



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# City of Casa Grande ULI AzTAP



City of  
Casa Grande



Urban Land  
Institute

Arizona

March 5, 2019



# Acknowledgments

A robust team of people were instrumental in making this AzTAP a success. The Urban Land Institute Arizona District Council (ULI Arizona) gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who serve Casa Grande for being superb partners and for their enthusiasm and commitment. ULI Arizona is grateful to the Casa Grande City Council and Main Street Organization for their dedication of leadership and support.

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## THANK YOU ULI AZTAP CASA GRANDE SUPPORTERS



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# About ULI

## ULI ARIZONA DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute has members in 95 countries worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

The ULI Arizona District Council was formed in the early 1980s, as a direct response to the need for educational forums and events at a local level. ULI Arizona brings public and private sector leaders together to share and exchange ideas, information, and experiences to shape the way communities grow. For additional information, please visit: [www.arizona.uli.org](http://www.arizona.uli.org).

## ABOUT ULI AzTAPS

The ULI Arizona Technical Assistance Panel (AzTAP) Program is a service offered by ULI Arizona to assist Arizona municipalities, counties, regions, and nonprofits in the preliminary study of complex land use planning, development, and redevelopment issues. Drawing from a seasoned professional membership base, AzTAPs provide objective and responsible guidance on a variety of land use and real estate strategic decisions ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

AzTAP was initiated by the ULI Arizona District Council in 2003 as an extension of the time-tested national ULI Advisory Services Program that was established in 1947 with proven success for its comprehensive, pragmatic approach to solving land use challenges. Technical assistance interdisciplinary panel teams are carefully chosen for their specific knowledge and the

holistic lens that they provide to help resolve local issues.

Communities gain valuable insight and direction from highly qualified industry professionals who volunteer their time. Professionals who bring their expertise to bear also receive an intimate understanding of the unique development opportunities and challenges facing communities. The interaction among panel experts, local communities, and residents strengthens the community fabric and builds opportunities for strong public and private sector collaboration to promote thriving Arizona communities. The focus and scope of issues defined by the local sponsoring community make each TAP unique, so the approach is intentionally flexible to tailor it to the specific needs presented. Past ULI Arizona TAP reports are available to view and download at [www.arizona.uli.org](http://www.arizona.uli.org).

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# ULI AzTAP Panel

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# ULI AzTAP Casa Grande Process



The Casa Grande AzTAP was initiated when Casa Grande Main Street contacted ULI Arizona for assistance on ways to leverage their new Neon Sign Park as an attractor (and other strategies) to build the market potential of downtown



After receiving the application, volunteer ULI AzTAP Committee members met with local community leadership to understand and refine the assignment objectives and identify key issues



The ULI AzTAP Committee worked closely over several months with leaders from the City and Casa Grande Main Street to carefully select the best panel and prepare the logistics for Panel Day



Key questions were thoughtfully developed and refined to guide the panel's discussion of important real estate enquiries – the big picture vision, planning and design, market potential, redevelopment strategies, finance and implementation



Eight panel experts were ultimately chosen for their specific knowledge and ability to transfer their best practice solutions to help Casa Grande address their important questions



A detailed briefing book was prepared by Casa Grande and transmitted to each AzTAP panel member. This addressed community, demographics, economic and land use studies, and other information to support the panelists' preparation for Panel Day



The ULI AzTAP Committee and the selected panelists also conducted interviews with key stakeholder in the downtown Casa Grande study area. This insight was invaluable to know and helped panelists hit the ground running for Panel Day



The AzTAP kicked off with a guided walking tour of the study area the morning the panel convened in Casa Grande – Panel Day



The panel worked diligently over the course of an entire day to brainstorm strategies to support the City's efforts to revitalize the downtown Main Street area as an exciting hub of mixed use commerce and activity



This printed report summarizes the findings and practical recommendations for next steps. A presentation highlighting the outcomes of the panel is also provided to the Casa Grande City Council for consideration and acceptance



ULI AzTAP Casa Grande Panel Day.



# ULI AzTAP Casa Grande Purpose and Focus

## Focus

Leverage both city and privately-owned land to help catalyze the revitalization of Downtown Casa Grande.

## Purpose

Casa Grande's Neon Sign Park will open April 2019 with 14 restored Casa Grande neon signs. This unique asset will attract visitors to the historic Casa Grande Downtown and is viewed as an opportunity for revitalization.

This ULI Arizona Technical Assistance Panel focused on opportunities to leverage the Sign Park through redevelopment strategies for the downtown area.



Casa Grande Leadership and AzTAP Panel in front of the historic Casa Grande Paramount Theatre. From left to right: Casa Grande Mayor Craig McFarland; AzTAP Panelists - Kimber Lanning, Martha dePlazaola Abbott, Sylvia Urrutia, Max Sommacampanga, John McNamara, Jamie Blakeman, Robert Graham, Jeffrey McVay; and Casa Grande Main Street Director Rina Rien.

# About Downtown Casa Grande

Casa Grande's historic downtown is unique within the Central Arizona region. This historic heart of the city was founded in 1879 when a work stoppage occurred on rail deliveries from the East. Southern Pacific set up a temporary camp called Terminus (end of the line). Construction resumed in January 1880 and, by September 1880, the Southern Pacific Railroad had renamed the town Casa Grande after the nearby Casa Grande ruins.

In 1890, the original townsite map was recorded and the historic downtown started to develop around Main Street. Parallel and perpendicular with the railroad tracks, downtown streets are organized northwest-southeast reflecting the area's origins as a railroad community. (The City's streets are aligned north/south.) In 1886, 1893 and 1914 fires ravaged the town. In 1908 a flood damaged the town, but each time the community survived and rebuilt.

In 1928 - Highway 84 (the Old Tucson Highway) extended north from Tucson/ Picacho through Casa Grande to Gila Bend. Motor courts and neon signs came thereafter. Today the historic downtown includes about 110 acres of turn-of-the century and mid-century modern buildings.

Conserving the downtown continues to be an ongoing focus of the City, downtown landowners, and merchants. Casa Grande Main Street is a non-profit 501c3 organization working to promote and enhance downtown revitalization and historic preservation.



Downtown Casa Grande  
Main Street.



The Cook E Jar Bakery and Café  
is a local gathering spot and  
known throughout the region for  
its' fresh baked goods.

## Casa Grande Main Street Organization's Mission:

*"To support the vision of Historic Downtown by enhancing the economic vitality, promoting and marketing the District, fostering partnerships and acting as the lead advocate for Historic Downtown and its historic preservation." Main Street's vision for the downtown is, "an exciting, visually appealing, easily accessible, safe, balanced mix of uses that integrates residential, office, retail, entertainment, dining, and cultural and civic activities that is recognized as the heart of the community."*





Murals telling Casa Grande's history adorn the downtown.



Main Street Buildings.

Substantial work to redevelop the downtown has occurred. The Paramount Theatre, constructed in 1929 and a “sister” theatre to the historic downtown Phoenix Orpheum Theatre, operates as a concert hall and event venue. The Museum of Casa Grande is located downtown and open Thursday through Saturdays (and closed for the summer). The historic Women’s Club includes a BlackBox theatre and the Casa Grande Arts Museum. New and established restaurants are located throughout the downtown and include the CGQ BBQ, Big House Cafe, and the Cook E Jar Bakery & Cafe. The heart of the downtown is along Florence Street. An active City of Casa Grande Industrial Development Authority has supported the rehabilitation of several buildings, including the Cook E Jar Bakery and Café (its first project) and the currently vacant Old Town Ale House that was improved with sprinklers and is intended to be a bar (the IDA owns the liquor license). Murals evoking the history of the downtown are located throughout the area. Sidewalks are shaded with overhangs and these include period lighting. A Food City supermarket serves nearby residents. The Neon Sign Park (the catalyst for this AzTAP) is located on the site of the original Central School.

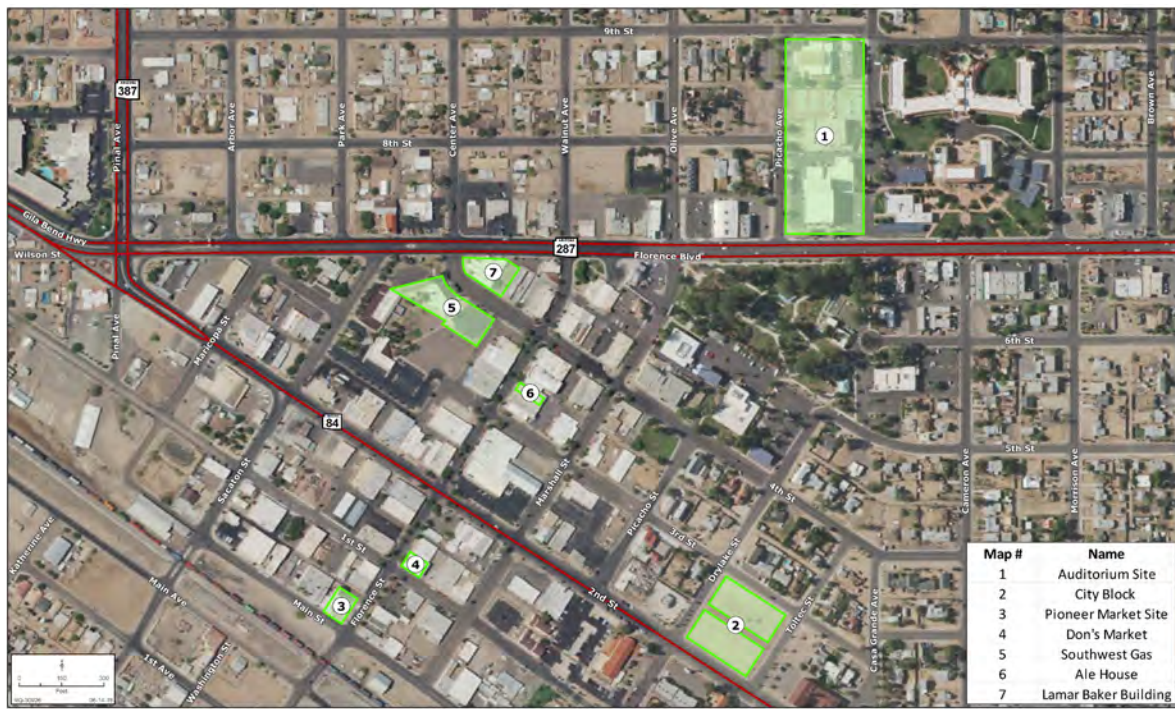
Also located downtown are several social service providers, including the Casa Grande Food Bank, Catholic Community Services, Arizona @ Work, and the Public Welfare Department. A older, economically challenged neighborhood is located on the southwest of the downtown across the railroad tracks.

Main Street organizes numerous events to bring people downtown, including a monthly Day Out Downtown, Annual Street Fair and Car Show in January, and Annual Fine Art Explosion in Peart Park every March. The local food truck community organizes a First Friday Food Truck Festival and others like the Western Trading Post and arts and culture destinations like The Museum of Casa Grande, BlackBox Theatre at the Woman’s Club, Paramount Theatre and The Casa Grande Art Museum hold regular events. As part of its revitalization work, Main Street obtained funding from American Express to create a Neon Sign Park in the northwest portion of the downtown. The Park will open in April 2019. The Sign Park is envisioned to attract visitors who could potentially help to support downtown businesses.

The downtown includes several City- and privately-owned properties that are currently available for development. These include, but are not limited to:

- The historic Casa Grande High School Auditorium located on the north side of Florence Boulevard adjacent to the City Hall (which is in the Historic High School). This building exhibits environmental issues, needs a new roof, with no current plans for its reuse.





- The Ale House, a vacant 3,900 sf commercial property owned and retrofitted by the IDA, is turn key with a liquor license and sprinklers. The intent is to lease this for a bar/or restaurant.
- A 1.5-acre vacant block in the southeast portion of the downtown adjacent to State Route 84 envisioned for residential development.
- Two buildings on sites less than ½ acre each located next to each other on the north side of the redevelopment area. One of the sites is a midcentury Irwin and Irwin office building, the other is the former Southwest Gas office building. Both structures need renovation.
- Two other sites are located southwest of 2nd Avenue (outside the Study Area for this AzTAP) and are also identified as potential redevelopment opportunities.

Casa Grande  
Redevelopment  
Opportunities. Source:  
Arizona Land Advisors  
Organization.

# Background Research

The background research conducted for this AzTAP included the review of documents provided by the City and Main Street in briefing materials (see a summary in the Appendix), a study area walking tour with City officials and community leaders, and interviews with key study area stakeholders by Panelists and ULI AzTAP Committee members (see summary below).



The AzTAP kicked off with narrated walking tour of the study area.

## Stakeholder Interviews

The following summarizes interviews between the AzTAP Committee and Panelists with Casa Grande Mayor Craig McFarland; Rina Rien, Main Street Director; Paul Tice, Casa Grande Planning Director; Paula Lambert, AZ New Horizons Realty; Kirk McCarville, Land Advisors Organization and member of the Casa Grande IDA Board; Richard Rosales, APS; and Darrell Wilson, HILGARTWILSON.

Topic	General Comments	Opportunities	Challenges	What's Good Now
<b>General Setting</b>	<p>There is a shift going on in Casa Grande – but some want to keep things rural and others want to embrace growth.</p> <p>Key downtown planning goals are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to grow</li> <li>• Attract outside investment</li> <li>• Strategic and sustained planning to create a strong downtown.</li> </ul> <p>The City and/or Main Street should reach out to property owners &amp; businesses and provide incentives for façade renovation and upgrades.</p>	<p>Evening uses now include the Paramount Theater, BlackBox Theater and Food Truck Friday.</p> <p>Area is currently very affordable, so gentrification is not a current concern.</p> <p>Destination retail uses tend to be the most successful, clothing stores have the least success.</p> <p>The City doesn't understand the importance of the downtown in Casa Grande's economy – the focus is on new locates.</p> <p>We need to connect experience with intelligence for our younger operators.</p>	<p>Progress has been happening two steps forward and then one step back.</p> <p>Investors are not responsive to area.</p> <p>People don't have a reason to go downtown at night.</p> <p>The area lacks housing options.</p> <p>Youth don't want to go to downtown because that is where old people go. (Young people tend to leave Casa Grande after graduation.)</p> <p>Too many retail vacancies in the downtown.</p> <p>Merchants struggle with the summer low times.</p> <p>To some extent, Phoenix is too close, so it is easy people go there for entertainment.</p>	<p>Plenty of shops providing services like hair salons and dry cleaners are busy and do well year-round because of workers in area – although they're only open just during weekdays, not weekends.</p> <p>Food City on Florence and 2nd Street is an asset because people who will live in downtown don't have to drive somewhere to shop at a supermarket.</p>
<b>Sense of Place/ Authenticity</b>		<p>The City can embrace the importance of the downtown in Casa Grande's economy by shifting the focus from new locations.</p> <p>City could/should be more engaged and supportive of Main Street Casa Grande.</p>	<p>The image and perception of the downtown needs to be changed.</p> <p>There is no downtown "sense of community."</p> <p>Area is missing a concentrated &amp; focused area of activity that is programmed, organized and supported.</p> <p>Moving the police station "decentered" the center of Casa Grande.</p> <p>The downtown lacks an identity.</p> <p>Downtown has no "sense of place" – it's far from the freeway.</p>	<p>Art projects, paved alleyways, cleaned-up and artistic murals done on sides of some buildings (alley off Florence Street and behind Cook E Jar restaurant)</p>
<b>Housing</b>		<p>Casa Grande needs neighborhoods that support retail, restaurants and entertainment venues with multi-family housing for all ages.</p>	<p>Homeless create blight in the downtown.</p> <p>Affordable housing is abundant in Casa Grande. 4,000 to 5,000 finished lots and another 3,000 – 4,000 that are engineered. They are selling for less than replacement costs.</p>	



Topic	General Comments	Opportunities	Challenges	What's Good Now
<b>Land Use/ Design/ Redevelopment</b>	<p>The City should think about including older residents and youth in its planning for downtown.</p>	<p>Lucid will help re-center the downtown to the center of the City and change the City's demographics with more professional positions.</p> <p>Co-working spaces are a potential use for older buildings.</p> <p>1928 Paramount Theater has opportunity but there are constraints</p> <p>Conference center, shared parking and new focus on downtown.</p> <p>Downtown needs an anchor development – microbrewery and restaurants.</p> <p>Downtown should have a 3-4 story boutique hotel with underground parking.</p> <p>Food City is a gem and can help facilitate redevelopment. With larger market (more population) with higher wages, they would update the store.</p>	<p>Neon Sign Park is terrific (but not enough on its own to attract and keep people downtown.</p> <p>One of the largest downtown landowners is the newspaper, and their building is not fully used.</p>	<p>Positive influence generated by the focus on historic preservation activities: Neon Sign Park, murals, and the revitalized Casa Grande Museum.</p>
<b>Marketing</b>	<p>Downtown is not leveraging existing target markets like retirees.</p> <p>There is no strong image or marketing campaign for downtown.</p>	<p>Retirees are showing preferences for apartments / condos in areas where they can walk to amenities and services. Boomers enjoy living in places with younger people because of the vitality and vibe.</p> <p>We need marketing to entice people AND developers. What is the purpose of investing money if there is no marketing to support the business?</p> <p>Expand the vision of our target market – there are multiple markets for the downtown.</p> <p>The downtown needs a convener to build excitement.</p> <p>More activities like the street fair to bring out residents.</p>		<p>Events are great; just need to “stir up more enthusiasm” for putting them on and get more people involved.</p>

Topic	General Comments	Opportunities	Challenges	What's Good Now
Land Ownership			<p>Taxes and insurance are \$3 of the rent. Impossible to amortize improvements in the rents.</p> <p>Many parcels owned long term by absentee landlords that don't operate businesses in the area.</p> <p>A decision about the High School Auditorium needs to be made. It is a blight on the downtown.</p>	Affordable commercial rents - \$6-7/SF in downtown (Florence Blvd are twice as high).
Regulatory	<p>Need a better understanding of how to handle renovations of old buildings.</p> <p>City inspectors need better training and more flexibility with regards to downtown code enforcement.</p>	<p>"Universal Building Code" could help make renovation &amp; rehabilitation more affordable.</p> <p>There are three tribes surrounding the downtown, look at Casino Grants to potentially support downtown redevelopment activities.</p> <p>Leverage CDBG funds to address fire sprinkler deficiencies on a reimbursement basis-maybe \$20,000 and creation of 2 FTE jobs.</p>	<p>There is a communication "breakdown" between City leaders' vision and that of staff.</p> <p>City codes require expensive renovations that inhibit development and adaptive reuse. (Ex: elimination of the fire sprinkler waiver.)</p>	

# Panel Discussion

Panel discussion was guided by questions on the topics of:

- Assessing the Vision
- Enhancing the Place
- Building Market Potential
- Building Economic Capacity
- Finance & Implementation
- Momentum and Leadership

*"The bones are here. We need to work with them and be prepared for revitalization and redevelopment opportunities that will come with the expansion and diversification of the City's employment base."*

— John McNamara  
Vice President, AECOM

## Overview

The opening of the Neon Sign Park was the catalyst for engaging ULI Arizona for assistance. The Park represents the largest outside investment in the downtown in several years. The investment is the result of a partnership between National Geographic, National Historic Trust, and American Express. With this investment, the City and Casa Grande Main Street are focused on connecting people visiting the Sign Park to the downtown, and on strategies to use the increased visitation and redevelopment of key sites to kick-start downtown revitalization.

The AzTAP, held on March 5, 2019 at Central Plaza Event Hall, served as an opportunity to examine how Casa Grande can move forward to create a strong sense of place with Main Street as the hub of downtown. A panel of eight multi-disciplinary development industry thought leaders discussed ideas and strategies aimed at enhancing the redevelopment potential for the area.

This summary report outlines the various strategies that were discussed during the AzTAP to help the City lay the groundwork for realizing a vibrant, sustainable downtown area.

As the City and its partners make decisions about how to invest in the short and long term, there are several important overriding priorities to consider. Historic downtowns are unique around the country and in Arizona. Casa Grande has one, so making it a priority and leveraging it as the City's anchor is critical. Leading with a strong vision and commitment will attract partners and bring community success. The ensuing AzTAP findings and ideas are available to help guide achievable next steps.

## Assessing the Vision / Initial Perspective

### "The Potential"

Initial discussion revealed a common thread - downtown Casa Grande embodies "strong bones" and is bolstered by a unique, authentic character

that can't be manufactured. With some care and committed action, the City will draw out the innate charm and realize potential for “a there-there”. Panel members described important ingredients to support a vision for the downtown:

- to be the “image”, the “identity”, the “heart” of the City
- a destination for entrepreneurial and creative activity supported by local champions, consistent focus and welcoming actions
- an anchor with seamless connections to other nodes of activity such as an arts district and government district
- a hub that transcends day to nighttime activity with multiuse spaces and residential living and services options at its core
- a place that honors its history and focuses on its future through a dynamic mix of historic, rehabilitated, adaptive reuse, and infill development
- a home that tells the story of Arizona's cultural heritage (Latin, Tribal, etc.) drawing diverse people together for one-of-a-kind experiences and multigenerational opportunities

Assets identified as important contributions to the downtown's sense of place include:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Peart and Elliot Parks   | • Angled, off-set grid system, walkable streets, favorable parking configuration |
| • St Anthony of Padua Catholic School  |  |
| • Casa Grande Library, Paramount Theatre and other nearby arts and cultural institutions | • Picturesque, historic building stock with adaptive re-use potential            |
| • The Neon Sign Park   | • The alleys and in-between spaces   |
| • Food City grocery store  | • And leaders and people who care  |
| • A growing employment base  |  |

Through revitalization and sensitive restoration, the downtown was envisioned as a “Place for Future Generations” that invites people to the community of Casa Grande.

## “The Challenge”

Many of the challenges identified by Panelists echo those identified during the stakeholder interviews and are organized into broad categories outlined below.



Casa Grande Activity Nodes.



Panel brainstorming.



Peart Park in Casa Grande, AZ.



Example of identity signage.



NACTO, safe bike lanes, slower traffic.



Traffic moves too fast on Florence Boulevard.

**Perception:** while the downtown provides the City with a sense of place, it currently lacks a coherent identity of who Casa Grande is or wants to be. There has been a focus on subdivisions and single-family housing throughout the City, so it will be important for the development community to hear about a strong, committed vision for the downtown and a desire for other housing options to lure new opportunities. The City should make it clear in everything it does that the downtown is the “core” of Casa Grande.

**Boundaries:** visually understanding the presence and physical boundaries of the downtown was identified as a challenge. Currently there is not clear definition of the boundaries to provide people a sense of arrival, a “reason to stop and be curious” and help identify the area. “You don’t know when you are downtown and when you are not”. The City has done a good job along Florence Street (Main Street), so it’s time to allocate more focus beyond to achieve a coordinated and comprehensive downtown district.

**Safety / Connectivity:** the width and speed of traffic on Florence Boulevard were identified as barriers that divide the downtown. The speed is 35 mph, but the roadway feels like a highway. There is also no connection between the sides of the street. Street and land use connectivity are challenges to overcome with vacant parcels and buildings that discourage visitors to stay and explore. Disconnected, unshaded, and unlit sidewalks are impediments to walking and biking and people feeling safe. The lack of a consistent streetscape throughout the downtown detracts from the sense of place. Adding bike racks and bike lanes connecting destinations, offers a good return on investment if the yield is more activity and people.

**Land Use Mix:** it was agreed that the ongoing focus on retail, almost to the exclusion of housing, results in an over-reliance on visitors for downtown economic activity. It was pointed out that older people tend to not like to drive at night, so they are a lost opportunity after dark. As a result, downtown is generally populated during the day, but many businesses close by late afternoon. The lack of incentives to build housing downtown was also cited as a challenge. Zoning focuses on commercial or low density residential, so the result is not getting the “mix of uses” desired.

Some also noticed that many buildings were “walled off” and not “open to the street.” Dark storefronts and empty parcels were identified as off-putting and perpetuating the perception that the downtown is not revitalizing.

Several social service providers such as the Living Center, NCHP, AZ @ Work, the Food Bank are all prominently located together in the downtown. While they serve as important community support resources, they don’t always create perception of a safe feeling environment and might be signaling a greater downtown presence than the retail and restaurant establishments.



**Market / Operations:** creating an 18-24 hour downtown can be challenging and will take time. It was pointed out that the Neon Sign Park will be viewed best at night when most of the downtown businesses are closed. Even if streetscape connectivity is improved, nighttime visitors will have nowhere to go. Finding ways to keep the businesses open longer will be important. The old Ale House couldn't provide food, so think about ways to accommodate simple food options onsite that wouldn't require extensive renovations for grilling/frying ventilation or find ways to partner with other local restaurant operators.

**Ownership:** the diversity of ownership and absentee owners are challenges to redevelopment. Absentee owners do not have a commitment to the downtown community, so this can make partnerships for redevelopment difficult.

**Regulation/Cost of Preservation Rehab:** rigid building codes were identified as a challenge, especially sprinkler regulations. The costs of preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings may be too high due to inflexible codes. The policies should be proportional to the investment in needed tenant improvements to open business.

**Revitalization Strategy:** the lack of a committed vision and revitalization strategy that includes incentives for downtown redevelopment is a hurdle. It could also be sending a message to would-be investors and development partners that the downtown is not a City priority. Not having an action plan in a City-recognized document (such as a Redevelopment Plan) makes downtown decision making less predictable and planning ad-hoc.

## "Downtown Opportunities"

**Walkable Streets:** Casa Grande's "good bones" - unique, walkable, connected street / small grid network provide great infrastructure for the historic downtown to revitalize as a pedestrian friendly, 24/7 environment.

**On-Street Parking:** as the downtown begins to revitalize, angled and on-street parking will encourage regional visitors to "drive down, walk around, and explore."

**Existing Amenities:** Dorothy Powell Senior Adult Center, St. Anthony of Padua Community Center, and Peart Park offer services and area amenities that are attractive to residential development. The Food City grocery store is an excellent opportunity to leverage and will be a key component to support future residential living options in downtown.

**Multigenerational Development:** go beyond parks and bring youth options to the downtown. This will attract a diverse population and can help "futureproof" the area with sustainable development options.

*"Where are the residents?  
Importing activity is a  
stop-gap measure –  
the Downtown needs a  
built-in population."*

-Jeff McVay, Manager of  
Downtown Transformation,  
City of Mesa



The Old Town Ale House is good example of need to develop flexible adaptive reuse policy.



Casa Grande angled, on-street parking and walkable streets.







Nighttime sign example.

*“People love in-between spaces like bars and restaurants they can access through an alley”*

– Martha dePlazaola Abbott  
Co-Managing Director,  
Gensler



Casa Grande activated alley.

**Employment Growth:** new employers, such as Lucid Motors, coming in adjacent to downtown and others in the overall region are a tremendous asset. Many of these employers will attract a highly educated and financially stable millennial population seeking living environments that the downtown can offer. It is vital to make sure the downtown is ready to “seize the opportunity.”

**Financing Opportunities:** the Casa Grande IDA is a great resource that should be leveraged more to defray costs and reduce risk for early entrants into the downtown market. Financing opportunities (discussed in greater detail on page 28) could include bonds, tax credits, the Opportunity Zone, and land trusts to maintain some of the properties. Reinstating the Heritage Fund at the state level would be a good funding source for preservation activities. The fund has been successfully used on projects by the City several times (a bill to restore the Heritage Fund has traction in the Arizona Legislature and is being monitored and supported).

**Available Land / Redevelopment Sites:** the City has plenty of available land but needs to increase the density in the urban core to attract residents, which enhances the market potential for retail uses. Vacant parcels, if properly zoned and incentivized, provide shovel ready opportunities for housing, commercial, and multiuse, “experiential” development. Vacant parcels can be leveraged by expanding established events in downtown, such as Food Truck Friday. Empty storefronts provide opportunities for their adaptive reuse potential. In the interim, they can be filled with art and temporary uses to stimulate interest and activity.

**In-Between Spaces:** the City’s use of alleys is impressive and an opportunity to expand as they provide unique entries to bars and restaurants. Focus on the “connective tissue” and create more creative ways to connect the events and the in-between spaces to the historic core. Well-connected areas to dining (and proximity to residential areas) is important to make them successful.

**Neon Sign Park:** embedding thematic elements of the Sign Park throughout the City is a catalytic opportunity that will shape downtown’s sense of place. Encourage businesses to display signs and weave in mutually supportive design elements to complement and promote the park.

**Arts and Culture:** expand the presence of the arts community in downtown. Build on the City’s successful mural program. Go beyond heritage murals and get funky.

**Storytelling:** use social media, YouTube, Twitter, and other digital platforms, to promote the downtown. This is low hanging fruit that can have big dividends. The Town of Gilbert marketing campaign (using the Justin Timberlake song “Can’t Stop the Feeling”) went viral and was a great way to involve local youth and get people excited about community events.



**Local Champions:** the enthusiastic and committed engagement of City public officials and Main Street leaders in the AzTAP demonstrates strong support and partnership for Downtown revitalization especially at the highest levels and among property owners and merchants. Getting behind local champions is one of the best opportunities that Casa Grande can leverage as initial energy.

Opportunities and Challenges identified by Panelists.



Casa Grande Neon Sign Park rendering.

# Enhancing the “Place”... Zoning, Circulation, and Historic Preservation

*“Grow your Mid-century Modern.  
Bring on the Funk!”*

-Kimber Lanning  
Founder, Local First  
Arizona



Mid-Century modern in Casa Grande: Old Town Commerce Center (1962).

Sense of place elements are what capture people's interest and give a community its unique identity. Why people get excited about a place is the result of growing a cohesive, authentic, and identifiable downtown. It starts with a common vision for what downtown should be, then it's promoted with plans, codes, and design standards to ensure growth and development make positive contributions to a strong sense of place and community. The City of Casa Grande's location in the region and its proximity to Phoenix is good, but not being too close offers an opportunity to celebrate and be different.

**Mix Compatible Uses:** focus on a mix of uses downtown, adding small-scale residential opportunities, live-work options for artists and entrepreneurs, and lodging/hospitality. Not every building has to be mixed but the area should be. It's important to evaluate where you want housing to be and focus actions accordingly (consider 4th, 3rd, and 2nd Streets).

**Update Land Use / Zoning Regulations:** make sure planning and zoning codes incentivize what you want to happen and is attractive to the market. Incentives do not always have to involve money and could be provided through expedited permitting processes, density bonuses, “providing a bigger pipe if the City has plans to upgrade anyway”, etc. For example, use the lot at East 3rd Street and Dry Lake to get the desired residential development and attach strings to it, like requiring drop boxes for deliveries. Consider a downtown overlay district, design guidelines, or a form-based code to steward the vision. Change regulations to increase height and intensity. Evaluate fairness and proportionality in building code requirements to reduce prohibitive costs that drive investors away. It was suggested that the City update codes and was applauded for its recent adoption of the 2018 International Building Code (IBC) to encourage investment and entrepreneurs into the downtown. If a building sits vacant for a long period of time, it could



trigger a new use permit. Shrink time in the development process as an incentive – “time is money.”

**Add Gateways:** think outside the box and form creative gateway and arrival features. Florence Street, at its' intersection with Florence Boulevard and Main Street, is an important entry gateway that should be better signed to set an expectation and sense of arrival to the downtown (currently there is nothing at I-10 at Pinal Avenue (SR 387) or Florence Boulevard). A roundabout might also differentiate this intersection from others in the City.

**Improve Streetscapes/Circulation:** add four-way stops at strategic locations throughout the downtown to slow traffic, especially along West 2nd Street (SR 84) and Main Street. Consider enhancing the streetscape along Florence Boulevard along the northern boundary of the downtown. Rolled curbs on Florence Street could facilitate events and street fairs transcending sidewalks into the street. Extend the Florence Street streetscape throughout a whole downtown district. Make sure trees and sidewalks do not end, especially as connections to the Neon Sign Park. Direct heavy truck traffic away from areas of high pedestrian and bicycling activity. Create a consistent streetscape by eliminating parking between buildings and opt for concentrated centrally located shared parking. Give people choices about how to move around the downtown (bicycles, pedestrian, circulators, trollies, cars, scooters). Connect large employers to the downtown by trolley during lunch time (Lucid Motors is just far enough to not be walkable). Establish a permanent fixed bus route that services the downtown (Central Arizona Regional Transit currently ends at the CAC Satellite Campus1 at the northeast corner of the downtown). Watch “**Build a Better Block**” to cut down on the freeway feel of Main Street and East 2nd Street.

**Get Creative, Get Funky:** “be bold, don’t be ordinary”. Add color everywhere and play on that as an identity driver. Funky old airstream trailers, like the Shady Dell in Bisbee, would solve some of the lodging needs and would be a great complement to the Neon Sign Park.

**Make Small, Targeted Investments:** incremental improvements are an important way to look at downtown revitalization. Clean up the alley near the Food Truck Festival and remove the fence so families can enjoy the park. Consider free WiFi in downtown to create a place where people can relax and communicate. Add public spaces with landscaping, benches, and signage; attractive creative placemaking elements to set the tone for the place; sidewalks and streetscape improvements; and trees along pedestrian corridors for shade. The City of Mesa funded a Downtown Lab for \$100k to incubate small intervention pilots to test their transferability and value long-term.

**Inventory/Promote Assets:** record your buildings, physical features and elements of uniqueness and recognize them in a public way through media, YouTube, publications, and websites. Ask “how do you know what you are



Seize opportunity for gateway at Florence Street and Florence Boulevard.



Funky window near Casa Grande Main Street office.

*“Add trees. They are the single most cost-effective improvement.”*

–Jeff McVay, Manager of  
Downtown Transformation,  
City of Mesa

preserving until you define it"? Include infill opportunity sites that could become something. The City owns a block on 3rd Street, so notify the development community of your vision. The City can also promote private properties to spark interest. The City could exert some control over vacant sites by requiring them to be screened or fenced in a manner that contributes to the downtown.

**Support Local Businesses:** offer storefront improvement grants to make it seamless for property owners and businesses. Hire an architect/construction manager through a Request of Proposal (RFP) and have them implement a program of improvements that will unify the look and feel of the area. Several businesses are installing lighting, so that should be an indication that the street is too dark. Add lighting and encourage businesses to be open at nights, especially during downtown events like the Food Truck Festival.



Trees on Main Street in Casa Grande.

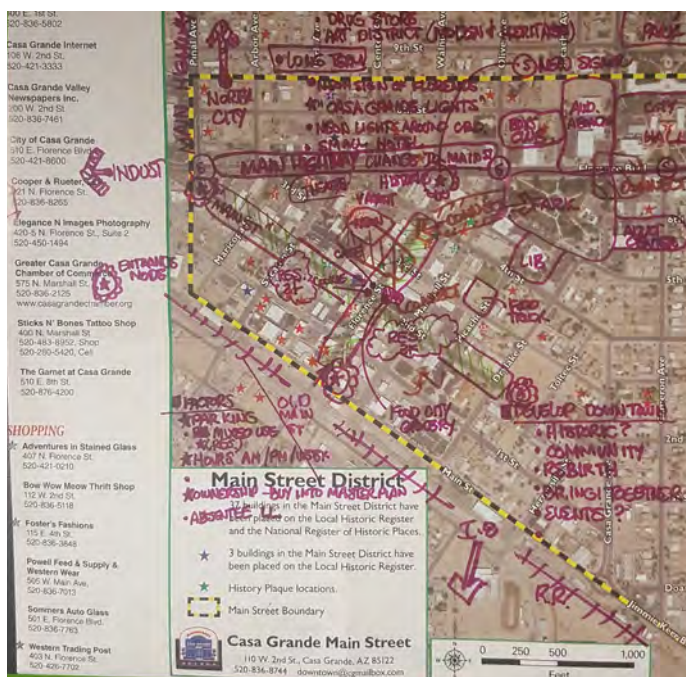


Main Street businesses are adding lighting.

# (Re)Development Conceptualization

To help visualize the opportunities, panelists mapped out some of their ideas:

- Recognize 2nd and Florence Streets as the downtown center and start establishing identity
- Connect Peart Park to Florence Street through the parking lots and the alley
- Redesign Florence Boulevard as a connective component: consider a road diet
- Recognize SR 84/2nd Street as the main gateway into downtown
- Connect to the Holiday Inn at the SR 387/278/84 intersection
- Create a non-motorized connection across Florence Boulevard between City Hall and the downtown at the northeast edge of Peart Park (North Casa Grande Avenue extended).



Panel Day discussion and ideas.



# Building Market Potential and Economic Capacity

A fact-based understanding of market opportunities and triggers for investment will be necessary to help Casa Grande Main Street and the City focus their downtown revitalization efforts. Evaluating the value capture potential and what makes the downtown a “draw” can support effective decision-making. It might be helpful to complete a market study and quantify the economic loss of residents and visitors choosing to go elsewhere for a “downtown experience”, to gauge role downtown contributes in in the City’s economy.

Feasibility studies for key parcels could help formulate an understanding of barriers to investment and development. Holding a community “think tank” could produce immediate results, such as issuing an RFP on a specific site.

Understanding triggers, like employment spikes, is a good future-focused way to prepare for development. The State Farm example in Tempe was cited as evidence of how employment can be a major catalyst for housing demand and the need for more transportation options.

**Work with Downtown Land Owners:** when current downtown land owners struggle to accept new paradigms, show them how investment in their property benefits them – not to get them to sell – but to participate in downtown redevelopment and the benefits it brings. As redevelopment begins, stay close to existing landowners so they don’t sell their properties to investors who do not share the downtown vision. Working with current or reticent landowners will require the City to set a framework of “if you do A, the City will do B.” Another option is to ground lease (with options) from current owners.

**Partner with Major Employers:** survey them to find out who their employees are and what they want. Assess what housing and amenities are needed and desired.

**Offer Predevelopment Assistance:** leverage the IDA to establish a predevelopment fund to provide low interest loans. Prepare the necessary upfront studies, such as market feasibility studies on the City’s key

redevelopment sites. An example is the City of Phoenix Adams Street Activation Study that resulted in the City issuing RFPs for several City-owned downtown sites.

**Get Shovel Ready:** get the City-owned block on 3rd Street ready to go, so when the right opportunity presents itself you are ready. “Hold onto it to get something good, but don’t hold onto it so much that you get nothing”. Be ready with infrastructure and know if it is the right size dry/wet utilities and whether half the street will need to be upgraded and tie with incentives, not just impact fees.

**Add Residential:** add residential living options downtown and consider the opportunity for middle density housing– **missing middle** – because there is a pent up demand for this in the region.

**Phase Development:** stage the development focus starting around East 2nd Street and Florence Boulevard and the City-owned parcel at Drylake and E. 2nd Streets and move north.

**Shore Up the Auditorium:** fix the roof so it doesn’t get worse as it is a substantial building with infrastructure that has been idle for 20 years. The building needs to be abated no matter what (even with demolition) and “the area already has vacant lots”. It doesn’t need to be treated as a historic site. It is a structural box where the floors can be flattened for new uses and windows are easy to add. Think outside the box to reinvent the building, like the Monroe Street Abby project, where massive fire destroyed the roof, forming a “courtyard” in the church’s center which is the key feature of the new design. Host a competition to identify temporary uses. It could be renovated to an entertainment space for youth.

**Activate:** galvanize the alleys for pedestrians (but not cars), program events, and build on the “neon” concept by encouraging businesses to use neon signs in their windows or on their facades – create a sign district. Leverage willing property owners who can contribute their horse power to attract more developers. Get easements and add some trees, flowers, and temporary uses. Leverage existing events like the Food Truck Festival by adding a stage, gravel, park benches, lighting, and musical performers.

**Update Development Guidelines:** establish and clearly communicate development guidelines. There are a lot of small, unique parcels that would be of interest to developers, and some very large floor plates that could be broken up. Make the rules known so it’s easy for potential developers and investors to do “back of the napkin” calculations. Streamline codes that were likely based more on Euclidean models – protecting people from each other doesn’t apply here because you are trying to attract a mix. “Lift off the lid - with restraint” - with uses, density, height, and flexible parking. Understand creative retention policies by creating a flood district allowing new strategies to mitigate flooding like bioswales as opposed to burdening individual properties.

*“Look at housing development as economic development.”*

– Sylvia Urrutia  
Founder, U Developing



City of Casa Grande-owned  
abandoned auditorium and gym.

**Invest and Lead:** don't wait for a silver bullet, the anchor is the place. The City should lead and prioritize investments in downtown and clear the way for private investment by streamlining processes and incentivizing.

**Leverage Downtown Advocates:** consider forming a nonprofit redevelopment authority or merchants' association to help do the things the City can't do, such as grants and financial incentives. The Roosevelt Row Community Development Corporation in downtown Phoenix advocates for development and streetscape improvements and as a 501(c)3 can funnel grants and other resources to the neighborhood. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is a resource that has supported Roosevelt Row and other downtown groups with funding to help them be effective and sustain momentum.



Inside Paramount Theatre.

# Finance & Implementation

“Developers like to figure out how to make money and be successful, and then do it again.” An important role that the City has in downtown development is reducing risk – especially predictable development costs and decreasing time - to make the downtown more competitive. If the City gets behind tough projects, it demonstrates a strong public-private partnership ethos for downtown’s success.

**Appoint a Downtown Ombudsman:** open an office of customer advocacy or designate a person to manage the downtown hurdles and expedite development applications review and approvals. Implementation requires a staff that is empowered with “administrative” relief valves to attract and support redevelopment and new development. Empower staff to actively promote the type of development the City wants.

**Encourage Artists:** provide artists space to work, do pop ups and events that are creative and entrepreneurial and focus on all the connections between spaces. Encourage businesses to hire artists to paint and do murals. Don’t be afraid to start small. Roosevelt Row was attracting 30,000 people when over half of the district was dirt lots, but the ability to transcend its day image to a large evening art attraction was powerful.

**Explore Creative Finance Options:** look beyond traditional banks to **Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)** who may be more willing to finance smaller-scale downtown redevelopment.

**Mitigate Investment Risk:** meet and communicate with investors (including CDFIs ) so they understand the City’s goals. Demonstrate (through codes, policies, administrative activities, and infrastructure investments) what the City is doing to mitigate investment risk by proactively reducing the regulatory burden on entrepreneurs. This also provides City staff with important economic development tools. When the City of Phoenix adaptive reuse program initiated, it started as a very small ½ mile program, but through demonstrated results is now one of the most comprehensive programs in the country.

*“A sprinkler system isn’t expensive, connecting to the water main is. ‘As-Built’ are important.”*

– Max Sommacampanga,  
Founding Developer,  
CIMA Holdings

## Create a Finance Inventory

Be creative and layer funds together

Historic rehabilitation projects typically use **Preservation Grants** preservation grants and **State** and Historic Tax Credits Federal.

The Casa Grande Opportunity Zone of 9,200 acres extends into the Main Street area and could be used to entice developers. It's another source of funds to consider that could be layered with other funds, but the narrow 10-year timeframe might not make it particularly fruitful for the downtown. The scale has to be significant – about a 200-unit project.

The City might be better off evaluating the Government Property Lease Excise Tax Program (**GPLET**) which can be used to fund residential development, not just employment.

Additionally, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (**LIHTC**), (not Section 8 funds) have high standards to qualify, but can result in great residential projects that often lease quickly.

Federal New Market Tax Credits **New Market Tax Credits** are targeted to go to specific distressed communities to attract private investment. Arizona has not been a target area for several years (~80% go to Texas). Clearinghouse CDFI and Dudley Ventures are local finance institutions that can draw new market tax credits to AZ.

Community Development Block Grants (**CDBG**) can be a good finance source because the City can use the money in many ways, such as creating a revolving loan fund. Mesa hired architects to work on several projects using CDBG funds. Essentially, the City took away all the burdensome, upfront requirements.

Transportation Enhancement (**TE**) funding helps communities expand transportation choices through activities like bike and pedestrian facilities, scenic easements for historic sites, and landscaping and beautification. Bond financing can be used for a community to develop infrastructure such as water systems and roads to attract larger types of development. It is important to review what revenue is available for debt repayment because bonds can't be financed longer than life of improvement.

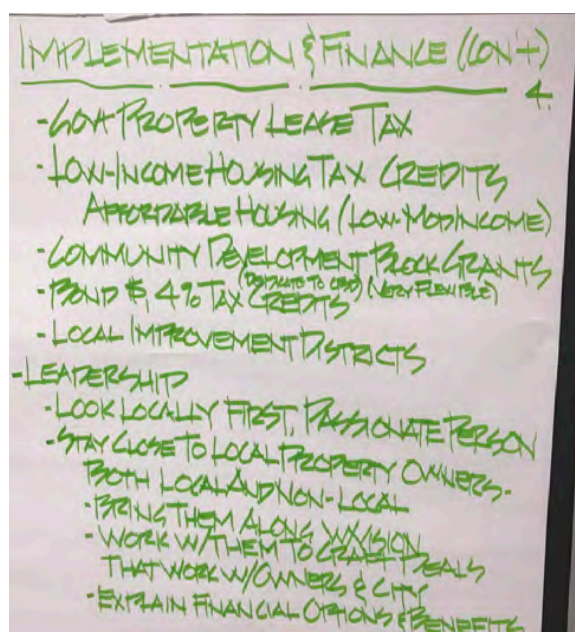
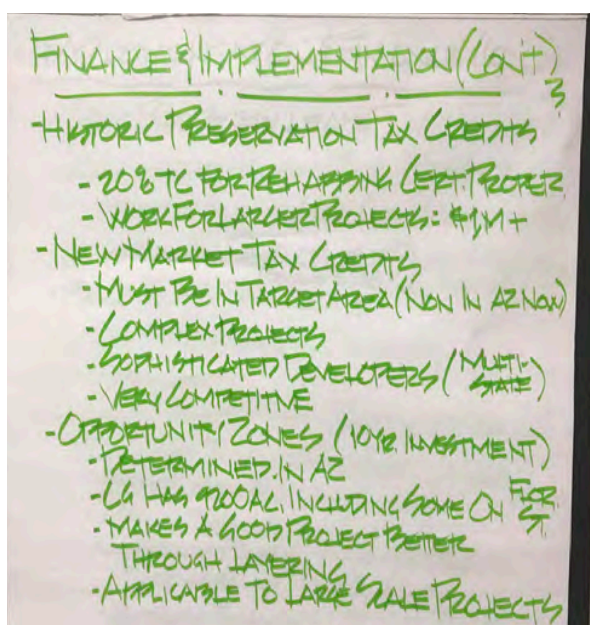
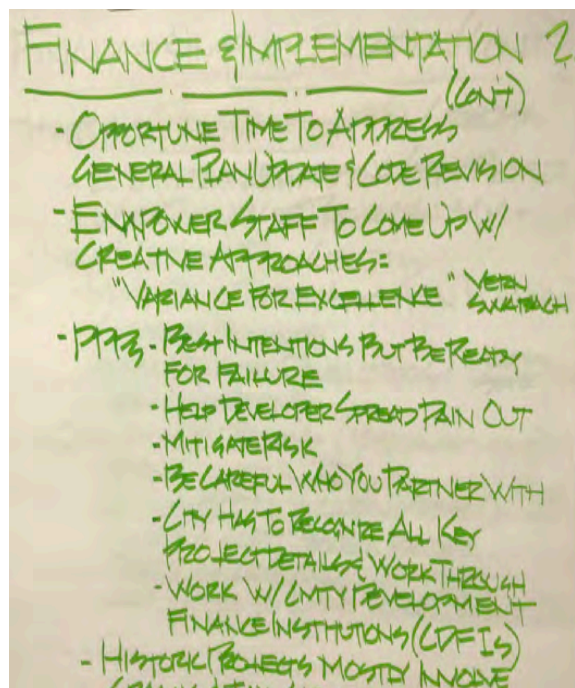
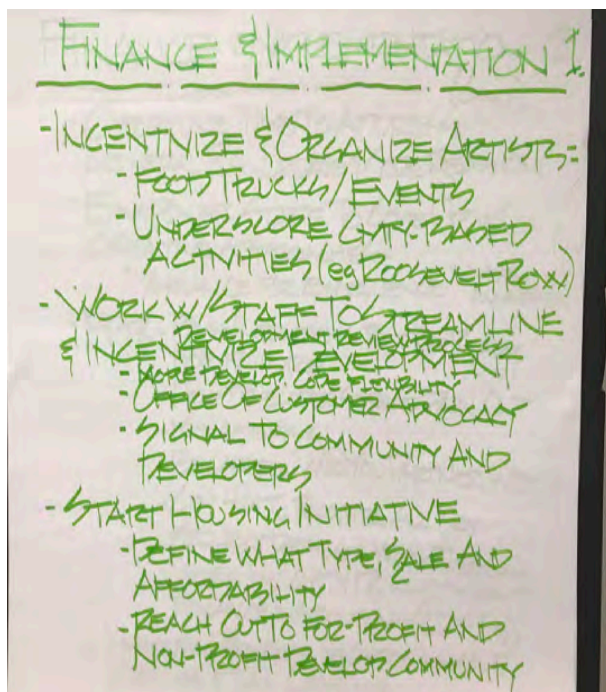
Business Improvement, Revitalization, Special Improvement Districts are also tools for adding public infrastructure or enhances services to an area with specific project goals.



**Leverage City-Owned Land:** the City's ownership position in the downtown is important and could be a lever to attract other community benefits and strategic development partners. Maximize the partnership with the IDA as much as possible to help finance redevelopment activity.

**Understand Infrastructure Needs:** know if existing infrastructure needs to be upgraded and whether the capital cost impacts of infrastructure on (re) development will help the downtown expand its competitive position. Typically, private development sees the City making improvements to the public realm before private investment capital follows.

Panel Day notes.





# Sustaining Momentum & Leadership

*“Don’t forget who you are and plan on the success you expect.”*

– Kimber Lanning  
Founder, Local First

The Panel emphasized that Casa Grande Main Street and the City “shouldn’t do it all at once” and encouraged revitalization from the “bottom up” as authentic redevelopment is often organic to honor the culture and feel of an area. Downtown redevelopment is a long-term proposition that is sustained by a consistent and well-thought out regulatory framework that includes plans, codes, and policy (downtown Gilbert’s downtown being a “30-year overnight success”). The first projects will be the hardest and will need the most commitment, but they can the pave the way for others’ success.

The City should consider focusing on local entrepreneurship and proactively finding the types of entrepreneurs and businesses desired in the downtown. Reach out to them and work with them to locate in downtown Casa Grande. An Office of Customer Advocacy that says “it’s our job to get your doors open” would show its internal business community and the external marketplace that the City and Main Street are serious about its downtown revitalization.

Finding a developer / investor that is willing to take risk, commit to the downtown, and be a champion will help prove the downtown market. As the City and Casa Grande Main Street move forward in seeking investment, be bold, take risks, and be ready for failure as not everything always works out at first. A strong partnership between the City, Casa Grande Main Street, and other public and private partners incrementally proving themselves overtime will ultimately yield big results.



Casa Grande Neon Sign Park.

# Next Steps

**Advice on some important activities and next steps is offered below:**

- » Focus on corners and encourage interim, temporary and pop-up uses and employ online marking – all of which are critical to get people to connect.
- » Let redevelopment be incremental and organic with small interventions over time. Don't forget who you are and plan on the success you expect. Don't lose your sense of community. You have a unique, historic, authentic downtown – it's your asset to play and leverage.
- » Whatever you do, add people to the downtown. Bring more people to work, live, and play. Survey business employees to see who would live downtown. Survey your seniors to see what they desire, and work with Central Arizona College (CAC) to move some classes to a more central downtown location.
- » Set specific goals and identify someone who is responsible for documenting success.
- » Build a team within the City to facilitate housing and business development.
- » Think about your unique buildings and assets. People value and crave authentic areas. Focus on using them to create a cycle of success.
- » Promote the idea that Casa Grande cannot achieve its goals unless it has a successful downtown. Make the downtown the City's anchor.
- » Get property owners involved in the visioning. Work together so the downtown can attract housing, retail and employers, partner and work with all of them.
- » Restripe and narrow roadways to include bike lanes and highlight signs and gateways. "Paint is cheap."
- » Recognize the downtown's potential and that residential activity will drive revitalization. Ensure the City's General Plan, zoning, and building codes have flexibility and policies to attract the type of development you want.
- » Don't be a victim of your success and lose affordability – keep that part of your focus.
- » Take action now:
  1. Connect Florence Street to the Neon Sign Park with a revitalized streetscape/pedestrian connection.
  2. Move ahead with using digital media to identify and focus on downtown activities and events.
  3. Get ready for new employers by understanding their housing needs and expectations and how they trigger projects within the City.



Casa Grande La Cocina  
Food Truck Festival.

# Appendix:

## Studies & Reports

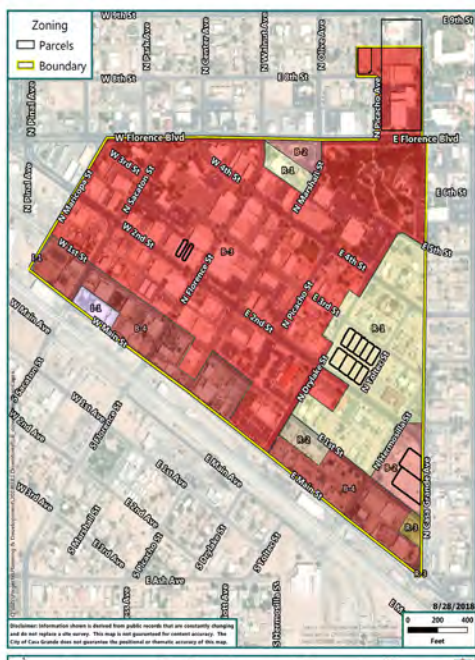
Background research is summarized below.

**Downtown Action Plan (October 2018):** The Downtown Action Plan is a series of steps, organized according to impact and difficulty, developed by Main Street. The plan identifies 16 items as follows:

Priority	Action Item	Impact	Difficulty
1	High police bicycle presence	3	1
2	Grind bumps on Florence Street	8	6
3	Paint ADA ramps	3	2
4	Stripe parking spaces on Florence and Marshall	7	3
5	Increase trash pickups on Florence	5	5
6	Power wash sidewalks	3	1
7	Repave Florence Street	9	6
8	Step up code enforcement on Dispatch litter	5	2
9	Step up code enforcement on Food City sidewalk items	6	2
10	Create Revolving Loan Program	7	3
11	Install "creative" crosswalks	7	4
12	Enhance downtown lighting	6	7
13	Develop a business incubator	8	7
14	Pass a downtown sign ordinance	6	7
15	Rehab Meehan-Gaar and Fischer Memorial houses	4	7
16	Acquire Paramount Theatre	2	10

**Casa Grande Downtown Project Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) (2012):** This SWOT was facilitated by Casa Grande Chamber of Commerce members Tom Yost and Richard Rosales. The group (identified by survey) found that the variety of buildings and architecture, events, and local pride in ownership were the strongest assets of the downtown. Vacant buildings, limited activities for youth and poor lighting and promotion the part of local business owners were found to be downtown's biggest weaknesses. Identified opportunities include restaurants and lounges that





Downtown Zoning and  
Redevelopment.

would provide night life, buildings and empty lots offer opportunities for new businesses, and that the area is attractive to Phoenix market investors. Addition of a known chain was thought to be the best way to bring people downtown, followed by an anchor store that would also attract people, and then providing nightlife, activities for teens, year-long activities, and anchor stores. Overall benefits of a thriving downtown included less driving for entertainment, increased City revenues, and civic pride.

**City of Casa Grande Downtown Zoning:** Maps provided by the City show that the approximately 74 of the 110 acres that comprise the Downtown is mostly zoned B-3, Central Business Zone. The purpose of the B-3 Zone is to provide for high intensity, retail or service outlets which deal directly with the consumer for whom the goods or services are intended. The uses allowed in this district are to provide goods and services on a community market scale. R-1 is the second most prominent zoning category and includes the 16-acre area generally northeast of E. 1st Street and southeast of N. Drylake street. R-1 allows development of single-family detached dwellings and directly related complementary uses at a low density. The R-1 Zone is intended to be strictly residential in character with a minimum of disturbances due to traffic or overcrowding. Other zones, within the downtown are on sites of less than 2+/- acres and include B-2 (approximately 2 acres), R-2 (approximately 1+/- acres and R-3 (less than .5 ac). Most of these smaller parcels are in the south east corner of the downtown with the exception of an R-1 parcel on the northwest side of N. Marshall St. just northeast of 4th Street and a B-2 zoned parcel at the southwest corner of N. Marshall Street and Florence Boulevard.

**City of Casa Grande Historic Downtown Redevelopment Plan (2009):** This plan outlines a vision for the Downtown as the “living room” of the community, and the center of City government, business, and finance. The plan includes maintaining the downtowns history through its buildings and envisions the downtown as clean, safe, and self-sustaining. While it is unclear if this plan was adopted, in accordance with State Law, a new redevelopment plan will need to be prepared by October 2020.

**City of Casa Grande Historic Downtown Design Guidelines (2009):** These design Guidelines are focused on creating new buildings and spaces that are “authentic” and will “stand the test of time”. The Guidelines address the pedestrian environment, building scale, architecture, and landscaping and call for public art.

**City of Casa Grande General Plan 2020 (July 2009):** The City of Casa Grande General Plan 2020 states, “Historic Downtown will be the most sensitive yet most intense area of development as reflected in earlier policies under the vision: A Vibrant and Celebrated Downtown. This is an area which has the greatest potential to explore some vertical mixed use without impacting existing

views of the Casa Grande and Sacaton Mountains.” Land uses identified in the Plan as appropriate include:

- Established historic neighborhoods
- Higher density residential developments
- Transit supportive and transit ready single use retail and commercial development
- Transit supportive and transit ready vertical and horizontal mixed-use commercial, retail, and residential developments.

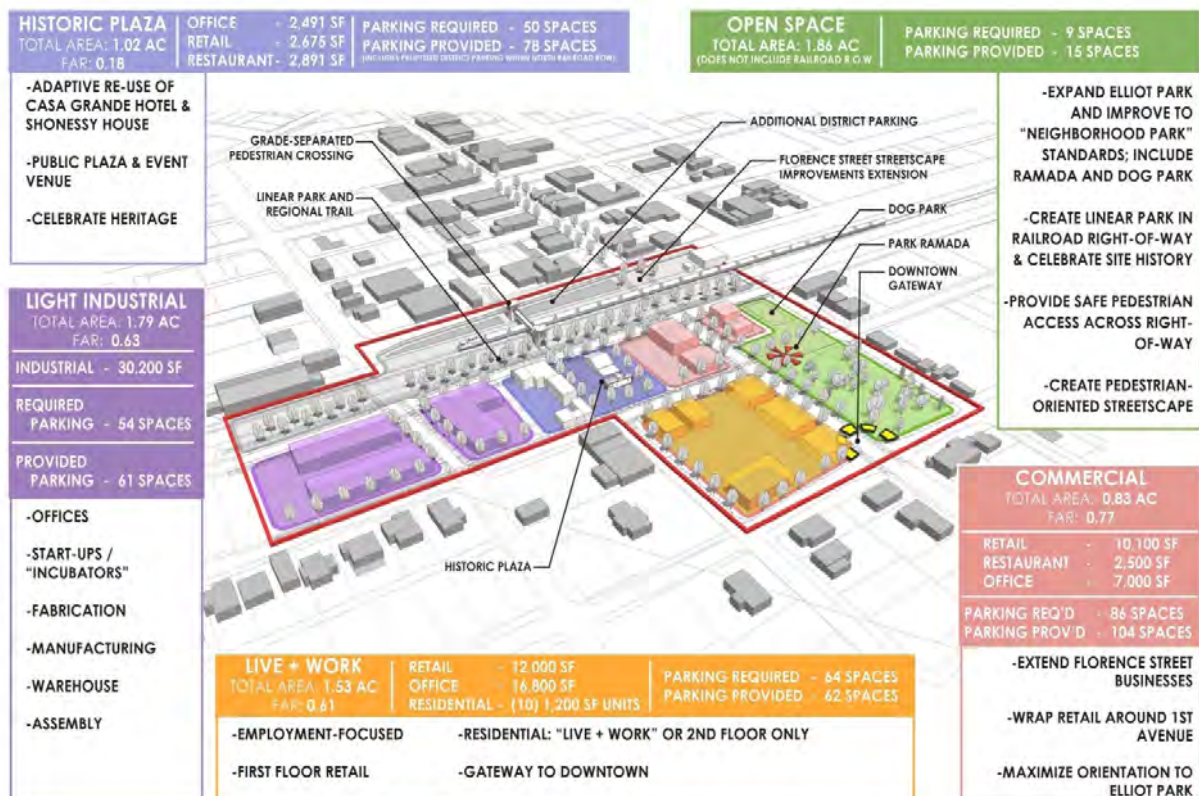
Densities identified in the Plan as appropriate include:

- Residential development at net densities between four and 20 units per gross acres
- Scale and form of buildings appropriate to their siting and adjacent uses

To remain in compliance with State law, the General Plan will have to be updated or re-adopted by 2020.

**Life on Main (August 2013):** This report focuses on 15 acres mostly on the southwest side of the Railroad Tracks and abutting land between N. Marshall and N. Maricopa Street. The report recommends parking and an enhanced streetscape along the north side of the tracks, with industrial, housing, and commercial uses recommended south of the tracks.

Life on Main Redevelopment  
Land Use Plan.



[illegible]

**The Future of Housing in Casa Grande (February 2019):** This report documents the increase in annual home construction, stating that since 2010, the city has added an average of 200 homes per year, but in 2018, annual home construction rose to over 400 units. As a result, the report states that residents should anticipate increased property values and additional revenues for City services. The report also states the city has about 1,865 highly accessible commercial acres available for development.

**Opportunity Zone:** A small section extends into the downtown area, but the majority is not included in the Casa Grande Opportunity Zone.





# AzTAP Strategic Focus Areas, Questions

## **Initial Perspective...Assessing the Vision**

1. Based on your initial review of the briefing materials, which aspects of the community's existing visioning and planning efforts offer the most opportunity given current market realities?
2. What role do you see the downtown serving, relative to the greater Casa Grande community?
3. What strengths does Casa Grande have in the downtown that could be built upon?
4. What do you see as the primary obstacles to overcome? Are there ways to reconcile these to increase opportunities?

## **Enhancing the "Place"...Zoning, Circulation, and Historic Preservation**

1. What can be done to strengthen "place" to attract people to spend time downtown?
2. Are there historic elements that should be preserved? If so, how could they add to the feel of a reimagined downtown, including the Neon Sign Park?
3. How can historic buildings be renovated and adapted for new uses in cost effective and efficient ways?
4. How can connectivity and circulation be improved downtown to enhance function and vitality?
5. What key parking elements must be considered to support more density/intensity, mixed use, and pedestrian activity and how does this change over time?
6. What land use, zoning, and regulatory changes could incentivize and spur revitalization?

## **Building Market Potential... Land Use, (Re)Development and Housing**

1. What type and density/intensity of development is realistic in the downtown to achieve the community's vision?
2. What direct and/or indirect value or role does the Neon Sign Park serve in the "new" downtown?
3. What types of businesses and mix of uses would be appropriate for the downtown area?
4. What use(s) might comprise an "anchor" use or be leveraged strategically to attract more growth and investment?
5. What housing products are the most in need and where are they best sited? Are there rehab and/or updates needed to existing housing or commercial uses to incorporate housing into the area?
6. How do the City's governmental offices relate to the study area?



7. How can the City encourage private property owners to embrace the revitalization/redevelopment of both public and private land parcels and properties?

### **Building Economic Capacity and Marketing a Strong Identity**

1. How can the Neon Sign Park be leveraged in marketing and branding for the downtown, and should it be part of a district or another entity to entice capital investment in the Main Street area?
2. How can the City and Main Street organization market the historic downtown to enhance tourism and attract more residents and businesses to the study area?
3. Expanding employers and employees look to many drivers (schools, safety and sense of community) in evaluating where to locate and live. How can downtown assist the City be more competitive in site selectors' eyes?
4. How can the downtown assist the City to achieve its strategic economic targets?
5. How can the City address workforce impediments to stimulate growth?
6. What compelling message(s)/call(s) to action would entice private capital and investment partners?

### **Achieving the Vision....Finance & Implementation**

1. Public/private partnerships come in all shapes & sizes. Which P3 provides the best opportunities to facilitate redevelopment? Are there streamlined examples for property owners to adopt to stimulate building upgrades?
2. What other specific grant opportunities are possible based on the success of Casa Grande Main Street getting the grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation & American Express for the Neon Park?
3. What incentives and finance tools should the City use to jumpstart redevelopment (New Market Tax credits, Federal Historic Tax credits, etc.)? Are there opportunities with the Ak-chin & Tohono O'Odham nations? How can the community maximize the Opportunity Zone?
4. What capacity building tools and techniques are recommended to support and promote continued investment?
5. Are the City and other responsible parties appropriately investing in infrastructure now? What and where are strategic capital investments needed?

### **Sustaining Momentum and Leadership**

1. How can downtown redevelopment activities serve existing and future residents and those who feel strong ties to the surrounding neighborhoods?
2. How should the City (re)affirm stakeholders' roles in developing a coordinated strategy for success (City, Main Street, Chamber of Commerce, Property Owners, and Merchants)? What community stakeholders can be leveraged as leaders?

3. What type of “encouragements” would foster property owners and landowners to work proactively and in a coordinated and mutually supportive way?
4. How could partnership roles and structures be improved (City, Main Street, Chamber, etc.) to enhance focus and overall management effectiveness?
5. What are effective ways to encourage the broadest possible participation from stakeholders and the private sector?

**What would be your top three actions to better Downtown Casa Grande?**

# AzTAP Agenda

8:15am	PANELISTS ARRIVE and quick meet and greet
8:30am	STUDY AREA TOUR
9:30am	WELCOME Mayor Craig McFarland, City of Casa Grande
9:45am	OVERVIEW of City Issues Being Considered Rina Rien, Director, Casa Grande Main Street
10:00am	PANEL INTRODUCTIONS and ULI AzTAP Process Review Mark Davis, President, 48 Development Co., ULI AzTAP Committee Vice-Chair John McNamara, Vice President, AECOM, ULI AzTAP Panel Moderator
10:15am	Initial Perspective...Assessing the Vision
10:45am	Enhancing the “Place” ...Zoning, Circulation, and Historic Preservation
11:30pm	Building Market Potential... Land Use, (Re)Development and Housing
12:15pm	WORKING LUNCH
1:00pm	Building Economic Capacity and Marketing a Strong Identity
1:45pm	Achieving the Vision...Finance & Implementation
2:30pm	Sustaining Momentum and Leadership
3:00pm	REVIEW PRIORITY ACTIONS
3:15pm	ADJOURN

# About the Panel



## Martha dePlazaola Abbott, LEED AP BD+C

Co-Managing Director, Principal, Gensler

Martha dePlazaola Abbott is a Principal and Co-Managing Director of Gensler's Phoenix office. Martha's comprehensive portfolio includes a myriad of "Work-Life" projects encompassing mixed use, multi-family, hospitality, retail, and office spaces, from

both the private and public sectors. Her expertise spans all project delivery methods from design-bid-build to alternative deliveries including design-build and CM@R. A natural leader, Martha's ability to foster relationships and gain the trust of clients and team members has been instrumental in the success of many high-profile projects. Recognized as a leader in the community, Martha is heavily involved with ULI and was recently honored as one of AZ|RE's Most Influential Women in Commercial Real Estate. Martha studied at the Vicenza Institute of Architecture and is a graduate of the College of Architecture from the University of Florida.



## Jamie Blakeman, PE

Traffic Section Lead, J2 Engineering and Design

Jamie is the founder and lead of the J2 Design traffic practice.

She is a registered professional engineer and a certified professional traffic operations engineer. Her experience in downtown redevelopment projects includes Fiesta District in

Mesa, Downtown Chandler, Peoria's P83 district, Downtown Tolleson, Downtown Sierra Vista, and Downtown Scottsdale. She specializes in analyzing and advising on transportation and circulation related issues on downtown mixed-use projects such as the expansion of Scottsdale Fashion Square, along with parking "right sizing" analyses for hotels and retail developments. Jamie's lead role in the Maricopa Safe Routes to School projects, Apache Junction's Active Transportation Plan and Paradise Valley's Bike and Pedestrian Plan showcases her passion in creating transportation environments that blend pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles to co-exist in harmony. Born and raised in Oahu, Hawaii, and a graduate of the University of Hawaii, Jamie appreciates and embraces the unique cultures and flavors of small towns.





## Bob Graham, AIA NCARB LEED-AP

Principal Architect, Motley Design Group

Bob Graham is Principal Architect of Motley Design Group of Phoenix, Arizona. The focus of his work has been in the areas of historic preservation, urban infill and rehabilitation projects. He has been recognized individually for his volunteer activities and his design work in historic preservation with the Arizona Heritage Preservation Award and received the Young Architect Citation from the Arizona Division of the American Institute of Architects. He currently serves on the City of Phoenix's Central City Village Planning Committee, as a Director of the Phoenix Trolley Museum, and as President of the Grand Avenue Members' Association.



## Kimber Lanning

Founder, Local First Arizona

Kimber Lanning is an entrepreneur, business leader and economic development specialist who works to cultivate strong, vibrant communities and inspire a higher quality of life for people across Arizona.

In 2003, Kimber founded Local First Arizona, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising public awareness of the economic and cultural benefits provided by locally owned businesses.

Local First Arizona has gained recognition for community-based business development across the state. Along with an advisory board of dedicated local business owners and civic leaders, Kimber pursues the dual goal of establishing vibrant and culturally unique businesses at the forefront of the state's identity, as well as creating a sustainable and healthy region through the implementation of diverse and resilient local economies. She works to inform, educate and motivate consumers to support local enterprises, and encourages public policy that enables locally owned and operated businesses to thrive.

In 2009, Local First secured 501(c)3 non-profit status and created the Local First Arizona Foundation, with Kimber as executive director. The Foundation acquired the Arizona Rural Development Council in 2013 and established itself as an official statewide entity, working on rural community and economic development policy, farm to table projects, healthy food initiatives and urban farms.

Kimber has emerged as a business leader, amassing over 3,300 Arizona businesses in the Local First organization, which is now the largest local business coalition in North America. With offices in Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff and the Verde Valley, supporting a staff of 28, the coalition continues to grow by adding over 75 new businesses per month. She has worked on policy issues, including building codes as they relate to the adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Kimber encourages municipalities to streamline their code in order to encourage, rather than discourage, new businesses in old buildings. She has led several planning studies and advocated for smart growth throughout the region, earning her the Distinguished Citizen Planner award from the American Planning Association in 2013, as well as the

International Economic Development Council's Citizen Leader of the Year in 2014. In addition, she is well versed in economic development and has worked on city and state procurement policies, which she believes are partially to blame for the state's economic woes. Former Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon appointed Kimber to the City of Phoenix Development Advisory Board in 2006, where she served for 3 years as vice-chair.



### John McNamara, AIA, FAICP

Director of Community Planning and Design, National Planning Technical Excellence Manager, AECOM

Mr. McNamara is a Vice President/Principal with AECOM in Phoenix, AZ, serves as the firm's National Planning Technical Excellence Manager, and has over 43 years of experience

working in transportation and community planning, and economic development. He is a nationally recognized expert in the planning and design of high capacity transit systems, and specializes in the land use inter-relationships with such investments, including devising strategies to address regional urban form, growth management and community revitalization. His work has focused on working with public officials, community groups and major land owners/asset managers to plan and develop communities that exhibit the principles of smart growth, mixed land use, environmental sustainability, multi-modal circulation and quality of life. Mr. McNamara was honored with the 2008 Arizona APA Historic Planning Pioneer Award and the AECOM Transportation Thought Leadership Award in 2010.

Mr. McNamara has particular expertise in planning and carrying out comprehensive public and stakeholder outreach programs for complex projects. This includes conducting project workshops, facilitating multi-day planning and design charrettes, and hosting unique participatory events to insure all perspectives are considered. Recent examples of these efforts include serving as Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Task Manager for the I-49 Lafayette Connector project for the Louisiana DOTD; Planning Manager for the SR 179 Corridor Development Program (2005 ITE Best Transportation Planning Project Worldwide, 2004 APA Community Involvement Award) for ADOT, which included facilitating week-long design charrettes at the project's three key milestones; Project Director for the Governor's Office and ADOT on the bqAZ Statewide Transportation Planning Framework Program (2010 APA Best Regional Project Award), which included facilitating statewide focus groups, common interest working groups, planning workshops, and public forums over the project's three-year duration; Urban Form/Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Task Manager for the Tucson-Phoenix Intercity Rail Alternatives Analysis (AA)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for ADOT, which has included facilitating alternatives definition gaming workshops for the three Regional Corridor Support Teams; and most recently, Lead Charrette Facilitator for the Illinois Tollway's I-90 Corridor Design Charrette to finalize all design components for the complete reconstruction of I-90 for 62 miles between the Kennedy Expressway in Chicago and I-39 in Rockford, IL. Mr. McNamara is a graduate of the National Charrette Institute's Design Charrette Training Program.



### Jeff McVay, AICP

Manager of Downtown Transformation, City of Mesa

With nearly 20 years of public sector experience in Wisconsin and Arizona, Jeff's career with the City of Mesa has included seven+ years as a planner, two years as a special project manager, and now as Mesa's Manager of Downtown Transformation. In

his current role, Jeff has become deeply engaged in downtown development and revitalization, redevelopment associated with light rail, and sustainability issues.

Jeff received his Bachelor of Science in Geography from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Master of Public Administration -Urban Management from Arizona State University.



### Massimo 'Max' Sommacampagna

Founder, CIMA Holdings, CIMA Construction, Somma Realty

Massimo Sommacampagna is the founder of an urban infill real estate development company, homebuilding, and brokerage company that specialize in the Metro Phoenix area. Founded in

2012, Massimo discovered opportunities in small vacant parcels of land throughout the Phoenix valley. Forming the companies, CIMA Holdings, CIMA Construction, and Somma Realty, he set out to execute on the full real estate cycle from acquisitions to construction to lease up. Massimo successfully executed on 4 ground-up development projects since the company's inception. Massimo's industry competencies include both residential for rent and for sale, as well as small-mid multifamily development. Massimo is both a proud graduate of Paradise Valley Community College and Northern Arizona University with an emphasis in entrepreneurship and small business, Summa Cum Laude. He also has a certificate of achievement from the Dale Carnegie Training Course, Real World Risk Institute, and is a proud graduate of the Arizona Small Business Association 2017 Emerging Leaders Program. Massimo is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and is co-chair of the Young Leaders Group Programs Committee. He is also appointed to the City of Phoenix Rio Vista Village Planning Committee. Residing in Moon Valley, Massimo has been happily married for over 6 years and has two loving children Luca and Isabella. When he is not playing with his children, Massimo enjoys reading, tennis, and weightlifting. He looks forward to growing his businesses and providing a positive impact to the community.



### Silvia Urrutia

Consultant, U Developing, LLC

With over 25 years in community development, Ms. Urrutia's expertise includes: financing of affordable housing, healthcare facilities and charter schools; providing technical assistance to development entities; planning and developing mixed-

income, mixed-finance projects; and utilizing collaborative leadership to revitalize neighborhoods. With experience in the public and private sectors, Ms. Urrutia has

participated in numerous development activities in Arizona and Massachusetts, and has served in zoning and comprehensive community initiatives to improve the quality of life and create communities that are inclusive and responsive to present and future community members. Silvia is currently collaborating with ASU's Stardust Center for Affordable Housing and the Family and Gustare, a development entity.

Ms. Urrutia holds a Bachelor degree from Arizona State University, a Juris Doctor from the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law, and has completed courses at Harvard's Business School and Graduate School of Design. She was an Adjunct Professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston – College of Public & Community Service. She is fluent in English and Spanish and is a member of the Urban Land Institute.





ULI Arizona Technical Assistance Panel



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