

business

## Expert eyes analyze 16th Street Mall needs

Keep the costly granite pavers but get rid of the colorful planters, an urban panel urges.

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A variety of signs advertising establishments in the Denver Pavilions hang over the 16th Street Mall. (Denver Post file photo)

Don't change it. Fix it.

That was the advice Friday from a panel of experts from the Urban Land Institute who addressed what needs to happen to the 16th Street Mall in downtown Denver.

The panel suggested fixing the granite pavers and cleaning up the visual clutter on the mile-long strip designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei.

"The Teletubby planters and wastebaskets have to go," said Ray Brown, chairman of the panel and principal architect at Self Tucker Architects Inc. in Memphis, Tenn., referring to the bulbous, colorful trash cans along the mall.

The panel urged city leaders to keep the granite pavers, which cost the Regional Transportation District about \$1 million a year to maintain.

A design defect in the base on which the pavers are set has caused the granite to loosen and sink over time, creating tripping hazards and other problems.

RTD wants to replace the granite in the bus right-of-way with concrete to get a longer service life from the pavement. But the panel said the pavers are in integral part of the design and everything possible should be done to preserve them.

"It's a piece of extraordinary art, and to impact it in a negative way would be like painting over a Rembrandt because it didn't fit the color scheme

of a room," Brown said.

The panel also suggested creating an urban village between 17th and 14th streets and Court Place and Lawrence Street to serve a diverse population.

Denver should establish "incubator" space for retailers on the streets crossing the mall for new entrepreneurs who can't afford the mall rent and for retailers who are getting priced out.

"Ross Dress for Less and TJ Maxx can go a couple of blocks away, and they're still close to their customers," said Scott Schuler, a retail consultant from Arnold, Md. "That would open up retail on the mall."

The panel also recommend that the Downtown Denver Partnership Inc. hire an expert dedicated to retail recruitment and matching tenants with landlords.

Tami Door, president of the partnership, said she appreciated the broad look the panel took at the mall.

"I'm really looking forward to exploring more in depth the connections to the mall," she said. "How do we build up the named streets so they support the use of the mall."

"The message they sent was the city of Denver has a real gem right in the middle of downtown. We're all so close to it that we forget how great it really is."

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