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Authors	Riker, Jefferson
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Downtown Planners Unfold Seven-Point Redevelopment

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By JEFFERSON RIKER

Planners for the redevelopment of downtown Memphis unfolded a seven-point "strategy" for the project yesterday which centers on a Main Street pedestrian mall from McCall to Madison.

The top priority should be to enhance the retail shopping area between Beale and Madison, said Douglas Porter, director of community development for Marcou, O'Leary & Associates, consultants.

"The strategy for a mall should be to start with the lower end of Main Street, varying the treatment along Main Street to fit specific areas," Mr. Porter said.

Among the alternatives he offered were a full mall, a center mall and sidewalk landscaping. The preferred approach, he said, would be a combination of a full and partial mall.

Members of the project's steering committee, headed by W. D. Galbreath, heard the report during a luncheon meeting at the Albert Pick Motel. Newsmen were not invited.

Mr. Porter listed these aims of the program:

- Consolidate and strengthen retail shopping between Goldsmith's and Madison.
- Focus new office development in the Court Square area as a transition between public and private office areas.
- Use Third as the boundary of the office and retail area, with parking concentrated east of Third.
- Concentrate public space in the Civic Center area.
- Encourage hotel development in the convention center, Court Square and Beale Street areas.
- Locate new housing between Danny Thomas Boulevard and the Medical Center, on Mud Island and along Front Street.
- Develop Beale Street for shopping, entertainment and housing.

The report recommends development of 1,460 additional hotel rooms in the downtown area by 1985 and from 3,300 to 4,200 new housing units. It also calls for construction of about 1.5 million square feet of office space and a modest increase in retail space.

It recommends 1,000 units of housing for Mud Island and 500 along Front Street above Adams, as well as 1,000 in the Beale Street area.

Cross streets would be kept open along Main to permit traffic circulation and the report recommends Interstate 40 as the major approach to downtown. I-40 is unfinished because of court fight over completion of the Overton Park leg.

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Without specifics, the report calls for improvement of Danny Thomas and Riverside Drive.

The mall, Mr. Porter said, should eventually have some form of "people-mover" system for local transit. North of Madison, the mall could provide limited vehicle traffic, he said.

After the presentation, the steering committee told the planners to submit preliminary sketches and cost estimates for the project. A formal report on the first phase of the five-step study is to be published about July 1.

Among forecasts in the report was a prediction of a 50 per cent cut in service, wholesale and manufacturing functions in the downtown area.

The study area for the project is bounded by Riverside Drive on the west, Danny Thomas on the east, I40 on the north and Linden on the south.

Mr. Porter's progress report came one week after a report by W. Wise Swepston Jones, hired by the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce to investigate the possibility of hotel development, that the task was futile.