

St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership

INNOVATION

In collaboration with academic, public and private sector leaders, the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership developed the first ever Downtown Development Guide (the Guide) to memorialize our progress and provide a road map for thoughtful growth into the future. The Guide takes the basic concept of a State of Downtown economic benchmark report and expands the data to shape future growth and development in our city center.

Like many other urban centers, St. Petersburg has seen a renaissance of growth and vibrancy during the last decade. While we have seen significant growth in residential development and exponential growth in the experiential dining and retail sectors, we have struggled to attract new office construction. The Guide creates the context for future office development.

This is the first time our community has produced a downtown report like this. Since we had not ever produced a report, there were no expectations among our stakeholders about what the report should include. Consequently, it is more expansive in scope, detail and subject matter than traditional downtown reports.

The Guide's target audience is developers, investors and commercial real estate professionals. A secondary audience is public sector leaders who can help to shape policies that will influence good development and design through forward thinking public policies.

OUTCOME

The Development Guide has been useful in helping our community secure commitments for an estimated 450,000 square feet of new office development. Since we have not had a new office tower built in our urban center since the early 1990's this represents a significant achievement.

The Guide has become a primary sales tool for our Chamber of Commerce, local economic development organization, innovation center, city and county economic development staff, elected officials and our innovation district is using the Guide as a foundation to develop their own new collateral.

It has also become a useful recruiting tool for local businesses working to attract top talent in the financial services and tech industries. Surprisingly, it has also become a useful tool for local commercial and residential realtors who are working to find space or homes for people relocating to our community.

While it was created over the duration of eight months, we believe that now that the groundwork has been accomplished we will be able to produce this document on an annual basis with the creation process lasting only four months.

One of the most important aspects of the Guide is that it provided our small organization with credibility and established that the Downtown Partnership is the local expert on urban development initiatives. This aligns directly with our board goals and long term thought leadership strategy as an organization.

EXECUTION

Created over eight months, our first step was to interview potential stakeholders to ensure that the Guide was developed in a way that would serve multiple audiences. In the end, we surveyed and spoke to more than 100 potential end users to prioritize the most important elements for the Guide. This process took about two months.

We corralled a group of public and private sector researchers who included city county data experts, academics, commercial brokers, residential real estate leaders, and urban development bloggers. We aggregated the data, both quantitative and allegorical, then identified what data points and stories would be most useful to share with our target audiences. This process took about four months.

We hired an outside design team to incorporate our brand assets into the document and to ensure a professional document. It includes photos, original graphs and illustrations to help ensure the Guide is useful for casual readers as well as industry professionals. Design, reviews, edits and printing took about two months. The entire process took approximately eight months. Now that we have a prototype, we believe that we can create the next edition in less time.

REPRESENTATION

The creation of the Downtown St. Pete Development Guide was a collaborative effort, bringing together representatives from over a dozen organizations to ensure we represented a diverse view of the community. Our planning and research team included a diverse range of ethnicities, ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and education levels. We also worked to ensure that the guide included graphics that were inclusive and supported a wide range of experiences in our urban center.

REPLICATION

The concept of an economic benchmark report or State of Downtown isn't new. But in addition to traditional elements included in most downtown publications like the urban housing market, retail sales and office lease rates, this guide includes sections on adjacent residential neighborhoods, education including K-12 information for the larger community and higher education information about colleges and universities within 20 miles of downtown. We also highlighted new firms that have recently relocated to our downtown, and have a section on transformative developments we anticipate happening in the next five years. We discuss opportunity zone development, community redevelopment areas in our downtown and zoning for the Coastal High Hazard area, which is important for coastal communities. All of these elements could easily be replicated.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The Downtown St. Pete Development Guide is a simple 40 page document that has highly curated content designed for a specific purpose and audience. The publication is designed to look simple, but there was significant complexity in the decisions about what to include, where to source information and how to design the Guide to ensure it would be useful. Interviewing more than 100 stakeholders and involving a dozen partners in the development of the publication for the first edition was important, but it added to the complexity of delivering a publication that would meet the expectation of multiple constituents who all had a shared sense of ownership for the eventual work product. As a small organization with only two full time employees, it was a significant first time project to complete. But the credibility it has imparted and the utility it has created has been worth the investment of time, resources and political capital.