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Article Launched: 5/29/2006 01:00 AM

business

Parking lots curb downtown, says urban sage

By Margaret Jackson
Denver Post Staff Writer
DenverPost.com

Developing Denver's surface parking lots would go a long way toward making downtown more livable.

That's according to Mark Hinshaw, director of urban design for Seattle-based LMN Architects and author of "True Urbanism: Living in and Near the Center," to be published early next year. He is the featured speaker at ULI Colorado's quarterly networking luncheon at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Hyatt Regency Denver.

"The core of downtown is very stark and raw," Hinshaw said. "Other than the mall, it's a very spartan environment. A lot of those lots are development sites, but they're all in a holding pattern."

The Downtown Denver Partnership is taking a close look at the surface parking lots as it forms the 20-year downtown area plan, said Tami Door, the organization's president and chief executive.

"A lot of people say we don't have enough parking down here," Door said. "The reality is we have enough physical spots, but people don't know where they are."

Denver was one of 16 U.S. cities Hinshaw studied for his book. He selected cities that demonstrated a significant increase in people living downtown over the past 15 years.

"This is clearly a major phenomenon," Hinshaw said. "It is becoming a prevalent choice to select downtown as a place to live, but it's not just housing units. Downtowns are taking on the character of true urban neighborhoods."

Denver is slightly behind some of the other cities with regard to offering residents choices of goods, services, recreation and entertainment, Hinshaw said. But things are starting to improve.

"The area around the (Denver Art) museum has interesting things going on," he said. "There are some quirky businesses starting to slide into that area."

Staff writer Margaret Jackson can be reached at 303-820-1473 or mjackson@denverpost.com.