

## UNC-Asheville Millennial Campus Development Advisory Committee

Meeting 2: February 2026 | Summary Notes

**In its second meeting, the Committee explored other precedent university development projects to identify strengths, weaknesses, and key lessons learned by those institutions to consider in UNCA's Millennial Campus development.** The Committee learned about five precedents:

- The University of Connecticut's (UConn) Storrs Center
- UNC-Wilmington's Student Village
- Lehigh University's Mountaintop Campus
- Wake Forest University's Innovation Quarter
- The University of Akron's Polsky Building

Each precedent offered a parallel context with similar goals to UNCA's: 1) Add housing for the university community; 2) Create a vibrant place for students to gather that is tied to the energy of the city; and 3) Generate revenue for the university through development-connected cash flow and/or increased enrollment.

**UConn's Storrs Center highlights how a strong public-private partnership can deliver a vibrant gathering place that benefits the entire community.** Prior to the project, Mansfield, CT, did not have a downtown. Storrs Center delivered a new downtown, and in doing so, created a vibrant place for students that included housing. UConn contributed the 45-acre site for the project, which ultimately yielded 626 rental housing units, 42 for-sale townhomes, 109,000 square feet of retail, 30,800 square feet of office, and a half-acre town center. The Downtown Mansfield Partnership was established to oversee public space and curate and support retailers.

**A fellow UNC System institution, UNC-Wilmington's Student Village, reflects a public-private development partnership that addresses institutional housing needs while yielding substantial cash flow to the university.** The 21.8-acre site abuts the University's recreational facilities and yielded 1,816 beds with approximately 3,500 square feet of supportive retail. A private non-profit invested \$147 million in the project, and the University receives \$940,000 per year in ground lease revenue from the project.

**Lehigh University leveraged a shuttered steel mill property to establish a vibrant innovation facility and plans to develop a mix of other uses to deliver new housing and strengthen its enrollment.** The 72-acre Mountaintop Campus in Bethlehem, PA, is home to an innovation hub with programming across Lehigh's academic offerings. The University's 2024 master plan includes a graduate student village, hotel and conference center, and supportive retail amenities at the Mountaintop Campus. A shuttle connects the Mountaintop Campus to Lehigh's other campuses.

**In the face of declining industry, Wake Forest University established a new innovation hub that has delivered housing, retail, and community-oriented public space and programming.**

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The Innovation Quarter's first phase sits on approximately 33 acres of former tobacco warehouses. The University and its clinical partner, Advocate Health, acquired the properties and relocated the Wake Forest School of Medicine onsite. The University also offers undergraduate life science programs that bring students to the Innovation Quarter from its main campus. The first phase of the Innovation Quarter includes 310 rental apartments, 40,000 square feet of retail, 370,000 square feet of office and lab space, and a highly programmed 1.6-acre Bailey Park. The park features concerts, yoga classes, and children's events. These programs, along with unique dining and gathering spaces on this campus, make the Innovation Quarter a dynamic destination for students and strengthens the energy of the rest of Downtown Winston Salem, NC.

**Lastly, the University of Akron is reorienting its front door toward the Polsky Building to engage directly with Downtown Akron to evolve from a pastoral campus experience to an urban experience.** In an effort to reverse a trend of declining enrollment, the University is transforming the 427,000 square foot former department store – a property the University owns – into a vibrant hub of community and academic programming. The ground floor of the building faces Main Street, the spine of Downtown Akron, and will feature community-oriented art and event space. Upper floors will include a mix of partner spaces, academic programs, and community spaces. The University's pivot toward Downtown Akron reflects a national trend toward urbanized academic campuses that attract today's prospective students.

**The Committee identified six key takeaways from these precedents to be applied to future thinking about UNCA's Millennial Campus properties:**

1. **Other universities have succeeded in getting to where UNCA seeks to go.** Goals similar to UNCA's have been advanced by institutions employing comparable approaches to placemaking.
2. **Public-private partnerships (P3) are key to success.** Universities and developers bring different skills and sources of funds. Partnership is essential.
3. **P3 partnerships require long-term commitment.** Alignment between universities and developers shouldn't end at construction. Sustained collaboration is what drives successful outcomes over time.
4. **Community trust is earned through transparency and consistent communication.** For public-facing projects, it's important to keep residents informed, provide multiple avenues for input, and ensure a wide range of perspectives are heard and considered throughout the process. It may be helpful to bring in an experienced third party to facilitate the process.
5. **Good design is a worthwhile investment.** Design quality and the deliberate selection of qualified development partners are central to successful development.
6. **Phasing is essential.** Breaking financing and construction into phases lowers risk, allows early wins to build credibility, and keeps the project responsive to current market realities.

The Committee will consider these takeaways and previous findings of UNCA's institutional goals and challenges as it explores the economic, programmatic, and environmental challenges and opportunities of the Millennial Campus properties at its March meeting.