

The Downtown Planning Collaborative

Executive Summary

The “Final Collaborative Report” documents the origins, evolution, and outcomes generated by the Downtown Planning Collaborative. It includes an overview of the issues and viewpoints that led to its creation, and presents all the ideas and information stakeholders produced during the planning process which engaged over 600 participants. As a result of the downtown community’s commitment to listen, learn, discuss and debate, a comprehensive, integrated set of recommendations was developed. That body of work is presented in this “Executive Summary”. The full set of recommendations as developed by stakeholder groups, greater detail in the form of summary reports, the notes of all stakeholder group meetings and all related research are contained in the “Final Report”. The “Executive Summary” and the “Final Report” were presented jointly to Mayor Tom Murphy and his administration, the Urban Redevelopment Authority and City Council for consideration during deliberations over the future of the Fifth and Forbes corridor.

Background

The 1997/1998 “Pittsburgh Downtown Plan” planning process engaged a large and diverse group of Downtown stakeholders in a nearly two-year effort to create a consensual vision of what Downtown Pittsburgh should become. The Plan articulated a vision for downtown that addressed a number of areas: North Shore development and new stadiums, Business Climate, Housing, Transportation, Urban Design considerations, the role of institutions (churches and schools), and the retail and entertainment climate. Specifically, emphasis was focused on retail and entertainment in the Fifth and Forbes retail corridor and the critical importance of new investment to redevelop that area.

A careful retail and entertainment market analysis conducted for the Downtown Plan concludes that the overall mix of stores and entertainment options must be strengthened if downtown hopes to keep employees in the area beyond working hours, and attract suburban residents, meeting and convention groups and regional visitors, both day-trippers and overnight guests.

A new Lazarus department store and proposed Market Square cineplex will serve as catalysts in Pittsburgh’s broad strategy to expand Downtown retail, dining and entertainment options. Unlike festival marketplaces or enclosed malls, the planned development, management and marketing of Downtown will be focused on existing streets and users. Store and restaurant facades will complement the

established Downtown character, and streets will connect the Triangle and adjacent commercial districts.¹

By the time the ink was dry on the “Pittsburgh Downtown Plan”, many of the concepts and visions defined by the “Plan” were already underway. Plans for both new stadiums were on the horizon and the construction of a new stand-alone Lazarus Department Store at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Wood Street was underway. While the new Lazarus store was a real boost to the corridor, the “Plan” did not suggest that it alone would transform the area. Following the first “leaks” of the plan in July 1999, Mayor Tom Murphy unveiled a plan in October that his office had developed in conjunction with the URA for “The MarketPlace at Fifth and Forbes”, a major redevelopment strategy that involved acquiring five blocks of properties in the area for redevelopment by nationally recognized retail developers, Urban Retail Properties (URP).

From the moment the “MarketPlace” plan was presented, questions were raised regarding its impacts on existing businesses, property owners and buildings, and costs that would be incurred by the city.

The response to the Plan was divided. Some stakeholders expressed optimism about what the development would mean to Downtown’s economy and offered conditional support for the Plan. However, predominantly small property owners, locally-owned businesses in the redevelopment area, and preservationists voiced concerns and objections to the engagement of an out of state developer, without benefit of an open RFP process, and the city’s intention to use eminent domain if necessary, to assemble the site. With few details made public, requests for clarification and specific information from the Mayor’s Office grew. As the weeks went by, and information was not forthcoming, tensions mounted and the need for public dialogue became increasingly apparent.

To address this need, Councilman Sala Udin in August began holding a series of monthly “Brown Bag Luncheons” that provided a forum to update Downtown stakeholders on the proposed “MarketPlace at Fifth and Forbes”, and allow for questions and community input on downtown revitalization. Concurrently, on October 22, the PDP hosted a public meeting on the “MarketPlace” proposal at Heinz Hall. The standing room only crowd heard the “MarketPlace” plan presented by Mayor Murphy and had the opportunity to meet and ask questions of Urban Retail Properties representatives and city officials.

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By the end of the year, it was obvious that more information was still necessary and that the dialogue needed to continue. In January 2000, The Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP) commissioned a retail study conducted by an internationally recognized retail consultant to help address stakeholder concerns

¹ “The Pittsburgh Downtown Plan: A blueprint for the 21st century”

and provide an additional review of Downtown's retail climate and potential. As a follow-up to the Brown Bag Luncheons, Councilman Sala Udin developed a proposal to establish the "Downtown Planning Collaborative". In February, 2000, in partnership with the PDP, the Collaborative was created to initiate and sustain a process that re-engaged the entire community in dialogue, allowed for input, and provided a report of recommendations to Urban Retail Properties, the Urban Redevelopment Authority and City Council, who was expected to vote on the "MarketPlace" proposal in May. Representatives of merchants, businesses, civic and preservation-based organizations agreed to oversee the process as members of a coordinating committee and participate in it.

It began with an opening conference on March 3 and 4, 2000, and continued through mid-November 2000. A Coordinating Committee led by Councilman Udin and PDP Past-Chair George Werner, and made up of representatives of downtown stakeholder groups, economic development agencies and local experts, met regularly into the summer to oversee the progress of the working groups. Stakeholder groups, formed during the Opening Conference, met through the spring and into the early summer. Town meetings were held in city neighborhoods to engage additional comment from city residents. A tour of other Downtown cities was conducted to compare Pittsburgh's situation to that of other metropolitan areas. And a study was commissioned to determine the economic impact of the various proposals that had surfaced during the course of the debate.

While the process got off to a rocky start and was at times difficult and contentious, it was thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive. The Murphy Administration and Urban Retail Properties were cooperative, providing information and participating in dialogue when asked. At its conclusion, all the participants had been heard, their concerns acknowledged, and their viewpoints incorporated into the debate. A description of that public process, and the outcomes it generated are described in this document.

Coordinating Committee Final Meeting

In its final meeting held on November 13, 2000, the Collaborative's Coordinating Committee adopted its recommendations derived from resources including but not limited to:

- the stakeholder group reports,
- the economic impact study,
- the Cities Tour Report,
- Main Streets principles and programs,
- Urban Retail Properties' response to the Collaborative: a modified "MarketPlace" Plan ,
- a construction cost analysis, and
- information provided by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, National Institute for Justice and Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation.

The 25 Committee members in attendance elected to include, as voting members, several participants who had been consistently involved in the Committee's and Collaborative's work, but had not been originally named official Committee representatives.² The Committee members in attendance unanimously agreed that all of the committees' recommendations would be approved by a super-majority rule of two-thirds or better. The recommendations of the Coordinating Committee serve to supplement the original stakeholder recommendations.

Coordinating Committee Recommendations

It is the wish of the Coordinating Committee of the Downtown Planning Collaborative (DPC) to present an "Executive Summary" which attempts, in the words of the Urban Design Stakeholder Group, "to integrate the recommendations from all the stakeholder groups, into a coherent and internally consistent recommendation."

Although there were five stakeholder groups, the broadest consensus was forged in the Urban Design Stakeholder Group. Many of the recommendations of that group are included in this "Executive Summary". The Recommendations of the Downtown Planning Collaborative Coordinating Committee take these and other discussions into account. The Recommendations of the Downtown Planning Collaborative Coordinating Committee, therefore, are as follows:

Almost everyone agrees that the overall retail potential of the Fifth and Forbes retail district is not being achieved, and major revitalization is desired to convert the district, in combination with other existing downtown amenities, into the shopping and entertainment center for the entire Western Pennsylvania region.

There is also widespread agreement that our focus should be broader than just the Fifth and Forbes district, but should include the entire Golden Triangle, or perhaps even the "Greater Downtown Area," including the North Shore and South Shore.

The three most contentious issues in response to the MarketPlace proposal are:

- 1. Relocation of displaced businesses*
- 2. The use of Eminent Domain*
- 3. Historic Preservation*

² See Appendix I of the "Final Report: Forbes and Fifth Downtown Planning Collaborative" for the complete Coordinating Committee Membership List.

A. Merchandising

Major retail and entertainment development, inclusive of features unique and particular to Pittsburgh, should occur in the MarketPlace project, creating a “wow.”

- There should be excellence in architecture, art and materials.
- It should feature street-oriented retail and should be pedestrian and family friendly.
- It should be sustainable and transit oriented.
- It should encourage an increase in downtown housing construction.
- The Forbes/Fifth footprint should include national retailers and entertainment venues, and Pittsburgh-based regional retailers, restaurants, entertainment venues, and street vendors.
- Development should include and encourage local participation.
- Main Street principles are compatible with new development, thus, to the extent feasible, the Main Street Program and the Marketplace Project should be mutually supportive.
- Pittsburgh should become the “City of Customer Service” to counter the perception of a typical “mall”, and to exploit one of our greatest assets, i.e., our inherent friendliness and helpfulness. Selling Pittsburgh as “first in customer service”, would set Downtown apart from the prevailing national retail culture which invests minimally in the value-added that service brings. The adoption of this concept transcends any development plan that may be instituted.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 24 Yes/ 0 No/ 1 Abstention

B. Disruption Mitigation

The DPC Coordinating Committee supports and extends, by 2 years, the Disruption Mitigation Stakeholder Group’s recommendation for a five-year disruption mitigation plan, facilitated by a Disruption Mitigation Coordinating Committee. This five-year plan should include a Coordination Plan, a Communication Plan and a Funding Plan, as detailed in the Stakeholder Group’s enclosed recommendation. The Plan should be coordinated and implemented in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership’s existing Construction Mitigation Strategic Plan.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 22 Yes/ 2 No/ 1 Abstention

C. Housing

The DPC supports the Urban Design Stakeholder Group’s recommendations on housing:

- Expand the residential population as proposed in the “Pittsburgh Downtown Plan.”
- Develop programs to support downtown development of small scale and large scale housing to close the financing gap, which now exists between market rents, and construction costs.
- Within the Fifth/Forbes district, encourage air rights housing of appropriate scale over new retail development, in adaptive reuse of upper floors of

existing buildings, and on surface parking lots near Forbes Avenue and Smithfield Street.

- Housing makes the downtown a 7 day, 24 hour district, supports retail and puts people on the street.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 25 Yes/ 0 No/ 0 Abstention

D. Relocation

The DPC recognizes the tremendous contributions the existing downtown businesses have made to keep our downtown thriving, during the last few decades of population loss and economic decline.

- All businesses and property owners within the footprint of the project must be treated fairly and respectfully. To the extent possible, they should be beneficiaries of the project.
- If it is not necessary to the success of the project, they should not be relocated at all, if they desire not to relocate.
- If they must be relocated, they should be relocated within the footprint of the project, to the extent possible, if they so desire.
- If they cannot be relocated within the footprint, then all efforts should be made to locate them as close to the project as possible.
- The creation of retail sub-districts in various parts of downtown and the overall revitalization of the entire “Greater Downtown Area” creates additional opportunities for relocation to areas that have the potential to increase gross business opportunities, even beyond the level of business currently enjoyed by existing downtown businesses.
- To the extent possible, relocated business should receive more than the minimum legal compensation. They should be compensated for lost business, determined by some fair and neutral process. They should be given priority for business loans and grants that will help them to be competitive in the new, revitalized environment.
- Business that must be relocated should not be required to move more than once.
- Businesses that choose to relocate into historic buildings should be given priority for renovation and business assistance loans and grants.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 17 Yes/ 7 No/ 1 Abstention/ 1 member not present to vote

E. Eminent Domain

Committee members formulated four alternative recommendations. After lengthy deliberation and several votes, no single recommendation received the super-majority of votes needed for acceptance.

F. Historic Preservation

Almost all participants in the DPC agree that we want to preserve the character of the historic, traditional look of the Fifth and Forbes historic district. Almost all participants also agree that maintaining this historic character and attracting the mix of retail and entertainment venues that will achieve the above stated goal of

creating an entertainment and retail center for the region, represents a formidable challenge. It has been estimated that preserving the facades of the buildings most participants think are worthy of preservation, may cost as much as an additional \$28 million. Most participants agree and the DPC recommends that we do whatever is necessary to find the funds to preserve the historic look of Pittsburgh in this district, as much as physically possible. We recommend the preservation of all the facades included in the recommendations of the Urban Design Stakeholders Group.

The Urban Design Stakeholders Group also made another important recommendation, that we include in this Coordinating Committee general recommendation, i.e., that to the extent possible, whole buildings on the west side of Wood Street, between Fifth and Forbes Avenues (among others) be preserved.

As regards Nordstrom, the Committee recommended that it not locate in the Murphy block. However, an amendment endorsed the recommendation that Nordstrom be conditionally welcomed to the block if it adheres to the preservation guidelines as set by the Urban Design Stakeholders Group. Those guidelines seek to preserve whole buildings on the west side of Wood Street, and retain complete facades on Fifth Avenue, Forbes Avenue and Market Square. Nordstrom would be encouraged to utilize original doorways on the facades to stimulate pedestrian activity on all adjacent sidewalks.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 17 Yes/ 7 No/ 1 Abstention

G. Finance

The Downtown Collaborative accepts the conclusions of the Economic Research Associates (ERA) "Economic Impact Study" included in this report. The ERA study concludes that the Downtown Pittsburgh market is under-served and could support the proposed major local and national retail and entertainment enterprises, as proposed in the MarketPlace proposal.

VOTE TO APPROVE RECOMMENDATION: 16 Yes/ 8 No/ 1 Abstention

H. General Recommendations

The following were proposed and adopted by the Coordinating Committee as additional recommendations:

- In addition to the resources available for promoting the MarketPlace at Fifth and Forbes, the PDP and the GPCVB should be provided with the resources necessary to actively promote patronage throughout the entire Downtown.
- As an alternative to the employment of Eminent Domain, the City, URA, developers and planners should investigate innovative ways to benefit current Downtown property owners by providing opportunities for them to participate as financial stakeholders in any new development initiative.
- The PDP and Councilman Udin may convene a citizen oversight group as deemed desirable or necessary, as plans for Downtown continue to evolve.

The Coordinating Committee members in attendance and voting at final meeting include:

Councilman Sala Udin, Co-Chair	Pittsburgh City Council
Frances Bennington	Fragile Paradise
Richard Beynon	Beynon and Company
Cathy Broucek	Pgh History and Landmarks Foundation
James Calato	City Deli/Golden Triangle CDC(GTCDC)
Don Carter	UDA Architects
Richard Crimone	Oxford Development Company
Harry Finnigan	Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP)
Katherine Henderson	Point Park College/PDP
Ralph Horgan	Pittsburgh Parking Authority
Charlie Humphrey	Pittsburgh Filmmakers
Kevin Joyce	Restaurant Association/The Carlton
Bonnie Klein	Camera Repair Service/GTCDC
Bernie Lynch	GTCDC
Arthur Lubetz	Preservation Pittsburgh
Patty Mahoney	The Card Center/GTCDC
Joe McGrath	Gr. Pgh Convention & Visitors Bureau
Barbara McNees	Gr. Pgh Chamber of Commerce
Harold Miller	PRA/Allegheny Conference
Rob Pfaffmann	PIA Architects
David Richardson	First Fridays
Gerald Schiller	ForWood Group
Polly Speros	PUMP
Robert Stephenson	Strategic Investment Fund
Doris Carson Williams	African Amer. Chamber of Commerce

Coordinating Committee Members Absent for Vote:

George Werner – Co-Chair	Past-Chair, PDP
Carol Brown	Pittsburgh Cultural Trust
Robin Fernandez	Sports Rock Entertainment
Ann Hornak	A to Z Communications/Pgh's Next
Ed Jacob	Southside Slopes Neighborhood Assoc.
Jeff Joyce	1902 Tavern/Market Square Assn.
Maxwell King	Heinz Endowments
Joseph Mistick	Duquesne University School of Law
Paul Skoutelas	Port Authority of Allegheny County
Robin Young	Sincerely Yours