

Dawdling Keeps Downtown in Hole

WHILE city officials dilly-dally about reconstructing downtown Oklahoma City, other interests have launched a program to build yet another major business district at May Avenue and NW Highway.

If this project moves along as other private developments have, Centennial Plaza will be doing business while downtown is still mostly holes in the ground, surrounded by traffic jams.

On all sides of the city, new office complexes and shopping centers are being built as wholesale, retail and manufacturing firms flee the confused mess Urban Renewal has made of the inner city.

For a long time, downtown has not been the center of attraction for visitors. The area around I-40 and Meridian has become the state's largest concentration of motel rooms, plus many eating places.

At one time, families and friends often went downtown for dinner and entertainment, but this custom has vanished. A few good restaurants

remain downtown, struggling along mainly on lunch trade.

Two new office buildings (without parking) are under construction and work on Myriad Gardens has been creeping along for a year or so, still a long way from completion.

Meanwhile, the City Council has approved plans for a "String of Pearls" park system along the North Canadian river. This might be a good idea, but does the council really need more projects right now?

Unquestionably, one principal reason for the hemming-and-hawing about downtown has been the involvement of the federal government.

This, of course, became necessary when the city sought subsidies from Washington instead of relying upon local bond issues and private capital. If the latter had been available, there is strong likelihood that the new downtown visualized 20 years ago by civic leaders would be more than an unrealized dream today.

A number of firms have become seriously interested in participating

in the proposed retail Galleria. Then, after dealing with Urban Renewal and city officials for a few weeks or months, one after another has folded its plans.

It might be argued that a lot has been done. That is true. Where private capital has been able to untangle the red tape and build, several handsome structures have resulted.

But their beauty is marred by the unsightliness of nearby cavities. Their utility is hampered by the poorly planned traffic flow, and patronage may be limited by inadequate convenient parking.

The way things are moving, it might appear that development is being held back deliberately so that completion may coincide with the Chamber of Commerce's projected gala celebration of the Centennial of the Run, nine years from now.

But that could not possibly be the case. Unless something is done to accelerate construction, and get the necessary thoroughfares to downtown built, the city won't be ready even by 1989!