



## **Downtown Vision, Inc. Convention Center Position Statement**

**January 2011**

### **Background**

In March 2010, Downtown Vision released a white paper, *Turning the Corner: Rethinking and Remaking Downtown*. Its purpose is to suggest a framework for approaching Downtown revitalization and to set forth principles we believe should guide our community in that effort.

The four key points based on the eight tenets outlined in the paper are 1) focusing on the core, 2) employing a holistic approach to revitalizing Downtown, 3) creating a compelling Downtown experience that generates pedestrian activity, and 4) placing emphasis on projects that leverage private investment, especially in the core of Downtown. These key principles are the guidelines Downtown Vision uses to evaluate policies and projects.

### **Convention Center**

Downtown Vision recognizes that the Prime Osborn Convention Center has considerable facility limitations and its location away from the core does not meet the basic needs of today's convention and hotel business nor does it leverage existing Downtown businesses. Downtown Vision supports the completion of a comprehensive analysis and master plan process to vet the most strategic alternatives related to the location of a convention center in the Northbank core of Downtown. We also support the long term vision for the transformation of the Prime Osborn building to be used as a multi-modal transportation hub for centralizing and improving public transportation in the form of bus, trolley, light rail and railroad transit to and around, not only Downtown, but also the region.

While the 2007 Convention Center Task Force did not specify a recommended site, the location highlighted in many recent discussions is a site that would take advantage of the nearly 1,000 hotel rooms at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. Downtown Vision, Inc. supports the selection of a site in the Northbank core of Downtown that would take advantage of the Hyatt's status as a convention hotel and leverage and support existing Downtown businesses and cultural venues.

The following specific recommendations with respect to the siting, design, function and operation of a new convention center:

### **Activation and Design Considerations**

- Any new convention center should be a multifunctional facility designed to complement existing buildings, and the scale of surrounding buildings. The Convention Center should be *wrapped* with stores, restaurants, public space and other amenities to decrease the dead space often associated with convention centers regardless of convention bookings. These businesses should also complement the existing mix of businesses in the emerging entertainment district along Bay Street. Other considerations for activation include cultural or entertainment attractions.

### **Activation and Design Considerations** *(continued)*

- Walkability, access to alternative transit options and connectivity to other Downtown activity nodes and the riverfront are of utmost importance.
- Design elements that maintain and strengthen the pedestrian environment are encouraged as is a strong exterior public space component of the convention center. The traditional windowless box design should be rejected.
- River orientation should be sensitively managed to create not only a significant element of the city's skyline, but also a facility which embraces the river and its views to and from the river. Its design must blend with the city's riverfront, allow maximum public access and add pedestrian scale to the overall river experience. View corridors to the riverfront should not be blocked by the closing of streets or by the creation of overhead pedestrian skyways.
- Jacksonville has the opportunity to significantly raise the awareness of sustainable design by practicing sustainable principles on what could be its most important architectural statement in decades. Through the implementation of "green" development standards throughout the design process, our Downtown can become a national example of forward thinking design. Therefore we highly encourage green building, or LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) design practices throughout the evolution of this facility's design process.
- Neighborhood input and dialogue with DVI, property owners, retailers, businesses, residents, and other Downtown stakeholders from the beginning is critical.
- Design review should be conducted using the current systems in place such including the Downtown Development Review Board (DDRB) and Jacksonville Economic Development Commission (JEDC) staff.

### **Funding**

- Funding for a convention center should not deplete already limited funding or other resources for other needs in Downtown.
- Maintenance and other operating expenses for the new convention center should be included and discussed as part of the convention center's overall budget.
- A Downtown amenity package should be developed and funded to make the convention center more attractive to conventioners. This would include funding for additional police officers, cleaning and maintenance of adjacent public spaces and sidewalks, promotions, events and block parties, and transportation services to connect conventioners with San Marco, Riverside, Springfield and surrounding hotels.