

Ash Institute Summer Fellowship in Urban Policy Project Description | 2009

City of Indianapolis Mayor's Office

Context/problem:

Indianapolis has several obsolete commercial areas. Each is different, but all have dying strip-malls. Several have low-end car dealers and empty big box stores. Among these areas: Keystone Avenue from Fall Creek Parkway north to 56th Street. Pendleton Pike from 38th Street northeast to the county line, and the area both along 38th Street from Lafayette Road west to I-465 and Lafayette Road from I-65 south to Kessler Boulevard.

These areas are a problem because they:

- Waste the land on lower value uses, thus lowering property values and property taxes
- Suppress home values in adjacent areas,
- Make the city a less desirable place to live as a whole, and
- Offer fewer employment opportunities for local residents.

In addition, these areas were designed around the automobile and are not compatible with a vibrant street life, pedestrian access or possible new mass transit. Despite all of those negatives, these areas have high potential because each one has excellent transportation links, including interstate access. Each is also well-placed between a growing downtown residential community and growing suburbs.

Description of the proposed project:

Because these areas are physically unattractive and viewed to be undesirable, improving them seems likely to require collective action as few property owners want to develop new projects that will remain surrounded by blight. The proposed project for the fellow is to take one of these areas, Keystone Avenue from Fall Creek Parkway to 56th Street, and develop a plan to transform it from low value uses to higher value uses. If successful, this template could then be used in other areas. This process would include looking at best practices from around the country. For example, the King Street corridor from I-280 to 3rd Street in San Francisco could be a role model. The fellow would also search for other examples, preferably from mid-size, moderate growth cities in the Midwest. The fellow would also meet with land owners, business operators and representatives from adjacent neighborhood associations to discuss their views on the corridor. The fellow would review relevant local and state laws and zoning restrictions to better understand what is holding the area back.

Where the fellow would work: The fellow would work in the Mayor's Office. Indianapolis is the 13th largest city in the country and one of the most successful cities in the Midwest. Mayor Ballard, a Republican, was elected in 2007.

Under whose supervision: David Wu, Mayor's Policy Director

Time: Starting/ending dates are flexible based on fellow's availability. Normal office hours are 40 hours per week, but the fellow might be expected to hold some meetings outside of normal business hours if necessary.

With whom fellow would collaborate: Mayor's office staff, Department of Metropolitan Development, community and business representatives.

Product: Written report and presentation to Mayor's staff and civic leaders

Qualifications: Interest in cities and urban life. Logical. Good inter-personal skills. Good writing skills.