mixed-use development on its four-acre grounds. Although details of the project are still being determined, the conceptual plan is to use the theater as a concert venue or performing arts center while preserving its gorgeous 1940s-era design and architecture. Surrounding structures, which could include office space, condos and dining establishments, would also be integrated into that design.

It’s an ambitious step. Maybe even daunting. The building has been closed since 2004 and is in horrific shape, with a partially collapsed roof and years of being an unauthorized homeless encampment. The permitting processes involved in making the building inhabitable again are extensive and complex.

The theater’s legal status also will need to be sorted out. It’s caught in a lawsuit filed by the Nevada Commission for Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation and Huntridge owner Eli Mizrahi over covenants requiring him to preserve the building and allow access to state inspectors.

But even though saving it will be a major challenge, Dapper said several factors prompted him to take it on. One was his appreciation for historical significance of the building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Two, Dapper said a number of tenants already expressed interest to him about moving onto the site, so he’s confident it’s a solid investment.

Finally, he said, the city of Las Vegas is supporting the initiative as part of its Project Enchilada master plan for downtown revitalization.

“I give all credit to (city attorney) Brad Jerbic,” Dapper said. “He’s laid the pathway to getting this done. He’s passionate about what’s going on downtown.”

It’s clear, however, that Dapper also is highly motivated by a tender appreciation for the city’s past.

In explaining why he got involved, he recalled such fond memories as attending concerts at the Huntridge Theater and buying concert tickets at Mahoney’s Drum Shop, which was housed in one of the buildings he purchased in the area.

“I’ve been here my whole life and I’ve always had a love for all things downtown,” he said.

That passion prompted him to break from the norm when he began investing near Maryland and Charleston. Conventional thinking at the time was that the properties were too far gone and the neighborhoods around them were too poor to support new businesses.

But as Dapper proved, making socially responsible investments is a terrific way of

doing business. New tenants like Wing Stop and Savers moved into the shopping center, and business is brisk at holdover establishments like the renovated Circle K convenience store on the corner.

For neighborhoods, such investments help raise property values, reduce crime and blight, and otherwise improve the quality of life.

So here's hoping Dapper can bring about that next big step — nurturing the Huntridge Theater back to life. With continued support from the neighborhood and the city, we're confident he can lead the resurrection of downtown to new heights.