

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

# Cedar Rapids Iowa



**Urban Land  
Institute**

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**Foundation**

# Cedar Rapids Iowa

Strategies for the Downtown

June 1–4, 2009  
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

# About the Urban Land Institute

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**T**he mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and
- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 32,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians.

ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

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# About ULI Advisory Services

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The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

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

The agenda for a panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; hour-long interviews of key community representatives; and a day of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

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

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# Acknowledgments

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The panel would also like to thank the more than 40 stakeholders, citizens, business leaders, and community organizations that participated in this panel. With all of the priorities and work facing the Cedar Rapids community in the wake of the 2008 floods, these people were unsparing of their time and involvement.

Finally, ULI acknowledges the ULI Foundation, which provided the monetary support for this panel. On a regular basis, the ULI Foundation provides funds for panels to address communities in need because of natural and man-made disasters. The Foundation's dedication in providing funding reflects its mission of helping crisis-beleaguered communities and providing leadership in the sustainable use of land.

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# Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

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With a population of 128,000, Cedar Rapids is the second-largest city in Iowa and the center of commerce and other activity in eastern Iowa. Cedar Rapids is home to several large businesses, including Rockwell Collins, AEGON, Quaker Oats, Cargill, and General Mills. In addition, it is the county seat of Linn County, the administrative center of a larger metropolitan area of more than 255,000 people.

In the early days of June 2008, torrential rain and melting snow in the upper Midwest led to serious flooding for a large number of communities in Iowa. As a result, the estimated financial public assistance needs for the state of Iowa exceed \$1.1 billion, making the floods of 2008 the fifth-largest state disaster in U.S. history, behind Hurricane Katrina (Louisiana), the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina (Mississippi), and Hurricane Wilma (Florida).

The floodwaters of the Cedar River inundated Cedar Rapids. When the river crested on Friday, June 13, it extended well beyond the 500-year floodplain, covering more than ten square miles of the city. The water overtook neighborhoods that had never been considered susceptible to flooding. The river flowed through nearly every downtown business and most public buildings, displacing city and county services.

The city and the region immediately began a comprehensive flood recovery program involving thousands of individuals in government, the private sector, and the community. These recovery efforts continue today. The far-reaching recovery program includes specific initiatives for debris removal, building and occupancy permits, redevelopment incentives, regional infrastructure proposals, long-term flood mitigation options, coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies, river-side development standards, and reconstruction op-

The 2008 flood devastated the entire downtown.







Location map.

portunities. As one would expect, the flood recovery initiatives attempt to integrate past planning and redevelopment efforts for the downtown that had been underway when the flood hit. The panel was cognizant of the extraordinary work that the city had already completed as part of the 2007 Downtown Framework Plan entitled “Vision Cedar Rapids.”

## The Panel’s Assignment

ULI’s Advisory Services Program has a long history of providing panels for communities trying to recover

Regional map.



from natural and man-made disasters. Previous work includes panels in New Orleans, Louisiana (Hurricane Katrina); Grand Forks, North Dakota (flooding); Jackson, Tennessee (tornados); Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (Murrah Building bombing); and Minneapolis, Minnesota (bridge collapse). The ULI Foundation funded all of these panels. The Foundation supports ULI’s mission by providing an assured source of funding for ULI’s core research, education, and public service activities and for a variety of special incentives. The ULI Foundation generates funding for research, education, and public service programs that enhance communities in meaningful and visible ways through intelligent land use and development.

The ULI approach in Cedar Rapids was to provide a focused, strategic look at a specific portion of the city: the area in and around the U.S. Cellular Center in downtown. The city provided the panel with a series of questions regarding redevelopment and revitalization of the downtown core near the center, which included the following:

- How can the city attract the next-generation workforce to downtown?
- How can investing in a downtown act as a catalyst for housing?
- What uses will drive expanded development?
- What transportation and parking improvements will be necessary in a revitalized downtown?
- How can people be better attracted to downtown?
- What components of “branding” can be brought to bear on downtown?
- What should be done with the U.S. Cellular Center and its associated hotel?

## Summary of Recommendations

After an intense week of tours, presentations, interviews, and work sessions, the panel was able to identify the issues and formulate recommendations. The following report focuses on the strategies for marketing, development, and planning that will answer these questions. The panel has no doubt that the city has the will power and wherewithal to create a place enjoyed and used for many generations. As noted previously, earlier studies laid much of the



The ULI Advisory Services panel just prior to its presentation to the city.

groundwork for the panel’s recommendations. The city has clearly relied on those findings in recent decisions. The ULI panel validates and affirms much of the content in those earlier findings and recognizes the efforts of the city, its businesses, and the community as commendable first steps. The panel believes the city can go further by encouraging and implementing a variety of strategies and approaches that include the following:

- Recognizing that great downtowns require not only a plan with specific physical improvements but also patience to allow both market forces and government financial backing to create an environment that reduces private sector risk. Although the economy of 2009 is challenging, opportunities are available for those willing and able to act.
- Establishing and incentivizing new approaches to encourage a variety of housing in downtown to attract pent-up demand. The panel feels that the lack of residential product types in downtown limits expression of market preference.
- Retaining and remodeling the U.S. Cellular Center.
- Retaining and remodeling the Crowne Plaza Cedar Rapids–Five Seasons Hotel so that it acts as a true conference center hotel with highly amenitized conference space and excellent audiovisual capabilities, and purchase of the hotel by the city.
- Reimagining the arena, hotel, and conference center street presence on 1st Avenue.
- Establishing an iconic architectural focus in the remodeled U.S. Cellular Center at the terminus of 3rd Street.
- Planning for and nurturing a new arts, culture, and entertainment (ACE) district focused on the area between 4th Street and the Cedar River.
- Expanding downtown management and programming for events and activities.
- Improving the governance for downtown activities.

The vision that the panel suggests is to make a place that is the “There” for the city, the region, and eastern Iowa.

# Market Potential

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Cedar Rapids lies in the center of a scenic, agriculturally rich, and economically viable region. Since the city's inception, the core area of Cedar Rapids, now the downtown, has been the center of this region. Today, downtown retains the assets that make it the employment and cultural center of its region.

## Background

During the decades from the last half of the 20th century, while employment remained downtown, increasing decentralization of population into suburban areas led retail to leave downtown. As retail left, downtown was also "improved" by street widen-

An aerial view of downtown Cedar Rapids, including the City Hall and Courthouse complexes located on Mays Island in the Cedar River.



ing and the imposition of one-way-street couplets to speed cars through downtown. As a result, in the last decade of the century, the city leaders realized that proactive effort was necessary to revitalize downtown. By 2007, these efforts had yielded fruit, and the city declared 2008 the Year of the River, to celebrate planning of improvements to reconnect downtown with its unique identifying asset.

## Current Situation

Two things happened that slowed this momentum. First, the Cedar River flooded downtown with a historic inundation unlike anything previously experienced. Many blocks of housing in the peripheral neighborhoods were rendered uninhabitable, and the downtown core was flooded. Flooding of the ground-floor businesses in the downtown core destroyed years of hard work by owners and the city, setting back revitalization efforts. Revitalization is further hampered by the second event: the national financial collapse of the banks, Wall Street, and the housing market.

Despite these difficulties, the city's vitality is returning, and Cedar Rapids is seeking to take concrete measures to rebuild downtown. Economic indicators in Cedar Rapids are better than in many places in the nation. Employment remains steady. Even though unemployment has risen to 5.1 percent, it is well below the national average of 8.2 percent and the 18 to 20 percent in some counties in America. Because the city's economic base includes industries that are difficult to outsource, employment is likely to remain steady.

Demographic trends are favorable for Cedar Rapids. It has experienced growth at a manageable rate. Since 2000, Cedar Rapids is estimated to have grown by more than 5,000 people. Median income rose during the same period from approximately \$44,000 to slightly over \$53,000 per household. By 2013, median income is projected to rise to almost \$67,000 per household.

Regionally, an expected growth of slightly more than 5,000 households is projected in the area within 20 minutes' driving time of downtown. Because Cedar Rapids has a lower cost of living than the national average, consumer spending should be available for discretionary spending.

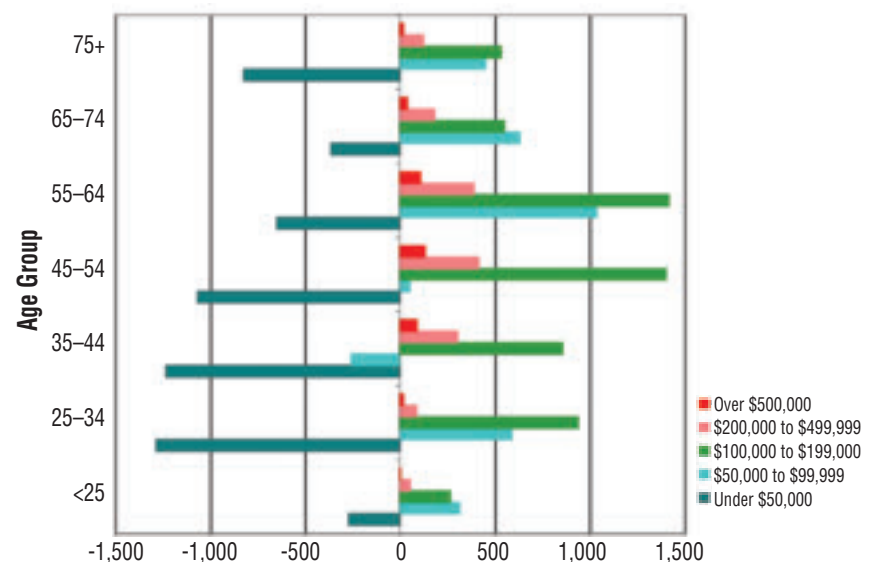


The skywalk system in Cedar Rapids links 15 downtown blocks.



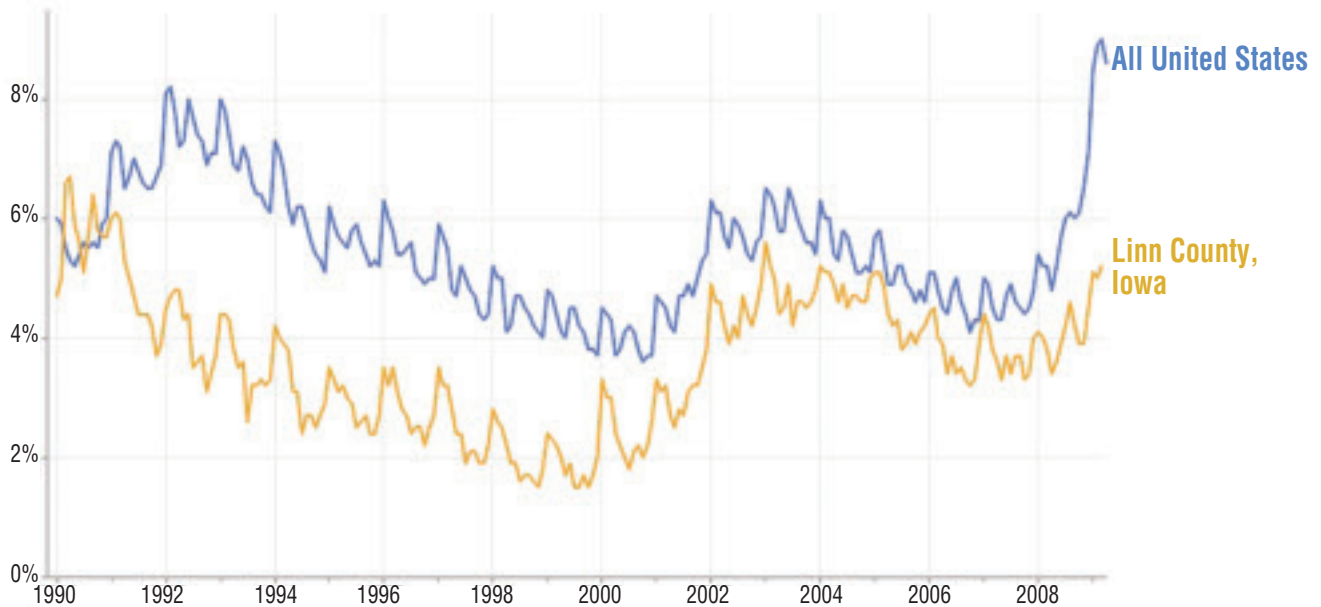
## Household Change by Age and Income, 2008–2013

Households within 20-Minute Drive of Downtown



Source: ESRI, Business Analyst On-Line 2007.

## Unemployment Rate Comparison between Linn County, Iowa, and All United States



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics May 29, 2007.

All of these trends are positive, but they do not indicate how revitalization can occur in the core downtown area. To address the need for concrete actions, this report outlines specific steps to set the stage for redevelopment of one portion of downtown and offers first priorities for action in that area.

### Downtown Housing Demand

Downtown has not been a traditional location for housing in the Cedar Rapids region. More than 81,000 households are located within a 20-minute drive time from the center of downtown. The panel was told during interviews that only 900 people currently live downtown. If so, downtown living is far less than 1 percent of the total. Many believe that only a very limited demand exists for downtown housing or that such demand is largely for affordable housing.

Earlier studies, recently updated by Maxfield Research, have demonstrated a need for housing and a capture of 442 to 492 units in the downtown core by 2020 and between 370 and 408 in the downtown fringe. This estimate is a positive indicator of potential demand calculated on past trends within the region.

Demand for downtown housing is hard to evaluate in standard terms because it does not have a long history. The phenomenon of pent-up demand in developing urban markets has been identified but is not usually quantified in standard studies. To understand whether pent-up demand would affect demand for housing in downtown Cedar Rapids, the ULI panel took a different approach and looked at segmentation profiles by the preference for urban housing. When the panel looked at those categories, approximately 20 percent (or more than 16,000 households within a 20-minute drive time) would prefer a location in or near downtown and urban-type housing, if available. One can argue that the reason these households are not in or near downtown is that the product is not there and the locations are neither ready nor rich enough yet to fulfill this demand.

# Development, Planning, and Design Strategies

Using the projections and possibilities mentioned in the previous section, the panel recommends a series of improvements focused initially on the U.S. Cellular Center but with a longer view to the specific downtown area along 3rd Street and ultimately for the entire downtown.

## U.S. Cellular Center

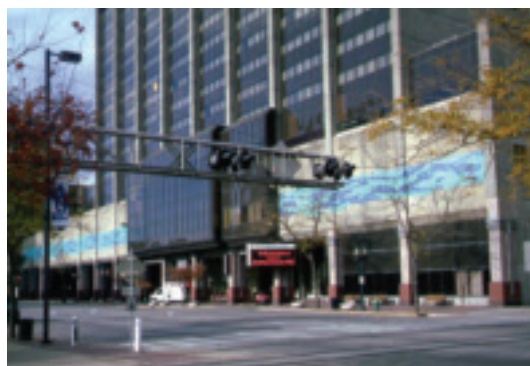
The U.S. Cellular Center opened as the Five Seasons Center in 1979. The project was one of three major projects downtown, the other two being the Crowne Plaza Hotel and the Five Seasons Parkade. The arena has a basketball capacity of about 7,200 and can seat up to 10,000 for concerts. The Five Seasons Facilities Commission oversees the facility. It was the primary sports and entertainment venue in eastern Iowa until the completion of Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City four years later.

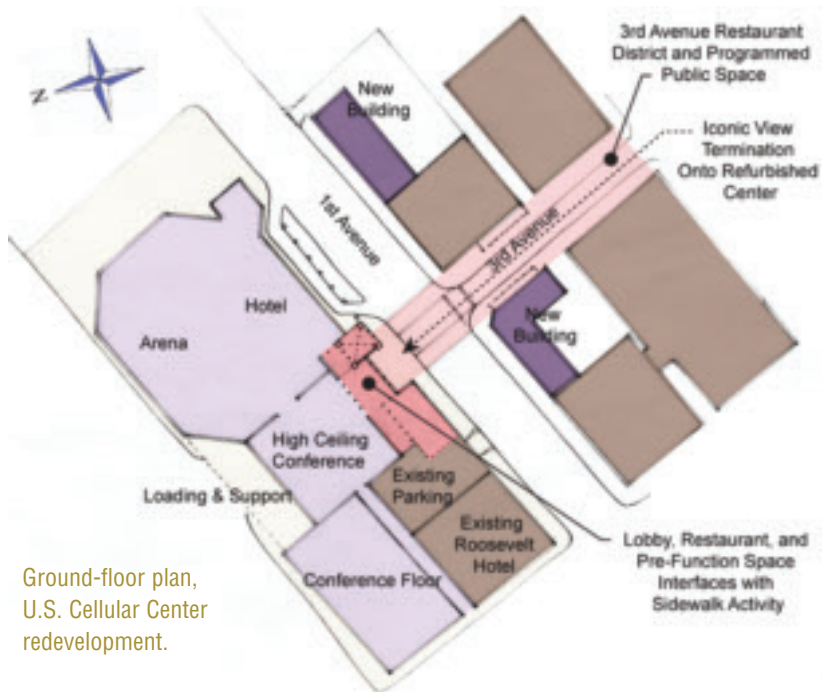
The challenge for this ULI panel is to provide solutions for a more viable downtown. Part of the solution involves solving for the U.S. Cellular Center's inadequacies, weakening operations, and long-term viability. Where should the facility be located, should it expand, and can it be the driver for future downtown development? The U.S. Cellular Center is ready for reinvestment and has the potential to catalyze future downtown reinvestment. The city should take advantage of this facility and the vitality it brings to downtown by upgrading the space and capacity so its success can radiate to the downtown core.

The panel recommends the U.S. Cellular Center facility remain in its current location, with an upgraded hotel, arena, and expanded conference and meeting facility. Improvements to this facility are critical for Cedar Rapids to remain competitive in the market and for the arena to continue to attract decently sized events. Similarly, keeping the facility in its current location is the most economically viable alternative and allows the city to spend capital resources in other, pertinent areas of the downtown. The detailed

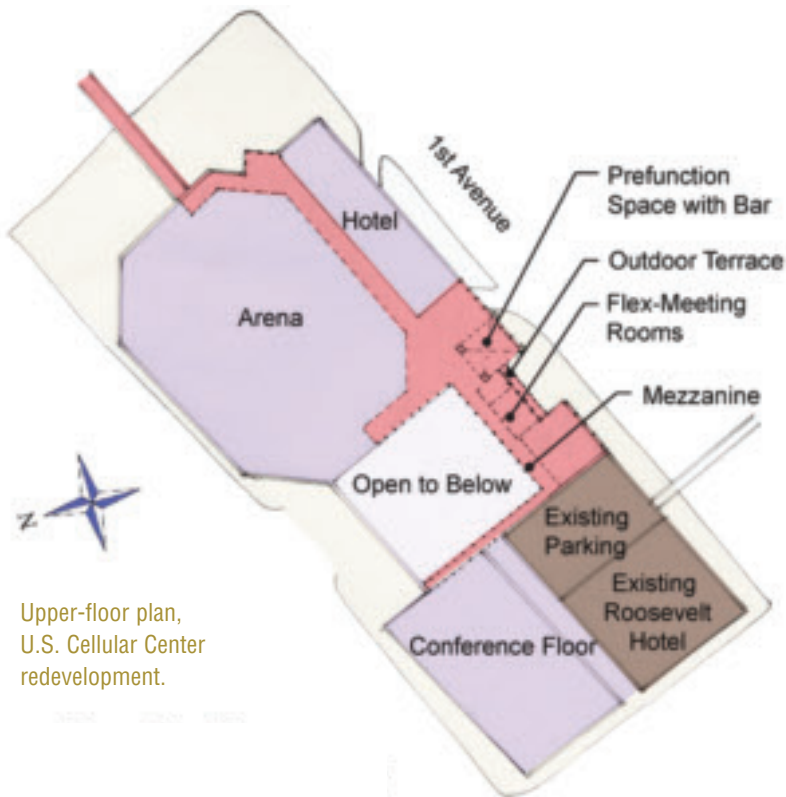


Built in 1979, the U.S. Cellular Center is a 10,000-seat facility with an integrated hotel and a connected parking structure.





Ground-floor plan, U.S. Cellular Center redevelopment.



Upper-floor plan, U.S. Cellular Center redevelopment.

recommendations for each of the three uses within the U.S. Cellular Center site follow.

### Meeting, Conference, and Showroom Facility

The panel recommends the city pursue expansion of the facility and see Option 2B as defined by consultant JLG as a satisfactory solution. Purchasing the underused property southwest of the arena to accommodate the expanded convention space is the appropriate phased approach for the U.S. Cellular Center facility while using the existing facility. Keeping the convention center on the same parcel as the hotel achieves synergy between hotel and convention center space and allows catering facilities to be shared.

Specific design recommendations include the following:

- Expand and improve how the building addresses 1st Avenue. The ground-floor facade should be visually interesting and should not have a vacant storefront appearance.
- Develop an iconic architectural element on the building where 3rd Street terminates.
- Incorporate an outdoor plaza space at the entrance of the conference facility. This area could be used for farmers markets or expanded outdoor showroom needs.
- Incorporate a restaurant leased or owned by an independent operator. An independent operator is advantageous so that below-projected convention center operations will not negatively affect the restaurant (for example, by requiring lower-quality food supplies and reduced operations costs).

### Arena

For the success of the arena, it must be modernized to maintain current event scheduling numbers and to continue to compete with the two nearby arenas. Arena scheduling should be concentrated on events that are appropriate for its competitive size. The panel is in agreement with JLG's recommendations for the arena improvements. Some of the design improvements discussed include new lighting in corridors and on the arena floor, widened walkways, more restrooms, modernized signage, current technology such as a large-format screen (Jumbotron-like), a new scoreboard, more locker rooms, and a defined performer green room. As with the hotel and

convention space, how the arena addresses 1st Avenue must be improved. The ticket booth and admissions area along 1st Avenue should be pulled to the back of the street right-of-way and should provide some visual interest at the street level.

### Hotel

The city needs to purchase the hotel. Because of the number of distressed properties and low lending rates, now is the time to buy real estate, and owning the hotel will prevent its further degradation. At a minimum, owning the hotel will allow the city to control hotel operations while the positioning of the arena and the meeting and conference facility is being completed. Upon completion of the arena and conference facility improvements, the city should begin discussions within an international hotel operator so the operations can be outsourced and downtown hotel beds can be more adequately available on a national basis.

Capital improvements to the hotel would keep the hotel relevant regionally and would allow it to stay competitive with the hospitality accommodations on Collins Road. Specific suggested hotel improvements include lighting and upgraded public areas (hallways, elevator shafts, bar, check-in facility) at a minimum. The hotel also needs a more grand street presence and hotel entrance. This upgrading not only would benefit the hotel's visibility but also would create a more urban street edge. This goal can be accomplished by pulling the ground-floor lobby space out to the right-of-way of 1st Avenue. The existing porte-cochere should be replaced by an on-street drop-off zone—an approach used in numerous urban locations.

### Arts, Culture, and Entertainment District

The panel recommends that the city focus its efforts on the urban assets the city currently has and expand upon those before diluting its emphasis by looking elsewhere. The ACE district has the bones of what makes an attractive downtown, and the panel recommends that development incentives and attention be paid to the blocks between the tracks to the east, the riverfront to the west, A Avenue to the north, and 4th Avenue to the south. Public investment and incentives are essential in attracting the businesses and amenities



Before and after: a view of the U.S. Cellular Center from 3rd Street.



necessary to spur residential development. In the near term, the ACE district is an area where these amenities should focus as the residential housing demand and supply catch up. The city should concentrate on a small core area, focusing on current assets such as occupied office buildings; restaurants with sidewalk amenities; theaters; excellent architecture for all new construction, including appropriate scale and design of the public realm; additional entertainment

establishments; more retail businesses; and, above all, accessibility. To its credit, the city has already done some of this work, especially in terms of the streetscape in the 2nd Street area.

The riverfront is a natural and unique asset to the downtown, and the work completed around this “heart” should not be diminished. The riverfront will develop incrementally as the city’s other successes are realized. It will evolve as federal funding is awarded and FEMA improvements have been made. The goals, objectives, and physical plans for the riverfront redevelopment are excellent and necessary as the riverfront is improved.

The ACE district complements the JLG Mixed-Use Housing Incentive District. The former focuses on the existing mixed-use building stock and creates an active, entertainment focus in the downtown that supports the U.S. Cellular Center, whereas the latter focuses on new and renovated residential development. The existing infrastructure and built form of the ACE district require little public investment. In addition, retail uses have started to concentrate there, and 3rd Street provides a direct link to U.S. Cellular Center activities. The city should incentivize retail tenants to locate within this district (for example, through tax abatement) to ensure the ground floors are filled with occupied space and retailers can afford to stay in business while the residential base downtown increases.

#### ACE District: Priority 1 Zone

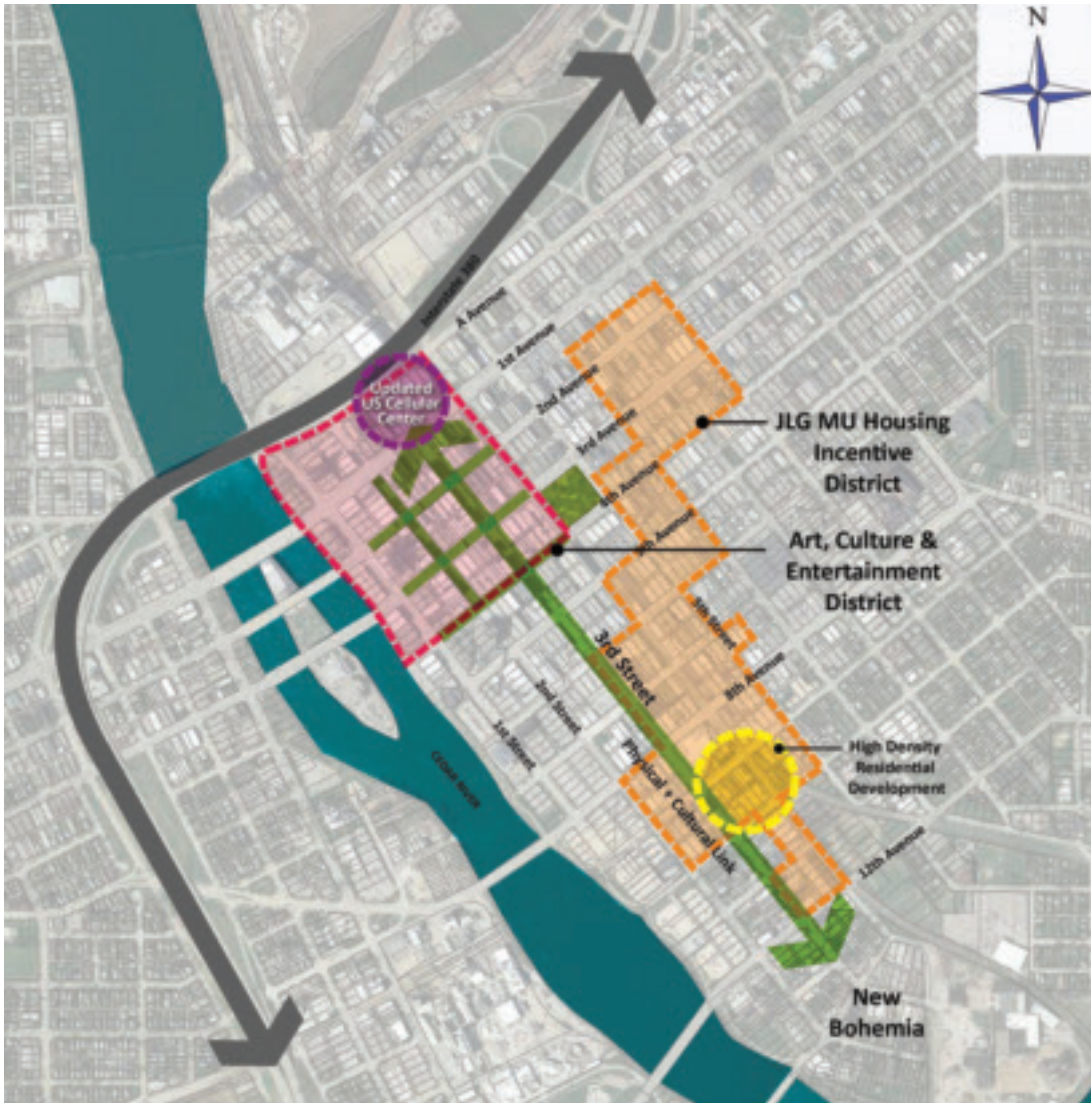
A redeveloped conference center, arena, and hotel complex will form a significant anchor to the emerging ACE district. These amenities should form a mutually supportive relationship, where event attendees and visitors activate the street life and ground-floor businesses within the district. In turn, this renewed activity serves as a valuable amenity to the conference and arena complex and could serve as an early catalyst for the future riverfront redevelopment. The ACE district would encourage food and beverage-focused ground-floor businesses with an emphasis on sidewalk dining and outdoor pedestrian activity.

Downtown’s urban design character needs to stop being defined by the perceived traffic volumes and desired traffic speeds through the downtown. Transportation links (that is, bike, trolley system, and pedestrian circulation) to and from the conven-



Portions of the downtown streetscape have been renovated in an attempt to establish it as a destination. The high-quality design should be replicated in other downtown areas, particularly near the U.S. Cellular Center.





Downtown development context.

tion center, through the ACE district and the adjacent neighborhoods, are important to the vitality of the district and support retail.

### Proposed 3rd Street Improvements

To support the vision for the ACE district, 3rd Street should be narrowed to become the first stages of the special district. The street currently acts as a physical and cultural link between the redevelopment that has occurred on the south side of town and the updated convention center and arena. The two blocks of 3rd Street closest to 1st Avenue could periodically be closed to traffic, allowing the street to serve as programmed public space—an outdoor corollary to

the adjacent indoor conference and meeting facilities. The redevelopment of the conference center facility would form a visual termination to 3rd Street. The addition of windows and indoor activity space would allow an important visual connection where event attendees have a direct view to 3rd Street activity, and conference center activity would in turn be viewable from 3rd Street.

To achieve this end, regulations and policies should encourage and incentivize refurbishment and infill development with food and beverage-focused ground floors and upper floor uses that include residential units, lodging, and offices. The location that needs to be redeveloped first is the parking



Conceptual development for 3rd Street, U.S. Cellular Center, and ACE district.

lot at 1st Avenue and 3rd Street. Third Street itself needs to be reduced to two traffic lanes, allowing an approximately ten-foot widening of the sidewalks to accommodate fixed sidewalk dining areas. Other, specific streetscape improvements could include the following:

- Increase total sidewalk width from ten feet to 20 feet by removing one traffic lane in each direction. The remaining street width should still adequately serve the actual and estimated traffic volumes.
- Allow patio seating a maximum of ten feet from the edge of the property line (or building facade). Removable or permanent fencing can define the space for dining and outdoor liquor concessions.
- Provide a ten-foot-wide sidewalk, to allow pedestrian circulation on the outside of the existing trees.
- Allow on-street parallel parking.

## Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes, presented in both diagrams and words, are keyed to a *regulating plan* that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development rather than only distinctions in land use types. This focus is in contrast to conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., floor/area ratio, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic levels of service) to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory.

Source: *Definition of a Form-Based Code*, June 29, 2008, Form-Based Codes Institute, [www.formbasedcodes.org/definition.html](http://www.formbasedcodes.org/definition.html).

- Use special pavers at key intersections.
- Plant ornamental trees.
- Install adequately spaced pedestrian streetlighting.
- Install street furnishings such as benches, bike racks, and planters.

## Form-Based Code

The panel recommends that the city rewrite the development code for the ACE district—to convert it from a zoning code to a form-based code. The benefits of adopting and legalizing a form-based code methodology are myriad. For entertainment uses specifically, form-based codes can produce a more desirable outcome and can be used to incentivize development and redevelopment. It will incentivize reinvestment as a result of less restrictive and prescriptive land use regulations (in comparison to typical zoning laws), and the approval process can be tailored to achieve expedited staff approval when development applications are presented.

# Implementation

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The preceding sections of this report outline an ambitious approach to help define, leverage, and develop downtown assets. Ultimately, however, the market (national and local) will need to recover before private developers become interested in the private side of this development. In contrast, the concepts for the redevelopment of the U.S. Cellular Center and the hotel should be pursued diligently.

The recent grant proposals to the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Authority (EDA) are an excellent start. The proposed programs and requisite justifications incorporated in the grant

applications are focused, lucid, and logical arguments that the EDA should appreciate.

## Planning

Planning strategies for both the U.S. Cellular Center redevelopment effort and the ACE district should be a priority for the city and the Cedar Rapids Downtown District. If funds are available from the EDA, grant work can begin immediately. The panel recognizes the many recovery and redevelopment issues facing the city but sees these two efforts as part of the larger effort and as a subset of the initiatives promulgated by the Vision Cedar Rapids plan. The focus should

The panel believes the improved frequency and variety of downtown events will make the area more desirable for housing.



be on improving the street image of the U.S. Cellular Center and hotel, tying it to the 3rd Street corridor and the rest of downtown.

A form-based code approach to development regulation will improve the visual character of the area, foster destinations for visitors, and generally encourage and improve the pedestrian-based activity that is so crucial to successful urban spaces. The panel recommends that the city immediately undertake a form-based code initiative to make this approach a reality. If the city is hesitant to apply this method, the panel recommends a pilot program within the ACE district to work out the inevitable kinks that will arise with this new method of zoning.

## Programming

Throughout the world and the United States, cities are redeveloping older downtowns for human habitation. Part of the lure of downtown housing is a vibrant, active city life. The ACE district is not an enclosed shopping center; it is, in fact, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in good weather and bad, during high season and low. Management that is more intensive is required to maintain safety, the perception of safety, cleanliness, and efficient activity levels. For these reasons, the involvement of the Cedar Rapids Downtown District will be essential for the success of a redeveloped U.S. Cellular Center, the 3rd Street initiative, and the ACE district.

The city, in cooperation with the Cedar Rapids Downtown District, should continue to improve downtown by focusing on maintenance, landscaping, security, and events. They should work with the retail management and property owners associations to address ongoing issues and solve problems. In addition, a new focus should be given to events and marketing efforts with a theme.

Specific focus should be on either creating or refining the following concepts:

- A tourist train;
- Performance artists and live music;
- Retail, kiosks, and food and beverage vendors;
- A performance shell;
- A fitness center;
- Parks, trails, and fountains;
- Bicycle, boat, and electric cart rentals;
- River cruises and fireworks after dark;
- An enclosed year-round farmers market;
- A pedestrian bridge to link east and west downtown and draw people to the river; and
- Mitigation measures regarding freight rail through the downtown.

# Conclusion

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Cedar Rapids can be proud of its many accomplishments since the 2008 flood. The successful launch of the recovery effort, the coordination of diverse ideas and interest groups, as well as the dedicated, tireless work of city employees, private individuals, and companies all show that this community is eminently capable of not only recovering from the flood but also reinventing its downtown. The panel's vision for the U.S. Cellular Center and the ACE district is really a continuation of a vision that has been percolating in the Cedar Rapids community for years.

However, action—not plans—is needed to implement this vision. The success of this vision will require bold moves and dedicated leadership. The public and the private sectors must work together to execute

important action plans to achieve the ideals envisioned for downtown. Bold, however, does not mean achieving unconditional consensus for each initiative or individual development proposal. Leaders in the community must listen to a diverse set of stakeholders, formulate actions that are in the best interest of the community, and execute those actions.

Routine moves are also important. The day-to-day details of effective, responsive collaboration among the city, the Downtown District, and the business community will make the vision coalesce. Breathing new life into the U.S. Cellular Center, improving its street presence, and expanding the improvements into the 3rd Street corridor will be difficult, time consuming, and ultimately, worthwhile.

# About the Panel

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## John M. Walsh III

*Panel Chair  
Carrollton, Texas*

Walsh is president and founder of TIG Real Estate Services, Inc. TIG has developed more than 2 million square feet and manages and leases almost 16 million square feet on behalf of its institutional clients in three states. Before starting TIG, Walsh spent 17 years with Trammell Crow Company in various leasing, development, and senior management roles. During his tenure as development partner for the Northwest Dallas area market at Trammell Crow, Walsh developed almost 5 million square feet and leased over 8 million square feet of office, industrial, and service center space. A Dallas native, Walsh has served as chairman, director, and trustee of various business and charitable organizations, including Trammell Crow Employees Profit Sharing Trust, Valwood Improvement Authority, Carrollton Zoning Ordinance Board, Texas Commerce Bank, Valwood Park Federal Credit Union, and Sky Ranch Youth Camp. He has also served on working committees and boards for the city of Carrollton, the city of University Park, Highland Park Independent School District, and the city of Farmers Branch.

A leader and active participant in the Urban Land Institute, Walsh has served as a volunteer member of numerous ULI Advisory Services panels, including panels in Hengelo, The Netherlands; St. Joseph, Missouri; Richmond and Portsmouth, Virginia; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Walsh has participated as a speaker for ULI at both the national and local levels, has acted as a product council chair, and currently presides as chair of the North Texas District Council of ULI. In addition to his many activities in ULI, Walsh is currently serving as a trustee.

Walsh is a member of the Texas State Bar, with a law degree from Texas Tech University School of Law. He served for ten years as an adjunct professor of

Business Law at Dallas Community College and the University of Texas at Arlington. Walsh earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Texas, Arlington.

## Geoff Dyer

*Calgary, Alberta*

Dyer is a senior urban designer and principal for Calgary-based T-Six Urbanists, Inc., and a partner and director with U.S.-based PlaceMakers, LLC. Dyer has gained considerable international experience with some of North America's foremost urban design firms and world-renowned urban designers. He contributes to his firm's abilities in progressive planning and form-based codes projects throughout North America using the Transect-based SmartCode regulatory system.

Dyer works throughout North America as an expert in sustainable urbanism and the systematic reform of automobile-focused, segregated land use development patterns. Typically in the design charette format, his projects have included inner-city revitalizations such as Memphis's Intown Neighborhood, the Mississippi Renewal Forum following Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the Gulf Coast, and numerous other projects, ranging from rural villages to high-density transit-oriented developments and downtown revitalizations. Working in a senior role, Dyer has been involved with the development and execution of comprehensive alternative zoning codes and public works standards for Taos, New Mexico; Lawrence, Kansas; El Paso, Texas; and throughout Alberta, Canada. Many others are currently underway.

Dyer holds a master's degree in urban design from the University of Calgary and is a Knight Fellow in Community Building with the University of Miami. He is an instructor and panelist in the Bi-Annual SmartCode workshop with Andrés Duany and a regular presenter at the Canadian Institute of Planners conferences and the annual Congress for the

New Urbanism (CNU). In 2008, he was a member of the CNU Charter Awards adjudication panel. As an associate instructor, Dyer has conducted courses at the master's program in urban design of the University of Calgary and will be teaching this fall in the university's Certificate in Real Estate Program.

## Amanda Hindman

*Denver, Colorado*

Hindman was born and raised in the Denver metropolitan area and has particular interest in contributing to the development and vitality of the city. Today, she lives and works in downtown Denver and is excited at the opportunity to address urban issues that face the evolving skylines across the country.

She has an undergraduate degree in environmental design from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Hindman continues to display dedication to the industry through her pursuit of a master's degree in business administration, emphasis in real estate development, from the University of Denver. Hindman began her career at EDAW in San Francisco, gaining experience primarily in high-density residential development, transit-oriented development, and public sector master plan projects. For the six years Hindman has been at EDAW, specifically for the three years she has been in the Denver office, she has built on the foundation developed in the Bay Area to amplify both her leadership and management skills. Her range of work experience and academic profile offer unique perspective to numerous projects.

Hindman's work includes numerous public sector projects such as Denver Federal Center Master Plan, Wichita 21st Street Revitalization Plan, Black Hawk Comprehensive Plan, Balboa Park Station Area Plan, and Milpitas Specific Plan. She has helped develop goals, objectives, and policies to implement and guide development in the respective planning areas. In addition, these projects have exposed her to the demanding and practical processes inherent in public jobs. Her complementary private sector experience includes master plans for Fairhill in Farmington, Minnesota; Meridian Village in Englewood and Orvis Shorefox in Granby, both in Colorado; Santa Teresa in El Paso, Texas; and Tiechert Aspens in Sacramento, California. She is familiar with plan approvals, zoning regulations and applications, land use programs,

and residential unit absorption rates. Throughout all jobs, Hindman collaborates with other disciplines to develop the most innovative and applicable ideas for a project.

## Satyendra S. Huja

*Charlottesville, Virginia*

Huja is president of Community Planning Associates, focusing on planning, design, development, and management consulting. He also currently serves on the Charlottesville City Council through 2011.

He was director of strategic planning for the city of Charlottesville from 1998 to 2004. Prior to that, he was director of planning and community development for the city of Charlottesville for 25 years.

Huja's experiences are in the area of downtown revitalization, housing, historic preservation, transportation planning, art and culture activities, and neighborhood revitalization. He has received an honor award from the Virginia Society of American Institute of Architects, recognition from the Pew Foundation for downtown revitalization, and a special recognition award from Piedmont Council for the Arts for his outstanding contribution and support for the arts. He also has been a consultant to the city of Pleven, Bulgaria, for economic development and tourism marketing.

Huja is a member of the adjunct faculty at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, and teaches urban planning courses on a regular basis. He is a member of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners. He has served on a number of ULI's Advisory Services panels. He received his master's degree in urban planning from Michigan State University.

## Edward Starkie

*Portland, Oregon*

Starkie has 18 years' experience in real estate that includes moving complex projects from conception and feasibility analysis to financing and development. He concentrates on project implementation and economic analysis. A particular career focus has been the financing and feasibility of smart growth, both as part of the State of Oregon Transit Growth



Management process and for a series of built transit-oriented projects.

Starkie's work has received three awards from the American Planning Association in the areas of main streets and downtown revitalization, and he contributed to the current EPA guidelines for promoting smart growth. Starkie is a financial adviser for private and public development who brings a unique, pragmatic approach resulting in projects that are

feasible, are profitable, and contribute to community livability.

Starkie holds a master of science in real estate development from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is a panel member of Urban Land Institute Advisory Services. Starkie also serves on the faculty of the University of Oregon Urban Architecture Program.



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