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COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT SERIES

CITY OF MADISON | BUSINESS WALK

Post Summary Event Report

City of Madison | October 6, 2026

Post-Event Report

On October 6, 2026, the City of Madison brought together two divisions, Economic Development and Planning, to host the City of Madison's 2026 Business Walk. This walk supported the City of Madison's North Area Plan and Near West Area Plan. A Business Walk is an economic development initiative that, in a short amount of time, allows local leaders to get the pulse of how a business community is doing. The premise behind each walk is to learn about the successes and obstacles the local business community faces, track that information, and provide assistance. A total of 48 volunteer business and civic leaders and City staff visited 247 businesses throughout Madison, including 76 in the North Area and 171 in the Near West Area. Interviews were conducted with businesses that were available and willing to participate.

The business walks primarily focused on local, public-facing businesses. The team generally excluded home-based or sole-proprietor operations without a public-facing storefront, churches, and schools. Because the Near West Area has a greater overall number of businesses, staff and volunteers visited approximately twice as many businesses there compared to the North Area. Of those businesses, 56 businesses requested and received follow up calls and email support to discuss questions.

The conversation with the businesses focused on five questions:

1. **How's business?**
2. **What do you like about business in your area?**
3. **What can be done to improve business in your area?**
4. **Do you or your employees experience any barriers or challenges getting to work, such as transportation, childcare, or other issues?**
5. **Would your company like to be followed up with after the Business Walk?**

Summary Results

The City of Madison Business Walk was held in two areas:

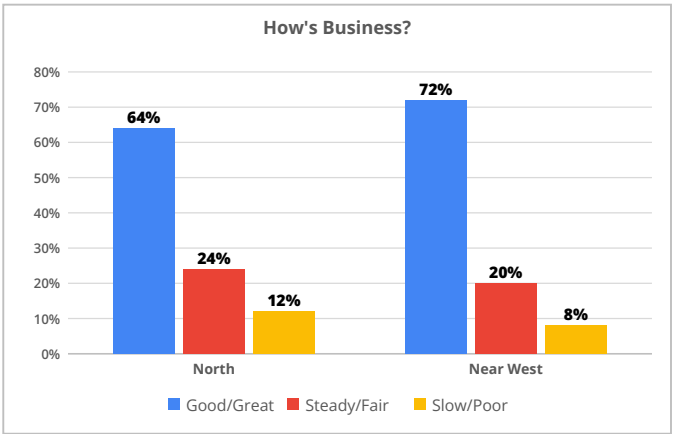
- The **North Area** is a community shaped by a diverse mix of residents, businesses, and destinations like Warner Park and the Northside Town Center.
- The **Near West Area** includes a mix of neighborhoods, business nodes, the UW-Madison campus, Edgewood University, and the Arboretum.

Throughout this report, you will read about the differences and similarities between the two areas. The walk volunteers visited a diverse blend of businesses, including, but not limited to, manufacturing, industrial, service based, retail, professional offices, hospitality, entertainment, transportation, and restaurants.

The results indicated that while both areas offer many promising opportunities, they also face several challenges that require attention. When asked "How's business?" 88% (North Area) and 92% (Near West Area) cited that business was at least steady/fair or good/great. Although most businesses are steady and/or succeeding, a handful of businesses indicated business is slow/poor. When asked what they "liked about doing business" in the North and Near West Areas, two things stood out: 1) community / customers and 2) location. When the volunteer business and civic leaders asked what could be "done to improve business" in the area, the most frequent responses in the North Area were: 1) infrastructure/traffic, 2) safety concerns, and 3) government regulations and compliance. The Near West Area mentioned: 1) infrastructure/traffic, 2) business visibility and growth, and 3) parking. The majority of the businesses mentioned facing no barriers for their employees to get to work. The remainder of this report will go over the questions in detail as well as provide steps the City of Madison is taking to improve the business climate.

QUESTION 1: HOW'S BUSINESS?

(Open ended question with respondents providing multiple answers)



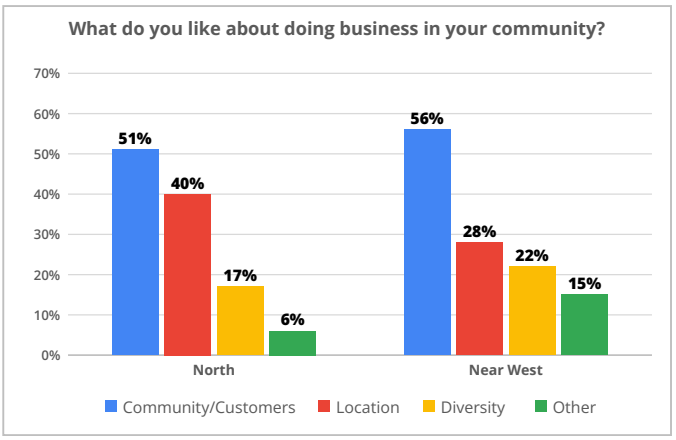
In response to the question "How's business?" respondents provided a variety of answers from "we are slammed, doing well" to "could be a little busier but decent" to "slow due to seasonal transition, construction, rising costs."

Sixty-four percent of businesses in the North Area said that business was **good/great**, indicating that they are thriving due to various reasons: longevity of business, word of mouth and location. Seventy-two percent of respondents in the Near West Area said their businesses' success was due to their relationship with their community, location, and foot traffic. The 24% of businesses that rated business as **fair/steady** in the North area referenced that they have been doing "okay," but they are steady overall as their business "tends to have seasonal ups and downs". Businesses in the Near West area had 20% respond fair/steady, reporting challenges "due to (the Wisconsin) Badgers record", and "unreliable foot traffic patterns," describing the overall spending climate as just "okay." Some mentioned they were a seasonal business.

Slow or poor responses accounted for 12% in the North area. Businesses highlighted a lack of marketing, a need for new customers, and the economy/inflation. In the Near West area, 8% of businesses expressed concern about foot traffic being down, construction, the economy, and overall rising costs. Despite some of the setbacks, businesses overwhelmingly stated they want to stay in their area and plan to stay in business.

QUESTION 2: WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT DOING BUSINESS IN YOUR AREA?

(Open ended question with respondents providing multiple answers).



For the North Area, **community and customers** were mentioned by 51% of the respondents. Many love the people, small town feel, their ability to have a personal rapport with their clients, describing them as loyal, nice, kind and committed. The Near West Area was similar (56%), and businesses said their customers are trustworthy, progressive, and friendly. They value the strong community support for small businesses, the loyalty of repeat customers, and the unique culture and atmosphere of the area.

Forty percent of people said **location** was the reason they liked doing business in the North Area. They described it as convenient, close to where they live, and accessible to other parts of Madison if needed. Twenty-eight percent of respondents in the Near West Area said they enjoy the area, describing it as a quiet place that offers the feel of a big city with the charm of a small town. They appreciated the walkability, proximity to other anchor businesses, being near West High School, UW Hospital, UW Campus, and having college students as customers.

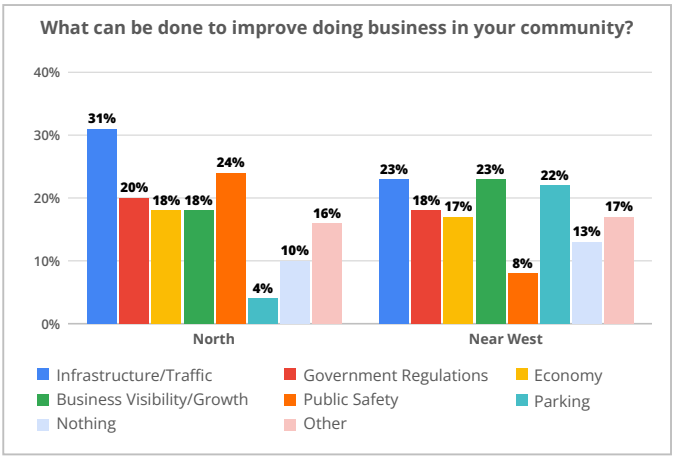
Diversity was mentioned in 17% of responses from the North Area, reflecting differences in income, age, ethnicity, and shopping preferences. Diversity was mentioned by 22% of respondents from the Near West Area, who highlighted the variety of people, businesses, education levels, cultures, and backgrounds, including students, medical professionals, health-conscious, and the mix of types of businesses in their area.

In addition, 6% of respondents in the North Area shared additional comments **("other")** highlighting the history of the

Area and the role of emergency services and first responders. In the Near West Area, 15% of respondents offered "other" feedback, mentioning local events, BRT bus stations, neighborhood newsletters, and safe streets.

QUESTION 3: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE BUSINESS IN YOUR AREA?

(Open ended question with respondents providing multiple answers).



For the past few questions, responses have been very similar across the two areas. However, while respondents shared similar suggestions for improving local businesses, their levels of concern varied significantly. To better reflect these differences, the report will now present responses separately by area, ranked from highest to lowest percentage.

NORTH AREA

For the North Area, 31% of respondents identified **infrastructure/traffic** as an area for improvement. Suggestions included addressing access challenges at select roadways and improving traffic flow at key entry points. Minimizing traffic/access disruptions to buildings during construction, adding a splash pad to the Northside community, improving the number of bus stops, addressing water and sewer backup issues and making walking and biking paths wider and safer. The next highest response for the North Area was **Safety Concerns,** at 24%, with respondents mentioning concerns about homelessness, panhandlers, biker/traffic safety, drug use, and theft.

Government Regulations and Compliance was highlighted by 20% of the people who took the survey. Businesses are looking for more information and communication around government regulations and fees. Many would like more TIF*-supported projects to be undertaken in the North Area. Specific topics included the need for more flexible signage regulations and permitting requirements, clearer communication about online submissions, and more timely responses from the City after permit applications are submitted. **Economic Conditions** (18%) were cited as a concern due to rising costs, tariffs, and high gas prices. People are "feeling the pinch of inflation and people are struggling." Affordability was a common concern among respondents, with many sharing that the rising cost of living and doing business is making it more difficult for individuals and businesses to manage expenses.

Business Visibility and Growth (18%) was a concern, and people are looking for more visibility to increase customer flow. Businesses are searching for ways to get more outreach and support for the North Area as a whole through marketing, events, word of mouth, and support for buy local campaigns. They want the community to care about the North Area and continue doing business in the North Area.

Parking was mentioned by 4%, concerns included the impact of new development on parking availability, as well as maintaining convenient access to existing parking in select areas. Ten percent of the businesses stated that nothing needed improvement, noting that they were not facing any major challenges.

In addition, 16% of North Area respondents provided several other requested improvements and changes, including:

- More support for public schools as the area grows
- A need for more retail and restaurants in the Area
- Funding for maintenance of trees and bushes around businesses to maintain curb appeal

NEAR WEST AREA

Infrastructure/traffic was one of the highest concerns for the Near West Area at 23%. Survey responses mentioned the need for "better roads," expanding bus routes, and larger bike paths. Businesses suggested more communication with the local businesses when streets or sidewalks are being closed down so they don't cause so many pain points. Construction has impacted and/or slowed down multiple businesses.

Business Visibility and Growth (23%) was also a high concern. Much like in the North Area, businesses in the Near West Area are looking for more visibility and community

**Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) is a governmental finance tool that the City of Madison uses to provide funds to construct public infrastructure, promote development opportunities and expand the future tax base.*

support. Suggestions include more in-person events and promotion via social media, as well as figuring out ways for businesses to collaborate together and promote each other to get people to shop locally.

Parking (22%) is a barrier for businesses in the Near West Area. Businesses cited a need for more parking lots in the Area to make it easier and safer for clients and employees. Current garages are always full and/or very expensive. Limited staff parking as well as two-hour parking limitations make parking difficult for staff and customers, especially in the winter. No parking signs were put up with no warning and there appeared to be no street work being done, making doing business hard to navigate.

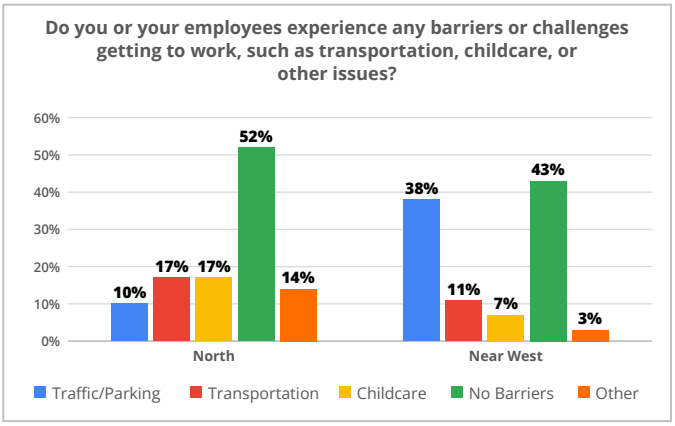
The next improvement was around **Government Regulations and Compliance** (18%) for businesses. Businesses are looking for clearer communication on what is needed around zoning, signage, fees, and permitting. The city could improve by "empowering staff to be able to make decisions." Businesses stated that signage rules and regulations are a pain point because there are too many restrictions. Some feel there are different rules for different businesses and/or buildings. They want to stay in business but don't want to have to jump through so many hoops.

Economic Conditions (17%) are a challenge as costs are rising, businesses are dealing with supply chain issues, and affordability is top of mind. There are a lot of high costs (gas, utility, wholesale costs, taxes) and rents are high in the Near West Area. People are "feeling the crunch" as everything is now more expensive. **Safety Concerns** was the least-mentioned topic in the Near West Area, at only 8%. Businesses mentioned unsafe intersections, dark areas, bicyclist safety due to new construction, and road construction safety for workers and walkers. Thirteen percent of businesses stated that **nothing** needed improvement, noting that they were not facing any major challenges.

In addition, 17% of Near West Area respondents provided several **other** improvements and needed changes, including:

- More business funding opportunities
- Better school bus logistics (which is managed by the school district)
- Better public transportation options
- Funding for maintenance of trees and bushes around businesses to maintain curb appeal

QUESTION 4: DO YOU OR YOUR EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE ANY BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES GETTING TO WORK, SUCH AS TRANSPORTATION, CHILDCARE, OR OTHER ISSUES?



Fifty-two percent of businesses in the North Area stated that they and their employees have no barriers or challenges getting to work; many drive and park. That said, 17% of the respondents stated that transportation was a barrier due to late bus pickups, bus routes taking a long time, and/or lack of bus options for staff, especially on weekends. Seventeen percent also responded that childcare is an issue due to lack of access, costs, and limited childcare options for families working nontraditional hours. Parking and traffic (10%) were minor issues for some, with high traffic at times and limited parking. Fourteen percent had other concerns, stating safety issues on crossing streets and high gas prices.

Forty-three percent of people in the Near West Area stated that they and their employees have no barriers or challenges getting to work. While **parking/traffic** is a challenge for their clients it is a bigger challenge for their employees (38%). Parking challenges include two-hour parking limits and a lack of available spaces near businesses. Traffic congestion is also a concern during construction, game days, and peak travel times. Eleven percent cited needing increasing bus service frequency to reduce wait times and improve transit accessibility, options for people who live farther away, or bus options for East side to West side travel. Seven percent of people mentioned childcare as a barrier, discussing cost and availability of childcare options. Three percent stated other reasons, such as construction.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES!

- 4 Lakes Plumbing
- 7-Eleven
- A New Way Forward
- Advance Auto Parts
- Alimentari
- Alvarado Group
- American Family Insurance (2)
- Amy Nicholson
- Amy's Washbasket
- Animal Hospital at Hillshore
- Architectural Building Arts, Inc.
- Art Gecko
- Artful Home
- Artsy Fartsy Madison
- Asian Midway Foods
- Associated Bank
- Avis Budget Rental Car
- Awesomely Radical Love
- Bagels Forever
- barre3
- Barriques Market
- Basecamp Fitness
- Best Western Plus InnTowner
- Bill's Electrical Maintenance, LLC
- Bliss Nail Bar
- Bloom Bake Shop
- Blue Moon Bar & Grill
- Bluestem Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine
- BMO
- Borokhim's Oriental Rugs
- BP (2)
- Broadwing Advisors, LLC
- Buckingham Inn Bed and Breakfast
- Budd's Auto Repair
- Budget Bicycle Center (2)
- Burnie's Rock Shop
- Butterbird
- Cafe Domestique
- Cafe Mimi
- Calabash Gifts
- Camp Cantina
- Capital Auto Clinic
- Capital City Barbers (dba Regent Cuts)
- Capital Lock, Inc.
- Capitol Chordsmen
- Capitol City Barbers
- Capitol Physical Therapy
- Car Care Clinic
- Carley, Wood Associates, Inc.
- Chet's Car Care
- Chocolate Shoppe Ice Cream
- Clearspring Energy Advisors, LLC
- Club Pilates
- Colectivo Coffee
- Cool Bikes North
- Cool Sweet Treats
- Creando
- Crone Apothecary
- Culver's
- Curry in the Box
- Dark Matter Tattoo Gallery
- DataWrangler
- D-Chi LLC
- designCraft Advertising
- Dog Haus University
- Dovetail Detailing
- D'pelos Pet Groomer
- D&S Bait, Tackle and Fly Shop
- Dutch's Auto Service, Inc.
- DuWayne's
- Dykmans Time Shop
- Edward Jones (2)
- Einstein Bros Bagels
- El Rancho Mexican Grill
- Enrique's Market
- Enson Market
- Enterprise Rental
- Everly
- EVP Coffee
- Excellence in Dentistry
- Family Dollar
- Fancy Nails
- First Choice Dental
- Focal Flame Photography
- Gallo Men's Clothier
- Genin's AutoCare
- Good Day Shop
- Goodwill Madison North
- Grandad's Farm Stop
- Greenbush Bakery
- Gregg Shimanski Realty, Inc.
- Gulesserian's
- Habanero's Mexican Grill
- Hair Studio Day Spa
- Harry's Liquor
- Hertz Rental
- Hive of Madison
- HWY1 Baja Bowls & Burritos
- Ideal Pase
- Indie Coffee
- Infusion Chocolates
- Ink & Ivy Book Boutique
- Inspired Transformations
- Installerstore.com
- Jimmy John's University - Madison
- Jim's Auto Upholstery
- Jim's Card Korner, LLC
- Jung Garden Center
- Kinder Care Learning Center
- Kinergetics, LLC
- Kingdom Restaurant
- Klinke Cleaners (2)
- Kwik Trip (2)
- La Hacienda
- Lakeview Living Support Services
- Lakeview Veterinary Clinic
- Landmark Credit Union
- Leopold's
- Linda P. Hancock Creative
- Lindner & Marsack, S.C.
- LSM Chiropractic
- MadCat
- Madison Behavioral Health
- Madison Chiropractic North
- Madison Golf Performance
- Madison Psychiatric & Psychological Services
- Malone Tax & Accounting
- Massage East
- Mazur Realty
- McKinney Dental
- Milan Laser Hair Removal
- Milios
- Milward Farrell Fine Art
- Mister Car Wash
- MOKA
- Monroe Street Arts Center
- Monroe Street Family Dental
- Monroe Street Framing
- Movin' Shoes
- Mystery to Me
- Nakoma Dental
- Neuhauser Pharmacy
- New Life Hand Car Wash LLC
- Niemann Ace Hardware
- Nogginz
- Nori Sushi & Grill
- North Sherman Food Mart
- Northport Barber Shop
- Northport Laundry
- Northside Animal Hospital
- Nutzy Mutz & Crazy Catz
- OG Liquor
- O'Mara Moving & Storage
- Onward Physical Therapy
- Orange Shoe Personal Fitness
- Orange Tree Imports
- ORTHDX Natural Fitness
- Orthodontic Specialists of Madison
- Oscar's Auto Repair
- Over & Through Therapeutic Massage
- Paisley Hair Design
- Pasture & Plenty
- Peaceful Wellness
- Percy's Service Station
- Pittman Pittman Law Offices, LLC
- Pizza Brutta
- Pizza Hut
- Premier Bodywork LLC
- Prime Health Dental
- Puffin Pass
- QDOBA - University Avenue, Madison
- QQ Express
- Quarry Arts Building
- Recycle That Stuff
- Refuel Pantry
- Regent Market Co-op
- Regent Street Liquor
- Restore Wellness Massage
- Rockin and Rollin
- Ruedebusch Development & Construction
- Rusinak Psychology, LLC
- Sacred Rose Ayurveda
- Sage Counseling, PLLC
- Sconnie Bar
- Sherman Plaza Barbers
- Smiling Faces Home Health, LLC
- Sparkle Auto Body
- Spirit Mini Mart
- Starbucks
- State Farm
- Steinhauer Family Eye Clinic
- Stellas of Madison
- Stonyhill Antiques
- Strictly Discs
- Studio Jewelers, Ltd.
- Subway (3)
- Sunne Boutique
- Sweet Home Wisconsin
- Taj Indian Cuisine & Bar
- Tanya By Design
- TAS Communications
- TAWGEAR
- Thai Basil Madison
- The Book Deal
- The Century House
- The Curve
- The Fit On Monroe
- The Integral Psychology Center
- The Library Cafe & Bar
- The Village Bar
- Trader Joe's
- Trendsetters
- Tru-Check
- Turning Leaf
- Udvari-Solner Design Company
- U-Haul
- University Audio
- Up in Smoke
- U.S. Bank
- UW Credit Union (2)
- UW Health Northport Dr Clinic
- Villa Tap
- Walgreens
- Wayne's Barber Shop
- Weisman Counseling LLC
- Welton Enterprises
- Westring Construction LLC
- W.F. Butler Plumbing, Inc.
- William Jon Salon and Spa
- William Thomas Jewelers
- Willy Street Co-op
- Wine and Hop Shop
- Wings Over Madison
- Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters
- With in Sight Therapy
- Zan Auto Repair
- Zander's Interiors
- Zoddies

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