



Minnesota

UPTOWN REBOUND A STORY OF ABUNDANCE

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Technical Assistance Panel
October 27–29, 2025



About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute. It is supported by more than 45,000 members in 84 countries representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI Minnesota was founded in 2001 to serve the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region and the state of Minnesota. Members are involved in all aspects of the development and city planning process and members have access to the global research and resources of the oldest and largest network of cross-disciplinary real estate and land use experts in the world. Local members lead ULI Minnesota's efforts and engage public and private sector leaders to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and influence meaningful strategic action in the pursuit of ULI's mission.

ULI District Council Leadership

Gabe Philibert

Vice President of Real Estate Development and Asset Management, Project for Pride in Living, Inc.
District Council Chair

ULI Advisory Services

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

Cover photo: The redevelopment of the Hennepin Avenue roadway infrastructure included new sidewalks and bicycling infrastructure. (ULI)

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evaluated by a panel of volunteer experts selected from ULI's membership. This is a conversational format that lends itself to an open exchange of ideas among diverse industry practitioners with distinct points of view. From the streamlined two-hour session to the "deeper dive" eight-hour session, this intimate conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving. Learn more at americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/. Distinct from Advisory Services panels, TAPs leverage local expertise through a half-day to two-day process.

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Acknowledgments

On behalf of ULI Minnesota, the panel would like to thank the City of Minneapolis for inviting ULI to conduct this study. The panel would also like to thank the City's elected leaders, municipal staff, Uptown business owners and operators, property owners, community organizations, and residents for sharing their insights and perspectives during the interview sessions.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Uptown, Minneapolis is a beloved city district with a rich history. It is where young people can explore their independence. It is where residents and visitors go to visit the Chain of Lakes. It is a place where artists, musicians, and restaurateurs can develop and hone their creativity. It is where many local retailers launch their brand.

Over the course of the last ten years, Uptown has been struggling to find its footing. Retail trends have shifted wildly, and the spaces lining Uptown's commercial corridors have not been able to adapt easily to the needs of this changing market. With reduced retail foot traffic, restaurants and entertainment venues have closed. Reduced foot traffic has also left storefronts, building entries, and alleys devoid of people, which has created spaces for unhoused people to find refuge while others with addiction or mental health challenges wander between spaces. Multi-year road construction and street closures have negatively impacted the economics of Uptown's businesses. The 2020 murder of George Floyd sparked civil unrest across the city, which led businesses to board up buildings district-wide.

On the positive side, multifamily residential development has taken off in the streets surrounding Uptown's commercial corridors, bringing more households and additional market-rate units to the area.

The City of Minneapolis, recognizing these challenges and the mounting issues that property owners and the remaining business

owners face, turned to the Urban Land Institute Minnesota district council (ULI) for assistance. Using its technical assistance panel (TAP) program, ULI convened a panel of real estate professionals to study the challenges in the district and deliver a set of recommendations that the City, civic leaders, and community members can embrace as they consider the future of this once-thriving commercial district.

At the beginning of its study and following an initial set of interviews with community stakeholders, the panel identified the following organizing principles to guide its work.

- Uptown must be made and perceived to be clean and safe.
- People are attracted to active and inviting spaces.
- The district needs an authentic, positive narrative.
- There must be capacity for action that mobilizes the people, leadership, and resources to get the work done.

The panel considered who currently visits, works, and lives in Uptown. The list was broad, but it also highlighted what appears to be a shared community goal that Uptown is for everyone and everyone should feel welcome. As related to the built environment, the needs of businesses and organizations occupying space in Uptown were of particular interest for the panel, as were the needs of commercial property owners who continue to invest their time and resources in seeing Uptown thrive.

The district has several unique competitive advantages. It is the heart of the Minneapolis

"Lakes District" and is the perfect urban complement to the nature, serenity, and activities of the Chain of Lakes. It is a walkable, full-service urban district, which continues to create a significant draw to residents and visitors alike. Even as Uptown struggles with retail vacancy, there is an energy to the streetscape, due to its compact array of smaller storefronts. The district is also very diverse, as evidenced by the people, businesses, housing stock, and activities found across the area. Finally, Uptown is known as a place to create, to experiment, and to produce things—art, music, crafts, products, services, and more. Each of these attributes helps Uptown stand out from the other districts competing for attention.

Public Realm Improvements

The public realm plays a vital role in the health and vitality of Uptown, and drawing lake visitors from that public realm into the commercial district will be important to the success of Uptown. The panel shared the following recommendations to address challenges and build upon the area's public realm assets.

Create a Lake Loop. To amplify Uptown's assets and better connect the community to the Chain of Lakes, the panel envisioned a new "Lake Loop." This circular path for walking, biking, and rolling around the core of Uptown would follow the Mall to the north, Girard Avenue to the east, W 31st Street to the south, and Knox Avenue to the west. Each segment could transform as follows:

- The Mall could be transformed into a better connected community asset and an all-ages recreation space.
- Uptown Alley would follow Girard Avenue to create a fun, pedestrian-first space full of street art and graffiti walls.
- The wide expanse of W 31st Avenue could also lend itself to an art-themed experience or “Art Stroll.”
- A new “Lagoon Link” could travel along Knox Avenue as a quieter alternative to the more active paths adjacent to the lake.
- Include additional transportation solutions, such as an additional BRT station at the Seven Points Mall, micro-mobility resources, and street reconnections, specifically Holmes Avenue to the Mall and 29th Avenue to the Mall.

Create public spaces in the heart of

Uptown. The community would benefit from additional spaces to play and to gather.

These could include a new public space in the Seven Points Mall redevelopment, as well as an indoor-outdoor playground there or elsewhere. Existing underutilized spaces in Uptown, including MoZaic Plaza and the district’s alleyways, could also transform into spaces for gathering through the addition of murals, lighting, and other creative solutions.

Improve access across the district.

Improved access for all modalities and more wayfinding in the district are needed. Recent transportation improvements have impacted vehicular access to businesses and walkability in the district remains a challenge due to speeding traffic and a

sidewalk experience that needs improvement. Garage parking is plentiful in the district but remains underutilized. The City is encouraged to purchase the Seven Points Mall garage with funds from the area’s Special Service District (SSD) or similar source and provide free garage parking to help the district better compete with other regional draws. Street connectivity is key and restoring the street grid, for pedestrians at a minimum, will assist with movement around Uptown and support the Lake Loop concept.

Capacity and Communications

Uptown needs a new narrative to convey the current reality, which is better than typical public perceptions, and support awareness of anticipated improvements, which will accelerate virtuous cycles of investment. At the same time, the panel recognized the need for improved public safety and its priority in any initiative sequencing.

The panel also noted that there is a vacuum in leadership in the district. Uptown does not lack passionate business owners, patrons, or residents—it lacks a cohesive leadership structure and the capacity to tackle issues and implement initiatives.

Establish a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID).

Much like a business improvement district and with more range than a special services district, a NID can step into the leadership void, represent the collective interests of the district, including business and property owners, and fund improvements to further Uptown’s success. The City and private foundations should support this effort with

early funding to build momentum and property values that will eventually raise the district’s assessment capacity.

Focus on branding and programming. Within the next 12 months, a new cohesive branding strategy should be developed and become the platform for improved messaging, wayfinding, and marketing of Uptown. A dedicated marketing manager should be in charge of implementing a district marketing plan and managing a unified programming schedule that builds on the success of recent markets and recurring events. Over time, programming could be expanded to include district-wide celebrations, annual festivals, or other signature events. Additional marketing support, public relations, and/or event staff may be needed in the coming years.

Embrace the shift in retail. A national trend in retailing is shifting to an experiential format where shoppers co-create and design products that are made onsite. The larger format spaces in the district might work well for this business model, where the space to produce items is available alongside display areas.

Focus on small business supports. The panel recommends a business and economic development strategy that focuses on and connects local businesses, business incubators, and entrepreneurs. A strategy is needed to invest in additional capacity, connecting owners of vacant spaces with new destination businesses, similar to the [Arts & Culture Vibrant Storefronts](#) program. Some of these businesses could together leverage the larger retail spaces, combining

efforts in a collective space. There should also be a review of the City's rules and business regulations to eliminate any undue burdens or imbalances for small businesses, especially in comparison to neighboring municipalities. Finally, support for space reconfiguration and adaptive design for commercial buildings is encouraged and could be supported through a low-interest loan program.

Commercial Property Considerations

Business owners across Uptown are struggling to remain viable in an environment where shoppers often contend with public safety matters on the sidewalks.

Address crime and homelessness. Business owners need the City and service providers to take a stronger approach to care for the unhoused and address addiction and mental health challenges in the area. More resources, more accountability for negative behavior, and clear connection points to services are needed, as is the commitment to prosecute illegal behavior.

Consider policy modifications. Other issues, such as property tax and insurance considerations, are policy matters that will take a longer time to implement, but groundwork can begin now. Similarly, revisions to policies around wage parity with neighboring jurisdictions and the work of the labor standards board should be recalibrated to support a more competitive business environment. There are also state-level policies that directly affect Uptown businesses and likewise warrant reconsideration.



The Midtown Greenway is an important regional asset that runs through Uptown.

Funding and Financing

Implementing these recommendations will require capital, and new funding streams should be explored.

Pursue economic development tools. The City and business leaders are encouraged to create an Uptown Tax Increment Finance District (TIF) to support property owner investments in obsolete buildings. This same group should also identify and leverage all potential economic development tools that can be put to work in Uptown.

Form and launch a NID. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the NID could provide the district with operating revenue to address the following measures, starting with making the neighborhood clean and safe.

- Early responsibilities would staffing Clean and Safe Ambassadors (supported by redirected funds currently going to contractors), supporting safety through consistent and compassionate accountability, leading and coordinating

the district's services and initiatives, and providing trash and snow removal. The NID could issue a request for proposals (RFP) to provide clean and safe services as an immediate next step or work to bring all of these services inhouse.

- The NID would be responsible for creating and executing the district's new brand identity, marketing campaign, and wayfinding. It would also produce programs and events to drive foot traffic.
- Eventually, the NID might expand geographically to include the Midtown Greenway and the Mall and programmatically to include district-wide events and festivals.

The City and district leadership are also encouraged to explore the potential expansion of existing programs to support Uptown businesses or replicate successful programs from other communities to support Uptown.

Summary

There is a great deal of work ahead in Uptown. The foundation of the district is strong, however, and boasts an urban fabric and built environment that would be the envy of any city. Another important asset is the district's diverse residents, steadfast business and property owners, and adventurous visitors who are passionate about the district and its future success.

Working together, convened under a leadership umbrella that embraces and lifts up the district's assets, Uptown can find its footing once again, perhaps discovering along the way an even more vibrant path forward.

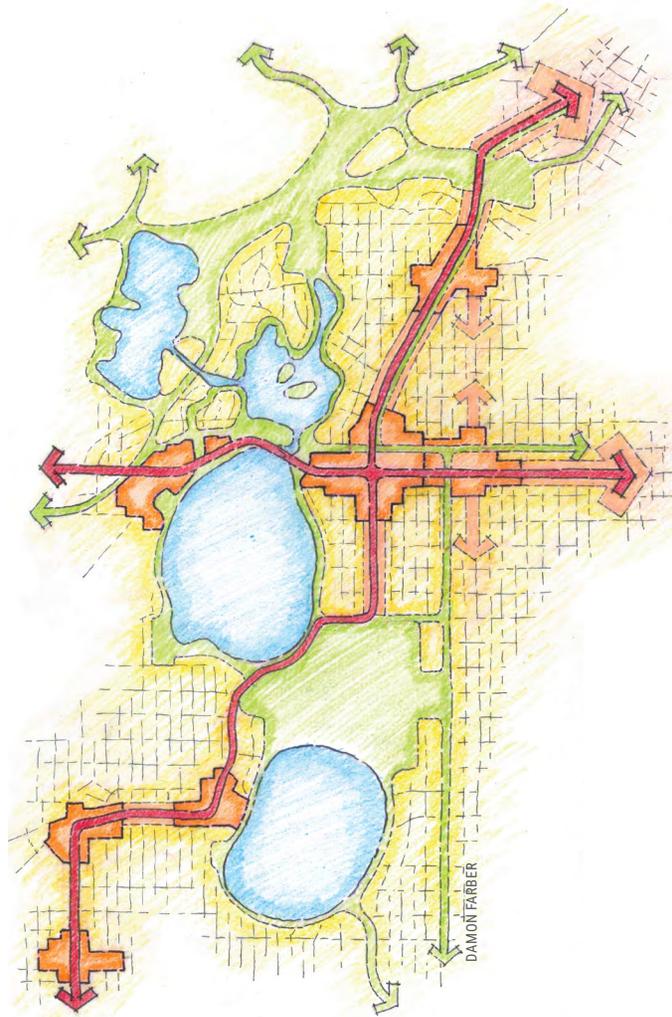
Introduction and Background

Uptown is well-known and beloved by Minneapolis residents and visitors alike. Those new to the city, as well as those who have lived their entire lives in Minneapolis, have found the urban district unique and appealing. Situated around the intersection of Lake Street and Hennepin Avenue, Uptown connects several neighborhoods and has a vibe all its own.

From the Chain of Lakes and Midtown Greenway to the commercial areas and diverse residential offerings, Uptown has a wide appeal. The area has also developed a reputation as an arts and entertainment district, with young people coming to explore the shops and venues, artists finding space to create, and retail businesses enjoying a concentration of activity that makes walking and shopping a pleasure. Homes line the surrounding streets, with opportunities ranging from small apartment rentals to large home ownership and everything in between. An influx of additional residential development in the past ten years has brought even more housing opportunities to Uptown, with more people calling Uptown “home” than ever before.

The chain of lakes that line the western edge of Uptown is an incredible draw, serving as the second-most-popular destination in the state of Minnesota. (The Mall of America continues to rank first.) Uptown has benefited from this proximity, with people choosing to live near the lakes and their associated recreational opportunities. People who visit the lakes, for the beach or water sports, can likewise enjoy the restaurants and shops of nearby Uptown.

UPTOWN: THE HEART OF THE LAKES DISTRICT



Uptown grew up at a crossroads - where Minneapolis' growing network of streets and streetcars met the natural beauty of the Chain of Lakes. In recent decades, these foundational assets have seen a rebound in investment. Today, Uptown still forms the heart of the Minneapolis “Lakes District.”

Why Uptown? Why Now?

Cities develop irreplaceable competitive advantages through their unique ecosystems of talent, industry, and community. Once established, these deep networks of expertise and practice are difficult to disrupt and nearly impossible to replicate elsewhere.

Uptown has been a beloved place and already possesses many qualities that cities nationwide seek to cultivate. As one local business owner says, “no one can see a peak until it is past.” This same businessman also noted out that commercial leases tend to span five to ten years, so it makes sense that the 2008 financial crisis created ripples for Uptown into 2015 and beyond.

In the past decade, the district has faced a series of compounding challenges:

- 2015–2019: Retail sector shifts led to declining occupancy and rents as major tenants departed. Between 2009 and 2025, 48 businesses closed or left Uptown (29 local and 19 national businesses).
- 2018–2019: The City of Minneapolis (the City), Hennepin County, and Metro Transit began improvements to Hennepin Avenue that significantly restricted access during two construction seasons and removed some highly-valued parking.
- Spring 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic led to business shutdowns, which were followed by George Floyd’s murder and civil unrest during which businesses boarded-up buildings district-wide.

- 2020–2022: Elevated crime created operational challenges during the City’s transition to new public safety approaches. In 2021, a black St. Paul resident named Winston Boogie Smith, Jr. was shot and killed by the U.S. Marshals in the Girard Ave parking ramp adjacent to Seven Points, prompting protests in the area. One protester, Deona Marie Knajdek, was killed by a vehicle ramming a blockade. The streets in the district were regularly closed due to protests during this time.
- 2024–2025: Major Hennepin Avenue infrastructure investment severely restricted access during two eight-month construction seasons. At the time of this study, Hennepin Avenue was still closed or restricted from Douglas Avenue to 26th Street, and merchants and property owners with vacancy struggle while awaiting the benefits of the new infrastructure investment. Construction is expected to complete and new E-Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service commence by the end of 2025. The E-Line BRT will serve as a replacement for the existing route 6, operating on segments including France, Hennepin, and University avenues between Southdale Center and the University of Minnesota.

All of this happened while other walkable commercial districts developed in ways that created new competition for Uptown. The City’s public policy and regulatory environment creates additional costs for city businesses in relation to neighboring jurisdictions, further challenging the competitiveness of districts like Uptown.

The diverse ownership that has made Uptown such a unique and authentic place also makes it difficult to organize change at significant scale, and substantial value has been lost by real estate investors and business owners. In addition to the 48 business closures, the last three owners of Seven Points Mall (the former Calhoun Square) have lost large sums of money. The award-winning MoZaic Project lost most of its tenants and foreclosed.

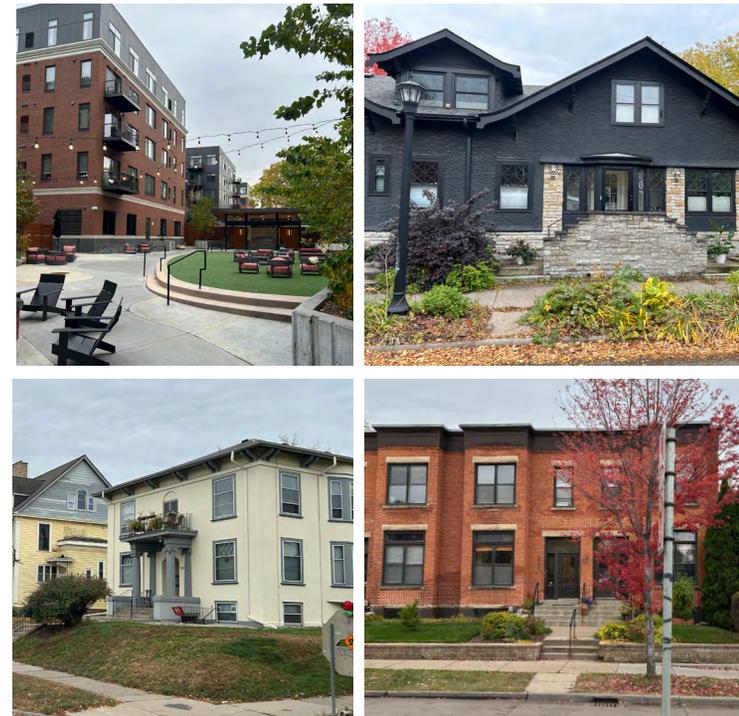
All of these combined factors have had a compounding effect on Uptown, giving way to a negative narrative and inertia that needs to be overcome.

Uptown’s Potential

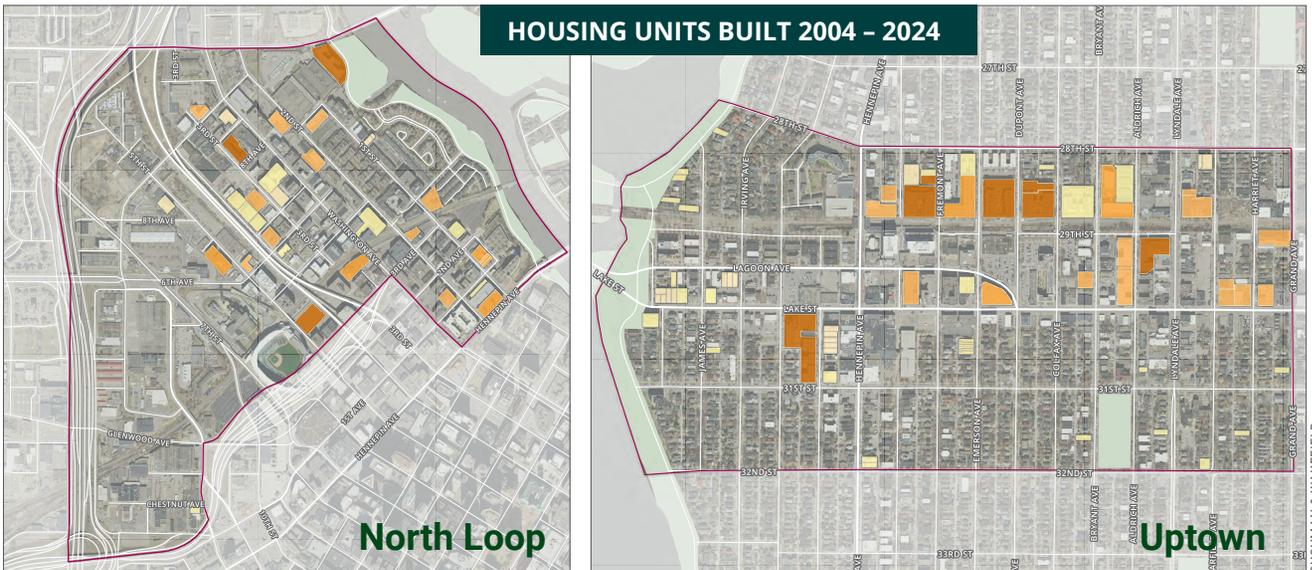
Uptown remains one of the worst performing districts relative to its potential, the highlights of which are noted below.

- Population density. The district has critical mass sufficient to support thriving local businesses and services and is significantly more dense than its two most significant competitors, 50th & France and North Loop, which includes all downtown office buildings. (A comparison is included in the appendix on page 40.)
- Diverse housing stock. There is a complete range of high-quality housing options in Uptown, including single-family homes, duplexes, townhomes, small apartments, and modern multifamily podium developments with full amenities.

- Affordability. Due to the diversity of its housing stock, Uptown is much more affordable than other comparable areas. Median residential rents in Uptown are \$1,400 – \$1,700, compared to \$1,900 – \$2,100 in the North Loop.
- Natural amenities: Uptown anchors the Chain of Lakes, part of the Grand Rounds Scenic Byway, a 53-mile interconnected parkway system linking Minneapolis’s lakes, parks, and the Mississippi River. Minneapolis’s Chain of Lakes consistently ranks as the most-visited regional park, with approximately 7 million annual visitors since 2021.



Uptown boasts a wide variety of housing options in varying sizes, ages, and configurations, which helps maintain the district’s affordability.



HOUSING UNITS BUILT 2004 - 2024

North Loop

Uptown

	2004-2024	2014-2024	2020-2024
NEW HOUSING UNITS			
Uptown	4,740	2,120	610
North Loop	4,020	2,440	700
NEW UNITS PER SQ MI			
Uptown	8,778	3,926	1,130
North Loop	4,674	2,837	814

Median rent ranges for each:
 • Uptown: \$1,400-\$1,700
 • North Loop: \$1,900-\$2,100



- **Urban infrastructure:** Uptown features an intact street grid that supports walkability and mixed-use development. Uptown is a rare large neighborhood that was not bisected by freeways.
- **Authenticity:** Uptown is an authentic urban place that has evolved over one hundred years. It contains a special combination of businesses serving both the daily needs of its local residents and attractions for shoppers from around the region
- **Reduced cost basis:** As property values have declined and been written down, there has been new investment in Uptown, by both local and institutional investors. These new investors are improving properties and operations and making a meaningful difference.

This Study

To explore potential solutions to the challenges Uptown is facing, the City's Planning Department turned to the Urban Land Institute Minnesota district council (ULI) for guidance. Specifically, the City sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the Uptown user profiles that Uptown should be solving for, and what do they want to experience? Consider specific residents, visitors, employees, etc.
 - What existing assets support these experiences?
 - What is missing that would support these experiences? Which of these are most important?
 - What are competing commercial districts? How would we describe each of these in 1-2 sentences? (i.e., 50th

and France, North Loop, Northeast, West End, Wayzata, Linden Hills)

- How would this user describe Uptown now? How do we want each user to ideally describe Uptown?
2. What is Uptown's competitive advantage over the next 5-10 years relative to the rest of the region? What is Uptown's "why"?
 3. How do we bridge the gap from where we are now to where we think Uptown should be?

ULI, using its trusted and objective technical assistance panel (TAP) program, assembled a panel of real estate professionals (the panel) with expertise in the areas of real estate development, architecture and urban design, retail brokerage, economic development, placemaking and activation, and entertainment and hospitality. The ULI panel



What the Panel Heard

The panel interviewed a wide variety of stakeholders from the community, including staff from the City of Minneapolis, business owners and operators, real estate developers and brokers, community organizations and advocates, and residents from the area who shared the following feedback:

Assets

- There is a deep love for the district and its unique attributes.
- Retailers and restaurants are unique and mostly locally owned and operated.
- The lakes shaped the area historically and continue to draw visitors and residents.
- The area is known for its retail history, and there are good stories of past success.
- Historically, the district is also known as being weird, fun, edgy, and a destination for entertainment.
- There is a thriving and diverse residential market across the surrounding streets.
- Robust transportation access includes buses, new BRT routes, bike lanes, and greenways in addition to vehicular access.
- Long-time and new property owners are committed to the area.
- There are ample parking resources in the district, yet the garages are hard to find.
- The City is willing and able to partner to support improvements in the area.
- There is a Special Services District already in place, supporting the district with additional public-works-type services.

Challenges

- Visitors, business owners, and residents note that a sense of security and safety is lacking across the district.
- Minneapolis public policy and complex regulatory environment has created a more costly business operational environment than in Edina or St. Louis Park.
- Streets are lined with a number of vacant storefronts and remaining retail struggles.
- There is weak capital interest in additional investments or purchases in the area.
- Stakeholders note that other districts, like the North Loop and 50th and France, present strong commercial competition for Uptown.
- Populations with mental health and drug issues are very present and bring associated perceptions of crime.
- Vacant retail spaces are large and long, which makes them hard to retrofit or reduce down into multiple smaller spaces.
- With transit improvements, there is now a lack of on-street parking, and the garages are not free.
- Uptown is full of passionate people, yet the area is lacking district leadership.

“Uptown’s best days are not behind us.”

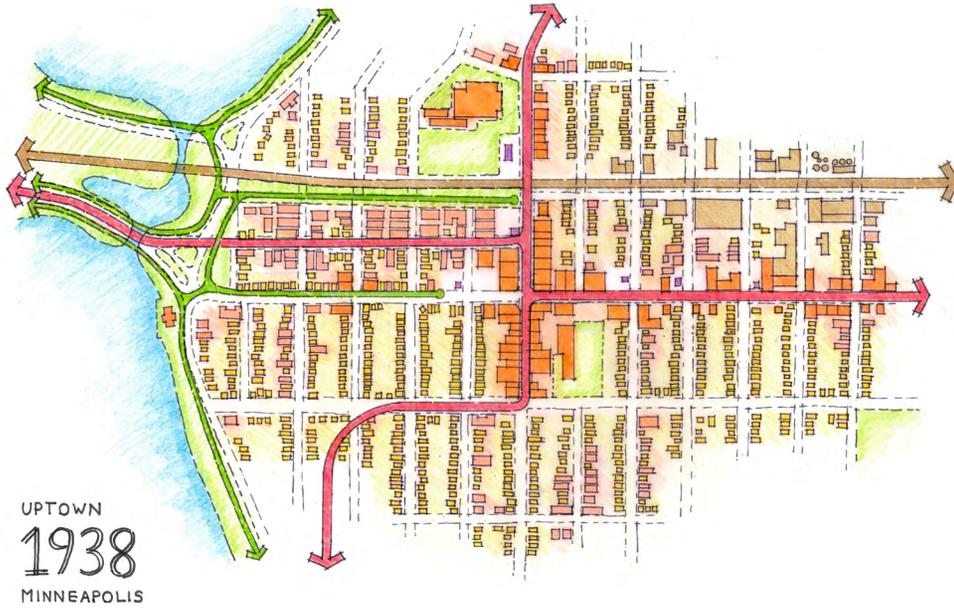
The panel’s study area, as defined by the City for this engagement.

spent two-and-a-half days touring the area, interviewing community stakeholders, and discussing and applying their professional expertise to the challenges. The result was a series of recommendations the City can leverage as it works to infuse Uptown with the energy, safety, and support its businesses need to become a lively, thriving, and successful district once again.

The City asked the panel to study specifically the commercial corridors of the Uptown Special Service District. The district runs along Lake Street, Lagoon Avenue, and Hennepin Avenue and is bordered by Knox Avenue S on the west, Dupont Avenue S to the east, W 28th Street to the north, and W 31st Street to the south.

Uptown's Evolution

These sketches show how Uptown has evolved. Despite a mid-century shift toward suburbanization, Uptown has largely retained an effective urban grid network of streets and a core of mixed land uses. The construction of the Midtown Greenway and increased demand for urban living have driven significant regrowth and population density in Uptown, leading to investments in walking, biking, and public transit.



DAMON FARBER



Organizing Principles

As the panel worked through the stakeholder feedback and shared their professional perspectives on the challenges Uptown is facing, they agreed on a set of organizing principles. These principles helped organize the recommendations that followed and ensure that the focus remained on the future vibrancy of the district.

Organizing Principles

Clean and Safe. Presently, the district struggles to remain clean throughout the day and night, and there are challenges with residents and visitors feeling safe as they walk around the district and between businesses. When Uptown feels safe and looks clean and cared for, residents, shoppers, and visitors will be more likely to return and linger, bringing vibrancy to the Uptown streetscape.

Active and Abundant. Uptown is a walkable district that is largely devoid of people. Bringing positive activity back to the streetscape and amplifying the district's abundant assets is key. That abundance includes the variety of shopping and dining options, choice in movement (walking, biking, scooting, transit, cars, and more), arts and entertainment in the theaters and on the street, recreational opportunities along the Greenway and on the nearby lakes, and more.

Authentic Positive Narrative. At the time of this study, Uptown was mired in a negative narrative that does not serve its people or its businesses well. Work to shift the narrative can begin now by highlighting the good things happening today. As the district becomes

more clean and safe, amplifying this narrative will further support the positive activity in the district. Authenticity is key, as people can quickly recognize public relations spin. The area, always known for being artsy and edgy, can again embrace that narrative, find its new vibe, and appeal to a larger population without losing its fun and funky edge.

Capacity for Action. There are passionate people across the community who are deeply invested in Uptown. Some have invested significant funds in the built environment, while others have invested their personal time and energy in its vibrancy. While there is not a dearth of energy, this energy needs focus, leadership, and capacity building to enable the type of broader action an Uptown resurgence will require.

Uptown is for...

The leading question from the City centered around the people who would be attracted to Uptown, filling its stores, eating at its

restaurants, enjoying the streetscape and recreation, opening businesses, and moving to the district. This keen evaluation, "solving for the people in the district," is foundational to the real estate needs of Uptown and its built environment. Places and spaces are built for people. Who are the people of Uptown?

The people moving around the district, living in the area, shopping in the district, and activating the streetscape today vary widely.

- **Families.** People with children are drawn to the walkable neighborhood that is full of homes with yards, as well as proximate parks and recreation.
- **Young adults (under 30).** The vibrancy and walkability of the area continue to draw young people out into the shops and onto the sidewalks, where they can explore their independence and build their lives affordably.
- **Seniors.** In addition to senior housing opportunities in the area, many of the



Lake Bde Maka Ska on the western edge of Uptown.

homes are still occupied by long-time residents. These are seniors who grew up, raised their family, and continue to choose Uptown, even when their children move on.

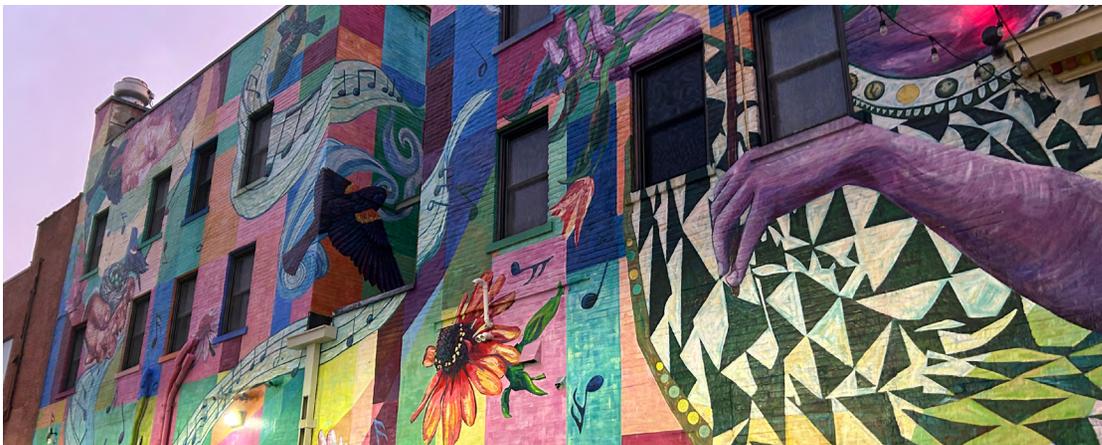
- **Regional visitors.** The lakes continue to be an important draw for regional visitors, many of whom then explore Uptown for its dining and drinking establishments.
- **New Americans.** The diversity of Uptown continues to attract people who are new to the United States, finding comfort in food offerings that remind them of home or by surrounding themselves with other diverse populations.
- **Fitness and wellness enthusiasts.** Again, the lakes are a draw, this time for people looking for lake-based activities and recreation. Similarly, the Midtown Greenway has become an important exercise track in addition to its role as a commuter path and recreational space.
- **“Young punks” and alternative culture.** The edgy and artsy vibe of Uptown

continues today and attracts young people who are interested in arts and entertainment opportunities that some might describe as “alternative.” Low-cost music venues, late-night food options, and even tattoo artists are finding this market particularly active.

- **Unhoused.** People across the United States are struggling to find and stay in permanent housing, and Minneapolis is no different. Unhoused people are making their way to Uptown and find that the vacant storefronts work well for overnight shelter. Unfortunately, some of these same individuals are also struggling with untreated mental health challenges, while others are wrestling with addiction issues. The presence of those struggling with mental health and addiction issues and the unpredictability that can come alongside those challenges makes the streetscape and sidewalk environment particularly fraught for other residents, shoppers, and visitors.

The panel also took time to consider who has been and should be occupying the spaces along Uptown’s commercial corridors. These groups often represent the people who will be bringing business and activity back to the streetscape.

- **Creators and makers.** The arts, edgy, creative, and innovative vibe is still alive and well in Uptown, strengthened by the City’s investment in its [Arts & Culture Vibrant Storefronts Program](#). People who create things, start new ventures, and make products have each found a home in Uptown and should continue to do so.
- **Restaurateurs.** The restaurant scene is an important draw for Uptown, bringing people out to enjoy long-time favorites and explore new options. Food brings people together, and the restaurateurs bringing culinary options to Uptown should be factored into the discussion.
- **Hotels.** With few hotel options in the district, thought should be given to what it might take to operate a hotel in Uptown.
- **Small businesses.** People expressed pride in their locally-owned small businesses in Uptown—either those they run or those they frequent. Ensuring their continued support and viability is important.
- **Office tenants.** While the commercial property conversation in Uptown often centers around Uptown’s retail offerings, the viability of commercial office space is also important. New business ventures may need small options, while corporate



This Uptown alley has been transformed with a colorful mural that calls to mind a variety of art forms.

or other established tenants might be interested in larger Uptown office space. These commercial tenants can also help support the district's dining and service establishments in daytime hours, a possible welcome balance to other nighttime activities.

Finally, the panel considered the more specific needs of those who own, operate, invest in, or manage commercial real estate.

- **Local owners.** There are a number of people who continue to own and lease commercial real estate in Uptown. Their steadfast support of and belief in the district are foundational to the district's future success.
- **Local investors.** Similarly, there are individuals who continue to financially support the work of the district, whether through investments in redevelopment, new construction, new businesses, or

programmatic endeavors that require business or "corporate" sponsorship.

- **Institutional investors.** Some of the more substantial developments in Uptown have benefited from larger institutional investors that have recognized the value of this market. While many are not able to invest new funds in the area, they are not pulling existing investments out either.
- **New investors.** This district is unique and beloved, and new people and new investors are discovering daily all that Uptown has to offer.
- **Lenders.** Traditional bank financing remains a critical piece of the commercial real estate puzzle in Uptown. Building owners and commercial businesses continue to turn to lenders for financial support, and their view of the district as a stable investment remains important.



Arts & Culture Vibrant Storefronts

The [Arts & Culture Vibrant Storefronts](#) is a City-led initiative that supports new and growing creatives in Uptown and other areas of the city. Working with property owners, the City provides qualifying artists and makers with up to \$50,000 annually to subsidize the lease of commercial space. With a goal of increasing vibrancy, innovation, and sustainability, the program helps ensure stable tenants for property owners and furnishes essential space for the local creative community.

Through this public financial support and advocacy, local artists, creative entrepreneurs, and arts organizations serve to:

- "Stimulate the economic revitalization of Uptown by building a new sense of cross-sector creative cohesion.
- "Increase and catalyze arts vibrancy, foot traffic, and cultural public engagement through arts activation.
- "Assist local artists, creative entrepreneurs, and arts organizations with physical space to workshop, incubate, develop, and offer their programming and artmaking to the public.
- "Address the ongoing space crisis affecting the creative community and increase a sense of public safety in Uptown.
- "Remediate patterns of systemic and institutionalized discrimination, disinvestment, economic exclusion, and disenfranchisement of peoples and identities that have been suppressed and erased."



Competitive Advantage

While it may be true that there is more competition in the market for attention and investment from the Twin Cities' residents and visitors, Uptown still holds a unique competitive advantage. This advantage can be found in the sum of its attributes and is not reliant on any one characteristic, which creates strength and resilience. That said, it is time to focus on those collective attributes, shore up those that may be slipping, and ensure that the advantage is not lost.

In the process of envisioning a future Uptown, based on stakeholder insights and the panel's professional perspectives, the panel outlined the following as future attributes of a thriving Uptown. Fortunately, most of these attributes are already in place; some may need additional support or focus in order to truly drive economic vitality in the area.

The heart of the Chain of Lakes. The Chain of Lakes were the initial draw to the area, well before Minneapolis had grown much beyond the core of its downtown. The lakes are just as much a draw today and are far more accessible to far more people than ever before. Uptown is the perfect urban complement to the nature, serenity, and activities the lakes provide.

Unique and authentic. If someone were to try to create a district like Uptown from scratch, it would feel forced and unreal. The authentic vibe of Uptown is unique to its environment and is the sum of its diverse, artistic, and energetic parts. The growth of the district and the attraction of other local retailers and

“

Things don't just happen here – it's where they start.

–Stakeholder



The panel heard from community members during a reception at the Jungle Theater and during structured interviews.

restaurateurs to the area reinforce this unique and wholly authentic vibe.

Abundance and energy. There is so much to see and explore in Uptown—and so much potential for more across the district's storefronts. Murals dot the landscape and can be found lining some alleys. Korean BBQ sits next to nail salons, while a fantastic bookstore and spice shop line another street. The Jungle Theater provides an important performance space, further supporting the arts and creative endeavors. The people in Uptown are eager to see it succeed and fully thrive once again. Connecting the dots between these businesses and filling the gaps will help ensure that abundance and energy are felt across the district.

Everyone belongs. The diversity of Uptown—its people, businesses, housing stock, and activities—creates space for everyone and invites everyone to find their fun in Uptown. It is important that in Uptown, everyone belongs.

Thriving. While Uptown may not be thriving in the same manner it once was, there are still businesses finding success there. People call the successful surrounding neighborhoods home. Lake recreationalists and bikers love what Uptown has to offer. Artists and makers have space to experiment and create. The economic vibrancy of the district is important, and while that light has dimmed a bit, it has not been extinguished. It only needs to be stoked in order for Uptown to fully thrive once again.

Connection to nature. The natural beauty and appeal of the parks, the lakes, and the Mall are easy to see. Each of these is also readily accessible to anyone, and everyone is invited to get out, explore, and connect with nature. These natural resources in the midst of a dense urban environment are to be relished, treasured, protected, and enjoyed.

A place to experiment. The continuing reputation of Uptown as a place to create new products, explore new ideas, experiment with new materials, and experience unique things is a clear competitive advantage. Other places are trying to create this appeal and are experiencing varying levels of success. In Uptown, it is a true and authentic characteristic and one that is well-known.



Photos from the panel's tour of Uptown highlight the variety of amenities, built structures, and transportation assets available across the district.

Public Realm Improvements

In a dense urban environment like Uptown, the public realm plays a vital role in the health and vitality of the area. Engaging, welcoming, and functional public spaces encourage people to visit and explore, to walk and to linger, to shop and return. Drawing lake visitors deeper into the streets of Uptown is vital to the district's commercial success.

As one panelist noted, the bones of Uptown are excellent. The streets are well-connected and lead to district delights like parks and lakes. Sidewalks and transit are plentiful and accessible. Buildings were built at a human scale that is inviting. The housing stock offers a variety of options for a diverse community. Uptown's public realm is the common thread that weaves these assets together.

The panel's objectives as related to the public realm in Uptown were threefold: understand the existing assets and functionality that currently define Uptown; make targeted improvements to create quality connections and build activity, community, and culture; and allow improved connections and culture to drive future re-design opportunities.

The resulting recommendations center around public space and transportation and focus on the Lake Loop, the Heart of Uptown, and the streets of the district.

The Lake Loop

"Uptown" has become an increasingly broad reference. The "heart of Uptown"—the central intersection of Lake and Hennepin, defined by the Uptown Theater and Seven Points (formerly Calhoun Square) signs—is

increasingly competing to maintain its role in defining Uptown. The panel's "Lake Loop" concept provides access to the heart of Uptown while introducing a new, memorable reference that does not compete with Uptown's identity. It would connect Uptown to the Chain of Lakes, use improvements to existing assets to avoid major disturbance to the main commercial corridors, and create an opportunity to build community and culture within public spaces that can drive Uptown's resurgence through everyday activities and curated events.

The panel envisions the Lake Loop following a path that is pedestrian-friendly and a pleasure to experience. Key elements would include:

- The Mall to the north
- Girard Avenue to the east, which would transform into Uptown Alley
- W 31st Street to the south, reshaped into the 31st Street Stroll
- The Lakefront to the southwest
- The Lagoon to the northwest



The Lake Loop, as envisioned by the panel, encircles the core commercial corridors of the district and would take pedestrians and bicyclists on an inviting tour of the district, its physical amenities, and its arts resources. The Loop also helps separate pedestrians from the more auto-centric Lake and Lagoon streets.

The Lake Loop would create a welcoming, pedestrian-friendly alternative to these active thoroughfares while also encapsulating the activity running through the core of Uptown.

Extending this vision, the panel began to explore how the various spaces across the Lake Loop could be activated, each with its own identity and attraction, and yet each element complementing the others to create a signature experience that is very much in keeping with Uptown's unique, edgy, fun, and artistic vibe.

Use the Mall

Running along W 29th Avenue, the Mall was constructed in 1914 and connects Hennepin Avenue to the Chain of Lakes. This expanse of green is marked by a lovely winding sidewalk and trees... and little else. The panel noted that the Mall should bring people walking, biking, and rolling within the parkway system into Uptown from the north, improve public safety through increased walking and biking, continue to provide access for nearby residents, and space for pop-up events.

Near-term strategies:

- Improve wayfinding and crossing (raised, signalized, or stop sign) at the parkway, encouraging bicyclists to cross from the Chain of Lakes trail to the existing streets in the Mall.
- Create a trail connection and improved wayfinding at Hennepin Avenue to facilitate bike and pedestrian crossing to the new bikeway and 29th Street.

- Improve lateral connections and wayfinding from the Midtown Greenway to The Mall. Examples might include large “Uptown” signs on the Uptown Transit Center above the Midtown Greenway,
- Remove the eastern wing of the Uptown Transit Center, creating green space and trail connections that “extend the Mall” across Hennepin Avenue along 29th Avenue, opening up a critical connection to form the northern leg of the Lake Loop.
- Program a “Play-Mall” event where community members gather and bring old/unused play equipment or play items to bring life, activity, and recreation to the green space.

Long-term strategies:

- Convert the roadways within the Mall to a curbsless “shared street” with a continuous street material and raised crossings at James, Irving, and Humboldt.
- Convert the Mall to a one-way bike-friendly street on the south side (exiting to Lagoon at a restored Holmes Avenue or the existing alley behind the Walker Library), maintaining street parking along the southern edge. Remove the northern roadway and replace it with an expanded nature-play park space with all-ages recreation features.

Elevate a New Uptown Alley

In alignment with the 2008 Uptown Small Area Plan, the panel sought to preserve and improve the shared pedestrian and bicycle-priority route along the Girard Avenue corridor



The Mall at the time of this study.,



STUART BETT FOR SITE WORKSHOP



BLAKE SLETTE

The Mall could transform into a long linear recreational spaces as seen in Seattle (center) and in Madrid (bottom) at the Bosque de Trepas—or “Climbing Forest.”



This alley in Detroit has been transformed into inviting outdoor seating for the restaurants in the adjacent buildings.



Murals and street art can be found across Uptown and could find a nexus along Uptown Alley.

as a key stretch of the “Lake Loop” and create a central, recognizable “alley” experience through which to activate adjacent branching alleyways.

Near-term strategies:

- Rebrand Girard Avenue as the “Uptown Alley” and improve wayfinding and lighting.
- Use art to fill walls and pavement along the “alley” and adjacent alleyways and plazas. Local Uptown and Minneapolis artists could be hired to create active street art and graffiti.
- Organize social gatherings focused on street art, entertainment, and food.

Long-term strategies:

- Reconfigure conflicting entrances to the Seven Points parking ramp.
- Redesign a pedestrian and bike-only space between Lake Street and Lagoon Avenue.

Create a 31st Street Stroll

To transform 31st Street into the 31st Street Stroll, the panel sought to bring people walking, biking, and rolling within the Chain of Lakes parkway system to and from the heart of Uptown by providing a safe, comfortable, and recognizable route to walk, bike, and roll parallel to Lake Street.

Near-term strategies:

- Convert half of the double roadway on 31st Street into a linear green space with walking and biking trails.

- Organize temporary interactive community and/or featured art installations. Examples might include a sculpture collaboration with local schools, an outdoor “Museum of Touchable Art (MoTA)”, and a “life-sized Etch-a-Sketch” partnership.
- Improve wayfinding and ease of access above and below the staircase at 31st Street and Bde Maka Ska Parkway.
- Introduce raised crossing/traffic-calming measures at the intersections of 31st Street with Bde Maka Ska Parkway and Girard Avenue (“Uptown Alley”).

Long-term strategies:

- At the intersection of “31st Street Stroll” and the lakefront, construct a “gateway” beneath Bde Maka Ska Parkway to provide a continuous, accessible route from the lakefront to the southern leg of the Lake Loop.
- As part of the new gateway, integrate an elevated “lookout” platform over Bde Maka Ska at the top of the hill to create a strong terminus to the 31st Street Stroll.

Strengthen Lakefront Connections

At the Lakefront, the panel wanted to maintain and increase walking, biking, and transit-oriented activity along the Uptown Lakefront, connecting the Chain of Lakes to the heart of Uptown while improving safe, comfortable, and convenient walking, biking, and rolling connections from Lake Street and the Lake Loop. This stronger connection would support economic activity along the Parkway and Lake Street west of the heart of Uptown.

Near-term strategies:

- Relocate watercraft rentals to the Lagoon, converting sand boat launch areas to a public beach and gathering space connected to the Bde Maka Ska pavilion.
- Create a safe biking connection along Bde Maka Ska Parkway between 31st Street and the Bde Maka Ska Pavilion.

Long-term strategies:

- Create complete two-way biking and walking connections along the Lakefront between the Mall and 31st Street gateway and overlook.
- After the planned relocation of the sailing school, convert its sand boat launch areas to a public beach and gathering space connected to the Bde Maka Ska pavilion.

Focus The Lagoon

The goal of the Lagoon is to celebrate its unique strengths as a landing and a “little learning lake,” with a small, protected body of water with connections to both Bde Maka Ska and Lake of the Isles. This focused approach could provide a safer and more accessible paddling experience to a range of ages and in a wider range of weather conditions, and establish the Lagoon as a clear origin and destination for people traveling along the Mall and Lagoon Avenue.

Near-term strategies:

- Remove a portion of the shoreline wall and provide access to the water using a gravel or sand boat landing.

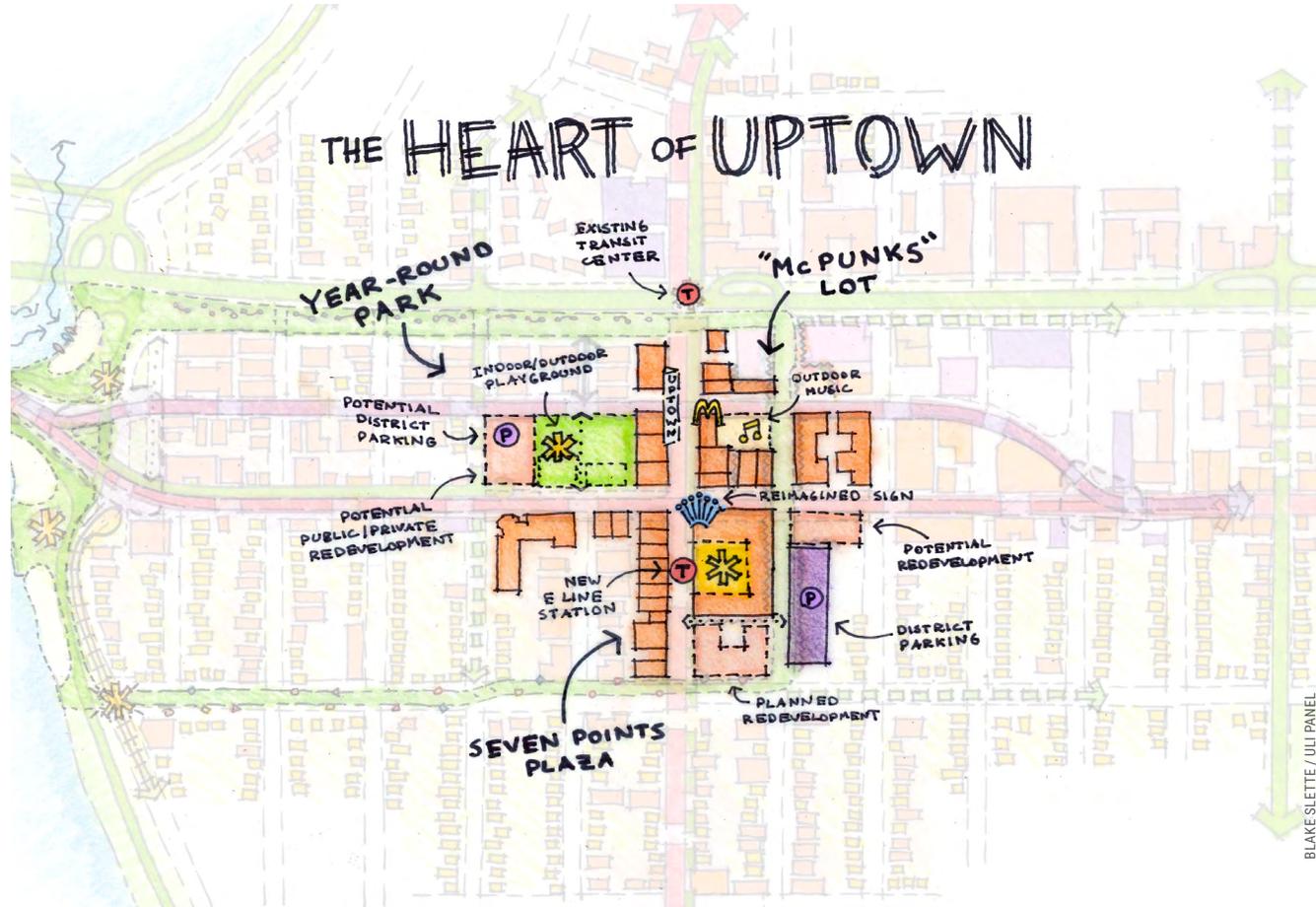
- Relocate the paddling rental facility from Bde Maka Ska to the Lagoon and add year-round ski rentals.
- Replace the shoreline wall with a sand or gravel landing for watercraft and ski access.

Long-term strategies:

- Develop a formalized gathering space to support watercraft rentals and provide passive and family-friendly recreation, such as lounge seats, picnic tables, etc. Graco Park provides a good example.

The Heart of Uptown Restore the Role of Seven Points

In the heart of Uptown, the panel sought to restore the role of Seven Points (the former Calhoun Square) as a regular central gathering place, starting point, and anchoring destination at the heart of Uptown. By providing a permanent, flexible, programmable indoor-outdoor space for year-round public events, visitors would be drawn to the area to support businesses in the district. Improved centralized connections to and from all key transportation systems



would assist in connecting to Seven Points and should consider driving, biking, rolling, transit, and rideshare modes.

Near-term strategies:

- Reimagine the former Calhoun Square sign as an iconic symbol of Uptown.
- Organize events in the vacant portions of the building and in the vacant lot adjacent to Seven Points.
- Provide bike, scooter, skateboard, and other recreation equipment rentals to aid people in exploring Uptown, the Chain of Lakes, and nearby parks.
- Add an additional E Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) station along Hennepin Avenue between Lake and 31st to serve the heart of Uptown by providing direct access to the core commercial district.

Long-term strategies:

- Reconfigure a portion of the indoor mall into a central indoor-outdoor public plaza, creating year-round space for public events, activities, and day-to-day urban life in the heart of Uptown.

Celebrate the “McPunks”

The Uptown McDonald’s site is an under-recognized asset at the heart of Uptown that could be brought to life to celebrate its unique identity and the story of the “McPunks” era in Uptown.

Near-term strategies:

- Partner with the Uptown McDonald’s and local and adjacent music venues (i.e.,



Shop windows inside the vacant mall building have been transformed into community billboards.

Uptown Theater, Green Room, First Ave, etc.) to host temporary concerts in the McDonald’s parking lot and drive-thru, ranging from small to large events with a focus on the Minneapolis punk scene.

- Add local street art to nearby blank walls, alleyways, and McDonald’s wall along Hennepin (honoring the McPunk story).

Long-term strategies:

- Collaborate with McDonald’s, local partners, and musicians to redesign the Uptown “McPunks” site as a long-term, regular outdoor concert venue to support day-to-day busking and outdoor concerts.

Create a Year-Round Park and Playground

Stakeholders noted a lack of family play space in the heart of Uptown and, in response, the panel identified the opportunity to provide year-round green space and recreation within Uptown that would be well-connected to the surrounding neighborhoods. This addition would make Uptown a more family-friendly environment, for both residents and visitors, and create a long-term redevelopment opportunity which could provide additional district parking capacity.

Near-term strategies:

- Begin discussions regarding potential long-term reconfiguration and public-private development on the western portion of the Lunds & Byerly’s block.

Long-term strategies:

- Maintain the grocery store and other commercial space in any subsequent redevelopment plans.
- Create a year-round urban park and playground, which would restore public pedestrian access along the Holmes Avenue corridor and help activate the new development.
- Explore partnerships with play structure manufacturers to create a unique, colorful, and iconic indoor-outdoor playground.

Form a District Parking Strategy

Across stakeholder groups, the panel heard how shifts in parking availability and complimentary parking in competing districts

have impacted Uptown. Garages remain underutilized (and require a fee), on-street parking has been replaced by bus lanes, and retail patrons still expect to park in front of the businesses they are visiting.

Purchase the Seven Points garage. Given the significant importance of accessible and safe parking needed to draw people to Uptown, the panel recommends that the City purchase the parking garage adjacent to the Seven Points Mall on the east. The responsibilities of the long-term operation of the garage and security would shift to a new improvement district formed to serve the area (see page 34 for details on the potential new district).

Near-term strategies:

- Parking would be provided free of charge in the near term to make Uptown easier to access and more competitive with other popular walkable districts in the region.
- Improved wayfinding could help drivers find the garages, and additional marketing efforts could encourage visitors to park once and walk everywhere in Uptown.
- Motorists need to be able to see the garage from the street, and improved visual connections between Hennepin and the garage are needed.

The Streets
Connect Lake and Lagoon

The panel recognized the need to improve safety and livability along major roads by reducing excessive speed and noise while retaining vehicular access. This focus would encourage residents and

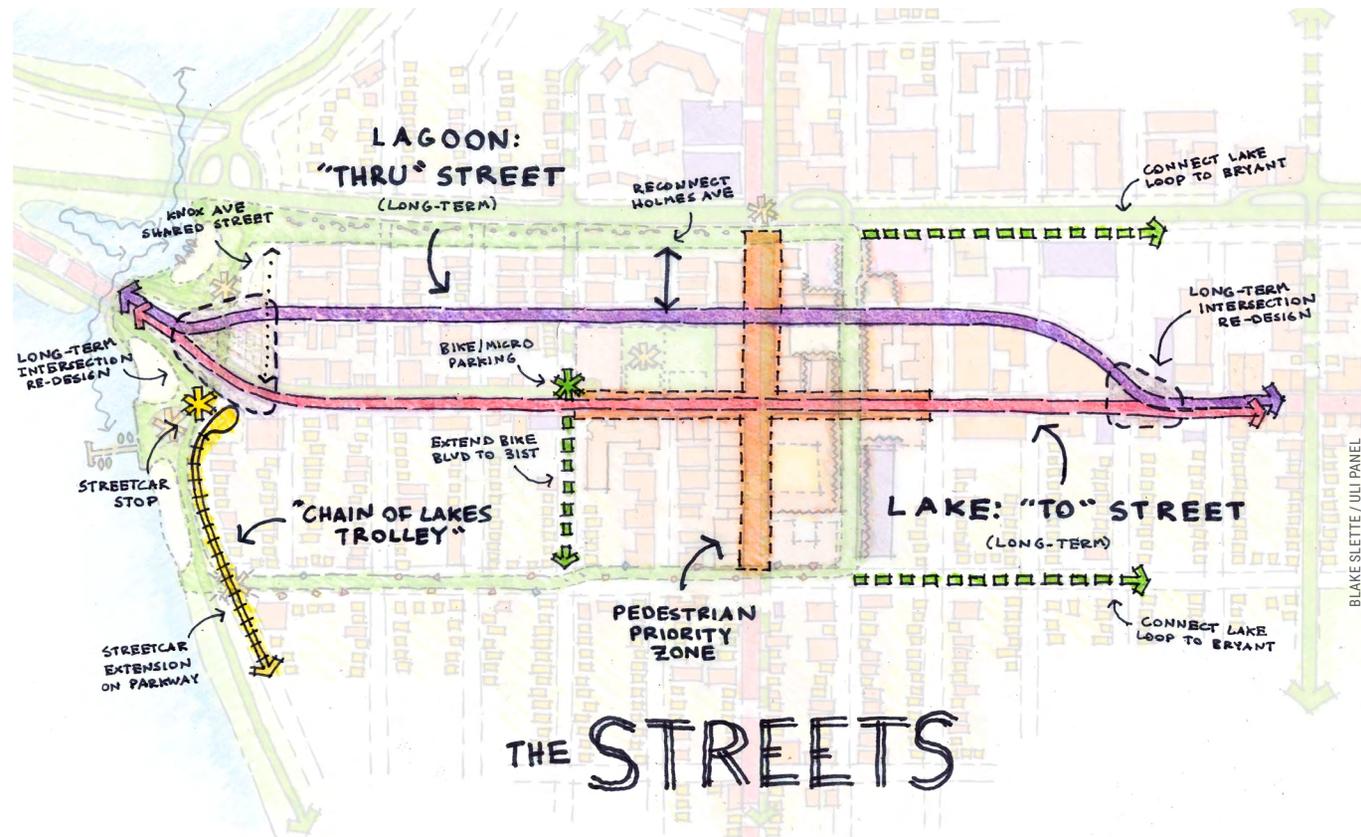
visitors to walk throughout the district and leave their vehicles behind. Following the lengthy closure of Hennepin during recent construction improvements, it will be critical to avoid significant roadway disturbances through any construction processes and preserve convenient access to businesses throughout the work.

Near-term strategies:

- Use additional low-cost, low-disruption traffic-calming improvements along Lake Street.

Long-term strategies:

- Re-stripe Lake Street and Lagoon Avenue as distinct “To” and “Thru” streets, respectively. Local business traffic and transit should be directed to Lake Street, and two-way regional traffic should be directed to Lagoon Avenue.
- Reconfigure the intersections of Lake and Lagoon at Bde Maka Ska Parkway and Knox Avenue and Dupont Avenue South while keeping either Lake or Lagoon open to through traffic.



The panel’s vision for transportation in the district follows the Lake Loop and incorporates new connections between key assets and new priority zones for pedestrians.

- Move two-directional BRT lanes and stations to Lake Street.
- Add street trees along Lake Street.

Create a Pedestrian Priority Zone

Uptown was designed with walkability in mind, yet the speed of passing vehicles and sidewalk experience detracts from the pleasure of walking the district. A pedestrian priority zone would begin to create a more walkable district. This dedicated one-block zone could start at the intersection of Lake and Hennepin and would prioritize walking spaces over biking, driving, and parking. While this is a longer-term strategy, with sufficient progress on the Lake Loop, the zone could expand with the removal of the Hennepin Avenue bikeway between the Mall and Lake Street to create safer space for pedestrians.

Park Bikes and Micro-Mobility

To encourage additional bike and micro-mobility use, visible and adequate quantities of bike and micro-mobility parking and wayfinding should be installed at key locations, such as the terminus of the bikeway at the corner of Lake and Humboldt and at the intersections along the Lake Loop. Completing the bike boulevard along Humboldt Avenue between Lake and 31st would also encourage more biking in the district and could help reduce vehicular trips.

Reconnect Holmes Avenue

In pursuit of a more connected district, Holmes Avenue should reconnect between the Mall and Lagoon Avenue for pedestrians at a minimum. This effort will require working with landowners along the short route and should begin with a pedestrian path at a minimum or, should the community and landowners be supportive, a shared street could more effectively connect Lagoon and the Mall.

Improve Knox Avenue

Knox Avenue could provide a welcome pedestrian and bicycling connection between 31st Street and Lake Street. The terminus of West 31st Street at the Parkway makes accessing the lakefront difficult. A short stretch along Knox Avenue leads to Lake Street, which features much safer and easier access to the lake for those walking, biking, or rolling. The street would benefit from the addition of dedicated bike lanes in addition to the current sidewalks.

Extend the Chain of Lakes Trolley

The heritage Como-Harriet Streetcar is a district resource that could be leveraged further in the long term by extending it northward along Bde Maka Ska Parkway to the Bde Maka Ska pavilion. This “Chain of Lakes Trolley” would bring the historic streetcar back to Uptown while providing a universally-accessible and all-ages form of



The Como-Harriet Streetcar is operational in the area but does not extend into Uptown.

recreation and leisure transportation along the lakefront between Uptown and Linden Hills.

Connect to Bryant Avenue

Improving non-vehicular connections from Uptown to the east is important. Improving biking, walking, and rolling connections along 29th and 31st streets between the Uptown Alley and the Bryant Avenue Bikeway would assist in better connecting the Lake Loop to neighborhoods to the east.



Capacity and Communications

It is clear that Uptown needs a new narrative to help reshape how the public views the district. At present, there is no impactful public-facing plan or message for Uptown, and the primary messages circulating in the general public relate to safety concerns and problems with crime.

Uptown needs a clear marketing, branding, and communications strategy that is future-forward and focused on a new vision for Uptown. Rather than relying on the Uptown of previous decades, public messaging could feature clear narratives about all that Uptown has to offer, segmented for each user group, including shoppers, recreationalists, families, and nightlife enthusiasts. The marketing and communications strategy should focus on what is working well in the district and share the stories of the various families and friends who love Uptown. The district's public safety plan and related efforts can under-gird the messaging but not be the primary focus. The messaging work will require staffing and leadership that can act with agency and urgency, supported by the capital necessary to make change.

Goals and measures of success. The panel outlined the following attributes that can help district leadership, business owners and operators, and residents identify progress toward a new narrative.

- Changes should be seen in the way people perceive Uptown's experiences, shifting from scarcity and lack of safety to positive energy and vibrancy. Success will be

found when narratives center Uptown as a safe place to live, work, and play, and as a magnet for people from all walks of life.

- Measurements could include the percentage of visitors who are not adult males and tools like [Critical Mention](#) can help track public perceptions of Uptown in the media and in social spaces.
- Another measure of success is an increase in foot traffic, including those coming to shop, dine, and play.
- It is also anticipated that there will be spikes and maintained improvements in retail sales and building and space occupancies.
- Year-round activity and events will take place, and positive media coverage of those events, as well as district businesses, activities, and the Uptown vibe, will flow.
- New amenities will be created to drive new and renewed interest in Uptown.

Capacity Building

Near term. Within the next 12 months, the panel recommended that the City and district leadership pursue the following actions.

- **Establish a new organization to lead the work and convene stakeholders.** The passion business owners, operators, and residents feel for Uptown needs to be organized and channeled. A new operational entity or association, perhaps managed and led by a neighborhood

improvement district, should step into the leadership gap and take on this work.

- **Address public safety.** Improvements across the district will struggle if public safety is not first improved. A plan should be put in place in collaboration with district stakeholders that will guide the work and support partnerships with the police, social service agencies, and related organizations. A District communication strategy should provide stakeholders with updates, including improvements, milestones, and remaining challenges. Resources will be needed to execute the plan and maintain the enhanced environment.
- **Create a branding plan.** Working with stakeholders from across the community, a branding exercise, led by a professional firm, can bring people together to tell the story of Uptown and chart a re-imagined path forward. The product should be a cohesive branding strategy that the neighborhood improvement district and the businesses and organizations that call Uptown home can leverage to market their own businesses, events, and the broader Uptown experience.
- **Re-imagine the iconic sign.** The iconic Calhoun Square sign atop the building at the corner of Hennepin and W Lake Street (the Seven Points sign) is ready for a new life. With some energy and creativity, the sign can again direct people to the heart of Uptown.

- **Hire a marketing manager, contractor, or firm.** Dedicated staff focused on Uptown marketing efforts should be engaged within the coming year. This person or firm would manage and update the Uptown’s online presence, social channels, email newsletter, and other marketing efforts. This person can also implement a new wayfinding program, created by an outside firm, across the district.
- **Host interim programming.** There are a number of opportunities to host events throughout the year, to draw surrounding residents and people from across Minneapolis into the Uptown streets. A transit-oriented music festival along the E-Line (“Entertainment Line”) could feature local artists and inspire young people to ride transit. Events celebrating or themed around Halloween, Christmas, and even World Lake Day (August 27) can bring people out to meet, mingle, eat, and shop—all of which will help to activate the district. The City is also encouraged to expand the types of activities that do not need to get temporary use permits.
- **Prepare for Uptown 2029.** In just a few years, the namesake Uptown Theater will celebrate its anniversary, representing an unofficial “100th birthday” of the Uptown name. Planning should begin soon to highlight and celebrate this milestone anniversary.

Long term. Within the next few years, looking a little further out, the panel recommended a number of other marketing and branding

initiatives that would further support the growth and success of Uptown and its businesses.

- **Host signature events and annual festivals.** Regular events and annual festivals keep people coming back for experiences they love and can attract new people each year. Big events can boost district visibility, while regular events more often produce a more reliable and welcome return on vendors’ investments.
- **Expand the marketing effort.** A new website that more fully reflects the Uptown experience should be launched, and full-time marketing staff should be hired to manage the site, a digital app, and a new digital passport program that can elevate the visibility of the district’s businesses.



This Nike Experience store in Dallas, Texas, encourages shoppers to customize their sneakers during their purchase.

A New Approach to Retail

Uptown has such a strong retail history, and many of its spaces are still set up for retail trade. At the time of this study, however, many of the retail spaces in Uptown were overly large, difficult to subdivide, and generally not well aligned with the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs, the very people who are likely needed to fuel future growth in Uptown’s commercial corridors.

The changing landscape of brick-and-mortar retail operations will impact how the future commercial environment evolves in Uptown, and designers and creative thinkers are needed to envision how the spaces in Uptown can work better for smaller operators.

The panelists noted that the future of retail in Uptown could leverage a national trend wherein retail returns to its roots of making and selling goods in the same place. This shift also supports a hyper-local supply chain and does not rely on international suppliers and fabricators. This emerging pattern supports the shift in retailing to more experiential retail and could also make use of some of the larger retail spaces for production functions. This trend uses a co-creation model that invites shoppers to work directly with the fabricators in the store, designing and creating an item that is unique to them.

Uptown has a unique opportunity to recapture its robust retail legacy and its reputation for being one-of-a-kind by embracing this shift to experiential retail.

Emerging Business Development

Uptown has a reputation and history of being distinctive and unique. The panel recommends building on those qualities by incubating makers, creators, fashion designers, and craftspeople and creating opportunities to match these makers with emerging online markets, Uptown audiences, and more.

The panel recommends a business and economic development strategy for Uptown include the following elements:

- **Connect and focus locally.** With a focus on incubating products and services that support local needs, Uptown businesses can pursue and secure a loyal local following and then expand. People are passionate about Uptown and likely to align their purchases with that passion.
- **Prioritize a mixture of pursuits.** Allowing the same space to host the making, exhibiting, selling, and distributing of goods can prove efficient for the businesses and compelling for the shoppers. The City can assist this pursuit by simplifying the business approval processes.
- **Cluster to support diverse and distinct offerings.** Uptown's unique vibe has grown authentically over the years. By clustering complementary businesses, the district can provide additional incentive for shoppers to go out of their way for a unique item that can only be found in Uptown.

- **Match building stock to uses.** The district's diversity of spaces can align with a wide variety of potential businesses and users. Mixing and matching uses across available properties may take more time than a one-size-fits-all approach, but can better serve the business operator and help the shopper feel like the space just "fits."

Near term. The following actions should be pursued in the coming year to support more business and economic development in Uptown.

- **Install wayfinding to connect to Uptown.** Additional wayfinding and signage should be installed around the district to better connect lake visitors, Greenway users,

and other visitors with Uptown and its amenities.

- **Create and curate smaller, more diverse commercial sites and events.** The district's small and emerging businesses, including emerging makers and artists, would benefit from smaller spaces with lower lease rates and events with lower entry fees. The City's Vibrant Storefront program is doing a great job of finding these spaces and matching landlords to artist tenants. Expanding this program or replicating it to also include other businesses could also be helpful.
- **Activate empty spaces with incubators.** Working with brokers and property owners, the City could fashion a program



With some creative partitions and furniture staging, these vacant storefronts in Melbourne, Australia, transform into vibrant shops.

MARCUS WESTBURY

to borrow empty spaces to incubate small businesses on a short-term basis, bringing activity to the building and providing commercial space to new entrepreneurs.

- **Relaunch the Uptown narrative.** Working with the NID's chosen branding firm, Uptown's new narrative and marketing campaign should launch. This could coincide with streets reopening and could also include events that encourage more BRT ridership, such as a transit-oriented event for young adults.
- **Identify process improvements for obtaining business permits.** Opening a new business can be challenging; navigating the City's business permitting process should not add to that stress. The City is encouraged to review the processes to identify what can be streamlined or bypassed, and thought should be given to providing applicants with assistance in navigating those processes.
- **Identify financing opportunities.** New and existing Uptown businesses may need financing support at various stages of their business lifecycle. Helping operators and entrepreneurs identify grants, philanthropic partnerships, micro-finance options, and even opportunities to leverage sweat equity or trade can prove helpful.
- **Improve through new capacity and additional support.** The safety and security of Uptown remains important

to all, including businesses that rely on a safe environment for patrons walking to or exiting a store. Additional support services and greater accountability measures can support improvements in safety across the entire district.

Long term. In the longer term, the following factors can continue to support ongoing business development in the district.

- **Lower the barriers to entry.** By working with the City, property owners, and philanthropic partners, district leadership can help identify opportunities to lower the barriers to entry for new businesses seeking to locate in Uptown.
- **Encourage reconfiguring spaces.** District leadership and the City are also encouraged to work with property owners to develop and adapt spaces for business incubation (e.g., providing smaller footprints, curating retail communities).
- **Streamline approvals.** Building on the earlier process improvements for business permitting, the City is encouraged to further simplify governance measures for low-risk projects.
- **Design adaptive commercial buildings.** In an ever-changing retail landscape, property owners and the City should consider all opportunities to build adaptability into current and new commercial spaces. As one panelist noted, "we can't predict the future." Space flexibility will be increasingly important.

- **Develop maker messaging.** A business development approach that embraces messages like "Things Start Here" and "Start Uptown" can easily align with the reputation Uptown has built over the decades while also opening the door to a re-envisioned and energized Uptown that can continue to draw creative and industrious people to this unique district.





Commercial Property Considerations

The commercial property and business owners across Uptown have traveled a rocky road. The one-two punch of local retailers challenged by national retail chains, who then left the district, has left property owners wondering what may be next. The condition of the social environment in Uptown, and specifically challenges with crime and homelessness, is exacerbating the basic business challenges district owners face.

As the panel stressed earlier, the urban fabric of Uptown is strong. The business climate and prospects for commercial property owners, however, remain weak and in need of immediate attention.

Now. The following actions should be taken now to better support the commercial property owners and operators who continue to work every day to help Uptown thrive.

- **Address crime and homelessness.** The City should convene a coalition of experts—social workers, chemical dependency specialists, and representatives of all of the public safety jurisdictions—to care for the unhoused and address the problem of public safety in Uptown. A new neighborhood safety center or social service center that would operate 24 hours a day and seven days a week could provide important lasting support for people moving through the area and provide property owners with clear resources when encouraging individuals to seek assistance when needed. It will be important to identify and understand all the metrics associated

with crime in Uptown, tracking crimes from petty to major, to better understand the problems, measure and identify success and improvement, and inform the narrative authentically when security is measurably improved.

Near term. Within the coming year, the panel recommends the following actions and initiatives.

- **Create a new improvement district.** Stakeholders should come together to create a specific improvement district and/or a revitalized Uptown Association to represent the collective interests of the district and more actively fund improvements and activities that support the district's commercial success.
 - **Elevate needed City services.** District leaders (i.e., the improvement district) should develop a list of services needed in the district and detail the expectations of what it looks like for a city to provide these services above and beyond what is typically provided. Working together, the City and the improvement district can then create strategies for the City to accomplish those objectives.
 - **Create a district parking strategy.** The existing parking resources in the district are underutilized. With a shared parking strategy and City resources (i.e., City ownership of the Seven Points garage), the public can be more effectively directed to these resources, which should be improved with enhanced lighting and
- **More actively address illegal behavior.** The open drug use in the district is alarming to the general public and should be stopped. Reducing drug use can also help curb other unwanted behaviors that may occur when people are influenced by mind-altering substances.
 - **Launch a public relations campaign.** Once the area is safe (as identified by clear metrics), create a campaign to help improve public perceptions of Uptown.
 - **Provide incentives to attract businesses.** Working with the improvement district, the City is encouraged to develop an incentive or grant opportunity that could entice and support a mix of thriving hospitality, retail, and experiential businesses in Uptown.
 - **Engage the greater Twin Cities community.** Uptown is for everyone in the region, not just the people in the surrounding residential streets. This regional asset should have a regional engagement approach that invites everyone to join in the revitalization effort and come enjoy Uptown.
 - **Cluster businesses.** As noted in the previous section, clustering complementary businesses can support broader activation efforts. Ideally, these businesses would co-locate and open at the same time to create an early buzz and support ongoing impactful experiences for people returning to the district.

Long term. Over the next few years, the district should seek to provide the following support to area commercial property owners.

- **Ensure accessible parking.** Vehicular parking in Uptown should eventually be well-known, abundant, affordable, safe, and visible. It is important to make it easy for drivers to navigate to parking resources and leave their cars behind while they walk between Uptown destinations.
- **Improve the connections to the lakes.** The district would benefit from amenities or wayfinding that would create a more visible and engaging connection to the lakes, allowing and encouraging visitors to explore all of the benefits—including the natural beauty—of Uptown and encouraging lake visitors to explore the commercial district.
- **Reconfigure medians.** Through the course of transit and pedestrian safety

improvements, certain streets no longer allow vehicles to make left turns into businesses. Efforts should be taken to remove or cut into these concrete medians to provide vehicular access to the businesses that line the street.

- **Support solutions for property expenses.** Property owners in Uptown continue to face taxes and insurance premiums at rates commensurate with a thriving business district. Until such time that the district is again truly thriving, the City is encouraged to explore opportunities to support commercial property owners with access to affordable insurance, tax deferral, and other measures that will help reduce property expenses.
- **Eliminate competitive disadvantages with adjacent municipalities.** There are a number of policy issues at play in the city of Minneapolis that lessen its businesses' ability to compete with those

in neighboring jurisdictions. Addressing items like wage parity with adjacent cities, eliminating the labor standards board, levying competitive/reasonable sales taxes, and aligning property taxes with a tenant's ability to thrive can each help level the playing field with Minneapolis's competitors.

- **Support state-level policies that help local businesses and entrepreneurship.** There are also actions the improvement district can take to support state-level actions that can help businesses thrive in Uptown. Allowing for a tip credit or tip pool, more affordable paid family leave policies, policies that follow Federal Trade Commission rulings on service charges, making all shoplifting illegal, and prosecuting all levels of shoplifting would help business owners operating in Uptown and across the city better manage their operations and make a living.





Funding and Financing Tools

The improvements and initiatives proposed by the panel will require revised or new policies, additional funding, and financing mechanisms to address the existing market failures in Uptown.

Broadly, the panel pointed to three primary tools that can equip the district with the leadership, resources, and structure needed.

Create an Uptown Tax Increment Finance District (TIF). A TIF focused on Uptown can provide critical financial support for property owner investments in obsolete buildings that do not meet the needs of current commercial tenants. Many of these property owners are facing an impossible scenario where they need to make costly improvements to retrofit buildings to meet the needs of a changing market, yet rents are not at a level to allow the property owners to recover those costs or facilitate traditional lending pursuits. A TIF could create funding streams that could support these critical investments.

Form a Neighborhood Improvement District. As noted in earlier sections, a new improvement district is needed for Uptown, and the panel recommends one that focuses on the needs of Uptown, supports the local businesses, and provides services beyond what is available through the special services district. For Uptown, the panel recommends a neighborhood improvement district. A NID has the powers of a business improvement district and special services district, but can expand its purview to also include significant clean and safe operations and long-term brand building for Uptown.

Identify and leverage all potential economic development tools. Uptown is in an all-hands-on-deck moment, and all possible financial tools should be put to work in order to support entrepreneurship and commercial space tenancing across the district's streetscapes. Professional economic development consulting services may be needed to explore the options and recommend the best path(s) forward.

Neighborhood Improvement District

A new neighborhood improvement district can help to fill the gaps in critical day-to-day operations across Uptown. The district needs focused attention, beyond what the City is able to provide, in order to make the area feel safe, welcoming, and exciting again.

A neighborhood improvement district can provide a greater scope of services and activities than what is currently available to Uptown. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the NID would provide the district with a new operating model that expands the geographic boundary currently served by the SSD and could include residential properties. The NID would also be able to partner with civic and corporate entities to deepen its resources and potential impact.

A NID receives its operating revenue through an additional tax levied on the properties in its defined geography as well as through sponsorship or partner contributions. The NID would be led by a Governing Board

consisting of those who pay into the NID and include property owners, business owners, and residents.

For Uptown, the panel envisions the NID providing the following services:

Phase one. Operations of the improvement district will take time to ramp up. Early phases should prioritize making the neighborhood clean and safe.

- **Manage and improve trash and snow removal.** Daily attention to the appearance and navigability of the streetscape will help ensure that the district remains inviting and walkable. It may be possible to use existing contractor funding for snow and litter removal to fund clean and safe ambassadors who could manage this work more actively in house.
- **Provide Clean and Safe Ambassadors.** The addition of NID ambassadors to the district can bring an important personal presence to the area. The ambassadors would be tasked with providing directions to visitors, spotting potential issues, and helping to ensure that the area remains clean. The NID could use a RFP to explore the potential for this type of shift in service provision.
- **Provide safety through consistent and compassionate accountability.** The presence of the NID ambassadors can support safety in the district. They can also serve as important connectors to public safety offices, social workers, and the police should the need arise.

- **Lead and coordinate services and initiatives.** Uptown encompasses a broad geography. The services currently available in the area and the additional services proposed by the panel will require central coordination and knowledgeable leadership. The NID should take the lead in coordinating the various business entities, public safety contacts, and social services organizations working across the district.

Phase two. With the fundamentals in place, the NID can begin to focus on a new narrative and raising the visibility of the district.

- **Create and execute a new brand identity, marketing campaign, and wayfinding.** The panel’s recommended marketing efforts, built on a foundation of authentic and community-informed branding, should be led and coordinated by the NID. The NID should also lead and coordinate the wayfinding in the district, which would leverage Uptown’s brand identity.
- **Program events.** While individual businesses and organizations are still welcome and encouraged to host events, district-wide and special events should be led and coordinated by the NID. This central organization can help ensure that the efforts support the district and its businesses and are produced in a manner that meets City requirements and is considerate of residential neighbors.

Phase three. In the longer term, the NID can expand its programming and consider expanding its geography.

- **Include the Greenway and Mall.** In the longer term, the NID geography could be expanded to include the Midtown Greenway and the Mall. These are two important amenities for the district and surrounding neighborhoods and are worthy of additional attention and support.
- **Expand programming.** Building on the events and festivals of the early days, the NID can expand the scope of its events to further their reach and continue to elevate the visibility of the district and its appeal as a vibrant, energetic, and thriving place to spend time and money.

The City and district leadership are also encouraged to explore the potential expansion of existing programs to support Uptown businesses or replicate successful programs from other communities.

- **Expand Vibrant Storefronts.** The successful City of Minneapolis Vibrant Storefronts program is a critical connector of landlords and tenants and is currently focused on the arts community. Expanding that program to include other industries that align with the goals for Uptown could prove powerful.
- **Bring a program to Uptown that functions like Motor City Match.** This Detroit program supports emerging entrepreneurs through business coaching and funding. Deploying focused resources to grow the business community in Uptown organically could be a good investment in the future success of the district.

Motor City Match

[Motor City Match](#) is a Detroit-based program that supports entrepreneurs through funding, resources, and guidance to launch and grow small businesses. The program provides the following support and services:

Guidance from idea to opening. Through four tracks—Plan, Develop, Design, and Cash—entrepreneurs and new business owners are supported at every stage, from writing a business plan to securing a location to designing a space and accessing grant funding.

Financial and technical support. The program awards grants (up to \$100,000) and connects entrepreneurs with business services like legal aid, marketing, and architectural design to turn ideas into brick-and-mortar storefronts.

Commercial space connections. The program connects businesses with vacant commercial spaces by offering property listings, hosting open houses, and facilitating direct engagement with building owners.

Inclusive economic growth. Motor City Match prioritizes Detroit-based, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses, helping revitalize neighborhoods and create local jobs across the city.

Next Steps

The panel outlined a wide variety of recommendations that can help Uptown regain its footing in the market. The district is rich in resources, from the walkable design of the streets and buildings to the property and business owners who continue their steadfast pursuit of a thriving Uptown, to the

residents and visitors who continue to be attracted to and enchanted by all the district has to offer.

The seismic shift in the retail foundation of the district has left everyone wondering what the future might hold for this important

Minneapolis neighborhood. Working together, looking forward while respecting the past, residents, business owners and operators, property owners and managers, and City leaders and staff can begin the steady march toward the next iteration of Uptown.

	Start Monday	Near term (1-3 Years)	Long term (3+ Years)
Governance and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a Neighborhood Improvement District to lead and coordinate efforts in the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a tax increment financing district Identify all possible economic development tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support solutions for property expenses Even the playing field and support policies that help local businesses
Neighborhood Improvement District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue RFP for clean and safe services (e.g., trash and snow removal) to gauge cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage and improve trash removal Provide Clean and Safe Ambassadors Provide safety through accountability Lead and execute new branding and programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand programming Expand footprint to include the Greenway and Mall
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase accountability for negative behaviors Prosecute illegal behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene safety, business and social service entities to coordinate safety and quality of life issues and responses Find resources to transition unhoused population to stable housing 	
Public Realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a watch-party space in the Seven Points lot Begin planning Lake Loop elements Improve wayfinding to parking garage(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add an E-Line BRT stop at Seven Points Connect the Mall at the Transit Center Create micro-mobility hubs and parking Improve Uptown Alley and Knox Avenue connections Purchase and improve connections to the Seven Points garage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enact social district boundaries Reconnect Holmes Avenue Create a pedestrian priority zone Extend the lakefront streetcar Improve pedestrian connections to the lake
Marketing and Events		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a branding plan and relaunch the Uptown narrative Launch a public relations campaign Install wayfinding to connect to Uptown Reimagine the Seven Points sign Hire a marketing manager Host interim programming Engage the greater Twin Cities community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and implement Uptown 2029 Host signature events Expand marketing
Business Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch conversations with property owners exploring activating empty spaces with incubators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify process improvements for business permits Identify financing opportunities Provide incentives to attract businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower barriers to entry for new businesses Facilitate space reconfiguration and adaptive design for new buildings Streamline approvals Develop maker messaging
Commercial Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cluster businesses Curate smaller spaces, match space to uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate needed City services Create a district parking strategy Consider tax deferral for those struggling with vacancies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure parking is accessible (reconfigure/remove medians) Improve connections to lakes



Appendix: District Comparison

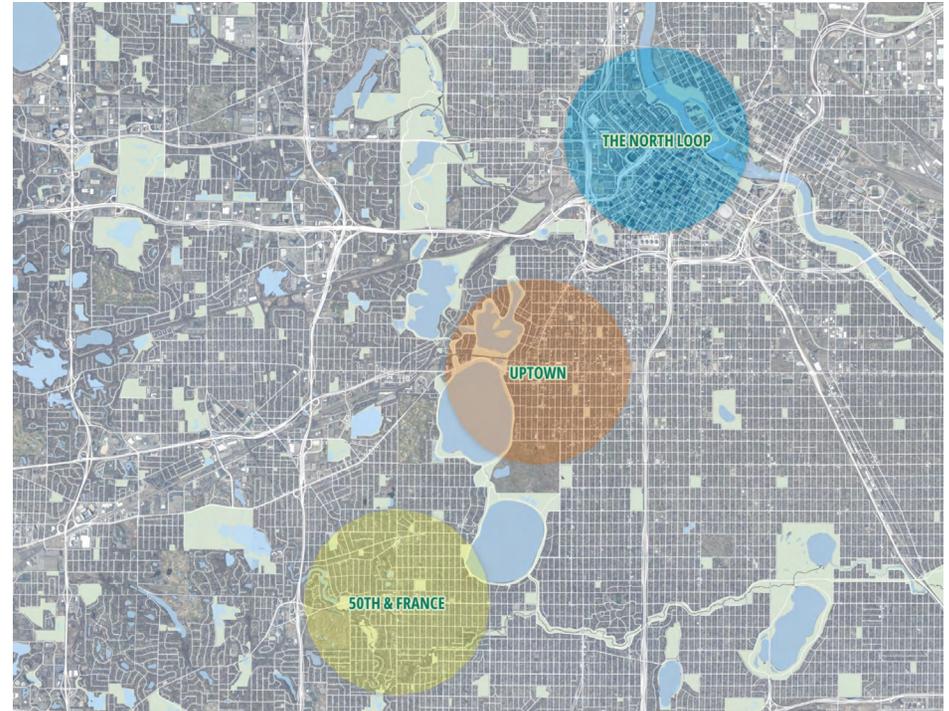
The information provided below may help inform discussions regarding a potential new business improvement district for Uptown. The table lists the populations of comparable walkable business districts and notes related retail expenditures. With the exception of

the North Loop, which includes all of the downtown office buildings, Uptown had the highest retail expenditures in 2025. Assuming these trends continue, this type of retail spending would positively impact a funding stream created by and for a BID in Uptown.

District Comparison

Population, Income, Businesses, and Consumer Spending

Location (1 mile radius)	Uptown	The North Loop	50th & France
2025 Total Population	34,764	32,808	18,102
2025 Total Daytime Population	23,799	150,904	15,282
2025 Median Household Income	\$76,918	\$101,579	\$196,027
2025 Total Households	19,516	19,913	6,864
2025 Total Housing Units	20,938	23,085	7,382
2025 Total Businesses (NAICS)	1,295	4,970	602
2025 Annual Budget Expenditures	\$1,893,137,370	\$2,347,874,568	\$1,487,845,019
2025 Retail Goods	\$573,389,689	\$709,418,141	\$473,034,912
2030 Food at Home	\$159,834,256	\$213,735,028	\$114,910,489
2025 Food Away from Home	\$85,049,406	\$105,407,417	\$61,865,366





About the Panel



John Breitinger

**Panel Co-Chair
Practice Leader
Cushman & Wakefield**



John Breitinger is a seasoned real estate professional with 40 years of experience in all aspects of real estate investment and development. He has a particular passion for the ways that the built environment supports investors, occupiers, and communities. He understands the special challenges of keeping real estate assets aligned with the changing needs of these stakeholders. His career has spanned multiple market cycles. He believes that change creates opportunity. He is a strategic thinker and a strong leader who enjoys building teams to work across disciplines to deliver value to diverse stakeholders.

John currently oversees Cushman & Wakefield's Minnesota-based Real Estate Development Advisory practice, which delivers solutions to maximize the value of real estate assets that are out of sync with operating or investment strategies and in need of (re)development or repositioning. The team specializes in working with property owners and communities who are not in the real estate business to help them harvest stranded value using a disciplined approach focused on simplifying the unique challenges of the development process. Since its inception, this team has contributed to more than \$2.5 billion in development projects.

Max Musicant

**Panel Co-Chair
Founder & Principal
The Musicant Group**



As Principal, Max leads the placemaking practice of The Musicant Group.

Under his leadership, the firm has pioneered a holistic and organic approach to the creation of place that integrates design, events, and management systems all through the lens of the user experience. Since its founding, the firm has demonstrated that community and commercial interests all benefit from more humane, inviting, and lively places for people.

He received an M.B.A. from the Yale School of Management and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

Marcello Cabezas

**Award winning
placemaking leader,
experience producer,
city builder and
movement maker**



Marcello Cabezas is an award-winning placemaking and real estate innovator who shapes how cities and brands cultivate belonging, economic vitality, and vibrant destinations through experience. A strategic connector across hospitality, civic engagement, and urban development, he has contributed to landmark Toronto projects including RendezViews, WinterViews, stackt market, The Drake Hotel, and various interim use/master amenity and programming plans. Most recently, Marcello served on the Toronto Organizing Committee for the 2025 Global Placemaking Summit and has represented Canada internationally in Dubai and Rotterdam, presenting on The Business Case for Lifestyle Placemaking.

Marcello's work has earned distinction through the Toronto Urban Design Award for Best Large Space, Best Placemaking of Global Cities (The Place Economy, Australia), Street Art Cities Best Outdoor Mural (Sweden), the Bright Light Innovation Award (Toronto Star), the Arnold Edinborough Award, and the Grey Goose Notable Citation.

Widely recognized as a "connector" and a "think big and do big type practitioner," Marcello turns visionary ideas into measurable impact. For more, visit marcellocabezas.com (password: toronto).

Lisa Christianson

Senior Vice President
Colliers



Lisa Christianson is a seasoned commercial real estate broker, community builder, and podcaster. In January 2025, she sold her successful brokerage firm, Christianson & Company Commercial Real Estate Services, to Colliers, where she now serves as Senior Vice President. Licensed in both Minnesota and Florida, Lisa represents tenants and property owners nationwide in buying, selling, and leasing retail, office, industrial, and multifamily properties.

A recognized specialist in retail properties, Lisa helps investors align their real estate holdings with their broader life goals. She is especially passionate about guiding clients through transitions—from exiting management-intensive properties and restructuring partnerships to creating estate strategies that protect both assets and family harmony for generations to come.

Lisa also hosts the podcast *People and Places and How We Use Spaces*, sharing inspiring stories of business, community, and the ways people shape the environments around them.

Thomas Fisher

Professor of
Architecture
University of Minnesota



Thomas Fisher is a professor in the School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Design (ALI), director of the Minnesota Design Center (MDC), and the former dean of the College of Design (CDES). He is one of the most published authors about architecture in the U.S., having written a dozen books, over 80 book chapters, and over 640 articles. He won the national Topaz Medallion in Excellence in Architectural Education in 2025 and has lectured extensively at universities around the world.

Dayna Frank

President & CEO
First Avenue
Productions



Dayna Frank is President and CEO of First Avenue Productions. Originally founded in 1970, First Avenue promotes over 1,200 shows annually and owns and operates the Fine Line, Turf Club, Palace Theatre, and Fitzgerald Theater, as well as the First Avenue Mainroom & 7th St Entry.

Dayna is co-founder and a Board Member of the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA), who rallied music lovers and lobbied Congress, securing \$16.25 billion dollars to Save Our Stages. Dayna is a 2018 Henry Crown Fellow at the Aspen Institute, Rolling Stone Future 25 (2021), Billboard Women in Music Top Executive, pickleball champion, and firm believer in community building through live music. She lives in Minneapolis with her wife and two sons.

Erin Lonoff
Principal
HR&A Advisors



Working at the intersection of the public and private sectors, Erin leverages her experience with real estate and public policy to contribute to the vitality of cities and the public realm. Her work includes leveraging transit plans for inclusive economic growth and dense, resilient development, creating large-scale, long-range master plans that will have critical economic and fiscal benefits for communities, and developing funding, financing, and governance strategies for open spaces and parks.

Recent work includes supporting UW-Madison’s West Campus Innovation District Plan, leading the financial analysis and guiding the overall vision and partnership strategy on behalf of the university; leading the master planning and real estate strategy, and managing the design and engineering teams for the development a 600-acre site in Greenville, SC; managing the City of Saint Paul’s Anti-Displacement and Community Wealth Building Plan; and developing economic impact analyses on behalf of developers seeking public-private partnerships and entitlements for unprecedented development projects.

Erin holds a Master in City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Carleton College.

Blake Slette
Landscape & Urban
Designer
Damon Farber



Blake is a lifelong resident of the Twin Cities working as a landscape and urban designer with Damon Farber Landscape Architects. He completed his Master of Urban & Regional Planning and Master of Landscape Architecture degrees at the University of Minnesota with specializations in Heritage Studies & Public History and Ecological Restoration. He is driven by a sense of respect for his surroundings and a desire to help deepen our collective relationships to the places we live.

In his work, Blake focuses on communication through learning and storytelling. He aims to recognize and leverage the inherent connections between the past, present, and potential futures of places as a foundational framework for shaping meaningful environments. His experience spans a range of methods and scales of culturally rooted landscape and urban design work, including conceptual vision planning, detailed landscape design, on-the-ground community engagement, and cultural landscape research.

Howard Paster
Owner
Paster Properties



Howard joined Paster in 2000 and worked alongside his father, Edward, until his passing in 2012. Howard is the third generation to lead the family real estate business with a focus on the commercial real estate industry. Howard continues Paster’s legacy of combining local knowledge, regional insight, local relationships and a broader national perspective. Howard currently spends his time leading a small and talented organization focused on strong asset management, real estate acquisition and real estate development.

Howard earned his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin- Madison, and post- college worked for Mid-America Asset Management Company in Chicago, IL where he focused on third party property management and leasing of grocery-anchored retail shopping centers throughout the Chicago metro area.

When not in the office, Howard spends time raising his five sons, attending many youth sporting events and occasionally getting a word in at the dinner table. He also enjoys cycling, tennis, and snowboarding.

Patty Wall
Founder & Owner
The Market at Malcolm
Yards



Patricia Wall is the visionary founder and owner of The Market at Malcolm Yards, a 19,000-square-foot food hall situated in the historic Harris Machinery building in Minneapolis's Prospect Park neighborhood. With a dual background in culinary arts—having studied at the Culinary Institute of America—and in real estate development, Patricia uniquely bridges food-service passion with place-making expertise.

Her approach to The Market at Malcolm Yards emphasizes chef-driven, fast-casual kitchens, a broad demographic of visitors, and creating an inclusive gathering space for the neighborhood and beyond. Patricia sees The Market as more than a collection of eateries — it anchors the wider mixed-use development of the adjacent Malcolm Yards site, which includes residential and commercial components. She believes in lowering barriers for emerging chefs by offering shorter-term lease structures and percentage-of-sales models, enabling culinary entrepreneurs to experiment with less risk.

Marcus Westbury
Consultant, Urbanist,
Social Innovator



Marcus Westbury is an Australian urbanist, social innovator, writer, and media maker working at the intersection of cities, culture, innovation, and creativity. Marcus was most recently the founding CEO of FB IDEAs, a non-profit organization responsible for supporting Innovation, Diversity, Experimentation and Activation across Fishermans Bend, Australia's largest urban renewal project in the heart of Melbourne.

From 2016 to 2021, Marcus led projects that have revitalized main streets, launched hundreds of creative and community projects in empty and abandoned buildings and reopened more than a hundred vacant shops and offices across Australia.

Marcus has been an advisor, consultant, and board member to local, state, and national governments. He is the author of the book *Creating Cities* and was the writer and presenter of several Australian TV series, a Westpac Foundation Social Change Fellow, and an Honorary Fellow of Monash University.