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## THE CLUE GROUP

[www.cluegroup.com](http://www.cluegroup.com)

The Community Land Use and Economics (CLUE) Group is a consulting firm that helps communities create vibrant, dynamic downtowns and neighborhoods.

We help local and state governments, developers, and nonprofits design innovative downtown economic development strategies, cultivate independent businesses, recycle historic buildings, attract young talent, strengthen downtown management programs, and craft planning and land use tools that mitigate sprawl and stimulate town center development.

We specialize in downtowns. One of our two principals, [Kennedy Smith](#), directed the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center for 13 years and is considered one of the world's leading experts on downtowns, downtown economics, independent business development, and the economic impact of sprawl, with a career in downtown revitalization spanning 23 years. She created the retail market analysis methodology now used by most historic downtowns in the US. [Josh Bloom](#) spent ten years as a program officer at the National Trust's Main Street Center, focusing on the economic and organizational dynamics of commercial district revitalization, particularly in urban neighborhoods.

Our work is driven by several key principles:

### **Comprehensive action**

No community development challenge exists in a vacuum. We examine all the interrelated problems and opportunities together to get beyond symptoms and address the core issues.

### **Practical implementation**

The best plan in the world is useless if it isn't implemented. We provide step-by-step guidance on putting our market analyses, business development strategies and historic preservation plans to work right away.

### **Balance**

We recognize that communities have tough decisions to make. We'll help you carefully and objectively weigh the many factors involved in community development decisions.

### **Clear goals**

Strong, rewarding collaboration begins with a clear sense of a project's ultimate purpose. We'll work closely with you to explore your project's possibilities and clearly define its goals.

Our practice focuses on three key areas:

- Strong downtown economies
- Land use policies that support and stimulate community development goals
- Effective, dynamic downtown management programs

## **STRONG DOWNTOWN ECONOMIES**

### **RETAIL MARKET ANALYSES**

We believe that the one of the two foundations of a great downtown is a great market analysis (the other is a great land use strategy ... but we'll talk about that later). Without a good market analysis, you're just taking blind stabs at shaping the district's economy. For town centers to succeed, their leaders must be strategic and focused in positioning the downtown within the regional and global economies.

Most retail market analysts have experience with shopping malls - but downtowns aren't shopping malls. Downtowns have a wider range of uses. They serve a wider range of customers, so they have lots of overlapping trade areas. They have multiple property and business owners. They have physical constraints that malls don't have - and assets that mall developers wish they could replicate. It is critical that retail market analyses reflect and build on these special characteristics.

We've also found that too many market analysts produce "one size fits all" reports - expensive studies that ultimately just sit on a shelf somewhere, gathering dust, because no one knows what they mean or how to implement them. We believe in tailoring market analyses to a community's needs, providing just the right amount of information. And we believe in making market analyses easy to use and easy to update - in other words, market analyses that become the foundations of an ongoing process of improving the town center's economy.

We offer a wide range of market analysis services, from sales gap analyses to comprehensive market studies. We're happy to work with you to phase the work over several years and to help you learn how to do some of the work yourself, reducing the cost and building local expertise.

### **TOWN CENTER RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PLANS**

Great downtowns have great businesses. Hot restaurants. Cool merchandise. Stellar service. Places where everyone knows your name.

Great businesses don't just happen, though. It takes progressive planning, flawless execution - and a solid, innovative business development plan that provides specific ideas about the types of businesses that would work well in your district, how they should be merchandised and marketed, and where they should be placed within the district to have maximum impact.

We've seen too many downtown business development plans that are vague about the kinds of new businesses a district might add - "10,000 square feet of restaurant space" or "5,000 square feet of apparel" just doesn't offer much guidance. We prefer to be more specific than that. MUCH more specific. We outline the *exact* types of businesses we think your district can support. We look for opportunities to create back-office service businesses that support the community's industries. We explore ways retailers can use multiple channels to boost sales. We structure strong business clusters. And, we're committed to strengthening existing businesses first - so our business development plans always look for those opportunities.

### **"MOM AND POP" BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

You can't have a cool downtown without independent businesses. In fact, according to [CoolTown Studios](#), independent businesses account for more than 85 percent of the businesses in the hottest downtowns in the US. Independent businesses offer enormous advantages over national retailers. They're more market responsive (you don't really think "The Gap" sells things in Sacramento that it doesn't sell in Baltimore, do you?). Their owners are experts in what they sell. They invest a higher percentage of their profits in the community.

But, cultivating independent businesses takes time, and the infrastructure that once supported independent businesses - training programs, start-up funding, long-term financing, mentorship - has disappeared over the years.

We can help you create the kind of community that cultivates independent businesses and attracts young talent. We help communities craft business development plans that cultivate independent businesses. We analyze the tools and resources available locally and point out ways to build the infrastructure needed to stimulate "mom and pops". And we offer practical, realistic guidance on identifying entrepreneurs, spinning off second locations, and stimulating start-ups.

### **ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDIES**

Decisions about key community development proposals are too important to leave to chance. It is critical that community leaders have a solid, realistic understanding of the likely economic impact a proposed project will have on the local and regional economies. This is particularly important for decisions about new commercial development. Just as soil and water have "carrying capacities", communities have a retail "carrying capacity", as well - an amount of retail space beyond which the costs of new development outweigh the revenue benefits to the community.

Our economic impact studies take a thorough, objective look at these costs and benefits. Our extensive familiarity with historic and traditional town centers gives us a deep understanding of the many ways in which a proposed development plan may affect existing districts, including many areas of impact often overlooked by those not as familiar with the economic dynamics of downtown districts. We approach our economic impact studies from the community's perspective - not the developer's - to ensure objective, unbiased guidance to civic leaders in making these important decisions about the community's future.

### **DOWNTOWN MARKETING AND PROMOTIONAL PLANNING**

People shop where they have fun, and great downtowns offer unforgettable experiences. But a downtown's

marketing and promotional events must be much more than entertaining; they must be point-blank effective at capturing the attention of the district's target market segments. Developing successful downtown marketing and promotional plans requires both a solid understanding of a district's economic direction and a very healthy dose of creativity.

Our marketing and promotional plans start with clear identification of the district's economic development strategies and of its target customer groups. We examine market data and study seasonal fluctuations in retail sales within the district, the community and the region. We conduct focus groups to understand area shoppers, and we learn about their perceptions of the district. We gather information on the district's history (a great tool for differentiating an older town center from other shopping alternatives), its personality, and other characteristics that give it a distinct identity within the region.

We then craft a 24 month schedule of activities that builds on the district's sales patterns and market-based strategic directions. Each plan includes several signature events - one-of-a-kind festivals and events unique to the region that help put the district on the map - as well as a variety of events designed to keep consumers coming back throughout the year, with instructions on implementing all activities and on measuring their results.

## **LAND USE POLICIES THAT SUPPORT AND STIMULATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

### **LAND USE STRATEGIES**

It's ironic, but downtown revitalization doesn't really take place downtown; it actually takes place in a community's land use policies. Sure, there are many things that can (and must) happen within the district to make it stronger - but, if it is ultimately more difficult to develop or rehabilitate a building or open a new business downtown than out on the highway, the downtown will always be at a serious disadvantage and its revitalization will be an uphill battle.

Unfortunately, local land use policies often create unintended barriers to town center revitalization. Zoning requirements make it difficult to develop housing above a retail storefront. On-site parking requirements intended for detached houses in the suburbs are impractical for downtown upper-floor apartments. Planning codes that allow development of commercial space outside the downtown when vacancies exist there dilute the commercial market and make it difficult to create a critical mass of retail businesses.

We help community leaders identify barriers like these that make it difficult to revitalize older and historic commercial districts. We offer an affordable review service in which we examine the community's comprehensive plan, zoning regulations and other planning and land use documents and provide objective feedback on ways to make them as effective as possible at shaping your community's growth in the ways you want it to develop.

### **BIG-BOX DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS**

Few community development decisions generate more controversy than decisions about whether to allow development of big-box discount stores. But few decisions are more important in shaping the community's future. Big-box stores often bring about profound changes in the economic dynamics of the community's existing commercial centers and in the community's physical form, and it is crucial that decisions be well informed, with a clear understanding of the potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed development, and that they have strong community support.

Sadly, controversies over big-box stores often polarize members of the community - but, with good facilitation, they can also open the door to honest community discussion about broader community development issues and can be the starting point for exciting transformation.

We can guide your community through the process of examining the pros and cons of proposed big-box development decisions. We'll help you weigh the potential costs against potential benefits and navigate a course that helps ensure your community grows in ways that reinforce its goals.

### **COOL CITIES**

What's a "cool city"? It's a place that attracts and retains young talent, that blends old architecture with new attitudes, that taps into and celebrates its cultural legacies, that vibrates with energy, that offers something different from any other place. Cool cities are where the nation's new economic growth is taking place and where new businesses are taking root.

Many older and historic town centers already have the raw ingredients needed to create a cool city: old buildings, independent businesses, unusual spaces, mixed uses, and rich cultural traditions. We can help you identify your

district's "cool" assets, create a vibrant business development plan, design practical programs to cultivate new businesses, and craft a creative, forward-thinking marketing program.

## **EFFECTIVE, DYNAMIC DOWNTOWN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS**

### **FUND RAISING STRATEGIES FOR REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS**

Long-term funding for town center revitalization programs is one of the biggest barriers to town center revitalization - particularly after the first few years of revitalization activity, when the program's initial funders want to see tangible results before investing more money in the program's future. Unfortunately, many revitalization programs remain stuck in "initial funding" mode, asking for contributions year after year and, not surprisingly, finding it more and more difficult to attract funding support. As town center revitalization programs mature, their funding models must evolve, as well.

No matter where your community's town center management program is in the revitalization process, we can help you not only find new funding sources but also strengthen your program's long-term funding outlook. We focus particular attention on two key strategies - crafting a strategic plan that involves a broad web of revitalization partners, and recapturing some of the district's increased economic activity as the district's economic condition improves.

### **TOWN CENTER MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION**

With more than two decades of experience working with hundreds of town center management programs in all 50 US states and almost a dozen other nations, we have a very deep understanding of the challenges facing older and historic town centers and their management programs. We can help your community solve tough revitalization challenges and fine-tune your town center management effectiveness. Whether your community is new to revitalization and looking for guidance on moving forward or you have an experienced revitalization program in place but need help tackling difficult issues or moving to a new plateau, we can help. We offer a very affordable two-day consultation service for most issues, assessing your district's greatest needs and providing straightforward answers on your best opportunities for success.