

**Strengthening and Preserving  
The Historic Town Square District  
Collierville, Tennessee**



**Report Prepared By  
International Downtown Association  
Urban Place Consulting Group, Inc.**

## I. BACKGROUND

The Downtown Square Development Plan (DSDP) prepared by Market Street Services in 2005 developed a number of recommendations for the strengthening and preservation of the Historic Town Square. The Plan also made a recommendation for a structure to implement the Plan recommendations. The Plan recommended an implementation structure called a "Housing Authority," which was rejected by the steering committee as inappropriate to Collierville. Although rejecting the "housing authority" approach, the steering committee recognized the importance of a new entity to implement the plan's recommendations.

*"The Steering Committee was in near-unanimous agreement that the current regulatory dynamics in the Downtown Square area would not be the optimal means to implement the Town's Downtown Square Development Plan. They favored the creation of a new entity to effectively review, coordinate and monitor the progression of the plan's components to successful completion."* (DSDP)

The International Downtown Association (IDA) was contacted by downtown property and business owners and asked to assist the steering committee in developing a new entity to implement the Plan's recommendations and oversee historic district development. IDA President Dave Feehan and Steve Gibson, President of Urban Place Consulting Group, Inc, a Long Beach-based consulting firm, teamed together to advise the steering committee.

The IDA team visited Collierville on Friday July 14 to meet with downtown stakeholders and get a first hand look at the Historic Town Center and Historic District. In addition to the one-day visit the team reviewed the following documents:

- ❖ *Downtown Square Development Plan, Market Street Services, 2005*
- ❖ *Comprehensive Plan 2003-2013, Lyle Sumek Associates, 2003*
- ❖ *Downtown Square Development Plan, Looney Ricks Kiss, 2000*
- ❖ *Main Street Collierville plans and documents*

The following recommendations are based upon the site visit, meetings with stakeholders, document review and over 40 years of downtown organization experience of the consulting team.

## **II. Challenges Faced By The Historic Town Square District**

Each of the previous reports clearly defined the challenges faced by the Historic Town Square District.

### **Looney Ricks Kiss, 2000:**

- Community growth
- New subdivisions not in keeping with the character of the historic district
- “Marketing the Square”
- Historic District boundary transitions
- Conversion of owner occupied properties to rental properties
- Conversion of residential structures to commercial uses in predominantly residential areas
- Improvement of infrastructure in downtown
- Poplar Avenue traffic
- Wide range of uses allowed under the base zoning
- Loss of open space as it is converted to parking
- Stabilization of property values in downtown
- Disparity in property values between downtown and the surrounding areas
- Conversion of large lots to more dense lot configurations

### **Lyle Sumek Associates, Inc. 2003**

- Historic Square with quality buildings and businesses
- Entrances to Square, beautification and signage
- Historic preservation: Policy and Strategy
- Historic preservation, Square and surrounding neighborhood
- Infill development: Policy and Standards
- Uniform design standards
- Property maintenance code
- Commercial development consistent with “charm”
- Tourism development
- Neighborhood upgrades adjacent to square
- Range of housing/home ownership choices
- Town square upgrades
- Unique businesses on the Square
- Museum/history of Collierville

### **Market Street Services, 2005**

Throughout the development of Collierville's Downtown Square Development Plan, the planning team received clear and unmistakable dictates from the Steering Committee and Collierville residents to enhance Downtown, but not at the expense of the existing Town Square. It is plainly evident that those who come to know the Town Square area cherish its current character, amenities and evocative power.

The following key issues related to this development plan represent the synthesis of the entire collected stakeholder input from multiple interviews, focus groups, and an Online Survey that received over 400 responses. These issues represent the core challenges facing the Town Square today, and will impact the future expansion of the Square into the adjacent Downtown district. They are:

- Risk of losing the historic charm and quaint "neighborhood feel" of Town Square if there is new development in the district;
- Town Square hard to find/access from outside of district;
- Critical mass of Downtown shoppers is lacking;
- Existing zoning and development regulations only allow single uses and are perceived to be overly stringent;
- Poor connectivity between Square, rest of Downtown, and greater Collierville;
- Lack of housing options;
- Potentially contaminated industrial properties hamper development; and
- Avenue Carriage Crossing could take business away from the Town Square.

### Summary of Challenges

Each of the three studies, although using somewhat different words, clearly identified the challenges facing the Historic Town Square district. The IDA team concurs and reinforces the previously defined challenges, but suggests that there is an even more important and basic challenge facing the Town Square neighborhood.

### **The primary challenge is:**

***Lack of an effective Private Sector Implementation/Leadership organization, focused on the Town Square neighborhood, charged with implementing and managing the changes necessary to overcome the challenges defined in each of the plans, and provided with sufficient resources to accomplish its charge.***

The Town and Town Square stakeholders can debate solutions to the defined challenges, but until there is a private sector leadership organization to partner with the Town and implement those solutions, any debate is just academic and won't result in the changes needed to preserve and improve

the Historic Town Square district.

### **III. Primary Recommendation - Develop a Leadership/Implementation Organization**

#### **A. First Step – Overcoming Barriers to Effective Leadership**

Currently there are many different stakeholders who all have input on historic town square development.

- Board of Alderman
- Town Staff
- Historic District Commission
- Historic Town Square neighborhood property owners
- Historic Town Square neighborhood business owners
- Historic Town Square neighborhood residents
- Main Street Collierville
- Chamber of Commerce
- Town Square users/customers

While it is certainly appropriate and important that all of these stakeholders have input to historic town square development, the current process to receive and process the input is a barrier to the goal of attracting investment to the Town Square neighborhood.

Cities such as Nashville, Memphis, Birmingham and Mobile that have been successful in reviving their downtowns all started with the same first step. They organized and focused the various private sector stakeholders under one umbrella organization in order to become a more effective partner with the public sector to implement the changes necessary to improve the downtown.

The advantages of a new private sector implementation organization were clearly stated in the Downtown Square Development Plan:

- The ability to appoint a Board of district stakeholders (including residents, property owners and business owners), and key professionals to oversee the development of parcels within the Downtown Square Development District.
- The ability to create a bonding authority to finance land acquisition, infrastructure improvements, and other actions within the boundaries of the Development District.
- The ability to secure funds from a variety of sources, including government grants and private sector investments.
- The ability to use best-practice, progressive funding tools such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to finance key infrastructure improvements, environmental remediation, and other non-developer-financed enhancements to the District.

- A justification for the creation of zoning regulations specific to the Development District that would allow certain development activities to occur by-right.
- The provision of additional flexibility to offer high quality housing to the residents of the District.

**B. Second Step - Goal of Organization**

From our review of the previous studies and our interviews with historic district stakeholders it was obvious there was consensus on a common goal to be achieved. Private property and business owners as well as public officials that were interviewed all agreed that the common goal was:

***“To encourage and stimulate high quality, appropriate, new and rehab development to support the Historic Town Square”***

The second step in moving beyond planning documents and to begin implementing change is to develop a broader agreement within the public and private sectors on the common goal. In order to preserve the historic Town Square neighborhood, the Square itself must be economically vibrant and viable. In order to be economically viable, development must be high quality and historically appropriate, bringing new businesses, new residents and new users to the historic Town Square neighborhood.

**The core purpose of the new leadership/implementation organization should be to:**

***“Facilitate the development of high quality, appropriate new and rehab development to support the Historic Town Square neighborhood”***

**C. Third Step – Structure of Organization**

The IDA team recommends that a new private sector-directed non-profit corporation be created to act as the umbrella organization and lead the implementation of the Downtown Square Development Plan. The new organization would have the following structure:

Name: Collierville Downtown Development Corporation (CDDC)

Legal Structure: 501 C-6 non profit corporation

Board: 9 members to include;

7 from the private sector, representing downtown property owners, business owners and residents.  
2 from the public sector, representing the Town Administrator and the Board of Aldermen.

**Core Purpose:** Facilitate the development of high quality, appropriate new and rehab development to support the Historic Town Square neighborhood.

**Role:** Assist in the permitting, financing and developing of new and rehab projects in the Historic Town Center District. Provide staff to the Historic District Commission and Main Street Collierville. Serve as the first stop for all development projects within the Historic Town Center District. Build support and consensus for development projects and facilitate their journey through the regulatory process.

**Subsidiary Organizations:** Historic District Commission  
Main Street Collierville

**Funding:** A variety of funding sources will be needed to successfully achieve the goal of quality new and rehab development to support the preservation of the historic Town Square. Initial start-up funding for the new organization should be secured through a partnership between the private sector and the Town.

#### Initial Funding

- Private sector grants – 3 year pledges, total of \$150,000 per year.
- Town matching grants – 3 year pledge to match private sector grants up to \$150,000 per year.

#### On-going Funding

The CDDC must become financially sound and independent of Town match funding after the third year of operation. Funding sources will include:

- CBID – Renew, expand boundaries, increase rate and term of district.
- Historic Preservation Fee – Continued use of the Historic Preservation Fee for infrastructure in the Historic District.
- Event Income – Main Street Collierville as a subsidiary organization should continue producing

events and should increase the number of events and event income.

- State, Federal and Foundation Grants – CDDC in partnership with the Town should pursue infrastructure, community development and historic preservation grants from both public and private sector sources.
- Earned Income – CDDC should develop earned income opportunities by managing and implementing programs.

**Budget:** The initial budget for the first three years should be a minimum of \$350,000 per year. This would consist of \$150,000 from the private sector, \$150,000 from the City, \$40,000 from CBID assessments and \$10,000 from event income.

**Staffing:** Currently Main Street Collierville has a full time staff of one. The Town provides staff support to the Historic District Commission. It is recommended that at full staffing the CDDC, which includes Main Street Collierville and the Historic District Commission, have a staff of four.

- President – Collierville Downtown Development Corporation
- Vice President (CDDC) Director – Main Street Collierville
- Director of Development
- Office Manager

### **III. Next Steps**

In order to implement the recommendation contained in this report the following steps should be taken.

#### Immediate Steps

1. Begin process to establish new C-6 non-profit corporation, State charter, IRS filings, articles of incorporation and by-laws.
2. Select and install initial Board of Directors
3. Start private sector fundraising with the goal of having \$150,000 in contributions by December 31, 2006. The Main Street Collierville Corporation, which is a C-3 non-profit, can be used as a vehicle to

receive donations for those individuals and companies that need a charitable deduction.

4. Begin the implementation of a political strategy to obtain Town Administrator and Board of Aldermen approval of International Downtown Association (IDA) recommendations. Approvals needed are:
  - i. Board of Aldermen resolution of support for the IDA recommendations.
  - ii. Authorize Town Administrator and One Alderman to be members of the CDDC board of directors.
  - iii. Authorize Town Administrator to work with the CDDC Board to develop the time line and implementation steps For the CDDC Board to work with the Historic Preservation Commission.
  - iv. Authorize a funding source to provide the Town's annual match to private sector contributions, at a level of \$150,000 per year for three years.

(As soon as funding is in place)

5. Hire President Collierville Downtown Development Corporation
  - i. Develop job description for position
  - ii. Develop required qualifications for position
  - iii. Conduct a national search to fill position

#### **IV. Summary**

For at least the last six years it has been clear that the Historic Town Square District faces serious challenges. These challenges were defined in the Looney Ricks Kiss study in 2000, the Lyle Sumek Associates study in 2003 and the Market Street Services study in 2005.

Previous studies and IDA team observations clearly identify the threat to the Historic Town Square District. Unless the Town Square District adds additional residential and commercial development, both adjacent to and near the Square, it will have a very difficult time surviving in the long term as an economically viable business location.

All of the recent studies not only identified the challenges and threat, but also made recommendations to overcome the challenges and reduce the threat. Although some of the recommendations of the studies have been enacted, not nearly enough to reduce the threat and insure the long term survival of the district. It is obvious from the lack of new private sector investment in the district that more changes are needed to attract private sector investment back to the district.

As we stated in section II of this report, “The Town and Town Square stakeholders can debate solutions to the defined challenges, but until there is a private sector leadership organization to partner with the Town and implement those solutions, any debate is just academic and won’t result in the changes needed to preserve and improve the Historic Town Square district.” The choice is simple: Private sector stakeholders and the Town can partner together to fund and implement a new downtown management entity; or can allow this important and irreplaceable business district to suffer from increasing competition.

We therefore recommend:

***That business leaders concerned about the Town Square Historic District take immediate steps to create an effective private sector Implementation/Leadership organization focused on the Town Square neighborhood and charged with implementing and managing the changes necessary to overcome the challenges defined in each of the plans.***

There are few historic town squares throughout the US with the charm, vitality, and potential of Collierville’s. It would indeed be a shame to let this unique asset slip into a state of blight and neglect. However, if Town and private sector stakeholders continue to delay taking resolute and positive action with regard to these issues, solutions that are now available might become very difficult to achieve. The question of who should take responsibility for managing the district is not difficult; other towns and cities have shown the way by establishing development organizations, so to prevent the Historic Town Square District from losing economic viability, we strongly encourage and urge the steering committee and other private sector leaders to engage the Town in a partnership now.