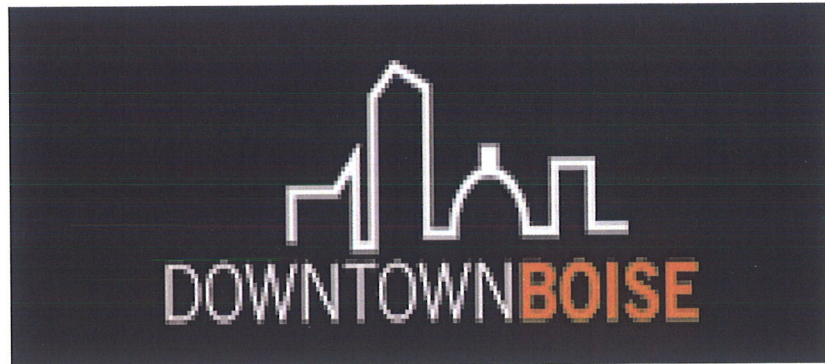




Downtown Boise Association



**International Downtown Association
Advisory Panel Report
Downtown Boise Association
Boise, Idaho
October 18-21, 2008**



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Introduction

The Downtown Boise Association (DBA) in association with the Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC) commissioned the International Downtown Association (IDA) to engage an Advisory Panel to help the DBA assess its current situation and make recommendations regarding possible new paths for the DBA to travel. The Advisory Panel was also charged with assessing the current conditions in Downtown Boise with regard to barriers to balanced development and recommending strategies and tactics to mitigate and better manage the conflicts between uses in a thriving downtown.

The following team was selected based upon their organizational development experience in communities similar to Boise. The panel represents more than one hundred years of collective experience in place making and downtown development.

Advisory Panel Members

Dave Feehan* - President, International Downtown Association, Washington, DC
Dan Carmody - President, Eastern Market Corporation, Detroit, MI
Scott Knies – Executive Director San Jose Downtown Association, San Jose, CA
Dave Anderson – President, Downtown Community Partnership, Fargo SD – Morehead, MN
Mike Edwards – President, Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, Pittsburgh, PA

The Advisory Panel was directed to investigate two key issues:

Evolution of the Downtown Boise Association

Boise, Downtown Boise, and the Downtown Boise Association have all enjoyed significant success over the past fifteen years. The region, the city, and downtown have all experienced exceptional growth and Boise regularly shows up in the ratings for being one of the best places to live in America.

Despite recent success or perhaps in part because of that success, the Downtown Boise Association struggles to keep pace with growth. Over the past few years DBA has strengthened its core competencies and become much stronger in collaborating with important partners but key organizational income sources are either subject to wide fluctuation based upon weather such as special event income or threatened by the weakening of the national economy as is the case with sponsorship sales. Moreover, the DBA does not have the resources to extend current services provided to a more widely developed downtown or to implement new initiatives needed to sustain downtown growth.

The Advisory Panel was charged with looking at the current situation and identifying program development opportunities and funding alternatives to sustain and grow the DBA.

Continued Balanced Development

Downtown Boise is becoming a sought after place to live while it has retained its dominance of the regional office market and strengthened its role as the regions place to party. These different kinds of uses are essential to the creation of a bona fide 24 hour downtown yet such diversity of use brings

inherent conflict - noise and waste management have grown as concerns as downtown Boise has become more successful.

Background

Regional Economy

Few cities in the United States have enjoyed the kind of explosive growth that Boise Metropolitan Area has recently experienced. From a 1990 population of 295,851 to the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau estimate of 587,689, Boise MSA has enjoyed a 98.6% growth, nearly doubling in size during this period.

Further, given the dynamic growth of Boise State University, the stability of serving as the state capital, and the diversity of its regional employment base, Boise seems well positioned for future economic prosperity though it is unlikely to continue its high rate of growth given retrenchment of the national economy.

Organizational History

The Downtown Boise Association was formed in 1987 “to develop and promote Downtown Boise as a unique place to shop, work, and enjoy; to bring together committed people, creative ideas, public and private resources for the purpose of building an exciting downtown for our capital city.”

Over the years DBA has developed these core programs:

- **Clean and Attractive**
Successful downtowns attract people, people generate litter, and the DBA works to pick up the litter and empty trash containers so that downtown remains litter free. Further, the DBA maintains more than 400 flower planters to make downtown a more beautiful place.
- **Safety**
Sustainable downtowns provide a feeling of safety for its residents, employees, and customers. Strong collaboration between the DBA, local law enforcement officials, and business owners has helped keep Downtown Boise a safe place as it has grown.
- **Special Events**
The Alive After Five summer concert series, along with other events produced by the DBA, provides the animation that helps make downtown a convivial and compelling place. These events attract thousands – customer traffic. The Alive After Five summer concert series especially benefits food and beverage businesses. More importantly though, events help foster a sense of community for the city and strengthens downtown’s role as the convening place within the region - benefits that all business and property owners enjoy.
- **Marketing and Communications**
The Downtown Boise Gift Card program, recently selected for a Downtown Achievement Award by the International Downtown Association, is the flagship program that markets and promotes downtown businesses. Other marketing efforts include a downtown maps and business directory that make it easy for newcomers to discover Downtown Boise.

- **Advocacy**

The DBA has also become a key advocate for downtown and has built good relations with both public and private sector partners to vet emerging downtown issues and address property and business owner concerns.

Key Partners

Community development in general, and downtown revitalization in particular, are team sports and Boise has built a very good team of organizations dedicated to moving downtown forward. In addition to the DBA, these key partners are engaged in the process of bettering downtown:

Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC)

An adequately funded organization with great staff capacity enables creative intervention in a wide variety of projects. The CCDC is a talented community-based development entity that augments and supports private investment by providing a sound planning framework, building a robust public realm, initiating catalyst projects, and helping find creative solutions to filling the funding gaps of projects of all sizes.

City of Boise

Capable and committed leadership from both elected and appointed officials has powered much of downtown success by providing the requisite public investment in facilities, infrastructure, and services that gives developers and businesses confidence to invest in downtown.

Mayor Bieter highlighted the progressive city approach by nailing the junction faced by the Downtown Boise Association and Downtown as both strive to move from good to great. "Fixing the roof while the sun is shining", as Mayor Bieter observed is a great metaphor for the situation downtown Boise faces.

With its recent profound success, Boise might be forgiven for being a bit complacent but it is inspirational to observe city leadership that understands how fragile success is and that the job of a successful community is never done.

Ada County Highway District

The maintenance and improvement of downtown streets is primarily the responsibility of the State Department of Transportation and the Ada County Highway District. This unique situation creates challenges for local direction and planning but in general the streets are well maintained.

Based upon two days of touring and inspecting downtown and most importantly listening to downtown Boise stakeholders discuss issues, recent trends, concerns, and dreams the Advisory Panel offers these observations with regard to the current situation of the DBA and Downtown Boise:

Good News - Positive Observations

- **Relatively clean, safe, & attractive**

Boise stakeholders seem to see the glass as half empty and focus on the negative issues with regard to litter, safety, and overall quality of the built environment. While there is work to be done, Downtown Boise compared to peers is relatively clean, safe, and attractive.

- **Strong city leadership**

Clearly the Mayor has a vision for a more successful downtown and has the leadership skills to communicate that vision and build support for the necessary public involvement. While the Advisory Team did not meet all members of the City Council, those we did meet with shared the Mayor's enthusiasm for downtown which indicates strong consensus among elected leaders for downtown.

Further, key staff members from a variety of city departments are embedded in the downtown revitalization process and are making significant contributions such as the Police Captain who is being very proactive towards mitigating the late night club and bar related safety issues.

- **Parking is well supplied**

Both on-street parking and off-street parking is generally plentiful and reasonably priced. While there is no overarching parking problem in Downtown Boise, there are always a wide variety of parking issues in an evolving, successful downtown. Complex parking systems, like Boise's, need to be regularly tweaked to maximize the utilization of this key asset as downtown uses and users shift.

- **Strong regional economy**

Robust regional growth has given downtown a strong tail wind but even more noteworthy is that downtown has increased its significance during this time of explosive growth. Often downtowns and adjacent neighborhoods decline as a metro area grows. Boise understands the critical importance of downtown to the continued growth of the region.

- **Growing residential population**

Downtown Boise living is showing excellent growth consistent with other downtowns that have added downtown housing as the public realm has been enhanced and as the hospitality and event programming have made downtown more exciting.

- **Proximity to BSU**

Boise State University's location adjacent to downtown has been a great stimulant for growing downtown and it should only get stronger as the two grow more closely together in the years ahead. The pool of creativity and youthful talent at BSU can provide the energy to propel downtown to greatness.

- **Adequately funded and capable development entity (CCDC)**

As noted earlier, the CCDC is a very capable community-based development organization that has excellent leadership and the resources to continue downtown momentum.

- **Proximity to river and river trail system and foothills**

Downtown Boise is emerging as a great urban, mixed-use district. What makes downtown Boise truly compelling is the proximity of great natural amenities to this cool urban place. Walking or biking to a regional river trail system and/or the foothills provides for a great quality of life.

- **Huge market share of regional night life**
Downtown Boise is the place to go for evening food, beverage, and entertainment. In planning their evenings out, Boise residents need only concern themselves with when to hook up with their friends because they already know where they are meeting.
- **Office market is strongest in the region**
High occupancy rates provide strong indication that Downtown Boise has retained its role as the largest office market in the region. Additions of new space remain gradual which is sustainable given the national economic slump.
- **Good retail sector for a city its size**
Independent hospitality businesses are more plentiful than independent retailers but there are some notable gems including a used book store and a record store that many cities the size of Boise would kill for. A stand alone Macy's is no small achievement either.
- **Great dining and outdoor cafes**
The quantity and the quality of dining options and the spectacular collection of outdoor cafes provide downtown Boise with a strong identity. The concentration of food and beverage establishments adds great vigor to downtown.
- **Downtown is complex, evolving, and growing**
Those who view the complicated mix of uses as a cacophony may never be enticed to live downtown but for those who hear an urban symphony, this yeasty mix of uses is the game changer that makes downtown very attractive for living, working, visiting, and investing.
- **Zoning and parking requirements support organic mixed use development**
Downtown land is divided into relatively few zoning classes which promote mixed use and offer few parking requirements. Boise has exactly the kind of zoning framework that is conducive to mixed-use development.
- **1.4% for arts program provides a means for improving the built environment**
The great examples of public art found throughout Downtown Boise are no accident. The dedication of a portion of building project costs to the arts provides a strong institutional framework to support both the arts and artists.

Not – So- Good News – Challenges facing Downtown Boise

- **One dimensional night life**
Despite a good roster of restaurants, the prevailing perception of Downtown Boise after dark is derived from its strong cluster of night clubs and large crowds of younger revelers. Encouraging a wider variety of night time uses is important in order to sustain downtown given that the night club business is especially trendy - today's hot cluster of clubs can cool quickly.
- **Complex sound problem**
Another version of the famous chicken and egg problem, the vibrancy of special events, restaurants, and night clubs made downtown more attractive as a place to live but as more

and more people choose to live downtown that very noise that attracted new residents becomes problematic for residents seeking a good night's sleep.

This problem is encountered in all successful mixed-use downtowns. As Downtown Boise evolves into an even more successful place with even more diverse uses the noise problem will continue to fester but with effective management the problem can be mitigated.

- **Late night food vendors lack oversight and management**

There is significant entrepreneurial activity on the streets of late night Boise. Street vendors catering to the bar crowd provide a great service to bar owners and bar patrons by providing food to help offset the worst effects of being over served.

While they do provide an essential service they also generate significant litter and do not pay their fair share towards the costs of maintaining and developing a successful business environment.

- **Retail is not concentrated**

While the overall retail offerings downtown are significant the retail sector appears less than the sum of its parts because they are spread throughout downtown and are not as clustered as either restaurants, night-clubs, or office development.

- **Condition of alleys**

The public realm of alleys is very inconsistent. Graffiti which is not a huge problem for downtown can be found in alleys. The use of alleys for delivery vehicles is compromised by the increasing number of dumpsters which forces delivery vehicles to use the front door which creates street traffic problems.

- **Cleaning program is understaffed and underfunded yet downtown is pretty clean**

A number of participants conspire to clean downtown streets and the overall result is that the streets are pretty clean. Moving from good to great or maintaining good as downtown grows requires more staff and stable funding to support the increased level of service.

- **Auto dominated downtown**

Dramatic pedestrian scale success on 8th Street strongly demonstrates Boise can craft urban streets that balance walkers, bikers, autos, and delivery needs. That said the overall impression of downtown is a place dominated by auto traffic.

One way streets, wide arterials, and high travel speeds indicate a focus on getting traffic through downtown as quickly as possible rather than on creating a pedestrian experience that encourages people to linger downtown.

- **Control over streets**

The Ada County Highway District and the State of Idaho both have some involvement in building, maintaining, and managing downtown streets. This complexity increases the need for developing a shared vision about transportation that is more balanced and more sustainable given the spike in bike and bus use since the uptick in gasoline prices last summer.

- **Wide streets divide downtown**
Wide street expanses (Front & Myrtle) serve to sever downtown into disparate parts and reduce the pedestrian flow between sections of downtown.
- **Too many one way streets**
One way streets reduce the visibility of storefronts and the access to specific locations because travel is far less flexible than with two way streets.

Higher travel speeds associated with one-way streets means drivers and passengers do not see as much when they are forced to slow down with two way traffic. In addition, if they miss an address it is far easier to circle back in a two way street system.

- **Supply of parking exceeds demand**
Currently there is an over-supply of parking which is both good and bad news. On one hand an over-supply allows for additional development without the need to build additional parking while on the other, over-supply reduces the price for parking which makes it difficult to finance parking in those projects that do need their own parking.

Observations Suggesting Further Study

- **Parking economics**
The Advisory Panel did not have the time to adequately research current parking economics to make meaningful recommendations regarding parking strategies. Boise and IDA participated in an earlier Advisory Panel regarding parking and Boise has utilized the services of one of the most qualified parking consultants for a number of studies. Continuing to hone the parking system is an on-going task as downtown evolves.
- **Connection between the Boise brand - one of America's Most Livable Cities and lack of green strategies**
There are many great things about Boise and about Downtown Boise but there are a few disconnects between Boise as one of America's Most Livable Cities and current reality especially around the topic of environmental sustainability.

Sustainability is more than constructing new buildings to LEED standards. Two critical sustainability issues for communities are transportation and waste management. In both of these areas downtown could become Boise's laboratory to showcase a more sound ecological approach.

Balancing the downtown street system to promote walking, biking, use of public transit will lead to increased use of these forms of transportation not just for recreation but for everyday transportation needs.

Revising waste collection practices can help address noise issues caused by early morning garbage trucks and landfill costs by increasing composting and recycling rather than hauling.

- **Panhandling seems insignificant**
We heard that panhandling was a problem in downtown Boise but we observed very little pan handling or other nuisance crimes. We were not in Boise long enough to adequately survey the actual scale of the problem.
- **Crime rate is average to low yet safety concerns linger**
Downtown is relatively loud and large evening crowds assemble. Given these simple facts downtown may always have a perception of being less safe than a quiet residential street. Continued evaluation of crime statistics and annual downtown customer survey work is needed to establish solid benchmark data and to measure changes in safety perceptions over time.
- **Tree management is chaotic and planters lack year round plantings**
For a city proud to be called “The City of Trees”, the care and maintenance of downtown street trees is chaotic and not well executed. The need to water trees make tree maintenance more complicated but developing a better system of tree maintenance helps build the sustainability brand while directly improving the look of downtown. (Expand on the issue of the Planters)

Downtown Boise Association Issues

The Advisory Team offers the following general observations about the Downtown Boise Association before making recommendations about how to grow the program.

The Good News Regarding the DBA

- **Leveraging of current assessment**
The DBA over the years has developed an ability to augment its assessment income in the form of both cash and in-kind support. The DBA has proven its entrepreneurial mettle by earning significant income from special events and has broadened the financial base of supporters by increasing sponsorship income.
- **Supportive property owners**
Downtown has a relatively small number of property owners and the DBA has earned their respect with its judicious use of resources. Further, most property owners agree that additional resources are needed to maintain current service levels, expand those services into a larger geographical area, and add any desired new services.
- **Capable staff**
Stakeholders are right to be proud of DBA staff. They are highly professional and dedicated to working hard and growing their skill sets and the organizations capacity.
- **Good relations with CCDC and City**
The DBA Board of Directors and staff have developed very strong relationships with both the City of Boise and the CCDC which has not always been the case. Excellent partnership and collaboration is needed to tackle the complicated challenges that lie ahead.
- **Strong core competencies**

The DBA has developed strong event programming capabilities and has done an excellent job of cleaning downtown with limited resources.

Not-So-Good News Regarding the DBA

- **Many partners not sufficiently engaged**

While the DBA is well-connected to its two most important partners, stronger relations can be built with others that have important roles to play in downtown development such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Ada County Highway District.

- **Lack of coordinated vision for Downtown**

There has been a great deal of project specific and topical planning conducted with regard to specific aspects of downtown revitalization but there remains a general lack of a coordinated strategy to guide downtown revitalization. The lack of consensus regarding convention center expansion or relocation and how to best integrate BSU into downtown are big issues that would benefit from a larger, shared vision for Downtown Boise. One project that might be included in this vision is a new downtown library. Libraries have become important anchors in many downtowns, for several reasons. They attract repeat visitors; they attract both parents and children; they provide a neutral, comfortable meeting place to discuss even the most contentious community issues; and they generally create few conflicts with other uses.

- **Dialogue lacking between residents and the DBA**

The lack of a convening organization to vet downtown residents concerns was evident from how receptive many of our focus group attendees were to the forums made available as part of the Advisory Team visit.

Given the increase in downtown residents more regular communication with and between the DBA and residents is needed. The DBA does address this in their strategic plan. One issue that arises in most BIDs is whether or not to assess residential properties. Some districts simply exclude them from the district, but this creates a “Swiss cheese” effect. Others include them but exempt them for assessment. Still others assess apartment buildings as profitable ventures, while exempting condos. If DBA seeks to assess residential properties, it would be wise to convene a residents’ group first and attempt to show the benefits to residential properties from the BID.

- **Insufficient funding reduces leverage with partners**

The minimal financial resources of the DBA diminish its perceived importance with some partners. The development work of the CCDC is often more high profile than the day-to-day work of the DBA but the work of both organizations is needed to sustain success in downtown Boise.

- **Unpredictable funding sources**

The DBA is one weather catastrophe removed from financial failure. Long term financial sustainability needs more dependable funding that that offered by beer sales and sponsorship sales.

Findings and Conclusions

Balanced Development

Good to Great

Boise is well positioned to move from being a very good downtown to becoming a great downtown. It has considerable assets that, properly marshaled, can yield a compelling place. Elements include an emerging built environment, organizational strength, public and private sector leadership, and a healthy regional economy.

Balancing the Big Three

The first lesson of greatness is to focus on your strengths. Weaknesses must be mitigated but greatness comes more from maximizing your strong points than by minimizing your weaker ones.

Boise strong office market, its dynamic hospitality cluster, and its emerging mass of downtown housing are the three legs of downtown growth. Managing the conflicts between these three uses is essential if Boise is to build on these three legs for long term success.

- **Address potential conflicts now**

There is no solution to the issues of noise and litter as downtowns accommodate different uses. The best that can be achieved is a system that controls noise and litter at lower levels than would be possible without intervention.

- Finding an “acceptable” level of noise depends upon whether the person is a club patron, a club owner, a band member, or a loft resident. Some general parameters can be set with regard to the hours that outdoor speakers, outdoor stages, and open storefronts of music clubs can be operated.

At a certain point in the evening it is appropriate for music to move indoors. There will still be crowd noise and the vibration caused by indoor music but exterior music should have limits.

- **Noise, regulation vs. collaboration**

The DBA should seek to build a collaborative culture between downtown club owners and residents. Improving communication between residents and club managers and owners helps identify the minutia of noise and litter problems that can assist with identifying specific remedies.

Training efforts in partnership with the Boise Police Department can help club managers and owners better manage crowds and noise. Developing a point system that can impact liquor license renewal is a way to build discipline into the system.

Mayor Bieter was correct to express concerns about taking the fun out of the party but a nuanced, steady, and fair approach to noise control can take some of the excess out of the party that permits for a much more sustainable good time.

- **Sound Design**

Land and building use are in constant state of flux and developing a more concentrated club district should be avoided as should residential only districts. Downtown is intrinsically mixed use and that tradition should be extended to include the mixing of entertainment and housing.

To minimize long term negative impacts new hospitality and residential development should be designed with sound attenuation firmly in mind.

Incorporating sound attenuation in new residential development is a prudent investment. Situating sleeping spaces in quieter places makes good design sense. Since neighboring uses cannot be guaranteed over the useful life of a residential project the owner is well served to do what he can to reduce the potential impact of noise whenever possible.

Any venue seeking a liquor license should be required to submit a sound reduction plan that seeks to capture as much sound as possible within the premise. Vestibule entrances not only keep cold or hot air separated but keep noise from exiting a space far better than a single entry door. While none of the panelists knew of specific downtown sound reduction plans, and developing one would be beyond the scope of the Advisory Panel, IDA has a program called Brain Trust for determining the answers to questions like this. Brain Trust will be utilized after the panel process is completed.

Both residential and hospitality developers can reduce noise issues by installing glazing that reduces noise transmission.

- **Vendors**

Late night street vendors are a source of both noise and litter complaint. Carefully locating vendors in areas to reduce their impact on adjacent residential development seems much more feasible since the fixed investment of vendors is very little

More control over the late night vendors is crucial. Regulating where and when the vendors can operate and increasing the fee structure of vendors to help cover the cost of litter pick up is recommended.

These operators are very entrepreneurial and they are benefiting from a relatively low cost structure. They have low fixed costs and they take great advantage of the crowds that come downtown to businesses that have invested millions.

While they provide a useful service, they should be more closely monitored and managed and assessed more aggressive fees to help offset the costs they cause others to bear for litter control.

- **Late Night / Early Morning Trash Pick Up Noise**

Another relatively easy problem to fix is the early morning clanging of dumpsters. Given that the city controls commercial waste removal it can attach acceptable hours to the next contract awarded for downtown trash hauling. Similarly, opening the landfill for Sunday deposits should be explored as a way to reduce the over the weekend trash build up that occurs because the landfill does not accept Sunday deliveries.

- **Alley and Street Congestion**

A number of problems are caused by use of the streets for deliveries. Essentially as alleys have become clogged with dumpsters, truck deliveries are increasingly using streets for deliveries. This contributes to street congestion that could be lessened with these interventions:

- **Scheduling to non-peak times**

DBA should initiate communication with downtown property owners and tenants about working with their suppliers to schedule deliveries during non-peak times.

- **Model waste program**

Shared compactors and the segregation of waste streams to encourage recycling and composting can help reduce the space dedicated to dumpsters and the noise generated by waste removal trucks. The DBA should widely promote the model waste program now under development should the City decide to implement it.

- **Split use loading zones**

Designation of some parking spaces as loading zones during specified times of the day or days of the week can get trucks out of travel lanes and help to reduce peak drive time congestion.

Connectivity Vs. Accessibility

The other improvement in balance that is needed to assure long term success for Downtown Boise is between improving connectivity without adversely affecting downtown's accessibility.

- **Convert One Way Street to Two-Way Traffic**

Wide expanse of streets and six lanes of traffic effectively serve to divide downtown into quadrants and destroy pedestrian connectivity between the quadrants. In addition, storefront businesses suffer from limited visibility because traffic moves so fast and it is not easy to double back if you drive past a business.

Most traffic engineering research indicates that conversion of paired one way streets to two way configurations slows vehicle speeds, reduces accidents, and increases travel times.

- **Add Angle Parking Where Possible**

The lowest cost way to reduce the impact of over sized streets is to add angle parking that narrows the street dedicated to travel lanes making pedestrian crossings much safer. Further, back in angle parking provides for one of the safest configurations for bike lanes since it provides the driver with the best view of approaching bicyclists and the door opening problem of parallel parking is removed.

- **Municipal control of city streets, alleys, and sidewalks**

For long term success, Downtown Boise needs a balanced approach to sharing the public right of way between cars, pedestrians, mass transit, bicyclists, and delivery trucks. One example is to create angled parking and a two way street grid.

Clean But Could Be Cleaner

Compared to its peer cities, Boise does a good job of cleaning and landscaping. Downtown looks pretty good except in the dead of winter when the planters become oversized ashtrays.

Recommendations to get cleaner include:

- **Plantings twice per year**
Instead of one planting per year, the planters should either be planted twice per year and/or be removed from downtown during winter months. Many cities plant on a three times per year cycle with a spring, summer, and winter planting that keep planters looking good year round. Boise, with minimal additional funding, can expand the number of planters for consistency throughout an expanded downtown core and add one additional planting while removing the planters during winter months.
- **Graffiti and snow removal needs**
Fine tuning the downtown experience should also include prompt removal of graffiti as it is committed and fine tuning the snow removal services.
- **Tree Maintenance**
As “The City of Trees”, Boise needs to show a bit more tree love. Improved tree maintenance throughout downtown, including more frequent pruning and watering could be coordinated by the DBA with financial assistance.

Maintain Three Strong Markets

As noted above, Boise enjoys three strong markets in its downtown. The CCDC works diligently to help finance and build new projects and the City of Boise focuses on the attraction and retention of large employers but no one is focused on keeping existing office, retail, and hospitality space filled.

- **Recruitment and Retention**
With national economic trends faltering and retail and office markets weakening, it is critical for Downtown Boise to have a stronger effort for recruiting and retaining downtown businesses. No other organization in Boise is recruiting specifically for downtown and no other downtown organization is working to retain businesses.
- **Strengthen Clusters and Maintain Balance**
In addition, DBA could lead efforts to strengthen downtown clustering and help maintain the balanced development of office and nightlife sectors
- **Added Value**
Lastly, a greater role in leading downtown recruiting and retention efforts provides an ideal new component for DBA that delivers real value to people who are paying an increased assessment

Expand Boise Brand

Downtown can be a key link to better connect Boise emergence as one of “America’s Best Places to Live” and its “City of Trees” heritage. Enhanced civic focus on sustainability can drive downtown revitalization by:

- **Strategic planning with all branches of the tree**

Development of a more ecological or systems based approach to downtown revitalization requires closer working relationships between the many organizations that contribute economic, social, natural, and human capital to the process.

Beyond building better working relations between more organizations, developing a coherent and shared vision for the future of downtown Boise can be the glue that continues to join disparate organizations around a common agenda and joint action.

- **Safe bike lanes to climbable art to dog parks**

Integrating the pedestrian and human scale into all aspects of downtown development and programming is important. Interaction between people and place should be encouraged across generations.

Examples of such interaction include; Bike lanes should be safe enough to permit an eighty year old great grandmother to take her eight year old great grandson on a trek; public art that is not static but built to encourage play between parent and child; dog parks that encourage single person households to mingle.

- **River and Park connections**

The current system of road cuts downtown off from the great parks and green ways located along the Boise River. Implementing traffic calming measures will reduce the perceived barriers and increase pedestrian activity between downtown and the river.

- **Green the City – green roofs, pocket parks**

Forging closer connection between Downtown and the great nearby natural resources of mountain peaks and river valley is more than road, sidewalk, and path improvements. Downtown Boise should integrate more environmental design into its fabric by adding more pocket parks, green roofs, and enhancing the maintenance of trees and planters as discussed earlier.

- **BSU connections**

The idea of downtown should be expanded to include the Boise State University campus. A variety of connections should be enhanced by improving pedestrian links between the two to operating a shuttle bus between the heart of downtown and the heart of the campus.

- **Way-finding – distinct “villages”**

Downtown Boise is becoming a large downtown and several of its parts are developing distinctive personalities. Way finding signage can bring order to the collection of distinctive villages by building the identity of the sub-district while unifying the parts under the banner of the whole.

Downtown Business Association Funding Expansion Logic

Downtown Boise is evolving and becoming more successful and more complicated. The key organizations helping to facilitate downtown's growth and development must become more complex and their funding model must evolve and provide sufficient resources to allow the organization to meet the growing needs of a growing downtown.

Throughout our discussions with key stakeholders there was strong consensus that there is a need for additional services and that appropriate funding must be secured to allow the DBA to provide such services.

Important Characteristics of New Downtown Funding

Developing a new funding paradigm for the Downtown Boise Association is challenging. The task will be easier if the criteria used to develop new funding models are clear and straight forward.

- **Simplicity**
Any funding scenario should be easy to understand. More complicated funding formulas are difficult to communicate with stakeholders and make agreement more difficult to obtain.
- **Fairness**
Those who benefit from the services provided by the DBA should share in funding the organization.
- **A funding source that grows along with downtown**
Identifying funding sources that grow as downtown grows gives DBA the opportunity to expand its services in incremental fashion that doesn't require having to take the time to develop new funding sources if a static revenue source is selected.
- **Doesn't jeopardize existing base**
The DBA already has in place an accepted formula to garner much of its existing revenue. No new revenue source should cannibalize existing revenues.

DBA BID Funding Recommendations

Businesses

The current assessment district funding is paid by business owners. It should be retained but modified in these ways to be more effective as a funding source:

- **Apply cost of living adjustment (CPI) to current assessment**
The cost of providing services has gone up considerably in the twenty-two years of the DBA's existence but the core assessment has been frozen. Adjusting annually for inflation keeps funding constant in real dollars and is easier for business owners to absorb than larger and more infrequent rate increases.
- **Expand core to recognize recent growth (BODO and Old Boise)**
Per the attached maps the original core area should be expanded to include those areas of recent growth that have become part of the core. Over time the definition of the core area will shift as the center of Boise is redensified – designations between "Core" and "Outer Core" should be periodically evaluated to insure they accurately describe the intensity of the built environment.
- **Convert balance of "Outer Core" to "Outer Zone"**
Simplifying the assessment district from three classes to two classes is sensible. Converting the balance of the "Outer Core" (i.e. Idaho Power and Global Travel blocks) to the "Outer Zone" class and eliminating the "Outer Core" designation should be adopted.

- **Institute a business license program**

The City of Boise currently does not require a business license for someone to establish a business. Adopting a business license program should not be seen as a major revenue source for the city but as a tool to provide more useful information about businesses and business owners.

The fee can be nominal but the impact will be huge if DBA, the Chamber, City Inspectors, and others can better track downtown business.

Property Owners

Property owners have been key investors that have helped grow downtown Boise. They also have benefited from the work of the DBA and are poised to reap even more benefits if the DBA can secure additional funding. One of the benefits that is widely acknowledged is that effective BIDs help make downtown properties more competitive. While suburban office buildings have free parking and are often newer than downtown buildings, they cannot match the other advantages of being downtown, such as walking proximity to restaurants and stores, evening entertainment, and other amenities such as parks and libraries. In the past, downtown office properties suffered from an image – and sometimes a reality – problem. The public spaces surrounding them were unkempt and unappealing, and safety was perceived as an issue as well. Now, BIDs have largely eliminated this disadvantage.

- **Launch a property value based assessment**

Within the same assessment district establish a property value based assessment district. Set rates using peer cities such as Spokane and develop a simple methodology that will generate in the vicinity of \$300,000 to provide the core funding for the expansion of services and service area detailed in Appendix A.

- **Include public buildings**

City, county, state, and other buildings owned by public agencies should make a payment in lieu of taxes to support the added services and service area. These buildings and the employees in these buildings benefit from an increased level of services.

A great downtown is one way a public agency, like private firms, can attract and retain excellent workforce. Public agencies in many other places have seen the benefit of investing in business improvement districts and have agreed to such payments.

- **Capture residential**

With exploding residential growth this sector should be included in the property assessment district. Residents directly benefit from the kind of improved security, appearance, and programming provided by the DBA.

Rental property owners should be taxed at the full rate since their properties in essence are not different than any other income producing property.

Ownership units such as condos should be assessed but at a lower rate than owners of income producing properties.

- **Review provision**

To insure effectiveness and responsiveness build in a provision that causes the new assessment district to be reviewed (measured against a set of criteria) after a period of time. Other cities have inserted such provisions to require the renewal of assessment districts after five or ten years.

Financial Impacts

From a downtown perspective, Boise has a total assessed value in the range of \$300,000,000. An assessment of \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation will generate an annual assessment of \$330,000 to support the expansion of services and service area by the DBA. In a follow-up report, IDA intends to work with DBA staff to determine with more precision how an expanded assessment district might work and what it would cost.

From the perspective of an individual property owner the property value assessment will require an additional investment of \$1,100 per \$1,000,000 of property value.

Conclusion:

All of the panelists were impressed with the overall quality and vibrancy of Boise's downtown. Not many cities throughout the US have a downtown that boasts the nightlife, the residential community, the strong office market, and the unique character that marks and distinguishes downtown Boise.

At the same time, every panelist expressed a desire to see Boise stretch to reach the next plateau – in short, to become the “best in class.” Some in Boise might be willing to settle for a downtown that is in the top quartile, and perhaps in the top tenth, when it comes to downtowns in cities this size. But many downtowns that might compete with Boise for the title of “the best” simply don't have the assets and resources that Boise has.

Reaching for the title of “the best” is a task best led by the DBA. But DBA cannot do this alone. It will need an even stronger commitment from individual property owners, business owners, city officials, and other civic-minded citizens.

This report offers some very specific recommendations. Taken together, these constitute an action plan that panelists feel confident will elevate downtown Boise to a level where the title “best in class” can be secured.