



Businesses warned about growth's possible downside

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PORTLAND — Vancouver-Portland's location, economy and culture have fueled a buzz that has creative, knowledge-based workers flocking to the area.

It's the kind of excitement Richard Florida, author and professor of business and creativity at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, hasn't heard since Austin, Texas, was referred to in similar terms.

"Make sure you don't screw this up," Florida said. "Because growth brings opportunities, but also can undermine some of the very assets you've created."

Florida's warning came Wednesday in Portland during a gathering of 500 area business and government leaders. They gathered to discuss a regional economic report issued by Greenlight Greater Portland, an economic development group that was formed last year to promote the business interests of Clark and six other metro area counties.

The report highlighted the region's affordability compared to other cities in the West, forecast an increase of 100,000 jobs in the market during the next five years and a 29.1 percent expansion of the gross regional product to \$144 billion in the same time period.

Greater Portland intends to use the study this summer as it recruits businesses to the region.

Protecting the advantage

Florida said that if we don't protect what makes the area special, the quality of life advantage could be lost. He watched this happen in Washington, D.C., years ago as congestion worsened, housing costs skyrocketed and new suburbs were built without open space.

Protecting what makes this part of the country special is critical given the competition for companies and qualified workers.

Florida tackled this issue in his latest book, "Who's Your City?" Florida argues in the book that globalization is not flattening the world, but creating economic clusters where desirable cities and creative workers go hand in hand.

He said he believes there is a protocol that allows a city to be successful in the new post-industrial world. Cities must:

- Provide basics like police, fire and infrastructure.
- Create economic opportunity.
- Have great leadership in government, business and civic arenas.
- Foster an open-minded community.
- Create quality of place.

Florida said the Vancouver-Portland region scores high in the quality of place category, which he determines by the synergy between physical, human and natural environments.

“This seems like the kind of thing Portland has organically figured out,” he said.

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