



# **City of Myrtle Beach**

## **Partnerships between Universities and Cities as Economic Development Catalyst**



## Economic Development through Higher Education Downtown

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Bulldogs, Quakers, Titans, Lions, Spartans, Panthers, a Phoenix, even Belles. Guilford County is home to a menagerie of mascots representing various institutions of higher education, but only one, the aptly named Phoenix belonging to Elon University, has a physical presence in downtown Greensboro. When Elon University School of Law moved into the former public downtown library building in 2006, the city center saw an influx of 311 law students, 27 faculty members, and countless other visitors to the school. A critical mass of students can act as a driver for economic development in downtowns, injecting vibrancy into otherwise sparsely populated streets, patronizing retail and service businesses, and stimulating development in adjacent areas.

The City of Greensboro, like many other North Carolina towns, has seen a decline in its textile and manufacturing industries, and is now moving towards a knowledge-based economy. According to [Downtown Greensboro Incorporated](#), Greensboro's colleges and universities employ 7% of the city's population, paying a median salary that is 25% above the city's average. Moreover, these colleges and universities collectively host over 40,000 students each year and are projecting more growth in the coming years. The city recognizes that this is an opportunity for economic growth that can benefit both institutes of higher education and downtown Greensboro. The city's 2010 [Downtown Greensboro Economic Investment Strategy](#) seeks to build on Elon's success by encouraging more colleges and universities to locate their operations downtown. The city has identified seven potential development sites in downtown and has formed a Higher Education Working Group, a multi-sector stakeholder group that meets bi-monthly and includes representatives from the public sector, colleges and universities, and key business leaders. The



Working Group is "discussing joint marketing efforts and the creation of an 'education district' in downtown Greensboro.

The notion that an institute of higher education could locate downtown isn't just for big cities and four year colleges – smaller towns can (and do) pursue this strategy as well. North Carolina's Community College System, the third largest in the country, has seen unprecedented growth in the past few years. With an enrollment of 850,000 students, [1 in 8 North Carolinians](#) were enrolled in classes at one of the state's 58 community colleges in 2010. College campuses tend to be located in suburban areas outside of town centers for a variety of reasons: more room for parking, cheaper land and more of it, making future expansion a possibility. Yet, many small towns offer tremendous opportunities for redevelopment in their downtowns that present numerous advantages – large, historic buildings that are currently underutilized, affordable housing for students within walking distance of town centers, broadband access, and existing infrastructure for water and sewer.

Some small towns have already recognized this opportunity for economic development and have partnered with local colleges to bring facilities into downtown. In Siler City, NC, for example, Central Carolina Community College's [Professional Arts and Crafts Program](#) in clay and metal sculpture as well as its innovative arts-based small business incubator are housed in a total of seven historic downtown buildings. This effort was a result of a partnership between the town, the college, and the NC Rural Center. Also in North Carolina, the Town of Wadesboro partnered with South Piedmont Community College to renovate an [abandoned textile mill](#) to house a business incubator, training facility, and public meeting space. The renovation was largely supported by a private fundraising campaign. These examples demonstrate that higher education can be a catalyst for downtown economic development. As small towns contemplate the reuse of vacant downtown buildings, they should move beyond the usual suspects and consider their local colleges and universities – they just might find their own Phoenix.

*Marcia Perritt, a UNC-Chapel Hill graduate student pursuing a joint master's degree in Public Health and City and Regional Planning, is a Community Revitalization Fellow at the School of Government.*

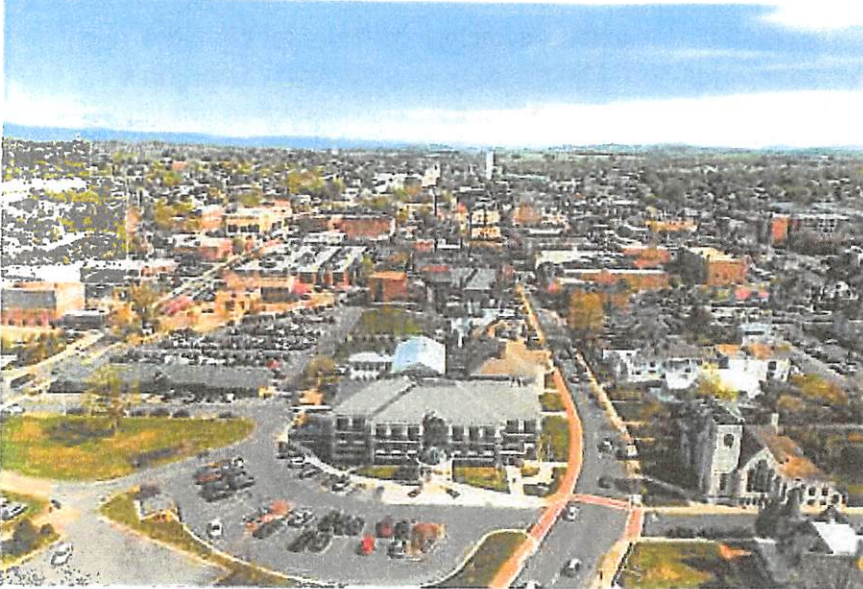


## Industries

# City is no longer a sleepy college town

## JMU, downtown revitalization drive area's rapid growth

by James Heffernan



*An aerial photo of Harrisonburg shows its newly expanded City Hall in the foreground. Photo by Cody Troyer, courtesy JMU*

As Harrisonburg awakens on a summer Saturday morning, young people emerge from downtown apartment buildings and lofts to get in a run or to walk their dogs along the city's tree-lined streets. Neighbors stop to exchange pleasantries en route to the post office, the library or the grocery store.

A crowd gathers at Turner Pavilion, behind the newly expanded City Hall, for the local farmers market, which offers seasonal produce, baked goods, meats, eggs, wines, ice cream and honey.

Downtown merchants prepare their shops for the day's patrons — the regulars whom the owners know by name as well as passersby who stop in to browse.

The smell of roasted coffees, fresh pastries and homemade breads fills the air. In a few hours, Main Street sidewalk cafés will be full, and the taps will be flowing at craft breweries.

### Not your father's city

Harrisonburg in 2019 is a far cry from the sleepy college town of decades ago. With an estimated 54,606 residents as of July 1, 2018, the city's population has nearly doubled since 1990, according to the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

Much of that growth, officials say, can be attributed to James Madison University, which has followed a similar trajectory during that span, increasing its enrollment from 10,000 to 20,000 students.

"That certainly has been an accelerator for us," says Brian Shull, the city's director of economic development, who arrived in Harrisonburg in 1994. "It has been fun to grow alongside JMU."

Some of the university's nearly 4,000 employees settle in Rockingham County, says county administrator Stephen G. King. The county's population has increased 6.7% since the April 2010 Census, to an estimated 81,422 residents.

The combined growth of Harrisonburg and Rockingham since 2010 has been 8.6%, the third-fastest among Virginia metropolitan areas. It trails only Northern Virginia (12.4%) and Winchester (11.1%), according to Census data.

Boosting growth in their hometowns is nothing new for Virginia colleges and universities.

Charlottesville, Blacksburg and Lynchburg all have blossomed around educational institutions. These



**schools spur commercial and residential development while producing a steady stream of graduates, many of whom stay in the area to work, start businesses and raise families.**

Harrisonburg and Rockingham are capitalizing on their own group of schools, which include not only JMU, but also Eastern Mennonite University on the city's north end, Bridgewater College near Dayton and Blue Ridge Community College in nearby Weyers Cave. Together these institutions produce more than 7,000 graduates per year.

Shull says the region's diverse economy, natural beauty and recreational amenities are a major draw for young professionals. "Workers now are often picking where they're going to live, and then they find the job. That was unheard of 20 years ago. ... But this area certainly checks all of the boxes."

In April, Reviews.org ranked Harrisonburg seventh out of 325 metro areas nationwide on its 2019 "Best Places for Millennials to Move" list. (Lynchburg was No. 1.) The survey was based on factors such as unemployment rates, immigration flows, housing costs and crime rates. The report states that Harrisonburg is "great for outdoor activities, strolls to the local breweries and restaurants, or bringing out your artistic and creative side." The city is also "a wonderful place for ethnic and linguistic diversity," it says. That's a nod to Harrisonburg's status as a Church World Service refugee resettlement area since 1988. Children from families speaking more than 50 languages attend the city's public schools.

### Now a destination

A generation ago, downtown Harrisonburg was not much of a destination. Aside from a smattering of restaurants and bars, an ice cream stand and the Court Square Theater, there were few businesses to attract residents and visitors to the area. The Downtown Merchants Association was active, but many stores had abandoned Main Street for the growing U.S. 33 commercial corridor.

Beginning in the late 1990s several revitalization efforts were undertaken by citizens' groups and the city. "One of the first things that was on my desk when I arrived [as economic development director] in 1998 was the idea that we were going to try to do a revitalization of downtown," Shull says. However, such efforts were largely volunteer-driven and lacked substantial funding.

With the launch of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance in 2003, the seeds for a vibrant community were planted. The nonprofit soon hitched its wagon to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street America program, with its four-point plan for revitalization: economic vitality, design, promotion and organization.



"It's all open source, so we had that framework and the methodology, and we got to customize it to our local needs," says HDR Executive Director Andrea Dono. "We had a bunch of people roll up their sleeves and take a piece of everything."

As a designated Virginia Main Street community, Harrisonburg was able to leverage state funds for feasibility studies, training, streetscape projects, tax incentives and public-private partnerships.

From the beginning, HDR has worked with the city and area developers to meet the demand for housing downtown. The number

of residences in the district increased from 150 in 2003 to 586 at the end of last year. Many of those units are part of mixed-use developments, with apartments and lofts above shops on the ground floor.



"That was huge for us," Shull says, "because now you have 24/7 activity downtown. And that led to more restaurants and retail popping up and just more vibrancy."

King says that, with the growth of JMU, Rockingham is seeing more urban-style development, including student housing. Two new apartment complexes are expected to open along Port Republic Road, just outside the city limits, next year.

### Technology, food and the arts

When tech startups showed interest in locating downtown, the city responded by creating a technology zone. The language-learning software company Rosetta Stone was one of the first to take advantage of the zone's tax incentives. Jenzabar, a Boston-based higher education technology firm, soon followed, opening an office on Liberty Street. One of the newest ventures is Chiedo Labs, a web and mobile app developer started in 2012 by a JMU graduate, Chiedo John.

Dono of HDR says the tech sector is growing — and clustering — organically. "Some people who left Rosetta Stone started their own ventures. And Chiedo ... I'll see the owner networking with somebody at a coffee shop or somewhere ... and he'll say to me, 'Hey, this is so-and-so from New York and I'm trying to recruit him.' There are people who love it here so much. And they want to have peers in their field. ... So those conversations are happening, and new companies are opening up."

In 2014, downtown Harrisonburg was designated as Virginia's first culinary district. It boasts 38 eateries, the most recent of which, the Habana Café on Court Square, serves Cuban cuisine. "We have this critical mass of restaurants," Dono says, "from ethnic eateries to farm-to-table to longstanding icons like Jess' Quick Lunch ... There's something for everyone." Dono recently was able to help the owner of a longtime Korean food truck in the city, Mashita, find a space downtown to expand.

Downtown also includes a thriving arts scene, with boutiques, craft stores and makerspaces. "When you come to downtown Harrisonburg, you're not just doing a simple transaction," Dono said. "You're actually having an experience where you get to meet the people who are making the products, and in some places you get to even watch it being made."

As HDR has matured and added staff, "we've taken on more and bigger projects," Dono says. "That cycle of disinvestment has been reversed, essentially."

Today, Harrisonburg and HDR are held up as models for downtown revitalization. "We have people coming here from other towns in Virginia and all across the United States," Dono says. "We even hosted a delegation from Japan." The organization won the National Main Street Center's Great American Main Street Award in 2014 and recently was contacted about serving as a case study for an upcoming report by the Brookings Institution.

Downtown also has become a major recruitment tool for Harrisonburg and Rockingham. "I know that JMU [is] bringing people down here to show off the downtown," Dono says. "So are the hospitals and the major employers. ... We hear stories about people who stopped because they had to get off the highway or they had a flat tire or they're tired or needed to stop for food. And next thing you know, they want to move here."

### A catalyst for development

JMU also has been a major factor in commercial development as well as the redevelopment of real estate in Harrisonburg and Rockingham.

The university's acquisition of older properties, such as the former Rockingham Memorial Hospital and the old Harrisonburg High School, have been important to the revitalization of areas adjacent to the campus.



The Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center — a joint venture involving the city, the JMU Foundation and a private developer — is helping grow the area's hospitality and tourism sector.

The university also was instrumental in the decision of a leading research and development firm, SRI International, to locate a 40,000-square-foot biosciences center on a 25-acre campus in Harrisonburg in 2009. JMU has developed a close relationship with SRI by placing interns and graduates and by sponsoring joint research projects.

As part of the recently announced \$1 billion expansion of the Merck pharmaceutical plant in Elkton, JMU and Blue Ridge Community College will receive up to \$2.5 million over five years from the state. The grant will be used to address Merck's workforce needs and those of other major employers in the Shenandoah Valley, including MillerCoors, Danone/WhiteWave, Shamrock Farms and Hershey Foods.

With colleges and universities leading the way, local officials are optimistic about the region's future. But they also want to ensure smart growth.

"We don't want to grow just for growth's sake," Shull says. "We want to make sure that we have all the right infrastructure to accommodate growth that leads to better jobs and better economic well-being for our residents."



# IDEAS FOR VIBRANT CITIES

BY JOHN KARRAS



Blog | About Urban Scale | The Urban Scale Rating System

Home | List of 20 Examples of VIBRANT Cities | urbanSCALE

## 20 American Downtowns Being Transformed by Universities

SEPTEMBER 5, 2018 BY JOHN KARRAS

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If you could transform your downtown into a more vibrant district with a single strategy, which approach would you pick? The right answer for dozens of communities is...**A Major Expansion of Higher Education.**

This blog post represents what I believe to be the largest single collection of downtown revitalization examples driven by the expansion of universities. Special shout-out to all my LinkedIn friends who provided feedback on this topic :).



Below are 20 examples of cities enjoying the benefits of university expansions in their downtowns. For each example, you'll see a brief description of how the the higher education expansion is translating into (or will lead to) new growth and energy in the downtown district. I've included a few existing universities that are expanding an existing downtown (or near downtown) campus, but most of the examples below represent entirely new investments where nothing existed before.

## Downtown University Expansion #1:

### Wake Forest University in downtown Winston-Salem



Image credit: Wake Forest University

[Wake Downtown opened in 2017](#) with a 115,000 square-foot, STEM-focused urban campus in Winston-Salem's emerging Innovation Quarter. The urban campus is housed in the old R.J. Reynolds tobacco building, which has been completely renovated and provides space for three new majors at the university: biochemistry and molecular biology, medicinal chemistry and drug discovery, and engineering. Wake Forest University President Nathan O. Hatch described Wake Downtown as an inflection point in the university's trajectory, "When we look back at the major milestones in Wake Forest University's history, I think this will rise to the top."



## Downtown University Expansion #2:

### University of South Florida in Tampa

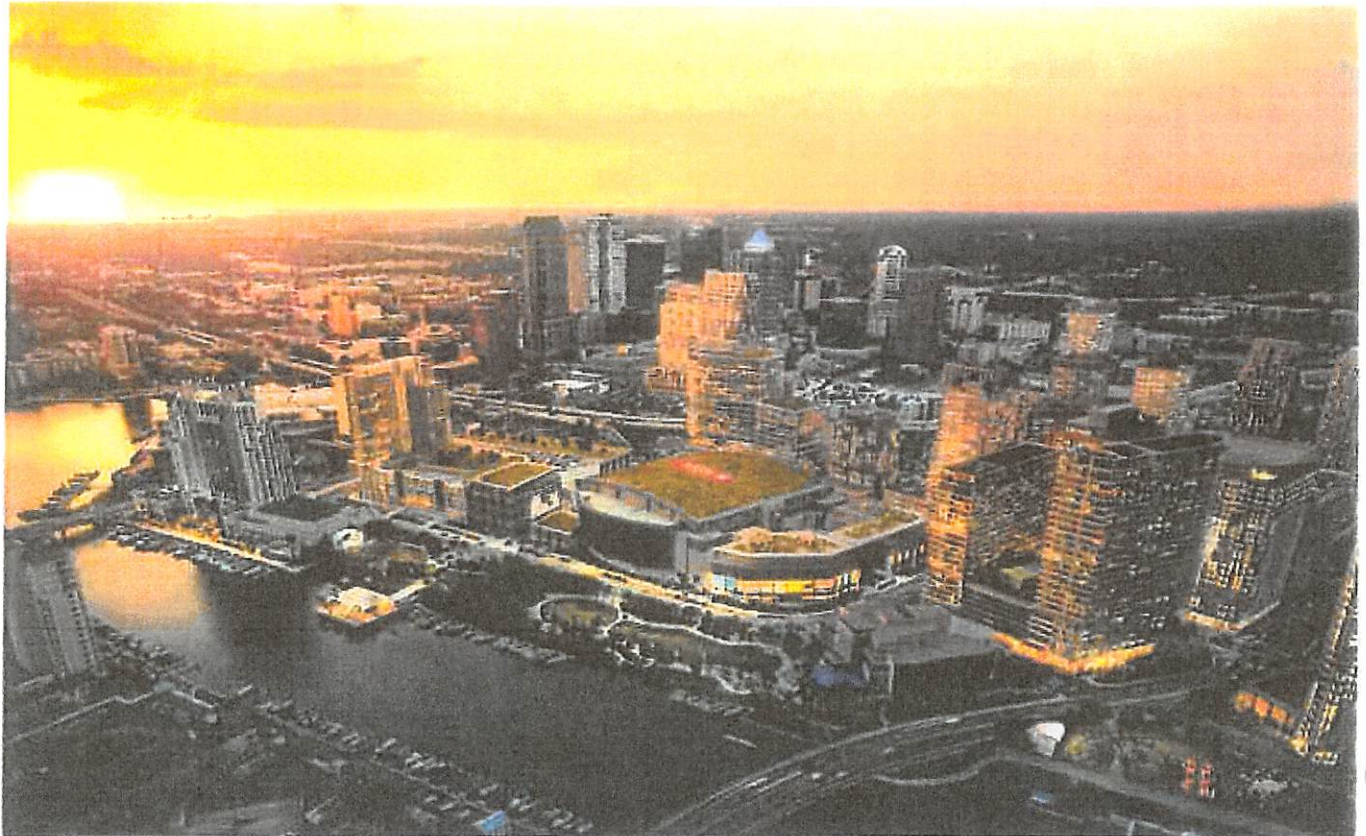


Image credit: Strategic Property Partners via Curbed

The [USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and Heart Institute](#) will open in 2019 in downtown Tampa. The new medical school will be an anchor as part of the [Water Street Tampa](#) district, planned as a dynamic urban mixed-use destination. Water Street is being touted as the world's first "wellness district" and the new College of Medicine is an important part of that, with the 1,800 students, faculty, staff, and researchers that will occupy the facilities. Read more about the new urban neighborhood and its potential to transform Tampa's economy as a medical/tech cluster (thanks in part to the new USF facilities) in [Patrick Sisson's article at Curbed](#).

## Downtown University Expansion #3:

### University of Washington – Tacoma



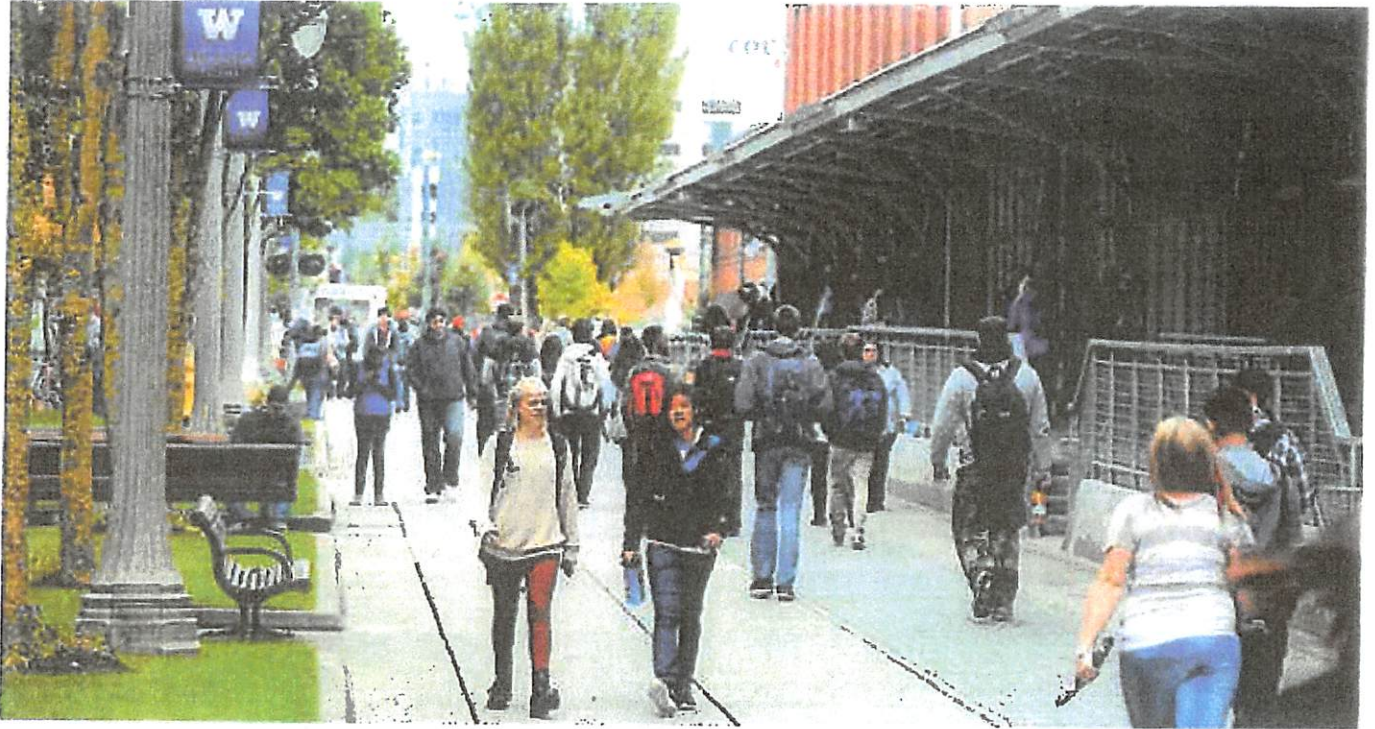


Image credit: University of Washington – Tacoma

Tacoma, Washington has struggled economically for decades, living under the shadow of neighboring Seattle. Malcolm Burnley at NextCity [wrote this article](#) detailing UW-Tacoma (UWT) and its influential role in the city's downtown resurgence. When UWT opened in 1990, the State of Washington was trying to accomplish two major goals: 1) boost in-state enrollment; and 2) encourage economic development. By most accounts, UWT is now credited with leading a transformation of the city's once depressed downtown. The question remaining is whether the university and the urban core can spark a broader citywide wave of prosperity.

## Downtown University Expansion #4:

### Arizona State University in Phoenix



Image credit: Arizona State University



Arizona State University's downtown Phoenix campus is one of the most ambitious and strategic efforts to create a new higher education presence in a downtown. With an investment of nearly \$225 million, the new campus will ultimately house 15,000 students and nearly 2,000 faculty and staff in the heart of Phoenix. ASU's main campus in Tempe (a suburb just east of Phoenix) remains one of the country's largest universities. But the university's growing presence in Phoenix is the centerpiece of the city's downtown revitalization efforts. This CityLab article by Jon Tatton describes Phoenix's recent progress toward urban transformation, driven largely by the new ASU campus.

## Downtown University Expansion #5:

### University of Central Florida in Orlando



Image credit: University of Central Florida

UCF's downtown Orlando campus is a perfect example to highlight after ASU in Phoenix. Not only because both universities already have huge flagship suburban campuses, but because UCF specifically used ASU as a model for their urban expansion. A few highlights about what makes this a great example: private sector funding was the major force behind the project, the intermingling of downtown employers with students (for internships especially) was a key consideration, and UCF partnered with the local community college to develop the campus. A recent article from



**UCF** describes what the downtown campus will look like when it opens its doors to nearly 8,000 students in 2019.

## Downtown University Expansion #6:

### University at Buffalo medical campus



Image credit: Derek Gee, Buffalo News

Buffalo, despite being the largest city in New York State by population after NYC, has more in common with Midwestern “Rust Belt” cities like Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee. The city’s downtown has a one of the largest collections of historic buildings in the US, but that urban core had fallen on hard times for more than a generation...Until recent years when the University at Buffalo launched the development of a new medical district anchored by the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biosciences. **With hundreds of millions invested in new facilities, including major R&D centers such as the [NYS Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics & Life Sciences](#), the university is credited with kickstarting a broader downtown renaissance. [This article by Henry L. Davis of the Buffalo News](#) describes the medical district’s role as a catalyst of urban revitalization. Davis is careful to point out, however, that “The campus isn’t a panacea. It won’t on its own solve all of the region’s big health care challenges, eliminate poverty in nearby neighborhoods, or suddenly make Buffalo the medical version of Silicon Valley. **But it is steering the region’s medical culture and downtown life in the right direction.**”**



## Downtown University Expansion #7:

### Sacramento State University School of Public Affairs



Image credit: Sacramento State University

Not all downtown revitalization efforts from universities must begin with a major new campus. Sacramento State University took a relatively modest, but important, step in 2016 by purchasing an existing 3-story, 30,000 square feet building in downtown Sacramento. The facility now houses the university's School of Public Affairs and the downtown location decision has been lauded by local, state, and national political leaders as a critical symbolic move by the university that will help retain and attract students, in addition to playing a role in downtown's continued enhancement. [University President Robert S. Nelsen describes the new downtown location](#) as a signal of the school's status as "an anchor university," the opposite of an ivory tower, with a focus on community engagement.

## Downtown University Expansion #8:

### UT-San Antonio downtown campus



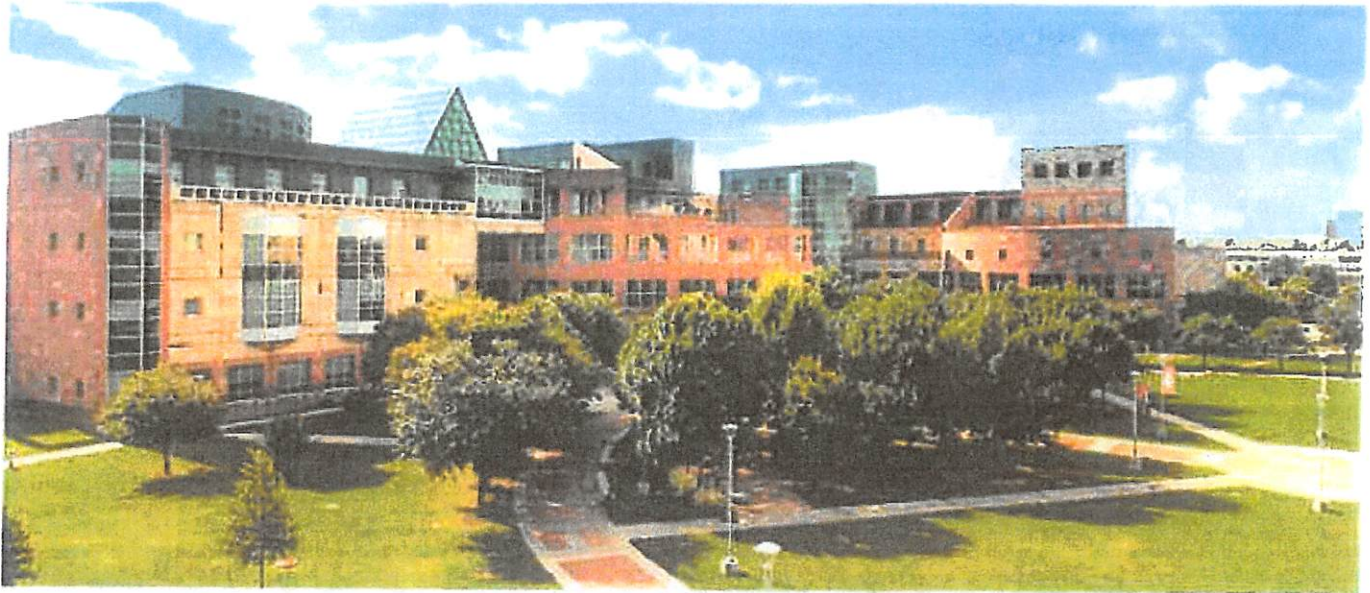


Image credit: UTSA

The near west side of San Antonio's downtown has struggled with blight and disinvestment for many years. When UTSA's downtown campus opened in 1997, one of its goals was to spark a revitalization in the surrounding area. The campus now serves a third of the university's graduate students and houses UTSA Downtown Campus is home to the College of Architecture, Construction and Planning, the College of Public Policy and several departments of the College of Education and Human Development. In 2017, the university celebrated the downtown campus's 20 year anniversary and highlighted the integral role UTSA has played in the creation of one of San Antonio's up-and-coming urban districts. More recently, UTSA President Taylor Eighmy has called for a major expansion of the downtown campus's footprint and economic impact with up to 10,000 new students, two new schools, and two urban institutes over the next decade.

## Downtown University Expansion #9:

UT-Austin Dell Medical School.





Image credit: UT News

In 2012, Travis County voters approved a medical bond package that provided the funds to create a new medical school. This was the first new medical school as part of a major public research university in roughly 50 years. [This 2015 article in Fast Company](#) by Evie Nagy describes the bold vision for the Dell Medical School at UT-Austin (DellMed). From the outset, the new medical school was designed to reinvent health care from the ground-up. In addition to the school's intent to disrupt the medical industry, it has also been touted as the centerpiece of a new "innovation district" that would spark a wave of economic growth and urban development in Austin's downtown area. When the global pharma company [Merck announced in 2017](#) it would create a 600-person innovation hub that would be located adjacent to DellMed, that vision started to become a reality.

## Downtown University Expansion #10:

### Cornell Tech in NYC





Okay, so Roosevelt Island (a small 2-mile long stretch of land in the East River between Manhattan and Queens) isn't exactly downtown. But it is an urban district in need of transformation. In the past it has been home to housing projects, an insane asylum, a smallpox hospital, and it served as the setting for *Dark Water*, the 2005 horror flick starring Jennifer Connelly. As of 2017, the island became home to the beginnings of what promises to become one of the most high-tech urban university campuses in the world: Cornell Tech. [This 2017 NYT article](#) by Elizabeth A. Harris tells the story of how this campus came to be and what its ambitions are. In short, Cornell Tech aims to spark a Silicon Valley-esque tech and R&D scene in NYC through several new graduate programs focused on computer science and electrical and computer engineering.

## Downtown University Expansion #11:

### University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire





Image credit: UW Eau Claire

The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire is located only about 1 mile from the city's downtown. The relatively short distance between the university campus and the city's downtown allows for development opportunities between the two districts. But that hasn't stopped the university from expanding directly into the community's CBD. The [Pablo Center at the Confluence](#) (photo above) is a \$51 million concert and theater venue for the university and the community, located in the heart of downtown at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. Adjacent to the Confluence project is the [Haymarket Landing development](#) which includes student housing for about 400 UW-Eau Claire students. **The downtown investments by the university have helped stimulate private sector investment in the city's urban core as well.** Foxconn Technology Group announced a couple months ago it would open [a 150-person tech hub in downtown Eau Claire](#). Foxconn's announcement came on the heels of a similar announcement for downtown Green Bay in addition to its new North American HQ in downtown Milwaukee and its \$10 billion manufacturing campus now under construction in Racine County in southeastern Wisconsin.

## Downtown University Expansion #12:

### University of Connecticut in Stamford





Image credit: Angelina Reyes/UConn Photo

There is a virtually insatiable demand for downtown housing options in cities across the US. The desire to live in an authentic urban location seems to hold true not just for the private real estate market, but for student housing as well. UConn Stamford opened its downtown campus in 1998 and embarked on a development to add a 116-unit student housing development that opened its doors in 2017. Demand from UConn students has been so strong that the university is now planning to **add another 120 units** by partnering with apartment owners of surrounding rental properties.

## Downtown University Expansion #13:

### UConn Hartford



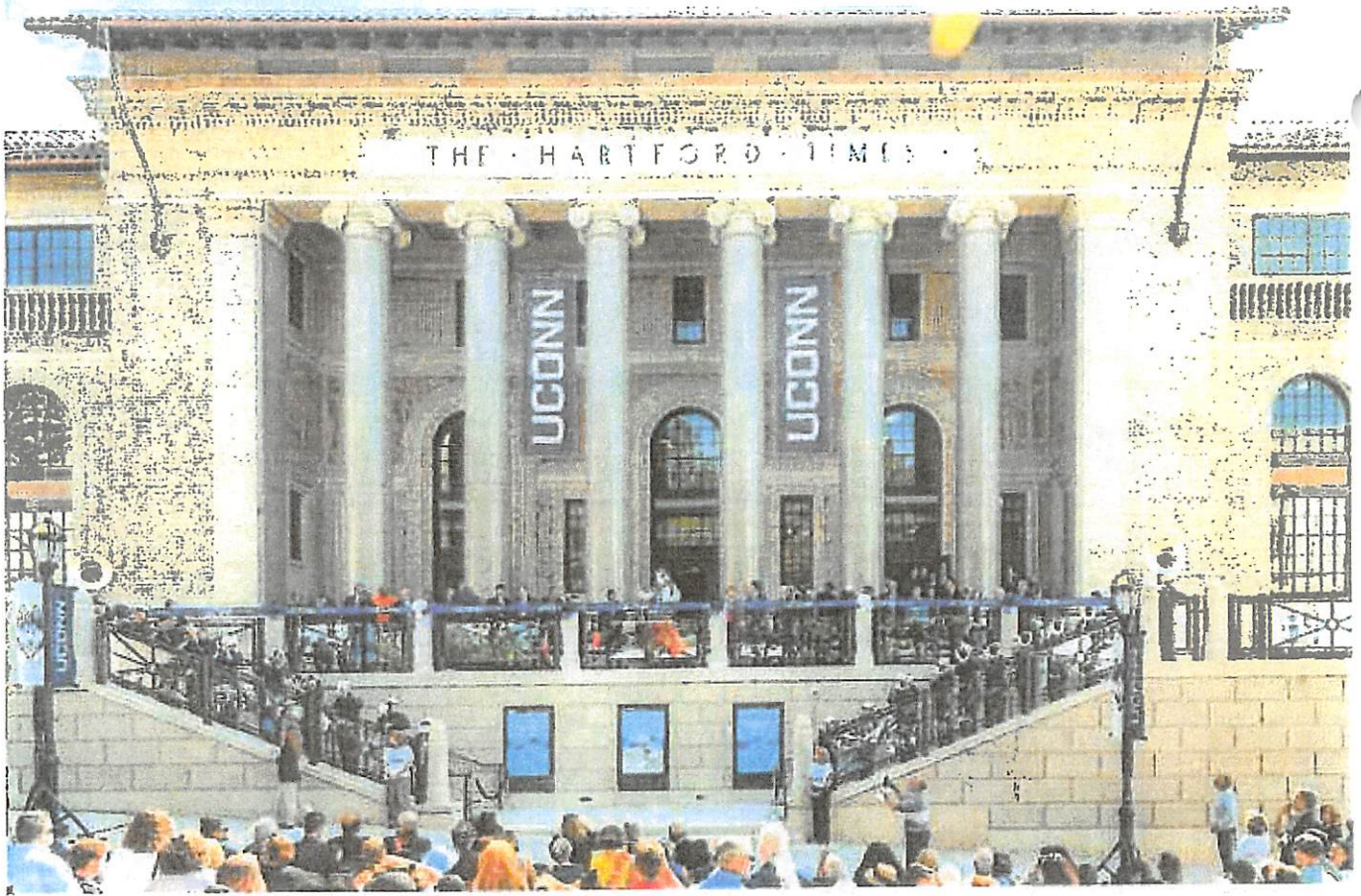


Image credit: Peter Morenus, UConn Photo

Stamford isn't the only city in Connecticut to receive a downtown UConn campus. In 2017, [UConn Hartford opened its doors to 2,300 students](#) after 20 years of dreaming, planning, and visioning. The \$140 million investment in the new 5-building campus in downtown Hartford is being touted as [the biggest economic win](#) and redevelopment project for Hartford in over a decade.

## Downtown University Expansion #14:

### University of Oregon in Portland





Image credit: UO Portland

The main campus of the University of Oregon is in Eugene, 100 miles south of Portland, Oregon's largest city. Portland State University has its campus in the heart of downtown Portland, making it one of the most urban university campuses in the US. But 10 years ago, the University of Oregon saw an opportunity to make a big investment in downtown Portland, with the consolidation of several Portland programs in the historic [White Stag Block](#). The facility houses a range of programs in architecture, law, business and journalism, and serves as a highly visible knowledge center in downtown Portland.

## Downtown University Expansion #15:

### Mississippi State University – Meridian



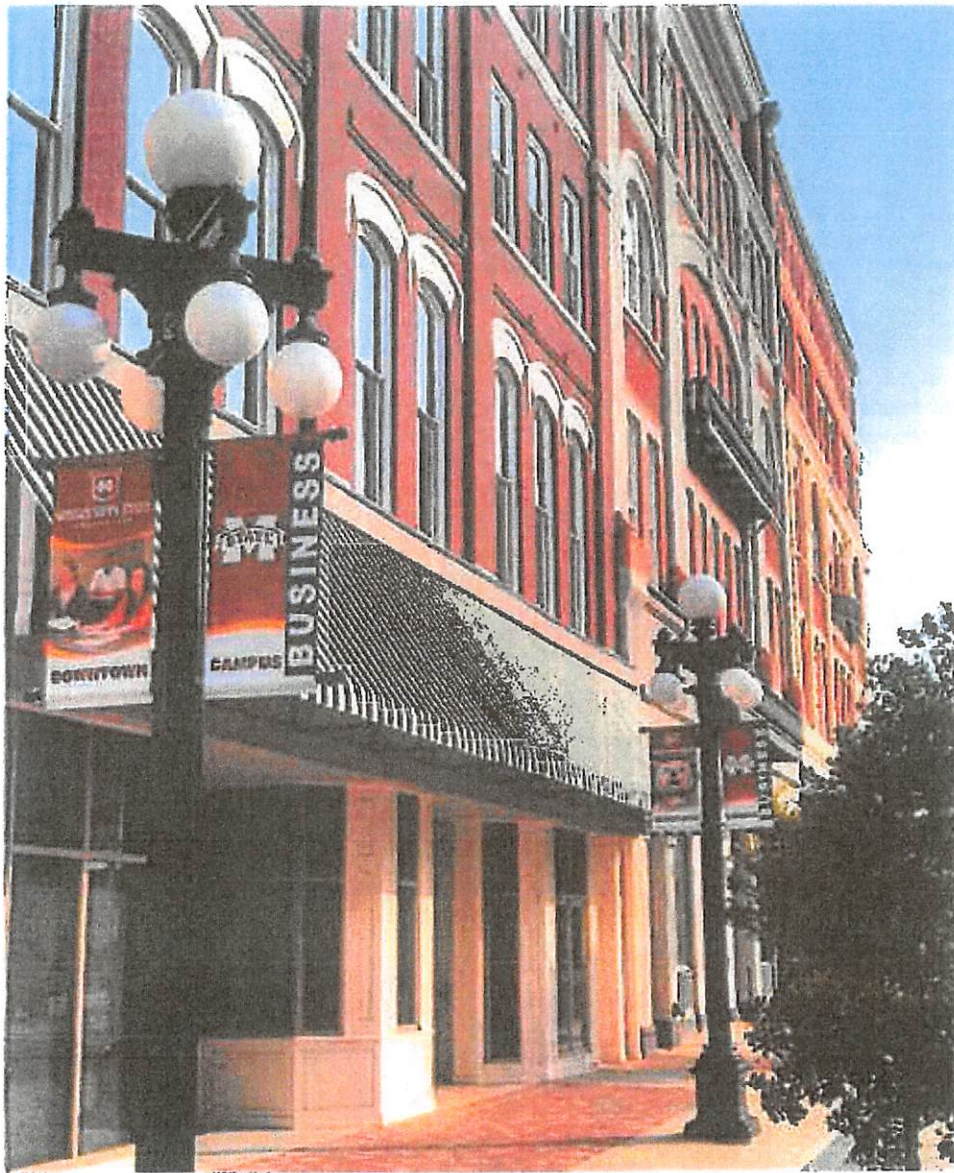


Image credit: MSU Meridian

Mississippi State University's flagship campus is in Starkville, but the university also operates an urban campus 75 miles to the south in downtown Meridian. The [MSU Meridian downtown campus](#) includes three separate facilities, the Riley Center (a performing arts facility and Grand Opera House), the Deen Building (pictured above) which houses the university's Division of Business, and most recently—thanks to an \$11 million grant from the Riley Foundation—[the Rosenbaum Building](#), which will house the university's kinesiology program.

## Downtown University Expansion #16:

### University of Minnesota – Rochester



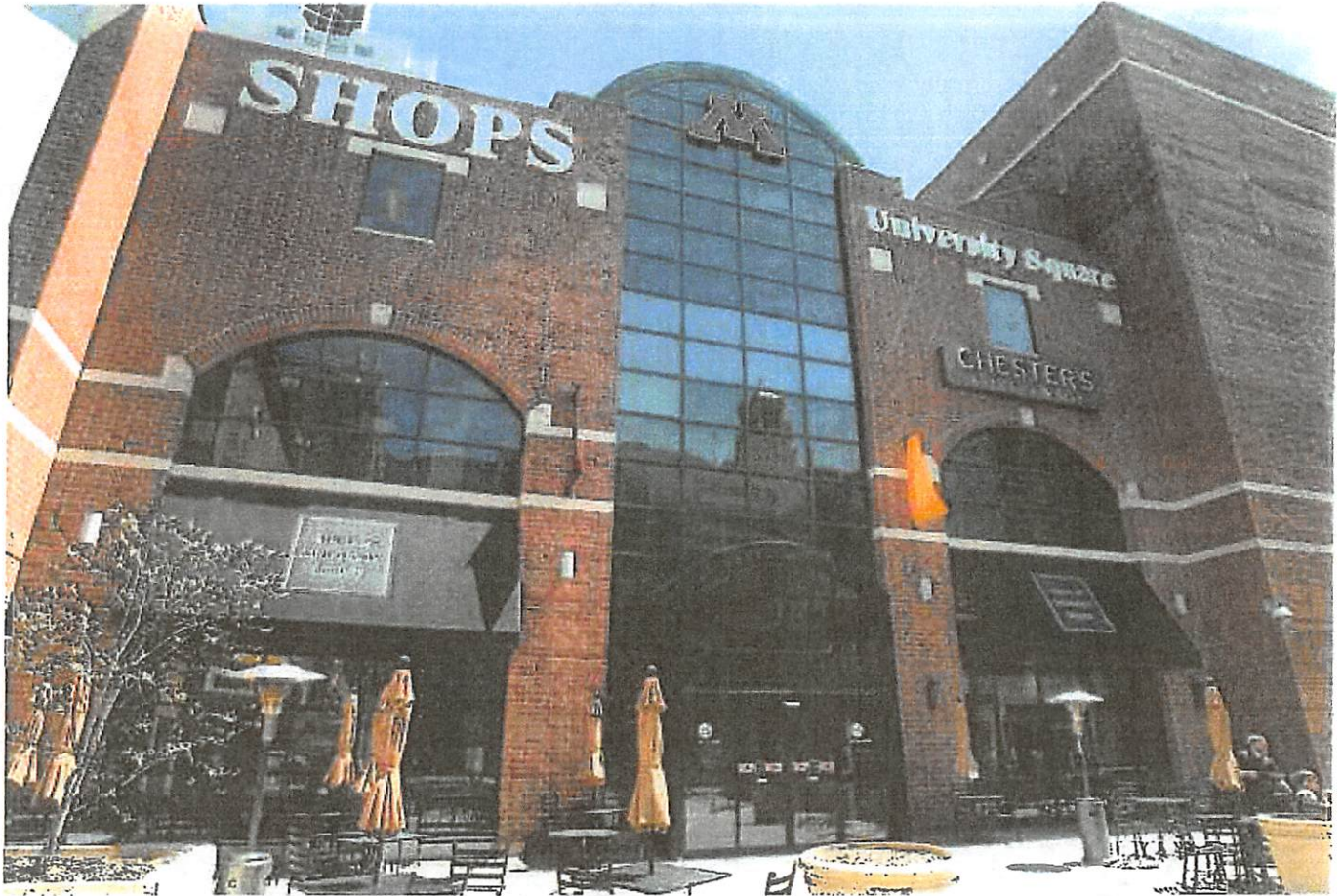


Image credit: Alex Kolyer, Minnesota Public Radio

Rochester, Minnesota is known for being home to the world-class Mayo Clinic, but it did not have its own University of Minnesota campus until very recently. Initially established in 2006, the downtown campus [graduated its first class of undergraduate students in 2013](#). The campus is focused on health sciences, leveraging its proximity to the Mayo Clinic. UMN Rochester now has [a new chancellor](#), Dr. Lori Carrell, that is poised to continue moving the campus forward with a plan for growth over the next several years.

## Downtown University Expansion #17:

### University of Memphis Law School





Image credit: University of Memphis

The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law was established in 1962, but moved into [its current downtown home in 2010](#). It took \$42 million to renovate the 169,000 square foot building into a modern law school. The impressive building was originally built in the 1880s and has been operated as a US Custom House, Court House, and Post Office before its higher education conversion. In addition to its positive role in efforts to rejuvenate downtown Memphis, the law school is a strong visual bookend at the end of Madison Avenue on the western edge of downtown for travelers heading toward downtown from the rest of the city.

## Downtown University Expansion #18:

### UMass Center in Springfield



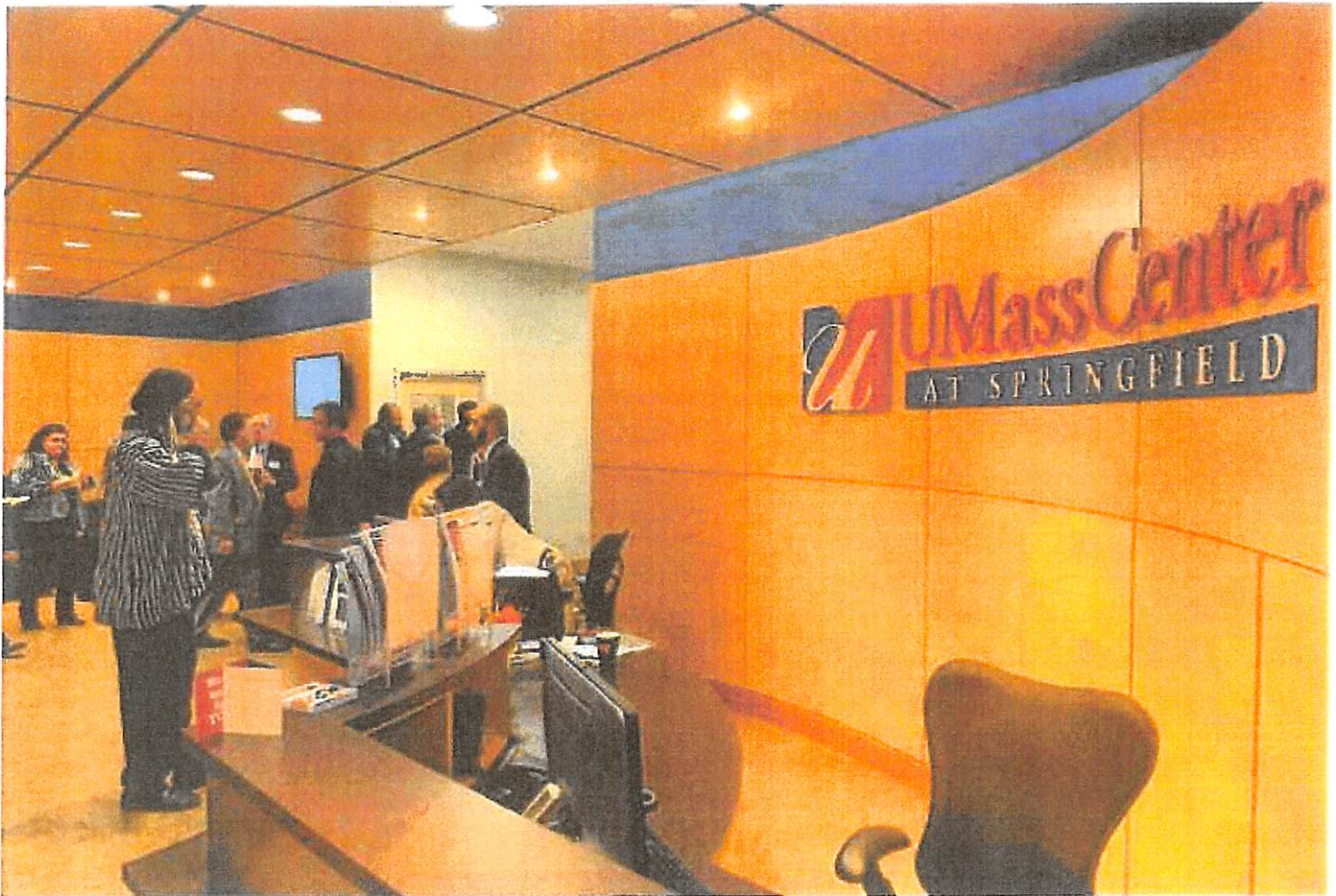


Image credit: John Suchocki, The Republican

The University of Massachusetts opened its UMass Center in downtown Springfield in 2014. Since opening, the student enrollment has grown from 250 to nearly 1,000. Springfield's economic development leaders are excited about the potential of this higher education expansion to benefit the region's economy. Richard K. Sullivan Jr., president and CEO of the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts (whose office happens to be located adjacent to UMass Center), describes the new facility as "a momentum changer" for downtown Springfield. "It's a big statement from higher education, saying that this is the place to be," Sullivan said. "On a practical level, having hundreds of students in downtown creates foot traffic and retail momentum," Sullivan said. "And, that younger population brings a vitality to downtown." Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno agrees with Sullivan Jr. "It is a boost to the psyche, morale and image of our city, because the naysayers said it would never happen," Sarno said. "Specifically, it's brought the eclectic mix I'm looking for in our downtown, driving not only higher education options such as STEM and cybersecurity, but it's been a catalyst for innovation-entrepreneur district, young professionals, arts, culture, (New England Public Radio) and bringing new-found life to our Tower Square to name a few."

## Downtown University Expansion #19:



## Delta College in downtown Saginaw

### Delta College in Downtown Saginaw

Artist Rendering



Image credit: Delta College

Delta College is the regional community college serving three separate metropolitan areas in East Central Michigan: Saginaw, Midland, and Bay City. The main campus sits on 640 acres in a “middle ground” location between the three cities, adjacent to Saginaw Valley State University. Several years ago, Delta College leaders decided to open a satellite campus in downtown Saginaw to help revitalize the struggling urban district and to provide an urban alternative for students. In 2016, a site in downtown Saginaw was selected and the State of Michigan authorized funding to move forward with the new campus, which is now well under construction and set to open its doors to 1,100 students in 2019.

## Downtown University Expansion #20:

### High Point University



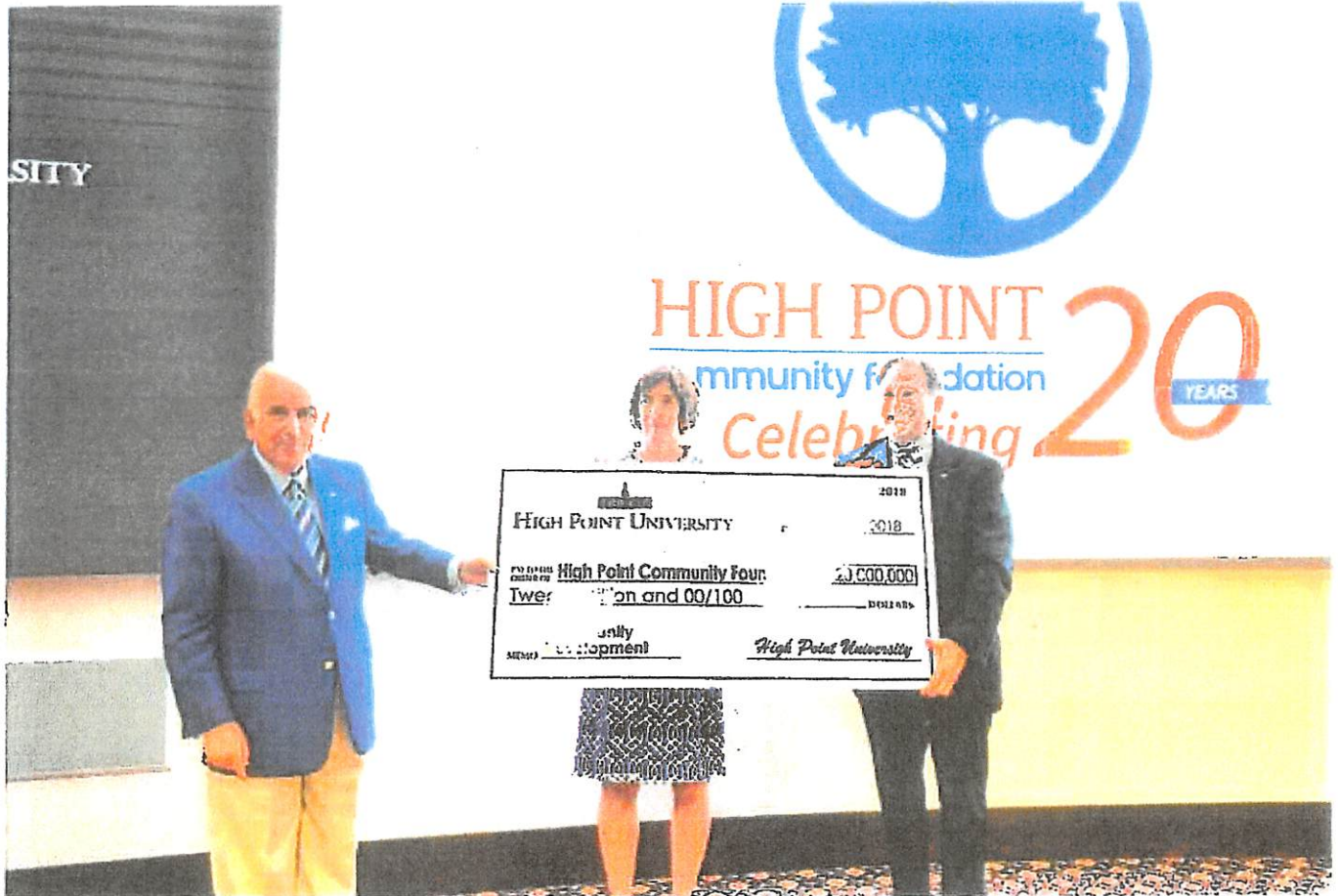


Image credit: High Point University

There is no question universities are key players in supporting regional economic development through their innovation, research, and talent development efforts. And we've highlighted numerous examples in this blog post of how universities are working to stimulate urban redevelopment in downtown districts. By developing downtown campuses that bring in thousands of students, faculty, and staff into an urban core, universities can make a big difference in transforming a downtown. But how often does a university lead the way in a downtown revitalization strategy simply by funding a bunch of non-higher education projects? That's exactly what High Point University's leadership is doing in High Point, North Carolina. In May 2018, the University's Board of Regents approved a \$20 million investment to the High Point Community Foundation that will fund several downtown revitalization projects including: a children's museum, Lego Center, events center, and community park. High Point University president Dr. Nido Qubein has also helped raise tens of millions of dollars from the private sector to support catalyst projects in downtown High Point. These funds are working in concert with public investments in a new multi-use stadium that will anchor a district to include a 120-room hotel, two office buildings, 30,000 square feet of retail space, a 120-unit apartment building, and parking facilities.

## Bottom Line



This is by no means every downtown higher education expansion in the US...there are plenty of additional examples out there. You may also notice I focused on downtown university campuses, but you can find similar stories of community colleges in downtowns, higher education research & innovation centers, and other relevant examples. But the main takeaway is: **Don't underestimate the potential of leveraging your region's higher education institutions as a catalyst for downtown transformations.**

What are your favorite downtown higher education expansion projects?



**John Karras (32 Posts)**

John Karras believes that all communities have the potential to become more vibrant. John's professional passions are aligned at the three-way intersection of urban planning, economic development and transportation policy. John founded urbanSCALE.com to empower urban planning and economic development professionals with the knowledge and tools needed to make their communities more vibrant. John is also the creator of the urbanSCALE Rating System, the first comprehensive measure of how urban a city is on a scale of 1 to 10.



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## COMMENTS

bill j karras says

[September 7, 2018 at 4:33 pm](#)

Adding further support to your Urban Scale Blog about the benefits of university expansions in their downtowns: in a prediction of further expansions, the president of the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) just recently announced the construction of two new buildings in its downtown campus. One is a \$33 million, 80 thousand square foot center for cyber-security research, and the other is a \$57 million, 138 thousand square foot hub that consolidates existing cyber-tech programs. Major reasons for these moves to the urban center according to officials: "The closer you put people together...the faster innovation happens", and "...those that are situated within an urban environment will have the best chance for that."

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