



Accelerated Development

A younger, more diverse generation of developers has emerged on the Milwaukee real estate scene.

Like many cities, Milwaukee traditionally sought leadership in the ranks of older, more established developers. Today, we see the emergence of a new group of leaders who offer the city a fresh vision, helping it identify opportunities others may not have explored. From turning old factories into educational facilities to converting offices into residential apartments, they are at the forefront of a changing cityscape, but change is about more than repurposing buildings. This new generation is looking to collaborate in ways that bring new voices to the table.



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Whether they are putting together joint ventures or developing properties to meet the needs of a specific neighborhood, these leaders seek comprehensive strategies for involving the public and private sectors in new and innovative ways. This generation is more focused than ever on creating assets the public truly wants and needs, like ensuring there is greenspace involved in developments that can be used as community meeting places. Equally important to this new generation is the way development can connect versus divide different neighborhoods and create spaces for the community to come together, as demonstrated by the success of the Deer District.

Cross-generational events like the annual URBANO Hispanic CRE Conference provide opportunities for younger developers to learn from more established industry leaders who share their “all boats rise” mentality. With projects like the Sherman Phoenix and

the North Avenue Market, we see how expertise from an older generation combines with new perspectives from a fresh set of eyes. I am excited to see not just the cityscape of Milwaukee change, but also its individual neighborhoods as we work to bring more local enterprises and development to our community.

When I was in Brooklyn, I noticed how developers focused on what was already vibrant about neighborhoods before embarking on a project. Instead of saying, “This is my vision of what this place should be,” they took the time to sit down with residents and hear what it could be. That model is fast taking root here in Milwaukee.

Development is often a family business, so creating a generational BIPOC developer scene in Milwaukee should be a priority. It might not happen overnight, and some projects will start small, but the time has come to get beyond good intentions. The more developers we have coming from these backgrounds, the more vibrancy we will see across our city.

Milwaukee is, in many ways, still “Small-waukee” when it comes to doing business. For younger, more diverse professionals to succeed, this requires more opportunity for connection and greater access. As the circle of influence expands, community leaders will be essential for identifying issues and opportunities around developments to address both market demand and public need.

Developers, elected officials and community leaders need to establish an open conduit for innovation and diversity of vision, while staying true to the city’s character. Instead of “build it and they will come,” the next generation is telling us, “listen and then build it.” If we continue to take this path, our city will be all the richer for it.