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## Urban planner criticizes parts of Wichita's downtown revitalization

By Dion Lefler  
The Wichita Eagle

A visiting urban-planning economist from a Washington think tank criticized on Thursday the way Wichita is trying to revitalize its downtown.

The city's focus on publicly subsidized high-density housing and "walkability" has failed almost everywhere it's been tried and is not all that likely to work here, said Randal O'Toole, a senior fellow from the Cato Institute.

He was particularly critical of tax increment financing, a process cities use to encourage development by setting aside expected future property tax growth.

Wichita regularly uses TIF funding for projects such as the struggling WaterWalk development.

"You've got the condo building down here that's what, about a third full?" O'Toole said. "When you fill it up, build another one."

In the meantime, it doesn't make sense to use TIF funding to encourage more condo development, he said.

He also said "pedestrian-friendly" development — a cornerstone of Wichita's downtown effort, usually means car-hostile.

He said more than 200 cities followed a fad of downtown pedestrian malls and almost all of them have been reopened to auto traffic.

"The ones that were successful were college towns and resort towns where they already had a lot of pedestrians," he said.

O'Toole encountered some pushback from members of the audience who said there are a lot of Wichitans who want more walkways and bike paths.

"I don't think it's a fad like you're saying," said resident Janice Bradley.

O'Toole will speak today at the noon meeting of the Pachyderm Club, held at the Petroleum Club on the top floor of the Bank of America building, 100 N. Broadway.

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