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Exercise 1

Cleveland Convention Center

For several years, a battle has raged on in the city of Cleveland, Ohio regarding the design and construction of a new convention center. This project demonstrates regional planning in action and brings to light the extreme difficulties faced when developing a major new public project.

Cleveland's present convention center is over 80 years old. Although it is a nice looking structure, it no longer can meet the needs of a modern hall and is losing business to other centers that can better fulfill these needs. The primary deficiencies of the current facility include a lack of loading docks, low ceilings, and closely spaced columns (*Convention Center: Not Fit...*). The current standard in convention center design calls for one loading dock for every 10,000 square feet of exhibition space (*Convention Center Site Analysis "Erievuew"*). The current center has only two docks for 279,000 square feet; it should have 28 docks to meet the standard. Current ceiling heights range from 17 to 32 feet, which is too low to accommodate the construction of many modern displays. The support columns are spaced 30 feet apart, cramping displays and breaking up the view around the hall. In addition, more space is desired for meeting rooms and ballrooms (*Cleveland Convention Center*).

At present, five proposals are being considered by the city. The first four involve the city building a new center and the fifth would have a developer building the center and the city leasing it. Each of the designs has good and bad points and depending upon your position and status in the area, you may see things differently. The four

construction sites include the Warehouse District, the Lakefront, the Galleria/Erievue, and the Mall. The latter site is the location of the current convention center. The leasing site is on property currently owned by Norfolk Southern Railroad.

While the current convention center is not ugly, replacing it with a new center on the same site could rejuvenate interest in the area by giving it a new look. The Norfolk Southern property is currently abandoned and considered by many to be an eyesore. The construction of a facility such as this would very much beautify the site and put to good use a prime piece of real estate.

The monetary cost to the public for any of the proposals will easily reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars. However, the non-monetary costs would also be many. For instance, building at the Warehouse District site would interfere with developers' plans to build vast amounts of parking, 1,100 housing units, and over 120,000 square feet of retail space, which all together could pump over \$300 million into the local economy. It could also harm the other businesses already in the area during the anticipated 42-month construction period. In renovating the current mall location, the city would be left with only the I-X Center for holding exhibitions; meaning a loss of business for the areas around the mall during the 48-months of the project. Meanwhile, the lakefront project would require part of the Port of Cleveland to be moved, which will extend the time required for construction and could displace some workers (*Convention Center Site Analysis*).

With the massive cost of this project, raising the necessary funding has become a battle all to itself. To date, county and city officials have seriously discussed three new taxes to pay for the new center. First, the hotel/motel tax will be raised from 3% to 5%.

Second, a 2% tax on all sit-down meals will be added for restaurants in Cuyahoga County (*Restaurant Tax...*). Finally, Cuyahoga County Commissioners wish to impose a 0.25% sales tax, which would bring the county tax up to 8.25% (*Officials Want Sales Tax...*). However, the commissioners will probably face an uphill battle with these taxes, especially the sales tax and to a lesser extent the restaurant tax. The sales tax will affect everyone who lives or shops in Cuyahoga County, no matter what level of income they might achieve. This is causing an uproar with the lower-income residents who will be taxed for, but not benefit much from the new center.

No matter which location is finally selected, property values in the area will skyrocket. The convention center will bring thousands of people to view the exhibitions and there will need to be plenty of restaurants and other areas of entertainment. These large crowds will make the area very attractive to this type of business and they will be willing to pay more for the real estate from which to operate.

Works Cited

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