

**Managing and Enlivening New Century Cities
Business Improvement Districts
as a 21st Century City Strategy**

Examining the Possibilities for the MIT Triangle

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*“...a new type of interactive public space that is emerging in cities throughout the world, in contrast to interactive spaces of the past, which were largely the product of a single designer, these places are emerging through the aggregation of many actors – property owners and their architects, advertising and media companies, telecommunications service providers, urban designers and individuals”.*¹ – Anthony Townsend

The advent of New Century Cities is changing the paradigm of space, city development and management. New Centuries Cities are the phenomena of the new millennium and the information age. The expansion of electronic infrastructure – sensing, digitized information mediums, wireless connections – are being welded and symbiotically immersed into the urban fabric. New Century Cities are mega-developments which are integrating the residential, recreational and working realms to be the intellectual and innovation capitals in a global marketplace. Not surprisingly as New Century Cities are embodying the new economy and its manifestations, NCC sponsors are using the NCC often as a positioning strategy for their respective nation or region.

As New Century Cities are forming and being built out, it is appropriate to examine how New Century Cities could be governed and managed. The true long-term value of a New Century City is based on sustaining its innovative and cutting-edge character, and enabling the NCC to constantly re-invent itself.

A hallmark of New Century Cities is the partnership with major institutions, private corporations, universities, research centers, and media entities that become a part of the NCC.

How is the partnership sustained over time? In some locales, particularly Asia, the national government is playing a decisive role in shaping and financing NCC development as in one-North, Singapore and the Digital Media City in Seoul. Similarly in Europe, where there are also strong central national and provincial governments, there is significant partnership and investment in NCC with national and provincial ministries. Unlike most Asian and European countries, in the United States, land use and development has been the domain of local governments, who tend to have limited resources and capacity to make long-term commitments.

In New Century Cities, partnerships reach beyond the traditional meanings of public-private partnerships where each sector joins forces to reach a common end retaining their traditional roles. Rather, the traditional definitions of public and private sector are blurred – what is private is becoming somewhat public, and what is public is becoming somewhat private. How do we manage this blurred space? Privately? Publicly? How do we effectively involve the aggregation of many actors – property owners and their architects, developers, universities, private telecommunications and technology companies, governments, individuals? What’s the new way to manage place in the 21st century reflecting the New Century City reality?

The development of place management has been pioneered by shopping malls and downtowns. Shopping malls, with their singular owner, do not adequately provide a means for the multiplicity and need to aggregate the work of multiple actors and stakeholders. Downtowns with their multiple property owners ranging from small “mom and pop” businesses to corporate titans may be more instructive for how cities and institutions in the US and across the world can

realize the vision of the New Century City. Two distinct and complementary approaches – Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Main Street – could enhance New Century Cities.

Similar to the blending and blurring of sectors and actors in NCC, BIDS “combine aspect is of both the public and private sectors. BIDS are one product of the move toward hybridization of public and private responsibilities that is increasingly taking place.”ⁱⁱ Business Improvement Districts create a financing mechanism where all property owners, large and small, pay a fee to provide supplemental common services, such as marketing and promotion, capital improvements, cleaning and maintenance, and security for a specific geographic area. The property owners determine the scope and range of activities to be undertaken.

Main Street is a four point approach – promotion, design, organization, and economic restructuring – that can capitalize on key trends and further the vision of NCC. The Main Street model is a public-private partnership which is accustomed to the wide range of needed actors for a lively, prospering NCC.

BIDs and Main Street^{*} are focused on developing a sense of place and place management over an entire district, or New Century City. They are the creative and entrepreneurial response to providing needed services amongst multiple property owners. They are simultaneously visionary and focused on the details that make the difference between excellence and ordinary. BIDs create value through common service provision at an aggregated shared-cost amongst property owners. Moreover, BIDs are an entity that can move more quickly

* Although BIDs and Main Street are two distinct and complementary approaches, the term BID is used throughout the paper to encompass both approaches.

and agility responding to opportunities and needs than most governments and large-scale institutions.

Some BIDs are already becoming New Century Cities, as in Lower Manhattan in New York City. Two BIDs, the Downtown Alliance and the Bryant Park BID in collaboration with NYC Wireless, a nonprofit, to provide wireless connections 24/7 in eight public parks. Two other BID-like organizations, MASCO in Boston and University City District in Philadelphia, illustrate the range and potential for BIDs for New Century Cities.

Although not a formal BID^{*}, MASCO is supported by the voluntary contributions of its member institutions and by fees for services. It's mission is to "pursue shared programs that promote a sense of community among its members and the citizens who live and work in the LMA, and to lessen the burdens of government with regard to planning, development, and enhancement of the LMA." ⁱⁱⁱ

MASCO, or the Medical, Academic and Scientific Community Organization, is comprised of nineteen institutions and has been serving the Longwood-Medical area (LMA) of Boston, a 213 acre area, since 1972. 37,000 people work in the LMA area. In addition, student living in the dorms of Simmons and Emmanuel Colleges are LMA residents. Some of MASCO's most prominent members include Harvard University Medical School, Dana Faber Cancer Research, Brigham & Women's Hospital, Beth Israel Hospital. MASCO provides area planning and development services, particularly in the area of transportation, liaisons with city

^{*} MASCO was organized before the enabling legislation was enacted in Massachusetts. The first BID was created in Toronto, Canada in 1971.

government, manages parking and shuttle services, coordinates security, provides cooperative purchasing, and operates a child care center. MASCO's telecommunications center processes 3.6 million calls annually with centralized attendant services, radio paging, data networking, and physicians' message center. In addition, MASCO owns and operates a fiber-optic network serving the LMA area. MASCO illustrates the range and potential value-added of a BID serving multiple institutions or corporations. This same quality, depth and range of services is difficult for one institution (or one private development or one corporate office) to bear the total costs. Unlike, New Century Cities which are fusing live-work-recreation into one location, MASCO is focused on a 24/7 work environment.

The University City District BID in Philadelphia provides an example of a BID with a greater emphasis on marketing and neighborhood livability. The University City District (UCD) is a 2.2 square mile area west of downtown Philadelphia. It is the home of the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The University City District has 60,000 employees, 37,000 students, and 47,000 residents, and two commercial corridors. Formed in 1997, UCD focused on clean and safe initiatives and changing the negative perception of the area.

Today, UCD's programs include public space maintenance, an Ambassadors program, hospitality and visitor services, and marketing and promotions. UCD defines one of its core responsibilities as the development and management, including the quality-assurances, of the University City "brand." University City District's new tag line is "Left of Center," which capitalizes on its location just west of downtown—Center City Philadelphia, and on its "funky

artsy tone that melds its diverse immigrant population with masses of students and employees^{iv}”

UCD is aspiring to be the premier urban experience in the Philadelphia region by 2007 capitalizing on restaurants, cafes, entertainment, and the rich mixture of academic, research, and health care institutions. Although UCD is not explicitly promoting a digital village live-work-play experience, the City of Philadelphia announced a citywide wireless initiative that will include the UCD area. UCD illustrates how a BID and Main Street-like organization promotes and enhances the livability agenda.

The Downtown Alliance, Bryant Park BID, MASCO, and the University City District all demonstrate elements of how BIDs bring the aggregation of many interests, entities and players together. They provides potent examples for how MIT, which has many of the elements of a New Century City, could become the premier and leading New Century City in the Americas, if not the world.

MIT as a New Century City using a BID

MIT is an institution before its time. As the notion of hybrid organizations and blurring of boundaries is a characteristic of the digital era and New Century Cities, MIT in its inception as a publicly created private institution in 1861 embodied the spirit of boundary-spanning. Today, many of the attributes of a New Century City are in essence at MIT.

MIT and its neighbors are a mega-project. The MIT campus comprises 154 acres and one-mile of frontage along the Charles River. In addition, MIT partnered with Forest City Development for 27 acres of former industrial land for the University Park Development. Lyme Properties just developed ten acres for the Genzyme headquarters near MIT in Cambridgeport. As of spring 2004, 2.3 million SF of new office, research and development and residential space was being permitted and/or under construction by the City of Cambridge in the MIT vicinity.^v Over 17,000 people work In the MIT vicinity. There are 10,000 students, and nearly 15,000 residents.^{vi}

MIT is an innovation and intellectual capital. MIT is the leading academic institution as to annual patents, and has developed a culture encouraging entrepreneurship amongst faculty. It established the Desphande Center for Technological Innovation amongst students and faculty in 2002 to further entrepreneurship and early stage commercialization of new technologies. MIT is one critical pole in Boston as a global academic and research center. Boston has the most research intensive economy in the US.^{vii} Over the past five years, MIT has issued 50 to 75 licenses for its patented research annually.^{viii} This culture of innovation at MIT is encircled by other national research institutes, such as Draper Lab and the Whitehead Institute, the Volpe Center, and private industries undertaking research and development, such as Genzyme, Novaritas, Amgen, Akamai, to name a few.

MIT in the global marketplace. As an international innovator, MIT is engaged in the global marketplace through alliances with Cambridge University in the United Kingdom and

Singapore University, as well as with international partnerships with cities, regions, nations, and private corporations.

The integration of living and working at MIT is in early stages of development. MIT has recently built new dorms for graduate and undergraduate students, but the development of living space throughout the MIT vicinity is just beginning. The MIT vicinity is the lowest populated area in Cambridge. MIT has been growing and expanding in the former industrial quarter of Cambridge. The focus over the past two decades has been on the institution and spawning business-development ventures, as with University Park. While housing has been a component, it has been a small element. Some of the prime businesses uses composing a lively urban environment, such as restaurants and cafes, are missing. Although MIT is situated on the Charles River, and could easily incorporate recreation and ecology into an MIT edition of a New Century City, the connection with the river is weak.

The development of MIT as a place that integrates living, working, and recreation needs to begin. MIT has many adjacent resources to capitalize upon, such as the urban environment of Central Square and funky Cambridge and the natural environment of the Charles River. A place management strategy is needed to link MIT with many of its adjacent research neighbors, both nonprofit and corporate. Such a place management strategy can and should encourage mixing and exchange and the potential for tacit knowledge exchange that creates innovation.

The Infinite Corridor has been MIT's Main Street where chance encounters and exchanges have occurred. Expectations have risen for a higher quality street with more

amenities as horizons have been expanded and standards of living have increased. The need for chance encounters and exchanges is needed at MIT both amongst the institution itself and with its high-powered research and corporate neighbors. The boundaries of the Institute are permeable and porous to one who has ventured down the Infinite Corridor, but somewhat intimidating to the uninitiated. Wayfinding, both electronic and physical, as part of place management, could enhance the permeability of the Institute. The merging of living and working is about stimulating chance encounters and creating innovation and knowledge-rich intensive experiences.

The livability factor is important. Just as UCD is capitalizing on its arty-funky neighborhood with historic architecture, and other cities, and citizen advocates in places ranging from Austin, Texas to the Clarendon neighborhood in northern Virginia on Washington, DC's Metro stop have clamored to retain their unique character in the face of major new construction and development with campaigns calling to keep "Austin Weird," the MIT area needs to find a path to be a New Century City while retaining its historic fabric and character of MIT and Cambridge, and creating new fabric as with the Strata Center. The mass of buildings and vast space at Tech Square need to be punctuated with more person-oriented micro-environments. The rows of taxpayer block buildings on Mass Ave need upgrading to make a more livable and hospitable environment. These investments can create and add value to existing properties and to the MIT area.

Or as Richard Friedlander, President of Northeastern University in Boston, responding to a question on why invest in the appearance and landscaping on the Northeastern campus, stated

the campus is our first impression, people shape their decision to come within the first five-to-seven minutes upon arrival. Do they like the look and feel of the place?^{ix}

Positioning. The competition amongst city-states, regions, and institutions is increasing. The MIT area unlike other areas has not focused on image and branding, until very recently with the Evolving Campus campaign and the construction of the Stata Center, Simmons Hall, and the Brain and Cognitive Science building, which linked innovative architecture with an innovative academic institution. This is the first step in the right direction. Some new jewels have been built on the MIT campus, along with the existing, and adjacent jewels, such as new platinum LEEDS-rated Genzyme headquarters. The next step is to link and connect the jewels together as to livability and as to a coherent positioning and marketing strategy for the MIT area.

A Business Improvement District could help bring the disparate but synergistic parts of the MIT area together to forge the leading New Century City in east Cambridge, known as MIT. In addition to enhancing livability and positioning, the MIT area BID could be the focus of innovation in the new connections by exploring and demonstrating sensing, digital media, and electronic infrastructure. The pieces are here, but they need to be sewn together. Business Improvement Districts through their capacity to be visionary, with a focus on development and management of place can create and enhance value in real estate and attracting students, faculty, and researchers to the greater MIT community.

ⁱ Townsend, Anthony. "Digitally Mediated Urban Space: New Lessons for Design," *Praxis 6* (2004): 100-105.

ⁱⁱ Briffault, Richard. "The Promise and Challenge of Business Improvement Districts," *The Taubman Center Report*, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1998, page 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ MASCO web site, <http://www.masco.org>

^{iv} “University City touts its assets: Marketing sets out to boost image of West Philadelphia neighborhood,” Philadelphia Business Journal, June 25, 2004.

^v City of Cambridge Community Development Department Development Log, March-June 2004, www.cambridge.gov

^{vi} US Census 2000 for the 3 census tracts encompassing MIT and Cambridgeport. Student data from MIT. Employment data for the City of Cambridge’s Top 25 Employers:2004.

^{vii} Engines of Economic Growth, The Economic Impact of Boston’s Eight Research Universities on the Metropolitan Boston Area, 2003, page 49.

^{viii} MIT, www.mit.edu/facts/research.html

^{ix} Richard Friedlander, Chronicle, Channel 5, December 13, 2004.