Best Opportunities for the Next Five Years: Urban Places

The mayors’ comments underscore that Florida’s big four cities are well-positioned to thrive in the “what’s next” economy. In fact, they are already magnets for new investment and residents, including today’s creative economy knowledge workers and the gen yers (the 20 somethings and the largest population group reported on in What’s Next). They are the places where those workers and the businesses that wish to employ them want to be because of a commitment to and conscious investments in creating and sustaining dynamic and stimulating downtowns and urban places. That includes strategic investments in housing close to where the jobs are, culture, connectivity, and the creation of lively public gathering places.

In the words of their mayors:

The city’s recent creation of a Downtown Investment Authority will draw from the power of private investment in the urban core with a goal of building a 24-hour hub of business and entertainment. “Downtown should be a destination to help make Jacksonville the most vibrant, competitive city it can be.” Mayor Brown

Downtown Miami is attracting foreign investors and a younger population that wants urban places. Instead of being overbuilt as it was just a few years ago, the excess units are now sold out. Investments in the cultural arts are providing a powerful magnet. Mayor Gimenez

Orlando is experiencing real growth in its downtown. That comes from investments in transit-oriented development and creating an innovative business cluster. Sun Rail alone has led to some $500,000 million in investments. Mayor Dyer

Cities are hot. The creative class wants that cool 24-hour lively urban environment. One way is to build on one of the city’s urban assets – the river that runs through. The focus is on making the river a unifier, not a dividing line, and using it to attract all ages downtown. Mayor Buckhorn

In short, the mayors of Florida’s big cities – those that are driving the state’s economy and population growth – are already doing what is advised in What’s Next?: thinking differently and leading the way in understanding trends, capitalizing on new market opportunities, and directing investments in strategic ways.

The five ULI Florida District Councils prepared this publication to further the important dialogue about the need to think and act regionally if Florida is to compete successfully in the new 21st Century global economy. Better communication and collaboration – and partnerships among regions – will help make that possible.

Don’t miss the 2013 ULI Statewide Summit, June 6 & 7, at the Ritz Carlton Naples. Program and registration information at <ulifloridasummit.org>.

“Today’s knowledge workers pick a location that offers the quality of life they want. For Florida to compete in the new world market, we need to work together to create the places where those workers want to be. It is those places where businesses will want to be.” Eric Swanson, Executive Vice President, Flagler; Summit Chair; and Chair, ULI Southeast Florida & Caribbean District Council
THE STATE WE'RE IN: SETTING THE CONTEXT

The mayors’ panel was a part of ULI Florida's first statewide summit, held in June 2012 in St. Petersburg Florida, a part of the Tampa Bay region. The summit brought together Florida’s leading experts and practitioners from private practice, the public sector, and academia to learn and have a visionary conversation about “What’s Next” in creating and sustaining thriving Florida communities.

The summit:

• Built on the 2003-2005 ULI Florida multi-year initiative, Building Florida’s Future (http://uli75.org/whats-next), that examined why regional collaboration is essential and what the state of Florida could do to promote it. Participants from all parts of Florida and with a variety of views reached a shared conclusion: if Florida is to succeed in the global economy, it must recognize the importance of regional approaches. Metropolitan regions are the units of economic competitiveness in today's global economy and the right size to develop the working relationships and shared identity necessary for reaching effective solutions to complex regional issues.

• Was organized around the ULI publication, What's Next? Real Estate in the New Economy, produced to kick off a dialogue about the future of real estate in a rapidly changing economic environment. Highlights of the report were the topic of the Summit's opening presentation by ULI's Senior Research Fellow Maureen McAvey. Today's market realities are creating a new paradigm for real estate and community-building. The dramatic changes that are occurring in all aspects of life – how we work, live, connect, renew, move, and invest – will require new approaches to planning and designing communities and regions. They are also reversing decades of what felt like unlimited resources and far-flung, disconnected development where proximity to anything did not matter.

FLORIDA’S LEADING 21ST CENTURY CITIES

The four mayors share a common view about:

• The need to think and act regionally if Florida is to succeed in the 21st century.

• How the state can help its metropolitan regions succeed in a global economy.

• What the big opportunities are, given “what’s next.”

Regional Thinking and Action: The Ticket to Success

Each mayor stressed the importance of working across jurisdictional lines on the big issues that cannot be solved by governments acting in isolation. Although each of the urban regions has its own distinct features, challenges, and opportunities, they also have a lot in common: developing the world class strategies needed to compete on the global stage.

“The commonality,” Rummell noted, “is what binds those unique and identifiable regions. Although there are several different Floridas, the focus needs to be on how to weave that diversity together into a unified state with common policies. If we can do that, the whole of Florida will be greater than its parts.”

The mayors’ comments championed that view:

“When the public and private sectors work together toward a shared vision, everybody benefits. In today’s economy, partnership is a crucial, if not a wholly necessary, function to leverage scarce assets into meaningful investments.”

Jacksonville Mayor Alvin Brown

“In South Florida we recognize that if one county benefits, we all do.”

Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez

“The big message is the regional perspective and that we are all part of the same state, share common issues, and need to be working toward a common vision.”

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer

“It is time to stop bickering, set aside partisan politics, and quit caring who gets the credit.”

Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn

“What's Next? Real Estate in the New Economy

There was remarkable agreement about what the Governor and state government need to do so that Florida’s metropolitan regions will be competitive in the 21st century global economy. They should:

• Develop a guiding state vision and policy that clearly set out what Florida wants to become in the 21st century, given the state’s tax structure, climate, proximity to markets, and diversity of people. Then put together the public-private partnerships needed to achieve that vision.

• Let cities be cities. That means providing more flexibility and autonomy, less red tape, and more home rule. It also means letting local officials do what they need and know how to do the mayors emphasized (for example, enabling those urban regions to advance transit, a requisite if they are to remain competitive).

• Invest in connecting infrastructure; seamless multi-modal regions (for people and freight) are the future. As a gateway state, Florida’s ports are a critical part of that infrastructure. The widening of the Panama Canal will help make Florida an economic powerhouse. The mayors’ emphasis on investing in the state’s infrastructure is reinforced by an observation from What's Next?: “If states and cities do not come around to it, these networks will become less reliable and more dangerous, and will limit economic growth.”

• Invest in education. To make Florida the number one place in the U.S. for locating or expanding a business, the state needs to become number one in education. That means making higher education accessible to all residents, rather than raising fees that make it the opportunity for a few. It also means investing in moving research to the marketplace – those value-added tech jobs that Florida should grow. In short (from What's Next?), “For communities to thrive, education and a cluster of talented firms, workers, government leaders, and local amenities are required.”