

# DOWNTOWN TULSA | ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

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## BACKGROUND

The Downtown Coordinating Council (DCC), which oversees enhanced services provided through the Tulsa Stadium Improvement District, launched a strategic planning process to develop a new downtown management organization. Downtown Tulsa currently has a business improvement district (BID) that funds the ballpark (ONEOK Field) and services throughout Downtown, but has the potential to employ a state-of-the-art organization, inspired by national best practices, to guide and champion Downtown management, marketing and maintenance efforts.

To assist in the strategic planning process, the City of Tulsa contracted Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.), a Denver-based consulting firm that specializes in downtown strategic planning and organizational development. In January 2020, P.U.M.A. facilitated **15 roundtable discussions, with nearly 200 participants**, representing a variety of stakeholders including: property owners, small businesses/retailers, hospitality, culture/community, large employers, social services, faith-based, District leaders, adjacent neighborhoods (including a North Tulsa Town Hall discussion) and downtown residents. A summary of strengths, challenges and improvements for Downtown Tulsa is provided below. In addition, an online survey will be broadly distributed.

## Downtown Tulsa Strengths

There are many strengths of Downtown Tulsa; the list below captures common themes (listed alphabetically):

- **Entertainment** | Downtown has a thriving entertainment scene; stakeholders specifically mentioned the growing variety of restaurants, the BOK Center, ONEOK Field, the Arts District, and the many festivals and events that take place in Downtown.
- **Growing Residential Community** | There are an increasing number of people living in Downtown Tulsa, adding new energy and activity, especially in the evenings and on weekends.
- **Guthrie Green** | Generally parks and open space have improved in Downtown, with many stakeholders specifically mentioning Guthrie Green as a great community asset with excellent programming.
- **Historic Architecture** | Stakeholders respect the high-quality design of Downtown's historic buildings and point to many successful examples of historic preservation and adaptive re-use.
- **Increasing Walkability & Bikeability** | Walkability between Downtown districts is improving; many stakeholders noted the recent walkability study and new improvements to streets including one-to-two-way conversions and the addition of bike lanes.
- **Locally Owned Businesses** | Stakeholders are proud of the varied local businesses in Downtown, with unique, independent restaurants and retailers outweighing national chains.
- **Momentum** | Downtown Tulsa looks different today than it did five years ago. Many stakeholders noted a growing momentum in Downtown and a resurgence of activity and investment.
- **Philanthropic Community** | Tulsa has a uniquely robust philanthropic community, which has generously contributed to many community assets including the Gathering Place, just outside of Downtown.
- **Support Services** | Several roundtable groups mentioned the supportive services in Downtown that are accessible to the community's vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness.

## Downtown Tulsa Challenges

Many challenges were discussed for Downtown Tulsa; the list below captures common themes (listed alphabetically):

- **Connectivity** | A lack of connectivity between Downtown districts, across rail tracks, and across the IDL to adjacent neighborhoods, such as Greenwood, was frequently noted by stakeholders.
- **Construction** | Construction disturbances were noted as an ongoing issue; including noise, street closures, traffic congestion, debris, and a lack of reliable information to provide forewarning.
- **Displacement** | Growing investment in Downtown is increasing the risk of displacement and gentrification in and around Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.
- **Homelessness** | The number of people experiencing homelessness is an increasing challenge; some stakeholders noted issues of panhandling and occasionally aggressive behaviors.
- **Housing Affordability** | While the relative affordability of Tulsa was noted in terms of cost of living, there is still a pressing need for affordable housing; including options for deeply affordable, transitional/supportive, and family housing.
- **Impact of Special Events** | While events were noted as a strength for Downtown, they can also be disruptive and a variety of stakeholders expressed concerns related to the impact of street closures and a lack of information regarding or indicating when and where disruptions will occur.
- **Inequity** | Tulsa has a long, painful history steeped in racial inequity and injustice, which continues to weigh on the community today. Some stakeholders noted a lack of meaningful cultural diversity and inclusion.
- **Parking Management** | Stakeholders expressed a variety of sentiments related to parking, including an overabundance of surface parking, a lack of free parking, a perception that there is not enough parking, and general confusion around the parking system.
- **Residential Amenities** | With a growing population Downtown, there are desires for more resident and employee serving amenities. Most notable was the need for a full-service grocery store.
- **Safety** | Safety for pedestrians was a concern; particularly related to poor lighting, the disconnect between Downtown districts, and gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network.

## Downtown Tulsa Improvements

After brainstorming a list of improvements, participants were asked to vote on their top priorities (3 votes/participant). Common themes for priorities (listed alphabetically) include:

- **Affordable Housing** | Increase the amount of affordable housing, including a variety of housing types and the ability to gain ownership.
- **Connectivity** | Increase connections between Downtown districts, across rail tracks, and the IDL to adjacent neighborhoods – making Downtown more accessible and pedestrian friendly.
- **Improve Safety** | Improve safety through improved lighting and visibility of safety and outreach personnel.
- **Invest in Greenwood** | Investment in Greenwood to improve the neighborhood's connection to Downtown; further recognize its historic significance, and provide support for black-owned businesses.
- **Marketing** | Cohesive, inclusive marketing plan to promote Downtown Tulsa and tell its story.
- **Primary Employment** | Recruit primary employers to Downtown Tulsa to increase and diversify job opportunities.
- **Reduce Homelessness** | Strengthen services and resources for populations experiencing homelessness. Reduce disruptive behaviors through a compassionate response.