

The Gateway Mall St. Louis, Missouri

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

January 6–12, 2024



COVER: Downtown St. Louis, Missouri. (ULI)

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About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. Each year, thousands of events, both virtual and in person, are held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on [X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

About ULI St. Louis

ULI ST. LOUIS brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and communities across the region for educational programs, initiatives, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. With over 250 members, ULI St. Louis furthers ULI's mission by locally delivering on the Institute's best practices in leadership development and by

facilitating regional community service and enhancement of land use policy and practice. ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, impartially reports findings, and convenes forums to find solutions.

About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAM

is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda of an Advisory Services panel is tailored to meet a sponsor's needs. ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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Acknowledgments

This panel is a result of multiple individuals and organizations participating collectively to achieve transformational change for downtown St. Louis and the Gateway Mall.

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Contents

3

ULI Panel and Project Staff

22

**Placemaking, Placekeeping, and
Activation**

5

**Introduction and
Key Recommendations**

34

Implementation Strategies

9

The Status of Downtown

40

Next Steps and Priorities

11

The Real Estate Strategy

43

About the Panel

17

**The Economic Development
Strategy**



ULI

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The panelists met with a wide range of community stakeholders and, as a function of the study tour, toured the Loutopia art exhibit and met with artists active in the community.



Introduction and Key Recommendations

THE GATEWAY MALL RUNS THROUGH THE CENTER OF DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS and has been the focus of a long history of grand plans for this Midwestern city. The Mall is a block wide and stretches from the Gateway Arch National Park on the eastern end to the city's new Major League Soccer stadium 18 blocks west. The Mall has served as the location for countless events over the years and continues to be a downtown gathering place. The Mall also has the potential to become the city and downtown's family room, a place of constant activity and activation, a space for formal and informal events, and a catalyst for a new downtown neighborhood.

The history of the Mall dates back to 1907 when existing city blocks were envisioned as a new grand, Beaux-Arts-inspired green space and public parkway leading from the Old Courthouse west into the city. Although this plan did not come to fruition, it laid the groundwork for efforts to redevelop the area. In the 1950s, urban renewal practices cleared several blocks west of Tucker Boulevard, including Mill Creek Valley, the city's largest Black neighborhood at the time. In the 1980s and 1990s, blocks east of Tucker were cleared and plans for the Mall continued, including proposals for new office development in addition to or instead of open space. Over the decades that followed, the Mall attracted piecemeal development, including the construction of Kiener Plaza in 1965 on two blocks of the Mall; the installation of the Richard Serra sculpture, *Twain*, on the block between 10th and 11th streets; the 1986 development of 701 Market Street (a 15-story office building) on the northern half of one block;

and the 2009 development of the Citygarden sculpture park on the two blocks between 8th and 10th streets.

Market Street runs along the southern edge of the Mall and was envisioned as the city's grand parade route. Chestnut Street, along the Mall's northern boundary, is narrower than Market, is a one-way street traveling east, and has recently been narrowed further through a road diet and the addition of bike lanes. Aside from these two roadways, little ties the Mall's blocks and uses together.

The buildings that surround the Mall are as varied as the uses within them. Historic buildings such as the Old Courthouse sit alongside newer office buildings. Municipal buildings front the Mall, as do parking garages and a number of vacant storefronts. A few hotels and restaurants—with varying levels of success—can also be found along the Mall.

The Mall has at times been likened to downtown’s living room. Other plans have called it a hallway, linking the “rooms” of activity along its length.

At the request of Greater St. Louis Inc. (GSL) and St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC), ULI convened an Advisory Services panel to study the Gateway Mall and make recommendations on its future use as an activated park, a catalyst for additional real estate and economic development, and a people-centric hub with a “must visit” identity.

The Panel’s Assignment

The panel was asked to evaluate the Gateway Mall, specifically the blocks between North Broadway and 11th Street, and the downtown blocks immediately surrounding the park. The specific questions posed to the panel are as follows:

Park Identification and Activation: How can GSL and SLDC transform the project area into a more vibrant, people-centric hub that has a compelling “must visit” identity and acts as a catalyst for the development of adjacent properties? Are there opportunities to tell a more complete civic history in this physical space, which sits between the Old Courthouse, Gateway Arch, and Pillars of the Valley? Can some nodes within the Gateway Mall incorporate public-serving commercial uses in a way that activates the park and the streets around it? How can an always-on sense of programming be built to reinforce the district identity?

Complementary Real Estate Investment: How should adjacent land uses differ by block along the Gateway Mall, if at all? Considering downtown St. Louis’s current demographics, what new or current property and housing types as well as amenities should or could be developed to spur population growth and housing affordability within the target area? What uses should be pursued in properties bordering the Gateway Mall? What uses will benefit most from being park-adjacent? What uses will drive foot traffic and positive, complementary use of Gateway Mall?

Financing: What are the available development finance tools and strategies to support implementation of the broader vision for the project area?

Policy: How do SLDC and GSL implement the broad vision for the project area from a policy perspective? What existing policies, regulations, or processes are creating barriers to reinvestment? What governance, policy, and equity considerations should overlay the project area? What specific

equity elements could be implemented within the project area in light of social justice considerations? How can GSL and SLDC be the drivers and influencers of change in downtown to unlock its potential as a place for everyone in St. Louis?

Advocacy and Marketing: How do SLDC and GSL sell this new vision and plan to St. Louis and the broader region, including prospective tenants, the development community, property owners, the city government, potential residents, and visitors from the outside of St. Louis?

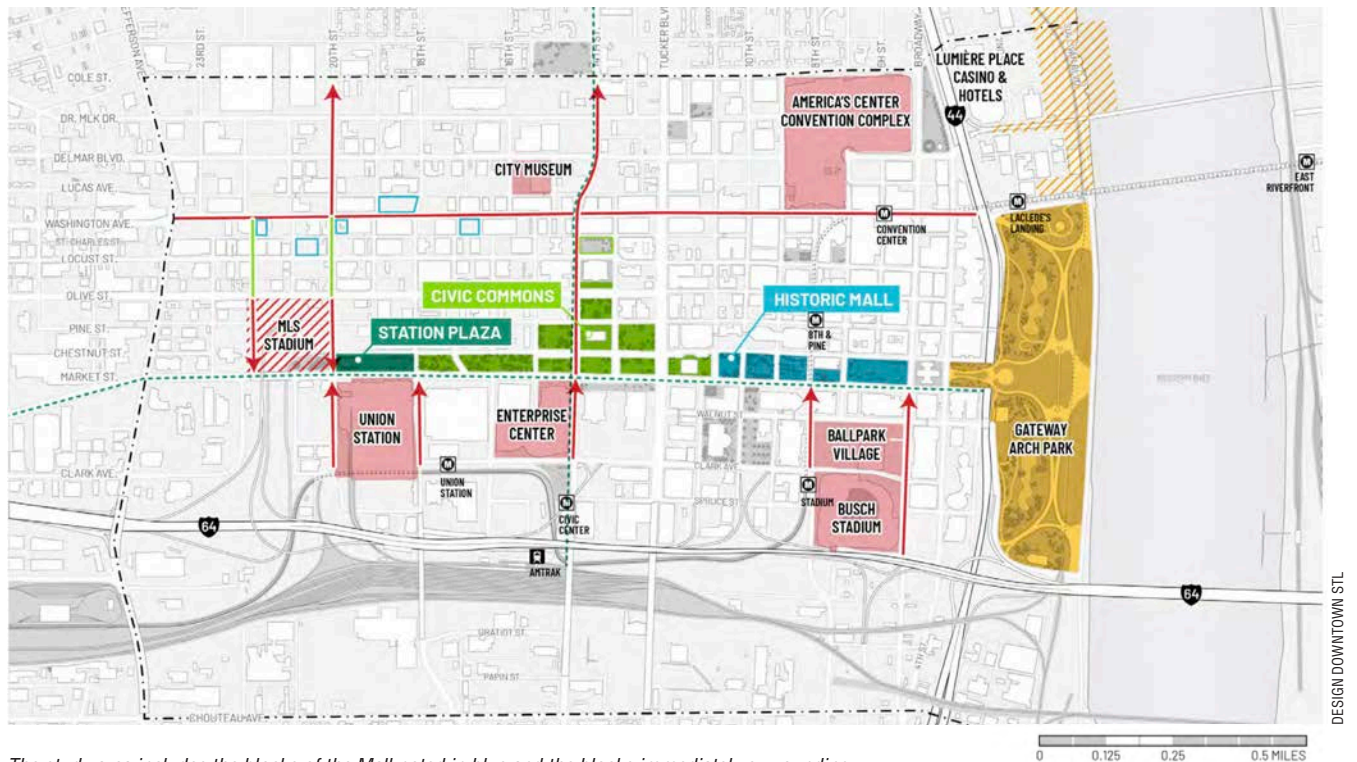
The breadth of these questions points to the need to address the Mall in the context of downtown St. Louis today. In this postpandemic era, office buildings may need to be reconfigured for a new use, and “downtown” employees may not physically work downtown frequently or at all; but resources and infrastructure can still support grand things.

Key Recommendations

The ULI Advisory Services panel delivered its recommendations to reframe the Gateway Mall’s relationship with downtown St. Louis. Instead of serving as the region’s central business district, with success and failure rising and falling with the tide of office tenancy, downtown can instead become the central social district for the region, positioning culture, creativity, and joy as key drivers of economic competitiveness. Positioned around the Mall and using its blocks as a canvas for experimentation and performance, participants in the cultural economy can infuse new life into the Mall; spread down its connecting streets; and bring life, diversity, activity, and energy into downtown. The goal is to continue to design and operate the public spaces and to program adjacent private spaces in ways that continue to increase the relevance of this downtown district to the lives of the diverse array of people in the city, region, and beyond.

Real Estate Strategy

The panel’s understanding of downtown St. Louis as a no-growth market positions this as the right time to make strategic real estate acquisitions. Through a few key building acquisitions at corners of the Mall that adjoin important connecting streets, GSL and SLDC can begin to control aspects of the Mall’s surrounding environment and position those real estate assets for new uses that support, incubate, and help launch the cultural foundation of a new central social district for downtown.



The study area includes the blocks of the Mall noted in blue and the blocks immediately surrounding.

St. Louis-based creative entrepreneurs—especially those from Black and brown communities—are “market makers” throughout the region and present an opportunity for downtown’s future economy. Active in neighborhoods across St. Louis today, these creative entrepreneurs could shift their cultural production to or expand into downtown, continuing to provide an amenity for St. Louisans and providing an authentic attraction of interest to more visitors. Opening the door to downtown spaces and providing these market makers with an equity stake in these and other downtown developments offers twofold benefits: (1) the potential to bolster the creative industry’s interest in and commitment to operating downtown, and (2) the opportunity to be intentional about creating more equitable access to wealth creation and economic opportunity than has long been the case in downtown real estate investment and business development. Over time, this commitment will produce an activated, must-see experience and a more equitable and resilient downtown neighborhood that is a draw for residents and visitors alike.

Equitable Economic Development

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting influx of hybrid work environments laid bare the weaknesses of a single-use office district like those found in many U.S. downtowns. The

office market in downtown St. Louis was not strong before the pandemic and is even more challenged today. Creating a resilient, mixed-use district around the Mall and across downtown should be a priority.

Recent economic development and growth plans from GSL and SLDC aim to shift the tide and foster a new St. Louis economy that embraces business diversity, racial equity, and economic resilience. These same goals, applied to downtown, support the panel’s recommendation of shifting from a single-use district to a cultural economy—built by many, supported by locals and visitors, and diverse in its offerings. The physical design of spaces is also important. Design guidelines can help create a streetscape that is more human in scale, inviting people to stroll, linger, and explore on foot, bike, or other nonvehicular means.

The buildings lining the streets around and connecting to the Mall should become places for testing, refining, and expanding new ideas for activating the Mall and enlivening the neighborhood for both downtown residents and visitors from around St. Louis and beyond. Diverse businesses, built into the fabric of such an economy, will prove more resilient over time.

From Activation to Anchor

The Gateway Mall has the potential to become a testing ground for new creative ideas and cultural expressions: the downtown area can be the space in which a virtuous cycle—from “activation” to “amenity” to “anchor”—occurs. In the activation phase, spaces are designated for testing new ideas that make downtown more interesting and engaging to visit. The activations that prove successful move into more fixed environments, thus becoming amenities, for example, stages for performances or studios for enhancing one’s craft. Some of these amenities ultimately establish an independent following and warrant anchor-type space—space that the public can count on to host the original concept as well as related activations that align with and benefit from proximity to the anchor activity. This approach also applies to the blocks immediately surrounding the Mall, particularly the ground-floor spaces. These adjacent spaces can complement the energy of the Mall activations to create an activated, must-experience district that reaches deep into and across downtown.

Successful placemaking for the Mall will require building capacity, visibility, and community equity and resilience. Additional capacity will be needed to support consistent programming, provide structure for “plug and play” placemaking, and encourage the growth of talent over time. A “curators committee” can assist with some of this work, helping to identify potential new tenants and market makers for downtown. Visibility is important, particularly in the early days, and should take the form of supporting the new businesses with marketing assistance, hiring ambassadors and influencers to be the face of downtown, and paying people for their social capital. Community wealth building and resilience will come over time and should focus on the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) of St. Louis. That means paying them for the value they bring to spaces and folding in ownership and equity stakes for tenants in the buildings owned by GSL, SLDC, or future partners in this work. The cultural economy, particularly centering Black Americans, is a proven growth strategy and one that could be defining for this next version of downtown St. Louis: a vibrant and successful neighborhood and destination.

Implementation Strategies

Not surprisingly, efforts to create a coherent sense of place and identity at the Gateway Mall face significant challenges. The Mall is a collection of properties owned and operated by several different entities, including the federal and city governments and civic organizations. The panel reaffirmed the widely held view that this arrangement is untenable. An organized, empowered central body is needed to curate a cultural economy, organize programming, recruit talent, help unify spaces along the Mall, and facilitate access. Given that several different entities manage operations for different sections of the Mall, the panel recommends establishing a conservancy to oversee maintenance, programming, and improvements to the Mall. Additional support for the areas surrounding the Mall and across downtown will also be required, particularly to advance the panel’s proposed real estate actions, district-wide connections, and coordination of the initial cultural production. A centralized and highly transparent system of access makes it easier for a diverse public to navigate the business and cultural opportunities, further supporting community wealth building, equitable economic development, and community resilience. This form of park management, led by strong, unified, and well-resourced parks management organizations, is finding success across the county, activating key public assets and creating and sustaining vibrant civic spaces. Powerful champions and a downtown coalition, including market makers and cultural producers, will be needed to set this new stage for downtown and to build and sustain the effort.



The Status of Downtown

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHIFTED THE WAY OFFICE WORK TAKES PLACE. The move to hybrid environments or out of the downtown office environment altogether is affecting central business districts across the United States. At a time when people have more choices than ever before about where to work, live, study, or visit, downtown building owners and civic leaders are wisely reevaluating the future of these once-bustling single-use office districts.

Building owners are rethinking their office towers. Some are renovating the spaces with an intense focus on amenities. Others are exiting the office market entirely and converting buildings to residential uses. Both options help create a stronger neighborhood customer base, day and night, for amenities and services that further attract demand to the area. The public sector, too, is reconsidering the traditional central business district and revising land use and zoning controls to allow for a broader range of uses downtown. These efforts also help create a more diverse mix of uses that may prove more sustainable and economically resilient over time.

Similarly, following the racial reckoning of 2020, city leaders are working to understand the public sector's role in supporting racial healing and promoting racially equitable practices and policies that will provide economic justice and support more of their citizens, uplifting Black and brown communities in particular.

Economic competitiveness remains a high priority for civic leaders. However, finding key points of differentiation and gaining a market edge is increasingly difficult in a quickly moving and shifting global economy. What quality of life is being offered downtown? What is distinctive and appealing about the experiences there? How is the downtown area welcoming and nurturing the sort of diversity that attracts people to other cities and is a critical factor in the growth and health of innovation economies? Downtown leaders across North America are doubling down on efforts to enhance this experience of place centered around shared civic space, food, entertainment, leisure, and an array of cultural attractions.

Downtown St. Louis has served as the metropolitan area's economic engine since the city's founding—downtown was the center of commerce, the financial heart of the city, and a place where innovation and manufacturing filled the buildings lining its streets and alleys. What will the future hold for downtown St. Louis?

Now Is the Time to Act Boldly

Before the pandemic, corporate offices were moving west, out of downtown, to Clayton and west St. Louis County, locations closer to the homes of CEOs and perhaps considered safer than downtown. New construction followed the market, leaving downtown businesses with no significant new office offerings. Vacancy remains high and is estimated at about 20 percent, which does not account for offices that remain under an active lease but sit empty.

Commercial shrinkage following the pandemic has further pulled office workers out of downtown, and, as in many other downtown districts similarly lacking a bustling office population, safety has become a concern for residents, visitors, and remaining employees. Investments in areas like Washington Avenue created new energy and transformed the streetscape but proved fragile when the next new entertainment district came along. Reinvestment has proved challenging in the face of new competition. Downtown as an economic driver is at risk.

These movements—which are affecting commercial real estate, racial equity, and economic positioning—demand a new approach. There is already a regional commitment to downtown’s future, as shown by recent plans that support

investment in downtown and point to its continued relevance in the center of the 15-county region. From SLDC’s [Economic Justice Action Plan](#) to the [Design Downtown STL](#) plan to GSL’s [STL 2030 Jobs Plan](#), solid economic development plans are on the table, and recent substantial capital investment is helping them gain momentum in the city. The plans are in place; it is time to step on the implementation gas.

What Is Next for Downtown?

Recognizing the seismic commercial shifts, unique asset alignments, and current and potential economic impacts on downtown St. Louis, the panel suggested reframing the central business district as a central social district. This reframing centers culture, creativity, and joy as the new key drivers of economic competitiveness and envisions a new future for downtown St. Louis. Using this central social district framing, the panel envisioned a future for downtown that leverages the Gateway Mall in a manner that goes far beyond its original design as a grand public lawn lined by massive public and private buildings. The panel’s vision turns the Mall into a family room for downtown, the central social space where residents and visitors come to play, explore, and express themselves.

SWOT Analysis of Downtown St. Louis and the Gateway Mall

STRENGTHS

- Internationally known city
- Rich cultural history
- Deep bench of creatives
- Diverse population
- Recent capital investment
- Events and programming

WEAKNESSES

- Negative perceptions and “self-talk”
- High vacancy rates
- Public safety concerns (both real and perceived)
- Physical fragmentation; lack of cohesion
- Wide-open spaces that feel empty
- Mall management divided among multiple organizations

OPPORTUNITIES

- Chance to redefine the space and the narrative
- Affordable real estate for acquisition
- Rapid deployment of programming and activation
- Space in which to create a spectacle
- Enhanced connections to nature, water (riverfront), food, culture

THREATS

- Changing nature of work
- Continuation of current economic conditions; decline in commercial occupancy, etc.



GREATER ST. LOUIS INC.

The Real Estate Strategy

NOW IS THE TIME TO CONSIDER A DIFFERENT PATH FOR DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS. This path can be more culturally diverse, economically resilient, and inviting to a broader array of downtown and regional residents, visitors, and employees working in downtown offices, public spaces, and entertainment venues. Rather than a district marked by office buildings and restaurants serving primarily the business population, downtown St. Louis should become the central social district for the greater metropolitan area. This transformation will require a focused real estate strategy to help catalyze the shift.

The Opportunities

A central social district leverages many of the city's existing assets and positions downtown for a host of new opportunities. As a central social district, downtown becomes

- A socially and economically resilient district that feels like a city neighborhood, one that is accessible, inviting, beloved, and cared for by both residents and visitors;
- An ongoing economic driver for the city that is more diversified, resilient, and less cyclical or influenced by any particular market movement;
- An environment with focus on racial equity and inclusion in all aspects of commerce, culture, and city life;

THE CENTRAL SOCIAL DISTRICT: POSITION CULTURE, CREATIVITY, AND JOY AS KEY DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

- Make culture, creativity, and shared joy legible and accessible as a core experience of downtown.
- Support creative enterprises through incentives and targeted investments.
- Define creative hubs and corridors animated by the music industry, fashion, and other forms of creative expression.

- A neighborhood offering a variety of housing choices at a range of price points that helps ensure current residents can continue to afford to live downtown and energizes new residents with the new housing options;
- A neighborhood that meets the needs of St. Louisans to live, work, learn, create, and play;
- A hub for art, culture, and entrepreneurship.

The compelling advantages to this shift to a central social district include the strong potential to bring people and activity downtown through additional entertainment and cultural offerings, enhanced residential uses, and bolstered tourism. Residents and tourists require a similar mix of neighborhood amenities and are attracted to similar quality-of-life features, thus improvements to one sector naturally benefit the other. Nationally, downtowns with a significant entertainment focus, which come with significant hospitality jobs, have proven most resilient in the postpandemic economy.

Downtown St. Louis has many of the physical supports in place to become a central social district. Washington Avenue and its venues line the north; a resurging Laclede’s Landing is to the east; Ballpark Village, Enterprise Center, Stifel Theater, and Union Station line the south; and Downtown West and the new Major League Soccer stadium bookend downtown to the west. Running through the center of this geography is the Gateway Mall. As downtown’s family room, the Mall can be the center for the social district’s activities, hosting festivals, providing stages and venues for performances, and serving as the central gathering and connecting space for downtown’s venues, activities, and operations.

The Big Play

The current economic downturn, marked by lowered property values and high vacancy, offers a tremendous opportunity for targeted real estate acquisitions by the public sector or aligned partners. The goal of these very specific and limited acquisitions is to leverage certain underperforming properties in a manner that catalyzes activity along and attracts people to the Mall. Now is also the perfect time to use these acquisitions to intentionally and strategically facilitate wealth creation for Black St. Louisans using the following real estate strategy.

This strategy for activating the Mall and energizing the downtown core is grounded in three premises:

1. The down market positions the public sector to acquire and activate catalytic properties downtown to control the environment.

CREATE AND CAPTURE VALUE BY CONTROLLING MORE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- Make strategic real estate acquisitions in an under-priced market.
- Hold and activate real estate for value creation and value capture.
- Define nodes and corridors for concentrated public-sector real estate investment.

2. St. Louis-based creative entrepreneurs—especially those in the Black and brown communities—are “market makers.”
3. Providing market makers an ownership stake in downtown’s development will bolster their interest in and commitment to downtown and produce a more resilient neighborhood in the face of future downturns.

This real estate approach leverages a short-term acquisition and disposition strategy that delivers the following for downtown and its present and future stakeholders:

- Space and ownership for multiple creative producers, allowing for wider participation in the downtown economy and improved economic resilience through multiple operators.
- BIPOC equity participation in downtown’s present and future. This participation could potentially be based on cultural producer participation and development partner selection criteria. (See [Development as a Catalyst.](#))
- Much-needed at-grade, streetfront activation, including more robust retail activity and ground-floor visibility.
- Interim and active uses in current spaces that can lead to eventual full building redevelopment as the market matures and based on value created and captured by the cultural uses within the spaces.

This approach could also include scenarios in which the public entity holds the real estate for a longer term while still creating opportunities for creative producer-tenant equity participation in resulting property valuation increases. During this time, buildings can feature and benefit from interim activation, such as ground-floor tenanting and facade activation. Future redevelopment of the properties could pursue a similar disposition process with the BIPOC market makers and lead to a more permanent mixed-use redevelopment outcome for downtown.



Cafés with outdoor seating, studio spaces visible from the sidewalk, merchandised retail displays, and active park spaces can add significant life to the downtown landscape.

Existing Buildings, Spaces, and Potential Uses

Within the vacant buildings downtown and surrounding the Mall, opportunities may exist for activation based on the current buildout. Buildings with commercial kitchens could host temporary pop-ups for St. Louis’s budding chefs. Other buildings, such as certain parking garages, could be blank slates for innovation. Interim uses could transform those underperforming assets, drawing people into the center of downtown in months when the weather more readily accommodates outside activities. Placemaking initiatives on the southern walls of these buildings could enliven the visual experience of Mall visitors and lessen the negative impact of those concrete structures until the properties find new life.

The panel identified five key sites with a potentially important role to play in this catalytic redevelopment real estate strategy:

- **Former Mike Shannon’s restaurant building.** Given its position along Market Street and 7th Street, the panel identified this building as an important site for catalyzing activation along the Mall. In the short term, the building could provide space for temporary activation with food-focused cultural producers. The panel recommends leveraging the building’s existing commercial kitchen for temporary pop-ups for St. Louis’s chefs, future restaurateurs, and caterers. Activity created within the building could spill out along the street edges, along the Mall, and into Kiener Plaza, helping to create the type of connectivity GSL and SLDC seek. This site holds significant activation potential and, in the long term, this building could transition to ground-floor commercial uses with residential uses built above.
- **Kiener West Garage.** Due to its prime position adjacent to the Mall and overlooking Kiener Plaza, this site is ideal for residential development featuring ground-floor commercial uses. In the short term, the facades of both the Kiener West and Kiener East garages should be prioritized for murals or other placemaking, perhaps using rotating digital projections.
- **Kiener East Garage.** The positioning of this site, alongside the Mall and overlooking Kiener Plaza, also makes this site an ideal location for new residential uses with ground-floor commercial space. As already noted, in the short term, the facades of both Kiener East and Kiener West garages should be prioritized for murals or digital placemaking interventions.
- **Peabody Building.** The long-term future of this building warrants strong consideration, either preserved for continued commercial office use or renovated to more

ELECTRIC WORKS, FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

The 39-acre, \$425 million mixed-use redevelopment of a former General Electric campus in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is a good example of how a property can be repositioned as a space for creative producers, entrepreneurs, and market makers to establish a business, build a brand, and reenergize an environment.

Phase 1 of the redevelopment features 740,000 square feet of office, retail, coworking, and a market. The initial Phase 1 investment of \$286 million has generated \$400 million in economic impact and 3,000 new jobs on site and in the neighboring community.

The approach at Electric Works is to leverage inclusive economic development, social networks, and cultural production to maximize the development's catalytic effect. Building on the legacy and historic impact of GE on the Fort Wayne community, Electric Works is set to become the new engine for the community's future economy.



PECKHAM LEVELS, LONDON

In 2017, an underused parking garage in London, England, was transformed into a hub for creatives, local entrepreneurs, and the community.

Bringing together theater, music, comedy, and events with London's nightlife and food and bar scene, the new spaces are full and the building is energized—and hopefully will remain so through the sunsetting of the structure's lease in 2039.

The project encompasses approximately 130 independent enterprises (70 percent of which are locally owned), which have generated over 300 jobs. The space offers 20 percent of its studios at 35 percent of the market value, 25 percent of the event spaces are free of charge, and 10 percent of profits are retained in a community investment fund.

Thus far, no producer has equity stake in the project. That leaves the project falling short of its goals to be a transformative catalyst. The project is outwardly successful, but it will not assist with transformative community wealth generation.



PECKHAM LEVELS



PECKHAM LEVELS



The building formerly housing Mike Shannon's restaurant would be a compelling location for a pop-up or incubator restaurant concept.



The garages lining the north side of the Mall are underused and sit on land that could be put to more productive and attractive use.

actively contribute to an improved Mall experience. In the short term, the building facade should be improved or resurfaced with a painted mural or digital placemaking to help blend the building into the surrounding park-like atmosphere.

- **909 Chestnut.** This challenging property should be preserved for later use (i.e., mothballed). It would be very expensive to demolish this building or convert it to residential uses. In the short term, interim uses that provide ground-floor activation should be considered and incorporated into the building.

In addition to those five acquisitions, the panel also recognized the value of two very specific partnerships along the Mall and the benefits that these two additional initiatives could provide to broader Mall activation.

- **Partnership with the Hilton at the Ballpark.** The northern facade of the Hilton property is a long, blank wall along the southern side of the Mall. Improving this northern facade of the Hilton property and its ground-floor spaces would activate nearly two blocks of the Mall along Market Street and could spark additional opportunities for activation.
- **Partnership with Great Rivers Greenway.** The Brickline Greenway is set to run along the entire southern edge of the Mall, separating park activities from the roadway beyond, creating a welcome and important separation of uses and connecting people to a host of downtown locations through a multiuse path. By partnering with Great Rivers Greenway, SLDC and GSL can help ensure this section of the Brickline fulfills its promise as an important link to all the Gateway Mall sites.

This ambitious real estate and central social district strategy relies on GSL and SLDC to initiate the process by acquiring the real estate and positioning the properties. The key to the strategy is the next step: once the initial curation of market makers and partners is complete, the activation of the space is placed in their very capable hands. The market makers get to work creating and refining their craft, inviting their networks to come experience, witness, taste, and enjoy their work in this new environment. Throughout it all, these market makers own the process, the equity, and the outcomes. They are the influencers, the marketers, and the attractors who can spark new life and then enliven and populate downtown authentically.

Fiscal Approach to Cultural and Social Resilience

Developing a real estate strategy with a core mission to acquire properties (much like a community development corporation) and position each one for equity participation by cultural producers takes intentionality and careful planning. An inclusive enhancement fund could provide the structure that this approach needs. This type of fund identifies areas for local impact and investment and welcomes partners from across the community who share or align with the impact goals of the fund. The fund would use a graduated contribution schedule, pursue matching fund commitments, and institute inclusive award criteria. Funding awards could go to individuals, organizations, or businesses, and would provide flexibility over time, supporting the content creators equitably while maintaining a platform for future opportunities.

PARK-TO-PRIVATE REALM TRANSITIONS

Successful park-to-private realm relationships often feature ground-floor commercial uses that complement park activity. Examples include restaurants or cafés with outdoor seating and beer gardens, which provide services to park users, or interactive activities such as mini golf, climbing walls, or other pop-up recreational activities. These activities can spill into neighboring sidewalk areas and into the park itself, blurring the line between private and public spaces. From a design perspective, using the same materials across public and private areas—for example, through landscaping and lighting—creates visual consistency, while ensuring a clear line of sight from the park into shop windows can draw potential customers into retail spaces. Specific examples include a [Subpar](#) mini golf/arcade on the San Francisco waterfront and a [pop-up climbing wall to market a nearby Ikea store](#).

ULI’s *Successful Partnerships for Parks* report also has relevant information on this topic. Specific examples include the following:

- **Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York:** This publicly accessible private park was developed and operated by a private developer with oversight by the city’s parks department. Design features include an “artifact walk,” which is a five-block path with over 30 pieces of salvaged factory machinery, separate gathering spaces with seating, and space for active programming, including yoga in the park, children’s events, and more. The brewery across the street has outdoor seating and large windows, welcoming and facilitating interaction between people inside the building and those in the park beyond.
- **Gloria Molina Grand Park in Los Angeles:** This public park was developed with funding from a real estate developer and is operated by nonprofit organizations. Programming in the park includes weekly food trucks, “Sunday Sessions” featuring local musical artists, and a “Wellness Break” series featuring meditation, yoga, tai chi, and other activities.



ALEX STANILOFF

Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York.



JIM SIMMONS

Grand Park in Los Angeles, California.



Economic Development Strategy

THE APPEAL AND ULTIMATE RESILIENCE OF DOWNTOWN HINGES ON ITS ABILITY TO BECOME A NEIGHBORHOOD that is loved and cherished by people and that loves and cherishes its people in return. People need to feel welcome, feel a sense of ownership over place, and ultimately feel a sense of responsibility for the future success of downtown. Achieving all this can be challenging in the long term unless people have an actual ownership stake in the future success of a business, building, or district.

The nature of real estate development is slowly changing. Historically extractive, real estate development often recognized the value of place and sought to maximize the financial value of the characteristics, culture, and people who made a place special—without compensating those place makers and cultural producers for the value they provided. Today, the public sector and private developers are starting to come to terms with the roles their policies or businesses played in these inequitable and often race-based practices. The next step in this important evolution is to pay communities equally for the culture a development extracts and upon which it generates long-term capital.

For downtown St. Louis and for the properties surrounding the Gateway Mall, there are exciting opportunities to develop and share the economic benefits of new development and redevelopment with the local community and with cultural

producers and begin to implement proactive measures to protect and cultivate resilient community assets going forward. This resilience will serve the developments well in the long run and, at the same time, serve and support community resilience.

DIG INTO THE PAST TO PLANT THE FUTURE

- Honor the long history of Black and brown innovators and culture-makers who have created value and joy in the district.
- Integrate meaningful storytelling and placemaking that references this history while creating fertile ground for future innovation.



The green spaces in the center of downtown St. Louis flow from the grounds of the Arch west toward CityPark, creating an east-west axis through the city.

Existing Plans and Activation Supports

The focus of key economic and civic agencies in St. Louis in recent years has been on restoring equity in the economic development process. The idea is to ensure that development does not simply continue to invest where returns have historically been delivered. SLDC’s [Economic Justice Action Plan](#) and [Inclusive Economic Growth Incentives](#) plan, as well as the [Design Downtown STL](#) plan offer a more equitable approach to real estate and economic development, built on ingredients that will help create and support a vibrant, mixed-use district.

Now is the time to expedite the work called out in these plans and begin to create BIPOC equity and cultural production in the downtown community.

Connector Streets as Activators

GSL and SLDC have identified 7th Street as a key connector for downtown, connecting Washington Avenue to Ballpark Village and stitching together a number of other anchors in between. The panel further highlighted the importance of 7th Street and other north–south connectors to the future vitality of the Mall. These north–south connectors have great potential for cultural cultivation and connection to Mall activation and programming. These connecting spaces provide high-quality street frontages and have good potential

for a return on the investment needed to bring the spaces back into production.

The activation of the spaces along the streets connecting to the Mall is important for a host of reasons. Retail and services launched along these connectors can better serve the population of downtown residents who presently leave downtown for a florist, printing services, bookstore, and other basic retail needs. Ground-floor, white box spaces, as called for in the Design Downtown STL plan, are blank canvases for cultural experience creation. With the added benefit of large ground-floor windows, they can enliven

WHITE BOX SPACE

The International Council of Shopping Centers defines white box space as space that is partially completed by the landlord, typically with walls; floors; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; and basic electrical and plumbing work. White box space provides new tenants the opportunity to customize the space—visually or otherwise—to suit themselves and the needs of the businesses moving into the space.

the experience for passing pedestrians. White box spaces, varying in size and position to the street, can also appeal to a broader array of content creators looking for space for production or a venue for performance. These spaces can feature a mix of short- and long-term activation strategies, helping to ensure something is always happening in and around the buildings adjacent to the Mall.

Urban Design as Activation Support

To support the activations along the Mall and within the surrounding buildings, attention should turn to the streetscape and pedestrian experience. Creating a human scale that is walkable and bikeable is a critical ingredient to economic development, and the width of streets and the length of blocks are important. To begin to create a scale that is more inviting to pedestrians and more encouraging of exploration, streets should be narrowed where possible through road diets. A road diet will begin to reclaim space for pedestrians downtown. And though blocks cannot easily be shortened, adding mid-block crossings will make walking safer and more pedestrian-friendly. The spaces no longer dedicated to automobile traffic can be leveraged to improve the retail experience. A wider and safer, nonautomotive space makes room for more pedestrians and for tables, chairs, and street furniture. The addition of sidewalk planters, street trees, and other green infrastructure can also help manage stormwater and reduce the urban heat island effect. These ideas are already expressed in plans for the Brickline Greenway, and road diets have been called for in previous



Retail businesses can claim additional space on the sidewalk for further activation.

INVEST IN MARKET MAKERS

- Create market demand that does not exist today.
- Offer products, services, and experiences to consumers that they did not know they wanted.
- Rather than relying on outside investments or franchises, support promising existing entrepreneurs, creatives, and civic organizations.

LOCAL RETAIL INCUBATION



In other St. Louis neighborhoods, retail business incubation is already underway. Through the University of Missouri–St. Louis and its Accelerate program, businesses like Butter Love Skin are given a startup grant of \$50,000 to help them grow, from operating in a temporary or pop-up model to evolving into a brick-and-mortar operation.

Butter Love Skin launched in 2014 and operated as a pop-up retailer at local events and markets until participating in the Accelerate program. In 2023, La'Crassia Wilderness, the business owner, was able to move into a retail location along Cherokee Street.

"I built Butter Love on that street. That community is such an important part of the growth of my company. It felt like home."

—La'Crassia Wilderness

INVEST IN COMMUNITY CAPACITY-BUILDING

- Channel resources and power to organizations and individuals in communities who will be strong allies and activators for downtown.
- Increase capacity for entrepreneurs and culture-makers already embedded in neighborhoods—focusing on BIPOC leaders—who will be key tenants and attractors in the downtown core.

downtown plans. However, the panel stressed the importance of these improvements around the Mall as a mechanism to support an environment that invites people to walk, explore, linger, and relax. These design interventions can be seen in other successful districts around the metropolitan area, such as the Streets of St. Charles, and in the planning for suburbs like Creve Coeur that are working to create new “downtowns” in their commercial centers. These places are designed at a human scale, focusing on walkability and park-once principles, and are still able to factor in larger, multistory buildings without losing that pedestrian appeal. The buildings in downtown St. Louis are already in place; it is time to focus on the surroundings and redesigning the streetscape, this time for the pedestrian instead of the car.

The Cultural Economy

Cultural production provides both an amenity for residents and an authentic St. Louis attraction for visitors. Making the shift from a central business district dominated by large-scale office users to a cultural economy centered around cultural production—as diverse as it is diffuse—requires a strategy that is intentional, inclusive, creative, and focused on authenticity.

Populating downtown with cultural production has multiple positive effects: it can cater to and engage youth, focusing their creativity in exciting and productive ways; it can enhance safety by bringing more people downtown for shared creative experiences, delivering more “eyes on the street,” which is proven to help deter crime; it offers residents amenities that are largely missing from downtown today; and it attracts tourism.

Cultural producers do not naturally want to be downtown. Their audiences and networks are in the surrounding neighborhoods in which they currently live and work. If civic leaders want to bring these market makers downtown, they must forge new paths, creating and opening access to space

RETAIL CURATORS



DISPLAY CALIFORNIA

In Sacramento, California, where the downtown streets are lined with large civic uses, retailers are being pushed to the periphery. *Unsung Heroes*, a local retail curator, recognized this challenge and, using his own resources to lease space, pulled together friends with goods to sell and created small, highly curated retail shops in vacant buildings. After refining this approach further, *Unsung Heroes* launched *Display*, a retail concept that partners with developers who understand the benefits of this retail model and provide space at a reduced rate in exchange for a share of net revenues. The success of this model, as it spread across Sacramento, caught the attention of civic leaders hoping to activate vacant spaces closer to downtown and yet still proximate to residential areas. The newest iteration of this retail incubator, *CLTRE Club*, provides a similar opportunity for retailers to have a presence in a space with low barriers to entry and yet, when paired with other complementary retailers, has the potential to create a broader draw and boost the success of the collective.



CLTRE CLUB

“This Midtown incubator helps Sacramento entrepreneurs start their small businesses.”

—Sacramento Bee

and equity opportunities. It is time to allow the producers to benefit from the value they generate through ownership and equity participation.

St. Louis has an impressive network of institutional and world-class arts institutions bringing art to the city and fostering hometown creatives. Also impressive but lesser known is the informal network of artists and cultural producers across the city. Downtown's champions can play a critical connective role here, investing in, nurturing, lifting up, and amplifying this informal cultural and arts ecosystem through strategic partnerships and visibility opportunities between the cultural producers, the city's arts heavyweights, and newer cultural innovators like the 21c Hotel.

Community ownership, spread across the population, and cultural ownership, marked by an equity stake in the work delivered and the enhanced property values bolstered by the production, will create a more resilient network. That resilience will better support all of downtown in the face of future market dips. Much like any economy that is multifaceted and not reliant on any one sector, the diversity of the cultural economy can, as a whole, generally weather dips in any particular submarket.

A Proven Growth Strategy

Downtown St. Louis is a neighborhood for everyone, and Black consumers in particular offer St. Louis and downtown specifically an opportunity for growth and equity. The [McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility](#) says, "Black consumers' collective economic power is set to expand dramatically, from about \$910 billion in consumption in 2019 to \$1.7 trillion (in nominal dollars) in 2030. Even so, they are more likely than their non-Black counterparts to live in consumer deserts and be underserved across all areas of consumption. This collection of research highlights both the social and commercial benefits of integrating broad racial equity goals into consumer businesses to better serve Black consumers." St. Louis's Black population, roughly 44 percent of the city's population according to the 2023 census, has money to spend and is eager to do so, particularly in support of Black businesses.

Nationally, [Black Americans spent \\$109.4 billion on leisure travel in 2019](#), making up about 13.1 percent of the U.S. leisure travel market. St. Louis businesses can begin attracting those travelers and their leisure dollars to downtown St. Louis with a unique value proposition built on a foundation of cultural production created in an equitable district.

DEVELOPMENT AS A CATALYST



EastPoint is a 40,000-square-foot redevelopment project located on the northeast side of Oklahoma City along Route 66 and Northeast 23rd Street, a commercial artery built in the 1950s to serve the subdivisions surrounding the then-new state capitol 1.5 miles to the west. Segregation and sprawl soon led to disinvestment in certain areas of Oklahoma City, particularly in the largely Black, northeast quadrant of the city; and the Black neighborhoods languished. Prior to EastPoint, no new development had occurred on the east side of Oklahoma City in 30 years.

EastPoint's Phase 1 includes a Medicaid-patient-focused medical clinic, a medical research tenant that works alongside the clinic, a grocery store, and 11 retail spaces on nearly three acres of land. Nearly all the retail tenants identify as BIPOC, and over half of the businesses are owned by women. Phase 2 is retail-driven and 95 percent complete; tenants are building out their spaces now.

The EastPoint partnership gives ownership and relational authority over the developer, Pivot Project, to a community partner, Sandino Thompson. Upon signing their leases, tenants receive 15 percent ownership in the space. Upon the maturity of their lease, the tenants' ownership is memorialized for perpetuity until they choose to sell. The partnership also passed along city incentives (provided through tax increment financing, or TIF) to the tenants to include additional tenant improvements and reduced rent.

With over \$8 million in project costs, EastPoint has created more than \$200 million in economic impact for this long-neglected area of east Oklahoma City.



GATEWAY ARCH PARK FOUNDATION

Placemaking, Placekeeping, and Activation

BRING LAUGHTER AND JOY BACK DOWNTOWN. Through the stakeholder interviews and an engagement exercise with community members during the study week, the panel uncovered this theme—people want to experience joy and laughter in downtown. Placemaking and activations across downtown and in the Gateway Mall specifically can create just such an impact for residents and visitors alike.

In the early days, civic leaders envisioned the Gateway Mall as a grand green boulevard for the city. More recently, the living room analogy has taken hold. The reality of the Mall today is that most of it is very much like a formal living room—a space used for special occasions and for sitting quietly. It does not feel like a space in which to be playful or spontaneous. The better analogy is the family room: the Mall should be a space where families gather to enjoy one another's company on a regular basis, a place where playfulness and creativity are expected and celebrated, and a place where everyone feels welcome and like they belong.

Ingredients for a Successful Mall

Through the stakeholder interviews, the panel heard from a wide variety of people and gained further insights into what

is needed to make the Gateway Mall and downtown a place where people want to gather, play, and linger.

- **Share a story worth caring about.** The history running through downtown is incredibly rich. Early on Indigenous tribes settled in the area, planting corn and creating the massive ceremonial and burial mounds that gave St. Louis the nickname “Mound City.” Then came the early fur trade and European settlers, the historic Dred and Harriet Scott court case, and the first U.S. Olympics. There is so much history threaded through downtown and so many places to explore. Residents and visitors alike want to know more. They want to hear a story, and they want to care about the places they visit. Plaques around downtown commemorate several historic sites and points of interest, but more visibility is needed—as

is a narrative to stitch the sites together. St. Louis has a rich, complex history worth sharing, and people desire deeper reasons to care about the places they occupy.

- **Provide temporary and anchor experiences.** The variety of experiences available downtown should include both temporary experiences, featuring new and growing opportunities for fun and play, and anchor experiences that have been time-tested and will keep people coming back regularly. Winterfest 2023 was a great success, with 70 percent attendance growth over the previous year. By expanding that experience throughout the year (e.g., perhaps a Springfling and a Fallfest), downtown can leverage people’s known experiences with Winterfest and give them a new and exciting reason to return downtown.
- **Welcome and foster experiences developed by people from diverse backgrounds.** St. Louis is home to a wide range of people from different races, ethnicities, religions, and more. This diversity should be visible downtown and around the Mall, with the environment made recognizable as having been intentionally developed by stakeholders from diverse populations. The intentional representation of St. Louis’s rich cultural diversity will make residents and visitors alike feel welcome in downtown.

“My measure of a good place, however trite it may sound, may be when you see young people, teenagers, making music videos in a public space. That means it represents them and they want to share it with the world—and it’s a place to share their creativity.”

—Panelist

- **Enhance safety.** Civic leaders across the United States are working hard to improve safety in their cities and particularly in their downtown spaces. St. Louis is no different. Although incidents of violent crime are down year over year in downtown St. Louis, the perception remains among residents, employees, and visitors that safety is lacking downtown. By activating the Mall—enlivening the ground-floor spaces lining the connecting streets to and around the Mall and inviting more people downtown to be out walking, playing, working, dining, and shopping—downtown will feel safer and become a more welcoming environment.

- **Create a social media–worthy place.** The influence that an individual can have by highlighting and sharing an experience on social media should be taken very seriously. These informal or even paid social media influencers can create public interest in a space or experience and help drive the success of an endeavor. Creating spaces and experiences downtown that are worthy of sharing on social channels should remain important.

GENERATE A VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF ACTIVATION ► AMENITY ► ANCHOR

- Implement a foundational strategy for weak market locations.
- Start with intentional, temporary but consistent activations—such as musical events, test kitchens, and pop-up retail—that offer welcome amenities to residents and visitors.
- Foster these amenities to help them become strong, recognizable anchors for attracting and retaining residents, visitors, and businesses.

Building Blocks for Successful Placemaking

Successful placemaking, placekeeping, and activation strategies involve building capacity and visibility, which in turn build community wealth and resilience. Each of these factors can help a placemaking effort move from a temporary activation into a community amenity that people can enjoy regularly, into a community anchor that helps define the character of the space and the broader community.

Build Capacity

St. Louis has the building blocks needed to fully activate the Mall and the rest of downtown. Sustaining that activation over time so each intervention can grow through the activation–amenity–anchor process will take additional, and at times considerable, muscle and support. The good news is that the ingredients are already in place. Key actions include the following:

- **Build and support consistent drumbeat of events, programs, and promotion.** Every day of the year, seven days a week, and 18 hours a day, there should be opportunity to experience something around the Mall.

BUILD AND NURTURE A “REEF” FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION

- Invest in a nurturing, supportive environment for civic life and social infrastructure.
- Identify specific locations within downtown that serve as nodes and attractors of civic life.
- Subsidize rents, improvements, and operations for key tenants.

This consistency supports a growing expectation and anticipation around what may be happening downtown, leading people to feel like they can't miss out. From big productions that happen just once or twice a year to small events that take place every week, people need to begin to see and expect activity on the Mall.

- **Create a platform to encourage local talent over time.** An enormous community of BIPOC and young community members already live in and love St. Louis, and they are already experimenting and creating content. They are ready and willing to take on a platform like the Mall. Some may need light support (financial, access, etc.) to do so. Regardless, by centering these BIPOC and young creators, St. Louis will be building and supporting the future anchors of the city.
- **Draw on the city's cultural strengths.** St. Louis has deep cultural roots. From jazz and blues to hip hop and rap, music has always had a significant influence on the culture and experience of being in St. Louis. The city

also has an internationally renowned food scene replete with James Beard chefs, neighborhoods known for their international flair, and restaurants making a name for themselves by lifting up locally sourced and Missouri-native creations. Nature is also a strong driver for the region. Rivers surround the city and county, numerous lakes and streams are within a 60-minute drive, and the city's many parks—including Citygarden in the heart of the Mall—provide ample and enviable access to nature and outdoor recreation.

- **Enable plug-and-play informal placemaking.** Not every experience has to be formulated, led, or hosted by a formal organization. Some of the “stickiest” experiences (those experiences that are highly memorable and have staying power) are crafted by community members. Allowing community members easier access to spaces and simpler means to activate them lets those individuals create their own unique draw. In that way downtown helps percolate ideas and experiences that may be more authentic to the community and perhaps even more sustainable—supported by and across a broader community rather than hosted by a single organization—over the long term.
- **Convene a “curators committee” to create programming, identify talent, and build advocacy.** The broader the activations and programming and the deeper the bench of talent and cultural producers, the more downtown will benefit from a curators committee. The committee should include public-sector members and individuals from the cultural community who



JAMES LIMBA

The stairwell in the 21c Hotel is an excellent example of lifting up the work of home-grown, St. Louis-based artists.

help identify and curate the mix of programming over time. This expertise is needed to follow through on the activations and bring forth the public space design ideas that exist in spades among St. Louis creatives. In addition, the manner in which the community is engaged is critical. St. Louis has several models of this type of empowerment that can be used to ensure this inclusive process is followed. A curators committee can also serve as a central point of contact for new producers who wish to program a space and can advocate on behalf of the content creators to help represent their resource or other needs before the city.

Build Visibility

Greater St. Louis Inc. is known for its talented marketing delivery, and downtown and the broader region benefit from these skills. However, GSL cannot do it all. The promotion and reputation-building needed to create, support, and sustain the 365 days a year/7 days a week/18 hours a day programming recommended by the panel requires a broader communication base. Key actions include the following:

- **Build a paid cultural ambassador program.** By partnering with and financially supporting content creators as cultural ambassadors, GSL can provide resources to help these individuals extend their reach and deepen their marketing impact across the community and into spaces that GSL and SLDC might not normally frequent or easily access. Sacramento, California, has a successful community ambassador program that can serve as a model.



CELEBRATE AND COMMUNICATE DISTINCTIVE AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Use marketing and messaging vehicles to put diversity in the foreground as a competitive advantage for downtown.
- Center narratives of BIPOC innovators and culture-makers in communication strategies, positioning downtown as a place where Black and brown communities thrive.
- **Pay people for social capital and for sourcing tenants.** It is not enough to hope that people will share their social capital out of goodwill alone. Compensating individuals for sharing talent and content with their networks and paying people for bringing new cultural producer tenants to downtown incentivizes people in the community to spread the word—and the work.
- **Build long-term trust with market makers.** Working with content producers over time and building a trusting relationship ensures they retain ownership of the process. Much of the buzz and visibility around their events will be created by the market makers themselves, resulting in more authentic marketing and resilient visibility and awareness over time.
- **Manage a centralized social media account.** A central social media account that uses a simple and recognizable handle will be an essential tool for reaching diverse



audiences and building awareness around downtown and the Mall. By accessing this account and posting their own content in response, people from across the community and visitors can find out what is happening downtown and on the Mall and spread the word to their own personal social networks, further amplifying the central messaging.

- **Rename spaces to create recognition.** Specifically, the panel recommends renaming the Gateway Mall. The formality associated with a landscaped open green space and civic mall no longer applies to the space that exists today and certainly not to the type of activated space civic leaders seek. Turning the Mall into this activated and engaging space or string of spaces warrants a new moniker that is more in line with this new vision. A new name should be descriptive and memorable, giving the space a greater sense of meaning, action, and placemaking.

Build Community Wealth, Equity, and Resilience

Downtown has historically been known as a corporate center, economic engine, and wealth generator for primarily white business owners and shareholders. Today, as downtown is reshaped into a more resilient, culturally and economically diverse neighborhood, it is important to understand how the downtown district can shift priorities and processes to also facilitate and help generate more broadly held and economically resilient community wealth.

- **Facilitate BIPOC wealth generation.** In addition to featuring cultural producers and creating space for market makers, further efforts to open the door to deeper equity opportunities to facilitate Black wealth building over time should be pursued.
- **Secure empty anchor spaces early.** Using a community ownership structure, GSL and SLDC are encouraged to secure three or more empty anchor spaces as soon as possible with the intent to facilitate cultural production and near-term community ownership of the spaces. Leveraging the down market and moving before the market shifts again, the civic organizations can pursue the key buildings around the Mall that will serve as activation points and future anchors for cultural production.
- **Pay talent for building value.** Counter to previous real estate practices, talent arising from the community should be compensated for the property value they are building in these spaces and the cultural value

they are bringing to the Mall and broader downtown neighborhood. Such payments would be similar to paying visual artists for mural work or paying musicians to perform in Kiener Plaza. The [EastPoint case study](#) provides another model for compensating producers, this time in the form of a discount on tenant improvements, in a real estate transaction.

- **Move from pilots to anchors.** By testing the market, revising production as needed, and concurrently building audiences and community cohesion, cultural producers can begin to transition their concepts more readily from temporary pilots to community amenities to permanent downtown anchors.

“If we just go for activations all the time, it’s like eating Twinkies—it may feel good at the moment, but after a while, the body shuts down. We need to nourish what we’re doing.”

—Panelist

- **Reveal creative process through visible ground floors.** The combination of newly activated ground-floor spaces and the ability to see what is happening within those spaces can transform the pedestrian experience across downtown. When windows are transparent and interior spaces not hidden behind shades, drapes, or other coverings, the public gets a sneak peek into the creative production taking place within. In much the same way that diners enjoy an open kitchen experience, pedestrians downtown will be entertained by and attracted to the opportunity to see creatives at work.
- **Elevate land values by giving meaning to spaces.** Kiener Plaza is home to a statue of a person running, which commemorates the Olympics held in St. Louis in 1904. Today, that statue serves as the meeting place for a downtown running club. Associations like this provide value and meaning, through which people learn about, respect, and more deeply value the spaces they inhabit. Over time, as those spaces and places become more valued, that can translate into enhanced land values that serve the community and community ownership well.

Build Placekeeping Downtown

Downtown was once home to Indigenous people who recognized the value of its central geography, climate for growing corn, and positioning along the major waterways

for trading among tribes. Downtown is also a place where history was made when Dred and Harriet Scott famously sued for their freedom and lost. And it's where the first skyscraper was built west of the Mississippi River. Today, downtown is generally known for its large office buildings, sporting venues, and corporate tenants. Placekeeping is an effort to maintain and care for a place and its social fabric, often by the people who live and work there. Placekeeping in a downtown environment, where many people—workers, residents, and tourists—come and go can be a tricky proposition. As cultural producers are encouraged to explore their craft and create a new economy for downtown St. Louis, thoughts should first turn to potential placekeeping opportunities: understanding the existing social fabric of the district, working with residents to identify and preserve the things they cherish, and identifying ways in which cultural production can help preserve and potentially amplify that social fabric.

Activation to Amenity to Anchor

“Activation to amenity to anchor” is actually an ancient process of city-making. Cities are formed and sustained by creating gathering places for people and places to exchange goods and ideas. Some gathering spaces evolve into something that has greater permanence while others do not. In the modern U.S. context, in the past 15 years, considerable effort has been put into making this necessary evolutionary process more accessible and visible across the community.

The following examples, curated from conversations with community experts and among panelists during the study, demonstrate how initial activations along the Mall can, over time and with intention, transform into community amenities and ultimately community anchors.

CONNECTING HISTORY TO PLACE AND PRESENT

Communities across North America are embracing their histories fully, helping to ensure that residents and visitors have opportunities to learn, see, and understand the communities and cultures that preceded the people and buildings in place today. Several examples are worth reviewing.

[Wayfinding Masterplan, Cleveland, Ohio.](#) The city created and implemented a Wayfinding Masterplan in 2013. In an effort to link history with wayfinding and transportation nodes, each of the downtown HealthLine stations have wayfinding for nearby historic resources.

[Yanaguana Garden, San Antonio, Texas.](#) Yanaguana Garden is a park and play area located within the former World's Fair (1968) site in downtown San Antonio. The park's name and core design theme pay homage to the original stewards of the land, the local Payaya Tribe, who built seasonal villages along the banks of the San Antonio River.

[The Bentway, Toronto, Canada.](#) The Bentway is a connected urban park underneath the Gardiner Expressway in downtown Toronto. Operated and managed by the Bentway Conservancy, the park contains large installations and regular programming that center diverse voices, including local Indigenous artists.

[Riverfront Park, Spokane, Washington.](#) Riverfront Park was the site of the 1974 World's Fair and has been recently transformed into a dynamic public space highlighting the history of the local Spokane Tribe.



ACTIVATION
Monthly Farmers Market + Food Truck



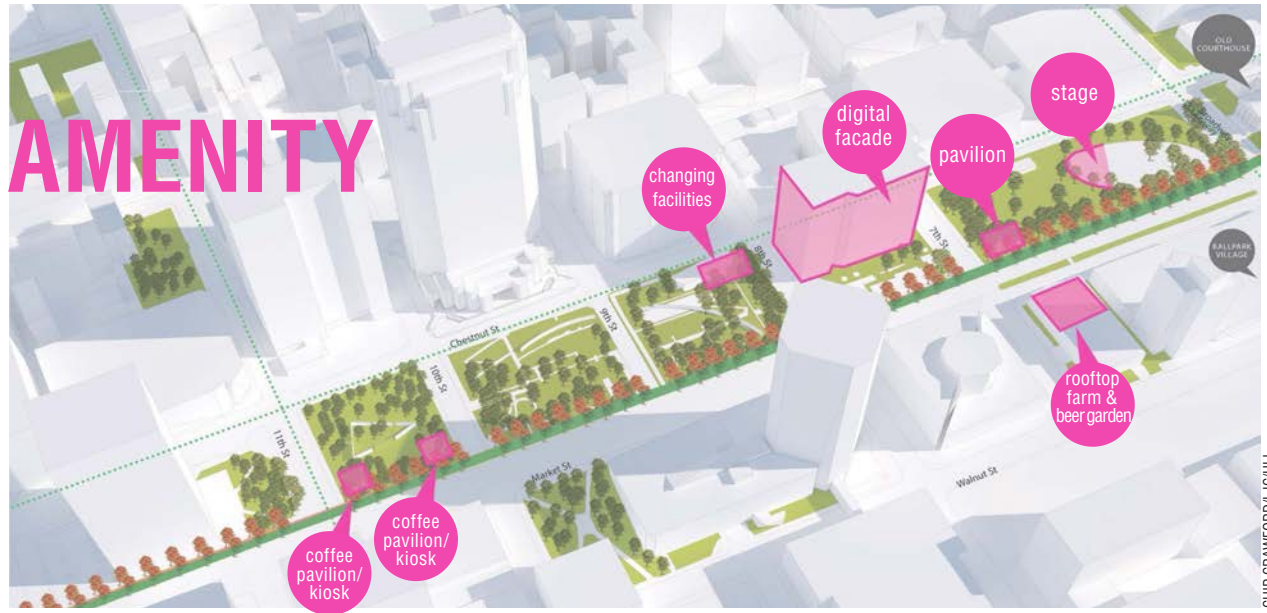
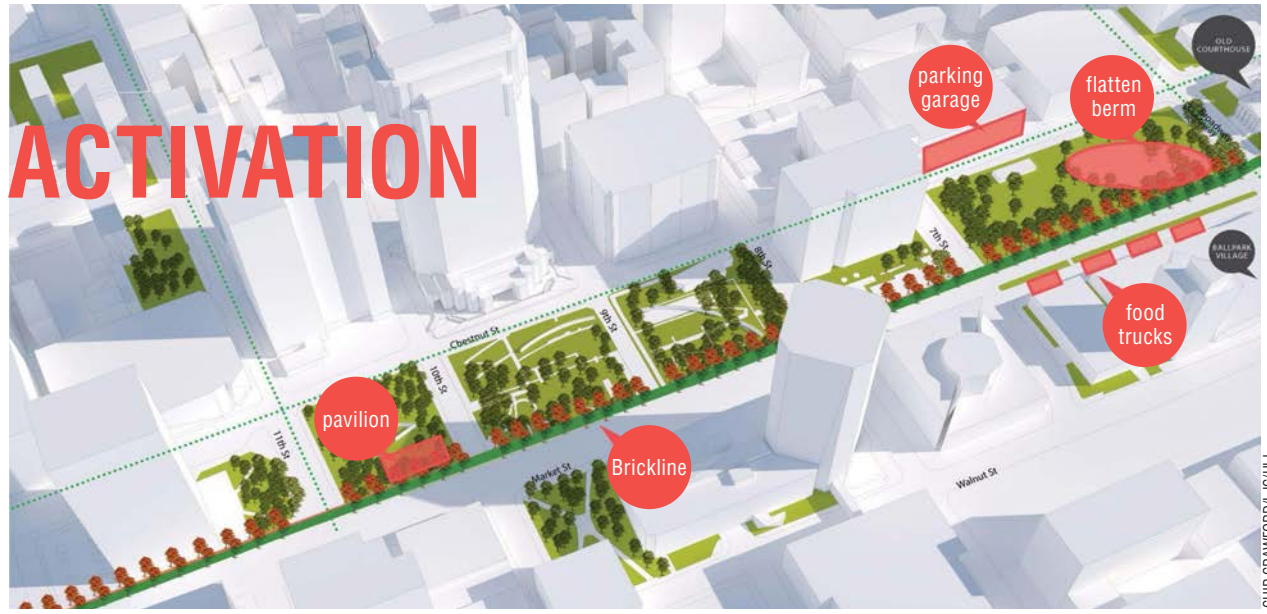
AMENITY
Rooftop Farm + Grocery Store



ANCHOR
Market Hall + Destination Restaurant

Time

Scale



The above sketches depict how initial activations within sections of the Gateway Mall can begin to set the stage for future development and long-term amenity and anchor building within the Mall and the surrounding environment.

Initial activations along the Mall might include leveling the berm in Kiener Plaza, to better accommodate programming, and installing a coffee kiosk so downtown residents have a reliable coffee shop to visit when walking their dog. The activations spark interest in the space, drawing people in and allowing the producer to pilot new ideas and pivot based on feedback.

Over time, these activations should evolve into amenities for the area. The former Kiener berm could evolve into a stage for performances. The coffee kiosk could catalyze a larger nearby pavilion with a catering kitchen for hosting larger gatherings. A digital facade along the southern side of the Peabody building could be added at this stage, too, to further enliven the district. Amenities like these serve to solidify the activation, bringing greater permanence to the space and related service.

In the anchor stage, the initial activations and amenities evolve into larger mixed-use developments and become permanent fixtures along the Mall, providing predictable services, programming, and entertainment for residents and visitors alike. A music club could locate near the former site of the Kiener Plaza stage, an art museum outpost would make sense along the northern side of Citygarden, and a permanent playground in the space just south of the Peabody building could finally activate an otherwise seemingly private open space.

The following stories that stakeholders shared with the panel illustrate potential activation to amenity to anchor progressions, any or all of which make good sense for the Gateway Mall.

Food

ACTIVATION: Monthly Farmers Market + Food Truck

AMENITY: Rooftop Farm + Grocery Store

ANCHOR: Market Hall + Destination Restaurant

St. Louis has a number of successful farmers markets, but few operate north of Soulard Market. Bringing fresh food into downtown, making it accessible to neighborhoods to the north, would be a welcome addition. These fresh food sources could evolve into a rooftop farm or more permanent store and eventually lead to another food hall for St. Louis or destination restaurant featuring locally grown produce.

Music

ACTIVATION: Busking Backdrops

AMENITY: Plug-and-Play Stages

ANCHOR: Music Industry Incubator

GSL has already hired buskers to work across the downtown landscape. This is a great start and one that could evolve into plug-and-play stages along the Gateway Mall. Eventually, a permanent space could be provided, which would give musicians the opportunity to incubate their talent, record, and build a musical career and enterprise.

Art

ACTIVATION: Mural Program

AMENITY: Digital Canvases

ANCHOR: Digital Arts Institute/Art Museum Outpost

Art is often one of the first tools of activation and paint is an easy and low-cost way to start. A mural program across downtown, connecting venues and leading visitors to key places—such as entertainment venues and historic markers—would be a great first step in art activation. Amenity creation could involve the installation of digital canvases downtown, particularly around the Gateway Mall. These canvases would display art and could also provide valuable advertising space and follow-on funding for Mall enhancements. Anchors that could evolve from these art paths include a digital arts institute and an outpost of the cherished St. Louis Art Museum, which could provide ongoing programming for downtown.

Natural Well-Being

ACTIVATION: Indigenous Gathering Space for Envisioning an Eastern Gateway

AMENITY: Meadows, Coffee Kiosk, and Seating at Serra's Twain

ANCHOR: Gateway to the East Commission for Indigenous Art

Nature is all around St. Louis, but downtown is home to a great deal of concrete, brick, and stone. The Mall is a welcome interruption to that built environment and provides space for enjoying green and open areas. There is an opportunity to facilitate more direct exploration of nature and the native presence in St. Louis by engaging Indigenous people in the region to help guide activations on the Mall that honor their history and present contributions.

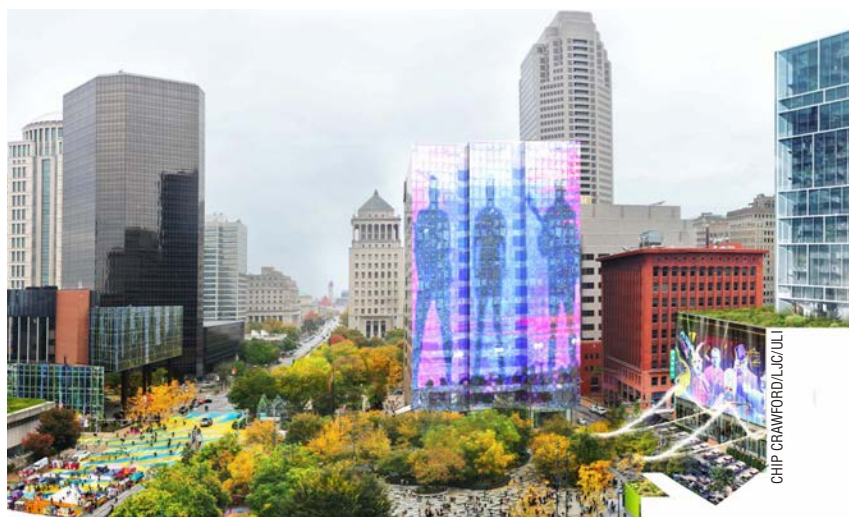
Through an interview with an Indigenous community leader, the panel learned that the “gateway to the west” moniker for St. Louis is painful for the Indigenous community as it represents the wholesale displacement of tribes from the land and the destruction of their communities and culture. The west also represents death and decay, while the east signifies birth and life. Given this symbolism, the Mall might be a location for an eastern gateway, a space where life is celebrated and Indigenous people are centered.

The green space around the Serra sculpture, in particular, has the potential for activation. Amenity creation on the Serra sculpture parcel could include new lighting, seating, and a coffee kiosk. In the anchor stage, new Indigenous art could be commissioned to express a “gateway to the east” that affirms Indigenous life. The art could be situated in a way that puts it in conversation with the Serra sculpture, bringing new life to the site. The idea is to spark the imagination. Indigenous people should be part of a new committee to design ways of expressing their tribes’ presence on the Mall.

Unify Spaces and Operations

Each of the 18 blocks of the Mall is unique in its own right, notable as separate spaces for distinct activities. The [2009 Master Plan for the Mall](#) identified these spaces as rooms along a hallway. Unifying those spaces and creating a sense of cohesion will encourage visitors to stay, play, and explore all the Mall has to offer.

The [Brickline Greenway](#), set to run along the southern edge of the Mall, will help create that sense of cohesion, unify the rooms, and encourage further exploration along the Mall’s length. The placemaking



(above) The three images depict how activations could transform the Gateway Mall from its current state to the second iteration, which could feature painted crossings and a food truck plaza on Market Street, building banners and wraps on the Peabody building and the Kiener West garage, and festive lighting. The bottom image takes that evolution further to include digital projection on the Peabody building and redevelopment of the Kiener West garage into a mixed-use development featuring multiple stories of new housing.

(left) Building wraps and banners can transform an otherwise blank building wall into a point of engagement, and moveable furniture can transform a narrow city street into a fun gathering spot.

and activation recommended by the panel for this corridor will also serve to unify the spaces and operations. Then individuals, businesses, and organizations can leverage those efforts as they work to activate spaces or otherwise to tie into the activity on the Mall.

“Doing is narrative change.”
—Panelist

Design Matters

Design plays an important role in activation. The design should take into account the pedestrian’s experience “on the ground,” walking along the sidewalk, as well as the experience “up above” for those viewing the area out of a 10th floor window or from surrounding areas. By going big with design and drawing the eye from afar, the facades of empty buildings and the too-wide roadways can become canvases for design and play until they are ready to transform into new and more productive uses. Joy should also be foundational in the design—for example, positioning items as basic as street furniture in a manner that creates delight and a sense of play for people living, working, and visiting downtown.

Urban design guidelines will be an important tool. They can help ensure that changes to the Gateway Mall have a transformative effect on the rest of downtown, helping to create an environment that is vibrant and walkable for years to come. Once established for the Mall and its surrounding streets, urban design guidelines help ensure that future developments continue to align with and abide by the requirements for streetscaping, street frontage, massing, height, and so on. The city of St. Louis should use urban design guidelines to build and protect an urban form that fuels its economic engine. The panel understands there are possibilities for a form-based code in the future. In the meantime, it is critical to have some guidelines in place to support, promote, and protect the work contemplated for the Mall.

Toolkit

Visually unifying spaces across the Mall and through the surrounding streets can be managed and supported through a number of approaches.



The Gateway Mall looking east from 8th Street in its current state.



The Gateway Mall as it could look, incorporating recommendations from the panel. Updates to Market Street include a road diet and significant, colorful pedestrian crossing at 7th Street where a food truck plaza could form on special days. The Brickline Greenway is shown as complete, linking the blocks of the Mall from east to west. Peabody Plaza is transformed into public space, featuring outdoor furniture and shade awnings, and the building’s suburban-style office facade is transformed via digital projection into a beacon for downtown. Rooftops along the south side of Market Street could also be leveraged, morphing into green roofs that help cool the building or terraced spaces where occupants gather and celebrate when parades march past.

Wayfinding pillars can encourage movement across the Mall and deeper into the connecting streets.

- A banner and building wrap program can engage surrounding property owners in the activation around the Mall and create visual markers that help visitors navigate to and through downtown.
- Moveable tables and chairs, preferably similar or complementary in color or style, can be points of recognition for pedestrians across

the Mall. People can make a space their own by adjusting the placement and spacing of the furniture to suit their individual needs.

- Graphic crossings and painted crosswalks create a safer and more visually appealing pedestrian experience, helping connect people across blocks and slowing traffic as it moves through downtown streets.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Within the study area, the panel focused on two Mall sites that could benefit from specific interventions. Each of these sites deserves careful design analysis; the following recommendations simply set the stage for these explorations and potential improvements.

Recommendations for Peabody Plaza

Peabody Plaza, covering the southern half of the block between 7th and 8th streets and fronting 701 Market Street, is an important connector along the Mall's length. It deserves particular attention to eliminate the perception that it is a private space for building tenants only. The following ideas could be considered:

Activate the south building facade (facing Market). Ideas for bringing life to the south facade encompass two dimensions: one that is visible from afar and one that is visible from the ground level nearer the building. From afar, lighting, a mural, or a digital media skin can have an impact. The ground-level view will require working with the level change in the plaza to create continuity across the block and encourage pedestrians to continue their exploration around this area and onto the next block of the Mall.

Embrace consistency through materials. To support the perception that this plaza is part of the Mall and open to public use, updates to the plaza's materiality should use the same family of materials for paving, landscaping, graphics, furnishings, and lighting as the rest of the Mall to visually connect Kiener Plaza, Peabody Plaza, and Citygarden. It will be important to consider how the color palette across these elements can be adapted for each plaza to give each space its own identity within the wider Mall "family." These modulations also make for a more interesting journey across the Mall for visitors. If the redesign of Peabody Plaza is successful, walking from Citygarden to Kiener Plaza should be a seamless experience.

Prioritize crosswalks at 7th and 8th streets. Using color and graphics, these important crosswalks can be

highlighted, further protecting pedestrians by slowing traffic. These crosswalks can also provide visual continuity to the connectors between these spaces. And the colors and graphics could change with the seasons and provide a canvas for local artist commissions.

Establish a programming focus. In each of the plazas along the Mall, a clear programming purpose could define the experience unique to each space while also complementing the other segments along the Mall. For example, Kiener Plaza could focus on sports and other active uses; Citygarden could focus on interactive sculpture play; and Peabody Plaza could focus on music. The intentional programming would support feelings of continuity between spaces while also providing experiences that encourage further exploration and enjoyment of the Mall.

Recommendations for Serra Sculpture Park

The panel acknowledges that significant changes to the Serra Sculpture Park are unlikely in the short term. However, the panel identified a number of opportunities to bring activity to the space.

Review original plans for the space. Care should be taken to review and consider any original design elements that have not been included to date. For example, a lighting design created for the installation remains unrealized. Including a lighting or artistic projection at the site would enhance both the piece and safety within the walls of the sculpture.

Consider adding landscape design and plantings. Bringing color and life to the site through landscape design can help alleviate the rather barren feel of the park, which is most pronounced in winter months when the grass is dormant. A horticultural commission from a local Indigenous horticulturist or artist working with plants and nature could be incorporated. And a landscape or garden designer—such as Piet Oudouf, who provided landscape design for the High Line in New York City—could be engaged.

Embrace the way the space is currently used. Many people use the space to walk their dogs. Perhaps an area could be designated for off-leash play. New amenities could be added to support this use and help ensure the park remains clean and hospitable for all (e.g., water fountains, trash bins with doggie bags).

Align operations and maintenance quality with Citygarden. Could Serra's Twain sculpture be folded into and presented as a part of Citygarden? The art and play that is celebrated



The view looking east from Peabody Plaza.



The view looking east from the Serra sculpture.

in Citygarden could easily expand to include Twain, thus enlivening the space while educating visitors about its meaning. The addition of flexible seating, tables, and nodes in which to gather would also be welcome and encourage visits, as would the addition of a coffee truck or café concession.

Celebrate the “gateway to the east.” The entire Gateway Mall presents a compelling opportunity to redesign and activate the area using the principles of codesign with local Indigenous groups. As the panel met with Eric Pinto of the Buder Center at Washington University St. Louis, panelists came to understand that the “Gateway to the West” and the Arch itself are painful reminders of the great harm Indigenous people endured and how their lands were stolen during westward expansion. The panel learned that, in contrast, for many Indigenous people the east symbolizes birth and life. The Serra Sculpture Park or other spaces in the Mall could center and celebrate Indigenous voices with art pieces developed with native artists and scholars. Imagine a lighting, digital, or nature-based commission that matches the scale of the Arch but is made with radically different materials. A program could be added to support learning and interaction with the artwork. Such a piece could garner international attention while creating meaningful individual-to-communal experiences for all visitors. This idea is just one example of the richness that can come when the client engages its diverse community in the codesign of solutions.

Consider long-term updates. Eventual improvements to the site might include redesigning the entire site plan, improving the art interpretation through signage and branding of the

space, and incorporating the Brickline, which will bring visitors through the site.

Additional Tools and Resources

Activations such as those noted above have deep precedent. Movements like [Better Blocks](#) and [tactical urbanism](#) are nearly 20 years old and have been used time and again as economic development tools. In some instances, public policy may need adjusting to provide opportunities for these types of interventions, preferably with minimal lift by the public. For example, some cities have robust “parklet” policies that allow property owners to transform excess space into more inviting and useable park or open space.

The [Better Block Foundation](#), [Street Plans](#), and the [Project for Public Spaces](#) are three of the groups that have led the way in popularizing tactical urbanism as an activation tool, and they continue to offer technical assistance to communities across the United States. Tactical urbanism has been so successful in creating activations that its tools have been institutionalized in guides and policies (e.g., parklet policies, car-free zones) to make replication easier. As they work to activate the Gateway Mall, GSL, SLDC, and the city can tap into a plethora of resources and additional expertise.

These activation–amenity–anchor ideas are suggestions made by the panel, sparked by stakeholder interviews. The actual concepts for the Mall should be led and guided by the community, informed by the market, and turned over to the cultural producers for realization.

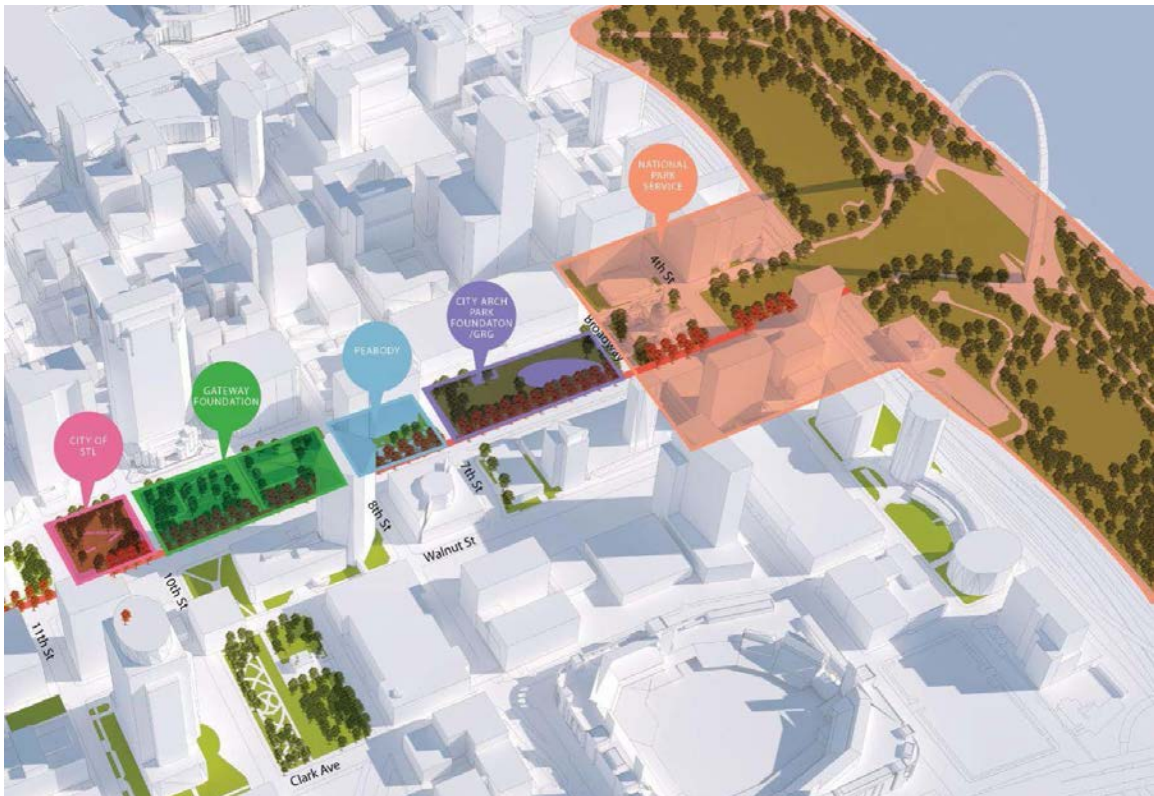


Implementation Strategies

THE RECOMMENDATIONS POSED BY THE PANEL REQUIRE COLLABORATION, deeper partnerships both existing and new, and funding. There is much to be done along the Gateway Mall, but downtown is rich in organizational resources, has strong public-sector support, and has the attention of the public, particularly those cultural producers who would like to play a role in a new downtown built on a more diverse cultural economy.

The stakeholder interviews, tours, and meetings with civic leaders helped inform the following additional observations related to the work of implementing the strategies and recommendations from the panel.

- **GSL-led work is underway.** GSL's reestablishment of downtown-focused resources and the work to-date by its downtown team have been effective and are creating positive impact. More is needed.
- **Mall management is fragmented.** A lineup of several organizations have responsibilities for portions of park operations. This fragmentation creates challenges with alignment (e.g., visual, programmatic, maintenance) along the entire Mall length and makes it difficult for the public to understand whom to contact regarding potential programming and events. This fragmentation also leaves unclear which entity has "ownership" or accountability for park programming and maintenance at any particular point along the Mall.
- **Security is critical.** Security is improving and remains a top priority for business owners, employees, residents, and visitors.
- **The community improvement district (CID) could be stronger.** The current downtown CID lacks capacity to support adequate levels of safety and maintenance across its footprint.



Ownership, control, and maintenance along the Mall is spread across a number of entities, creating confusion for those wishing to activate its various spaces.

- **Corporations lack resident trust.** Corporate entities have largely shaped downtown over the past century. Residents living downtown do not hold much trust that these corporate entities will breathe new life into St. Louis or the Mall.
- **Plans are good; progress is better.** Stakeholders have a clear understanding of the robust planning work that has focused on the Mall and downtown. Now they have a strong desire for focused and rapid implementation of those plans.

The panel also noted that the urgency needed and expected to make progress around downtown requires strengthening public/private partnerships (P3s) and capacity. At the same time, the panel points out the importance of recognizing that reliance on private solutions for delivery of core municipal functions sidesteps a larger need to strengthen city capacity. P3s can provide interim solutions and support, but municipal capacity must be strengthened and deepened in the long term.

Governance Needs

As already noted, downtown is rich in organizational resources. Potential partners are already present and active across the downtown geography. The recommendations

posed by the panel—most notably, a shift to a central social district that features a cultural economy—will require a host of partners focusing on the following key aspects of the Mall and its surroundings.

- **Gateway Mall parks.** This includes the open spaces and amenities within the park spaces.
- **Public realm.** The sidewalks, trails, streetscape, and public spaces that surround, connect to, and draw people into the Mall require coordinated oversight.
- **Development.** The uses within and design of the real estate assets that surround the Mall are critical to the Mall's ability to welcome people to the space, encourage exploration, and improve activation downtown.
- **Ground-floor and retail activation.** The first-floor spaces of the buildings surrounding the Mall and the buildings lining key connector streets heavily influence the experience of people walking to and from the Mall and exploring downtown.
- **Cultural production cultivation.** The formation of the curation committee will require coordination, to support the initial selection of the cultural producers and matching these market makers with potential spaces downtown.

- **Cultural production.** The cultural economy and its producers will need support in much the same way that an economic development agency supports business recruitment and retention efforts.
- **Marketing.** In addition to the marketing efforts GSL and SLDC currently undertake, additional marketing support for the Mall and the cultural producers could include efforts to amplify producers' messaging and the messaging of organizations hosting events and programs in and around the Mall (rather than serving as the initial source of the messaging).
- **Entrepreneurship support.** Support for small businesses and entrepreneurs—including assistance with finding and leasing space, connecting to lenders and professional service providers, and marketing and cross-promotion—will be welcome and likely needed as some cultural producers use this opportunity to launch a new enterprise or business line.
- **Stewardship.** The Mall will benefit from and begin to thrive under the stewardship of an entity that is clearly charged with its care today and into the future.

Across the city, a number of entities have the tools, resources, and potentially even the capacity to help manage some of the responsibilities noted above. In many ways, these and other organizations also have a vested interest in the health and vitality of the downtown neighborhood and should participate in its support. Key partners include the following:

- [City of St. Louis](#)
- [Greater St. Louis Inc.](#)
- [St. Louis Development Corp.](#)
- [Downtown Community Improvement District](#)
- [Citizens for a Greater Downtown](#)
- [Downtown Neighborhood Association](#)
- [National Park Service](#)
- [Great Rivers Greenway](#)
- [Gateway Arch Park Foundation](#)
- [Gateway Foundation](#)
- [Explore St. Louis](#)

Recommended Responsibilities

The following recommendations from the panel will help GSL and SLDC implement the improvements relating to the Mall and the surrounding real estate.

Form a Conservancy for the Gateway Mall

To guide the future of key sections of the Gateway Mall, the panel recommends the formation of a conservancy that would encompass the blocks of the Mall that currently hold Kiener Plaza, Citygarden, and the Serra sculpture. The conservancy would manage maintenance of these blocks, programming (in charge of curating and hosting events and managing Mall venues), repair and capital improvements to these sections of the Mall (in partnership with the Bureau of Public Service), and potentially permitting (currently managed through a city department).

Some of the entities currently at work along the Mall could be a good home for such a conservancy as their operations and missions may align. These could potentially include Great Rivers Greenway, the Gateway Foundation, or a collaboration of partners that could be identified through a taskforce. Coordination with public/private development and community development partners will be required for construction, tenancing, and capacity building for in-park venues.

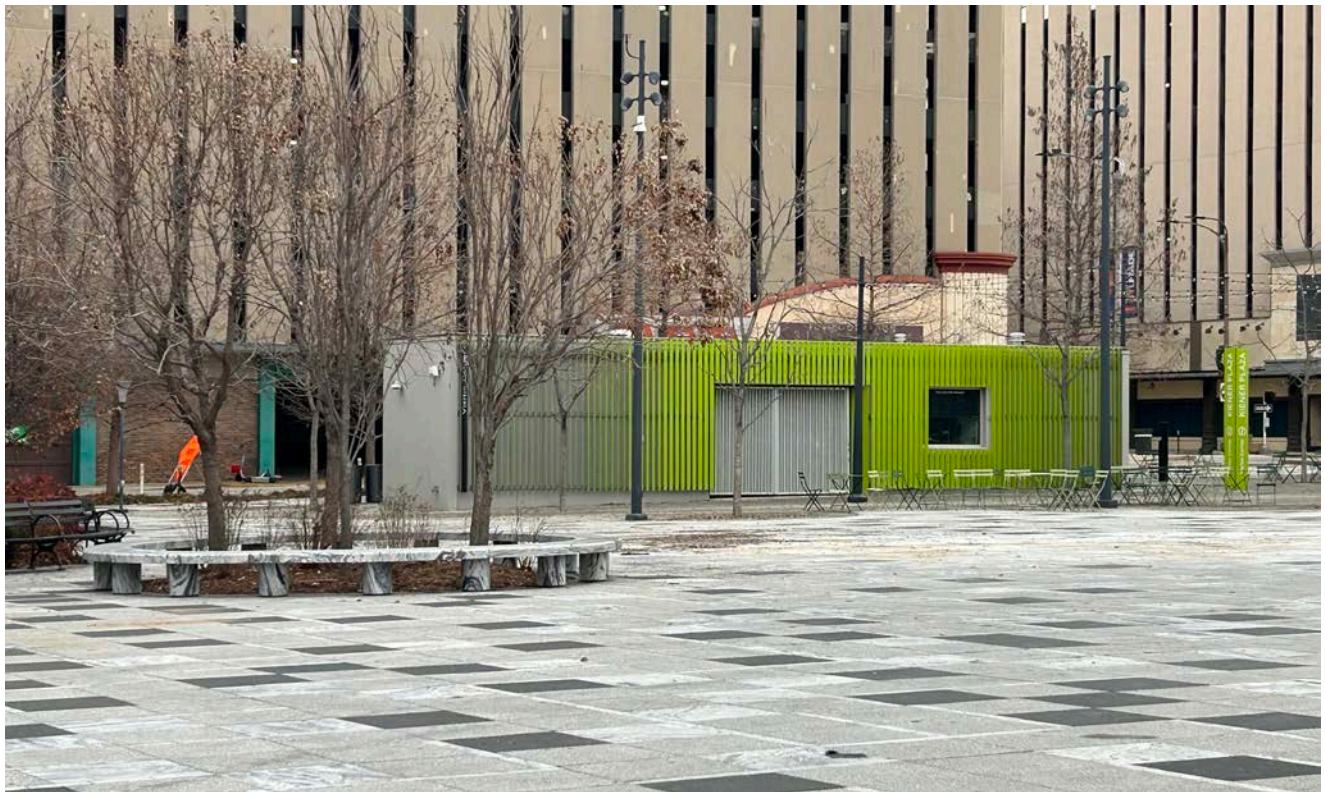
Further Support Downtown Stewardship

Effective and impactful stewardship and management is needed downtown for the central social district and its cultural economy to thrive. That means continued—and perhaps expanded—financial, political, and people resources to successfully address three key areas of focus.

- **Invest in improvements to the public realm.** These improvements include wayfinding and welcoming

CHOREOGRAPH THE URBAN EXPERIENCE THROUGH A STRONG DISTRICT MANAGER

- Consolidate governance and stewardship into an empowered curatorial position.
- Establish a strong steward for the district with the resources and responsibility for managing both the public realm and the private-sector tenant mix.
- Make space for a broadly representative cohort of diverse leaders.



Kiener Plaza, looking north toward the garages, is ready for a refresh and renewed energy across its blocks.

efforts, safety and security, maintenance and cleaning, and infrastructure care and repair (in partnership with the Bureau of Public Service).

- **Create a vision that can guide stewardship of the Mall.** The vision needed is twofold: a vision for a development strategy, particularly for the buildings surrounding the Gateway Mall, and a vision for ground-floor activations, which will require a collaboration with the development entities working on those spaces.
- **Use marketing to support the vision.** Marketing should help communicate the vision for the future of the Mall, share the stories being built downtown by cultural producers, and amplify the marketing efforts of partnered entities hosting programming, events, and more along the Mall.

The following entities are established in cities where businesses, property owners, residents, and other community partners and stakeholders share a keen interest in the health and vitality of their downtown district:

- **[Downtown Detroit Partnership](#).** Created in 1922, this nonprofit convenes business, philanthropic, and government partners dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Detroit. It also manages the city's downtown

Business Improvement Zone and programs nearly 2,000 events annually in downtown parks and public spaces.

- **[Midtown Detroit Inc.](#)** Created in 2000, this entity resulted from a collaborative merger between the University Cultural Center Association and the New Center Council whose organizations had similar missions with a focus on real estate and economic development. It represents over 150 area stakeholders, including Detroit's anchor institutions. The organization has raised over \$80 million for various projects and programming.
- **[Cincinnati Center City Development Corp.](#)** This nonprofit, real estate development and finance organization focuses on revitalizing Cincinnati's urban core in partnership with the city of Cincinnati and the local corporate community. It has completed nearly 100 development projects.
- **[Center City District \(Philadelphia\)](#).** In 1991, the business leadership organization, Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, created the Center City District business improvement district to deliver daily services with the goal of making the city center clean and safe. It is responsible for the management of downtown parks and public spaces.

- **Downtown Denver Partnership.** This nonprofit business organization focuses on economic development, public space activation, and safety.

Strengthen Development Capacity

Public/private development capacity is needed to serve the downtown steward vision. This capacity could be located within an existing organizations like SLDC, a new entity like a downtown community development corporation, or another entity that has the capacity and ability to build downtown participation into board oversight. This entity should be charged with the following key tasks:

- **Partner in key development pursuits.** This task entails helping guide the development work required to support cultural production downtown. It will involve leadership and assistance with acquisition and disposition of key parcels, real estate financing, disposition, and structure for interim operations.
- **Pursue ground-floor and venue activation.** This task entails helping activate the Mall’s venues and the ground-floor spaces in the buildings surrounding the Mall by helping curate and providing assistance to tenants (in coordination with a community development capacity builder). It will also involve business and real estate permitting and placemaking activities, such as installations of murals to help call attention to spaces and invite exploration.

“This is not cheap, but it’s important to know that it’s not going to get cheaper. This is probably the least-expensive opportunity you will have to pursue some of these actions.”

—Panelist

Identify a Community Development Partner

The economic and real estate development work contemplated for the Mall and its surroundings can seem daunting if viewed as the sole responsibility of one entity. However, by partnering with a strong community development corporation (CDC) or creating a new entity to tackle these challenges, GSL and SLDC can help ensure that progress is made and continues at a granular level while both civic entities continue their high-level strategy work for the city and the broader region. Invest STL may be able to help

with strategies for identifying an existing CDC or developing a new CDC to champion downtown development. In addition to its real estate focus, this downtown CDC should be charged with two additional mandates:

- **Cultivate cultural production.** This focus should include work both in privately owned spaces and within the Mall. The CDC should be responsible for building relationships with potential producers and curating the mix of producers across the district. Operations, business planning, and fundraising will also be important functions of the CDC.
- **Support entrepreneurs.** The CDC should be prepared to support cultural producers in their operations, providing assistance or connections to BIPOC/women-owned business support, technical and legal assistance, and business capacity building and support.

Leverage the Existing St. Louis Network

St. Louis is a city known for “punching above its weight” when it comes to arts and culture. A number of resources already exist across St. Louis that could be of assistance in building this new cultural economy in downtown.

- **Tap potential capacity and coalition builders.** Existing organizations can be strong partners in helping to advise and stand up a new entity. The Regional Arts Commission and Community Arts Training Institute, the Kranzberg Arts Foundation, Seed St. Louis, and Greencubator have all demonstrated their commitment to community development and community capacity building in other areas of the region.
- **Connect with potential producers.** Cultural producers that are already established, successful, and productive might be open to launching a related or satellite operation downtown, particularly within a district dedicated to or featuring a cultural economy. These could include the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, the St. Louis Public Library, the St. Louis Symphony, The Muny, Rated Test Kitchen, Milk & Hummus, STL Run Crew, and Mvstercamp (a musician capacity-builder).

Funding Needs

Significant new investment is needed downtown and around the Gateway Mall, but sustained focus on growing a cultural

economy and supporting it through cultural placemaking will generate long-term value and economic strength for downtown and the broader region. The following areas of focus will require funding support.

- **Enhanced Gateway Mall environment.** The spaces along the Mall that are designed for formal programming will require funding to support certain initial and continuous programming to build and maintain visibility, enhanced maintenance to support the increased activation, and minor capital improvements to better support regular and increased programming (e.g., staging infrastructure, restrooms).
- **Improved public realm.** A significant increase in service, including enhanced maintenance, will be needed to ensure that the public realm provides a safe and welcoming environment for residents, employees, and visitors of all ages. The commitment by GSL to fund public safety ambassadors for all of downtown starting in 2024 is an excellent example of the type of public realm support that is needed.
- **Active public/private development.** Funding will also be needed to support the real estate development actions recommended by the panel. These actions include acquisition, interim operations, facade improvements, tenant improvement programs, cultural subsidies,

lease or revenue guarantees for ground-floor activation, and perhaps later, development subsidies for building renovation or conversion.

- **Potential additional costs.** Marketing, ground-floor activation, and community development each entail potential additional costs that may be incurred through the course of activating the Mall and the surrounding buildings. Some of these costs may be absorbed through existing program funding, yet the need may grow beyond existing funding capacities and should be identified at the start for future budgeting purposes.

Potential Funding Sources

The panel outlined an initial list of potential funding sources to support its recommendations. Public funding sources may come with additional political complexities, yet the funds held in those sources are considerable and therefore worthy of consideration or a second look. Earned income may come through Mall programming and could include revenue from events, parking, and advertising and then also potential bonding against those funds. Private sources or funds received through value-capturing mechanisms should be explored and could include funding from foundations or other powerful champions, taxing district revenues, or even potential new tax credits at the state level. Figure 1 outlines the possible funding sources.

Figure 1. Potential funding sources

	Operations	Infrastructure	Development
Public			
Explore possible funding from American Rescue Plan Act or Rams settlement		X	X
Increase share of general fund proportionate to revenue generated downtown	X		
Redirect earnings tax toward downtown	X	X	X
Increase/establish citywide tax for increased amenities or downtown revitalization	X	X	X
Earned Income			
Earn revenue from private events, parking, facade advertising/projections (and potentially bond)	X	X	
Private/Value Capture			
Explore office-to-residential conversion tax credit: state will need more than \$50 million			X
Leverage future value of CID and TIF (not available initially)	X	X	X
Tap foundations focused on equitable development (e.g., Mellon, Ford)	X		X
Define powerful champions	X	X	X



Next Steps and Priorities

THE SHIFT TO A CENTRAL SOCIAL DISTRICT FEATURING MARKET MAKERS in a cultural economy will take time, yet the work can begin today. Actions taken in the next three months to three years can set the stage for a successful and thriving downtown neighborhood that is authentically appealing, uniquely “St. Louis,” and economically resilient over the long term. Figure 2 summarizes the recommended actions.

Immediate Steps

The following steps should be taken within the next 100 days.

Real estate

- Prepare an acquisition strategy. The downturn in the market makes now a good time to identify key sites and the roles and responsibilities associated with each site.

Programming and district connections

- Advance activation by building a curators committee, planning Year 1 events across the length of the Mall, and creating or purchasing low-cost activation equipment.

- Hire more ambassadors.
- Create a cultural tenanting and capacity-building structure to begin to cultivate the producers and activate the ground floors.

Governance and funding

- Seek powerful champions and build a downtown coalition to advance and advocate for this future vision.

The Next 12 Months

Over the course of the next 12 months, the following actions should be taken.

Real estate

- Advance the real estate acquisitions and prepare for the future disposition of the real estate (potentially within three years). Use these publicly owned spaces to advance temporary activation with cultural producers until the market is strong enough to support those businesses naturally and without subsidy.
- Adopt the office-to-residential tax credit program, which will drive housing production downtown.

Programming and district connections

- Activate cafés and kiosks as temporary spaces that can begin to activate the Mall with the types of retail and services that invite people to linger and explore.
- Create consistent programming to instill a constant drumbeat of activity on the Mall supporting the public's expectation that one can always discover something to see or experience there.
- Define the unique identity and branding for the Mall and its immediate surroundings. Incorporated into signage,

marketing, placemaking, and the public realm, the Mall's unique brand can help identify the space, create a sense of arrival, and further unify its blocks.

- Identify, facilitate, and support the transitions of activations, amenities, and anchors within the Mall to begin to move producers from temporary spaces into more permanent fixtures for the neighborhood.

Governance and funding

- Establish a conservancy for the Mall.
- Confirm community development and cultural partners and establish the roles that GSL and SLDC will transfer to those partners and others being retained.
- Convene a cohort of community culture-makers to launch the cultural economic development strategy for downtown.

Within Three Years

The panel recommends the following actions be undertaken within the next three years.



CHIP CRAWFORD/JC/CULT

The possibilities for a fully activated Mall, featuring a number of placemaking installations, could become a cannot-miss attraction for downtown, St. Louis, and the greater region.

Real estate

- Advance temporary activations and identify those assets needing additional real estate or business supports.
- Commence disposition of publicly owned real estate into the hands of the cultural producers or a joint-ownership structure that retains producers' ownership and equity share while also leveraging additional real estate or development partners.
- Drive housing production across downtown and particularly along the Mall and on sites once dedicated to parking.

Programming and district connections

- Identify and convert temporary culture-maker activations into amenities or permanent space and anchor status.

Governance and funding

- Solidify development capacity.

Figure 2. Next steps and priorities

	IMMEDIATELY First 100 days	NEAR-TERM Year One	MID-TERM Three Years
Real estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare acquisition strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance acquisitions. • Adopt office-to-residential tax credit program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance temporary activation. • Commence disposition of publicly owned real estate. • Drive housing production.
Programming and district connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance activation. • Build curator committee. • Plan year-one events. • Create or purchase low-cost activation equipment. • Hire more ambassadors. • Create cultural tenancing and capacity-building structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate cafés and kiosks. • Create consistent programming. • Define identity and branding for study area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert temporary culture-maker activations into permanent spaces and amenities.
Governance and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek powerful champions and build a downtown coalition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a conservancy. • Confirm community development and cultural partners. • Convene cohort of community culture-makers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solidify development capacity.

About the Panel

James Lima

Panel Chair
New York, New York

James Lima has been actively engaged in complex matters of real estate, economic development, and public policy since 1986, and has extensive private- and public-sector experience in the planning and revitalization of urban places at a variety of scales.

Lima founded JLP+D in 2011 after leading redevelopment strategies for numerous large-scale sites as a partner at a major national economic and real estate advisory firm. Previously, he was senior director of development in the New York office of residential REIT AvalonBay Communities Inc. Additionally, he was appointed by New York City (NYC) Mayor Michael Bloomberg as founding president of the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation, overseeing the redevelopment of a 172-acre former-military facility in New York Harbor. Lima also served as senior vice president for special projects at the NYC Economic Development Corporation, where he managed initiatives focused on growth of the city's central business districts, including Downtown Brooklyn, and increasing public access to the city's waterfront. His prior work as assistant commissioner at the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development and at Forest City Ratner Companies centered on new construction of affordable housing and retail development throughout NYC.

Lima has served as assistant adjunct professor in the Columbia University Master of Science in Real Estate Development (MSRED) Program, where he has led a course entitled Public-Private Partnerships in Real Estate Development. He earned a bachelor of arts from Columbia College with a major in architecture and urban studies, and stayed on at Columbia to complete the MSRED Program. At the Harvard Kennedy School, Lima participated in the Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government as a Fannie Mae Fellow. He is a frequent speaker at Urban Land Institute and other conferences, has served on advisory panels throughout North America, and has lectured on urban redevelopment at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Penn, and Syracuse, as well as in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and São Paulo, Brazil.

Lima served on the Economic Development Committee of the Fourth Regional Plan for the Regional Plan Association in New York. He is a member of the Design Trust for Public Space's Design Trust Council and serves on the boards of the American LGBTQ+ Museum, public art innovator ArtBridge, and the Billion Oyster Project.

Chip Crawford

Local Vice Chair
St. Louis, Missouri

As managing director for LJC, Chip Crawford is a practice builder, creative thinker, and problem solver. An award-winning landscape architect, Crawford has more than 40 years of experience leading complex planning, landscape architecture, and urban design projects across the globe. A true collaborator, he connects with clients and has a unique ability to stimulate creative thinking and problem solving, bringing proven expertise and the freshest thinking to the table. He has dedicated his career to being a steward of the public realm and creating inspiring places that improve the quality of people's lives.

Crawford is experienced at every scale, from city planning to community planning, mixed-use districts, streetscapes, academic and corporate campus planning and design, greenways, and parks, to site-specific landscape architectural design on projects worldwide. He has led or played a significant role in over 95 award-winning projects. His creative thinking impact on downtown St. Louis includes the North Riverfront Redevelopment Master Plan, the Brickline Greenway, Pillars of the Valley Plaza, the Mississippi Greenway Park, Katherine Ward Berg Garden, and the new Gateway South Construction Innovation Framework Plan, among many others.

Crawford brings relentless rigor and dedication, rooting his designs in exploration, research, and infectious meaning. His design ethic yields a balance of respect for the brilliant craft of previous best practices, with a view to future tools and technologies, cultivating next practices—all in an inclusive and informative process, which leads to positive outcomes.

Crawford is a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, a 10-year board member and past president of the Landscape Architecture Foundation, a previous ULI chair for the St. Louis District Council, and a Kansas State University alumni fellow. He is a frequent speaker and event leader who has presented and led ULI, ASLA, Extreme LA, CoreNet Global, LAF, and University Programs events.

Jennifer Allen

St. Louis, Missouri

Jennifer Allen is passionate about helping communities gain control of their futures. She works as codirector of St. Louis Art Place Initiative (API), a nonprofit doing arts-based affordable housing and community development in St. Louis. API's work is currently focused in the Gravois Park neighborhood where the organization is building affordable, for-sale homes for low-to-moderate-income artists, public arts infrastructure, green spaces, and a community land trust to preserve and steward it all. Part of a staff of two, Allen's work at API involves organizational development, fundraising, artist and community engagement, and program administration.

Allen has 18 years of experience working as an urban planner in the fields of affordable housing development, bicycle and pedestrian planning, and civic engagement. Her expertise includes community engagement, urban planning, facilitation, management, and organizational development. Her previous roles include senior director at ioby (in our backyards), a national nonprofit crowdfunding platform for community projects, and director of strategic initiatives at Trailnet, where she led advocacy campaigns. Also at Trailnet, she spearheaded the creation of The Calm Streets Project, which led to construction of a Calm Street on Louisiana Avenue. Allen has a master of arts in urban planning from UCLA with an emphasis in housing policy and urban design. One of her proudest legacies is initiating and leading the creation of the BlackSpace Manifesto with her fellow BlackSpace Urbanist Collective members.

Philip Barash

Sante Fe, New Mexico, and Boston, Massachusetts

Philip Barash, cofounder of Public Sphere Projects, is a community design and placemaking expert. He brings two decades of advising public, institutional, and real estate clients on strategies to develop and activate urban spaces. Barash publishes frequently and serves on the faculty at Boston University's City Planning and Urban Affairs Department. He is currently Arts and Sciences Planning Division vice chair at the American Planning Association, and on the board of the International Downtown Association. Barash has worked with the Chicago Architecture Center, Barack Obama Presidential Center, National Park Service, Walton Family Foundation, and others in developing programmatic and physical strategies to connect physical assets to communities of users.

Barash launched the first-ever citywide festival celebrating community spaces in Chicago, co-led an unprecedented visioning effort for the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston, and established a philanthropic and policy initiative that supports inclusive public spaces across Greater Boston as part of a fellowship at the Boston Foundation. His writing about the intersection of culture and design frequently appears in publications including *Crain's*, *Building Design and Construction*, *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, and *Commonwealth* magazine. In addition to his appointment at Boston University, he regularly lectures and serves as guest critic at TU Delft and Harvard Graduate School of Design. Barash is an alumnus of the University of Detroit Mercy and the University of Chicago. He lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and in Boston, Massachusetts.

Kate Collignon

Oakland, California

Kate Collignon helps communities implement inclusive economic growth and development strategies. Drawing on over 20 years of experience in the public and private sectors, she provides the economic insights and builds the partnerships needed to deliver community goals. Her career has ranged from management of some of the most complex public and private development initiatives in New York City, to cultivation of economic turnarounds in small and mid-sized cities across the Midwest and beyond. Throughout, her work has paired physical investment strategies with public policies, programs, and processes that promote equitable participation in economic growth.

Collignon served as HR&A's first managing partner for its New York headquarters, overseeing staff and institutionalizing new systems to promote quality and culture during a period of rapid growth. Prior to joining HR&A, she managed predevelopment for Manhattan West and other mixed-use projects as development director with Brookfield Properties. She also led large-scale planning and development initiatives in downtown Brooklyn and Coney Island, at Brooklyn Bridge Park, and across New York City as senior vice president for development at the NYC Economic Development Corporation.

Collignon has served on the faculty of the NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and as an adviser with the ULI/National League of Cities' Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use. She is a graduate of Columbia University, and holds a master's degree in public policy and urban planning from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Joanna Mack

West Sacramento, California

Joanna Mack's dedication to improving social conditions through architecture and her passion for collaborating with historically excluded communities feed her work at Salazar and beyond. For 10 years, she has focused on innovative and equitable neighborhood transformations through urban planning, infill development, affordable housing design, and other project types that bring community benefits. She is a leader in the firm's Sacramento office and is deeply engaged in the local community. As part of the ULI District Council Task Force for Health and Social Equity, she was a major contributor to [*Empowering Community: An Engagement Toolkit for South Sacramento*](#), which focused on Sacramento's Meadowview neighborhood. Mack was recently named a Top 25 Black Changemaker by the *Sacramento Bee*.

Nolan A. Marshall III

Los Angeles, California

Nolan Marshall began his professional career as a 22-year-old entrepreneur in New Orleans. He employed four full-time staff, and his business was projected to cross the seven-figure revenue threshold in 2005.

Marshall's most impactful decision as president and CEO was declining to purchase business interruption and catastrophic loss insurance three weeks before Hurricane Katrina.

Over the past 18 years, Marshall has been a leader in rebuilding and reimagining systems, programs, and places that make incredible cities better. From 2006–2012, Marshall worked on public safety and criminal justice policy, public education reform, government ethics, and land use policy. During this time, he served as the associate director of common good at Loyola University, director of policy and advocacy at the Cowen Institute, president of the Young Leadership Council, and chair or board member of several nonprofit and civic entities, including as the governor's appointee to the Greater New Orleans Biosciences Economic Development District.

In 2012, Marshall began to apply his talent and experience to placemaking and economic development. In the past decade, Marshall has served as director of public affairs and policy at the Downtown Development District in New Orleans, executive director of Uptown Dallas Inc., chief engagement and solutions officer at the New Orleans Business Alliance, and president and CEO of Downtown Vancouver in British Columbia. Marshall is currently serving as executive director of the South Park Business Improvement District in downtown Los Angeles. South Park is downtown LA's entertainment district—encompassing LA Live, Crypto Arena, the Grammy Museum, and the Los Angeles Convention Center, alongside substantial residential development.

Marshall has been appointed by two mayors to serve terms on the New Orleans City Planning Commission, including a term as chair; been an adviser to police departments; served on park, zoo, aquarium, and charter school boards; and cofounded nonprofits to guide the work of community building. His most rewarding endeavor is being a husband and father of two boys. Not purchasing insurance before Hurricane Katrina could call into question Marshall's foresight and intuition, but he has spent two decades making much better decisions to improve the lives of those in the communities where he has worked.

Rosanna Vitiello

London, England

Rosanna Vitiello is a cultural strategist and creative director whose work explores how places speak to us and how we speak back. Seeing placemaking as meaning-making, her work shines new light on overlooked places. As a strategist and urban researcher she looks at the physical place through various cultural lenses to pinpoint a distinct local identity. And as a creative director and designer she creates responsive public spaces that encourage greater civic agency.

Working with narrative and experience design as tools, Vitiello's work sets out to reinvent our relationship with places and public realms. From a family of linguists and architects, she has spent a lifetime exploring the sweet spot between cultures and physical contexts, working with people and places to build powerful relationships between the two. Her current engagements include bureau chief and cofounder at The Place Bureau; consulting creative director for place at Bruce Mau Design; trustee of The Participatory City Foundation; research associate at Central Saint Martins within the Socially Responsive Design and Innovation Unit on Urban Lexicons; and cofounder and curator at Place Labs. Vitiello's educational background includes a master's degree in design for public space from The Barcelona School of Design and Engineering and a bachelor's degree in communication design from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.



The Old Courthouse building, operated and managed by the Gateway Arch National Park, anchors the east end of the Gateway Mall and was the site for a number of landmark court cases. The rotunda and the rest of the building are undergoing renovations.



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