legally allowed. They should also take an inventory of city-owned land and buildings that could be available for early development or redevelopment since the land will have to be written down or creatively provided to make it financially feasible in the early years of the turnaround process. It is important to realize that housing is two-thirds of the built environment, so it is always a critical part of the strategy.

- **Retail.** Determine the retail concentrations that a downtown market could support, including urban entertainment (movies, restaurants, night clubs); specialty retail (clothing, furniture, and jewelry boutique stores); regional retail (department stores, lifestyle retail); and local-serving retail (grocery, drug, book, video stores). These different retail options should be concentrated into walkable districts, creating, in essence, regional destinations that give the area critical mass, identity, and a reason to live there.

- **Culture.** Determine which one-of-a-kind cultural facilities should be downtown and how existing facilities can be strengthened. With very few exceptions, these facilities—arenas, stadiums, performing arts centers, museums, historic sites and buildings, and others—do in fact perform better downtown.

- **Public Infrastructure.** Focus on essential issues such as water and sewer, intra-core transit, transit to the downtown, structured parking, conversion of one-way streets to two-way, tighter turning radiuses at intersections for a better pedestrian experience, and enhanced security and cleanliness, among others. Parks and open space, and, when appropriate, opportunities for waterfront development, should also be included in the strategy. Paying for this new and improved infrastructure often involves "tax increment financing" ("TIFs"), a controversial tool in some places, which usually needs state legislative authorization.

- **Employment.** Focus recruitment efforts on businesses that could be downtown, which includes both "export" employment (businesses that export goods and services from the metropolitan area which provide fresh cash into the economy) and regional-servicing employment (support businesses or organizations which locate in regional concentrations such as downtown). Generally these strategies occur later in the turn-around process, after a critical mass of urban entertainment and housing has occurred.

- **Community Involvement.** Ensure that citizens, particularly residents of surrounding neighborhoods, have continuous opportunities for input and involvement. It is also important to keep the opinion-makers and the media informed about the revitalization process, as the public image of downtown during the early phases of revitalization is generally negative. One example is creating a local cable TV show highlighting individuals and businesses helping turn around the downtown, putting a human face on the revitalization effort.

- **Involvement of Non-profit Organizations.** Bring existing non-profits into the process, and create new organizations to fill needed roles. These include business improvement districts and possibly a transportation management organization, as well as temporary task forces, a parking authority, an arts' coordinating group, and others.

- **Marketing.** Continuously market downtown, as well as specific new downtown events. The image of most downtowns is so negative prior to revitalization and such skepticism exists during the early phases that constant attention must be paid to re-positioning the area. It is especially important to communicate the strategy and progress in implementing it to the investment and banking community so they will have faith in the process in which they are being asked to invest.

- **Social Values.** The social values of downtown need to be defined and plans put in place to enforce them. The ultimate goal of a downtown revitalization is to make it the community gathering place, a place for the entire community regardless of income or race. Housing affordability and other "equity" programs may be essential components of the revitalization effort.

The process for determining the comprehensive strategy starts by bringing together an expanded version of the advisory group. The group should include neighborhood group representatives, retailers, investors, developers, property owners, churches, the mayor and key city councilors, the heads of select city departments, non-profit organizations, artists, homeless advocates, and others. Selecting the right composition is extremely important to ensure that no significant group feels left out. The group needs to be relatively small (less than 25 individuals), however, in order to both build a sense of trust and cohesion and, ultimately, to ensure the process stays focused on results. It is also crucial that the individuals be people who are interested in successful solutions, not narrow political gain.

Two one-day sessions devoted to the strategic planning process, separated by about a month, are generally sufficient to crafting the strategy and implementation plan. Before the first day, a "briefing book" should be assembled to provide the group with a common set of data about the existing conditions downtown. This briefing book should include findings from the visioning process (technical and subjective portraits), market and consumer real estate research for all product types (office, hotel, rental housing, retail, etc.), data on the existing condition of the downtown infrastructure and public services, and other relevant information.

The first day will be used to introduce the group to one another and to understand the contents of the briefing book. The day will also lay out the possible strategic options, outlined above, that need to be considered in crafting a strategy. In the next meeting, participants will develop the strategy, selecting the general and specific items that are most appropriate for their downtown. Finally, the group will determine what initially needs to be done to implement the individual strategies, who is responsible for these next steps, and when these steps should accomplish.

The results of the strategy and implementation plan should be summarized in writing very quickly after the second meeting and distributed for comments. A final plan will probably be only 10 to 15 pages long and should be sent out to politicians and citizens as part of the marketing and community involvement strategies.

Follow-up sessions should be scheduled every few months to constantly modify the strategy and monitor progress on its implementation to date. At each subsequent meeting, a new implementation plan should be fashioned with tasks and dates assigned to volunteers and the next follow-up session set.

Step 3: Forge a Healthy Private/Public Partnership

Successful downtown revitalizations are generally private/public partnerships, not the other way around. The public sector, usually lead by the mayor or some other public official, may convene the strategy process but it must quickly be led by the private entities whose time and money will ultimately determine the effort's success. A healthy, sustained partnership is crucial to getting the revitalization process off the ground and building the critical mass needed to spur a cycle of sustainable development.

The key to the public sector's successful involvement in downtown redevelopment is to avoid making it overly political. Once it has been launched, it is essential for future politicians to "keep their hands off" to the maximum extent possible. Unfortunately, this can be difficult. With an eye on future elections, they often seek acclaim for positive things happening in their city and look for people to blame if it suits their agenda. And once the downtown revitalization process appears to begin yielding results, there is added motivation for politicians to want to take control over the process.

tion. Among other things, this code allows for higher density, "stick-built" construction, many times the only financially feasible construction type for new residential. Adopting a rehabilitation code similar to the current New Jersey Rehabilitation Subcode can cut costs for historic rehabilitation by up to 50 percent, making historic rehabilitation much more feasible. It works under the assumption that historic buildings need not imitate new construction in every detail for it to be safe and accessible. For example, many historic buildings have been torn down because, among other things, their five foot marble clad hallways were not up to the new building code, which is six feet, and could not be widened in an economical manner.

Step 5: Establish Business Improvement Districts and Other Non-Profits

One of the leading ways the private/public process is implemented is through various non-profits, particularly business improvement districts (BID). There are over 1400 BIDs in the country and it is now well understood that establishing a BID is crucial to the successful revitalization of a downtown. In essence, the BID is the quasi-government for the downtown, the "keeper of the flame" of the downtown strategy, and the provider of services the city government cannot deliver.

A downtown BID is funded by property owners who voluntarily increase their property taxes by 5 to 15 percent to pay for BID functions. The tax is collected through the normal city channels, so there is always the temptation by the city council or mayor to co-opt the use of those funds. It is important that the legislation, typically enacted by the state legislature, be written to mandate control of the funds by the BID's board of directors.

The BID's main leadership role is managing the implementation of the strategy, which must be constantly updated. The BID may be responsible, for example, for ensuring the various task forces charged with implementing parts of the strategy are motivated to complete their efforts. The BID might also create a new signage program for downtown, work for the development and approval of the form-based code, and market the downtown to new developers.

The BID's operational role is usually (1) increasing the perceived and actual safety of downtown; (2) making the place cleaner; (3) creating festivals and events to encourage suburbanites to come downtown, and; (4) improving downtown's image. BIDs typically include a force of trained "safety ambassadors" who offer a friendly face on the street, are trained to handle quality of life infractions, and who are wired to the police. They also have permanent staff performing the cleaning, events, and marketing functions.

The downtown revitalization effort may spur the creation of additional non-profit organizations. A parking authority can often more efficiently manage and market the availability of parking in downtown, for example. Another non-profit could take responsibility for encouraging the development of affordable housing and commercial space. A separate non-profit might focus just on keeping artists and galleries downtown in the face of rising rents and values. It is critical that these non-profits either have a dedicated source of funding and/or offer services which generate revenue so that they don't have to rely upon perpetual foundation grants or government subsidies.

In short, the BID and other non-profits are a downtown's management team—ensuring its many complex elements work together to create a safe, attractive, unique, and well-functioning place.

Step 6: Create a Catalytic Development Company

Most conventional suburban developers do not have the experience, investors, bankers, or inclination to come downtown. The difference between modular, single product, car-oriented suburban development and integrated, mixed-use, walkable urban development is substantial. And the very fact that a downtown sorely needs revitalization generally scares off the development community. The market risk is perceived as

Arts festivals, galleries, museums, and workshops are among the best and earliest urban entertainment providers.

- **Night Clubs.** Generally aimed at people in their 20s and 30s, night clubs also have a natural affinity for downtown; these venues tend to be loud and stay open late so there are constraints on where else they can locate in the region.

These urban entertainment concepts appeal to different clientele, yet can all be accommodated within walking distance. There can be a night club district a few blocks away from the performing arts center. There can be an arts district close to a movie theater and restaurants. An arena can be shoe-horned near office towers, double using the commuter roadways, transit, and office parking lots. This complexity gives all sorts of people a reason to come downtown, which is particularly important in the early years when downtown's image may not be positive.

The most important benefit of entertainment is to get "feet on the street," especially at night. And just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation that it is a good place, crowded sidewalks recommend downtown, signaling a safe environment, and providing an excitement and spectacle that draws people to the area.

Step 8: Develop a Rental Housing Market

The initial urban pioneers looking to live within walking distance of the urban entertainment growing in downtown will tend to be young, often students and those in their 20s. This age group was probably raised in the suburbs, and probably doesn't have as negative an impression of downtown as their elders. They also look upon it as exciting and interesting, especially compared to where they were raised.

The young also tend to rent, as they don't have the assets, income, or location stability required to buy a home. They are more flexible, tied only to the lease they have signed, probably for a year or less. Once an urban entertainment concentration begins to emerge, this group generally has both the propensity to move downtown, and the ability to make the move quickly.

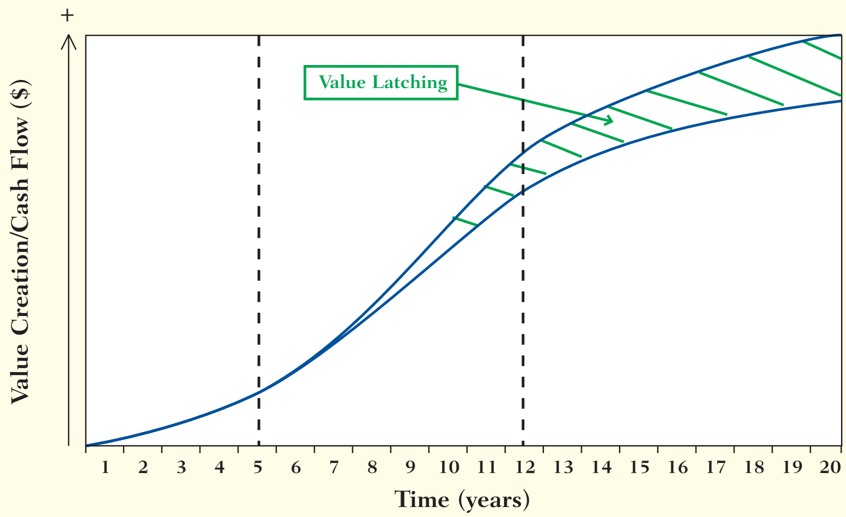
Rental housing projects can be conversions of existing office, industrial, or institutional buildings or new construction. The renovation of existing buildings offers some of the most exciting new housing options, as they are unlike other rental products in the regional market. Though often a source of great challenge for developers, converting obsolete, sometimes decrepit buildings into attractive, active uses has ancillary benefits. This type of development also begins to take lower end, class C office buildings off the market, paving the way for the eventual recovery of the office market.

New construction of rental housing has its own unique trials. While construction costs are much better known up front, with fewer surprises than conversions, these new costs tend to be high. There is no existing steel or concrete structure frame, parking, or re-useable heating and cooling systems to recycle. Since apartment rents tend to have an absolute ceiling in any market, the cost of new construction must come in at a level that is financially feasible, which can be very difficult to do, especially early in the redevelopment process when rents are probably low.

Like suburban development, an initial downtown turnaround requires sufficient parking. Only after critical mass is reached will parking ratios begin to drop, as more of the residents are walking or taking transit for their daily needs. The majority of the parking for rental apartments typically needs to be on-site. While converted office or industrial buildings may have more than sufficient parking, new construction will likely require structured parking, which is approximately 10 times more expensive than surface parking to build. In either case, the amount of parking on the site will drive the number of units that can be built.

In spite of the obstacles, downtown can often achieve the highest rents in the metropolitan area. If you offer a unique rental product in a unique, walkable downtown that is on the way back, the rents are likely to float to the top of the market.

Figure 3. Progressive Real Estate Cash Flows with Value Latching



Source: Christopher B. Leinberger, Arcadia Land Co. and Robert Charles Lesser & Co.

artists in the area and providing potential housing within walking distance for the business' employees. This complexity just adds to the upward spiral of value creation. Fourth, the use of old-fashioned guilt at not participating can be very influential. Finally, there are still civic-minded people and developers who would do it because it is a good thing to do for the community.

The future cash flows that are dedicated to the Civic Trust can be employed to provide equity investments in market-rate housing projects in return for an agreed upon number of affordable housing units. These housing units will be affordable for the long-term, not for 15 years like Federal programs. For example, the Civic Trust may finance CDCs in their development work, buy land and hold it and then contribute the land for future development which includes affordable commercial space and housing.

The obvious problem with value-latching is that the funds from the market rate development projects are not available to the Civic Trust when the downtown is just in the beginning stage of redevelopment, when the prices are the most affordable. Waiting until those funds become available then means that the prices of land and buildings have already begun to rapidly escalate, making it harder for the Civic Trust to fulfill its mission.

The answer to this dilemma is to borrow money from foundations who have a "program related investment" (PRI) loan program. First created by the Ford Foundation in the 1970s, PRIs allow foundations to lend substantial amounts of money which fulfill their mission. PRIs are usually invested in affordable housing or commercial projects that must then pay back the loan from that project's cash flow. Basically, this constitutes a non-recourse loan with the real estate project as the only potential source of repayment, a daunting proposition for most lenders. As a result, PRIs have a relatively high default rate. However, the Civic Trust can obtain PRI loans which will have two sources of repayment to the foundation making the loan: the market rate real estate project which dedicated its unanticipated profits to the Civic Trust and the affordable housing or commercial project that the money was invested in. This mechanism allows the Civic Trust to get in front of the gentrification curve, obtaining a capital base before the gentrification of downtown drives prices too high.

Getting in front of the issue of affordability adds tremendously to the complexity and social equity of downtown. At the same time, having households of all income levels living within

"Having households of all income levels living within walking distance provides another unique aspect to life in downtown."

walking distance provides another unique aspect to life in downtown, something not available in any other part of largely income-segregated America. This is yet another competitive advantage for a reviving downtown.

Step 10: Focus on For-Sale Housing

Following the establishment of urban entertainment and the initial "colonization" of downtown by urban pioneers who rent, for-sale housing can return to downtown. For-sale housing appeals to a very different set of households than renters. They are generally older, not as adventuresome, and are prepared and able to invest in the largest asset of their personal net worth, their home.

The natural markets for for-sale housing in a reviving downtown include young professional singles and couples and Baby Boomer empty nesters. These are typically childless households who likely demand less living space, and aren't concerned about the quality of the schools. Still, far-sighted civic strategists responsible for downtown revitalization would be wise to include improving the downtown schools in their strategic plan. This would allow for the young professionals to stay in downtown if they eventually have children. In downtown Albuquerque, for example, the schools were a part of the strategy. There is a magnet elementary school serving downtown and in the fall of 2005, a charter high school with 200 students is moving into an old federal Building.

Another likely market to come downtown, though generally after the initial wave of for-sale housing, is retirees. The ability to access goods and services without the need for a car, coupled with close proximity to medical care in many cities, make downtown an ideal location for this group. This allows them to stay in the same city near friends and family while maintaining their self-sufficiency, especially if they are not able to drive.

Having an established for-sale housing market is the ultimate test of whether the downtown has achieved critical mass. Given the size of the for-sale housing market, it is crucial to the success of a downtown turnaround. Bringing middle and upper-middle housing to downtown will provide the tax base so sorely needed by most cities, and members of these households will demand a level of service that will continue the upward spiral. These services—whether they be safety, cleanliness, or parades—will benefit all elements of the community, not just those who choose to make their home downtown.

Today, with around two-thirds of U.S. downtowns in some stage of revitalization, there are many more examples of cities where for-sale housing has been profitably built. Well-known successes in downtown Denver, San Diego, Dallas (Uptown), Houston, Baltimore, Atlanta, and others have given the buyers, developers, bankers, and investors confidence that it can work in other downtowns around the county sooner than one might expect.

Step 11: Develop a Local-Serving Retail Strategy

Once downtown begins to be repopulated, the demand for local-serving retail will grow. As new downtowners often come to realize, however, long-time inner-city households have had to drive to the suburbs for most of their daily shopping needs for the past 20 to 30 years. In the initial stages of redevelopment, the new downtown residents have to as well. There are two primary reasons why many of these urban areas are under-retailed, despite their high density of demand for goods and services.

First, the structure of retail has changed considerably over the past several decades, evolving into fewer and larger outlets. These larger outlets draw from a consumer radius that has become wider and wider, increasingly undercutting smaller retailers in the area in price and selection. In the grocery business, A & P and Winn-Dixie put the small mom and pop corner grocer out of business, just as Wal-Mart is putting A & P and Winn-Dixie out of business today. The mom and pop grocer had a three to four block consumer draw, A & P had a one to two mile consumer draw and Wal-Mart has a three to five mile consumer draw. Store sizes went from 5,000 square feet mom & pop stores to 20,000 to 40,000 square feet regional and national chains to 180,000 square feet super centers. More significantly, the 40,000 square foot grocery store had about five acres of land, 80 percent under asphalt for parking, while the super center has a need for about 20 to 25 acres of land, most of it used for parking. Finding five acres in or near downtown is difficult, and finding 20 to 25 acres is nearly impossible in many cities.

As each succeeding generation of retailer's stores and parking lots became geometrically larger in size, the obsolete retail space was abandoned or under-utilized, resulting in the miles of deteriorating strip commercial littering American arterial highways. The big retail boxes went further to the fringe to obtain the vast amount of land required for their "modern" concepts. This includes selling goods in larger quantities and portions than those found in traditional grocery stores (flats of soda, not six-packs, and 180 ounces of dishwasher detergent, not 16 ounces), which then requires a car, or an SUV, to haul the stuff home. No one walks to a Sam's Club.

Second, local-serving retail is a "follower" real estate product, i.e., the housing must be in place before a grocery store can build a store. As a downtown redevelops, there are not enough households initially to justify the conventional grocery store. This is coupled with the fact they these stores have little or no experience in an in-fill urban location with parking challenges. Over the past three decades, these stores have been built primarily in the suburbs, relying upon new housing sub-divisions for demand and cheap surface parking. These national and international companies have top down policies for site selection, based upon this suburban paradigm. Obtaining an exception to these policies is very difficult, even if the local or regional management understand the demand for their store in downtown.

The super-sizing of retail and its subsequent flight to the fringe meant that as people began moving into American downtowns, they had no choice but to drive to the suburbs to shop. That, however, is changing.

There are some national and regional local-serving retailers who are experimenting with downtown and inner-city locations, making significant modifications to their format to fit the smaller urban sites and confined parking. These include the Ralph's, Safeway, and Kroger grocery chains, Home Depot, and the major book stores, among others. Grocery stores in particular are finding urban locations exceeding profitable due to less shelf space devoted to low-profit paper goods, like diapers, and more space for more profitable take-out food for busy professional households. The limitation on land that can be assembled in and near downtown also has an advantage for national, regional, and local chains that move there: Wal-Mart super centers will have a hard time getting very close.

Of course, there are still locally-owned retailers who provide groceries, drugs, and hardware and offer the "in and out" convenience—especially for one and two item trips—that larger stores lack. Unfortunately, they have become a dying breed. These companies often have weak balance sheets and thus have difficulty obtaining financing from banks for new development. Only if a project has sufficient patient long-term equity is it possible to lease or build space for smaller retailers with a shaky financial history. Thus while some of these stores will continue to thrive, as a group they are probably only part of the solution to downtowns' growing local-serving retail demands. The other part of the solution is finding ways to entice national "big box" retailers to integrate into a walkable landscape.

Step 12: Re-create a Strong Office Market

As entertainment, housing, and retail are established downtown, the office market will begin to follow.

In every metropolitan area in the country, there is at least one major concentration of upper-income housing. This concentration may be to the northeast, like Phoenix, the south, like Kansas City or the west, like Philadelphia. In each area, this is also where most of the office space has been built over the past 40 years.[12] It is known as the "favored quarter," the 90 degree arc coming out from downtown that includes the bulk of high end housing, the major regional malls, most of the new infrastructure, and the vast majority of new office space in the metropolitan area for two generations. The explosion of growth in the favored quarter is the major reason downtowns went into decline from the 1950s to the 1990s.

As upper-middle income for-sale housing is built in downtown, there will gradually be a return of a healthy office market and the employment it houses.

Once the bosses, who make the ultimate decision about office location, begin to live downtown, they will decide to bring their office there as well. Why should they drive to the suburbs from downtown when they could walk to work or have a very short drive? This has happened in those downtowns that have been redeveloping the longest over the past generation, particularly Denver, Portland, and Seattle. Denver, for example, had a vastly overbuilt office market following the energy bust of the early 1980s, which left office vacancies over 30 percent. Due to the combination of the 1990s economic boom, the conversion of obsolete office space into housing, and the construction of new for-sale housing in downtown, office buildings were once again being built in the last few years.

This step in the redevelopment process will probably only fill existing, vacant office space in most cities, due to the past overbuilding and the weak demand for office employment in the economy in general. However, it will be a tremendous benefit for city revenues and the employment prospects of other downtown and city residents. With most new metropolitan jobs located in the favored quarter of the suburbs, they were hard to reach by city residents, especially those with lower incomes. A growth in office development will address this imbalance, though it generally takes 15 to 20 years from the start of the revitalization process.

Endnotes

1. Christopher B. Leinberger is a partner in Arcadia Land Co, a new urbanism development company with projects in Pennsylvania, Missouri, and New Mexico. Arcadia is the managing member of the Historic District Improvement Co. (HDIC), the catalytic development company in downtown Albuquerque. Leinberger is also a managing director of Robert Charles Lesser & Co., one of the leading real estate advisory firms in the country, and has consulted on downtown revitalizations in over 50 cities world-wide. He has written or contributed chapters to six books on metropolitan development and strategy and his articles have appeared in numerous national magazines and trade and academic journals. Leinberger is a graduate of Swarthmore College and the Harvard Business School. His web site, which has copies of his articles and links to various development projects, is **www.cleinberger.com**.

2. Eugenie Birch, "Who Lives Downtown" (Washington: Brookings Institution, forthcoming).

3. Robert E. Lang, *Edgeless Cities: Exploring the Elusive Metropolis* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003).

4. For more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see "Building for the Long-Term" (Urban Land, December, 2003), at **www.cleinberger.com**.

5. These lessons come predominantly from Robert Charles Lesser & Co. experience consulting in large cities that include Baltimore, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland (OR), Chicago, Minneapolis, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, El Paso, Phoenix, San Diego, Denver, Atlanta, Miami, Orlando, Jacksonville, Savannah, Nashville, and one of the finest examples in recent years, Chattanooga. There has also been consulting work in many small towns, such Provo (Utah), La Grange (Georgia), and Hershey (Pennsylvania), among others. Finally, they are also based on direct development experience in two very different places, St. Petersburg, Russia and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

6. *America's Real Estate*, Urban Land Institute, 1997

7. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

8. Ansley Park, just north of downtown Atlanta, is a prime example. Averaging under $30,000 twenty years ago, today homes in this neighborhood are among the most valuable single family housing in the region, with values topping $1 million.

9. Go to **www.cabq.gov/planning/publications/down2010** to see the Albuquerque Downtown 2010 Plan.

10. The first catalytic development companies were the redevelopment agencies cities set up in the 1950s and 1960s to spur downtown redevelopment, generally called community redevelopment agencies or something similar. These were government departments, managed by public employees. By the 1970s, however, the opportunity for political interference, combined with the fact that public employees had no entrepreneurial incentives to motivate their work, made it clear that an alternative structure was required. That alternative took the form of quasi-independent special purpose government organizations with their own board of directors. While still managed by government employees, there was less political interference and a focused purpose for the organization. However, the incentives this type of organization could offer its employees were constrained, as it was still an arm of government. Two of the best examples of this kind of catalytic developer have been the Centre City Development Corporation in downtown San Diego and the Portland Development Commission, which have overseen two of the most impressive revitalization processes in the country over the past 30 years.

11. For more information go to **www.abqcivictrust.org**

12. Robert E. Lang, *Edgeless Cities* and Christopher B. Leinberger, "The Changing Location of Development and Investment Opportunities" (Urban Land, May, 1995). Available at **www.cleinberger.com**

Acknowledgements

The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program would like to thank the Surdna and Fannie Mae foundations for their support of our work on competitive cities.

The author would like to acknowledge the city of Albuquerque (current Mayor Martin Chavez, former Mayor Jim Baca, and the City Council) and the McCune Charitable Foundation, especially Executive Director Owen Lopez, for taking on the challenge and financial risk of revitalizing downtown Albuquerque. Finally, the author wishes to thank his national partners, Robert Davis, W. Joseph Duckworth, Gadi Kaufmann, and, especially, his Albuquerque partner, Pat Bryan, who have brought such commitment, passion, and wisdom to the revitalization of downtown Albuquerque.

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