

## *2030 Districts - Beyond Business Improvement Districts and Associations: new forms of local thematic partnerships*

The emergence of other more niche forms of partnerships drawing on private sector engagement with urban (and wider societal) issues offer another welcome alternative to the economic-focused improvement business agenda. One prominent example of these is creation of **2030 Districts** which aim to meet incremental reduction targets for existing and new buildings as contributions by cities to the global climate crisis. They illustrate how new forms of city centre management are looking to bring

### 2030 District Network

THE VISION OF THE 2030 DISTRICTS NETWORK IS TO ESTABLISH A GLOBAL NETWORK OF THRIVING HIGH PERFORMANCE BUILDING DISTRICTS AND CITIES, UNITING COMMUNITIES TO CATALYZE TRANSFORMATION IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN MITIGATING AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE. EACH DISTRICT COMMITS TO MEETING 50% REDUCTIONS IN ENERGY, WATER AND TRANSPORTATION RELATED EMISSIONS AS ESTABLISHED BY ARCHITECTURE 2030 IN ITS 2030 CHALLENGE FOR PLANNING

SEE [HTTPS://WWW.2030DISTRICTS.ORG/ABOUT-NETWORK](https://www.2030districts.org/about-network)

about change and add value through collective action beyond that of direct economic returns and contribute to a more environmentally sustainable city centre.

On the surface, there are similarities between BIDs and these districts. The 2030 Districts' focus on using "thriving high performance building districts and cities" to ensure that city areas are healthy and liveable in order to keep properties and businesses competitive. The Districts also unite members of local communities to undertake transformations of their area, creating a shared vision of sustainability and economic growth, with the returns from the investment being to the individual members of the collective. However, with the focus firmly on reductions in energy, water and transportation use, the 2030 District goal is fundamentally environmental rather than explicitly economic, as part of the transition to a low carbon economy and its agenda is to bring about transformational change in the ways in which partners operate and make a contribution to the city centre environment.

#### Pittsburgh 2030 District

The largest and early example of this initiative is the Pittsburgh 2030 District, an ambitious project seeking to cut energy and water use and transportation emissions to help improve the environmental quality of the downtown area of the city. It is a voluntary initiative, fostered by Architecture 2030 and supported by the **Green Building Alliance**, which sees individual property owners in charge of landmark buildings commit to work collectively towards meeting their shared goals. Although there is an economic basis to the project – driving down operating costs and helping to keep the city and region

competitive – the primary motivation is of environmental improvement. Initiated in 2012 the ‘green agenda’ has gathered momentum and prominence and is leading further development of the programme to include measured improvement in indoor air quality. More than 10 years on, 200 organisations have signed up and more than 48 million square feet of real estate is included. More than \$2.3 billion has been invested in building renovation and construction that helps meets the 2030 goals, helping to achieve a 38.3% reduction in carbon emissions.

As a voluntary project, the alliance is between property partners, non-profit community partners, and resource partners (those providing for example utilities or financial resources). Each partner (member) decides on their own ways to contribute to the 50-65% carbon emissions reduction by 2030 for existing buildings and zero carbon for new build and major renovations. Some members address building change on their own, whilst others work more collaboratively. Collectively, partners are invited to monthly meetings that feature presentations from technical experts, service providers, and building owners that showcase successful projects and through which partners gain direct access to policymakers, regional leaders, university researchers, and financial organisations. The 2030 District initiative is sponsored and has donors to help it financially to offer resources and advice, but the key to its success is buy-in from organisations and properties across the city centre.

As of 2022, 560 properties covering healthcare, hospitality, higher education, technology as well as commercial sectors (Figure 2.1), are engaged and are reported to have made collective savings of US\$154.5 million and avoided over 1.48 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.



Figure 2.1: The extent of the Pittsburgh 2030 District projects, 2022 © Green Building Alliance

The success in Pittsburgh is being mirrored across the wider 2030 District Network covering more than 20 other districts, where locally organised private/public partnerships are bringing together property owners, developers, government officials, and community institutions to generate and implement local strategies. Each creates their own best practices and verification methods to demonstrate success against the shared reduction targets. Solutions and strategies to achieve climate change varies, reflecting the different climates and geographies of each district.

## MEASURING RESULTS, DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

THE 2030 DISTRICT PROGRAM SUCCEEDS, IN PART, BECAUSE IT USES DATA TO DEMONSTRATE IMPACT. PROPERTY PARTNERS PROVIDE DATA TO SET PERFORMANCE TARGETS AND REPORT ANNUAL ENERGY AND WATER USE TO ASSESS PROGRESS. PITTSBURGH 2030 DISTRICT STAFF PREPARE INDIVIDUAL AND DISTRICT-WIDE PROGRESS REPORTS TO SHOW MEASURABLE OUTCOMES. THE ANNUAL REPORTS ILLUSTRATE THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF PARTICIPANTS' EFFORTS, SETTING THE STAGE FOR RENEWED ENTHUSIASM FOR AND INVESTMENT IN THE CREATION OF HEALTHY, HIGH-PERFORMING BUILDINGS. FROM THE START OF THE DISTRICT IN 2012, PROPERTY PARTNERS HAVE COLLECTIVELY INVESTED AT LEAST \$2.3B5 IN BUILDING RENOVATIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION.

The 2030 District idea represents a new pathway, one that marks a shift away from direct local

economic growth to embrace environmental and social issues. By setting local benchmarks – and indeed individual partner targets – there is a strengthening of ‘place affinity’ amongst members as they commit to the area and meet local benchmark targets, and also more inclusive sharing of insights and technology to help transformative change – scale up what can be achieved in individual buildings or by single owners. And it indicates how they can turn into an asset the exclusivity of the BID membership to act as champions and leaders for the local community.

This pathway is not without its potential limitations however. In terms of its impact the focus to date has been on larger buildings – the ‘landmark buildings’ in the case of Pittsburgh – rather than on smaller commercial buildings that make up 90% of total buildings in the US (Barnes and Parrish, 2016), although toolkits have been developed to provide resources to small building owners and tenants – including through demonstration projects in Pittsburgh. The use of local benchmarks as success measures raises issues about accountability and verification when measurement is self-organised and there is a lack of a standard framework or metric to allow comparisons between districts and evaluation of their contribution to urban, regional or national targets. And like BIDs, the self-management of the network

and their (potential) separation from municipality planning – including climate change and carbon reduction – risks being at odds with objectives of elected city representatives and their officials. In each of the 2030 districts they have sought to recruit its municipality's administration to pledge their commitment to the programme and in the case of Pittsburgh, the 2030 District has helped the city prepare the marketplace for eventual benchmarking legislation and hopefully future building performance standards.