



**INSPIRED LEADERS
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**IDA
ADVISORY
SERVICES**

PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

DURHAM, NC
FEBRUARY 2023

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Panelists

Davon Barbour, *President & CEO*
Downtown Development District of New Orleans
New Orleans, LA

In December 2021, Davon Barbour was appointed President & CEO of the Downtown Development District for the City of New Orleans. He is an enthusiastic urban advocate, possessing more than twenty years of progressive leadership in inclusive economic and community development. His areas of expertise include, public/private partnerships, business attraction, retail revitalization, and community development. Davon currently serves on the Board of Trustees of ICSC. He has worked for private sector, public sector, and non-profit organizations revitalizing urban communities across the nation in cities such as Baltimore, Miami, Orlando, and Los Angeles. Additionally, he has authored works for IDA, ICSC and ULI.

Kris Larson, *AICP, President and CEO*
Central Houston, Inc.
Houston, TX

Kris is the President & CEO of Central Houston, Inc. He's held positions on the public and private sides of community leadership and served as the President & CEO for the downtown organizations in Raleigh, NC, and Grand Rapids, MI, where he led TIF and special-assessment districts. He earned an MPA from NC State University, was a Daniel Rose Fellow through the Rose Center for Public Leadership, and was a Vice Chair of the IDA's Executive Committee. He currently serves as the Chair-elect of the Board of Directors of the International Downtown Association, where he has been has awarded four Pinnacle Awards to his projects in the fields and Leadership, Planning, Advocacy, and Marketing.

Tim Tompkins, *Principal*
SharedCitySharedSpace
New York, NY

Tim Tompkins works to understand and improve cities through SharedCitySharedSpace, which explores how the interaction of ideas, institutions, individuals and culture can contribute to prosperous and vibrant cities. He teaches at New York University and led the Times Square Alliance from 2002-2020, transforming Times Square's public spaces and founding Times Square Arts.

He chaired the International Downtown Association and founded Partnerships for Parks after working for NYC's Economic Development Corporation and serving briefly as the Nationals Editor of the Mexico City News. He has given keynote speeches about urban transformation in many cities, including Stockholm, London, Bilbao, Halifax, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, New Delhi, Barcelona, Tokyo and Toronto. He has degrees from Yale and Wharton and has lived in New York, Paris and Mexico City.

David Downey, *President and CEO*
International Downtown Association
Washington, DC

As President and Chief Executive Officer, David is responsible for the overall strategic positioning of IDA as a world leader and champion for vital and livable urban centers. Prior to joining IDA, David served as the Managing Director for the American Institute of Architects' Urban Design Center and as Executive Director for the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association. David has been a city advocate since the 1980s having received his degree in Architecture and Design with a focus on Urban Design. He speaks frequently throughout North America and has delivered talks in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, El Salvador and Japan. David has served on numerous

not for profit boards over his career including recently for the Golden Triangle Business Improvement District in Washington, DC and the Responsible Hospitality Institute in California. David is currently on the Mobility Innovation District Advisory Board in Southwest Washington, DC.

Clay Daneker, *Research Manager*
International Downtown Association
Washington, DC

Clay joined the IDA team in February of 2022 and supports the in-house research efforts of IDA on various projects supporting the place management industry, including *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* and the IDA Salary Survey. Before joining IDA, Clay was Senior Associate with the Urban Land Institute's Center for Real Estate Economics, and prior to that was a Research Associate with CoStar Group, where he got his start in the real estate field. Clay has a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy from St. Mary's College of Maryland and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Georgetown University.

IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the wellbeing of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit downtown.org.

Executive Summary

The International Downtown Association Advisory Panel team had the distinct honor of spending approximately 48 hours in Durham, engaging with City and County government representatives, public and private stakeholders, property and small business owners, the arts and cultural community, and residents. Downtown Durham is growing at a remarkable rate that many peer communities would envy but finds itself at a critical juncture because of this sustained, rapid growth. The panel was most impressed by the striking unanimity of opinion from virtually every walk of life participating in the process as the panel sought to determine the key challenges which need to be addressed in the new downtown plan.

Listed below and further discussed in the report are physical, social, and cultural challenges the 2035 Downtown Blueprint must address for downtown Durham to continue to grow while regenerating its original, unique and authentic character. The blueprint must resolve major legacy projects such as the 147 freeway and the Loop along with other challenges both new and old so Durham is poised to respond quickly when timing and resources align.

The IDA panel intentionally bookended Durham's challenges with the two major concepts of a unified vision and coordinated implementation. Without both, the 2035 Blueprint has little hope of realizing the authentic downtown Durham the community so desperately seeks.

The first challenge was overwhelmingly obvious. Durham needs a coordinated, coherent, and cohesive community vision for the future. Consulting proposals solicited for the 2035 Downtown Blueprint must focus on how the planning process will yield a community-driven vision that is universally acceptable. Fortunately, the community is often of like mind in this vision. A uniquely deep and integrated community engagement approach will be needed to make visible and define these common aspirations that already exist across all interest groups and create discourse where there are now often closed-off and protective silos.

Key to success in bringing this vision to fruition will be an agreed upon system of coordinated leadership, cooperation, and accountability among all partner agencies and stakeholders. No one entity is poised to singularly lead the plan implementation, nor is any one entity independently strong enough to affect change alone. Without renewed and coordinated leadership, Durham will remain on its current trajectory which is directed by the existing status quo of by-right regulations. Downtown Durham Inc. (DDI) can certainly be the steward of the long-term downtown vision, as well as acting as a champion in advocating the final plan outcomes, but it cannot execute the plan alone. Each agency and community stakeholder must remain an active partner and embrace the Blueprint as an ongoing process, aligning their efforts to collectively achieve the plan goals.

Challenges:

- 1. There is a lack of a coordinated, coherent, and cohesive community vision for downtown.**
Despite remarkable consensus among varied constituencies about the challenges downtown faces from two decades of growth and change, the key government, civic and private players need to step back and collectively develop a comprehensive action plan for the next decade.
- 2. The public realm in downtown is increasingly perceived as unsafe**
The feeling by some that anti-social behaviors are on the rise in public spaces, and an inconsistent or unwelcoming pedestrian environment deter people from going downtown or from exploring multiple areas in a single visit, which negatively affects the vibrancy of downtown.
- 3. Downtown Durham is considered by some to be less welcoming to people of color, to families, and to those with low to moderate economic means.**
As downtown has grown, that growth has largely catered to young, educated professionals. This has led to the perception by some that people of color, people of modest means, and families are no longer welcome downtown.

4. The area is characterized as disconnected both within downtown and to nearby neighborhoods, and from citywide assets and other institutions.

Poor transit policies in the past – from destructive highways that profoundly divide the city to neglect of walkable networks within the city – have severed not only physical but also cultural and community links between downtown and the rest of town.

5. Downtown Durham’s unique assets and authenticity are in jeopardy.

Independent restaurants and retailers, including Black-owned businesses; its thriving, diverse and home-grown arts scene; and its reputation for one-of-a-kind architecture are all threatened by rising costs and the absence of governmental strategies to protect downtown’s distinctive qualities.

6. Durham is at risk of not being inclusive, accessible, and affordable to all.

Durham’s remarkable success – which grew from its diversity, grit, quirkiness, and distinctiveness – is creating market pressures that threaten those same qualities. Left unchecked, these forces may cause Durham to lose its inclusivity and accessibility.

7. Without leadership, coordination, and accountability, the community’s vision won’t be realized.

Devising a coherent, consensus-driven action plan to address these challenges will not be enough; systems for accountability and collective action must be built into the plan to ensure that all the relevant players work together to make sure markers become milestones and words become actions.

Background on Durham

Durham is one of three points on the Research Triangle, a region in central North Carolina also anchored by Raleigh and Chapel Hill. Each of these cities is home to a major research university, Durham itself being home to Duke University, North Carolina Central University (NCCU) and Durham Technical Community College. Durham is also close to other major employment centers, such as the Research Triangle Park, a 7,000 acre facility which houses more than 300 companies and employs over 60,000, and which gives the Research Triangle region its name.¹

Durham, and particularly downtown, have enjoyed accelerating revitalization and growth for the past several decades as the entire Research Triangle region has exploded. In light of this growth, not just DDI but also Durham City, Durham County, and the overall region are all exploring new and renewed plans to help direct, manage, and continue this growth and guide their respective jurisdictions into the future.

In 2005, the time of Durham's last comprehensive plan, Durham County had approximately 155,000 total jobs² and 242,000³ residents. Since then, Durham County has grown by approximately 49,000 jobs and 57,000 residents. This reflects a county-wide growth of about 32% in jobs and 24% in population in less than two decades. Projections for the next decade estimate that both jobs and residential population will continue to grow, with an additional 19,000 jobs and 43,000 residents expected in Durham County.⁴

Downtown is at the heart of Durham's tremendous growth. IDA's 2018 *Value of US Downtowns and Center Cities* report on Durham found that employment in downtown was growing at a rate five times faster than the city overall, and more than 6 times faster than the region. Central Durham's population was found to be growing at a rate almost twice as fast as the city, and more than twice as fast as the region. A large portion of this growth was driven by a rapidly expanding cohort of 18–34-year-olds, reflecting the emergence of an increasingly prominent population of young professionals.

Prior Downtown Plans

Downtown Durham has published a series of previous downtown master plans, once every 7-10 years since the first plan was published in 2000. These plans serve as both a helpful narrative mechanism to understand the trajectory of downtown Durham's growth, and as an aid for understanding key recurring issues.

At the time of the 2000 plan, downtown's goals centered on establishing a pivotal center of activity within the city and region, and growing a tapestry of mixed uses that would fan the sparks of growth. Certain pain points downtown which stakeholders expressed to IDA in focus groups in 2023 were already obvious as early as the 2000 plan, such as the need to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and the importance of examining the relationship of transportation infrastructure such as the Loop to downtown.

The 2007 Downtown Durham Master Plan was a review and update of the original plan. By this point in time, the sparks of growth the 2000 plan had hoped to kindle had become a clear reality, and the first stages of downtown Durham's rapid growth had begun. The major goals of this plan included restatements or reiterations of goals from the 2000 plan, such as creating a downtown that was the centerpiece of the city, further residential in-fill development, improving connectivity and infrastructure to adjacent neighborhoods. It also included new goals of enhancing the capacity of downtown organizations and expanding recreation opportunities and open space downtown.

The 2017 Downtown Master Plan was the final update to the 2000 plan. During the period between the 2007 and 2017 efforts, downtown Durham had continued to experience rapid growth across all major sectors, and the area had matured into a nationally recognized real estate market. With this growth came the need for the downtown plans to transition from being primarily visioning documents to establishing frameworks by which to act on a

¹ "Our Community." . <https://www.rtp.org/our-community/>.

² LEHD OnTheMap

³ US Census Bureau American Communities Survey

⁴ Joint City-County Planning Committee, (JCCPC). *Durham Comprehensive Plan Frequently Asked Questions*.

common agenda. The 2017 plan identified four key themes: Connectivity, Logistics, Diversity, and Design. These themes, along with many elements from the earlier plans, still resonate today with Durhamites and are clearly noticeable in both survey results and focus group conversations.

Other Concurrent Plans

There are multiple other planning efforts currently underway in and around Durham today. They include a new comprehensive plan led by the city-county planning office, a cultural roadmap, the design of the Durham rail trail, both regional and county transportation plans, and a regional rail plan. These other plans will inevitably impact downtown and interact with the future downtown Durham plan. With many other planning processes occurring concurrently, though not in a coordinated manner, there is a risk of a multitude public engagement processes overly fatiguing local participants. Care will be needed to ensure the community understands the scope of the downtown planning process and how DDI intends to coordinate with the other planning efforts.

IDA's Process

Pre-visit survey

Prior to IDA's visit to Durham, a survey was conducted to help gauge public perceptions of downtown and issue importance. This was done with the aim of guiding and enhancing the on-site focus group conversations and informing the panelists of key topics rather than providing definitive or all-encompassing information. It was not intended that this survey be a statistically valid measurement nor the primary public input to the actual planning process that will be initiated later in 2023.

The survey was open for a period of one week, from January 23rd to 29th. It was published in both English and Spanish and promoted through DDI's various social media and email channels to both downtown stakeholder groups and the general public. In total, the survey received 581 responses. Though this methodology suited IDA's need for timely feedback facilitated by a trusted local partner, there is an inherent weakness to the sample of this approach, in that it only reached individuals already connected to DDI, and by extension connected to downtown.

90% of respondents to the survey reported going downtown at least once a month, and these respondents provide valuable insight into the challenges facing downtown. However, this approach did not readily capture those who may not choose to go downtown regularly. In the survey, 22% of respondents said they did not feel downtown was welcoming and representative of all in Durham. Why some in Durham's Black and Hispanic communities may not choose to go downtown or feel welcome downtown is a relevant topic which was discussed often in focus group conversations and will need to be explored further in a more in-depth outreach effort.

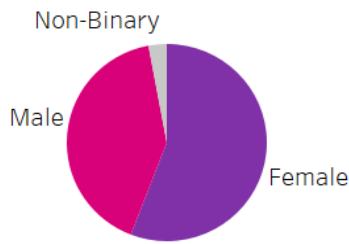
Respondent Profile

The survey's respondents were significantly less diverse than the region overall, 73% of survey respondents reported being White, compared to 54.5% of Durham County. Only 17% of the survey respondents were Black or Hispanic, compared with 49.7% in Durham County. The respondents also tended to be well off financially, with almost half of respondents reporting a household income over \$150,000. The median household income in Durham County by contrast is \$67,000, about on par with the U.S. median.⁵ This illustrates the need for any engagement process for the creation of the new plan to actively engage minority communities in Durham.

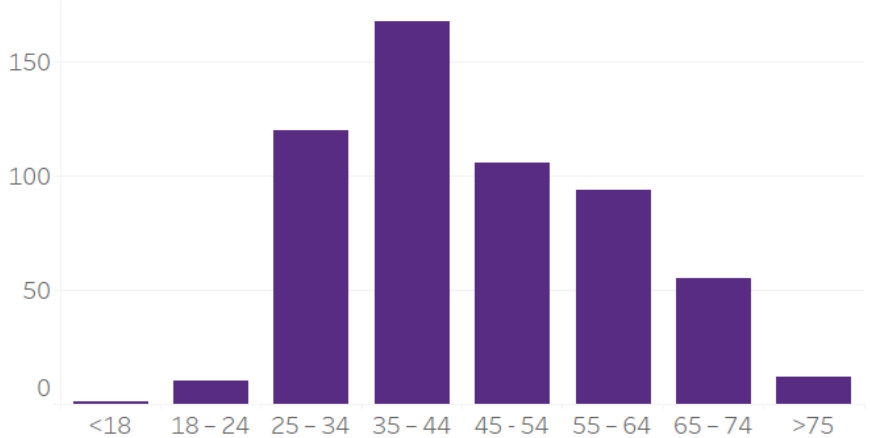
However, the survey takers, who are generally going downtown frequently, had a high level of satisfaction with downtown Durham. When asked about their satisfaction with the overall downtown Durham experience, 89% of respondents reported being either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied." Less than 2% of respondents answered, "very dissatisfied."

⁵US Census Bureau. "QuickFacts Durham County, North Carolina." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/durhamcountynorthcarolina>.

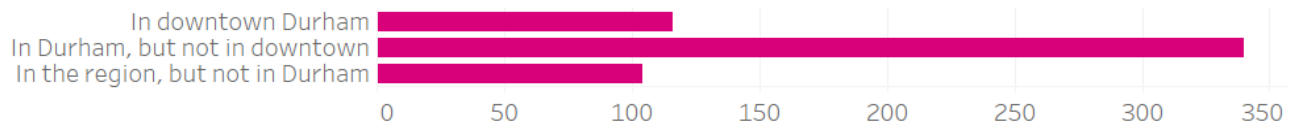
Respondent Gender



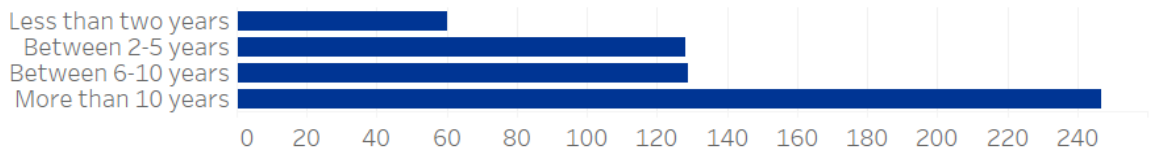
Respondent Age



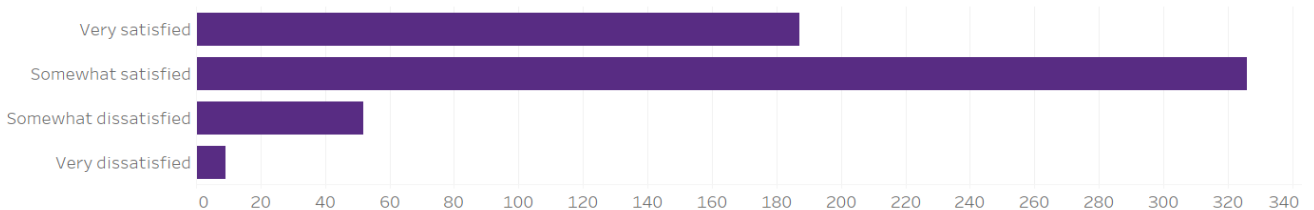
Respondent Residence



How Long They've Lived There

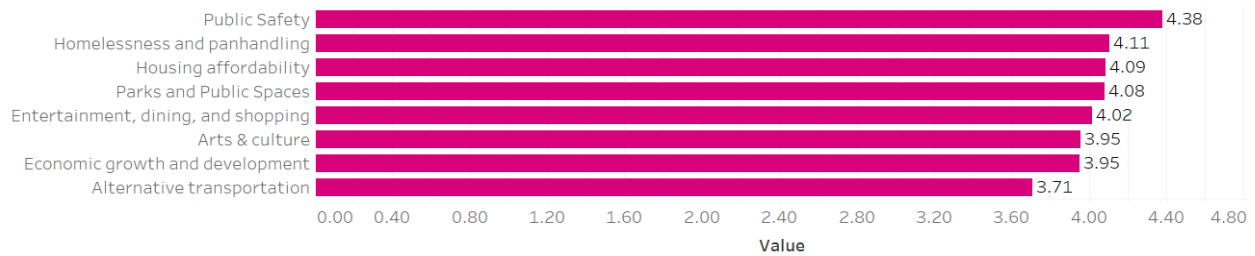


How satisfied are you with downtown?



Respondents were also asked which issues downtown were most important to downtown on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most important. By far the top response was Public Safety, with a score of 4.37 out of 5. Following that were "Addressing homelessness and panhandling" at 4.10, and "Housing affordability" at 4.08. However, these latter two responses were far closer to the mean issue importance score of 3.94. The only issue which was rated significantly lower in importance than the others was "Traditional transportation (cars/parking)" at 3.22 out of 5.

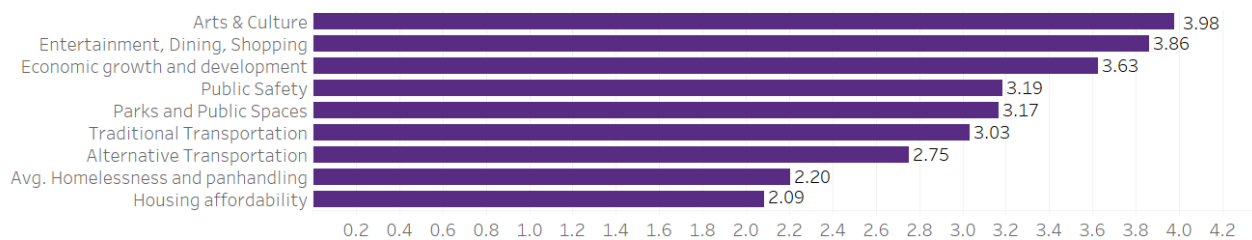
How important are these topics to downtown?



The issue of inefficient or mismanaged parking resources came up throughout many of the focus group conversations with downtown Durham stakeholders, particularly regarding how the current philosophy of management of downtown parking is both regressive to downtown’s service workers and discourages downtown visitation. However, this issue did not show as particularly important in the survey results, illustrating the importance of using the survey results as a supplement to the focus groups, rather than a replacement for them.

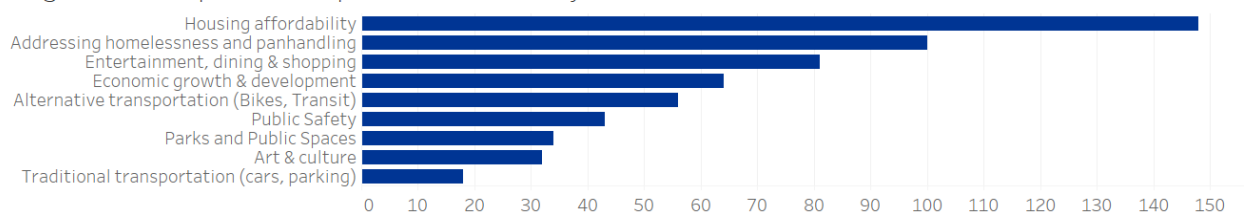
When asked about how well topics were currently being addressed downtown, “housing affordability” and “addressing homelessness and panhandling” were by far the lowest rated, rated at 2.09 and 2.20 respectively on a scale of 1 to 5. The current handling of public safety, rated as the most important issue downtown, was rated above average compared to other issues, at 3.19 out of 5. The two issues rated as being best addressed in downtown Durham were “opportunities for entertainment, dining, and shopping” at 3.86 and “Arts & culture” at 3.98.

How well are these topics currently being addressed currently?



When asked to identify the single most impactful issue to the next 5 years downtown, “housing affordability” (27%) and “addressing homelessness and panhandling” (17%) again appeared as the top two results, showing a shared feeling of the importance of these issues that was reiterated in focus group discussions. The importance of housing affordability in downtown Durham was an issue that cut across all demographic groups, which only serves to further highlight the urgent need to reexamine affordable housing strategies downtown.

Single most important topic for the next 5 years



Focus Groups

While in Durham, IDA hosted five focus groups, in addition to smaller meetings with DDI staff and elected officials. These focus groups were composed of representatives from specific community interest groups and designed with the intent of creating an open environment that would facilitate the easy and rapid distillation of a collective outlook. These groups represented: Durham’s arts, culture, and outdoors community, small business proprietors, real estate brokers and developers, downtown residents and small property owners, and the DDI board.

IDA's goal was to clearly define what challenges downtown Durham's Blueprint 2035 Plan should address, to craft specific and tangible challenge statements that are relevant to the community and within the scope of the future downtown plan. In crafting these challenge statements, both succinctly capturing these conversations, as well as providing background material and guidance to applicants to a future RFP were of key importance.

IDA's approach was founded on the principle of bringing an objective, outsiders' perspective to the task at hand. IDA's panelists spent an intensive 48 hours on the ground in Durham learning about local perspectives on the challenges faced by downtown and Durham overall. In total, IDA's panelists met with over 70 individuals on-site in Durham. By no means is this process omniscient or perfect, but it does facilitate a thorough and timely final product, this report and enables DDI to continue on with the deeper work of the plan itself.

Recommendations

The purpose of the IDA Panel is to identify the challenges that, if not addressed, may prevent downtown Durham from continuing to be a vibrant and inclusive community. Following a combination of studying the area, reviewing of existing reports and plans, surveying downtown users, touring & experiencing the downtown, holding focus groups, and engaging with both the DDI team and the Steering Committee for the Downtown Durham 2035 Blueprint, the following recommendations encapsulate the key challenges that must be addressed in the forthcoming planning process.

A. There is a lack of a coordinated, coherent, and cohesive community vision for Downtown.

The recent decade of infill development has successfully replaced many surface parking lots and other development-ready sites, but many of the projects themselves are not architecturally representative of Durham's DNA. While growth and investment are not inherently the challenge, the expression and actualization of that growth is discordant with many longer-term residents and stakeholders within the community. Many fear downtown's current growth trajectory will further erase Durham's unique identity as a diverse, inclusive, and tolerant community, with a distinct collection of cultural and architectural assets and independent businesses.

Among stakeholders, there exists a recurrent sense of the city's ethos, and also a shared identification that Durham lacks a clearly defined vision for the future of Downtown. Virtually all Durhamites agree on Durham's values and key challenges, and they want a compelling vision that demonstrates leadership's commitment to preserving Durham's inclusivity, authenticity, creativity, and grit. This is an opportunity to charter a unifying language for the community to serve as a resonant articulation of the community's vision for itself, and an arbiter for the eventual issues that will divide.

For any vision to unite, all of Durham's constituencies must feel as though their voices were heard. To initiate their engagement, the process should be intentional about proactively reaching a broad swath of citywide groups, especially Durham's Black and Hispanic communities which often feel unwelcome or unwanted downtown, to share their perspective about the past and their vision for retaining what's left of the shape of the city they love. The community engagement process must be meaningful, robust, and thorough, and should seek to engage people through myriad tactics to ensure that community members are engaged "where they are" and provided the opportunity to contribute through means that accommodate many different stages of life, preferences, and privileges in engaging civically. When the engagement process is designed through a lens of empathy, it will enable quality rather than becoming a focus on quantity. Additionally, the engagement process should be respectful of the time and energy of a community which has been engaged in many planning processes over recent years.

There is an opportunity to standardize the focus on community benefits in a fair, clear and predictable manner while protecting the financial viability of new investment. Ultimately, the growth and development of downtown must be harnessed to the economic benefit and prosperity of all Durhamites.

In terms of process, bringing together various stakeholders across categories will allow all involved to see what we saw: a remarkable (and we might add, somewhat atypical) consensus across the focus groups and constituencies – about what is valued in Durham and what is at risk. With that sense of common concerns affirmed, fashioning a consensus action agenda supported across groups – residents, developers, small businesses, cultural groups, tourism and governmental groups – must be an essential part of the upcoming scope of work.

B. The public realm in downtown is increasingly perceived as unsafe.

A common and strongly expressed theme across the groups IDA met with was concern about safety, and perceptions of safety in public spaces. Specific anecdotes about aggressive panhandlers confronting or following people in or near shops, a comment from police to a shop's employee to "buy pepper spray," advice to NCCU students not to walk to downtown, and gnawing fears in poorly lit and unstaffed parking garages painted a palpable sense of growing unease.

Irrespective of lower index crime stats compared to areas outside of downtown, perceptions of public safety downtown have been negatively affected by the sluggish return to office rate, persistence of visible homelessness, a reluctance to enforce nuisance ordinances, slow processing of criminal cases and diminished law enforcement presence due to a variety of factors. These conditions lead to a higher concentration of situations that negatively affect perceptions of safety relative to pre-pandemic comparisons; in the words of one focus group participant, “things are going in the wrong direction.” How downtown’s stakeholders perceive public safety defines the reality. In many cases, the justification and experiences of stakeholders are not reflective of illegal activity per se; rather, they are informed by a perception of disorder in the public realm.

Pedestrian activity has diminished, especially in the daytime, as the office workforce has been sluggish to return to downtown post-pandemic and some activations and events have been curtailed or canceled. Getting a higher percentage of workers back to the office, or otherwise replacing that missing daytime foot traffic, is critical to downtown’s future as historically workers have served as a primary driver of consumer spending, especially during the daytime. Their diminished presence directly impacts the health of the storefront economy, as does that of people drawn by demand-driving events. It may be unrealistic to expect a full-time return of the downtown office workforce and so other routes to creating daytime activity must be examined, such as drawing youth and families downtown with stronger retail options and cultural or recreational experiences. The decreased pedestrian vibrancy on the street level also leads to negative perceptions of safety and overall community vitality.

Lower overall vibrancy also has the unintended consequence of revealing the physical condition of the public realm. Once-bustling sidewalks are often empty during the day, resulting in mental images of the city that become alarming to users. Those images are further degraded by crumbling physical conditions and incongruent operational reliability. Stakeholders remarked that sidewalk conditions, dead zones caused by inconsistent or outmoded urban design regulations, plus pedestrian lighting characterized as insufficient are factors that aggravate already challenged public realm perceptions. These physical challenges, which make it difficult to move around downtown on foot, discourage foot traffic and exploration by visitors, and create a difficult retail environment.

C. Downtown Durham is considered by some to be unwelcoming to people of color, families, and to those with low to moderate economic means.

An essential and alternative narrative that arose in multiple discussions was whether downtown was welcoming to all, for reasons that have nothing to do with safety. Sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, the concern was expressed in various forms and voices that downtown “doesn’t feel welcoming to all,” and that as downtown has experienced its economic boom, a side effect has been that some constituencies feel left out. Specifically, some in Durham’s African American and Latino communities – especially those of lower income – feel that downtown is “no longer for us” or is, at the very least, more responsive to a newer, wealthier and less diverse population that may not fully know or appreciate the rich and diverse history of Durham than it is to lower income and minority communities. Few asserted that this was deliberate or intentional, but as was the case with crime, it was stated that there was a perception among some – in some cases on behalf of Durhamites not in the room – that they are not welcome, that downtown is not meant for them. A representative of the Spanish-speaking community spoke of her community being less visible as downtown consumers, despite its steady presence as part of the Durham service industry workforce.

Additionally, though the trajectory of increased focus on young professionals and empty nesters as the drivers of the downtown market has borne fruit for many downtowns, catering primarily to the young professional class has resulted in a dearth of spaces that welcome children, teens, and families. There are few spaces in downtown that are oriented towards those groups, and so there is little reason for families to consider spending time and money there; they too have been disconnected from downtown. As with safety, these perceptions of an “unwelcoming” downtown can often quickly materialize as reality, and action is needed to prevent these perceptions from cementing themselves as conventional wisdom.

Downtown Perceptions

In the case of both downtown inclusiveness and downtown safety, perceptions exist which threaten the long-term success of downtown. Perceptions about how safe or welcoming downtown is were driven by the many cues one receives in a public space – who is there, how many they are, what they look like, how they approach or respond to you – some of which may align with a larger reality and some of which may not. As urbanists know, especially when it comes to the public realm in a diverse city full of strangers, perception becomes reality if not addressed. Going forward, discerning more clearly who *feels* welcome, who does not, and what cues or characteristics lead them to feel that way, is essential to creating an inclusive, safe, welcoming and vibrant downtown. What community was Durham in the past, what community is Durham today, what are the current divides between those communities, and how might they come together in the future? As one developer said, his vision for Durham is that he'd like to see "all of Durham in downtown." To achieve this, both sets of public realm perceptions – those about safety and those about being welcome – must be addressed.

D. The area is characterized as disconnected both within Downtown and to nearby neighborhoods, and from citywide assets and other institutions.

Transportation infrastructure creates barriers that divide Downtown and cut it off from other parts of Durham. 147 and the Loop were cited repeatedly, with one person asserting there are "two Durhams" and another stakeholder from Hayti saying "I personally don't think that real change can occur without addressing Highway 147." "Safe, attractive access" not just between Hayti and downtown, but between other areas which are often distinct racially and economically was articulated in multiple sessions as an essential and perhaps even existential question for Durham's future.

Past urban design failures and auto-centric prioritization create poor pedestrian experiences that impede walkability and underutilize the public right of way. All were clear-eyed about the immense challenge of reversing decades of auto-centric policies, and many spoke of smaller wins that might create connectivity and a greater sense of safety. But there seemed to be a consensus that a long-term vision plan must, at the very least, acknowledge the centrality of these physical barriers which impede connectivity between downtown and the rest of town. It was noted that unlike the coherent county, city and civic strategies and funding being harnessed to address housing, holistic transportation solutions and strategies are lacking. This is not the first time many of these issues have been vocalized; as far back as 2010 the city has studied the feasibility of converting the Loop to 2-way traffic, and an urgent need to improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure was a central point of the 2000 Downtown Durham Master Plan. It was argued by focus group participants that some part of this vision process should result in an "on the shelf" big-picture plan for transportation solutions and connections, ready for the moment when the political will and funding might become present.

Within downtown, there were frequent comments about the need for more connectivity among downtown's distinctive assets and nodes: Brightleaf, American Tobacco, Five Points, Golden Belt, Old Durham Ballpark, etc. Terms like "explorability" and "walkability" were mentioned as aspirations, which of course were linked to both public realm and public transit needs. This is an area that appeared ripe for quicker, short-term wins, compared to larger and long-term goals like addressing 147.

While many credit the institutional and student presence of Duke University downtown as an early catalyst for Durham's growth, NCCU and Durham Tech, the city's other major educational institutions, are comparatively disconnected from downtown Durham. The lack of physical connectivity to NCCU and Durham Tech limits their presence downtown and is a missed opportunity for advancing a more diverse and representative Downtown; Durham Tech⁶ enrollment is 63% Non-White, and NCCU⁷, a HBCU, is 94% Non-White. The physical disconnection of these particular schools reinforces some of the intangible and perception disconnections cited above, with one person saying that it "exemplifies who feels welcome and who does not." It was noted, similar to the "welcoming"

⁶"Durham Technical Community College Overview." . <https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/durham-technical-community-college-CC02455>.

⁷"North Carolina Central University Overview." . <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/north-carolina-central-2950>.

themes above, that connectivity was not only about physical connectivity, but also about culture and community connectivity. Virtually all cherish Durham's inclusive values and yet many fear the recent growth has put Durham at risk of losing cultural connection to Black and brown people, independent businesses, artists, young people, children, and families.

There was an acknowledgement that those physical disconnections risk exacerbating the social, class and race disconnects which often course through our society. In different conversations, there was an understanding that Durham's deep pool of authentic intangible assets – especially those related to the arts, culture, food and sports – could be tools to draw people into downtown, connect them together, celebrate different communities and cultures, build trust and tolerance and create connections.

E. Downtown Durham's unique assets and authenticity are in jeopardy.

Local, independent businesses feel especially vulnerable to displacement. The number of references to Durham's distinctive independent businesses was striking. While some acknowledged that the price points of national chains may accommodate a greater range of income levels, virtually everyone seemed proud of Durham's lack of national chains, and its mix of local entrepreneurs, shops and restaurants. They understood that those entities contributed to Durham's "cool" and "grit" factor, and that rising rents threatened one of their key competitive distinctions relative to other cities like Charlotte and Raleigh. Any planning effort, therefore, must look at what tools can be put in place to keep existing independent businesses and to attract new ones, such as the city or county using its inventory of land in downtown to create below-market spaces for local and minority entrepreneurs. Finally, several stakeholders noted that any planning effort must note and nurture not only independent businesses, but also which of those are owned by people of color.

Durham's character and cool factor are being diluted by uninspired infill development, causing it to lose its proud, distinctive vibe. There was an understanding that another part of Durham's distinctiveness was architectural and design-related, and that steps must be taken to protect that, especially with respect to new construction. Stakeholders seemed confident that the tobacco warehouses would be preserved, as many of them have been successfully converted to modern uses, but many worried about the impact of homogenous, one-size-fits-all or "cookie-cutter" residential construction, with some suggesting that there may need to be some form of design review or guidelines going forward. The city will need to lean into and prioritize a commitment to more innovative development schemes and partnerships to avoid an over delivery of predictable by-right development patterns, perhaps by leveraging the inventory of government-owned land downtown.

Durham's competitive niche appeal within the Triangle and North Carolina that was long cultivated by an embrace of arts and culture is increasingly threatened with rapid growth. The importance of the Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC) as an anchor and a model was noted, but also a concern for the vulnerability of smaller arts entities and individual artists themselves in the face of rising real estate costs. A considerable amount of land downtown is owned by the city and county of Durham, a fortunate situation as the preexisting bank of land can be leveraged creatively to both spur economic development and protect these cultural assets. Much like the ticketing subsidies employed at DPAC to maintain some level of attainability for the public, programmatic support for the artists themselves is needed.

Many homegrown festivals and community celebrations which instill community pride are being poached and/or displaced due to rising costs of doing business. Multiple stakeholders felt that the issue here was cumbersome event and permitting requirements which resulted in the loss of recent festivals and events. Still more cultural assets downtown, such as the Museum of Durham History, lack permanent homes and are at risk of being relocated elsewhere. In the context of larger concerns about downtown being connected to the rest of Durham, all of Durham being welcome downtown, and the need to draw activity back to downtown post-COVID, it was noted that having a greater number of diverse festivals, cultural spaces and community programming can achieve multiple goals for downtown. Any planning effort must look at ways to support and grow this kind of programming, especially in the face of recent losses.

F. Durham is at risk of not being inclusive, accessible, and affordable to all.

There aren't adequate public sector resources to support local Durhamite, minority-owned, or disadvantaged entrepreneurs. As noted above, in the context of Durham's unique positioning as a place with more independent shops and restaurants than nearby cities, special attention must be paid to the diversity of ownership, which is connected to the larger goal of conveying a welcoming and inclusive downtown.

Retail and dining offerings and new housing stock do not include diverse and affordable "missing middle" options which may require either subsidy or the leveraging of publicly owned real estate downtown to be viable. It was noted that one of the very characteristics which community members like about Durham – its one-of-a-kind shops and restaurants – may result in higher price points. How to balance the desire to nurture businesses other than national chains in the context of a heated real estate market is a challenge for the upcoming planning process. Rapidly increasing inventory of unaffordable commercial space (office, retail and dining) presents a threat to the local entrepreneurs that define Durham's character.

Workforce development opportunities aren't being coupled with new investments that provide for upward mobility of all Durham residents. Looking at workforce development tools can be one of many easy ways of connecting downtown's economic success to residents from outside downtown, and in particular lower-income communities of color and families.

G. Without leadership, coordination, and accountability, the community's vision won't be realized.

Implementation of the future plan will require the coordinated actions of many partner agencies and stakeholders. It was noted repeatedly throughout the sessions that despite a remarkable degree of stakeholder consensus across business sectors, cultural entities, residents, city and county government about the challenges Durham faces, there needs to be far more coordination and sustained cooperation to address those problems in the years to come. This sustained and coordinated effort needs to happen not only among the many agencies and levels of government but must also be fostered with good faith efforts between the public, private, non-profit and philanthropic sectors.

To have an enduring, lasting effect, a leadership and accountability structure must arise that ensures ongoing cooperation and communication to achieve key milestones towards the consensus goals that are identified through this planning process. The planning process itself creates the avenue for soliciting and receiving buy-in and commitment from local agency leaders whose partnership, support and follow-through will be essential. Any plan should seek relevant agency affirmations related to specific timetables, milestones and action items. Rather than regarding growth as something that happens to their community, can city leaders get more intentional about guiding growth in a manner that includes and enhances the community?

City and County leadership will need to align their efforts to impact major decisions affecting Durham made by the State of North Carolina and other bodies. Recognizing that at times the goals and priorities of the state, city and county may not always be in sync, there may be a need to frame local issues in a way that aligns with the needs of the state's non-urban representatives, where possible. Within the Triangle and for North Carolinian cities, this is an opportunity to create and pursue an alignment of urban issues and interests and advocate alongside a broader constituency.

Part of this means looking at the ways in which the articulated, consensus goals of elected and civic leadership may or may not be filtering down to city agencies, or across the silos of government. Multiple stakeholders noted that too often local government is perceived as closed off or slow to receive new ideas. Some went so far as to characterize city staff as punitive and retaliatory, a posture which causes business owners to second guess or even reconsider investing in Downtown. Under the status quo, when investment is made, predictable by-right projects are most likely to emerge rather than innovative public private partnerships which could deliver specified community benefits.

Ideally, entitlement processes and land use procedures should be a vehicle for delivering on a community's vision. Descriptions about the vast juxtaposition between what is allowed by-right versus application procedures that require City Council approval inspire a need to evaluate the fairness and consistency afforded to future development proposals. In some cases, developers are characterized as delivering suboptimal projects as a way to meet by-right allowances and choose to do so to avoid the uncertainty associated with projects that seek variances or other discretionary considerations. Such regulations have enabled an unintended consequence of uninspired and repetitive end-projects, thereby stifling the upsides that a great project can deliver both for the community and reputationally for the prospect of new investments. The wealth of land which is publicly owned downtown can be used as a powerful tool to generate economic development, housing, and other projects which align with the community vision. This plan presents the opportunity to establish a reconciliation of development regulations to ensure that new projects are helping the physical landscape advance toward the citizenry's vision and provide meaningful community benefits.

Bibliography

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[Downtown Loop 2-Way Conversion Feasibility Study](#) (2010)

[Downtown Durham Open Space Plan](#) (2014)

[Downtown Durham Parking Study Final Report and Action Plan](#) (2017)

[Downtown Master Plan: A Framework for the Future](#) (2017)

[Business Diversity in Downtown Durham](#) (2018)

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[Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities: Durham, North Carolina](#) (2018)

[State of Downtown Durham](#) (2022)

[Commuter Rail Feasibility Report](#) (2023)

[Durham Draft Comprehensive Plan](#) (2023)

[Durham Draft Transit Plan](#) (2023)

Appendix

Downtown Durham Blueprint: 2035

Overview/purpose -- Identify the challenges that, if not addressed, may prevent downtown Durham from continuing to be a vibrant and inclusive community.

Blueprint Steering Committee:

Wanda Page, City Manager
Kim Sowell, County Manager
Zena Howard, Perkins + Will & DDI Board Chair
Susan Amey, President & CEO--Discover Durham
Kim Cameron—City/County Planning Commission Chair
Jonathan Collins—Executive Director--Durham Tech SBC
John Hodges-Copple (retired from TJCOG)
Geoff Durham, President & CEO, Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce
Adam Klein, Chief Strategist--Capitol Broadcasting
Angela Lee, Executive Director—Hayti Heritage Center
Kevin Price, President & CEO--Institute of Economic Development
Pilar Rocha-Goldbert, President & CEO--El Centro Hispano

First Phase:

Work with IDA through its Advisory Services to help craft what the major challenges are and the basic framework for the scope of work that would be used to select a team to create the master plan.

Members of DDI Advisory Services:

David Downey—President & CEO, IDA
Devon Barbour, President & CEO, Downtown Development District (New Orleans)
Kris Larson—President & CEO, Central Houston, Inc.
Tim Tompkins - Principal & Founder Shared City Shared Space and Former President & CEO, Times Square Alliance (New York City)

Components of the DDI Advisory Services

1. Design, deliver, and analyze a downtown user survey noting key opportunities downtown along with the most pressing challenges facing downtown. In particular any issues which left unchecked, could slow down or reverse the progress made in the recent decade. The survey will be pushed electronically through social media and Downtown Durham’s communications. Downtown Durham will also send survey links to all key stakeholders for which they have email addresses.
2. IDA will facilitate a set number (TBD) of focus groups to solicit additional insights on the opportunities and challenges facing downtown and test issues identified by the community survey.
3. IDA will convene a meeting of the steering committee to workshop the final issues to be addressed by the downtown master plan. The aim of this session, and the advisory panel in total, will be the creation of clearly articulated problem statements the downtown plan must address.
4. In collaboration and consultation with the Downtown Durham Inc staff team, IDA will deliver the final problem statements such that a scope of work for the planning process can be established by the DDI staff. A full description of the community engagement and consensus process used to determine the final problem statements will be in the final document.

Schedule:

IDA is prepared to deliver the panel on February 1st and 2nd with the community survey being published by January 15th and the panelists arriving on or before January 31st.

Day One (31st): Panelists arrive throughout the day, preferably by late morning. Host working group and panelists convene at an afternoon orientation meeting, followed by orientation tour of downtown. IDA will confirm the panel process and expected deliverables. Initial insights from the host leaders will be sought by the panelists during this meeting. Day one will end with a closed dinner meeting for panelists to explore initial observations and prepare for the first day.

Day Two (1st): Panel will convene a series of focus groups to solicit input and feedback from community stakeholders, leaders, business owners, and residents. The day will conclude with a working session including DDI staff and the panel to summarize the information gathered. The panelists will convene a working dinner to outline the next day's steering committee session.

Day Three (2nd): The IDA Advisory Panel will deliver an initial set of issues during a breakfast presentation to the steering committee members. The panel will test the validity of the issues and workshop clear problem statements everyone can get behind. The morning session will conclude late morning allowing the panel members to depart early afternoon. The final report will be refined and transmitted within 10 business days.

Downtown Durham Blueprint: 2035 [EN]

Thank you for taking part in this survey. The International Downtown Association is working with Downtown Durham, Inc. and the city and county of Durham to help inform the future planning of downtown Durham. We are hoping to add your voice and those of many across the community to be sure downtown best serves everyone.

Downtown Durham, Inc. (DDI) is a nonprofit organization, formed in 1993 to serve as a catalyst for downtown revitalization. DDI is currently exploring which topics should be covered in a future downtown blueprint. Your input and responses on this survey will help DDI consider which items will be most important for the plan to address.

This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers are confidential and will be reported only in aggregate along with other responses. Please contact Clay Daneker, Research Manager at research@downtown.org with any questions.

Downtown Durham Blueprint: 2035 [EN]

1. Please describe your most positive experience in downtown Durham.

2. Please describe your most negative experience in downtown Durham.

3. How satisfied are you with the overall downtown Durham experience?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

4. Do you think downtown welcomes and represents Durham's diverse population (race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)?

- Yes
- No

5. Please explain your response.

6. In your opinion, how well are these topics downtown being addressed currently?

	Very well				Not well at all
Addressing homelessness and panhandling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alternative transportation (public transportation, bike lanes, scooter/bike share)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art & culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic growth and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing affordability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for entertainment, dining, shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parks and Public Spaces	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditional transportation (cars, parking)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. In your opinion, how important are the following topics to downtown?

	Most Important			Least Important	
Addressing homelessness and panhandling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alternative transportation (public transportation, bike lanes, scooter/bike share)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art & culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic growth and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing affordability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for entertainment, dining, shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parks and Public Spaces	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditional transportation (cars, parking)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. In your opinion, which of these topics is the most impactful to downtown's success over the next 5 years?

- Addressing homelessness and panhandling
- Alternative transportation (public transportation, bike lanes, scooter/bike share)
- Art & culture
- Economic growth and development
- Housing affordability
- Opportunities for entertainment, dining, shopping
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Public Safety
- Traditional transportation (cars, parking)

9. What would you like to see done about the topic you selected above?

10. In a few words, are there any other issues important to you which weren't listed in the previous question(s)?

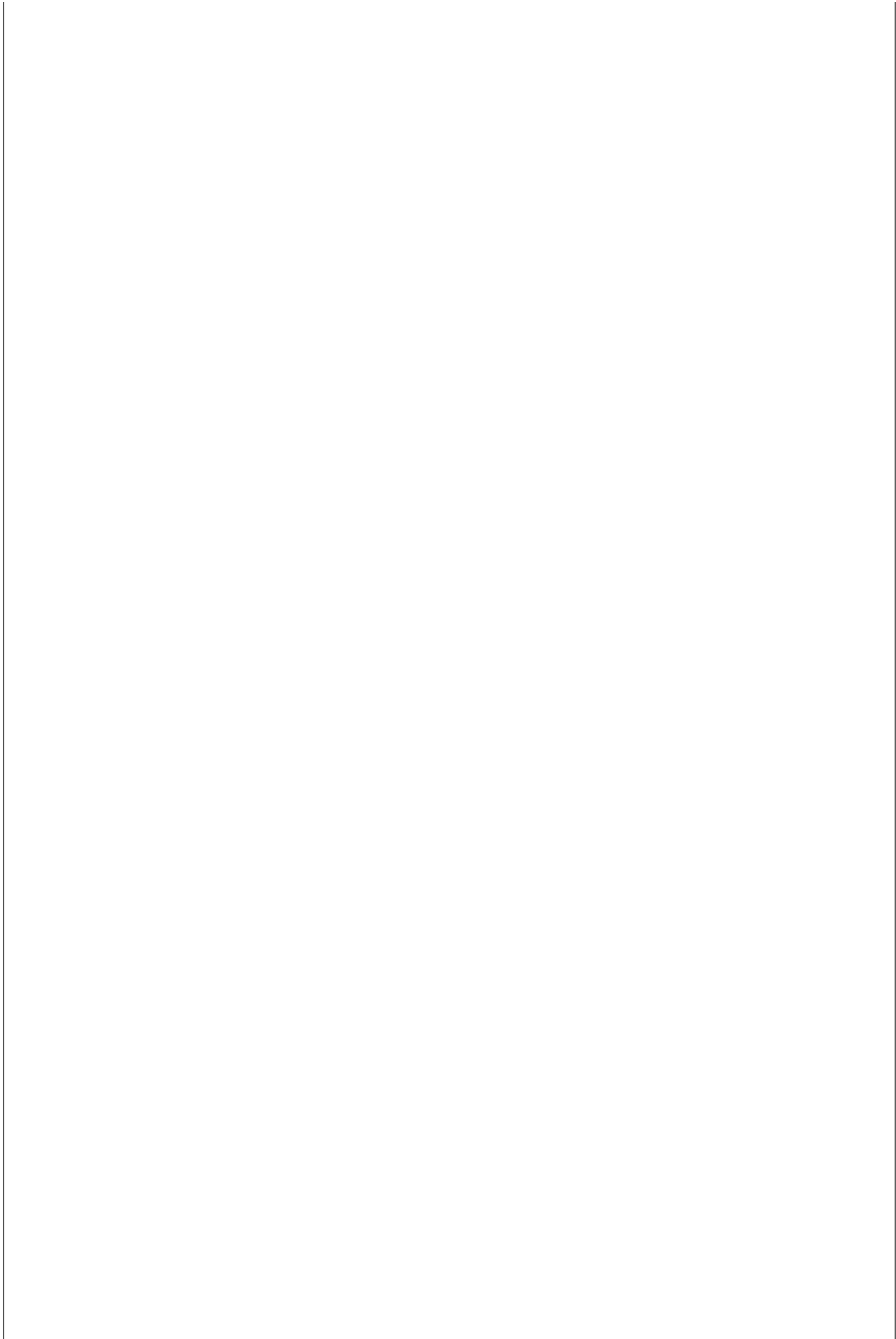
11. In what ways do you spend time downtown? (check all that apply)

- Entertainment/recreation
- Dining and/or drinking
- I live downtown
- I work downtown
- Other (please specify)
- I own a business downtown
- I own a property downtown (residential or commercial)
- Shopping
- I Don't spend time downtown

12. What is your favorite aspect of downtown?

13. What do you feel is missing from downtown?

14. If you could change one thing downtown, what would it be?



Downtown Durham Blueprint: 2035 [EN]

Demographic Information

Ensuring the downtown serves all people is a priority. We appreciate you sharing information about yourself.

15. Where do you currently live?

- In downtown Durham
- In Durham, but not in downtown
- In the region, but not in Durham
- Prefer not to answer

16. How many years have you lived in that area?

- Less than two years
- Between 2-5 years
- Between 6-10 years
- More than 10 years
- Prefer not to answer

17. Do you rent or own your living space?

- Rent
- Own
- Prefer not to answer

18. Which race or ethnicity best describes you? (Select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Other (please specify)
- Hispanic
- White / Caucasian
- Prefer not to answer

19. Please select your age range

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 74
- 75 or older

20. What is your total household income?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> \$0 to \$19,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$130,000-\$149,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$20,000-\$49,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$150,000+ |
| <input type="radio"/> \$50,000-\$89,999 | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to answer |
| <input type="radio"/> \$90,000-\$129,999 | |

21. What gender do you identify with?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Male | <input type="radio"/> Other |
| <input type="radio"/> Female | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to answer |
| <input type="radio"/> Non-Binary | |

22. How often do you go downtown for reasons other than work

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Daily | <input type="radio"/> Once a month |
| <input type="radio"/> 2-3 times a week | <input type="radio"/> Once every few months |
| <input type="radio"/> Once a week | <input type="radio"/> Once or twice a year |
| <input type="radio"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="radio"/> I rarely/never visit downtown |