A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

Clearwater Florida

June 15–20, 2014

Urban Land Institute

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A New Vision for Downtown

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About the Urban Land Institute

THE MISSION OF THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and
- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 32,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

Cover photo: City of Clearwater

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About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF ULI'S ADVISORY SERVICES program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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The panel also recognizes the Clearwater Downtown Partnership and its membership. Their vision for downtown Clearwater as an urban setting with an amenity of a marina and a place where a diverse group of people feel comfortable living, working, and playing provided this panel with an excellent point of departure.

Finally, the panel would like to thank the more than 90 community stakeholders who gave their valuable time to attend the interview sessions, presentations, and receptions.

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Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA, IS A CITY of approximately 110,000 located in the Tampa Bay region on the Gulf of Mexico. As the county seat for Pinellas County, it is an administrative, financial, and business center for the western portion of the Tampa region. Clearwater Beach is part of the city and is a well-known tourist destination with almost 1 million visitors every year. Clearwater's downtown is the location of many city facilities, including City Hall, the central library, and Pinellas County offices. The downtown is located on a bluff that rises 30 feet above Clearwater Harbor.

The downtown serves as the gateway to Clearwater Beach and is a focal point for the community along Clearwater Harbor whose centerpiece is Coachman Park and more recently the downtown Clearwater marina. Although the commercial prominence of downtown Clearwater has declined over the years, it nevertheless retains much of the governmental and institutional uses associated with government functions for the city and Pinellas County, as well as the institutional land uses associated with being home to the Church of Scientology.

The current guiding planning document is the Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan (CDRP). The CDRP covers and is largely coterminous with an area designated as a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). The redevelopment plan area covers some areas not included in the CRA. The CDRP provides the basis for the establishment of the CRA.

Downtown Clearwater with Clearwater Bay in the background.

Regional map.

Both the CDRP and the CRA have been in place for a period in excess of ten years. During that time, much has changed in and around downtown Clearwater. Additional changes are contemplated, such as the Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) proposal for a new aquarium, possible reallocation or redevelopment of various parcels including relocation of Clearwater City Hall, a referendum on regional transit expansion, and if successful, future transit-oriented development potential.

The Panel's Assignment

At the request of the city of Clearwater, the ULI panel was asked to provide strategic advice regarding a comprehensive and long-term perspective for the continued growth and development of downtown Clearwater.

Left: The study area.
Right: The ULI panel at work.

Although the study area includes many neighborhoods, the priority areas for the ULI panel included the East Gateway, Old Bay, and the Downtown Core. The panel was asked to evaluate the validity and appropriateness of the city's current vision for these areas and lay out potential and appropriate changes to that vision.

Summary of Recommendations

This is neither the first time nor the only way the city has reflected upon its future. Indeed, it is an ongoing process that has been refined, revised, rewritten, and updated in documents, studies, and plans many times over the past several decades. Like any responsible company or organization, the city must do this in response to changing socioeconomic context and environment. After reviewing the background data, touring the subject area, and interviewing more than 70 stakeholders, the panel deliberated on the questions posed by the city and the additional considerations recommended by the interviewees. The panel is suggesting a series of physical developments, long-term planning, and organizational actions that it believes is consistent with the city's vision for change. A summary of these recommendations includes the following:

- Crafting a vision for Clearwater that recognizes the important entities present in downtown and the roles those entities play in the larger vision for the city;
- Better understanding the macro and micro real estate market forces that are helping shape the land uses in downtown; and
- Generating a series of development programs for specific parts of the downtown including
  - The Waterfront;
  - The Bluff;
  - The central business district; and
  - The East Gateway.

Each of these actions includes recommended changes to the current CDRP:

- Creating a strategy for multimodal mobility that will help realize the new vision for downtown;
- Fashioning a set of strategies for gateways and connections that will contribute to economic prosperity and public health; and
- Creating a new framework for leadership and organizational capacity that will allow the city, the Church of Scientology, business leadership, and citizens to better collaborate and function in a more cooperative effort to realize the new vision.

The remainder of this report provides the details of these recommendations.

The Vision

CLEARWATER FACES A CLASSIC CHALLENGE, one that has been posed to almost every community with a tourism-based economy: the more successful that economy becomes, the easier it is to invest in making the tourism district even better, and the harder it becomes to invest in making the rest of the city work. The panel has witnessed this process at work here in Clearwater, where major capital investments in the past decade (the bridge, the roundabout, and the waterfront promenade) have made the beach an astonishingly dynamic place, while at the same time several of the interviewees seriously proposed abandoning downtown altogether.

This pattern repeats itself in city after city, for several very good reasons. First, investments in a successful tourism district promise reliable, quick returns. Second, they are supported by organized constituencies that typically comprise direct beneficiaries. And last, to keep doing something that is working is easier than to risk something new that may fail.

This dynamic represents a particular threat to Clearwater, because in the panel's experience it seems to be a profoundly divided city. It is geographically divided between the mainland and the beach, but it is also internally divided, with deep and enduring tensions between various sparring factions. These tensions are palpable in interviews, and they include all the hot-button issues of race, class, ethnicity, politics, and religion. As a result, the classic schism of a tourism economy continues unabated, and the economic fate of the mainland (and in particular, that of the study area) drifts further and further from that of the beach.

In city after city across America, experience has provided the closest thing we have to an immutable law of economic development, which is balkanization equals decline. Cities that endlessly point fingers fall inexorably behind their competitors. If you are not flying, you are falling.

The causeway to Clearwater Beach.

Rather than remaining separated by two economies—a beach and a mainland—Clearwater must find one unified vision. This vision is essential, because in the long term the two sides face a shared destiny. Mainland Clearwater cannot improve without the revenues and jobs created on the beach, and the beach cannot continue to prosper if the downtown core falls further apart. A failing downtown poses an existential threat to both the perception and the reality of the beach economy; a successful downtown will complement that economy with new activities for visitors and with neighborhoods that attract and retain high-quality employees.

But to accomplish this critical task, the city must have a unified vision. This vision must include each of the different constituencies that form Clearwater, and they must buy into that vision. Everyone must feel invited, and everyone must be invested in the outcome, because the city simply cannot afford to leave assets or talents on the table. It must use everything available to it.

To build and implement a coherent vision for a unified and successful Clearwater, the city must address three crucial topics: strategy, communication, and partnerships.

Strategy

Clearwater must bridge the gap between the mainland and the beach by identifying complementary mainland activities that reinforce and build upon its existing tourism base. These include "third day" activities for dehydrated, sunburned visitors who are tired of the sun, and cultural activities for visitors who are ready to explore beyond their corner of the beach. A relocated aquarium is an excellent example of this kind of destination, and Coachman Park can be programmed to include far more activities than the eight major events held each year.

Moreover, the city must reach out to the downtown waterfront, and into the bay itself, to create activities in and on the water. After all, Clearwater is home to more than just two dolphins. The bay is home to hundreds of dolphins, along with millions of fish and other natural wonders, and this fact is not fully capitalized upon from the mainland side. Activities on and in the water, which begin or end downtown, will convert the bay from a barrier into a bridge, unifying the otherwise isolated parts of the city.

That said, attracting tourists downtown is not enough to change the trajectory of the study area. It is certainly necessary, but far from sufficient. The panel does not believe that any tourism-related destination (even the aquarium) can, on its own, serve as a game-changing silver bullet for downtown. Rather, downtown Clearwater must continue to improve itself, on its own terms, for its own citizens. It must not try to become simply an extension of the delightful (but artificial) tourism district. Instead, it must become a vibrant and successful place in its own right, serving its own citizens.

This strategy means rebuilding the kind of downtown that once existed, with activities that people want to do. But it will also require adding new residences to downtown, thereby building its population. Restaurants and bars need patrons, and streets need pedestrians. These people cannot come exclusively from outside the neighborhood. Rather, outside patrons must complement and enhance an organically grown downtown population.

Interestingly, the more viable, real, and attractive downtown becomes, the more the tourists will show up on their own, eager to participate. Downtown as a whole—successful and authentic—will become a third-day activity, giving the city of Clearwater a rich spectrum of both cultural and natural attractions.

In later sections, the panel details a series of development programs for specific neighborhoods that will help accomplish these crucial tasks.

Communication

Clearwater must begin to actively tell its own story. To date, the city has been defined passively—and, to a large extent, negatively—from the outside. Clearwater must fill the vacuum with its own voice, creating a brand identity that is strong, positive, unapologetic, and inclusive.

Given how much work needs to be done to make Clearwater into the city that its residents hope for, many years will be needed to make its shared vision a reality. However, the city cannot wait until all the hard work is done to communicate effectively about itself. Therefore, the brand messaging must be aspirational yet genuine enough not to disappoint until the goal is finally realized.

Although a meaningful branding effort takes far more time and discipline than is available during this study, the panel has mocked up the kind of message it envisions as working. This message is capable of encompassing all the various strengths of Clearwater: the water and its amazing wildlife, its long history as a beloved destination, the Bluff, the beach, and most critically, the city's wonderful citizens. In particular, the panel urges the city to take advantage of its beautiful and evocative name, which gives it a unique advantage over cities such as Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota. In a sense, the entire story of Clearwater is in its name.

Partnerships

In all the panel's interviews and conversations, which totaled nearly 100 separate interactions, the panel found

widespread unanimity about the city's future. No constituency wanted a moribund downtown. Nobody wanted empty storefronts or deserted streets. Nobody wanted dilapidated buildings, failed businesses, or unemployment. All of this speaks to a genuine opportunity: if everyone could just figure out how to work together, Clearwater's constituencies might actually be able to get what they want.

Of course, the other side of this unanimity was the widespread suspicion and distrust that ran rampant in the panel's conversations. Most people felt frustrated, stymied, and blocked from contributing to a better Clearwater. The panel cannot stress enough how universal this sentiment was. There were no exceptions. Everyone wants the same thing, everyone professes willingness to cooperate, and everyone feels that someone else is out to stop them.

As a result, the city has commissioned innumerable studies such as this one over the past 40 years. And while progress has been made, Clearwater has still not reached its full potential. This panel suspects that the challenge lies not in getting people to agree on a vision, but in getting them to work together to make it happen.

The panel does not deny the difficulty of building trust in a situation where it is sorely lacking. But this work must be done, or else everything else is pointless. Clearwater cannot afford to waste the efforts or talents of any constituency, and it is inexorably true that balkanization generates decline. If Clearwater wants things to get better, the city must find a way to make this work. This means engaging in a serious and constructive way with communities that still clearly feel alienated, such as the historic African American communities in Old Bay and North Greenwood and the growing Latino community in East Gateway. This is their city, and they must be a part of the solution.

Of course, partnership and trust building cannot happen all at once. It must start with the largest and most influential players, who must find in themselves the courage to lead. Specifically, this means the city of Clearwater and the Church of Scientology. They are the two largest landowners in the study area; they command the largest budgets; and they have the most influence over public opinion.

The Flag Building of the Church of Scientology is a prominent landmark in downtown Clearwater.

These two organizations must become partners in the future of the city. If they cannot, no one else will.

During the panel's time in Clearwater, its members heard numerous descriptions of the church's purported lack of interest in a healthy, vibrant downtown where everyone is welcome. Yet despite whatever real or imagined conflicts may have taken place in the past, the panel found no evidence that the church is now behaving in a manner significantly different from most large institutional urban landowners, such as a university or a hospital. That the church appears first and foremost to be interested in meeting its own programmatic needs seems rather unremarkable. That is, after all, its function.

The church's Clearwater campus serves as a large, highly organized, and ultimately self-sufficient monastery. As a result, it is naturally inward looking, and the rest of the community has limited opportunities to interact directly with the church's inner functions. But again, aside from the fact that most of its employees live in church housing, this situation is not particularly dissimilar from that of any urban hospital or university. Although the scale of operations will inevitably produce curiosity on the part of outsiders, what parishioners do when visiting the Flag Building is ultimately irrelevant to the critical question of whether the city and the church can work together productively to make an active and successful downtown.

To that end, the panel cannot find evidence that the church is uninterested in participating in or improving the community. From its ongoing charity work, to its sponsorship

of the annual 5K Run in Coachman Park, to its leadership's strong participation in the Downtown Partnership, the panel found an organization that is making a meaningful effort to engage with and improve the Clearwater community. (And since nearly 10 percent of the city's population is practicing Scientologists, including large numbers of successful business owners, one should be careful in assuming that "the community" is by definition entirely separate from the church.)

Moreover, the specific assumption that the church is not interested in downtown revitalization seems contradicted by several important actions it has taken. Beyond the impeccable condition of its buildings, the church brought Starbucks to downtown and has attempted to bring in other similar uses. The importance of the Starbucks is easy to discount or take for granted, but the panel sees this as a major milestone for downtown: *the successful accomplishment of a project that benefits both the church and the downtown*. It should be the template for future cooperation and partnership, one that is rooted not just in a Pollyanna-ish rhetoric of togetherness but in genuine, mutual shared interest. The big question is, what will be the next Starbucks?

The panel also feels that the opportunities and activities associated with Pinellas County are an important component of downtown. The city and the county should recognize that because Clearwater is the county seat, Pinellas County plays an important role as a daytime employer. A significant number of county employees patronize local restaurants and services during the day. The city needs to do everything possible to retain county employees in downtown.

The implementation section of this report outlines some organizational suggestions to help with this idea of partnerships.

Market Potential

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS that are affecting the study area can help planners and elected officials identify the potential and pressure for future land uses. ULI believes that successful urban planning and land use policy can best be described as public action that generates a desirable, widespread, and sustained private market reaction. Therefore, Advisory Services panel reports typically have their foundation in market possibilities. For the purposes of this report, the panel presents its observations and conclusions from both a regional and a local perspective.

The Regional Picture

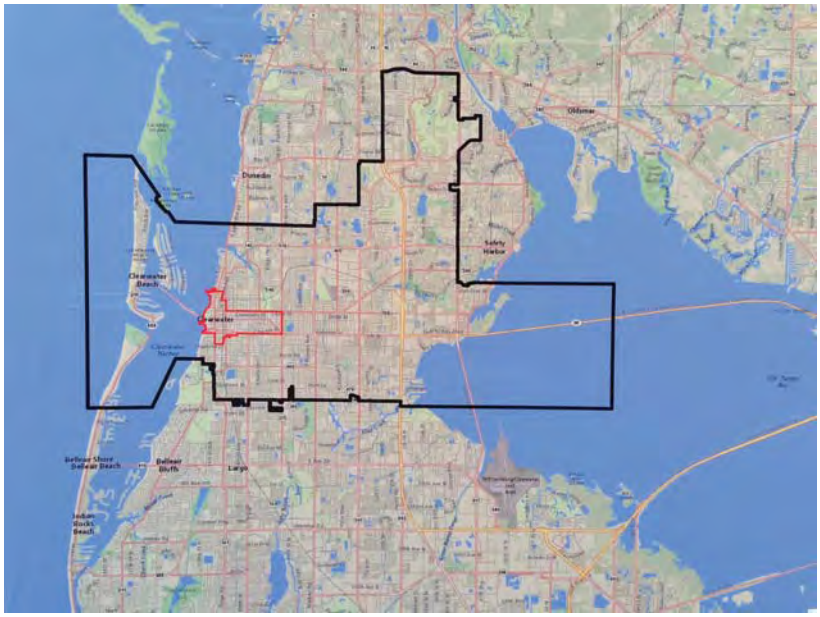
The city of Clearwater consists of almost 40 square miles and has three main development concentrations:

- The U.S. 19 corridor;
- The center city area; and
- The beach.

Because of the physical separation of the areas, more effort than in most downtowns will be required to create a good urban core, but it can be done. Tampa and St. Pete are slowly conquering similar spatial separations and are slowly creating good downtowns.

The separate subareas require separate efforts to attract amenities to each. Ruth Eckerd Hall has been located 12 miles from downtown for the last 30 years, and the new Phillies spring training camp was located near U.S. 19 because of land availability. So these amenities serve to exacerbate the physical separation of the city.

Clearwater is a potent force in the market. Its hotel supply and contribution to tax collections are high when compared with the balance of the Tampa Bay area.



Downtown Clearwater is outlined in red, and the remainder of the city is outlined in black.

Regional Hotel Supply

City/submarket	Rooms
Downtown/airport	11,546
St. Pete/St. Pete Beach	9,052
Clearwater	7,458
North/Busch Gardens	6,944
East	5,963
Tarpon Springs/North Shore	3,722
Total	**44,685**

Sources: PKF, Johnson Consulting.

At least from a tourism standpoint, Clearwater and St. Pete and St. Pete Beach have the same stature. Why can't their downtowns? The entire metropolitan area would benefit from having good downtowns everywhere.

The market has a high out-of-state and international visitor profile. These visitors stay longer than an in-state

5 Percent Pinellas County Local Option Tax, June 2013

City	Amount
Clearwater/Clearwater Beach	$875,087
St. Pete Beach/Tierra Verde	562,316
Miscellaneous/other	447,151
St. Petersburg	322,075
Treasure Island	162,584
Indian Rocks Beach	74,083
Madeira Beach	70,265
North Redington Beach/Redington Beach/Redington Shores	67,440
Indian Shores	56,137
Oldsmar/Safety Harbor	51,469
Palm Harbor	41,803
Dunedin	25,330
Tarpon Springs	16,032
Belleair/Belleair Beach/Belleair Bluffs/Belleair Shores	14,386
Total	**$2,786,158**

Sources: Pinellas County, Johnson Consulting.

visitor and seek activities other than just beach activities. Shopping, entertainment, and attractions all help keep tourists busy, and downtown Clearwater has a major role in making that happen.

The Phillies outdraw other teams for spring training, and standing room causes attendance to exceed stadium capacity. The same stadium hosts a top-drawing minor league.

Ruth Eckerd Hall is a successful draw for non-beach-going tourists and demonstrates the potential diversity of Clearwater as a destination with a diverse visitor base.

The success of the Capitol Theater demonstrates how community leadership can create venues that drive activity and visitation in downtown.

The success of these venues is not just because they have been placed more centrally to the greater Tampa Bay area population—they have not. They are still located very far away from the population concentrations. Nevertheless enough residents and tourists are willing to drive to see good product. Promotion and management are also good.

Downtown has already proven that it can attract demand this year, as evidenced by the reopening of the historic Capitol Theater. Under the management of Ruth Eckerd Hall, the theater has expanded to 750 seats—including six private loge boxes, multiple concession stands, a larger lobby, an outdoor balcony that wraps around the building overlooking the beautiful Clearwater causeway, a VIP room, and Frenchy's rooftop terrace—and is now ADA accessible. Its event list since opening in the spring is extraordinary for a theater this size.

So, what does this mean for downtown? It means that if good quality product is added, if it is well conceived, well managed and marketed, people will come. Hence, if Clearwater seeks to add more boating volume to its waterfront, it can. If it seeks to add more entertainment, it can, and if it seeks to add an attraction, it can and should. It also means downtown should leverage its tourist and international draw. Finally, it means the city should follow

the model devised at Ruth Eckerd Hall, which has made a center of excellence out of its entertainment choices.

Downtown Market Demand

Population and job growth drive and support the market for new real estate product. Although both of these drivers slowed dramatically during the recession, both are on the comeback trail, and the time is right to begin to take advantage of this growth.

Employment

The study area's population has increased 16 percent since 2000 and 5 percent over just the past three years. It has also increased its share of Clearwater's total population during that time. Employment in the broader Tampa Bay area has been growing, adding 31,000 jobs in the past 12 months to reach total employment of 1.2 million jobs, the highest level in six years. In fact, the Tampa Bay area has gained back roughly 80 percent of the jobs lost in the recession, and the unemployment rate stands below 6 percent.

Employment in the study area totals roughly 8,500 jobs and is strongly concentrated in two sectors: government jobs and retail and service jobs, which together comprise more than one-third of all jobs. Included in the services category is health services, which is expected to be a major growth area for the future because of the aging of the baby boom generation. Finance, insurance, and real estate account for about one-fifth of area jobs, and these sectors are also ones that are likely to grow over time.

The economic development strategic plan completed in 2011 determined that potential sources of job growth going forward for the Clearwater market include many of these existing industries as well as some new ones. Their targets for Clearwater job growth included the following industries:

- Applied medicine;
- High-tech electronics, software, and data services;
- Business and professional services;
- Financial and insurance services; and
- Marine and environmental activities.

Growth in any or all of these industries will support increasing opportunities for new housing, retail, and office land uses, particularly new real estate product that is geared to those with middle and upper-middle incomes.

Housing Potential

The housing market within the study area is characterized by many older housing units, some of which are in need of repair or should be torn down. In fact, 87 percent of existing housing units are more than 25 years old, and only 5 percent of all homes have been built in the past ten years. The average home in the study area is 40 years old. The vast majority of housing units are being rented (81 percent) while owner occupancy is a very low 19 percent. Although quite a few homes are still in some stage of foreclosure, the panel sees pent-up demand for new, contemporary housing that is built to appeal to the large

The panel sees opportunities for many types of residential units from high-rise apartments to single-family bungalows.

percentage of people who are employed in the study area and in Clearwater generally but who live elsewhere.

With regard to multifamily rental property, pent-up demand exists because of the lack of new postrecession construction. Many employees who work in the study area and even Greater Clearwater are choosing to leave the city for housing that is newer and more desirable. Apartment vacancy rates have been declining throughout the Tampa metro area, and construction is picking up and rental rates are rising. The panel estimates that the market could potentially support 400 to 600 new rental units over the next five years.

The Central Peninsula area in which the study area is located has less than a 5 percent vacancy rate, which is a strong indicator that additional rental inventory is needed. This area has had no new apartment construction since the recession, though several projects have been proposed to fill the gap. Given the pent-up demand and the availability of capital as well as a high level of investor and developer interest in building new rental communities throughout the country, the time is right to move forward on building additional units in the study area. This will also be an incentive for potential new employers to locate nearby, because most employees would prefer to live closer to rather than farther from their workplace. The Prospect Lake Park project would be a good start in that direction.

The for-sale housing market has been gradually on the mend with 2013 being an "up" year in the Tampa Bay area; that trend is continuing into 2014. Home prices have been rising, and inventories of available homes declining. Given the age of the study area's housing stock, the lack of recent construction, and recent population growth, the panel believes that demand exists for both new and rehabilitated for-sale housing.

The inventory of older bungalows and other types of homes, particularly in the Old Bay area and to some extent in East Gateway, presents an opportunity to generate additional high-quality for-sale housing. This could include the renovation of older homes as well as the construction of new infill homes of similar styles within those neighborhoods. Incentives may be needed to kick-start the process, but once it begins and values improve, incentives may no longer be needed to entice buyers into these areas. In addition, demand exists for additional attached or multifamily for-sale product, such as townhomes and waterfront mid- or high-rise condominium units.

The panel estimates that the market could potentially support 150 to 250 rehabilitated or new construction for-sale housing units over the next five years.

Although the panel heard from some individuals opposed to new housing in downtown, most interviewees were strongly supportive of both new and rehabilitated housing. The panel feels that housing in the downtown area is a key component of economic growth bringing new customers and activity.

Office

Currently an oversupply of office space exists and thus limited opportunity for ground-up new construction in the near future. The vacancy rate in the North Pinellas submarket in which the study area is located is roughly 20 percent with rental rates stable to slightly rising because of building owners' increased operational costs and a leasing environment that is just on the cusp of improving. However, this inventory of unleased space presents an opportunity to recruit new employers at reasonable rental rates to backfill this space. The area is very fortunate to have access to a high density of Tier 1 and high-bandwidth fiber-optic cable, that is, telecommunications infrastructure, thus allowing building owners to upgrade older office buildings to support high-tech and other new employers that require or desire state-of-the art Internet service. The recent success of the Bank of America building within the study area is a good example of successfully renovating and backfilling vacant office space, and the panel recommends that the city continue to work to attract new employers to occupy existing office space.

Retail

The retail market in the Tampa Bay area has experienced relatively stable occupancy over the past two years with

Cleveland Street, with its attractive urban design elements and streetscape, is a model for redevelopment of several blocks in downtown.

only about 100,000 square feet of new product added to the market. The vacancy rate is in the 8.5 percent to 9.0 percent range overall. The Mid Pinellas County market in which the study area is located has a slightly lower vacancy rate of between 7.5 percent and 8.0 percent. Absorption of space in the Mid Pinellas submarket has been relatively good this year, as the economy and consumer confidence grow and the job market strengthens.

Although a large amount of new retail space is not needed in the study area, a limited amount of new space can be brought online as part of new mixed-use developments, such as the Prospect Park project, and in other prime locations.

The panel conservatively estimates that the potential for positive net retail space absorption in the study area is roughly 10,000 to 12,000 square feet at this time, based solely on demand generated by residents. When demand generated by tourists, employees, and future population growth is added, the estimate for demand over the next five years expands to 30,000 to 50,000 square feet.

Retailers that would make good targets for new or existing retail space located within the study area include full-service restaurants, general merchandise stores, sporting goods, hobby and bookstores, electronics and appliance stores, and clothing and shoe stores. These types of stores are all undersupplied in the study area at this time. In addition, a growing demand for a variety of health care services presents a strong and expanding opportunity for filling existing and new retail spaces.

More retail means more activity, and more activity enlivens the downtown.

Industrial and Flex Space

The market for industrial and flex space in the North Pinellas submarket in which the study area is located is relatively strong, with a vacancy rate of just 5 percent. However, most of the uses that would occupy this type of space are not permitted or appropriate, with the possible exception of the rehabilitation of some of the older warehouses that could be turned over to flex space for new-economy workers.

Conclusion

The real estate market and potential for expansion of real estate activity within the study area are on a positive trajectory with the potential for new near-term construction strongest in the rental and for-sale housing markets. However, the panel wants to emphasize that attracting the developers and builders as well as the residents and employers required to realize and maximize this potential is not a given. The study area and the city as a whole are competing with many other cities both within and outside the Tampa region to capture this real estate activity.

The city must do more to develop and leverage the competitive assets that it possesses and to create a unique and highly attractive environment imbued with the qualities and characteristics that today's consumers and employers are seeking. The panel believes Clearwater has many important pieces of the puzzle already planned, in progress, or in place. But the panel also believes that the city will need to achieve more to really capture the true potential that is before it.

Planning, Development, and Design Strategies

THE PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS for planning, development, and design are focused on two geographic groupings: (a) the downtown core, and (b) larger citywide strategies for community gateways and connections, including those for the Eastern Gateway and mobility strategies.

Downtown Core

Although the panel was asked to identify planning and development concepts across the site area, the panelists found that the largest concentration of opportunity areas and those with the greatest catalytic potential were located in the area designated as the Downtown Core, with certain solutions extending to the Old Bay and South Gateway areas.

The core of downtown Clearwater can be better explained as three subdistricts: the central business district, the Bluff, and the Waterfront.

The Downtown Core—roughly bounded by Myrtle Avenue to the east, Drew Street to the north, Chestnut Street to the south, and Clearwater Harbor on the west—is the primary nexus of the city's office, retail, governmental, and higher-density residential uses. Cleveland Street, specifically the 400 to 600 blocks, acts as downtown's central business spine and organizing element. These blocks consist of a relatively connected strand of retail frontages intermixed with office buildings, institutional uses, and Station Square Park, a pocket park meant to act as an urban plaza and event site. Following the installation of streetscape and wayfinding elements as described in the CDRP, the Cleveland Street corridor possesses many of the elements integral to the creation of a walkable urban environment but, as many residents and stakeholders pointed out, lacks the vitality of other successful downtown areas. The areas surrounding Cleveland Street have seen less infrastructural investment and, consequently, lack the cohesive branding established by the Cleveland Street area.

Though Cleveland Street is perceived as the center of commercial life for downtown Clearwater, the area adjacent to the waterfront is seen as the community's heart. Stakeholder interviews and observation made evident to the panel that the waterfront area is a unique and valuable asset to the growth and stability of the city. Over the past several years, the areas directly adjacent to and within the waterfront area have been the focus of investment that has yielded a festival walkway along the harbor edge and a new public marina at the foot of Cleveland Street, among other achievements. Although these projects have been largely well received and are measures of successful and positive change for the city, they represent only the first steps in a much larger process of growth and change.

Finally, the panel recognized the Bluff—the highest escarpment along the water's edge in Florida—as a

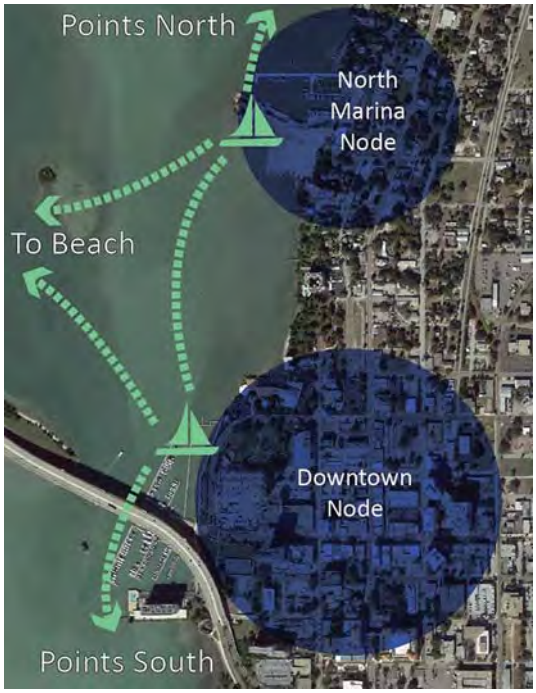
prominent and exceptional asset on which the city can build its brand. The Bluff runs parallel to the water and rises to 30 feet above sea level, thereby allowing for stunning views over the harbor and toward the beach destinations. The Bluff sits directly between the downtown core and the waterfront areas and, as a result, can be seen as a connective piece with the potential of tying the two areas together. Ideas for the Bluff varied across the interview process, but a desire to see an enhancement of the existing elements and investment in Coachman Park, a major open space that connects to the waterfront, was overwhelming. Recently, the most notable change to come to the Bluff was the public library, an element that both adds to the district and requires a certain amount of rethinking. The singularity of the Bluff can be used as an attraction and a competitive advantage by presenting a different form of waterfront than found anywhere else in Florida.

The mutual success of the downtown office and retail environment (as centered on Cleveland Street), the Bluff, and the areas adjacent to the waterfront are inherently linked and should be conceived as three parts of a larger whole. For purposes of discussion, however, the panel found it easier to approach the area as having three subdistricts: the central business district east of Osceola Avenue; the Bluff, generally defined as the area west of Osceola and including the sloped areas leading up to the waterfront; and the Waterfront District directly adjacent to the water west of the Bluff, including areas along the water's edge north into the Old Bay area.

Waterfront District

The Waterfront District is a unique and underused asset to the city. The area is defined by a stunning setting on the calm waters of Clearwater Harbor, including areas that are currently occupied by Coachman Park and the large parking lot that originally served the Harborview Center. The following main themes arose during the research and interview phases for this district:

- Enhance and strengthen Coachman Park;
- Promote and grow the boating culture; and
- Instill activity along the waterfront.



Make the downtown waterfront the boating capital of the region. The entire waterfront should be tied together throughout downtown and connected to the beach.

With these themes in mind, the panel created a series of recommendations and opportunities for economic development, public enjoyment, and civic identity:

- Make Clearwater the boating capital of the region.
  - *Create a comprehensive boating plan:* The panel recommends that the city should engage a qualified consultant to help prepare a plan that would establish Clearwater, specifically downtown, as a major boating center. The plan should indicate opportunities and challenges in providing a full-service environment for boaters that could integrate with goals of the Waterfront District. Areas of focus may include the provision of fueling stations and storage facilities, a redistribution of boat-related enterprises from Clearwater Beach to the downtown marina, and on-shore commercial activities that could attract boaters and bring them into the downtown area. The plan should be completed before major decisions are made regarding boat-related infrastructure along Clearwater's waterfront, including the "high and dry" facility proposed in the Old Bay area.

- *Provide recreational boating experiences at the downtown marina:* Providing opportunity to boat owners to engage with the waterfront will help in establishing the waterfront as a boating destination and will help attract boating enthusiasts to the Waterfront District. The city should partner with the operators of recreational boating entities, such as kayak, paddleboat, and jet-ski rental businesses, to provide these amenities to the public. With a variety of boating experiences, the Waterfront District of downtown can become known as the "start of the water adventure" for the entire city of Clearwater.

- *Ensure Clearwater stays clear:* With the increase of boating activity in Clearwater Harbor, a certain degree of environmental degradation can be expected. The panel recommends that the city should become the steward of a healthy marine environment. This may include engagement of a qualified entity to periodically monitor marine health, creating policies that help protect marine life and the quality of water, and empowering the harbormaster or similar position with enforcing these policies. The cleanliness of the water is part of the brand of the city and will help the city live up to its name.

■ Enhance public access to the waterfront.

- *Ensure future connections to the waterfront:* The panel recommends that a policy be implemented that ensures all future development within the study area that directly abuts the water's edge should provide for public access to the water. Though many properties along the water currently are not accessible to the public, this policy will guarantee that future development or redevelopment of waterfront properties will minimally include a promenade or other accessible elements directly adjacent to the water. In the long term, this policy may lead to a contiguous waterfront walkway within the study area following redevelopment of existing uses.

All future development or redevelopment on the waterfront in the study area should have a provision for public access.

- *Create a water taxi or ferry service:* Consistent with the promotion of downtown Clearwater as a regional boating capital, the creation of a potential water taxi or ferry service should be considered to connect the downtown area with other important destinations, such as the Island Estates area and Clearwater Beach. This service can complement the Jolley Trolley service and enhance the boating brand. This type of amenity can attract beach-going visitors to downtown as well as become a tourist attraction in itself. The proposed water taxi could also make multiple stops along the downtown and adjacent waterfront areas, such as North Marina, to better connect the mainland portions of the city. The city should partner

Enhancing Coachman Park can include additional programming of festivals and activities such as the Clearwater Jazz Holiday and Fun 'n Sun Music Series.

A comprehensive plan for the North Marina should be created that balances the needs of the boating community, area residents, and the development community.

with a high-quality and trusted vendor to ensure a successful and useful service. Fast service to and from the beach would be desirable and would likely require a minimum of two boats to provide a short headway between departures.

- *Create a comprehensive North Marina plan:* The panel recommends that the North Marina area, including the proposed "high and dry" site, be studied and planned comprehensively to provide the greatest value to the residents of the neighborhood and the city. The city-owned portions of the marina area should retain current boat launch and docking facilities as well as the existing open space, but the city should investigate opportunities to enhance the publicly accessible open-space elements on the site. Though an increase in open space is desirable, the park space should not be expanded without a clear maintenance plan, source of funding, and programming schedule. The site represents one of few areas outside Coachman Park where the city can provide meaningful open space to the public along the water's edge. A comprehensive plan should be created that balances the needs of the boating community, area residents, and the development community. The city should work with developers of the proposed high-and-dry facility or other development projects that show interest in the site to ensure that the resultant product adheres to the design guidelines created in conjunction with the Old Bay neighborhood residents and stakeholders.

- Connect the waterfront to the city.

  - *Attract waterfront restaurants:* The panel recommends that one or more restaurants or eating establishments be located on the waterfront on or near the pier at the foot of Cleveland Street. These establishments should be highly vetted for quality. The city is advised to search for and directly approach high-quality and well-known restaurant brands (though not necessarily large chains) that have a proven track record with successful waterfront sites in lieu of an request for proposal (RFP) or request for qualifications (RFQ) process. The restaurant or restaurants can be formal sit-down venues or smaller informal spaces. They should provide a visual connection to downtown to attract visitors to that area as well as attract the boating crowd. Additionally, the city should consider bringing a dining establishment of some description to the North Marina area to create a destination and secondary node along the waterfront for both boaters and nonboaters. The concept is consistent with the Coachman Park master plan as found in the CDRP.

- *Capitalize on and grow the Old Bay housing stock:* The Old Bay neighborhood has a unique mix of older housing types that give a rare taste of "old Florida." This community fabric, consisting largely of historic bungalows and shotgun-style houses, should be invested in and enhanced. The city should provide assistance in renovating existing houses to bring them up to a modern standard of living while retaining their historic charm. This assistance may come in the form of low-interest loans or grants that help property owners update their houses under specific criteria. Through the modified downtown plan, the city should also promote the development of housing products that are sympathetic to this older housing stock within the Old Bay neighborhood, including modern bungalows and similar housing types that are geared to a mixed-income population.

The Bluff

The area is defined by a large ridge upon which downtown sits, overlooking the harbor from above. This elevated vantage point is unique to Clearwater and the surrounding small towns and can be captured as an asset for both economic development and public access purposes. The 28-foot contour line that represents the starting point for the referendum that controls waterfront development runs through the center of this district and will be a difficult challenge for anything proposed for this district or the waterfront. The following main themes arose during the research and interview phases for this district:

- Capitalize on the prominence of the bluff;
- Investigate the feasibility and potential impact of the Clearwater Marine Aquarium;
- Connect the waterfront to the downtown area; and
- Balance land uses for different preferences and user types.

The panel's recommendations for this area entered into certain controversial areas but represent an approach that the panel believes will help downtown grow and become more connected and accessible to the city and its visitors.

- Master plan the Bluff district. The area adjacent to the waterfront, specifically the two large blocks owned by city, should not be developed or altered without a guiding vision that has a large degree of buy-in from key stakeholders and area residents. Because of the many competing ideas for the waterfront area, a proposed master plan vision likely will contain certain areas that are disagreeable to many parties. Despite this, a balance in resident and stakeholder needs should be the goal of the master-planning exercise. The city under the proposed "brain trust" should initiate an RFP or RFQ process to locate a qualified development partner to bring together a shared vision for the area. This public/private partnership will endeavor to create a master plan, following a robust community engagement process that is realistic and finds ownership among the various stakeholders. Following this process, the city should put out another RFQ/RFP for a master, "horizontal" developer that can bring this vision to reality by establishing the infrastructural framework upon which future development will be built. The panel believes several primary elements should be the focus of any master plan for the area, as follows:

  - *Expand Coachman Park:* The theme of expanding Coachman Park, both programmatically and physically, was evoked consistently throughout the interview process. The panel recommends Coachman Park's footprint be expanded outside its current bounds to create a greater presence along the waterfront. The scale of the future green space should be balanced with development in the area. Though the panel heard from a number of interviewees a desire for a park that consumed the entirety of the Harborview site and beyond, the panel believes that too much green space is as bad as not enough in that it limits developable space, creates potential for dead zones, and is difficult to program. More active uses should be included in the expanded park to offer families and residents a variety of activities.

Such uses may include a skate park, programmable and interactive fountains, and playground equipment. The existing tennis courts south of Cleveland Street may have to be removed, reduced, or relocated to accommodate a wider variety of uses.

- *Identify opportunity sites along the Bluff:* Though the panel heard several rebuffs for the idea of developing areas west of Osceola, the panel believes development along the Bluff is essential to the success of the district and city. Several opportunity sites are immediately evident to the panel while others should be identified by the master-planning process. The parking lot between the library and Harborview Center is one prime development piece while Harborview Center itself sits on land that may prove to be one of the most desirable development sites in the downtown area. Following the master plan process for the area, Harborview Center should be demolished to make room for an expanded Coachman Park and a mix of uses that will likely include residential, retail, and restaurant. Restaurant uses should be prioritized for sites atop the Bluff with water views (possibly as part of a larger development). These restaurants will have great visibility for boaters and users of the park from below while offering a one-of-a-kind dining experience overlooking the harbor. Development along the Bluff should attract people approaching from below and draw them into the city.

- *Attract and promote a large draw:* The panel heard a variety of comments concerning the potential relocation of the CMA to a site within the Waterfront District, specifically the current city hall site. The panel believes this proposed move is appropriate, assuming the feasibility has been well established by outside consultants. Possibly a scaled-down version of the aquarium may be more suitable for the downtown area. Additionally, the site chosen for the CMA is good choice given its adjacency to the downtown core but its distance from the prime mixed-use development sites. Despite this, the panel is adamant that this move is not a "silver bullet" that will save downtown but should be considered merely a part of the economic development puzzle. Should the CMA decide not to move to the site, the city should attempt to identify similar organizations or institutions (such as a museum) that may consider locating in the same location. A large family-oriented tourist attraction can help bring beach-going tourists and other visitors to the downtown area. A vibrant downtown must be developed to retain these visitors.

The Bluff is a unique and iconic landform that should help the central business district connect to the waters of Clearwater Bay. A comprehensive master plan for the Bluff should be the responsibility of the city with input from all of the important downtown stakeholders.

■ Bring users to the Bluff and beyond.

- *Boost the library:* The new library along Osceola Street is a decent building with a limited use on an exceptional site. Though the panel heard that the library is well used, it continues the institutional dominance along the waterfront and is outsized for its use and location. The city should identify uses that can easily colocate with the library to boost its use and help activate the area around it. Such uses can include a community meeting room and center, a community arts initiative, and more active uses such as a café that could make better use of the patio spaces overlooking the waterfront. In addition,

The Clearwater library can act as an important link between the core of downtown and the waterfront. The city should identify uses that can easily colocate with the library to boost its use and help activate the area around it. The fencing and bollards should be removed to make the entrances and outside gathering areas more inviting.

the panel feels strongly that the fencing and bollards recently erected around the library should be removed to make the building more welcoming and provide a sense of inclusion for all users.

- *Make attractive connections across the Bluff and to the water:* The Cleveland Street streetscape upgrade that was implemented over the past few years made a generally positive impact for the attractiveness and functionality of that corridor, but the energy it created was abruptly severed at Osceola Street. Though this may represent a desire to wait for future development at the Harborview site and in Coachman Park, it creates a barrier for passage between downtown and the waterfront along the Bluff. Quality interim streetscape upgrades, with an eye toward future reuse or removal elements, should be added to create a more interesting and inviting connection to and from the water. Cleveland Street will serve as a primary connection through this area, but identifying other connectors that can act as secondary links from the core to the water is also important. Drew Street is an excellent connection because it is a through street that connects to the city and the Pinellas Trail, thus creating an opportunity to capture bikers and pedestrians who are using the trail for exercise and recreation. Creating a comfortable street that is designed for use by all modes of travel—including automotive, bike, and pedestrian—can attract users who would otherwise not choose to travel to the waterfront. The establishment of clear connections to the waterfront and enhancement of the waterfront as a destination will have to be implemented to create a desirable destination. Other streets should be evaluated for their connective potential.

- *Use the bridge as a gateway:* The new Clearwater Memorial Causeway that connects the downtown core to the beach crosses across the view plane from the top of the Bluff at Cleveland Street and offers an opportunity for a visual gateway. The bridge, which is an elegant looking structure in its own right, can be outfitted with LED lights or other decoration to make an interesting element that can attract people down to the water who would otherwise not find reason to approach that area. A design competition can be used to allow local artists to propose a gateway element using the bridge as the template. Strong visual pull can be created with relatively limited means.

Central Business District

The central business district was once—and can be again—the commercial hub of the city and has potential to be so for a much larger region. Though downtown may not currently have a strong market, vibrancy can come from a number of disparate locations, ranging from an improved aesthetic to the attraction of business anchors that plant a seed for growth. The panel heard several prominent themes across the interview and research process:

The Clearwater Memorial Causeway could be outfitted with LED lights or other type of decoration to create an interesting element that attracts people to the waterfront and the downtown.

- Make downtown more attractive;
- Bring more people to the streets;
- Make downtown more legible and navigable; and
- Reconsider design guidelines and signage regulations that are too strict or arbitrary.

Though many elements are already in place to make the central business district a vibrant place, in addition to an increased focus on overall economic development, the panel has several recommendations for this area:

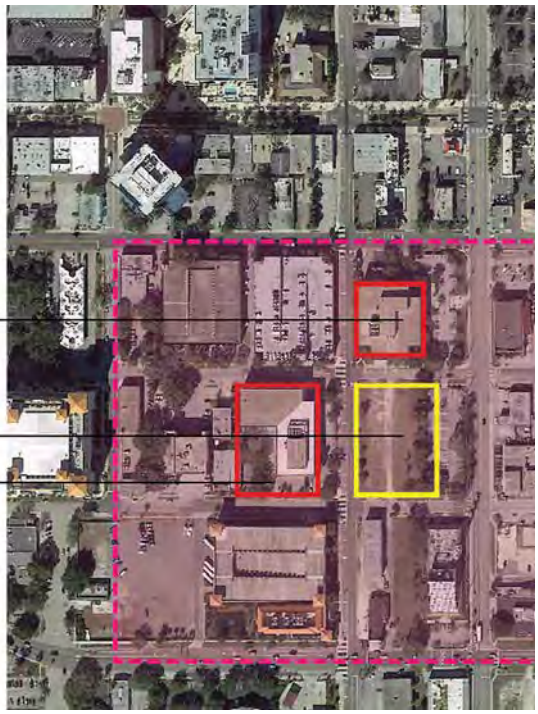
- Create a beautiful, lively downtown. The Cleveland Street streetscape project was an important step in establishing that corridor as the heart of the central business district and forming a brand. Unfortunately, the love is not spread throughout the area. A toolkit for streetscape improvements and a clean city should be formed and applied to areas beyond the Cleveland Street core. This toolkit should include street trees, trash cans, recycling bins, street furniture (such as benches), and a planting palette, among other pieces. These tools should be used strategically on streets that need a boost in commercial or residential attention. Fort Harrison Avenue, Drew Street, East Avenue along the Pinellas Trail, and Pierce Street are several important streets to improve, thereby forming the core pieces of a larger framework of capital improvement. At a minimum, street trees and trash receptacles should be implemented to create a safe, clean, and shaded environment for people exploring downtown. The city may want to consider applying a form-based code in downtown. The panel feels that if the city, the property owners, and the church can all focus on the "look and feel" of downtown rather than the specific uses, more could be accomplished.
- Attract anchor businesses and institutions.
  - *Attract an incubator:* The city can attract and support new entrepreneurial small businesses by investing in a technology innovation center or business incubator as identified by the Clearwater Technical Alliance. Initial investment would be required to hire and sustain an experienced executive manager and provide attractive, affordable workspace for about five years. The city could allocate funds, apply for grants, or partner with organizations such as the Clearwater Technical Alliance, the Church of Scientology, and private information technology sponsors (Dell, Microsoft, etc.) to implement this proposal.
  - *Consider the intermodal hub area for a new City Hall:* The location of an intermodal site near the Development Services Building and the Police Department could be another catalytic use that helps the central business district.
  - *Create a secondary, service-based retail environment:* Consistent with the retail market research done prior to the panel's work, the panel recommends over time creating an environment along Fort Harrison Avenue that provides service retail space along the corridor. Service uses that could benefit the residents and visitors of this area include laundry and dry cleaning,

Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes, presented in both diagrams and words, are keyed to a *regulating plan* that designates the appropriate form and scale (and, therefore, character) of development rather than only distinctions in land use types. This focus is in contrast to conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., floor/area ratio, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic levels of service) to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory.

Source: Definition of a Form-Based Code, June 29, 2008, Form-Based Codes Institute, www.formbasedcodes.org/definition.html.

An intermodal transportation hub can be a catalytic element that both enhances downtown and provides access and convenience to existing employees and new visitors. The city should consider moving its City Hall to within two blocks of that new hub.



small markets or convenience stores, salons, and other uses that are generally not preferred for a location on Cleveland Street. These uses will complement the retail and restaurant uses along Cleveland Street and help create a more comprehensive set of services and attractions for current and future residents. Improvements should include an expanded sidewalk and streetscape elements including street trees and refuse receptacles. The city should also promote the renovation of storefronts along this corridor to attract these businesses. Design guidelines should govern the development and redevelopment of this corridor, allowing for an urban environment that is attractive for business owners.

- *Find the next Starbucks:* Many see the Starbucks located along Cleveland Street as a successful and positive addition to the downtown retail environment. Through a partnership with the Church of Scientology, the café was attracted by guaranteeing a built-in customer base in the church parishioners and employees. This partnership was successful where other similar ventures failed, possibly because of the expanded resident population that appeared around that time as well as the overall popularity of the business. The city should partner with the church, Morton Plant Hospital, or other large employers in the area to form a similar alliance to bring businesses downtown. These businesses, once attracted, should be promoted to these large employment bases and area residents to ensure visibility and patronage.

- *Find the next Capitol Theater:* The panel heard over and over that the Capitol Theater was an excellent example of the type of uses and businesses that should populate the downtown area and specifically the Cleveland Street corridor. The panel recommends that a partnership be formed with a venue or entertainment organization, such as Ruth Eckerd Hall, to attract another cultural or entertainment venue to the area. Attracting this type of business will help create a critical mass of attractions and will help establish a reputation for downtown Clearwater as an entertainment hub. These large attractions will help attract the user base for restaurants and shops in the area and promote a more culturally rich lifestyle for current residents or those who would consider locating to the area. Other uses can be attracted to complement this cultural identity, such as art galleries, playhouses, and smaller music venues.

Community Gateways and Connections

The primary function of transportation is access. Access makes a measurable contribution to a community's prosperity, vitality, health, and quality of life. Enhancing the transportation system and improving regional connections often provide access to better employment and education opportunities. This results in increased incomes, productivity, property values, and tax revenues.

The way people travel and the places they can reach with ease also have a significant impact on their health and wellness. Today, communities across the United States are battling chronic diseases of epic proportions. In Clear-

The panel's vision for the transportation network in the Clearwater study area involves (a) strengthening the connections between downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods and communities; (b) serving a diverse community with a multimodal transportation network; and (c) enhancing the health and quality of life of the community by providing multiple options for transport and establishing or enhancing nodes that generate activity.

water, the majority of the population is either overweight or obese. This can be costly and debilitating not only for afflicted individuals but also for the community as a whole. Clearwater also has a large population of seniors. Communities adjacent to downtown have low median incomes and are not highly educated. Research has shown that these are all important factors correlating to the health of the community.

A robust transportation system that supports economic development and healthy communities provides mobility to a variety of age groups for a variety of trips. The panel's vision for the transportation network in the Clearwater study area involves the following goals:

- Strengthening the connections between downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods and communities, especially
  - East Gateway, Town Lake, Old Bay, and North Greenwood;
  - Tourists staying at Clearwater Beach;
  - Weekend and day trippers to the beach from local or regional destinations;
  - Weekday commuters to downtown from regional destinations; and
  - Users of the Pinellas Trail passing through Clearwater.
- Serving a diverse community with a multimodal transportation network that
  - Provides several viable mode options for each trip;
  - Enhances access to a variety of destinations; and
  - Provides reliable travel times throughout the day.
- Enhancing the health and quality of life of the community by providing options that
  - Encourage active transportation to reduce the incidence and severity of chronic diseases, including obesity, heart disease, strokes, and cancer;
  - Make travel more affordable and accessible for people of all age groups and physical ability;

- Enhance access to jobs and education, active and passive recreation, healthy food, health care and social services, and community events and facilities; and
- Increase the convenience and relieve the stress of travel.

The panel realizes that it is critical for Clearwater to focus on enhancing the transportation system to meet the current needs of downtown and the adjacent communities and to continue to expand the network as these areas grow and evolve. The vision outlined above can be realized by a system that (a) welcomes, (b) layers, and (c) connects.

Welcomes

Today, downtown Clearwater lacks identity and presence. One can drive, ride, or bicycle right past downtown without even noticing this special district, let alone being attracted to divert one's trajectory and explore the area. For this reason, the panel recommends paying special attention to the gateways of the community to welcome visitors.

Gateways to downtown must emphatically communicate to visitors that they have arrived at an important destination. The downtown brand must be projected through signage, public art, architectural elements, and green space. The brand must tell a powerful story about the place Clearwater is and wants to be. Advertising this story will create a desire in visitors from adjacent communities and farther away to experience and be a part of this special place.

Gateways must be designed to welcome visitors arriving by all the available modes of travel. Important gateways highlighted here are the proposed intermodal hub, the intersection of the existing Pinellas Trail and Cleveland Street, and the intersection known as Five Points.

Greenlight Pinellas will bring light rail to downtown. A proposal exists to move the existing bus station and colocate it with the new train station to develop an intermodal hub. Locating the hub at the southeast corner of downtown would place it within walking distance of retail and employment in the downtown core and attractions along the waterfront. The hub would also be located on the Pinellas Trail, which provides an opportunity to connect with the bicycle system. The hub can be enhanced to welcome visitors arriving by train, bus, or bicycle by integrating or colocating retail and convenience stores, amenities for travelers, and a bicycle shop offering rentals and maintenance services.

The main vehicular route to the beach, State Route 60, runs along the southern edge of downtown. It provides an investment opportunity for the city to build a garage and provide free parking near or adjacent to the intermodal hub to serve as a gateway for visitors arriving by car. The garage will encourage walking, bicycling, and riding public transit in downtown, which would alleviate stressful traffic congestion and support more active, affordable, and environment-friendly travel. Beachgoers may also find this garage attractive for parking so they can take the trolley or rent bikes from the intermodal hub.

The intersection of Cleveland Street and Myrtle Avenue is another important gateway to downtown for travelers along the Pinellas Trail and residents of East Gateway. The Pinellas Trail is a cross-county trail connecting downtown Clearwater to St. Petersburg and other points to the south, and Dunedin, Palm Harbor, and Tarpon Springs to the north. The comfort and convenience of the trail can be improved by providing more shade, greenery, and smooth transitions to adjacent land uses. While traversing the Clearwater study area, trail users must be greeted with opportunities to rest and replenish supplies. The historic post office building is a unique asset here that can serve as a visual marker and a location for services.

The current gateway at Five Points needs to be enhanced to aesthetically communicate the downtown branding. It provides an opportunity to acknowledge the history of Cleveland Street and the East Gateway community and to project the aspirations for the future of Clearwater. Free parking near the intersection of Cleveland Street and Gulf to Bay Boulevard can also serve as a transfer point to the bike or trolley system.

Layers

The city of Clearwater has a number of existing community assets, and enhancement or development of more is planned. Reviewing planning documents and interviewing staff and stakeholders has assured the panel that transportation has been considered an integral part of planning for new development. In particular, the CDRP and the East Gateway District Vision Plan have identified many important improvements to the existing transportation system to support the proposals.

The panel supports the proposals in these plans and makes an overarching recommendation to strive for a system that incorporates several travel modes while taking care to make the options simple to understand and navigate. This can be achieved by planning the operations, routes, and facilities for each mode separately, and then layering several complete systems. Modes must be linked by providing prominent well-designed transition points at appropriate locations. The following modes of transportation will be offered in the Clearwater study area:

- Private vehicles;
- Light rail;
- Bus;
- Trolley;
- Bicycle;
- Walking; and
- Water taxi.

Connects

Several road, parking, bus, and train improvements are proposed in other plans. The panel highlights opportunities to enhance connections between local destinations by providing two new loops within the Clearwater study area:

- A bike/walk loop to connect downtown with North Greenwood and East Gateway using the existing Pinellas Trail, new trails along the CSX right-of-way, through the golf course, and along Stevenson Creek, and a bike lane/trail along Court Street; and

A mercado *could form the civic core of the East Gateway neighborhood where people could gather in the evening to stroll and chat while enjoying food from local eateries or food trucks. Some amount of programming could keep this venue lively and active.*

- An extension of the Jolley Trolley route to connect the waterfront and downtown with East Gateway destinations along Cleveland Street.

Destinations within the Clearwater study area specifically connected by these two networks would enhance access to recreation areas, a community market/civic space, and healthy food:

- *Recreation areas:* Three major areas for active and passive recreation will be connected with the preceding transportation network: the waterfront (as described above), the golf course, and Glen Oaks Park. The existing golf course is moderately used with an average of 32,000 rounds played per year. The highest and best use of this large, valuable piece of land must be evaluated. An opportunity for enhanced use may be taken advantage of by incorporating a sports center, soccer golf, skate park, fitness stations, and walking and biking trails. In addition, Glen Oaks Park south of Court Street can be enhanced by adding wetlands, natural play areas, and fitness stations. The golf course and Glen Oaks Park can be connected by enhancing Stevenson Creek with a biking/walking trail.
- *Community market:* As outlined in the East Gateway District Vision Plan, a festival core in this area will provide a much-needed local activity center. It can take the form of a *mercado*, a traditional fixed market in Mexico housed in buildings owned and operated by the local government, with numerous stands inside rented by individual merchants to sell produce and other basic food staples.

The *mercado* would form the civic core of the neighborhood where people could gather in the evening to stroll and chat while enjoying delicious food from local eateries. Features should include traffic control prioritizing pedestrians; a plaza, grocery, and homes located over retail space; a clinic or other community services; and flexible space for farmers and art markets, street vendors, temporary stalls and installations, and food carts/trucks. Ideal locations for the *mercado* include the intersection of Cleveland Street and Gulf to Bay Boulevard (as proposed in the plan), or near the golf course.

- *Healthy food:* Clearwater already has programs in place to support the health and nutrition of local residents and employees. The panel highlights opportunities to build upon existing activities. For instance, Cleveland Street can serve as a walkable and bikeable corridor connecting the proposed *mercado*/festival core to the waterfront. Residents would be able to access retail, restaurants, and services in the downtown core or at the existing node on Cleveland Street that includes a health food store and restaurants. Healthy food options can be expanded to serve a more diverse range of customers. A recently established farmers market in the East Gateway has proved very popular and provided fresh vegetables and healthy food to a community underserved by grocery stores. Every effort must be made to continue this effort and make it a permanent part of the community. More affordable grocery or convenience stores along or near Cleveland Street are also desirable. Healthy food consumption can also be encouraged by educating and supporting residents to grow their own food in their own gardens or in community gardens as well as cooking foods that are more diverse.

The bicycle and walking trails as well as bus and Jolley Trolley routes would also connect downtown to destinations outside the Clearwater study area. The Pinellas Trail already mentioned connects to regional destinations. It also connects to Clearwater Beach via a community trail that crosses the bridge. This connection through downtown Clearwater can be enhanced by improving or adding a trail along the waterfront and bike lanes along Osceola Avenue. This would also connect downtown to the North Marina, playhouse, and community facility in the Old Bay neighborhood (described above).

The Jolley Trolley is one of many modes of transportation in and around downtown. An expanded trolley route will bind the East Gateway neighborhood and the central business district closer together.

Organizational Capacity and Implementation

THE PURPOSE OF AN IMPLEMENTATION strategy is to harness the collective resources (business, institutional, governmental, community) of the city of Clearwater and to apply those resources toward achieving the shared vision for the city's future.

Several primary stakeholders are involved in defining Clearwater's future. One is the business community: the individuals and companies that own, manage, and invest in businesses and properties in the area. The collective entrepreneurial skill and experience of the current and future business leaders in Clearwater are critical to its success. The second participant is the city government—the elected officials and department managers who set public policy and allocate resources. Strong and consistent leadership from the city is needed to achieve the vision for the future. The third is the county: the county is a major employer in downtown and has significant influence over the establishment and duration of the CRA. The fourth participant is the Church of Scientology, which owns a large portion of the Downtown Core. The fifth and most significant group is the citizens—the civic leaders and residents who call Clearwater home. It is incumbent on all stakeholders to work closely in addressing the issues that affect the city's future.

Adopting a downtown redevelopment plan is like getting a college degree; it is a significant accomplishment, but its value depends on what you do with it.

The City

Chapter 4 of the CDRP deals with plan implementation. Contained within this chapter are 38 downtown strategies in support of the plan. The plan shows the following lead departments responsible for these strategies:

- Planning;
- Economic Development;
- Neighborhood Services;
- Public Works/Engineering;
- Development Services;
- Police; and
- Parks.

The ULI panel believes this allocation of lead responsibility is much too fragmented to be effective. The authority and responsibility for implementation of a revised downtown redevelopment plan should be assigned to an assistant city manager who would have no other duties than to achieve the vision of the plan. This individual would establish a "brain trust" of key department heads and representatives from other government agencies to guide the implementation of the downtown strategies, capital improvement projects, and redevelopment incentives for the city. This brain trust would meet on a regular basis to resolve conflicts and adjust priorities in a timely and effective way. The attendance of department heads at these meetings must be mandatory; it cannot be relegated to other staff members.

The panel recommends that the city government take bold and decisive action in the implementation of a revised downtown development plan. We call this "risking greatness." For a city to be successful decision makers must

be willing to accept an element of risk. When pursuing opportunities, the risk associated with bold action should be measured against the risk of moving too slowly or not at all. In this respect, the panel understands that the city is not leveraging the $1.8 million tax increment financing (TIF) funds. This is a missed opportunity; all around the country TIF districts use bonds to leverage an income stream to generate significant capital to invest in redevelopment projects. The city could generate $18 million to $20 million this way if the city is prepared to accept some level of risk.

The implementation of a revised downtown redevelopment plan will require a number of partnerships with development companies and institutions. In this regard, the panel recommends that the city not follow the traditional process of issuing RFQs and RFPs, but rather seek out and find the most qualified and capable companies and organizations to partner with. The panel calls this "Select a Partner, Not a Concept." This is because a concept can be modified in response to market forces or other dynamic conditions, but the strength and ability of your partner is very difficult to change. In fact, the best approach in some cases is to select a partner and then work together to create a concept in concert with stakeholder input. The city should evaluate public/private financing opportunities in terms of the return on investment, not just the percentage of project costs. Although it is always preferable for the private investment to exceed the public investment, the key is what return the city will receive and how long it will take to recoup the investment.

The existing downtown redevelopment plan calls for a comprehensive approach that includes a public amenities incentive pool, downtown strategies, a capital improvement plan, TIF, and redevelopment incentives. The panel applauds this approach but recommends that it be expanded to include a "clean and safe" program and a special events and public engagement program. The panel knows that a large number of special events and outdoor activities take place in the downtown area, but the management of these programs should be better integrated with other redevelopment activities.

The implementation of a revised downtown redevelopment plan requires a long-term commitment on the part of the city. The transformation of Clearwater will occur incrementally and include multiple projects and initiatives. No "silver bullet" will solve everything, so the city must constantly demonstrate that downtown redevelopment is its number-one priority.

After the elected officials have agreed with the outlined implementation structure, their primary responsibility is to get out of the way. Empower the city manager and the professional staff to execute the plan within the budget and other related policies approved by the City Council. By all means, resist the temptation to become involved in day-to-day operational issues.

As previously mentioned, the implementation of a revised downtown redevelopment plan will require a number of public/private projects. The panel believes these partnerships are most successful when the public sector takes responsibility for the things it does best and the private sector takes responsibility for what it does best. For example, the city might be responsible for providing public facilities, streetscape, historic preservation, and other infrastructure improvements. The private sector would focus on design, leasing, construction, and management.

Pinellas County

Not to be overlooked, Pinellas County also plays a role in the leadership of downtown. The county occupies a significant amount of office space in downtown. Any move out of downtown by county offices—no matter how strategic for county finances and organizational efficiencies—will reduce the amount of daytime activity and affect retail, restaurant, and services uses. The county and the city should come to a mutual understanding regarding the importance of the county to downtown.

In addition, the county is a potential partner on transportation and other infrastructure funding. The panel recommends that the city and county work together on funding opportunities. This includes the continuation or expansion of the CRAs.

The Business Leadership

The successful transformation of downtown Clearwater will require the support of the city's business leadership. Both large and small business owners need to participate in the execution of a revised downtown redevelopment plan, and their participation should be channeled through an umbrella organization such as the Downtown Partnership. This type of organization, which includes property owners, developers, concerned citizens, and civic groups, is essential to provide constructive input to the city regarding issues affecting downtown activities.

As a strong voice for improving the downtown, an organization of business leaders can advocate for resources and policies that accelerate the implementation of a revised redevelopment plan. An organization of business leaders, for example, could request that the city establish a "Green Tape Zone" for downtown. Properties located within the Green Tape Zone would be eligible for an expedited plan approval and permitting process. This approach has worked well in other city redevelopment programs.

The Church of Scientology

The Church of Scientology is one of the major property owners and employers in downtown Clearwater. Large institutional uses such as university and medical campuses exist in many urban centers throughout the country. In most of these situations, the interests of the city and the interests of the institution are best served when good communication and coordination exist between the two. This becomes even more important when a city is implementing a redevelopment plan.

The Church of Scientology can assist the city in a number of ways. One is to continue to provide input to the city concerning the revised downtown redevelopment plan. In addition, the church needs to communicate what its plans are for future expansion. By providing this type of information to the city, the church would help remove a great deal of uncertainty and speculation about the future of downtown. As the ULI panelists have experienced firsthand, uncertainty in an urban context creates additional investment risk and makes implementation of a redevelopment plan more challenging.

The Flag Building is the largest of several buildings owned by the Church of Scientology. The church is one of the largest landowners, employers, and stakeholders in the downtown area.

By participating in the implementation of the revised downtown redevelopment plan, the Church of Scientology will help the city make informed decisions regarding requirements for infrastructure, public parking, and other improvements. This will lead to better outcomes for all downtown stakeholders.

Community Leaders

The residents of Clearwater, and particularly the people who live in downtown, must have an active role in the implementation of a revised downtown redevelopment plan. The city may invest resources in downtown and leverage a significant private infusion of capital, but the residents of Clearwater will sustain the transformation of the city over time. Clearwater's community leaders must make sure all the constituent organizations and civic groups are represented in an organized and effective way.

In this regard, the panel observes that the structure of community involvement in the redevelopment process is highly fragmented. During the panel's interviews, many entities with a stake in downtown were represented, including the following:

- East Gateway Advisory Board;
- Community Development Board;
- Public Art and Design Advisory Board;

- Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition;
- Clearwater Historical Society;
- Clearwater Downtown Neighborhood Association;
- Environmental Advisory Board;
- Marine Advisory Board;
- Harbor Oaks neighborhood Association;
- Downtown Technology;
- Old Bay Neighborhood Association;
- Downtown Technology Alliance;
- Downtown Development Board;
- Clearwater Downtown Partnership;
- East Gateway Stakeholder Advisory Committee;
- East Gateway Business and Neighbor Association; and
- Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Most likely the panel did not have the opportunity to meet with additional civic organizations and groups, as well as many business organizations and advisory boards. The point is that the public engagement process is much more effective if community leaders agree to form an umbrella advisory group with representation from all the other stakeholder organizations and civic groups. This is not to diminish the importance of any one group, but rather to create a forum for the discussion of issues with the city and their development partners that involves a cross section of community interests. This structure will strengthen communication, improve transparency, and identify competing civic priorities earlier in the process.

Community leaders should also play a significant role in partnering with the city to expand the capacity of the downtown residents to sustain its revitalization. For example, a program such as a citizens academy could be initiated by existing community leaders, with financial support from the city, to help develop community leadership skills among minorities and underrepresented areas of the downtown. Corporate sponsorships can help support this type of program.

Conclusion

THE ULI PANEL CAME TO CLEARWATER with the task of recommending strategies to help revitalize downtown. The panel observed many positive programs by the city and the greater community that are already underway. However, absent true collaboration and a compelling overarching vision, the future of Clearwater will remain uncertain. Action is needed. The success of this vision will require bold moves and dedicated leadership. The city and county, the church, the business community, and the citizens must work together to execute the recommendations. Bold, however, does not mean achieving unconditional consensus for each initiative or individual development proposal. Leaders in the community must listen to a diverse set of stakeholders, formulate actions that are in the best interest of the community, and execute those actions. Routine moves are also important. The day-to-day details of effective, responsive collaboration among the partners will make the vision coalesce.

The panel believes that through a series of additional planning exercises that conclude with specific, focused development projects, combined with a new organizational approach to partnerships, the desired revitalization and rebirth of the downtown can be achieved. The recommendations in this panel report outline those actions.

About the Panel

William P. Kistler

Panel Chair
London, United Kingdom

With over 30 years of international real estate experience, Kistler is a strategist with a global network of industry and government relationships. His career has included development, advisory, and investment work in the residential, retail, hotel, and office sectors.

In his current role, he leads Kistler & Company, offering advisory, investment, and development services to cities and the real estate industry. He also recently cofounded Knowledge City Partners, a network of academic, business, and government leaders.

Before this Kistler was the senior partner at Korn/Ferry International, where he led the real estate practice in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA). From 2003 to 2009 he was president of the Urban Land Institute–EMEA, a nonprofit, research and education institute dedicated to the built environment.

Previous to joining ULI, Kistler was founder and managing director of Equinox Partners, an advisory and executive search firm focused on the real estate industry with offices in Europe and the United States. The firm's clients included developers, investors, corporations, and governments in Europe, India, and the Middle East. Before this he was general manager of the Disney Development Company, responsible for the planned community of Val d'Europe at Disneyland Paris.

Kistler's prior experience includes senior roles at JMB Properties in Chicago and Cushman & Wakefield in New York. He began his career at IBM where he spent 12 years overseeing the company's real estate in New York and Paris.

He is a trustee of the Urban Land Institute. He is an architect and holds a BS in architecture from the University of Southern California.

Jordan Block

Denver, Colorado

Block is an urban designer and planner with RNL Design, based in Denver, Colorado. His focus is in bridging large-scale community and regional planning with attention to the human experience within the public realm. He specializes in projects that contain large infrastructural development or change as a catalyst for site-specific, detailed urban design.

He has worked on numerous urban planning and design projects with a wide variety of clients, ranging from developer-led urban infill and transit-oriented development projects to government-backed comprehensive vision plans for major metropolitan areas. He has worked both domestically and internationally, with a large concentration of projects in his home state of Colorado as well as in the Middle East and other regions.

Block is currently working with several municipal and county governments in Colorado to prepare vision plans for the growth of their facilities and employee bases as well as improving the accessibility and urban design of their campuses. He recently completed work for a 30-year master plan for the Abu Dhabi metropolitan area, focusing on the extensive North Coast region, as well as smaller development projects in the region. In all his projects, he aims to transform stakeholder and community ideas into implementable plans.

A graduate of the Master of Urban Design program at the University of Colorado Denver, Block received his master's

of city planning with an emphasis on urban design and economic development from the University of Pennsylvania.

Charles Johnson IV

Chicago, Illinois

President and chief executive officer of C.H. Johnson Consulting, Johnson is a nationally recognized consultant with over 30 years of experience in convention, sports, hospitality, and general real estate.

Before forming Johnson Consulting, he worked for the Chicago-based real estate development firm, Stein and Company, which was design-builder for the expansion at McCormick Place in Chicago. Prior to that, he was national director of KPMG Peat Marwick's Convention, Sports, and Leisure Consulting practice. He served as program manager for the Puerto Rico Convention Center District project in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for four years and successfully guided that project from an idea to a highly regarded 110-acre urban redevelopment project. He has worked on numerous projects in western New York, including the expansion analysis of the Buffalo Convention Center.

Johnson has worked on more than 600 public assembly and urban development consulting assignments in the United States and abroad. He is a member of ULI, and he has served on five Advisory Services panels.

Pamela Minich

Houston, Texas

Minich Strategic Services is a research and consulting firm engaged in providing strategic market and economic research, consumer insights, and advisory services to a broad spectrum of real estate and related organizations. The company's business philosophy is that injecting a customer-centric, fact-based approach to real estate planning, marketing, and management provides a solid basis for executive decision making that builds confidence and reduces risks and uncertainty. "Providing fresh insights about the most pressing strategic issues impacting success is always our highest priority."

Based in Houston, Texas, Minich Strategic Services has clients that include commercial real estate, homebuilding, not-for-profit, and public sector organizations that require a high level of market intelligence and value its strategic application to their most challenging real estate planning and business problems. The firm's market research expertise includes all quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, such as surveys, focus groups, mystery shopping, and one-on-one in-depth interviewing.

Minich has been personally engaged in both commercial and residential real estate projects located in more than 20 states. She is accustomed to collaborating with brokers, investors, builders, developers, land use and urban planners, architects, real estate attorneys, financial institutions, civil engineers, and government agencies on a wide variety of projects. She also holds an active Texas Real Estate Sales License.

Before formation of Minich Strategic Services, Minich headed several other boutique market research and consulting practices focused on the real estate industry. She was employed by a Fortune 200 public homebuilder as the Houston Division's director of strategic marketing for six years. She has served as an expert witness on the subjects of real estate development and marketing and has been an active member of the Urban Land Institute, the National Association of Home Builders, the National Association of Business Economics, the American Marketing Association, the Commercial Real Estate Research Forum, and the U.S Green Building Council.

Brad Rogers

Baltimore, Maryland

Rogers has 15 years of experience managing complex urban real estate transactions and harnessing the power of markets to achieve public policy goals. An attorney with a master's degree in environmental management, Rogers has broad experience across the private, public, and non-

profit sectors. In these different roles, he has participated in a wide range of real estate transactions involving private and institutional purchasers, elaborate multiparty public/private partnerships, multiple funding sources, challenging site conditions, active community participation, and complex regulatory environments. Rogers also has a well-developed background in the study of architecture and planning.

As both a board and staff member to nonprofit organizations, Rogers has worked to change state laws and local ordinances to generate smart growth, urban economic development, and sustainable design. In the private sector, he has worked on everything from large HOPE VI affordable housing developments to small residential infill projects.

Rogers founded and managed a family of social enterprise firms focusing on green building and urban redevelopment in Baltimore. These included the largest and most successful green construction firm in the region as well as a development firm and a real estate brokerage focused on sustainability. This allowed him to participate in the design and construction of many of the most innovative green projects in Maryland, including the first LEED-NC Gold building in Baltimore; the first near-zero net energy building in Maryland; and the first sustainable, universally accessible, and affordable residential development in the country.

He recently worked to transform 23,000 square feet of abandoned historic buildings on Maryland's Eastern Shore into the Eastern Shore Conservation Center, a sustainable mixed-use campus providing offices and apartments for regional nonprofits. He also put together a variety of complex real estate transactions to create new parks, trails, and pedestrian networks. He is now working as a consultant in private practice.

Rogers holds degrees from Haverford College, Duke Law School, and Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment. He is a regular lecturer, panelist, and author.

Sonali Soneji

Arlington, Virginia

Soneji is a principal with Simple Solutions Planning & Design LLC, a woman-owned small business based in Arlington, Virginia. The company has provided survey, analysis, and policy development services for transportation planning and urban design for the last ten years. Soneji leads a diverse team with experience encompassing urban and transportation planning, housing, and public health.

She has studied the way people travel, the reasons they choose to travel the way they do, and the impacts of their choices on themselves and their communities. She believes in and advocates for multimodal transportation solutions that reflect the needs and diversity of the community they serve. She supports transportation systems designed to fit the demographics, budgets, and land use patterns of the community.

Soneji has led several transportation performance monitoring studies for Arlington County that contributed to the county's knowledge base of local trip-generation rates, parking occupancy, and travel choices of residents and employees. She has also helped evaluate the return on investment of Arlington County's transportation demand management (TDM) program in achieving public health and safety goals.

In previous years, Soneji has acted as research manager for Arlington County Commuter Services and provided policy writing and research support to the Parking Office. Her transportation planning projects have included support for several TDM and transit development plans for the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Soneji has also developed campus master plans and policy documents for the U.S. Army, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Coast Guard. She has supported the development of installation design guidelines, a streetscape plan, and a multimodal transportation management plan for Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia.

Soneji is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. She has a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Bombay, India, and a master's in landscape architecture from Harvard University.

Doug M. Wrenn

Germantown, Maryland

Wrenn is a principal with Rodgers Consulting Inc., where he directs the firm's work on a broad range of urban planning and site development projects. Before joining Rodgers Consulting, Wrenn was the director of redevelopment programs for Montgomery County, Maryland. He was responsible for the management of all aspects of the county government's participation in a $400 million public/private partnership to revitalize downtown Silver Spring and the County's Redevelopment Office in Wheaton, Maryland.

Wrenn has many years of consulting experience as a land planner and urban development specialist. He has directed multidisciplinary teams on large-scale community planning and urban redevelopment projects, for both public and private real estate interests. He established a national reputation for his work in urban waterfronts, initially as author of the Urban Land Institute's first book on the subject and later as a planning consultant on numerous projects.

He holds a BS in environmental management and a master's degree in landscape architecture, both from North Carolina State University.

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