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ULI Austin's Technology LMC: Summary Since Inception

Austin, Texas has been booming. The city's music scene, food culture, natural features, and laid-back vibe are an attractive complement to the economic engine of state government, higher education, and open land that has been converted into powerhouses of industry, especially technology, from IBM and Dell to Indeed, Google, and Tesla.

In 2023, ULI Austin decided the time was right for a group of its members to form around the nexus of real estate and technology. Enter the Technology Local Member Council (LMC), one of [thirteen current ULI Austin Local Member Councils](#).

Since its founding in the spring of last year, [ULI Austin's Technology LMC](#) has convened its members to focus on topics about current and emerging technologies that can advance (and already are advancing) how we develop, build and manage the built environment and make an impactful change in Austin. Through this lens, the group has explored a variety of topics through speakers, tours, and discussions that are broadening awareness and insight across the interdisciplinary membership.

While most of those insights stay within the group, the LMC hopes to shed light on several themes and examples of what was covered.

New Construction Materials and Methods

The LMC invited [TimberLab](#) for an exploratory discussion on the emergence of mass timber construction. While building with wood is an old technology, building codes and standards have generally limited its application to low-rise construction based on what we knew at the time. New technologies and designs are facilitating tall wood structures in spaces that have become almost exclusively the domain of concrete and steel. The LMC then teamed up with the [Multifamily Housing LMC](#) to tour the 24-unit [Juno](#) building, a glowing new example of mass timber construction in East Austin.

Austin's own [ICON](#) illustrated the new possibilities of robot-built buildings using 3D printing technology and free-flowing forms. Beyond the groovy looks, this new construction method holds promise for bringing down the cost of housing while increasing speed, quality, flexibility, and energy efficiency, among other benefits. The LMC toured Icon's [House Zero](#), a remarkable single-family structure in East Austin.

PropTech

Property Technology (PropTech) is a catch-all term that can include creative new approaches to real estate finance, design, materials, management, and sale. As a result, most of the LMC's agenda includes an exploration of PropTech, which included sporadic discussion of a LMC's member company's product, [PowerStack](#), Texas-built solar poles that beautifully optimize form and function.

The LMC also toured Austin's smartest building which sits at the northern edge of South 1st Street. [River South](#) is a 320,000 sf LEED Gold certified office building with all the bells and whistles. For the fortunate tenant, the building recognizes you when you arrive each morning, calling the elevator, unlocking doors, cooling your office, and even ordering your coffee. Read a more detailed review of our tour on [LinkedIn](#).

In March each year, Austin is overrun with visitors during South by Southwest (SXSW) who come to town to share ideas about what's next in arts, industry, and culture. In 2023 and 2024, members of the LMC convened at [The PropTech House](#). It has been the only real-estate-focused SXSW destination for innovative technology and real estate.

Artificial Intelligence

It's difficult to talk about technology in any industry these days and not address how artificial intelligence (AI) is disrupting the way we work. The LMC invited [Gensler](#) to share its perspective on how AI has become an important part of how building designers are collecting and interpreting information that is influencing how we think about buildings and cities. Of course, AI is also enhancing the design tools, making sense of complexity and facilitating creativity while ensuring new designs maintain or enhance core elements of safety, function, and performance.

A later discussion with [Strategic Office Networks](#) sparked discussion around how AI is illuminating new possibilities for infrastructure planning. With AI, we can make sense of space and community resources to enable a "15-minute community" through distributed architectures of office, medicine, retail, recreation, and education. Such new tools are helping expand local access in more communities without aggravating transportation congestion. To this end, organizations such as [The Autonomy Institute](#) are convening a coalition of interests in support of "intelligent infrastructure" that promises to improve quality of life by enabling autonomous systems that make communities safer, more efficient, more connected, and more resilient.

Resilience & Sustainability

The LMC invited [Layer10](#) to present on its compelling work to build a smart and sustainable community. The team accomplishes this through human-centric, product agnostic design that optimizes appropriate technology to enhance spaces and enrich lives. The discussed example in Colorado sheds light on what's possible with thoughtful, intentional design for technology, delivering efficiency, sustainability, and enjoyment for the community.

Fifteen miles northeast of downtown, [EcoSmart Solution](#) and its partners are building one of the greenest planned residential communities in the country. The LMC teamed up with the [Resilience & Sustainability LMC](#) to tour the [Whisper Valley](#) development site, where rooftop solar, energy efficient construction, a community-scale geothermal energy plant, and 700 acres of green space are just a few of the draws. Hundreds of homes are already built and occupied, working towards a grand total of 5,000 homes and 2,500 multifamily units.

Most recently, the LMC visited the birthplace of sustainable building and community design and innovation at Austin's own [Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems](#). Entering its 50th year of what they call "serious commotion," the Center invited the LMC into a provocative

exploration of creative, systems thinking about real estate and the built environment, and how Austin has played a leading role in innovation. The discussion and tour of the Center's campus illustrated many examples of where and how technology has facilitated superior outcomes in design, construction, management, performance, and experience. How innovation, sustainability, and resilience will be incorporated into future real estate developments in Austin is a continual opportunity for creativity and intention in current and future projects of ULI members, recognized each autumn at the [Austin Green Awards](#).

Policy

While often less glamorous than new buildings and technologies, policy plays a constant role in shaping land use, often defining what, where, and sometimes how we develop, work, live, and move from place to place. The LMC invited [Winstead](#) to paint an engaging picture of real estate and land-use related policy discussion in the 88th Texas Legislature. Topics such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), minimum parking requirements, and even sale of land to foreign nationals were each in the spotlight during the spring of 2023. Gears are turning for another busy spring of 2025 with Texas land use and development again on the agenda.

With all the complexity already on the books, and still more to come, the LMC saw it fitting to invite [Cedar](#) to present its technology that helps users navigate complex land development codes and covenants.

Innovation

Many of the topics covered by the LMC are driven by curiosity to uncover relevant innovations for the nexus between technology and real estate. Few innovations are more relevant for ULI members than innovative project financing. The LMC invited [CrowdStreet](#) for an overview of new, creative financing tools and strategies for commercial real estate, with examples of projects across Texas and Austin.

For those of us in the trenches of designing, building, financing, and managing an evolving built environment, it's much more common to see the same old thing. Innovation in construction and real estate [really can be difficult](#).

Given all the new ideas, technologies, and insights uncovered during the first year of Austin's Technology LMC, the LMC is exploring expanding its name to the Technology and Innovation LMC! Tune back in next year for more on how a focus on innovation is shaping how ULI Austin members are thinking about innovation and implementing technology in our work to shape the Austin of the future.