

# New Life Urged For Downtown

By JAMES DENLEY

Business, civic and political leaders of Memphis were challenged last night to form a public-private partnership to revitalize the city's downtown area.

If nothing is done to the downtown area, "a sea of blight" around economically sound areas will widen "and the sound core will shrink," Jeremiah O'Leary Jr., executive vice president of Marcou, O'Leary and Associates of Washington, told a crowd of about 350, including many city and county officials.

The challenge came in the final feasibility report by the national consulting firm at the annual Downtown Association banquet at the Sheraton-Peabody.

"We are already caught in a downward cycle," Mr. O'Leary said.

The most important step in reversing the cycle, he said, is a "restoration of confidence in the viability of downtowns." An increasing confidence in downtown Memphis already is evidenced by such activity as new office building construction, he said.

"The major effort is going to come from the private sector," Mr. O'Leary said.

"We're talking mainly about 19th Century areas when we talk about downtowns . . . changing them to meet late 20th Century needs isn't going to be done with a coat of paint."

Mr. O'Leary outlined a number of possible steps in redeveloping the downtown area. Included were construction of a Main Street mall, redevelopment of the area around Court Square, development of Mud Island and an improved internal transportation system.

Officials already have submitted a proposed downtown district bill to the Tennessee General Assembly which would permit taxation of property owners for special improvements.

The next step in implementing redevelopment ideas suggested by the consultant firm probably will be to hire a consultant to perform detailed studies of proposals. The feasibility study was commissioned about five months ago.

"The 30,000 Memphians who are employed in downtown Memphis, and the 27,000 who come downtown daily for various reasons such as shopping, personal business, social recreation and others, can be assured we of the Downtown Association intend to continue our efforts toward complete redevelopment of the area," Thomas C. Farnsworth Sr., Downtown Association president, said.

C.A.

May 6, 1971

OPE 16-24  
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