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Downtowns Keep Reinventing Themselves

By Alan Ehrenhalt

Some center cities are coming back from the pandemic, with residential populations increasing even as many continue to work from home. While restaurants and retail are still suffering, it seems fair to speculate that something meaningful is

happening. If this is a crucial moment in the history of

American cities—and few would deny that it isthen it may be an even more critical time in the continuing saga of urban downtowns. Millions of words have been written about downtown and its problems since the COVID-19 pandemic began; meanwhile new habits, circumstances and challenges are turning up all the time.

In most cities, downtown retail commerce is stagnant, but in some notable cases the downtown residential population is increasing even as the city as a whole and the broader metro population are shrinking. In some of those places, center-city residents are choosing to live near their place of work while going to it only on a part-time basis.

It's important—albeit difficult—to try to make some sense of why these and other evolutions are taking place. Maybe it will be helpful to look back before we

look forward, and to take note of how downtowns in America and the rest of the developed world have reinvented themselves over the past century

We tend to conceptualize downtowns as the entities we remember from our early years, but in fact they are remarkably protean institutions. Until the late nineteenth century, western cities had compact downtowns in which people both lived and worked. If you ran a counting house in London, or baked hot cross buns, or sold linens, the odds were that you lived up the stairs from your place of business.

That cozy arrangement was broken up for the middle class in London with the passage of the Cheap Trains Act of 1883, which made it feasible to have a small cottage in the suburbs and commute to the city every morning. The cottages weren't universally popular-H. G. Wells called them "a bright fungoid growth in the ditch"—but



they changed the character of downtowns in London and later in other cities as well.

By the 1920s, American social scientists were laying out diagrams of what took place downtown and what happened further away.

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The construction of six new electrified tracks serving three high-level boarding platforms connected to the existing railroad right of way and includes a passenger concourse as part of a new rail personnel structure to an elevation above the FEMA base flood elevation (BFE). Other related rail infrastructure work involves two pit pedestal inspection pits in the station area: an existing bridge modification; a new, two-track railroad bridge that connects the new station to the existing commuter tracks with the related track: catenary, signal, and other work including a realignment of active commuter tracks and the related overhead catenary structures. ALL QUOTATIONS ARE DUE BY CLOSE OF BUSINESS Friday, April 14, 2023.

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New Hampshiré Secretary of State Corporation Division Contact: Miguel Moralez, 603-225-1601,

miguel.moralez@sba.gov Fee: Free; registration required

Starting a new business? Looking for capital and finance options? Looking for general advice on starting or maintaining your business? Hear

from representatives from the local SBA office

and the New Hampshire Secretary of State Corporation Division. This workshop (currently held online during the pandemic) is offered on the first Thursday of every month. To join this free webinar, copy and paste the link below into your browser, then register for tickets for the date of your choice to receive the access code. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/secretary-ofstate-quickstart-and-small-business-administration-programs-tickets-262004180557 Federal Contracting: Veteran Small Business **Certification Program Webinar**

Monday, April 17, 2023, 1:00 pm-2:00 pm Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration Contact: Jo Eckert, 319-362-6405, jo.eckert@sba.gov

transferred from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Certification with SBA allows service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs) to compete for sole-source and set-aside federal contracts across the federal government. Certified veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs) have additional opportunities Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, to pursue sole-source and set-aside contracts at the Veterans Administration (VA) under the VA's Vets First program. Register at https://www. eventbrite.com/e/veteran-small-business-certification-vetcert-program-tickets-580691793787 Selling to the Federal Government Webinar Thursday, April 27, 2023, 1:00 pm-4:00 pm

Certification program. Certification has been

Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration Contact: George Tapia, 610-382-3086, george.tapia@sba.gov Fee: Free; registration required Did you know that the federal government is the

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