

1 Executive Summary

The goal of this project was to identify community stakeholder views on the University Plaza Redevelopment Project. To achieve this goal, the MPA Capstone team performed a series of focus groups over three weeks that included campus constituents, community members, and the University District Development Corporation Board. Focus group sessions were conducted over Zoom to assess community opinions on the University Plaza Redevelopment Project. The analysis was based on coding the response data, categorizing it, and creating themes based on the frequency of responses. The most recurring themes included Business, Campus, Community, Infrastructure, Legacy, Safety, and Unknowns. The focus groups data were used to evaluate what stakeholders desired for the University Plaza location (e.g., grocery store, e.g., green space, or, e.g., recreation center). In addition, the three focus groups represented a larger population of the UA Little Rock District, and answers may reflect the views of the University District's larger population.

The MPA Capstone team reviewed the best practices literature from Cleveland State University(CSU), Bucknell University(BU), Temple University, University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and San Diego University(SDSU), approaches to neighborhood revitalization and community engagement. The best practices literature showed that in the past, public universities had done a poor job of revitalizing their local communities. However, CSU, SDSU and BU were successful in community redevelopment. The team also reviewed literature focused on Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) and the potential effect the relationship could have on UA Little Rock. Similarly, to gain a broader understanding of the role of anchor institutions when redeveloping university neighborhoods, the team also examined “town and gown,” Medical and Educational, Community Building, and Social Interactive literature.

Lastly, the MPA Capstone team presented recommendations to the UDDC Executive Committee that are grounded on feedback from the stakeholders. This report will identify successful practices that anchor institutions have utilized in redeveloping local neighborhoods, and how UA Little Rock can benefit from such practices. Using the literature as a guide, the team focused on the following research questions:

1. What similarities and differences emerged between the stakeholder groups regarding how the University Plaza should be developed?
2. What are consistent suggestions shared between the stakeholders and what they believe would benefit the surrounding university community?
3. What are the points of contention or concerns shared among the stakeholders that highlight drawbacks to the community and the university community?
4. From the feedback received, what are the most common recommendations for the redevelopment of the University Plaza?

The following recommendations are based on the feedback received from the stakeholder groups:

- Create green space within the development area which addresses concerns of infrastructure.
- Ensure a multipurpose configurable space to accommodate a variety of groups, activities and facilitate community interactions.

- Maintain local businesses, such as a space for retail and banking in the area to meet the needs of both the external and internal campus community.
- Prominently highlight the diversity within the University District, which will create an inclusive environment and identity as a unique and distinctive district in Little Rock.