



Philadelphia

AMPLIFY DOWNTOWN HARRISBURG

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Technical Assistance Panel | July 23-24, 2025

About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute. It is supported by more than 45,000 members in 82 countries representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI Philadelphia has more than 900 members in the Philadelphia District Council, which includes the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Central Pennsylvania, Delaware, the Lehigh Valley, and Southern New Jersey. ULI provides guidance to nonprofits and municipalities seeking solutions to land use challenges. Its Technical Assistance Panels objectively evaluate specific needs and make recommendations on implementation in an atmosphere free of politics and preconceptions. ULI member and non-member professionals provide their expertise in a voluntary capacity and each has signed an agreement to prevent current and potential conflicts of interest.

ULI Advisory Services

Since 1947, the ULI Advisory Services program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for complex land use challenges. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services. National and international panelists are specifically recruited to form a panel of independent and objective volunteer ULI member experts with the skills needed to address the identified land use challenge. The program is designed to help break through obstacles, jump-start conversations, and solve tough challenges that need an outside, independent perspective. Three- and five-day engagements are offered to ensure thorough consideration of relevant topics. An additional national offering is the project analysis session (PAS) offered at ULI's Fall and Spring Meetings, through which specific land use challenges are evaluated by a panel of volunteer experts selected from ULI's membership. This is a conversational format that lends itself to an open exchange of ideas among diverse industry practitioners with distinct points of

view. From the streamlined two-hour session to the "deeper dive" eight-hour session, this intimate conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving. Learn more at americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/. Distinct from Advisory Services panels, TAPs leverage local expertise through a half-day to two-day process.

Technical Assistance Panel and Project Staff

Kevin Moran

Executive Director, ULI Philadelphia

Christina Chavez

Strategic Initiatives Lead, ULI Philadelphia

Jennifer Long

Senior Associate, ULI Philadelphia

Alecia Caballero

Program Associate, ULI Philadelphia

Elisa Ludwig

Report Writer

Cover photo: A view down..... (ULI)

© 2025 by the Urban Land Institute

2001 L Street, NW | Suite 200 | Washington, DC 20036-4948

All rights reserved. Reproduction or use of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission of the copyright holder is prohibited.

All photos are courtesy of ULI unless otherwise noted.



Contents

Introduction	5
History and Background	9
Scope	14
Assessment	18
Recommendations	21
Summary	24
About the Panel	28
Appendices	

Acknowledgments

On behalf of ULI Philadelphia, the panel would like to thank the sponsor organization, Harristown Development Corporation, for this effort.

The panel would also like to thank the Pennsylvania Downtown Center and Tri-County Regional Planning Commission for their support, along with Harristown board members, city and state representatives, small business owners, residents, university leadership, local nonprofits, arts and culture organizations, and other stakeholders for sharing their insights and perspectives during the interview sessions.

Financial assistance was provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Governor Josh Shapiro's Main Streets Matter program.

Introduction

Harristown Development Corporation (HDC) called on ULI Philadelphia to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to explore possibilities for revitalizing Downtown Harrisburg. The panel, held July 23-24, 2025, at Strawberry Square in Harrisburg, identified ways that HDC could leverage real estate holdings to spur activity and reinvigorate the neighborhood while offering guidance toward a long-term strategy for attracting new residents and ongoing development.

On Wednesday, July 23, 11 ULI volunteers representing a broad range of real estate specialties gathered for an initial overview presented by HDC President Bradley Jones, followed by a walking tour of key sites in the Downtown area. In the afternoon, the panel conducted interviews with 49 stakeholders to learn more about the neighborhood and its challenges and opportunities.

The following day, July 24, the TAP reassembled to share and find common themes across the interview sessions. Based on these themes and their own expertise, the panelists developed a set

of recommendations that was presented to Harristown staff, board members, and stakeholders. That draft presentation is the outline for this report. The panel concluded that HDC should focus existing real estate strategy on continued efforts to convert office space to residential. In addition, the recommendations included the following:

- a. Conduct planning to create distinct districts in the downtown and consolidate real estate holdings to create more office to residential conversion opportunities
- b. Restructure finances to attract more partners and scale/speed up development
- c. Build a coalition of stakeholders to oversee a holistic planning process and implement plans
- d. Draw on the same coalition to create a marketing and messaging campaign that highlights downtown successes, celebrates its strengths, and evolving revitalization, and continues to build vibrancy



History and Background

As the capital city of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg's grandeur radiates from its stately governmental architecture, wide sweeping avenues, and a majestic grass-lined waterfront along the Susquehanna River. However, over the last century, the health and wealth of the city have fluctuated, and with it, the fortunes of the Downtown Harrisburg neighborhood.

Named for English trader John Harris, the city of Harrisburg was first settled in 1719. In 1822, it was named the state capital, spurring the initial construction of what is today known as the Capitol Complex. The National Historic Landmark District features a 45-acre park and a Beaux Arts style rotunda that not only houses the State Senate, House of Representatives, and offices of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, but attracts millions of visitors every year.

Industrialization in the late 19th century and early 20th century brought steel and iron production to Harrisburg as well as the development of a railroad hub. Amid the post-war boom of the 1950s, residents enjoyed a bustling downtown brimming with retail, restaurants, arts, and culture. A service economy replaced newly shrinking industrial sectors. As the city grew, so did its surrounding residential neighborhoods. By the end of that decade, Harrisburg's population peaked and then began to shrink as people sought housing in the suburbs.

In the late 1960s, white flight, the explosion of suburban culture, declining schools, and disinvestment in the city heralded an

era of decline for Harrisburg. In 1972, the city flooded during Hurricane Agnes as the Susquehanna River breached its banks, and it had fallen on hard times. Entire blocks of rowhouses fell vacant and blight spread—particularly in neighborhoods outside Downtown such as Midtown, Uptown, and Allison Hill—as the city's population declined by nearly half, deepening economic distress and weakening the city's core. As a response, HDC—named for what its founders hoped would be a town within the city of Harrisburg, though this concept never fully caught on—was formed in 1974, with the goal of working alongside the City and its Redevelopment Authority to activate Downtown and restore it to its former grandeur and activity.

In the 1980s, HDC began developing a new Hilton hotel on Market Square, which would eventually serve tourists, businesspeople, and conventions. Development of the Strawberry Square retail and office complex, a new city government center, and the 333 Market Street Tower followed, along with many other projects. By the early 2000s, Downtown Harrisburg found new vibrancy once again with an expanded dining scene and "restaurant row" and the development of the South of Market (SOMA) district. The city began to boom again with 30,000 state workers and an "Eds, Beds, and Meds" economy taking hold.

In 2005, the story of Downtown Harrisburg took another turn when the city budget, under decades of financial mismanagement, crashed. In 2013, the state offered a complex plan, the *Harrisburg Strong Plan*, for resolving



the City's fiscal issues and debt and bring the City out of Act 47 receivership. A key component of this plan was leasing its parking garages for 40 years which would refinance the city's debt and generate revenue. However, the arrangement would also drive-up parking prices and hamstring the city from attracting redevelopment opportunities in later years.

By 2020, the city had balanced its budget. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. With work from home orders in effect for all employees, Harrisburg's business districts and government buildings fell quiet. In the five years since then, the Downtown neighborhood has grown quieter still. The number of workers occupying the sea of office buildings and supporting local businesses daily has now dwindled to 3,000-5,000—just a tenth of what it had been at its peak. At the same time, many private sector employers have relocated their headquarters from Downtown Harrisburg. Currently, over 1 million square feet of office space has been deemed underoccupied or vacant, and retail occupancy has similarly declined. The health system and educational institutions which helped bolster the city have come up against social and political

challenges—reduced funding; demographic shifts—that limit their growth.

In recent years, HDC has focused on office-to-residential conversions and small business development to shore up Downtown's vitality. These projects have proved successful with a low residential vacancy rate, and as an affordable city with convenient proximity to New York and Philadelphia, Harrisburg has started to draw more "digital nomad" residents. A recently announced massive redevelopment of the State Museum adjacent to the Capitol Complex—to be completed in several years—will help establish a more centralized draw for tourists. These positive shifts bode well for Downtown Harrisburg and set the stage for a coordinated and cohesive neighborhood-wide transformation.

Study Scope

The ULI panel was asked to focus on challenges and opportunities in the Downtown area and specifically investigate the following questions:

- How can HDC thoughtfully address the "work from home" situation and create and maintain a vibrant downtown?
- What specific uses should HDC focus on for creating downtown vibrancy?
- How should HDC utilize and leverage real estate assets and other resources for a downtown revitalization strategy?
- How can HDC increase the rate of conversion of office buildings to apartments over the next five years? How can public or private financing options be leveraged for these conversions?
 - How can HDC attract new investors and partners for their redevelopment projects?
 - What are new or innovative finance solutions available to leverage?
- How can HDC increase stakeholder engagement for the City of Harrisburg and the Downtown?
- What is Downtown Harrisburg's brand and what can the city be known for, aside from being the capital city?



Assessment

Drawing from the provided background materials, interviews with stakeholders, and observations from the walking tour of Downtown Harrisburg, the panel evaluated the neighborhood's strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Strengths

Small City Feel

Harrisburg's intimate size and population make it a place where people easily know their neighbors and coworkers. That familiarity contributes to a sense of loyalty and pride among the Downtown's residents and supporters.

Beautiful Riverfront

The grass lined banks of the Susquehanna River are a unique scenic asset to Downtown Harrisburg, which, unlike many cities, has not built up its waterfront. At the current moment, that underutilization constitutes an opportunity for thoughtful development that could help define the Downtown neighborhood.

Local Heritage

Harrisburg residents are proud of the city's history as the seat of state government, an historic hub for industry, and a diverse urban center.

Culture and The Arts

Despite its economic challenges, Harrisburg remains a regional hotspot for culture and the arts with the Harrisburg Arts District that



encompasses Whitaker Center for the Arts, the State Museum, the Capitol Complex, murals, live arts troupes, theaters and venues, and festivals year-round.

Well Maintained Environment

With the oversight of HDC and others, downtown Harrisburg's streets and sidewalks are kept clean and invitingly well maintained while planters and banners add to the pleasant streetscape.

Impressive Architecture

Open to the public and drawing three million visitors from around the world every year, the Capitol Complex is a stunning display of Beaux Arts architecture. Elsewhere, strong examples of Victorian, Gothic, Classic Revival, and modern architecture grace homes, churches and office buildings.

Office-to-Residential Conversions

HDC's current focus on office-to-residential conversions has been a successful endeavor

and a well-advised pivot in the post-COVID-19 real estate landscape. Residential vacancies hover at five percent (5%), and HDC recently announced a new project that involves a new conversion of offices at 112 Market Street for market-rate senior housing.



Location

Harrisburg is conveniently situated between Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Washington D.C. With Amtrak’s Keystone Line connecting it to these destinations, and its close proximity to Hershey and Lancaster, PA, the city is an appealing homebase for commuters, work-from-home/digital nomad residents, and other professionals as well as families who want to take advantage of urban cultural offerings.

Challenges

Lack of Foot Traffic

With a greatly diminished number of office workers, Downtown Harrisburg’s foot traffic has dropped significantly, and this has had negative ripple effects on retail, restaurants, and the perception of public safety.

Inactive Ground Floors

Many of Downtown’s office buildings lack ground floor activations, making the pedestrian experience less welcoming and contributing to a sense of desolation, and limiting “eyes on the street” for public safety.

Underutilized Riverfront/Disconnected Amenities

The riverfront is one of the city’s strongest assets, yet it remains underutilized in terms of programming, art, and recreational activity. It also lacks clear and safe pedestrian connectivity to the downtown neighborhood, with the three-lane one-way Front Street serving as a key barrier to access.

Perception and Reality of Crime

Stakeholders reported not feeling safe, worrying about shooting incidents, and expressed concern that many nearby residents had given up on visiting Downtown Harrisburg at night out of concern for their safety. However, other stakeholders pointed out that perceptions of increased crime might be misaligned with reality due to negative media coverage.

Inadequate Wayfinding

While Downtown Harrisburg has some neighborhood banners, such as in SoMA, there are not enough signs, trailblazers, kiosks or other streetscape features to ensure that visitors and residents on foot know where they are and how to navigate to their next destination.

Car Dominated Streets

There was a general absence of both car and foot traffic in the city during the tour, but panelists noted that current urban design still favors cars and car traffic, making streets feel less welcoming to pedestrians, particularly with multi-lane, one-way streets like Second Street and Front Street.

Cost of Parking

Numerous stakeholders reported that the cost of both metered and lot parking in Downtown Harrisburg is prohibitively expensive and discourages visitors from coming into the neighborhood, effectively “handicapping” the residential and

commercial markets and hampering small business growth.

Parking Lots and Garages

The city agreement to generate revenue from once-public, now privatized, parking has helped Harrisburg overall, but it has stymied development as currently underused multilevel garages take up valuable land in the city. For example, the downtown area has nine parking garages which greatly exceeds current, and likely, future demand. At present there are no legal solutions on the table.

Negative Perceptions/Negative Media Coverage

Given its recent challenges, Downtown Harrisburg suffers from public criticism and low morale, which can have a cyclical effect.

Disjointed Economic Development Activity

HDC is among several organizations supporting a revitalized Downtown Harrisburg, as well as the Harrisburg Regional Chamber/Capital Region Economic Development Corporation (CREDC) and other organizations as well as the private development community. However, a lack of shared strategy and coordinated planning has limited the collective impact of these efforts.

Opportunities

Transformation out of Crisis

There is widespread consensus that Harrisburg has reached an inflection point, and immediate action is needed to address the Downtown neighborhood's hardships. The panel observed that this crisis moment could be transformational in galvanizing change.

New Coalitions

Achieving a truly sustainable revival of Downtown Harrisburg will require the joint efforts of stakeholders and organizations across the public and private sector. With a newly collaborative approach, new synergies and solutions can emerge.

Reposition Downtown

Finally, the panel noted that expanding HDC's current work in office-to-residential conversion will be crucial. Given the downturn in the worker population, there is an opportunity to reposition the neighborhood as an exciting and welcoming place to live, and not just as a place to work. Furthermore, adding to the population through these and other residential developments will help to foster an environment where small businesses, including new resident-serving amenities, can be successful.



Recommendations

The TAP grouped its recommendations into four categories: Strategically Aligning Real Estate, Planning for a More Vibrant Future, Creating Collective Impact, and Amplifying Downtown Harrisburg.

Strategically Aligning Real Estate

From its initial founding, HDC has focused on real estate development, to great success. The organization's core capability has been realizing new possibilities for Downtown Harrisburg through its retail and commercial spaces, with a renewed focus on residential properties in more recent years. At the same time, HDC can't do it alone. The panel suggested that HDC continue to do what it does best and offered suggestions for where it can do so more effectively.

Accelerate and Expand What's Working: Office-to-Residential Conversion

To build on and improve its current work converting office-to-residential space, the TAP offered these recommendations:

Celebrate market strength and residential demand.

Celebrate an already strong absorption rate and low vacancy rate and continue to focus on projects that potential Downtown residents and investors want and need.

Publish Harristown research on conversion sites.

HDC has compiled its own research on real

estate development in the neighborhood to inform its decision making, including office-to-residential conversions (as well as other development opportunities), vacancy by square foot, current ownership, and current tenancy. Making this information public would help attract investment from like-minded developers.

Address known challenges in the process.

As in any city, real estate developers encounter administrative hurdles in Harrisburg. With expert local knowledge around the process and its pain points, along with an opportunity to revisit prior policy, the panel advises working with city government to alleviate bureaucratic inefficiencies in zoning, permitting, and improve the existing commercial real estate tax abatement program.

Zoning

Review the land development process and ensure that zoning allows for adequate housing density by right in strategic areas.

Permitting

Create expedited permit reviews for conversions and the development of key corridors or districts.

Tax Abatement

Align both residential and commercial tax abatement to 10-year policies. Ensure predictability by allowing developers to extend the abatement for multiple years rather than requiring an annual renewal.

Consolidate Office Space and Density Residential Real Estate

To maximize the collective benefit of conversion opportunities, the TAP recommends that HDC concentrate its redevelopment strategy in specific geographies while deemphasizing projects that sit outside of other areas, supporting a density of residents that can contribute to the overall vibrancy of the area.

- Focus on an acquisition strategy to support nodes of residential density.
- Incentivize the relocation and consolidation of office tenants, prioritizing any high-vacancy buildings that are prime for residential conversion, especially if they are in close proximity to other existing residential projects or those prime for conversion.



Leverage Assets and Resources

To support ongoing real estate development that prioritizes residential space, HDC should maximize its inherent skill sets, resources, experience, and relationships.

Lean into HDC's strengths while exploring new strategies to expand impact.

These strengths and differentiators include:

- Access to acquisition opportunities outsiders may not have
- Knowledge of the zoning and permitting process
- A positive reputation and relationships with elected and public officials

Be the convener, not just the developer, to deliver scale.

To do more, and do it more quickly, HDC should draw on its credibility to bring together other developers and stakeholders around key projects. Bringing in other developers will require a structured proposal process and decision-making criteria that privileges skills and knowledge that complement HDC's. To that end, HDC should target groups that have expertise in conversion at scale and competency with a variety of financial assistance tools such as New Markets Tax Credits, federal and state Historic Tax Credits, Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) tax abatement program, and state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grants. With appropriate partners, HDC can achieve more and do so faster. The TAP suggested that HDC use the

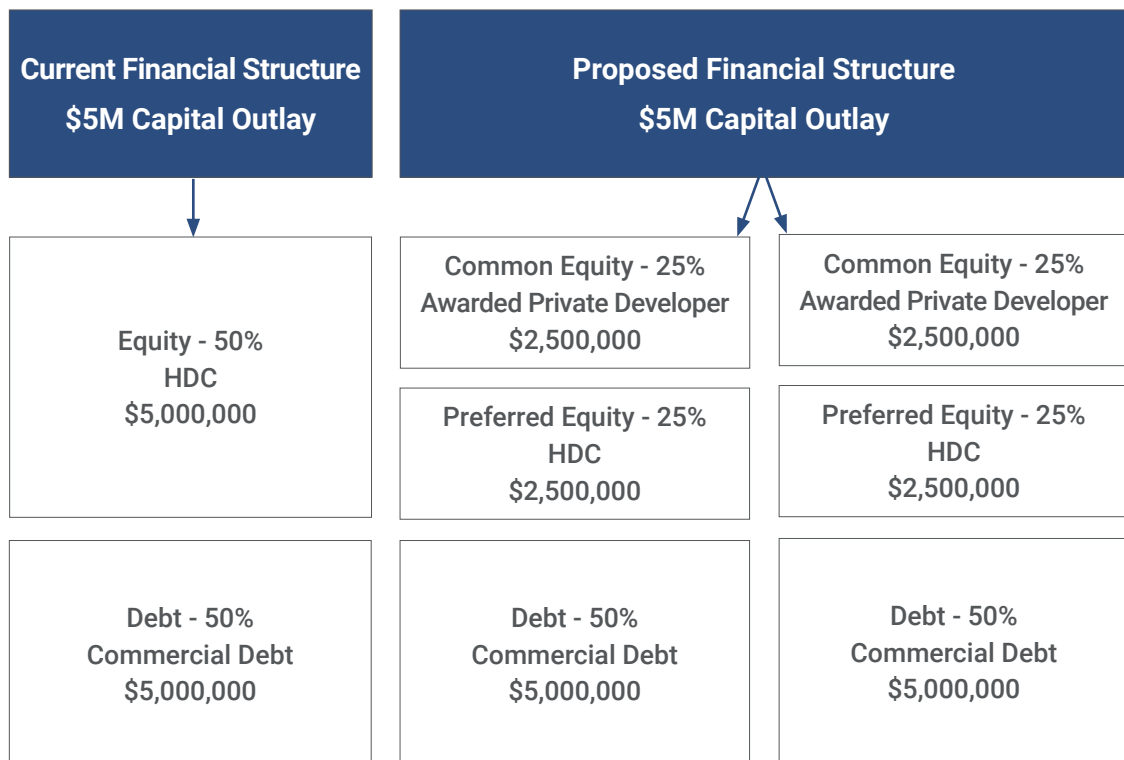
impending redevelopment of the 22-story 333 Market Street property as a pilot project to develop partnership protocols.

Leverage Capital to Attract New Developers and Accelerate Conversion

With some restructured capital, HDC can bring in more partners while derisking its own investments.

The TAP recommends that HDC diversify its investment approach by allocating smaller amounts of funding across a greater number of projects. For example, a \$10 million project could be structured as a 6% development

yield, resulting in an estimated \$600,000 in annual net operating income. The current way they are funding projects is a capital stack comprising 50% debt—such as \$5 million at a 5.5% interest rate. Thus, \$5mm gives them the ability to do \$10mm in deals. What we are proposing is —HDC would transition from being the sole developer to sharing risk through a preferred equity position of \$2.5 million. This would allow the engagement of a new developer brought in with \$2.5 million in common equity. The resulting distribution (or waterfall) would see the bank receiving approximately \$275,000, HDC approximately \$50,000, (2% Cash on cash yield) and the new developer around \$275,000, yielding



an 11% cash-on-cash return. This structure provides a highly attractive opportunity for new developers, encouraging partnership and investment. Simultaneously, it enables HDC to maintain a prudent, risk-managed position, which can facilitate the completion of more projects (double in this case) and maximize overall economic impact.

Additional Recommendations for Maximizing Real Estate Impact

- Where feasible, utilize public money and government resources in project capital stacks to fill financing gaps.
- Provide centralized high-end residential amenities, keeping the nomad worker in mind, such as a fitness center, coworking space, and outdoor space.
- Partner with and showcase existing small businesses such as designers and local shops in developing new properties. Consider opportunities to activate vacant spaces with these business owners to attract additional creative entrepreneurs.
- Develop residential units of all types and at a variety of price points, with an emphasis on density

Planning for a More Vibrant Future

As real estate development continues apace, HDC should begin creating a comprehensive urban design plan that maximizes Downtown Harrisburg's current and future real estate holdings, highlights existing cultural and



civic assets, and ensures that residents and visitors alike can engage with all the neighborhood has to offer. Central to any planning effort should be driving pedestrian traffic which will make the public realm feel safer and more vibrant while bolstering retail and restaurant health. The TAP recommended that HDC commission a proper design plan, while identifying three key goals for such a plan: (1) Link key assets; (2) create a cohesive experience of downtown and the riverfront; and (3) connect the city and its real estate via branding.



Create a downtown activity loop.

Ensure that people can find and easily move between the Capitol Complex, riverfront, Second Street, and Market Square with a one-mile pedestrian-friendly loop with activity nodes and clear wayfinding and interpretive signage and branding that defines and anchors the neighborhood.

Strengthen key connectors to the river.

Market, Walnut, and State Streets are important connectors to the riverfront, as well as the streets like Locust and Pine. Improve crosswalks at their intersections along Front

Street so access to the river is safe and easy. State Street can be designed as the premier connector by opening it to pedestrians and programming it as a linear plaza connecting the Capitol to the River, with an important node at the Second Street intersection.

Activate the riverfront.

- Create more amenities on the banks of the Susquehanna River to draw pedestrians and encourage them to linger, such as public art, playgrounds, gardens, dog parks, and programmed events. Temporary or seasonal installations such as pop-up beer gardens, or shipping container vendors / shops can also invigorate this stretch of underutilized land.

- Consider opportunities to connect the Susquehanna riverfront, part of the City's historic "City Beautiful" Capital Area Greenbelt loop, to other regional Susquehanna River trail networks, including those downstream in neighboring Lancaster County, to tap into the outdoor recreation economy and attract additional tourists to Downtown to support small businesses.

Revitalize Second Street as a Main Street commercial corridor.

- Increase ground floor activity by incentivizing and prioritizing not only retail and restaurant development that will enliven the neighborhood and attract

visitors and residents alike, but also providing opportunities for resident-serving, walkable amenities and personal services businesses.

- Repair and restore main street mixed-use facades through a strategic facade improvement grant program, with an emphasis on historic preservation standards. Consider the state's Main Street Matters grant program as a funding resource and partner with the PA Downtown Center for guidance.
- Implement facade uplighting on visually interesting historic buildings as a placemaking tool.

Redevelop Market Square.

With the planned relocation of Market Square's Bus Transfer Center away from the square, and the nearby development of a pocket park already underway, the area along Second Street in front of and to the south of the Harrisburg Hilton Hotel can be reimagined as a central plaza, providing a landing and gathering place for visitors, and a hub of neighborhood activity for residents and workers. Consider the addition of an outdoor farmers market – as a nod to the historical farmer's market that once occupied the current transit hub site – cultural events, and festivals, and public concerts. This intersection at Second and Market Streets serves as a southern gateway to the downtown activity loop.



Long Term Recommendations

Traffic Calming

With the proliferation of wide, multi-lane streets, traffic moves too fast, making it unsafe and unfriendly to pedestrians. Despite the sharp decrease in suburban commuters post-COVID-19 due to corporate and state-government “remote work” policies, the street network Downtown still favors commuters and their preference to enter and exit the city as quickly as possible. Consider expanding the bike lane network throughout downtown which inherently slows down traffic. Additionally, create more two-way streets, and consider focusing particularly on Second Street and Front Street, building upon the recent successful conversion of Second

Street (north of Forster Street in Midtown and Uptown) back to two-way from one-way. If two-way streets are a challenge, try reducing the number of traffic lanes and widening sidewalks or reconfiguring parallel parking lanes to angled parking to slow traffic. Cooperation and support from PennDOT will be critical. Curb bump-outs at intersections and wider medians, with plantings when appropriate, will also help to narrow the streets, slow traffic, and beautify Downtown.

Short Term Recommendations

Prototype and pilot safe-streets and placemaking ideas

Test traffic calming ideas through “tactical urbanism” methods before implementing

them on a large scale. For example, building temporary low cost, low maintenance pop-up parklets with planters (see image) and street furniture are low-cost ways to temporarily change the street experience and collect feedback from pedestrians before implementing more permanent solutions.

Cultivate Lancaster Entrepreneurship Coalition

Located in Lancaster, PA, Cultivate Lancaster is a hub for startup and small business resources that provides resources, including grants and mentorship to encourage a bustling, diverse, and equitable private sector in Lancaster County. The organization, supported by paid staff members, is overseen by the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce. What began as a series of events in 2015 evolved into a year-round mission. Five years later, the Coalition asked an independent consultant to map the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and help develop a strategic plan for stronger programming that provides opportunities for entrepreneurs, small business owners, and relevant resource providers. After creating a strategic plan, the group initially focused on post-pandemic recovery grants and planning for startups. In 2023, Cultivate relaunched as a primary resource for local business resources and funding for entrepreneurs and small businesses alike.



Develop a comprehensive urban design plan for Downtown Harrisburg.

Engage professional planners for a detailed and thorough urban design plan.

Creating Collective Impact

The TAP heard from stakeholders about a lack of coordination among community & economic development partner organizations' current efforts to support and revitalize Downtown Harrisburg. This misalignment has at best slowed down progress and at worst created friction between efforts. As such,

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore

A multifaceted community development corporation, Downtown Partnership of Baltimore focuses on driving investment in the city of Baltimore, MD. Priorities include cleanliness, safety, hospitality, business networking, economic development and advocacy, marketing and promotions, and special events, with initiatives spanning everything from new dog parks and alley beautification to grant funding for minority businesses. Highly engaged stakeholders and a truly collaborative approach ensure the nonprofit organization's success in supporting businesses, attracting investment, improving public spaces, and fostering a vibrant atmosphere in Baltimore.

one set of their recommendations focused on building a bloc of engaged individuals and organizations to advise on real estate development, improving the public realm, and a strategy for positioning and marketing Downtown Harrisburg while helping to implement all of the above. *A Coalition for Downtown Harrisburg* could be tasked with the following agenda:

Advise and develop a comprehensive strategy for Downtown Harrisburg.

Collaboratively create a long-term blueprint for the downtown area so that all efforts are synchronized, targeted, and sustainable, and address key priorities for stakeholders. Leverage the moment of crisis to revisit previously proposed ideas around parking, tax abatements, and the like to develop a new shared vision.

Drive action to move the plan forward.

Mobilize resources, coordinate projects, and set measurable goals to track progress. The coalition can also help remove bureaucratic hurdles, minimize duplication, engage additional partners, and maintain momentum. Establishing a strong governance structure of the Coalition to assure shared responsibility and accountability, and public sector support, is key to success.

Ensure widespread representation.

Include residents, business owners, cultural organizations, and local government from diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods to foster greater buy-in and minimize conflict for a plan that reflects the needs and desires of the entire community. Leverage the strengths and networks of existing individual organizations while coordinating activities for maximum impact in the service of building and implementing a shared new vision for downtown. Panel members suggested including stakeholders from the following organizations and sectors. (Note that this is likely not a comprehensive list.)

- Harristown Development Corporation
- Downtown Improvement District
- Harrisburg Regional Chamber/Capital Region Economic Development Corporation (CREDC)
- Visit Hershey & Harrisburg
- PA Department of Community and Economic Development
- PA Downtown Center
- City of Harrisburg Department of Commerce
- City of Harrisburg Bureau of Planning
- Harrisburg University
- University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Harrisburg
- Penn National Insurance

- Other large corporate entities
- Small businesses owners
- Representatives from the Capitol Complex agencies including local legislative leaders
- Community development organizations (other than HDC)
- Resident representatives from Harrisburg and surrounding areas
- Impact Harrisburg

Note: The provided examples are not “apples to apples” comparisons but they can serve as models for the types of partnerships structures that a Coalition for Downtown Harrisburg could emulate.

Amplify Downtown Harrisburg

A common theme among stakeholder interview groups was that Downtown Harrisburg currently suffers from negative portrayals in the media and a shared belief that in the wake of the pandemic, the neighborhood has become unsafe, too quiet, and/or undesirable. The panel recommended that HDC and its partners develop a positioning and messaging plan to intentionally shape and improve perceptions of the city in order to ensure that the experience of visiting, working in, or living in Downtown Harrisburg is positive, memorable, and meaningful. While a marketing and communications campaign cannot stand alone and must be supported by real changes and successes on the ground, the panel strongly believes that attitudes and opinions

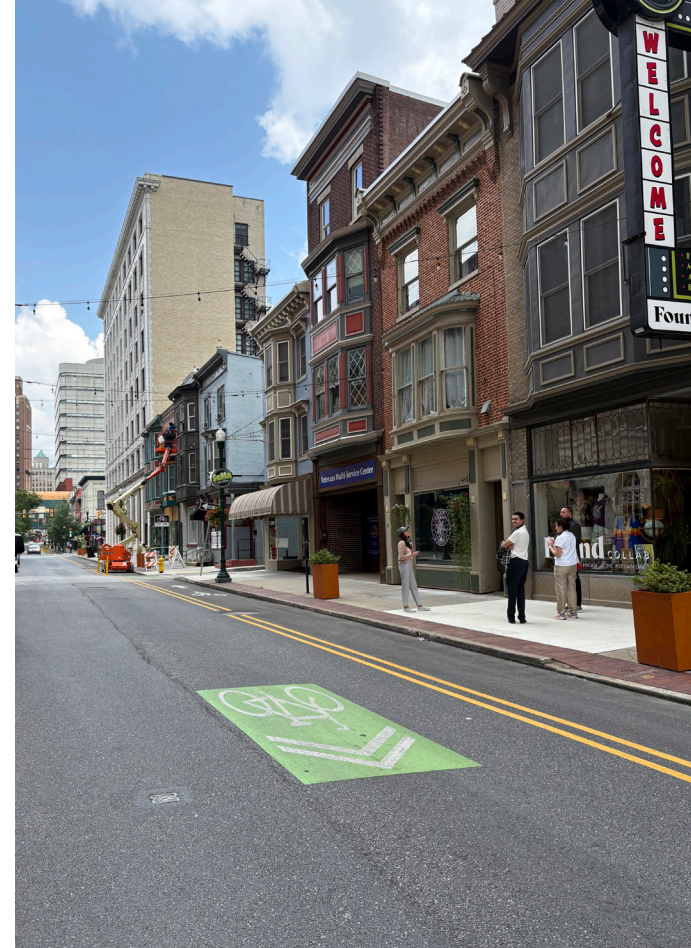
about the neighborhood can be influenced at the same time real estate, planning, and coalition-building work is taking place.

Celebrate successes, including what has been done to make Downtown Harrisburg a more vibrant neighborhood.

HDC has done a great job in tracking its own progress with development projects and making this data available on its website and other communications. A public-facing messaging campaign should communicate both these accomplishments and their impacts on safety, crime reduction, expanded housing options, increased support for local businesses, usage of public spaces, enhanced streetscapes, and other indices of revitalization. Communications can’t necessarily change media coverage, but they can counteract negative stories with positive ones and start to reframe the narrative about Downtown Harrisburg.

Start local, then focus outward.

With a primary goal of developing and attracting resident activity, communications should initially target potential and current residents with messaging about the advantages of living downtown. As perceptions start to change, the target demographics can widen to include the Central PA region to attract visitors, and then wider still to include residents of Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and New York City and beyond to position Harrisburg as a tourism destination.



Define local identity.

As noted earlier, Downtown Harrisburg lacks definition both physically and culturally. The panel recommends focusing on building identity and the city’s brand through several short- and long-term placemaking tactics.

Improve branding, signage, and wayfinding on the street.

Ensure that residents and visitors know when they are in the Downtown neighborhood with cohesive and integrated visual cues.

Expand digital imprint through influencers, social media, and blog coverage.

Give residents and visitors opportunities to interact with Downtown Harrisburg online and boost and connect these experiences with consistent, positive messaging.

Increase event programming such as festivals, fairs, and scavenger hunts.

Draw resident and visitor activity to the neighborhood with creative, fun events that capture the energy and excitement of living there.

Support small business growth.

Where possible, promote local businesses and business owners to nurture the neighborhood’s economic health and differentiate Harrisburg from other cities.

Emphasize accessibility and inclusivity—this is a neighborhood for everyone.

Among Downtown Harrisburg’s core strengths are its central location and its appeal to a diverse population. Build on these by featuring authentic stories of residents and business owners, emphasizing why they chose the neighborhood and how it welcomed them.

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
Publish HDC research on office-to-residential conversion opportunity sites	Address known challenges in the zoning and permitting process	Intensify absorption strength and demand for real estate
Address known challenges in the process	Leverage capital to attract new developers and accelerate office-to-residential conversion	Address known challenges in the development/permitting process
Develop RFP and developer criteria to advance redevelopment opportunities	Focus on improving neighborhood amenities	Consolidate office space and intensify residential development density
Explore various partnership structures	Provide centralized residential amenities	
Partner with, and showcase, existing small businesses		
Develop residential units of all types and at a variety of price points, with an emphasis on density		
Prototype and pilot safe-streets and placemaking ideas	Strengthen key connectors to the river, like State Street	Traffic calming like two-way streets and extending sidewalks
Develop a comprehensive urban design plan for Downtown Harrisburg	Activate the riverfront	
	Create a downtown loop with wayfinding	Redevelop Market Square
	Revitalize Second Street as a Main Street commercial corridor	
Ensure widespread representation	Advise and develop a comprehensive strategy for Downtown Harrisburg	Drive action to move the plan forward
Start local, and then focus outward	Celebrate successes, including what has been done to make Downtown Harrisburg a more vibrant neighborhood	Celebrate successes, including what has been done to make Downtown Harrisburg a more vibrant neighborhood
Improve branding, signage, and wayfinding on the street		
Expand digital imprint through influencers, social media, and blog coverage	Increase event programming such as festivals, fairs, and scavenger hunts	Increase event programming such as festivals, fairs, and scavenger hunts
Support small business growth	Support small business growth	Support small business growth
Emphasize accessibility and inclusivity—this is a neighborhood for everyone		

Summary

Despite its systemic, historical, and circumstantial challenges, Downtown Harrisburg has an exciting opportunity for renewal, spearheaded by HDC's leadership and real estate development activities, to be realized in partnership with a broader coalition of stakeholders who are invested in the neighborhood's future success. The TAP participants compiled a series of recommendations to guide this process with some overarching themes:

1. Consolidate and focus real estate holdings.

Rather than scattering projects across the neighborhood, deliberately home in on key corridors for new development projects to maximize impact. Consider incentives that could accelerate the consolidation of office and residential users.

2. Conduct planning that supports this focus and enhances the pedestrian experience.

With an expanded emphasis on residential conversions, urban planning in Downtown Harrisburg should prioritize pedestrian safety and activity, ground floor activation with a mix of small businesses serving residents and visitors, access to the riverfront within a neighborhood loop that clearly connects central nodes.

3. Leverage financing to scale and accelerate development.

With a creative approach to financing, HDC can attract and rely on more partners to achieve a larger number of projects in a shorter timeframe rather than going it alone.

4. Join forces with other organizations who share the same goals and work together on a shared vision for Downtown Harrisburg.

Power up revitalization—from real estate development to planning to marketing—with collaboration.

5. Change the narrative about Downtown Harrisburg with intentional positioning and messaging.

Start shaping perceptions of the neighborhood now with a multifaceted approach to communications and marketing that shares the stories of the people who already live and work in Downtown Harrisburg.



Appendices

Stakeholder Participants

Art Association of Harrisburg

Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central & Northern PA

The Burg News

Ceisler Media Group

Cheers Hbg

City of Harrisburg

El Sol Restaurant

The Foundation for Enhancing Communities

Gunnison Consulting

Harrisburg Development Corporate Board of Directors

Harrisburg Downtown Improvement District

Harrisburg Symphony

Harrisburg University

Hilton Harrisburg

Historic Harrisburg Association

JB Lovedrafts Restaurant

Jumpstart Harrisburg

Kennedy Wilson Property Mgmt

Kurowski & Wilson

La Cultura

Life Sciences Greenhouse Investments

M&T Bank

Market Square Concerts

Metalworking Lubricants

Midtown Property Management

Miller, Dixon & Drake

Morefield Communications

NAI CIR

Open Stage

PA DCED

PA Department of General Services

PA Senate

Select Capital Commercial Properties

Susquehanna Art Museum

Team PA Foundation

Temple University Harrisburg

Troutman Pepper

Visit Hershey & Harrisburg

Whitaker Center for Science & the Arts

Young Professionals of Color - Greater Harrisburg (YPOC)



About the Panel

**TAP Co-Chair
Danielle DiLeo
Kim, AIA**

**Founder
DDK Urban Consulting**



Danielle DiLeo Kim is an accomplished urban designer and civic leader known for delivering complex projects that drive lasting impact. As founder of DDK Urban Consulting, she draws on over 25 years of experience in architecture, planning, and nonprofit leadership to shape equitable, resilient, and culturally rich communities.

Danielle has led strategic urban planning and design initiatives for major public, institutional, and cultural organizations including the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Temple University, Fairmount Park Conservancy, and PIDC where she guided interdisciplinary teams and multi-million-dollar projects from vision to implementation. Her expertise spans urban design, stakeholder engagement, and organizational strategy.

As President & CEO of PHILADELPHIA250, she transformed the city's national anniversary initiative into a platform for civic renewal, mobilizing diverse partners and raising support for community-driven legacy projects. She currently serves as the 2025 President of the American Institute of Architects Philadelphia, advocating for public-interest design and policy.

A Harvard- and Virginia Tech-trained urban designer and architect, Danielle has been recognized with state-wide honors for her social impact. She is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and The Carpenters' Company, and a champion for women's leadership.

Danielle lives in Fairmount with her family, finding joy in biking, painting, and making cities better for all.

**TAP Co-Chair
Jeremy R.
Young, MURP**

**Vice President,
Community &
Economic Development
Lancaster City Alliance**



As Vice President of Community & Economic Development at the nonprofit Lancaster City Alliance, Jeremy Young leads the organization's efforts to foster commercial investment, support small businesses, and deliver transformative community outcomes aligned with the City's economic development goals.

He oversees the organization's Community & Economic Development Department, including the management of the Downtown Investment District Authority and the implementation of Building On Strength, Lancaster's 15-year economic development strategic plan. Jeremy also maintains a concurrent role as Acting Managing Director of the City of Lancaster Revitalization and Improvement Zone (CRIZ) Authority, in which he manages the annual tax increment financing program and administers a Small Business Financial Assistance fund.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography from Millersville University of Pennsylvania and earned a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree and a Graduate Certificate in Real Estate Development from Portland State University (Portland, OR).

Jeremy and his family proudly live in southwest Lancaster City.

**Sergio Coscia,
AIA**

**Principal
CosciaMoos
Architecture**



As a co-founding principal and lead designer at CosciaMoos Architecture, Sergio guides the firm's creative direction with a global perspective and a deep sensitivity to local context. With over 30 years of experience, he excels at crafting inventive solutions within complex constraints that reflect client aspirations and exceed expectations. While his portfolio spans a wide range of project types, he brings particular depth in adaptive reuse, complex renovations, and transformative additions, revitalizing existing structures to meet contemporary needs. Sergio strives to deliver projects that fulfill immediate functional requirements while also creating lasting value through enhanced user experience, and thoughtful design.

David Cranston

Managing Partner Vivid Project Management



Dave Cranston is Managing Partner at Vivid Project Management, a firm providing owner's representation and project management services for institutional clients across the Mid-Atlantic. With a background in construction and real estate, Dave brings practical insight into managing complex projects in active urban environments. He has led infrastructure projects for health systems, universities, and private organizations, with expertise in team formation, preconstruction planning, and execution oversight. His work is grounded in aligning stakeholders early, managing risk, and ensuring projects meet both organizational goals and community needs. He holds a BA in Economics from Rowan University and an MBA from La Salle University and is actively engaged in regional industry councils and advisory panels.

Jarrett James Lash, AICP

Township Planner Upper Merion Township



Jarrett James Lash is currently the Township Planner for Upper Merion Township, one of the fastest-growing residential areas in Pennsylvania, home to the third largest mall in America, and is ranked the second best place to raise a family in America by Fortune. As the lead of the Planning Division, he spearheads long-term economic and community development initiatives and has stewarded over 2,000,000 sq Ft of land development approvals.

Jarrett serves as a Youth Advisor to the Youth Housing Coalition and on the Board of the HealthSpark Foundation. Previously, Jarrett has held various roles including as a member of the Montgomery County, PA Homeless Task Force, a Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Vibrant Communities Fellow, RSL Homes modular housing Strategic Growth Lead, a United Nations Association Global Goals Ambassador, and a Manhattan Institute State and Local Policy Collegiate Associate.

He is an alumnus of New York University with a B.A. in International Politics, Rights, and Development, and studied abroad at NYU Paris, NYU Shanghai, and NYU Abu Dhabi. His senior thesis was "The Politics and Economics of Housing Affordability in the United States."

Mark M Callazzo

Managing Partner Lucern Capital



Mark Callazzo is the epitome of an entrepreneur. Over more than three decades, Mark has founded and led multiple real estate companies that flourish to this day—proof that strong business relationships, loyalty and rolling with the punches leads to long-term success in this fast-paced, unpredictable industry.

Mark boasts extensive expertise in the realm of Private Equity. In his capacity as the Managing Partner at Lucern Capital, he assumed a pivotal role in the acquisition of value-add multifamily and mixed assets exceeding a cumulative value of \$250 million along the East Coast. Furthermore, Mark served as the founding partner of Alpha Funding Solutions, where he successfully deployed more than \$800 million in short-term debt. In this role, he held direct responsibility for the company's underwriting and risk management efforts.

Mark received a B.A. in economics from Kean University and an M.B.A. with a concentration in finance from Monmouth University. With myriad business and philanthropic ventures, Mark manages to make time for another passion, wine.

Jaina Maultsby

Founder and Chief
Executive Officer
Elm Street Project LLC



Jaina Maultsby is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Elm Street Project LLC, a strategic venture firm focused on regional economic development and real estate. Jaina's experience spans driving enterprise multiyear global strategies in top-tier finance and investment asset management firms alongside management committees and senior executive leadership across \$7B+ businesses and \$1T+ AUM investments.

Leading private sector value creation and advancing regional strategies through strategy and strategic investments, ESP's comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach integrates regional scale with pragmatic implementation translating complex challenges into value creation while emphasizing systems thinking for institutional alignment and investment activation. Anchored in a strategic perspective, ESP's Blueprint for Growth is a strategic multi-year initiative focused on revitalizing local economic hubs and fostering sustained growth.

Jaina holds a Bachelor of Arts from McDaniel College, grounded in a rigorous education that cultivated a global perspective, critical thinking, interdisciplinary analysis and adaptive problem-solving honed through strategic executive leadership and driving cross-functional, multidisciplinary and complex multi-year global strategies and value creation.

Richard Olaya, AIA, NOMA

Principal, Architect
O Z Collaborative



Richard Olaya, AIA, is a principal and co-founder of the architectural firm OZ Collaborative. Rich has been in the architectural field for over 35 years and has been a registered architect since 2005. He has experience with a wide range of project types, including government & civic, university buildings, museums, churches, mosques, high-rise commercial offices, and multi-family housing.

Originally from Bogota, Colombia, and now a long-time Philadelphia resident, Rich is a self-proclaimed urbanist and proud advocate for the city. Rich's work is deeply influenced by his global perspective as an immigrant and his intimate understanding of the region's culture and historical vernacular.

When not in the office, Rich can be found at home cooking Colombian cuisine with his sons, surfing, competing in triathlons, or painting watercolors of old buildings.

Robert Ravelli

Director
Robert Ravelli
Consulting



Robert Ravelli has a Masters Degree in City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and brings extensive international best practice experience in the areas of placemaking, integrating transport and land use, development incentives for regeneration around transport stations and travel demand management. He has been a frequent panelist and speaker on these topics at conferences and universities. He has completed master planning and transport planning projects in both the public and private sectors in the USA, UK, Middle East, Russia, China and Australia.

He is an expert evaluator for transport projects for the European Commission. He worked for Mayor Ed Rendell in Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Transportation/ Office of Strategic Planning. Also in Philadelphia he was the Executive Director of the East Passyunk Avenue BID. He was a member of ULI Advisory Panels in Boston, Charlotte, Broward County FL, Moscow, Russia and Atlantic City NJ.

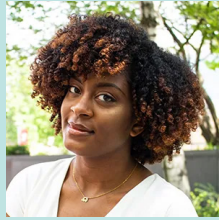
He was also a member of the ULI Philadelphia Technical Advisory Panel that looked at transforming Market Square in Harrisburg in 2014.

Lauren Smith

Manager, Economic Development Center City District

Lauren Smith is passionate about driving economic growth and empowering dynamic communities in Philadelphia through data-driven decision-making. As Manager of Economic Development at Center City District (CCD), she supports initiatives to strengthen the commercial office sector, retain and attract high-quality tenants, and collaborates with property owners, brokers, and stakeholders to enhance Philadelphia's downtown.

Previously, she served as Senior Research Analyst at CCD, where she developed interactive maps and managed databases on demographics, housing, employment, and commercial real estate, making complex data accessible and easy to interpret. Lauren holds a BA in Geography & Urban Studies and an MBA in Finance at Temple University.



Briana Wilkins

VP, Development Parkway Corporation

Ms. Wilkins joined Parkway Corporation in 2019 as Vice President, Development, specifically leading the development of Parkway's growing multifamily portfolio from conception through stabilization.

Briana joined Parkway after working for Ivy Realty, where she oversaw the adaptive reuse and renovation of over 300 apartments in the Philadelphia area. Prior to that, she worked at Silverman in Jersey City, as a project manager overseeing the construction of over 250 apartments through design, entitlement, and delivery. She also led the development of Andco, a coworking space with multiple locations in downtown Jersey City. Since entering the development field in 2013, Briana has overseen approximately \$350M worth of multifamily development across multiple markets.

She holds her A.B. from Princeton University, with a degree from the School of Public and International Affairs, graduating summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa.

Development Lead for Kansas City, Missouri; New Orleans, Louisiana; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia.

