

Uptown Cincinnati is a diverse neighborhood characterized by hills, greenery, modest and estate homes, and leading educational and healthcare institutions. These institutions make Uptown the greater Cincinnati region's second largest economic engine. Prompted by the momentum of development plans in Cincinnati's Center City and the continued decline of surrounding neighborhoods, leaders of Uptown's major employers: Children's Hospital, the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, the Health Alliance, TriHealth and the University of Cincinnati, joined forces to determine a revitalization agenda for Uptown's neighborhoods and to leverage their institutional resources.

Uptown, an area bounded by hilly topography and major regional interstates, is comprised of the Avondale, Clifton, Clifton Heights-Fairview, Corryville, Mt. Auburn, and University Heights neighborhoods. While over 40,000 employees work in the area and the five institutions produce over \$1 billion in payroll and generate approximately \$3 billion in economic activity; these assets have not translated into healthy urban neighborhoods within Uptown. Uptown's 20% homeownership rates rank far below Cincinnati's average (35%) and the national average of 68.3%. Although there is a significant

surplus of retail square footage, the area remains severely under-retailed for basic home goods, moderate and diverse dining options and family-oriented shopping.

During the fall of 2003, the Team interviewed Uptown stakeholders, including: community councils, neighborhood redevelopment corporations, local developers, elected officials, city staff and institutional members to identify key challenges and opportunities for the future of Uptown. These interviews identified the following opportunities and challenges:

Challenges	Opportunities
Uptown lacks defined public spaces and community identity	40,000 employees, with \$1 billion in annual purchasing power
High crime in isolated areas and perceived lack of safety	\$3 billion per year in economic activity
Disproportionately high poverty levels	Substantial area of underutilized green space
Low homeownership rates	Impressive quantity and historic character of existing housing stock
Deficiencies in internal street grid and in connections to downtown and expressways	Excellent access to major regional highway corridors and to the Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky Airport
Fragmented stakeholder communities	Active inventory of institutional/private projects

The institutions engaged a team of real estate and urban design professionals, led by Hamilton, Rabinovitz & Alschuler (HR&A), Greenberg Consultants, Inc. and Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners LLP (BBB) to create a strategic development plan for Uptown. The Team also includes: The Bratton Group, Brophy & Reilly, LLC. Gorove-Slade Associates, and Mastin/Kufka Associates.

From these interviews, as well as, the Team's urban design analysis, preparation of case studies and general market review, the team identified six key issues:

- **Neighborhood Definition/ Identification**
- **Transportation**
- **Public Safety**
- **Housing**
- **Retail**
- **Economic Inclusion**

Following two major public meetings and presentations to the leadership of five institutions, a preliminary "Conceptual Strategic Framework" emerged. Uptown possesses the strong assets necessary to realize its potential; however, a cohesive development strategy and implementation vehicle was needed. The HR&A team introduced a set of strategic principles to guide future planning and development.

These planning principles serve as a guide for future development in Uptown:

- **Approach Uptown as a unified market**
- **Establish a rich set of community amenities**
- **Connect neighborhoods and reinforce residential areas**
- **Support and enhance existing neighborhood grid of streets**
- **Restore major through street connections**

To execute these principles and to address the development challenges within Uptown, the five institutions formed the Uptown Consortium, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation, to serve as the implementation vehicle to create a more unified Uptown.

The Members, supported by HR&A, conducted a national executive search for a Chief Executive Officer who would assess Uptown's development needs, build on the strategic framework and planning principles and execute a plan for public safety, transportation, housing, retail and amenities.

In March 2004, Tony T. Brown was hired as President and CEO of the Uptown Consortium. Previously, Mr. Brown served as Director of the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, a government-owned corporation at the United States Department of Treasury, from August 2001 to March 2004.

THE UPTOWN CONSORTIUM: MILESTONES

- In February 2003, the chief executives of Cincinnati's five major Uptown Cincinnati institutions: Children's Hospital, the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, Health Alliance, TriHealth Inc., and the University of Cincinnati, and convened to define a coordinated development agenda for the Uptown community.
- The group named themselves the, "Uptown Steering Committee," and engaged the services of a real estate finance and planning team, led by HR&A,⁷ to assist in the creation of a strategic development framework for Uptown.
- During February-July 2003, with Uptown Steering Committee's leadership, the HR&A Team initiated an intensive stakeholder outreach process involving more than 40 individual and group sessions with key community, civic, public and institutional leaders. The meetings identified a series of important community development issues: housing, economic inclusion, education, retail and public safety.
- July-September 2003, the Team issued its preliminary findings and recommendations on the Planning Study to the Uptown Steering Committee.
- In October 2003, the Uptown Consortium, Inc., the implementation vehicle for the Planning Study's recommendations, was formally incorporated.
- During October-November, the Team gave a series of presentations to community and civic groups on their findings.
- In November 2003, five CEO's met with Mayor Charlie Luken to present their coordinated agenda for Uptown.
- In December 2003, the Consortium appointed an Interim Executive Director, Jonathan Lippincott, to provide leadership and capacity to the group. The Consortium also launched a national executive search for a full-time President and CEO.
- In March 2004, the Consortium hired Tony T. Brown as its first President and CEO.
- The Consortium expanded the HR&A team to include retail, public safety and transportation professionals. The Team continued its analysis of these issues within the Uptown Community.
- On June 8, the Team presented its preliminary Strategic Opportunity Plan to the public at the Children's Medical Center Campus. Over 100 people attended and participated in small and large group discussions about the future of Uptown.
- On July 22, the Team returned to the public with additional analysis and their suggested amendments to the Strategic Framework. The meeting, held at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens, was attended by over 125 people.
- On October 1-2, the Uptown Consortium Board of Directors held a two-day retreat to deliberate on the Team's recommendations.
- In December, the Team issued its final report entitled, "*Strategic Opportunity Plan: Uptown Cincinnati.*"