



MAKING DOWNTOWNS COOL AGAIN

New Approaches to Repairing Cities - For decades, cities both large and small have seen continuous economic leakage from the central core to outlying edge locations. These historic urban centers have witnessed this gradual but persistent transformation from being the center of regional economic activity to the unenviable position of barely hanging on, starved of customers, businesses, and cultural life. This decline often persists despite substantial reinvestment and redevelopment initiatives over the last several decades.

Just as America is rediscovering urban life, Covid hit, and it was apparent that most downtown areas suffered from an economic and cultural dysfunction that defies easy or quick remedies. In fact, this dysfunction is making it difficult to capitalize on the new urban zeitgeist that should be happening. Downtowns in America have experienced a resurgence over the last decade. And yet, even with this surge of new urban development, many if not most of our small, mid-size, and especially our regional downtowns are not experiencing any significant reinvestment; and many will see disinvestment. This is true even in Gateway Cities, the traditional gold-standard of safe investment.

Urban international Studios has a proven track record at partnering with both private and public sector clients to create viable and sustainable new downtown reinvestment strategies. We approach downtown strategic planning with a deep understanding of the historical and contextual factors that affect the current strengths and weaknesses of a particular urban center. We also bring a strong understanding of private sector development requirements and knowledge of how to bring back the competitive edge that downtowns once enjoyed. Above all, we believe in creating a strong partnered approach to problem-solving.

Downtowns frequently have the transportation infrastructure and available land and entitlement opportunities for high-density urban development that edge cities and ring locations often lack. But they cannot capitalize on potential new investment. They typically are not di-

verse urban live, work and play ecosystem. The traditional single office use land use created not resilience to the economic shock of remote work, or Covid protocols. Central Business Districts (CBD's) now needed to adapt to become Central Entertainment Districts (CED's) that support high levels of regional community connection - which is also favored by residential and workplace users. Investment will only return when CBD's transform themselves into CED's or thriving mixed-use communities and neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Placemaking - The reality is that without creating engaging, interesting places where people actually want to live, work, and visit you cannot successfully redevelop an urban center. This is a neighborhood approach to urban change – you have to start with a nucleus of a place that works, that is active, that attracts people, that is a real destination.

To Be Successful, the process of neighborhood placemaking, contrary to much conventional thinking and many planning efforts, usually starts small and focused. You cannot change a downtown by trying to save the whole downtown. Real people want exactly what private reinvestment wants – a clear destination, synergistic uses, defined edges and relationships – in short, a clear winner.

Retail is the Life-Blood of these new neighborhoods. You cannot have a viable city without strong retail destinations. And these retail destinations will not achieve viability without a critical mass of well-choreographed service and destination shopping, cafes, entertainment, restaurants, unique and national branded merchants. *Urban International Studios* is a recognized expert at understanding how to create this dynamic, viable retail and mixed-use district. We are experts at diagnosing the physical and economic constraints that inhibit private retail investment. We understand how to create achievable downtown solutions that build pride of place, reflecting the quality and unique character of the communities they serve.

