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Urban visionary Charles Landry addresses Central Corridor stakeholders

Great streets are essential to great cities

Inspiration blew into the Twin Cities on July 13-14 in the form of Charles Landry, a British consultant who helps cities take a fresh look at their potential and unleash creativity in becoming a bigger player on the global stage.

While his ideas are big, their focus is sometimes on the small scale – like the street.

“A great city is where people fall in love with the streets,” Landry said to a crowd of more than 200 people at the Guthrie Theater on the Minneapolis riverfront on Thursday, July 14. They were gathered for an event called “Unleashing the Potential of the Central Corridor.”

Great streets are walkable and human-scale, have a diversity of commercial and housing types, provide connections and offer surprises, Landry said. “The sensory and emotional experience of a place is the key.”

Getting engineers and artists to talk together

Using a rich and often entertaining variety of images, Landry provided examples of cities around the world – such as Vancouver, Melbourne and Zurich – that are transforming themselves into economic and cultural magnets by:

- Encouraging creativity and cross-disciplinary thinking
- Capitalizing on their diversity
- Focusing on becoming much greener in many sectors
- Doing transit- and people-oriented development

Too often, he said, the “rules” (such as zoning and streetscape parameters) are major obstacles to development that is designed for well-being and livability. So the rules must be re-examined in order to create places where people become anchored and that attract new residents and economic development.

Landry challenged the region to think about whether it will do developments “up to a standard” or “down to a price.” He said cities need to ask themselves: What is the cost of ugliness: of *not* thinking about creativity, culture, design, arts and heritage, and green infrastructure as they plan for the future.

“This is a classic moment...a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Landry said of the region’s planned investment in the Central Corridor. Acknowledging limited financial resources, he nonetheless challenged corridor stakeholders to “always be lifting this to the next level.”

The event also featured brief presentations about plans

Audio Player



Listen to Charles Landry addresses Central Corridor stakeholders | 2hrs 30 min (137.8MB, MP3 file)

around five specific stations on the Central Corridor, followed by a Q&A with Landry.

Mike Christenson, director of community planning and economic development for the City of Minneapolis, said one of the best outcomes of the event was a potential new collaboration. Representatives from the Textile Center of Minnesota – which is headquartered and owns land ripe for development near the Prospect Park station – and Aeon, a nonprofit developer of affordable housing, were at the presentation and talked for three hours after the event. “We’re all really excited about it,” he said. “These are exactly the kinds of connections we want to be fostering.”

The event was organized by the Corridors of Opportunity project. The project is a collaboration of business, foundations, local government, nonprofit and neighborhood groups, and others aiming to spur private investment and create long-term jobs, affordable housing and sustainable communities along the region’s emerging transitway system.

Landry also spoke on July 13 at the Ethnic Cultural Tourism Destinations Conference in St. Paul. His keynote address was titled “The Art of Conviviality: Planning for Diversity Advantage.” The conference featured a variety of speakers and workshops.



Charles Landry spoke and answered questions about the “creative avenue.”



This green, mixed-use development is in Freiburg, Germany.



People packed into the Dowling Studio at the Guthrie Theater for the presentation.

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