AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

Little Rock, Arkansas



Urban Land Institute

Little Rock, Arkansas

A Redevelopment Plan for Midtown

April 1–6, 2001
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI–the Urban Land Institute
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About ULI–the Urban Land Institute

ULI–the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 16,000 members and associates from 60 countries, 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, academicians, 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 America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan
President

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About ULI Advisory Services

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 panel teams are interdisciplinary and typically include several developers, a landscape architect, a planner, a market analyst, a finance expert, and others with the niche expertise needed to address a given project. ULI teams provide a holistic look at development problems. Each panel is chaired by a respected ULI member with previous panel experience.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day and a half of hour-long interviews of typically 80 to 100 key community representatives; and a day and a half of formulating recommendations. Many 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. At the request of 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 five-day 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, academicians, 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 our environment.

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Of particular note is the outstanding support provided by the planning staff under the leadership of Jim Lawson, director of the Department of Planning and Development, and Tony Bozynski, assistant director. Their invaluable assistance throughout the course of the study helped to ensure the success of the panel's efforts.

The panel is indebted to the more than 55 community residents, government and business leaders, property owners, and members of the medical establishment who provided unique and valuable insights during the interview process. As a group, they serve as a major asset in advancing the interests of the city. The individual perspectives gained from these interviews were crucial to the success of the planning process.

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Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

James Rouse, a leading developer and creator of the festival marketplace, once said, "The only legitimate purpose of a city is to provide for the life and growth of its people." The intent of the panel was to meet the community's needs and generate momentum for redevelopment of the prime real estate site defining midtown Little Rock. In addition, the panel considered development techniques and design guidelines that would enhance the intersection of West Markham Street and University Avenue as well as the frontage along West Markham Street from University Avenue to Pine Street.

The main task for the panel was to determine a workable redevelopment plan for midtown Little Rock. The need arose as a response to an infill commercial development proposal at C Street and University Avenue that was approved by the city.

The study area was divided into two parts: the primary area, containing two shopping malls, medical office facilities and freestanding commercial buildings; and the secondary area, dealing with the Hillcrest neighborhood border area that might be affected if significant development changes occur in the primary area. The secondary area, in turn, consists of two parts: the frontage along West Markham Street from University Avenue to Pine Street, and an area north of Lee Avenue to Evergreen Drive along the east side of University Avenue. The panel does not suggest any changes for this northern portion of the secondary area, other than to continue to recognize it as a Hillcrest neighborhood border that needs to be protected.

The panel's main objectives in carrying out this assignment were to protect the neighborhood and to create a center for the community. The planning area contains a number of strengths to build upon in considering redevelopment opportunities.





Location map (above). Little Rock area map (left).

The site is in a prime location—at the crossroads of University Avenue and West Markham Street, with visibility and direct access from Interstate 630. The intersection is recognized statewide as

Park Plaza mall, in the primary study area.



University Mall, in the primary study area.



A view of the north side of West Markham Street in the secondary study area.



midtown Little Rock. While I-630 is the major east-west corridor connecting the downtown area to midtown, Interstate 430 is the major north-south corridor connecting many areas of west Little Rock. In addition, the midtown site is directly across from a major medical facility, the St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center.

The primary study area is further known by its proximity to a larger medical land area of which the St. Vincent campus is a part. This area extends along West Markham Street from University Avenue to Elm Street and south to I-630. Other medical facilities in this area include the Arkansas State Hospital, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), and the John L. McClellan Memorial Hospital, a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility. Near this medical complex is a large recreation area with an 18-hole golf course, War Memorial Park, War Memorial Stadium, and the Little Rock Zoo.

The secondary study area that extends along West Markham Street follows the boundary of these medical and recreational properties. These surrounding land uses define the study area and provide its identity as the predominant area of midtown Little Rock. In addition, three well-established residential neighborhoods with relatively medium to high incomes surround the site —Hillcrest, immediately east of University Avenue; the Heights, to its north; and Briarwood, east of and contiguous to the site.

Hillcrest neighborhood residents—together with other area residents, the city, and the developers of the adjacent C Street/University Avenue site —look to the panel to help define a strategic development plan for the area. The impetus for the panel also resulted from concern that, with development moving toward west Little Rock, the midtown area will continue to decline.

The existing project site contains, among other buildings, one struggling mall, University Mall, and one seemingly successful mall, Park Plaza. However, the owners of the more successful mall are also partners with the development company that recently received approval for construction of a regional mall, Summit Mall, in west Little Rock. With Dillard's either planning or contem-





plating relocation of a department store, or stores, area stakeholders realize that either action will have a tremendous impact on the viability of Park Plaza and the entire midtown development area.

The panel recognizes a number of major concerns relevant to the successful redevelopment of midtown. First is regional mall competition, whether at the recently approved Summit Mall site or, inevitably, elsewhere in the area. Next is the uncertainty associated with the continued tenancy of the anchor stores, particularly the two stores operated by Dillard's at Park Plaza. Also, it is evident that the decline of University Mall has been caused by anchor stores leaving that location and the lack of modernization.

Of less complexity, the main concern regarding the secondary study area along West Markham Street is a lack of design guidelines. The panel was asked to consider ways to improve the physical environment along the corridor and to safeguard the adjacent residential neighborhood of Hillcrest.



An 18-hole golf course is part of a large recreation area off West Markham Street (top left). St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center (top right). Houses along Kavanaugh Boulevard in the Hillcrest neighborhood (left).



An interior entrance to Dillard's department store in Park Plaza.

Overview and Summary of Recommendations

The panel recommends a phased strategy based on a parcel-by-parcel development plan, with each parcel independent of the others, but linked by pedestrian connections critical to the functioning of the overall plan. The main benefit of this proposed strategy is that each block, or parcel, can be developed as it becomes available. Thus, phased construction can occur in any order, independent of development activity at the adjacent parcel.

Redevelopment of these approximately 130 acres can occur over the next ten to 15 years. However, the panel urges prompt action to initiate development of the Hillcrest/Lifestyle parcel and stresses the importance that it be of sufficient mass to stand on its own while awaiting further development.

The Development Plan

The goal of the redevelopment of midtown is to provide a mixed-use town center aimed at serving the surrounding communities. The panel suggests a wide variety of uses to result in an economically viable plan and to include the following: office space for medical-related use and education administration; a 150-room hotel; basic retail services such as a general merchandise store and/or a full service grocery store; "lifestyle" stores offering home furnishings; and, restaurants and coffee bars. A 20-screen megaplex movie theater would serve as an anchor for the parcel now defined by University Mall.



A good example of infill housing recently developed along Hill Road.

These proposed land uses should be incorporated into the town center using basic urban design principles to create a walkable environment emphasized by proposed pedestrian connections and enhanced by landscaping, lighting, and street furniture to ensure safety and convenience. Buildings should be designed to a scale allowing for greater visibility and ease of access from surrounding roadways, with sufficient parking and a transit transfer point incorporated into the traffic circulation system.

The panel further recommends the inclusion of housing to meet the market demand of those not seeking a single-family detached home. Multifamily for-sale housing is recommended for singles, couples, empty nesters, and seniors. (Refer to the planning and design section of this report for a more detailed discussion of recommended uses on a parcel-by-parcel basis.) Demand for rental and for-sale housing in the Hillcrest neighborhood is strong, but supply is limited due to a lack of vacant land for residential development.

The redevelopment site occupies a central city location that further enjoys the benefits of its relationship to the West Markham Street and University Avenue intersection that is known throughout the state. Surrounding land uses—residential, educational, medical, public recreation, and open space—also provide a positive influence on the site and a clear identity to the area. It is important to improve transitions and connections among these land uses by incorporating the panel's proposed suggestions to encourage safe pedestrian access.

Design Guidelines

Adoption of specific guidelines and controls should result in less visual clutter and provide greater convenience for the pedestrian. Design guidelines can help to safeguard the Hillcrest neighborhood and concentrate mixed-use development along the corridor. To this end, the panel recommends a set of design guidelines for new development and redevelopment along the West Markham Street corridor to ensure compatibility with the bordering Hillcrest residential neighborhood.

Safe pedestrian crossings, together with the development of a streetscape plan and signage controls, should help to reduce the visual clutter evident along the north side of the corridor. In addition, the panel encourages the medical community to become involved in the redevelopment of this area by creating a more sensitive presence along the south side of West Markham Street. Zoning changes should continue to encourage mixed-use development.

Implementation

The panel recommends that a development district for midtown Little Rock be set up to function as a facilitator for the proposed redevelopment plan. The district would be responsible for creating and implementing a master plan with oversight responsibility extending through the redevelopment's construction.

Action items to be accomplished during the first year are expressed in a time line. The panel emphatically suggests that the mayor and city government move immediately to create the district and provide it with the powers necessary to accomplish its tasks, including the power of eminent domain, the refinement of a master plan, the establishment of design guidelines, and the development of a financial plan.

Little Rock has a unique opportunity to influence and control future redevelopment of large blocks of land within established neighborhoods in the central, midtown area. The panel found consensus regarding the need for redevelopment among the stakeholders representing a broad spectrum of city residents and business people. This consensus will help support the efforts necessary to realize the proposed redevelopment of midtown.



The Arkansas State Health Department on the south side of West Markham Street could incorporate landscaping to create a more sensitive presence.



A view of downtown from the Little Rock Country Club.

Market Potential

To ensure that the solutions the panel recommends are economically viable, it assembled a profile of the market and conducted an assessment of market potentials.

Profile of the Region

The Little Rock metropolitan statistical area (MSA) is a relatively small region with a 2000 population of roughly 584,000. The capital city region of Arkansas, the metropolitan area has 21.8 percent of the state population. During the 1990s, the state and the region grew modestly—by 13.7 and 13.8 percent, respectively.

The regional economy is relatively strong and diversified. Total employment stands at 313,000; unemployment in the metropolitan area was only 3.3 percent in February 2001. Little Rock is primarily a city of government, health services, and education. Manufacturing provides 10 percent of the region's jobs, including corporate jet finishing and modification, railroad car refurbishment, printing and publishing, and fabricated metals.

Little Rock had a population of 183,133 in 2000, representing roughly one-third of the region's residents. Through annexation and new development, Little Rock's population grew by 7,300, or 4.2 percent, during the 1990s. (See Figure 1.) The city captured only 10 percent of the region's growth. The remaining growth was distributed around the region, with 6 percent occurring in the balance of Pulaski County, 37 percent in Faulkner County to the north, 27 percent in Saline County to the west, and 19 percent in Lonoke County to the east. (See Figure 2.)



John L. McClellan Memorial Hospital.

Residential development in the 1990s was concentrated in the western and southwestern portions of the city. Of the 9,098 units added during the decade, almost three-quarters were built west of I-430. Almost one-third of the units were constructed in the Chenal planning district, west of the study area at the intersection of I-430 and I-630. Reflecting its built-up nature, the midtown planning districts had 672 new units constructed during the 1990s, while 541 units were demolished for a net gain of only 131 new units.

Close-In Population

As an indication of the characteristics of the nearby populations of Hillcrest, Briarwood, and University Park, the panel reviewed the demographics of areas defined by a one-mile and a three-mile radius from the intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street. (See Figures 3–7.) The one-mile radius reaches Cantrell Boulevard to the north, the western edge of the UAMS campus on the east, 14th Street to the south, and Mississippi Street on the west.

These immediately adjacent neighborhoods had a 2000 estimated population of 9,700 residents, just over 5 percent of the city's total population. From 1980 to 2000, these close-in neighborhoods lost 13 percent of their population due largely to the trend toward smaller household sizes. Relative to the city and the metropolitan area population, the residents of these close-in neighborhoods:

- Were older—the area's median age was 43.2 years, and 24 percent were aged 65 or older;

- Had fewer children—only 17 percent of residents were under the age of 18;
- Had smaller households—the average household had 1.86 persons, with 46 percent of households having only one person and 34 percent having only two persons;
- Were more affluent—the median household income was $45,571, and 21 percent had incomes of $75,000 or more;
- Were more educated—38 percent had a college degree; and
- Were more likely to be employed in executive, managerial, or professional specialty occupations; 43 percent of employed residents fit these categories.

The wider area within three miles of University and Markham encompasses most of central Little Rock. A three-mile radius reaches to the river on the north, the state capitol on the east, Highway 67/70 on the south, and I-430 on the west, encompassing most of central Little Rock. With almost 73,000 residents, this area represented 40 percent of the city's estimated population in 2000.

Though similar to the population within one mile of the University/Markham intersection, this population:

- Was younger—the median age was 37.2 years, with 14.9 percent aged 65 or older;
- Had more children—23.7 percent were under the age of 18;
- Had larger households—the average household size was 2.18 persons, with 42 percent of households having three or more persons;
- Were somewhat less affluent—the estimated median household income was $42,322, and 21.9 percent had incomes of $75,000 or more;
- Were somewhat less educated—34 percent had college degrees; and
- Were somewhat less likely to be employed in executive, managerial, or professional specialty occupations—37 percent of employed residents held such jobs.

Figure 1
Little Rock Population Growth

Area	1990	2000	Change Number	Change Percent
City of Little Rock	175,795	183,133	7,338	4.2
Pulaski County	349,660	361,474	11,814	3.4
Little Rock MSA	513,117	583,845	70,728	13.8
Arkansas	2,350,725	2,673,400	322,675	13.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 2
Little Rock MSA Population Growth by County

County	1990	2000	Change Number	Change Percent
Pulaski	349,660	361,474	11,814	3.4
Faulkner	60,006	86,014	26,008	43.3
Lonoke	39,268	52,828	13,560	34.5
Saline	64,183	83,529	19,346	30.1
Total	513,117	583,845	70,728	13.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Nearby Employment

The University/Hillcrest area is blessed with an extensive employment base in the medical institutions east of University Avenue and south of West Markham Street. (See Figure 8.) The UAMS campus, the VA hospital, the Arkansas State Hospital, and the St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center



The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is located along the south side of West Markham Street.

Figure 3
Characteristics of Close-In Population

Population by Decade	One Mile*	Three Miles*
1980	11,203	83,456
1990	10,251	77,946
2000	9,727	72,681
By Age		
Under 18	17.4%	23.7%
18 to 24	4.9%	7.9%
25 to 34	13.5%	14.8%
35 to 44	17.4%	16.8%
45 to 54	14.8%	13.9%
55 to 64	8.7%	8.1%
65 and over	24.3%	14.9%
Median Age	43.2	37.2

* Distance from intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street.
Source: Claritas, Inc.

Figure 4
Households of Close-in Population

Number of Persons per Household	One Mile*	Three Miles*
One	46.2%	36.9%
Two	33.9%	33.2%
Three	11.2%	14.4%
Four	5.8%	9.5%
Five	2.2%	3.7%
Six or more	0.7%	2.2%
Average Household Size	1.86	2.18
Total Households	5,045	32,149

* Distance from intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street.
Source: Claritas, Inc.



War Memorial Stadium.

have extensive operations and are all staffed around the clock. Together with the many medical office buildings, these institutions have a workforce of 12,000 to 13,000 people. UAMS has an additional 2,350 students and medical residents, though some of those students work at Children's Hospital to the east.

Area Visitors

The medical institutions attract patients from across the state, while specialists at UAMS attract patients from a five-state region and beyond. These patients and the family and friends who accompany them often use the occasion to shop at the midtown malls. Also attracting visitors are War Memorial Stadium and the Little Rock Zoo. The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism estimates that Pulaski County attracted 4.34 million visitors (person-trips) in 2000. The midtown area is conservatively estimated to have drawn 15 percent, or 651,000, of those visitors.

Market Segments

The assessment of the market potentials looked at Little Rock's office, hotel, and retail markets.

The Office Market

The Little Rock office market has a total inventory of 10.8 million square feet of net rentable space, of which 87 percent is occupied. Downtown Little Rock accounts for 4.9 million square feet, or 45 percent, of the regional total.

Office construction in Little Rock has averaged 591,000 square feet per year over the past 10 years. Construction approved by building permit in 2000 was well above the average of the 1990s due to the new building construction for Acxiom, Southwestern Bell, the Arkansas Teachers Retirement System, the Donaghey Foundation, and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. Excluding the 2000 construction, office development averaged 479,000 square feet per year during the 1990s.

Midtown has an inventory of 1.2 million square feet of space, or 11 percent of the regional inventory. Of that total, 101,000 square feet, or 10.1 percent is vacant. This midtown office market within the study area includes medical space.

Future potential for office development depends largely on the growth of the medical institutions. UAMS physicians are all housed in UAMS facilities, and St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center physicians typically maintain private offices, most of which are connected to the St. Vincent Doctors Hospital facility just south of University Mall.

These physicians prefer close and direct access from their offices to the hospital facilities, allowing them to move quickly from one to the other. As St. Vincent grows, the board intends to focus its investments on the immediate proximity of the University Avenue campus. This creates the potential for new office development by St. Vincent or by physicians associated with the hospital.

Given the uncertainties in health care, it is difficult to estimate the potential scale or pace of that development. The existing Doctors Building, Doctors Plaza, and Plaza West buildings have a total of 343,000 square feet of net rental space, of which only 11,400 square feet, or 3.3 percent, is vacant. However, vacancy rates are higher at the Blandford Physician Center and Parkview Building, where vacancies are estimated to be above 5 percent and, perhaps, closer to 12 percent. Current asking rents range from $14.50 to $15.75 per square foot on full-service leases.

The Hotel Market

Pulaski County attracted an estimated 4.3 million visitors (person-trips) in 2000. Assuming that midtown attracted 15 percent of the county's annual visitors, an estimated 650,000 people visited this part of the city.

It can further be assumed that most visitor trips were associated with the area's medical services. Finding themselves in this part of town by necessity, some visitors support the retail services in Park Plaza and University Mall. Midtown may also serve as a destination for others who travel to visit the Little Rock Zoo or to attend games at War Memorial Stadium.

Not all of these visitors stay overnight in commercial establishments. The existing hotels accommodate an estimated 150,000 to 165,000 room-nights, or an estimated 100,000 to 125,000 visitors. The midtown market is served by a total

Figure 5
Income of Close-in Population

Average Household Income	One Mile*	Three Miles*
Median	$45,751	$42,322
Mean	56,481	59,177
2000 Household Income		
$0 to $24,999	22.4%	27.5%
$25,000 to 49,999	33.9%	32.0%
$50,000 to $74,999	22.2%	18.7%
$75,000 and over	21.5%	21.9%
Occupancy		
Owner	56%	56%
Renter	44%	44%

* Distance from intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street.
Source: Claritas, Inc.

Figure 6
Educational Level of Close-in Population

Highest Level Obtained	One Mile*	Three Miles*
Elementary or Some High School	10.6%	14.6%
High School Diploma	21.5%	23.4%
Some College	29.9%	27.4%
Bachelor's Degree	22.7%	21.5%
Graduate Degree	15.3%	13.2%

* Distance from intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street.
Source: Claritas, Inc.

Figure 7
Occupations of Close-in Population

Job Type	One Mile*	Three Miles*
Executive and Managerial	18.4%	15.3%
Professional Specialty	24.5%	21.8%
Technical Support	5.2%	3.8%
Sales	17.2%	14.6%
Administrative Support	17.4%	17.5%
Service	8.2%	12.3%
Manufacturing and Other	9.2%	14.8%

*Distance from intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street.
Source: Claritas, Inc.

Figure 8
Study Area Employee and Student Populations

Employer	Population
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences	
Employees	7,000
Students	1,700 – 1,900
Veterans Hospital	2,000 – 2,500
St. Vincent Medical Center	450 – 500
State Department of Health	900 – 1,000
Arkansas State Hospital	450 – 500
Office	1,260 – 1,620
Retail	1,125 – 1,900
Total Employees and Students	**14,885 – 16,920**

Sources: City of Little Rock briefing materials and interviews.

Doctors Hospital, located across from University Mall.



Montgomery Ward at University Mall is now closed.



of 640 rooms in five hotels. Closest to the redevelopment area is the Guesthouse Inn, a relatively new property with 72 rooms, located northeast of the University Avenue and St. Vincent Circle intersection on the St. Vincent campus. The Hilton Inn with 243 rooms is located just south of I-630 and east of University Avenue. It is scheduled for a total renovation to be completed by the end of 2001.

The panel believes that strong competition from other areas of the city limits the potential for near-term development of new full-service hotels in midtown. However, representatives of the medical institutions report a need for lower-priced hotel rooms for the families of long-term patients. Thus, there may be a potential for an extended-stay hotel or limited-service hotels.

The Retail Market

Regional Retail. In the Little Rock MSA, there are two nodes of regional retail. One node is in the ULI study area within midtown, and the other is in North Little Rock—the McCain Mall, an enclosed mall of 762,000 square feet, anchored by Dillard's, M.M. Cohn, JCPenney, and Sears department stores.

The regional retail node in the midtown area of Little Rock is at the intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street. It is composed of two malls that total about 1.1 million square feet plus a freestanding, 168,000-square-foot Sears store. Sears has indicated that it plans to relocate to the new Summit Mall.

University Mall is on the south side of West Markham Street and totals 542,000 square feet, of which 388,000 square feet is in the three anchors: JCPenney (scheduled to move to Summit Mall), Montgomery Ward (closed), and M.M. Cohn. Although the 142,000-square-foot Montgomery Ward has closed, there is a good chance that another national retailer will occupy this space. The remaining 153,000 square feet consists of a food court, discount retailers, and nonretail tenants like the Armed Forces recruiting center. University Mall suffers from a lack of national tenants, obsolete design, poor maintenance, high vacancy (40 percent), below-market rents, and low sales ($20 million range).

North of West Markham Street is a very different mall. Park Plaza includes 546,000 square feet, of which 284,000 square feet is in two anchor stores—both Dillard's department stores. The remaining 262,000-square-foot area is high-end national retail shops and a food court.

Park Plaza is a very successful regional mall. The mall's specialty stores enjoy sales of $360 per

square foot, total annual sales in the mid–$80 million range, a low vacancy rate of 5 percent, and attractive and well-maintained common areas.

In addition, a new concentration of retail has formed recently in west Little Rock, generally in the Chenal Parkway corridor. Almost all of the major big-box retailers have built stores in this corridor over the past few years, attracted by strong population growth and high-end housing that is transforming the west side. These stores have and will continue to affect midtown.

From a supply/demand perspective, regional retail in the Little Rock MSA is balanced: with a regional population of about 584,000, the area can only support the two existing regional retail nodes. And it is unlikely that Little Rock's growth will justify a third regional center in the near future since Little Rock's MSA only grew 14 percent in the past decade.

If it is built, the proposed Summit Mall, which the city approved in April 2001, will upset this supply/demand balance. Some have questioned whether it will be built. But even if it is not, the panel believes a new regional mall will be developed somewhere within Little Rock and that it will hurt midtown.

Summit Mall, as proposed by the Simon Property Group, will comprise more than 1.1 million square feet devoted to four anchor department stores, junior anchors, restaurants, and more than 100 specialty stores. The result will be the demise of one of the two existing regional retail nodes.

The panel believes that the clear loser will be the midtown malls for the following reasons:

- Summit Mall will be about three miles from the midtown malls.
- Summit Mall will benefit from the most advanced design and finishes, compared with the 30-year-old midtown malls.
- Dillard's is a partner with Simon Property Group in Summit Mall and will build a 300,000-square-foot store there. Because Dillard's has more than 284,000 square feet in two stores at Park Plaza, the panel believes it is very unlikely that the company will be able to operate profitably the combined 584,000 square feet of space at two malls only three miles apart. Dillard's has not committed to keep open its Park Plaza stores and has adopted a "wait-and-see" approach. This uncertainty created by Park Plaza's only anchor will make it very difficult for Park Plaza to retain its 85 high-quality small stores. Pushed by a Dillard's closing,



Panel members and city planning officials tour Park Plaza.



An interior view of Park Plaza.

Mayor Jim Dailey addresses the panel during the briefing session.



The Hillcrest commercial area along Kavanaugh Boulevard.



these tenants will also be pulled by Simon to Summit Mall.

- The Simon Property Group is the world's largest developer of malls and will use that leverage to attract the current in line tenants (small specialty tenants) at Park Plaza to its new Summit Mall. Given Simon's leasing ability and the basic retail advantage Summit Mall will have over Park Plaza because of its greater size (1.1 million square feet versus 574,248 square feet) and its design, the panel believes many small stores will prefer Summit Mall.

Research on "grayfield" malls—generally defined as sites averaging 45 acres in established areas that are economically obsolete and that would remain uncompetitive even with extensive renovation—demonstrates that rents for nonanchor tenants decline 25 percent after the loss of an anchor. This likely result will cause the downgrading and repositioning of the retail services at both Park Plaza and University Mall. Class A retail could disappear from midtown.

Thus, the addition of Summit Mall in west Little Rock could injure economically both University Mall and Park Plaza by cannibalizing their sales. The design and redevelopment strategies necessary to combat the demise of the midtown retail center are discussed in the remaining sections of the report.

Movie Theater Marketplace. There are two multiscreen theaters with stadium seating in the Little Rock MSA: The Wynnsong Theatres with ten screens and the Breckenridge Village with 12 screens are both in western Little Rock. The lack of a similar product in midtown, together with more recently developed technology, provides an open niche for a state-of-the-art megaplex theater with 20 stadium screens and digital technology. The midtown location would capture the trade areas to the south, east, and north of the MSA and beyond.

The one barrier to a megaplex in midtown is the poor economic condition of the theater industry. A number of theater chains have declared bankruptcy due to their large holding of small complexes that cannot compete with the new megaplexes. In fact, United Artists closed its screens in Park Plaza for this reason.

However, this is a short-term barrier, and within a year, obsolete screens will be removed from balance sheets and theater operators will be searching for megaplex sites. Little Rock's midtown could be attractive to these operators, especially if the theater is integrated into a town center development with attractive design elements that link the theaters to retail and a cluster of restaurants. A megaplex generally attracts 700,000 to 1 million patrons annually.

Community and Neighborhood Retail. Consumer demand for food and drug items exceeds supply in the trade area, which includes the neighborhoods of Hillcrest, Briarwood, and University Park. (The supply tabulation used includes the Kroger food store that is being expanded on Kavanaugh Boulevard.) The optimal grocer to fill this void will appeal to a market segment not now met by the expanding Kroger's.

Beyond groceries, there is unmet demand for community retail, according to panel interviews with local and regional real estate developers. Typical community retailers that might be encouraged to locate in the midtown redevelopment project area include Target and Michael's.

Lifestyle Retail. Alex Kreiger, who chairs the Harvard Design Institute, quotes Aristotle: "People first gather in cities for security, remain for economic opportunity, but ultimately stay for the good life." (*Cities in the 21st Century*, *Urban Land* Supplement, 2000, p.47.) Midtown is perfectly positioned geographically and demographically to provide a destination for those seeking the urban good life.

Two of the key ingredients to create this destination have been discussed: a megaplex theater and a cluster of restaurants. The third ingredient is lifestyle retailing, thought of as "shopping for the good life." Examples of lifestyle retailers include home fashions and cuisine with quality presentation and an appealing atmosphere, such as Pottery Barn, Hold Everything, Williams-Sonoma, FAO Schwarz, Imaginarians, Barnes & Noble, and Crate & Barrel. The midtown area can support a critical mass of these retailers that will be complementary to the local lifestyle retailers on Kavanaugh Boulevard.

The Residential Market

Hillcrest. The panel's study area includes the Hillcrest neighborhood of Little Rock. Hillcrest is one of Little Rock's oldest, most desirable, and most diverse neighborhoods.

It contains a charming mix of housing styles and sizes ranging from 1,700-square-foot bungalows to 10,000-square-foot Italianate mansions. The streets are tree-lined and wind through gentle hills. The neighborhood is further complemented by quality public schools and a pedestrian-friendly retail area established along Kavanaugh Boulevard.

The 1990 census that includes Hillcrest documents a total of 6,198 housing units occupied by 10,737 people. Given the lack of vacant land, these totals are probably accurate today. More than 64 percent of the residences are single-family



A residence on Ridgeway Drive in the Hillcrest neighborhood.



Lee Avenue residence in Hillcrest.

detached, nearly 4 percent are duplexes, and 32 percent are multifamily.

The housing stock in Hillcrest is among the oldest in the city. Less than 1 percent of the homes have been built in the past decade. Twenty percent are over 20 years old, 25 percent over 40 years old, and 24 percent over 50 years old.

Single-Family Housing. This is a strong but small market because there is virtually no vacant land available for new construction. By type:

- **For-sale homes:** According to the Realtors Multiple Listing Service, the sale price of existing homes in the Hillcrest/Heights area during the past year averaged $108,000. This average covers a wide range—from $48,000 to $250,000. While the area is very desirable, as demonstrated by the short time houses remain on the market for resale, home prices in the area are lower than those for the large new homes being built at the western edge of Little Rock.
- **Rental homes:** Twenty percent of Hillcrest's single-family detached homes are rented. The

Doctors Building is in the primary study area.



An interior view of Park Plaza shows a small tenant and the food court on the lower level.



majority of these rentals are on the south and west edges of the neighborhood. Many of these properties shows signs of deferred maintenance.

Multifamily Housing. This is also a strong market consisting mainly of rental mid-rise and older, small apartment buildings with fewer than 20 units per building. These rental properties enjoy a 95 percent occupancy rate.

Except for a very few condominiums, Hillcrest's multifamily homes are rentals. These are of two types: approximately 450 mid-rise apartments in three buildings west of University Avenue and many small unit apartments east of University Avenue. The majority of these small apartment buildings contains fewer than 20 units and is more than 30 years old.

The Hillcrest rental market is one of the strongest in Little Rock. Occupancy is nearly 95 percent, compared with the city's 91 percent average. Average rental rates range from $502 ($0.74 per square foot) for a one-bedroom unit to $826 ($0.63 per square foot) for a three-bedroom unit.

Market Potential Summary

These proposed land uses—offices, hotel, retail, entertainment, and housing—together include the necessary design components to create a town center in midtown that will become a destination.

The Office Market

Since the office market within the midtown area is almost exclusively medical-related space, the potential for future office development depends on the growth of the medical institutions. With an existing low vacancy rate just above 3 percent, there is potential demand among physicians and administrators associated with St. Vincent. Further, as redevelopment occurs, midtown will become a more desirable location for nonmedical office space.

Hotel Accommodations

Medical institutions report a need for lower-priced hotel rooms to accommodate the families of long-term patients. There may also be a potential for extended-stay hotels and limited-service hotels to serve this population better. In addition, with the redevelopment of midtown, it is likely that there will be a demand for higher-priced hotel rooms as the area becomes a more desirable destination.

Retail Services

In terms of a retail market, the panel believes that a niche exists for a 20-screen movie megaplex with stadium seating. This type of entertainment retail can be well integrated into a town center development scheme and would help to support restaurants, coffee bars, and other retail services. Also suggested for inclusion are commu-

nity retail services such as a specialty food store, not to compete with Kroger's, and perhaps a Target store. With the addition of lifestyle retailers, the panel believes that midtown would contain a full range of desirable retail services.

The Residential Market

In terms of a housing component, the demand for rental and for-sale housing in Hillcrest is very strong, but supply is severely limited by the almost total lack of vacant land for residential development. In most years, there are more homes demolished than built in Hillcrest. The pent-up housing demand in Hillcrest means that any new housing construction project would be a market success no matter what market segment was targeted—the first-time buyer, the move-up buyer, or the move-down buyer.



Panel members Anita Morrison and Bob Wulff assess the market potential of the study area.

Development Strategies

The study area is in the middle of a dense and generally stable portion of Little Rock. The strategy suggested for maintaining and enhancing the area as a vibrant and inviting gathering place was formulated to be flexible and with timing keyed to anticipated events, but without precise knowledge as to when those events will occur. The following description of existing conditions for the four parcels considered for redevelopment—the four "super blocks" area—is meant to show how conclusions were reached and why certain strategies are proposed.

Sears/Medical Center Parcel

The property between West Capital Avenue and I-630 contains Doctors Hospital, which is a medical arts building owned by St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center, and a two-level Sears department store, as well as an accompanying tire, battery, and auto accessory store. A New York investor owns the property, and the buildings are leased to the respective users. The lease to Sears expires in 2003 and requires a notice from Sears of its intent to renew at least six months in advance of the expiration of its lease. The renewal term is understood to be for a period of five years.

Since Sears has announced that it will move to Summit Mall when it is built, it must be assumed that this store will close, but the date for closing will be uncertain until a renewal notice is, or is not, received. Given that the new mall may not open for five to seven years, it seems likely that the lease will be renewed.

The panel recommends that, upon its closing, the Sears store be replaced by an office building of approximately the same size that will act as an attractive and welcoming landmark. If this building becomes a facility that relates to St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center, that use would clearly fulfill the proposed development strategy. Further, it would be advantageous to the plan for the current auto accessory building to be eliminated when the Sears store is closed and for the space to be used for parking.

University Mall Parcel

University Mall, operated by the Simon Property Group under a ground lease, is in obvious trouble. The closing of the 142,000-square-foot Montgomery Ward store virtually ended the viability of the center that was struggling with mediocre sales performance before the closing. It is understood that the JCPenney store intends to leave midtown and join Simon's new center, Summit Mall, when that opportunity becomes available within the next five years or so. M.M. Cohn would be left as a weak anchor tenant, contributing little to University Mall as a destination.

Simon has indicated that it will try to fill the Wards vacancy promptly; apparently, a Target store is the likely candidate and is being courted. The panel's judgment is that adding Target, or a similar large and competent mass retailer, would be an appropriate step in repositioning this center to become a far more energized project. Other big-box retailers not already part of the market to the west should be actively sought to replace the other existing but weak or departing anchors.

Since the small stores, to the extent that they still exist, will no longer properly relate to the big-box retail concept for the anchor tenants, and because the configuration of the entire mall will be inappropriate for the types and sizes of small stores to be sought for it, the panel believes it is necessary to remove the existing building and rebuild the mall.

As discussed previously, the panel recommends that a state-of-the-art, 20-screen megaplex theater be included in the center to help create an active destination. Other recommended comple-

mentary uses include multiple restaurants, bistros, and snack shops. A large bookstore, perhaps including a coffee shop, as well as a garden store and/or hobby shop, would add to the town center's ability to become a regional gathering place. A grocery or natural foods store would complement this objective. To accommodate this varied and intensive assortment of uses, additional structured parking is proposed. It is also suggested that about 150 housing units be included in this segment of the project to add further to its vitality.

Park Plaza Parcel

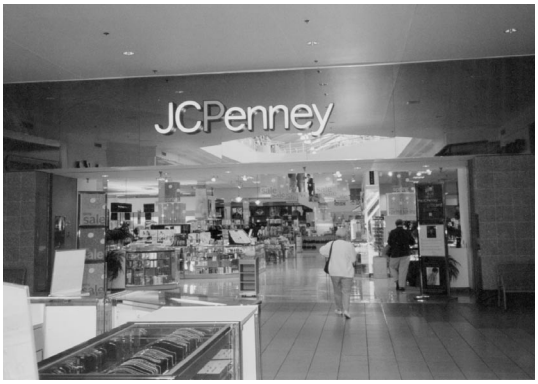
Park Plaza is clearly the most problematic portion of the study area. It is, without question, the most successful retail segment, but the issues raised by the fact that Dillard's is committed to enter Summit Mall, barely three miles to the west, and that it is Simon's joint venture partner in the new mall results in a very questionable future for Park Plaza. There is little doubt that the new mall, proposed to have more than 1.2 million square feet of space, will have a profound impact on Dillard's sales, as well as on the sales of the other stores in the center.

The likely result would be the departure of the two anchors for the mall, leaving it with grossly inadequate traffic to sustain viability. The fact that Dillard's owns the two building pads on which its stores sit further complicates the situation. It is highly questionable whether Dillard's would be willing to sell those pads to a competitor. If it is not willing, Park Plaza would have no opportunity to replace the crucial anchors at each end of the mall and continue to operate in its traditional manner. Further complicating the matter: the small stores all have the right to leave should Dillard's close its units.

In view of this state of affairs, it is impossible to predict what will take place and when. If Summit Mall opens in five to seven years, and Dillard's closes its stores and will not sell its pads to a traditional retail competitor, or if one or both of the stores remain open but not actively merchandised, one option would be for the city to take the pads by eminent domain. It then could make them available for sale and prevent the center from



Auto Express is in the primary study area in the Sears/Medical Center Parcel.



JCPenney plans to leave University Mall and move to Summit Mall.



An Interior view of University Mall.

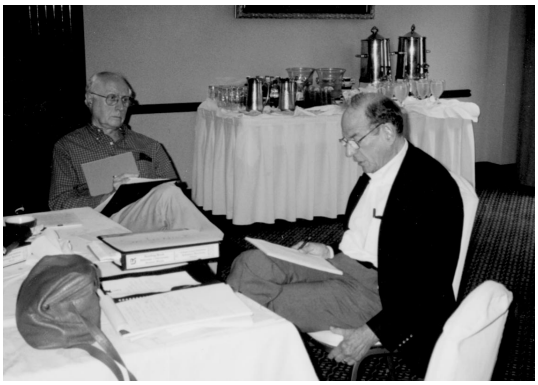
Dillard's is the anchor tenant at Park Plaza.



City Manager Cy Carney (standing) at the panel briefing.



Bud Lake (left), panel chair, and panel member Jim Selonick discuss development strategies.



falling into economic disaster. It should be noted that the proximity of the two malls and the limitations on the size of the market make long-term survival of Park Plaza highly doubtful in any event.

Should Park Plaza fail, the panel has proposed an alternative land use plan. The panel believes that trying to create or preserve another shopping mall in the face of the anticipated strong regional competition and limited demand would be futile and expensive. It suggests that the market would be more appropriate for a 150-room hotel with limited retail at the ground level, and an office tower at least four stories tall. A node of 150 apartment units in a high-density configuration would add to an appropriate combination of uses.

Hillcrest/Lifestyle Parcel

The final segment of the primary study area is immediately east of Park Plaza across University Avenue and to the north of St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center. This parcel is planned to contain lifestyle retail, together with multifamily and single-family homes.

Although this is predominantly a residential area, approval has been obtained to establish a small lifestyle center with ground-level upscale merchants catering to the large and solid longstanding residential market in the midtown area. The panel thinks this is an excellent plan that should be enlarged to give it an identifiable presence. Stores to be considered might include Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, Restoration Hardware, Harold's, and similar merchants.

This collection of stores must be designed to be visually and physically incorporated into the fabric of the adjoining residential properties. During the period that it coexists with Park Plaza, care should be taken to provide safe pedestrian crossings, with highly visible signals at University Avenue. In any event, it is essential that pedestrian access to the redeveloped Park Plaza connect the two projects so that traffic will flow easily between them.

Timing/Phasing Considerations

It is clear that the Hillcrest/Lifestyle parcel should be the first developed in the primary study area. There is a risk in delaying its construction because the deterioration of the adjacent center could dampen the enthusiasm for the retailers being courted to participate in the development. The longer development is delayed, the greater the risk. The panel urges prompt action that might even help Dillard's remain in the long term.

Concerns about the viability of this development after the new Summit Mall opens could be allayed if the Hillcrest/Lifestyle center has sufficient mass.

This, together with its location in the midst of the population density that exists, should alleviate concerns of potential retailers. For this reason, the panel further urges that the Hillcrest/Lifestyle parcel be large enough to stand on its own.

The development proposal for this parcel includes a small park built along University Avenue with about 40,000 square feet of retail space around it. Well-landscaped streets with surface parking, both at the curb and in small lots, will satisfy the needs of the retailers. Some high- and some low-density housing would fill out the block and provide an attractive and appealing urban setting.

The redevelopment of the other three parcels—Sears/Medical Center, University Mall, and Park Plaza—must await the trigger events mentioned earlier. Thus, the timing of the balance of development is estimated at ten to 15 years.

Planning and Design

At the heart of the most identifiable and diverse economic pocket of Little Rock, the proposed midtown "town center"—encompassing the four development parcels discussed previously—has the promise of creating a cohesive and attractive center with uses that will appeal to a broad spectrum of residents and visitors.

The panel believes it is important to the long-term development of Little Rock to establish the midtown town center as the gathering place for the area. It will be designed to serve as a "destination" for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods and employees at the various institutions east of University Avenue between West Markham Street and I-630. This recommended approach encourages a mix of uses in a well-designed and pedestrian-friendly setting. A town center differs from a typical retail mall in its openness and human scale, its approachability, and the strong design elements that attempt to meld the center into the fabric of the community.

The opportunity to create a master plan for such a large area in an already well-established and viable section of any city is unique, and adds energy to the midtown opportunity. Taking the four super blocks together, the area to be redeveloped over the next ten to 15 years is some 130 acres. Not only its size, but its prominent position on University Avenue, its frontage on and visibility from I-630, and its connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and job centers serve to enhance the site's potential to become an enduring town center.

Midtown occupies an enviable location within the larger Little Rock market. It has a more central location than any of the surrounding retail nodes, including the McCain Mall, the Riverfront District and downtown, the Rodney Parham Road commercial zone, the Chenal Parkway commercial zone, and the southwest Little Rock commercial zone. The existing concentration of diverse uses in midtown has established it as a retail node, though its viability in its present form is certainly questionable. The map on page 27 shows the location of the midtown malls in relation to the approved development site for Summit Mall and the five other commercial areas noted above.

Ingredients for Success

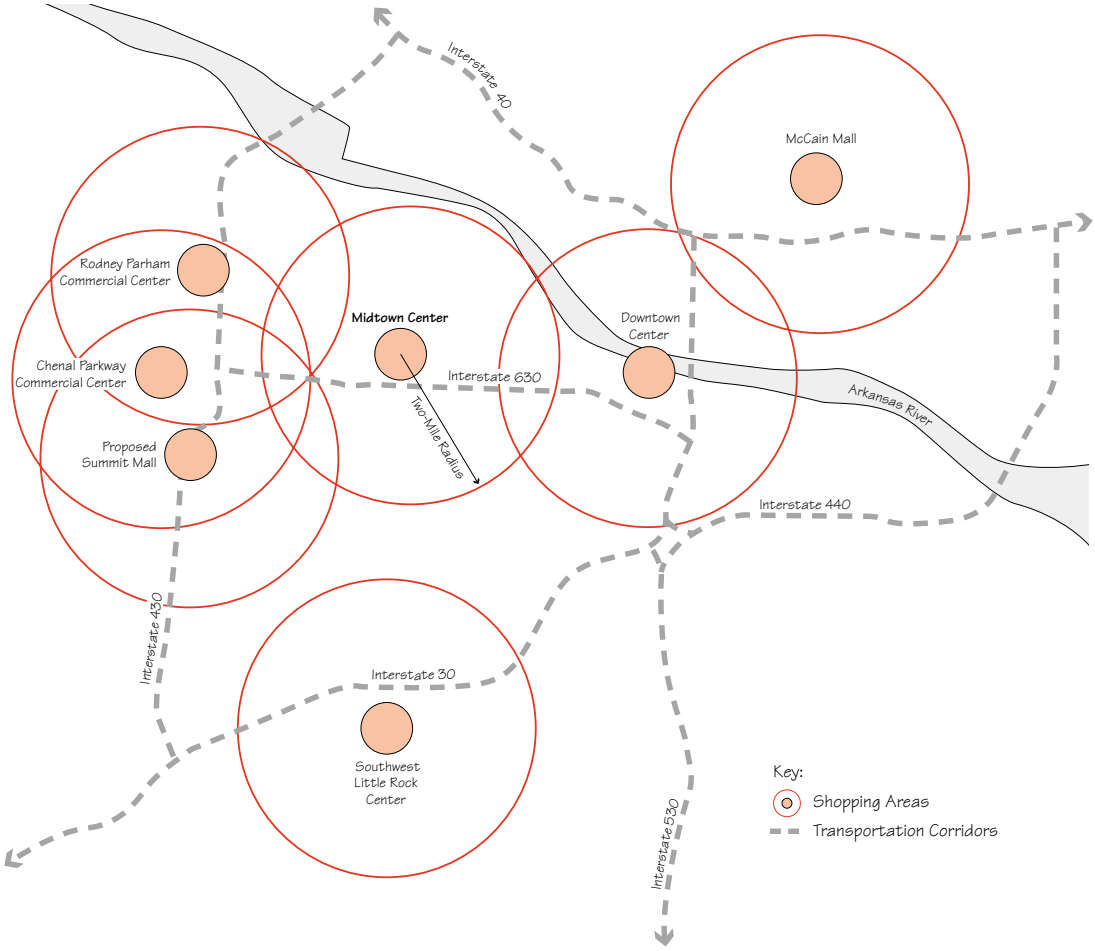
The success of a town center design depends in part on the forces influencing the site. In the case of midtown, the excellent transportation corridors, principally University Avenue, West Markham Street, and I-630, permit ready access to the site by users from the surrounding locales and from around the state. The site is visible from each of the major corridors, and views can be created due to the rising topography of the site as it extends north from I-630 along University Avenue.

The surrounding land uses also have a positive influence on the site and provide the context for development. This multiplicity of uses—ranging from well-established residential neighborhoods, schools and associated open space, major medical facilities and services, and public parks and recreation—strengthen the identity of the area.

The Need for a Plan

This is not to say that the midtown site is without challenges. Development has occurred largely without a plan, resulting in fragmented uses of land, underuse of many sites, and a lack of any overall theme or identity.

Viewed from almost any vantage point, the site has no sense of integrated use or coherence. It appears cluttered. As a result, there is no sense of place and, accordingly, no sense in the community that this is a natural gathering place. As University Avenue and West Markham Street have become more established as major traffic arteries,



Major retail shopping areas.

little has been done to encourage pedestrian use. The presence of sidewalks is sporadic and, in fact, the streets are considered very dangerous to pedestrians. The hilly topography, rather than enhancing land use, has made transitions between uses awkward.

The design challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Provide a district identity;
- Resolve automobile and pedestrian conflicts;
- Provide a viable set of uses;
- Integrate proposed plans with surrounding uses and structures;
- Create a gathering place;
- Use topography to design advantage; and,



River Market in the Riverfront District is a good example of a project that addresses some of these design objectives.

A street scene in the Riverfront District of Little Rock exemplifies a pedestrian-friendly environment.



A children's park south of West Markham Street.





Residential property adjacent to University Mall could be better integrated with the proposed town center plan.

- Establish a cohesive streetscape and reduce visual clutter.

Goals and Objectives

One of the first goals of the panel was to address the community needs and concerns as expressed by city officials, residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, and others through the interview process. In response to the insights gained, the panel has set the following objectives for the four super blocks area, or primary zone, and the West Markham Street corridor, or the secondary zone.

Four Super Blocks Area

The panel recommends that the goal of the redevelopment activity be to provide a mixed-use town center to serve the needs of the surrounding communities. Incorporating elements that create a walkable environment enhanced by the use of open space and landscaping, the plan is intended to create vitality and a greater sense of community.

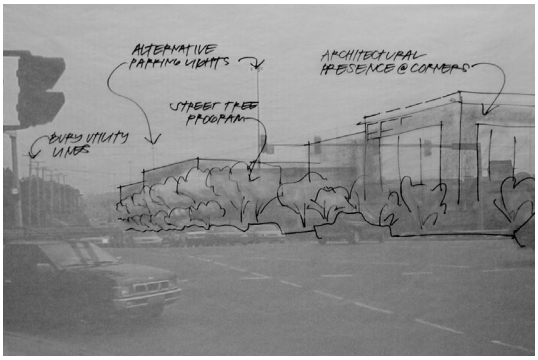
The built environment will be more visible from surrounding roadways and allow for a better pedestrian vantage point. Buildings will be scaled to fit within the context of the town center and will include lighting and other features to assure a safe environment for those who visit.

A transit transfer point, used by Central Arkansas Transit (CAT) buses, will form a part of the plan. While there is a fairly wide set of uses that could be accommodated on the site, those suggested by the panel will result in an economically viable plan.

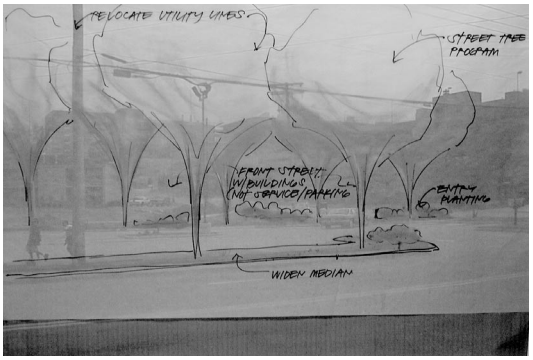
Thus, the goals and objectives for the primary area are:

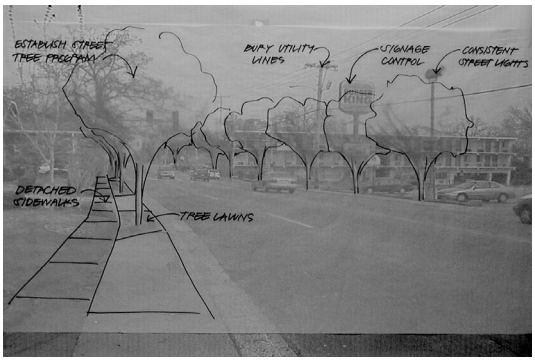
- Address community needs and concerns;
- Provide a mixed-use town center to serve surrounding communities;
- Develop an economically viable plan;
- Design a usable open space system and a safe walkable environment;
- Provide a visible and identifiable project;

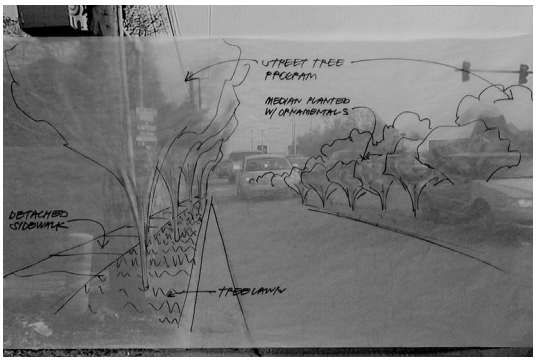












The panel's recommended improvements to some typical street scenes.

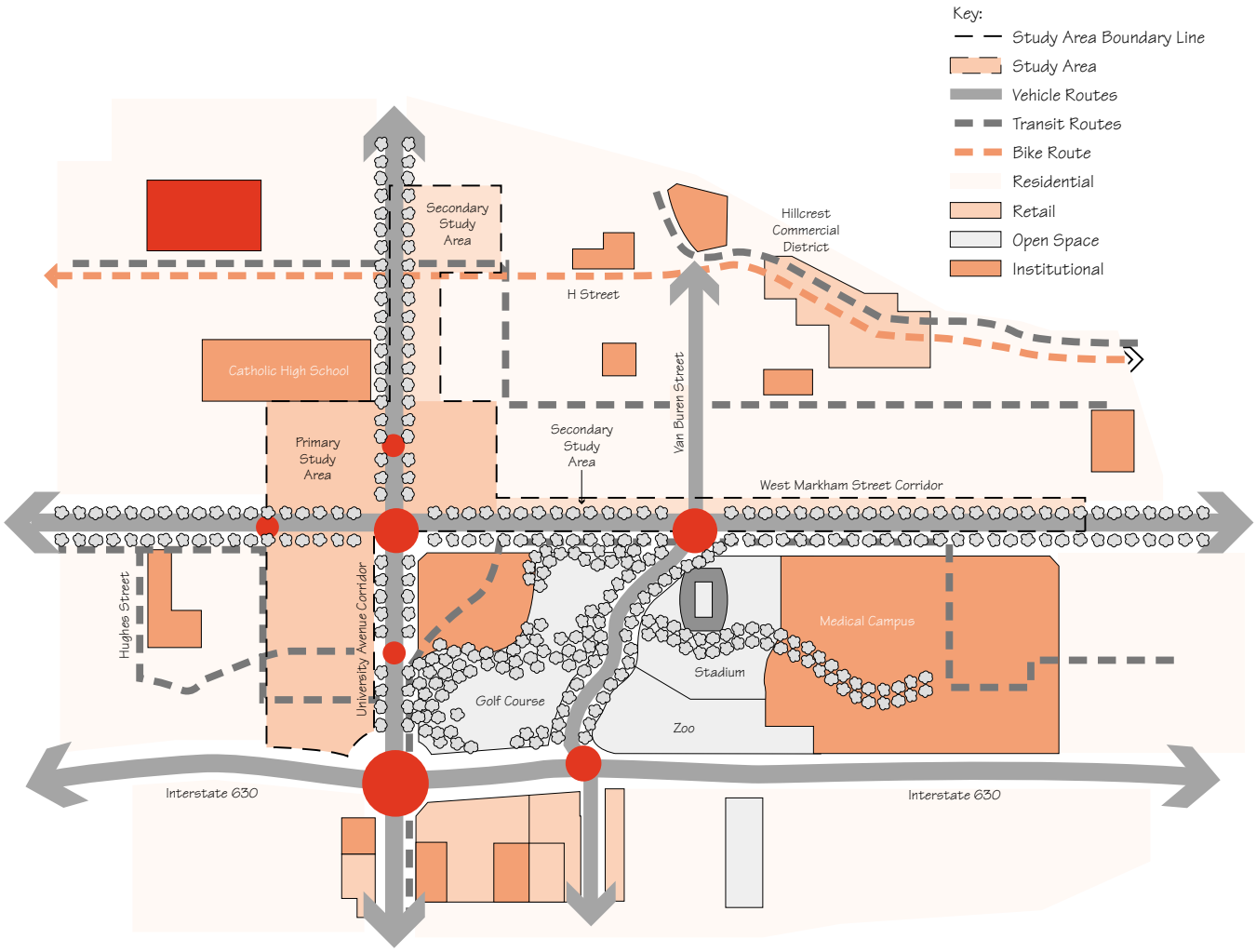
- Develop buildings to respect the scale of the surroundings; and
- Integrate a bus and taxi transfer point to serve local and regional transit.

West Markham Street Corridor

Many of those interviewed were concerned about the chaotic development along West Markham Street east of University Avenue. The panel recommends that a set of design guidelines for new development and redevelopment of this area be adopted and that proposed uses be compatible with the residential scale of the neighborhood.

In addition, the goals for this area include creation of safe pedestrian crossings and development of a streetscape plan that incorporates a consistent use of street trees, sidewalks, lighting, and other site elements. The reduction of visual clutter could be accomplished through sign controls and relocation of utility lines. (Examples of how these improvements could affect the streetscape are illustrated in the series of photographs above.)

A final design goal is to encourage the medical community to create a better presence along its



The planning area.

side of West Markham Street rather than turn its back to the street.

These goals and objectives are summarized:

- Develop new uses compatible with the residential scale of the street;
- Create safe pedestrian crossings;
- Develop a streetscape plan;
- Reduce visual clutter; and
- Encourage support/involvement of the medical community.

Proposed Land Uses and Town Center Strategy

The map of the planning area (above) shows the primary and secondary study areas, surrounding land uses, and major arterials affecting the midtown project area. The plan shows the relationship among the four super blocks, emphasizing connections among the parcels, and the residential areas, medical facilities, recreation areas, and open space, with an emphasis on circulation and points of intersection. One can identify I-630 at University Avenue, which provides regional access to the site, and West Markham Street at University Avenue, which provides access from the surrounding neighborhoods. The only north-

south arterial in the vicinity of the site other than University Avenue is Van Buren Street, which runs through Hillcrest and the public recreation area. The map also distinguishes the primary study area from the secondary study areas. (As mentioned previously, the panel decided it was not necessary to consider changes to the secondary area north along University Avenue.)

Four Super Blocks Area

A wide variety of land uses is proposed in the town center plan for midtown. All of the uses would be designed to create visually attractive landscaped public space and to provide adequate and convenient parking.

Based on panel interviews, it would be desirable to provide commercial office space for physicians or for other medical uses, and for education administration uses, to name a few. The panel also believes that there will be sufficient demand to support a hotel to be used both by professionals and patients visiting the medical complexes in the area.

Retail uses, particularly those that employ open designs rather than typical mall spaces, will be in high demand. These would include such basic retail services as could be supplied by a high-quality general merchandise store such as Target, or a full service grocery store. The panel also believes the market can support retail uses that are considered lifestyle stores offering a variety of home furnishings of the sort that are featured in Williams-Sonoma, Crate & Barrel, and Restoration Hardware. Given the desire to create a space that can be enjoyed by the community, restaurants and coffee bars are a fitting use.

To meet the need for entertainment, the panel also recommends anchoring a portion of the block currently occupied by University Mall with a 20-screen, state-of-the-art movie theater complex.

Lastly, the panel recommends that a variety of housing types be considered for portions of three of the parcels. Little or no new housing of any scale has been developed in midtown. A rising number of empty nesters, and persons for whom a single-family detached home is not the purchase of choice, will support housing development. Both multifamily rental and for-sale housing—for



Panel member Don Bauer works on the concept plan for the study area.

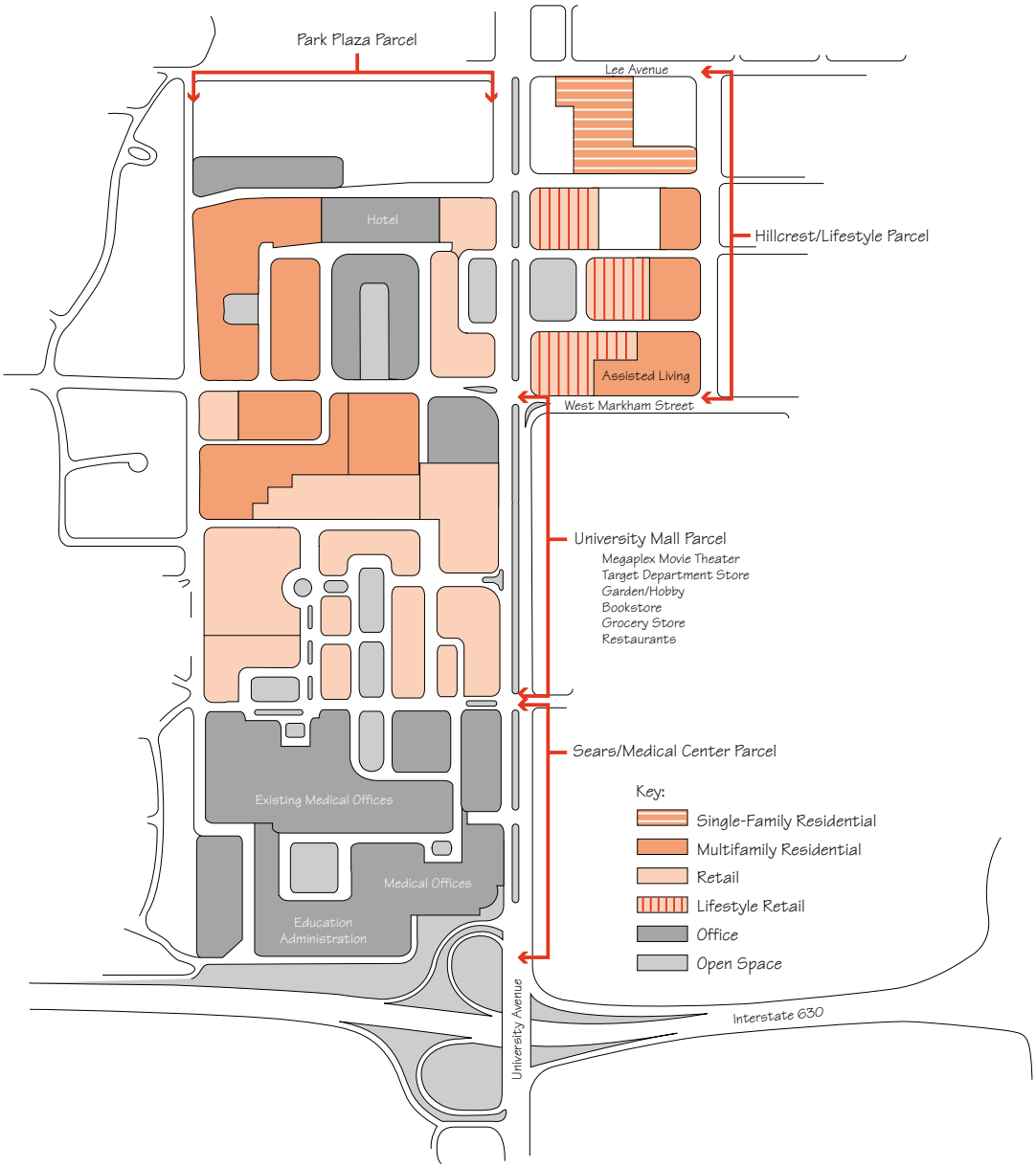


A casual restaurant, similar to this one at River Market, would be included in the town center.



The amphitheater located along the Arkansas River is a good example of public space.

Concept plan for the primary study area.



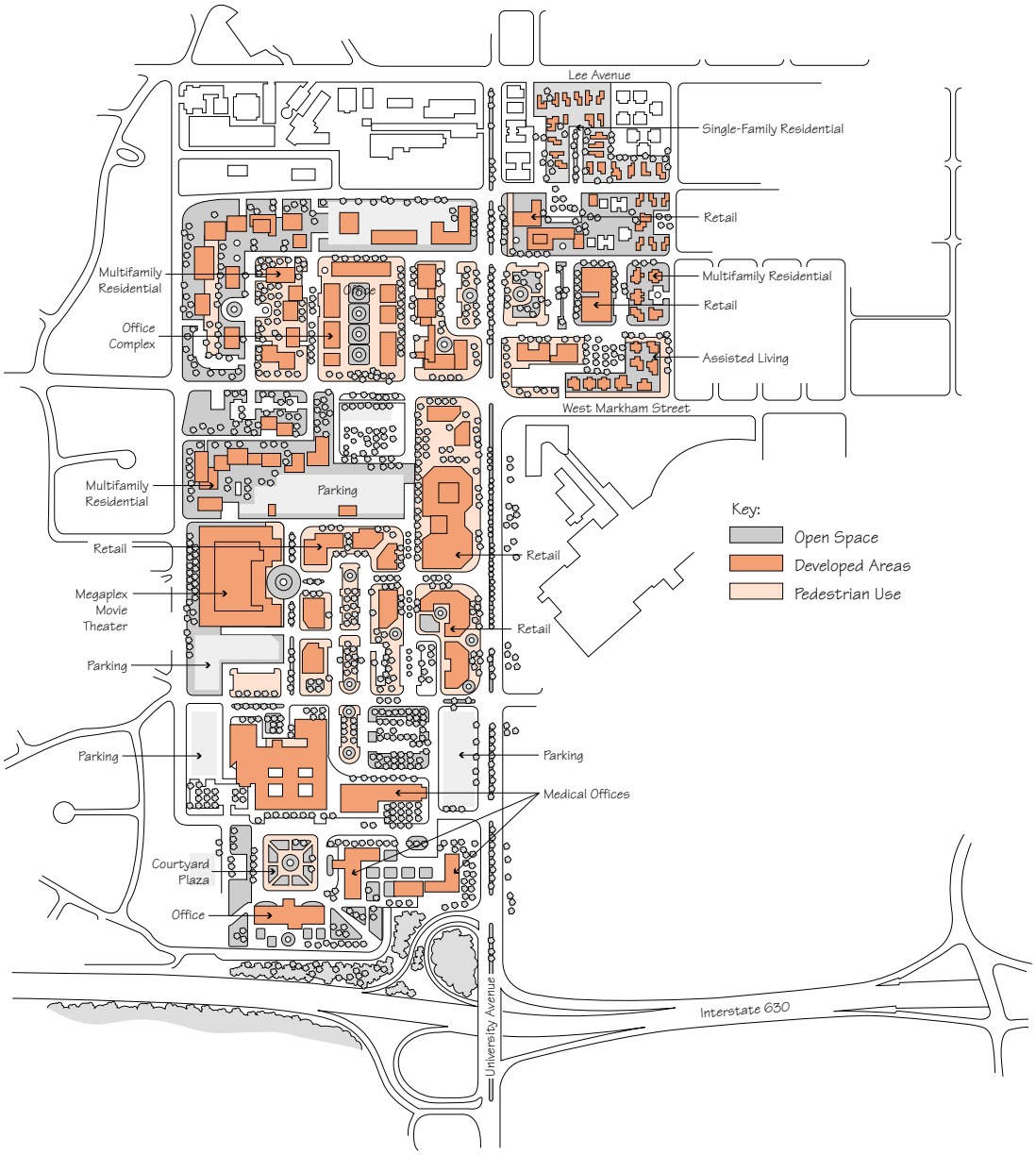
singles, couples, empty nesters, and the elderly—should be considered. To support these uses, sufficient public space and parking is integral to successful redevelopment.

Thus, the list of proposed uses includes:

- Office space (medical and education administration);
- Hotel accommodations;
- Retail services (community/neighborhood and lifestyle);
- Restaurants and coffee bars;
- A movie theater complex;
- Housing (multifamily and assisted living);
- Public space; and
- Parking.

The concept plan (above) shows the proposed uses for each parcel. The Sears/Medical Center parcel contains office development and open space and retains the existing medical building known as Doctors Hospital. The University Mall parcel redevelopment includes the megaplex movie theater, a Target department store, a garden/hobby store, a bookstore, a grocery store, and restaurants, plus some offices and multifamily housing with open space.

The Park Plaza parcel includes redevelopment for a hotel, offices, retail facilities, open space, and multifamily housing. A portion of the proposed open space for this parcel would be developed opposite similar space at the Hillcrest/Lifestyle parcel, with a connection between the two parcels over University Avenue. Lifestyle retail would be



Site plan for the primary study area.

located on the Hillcrest parcel toward the University Avenue side of the site.

Multifamily housing is proposed toward the rear of the site adjacent to existing residential development, with assisted living facilities located along the West Markham Street side. Alternatively, the only single-family housing proposed is recommended for the northernmost side of the parcel to relate to the existing housing in Hillcrest. The relationship of these proposed uses can be seen in the concept plan and, in more detail, on the site plan for the primary area (above).

West Markham Street Corridor

The West Markham Street corridor currently offers a mix of small offices, retail uses, including fast-food establishments, and a number of housing units. The street seems able to accommodate the mix of uses. It will become more attractive when design guidelines requiring streetscaping and sign control are in effect. It is the panel's recommendation that the zoning for the West Markham corridor remain mixed use.

Implementation

The complexities involved in a redevelopment project of this size call for a dedicated, focused approach. Little Rock is not alone in facing the difficult task of creating a new vision for a declining shopping mall. The Congress for New Urbanism estimates that some 140 regional malls have reached "grayfield" status, and an additional 250 malls are expected to join this list. A "face-lift" for these obsolete shopping malls would not change matters much.

There is every possibility that such malls can be successfully redeveloped with new uses that are often more fitting in the current neighborhood context. The panel believes that the alignment of a vision for a town center in Little Rock's midtown neighborhood, given the efforts and resources of city, business and neighborhood leaders, makes such a success possible.

While the time and effort required to create and carry out a plan for the reuse of a declining mall cannot be underestimated, the alternative of doing nothing and letting the market take its course cannot be supported. The lost tax base, lost jobs, underutilization of valuable land, and deteriorating influence that declining properties eventually have on surrounding commercial and residential uses is simply too high a price to pay.

That is especially true in the case of Little Rock's midtown neighborhood. To create the focus needed for this complex redevelopment, the panel recommends creation of a development district to function as a facilitator or master development coordinator of what essentially are multiple sites with multiple ownership and very different redevelopment time lines.

In assessing the future viability of the project area, the panel concluded that (a) University Mall has reached a point of severe decline, (b) the commercial parcel to the south is underused, (c) the parcel at the northeast corner of University Avenue and West Markham Street is also underused, and (d) Park Plaza's future is yet to be determined, but is not bright, given its age and configuration, and the recent approval of a new mall site in west Little Rock. Creation of a development district for midtown Little Rock will provide a vehicle with accountability to the city in general, and to the surrounding neighborhoods in particular, for design and implementation of a master plan.

Midtown Development District (MDD)

The development district recommended by the panel is designed to address the challenges posed by increasingly obsolete retail uses and the fragmented ownership of both land and buildings in the four super blocks area of midtown. This entity's sole focus would be advocating and pursuing higher-quality commercial, retail, and residential development and public improvements in midtown consistent with evolving market conditions.

The working name for this entity could be the Midtown Development District (MDD), although a different name may be more appropriate. The panel suggests that the entity have a stated period of life of 10 to 15 years to encourage it to set and implement redevelopment strategies in phases over the period predicted necessary to carry out the master plan.

The MDD's jurisdiction should encompass the large parcels within which University Mall and Park Plaza are located, plus the parcel to the south containing the Sears center and the parcel on the northeast corner of University Avenue and West Markham Road. In addition, the MDD should have jurisdiction over the length of West Markham Street between University Avenue and Pine Street to a depth of 300 feet. The inclusion of West Markham Street offers the opportunity to integrate this important "spine" within the city

with the new midtown town center, assuring consistent uses and visual integrity.

The MDD governance structure should be a board of directors composed of landowners, representatives of key institutions, and residents of the nearby residential neighborhoods, as well as the mayor, the city manager, and the director of the Department of Planning and Development. The key criterion for selection should be a commitment to timely preparation and implementation of a long-term development strategy for the midtown commercial district. In other words, MDD directors should be committed to cooperative action and not appointed simply because they represent a vested interest. A "bias for action" is essential for this entity to be effective.

Initially, financial constraints might limit the MDD to part-time staffing—perhaps an executive with related responsibilities such as facilitating development efforts in the Riverfront District and downtown area and, later, other areas of the city. Given the city's increasing involvement in facilitating development, the panel believes immediate recruitment of such a person should be a high priority.

It is essential that an experienced, entrepreneurial development professional serve as the executive director of the MDD from the outset. It would be better to have a very talented and experienced person on a part-time basis than have a less seasoned and less skilled person on a full-time basis.

Responsibilities of the MDD and functions of the executive director would be:

- Working with the city departments, commercial district landowners, developers active in the city, representatives of health care institutions, and residents of the surrounding communities to establish development standards for the four super blocks and to prepare a master plan applicable to phased implementation;
- Seeking refinements to the soon-to-be implemented street improvements to University Avenue to ensure a high standard of streetscape amenities providing adequate provisions for pedestrians as well as vehicles;



Bud Lake opens the presentation.



Don Bauer discusses major retail areas during the presentation.



Panel member Linda Davenport emphasizes the need for a Midtown Development District.

- Preparing and recommending for city adoption a development plan and design guidelines for the private properties on the north side of West Markham Street east of University Avenue to Pine Street;
- Working with city public works and planning staffs to prepare a streetscape improvement plan for West Markham Street from the westerly edge of the four super blocks to Pine Street on the east and along both sides of West Markham Street;

- Working closely with the city manager, finance director, and city attorney on a long-term public improvements financing strategy for the midtown commercial area, and coordinating local, state, and federal programs to be used for infrastructure and other public improvements;
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with current property owners to facilitate an orderly phasing of development, and maintaining relationships with developers, investors, and business leaders to encourage the greatest possible interest and focus on the midtown district;
- Developing and implementing a plan to promote and market the overall midtown district to potential office, retail, and residential users;
- Developing a plan and outreach effort to engender private financial support and financial support from foundations and civic leaders;
- Devising a parking strategy to ensure optimal use of parking facilities within the four super blocks; and
- Working with the city to obtain legislative authority for eminent domain power, to be used *only if necessary* to enable the orderly and optimal development within the four super blocks.

An Action Plan

The panel recommends that the mayor and city government move immediately to create the MDD and take the necessary steps to provide it with the power of eminent domain; refine the master plan; establish design guidelines; and begin financial planning for the various aspects of the master plan.

Authorize the MDD

The city planning commission, working with the city attorney, should take the legal steps necessary to establish the MDD and give it the ability to exercise the power of eminent domain under appropriate circumstances. The city also should conduct a search for an executive director of the MDD.

Refine the Master Plan

The panel has proposed a master plan for the midtown area and recommended the adoption of design guidelines for the West Markham Street corridor within the MDD area. These proposals are a framework that the MDD must refine and to which it must give further definition over time as the impact is felt of market forces that cannot be identified today.

Specifically, given the multiple ownership entities and differing economic conditions of various portions of the four super blocks, the master plan must account for and anticipate likely changes over time. For example, while Park Plaza is operating now, it is impossible to say what effect the new Summit Mall will have on its viability over the next 10 years.

A master plan must be developed and recommended to the city for approval. To effectively serve as a blueprint for development, the plan must be capable of being implemented in phases as events unfold.

As part of its refinement of the master plan, the panel strongly recommends that the MDD plan at least two tours to other cities that have successfully adopted and implemented similar mixed-use redevelopment plans. The panel understands that this technique was successfully used to acquaint those involved in the Riverfront District redevelopment with similar efforts in other cities. The panel recommends that the MDD board take a tour of and study redeveloped mall sites, including malls such as Plaza Pasadena in Pasadena, California; Mizner Mall in Boca Raton, Florida; Eastgate Mall in Chattanooga, Tennessee; Cherry Creek North in Denver, Colorado; and Triangle Square in Costa Mesa, California.

Establish Design Guidelines

The panel recommends that the MDD prepare and adopt a set of design guidelines that will be used for new development and redevelopment along West Markham Street and within the four super blocks. Given the importance of the intersection of University Avenue and West Markham Street, the surrounding uses should provide a consistent identity that will not only be visually

attractive, but will act to sustain the residential values and increase commercial values.

The Hillcrest and Heights neighborhoods are two of the oldest in the city, and together with University Park North, Briarwood, and the three smaller neighborhoods immediately to the west of the two malls, they elicit a strong interest in the revitalization of the midtown area as a neighborhood center or town center. People from these and other areas of the city will come here to shop, eat, and be entertained, and it is this location that people from the city and around the region will be drawn to for medical services.

As the MDD goes through the legal process to recommend approval of specific design guidelines, it should solicit community input on its proposed streetscaping, lighting, and landscaping plans, height considerations, sign controls, architectural elements, and other requirements for new development and for redevelopment of existing commercial and residential space.

Create a Financial Plan

The MDD must also create a financial plan. Funding is a constraint for every city, and the panel understands that it is costly to plan and administer the MDD and, if needed, to facilitate aspects of redevelopment.

Little Rock does not have extensive financial resources. However, the panel believes there are resources within the community that could be identified and aligned with the goals of the MDD effort to ensure its success. The panel recommends that the MDD create a financial plan that details the sources of such funds and appropriate ways to leverage such funds during various portions of the redevelopment process. The executive director of the MDD should be charged with identifying alternative sources of funds to those enumerated.

The range of financial resources at the city's disposal includes tax revenue, especially increased revenue from a hotel/motel or rental car tax, or additional city or county sales taxes. Also available are federal funds for community development and transportation through the community development block grant (CDBG) and Intermodal



Jim Lawson, director of the Department of Planning and Development, leads the way to the presentation.



Panel member Jeff McMenimen discusses streetscape improvements.

Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act (ISTEA) programs. Tax rebates are also a potential tool in attracting new users to the area.

Another potentially powerful new tool is tax increment financing (TIF). If used appropriately when the tax base of the area is perceived to be at its lowest, a TIF district can provide financing for redevelopment. In particular, tax increment financing can provide a source of collateral against which the MDD would be able to borrow sufficient funds to start the planning process.



Panel member H. Pike Oliver confers with other panelists on the site tour at University Mall.

Establish a Time Line/Phasing Plan

The following time line outlines proposed implementation procedures for the first year.

In the next three months, the city should:

- Obtain legal authorization for and create the MDD;
- Authorize the MDD to exercise the power of eminent domain;
- Identify and invite people to serve on the MDD board of directors; and
- Start a search for an experienced, entrepreneurial development professional to act as executive director of the MDD.

Over the next four to 12 months, the MDD should:

- Take a tour of at least two other cities that have completed plans similar to that proposed by the panel;
- Refine and complete the master plan for approval by the city council;
- Establish and recommend adoption of a set of design guidelines;
- Meet with all landowners and parties with economic interests in the MDD area to begin establishing the time frames and requirements for implementation of each element and phase of the master plan;
- Establish a framework for ongoing communication and negotiation with those with an economic interest in the master plan;
- Establish a comprehensive funding strategy, including generating private and foundation funding from prominent civic leaders and corporations;
- Consider requesting that the city establish a TIF district at an appropriate point in the implementation of the master plan; and
- Consider a business improvement district (BID) targeting midtown.

Estimating Costs

There will, of course, be costs to carry out the redevelopment plan. Initially there will be costs to refine the master plan and to create and operate the MDD. Refining the master plan will require engineering, site planning, and architectural work, together with advisory services from a qualified planner and specialists in retail and housing, as well as other consultants. Costs for such services are estimated to be in the range of $650,000 to $800,000.

The MDD will require the services of an executive director plus administrative support. At the outset, funds for staffing the MDD and preparation of the master plan and development standards should come from the city of Little Rock, pending a review of similar organizations in other areas around the country. Later, it may be appropriate to establish a fee that would be spread across all new development and allow the seed funding to be repaid over time on a "fair-share" basis as new development projects are implemented. Additional costs for the MDD include an estimated $25,000 for tours of comparable city redevelopment efforts in two locations.

The costs of the redevelopment efforts themselves will largely be borne by the private sector retail, commercial, and housing interests as they seek to redevelop portions of the sites. The public sector can anticipate requests that it provide financial support for infrastructure improvements, traffic improvements, establishment of public plaza areas, streetscaping, and other elements to create a pedestrian-friendly public space in this neighborhood venue.

Conclusion

While the breadth and scope of what is required to reclaim this urban space and the extended time over which redevelopment is likely to occur may appear daunting, Little Rock has a tremendous opportunity. It is not often that such large blocks of land can be considered for redevelopment in existing developed neighborhoods.

It is rare that the stakeholders in communities around such blocks of land have formed as much consensus as is evident. The panel interviewed more than 55 people representing a wide spectrum of the Little Rock community. The input of these community leaders who provided the panel with their knowledge of the community is the basis upon which the panel developed the vision of midtown presented in this report. The panel believes that with sustained commitment, the vision of midtown can become a reality.

About the Panel

Benjamin T. "Bud" Lake II

Panel Chair
Lafayette, California

Lake spent ten years in the 1970s as president of a national homebuilding company, ten years in the 1980s as senior vice president of a West Coast commercial real estate development company, and most of the 1990s starting and running a public/private economic partnership for Contra Costa County, California, which has a population of almost 1 million. Currently, as principal of Lake Associates, he is consulting in real estate development and property management.

Lake's professional affiliations include: former trustee of ULI; full member of Urban Land Institute; Lambda Alpha (honorary land economics society); past chairman of Lafayette Parking Commission; former director, East Bay Homebuilders Association; chairman, Building and Long Range Planning Committee, Lafayette/Orinda Presbyterian Church; licensed California real estate broker; and certified financial planner.

Lake received his MBA degree in marketing and finance from Stanford University; BA in political science from Stanford University; real estate degree from Diablo Valley College; and certified financial planning degree from the University of Denver.

Donald R. Bauer

Tustin, California

Bauer is owner and founder of Bauer Associates Urban and Community Planning. With more than 30 years of experience in urban and regional planning, he has expertise in strategic planning, economics, and design for new communities and large-scale development programs. His emphasis on the quality of life, environmental integrity, and long-term economic value of and return on developments has resulted in a number of national and international projects.

Bauer's experience has included residential villages and commercial areas for the Irvine Company; large mixed-use projects in Baltimore, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Dallas, Orlando, Denver, and Washington, D.C.; new towns such as the award-winning Woodlands, in Texas; and resort communities including Ventana Canyon in Tucson, and the Cojo-Jalama Ranch in Santa Barbara, California. His international work has included the summer national capital of Saudi Arabia, the new national capital of Nigeria, and projects in Indonesia, Colombia, China, and Kao Shung, Taiwan.

Bauer is a member of the American Planning Association. Between 1992 and 1996, he was Urban Land Institute District Council coordinator for Orange County, California. Bauer studied sculpture and architecture at the University of Oregon and participated in an exchange program at the University of Florence. He is a frequent university guest lecturer and ULI advisory panel member.

Linda G. Davenport

Alexandria, Virginia

Davenport, who is currently consulting on community development and housing issues, has a broad background in the area. Beginning in the late 1970s she was an attorney with the National Housing Partnership (NHP), which owned, managed, and developed rental housing under government assistance programs. As general counsel for the NHP, she advocated housing industry stands on the Tax Reform Act of 1986, the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery, and Enforcement Act (FIRREA) of 1989, and the low-income hous-

ing tax credit legislation. She also worked on the Preservation Commission.

As the NHP shifted its business focus, Davenport became involved in asset management and acquisitions of rental properties, both market rate and assisted, from private owners and the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC). As executive vice president of the NHP, Davenport led the acquisition efforts on some 8,000 rental units.

In 1996, Davenport joined Fannie Mae as one of two managing directors to launch the American Communities Fund, established to invest equity in hard-to-finance community revitalization transactions that directly affect neighborhoods. She led investment teams on some $150 million of redevelopment investments, in addition to assessing investment opportunities in numerous communities across the country. Through early 2001, Davenport directed the American Communities Fund's communications and training activities.

Jeff McMenimen

Denver, Colorado

As an associate with Design Workshop, McMenimen has experience in urban design and planned community development. His 12 years of professional experience have provided him with a broad range of expertise, allowing him to work on planning and design projects at the regional and international levels. He has participated in the design and management of urban design projects in North America and Asia.

McMenimen's urban design experience includes involvement in Denver's Central Platte Valley with the 60-acre, mixed-use urban village known as the Denver Commons Neighborhood. Over the past five years, he has led the design and implementation of the extension of Denver's streets and plazas into the Commons District. He is also involved in the redevelopment of Denver's 20-acre Cherry Creek North Sears site, leading the design of the public infrastructure, including streets and plazas, throughout the project.

McMenimen has received national and regional honors and awards for design excellence from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). He received his bachelor of landscape architecture degree from the University of Minnesota, where he continues to a serve as a guest panelist and juror, a position he also holds at the University of Colorado at Denver. His professional activities extend into the communities in which he lives. He has instructed graduate urban design studios at the University of Colorado at Denver and served on the Aspen Historic Preservation Committee.

Anita Morrison

Silver Spring, Maryland

Morrison manages the Washington, D.C., office of Bay Area Economics (BAE), directing assignments for the eastern United States. With 24 years of experience in development consulting, Morrison specializes in economic development, market and financial feasibility analysis, and public agency land disposition. Before joining BAE, she was a vice president with Hammer, Siler, George Associates.

Morrison's experience includes evaluation of potential economic incentives for redevelopment with the Baltimore Mayor's Economic Incentives Task Force; an economic development strategy for redeveloping the area around Dallas's Love Field airport; business planning for development of a bioscience research park at the former Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado; economic adjustment strategies for the former Naval Ordnance Station in Louisville and the Newark, Ohio, Air Force Base; and a detailed strategy to capitalize on the Buffalo, New York, region's base of medical device manufacturers and medical research activities.

From 1981 to 1996, she served as the economic and real estate adviser to the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in Washington, D.C.

Morrison was a member of the Silver Spring Redevelopment Citizens Advisory Board. She is a member and frequent speaker of the National Council for Urban Economic Development and a member of the Urban Land Institute. She is a member of the board of the George Washington

Chapter of Lambda Alpha, the honorary international land use society. Morrison earned a master of public policy degree from the University of Michigan.

H. Pike Oliver

Sacramento, California

Oliver has been a principal of the Presidio Group since 1994. The firm manages Presidio Land Company, LLC, a venture with AEW Capital Management formed in 1998 to acquire land in California's major metropolitan areas, process development entitlements, and sell approved projects to builders and developers. He is also vice chairman of INTERRA, which provides land development advisory services to private and public sector clients.

Before his current ventures, Oliver was employed at several development firms, including the Irvine Company. Earlier in his career, he worked for public agencies in California and New York.

Oliver chairs the Gold Flight of the Urban Land Institute's Community Development Council. He received a BA in urban studies from San Francisco State University in 1970 and a master of arts degree in architecture and urban planning from UCLA in 1973.

James B. Selonick

Cincinnati, Ohio

Selonick joined Federated Department Stores, Inc., in 1952 and became assistant manager of real estate in 1956. In 1961, he became executive vice president of Simon Enterprises, Inc., and executive vice president of Reston, VA, Inc., where he was involved in the planning and development of the 7,000-acre new town residential community of Reston, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C. Later, as vice president of the Mugar Group, he developed and managed regional shopping centers.

He returned to Federated in 1970 and three years later became senior vice president, responsible for real estate development projects, area research, store planning, and construction and distribution management for the $10 billion retail firm. In 1973, he formed and directed a wholly owned subsidiary of Federated, resulting in the development of seven major regional shopping centers in ten years. He retired from Federated in September 1987 and formed a real estate consulting firm working with U.S. and international clients on all forms of commercial and residential real estate.

Selonick has been a trustee of the International Council of Shopping Centers and a member of its executive committee; a trustee of the Urban Land Institute; and a member of the board of directors of Joseph Horne Company, a Pittsburgh-based department store chain until its sale to Federated. Until summer 1998, he was also a member of board of trustees of Kranzco Realty Trust, Inc., a New York Stock Exchange–listed real estate investment trust. He has served the Washington, D.C.–based real estate research firm of G.A. Partners (a subsidiary of Arthur Andersen) as "of counsel." He also served as chairman of the Cincinnati Historic Conservation Board from 1980 to 1991. Since August 1995, Selonick has been writing a weekly column for the *Downtowner*, a Cincinnati weekly newspaper covering politics, real estate, and development.

He is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

Robert M. Wulff

Fairfax, Virginia

Wulff has 20 years of experience in real estate development and finance. Since 1988, he has worked for the Peterson Companies (formerly Hazel/Peterson), a Fairfax, Virginia–based development company specializing in large-scale, mixed-use community development. As vice president for community development, he is responsible for directing all stages of development, from site planning and architectural design through construction budgeting to marketing and sales. The Peterson Companies' (TPC) community development division builds and sells/leases mixed-use developments made up of master planned retail, residential and office users.

Before joining TPC, Wulff was an investment banker with Smith Barney, Harris Upham &

Company and served in Washington, D.C., as deputy development director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In those positions, he was responsible for underwriting more than $2 billion of debt/equity investment for a variety of residential and commercial real estate projects. With HUD's urban development action grant program, Wulff was involved in the structuring and financing of more than 50 inner-city economic development projects using public/private partnerships.

Wulff holds a PhD from UCLA and a BA from the University of Chicago. He has taught at the UCLA School of Architecture and Urban Planning, the University of Maryland, various Urban Land Institute real estate courses, and for Yale's Community Renaissance Fellows Program. He also has cowritten two books.