

third dimension

Development plans bolster downtown attractiveness

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Magee said pedestrians would be able to cross O Street without the fear of traffic, much like in a shopping center.

There would be grass and trees," he said. "These are things I think people go to a shopping center for and enjoy."

"If we're going to compete with shopping centers we have got to have some of the same things downtown."

Adding to the shopping center effect would be a series of pedestrian walkways, or skywalks, connecting much of the downtown business district.

Bob Simon, head of the pedestrian walkway task force and president of Ben Simon's, said, "We have developed a plan to have a connection from Brandeis, to the Centrum, into the Magee-Miller and Paine block, to the Atrium (planned for the current National Bank of Commerce (NBC) offices).

"From there it would cross to the First Great West Building, to the Sharp Building, then to the First National

Bank, to the Cengas Building and back to the Atrium." The walkway system is supposed to provide the shopper with a shopping center atmosphere where he would never have to leave a building's warmth or coolness.

Some talk exists about a skywalk from Miller and Paine to Howland Swanson's on the north side of O Street, but plans have not been drawn up, Simon said.

Avoid pressure

"We are in the process of investigating what types of legislative act we're going to need in order to finance this for downtown," he said. "We want to know if there is a vehicle to get it done without forcing anyone into it."

Present legislation forces approval by 51 per cent of the businesses, he said, "and we don't want to force this down anyone's back if we can help it."

It would be difficult for businesses like Walgreen's at 13th and O streets, with only two stories, to use the system, he added. "We feel it's the obligation of the businesses to pay the bill, not the city, so we must work it out ourselves."

Simon said his store will be moving into the new Atrium complex at 12th and N streets after its completion in late 1976 or 1977.

Two atriums

He said the remodeling of the former Sears Building, which was originally the Rudge and Gunzel department store, will include two atrium areas extending the full seven floors with skylights at the top and plants and greenery on each floor.

Ben Simon's is the first business to sign a lease with the Chicago-based Hawthorne Reality Group, which has bought the building and is doing the remodeling work.

Simon's will occupy part of the first and second floors of the \$4.5 million Atrium, along with nearly 60 other shops, Simon said.

"Right now (at the current Simon's store) we have a vertical situation which poses a problem with the small floors," he said, "but hopefully the move will solve this problem."

Building priorities

Extensive remodeling of the old Western Electric Building in the Gunny's parking-shopping-entertaining complex at 13th and Q streets has been successful, according to downtown merchants. Remodeling of the older building has been offset by the construction of new buildings in the Lincoln Center.

Four building projects, totaling \$61 million, are completed or nearing completion.

Only a year old, the \$6 million Hilton Hotel on the Western entrance to downtown is accompanied by the \$16 million Federal Office Building and garage at O St. and Centennial Mall; the nearly completed \$9 million NBC Bank Building at 13th and O streets, and the \$20 million State Office Building and garages along Centennial Mall.

More parking needed

Although the Lincoln Center project is extensive, Magee expressed concern that improvements won't bring many more people downtown until the Centrum is constructed with more downtown parking.

"I think the project will help keep the businesses from leaving and vacating the downtown area and retain it as the major shopping and business area," he said.

Projects that now are occurring in downtown Lincoln are ones that Magee said he hopes will make for more interesting viewing.

"It is people oriented, rather than automobile oriented," he said, favoring the pedestrian change.

"We think we've got a very strong and vibrant, vital downtown Lincoln. We just don't want it to go down the drain and become kind of a ghost town."

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