



Envision the City of Nassau (Bahamas) as a College Town

2022 Quarter 1 Policy Brief

Written by Lesvie Archer

Policy Fellow, GPPI

March 31, 2022

In seeking to resolve recent frustrations associated with the maintenance of downtown Nassau, this policy brief advocates a strategic transformation of the city of Nassau, The Bahamas, into a college town.

The recent lifting of COVID-19 limitations has boosted the tourism business in The Bahamas. Along with a rise in cruise ships landing at downtown Nassau ports, public attention is returned to Nassau's chronic urban development and city planning challenges. Central Nassau, The Bahamas' capital city, comprises two distinct, yet interacting communities: Downtown Nassau and 'Over-the-Hill.'¹ Downtown Nassau is located off the waterfront and operates as a commercial district and tourism hub. Its initial 15-block boundary developed due to strategic albeit sporadic efforts toward national city planning around the time of the country's independence.² Although downtown's commercial importance and physical appeal are declining,³ recent policy efforts and physical planning activities seem intent on revitalising downtown using traditional design-oriented, and physical planning city development approaches.⁴ Examples include the establishment of the Downtown Nassau Partnership, relocation of heavy port activity, renovation and expansion of the cruise port hub, and the government placing pressure on property owners to eliminate downtown's brownfield land and improve the area's physical appeal.⁵ Responding to the government's critique, property owners argue that the only effective city development solution is to strategically and sustainably integrate residential living downtown.⁶

Interestingly, the Over-the-Hill part of Nassau city comprises a large residential community. This community is located on the east and west sides of Baillou Hill Road and features a densely populated, lower-income residential community overflowing with socio-economic issues.⁷ For example, this community's homes are chronically challenged with sanitation and drainage, citizen safety, transport and mobility, and land management.⁸ Recent efforts to resolve issues in this community include the 2020 Over-the-Hill Project, which uses policy intervention to directly facilitate socio-economic empowerment and urban development. This Project emphasises technology integration, social intervention, poverty reduction, physical (town) planning and beautification, and economic empowerment.⁹ This overall focus on improving Over-the-Hill through urban development policy and socio-economic planning differs from the focus on improving downtown chiefly through design-oriented physical planning. Therefore, although downtown and Over-the-Hill jointly comprise the city of Nassau, this division suggests that policymakers and other stakeholders lack a unified vision and approach when examining and attending to the sustainable development of Nassau city. As a result of this division, it is conceivable that downtown city planning activities and Over-the-urban Hill's development efforts are chronically deficient due to policy gaps.



Government and Public Policy Institute

Failure to integrate policy-driven imperatives significant to urban development and city planning—such as transport and mobility and residential housing—suggests a need to explore evolving intersections between city planning, urban development, and related stakeholders. Accordingly, this policy brief’s advocacy position prioritises the IADB’s stance that comprehensive identification of stakeholders is the first and most critical step when pursuing the development of an emerging, sustainable city.¹⁰ Understanding that a complete identification of stakeholders can lead to more effective planning and strategic action, this brief investigates the potential impact of prioritising the University of The Bahamas and its strategic advancement platform as a missing VIP stakeholder. As a stakeholder, UB brings its interest in increasing revenue, improving local and international student and faculty enrolment numbers, cultivating a thriving, youth-focused environment, and an eagle-eyed mission to develop its students into leaders and positive agents of change. University of The Bahamas possesses tremendous stakeholder value and influence because it offers a transformational vision of Nassau as a college/university city. Although limited attention has been placed on its inclusion in the city’s revitalization efforts, the prosperity and economic opportunities associated with college/university cities are well established throughout the region and world. Therefore, considering Nassau as a student city quickly builds upon the city’s current tourism and broader commercial platform.

Recent studies on the economic impact of universities on their communities demonstrate both increased GDP and positive spillover effects into neighbouring spaces.¹¹ Accordingly, elevating the value of UB as a city-stakeholder with significant potential impact may also operate as an effective and profitable starting point for the development of urban housing, transport, and mobility in the city and across the island more broadly. As the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) confirms, mobility demands prerequisite city development.¹² For example, a study on the mobility patterns of college students in emerging countries reveals that it directly changes the mobility and transport dynamics of the city, promoting a greater demand for public transportation, an increased percentage of persons acknowledging regular walking as their primary mode of transportation, and an eager embrace of newer mobility services such as bike-sharing, car-sharing, and ride-sharing that are sensitive to climate change.¹³ This vision can also implicitly strengthen the mobility and transport system and policies in the Over-the-Hill area because it is the Over-the-Hill community that directly connects downtown to the Oakes Field University Campus.

Lastly, consideration of Nassau as a student city can also bridge the historical gap between downtown and Over-the-Hill because of the critical role in society that university students can play as change agents and leaders to the benefit of Over-the-Hill. With Over-the-Hill social development programs, student volunteer opportunities, research studies, and pilot programmes, UB and its partners can directly support urban development and sustainable city management within this nation-change agenda in real-time. UB may operate as a neutral and trusted facilitator for all stakeholders (downtown business owners, university affiliates, over-the-hill residents, civil society, etc.) desiring to pursue city advancement, socio-economic empowerment, and national development. A related example considers the potential benefits of combining the development of Nassau as a student city alongside the embrace of cooperatives as a source of the city’s revitalisation and sustainable development. Recent research on cooperatives or ‘shareable’ cities evidence that worker-owned enterprises and cooperatives offer an effective solution to urban development ills while promoting city advancement.¹⁴ Overall, envisioning Nassau as a student city may not only operate as an effective solution to the city’s historical duality challenges but also beckons consideration as a driving vision for Nassau’s sustainable community building and equitable wealth generation, and societal prosperity.



¹ (2018, May 16). *Sustainable Nassau: Empowered people, revitalized city by BID - Ciudades Sostenibles - Issuu*. Sustainable Nassau: Empowered People, Revitalized City; issuu.com.

https://issuu.com/ciudadesemergentesysostenibles/docs/pub_2015_nassau_bhs_ces_2018

² 1976 National Development Plan. (1976). Bahamas Government.

³ McKenzie, N. (2022, March 23). *NO MORE SHAME: DPM says government has a plan for downtown redevelopment – Eyewitness News*. Eye Witness News; ewnews.com. <https://ewnews.com/no-more-shame-dpm-says-government-has-plan-for-downtown-redevelopment>

⁴ Gleye, P. H. (2015). City planning versus urban planning: Resolving a profession's bifurcated heritage. *Journal of planning literature*, 30(1), 3-17.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0885412214554088>

⁵ Thompson, Lindsay. (2022, March 22). Government to roll out sustained redevelopment plan for Downtown Nassau. Press Release. <https://bit.ly/3Nq4tYA>

⁶ McKenzie, N. (2022, March 23). *NO MORE SHAME: DPM says government has a plan for downtown redevelopment – Eyewitness News*. Eye Witness News; ewnews.com. <https://ewnews.com/no-more-shame-dpm-says-government-has-plan-for-downtown-redevelopment>

⁷ (2018, May 16). *Sustainable Nassau: Empowered people, revitalized city by BID - Ciudades Sostenibles - Issuu*. Sustainable Nassau: Empowered People, Revitalized City; issuu.com.

https://issuu.com/ciudadesemergentesysostenibles/docs/pub_2015_nassau_bhs_ces_2018

⁸ Donovan, M. G. (2015, July 1). *Five Takeaways from the Fifth Caribbean Urban Forum - Caribbean Development Trends*. Caribbean Development Trends; blogs.iadb.org. <https://blogs.iadb.org/caribbean-dev-trends/en/five-takeaways-from-the-fifth-caribbean-urban-forum/>

⁹ Bahamas, G. (2020, 0 0). *Over The Hill Bahamas*. OverTheHillBahamas.Org; www.overthehillbahamas.org. <https://www.overthehillbahamas.org/>

¹⁰ Inter-American Development Bank. (2020, June 30). *Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program | IDB*. Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program | IDB; www.iadb.org. <https://www.iadb.org/en/urban-development-and-housing/emerging-and-sustainable-cities-program>

¹¹ Valero, A., & Van Reenen, J. (2019). The economic impact of universities: Evidence from across the globe. *Economics of Education Review*, 68, 53-67.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775718300414>

¹² International Association of Public Transport. (2020, March 0). *Report Abuse*. <https://Www.Uitp.Org/>; indd.adobe.com. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/fdc7b672-7ba6-4137-a768-1726cd6c5f50>

¹³ Biosca, S. A. O. (2020). College student mobility in emerging countries: Case study on Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, México. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 6, 100155.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S259019822030066X>; International Association of Public Transport. (2020, March 0). *Report Abuse*. <https://Www.Uitp.Org/>; indd.adobe.com.

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/fdc7b672-7ba6-4137-a768-1726cd6c5f50>

¹⁴ Coca, N. (2019, March 5). *Spanish cities make the case for how cooperatives can address urban ills - Shareable*. Shareable; www.shareable.net. <https://bit.ly/3AkkSLn>