

ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL

Little Saigon

Westminster, CA

October 1-4, 2007



Introduction

J. Kevin Lawler
Managing Partner
N-K Ventures



What is ULI (The Urban Land Institute)

- Founded in 1936, ULI is a non-profit educational and research organization, headquartered in Washington DC, with district councils throughout the United States and overseas.
- ULI mission is: *To provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.*



The Panel Process

- Client-ULI Engagement/Agreement on Scope of Work
- ULI Selection of Panelists
- 3 Day Panel Process
 - Briefing books and information before arrival
 - 1st day; infield research and interviews
 - 2nd day, evaluation and draft report preparation
 - 3rd day, presentation and client wrap-up



The Panel

- Kevin Lawler, Chair, N-K Ventures LC, West Palm Beach, FL
- John Hixenbaugh, MuniPlan, St. Petersburg, FL
- Michael Maxwell, Maxwell + Partners, Miami Shores, FL
- Trang Tu, Trang Tu Consulting, Seattle, WA
- Jennifer LeFurgy, ULI Staff Consultant, Alexandria, VA



The Panel's Assignment

- 20 separate questions focused on the “Little Saigon”
- The consolidated essence of these questions is:
How to Enhance and Sustain what has evolved as a unique cultural/commercial base within the city.



The Panel's Observations

- A remarkable development of +1.0 mil s.f. of private commercial/retail “infill” development over 30 years
- A truly unique, one of a kind collection of commercial development
- The sum of the parts do not equal a whole
- Yearning for further, fuller expression, yet constrained by what is there now and how it has evolved
- No clear, consistent or coherent vision of the future



The Panel's Assessment of the Challenges

- Long on discussion of concerns, short on transformational action
- Perception and misunderstanding
- Code violations/enforcement
- Land use patterns, parcelization and zoning
- Traffic, parking and pedestrian circulation conflicts abound
- City resources and policies

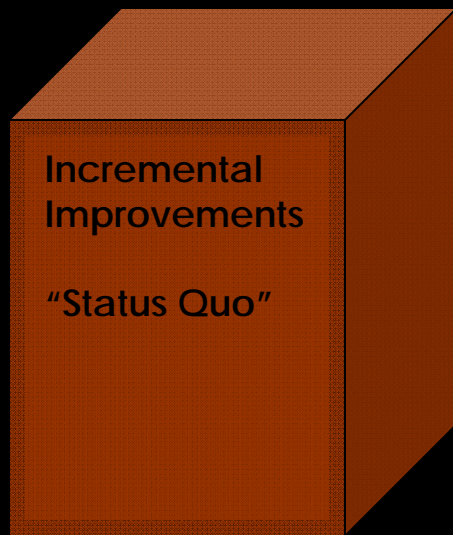


What are the Potential Opportunities?

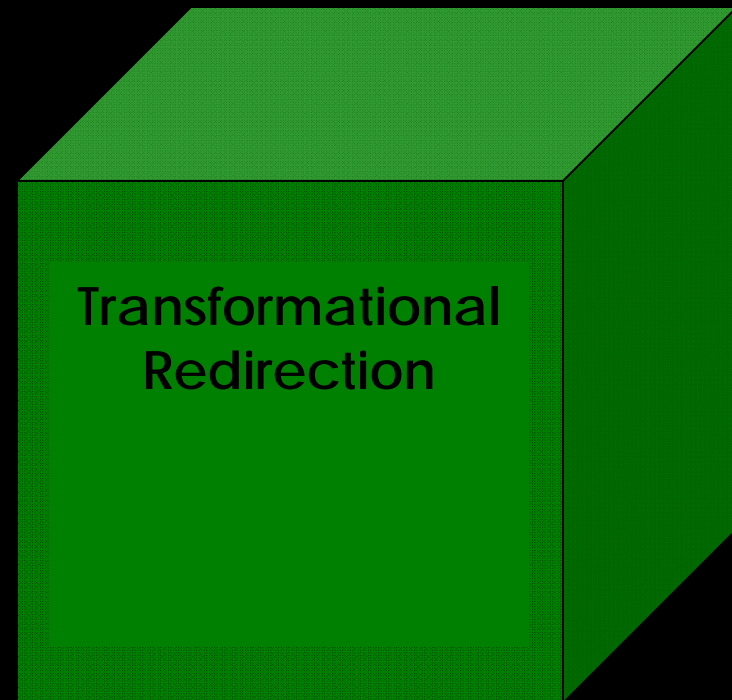
- Expanded retail/commercial base and scope of activity
- More housing – broader market mix (senior, live-work, entry level and market rate multi-family)
- Entertainment (cinema, live music)
- Cultural and educational activities (museum, arts)



At or Nearing a Fundamental Divide



OR



Assessment of the Incremental Approach

- Project driven, and only addresses a component, not the composition
- Time frame is subject to land availability and project stand alone viability
- Easy to execute
- High risk and low reward



The Panel Strongly Recommends a Transformational Approach

- Much more difficult of execute
- Requires higher level of participation and engagement by the City, civic and cultural organizations, property owners, businesses and developers
- Short and long term returns are greater; risk level is equal to any other urban infill development



Three Core Elements

- The Framework
- Placemaking; Building Blocks and Tools
- Respective Party Roles



The Framework

Michael J. Maxwell
Maxwell + Partners



The Framework

Little Saigon is far more than the study area. While the Southern California Vietnamese-American community resides in multiple cities, its emotional heart and commercial soul reside in Westminster's "Little Saigon" commercial district.

Although beginning as a humble collection of "mom & pop" shops, Little Saigon has evolved into the national and international center of the Vietnamese-American community.



The Framework

From humble shops, Little Saigon is now a complete place to live, work, play, pray, socialize, shop, eat, get the news, hear and see the latest music and movies but most notably be together as a community.

The panel sees a unique set of discrete, strongly interconnected commercial districts that has become "DOWNTOWN SAIGON USA"



Worldwide Reach

Vietnamese and other Asians throughout the world, our nation and California know and visit Little Saigon to eat its food, shop and experience in one of America's most vibrant and unique places.

Vietnamese worldwide shop its businesses via the internet and consume its media products -- newspapers, radio and TV, or are entertained by its music and films.



Downtown Saigon USA

Creating the elements of a successful Downtown requires planning functionally distinct, but interconnected *Districts*.

Downtown Saigon USA celebrates a culture striving to maintain its "one of a kind" identity. It is a differentiated market of non-descript mid-century suburban strip centers.

Downtown Saigon USA is diamond seeking new more brilliant facets, greater luster and higher value.



Going Downtown

Little Saigon is at a point of redirection: from status quo to transformational opportunities.

What we are presenting is a framework – not a plan or a finite vision. Rather, a set of ideas & concepts to facilitate an in-depth dialogue among the stakeholders that will lead to a comprehensive plan and unified vision that promotes the progressive development of one of America's most unique places.



Getting There

Downtown Saigon USA's development should be guided by a comprehensive Master Plan built from extensive community visioning and supported by **form based codes** that redefine the area based on visualized concepts NOT projects.

The plan should create well defined series of Districts that synergistically function and have iconography, symbolism, and are interconnected visually and physically to support multiple opportunities for new business, culture, recreation and entertainment opportunities.



Getting There

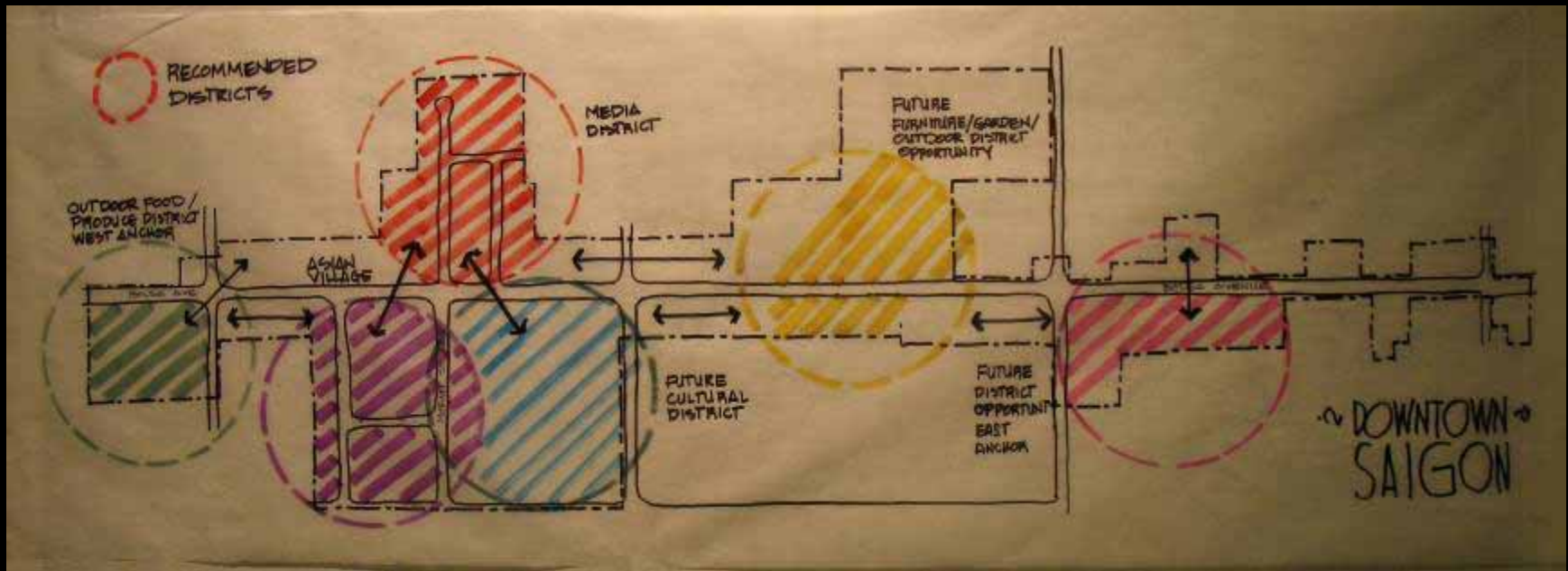
Our framework strives to strengthen and improve what exists, provide new opportunities for future growth and create anchors that diversify Downtown Saigon's market base.

Specialize Districts anchors are:

- ❑ Outdoor Food / Produce
- ❑ Asian Village
- ❑ Cultural Center Media District
- ❑ Furniture/Garden/Outdoor
- ❑ Future District Opportunities



Bubble Sketch of Proposed Districts



Outdoor Food / Produce & Vendors

- ❑ Asian Themed Food Market
- ❑ Indoor & Outdoor Produce / Food Sales
- ❑ Ornamental Plants, Flowers, Vegetables
- ❑ Downtown's Western Gateway & Anchor



Asian Village Mixed Use

- ❑ Dense traditional Asian retail center of Downtown
- ❑ Add cluster like retailers
- ❑ Expand to Moran & Weststate Streets
- ❑ Add infill commercial & residential uses
- ❑ Create parking behind buildings
- ❑ Develop Plaza/Open Space on Bolsa



Cultural Center Mixed Use

- Reinforce Little Saigon as the cultural heart of Vietnamese-Americans with the “National Vietnamese Cultural & Language Center”
- Develop a Hotel & Conference Center
- Art Center/Galleries
- Vietnamese Center for Entrepreneurship



Media/Entertainment District

- Enhance the media district's role as the national & international Center of Vietnamese information & entertainment
- Focus on radio, film, TV, Music, print media & advertising and production
- Animate & engage the community with glass walled street-front studios, like the *Today Show*
- Create an Outdoor venue for live productions



Furniture/Garden/Outdoor

Create new districts that strengthen the existing market, capture sales leakage and concentrate with new products and services:

- Asian furniture, garden and outdoor furnishings
- Compatible services such as architects, interior design, landscape, contractors, kitchens, house wares.



Future District Opportunities

New districts should strengthen existing Downtown connections and enhance Downtown's unique sense of place by infilling "gaps" in the commercial fabric

- Seek compatible uses that logically expand market opportunities – Cinema, theater, art galleries
- Land use policy and plans should create new opportunities for urban mixed-use residential / office / retail and services



The Building Blocks of Placemaking

From a 1960s commercial strip, Little Saigon has evolved into one of America's most unique places, despite its conventional suburban form.

The building blocks of placemaking should be embraced to facilitate the stakeholders desires for transforming new opportunities into reality.



Placemaking: Design and Districts

John Hixenbaugh
President
MuniPlan



Little Saigon Advisory Services Panel
Westminster, CA



At the Starting Gate . . .

ADVANTAGES

- High traffic counts
- Low vacancy rate
- Built-in client base
- Sound infrastructure
- Strong entrepreneurial ethic

CHALLENGES

- No easy development opportunities available
- Zoning ineffective
- Incompatibility of uses
- Linear development pattern
- Insufficient Parking



First Course: Form-Based Zoning Incentives

- Entice developers and property owners to redevelop by offering bonuses and more flexible development (e.g. more building height or dwelling units).
- The new zoning district overlay could be a type of form-based zoning that focuses more on a building's form and less on what activity goes on within it.
- Some activity might need to be promoted along with form-based zoning to create certain types of activity areas like the Media District.

Walkable commercial street:



Zoning as a Tool for Change

- New zoning tools would not require a business to close a business or a property to be redeveloped.
- New zoning would only provide incentives for redevelopment, not require it.



Second Course: Wayfinding in the Public Realm

- Signs in Downtown Saigon, if any, only serve the needs of local residents. There is no comprehensive sign to benefit non-Asians and tourists. A comprehensive sign program is needed which includes:
 - Special thematic gateway signs,
 - Signs that show the location of parking areas, and
 - Directional signs

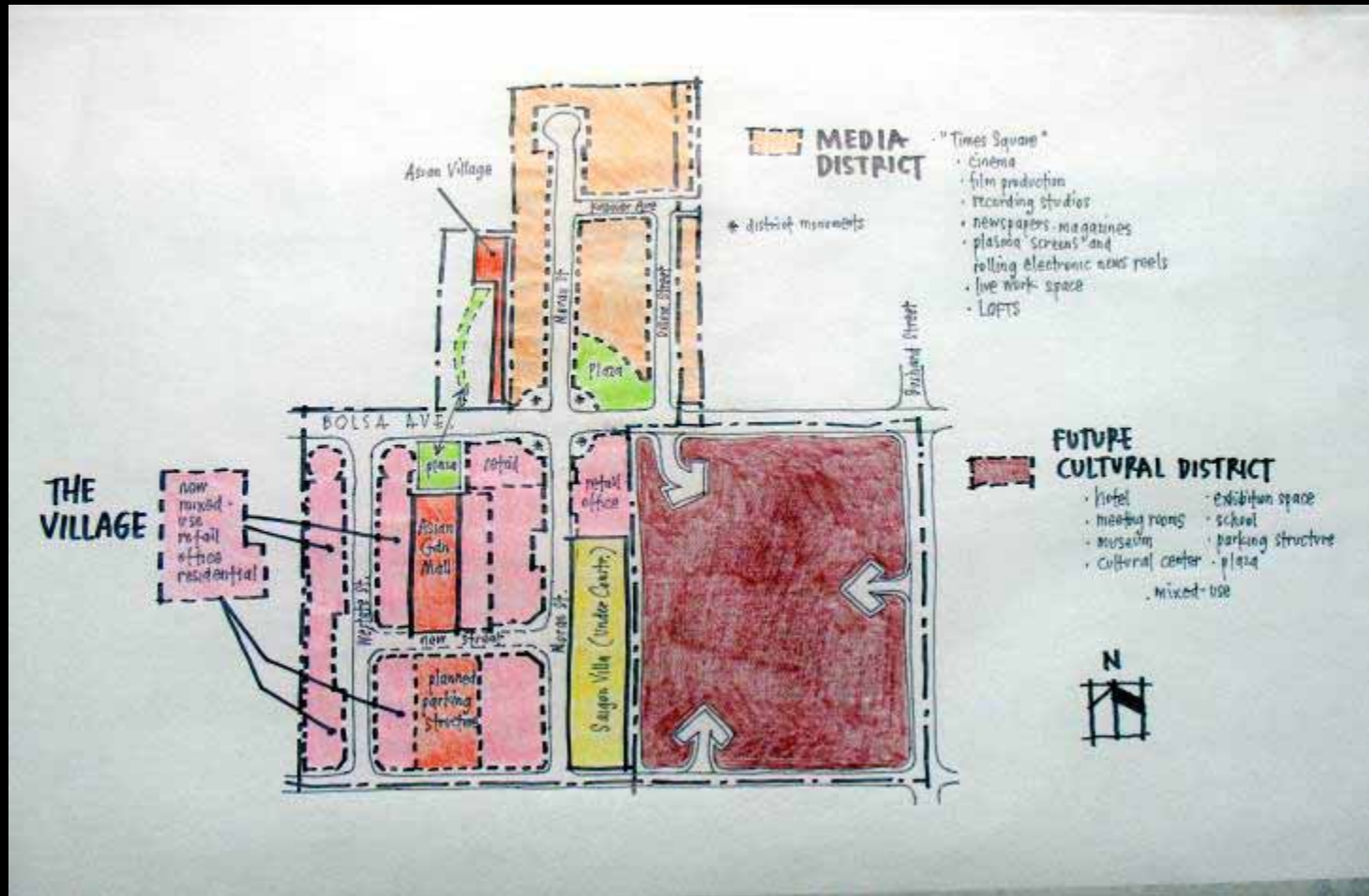


Third Course: Architectural Design and Signage

- Placemaking requires special architectural design.
- Based upon comments made to the panel, the current architectural regulations are not working.
- They promote a “canned” version of Asian architecture that is not authentically Vietnamese.
- Some projects have not been required to comply or the results have not been successful.
- Many Vietnamese relate to the French-Vietnamese style that includes interpretations from Beaux Arts to Art Deco.



Dessert: Concepts for Subdistricts



Diversity in Design Deconstructs Suburban Monotony

- If this is to be a lively area, some controlled chaos may be desirable.
 - Mix up the types of Vietnamese architectural style throughout Downtown Saigon and the districts.
 - Mix up the types and colors of signs, perhaps include some neon and moving signs.
 - Mix up building colors.



© E. Corbaro - virtourist.com

Little Saigon Advisory Services Panel

Westminster, CA



Asian Garden Village

- Build upon the advantages:
 - New senior housing
 - Asian Garden Mall
 - Planned parking structure
 - Active private developer
- New development would:
 - Create mixed-use walkable village
 - Fix parking problem
 - Could be designed as liner buildings
 - Provide public plazas



Media District

- Vietnamese-American Time Square with:
 - Plasma screens
 - Radio and TV production visible to the street
 - Ribbon style electronic headline news signs
- Live/Work space and lofts
- Contemporary architecture style



Little Saigon Advisory Services Panel

Westminster, CA



Cultural District

- This area could be a future extension of the Asian Garden Village mixed-use area and could include:
 - More retail and housing
 - A public plaza for the Tet festival
 - A hotel with meeting rooms
 - A cultural center
 - Sculpture garden
 - Structured parking
 - Business assistance center
- Could only happen if mobile home park owner was enticed to redevelop
- But could happen elsewhere if vacant land becomes available



Role of Community Organizations

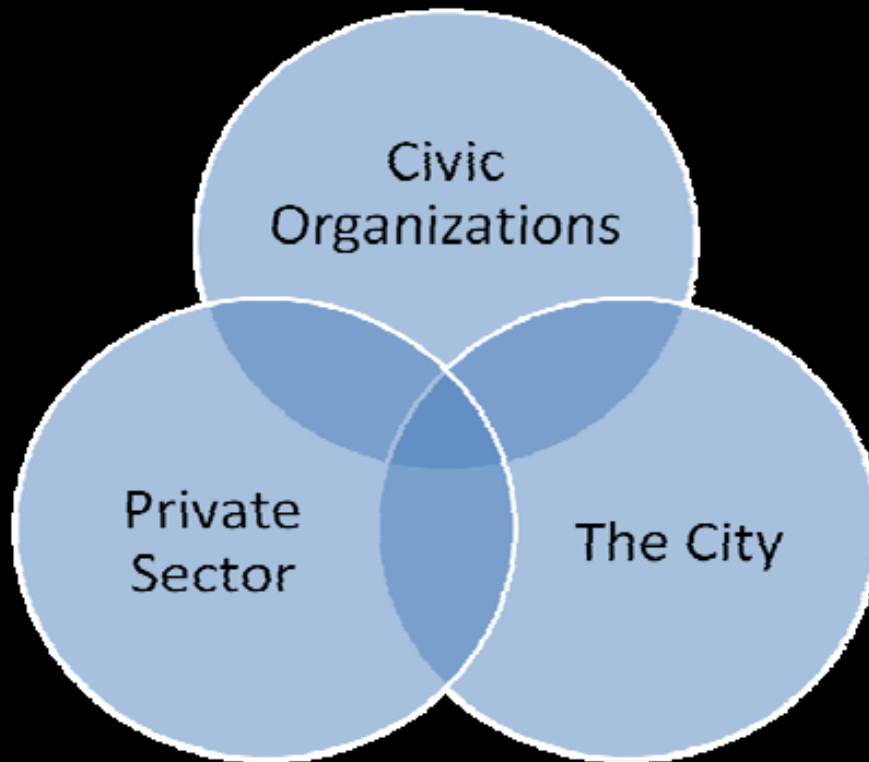
Trang D. Tu

Trang Tu Consulting



Starting the Transformation

Three essential parties:



- Common shared vision
- Collaboration and partnership



Landscape Today

- 90+ organizations serving Asian/Vietnamese communities in Orange County alone
- Appx. 2 dozen of them are in Westminster
- Local as well as national/international links
- Broad areas : arts and culture, seniors, student organizations, political (local and international), religious, mutual assistance associations, and media
- Much breadth, but most lack deep capacity (staff, resources)



Potential Roles

1. Vietnamese-specific Business Technical Assistance Center
2. Ongoing information access and communication in vision/planning process and beyond
3. Sponsorship of civic and cultural facilities
4. Increased sponsorship of arts and entertainment events
5. Non-profit capacity and centralization



Business Assistance Center

Business assistance services currently available:

- Orange County SBDC, part of U.S. SBA small business assistance centers
- only 1 of the staff consultants is Vietnamese-American
- Asian Business Association of Orange County: sporadic workshops, pan-Asian



Study of Capacity Gaps

- Survey of merchants in Seattle's Little Saigon—found that most businesses had strong desire to expand to serve a wider customer base, but few had the capacity to do so.
- One of the 3 gap areas was around business “technical capacity”:
 - lack of business plan or ability to develop one,
 - little marketing,
 - no market analysis,
 - knowledge of merchandising and storefront appeal
- Applicability to Orange County's Little Saigon



Recommendation

Vietnamese-specific Business Technical Assistance Center

- Targeted, tailored and culturally-specific technical assistance:
 - business planning and business operations
 - market assessment, marketing, merchandising
 - Navigating and complying with local regulations, permitting and licensing
 - Systems for accounting, tax compliance, inventory control
- Partnership of:
 - community organization (e.g. business group, community college, media outlets) for outreach, referral, cultural link and
 - existing TA provider (e.g. Orange County Small Business Development Center (SBDC) or
- Possible sources of funding: public (U.S. SBA, HUD CDBG); clients (sliding scale fees); private (property owners)
- Initial step: survey sample of businesses to discern specific needs



Communication

Ongoing information access and communication

- a. Serving as culturally-specific conduits for community members to access information about development initiatives
- b. Gathering feedback from community members



Civic and Cultural Initiatives

Sponsorship of civic and cultural facilities

- a. Projects that are not primarily publicly-funded, for example, Cultural center, museum, language school, senior center
- b. Unified development project that co-locates above uses in the Village
- c. Example: Vietnamese Community Center in Dorchester, MA--
Tenants: Au Co Preschool, Kit Clark Senior Services, Health Non-profit, Childcare Project, Viet-AID, MassCOSH

Increased sponsorship of arts and entertainments events



Building Non-profit Infrastructure

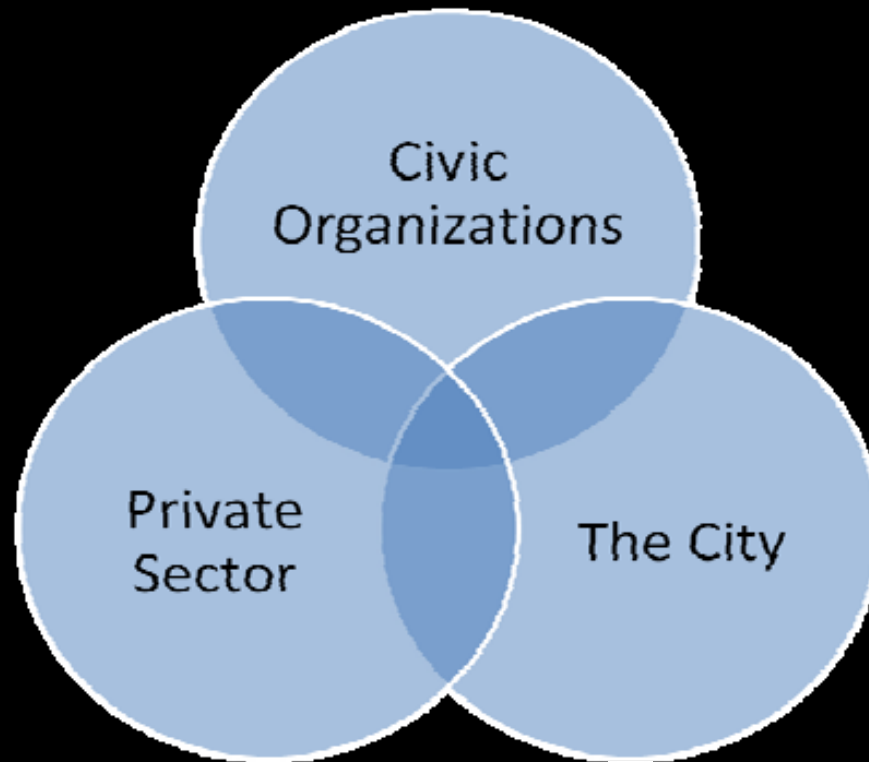
Non-profit capacity and centralization

- a. Many organizations, thin existing capacity, dispersed locations
- b. Asian Village is an opportunity for co-locate in one physical location
- c. Build capacity through partnerships with established non-profits such as Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA) or Neighborhood Housing Services of Orange County, Inc. (NHS OC)
- d. Pro-active efforts to build relationships with and access philanthropic resources



Starting the Transformation

Three essential parties to the transformation:



Private Property Owners, Developers and Business

- Need for a common, centralized voice to address and deal with the whole, not just individual property concerns.
- Recommend a property owner and business sponsored Business Improvement District (BID).



What Could a BID Do?

1. Operate and maintain common “public” areas.
2. Establish uniformity of operations (hours, signage, landscaping and lighting, coordination of external marketing between and among existing businesses).
3. Coordination/facilitation of events.
4. Business/tenant liaison with the City regarding regulatory and code matters.
5. Serve as the conduit for “shared” parking solutions.
6. Serve as the centralized voice of property owners and business in dealing with the City on operations and planning and development matters.



The City

At the broadest level of leadership:

- A facilitator and a framer of the process.
- Setting the ground rules
- Maintaining consistency and predictability in application
- Delivery of “gap” resources
- Adaption of the traditional redevelopment process



The City

Specific roles and responsibilities:

- Organize and manage a planning visioning process involving all the stakeholders – to arrive at a common point of departure (funding to joint responsibility of the City, private interests and civic organizations)
- Planning, zoning and other regulatory guidelines to be drafted and adopted upon completion of the visioning process (and demonstration of on-going commitment by the private sector).
- Staffing and staff liaison:
 - Code enforcement and education
 - Economic and community development



The City

- Provider of seed/start-up capital or service in lieu for essential activities (a BID, civic activities, etc.)
- Facilitator of private land assembly for key consolidation parcels (existing mobile home parks, industrial uses in the mixed-use village district, the older shopping center with fractured ownership).
- Joint venture partner for projects of merit that would not occur "but for" City involvement.



In Summary

- A significant, transformational opportunity awaits for “Little Saigon” .
- Manifestation of the opportunity will require changing how the development process occurs – by the private sector, by civic organizations and by the City.
- The opportunity is one of kind which can provide enduring enrichment to the cultural and social fabric as well as the fiscal base of the City.

