



Renaissance Programs for Cities and Towns

A City Practice Brief

August 2008

Many municipal leaders have refocused economic strategy on struggling, vacant or burdened city areas. In this new strategy, these areas are seen as potential assets to the city. In order to redevelop these areas, many cities have started to use **Renaissance Zones**.

These Zones can be constructed in two different ways, both accomplishing the same goal of redevelopment. The first tactic is creating a Tax-free Renaissance Zone. These specified areas include the incentives of property tax exemptions, state income tax credits and historical tax credits to projects that make a significant and comprehensive investment in real property. The second renaissance strategy is creating a comprehensive **renaissance** plan for the area in need of rehabilitation. This plan is generally created in order to restore economic prosperity to a once thriving area. Renaissance plans create strategic improvements in order to attract investors and development back in to the district.

Despite the challenges of redeveloping struggling city areas, cities and towns are finding innovative ways to create new and improved city centers, residential areas and commercial parks. This paper presents 10 programs that may serve as models for communities looking to revitalize areas of their cities.

For more examples, visit the City Practices database on the NLC website at www.nlc.org or contact the NLC Municipal Reference Service at (202) 626-3130 or mrs@nlc.org.

Tax Free Renaissance Zone

City: **Jackson, Michigan**

Population: 36,316

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The City of Jackson provided a number of incentives to the Kinder-Morgan company to convince it to build an electric plant on an old industrial site in the city rather than in an outlying area. The city provided demolition and environmental cleanup of the site, designation as a 12-year tax-free Renaissance Zone, right-of-way agreements, infrastructure upgrades, and a fast track process. The company initiated a neighborhood awareness campaign to ensure that residents' concerns and questions would be heard. The facility, which sits on the site of the former Goodyear Tire plant, added 25 high-paying jobs and \$20 million in local wages to the community.

Renaissance Zone Revitalizes City

City: **Beach, North Dakota**

Population: 1,116

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In order to encourage private sector investments in undeveloped areas, the City of Beach has created a Renaissance Zone, providing property tax exemptions, state income tax credits and historical tax credits to projects that make a significant and comprehensive investment in real property. The implementation of the Renaissance Zone had minimal costs - City employees administer the program so there is limited cost for staffing. There are no direct cost savings to the city; rather the end result is

increased taxable valuation which in turn generates more property tax revenues. Success of the program is measured throughout the five-year tax exemption period in a number of ways; creation of jobs, improved aesthetics, restoration of historical buildings and property valuation previous to the project with property valuation after the completion of the project. In the first two years of establishing the Renaissance Zone, the true and full valuation of Beach has increased \$242,900.

Main Street Corridor Revitalization Program

City: **Houston, Texas**

Population: 1,953,631

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Houston's Main Street Corridor Revitalization Project is a collaborative transportation and land-use initiative designed to create a signature corridor through the city. Main Street was once Houston's economic center and grand avenue. After several decades of decline, the Corridor enjoyed a renaissance of public and private investment, fueled by strong economic growth. With no comprehensive plan and zoning, disparate development efforts arose, including the city's first light rail line. The Main Street Coalition, a partnership of 60 groups, was created to coordinate development efforts, envisioning a 20-year plan to promote transit- and pedestrian-oriented development, increase access to jobs, services, and amenities, and preserve community assets.

Balanced Growth through Downtown Revitalization

City: **Barnstable, Massachusetts**

Population: 47,380

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Hyannis, one of the Town of Barnstable's seven villages, saw growth at its edges characterized by low-density residential subdivisions and strip retail, while its downtown was plagued with vacant storefronts and disinvestment. This pattern strained local infrastructure and impacted the town's fragile natural resources and historic character. The community and local decision-makers created a development strategy that encouraged growth and development in Hyannis' urban center while reducing growth on environmentally sensitive areas along the coast. Specifically, the town has adopted expedited permitting process for downtown development, made extensive infrastructure investments in streetscapes and wastewater treatment, created development offsets that move development from outlying areas to downtown, and improved connections and public access to the waterfront. The result has been a renaissance for the downtown area. The smart growth initiative has resulted in 93 new residential units, 22,000 square feet of commercial space, 342 new jobs, and \$25 million in private investment.

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

City: **Harrisonburg, Virginia**

Population: 40,468

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Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) was formed to assist the revitalization efforts for downtown, recognized as a national and state historic district, sparking the investment of millions of dollars from the private sector and launching redevelopment projects. Harrisonburg contracted a major streetscape improvement in 2006, which will upgrade gateways, landscaping, sidewalks, and lighting. HDR hired a private planning and architecture firm to survey and analyze the downtown area, recommend improvements and key development goals, and create a wayfinding system to draw people toward downtown.

A Renaissance Plan for Dallas Parks and Recreation

City: **Dallas, Texas**

Population: 1,188,580

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"A Renaissance Plan for Dallas Parks and Recreation in the 20th Century" outlines a 20-year approach to maintain and improve facilities at the city's 424 parks. The plan was created with a local consulting firm which conducted a needs assessment. It included surveys of residents, public focus groups, department staff focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and public forums. Consultants assessed the facilities at each park and examined traffic patterns in and around facilities. To rank and prioritize projects, the city maintains the Dallas Parks Inventory Database System (PIDS) to record the assessment of its parks and to run inventory systems.

Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership

City: **Tallahassee, Florida**

Population: 150,624

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Tallahassee's Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership creates partnerships between struggling neighborhoods and the larger community. The program addresses both the physical and social needs of participating neighborhoods. Each project must be neighborhood-driven with priorities chosen by residents, address multiple deficiencies and assets at the same time, and be a collaborative effort between governments, institutions, and residents. The wishes of residents are determined through public meetings and door-to-door research. The program is funded through partners in local government and business who also meet with residents of targeted neighborhoods to help with the planning process. The program helps neighborhoods reduce crime, increase homeownership and employment rates, and create community centers for education and recreation.

Helena Renaissance District

City: **Helena, Alabama**

Population: 13,863

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In order to help the city enter the 21st century with style and grace, the City of Helena engaged in various projects including revitalizing the Renaissance District, reconstructing old landmarks, seasonal planting and manicuring, and continuous maintenance of the city. Helena's Renaissance District was conceived as part of the city's Comprehensive Development Plan to expand and refurbish the small downtown area into a 19th century tourist/commercial district. The district is also home to the Old Town Amphitheater Park featuring a children's playground, walking trails, an outdoor stage, and a large grassy picnic area.

Boulder City Renaissance

City: **Boulder City, Nevada**

Population: 14,966

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Between 1996 and 2002, Boulder City invested over \$30 million in citizen-driven amenity development. In 1997, over 500 residents came to a Potluck Supper Community Re-birthday Party, where drawings of potential urban design changes were on display. By the end of the evening, citizens were dedicating themselves to a clean, green Boulder City. Citizens promised to be part of a Green Team to beautify the town, and in four community planting days and fifteen Eagle Scout

planting days, over 2,500 volunteers worked to green the city's boulevards and public spaces. That spirit led to a renaissance, in which the city renewed its Old Town, built a new library with amphitheater, grew community gardens, greened the streets, welcomed a Veterans Home, and developed soccer fields, fishing ponds, and a 27-hole golf course.

Renaissance Yakima

City: **Yakima, Washington**

Population: 83,707

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Renaissance Yakima is a visionary effort to bring new life and looks to the downtown area. The program was established as a public/private partnership involving the City of Yakima, a three-city Public Facilities District, and the 501(c)(3) charge with management and programming for the theatre facility and ensuing campus. The multi-faceted project will serve as a primary catalyst for downtown revitalization, create a defined city center and a visitor destination, build community capacity and pride, and secure the future of Yakima's historic downtown arts center, the Capitol Theatre. The project includes three phases, beginning with the addition of a state-of-the-art production center and performance space added to the back of the theatre. The second phase is the construction of a pavilion located next to the theatre. The final phase involves closing the street in front of The Capitol Theatre to create a park-like pedestrian plaza. Economic impact studies indicate that the completion of the project will generate 2,000 jobs and provide a minimum economic impact of \$36 million to the area annually. The city was successful in securing a .25 percent sales tax credit in the 2006-07 state legislative session. It is anticipated that initial revenues will support \$7+ million in bonding to be used for Phases 1 and 2. Another \$2 million has been raised through fundraising and private gifts, and the community has pledged to raise an additional \$2 million. The remaining \$4 million, need for planning and construction of the Plaza, will be generated through a mix of public and private dollars.

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City Practices Briefs contain examples from NLC's City Practices database, available at www.nlc.org. Series editors: Bruce Calvin and Larry Foxman. For more information contact the NLC Municipal Reference Service at (202) 626-3130 or email mrs@nlc.org.