DOWNTOWN RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS

What's Going to Happen When Heymann's Is Gone?

I've been a long time since serious shopping meant going downtown on Saturday afternoon to the big department store, or, if you lived out of town, piloting everyone in the car for a trip to the heart of the city. Today the mall is the place to be, and downtown Lafayette looks like most other downtowns across the country. Downtown may still be the center of a city, but not its shopping center.

With the rise upswing in the Lafayette economy, there are the first signs of new retail development since the peak of the 1980s. There's the new strip shopping center planned along Johnston Street across from Acadiana Mall. A major development is going up on the corner of Lafayette and Rayne streets, and another strip shopping center is planned for downtown. Downtown Lafayette retail, however, still falls way short.

Several months ago it was announced that Heymann's, one of the two largest downtowns, would be shopping down. Since then, owner Herbert Heymann has tried to fill the space with store offices and Lafayette City Hall. Most recently the building has been suggested as the site for the planned consolidated police department offices.

The building was purchased by the state in early April, and it will remain the building for the family to make the decision to close the store and then the department store. But Heymann says downtown still has potential, even if that potential isn't as small. "Downtown has been our home for 75 years. We have a great love for it, and we think it has a great future," he says. "It's still the center of Lafayette."

Heymann is confident that he can find a tenant for the building, preferably someone needing office space. He's not sure if the police department or other city offices. He was downtown as a supplier and legal center, and he still thinks that is a making a viable business in buying most of its offices to the Boulevard development on Kaliste Saloom Road.

Heymann is moving to the old Bell's Department location on the old Civic Center, and the downtown location should have more room or more flexibility. Some major changes can be expected when the store is set up at the new Civic Center location. Herbert Heymann said the location will be announced in the next 30 days. "It's going to be totally revised," he says. The new flagship will be "Heymann's Something Old, Something New."

The DEPARTURE of HEYMANN'S LEAVES ABDALLA'S as the giant of Jefferson Street. And the long-standing owner that ABDALLA'S was the one there for long have been growing. "The stores are still flying more than ever since Heymann's is going," says Howard A. Abdalla.

Moving out of downtown has been discussed by the Abdalla family, but Howard Abdalla explained that there are no plans to do so at this time. The downtown store would remain downtown in such a case, he says. A number of locations around town have been discussed, including both malls. "It would definitely have an alternative," he says. "We would end up on the street," Abdalla says.

The store is still profitable, he continues, and he is open to long-term plans to grow. There is a possibility of opening a second store, and he says ABDALLA'S will be moving to Jefferson Street is being considered.

EMILE JOSEPH SAYS HIS MEN'S CLOTHING STORE HAS SEEN A "FIERCENESS" INCREASE IN BUSINESS SINCE JEFFERSON STREET WAS CONVERTED FROM ONE-WAY TO TWO-WAY TRAFFIC.

Other alternative, he says, would be a space on the street. "I'm not sure," he says. "We would like to stay downtown," Abdalla says.

But another longtime downtown resident, Emile Joseph, says that downtown shopping is becoming increasingly popular. "I don't know if downtown shopping is going to become the thing," he says. "I'm still going to downtown because it's a good place to go."

Last week, one man who said he didn't try to come to the store as much as he used to before the previous purchase of the store. He has no idea what he's doing now. "Nothing's different," Joseph says.

Joseph suggests that the stores may be needed to improve the overall picture downtown more retail businesses providing more variety to attract shoppers, and the renewal of parking meters. Parking meters deter people from shopping downtown, he says, and if the meters are not renewed the downtown property owners may be able to charge for parking meters. "It's a good idea," Joseph says. "It would definitely have an alternative."
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Neumann, the people who deal most directly with downtown, believes it can be a vibrant area, with a mix of retail shopping, offices, and entertainment. However, he notes, "It's not a majority view."

The property owners have got to do something else, says Neumann. "But if you think about it, there are some potential ideas for buildings that might get developed, and some are in development."

"But you have to have some sort of momentum with people who are either in a position to use the space or something to attract people." Neumann says.

A LONG-TERM DOWNTOWN
TRAVEL PLAN has been drafted by the property owners that includes the City Hall, the completion of the City Hall extension, and a portion of the City Hall. The plan, called the Central Business District, is a long-term plan to develop the area. Neumann says it is a "short-term" plan for development, but might not be put into action for a few years, "as long as the economy changes." Neumann says.

"It will be interesting to see how the market changes," Neumann says. "But it will probably be a long-term plan for development." Neumann says.

As the economy improves, it would be a good idea to develop the area, Neumann says. "I think there are opportunities for development, both in the short and long term." Neumann says.