Pittsburgh’s Downtown Revival

Spring 2007

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The Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership and the Downtown Living Initiative are champions for the revitalization of Pittsburgh’s Downtown. As part of their mission, they seek to enhance Downtown living opportunities and to promote the role of Downtown as a major employment center. In the Fall of 2005, DLI sponsored a Systems Synthesis project with the Heinz School to examine the residential housing market. This project, which received tremendous community support, found that residential growth in the Downtown is four times higher than it was during the 1990s. Every year since 2000, the Downtown has added as many residents as it did in five years during the 1990s. Despite this growth, the project team found that the projected demand for Downtown living will exceed the current and planned supply by more than 2,000 units.

This project will build upon this existing work, and the relationship with the DLI and PDP. The project sponsor has identified several projects that are critical to their work to promote a positive future for the Downtown. The scope of work will depend on the skills and interests of the team but may include one or more of the following:

1. Downtown Worker Study. Develop a better understanding of the downtown worker. This activity will require skill with quantitative and qualitative data and methods. Existing sources of data on commuting patterns and employment will be supplemented with surveys or other primary sources. Other components such as retail demand or possible impacts on the housing market will be defined by the project team.

2. Pittsburgh uses a variety of development incentives but has relatively less experience with residential abatement programs. These programs have been used in some specific residential projects, but there is no residential development comparable to Pittsburgh. This project would explore appropriate residential tax abatement programs used in Philadelphia or other cities that provide an adequate comparison for Downtown Pittsburgh.

3. In the Fall the project team identified a variety of incentives that have been used to support development in the downtown. Nearly every project has received some sort of incentive. What is not known is how much subsidy is being used, what is the trend in these subsidies, and what impact are those dollars having on downtown development.

Advisory Board to be determined.