

DOWNTOWN NEXT

AN ACTION
STRATEGY FOR
**DOWNTOWN
MINNEAPOLIS**



**MINNEAPOLIS
FOUNDATION**

2023

The Villages of Downtown Minneapolis

— By R.T. Rybak, President & CEO of the Minneapolis Foundation

Why the Minneapolis Foundation Commissioned This Report

When I hear the important conversations today about the future of downtown Minneapolis, and especially when people say they want it to be what it used to be, I flash back to a memory from those “good old days”:

It was 1985, and I was swollen with civic pride as I brought an out-of-town visitor to the top floor of the IDS Center. Leading him to the floor-to-ceiling glass windows, I was certain he would look out and swoon over the city I loved.

Instead he looked for a while and, puzzled, turned to me and asked: “Where is it?” I was deflated but knew immediately what he meant. Back then, downtown had a lot going on around the IDS, including one of the strongest department stores in the country, but when you looked a few blocks away, the urban vista I was so proud of dropped off to almost nothing. My visitor looked toward the riverfront and saw only railroad tracks and abandoned land, toward the Metrodome to see an ocean of surface parking lots, toward Loring Park to see almost none of the housing that stands there today, toward what we now know as the North Loop, which was then filled mostly with obsolete warehouses.

I tell this story to introduce this Minneapolis Foundation-sponsored report on what’s next for downtown because it’s a reminder of the not-so-perfect-past—and why it shouldn’t be the model for the future. In 1985, it was great to walk through six active blocks of downtown Minneapolis, but once you did that, you either walked through blocks of almost nothing or turned around and did the same six blocks all over again.

Think of a great city you have visited. I imagine you didn’t feel like you were walking the same six blocks over and over again. Instead, you probably wandered through a series of districts, with distinct landmarks, sights, and sounds. In a way that was not possible 40 years ago, you can do that in downtown Minneapolis today. A short walk connects you to the vitality of the North Loop, and to whole neighborhoods that have grown in Loring Park and on both sides of the river. Those surface lots around the old Metrodome? They are now the thriving community of East Town, where more than \$2 billion in investment includes thousands of housing units, offices for Thrivent and Wells Fargo, a new stadium, a renovated Armory, two extraordinary parks, an expanded Hennepin County Medical Center, and more.

So our first recommendation is to think less about a few blocks and more about the broader *Villages of Downtown Minneapolis*. Think about each of these areas differently, and think about connecting

each of them. They are only a short walk from each other, both physically and in perception, and thinking about them as one ecosystem can create opportunities we never could have imagined just a few years ago.

We also have to recognize that even if we did want to replicate the past, we couldn't, because we face some significant headwinds.

- Massive changes in retail, especially the collapse of big department stores, mean it is unlikely Nicollet will be reborn solely as a shopping street.
- Remote work has brought tectonic shifts to the daily office population. While a large core of downtown tenants remain, it's unlikely we will ever see them all in the office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Recognizing these challenges and the opportunities they present, those of us at the Minneapolis Foundation leapt at the chance to broaden and deepen the vision for the next stage of downtown Minneapolis. Fortunately, there are already robust discussions going on about downtown's future, including the Downtown Council beginning its long-term planning process, the Mayor's task force on animating Nicollet, and the Abundant Cities series that the Minneapolis Foundation sponsored with the Walker Art Center.

We saw a need to harvest some of the best ideas that are surfacing, find some of the common themes that could have the most impact, and fuse them into a more comprehensive vision. To do that we hired a team of three people with deep experience making things happen in Minneapolis: Sarah Harris, David Frank, and Beth Shogren.

The report they delivered adds depth and insight to some of the issues that have been widely discussed, such as taking traffic off Nicollet Mall and connecting the Mall to the riverfront. It also raises some themes that deserve significantly more attention than they have received so far, including how the traditional office core must be reimagined to welcome a greater diversity of uses by a greater diversity of participants, and how there is not currently one organization that can represent the many different users over the many blocks of the *Villages of Downtown Minneapolis*.

The Minneapolis Foundation wants this report to advance the current conversations, but certainly not to be the final word. We hope you take away ideas, add your own, and get involved. Downtown Minneapolis has reinvented itself many times before, and more successfully than most cities in the country. In the past, those efforts were usually led by a small group of people, most of whom ran big businesses in the central business district. This time the coalition needs to be much bigger and much more diverse, especially if we want downtown to be more central to more people, over more hours in a day, with more diverse uses.

All this means we shouldn't be waiting for a few heroes to "save the day." City building is not a spectator sport. So read this report, find an idea or two that resonates with you, and find a way to play a role in making it happen. While this report raises many questions, the most important one you can answer is: What will YOU do about it?

Introduction

By David Frank, Sarah Harris, and Beth Shogren

Downtown Next: An Action Strategy for Downtown Minneapolis

This action strategy springs from a deep love of our city and the desire to make it a viable and vibrant place in the face of new challenges confronting downtowns everywhere. The Minneapolis Foundation engaged this effort to bring action to ideas; to connect the dots and elevate those who are working to revive our downtown; and to provide a game plan behind which everyone can rally.

The times are calling for something different in the core of downtown Minneapolis. Rapid global and regional impacts have changed how downtowns everywhere are used and how they serve their communities. Our city needs to change. But how?

To form specific, actionable recommendations, the Minneapolis Foundation brought us together—a collective of three people with deep knowledge around city planning, real estate development and finance, public realm activation, and community engagement (*see our resumes in Appendix A*). Our recommendations include ideas around engagement opportunities, key focal places and uses, and transforming the experience of being downtown.

We acknowledge that these measures won't do it all. Real change means creating a downtown that works for everyone. True transformation of downtown means school-aged children, business owners, community elders, employees, faith leaders, policy makers, academics, and visitors will all be champions for downtown. This new common narrative will require a sense of pride and ownership that can only happen when everyone has a real seat at the table and a voice in setting priorities and making decisions.

Our bottom-line recommendation is to engage with the broader community to co-develop ideas and then—and only then—develop priorities for moving forward. While some of the ideas we include here can be implemented right away, they should be considered alongside the many other important conversations taking place elsewhere in the city.

The most important idea put forth in these pages is the creation of a new, collaborative decision-making model.

Executive Summary

Change is not optional. We can choose to have change happen **to us** or **by us**.

We are at the beginning of a new era. COVID-19 and other historic events over the last few years require us to set a course for a future that will look different from the past. This is an opportunity to collectively harness massive transformation for our benefit. This is also an opportunity to let go of debates over whether past decisions were good or bad. They no longer relate to the world we are in.

To envision our future, we looked to many successful places elsewhere in the country and here in our own community (including some of our downtown neighborhoods) to identify actionable ways to make all of downtown a vibrant place that serves the economic and cultural health of the city year round. Our action plan highlights things that are already working well and identifies roadblocks that should be overcome, people who should step up, public and private resources that should be prioritized, and long-standing beliefs that should be debunked or confirmed. In addition to taking action based on what we know today, we should welcome new ideas when they surface and evolve in community discussions, as we hope they will. We have provided a framework structure for the implementation of ideas (see Appendix B) so we can rally the leadership, funding, policy, and timing needed for these combined efforts.

Creating the vibrant place we all want downtown Minneapolis to be will take focus and resources. We urge the public sector to be creative and aggressive in identifying financial tools which can be available to support these efforts.

Our action plan is broad. Just as the recipe for a great cake requires more than one ingredient, there is no one thing that will make all of downtown thrive. It's a combination of things big and small, short- and long-term, known and unknown. The ingredients needed include spaces that welcome, uses that appeal, and people—lots of them—to make downtown come alive. Our recommendations fall into three main areas:

MOVING FROM AN 8-HOUR TO A 24-HOUR DOWNTOWN CORE

Varied uses for diverse users enable a more resilient city. Transform downtown, too long focused on Monday-to-Friday white-collar workers, to include spaces where people do more than just work, but also live, innovate, play, educate, shop, and recreate.

- **Action:** Node Clusters and Entrepreneurship. Create focus areas that draw customers and create an ecosystem of support for a diverse mix of entrepreneurs.

- **Action:** Conversion of Building Spaces. Repurpose some buildings to post-COVID uses that move away from large office tenants to a mix of big and small businesses, retail, residential, and more.
- **Action:** Street Experience. Downtowns are experienced first at the ground level. Let's focus on storefronts and what is needed to support small businesses in them.
- **Action:** Service-Focused Skyways. Stop diluting the pedestrian traffic needed for ground-level retail and instead focus skyways on services and commuting.

Anchors create identity of place and draw people. Places known by name instantly provide a destination for people seeking their purpose.

- **Action:** Riverfront/Post Office. The time is right to transform this architectural wonder, eliminate the inaccessible monolith blocking access to the Mississippi River, and create an iconic symbol of downtown's riverfront complete with a host of publicly active uses.
- **Action:** People-Centric Nicollet Mall. A reimagined, activated walkway with 24/7/365 must-see, hyper-local experiences connecting all the new places and users in downtown's core.

CREATING COMMON GROUND

Beautiful and activated spaces inspire the imagination, make experiences memorable, generate buzz, and make people want to be there.

- **Action:** Green and Beautiful. Well-maintained plantings layered in the streetscape naturally attract people and support the physical, mental, and economic health of the community. We should make downtown as green as possible.
- **Action:** Safety Drives People; People Drive Safety. As there is safety in numbers, this action plan focuses on the activation of downtown that should be a part of the solution. Other smart people are focused on comprehensive safety measures downtown and beyond.
- **Action:** Activation; One Person or Organization Focused on Energizing Downtown. The energy of a place is as important as the physical design. Let's bring focus to activating downtown. Downtown should be active all year, including during winter months.

FROM MONOCULTURE TO MULTI-CULTURE

The diversity and depth of our community is the strength from which we should draw solutions. Ignoring any part will weaken the resilience of our downtown and limit the full expression of who we are as a society. Creating focal points, making experiences memorable, and transforming spaces must reflect the aspirations of the people who will create them, locate businesses in them, live in them, and use them. An important step is to go into the community at large and listen to the

needs and aspirations of the people we need to be part of downtown's future—people who may not have been historically welcome downtown. We should bravely ask and humbly listen.

- **Action:** Whole Community. Including everyone in the solution will result in more people and businesses downtown, both of which are needed to make downtown vibrant, resilient, safe, and economically successful.
- **Action:** Authentic Engagement. The downtown of our future needs to work for everyone, including those not already present. Let's not rely on past decision-making methodology or only current spokespeople to plan what is to come.
- **Action:** Celebrate Existing Abundance. Downtown is a constellation of neighborhoods, each with its own culture and diversity of uses and users. A new perspective that emphasizes connections between them can break down perceived boundaries and encourage growth.

Let's get going.

All these ideas require vision and resources, including from the public sector. Vision without resources is hallucination. Resources without strategy is scattershot. Strategy without action is meaningless. Let's not let "perfect" be the enemy of action. Let's get going!

Table of Contents

Overview.....9

| | |
|--|----|
| What is downtown? | 9 |
| What makes downtown vibrant? | 10 |
| Why does a vibrant downtown matter? | 10 |
| Why now? | 11 |
| Who needs to be included? | 12 |
| Others are doing important things too. | 13 |
| Let's celebrate – and build upon – our wins. | 13 |
| Urgency and patience are not mutually exclusive. | 13 |
| How can we build a resilient model? | 14 |
| What is an action strategy? | 14 |

Actionable Ideas.....16

| | |
|---|----|
| Whole Community | 16 |
| Age at Founding | 17 |
| Safety drives people. People drive safety. | 20 |
| Riverfront/Post Office | 21 |
| People-Centric Nicollet Mall | 23 |
| Node Clusters and Entrepreneurship | 26 |
| Green and Beautiful | 29 |
| Conversion of Building Spaces | 31 |
| User Experience | 34 |
| Skyways: Service (Not Retail) Focused | 37 |
| Activation: One Person or Organization Focused on Energizing Downtown | 39 |
| Funding Strategies | 41 |
| Authentic Engagement | 48 |

Supporting Materials.....53

| | |
|---|----|
| Appendix A - About the Authors | 53 |
| Appendix B - Workplan Framework for Ideas | 54 |
| Appendix C - Projects by Others | 56 |
| Appendix D - Abundant Cities Survey Results | 62 |
| Appendix E - Abundant Cities Panelists Bios | 64 |

Overview

Just do it!

Indeed, we should change our model of leadership. That's just the start.

We should recognize that increasing vibrancy and sustaining downtown's viability does not have a single solution. It will take a series of things big and small.

We should adopt an innovation mindset that allows us to try things and accept that ideas that don't last are not failures but opportunities to adapt and enjoy the moment. We heard about this mindset from leaders at the city, in the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup report, from Abundant Cities speakers, and elsewhere.

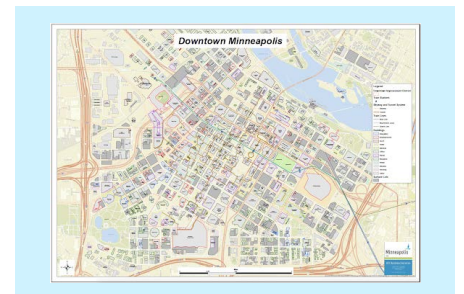
We should have policies that say “yes” instead of relying on existing “we've always done it this way” approaches or practices that do not recognize the massive change that we have been through.

We should clearly focus funding on catalyzing key first steps.

We should get going.

WHAT IS DOWNTOWN?

When people say, “Downtown Minneapolis isn't doing well,” we should remember that we're really talking about the Central Business District. Many other parts of downtown are thriving or doing just fine. How we define downtown Minneapolis has evolved over time to meet the needs of a changing society, greater density, and different use patterns. From Owámniyomni, to a milling town by the river, to the Midwest hub for many Fortune 500 companies, downtown has evolved.



In the 1960s, downtown Minneapolis was thought to be a compact few blocks centered at 8th Street and Nicollet Mall with ample surface parking (created in many cases by the demolition of historic buildings during that era's national focus on “urban renewal”). Downtown has since expanded to an area covering more than 150 blocks from the intersection of I-35/94 on the south, the Mississippi River on the north, I-94 on the west, and I-35W on the east.

The mid-20th century organizing principle was a series of use-specific corridors—a retail corridor along Nicollet Mall, an entertainment corridor along Hennepin Avenue, a corporate corridor along

Marquette and 2nd Avenues, and a quasi-industrial corridor along North Washington Avenue, with residential areas and sports facilities far away from downtown. In the 1980s through early 2000s, this was diffused as corporate activity consumed land along Nicollet and spread to the west across Hennepin Avenue and east to Chicago Avenue. The shift to large corporate towers along Nicollet eliminated smaller street-front retail spaces that were already struggling due to skyway retail pulling consumers off the sidewalk. The advent of online retailers in the 1990s onward accelerated the shift from brick-and-mortar retail and has nearly eliminated street level retail spaces downtown. During this same period, high-end residential buildings, sports venues, hotels, and the Convention Center blossomed on all edges of and in the core of downtown's Central Business District.

WHAT MAKES DOWNTOWN VIBRANT?

The blurring of uses in and around downtown's core created smaller villages within the overall downtown area—each with a unique identity, audience, and level of success. Villages with available land or buildings flexible enough to welcome this blurring have been the net vibrancy winners. Villages with inflexible building types, limited land, and/or prescriptive zoning and policies have been the net vibrancy losers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the comparison between the North Loop and the Central Business District. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home-orders, North Loop's varied uses remained active while the primarily corporate use of the Central Business District was laid bare.

Even now, activity in the core is still significantly less than pre-COVID, while many office users who choose to stay in the downtown area are signing leases in the North Loop, including KPMG, Piper Sandler, Varde Partners, and others. Why does this matter? When asking if downtown is vibrant, the answer will vary by neighborhood: North Loop is different from the Mill District, which is different from Elliot Park, which is not the same as the core Central Business District. For people not frequently downtown, perception can cast a shadow that blurs these distinctions. If people hear that safety is an issue—which it may be in certain areas or at certain times—then ALL of downtown is unsafe ALWAYS. So, is downtown vibrant? Well, it depends.

WHY DOES A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN MATTER?

Historically, downtown was the civic and economic epicenter of the region: As goes downtown, so goes the community. But what if that epicenter shifts?

Downtowns are the visible representation of a community's condition—good, bad, or otherwise. Done well, downtowns are where people converge to achieve personal and professional goals, express mutual interests and aspirations, share cultures and experiences, and demonstrate what the broader community has to offer. A vibrant downtown serves the needs of its people. With far fewer office workers in the core and no other primary uses to fill the void, sidewalks feel abandoned or activated only with threatening behavior. As the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup report says, we should not accept the current amount of vacancy in retail spaces and the corresponding lack of vibrancy downtown. How do we restore a vibrancy that

makes people feel safe and welcome? Sociologists tell us that 40 people doing the right thing makes the one person doing the wrong thing uncomfortable. There is safety in numbers! How do we restore the 40:1 balance? Mayor Jacob Frey has encouraged downtown employers to ask their employees to come to the office three days per week, and for those working to activate and enliven spaces to target their efforts accordingly. This will help, but we also need many other strategies. Until downtown feels vibrant, media coverage—and our collective perception—will be impacted. The narrative matters. Unified programmatic efforts and aligned communications will be essential.

By the numbers, downtown Minneapolis has long been the economic engine for the region’s infrastructure, services, and growth. Property taxes are used to support services (such as fire and police), infrastructure (such as roads, bridges, and sewers), schools, and parks. In 2019, Minneapolis property taxes provided 32.37% of Hennepin County’s tax base. Minneapolis is one of the Top 5 net contributors of taxes to the 7-county region ([Metro Area Fiscal Disparities Program 2019](#)). And, for every \$3 in property, sales, and income tax revenue Minneapolis generates for the state, it receives only \$1 back, making it a net contributor to the state ([Fiscal Disparities Program in The Twin Cities Metro Area](#)). At all levels of government, Minneapolis provides annual support for citizens well beyond its borders.

As workers show their preference to stay at home instead of returning to the office, employers are looking for smaller spaces to lease, and in many cases this new space is outside the Central Business District. At the same time, many buildings are at or approaching the end of their loan terms, requiring them to refinance in a moment when interest rates have increased. Lower occupancy and higher interest rates reduce available debt and destabilize buildings. Ballard Spahr, a national law firm with a local office, has recently announced the formation of a new practice group focusing on loan work-outs for troubled commercial properties where reducing values do not support needed refinancing.

In short, downtown’s tax base is going to decrease. How do we respond to this in a way that doesn’t unduly burden other parts of the community? How do we minimize the reduction and find a path back to economic stability?

WHY NOW?

The world has changed. Impacts of the pandemic on our labor force (such as digital access allowing some to work from home vs. essential and frontline workers), coupled with the killings of George Floyd, Daunte Wright, Amir Locke, and too many others around the country, have put corporate, elected, and community leaders on notice. We should find a more just, more inclusive, and more flexible path forward. The evolution of downtown villages is already showing us this reality.

The Central Business District – the downtown core – continues to struggle with singular types of space and culture, together with corporate decisions around hybridizing workforces and downsizing space. The “Great Resignation” is transitioning a large percentage of our labor force into prospective small business owners for whom the large monolithic physical spaces, economic

structures, and narrow mentoring ecosystem of downtown's core were not designed. Further, the balance of daily life has tipped from a primarily physical experience to a more immersive digital experience. And at a time when funders and policymakers are rightfully shifting program focus towards promoting diversity and equity, we need to reckon with—and change—downtown's history of ignoring or excluding people from diverse cultures and ages. Many people simply do not have a meaningful connection to downtown.

It is not all doom and gloom. Many of the neighborhoods within downtown possess rich residential and commercial activity. Street-front retail is not dead, it is just focused in the North Loop. There is an opportunity to create a narrative that highlights the connections between these areas, breaking down perceived boundaries to weave downtown into a multicultural mosaic that drives growth.

The time is right. People are ready to engage in fun, and the recent social and political trends in our society point toward a real inflection point. If we act quickly, we can tap into Minneapolis' legacy of civic pride, engagement, and volunteerism to generate excitement and optimism about our city. Major ownership shifts that are likely to occur as buildings refinance also will bring new leadership energy and investment readiness. We are presented with an extraordinary opportunity to harness these changes and reimagine a vibrant downtown of the future—one where uses and users of space are wide-ranging, in different sizes, from diverse cultures, and representing all ages. Leaders in all sectors are making choices about how to recharge downtown. These decisions should not default to “the way it was.” We should expect our downtown to look different than it did in 2019. In fact, our success as a region depends on it.

WHO NEEDS TO BE INCLUDED?

Everyone! Downtown should encourage everyone to come together, from everywhere, all the time. The only way to create spaces and places that support and encourage youth (our future business owners and labor force) is to ask them what they want from their downtown. The only way to catalyze successful small and BIPOC businesses is to ask them what they need, including how to remove traditional financial and other barriers that have prevented them from being here. The only way to have policy and funding lift up opportunities is to have policymakers and funders in the conversation. The only way to remove barriers for elders (our mentors), people with disabilities, non-English language speakers, low-income earners, and others we need in this equation (as business owners, customers, and workers) is to ask them what the barriers are!

Ideation, planning, and execution all require authentic participation. A “build it and they will come” mindset is out of touch today, and it has produced the results we are living with. Including all people in planning ensures they will be here when we take action. First, we should stop the self-perpetuating cycle of only asking people who are already here. Instead, we need to seek invitations into other, existing community conversations to listen and understand why downtown is not their chosen place to be—yet.

Let's also recognize that no one sector or group can do this alone. This is a trust fall. The public sector needs to provide leadership, adapt policy, and signal necessary prioritization through catalytic and seed-funding investments. We heard support for this work from the mayor and city staff when we met with them. The private sector needs to provide leadership and bring technical expertise, businesses, workforce, and capital. We know they are eager for their investments to contribute to a robust downtown environment and economy. The community—faith leaders, academic leaders, elders, youth, artists, workers, and more—need to bring ideas, energy, and honesty to the discussion. And everyone needs to be in it together, equally. We should work together to redefine the goals and metrics of success. This includes people who are not reading this report. Everyone acknowledges that we need more and different people downtown. We need them to help lead this effort.

OTHERS ARE DOING IMPORTANT THINGS TOO.

It's both-and, not either-or.

Downtown is a big, multi-dimensional place. We have included outlines of important work being done by others as context for the big ideas in this framework to ensure all efforts are additive, not conflicting. We also want to avoid reinventing the work being done by others. Just as we expect additions to this framework over time, so too will efforts by others expand. We have included a list of many—but not all—efforts underway by others in Appendix C.

LET'S CELEBRATE – AND BUILD UPON – OUR WINS.

As noted, a lot of good work is being done by others. But that's not all: City leadership has expressed interest in supporting innovative ideas. The McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis Foundation, and others have already begun to support small and BIPOC business development. The announced conversions of office buildings to housing demonstrates a private sector appetite for this type of undertaking. Professional sports at all three downtown venues bring energy throughout the year. Recent events including the Taylor Swift concert, Taste of Minnesota, and Pride activities demonstrate that downtown is a place people want to be.

Moreover, the old concentric circle model where downtown was anchored at 7th and Nicollet has been replaced by a Venn diagram of numerous vibrant downtown neighborhoods overlapping to create opportunity for the core of downtown. While this has initially created a vacuum in the core, it more readily positions the core to be re-envisioned as the gathering place and common ground for all the strong surrounding villages.

URGENCY AND PATIENCE ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is today. Let's start doing some things without delay so we aren't watching opportunities fall away as we continue to plan. Current

and ongoing planning will continue to build upon these actions and leverage funding, policy, and action toward a bigger outcome in which the whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts.

Many of the things in this plan will take time, especially setting a new leadership and planning model. However, if we don't start now, we will be having the same conversation in three years, or five years, or ten years. If we don't ever change the model, things we do the old way will fall flat, and we will still be asking how to fix downtown.

HOW CAN WE BUILD A RESILIENT MODEL?

Let's try things, adapt things, take risks, and be open to pivots along the way. To do this, we need patient capital, policies, and mentors. And we need to nurture and adapt ideas.

The best way to have a healthy ecosystem is through variety. One monolithic use is overly susceptible to disruptive events. We need expansive uses (housing, offices, maker space, entertainment, retail, and green and open spaces) that appeal to broad users (people of all cultures and ages), and support ongoing evolution (small to large businesses, and re-population with small businesses again). This varied platform will prepare downtown for disruptions that are occurring more frequently as globalization and digitization accelerate.

Resilience also happens when decisions are made and adapted in alignment with core values. Policymakers, funders, business leaders, and other constituencies should define and adopt values. We recommend as a starting point:

- **Diversity** of uses, users, ideas, and leaders. We need more than one basket for our eggs.
- **Innovation** that allows us to try new things and accept changes not as failures but opportunities to pivot. Disruptions will continue to occur. A culture of change makes us ready and eager to adapt.
- **Future-facing** discussions that consider who, what, where, how, and why, with intentional separation from historic decisions, metrics, and leadership models.
- **New measures of success** that center community "access, attachment and agency," diversity of ownership, and thriving businesses of all types, size, and duration.

WHAT IS AN ACTION STRATEGY?

This isn't a report. It's not a plan. **It's a call to action.** The tipping point of this moment requires that we use a new model of engagement and leadership to create the vibrant and diverse place we desire.

Below are ideas: some are big ideas that have been around for some time; some were informed by the panel discussions hosted by the Walker Art Center and Minneapolis Foundation in March

through May of 2023 around the notion of “Abundant Cities” (see Appendices D and E for panelist bios and audience survey results); and some have been emerging elsewhere.

We don’t know what other ideas will arise from the community and what their urgency and priorities should be.

We do know that if we were to move forward with these projects without community input, engagement, leadership, and prioritization, we would not achieve the goal of a sustainable and vibrant downtown. We would replicate the mistakes of the past. We need new voices in the dialogue about our city, and we need narrative change. We have to generate some excitement. Panel discussions at the Walker revealed that projects such as these intending to transform downtown can only move at the speed of trust. It will take time to build that trust. It starts with listening, asking questions, and being unafraid to go off the path we think a project will take.

We are aware that we did not do significant outreach and communication with the groups who need to be included in future discussions and decisions about downtown. And we are aware of the limitations inherent in this approach. But we believe that it’s important to get this kind of thinking out there quickly.

Actionable Ideas

This action plan identifies many big and little things that could collectively make downtown a resilient and thriving economic and cultural engine for our region. We conclude the plan with the need to authentically connect with leaders throughout the broader community. While we take the necessary time to engage, listen, and act together, on a parallel track we can be taking the actions shared throughout this plan (which assumes that each idea has a benefactor/client to both provide the pursuit and planning funds and engage subject matter experts and conveners needed take these steps).

WHOLE COMMUNITY

Including everyone in the solution will result in more people and businesses downtown—both of which are needed to make downtown vibrant, resilient, safe, and economically successful.

Historically, disenfranchised groups—youth, people of color, lower income earners, elders, and others—were at best forgotten or at worst discouraged from being downtown. Ironically, many of these groups are the invisible workers downtown, supporting wide swathes of retail, hospitality, and administrative industry while being discouraged or unable to afford to live or recreate downtown. Through exclusion, downtown has been losing the opportunity to connect with a large swath of prospective current and future business owners. Downtowns that primarily serve career-aged people (25-60) are likely to be expensive, physically challenging (requiring climbing stairs, with limited seating, and involving crossing wide and heavy traffic intersections), and with a limited range of activities. Once those same career professionals want children or are ready to retire, they age out of the downtown monoculture and leave. This cycle has been magnified by the impacts of COVID, with more career professionals now working from home and choosing to relocate out of downtown sooner. This is the story of the core of downtown Minneapolis.

Planners, policymakers, and business owners in the core of Minneapolis didn't just focus on attracting career-aged people; they have long made overt decisions to deny broad audiences access to downtown. These include developing buildings that require luxury-brand, well-established, and creditworthy tenants who pay premium rents; vetoing youth centers and placing obstacles for skateboarders while offering few alternative ways for youth to engage; eliminating places for elders and physically disabled persons to sit and rest; providing little to no housing that can be attained on a lower or fixed income; and shifting retail traffic to skyways that are most easily found and frequented by workers, not visitors, while eliminating small "startup" sized and priced storefront spaces.

These examples demonstrate the downtown core's focus on the primacy of white-collar career-

aged workers, shoppers, and entertainment audiences—many of whom have not returned post-COVID. The data supports this singular focus as highlighted in a May 4, 2023, *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* article about post-COVID return of foot traffic using cell phone connectivity data. At just 41% of pre-COVID foot traffic, Minneapolis ranked 5th from the bottom of all North American downtown employment centers (Minneapolis core business district, not North Loop). Minneapolis' downtown core was ahead of only San Francisco, CA, St. Louis, MO, Portland, OR, and Indianapolis, IN. People do not need to work or meet their daily needs downtown, and we have not developed an ecosystem of other reasons to be here. We've had "all of our eggs in one basket" and the basket fell. It's time to treat our eggs differently.

Part of doing things differently means offering an intensely localized experience that cannot be delivered digitally. Downtown needs to be a place for a wide variety of people to live, recreate, meet their daily needs, and find unique and authentic experiences and retail. Creating cultural and entrepreneurial hubs that offer entertainment, food, mentoring, and economic opportunities is paramount. Equally important is reducing cost and other access barriers for elders (mentors), BIPOC communities and families (small business owners, employees, and customers), and the full spectrum of income earners (labor force). We need all of these people and the everyday activation they bring to make downtown's core village vibrant.

Downtown should be the place where small business owners find a network to support their launch, a customer base to accelerate their growth, and spaces to house all phases of the business life cycle.

- Youth.** We are building our city of the future for people who need to be at the table today. One only need look at young people who started businesses or movements that forever changed global norms to know that youth have untapped potential for our city. There have been good programs that help youth and young adults connect to the business community for mentoring and internships in the broader Metropolitan Area (Minneapolis' Step Up and the joint City-County Youth Coordinating Board, for example). However, for decades downtown leaders have overtly denied opportunities brought forward by youth to meaningfully connect, such as youth centers and skate parks. Instead, unless working, youth downtown have been relegated to "hanging out" in the public realm, reinforcing fear about their presence. It is critical that leadership be honest about these historically negative attitudes towards youth and instead engage to ask what types of places and activities would be welcoming and provide a platform

AGE AT FOUNDING

| | | | |
|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|
| Dell | 18 | Morgan Stanley | 50 |
| Facebook | 19 | Garmin | 51 |
| UPS | 19 | Hyundai | 51 |
| Microsoft | 20 | Starbucks | 51 |
| Apple | 21 | Campbell Soup | 52 |
| Burberry | 21 | Nestle | 52 |
| Tesco | 21 | Nissan | 53 |
| Harley-Davidson | 22 | Estee Lauder | 54 |
| Microsoft | 22 | Las Vegas Sands | 55 |
| Disney | 22 | Porsche | 56 |
| Heineken | 23 | Kawasaki | 59 |
| Best Buy | 25 | Bank of America | 60 |
| Google | 25 | IBM | 61 |
| HP | 25 | | |
| Sony | 25 | | |
| Nike | 26 | | |

for positive engagement of youth downtown. Ideas could start as prototypes that bring youth during certain days/times of the week but should be done with an eye towards integrating youth as an important part of downtown every day. A visible and ongoing youth council should be formed and charged with both bringing ideas forward and vetting/adapting other ideas through a youth lens. The group should be convened by an existing organization (Youth Coordinating Board, City, or Downtown Council, etc.) with the organizational capacity in place to support the council's activities.

- **Innovators and creatives** are the future of our economy and identity. Changing the economic structure of downtown will make spaces more accessible to emerging ideas that may be short-lived, or may use this foothold to grow into the next global juggernaut. Short-lived and long-term businesses are both critical to downtown's success—a healthy combination of change (always something new to see and do) and stability (counting on what will be there) makes a place compelling.
- **Elders** also start businesses and play a critical role in mentoring, supporting, and offering new ideas. Further, like a canary in a coal mine, one can determine if a place is safe and functions well if it works for elders (and young children).

How can we make downtown work for everyone? We need to ask. We need to go to existing conversations and be ready to listen, really listen. We need to act on what we hear by changing the way we do things—not trying to fit what we hear into how we are already doing things. We need to open downtown and welcome people in.

ACTIONS:

- Go to neighborhood spaces, events, and leaders where they already are—sit on porches, in park and rec centers, libraries, coffee shops, and barber shops to listen. Experience the hopes, aspirations, celebrations, and challenges of the community. Host community dinners. Northside, Southside, Northeast, Southeast. Go to the city's Cultural Districts. Celebrate community by bringing people together over a meal. Breaking bread together is a visceral way to break down barriers, give people an opportunity to get to know each other, and learn about how we differ and what we share.
- Once engaged out in the community, host an all-community dinner downtown along Nicollet Mall (the "Nicollet Meal"): a) highlighting the cultural and innovative breadth and depth of our city; b) encouraging cross-cultural cross-neighborhood conversations to take place; c) demonstrating downtown is the place to bring together and celebrate the city's diversity; and d) setting the tone that all are welcome in downtown's future. Embed this idea in neighborhood events to serve as a steady way to reinforce community throughout the city. Make an annual meal on Nicollet a predictable way to bring people together to share what they have in common and celebrate the unique qualities of their neighborhoods. (The Minneapolis Downtown Council announced a Nicollet Mall meal this summer.) *If winter has a Holiday festival, what if summer had a picnic table?*

- Engage artists to create spaces and environments to break down barriers between neighborhoods as they come together to cross-pollinate ideas. This could include cues to have people change seats throughout the community meals so as to meet new people; different prompts or activities through the space that elicit conversation; and spoken word or visual representations provided by each neighborhood. This could also lead to quasi- or permanent installations downtown that commemorate and celebrate the various places in our community and how they come together downtown.
- Connect with established organizations that are already working with groups throughout the city—MEDA, SCORE, neighborhood resident and business associations, the Youth Coordinating Board, the Walker Art Center’s WAC-TAC, Juxtaposition Arts, and many others. The Minneapolis Foundation should convene these groups to honor their work and seek to participate in the work they are doing.
- Identify places where a community of regulars already exists downtown—places like Hen House restaurant and the Cigarden cigar events on Sundays—and engage in dialogue about why a sense of community ownership exists there and what could expand that ownership to other places.
- The outcome of this needs to be a continued time and place to meet, listen, celebrate the diversity of our community, and share information and ideas to inspire other big ideas. The Abundant Cities series featured several projects that used this approach, as well as recurring community events to create trust and connection through shared experience. This is not a one-time effort, and it needs to be sustained over time.

Examples and Resources:

- Frogtown dinner: The Community Meal (2012–present)—Seitu Ken Jones. “In his iconic Community Meal events, Jones brings forth stories of food in an artful experience across a shared table that exposes our differences and inequities, illuminates our similarities and connections, and builds bridges of understanding between people.” (Seitujonesstudio.com)
- Detroit Island Park COVID Memorial Parade: people from all over Detroit came together in memory of loss to view a tribute gallery installed along the parade route. (Rochelle Riley, Detroit’s Director of Arts and Culture.)
- 8-80 Cities
- Hen House
- Cigarden
- Hennepin Healthcare revisioning of its downtown campus with engagement strategy led by Imagine Deliver
- Candy Chang: public art opportunities to elicit community answers
- WAC-TAC (Walker Art Center’s Teen Arts Council)
- Juxtaposition Arts
- Youth Coordinating Board (Ann DeGroot)

SAFETY DRIVES PEOPLE. PEOPLE DRIVE SAFETY.

As there is safety in numbers, we focus on the activation of downtown that should be a part of the solution. Other smart people are focused on comprehensive safety measures downtown and beyond.

Some people are afraid to come downtown. They either experience or perceive that a trip downtown will result in being subjected to loitering, soliciting, confrontations, and assaults (even homicide). Even if there are positive experiences happening, these negative actions are reinforced regularly in the media. Anecdotally, the primary theme shared when people heard of this downtown planning effort was, “You have to make it safe first—it’s not safe now.”

A big part of the solution is more people. Sociologists have identified that if 40 people are doing the right thing, the one person doing the wrong thing will be uncomfortable and leave. There is safety in numbers and in community. Studies also reflect that anonymity allows bad activity to fester. Also, a well-cared for place—clean, good-smelling, beautiful—thwarts bad behavior while neglected places invite bad behavior. Bringing more people downtown, combined with 24/7/365 activation of spaces, will create a place where bad activity does not want to be. DID Ambassadors are there to interact with people, tend to cleanliness and beauty, and serve as a visible cue that when people are downtown there are people available to assist.

Many others in the community are focusing on policing, mental health and safety interventions, private security, and other measures needed to address current and ongoing safety concerns (including via The Minneapolis Safe and Thriving Communities report referenced in Appendix C). These are critically important. Here, we advocate for essential and complementary action to increase vibrancy and foster “safety in numbers,” which will reduce disappointing and illegal behavior. As a community we should adequately fund and staff all these resources.

ACTIONS:

- Engage with and support the work of others addressing comprehensive safety systems in the city.
- Encourage a balance between the ideas that more police create an impression of safety, and that a greater police presence sends the message that it is unsafe. People react differently to the presence of police and that needs to be part of the consideration.
- Continue to support (and increase as needed) mental health interceptors and DID Ambassadors who keep eyes and ears on the street, offer the public a welcoming assist, and address issues that are concerning but may not need enforcement. Upstream interventions to support people who may be in economic or mental health crisis offer a more compassionate and fiscally viable way of addressing troubling downstream issues. Providing people with the early supports they need has been proven to both remove the barriers that cause the crises and reduce court activity and emergency room visits—a win-win. A

percentage of the cost savings achieved from reductions in enforcement and health system utilization should be targeted to support and expand this program.

- Rather than broad restrictions that run afoul of constitutional protections around freedom of speech and assembly, ensure the interceptors and Ambassadors are trained to identify when someone's actions are aggressive or threatening—amplified in certain places (near ATMs, intersections, etc.)—thus needing intervention or enforcement.
- Continue force-multiplier networks between public (police), DID, and private security forces (e.g., 1st precinct Fusion Center and RadioLink and cameras).
- Continue programs to help unhoused individuals connect to services and housing. Utilize the record state investment made in 2023 towards homelessness prevention to increase the city's funding for programs to help unhoused people connect to services and housing.

RIVERFRONT/POST OFFICE

The time is right to transform this architectural wonder, eliminate the inaccessible monolith blocking access to the Mississippi River, and create an iconic symbol of downtown's riverfront complete with a host of publicly active uses.

This Art Deco property is located along the majestic riverfront gateway to downtown. Its 360° panoramic views of the city are unmatched. It has gracious spaces, wide-open patios overlooking the river, and a large space with high ceilings and marble archways extending along the base of the building at the riverfront side. Contemporary additions (including the parking ramp) obstruct views and detract from the grandeur of the building. Further, as most of the building is accessed only by postal office staff, the public is largely unable to benefit from the spectacular experiences the building offers. We have a giant, historically significant and recognizable landmark providing limited benefit to the community in which it sits.

For several decades, different conversations such as downtown gateway and riverfront planning, media coverage of postal market-share declines, and others, have prompted different groups to aspire to repurpose this building. Over the last 20+ years, this aspiration has intensified as significant public and private sector focus and investment transformed the once industrial Mississippi River on which this building sits. Today there is the Mississippi River parkway extension: the Mill District, North Loop, and St. Anthony Main communities, Guthrie Theater, Federal Reserve Bank, and Waterworks Park (with Owamni restaurant, which honors the Indigenous heritage of the river and falls). All this investment pivoted focus and density towards the river, drawing greater attention to repurposing this post office building into a contributing and compelling landmark for downtown vs. a large barricade for the area. Like other cities known for active anchors—Pike Place Market (Seattle), Faneuil Hall (Boston), Navy Pier (Chicago), Fisherman's Wharf (San Francisco), and South Street Seaport (New York)—this reimagined destination could serve as the keystone anchor to the river and a gateway into downtown.

ACTIONS:

Develop an execution plan to move the USPS out of the building:

- Meet with U.S. Senators and Congress members to gauge appetite for pursuing USPS cooperation in exit timeline and strategy. Discuss policy, funding, and critical path for decision making (including needed advocacy with USPS).
- Meet with the USPS to determine the future business model and needs for the building. Discuss how the USPS business model has changed. Does USPS need central distribution or can this site merge with another in the TCMA? Will USPS work solely with a public purpose user or will they expand to include private competition?
- Create a Technical Advisory Panel to envision the future use of this building. Include public (city, county, federal, USPS), corporate, creative, youth, entrepreneurial, and philanthropic leaders. Ideas include any combination of markets, housing, arts and interactive spaces. Ensure that existing conversations on this topic are pulled into or parallel to this effort making sure to avoid conflicts, gaps, or restarting already underway efforts.
- Gather available building architectural and engineering plans. Convene with and use any planning data completed previously by other interested groups, including the Trust for Public Land, Mpls Downtown Council, City of Minneapolis, etc. Engage architectural expertise to assess building capacities and create plans.
- Develop goals for view corridors (e.g., demo the parking ramp), public uses, space program, historic preservation, and interpretation.
- Develop proposed ownership model (public-private, nonprofit, etc.) with timelines, sources and uses, and approval strategy.
- Negotiate an agreement with the USPS to get started, even if the path to the end isn't clear.
- Pursue funding options including: Historic Tax Credits (Custom House), National Parks Mississippi NRRRA funding, state bonds, philanthropy focusing on historic preservation, private capital, and others.

Examples and Resources:

- Custom House, Downtown St. Paul (Exeter)
- City Museum, St. Louis
- Pike Place Market, Seattle
- Chelsea Market, NYC
- Faneuil Hall, Boston
- Railyard District, Santa Fe

PEOPLE-CENTRIC NICOLLET MALL

A reimagined activated walkway with 24/7/365 must-see, hyper-local experiences connecting all the new places and users in downtown's core.

Nicollet Mall was renovated in 2017 (design by James Corner Field Operations) to meet the needs of a downtown then primarily focused on the office worker. As highlighted throughout this action plan, we should now focus on a new, full spectrum of uses and users, with Nicollet Mall critical to this pivot. This key corridor that connects the Walker Art Center to the river should be a symbol of the new downtown—a place for food vendors, artisans, and other small businesses; a place for entrepreneurs and residents; a place that welcomes all cultures and ages. Potentially, it should have a new name to signal that this place is looking forward. While Nicollet Mall is not the only place new activity should occur, it is the most widely recognized symbol of downtown and will be instrumental in tangibly showing that changes are occurring in the core.

Currently, bus riders exit a bus and leave the Mall for lack of reasons to stay because the Mall has many vacancies. Removing buses and fully opening the Mall to pedestrian and bike activity will expand opportunities for open-air markets, sidewalk cafes, artists, and green spaces, which will attract creative small businesses and people (*see sections on Conversion of Building Spaces and Node Clusters*). This idea to reinvigorate pedestrian activity on the Mall is not new and has recently gained new momentum in a recommendation from the city's Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup, in the media, and in public sentiment. This idea, like so many others, is part of a larger strategy that requires other pieces to make it successful (*see User Experience and Funding sections*).

ACTIONS:

- Create a “signature urban walkway” from Washington Avenue (with a future connection to the Mississippi River via the Post Office) to 12th Street (and perhaps continuing along the Loring Greenway through Loring Park to the Walker Art Center and Sculpture Garden). This corridor could be a spine of greening, arts, culture, and entertainment, and should incorporate key big nodes such as Washington/Nicollet, continued activation of Peavey Plaza, etc. This should be done in alignment with the branding and goals of others plans (e.g., Meet Minneapolis 2030 plan).
- The unique nature of Nicollet Mall, with limited vehicles and limited small storefront spaces, provides a contrast to other places such as Hennepin and First avenues, where full vehicular traffic and more street-front spaces offer a different character and purpose. It is important to coordinate planning for Nicollet Mall with these other areas, including when defining the types and locations of node clusters (*see Node Clusters and Entrepreneurship section*). In particular, the Warehouse District Business Association is pursuing a Technical Advisory Panel through ULI Minnesota in an effort to look at safety, infrastructure improvements, and business cohesion for the area that draws significant sports and entertainment patrons.

- Close the nexus of Nicollet between Washington Avenue and 3rd Street (as suggested by the city’s Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup) to create a people-centric space quickly. (See *Gateway Plaza* section below.)
- Encourage the city to outline pedestrian-only guidelines, to include:
 - Sufficient emergency vehicle access.
 - Needed changes to zoning.
 - The Mall’s renovation was financed using tax-exempt bonds which specifically prohibit income-producing activity or activity unrelated to the tax-exempt purpose. Counsel should be sought in an iterative process to work through plans that activate the Mall and ensure those plans are consistent with bond rules.
 - Federal and state funds were used to construct Nicollet Mall when it was built and renovated several times. Confirm what funder requirements remain in effect.
 - Work with Metro Transit to permanently relocate service. Shifting transit capacity to other corridors should be studied to determine where capacity exists (e.g., are the Marq-2 corridors full or not?) and where rider experience would not be unduly impacted.
 - An overview of planting or other streetscape elements design objectives (e.g., priority to enable activity, and maximum visible impact via vertical vs. horizontal design elements)
 - An overview of planting or other streetscape element restrictions (e.g., underground areaways and utilities, product durability in high traffic areas, proximity to application of salt, winter-hardiness, attractive nuisance / vandalism, and identified sources for ongoing costs).
- Incentivize property owner investment in street-level retail, negotiate friendly lease terms, training programs for small and BIPOC businesses. Minneapolis (Step Up and others) excels in providing summer employment and training opportunities for young people. A focused version of this work could attract young people and their energy to the Mall.
- Create a plan for an open-air market along the Mall:
 - Identify best practice open-air market examples and operators from elsewhere; identify key criteria that make markets vibrant.
 - Assess economics needed to sustain the ongoing activation, operation, and maintenance of the market (without assuming major reliance on perpetual philanthropic support). This work should be sure to review any available analysis for the renovation of Peavey Plaza, The Commons and other areas (e.g., HR&A analysis, Bryant Park, etc.).
 - Consider a right of first refusal or other mechanism for participation to reward invested, in-line, downtown businesses.
 - Consider a single master lease to a private or nonprofit operator for vendors and activation opportunities along the Mall (entire stretch or full blocks) for a trial period which, if successful based on key metrics, could become a permanent operating model. This would allow a comprehensive approach to uses/mix, programming, and user experience.

- Recommission bus shelters as vendor kiosks and shelter for cafes, thus creating an all-year open-air market; add heaters to kiosks and blankets to restaurant seating to extend to year-round use.
 - Develop mobile kiosks for arts-related or BIPOC entrepreneurs to launch businesses.
- Activate the street with artists and creative businesses in sectors such as fashion, food and filmmaking, as suggested in the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup report.
- Create a working group to consider changing the name of the street. Nicollet was a European explorer. Changing the name could commemorate the significance of the place before this time.
- Identify changes to zoning and other ordinances that require amendment to allow broader or different use of Nicollet. Look at regulations (health code, encroachment permitting), precedents, and competitive barriers that have historically governed (whether statutorily or practically) the who/where/how often for activities located on Nicollet with an eye towards minimizing obstacles wherever possible. The goal is to remove the barriers—statutory, policy-based, or perceptual—to allow things to be done differently. Downtown needs to try something new on this recognized corridor.
- Change ordinances as needed to allow licenses that extend activity from an adjacent storefront to the public right of way and that allow a master licensor to activate a full block or blocks of the Mall.
- Consider common learnings from the 2017 Nicollet Mall renovation, Peavey Plaza renovation, The Commons, and other public benefit projects:
 - The need for adequate funds for capital and ongoing operations and activation.
 - State bonds can be used if public purpose exists and control rests with the public. For properties owned by a nonprofit, a long-term lease to a public agency will meet this test (as with the Guthrie, Ordway, and others).
 - Subject to bond restrictions, activities on the Mall, such as vendor kiosks and events, should be income-producing with all rent or fee revenue used to support the on-going costs of maintaining the Mall—a self-perpetuating public space. Income-producing opportunities are critical to underwrite this effort because no public agency or nonprofit is able to commit the funds necessary in one year, let alone commit the sustained funding needed to adequately subsidize operations, maintenance, capital repair, and activation.
 - All projects have design features eliminated before construction begins, and the 2017 Nicollet Mall renovation plan was no different. While reduction in construction cost may have been a factor, the primary reasons for plan changes related to long-term durability and increased or specialty maintenance protocols, all of which increase ongoing operational cost. A pedestrian-centric Mall will require ongoing investment. A plan should target limiting customized design features to only those that make the greatest impact: perennials vs. annuals; structures for the people, activities, and products that will continually change and activate the space; and features that are year-round (such

as blankets and heat lamps that extend outdoor seating season into the winter). It is also critical to make sure the design is climate-friendly, or it will fail and need to be replaced (This includes features that are durable in temperatures that range 140 degrees, can withstand ubiquitous applications of salt and/or sand, low gloss walking surfaces to limit slips and falls, and have sufficient wind and sun breaks to moderate extremes). Lastly, there need to be adequate trash and recycling containers, restroom facilities, public seating, and other details for real-life scenarios. If these are not part of the initial design, they will either need to be added at greater cost later, the annual maintenance costs will increase to address their absence, and/or the space will be unappealing and under-used (and therefore a failure).

Examples and Resources:

- Car removal in key corridors, Bogota, Columbia
- Old-Town, Riga, Latvia
- Stroget, Copenhagen
- Pearl Street Mall, Boulder
- Downtown street closures (various), Detroit

NODE CLUSTERS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Creating focus areas that draw customers and create an ecosystem of support for entrepreneurs.

Node Clusters: Critical mass creates momentum that draws people to a place. As noted by the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup, and as called out in the city's 2040 Plan, critical mass with focus creates an identity that draws people or businesses. Grouping businesses together, especially like-kind businesses, makes an area feel full, active, and vibrant. Beyond foot traffic for consumer-based businesses, critical mass clustered around a particular type of industry or use also provides an ecosystem of technical, financial, and emotional support for new businesses. Sporadic or randomly placed businesses intermixed with vacancy makes a place feel awkward, deserted, and unsafe. Businesses deep inside buildings and hidden from the end-user have no impact. Positive user and business owner experience in different areas, coupled with providing a robust ecosystem of support for businesses, requires intentional curation through definition of nodes.

Entrepreneurship and business development: Downtown needs to become a place where people can start and create small businesses. It should be a place that fosters innovation, creativity, and industry. Diversification of business size, type, and modality will create greater economic opportunity for all kinds of people, generate excitement and discovery, establish creative culture, and more. The "Great Resignation" that occurred during COVID led to many workers starting their own businesses. This shift creates an opportunity for downtown if we act nimbly to remove barriers to fund this wave of small businesses. This theme also featured heavily in the Abundant Cities series.

Node clusters are integrally important to entrepreneurship. The critical mass and peer and mentor knowledge-sharing in clustered communities creates an ecosystem critical to the success of launching a business.

ACTIONS:

- Identify project partners and team, including determining who should put the clusters, funding, and mentorship programs in place.
- Convene and align other groups working in this arena.
- Conduct assessment: What is already happening with other projects and how they fit together; what are priorities for growth and expansion?
- Map tenancy and vacancies throughout downtown (with emphasis on the street and skyway levels).
 - Inventory the uses that are already here. Identify where they are and what spaces could connect them to form a critical mass district. Identify existing or natural locations for different industry clusters and the amenities available or needed to support a vibrant community. Identify opportunities for clusters that should exist. Clusters could include:
 - Medical services
 - Entertainment
 - Retail
 - Creative (arts, performance, design)
 - Financial services (consumer)
 - Financial – business and venture capital
 - Tech; Med-tech
 - Food development and production
 - Conduct a market study to allow the demographic, psychographic, and economic drivers to tell the story to potential entrepreneurs, funders, and property owners.
 - Survey existing and potential users – existing residents, new residents, existing small businesses, artists, service-oriented business vs. impulse retail, etc.
- Establish a coalition. Develop priorities, guiding principles, and a strategic approach. Identify funding sources and policy changes required.
- Convene a working group of property owners to model the economics (capital costs, revenue loss/gain over time, funding gaps, if any) and map out non-economic challenges and opportunities from both moving retail to ground level and master leasing scenarios.
- Establish or attract master tenant organization(s) to: lease space blocks and bring economy of scale to space management, purchasing, and insurance; develop one master organization or

multiple divided by industry cluster; form new or reinforce and support existing organizations such as Chameleon Shops; develop affiliated mentorship programs for each cluster.

- For entrepreneurs to thrive, sufficient and sustained funding is needed. This is an ideal place for foundations and nonprofit partners to engage. Beyond funding this report, the Minneapolis Foundation could stay involved in this important effort by committing to fund the Chameleon Shops for an extended period.
- Focus industry clusters in certain buildings or corridors to enable mentoring, networking, and collaboration, and co-location of complementary businesses and service providers to create the ecosystem needed for success.
- Celebrate and elevate the thriving existing clusters, including restaurant and entertainment businesses.
- Provide ample opportunities for mentorship and training through SCORE, MEDA, and others. Offer an innovation mentoring hub during specific hours staffed by long-standing subject experts and service providers to support different clusters (this support hub idea was suggested by *Twin Cities Business* on April 10, 2023).
- Identify where unique space needs for different clusters and building topographies are aligned.
- Tie public funding (tax credits or other) of properties to a long-term agreement to maintain clusters of small businesses and prevent gentrification from destabilizing and displacing these businesses once they create vibrancy in the area.
- Multi-source funding provides shared risk and reduces the likelihood that startups will not be resource burdened before they fully launch and stabilize. It also keeps cross-sector leadership invested in the success of these businesses. Unlike traditional incubators that charge fees or seek equity stakes, the value achieved is the virtuous circle that builds wealth throughout the community, increases occupancy, and creates overall downtown vibrancy—all of which will fill other spaces by attracting tenants who pay higher rents and more property taxes. This could include:
 - Buildings with reduced rents in key cluster spaces.
 - Larger businesses providing pool funding for incubation businesses to locate nearby.
 - Industry and philanthropy creating a seed fund that tangibly embodies their diversity and equity goals.
 - Public sector trust funds and tax credits matching the investments of industry and property ownership.
 - The Bush Fellowship (\$50,000 lump sum)
 - *See Funding Strategies section*
- Engage local youth (Juxtaposition Arts, Minneapolis Schools/Fair School for Arts, and others) in planning for all nodes. Having young people tangibly connected and loyal to downtown will be key to ensuring they prioritize downtown when making their decisions to start or patronize businesses now and in the future.

- Engage small and BIPOC businesses to help plan these nodes and ultimately locate there (with ecosystems that value mentoring the next generation of businesses a part of the draw).
- Collaborate with MEDA, SCORE, SBA, and others already supporting BIPOC and other non-traditional businesses with funding and business mentorship programs.
- Establish local industry leaders and investors as mentors for the next generation of businesses.
- Align with others already doing this work: DID, city staff (Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup), and more.
- Redefine success so that businesses not only launch, but also remain and thrive.

Examples and Resources:

- Above the Rhine (3CDC)
- Destination Crenshaw, Los Angeles
- ICIC.org
- Chelsea Market, New York City
- Railyard District, Santa Fe, NM
- Chameleon Shops, Minneapolis
- Building Bridges Across the River, Washington, DC
- Clean Energy (<https://www.energy.gov/eere/buildings/incubators-and-accelerators>)
- International Business Innovation Association (inbia.org)

GREEN AND BEAUTIFUL

Paying attention to the physical, mental, and economic health of the community while naturally attracting people to this place.

Trees reduce CO2 and provide shelter from wind, sun, and rain. Trees and understory attract songbirds. Access to green space is proven to reduce stress and improve mental health. Art provides ongoing visual relief and activation during its creation. Art can also create and reinforce the identity of a place and the culture of its people.

Time and time again, studies attribute direct connection to nature and beauty with reducing heart rates, stress levels, crime rates, and other key indicators. These amenities also make people gravitate to a place. If we want to make downtown attractive and welcoming to a wide spectrum of people (see *Conversion of Building Spaces* section), we should be planful about providing an environment where people want to be. Joy and whimsy are contagious.

ACTIONS:

- Consider a variety of permanent and temporary features that are playful, fun, bring joy, and enhance the public right of way to include art, lighting, greenery, etc. (See *Activation; One Person or Organization Focused on Energizing Downtown* section)

- Trees are challenging to plant in the downtown core given underground infrastructure that severely limits where roots can grow. The dual efforts of the city and Minneapolis DID have generated comprehensive studies of downtown’s underground infrastructure to identify locations where trees can be planted and thrive. (Tree height and duration is directly proportional to the distance roots are allowed to grow.)
- Require adequate irrigation and funding to maintain any planting areas.
- Require all new developments to include a percentage of green planting.
- Green planting should include trees where possible and expand to include green walls, window boxes, green overhangs, etc. especially when trees are not able to be planted due to underground utilities, areaways, and other infrastructure impediments.
- Continue the work of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the city’s Public Works department to create successful tree and planting areas that ensure tree health and mitigate climate impacts such as water quality, storm surges, and heat island effects.
- Continue modern stormwater capture from the street that allows for more trees and rain gardens.
- Create an artist(s) in residence program to consistently bring new art downtown.
- Include creative design thinking principles in all planning activity.
- Reinforce policies that prioritize keeping older trees as part of development projects and street projects; require exponentially larger quantities of trees to be planted when older trees must be removed; require new tree calipers to be large enough to prevent vandalism damage and small enough to establish a root system for growth (work closely with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board’s arborist to assure best tree planting protocols).
- Funding streams could include Minneapolis DID, Green Minneapolis, and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. (*See Funding section.*)

Examples and Resources:

- Chicago—downtown greening
- New York City tree planting
- DID seasonal plantings
- Sidewalk artists
- Murals (e.g., Bob Dylan, Schmitt Music Building Musical Score, and Prince)
- Sculpture gardens throughout Santa Fe, NM
- Pocket parks (Target HQ, Assisi on Ninth, etc.)
- Green walls and canopies
- Loring Greenway
- Mississippi River Parkway
- Gold Medal Park
- Peavey Plaza, and activation by Green Minneapolis
- The Commons
- Towerside rain garden and water capture/reclamation

CONVERSION OF BUILDING SPACES

Repurposing buildings to post-COVID uses that move away from large office tenants to a mix of big and small businesses, retail, residential, and more.

We have empty space. Lots of it. Cities around the country are in the same boat. Offices may never be used in the same way again. Corporate campuses are being downsized or vacated. Moody's Analytics expects office vacancy rates in America to peak at about 19% in 2023 and to stay high for at least five years. This is not an issue unique to downtowns. And downtown's large-footprint retail spaces are empty too.

The core of downtown Minneapolis has long had a monoculture dependent on activity generated from people in the offices. This worked, until it didn't. The office workers were needed to drive retail, entertainment, vibrancy—and safety.

Convert to Residential

Around the country and locally, there is a wave of conversion taking place. Vacant offices are being transformed into housing or mixed uses with housing. As a New York Times op-ed stated (*26 Empire State Buildings Could Fit Into New York's Empty Office Space. That's a Sign. 5/10/2023*): "Even without red tape, remaking a city from the empty but brittle shells of 20th-century office towers will not be easy. Modern office towers have deep floor plans meant to maximize square footage, but units in residential buildings need windows and their natural ventilation and daylight. To achieve conversion at scale, we should therefore look past the architecture of the traditional apartment. Deep-core office buildings could be converted into new kinds of spaces optimized for co-living and co-working. Bedrooms, with windows, could line the perimeter while common areas for cooking, laundry, work, exercise, and socializing could fill the middle. Such arrangements could also help meet one of the social challenges of our time: loneliness."

Not all office buildings are prime candidates for conversion to residential and other uses. We should create a list of criteria to help prioritize the leading candidates, and then work on those projects first. Downtown needs all the residential construction possible: office conversions as well as continued new development of market rate, mixed income, and affordable housing.

In converting buildings to new uses, we should be careful not to perpetuate the same monoculture of users. We should think about an integrated and diverse community that is active 24/7 with choices for multigenerational individuals and families, full income ranges (including frontline workers and administrative workforce), and opportunities for live-work spaces.

Several downtown buildings have already begun to transition to housing with more certain to happen as Mayor Frey champions this in the media. It's time to make a proactive and concerted effort to accelerate this transitioning of spaces.

Convert Retail and Office Spaces to Smaller Formats

Beyond the conversion of space to housing, we should also convert our thinking about office

tenants. No longer can we assume that medium to large businesses will be the primary occupants of buildings. Building owners and the funders that actively drive building economics will need to expand their underwriting to both allow smaller businesses (often startups with little credit and resources) and those from a broader mix of industries (often less understood than traditional financial, medical, engineering, or service industries). This change in underwriting models will also require tax policy adaptations (*see Funding Strategies Section*).

Creating incubation hubs in buildings could provide new life for buildings with high vacancy rates. These hubs could consume entire buildings or drive a strategy to develop live-work spaces in buildings. Hubs provide support from early ideation to ongoing concern and are specifically designed for support businesses during the critical startup phase (*see Use Node Clusters and Entrepreneurship section*).

ACTIONS:

- Engage an architectural team to develop a quick list of ideal physical conditions (requirements vs. fatal flaws) and action steps necessary to convert buildings for housing, small businesses, or both; review the current downtown core building inventory to determine which are best suited for conversions; interview/engage property owners to identify impediments and opportunities (BOMA needs to bring their membership into the conversation on this effort).
 - Develop criteria for the first buildings to prioritize as conversion candidates to housing, small incubator, or maker spaces.
 - Identify the unique space and amenity needs of different use types—housing, labs, coworking, performance, sound studios, makers, offices suites, etc.
 - Develop a guide showing which buildings are best suited to different conversions.
 - Develop rough construction estimates for conversions.
 - Develop prototypical conversion layouts aligned with building topographies in downtown.
- Identify policy and zoning issues, if any, that stand in the way of conversions.
- Approach property owners proactively to discuss prospective conversions.
- Propose new funding strategies to incentivize prioritized office conversions to happen now, even before property values fall to a level which would make conversions economically viable.
- To facilitate conversions and support the city's tax base, contact the largest property owners to identify likely reductions, the status of loan workouts, and commonality of lenders. Model tax reallocations and revenue reductions. BOMA and the Mpls Downtown Council need to drive this conversation with their members.
- Keep the “15-minute cities” principle at the forefront in all planning. Everything needed in daily life should be within 15 minutes of home. When mapping out conversions, develop a quick list of ecosystem amenities needed to make conversions possible (e.g., open space,

grocery and schools for housing, mentoring for incubators, etc.). Identify areas best suited for residential or business clusters based on existing or easily achievable amenities and or existing clusters of users.

- State and federal affordable housing funding programs have many barriers that preclude mixed-income and different resident groups from occupying one building, which can reinforce the concentration of poverty. Identify policy changes needed to address this conflict.
- Empty-nesters and young professionals are not the only residential market for downtown. Families will gravitate downtown when unit sizes and the area's amenities are responsive to their needs. Communication and marketing strategies should bust the myth that all families want to live in detached single-family homes with a yard. Any major city around the world disproves this theory as families live in dense buildings with nearby parks and schools.
- Residential property has a lower tax rate—consider how this may change the downtown tax model (*see Funding Strategies section*).
- The Minneapolis DID model should change, as residential properties currently are exempt from paying service district assessments even though they benefit greatly from the services. This will necessarily require the DID model to include residential leadership (*see Funding Strategies section*).
- Flexible spaces make dynamic places. Work with both the City Assessor on changes to the taxing models (*see Funding Strategies section*) and with lenders and investors to broaden underwriting criteria to address any issues such as tenant credit that currently act as barriers to nontraditional office tenants.
- The costs to transform these buildings regardless of use will require real capital. Funding models may include tax classification strategies (*see Funding Strategies section*), TIF, tax abatement, LIHTC, affordable housing trust funds, Historic Tax Credits, Feds/Infrastructure bill, and a to-be-created trust fund to underwrite conversion costs on the first conversions to catalyze the market and have other funders follow suit.

Examples and Resources:

Housing

- Vertical neighborhoods—University of British Columbia (limited land required building vertical student housing where residents go to a common courtyard level before walking up or down to one's home thus recreating the outdoor public space atmosphere of horizontal neighborhoods).
- 25 Water Street conversion, New York City, NY (creating a center courtyard to gain windows, increasing height, allowing rooms without windows, and no affordability restrictions to help close economic gap).
- Penthouse, garden over parking lots (Bjorke Engel, Architect, Denmark).
- Tower Lofts—some apartments with windows only to center courtyard (Minneapolis).
- Calgary Turnaround Plan (\$75/PSF for developers once residents move in, permitting process of less than two months, community-led vision, *preference* for affordable housing, the Office of Downtown Strategy approves).

- Northstar Center East, Minneapolis (Sherman).
- Old Republic Building purchased as conversion candidate (Elkhateeb).
- 6 Quebec Condos.
- Co-housing (Europe).
- Exxon Mobil Building, Houston, TX.

Mixed Uses / Entrepreneurial

- Strathcona Village, Vancouver, BC
- University Enterprise Labs, St. Paul, MN
- Destination Crenshaw, Los Angeles
- 11th Street Bridge, Washington, DC
- Over the Rhine (3CDC, Cincinnati)
- Main Street Economic Revitalization Corridors (Minneapolis Foundation)
- Northrup King Building (Minneapolis)

USER EXPERIENCE

Downtowns are experienced first at the ground level – let’s focus on storefronts and what is needed to support small businesses in them.

Small businesses with diverse and or culturally specific offerings contribute to a more representative, exciting, and resilient economy and culture. They also create a uniquely local experience that, from a retail and entertainment perspective, provides a reason to come downtown for needs that cannot be met online (*see Node Clusters and People Centric Nicollet Mall sections*).

Activation of spaces draws people for an experience that cannot be found online (*see Activation section*).

A vibrant downtown pedestrian experience is critical to tourism. Convention centers, arenas, and other event venues are only part of the assessment made by a large-scale event planner or individual traveler when selecting a destination. Having interesting things to do between sessions, “breadcrumbs” that line the path between venues and hotels, and the safety of activated vs. empty spaces are all critical to the decision-making process. Tourism is an economic boon for our region, whether from sales tax, lodging tax, or property tax paid. Explore Minnesota estimates that \$14.1 billion of travel spending was lost to pandemic shutdowns through May 2023, with downtown Minneapolis showing the slowest return to pre-COVID levels. As of 2022, hotel occupancy in downtown was still 22.2% lower than pre-COVID levels with a ~40% reduction in events at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Meet Minneapolis’ Downtown Transformation 2030 plan includes goals and strategies to create a thriving tourism economy that aligns with many of the goals in this report. Working in tandem with them and others can leverage that knowledge and possibly funding streams. (*See Appendix C for more information on their plan.*)

The Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup convened by Mayor Frey highlighted actions to support downtown retail and vibrancy. Suggestions included: more flexibility on signage; bringing back the city’s cross-department teams grouped by geography, including downtown; revamping

the city's small business team to focus more on downtown; expanding the Chameleon Shops entrepreneurship program (*see Appendix C*); and engaging a master broker for downtown. Many of these suggestions are addressed in this framework.

A unified communications strategy about downtown will be essential to downtown's success. Positive, enticing, and consistent messages woven throughout the various forms of media will be necessary to turn the tide of perception about downtown.

ACTIONS:

- Discuss barriers, needs, and aspirations with aspiring business owners throughout the city.
- Survey residents and workers to determine market needs, then identify entrepreneurs in those areas.
- *See Activation: One Person or Organization Focused on Energizing Downtown.*
- Develop FAQs to use in communicating with property owners and businesses about the key things each bring to the table.
- Develop a quick list of spaces available and their attributes (sizes, utilities, in-place physical improvements, surrounding amenities, etc.).
- Where street spaces are too big for one business, create shared spaces with staff provided (e.g. Chelsea Market), and/or work with property owners to create smaller spaces.
- Current small businesses in the Chameleon Shops consortium are struggling, mostly due to lack of foot traffic; move them to clusters on the street level (*see Node Clusters and Skyways sections*).
- Create a massing plan that highlights placement of different nodal focus areas.
- Create a business mentorship guide highlighting resources, funding, and expertise available to different types of businesses.
- Supplement this with other correlating programs, e.g., bring in studio artists as tenants and those who can create experiences (performances and public art).
- Create a guaranty program: develop a public/private/philanthropic reserve fund to entice property owners to participate by buffering them from absorbing the entire burden of leasing to untested businesses. This would remove a giant barrier to entry for small and BIPOC businesses.
- Work with the city to develop expedited permitting, flexible signage, encroachment flexibility for adjacent sidewalk activation (extension of premises licensing), and property tax relief incentives.
- Work with property owners to simplify/streamline building policies and lease terms; develop a reduced rate structure that assumes lower taxes and a guaranty fund.
- Develop an entity to master lease spaces in focus areas to pop-up (short-term) and longer-

term businesses. Doing this would streamline lease administration, marketing, and leasing efforts, and enable a strategic, curated approach to critical mass and user experience that is unhindered by property-by-property decision making. Use the guaranty fund to entice property owners to participate in master lease structure and relinquish some control. Reduce rents, preferably with BIPOC leadership to both provide a double bottom line of building equity/wealth in the community and demonstrating that the BIPOC community has a voice in the process.

- For spaces where master leasing is unavailable, engage a master broker to identify and assist small businesses in locating and negotiating spaces downtown.
- Develop an insurance pool to bring down the cost of coverage to small businesses while also ensuring property owners have the correct policies in place.
- Develop a master brand and marketing campaign to inform small businesses and the general public that there is critical mass of something special awaiting them.
- Develop critical training and mentorship programs for new businesses when first seeking space and before opening; these programs should focus on directly relevant topics that will be the key to thriving once in place, to include: marketing and growth, business finance and operations, addressing homelessness in the area, store security and safety, etc.
- Lower financial barriers to entry with a new tax classification to incentivize businesses (and property owners) to locate retail on sidewalk-level storefronts vs. skyways. Help spaces to be affordable long-term to creatives, entrepreneurs, and youth and offer exponential opportunity for new and long-standing uses of space that are hyper-local. Policy should connect and embed these users to think of downtown for the long term (historically policies allow these groups to bring new life to an area only to then be excluded by gentrification resulting from their very own success).
 - Lower barriers to entry by using depressed property values to achieve tax advantaged structures with donations of partial or full rent or property. Counsel will need to guide tax advantaged structures as donative value requires establishing the higher-level market rate (will it appraise?) and then recognizing and paying income tax on the income/gain that is being forgiven/donated back.
- Lower barriers to entry with funding to include foundational business planning, testing and marketing product, and iteration.
- Funding sources to include:
 - Guaranty program—develop a public/private/philanthropic reserve fund to prevent property owners from absorbing the entire burden of leasing to untested businesses.
 - Work with MEDA, SBA, and others to develop a pipeline of businesses ready to open in downtown.
 - Coordinate and leverage marketing and brand campaigns with Meet Minneapolis and the Mpls Downtown Council.
 - Master programs for leasing, marketing, insurance, etc. brings economy of scale which drives technical delays and costs down.

- DEED/state funding.
- Tax Incentives.
- Bush Fellowship (\$50,000 lump sum).
- Philanthropy.
- *See Funding Strategies section.*

Examples and Resources:

- “Vacant to Vibrant” program (provides \$8,000 per pop-up), San Francisco, CA
- Chameleon Shops (Minneapolis)
- Roosevelt Avenue cultural district (Queens, NY)
- Over the Rhine (Cincinnati, OH)
- Museum of Tomorrow (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
- City Museum (St. Louis, MO)
- Riverfront walks (various cities)
- 16th Street Mall Pop-Ups requires co-locating in market area or should have in-line store experience (i.e., with homelessness and safety issues) for stand-alone space (Denver, CO).
- Eat Street (branding was key to marketing the food cluster along the street), Minneapolis

SKYWAYS: SERVICE (NOT RETAIL) FOCUSED

Stop diluting the pedestrian traffic needed for ground-level retail and instead focus skyways on services and commuting.

The Minneapolis skyway system began in the 1960s in an effort to counter the flight of commerce and retail to suburban office parks and malls. Designed to integrate independent buildings into a campus for office workers, they have evolved into a 120+ block system of pathways that are not easy to navigate into or through by casual visitors. This extensive network of skyways shifted walking patterns of office workers away from the sidewalk, reducing the foot traffic needed to support storefront retail. This retail relocation changed the economics of buildings—driving retail rents to the skyway—and in the process changed the design of buildings built in the skyway-era (including so many on the Nicollet Mall) to repurpose sidewalk level spaces into grand lobbies for office towers with little or no storefront access and retail tenancy.

ACTIONS:

- No new skyways. We should stop allowing the creation of new skyway connections and evaluate the skyway system as an ongoing feature of the Central Business District. The success of the skyway-less North Loop in attracting businesses away from the core counters the longstanding argument that limiting expansion of the system creates winners and losers in property ownership.

- Skyways should serve as a commuting function only.
 - Downtown Minneapolis no longer has (if it ever did) enough pedestrian traffic to promote safety and commerce both at the sidewalk level and in the skyways. Downtown retail will be navigable and visible to more than just office workers only if we return it to the sidewalk level. We should move all retail shops (and the pedestrians who shop in them) to the sidewalk level to transform the core of downtown.
 - Upon returning skyways to a commuter function, transition to having destination services such as banks and medical offices in skyway spaces.
 - Skyway access hours should be adjusted to serve downtown resident populations (especially seniors, for whom climate-controlled movement is needed) and office workers, whose frequency downtown provides sufficient familiarity navigating the system, as recommended in the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup report. Identify primary commuter or senior routes (e.g., the “skyway highway”) and make sure they are accessible and open during key times with oversight/management by DID or other.
 - Skyway level service businesses should market their street-level entry location.
 - Connections from the sidewalk have long been proposed (usually in the context of “improving Nicollet Mall”) as a way to make the system more user-friendly to visitors. Architectural statement staircases, elevators, and escalator towers have all been suggested by varying leaders at various times. This continued discussion is an ongoing recognition that the skyways are not easily accessed or navigated by the non-commuter or casual pedestrian. These connections are expensive and require building/skyway owner approval (both reasons for why these connections were eliminated from the most recent Mall renovation). These skyway connections would be a significant doubling-down on the very thing that is pulling activity away from sidewalk storefronts. We should stop trying to make them happen once and for all.
- We are a winter city and it’s a myth that people won’t go outside. Many will debate the advantage, or disadvantage, of skyways, especially during winter weather. Minnesotans are outside every day—running, riding bikes, walking dogs—even during major snowstorms. This is also true in other great winter cities with vibrant downtowns (examples include Chicago, Ann Arbor, New York, Winnipeg, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Boston, etc.) where skyways and tunnels are not present. Moreover, all cities in the world have 60+ days of bad weather (cold, rain, heat, etc.) when people will stay inside. As skyways have demonstrated in downtown Minneapolis, designing a city around the bad days does a disservice to the 300 good days. As the Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup report notes, we should embrace the seasons. Embracing the winter should be part of all marketing and communications strategies similar to the “Bold North” campaign that was used during the Super Bowl (*see Activation Section*).
- Skyway spaces largely have retail and restaurant level of improvements in place. The economics of abandoning this investment requires incentives (*see Funding Strategies section*).
- Incentivize retail to the sidewalk through a reduced tax structure (*see Funding Strategies section*).

- Minneapolis skyways are privately owned by the building owners to which they attach. The city provides encroachment permits to allow the skyway to extend over public property (sidewalks/street). The permit includes regulatory control of the skyway bridge's design, insurance, hours of access, and other conditions; the city should consider using this permit to restrict uses or maintain certain hours of operation in some skyways.
- To access financial incentives, require sidewalk-level openings and window transparency (what good is a window if it is covered with a poster?).

Examples and Resources:

- Any winter city without a skyway or tunnel system (Chicago, Ann Arbor, New York, Winnipeg, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Boston, etc.).
- North Loop (successfully attracted Piper Sandler, KPMG, and other core office tenants).

ACTIVATION: ONE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON ENERGIZING DOWNTOWN

The energy of a place is as important as the physical design. Let's bring focus to activating downtown.

Spaces are inanimate. Activation is what makes a place come alive. The great cities in the world have a healthy combination of formal and informal activities that make them feel alive and memorable. Close your eyes and remember your favorite place: storefront design, sidewalk cafes, indoor and outdoor music, public art, competitions, fountains, town square speeches, people watching, lush greenery, interactive play for kids and adults, artisan markets, flash mobs of music or dance, all-weather recreation, sidewalk vendors, sports, theater, banners, twinkle lights, and more. It is our memory that creates community and attachment.

As we emerge from COVID, we are craving ways to be together and experience joy. We need someone who wakes up every day focused on how we weave together plentiful opportunities for downtown to come alive, day and night. Someone who looks not just at designed event spaces but also ad hoc alleys and storefronts and sees opportunities to make something unexpected and special happen. Someone who asks community leaders how best to celebrate the rich and diverse culture our community offers. Someone who creates a buzz that ripples into conversations far and wide: *"Did you hear about? . . . Have you seen? . . . We have to be downtown, it's really cool."*

The city's arts and culture leader, Downtown Council, and DID have staff who are hard at work on these efforts, and what they do with limited resources is commendable. These efforts should be multiplied, with additional and predictable funding, expanded authority, and significant attention from public and private leadership.

ACTIONS:

- Program a variety of 24/7/365 activities along cluster areas including:
 - Pickleball
 - Roller skating
 - Skateboarding
 - Basketball
 - Concert series
 - Street musicians
 - Pop-up shops, storefronts
 - Food vendors
 - Farmer's markets
 - Art markets
 - Visual Artists (neon, murals, storefronts, etc.)
 - Pedal pubs
 - Scavenger hunts
 - Festivals
 - Performance artists (musicians, chalk painters, dancers, etc.)
 - Interactive elements (pianos, musical steps, sound activated containers, life-size chess)
 - Face painting
 - Jugglers
 - Live broadcasts
 - Youth market stands (lemonade, hot dogs, crafts)
 - Flash mobs (music, dance, art, and more)
 - River Kayaking
 - Segway tours
 - Pedal pubs
 - Scavenger hunts
- Engage one person or organization focused on energizing downtown (potentially through expansion of DID's Urban Planning, DID's Public Space Engagement, and city's arts and culture leader authority and budget) with the expectation that they will immediately reach out to engage broader communities for long-term activation while also doing immediate tactical events and art installations throughout downtown.
- Provide that leader (or collective identified above) with the needed authority (e.g., blanket encroachment permit authority), adequate and predictable funding, and clear accountabilities to make bold moves and partner with external partners (profit and nonprofit).
- Establish a fixed percentage of property tax collections to fund these activities and provide seed funds for them to execute small- and medium-scale ideas. Activation will attract downtown business and visitors who increase the property, hospitality, and sales tax collections, thus increasing overall tax collections. This creates an exponential return on investment for this fund. (See *Funding Strategies* section.)
- Make sure activation is day and night during all four seasons.

Examples and Resources:

- Riverfront walks (various cities)
- City Museum, St. Louis, MO
- Red Boardwalk (Montreal)
- Northern Spark, Minneapolis
- Museum of Tomorrow, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Roosevelt Avenue cultural district, Queens, NY

- New York Office of Nightlife, New York City, NY
- Open Doors, Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN (Scott Mayer)
- Flint Hills International Children’s Festival, Ordway, St. Paul, MN
- Minneapolis Downtown Council Urban Activation Team
- Cities with dedicated activation leads pre-COVID include Cleveland, New York, and Santa Cruz.
- City of Minneapolis Director of Arts and Culture
- Super Bowl LII week in February 2018 was complete with activation and crowds, even during a week with sub-zero weather. Bold North was more than a marketing theme for the week – it was our mentality.
- Events ran along Nicollet Mall and throughout downtown.

FUNDING STRATEGIES

Vision without resources is hallucination. Resources without strategy are scattershot.

Tax Policy and Return on Investment

Understanding how property taxes work is key to understanding how the massive changes happening in downtown’s property climate will impact—for good and bad—how our city functions. In Minnesota, residential properties pay a much lower tax rate than commercial/industrial properties. This means that two buildings—one residential and one commercial—with identical sizes and locations pay very different taxes. Since commercial properties carry significantly more of the burden, when commercial properties in the downtown core lose value and their taxes decrease, where will that burden shift?

For perspective, in 2019, citywide property taxes for all property types were \$1.06 billion, with commercial representing \$360 million or 34% of that base. Currently, 99.9% of commercial property taxes in Minneapolis are paid from parcels located in the core of downtown. **Over 36% (\$130 million) of the city’s commercial taxes is paid by the 29 highest-valued parcels in downtown’s core.**

County Property Taxes



Minneapolis properties pay nearly one third of all property taxes in Hennepin County. One third of the City's taxes are from commercial properties and, of that amount, one third are from just the 29 largest parcels in the downtown core.

As the downtown core grapples with how to return post-COVID, occupancy and related values are in flux. Large and small office users have been reducing space or altogether vacating their buildings. Post-COVID media reports have highlighted the tenuous financial standing of various downtown buildings on that Top 29 parcel list, including LaSalle Plaza, the Hilton Hotel, 5th Street Towers, and the IDS Building. Whether formal foreclosure has been initiated, discounted sales have occurred, or work out negotiations with lenders have begun, these actions demonstrate a loss of rental revenue that makes debt payments unworkable at values set in pre-COVID times. Once completed, these reduced loan or sale transactions are formally recorded with the County, automatically reducing assessed value and the resulting property tax collections. These properties are not alone; they were simply first to default and/or have loans expiring. In fact, the Minneapolis Metropolitan Statistical Area has the highest level of distressed commercial real estate debt in the country, and it is largely concentrated in the high-profile buildings like the IDS. (Source: MSPBJ, April 13, 2023.)

From 2019 to 2023, the top 29 parcels downtown saw their valuations reduce by 14.7% (not yet capturing the reductions still in negotiation) while their taxes reduced by only 2.21%. This disparity shows that reduced taxes do not track with reduction in value, let alone the large-scale reductions yet to occur. If other parcels—commercial and residential—successfully appeal their valuation, then what? The reduced tax chickens have not yet come home to roost.

To be clear, this is a national phenomenon. “Misery loves company” is a reflection of the national debate occurring about how to repurpose commercial spaces and reimagine economic models. Taxing authorities will need to respond to property value reductions with a new model with some combination of: 1) reduced expenses (reduced public services); 2) a shift in tax collections to other properties (e.g., reallocation to residential); and 3) an increase in tax rates against all properties.

As models are being reimaged, we should consider a thoughtful approach to how taxing policy (allocation of value and tax rates) catalyzes identified priorities, e.g., reductions to support small businesses, activation, and sidewalk retail. How much Minneapolis needs to upend its economic model depends on how much downtown can recapture its vibrancy and be the epicenter for the city and region around which these priorities are centered. In other words, investing in priorities will help moderate the shifting of tax burden and help downtown continue as a net contributor.

Opportunities to think differently about land use to reactivate spaces may be in direct conflict with taxing objectives. To date, the assessor’s valuation concept of “highest and best use” together with lender-imposed underwriting requirements have resulted in prioritizing commercial tenants paying premium rents in core downtown space. Declining occupancy is proving this definition of “highest and best use” no longer works. Work to support real estate ownership by communities of color is also an important component of success.

Beyond property tax, businesses are also subject to 8.025% sales tax (6.875% state, 0.15% county, 0.5% city, and 0.5% special tax), a 3% Minneapolis restaurant tax specific to businesses within a defined boundary that does not include all of downtown’s surrounding residential village areas, a 3% lodging tax (commonly referred to as the hospitality tax) for properties with 50 or more rooms,

and a 3% entertainment tax. Various of these taxes in Minneapolis have been and are used to fund the Convention Center, Meet Minneapolis (Convention and Visitors Bureau), Target Center, US Bank Stadium, and more. As the occupancy level and type of use of properties in downtown shifts, so too will these various tax collections.

The economic model of downtown—and therefore the region—needs to be re-envisioned to focus on what makes the most people want to be downtown most often. Vibrancy is the best way to bring the most relevance, which is required to achieve the most long-term economic value.

Normally, changing tax policy would not be the first thing to do because it takes time. However, as economics can be the front-end issue that prevents things from happening, this should be an urgent priority. This is also an opportunity for our region. A significant change in property ownership will be occurring in a relatively compressed timeframe, and at a level not seen before or likely again.

We should leverage this new wave of leadership and reinvestment into a greater overall outcome for downtown.

The City Assessor needs to be proactive about changes that are happening. Reacting as collections fall will make it difficult to preserve the base and apply incentives.

While not in the City Assessor's purview, we'd be remiss if we didn't mention the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District's role in creating a cohesive overall downtown experience. The DID is a special services district wherein the property owners agree to tax themselves to provide cohesive services in the public right-of-way. The premise of the DID was to provide clean, green, and safe services to eliminate the contrast between properties that were well-tended and those that were neglected, thus elevating the overall experience of being downtown for employees, customers, and visitors.

When the DID was created in 2008, by statute, residential and tax-exempt properties could receive services but could not be charged via the taxing authority; rather, they would need to voluntarily contribute. As a result, the district boundaries were defined based on the most densely used or likely-to-be-developed commercial areas of downtown, covering approximately 120 blocks. The surrounding residential villages (many of which are vibrant residential neighborhoods today but were in their early formation in 2008) were intentionally excluded. In 2023, the State Legislature amended the statute to allow inclusion of multi-family residential in the taxing authority. Still excluded are tax-exempt properties and multi-family properties that are classified as affordable via formal agreement with a public jurisdiction (known as "4d" properties - referring to Section 4. (d) of the housing statute). These affordable buildings are obligated via long-term agreements with cities or counties to cap rents at a level serving residents earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income, for which the properties receive some form of public funding.

Context: The state statute for Services Districts (Chapter 428a. Special Service Districts; Housing Improvement Areas) was drafted in the 1980s at a time when there was a very clear delineation between residential and office communities throughout the city. As the lines between uses in the

downtown core began to blur, in 2023 the statute was updated. When the DID was implemented in 2008, the then-few core downtown residential properties were asked to participate voluntarily (without a statutory mandate requiring all properties to do so equally, opting-in disadvantaged properties by reducing their net cash flow versus their peers who chose not to participate, even though all residents benefitted from the services). While property type inclusion was already established in statute when DID was formed, the types of services allowed to be paid for by DID were not defined. In establishing DID, the city ordinance was drafted to give the utmost flexibility for services needed by geographic location and over time as needs changed to keep the DID program relevant and effective. Thus, the ordinance requires that the DID's annual public hearing notice provide the proposed per property cost and "describe with particularity" services to be delivered. Services must be for the public (not benefitting a specific property) and take place in or for the public realm (not in privately owned properties such as the skyways).

Now that the residential villages are fully dynamic/mixed-use areas and residential uses in the core are expected to increase, the DID should expand to incorporate and integrate residents as both audience and stakeholders. Creating a holistic experience that includes the residential villages would address the current spectrum of perceptions about downtown and would support the development of downtown Minneapolis into a true multi-use economy. Formal approval will be required from properties in an expanded area and residential uses in the core that are currently exempt until formal action is taken. Approval will be required via a petition and public hearing process based on a formula of both 25% of the to-be-added properties by land area and either 25% of their overall net tax capacity or 25% of their service charge capacity. When establishing the DID in 2008, the business community intentionally surpassed this required 25% threshold and achieved nearly 85% approval from property owners. It would be equally important for a newly expanded district to be mandated by a majority of support.

While some may want to create smaller districts in lieu of expanding the current DID, providing disconnected services to different areas will reinforce the contrasting perception of each area's safety and well-being. A single, expanded district should have planning and governance structures that allow for both clear decision-making representation from all property types and locations as well as the ability to address the differing needs of each area, while ensuring it adds up to a holistic downtown experience. The ability to provide different services and levels responsive to needs in different areas is already happening within the DID, as this was contemplated when it was established in 2008. The ability to change the budget, service level, and services type every year could allow DID to focus on many of the activation, markets, and other ideas in this plan provided the case is made and the payers (properties) are in support at the annual public hearing. (See *People-Centric Nicollet Mall, Node Clusters and Entrepreneurship, Green and Beautiful, User Experience, and Activation* sections.)

ACTIONS:

- Using the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) model (the federal system established to resolve and process massive real estate defaults in the late 1980s within the savings and

loan industry), establish an oversight body to work through commercial loan valuations, restructuring, and foreclosures. BOMA should convene and incent property owners to collect, analyze, and act on this critical information. City leaders (City Assessor and CPED, etc.) would participate to ask questions and understand the downstream likely impacts on property values. An analysis of the senior debt holders of the top 29 properties would be an important first action of this group to understand if there are 29 individual problems to solve or if fewer parties are making decisions that affect an aggregated loan portfolio.

- Determine what assessment policy is the purview of the Assessor versus state or federal property law.
- Change tax classifications to incentivize businesses (and property owners) to locate retail on the sidewalk level vs. skyway. This could be part of rethinking the overall tax classification system for towers converting to housing or mixed uses. Focus taxing model changes on sidewalk retail first, but don't forget about retail if valuation reductions or conversion of tall towers captures the assessor's attention first.
- Because the vibrancy created by activating and repositioning downtown will increase tax base over time (a return on investment), the city should commit a permanent percentage (as determined by modelling) of property, sales, and lodging tax to fund:
 - activation
 - open spaces, public art, and greening
 - catalyzing business start-up priorities
 - small business seed capital
 - establishing master leasing organizations
 - building conversions
 - leveraging corporate and philanthropic investments
 - critical ongoing community engagement.
- Expand the DID
 - Study other national service districts that include residential payers; develop key FAQs, position statement, economic analysis, and expansion petition for use in discussion with residential property owners in Minneapolis.
 - Create a working group with meaningful resident participation to develop a model and approval strategy to expand the DID boundary and include all residential payers.
 - Pursue expansion of the DID to include surrounding residential villages and participation by core residential properties. Until this happens, conversion of buildings to housing and any expansion of DID services to include the many surrounding villages which have substantial residential populations (e.g., North Loop, Mills District, Elliot Park) will upend the current DID funding model.
 - DID, Mpls Downtown Council, BOMA, the Chamber, neighborhood groups, and the city should actively support this, including the need to have resident voices co-lead it.

- To address the changing tax base: Create a downtown-wide model reflecting tax collection from both current uses and projected uses (with incentives identified above) giving all parties a shared planning tool for future revenue and budget implications. The model should:
 - Estimate increases in property, sales, and hospitality taxes that directly result from investments in increased occupancy and vibrancy downtown, i.e., the ROI.
 - Benchmark Minneapolis against peer cities to ensure it remains competitive (include voices from BOMA, DID, the county, Meet Minneapolis, and other key property experts).
 - Prioritize building occupancy for hybrid uses and on-site experiences that cannot be delivered digitally or remotely. This approach may deliver the highest possible rents in a hybrid world, but will most assuredly not be at the same level as pre-COVID. In a post-COVID world, changing from highest economic value to highest community value may be one and the same.
 - Recognize the significant costs of transforming buildings to accommodate different types of uses. Tax Increment Financing (TIF), tax abatements, or similar fixed tax reductions for a period of time should be offered to cover physical, property value write-down, and other conversion costs.
 - Confirm that the change from commercial to residential will reduce taxes or demonstrate that conversion to housing will, despite the reduced rate ascribed to residential property, increase tax revenue over projected losses from commercial vacancies.

Examples and Resources:

- Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC)
- Other service districts with residential payers across the country include Long Beach and Seattle.
- Economic impact models

Capital – A Jump-Start Campaign

One of the biggest barriers to success (or even getting started) is capital. We should find a way to jump-start the initial planning and launch of every one of these initiatives, including small businesses that do not have access to traditional capital. While there are many other pressing needs for capital, frankly, we cannot afford to ignore stabilizing downtown's role as a net contributor to our community and region. The city could develop a national model reliable seed-capital fund by dedicating a small percentage of the tax base for this purpose. Through modeling one could determine the ROI (via added property, sales, and other taxes) driven by this investment in small businesses.

ACTIONS:

- Incentivize the first number of businesses or businesses in each category of use to come to the core before there is critical mass to draw them in. This is not unlike the old regional mall strategy of discounting rents for department store anchors or key lifestyle brands to attract other tenants. Target this incentive to anchor early businesses.
- Corporate, philanthropic, and public sector leaders seed a fund:
 - *To ensure all stakeholders are invested.* Develop a property owner matching fund to the city's dedicated tax support noted above. Through increased occupancy and rent levels, property owners will benefit from increased vibrancy driven by these investments; thus they should participate in the investment. This could be accomplished by establishing a new dedicated fund (pay in advance or pay a percentage of increased rents) or it could be added to the DID budget depending on how and where the funds will be used (DID funds must remain focused on the public right-of-way and not be specific to a particular property or properties).
 - *To support development of downtown as a residential, business and entertainment draw for the region.* The Itasca Project (and Greater MSP, its economic development affiliate) should create a specialty focus on capital to complement existing housing, transportation, and other focus areas (this focus would necessarily include the St. Paul downtown area).
 - *To support entrepreneurship and node clusters.* Pursue specific corporate and philanthropic funds aligned with interest areas, e.g. med-tech or food clusters, diversity and BIPOC businesses, etc. Recognize that poverty doesn't just exist in North Minneapolis and that a nexus of economic opportunity downtown serves the entire community.
- Capital to entrepreneurs to launch, to test and iterate product, to pay owners and staff, and to manage through slow market or seasonal shifts.
- Investment to seed diversity of property ownership.

Examples and Resources:

- A Shark Tank-like forum to which ideas can be brought, resources and mentorship can be found, and entrepreneurial thinking can be role-modeled for the whole community
- U of Minnesota MN Cup
- Google accelerator
- Neighborhood Development Center
- MEDA
- SCORE
- SBA
- South Shore Bank, Chicago
- CDCs
- Community Land Trust
- First Independence Bank, Minneapolis
- "Vacant to Vibrant" program (provides \$8,000 per pop-up), San Francisco, CA
- Bush Fellowship (\$50,000 lump sum)

AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

Vibrant downtowns work for everyone, including people not already present. Let's not rely on past methodology or current spokespeople to plan our future.

As we began our work, we thought long and hard about the many things that could and should be done to truly transform the Central Business District of downtown. Ideas that have been long discussed for our city. Ideas that respond to the many disruptions our world has seen in the last few years. Ideas that have been successful elsewhere. Some appear in this plan. **However, we realized we had not addressed the elephant in the room: We have the same people gathering in the same ways to set priorities and make decisions (including us as we wrote this plan). The bottom line is that until we change this model, no matter how well-conceived an idea may be, outcomes will remain remarkably unchanged and narratives about downtown will be fractured.**

Downtowns of the past were able to thrive by focusing singularly on white-collar workers. Office buildings were at the core of all planning and economic models, with ancillary uses meant to support them. Decision-making structures and priority setting were intentionally designed to represent this hierarchy. Leaders from—or sanctioned by—the business community were charged with planning, communicating, and deciding what was best, then realizing it through plan sponsorship or property investment.

The evolution of the Central Business District of downtown Minneapolis over the past century highlights the many societal shifts that have happened nationwide. Flight to the suburbs, retail shift to regional malls, movements to live and work downtown, and the development of entertainment districts are just some of those trends. Since 2020, downtown Minneapolis has been impacted by macro issues facing cities across the globe: a pandemic, a reckoning with historic injustices, supply chain disruptions, frequent and historic natural disasters, and a workforce “Great Resignation.” The impact of these issues downtown exposed long-standing inequities and serve as our call to action. We can and should do better.

With workers untethered from downtown offices, buildings emptied, restaurants and events lost patrons, and so on. Downtowns of the future should be relevant to everyone—all ages, all cultures, all income levels—most of whom have been historically ignored or discouraged from being in downtown Minneapolis or have been there simply in service to the business community.

If we truly want downtown to be successful in meeting the moment, we should expand how downtown meets the needs of the entire community, and who gets a say. We need lots of people at all different times to make downtown vibrant, engaging, and economically expansive. This includes residents who have been largely excluded from planning decisions, and youth who are downtown's current and future employees, entrepreneurs, and residents, and yet have been repeatedly discouraged from participation. Starting now, we need to engage residents (including amending the Downtown Improvement District model to include residential participation and governance) and give youth a voice with permanent ongoing power and accountability.

We are at an important inflection point. Several longstanding and important organizations seek new leaders, including the city's Community Planning and Economic Development department (CPED). The Minneapolis Downtown Council and the Minnesota ULI have recently hired new leaders. But these are the usual suspects. We should engage a broad cross-section of thought leaders, so downtown can be the place where we—public and private sector leaders, community leaders, artists, entrepreneurs, youth, elders, and so many more—come together to demonstrate our community's collective strength.

We can do things differently. Let's seize this opportunity.

We encourage downtown organizations to ensure their executive management, boards, committees, and advisory groups include a broad spectrum of voices from beyond the workforce and beyond downtown's boundaries. Let's go into the community and listen to those who are making things happen and ask them to be part of the solution, instead of assuming business-accredited leaders can speak for them. Let's make sure varied groups of people are truly leading the ideation for downtown and not just present for optics. Let's value those who represent diverse ideas, not just who can pay more. Disability groups have long said "Nothing About Us Without Us." This commonsense planning principle holds true for everyone. Public and private efforts should go to community foundations, faith organizations, schools, park buildings, and businesses out in the community to understand who is convening and about what.

We also encourage planning to be done holistically, not in workgroups focused on narrow issues. Having specialty committees that focus on economic development vs. arts and culture vs. housing vs. safety, etc. only serves to marginalize ideas. We need to do the messy work of understanding how these issues support or detract from each other. Baking a cake only works if the ingredients are blended and proportionately measured.

Accept the messiness and be ready to go down the rabbit hole. We cannot enter into a discussion about what downtown wants, needs, and who it should serve without being ready to listen to the answers. What the community needs may not be what traditional downtown leaders are prepared to do. The immediate task may be to focus on job training or food security, not on building a new public space. We should be ready to invest time and money into what will actually create the economic ecosystem that we are aiming for.

These themes were highlighted over and over in the Abundant Cities speaker series. We need to "open the aperture," share power, and move at the speed of trust and authenticity.

We need to organize this effort. We encourage the city, the Downtown Council and DID, BOMA, the Minneapolis Foundation, and others with an interest in accelerating downtown's vibrancy to get these community engagement sessions successfully underway as soon as possible. The first step would be to seek a partner who is uniquely expert in authentic engagement, to design and launch a process that results in actionable and accountable ideas.

Until we address who is involved when priorities and decisions are made, everything else, including the ideas laid out in this plan, won't matter because we will be doing the same old thing and expecting a different outcome.

ACTIONS:

- Seek listening sessions with community foundations, faith organizations, schools, at park buildings, and with businesses to understand who is convening, about what, and to listen to those who are making things happen and ask them to be part of the planning solution. To begin, the Minneapolis Foundation should connect with established organizations that are already working with groups throughout the city: MEDA, SCORE, neighborhood resident and business associations, the Youth Coordinating Board, the Walker Art Center's WAC-TAC, Juxtaposition Arts, and many others. The Foundation should convene these groups to honor their work and seek to participate in the work they are doing.
- Meet with faith and community leaders, downtown neighborhood and business associations (including the Downtown Council, Regional Chamber, and organizations representing the North Loop, Warehouse District, Elliot Park, Mills District, East Town and Loring Park), government staff and elected officials (including city, county, and Met Council), key small and large employers/constituencies, and topical associations (including BOMA, ULI Minnesota).
- Meet with downtown leaders to rethink how governance and planning is done with the meaningful voice of broader community. This needs to be an honest conversation among groups representing all downtown neighborhood villages and business associations. No longer can the voice of the "tall towers" be the assumed voice of downtown.
- Develop community-wide working groups to ideate broadly, not separate topical committees and not just for downtown. The conversation should be about the goals for all of the community and the role downtown plays in achieving them.
- Charter a downtown youth council to ideate around, participate in, and vet downtown planning. This could draw upon existing group/s such as Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, Minneapolis Youth Congress, Juxtaposition Arts, WAC-TAC, MCTC-UMN-MCAD students, or others, provided they draw upon a broad cross-section of metro area young people (ages 14–29). Importantly, there needs to be a commitment to fund implementation.
- Work with the YMCA, YWCA, and others to establish free access for youth at a regular interval (Saturdays?). This "open doors" type of program will create an initial connection for youth as a first step to making them feel downtown is open to them always.
- Co-create a new governance model for all of downtown (core and villages) to balance a collaborative approach for big area priorities while preserving nimble localized ideation and decision making in each village area.
- A tension point to be cautious about: the traditional power held to date by the "tall towers" and big companies as decision makers should now be shared. This diversification of power will allow the activities and vibrancy occurring by residential and small business

constituencies beyond the core of downtown to blend into the core. Equally important is to find a way to blend the strength and energy of these villages into the core without depleting their success. The core should expand, not dilute, the vibrancy, volunteer capacity, and funding of the villages.

- Accountability (measures of success) should be built in for everyone involved, bringing clarity and action to community interests and not just providing a platform to magnify chaos. This means all leaders need to understand and be held accountable to action.
- Have a representative group find the overlap, gaps, and conflicts between community ideas. These sessions should be facilitated and iterative with the larger audience of working groups. The leaders of this group should be more than the traditional downtown business leaders.
- Ideas generated by doing this important work in the community should be added to a priority and decision-making framework along with the ideas contained in this plan (some of which may be abandoned or changed if or when community priorities become clearer). The work plan would include:
 - Establish shared values and goals that articulate the purpose, aspirations, and outcomes by which we will collectively measure each idea.
 - Identify work being undertaken by others that is needed and or that conflicts with making an idea successful.
 - Determine who is or should be working on the idea. Develop a coalition accordingly.
 - Identify leadership, timelines, policy implications, planning and action steps, funding needed, potential sources, etc.
 - Based on the above and in context of other work happening, determine the idea's urgency and priority.
- Develop a communication strategy and plan.
- Start to change the narrative around downtown. Create a movement. Unite all the varied efforts with one basic concept that everyone can weave into their own individual work.
- Unify branding and messages to spark excitement around possibility, generate interest, and tap into Minnesota civic pride and volunteerism.
- Update list of big things to do, to include ideas that the new voices deem important. We suggest using a work plan framework for each idea that can then be aggregated to show how timelines, funding, policy work, and leadership capacity for each idea (*see Appendix B*).
- To support community engagement and planning, identify specific ongoing corporate and philanthropic funds aligned with this engagement.
- Develop a strong communications strategy to engage with and be responsive to the full complement of messengers and consumers.
 - Work with city, philanthropy, faith, business, community, and academic leaders to develop a common narrative and multi-channel communications plan to change the

downtown narrative. Like the broad messaging used by the “Bold North” during the Superbowl, the local and national public needs a united, consistent, and digestible message about the future of downtown and their role in it.

- The narrative should declare victories: a) expansion from a singular compact downtown on few blocks to many vibrant villages for more and different use and users; b) acknowledge the work to be accomplished, such as core repositioning needed; and c) clarify that there is no one thing to do or a to-be-completed-by date, that a relevant downtown is a growing and ever-changing place.
- The strategy will iterate, balancing the need for immediate, positive communication with incorporating ongoing community input.

Supporting Materials

Appendix A – About the Authors

David Frank

David loves cities and trying to understand how they work. He has worked in the private sector and the public sector in Minneapolis and Portland. For the past few years, David has provided counsel to organizations who want to develop places and build community. He served for several years as Director of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the City of Minneapolis, and before that for Schafer Richardson, a real estate development company in Minneapolis. In Portland, David worked in the City's redevelopment agency on development and affordable housing in the Pearl District, and for a large private real estate company. David serves on the board of the Hennepin History Museum. He is a past president of the North Loop Neighborhood Association and the Minnesota Fringe Festival.

Sarah Harris

Sarah believes it is her professional responsibility to make a better community for all who call it home. In her 35+ year career, Sarah led the formation and stabilization of community-based efforts including the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District and the University of Minnesota Foundation Real Estate Advisors. She managed an affordable housing development team at Aeon and counseled clients such as the City of Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, and Allina Hospitals and Clinics on the finance, management, and development of their complex real estate projects. Sarah also guided many community and cultural organizations as Board Chair, including the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, University Gateway Corporation, ULI Minnesota, Towerside Innovation District, and the Ordway Center for Performing Arts.

Beth Shogren

Beth is deeply committed to her community, the natural environment, and building more equitable and welcoming cities. Her work is focused on solving problems, managing complex projects with a variety of stakeholders, and creating transformative change that improves the community. She began her career in project management, managing projects for high end retail, hospitality, industrial, and commercial clients. In 2009, Beth joined the team that launched the Minneapolis DID, and served as Director of Operations and Chief Operating Officer. In those roles, and as Executive Director of Green Minneapolis, a multi project non-profit conservancy, Beth worked to bridge the gap between public and private sector stakeholders, create partnerships and realize both operational and place-based improvements to Minneapolis. Her projects for the affordable housing development team at Aeon Housing centered her commitment to social and racial justice, and she has provided consulting services to organizations in the nonprofit and private sectors. Beth also enjoys her work on the boards of the Surdna Foundation, the Helen Andrus Benedict Foundation, and is Board Chair of Andrus on Hudson, a senior care facility in New York.

Appendix B – Workplan Framework for Ideas

Ideas generated in the community along with those described in this plan could use this framework to develop a workplan. All workplans would then be aggregated to develop priorities and show coordinated timelines, funding, policy work, and leadership capacity.

| Project/Initiative | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Description | | | | |
| Outreach methods | | | | |
| Goals | | | | |
| Complementary efforts | | | | |
| Coalition/Work group | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Policy Changes (Barrier Reduction or Catalyst) | | | | |
| Federal | | | | |
| State | | | | |
| County | | | | |
| City | | | | |
| MPRB | | | | |
| Property ownership | | | | |
| Funder/Investors | | | | |
| Other | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Interconnected / Integral Work | | | | |
| Dependent on | | | | |
| Required for | | | | |
| Conflict with | | | | |
| Seed capital | | | | |
| Operating capital | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Sources (examples) | | | | |
| Tax Classification | | | | |
| Tax Abatement | | | | |
| TIF | | | | |
| Minneapolis DID | | | | |
| City Trust Fund | | | | |
| Mpls Park & Rec Board | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| County Trust Fund | | | | | |
| County - Other | | | | | |
| LIHTC | | | | | |
| Historic Tax Cred. (MN/Fed) | | | | | |
| HIBs | | | | | |
| National Parks | | | | | |
| DEED | | | | | |
| Property Owners | | | | | |
| Corporate | | | | | |
| Mpls Downtown Council | | | | | |
| Minneapolis Foundation | | | | | |
| Regional / State Chamber | | | | | |
| Philanthropy | | | | | |

Appendix C – Projects by Others

Many key stakeholders have their own plans, programs, and projects happening downtown. This list will not capture them all, but some key efforts include:

Vibrant Downtown Storefronts Workgroup

Mayor Frey convened this group, which presented recommendations in June 2023, to consider how to reinvent the storefront experience in downtown Minneapolis. Recommendations included new partnerships between the public sector and businesses, making Nicollet Mall a pedestrian-focused street, revised assessment methodology to incentivize active street level uses, and focusing resources where they can make a difference.

Downtown 2035

The Minneapolis Downtown Council (MDC) has begun work to create the next iteration of its vision for downtown Minneapolis. The last plan, *Downtown 2025*, was completed in 2011 with 10 key focus areas. Led by a steering committee composed of MDC board members, the 2035 Plan will include the following themes:

1. Public safety (the full breadth of safety approaches beyond law enforcement, such as community groups, ambassadors, activations, and CPTED design)
2. Healthcare
3. Human services and Wellness
4. Residential growth and integration (affordable and market rate)
5. Evolving downtown (adapting to the new dynamics of downtown, hybrid work, more residents, etc.)
6. Culture, Arts, Education, and Faith
7. Vibrancy and Entertainment
8. Sustainability and Greening
9. Transportation (inclusive of all modalities)

The planning is slated to complete in July of 2024. Of note, Steve Cramer, the CEO of MDC and its affiliate, Minneapolis DID, announced his retirement at the end of 2023. The search for a new CEO of both MDC and its affiliate, Minneapolis DID, is expected to conclude in fall of 2023.

The MDC also works to program and activate downtown. Learn more about this work in the *Downtown Activation and Livability* section below.

Minneapolis 2040

The Minneapolis 2040 plan is consistent with many, if not all, of the goals for downtown shared in this report. Most of the goals cited in the 2040 plan pertain to downtown, and include:

1. Eliminate disparities

2. Create more job and improve access
3. Increase affordable housing
4. Foster healthy, safe, and connected people
5. Develop a high-quality physical environment

The 2040 Plan website provides detail on all the themes and policies that support these overarching goals. We know from conversations with Mayor Frey, members of his staff, and leaders from CPED and other departments that the city understands and is focused on addressing the unique issues that face downtown and specifically the Central Business District and are open to new ideas and best practices, and are willing to consider ideas and recommendations.

Metropolitan Council Thrive 2040

This plan aligns with the themes addressed in this report, and specifically identifies the need for change in planning and decision-making processes to be more equitable and inclusive, and to work directly to combat the terrible racial disparities in income, poverty, unemployment, homeownership, and education that exist in Minnesota. By 2040, people of color will be 40% of the region's population.

The Metropolitan Council recently revised its population projections downward, showing Minneapolis with a slowing population growth, and net loss in domestic migration. The immigrant population will continue to rise, escalating the need for affordable housing as well as opportunities for diverse communities to integrate into the fabric of Minneapolis and the region.

Hennepin County 2040 plan

The Met Council Thrive 2040 Plan, the county's Comprehensive 2040 plan was adopted in 2018. The themes therein align with the ideas in this report. Key items to note is that the Plan recognizes:

1. Preferences for how people work, live, and use space are changing.
2. There is less need for segregation of land uses, and people are mixing work with play.
3. Our population is becoming more racially diverse. We need to be welcoming and inclusive to compete.
4. Place-based strategies are important; place largely defines outcomes.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Downtown Service Area Plan

This plan was done in 2017, recognizing the growing downtown residential population and focused on creating and supporting neighborhood parks. Since this report was completed, the MPRB has built the Water Works Park Phase 1 along the Mississippi Riverfront, taken over operations of The Commons in Downtown East, and is well underway on projects at Bassett Creek, North Loop Park, and Cedar Riverside. The Stone Arch Bridge will undergo a significant two-year renovation project beginning in 2023. Elliott Park is a beautiful neighborhood park with turf field that is the site for recreational competitions for people from all over the city. Other projects in varying stages of

planning and execution are Waterworks Ph 2 (partnership with MPF), Upper Harbor Terminal, North Commons, and trails to complete the Grand Rounds.

The Minneapolis Parks Foundation works in partnership with MPRB to garner philanthropic dollars to develop and maintain parks.

North Minneapolis Light Rail

A planned alignment of LRT and a station in North Minneapolis will connect this neighborhood community to downtown. Issues around entrepreneurship, displacement, construction disruption and business resiliency, gentrification, and community driven priorities are all currently in discussion.

The Falls Initiative

(formerly Friends of The Falls or Friends of the Lock & Dam)

Located on the Central Riverfront of downtown Minneapolis at Owámniyomni (the Indigenous name of the St. Anthony Falls), Friends of the Falls (FOF) is working to create a place of healing, restoration, education, and connection at the site of the Upper Lock on the Mississippi River. This land was sacred to the Dakota and other indigenous people. This vision has grown out of an extensive community engagement process, shaped by a Native Partnership Council and in consultation with Dakota Tribal Nations, that has brought Native and non-Native communities together. Site ownership is the key issue currently, with the Army Corps of Engineers in control of the site. It is by Shelley Buck, president, Friends of the Falls.

Key outcomes are:

1. Establish long-term Indigenous leadership through ownership structure, governance, and partnerships.
2. Educate about the full and complete history of the site.
3. Establish access to the river on the Central Riverfront to include other amenities in the area.

10 years into the project, the upcoming timeline is:

- *Late 2023* – Site conveyed from Army Corps to City of Minneapolis or its designee.
- *2024-2029* – Early site improvements and capital campaign.
- *2029+* – Long term improvements to the site.

Gateway Plaza

This project would convert the Nicollet Mall right of way between 3rd Street and Washington Avenue into a new public plaza. The new publicly accessible and programmable open space would connect the existing plaza at the new RBC Gateway building with Cancer Survivor's Park, allowing for active uses including concerts, skating, public gatherings, and a place to visit at the north end of the Mall. It would complement Peavey Plaza at the south end of the Mall and the Commons to the east, connecting the downtown core to the river, and connecting new residential density in east downtown and the Mill District across Hennepin Avenue to the North Loop. The vision is to attract more people and give them somewhere to go.

A good deal of progress has already been made with the city and Metro Transit, who agree that rerouting buses from this block is feasible. Next steps include understanding any federal and state funding requirements from past renovations of the Mall and how these would apply to this project; determining the best ownership and operating arrangement; city decisions on infrastructure; forming a steering committee; project design; and fundraising.

Harmonia

Formerly the Wells Fargo Data Center site, Sherman Associates purchased this block for redevelopment. The plan for this is not yet publicly available.

Washington Boulevard

Washington Boulevard was part of work by AIA Minnesota showing what could happen if public and private investment both focused on the same place. Under then-Mayor R.T. Rybak, the public invested in infrastructure and produced a new master plan for an underutilized area adjacent to the Warehouse District. The private market responded, and together their work created the North Loop.

Third Avenue bridge

The City of Minneapolis is currently updating the Third Avenue bridge to extend the life of the bridge for the next 50 years. The work will provide a smoother road surface, improve safety and accessibility, while enhancing and preserving historic features. The project cost is \$130 million.

Kmart

Located at the intersection of Lake Street and Nicollet Avenue, the city purchased this site, which is critical to reconnecting south Minneapolis to downtown by eliminating the Kmart store that was constructed to close off Nicollet Ave. CPED reports that the Kmart building will be demolished before the end of 2023. Planning and community engagement will begin in 2023 with expected redevelopment and reconstruction in the next five years.

MDC and Minneapolis DID: Downtown Activation and Livability

Both the MDC and the Minneapolis DID are working to activate and promote vibrancy, community belonging, and safety downtown. The approaches each organization takes are layered and typically done in partnership with other entities such as the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Meet Minneapolis, business and community foundations, the Minneapolis Chamber, Move Minneapolis, etc.

With more than 1,000 events announced in summer of 2023, highlights are recurring weekly events on Nicollet Mall:

- Tuesdays: Nicollet xChange, a sustainability (swap) marketplace with themed weeks.
- Wednesdays: “Go Outside with Hennepin County” summer sessions over lunch hours with outdoor movies, music, market, and performances at The Commons and on Nicollet.
- Thursdays: themed activities and food trucks on Nicollet Mall from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

DID projects and activations reflect a holistic approach, such as working to address perceptions of safety not with more police or ambassador presence, but also through economic vitality and cultural vibrancy. DID activation and livability staff are working to make Minneapolis a “Sociable City,” developing a downtown community and fostering a sense of engagement, attachment, and belonging. Some examples of this approach are:

- Warehouse District Live, a pedestrian-only zone late night in the Warehouse District that creates a safe place for people of all ages to be, with activities and lots of eyes on the street. Includes late night food, pick up zones for Uber, services, activity, and entertainment for all.
- Community benefits such as public restrooms, storage for belongings, and downtown visitor support at the Nicollet office and at Meet Minneapolis.
- Activations and arts programs beyond those on Nicollet Mall listed above.

Chameleon Shops

This entrepreneurship program connects women and entrepreneurs of color to resources and shared retail spaces to support and grow their business. Coordinated by the Minneapolis DID, in partnership with many other agencies, the downtown Chameleon Shops is in its 4th year and currently has eight shops (in Young Quinlan (2), IDS (2), Gaviidae (2), Meet Minneapolis on Nicollet Mall (1), and Baker Center (1)) where businesses pay 20% of their revenue to lease space.

The three elements of the program are to:

1. **Connect** entrepreneurs to retail space and to each other with shared and individual retail spaces and a quarterly networking event.
2. **Incubate** by linking to mentors, assets, and programs from economic development entities.
3. **Accelerate** by supporting each business’s launch in a retail space, allowing the chance to experiment and test product.

Meet Minneapolis Downtown Transformation 2030

In 2016, Meet Minneapolis developed this tourism masterplan for Minneapolis-St. Paul. This research done for the report identifies many of the same issues that downtown is wrestling with today. While specifically focused on driving tourism, the goals and methods in the report will support the successful city we envision in this report. Meet Minneapolis will be a key partner, and there might be opportunities to align with their work to further the shared goal of a vibrant community and active, thriving downtown.

Destination Transformation 2030 Goals

1. Attract 50 million visitors to the metro area annually by 2030: Increase from 32 million visitors in 2015, expand winter tourism from 6 million to 11 million, and target visitors from beyond the Upper Midwest, younger visitors, and more visitors of color.
2. Launch a metro-wide branding and marketing campaign: Invest \$10 million annually, highlight urban sophistication, natural beauty and outdoor activity. Develop metropolitan

brand, leverage the region's robust arts, biking, brewing and culinary scenes, park system, and vibrant cultural communities and neighborhoods.

3. Build an iconic visitor's center on downtown's central riverfront: with the Mississippi River as the heart of Minneapolis' tourism experience, integrate the riverfront into the city with attractive green streetscapes, public art installations, markers, and a gateway monument.
4. Implement a unified transportation, wayfinding, and information program for Minneapolis, including a legible network of signs (at the airport; along freeways, streets, and sidewalks; on bike trails and in skyways) and a Nicollet Mall system of circulators that may include streetcars and water taxis.
5. Adopt a comprehensive place-making plan to drive Minneapolis' tourism priorities and investments: Build and maintain a green, high-quality, and consistently-compelling walking experience along the sidewalks of downtown Minneapolis, develop a signature urban walkway from the Sculpture Garden, down Nicollet Mall, to the riverfront. Encourage retail opportunities at street level, child-friendly activities, and emphasize safety — and the perception of safety — on downtown sidewalks. Develop “cultural corridors” along East Lake Street, West Broadway, and other appropriate thoroughfares, and support Minneapolis Convention Center improvements.
6. Accentuate winter as a novel tourism adventure; with distinctive experiences, infrastructure to support outdoor and indoor winter activities, and a signature event.
7. Grow and emphasize hospitality jobs as important to social equity and the metro economy: grow hospitality jobs from 32,500 in 2016 to 40,000 by 2030, raise awareness that these jobs represent an important entry point into the workforce for thousands of disadvantaged residents, and increase the cultural diversity of the hospitality labor force.
8. Identify and secure ongoing resources to implement the tourism master plan.

Of particular note: Included in the research are common complaints about downtown: downtown's dearth of shopping and children's activities top the list, along with heavy traffic, construction, and a perceived lack of safety. One oddity that stands out is that many tourists fail to take advantage of what are regarded as the best restaurants, hippest bars, most impressive arts and entertainment venues, and most scenic natural areas. There are two big factors contributing to this feedback: lack of awareness and vacuum of information and marketing about Minneapolis, and poor wayfinding.

Appendix D – Abundant Cities Survey Results

What idea from other places would you like to see happen in Minneapolis?

- Both Austin and San Antonio, TX boast riverwalks. They are designed for pedestrians and it would be great if the scale of Nicollet Mall could shrink to human proportions.
- Better utilization of the river.
- Cool integrated sturdy art, hardscaped for durability safe inclusive public spaces, besides the library.
- Flexible zoning. Daycare integration.
- Riverfront walk with shops green on buildings.
- City museum.
- I'd like a beach.

Is there an idea you've never seen, but would like to see happen in Minneapolis?

- More water features and nature. If it was designed as a city in a park then DT should reflect that too. Let's take some cues from H.W.S. Cleveland.
- Abundant affordable housing.
- Wide raised pedestrian crosswalks - traffic calming but snowplowable.
- I've never tried many things. Sorry, don't understand.
- Giant robots.
- I would close Nicollet mall and create a year-round festival and local folk artist fair.
- A gondola.

What do you like about downtown?

- The nicollet mall when it hosted market Thursdays. I worked DT and it was a great way to shop before heading home. Most of my focus is in the northloop district. Rarely Nicollet mall.
- Compact and easy to get around.
- Wide walkable sidewalks, the public art. (I rarely take a bus) and the DID people do a good job.
- Crystal court. Stone Arch Bridge.
- Variety of restaurants, River as an attraction, Guthrie Endless Bridge.
- It's cozy.
- Cross roads for everybody and everything.
- Energy.

What do you not like about downtown?

- Right now it's rather sparse unlike the Northloop. The City should study the northloop's website. It's best in class.
- Not enough people living in the central DT to support retail and restaurants. No reason for people in North.
- Loop or Mill District to spend time in central DT.
- Dirty sidewalks, lack of basic safe public bathrooms.
- Nicollet Mall is barren and feels like a bleak landscape.
- Crime, redesigned Mall seems soulless, empty storefronts.
- Scary.
- Not terribly innovative.
- Emptiness.

What are your ideas about ways to make downtown more fun, inclusive or successful?

- A cultural festival that goes all day into a night market atmosphere. All on Nicollet mall.
- More and diverse events at The Commons.
- More people living downtown. Stores for the things people need to buy, indoor/outdoor spaces because MN weather can be challenging (sidewalk and rooftop dining) summer concerts at peavey plaza.
- Make the downtown greener.
- Concerts.
- See my answer for #2.

Anything else you'd like to include?

- I appreciated the event tonight. Fantastic panelists and moderator.
- Love what you're trying to accomplish with this series! Keep up the enthusiasm!
- I love the IDS center atrium.
- My experience while running a downtown organization is that Minneapolis zoning rules delayed us for years. in bringing in vibrancy. Our zoning should be made dramatically lighter.

Appendix E – Abundant Cities Panelist Bios

Abundant Cities is a series of three talks co-presented by the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Foundation. Moderated by Adair Mosley, CEO of the African American Leadership Forum, which builds cross-sector networks of leaders and institutions to improve the lives of African Americans in Minnesota, this series was established to generate meaningful discussions on how we can pour resources, energy, and community voices into our civic life.

Evolving Downtowns, March 2023

What will it take to reinvigorate downtown Minneapolis as a thriving, forward-leaning urban center? What role should downtown play in relation to our citywide and regional economy?

- This free talk brought together local leaders with deep knowledge of our community's history, diverse perspectives on the importance of art and economic equity as a driver of regional prosperity, and visionary ideas about what downtown could look like in the future.
- Panelists:
 - Gabrielle Grier is an artist, visionary, and facilitator of growth, perspective shifts, and intentional responses to social and political change.
 - Oscar Perry Abello is a journalist covering policies, programs, and business models to address systemic injustice in the economy.
 - Tom Fisher is an author, a professor, and the director of the Minnesota Design Center who specializes in urban design, systems design, and ethics.

Inclusive Cities, April 2023

We envision Minneapolis as a place where everyone is valued and seen as essential to our city's economy and culture. How can our city become a place that fully embodies that spirit of inclusion?

- In this free talk, a panel of community leaders shared their ambitious visions for creative placemaking, art and design in public spaces, and other innovative approaches to building urban realms that are accessible and welcoming to everyone.
- Panelists:
 - Kate Downing Khaled is founder and CEO of Imagine Deliver, a nationally award-winning strategy and insights firm using community centered and equitable design methods.
 - Rochelle Riley guides Detroit's investment and innovation in the creative economy as the city's director of arts and culture.
 - Steven Bosacker is the senior vice president of innovation at the German Marshall Fund and directs the GMF Cities program, supporting local-level policymakers and practitioners in building inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged cities.

Building Common Ground, May 2023

As Minneapolis seeks to write its next chapter after three challenging years, we are not alone. Cities across the country face many of the same obstacles and opportunities—and those communities, like ours, benefit from a variety of changemakers who are stepping forward to meet the moment with real ambition.

- This free panel discussion dug into several examples of successful efforts here and in other cities to plan and build toward a stronger future.
- Panelists:
 - Now the president and COO of Destination Crenshaw, Jason Foster previously worked with community partners and residents at the nonprofit River LA to grow civic pride and social responsibility surrounding the Los Angeles River.
 - Scott Kratz has worked in Washington, DC, with the Ward 8–based nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River for the past 10 years, developing a one-of-a-kind civic space supporting active recreation, environmental education, and the arts.
 - Witt Siasoco is a Twin Cities community–based visual artist and 2021–2022 Jerome Fellow whose work falls at the intersection of art and civic engagement.



2023