ULI Urban Land Institute

San Francisco
Serving the Greater Bay Area

NAPA
Oxbow District
California

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL

Napa, California
August 6–7, 2018

About ULI

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 42,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries, including over 2,200 in the ULI San Francisco (ULI SF) district council (sf.uli.org). ULI San Francisco serves the Greater Bay Area with pragmatic land use expertise and education.

About ULI TAPs

The ULI San Francisco Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program is an extension of the national ULI Advisory Services program. ULI's Advisory Services panels provide strategic advice to clients (public agencies, nonprofit organizations, or nonprofit developers) on complex land use and real estate development issues. The program links clients to the knowledge and experience of ULI and its membership.

Since 1947, ULI has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. More than 700 panels have been conducted in 12 countries. Since 1996, ULI San Francisco has adapted this model for use at the local level, assisting over 30 Bay Area cities.

TAPs include extensive preliminary briefings followed by a one-and-a-half-day intensive working session in the client's community. A detailed briefing package and guided discussion is provided by the client to each TAP participant before the working sessions. In these sessions, ULI's expert panelists tour the study area either by bus or on foot, interview stakeholders, and address a set of questions proposed by the client about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area. The product of these sessions is a community presentation and final report. This report presents highlights of the panel's responses to the client's questions, as well as contains a diverse set of ideas and suggestions.

Napa Oxbow District Technical Assistance Panel

Panel Chair

Jim Heid, Founder, UrbanGreen® Advisors & CRAFT Development

Panel Members

David Israel, Principal, BAR Architects

Sandra Kulli, Explorer. Pollinator. Cheerleader.

Michael Lander, President, Lander Group

Blaine Merker, Partner and Managing Director, Gehl

Edith Ramirez, Economic Development Director, City of Morgan Hill, California

Elizabeth Shreeve, Principal, SWA Group

Carrie Huang, Strategic Planner, AECOM; TAP Writer and Report Designer

City of Napa Acknowledgements

City Council

Jill Techel, Mayor

Peter Mott, Vice Mayor

Doris Gentry

Jim Krider

Scott Sedgley

City of Napa, Staff Team

Robin Schabes, Economic Development Manager

Robin Klingbeil, Senior Development Project Coordinator

Rick Tooker, Former Community Development Director

Erin Morris, Planning and Code Enforcement Manager

Michael Walker, Senior Planner – Advanced Planning

ULI San Francisco

ULI Staff

Michelle Frey, Executive Director

Natalie Sandoval, Senior Director

Nathaniel Hanson, Senior Associate

ULI TAP Committee

Frank Fuller, TAP Committee Co-Chair

Kara Gross, TAP Committee Co-Chair

Contents

Elements of the city of Napa.

Context

The city of Napa is located in the southern portion of Napa County, 50 miles north of San Francisco. While the term *Napa* refers to the broader valley—and to many, the wine country—Napa the city is a unique urban core within the storied region. Though the valley is predominantly rural and deeply rooted in agriculture, downtown Napa has experienced revitalization after years of initiatives to breathe new life into it. The city has 25 distinctive neighborhoods and includes special environmental features such as the Napa River and scenic mountain vistas. Though the valley's wine region receives more 3 million visitors each year and continues to expand, over the past several years the city's population has remained steady at about 80,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau; the median age is 38.8 and the median income is $71,087, according to Data USA.

The city's Oxbow District, located on the edge of the greater downtown area, is bounded by the Napa River and Oxbow Commons parks on the north, the Napa River to the east and south, and Soscol Avenue on the west, and serves as a gateway commercial corridor to the rest of downtown. Named for the bend, or oxbow, of the Napa River, this area historically has been commercial/industrial in nature and home to small hotels and food and beverage businesses.
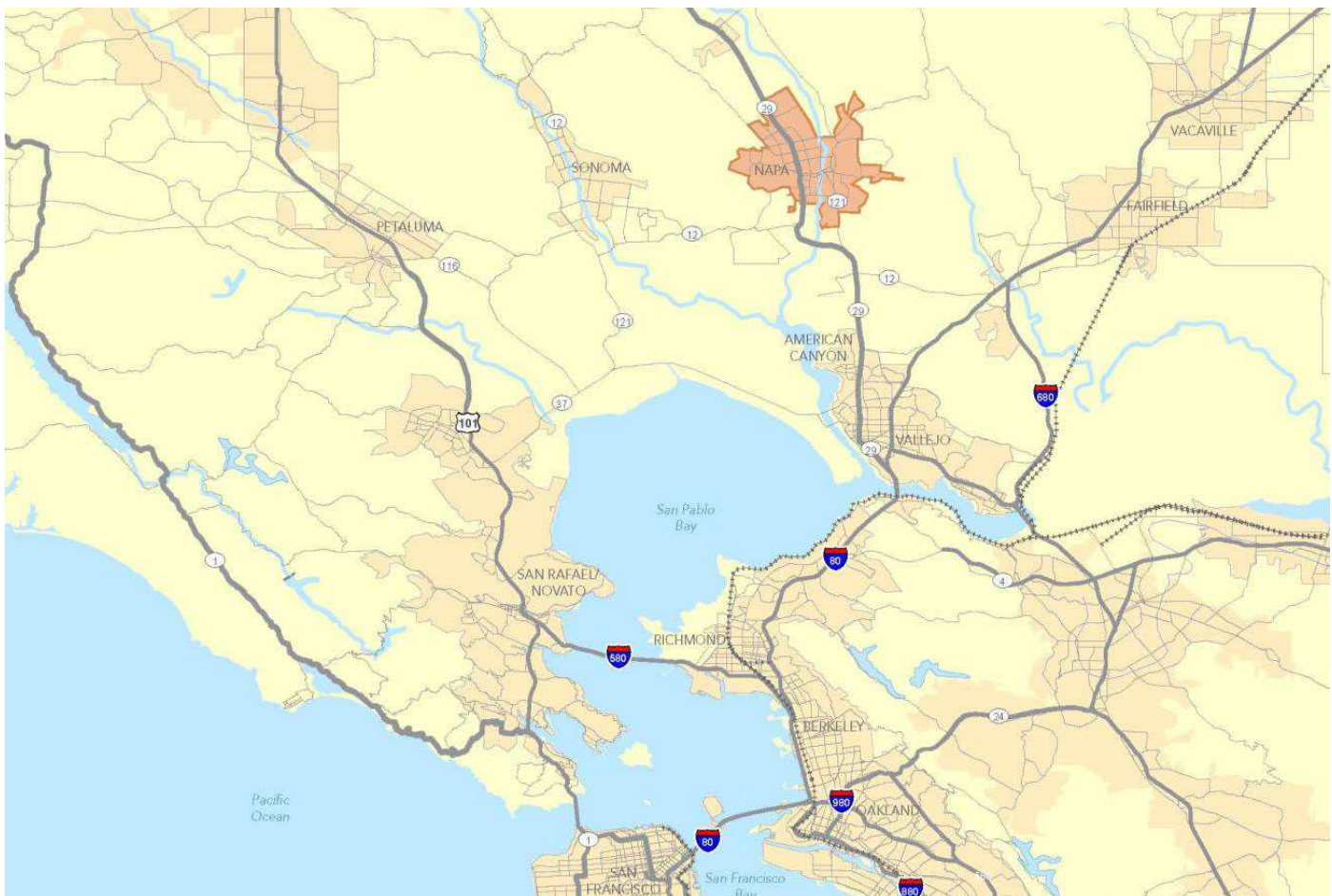
Napa in relation to the Bay Area.
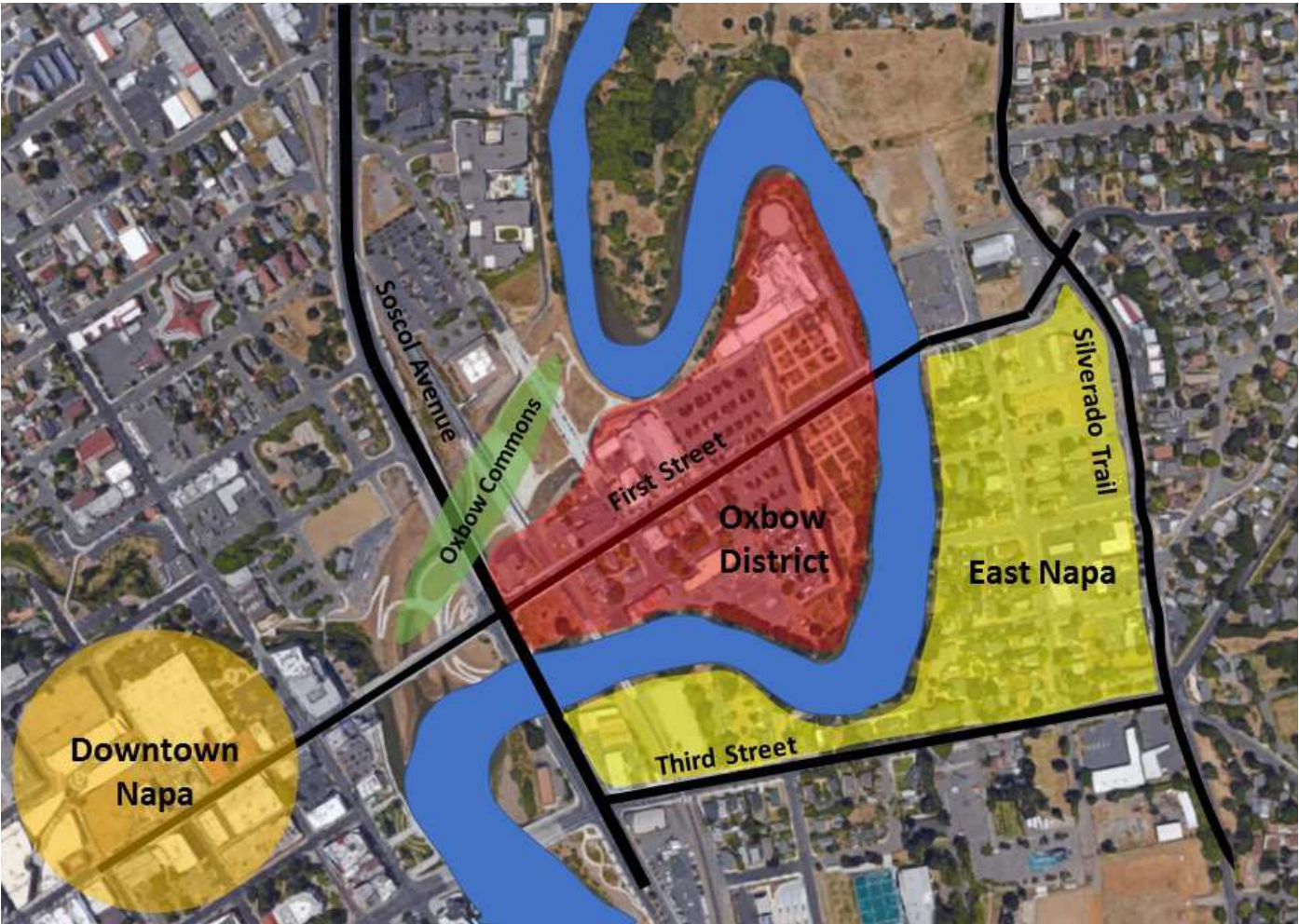
The Oxbow District in relation to the rest of the greater downtown districts. Currently, the district is bounded by the Napa River and the Oxbow Commons, with East Napa on the other side. Downtown Napa sits west of the Oxbow Commons.

The Oxbow District has several popular anchor developments, such as the Oxbow Public Market, the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Copia, the Napa Wine Train depot, and the Westin Verasa Napa hotel. Across the Napa River on the north side of First Street is the 12-acre Oxbow Preserve and an 11-acre vacant site that is currently entitled for a 350-room luxury resort.

On the south end of the district, there are a number of properties accessible by Third Street, including commercial buildings, residential, a city-owned parcel currently used for parking, and the Oxbow Arts School. Currently, the properties are zoned as the Oxbow Commercial District, which allows for tourist-oriented uses, retail, and restaurants.

Given its organic, fine-grained, and evolving urban character, many local residents and visitors describe the Oxbow community as a maker's community, well-loved and oriented not only for visitors, but also for local residents.

Local context. Clockwise from top left: Culinary Institute of America at Copia; Oxbow Commons with the Napa Valley Train tracks over the bypass trail; the Oxbow Public Market; the First Street Bridge to downtown.

In recent years, Napa and the former redevelopment agency initiated numerous traditional planning efforts focused on the greater downtown, ranging from riverfront guidelines, infill development strategies, commercial corridor plans, and other design guidelines. In 2012, the city adopted the Downtown Napa Specific Plan, providing a guiding framework for the revitalization and increased vitality in the core for its residents and businesses. While this plan incorporated extensive community engagement, it has been criticized for not being specific enough, especially for guiding areas undergoing rapid transition and development pressure: for example, what is essential for the Oxbow District to keep its unique qualities?

The Specific Plan identified three focus areas in downtown to help guide development, one of the areas being the Oxbow District. Ownership of several properties has recently been transferred, and projects are currently in design, planning, or approval for development.

Given the growing popularity of the Oxbow district with residents, visitors, and developers, the city engaged ULI SF's TAP program to identify, acknowledge, and document elements and experiences that make this area unique. This exercise was undertaken to establish the groundwork for planning for the future of the Oxbow District through the lens of place branding.

Elements of the Oxbow District. Bike share in the Oxbow, a residence in the area, and the First Street Bridge over Oxbow Commons.

Team Assignment and Process

The panel was composed of real estate professionals, cultural anthropologists, urban planners and designers, and public-sector experts, all of whom brought a wide range of perspectives to the TAP assignment. The primary goal of the TAP was to develop recommendations that would provide the city with a set of proposed next steps in its **place-branding** efforts for the Oxbow District. The variety of skill sets and disciplines represented on the panel brought important cultural, economic, and design perspectives that informed its advice to the city.

Over the one and a half days, the panelists were asked to answer the following questions and carry out the following tasks:

1. Based on the TAP interviews with stakeholders and related research, what variables make the Oxbow District a special place? Provide recommendations for possible place-branding strategies or other vehicles/tools for the district.

2. Identify means of integrating the district into the larger neighborhood and define geographic boundaries.

3. Provide a unifying decision-making framework to guide how the Oxbow District is presented from a place-branding, placemaking, and urban design perspective.

4. How should a place-branding effort interact with the city's current plan and land use regulations encompassing the defined area? What are recommendations to facilitate a viable connection?

Before arriving in Napa, the panelists reviewed a briefing book compiled by the city. The panelists also received a summary of a Stakeholder Sounding Board Session initiated by the city, as well as conducted their own research to define place-branding and what such a process would look like.

Place branding suggests that places, cities, regions, or countries can be considered as brands as long as people's experiences are authentic and memorable. Provided by the City, the book *Destination Branding for Small Cities* by Bill Baker defines a place brand as ". . . the totality of thoughts, feelings, and expectations that

people hold about a location. It's the reputation and the enduring essences of the place and represents its distinctive promise of value. . . . Place branding provides a framework and toolkit for differentiating, focusing, and organizing around the location's competitive and distinctive identity."

A location's brand contributes to people's perceptions of the region, striking emotional connections and creating an environment for memories of an experience in that setting. Therefore, an inclusive place-branding strategy can be used by cities to reinforce, reflect, and protect what people love.

Based on the panel's review of several publications and frameworks for place branding, it created a stepped approach to address issues involving the Oxbow District:

Step 1: Define what is special and significant about this neighborhood.

Step 2: Define what the future could and should be.

Step 3: Confirm the area that defines, captures, and shapes the potential of place.

Step 4: Define what is working for this area and what is at risk.

Step 5: Assess how market trends, city policies, guiding documents, and potential development can help deliver the desired place brand.

The TAP event kicked off with a walking tour of the Oxbow District and the surrounding areas. Key sites visited included the CIA at Copia on the northern edge of the Oxbow; the First Street Bridge over the Napa River; the locally adored Oxbow Public Market at the center of the district; the recently completed Oxbow Commons, a flood-containment area with a bypass connecting to the greater downtown area; the 11-acre entitled hotel site; the proposed hotel site at First and Soscol streets; the Napa County Flood District Office; the entitled Black Elk Hotel site; the proposed Napa Valley Wine Train hotel site; the Napa River Trail; and a recently entitled four-acre parking lot and gardens and 2.2-acre county corporation yard site across from the CIA, currently in the city's development pipeline and awaiting action.

After the tour, the panel interviewed a number of stakeholders and community representatives in order to better understand who they are and what their relationship is to the Oxbow District, what makes the Oxbow District unique, the issues that affect Oxbow's future, and important features of Oxbow that should be preserved.

By gathering a diverse group of interviewees, panelists were able to learn what is important to this district from an economic and cultural perspective.

TAP panelists and city staff on the site tour. This site tour covered a number of important sites in the Oxbow District, such as the Commons, the Oxbow Public Market, the river, and the bridges.

The ULI Oxbow District walking tour visited important landmarks in the district.

August 6, 2018

1. Culinary Institute
2. First Street Bridge over Napa River
3. 11-acre hotel site (entitled)
4. 4-acre site/parking & gardens
5. 2 2-acre site/County of Napa Corp Yard
6. First Street streetscape: existing structures between NVRR and Vernon Street
7. First & Soscol proposed hotel site

8. Napa County Flood District Office
9. Black Elk hotel site (entitled)
10. Oxbow Commons
11. Napa Valley Wine Train proposed hotel site
12. Westin Verasa Napa expansion site
13. Napa River Trail
14. Oxbow Public Market

– – – – – Oxbow District walking tour route

The TAP panelists discussing their findings after the site tour. The panelists had about 24 hours to come up with recommendations after the tour and stakeholder interviews.

Stakeholder Input

Panel members engaged with more than 20 stakeholders from the Oxbow District during a welcoming session at the beginning of the first day, the site tour, and scheduled interviews on day one. The stakeholders represented public and private interests, including city officials and staff, developers, business owners, and community representatives. During the interviews, panelists were able to ask all stakeholders individually what the Oxbow means to them and what their goals and visions are for the Oxbow District's future, as well as gain an understanding of their concerns and any threats they perceive.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders interviewed by the panel included the following:

City staff:

- Dr. Peter Pirnejad, Former Assistant City Manager, Development Services

- Jill Techel, Mayor of Napa

- John Coates, Director, Parks and Recreation

- Mike Walker, Senior Planner

- Phil Miller, Deputy Director, Napa County Flood Control

- Rick Tooker, Former Director, Community Development

- Robin Klingbeil, Senior Project Coordinator

- Robin Schabes, Economic Development Manager

- Steve Potter, City Manager

Community representatives:

- Barry Martin, Founder, Lucky Penny Productions

- Catherine Heywood, Director, Visit Napa Valley

- Craig Smith, Executive Director, Downtown Napa Association

- Francie Winnen, Board Member and Secretary, Friends of the Napa River

- Jeri Hansen, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Napa Valley

- John Salmon, Community Representative

- Tom Bensel, Managing Director, Culinary Institute of America

- Travis Stanley, President and Chief Executive Officer, Napa Chamber of Commerce

Property owners, developers, business owners and general managers:

- Christine McDermott, General Manager, River Terrace Inn

- Don Shindle, General Manager, the Westin Verasa

- Greg Brun, Owner and Developer, Napa Valley Wine Train/Hotel

- Mary Beth Herman and Tim Herman, Foxbow (First and Oxbow) Development LLC

- JB Leamer. Foxbow Development LLC

- Jeremy Sill, Civil Engineer, RSA+, Foxbow Development LLC

- Michael Holcomb, Strong & Hayden

- Steve Carlin, Developer/Founder/Chief Executive Officer, and Bill LaLiberté, Oxbow Market and the Carlin Companies

- Wayne O'Connell and Gabrielle O'Connell, Owners and Developers, south Copia site, Napa County corporate yard site
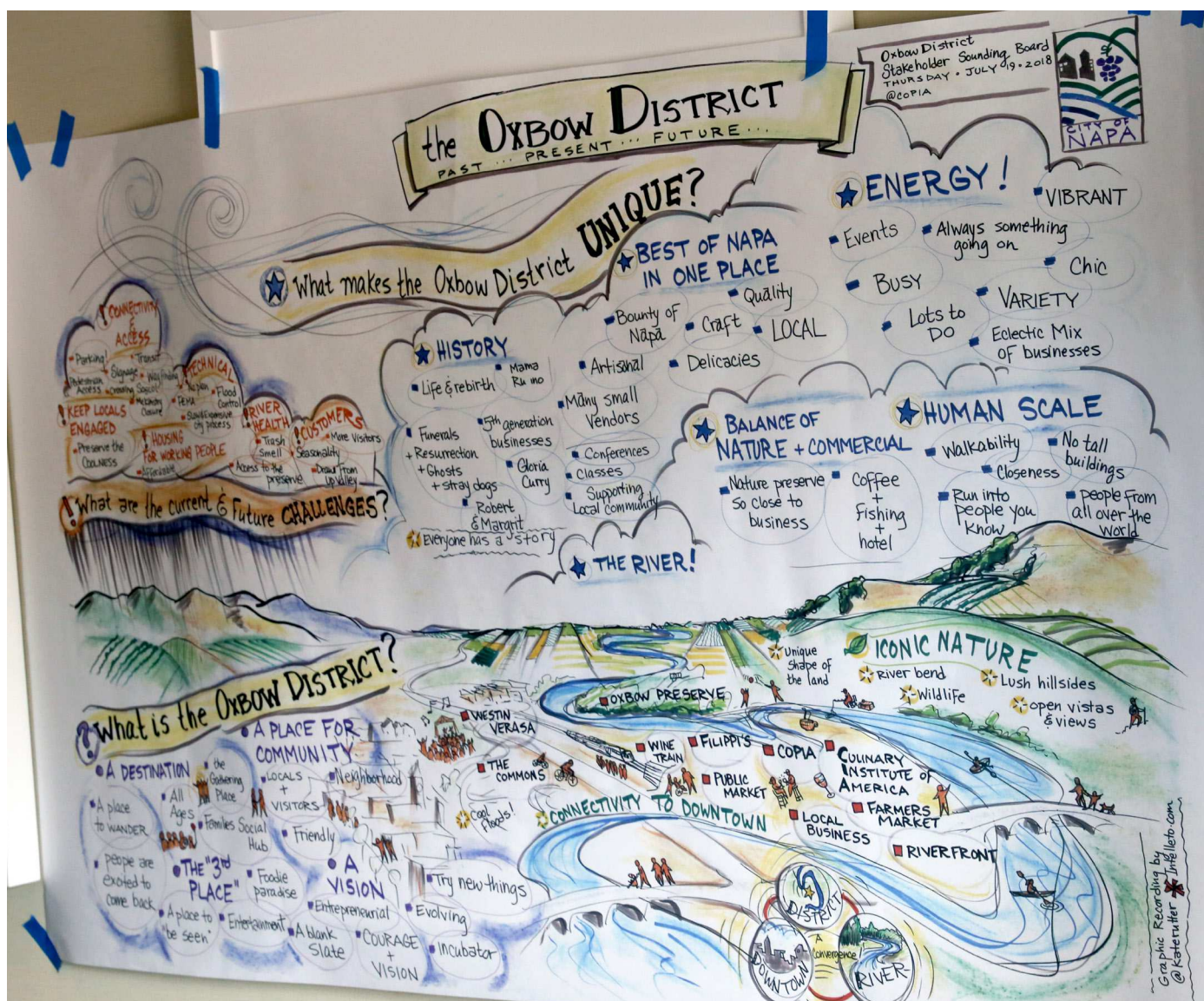
The City of Napa held a sounding board meeting with its stakeholders to answer what makes the Oxbow District unique, the issues that affect Oxbow's future, and the important features of this district that should be preserved.

What the Panel Heard: Themes

Several themes emerged from the stakeholder interviews, with the consensus being that the Oxbow District is unique to the downtown area and, in its current state, is not taking advantage of key opportunities. More important and to the purpose of this panel, critical decisions are about to be made for the Oxbow District that could change it forever.

Among the themes are the following:

The character of the Oxbow District:

- The Oxbow District grew organically on its own, away from downtown.

- Natural elements, such as the river, hills and the Oxbow Preserve give visitors and locals a perception of serenity in the city.

- The Oxbow District is one of the most prominent areas embracing the Napa River.

- The district has first a history and now a culture of being a place for pioneers, craftspeople, artists, and entrepreneurs.

Both a tourist and local place:

- The Oxbow District is close to downtown, but feels significantly different from downtown.

- The district is where visitors and locals comingle.

- The Napa Valley Wine Train and the Oxbow Public Market are the area's biggest attractions.

- People enjoy the variety of choices for dining and beverages in the Oxbow District compared with the retail and brick-and-mortar options in the greater downtown.

- The Oxbow Public Market serves as a town square and provides a community feel to Napa.

Better use of the river:

- The river is still underused, despite its changing role from liability to being one of the area's greatest potential assets.

- There is a lack of pedestrian-friendly views and access to the river.

- The river has little connection to the land—visually and physically—and there is fear that proposed flood walls will exacerbate this condition.

- The Napa River Trail from downtown to the Oxbow District has the potential to be a main link between the two areas but is currently underused and lacks signage.

- The Oxbow District, in general, needs to embrace the river.

More frequent programming and marketing of the area is needed:

- Many think people usually stumble on the Oxbow District rather than seek it as a destination.

- There is no clear entrance or sense of arrival in Oxbow.

- The Oxbow Commons is not fully programmed on a regular basis.

- Many people are unaware of the bypass connection (through the Commons) from downtown to the Oxbow District.

- The Oxbow District has the potential to be the cultural center of downtown life.

Lack of vision for the district

- The Oxbox District has a human scale and quality—it is a place where adults and families with children can visit—but new developments, if not designed appropriately or sensitively, could erode that quality.

- Concerns exist that future developments may benefit only tourists and drive out locals.

- The scale of proposed hotel developments feels "off," and the lack of housing for employees working in the downtown is a growing concern and could constitute a missed opportunity/critical need.

- New developments may overwhelm the street character and block views of natural elements.

- Parking is a daily problem, but alternatives need to be considered for this neighborhood as modes of transportation change.

Frequent programming is lacking, as is individual promotion. Nonetheless, with its agricultural roots blended with its makers' background, Oxbow has the potential to engage its industrial and agrarian heritage and expand its legacy as a place where locals and tourists coexist—enriching the experience of each group. Future development should consider these sentiments.

A view of the Napa River right next to the Oxbow District.

Place Branding

Taking the unique identity of the Oxbow District into consideration, TAP panelists synthesized the information received to address the preliminary place-branding issues and define the Oxbow District. These issues helped guide the panel recommendations.

Step 1: Define what is special and significant about this neighborhood.

Through the stakeholder interviews and the summary from the Sounding Board Session, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that the Oxbow District represents the "best of Napa in one place." The area retains much of its history, carries a balanced selection of local and commercial crafts, and has a vibrant energy and the element of walkability.

Rooted in agriculture, industry, and Napa's founding families, the Oxbow District is a home for pioneers and risk takers. The river is an important historic, environmental and defining natural element in the town, and the district is where the river and town meet. The Oxbow District is a place for the community—a place for all ages, bundled with small and artisanal vendors and multigeneration businesses. Last, the district has the potential to be a destination where both visitors from all over the world and Napa locals would want to go.

The Oxbow Public Market is a marketplace featuring a number of local vendors and restaurants, and is one of the district's most popular attractions.

Step 2: Define what the future could and should be.

Using the information from the Stakeholder Sounding Board Session and the stakeholder interviews, the panel compiled the key elements of what the Oxbow District currently is and what it could be in 20 years if the city were to implement the appropriate policies.

Image. Currently, three iconic places draw a majority of visitors to the Oxbow District—the Oxbow Public Market, CIA at Copia, and the Napa River, which currently hugs the perceived perimeter of this uniquely shaped area. Twenty years from now, the district should continue to embrace these iconic elements. However, the district should also aim to integrate more of its natural elements, primarily the river, into the image of the place. This means opening up access to river views and taking advantage of mountain vistas as a touchstone. The streets of Oxbow should continue to evolve as a walkable neighborhood with a variety of uses. The district needs to maintain some semblance of its fine grain with individual buildings and not be redeveloped to be made up of large-block "projects."

Vibe. The Oxbow District embodies an evolving, experimental, uniquely local and artisanal vibe. That must continue to ensure both its economic potential and unique market differentiation as the neighborhood evolves. As new developments arrive, the Oxbow District should retain this spirit as an essence of its place.

A view of the Soscol Bridge from the Oxbow Commons. Across the river lie the Napa River Inn, Riverfront Residences, as well as retail shops and restaurants.

Experience. First Street, arguably the main street of downtown Napa, runs directly from the core to the Oxbow District, where a majority of the district's main businesses reside. To many, this single main street represents a small, linear area of the Oxbow District. Visitors arrive by car over the First Street Bridge above the Napa Creek and Oxbow Commons, and the First Street Bridge from Oxbow to Silverado Trail on the Copia end. These bridges are less used by pedestrians because the destination feels ambiguous. No clear signage exists to represent the Oxbow District as a standalone district. This lack of signage directing people or showing that it is just over the bridge makes it appear to be much farther away than it is. Conversely, this lack of signage also gives it a bit of the mystique and cachet that accompanies great "discovered" neighborhoods, furthering its understated brand as the cool place to find.

In the near future, Oxbow should increase the promotion of its identity. The Oxbow District can be embraced as a unique district of the city, with multiple nodes and places to visit. To address the district's current lack of an entrance and its separation from downtown by the bridge, the city should carefully implement elements from downtown to make Oxbow a seamless extension of downtown, but without making it feel like a "shopping mall" or other highly designed destination. Maintaining its funk and grit, while making it easier to find, will require a careful balance.

Getting around. A main concern of the Oxbow District's residents is parking and traffic. Most locals and visitors alike come to the district by car. There is one primary route into the district, traffic can be a problem on certain days. Many often resort to parking in downtown or in the East Napa neighborhood. This is particularly problematic, as both locals and visitors have said that they do not feel comfortable having to cross Soscol Avenue or the bridge from Silverado Trail. Building more surface parking throughout is not a good long-term solution—especially considering changing norms and transportation—the panel encourages the city to promote and encourage alternative modes of transportation to get to Oxbow while over time reducing the convenience of parking.

The city should also focus on making the area more pedestrian-oriented or consider evaluating rideshare scooters to encourage a more engaged, wellness-inspired district, while also leveraging the district's appeal as a way to get people to park downtown, and support and discover new businesses there while they are en route to the Oxbow District.

A district for whom? As the district continues to grow, many fear that the area will increasingly cater to tourists rather than locals. As a distinct community in Napa, the Oxbow District should continue embracing its development for both visitors and locals. The panelists see the potential for Oxbow to be a place that represents the locals, their families, and visitors alike, but a key to this is the careful integration of new forms of housing and connections in East Napa so that the district has a complementary base of residents to support the growing business offerings.

Inside the Oxbow Public Market, which houses many local vendors and restaurants.

Step 3: Confirm the area that defines, captures, and shapes the potential of place.

The Oxbow District, as currently described, is bounded by the Napa River, downtown Napa, and East Napa, with the Oxbow Preserve and Commons to the north of the district. The panelists agreed that there should be a more seamless connection between the Oxbow District and the surrounding neighborhoods. The river and vistas should be taken advantage of because the basic elements missing from the greater downtown area include natural connections.
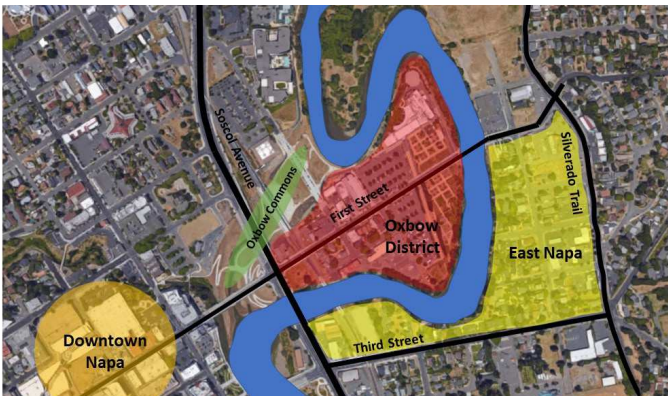
A map of the Oxbow District and the other greater downtown areas.

Step 4: Define what is working for this area and what is at risk.

What's working. The Oxbow District is, and has always been, an organically evolving area, with a range of local businesses and artists giving the neighborhood its inviting, constantly changing atmosphere. An explicit and implicit connection exists to the natural setting, away from the busy, retail-oriented greater downtown. The block-fronting Oxbow Public Market has a varied and interesting landscape that is pedestrian friendly and offers opportunities to engage the street in different ways.

> These eclectic types of pedestrian qualities, which are different from the more structured streetscape of the rest of downtown, combined with the river walk and Oxbow Commons, invite strolling and exploration. This is ultimately a place of discovery that enables chance encounters for locals and visitors alike.

What's at risk. As the Napa Valley continues to grow, the Oxbow District will represent an even more desirable opportunity for development. In order for the Oxbow

to retain its fine-grained and eclectic block and building patterns, the city will need to be sensitive in how it plans for future growth and change. The city will need to work hard to ensure that buildings are designed at an appropriate scale—both in terms of height and mass, but also as it relates to street-level articulation and permeability. Large buildings, without curated and pedestrian-scaled penetrations, will overwhelm the streetscape and the character of the district, and views of the mountains could be lost.

Current plans to install more floodwalls along the river may inhibit views and access to the river, so access to rivers will need to be provided in other ways. In addition, if there is too much emphasis on prioritizing and accommodating the automobile over the pedestrian, the city will diminish the public realm and the Oxbow District's brand as pedestrian-friendly, interesting place.

Step 5: Assess how market trends, city policies, guiding documents, and potential development can help deliver the desired place brand.

Local market. Tourism continues to serve as the Napa Valley's economic engine and will for the foreseeable future. The challenge is to balance development in the district and across the city in ways that address both resident and visitor needs. Attractive and vibrant retail districts have the power to create place, as already evidenced in the Oxbow District. The challenge and opportunity now is to continue development in a thoughtful manner that complements the downtown and other districts. The provision of enough housing for all income levels and household types, from working families and millennials to empty nesters, is an issue facing Napa as much as any city in Northern California. Integration of much-needed new housing stock into Oxbow and nearby areas will help meet demand while increasing street life, foot traffic, and vibrancy. Finally, parking and appropriate preparation for ridesharing, carsharing, and non-auto transportation options (bike and scooters) is needed in current plans and new projects to manage traffic and future-proof the experience for all stakeholders of Oxbow.

City policies and tools. Policies and tools are in place for the greater downtown. However, the Downtown Specific Plan does not articulate a clear vision, guidelines, and standards for the Oxbow District. The connections to the Oxbow are missing throughout the plan, providing the opportunity to establish new standards yet experiment with the organically growing culture of the district.

Canvas of opportunities. New hotel sites, including the former Ritz-Carlton site, have been sitting fallow. Other opportunity sites include the south Copia site, and other city- and county-owned lands outside the Oxbow. All are part of a portfolio of real estate assets that can and should be strategically leveraged in a cohesive manner in order to create a physical environment and introduce uses that will support the desired district brand and lifestyle.
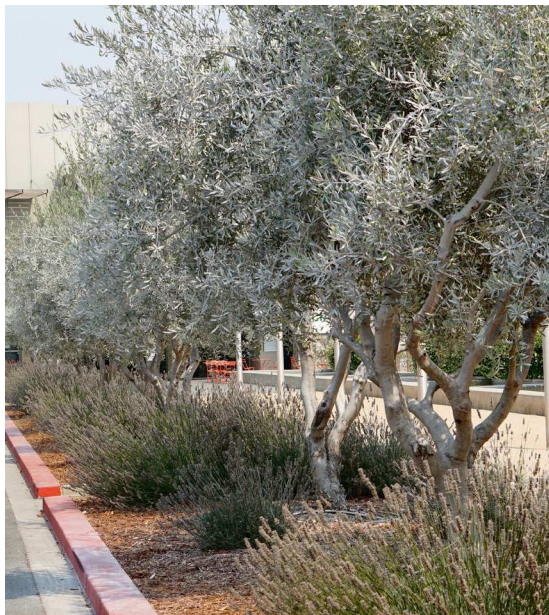
The Oxbow District has many elements that make the area unique, including its geographic location, the natural elements, and its history in the valley. The city has the potential to leverage those elements in its place-branding strategy.

Panel Recommendations

After deciphering the Oxbow District's unique qualities, characteristics, and strengths, and the challenges it faces, the panel synthesized the following recommendations to guide the city in creating a place-branding framework for the Oxbow District.
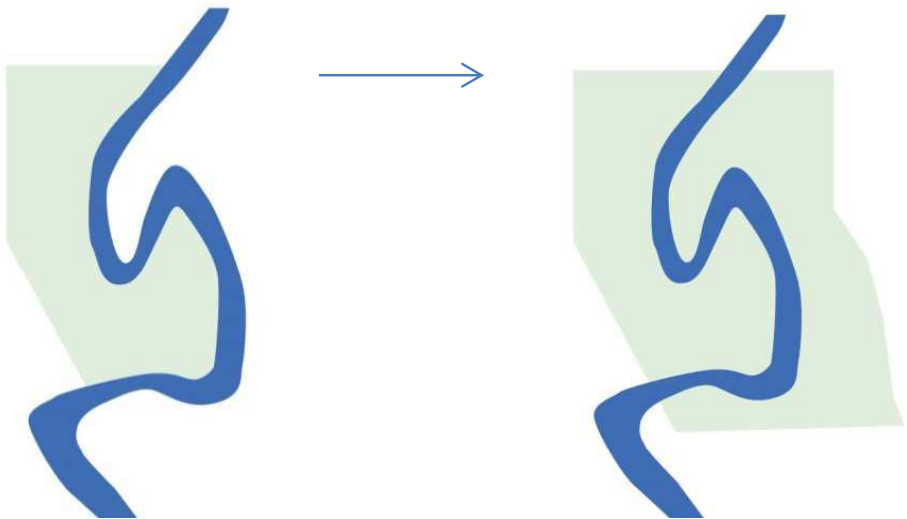
Recommendation 1: Focus on the River

The Oxbow District represents a unique juxtaposition of natural and built geographies. To optimize the advantages of this "urban wild" condition, the panel proposed extending the Oxbow District's boundaries so that the river becomes not an edge but the center of the district. This sets the stage for place-based identity and branding and creates more opportunities to program a mix of uses and scales to make this a vibrant, multidimensional destination.

To further reinforce the potential impact of the river, the panel looked for ways to make the river more visible and better integrated into the visitor and resident experience through sight lines, connections, place making, and graphic identity.

Sight lines and corridors. Streets, pathways, and outdoor spaces should be aligned to open onto the river. People should be able to locate the river consciously or subconsciously as the center of the district. Buildings should be oriented to frame views of the river and to not block views. Projects currently in development should be reviewed carefully to ensure that buildings, circulation, and open spaces are all oriented to provide access to, and views of, the river, as well as to address streets with front-facing architecture. Vehicle parking should be contained within sites and should not front on waterways or public streets.

Connections. The river should be treated as a community amenity rather than as a backyard. To foster connections, the city should look for opportunities to connect publicly accessible streets, trails, and open spaces to the river. Links across the river should be provided with new and upgraded bridges for pedestrians, and the river trail and river-edge landscape should be extended, maintained, and improved to the maximum extent possible. Priority should be given to programmed activities along the river—such as access for small boats, art installations, and performances—because they will position the physical setting as something to celebrate and enjoy. Together, these elements will provide opportunities for visitors and residents to directly experience the spatial character and qualities of the river, further reinforcing the overall brand of the district.

Graphic identity. The intrinsic character of the river—the shape and nature of the oxbow for which the district is named—can be further promoted by featuring and emphasizing its natural qualities. The riverine and riparian imagery and shape should be incorporated into the district's graphics, wayfinding, and signage. This comprehensive "signaling" of the area's natural character can reinforce the emblematic importance of being located on the river, right in the Oxbow District.

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Redrawing the boundaries of the Oxbow District.
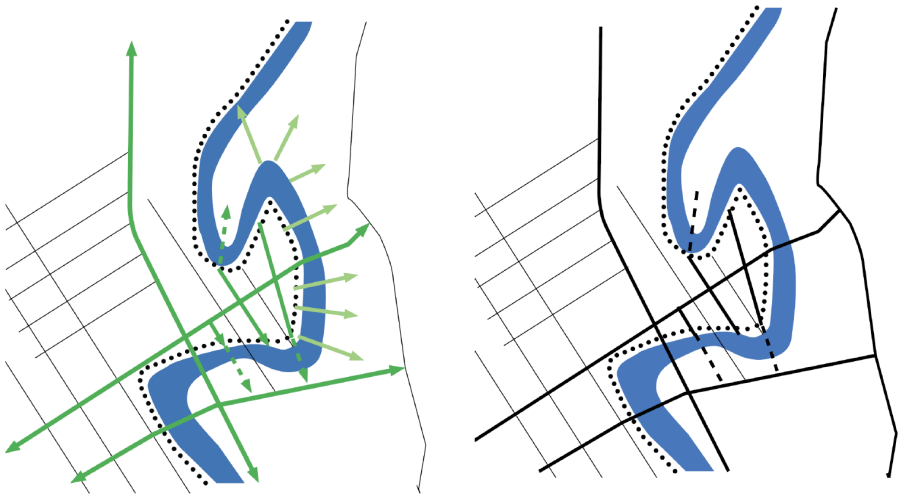
Think of the river as the *center*—not the edge.
Both images display recommendations for new walking paths and connections on the river.

The river should be treated as a community amenity rather than as a backyard. The riverine and riparian imagery and shape should be incorporated into the district's graphics, wayfinding, and signage.

Case Study: Buffalo Bayou Promenade

The Buffalo Bayou Promenade connects Houston's downtown core to the river park to the west under and through a neglected and near-impossible mess of freeways and bridges, adding 23 acres of parkland to Houston's inner city. The project's early visioning and then implementation converted a trash-strewn eyesore—intimidating to pedestrians and detrimental to flood control efforts—into 3,000 linear feet of urban park that provides a prominent gateway to downtown Houston.

Top left: Buffalo Bayou before the renovation. Today, Buffalo Bayou is a series of parks and pathways that extend from Shepherd Drive to downtown Houston.

(http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2015/09/buffalo-bayou-promenade-by-swa/)

Recommendation 2: Nurture Public Life

An important tool for the city in managing the brand of the Oxbow District is to create a strong and distinctive public life.

Public life is what people do outside and what they collectively create when they live their lives outside of homes, workplaces, cars, and (in this area) hotels. It is supported by "third places," but also by the connective tissue of walkable streets, parks, and activated public spaces that encourage people to linger between attractions.

Planning for public life gives the city the opportunity to build on what is already working for Napa; it is the everyday small-scale activities, big public events, outdoor recreation, fine dining, and casual meetings. Nurturing public life can occur through design, because design can make people comfortable and remember the setting that enables this feeling. Places with a strong public life are easy to brand because these environments are easy to remember: their energy and human character is, in fact, the brand.

Sample Framework Plan: Redefining connections of public life through bridges and walking routes.

Planning for public life prioritizes comfortable, legible human-scale streets and spaces designed with attention to the details of how people use them, as well as the ongoing active programming that can be encountered during both special occasions and weekends, and throughout the week.

The panel recommends developing a Framework Plan focusing on desired activities and an understanding of who will be attracted—both in terms of basic demographic characteristics and in terms of visitors and local residents—and where different intensities of activity should occur throughout the district. The district's existing environment has the potential to stimulate a public-life brand through its physical aspects and by employing its streets, the Public Market, the Commons, and CIA at Copia.

The panel recommends building on what is currently working: current programming in the Oxbow Commons has been successful with large, occasional events, but should be expanded with everyday programming that caters to both visitors and locals. Connecting the district with new walkable routes through the Commons and on streets, bridges, and trails—all human-scaled—will provide the Oxbow District with comfortable and usable public spaces. The figure at left is a sample Framework Plan that highlights walking routes over automobiles, reinforcing the panel's recommendation to create a plan for the public realm to support public life. This approach creates an intentional focus on the overall district structure as an armature for future development decisions. It highlights third places, walkable spaces, and a human scale that interconnects the whole district as the fabric for development rather than just focusing on land uses and the connections becoming being whatever is left over.

Hog Island Oyster Co. in the Oxbow Public Market. The Oxbow has the potential to use its public life as an image for its brand.
(https://insidescoopsf.sfgate.com/blog/2011/08/18/oxbow-matures-murray-circle-revisited-in-todays-newspaper/)

A public-life framework is the "software" counterpart to the "hardware" of urban design for the public realm. Both are critical to creating places where people want to spend time—and, importantly, spend time outside their cars and other private spaces.

The district's existing environment has the potential to stimulate a public-life brand through its physical aspects and by employing its streets, the Public Market, the Commons, and other staples of the district.

(Left image: https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/kayak-launch-dedicated-to-memory-of-napa-river-advocate-jim/image_d4c23b8e-407e-59c2-b5e5-0feda5831b30.html; right image: http://hyattsvillelife.com/photos-hyattsvilles-first-porchfest/)

Recommendation 3: Embrace the Commons— Name It, Sign It, Use It

The Oxbow Commons is dually designed to serve as flood protection and public space. However, its wide-open range and bypass trail that connects to downtown are not used on an everyday basis. The Napa Valley Wine Train tracks lie above the bypass trail and connection is not obvious. There is a lack of signage, and many people are unaware the connection between the two areas exists.

The panel recommends the city more deliberately embrace the Commons by intentionally focusing on activating higher levels of daily use. Flexible programming can create a vibrant place that people are drawn to. For example, signage will encourage walking and exploring by pedestrians, and activities will encourage more people to come to the Oxbow District via the trail. The Commons accommodates removable objects, which gives the opportunity for the city to display public art or structures that can be utilized by the public. In addition, there is an opportunity for the Oxbow District to provide outdoor activities. For example, the river does have a kayak launch, but it lacks signs that make it easy to find and is located farther south and not easily visible in the greater Oxbow District. By allowing people to gain access to the river through the Commons, not only will it act as a walkable destination and encourage foot traffic through the bypass from downtown, but it also will allow the river to serve as the center of the district.

An existing trail between downtown Napa and the Oxbow District is currently underused. There is a lack of signage, and many people are unaware the connection between the two areas exists.

The Oxbow Commons' current state: it has no structures or installed features besides landscaping for flood control.

More signage and resulting pedestrian traffic will bring people to the river where they can celebrate its history and enjoy this unique feature in the center of the city.

Case Study: JPL Mars Exploration Rover Naming

When the Jet Propulsion Laboratory was preparing for the Mars Exploration Rover 2012 launch into space, NASA invited schoolchildren to send in essays suggesting names for the rover and why the name was appropriate. Clara Ma was the 11-year-old girl who won, naming it Curiosity.

A similar contest could be held with Napa schoolskids, asking them to write essays naming the bypass trail. A group of judges could select the winner, and the whole town could celebrate this moment with a party, along with new signs pointing the way to this newly named trail.

(https://mashable.com/2012/11/16/clara-ma-curiosity-ro ver/#ssnBphrr.gqV)

In addition to proper signage, the trail and the Commons should be given a distinct and memorable name. The city should use the process of naming as a community event that creates more awareness of and excitement about the trail and brings greater buy-in. A successful example of this type of process was when the Jet Propulsion Laboratory developed the Mars rover. It held a competition and invited local schoolchildren to suggest a name for the rover. This created much more awareness of the project and a broad group of ambassadors who embraced the bigger idea. Napa has the opportunity to engage its local community and name this trail together.

Flexible programming involves daily, weekly and monthly gatherings with portable infrastructure, such as designated local food truck events, summer concerts, local art installations, and much more.

A few examples of how flexible programming can revitalize the community can be taken from "Off the Grid" at Fort Mason in San Francisco, which is a weekly event with local bands, mobile food trucks, picnic tables, and benches. Visitors and residents come from all over town to experience a night with what feels like their community. On Governor's Island in New York, residents meet biweekly to plan unconventional programming. The success of Governor's Island comes from utilizing the local residents' ideas and having them plan the experience for other residents and visitors.

An example of embracing and refreshing the Oxbow Commons. The panel recommends lining the bypass trail in the Commons with pumpkins for Halloween.

(Top left: https://kid101.com/category/things-to-do/san-francisco/page/8/; top right: https://www.bayarea.com/things-to-do/free-bay-area-earth-day-events/; bottom:: Harold Wong, to FivePoint

## Case Study: RAD Napa Radiates Ideas for the Commons

Rail Arts District (RAD) Napa is an abundant source of ideas for the Commons. This is an art movement that is transforming local businesses, community dialogue, old warehouses, forgotten walls, the scenic route, and the Wine Country through art. How might the Commons capture some of the magic that RAD Napa has created in its two-mile long outdoor art gallery? A collaborative team of everyday citizens + business leaders, and city officials + artists, makers, artisans, and visionaries joined up to give life to the Rail Arts District. Tap into this local success story and apply its collaborative approach to a community-engaged Commons plan. The genius is in its mix of participants and its ever-evolving process.

(https://www.radnapa.org/)

Case Study: Warby Parker Maps

When Warby Parker, a modern eyewear company, opens a new store in a new city, it creates a "Best Spots to Read a Book" map for that area. This map embraces the hidden gems known only to locals. Warby Parker has done this "localness mapping" around the country. A similar "Oxbow District to Downtown" map can help reveal all that this part of Napa has to offer. This map would be curated by locals and used by everyone.
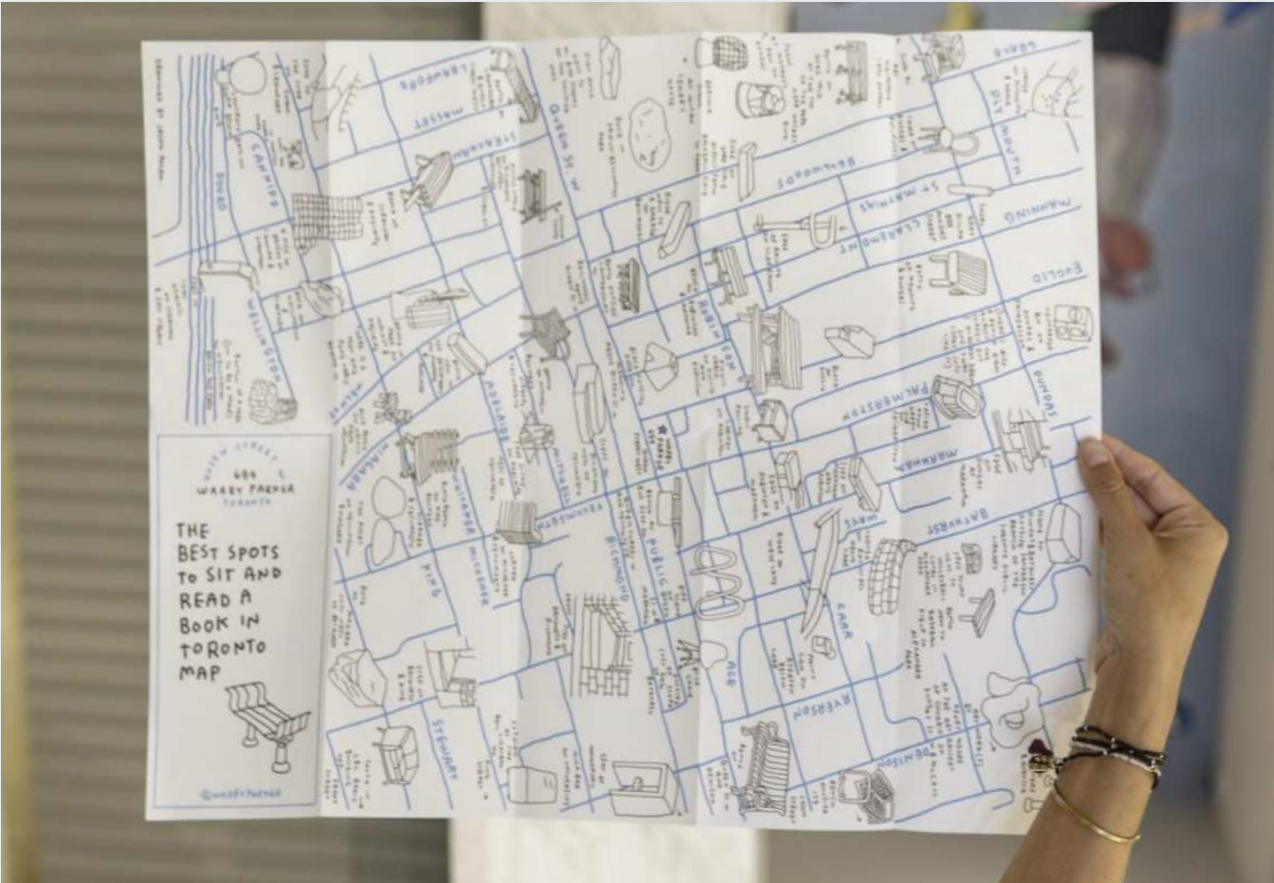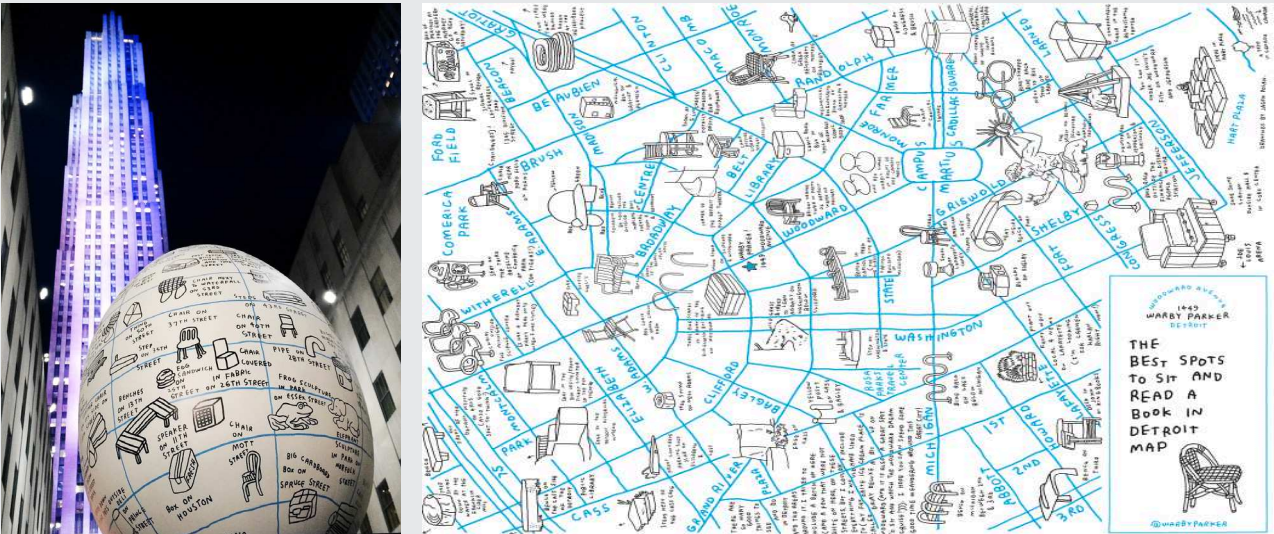
(Warby Parker & Jason Polan)

Recommendation 4: Enhance the Bridge

Napa's flood-control investment provides protection, economic stability, and an opportunity for the community. The First Street Bridge over the Napa Creek is 30 feet wide and 430 feet long, with 115-foot-long spans. This bridge connects downtown to the Oxbow District and is situated on the west of Soscol Avenue.

Historic First Street Bridge. This bridge has no benches or additional features that invite pedestrians to cross it.
(Historic American Engineering Record and TY Lin International. https://bridgehunter.com/ca/napa/first-street/)

The Oxbow District has benefited greatly from this investment in flood control. However, in order for the Oxbow District to achieve its full potential, strategies to make the district more accessible, walkable, and connected are needed. People expressed concern about crossing the bridge and Soscol Avenue from downtown, saying it is not comfortable to cross because it can be hot, it feels long, it offers no places for pedestrians to rest, and it feels generally uncomfortable due to its wide and exposed expanse.

Some employees in the Oxbow District are encouraged to park in areas west of the First Street Bridge, but the long walk makes people uncomfortable and apprehensive. To make the bridge a more welcoming feature and serve as something to experience, rather than just an expanse to traverse, design improvements to make it both an event and a link should be undertaken.

At the same time, the First Street Bridge offers a distinctive opportunity to promote the area's brand by embracing the river and making the bridge embody the Oxbow District's welcoming spirit toward innovation, entrepreneurship, and artists. That spirit can be showcased by transforming a concrete-and-steel structure into a walkable, hospitable, and convivial place that offers a memorable experience.

The bridge and Soscol Ave, facing downtown.

The achieve this, panel recommends the following strategies:

- **Install shade structures** to help protect people from strong midday sun. A shade structure can help create a more intimate space for pedestrians, making the large bridge appear to be of a more human scale.

- **Provide seating areas** to invite people to sit and take a break, stop to rest, and enjoy the views across the river.

- **Add greenery** by adding potted trees, shrubs, plants, or all these to soften the concrete structure and add color. Greenery provides natural cooling and a connection to the environment.

- **Use art** to make the bridge interesting and engaging. Art installations could be either temporary or permanent and can encourage the community to engage with the bridge. In addition, it would encourage pedestrians to walk instead of drive over the bridge. Programming the bridge for arts and culture could take different forms, from kinetic structures that add movement, to temporary chalk art, cultural performances, or rotating art displays. Pedestrians not only need to feel safe and comfortable while walking; they also want to be entertained.

- **Use lighting strategies** to make the bridge more welcoming at night. Lights can be used as interactive and engaging art installations. Programmable lighting can reflect the seasons (using holiday colors during the winter season) or acknowledge important events or efforts (Light It Up Blue for National Autism Awareness Month).

Examples of installations on bridges that enhance public beauty. The lights on the bridge draw people to walk through the installation and engage with the infrastructure. Adding more greenery makes the bridge more approachable and instills an environmental element to the bridge.

(Left image: http://maloufsrvtour.blogspot.com/2018/?_sm_au_=iVVnMSQF7JTFq4PP; right image: https://www.dezeen.com/2017/10/18/video-mvrdv-seoul-overpass-plant-covered-walkway-mini-living-movie/)

By implementing these strategies, the city can make the First Street Bridge a welcoming, engaging, and walkable destination and create a robust connection between the historic downtown and the Oxbow District. To manage the district's future parking needs, satellite parking throughout the greater downtown may be necessary; therefore, the proposed bridge improvements should not be treated as aesthetic enhancements but rather as part of downtown's parking management, placemaking, and development strategies.
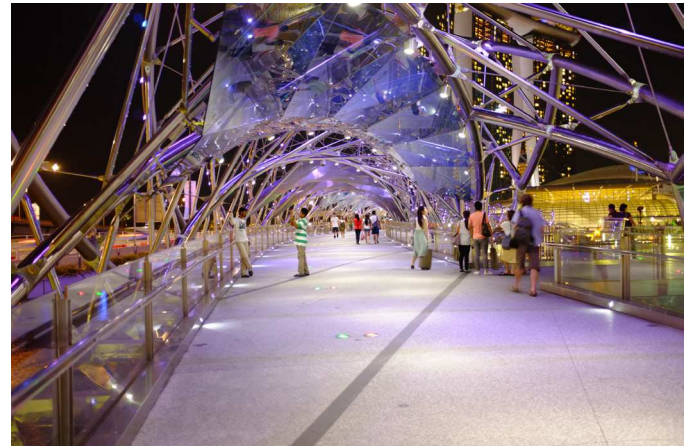
> *"Walkability is the cornerstone and key to an urban area's efficient ground transportation. Every trip begins and ends with walking. Walking remains the cheapest form of transport for all people, and the construction of a walkable community provides the most affordable transportation system any community can plan, design, construct and maintain. Walkable communities put urban environments back on a scale for sustainability of resources (both natural and economic) and lead to more social interaction, physical fitness and diminished crime and other social problems. Walkable communities are more livable communities and lead to whole, happy, healthy lives for the people who live in them."*
>
> —Dan Burden, Walkable Communities Inc. (www.walkable.org)

Singapore's Double Helix Bridge serves as a perfect example of how installations on bridges can attract locals and visitors.
(http://www.worldfortravel.com/2014/06/15/the-double-helix-bridge-marina-bay-singapore/)

Recommendation 5: Demand More from Developers

Napa has a history of clear examples of excellence. New development in the community should build on the "best of Napa" and be guided by a vision plan. A clear plan signals what is expected of developers. Developers that carry out the vision should be welcomed by the city and moved to the front of the line, minimizing expensive delays while ensuring excellence.

The panel recommends that the city elevate its role in ensuring high-quality development and demand excellence from those who want to develop in the city. To guide future investment and development, Napa should create a principle-driven vision plan, working with the stakeholders and leadership in the community. These stakeholders and leaders should become champions of the plan.

In addition, the city should continue seeking to augment staff by retaining design and development professionals to work with city staff to assist developers on individual projects. This process, anchored in the vision plan, will help ensure that new development is consistent with the Oxbow District brand.

By clearly articulating the community vision in writing, and explaining the plan and public realm requirements as part of the plan, the city can ensure that new development extends the best of Napa by taking the guesswork out of the what the city wants from developers, and what staff should be requiring when new development proposals are being viewed at the pre-application stage. Some of the defining qualities that should be clearly articulated are human-scaled development with an emphasis on active ground floors and permeable edges, a mix of uses, interesting frontages, and integrated pedestrian and bicycle networks.

The city vision and adherence to that vision will support the Oxbow District brand and foster a win/win relationship with developers from the beginning of the design process. Among the ways this can be promoted is to do the following:

- Remind developers that the plan plays a key role in the economic success of the Oxbow District;
- Remind developers that their projects need to contribute to the larger vision;
- Explain to developers that a high-quality public realm surrounding their projects increases real estate value; and
- Ensure that developers follow the vision plan in the district, including in scale and uses.

Case Study: St. Paul on the Mississippi

St. Paul, Minnesota, started with a clear principle based on a vision, illustrated in the "Saint Paul on the Mississippi" plan. The plan was backed by the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation (SPRC), which had a board made up of the CEOs of major companies and other key leaders. The SPRC hosted a design center staffed by top design and development experts to introduce and promote the plan and work with individual project teams to help ensure that their projects complied with the plan. Projects deemed to conform with the plan were allowed to skip planning commission review.

(https://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View4/73779.pdf)
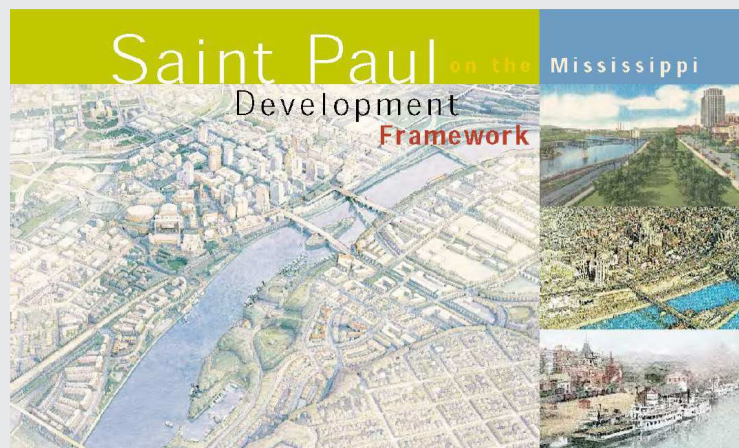
Recommendation 6: Leverage City Land

As the county seat, the city of Napa is uniquely positioned to work with its sister government agencies to collaborate and capitalize on land and building assets in the greater downtown. This partnership should catalyze and support the kinds of development that will reinforce the District's vision and brand, and the downtown at large. Such properties can also help fulfill programmatic city needs such as affordable and market-rate housing, and parking (interim or long term), and provide public space for residents and visitors that enhance the public-realm experience that is core to the panel's recommendations.

A joint exploration of opportunities with the County and other agencies could assess the highest and best use of public assets and identify creative solutions, such as co-location of staff and functions. The city and county share an interest, and will benefit from, promoting the Oxbow and the ongoing renaissance of downtown. Exploring land exchanges and public private partnerships or other methods of key site reuse can generate new sources of funding for adjacent developments, infrastructure, and other improvements. For example, the Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District building on First Street, which sits at the gateway to the Oxbow District, could be better leveraged to enhance the gateway to the District, while strengthening the connection between Oxbow and downtown.

The Oxbow District can utilize the City land to provide opportunities for programming.

Recommendation 7: Facilitate Evolution

As noted, the Oxbow District has a reputation as a maker's place. Napa has many local artists who help build the Oxbow District's creative culture. The economic development value of using small and independent businesses and encouraging entrepreneurship can enhance the Oxbow District's brand, not only as a destination and place for visitors, but also as an entrepreneur's haven—if the right tools of encouragement are deployed. The panel believes that the Oxbow District has an opportunity to experiment and use key sites by encouraging artists and local craftspeople to take advantage of the space. This initiative would have a ripple effect that supports other local businesses because it would provide a broad representation of people in that area.

An example of this type of initiative is creating a community residency program or creating other partnerships that encourage creativity among residents.

One example is Brookland at the Monroe Street Market in Washington, D.C. This project facilitated the evolution of an underdeveloped and underinvested part of the city by bringing mixed uses of housing, retail, and the arts together at the edge of Catholic University's campus. The minimalist branding name recalls the neighborhood's historic name, but brings it back as a brand through its bold display on the new building, while recalling a more industrial, warehouse-like appearance. On the ground floor of the apartment building are a number of front-facing studios for artists and a marketplace for their work. The surrounding district has evolved through a citywide creative initiative in which local nonprofit organizations leverage artists in the city and provide them with a space to create art. In order to have access to a studio, the artists must display and sell their work daily. This initiative has broken down this large building to a human scale at the street level, while also supporting the maker's economy and designated place brand of this area.

Case Study: Brookland at the Monroe Street Market

At Brookland at the Monroe Street Market in Washington, D.C., the brand is written on the minimalist building, advertising the district in lettering visible from the nearby Metro station. On the ground floor of the building are studios open daily to allow people to observe artists and shop. Arts initiatives like this brand the district as local and a maker's place.

(Left image: http://www.dcareahouses.com/neighborhood/Brookland; right image: http://www.eastcityart.com/workshops-and-classes/meet-the-maker-events-at-stitch-and-rivet-in-brookland/)

Another example is the Motor City Match in Detroit, where the city, in conjunction with the local nonprofit community, linked two large problems faced by the community in the recent decades—empty buildings and struggling business owners. Foundations help provide seed money for business planning, and a once-per-quarter call for proposals, which helps budding entrepreneurs gain access to help with business plans, marketing assistance, and mentoring. With a cadre of new business owners with business plans, Motor City Match then went on to match building owners with empty storefronts with people who wanted space to launch their business. This type of initiative starts to nurture and catalyze neighborhoods and ultimately contributes to place branding through its efforts and the development of unique, local businesses. This experimental program, now in its third year, continues its success, leveraging more than $33 million in investments, contributing to the use of 2.9 million square feet of space, and serving more than 957 businesses.

Napa's journey for growth is ever evolving and changing, and should be an effort the city continuously pursues for the Oxbow District.

Facilitate Evolution: Motor City Match in Detroit

Motor City match is a prime example of facilitating evolution through initiatives revitalizing the city's brand. The City connected two large issues the community faced in the recent decades – empty buildings and struggling business owners. Foundations in the city set up a match program for building owners with empty storefronts with business owners who wanted a discounted space to launch their businesses. The program ended up being a remarkable success, leveraging over $33 million to serve over 957 businesses.

GUADALAJARA #2, INC.

1630 Lawndale
$50,000 Grant Winner

A butcher shop known for its Mexican-cut steaks its original family recipe chorizo. The business was previously located in a small space inside a convenience store and is now expanding into a full-service operation.

$500,000
EACH QUARTER
IN GRANTS TO BUSINESS & BUILDING OWNERS

MOTORCITYMATCH
DETROIT'S BUSINESS CHALLENGE

(Prosperus Double)

Case Study: Rainey Street in Austin

Rainey Street, located a few blocks from the Colorado River in Austin, Texas, originally was given little attention—almost like an alleyway, sitting between a few houses. Several entrepreneurs started assembling and adaptively reusing the old houses, turning them into restaurants and small businesses, and installing picnic tables and lights for patrons. It grew organically through word of mouth and created a place brand on its own. Today, the street has grown into its own unique district and spurred housing developments, and is one of the most frequently visited areas in Austin.

(https://lostinaustin.org/best-rainey-street-bars/)

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Implementation

Through its research and recommendations, the panel came up with a number of immediate actions that Napa can take to begin managing the Oxbow District's brand.

Review	**Look at all the designs for new developments currently in the pipeline.** Work to create a larger composition of how they will fit together and support the panel's recommendations for a walkable public realm and connected place. It is important to not just look at individual projects and whether each adheres to guidelines, but rather to put the projects together and determine whether they stand harmoniously and are able to represent the brand and vision the city wants for the Oxbow District.	**Understand the Oxbow District and the current buildings within it.** Complete an inventory of existing buildings to identify which buildings contribute to the area's unique character, and what resources and building materials should be reused or repurposed to maintain the Oxbow District's brand and historic story.
Establish	**Establish what the Oxbow should be.** Write and share a final vision plan for Oxbow district for what Oxbow should be, starting with the Stakeholder Sounding Board Session. By articulating a complete vision, the foundation for new development is established and will make communication with current stakeholders and developers more significant.	**Complete the Public Life Action Plan and the Public Realm Framework.** These are needed to provide the elements new development must respond to and respect, and then provide the glue that will knit all new projects together over time.
Branding & Programming	**Tackle the programming and promotion of the district.** The city should begin planning and adding functionalities and frequent programming in its open spaces, such as the Oxbow Commons and bridges.	

The Oxbow District is a unique part of the City of Napa's identity, with its rich history and unique features.

About the Panel

TAP panelists (left to right):
Back: Blaine Merker, David Israel, Michael Lander, Jim Heid
Front: Natalie Sandoval, Elizabeth Shreeve, Sandra Kulli, Edith Ramirez, Carrie Huang

Jim Heid, FASLA

**UrbanGreen® Advisors
CRAFT Development
Healdsburg, CA**

Heid is a strategic real estate advisor and developer focused on the tools and techniques that lead to a more sustainable built environment. Since 2000, his consultancy UrbanGreen® has advised government agencies, real estate companies and legacy landowners on the criteria and approaches for building more sustainable communities. With a desire to move from advising to doing, in 2017 Heid founded CRAFT, a real estate development company focused on incremental development and place building. A resident of Healdsburg, California, Heid's is currently developing an infill residential cottage court project, and a new co-working space, as well as providing advisory services to a wide range of developers and cities throughout California.

An active member of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), he has authored numerous publications, chaired Panel Advisory Service programs and speaks regularly on sustainable design, resilience, and the value of small scale, incremental development. He helped found ULI's Real Estate Entrepreneurs program, and serves as the lead instructor for the Small Scale Developers Forum - semi-annual tours that look at innovative approaches to incremental development in a new city each time. Lessons learned from the tours, and the practical tools needed to expand the role of small scale development will be the focus of his forthcoming book – Building Small: A Handbook for Real Estate Entrepreneurs, Civic Leaders and Great Communities.

Trained as a landscape architect at University of Idaho, Heid went on to receive a Masters in Real Estate Development from MIT as a way to more effectively integrate economics, development and design thinking.

Carrie Huang
TAP Writer/Report Designer, Strategic Planner, AECOM

Huang is a strategic planner working in the Asset Advisory Group at AECOM. She has experience working with private, local, and regional governments on establishing asset management strategies and plans, and aiding in implementation of such programs. Many of these projects involve using the group's asset management and inventory collection app and platform, which Huang manages on a daily basis. Her professional skills lie in data collection and analysis, as well as GIS.

Huang is a graduate of University of California, Berkeley, with degrees in urban planning and GIS.

David Israel
Principal, BAR Architects

Having developed his interest in architecture during his early years in high school, Israel has come to embrace the notion that creating meaningful architecture is a process involving patience. He feels strongly that truly successful projects explore the broadest range of alternatives and that ultimately buildings must go beyond meeting program and budgetary requirements by adding value and being welcome additions to communities.

A proponent of developing livable and sustainable communities, Israel encourages increased density in the urban core and projects sited adjacent to mass transit. A LEED-accredited professional, Israel is an active member of ULI and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), and served previously as a board member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), San Francisco and the AIA California Council. He shares his knowledge in a variety of forums, workshops, and volunteer efforts. Israel has provided his expertise in the revitalization efforts of the Mid-Market neighborhood, serving on the technical assistance panel for ULI San Francisco, as well as working on the housing committee of SPUR supporting policies that seek an increase in funding for affordable housing within market-rate projects.

Sandra Kulli, Explorer. Pollinator. Cheerleader

Kulli consults with residential builders, master-planned communities, and mixed-use developers on marketing strategy, working with more than 100 companies on 193 communities with a sales volume exceeding $5 billion throughout the United States and in Japan, Dubai, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Mexico. From greenfield development to adaptive use, Kulli is passionate about collaboration with great teams.

Kulli has served on a number of ULI Advisory Services panels, including the Memphis riverfront development and Ardmore, Pennsylvania, panels. She was chair of the Sears/Boyle Heights technical assistance panel. She participated in the ULI teams that wrote Ten Principles for Successful Development Around Transit, Ten Principles for Rethinking the Mall, and Ten Principles for Building Healthy Places.

A graduate of Wellesley College and recipient of a master's degree from Boston University, Kulli taught in inner-city schools for seven years, then worked as a real estate agent and marketing chief for a large homebuilder before starting her own company. She is an ardent city bike rider and traveler and remains endlessly curious about how people can create ever-better communities.

Michael Lander
Owner, Lander Group

Lander is a real estate developer and broker, urban planner, speaker, new urbanism advocate, and expert on smart growth and transportation policy. As founder and president of Lander Group, he leads the planning, design, and development of commercial, residential, and mixed-use developments. Lander's work is known for creating thriving urban spaces incorporating new urbanist principles, high-quality design and construction, and a commitment to the public realm.

For Lander Group and as partner in urban planning firm Town Planning Collaborative, Lander has held lead planning roles for many major new urban developments over the past two decades. In the Twin Cities, he helped create the award-winning plan for Excelsior & Grand, St. Louis Park's new town center, and the Sears redevelopment, and led an acclaimed design charrette for Minneapolis's Uptown district.

Lander's commitment to high-quality urban development include active roles as a member of ULI, the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), the Minnesota chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the Steering Committee of LOCUS, a national smart growth real estate group working to reform federal and state transportation policy. He has served on juries and Advisory Services panels for ULI, and on jury panels for the Minneapolis AIA and CNU. He speaks regularly to local, state, and national industry groups and is a guest lecturer at the University of Minnesota, St. Thomas University, Macalester College, the University of Miami, and Harvard University.

Blaine Merker
Partner and Managing Director, United States, Gehl

Merker is an urban designer inspired by the challenge of making cities that support human happiness, equity, health and connectedness. As managing director, United States, of Gehl, he manages the San Francisco and New York offices and directs fine-grained, catalytic projects that steer cities and organizations toward sustainability, creativity, and long-term value creation. Merker is a seasoned listener and facilitator, engaging communities, governments, developers, academics, and cultural institutions in cross-disciplinary collaboration. Before joining Gehl, he led Rebar Art and Design Studio. He is a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, College of Environmental Design, where he earned his master's degree.

Edith Ramirez
Economic Development Director,
City of Morgan Hill, California

Ramirez has over 20 years of community, business, and local government experience. She helps communities expand their economies, collaborating with businesses and generating or growing strategies to help create places where people want to work, live, and play.

Ramirez started her career in local government as a policy adviser and community relations manager for a San Jose City Council district of 100,000 residents, 14 neighborhood associations, and three business districts. She spent 11 years with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency supporting downtown development, project management, and industrial development. Her experience at the redevelopment agency ranged from developing policies and regulations for the nighttime economy to retail attraction and management of the largest business park in the city, home to more than 45 million square feet of business and many of the largest tech giants in Silicon Valley.

For the past six years, Ramirez has sheparded the visioning and subsequent development of the city of Morgan Hill comprehensive economic development program to attract investment, leverage resources, create partnerships, and raise awareness of the Economic Development platform. Through skilled facilitation and the art of building community consensus, Ramirez has been a leader in the downtown renaissance that includes a downtown placemaking investment strategy of $25 million leveraging over $100 million of private investment in four years. In addition, she championed an economic blueprint that will anchor the city's land use and investment decisions to achieve economic prosperity and fiscal sustainability.

Ramirez is active with the Silicon Valley Economic Development Alliance and most recently led the first regional economic development symposium curated by economic development professionals. She is active with ULI and the International Council of Shopping Centers, and is a regular member of discussions regarding community placemaking, revitalization of downtowns, and retail, sports, recreation, and leisure attraction strategies.

Elizabeth Shreeve
Principal, SWA Group

Shreeve is an urban planner and designer with more than 32 years of experience in land use, landscape architecture, and site restoration. As planning leader in SWA's San Francisco and Sausalito studios, she focuses on urban infill and revitalization, campus planning, public outreach, and communications. Shreeve works closely with multidisciplinary teams and public and private clients to translate physical, economic, and cultural factors into enduring physical designs and policy strategies that emphasize health, wellness, and sustainable practices.

An active member of ULI, Shreeve is chair of ULI's Sustainable Development Council. She contributed to ULI's Building Healthy Places Toolkit and has written numerous professional articles, including "Open Spaces and Active Transportation" for Urban Land magazine. Her speaking engagements for ULI, the American Society of Landscape Architects, Yale University, the U.S. Green Building Council, Housing California, and the American Planning Association address best practices for achieving health, resilience, and sustainable outcomes through design of urban environments.

ULI San Francisco
1 California Street, Suite 2500
San Francisco, CA 94111
(628) 231-2197
ULISanFrancisco@uli.org
www.sf.uli.org
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