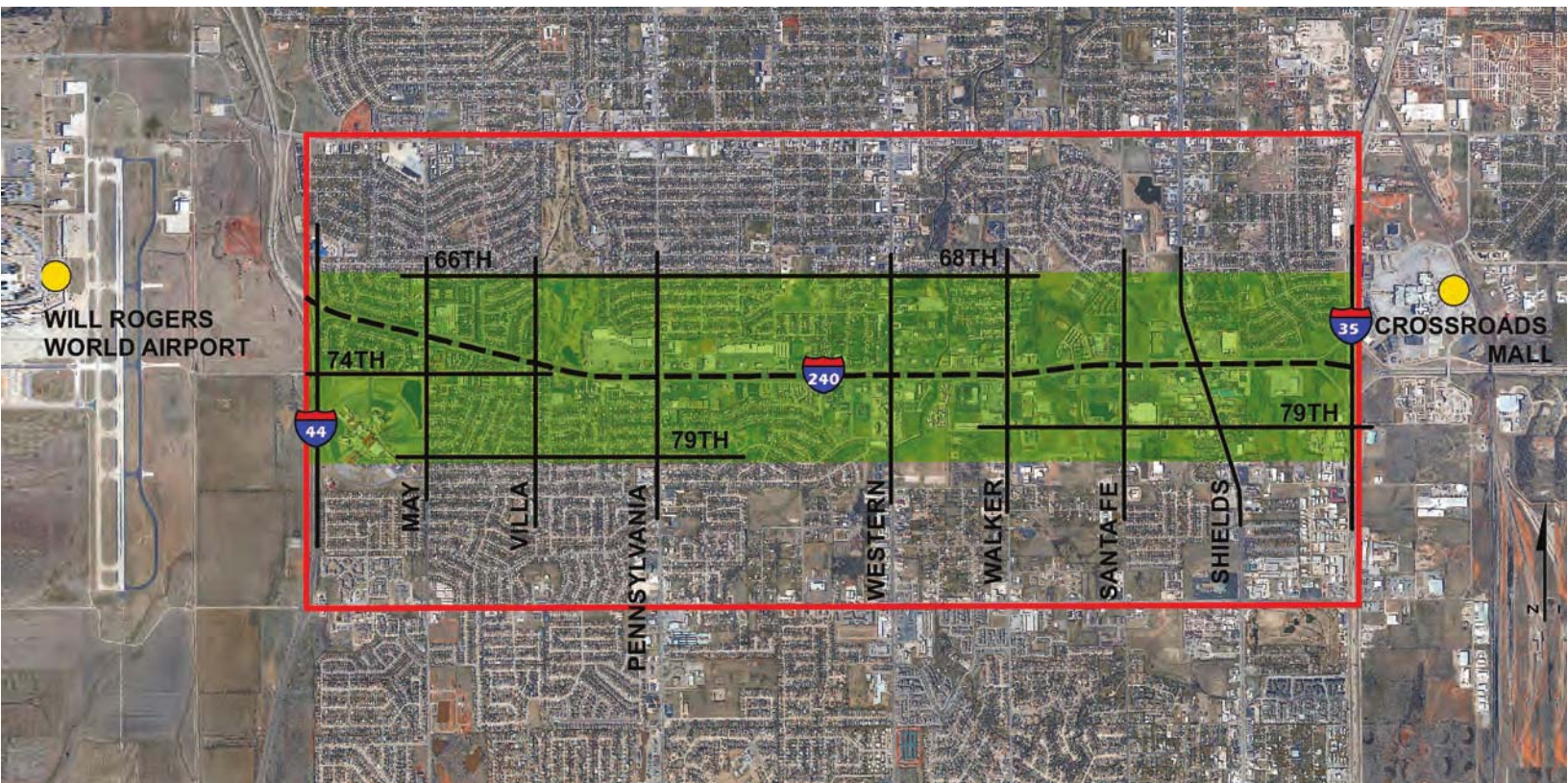


Envision 240 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

March 6–April 12, 2012



A ULI Advisory Services Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Report



oklahoma.uli.org

Envision 240

A candid look at the most important retail
corridor in south Oklahoma City

March 6–April 12, 2012
A ULI Advisory Services Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Report

ULI Oklahoma
P.O. Box 20780
Oklahoma, OK 73156

About the Urban Land Institute

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to:

Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;

Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue and problem solving;

Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation and sustainable development;

Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;

Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing and electronic media; and sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 29,000 members in 95 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines and working in private enterprise and public service. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academicians, students and librarians.

ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth and development.

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About ULI Oklahoma

ULI, the Urban Land Institute, is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates an open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places.

ULI Oklahoma is ULI at the local level. The Oklahoma District Council of ULI was officially designated in October 2007. Since then, it has sponsored educational forums and events, project tours and in-depth initiatives such as the national Advisory Services Panel on Oklahoma City's Core to Shore Master Framework Plan. Through these efforts, ULI Oklahoma offers development and planning expertise to community leaders.

The opportunity to influence local land use policy is the focus of ULI Oklahoma. By offering an unbiased and nonpartisan exchange on issues impacting real estate and development, ULI Oklahoma provides the avenue for active dialogue between private industry, grassroots organizations and public entities to help provide solutions to local and regional issues.

About ULI Advisory Services and Technical Assistance Panels

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs and policies. This program assembles ULI-member teams to help find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) are part of the Advisory Services Program. TAPs were specifically designed to be run and implemented by District Councils.

Each TAP is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member chairs each panel.

The agenda for a panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; interviews of key community representatives; and substantial time formulating recommendations. The panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor, and then a written report is prepared and published.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions and others.

In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this TAP report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to create and sustain a thriving community.

Acknowledgments

The panel thanks the City of Oklahoma City Planning Department, the South Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce for having the vision to partner and collaborate with ULI Oklahoma in exploring ways to improve and strengthen the I-240 corridor, and to position it to thrive in the coming decades.

The panel also wishes to thank ULI's Urban Innovation Grant Program for funding Envision 240. As part of ULI's 75th anniversary celebration activities, 30 cities received the coveted Urban Innovation Grant, and Oklahoma City is honored to be among those. The panel is also thankful for the sponsorship of BancFirst.

Finally, the panel wishes to thank the more than 40 citizens, business leaders, community leaders and government officials who took part in the panel interview process, and the more than 75 individuals who attended the final briefing on April 12. Without their participation, this report would not have been possible.



Top: TAP on tour. From l. to r.: Leslie Batchelor, ULI Oklahoma Chair; Elaine Lyons, President, South OKC Chamber of Commerce; and TAP panelists, Bill Sanford, Kirk Humphreys, Jonathan Heusel, Jim Parrack, and Bob Zahl. Photo credit: ULI Oklahoma.

TAP Clients

City of Oklahoma City Planning Department
South Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce
Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce

TAP Chair

Kirk Humphreys

Chairman, The Humphreys Company
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

TAP Advisor

Dan Guimond

Principal, Economic & Planning Systems
Denver, Colorado

Panelists

James Cloar

Scholar, Penn Institute for Urban Research
Tampa, Florida

Jonathan Heusel

Project Manager, Tetra Tech, Inc.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Jim Parrack

Senior Vice President-Retail, Price Edwards & Company
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Bill Sanford

Senior Vice President, BancFirst
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Bob Zahl

President, Zahl-Ford, Inc.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

ULI Project Staff

Leslie Batchelor

ULI Oklahoma Chair

A.J. Kirkpatrick

ULI Oklahoma Programs & Initiatives

DeShawn Heusel

District Council Coordinator

Shauna Lawyer Struby

Technical Writer and Managing Editor

Jeff Martin

Graphic Design

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Executive Summary

As the capital of Oklahoma, the state’s largest city, and with a thoughtfully planned renaissance underway, Oklahoma City continues to move forward in positioning itself as a world-class city in the new millennium. The city’s frontier-style optimism and ability to reinvent the character and image of its downtown and midtown areas has garnered well-earned praise from around the nation. Yet new challenges face this city as it continues to evolve. One such challenge is managing, redeveloping and repositioning last century’s suburban commercial districts in such a way that they not only retain their competitive edge but continue as liveable, attractive communities with viable employment and a healthy mix of retail, restaurants and green spaces.

With its suburban location and birth in the heyday of the interstate highway era, the Envision 240 study area along the I-240 corridor in south Oklahoma City between Will Rogers World Airport and Crossroads Mall, is perhaps a perfect illustration of this challenge. Working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders, the Envision 240 TAP took a candid look at opportunities, risks and market potential along the I-240 corridor. They found the I-240 corridor has a unique advantage: Rather than being in the midst of decline, the area is performing well. However, given rapidly shifting market and demographic conditions and to prevent a downward spiral, the area needs to be aggressively proactive in redevelopment.

Given the unique make-up of Oklahoma City residents in the area, as well as the location of the existing cluster of uses, the I-240 corridor area is well positioned to become a mixed-use destination for Oklahoma City and metro-area residents, and has the potential to be an attractive and popular destination. With this in mind, the panel recommended three high-level strategies you’ll read about on page 12, a series of key recommendations on pages 14-16, and the panel offers several potential tools on pages 17 and 18 to utilize in the implementation of the strategies and recommendations.

Panel Assignment and Study Area

1960s Suburbs Meet the Millennium

Economic activity and real estate in the I-240 corridor has developed in a similar manner to other freeway corridors in the region and nation. The area post-World War II was developed in a manner typical of the time: automobile centric, and based on the assumption of an endless supply of cheap, easy-to-produce fuel. What was S.W. 74th Street became Interstate 240 in the late 1960s, and the area was annexed as part of Oklahoma City between 1946 and 1965. Residential development escalated in the 1960s and commercial development followed in the late 1970s-early 1980s. The service roads along the corridor were converted from one-way to two-way roads in the 1970s. Texas turnarounds were added to the interstate in the early 1990s and frontage roads were converted back to one-way traffic. Major freeway maintenance took place in 2004, but frontage roads were not addressed at that time.

The Panel's Assignment

This panel's assignment was to take a candid look at the I-240 corridor's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks, particularly with regard to economics and appearance.

The corridor's current character, with its 1960s-style suburban layout and blend of single-use regional and local retail, in tandem with the evolving nature of urban landscapes and an ever-changing marketplace, raises questions about the area's future. While the area performs well enough for the present, many stakeholders express concerns about the area's ability to adapt.



Leslie Batchelor, ULI Oklahoma chair, addressing stakeholders, panelists and press at the Envision 240 kick-off meeting on March 6, 2012. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.

The Panel Process

In an undertaking such as this, gathering information and observations from those living and working in the area, and understanding their thoughts and concerns is essential. Accordingly, the panel sought input and feedback about the study area from more than 40 stakeholders, and nearly 900 stakeholders were contacted throughout the course of the project, including property owners, businesses, neighborhood associations, real estate brokers, housing developers, elected officials, churches and residents. The panel heard and gathered a wide range of input about the area, which guided its work every step of the way.

The panel interviewed people from diverse backgrounds with a range of perspectives, and from a variety of groups. While feedback from the stakeholders ran the gamut of positives and negatives, one constant and recurring priority mentioned by all was the need for collaborative, unified leadership and vision for the area. After collecting and consolidating information from the stakeholders, panelists spent a day considering and analyzing the interviews, resources and materials during the process of formulating recommendations.

“...one constant and recurring priority mentioned by all was the need for collaborative, unified leadership and vision for the area.”

Area highlights

- 14,000 households
- 36,000 residents
- 1/3 of Hispanic origin
- More than 100,000 vehicles per day use the corridor
- A significant number of daily commuters are from surrounding areas
- The corridor connects south Oklahoma City to downtown (approximately six miles north)

Overview of the Study Area

The study area occupies approximately 2,400 acres around I-240, is about four and a half miles from east to west, and includes the frontage roads and intersection properties along those roads. For demographic purposes, the study area was expanded one mile north and south of I-240, with the total area including approximately nine square miles. While Will Rogers World Airport and Crossroads Mall are not in the specific study area, they serve as bookends, and their close proximity to the area is considered integral and vital.



The Envision 240 study area runs along I-240 between Will Rogers World Airport on the west, and Crossroads Mall on the east. Map provided courtesy of the City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.

Street Stress

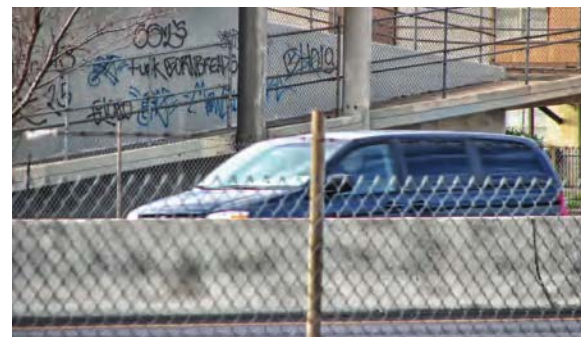
Feedback and perceptions about the area's overall appearance were consistently mixed or negative. While several recent facelifts of aging shopping centers and strips have brightened the facades, poor conditions persist for concrete freeway infrastructure, pavement conditions, signage and right-of-way maintenance. As the main gateway from the airport for east-bound travelers, the area is neither welcoming nor appealing.

Sea of Concrete

In considering the area's land use adaptability and sustainability, arranging large single-use buildings in acres of parking is not a resilient, tenable or scalable model for future development. Additionally, the sea of concrete in the area contributes to the overall unattractiveness and lack of appeal. The corridor's assets do present good bones for transit-oriented development, but the freeway running down the spine of the area limits walkability and inhibits the development of a sense of community.



Empty parking lots are an unattractive feature of the area, but are also an opportunity for redevelopment. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.



Top: Graffiti and an overabundance of concrete infrastructure contributes to the unappealing atmosphere of the area. **Middle:** Downed bus stop signage illustrates some of the issues that need to be addressed. **Bottom:** A jumble of signage, street light fixtures, and utility poles and lines creates an unattractive atmosphere along the corridor. Photo credits: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.

A Lack of Character

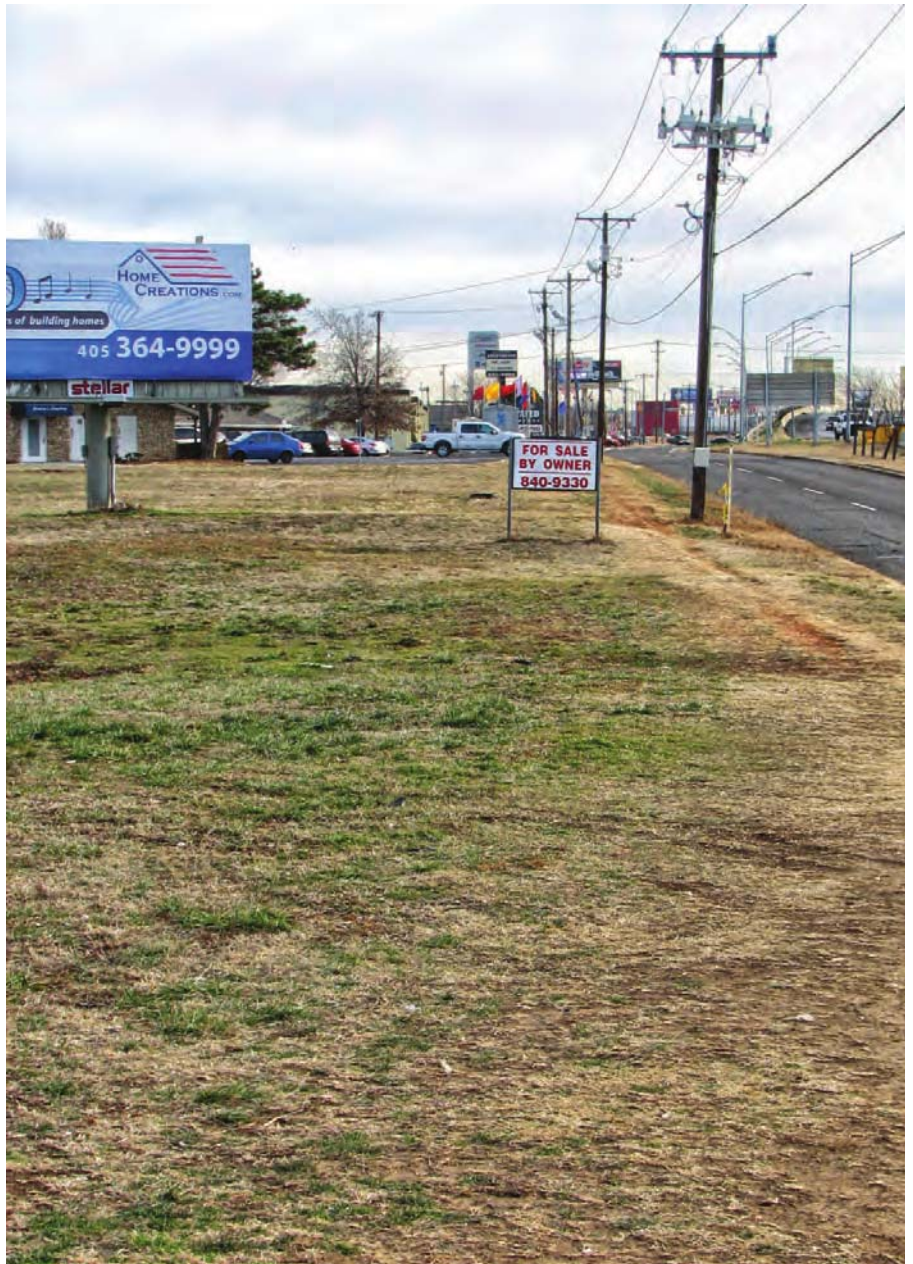
The I-240 corridor's built environment lacks any distinctive character and needs to relate more to its surrounding territory to become something more than just a freeway number. Without improved connectivity and character, the area's retail services and surrounding residential areas will likely decline and/or relocate, and the local market will meet its needs in other areas of the metro.

An Area in Transition

While the I-240 corridor is currently the strongest retail area in south Oklahoma City, it faces formidable competition from more appealing, modern development in other areas, and streamlined and/or incentivized retail development in Moore, Norman and Midwest City. And because sales tax from retail revenue along this corridor is very important to Oklahoma City's general operations, it is vital the area take steps to minimize the threat of revenue leakage. Additionally, while stakeholders expressed concerns for safety and community well-being, Oklahoma City police note crime statistics for the area are not disproportionately greater than in comparable areas in the city. However, continued vigilance and awareness about the risks associated with increased crime should be a part of any planning process.



Trash along the corridor creates a negative impression. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.



One of the vacant lots along the corridor. Notice the "path of desire" where pedestrians walk since there is no sidewalk. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.



Vacant and/or obsolete buildings and lots are an opportunity for redevelopment in the area. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.



Signage and unattractive infrastructure are two issues that need to be addressed in remaking the image of the area. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.



A vacant lot – with trash on the lot and no greenery – is an eyesore, but also an opportunity. Photo credit: City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.

The Time is Now

Shopping centers and strip centers built in the 1960s-80s are at the end of the real estate investment cycle, and the loss of even one anchor store can lead to center decline, higher vacancies and lower value uses and rents. Lower rents can trigger a downward spiral to lower operating income, deferred maintenance and lack of reinvestment, marginal uses and higher turnover. The I-240 corridor has a unique advantage in that rather than being in the midst of decline, it stands on the cusp of this cycle. To prevent a downward spiral from occurring, the area needs to be proactive in envisioning, planning and implementing modern, competitive redevelopment.

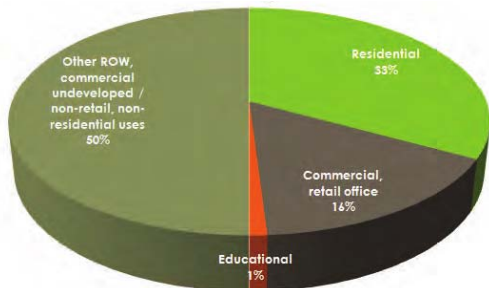
Key Questions and Considerations

As part of the assignment, panelists were asked to consider and include and/or consider these key areas:

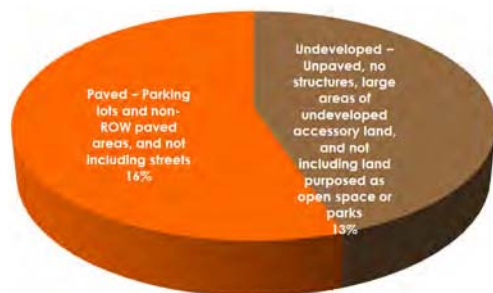
- 1) Market Potential.** Given current and future demographic shifts and income, what retail uses and workforce housing is needed to meet the market now and in the future?
- 2) Development Strategies.** What three strategies should the area employ for a transformation that improves resilience, stability, competitiveness and appeal?
- 3) Planning and Design.** What would help make a more livable community, in terms of walkability, bikeability, safety, community organizing, beautification and green/open space planning?
- 4) Strategy Implementation.** What does the area need for short- and long-term implementation?

Market Potential

Land use by percentage in the study area



Undeveloped and paved land = 29% of the total area



Along with abandoned and/or obsolete buildings, paved and undeveloped land presents an opportunity for redevelopment.

The Land Picture

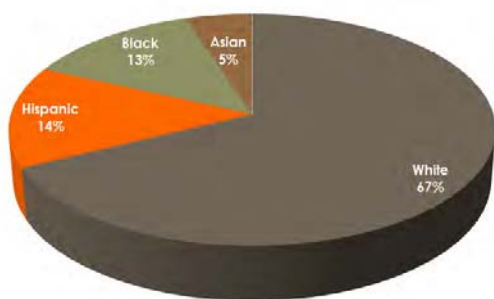
A diverse range of opportunities exist within the corridor. More than 100,000 vehicles per day use the corridor, many of those daily commuters on their way to and from school and/or work. There is 1.3 million square feet of retail space along the corridor; 9.7 percent of which is vacant; that is a rate consistent with city averages. Community amenities in the area include Oklahoma City Community College, four city parks and Lightning Creek.

A combination of paved and undeveloped land accounts for nearly 30 percent of the study area. Few parcels are greater than 10 acres, with 19 parcels larger than five acres and owned by 10 entities. These large parcels are located between Shields and Western, about a quarter mile north and south of frontage service roads. Limited developable parcels are a characteristic of mature submarkets.

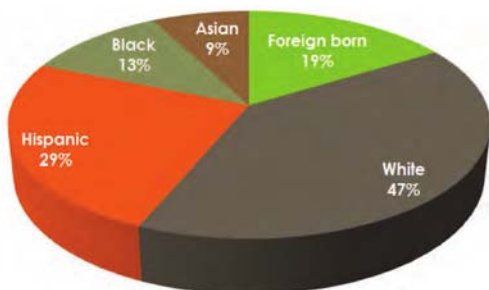
Residential development in the larger study area (S.W. 59th to S.W. 89th) is primarily single-family homes built between 1960 and 1967, with very little development before the 1960s or after the early 1970s. Most of the multi-family properties were built between 1964 and 1974. The area's median home value is \$87,700, however, that lags behind the city's \$101,000 assessed median. While values per square foot in this area match the median city value, the median home size in this area is about 15 percent smaller: 1,180 square feet, as opposed to the median size of 1,400 square feet found in the rest of the city.

Much of the residential product, particularly multi-family, is in fair to poor condition and not well maintained. Additionally, it's important to bear in mind that the people who work and shop in the study area are from all over the city. The retail draws from a large area and one of the heavy growth areas is along I-240 to the east of the study area.

U.S. population - actual 2005



U.S. population - projected 2050

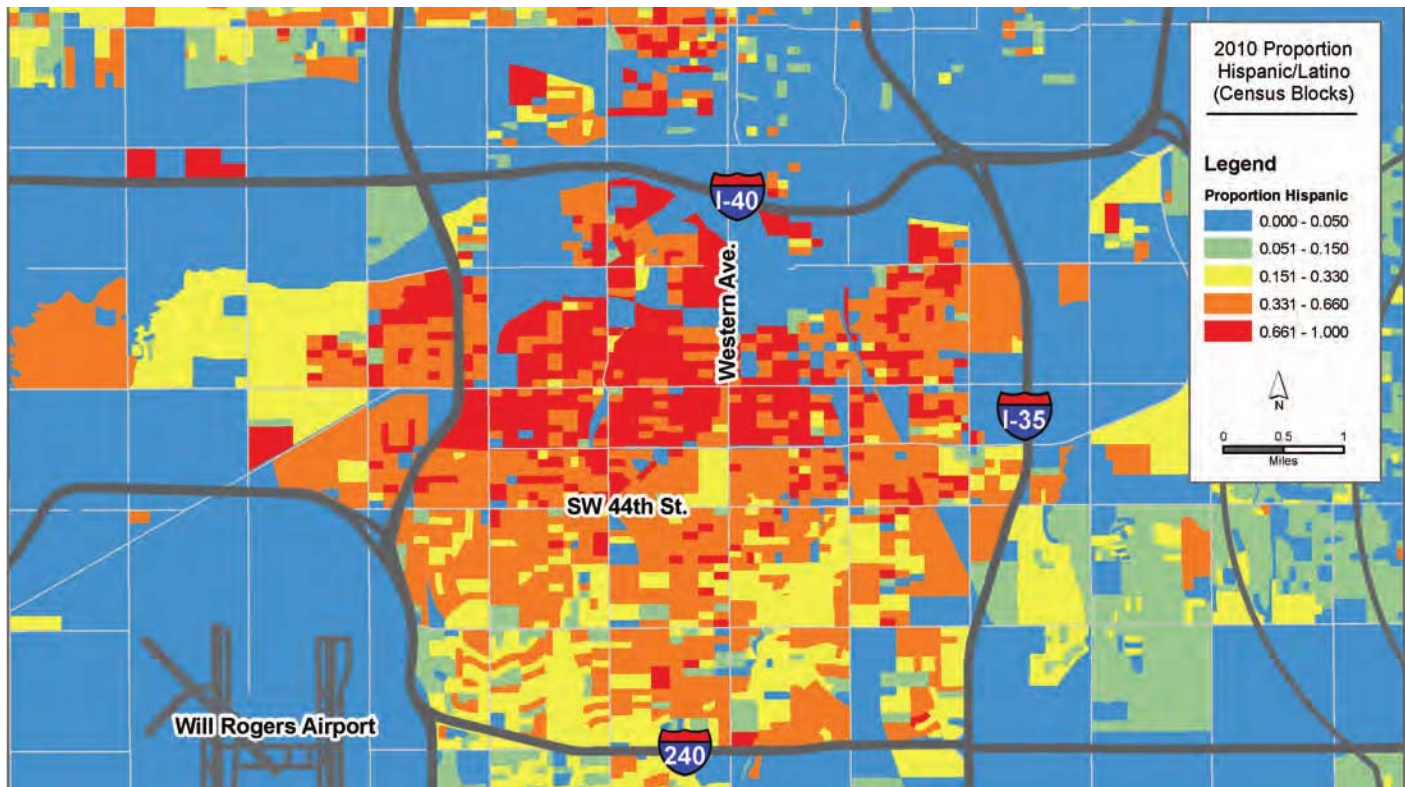


National demographic shifts may reflect local trends that could inform redevelopment decisions. Source: Pew Research Center.

Demographics in the Age of Fusion

A dramatic paradigm shift in the composition of our nation's population is taking place right now and the rate of change is expected to accelerate over the next 40 years. The area has an above average Hispanic population, a trend expected to continue as the Hispanic community grows and expands into other areas, in particular moving further south. The population is aging and at the same time, young adults are remaining single longer, or are choosing a single lifestyle or single parenthood. Those who do marry tend to choose a two-career and two-income standard of living. Increased immigration, with many new people from diverse cultural backgrounds, is resulting in more cosmopolitan expectations.

In response to these changes, retail is already taking on a new face in place of the freestanding retail strips that were designed for a different time and a different consumer. In interviews with retailers, many in the study area report performing well now, but going forward they will need to address the fusion of cultures, music, food, clothing styles, friends and changes driven by rapidly evolving consumer tastes and market demographics. Redevelopment efforts need to consider these changes.



The Hispanic/Latino population in south Oklahoma City continues to grow and should be included in collaborative redevelopment efforts. Map courtesy of the City of Oklahoma City Planning Department.

In Our Study Area

Buying Power. By 2016 more than 20 percent of households will be in the \$50,000-\$75,000 bracket, a 30 percent increase in this income bracket over 2010.

Changing Demographics. Today, about a third of the residents in the area are of Hispanic origin and that percentage is expected to continue growing. About 1 in 13 children in Oklahoma City are Hispanic, and Hispanic students now comprise the largest population group. The student population in Oklahoma City Public Schools breaks out as follows: 3 percent Asian, 5 percent Native American, 20 percent Caucasian, 27 percent African American, and 45 percent Hispanic.

Generational Shifts. National demographic shifts are reflective of current and possible future trends that could inform local redevelopment decisions. Currently Gen Y (also known as the Fusion Generation, ages 15-34) is about 25 percent of the population in the U.S. and about 40 percent of that group is Hispanic, black or Asian. Baby

boomers are 25 percent of the U.S. population and less than 30 percent are Hispanic, black or Asian.

Population. In the short term (between now and 2016), the study area is projected to be stable, with no significant increases or decreases. At the same time, the surrounding commuter population is expected to continue booming in cities such as Blanchard, Moore, Newcastle, Mustang and Norman.

Employment. The approximately 15,000 employees 16 years of age and older working in the area between S.W. 59th and S.W. 89th in 2010 were employed by 1,500 businesses. Major employers in the area include:

Will Rogers World Airport, Oklahoma City Community College, hotels, restaurants,

large retail stores, Crossroads Mall and Tinker Air Force Base.

Within the corridor, the retail sector accounts for 28 percent of the businesses, but more than 43 percent of the total employees (6,450). Comparatively, the retail sector in Oklahoma County accounts for 21 percent of the businesses, but only 18 percent of the total employees. The corridor's rate of retail employment is nearly 250 percent higher than that of Oklahoma County. These figures highlight the corridor's high concentration of retail businesses and the part-time jobs common in big-box retail and restaurants. Such a high concentration could eventually increase economic instability in the area and contribute to a downward spiral.

Employment Sectors in the Study Area

54.6% white collar 17.4% services 28.0% blue collar

Vision, Strategies, Recommendations and Tools



Highway in Orange Beach, Alabama, before walkable and liveable envisioning. Photo credit: Walkable and Liveable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org



Same highway after walkable and liveable envisioning. Photo credit: Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org

Re-Thinking

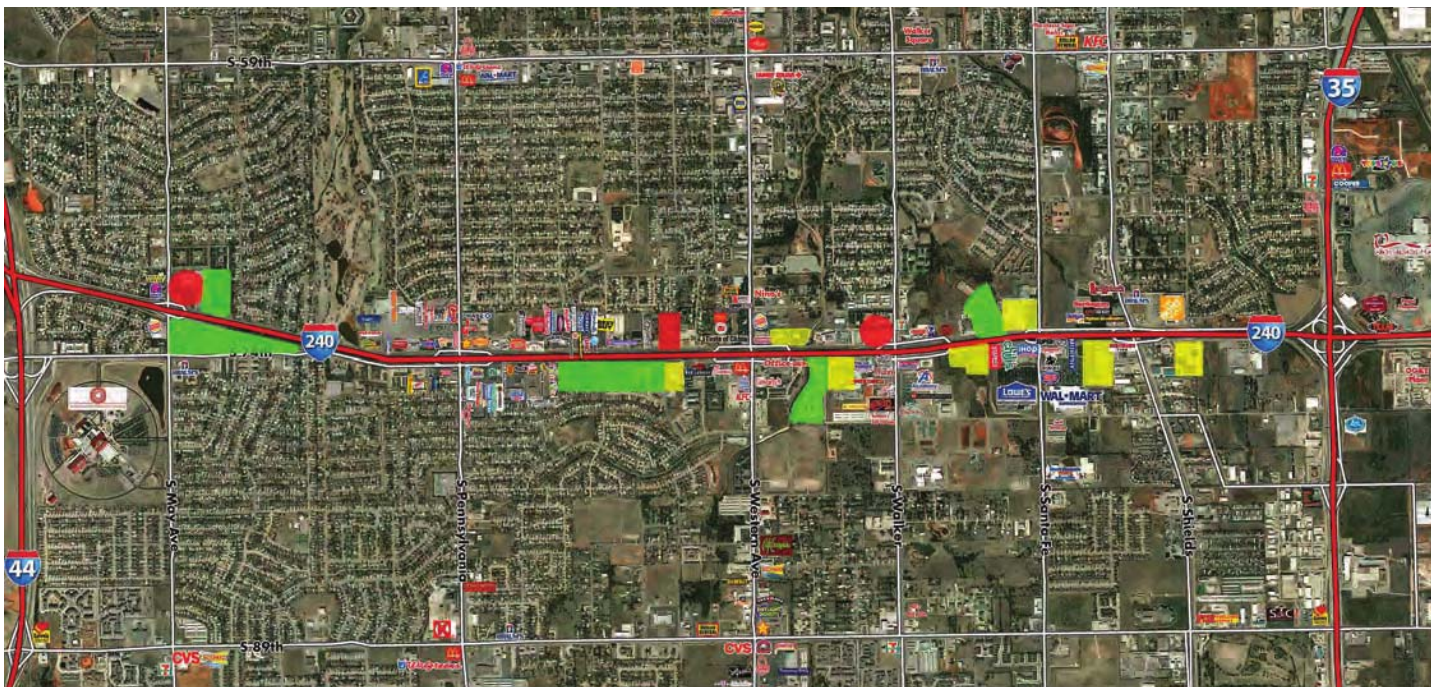
The new face of retail will not appear overnight, but the paradigm is shifting rapidly across the country. As demographics change, and land values, densities and congestion increase along suburban strips, pressures will mount for new development patterns and land uses.

Getting ahead of the curve and seizing the initiative is critical to the continued viability of the I-240 corridor and successful redevelopment efforts. With that in mind, the panel recommends three high-level strategies for the area:

- **Re-tenant** viable big- and mid-box stores
- **Reinvest** in the best retail centers and nodes
- **Redevelop** outmoded retail for other uses such as employment centers, civic and cultural amenities, residential and/or mixed-use areas.

With vision and dedicated, collaborative leadership, the I-240 area has the potential to become a model of sustainable redevelopment that capitalizes on the proximity of the corridor to other vital areas (Will Rogers World Airport, I-35, Moore, Norman and Tinker Air Force Base). The panel recommends utilizing the above strategies to mold the area to become:

- A place that can accommodate a wide range of uses, attract new jobs and investment
- A compelling community where people want to live, work and play
- A unique and appealing destination that's attractive to both residents and visitors
- An amenity for those who work and live in the area



For illustrative purposes only, this high-level retail snapshot shows the entire corridor. Green areas are older multi-family properties; red circles are vacant big-box spaces; and yellow areas are car dealerships. Photo credit: Price Edward & Company.

Corridor Redevelopment Strategies

Drilling further into more specific elements in support of redevelopment strategies, the panel recommends the following as opportunities for the area:

Rezone. Scale retail-zoned land to reflect a realistic assessment of the size, strength and character of the market, and rezone excess commercial land in older strips to encourage reinvestment and improve the quality of existing properties. The character of the corridor should be diversified by stimulating infill with new forms of mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented retail development on remaining retail-zoned land. To bring balance to redevelopment efforts, some of the previously zoned retail land should be reserved for a mix of uses: housing, office space, civic uses, recreational facilities and open space.

Limit sprawl. Thought should be given to limiting the extension of infrastructure to prevent sprawl and congestion, as long as existing infrastructure is underused, and structuring zoning in mature strips to encourage denser forms of development that can be reached by multiple modes of transportation.

Establish pulse nodes. Establishing pulse nodes of development and using key intersections to create cores of development that become unique points of reference can initiate a positive viral effect for the whole area, and serve as a catalyst to rendering the overall area more resilient. These nodes should be redeveloped with an eye toward making them friendly, attractive, walkable and filled with intense activity. At the same time, the nodes should differ from each other in character, function and/or purpose. Pulse nodes do not necessarily need to be retail driven. Senior living or support facilities can drive a node, perhaps even anchored by one of the MAPS 3 senior wellness centers, with the possibility of other types of housing and/or mixed-use areas forming around such a node.



Redevelopment Roadmap

Analyze Zoning and Parcels

- Size and building condition
- Density/Fatality Analysis Reporting System
- Building to land value

Identify the real estate conditions and redevelopment potential of occupied, unoccupied and/or obsolete individual buildings and parcels

- Stable
- Near-term opportunity
- Long-term opportunity

Identify opportunity sites

- Catalyst developments
- Project feasibility
- Paved and unpaved areas and obsolete or abandoned buildings are opportunity sites, and illustrate the principle that some of the biggest threats to the area also present great opportunities

Above: A featureless street with no people, activity, character or vibrancy. **Below:** The featureless street springs to life with redevelopment, streetscaping and walkable features. Photo credit: Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org.

Guidelines for Humanizing Spaces

Surround big boxes with “sleeves” of retail and service uses to minimize blank walls and dead spaces.

Add vitality with active uses along the sidewalks, such as outdoor dining (except along the arterial), interactive displays in shop windows, entertainment, and diverse architectural elements, styles and setbacks.

Configure sidewalks so they are wide, appealing and shady.

Carefully place strong landscaping elements, including mature trees, to enhance the place but not detract from the retail sight lines.

Vary roofscape and facade designs to build the character of place.

Use compelling, informative and consistent signage to tell the story of the place.

Design attractive corners and gateways to development nodes.

Four Recommendations

To implement the strategies, the panel makes the following recommendations:

1. Deliver Community

Americans are beginning to choose increased density in urban areas, and this choice provides enormous opportunities for suburban strips to remake themselves into new forms of community centers more attuned to the emerging needs of increasingly harried suburban residents. These redeveloped areas should reflect the best of metropolitan living: convenience of mixed uses, increased choices more in tune with today’s lifestyles, pedestrian environments with multidimensional character, and varied densities that permit a complete range of goods and services that people depend on in their daily lives. Along the I-240 corridor, the panel sees an opportunity to mold redevelopment by collaborating with surrounding neighborhoods and utilizing assets already in place. Several neighborhood associations are active in the area and many residents and community organizations have great interest in redevelopment efforts.

Humanize the Spaces. People go to places that appeal to, speak to and inspire them on multiple levels. Humanized spaces with an environment where people can live, work, shop and play, places that are walkable and bikeable, become popular destinations for socializing and lingering, rather than mere errand stops.

Along the I-240 corridor, the panel sees an opportunity for well-conceptualized humanized developments that are co-located with other well-conceptualized developments in a coordinated, entertaining, appealing and lively environment.

Benefits of Humanized Spaces. Humanized spaces are worth more in real estate value than stand-alone buildings in a sea of parking. This difference in value is called the “design dividend.” It is no surprise to discover that such places also maximize retail spending and rents and, as a consequence, capital value.

Amenities in the study area	Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC)	Elementary and middle schools	High schools (includes Pathways at OCCC)	Parks	Day care centers	Churches
Quantity	1	9	3	4	10	42
Per capita	1:36,000	1:400	1:13,000	1:9,000	1:3,600	1:850

Amenities in the study area.



One strategy for the area is to redevelop outmoded retail for other uses, such as employment centers, civic and cultural amenities, residential and/or mixed-use areas. Photo credit: ULI Oklahoma.

Connect the Dots

Sidewalks and trails connect area assets and build community

Treat creeks, streams and drainage areas as opportunities for developing open and green spaces that will enhance other redeveloped areas

2. Tame the Traffic

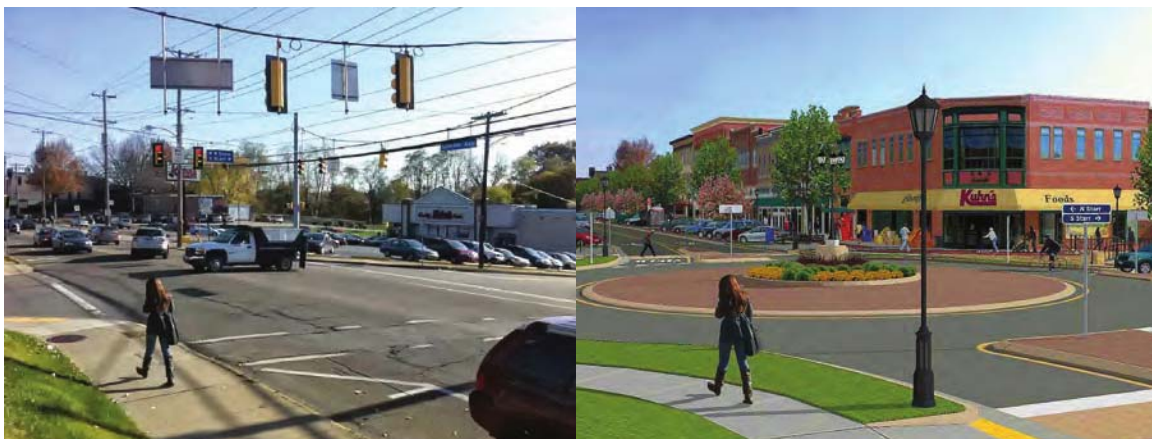
Taming the traffic along frontage roads is vital to humanizing the I-240 area. Every strip needs to find the balance between accommodating through trips and providing access to the activities and services of the strip itself. To ensure continued mobility, traffic planning and design should resolve the inherent conflict between through-traffic and traffic whose destination is the strip itself. In other words, traffic must be tamed and managed both within the strips and along the frontage.

- Recommendations include consolidating driveways and interconnecting parcels so that automobile, bike and pedestrian movement is possible without going onto arterial roads.
- As an added benefit, halving the number of access points results in about a 30 percent decrease in the accident rate. Limit curb cuts to avoid excessive turning motions that snarl traffic, and manage this process through zoning ordinances, design requirements or comprehensive codes.
- Reducing lane widths and consolidating curb cuts can actually improve vehicular traffic flow, and additionally allows more room for trees, sidewalks and bike lanes, and creates a cool, inviting canopy for pedestrians and cyclists.
- An added advantage to reducing lane widths and corresponding speed limits is a decrease in accidents involving automobiles and pedestrians or cyclists.
- Connecting transportation links between pedestrians, cyclists, transportation districts and communities, also invites a greater diversity of visitors and residents to take advantage of area offerings.

Biking, Pedestrian and Public Transit Trends

Consider repositioning the area in response to the steady upward trend of biking and walking, and work in partnership with the City of Oklahoma to take advantage of public transit opportunities. A recent major new report from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group noted the following:

- Young Americans – 18- to 34-year-olds – are driving much less than their parents.
- The average annual number of vehicle miles traveled by young people (16- to 34-year-olds) in the U.S. decreased by 23 percent between 2001 and 2009, falling from 10,300 miles per capita to just 7,900 miles per capita in 2009.
- The share of 14- to 34-year-olds without a driver's license increased from 21 percent in 2000 to 26 percent in 2010, according to the Federal Highway Administration.
- Young people are making more use of transit, bikes and foot power to get around.
- In 2009, 16- to 34-year-olds took 24 percent more bike trips than they took in 2001.
- Young adults walked to their destinations 16 percent more often, while their passenger miles on transit jumped by 40 percent.



Intersection before and after redevelopment, with humanizing features. Photo credit: Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org.



An actual suburban street is shown in the before shot, and an envisioning illustration is shown in the after shot. Photo credit: Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org.

“For such efforts to succeed, an area needs to coalesce behind dedicated, visionary leaders and create conditions for long-term redevelopment to flourish.”

3. Evolve the Image

Having an attractive retail image and identity is a critical and fundamental principle for success in an increasingly competitive marketplace, and many elements of image begin with having inviting and appealing infrastructure. This principle is closely aligned with one of two top issues mentioned by virtually all stakeholders during the interview process: getting rid of the area’s ugliness and controlling signage. To begin crafting a better image, the panel recommends implementing the following:

- Sidewalks large enough to accommodate outdoor cafes.
- Encourage buildings that enclose and frame the corners of major intersections to define and identify the area.
- Be creative with parking by placing it in courtyards, behind buildings, above stores, and in innovative arrangements as properties are redeveloped in new and denser configurations. This type of arrangement reduces the visual blight of endless parking lots.
- Design and landscape parking areas so that cars are in a park-like setting rather than having a few trees in a parking lot.
- Plan for a pedestrian-friendly environment with appropriate signalization and crosswalks along the arterial and secondary streets.
- Create signage that’s appropriate for pedestrians and vehicles and meet or exceed guidelines and standards set by the community for beautification.
- Address the deteriorating condition of the frontage roads.

4. Eradicate the Ugliness

Ugliness has to go if suburban strips are to remain competitive and be successful in the future. Simple actions such as picking up trash, installing attractive trash cans in strategic locations, and landscaping and trees in seas of parking can make a big difference. At the same time, to make an even greater impact, the panel recommends the following:

- Develop enforceable guidelines for the area that include striving for architectural excellence and higher-quality building design.
- Develop a set of enforceable design guidelines for each street and strip, designating types of pedestrian-scaled streetlamps, sidewalk pavers, tree types and sizes, signage and landscaping.
- Wherever possible, landscape with mature, drought-tolerant and/or native trees and plants with a goal of having plenty of lush green spaces throughout the area.
- When possible, work with the local utility and cable companies to place all power lines underground going forward (an added benefit of this element is reduced maintenance, weather-related repair and service disruption costs).

Next Step Opportunities: Tools for a Renaissance

Looking for a quick fix in any redevelopment effort is a mistake. For such efforts to succeed, an area needs to coalesce behind dedicated, visionary leaders and create conditions for long-term redevelopment to flourish. With that in mind, the panel recommends the following next-step opportunities:

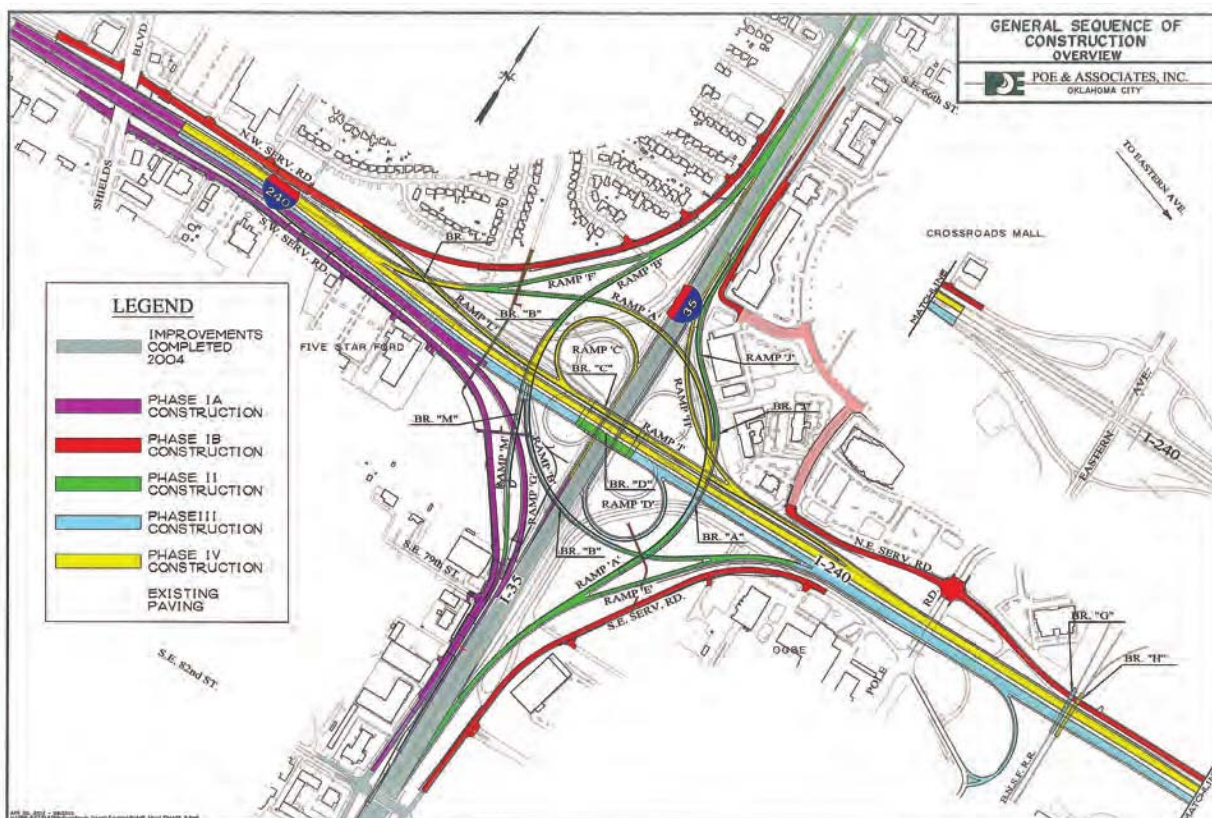
Leadership. A comprehensive vision, an urban design plan, traffic plans and market studies provide the tools for formulating strategies for successful corridor redevelopment, but these are only the starting point. Strong leaders with a willingness to commit to being inclusive of all stakeholders, and to staying the course, are critical to success. In the case of the I-240 corridor, three supportive councilmembers, an enthusiastic county commissioner and strong city staff form a promising foundation, and stakeholder interviews revealed that residents, area property owners and businesses support an organized vision. Bear in mind that success will not be easy or fast – there are no quick fixes to what has become one of the most intractable development problems of the past 50 years. Positioning the I-240 corridor to thrive in the coming decade will require project champions in tandem with organized, long-term and assertive advocacy. Leaders must be willing to implement a plan based on a shared vision, and having a formally established organization with dedicated staff is another critical piece to implementing any plan.

Physical Improvements. The following tools can be used to implement the four recommendations:

Zoning. Essentially a “stick” to prevent negative uses or characteristics. However, zoning may also include positive incentives in the form of “bonuses”; that is, the owner/developer may be excused from complying with certain requirements in exchange for providing other public benefits. Form-based codes are another version of traditional zoning that is becoming popular and includes flexibility in design.

Bonding. Allows for accelerated investment by the public sector in public projects. This generally requires a referendum but expedites the implementation of a comprehensive set of improvements with a greater impact than if appropriated out of the annual budget process. The panel recommends area leaders work closely with city staff to take advantage of upcoming bond opportunities.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF). This method, such as the TIF currently being used for the downtown Oklahoma streetscape project, assumes that public improvements lead to an increase in tax revenues and that all or a portion of that incremental revenue is used to finance those improvements (in effect, a revenue bond). Usually a TIF is pledged against bonds and there is often more flexibility in defining public purpose when issuing TIF-backed bonds than with general obligation bonds.



The general sequence of construction at the intersection of I-240 and I-35 is another aspect to be considered in redevelopment efforts. Map provided courtesy of ODOT.

Managing the Built Environment and Image. Without a plan for managing the environment of the area via a collaborative effort such as a business park or shopping center association, it will be difficult to sustain redevelopment efforts over time. Concerns about security – whether perceived or real – can be addressed via visible “ambassadors” who provide eyes on the street and can also serve in a concierge role. Maintenance of the area should include prompt and consistent landscaping care, litter pick-up and immediate action on property issues such as damaged signage. These elements could be managed together as a combined function. The final and critical tool is strong, creative and ongoing marketing, image enhancement and branding.

Business Improvement District (BIDs). A final tool for consideration is a BID, which includes an assessment on property owners in a defined area, and needs approval of more than 50 percent. Most importantly, it provides a source of reliable and enforceable funding. The City of Oklahoma has a commercial district program to assist with discussions on how to organize for BIDs and general stewardship. In some cases a BID may result in cost savings, as it should ensure everyone who benefits pays proportionally. If a BID were to include residential properties, it could be called something else, such as a Community Improvement District or Special Services District.

Conclusion

Although deeper studies in key topic areas such as market potential were beyond the scope of this panel’s work, additional analysis, outreach and studies for the area will enrich the panel’s strategies and recommendations for this corridor. Additionally, there is an opportunity for an exploration of how other cities are handling corridor redevelopment and demographic shifts. Leadership in the I-240 area may wish to explore future partnerships with city planning staff and/or ULI to do so. The panel also anticipates the retail study currently underway for Oklahoma City will assist in identifying more specific retail strategies for the corridor.



An example of successful redevelopment is found in Oklahoma City's Midtown area.



Before and after envisioning exercise for an urban thoroughfare. Photo credit: Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org.

About the Panel

Kirk Humphreys

TAP Chair
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Kirk Humphreys is chairman of The Humphreys Company, a development firm that specializes in creating mixed-use communities.

Humphreys served as mayor of Oklahoma City from 1998 to 2003. He remains active in the community serving on the boards of OGE Energy Corp., the Oklahoma State Fair, the Oklahoma City Airport Trust and the Oklahoma District Council of the Urban Land Institute. Humphreys also is co-host of *Flash Point*, a weekly televised commentary and debate on issues of local and national interest.

Humphreys and his wife Danna have been married for 40 years and have three children and seven grandchildren.

James A. Cloar

Tampa, Florida

Jim Cloar is a scholar with the Penn Institute for Urban Research. Cloar has spent over 40 years as a professional urban planner and downtown manager. He has been a consultant or advisor to more than 50 cities across the U.S. and abroad. Presently he is on the board of directors of the National Civic League and the Tampa Housing Authority.

From 2001 to 2009, Cloar was president and CEO of the Partnership for Downtown St. Louis, the Downtown St. Louis Community Improvement District, and a companion not-for-profit development corporation. In 2006, he received the St. Louis mayor's "Quality of Life Award."

From 1992 to 2001, Cloar was president of the Tampa Downtown Partnership and previously he was a partner and principal of an urban design consulting firm based in Columbia, Md. Prior to that, he headed the staff of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in Washington, D.C. From 1977 to 1985, he was president of the Central Dallas Association (now named Downtown Dallas, Inc).

Cloar is a past chair of ULI's Public-Private Partnership Council and has been on ULI Advisory Panels for Raleigh, Orlando, New Orleans, Charlotte, Denver and Oklahoma City. A native of Oklahoma City, he has a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering and a master's degree in regional and city planning, both from the University of Oklahoma.

Dan Guimond

TAP Advisor
Denver, Colorado

Dan Guimond is an economist and planner with more than 25 years of experience in economic and financial analysis and development planning for the public and private sectors. He has specialized in retail development/redevelopment feasibility analysis, including market studies for neighborhood and regional shopping centers, department stores, discounters and grocery store chains. For the public sector, he has conducted city-wide and district specific retail development strategies. Guimond has extensive experience with redevelopment projects, including commercial corridors (Fort Collins Midtown Corridor Redevelopment Study), aging facilities (Boulder Diagonal Plaza Feasibility Analysis), infill sites (Lowenstein Theatre Market Analysis) and transit-oriented development sites (Denver Union Station Market and Financing Study). His experience includes overall project management, development strategies, public and private financing, and developer selection and negotiation.

Jonathan Heusel

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Jonathan Heusel has served as a project manager for Tetra Tech, Inc., since 2006 and has more than 16 years of diverse transportation and design experience with public and private sector clients. His work with state transportation departments, municipalities and various stakeholders enables him to provide a broad perspective.

He has served as project manager for the City of Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the City of Norman, as well as Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority and the City of Durant on numerous projects. Throughout his career, Heusel has developed "streetscape" projects throughout the state of Oklahoma and Texas. Heusel served as project manager for P180 streetscape projects in downtown Oklahoma City, as well as the City's Asian District streetscape project.

Heusel has been married for more than 15 years to DeShawn and they are blessed with three children. Heusel's current civic involvement includes being an active member of the West Oklahoma City Rotary, as well as an active member in a new church plant in Oakdale. Heusel has a civil engineering degree from Texas Tech University.

Jim Parrack

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Jim Parrack is the senior vice president of retail for Price Edwards & Company. Parrack has more than 20 years of experience in management, leasing and development, and heads the firm's retail division. The division encompasses management and brokerage activities for more than 50 shopping centers in Oklahoma and North Texas. He is actively involved in overseeing all management and leasing efforts of the firm's retail building portfolio to ensure asset protection and enhancement of client-owned properties. Parrack is an active member and participant in ChainLinks Retail Advisors, a national retail leasing and networking organization.

Bill Sanford

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Bill Sanford is senior vice president with BancFirst and has 36 years of banking experience in commercial real estate lending. Sanford's projects include construction financing of Town Center, a 500,000-square-foot shopping center in Midwest City; a 130,000-square-foot shopping center in Edmond; a 350,000-square-foot shopping center in Norman at Robinson and I-35; the East Wharf office building at Britton Road and Hefner Parkway in Oklahoma City; renovation and permanent financing for several buildings in Bricktown, Oklahoma City; and construction and permanent loans to build Hotel ZaZa in Dallas and Hotel ZaZa in Houston.

Sanford was born in Oklahoma, and educated at Oklahoma City University receiving a Bachelor of Science in business and a juris doctor in law. He has been a member of Commercial Real Estate Council for 16 years, and he is a member of Central Oklahoma Home Builders Association where he served on the board of directors in 1997. He also served on the Edmond School Board in 1992 and 1993.

Bob Zahl

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Bob Zahl is the CEO of Zahl-Ford, Inc., a 17-person structural engineering firm Zahl and Steve Ford started in south Oklahoma City in 1980, following a friendship that developed when they were classmates at Oklahoma State University. Although Zahl is both a licensed architect and a professional engineer, Zahl-Ford, Inc. does not actively pursue an architectural practice. In their engineering practice over the last 32 years, they have provided structural engineering services for many significant projects in the Oklahoma City area.

In addition to having served on the boards of many professional associations with which he is associated, he is beginning his third six-year term serving on the Oklahoma State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, having been appointed by the last three governors of Oklahoma. He also serves on the Residential Building Code Commission for the City of Oklahoma City and the MEP Variance Review Board for the State of Oklahoma.

On a national basis, Zahl is currently serving his 12th year on the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam Committee at the National Council of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors (NCEES). This is the group that writes and administers the licensing exams for engineers and surveyors. He is also the vice chair of the EPE Committee, which is the committee that establishes all of the national policies for NCEES.

From a technical standpoint, for the last few years, most of the projects on which Zahl spends his time involve investigations of buildings that have damages of some sort or expert witness work in litigations involving buildings with design-related or construction-related problems.



**Urban Land Oklahoma
Institute**

P.O. Box 20780
Oklahoma, OK 73156
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