



Envision Downtown

Landmarks Commission | May 18, 2026

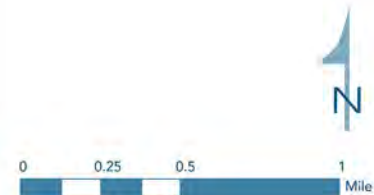


MADISON GREATER DOWNTOWN

LOCATION

LEGEND

-  Greater Downtown Economic Investment Strategy Boundary
-  Downtown Area Plan Boundary



DOWNTOWN STRATEGY



WE ARE HERE

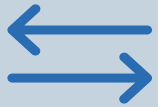
ONGOING ENGAGEMENT



DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE



Major Components of Envison Downtown



Vision and Big Moves: Through a shared vision and several “Big Moves” that set Downtown on the path to achieving the vision.



Downtown Plan: The **vision will direct policy and investments** in land use, transportation, economic opportunities, cultural resources, housing, parks, health, safety and city operations.



Economic Strategy: The **vision will inform a framework for short-term actions and long-term strategies and key opportunities for investments** that leverage public and private sector strengths to support and balance the economy, livability, and accessibility of Downtown.



Recommendations: The Downtown Plan and Strategy will each have a set of recommendations that speak to the **key opportunity sites** and dive into more specific **policy, regulatory or code, and programmatic changes** that will have broad-scale implications and support the Big Moves.

Recent Changes in the Downtown

**36% more
people living
Downtown**

Appx. 34,000 residents

Recent Changes in the Downtown

**Downtown is
younger and
more diverse
80% are 30 or younger**

Recent Changes in the Downtown

**7,500 homes
added
1/3 of all downtown
housing**

Source: Building Permit Data

Recent Changes in the Downtown

A multi-story apartment building under construction. The building has a modern design with a mix of light-colored siding and dark accents. A concrete pump truck is positioned to the right, with its long arm extended towards the building's upper levels. The scene is set in an urban environment with trees and a sidewalk visible in the foreground.

**...but housing is
less affordable**

43% spend half of
their income on rent

Recent Changes in the Downtown



**Over \$1.3 billion
of investment**

Recent Changes in the Downtown

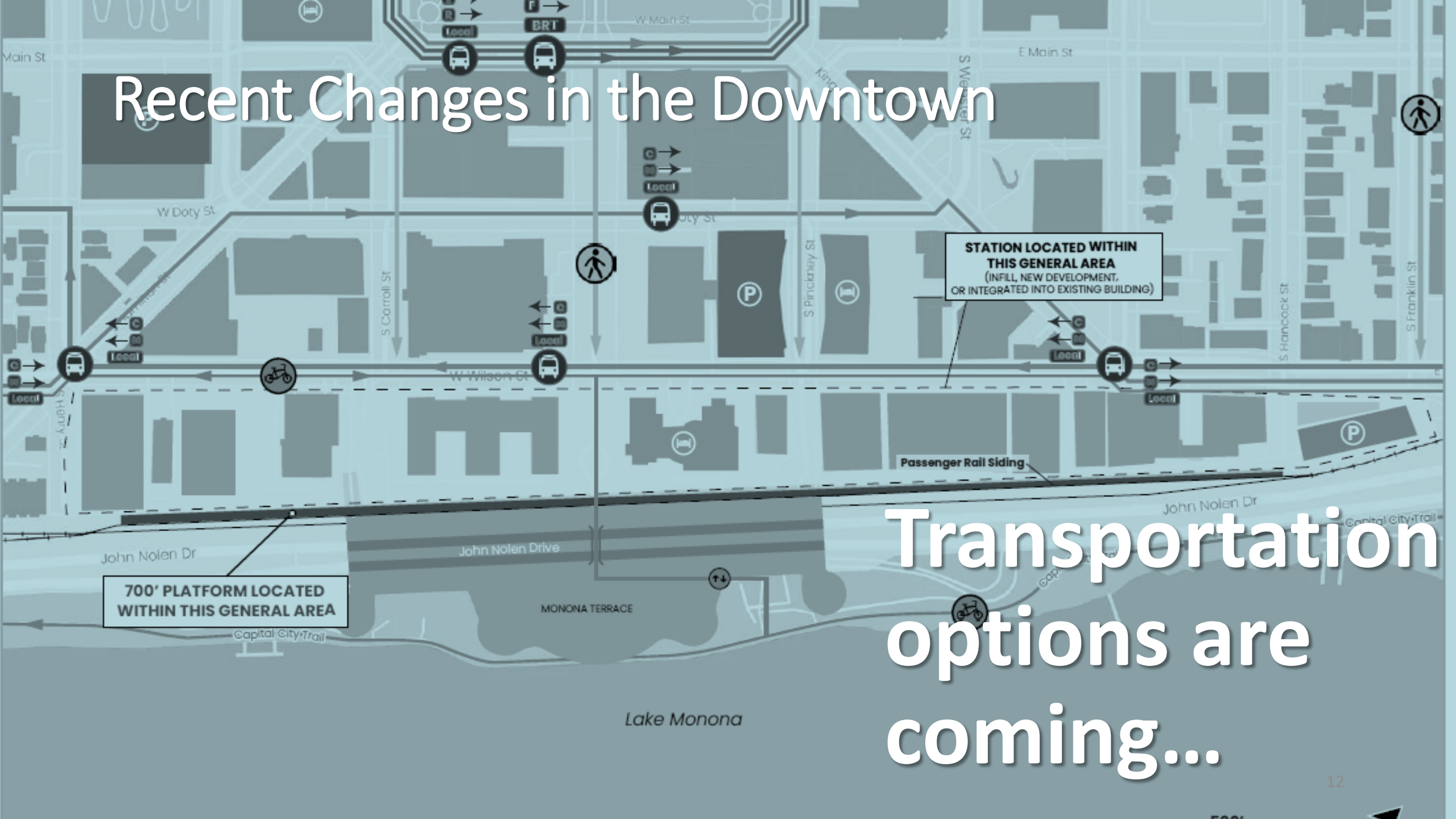
**2020: Covid,
outdoor space
and WFH**

Recent Changes in the Downtown

**Downtown
transit use is up
22% since 2013**

Source: Metro Transit boarding data

Recent Changes in the Downtown



STATION LOCATED WITHIN THIS GENERAL AREA
(INFILL, NEW DEVELOPMENT, OR INTEGRATED INTO EXISTING BUILDING)

Passenger Rail Siding

700' PLATFORM LOCATED WITHIN THIS GENERAL AREA

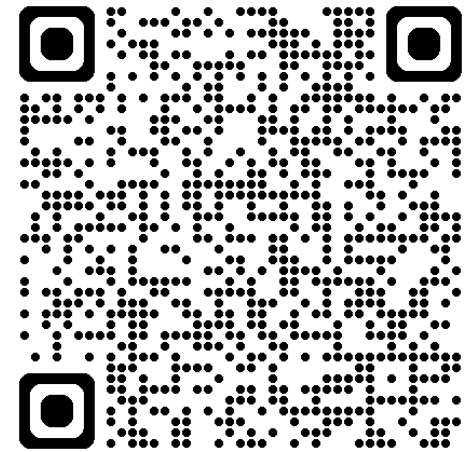
Transportation options are coming...

Recent Changes in the Downtown

**...and so is a
generational
investment in
public space**



What We've Heard



Open House #1

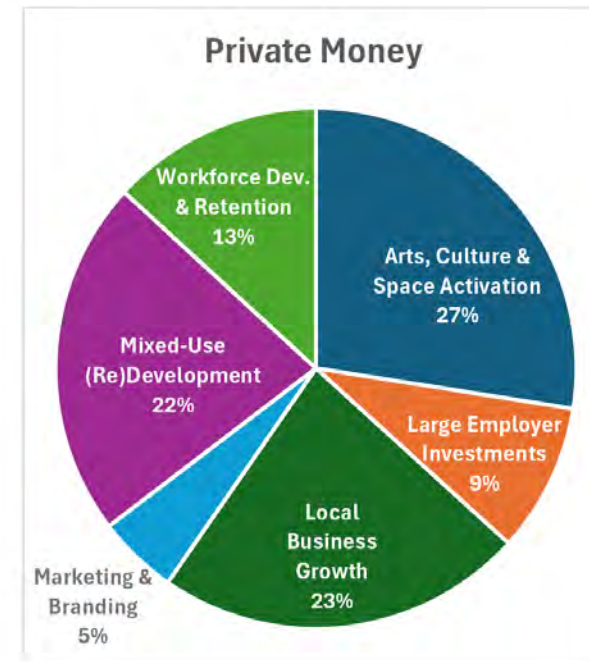
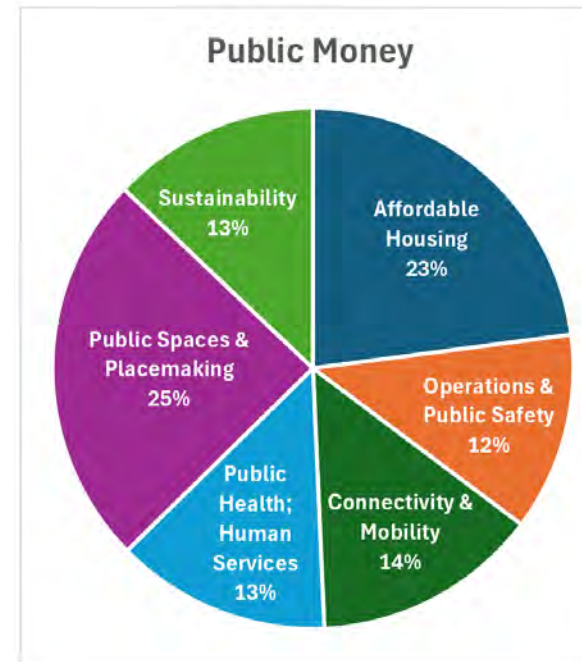
Dec 2, 2025



What Makes a Thriving Downtown



Investing in the Future of Downtown



Open House #1

Dec 2, 2025



Important Places Highlighted:

- Capitol & State Street
- Parks
- Terrace and Bascom
- Cultural venues

Improvements Needed:

- Redevelopment sites
- State Street (top)
- Mendota Waterfront



Other Public Engagement

		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%	26%
	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%
	Transit Service Later at Night	36%	25%	8%	6%	3%
Open Spaces and Recreation	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%

Reasons to be Downtown

Downtown Living and Working

Open Spaces and Recreation

Ways to Get Around

The City of Madison is planning for the future of Downtown! To help us better understand your thoughts and preferences about how the Downtown could grow and change, we've created a tournament style bracket. Each bracket "region" has a different focus: Reasons to be Downtown, Ways to Get Around, Downtown Living and Working, and Open Spaces and Recreation Opportunities. Each "team" represents an essential component of a downtown for all. Tell us what's most important to you by selecting your preferred team in each matchup. In our planning process, a team not advancing to the finals doesn't mean it's excluded from consideration. But crowning your "champion" is a fun way for you to help us understand your priorities for downtown's future.

Fill out your bracket online and get more information on the Downtown Area Plan. Be sure to include your email address to get project updates!

www.cityofmadison.com/downtownplan
downtownplan@cityofmadison.com

Downtown Area Plan
www.cityofmadison.com/downtownplan
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The Downtown Area Plan is part of ENVISION Downtown Madison, the City of Madison's strategic partnership with Downtown Madison, Inc.

Downtown Strategy Surveys + Focus Groups

- 600+ people filled out the survey
- 112 businesses + 518 community members
- 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



2 in 3

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

42%

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

What You Most Look Forward To Doing



78%

Enjoying a variety of eating / drinking options



61%

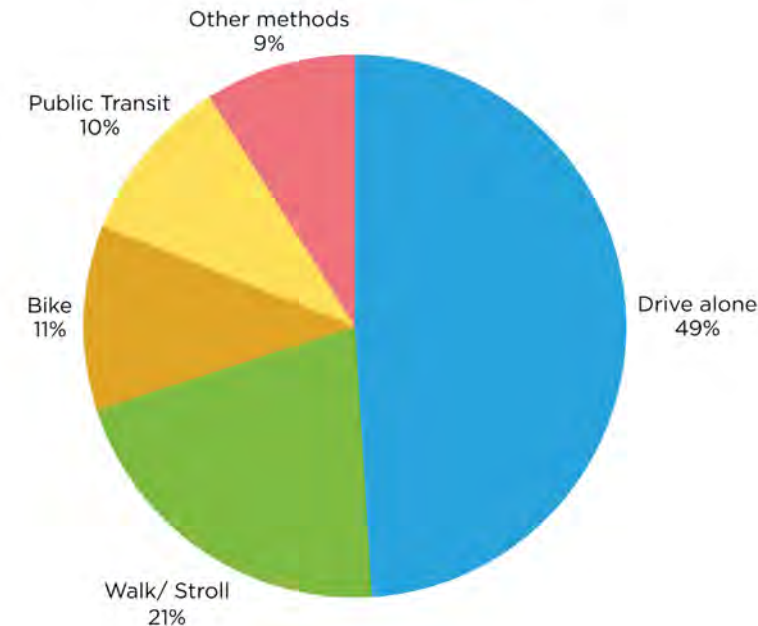
Attending special events like the Market



46%

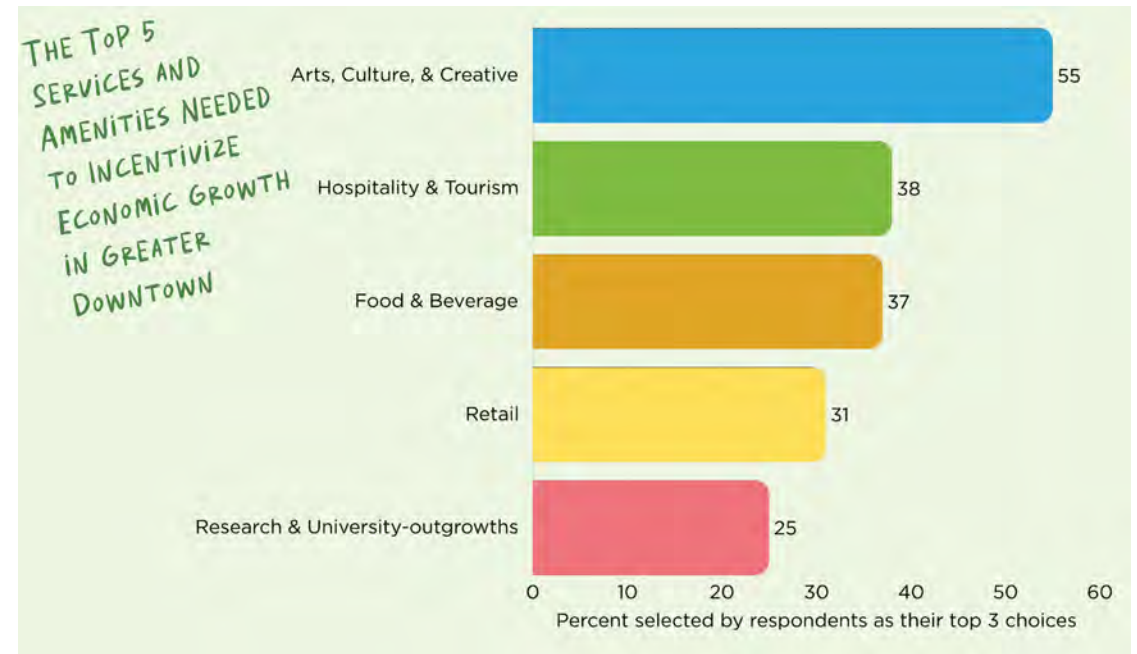
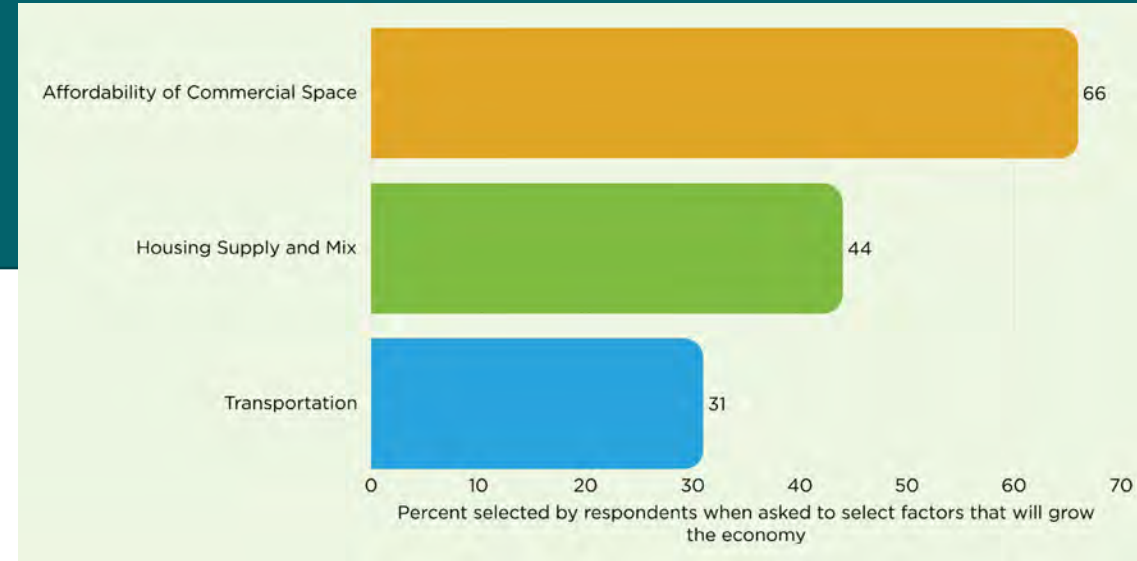
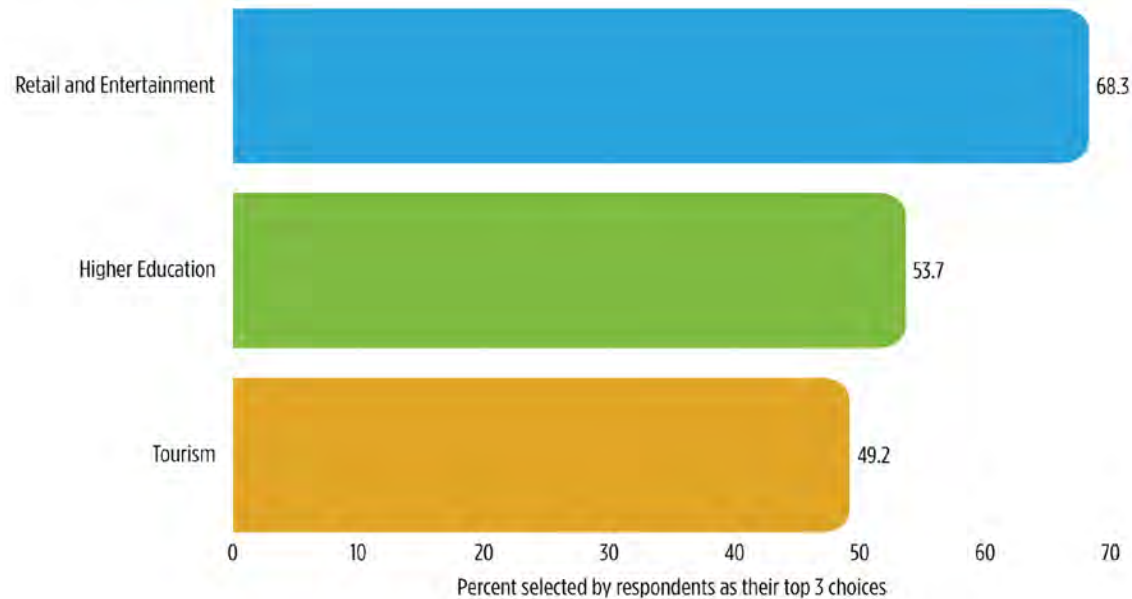
Gathering for social meet-ups

Percent of people who use these primary modes of transportation into GDM



Downtown Strategy Surveys + Focus Groups

Top Sectors Perceived as Vital for Growth





What We've Been Doing

Area Analysis

Since 2010, 7,500 new homes were built downtown.

In areas with more undeveloped land, this growth could have generated 120 acres of parkland through the parkland dedication process. When land isn't dedicated, developers must pay into a park acquisition fund.

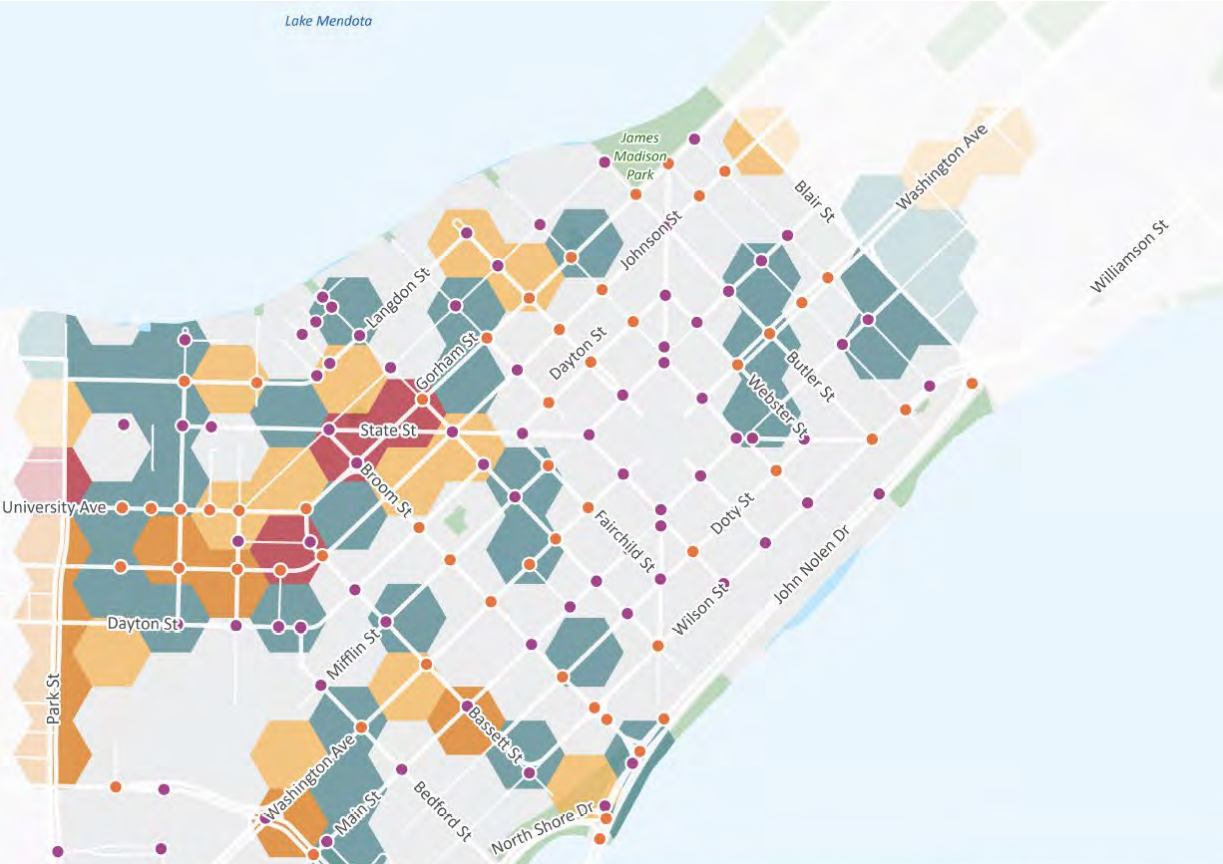
Obtaining land for parks in downtown is far more difficult than in outlying areas. Since 2010, the downtown added 1/2 acre of park, bringing total parkland to approximately 45 acres.



As Downtown Madison welcomes more and more new neighbors, visitors and employees, the demands on existing park and open spaces becomes more acute. Addressing open space needs may include:

- » Improving existing park and public open spaces that are underutilized
- » Creating plaza and linear open spaces along streets and paths
- » Creating new public parks or other open spaces in deficient areas
- » Enhancing access to the lakefront and water itself





Pedestrian Crashes & Crossings Downtown Area Plan

Pedestrian Crossing Stress*

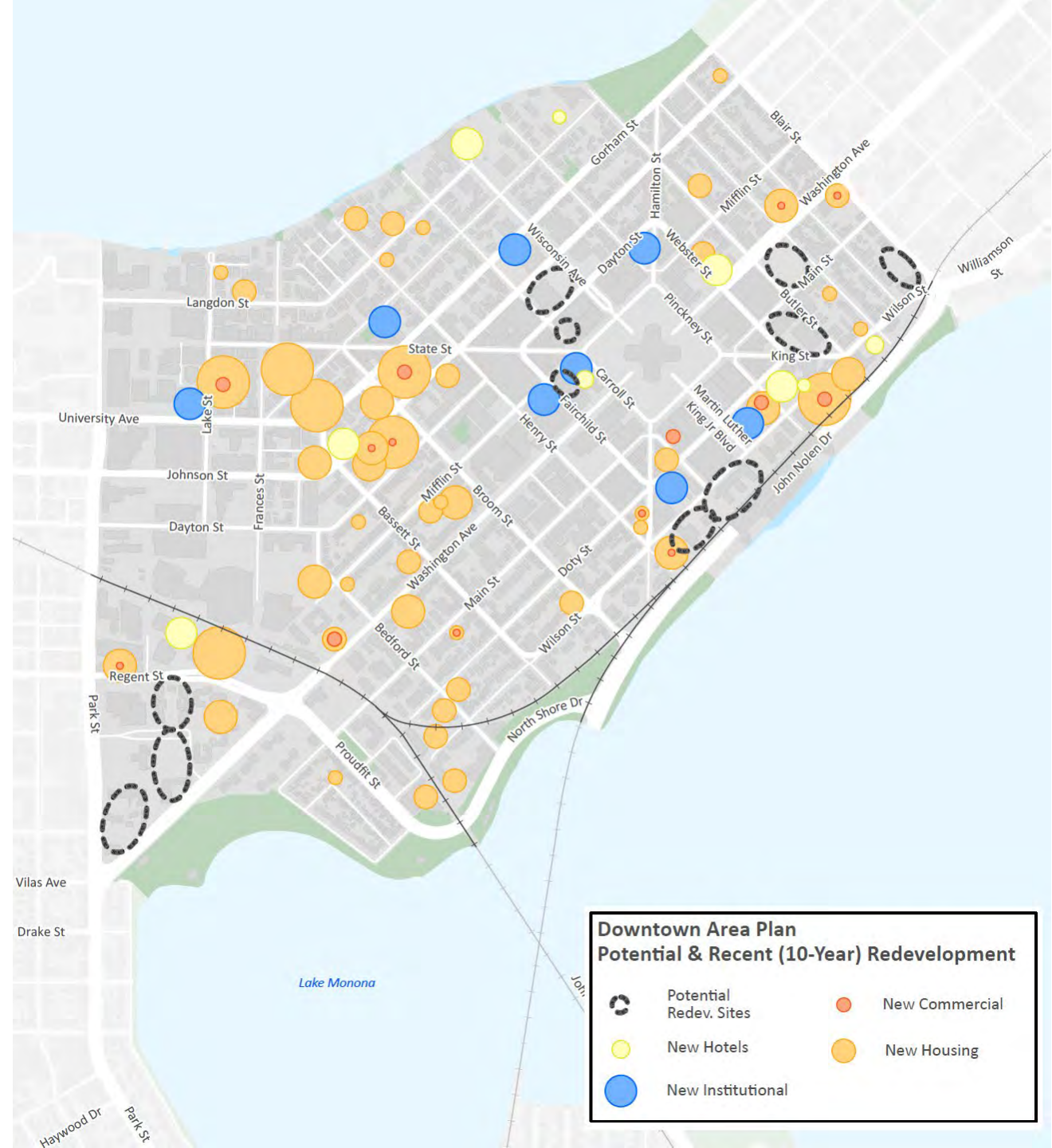
- Low Stress
- High Stress

Crashes Involving Pedestrians per 5 Acres | 2020-2026

- ≤6
- ≤4
- ≤2
- ≤1

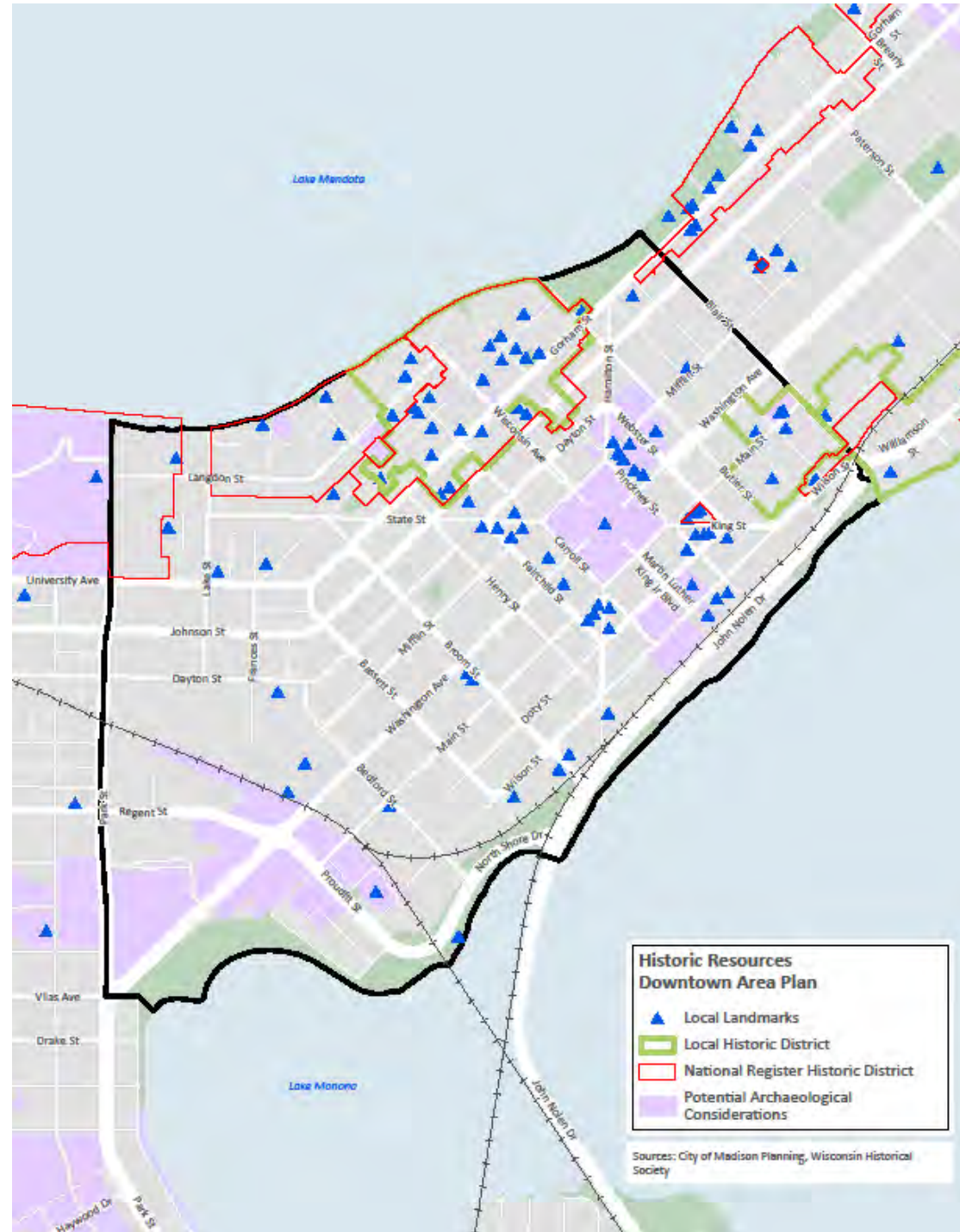
Source: Wisconsin TOPS Lab 2020-2026

*Pedestrian Crossing Level of Traffic Stress (LTS)



Downtown Area Plan Potential & Recent (10-Year) Redevelopment

- Potential Redev. Sites
- New Hotels
- New Institutional
- New Commercial
- New Housing



Emerging Vision & Values

1

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.

2

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.

3

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.

4

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.

5

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.

6

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.



Draft Big Moves

The 10 BIG MOVES



[plans.cityofmadison.com/
evision-downtown-big-
moves](https://plans.cityofmadison.com/evision-downtown-big-moves)

WHAT THESE BIG MOVES ARE

- » Early ideas for how Downtown could evolve
- » Based on community input, planning work, and existing strengths
- » Meant to explore possibilities—not select final projects
- » A starting point for understanding potential directions

WHAT THESE BIG MOVES ARE NOT

- » Final plans or approved projects
- » Funding commitments or construction schedules
- » Fixed priorities or guaranteed outcomes
- » The only ideas being considered for Downtown

1. Come on Down(town)

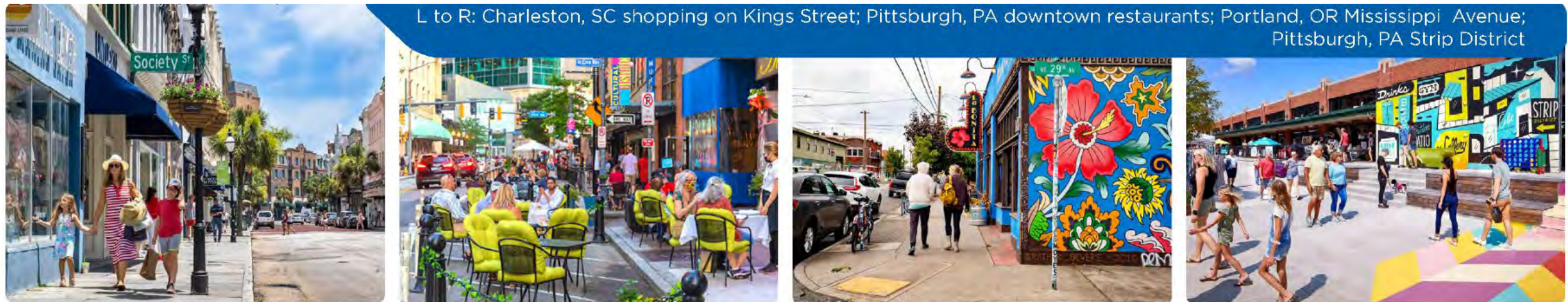
- **Become one of the easiest downtowns to get to, and make downtown enjoyable, safe, and clear to navigate with or without a car.**
 - The goal is a Downtown that is less dependent on any one way of getting around and that feels easier, calmer, safer, and more enjoyable to travel to and around.



L to R: Boulder, CO pedestrian streets; Chattanooga, TN electric shuttle; Vancouver, BC water taxi; Providence, RI waterfront trail linking destinations

2. Curate Unforgettable Districts

- **Cultivate and promote several thriving districts within the Greater Downtown that are memorable, walkable, and well-connected.**
 - As Downtown grows, this is about celebrating unique cultures and offerings in Madison, complementing and serving neighborhoods, avoiding homogeneity, and making different parts of Downtown easier to understand, easier to navigate, and easier to remember.



3. Put the “There” Back in State and Square

- **Make the ground floors along State Street and the Square reflections of the diverse, high quality offerings Madison and Wisconsin have to offer.**
 - As Wisconsin’s capital, these are signature public spaces with the largest collection of ground floor commercial spaces and the opportunity to offer more for a greater diversity of people.



L to R: Boulder, CO Pearl Street Pedestrian Mall; Charleston, SC Kings Street; Indianapolis, IN Massachusetts Avenue; Indianapolis, IN Massachusetts Avenue

4. Reimagine People Spaces and Places

- **Expand and rethink the delivery, ownership, programming, and operations of public spaces and who they serve.**
 - Downtown will need to be more creative in using streets, street ends, parking, plazas, balconies, rooftops, and the lakes to create more places and spaces that are safe, attractive, and accessible to the public.



L to R: San Francisco, CA "Privately Owned Public Open Spaces"; New York, NY "Privately Owned Public Spaces"; San Francisco, CA parklet; Asheville, NC Pack Square Park

5. Feel the Lake Effect

- **Leverage the lakes and lakefronts for access, activation, recreation, and connectivity.**
 - The goal is to make the lakes feel more integral to daily life Downtown, more important to how people experience the city, and a stronger complement to other destinations in Greater Downtown.



L to R: Boston, MA Wharf District Parks; Boston, MA Harborwalk; Tampa, FL Riverwalk; Seattle, WA Overlook Walk

6. Drive the Next Gen Economy

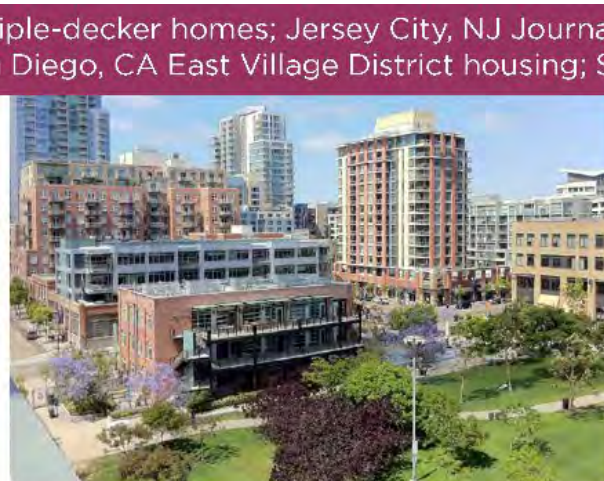
- **Attract investment and growth in existing economic anchors, growing business sectors, and new jobs and businesses.**
 - Downtown can serve as a central gathering hub and support center for the larger regional economy.



L to R: Nashville, TN Entrepreneur Center; Austin, TX Downtown Innovation District by University of Texas; Pittsburgh, PA Carnegie Mellon University Robotics Innovation Center; Pittsburgh, PA Bakery Square mixed-use district

7. Make Downtown a Diverse and Complete Neighborhood

- **Deliver more housing for more people and support housing choices with amenities that serve daily needs.**
 - The goal is a Downtown with more people, more housing choices, and more resident-serving retail and amenities for a broader mix of households.



L to R: Boston, MA triple-decker homes; Jersey City, NJ Journal Square transit-oriented development; San Diego, CA East Village District housing; San Diego, CA townhomes in Little Italy

8. Elevate the Arts, Culture, and Entertainment Scene

- **Establish a sustainable roadmap and set of tools for better connecting, activating, funding, and promoting Madison's great existing events, venues, and cultural and historic resources.**
 - Better showcasing the existing arts, culture, and entertainment scene and better wrapping it into the urban fabric of Downtown can create even more activity, more variety, and more reasons to come Downtown beyond just food and drink.



L to R: Pittsburgh, PA Cultural Trust programming; Columbus, OH Short North Arts District; Knoxville, TN downtown events; Columbus, OH gallery hop



9. Become the Healthiest and Greenest Downtown

- **Promote and support community and environmental health with green infrastructure, development, and recreation.**
 - The goal is a Downtown that feels healthier, more resilient, and more pleasant in everyday life.



L to R: Portland, OR South Park Blocks; Washington D.C. bioswales; Portland, OR green streets; Austin, TX Lady Bird Lake waterfront

10. Infuse Learning, Play, and Discovery

- **Reshape one or more districts in Downtown as a can't miss destination for kids and families.**
 - The goal is to make sure families of all shapes and sizes are better served across many parts of Downtown.



L to R: Vancouver, BC play area in Science World; Halifax, NS waterfront park; Boulder, CO Pearl Street Pedestrian Mall play area; Halifax, NS waterfront hammocks



Preservation Discussion

Local Historic Districts

MADISON GREATER DOWNTOWN

LOCATION

LEGEND

-  Greater Downtown Economic Investment Strategy Boundary
-  Downtown Area Plan Boundary

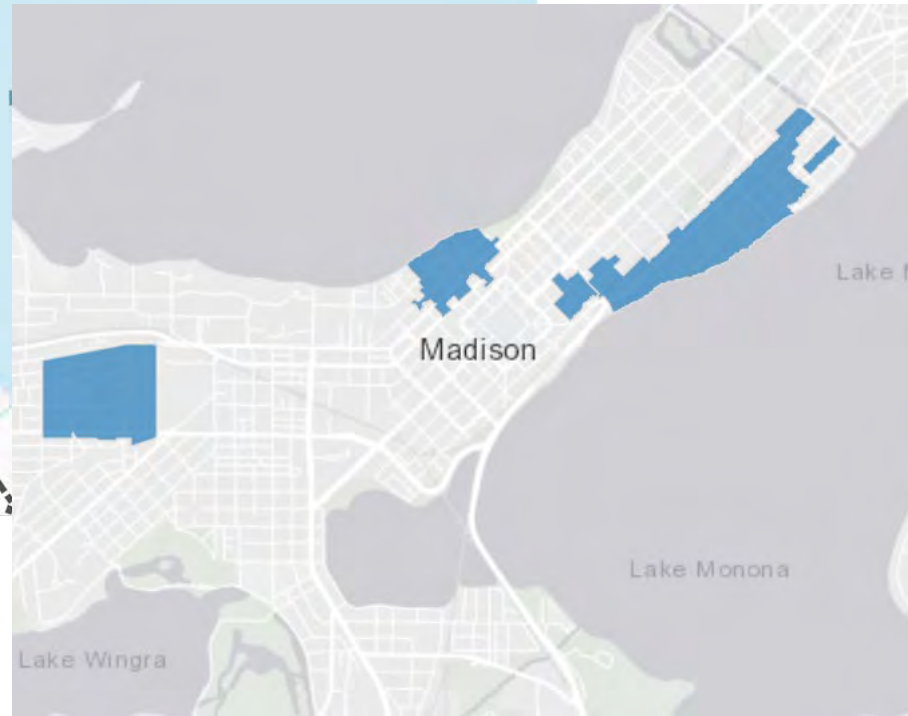


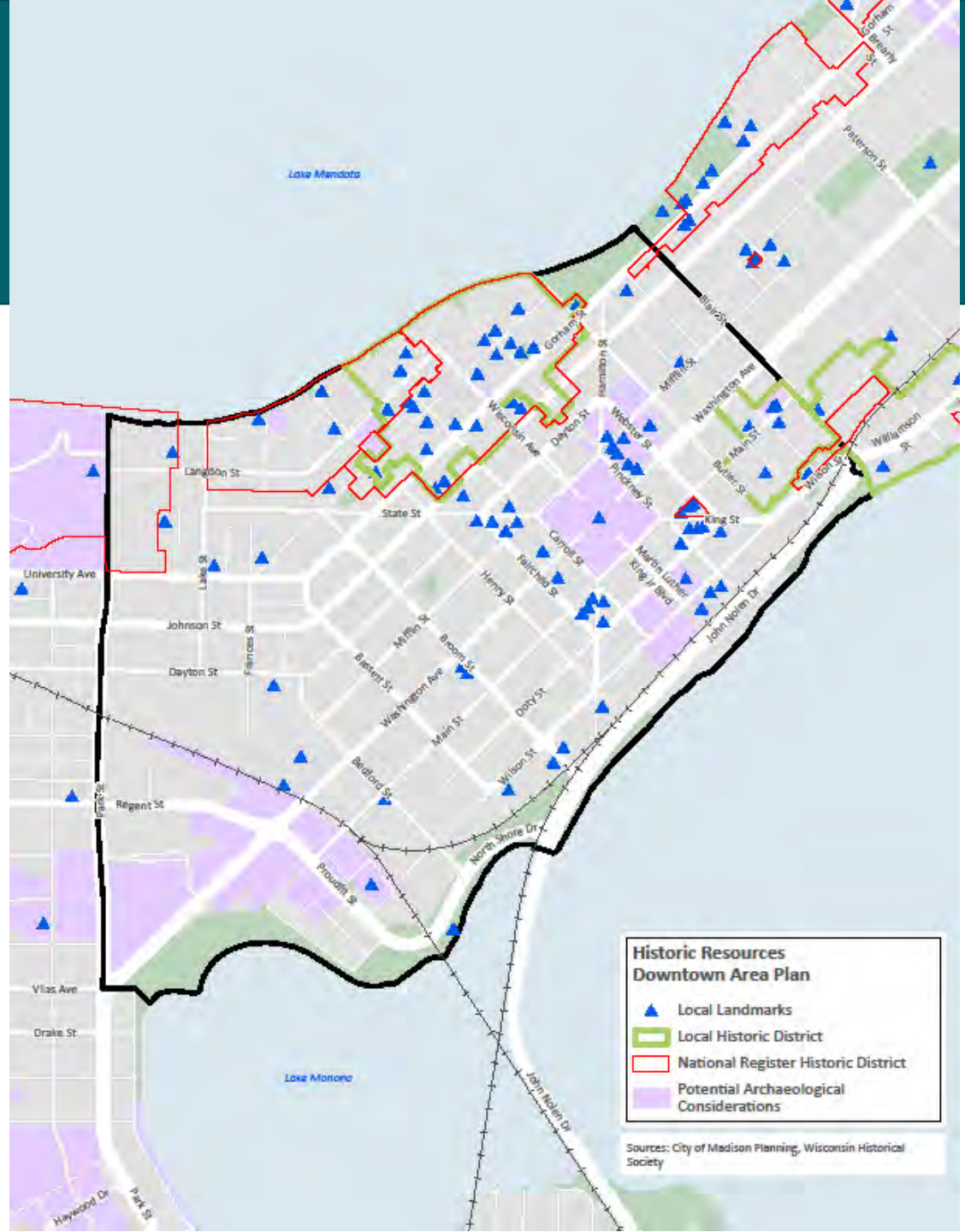
Downtown Area Plan:

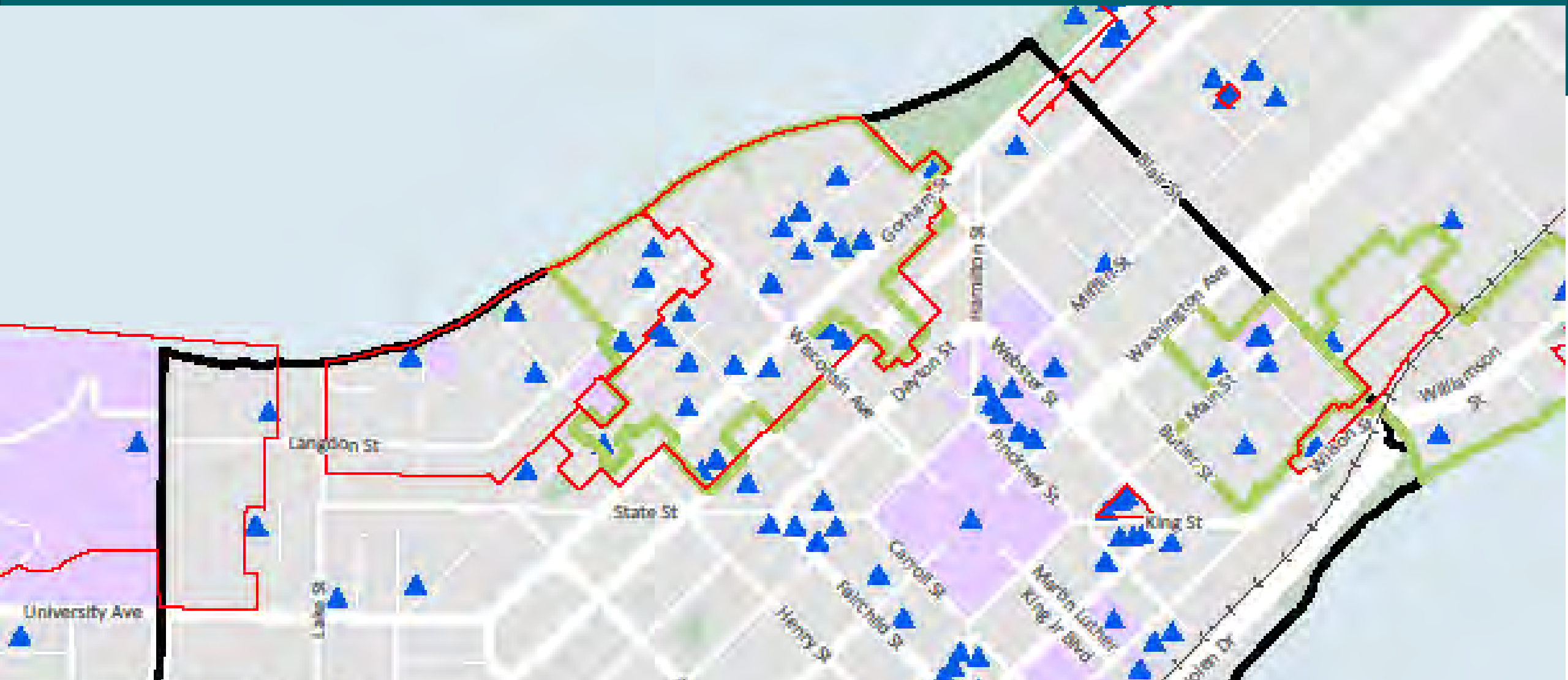
- Mansion Hill
- First Settlement
- Ruby Marie (TLR)

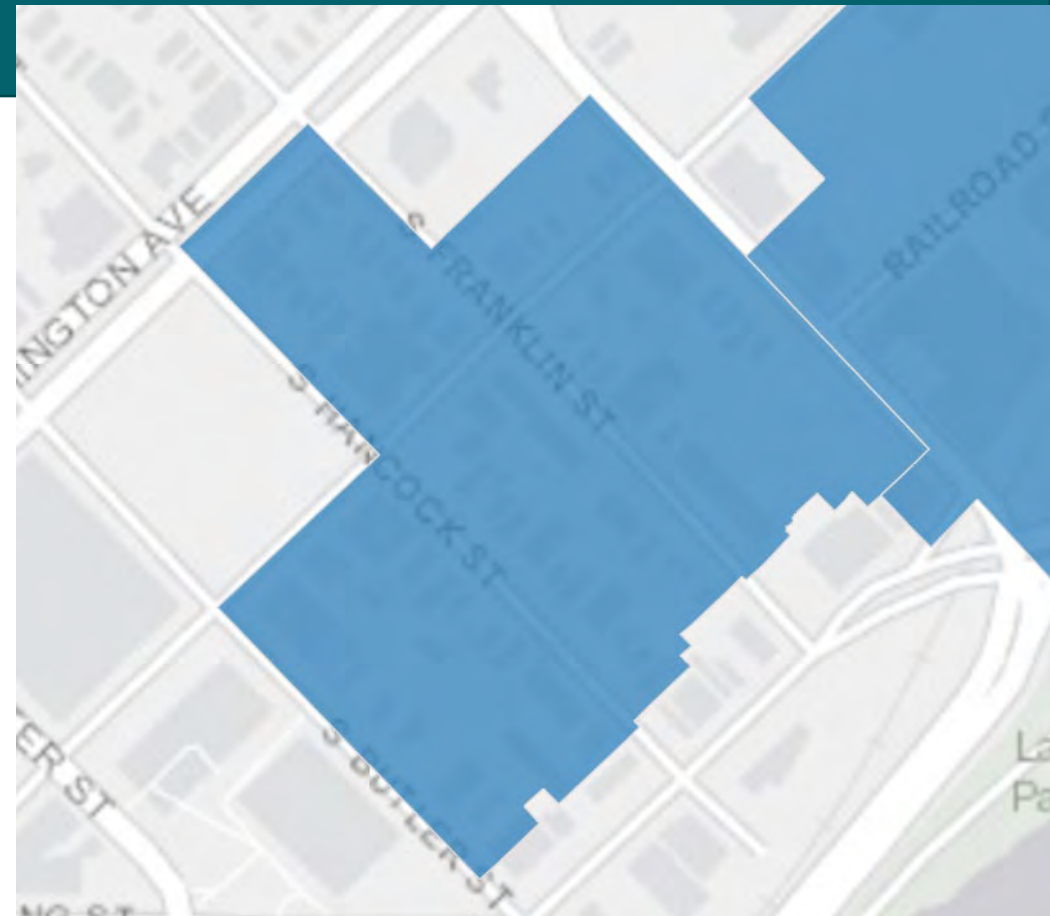
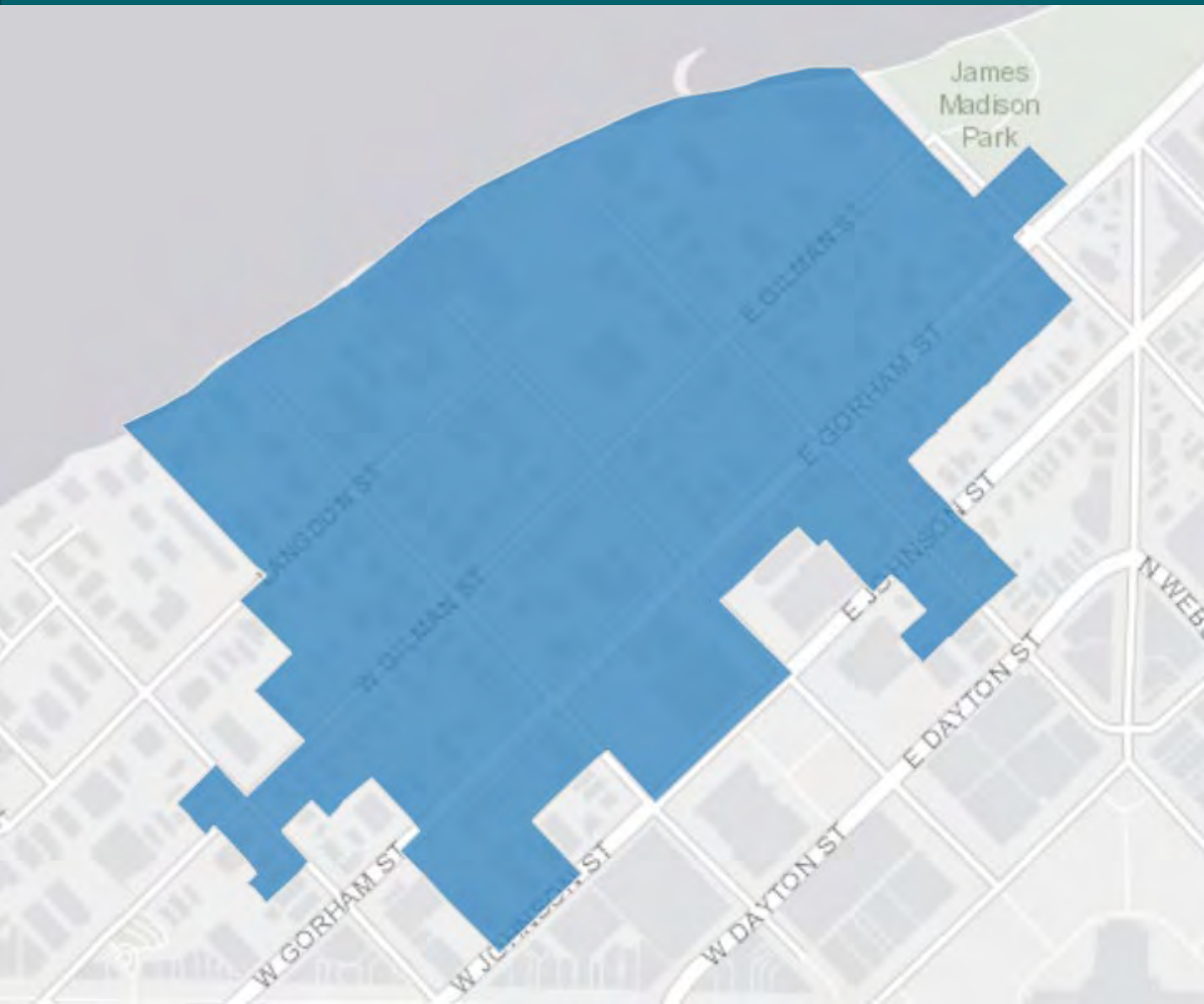
DMI Downtown Strategy:

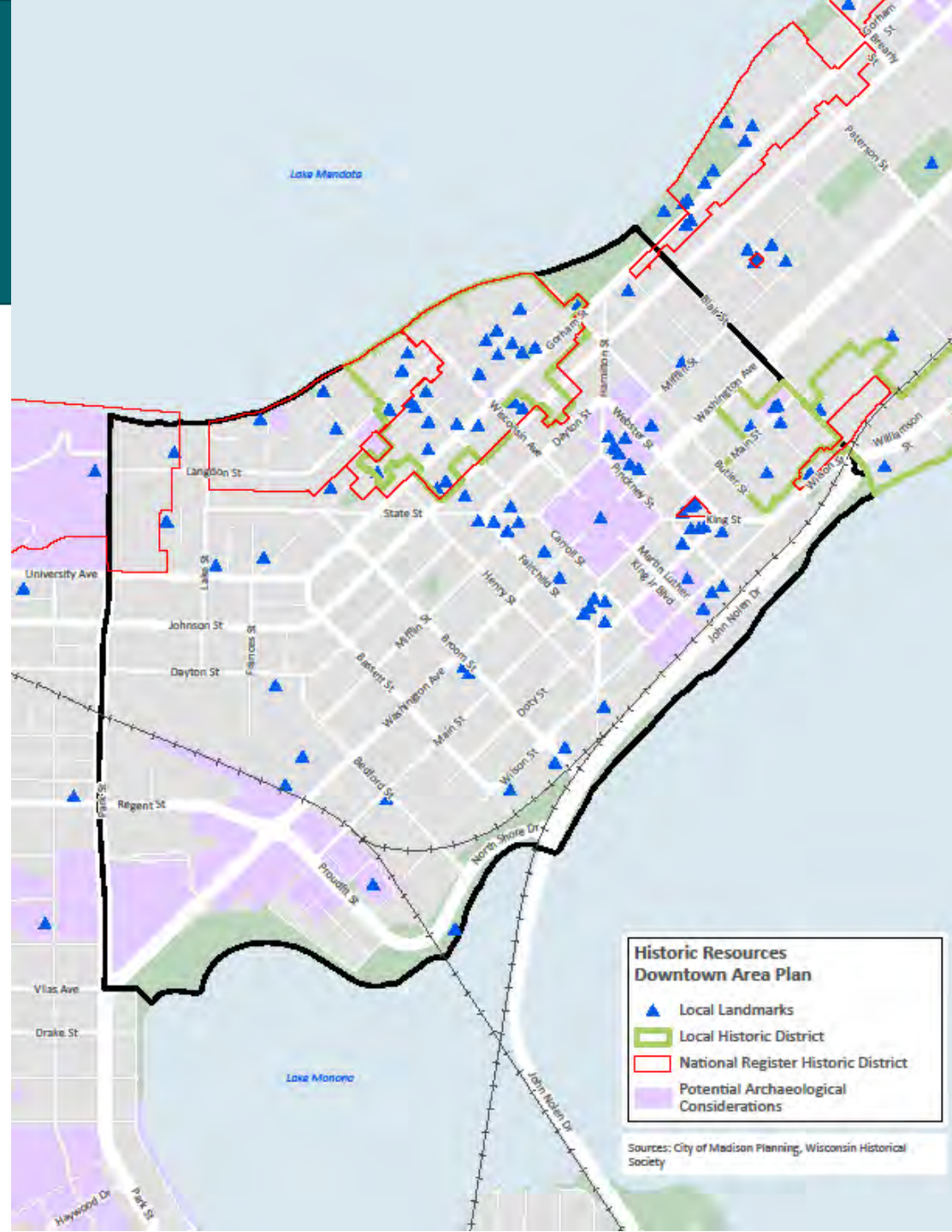
- Borders University Heights
- Mansion Hill
- First Settlement
- Third Lake Ridge
- Marquette Bungalows











Future of Downtown Preservation Discussion

1. Do members of the Commission have policy ideas, projects or other potential recommendations that fall under the draft “big moves”?
2. What role should Historic Preservation play in the future of Downtown Madison?
 - *What do you see as the opportunities, challenges and potential policy guidance to help navigate growth and preservation?*

Future of Downtown Preservation Discussion

3. The previous Downtown Plan recommended considering co-terminus boundaries for Local and National Register Historic Districts.
 - *How does the Commission feel about shrinking/expanding local districts to match National Districts?*
 - *First Settlement – areas of potential change*
 - *Mansion Hill - areas of potential change*
4. Does the Commission have ideas for potential tools, projects, or policies to advance Heritage Tourism and telling place stories?

Information and Updates

Downtown Area Plan

www.cityofmadison.com/downtownplan

Contact:

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City of Madison Planning

downtownplan@cityofmadison.com

