



Big Impact Urbanism: How Small Markets Can Win Big

Across the country, Tier 2–4 cities face the same challenge: how to transform underutilized districts into cultural and economic engines.

Too often, the temptation is to imitate giga-scale projects designed for global capitals. The result in smaller markets? Stranded capital, empty venues, and projects that don't connect with the community.

But there is a better path: **Big Impact Urbanism**. A strategy where small markets deliver outsized results by choosing stable anchors, aligning with their cultural DNA, and building corridors that connect sport, convention, and innovation into a unified ecosystem.



SXSW #1 1987

Global Lessons

We've seen this model succeed at scale:

- **SXSW (Austin):** Began in 1987 using empty commercial spaces, warehouses, and university classrooms—*before cell phones*. Today it generates hundreds of millions annually and defines Austin's global cultural brand.
- **Sundance Film Festival (Park City):** Started as a small regional festival; now the world's premier independent film festival, generating \$167M+ annually for Utah.
- **Art Basel (Miami Beach):** Adopted in 2002; within two decades it rebranded Miami as a global art capital, fueling billions in cultural tourism.
- **Tottenham Hotspur Stadium (London):** Built for soccer, but designed as a multi-use hub for NFL games, concerts, and global events.
- **Circuit of the Americas (Austin):** Anchored in motorsport, now a cultural and festival hub drawing global visitors.

These projects prove the same point: when anchors are chosen wisely and tied to broader ecosystems, they don't just build skylines—they build economies.

The Big Impact Framework

For small markets, the framework is straightforward:

1. **Anchor:** A venue or cultural institution that is stable, flexible, and tied to a reliable global network. This can be sport, music, esports, or conventions. The critical factor is stability and scalability.



2. **Convention + Hospitality Core:** Spaces that drive visitors while feeding hotels, restaurants, and retail.
3. **Innovation Corridor:** A connected district where startups, creative industries, and intellectual capital take root.

The result isn't just a building—it's a **destination ecosystem**. One that raises land values, attracts residents and talent, and creates civic pride.

A Rogue Valley Case Study

Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley is a living example of where **Big Impact Urbanism** can thrive.

We've seen it globally. And locally, we already have proof points:

- **Peter Britt & the Britt Festival:** From one man's pioneer homestead to one of the Pacific Northwest's premier music festivals, drawing world-class performers to a rural setting.
- **Sid DeBoer & Lithia Motors:** From a single Ashland dealership to a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Medford — proof of entrepreneurial DNA that scales.
- **Harry & David:** From orchards to America's best-known gourmet fruit brand, born in Medford and still synonymous with quality and heritage.
- **Racing Culture:** With Lithia's founder and others, motorsport innovation has long been part of Southern Oregon's identity, linking culture and commerce.
- **Destination Healthcare:** Dr. Patrick Denard and OSI (Oregon Shoulder Institute) attract patients globally for elite orthopedic care, while Providence and Asante anchor Medford as a hub for advanced medicine.

The next step is to connect these threads into a new urban corridor:

- **New City Innovation District:** a creative hub attracting startups, intellectual capital, and cultural industries.
- **Convention Center Core:** tying directly into downtown hospitality, retail, and walkable amenities.
- **Event Stadium Anchor:** a professional soccer-first venue that also hosts rugby, lacrosse, concerts, and festivals.

Together, this corridor becomes more than infrastructure. It creates a **destination halo** — a place to live, work, and visit that opens the gateway to the entire Rogue Valley.



Why the Anchor Matters

It's not just about building more buildings. The long-term value of any development rests on the stability of its anchor and its ability to reflect the **spirit and heritage of place**.

- A fragile anchor leaves empty seats and financial drag.
- A stable, globally connected anchor builds a *brand*—a halo effect that makes the city a destination for residents, talent, and visitors.

This is how growth becomes transformation. Cultural and creative foundations, aligned with economically sound anchors, turn a district into a true **destination**. That is where maximization of value occurs.

The Call to Action

For Tier 2–4 cities, the question is not whether they can compete globally—it's whether they will organize locally to do so.

Big Impact Urbanism offers a replicable model:

- Anchor with culture and sport.
- Connect with convention and hospitality.
- Extend with innovation corridors.

Done right, the results are transformative: jobs, new businesses, cultural pride, and a city brand that reaches beyond its borders.

From Austin to Park City to Miami to London to Saudi Arabia, we've seen how this works. Now, it's time for smaller markets to show that big impact is not about size—it's about strategy.

Michael Flynn

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Building the future of sport, culture, and innovation in the Rogue Valley and beyond

#BigImpactUrbanism #SportsBusiness #UrbanDevelopment #InnovationDistrict #CityBuilding
#CulturalCapital #MLSNextPro #OpportunityZones #SXSW #Sundance #ArtBasel #BrittFestival
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