

THE RECESSION:

Planning guru holds out some hope for Vegas

Build on entertainment, link with Calif., he says

By [Mike Trask](#)

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A year ago urban planning guru Richard Florida told the Sun that Las Vegas has a bright future.

He said the region could draw more artists and musicians, emulating Nashville, a city that morphed from a Southern outpost into a hub for popular music.

The interview came in the days following the release of his book, "Who's Your City?" in which he maintains that the biggest decision an person makes is where to live.

The author ranked 166 U.S. cities in terms of livability. Las Vegas fared poorly: No. 66 for singles, No. 82 for professionals, No. 88 for empty nesters, No. 127 for retirees and No. 135 for families with children.

But, in that discussion last year, Florida said there was plenty of hope for Las Vegas and its suburban neighbors.

"The thing that bodes best for Las Vegas is its location," Florida said at the time. "It's sandwiched between these mega regions, Southern and Northern California and Phoenix. As Las Vegas connects to those regions and becomes part of those regions, it has a bright future."

Florida is the founder of the Creative Class Group, which advises cities on how to become more attractive to young professionals.

Former UNLV president Carol Harter has applauded Florida's plan as a way to draw intellectuals to Las Vegas. The redevelopment plan for downtown Henderson reflects Florida's theory, calling for a vibrant arts scene to draw business and growth.

The recession has derailed those plans, as it has elsewhere as cities grow more concerned with making payroll than enticing hipsters to move to town.

Indeed, much has changed since our talk with Florida in March.

In the current issue of *The Atlantic*, the author examines the fates of U.S. cities in the post-recession era in an article titled “How the Crash Will Reshape America.”

Of Las Vegas and Phoenix, Florida wrote: “At a minimum, these places will take a long, long time to regain the ground they’ve recently lost in local wealth and housing values. It’s not unthinkable that some of them could be in for an extended period of further decline.”

In an interview from his office at the University of Toronto, Florida talked of how Nevada can rebound.

The key, he said, is to aggressively court businesses that export gaming, such as slot machine manufacturers and video poker game designers, and expand the entertainment industry.

More than just shows on the Strip are needed, he said.

He envisions a city reaching out to recording studios, costume designing firms and filmmakers. In short, the city needs the “Creative Class” to set up in Las Vegas, bringing a diversity to the region that would lessen its dependence on the construction industry.

In the future economy, Florida predicts lower rates of homeownership than in previous generations, meaning a long-term decline in new home construction.

Critical to Las Vegas’ future, he said, is becoming more closely linked with Los Angeles, such as through a long-proposed maglev train.

Connecting the Las Vegas Strip and Hollywood is an obvious way of expanding the entertainment industry and tourism.

But Florida said it also would allow the easy transportation of goods and employees, giving people a larger job market.

The places that create high-speed, low-cost transportation corridors with big neighbors “will be successful in the future,” Florida said.

The places that do not, he said, won’t achieve economic growth.

And will Las Vegas make a fast connection with Los Angeles?

All depends on that train.