



Envision Downtown

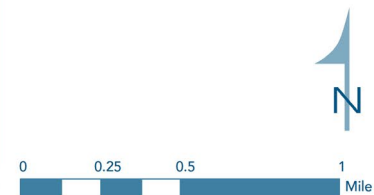
Madison Arts Commission | July 14, 2026



LOCATION

 Greater Downtown
Economic Investment
Strategy Boundary

 Downtown Area Plan
Boundary



DOWNTOWN STRATEGY



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT



DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE

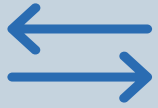


2025

2026

2027

Major Components of Envision 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

Source: Census/ACS

Recent Changes in the Downtown

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

Source: Census/ACS

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 photograph of a modern, multi-story apartment building under construction. The building features light-colored horizontal siding and dark-framed windows. It has multiple levels of balconies with dark metal railings. A concrete pump truck with a long, articulated boom is positioned to the right of the building, pouring concrete into the upper floors. The ground in front of the building is uneven and covered with dirt and some sparse vegetation. A sidewalk runs along the left side of the building. In the background, other buildings and construction cranes are visible under a clear sky.

**...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

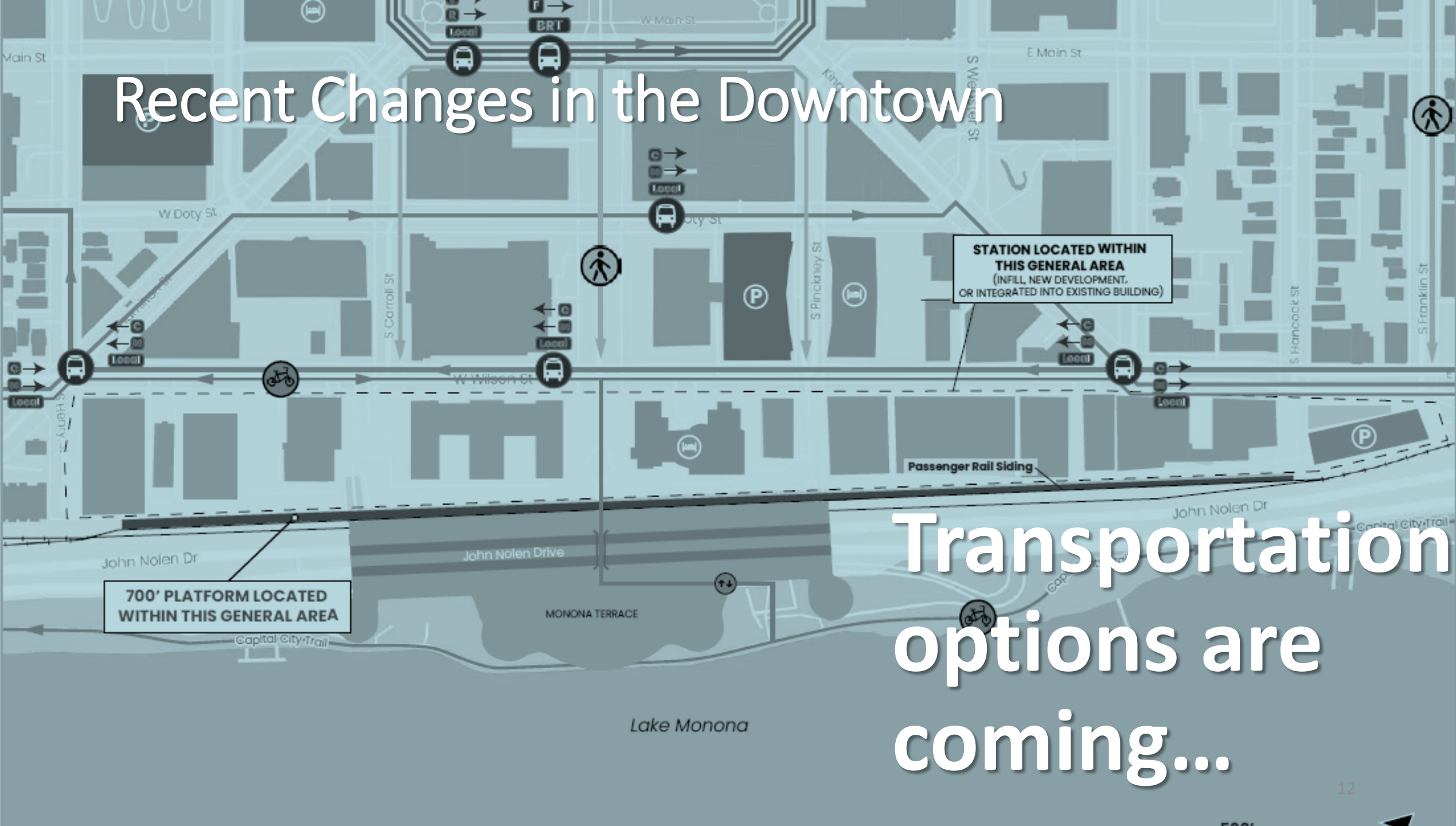
**2020: Covid,
outdoor space
and WFH**

Recent Changes in the Downtown

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

Source: Metro Transit boarding data

Recent Changes in the Downtown



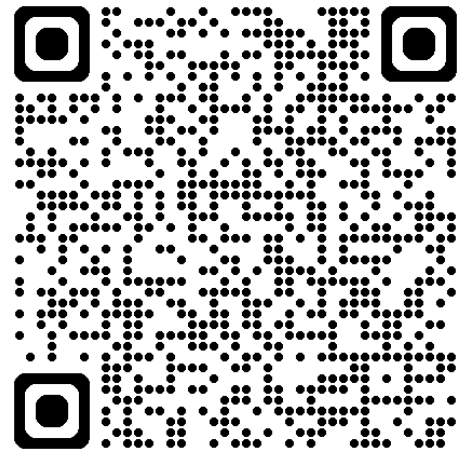
Transportation
options are
coming...

Recent Changes in the Downtown

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



What We've Heard



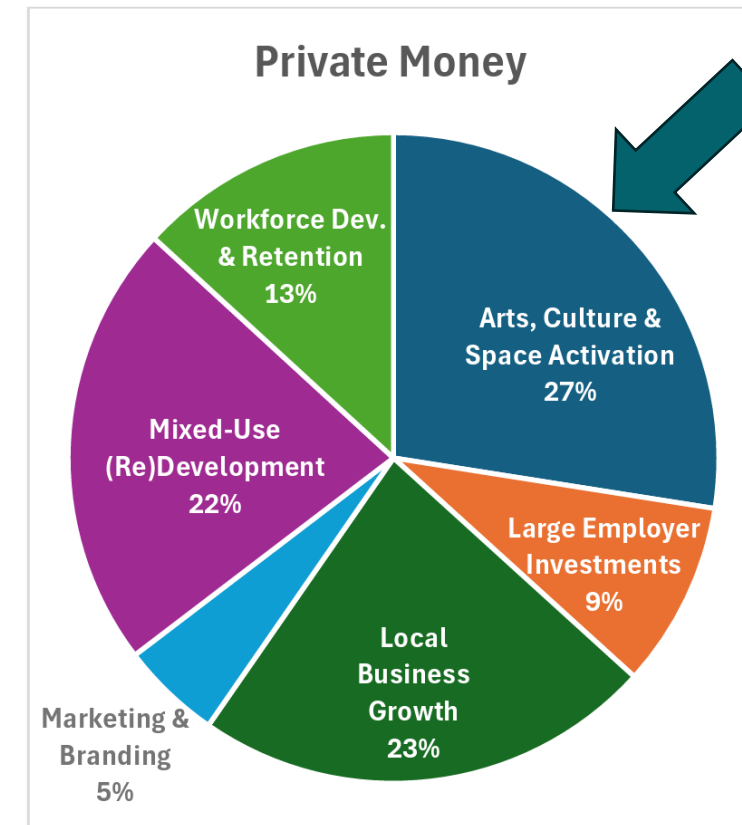
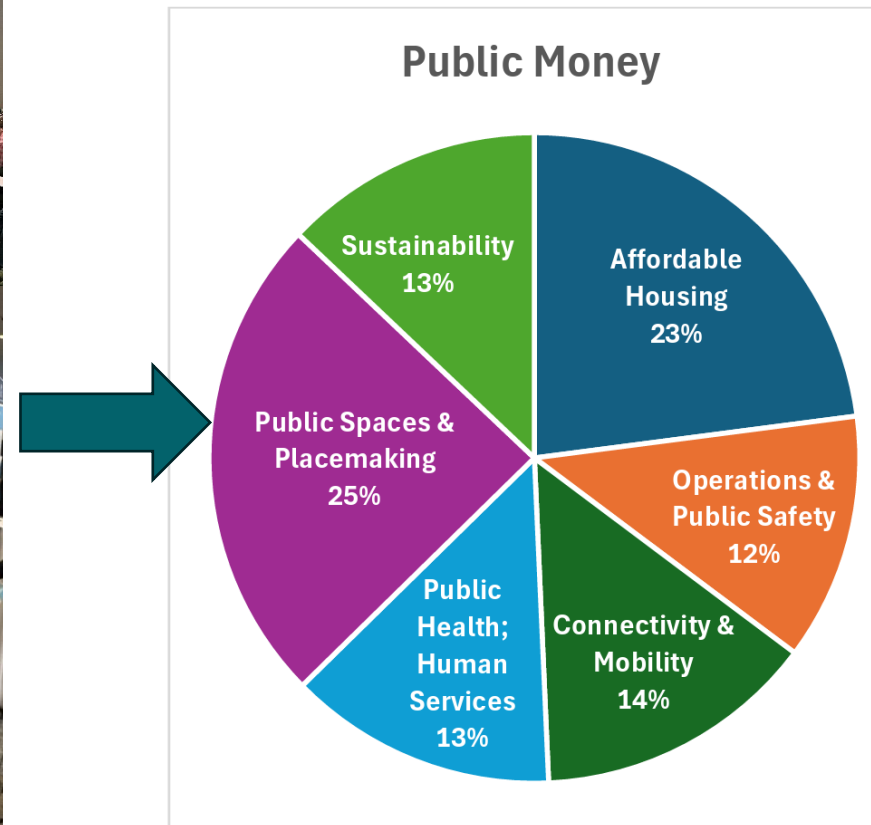
Open House #1

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

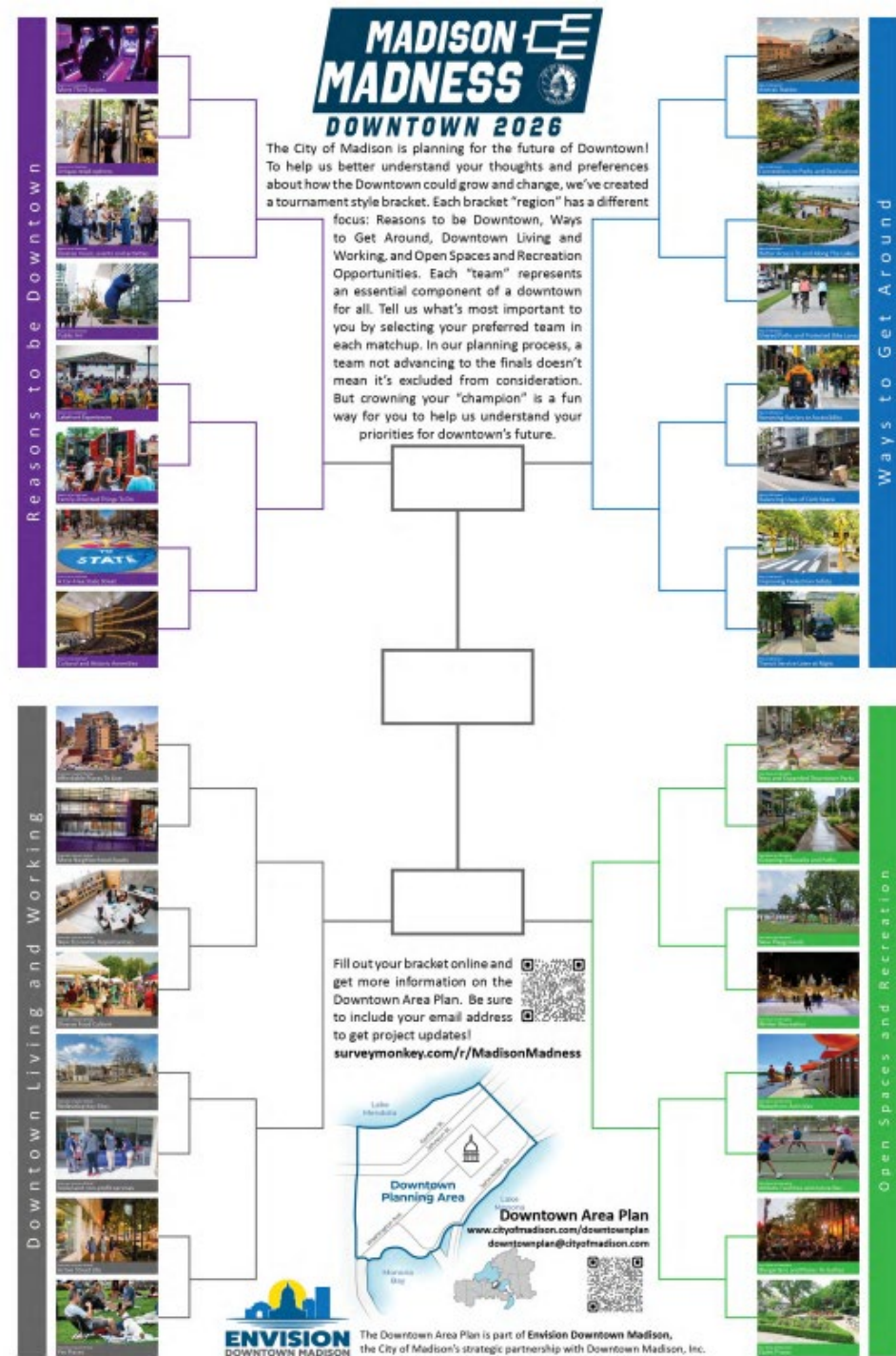
Improvements Needed:

- 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%



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%

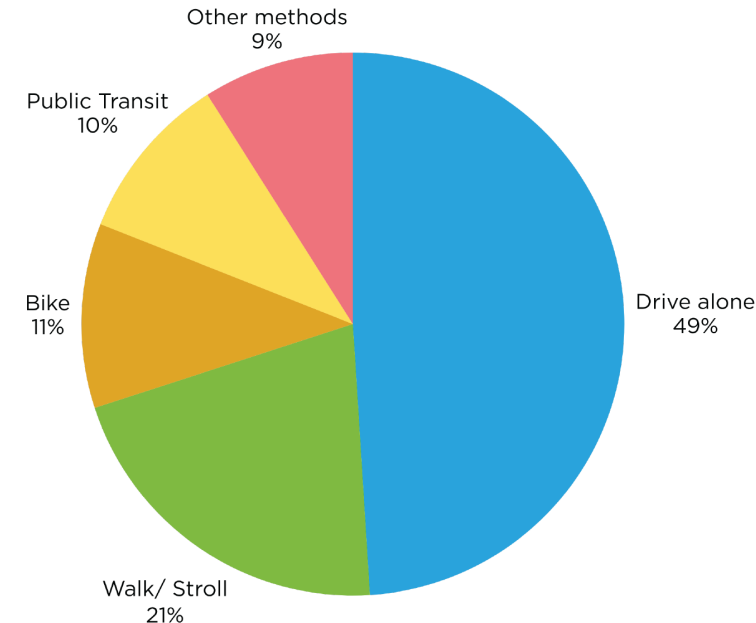
Attending special events like the Market



46%

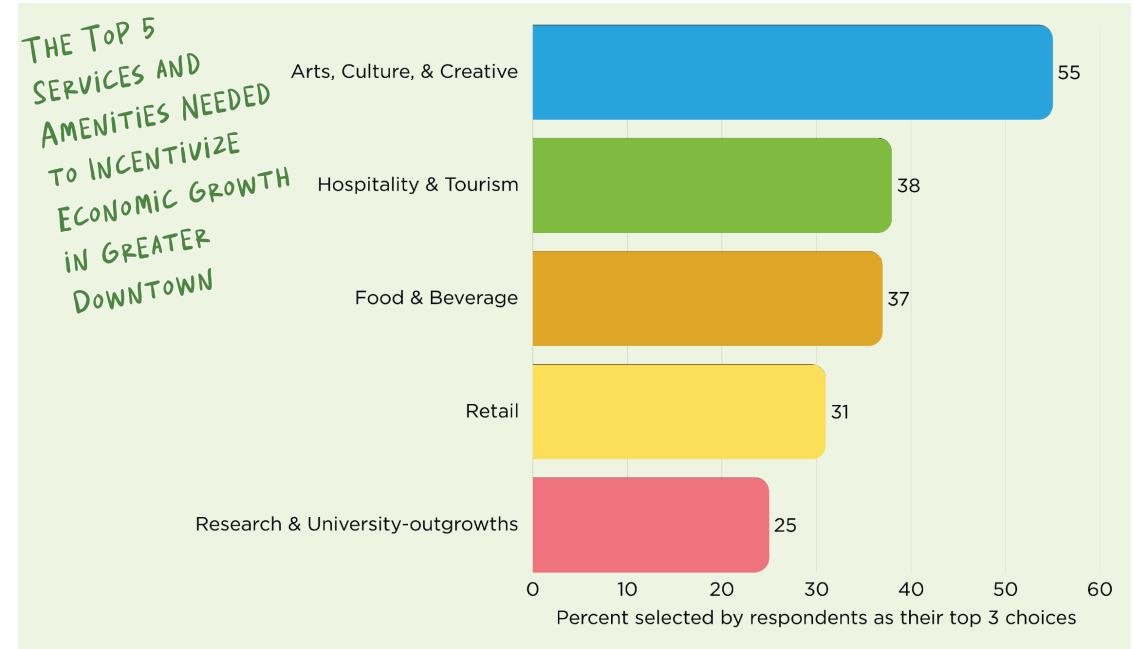
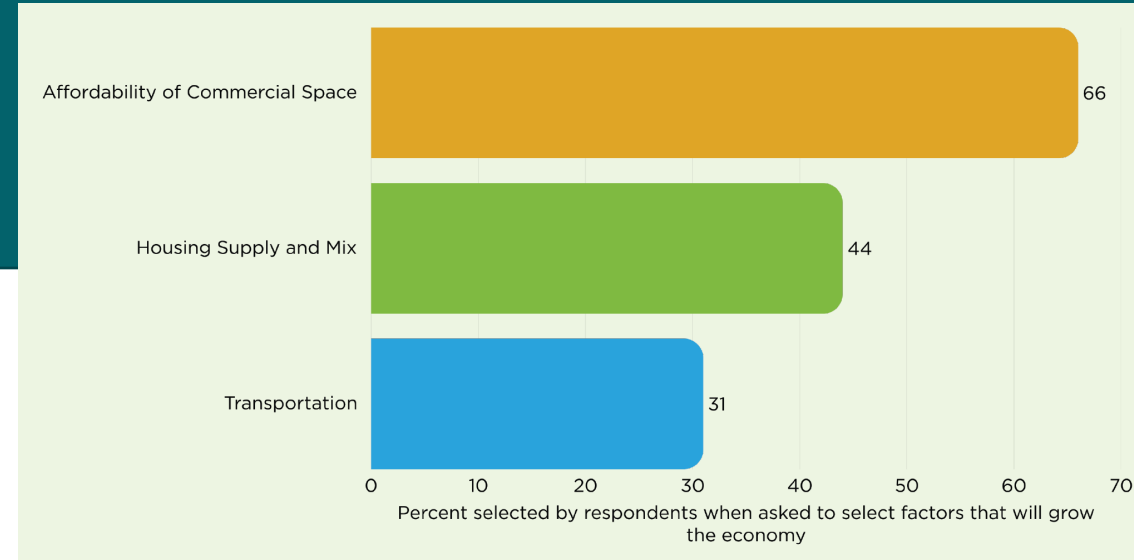
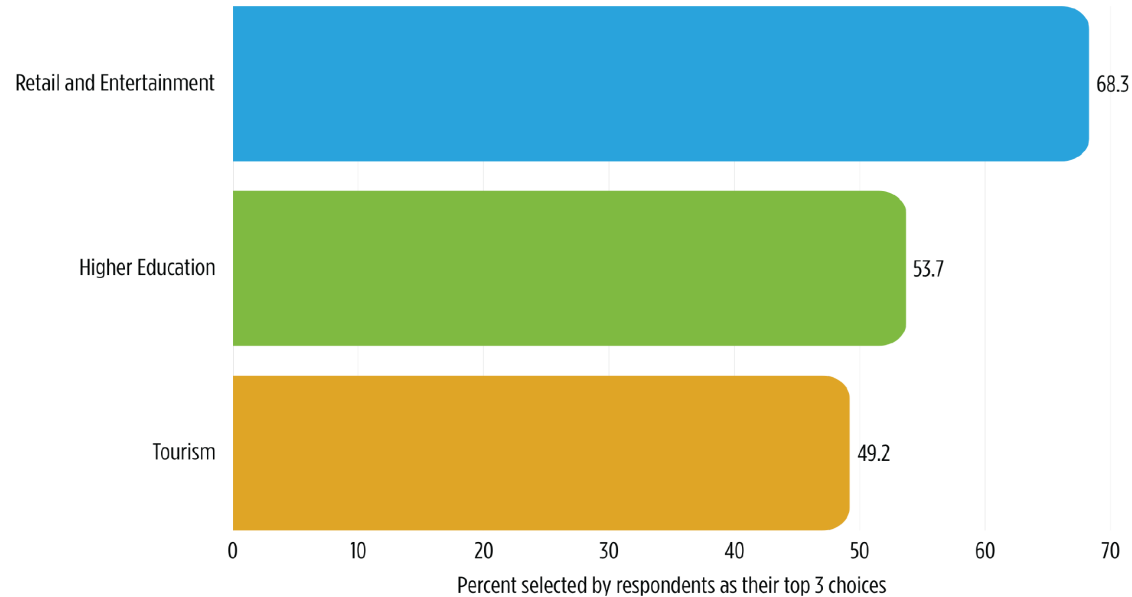
Gathering for social meet-ups

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



Downtown Strategy Surveys + Focus Groups

Top Sectors Perceived as Vital for Growth





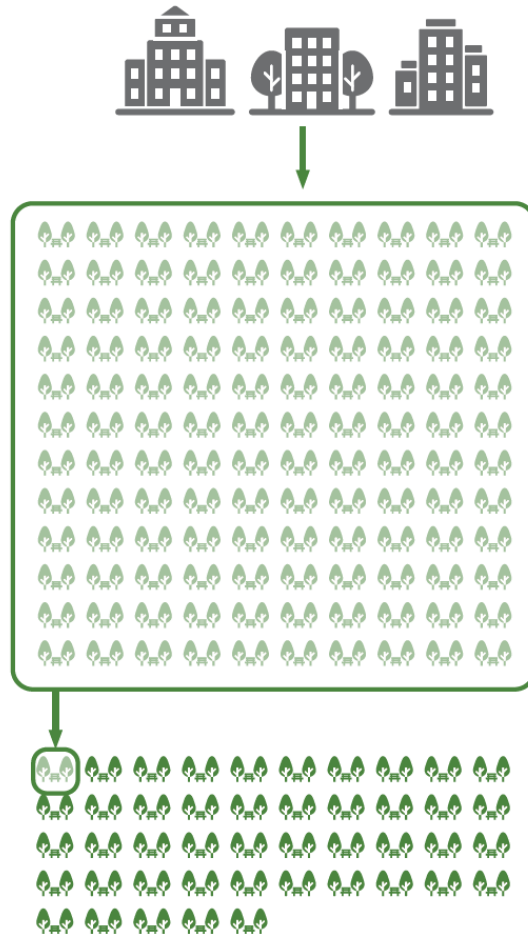
What We've Been Doing

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





Draft Big Moves

The 10 BIG MOVES



plans.cityofmadison.com/envision-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)

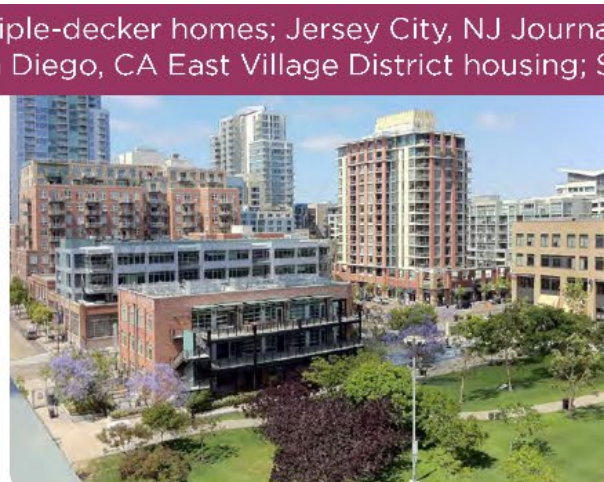
- **Become one of the easiest downtowns to get to, and make downtown enjoyable, safe, and clear to navigate with or without a car.**
 - The goal is a Downtown that is less dependent on any one way of getting around and that feels easier, calmer, safer, and more enjoyable to travel to and around.



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

7. Make Downtown a Diverse and Complete Neighborhood

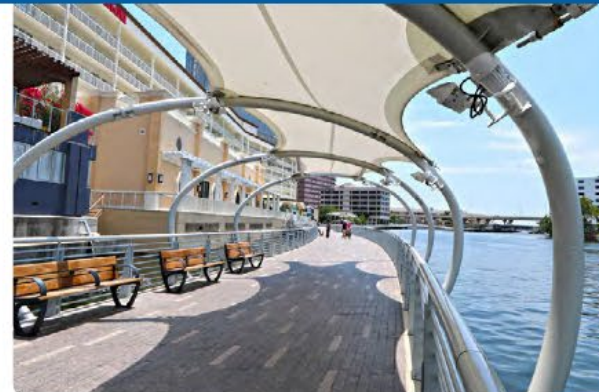
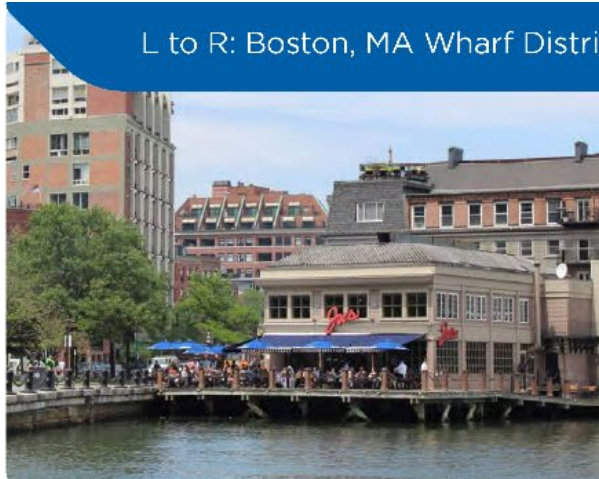
- **Deliver more housing for more people and support housing choices with amenities that serve daily needs.**
 - The goal is a Downtown with more people, more housing choices, and more resident-serving retail and amenities for a broader mix of households.



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

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

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



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.



L to R: Charleston, SC shopping on Kings Street; Pittsburgh, PA downtown restaurants; Portland, OR Mississippi Avenue; Pittsburgh, PA Strip District

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.



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

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.



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.



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

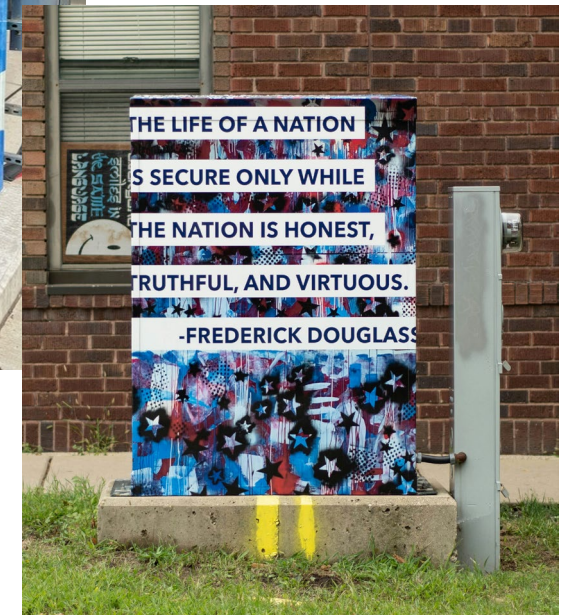
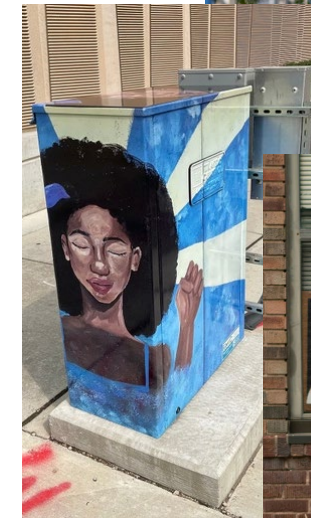
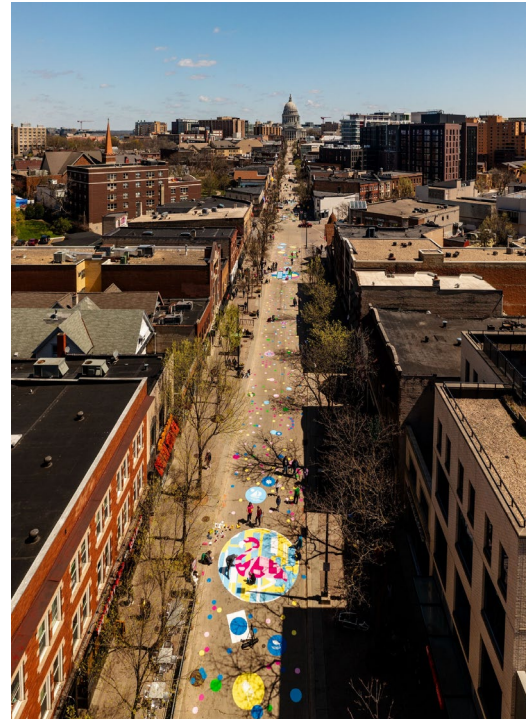




Arts & Culture Discussion

Art since 2012 Downtown Plan

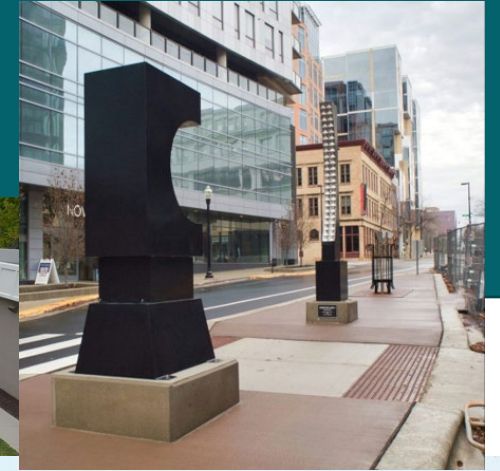
1. Programs:
 - Utility Boxes
2. Grants: Blink Grants/ Arts Grants
3. Projects:
 - State Street Murals / utility boxes
 - Gilman Street Social Practice Art, Temporary Mural / Dragonfly Lights
 - Flock to State Pedestrian Experiment



Art since 2012 Downtown Plan

1. Murals & Street Paintings

- Art Momentum – Wilson Street Garage
- State Street Rainbow Crossing
- Rainbow over Zebra Mountain



2. Sculpture

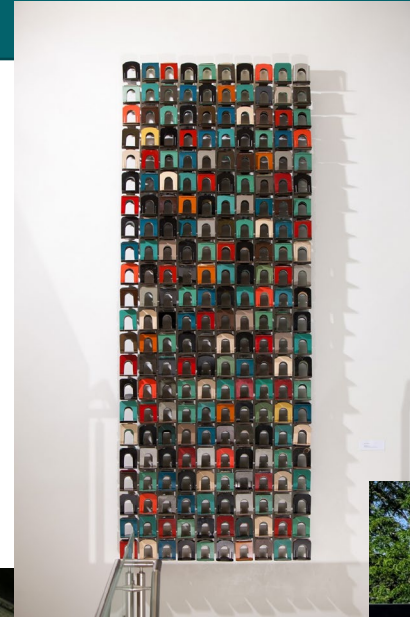
- Both/And Tolerance/Innovation, RDG - Confluence
- Updraft, Michale Burns – Brittingham
- State Screen, William Turnbull - State Street
- Roads Diverge – Rotary Plaza, MCM
- Greeting Arc I & II, Sunghee Min - S Pinckney



Art since 2012 Downtown Plan

1. City Facilities:

- Senior Center Mural, Doors
- Public Library Art
- MMB, CCB Interiors



Art since 2012 Downtown Plan

1. Coming Soon

1. State Street Garage / Hawthorne Court
2. Lakeway
3. Other % for Arts

Future of Downtown Arts Analysis

What are the Strengths of Downtown Arts & Culture?

What are the Weaknesses?

What are the Opportunities that we are missing?

What are the Threats to having successful Downtown Arts?

Future of Downtown Arts 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 Arts & Culture play in the future of Downtown Madison?
 - *What do you see as the opportunities, challenges and potential policy guidance to help navigate support of the arts?*

Future of Downtown Arts Discussion

3. What are the Commission's priorities for downtown?
 3. Temporary events, grants, ephemeral art
 4. Performing Arts
 5. Permanent Public Art Collection
 6. Murals, sculptures, or other
4. Does the Commission have ideas for potential tools, projects, or policies to advance Arts Tourism and telling place stories?
5. What hasn't happened since the last downtown plan that is still relevant?

Next Steps

3. October 1 Public Meeting

- City will Focus on Land Use & Transportation Initial Ideas
- DMI – Economic Strategy will present their draft report findings and recommendations

4. October/November

- City will start to revise Land Use / Transportation
- City will start focusing on other elements of Comprehensive Plan
- Arts & Culture Workshop to be scheduled for October.
 - Have been successful parts of past area planning efforts

Information and Updates

Downtown Area Plan

www.cityofmadison.com/downtownplan

Contact:

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City of Madison Planning

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