



CHARTER CITIES
— INSTITUTE —

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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OUR / VISION

Empowering New Cities

WITH

Better Governance

TO LIFT

Tens of Millions

OF PEOPLE

Out of Poverty

OUR / MISSION

BUILDING THE ECOSYSTEM FOR CHARTER CITIES BY:



Creating legal, regulatory, and planning frameworks needed for rapid urban growth.



Advising and convening key stakeholders including governments, new city developers, and multilateral institutions.



Influencing the global agenda through research, engagement, and partnerships.

LETTER FROM MARK LUTTER / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear CCI Community:

Several years ago at a dinner I told the story of Genghis Khan. It took him several decades to unite the Mongolian tribes under a single banner before he built the largest land empire in human history. I analogized the Charter Cities Institute to the uniting of tribes, we were building an illegible set of knowledge that, when ready, would have a fast and scalable (positive) impact on the world.

I believed the story when I told it. However, I can't deny there were some doubts lurking in the back of my mind. Things were progressing more slowly than I had hoped, and we didn't have the project level engagement we initially aspired to.

Today, I am confident the analogy is correct. The last six months have seen numerous projects come out of the woodwork and validate our strategy. Our job for next year is to consolidate our gains and accelerate the development of charter cities.

The Charter Cities Institute is building the ecosystem for charter cities. We have spent much of the past 7 years focusing on Africa. We are beginning to see the fruits of the ecosystem building – a machine that builds cities.

The machine has two key parts, 1) **Catapult**, a new cities accelerator, and 2) the **New Cities Summit**, our annual conference, being held in Nairobi on June 12th and 13th. Catapult identifies and empowers early stage new city projects. We facilitate introductions to service providers, investors, and experts to give projects the best chance of success. The New Cities Summit brings together these stakeholders in person, allowing them to share best practices, form partnerships, and find supporters of new city projects. As projects hit milestones, the flywheel will accelerate, attracting more talent, investment, and government interest.

We launched the **African Urban Lab** in Zanzibar. In partnership with the African School of Economics, we have opened the African Urban Lab, a research and educational institution. We had our first professional certificate program in November, with nearly 40 students coming throughout Africa to learn about urban planning and design. The program continues in April with a focus on urban governance and finance.

In addition to our success in Africa, we've begun to explore global possibilities, including India, Central Asia, South America, and the United States.

In the United States, we've partnered with the Frontier Foundation to work on **Freedom Cities**. President Trump gave a short speech around 18 months ago on Freedom Cities, new cities with regulatory autonomy built on federal government land. We believe Freedom Cities can be an important tool to increase innovation and experimentation, especially with emerging technologies including biotech, drones, and nuclear. Over the next few months we'll build a coalition of companies, investors, and nonprofits interested in Freedom Cities and work with the incoming administration and legislators to make Freedom Cities a reality.

Our work in India, Central Asia, and South America is in an early, but exciting stage. In India, the Foundation for Economic Development has gotten a special economic zone law passed in Uttar Pradesh. We are exploring how to work with them to get concessions from the national government and create the administrative structure for the zone. In Central Asia we are part of a consortium that is working on a charter city to attract foreign investment. In South America we're reviewing charter cities legislation that a local group is interested in passing.

After years of building the framework for charter cities, we are in the early stages of execution. There is still a tremendous amount of work ahead, and it will take years for the payoffs of the work to become apparent. I'd like to thank our supporters for their continued generosity. I am more excited about charter cities than any time since the founding of the Charter Cities Institute.

Best regards,

Mark Lutter

Dr. Mark Lutter

ABOUT / CCI

THE CHARTER CITIES INSTITUTE IS A NONPROFIT DEDICATED TO BUILDING THE ECOSYSTEM FOR CHARTER CITIES.

CCI was founded on the idea that a fresh approach was necessary to tackle humanity's most pressing challenges: global poverty, rapid urbanization, and limited governance capacity throughout the Global South.

Charter cities—new cities granted a special jurisdiction to create a new governance system—are that solution.

60% of the world's population will be living in urban areas by the end of 2030.

If countries don't effectively manage rapid urbanization, this can lead to continued poverty and slum growth, poor living conditions, and limited job potential for city residents. **Charter cities can help.**

Cities in Africa and Asia will add over **2 billion new residents** by 2050 without the infrastructure or jobs to support these residents. New urban spaces are needed.

THE INCREASING NEED FOR CHARTER CITIES

Charter cities are one of the best public policy tools to ensure urbanization jumpstarts long-term economic development, rather than perpetuates poverty, in emerging economies. By improving governance and institutions, charter cities can create a more competitive business environment, attract investment, create more jobs, and improve the lives of millions.



LETTER FROM JEFFREY MASON / HEAD OF RESEARCH

Dear Charter Cities Community,

2024 was a phenomenal year for our Policy team, seeing the continued production of informative, engaging, and policy relevant papers, media, and events. Some of our key achievements from 2024 include:

- **Launching CCI's policy brief series**

We're tailoring our research efforts to prepare policy briefs which break down the complex policy issues in the countries where we work to inform policymakers and drive reform. Policy brief topics include analysis of special economic zones reform in Malawi, key lessons from successful small-country investment promotion authorities, and more.

- **Engaging global development leaders at the Growth Summit**

In partnership with the Center for Global Development and Growth Teams, as well as the generous financial support of Open Philanthropy and Bridgewater Associates, CCI hosted the first Growth Summit. Bringing together leading practitioners, philanthropic funders, academics, and businesses, the Growth Summit served as a call to action within the development community to prioritize economic growth as the best and most sustainable long-run solution to alleviating poverty.

- **Continuing to publish high-quality research**

As always, CCI continued to publish engaging research throughout the year. Our research touched on a wide variety of topics, including a history of alcohol production in economic development, a deep dive on South Korea's Songdo new city, rich analysis of the laws and policies stifling urban growth in Africa, and more.

- **Beginning our expansion to new regions**

Starting in late 2024, exciting new opportunities for charter cities which go beyond the progress we've made in Africa have emerged. Freedom Cities in the United States, as well as advanced charter city and special economic zone projects in Central Asia, India, and elsewhere are emerging. We look forward to expanding these opportunities for technical engagement, policy and research dissemination, and stakeholder convening into 2025.

We are excited for what's next in 2025! We'll be hosting the second New Cities Summit in June in Nairobi, Kenya, with the policy team leading on the development of engaging, informative, and action-oriented programming. We'll continue to publish policy briefs, research, popular media, and podcasts on charter cities, freedom cities, special economic zones, and other critical topics throughout the year

2025 is likely to be a year of major expansion for the charter cities ecosystem, and our policy team is ready to hit the ground running in the wake of the upcoming New Cities Summit!

Best regards,
Jeffrey Mason,
Head of Policy

FEATURED / PROJECTS

1. AFRICA URBAN LAB



AFRICAN
SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS

ZANZIBAR

African School of Economics Zanzibar



We launched the **Africa Urban Lab** (AUL), a research center at the African School of Economics-Zanzibar focused on rapid urbanization across Africa. The organization's mission is two-fold. First, the AUL conducts frontier research on the challenges and solutions to rapid urbanization on the continent. Second, the AUL trains the African city builders, planners, and urban leaders of tomorrow to harness rapid urbanization for human prosperity. The first cohort started in November 2024!

FEATURED / PROJECTS

2. CASE STUDIES



Case Studies

CIUDAD MORAZÁN



Case Studies

FUMBA TOWN

We developed a series of **case studies** showcasing new city developments we are associated with, including **Ciudad Morazán** and **Fumba Town**. Taking a story-driven approach, these case studies highlight not just the challenges and innovations behind building new cities but also the people who call them home. Through their stories, we explore how these developments are shaping livelihoods, fostering communities, and driving economic growth, offering a compelling narrative on the impact of charter cities in action.

FEATURED / PROJECTS

3. STUDENT DIARIES



We introduced a student mentorship program and blog series titled **Student Diaries: Perspectives on Urbanization & Development**. This program amplifies the student voice on **urbanization, governance, and other critical development issues** in Africa. As the continent's population increasingly gravitates towards urban centers, understanding how urbanization can be leveraged as a catalytic force for development is important, and since 60% of Africans are under 25 years old, hearing their voice is arguably even more important. Accordingly, this blog series invites young people to contribute to Africa's development discourse with well-researched, analytical, nuanced blogs on sustainable and inclusive urban development.

FEATURED / PROJECTS

4. MEET THE TEAM

Eva Klaus

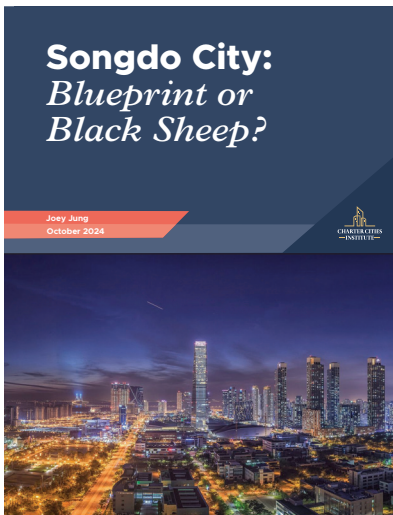


Matthew McCartney



We began our new “Meet Our Team” video series, where our audience has a chance to get to know the incredible individuals behind the Charter Cities Institute. In our first episode, we introduced Eva Klaus, one of our brilliant researchers. The second episode featured Professor Matthew McCartney, our witty senior researcher. More insights into the individuals behind the scenes are yet to come.

2024 PUBLICATIONS SUMMARIES



Songdo City: Blueprint or Black Sheep?

Songdo City, South Korea's flagship smart city, is a \$40 billion marvel that embodies innovation and ambition. Over two decades, it has transformed from a wetland to a high-tech hub, championing sustainability and urban planning excellence. Despite its cutting-edge infrastructure and status as a model for global urban development, Songdo faces criticism for top-down governance, underwhelming population growth, and cultural shortcomings. This research delves into its governance, built environment, and economic frameworks to evaluate whether Songdo is a blueprint for future cities or an outlier among global urban experiments.



To Beer Or Not To Beer? A Liquid History of Economic Development in Canada and Zambia

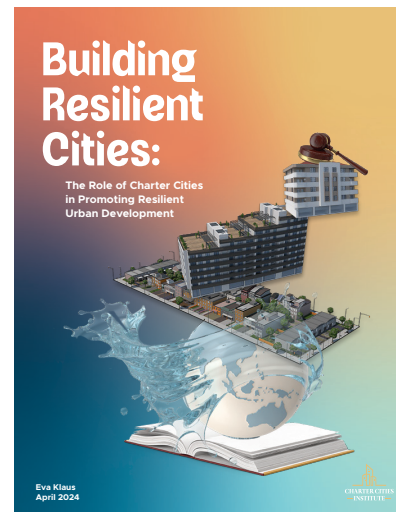
This paper explores the integral role of beer in the economic development and social fabric of Toronto, Canada, and Lusaka, Zambia. While a recent biography paints a negative picture of Toronto's historical relationship with alcohol, this paper argues that beer has been a crucial driver of economic growth, tax revenue, and industrialization. Similarly, the study highlights the absence of brewing incentives in Zambia's Lusaka South Multi-Facility Economic Zone, advocating for the recognition of beer's developmental impact. The findings underscore the importance of local craft breweries in shaping Toronto and Lusaka's contemporary identities and livability.

2024 PUBLICATIONS SUMMARIES (CONT.)



Introducing the New Cities Map

This research paper introduces the New Cities Map (NCM), an open-source database cataloging over 350 master-planned cities built worldwide since 1945. It provides insights into the rapid growth of new cities, particularly in the Global South, and offers valuable data on city governance, finances, and planning to support future research and policy development.



Building Resilient Cities: The Role of Charter Cities in Promoting Resilient Urban Development

This paper explores how cities, particularly in the Global South, can tackle the challenges of climate change and rapid urbanization to become resilient centers of sustainable development. Focusing on the concept of charter cities—newly established urban areas with innovative governance—the paper discusses their potential to strategically manage urban growth, develop sustainable infrastructure, and implement adaptive governance practices. Despite challenges, charter cities offer a pathway to building resilient urban centers that drive economic prosperity and innovation in the face of climate change.



Making Bad Urban Laws Better: Can the Urban Physician Replace the Urban Politician in Africa?

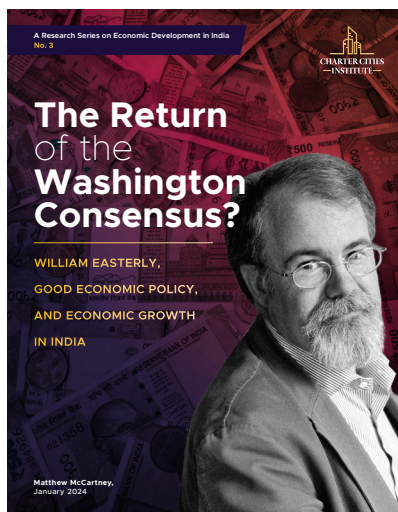
In response to evolving global priorities and local challenges, our latest research paper, titled “Making Bad Urban Laws Better: Can the Urban Physician Replace the Urban Politician in Africa?” delves into the dynamic landscape of urban policy reform in Africa. Drawing from the Biden administration’s strategic shift towards urbanization and the comprehensive analyses of international organizations, we explore the emergence of the “urban physician” – a technocratic figure tasked with enacting policy changes to enhance urban governance. However, our analysis goes beyond surface-level assessments of “bad laws,” urging a deeper examination of their origins, impacts, and vested interests. We argue that alongside the urban physician, skilled “urban politicians” are essential for navigating complex political landscapes, building coalitions, and driving meaningful reform. Through a series of case studies and discussions, we shed light on the symbiotic relationship between these two actors and advocate for a holistic approach to urban policy reform in Africa.



15-Minute Cities and American Inequality: The Relationship Between Walkability and Social Inclusivity

Over the past few years, the 15-minute city has emerged as a contentious urban planning paradigm. The concept, which proposes organizing cities into clusters of dense neighborhoods where all daily needs can be reached within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, is criticized as a segregationist and impractical approach to urbanism. Its detractors fear that it will worsen social inequality and reduce economic benefits. In this paper, we challenge these criticisms. We argue that 15-minute cities are an effective urban policy to improve social equality and spur economic development. We conceptually argue that 15-minute cities embody consensus policies among urban planner, and therefore, they should not be treated skeptically. We also discuss how 15-minute cities are beneficial to low-income residents. To illustrate our arguments, we qualitatively compare New York City and Washington, DC’s impoverished neighborhoods. We show that the relatively more walkable neighborhoods of NYC are better for the poor than DC’s relatively less walkable neighborhoods.

2024 PUBLICATIONS SUMMARIES (CONT.)



The Return of the Washington Consensus? William Easterly, Good Economic Policy, and Economic Growth in India

This paper engages with a specific effort by Easterly (2019) to solve the liberalization–economic growth paradox. Focusing on India’s liberalization in 1991, it questions Easterly’s analysis on several fronts. Firstly, it argues that the growth paradox diminishes when more rigorous empirical methods are applied. Secondly, it contends that Easterly’s metrics fail to capture India’s reform efforts adequately. Thirdly, it suggests that while Easterly posits a delayed effect of good policy, the actual delay lies in realizing the benefits of such policies due to various factors like the need for complementary policies and the time it takes for firm-level impacts to manifest at the macro level. Lastly, it critiques Easterly’s linkage of rapid growth in the 1990s solely to better economic policy, highlighting the need to consider sustained growth and the interplay between growth and institutions for a comprehensive understanding of India’s economic trajectory since 1980.



Let Them Eat Cake (and surf, and swim, and play golf): Is King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC), Saudi Arabia a Liberal Oasis?

Recent research delved into the economic challenges facing King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) in Saudi Arabia, revealing a nuanced perspective. While the outlook for KAEC’s economy appears pessimistic, there’s a glimmer of social optimism regarding the appeal of social liberalism, particularly among the youth. This emerging trend has garnered attention from Western media and scholars. KAEC, alongside other planned cities like NEOM, is positioned as a response to population growth and urbanization while aiming to stimulate economic growth. However, official Saudi government sources lack substantial mention of social liberalism, prompting questions about its authenticity versus being a marketing ploy. Is this dual message reflective of Saudi trying to push the social liberalism signal overseas while maintaining a conservative rhetoric at home? Is there a social cherry on the slightly stale economic cake?

FEATURED / EVENTS



The Growth Summit:

Recentering Economic Growth in Development

The Growth Summit convened leading academics, policymakers, donors, and development practitioners for a series of panels and open discussions on reigniting economic growth in low- and middle-income countries. Sessions covered topics such as overcoming growth barriers, fostering firm-level productivity, and the role of evidence-based interventions in promoting sustainable growth. With renowned speakers including Stefan Dercon, Vera Songwe, and Lant Pritchett, this event provided a platform for innovative dialogue and actionable outcomes in the global development landscape.



Zanzalu

Zanzalu was a five-week pop-up city event held in Fumba Town, Zanzibar. It was designed to connect African builders, explore alternative forms of city organization, and foster a growth ecosystem. Organized by the Charter Cities Institute, Zanzalu brought together a community of builders, organizers, and outside-the-box thinkers who aimed to advance human flourishing through technological and social innovation. The event featured in-depth programming such as student weekends, crypto events, presentations, ZED Talks, startup weekend, and more, aiming to connect innovators from around the world and explore new ways of incubating community among local groups. The second edition of Zanzalu will take place again in Fumba Town in July 2025.



Staff Retreat

to Fumba Town, Zanzibar

In July, the Charter Cities Institute team came together for a two-day retreat in Zanzibar, strengthening team bonds while experiencing our flagship project, Fumba Town, firsthand. Beyond exploring the island's vibrant culture and stunning landscapes, we took the opportunity to enhance our professional image, updating our team's headshots for a cohesive and polished look. The trip was both productive and refreshing, reinforcing our commitment to building better cities while fostering collaboration among colleagues.

FEATURED / EVENTS



CCI Presents at the University of Chicago

CCI's Jeff Mason and Tommie Thompson led a compelling discussion on the re-evaluation of charter cities as a development strategy at the University of Chicago. They were accompanied by esteemed professors James Robinson and Raul Sanchez de la Sierra from the Harris School of Public Policy, sparking lively conversations among the enthusiastic students of UChicago's policy school.



[Webinar] Research Paper Virtual Dissemination:

To Beer Or Not To Beer?

On August 2nd, the Charter Cities Institute (CCI), in partnership with the Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM), hosted a virtual dissemination of our research paper titled *To Beer or Not to Beer? A Liquid History of Economic Development in Canada and Zambia*. During the webinar, Professor Matthew McCartney discussed his paper, exploring the historical and economic significance of beer in both Canada and Zambia. He highlighted beer's role in social and economic development, including its contribution to economic growth, tax revenue, and industrialization. Additionally, Kalemba Mpandamwike from the Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR) and Zondwayo Duma from ZAM joined the discussion to question matters such as social ramifications, health concerns, and taxation.



[Webinar] Africa Urban Lab:

Building the Capacities of Urban Actors in Africa

On August 28th, the Charter Cities Institute, the African School of Economics, the Africa Urban Lab, and UN-Habitat co-hosted a crucial webinar on strengthening Africa's capacity for sustainable urbanization. This event explored the continent's institutional needs and highlighted the Africa Urban Lab's role in bridging these gaps. Participants engaged directly with panelists, asked questions, and participated in a dynamic discussion.

LETTER FROM MICHAEL HOLSTEIN / HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

Dear CCI Community:

2024 was another transformative year for CCI and the Communications Team. From supporting our internal teams, to hosting several marquee events, to proactively communicating about the state of charter cities and the goings-on at CCI, it was a year full of highlights – none more notable than the launch of the **Africa Urban Lab** (AUL) in Zanzibar (where we also held our first ever staff retreat). The AUL's mission is two-fold. First, it conducts 'frontier research' on the challenges and solutions to rapid urbanization on the continent. Second, the AUL trains the African city builders, planners, and urban leaders of tomorrow to harness rapid urbanization for human prosperity. The first cohort started in November 2024 with another to follow in April 2025, and the Comms Team built and rolled out the website, created branding and guidelines, and ran a highly successful marketing and PR campaign to drive enrollment.

Between launching AUL, spearheading other events, communicating to our stakeholders about our "regular" operations, and planning for our second "New Cities Summit" – in Nairobi in June – it was an exceptionally busy, fun, exciting, and productive year.

Some additional highlights from 2024 include:

- Designed, published, and promoted 8 research papers, 46 blogs, and 11 policy briefs
- Secured major **media placements** – articles about us and written by us, as well as podcast and other appearances – in notable publications around the world
- Added significant social media followers across all platforms, including more than doubling our **LinkedIn** followers and generating nearly one million **Twitter** impressions (despite having our account hacked and being offline for several weeks)!
- Began our new "Meet Our Team" video series, where our audience has a chance to get to know the incredible individuals behind the Charter Cities Institute.
- Launched the "Student Diaries" series to help establish CCI as a mentor in urban development through a branded student diaries page on the website, & quarterly blogs, fostering a connection with the next generation of urban developers.
- As Africa's **NXT50 Cities Coalition** continues to grow, we launched the NXT50 Member Spotlight series to highlight the exceptional work of our members. This interview series provides a platform for innovators and leaders shaping the future of African cities, giving them the stage to share their vision and impact.
- We developed a series of case studies showcasing new city developments we are associated with, including Ciudad Morazán and Fumba Town. Taking a story-driven approach, these case studies highlight not just the challenges and innovations behind building new cities but also the people who call them home.
- Last, but not least, we started work on our flagship 2025 event: the **New Cities Summit**, as well as making plans to roll out a redesigned website, launch the "Cities Media Group" – a consortium of video, written, and audio content – and much more.

We thank you for your continued support, ideas, and passion. We are thrilled about the strides our department, organization, and movement made in 2024, and we look forward to sharing new CCI content, events, breakthrough work, and organizational updates with you throughout 2025 and beyond!

Best regards,

Michael Holstein
Head of Communications

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



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research papers

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blog posts

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guest authors

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press releases

Produced our first Policy Brief,
publishing 11 briefs throughout 2024



PODCAST

11

episodes



Began video podcasts



VIDEO

53

videos published

24

comments

403%

Increased impressions
by 403% from
the previous year

338%

Increased views
by 338% from
the previous year

44,199

views

1000

youtube subscribers

245

shares

280

likes

Most viewed - Opening Remarks -
Nelly Mukazayire - 881 hours watched



SOCIAL MEDIA

LinkedIn

X

64K

Impressions

35K

engagements

1633

reactions

5.4K

profile visits

5K

page views

355

Impressions

1000

new followers

LETTER FROM CARL PETERSON / SPECIAL PROJECTS

Dear CCI Community,

2024 was an outstanding year for our Special Projects team, some highlights from the past year include:

Supporting the Zanzibar Investment Promotion Authority (ZIPA) Strategic Plan:

We worked closely with ZIPA to help shape its strategic plan, ensuring that Zanzibar remains a leading destination for investment and economic growth in East Africa. Our contributions supported key initiatives aimed at streamlining business operations, attracting high-quality investments, and fostering a dynamic economic environment.

Expanding Our Network of Partners and Supporters:

This year, we welcomed additional members into our growing network, strengthening our ability to advance special projects that drive economic development and innovation. These partnerships have enhanced our capacity to support policy reforms, investment strategies, and ecosystem-building efforts in key regions.

Hosting High-Impact Roundtables:

We convened a series of focused roundtable discussions with experts, policymakers, and industry leaders to explore solutions to some of the most pressing challenges in economic development. These included:

- **May: MIGA Risk Insurance** – We held a digital roundtable on risk insurance, featuring a presentation by the World Bank Group's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) on their risk mitigation insurance offerings.
- **August: Financing Climate-Resilient Infrastructure** – We hosted a digital roundtable on financing climate-resilient infrastructure, centered around a presentation by auctusESG. auctusESG is a global advisory firm based in Mumbai, India, that focuses on facilitating sustainable development and the climate transition, at the intersection of finance, investments, and sustainability.
- **October: Upskilling and Industrial Policy** – We hosted a digital roundtable featuring Kartik Akileswaran from Growth Teams, who discussed the role of labor mobility, skill transfer, and economic strategies in fostering city growth. The session covered key insights from Kenya's export data, explored the role of diaspora and foreign direct investment, and provided recommendations for facilitating knowledge exchange and development.

Engaging at Key Conferences and Events:

Our team actively participated in and spoke at major global gatherings, sharing insights on charter cities, investment, and economic development:

May: Corporate Council on Africa – We engaged with city leaders and private sector experts to discuss governance, infrastructure, and investment strategies in African urban centers. The panel focused on democracy-driven governance, investment asset classes, public-private partnerships, and regulatory environments to support sustainable growth.

June-July: Zanzalu – This five-week pop-up city event in Zanzibar brought together African builders to explore alternative city governance models and develop a collaborative ecosystem for innovation. Participants engaged in hands-on city-building activities, fostering relationships and promoting intentional development strategies.

November: Liberty in Our Lifetime – This event examined ambitious charter city projects in Africa and the broader implications of special economic zones and decentralized governance. Discussions highlighted the role of special jurisdictions in economic growth, regulatory innovations, and the NXT50 Cities Coalition's vision for fostering new urban centers.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are excited to build upon these successes with even more ambitious projects, deeper partnerships, and continued thought leadership in the charter cities space. Thank you for your continued interest and engagement—we look forward to another year of progress and impact!

Warm regards,

Carl Peterson

Senior Manager, Special Projects

THE / TEAM

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Founder & Executive Director



JOHN HOYT
Head of Operations



MICHAEL HOLSTEIN
Head of Communications & General Counsel



MWANDA PHIRI
Africa Policy Lead



AMB. OMAR AROUNA
Senior Advisor, Government Relations



JEFFREY MASON
Head of Policy



CARL PETERSON
Senior Special Projects Manager



EMMANUEL OLAWOYE
Operations Manager



GEMMA ADELMAN
Marketing and Communications Manager



JIDY CHITTA
Special Projects Associate



KATIE ESTES
Art Director



OLIVER BAKER
Development Associate

AUL STAFF



KURTIS LOCKHART
Director



MATTHEW MCCARTNEY
Head of Research Programs



HEBA ELHANAFY
Principal Urban Planner



EVA KLAUS
Researcher

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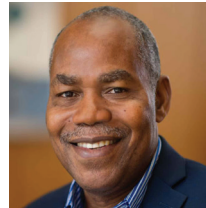
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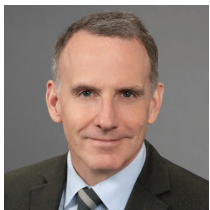


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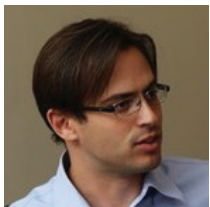
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MAGATTE WADE



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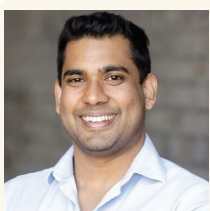


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