

**70 livable places**  
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President Theodore Roosevelt parades north on Eighth Street past Boise's Romanesque Revival City Hall, 1903.

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**CROSSROADS**  
by Jacey Brain

**T**he downtown intersection of 8th and Idaho streets—just a stone’s throw from City Hall, the Boise Convention Center, several of the state’s largest banks and dozens of retail stores and restaurants—is the urbane hub of Boise. Its street scene reflects Boise at its citified best—an eclectic mingle of counterculture teen-agers, button-down bankers/lawyers and North End vegans, all going their separate ways, yet brought together on this busy patch of downtown real estate. But as contemporary as the 8th and Idaho scene is, three of its four corners are occupied by historic buildings whose rich heritage and classic aesthetics date back to the dirt-street days before the automobile.

The Mode Building and Fidelity Building, both former department stores, sit on two of the corners. The Simplot Building, once the home of Boise City National Bank, occupies the third. Until 1953, the fourth corner featured a Romanesque-style City Hall where the Capitol Terrace parking garage and retail complex now sit. In addition to a variety of shops and

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restaurants, these buildings include professional and office space. Adjacent blocks feature residential space, and a proposed apartment complex above the Capitol Terrace could eventually come to fruition. Through mixed use—a combination of retail, office and residential space—the corner of 8th and Idaho serves as a perfect example of “smart growth” in Boise. The preservation and mixed-use development of classic buildings is at the heart of the block’s success, and can serve as a template for others across the city.

The intersection hasn’t always been the lively, people-centered place it is today. In fact, it witnessed one of the most regretful eras in Boise’s city planning, a time when a large segment of the historic downtown fell to the wrecking ball in the name of “urban renewal.” But, unlike many to the south, the intersection survived intact and eventually benefitted from the subsequent emphasis on the redevelopment of existing downtown buildings. The urban renewal saga began in the mid-1960s when Boise’s central downtown suffered from disinvestment and suburbs began to sprawl at the edges of Boise. A civic task group developed a central business district plan in 1964 that called for a process of urban renewal, including the clearance and redevelopment of downtown’s blighted areas. The City Council adopted the plan and created the Boise Redevelopment Agency (B.R.A.) in 1965 after passage of Idaho’s Urban Renewal Law. Between 1965 and 1969, the B.R.A. (now called the Capital City Development Corporation) surveyed the area and then acquired and cleared buildings deemed to be beyond rehabilitation or in the way of the large, multi-block regional shopping center planned for the central business district. Using federal urban renewal funding, the B.R.A. acquired 12 blocks and cleared six between 1965 and 1974. Four city blocks cleared for the shopping center became parking lots. As the B.R.A. began to demolish historic downtown buildings, ordinary citizens and prominent Boise residents alike condemned the activity. Senator Frank Church urged the agency to “...save what remains of downtown Boise before the bulldozers run completely amuck.” While the B.R.A. succeeded in completing some projects during this time—most notably the new Boise City Hall and the tall U.S. Bank building—the downtown shopping center never advanced beyond the planning stages. The B.R.A. worked with five major shopping center developers over the years, none of which worked out due to the unresponsiveness and unwillingness of major retailers to commit to the project. When the last of the five developers resigned in May 1985, the B.R.A. asked the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) at the American Institute of Architects to study Boise’s downtown area and develop a new concept plan. Following the advice of the R/UDAT, the B.R.A. abandoned the proposed shopping mall and took the plans for the central business district in a

new direction that called for mixed-use development and the reintroduction of regulated private development. The R/UDAT stated that the development of downtown Boise “must pull together people and factions fragmented by two decades of the redevelopment struggle,” and that “it must succeed in



Photographer R. Harold Sigler captured the commercial vitality of Eighth Street, looking north from Main Street, about 1930.

blueprinting a redeveloped city core with business, entertainment and recreational opportunities that will provide the sense of identity Boiseans have missed.” In the plan, the R/UDAT suggested that the “Eighth Street Mall,” or 8th Street between Front Street and Bannock, should be the focus of new development in downtown Boise’s core.

The R/UDAT plan for the outdoor mall on 8th Street suggested that retail space should line the street at ground level and the landscaping should be informal, connecting the Boise River and the Greenbelt to the Capitol Building. Outdoor entertainment and cultural and recreational activities should be interspersed along the way. In 1986, the Boise City Council adopted a new plan for downtown that envisioned Eighth Street as a pedestrian-

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friendly zone with an emphasis on open public space. It called for street trees and iron tree grates, appropriate lighting and street furniture, and furnishings for the whole width of the street. Since 1987, the streetscapes around 8th and Idaho have undergone major renovations. The wider side-



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Service alleys contribute to the walkability of the urban renewal district. Pictured: alleyway ghost sign behind the Fidelity Building, 2009.

walks along 8th Street between Idaho and Bannock now feature extensive patio space for the restaurants on the block. The streetscape also includes trees, benches, planters, bicycle racks and even public art. Although the street did not become an auto-free zone, it is open only to slow traffic and

street parking is limited. The improvements allow for optimal mixed use. Several restaurants take advantage of the upgraded sidewalks that line both sides of 8th Street. According to CCDC Executive Director Phil Kushlan, all new plans for development in downtown Boise call for the sidewalks to be designed to encourage people to walk and spend more time. Kushlan says that the goal is to “extend activity downtown beyond 8 to 5, rather than rolling up the sidewalks at 5 o’clock.” Special events, such as the Capital City Public Market, with its blend of local art, food and agricultural products, draw thousands of people to 8th Street each weekend from early spring to late fall.

The three historic buildings that anchor the 8th and Idaho intersection came through Boise’s “urban renewal” era of the 1960s and 1970s unscathed as visible reminders of Boise’s past, yet they are vitally immersed in the present. The stories of their early years are testaments to the city’s rich heritage of entrepreneurship and civic pride. Developers used sandstone from Table Rock Quarry to construct the Boise City National Bank, founded by Henry Wadsworth and Alfred Eoff, in 1891-92 on the southwest corner of the intersection. The team of John Tourtellotte and Charles Frederick Hummel, along with James King, designed the building. Tourtellotte and Hummel designed almost 200 Boise buildings. In 1905, Boise approved the addition of a new story and an annex to the building, costing \$80,000. The bank ceased operation during the Great Depression on Aug. 1, 1932. After the bank closed, over the years the building has been home to many tenants, including offices for Idaho Power, J.R. Simplot Co., lawyers, accountants, architects, real estate companies and the CCDC. In 1978, the building was named to the National Park Service’s Register of Historic Places. Developer Rick Peterson completed a \$4 million renovation in 1993, attracting a variety of tenants that includes restaurants, retail outlets and offices. An outdoor dining area in front of the former bank contributes to the intersection’s lively atmosphere.

The Mode Building stands at the northwest corner of 8th and Idaho. Completed in 1895, the building housed the Mode, Ltd., a department store for almost 100 years until it closed in 1991. Before the Mode’s construction, a small store called the Palace Meat Market stood at the corner. In its early days, the Mode block brought high-end and specialty shopping to downtown Boise. Harry Falk, a member of the family that established Falk’s Department Store, hired Boise-based developer John Broadbent to build the Mode’s three-story building, which featured picture windows on each floor. Several other locally-owned department stores made their homes in downtown Boise

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during the heyday of the Mode, including Falk's, the Bazaar and C.C. Anderson's, all of which the Mode outlasted. Despite the continued success of the store, Falk and his partners sold the business to J.J. Chapman in 1938. Chapman's wife, Ethel, began managing the store after he died only four years later. Fire engulfed the Mode's interior on June 18, 1958. The disaster attracted thousands of people, who watched as fire and water destroyed everything inside the store. Chapman held a reopening ceremony for the rebuilt store nine months later. In 1969, she sold the Mode to James Ruark, the manager of Falk's. As soon as the store opened, downtown shoppers quickly grew fond of second-floor Mode Tea Room, beginning a long tradition of dining in the Mode Building that continues today. In 1988, Ruark completely upgraded all four floors and expanded retail space. He turned down an offer to move to the Boise Towne Square mall, and instead purchased the building from the B.R.A., which had obtained the property in 1978 during the urban renewal project. Despite his satisfaction with the remodeling, Ruark put the Mode, Ltd. up for sale in January 1991. But that October he announced that the landmark Boise store would close by the end of the year, stating that the business was not profitable enough to remain open. The Mode Building was empty for a few years following the store's closure. In 1994, after another major interior renovation (and demolition), tenants returned, and today the building includes a mix of restaurants and retail businesses. Many residents credited the area's recent business boom to the reopening of the Mode Building.

Across from the Mode, the sandstone Fidelity Building, formerly called the Montandon Building after builder August F. Montandon, has functioned as a mixed-use property for more than a century. Architect J.W. Smith, who designed the Montandon in the Romanesque Revival style, built several buildings in Baltimore before the Boise project. In late 1908, the \$30,000 building became the new home of the Anderson-Blomquist department store. Prior to that, Sanborn maps indicate that the corner was home to several small businesses, including a barber, a fish market and a hardware store turned candy store. The Anderson-Blomquist store held its grand opening in the new building on Jan. 15, 1909, but in 1927 the store closed and one year later the building became home to the Fidelity Loan and Investment Company. Although the company was in business only until 1932, it put a "Fidelity" sign on the second floor and since then the structure has been known as the Fidelity Building. For the next 55 years the building saw many tenants come and go, including drug stores, government agencies, retail outlets and non-profit organizations.

In 1972, the National Park Service added the Union Block and Fidelity Building as one piece of architecture to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986, consultants advised the B.R.A. that a restoration of the Fidelity-Union Block would be economically practical. Planners expressed



Library of Congress

The 1908 Fidelity Building abuts the Union Block on the northeast corner of Eighth and Idaho, about 1978.

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immediate interest in the project, even though reports anticipated the restoration would cost \$3.6 million and it would take an estimated four years to fill all vacancies with tenants. Investors Gary Christensen and James Tomlinson purchased the Fidelity Building, refurbishing it during their first year (1993) and operating it for only five years. They sold it to David Almquist, president and CEO of California-based marketing firm The Designory, Inc. Today the building is home to several restaurants that credit outdoor patio dining combined with the revitalized downtown for their success. Re-use of the historic Fidelity Building brought a new energy and

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audience to 8th and Idaho, and contributed to the block's present day mixed-use atmosphere.

The Capitol Terrace, the only contemporary building on the corner of 8th and Idaho, was the site of the former Boise City Hall, a Romanesque



North-bound traffic dominated Eighth Street, about 1980. Barren, treeless sidewalks discouraged walking.

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Revival building designed by German architect James C. Paulsen and completed in 1893. The Boise City Council held its first meeting there on May 24, 1893, and it soon became the center of town celebrations and special events. The city put the City Hall up for sale in June 1948 after Mayor Potter P. Howard announced that city offices had outgrown the building. William Zeckendorf and the Webb and Knapp Corporation purchased the property after the building became vacant. After sitting empty for three years, it became a canteen for Boise military servicemen in 1951, and wrecking crews began dismantling the building in 1953. The space served as a temporary parking lot, and later a drug store occupied the corner for several years. In

1988, the CCDC took over the block and constructed the Capitol Terrace, a colorful mixed-use building that functions today as a parking garage enclosed by multi-level commercial space. The Capitol Terrace is one of several parking garages built between 1978-1990 in response to a R/UDAT survey



The 1990s remaking of Eighth Street included wide sidewalks, landscaping, benches, street art and patio seating.

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that suggested that the surface parking lots downtown should be replaced with parking garages located near and integrated with new developments. Thus, the Capitol Terrace brings consolidated parking, an important element of mixed use, to the corner of 8th and Idaho.

While they have added character and interest to the intersection, the structures at 8th and Idaho lack one important element of mixed-use development—residential space. Although nearby locations such as the Idaho

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Building and the Washington Mutual (now Chase) Building offer housing options in the heart of downtown Boise, the proposed Capitol Terrace Apartments above the garage structure could complete the 8th and Idaho mixed-use resume. Pam Sheldon, general contracts manager at CCDC, says



©Dan McLean

Crafts and produce lure crowds to the open-air Capital City Public Market. Pictured: buying flowers at Eighth and Bannock, 2009.

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that traditional thinking paints city downtown areas as primarily centers for office and retail space. Instead, she explains, "Retail is a follower. Housing can do a lot to help other aspects of downtown development." CCDC-hired consultants found that downtown rated high in available jobs, retail, nightlife, recreation, schools and most importantly, demand for housing. So the CCDC began working with developers to consider locations for new residential space. Since 2006, 251 units of new downtown housing have been

built in developments such as the Aspen Lofts, CitySide Lofts and the Royal Plaza, says Sheldon. In December 2005, developer Ken Howell of Parklane Management Co. proposed the construction of an 81-unit apartment complex to be built above the Capitol Terrace parking garage and retail building. The plans called for 57 studio or one-bedroom apartments to be targeted toward downtown workers and those with low incomes. One- or two-bedroom units to be rented at the normal market rate comprised the remainder of the complex. The downturn of the national economy and the decreased value of the property repeatedly delayed the development.

Continued preservation efforts and imaginative re-use of the buildings at 8th and Idaho have fostered a sense of community and history and created a comfortable atmosphere on the block. Karen Sander, executive director for the Downtown Boise Association, says that historic preservation is an important part of the city development and planning process "so that the fabric of the city is maintained ... our history gives us a sense of place." The CCDC's Sheldon adds that through the preservation of these buildings, memories and personal connections to downtown Boise are being saved. Sheldon says that while not all of Boise's historic downtown buildings are unique, the combination of buildings certainly is, and the variety should be preserved. Through historic preservation and mixed use, the corner of 8th and Idaho has become one of Boise's most prominent and popular spots. The block's streetscapes encourage pedestrian activity and promote outdoor enjoyment. Local historian J.M. Neill may have put it best when he said that people can sit at a table on 8th Street and feel like they are in San Francisco. "Not that we really want to imitate San Francisco, but having an occasional touch of San Francisco ain't too bad."

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**Jacey Brain** graduated in December 2009 with a degree in history. A 2005 Capital High graduate, he will pursue a master's degree in U.S. history.

What are the most important aspects of a livable city?

"A great city is one that holds a sense of place. Cities are livable if their historical and natural aesthetics are acknowledged when looking to the future."