



## International Downtown Association

**International Downtown Association  
Fresno Advisory Panel  
Fresno, California  
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### Introduction

The International Downtown Association was asked by the Downtown Association of Fresno to provide expert advice regarding the formation of a Property-based Business Improvement District (PBID). The Business Improvement District has become perhaps the most successful tool for the revitalization and on-going management of downtowns and other urban districts. With some 1200 BIDs in operation in the United States and Canada – and dozens of BID-like versions worldwide – the potential for sustainable revitalization is well established.

California’s Property-based BID enabling legislation was created in 1994 to provide an additional self-assessment tool to complement the Business Assessment BID<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Established in the 1980s, business-based BIDs only assess businesses with a geographical boundary and raise limited funds.

PBIDs provide essential services – identified by the property owners themselves – which enhance specific services already provided by the local government. The services are concentrated within a distinct geographic area (the BID district) and are paid for by means of a special assessment against property within the district. There is a three-step process for approval of PBIDs in California. First PBID organizers must obtain signatures of support from property owners representing a simple majority – 50.1% – of the total proposed PBID assessment. This is followed by a Prop 218 secret ballot vote that requires a simple majority vote, weighted by proportion of assessment. The PBID then must be approved by City Council after a full public hearing.

An organization must be formed to govern the PBID and is responsible for providing these services. The PBID is governed by a Board of Directors, with the majority of the directors most often selected from among the rate payers.

### PBIDs 101

A Property-Based Business Improvement District is based upon the "benefit assessment district" concept, which provides for an assessment on commercial property to be raised within a geographic district with proceeds directed back to the district to provide services that benefit it.

The "Property and Business Improvement District Law of 1994" ushered in a new generation of management districts in California by allowing a greater range of services and independence from government.

Key provisions include:

- Wide range of service options, including security, maintenance, marketing, economic development, special events, etc.
- Governed by those who pay.

- Encourages private sector management.
- Requires petition support from private property owners paying more than 50% of proposed private property assessments.

The IDA Panel reviewed background information prior to spending four days in Fresno touring the district and the surrounding region, listening to community leaders, and interviewing what IDA refers to as “stakeholders” – property owners, residents, arts leaders, government officials, tourism professionals, and others (See Addenda for details). From the background information and on-site agenda, the Panel developed a series of observations about the potential for a PBID in Downtown Fresno, as well as a set of potential first- and second-phase PBID services.

## Advisory Panel Members

**Betsy Jackson** (Team Leader) – Betsy is president of The Urban Agenda, an urban development consulting firm located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Betsy was president of the International Downtown Association in Washington, DC for four years. Prior to joining IDA in 1997, she served as the Executive Director of the Society for Environmental Graphic Design. Betsy has worked in the field of downtown revitalization and management for 24 years, first as the Executive Director of Jackson Main Street, in Jackson, Michigan, and then for nine years as Program Associate and Program Manager for the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Center.

**Kourtny Garrett** – Kourtny is vice president of marketing for DOWNTOWNDALLAS. She provides innovative strategic marketing programs for downtown, including branding, advertising, media, public and community relations,

special events, market analysis, and business development. Kourtny also directs DOWNTOWNDALLAS’ retail recruitment and retention efforts. She helped create the Main Street District Retail Incentive Program, a \$3.25M fund used to attract targeted retail tenants, and remains instrumental in the execution of the overall Downtown Retail Development Plan. She created the Main Street District Merchant’s Association, and was a founder of the Dallas Fashion Incubator which helps to grow local fashion designers.

**Nancy Hormann** – Nancy offers more than 20 years of experience in the field, having headed up downtown associations in Sacramento, San Francisco, Dallas, and Raleigh, North Carolina. During her tenure in Downtown Sacramento she was instrumental in creating California’s Property Business Improvement District legislation and created the state’s first PBID in Sacramento. She went on to create 14 individual PBIDs throughout California. Nancy now heads up Hormann & Associates, a Scottsdale-based company that provides urban marketing and management solutions nationwide. Nancy is a former member of the Board of Directors of the International Downtown Association.

**Kent Smith** – Kent is the executive director of the LA Fashion District, a 90-block business improvement district in downtown Los Angeles. He oversees all aspects of the BID’s \$3.3 million budget, including the Clean & Safe Teams, marketing, advocacy programs, and representing property owners in planning the future of the district. Kent serves on the Project Advisory Committee for the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency’s newly created City Center Redevelopment Project. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the International Downtown Association (IDA).

A resident of Santa Monica, Kent was recently elected by Santa Monica City Council to the Pier Restoration Corporation Board, which oversees the Santa Monica Pier.

## IDA Panel Observations

Every community has the opportunity to give its downtown new meaning and a sustainable future. But every community brings to the effort different assets and liabilities. Assets serve as the building-blocks for revitalization; liabilities serve as challenges that must be faced and overcome as part of the revitalization process. The IDA Panel observed the following strengths, assets, weaknesses, threats, and challenges that inform their recommendations for a potential PBID.

### Strengths and Assets

#### Leadership Strengths

PBIDs may be simple in concept, but they are tough in execution. In the face of the complexities, leadership and organizational capacity are essential. Downtown Fresno has hit a triple in terms of capacity to make a PBID *happen*:

*Competent, respected staff* – During the IDA Panel interviews, Downtown Association of Fresno Executive Director Jan Minami was singled out – without exception – as exceptionally competent, responsive, and well liked. If the community commits to the formation of a PBID, Jan’s background, track record, and established credibility will help pave the way to success.

#### *Experienced business leadership* –

Likewise, Fresnoans are lucky to have Dan Doyle, president and CEO of Central Valley Community Bank, involved in the PBID process. Dan’s experience as chairman of the first-ever PBID in downtown

Sacramento cannot be duplicated. He is familiar with the legislative process required to enact a PBID, but skilled at making the case for PBIDs to local and out-of-town property owners.

*Downtown Association of Fresno* – Forming a PBID requires an organization that is willing to (1) step up to the months of hard work necessary and (2) recognize that organizational changes will result once a PBID is up and running. The Downtown Association of Fresno has been taking the lead, listening to the needs and priorities of the community (particularly the community of property owners who will be assessed for the PBID), creating the fundamentals of a PBID plan, and helping sell that plan to the community.

#### Physical Assets

Most often, the current physical condition of a downtown is seen as a liability, not an asset. But as the IDA Panel knows, regardless of current condition, the physical assets of the district are both the building blocks of future investment and the visual elements that give a downtown a *sense of place*. Using this perspective, Downtown Fresno has a number of future building blocks:

*An in-tact urban core* – Many, many American downtowns were decimated by federal, state, and local policies of urban clearance in the 1960s. And while Downtown Fresno certainly experienced some form of urban “renewal,” the core of the downtown district was spared the wholesale demolition many downtowns suffered. Downtown Fresno’s in-tact urban core is an asset to future mixed-use rehabilitation – there truly is a “there” there in Downtown Fresno.

*Public art* – Fresno is a community that has a long and rich history of supporting public art. Certainly, the most concentrated collection exists on the Fulton Mall, but public art is evident throughout downtown. The Fresno collection of public art is certainly among the finest in the nation.



*Strong architectural/visual assets* – Likewise, Downtown Fresno’s collection of 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture is something to behold. These buildings speak of the city’s history as an economic and cultural powerhouse and provide the backbone for future adaptive re-use. In the most visual and fundamental way, Downtown Fresno’s built assets provide the basis for the creation of *place*.



*Concise, compact downtown* – Ironically, the formation of the three highways – 41, 99, and 180 – has created a compact central business district surrounded by near-in, urban neighborhoods, many of which are made up of single-family homes, an asset

that many downtowns struggle with. While compact, the district is not small, containing a number of sub-districts including Chinatown, the Cultural Arts District, the Fulton Mall, Sports Town, the Convention Center area, Warehouse Row, Government Center, and Armenian Town.

#### Competitive Advantages

Leadership. Physical building blocks. But what of the *market potential* for Downtown Fresno? How does downtown stack up to the competition in the city and the region? What advantages can downtown capitalize on when a PBID is in place?

*40,000+ downtown employees* – 40,000 daytime employees represent a huge consumer group for downtown’s businesses. However, the true potential lies in extending their influence in downtown as residents, supporters of arts and cultural events, patrons of entertainment venues, and so much more. Downtown Fresno has yet to tap the full potential of this captive audience.

*Lots of development potential* – The scale and density of the historic core of Downtown Fresno provides dozens of development options. From full-scale, multi-story adaptive re-use projects, to smaller building rehabilitations, downtown presents an opportunity to virtually every type of investor, from the first-time owner to the real estate investment trust, from high-rise condos to apartments above the shop.

*Existing anchors* – Employment isn’t the only reason to venture downtown. Chukchansi Park, the Convention Center, Saroyan Theatre, the Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art and Science, Warnors Center for the Performing Arts, the Hispanic Museum, the County Library – even the Community Medical Centers – serve as ‘anchors’ to attract residents and visitors to

the district and keep daytime workers downtown longer.



*Not ringed by strong competition* – Downtown Fresno is located at the center of the city, surrounded by neighborhoods, college campuses, and neighborhood commercial centers. As a result, competing commercial centers of a similar size are located some distance away. This helps solidify downtown’s visual image, unlike other downtowns whose edges are eroded by miles and miles of strip commercial development.

*Closest commercial center for some surrounding towns* – Development patterns have caused suburban Fresno to grow primarily to the north, leaving smaller communities to the south and east less served commercially and making Downtown Fresno the major shopping and services destination for these neighborhoods and smaller cities.

*Little traffic congestion* – Highway patterns have kept downtown concise and compact, which could have resulted in greater traffic congestion. But Downtown Fresno is surprisingly free from traffic congestion, contributing to its feeling as a walkable, livable place.

*Emerging nightlife* – While few people interviewed by the panel were aware of it, there *is* an emerging club culture in Downtown Fresno. Combined with the Club One Casino, these businesses form a

“cluster” that can be built upon to extend downtown’s vitality into the evening.

*Strong core of existing special events* – The Downtown Association of Fresno has built a strong core of special events for the area, and has helped to elevate, through promotional support, events produced by other groups. Events like Sudz in the City, Cinco de Mayo and El Grito invite thousands of Fresnoans to discover downtown. Special events promote economic development, create a sense of ‘place,’ and can elevate the brand, identity, and awareness of the downtown.

#### Human Factors

Creating *place* cannot be accomplished without the infusion of *people*. Beyond leadership, human assets can make or break the vitality of a downtown. Fresno can boast great people, with established commitments to downtown.

*The “creative class” is growing and motivated to participate* – Coined by author Richard Florida, the term “the creative class” describes those professionals engaged in creative – not just artistic – pursuits. Creative professionals typically work outside the strict confines of the 9-to-5 cubicle. They are portable and they value the environment in which they work as much as the work itself.

The IDA Panel was astonished by both the quantity and quality of the creative class in Fresno. Many of them are affiliated with the Creative Fresno and are patrons and administrators of venues in the Cultural Arts District. The people interviewed were engaging and engaged by the idea of creating a dynamic downtown, with living options, organized and informal entertainment, and a strong sense of place. Maybe not a “24/7” downtown, but a well-

managed “18/7” Downtown Fresno would be welcomed by the creative class. And the creative class in Fresno can deliver in at least three critical ways – as leaders of downtown revitalization, as idea and project generators, and as a growing consumer group.

*Solid arts community* – Every city has an arts community, but Fresno’s is really robust. Both organized and informal, the visual and performing arts can be found in everything from museums and theaters, to galleries and sidewalk performances. With most arts activities occurring in and around downtown, connecting to the arts is an obvious first step for downtown’s revitalization.

*Family oriented community* – The panel was told, time and again, that Fresno is a great community for families. Housing prices allow families to put down roots, and schools are strong. The panel also observed that, for certain families, downtown is the informal gathering place, particularly on Sundays, when the Fulton Mall serves as the “paseo” or “passaggiata” for young and old. Expanding downtown’s role as a family-friendly gathering place should be a top priority.



### **Weaknesses, Threats and Challenges**

In almost every case, in almost every downtown, something that may serve as an asset also has its down side. In addition to other observations made by the IDA Panel are a few of these “double-edged swords:”

*Dearth of leadership* – Jan Minami and Dan Doyle can not make a property-based BID happen on their own. For the effort to be successful, more leaders – both public and private sector – must step up to the plate and apply not only their advice, but their *influence* to the formation of the PBID.

*Multiple organizations/multiple agendas* – The IDA Panel noted two things about the people we met in Fresno. First, they go to a lot of meetings, but it’s not clear how much is actually accomplished at the meetings or after. Second – and of more concern – is a real sense of entrenchment of viewpoints and an unhealthy interest in blaming one another for lack of progress...or the ‘wrong’ progress.

There is no doubt that downtown revitalization will require many hands and many organizations should have an interest in its development. But *cooperation is the key*. No single organization will have all of its priorities satisfied in the downtown. Likewise, no participating organization should leave the table without seeing at least some of its agenda reflected in the priorities for downtown.

*It is absolutely imperative that ONE vision for the development of Downtown Fresno be created that all stakeholder groups within the community can support.* To continue to function with a ‘take no prisoners’ attitude is a recipe for failure.

*Very little downtown housing* – Everyone wants a vibrant downtown. To help insure a true live-work-play environment, people need to be *living* downtown. There are some very notable efforts to introduce downtown housing, including Pacific Tower Lofts, Vagabond Lofts, and the H Street Lofts. And while there may be interest from some of the 40,000-plus downtown workers, the

region's college students, and the previously acknowledged creative class, the IDA Panel believes that the current state of the housing market will retard additional downtown housing development by at least a few years.

*Little or no congestion* – While lack of traffic congestion gives the downtown environment a more laid-back and relaxed quality, it does connote a *lack of reasons to be in the district*. As Downtown Fresno revitalizes, this weakness will be replaced by the challenge of maintaining a high quality of life in the face of traffic congestion spurred by new interest and investment.

*Perception that there's no urban experience* – The panel was surprised to learn from people interviewed that college students show very little interest in coming downtown. In many other downtowns, it is the college crowd that 'discovers' downtown...and the funkier the better!

*Lots of vacancies* – This is the flip-side of having lots of development potential in Downtown Fresno. Vacancies are development opportunities, but in the meantime they are perceived as eyesores. And among the general populace, lots of empty buildings connote a form of community failure that can not go unaddressed.



*Parking visibility, wayfinding, and navigation* – The panel does not sense that

parking supply is a real problem, even in the near-to-mid term. What *is* a problem is parking visibility, perceived safety, directional signage to parking, and parking management. And overall, finding one's way around downtown is challenging. From closed streets to highway on and off ramps and one-way pairs, downtown is not welcoming to the average driver.

*Not business friendly* – Again, it is not uncommon for IDA panelists to hear complaints about the business climate emanating from City Hall, and Fresno is no exception. Among the concerns voiced were the cost of permitting for special events; signage regulation and review; parking pricing and enforcement; and an overall sense that government oversight takes too long and is not consistently applied.



*Business not taking advantage of outdoor climate* – With the exception of one fruit ice cart and one outdoor café, the panel observed almost no outdoor commercial activity in downtown. This is particularly perplexing because of the physical environment created by the Fulton Mall and the maturity of the plantings; there are few places where outdoor commercial activities would be more pleasant.

*Downtown is too “9-to-5”* – Again, this is not uncommon for a downtown still struggling to evolve. But with near-in neighborhoods, solid arts and sports venues, and a healthy employment population, the opportunities to extend the “life” of downtown is tremendous. Many downtown leaders would be envious of the intersection of all these assets for creating the “18/7” Downtown Fresno.

*Downtown is no one’s responsibility* – Just like finger pointing and blame, there seems to be few who believe that Downtown Fresno’s future is *their* responsibility. As explained in the public presentation, it is as if everyone is in the outfield, but no one wants to catch the pop fly.

*City not ready to buy-in to the PBID* – As a potential rate payer, it is not clear that city officials see the value of a PBID. And with control of a sizable amount of space in the downtown area, the city’s support for the BID will be essential.

*Lack of identity/brand* – There seems to be, even among key stakeholders, no clear sense of identity for Downtown Fresno. For some, it is the Fulton Mall. For others, identity is created by the historic architecture. And for some others, downtown is just a government center. The IDA Panel sees all of these as part of the downtown “brand,” but it will be critical that PBID advocates help the stakeholders to see the *complete* vision for the district.

*Everyone is waiting for someone else to do something* – Like reluctant leadership, it seems that stakeholders are all waiting for someone else to take the first step to improve Downtown Fresno. Property owners are waiting for help from the city. Business owners are waiting for property owners to make improvements. And the city

is waiting for others to come to them with development ideas. Without an effective development strategy and a management plan, stakeholders will continue to wait, and the community will continue to turn its back on downtown.

*Too many plans /no implementation* – Many people articulated their frustration with the community’s penchant for hiring consultants, preparing plans...and doing little or nothing with the results. One interviewee even intimated that their business – a major downtown company – may move as a result of inaction on promised improvements. As consultants, the IDA Panel agrees: plans without clearly articulated *implementation steps* – and the will to undertake them – are a waste of time and money.

*Areas of downtown feel isolated* – The panelists agreed with some of the interviewees who noted that areas of the downtown feel a bit foreboding, a bit isolated. And those ideas lead naturally to a perception of crime and a lack of personal safety.



Anti-panhandling campaign, Philadelphia, PA (?)

*Panhandling-vagrancy-homelessness* – Every downtown has to contend with, at a minimum, loitering, and more often, issues of homelessness, panhandling, and anti-social behavior. Mental health problems and drug and alcohol use are the usual culprits;

left unaddressed, these behaviors turn away customers, visitors, and potential downtown investment.

*Farmers market inadequate* – While a farm stand exists in downtown, it is woefully inadequate. Given Downtown Fresno’s unique status as the CBD of the richest agricultural economy in the world, the downtown farmers market should be among the largest, most dynamic markets in the state, if not the nation.

The family oriented nature of Fresno, coupled with the new ‘eat local/eat natural’ trend among Generation X and Y consumers, should give an expanded Downtown Fresno Farmers Market a solid customer base. And, with gas prices skyrocketing, farmers in the area should be highly motivated to participate.

*No groundswell of support from property owners* – Perhaps most disconcerting to the IDA Panel was the fact that the exploratory committee for the PBID is not populated by downtown property owners! Without strong, enthusiastic support from the very stakeholders who will be called upon to financially support a PBID, the effort will not succeed.

## IDA Advisory Panel General Recommendations

Property-based Business Improvement Districts are highly successful tools for revitalization and management. But they can be controversial at the beginning – and disappointing later on – if the PBID doesn’t follow these basic steps:

*Focus on visible accomplishments first* – Nothing succeeds like success, and communities need to see that things are changing downtown. This doesn’t mean that

huge, ‘silver bullet’ projects are the way to go; in fact, big, visible projects run a higher risk of failure. Rather, visible success will be measured by the variety of *modest improvements* made. And modest improvements have a much greater rate of success in the first few years of the PBID.

*Achievable in the short-to-medium term* – In addition to being visible, the initial activities of the PBID need to be able to be successfully completed within the first few months and years.

*Create programs built on consensus* – It is essential that all stakeholders see some part of their personal vision for Downtown Fresno in the work of the new PBID. No stakeholder will have all of their priorities represented, but over the first few years, all stakeholders need to see that the PBID is undertaking projects and services that matter to them. Building consensus *from the very beginning* helps to insure that stakeholders remain supporters over time.

*Build credibility with every activity* – Likewise, every activity of the PBID in the early years (and beyond), needs to help build the capacity and the credibility of the organization. This is another reason that starting off with a big, silver-bullet project is a bad idea: the PBID organization won’t have the credibility or the talents needed to pull it off in the early years. And failing in a big way is nearly impossible to recover from.

*Be responsive to community issues and needs* – Even with consensus established and stakeholders involved, it is critical that a PBID builds in a reporting and feedback system that keeps the organization connected to emerging issues and expectations. Again, nothing succeeds like success; but with success come pressures to

do more. Letting the community know how far downtown has come helps direct desires in a way that builds on that success.

*Elevate public awareness and positive perception of the organization* – In the first 12-24 months of the PBID, it is critical that the organization’s leadership be ‘physical and visible’ on downtown issues in the media, in front of elected officials, and in the public eye. This will aid in (1) managing the message and strengthening the ‘one vision’ for downtown; (2) lending credibility to the organization; and (3) making it the ‘go-to’ source for all that is Downtown Fresno.

## Priority Recommendations – Phase One of the PBID

The first few years of any PBID are, in some ways, the most important. For all the reasons described above, the program of services at the beginning of a BID must be varied and achievable. What’s most important is that BID leaders pick the optimum program of work first, then determine the cost for these services, and *only then go out and pass a PBID*. To set a budget first is to ‘low ball’ the effort in an attempt to make the process palatable to the rate payers. The outcome is usually the reverse: by establishing the budget first, no matter how meager and lacking a program of work, potential rate payers won’t see the value-for-dollar equation and will have a good reason to say no to the PBID.

The IDA Panel recommends that Fresno’s PBID leaders consider the following services for the first round of the proposed district. The panel referred to these services as the “low hanging fruit” – the activities that meet three important tests:

1. They are tried-and-true PBID services...services that many BIDs have

undertaken, with great success. That means that Downtown Fresno can build these services based on the lessons learned from PBID colleagues around California and across the nation.

2. They address issues articulated by the community. The panel believes that these services will address concerns and demonstrate visible results.
3. These services serve as a “portfolio” – taken as a whole, they are comprehensive, based on the downtown’s assets, and reflective of the needs of a variety of stakeholders.

In short, this “low hanging fruit” represents, in the panel’s estimation, the best win-win-win situation for a new PBID in Fresno; they represent projects that are *visible, attainable, and build consensus*.

### Recommendation #1 – Establish a Downtown Ambassador Program



Downtown Winnipeg BIZ Ambassador Program, Winnipeg, AB

Downtown ambassador programs are simply supplemental security programs for the district. They do not substitute for existing police presence, patrols or substations, but *do* offer the city’s police department additional support.

Likewise, ambassadors serve as, well, *ambassadors* – boosters for the downtown that serve the district’s visitors, customers, business operators, and residents. These teams are extra ‘eyes and ears’ on the street; they also put ‘bodies’ on the streets, giving

it life; and they create good will within the community.

Ambassadors are direct messengers of the district's identity to consumers, carrying positive messages about everything there is to discover downtown. Good ambassador programs interface daily with the police department and provide what the panel referred to as "soft safe" services – directions, foot patrols, walk-ins to storefront businesses, crowd control, nuisance reports, etc.

There are literally hundreds of fine examples of downtown ambassador programs around the country. Contact the International Downtown Association at [www.ida-downtown.org](http://www.ida-downtown.org) for examples.

#### Dallas' Downtown Ambassadors

DOWNTOWNDALLAS began its ambassador program in 1994 with 15 hospitality-trained representatives who 'patrolled' downtown seven days a week. In 2005, the ambassadors were shifted to a more safety-oriented force (and increased to 35), while also maintaining their outgoing hospitality role.

In its first year of operation under new direction, overall crime downtown decreased by 21% during their patrol hours. In 2007 alone, the DOWNTOWNDALLAS Safety Patrol interacted with 500,000 downtown residents, visitors and employees providing escort, directional, and general information services.

#### Recommendation #2 – Invest in Beautification

In general, Downtown Fresno looks good. But the new PBID can and should take the lead in enhancing the public realm through landscape improvements and storefront rehabilitation. Again, both of these efforts already have some city-sponsored components that should be retained or redesigned to be part of the PBID initiative. Landscape improvements should include planting, but *must* focus on maintenance of

the existing landscape...including the public art collection. And storefront improvements should focus on inexpensive treatments that have a lot of visual impact – window cleaning, signage removal and improvements, window display programs for vacant storefronts, lighting, and the like.

For example, DOWNTOWNDALLAS runs a matching grant program whereby property owners are granted matching funds up to \$25,000 for façade, parking lot, lighting, sidewalk, and park improvements. In addition, through a City of Dallas program that the DOWNTOWNDALLAS BID administers, retail businesses can receive additional build-out incentives for creative storefronts and window displays.

#### Recommendation #3 - Expand Graffiti Removal

Again, most city departments of public works make some effort to remove graffiti and Fresno is no exception. But when graffiti is allowed to mar world-class sculpture like Renoir's "La Grand Laveuse (The Washerwoman)" *for even a day*, that is an indication that the city needs a partner. Many BIDs offer graffiti removal services, both for public spaces and private properties.

The DOWNTOWNDALLAS BID "Clean Team" (a team of 11 contract employees) removed 1,500 pieces of graffiti in 2007.

In addition, a DOWNTOWNDALLAS BID Earth Day event brought out over 800 corporate volunteers to do graffiti removal and other beautification projects throughout downtown.

In Downtown Fresno, the graffiti removal program will need to be expanded to include removal techniques on public sculpture. In this way, the new Downtown Fresno PBID may be setting a standard for public space

maintenance that other BIDs in America and beyond will one day emulate!

#### **Recommendation #4 – Create the Best Farmers’ Market in California**

As mentioned in “Weaknesses, Challenges, and Threats,” Downtown Fresno should by rights host the best fresh foods farmers market in the state, if not the nation. Not only is downtown situated in the middle of the richest agricultural region in the world, it offers one of the best “stages” for fresh foods marketing anywhere – the Fulton Mall.



Sennaya Plaza, St. Petersburg, Russia

The IDA Panel recommends the creation of a true farmers market to be scheduled – initially – from Noon to 6:00 pm on a weekday. Selecting a weekday and setting these times takes advantage of the downtown worker population and allows them to shop at lunch and at the end of the work day. The market should incorporate music, food demonstrations, and events for children. Once established – perhaps 12-18 months later – the market should be expanded to twice weekly, once at mid-week and once again on the weekend.

An evening market date should also be incorporated into the long-term plan as a tool to (1) boost restaurant patronage; (2) create a community gathering place that attracts visitors from throughout the region;

and (3) attract that all-important college and young-adult demographic.

Downtown San Luis Obispo’s Thursday Night Market is a great example of a dynamic market and a successful evening event.

Farmers markets, when done right, are more than economic and cultural activities; they evolve into business incubators from which new entrepreneurs move from temporary market stalls into downtown storefronts. And nothing ties a nascent residential population to its new neighborhood like a farmers market. Don’t underestimate the power of the farmers market to help meet other revitalization priorities of the PBID.

Again, the IDA is a great source of information about successful downtown farmers markets. But start at home: contact the California Federation of Certified Farmers’ Market -

[www.cafarmersmarkets.com](http://www.cafarmersmarkets.com).

#### **Recommendation #5 – Develop the Downtown Brand**

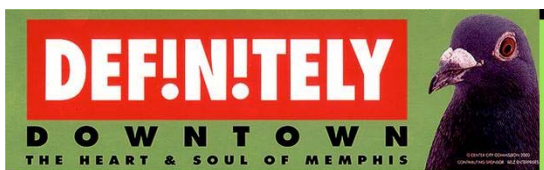


Downtown Norfolk (VA) brand

The proposed Downtown Fresno PBID must take the lead on creating an identity for the district and promoting the brand. ‘A Great Place to Live, Work, and Play’ is not good enough – it’s being used by dozens of downtowns around the country. What downtown leaders need to do is look at the district’s assets and do the following:

- ❑ Create the “mega brand” for downtown – Generally a broader set of terms and images, the over-arching brand must be relevant to everything the PBID plans to offer. In addition, the mega brand must be meaningful to all the stakeholders: like the PBIDs program of activities, *stakeholders must be able to see some part of their own vision in the brand.* That doesn’t mean that the words and images become a goulash. Rather, it means that creativity must be applied to find the shortest message and the cleanest graphic image to depict what Downtown Fresno is and will become.

DOWNTOWN DALLAS’ ‘mega brand’ is “*Where is Your DSPOT? Downtown Dallas.*” The “D” is then translated any number of ways as required to promote downtown’s unique assets: D = District, Destination, Downtown, Dining, Dwelling, etc. The mega brand gives DOWNTOWN DALLAS the mechanism to define and promote each district and destination under a unifying umbrella. The Arts District, West End Historic District, and Victory Park, all with their own brand equity, now support Downtown Dallas as “D Spot!”



Downtown Memphis (TN) brand

- ❑ Create the “sub brands” for downtown’s districts – Some work has been done in this regard, with banner signage in “Sports Town” for example. But each of downtown’s distinct districts need brands of their own – brands that support, and are supported by the mega brand. Chinatown is a good example of a district with a built-in identity. But in a

revitalized downtown, Chinatown’s brand needs to tie into the larger downtown brand. Too often, downtown districts perform as if they are miles away from the downtown itself.

#### When Consultants Are A Good Idea...

All complaints about outside consultants aside, *this is the place to employ the best possible branding and graphic design professionals.* A well-respected branding, marketing, and/or graphic design consultant will be able to help you answer these essential questions:

##### ⇒ Step One: Who Are You?

Creating the Brand Position

- How does the ‘outside world’ define you?
- How does the community define you?
- How to YOU define you?
- Who are your competitors?

##### ⇒ Step Two: Who is the Customer?

Defining the Target Audience

- Define the demographic profile
- Define the psychographic profile
- Determine their ‘key care-about’s’

##### ⇒ Step Three: What is the Message?

What do you want to say – and how do you say it?

- Create the brand
- Communicate a message that commands attention
- Gain community consensus behind the brand

##### ⇒ Step Four: How Do You Spread the Brand?

Marketing Plan and Execution!

- Determine the Marketing Plan, including production and promotional vehicles, that bind you to your market.
- Create a viral component that creates buzz and encourages sharing
- Funding – for Downtown organizations, creating a cooperative campaign with the companies and organizations that will be the primary beneficiaries is a highly effective way to leverage small budgets.

#### Recommendation #6 – Conduct Competitive and Market Analyses

While the IDA Panel feels strongly that Downtown Fresno can capitalize on some solid target markets, including downtown workers, nearby communities, and college

students, the new PBID must commit time and resources to making the case for pursuing certain target markets. Three types of market analyses should be undertaken:

1. Competitive analysis – The new PBID needs to have an intimate understanding of how competitive commercial and residential markets are performing – what are their key ingredients, how do they attract users, who are those users, what are the competitors’ strengths and weaknesses, and how do these characteristics compare to Downtown Fresno’s profile.
2. Market analysis – Likewise, the PBID needs to be the expert in understanding the consumer marketplace...and downtown’s potential role. Demographic and psychographic analysis, consumer surveys, residents’ opinion surveys, business data – all these will be needed if the PBID is to use its precious resources to attain the economic and cultural revival of the downtown district.
3. Community perception survey - A direct mail survey should be distributed to residents in the defined market area to (1) determine current perceptions of downtown; (2) identify use patterns and priorities; and (3) better understand how people receive their information about downtown. Downtown retailers should also be asked to distribute the surveys to their customers. The survey should probe questions such as where customers are spending their dollars and time, why they choose to come downtown or not, and what would encourage them to visit downtown more frequently. The survey could be distributed via public utility bills or through a similar community distribution channel.

### **Recommendation #7 – Create Segmented Marketing Campaigns**

Once empowered with an understanding of the competitive marketplace and armed with targeted consumer priorities, the PBID will be ready to create two segmented marketing campaigns that make the best argument for (1) “consuming in” and (2) “investing in” Downtown Fresno. These specialized campaigns should target not only strong consumer segments, but should specialize in reaching potential investors, retailers, and residents.

The consumer campaign should focus on the themes of ‘live, play and stay,’ while the investor campaign must be ‘no nonsense’ – built with sophisticated collateral materials and peer-to-peer outreach that sell businesses on coming to Downtown Fresno purely on the basis of economic benefit.

To see how marketing campaigns can be segmented but still deliver on the same brand, visit: DOWNTOWNDALLAS’ consumer-driven website at [www.yourDspot.com](http://www.yourDspot.com) and its other, more member and investor-driven campaign at [www.downtowndallas.org](http://www.downtowndallas.org).

### **Recommendation #8 – Establish a Strong Communications Program**

Communication is different from marketing or event production. Marketing *persuades*. Events *entertain*. Communication *educates*. All three support each other and the brand. Communications should include:

- ☐ Website/viral marketing – This is an emerging – and extremely powerful – tool for communicating with important target markets like creative professionals, college students, and tech-savvy entrepreneurs.



Web-driven rideshare campaign,  
Downtown Pittsburg, PA

- ❑ Internal public relations – It’s one thing to communicate with the public. But it takes different communications tools – and different messages – to connect with stakeholders and rate payers...and keep them engaged, informed, and inspired. In-house newsletters, blast e-mails, annual meetings/reports, and quarterly meetings disguised as breakfasts, lunches, or happy hours are all ways to get the message out....and repeat it.
- ❑ Guides and maps – The PBID can not be everywhere every time someone needs information. Directories, downtown maps, informational guides, and business recruitment packages all provide details that help people make informed decisions...and make them feel better about Downtown Fresno.
- ❑ Events – Every event in downtown is an opportunity to communicate the vision, the brand, and the progress being made by the PBID. Make sure that materials and programs that highlight the BID’s progress are incorporated into every event staged downtown.
- ❑ Partnership/co-op events – The PBID should take the lead in creating business advertising, marketing, and events opportunities that not only promote the participating businesses, but get the PBID’s message out to the targeted audience. By managing partnered events and co-op advertising, the PBID *manages the message*.

### **Recommendation #9 - Create an Events Intervention Team**

The IDA Panel heard a good deal about how onerous it has become to stage events downtown. Regardless of how hard it *really* is, the PBID should offer to be the advocate, the liaison, the “one stop shop” in streamlining the permitting and licensing processes for events. *This should not be misconstrued as eliminating regulation;* rather, the goal should be to work with the city to make permitting and licensing reasonable and to guarantee that rules are applied fairly. The most effective team is made up of PBID representatives and all the public-sector departments that exercise regulatory authority over event permitting and production, typically including public works, parks and recreation, police, fire, emergency services, transportation, etc.

If the PBID is successful in creating this intervention team, great strides will be made, not only in the quality and quantity of events, but in the credibility of the PBID with both the stakeholders and the city alike.

### **Recommendation #10 – Host and Manage Dynamic Events**

The PBID can become its own events producer. But events are time consuming and can be expensive. The IDA Panel recommends that, in the first few years, the BID limit itself to the following three things:

1. Limit new events to one or two – Do fewer things with a fantastic outcome, rather than a lot of things with just mediocre (or worse) results.

Instead of creating multiple new events, the Panel recommends that the Association ‘grow’ its existing events and publicize events produced by other organizations through the PBID’s web site, newsletters and other communications vehicles.

DOWNTOWN DALLAS has a sponsorship program for outside events, whereby “grants” are given to special events produced by other organizations that demonstrate direct benefit to the downtown community. This not only helps the event succeed, but provides a branding and exposure opportunity for the BID without the time and effort of actually producing the event.

2. Welcome-back-to-campus block party – The PBID could hit a big homerun by hosting a “welcome back” block party for Fresno State and other returning college students. These students are a key demographic for downtown; they represent a large consumer group with a proven interest in urban experiences, and may, over time (and with positive reinforcement), become future downtown residents and entrepreneurs.

The Fulton Mall is a terrific staging area, the presence of the Grizzlies and Chukchansi Park are natural tie-ins, and a core group of restaurants, stores, and clubs exist to offer student-oriented goods and services. This event could even be scheduled to coincide with one of the evening Farmers Markets!

The welcome-back event should be deemed successful, not by how many cash registers are rung, but by how well the downtown is perceived by the participants. If successful and repeated perhaps three or four times a year, the PBID should begin to see students returning to the district *between* block parties.

3. Improve existing events – There are one or two very successful events in the downtown, Cinco de Mayo being the premiere example. The PBID should

offer to help improve the quality, the ‘reach,’ and the message for existing events in order to bring more – and new – people to these terrific events.

### **Recommendation #11 – Serve as “the United Nations for Downtown”**

As previously mentioned, too many factions exist “on behalf” of downtown. It is critical that, from the very beginning, the PBID is positioned as the neutral ground through which stakeholder disputes can be aired and resolved. *This is no small feat*; to be the “U.N.,” PBID leaders will need to establish their commitment from the very start of the campaign, so that, when the PBID is up and running all stakeholders (and factions) know that the PBID is the demilitarized zone for conflict resolution.

This is a very long list of recommendations. But every activity has already been successfully attempted by scores of BIDs in California and around the country. By committing to a comprehensive list of activities, the emerging Downtown Fresno PBID is telling all Fresnoans that they are not only welcome downtown, but are crucial to downtown’s vitality and success.

### **Phase Two – Expanding the PBID’s Reach**

As management tools, PBIDs very rarely ever ‘go away.’ Rather, BIDs usually expand, either by enlarging their boundaries, expanding their services, or both. After the first few years, the PBID will be challenged to take its program of work to the next level...without compromising the services that the community has come to expect!

So the IDA Panel recommends that, once the PBID has been up and running for two years – and its programs thoroughly evaluated – PBID leaders consider taking on the

following additional initiatives (*along with all the previous programs and activities*):

### **Phase Two Recommendation – Advocacy and Public Policy**

Taking the “U.N.” concept a step further, the mature Downtown Fresno PBID could evolve into an advocacy organization for sustainable, strategic, and appropriate development. Such advocacy could aid in relationship building with both the public and the private sectors in the following ways:

#### Advocacy with the public sector

The PBID should be the advocacy organization for planning, incentives, and regulatory reform, particularly as it relates to:

- real estate development and incentives
- business development and incentives
- business retention and recruitment programs, particularly restaurant, office, retail, entertainment, and residential development
- streetscape planning, financing, and project management
- wayfinding and directional signage
- lighting, including street lighting, building and accent lighting, and public space illumination
- central library development, particularly siting and connectivity to the CBD
- transportation initiatives

#### Advocacy with the private sector

Likewise, the PBID is in a unique position to serve as advocate when it comes to business practices as they relate to all of the items listed above, especially business recruitment, and retention; real estate development; wayfinding and directional signage; and lighting.

## Conclusion

Downtown Fresno has many of the qualities already in place for a successful Property-based Business Improvement District – a defined downtown, fabulous architecture, a notable portfolio of public art, a solid base of downtown employees, and several sports and cultural destinations. *But successful downtown revitalization – and the formation of a PBID – will only happen if:*

- The community can find a way to get beyond its long-held habits, including:
  - waiting for someone else to take the lead;
  - blaming others and organizing around opposition rather than support; and
  - failing to reach consensus;
- Leadership can be expanded. Jan and Dan need to be joined by other dynamic leaders with vision, commitment, and a willingness to roll up their sleeves and lend their wisdom and influence to the effort; and
- Organizers will engage in intensive PBID education. It’s not simply a matter of getting the minimum level of support to pass the PBID; efforts to educate the community about the merits of a PBID should:
  - be driven by a schedule of outreach that is conducted well in advance of actual formation of the PBID;
  - begin with what the panel affectionately called “The Dan and Jan Show” – a series of small-group meetings where Jan and Dan can present “PBID 101;”
  - include outreach to both the public and private sectors;
  - *not* be consultant driven;
  - be privately funded during the PBID outreach process;

- include case studies of successful BID services from around California and the nation; and
- offer study tours of similar PBIDs and/or invite leaders from other successful PBIDs to visit Downtown Fresno.

### **Moving Forward - PBID or No PBID**

It is not the assignment of the IDA Advisory Panel to recommend the formation of a PBID. The panel members have decades of experience with successful BID formation and management, but ultimately, it is up to the downtown property owners in Fresno to determine whether or not to proceed.

If, after the process of stakeholder education has been completed, leaders agree to move forward with PBID formation, the Panel advises that public-sector funding for the PBID formation process be secured as soon as possible. Once informed, stakeholders will be looking for signs of progress; it is essential to keep the effort moving forward quickly.

This formation process is another place where retaining a professional consultant is strongly advised. The timeframe is short and the campaign effort to property owners is complicated; don't short-circuit the process by trying to do it all in house.

All of this can be done in a 12-month period, but organizers will need every minute of that time to complete the educational process, develop the PBID business plan, and mount the campaign to secure its passage. It can be done, but it must begin *now*.

*The IDA Advisory Panel strongly believes that this is the window of opportunity for Downtown Fresno. The signs are there...*

- The Downtown Association of Fresno has demonstrated enough commitment to

the idea to seek the counsel of the International Downtown Association

- Community interest and qualified support was evident in virtually every interview and public meeting
- New political leadership is on the horizon
- Staff support and expertise is in place and visible
- Experience business leadership is already at work

*...take Advantage of the Momentum*

## **Addenda**

### **Acknowledgements**

The IDA Advisory Panel wishes to extend its sincere thanks to the following groups and individuals who helped make the Panel's visit to Fresno a success:

City of Fresno  
 Tom Richards  
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 Steve Geil  
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 Haron Motor Sports  
 City of Fresno FAX  
 Joe Moore  
 Holiday Inn Fresno Downtown  
 One by One Leadership  
 1060 Fulton Mall (formerly Security Bank Building)  
 Downtown Association of Fresno

## **Advisory Panel Agenda**

### *Saturday, June 7*

6:00 p.m. Panel assembles at hotel and has dinner in Downtown Fresno

### *Sunday, June 8*

9:00 a.m. IDA Advisory Panel working breakfast

11:30 a.m. RDA presentation of Vision 2010 update

12:00 p.m. Lunch meeting

2:00 p.m. Orientation tour (trolley and walking); local television coverage on trolley tour

6:00 p.m. "Land mine" dinner with core constituents

### *Monday, June 9*

7:30 a.m. Public Discussion Introduction of the IDA Advisory Panel to invited community leaders

9:15 a.m. Small Group Interview – Government

10:15 a.m. Small Group Interview – Community

11:15 a.m. Small Group Interview – Small Business

12:00 p.m. Working Lunch

1:00 p.m. Small Group Interview – Large Business

2:00 p.m. Small Group Interview – Small Property

3:00 p.m. Small Group Interview – Large Property

6:00 p.m. Working Dinner

### *Tuesday, June 10*

7:30 a.m. Working Breakfast

11:00 a.m. Lunch Meeting and De-briefing with PBID Team

12:00 noon Working lunch

1:00 p.m. Panel presentation to stakeholders

## Notes from Public “Listening Session”

The listening session was held Monday morning, June 9, in an effort to have a public conversation about the assets, challenges, and opportunities for a revitalized Downtown Fresno. The notes from the listening session helped the IDA Panel to formulate its recommendations.

### *What do you come Downtown for?*

- Cultural events
- Sports
- Concerts
- Church
- Private and public nightclubs
- Visit the Fulton Mall – take in the public art collection
- Art galleries
- Fundraising events
- Conferences
- Government offices/services
- Festivals

### *Where is Downtown?*

- Not the triangle formed by the highways
- Defined differently by different government agencies
- Really two triangles formed by the diagonal streets
- Perception of crime is increased by what is reported as “downtown”
- The historical center
- Includes Chinatown
- Doesn’t include Chinatown
- Does/doesn’t include nearby neighborhoods

### *Downtown Fresno’s Assets*

- Old buildings/exceptional architecture and public art
- Urban context
- Diversity (ethnic and business diversity)
- 40,000 +/- workers in the district Mon-Fri. 9:00 – 5:00
- Strong collection of cultural institutions – arts, performance
- Art walks – “multiple hubs”
- Burgeoning artists’ studios
- Grizzlies Stadium
- Strong faith community

- Strong partnerships in/among larger Fresno community
- Room for growth (in empty buildings)
- Neighborhood potential
- Historical center of Fresno
- Very walkable downtown
- Growing medical community/economy
- Sufficient green space downtown
- Available funds for public transit (Measure C)

### *Challenges*

- Multiple agendas
- Absentee owners
- Perceived lack of safety
- Perceived lack of parking
- Perceived lack of any reason to come downtown
- Dependence on outside consultants
- Lack of implementation (lots of plans and reports, not enough action)
- “Bank blight” – refuse signage/poor building maintenance from banks who have left downtown
- Lack of “ownership” of downtown by the general public (“I’m proud of my downtown”)
- Battles over the future of Fulton Mall
- Too much focus on the details, not enough on the “big picture”
- Lack of infrastructure (lighting, signage, sidewalks, curb cuts, “in general”)
- Lack of *local* investment

### *Opportunities*

- Lighting significant architecture
- Improve traffic flow and wayfinding
- Better nightlife
- Better, cleaners, more public restroom facilities
- Anchor/destination businesses
- Restaurants (including upscale)
- Businesses that stay open later
- Middle-class residential development in – not just near – downtown
- Strategies to address homelessness
- “Theme” that attracts residents and visitors
- Specialty districts within the downtown (e.g. Albuquerque)
- Creation of a consistent “brand”

- Coordinated transportation and transit options...all coming to/through downtown
- Educational facilities and an Information Center
- Theme park in the Fresno area...even in downtown?
- Create exciting jobs – lasting, that build for the future
- Get people to stay *longer*

*What could a PBID do for Downtown Fresno?*

- Improved landscaping
- Maintenance (including graffiti removal)
- Public art restoration
- Lighting
- Identification for distinct districts (including wayfinding signage)
- Protecting historic resources
- Security
- Advocacy for PBID members (“can’t let City off the hook”)
- Equal benefits for equal assessment (fair treatment from the City)