



Focus Group Meeting #5 – Real Estate and Design Professionals
July 9, 2020

SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The fifth meeting in a series of Focus Group meetings for the Charlotte Center City 2040 Vision Plan convened on July 9, 2020. Focus Group #5 invited local Real Estate and Design Professionals to represent their respective fields and industries to comment on Center City’s future.

The meeting was conducted via Zoom and was facilitated and recorded through a collaboration with staff from Center City Partners and MIG.

INTRODUCTION

Following opening remarks from Michael Smith of Center City Partners, Mark De La Torre, Project Manager with MIG, Inc., opened the meeting with a brief project overview. The PowerPoint presentation, projected via Zoom’s screen share functionality, provided an overview of the project, including community engagement activities, main objectives and goals, draft vision framework elements and focus areas, and a synopsis of the impacts and consideration of COVID-19 on plan outcomes. Immediately after the presentation, Mark facilitated a discussion with the meeting participants. Discussion topics focused in on the draft plan Vision elements, Goals, and emerging strategies but were also wide-ranging and encompassed an array of subjects, concerns, and ideas. Discussions were documented in real-time through a digital graphic summary shared with attendees through Zoom.

This document summarizes the information and ideas covered in the meeting, organized by topic. The Project Team will use the feedback collected during this session to revise the Plan Framework and inform draft plan recommendations. An image of the graphic notes recorded at the meeting is included at the end of the document.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Vision and Goals

- Intentionality is a key word. Pursue objectives and forge partnerships that address shortcomings in affordable housing, arts and culture, vibrancy in Uptown
 - Zoning requirements should balance efficiency and appropriate amount of resources needed.
 - A design perspective is critical as neighborhoods grow and evolve.
- Equitable and Diverse: Displacement is a problem.
- Accessibility: Need increased mobility to facilitate participation in Uptown activity.
- Vibrancy and Authenticity: People look for this in neighborhoods. We have an opportunity to build identity.

Responding to Black Lives Matter

- Be transparent about advancing Black community life in Charlotte, building off of the response to Black Lives

Matter. The recent movement is great for awareness and brought Black creatives and artists to Uptown.

- The BLM Mural is temporary. Find ways so the movement will leave a permanent cultural mark on Uptown.
- Be more inclusive and build real economic opportunity for African American lives and businesses Uptown.
- Engage with people and populations who have not shared in the prosperity.

Community Character

- Transform Charlotte into a cultural hub. Right now, there is no reason for one-time visitors to return to Tryon street. They do not have an emotional connection with the place.
 - Uptown feels stiff and “buttoned-up”.
 - Limited shopping and entertainment options.
 - Many restaurants inaccessible (perception of being upscale, expensive, and tailored to only certain clientele).
- Ideas of sustainability, cleanliness, authenticity from last recession have stuck and are still important.
- Keeping local businesses alive is key to successful Center City neighborhoods.
- Potential for Uptown to become a real neighborhood with housing as a key element.
- Moving from single to mixed uses makes Uptown more approachable to people, which saw a lot of success.
- Many people look for authenticity and neighborhood vibrancy and want to live in equitable and diverse places. However, this has resulted in displacement.
- Add a layer of emotional and cognitive engagement to bring passion into Uptown and Center City.

Strategies

- Important to identify potential partnerships for the Focus Areas, which would be critical to strategic implementation. Currently there is a lot of competition for capital. Place-based partnerships, leaders and champions would address challenges.
- The North End is a unique Focus Area and a different approach is needed. It would benefit further from creative partnerships to tackle affordability and infrastructure.
- Investment in underrepresented and underinvested areas. Identify these areas and be deliberate about investments.
 - Five Points is a key center of the West End.
- Invest in mobility so people can connect to places in Center City and Uptown. Existing and planned infrastructure is critical to these areas.
- Be mindful about ensuring accessibility and mobility. Mobility investments attract people and businesses.
- Vibrancy in Uptown depends on identifying the right balance of office and housing.
 - Alternatively, seek a diverse mix of residential, retail and hospitality rather than residential/business balance.
- Potentially identify opportunities to convert office into housing.
- Mixing of uses has been successful and Center City has been doing well on building high-end market rate residential and office (no need to construct significantly more).
- More of a push from the City is needed to create street-level activity and open frontages.
- The New York City model of mix of uses and vibrancy; this comes from people actually living in these places and is a result of proximity and walkability.
- More engaging and exciting Uptown programming (events, arts and culture) is critical to contributing to vibrancy which cannot be achieved by just a mix of uses. Look beyond development and the physical form.
- Create more cultural nodes.

- Brevard Street has some momentum to become a node, showcasing historic/cultural assets and live music.
- Be intentional about pushing cultural activities and appreciation and give special attention to and conversations with people of color.
- People from Charlotte go to New York City, Washington DC, and Atlanta for culture. Reverse this trend and make it a priority!

Affordable Housing

- Community does not currently have a credible response to the affordable housing issue.
- Housing is an issue for Uptown service workers, and it is something that affects the Center City's brand. This is critical to economic success; it starts with housing.
- It is also is a human issue! Demonstrate corporate commitment to social good.
- Get creative in where we locate affordable housing.
- Financing and constructing affordable housing becomes difficult when ground-floor retail is required. This is a challenge for developers. The solution is to either prioritize housing over a traditional mix of uses or figuring out how to subsidize ground-floor uses.
 - Collective lease agreements could be an option.
 - Need creative partnerships to find affordable housing solutions in how developments get built (podium vs. residential sections).
- Complex deals bog down development. Streamline three to five-year deals and make them happen in one to two years.
- Pair developers with a single partner to advance ideas. Involving more parties slows the process down.

Other

- Adapting, adjusting, and planning during and after COVID-19:
 - New shared experiences in working and learning from home.
 - Optimism over return of normality of urban life over the next two to three years. People want to return to normal life re: social life, work, and being around others.
 - Historically, pandemics have ultimately not changed human behavior, making a flight from cities unlikely in the long run.
 - People are open to new ideas, opportunity to test and try.
- Establish a "comfort index" that addresses a more human strategy with measurable results.
- Uptown is good at recruiting millennials, but not so much at retaining them long-term.



ALL IN 2040 CENTER CITY VISION PLAN

DESIGN & REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS



vision elements

Thriving	Inclusive	Memorable
Resilient	Sustainable	Lower

VISIONARY

- + **HEALTH & WELLNESS**
 - 5 POINTS TO LIVE PLACE UNWIND 5 POINTS
 - POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR FOCUS AREAS
 - CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO COOPERATE/LEARN/SHARE

goals

1. Increase the number of people who live in the city	2. Increase the number of people who work in the city	3. Increase the number of people who visit the city	4. Increase the number of people who invest in the city
5. Increase the number of people who are born in the city	6. Increase the number of people who are raised in the city	7. Increase the number of people who are educated in the city	8. Increase the number of people who are employed in the city

strategic strategies

1. Increase the number of people who live in the city	2. Increase the number of people who work in the city	3. Increase the number of people who visit the city	4. Increase the number of people who invest in the city
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- + **HEALTH & WELLNESS**
 - IMPROVING ACCESS TO INTERPRETIVE IN PUBLIC SPACES
- + **CULTURE IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT**
 - BE AWARENESS OF PUBLIC SPACES!
 - HISTORICAL WALKS AND
 - IMPROVE SOMETHING EXISTING IN THE URBAN!
- + **CHANGES/TRENDS FROM COVID-19**
 - CONSIDER, SPLITTING PATTERNS INTO PEOPLE WHOSE TO LIVE
 - CHANGE APPROACH TO URBAN

FOCUS AREAS

- CAN WE HELP HOW WE WOULD THE PROPOSED FEEL MORE?
- QUANTIFIABLE METRIC

HOW DO WE PLAN FOR THE RETURN POST COVID?

- + **ACCESS**: HOW WOULD COMMUNITIES WILL INTERACT
 - MEASURED SUCCESS WILL BE ON A DIFFERENT METRIC
- + **UNCERTAINTY**
 - ADAPTING TO WITH/BALANCE
 - POSSIBLE SHIFT IN OFFICE WORK TRENDS
 - "9-5" CHANGED
 - POTENTIAL OFF WITH WORKING UPWARD
- + **POSSIBILITIES TO IMPROVE TO NORMAL**
 - DEMAND MORE PATTERNS TO WORK, RESTAURANTS, SOCIAL CAFE
- + **MOBILITY**
 - BUILD UPON EXISTING WORK (BUS & QRD BUS)
 - ADVANCE THEM!



emerging focus areas

Center Yards	Sky & Bus Line Crossing	Tron Street in Urban	Medical School Opportunity	Bay Trade / Government District	Port in End	Roward Street	Wax Trade Corridor	South End Gateway
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INCLUSIVITY: FRONT & CENTER



MORE INTENTIONAL!

- CULTURAL APPRECIATION
- CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

NEW YORK, D.C., CHARLOTTE!

PUSH THESE FORWARD!