

Water and Livability in an Arid Urban Downtown Environment

Steve Rossi
City of Phoenix

Co-Authors:

Steve Rossi, Principal Water Resources Planner, City of Phoenix Water Services Department

Dean Brennan, Principal Planner, Phoenix Planning Department

Adam Miller, Water Conservation Coordinator, City of Phoenix Water Services Department

Christy Ten Eyck, President, Ten Eyck Landscape Architects

Nan Ellin, Director, Urban & Metropolitan Studies Program, Arizona State University

Abstract

The role of water in the redevelopment of Downtown Phoenix has become a key consideration in the City's "Downtown Urban Form Project." The "Project" will establish a vision to guide downtown as it continues to transform. The ultimate nature of the transformation will depend primarily on the initiative of the private sector, and will be driven by market demand for housing, office space, hotels, events and other urban features. The City plays a key role by investing in streets, parks, art, and other improvements, and by supporting critical "catalyst" projects such as the ASU downtown campus or the bio-medical center.

Recently, the incorporation of water and water-related features in the downtown "vision" has been rigorously debated among representatives of the City, ASU, consultants and the business community. The attempt is to ultimately achieve consensus on a strategy which: 1) honors and celebrates the history of water in the area; 2) educates citizens and visitors on the role of water in the City and the region; and 3) provides for the establishment of urban "oases" to enhance the livability and sustainability of Downtown Phoenix, which will become more densely developed and populated over the next 10 to 15 years.

Many of the preliminary concepts involve utilizing a small portion of the City's available supplies for more intensive (though efficiently managed) water uses in the core area. To further support the "sustainability" aspect of the proposal, the strategy could involve water harvesting and the re-direction of water savings generated through efficiency improvements elsewhere in the City. As the strategy is developed, key public policy decisions will attempt to integrate traditional conservation and drought-preparedness strategies with the desire to improve livability in the downtown area. Water-related elements and associated policy will be incorporated in an initial draft report for the Downtown Urban Form Project in mid-summer 2007.