

**INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
ADVISORY PANEL REPORT
CITY OF TULSA
TULSA, OKLAHOMA
NOVEMBER 15-18, 2008**

INTRODUCTION

A first-time visitor to downtown Tulsa may be somewhat mystified. Streets and sidewalks are clean and well-lighted. A collection of handsome, even extraordinary art deco buildings adorn the office core. A strikingly designed arena stands dramatically on the edge of downtown, complemented by perhaps the most attractive new City Hall in America. Here and there, a café or coffee house lights the street. And yet...where are the people?

As a visitor spends more time in downtown Tulsa, other impressions emerge. There are few street level establishments of a retail nature. Windows facing the street are far too often dark. The hustle and bustle that today characterizes many downtowns across North America is simply absent. It feels like a time warp – as if it's 1988 in downtown Tulsa, not 2008.

This is not to say that the leaders of Tulsa do not recognize this dilemma. Mayor Kathy Taylor and her staff, realizing that downtown Tulsa's full potential was not yet realized, engaged the International Downtown Association to assess conditions in downtown and make recommendations with respect to the business improvement district contract currently held by Downtown Tulsa Unlimited.

Business Improvement Districts, or BIDs as they are commonly known, have become a virtually essential component of downtown revitalization in North America, and increasingly around the world. Though the exact number of BIDs is not known, some experts have estimated that more than 1,000 exist in the US, and perhaps another 300 in Canada.

Tulsa was a pioneer in establishing such districts, creating the Tulsa Improvement District in 1981. While the first true business improvement district was established in Toronto in 1968, there were very few others until the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, BIDs were operating in Philadelphia, New York, Washington DC, Portland, Des Moines, and New Orleans, as well as many cities in Canada.

BIDs are special assessment districts established to augment or supplement city services. According to the DTID (Downtown Tulsa Improvement District) Summary Sheet, the downtown Tulsa district “was created to provide public improvements and maintenance beyond normal City services to help sustain, increase, and re-attract businesses as well as entertainment activities to downtown.” According to the Summary Sheet, the City is the governing body and Tul-Center, Inc., a non-profit organization of Downtown Tulsa Unlimited, manages the daily services provided by several subcontractors.”

The 2008-2009 contract of approximately \$952,000 between the City of Tulsa and Tul-Center, Inc. comes from two roughly equal sources: assessments on property owners in downtown and the City of Tulsa itself. The current contract, approved by the Tulsa City Council in 1999, is in effect through June 30, 2009.

Given the challenges that downtown Tulsa faces, the Mayor and others in City government have determined that a close review of the contract and the degree to which it meets the needs of downtown is important. It was with this in mind that the International Downtown Association was invited to organize an IDA Advisory Panel.

The agreement between the City of Tulsa and the International Downtown Association states that the purpose of the panel as follows:

The City of Tulsa seeks to create an organization that can coordinate, plan, direct and manage a wide range of downtown revitalization functions, including the integration and implementation of downtown plans, management of downtown public/private partnerships, support for downtown business groups, and support and management of programs as designated by the City. Possible functions include parking management, management of downtown business improvement district programs, event functions, and other downtown operations.

The IDA Advisory Panel will examine and assess the current organizations, agencies and programs focused on the revitalization of downtown Tulsa, including the relationship between the City of Tulsa, Downtown Tulsa Unlimited and various stakeholders; discuss and compare best practices and successful strategies employed by other similar business districts in terms of

organizational structure, functions, and programs, particularly with regard to functions within the scope of a downtown management organization; review and make recommendations regarding any appropriate organizational development strategies; examine advantages and disadvantages of collaborative planning and funding strategies, especially in business improvement districts; and recommend ways that programs, if initiated, can be sustained.

The Panel was led by David Feehan, President and CEO of the International Downtown Association. Other panelists are listed in the Addendum.

IDA Panel Observations

Panelists divided observations into six categories: Physical, Organizational, Political, Economic, Management, and a final category, called Other Observations, for those that did not fit neatly or well into the first five categories.

General Observations

“Downtown Tulsa is stuck in a time warp.”

On assembling in the hotel lobby on Saturday afternoon, the International Downtown Association advisory panel shared this jarring thought with one another. The weather was clear and sunny, the temperature was a pleasant 55 degrees – and yet there was no one on the sidewalks and hardly a car moving on the street.

Inside the hotel, the check-in lines were long and buzzing. Marathoners from throughout the region and the US were talking about what marathoners talk about – the upcoming race, previous races, the best runners that might be participating on Sunday morning.

IDA’s four panelists represent, collectively, more than 100 years of downtown and community revitalization experience. Their experience spans the US, Canada, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the Caribbean. As a group, they have visited more than 200 downtowns around the world. Their first impression of downtown Tulsa was that it reminded everyone of American downtowns in the early 1990s, about the time business improvement districts first gained a foothold.

As the panelists began an informal walking tour on their way to James E. McNellie's Public House for dinner, they encountered virtually no one on foot. And then, as they stepped inside the Irish pub, it was as if they re-entered the time warp and were back in the present. The pub was alive with activity – no empty tables were visible, and the bar was as busy as the eating area. It was a scene one might expect in Manhattan's East Village or Chicago's North Side.

Downtown Tulsa is place of unexpected contrasts.

McNellie's was not the only surprise. In the next 48 hours, panelists seemed to be frequently in a time machine. Some elements of downtown Tulsa and its adjoining neighborhoods are clearly dated. Some elements are just as clearly consistent with the best practices and successful strategies of today. The challenge is to develop a vision, use that vision to drive an effective and energetic organization, and employ the knowledge and wisdom that two decades of experimentation, innovation, and investment have provided as a textbook for achieving downtown vibrancy.

Tulsa's community leaders – public sector, private sector and nonprofit sector – are both frustrated and motivated.

Something is not working. Some – though not all – elected officials and department heads expressed frustration with Downtown Tulsa Unlimited. DTU's leadership and other business leaders shared frustrations with City government. Neighborhood leaders are perplexed and don't know whom to blame. Yet, despite this apparently high level of frustration, some very promising things seem to be happening.

Here and there, mostly younger entrepreneurs are starting businesses and breathing new life into historic buildings. Downtown housing, though getting a start just as mortgage money is much tougher to find, is popping up in several locations, and the units panelists witnessed were just what downtown living space ought to be.

Tulsa's "community gathering and celebration spaces" – the Bok Center, Convention Center, the new ball park, and the performing arts venues – are functional, handsome, and drawing crowds.

So, though some things are not working, other things are definitely working.

Downtown Tulsa is closer to success than ever – and closer than many local leaders and residents think.

What is working? First, motivation and energy are readily apparent. Especially among the younger people the panel met, the affection for downtown Tulsa is genuine, the talent and determination are clearly evident, and the willingness to look for successful strategies and adapt them to the culture of Tulsa is a very positive sign. Second, the sense of frustration many expressed has a positive side – an unwillingness to accept the status quo, an impatience with the slow pace of change, and a recognition that other nearby cities are “getting it right” when it comes to downtown revitalization.

Downtown Tulsa is blessed with an extraordinary set of assets.

This combination of energy and frustration builds on downtown Tulsa’s extraordinary assets. Its outstanding collection of beautiful art deco buildings, the strength and potential strength of its adjoining neighborhoods, its investment in streetscape infrastructure, its abundant parking, its hip entertainment clusters around downtown’s fringes, and its striking new buildings, especially the BOK Center and City Hall are huge pluses in any municipal ledger.

Even beyond these obvious assets, Tulsa has other potential assets, two of which are worth mentioning. The Arkansas River, though not well-connected to downtown, is close enough to become an important asset in the future; and the rail line, assuming those who predict a return of passenger rail are right, could become, along with the proposed light rail link, the beginning of an important transit network centered on downtown.

Downtown’s challenges are surmountable – but they must be recognized and addressed.

Throughout the panel process, individual panelists often expressed a strong belief that downtown Tulsa is well-positioned to become a real success story, partly because it is arriving late to the game. It can learn not only from the successes of other downtowns – it can also learn from their failures, and avoid them.

In order for downtown Tulsa to achieve the success the panel believes is possible, three things must happen:

- ❖ An effective downtown organization is essential to the success everyone wants to see for downtown Tulsa. At present, Downtown Tulsa Unlimited has strong support from its board of directors, but is viewed negatively by others in the business community, in City government, and elsewhere in the community.
- ❖ An effective program of business support residing in City government is also essential. The City must develop a well-coordinated “tool kit” to help attract and support the kinds of businesses everyone would like to see in downtown.
- ❖ A functional and mutually supportive relationship between DTU, the City, downtown property and business owners, and adjacent neighborhoods must be developed through negotiation of clear roles and responsibilities.

Specific recommendations regarding a “road map” for accomplishing these objectives will be discussed further on in this report.

Specific observations

Panelists noted several impressions during the walking and driving tours, and in interviews with a wide range of downtown constituents. These impressions are listed below:

The basics – maintenance and management

- ***Downtown is very clean***

Panelists were impressed and pleasantly surprised with the overall cleanliness of downtown sidewalks and streets. There did not appear to be, at least in the office core, any neglected areas where trash and litter had collected. There was likewise almost no evidence of graffiti, except for one building; and gum stains were remarkably absent from downtown sidewalks. Even in peripheral areas of downtown, where nightclub and restaurant activity is more prevalent, litter, while slightly more evident, was not a major problem. Cigarette litter, a frequent problem in many downtown office districts, was also almost non-existent. The clean condition of downtown may be due in large

part to an aggressive and effective cleaning program by DTU, and in part to the lack of pedestrian traffic on weekends.

- ***Downtown is served by abundant surface and on-street parking***
As in many downtowns where development pressures have been moderate to low, downtown Tulsa has many surface parking lots. While abundant surface parking was seen as the solution to saving downtown several decades ago, downtown leaders today understand that surface parking tends to deaden urban spaces and contributes little to City tax revenues and BID assessments, and virtually nothing to the vitality of downtown. These parking lots are not a complete negative, however. They represent opportunity as well. They are, in effect, development sites waiting to happen. Panelists also observed that many of the surface lots were not landscaped, and were told that no City ordinance required landscaping of existing lots.

Management of the City's on-street parking system suggests that the Parking Authority is keeping up with technology. The "pay-by-space" meters are an improvement and are expected to replace the old single-space meters in the near future.

Panelists heard from more than one interviewee that safety is a concern in downtown Tulsa, though this seems to be more perception than reality, as is the case in many downtowns.

DTU's operations director is a veteran of more than 20 years with the organization, and is respected for his in-depth knowledge and experience.

Connecting the dots – connectivity and barrier issues

- ***Connectivity is lacking***
While part of the problem connecting people and places is physical (e.g., the IDL, the distance between major attractions, wide one-way streets, and too many surface parking lots), many of the people interviewed by panelists talked about another kind of "connectivity" – or the lack thereof. Small business owners expressed a disconnection from DTU and City government. Representatives from neighborhoods adjoining downtown sometimes expressed similar sentiments. Some interviewees saw this as resulting from an "inside group" of DTU

board members and an “outside group” of business and property owners not connected with DTU.

- ***Major attractions are not yet connected***

Downtown Tulsa boasts one of the most striking new arenas in the US. The Cesar Pelli-designed BOK Center is a major asset and a dramatic symbol that Tulsa is committed to its downtown. Likewise, the new baseball park will add significantly to downtown’s level of activity and to its appeal. Most new facilities such as these in other cities have been located in close proximity to one another, but in downtown Tulsa, the BOK Center is west of the core, while the new baseball park is in the Brady Arts District north of the core and several blocks away.

The Vision 2025 plan acknowledges this distance and proposes some solutions through the Downtown Events Linkage Plan. Panelists applauded Tulsa’s efforts to ensure and strengthen connections and hoped that future major projects would be sited as close as possible to the core rather than close to freeways, noting that attendees at events are more likely to stay in downtown for dining and additional entertainment when major venues are not next to freeway interchanges.

- ***IDL creates physical barriers***

When interstate highways were first conceptualized, planners envisioned them as connecting cities but not penetrating them. However, in the 1950s and 1960s as the interstate system was being built, local elected leaders and planning directors saw freeways as an opportunity to connect downtowns and growing suburbs, and at the same time accomplish slum removal. The end result was that many cities like Tulsa created freeway rings around their downtowns.

These new freeways had an unanticipated effect – they made it even easier for downtown workers to escape rapidly to “safe” suburban environments for shopping, dining, and recreation. Cities were becoming increasingly unsafe and undesirable. Furthermore, the elevated and depressed freeway rings created massive barriers, both perceptually and real, cutting off downtown from adjoining neighborhoods. Some experts believe this was intentional, because

inner city neighborhoods were viewed as the source of much criminal behavior.

Today, close-in neighborhoods are seen much differently. As urban crime has waned, these neighborhoods have become highly desirable, diverse and walkable places where downtown workers see opportunities to reduce commute time and expense.

While surface streets do penetrate the visual barriers presented by the IDL, panelists saw these massive structures as challenges Tulsa's leaders should recognize and address.

- ***Downtown has too many one-way streets with excess capacity***
While Tulsa has paid attention to streetscape design and maintenance, it clearly lags behind most other cities its size in converting one-way streets back to two way use. Fifty years ago, one way streets were thought to be the answer to downtown traffic congestion. But, as one urban expert said several years ago, are there any really vibrant downtowns that aren't congested? Western and Midwestern cities in particular built downtowns with wide streets, and converted these originally two-way streets to one-ways with a vengeance after World War II. Now, most American cities are redesigning downtown traffic patterns to be more pedestrian friendly and adopting traffic calming as a standard practice.

Panelists noted that on Saturday and Sunday there was almost no vehicular or pedestrian traffic on downtown streets and sidewalks. One panelist observed that downtown Tulsa could probably accommodate double the work force it currently has with the street and sidewalk capacity now in place.

- ***Is Downtown hostile to pedestrians or pedestrian friendly?***
This question elicited mixed responses. Most panel members viewed downtown Tulsa as somewhat hostile to pedestrians, while many local participants in the panel process thought the opposite was true. Panelists noted the absence of pedestrian traffic, and thought that the scarcity of pedestrian uses at street level in the downtown core (such as retail shops and sidewalk cafes) combined with wide, one-way streets to make downtown feel less than friendly to pedestrians. Local participants pointed to the cleanliness, attractive design, and generally

good maintenance of pedestrian spaces in downtown, as well as the directional signage. Panelists acknowledged these strengths and agreed that while there were significant opportunities to improve the pedestrian experience, many good things had been done or were being done.

- ***Railroads are seen as a barrier and an important issue***
A major rail line separates the Brady Arts District and the Greenwood District from the core area of downtown. This line not only creates a physical barrier, but many see it as a barrier to further residential development in the downtown zones close to the tracks. Trains are required to sound their horns as they approach grade crossings, and they must maintain a slow pace through downtown, blocking traffic for several minutes. Panelists were told that efforts are underway to create a “quiet zone” through downtown by installing gates at each intersection.
- ***Connectivity means good public transit***
In many cities the size of Tulsa, and especially in areas of the country where public transit is not viewed as a desirable means of transportation, running a transit agency can be a thankless task. However, Tulsa’s public transit system came in for its share of criticism during panel interviews. On the horizon, there are plans for a new light rail connection, and expanding the network of bike lanes leading into and around downtown.
- ***Connectivity to the river from Downtown is weak to nonexistent***
The Arkansas River is an asset of historic and current value to downtown Tulsa, but it is almost as if Tulsa has intentionally chosen to ignore its value to downtown. The IDL wraps around the western and southern edges of downtown, creating a massive perceptual barrier between downtown and the river. With the BOK Center, the Tulsa Convention Center, and the Oklahoma State Medical Center all in reasonably close proximity to the river, panelists looked for but did not see pedestrian-friendly walkways connecting these vital facilities to the water; nor did they see the kind of riverfront improvements most downtowns have implemented.

Downtown Tulsa has outstanding assets

- ***BOK Center is an outstanding design and a vital anchor***
When faced with the choice of designing a facility that is likely to have a major impact for the next half-century, many communities have chosen “safe” instead of “striking.” Tulsa, on the other hand, mustered the courage to engage the services of a world-renowned architect, Cesar Pelli, to design its downtown arena. Today, the BOK Center dramatically reinforces the image that downtown Tulsa is once again preparing to rebrand itself as the heart and soul of this community.
- ***Streetscapes are well done***
Another mark of a city that cares about its downtown is the degree to which attention is paid to smaller details. What materials are used in replacing sidewalks? Are sidewalks wide enough to accommodate sidewalk cafes, but not so wide that pedestrians feel uncomfortable? Are trees appropriate for downtown environments? Are planters well-located and well maintained? Downtown Tulsa shows evidence of thoughtful design and regular maintenance – important factors in any effort to bring people back to downtown streets.
- ***Downtown is surrounded by attractive and potentially attractive adjoining neighborhoods***
Like most American cities, Tulsa built some fine neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. Some of these have been heavily impacted by neglect and decay; but others are still well-maintained. A few deteriorated neighborhoods show signs of new investment. These neighborhoods, according to panelists, are an immense resource for downtown Tulsa. They provide affordable housing for the downtown workforce, and in many cases are within walking or biking distance.
- ***Churches have a big presence in downtown***
One component of downtown that elicits justifiable pride is the number of historic churches still in use. These contribute to the impression that downtown is still the “heart and soul” of the community. However, churches have drawbacks as downtown uses. They tend to be really active only one or two days a week; and they generally like to be surrounded by large surface parking lots.

Panelists agreed that one challenge for downtown will be to engage the churches in positive ways that creatively address the surface parking lot issue.

- ***Tulsa possesses an outstanding City Hall***

Few government buildings at any level – federal, state or local – are as architecturally pleasing and as highly finished as Tulsa’s City Hall. This building was originally designed as a corporate headquarters facility, and it shows. Along with the BOK Center, the new ball park, and the outstanding collection of art deco office buildings, downtown Tulsa’s City Hall helps to give the central business district a visual appeal few cities of this size can match.

The fountain in street – is it an asset or a liability?

Local opinions concerning the Bartlett Square fountain located at what at one time must have been the “Main and Main” corner vary widely. Some find the fountain a relic of the now-removed pedestrian mall. Others find it a traffic barrier with too many tire tracks around the base. Still others would like it to be rebuilt and redesigned as a more attractive focal point. Panelists agreed that the downtown organization and city officials should take a hard look at the current fountain, and determine if a redesign or removal makes more sense.

- ***Parking infrastructure ranges from fair to good***

Tulsa’s most recent parking structures show an understanding of how modern parking facility design can add to the attractiveness of downtown streetscapes without reducing the efficiency of the structure. However, downtown Tulsa also has older structures that negatively impact the appearance of downtown and pedestrian experiences.

- ***Selection of HOK to design the new ball park sends the right signal***

The architectural firm HOK has become the “gold standard” for baseball stadium design. Beginning with Baltimore’s Camden Yards, HOK has pioneered baseball park design and become the designer of choice for these facilities. The signal sent by this choice is that Tulsa is not satisfied with mediocre, but is striving for excellence in design whenever major public facilities are to be constructed in downtown.

- ***The Tulsa Community Foundation is an important asset***
Described as being the “largest community foundation” in the US, the Tulsa Community Foundation has an enormous impact on the Tulsa community. It often is the lead contributor on major community projects, and its dollars can help to leverage other charitable contributions and public funding.
- ***Downtown Tulsa has some outstanding arts and cultural offerings***
The Performing Arts Center houses the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra, Tulsa Ballet and the Tulsa Opera, as well as Light Opera Oklahoma, The American Theatre Company, and touring Broadway shows. Also in downtown is the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame. Not every city of Tulsa’s size can boast a symphony, ballet and opera.

Finances and Politics

- ***Downtown property owners face a major assessment increase***
Financing the ball park was not an easy task. In order to complete the financing necessary for this project to proceed, the City increased the BID assessment on downtown properties significantly. Panelists heard from several property owners who were uneasy with this assessment, particularly coming in the wake of the most significant economic downturn in several decades.
- ***The BID assessment – whose money is it?***
In most cities, property owners initiate the process of forming a BID, and do with the understanding that, once the BID has been approved by City Council, they will determine how the money is to be spent. In Oklahoma, BIDs are fundamentally creatures of City government, and the City has the authority to determine who will be awarded the contract to provide BID-supported services, and what those services will be.

As the BID contract between the City of Tulsa and Tul-Center Inc. expires on June 30, 2009, the Mayor has signaled a desire to review the terms and conditions of the contract, and whether it should be subject to competitive bidding. Panelists noted that the decisions surrounding the renewal of the BID contract involve political, legal, and economic implications, with the future of Downtown Tulsa Unlimited hanging in the balance.

- ***Downtown champions – public and private***

In many cities with revitalized downtowns, someone has played the role of downtown champion. Over time, different people can play this role. In some cities, it's a prominent private sector leader; in others, it's the mayor or a member of city council. In Tulsa, panelists found it hard to identify a "downtown champion." Certainly, the mayor has spoken out strongly for downtown, as has councilor Eric Gomez. Jim Norton, DTU's CEO, is seen by some as the downtown champion; but he is often viewed as playing a behind-the-scenes role rather than an out-front downtown champion.

One potential problem for downtown Tulsa is that, with a city council ward system in place, only one councilor has downtown in his ward, and downtown makes up only a portion of this ward.

The chairmanship of the DTU board is a one-year term. While this arrangement has several advantages, it often means that no volunteer board member ever becomes the recognized downtown champion.

- ***Solving the DTU dilemma***

One of the primary events precipitating the visit by an IDA advisory panel is the upcoming expiration of the BID contract between the City and DTU. With more than 50 years of history, DTU is one of the oldest downtown organizations in the US. It has a track record of accomplishments during its existence. It has a board of directors composed of some of Tulsa's most prominent corporate citizens. And, through Tul-Center Inc., it has managed the business improvement district since it was established.

Like many downtown organizations today, DTU relies on the BID assessment for its very existence. BID revenues constitute about 9 out every 11 dollars passing through DTU each year. With the BID assessment, DTU manages a fairly standard menu of "clean and safe" services, and also promotes downtown with events like Mayfest and by installing , removing and storing holiday decorations.

Increasingly, though, DTU has become the focal point of criticism from several sectors. Among the comments heard by panelists during the panel process were:

- A lack of a commonly shared vision, and a belief that DTU should be the “keeper of the vision” for downtown.
- A sense that DTU is out of touch with younger entrepreneurs in downtown, and with those that might want to locate in downtown.
- Dissatisfaction with DTU’s downtown marketing plans and programs.
- A belief that homelessness is a serious problem in downtown, and complaints that DTU does little or nothing to solve this problem.
- Complaints that DTU’s working relationships with some City departments are frayed and confused.
- Assertions that DTU is “old and coasting” and that Mayfest is “old and tired.”
- A feeling that DTU serves primarily a small group of established downtown businesses, and that its planning and programming lacks transparency and inclusiveness.
- A general sense of confusion about roles and responsibilities, especially in terms of City departments.
- Lack of well-defined, measurable goals, and metrics for measuring success.

Not all comments about DTU were negative, however. Among the many positive comments were:

- An appreciation of DTU’s history and its accomplishments.
- A sense that DTU is misunderstood and underappreciated.
- A recognition that DTU carries out the terms of its current contract efficiently.
- A sense that DTU’s president does a good job of advocating for downtown behind the scenes.

Opportunities and Challenges

- ***The historic Route 66 project is an authentic, “Community DNA” opportunity***

One of the most important opportunities communities and downtowns have is to discover unique aspects of their history, personality, identity and character – in short, their “community DNA” – and capitalize on them. Tulsa, along with a handful of other US cities and towns, were important mileposts along the famed Route 66 cross-country highway.

The Route 66 District sits along the southern edge of downtown and provides a potential connection to the river, as well as a reservoir of opportunities for marketing and promotion.

- ***Casinos are perceived as a threat***

Panelists heard from several participants that the presence of nearby casinos could threaten downtown as a tourist and recreational destination. Those who worried about the casinos asserted that there are only so many discretionary recreational dollars in a region; and that casinos tend to capture a large share of these dollars without creating much in terms of spin-off benefits.

- ***Downtown is mostly a 9 to 5 place; but should it be 24/7?***

More than 30,000 people are reported to work downtown every day; but most leave after work for home and don't come back in the evening unless for a special occasion or event. This means that downtown, with the exception of the Brady arts district and the Blue Dome district, is relatively lifeless after 5 p.m.

As more people rent apartments and buy condos in downtown, the possibilities for a 24/7 place increase. But other cities have experienced a whole new set of problems as nightlife returns to downtown streets. Panelists heard several people advocate for a 24/7 downtown, but did not hear much thought given to the implications of achieving this goal.

- ***A need to conserve remaining buildings***

Downtown Tulsa has a priceless collection of art deco buildings; but it also has other buildings that, while not as architecturally or historically significant, represent adaptive re-use possibilities for residential development, office space for small companies, and street level space for restaurants, clubs, and retail shops. Panelists were told that Tulsa's history has been one of tearing down old buildings for surface parking, leaving gaping holes in the streetscape. Some argued for a moratorium on any further demolition. Young people in particular perceive a lack of appreciation for "funky, cool buildings."

- ***An opportunity to expand hotel capacity and ancillary amenities***

With the BOK Center, an expanded convention center, and a new ballpark, there may be an opportunity to bring anywhere from 500 to

2,000 new hotel rooms on line. The CVB and others connected with the hospitality industry believe that downtown Tulsa's meeting and convention potential could be hampered unless this increased demand is met.

At the same time, there are opportunities for more eating establishments in the immediate vicinity of the BOK Center.

- ***The City's regulatory/permitting process is intimidating and frustrating***

Panelists were told by businesspeople and developers that the City's permitting and regulatory process is a barrier to development, and should be streamlined and redesigned.

- ***Problems with planning and project management – sequencing, transparency, accountability, quality lacking***

Panelists heard issues from both public officials and businesspeople on this issue. City department heads noted, for example, a lack of consideration of public safety in some private development projects. At the same time, businesspeople thought the City's processes were at times opaque, badly planned, and lacking in accountability. Overall, the consensus is that the planning and project management process in downtown is ripe for rethinking and redesign.

Economic Opportunities Abound

- ***Downtown Tulsa is underserved in terms of eating establishments and retail.***

Panelists agreed that downtown Tulsa has less retail than any other city of its size they have visited. Good restaurants can find a market in downtown, even with the small number of downtown residents. Some dynamic young entrepreneurs are proving this. Panelists met with the owners of McNellie's Public House, Joe Momma's Pizza, and other new restaurants that appear to be doing well. Some retailers are finding niches as well.

- ***Some attractive residential conversion units are underway***

Panelists had the opportunity to tour a handful of downtown residential projects that are either recently completed or under construction. They were pleasantly surprised with the quality, variety, and “cool factor” appeal these units displayed. Even in the face of the current economic crisis, panelists believe there is now and will continue to be a market for downtown living, and that new units coming on line are of significant importance to overall downtown vitality. At the same time, panelists observed that most cities provide economic incentives for residential development until the market takes over, and this may take ten years.

- ***Outward migration of Government employees***
Government facilities are an important asset in any downtown. These facilities are relatively stable anchors, and their employees support downtown retail and restaurants. However, since September 11, many downtown federal facilities have been looking to relocate to green-field sites. Executive Orders 12072 and 13006 have been less frequently observed in recent years, but an opportunity exists with the new administration to advocate for maintaining federal offices in downtown and in historic buildings.
- ***The BOK Center and Ballpark are seen as “transformational projects”***
These once-in-a-generation projects are both of a size and scope, and are architecturally significant enough to transform a whole section of downtown Tulsa. If the area between the two projects and surrounding areas are planned carefully and developed effectively, the leverage factor should be significant and could be transformational.
- ***New light rail is projected***
A new light rail line projected to enter downtown from the west and connect the BOK Center, arts district and new ballpark could be the beginning of a 21st century transportation system for Tulsa. Cities that have developed light rail projects are seeing significant mixed-use development around transit stations. The panel expects the same to happen in downtown Tulsa once the light rail project is operational.
- ***Opportunity to focus on affordable housing***

Most of the housing recently developed in downtown Tulsa is aimed at middle to upper income residents, which is a pattern most US cities have employed in the past decade. This is a sound strategy, because it is much easier to establish housing on the high end and then bring affordable housing in afterwards, rather than the other way around. However, it is time for Tulsa to establish an affordable housing strategy that combines units in the core area with other units in adjoining neighborhoods. Panelists saw great potential in these adjoining neighborhoods.

- ***Downtown contributes much more in taxes than it receives***
Panelists are convinced that downtown Tulsa, like virtually every downtown in America, contributes more to the city in tax revenues than it consumes in services. IDA intends over the next year or two to develop a methodology for calculating the net fiscal impact of downtown. Once this is done in Tulsa, it can be the basis for strengthening resident support for continued investment in downtown.
- ***DTU is a good source for Downtown housing information***
Panelists heard from more than one interviewee that DTU is a good source for housing information, both in terms of available units to buy or lease, and in terms of opportunities to develop housing.
- ***Lack of apparent connections between parking and economic development suggest opportunities are being missed***
While the City of Tulsa has made strides in terms of more efficient parking operations and construction of well-designed parking structures, panelists believe the connection between a downtown economic development strategy and a parking strategy is tenuous and see an opportunity to strengthen and leverage this connection.

Other Observations

- ***Homelessness perceived as a problem***
While homelessness in downtown Tulsa is not the problem it is in cities like Los Angeles and Washington DC, it is a problem that needs attention. Chronic homelessness is a problem, obviously, for those who are homeless; but it can also be a problem for downtown businesses, workers, and visitors. Panhandling is also perceived as a

related problem; however, it should be noted that not all homeless people panhandle, and not all panhandlers are homeless.

- ***The image of Tulsa is a “blank” for many people***
Tulsa at one time had a strong image, both for local residents and others, because of its heritage as the headquarters city for the oil industry. Over time, the companies that pioneered that industry have moved away or been acquired by other entities. Today, Tulsa’s image beyond its region is murky at best. Creating a new image based on a new vision for the city and for the downtown is seen as critical to the ultimate success of this community.
- ***The Jazz Hall of Fame is an asset***
While jazz is not something most Americans associate with Tulsa, this is one of the surprising and appealing assets visitors should have the opportunity to discover. Jazz is now recognized as a timeless genre and one that appeals strongly to demographic segments with discretionary income. The Hall of Fame can become even more of a regional and national draw than it is today.
- ***Opportunity to reach out to neighborhood organizations***
Panelists were surprised to hear that the connections between downtown in general and DTU in particular are somewhat weak and infrequent. Neighborhood representatives with whom the panel met expressed both affection for downtown and a sense of disconnectedness. However, they also expressed openness to increased cooperation and mutual support with downtown.
- ***Young people want to be “in the room”***
Somewhat related to the sentiments expressed by neighborhood residents, younger people in general feel excluded from the downtown decision-making process and clearly want to be “in the room.” They believe they have the ideas and the energy to make downtown a much livelier and more vibrant place. DTU has the potential to be more inclusive, but it needs to make special efforts to reach out in both formal and informal ways to younger people.

Findings and Analysis

- **Downtown Tulsa is a regional asset and is the “Heart and Soul” of the community. There is a great opportunity for Tulsa leaders –**

both public and private – to change the course of downtown dramatically and for decades to come.

- **Downtown Tulsa may be a decade behind many comparable communities in terms of downtown revitalization. This certainly has negative aspects, but positive ones as well.**
- **There does not seem to be a shared vision/direction for downtown Tulsa. Community leaders seem to be uncertain as to who should be the “keeper of the vision.”**
- **Tulsa should be proud of choosing quality in design for major projects like the BOK Center and the Ballpark.**
- **Downtown is the stage on which we celebrate our community. Every day is a new performance. Downtown is too often a “dark stage”.**
- **Downtown has “great bones”. A remarkable collection of art deco buildings, a stunning City Hall and other physical features are the foundation on which to build.**
- **Downtown Tulsa is still more auto-oriented than pedestrian-oriented (e.g. one-way streets, too many lanes, etc.), but is moving in the right direction.**
- **Downtown residential development is beginning. Quality projects are coming on-line – but more, much more – are needed. An overall strategy is needed.**
- **Likewise, a comprehensive strategy for integrating transit (light rail), parking and economic/TOD is needed.**
- **The IDL is a physical and perceived barrier. Downtown needs to do more to connect to adjoining neighborhoods. These are an under-utilized resource.**
- **People are both frustrated and enthusiastic about Downtown. Young entrepreneurs need more support and inclusion. Other groups – Chamber, CVB, Tulsa Now, Greenwood, neighborhood**

associations – should be invited to partner with Downtown. Some feel excluded.

- **DTU has served Downtown for more than 50 years and is led by a high level Board of committed individuals. It continues to deliver services as specified in its contract. But there is both a growing need and desire to change focus and direction.**
- **Connectivity is an issue and should be addressed before major new projects (i.e. Library) are sited. Strong attention is needed to building connections and filling in gaps**

Panel Recommendations

The panel concluded its process by developing a set of ten specific recommendations. These are high-priority actions, many that can be undertaken in the next year. Some, like a new downtown library, obviously are longer-range, but are part of an overall rethinking of downtown Tulsa's future. The ten recommendations are:

1. Create a “Downtown Coordinating Council”

- City and downtown organization staff should coordinate the meetings and actions of the Downtown Coordinating Council (DCC).
- The DCC should be made up of top-level representatives from:
 - The City of Tulsa
 - DTU
 - The Chamber of Commerce
 - CVB
 - Other key entities (TBD)
- The DCC should meet monthly, in order to ensure regular action and coordination.
- The DCC should be driven by an action agenda; this should not be just a discussion forum.
- DCC should convene quarterly meetings with a broader downtown constituency in order to keep everyone in the loop.
- DCC should be the vehicle that clarifies the roles, responsibilities and authority of the key entities leading downtown's renaissance.

- 2. Downtown Coordinating Council Immediate Agenda**
 - DCC, once constituted, should set in motion:
 - A vision and direction-setting process
 - A series of strategy developments, addressing:
 1. Housing
 2. Economic Development/Parking
- 3. The City of Tulsa should enact a short-term (6-12 months) continuation of the current contract with DTU (if necessary) to make sure that NEW contract is VISION/STRATEGY driven. Options once the vision and strategy are in place, the City can determine whether it should contract with:**
 - DTU
 - Hybrid
 - New DT Organization
 - **The IDA Advisory Panel strongly recommends a well-financed, independent, business-led downtown organization.**
- 4. The City of Tulsa, in conjunction with the downtown organizations, should develop funding plan and commitments, and a downtown “tool kit” of enhanced, coordinated and publicized incentives for both housing and economic development.**
- 5. The City of Tulsa should examine merging the Public Parking Authority with the downtown organization to tightly coordinate parking and economic development. The downtown organization can staff, manage and direct parking activities.**
- 6. Tulsa should locate future major projects close to the core rather than on the IDL. People will attend events, get in the car and go home otherwise.**
- 7. There has been talk of a new downtown public library. Central libraries can be major anchors for any downtown. Tulsa should re-conceptualize the downtown library, and beginning planning to build a world-class facility located in or near the heart of downtown.**
- 8. A cooperative effort of the public and private sector should be organized to create an “Art Deco” interpretive center in**

downtown (in one of the great buildings). Films, interactive experience, walking tours, historic archives and other elements could make this a focal point for any visit to Tulsa.

9. Working with the county and state, the City of Tulsa should accelerate progress on conversion of one-way to two-way streets.

10. The downtown organization should program the “downtown stage”. One way to do this would be to engage the Arts Council for a 52-week schedule with \$104K for incentive/seed funding.

Conclusion

Downtown Tulsa is full of surprises – many of them positive, some not so positive. A first-time visitor to Tulsa has to be surprised and impressed with the quality of the architecture, from the historic art deco office buildings and the new BOK Center to City Hall and a number of smaller historic commercial buildings. Downtown has some nascent entertainment districts – the Brady and Blue Dome districts; and other districts with potential for unique offerings, like the Greenwood district. Downtown is clean, by most city standards, and the public environment is generally in good shape.

The lack of pedestrian traffic, especially on weekends, and the lack of auto traffic most of the time suggests downtown Tulsa is still underperforming when compared with most cities its size. While there are occasional signs of activity, such as the marathon that occurred during the panel visit, and during Mayfest, downtown Tulsa is still some distance from the vibrant downtown most residents and downtown leaders would like to see.

Tulsa, however, has a remarkable opportunity that few American cities can claim. It can learn from the experiments and failures of many other cities over the past two or three decades, and it can create what is truly the first American city of the 21st century. It is large enough to be a significant player; but not so large that its problems are unmanageable.

To take advantage of this singular opportunity, Tulsa must find a way to build a new and better kind of cooperation between the public and private sector. The Mayor recognizes this issue, as do the leaders of DTU. Nearly

everyone the panel talked to agreed that public-private sector cooperation leaves much to be desired.

The upcoming business improvement district contract renewal offers Tulsa the opportunity to re-think, re-engage, and re-construct the public-private sector relationship. The core recommendation the panel makes is the creation of a new Downtown Coordinating Council. This organizational vehicle should give everyone interested in downtown a new way to accomplish downtown's business – a way that is both effective and efficient.

Beyond this mechanism for cooperation, both the City and the downtown organization need to reach out to younger people, both entrepreneurs and residents, and include their voices in planning and execution. There is much energy and talent waiting to be tapped – and no one seems to be doing it.

Finally, all of this organizational effort and outreach will not reach the heights Tulsa is capable of without a compelling and unifying vision. This vision must be built on what is truly and authentically Tulsa – it cannot be a cute “brand” or vision dreamed up and superimposed.

We hope, we as panelists and downtown experts, have the opportunity to return to Tulsa in the next few years and see a downtown that is well on the way to achieving its true potential.

Addendum: Panelist Bios

Dave Feehan has devoted a 40-year career to rebuilding and revitalizing cities. He has directed downtown programs in Des Moines, Detroit, and Kalamazoo, and neighborhood development programs in Pittsburgh and Minneapolis. He helped found and served as the first director of the Citizens League of Southwestern Pennsylvania, a Pittsburgh-based regional public policy organization. He has been active in IDA for 20 years, and the programs he has directed have won several awards, from IDA, the International Parking Institute, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. He has served IDA as a board member and officer, most recently as chairman. He was appointed by the board to serve as president and chief executive officer in April, 2001.

Under Dave's leadership, IDA has set records for attendance at conferences, and has seen steady growth in other areas.

Dave maintained an active consulting practice before coming to IDA, assisting a number of cities, including New York, Chicago, Las Vegas, and Miami Beach. He is also the co-author of two books and has written numerous published articles. He plans to resume his consulting practice when he steps down as president of IDA in the summer of 2009, and is currently working on two books.

Dave holds a Masters Degree in Social Work Planning and Administration from the University of Pittsburgh. He has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Iowa and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN.

Jane Jenkins has recently accepted the position of the President and CEO of Downtown Oklahoma City Inc. and was the Executive Director of the Downtown Boulder Business Improvement District. Under her leadership, Downtown Boulder has developed and implemented a consistent brand identity and maintained a 95 percent retail occupancy rate in the face of a declining economy and competition from a new regional center. In cooperation with partners from the City of Boulder, the Downtown Boulder team has won three International Downtown Association (IDA) Downtown Achievement Awards. Prior to this, Jane was the Director of the Southwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation where she developed a marketing plan that increased National Trust visibility in the region and successfully advocated for retaining preservation enhancements as part of the federal Transportation Equity Act. She was previously the downtown manager for Denton, Texas, a Great American Main Street Award winning city. Jane began her downtown management career in 1986 as one of the first managers in the Oklahoma Main Street Program. Currently Chair-Elect for the IDA Board of Directors, Jane is the immediate past-president of the Colorado Community Revitalization Association and served as a board member of the Texas Downtown Association. Working through the National Main Street Center, Jane has been a consultant to many downtown programs across the US and Canada. She has also served on R/UDAT teams for the AIA and been a member of IDA advisory panels. As a former high school educator, Jane was named Teacher of the Year at Union High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Texas in Denton.

Dennis Burns

Mr. Burns is the Vice President of the Studies and Operations Consulting Group for Carl Walker, Inc., a national parking design and consulting firm. Mr. Burns has over 25 years of parking

operations, management and consulting experience. Mr. Burns' particular expertise is in parking master planning and management consulting. He is the author of over 200 parking studies. He has published extensively in several professional journals and books including the International Parking Institutes' "Parking Management - The Next Level" and the International Downtown Associations' publication "Making Business Districts Work". His particular areas of expertise include: parking master planning, municipal parking strategic planning, feasibility studies, supply/demand analysis, shared parking analysis, parking management and revenue control technologies, operational audits, and organizational development.

Russell Claus grew up in Rosewood, a small town near Brisbane, Australia. He emigrated to the US in 1992. He holds a BS in Environmental Studies from Griffith University (Brisbane, Australia), and a Masters in City Planning (MIT 1994). Russell has worked for the City of Oklahoma City since 1996 and is the City's Planning Director. Prior to that, Russell had several different roles, all focused on the revitalization of downtown. Russell began his career in Oklahoma City overseeing reconstruction and economic recovery efforts in the wake of the Murrah building bombing. Prior to emigrating to the U.S., Russell worked for the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Brisbane City Council. Russell played an instrumental role in facilitating the adoption of quality of life goals as the primary driver for Brisbane's 2020 plan, and is elated with the impact the plan's implementation has had on Brisbane's development and quality of life. Prior to moving to Oklahoma, Russell worked for the Nature Conservancy in New York and for Pierce County Planning in Washington State. Russell is a board member of Oklahoma City Urban Land Institute District Council, Sustainable OKC, the Downtown OKC BID Board, and the Capitol Medical Zoning Board. He is a strong advocate of vibrant urban environments, equitable communities, and sustainability initiatives, and is working to have these become key foundations for Oklahoma City's growth. Russell is an ardent supporter of social justice, environmental protection, quality education, global awareness, and children's rights.