



# 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership - April 2018

**P.U.M.A.**

Prepared and presented by Progressive Urban Management Associates  
(full report available May 15, 2018)



In order to guide Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership's family of organizations moving forward and to prepare for the upcoming BID renewal, DOKC retained Denver-based downtown development and management consulting firm Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA) to create a Strategic Plan. The PUMA team brings a 20-year track record in assisting with downtown Oklahoma City's evolution, including assisting stakeholders to create and renew the BID and completion of a similar strategic plan in 2010.

## DOWNTOWN'S FAMILY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Formed in 2000, the Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership (DOKC) is a 501(c)6 nonprofit leadership organization that administers a variety of improvements and services and provides advocacy to advance downtown interests. DOKC's annual budget of nearly \$1 million is funded by several sources, the largest being revenue from special events and sponsorships.



Initiated in 2001, the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) currently raises \$2.5 million from special assessments to fund enhanced services that include downtown-wide marketing, streetscape maintenance, the upkeep of amenities such as the Bricktown Canal and Underground, and promotion for sub-districts. While the BID budget is about average among downtowns of similar size, its service area is large (1.5 square miles with eight sub-districts,) and its underlying structure is complex. The BID operates on a series of 10-year terms, requiring periodic reauthorization from its property owner ratepayers.



Downtown Oklahoma City Initiatives is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that raises charitable contributions for special projects and beautification. Initiatives has most recently focused on creating public art installations in downtown.

## Objectives for the 2018 DOKC Strategic Plan include:

- Engage the boards of directors, ratepayers, business and civic leaders, residents, and other stakeholders in a participatory process to develop the Strategic Plan
- Assess current and future market influences in downtown
- Develop recommendations to guide the organization's evolution over the next five to ten years
- Explore ways to diversify and grow audiences, enhance DOKC's perceived value, generate additional revenue, and improve current programs



# FINDINGS FROM THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The process to develop the strategic plan included both an external and internal assessment. The external assessment looked at market conditions and sought improvement priorities from more than 600 stakeholders through a series of meetings with DOKC's governing boards, leaders from each of the downtown districts and an online survey that was distributed broadly throughout the downtown community. The internal assessment reviewed organizational budgets and documents and included group and individual meetings with key staff members.

## MARKET CONDITIONS

Overall, downtown is enjoying a resurgence that is shared by many downtowns throughout the nation, but accelerated locally by public investments concentrated by the Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS). Despite the addition of new office towers, the office market is outperforming the city's suburban areas. Housing is a growth segment, with more than 1,000 units added since 2015. Projections find that the existing downtown population of 8,500 could nearly triple by 2030. While downtown lacks destination retail, several neighborhoods have experienced growth in local independent boutiques and restaurants. Prospects for the hotel and hospitality market are bright, with the construction of a new convention center underway.

## THEMES FROM COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The strategic planning process received input from more than 600 downtown stakeholders through facilitated board meetings, district-specific workshops, and an online survey. Important themes from outreach include:

- Downtown has come a long way; stakeholders are proud of investments in its infrastructure and elevation of its brand.
- When asked to grade the efforts of DOKC, **76% of respondents gave the organization an "A" or "B" grade**, 4% fewer than those who responded the same way 10 years ago.
- While the last decade has been marked by large scale infrastructure projects, priorities for the next decade might be more small scale and granular (i.e. activating public spaces, filling storefronts, more amenities for residents, etc.)
- Increased residential density is a top priority for downtown improvement, along with more retail and service businesses, improved connectivity between districts and mobility enhancements, including making downtown safer for pedestrians.

## OVERVIEW OF ONLINE SURVEY

- 70% responded with "much better" to describe downtown's general appearance including landscaping and beautification over the past five years. Nearly 90% of respondents ranked the appearance of downtown as the most improved characteristic, tied with the overall image.
- Priorities did not change drastically between the 2008 survey and the 2018 survey. Walkability, events & activation, retail development, and residential activity were ranked highly in both surveys.
- Respondents want to create a downtown that is an **exciting, vibrant, and walkable destination**.

# KEY CONCLUSIONS

## Downtowns are Ever-Changing, and DOKC Must Grow and Evolve to Meet Demand

Downtown Oklahoma City is dynamic as it nears the end of its third generation of MAPS projects, and it continues to evolve as a patchwork of neighborhoods. New MAPS projects include the streetcar, new convention center and hotel, and the 70-acre Scissortail Park. The streetcar is a transportation amenity that should benefit the existing BID, and the new park and convention facilities will test whether the BID, already one of the largest geographic districts in the nation, should expand once again. The most significant market trend on the horizon is more residential development throughout downtown. Residential growth will create new and different demands for services, and bring new challenges for representation and accountability to the organizational structure of both the BID and DOKC.

## Increasing Retail and Residential Options Remains Top Priority of DOKC Stakeholders

From stakeholder focus groups and responses to the online survey, improving downtown retail and neighborhood services and continuing to encourage the development of downtown housing are top priorities. These top rankings are consistent with stakeholder priorities voiced in the prior strategic planning/BID renewal process conducted ten years ago. While retail and residential development issues are outside the purview of DOKC, they remain a stakeholder expectation for improvement. Retail recruitment is largely the domain of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and continued residential development relies on favorable market forces; however, the Strategic Plan suggests a stronger advocacy role for DOKC in these areas and a reaffirmation of partnerships to focus more energy and resources on implementation.

## Downtown Improvement Priorities are Becoming More Small-Scale and Granular

With the third generation of MAPS investments well underway, there is an increasing need to focus more attention on the maintenance and activation of new civic assets, both large and small. This places an increasing demand on the DOKC family of organizations to build upon its strengths in events production and place activation. Smaller, more frequent, community-focused events may shift DOKC's prior programming emphasis. Place activation will include both programming and small physical assets such as movable furniture, interactive games, Wi-Fi and other technology upgrades. Larger assets, like the OKC Streetcar, may need both operational and marketing partnerships with DOKC to make sure its utility is maximized.

## Spending Flexibility Should be Increased for the BID

Moving forward, the DOKC family of organizations should evaluate ways to mobilize resources for needs that are likely to change over the next ten years. For the next iteration of the BID, the downtown-wide "Special Projects" fund in the budget should be increased to support more programming and activation for items that benefit all of downtown. DOKC's Initiatives subsidiary can become a conduit for resources that support programming, placemaking and other upgrades. Innovations such as crowd-sourcing should be used more frequently to encourage residents to invest in amenities that benefit growing neighborhoods, from dog parks to day care, to a co-op grocery.

## The Largest Opportunity Area for DOKC is in Community Building

While downtown Oklahoma City is defined by its sub-districts, there are emerging opportunities to employ downtown-wide approaches to enhance services and solve challenges. The downtown residential population is growing, and new residents share priorities beyond the boundaries of their districts. Downtown's traditional strength as a center for commerce, and its regional consumer appeal for events and diverse experiences lend credibility to the concept of one united downtown area as a regional destination. DOKC and the BID will need to continue to balance the need for a multi-dimensional communications strategy that builds community within districts, economic sectors, and the downtown area as a whole.

## The DOKC Family of Organizations Can Incubate the Next Generation of Leadership

Throughout the nation, there is a generational change in leadership occurring within the public, private and nonprofit sectors. As baby boomers retire, younger and more diverse Gen X leadership is emerging, with Millennials not too far behind. The DOKC family of organizations can be an incubator for new leadership in Oklahoma City and reflect the vibrant new populations of employees and residents in downtown. Connections between governing boards and committees should be established to foster new leaders, including a deliberate focus on age, gender and racial diversity. Companies, sub-districts and neighborhoods can designate "up-and-coming" leaders to be plugged into the DOKC organizational infrastructure.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking all research and data into consideration, PUMA's recommendations have been organized into seven categories with the original strategic plan goals in mind. Short- and long-term strategies for each are included in the full plan.

## BID 3.0 RENEWAL

**Goal:** Renew the BID for its third term before September 2020.

**Why It's Important:** The Downtown Business Improvement District is the backbone of the DOKC organization and one of the main reasons it exists.

## STAFFING AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

**Goal:** Ensure the future success, respect, worth, and sustainability of Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership. Nearly all the recommendations can be accomplished with the existing forward-thinking mission, personnel, and budget.

**Why It's Important:** According to best practice research, successful downtown organizations have a clear plan and formalized process in place for the eventual succession of executive-level leadership.

## EVENTS AND ACTIVATION

**Goal:** Provide a greater variety of events and activities for visitors, families, and entertainment-seekers. Fill the gaps in downtown's physical fabric through activated ground-floor uses and other small-scale placemaking interventions.

**Why It's Important:** Encouraging people to linger and experience OKC's "sense of place" and unique offerings is an important aspect of downtown's appeal as a destination.

## MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

**Goal:** Enhance OKC's destination appeal and competitiveness by building upon pedestrian friendly streets and alleys and creating additional improvements, paying attention to connections between subdistricts and the new streetcar.

**Why It's Important:** Streets and sidewalks provide the lifeblood of downtown and its districts, and they are the most utilized non-developed spaces in downtown.

## STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

**Goal:** Effectively communicate with and determine the needs and desires of downtown stakeholders, particularly residents, business owners, and potential visitors.

**Why It's Important:** Optimizing stakeholder communication and marketing can solidify the downtown "brand" and usher in a new wave of residential and business vitality, as well as maintain responsiveness and accountability with BID ratepayers and other downtown constituents.

## ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION

**Goal:** Ensure DOKC's interests are well represented in downtown-related planning and civic engagement initiatives, particularly those aimed at creating walkable neighborhoods, addressing housing needs, recruiting residents and businesses, strengthening the DOKC brand, and bolstering streetcar investment.

**Why It's Important:** DOKC has an opportunity to elevate its influence in policies and projects that positively impact downtown stakeholders.

## ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP

**Goal:** Create more pathways to board positions and leadership.

**Why It's Important:** The organization should work to diversify the composition of the BID and DOKC boards to better match demographic changes within district in terms of age, gender, and ethnic background.