



Downtown Madison Strategy and Downtown Area Plan

Public Workshop #3 | October 1, 2026



Meeting Participant
Demographics:



Public Workshop #3 Agenda

- What We Heard in Open House 2
- What We've Been Doing: Refining the Big Moves
- Where We Headed: Uncovering Opportunity Areas & Crafting Recommendations
- Downtown Plan Land Use + Height: Analysis and Vision
- Next Steps
- Online and In-Person Activities

Online Participants:

- Please stay muted
- Use chat for questions + comments
- During Q+A periods, use raise hand function if you'd like to speak and we will call on you.

Meeting Participant
Demographics:



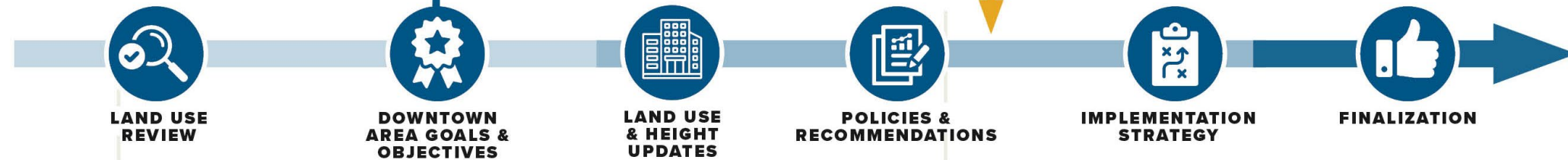
DOWNTOWN STRATEGY



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT



DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE

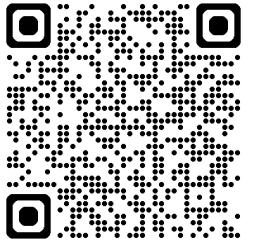


2025

2026

2027

For past meeting summaries, go to
www.cityofmadison.com/downtownplan



What We Heard

Open House #2

Draft Vision Elements

1. Experiential and Engaging
2. Economically Vibrant and Inclusive
3. Connected and Accessible
4. Safe and Welcoming
5. Diverse and Equitable
6. Sustainable and Resilient

78% of participants found Vision Elements very meaningful and relevant



EMERGING VISION ELEMENTS

TEMPERATURE CHECK! DO THE VISION ELEMENTS & VALUES REFLECT THE FUTURE YOU WANT?

Place a sticker dot on the scale below to identify how meaningful the vision elements and values are to you, and how strongly they reflect the future you want.

VERY MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT

SOMEWHAT MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT

DOES NOT CONNECT WITH ME OR DOES NOT FEEL RELEVANT TO DOWNTOWN

WHAT RESONATES MOST WITH YOU?

Choose your top two: Place two sticker dots next to the vision elements and values that resonate most with you.

1 2 3 4 5 6

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE MISSING?

Use sticky notes to provide additional feedback and stick it to the board.

Here, I would like to see more green space and more walkable streets. I also think it would be great to have more public art and more community events. I think it would be great to have more affordable housing and more job opportunities. I think it would be great to have more public transit and more bike lanes. I think it would be great to have more parks and more open space. I think it would be great to have more community centers and more libraries. I think it would be great to have more museums and more galleries. I think it would be great to have more restaurants and more shops. I think it would be great to have more hotels and more offices. I think it would be great to have more schools and more universities. I think it would be great to have more hospitals and more clinics. I think it would be great to have more police stations and more fire stations. I think it would be great to have more courts and more government buildings. I think it would be great to have more parks and more open space. I think it would be great to have more community centers and more libraries. I think it would be great to have more museums and more galleries. I think it would be great to have more restaurants and more shops. I think it would be great to have more hotels and more offices. I think it would be great to have more schools and more universities. I think it would be great to have more hospitals and more clinics. I think it would be great to have more police stations and more fire stations. I think it would be great to have more courts and more government buildings.

DOWNTOWN MADISON

Open House #2

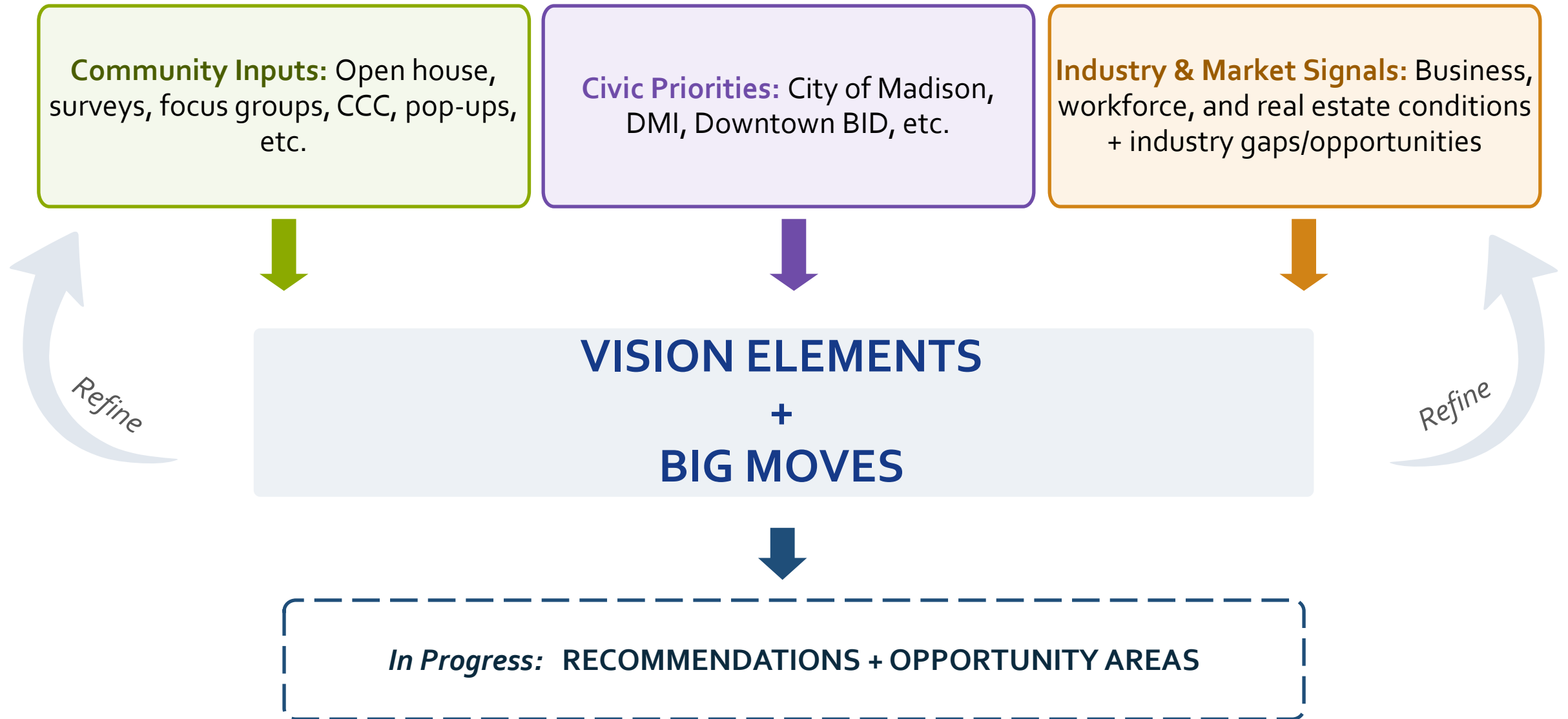
Draft Big Moves

Participant Voting on Potential Impact				
Big Moves	Small	Moderate	Big	Transformational
Feel the Lake Effect	0%	4%	18%	77%
Make Downtown a diverse and complete neighborhood	0%	13%	20%	67%
Come on Downtown	3%	6%	44%	47%
Reimagine People Spaces and Places	3%	22%	34%	41%
Become the Healthiest & Greenest Downtown	2%	22%	38%	38%
Put There Back in State and Square	1%	22%	44%	33%
Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene	5%	23%	31%	41%
Curate Unforgettable Districts	9%	32%	26%	33%
Infuse Learning, Play & Discovery	16%	26%	41%	17%
Drive the next Gen Economy	17%	46%	19%	19%



What We've Been Doing

Framework: Designing the Big Moves



From 10 to 7: Big Moves Refinement

THE ORIGINAL TEN

Reimagine People Spaces and Places

Come on Down(town)

Feel the Lake Effect

Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood

Curate Unforgettable Districts

Put the "There" Back in State & Square

Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene

Drive the Next Gen Economy

Become the Healthiest and Greenest Downtown

Infuse Learning, Play, and Discovery

THE FINAL SEVEN

1. Reimagine People Spaces and Places

2. Come on Down(town)

3. Feel the Lake Effect

4. Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood

5. Curate Unforgettable Districts

6. Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene

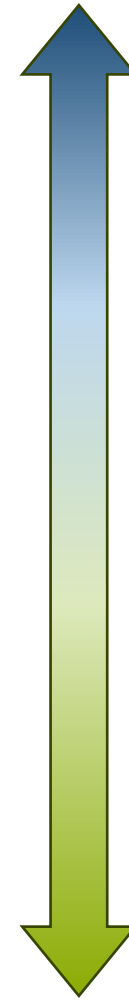
7. Drive the Next Gen Economy

WOVEN THROUGH ALL SEVEN

Healthiest & Greenest Downtown · Learning, Play & Discovery

The Seven Big Moves

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Reimagine People Spaces and Places |
| 2 | Come on Down(town) |
| 3 | Feel the Lake Effect |
| 4 | Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood |
| 5 | Curate Unforgettable Districts |
| 6 | Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene |
| 7 | Drive the Next Gen Economy |



**PUBLIC
SECTOR
LEAD**

**PUBLIC-
PRIVATE
PARTNERSHIP**

**PRIVATE
SECTOR
LEAD**



Where We're Headed

Definitions

VISION ELEMENTS

North stars

The Vision Elements describe the Downtown we are working toward, guiding both the Downtown Area Plan and the Economic Investment Strategy.



BIG MOVES

Action drivers

The Big Moves are the ideas and topics that move Downtown towards its future vision.



OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Places with catalytic potential

Opportunity Areas are the places where several Big Moves could be advanced together in a concentrated geography through projects, programs, and policy recommendations, creating catalytic impact in downtown and the city.

Big Moves → Opportunity Areas

Initial Opportunity Areas for Discussion

These initial opportunity areas **reflect outcomes of technical analysis and community input** to date.

- Progress multiple Big Moves
- Could involve a mix of public, private, and nonprofit/community projects
- A concentrated area where an intentional strategy could have catalytic impacts

Specific projects or recommendations have not yet been determined.



Reading the Big Move Slides

Each Big Move has two slides:

1. Highlights of what we heard (input) and looked at (technical analyses)
2. Where we are headed: early example actions and a map.
 - This slide illustrates how we will begin to craft recommendations (action via projects, programs, and policies) that progress each Big Move
 - These are illustrations, not decisions
 - The work to develop recommendations is still in progress
 - Draft recommendations will be shared at the next public workshop

1. Reimagine People Spaces and Places

Treat public space as economic and social infrastructure, shifting Downtown from a place people pass through to a place they stay.

What We Heard from the Community

Parks and public spaces are among the most-cited parts of Downtown's vitality.

People want **transparency about who owns and controls** the spaces they are asked to use.

Cleanliness and comfort of the public realm are a **basic expectation**.

Public space provides a **common ground** that people of all identities and backgrounds want to see.

What We Looked At

Downtown has an opportunity for **new and different types** of public open spaces.

High-quality public space encourages people to **spend more time** Downtown.

Connected and active public spaces **support local businesses** and attractions.

Green space is one of the amenities that **draws people to live and work** in Madison.



Privately-owned public spaces in New York



Roof-top open space, San Francisco

1. Reimagine People Spaces and Places

For example...

PUBLIC

- Reimagine State Street and Mifflin and Carroll Plazas
- Monona Lakefront Streets and Public Spaces
- Southwest Path open spaces

PRIVATE

- Free, all-ages programming in private and non-traditional spaces
- Privately owned public spaces with clear access rules



2. Come on Down(town)

Make it easier to get to, from, and around Downtown, so more of the region can reach it more often.

What We Heard from the Community

Travel into and out of Downtown is critical to success.

Access and safety perceptions are about the **experience, not just the trip**.

Walking and biking should feel safer, especially at difficult intersections.

Parking is a common frustration; multimodal trip options can help.

What We Looked At

Transit access is **strong within Downtown** but drops off quickly outside of it.

Many short trips into Downtown **still happen by car**.

Downtown holds **platinum-level bike friendliness**, a differentiator few peer downtowns can claim.

Better regional connections could open Downtown to a large regional market.



Walkability in Boulder, CO



Amtrak

2. Come on Down(town)

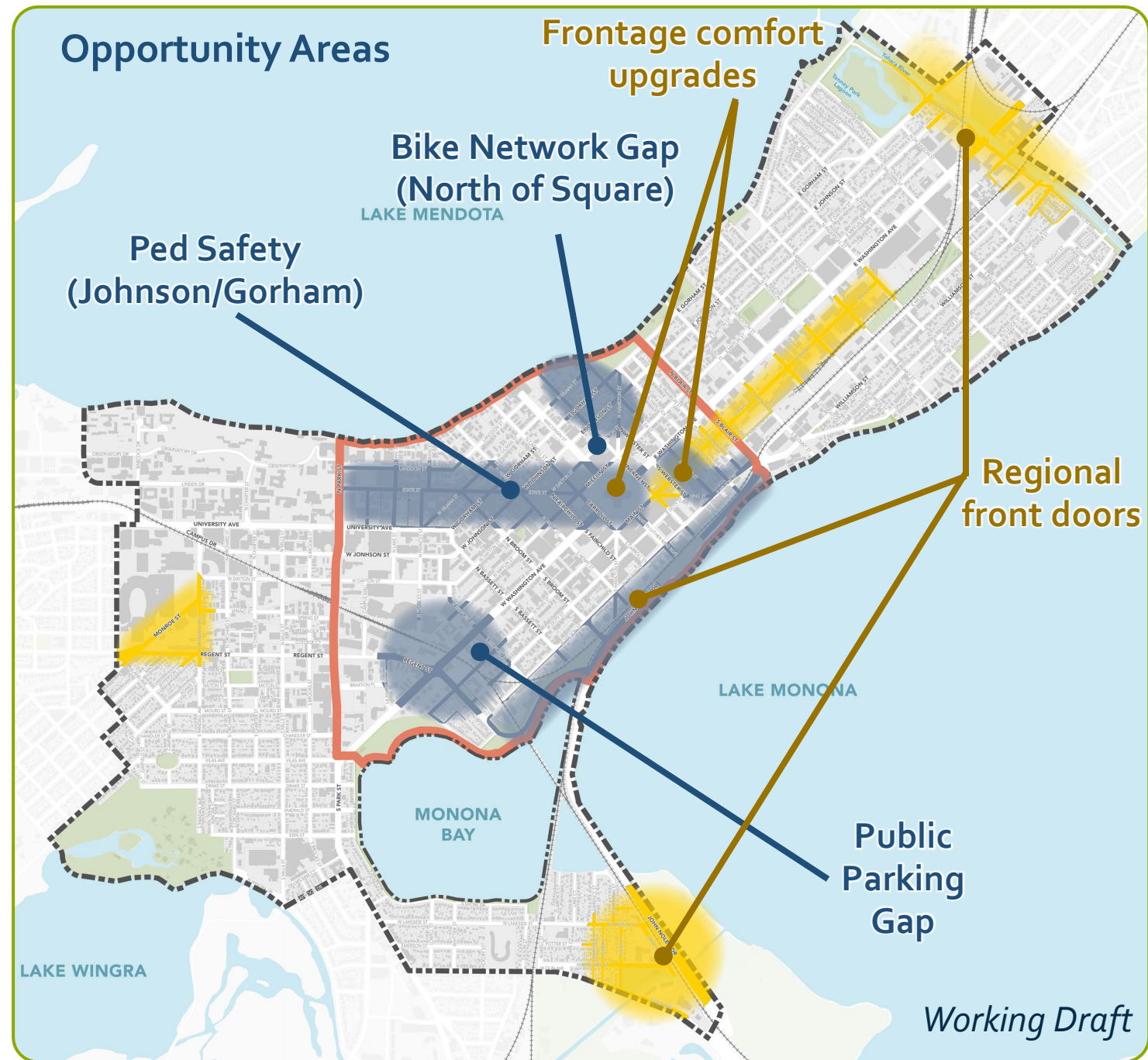
For example...

PUBLIC

- Pedestrian safety improvements
- Fill bike network gaps
- Public parking – gaps and wayfinding

PRIVATE

- Regional access campaign for the 25-50 mile market
- Comfort, shade, and seating upgrades at private frontages



3. Feel the Lake Effect

Make the lakes part of everyday Downtown life, connecting and activating lakefronts that remain among its most underused assets.

What We Heard from the Community

People name the lakes as one of the **most important parts** of Downtown's vitality.

Lake and water access should have **an equity lens**, not just a development one.

Water quality is an important part of sustainability goals.

Getting to the water is difficult today.

What We Looked At

Lakefront viewing, gathering, and on-water access exist today **in only a few isolated pockets**.

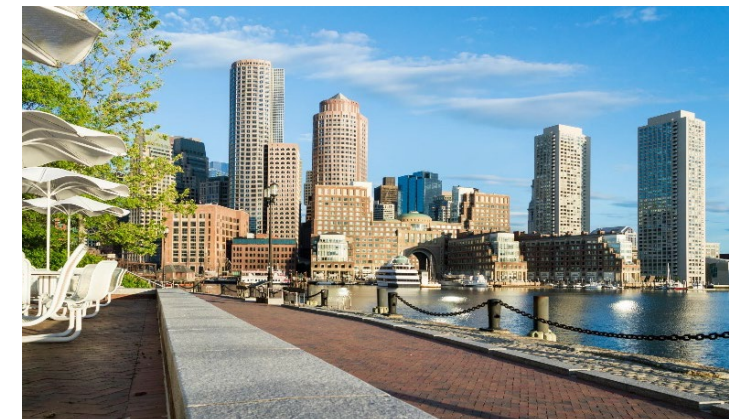
An activated waterfront **grows the recreation economy** and helps **create a destination** in the downtown.

The Lakeway project is **a strong first step** and the anchor the rest of the waterfront work can build from.

Activity already **concentrates near the water** where amenities exist.



Boston Commercial Wharf



Boston Harbor Walk

3. Feel the Lake Effect

For example...

PUBLIC

- Pursuing Lakeway improvements
- Mendota open spaces
- Links to lakes

PRIVATE

- Lakefront programming
- New private waterfront development



4. Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood

Make Downtown a place people at every life stage can live, with the housing choices and everyday services that support them.

What We Heard from the Community

Affordability is **the top concern**.

Housing supply and diversity are necessary for continued economic growth.

Livability matters: **open space and neighborhood destinations** are essential, not just housing.

Young people and renters feel the **most urgency** for housing.

What We Looked At

Family-sized, ownership, senior, and income-restricted housing is **the clearest gap** in what gets built.

Recent growth **has not matched demand**, adding mostly small market-rate units.

Downtown is **missing parts of an everyday mix** of shops and services.

Affordability impacts **business growth and talent attraction**.



East Village District, San Diego



Affordable housing in downtown

4. Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood

For example...

PUBLIC

- Ensure land use and height framework support a range of housing options
- Continued support of affordable housing
- Public realm improvements that support a downtown neighborhood

PRIVATE

- Family-sized, for-sale, and senior housing in the pipeline
- Grocery, services, and childcare keeping pace with growth



5. Curate Unforgettable Districts

Organize Downtown into a network of distinct, complementary districts, each with its own identity, draw, and reason to visit.

What We Heard from the Community

Walkability is a primary draw.

Events and visitors drive activity today, but **families and K-12 students** were named as groups missing from Downtown.

State Street and the Square are named as the places that define Downtown for the region.

Each district should have a **clear identity and reliable activity.**

What We Looked At

Unique districts keep dollars local and make the case for **reinvestment.**

Downtown has a **strong destination base** but a **thinner everyday mix.**

State Street's **business base** has **thinned sharply** over time.

Local and independent businesses are Downtown's base to build on.

Emerging districts are taking shape, bringing new activity to a mix of places.



*Downtown restaurants,
Pittsburgh*



*Granville St. Ped Zone.
Vancouver, BC*

5. Curate Unforgettable Districts

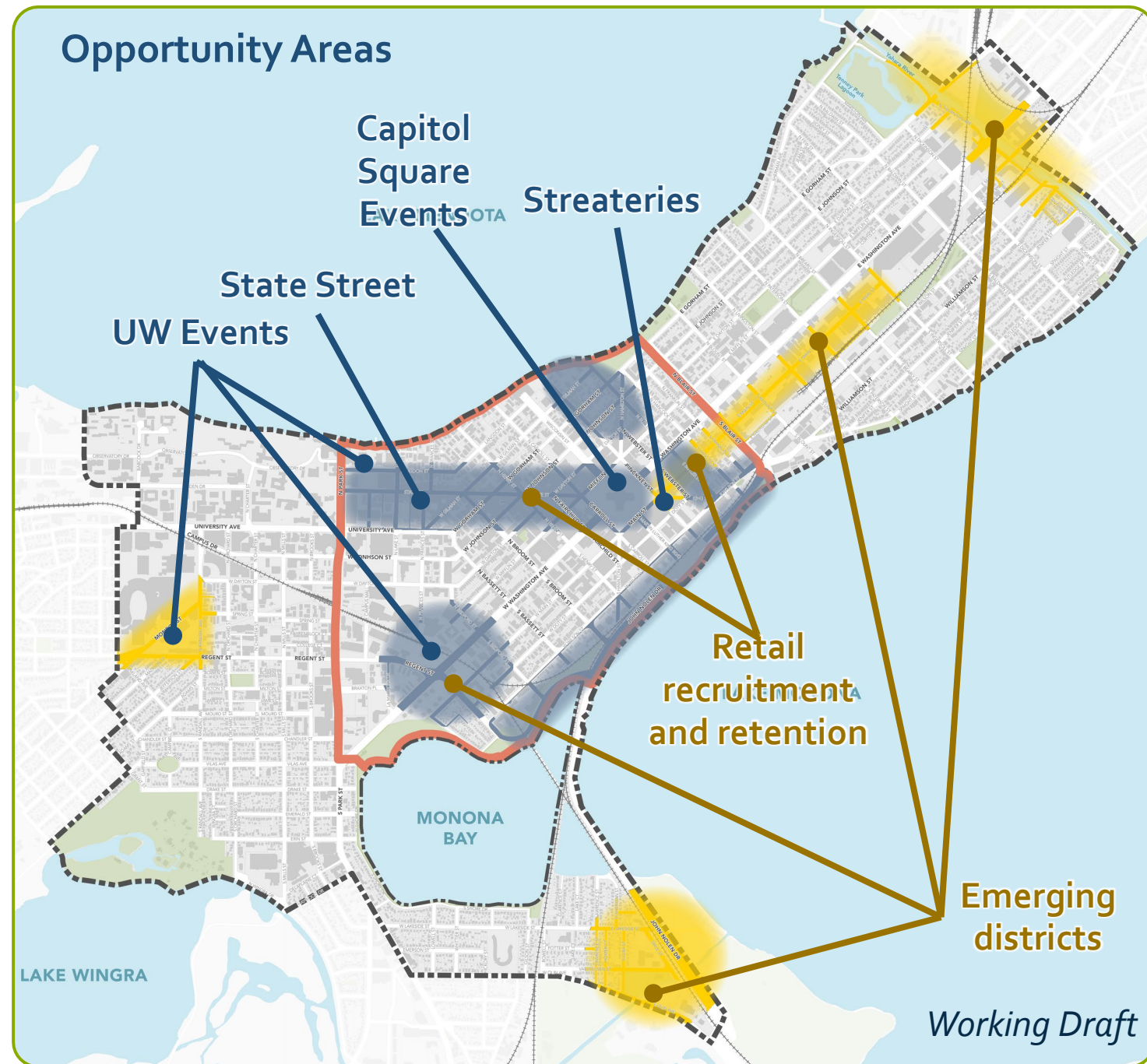
For example...

PUBLIC

- Pedestrian State Street
- Public realm improvements to support character of districts
- Support policies enabling events, streateries, popups, etc.

PRIVATE

- Coordinated leasing, retention, and recruitment
- District branding and year-round programming



6. Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene

Connect, fund, and promote Madison's arts, culture, heritage, sports, and entertainment as economic infrastructure, not simply nice things to have.

What We Heard from the Community

Arts, culture, museums, and historic assets are a **primary reason people come Downtown**.

Cultural attractions and events should **reflect and welcome all users**.

Activity is seasonal, concentrated in the summer and across signature fall events.

Cost, permitting, and access barriers disproportionately impact small and BIPOC businesses.

What We Looked At

Venues remain **disconnected from one another** and overly reliant on philanthropic funding for operations.

Arts and culture are a **major economic engine** for the region, drawing visitors from far beyond Madison.

Arts and culture investments require **public, private, and nonprofit partnerships**.

Arts and entertainment employment is growing fast.



Asian Festival in Knoxville, TN



MadLit event in Downtown Madison

6. Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene

For example...

PUBLIC

- Historic resource stewardship and storytelling
- Public art infrastructure and capacity building

PRIVATE

- Arts, culture, and entertainment roadmap
- Shared promotion and a regional events calendar



7. Drive the Next Gen Economy

Grow the industries, ideas, and jobs of Downtown's next economy, making Downtown the catalyst of the Madison region's innovation ecosystem.

What We Heard from the Community

Creative and innovative industries are seen as high-potential, but Downtown does not yet support new and emerging businesses.

High costs of entry and access to capital are the main constraints on starting and growing a business.

Most rate Downtown's economy as **moderately to very strong**, so the work builds on strength.

Downtown's economy should **include and welcome** everyone.

What We Looked At

Commercial and lab space is harder to finance than housing, so **projects default to residential**.

UW Madison and state government anchor **more than half of Downtown's jobs**.

Growth depends on **new and emerging sectors** like life sciences, health tech, and software.

Many key sectors are **growing faster outside Downtown** than within it.



Nashville Entrepreneur Center



Bakery Square, Pittsburgh

7. Drive the Next Gen Economy

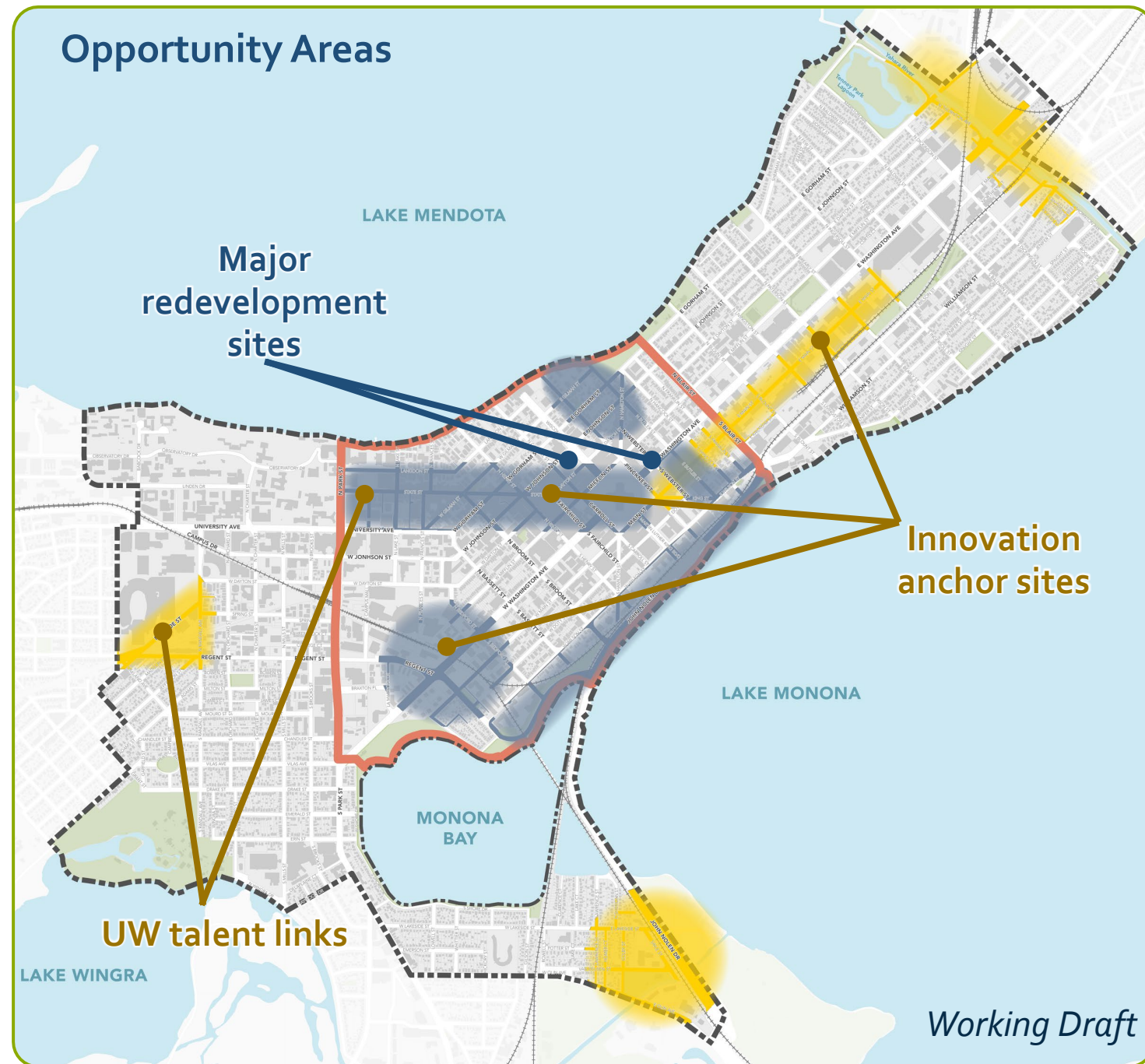
For example...

PUBLIC

- Ensure land use and height recommendations support future employment uses
- Identify priorities for City's Economic Development tools

PRIVATE

- Recruit 1-2 marquee innovation or research anchors
- Talent pipeline with UW, schools, and major employers



When Will You See Draft Recommendations?

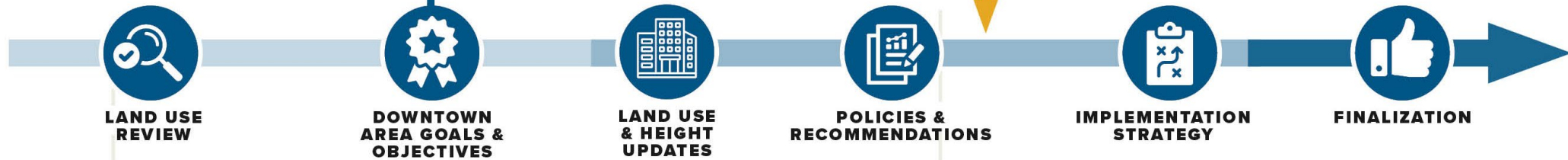
DOWNTOWN STRATEGY



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT



DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE



2025 | 2026 | 2027

WHERE WE'RE HEADED NEXT

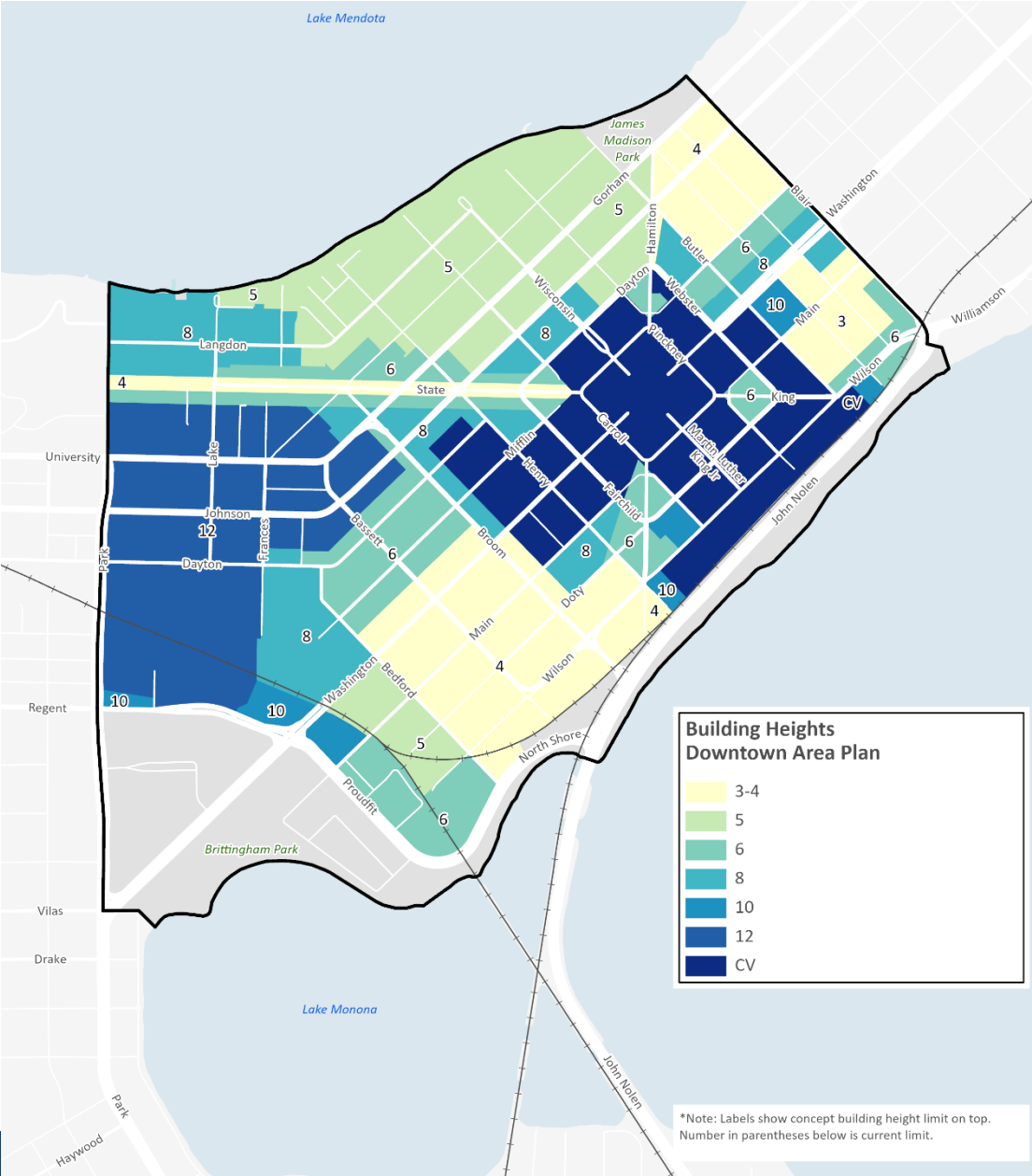
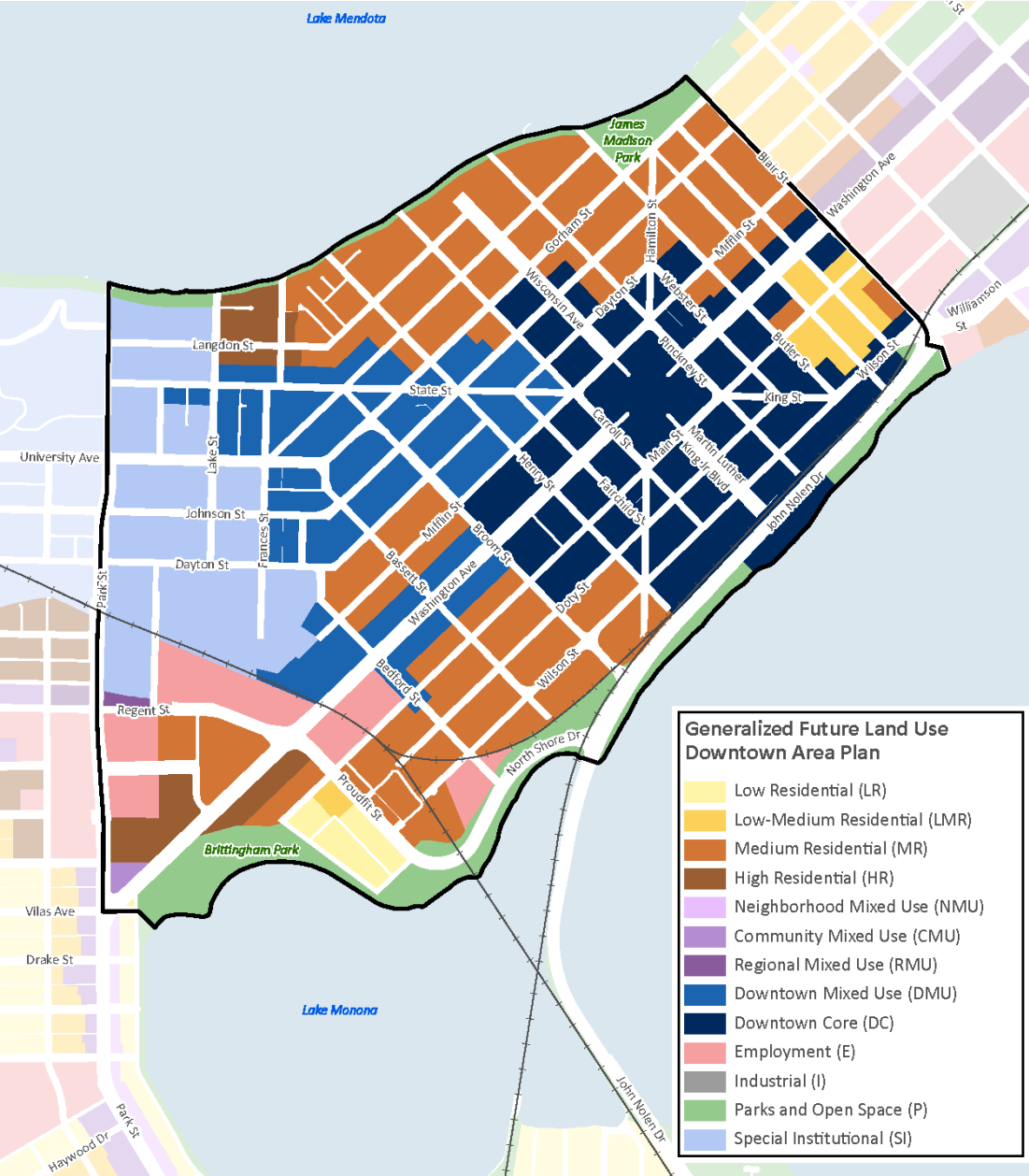
- Next public workshop in early 2027 → draft recommendations
- A more focused strategy and set of recommendations for each Big Move

Big Moves Q&A

Up next: Land Use

Land Use + Height

Land Use + Height – Existing Framework



Place Character Vision



Height Vision and Influences



Land Use + Height Q&A

Next Steps

Next Steps

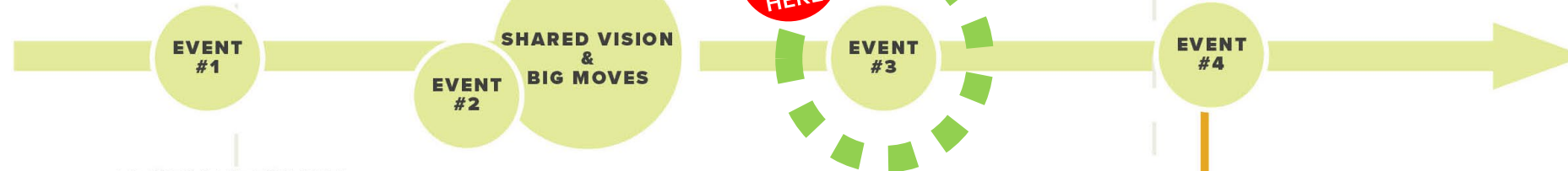
Downtown Strategy

- Draft recommendations for each Big Move
- Funding and governance strategy
- Public draft strategy shared for review (early 2027)

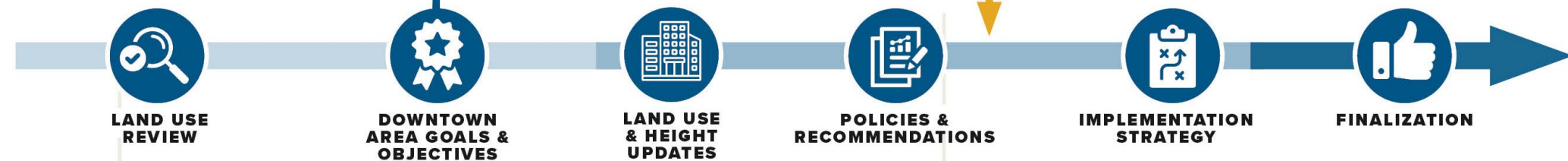
DOWNTOWN STRATEGY



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT



DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE



2025 | 2026 | 2027

Downtown Area Plan

- Formalize recommendations for each Big Move
- Refine land use and height strategy
- Other policy and project recommendations

Online + In-Person Activities

Thank You + How to Participate

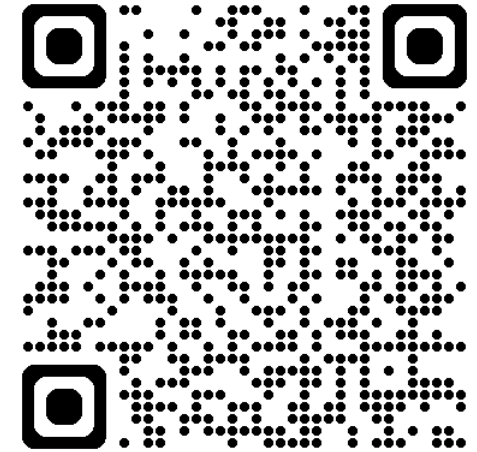
Participate online:

<https://plans.cityofmadison.com/envision-downtown-opp-areas-lu-vision>

- Scan the QR code or visit the URL to access the online activities.

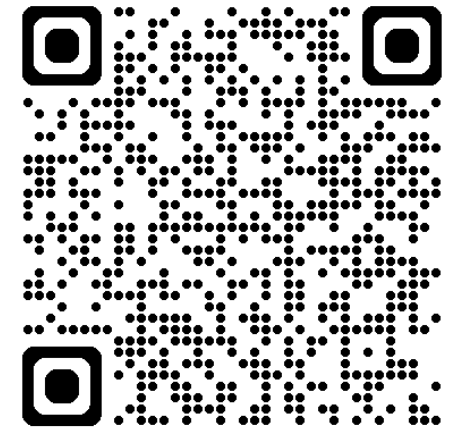
Participate in person:

- Review boards around the room and provide your feedback via sticky notes and voting with sticker dots. You can also use the online version



Stay informed about Envision Downtown Madison

- join our email list for future update including meeting announcements and feedback summaries



Your Feedback: Actions for the Big Moves

Do you have comments or ideas for projects, policies, and programs supporting the Big Moves? Let us know by adding your comments next to the related Big Move. We will use this input when formalizing the recommendations.

1

Reimagine People Spaces and Places

2

Come on Down(town)

3

Feel the Lake Effect

4

Make Downtown a Complete and Diverse Neighborhood

5

Curate Unforgettable Districts

6

Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene

7

Drive the Next Gen Economy

What is the most important public sector project?

What is the most important private sector project?

Your Feedback: Land Use Vision

Let us know your thoughts by placing a dot on the line for each question.

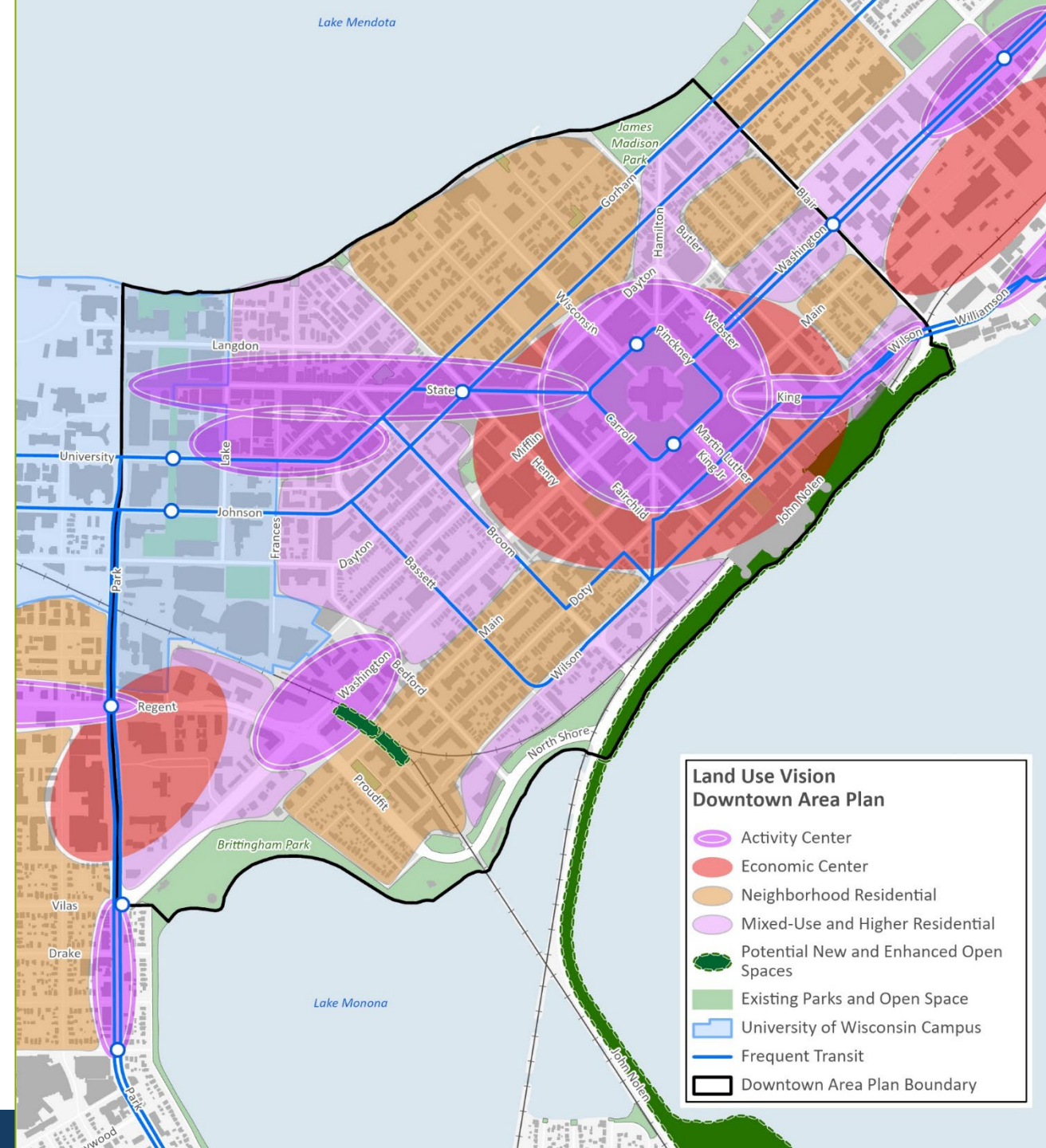
Do you agree with the general land use approach?

●-----●
Agree Disagree

It is important to maintain mixture of housing types and scales in the downtown.

●-----●
Agree Disagree

Add your thoughts about specific areas
by placing a comment on the map ↗



Your Feedback: Building Height Vision

Let us know your thoughts by placing a dot on the line for each question.

Do you agree with the general approach to building heights?

●-----●
Agree Disagree

It is appropriate to increase building heights along main corridors like Johnson St and East Washington Ave.

●-----●
Agree Disagree

Add your thoughts about specific areas by placing a comment on the map 





Downtown Madison Strategy and Downtown Area Plan

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