

## Partnerships: The Critical Element For Downtown Success

Have you ever wondered why some downtowns seem to be constantly having boom and bust cycles that push the occupancy and activity levels up for a while only to see them plunge dramatically the following year? Sure, national and local economies have something to do with such cycles of prosperity and decline. But normal market corrections and run-ups are not the total reason. How some downtown's are structured or positioned to face or deal with such broader market influences while still advancing the desired objective(s) is one of the major defining differences.

Are the downtown stakeholders, not just the City, actively working together to accomplish something greater than any of the individual property owners, business owners, or residents could obtain on their own? Are multiple parties, both public and private, actively pursuing a shared vision and acting collectively to obtain it? In short, are there multiple partnerships in place to share responsibilities for creating a desired change; and are those partnerships functioning in meaningful ways to share the workloads, pool resources, and, through their coordinated actions, increase the likelihood of the desired result(s)?

Most people know what partnerships are and how such organizational structures are supposed to function. In most instances, partnerships help the individual "partners" (comprising the partnership) save costs, increase delivery of the proposed service, product, or action, and increase visibility for the now larger entity working together. For partnerships to produce the customary and expected results, all such unions must share mutual respect, trust, resources, and, most importantly, a common vision or interest that the partners want to advance or improve.

While Downtown Pensacola and most of its businesses have not been immune to the impacts of the national recession, we have fared better than many in terms of economic consequences from the broader downturn. It remains my belief that this is because of the long history of collaboration via partnerships that has been employed downtown to advance common objectives. Even as far back as the early 1970's, downtown property owners and local government worked together to convince the state legislature to create an equitable framework and delivery vehicle (i.e. the DIB) for addressing the need to attract additional investment, businesses, and residents back to downtown. More recently, we have seen additional partnerships between public entities and multiple private concerns to present the Palafox Market on N. Palafox Street. The creation and operation of the Downtown Parking Management District is in itself a multi-layer partnership between four governmental entities following a strategy developed and promoted by the private downtown stakeholders. The influx of tourists into our historic downtown in recent years has at its roots the marketing partnerships between the DIB and the Pensacola Bay Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Perdido Key Chamber of Commerce, and the Florida Black Chamber of Commerce.

Almost all of the special events and festivals that occur in the downtown are examples of individuals, groups, businesses, and government working together to accomplish something

that they could not have achieved, or not achieved as well, on their own. The types of civic partnerships that we so frequently employ downtown to address common problems, seize opportunities, or turn visions into reality are definitive of why our local economy and quality of life is not significantly rattled by events occurring nationally or globally. It has become common place for those that operate a business, or own property, or live in downtown to maximize and pool resources to produce economies of scale and prohibit duplication or disjointedness when pursuing a desired outcome. Such “ownership” and commitment to the desired outcome would not be possible if just the City or a single benevolent corporation made all the decisions and executed all of the grand plans.

Because the businesses, residents, and governments here understand the value of collaboration and the sharing of responsibility, much has been achieved and much good work has been able to stay the course even when the world around us has been shaken. How fortunate we are that we understand, and have understood for such a long time, the value and benefit of such shared actions. Downtown Pensacola is a much better place because of it.

Franklin D. Kimbrough  
Executive Director  
Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board