DOWNTOWN INVESTMENT: ADAPTING TO A POST-PANDEMIC ENVIRONMENT

A 2024 TOP ISSUES COUNCIL **BRIEF**

INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES

Urban place management organizations (UPMOs) face significant challenges in the downtown office market. Shifting work patterns, downsizing, flight to quality, and weak leasing markets have raised concerns about economic resilience, urban vibrancy, talent retention, and community engagement. In fact, the McKinsey Global Institute estimates that 20-25% of the workforce globally could work remotely in the future—four times more than before the pandemic. (For more on which jobs are most affected, see Forbes.) The resulting drop in demand for office space poses a triple threat to downtowns' vibrancy, municipal budgets (from shrinking tax revenues), and a loss of stores, restaurants, and businesses serving downtown employees. Addressing these challenges will prove crucial to UPMOs' ability to shape vibrant and sustainable urban environments.

This brief reviews the role of UPMOs, examining challenges facing both office and retail markets. Additionally, it offers examples and practical tools for addressing these issues within individual districts. It doesn't offer one-size-fits-all recommendations, because geography, local assets, and partnerships all help determine how each UPMO can best empower stakeholders to make informed and strategic decisions that enhance the downtown economy and larger community.

SECTIONS

Setting the Stage

UPMOs play a subtle and complicated role in shaping downtown investment. Place management "sets the table" for increased investment but rarely acts as the sole reason a company invests. Even though UPMOs lead the development of viable, vibrant mixed-use districts, in most instances they don't own or control real estate, infrastructure, or municipal services. Disparate ownership, stakeholders, and investments create a set of decision makers with conflicting interests; UPMOs help these partners implement ambitious, community-driven visions for their downtowns/districts. Through trusted relationships, influence, messaging, and service provision, a UPMO can make a powerful difference in its community.

Geography provides critical insights into the location of businesses, residents, and infrastructure within a district. By helping districts understand the spatial distribution of resources and opportunities, this information can guide strategic planning and development initiatives. Geography—a district's one unchangeable feature—determines the assets and characteristics that distinguish one location from another. Does the district boast the region's largest main street? Does it border water? Does it have the most vibrant arts and music scene? A mega employer? A university? Identifying these features helps explain what draws companies, residents, and visitors to spend time and money in the district...and what connects them to it.

Messaging the current state of downtown is critical to dispel untruths and gain resources. It's essential to create a "State of Downtown" report that highlights advantages and includes a development activity/opportunity map. This report describes office, residential, hotel, and retail markets and trends over time, invaluable information for businesses looking to thrive within the district and for helping the UPMO identify where to focus resources.

From there, UPMOs can play a crucial role in creating a shared vision for downtown through infrastructure planning and development. Districts can plan and strategically identify transportation routes, pedestrian pathways, parking facilities, and public amenities based on development trends and geographical data.

UPMOs lay the foundation for education, advocacy, and partnerships to support investment in districts. They also influence policies and regulations needed to carry out the vision. UPMOs participate in discussions and decisions about land use, zoning, and urban design, ensuring that development aligns with the district's vision while preserving its unique geographical and cultural character.

UPMOs succeed when their services match their constituents' needs. UPMOs supplement and improve services generally provided by the municipality and increase the efficiency and quality of outcomes typically required by the UPMOs' stakeholders. The vision, which blends geography and data, provides an outline for successfully meeting a UPMO's constituents' needs. Districts can make informed decisions, create measurable performance metrics, and track progress toward their goals.

Defining the Problem

Downtowns around the world continue to navigate the impacts of the pandemic. These vary by region and community size. Vacancy rates vary, too; in some markets, they run as high as 25.1% (Houston). Over the next few years this will translate into a potential loss of municipal and state tax revenue; reduced foot traffic and sales at retail, food and beverage, and entertainment establishments; and fewer resources to weather a new storm. These challenges create a daunting situation from which it may take a decade or more to recover.

The 2024 Top Issues Council undertook an assessment of the state of downtown investment to provide insight, potential tools, and resources to the IDA community.

> "The pandemic accelerated changes that had been in motion for years, many not favorable for downtowns, including flexibility in the workplace, the demise of traditional retail brands and formats, rising housing costs, and symptoms from America's gaping inequality most visible in a growing unhoused population. Recovery will require a new set of coordinated strategies – some old, some new—and collaboration among downtown advocates and their civic partners."
>
> IDA + P.U.M.A. Global Trends Report 2023

Our team, representing large, mid-size, and small cities, identified four critical issues of investment:

- Increasing office vacancies due to downsizing, flight to quality, a weak leasing market, and a shift to remote and hybrid work models.
- A growing ground-floor retail vacancy rates directly tied to rising office vacancy rates, issues of safety, and shifts in the retail industry accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A need for greater public-sector investment and how best to communicate that need in this environment.
- UPMOs' role in forging partnerships, identifying and communicating the changing needs of their districts, and adapting to these issues going forward.

Converting Office Properties

After a pandemic that legitimized remote working, downtowns have not seen worker headcounts return to pre-pandemic levels. The model of downtown as a business-only monoculture looks increasingly obsolete in this new era. Central districts with strong residential populations—alongside offices, retail, entertainment, and tourist destination—have proven more stable and rebounded more quickly.

Office-building conversions can attract people and activity back into a central business district, but they don't represent a complete solution. Research by Downtown Houston+ and AECOM and those tracking these conversions reveals multiple challenges to success.

These include barriers created by planning and zoning laws. The cost of retrofitting, compounded by rising inflation and elevated financing rates, threaten viability: Per square foot, most residential spaces generate lower net operating income than office spaces. Building configurations also pose an issue: Many office buildings have such large floorplates that interior areas have no access to natural lighting, which making it extremely difficult to market them.

Cities with successful office-to-residential conversions typically have a large stock of buildings built before 1980 (which typically have smaller floorplates). Historic preservation efforts and incentives have long played a key role in downtown revitalization and investment, but they have taken on renewed importance with the rising interest in conversions. Federal historic-rehabilitation tax credits can fill financing gaps in preservation projects, and many states have created add-on credits that can help fill remaining gaps. States where developers can combine both tax credits usually see a greater volume of investment. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's resource guide outlines tax credits by state and serves as a policy guide for education and advocacy. Novogradac, a national professional organization with expertise in tax credits, works in the fields of affordable housing, renewable energy, and historic preservation. Novogradac's report, The Historic Tax Credits Issue, provides a deep dive into state credits and investment.

Cleveland, Ohio

According to CBRE Future Cities research among 40 major markets, Cleveland has the highest share of office space slated for new uses—primarily apartments, but also hotels, restaurants, and event spaces. 55 Public Square stands as a conversion that combines federal and state historic tax credits and preservation easements. A 22-story office tower built in 1958, the building underwent a mixed-use conversion in 2021 and reopened in 2023. Developer K&D Group invested more than $80 million in the building and its garage, converting 14 floors into residential space, adding a gym and rooftop lounge, and renovating a ground-level restaurant.

Columbia, South Carolina

Columbia has attracted investment through preservation, with more than 20 buildings—mostly offices—converted from original uses to new ones. These include one of Columbia's first "skyscrapers," the aging and neglected Owen Building, a circa-1949 structure transformed into a vibrant 132-unit apartment complex. The conversion used historic tax credits and easement investments to convert the longtime home of Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. Matt Kennell, President and CEO of downtown's Main Street District, calls federal and state historic preservation tax credits "a lifeline to boost our office market and increase residential density downtown. Converting these 20-plus buildings to residential and hospitality [hotel] uses has kept our office market and rents tight, as many are now working from home. Our office market is currently about 90% occupied, and rents are increasing. We see continued growth in residential, including student housing and market-rate. Hotels such as the Hotel Trundle are gaining national recognition and are becoming travel destinations."

Local preservation organization Historic Columbia commissioned a study by PlaceEconomics on the positive economic impact of new tax abatements and of maintaining affordable housing in historic neighborhoods.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Thanks largely to the federal and state historic-preservation tax credits, downtown Baton Rouge has enjoyed a relatively stable vacancy rate in the wake of COVID shutdowns. Many historic buildings underwent conversions prior to the pandemic; most recently, conversion of the 21-story Rivermark office tower into a mixed-use development with 168 apartments. Louisiana ranks first nationally in applications received and approved for federal historic tax credits and tenth in qualified rehabilitation expenditures. Louisiana also offers a five-year restoration tax-abatement program—eligible for an optional five-year renewal—that further supports conversion. This ability to couple state and federal tax credits, in addition to stacking available tax abatements, helped to bridge financial gaps inherent to conversions and buffer the post-pandemic decline in downtown office occupancy.

Dallas, Texas

Recent decades have brought multiple historic rehabilitations and adaptive reuse projects to downtown Dallas. Tax credits have helped power the conversion of many historic office buildings to retail and hotel uses—for example, the 1954 Republic National Bank Building, the city's 11th-tallest. Although no longer the headquarters of an active bank, the renamed Gables Republic Tower houses both residential and commercial office uses. Converted in 2007, the complex provides inviting pedestrian access to adjacent buildings and nearby public spaces, integrating it into the fabric of downtown.

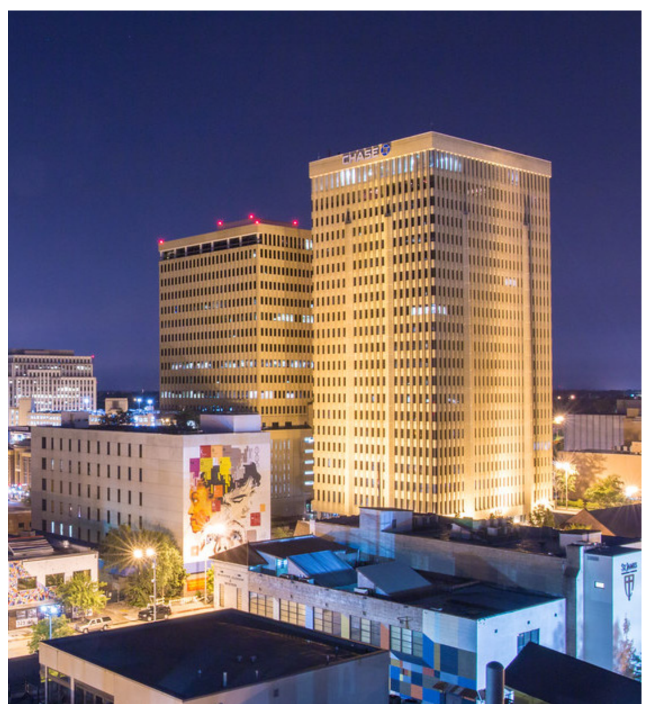


Photo Credits: Rivermark Centre and Downtown Development District - Baton Rouge. (2023). Baton Rouge, LA.

Austin, Texas

In addition to state and federal tax credits, the City of Austin provides a ten-year property tax abatement for commercial buildings (and a seven-year abatement for residential properties). To encourage preservation and protect the architectural character of local historic districts, the City offers these abatements to the owners of contributing and potentially contributing properties who complete substantial rehabilitation or restoration. The program abates 100% of the tax assessed on the extra value generated by rehabilitation or restoration. To qualify, the improvements must comply with the historic district's preservation plan.

Advocating Change with IDA

Responding to the changing needs of downtowns, IDA has worked with a broad group of industry partners to advance office-conversion tax credits in Congress. In July 2024, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced the Revitalizing Downtowns and Main Streets Act. Modeled after the effective and popular federal historic tax credit, the bill creates a tax credit equal to 20% of qualified conversion expenses for converting obsolete office buildings into residential, institutional, hotel, or mixed-use properties. A developer can use the credit on a building at least 20 years old at the time of conversion if the owner certified that it requires conversion due to market conditions related to the pandemic. A residential project may qualify for the credit if the project provides at least 20% affordable housing (i.e., housing reserved for households whose income does not exceed 80% of the Area Median Income and offered at a rent affordable to those households) or meets alternative affordable housing standards under state or local policy, ordinance, or agreement.

Photo Credit: Cayton Photography (2023). New residential crane downtown. Colorado Springs, CO.

While historic preservation and its supporting tools offer a wise approach to attracting downtown investment, they can present challenges. Properties less than 50 years old don't qualify for the federal credit, and most states align their tax credits with the federal program. Alabama, however, only offers credits for work on buildings at least 75 years or older, which eliminates many office buildings constructed after World War II. UPMOs may need to advocate for updates to their National Register historic districts and historic building inventory to ensure that tax credits are available to developers who want to pursue them. And preservation incentives don't typically pay for redevelopment; filling the financing gap may require the marshalling of more resources, especially for costly conversions.

Planning and zoning laws can also present a barrier to changing a building's use from office to residential. San Francisco, California, approved the "Commercial to Residential Adaptive Reuse and Downtown Economic Revitalization" ordinance in June 2023. It aims to facilitate conversions by relaxing certain planning-code requirements and streamlining permitting and approvals. It loosened requirement for rear yards, open space, streetscape improvements, dwelling unit exposure, bike parking, and the mix of unit sizes. It also created a "Flexible Workspace" use, raised regulatory thresholds, and streamlined review procedures. The City also issued a request for interest asking owners/stakeholders to identify potential conversion projects and list possible ways the city could assist (e.g., with financial incentives or further regulatory modifications). The Downtown SF Partnership supported the changes and streamlining but reports that multiple pressures—including higher costs, elevated interest rates, seismic requirements, and lower net operating income for residential properties—have so far stymied conversions. The Partnership believes that cost and interest rates stabilization (or decline) will make conversions more likely.

Tools for UPMOs

- Understand the district building stock; create/update historic-resources survey.
- Assess existing tax credits/easements/incentives for office investment, especially historic preservation.
- Assess regulatory requirements that may act as barriers to investment.
- Create new or strengthen existing partners, such as local historic-preservation groups, to support tax credits and policies.

Photo Credit: Baltimore Peninsula Partnership (2024). 2455 House Street. Baltimore, MD.

Managing Retail Change

Ground-floor retail vacancy continues to loom large in the health of rebounding downtowns and districts. Storefronts play an essential role in overall district vitality—and current challenges surrounding empty storefronts illustrate how overdependence on office uses created many of the challenges facing urban districts today. Because so many stores mostly serve office workers, many shut down as workforce levels fell and have struggled to recover. This should galvanize UPMOs to rethink their approach to retail, targeting a balanced mix of high-quality stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues that serve residents and the wider community first. Events such as the 9/11 attack and the pandemic suggest the dangers of catering narrowly to tourists or office workers.

The pandemic accelerated trends already afoot in retail—such as the drift toward e-commerce—and introduced new challenges like a 40-year-high inflationary spike and supply-chain disruptions. In addition, opening new stores in urban areas faces its own set of issues: challenging building footprints, multiple property owners with different goals, safety (and perceptions thereof), rising costs, and updated building codes. This tricky territory contains both opportunities and hurdles for UPMOs.

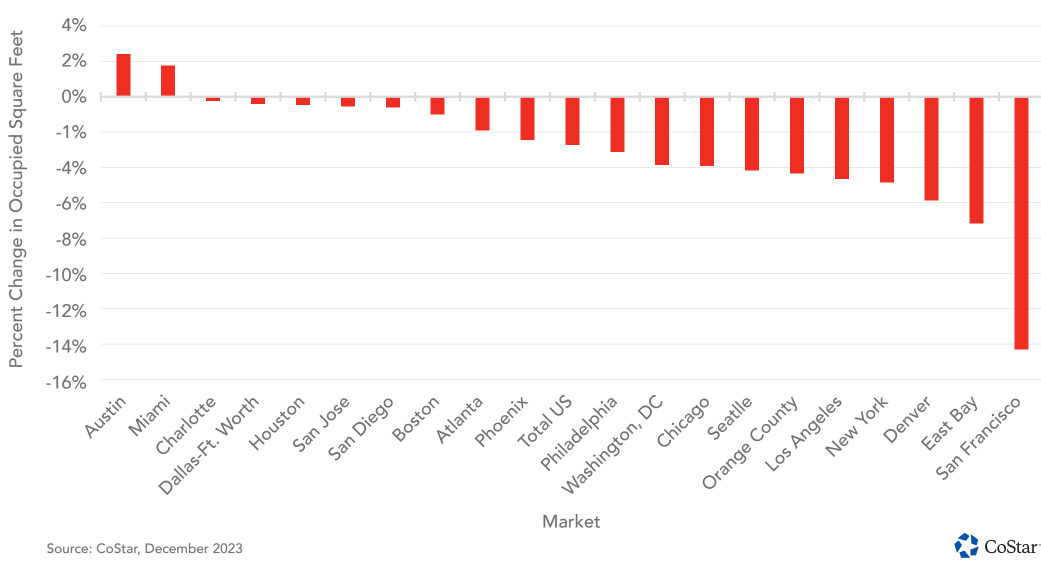
Photo Credit: U District Partnership & April Hong (2024). Seattle, WA.

Trends Reshaping Retail

Downtown centers with retail tied to office-worker foot traffic have struggled, as many cities have yet to return to pre-pandemic office occupancy levels. CoStar analysts write that "this trend of shrinking office occupancy solidified in 2023. Average workplace attendance stabilized somewhere around 60% of pre-pandemic levels, with midweek "peak" days becoming evident."

Occupancy Declines in Most Major US Office Markets

Cumulative Change in Occupancy Since 2019



Source: CoStar, December 2023

While the loss of office workers persists in downtowns, shifting strategies for some big box retailers have also created significant challenges in retail. After years of adding smaller-format urban stores, chains like Target and CVS have refocused on larger formats. This change has created voids in ground-floor retail in downtowns, where large-footprint stores often dominate the built environment. These spaces may prove too big for potential replacement businesses, but UPMOs could work with property owners to recruit big box retailers that are adding new urban stores. CoStar analysts describe "there's a horde of potential tenants vying for empty retail space… including Burlington Stores, Ross Dress for Less, T.J. Maxx, HomeGoods, Aldi, Hobby Lobby, Five Below, Dollar General, Barnes & Noble, quick-service and fast-casual restaurant chains such as Chipotle and WingStop, and grocers serving the Hispanic and Asian communities like H Mart." In addition, UPMOs may want to work with municipality authorities to revise codes and zoning requirements to give owners the flexibility to re-size ground-floor spaces to make them more retail-friendly.

Elgin, Texas

This central Texas community of 12,000 created an overlay district in its historic downtown to allow division of first-floor spaces into different uses. The code now allows 50% residential use at the rear of the ground floor; that level must remain dedicated to retail uses at the front. The overlay also added new allowed uses, including wineries, breweries, metal smithing, food processing, and glassblowing.

Understanding the Opportunities and Challenges Affecting Retail Investment

While post-pandemic trends continue to affect retail vacancy nationwide, a UPMO's geography ultimately determines its retail needs. I-Miun Liu, a property owner, real estate broker, and business owner in Seattle, Washington, cites regulatory uncertainty, permitting timelines, and construction costs as deterrents to new entrepreneurial ventures. In addition, he notes that "we've experienced a fundamental shift in retail, with operators downsizing their storefront spaces, reducing employees, and focusing more on online delivery to align with consumer demand."

Updates to the International Building Code and local build-out and change-of-use regulations have changed the equation for tenant improvements in retail spaces, because costs may outweigh potential return on investment. The result: some downtown retail storefronts experience long-term vacancy. Finding creative responses to the challenges change-of-use code may create can play a key role in supporting a vibrant post-pandemic retail economy.

UPMOs can work around permitting and regulatory constraints by building consensus around a retail vision for their district. Working with Downtown Works, a retail consultant, the Downtown Nashville Partnership (DNP), created a district retail vision in 2008. Implementing a long-term strategy proved key to its success. The DNP hired a retail recruiter/advocate who led a decade-long campaign to strengthen relationships with retailers, restaurateurs, and entertainment operators. The advocate worked closely with property owners and stakeholders to educate them about the value of creating a quality retail environment. New developments such as Fifth and Broadway worked with the DNP to create mixed uses with retail anchors such as Apple and Tecovas. As a result, downtown Nashville recently ranked #1 nationally for retail density, and it maintains a low vacancy rate of 4.1%. In fact, the vacancy rate hasn't risen above 5% in the last five years—even during the pandemic. The Partnership is especially proud of the fact that 68% of all downtown retail is locally-owned.

Unlikely Retail Partnerships

Retail partnerships represent one key to long-term success. UPMOs have crafted retail partnerships with unexpected players, including universities and city governments. For example, the University of Washington, Tacoma, played an essential role in recruiting an intentional mix of retailers to create a thriving retail spine linking downtown and the university. University real estate officers increasingly understand the benefits of creating and implementing retail strategies that feel inviting to the entire community.

City governments can also play a central role in retail development. During the pandemic, the City of Santa Cruz, California, created a master-leasing program, Downtown Pops!, under which it leases spaces directly from property owners then sublets them to qualified retailers. Leases run six months, avoiding the need for a permanent certificate of occupancy that requires a longer, more costly application process. To maintain a lean budget and quick turnaround, the team has focused on businesses that don't need to make costly investments in their new spaces. Tenants pay only 5% to 10% of sales, and the City pays the property owner the difference between that percentage and the minimum rent threshold, set at $1/sq ft. The City's commitment to shouldering all risk and liability has played a key role in the program's success. Several participating retailers have gone on to sign longer leases directly with their property's owner, and the City has turned its attention to harder-to-lease and larger spaces. A master-leasing program like Downtown Pops! can significantly benefit a retail corridor, but it does demand substantial upfront staff and funding to succeed.

How UPMOs Can Support a Vibrant Retail Economy

Vibrant ground-floor retail represents a critical outcome for many UPMOs, but success hinges on the opportunities and challenges specific to their district. These strategies may not apply to every district, but they can stimulate creative approaches to expanding the role a UPMO can play in elevating the retail economy in a post-pandemic world.

Tools for UPMOs:

- Map the reality of your retail mix with a comprehensive list of ground-floor businesses categorized by use, foot-traffic counts, ground-floor vacancies, and key storefronts.
- Build relationships with existing businesses, prospective businesses, property owners, real estate agents, and public agencies to gain insights and build consensus around a retail vision.
- Sell the retail vision through annual reports and marketing collateral that highlight psychographics, demographics, retail economy, foot traffic, unique community characteristics. Include retail testimonials.
- Educate your existing retailers. Create toolkits that spur inspiration and provide best practices for façade improvements and outdoor dining.
- Activate and increase foot traffic through placemaking and events that leverage unique opportunities found in your district.

The UPMO's Evolving Role

The pandemic exposed weaknesses in downtowns and urban districts globally by altering the numbers and types of visitors; creating a new understanding of tourism's volatility; and spotlighting the long-term impact of remote work. The abrupt disappearance of office workers and tourists left many downtowns void of activity, and life. Lower numbers of daily workers put stress on retailers that depended on heavy foot traffic. Many downtowns lack the residential density needed to balance overreliance on a traditional business district model; those that have fared better have demonstrated the importance of mixed-use neighborhoods. Office-to-residential conversions can help create a more balanced district, but people won't move downtown without amenities and public infrastructure that meet their needs—which often differ from office workers' needs. UPMOs must evolve to meet this challenge.

UPMOs play their most valuable role in attracting investment by serving as the reliable expert on their district and establishing trusted relationships with all stakeholders. To do their job well, they must collect data and analyze it, plan and recommend projects and programs which leverage unique community characteristics and enhance the district, and measure implementation performance. They must craft messages that communicate district data and performance to various audiences to influence both private and public investment.

Decades ago, following the near abandonment of many downtowns, UPMOs advocated for significant investment in neglected urban centers and cities made public investments to revitalize downtowns and attract private investment. Downtowns benefited measurably, but the post-pandemic landscape demands new investment to repair and reorient aging infrastructure—even as growing demands for city resources and rising construction costs limit the resources available to fund this work. UPMOs

Photo Credit: U District Partnership & April Hong (2024). Seattle, WA.

have long experience using both quantitative and qualitative data to educate stakeholders and partners on downtowns' needs. The pandemic has accentuated the importance of that work.

In a post-pandemic era, UPMOs can lead the curation of urban centers for the next generations. To do that, they must continue to serve as experts, messengers, influencers, advocates, and change-makers. They must continue to focus on creating clean, safe, attractive, and inclusive environments to spur investment. And they must continue working to create and activate spaces that draw people. All this requires creation of trusted partnerships with long-term partners and new organizations alike.

To forge catalytic partnerships, UPMOs must remain open to new perspectives and cultivate the ability to clearly articulate a district's needs, its relationship to the broader community, and its overall importance. Messaging begins with the story of urban centers' need to adapt constantly to emerging technologies and changing social climates to ensure economic stability and vitality. Each UPMO must explain how the pandemic accelerated change in its district, using data, performance indicators, and the stories of how those changes affect stakeholders and the larger community. That message needs to be clearly crafted and constant. Ultimately, the UPMO must devise solutions, sometimes adapting its own operations, to meet changing needs and advocate for continued investment.

Implementing Action

• Adapt to your geography and the needs of the district. Downtown San Francisco BID has reimagined its purpose, moving away from some traditional roles into active urbanism. Review its Public Realm Action Plan.

• Realign your message to match what your district needs to achieve. Data on its own might persuade policy makers and investors, yet it might not resonate with community residents and stakeholders. Identify and tell the stories that illustrate changes in the district and show how the UPMO—and community—can address them.

• Listen and learn from your staff, stakeholders, and partners; engage new voices, groups, and constituents. Admit publicly that you don't have all the answers; humility can go a long way toward building a community people care about.

• Publish a regular "State of Downtown" and development activity report to establish yourself as the trusted source of information for your downtown/district.

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IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit downtown.org.

IDA Board Chair: Kate Borders, LPM, President, University Circle Inc.
IDA President & CEO: David T. Downey, CAE, Assoc. AIA, IOM

IDA Top Issues Councils

The IDA Top Issues Councils are a strategic research initiative that brings together industry leaders to produce research briefs on the top urban issues identified by IDA members. Each council is led by a chair, comprised of place management professionals sharing their expert knowledge, and supported by both IDA staff and the IDA Research Committee. Those selected to serve on a council contribute their expertise to the growing body of knowledge on the place management industry and provide meaningful tools and information to IDA members.

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COUNCIL CHAIR

Molly Alexander

Founder & CEO, ITP Consulting

Molly Alexander is a visionary leader with over 30 years of experience in downtown revitalization, retail development, cultural arts and parks. Molly created Imagine the Possibilities (ITP Consulting) in 2022 working with communities to turn around struggling retail districts. She is an internationally recognized speaker and expert on urban issues. She sits on the board of Frontier Bank of Texas. She also serves on the board of Texas Downtown. Molly is actively involved in the Urban Land Institute Austin Chapter, the Austin Area Research Organization and the International Downtown Association. Molly was recognized by the American Institute of Architects, Austin Chapter and the Austin Foundation of Architecture with their highest honor the Alan Taniguchi Award for Public Architecture (2023) for her three decades of work in Austin, TX and Elgin, TX. She was also named the 2023 Business Leader of the Year by the Elgin, Texas Chamber of Commerce. Molly and her partner Gary own and operate two retail stores in downtown Elgin, Texas.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

David Fleming

President & CEO, REV Birmingham

David Fleming is President and CEO of REV Birmingham, a nonprofit working for the vibrancy of Downtown Birmingham and the urban neighborhood of Woodlawn. David has chaired the Birmingham Planning Commission. He has served as a founding Board member of Main Street Alabama, participated in Leadership Birmingham, Leadership Alabama, the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program, and has LPM certification through IDA.

Jane Jenkins

Principal, Jane Jenkins Resources

Jane Jenkins is the principal of Jane Jenkins Resources, a consulting firm for downtown management organizations and nonprofits. Most recently, Jane concluded a 38-year career in downtown management with fourteen years as the president and CEO of the Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership. An internationally recognized expert on urban issues, she is a former Chairman for the International Downtown Association Board of Directors and has served on numerous local and national boards throughout her career. An experienced speaker and trainer, Jane has worked as a panelist and team member for the American Institute of Architects, the International Downtown Association, the International Economic Development Council, the National Main Street Center and the Urban Land Institute. She has also served as an awards jurist for many professional organizations, most notably the ULI Global Awards in 2021 and 2022. In 2014, Jane earned accreditation from the Congress for New Urbanism and she was recently named a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Place Management in Manchester, England. The International Downtown Association recognized her with the Inspired Leader Award at their annual conference in Vancouver in 2022 and the Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership honored her with the President's Award for Leadership in 2023.

Claudia Freeland Jolin

Executive Director, Baltimore Peninsula Partnership

Claudia is responsible for all aspects of operating, activating, and securing the public realm on the Peninsula. She will be identifying and implementing programs and procedures which will assure that the new neighborhood is a clean, safe, and desirable place to live, work, visit, and play. Previous to this role, Claudia was the Vice President of Economic Development at Downtown Partnership of Baltimore and vital to the success of Baltimore's Central Business District, Baltimore City, and the greater state of Maryland. She led research-driven initiatives that foster development and track downtown's economic success, and she did so with passion, flair, and authenticity – all with a focus on data.

Daniel Lokic

Economic Development Manager, U District Partnership

Founder & CEO, LOKIC Economic Consulting

Daniel is an economic developer for the U District Partnership and consultant serving the Economic Alliance of Snohomish County, the City of Mountlake Terrace, and the Mountlake Terrace Chamber of Commerce - with nearly a decade of experience implementing commercial revitalization, placemaking, business promotional events, and economic development strategies. Daniel is an adept problem solver, mover and shaker, and entrepreneur with experience leading innovative initiatives to support businesses, enhance the public realm, and create a unique experience for consumers.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal

Executive Director, Baton Rouge Downtown Development Authority

As Executive Director for the Downtown Development District (DDD), Whitney Hoffman Sayal is responsible for carrying out the mission to initiate, incubate, and support partnerships that develop and enhance Downtown Baton Rouge. Whitney Hoffman Sayal has an educational and professional background in architecture, and landscape architecture, and urban planning.