

Street Talk:

*Downtowners reflect on the hits
and misses in 2003.*

8



■ **AROUND TOWN:** *Los Angeles Theatre Center
hopes to make encore performance.*

2

■ **CITY OBSERVED:** *Yes, there is life after
Disney Hall.*

4

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What's in Store for 2004?

The Events and Issues

That Will Shape Downtown This Year

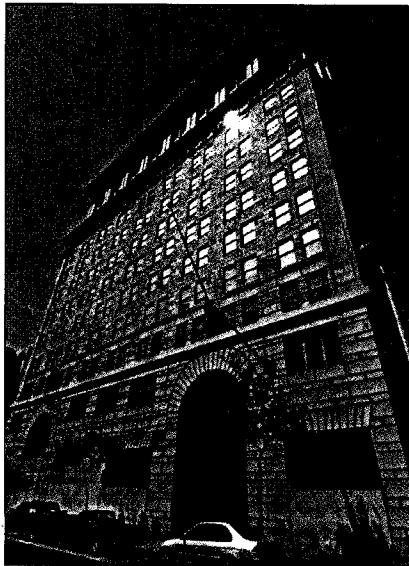


photo by Gary Leonard

*The Subway Terminal Building is one of about a dozen housing
projects expected to bring new units online by year's end.*

BY JASON MANDELL
STAFF WRITER

Downtown in 2003 didn't lack for action. The community was abuzz with one opening after another, from the debut of the landmark Walt Disney Concert Hall, to the numerous loft buildings, to the Gold Line.

While the 2004 calendar appears to lack a signature event akin to Disney

LOOKING FORWARD

Hall, that doesn't mean momentum is slowing. In fact, there are already plans for the debut of thousands of new residential units, as well as the arrival of hip restaurants and arts spaces, cultural events and civic projects.

Yet the year ahead also holds uncertainty. As Downtown continues developing into a 24-hour urban center, the complex worker/residential community will no doubt experience growing pains. Where there's change, there's controversy.

What follows is a look at some of

the most crucial issues and events that will impact Downtown in 2004. While no one can predict exactly what this year will hold, it's a fair bet that the Central City will be a very different place in 12 months.

Actually, there is one thing we can say with near-certainty: Start planning for a Lakers championship parade Downtown in June.

Lofty Ideas Will Become Reality: Residential development was last year's big story, and it promises to fill headlines in 2004. At least a dozen housing projects are scheduled for completion by year's end, and could bring more than 2,000 new units to Downtown. The Historic Core continues to be ground zero for loft development, with many of the district's historic commercial edifices undergoing conversion into sparkling new apartments via a process known as adaptive reuse.

Among the projects expected to open this year are the 140-unit Bardett Building and the 280-unit structure at Fifth and Broadway, and the 277-unit Metro 417 (formerly the Subway Terminal Building). Several of the buildings set to open in 2004, including the 143-unit Arcade Building and 153-unit Security Building, are on or near Spring Street, which is undergoing a quiet transformation along the lines of
see News, page 6

LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN NEWS

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6 Downtown News

LADowntownNews.com

January 5, 2004

News

Continued from page 1
its neighbor, the Old Bank District.

The action isn't limited to the Historic Core. Neighborhoods all across Downtown, from South Park to the Jewelry District, will boast new residential developments this year.

While Downtown boosters are touting the housing boom, almost everyone agrees that for-sale developments, and the ensuing investment by property owners, are the key to creating a lasting revitalization. This year will see the completion of the 130-unit Toy Factory Lofts in the Industrial District. By the end of 2004, construction could be complete or in the final stages on three other for-sale projects: the 50-unit

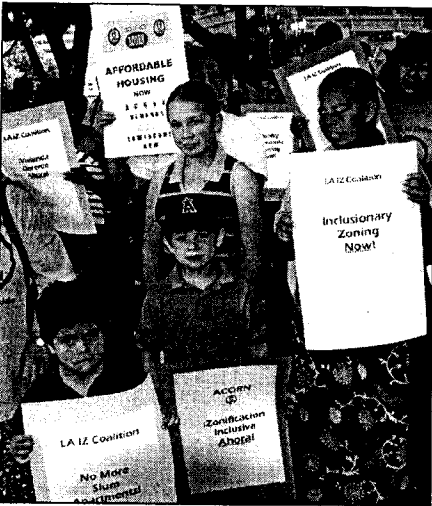


photo by Gary Leonard

The affordable housing debate is expected to heat up this year as City Council examines the inclusionary zoning proposal in the coming months.

Douglas Building on Spring Street in the Historic Core, the 66-unit 1100 Grand Lofts in South Park, and the Brockman Building Lofts in the Financial District.

It is inevitable that this year will feature a flurry of announcements of new projects. Pick any building in the area; it could just be the next big thing.

Controversy Over City Housing Policies Will Continue: With development surging Downtown, debate over the city's housing policies will heat up as well. One of the most controversial items making its way through City Hall is the Community Impact Report (CIR), a proposal that would require developers to go through a public hearing and provide information on a project's potential effects on the community before receiving city approval.

The proposal was met with a backlash from Downtown developers, lawyers, business leaders and some city officials, including Mayor James Hahn, who argued that it could stifle residential development and Downtown's larger revitalization efforts. The Community Redevelopment Agency, which was set to vote on the CIR, dropped it in November.

Now City Council will consider the ordinance. If passed, it would apply citywide. The CIR will likely go to the Housing, Community and Economic Development Committee in late January or early February. If approved, it will then head to the full council for a vote. Expect plenty of conflict between developers, officials and advocacy groups.

Inclusionary zoning, a proposal that would require virtually every development citywide to include a percentage of affordable housing, has sparked similar concern among many in the Downtown development community. The details of the ordinance are being worked out, and a version of the ordinance will likely go before City Council's HCD and Planning and Land Use Management committees in the coming months.

NBA All-Star Weekend Will Bring B-Ball and Big Bucks: Downtown hotels, many of which have struggled with low occupancy rates in recent years, will receive a big boost next month, when the NBA All-Star game comes to Staples Center. The Feb. 15 game caps off a week of NBA events Downtown, including a family-oriented interactive attraction at the Convention Center on Feb. 12.

Last year's All-Star game in Atlanta generated \$27 million for the city, and observers expect a similar financial boon for Downtown L.A. In fact, the local economy is already benefit-



photo by Gary Leonard

The Brockman Building Lofts in the Financial District is the latest for-sale housing project to be announced.

ing, with most major local hotels booked for All-Star weekend. Many restaurants say their tables are reserved as well. By providing a much-needed bounce to Downtown's lagging tourism industry and attracting thousands of new visitors to the area, the events will add to the hype surrounding the district's reemergence as an entertainment center for Los Angeles.

Grand Avenue Designs and Fundraising Will Get Going: After numerous failed attempts over the past several decades to turn Grand Avenue into a bustling and beautiful promenade, officials have finally embarked on what looks to be the real thing — if they can get someone to pay for it. Downtown leaders in September unveiled a \$1.2 billion vision for the corridor, which stretches from Cesar Chavez to Fifth Street. The plan calls for the development of four key parcels of land around the new Walt Disney Concert Hall into high-rise apartments, offices, restaurants, theaters and hotels. The proposal also includes a 16-acre civic park and a street widening and redesign. Billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad is among those pushing the public-private partnership, which many consider a crucial component of Downtown's revitalization.

The plan will take a major step forward this month when a developer is chosen by the Grand Avenue Committee, head-

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Downtown News 7

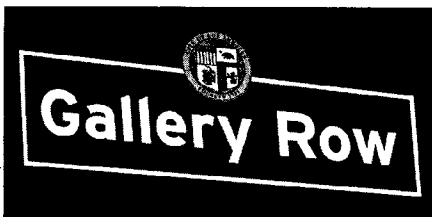


photo by Nic Olin Kim

Historic Core residents and artists hope to create a 26-block concentration of galleries.

ed by Arco Plaza owner Jim Thomas. Nearly 60 firms, including Disney Hall architect Frank Gehry's and Levin Associates, have submitted bids for the high-profile job. The developer will be required to create a master plan by September 2005.

Still, the project requires a \$900 million investment, which means success is a long way off. The project's boosters will spend the next year mustering financial support.

New Arts Community Will Begin to Take Shape: This year will see the gradual emergence of one of Downtown's most unique new neighborhoods. Gallery Row, a 26-block area that falls mostly in the Historic Core, was recently designated an arts center by the city, and signs have already been posted bearing the community logo.

Four art galleries, Inshallah, Zero One, Gallery 727 and Bank, currently comprise the district, but community leaders envision opening more in ground floor spaces. Kimmy McCann, a Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council member and a leader of the Gallery Row committee, said the group wants 28 of the 80 available spaces earmarked as gallery sites. McCann says several new galleries are moving in early this year. A grand opening for Gallery Row is planned for May 17.

In the meantime, the committee is gathering support from landlords. It also is developing plans for a Phantom Galleries project, which would require certain storefront windows to display public art. While Gallery Row won't blossom overnight, the next year should see a noticeable transformation in the look of this burgeoning community.

Plans for New Police Headquarters Will Be Finalized: The city is in the final stages of nailing down plans for two new police headquarters: a permanent replacement for the aging

Parker Center, and a temporary facility that would house the department while the new complex is being built.

The City Council early this year could authorize the purchase of a Broadway building that is part of the Transamerica complex to serve as the temporary LAPD headquarters. In November Chief Legislative Analyst Ron Deaton recommended the property, whose owners, the Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund, have tentatively agreed to sell the structure for just over \$50 million.

The City Council also will likely make a final decision on the design of the permanent headquarters. Currently on the table are two plans, both of which split the headquarters between Parker Center's current site at First and Los Angeles and a 10-acre plot at First and Alameda. While Little Tokyo community members are pushing for public parking and retail to be included in the new facility, the Police Commission recently came out against that idea, warning that it would pose a safety threat.

Unless a new plan is introduced, Deaton and the other city officials handling the project will recommend one of the two design proposals to the City Council, which will make the final call.

Officials Will Determine the Ambassador Hotel's Destiny: The fate of one of the most well known historic sites in the Downtown area should be decided this year. The Ambassador Hotel, built in 1921, once housed the famed Coconut Grove nightclub, and is the site where presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is considering tearing down the hotel to build a school. Superintendent Roy Romer is weighing five different construction options, which differ in how much of the hotel would be razed.

Preservationists have long lobbied to save the hotel. Los Angeles Conservancy officials contend that saving the structure would cost about \$50 million less than the \$288 million estimated by school board officials. Recently a Mid-Wilshire Group called RFK-12 advocated tearing down the property, and argued that demolishing the hotel would be less expensive than turning the preserved site into a school.



The school district will decide whether to tear down the historic Ambassador Hotel or build a school.

Romer is expected to present an option to the school board in the coming months.

Homelessness Will Take Center Stage: Homelessness will be among the most talked-about issues of 2004. Downtown's staggering population of encampments, as well as the drugs and crime that accompany them, have gained increasing political attention as the area's revitalization escalates. Next year will see the construction of a new facility at Sixth and San Pedro for the Midnight Mission, a major local shelter and service provider. The move will likely prompt further examination into the community of social service providers Downtown, which some say is shouldering the burden for the whole county.

In 2004, expect talk and (hopefully) some real solutions from Bring L.A. Home, a newly created countywide coalition of city officials including Hahn and Downtown Councilwoman Jan Perry, homeless service providers and advocates and other leaders. The group gathered in November at the Convention Center to discuss their plan to end homelessness in 10 years; it has meetings planned for February, April and June, when it will release an initial plan for ending homelessness. Also, expect Perry and other officials to continue their push for more shelter beds, as well as new laws and policy reform on homelessness and law enforcement issues.