



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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## **2019 Main Street Now Conference Report May 9, 2019 Trevor Martin, Associate Planner**

### **1. Parking [Public] Spaces**

"The more downtown gets broken up and interspersed with parking lots, the duller and deadlier it becomes. And there is nothing more repellent than a dead downtown." -Jane Jacobs

This course was an insight on how to manage common parking problems and leave with proven, low-cost implementation strategies that will help transform vacant parking into places that promote economic vitality. This course also mentions the integration of applied technology to offer smart parking solutions with dynamic pricing that can help manage Main Streets plagued with a lack of parking. Topics covered include creative solutions for activating unused parking spaces to spur economic activity, implementation of shared parking agreements, changes to land development code, and the truth of our future parking needs.

In the U.S. we've built an average of eight parking spaces for every car, creating a vastly over-parked cityscape with an abundance of surplus parking. The continuation of improved technologies will have an impact on the way people use their vehicles and parking into the future. Trips and travel will become more efficient, further emphasizing the abundance of over-parking with cities.

With the amount of parking surface cities have installed over the past years, the questions of parking lot maintenance, and who is going to pay for the parking lot maintenance comes into question. As cities allow for free parking, cities lose out on potential revenue, and activities like biking and walking are discouraged because the amount of solo motorized vehicle trips increases. Lack of a diversity of transportation increases congestions, further pollutes the environment and creates heat islands, and decreases the overall health of the general public.

The address the issues of over-parking municipalities should start to examine the following:

- Repurposing parking spaces
- Improving opportunities for transit, biking, and walking
- Reinvigorating land development codes
  - Infill development
  - Shared parking
- Main street parking study
- Creative branding for parking awareness

Parking, and the way transportation is used, is going to continue to change and adapt. More and more people are moving to areas where commute times are shorter and areas where there are options for transportation. Fewer teenagers are getting driver's licenses today than in the 70's, 80's, and 90's, and this trend is anticipated to continue into the future. Cities need to evaluate the way they perceive and use their parking areas, and ask the tough questions such as "Do we need this, or could this space serve as something greater?"

## **2. Magic Happens When the Property Owner Has Vision**

This course addressed questions like - Do you struggle with connecting to property owners? Do you get invited to the "party" too late? Have the spaces been leased for the good of your downtown or to a "who will pay the rent" tenant? Do you have old buildings crying out for rehabilitation?

Rory Turner and Linda Haglund gave a presentation on the rehabilitation and preservation of old buildings. Rory mentioned how he was using various tax incentive programs, the same ones the City of Yakima can access, to improve and rehab buildings.

## **3. Cultivating Community to Save a Theatre**

After Hurricane Matthew blew through Downtown Edenton, NC and revealed a neglected and potentially dangerous movie theatre, Destination Downtown Edenton, Inc. began rallying community leaders and communicating with the theatre's absentee landlord to come up with a solution. This session talked about the value of and need for historic preservation tools such as a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance.

The City of Edenton had a historic theatre that was damaged during Hurricane Matthew. The property owner lived out of state and did not understand the scope of the damage on the building. The City and community had attempted to notify the property owner, but had minimal luck in getting the property owner. The City used the tool of demolition of neglect, which got the property owner's attention. The property owner eventually came to the City to inspect the damage. After inspecting the actual damage the property owner worked with the City and local business to relinquish control of the Theatre.

## **4. Housing Matters for Your Community, Downtown, and Historic Preservation**

Strong downtowns and communities almost always have active residential space. Making use of every inch of a building helps both property owners with cash flow and downtown residents bring activity, life, and customers to the downtown. Because many rural downtowns have so many underutilized and/or vacant buildings, there are lots of opportunities for this activity. It was said frequently that there is a housing shortage. Identifying the appropriate housing types desired is imperative.

During this session the speakers addressed the question – Why should we care about housing downtown? First maintaining a vacant building in the downtown cost the community hundreds of thousands of dollars. Turning those vacant buildings into operating spaces, specifically creating more housing in the downtown areas within Cities.

Cultivating a diverse housing stock within the downtown core helps in many different aspects in the health of a City.

- Homelessness - A lack of affordable housing options makes it more likely that vulnerable individuals and families become homeless. The average chronically homeless person costs taxpayers an estimated \$40,000 a year through the utilization of public resources, from hospital emergency room visits to police time.
- Low-wage Workforce - Lower-wage workers will be among the first to feel the pressures from higher rents and prices if there is an insufficient supply of affordable housing. Look for housing further out → longer commuters, more traffic congestion Businesses have a harder time finding workers → fewer restaurant, retail, and health care options
- Moderate & High-wage Workers - Higher-wage workers have more housing choices; however, even these households will face affordability challenges if there is not a sufficient supply of housing, at the right prices/rents and in the right locations. Spending

more on housing → less spending on goods and services in the local economy without affordable homeownership opportunities → may leave for other regions.

- A state, region, or city can continue to be an attractive place for businesses and economic investment if it sees housing as a key part of an economic development strategy. Businesses are increasingly saying that they are looking at quality of life, economic diversity and cultural tolerance as they seek to locate or expand.

## **5. Pocket Parks – New third Place in Challenged Neighborhoods**

The City of Milwaukee's HOME GR/OWN initiative has successfully transformed City-owned vacant lots into over 35 new green, third spaces in just the last four years, in Milwaukee's most challenged neighborhoods, with limited city funding and staffing, and receiving significant national attention, book mentions and awards.

Unfortunately many cities have lots with a zero or negative value and have faced various struggles on what to do with these lots. The lots may not have readily available utility infrastructure, or the reinvestment into the area may not be worth the cost to a builder. This initiative focuses on using local community investment to create spaces that are meaningful to the local neighborhoods. In Milwaukee, the objective is to work with north side neighborhoods, which are predominately black and poor. In order to create a space that will be used and successful, revitalization initiatives need the input from the people they aim to serve. That means organizing neighborhood meetings, getting input from the targeted communities, and using workers and volunteers from those neighborhoods to build those parks.

## **6. How to Prevent Development on Purpose or by Mistake**

Private-Public Partnerships can make a positive difference for communities trying to encourage development or redevelopment, particularly in their downtowns. But sometimes apathy, lack of readiness, misinformation, and shortage of knowledge of the available development tools prevent development. In this presentation you learn about "tools and surgical instruments" that can be used to help communities with economic development.

Examining Economic Development vs. Community Development → how to attract households → change the attitude → accomplished by changing quality and perspective.

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century Economic Development

- Luring investment and jobs
- Locally based
- Incentives, infrastructure, and job training
- Transactional/commodity mindset

New paradigms in job Creation

- Job creation does not necessarily lead to population growth
- Capital investment in equipment does not necessarily tie to greater job creation

Cities should begin to shift policies towards those that create households such as schools, safe and livable communities, and recreational amenities.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economic Development

- Luring people (talent attraction, retention, and development)
- Locally based (traditional ED becomes regional)
- Upper-story and infill
- Quality of services
- Assumes jobs move to people
- Values-added mindset – "The value proposition"
  - Leveraging development projects for greater community impact

- Mixed uses, shared greenspace, improved infrastructure

The end goal for development of downtown and historic spaces is to create a sense of place → turning space into place.

## 7. Stimulating Economic Development through Preservation: A Case Study

Seattle developer and preservationist Kevin Daniels teamed with award-winning architect Allyn Stellmacher of ZGF architects to tell the story of The Mark Tower. This iconic addition to the downtown Seattle skyline helped preserve the adjacent historic sanctuary: the nation's oldest Beaux-style building and downtown Seattle's the oldest church. We learned how to build a coalition of local and national support to preserve historic spaces, the unique way a new Seattle development became a catalyst for preserving existing spaces and sparking new uses, and how new commercial projects can both complement and celebrate existing historic structures.

## 8. Inside Out: Creating and Maintaining Authenticity

Two very different Detroit metro places focused on the concept of authenticity and the need to either enhance your business districts authenticity. If you are in a place that is regarded as generic; or to maintain your authenticity; or if you are place experiencing a sudden surge in real estate investment that threatens to transform your cherished place in ways that diminish authenticity there are programs and methods that can be used to help strengthen or reinforce your community culture.

Authenticity → The real deal → true to one's character

- This concept resides within the person looking at an object and what is used to bind people to a place.

Learn to distinguish Trends vs. Fads.

Invest in long term trends and trends that are appropriate for your community.

When looking to make investments, a variety of designs are required, a community needs to be inclusive of all who use the space.

Items to consider when celebrating authenticity

- Art
  - Who?, What?, and Where?
- Design of buildings and street scape (downtown and historic places)

## 9. The "Opportunity" in Opportunity Zones

The new Opportunity Zone program has the potential to be the largest single economic development program in U.S. history by making trillions of dollars of capital gains available for reinvestment in designated Opportunity Zones. This reviewed how the program works, who the major players are, and how to build the local funding ecosystem necessary to attract Opportunity Zone capital to the community.

Essentially, Opportunity zones are a tool for Capital gains investment. There are set criteria of thresholds needed prior to anyone using this program.

## TAKEAWAY

It's a fairly simple takeaway – Downtowns define the culture and health of a City. It's a centralized location that should serve all people of the community. Without investment in our downtowns, and subsequently the historic areas around them, communities begin to become disengaged, they start to forget their culture, and apathy begins to takeover. Investment in the downtown is necessary for a city to survive into the future.