

Community Feedback Summary – Draft Vision and Big Moves

Envision Downtown Madison – Downtown Area Plan

July 14, 2026

Background

This feedback summary includes public input from Phase 2 of the Envision Downtown Madison process, starting with the April 30th open house hosted by the City of Madison and Downtown Madison Inc. (DMI). During this phase of public engagement, draft Vision Elements and Big Moves were shared. Participants reviewed background information on the project to date and then provided feedback on the draft Vision Elements and Big Moves. More details and meeting materials from the April 30th open house are in the links below:

[What We've Heard \(prior to April 30th\)](#)

[What We've Been Doing \(data and analysis\)](#)

[Vision and Big Moves](#)

[The Local Guide](#)

This summary includes public feedback from several sources. The City and DMI hosted two open house events (one in-person and one virtual). The team also held pop-ups at two existing downtown events. Feedback in this summary comes from the following sources:

Event	Date	Number of Participants
Open House (in-person)	April 30, 2026	220
Online Open House (virtual)	May 14, 2026	25
Madison Night Market (pop-up event)	May 11, 2026	Appx. 250
Bike Week at Law Park (pop-up event)	June 2, 2026	Appx. 175

Key Takeaways from Public Feedback

1. The majority of participants found that the draft Vision Elements resonate and feel meaningful to them. Approximately 77% said they were “very meaningful and relevant.”
2. The two draft Big Moves that were rated to have the highest potential impact on downtown include “Feel the Lake Effect” and “Make Downtown a diverse and complete neighborhood.”
3. Seven of the ten draft Big Moves were rated to have at least a big impact on downtown.

Draft Vision Elements:

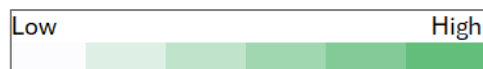
Participants reviewed the six Vision Elements and were asked to vote for two that resonate the most. They were then asked to rate how meaningful and relevant they found the draft Vision Elements.

“Experiential & Engaging Downtown” had the largest percentage of votes (24%). The two draft Vision Elements that received the lowest percentage of votes were “Diverse & Equitable Downtown” and “Sustainable & Resilient Downtown.” Both received 11% of votes.

Vote on Most Resonate	
Vision Elements	Percent of Total (293 total responses)
Experiential & Engaging Downtown: Greater Downtown is a multi-faceted gathering place that offers immersive and memorable experiences for all. Through a unique and dynamic collection of destinations, events, programming, and public spaces, Greater Downtown cultivates authentic connections to people and place.	24%
Economically Vibrant & Inclusive Downtown: Greater Downtown is an economically thriving mixed-use activity center with businesses, diverse employment, housing, shopping, dining, cultural, and entertainment offerings that attract, serve, and reflect all Madison residents.	22%
Connected & Accessible Downtown: Greater Downtown promotes accessible movement and mobility in and around Downtown with well-connected, multi-modal transportation networks that link key destinations, services, retail, entertainment, and the lakes is essential for a healthy and thriving Downtown.	18%
Safe & Welcoming Downtown: The Greater Downtown environment and experience are comfortable and inviting for all employers, employees, residents, and visitors regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mobility, or other identifying characteristics.	15%
Diverse & Equitable Downtown: Greater Downtown celebrates the diversity and history of the Madison community. Through intentional inclusivity, dedicated resources, cultural competency, collaborative partnerships, and authentic representation, downtown creates spaces where everyone belongs and independent, minority, and women leaders and entrepreneurs are actively supported, empowered, and celebrated.	11%
Sustainable & Resilient Downtown: Greater Downtown Madison embraces sustainability and resilience as core principles for our future. By working together to address environmental, social, and economic challenges, the Greater Downtown creates adaptive solutions and lasting impact through education, advocacy, and collaborative partnerships that ensure continued prosperity and vitality for all.	11%

**Participants were asked to select 2, but may have over voted*

Vision Elements - Relevance	
Scale	Percent of Total (91 total responses)
Very meaningful & relevant	77%
Somewhat meaningful & relevant	21%
Does not connect with me / Not relevant	2%



Note: The tables in this document display as a shade of green from low to high, helping to visually show level of support/feedback for items in the table. This color gradient is meant as a summarization tool only and is not meant for statistical analysis.

Draft Big Moves

[Ten draft Big Moves were shared](#). The Big Moves are early ideas for how downtown could grow and improve over time. After reviewing the list, participants at all four events were asked to vote for which of the ten Big Moves they are most excited about, and noted this with a gold star. In addition, participants at the in-person and virtual open houses were also asked to consider the potential impact of each Big Move. The potential impact scale ranged from small impact to transformational impact.

Gold Star Ranking (most excited about)

- “Make Downtown a Diverse and Complete Neighborhood” had the largest percentage of people (21%) who selected it as the Big Move they are most excited about.
- “Feel the Lake Effect” had the second largest percentage of people (20%) who selected it as the Big Move they are most excited about.
- “Drive the Next Gen Economy” received the least amount of votes across all four sources of feedback.
- “Infuse Learning, Play & Discovery” and #4 “Reimagine People Spaces and Places” both received low levels of support across all sources of feedback.
- “Come on Down(town)” received lower levels of support at the in-person open house on April 30 compared to the other three sources of feedback.

Participant Gold Star Ranking (most excited about) of Big Moves	
Big Moves	Percent of Total (569 total responses)
Make Downtown a Diverse and Complete Neighborhood	21.3%
Feel the Lake Effect	19.7%
Come on Down(town)	14.6%
Become the Healthiest & Greenest Downtown	12.5%
Put the “There” Back in State and Square	9.7%
Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene	7.6%
Curate Unforgettable Districts	5.8%
Reimagine People Spaces and Places	3.2%
Infuse Learning, Play & Discovery	3.2%
Drive the Next Gen Economy	2.6%

Participant Ratings of Potential Impact

- The two Big Moves perceived as the **most transformational** are “Feel the Lake Effect” and “Come on Down(town).”: These had the largest percentage of people (96% and 91% respectively) who said it would have either a big or transformational impact.
- The two Big Moves perceived as the **least transformational** are: “Drive the Next Gen Economy” and “Infuse Learning, Play & Discovery.” These had the largest percentage of people (63% and 42% respectively) who said it would have either a small or moderate impact.

Big Moves Impacts Ratings					
Big Moves	Small (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Big (3 point)	Transformational (4 points)	Impact Score (out of 4)
Feel the Lake Effect	0.0%	4.2%	18.5%	77.4%	3.73
Make Downtown a Diverse and Complete Neighborhood	0.0%	12.7%	20.3%	67.1%	3.54
Come on Down(town)	3.1%	6.1%	44.3%	46.6%	3.34
Reimagine People Spaces and Places	3.3%	22.0%	34.1%	40.7%	3.12
Become the Healthiest & Greenest Downtown	2.0%	22.3%	37.8%	37.8%	3.11
Put the “There” Back in State and Square	0.9%	22.0%	44.0%	33.0%	3.09
Elevate the Arts, Culture & Entertainment Scene	5.3%	23.0%	31.0%	40.7%	3.07
Curate Unforgettable Districts	9.2%	31.5%	26.2%	33.1%	2.82
Infuse Learning, Play & Discovery	16.4%	25.9%	40.5%	17.2%	2.59
Drive the Next Gen Economy	16.9%	46.0%	18.5%	18.5%	2.39

The percentage values are of votes for each big move. The total impact rating votes for each Big Moves varied slightly, between approximately 110 and 170, as some participants did not rate all Big Moves. An impact score was calculated by assigning points to each of the four impact categories (small impact =1, moderate = 2, big = 3, transformational = 4). Total scores were then divided by the number of votes, resulting in an average score for potential impact.

Overall, seven of the ten Big Moves were rated to have an average score of at least 3 out of 4 for potential impact. In other words, on average participants expect the Big Moves will have at least a big impact on downtown.

Other Observations

- “Put the “There” Back in State and Square,” had many people skip voting on its potential impact altogether. It is possible the phrasing of this Big Move was either unclear, or it just did not resonate enough.
- “Drive the Next Gen Economy” was rated to have the smallest potential impact on downtown compared to the other Big Moves. On the other hand, the Vision Element “Economically Vibrant & Inclusive Downtown” received the second highest number of votes for which one resonates the most. The Vision Element and Big Move cover similar topics related to the economy. However, this difference in feedback suggests that participants were either supportive of the “Inclusive” aspect of the Vision Element or the phrasing for one of these items was not clear enough.

Written Comments on Draft Vision Elements

Several additional comments were left in response to the question “Is there anything else missing from the emerging vision and values?”

- “More density is fine but not without more infrastructure. Cars are not going away! The Mifflandia plan is an important plan that should not be cast aside.” (original emphasis)
- “A sustainable, green downtown with tree canopy. Not a concrete heat island as much of it is now. Also many active outdoor sitting and walking places. Ideally a real urban park at the old cathedral site. These are necessary to meet other goals for the downtown as state government employees have departed.”
- “Madison, specifically the Bassett area, should implement a Parking Benefit District concept as part of an active curb management plan. Designated short-term loading/parking spots should be implemented for delivery drivers, ride share cars and residents.”
- “On the map of potential redevelopment sites include all surface parking lots. On the 600 blocks of W. Washington, W Main & W Doty surface parking lots extend through the blocks. The broad terraces of the 400 & 500 blocks of W Washington should become a linear park with a focus on gathering places for residents. This could resemble the areas around the square. The zoning code should be changed for DR1 & DR2 so that on corner lots both streets faces have the current front yard setback.”

Written Comments on Draft Big Moves

Write-in comments related to the draft Big Moves largely reflect ideas heard in earlier engagement efforts including. General themes include ideas about housing types, preferences for walking and biking, lake water quality, and economic investment.

Big Ideas	Comment
Come on Down(town)	• “Walking and biking should be visible more efficient and pleasurable” • “People who complain about driving & parking can either pay for it or not come. We don’t need more parking downtown, and building it is \$\$\$ (money)! We live in a city on an isthmus.”
Feel the Lake Effect	• “These targets/goals won’t be as impactful if the water quality and cleanliness are poor and unaddressed.”
Drive the next Gen Economy	• “Exact sciences sale to Abbott was just brought” • “(\$750M-\$1.6B)~\$billions to Madison. Help us keep it in Madison by forming new companies!”
Make Downtown a diverse and complete neighborhood	• “Condos & Long-term residents” • “More cooperative living: affordable cohousing, co-ops”