

Houston, Texas The Energy Corridor

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

April 30–May 5, 2023



COVER: A bird's-eye view of the Houston Energy Corridor. (ULI)

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Houston, Texas

The Future Energy Corridor District

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

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Urban Land Institute
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uli.org

About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in 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 84 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2022 alone, more than 2,800 events were held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAM is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day Advisory Services panel (ASP) is tailored to meet a sponsor's needs. ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's ASP assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this ASP report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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ULI also thanks the more than 75 stakeholders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel, including public officials, property owners, developers, business representatives, economic leaders, and community members.



energy
corridor™

Contents

2

ULI Panel and Project Staff

18

Branding and Events

3

Executive Summary

20

Economic Vitality

5

**Background and Panel
Assignment**

24

**Organizational Strategies
and Approaches**

8

Place: A Connected Community

28

Conclusion

11

Nodes and Networks

29

**Appendix: 10 Best Practices in
Creative Placemaking**

15

Identity through Placemaking

30

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Executive Summary

HOUSTON'S ENERGY CORRIDOR (or the Corridor) and the endeavors of its improvement district, the Energy Corridor District (ECD, or the District), to create a more vibrant, livable, and sustainable community are impressive. The ECD, a state-enabled improvement district for the Energy Corridor, focuses on placemaking and branding efforts as well as engaging with local partners and businesses on long-term projects in the Corridor. Its mission is, in part, to “promote, develop, maintain, and enhance the Energy Corridor District through implementation of projects, services, and initiatives in the realm of public safety, transportation and mobility, infrastructure, streetscape, and economic development.” The ECD’s five core services focus on (1) advocacy, leadership, economic development, and marketing; (2) beautification and maintenance; (3) planning, identity, and placemaking; (4) public safety and security; and (5) transportation and mobility. Since 2001, the ECD has created a remarkable foundation on which to build. It will be important for the ECD to carry this momentum forward to continue to create scalable and visible long-term change in the Corridor.

The energy industry is undergoing a major transformation and the District can position itself as a leader in this new era. This effort requires judiciously supplementing its existing scope, while remaining focused on its existing mandates and initiatives. The ECD has an opportunity to expand the public’s understanding of energy through efforts such as storytelling, linking energy’s present and future through programming and investment, and showing and telling what the future of energy looks like.

The confluence of its place-based mission, private-sector partners, and focus on energy makes the ECD uniquely positioned to demonstrate implementation of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. This rests, however, on the ECD being big, bold, and credible. The ECD should leverage its assets, execute a mind-set shift on funding and partnerships, and use these to generate investment options and opportunities. With these steps, the ECD can position the Corridor as a leader in the energy industry and help shape the future of energy in Houston and beyond.

Four Themes

The panel's recommendations fall under four themes: place, identity, economic vitality, and organization.

- **Place:** The Houston Energy Corridor is home to multiple major energy companies and other businesses. Office buildings dominate the built environment, but there are also parks, trails, and other amenities. The ECD and its partners should focus on creating a more walkable and bikeable community and on connecting the Energy Corridor to nodes and networks in the area.
- **Identity:** The Energy Corridor is known for its energy industry, but it is also home to a diverse population of residents and workers. The ECD and its partners should work to create a sense of place that is unique and appealing to its diverse stakeholders through placemaking, branding, programming, and public space activation.
- **Economic vitality:** The Energy Corridor is a major economic engine for Houston and is home to many high-paying jobs. The ECD and its partners should focus on attracting and retaining businesses and jobs through both traditional economic development endeavors and the priorities and inclinations of today's diverse workforce.
- **Organization:** The Energy Corridor is a multifaceted community that requires strong leadership and coordination. The ECD and its partners should work with a variety of stakeholders, including government officials, businesses, and community members, to develop and implement plans that further the positive development of the Energy Corridor. The ECD must responsibly and strategically use its limited resources to catalyze partnership-led change.



Background and Panel Assignment

THE HOUSTON ENERGY CORRIDOR is a business district located on the west side of Houston between Beltway 8 and the Grand Parkway. It is home to the headquarters and regional offices of many of the world's largest energy companies, as well as a variety of other businesses. The Houston Energy Corridor District is an improvement district created by the Texas Legislature in 2001. The District is responsible for promoting, developing, maintaining, and enhancing the Energy Corridor through public safety, transportation, infrastructure, and economic development.

The ECD asked ULI to convene an Advisory Services panel to consider multiple aspects of its work in the Energy Corridor. As the corporate home to many of the world's traditional oil and gas corporations, the ECD is reimagining itself as a place for highlighting, promoting, and showcasing the importance of energy in placemaking.

Today, the Energy Corridor is one of Houston's premier business districts, accounting for more than 67,000 jobs and growing according to a recent economic study. Over the next decade, the region is expected to transform into a destination with a more balanced mix of jobs, residents, and visitors. This change will coincide with the low-carbon transition occurring in the energy

industry, and the District is uniquely positioned at the confluence of these two fundamental restructurings—the evolution of business districts into mixed-use places, and the energy industry's mission to achieve net zero carbon.

The Energy Corridor has five key assets: commercial office space, global energy giants, control of public rights-of-way, centrality, and a unique mix of public and private relationships. The ULI Advisory Services panel was asked to help the District create a road map to identify how to use its position to create a resilient, economically thriving place. The timeline and recommendations in the road map will serve as a set of actions that will inform the District's Service Plan.

Panel Assignment

Specifically, the ECD identified the following questions for the panel to address:

- What role does the sponsor play in the transformation of the district over the next decade?
 - What can the ECD do to leverage and build off its unique positioning to define the role of place management and economic development organization to advance the energy transition?
 - How can the ECD use its advancement of ESG principles, resiliency, and sustainability through placemaking and infrastructure as an economic development tool for recruiting and retaining businesses?
 - How can the ECD (as a quasi–public/private partnership) influence the redevelopment of older office buildings and low-rise commercial centers, and the development of vacant land, especially in Houston with its unique land use regulations?
- How can the ECD prioritize ESG principles and move toward a net zero future, while influencing the future district as part of the transformation?

The ECD, through agreements with the city of Houston, controls significant amounts of public rights-of-way and wants to showcase how energy-related innovations can be implemented to improve the look, feel, and efficiency of the public realm.

- What small-scale innovations can the ECD implement to showcase energy (or the reduction of energy use) in a net zero world? (Examples include adaptive use of old energy equipment, such as old windmills into public art; solar panels on bus shelters and pedestrian lights; and green roofs and parking garages.)

Many, if not all, of the district’s class A office spaces are certified under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program or have similar designations.

- As older buildings undergo renovations or conversions, how can the ECD, through existing or future mechanisms, support the implementation of tools that reduce emissions?

- How might the ECD implement existing plans for the Corridor in alignment with its ESG goals?

The ECD has recently completed several plans on transportation, streetscapes, and transit-oriented development, all designed to increase a mix of uses and walkability in the Energy Corridor.

- What projects should be prioritized, and what are the potential processes for implementing these projects?

- What are strategies for financing these plans?

The district’s transformation from a business district into a mixed-use destination requires significant investment.

- What public and private funding opportunities are available for advancing placemaking, transportation, and other infrastructure projects?

- Which funding opportunities are most viable for identified, implementable projects?

Setting the Scene

Houston is a growing city poised for rapid economic, population, and urban space expansion. The city’s population has grown by more than 20 percent in the past decade, the unemployment rate is below the national average, and the median household income is above the national average. Several factors contribute to Houston’s economic growth. The city’s low cost of living and low-tax environment are major draws for businesses and individuals. Houston is also a major center for international trade, and its central location in the United States makes it an ideal location for businesses of all sizes.

The Houston Energy Corridor is home to several Fortune 500 companies, boasts many high-paying jobs, and is a major center for energy innovation. The Energy Corridor has had tremendous success attracting new startups, established energy companies, and the renewable energy sector.

The Energy Corridor enjoys a strong competitive position with a high quality of life. It is a center of the region’s continued westward population and development growth along Interstate 10. The Corridor has a deep engineering talent pool, shorter commute times, and competitively priced class A office space compared with other office-heavy areas within Houston. It also has a variety of cultural and recreational amenities and abundant parks and open spaces, and it is close to several high-quality schools and hospitals.

However, the Energy Corridor also faces challenges; some are not unique to the Corridor but are challenges nonetheless. Traffic congestion, constrained mobility options, insufficient housing to accommodate employment growth, and unconnected sidewalks, paths, and trails all reduce the livability of the area and the ability of people to move across it. A lack of community gathering places, fragmented development patterns, and functionally obsolete or vacant commercial space hinder the region's ability to live up to its full potential. Together, they are challenges that constrain the Energy Corridor's ability to grow and prosper.

The ECD plays a key role as a change agent. It is a key stakeholder, partner, convener, and enabler. It is working to address challenges by investing in comprehensive mobility plans to connect trails, improve intersection safety, and enhance walkability, cycling, and

connectivity. The ECD has also recently invested heavily in gateway placemaking designs for implementation; completed its design standards and streetscape guidelines; convened stakeholders to facilitate information sharing and promote the vision of the District; advocated and regularly engaged with elected officials, public agencies, etc.; developed a master plan for a destination park; and rebranded the organization district. Likewise, the ECD is supporting the arts and culture, investing in commuter service and public transit, programming community gathering spaces, and encouraging environmental sustainability. These efforts will help the Houston Energy Corridor become a more vibrant, livable, and sustainable community. The panel hopes that its recommendations support, encourage, complement, and strengthen the ECD's existing work.



Place: A Connected Community

ECONOMIC VITALITY, strong office leasing, and vehicular access are all strengths of the Energy Corridor. However, it faces several challenges, such as traffic congestion, unmet housing demand, and limited mobility options. The panel believes that with its strong location advantage, the ECD can be a change agent and turn these challenges into opportunities by investing in nodes and networks.

Nodes are specific places that can be used to bring people together, such as parks, schools, and transit stations. Networks are transportation systems that connect people to these nodes, such as streets, sidewalks, and bike paths. By investing in nodes and networks, the ECD can create a more connected community. This will make the Corridor more attractive to businesses and residents, and will help it grow and prosper.

High-level takeaways, followed by more detailed analysis, on specific nodes on which the ECD must focus include the following:

- **Addicks Park & Ride.** This major transit hub provides easy access to the Energy Corridor for residents and workers. It is also the subject of upcoming redevelopment efforts that will transform Addicks from an underused depot to a destination. The panel recommends that the ECD continue to engage with Metro as a partner in the planning process. This includes contributing input to Metro's anticipated

request for proposals (RFP) for redevelopment. The ECD should encourage a high-density mix of residential, retail, entertainment, and cultural uses, with open space at Addicks.

- **Langham Park.** The ECD should complete the development of Langham Park, a large, undeveloped, federally owned parcel located north of Terry Hershey Park. This would make the area a more attractive destination for people who want to enjoy the outdoors. The panel understands the ECD is concerned about the impact of potential future flood events or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decisions on any park improvements. Therefore, the panel recommends that the ECD start with a less complex and less capital-intensive plan for this park. This "lighter, quicker, cheaper" approach will help bring the benefits of space activation while mitigating potential risks to sunk capital in the event of future changes that might be required by future flooding or extreme weather events.

- **Watermark District.** The panel believes Midway will do a fantastic job repositioning the former Conoco headquarters into a mixed-use development that will include office, retail, and residential space. However, the panel also recommends that the ECD look for opportunities that might bring more of the community together there. For example, the ECD could partner with the Energy Corridor of Houston Orchestra (ECHO) to have performances in the Watermark District. Such a node would help draw more and different groups of workers, residents, and visitors to this new asset, diversifying and densifying the Corridor’s amenities.
- **Grisby Square.** This vibrant area provides a gathering place for the community. The ECD should partner with existing owners of vacant property to add open space for casual gatherings and community events. They should allow for this node to develop organically while maintaining its current character as an eclectic, walkable dining and entertainment destination.

The ECD must also focus on and invest in networks. The panel recognizes that Park Row and closing trail gaps are initiatives that the ECD has identified in the District’s design standards, streetscape guidelines, and the Mobility Action Plan, as well as a recently awarded and significant grant. To wit, the ECD must continue focusing on the following:

- **Park Row.** This street must be designed as a “complete street” to make it more pedestrian and bike friendly, encouraging it to be both more attractive for development and more accessible to non-car modes and users of all abilities.
- **Closing trail gaps.** A bike and pedestrian commuter trail system will provide safe and convenient ways for people to get around the Energy Corridor without a car, for commuting, recreation, and exercise. It will also increase nearby property values and accelerate place-based programming successes by enhancing and diversifying car-free access.
- **Districtwide green infrastructure plan.** Consistent with the District’s commitment to sustainability, this would help reduce flooding, improve air quality, and manage stormwater runoff. Green infrastructure improvements could help protect Buffalo Bayou, which traverses the Corridor and is the only waterway connecting west Houston with the Gulf of Mexico.

A focus on nodes and networks is designed to create a more connected, resilient, and sustainable community. By investing in these assets, the ECD is setting the foundation for its other long-term initiatives and goals.

Leading with Multifamily

With a strong economy, a growing population, and a commitment to sustainability, the Houston Energy Corridor is a prime location for investment. The panel believes that a focus on nodes and networks will create a more attractive and vibrant community, which will in turn attract more businesses and residents.

The panel is aware of the unique challenges faced by the Energy Corridor given its location between and in close proximity to two massive reservoirs. This location affects varied aspects such as travel time, population size, and commercial proximity, which are all traditional metrics in market analysis for real estate development, investment, and commercial positioning—especially in the commercial and retail sectors. These challenges are not impossible to overcome. The panel recommends the following active efforts for the ECD and its partners to ameliorate a difficult structural situation.

The panel believes the Corridor can revitalize itself by first starting to develop a more robust mixed-use environment. The panel recommends the ECD lead with multifamily development, both redevelopment and new construction. The panel also recommends that the ECD work with institutional investors who own struggling assets in the district to reposition or trade these to developers who can make them more viable.

Notwithstanding the structural challenges posed by the reservoirs to the market analysis metrics mentioned above, the panel knows that more residents will lead to more retail, hospitality, and other amenities. Thus, it is imperative to start with residential development. These amenities, along with abundant open space, will create opportunities for group retreats; large, programmed events; and institutional gatherings. The panel believes this nexus of open space and amenities will create opportunities for those within the Corridor and make it a destination point for those in the Greater Houston area.

The following road map will help create a more robust mixed-use environment:

- **Lead with multifamily development.** The ECD should focus on attracting multifamily housing development to the region as a first priority. Multifamily housing will help drive the evolution of a more vibrant and walkable community and provide housing options for current and future residents and potential area employees.
- **Encourage ground-up and conversion development.** The ECD should encourage ground-up and conversion development, especially development that aligns with the District’s focus on mobility and sustainability. Ground-up

development will create new housing stock, while converting office to residential or lab space will revitalize existing properties.

- **Identify financing.** The ECD should collaborate with developers and building owners to identify and secure tax abatements, rebates, and other local, state, or federal incentives to reposition or repurpose obsolete buildings and blank space. To do so, the ECD needs to secure a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)—the panel recognizes the limited ability of the ECD to accomplish this work without a TIRZ. Likewise, the ECD’s work with a capital improvement and financing plan for Corridor infrastructure will help make private development and investment more attractive and feasible when these projects are funded or delivered.
- **Promote retail development.** More residents will support more retail. This is the biggest argument for commercial investment and development in the area; it overrides the structural arguments against such development (for example, the effect of the reservoirs on traditional market analysis metrics such as travel time). As the region’s population grows, so too will the demand for retail quantity, quality, and diversity. The ECD should promote development of a variety of retail options, including food and beverage, convenience, entertainment, and social retail that follows in the wake of residential development and demand.
- **Support hospitality retail development.** Hospitality retail will retain visitors, employees, and residents. The ECD should support the development of hospitality retail, such as restaurants, following the residential and retail development described earlier. Hospitality retail naturally increases in these sectors and will help keep visitors, employees, and residents in the Corridor, creating a catalytic ecosystem of growth and investment. This catalytic ecosystem will help mitigate structural impediments to development, such as the nearby reservoirs.

- **Encourage new hotel development.** As the Corridor grows, diversifies, and becomes more attractive, demand for hotel rooms, especially boutique or luxury, will increase. The ECD should encourage the development of new hotels. Economic and market analysis data from increased residential and commercial development will show hotel developers and operators that the Energy Corridor is a profitable investment opportunity.
- **Cultivate dense, mixed-use development.** Dense, mixed-use development will create walkable nodes, which will in turn increase office demand, decrease vacancy, and improve the satisfaction of office tenants. This will create a virtuous cycle that continues to attract residents.
- **Add and improve connections to the trail network.** The Energy Corridor’s trail network is not only a unique amenity for residents and companies but also a regional draw. The Buffalo Bayou’s 53 miles of scenic waterways serves as a nature habitat refuge as well as a natural draw for walks, bike rides, and quiet contemplation. These connections will promote health and wellness and support weekend retail when Houston residents come to the Corridor for leisure, exercise, and programmed activities. The ECD’s Mobility Action Plan outlines the importance of the trail network and good immediate steps to take to enhance this amenity, including working with partners such as the Houston Parks Board.
- **Highlight the area’s amenities.** Amenities plus abundant open space equals recreational outings and corporate and group retreats. The ECD should highlight the local amenities and abundant open space when marketing the Corridor. These amenities will make the Corridor an attractive destination if the appropriate facilities (hotels, event space, dining) are available. They also could serve large, planned events, such as races and athletic events or music and cultural festivals.



Nodes and Networks

MULTIPLE POINTS OF CONNECTION and interest exist within and near the Energy Corridor. Accessibility to, interaction with, and visibility of these areas are vital to the Corridor being a connected community. Nodes and networks will help the ECD realize its vision for the Energy Corridor.

Node A: Addicks Park & Ride

Node A, the Addicks Park & Ride, is a major transit hub located in the heart of the Houston Energy Corridor. It is owned by Metro, Houston's regional transit provider. The area is currently underused but has the potential to be a vibrant mixed-use community.

The ECD has already been greatly involved with Metro, which the panel commends. The District has been heavily engaged with Metro on this topic for more than a year and a half. Efforts include several meetings with senior leadership, a letter of support/advocacy, public meetings in partnership with Metro, and serving on an advisory committee.

The ECD, Metro, and future development partners should advocate for a mixed-use, mixed-income, multi-tenant development in the 100 acres of vacant/underused land in and around the Addicks Park & Ride for a walkable community. The ECD should partner with Metro to encourage the development and shape the RFP

for the Addicks Park & Ride into a high-density, mixed-use community. The development should include a mix of residential, retail, entertainment/cultural, and open space uses with both programmed and passive open space.

Redeveloping the Addicks Park & Ride would offer several benefits, such as connectivity, sustainability, density, and the support of businesses with more potential customers. It would attract employees and residents, which in turn would help with office tenancing and business recruitment to the Corridor. Making the area more walkable and bikeable will support programming for a thriving and livable community. In addition, a high-density, mixed-use development at Addicks Park & Ride would make hotel development more viable, making the space more attractive to tourists and visitors. Such development could include a variety of amenities, such as restaurants, shops, and entertainment options. This would also provide a more attractive destination for corporate and group retreats.

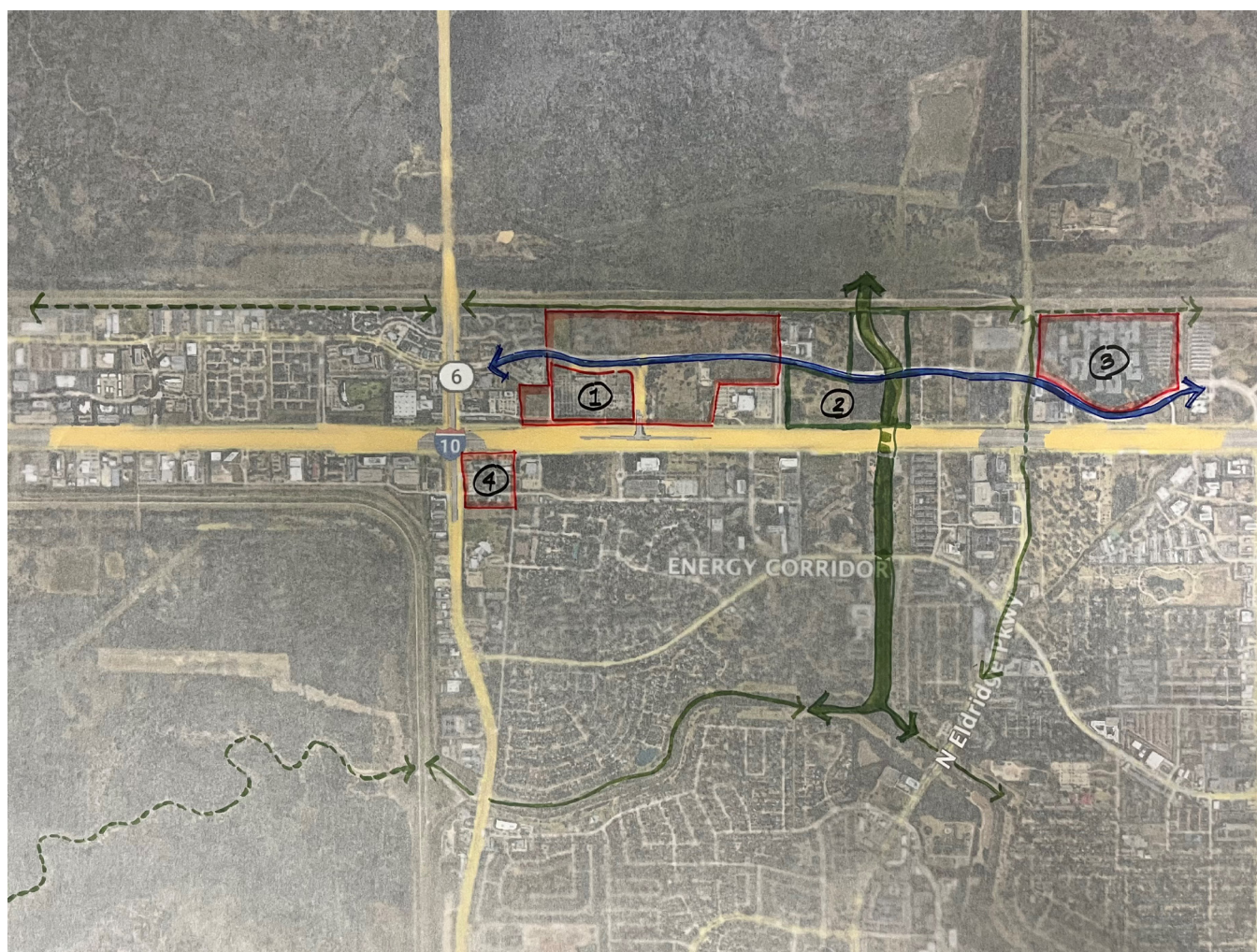
Addick's Park & Ride can meet all these demands. Metro has a wealth of experience in developing transit-oriented development, and would be a valuable partner in this project. The ECD should lean into its natural role as a local knowledge bank and community relationship broker to positively influence the redevelopment RFP to best suit local realities and needs. In addition, the ECD should have a role in the developer selection committee. The ECD should embrace these responsibilities because development at the Addicks Park & Ride will dramatically affect the Energy Corridor for decades to come.

Node B: Langham Park

Node B, Langham Park, is a large, undeveloped parcel located north of Terry Hershey Park and east of the Addicks Park & Ride. It is a federal property owned by the U.S. government. The space is currently underused and under-activated.

The District completed a master plan concept for this park a few years ago. The full buildout plan for Langham Park is ambitious and will require extensive and multifaceted stakeholder engagement, capital investment, and planning. The ECD should execute this plan, but in the near term, it should pursue an interim, low-capital solution that is simple and achievable in the near term. As developed by Partnership for Public Spaces, the “lighter, quicker, cheaper” transformation of Public Spaces is appropriate in this situation. (More information can be found at <https://www.pps.org/article/lighter-quicker-cheaper>.) This approach can develop Langham Park into a place with physical amenities such as exercise equipment, shade, water, and places to sit and relax, allowing it to serve as a gathering point for runners, bikers, walkers, and employees in the vicinity.

An interim solution at Langham Park would have myriad benefits. It would provide a much-needed park for Corridor residents and workers. It would also attract visitors and connect other parts



Nodes and networks (shown in blue and green) form a connected, inviting community that accommodates movement by people.

of the Energy Corridor with off-street trails. An interim solution at Langham Park would also provide opportunities to upgrade stormwater management infrastructure to mitigate flood risk in the area. The ECD should leverage existing partners to facilitate U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approval as needed. In addition to these tangible benefits, an interim park can drive interest, attention, and potential funding for achieving the longer-term vision for the area as spelled out in the master plan. As such, the interim quick build of the park is not a distraction or an impediment to a full buildout, but rather a step on the road to achieving a destination-level park.

Node C: Watermark District

The Watermark District is a proposed 70-acre redevelopment of the previous headquarters of ConocoPhillips. Midway is a privately owned, Houston-based development, construction, and investment company spearheading the project. The panel does not doubt that Midway will do a fantastic job redeveloping the Watermark District, given its wealth of knowledge and track record with mixed-use development. The ECD's role should be as an encourager and trusted confidant, pushing for the best and most community-relevant development.

The Watermark District will be a thriving community with a variety of amenities, such as restaurants, shops, and entertainment options. The ECD should leverage the mixed-use vibrancy of the new Watermark District to promote the redevelopment as a highly sustainable adaptive redevelopment within the Corridor, indicative of the District's commitment to sustainability.

Upon buildout, the Watermark district will have gathering spaces such as plazas and walkways. The ECD could facilitate use of some of these spaces for public-facing events, such as arts and entertainment community-serving organizations and amenities like ECHO. Another important aspect is facilitating off-street connectivity to Terry Hershey Park, Addicks Park & Ride, and other nodes. This will make the Watermark District more accessible while promoting car-free transportation options that benefit health and sustainability.

Node D: Grisby Square

The ECD should partner with existing owners of vacant and underused parcels in Grisby Square, including existing businesses. The panel suggests incorporating open space, casual gathering spaces, a play area, a dog park, and community events into the node, but the panel also recommends that Grisby Square be allowed to develop organically and retain its eclectic character.

The panel believes this approach would help create a vibrant and welcoming space in Grisby Square. Open space would provide a place for people to gather and relax, while the play area and dog park would provide family-friendly amenities. Events would help bring people together and create a sense of community, while facilitating and celebrating the organic evolution that has made Grisby the favorite dining and entertainment hot spot it is today.

Network A: Park Row

The panel recommends that the ECD prioritize Park Row, the north spine of the Energy Corridor, as a complete street, enabling safe, comfortable access for all modes of transportation and for people of all abilities. This effort would entail designing the street to accommodate all users, reducing traffic speeds, eliminating dangerous intersections, and providing adequate lighting. The panel believes this would make Park Row and its adjoining buildings a more sustainable, livable, and equitable place. While the panel recommends that Houston, Harris County, and concerned private developers work together to implement this recommendation, it believes the ECD can play a critical role as an advocate, relationship broker, and source of local insight.

Network B: Closing Trail Gaps

The District should complete the Addicks Reservoir Trail to close the gap along Park Row between State Highway 6 and Eldridge Parkway, elevating trail users' experience. This would create a continuous bike and pedestrian commuter trail system that would connect Terry Hershey Park, the Addicks Park & Ride redevelopment, and points east, such as Bear Creek and Chatterton Trail, and Eldridge Parkway to Enclave Parkway.

The low-hanging fruit would be to amenitize trails with basic infrastructure to encourage biking, walking, and jogging for both leisure and commuting. This infrastructure could include shade, exercise, water, bike repair equipment, and places to rest. This will require coordination and partnerships with various groups, such as the community, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Harris County Flood District, and the city of Houston. These agencies have the expertise and resources to help the ECD complete the trail safely and efficiently. The panel believes this improvement would make it easier for people to navigate the Corridor by bike or on foot while also helping promote a more sustainable lifestyle, consistent with the ECD's priorities.

Given that Houston's long-term vision is to connect the Buffalo Bayou Park and trail across town, there exists potential

partnerships and energy for the ECD to pursue the congruence of this idea with the idea of a regional park and destination-worthy trail system in the Energy Corridor. There exists mutually beneficial and public-serving potential for the county and city to fit the ECD's regional park ambitions into the planning for the future trans-city/county Buffalo Bayou Park and trail system.

Network C: Districtwide Green Infrastructure Plan

The panel commends the ECD on a strong organizational position statement on ESG and its built environment. The ECD should further promote a green infrastructure system for visible, sustainable strategies that enhance the natural habitat in the public realm. This could include creating Langham Park in a way that displays resilient landscape planning and serves as both a public space and flooding solution that leverages the proximity to the reservoir nature preserve. The panel believes this improvement would make the Corridor more resilient by designing the park to cleanse and absorb stormwater runoff generated from the adjacent streets while also providing a unique

and attractive public space for residents and visitors to enjoy. Stormwater treatment opportunities, native vegetation, and visible and tangible placemaking show people that they are in a different neighborhood that cares about the future.

Green infrastructure is a type of stormwater management that uses natural systems to absorb and filter stormwater runoff. This infrastructure can include rain gardens, bioswales, and green roofs. Benefits of green infrastructure include reducing stormwater runoff by absorbing and filtering it before it reaches the sewer system, which helps reduce flooding and improve water quality. It improves air quality and native habitats by absorbing pollutants from the air and improving biodiversity. In addition, green infrastructure is aesthetically pleasing, which can make the area a more enjoyable place to live and work while increasing property values and sense of place.

The panel believes that these three network opportunities would make the Energy Corridor a more sustainable, livable, and equitable place, and urges the ECD to consider these recommendations as it plans for the future of the Corridor.



Identity through Placemaking

PLACEMAKING IS THE PROCESS OF CREATING PUBLIC SPACES that are inviting, interesting, and functional. It is a way to create an identity that serves economic development objectives, while making a place more livable and enjoyable for residents, workers, and visitors.

Placemaking Approach

The ECD has a strong placemaking plan and is making great progress in implementing it with gateway signage and public art. The panel recommends that the ECD think big and destination worthy in its placemaking efforts, and suggests investing in large-scale installations that will be visible and memorable.

The panel also recommends making placemaking *active* (interactive physical landscapes such as a playground) and *activated* (engaging displays and programming that tell the story of a place).

Develop programming and storytelling around the installations: create events and activities that will draw people to the space and make it a destination. Programming could involve hosting events, providing educational materials, or creating interactive games and activities for all. One way to achieve activated displays is by using QR codes to tell the story of the Energy Corridor.

The ECD has a good start in this regard with its public art and programming study. The panel is also aware of this summer's first 40-foot mural. The ECD must think about public art and installations as part of its brand that supports telling a cohesive story. This approach will connect art investments with the sponsoring organization while demonstrating the District's commitment to sustainability and innovation. Public art installations do not need to share the same color palette, but the District's brand guidelines should be given to artists and fabricators as a starting point for inspiration that will help create a cohesive look and feel throughout the Corridor.

The panel was impressed by the ECD's gateways and secondary gateways projects. This dovetails with the panel's belief that the ECD must think big. It should invest in district-defining placemaking or an art piece inspired by its values and aspirations that creates a focal point. This effort will require partners,

WHERE HAS IT BEEN DONE?

Evanston, Illinois, and its downtown business district recently reimagined the heart of their downtown.

One part of a larger rebranding includes using 3-D printed streetscape furniture from recycled plastic for seating in their downtown square. The furniture has QR codes that tell the story of downtown Evanston, the city's metals, and the recycled furniture.

Further detailed examples relevant to the Energy Corridor can be found in the report *Creative Placemaking: Recommendations from and Impact of Six Advisory Services Panels*. Best practices in general can be found in the report *Creative Placemaking: Sparking Development with Arts and Culture*. The appendix includes the 10 Best Practices in Creative Placemaking, gathered from these sources.

funding, and relationships around a shared vision. Cohesion can be achieved through incremental and lower-capital “quick hits” (improvements that require little time to implement). When the ECD performs these quick hits, it must think about the installation as a districtwide connector and contributor to longer-term placemaking and identity initiatives that help promote the Corridor as an international leader in energy transition.

Finally, it is imperative to involve the community, be flexible, and be creative in this process. When planning placemaking projects, community engagement helps ensure that the projects are relevant to the community needs and have the community's support. Placemaking is an iterative process. It is important to be flexible and willing to make changes as needed. Creativity is key: placemaking is about creating spaces that are inviting, interesting, functional, unique, and memorable.

Three-Dimensional Print Streetscape Furniture from Recycled Plastic

The panel recommends that the ECD work with an artist or manufacturer to 3-D print streetscape furniture from recycled plastic. The furniture could include seating, garbage cans, and planters. The panel believes this would be an excellent way to tell the story of the new plastics economy and tie it back to innovation within the Energy Corridor. The furniture could be placed in public spaces throughout the Corridor, such as Grisby Square, Terry Hershey Park, Addicks Park & Ride, and the future Watermark

District. The panel also recommends including custom vinyl stickers on the furniture with QR codes that link to the ECD website and social media. Coupling this with a marketing campaign that tells the story of the new plastics economy and the Energy Corridor's role in it will raise awareness and brand profile.

The panel believes this project would have several benefits. First, it would help raise awareness of the new plastics economy and the innovation that is happening in the Corridor. Second, it would provide a sustainable and aesthetically pleasing way to activate public spaces. Third, it would be a terrific way to partner with local businesses and organizations in mutually beneficial ways.

The panel recommends that the ECD pursue this project in the near term. The project could be implemented in phases, starting with a pilot project in Grisby Square, a local place of natural activation, leisure, and exploration. This pop-up activation can be used to evaluate the feasibility of using recycled plastic furniture in public spaces and to gather feedback from the community. The panel believes this project would be a valuable addition to the Corridor and would help make the Corridor a more sustainable, attractive, and enjoyable place.

Be a Host of Smart City Technologies

The panel recommends that the Houston Energy Corridor position itself as an international leader in smart city technologies by creating demonstration installations and investing in long-term infrastructure projects that support placemaking. Doing so would display the ECD's commitment to innovation and sustainability while also helping create a more efficient and sustainable Corridor. The ECD could also work with the city of Houston to identify opportunities to integrate smart city technologies into the Energy Corridor's infrastructure, creating an innovative and application-positive feedback loop. The ECD could seek funding from public, private, and philanthropic sources to support the ECD's smart city strategy.

The panel recommends that the ECD invest in sensor technology that can be added to existing infrastructure, such as light pole attachments and air quality sensors. These installations can serve as art, telling the story where they are installed, and as interactive points of engagement. The panel also recommends that the ECD invest in smart technology in streetscape construction, such as light poles and smart pavers of clean energy demonstration. This would help create a more connected and interactive district while positioning the Corridor as a model for smart city development. The ECD could partner with, for example, the University of Houston's Electrical and Computer Engineering Department and the Ion District (a 16-acre innovation district in Midtown Houston

formed through a partnership with the city and Rice University) to develop and deploy smart city technologies. These are good example entities because they have successfully harnessed the nexus of ideas, money, and preexisting relationships.

Use Ultraviolet and Solar Power

The panel recommends that the Houston Energy Corridor use ultraviolet (UV) and solar power to create dynamic public placemaking. In the short term, the panel recommends using a glow-in-the-dark coating that absorbs UV light to help connect areas of the Corridor and enhance safety along trails and high-traffic corridors. In the long term, the panel recommends a large-scale installation at the redevelopment of the Addicks Park & Ride that uses energy and natural resources, such as wind and solar power that generates electricity, to emphasize energy transition within the Corridor. Potential partners for technical assistance and funding for the installation may include public, private, philanthropic, and educational or institutional partners.

Highlight Proximity to Nature and Promote Health

The panel recommends that the Houston Energy Corridor invest in select placemaking projects that highlight its proximity to natural resources and engage the community in nature-based, interactive programming. These projects would help improve the health and wellness of residents and visitors by providing opportunities for physical activity, stress relief, and social interaction, as well as promote sustainability and connection with nature.

In the short term, the ECD can create a “talking trees” tour that includes QR codes with information about species of trees and their benefits, as an engaging and educational way for residents and visitors to learn about nature in the Corridor. Likewise, the ECD could enliven vacant parking lots and street rights-of-way with movable potted trees and vegetation. This would add greenery and contribute to placemaking efforts by creating a more inviting atmosphere.

In the longer term, the panel recommends exploring the viability of installing a large-scale vertical community garden at Terry Hershey Park (alongside the farmers market). This would provide a place for residents to get food, and plant and tend the garden. The panel recommends collaborating with community organizations to maintain the garden and ensure that it is accessible to everyone.

Health and nature are intrinsically linked. The ECD should leverage its proximity to Houston Methodist, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and other health care providers in the immediate region by connecting health and wellness into the public and private realms. This could be done through initiatives such as enhancing walking trails, bike paths, and parks, or sponsoring health screenings and fitness classes. These initiatives also help create a sense of place, community, and public space programming and activation.



Branding and Events

BRANDING AND EVENTS are a natural extension of, and complement to, placemaking and public realm activation. They provide an access point for visitors, residents, and workers in the Energy Corridor to enjoy all the amenities of the area.

Branding

The ECD serves as a chief storyteller to communicate the vision for the Energy Corridor and elevate brand awareness. Recent brand playbook and brand workshop deliverables build an excellent foundation, and the panel recommends that the ECD lean into these developments to reevaluate its vision statement to reflect an ambitious, aspirational, yet attainable view of what is to come. The connection between the brand playbook and the vision statement is that of aesthetic messaging becoming stated ideas and identities. Incorporating this updated vision into the ECD's storytelling will build excitement and momentum, attract investment, and better position the organization to have a voice in shaping the very projects that will be responsible for attaining this vision.

The panel also recommends that the ECD identify and continue to pursue opportunities to share the Corridor's story through

thought leadership, earned media, and unearned media. Thought leadership opportunities include panels, keynotes, conferences, and project awards. Earned media opportunities include events and relevant key projects, such as partnering with local media outlets to produce stories about the Energy Corridor's vision and progress in achieving it. Unearned media opportunities include identifying the most impactful opportunities to share the Corridor's story through partnership and strategic participation, such as press releases, social media, events, and word-of-mouth.

Finally, the panel recommends that the ECD's vision statement be updated to include desired outcomes for major projects, such as walkability, connectivity, and access to green space. The ECD's storytelling should recognize the current brand offering yet enable the audience to visualize the future. For example, the ECD can highlight how Grisby Square, the Addicks Park & Ride redevelopment, and the Watermark District will serve as new

destinations for residents, neighbors, and fellow Houstonians. The ECD can also highlight how flood control investments will protect the area from future flooding and provide access to a natural oasis in the Addicks and Barker reservoirs. Finally, the ECD can highlight how fixing gaps in the trails and sidewalk networks will deliver a seamless and safe interconnected network.

By following these recommendations, the ECD can become a more effective storyteller and better position itself to achieve its vision for the future.

Events

Unique events and programming are important tools and mechanisms for the ECD to connect with the community, activate the public realm, and deliver on elements of the brand promise. They can, however, require significant resources—both staffing and financial. To be successful, events must be strategic, purposeful, and incorporate elements of the ECD brand, and they must ideally evoke the future vision of what the Energy Corridor can and will become.

The panel recommends that the ECD develop a three-pronged approach to events and programming, including building off recent successes such as the tree lighting and the farmers market. This will elevate the Energy Corridor's destination appeal and attract talent and businesses to the area.

The first prong of the approach is to host a large-scale music festival in the corridor. The festival should be held at the Addicks Park & Ride or another vacant parcel adjacent to one of the Corridor's transformational projects. The festival should be branded as a celebration of the Energy Corridor's future as a destination for talent and businesses, and marketed to a wide audience, including millennials, young professionals, and

families. Implementation should start slow; for instance, pilot one large-scale event in the next fiscal year and, if successful, incorporate two to four similarly scaled events annually. Also, it is important to bring in a professional event producer and resist the temptation to organize an event of this scale in-house. The panel believes that a large-scale music festival would be a fantastic way to showcase the Energy Corridor's vibrancy and attract new people to the area.

The second prong of the approach is to create an interim activation space at Grisby Square. The space should be designed to support existing businesses there and provide a venue for community events. It is important to collaborate with the property owners in the Grisby Square area to ensure the interim activation space is designed in a way that is compatible with the surrounding businesses. The space could be used for a variety of purposes, such as concerts, movies, and festivals. There are underused parking spaces near Grisby Square, and this strategy dovetails with the interim placemaking recommendations for the Corridor. This interim activation space would be a wonderful way to enliven the Grisby Square area and make it more inviting to visitors.

The third prong of the approach is to cultivate relationships and sponsorship partners for these and other events and interim activation. Businesses and organizations love to have their brand associated with a positive and fun memory, such as a family night out at an outdoor concert. By cultivating these events, the ECD sets itself up to be seen as a valuable and important broker in the eyes of both sponsors and the community, while also achieving its vision of activated places and increased sense of place and community. The ECD could also find partnerships with other types of events, such as those that promote employees coming into the office or fitness, exercise, and race activities that use the amazing natural elements within the Corridor.



Economic Vitality

THE ECD HAS AN OPPORTUNITY to expand its identity in Houston to include renewables, innovation, and technology. This would contribute to the brand and sense of place by creating another center of gravity for the energy transition in Houston. To be successful, the ECD must center economic vitality and understand that this rests on many areas not traditionally considered to be part of economic development.

A Holistic Approach to Economic Vitality

The ECD has a unique opportunity to become a leading center for energy transition and innovation. The Corridor has a strong talent pool, a vibrant business community, and a commitment to sustainability. However, to fully realize its potential, the ECD needs to take a holistic approach to economic vitality. It should focus on attracting and growing talent, partnering with universities and colleges, providing affordable and available housing, creating a high quality of life, and supporting mobility options.

The panel believes the ECD is well positioned to support an innovation ecosystem in Houston. The ECD has several comparative advantages, including its talent pool, existing firms, and the potential to accommodate more housing. By encouraging smart land use and advocating exceptional design for

undeveloped parcels, the ECD can provide new public spaces that promote innovation by hosting informal and formal interactions among both workers and residents.

The ECD should partner with universities and colleges to create internship and training programs for students interested in energy and innovation to attract and grow talent. The ECD achieving its mission is an incentive for businesses to relocate or expand to the Energy Corridor. Coupled with this, new employees must have somewhere to live. The ECD should work to ensure that a variety of housing options is available in the Energy Corridor, including attainable housing. This approach will help attract and retain talent, and make the Energy Corridor a more attractive place to live and invest in.

The ECD should invest in public art, cultural amenities, parks, and open spaces to create a high quality of life. This investment will help create a more vibrant and attractive place for people to live and work, as highlighted in the placemaking recommendations. To get to these community amenities, the ECD should work to improve transportation and mobility options in the Energy Corridor, such as by expanding public transportation and bike lanes. These improvements will make the Energy Corridor more accessible to people from all over the region. This goal can be worked into the Addicks Park & Ride RFP and developer selection process.

Modern Workforce

The Energy Corridor has great potential to attract and retain a modern workforce. To do so, the Corridor must focus on providing the amenities that these workers demand. These amenities include the following:

- **Natural light and air.** Studies have shown that employees are more productive when they have access to natural light and air. The ECD should encourage developers to design buildings with plenty of windows and access to outdoor space.
 - **Innovative workplace design.** Today's workers are looking for workplaces that are creative and inspiring. The ECD should encourage design teams to use innovative design elements, such as open floor plans and collaborative workspaces.
 - **Fitness and wellness facilities.** Employees who are healthy and fit are more productive. Developers should include fitness and wellness facilities, including showers and changing areas, in their projects. These facilities will encourage and enable active commuting such as walking, biking, or combining those methods with public transportation, and provide expected office building amenities for tenants.
 - **Outdoor walking paths and space.** Outdoor space is important for employees' mental and physical health.
 - **Quiet indoor and outdoor places to work or relax.** Employees need places to relax and recharge. Quiet indoor and outdoor spaces provide for contemplation, processing, well-being, and better work outcomes.
 - **Food trucks and variety in food offerings.** Employees want a variety of food options within walking distance of their workplace.
- **Proximity to transit.** Employees want to be able to get to work easily. The ECD should work with the city of Houston to improve public transportation options in the Energy Corridor, such as with the Addicks Park & Ride RFP and last-mile solutions.
 - **Volunteer opportunities.** Employees want to feel like they are making a difference in the community. The ECD can help facilitate the connections between businesses wanting to provide this experience and area nonprofits that need volunteers.
 - **Child care/pet care.** Employees with children or pets need access to child care and pet care. The ECD should encourage building owners to include child care and pet care facilities in their projects or to provide subsidies to access these if they want to encourage greater in-office attendance. Providing or paying for child care also has shown better outcomes in the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women in the workplace.

Vacant Commercial Space

The Energy Corridor has a significant amount of vacant office space. The panel recommends that the ECD convert or renovate this space to meet the needs of businesses and residents. One potential use for the vacant office space is to accommodate wet lab space, which is in high demand in the Innovation District in Midtown Houston. Several buildings in the Corridor are well suited for this purpose, as they have the necessary infrastructure, such as HVAC systems that are compatible with wet lab spaces. In addition, rents in the Energy Corridor are lower than in Midtown, which could make this area more attractive to startups and other businesses that need wet lab space.

Another potential use for the vacant office space is to develop creative office space. This type of space is designed to be flexible and adaptable, and it is often attractive to businesses that are looking for a collaborative and innovative work environment. The Corridor has buildings that could be converted into creative office space. The panel believes that this would be an effective way to attract new businesses and residents to the Corridor.

In addition to these specific recommendations, the panel also recommends that the ECD take steps to adapt the Corridor's commercial space to leverage hybrid work. This could involve creating deeper units that can accommodate both work and living space, and providing more natural light and amenities such as fitness centers and dog parks. Abundant and differentiating indoor and outdoor amenity spaces could reduce market vacancy.

In addition, the ECD should evaluate parking needs versus supply. If excess exists, the Corridor could repurpose it for other uses. By making these changes, the ECD can create a more attractive and livable environment for the Corridor's residents and businesses.

The panel recommends that the ECD provide ongoing promotion and support to the property owner community to help them implement these recommendations. By working together, the ECD and property owners can create a vibrant and dynamic community that is well positioned for future growth.

Thought Leadership

The panel recommends that the ECD capitalize on its unmatched thought leadership and convening potential. The panel believes that the Corridor can become a leading destination for energy innovation by hosting a transitional energy speaker series, reformulating Earth Day to highlight transitional energy themes, and conducting technology demonstrations. In the longer term, the panel recommends that the Corridor host technology expositions and energy summit events.

The panel believes the Corridor is well positioned to become a leader in energy innovation. The area has a strong concentration of (or relationships with) energy companies, universities, and research institutions. The panel believes the ECD can build on these strengths by creating a community of innovators who can cross-fertilize ideas.

A first step is to host a transitional energy speaker series. These regular series of speakers on transitional energy topics could include energy company executives, academics, and entrepreneurs. The panel believes that this speaker series would help raise awareness of transitional energy and introduce new talent to the Energy Corridor. While a speaker series alone will not attract new talent to the area, along with other intentional events, social groups, and dedicated spaces, it can help foster a sense of belonging and place and lay the groundwork for long-term centrality. Furthermore, by reformulating its Earth Day event to showcase transitional energy themes, the ECD could include exhibits, demonstrations, and speakers on topics such as carbon capture and storage, hydrogen, and waste-to-value streams. These events would help educate the public about transitional energy and promote the ECD as a leader in this field, while also demonstrating the ECD's convening power and thought leadership.

Technology demonstrations, expositions, and summits are another way to succeed in this area. The ECD could conduct technology demonstrations on transitional energy topics held in the Energy

Corridor's streets, parks, and other public spaces. The panel believes that these demonstrations would help highlight the potential of transitional energy and attract new investment to the Corridor. Similarly, when the ECD hosts technology expositions and energy summit events in the longer term, these events would bring together energy companies, investors, and policymakers to discuss the latest trends in transitional energy. The panel believes these events would help strengthen the ECD's identity as a global leader in energy innovation.

Partnership and Business Incubation

Business incubation requires partnerships, vision, and a long time horizon. The Energy Corridor and the ECD can foster this ecosystem through multiple avenues. The ECD should pursue partnerships by collaborating with Energy Corridor building owners; major energy companies; and one or more of the existing incubators, accelerators, and makerspaces in Houston to create a presence in the Corridor. The panel believes the ECD can collaborate with existing organizations to create a more vibrant and supportive environment for startups and entrepreneurs. The ECD can start with a market analysis and demand studies to understand the current context. Then the ECD can identify businesses on the cutting edge of energy innovation and research and development activity in the corridor. The ECD can invite these entities with their potential demonstration technology that can be shared with the public through technology exposition events, temporary or permanent public installations, and demonstrations.

The panel recommends that the ECD also consider what it could learn from the experience of the Houston Energy Transition Initiative (HETI) in applying for and receiving a National Science Foundation (NSF) Innovation Engines grant, made possible through the federal CHIPS and Science Act. Key insights include what partners were included, how these different groups' mutual interests were engaged, and how their collective funding and experience were leveraged.

The panel also recommends that the ECD develop a communication plan for stakeholders and identify steps to make property owners aware of lab space needs and opportunities in conjunction with these efforts. These could also dovetail with conversations on job training and workforce development. Likewise, the ECD can explore collaborating with HETI and its five university partners for the NSF Innovation Engines program to develop a more robust innovation ecosystem in the Houston region. This collaboration could be in partnership with and be shaped by the market study to determine the demand for and potential operator of a transitional energy incubator/accelerator.

Robust Information Clearing House

The panel recommends that the ECD expand its role as a clearinghouse for information about the Corridor. The panel believes this would help underscore the ECD's unique value proposition and attract new businesses and talent to the area. The panel recommends that the ECD collect and disseminate real-time real estate information, demographic and economic data, and real-time location analytics. This information would be valuable to commercial leasing agents, developers, property owners, utility company Centerpoint Energy, and retail businesses.

The panel believes the ECD could learn from the Houston Downtown Management District to develop real estate information data tracking and dissemination strategies specific to the

Corridor. The Downtown Management District has a program in which it surveys brokers and shares information about real estate vacancies, rental rates, absorption, and availability. The program has been remarkably successful in providing valuable information to the market.

The ECD could also explore using cellphone data or tracking information such as Placer.ai to track traffic flows and who is going where in the Corridor. This information would help the development community and the brokerage community understand the dynamics of the Corridor and make better decisions about where to site new projects or land retail tenants. It would also be valuable to Centerpoint Energy's planning for service and capacity upgrades.



Organizational Strategies and Approaches

TO CONTINUE ITS GROWTH AND SUCCESS, the ECD needs to develop a strategic plan that will guide its development over the next 10 to 15 years. This plan should focus on four key areas: capital project development, partnership, funding, and organizational capacity.

Strategic Approach

The Houston Energy Corridor is at a critical juncture. The ECD has a clear vision for its future, but it needs to adopt a strategic approach to achieve its economic vitality goals. The panel recommends that the ECD translate its vision into a 10-year strategic plan. The plan should identify priorities, estimated costs and timelines, and benchmarked goals (for example, goals for years 3, 5, and 10). The plan should also clearly articulate the ECD's value proposition, or what makes the ECD unique and attractive to businesses and talent. In addition, the ECD must develop an actionable work plan for the next one to three years. The work plan should include specific activities and goals, partners, funding sources, and performance metrics.

Capital Project Development Approach

The panel recommends that the ECD adopt a capital project development approach that focuses on the early stages of the project life cycle. The panel believes the ECD is best suited to be the owner of capital development projects in the initial stages when ideas are first being germinated and funding is being secured. The ECD can use its relationships with stakeholders and its understanding of the Corridor to advocate for projects that will benefit the community. The ECD can then position these capital development projects for funding and function as a shepherd of the project through the infrastructure development life cycle.

Once projects are funded, the ECD can continue to support them by providing technical assistance and coordinating with other stakeholders. However, the panel believes the ECD should avoid taking on the role of project owner, because this would be



Stages of infrastructure development.

too intensive and duplicative of the work that is already being done by other organizations, such as public agencies. The panel believes this approach is more efficient and effective for the ECD. It allows the ECD to focus on its strengths and avoid duplicating the work of other organizations. In addition, it allows the ECD to get projects off the ground sooner and have a greater impact on the community.

The ECD should identify the stages of the capital development project life cycle where it can add the most value, knowing its “sweet spot.” For example, the ECD may be well suited to be the owner of projects in the preliminary stages, when the ideas are being developed and advocated for. The ECD can then advance projects, maintaining a knowledge of where they can be most effective and when they must delegate and partner with other entities and institutions. For successful and long-lasting results, the ECD should not proceed alone on big, ambitious capital development projects. It is imperative to partner, as well as to know when and how to delegate and let other entities with complementary goals help the ECD in achieving its goals. This collaboration with partners can advance projects to a point where they are well positioned for funding. This effort may take the form of developing detailed plans, securing permits, and raising awareness of the projects.

After the initial stages, the ECD should be prepared to act quickly when funding becomes available. By having existing relationships with potential funders and a rapport from previous collaboration, the ECD will be ahead of the curve when it comes to securing funding. Likewise, project experience with best practices, such as having a clear understanding of the project’s budget and timeline, will demonstrate the ECD’s capacity and propriety to external funders. The ECD can then move into the role of shepherd of the project through the infrastructure development life cycle, including right-of-way (RoW) acquisition and utility development. This may involve managing the project, coordinating with stakeholders, and ensuring that the project is

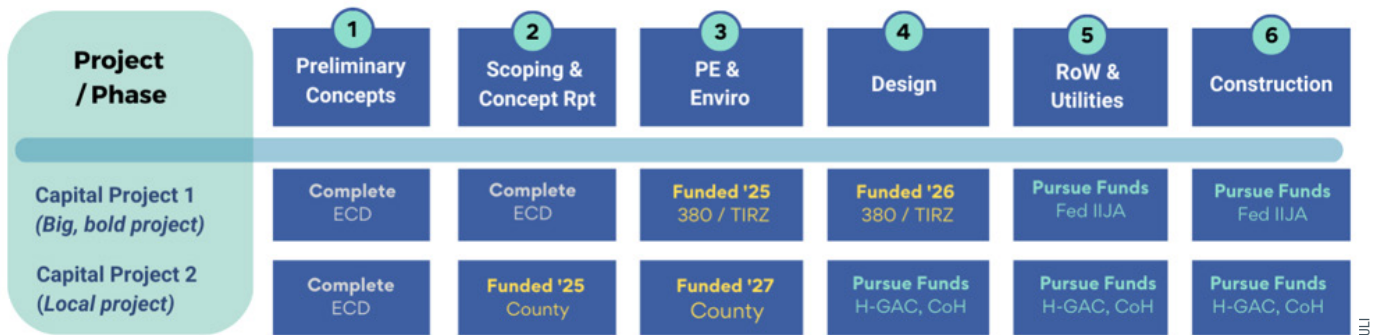
completed on time and within budget. The panel recognizes these best practices have been demonstrated previously in the ECD’s delivery of other projects. The goal of spelling out best practices here is not to downplay earlier efforts, but to crystalize standards to follow as the ECD takes on ambitious capital development and infrastructure projects in the future.

Partnership Approach

The ECD must adopt a partnership approach that focuses on building strategic relationships with critical partners. This includes a mind-set shift from “limited” to “leveraging.” That is, the panel believes the ECD should treat local assessments as seed funds to maximize return on investment (ROI), which then can attract partners to want to work with the ECD and to contribute money to efforts the ECD is championing.

First, the ECD must identify those partners that are most important to its success. These may include government agencies, businesses, and civic organizations. To do this, the ECD should conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify organizations that have a vested interest in the ECD’s success. When identifying critical partners, the ECD should also consider an organization’s resources and capabilities, its alignment with the ECD’s goals, and its willingness to partner with the ECD. The ECD can attract a partner’s interest and funds by showing an alignment with needs, risk mitigation, and cost reduction.

Second, the ECD should cultivate and nurture strategic relationships with its critical partners. This may involve meeting with partners regularly, sharing information, and working together to achieve common goals. The ECD should also develop a communication plan to ensure that it is effectively communicating with its partners. The communication plan should include a clear and concise message, a variety of communication channels, and a regular communication schedule.



Project engineering (PE); right-of-way (RoW); Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC); City of Houston (CoH); Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IJJA); Chapter 380 (380); Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)

Example of partnership strategies framed against capital project needs.

Third, the ECD must understand implementation roles that its partners can play and eligible uses of funds. This will help the ECD identify the best partners for each project and ensure that funds are used effectively. The ECD should also develop a fiscal management plan to ensure that it is tracking and managing its funding effectively. The fiscal management plan should include a budget, a spending plan, and a reporting system. By having this plan in place, the ECD can best identify desirable funding stacks with its partners.

Fourth, the ECD must summarize partnerships through dashboards, road maps, and other visual means. This will help the ECD track its progress, identify opportunities for improvement, and communicate its partnerships to stakeholders. The ECD should also develop a reporting system to ensure that it is regularly reporting on its partnerships to its stakeholders. The reporting system should include a summary of the partnerships, the progress of the partnerships, and the challenges and opportunities facing the partnerships.

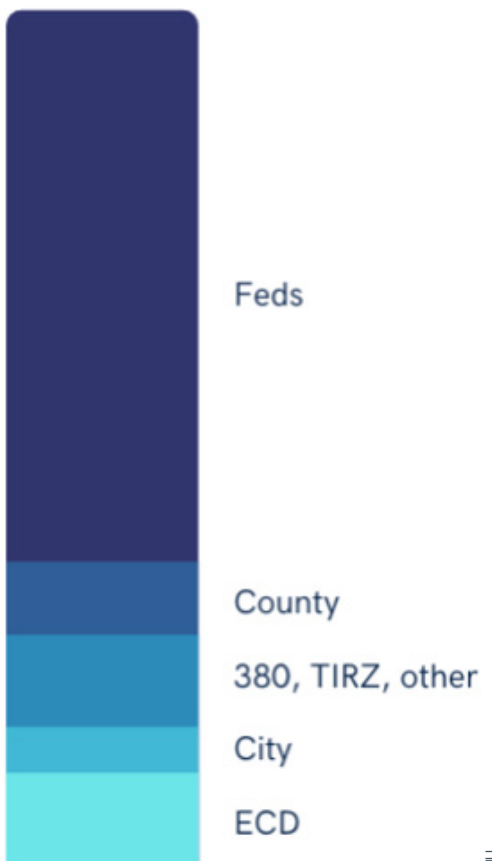
Funding Approach

The ECD should adopt a funding approach that leverages local assessments to attract partners' funds and maximize ROI. The panel believes the ECD should focus on aligning its projects with the needs of potential partners, mitigating risks, and reducing costs by developing a capital partners road map. The ECD should identify desirable funding stacks, such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IJJA) discretionary and formula funds for capital projects, and foundations and corporate sponsorships for programs. The ECD should prioritize immediate funding opportunities, such as Harris County's call for projects (\$350,000 to \$20 million for each project), and secure a TIRZ. In addition, the ECD should expand its boundaries to attract more funding sources.

Specifically, the panel believes that this funding effort will entail the following:

- Leverage local assessments.** The ECD should not view the funds generated by the assessment districts as the only source of funding for its projects. Instead, the ECD should use the assessment funds to attract other partners and sources of funding. For example, the ECD could use the assessment funds to match funds from other sources, such as the IJJA or foundations. This would allow the ECD to attract more funding for its projects and maximize its ROI.
- Align projects with the needs of potential partners.** The ECD must identify partners who have a shared interest in the ECD's goals and can provide funding for its projects. The ECD should also work to align its projects with the needs of these partners. This will help ensure that the ECD's projects are successful and that the partners are satisfied with the results.
- Mitigate risks.** The ECD should mitigate the risks associated with its projects. This could involve conducting feasibility studies, developing contingency plans, and researching insurance and contingency plans. By mitigating risks, the ECD can reduce the likelihood of failure and protect its investment.
- Reduce costs.** The ECD should continually seek ways to reduce the costs of implementing its projects. This could involve using innovative design and construction techniques, negotiating favorable contracts, and taking advantage of tax credits and other incentives. By reducing costs, the ECD can free up resources to invest in other projects or improve the overall quality of its projects.
- Identify desirable funding stacks.** The ECD must identify a variety of funding sources that can be used to support its projects. This could include federal, state, local, private, and philanthropic sources. By identifying a variety of funding sources, the ECD can maximize its funding opportunities.

- **Prioritize immediate funding opportunities.** The ECD can find funding opportunities that are available now and that can be used to support its projects. This will help the ECD to make progress on its goals and to demonstrate its commitment to its values. For example, the ECD could apply for funding from Harris County’s call for projects.
- **Secure a TIRZ.** A TIRZ, like tax increment financing, is a special district that can be used to finance development and infrastructure projects. The ECD should secure a TIRZ to attract additional funding for its projects. By demonstrating its wise use and leveraging of assessment and other funds, the ECD builds a case for itself for a TIRZ.
- **Prioritize connecting missing parcels within the district’s boundaries.** The ECD should work to stitch together its boundaries and fill in the missing elements of absent parcels within its boundaries as is possible. By weaving together its boundaries, the ECD can reach a larger pool of potential businesses and residents and better serve its mission, while having the recipients of its improvements be those who are paying a levy.



Example of a potential funding stack for a capital project.

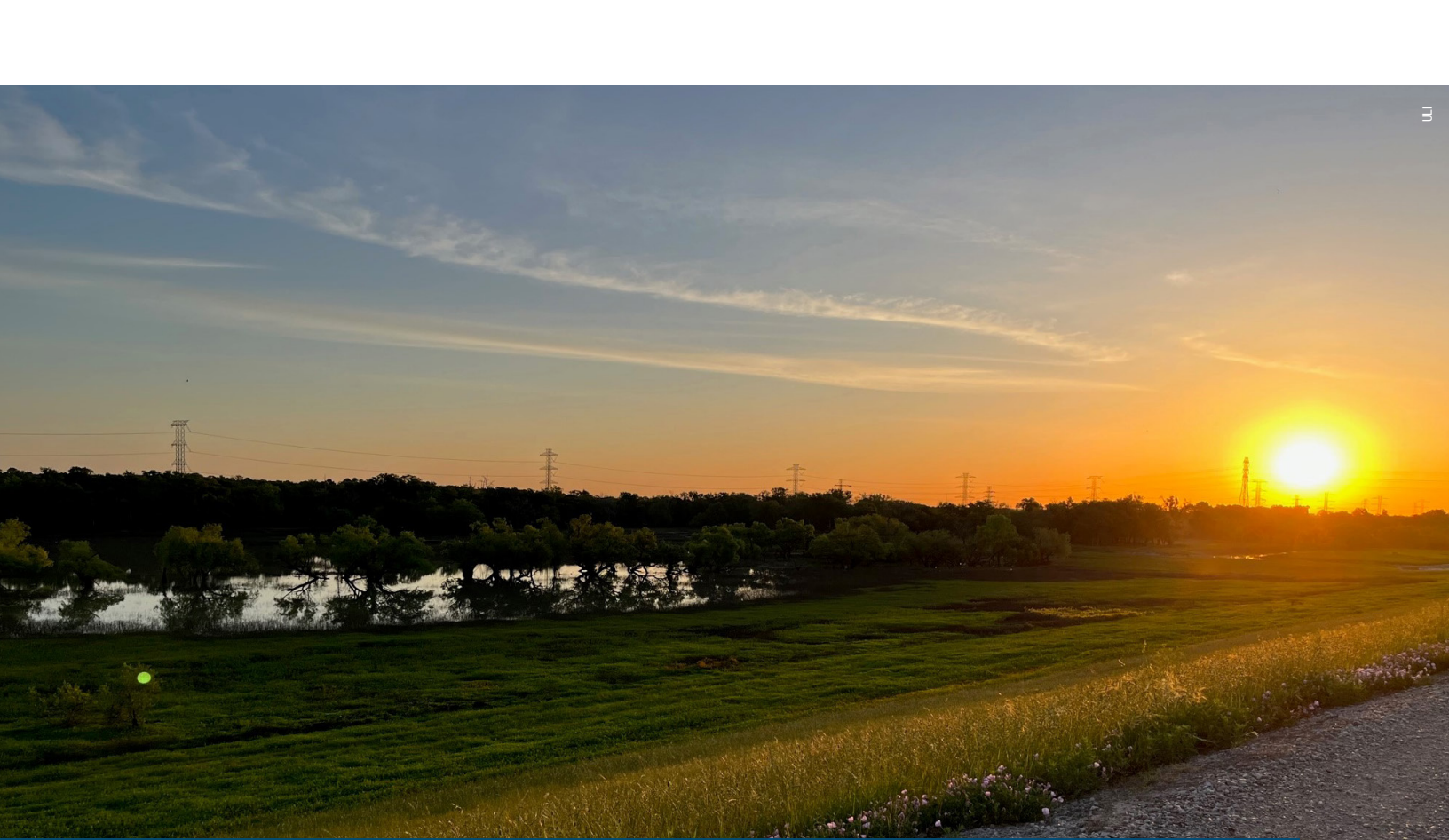
Organizational Capacity Approach

The panel recommends that the ECD perform a review to ensure its staff roles and responsibilities are aligned with its strategic priorities such as if any gaps are present or if additional roles are needed. This includes hiring or training current staff with the necessary skills and experience, developing a clear chain of command, and creating a culture of collaboration and delegation of tasks and authority. Aligning roles and responsibilities with ECD’s priorities ensures that team members have the background, experience, and role clarity necessary to execute the ECD’s vision.

One example of a division of responsibilities would be among the executive director, capital projects manager, public realm manager, economic vitality manager, and marketing and communications manager. The panel sees the ECD as currently reflecting this division. The executive director will be responsible for setting the vision for the ECD and overseeing its day-to-day operations. The capital projects manager will be responsible for identifying and securing funding for capital projects and overseeing the implementation of those projects. The activation and events manager will be responsible for activating the public realm and creating a more vibrant and inviting environment in the ECD. The economic vitality manager will be responsible for attracting new businesses and residents to the ECD and supporting the growth of existing businesses. The marketing and communications manager will be responsible for promoting the ECD and communicating its message to a variety of audiences.

This work will also help the ECD with the development of its 10-year strategic plan that identifies its long-term priorities and goals as well as a short-term activity (e.g., one to three years) work plan. The ECD should also develop performance metrics to track its progress and ensure that it is meeting its goals.

The other component of a well-functioning organization is a well-functioning board. When the ECD is executing an exciting and important component of its well-defined goals and vision, it will keep the board engaged and focused on necessary activities. The ECD board can adopt best practices for board governance, which may include adding ex-officio board members, setting term limits, and having bylaws. The addition of ex-officio board members will help the ECD gain the insights and expertise of a wider range of stakeholders. Ex-officio board members should be selected based on their knowledge of the ECD’s industry sector, their experience in business development, or their expertise in other relevant areas. The board must view their activities as important contributions to supporting the ECD and building on the exciting momentum the ECD has and will continue to garner.



Conclusion

THE ENERGY CORRIDOR AND THE ECD have a bright future ahead of them. They should keep in mind three important things as they advance their mission and vision.

First, top talent gets what top talent wants. The ECD must build a community. It is the only way to do economic development right in today's competitive environment. This effort includes a focus on attainable housing; a sense of place; and being focused on collaborating with the city, property owners, businesses, and residents on a shared vision for the future. That vision should be based on the principle of creating a vibrant, walkable, and active place that attracts top talent.

Second, the ECD must think big and play the long game. The District should not be limited by its current state. Instead, the ECD should focus on creating a vision for the future that is bold and ambitious. Even when things are bad, it is important to stay positive and stay the course. Large-scale change takes time.

Finally, the ECD must elevate big, bold, and exciting projects that captivate people's imaginations and get them to believe in the vision. These projects can help attract attention and build excitement for the Corridor. This is how the ECD can coalesce multiple competing entities and priorities around unifying visions of collective, large-scale change and improvement. The panel believes that if the ECD can elevate these projects, it can help create a sense of momentum and excitement that can help propel the Houston Energy Corridor District forward.

Appendix: 10 Best Practices in Creative Placemaking

- 1 BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND.** Envision not only what you would like to see—such as artfully designed buildings, an inclusive community, gathering places that promote health—but also what you do not want to see, such as displacement of existing residents, a lack of diversity, or exclusionary housing. Set no limits on the possibilities for combining arts and culture with the built environment.
- 2 BRING IN ARTISTS AND THE COMMUNITY EARLY.** Timing is everything. Arts and culture need to be central and at the core of a project’s design. Early engagement of the essential resources will facilitate an inclusive and well-designed project that meets the needs of the community.
- 3 “MINE” LOCAL ART AND CULTURAL ASSETS.** Understand which jewels exist in the community. Creative placemaking works best when it is used to amplify community assets, thereby fostering a sense of pride. Learn about the community’s history and aspirations. Practice “radical listening.”
- 4 ENGAGE LOCAL ARTISTS.** Find and recruit artists in the community, including visual artists, musicians, photographers, dancers, poets, writers, designers, chefs, media professionals, and other “cultural creatives.” Consult local arts organizations and city or county art commissions or councils to find local artists. Or work with an arts and culture curator who specializes in advising developers on how to integrate arts and culture within their projects.
- 5 UNDERSTAND AND ARTICULATE STAKEHOLDER BENEFITS.** Explore how arts and culture can contribute to the social and economic vitality of the project. Be prepared to discuss benefits from various points of view. Focus not only on community-driven outcomes and what is meaningful to the community, but also on the hard facts needed to sell the project to investors and others.
- 6 FORM CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS.** Include artists, community members, local government, foundations, and community organizations in project planning and development.
- 7 IDENTIFY THE CRITICAL SKILLS NEEDED TO DELIVER ON PROJECT GOALS AND OUTCOMES.** Determine the skills needed in addition to those provided by designers, architects, and artists. Collaboration with the right skill mix is critical to the success of a project.
- 8 LOOK FOR EARLY WINS TO GENERATE EXCITEMENT, VISIBILITY, AND BUY-IN.** Use pop-up events or installations to draw people in, and use community gatherings to get people engaged.
- 9 MAINTAIN A LONG VIEW.** Don’t stop when a project is built. Incorporate ongoing programming that keeps the community engaged and the place alive and exciting.
- 10 PURSUE CREATIVE FINANCING.** Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Money can come from unexpected places. If your vision is the right one, is conceived for the right reasons, and provides appropriate stakeholder benefits, the money will come. Persevere.

Learn more at knowledge.uli.org/en/Reports/Research%20Reports/2020/Creative%20Placemaking.

About the Panel

Sarah Sieloff

Panel Chair
Ferndale, Washington

Sieloff is a client leader at Haley and Aldrich, a national environmental and engineering consulting firm. She works with public- and private-sector clients to support land reuse, climate resilience, and community and economic development. She tracks state and federal funding, helps connect client projects to these resources, and analyzes rapidly evolving state and federal environmental justice policy.

Sieloff previously served as a 2020 Council on Foreign Relations-Hitachi Fellow in Japan, where she researched municipal responses to population aging. From 2015 to 2020, she served as the executive director of the nonprofit Center for Creative Land Recycling, the premier U.S. land reuse nonprofit. Sieloff's experience also includes nearly four years in federal service, during which she served as the Memphis team lead for the White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities. Sieloff speaks fluent Spanish, holds a master of public affairs from Princeton University, and is a Truman Scholar. She has led or participated previously in five ULI Advisory Services panels.

Robert H. Mandle

Arlington, Virginia

Since 2007, Mandle has played a leading role in the transformation of the National Landing area into a vibrant downtown community that is attracting residents, new businesses, and a wave of new investment from the private sector. His background in urban planning and economics, combined with his passion for placemaking and creative problem solving, drives his perspective and vision. Mandle's work envisioning and championing a new pedestrian connection to Reagan National Airport, the CC2DCA Intermodal Connector, helped propel a unique, differentiating idea into an important infrastructure investment included in the Commonwealth's winning Amazon proposal. In addition, Mandle's framing of the Greater Crystal City area as a downtown of scale and substance as the largest walkable downtown in Virginia helped propel the business improvement district's efforts to extend its boundaries to include Pentagon City and Potomac Yard.

Mandle has a track record for active and engaged community involvement with a vision for community action that embraces creativity, efficiency, and partnership building to proactively make change, not just advocate for it. Mandle has founded a downtown Civic Association in Norfolk, launched a farmers market in the Petworth neighborhood of Washington, D.C., and served a term as an advisory neighborhood commissioner, championing new bicycle infrastructure and traffic calming measures, supporting community organizations, and advocating for economic development efforts along Georgia Avenue.

Mandle earned a graduate degree in urban and regional planning at Virginia Tech's regional campus in Old Town Alexandria. Specializing in Physical Planning and Community Design, Mandle focused on how the relationship between the built environment and public space defines the public realm and an area's sense of place and identity. Mandle is also a graduate of Bowdoin College of Brunswick, Maine, having earned a degree in economics and environmental studies. Mandle resides with his family in the Petworth neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

Malaika Rivers

Atlanta, Georgia

Rivers builds collaborative, public/private partnerships between commercial real estate and government interests that transform commercial districts, add value to real estate investment portfolios, and build thriving places.

Rivers's unique experience brings public, private, and government stakeholders together to imagine, structure, and pursue critical infrastructure improvements. Her advisory services lead the complex technical, financial, and political strategies that, when carefully combined, drive outsized returns for all stakeholders.

Her notable successes include large-scale infrastructure projects for a variety of investors, such as the Atlanta Braves baseball stadium and The Battery mixed-use development. Other successes include roads, trails, parks, and other capital projects for office, multifamily, and industrial interests. She operates in a variety of submarket conditions, from dense urban cores to corridors experiencing economic stagnation.

A leader in community improvement districts (CIDs), Rivers is the foremost expert on these innovative, legislatively enabled finance tools. With a deep understanding of CIDs' utility beyond placemaking and urban management, she guides clients through the complexity of improving the built environment through these sustainable, public/private ecosystems.

She is a frequent contributor to various media outlets and publishes forward-thinking reports. Her most recent, coauthored with the Georgia Institute of Technology, considers CIDs as instruments to build the next generation of infrastructure around digital transformation and smart cities.

Rivers is a four-time “Notable Georgian” and has been included on the lists of 100 Influential Women to Know and 25 Power Women to Watch. She received her BS from Virginia Tech and her CME from Harvard Business School. She has been an appointee of the Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives and held various board seats with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, ULI, and the Council for Quality Growth, among others. She resides in Atlanta.

Mark Rivers

Washington, D.C.

Rivers leads the eastern United States for Lowe, including acquisitions, development, and management, where the company is active in many asset classes including multifamily, office, hotel, and mixed-use properties. Rivers also leads Concord Communities, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lowe, and its efforts to be part of the solution to the United States' affordable housing shortage.

Since joining Lowe in 2004, Rivers has been responsible for a variety of complex redevelopment and adaptive use projects, including Park + Ford, Alexandria, Virginia, the conversion of two 14-story office towers to offer 435 market-rate apartments; The George, Montgomery County, Maryland, the office-to-residential conversion of a five-story office building, including a seven-story addition, to a 194-unit multifamily building with two levels of parking; Gallery 64, Washington, D.C., the adaptive use of the Historic Randall Junior High School to the Rubell Museum D.C., a world-class art museum, and the construction of 492 apartments; the Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C., the renovation and expansion of the historic 1,100-room Washington Hilton hotel; The Hepburn, Washington, D.C., the development of a 195-unit luxury apartment tower as an addition to the Washington Hilton; 1400 Crystal Drive, Arlington, Virginia, the redevelopment and

expansion of a 308,000-square-foot, 1960s office building to a class A office building; and 2021 L Street, Washington, D.C., the redevelopment of a 1960s-era office building as a modern office building, including the addition of two floors.

Marisa Schulz

Chicago, Illinois

Schulz is principal and cofounder of All Together, a place-based creative agency in Chicago that offers community engagement, branding, and placemaking services to communities and the organizations that serve them.

As a writer and urban planner, Schulz is driven by telling the stories of places through the public realm. Her creative process is centered around engagement-designing processes that encourage reciprocal learning and trust-building. From Austin to Detroit to Santiago, Chile, Schulz has worked closely with people to ensure that they play a vital role in codesigning their communities. In 2022, Schulz designed and led the facilitation of the We Will Chicago comprehensive planning process—the city's first comprehensive plan in more than 60 years.

She has successfully written articles and studies that have been featured in *Next City*, *Bloomberg*, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today*. Schulz has taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in sustainability, planning, and design at DePaul University in Chicago.

David Shiver

Berkeley, California

With more than 30 years of experience, Shiver has worked nationally on many high-profile planning initiatives and public/private partnerships (P3s). His experience includes preparing residential and commercial market studies, market rent surveys, project and prototypical mixed-use project financial feasibility analyses, fiscal impact studies, economic benefit studies, highest and best use studies, community benefit studies, structuring ground leases, and P3 developer solicitations and negotiations.

Shiver's work portfolio includes engagements with the California State University for the reuse of the 300-acre Lanterman Hospital site (Pomona, California); P3 portfolio analysis for the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (San Jose, California); strategic

real estate planning and financial analysis for the mixed-use redevelopment of the 565-acre historic Fort Monroe (Hampton, Virginia); market analysis, developer solicitation, and joint venture structuring for the 16-acre Strawn site for the Charlotte Housing Authority and Horizon Development Properties (Charlotte, North Carolina); and project planning, market and financial analysis, and implementation for the 1,500-acre historic Presidio of San Francisco and 2,000-acre NASA Research Park (Mountain View, California).

Shiver has made numerous presentations of his work to public bodies and professional associations, including CoreNet Global, American Planning Association, CAL APA, American Defense Communities, Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, Society of Military Engineers, and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

He earned a BA in public affairs from the University of Chicago and a master of business administration and master of city planning from the University of California, Berkeley.

Geeti Silwal

San Francisco, California

Silwal is the urban design principal at Perkins & Will's San Francisco office. As the head of the West Coast Urban Design practice, Silwal brings vision and design leadership that establishes the foundation of transformative changes for livable and sustainable environments in cities. She strongly believes that urban designers hold the responsibility to inspire integrated, multipurpose design solutions of innovation and beauty that create healthy and inclusive cities.

Building and revitalizing communities, she lays deep emphasis on placemaking, regenerative design, equitable accessibility, and social justice. Her experience covers a vast breadth of scales, including regional transit-focused planning, downtown revitalization, waterfront redevelopments, urban mixed-use infill projects, research/innovation district planning, and public realm enhancement along heavily challenged infrastructure corridors.

Working with cities, institutions, and private developers, her work includes visioning and planning successful innovation ecosystems. The primary focus is the interrelatedness of economic, cultural,

and physical dimensions that combine to deliver a complete community and instill an authentic and lasting sense of place. She has led planning efforts for life sciences communities of innovation, including the University of Utah Research Park Strategic Vision Plan, San Carlos East Innovation District, Los Angeles Biomed/Tech Focus Area Study, and San Diego State University Innovation District visioning session.

Silwal is currently leading multiple projects in the cities of San Jose, Santa Clara, Portland, Austin, and Salt Lake City, which leverage transportation investment to deliver high-density, mixed-use, vibrant, equitable communities around transit stations. Prioritizing low-carbon modes of travel in these transportation projects to connect people and communities seamlessly is important to deliver on the aspiration of an equitable city. She believes designing cities around the fundamental organizing principle of “people first” delivers a more humane, inclusive, socially connected, and healthy city.

Silwal is also deliberate in her design approach to reveal the unrealized potential of nature and natural processes. This lies at the core of her push to deliver regenerative solutions that address climate change issues of water scarcity, food security, and social equity. Her research on the Resource Infinity Loop discusses a solution for a closed-loop water and nutrient infrastructure within cities. She believes that the pursuit of carbon neutrality is, at its heart, a clarion call for a culture change—one that heeds people's delicate relationship with nature and gives back to the environment more than it takes.

Silwal holds a master of urban design degree from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a board member of AREA Research, a member of the ULI San Francisco Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee, and a member of the ULI Public Development and Infrastructure Product Council. She also was a jury member of the ULI Hines International Design Competition 2022 (and was a jury member in 2021). In addition, she taught the 2022 spring semester design studio for the master of urban design at the University of California, Berkeley, with a focus on “Rethinking Declining Shopping Malls to Initiate New Paradigms for the Built Environment.”



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