

Playbook

TACOMA

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Colophon

Version 1.0 · September 2024

Editor in Chief

BLOXHUB

Layout

BLOXHUB

BLOXHUB Team

Martine Kildeby, mki@bloxhub.org

Lotte Breengaard, lcb@bloxhub.org

Ditte Gidionsen, dfh@bloxhub.org

Mateo Posada

BLOXHUB Member Experts

Enlai Hooi, Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects

Latonya Ludford, The Shift

Leilani Farha, The Shift

Johan Høgåsen-Hallesby, Beta Mobility

Lovisa Volmarsson, Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies

Matthew Claudell, Field States

Nabil Ali Jaloud, Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies

Santiago Orbea, Henning Larsen Architects

Thøger Riis Michelsen, AGORA

Workshop Participants on May 15, 2024

Adam Cook, TVE

Andrea Reay, T/P Chamber of Commerce

Becca Schrack, Greentrike

Ben Mauk, University of Washington Tacoma

Brian Surratt, Greater Seattle Partners

Bucoda Warren, Mayor's Office

Council Member Daniels, Tacoma City Council

Council Member Walker, Tacoma City Council

Councilmember Rumbaugh, Tacoma City Council
David Schrodell, Downtown Tacoma Partnership
Dean Burke, Travel Tacoma
Debbie Bingham, City of Tacoma
Don Clark, Sound Credit Union
Don Morrison, Traction Space
Eli Moreno
Herb Simon, Legacy
Jeff Carpenter, Downtown Marriott Manager
Jeff Jenkins, Public Works
Jeff Mincheff, J Squared - Rhodes Center
Jeff Robinson, City of Tacoma
Joe Frano, Public Works
Joe Lawless, UWT
John Xitco
Jon Rossman, Chair, TPC
Kathi Littman, Greater Tacoma Community Foundation
Laura Svancarel, Downtown on the Go
Mandy McGill, Inspire Consulting
Mark Hollander, Marriott
Mayor Victoria Woodards, Tacoma City Council
Michael Catsi, TPU
Mike McClure, MJR Development
Mike Raskin, MJR - Tacoma Center
Reid Fetters, FC Group

Thank You

We extend our thanks to Mayor Victoria Woodards and the Tacoma City Council for the opportunity to be part of their collaborative and decisive action in revitalizing downtown Tacoma.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 6 |
| 1. Introduction | 8 |
| Vision and Strategy - The City of Tacoma | 9 |
| The Challenge: An Empty Downtown Tacoma Today | 10 |
| Current Conditions | 12 |
| 2. The Approach | 20 |
| What: Action Areas | 21 |
| A. Transform Existing Buildings into Multi-use Hubs | 23 |
| B. Improve Public Spaces and Invite Dynamic Activation | 34 |
| How: Principles | 39 |
| C. Experimentation: Start Simple and Increase The Complexity over Time | 39 |
| D. Collaboration: Work with Community and Organizations | 41 |
| E. Integration: Adopt a Portfolio Approach | 42 |
| 3. Conclusion | 47 |
| Next Steps | 49 |
| Project Partners | 50 |



Executive Summary

Like many cities across the United States, Tacoma faces significant challenges with downtown vibrancy and building vacancy. This has implications for quality of life, tourism, and the broader urban economy. However, the city is resilient and has a forward-facing vision for urban vibrancy; it is poised for its next chapter.

This Playbook is designed to support the city and city stakeholders in moving closer toward decision-making and incrementally scaled action through public-private partnerships and in collaboration with residents. The document outlines the current and shifting context of Tacoma, including the challenges and opportunities facing downtown. To cultivate the city's latent strengths into place-based transformation, the Playbook gives recommendations to how Tacoma's changemakers should embrace distinct action areas with strong orienting principles.

Welcome to The Future of Tacoma's Downtown

Tacoma's 2025 plan ☺ centers on a bold ambition – that *“everyone in Tacoma deserves a city that keeps us safe, lets us live sustainably with our land and water, and contributes to our physical, social, and economic health.”* Downtown can become the centerpiece of that ambition, through collaborative, place-based transformation.

The Mayor has convened a cross-sector group of local changemakers who are ready to collaboratively take decisive action. Leaders from across sectors and industries – including public sector, real estate, academia, and community-based non-profits – have come to the table. They enlisted BLOXHUB, a global leader in sustainable urbanization and place-based impact, to guide the process of ideation and collaborative solution development. BLOXHUB collaborates with a broad group of expertises crucial for developing resilient, future-proof solutions to foster sustainable urbanization through transformative partnerships, integrating social, environmental, and economic sustainability as a fundamental part.

Through a series of meetings with the City of Tacoma, and a facilitated one-day in-person workshop, the group articulated local challenges, identified latent assets, and surfaced strategic solutions. The workshop included a diverse group of 45 participants, comprising City Of Tacoma representatives, city constituents, and BLOXHUB member experts. The results of the workshop are documented in this playbook.

Successful urban projects demand a holistic approach that integrates spatial and equity considerations, employs creative citizen engagement methods, and builds on existing momentum. Tacoma has already overcome the greatest hurdle to place-based transformation – creating a collaborative cross-sector group with a shared vision – and can now focus on prioritizing innovative ideas for revitalization, and creating an implementation plan to fulfill the vision.

① Introduction

Vision and Strategy - The City of Tacoma
The Challenge: An Empty Downtown Tacoma Today
Current Conditions

Vision and Strategy - The City of Tacoma

The Tacoma Strategic Plan outlines a vision for the city that leverages its current strengths. It will become “one of the nation’s healthiest, safest, and most playful cities. We have daily access to stunning natural surroundings and a great quality of life. We are Washington’s most diverse big city, with arts, culture, parks, and recreational opportunities that are envied by much larger cities.” (Tacoma Strategic Plan →)

The Downtown Tacoma Theater district can become a heart of the city, through a strategic and concerted effort to transform into a vibrant, inclusive mixed-use neighborhood that attracts a diverse array of residents and visitors. The goal is to create a downtown where all residents have compelling reasons to visit, experience seamless transportation connectivity, and encounter moments of surprise and delight. Creative building uses and thoughtfully designed public spaces will serve as catalysts for small businesses, the arts, and dynamic community activities.



Downtown Tacoma (North America Asset Management Group, LLC)

The Challenge: An Empty Downtown Tacoma Today

The urban doom loop

Walking through downtown Tacoma today is striking; the once-vibrant shopping and theater district is riddled with vacant storefronts. Sidewalks are empty. Some anchors resolutely draw visitors, but they are not enough to generate a critical mass of visitors and residents.

Tacoma is not alone – many American cities are suffering the same post-pandemic trends, collectively referred to as an “urban doom loop,” (Brookings Institute ☺). Hybrid and remote work have led companies to downsize or eliminate their office space footprint, resulting in class A and especially class B office vacancies. Many small businesses were unable to survive the pandemic, leaving behind vacant storefronts and reducing overall foot traffic.

Housing prices and a desire for more space are driving people out of dense, central neighborhoods. An increasing houseless population lives in encampments in downtown cores, causing real or perceived safety concerns. These trends are driving disinvestment and reducing the urban tax base, which leaves municipal governments with less funding to address the compounding issues (NYT ☺).

Urban economies were particularly vulnerable to the shock of the pandemic because they were unbalanced. For decades, American downtowns have been designed as single-use business areas “that exist predominantly as employment centers” (Knight Foundation ☺). Office spaces and the businesses that rented them were the single focus of land use planning. Downtowns operated on a 9-to-5 schedule, with limited residential and recreational activity. Like any ecosystem, a monoculture is not resilient to change.

The Opportunity: A Time for Reimagining Downtown

Buildings are vacant and businesses have moved out. Now city leaders around the country have a choice about how to fill them. In other words, the hollowing-out of conventional downtown economies is an opportunity for reimagining.

“The fall in commercial-real-estate values may, paradoxically, breathe new life into America’s superstar cities. As office and storefront space becomes more affordable, more family-owned restaurants, creative businesses, and upstart companies might move in, making the city an even more diverse and vibrant place for its inhabitants,” (The Atlantic ↻).

Tacoma can seize this moment to create a thriving downtown. The city can advance policy objectives such as building connected and affordable neighborhoods, providing livable wages and high quality educational opportunities, prioritizing civic engagement and community decision making, and ensuring all residents are treated equitably with access to services, facilities, and financial stability (Tacoma 2025 ↻).

Vibrant, mixed-use spaces can attract people not only for work, but also for living, playing, and culture. 24-hour neighborhood activation can replace the traditional 9-to-5 routine. By fostering a more dynamic and inclusive downtown environment, Tacoma will offer a higher quality of life for all. To achieve this vision, Tacoma should acknowledge its current conditions, embrace its strategic assets, and play to its competitive strengths. Few cities in the country can boast access to nature, comparatively lower housing costs, density of arts and entertainment, and access to an urban center with an international airport the way Tacoma can.

Tacoma can lead national post-pandemic recovery by revitalizing its downtown through strategic land use, building occupancy, incentives, and quality public spaces. The city’s progress begins with small steps, implementing prioritized projects from October 2024 to March 2025.

Current Conditions

Demographics

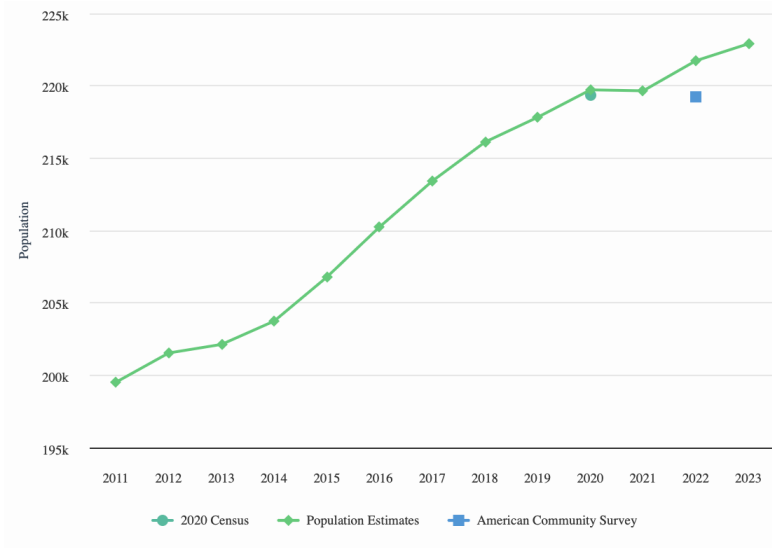
Tacoma is one of the most racially diverse cities in Washington State. Nearly 40% of people living in Tacoma are Latino, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Multiracial or Native American.

The average age is 36.9, leaning towards a younger population with over 40% under the age of 30, of which ~20% are under 18. In the downtown core, over 70% of the residents are between the ages of 18-64. The center has more working age residents than the region as a whole, with a moderate share of youth (12%) and a small share of seniors (10%) (PSRC ↻).

The population is expected to increase by 60% in the next decade from its current ~220,000. In downtown specifically, there are currently around 14,000 residents, and this number is expected to triple in the coming years. This growth presents both opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed proactively.

While Tacoma is diverse, the city experiences a good deal of racial and ethnic residential segregation.

As outlined by the city's Office of Equity and Human Rights *"we are still feeling the effects of decades of intentional disinvestment that harmed communities of color at disproportional rates. To transform into an antiracist city and reverse the inequities caused by the negative impacts of racist policies, practices and zoning, will take diligence, persistent determination, and intentional antiracist management of investment,"* (Tacoma Equity Index ↻). As a result, Tacoma's non-white population is concentrated in suburbs around the urban core where there is less access to nature and public transit.



United States Census Bureau. 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office. 7 December 2023.

Urban Design: Key development projects during the 1990s shaped the character of downtown Tacoma, including the expansion of the University of Washington Tacoma, the introduction of the state's first modern electric light rail system, expanded protected bicycle lanes, several street/alleyway activations, an established arts and museum district, and a restored urban waterfront.

These developments have brought new people and new activity to the area. However, much of downtown and its surroundings still bear the imprint of car-centric planning. Major roadways like Interstate 705 create barriers between downtown and the revitalized waterfront, limiting access for pedestrians, public transit, and cyclists.

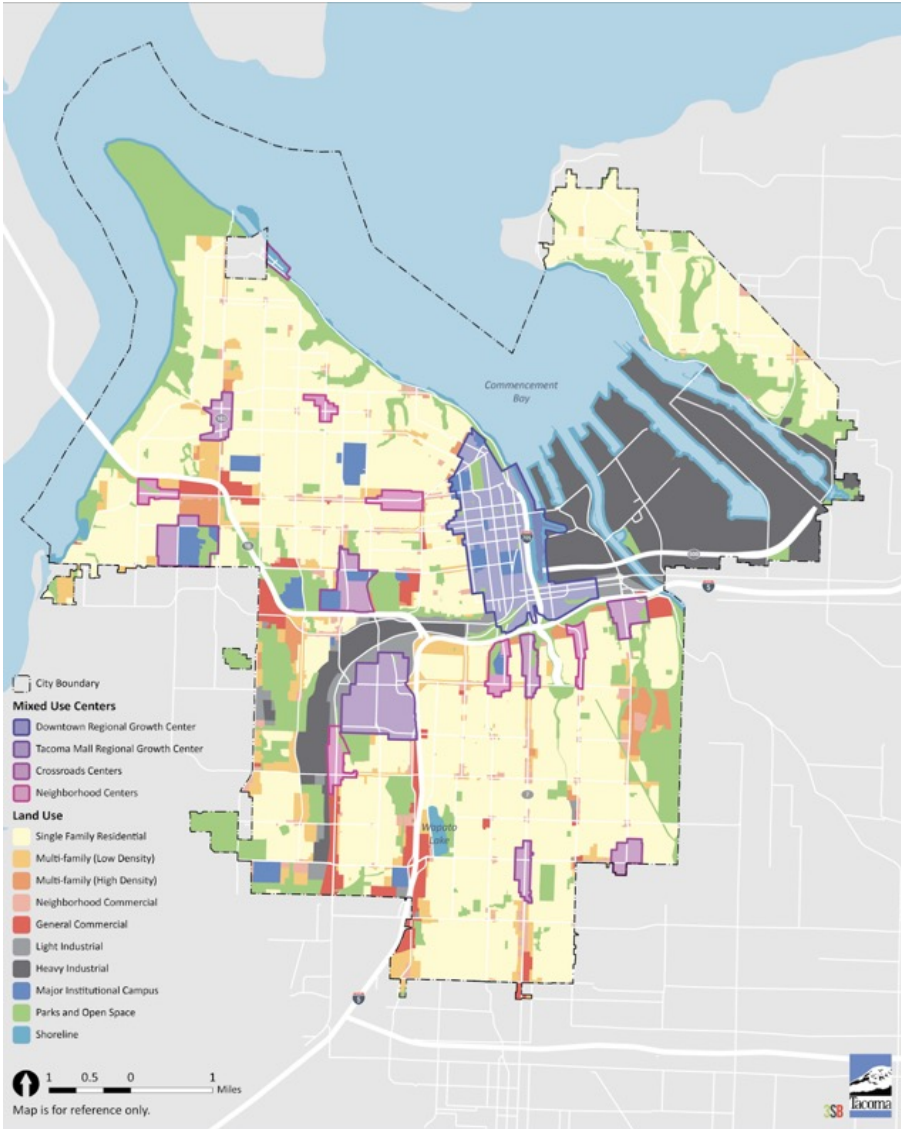
“...I-705 is a remnant of Tacoma’s past when Tacoma - and downtown Tacoma in particular - were something to pass through and avoid.

- Rubén Casas, University of Washington Tacoma, (The Urbanist ☺)

As of 2024, Tacoma City has newly implemented the Urban Design Studio ☺, “a long-term program with a focus on delivering urban design services to customers in the Planning and Development Services Department, to other City departments, and through external public and private partnerships”. Whereas historically, the City regulated the design of new projects through prescriptive and inflexible code standards, this new planning and land use permitting framework is intended to invite deep community review, and encourage a careful consideration of the urban environment, the public realm, connectivity, climate responsiveness, and other urban design concerns. It provides ☺ for “thoughtful and intentional code modifications,” which can enable dynamic mixed uses.

“Through the Urban Design Project Review, we’re fostering a Tacoma that embraces innovation and quality, creating spaces that enrich the lives of all who call our city home. This program is a testament to our commitment to thoughtful urban development, ensuring that every project contributes to the vibrancy and inclusivity of our community.

- Mayor Victoria Woodards (Tacoma City Press Release ☺)



Future Land Use Map - One Tacoma ↗

Public Space: Downtown Tacoma has few “third spaces” – places to rest, play, and gather. Those that do exist are in need of urban design and programming to achieve their potential for activation. Broadway plaza is a good example. The hardscape is less than welcoming. The Broadway weekly farmer’s market ↻ brings crowds (34 years running!) but only for a small window of time. Visitors come for a purpose and leave, rather than trusting that they will be surprised and staying to enjoy what they discovered.

Public spaces can only be great when they are activated with dynamic programs and events that matter to the community. The 2011 legalization of skateboarding is an instructive precedent – a policy change has been followed by an annual “block party” style event that celebrates skate culture, called Go Skate Tacoma ↻, and the emergence of nonprofit organizations that offer learning, discovery and mentorship, like Alchemy Skateboarding ↻. Skateboarding is now an important part of Tacoma’s public space identity.

“We’re so lucky that the work we do has this thing, has skateboarding, that just naturally teaches how to support each other, community, determination, focus, grit, all of those things.

- Taylor Woodruff, Alchemy Skateboarding (Grit City Mag ↻)

Some recent projects and policies are beginning to address the need for public space enhancement, such as the proposed Tacoma Town Center, the expansion of bike lanes, and new playgrounds. To achieve their potential, public space activities need to be coordinated, there should be enough of them to create a critical mass of foot traffic, and, most importantly, physical improvements must align with community-driven activation – whether through organizations or policy changes. In addition to better urban spaces and dynamic activation, Tacoma needs better transportation connections. making it easier for people to move between and around nodes, ideally without a car.

Ground Floor Retail: goes hand in hand with public space and activation.

Downtown Tacoma is made up of predominantly small businesses with around 53% employing 1-4 employees. “The major industry sectors are Services (69%), Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (10%) and Government (10%);” (according to the Puget Sound Regional Council, 2013 Regional Centers Monitoring Report ☺).

As of Q1, 2024, retail vacancy across the Puget Sound region has increased to 3.3%, rents have decreased, and net absorption is down (Puget Sound Properties ☺). In Pierce County, retail vacancy is at 2.6% (Pierce County ☺). In mid-2023, Tacoma’s downtown core had a 2% vacancy rate for restaurant spaces, and non-restaurant spaces approximately 15% (Puget Sound Business Journal ☺).

The recent provision of housing in downtown Tacoma – and the projected population growth that would accompany it – is sending a positive signal for retail: there will be an increased demand for urban amenities.


“If more people move in, more businesses will arrive, and if there are more retail and amenities here, then more people will want to live here.

- JD Elquist, Downtown Tacoma Partnership (Puget Sound Business Journal ☺)

Public-private partnerships are focused on supporting downtown vitality. What began as a business improvement district has become the Downtown Tacoma Partnership ☺, within the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce. The organization is focused on “*maintain[ing] expansive safe and clean services, while also providing community beautification, marketing services, and retail support and recruitment.*” The Downtown Tacoma Partnership is poised to play an important role in downtown revitalization efforts – not only through its continued support for retail and business, but also through convening and coordinating cross-sector activity.


Retail Report

Puget Sound Region
1Q 2024




\$29.73

Market Rent/SF/Yr.



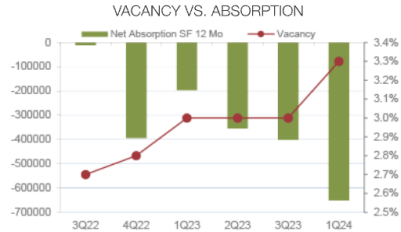
3.3%

Vacancy Rate



(651)K

12 Mo Net Absorption in SF



Puget Sound Properties ↻

Housing and Office: Recent years have seen a population shift from cities to smaller and peri-urban areas across the US (Bloomberg ↻ & NYT ↻). A number of factors are driving this trend, most notably that the housing market of larger cities is pricing people out, the sectoral embrace of hybrid work, and a desire to live in proximity to nature with more living space.

As a smaller city near Seattle, Tacoma is benefitting from this shift. However, with the high demand for housing and limited inventory, property values are increasing. In response to these trends, there are plans underway to increase and improve housing. There has been a surge in new developments, including apartment complexes, townhomes, and single-family homes. From 2021 through April 2023, a total of 4,022 new apartment units affiliated with the city's multifamily tax exemption program were either completed or under construction in Tacoma, according to the Puget Sound Business Journal ↻.

Another approach the city is taking is urban infill, developing underutilized or vacant land to increase density and revitalize older neighborhoods. And lastly, the city is focusing on senior housing to accommodate the growing demand for an aging population that includes assisted living and age-restricted communities.

Mike Raskin, president of MJR Development (owner of Tacoma Centre in the central business district), suggests that the recent growth of housing has bolstered Tacoma's office market, as compared to the rest of the Puget Sound region. "We need to go where the people are living," he said. "No one wants to spend hours a week in traffic. In Tacoma, there are so many people who are living downtown in the new apartments. It makes sense for companies to open offices here now," (PSBJ ☺). At the close of 2023, Pierce County office vacancy rates were at 9.3%. (Pierce County ☺).

Conclusion on The Vision and The Context

The previous pages have set the scene for a place-based transformation in Tacoma's downtown theater district. The section paints a vision, and outlines the challenges, opportunities, and conditions for transformation. This context will inform the path forward.

The following section, 'Approach', outlines initial steps to address Tacoma's central urban challenges, draw on the city's unique assets, and advance the shared vision for a vibrant downtown. This work emerges from the ideation and the solutions-focused process, presenting a set of success measures, inspirational near term actions areas and guiding principles. Together, these will help Tacoma create a vibrant downtown.

② The Approach

What: Action Areas

How: Principles

What: Action Areas

Together with BLOXHUB experts, Tacoma’s leaders from across industries and sectors have workshopped and developed ideas about the transformation in downtown. These ideas range from new programmatic interventions to inclusive and experimental processes with community stakeholders.

The group also outlined a series of critical factors that should be considered as a baseline for all projects to support downtown revitalization:

- **Municipal Leadership:** A strong municipal commitment is crucial to advance a comprehensive downtown revitalization strategy.
- **Downtown Tacoma Partnership:** can liaise with and organize the private sector coalition. Together with the City, DTP can drive the vision forward.
- **Collaboration Among Property Owners:** Property owners and managers must work together to explore and implement alternative building uses.
- **Building and Zoning Code Revisions:** Temporary exemptions or careful modifications will facilitate innovative uses and adaptive reuse of spaces.
- **Funding and Resources:** Securing the necessary funding and resources to support the revitalization efforts.
- **Community Engagement:** Active community engagement can guide temporary activations, creative building uses, and long-term public realm improvements.

This first phase of work strengthened and built relationships amongst Tacoma constituents and outlined an approach to be further developed in phase 2. This next section outlines two action areas for transformation (“what”) and three principles for how to do that effectively (“how”). These have been developed in collaboration with experts in community-based urban development within the BLOXHUB ecosystem and embody the BLOXHUB approach to fast and impactful project completion.

Each of the “What” and “How” recommendations are fully described in the following sections, including relevant project references from the BLOXHUB member experts portfolio.

What:

- Transform existing buildings into multi-use hubs
- Improve public spaces and invite dynamic activation

How:

- Experimentation: Start simple and increase the complexity over time
- Collaboration: Work with community and organizations
- Integration: Take a portfolio approach

A. Transform Existing Buildings into Multi-use Hubs

This action area focuses on revitalizing underutilized and vacant buildings by transforming them into vibrant hubs that host a variety of creative and multi-dimensional activities. Moving away from single-use programming, which lacks resilience to change, buildings should support a diverse range of uses simultaneously and adapt over time—whether across a day, week, month, or year.

Downtown Tacoma will become economically robust and socially vibrant when each building is home to a mix of activities, businesses, and uses that attract a broad demographic of users and visitors throughout a 24-hour period. The City can support this effort by streamlining the process for occupancy and use class revisions, and creating incentives or programs that facilitate dynamic uses.

The City should first identify underutilized buildings. Target buildings can be upgraded with light modifications to accommodate a flexible array of tenants and programs. Interior designs should be minimal to allow for continuous adaptation and evolution.

The City should also consider revising building and zoning codes to enable a wider range of uses, making it easier to repurpose spaces for diverse activities in the future.

Partnerships with individuals, companies, and organizations will be key to continuously defining and implementing new uses that bring these buildings to life. It is important for community benefits to be inclusive – one way of achieving that is for community members themselves to prioritize and implement potential uses.

Opportunity in Tacoma **Centering Vibrancy Efforts in The Theater and Arts District**

Known as the Theater and Arts district, this area of downtown comprises a cluster of heritage buildings with early 20th-century grandeur. They constitute the state's highest density of art and history museums. The theater district is an attraction for both local, regional, and national visitors, bringing in over 225,000 each year (City of Tacoma, Performing Arts ☺). Visitors attend ballet performances, live opera, and the orchestra or visit one of many museums in the vicinity. In recent years, attendance has been dwindling.

The theater district can broaden its cultural and community reach by channeling new forms of creative and entrepreneurial production and welcoming new demographics. The City's Arts and Cultural Vitality division should play an important role in arts-led urban revitalization. Tacoma has an opportunity to create explicit connections to the vibrant arts and culture scene of nearby Seattle, while also finding its own creative identity and drawing new and unique crowds. One example is Tacoma's remarkable academic and community-based arts programs. Hilltop Arts ☺ and Tacoma School of the Arts ☺ both bring youth downtown, proving that creative building uses can enable values-led programming.

Alongside many strategies to maintain and increase existing or new theater goers, a physical redesign may help. As described by Amy McBride, the City of Tacoma Arts Administrator, the space around the Museum is an *"underutilized deadzone, with limited pedestrian use and long, unattractive stretches of concrete."* The second action area focuses on reimagining these public spaces.



Boston Commonwealth Pier Revitalization,
Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects

Boston Commonwealth Pier Revitalization **By Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects**

Schmidt Hammer Lassen's adaptive reuse of the Boston Commonwealth Pier reimagines a historic industrial facility and customs house into a dynamic 705,000-sf hybrid mixed-use space. This transformative project blends retail, office, and event spaces, revitalizing the Boston waterfront while preserving its rich heritage. The project conditions mirror the industrial waterfront in Tacoma and demonstrate how urban revitalisation through building transformation can create both public benefit and return on investment.

Boston's broader urban development goals were guided by strategic tools developed by the architect which measure cost versus impact and lifecycle return-on-investment. A programmatic valuation study showed that subtracting public squares and courtyards from the built square metres improved project profitability by providing amenity and daylight to the interior, and extending the public perimeter. On-site resource mapping revealed historical structures that could be adapted to preserve the future flexibility in the project. This analytical approach led to a deeper understanding of adaptive transformation as a generator of both cultural and financial value.

To further mitigate risks and accurately determine a return on investment, the team is pioneering the development of specialized software and toolsets that utilize AI, site scanning and digital asset models to aid decision-making. Our new life cycle assessment (LCA) tools deliver rapid results on existing embodied carbon in buildings and feedback on design decisions.

The project demonstrates the potential of adaptive transformation to contribute meaningfully to Boston's urban landscape and economic future.

Achievements

Transformed from a 1913 logistics facility and world-trade centre, the building is repurposed for multiple uses, including workspace, retail, green spaces, and a grand waterfront plaza, providing a flexible neighborhood gathering space for year-round activities:

- New natural landscape with exterior courtyards and a public plaza with a tree grove.
- Two acres of new habitat and landscape – Native planting, habitat for shore birds, songbirds, & pollinators.
- Integrated health & wellness measures: biking facilities, biogenic materials, increased fresh air & daylight design.
- Exceeds City/State 2050 Net Zero regulation.
- Targeting LEED Gold, FitWel and ISO 14001 green/healthy building certifications.

Project Owner: Pembroke

Year: Ongoing, completion expected end 2024

Location: Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Partners: CBT Architects (Local Architect), IBI Placemaking (Landscape Architect), Thornton Tomasetti (Structure), Arup (MEP, Sustainability), Turner-JANEY (Contractor)



Tibble 2.0, Henning Larsen Architects

Tibble 2.0

By Henning Larsen Architects

The significant growth in urban populations poses a demand for the vibrancy of inner city life within the suburbs. The Tibble district of the Swedish suburb of Täby is exemplary of Henning Larsen's approach to this contemporary design challenge.

With Tibble 2.0, the best qualities of Täby will receive new life; reimagined through a masterplan that emphasizes local culture and elevates the city to a wider audience. The vision for Tibble is to consolidate it as a neighborhood for everyday leisure and activity, as well as an incubator for knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The district is designed to create synergies between schools, business, culture, and everyday life in a vibrant urban environment with plenty of sunny and wind protected locations.

In the winning proposal, Tibble gets a green and urban heart, in line with the idea of a "Central Park" for Täby. The green civic center provides citizens and visitors with plenty of opportunities for play, sport, and movement. Around the park, the plan provides facilities for collaboration between local entrepreneurs, students, and innovators. Flexible workplaces and meeting rooms, experimental labs, exhibition and event spaces offer the ideal conditions for knowledge exchange and cooperation beyond traditional borders.

Challenge

The development must optimize the microclimate of public spaces, ensuring comfortable outdoor environments throughout the year, which involves careful consideration of building heights and placements to shield against wind and maximize sunlight. Another challenge is creating a flexible infrastructure that can adapt to future technological advancements and changing mobility patterns.

The project also needs to address noise and safety concerns, particularly around the transportation hubs and rail tracks. Lastly, fostering collaboration while ensuring sustainable economic, social, and environmental practices adds to the complexity of the project.

Method

The development is planned with flexibility in mind, using a modular block structure that can be adapted over time to suit evolving needs, whether for housing, offices, or educational facilities. To foster a sense of community and synergy, the project includes multi-use spaces designed to encourage interaction and collaboration across different sectors.

Achievements

- Creating an innovation cluster provides new economic opportunities particularly for young talent to grow and thrive.
- Public spaces are designed for people from different backgrounds, professions and generations to meet and connect.
- Creating a balance between density and public space ensures both commercial interest and respect for nature.
- Providing variation at eye-level fosters a feeling of authenticity and attention to the human scale.

Project Owner: Täby Municipality

Year: 2030

Partners: SLA, Second City, COWI



Cascina Falchera Torino, Italy, AGORA

Cascina Falchera Torino, Italy

By AGORA

Context - Cascina Falchera is a multifunctional area on the outskirts of Turin (Italy) consisting of a forest, several farms, agricultural land, an industrial kitchen and several meeting rooms.

The operator of Cascina Falchera is an NGO that occupied the building a year ago and today runs everything from educational activities for school children; integration programs and language teaching for migrants and foreigners; sustainable micro-farming and food production and cultural events. They want art and culture to be a bigger part of Cascina Falchera's activity program and they want to establish stronger relationships with local creative education and local cultural institutions.

The task

AGORA has helped Cascina Falchera establish Roggia - a permanent Artist Refuge and a program where an artist, a designer, an architect, a chef, etc. - are invited to live and immerse themselves in the area for a limited period.

During their residency, the artist engages with the local community and landscape, ultimately creating meaningful transformations that leave a lasting positive impact on the area and the wider community. This can be in the form of innovative concepts, prototypes, artistic productions and events that celebrate the intertwining of art, culture and sustainability.

Achievements

- Manifesto for Cascina Falchera's Artist Refuge, i.e. a program of values and a set of working principles that should guide the artist's work.
- Text for the first Call-for-Artist.

- Recruitment of 15 young people from various creative education programs in the Turin area.
- Development work consisting of Context Research, Development of Story counting for Cascina Falchera.
- Curating a launch event for Roggia, Cascina Falchera's Artist Refuge.

Year: 2023

Client: European Commission

Partners: Consorzio Kairos; Cooperativa Coop Liberi Tutti

B. Improve Public Spaces and Invite Dynamic Activation

The broad objectives of this action area are to create a welcoming and safe public realm, enhance street life, and improve the downtown feel. To become truly vibrant, the urban fabric of downtown Tacoma needs two things. First, targeted infrastructural improvements, especially to third spaces like sidewalks, multi-use streets, plazas, parks, waterfronts, and playgrounds. These physical upgrades should prioritize simplicity, flexibility, and human- scale design.

But great public spaces are never created in a top-down fashion. The second need is clear opportunities for individuals and organizations of all kinds to dynamically activate public spaces. Businesses, non-profits, and local community events can attract visitors and residents of all ages and at all hours, strengthening the district's identity and recognition.

This can happen through making activation opportunities easy to find, simplifying regulations for streeteries and sidewalk cafes, and ensuring that small businesses can navigate the permitting process easily. The City may help organize a calendar of events in a specific park or host a design competition for temporary installations in a small square. Multi-modal transportation connectivity is crucial so that visitors can arrive to and move through downtown. Cohesion will arise naturally as the "hardware" of urban spaces is activated with the "software" of events, activities, and temporary uses. Together, these will enrich street life, benefit ground floor retail, and create a downtown experience that appeals to a broad demographic.

Opportunity in Tacoma **Proximity to Nature**

Tacoma is loved for its proximity to nature. The downtown has waterfront access, and a network of greenways connects the urban core with surrounding parks and trails.

The city is undergoing numerous greenway and connectivity projects, such as The Prairie Line Trail, which will transform an old railroad corridor into a multi-use trail connecting downtown Tacoma with the University of Washington Tacoma campus and the Dome District. The Ruston Way Waterfront Trail, a popular area along the waterfront, improving accessibility and integrating with nearby parks and recreational areas. The 6th Avenue Greenway aims to create a safer, more bike-friendly corridor, improving access to downtown and other key areas.

Within the downtown core itself, there is a significant opportunity to further integrate nature by adding more parks, green spaces, and increasing tree canopy coverage, which currently stands at a low 7% (2018 assessment ↻). Green spaces are “multi-solving” – they provide ecosystem services that improve resilience, reduce urban heat, advance Tacoma’s broader sustainability goals, and create a welcoming public realm.



Downsview Framework Plan, Henning Larsen Architects

The project will transform the site of the former Downsview Airport and surrounding land - an area comparable in size to downtown Toronto - into a sustainable, resilient, and healthy community, replete with nature and open spaces. Encompassing 520 acres, the lands at Downsview represent one of the largest community-building opportunities in North America. The unique site is located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the historic homeland of the Huron Wendat and Haudenosaunee people. It has a long history of supporting many people and uses over the last two centuries.

A project of this size and strategic significance creates a huge responsibility. Set in the context of a changing climate, growing inequality, and an increased understanding of the effects of the built form on public health and quality of life, the redevelopment of the Downsview Lands demands ambition. Therefore, the intent of the Framework Plan is to set the stage for the Downsview Lands to become a hub of urban innovation and a leader in healthy, inclusive, and resilient community building and urban design.

To ensure the Plan serves the current and future communities of Downsview, the landowners engaged extensively with the local community, Indigenous rights holders, and stakeholders to refine the overarching principles for development.

This visionary approach to the redevelopment of Downsview resonates with the downtown revitalization plan of Tacoma, which also faces the necessity of an active ground floor and public realm. In both cases, the focus on creating vibrant, community-centered spaces aims to stimulate local economies and enhance the quality of life for residents. By integrating commercial, residential, and recreational uses, the Downsview project serves as a model for Tacoma's efforts, demonstrating the transformative potential of thoughtful urban planning in addressing vacancy and invigorating public spaces.

The Challenge

The main challenges were focused on the site history, geographic location, and vast availability of land, in order to re-use of existing structures, transition appropriately to adjacent neighborhoods, re-connect mobility networks, leverage significant investments in transit by providing the right volume of jobs and housing in close proximity.

Method

Northcrest and Canada Lands developed the id8 Downsview process to ensure that the future of Downsview is shaped by many different perspectives, including: priorities of the public, Rights Holders, and groups with local and region-wide interests; public policy priorities and requirements; as well as the priorities of the landowners.

Achievements

- The Downsview Framework Plan is the result of an extensive community and stakeholder engagement process.
- All 520 acres were planned in connection to the bicycle and ravine network surrounding the site.
- The 100 acres of parks and open spaces are distributed and interconnected through a system of greenways.
- The open space network supports micromobility, enhances biodiversity, and facilitates distributed stormwater retention.

Project Owner: Canada Lands Company and Northcrest Developments

Year: 2020 - 2050

Partners: KPMB (Local Support), SLA (Landscape Architect), Ramboll (Resiliency and Climate Adaptation, Water Cycle Sustainability, Integrated Infrastructure), USI (Planning and Urban Design Support), Two Row Architect (Indigenous Consultant), Entuitive (Structural), TMP Inc. (Mechanical), Vermeulens (Cost Consultant), Future Simple Studio (Website Design)

How: Principles

The “How” section includes:

- **Experimentation:** Start simple and increase the complexity over time
- **Collaboration:** Work with community and organizations
- **Integration:** Take a portfolio approach

Each principle is described in the following and relevant project references from the BLOXHUB member experts portfolio is included at the end of the “How” section.

C. Experimentation: Start Simple and Increase The Complexity over Time

To avoid the risks of fixed long-term planning, the city should approach downtown transformation with an experimental mindset. This has two main components.

Learning Model: actively trying new approaches, learning from outcomes with clear metrics and an evaluation model, and being open to adapting the approach. By fostering a culture of learning-by-doing, Tacoma can effectively navigate and design for the changing nature of the city, refining the strategy in response to ongoing feedback (from all stakeholders).

Rather than planning top-down, invite collaborators and let projects organically evolve. Assign a project lead to enable experiments and document outcomes.

Strategic sequencing: Starting small is a way to work around resource constraints (like lack of a dedicated budget). Focus on amplifying the activities of existing organizations, establishing a foundation for larger, more transformative projects in the future.

In the first action area, *Transform existing buildings*, experimentation means starting with several buildings in the downtown area that are owned or managed by public agencies such as Pierce County and the City of Tacoma. These will have an easier time getting experiments off the ground as the city has more control and agency to provide the space to experiment.

In the second action area, *Improve public spaces*, experimentation means making it easy for organizations to use public spaces, through streamlined permitting, insurance, safety, and communications, clear guidelines for uses, and a point of contact for support.

Short-term activations can not only spark vibrancy, but also inform longer-term changes to urban planning and zoning code. This approach showcases what is possible and attracts more stakeholders over time.

D. Collaboration: Work with Community and Organizations

The future of downtown Tacoma will be shaped through collaborative efforts that involve visitors, businesses, and residents in both the planning and implementation processes.

The collaborative effort starts with a thorough investigation on the subcultures, in and around Tacoma, who are in need of a place and/or structure to support their endeavors. This is applicable to every group that has a potential to grow and are willing to work for their growth.

This approach fosters a sense of ownership and engagement, and ensures that the revitalization efforts reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. By actively including equity-seeking groups in all phases of a project, the city can enhance outcomes and maximize social impact. These groups, often overlooked in regeneration initiatives, can contribute to both the transformation and operation phases by taking on roles such as employment in building maintenance or participating as producers and consumers within the space.

For any project to be realized, an organizational entity is necessary. Tacoma is home to numerous active nonprofits, providing a prime opportunity to build upon the work already underway. Instead of creating new project-specific entities, the City should focus on empowering and expanding existing businesses and nonprofits that are already doing the “magic on the street”. A joint structure, such as an umbrella nonprofit organization, could support and connect these organizations, enabling them to work together more effectively.

In the first action area: Transform existing buildings, collaboration will involve aligning diverse stakeholders, including business owners, community-based organizations, and residents, around shared goals. Each stakeholder brings unique incentives, assets, and risks to the repurposing process.

Articulating a unified vision at both the building and district levels is crucial for fostering cooperation. Spatial interventions should be designed to support and enhance existing activities while guiding future developments that the area deems desirable, rather than focusing solely on the architecture.

In the second action area: Improve public spaces, collaboration means co-designing both the hardscape and activation of public spaces with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including residents and visitors of all ages, small business owners, and cultural institutions. Successfully activating downtown will require the City to design spaces that cater to a diverse set of people. The district must be welcoming and accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and interests. Public spaces should be easy to access, navigate, and enjoy, accommodating a wide range of activities throughout the day. It's especially important to create environments where children can play safely, and older adults can move about and socialize comfortably.

E. Integration: Adopt a Portfolio Approach

While individual projects may face challenges, a portfolio approach - where multiple initiatives contribute to the same overarching mission - ensures resilience. By addressing multiple aspects of urban transformation simultaneously, Tacoma can achieve a more integrated and sustainable revitalization of its downtown. Each initiative supports and informs the others, creating a cohesive ecosystem of actions.

Integration also involves connecting buildings, public spaces, and programs into a cohesive experience tailored to specific user groups. Effective “placemaking” is about seamlessly weaving these elements together, starting with user journeys and designing from that perspective.

In the first action area: Transform existing buildings, integration might mean balancing long term tenants with short term experiments. These short-term activations provide a valuable opportunity to assess the viability of long-term uses. Each building should maintain stable anchor tenants while also hosting dynamic, temporary uses. It’s crucial to create clear pathways for temporary users to transition into long-term tenants, fostering a continuous cycle of growth and adaptation.

In the second action area: Improve public spaces, integration might mean designing multi-use, all-hours public spaces. Great public spaces accommodate a number of different uses at the same time, and over the course of a day, week, month or year. This variety of uses generates “spillover effects,” where activity in one area enhances the vibrancy of the entire district. Downtown Tacoma will thrive economically and socially when a broad demographic of users and visitors engage with the area across a 24-hour period.



Nykøbing Falster - The Market Hall in the Southern Part of the Harbor, AGORA

The southern part of Nykøbing Falster's old industrial harbor is set to be transformed into a vibrant meeting place with enhanced appeal. This area aims to elevate the city's cultural and business life to a new level, inviting locals and visitors to gather for activities on land and water.

The Market Hall, a large, historic industrial building spanning 1,800 square meters, along with the surrounding outdoor areas on the waterfront, will undergo a physical transformation to support the community's dreams and needs for a developing city.

The Task

As the main consultant, AGORA has assisted Guldborgsund Municipality in developing a concept for the building's content and urban life in the area. This concept will be used by the municipality and local associations to seek funding for the renovation of the old Market Hall.

We have organized and facilitated a citizen and stakeholder engagement process consisting of a series of workshops and activities using both analog and digital engagement methods, resulting in a new program for the area.

The comprehensive concept for the area is based on innovative cultural formats and a mixed offer of functions and activities that create life around the clock. It appeals to various target groups and meets needs for new workplaces, types of communities and experiential formats, as well as opportunities for recreational activities.

Achievements

- A new narrative for the area (including a description of themes, main tracks, activities and functions, and a strategy for renting out spaces and involved actors).

- The establishment of a new citizen-driven association connected to the Market Hall.
- Development of a visual identity (created in collaboration with the city's local vocational schools).
- A financing plan for the renovation work for both the outdoor areas and the Market Hall.
- A business, organizational, and operational model for the area.
- Two applications to philanthropic foundations – one has received full funding, and the other is pending a response.

Project Owner: Guldborgsund Municipality, Region Sjælland, South of Denmark

Year: June 2023 - March 2024

Stakeholders: Landscape Architects; SLA Architects, Business Lolland Falster, Mask Teater, Museum Lolland Falster, local schools

③ Conclusion

Next Steps

Conclusion

The playbook presents the prioritized recommendations from the ideation and collaborative solution development process for the Tacoma City place-based transformation. The process involved stakeholder representatives from local changemaker groups, community-based non-profits, academia, and public and private sector partners.

The recommendations lay out a pathway for the suggested next steps towards the realization of the Tacoma Strategic Plan, which envisions Tacoma as *“one of the nation’s healthiest, safest, and most playful cities.”*

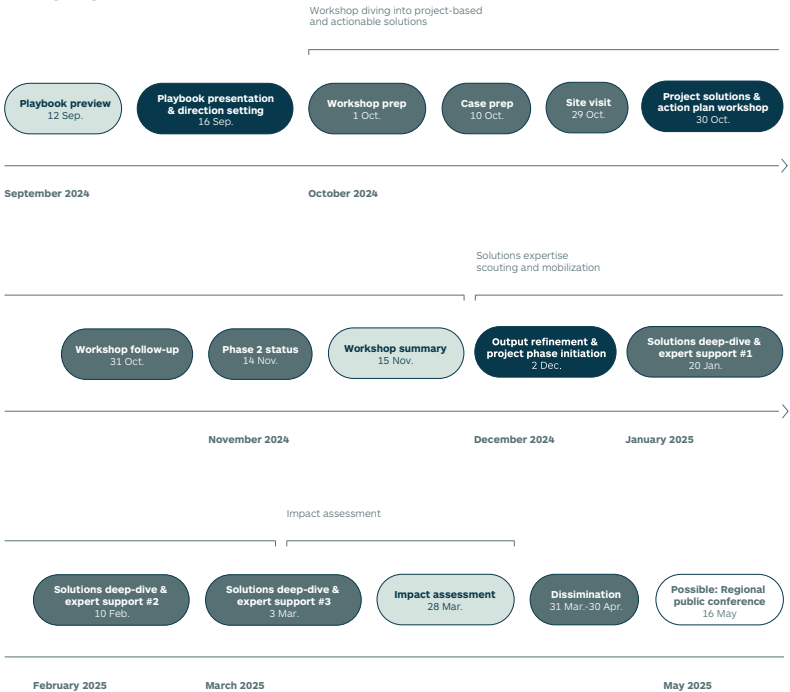
The Playbook brings light to the current and shifting context of Tacoma. It suggests six recommended success factors, two inspirational action areas and three orienting principles from the ideation and collaborative solution development process. Based on these, it is evident that there is a strong potential for Tacoma to take action that can bring the city closer to realizing its vision.

The playbook can be an inspirational platform for Tacoma city and city stakeholders to move forward to Phase 2 of a place-based transformation of Tacoma as a thriving city.

Next Steps

Phase 2 will commence in September 2024. Over 8 months, the collaboration will facilitate further discussions across City of Tacoma constituents, selected stakeholders, and the BLOXHUB ecosystem in service of designing focused pilot projects to be implemented in the downtown. There will be a need to prioritize strategies to advance, an intentionally designed process to carry out the development of a select first few projects. A strong municipal leadership, collaborative partnerships, and active community engagement to bring this vision to life.

Timeline



Project Partners

City of Tacoma departments and key stakeholders, including the Mayor, representatives from the Mayor's office, and the Community and Economic Development Department.

BLOXHUB serves as the Nordic hub for sustainable urbanization, facilitating connections, knowledge sharing, and business development for its members. The organization was founded on the belief that global urbanization and climate change challenges require new collaboration methods. Through diverse programs and events, BLOXHUB fosters collaboration and innovation. With partnerships spanning Europe, North America, and Asia, BLOXHUB operates locally and globally to drive positive change. Its ecosystem comprises approximately 350 companies, science institutions, organizations, and public bodies, all dedicated to advancing fields related to sustainable architecture, design, construction, technology, and beyond.

Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects ☺ Driven by a deep responsibility towards our planet, we strive for an architecture that transforms our understanding of the world by giving back to the environment, to communities, and to individuals. We find joy and inspiration in collaborating with stakeholders. Our architecture is motivated by artistry and discipline. We strive to deliver more meaning by using less. We see ourselves as part of a larger system - an ecology - where everything is connected. Something that goes well beyond the physical manifestation of spaces, buildings, and cities.

Our approach begins with a review of the existing site context, building, and urban environment. Using our software Pre:view, we conduct a preliminary scan of the building and surrounding area to identify viable alternative uses. The software enables a quick and cost-effective exploration of potential programmatic solutions and offering a data-driven foundation for further exploration.

Henning Larsen Architects ☞ Designing our built environment is both a responsibility and a privilege; an undertaking that we approach with curiosity and compassion. It is these that allow us to navigate the connections and complexities that define our physical realm, ecological systems, and societies at large, resulting in truly meaningful and impactful spaces.

We embrace the unending call for adaptability and responsiveness, to work at the nexus of artistic sensitivity, innovation, and impact.

AGORA ☞ What if we were to reinvent work and our organizations? Would we recreate management, leadership, organizational design and practices as we know them? Or would we do a lot of things differently? We believe a more creative, deliberate and humanizing approach to organizing is highly needed. We stimulate the development of organizations that we would want our children to work for in the future. Organizations characterized by genuine care for the world we are part of, deep responsibility for the social worlds created within and around the organization, and courage to distribute power and make everyone powerful.

Beta Mobility ☞ Offer specialized and industry specific consulting services to aid clients in transition to New Mobility: lower emission services, adapting to new user behavior and transform legacy structures. We partner with cities, urban developers, startups, and investors to succeed. Our work usually falls within new mobility and involves a combination of business development, technology, and user behavior.

The Shift ☞ The Shift recognizes housing as a human right, not a commodity or an extractive industry. The Shift restores the understanding of housing as home, challenging the ways financial actors undermine the right to housing. Using a human rights framework, The Shift provokes action to end homelessness, unaffordability, and evictions globally.

The Shift works with cities to ensure development initiatives promote diversity, equity and inclusion, that is neither performative, nor charity-based, but as an important foundation for vibrant community building. We help cities to reach and include disadvantaged groups throughout the city development process - so that they can contribute to its design and reap the benefits. This helps ensure the overall success of city building initiatives.

Copenhagen Institute for future studies ☺ The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies is an independent, non-profit think tank established in 1969. By building the capabilities necessary to address potential futures, we help create a society fit to meet the challenges and grasp the opportunities we face. We do this by applying our unique approach to futures studies and foresight, combined with more than 50 years of global experience and contributions to the field, working with organizations across the public, private, academic, and civic sectors, as well as with the general public.

Our vision is a futures literate world where everyone has the right and mandate to engage with the future, participate, and visualize change, so they can create the best possible future for themselves, society, and the planet.

Field States ☺ is a mission-driven organization focused on creating shared value for people and places. As a registered benefit company in Oregon and a certified Emerging Small Business (ESB), it operates on core values of curiosity, diversity, and integrity, guided by respect, learning, and equity principles.

Field States evaluates its social and environmental impact using frameworks like the B Impact Assessment. Key practices like “Percent for Place” and the “Responsible Project Portfolio” connect the company to communities and guide project selection. Field States shares its approaches openly to inspire others to create positive change.