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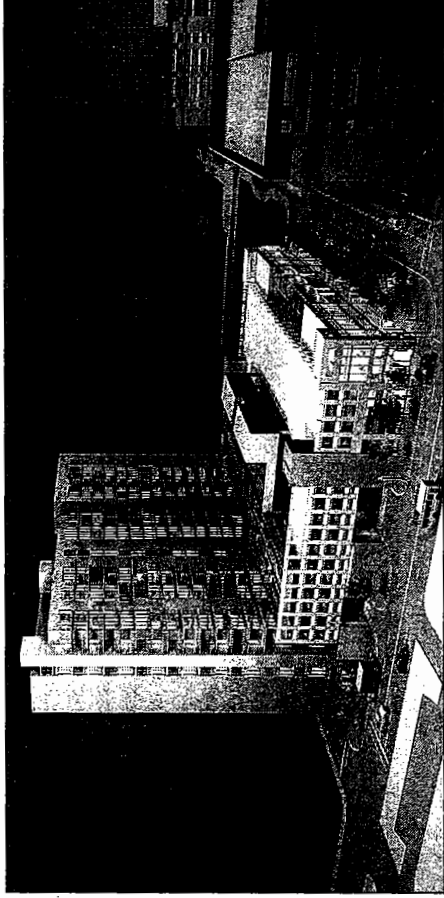
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 AMLI plans to build an apartment tower between Second and Third streets downtown.

Good things developing downtown

Visions of a reborn downtown Austin appear to be on the verge of at long last being realized. It's a rebirth aided by a rebounding economy, a commitment to stem urban sprawl and marketing that takes advantage of a strong desire by city leaders to make it happen.

Austin Mayor Will Wynn is serving as point man on the initiative to move 25,000 residents downtown in the next 10 years. Last week, he picked up a valuable ally in state Rep. Mike Krusee, R-Williamson County. They pledge to work together to nudge the downtown Austin development dream closer to reality.

Krusee's interest is most welcome because the involvement of a Round Rock official is an acknowledgement that a healthy downtown Austin is good for the region. Moreover, Krusee's leadership in developing state and regional transportation plans is going to lend both intellectual capital and political muscle to a rejuvenated downtown.

A downtown that is alive with a mix of residential and commercial development would curb sprawl, a move that is essential if Central Texas continues to grow. The people who continue to come here are going to have to live somewhere, so why not downtown?

What is it going to take to move people to the urban core? Housing, of course. There's been plenty of movement to build more residential buildings. AMLI Residential Properties Trust announced plans last week for an additional 231 high-end apartments downtown.

What does it take to draw residential development? Employment centers and amenities.

What does it take to draw retail development? Customers that the housing units could provide, and accessibility to other customers, which means some sort of parking accommodations.

That means, in turn, buffing up urban infrastructure to support that rebirth. We haven't been hit with those price tags yet, nor have we heard clear ideas about ways to reduce or meet them. That's part of what a study is supposed to flesh out. A council subcommittee voted last week to hire a consultant to take a comprehensive look at downtown redevelopment. The full council is scheduled to vote on it Thursday.

So far, objections to populating downtown have been muted. For Austinites who are scarred by years of fighting over suburban sprawl, a revitalized downtown might sound and look good. Or maybe, as the movie cowboys used to say, it's just too quiet. Potentially contentious issues, including commuter rail plans for downtown, are sure to stir opposition. Projects to protect the water quality of urban creeks are sure to get a good look as well.

As is the case with most Austin initiatives, this one begins with a study. Although we're usually skeptical of studies that end up as paperweights or doorstops, this one is called for, probably even necessary, if the city's elected and business leadership is to prepare for a serious run at downtown redevelopment.