

**Recap of the Joint East Town Business Partnership-  
Minneapolis Downtown Council Business Forum**  
*21st Century Design Practices for a Vibrant and Safe Downtown*  
(<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/event/21st-century-design-practices-for-a-safe-and-vibrant-downtown/>)  
**Thursday, December 16, 2021, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**  
**Hybrid Event: Aloft Hotel Minneapolis Downtown and via Zoom**

**I. Welcome and Announcements**

Steve Cramer, President and CEO of the Minneapolis Downtown Council-Downtown Improvement District, welcomed everyone who joined in person and via Zoom, and noted as he speaks some of their colleagues are at Loring Park setting up for Holidazzle (<https://www.holidazzle.com/>) which will start tomorrow afternoon and run through the weekend. It's just one weekend this year but it'll be a great winter-like event. Hopefully we can join them as a real fun time will be had by all.

The MDC's first program in 2022 will be an industry update with expert panelists who will discuss wins, challenges, and outlook for the coming year and beyond held on Thursday, January 13th, 8:30 a.m. (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/event/industry-update-retail-cre-air-travel-hospitality/>) at Two22 (<https://www.two22mpls.com/>). For Cramer, and he thinks for all of us, 2021 has been more positive than negative, certainly had its ups and downs and wasn't a straight line forward but generally a positive momentum and trajectory. Hopefully 2022 will get off to a good start, e.g., on New Year's Day the 2022 NHL Winter Classic will be held (<https://www.minneapolis.org/nhl-winter-classic-2022/>), and other major developments [such as the 37-story RBC Gateway (<https://www.uproperties.com/properties/gateway/>); Hines' North Loop Green next to Target Field (<https://www.northloopgreen.work/> and <https://thedevelopmenttracker.com/mps/news/construction-begins-on-north-loop-green>); Ryan Companies' residential tower next to U.S. Bank Stadium (<https://www.axios.com/local/twin-cities/2021/12/22/two-downtown-minneapolis-high-rise-developments>)] are forthcoming. Stayed tuned for more information.

**II. Happenings in East Town**

Dan Collison, Executive Director for the East Town Business Partnership and Director of Downtown Partnerships for the MDC, advised this is their first shared hybrid meeting, and then extended gratitude to Sherman Associates who owns the Aloft (<https://www.sherman-associates.com/hotels-retail/>) for hosting this event.

As background, Collison explained he's been with the ETBP since 2010 and during his tenure all the redevelopment in East Town took off, and when Cramer became head of the MDC he reached out to him and they developed a relationship of collegiality. The bridge between their organizations became important as they moved forward. The ETBP is a 21-seat Board and throughout COVID it continued to meet via Zoom and now does hybrid meetings as a commitment to reanimate spaces in downtown. The Board has spent several months now thinking about the commitments it has as an organization focusing on Elliot Park and Downtown East collectively and finding new and strategic ways to connect business with residents and those who visit the area. As a highly charged area for sports entertainment and hospitality that's been deeply impacted by COVID, the Board is focusing on ways to reanimate.

Collison then announced the following events:

- U.S. Bank Stadium's Winter Warm-Up returns and includes inline skating and indoor running open to all ages (<https://www.usbankstadium.com/events/detail/winter-warm-up-1>).
- The next Mill City Farmers Market *Winter Market* is on Saturday, December 18th and continues through April 23, 2022 on select Saturdays (<https://millcityfarmersmarket.org/>).
- Holiday music at Capella Tower is on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays through December 23rd (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/event/holiday-music-at-capella-tower-2/2021-12-21/>).
- The Chameleon Shoppes project (<https://www.chameleonconsortium.com/>), an MDC small business initiative with ETBP support, has five stores open in downtown this holiday season all within five blocks of each other:
  - Uniquely Global at Gaviidae Common ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXZ8Yg\\_ZsCE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXZ8Yg_ZsCE) and <https://uniquelyglobal.net/>);
  - Roho Collective at IDS Center (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrA-2WQeIM8>);
  - B'Youtique at the Baker Center (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdnirJhEJ5M>);

- Coconut Whisk Cafe' and Bubble Tea shop at Young-Quinlan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgwy6l1weyE>); and
- Sistah Co-Op at the IDS Center (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqEw3Q1M3fs>).

➤ The neighborhood associations continue to meet via Zoom:

- For Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association Board and Land Use Committee meeting dates, visit <http://www.thedmna.org/>.
- For Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc., Building, Land Use and Housing (BLUH) meeting dates, visit <https://www.elliottpark.org/>.

### III. 21st Century Design Practices for a Vibrant and Safe Downtown

Collison explained today's conversation is ultimately about understanding how the built environment, particularly in dense environments like downtown Minneapolis, has everything from really great to not so great design that either encourages a healthy, good, and vibrant environment or a not so healthy, good, and vibrant environment. Then he introduced the three panelists who have dedicated their lives and careers to the built environment, and they in turn provided more information about their backgrounds:

*Erica Christenson*, Director of TEN x TEN (<https://www.tenxtenstudio.com/our-team> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/erica-christenson-5bb5434/>), described her 6-year-old practice process and who they tend to design sites for which ranges from cultural institutions to developers, architects and the public sector, and in fact they've worked with both the other two panelists who were great partners. The scale of sites ranges from large parks to more intimate spaces.

*Paul Bauknight*, Project Implementation Director at the Minneapolis Parks Foundation (<https://mplsparksfoundation.org/about/our-staff/> and <https://www.aia-mn.org/paul-bauknight-interview/>), explained he's an architect by training with a varied career focused on community starting with doing a lot of work in North Minneapolis where he was lead design on projects such as the Minneapolis Urban League, Heritage Park, and Plymouth Christian Youth Center. As an urbanist, he's most passionate about where the physical, social, cultural, economic, and political systems come together. When the MPF thinks about place, it's about this intersection where the physical comes together with people and who the people are and what they're doing. He's interested in how people are interacting and how the MPF connects with them, and having lived at 311 First Avenue North when he first arrived in Minneapolis and served as Director of the African American Men Project at Hennepin County, he is well versed in diverse communities that don't get great service from design professionals and how they make that work better.

*Ben Shardlow*, Director of Urban Design at Minneapolis Downtown Council-Downtown Improvement District (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/benshardlow/>), who works with Collison on a daily basis, explained his work has been engaged in this specific topic since 2013 and focuses on capturing every opportunity for reinvestments coming into downtown Minneapolis to lead to good experiences people have when they're downtown. He's grateful for Collison's skills as a facilitator; he got a contact high just sitting next to him and feels like an Eeyore to his Tigger but they learn from each other. The topics he'll focus on are about some of the progress they've made over the last 5 to 10 years in those opportunities to build a better set of public spaces, and it's worth noting that safety and vibrancy can be talked about in a lot of different ways, e.g., what's in the newspapers, what the trends are, or all the strategies we need to employ for people to have a good experience downtown and that takes enforcement, engagement, outreach, activation, all those things. And when walking about urban design you're talking about projects that can take 5-10 years to happen, slower infrastructure changes over time to lay the groundwork for successful spaces for people in downtown. It's great to have this conversation in East Town because there's been phenomenal progress in improving this side of downtown for people.

Collison then asked for their high-level thoughts, principles, approaches they have for today's topic.

*Bauknight*: Agreeing with Shardlow, he stated safety is a broad topic, has all kinds of connotations connected with, people can look at it in so many ways, and what does safety means. We must think about our built environment exists in a social landscape, and if we're talking about downtown safety, we also must talk about its connection to the whole city. Downtown cannot be safe if the rest of the city isn't safe and vibrant because downtown is not a silo or bubble. People will come into downtown from different neighborhoods and perspectives, so how they're experiencing it has a lot to do with how they're experiencing life, i.e., are things good or bad, so as they transverse our built environment they're thinking about all that.

Thinking about inclusivity, welcoming, where and who you are, do you feel safe in the space, as a black man I can go into a space but if I don't see anybody that looks like me, I may not feel safe even though it may be extremely safe in terms of violence or anything else, so we have to think about people and how they feel in the different spaces when talking about safety. We can talk about all the physicality, the easy stuff like lighting, but what it comes down to is about your interaction, do you feel this is a place for you and everybody, so that's the perspective where he's starting from.

*Shardlow:* The other grounding principle he laid out is there's a whole practice around this topic (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or CPTED), research, a body of knowledge we're all benefitting from and trying to implement. One finding that comes up again and again in terms of what helps people feel safe and the place they're in is safe and vibrant is the presence of other people. It's the number one thing everywhere for every group of people, so that's one reason why all the development has happened in East Town. We have more people living in the neighborhood, busy hotels, event venues full of people, well used parks, the presence of other people out on the street, and that daily hum of activity is the major transformation over the last 10 years. East Town had a lot of surface parking lots in its core for major events 10 years ago which worked for the era, but so much of the investment that's happened has gone toward a multiuse, multifunctional urban neighborhood, and if we do all other principles of CPTED correctly to make downtown spaces inclusive, if we hit those notes and have the right types of programming and activation, that's the major opportunity we have for people to have a good feeling as they're walking around downtown.

*Christenson:* There is often a physical indication if you're welcome or not, and it's kind of simple when you say it in terms of lighting and site lines but those are important because you want transparency and visibility into the space to see who is there. Even just as an indication there are design principles and cultural cues in the built form that this is a space where people can come and sit down and do actual stuff to do, e.g., in Peavey Plaza there's a tacit and sometimes active amphitheater, so the nuances of that would be we're inviting diversity in understanding what other cultures might find welcoming. They try to understand these broader principles but there's no one formula, so you must understand the community, who might be there, who might be coming from other parts of town to work down there, what they might want to do during their breaks, and how to keep people downtown with the possibilities and access to a virtual experience. They talk a lot about how to get people to come back downtown and keep them here for their projects downtown, so that's different depending upon what you're offering and who you're inviting in.

Collison noted we have over 50,000 residents who live downtown and there's always movement in the apartments and condos; at the October 12th ETBP forum, Sherman Associates (<https://www.sherman-associates.com/>) announced several residential projects that would bring 500 more units into the neighborhood so the residential footprint will expand to 70,000 residents in less than a decade; and the downtown area includes Cedar-Riverside and Macy-Holmes less than half a mile away which are deeply complex demographically and all come downtown for a myriad of reasons. It's the MDC's job to reanimate downtown Minneapolis (<https://www.mplsdownatown.com/reanimation/>), and the crucible, alchemy is it has to be everything to everyone.

Next, the panelists described the following examples of this philosophy:

***Example 1: Elliot Park***

*Shardlow:* The core message he conveyed is in this downtown space they're seeking to make safer and more vibrant, they can't take their successes for granted. They need to count their blessings, appreciate, reprogram and utilize the space they have and get better outcomes, e.g., the historic Elliot Park. It always had a grassy multifunctional sports space and the first skate park built in 2004 wasn't used a lot because it wasn't fun. North Central University led an effort to replace it with a high-tech, artificial turf soccer field, and if you go over there in the warmer months of the year it's used all the time and you'll see the utilization of that public space for something positive and the full range of our community's racial diversity. It's a building block of a healthy community. More recently, through years of advocacy by City of Skate, the best skate park in Minneapolis is in East Town (<http://www.cityofskate.org/elliott-minneapolis-skatepark>) and again if you go there on any day warmer than today, you'll see kids from all walks of life because it's entertaining. In terms of a safe and vibrant downtown, much of the name of the game is taking spaces that are underutilized and investing in them so that they can become resources for our community.

***Example 2: 26th Avenue North Overlook***

*Christenson:* It is part of the Great Northern Greenway River Link (<https://www.tenxtenstudio.com/26th-avenue-north-overlook>) and

<https://mplsparksfoundation.org/Initiative/26th-ave-n-trail-link-pier/>), a vital connection from North Minneapolis to the Mississippi River, and part of the larger RiverFirst vision (<https://mplsparksfoundation.org/Initiative/riverfirst/>). This example shares a lot of the principles we've been talking about.

*Bauknight:* This project gets to culture and place and why it's important. Because 26th Avenue is near to the [Central Riverfront], they want the trail in front of Water Work to be eventually connected to it, but in terms of connectivity to folks on the northside it may as well be in Siberia. Culturally and psychologically, the people on the northside say yes, I'm connected to the river, but it's important to make a special place just like most of the rest of the city.

### **Example 3: Place Driving Equity**

*Bauknight:* This is part of a 10-city collaborative called Reimagining the Civic Commons (<https://mplsparksfoundation.org/minneapolis-is-reimagining-the-civic-commons/>) to learn how to use civic places and spaces to create connections and make social and economic change. It's a way for practitioners to think about how to use civic spaces differently, and to read about different examples of how space drives equity across the country, visit <https://civiccommons.us/2021/10/place-driving-equity/>. This is a challenge to all leaders and downtown folks to have a more equitable city and therefore a more equitable downtown. When looking at poverty rates (43% for blacks and 12% for whites), we still have a big problem, so place can be a part of that change as well as supporting other things that directly impact the people in the city such as housing, transit, education. If we're not moving the needle on these equities, we're not going to have the city we want to have or the downtown we want to have.

### **Example 4: DID Alley Activation Project**

*Christenson:* This is an ongoing project in partnership with Dream the Combine (<http://www.dreamthecombine.com/>) to address the alley between the FAIR School Downtown and the University of St. Thomas, i.e., between 9th and 10th Streets, and LaSalle and Hennepin Avenues. Some of it is private and some of it is public, so there was a process of engaging with the neighbors to identify the opportunity and bring lightness and joy and demonstrate a level of care.

*Shardlow:* The reason for highlighting this project is, it's being driven by the DID as a first alley activation. His challenge to us is, as we go around our corner of downtown start seeing underutilized public spaces including alleys, the spaces where a restaurant has popped up a sidewalk café or patio as a major asset for a place that draws people and enjoy spending time. One thing that he's proud about the work they do is, they think about design and activation even when there are real active serious safety concerns, especially when there are real active serious safety concerns.

The negative view in this alley complex is, there was day drinking all the time at one loading dock, there was a homicide this year in the block of 9th Street, when he was with his two kids at the Piano on Parade outside the FAIR School someone came around the corner holding a 2x4, so this is engaging directly in how people experience a space. If you have an alley complex that's 2/3 acre and the only thing happening is trash pickup, it's a vacuum in that amount of empty space and other things will fill the vacuum.

The positive view is it's next to the reconstructed Hennepin Avenue to the tune of \$20 million and looks great, across the street from the Orpheum Theater which is actively hosting phenomenal entertainment events, other investments nearby include the University of St. Thomas which is growing and thriving, the FAIR School just transition to an art school, so there are resources. They've gone through the exercise with expert assistance to determine who they have here (i.e., high school students, college students, hotel guests) and what will they enjoy. Wherever you have groups of people, the name of the game for a safer and vibrant downtown is to draw the people in the buildings down to the streets because when people can see others enjoying a space it creates a virtual cycle.

Thereafter, the panelists entertained questions from the audience.

## **IV. Closing Remarks**

Collison thanked Aloft for hosting, the panelists for sharing their knowledge, and the audience for joining in person and online. He reminded them that the MDC's first program in 2022 will be on Thursday, January 13th, 8:30 a.m. (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/event/industry-update-retail-cre-air-travel-hospitality/>), and the next ETBP business forum will follow one week later on Thursday, January 20th, on *The Young Professionals of Minneapolis*.

**V. Other Attendees via Zoom**

Christie Rock Hantge, ETBP Staff

Chris Johnson, Community-based Transportation Planning

Brian Maupin, Allied Parking

Alyssa Olson, City of Shakopee

Roger Raina, National Item Processing

Carletta Sweet, DMNA, ETBP Board

Marybeth Weisberg, MDC