



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

ENVISION DOWNTOWN MADISON KICK-OFF RESULTS

More than 175 participants shared their ideas and experiences to help shape the collective Shared Values and Potential Big Moves.

i Refer to the local guide for links to the web for the full meeting summary.

What makes a thriving downtown?

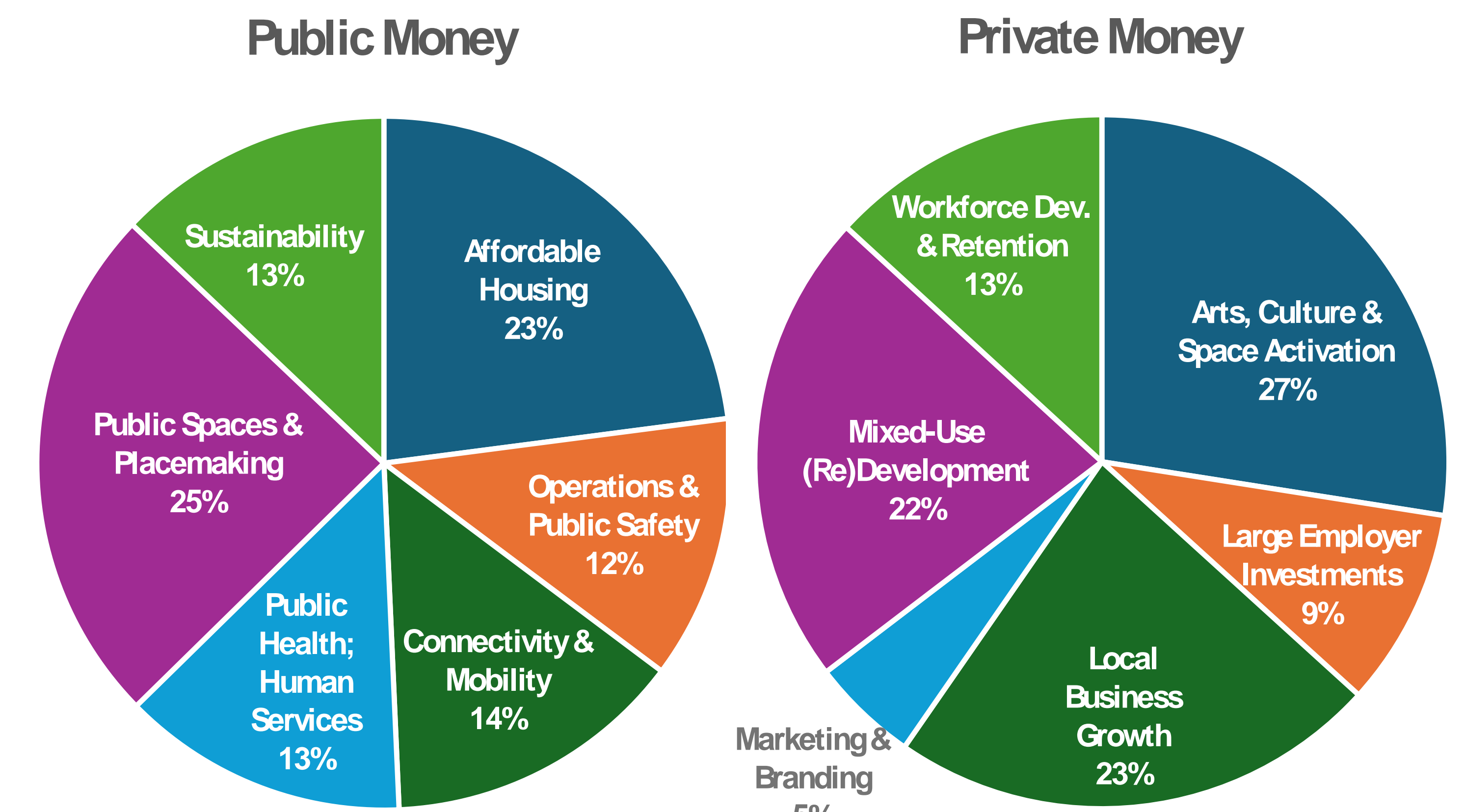


“If we’re going to have a safe, affordable, vibrant downtown. We have to get past the fear of inadequate car storage.”
Vs
“Better downtown roads and more parking opportunities. Downtown traffic is horrible as it is today.”

Investing in the Future of Downtown

Participants “allocated” funding based on their priorities. Merging online and in-person responses, pie charts show total allocation of funds.

- » Priorities for public investment included Public Spaces, Placemaking & Affordable Housing.
- » Priorities for private investment included Arts, Culture & Space Activation, Mixed-Use (Re) Development, and Local Business Growth.



Mapping your experiences

- » You likely spent money on State Street, Capitol Square and King Street.
- » You recreated on the bike paths and in parks.
- » You believed that improvements are needed on vacant lots, Lake Mendota waterfront and east of the Square.
- » You found meaning in cultural events on State Street, the Square and downtown open spaces.
- » You felt you belong in neighborhoods and the library.

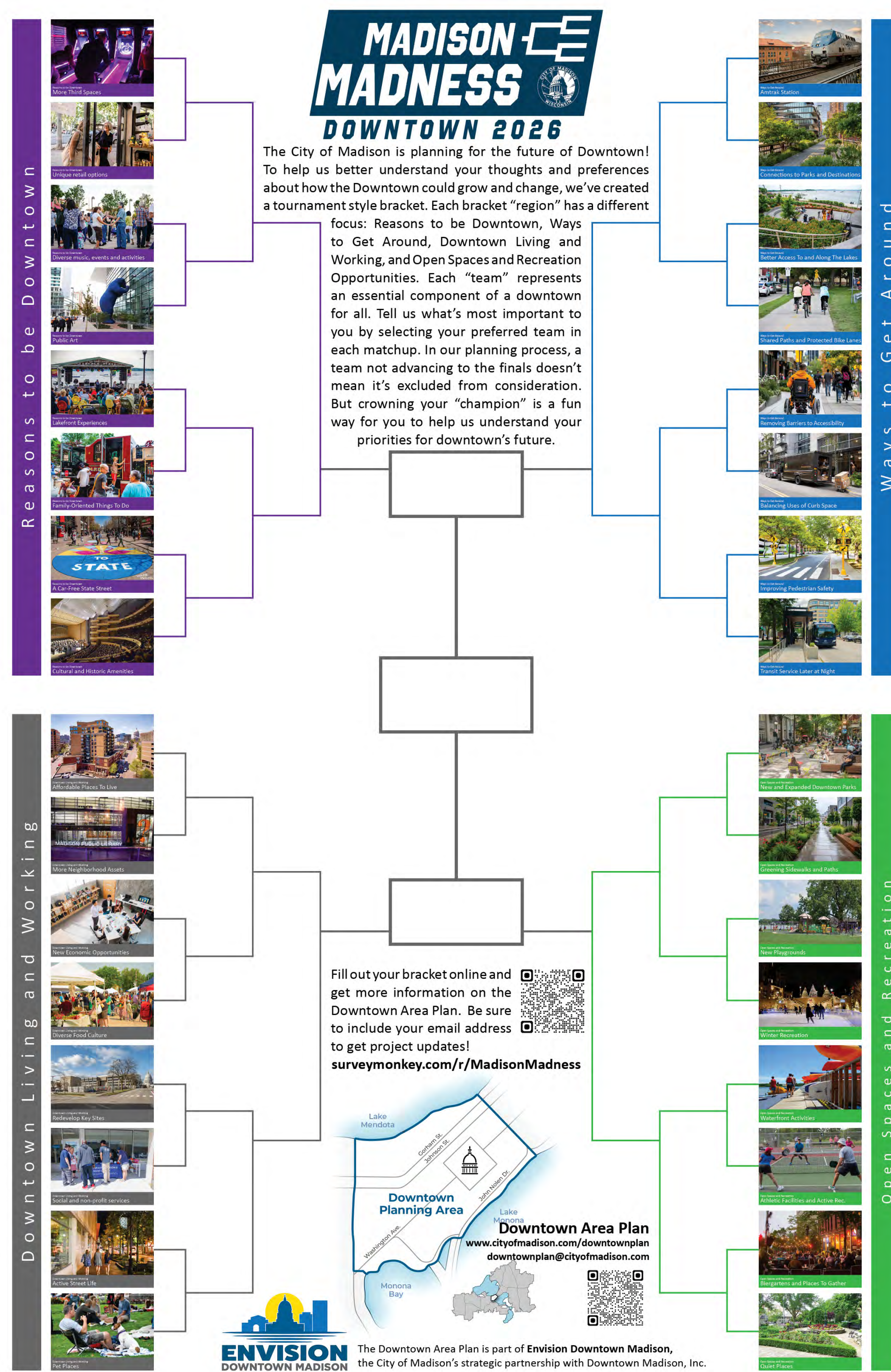




DOWNTOWN AREA PLAN ENGAGEMENT MADISON MADNESS BRACKET

The Bracket

Using a tournament-style bracket, Madison residents shared their priorities for the downtown. Each “team” represented an essential component of a downtown for all, and participants’ choices help us understand community priorities.



The Results

The results table shows the percent of each team winning each matchup. Overall priorities are Amtrak Station and Affordable Places to Live.

		Advance to Round of 16	Advance to Quarterfinals	Advance to Semifinals	Advance to Finals	Win Finals
Reasons to be Downtown	More Third Spaces	68%	37%	20%	7%	2%
	Unique Retail Options	32%	13%	5%	2%	1%
	Diverse Music, Events and Activities	81%	43%	23%	9%	3%
	Public Art	18%	8%	3%	2%	1%
	Lakefront Experiences	84%	36%	15%	6%	2%
	Family-oriented Thing to Do	16%	7%	4%	2%	1%
	Car Free State St	60%	37%	22%	10%	3%
	Cultural and Historic Amenities	39%	20%	9%	5%	2%
Downtown Living and Working	Affordable Places to Live	53%	43%	34%	26%	17%
	More Neighborhood Assets	45%	22%	10%	4%	1%
	New Economic Opportunities	21%	4%	1%	1%	0%
	Diverse Food Culture	77%	29%	18%	9%	3%
	Develop Key Sites	54%	30%	14%	7%	3%
	Social and Non-Profit Services	43%	29%	8%	5%	2%
	Active Street Life	82%	32%	11%	4%	2%
	Pet Places	16%	7%	4%	2%	1%
	Ways to Get Around	Amtrak Station	70%	53%	45%	40%
Connections to Parks and Destinations		27%	10%	6%	2%	1%
Better Access to and Along the Lakes		47%	15%	11%	6%	3%
Shared Paths and Protected Bike Lanes		50%	20%	15%	10%	6%
Removing Barriers to Accessibility		62%	21%	5%	4%	2%
Balancing Uses of Curb Space		35%	8%	1%	0%	0%
Improving Pedestrian Safety		61%	44%	9%	5%	3%
Open Spaces and Recreation	Transit Service Later at Night	36%	25%	8%	6%	3%
	New and Expanded Downtown Parks	39%	33%	14%	3%	1%
	Greening Sidewalks and Paths	57%	48%	28%	6%	2%
	New Playgrounds	28%	4%	2%	1%	0%
	Winter Recreation	68%	13%	6%	1%	1%
	Waterfront Activities	67%	20%	9%	1%	1%
	Athletic Facilities and Active Recreation	29%	10%	4%	1%	0%
	Biergartens and Places to Gather	63%	47%	30%	11%	6%
Quiet Places	33%	22%	6%	1%	1%	

Who Responded?

1082
Total Responses

315
Downtown Residents

289
Downtown Employees

122
UW Students

548
Frequent Visitors

561
Other Madison Residents

41 Non-Visitors
62 Non-Madison Residents

“Nightlife and things that encourage people to connect with the environment are very important to me.”

“I think affordability is the biggest issue Madison faces. 1k+ rents isn’t doable and makes attending UW a financial struggle just in finding a place that I can afford to live.”

“Make the city more accessible for people using wheelchairs and walkers.”

Differing Priorities

Different groups had different priorities. Here’s how each group differed compared to the overall results.

- » **Downtown residents** are more concerned about lakefront access and experiences, housing affordability and additional park space; and are less concerned about family-oriented features.
- » **Downtown employees** are more concerned about housing affordability and Amtrak; and are less concerned about pedestrian safety.
- » **UW students** are more concerned about affordable places to live, transit later at night, a car free state street; they are less concerned about neighborhood assets, unique retail and access to the lakes.
- » **Non-Downtown Madison residents** are more concerned about a diverse food culture and less concerned about housing affordability and park spaces.



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

WHAT IS YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE DOWNTOWN?

The 2025 kick-off meeting and downtown pop-up events gave people their chance to tell us their "BIG Ideas" for Downtown Madison.

More Culture...

- ... & free family events.
- ... & outdoor music.
- ... with variety & diversity.
- ... & public art.

Space for...

- ... people.
- ... recreation.
- ... trees & parks.
- ... playgrounds.
- ... discovery.
- ... a giant slide.

I wish...

it was easier to get around.

- ... more protection for pedestrians & cyclists.
- ... more accessible for all.
- ... that construction projects wouldn't close lanes or sidewalks.
- ... that there were more car-free spaces.
- ... that State Street was more pedestrian.

Downtown should...

- ... have a movie theater.
- ... have more "Third Spaces."
- ... fill empty storefronts.
- ... have more winter events.
- ... be memorable.
- ... diverse and welcoming.

More Lake Access...

- ... for food and drink options.
- ... Lake Mendota waterfront path.
- ... to touch water.
- ... for everyone.

I worry...

- ...housing is too expensive.
- ...local businesses are getting pushed out.
- ...about being safe at night.



BIG idea for Downtown Madison
What's your LITTLE idea?
Share your FUTURISTIC idea!

A sustainable city
 Green space
 Accessibility
 Amtrak @ Monona Terrace
 Less one-way streets
 Moms and expecting moms need closer parking spot!
 Community food forest/ community garden
 Rooftop gardens accessible to public
 Public Mar...





WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS SURVEY INSIGHTS

ABOUT THE SURVEY

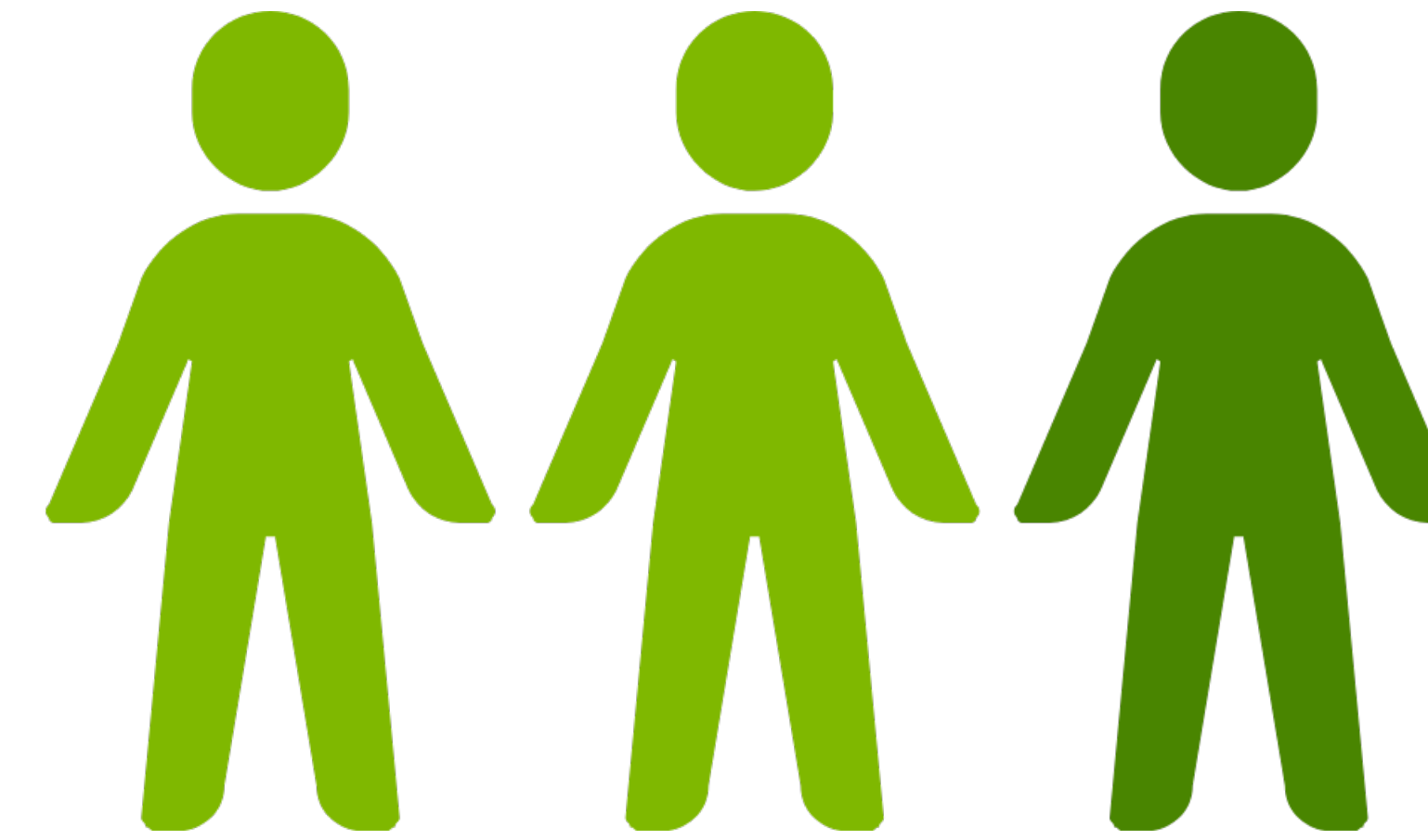
The survey was designed to reach as many community members and business owners as possible and gather input on key topics shaping the Downtown Area Plan and Greater Downtown Economic Investment Strategy. A total of **630 citywide residents, workers, and Downtown business owners completed the survey**, including 112 business respondents and 518 community respondents.



Where survey respondents were from

- 35% were from Greater Downtown
- 40% were from the City of Madison
- 21% were from Dane County

Downtown Connections & Engagement



2 in 3

respondents stated they primarily engage with Greater Downtown Madison for entertainment and leisure (outside of work or living).

Events remain the central driver for most visitors. Downtown residents, City visitors, Dane County commuters, young adults, families, and tourists **share a desire for more reasons to visit and more experiences that meet their wide interests.**

What You Most Look Forward To Doing



78%

Enjoying a variety of eating / drinking options



61%

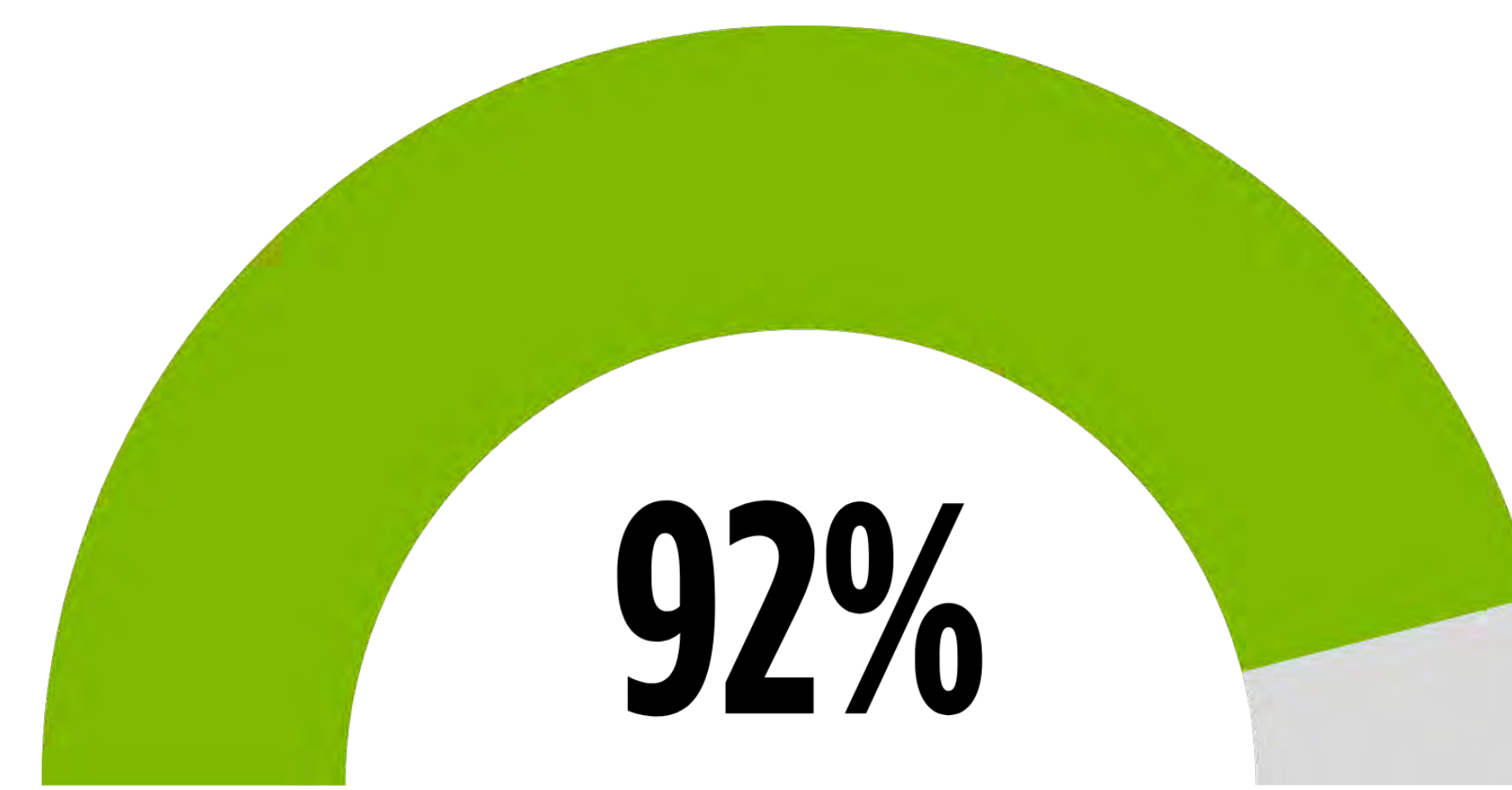
Attending special events like the Market



46%

Gathering for social meet-ups

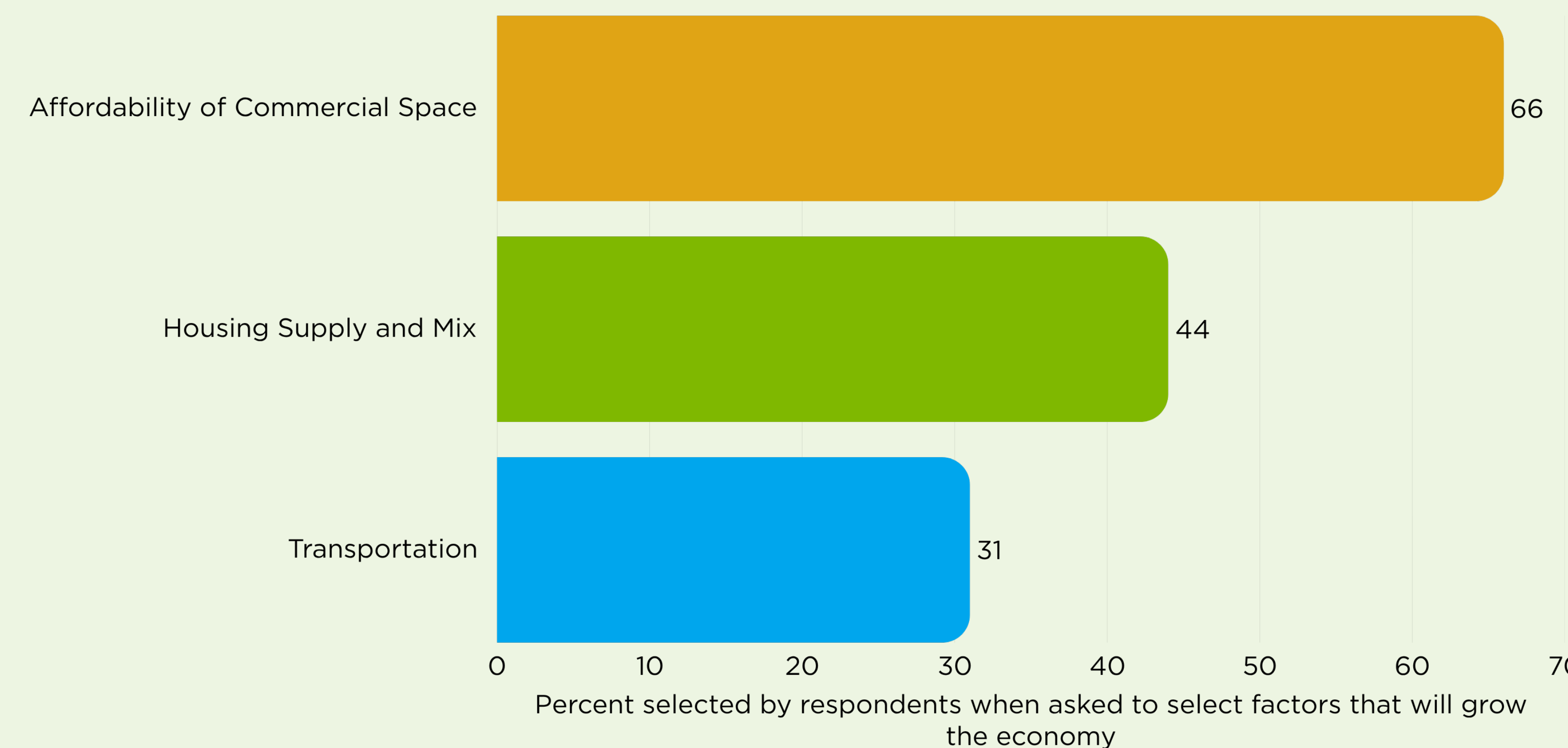
Public Spaces & Parks are Universally Celebrated



An overwhelming majority identified parks, lakes, and public spaces as essential for a thriving Greater Downtown economy. Other top rated priorities include Arts & Music, Local businesses, UW-Madison, and the tourism sector.

AFFORDABILITY IS A TOP CONCERN

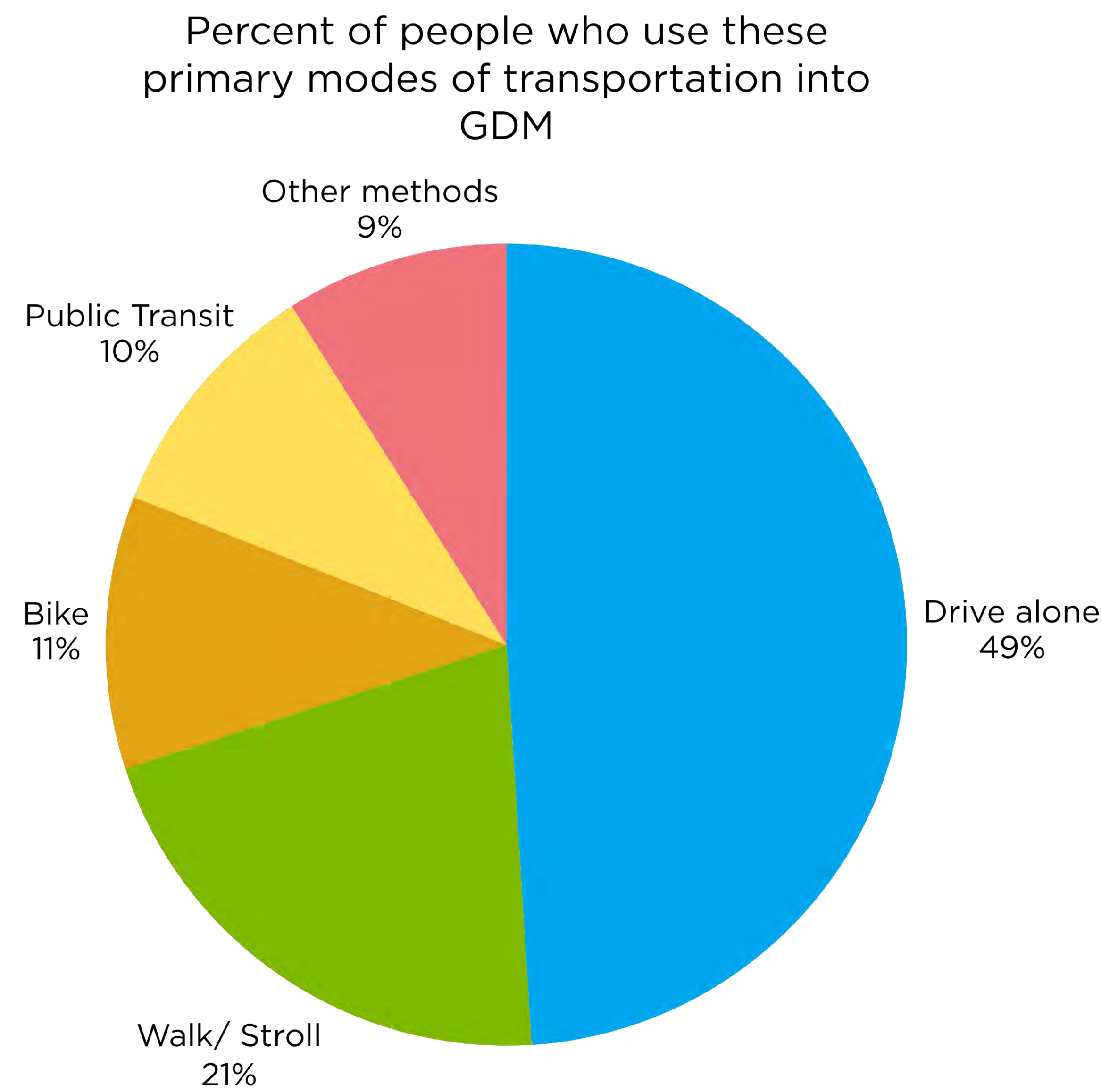
A top concern for residents and business owners alike, including the affordability of commercial real estate, and transportation options. Housing supply and diversity are necessary for continued economic growth.





WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS SURVEY INSIGHTS

Transportation Needs are Variable



Access and transportation need to be addressed in ways that better move people in, out and around Greater Downtown which will positively improve growth and vitality.

- » **Transit frequency is the defining challenge for young people** when traveling downtown (40% of 18-34 year olds vs 15% of 55+ year olds).
- » The **majority of respondents get to Downtown by driving alone**, with parking and traffic as their top concerns.
- » **Transit, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure were cited as major barriers** to using those modes more frequently.

"Biking and walking should be a priority. Trails and bike lanes are not great to get to downtown."

Perceptions of Safety

On a scale of 1-9, **Downtown residents ranked safety 7th while Dane County residents ranked it 2nd as most important for economic growth and vitality.** Those who commute are most concerned about safety compared to those who live downtown.

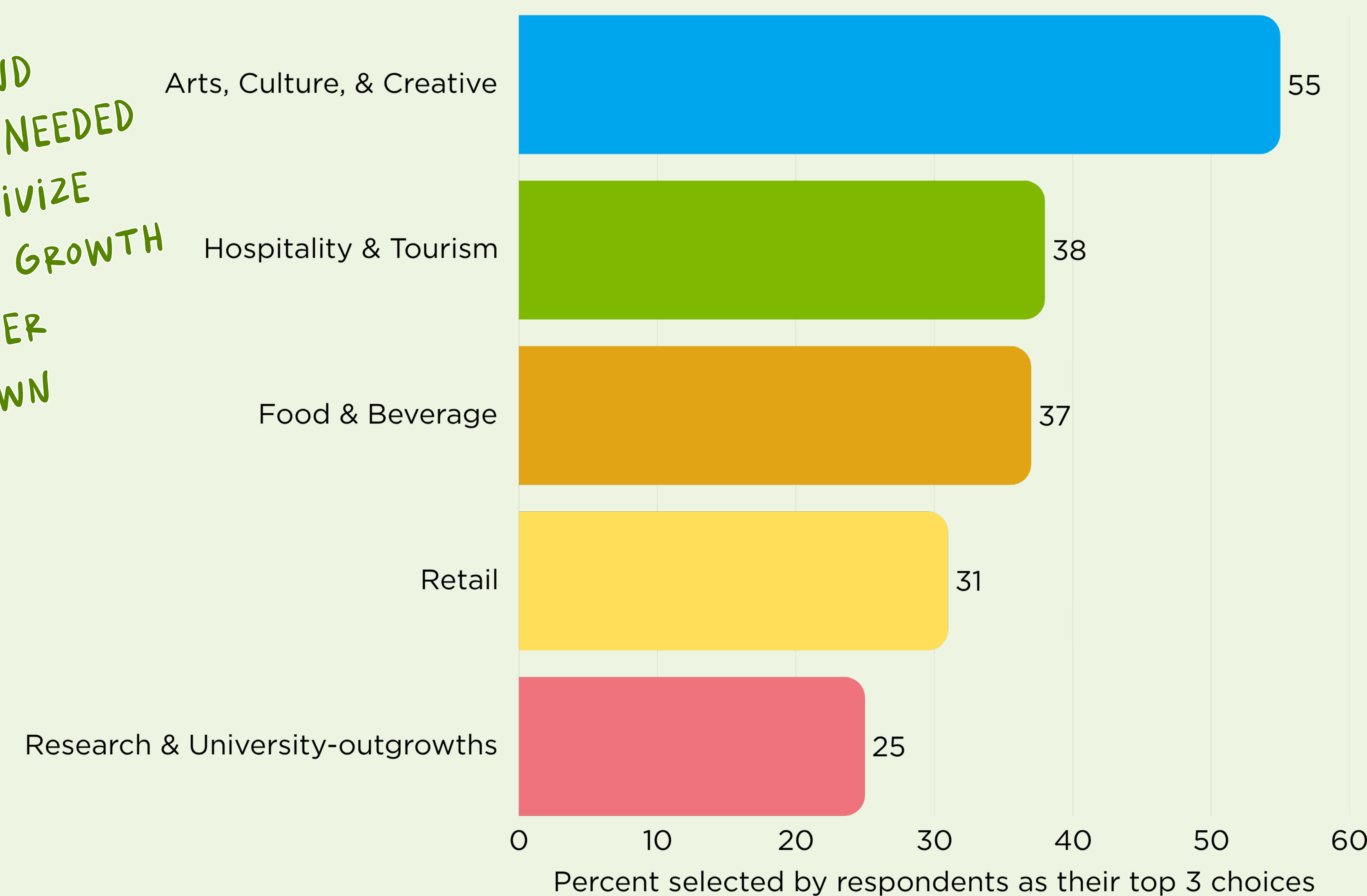
42%

of business and property owners said the perception of safety significantly impacts their ability to attract customers to downtown.

FACTORS NEEDED FOR BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, & ECONOMIC GROWTH

Businesses are staying — and some are ready to grow. Most plan to maintain operations or even expand. To support that, businesses identified key needs.

THE TOP 5 SERVICES AND AMENITIES NEEDED TO INCENTIVIZE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN GREATER DOWNTOWN



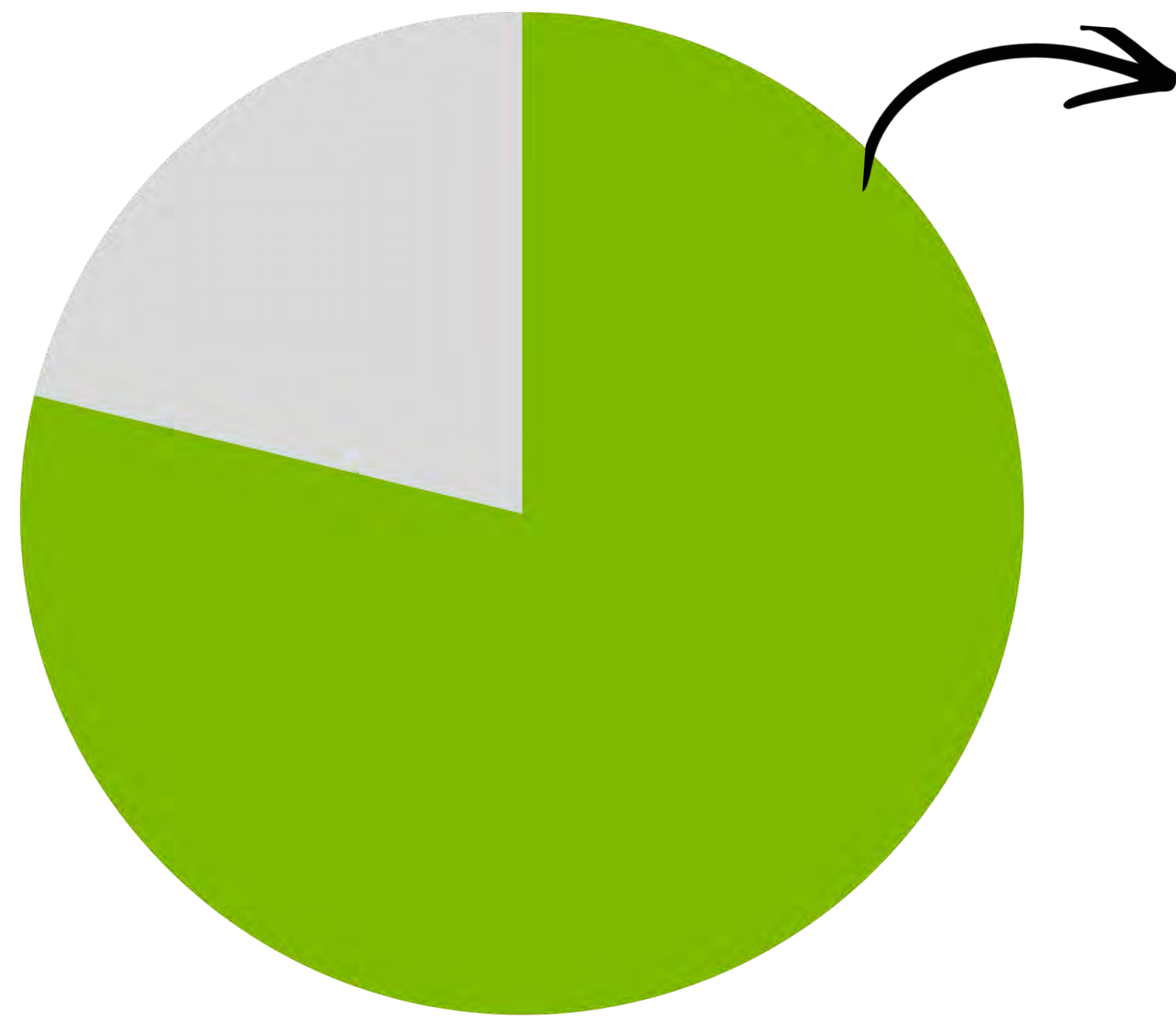
Top factors for business growth...

- » Affordable commercial space
- » Streamlined permitting and regulatory processes
- » Housing supply & mixture
- » Incentives and grants



WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS SURVEY INSIGHTS

A Strong & Resilient Economy



78% of respondents rated the GDM economy as Moderately or Very Strong

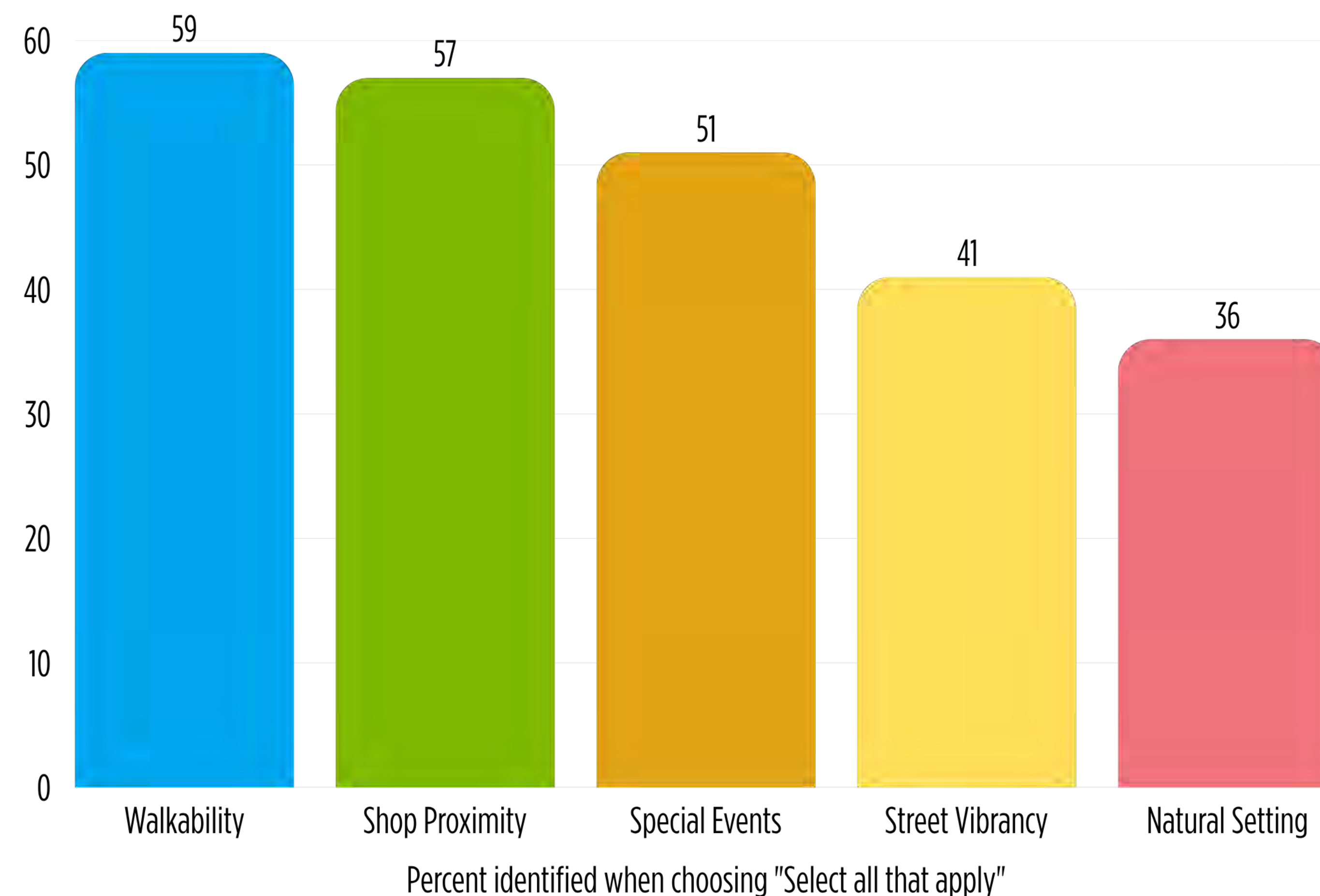
The majority of people rated it moderately strong which means they feel it is doing well, but there is some room for improvement too. Retail and entertainment, higher education, and tourism are the most important perceived drivers of economic growth.

“The district’s identity as Wisconsin’s cultural and political crossroads helps attract talent, partnerships, and visitors seeking distinctive places to gather, dine, and connect.”

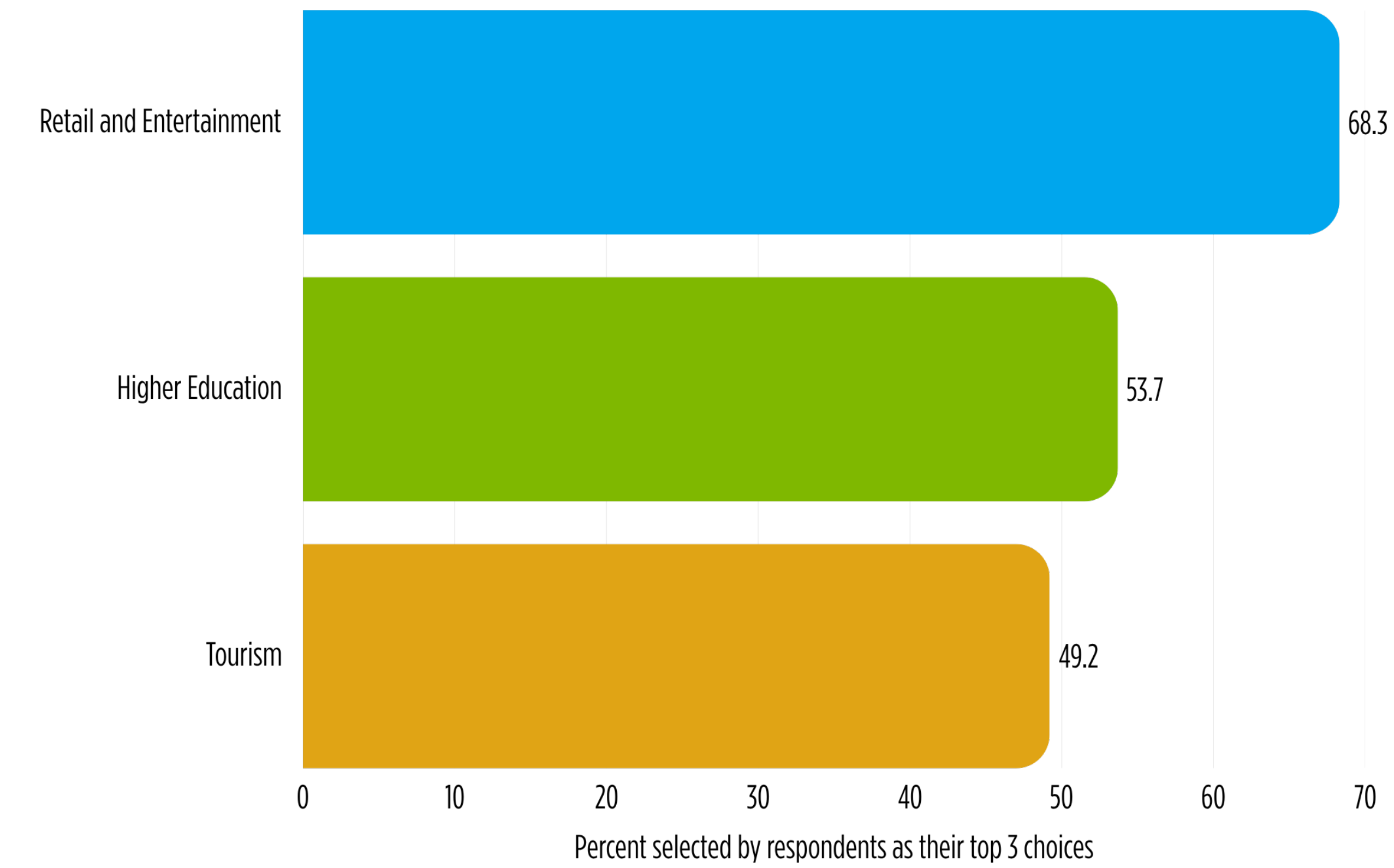
Business Owner Experiences

Business Pride & Strengths
Business owners celebrate walkability, diverse customer segments, and special events as factors that drive business success. 26% of owners state it is easy or very easy to hire and 17% state some difficulty.

THE BEST PARTS OF OWNING A BUSINESS IN GREATER DOWNTOWN



Top Sectors Perceived as Vital for Growth



Business Opportunity Areas

- » High costs of entry and access to capital constrain business growth. Twice as many BIPOC business respondents identified high costs of entry as a barrier compared to other businesses.
- » Non-traditional owners experience structural barriers across every section — permitting, access, cost, and transit.
- » Business equity will remain a requirement

68%

of business owners overwhelmingly plan to stay or expand their businesses in the region

“The central location is ideal: it makes it easy for us to hire employees from all over the city, and to conduct networking meetings. The amenities and dining options are a big plus as well.”



WHAT WE'VE HEARD FOCUS GROUPS

To help shape the Greater Downtown Economic Investment Strategy and broader Envision Downtown effort, the project team conducted 15 interviews and focus groups with stakeholders representing major industries, institutions, employers, and community organizations that play an important role in Downtown's future. Additional feedback was also collected through follow-up questionnaires to help validate key themes and identify emerging opportunities.

"Having a friendly downtown that feels warm and inviting, full of vibrant shops, cultural attractions, that target the needs of all audiences (and I would argue families, college students/young adults, business people and elderly alike!) is attractive to business growth and innovation."

WHO WEIGHED IN?

Fifteen different focus group interviews were conducted spanning across the following sectors:

- » Tourism and Hospitality
- » Arts and Entertainment
- » Commercial Real Estate
- » Banking & Investment
- » Infrastructure
- » Education
- » Athletics & Sports
- » Health & Wellness
- » Science & Technology

"People are attracted to places due to the energy and it is contagious. When parts of State Street or the Square "feel" quiet or empty or you have to walk too far from one activated space to the next activated space, it can be a turn-off."



DOWNTOWN... AS A REGIONAL ANCHOR

- » Serves as a major economic and cultural engine for Madison
- » Attracts residents, workers, students, and visitors from across the region
- » Shapes how people experience and perceive growth and development across Greater Madison



DOWNTOWN... PUBLIC SPACES & EXPERIENCES

- » Benefits from lakes that are a standout but underused asset
- » Needs more waterfront access, gathering spaces, and evening activity
- » Includes strong retail and restaurant corridors and districts, while others need improvement



DOWNTOWN... ARTS, CULTURE, & ACTIVITY

- » Offers a unique concentration of arts, events, and venues
- » Drives local pride and national visibility through major attractions
- » Relies on regular events to sustain Downtown's energy and economy



DOWNTOWN... INCLUSION & BELONGING

- » Does not always feel equally welcoming to all
- » Must grow in ways that are intentionally diverse and inclusive
- » Should better reflect people in its spaces, events, and culture



WHAT WE'VE HEARD FOCUS GROUPS

“ Addressing housing affordability is key to the future success of the community. We have a very strong workforce, but that will diminish if that workforce can not afford to live here. “

“ Transportation in/out of the City is greatly impacted by the Downtown. Even the positive developments, like those occurring on Johnson, have significant traffic impacts. “



DOWNTOWN... AFFORDABILITY & ACCESS

- » Faces cost barriers across housing, transportation, and daily activities
- » Needs more affordable options for food, events, and entertainment
- » Requires more housing choices for families, seniors, and young professionals



DOWNTOWN... GETTING THERE

- » Parking often feels limited, expensive, or hard to find
- » Perceptions of difficulty can discourage visits
- » Many still rely on driving due to regional access challenges
- » Parking availability influences employer and visitor decisions



DOWNTOWN... PRIORITIES & OTHER CHALLENGES

- » Faces growing pressure from external investment and rising costs
- » Is adapting to workforce shifts and reduced daytime activity
- » Needs a stronger mix of uses, industries, and spaces
- » Must grow without losing local character and influence



DOWNTOWN... GETTING AROUND

- » Transit can feel limited in timing, coverage, and convenience
- » Isthmus geography creates bottlenecks across all modes
- » Walking routes can feel disconnected or inactive
- » Safety and comfort remain barriers for some users

