

Technical Assistance Panel North Loop Highway Kansas City, Missouri



Panel Recommendations to the
City of Kansas City, Missouri &
Mid America Regional Council
January 2016

ULI Kansas City

The mission of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

The ULI Kansas City District Council Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program – the local version of ULI’s national Advisory Services Panel – provides expert, multi-disciplinary advice to public agencies

and non-profit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Drawing from its extensive membership base, ULI Kansas City conducts TAP programs to offer objective and responsible advice on a wide variety of land use challenges ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions and is intentionally flexible to provide sponsoring organizations with a customized approach to a solution. ULI Kansas City members from across the region participate as panelists, volunteering their time and expertise to the process.

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Urban Land Institute **Kansas City**

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North Loop Highway, Downtown Kansas City, Missouri

Introduction

In the 1960's, a small loop of interstate highways was built around and through a portion of the City's Central Business District. Although the goal of moving vehicular traffic more quickly through downtown was achieved, drawbacks to the system became readily apparent. A 1996-1998 crash study conducted by MODOT identified the northern section of this loop (Northloop) as having an accident rate that exceeds 150 percent of the state average¹.

In 2014, conversations around Missouri Constitutional Amendment 7 and the rebuilding of the Broadway Bridge, which feeds into the western-most portion of Northloop, took place between the Missouri Department of Transportation (MODOT), the Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Mayor's staff. These conversations opened the door to further discussions around transportation downtown and potentially decommissioning this section of interstate highway in downtown Kansas City, Missouri (the City).

¹ <http://www.modot.org/kansascity/metroi70/supplementaldocs/Purpose%20and%20Need%20Appendix%20A-D.pdf>

Through these conversations, and understanding the scope of the reconfiguration that would take place in the rebuilding of the Broadway Bridge, the City identified this as an optimal point in time to study the potential ramifications and opportunities that decommissioning Northloop might bring. A study of this nature presents as unique opportunity to re-envision a key section of downtown Kansas City, to re-connect sections of the City to the Central Business District, and to open up approximately 32 acres of highly valuable land to development. Seeking input from City stakeholders and real estate professionals, the City turned to ULI Kansas City for expert guidance.

ULI Kansas City, through its Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program, assembled experts from its member base and hosted a two-day, intensive work session to address the questions posed to it by the City and the Mid America Regional Council (MARC).

What Was Asked of the TAP

At the request of the City and MARC, the TAP addressed the following questions: What land uses/development should be recommended should the Northloop be decommissioned and the Northloop land become available for redevelopment?

The Study Area

The study area centers around the one mile section of highway that carries both Interstate 70 and Interstate 35 through the north end of the City's downtown. As the northern section of the Downtown Loop, the Northloop study area is bound generally by Broadway Boulevard to the west, Charlotte Street to the east, Independence Avenue to the north and 6th Street to the south.

When built, Northloop sliced through the City's historic grid system and a physical and perceptual barrier arose between the Central Business District (CBD) to the south and the housing and smaller businesses to the north. The areas to the north include the River Market and Columbus Park neighborhoods and the Missouri River.

Seven bridges span Northloop in the study area, providing vehicular access to the north and south, yet the break the interstate creates in the street grid, separating these two sections of downtown, creates a perception of a much broader divide and does little to encourage pedestrian and/or bicycle traffic from the CBD to the areas north. Nor does it encourage residents to the north, in the River Market or Columbus Park neighborhoods, to the north to walk or bike to downtown attractions or places of employment.

The CBD is recognizable by its predominance of high- and mid-rise buildings while the areas to the north consist primarily of mid- and low-rise buildings, many of which are residential or a mix of residential and commercial uses.

Northloop is served by the Broadway Bridge on the west and the Heart of America Bridge further east. Surface parking lots can be found in a number of areas adjacent to Northloop and

the KC Streetcar will cross Northloop at Delaware/Main, in the western section of the study area.



The Northloop study area encompasses approximately 32 acres

TAP Process

The TAP panel, consisting of ten professionals selected from the ULI membership base, represented the following skills and perspectives: real estate development; finance; urban planning; architectural design; institutional development; academia; and real estate law.

On the morning of the first TAP workday, held in the Kansas City Design Center, the panel met with the Mayor of Kansas City, who challenged the panel to "dream big" and view this as an opportunity to consider transformative ideas for the City. The panel then embarked on a guided bus tour of the study area.

Following the tour, the panel met with MARC leadership and professionals from the City Manager's Office and Long

Range Planning. Discussions with MARC and City leadership helped the panel further define the challenges inherent in the TAP charge and uncover additional details about the study area and the City's long-term goals that might impact the panel's findings.

Taking a holistic view of the functionality of the Downtown Loop, the panel also took time to consider the merits of decommissioning Southloop in addition to, or instead of, Northloop. The experts quickly agreed that Southloop – the section of the Downtown Loop that generally follows Truman Boulevard – would be a less-desirable option as development opportunities would be limited to green space or very low-rise buildings. (Southloop

would require a cap of land that could not bear the weight of buildings of any significant size.) The panel set the idea aside and refocused back on the development opportunities arising out of a decommissioned Northloop.

Funding, a key topic in any development discussion, was also discussed in depth with City leadership and the panel discovered that funding was currently in place to support a transportation study. Funding from MODOT or the City for the decommissioning the interstate, however, is not in place.

Following the meeting with City and MARC leadership, the panel conducted stakeholder interviews with individuals representing the following constituencies: MODOT; the Port Authority; the Downtown Council; the City Council; KC Streetcar; area real estate developers; and neighborhood leadership. These interview sessions provided additional context around which to evaluate potential development in the study area and provided the panel with critical opportunities to ask further exploratory questions of the stakeholders.

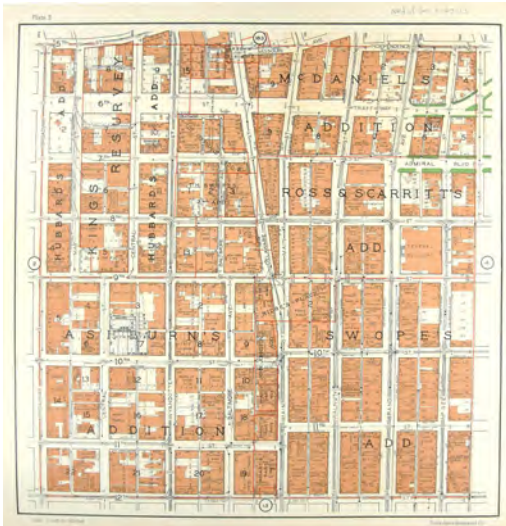


Stakeholder interview

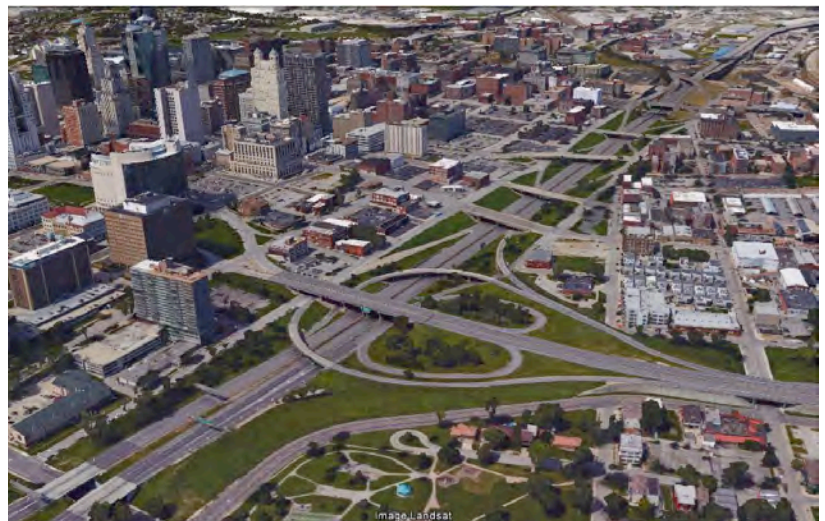
Several key themes arose throughout the course of the interviews. These themes included:

- Reconnecting the grid;
- Connectivity;
- Pedestrian access; and
- Open spaces.

These themes, explained in greater detail in the following pages, became a thread throughout the panel's deliberations and formed a foundation for the TAP recommendations.



A historic map of a portion of the study area, showing the street grid prior to construction of the interstate

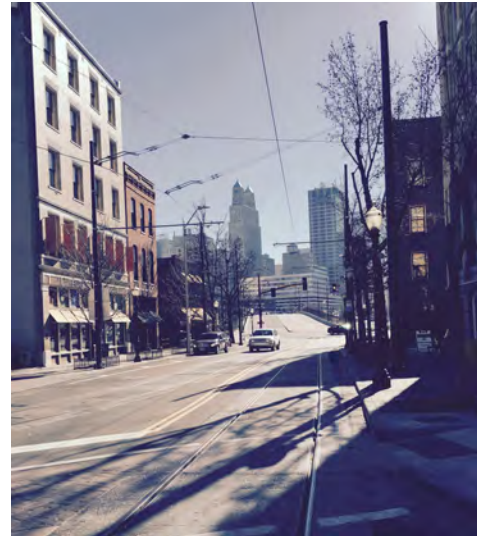


A bird's-eye view of Northloop, looking south into the Central Business District

Northloop, General Observations

The evaluation of the study area brought to light and added clarity to a number of key observations about the Northloop area and its development potential:

- MODOT confirmed that the State is open to the idea of decommissioning this stretch of interstate.
- Traffic counts along Northloop average around 70,000 cars per day.
- The frequency of on/off ramps along this stretch of interstate leads to a high rate of accidents and subsequent traffic congestion.
- An environmental impact study will need to be conducted prior to a final development decision.
- Other east-west thoroughfares will need to be improved and/or widened to accommodate the increase in traffic should Northloop be decommissioned.
- The Broadway Bridge needs to be rebuilt and, in so doing, tie into the street grid more effectively.



The KC Streetcar will connect River Market to the CBD, crossing Northloop, via Delaware/Main

- Northloop effectively divides River Market and Columbus Park from the rest of downtown.
- The Heart of America Bridge also divides the River Market and Columbus Park neighborhoods and this division is exacerbated by the infrastructure needed to support an elevated ramp leading to the southern end of the bridge.

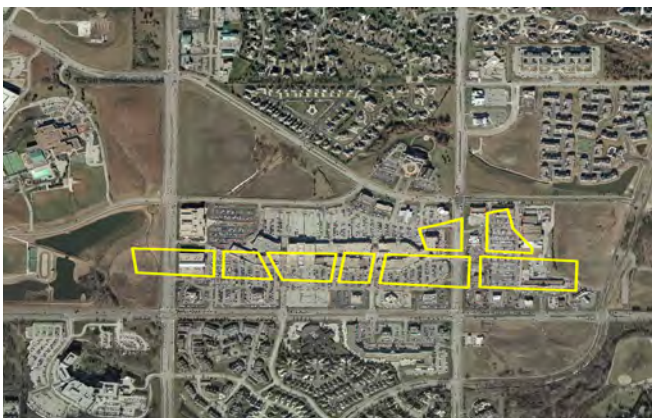
As Northloop also falls within the boundaries of Downtown Kansas City, the panel was also keenly aware of the stated primary goals of the Greater Downtown Area Plan:

- Create a walkable downtown;
- Double the population downtown;
- Increase employment downtown;
- Retain and promote safe, authentic neighborhoods; and
- Promote sustainability.

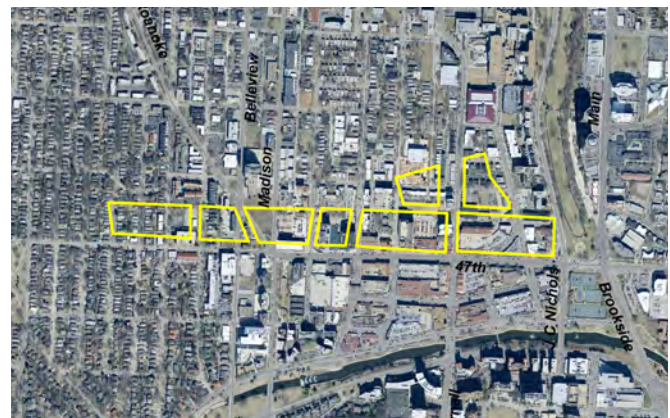
It is also interesting to note the scale of the subject area. Below are two images that overlay the Northloop real estate sections over two well-known Kansas City developments.



View of Northloop and 6th Street at Broadway



Northloop land area in comparison to Leawood Towne Center



Northloop land area in comparison to Country Club Plaza

Additional Considerations

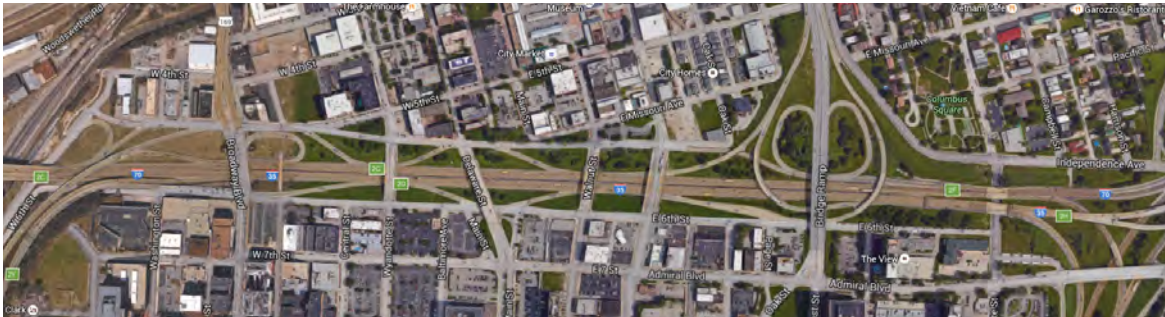
In order to proceed with determining the highest and best use for the land made available by decommissioning Northloop, the panel made note of current real estate market trends and used those trends as the foundation for the development discussion:

- The downtown district currently has 90+/- acres of open land;
- The current annual absorption rate is 5+/- acres per year;
- It will take approximately 10 years to prepare the site for development;
- The parking ratio used for this study is 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of occupied space;
- Office floor plates will encompass between 25,000 and 35,000 square feet;
- Retail could likely include “small box” retail such as a City Target store; and

- Residential development options would center around high-rise residential options generally priced at \$2.50 per square foot.

Additionally, throughout the deliberations, the panel made the following baseline assumptions:

- The interstate will be decommissioned;
- Traffic will be rerouted – absorbing 70,000+/- cars each day, however, will take considerable analysis and planning;
- The Broadway Bridge will be realigned, which will provide additional developable land (not included in the study area);
- The scope of the recommendation includes only the 32+/- acre study area;
- There will be no land acquisition costs to the City; and
- There will be two to three stories of parking in the excavated area (the former roadbed).



Northloop, Kansas City, Missouri

Themes

Throughout the course of the stakeholder interviews, four key themes emerged. These themes were explored further by the panel and then, as appropriate, built into the panel's recommendations.

1. Reconnect the Grid

It is clear to any one driving, walking, biking, or taking public transit in downtown Kansas City that the street grid of the Central Business District has been drastically interrupted by the intersection of Northloop. Vehicular traffic regularly uses the north-south bridges to traverse the interstate, yet these crossings remain far less appealing for pedestrians or bicyclists. As one stakeholder commented, *“There is an entirely different weather pattern out there in the middle of one of those bridges.”* This lack of connection and resulting interruption in what is otherwise a very functional street grid was a key concern to the panel.

A restored street grid would greatly enhance

the connections between the CBD and surrounding neighborhoods. Restoring the grid for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle use should be a priority.



Red lines indicate vehicular and pedestrian circulation, which could be enhanced or reconnected by the proposed development

2. Connectivity

In a number of instances, certain east-west streets have been cut off completely from the grid and no longer provide connections to neighboring streets. Like the interstate, these dead-end streets further disconnect people, cars, and bikes from the street grid.

Every effort should be made to reconnect the interrupted sections of Independence Avenue and connect 6th Street to Admiral. Not only would the City restore the functionality of the street grid, these two restored connections in particular would provide viable east-west travel alternatives to Northloop.

3. Pedestrian Access

The current configuration of streets, Northloop bridge crossings, and Missouri River bridge crossings cater specifically to vehicular traffic. By making conscious decisions to improve/include pedestrian access throughout the study



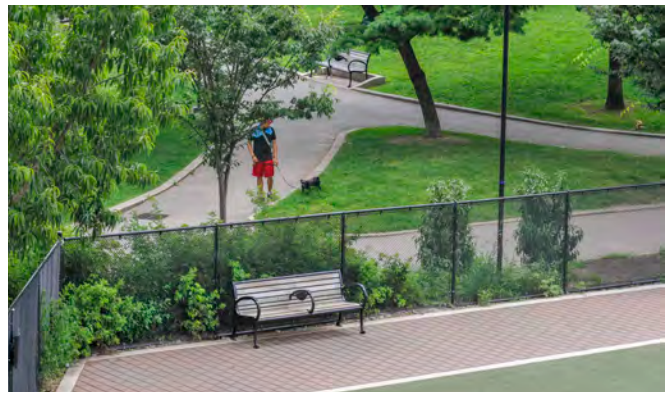
Inviting pedestrian paths encourage movement and interaction

area, the City should see a marked increase in people walking between the CBD and neighborhoods.

In addition to addressing the various bridge crossings over Northloop, the raised Heart of America bridge approach should be reconfigured to bring the bridge approach down to grade. This height reduction would reduce the visual barrier between River Market and Columbus Park and would provide better access for pedestrians moving between the neighborhoods.

4. Open Spaces

Today, River Market and Columbus Park each have a small system of parks used by neighborhood residents and residents living in the Central Business District. As the City continues to attract more full-time residents to its downtown, additional parks – even pocket parks and open green space – will be needed to adequately serve the growing population.



Pocket parks are welcome retreats in urban environments

Development Options

Four primary development options emerged as possibilities for the highest and best use for the land made available by decommissioning Northloop.

1. Big Bang

A “Big Bang” development option proposes that the City prepare the site and hold it until an opportunity arises to sell the site to one large corporate or institutional user who would then be responsible for the development of the entire site. The goal would be to find the “right” new user, preferably new to the market, that would develop the site into a corporate or institutional campus that would positively impact the fabric of downtown Kansas City.

2. Evolution

The panel also identified an “evolutionary” development option that would encourage the City to prepare the site for development generally, and then allow development to

evolve incrementally and naturally, as the market dictates, across the site.

3. Back to Nature

Given the wide expanse of vacant land created through decommissioning the interstate, the panel also considered an option that would preserve the site as open space or park space indefinitely.

4. Take Me Out To The Ballgame

A number of stakeholders interviewed noted that a downtown baseball stadium would be a welcome addition to the downtown skyline and a wonderful compliment to the range of activities available in downtown Kansas City. For Kansas City visitors lacking personal transportation, one stakeholder noted that a cab ride to Kauffman Stadium costs approximately \$40 one way.

Development Options, Evaluation

Back to Nature

While this may be the most economical solution for the site in the short term, without the ability to sell the land or generate tax revenue from new development/business on the site, permanent open space here provides the City with a weaker economic development solution. By converting the area to open space, the City also walks away from the potential opportunity for a transformative business or institutional development on this site. Stakeholders also noted possible safety and/or security challenges that may arise on such a large swath of open land in downtown.

Take Me Out To The Ballgame

A downtown ballpark was an exciting proposition in the minds of a number of stakeholders. With that, the panel carefully evaluated the idea, noting that the expiration date of the Royal's current lease on Kauffman Stadium might actually align with the timing associated with developing a new venue downtown. At the end of the day, however, the configuration of the land left by decommissioning Northloop remains quite linear and is not well-suited for a modern-day stadium.



A rendering of how Kauffman Stadium might fit in the Northloop footprint

Big Bang, Pros

With the Big Bang development approach, the 32-acre site provides the City with a potential "game changing" development and the opportunity to significantly impact downtown with one development decision. A development opportunity of this size has the potential to lure a national tenant to the region, add jobs to the market, and provide a public relations win for the City. The site's central location is convenient, with ready access to area interstates, potential employees from nearby neighborhoods, and direct connections to the City's CBD. The site would also better connect Downtown Kansas City to the Missouri River riverfront – a challenge that has remained constant over the years. Devel-

oping the site would also increase density in downtown and, at the same time, provide an effective transition of building size between the high rise structures characterizing the CBD to the lower buildings found in River Market. Development along the 32 acre site would also provide a great opportunity to support the City's investment in transit as the KC Streetcar line runs right through the site.

Cons

On the other hand, a Big Bang development approach may also present a number of challenges to the City. This one-tenant, one-developer approach will require a great deal of patience from all stakeholders and substantial political will from City leaders as the search for and negotiations with the *right* development partner take place. This waiting/searching period would also translate into a long wait for a return on the City's investment, which would include the up-front costs incurred by the City to demolish the current interstate roadbed, address utilities, and prepare the site for development. Finally, as the site sits unused, it will be critical for the City to maintain the property in order to avoid blight and any follow-on negative impacts of vacant land.

Phasing & Implementation

To address a number of the potential drawbacks to the Big Bang approach, the City should consider formulating a phasing and implementation approach to the site that would include the following key elements:

- Preparing the site for development, including demolition of the roadway, rerouting utilities, addressing any entitlements and/or related plans;
- Restoring the grid elements early in the process;
- Potentially adopting an interim use, which would require frequent communications and reminders to stakeholder of the temporary nature of the use (thereby lessening issues related to community attachment to the temporary use);
- Providing for ongoing maintenance of the site (again, lessening opportunities for blight or related negative perceptions); and
- National marketing and requests for proposals.

Evolution, Pros

The approach that allows development to occur incrementally over time provides the City with a number of benefits that make this approach worth considering.

- A phased approach requires lower up-front costs to the City, which would translate into lower holding costs for the land.

- With an upfront investment by the City in a certain amount of master planning, a plan could be in place at the start that would allow the City to retain a greater degree of control, make decisions as to possible uses, encourage a broader mix of uses, and possibly infuse more local flavor (local retailers, restaurateurs and business owners) and multiple visions into the development.
- A phased, evolving development approach allows the City to begin to realize returns on its investment more quickly than if it were to hold the site and wait for one large development.
- Lastly, smaller developments over time may also result in fewer disruptions in the local business market.

Cons

Of course, a phased approach is also subject to a number of drawbacks. Occurring over a number of years, a phased approach would require greater coordination and more frequent negotiation with developers as each site is sold for development. Smaller developments over time, instead of one large development may be seen in the com-

munity as a lost opportunity. ("How often does a 32 acre site become available in the heart of a downtown?") Finally, as smaller developments are generally more accessible, there is an increased chance that businesses currently operating within the Kansas City area will chose to relocate to the Northloop site. This movement would be less desirable than if the site were able to attract new businesses to the market.

Phasing & Implementation

The phasing and implementation associated with an evolutionary development should take into account the following elements:

- Multiple requests for proposals for the site;
- Prioritization of parcel phasing, which could help build momentum and provide natural follow-on development requiring less City intervention (e.g. lead with the areas adjacent to the streetcar line);
- Initial site preparation and ongoing maintenance;
- Planning controls (established early); and
- A financial framework to provide additional guidance along the way and reduce delays as development occurs.



Rendering of a potential master plan for Northloop

Design and Master Plan

The development potential of the Northloop site, characterized by its location in the Central Business District, the linear nature of the available land, the typography, and current market trends, provided the panel with an exciting framework around which to begin to envision a master plan. This plan could provide the City with a foundation on which to market an Evolution approach or, alternatively, provide a Big Bang developer with a suggested plan.

As noted earlier, restoring the street grid is key to any development in the study area. These renewed connections provide a host of natural and meaningful paths by which people and traffic can move around and through the site. With these connections restored, development between the streets and at grade may be easily envisioned, creating a



Pedestrian pathways and varying building sizes enhance the pedestrian experience

natural blending in the fabric of the CBD and River Market.

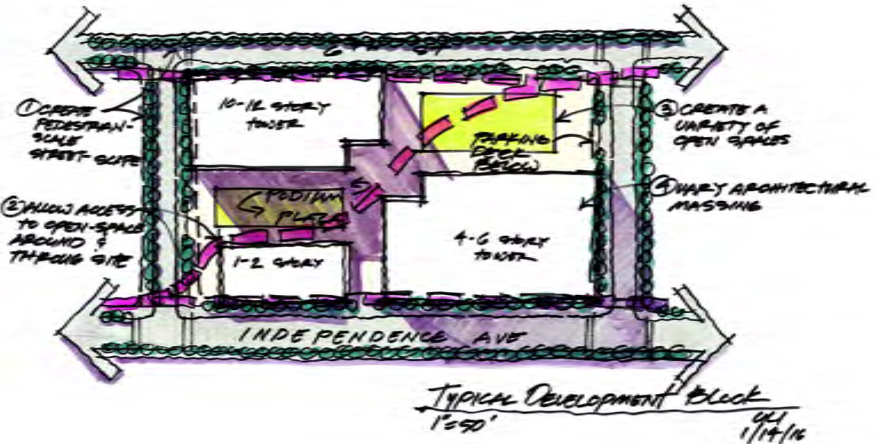
With a nod to successful headquarters developments such as Amazon's headquarters in South Lake Union, Seattle, and Uber's headquarters in downtown San Francisco, the panel was able to quickly envision a network of office and/or mixed use buildings locating in the revived city grid, connected visually across the street network through architectural design and connected within city blocks by pedestrian pathways and landscapes that embrace natural materials and are a joy to experience.

Development throughout the site will be sectioned naturally by the current and reconnected street grid. Within these smaller sections, the panel evaluated how a typical block may be designed to provide ample developable land while, at the same time, creating additional opportunities for pedestrian movement through the block, not just around it. Varying the massing of the buildings on each block would help create a visually interesting environment and prevent the blocks from each becoming imposing, continuous walls of new buildings. Creating open spaces, pocket parks, or seating areas would help encourage pedestrian movement through the blocks, adding life to the streetscape.

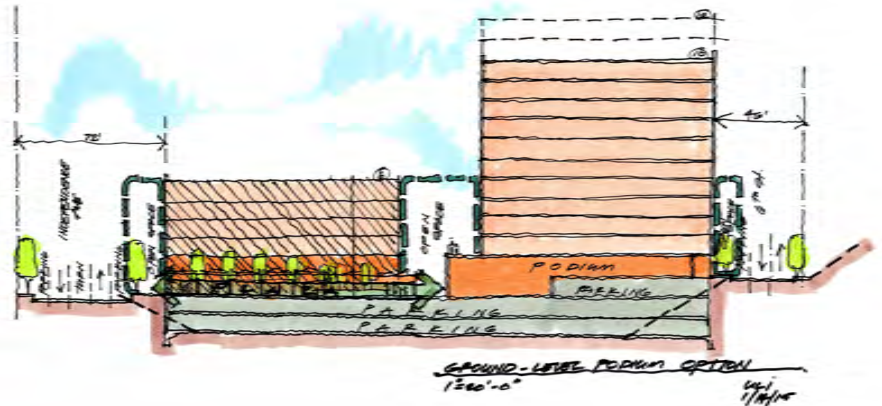
These varied building sizes and enhanced visual connections through each development segment will help insure that the development begins to deliver on the themes noted previously – connecting the downtown neighborhoods and serving as a transition in building height between the CBD and River Market.

Given the excavated space left after the roadbed is demolished and removed, the panel identified this excavated area as a prime location for new below-grade parking. Within these spaces, and below any at-grade development, it

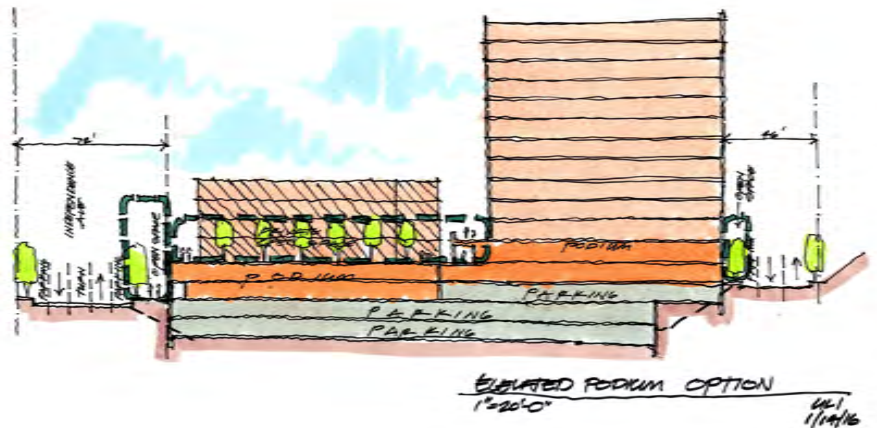
is estimated that two to three stories of parking could be placed, easily serving the development above. By placing any parking below-grade, the development above is relieved of the need for additional, unsightly parking structures and can dedicate additional free areas to further development or open space.



A typical block



A cross-section of a typical block



A variation on a cross-section of a typical block showing an elevated podium



Different uses, mixed throughout the site, can create visual interest

Financing

With two primary development options on the table, the panel addressed the financing of each and used the following parameters in the evaluation:

- Scenario #1: Single user “Big Bang Development” on 32 acres: corporate campus or similar
- Scenario #2: “Evolution Development” of individual blocks for mixed, multifamily, or office use
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and land sales pay for needed infrastructure

Capital Stack, Private

In the event that private financing is pursued for the development, the panel assumed that a private developer would

pay for the land at an estimated cost of 75 dollars per square foot. The developable land on the site is 1,390,000 million square feet (or 32 acres). A combination of mortgage financing and equity would pay for the private development.

Capital Stack, Public Carrying

Separately, the panel considered a public financing option for the capital stack. In this instance there would be nominal carrying costs for the property while it remains under public ownership and a TIF would pay for differential costs related to any necessary infrastructure (parking, roads, and streetscape).

Scenario 1: “Big Bang” Financing

Overview	
Office Development Square Ft.:	3,000,000 sq. ft.
Total Employee Count:	12,750
Multifamily Development:	1,050 units
Parking Required:	7,200 spaces
Retail:	100,000 sq. ft. with \$25mm sales
Plaza, Outdoor Space:	348,000 sq. ft.
Public Funding Available	
Land Sales Proceeds:	\$78,000,000
PV of TIF:	\$186,000,000
	<hr/>
	\$264,000,000
Use of Public Funding	
Parking:	(\$180,000,000)
Spaces	7,200 stalls
Cost/Space	\$25,000 per stall
Streetscape - for seven blocks	(\$7,000,000)
Road connections: Independence Ave., 6 th St., Heart of America	(\$ 25,000,000)
	<hr/>
	(\$212,000,000)
Unallocated	<hr/>
	\$ 52,000,000

Scenario 2: Evolution Financing – Single Block (4.8 acres)

Overview	
Office Development Square Ft.:	220,000 sq. ft.
Total Employee Count:	935
Multifamily Development:	174 units
Parking Required:	818 spaces
Retail:	34,500 sq. ft. with \$7.3mm sales
Public Funding Available	
Land Sales Proceeds:	\$15,600,000
PV of TIF:	\$16,100,000
	<hr/>
	\$32,000,000
Use of Public Funding	
Parking:	(\$20,400,000)
Spaces	818 stalls
Cost/Space	\$25,000 per stall
Streetscape - for seven blocks	(\$1,000,000)
Road connections	(\$10,400,000)
	<hr/>
	(\$31,500,000)
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	\$0

Financing Conclusions

Standard incentives, in this case TIF, allow for funding of differential development costs. At the same time, to attract development to the site, the City may need to pursue its well-tested template of funding for the differential infrastructure costs of such an urban development.

Recommendations

To the greatest extent possible, the panel encourages the sponsor to embrace a development approach that simultaneously preserves alternatives for one large, institutional user *and* an evolution of smaller users over time. This dual approach will provide the City with the greatest degree of flexibility and the strongest opportunity for success.

Through the course of this dual approach, the City should begin to pursue the development of certain common elements found in each development option, such as reconnecting the street grid and preparing the site for development (demo, utilities, etc.). Once the site is shovel-ready and

primed for development, the City is encouraged to take the time to evaluate the market again, at that point in time, as shifts in market demand may have occurred.

Prior to the launch of any work on the Northloop site, the City is encouraged to also examine all of the development elements before it and identify which roles it wants – or is able/prepared – to play in the area's development. With a defined role in hand, shared with area stakeholders, the City will be better equipped to embark on the successful and sustainable development of the Northloop site.

A rendering of how the Northloop site might be configured to allow for density while maintaining opportunities for open space and site lines between and through buildings



Summary

The decommissioning of Northloop represents a significant shift in the City's approach to development, now embracing an opportunity to restore a significant portion of downtown Kansas City back to the street grid, encouraging further development (residential and commercial), making the environment much more attractive and enjoyable for pedestrians and bicyclists, and supporting other investments

in transit by providing TOD opportunities around the new KC Streetcar line.

The Northloop development site represents a 'game changing' development opportunity for the City of Kansas City and the broader metro region. The added interest in and value placed on community benefits, such as those noted above, makes clear that the City has a progressive outlook – one that places value back on the pedestrian experience of downtown and lessens the import of an automobile's ability to speed more quickly through downtown.

Regardless of the final development decision, it is clear that the City would benefit from a development approach that attracts new business(es) to the market. In the process, however, the speed with which the site is developed and the related potential holding costs associated with slow absorption rates, should be considered. Absorption was assumed at about the rate historically demonstrated in Scenario 2. A high density rate was not assumed; the assumed rate was actually quite modest and is notable that even at that modest rate, it remains financially feasible.

Finally, the panel strongly believes that a dual-development approach, preparing the site for development by one large new user or multiple new users over time, is the most efficient and effective approach to pursue.



A rendering of the potential view from the Missouri River, looking toward downtown and a Northloop development that features a mix of building heights and configurations

TAP Panel

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