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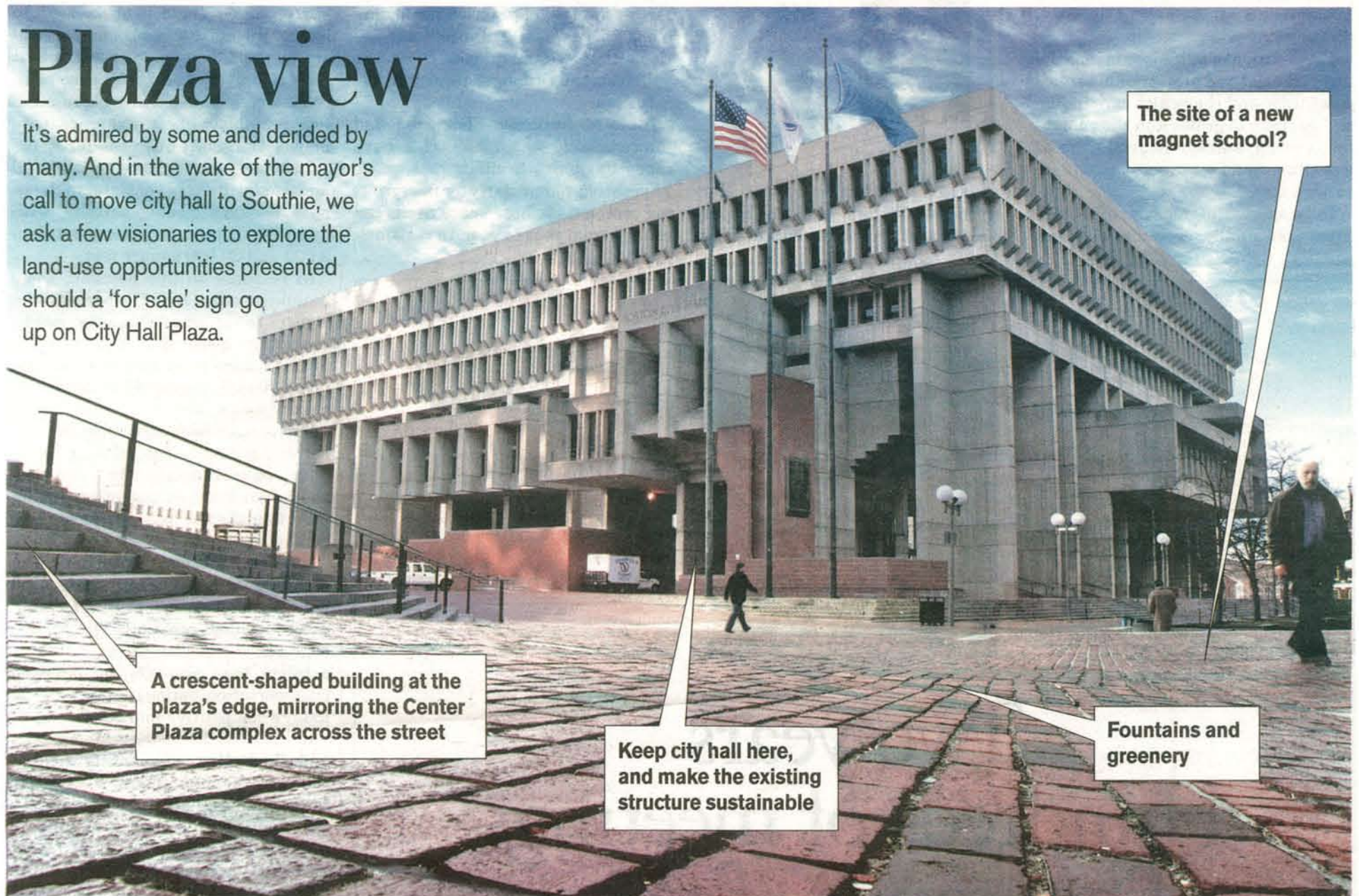
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Plaza view

It's admired by some and derided by many. And in the wake of the mayor's call to move city hall to Southie, we ask a few visionaries to explore the land-use opportunities presented should a 'for sale' sign go up on City Hall Plaza.



The site of a new magnet school?

A crescent-shaped building at the plaza's edge, mirroring the Center Plaza complex across the street

Keep city hall here, and make the existing structure sustainable

Fountains and greenery

W. MARC BERNSAU | BUSINESS JOURNAL

BY JOYCE PELLINO CRANE
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

It's 10 of the starkest acres in the city of Boston — a wide swath of brick with a jarring slab of brutalism in the middle.

And for developers like **Travis Powell**, it's the stuff of dreams.

Powell's Waltham-based **Saracen Properties** is upgrading a building that overlooks City Hall Plaza, which pretty much gives him a front-row seat at what promises to be a plum development opportunity.

"Anything that came up at City Hall Plaza, we'd love to look at," he said. "I think practically any-

thing would work there."

Mayor Thomas Menino late last year announced his plans to move the city's municipal offices to the South Boston Waterfront, which all but turns the 10-acre City Hall Plaza into a blank slate. In the wake of Menino's end-of-the-year announcement, we asked area developers and designers to speculate on the property the city wants to leave behind.

In drydock

Menino announced plans to move city hall to a 14-acre site at Drydock 4 on the waterfront within five years. It was an idea that spurred both excitement

and opposition, with some lauding his concept of an environmentally friendly building overlooking the harbor, and others bemoaning the isolated location.

The goal, said **Tom Miller**, director of economic development for the **Boston Redevelopment Authority**, is to reorganize city government and provide online services that would enable the public to pay parking tickets and conduct other government business without leaving home.

By using technology to reduce foot traffic to city hall, the Mayor is free to build new, said Miller. It

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CITY HALL: Menino's proposal leads to some land-use questions

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would also give him license to shed what many consider an eyesore and others label energy inefficient.

Powell said the nearby Government Center MBTA station and the mix of retail, office and restaurants would almost guarantee success for any replacement of the 1969 structure, designed by **Gerhard Kallmann** and **Michael McKinnell** of Boston. Their firm is now **Kallmann McKinnell & Wood Architects**.

Miller said city officials are already catching wind that the property located at Cambridge and Tremont Streets is in demand.

"I've been told there will be letters coming showing interest already," he said.

In the meantime, several Boston-area designers have their own ideas for city hall and the plaza that surrounds it.

A brutalist assessment

Kevin Sullivan, principal of **Payette** in Boston, values the brutalist architectural style and wants to see it retrofitted.

"It's a very important building in the history of the city," he said. "It was important in its time, in architecture and in the world ... it was one of the more striking buildings of that era — that at that time was world renowned. I think it could function in an entirely different way."

He said he envisions converting city hall to a library, a museum about Boston, an artists' workspace, or even a magnet high school for Boston students. Sullivan would add a thin building with street-level retail shops and restaurants at the edge of the plaza to engage pedestrians and al-

low them to continue walking through the plaza, which he would "green up" by adding a park for concerts.

John Zychowicz, senior vice president of **DiGiorgio Associates Inc.**, would also add a building closer to Cambridge Street. His would be crescent-shaped, mirroring the one across Cambridge Street. But behind the new building, he'd connect a new structure with restaurants and retail shops on the

'It's definitely a place where the city can demonstrate a commitment to sustainable design. No matter what goes on that site, they have to do that, because Boston is going to be a green city.'



Daniel Perruzzi
Principal, Margulies & Associates

first floor. Of the existing nine-floor building, he'd raze it and fill the plaza with grass and fountains as a venue for large city gatherings.

It's a very closed, inward looking building," he said of the current city hall. "Today you try to open government to the people."

Is the plaza the problem?

The existing concrete structure is textured with repetitive patterns, sudden, jarring irregularities and right-angled, concrete wings that jut at the edges. The building is edged into the hillside, giving it multilevel street entrances. The external brick walkway continues up stairways inside the Congress Street entrance on the first floor, and the Cambridge Street doorway on the third.

"Stylistically, I appreciate it," said **David Owens**, principal at **Tsoi/Kobus & Associates of Cambridge**. "It's an honest and intelligent design."

Owens believes the building cannot be retrofitted to another use and should remain as city hall. He said the throwing money away. Being able to determine the correct amount of capital you'll need to spend to take an asset from point A to point B is crucial to the success of a repositioning," noted Corr. His company has been involved in a number of office building repositionings in the Boston area, the most recent of which is the Totten Pond Office Center, a 296,640-square-foot, three-building corporate campus, located at 400 and 460 Totten Pond Rd, in Waltham. The purchase, completed last August, was for just over \$45 million. The current owners are repositioning the building

from a B-minus into a B-plus space.

"We feel by repositioning the asset we will be able to achieve close to or 100 percent," Corr said. "Lease rates are in the high teens per square foot, and we feel we can increase them to the mid-\$20s post renovation."

Margulies said the cost of making changes to a building to transform it into a higher classification is less expensive, "in almost all cases" than new construction.

"You can put money into a C building and make it a B-minus building, and as long as you don't put too much money into it, you have a good investment as a B-minus building. But if you over- or under-improve it and miss the mark, you've wasted money," he said.

Corr said his company felt it was buying into a rising market when it purchased the Totten property last August.

"We know 460 Totten's not an 'A' product, but that's OK, because many tenants, especially those who need and want to be in Waltham, cannot afford to pay top dollar to go to Waltham Woods or Bay Colony," he said.

Joseph Plunkett, senior director of **Cushman & Wakefield** in Boston, believes that in most instances, upgrading a B building to an A can be a tough road to hoe.

"As it relates to office space, a building is what it is. You can upgrade the lobby of a C building with carpet and landscaping and redo the parking lot and maybe get it to B status, but getting an a B building up to an 'A' is borderline impossible. I find that the 21st-century definition of Class A office space is something that can only come from ground-up structures, the latest systems and efficiencies with lobby. You can try, but at end of the day, it's really just a veneer."