

# DOWNTOWN DURHAM BLUEPRINT 2035



October 2025

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**THANK YOU!** to everyone who contributed to the **Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035**. Thousands of community members helped shape this plan through surveys, interviews, and public engagement events. A special thank you to our Steering Committee, DDI Board of Directors, Renaissance Downtown Durham Board of Directors, and City and County staff and leadership for your time and insight.

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**Kimberly Cameron**, Durham Planning Commission  
**Jonathan Collins**, Carolina Small Business Development Fund  
**Geoff Durham**, Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce  
**Bo Ferguson**, City of Durham  
**Vicky Garcia**, Latino Community Credit Union  
**Claudia Hager**, Durham County  
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## PROJECT TEAM

### **Downtown Durham, Inc.**

Nicole J. Thompson, President & CEO

### **Planning & Development Department**

Sara Young, Director

### **City of Durham**

Mayor Leonardo Williams

### **City Council**

Mark-Anthony Middleton  
Nate Baker  
Javieria Caballero  
Chelsea Cook  
DeDreana Freeman  
Carl Rist

### **Durham County**

Chair Nida Allam

### **County Board of Commissioners**

Wendy Jacobs  
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Michelle Burton

### **Interface Studio** *Urban Planning & Design*

Scott Page  
Ben Bryant  
Kylee Pierce  
Hongyi Li

### **AllTogether** *Engagement*

Marisa Schulz  
Tina Figueira

### **Blackspace** *Local Engagement*

Pierce Freelon  
Joshua "Rowdy" Rowsey  
Jada "J.Bow" Bowdrie

### **&Access** *Retail Strategy*

Bobby Boone  
Erin Berry

### **Ninigret Partners** *Office Market Strategy*

Kevin Hively

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Finally, this plan could not have been possible without the support of our funders:



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**Duke**  
UNIVERSITY

**LRC**  
PROPERTIES

**Lynn Solomon**

**Cover Artwork by Alison Hawkins**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>QUICK GUIDE</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A YEAR OF VISIONING FOR DOWNTOWN DURHAM</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>DOWNTOWN TODAY</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>VISION FOR DOWNTOWN</b>	<b>32</b>
ROOTED + READY	34
OPEN FOR BUSINESS	52
WELCOME HOME	66
WALK + ROLL	80
COMMON GROUNDS	98
DOWNTOWN WORK	114
THE MORE YOU KNOW	122
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>134</b>

# QUICK GUIDE!

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## WHY THIS PLAN? WHY NOW?

Downtown Durham is dynamic, unique, and ever-evolving. Once defined by its empty streets and storefronts, downtown Durham has been transformed by small businesses, festivals and open spaces, history and sense-of-place, and major attractions like DPAC, Durham Central Park, American Tobacco Campus, and the Durham Bulls, which now define its vibrant identity. This change has come on the heels of careful planning that guided investment downtown as one of the Triangle's central hubs for business, culture and community life, but this success brings new challenges. Growth has intensified pressure on downtown's limited space, raising concerns about housing affordability, and work from home policies have robbed local businesses of their daily customer base. The diverse and active streets that people identify with downtown Durham require attention once again.

To adapt to these new challenges, Downtown Durham, Inc. has worked with the City of Durham and Durham County to produce: **Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035**. The Downtown Blueprint will serve as a roadmap for the next decade, ensuring that downtown Durham preserves its unique character while supporting continued downtown growth.

## DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT PROCESS

Over the course of 12 months, thousands of community members were engaged in shaping the future of their downtown. From the very beginning of the project, the planning process aimed to create a vision that reflects the many different perspectives and needs of Durham, with a special emphasis on Black, Latino, and youth communities. How did we get there? Through **intentional programming**, a **variety of scales and styles of engagement**, and an **iterative process**. Throughout Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2024, outreach efforts brought the project directly to the community through digital tools, pop-up events at festivals and parks, panel discussions, and interviews. Materials were translated into Spanish, and bilingual staff supported outreach to ensure broad participation. Engagement highlights included:

- A community-wide **survey with over 2,200 responses**;
- **Nine pop-up events** across Durham that reached hundreds of participants in accessible settings and events;
- The **Black Voices for the Future Panel** that engaged over 75 attendees of Durham's Black community to share their hopes and concerns about the future of downtown; and
- The **Durham Future Fest**, where over 200 participants showed up on a snowy day and weighed in on draft concepts and recommendations.

Feedback from the engagement process was gathered and synthesized into a summary that directly shaped the goals and strategies that appear on the following pages, forming the foundation of the Downtown Blueprint.

# POP-UPS



## BLACK VOICES FOR THE FUTURE PANEL



## DOWNTOWN FUTURE FEST



# ROOTED + READY

*Downtown will be a welcoming space for people of all ages and backgrounds by celebrating Durham's history and rich cultural heritage and providing a diverse range of activities and experiences.*

Durham is grounded in a legacy of cultural richness, shaped by a deep-rooted Black history, a thriving LGBTQ+ community, a growing Latino population, and a thriving creative class. As the city and the region continue to attract residents from diverse backgrounds, it is critical to foster an inclusive downtown environment that honors this history through strategic programming, placemaking, public art, and cultural hubs. Through these efforts, downtown Durham can strengthen its identity as a welcoming, vibrant, and ever-evolving community that honors its past while embracing its future.

## STRATEGIES

1. Celebrate Parrish Street as a unique destination that reflects both past and present identities.
2. Create a hub for Durham's growing Latino community in the heart of downtown Durham.
3. Create more high-quality destinations for families.
4. Infuse the public realm with art and culture through a public arts initiative.
5. Streamline the permitting process for events.

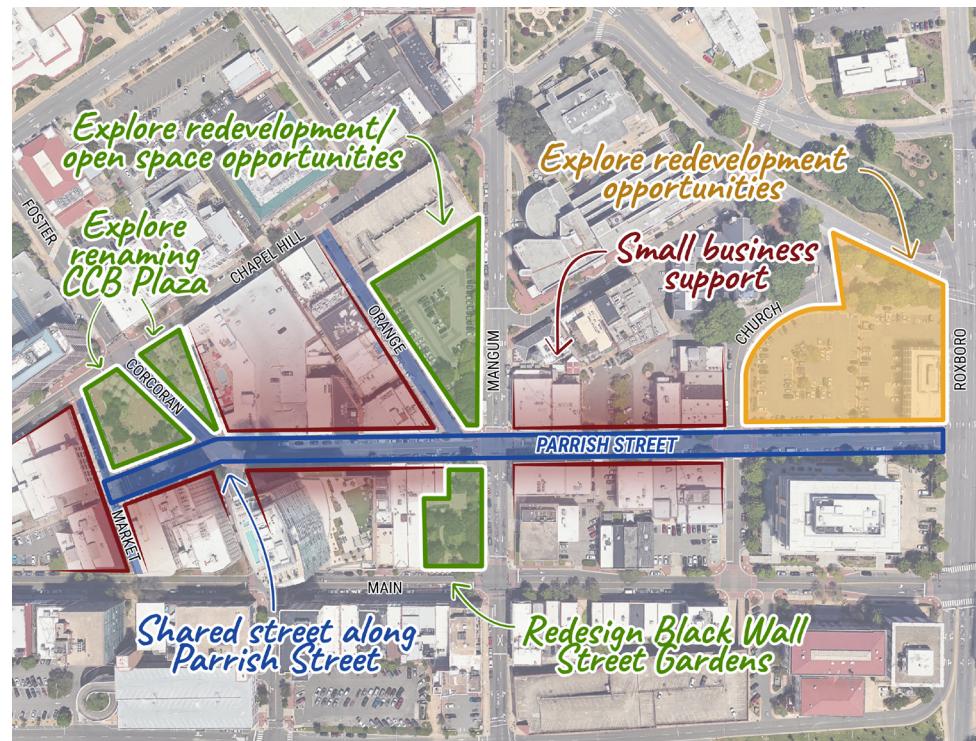


FIGURE 1: PARRISH STREET DIAGRAM

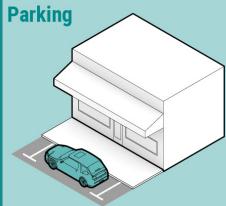
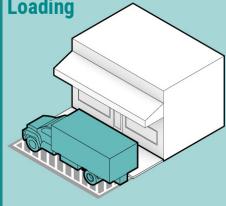
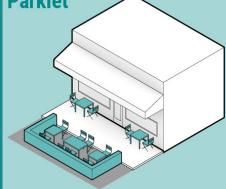
# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

**Downtown will be a place where small businesses feel supported and customers feel safe and encouraged to explore all that downtown has to offer.**

Downtown businesses are the lifeblood of downtowns, with restaurants, bars, stores, and services drawing people in and keeping them coming back. To help downtown Durham thrive in a world where people have more choices than ever on where to shop, eat, and spend money, we need to support, expand, and diversify our downtown businesses through careful planning, management, and programming. Meeting emerging demands for everyday goods and services, especially for the growing residential population, will be key to sustaining downtown's competitiveness and livability.

## STRATEGIES

1. Develop an integrated and centralized program of public safety interventions for downtown and other urban districts as necessary.
2. Preserve affordable space for ground-floor small businesses.
3. Provide technical support to downtown retailers and restaurateurs.
4. Develop strategic parking and loading management for business and customer use.
5. Appoint a dedicated coordinator to guide businesses through permitting and operational challenges.
6. Expand business hours and programming to capitalize on downtown events.
7. Address gaps and need for increased variety of businesses through strategic tenant recruitment.

Category	Uses	Effective Hours
	<b>Customer Parking</b>	All Day
	<b>Handicap Parking</b>	All Day
	<b>Short-Term Loading</b>	7am-6pm
	<b>Long-Term Loading</b>	All Day
	<b>Entertainment Loading</b>	4pm-12am
	<b>Outdoor Dining</b>	All Day
	<b>Lounge Area</b>	All Day

**FIGURE 2: CURBSIDE MANAGEMENT FOR BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER USE**

# WELCOME HOME

*Downtown will feel like a true neighborhood where diverse housing options, essential amenities, and development thoughtfully coexist.*

Downtown Durham's residential population is rapidly growing, with thousands of new units built or underway. While this growth helps support local businesses, it also highlights the need for a broader mix of housing options across income levels, both downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods. With upcoming zoning changes encouraging new infill development, maintaining a balance of market-rate, workforce, and affordable housing—while also addressing the needs of the unhoused population and fostering a sense of downtown community—will be key to fostering a vibrant, inclusive neighborhood.

## STRATEGIES

1. Reserve publicly-owned sites for future mixed-income and mixed-use development.
2. Coordinate with supportive housing providers and advocates to address needs of the unhoused population.
3. Develop a micro-grant program for community-led implementation.
4. Continue to engage downtown residents to promote a sense of community.
5. Set clear expectations for how key development sites should be designed.

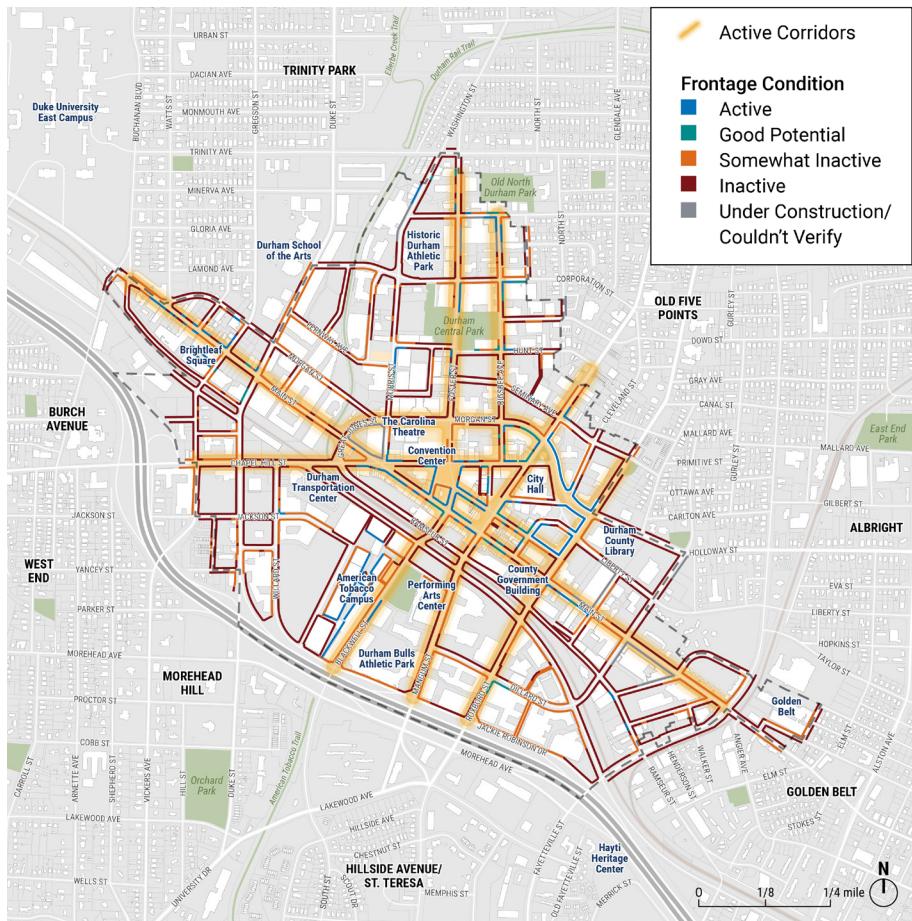


FIGURE 3: MAP OF PROPOSED ACTIVE CORRIDORS

# WALK + ROLL

**Downtown will offer a safer and more attractive travel experience for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.**

Wide, high-speed roads in downtown Durham have created physical barriers, prioritizing cars over pedestrians and cyclists and undermining downtown's connectivity and safety. Though redesigning these streets—such as converting one-ways to two-ways—has long been discussed, progress has been limited by factors that include jurisdictional issues, design challenges, and cost. However, advancing these changes remains critical to creating a more walkable and connected downtown.

## STRATEGIES

1. Redesign the Loop.
2. Strengthen multimodal connections along key streets and between anchor destinations.
3. Strengthen connections along Foster/Corcoran/Blackwell Streets as a major pathway.

### EXISTING



### PROPOSED



**FIGURE 4: RENDERING OF RAMSEUR STREET SHARED-USE PATH**

# COMMON GROUNDS

*Downtown will be filled with inviting, connected, and well-utilized public spaces.*

Downtown Durham's open spaces, particularly Durham Central Park and CCB Plaza, serve as key hubs for recreation and community gathering, but residents continue to call for more places to play, relax, and come together. While new amenities like the Durham Rail Trail are on the horizon, many existing open spaces are privately-owned and at risk of redevelopment. More work remains to upgrade existing parks, identify locations for permanent open space, and bring more events, programming, and people downtown.

## STRATEGIES

1. Improve connections between open space assets to create a strong downtown open space network.
2. Upgrade CCB Plaza.
3. Redesign Convention Center Plaza.
4. Leverage the uniqueness of downtown's alleys.
5. Position the YMCA as a downtown anchor.
6. Provide more shade downtown.

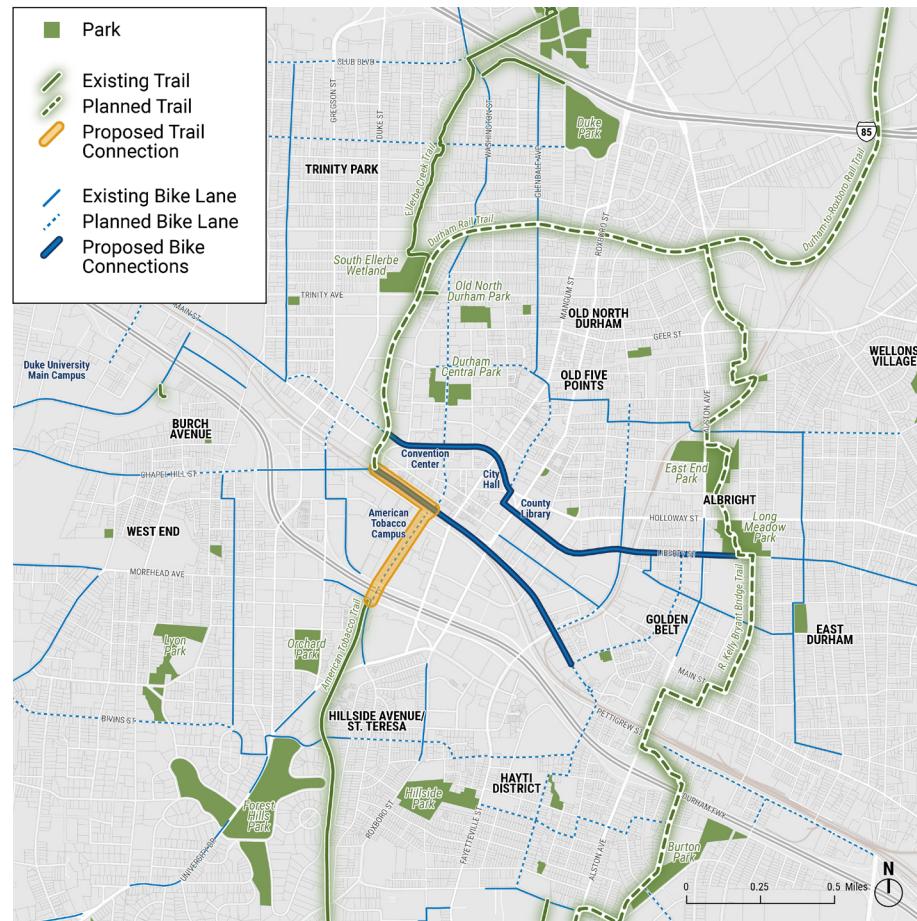


FIGURE 5: OPEN SPACE NETWORK

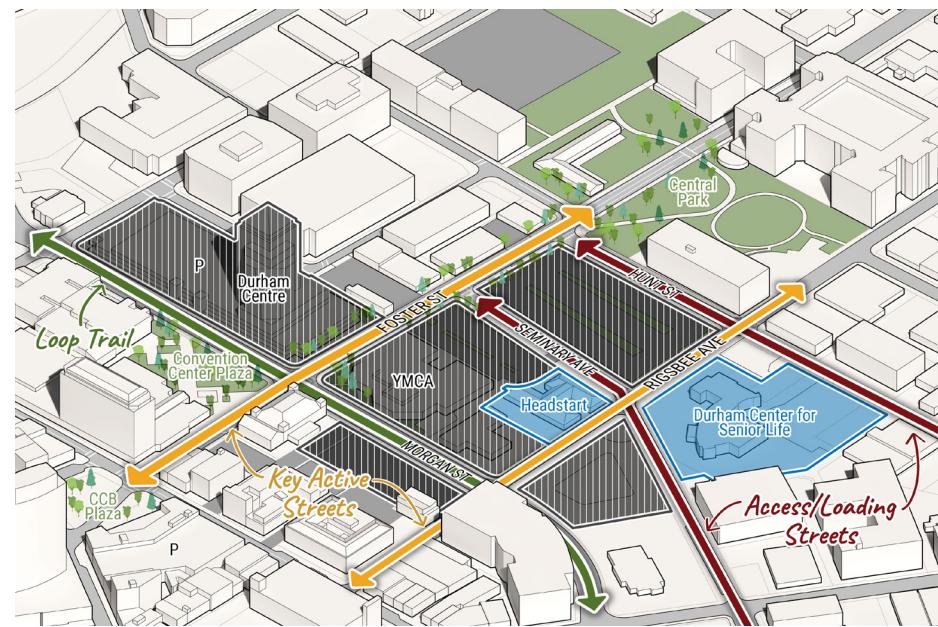
# DOWNTOWN WORKS

**Downtown will be a home for companies of all sizes, fostering job growth and cultivating a consistent daily workforce that enhances downtown vibrancy and sustains local restaurants and retailers.**

A healthy downtown economy depends on a balance of residents, workers, and visitors to support businesses and activate public spaces. With limited land and rising vacancies, downtown Durham must manage growth carefully—preserving space for jobs while addressing high lease costs that hinder new local businesses. Due to the high and impractical cost of retrofitting newer office buildings into housing, alternative approaches for the office market are needed to attract a diverse range of businesses, ensuring that downtown continues to serve as a dynamic economic hub.

## STRATEGIES

1. Preserve older, funkier downtown buildings for affordable office space.
2. Re-tenant existing office space.
3. Explore conversion of existing commercial buildings into lab space and explore locations for new construction lab buildings.
4. Keep event-driven economic activity downtown.



**FIGURE 6: LONG-TERM FOSTER STREET IMPROVEMENTS & DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

# THE MORE YOU KNOW

*Downtown will be perceived locally and regionally as a safe and welcoming destination that is easy to navigate and offers a variety of goods and experiences that are accessible to everyone.*

Perceptions heavily influence whether people choose to visit downtown, and misperceptions about downtown can deter engagement. Clear, accessible marketing and wayfinding are needed to highlight downtown's offerings and ensure people of all backgrounds feel welcome. Strengthening downtown's brand visibility can encourage exploration, support local businesses, and foster a more inclusive and vibrant environment.

## STRATEGIES

1. Improve perceptions of safety in downtown through marketing and messaging.
2. Change the narrative that downtown isn't for everyone.
3. Highlight the affordable opportunities within downtown.
4. Unify downtown by promoting destinations and not districts.

## EXAMPLES OF DESTINATION-BASED MARKETING



Map of Oak Park (Source: AllTogether Studio); Downtown Norfolk Experience Map (Source: Downtown Norfolk Council)

# VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

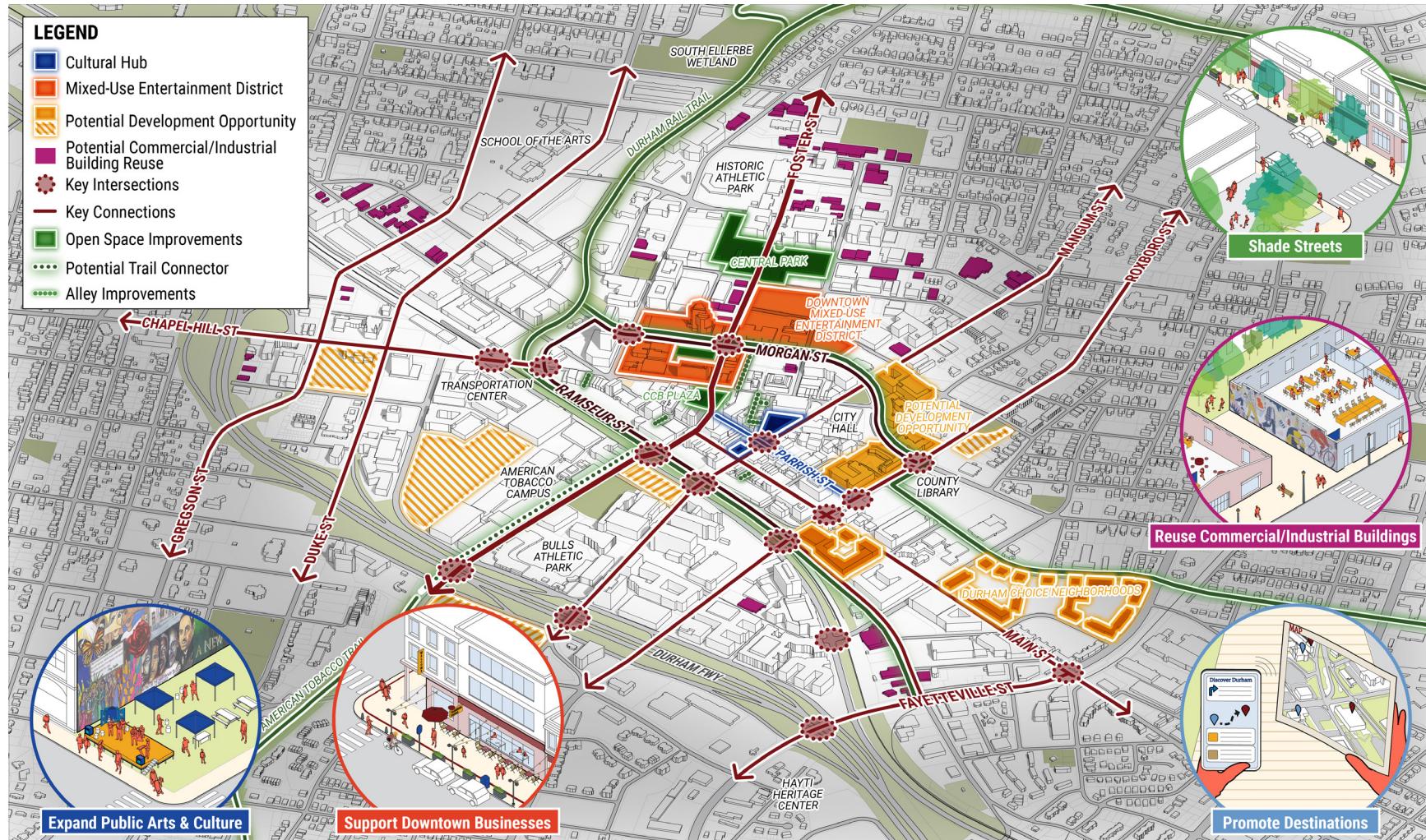


FIGURE 7: DOWNTOWN VISION DIAGRAM

*Photo from Downtown Durham, Inc.*





# INTRODUCTION

“A GOAL WITHOUT A PLAN IS JUST A WISH”

## WHY THIS PLAN & WHY NOW?

Downtown Durham is dynamic, unique, and ever-evolving. Think of downtown years ago when the loss of jobs resulted in empty streets and empty storefronts. We take for granted what has changed the face of downtown; the small businesses, the festivals and open spaces, the history and sense-of-place, and the many attractions that bring people here throughout the year. Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC), Durham Central Park, American Tobacco Campus, Durham Bulls Athletic Park, an updated main library, and countless new restaurants and places to live are now hallmarks of what has come to define downtown Durham. This change has come on the heels of careful planning that guided investment downtown as one of the Triangle's central hubs for business, culture and community life.

This change does not come without challenges. Durham's growth places even more pressure on downtown's small footprint. Housing affordability is a major citywide concern but so too is ensuring downtown remains a destination for jobs and businesses. Work from home policies that track with national trends have robbed downtown of some of the day-to-day customers that support local businesses. Downtown Durham is flourishing with new investment yet still struggling to recover. The diverse and active streets that people identify with downtown Durham require attention once again.

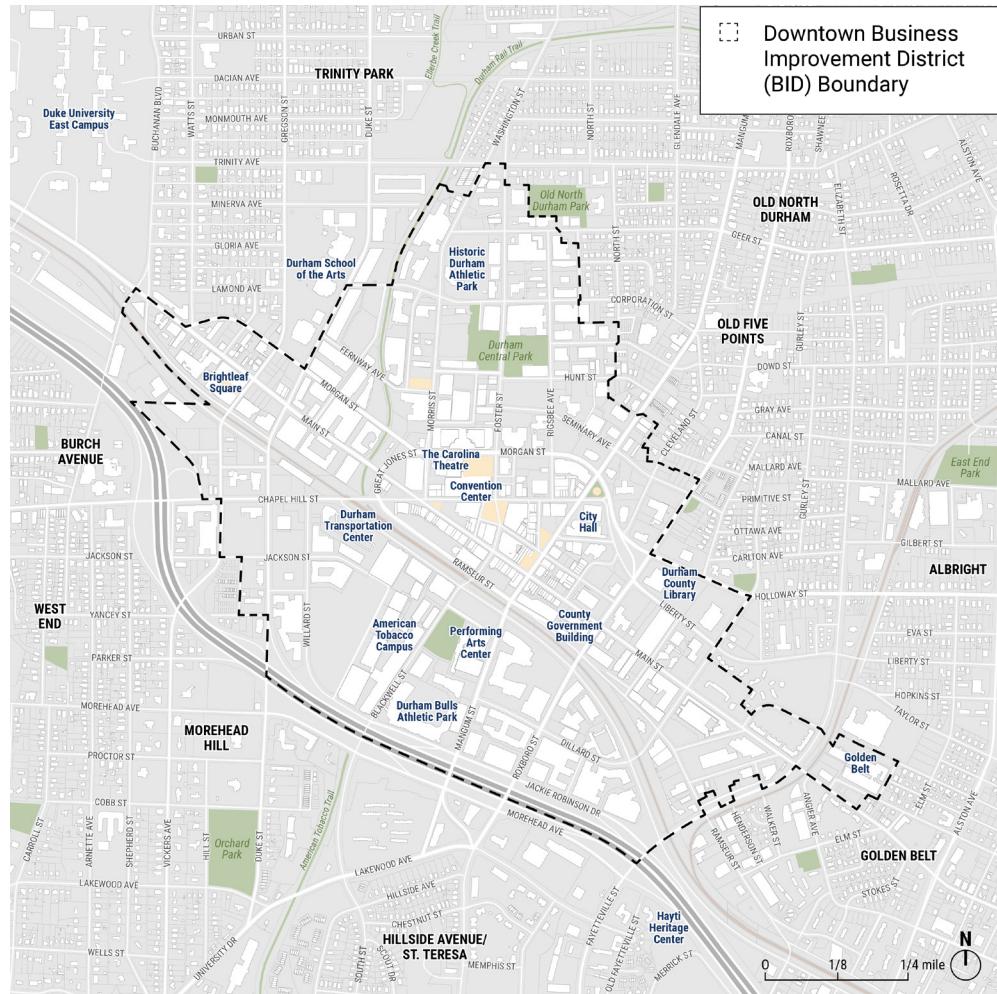


FIGURE 8: MAP OF DOWNTOWN

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To adapt to these new challenges, Downtown Durham, Inc. has worked with the City of Durham and Durham County to produce: **Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035**. The Downtown Blueprint will serve as a roadmap for the next decade, ensuring that downtown Durham preserves its unique character while supporting continued downtown growth.

## FOUNDATIONS OF THE DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT

This Downtown Blueprint is built on the voices of local Durhamites. Engagement reached over 2,400 Durhamites who expressed their goals and priorities for the future of downtown. A few key priorities came up in nearly every conversation.

Together, they form the foundation of the Downtown Blueprint and are reflected throughout this document and its recommendations.

### BE SAFE & WELCOMING

by working collaboratively to solve both real and perceived safety issues and ensuring everyone feels welcome and comfortable visiting downtown.

### KEEP DURHAM DURHAM

by embracing the unique character and culture of Durhamites, and ensuring there is space for creatives, small business owners, and residents to thrive.

### BE VIBRANT & GROWTH-ORIENTED

by putting in place policies that grow the housing stock, provide opportunities for businesses of all sizes, and that increase foot traffic and encourage a diversity of exciting visitor experiences.

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS & INITIATIVES

The **Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035** planning process reviewed the three previous downtown master plans and other downtown-focused plans with three goals in mind: (1) to examine how downtown has changed over the past 25 years since the first master plan, (2) to identify previously proposed opportunity sites, projects, and initiatives that were not implemented, and (3) to determine which initiatives are still relevant today. The planning team also reviewed recent city and county-wide plans, as well as relevant ongoing plans and initiatives, to ensure that the Downtown Blueprint's goals and recommendations fit within the framework of the larger vision for the city and county.

**A lot has been accomplished over the past few decades.** Development has played a major role in the transformation of downtown, with a significant amount of office, retail, and residential square footage added to the area and the adaptive reuse of historic warehouses preserving downtown's unique architectural character. Streetscape improvements along Main Street and within the Loop have contributed to a more walkable and pedestrian-friendly environment. Major destinations, such as DPAC and American Tobacco Campus, bring in visitors from across the city, county, and region.

### DOWNTOWN-FOCUSED PLANS

- > **Downtown Durham Master Plan** (2000)
- > Durham Cultural Master Plan
- > **Downtown Durham Master Plan: Seven Year Review & Updated Work Plan** (2008)
- > Downtown Durham Loop: Two-Way Feasibility Study
- > Downtown City Center District: Creating an Environment for Retail
- > Comprehensive Parking Study: Downtown Area
- > Downtown Open Space Plan
- > Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan: A Cultural Quilt
- > Business Diversity in Downtown Durham
- > **Downtown Master Plan: A Framework for the Future** (2017)

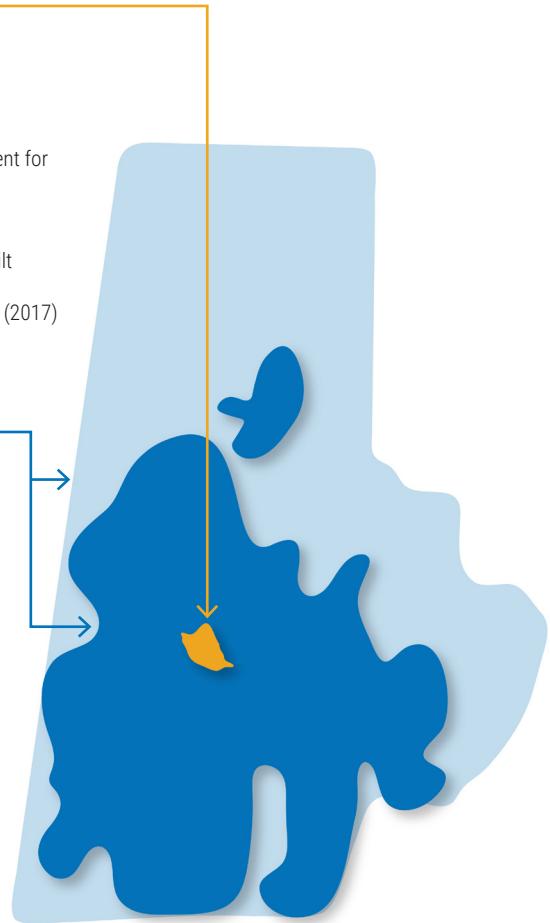
*\*bold text indicates a **Downtown Master Plan***

### RECENT CITY AND COUNTY-WIDE PLANS

- > Durham Bike+Walk Implementation Plan
- > Move Durham: Central Durham Transportation Study
- > Durham County Transit Plan
- > Durham Comprehensive Plan
- > Durham Destination Master Plan
- > Durham Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Systems Plan (*Ongoing*)
- > Durham Bike+Walk Plan Update (*Ongoing*)
- > Unified Development Ordinance Update (*Ongoing*)
- > Durham Cultural Roadmap (*Ongoing*)

### OTHER RECENT & ONGOING PLANS RELEVANT TO DOWNTOWN

- > Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan
- > Reimagine Durham Freeway Study (*Ongoing*)
- > Roxboro St. and Mangum St. Resurfacing and Study (*Ongoing*)
- > Durham Athletic Park Feasibility Study (*Ongoing*)
- > Durham Central Park Greenprint (*Ongoing*)



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Despite this success, some ideas come up time and time again but have found little footing toward becoming reality. These include:

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**>> The Loop should be converted from one-way to two-way.** The Loop two-way conversion has been a topic of extensive conversation for decades, with hopes of a more walkable, connected downtown along with new development opportunities, and yet, nothing has been put into action. The 2010 *Downtown Durham Loop Two-Way Feasibility Study* found that converting the Loop to two-way would not have a significant impact on intersections and would generally improve vehicular access in the downtown area. State ownership of the Loop and the cost of conversion remain difficult issues to overcome.

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**>> Foster/Corcoran/Blackwell should be a safe and inviting pedestrian corridor with a powerful and consistent visual identity, linking key destinations and unique areas of downtown.** The 2000 *Downtown Durham Master Plan* suggested an initial realignment of Corcoran Street with Foster Street as a first step in the formation of this central corridor, which was then followed up by the idea of Foster/Corcoran/Blackwell as an "Avenue of the Arts" that enriches downtown Durham as a destination for cultural tourism in the 2015 *Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan: A Cultural Quilt*. While the realignment was completed in 2006 and new bike lanes are currently in the design phase, very few of the SmART Vision recommendations regarding public art, placemaking, and public space improvements have yet to be implemented.

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**>> Downtown should be intentional about where existing open space is preserved and should explore new locations and opportunities for open space.** One of the "catalyst" projects proposed in the 2008 *Downtown Durham Master Plan: Seven Year Review & Updated Work Plan* was an "intentional open space" strategy. The recommendation acknowledged that although many vacant lots within downtown served as informal pockets parks for residents, workers, and visitors, the majority of those properties were privately-owned and would eventually be redeveloped—a prediction of the future that has become today's reality. The 2014 *Downtown Open Space Plan* doubled down on the need for quality open spaces downtown. Today's concerns about the need for quality public spaces downtown reflect the need to protect and reinvest in downtown parks and plazas, and it's critical to coordinate with the ongoing Durham Parks and Recreation 2024 *Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Systems Plan* and *Durham Central Park Greenprint* to create a shared vision for the future of downtown open space.

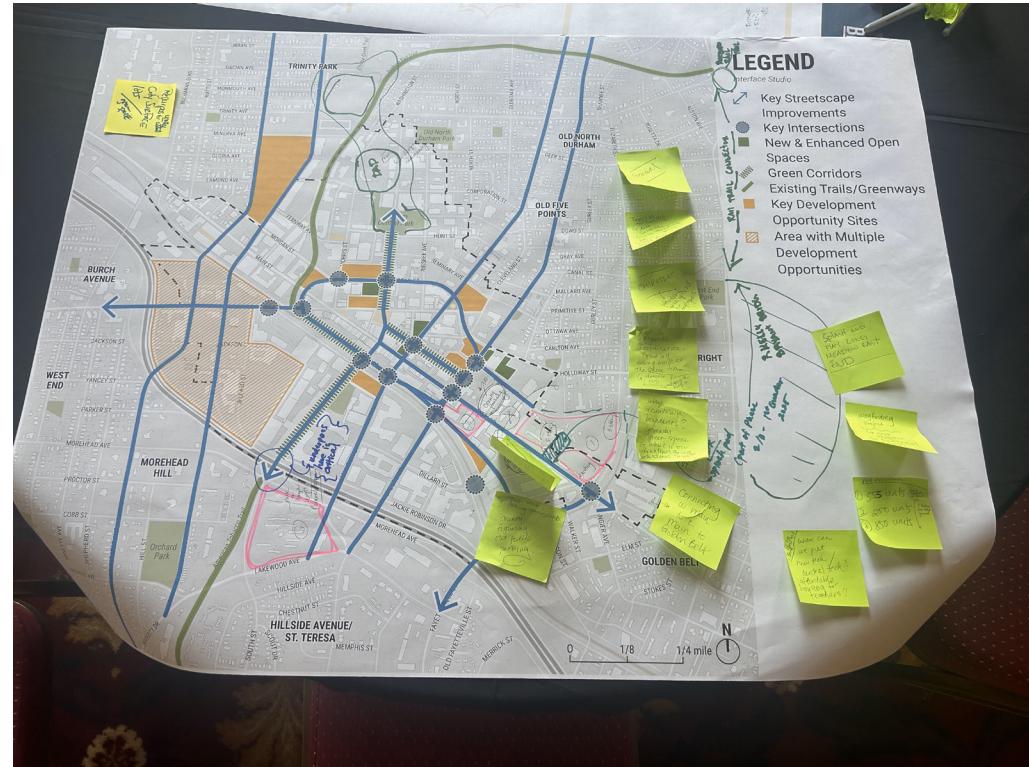
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As expressed by many that participated in this process, **these remain critically important for downtown's future.**

## A NEW WAVE OF PLANNING FOR DURHAM

In more recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of plans and initiatives related to downtown, the city, and the county, including several ongoing projects whose timelines overlap with this planning process. In this context, the Downtown Blueprint acts as a coordinating document such that these collective efforts are acting in unison.

The Downtown Blueprint planning team hosted an “Ongoing Planning Initiatives Meeting” in October 2024 with representatives of recent and in-progress plans to present initial ideas coming out of the Downtown Blueprint process, find overlap between efforts, and align overall visions for downtown. The meeting resulted in a positive consensus among participants that this type of interdepartmental and inter-plan coordination needs to happen more often. Reconvening this group periodically and consistently as the Downtown Blueprint moves into implementation will be a crucial part of the success of this plan and many others.



Ongoing Planning Initiatives Meeting (map of ideas for downtown with sticky notes of how they relate to other plans)

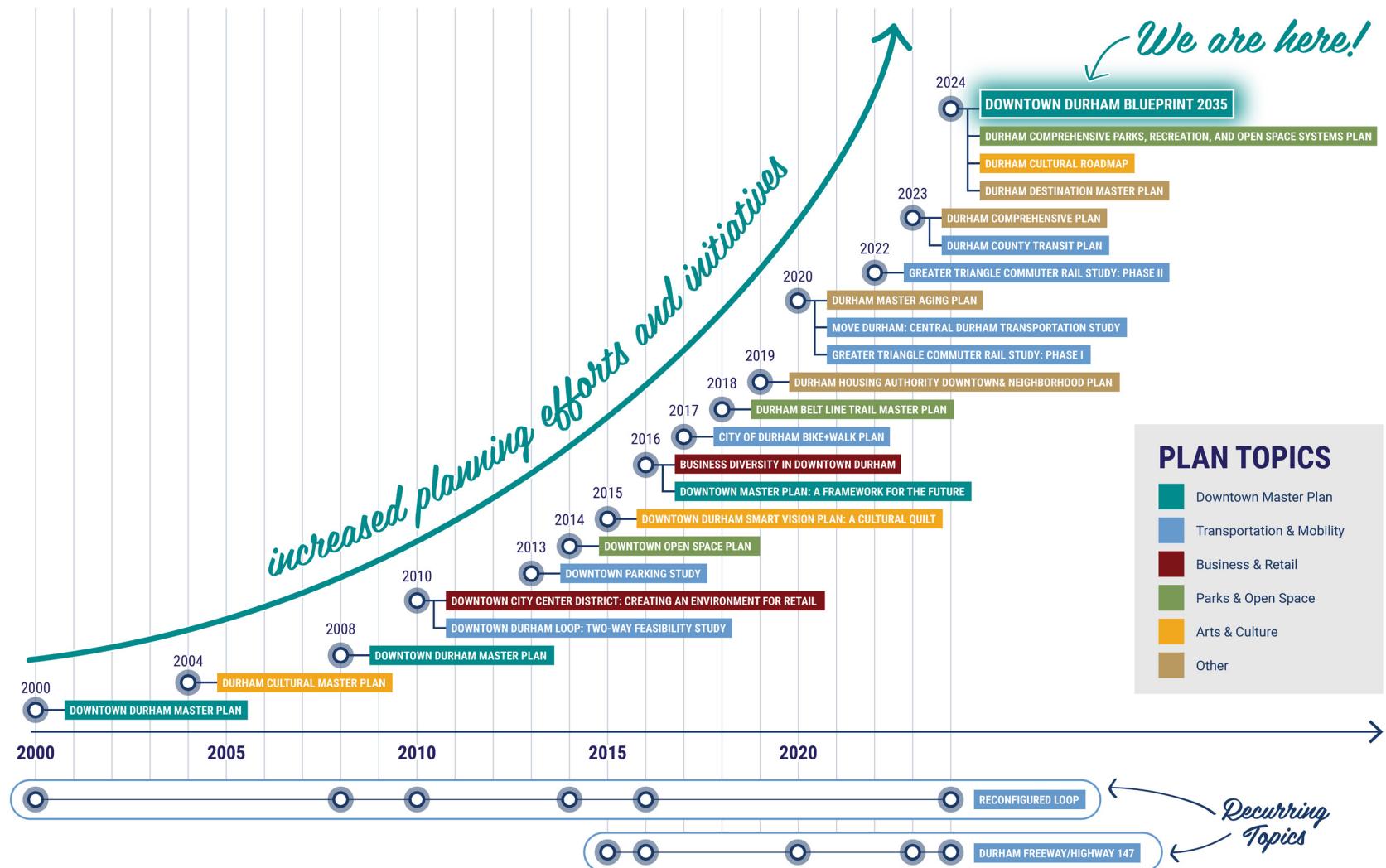


FIGURE 9: TIMELINE OF PAST PLANS

# KEY PLANS & INITIATIVES RELATED TO DOWNTOWN

## DURHAM RAIL TRAIL

The Durham Rail Trail is a proposed 1.8-mile multi-use trail for walking and biking that will be constructed over former rail tracks (construction scheduled to start in 2026 with a 2028 completion date). The trail will begin with a new park on the current gravel parking lot in front of the Durham Amtrak Station and will continue north/east. The Rail Trail is expected to improve pedestrian and bike connections, provide more open space, connect to the broader network of open spaces and trails outside of downtown, and bring more visitors and foot-traffic to the area.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT

With this upcoming investment in the Rail Trail, the Downtown Blueprint must consider how pedestrians and cyclists can access the Rail Trail, especially as one piece of a larger network of trails and open spaces, identify gaps between them, and recommend streetscape and safety improvements to strengthen those connections.

## DURHAM DESTINATION MASTER PLAN

Discover Durham's 20-Year Destination Master Plan aims to improve the quality of life for Durhamites while optimizing the visitor economy in Durham. The plan's recommendations related to tourism infrastructure, attractions, events, and placemaking are intended to grow the number of overnight visitors, increase the amount they spend in Durham, and extend the length of their stays. Durham Next, a nonprofit organization operated by Discover Durham, will employ some of the County's hotel occupancy tax funding to implement these projects.

Although the Destination Master Plan is intended to be a city/county-wide plan, there are several proposed projects that have a significant impact on downtown, including an expanded or relocated Convention Center, redevelopment of the Historic Durham Athletic Park as a multi-use facility, new events and festivals, and iconic activations at downtown destinations like American Tobacco Campus or Golden Belt Campus.

## ROXBORO/MANGUM STREETS RESURFACING AND STUDY

ONGOING

The study, led by the City of Durham Transportation Department, focuses on the feasibility of converting the one-way State-owned pair of Mangum and Roxboro Streets to two-way to create safer, multimodal streets. Many residents complain about frequent speeding on the one-way streets, which causes them to feel unsafe crossing on foot. The initial public outreach process took place in Spring and Summer of 2024, with the two-way traffic impact analysis report finalized and sent to NCDOT for approval in Fall 2024. If the project receives the required approvals and funding, the anticipated construction could occur in 2026-2027.

The two-way conversion of Mangum and Roxboro would provide a safer, more walkable street network in downtown. The conversion process will provide good lessons learned for similar Downtown Blueprint recommendations, such as conversion of the Loop roads to two-way, especially where Roxboro connects to Liberty, Holloway, and Ramseur.

## REIMAGINE DURHAM FREEWAY STUDY

ONGOING

The City of Durham Transportation Department is leading this federally-funded study to develop a community-led vision for the Durham Freeway Corridor (NC 147). Constructed in the 1970s, the Freeway cut through prominent Black neighborhoods and communities including Hayti, displacing many Black residents and businesses and severing important community ties. The Reimagine Durham Freeway Study aims to engage the communities impacted by the Freeway and identify ways to reconnect them along the corridor. Public engagement is ongoing, with draft recommendations planned for Spring 2025 and a preferred concept adopted by the City mid-2025.

NC 147 is a significant wall between downtown, Hayti, the Fayetteville Street corridor, and North Carolina Central University. Findings from this community driven process should be integrated into the Downtown Blueprint work plan to ensure seamless connections between downtown and historically black neighborhoods.

## DURHAM ATHLETIC PARK FEASIBILITY STUDY

ONGOING

The historic Durham Athletic Park, owned by the City of Durham, is undergoing a feasibility study and community outreach process to determine the future use of the site. Located in a rapidly growing area of downtown, the Durham Athletic Park is a key opportunity to develop a site that will benefit the community and connect to adjacent open spaces.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT

Because downtown has experienced significant growth in recent years, the Durham Athletic Park remains a significant opportunity to provide a center for recreation and culture. Once complete, this historic landmark promises to be an important destination for residents and visitors alike.

## UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE UPDATE

ONGOING

The Durham City-County Planning Department is currently working on a comprehensive update to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) that regulates how physical development of land is allowed to occur in both the city and the county. The update aims to make the UDO clearer and easier to use, simplify the approval process, expand housing choice and affordability, promote transit-oriented development, and increase open space, among other goals.

Some of the proposed UDO changes will affect downtown's development with restructured zoning districts and new ways to guide residential, commercial, and mixed-use density. The draft recommendations of the UDO are already integrated into this document and any changes should be reflected across the work.

# A YEAR OF VISIONING FOR DOWNTOWN DURHAM

Over the course of 12 months, thousands of community members were engaged in shaping the future of their downtown. The engagement process aimed to create a vision that reflects the many different perspectives and needs of Durham, with a special emphasis on Black, Latino, and youth communities. How did we get there? Through **intentional programming**, a **variety of scales and styles** of engagement, and an **iterative process**.

## GO TO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

From the very beginning of the project, engagement actions prioritized a variety of voices to ensure the **Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan** would represent the entire Durham community. Through Spring, Summer and Fall of 2024, this involved meeting community members where they were, including a variety of digital and in-person opportunities to participate—pop-up events (which brought the project to festivals/events, parks, and schools), community panel discussions, and stakeholder interviews.

### THE RESULTS?

- The State of Downtown Durham kick-off event introduced the plan, its goals, and the process to over 300 key downtown stakeholders.
- Nine pop-up events across Durham reached hundreds of participants in accessible settings and events. By strategically selecting diverse locations – including farmers markets, cultural events, and community spaces – engagement activities were able to reach a variety of audiences. Our engagement approach included Spanish communications and bilingual staff at events to ensure all voices were included.

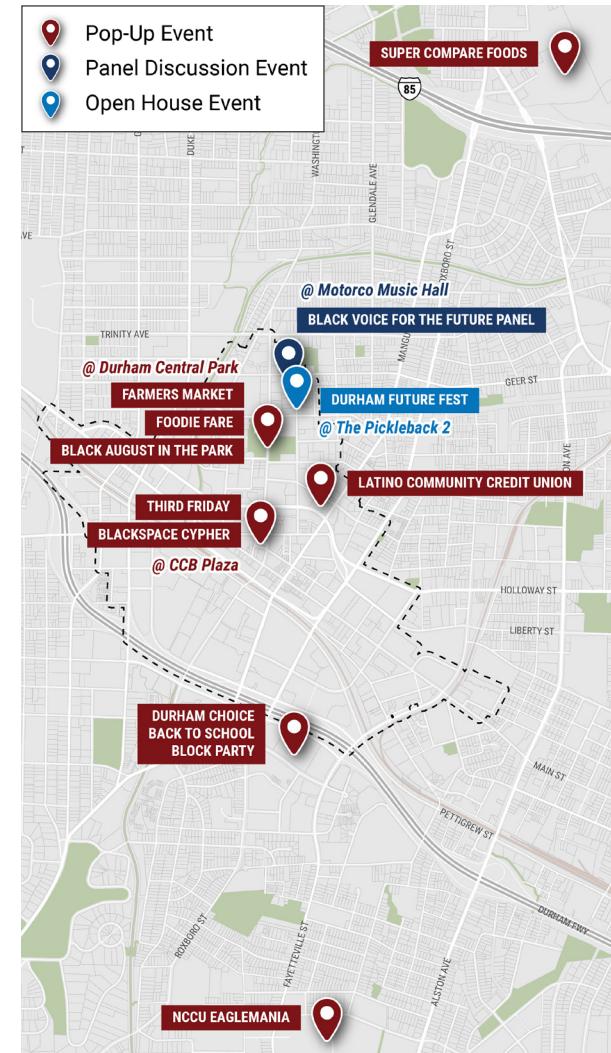


FIGURE 10: ENGAGEMENT LOCATIONS

## BROAD OUTREACH TO BUILD TRUST

The engagement process was used as a way to strengthen connections with key community partners, organizations, and institutions—cultural, educational, and community-oriented—that play a pivotal role in shaping downtown Durham, including Blackspace and the Latino Community Credit Union. To effectively engage Durham's growing Latino population, all materials and surveys were translated into Spanish.

The engagement process was designed to be iterative. After gathering feedback through surveys, events, and interviews, the input was synthesized into an engagement summary, highlighting what we heard and how it informed the process.

## ENGAGEMENT METRICS

The success of the engagement process is reflected in the sheer volume and diversity of participation. **Over 2,230 people** took the survey and hundreds participated in pop-up activities and the January Open House.

A breakdown of participation numbers:

- A **15-member Steering Committee** provided ongoing guidance to ensure the plan remained focused on community needs.
- The project team also met with the **DDI and ReDD Boards** throughout the process.
- Interviews were conducted with **20 stakeholders**, representing a cross-section of City/County departments, elected officials, Black and Latino organizations, business and tourism groups, local residents, and Duke University.
- **38 local businesses** were engaged through interviews and focus groups, and 99 employees were surveyed to understand the perspectives of those working downtown.
- The **Black Voices for the Future Panel** engaged over **75 attendees** of Durham's black community to share their hopes and concerns about the future of downtown.
- Recognizing the importance of alignment, the project was coordinated with other key initiatives through **ongoing planning meetings with 30 participants from various organizations and agencies**. This ensured that the Downtown Blueprint 2035 Plan would integrate seamlessly with other efforts, contributing to a cohesive vision for the city's future.
- A highlight of the engagement process was the **January Open House**. Even on a snowy day, **over 200 participants** showed up and weighed in on draft concepts and recommendations.

WE HELD SOME POP-UPS IN THE SUMMER AND FALL...



....WE HOSTED A  
BLACK VOICES  
FOR THE  
FUTURE  
PANEL...



...AND WE DISCUSSED  
SOME IDEAS FOR  
DOWNTOWN AT THE  
DOWNTOWN FUTURE FEST.

# DOWNTOWN TODAY

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The Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 is people-driven and data-driven. Data about downtown businesses, residents, development trends, crime, street activity and more was evaluated to provide a picture of downtown today. The analysis reinforces the perceptions expressed by those that know downtown best. Here are the major downtown trends the Downtown Blueprint must address.

## NEW CONSTRUCTION IS RAPIDLY CHANGING THE FEEL AND COST OF LIVING AND WORKING DOWNTOWN

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Downtown Durham has seen significant growth and development, reflecting the growth of the Research Triangle region, one of the fastest growing areas of the country. More than 4,000 residential units have been added downtown, with a total of approximately 580 new construction permits issued in neighborhoods within a half mile of the downtown BID since 2017. In addition, downtown has seen the addition of 1.8 million square feet of office and over 265,000 square feet of retail since 2017. Looking forward, the Durham Housing Authority plans to preserve and develop over 2,400 mixed-income units, 74% of which will be affordable, serving residents with incomes up to 80% AMI (Area Median Income) in the Downtown Development Tier.

Downtowns need to grow and change to stay vibrant and support regional economies. However, rapid growth coupled with increasing housing costs has led to concerns about the character

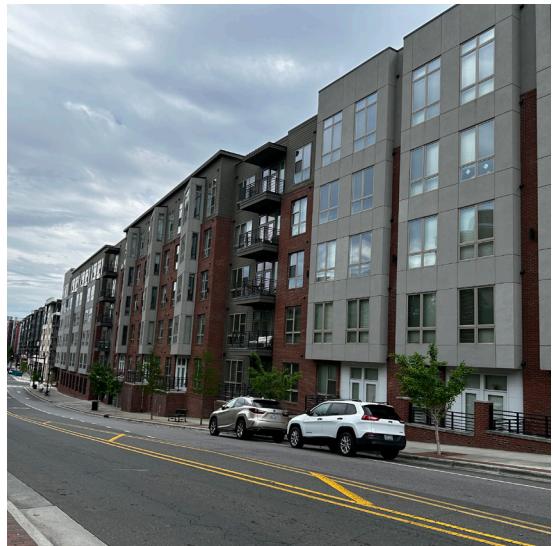
and type of new development, and what is being lost in the process. Survey respondents expressed concerns that development in Durham is proceeding without a clear plan, prioritizing new buildings over the community's needs and renovating existing structures. Survey participants also noted that many new storefronts and housing developments remain vacant, potentially due to overbuilding and/or leasing costs.

Demand for space in downtown and the high cost of new construction has driven up rental rates, creating a challenging environment for both new and existing tenants. As modern buildings with premium amenities set a new market standard, rental prices have soared to levels unattainable for many potential newcomers. At the same time, longstanding businesses that once thrived on more affordable leases are struggling to keep up with escalating costs, putting their sustainability at risk. This trend not

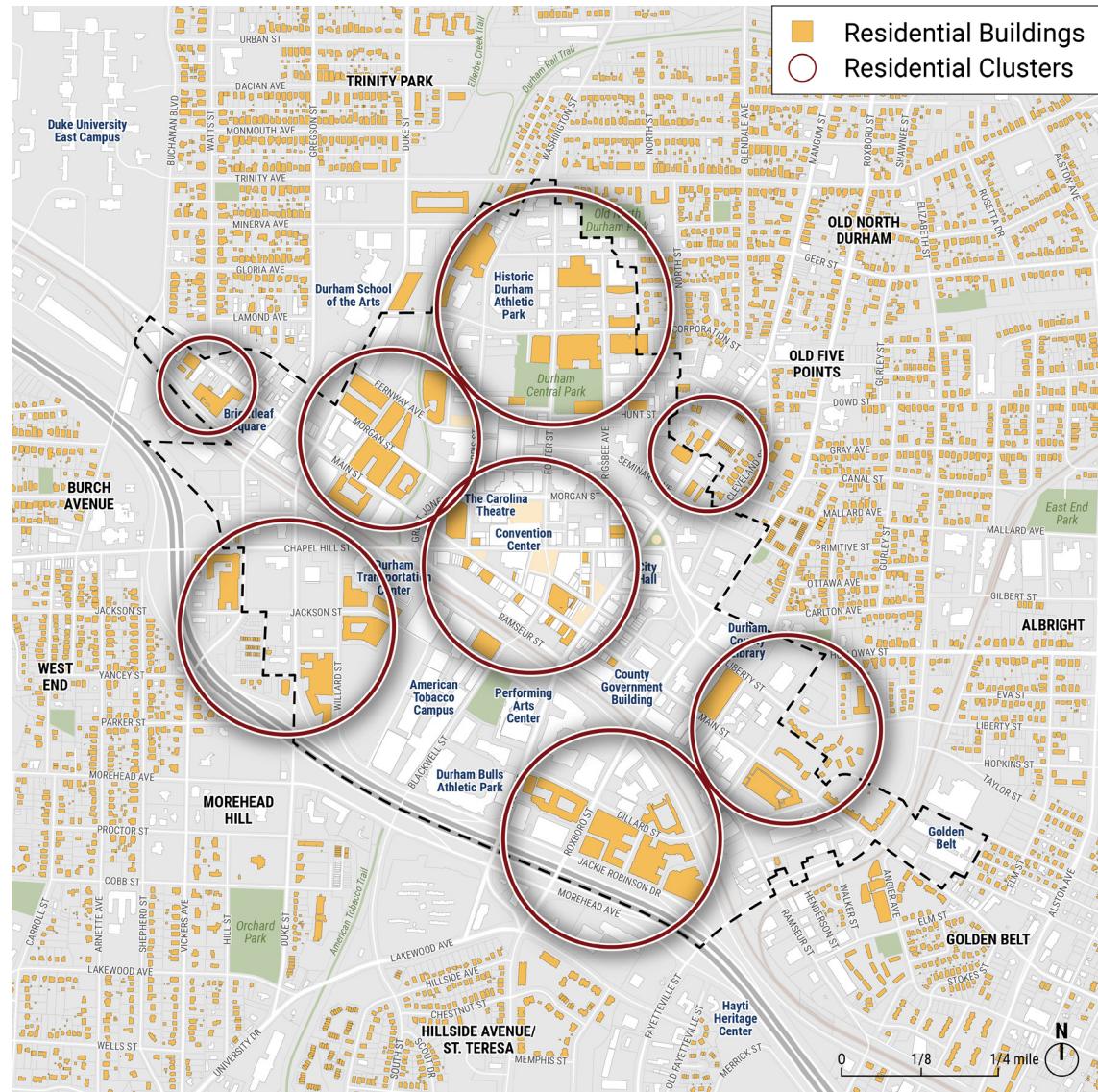
only threatens the diversity and character of the local business community but also raises concerns about downtown's accessibility and inclusivity. If unchecked, rising rents could lead to increased vacancies or a homogenized tenant mix, ultimately undermining downtown's vibrancy and economic resilience.

To ensure that downtown Durham's growth remains inclusive and sustainable, future development must balance expansion with community needs. Through thoughtful planning, Durham can foster a dynamic downtown that supports economic vitality while maintaining its cultural and historic identity.

**"I USED TO LOVE THE SMALL TOWN SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND THE DIVERSE CULTURE. THAT IS FAST DISAPPEARING WITH THE OVER DEVELOPMENT AND OBTRUSIVE CONSTRUCTION."**



### *Newer downtown residential developments*



**FIGURE 11:** RESIDENTIAL CLUSTERS IN DOWNTOWN

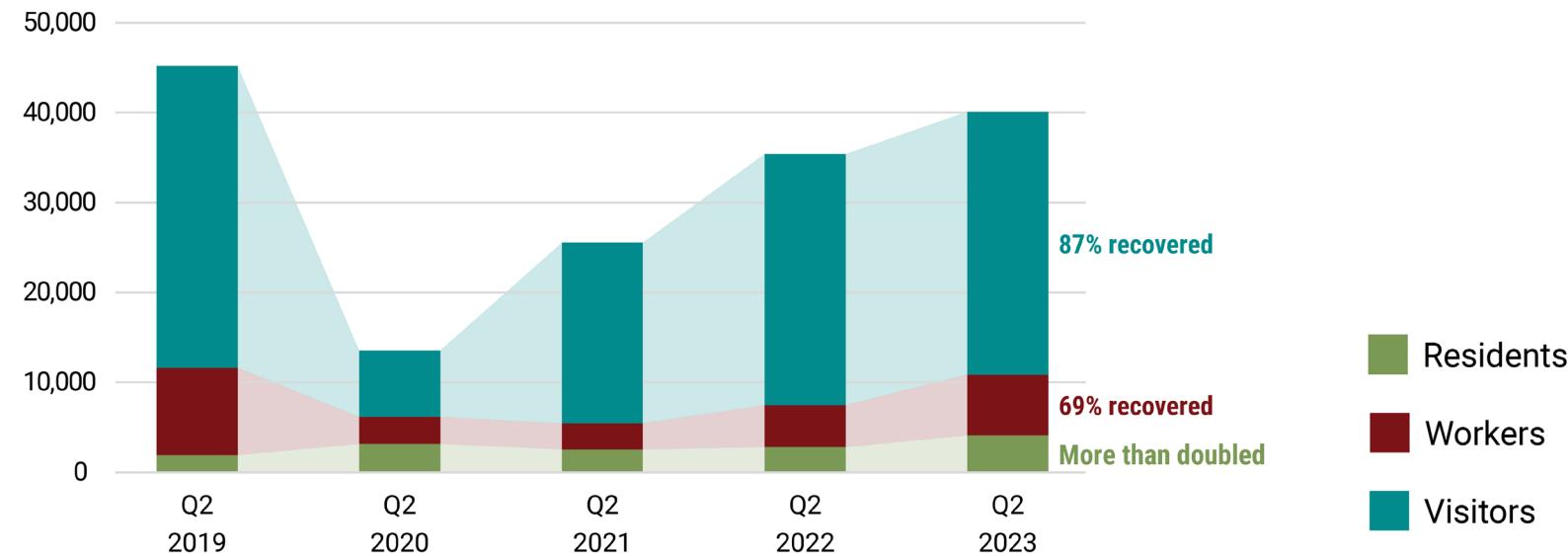
## HYBRID WORK POLICIES HAVE LED TO DECREASED WEEKDAY FOOT TRAFFIC

As downtown recovers from the effects of the pandemic, daily visitor numbers are almost back up to pre-pandemic levels (87%), and the number of residents has more than doubled. However, the daily worker population has lagged behind the other two groups, only reaching 69% of pre-pandemic levels, and this may not change any time soon. Hybrid work policies are likely here to stay, meaning empty desks and lower foot traffic during the week. In the past, many local

restaurants depended on a stable daily workforce that stopped by for lunch or grabbed drinks after work. Compounding this challenge, some of the newer office buildings have yet to be leased, including the entire new Roxboro at Venable Center building. Downtown Durham's office market is currently dependent on a few major tenants who occupy the majority of office space. This creates a vulnerability where the decision of one major tenant can significantly impact downtown.

To adapt to shifting workplace dynamics, downtown Durham must attract foot traffic beyond the traditional office workforce by fostering a mix of residential, retail, arts, and entertainment uses. Supporting small businesses through flexible leasing, targeted incentives, and event programming can help sustain activity throughout the day and evening.

**FIGURE 12: AVERAGE DAILY DOWNTOWN POPULATION** (Data Source: *Placer.ai*)





“DAYTIME DOWNTOWN  
WAS PREVIOUSLY  
THRIVING AND NOW IS  
VERY QUIET.”

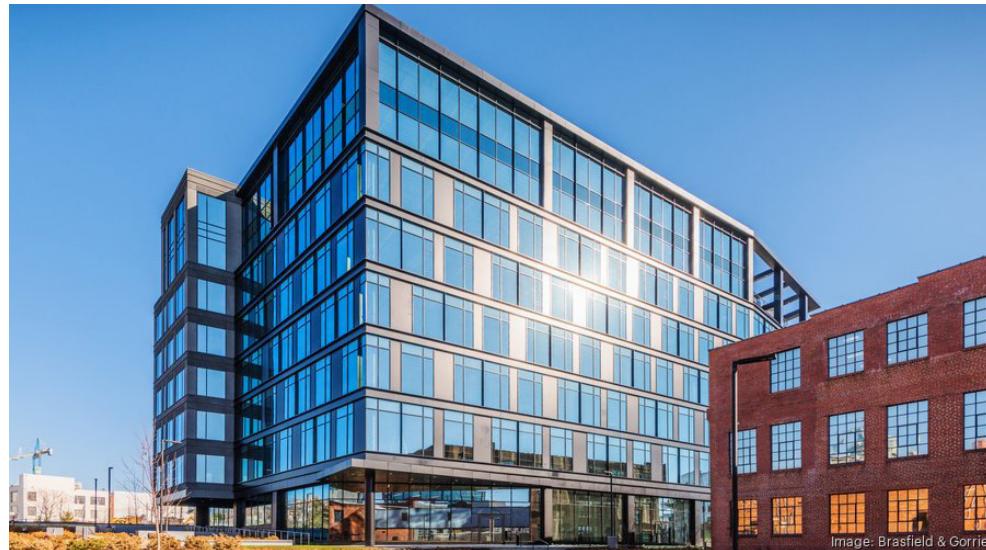


Image: Brasfield & Gorrie



Hybrid and remote work policies have reduced downtown's daily foot traffic, leaving restaurants and retailers without a consistent daily customer base. (Source (top left to bottom right): Brightleaf Square; Brasfield & Gorrie; Interface Studio)

## DOWNTOWN'S OPEN SPACES NEED A MAKEOVER AND DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO OFFER MORE TO DO FOR EVERYONE

Despite downtown Durham's vibrant culture and growing population, its public open spaces lack programming and activities that can draw residents, workers, and visitors on a regular basis. While the Convention Center Plaza is centrally located, its design does not easily accommodate events or programming. The large open space in front of DPAC remains underutilized, offering little to draw visitors or foster community engagement.

Existing public spaces also face challenges in maintaining activity outside of scheduled events. Durham Central Park's pavilion, while a valuable asset

for hosting markets and performances, can feel inactive during off-peak hours, missing opportunities for casual everyday use. Black Wall Street Gardens, a historically significant space featuring public art and sculptures, lacks the flexibility needed to support programming that could animate the area and attract new visitors. Meanwhile, new multi-family residential development trends are shifting open space toward private courtyards within the buildings, reducing the availability of shared green spaces for the broader community.

Downtown needs more to do particularly for families. Every time a family leaves

downtown immediately after a Durham Bulls game is a missed opportunity. Visitors drive local sales at stores and restaurants. Downtown needs to upgrade its parks and plazas to keep visitors here and coming back.



*Inactive open spaces (Left to right: Convention Center Plaza, Blackwell Street open space next to American Tobacco Campus, Black Wall Street Gardens)*

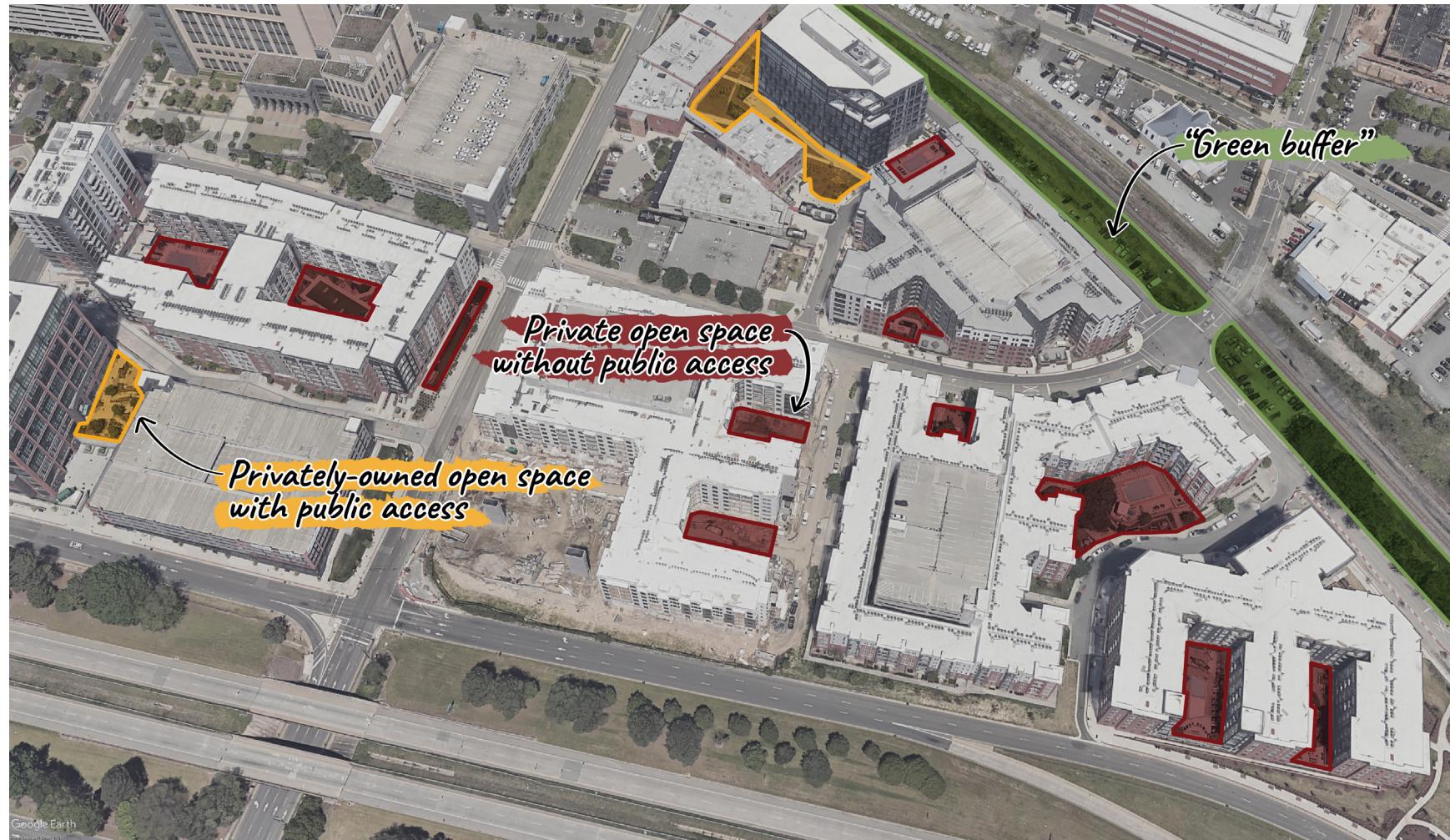


FIGURE 13: PRIVATELY-OWNED OPEN SPACES

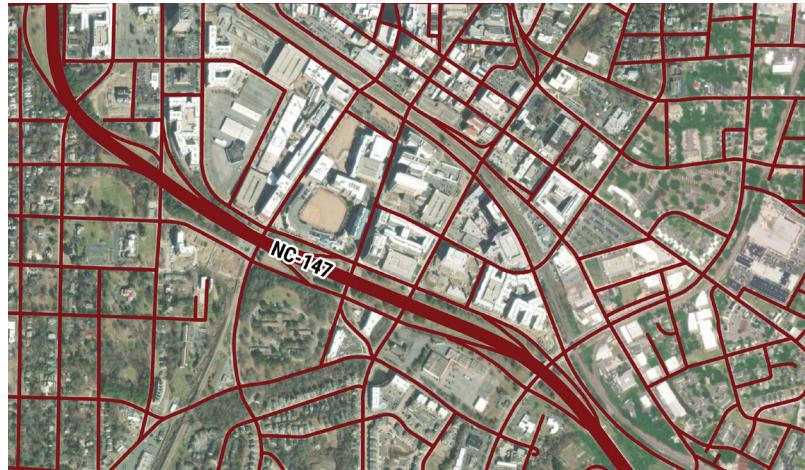
## DOWNTOWN IS CARVED UP BY MAJOR ONE-WAY ROADS

The design of downtown Durham's road network has long prioritized vehicle movement at the expense of connectivity, creating barriers between downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. The Loop and other one-way streets encourage fast-moving traffic which creates unsafe conditions for those walking or bicycling. These roadways, originally designed to improve circulation, now function more as obstacles than connectors.

The Durham Freeway, a product of mid-20th-century urban renewal efforts, severed the historic Hayti community, displacing residents and dismantling the area's once-thriving street grid. This physical and social disruption remains a lasting wound, reinforcing the separation between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Additionally, surface parking lots further fragment the urban fabric.

Redesigning major roads is not just about improving safety for those walking and bicycling but restitching downtown and creating stronger connections with adjacent neighborhoods.

**"THESE HIGH SPEED ROADS DEPRESS THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY ON THOSE ROADS AND MAKE DOWNTOWN A CRAPPIER PLACE TO VISIT AND HANG OUT IN."**



A 1966 map of Durham City Limits from the Department of Public Works (shown above) reveals the tight-knit street grid of the Hayti community that was destroyed by the Durham Freeway/NC-147.

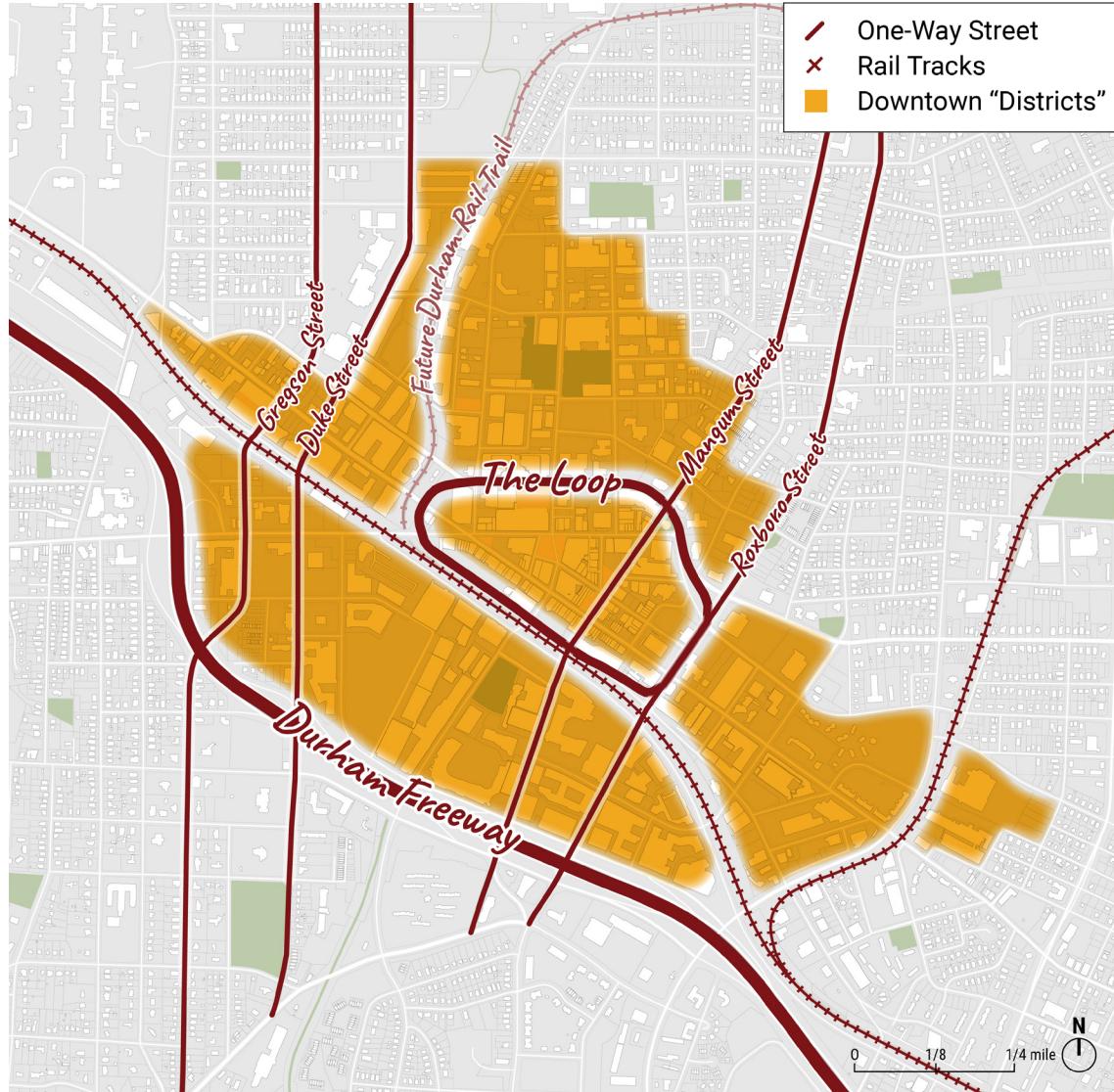
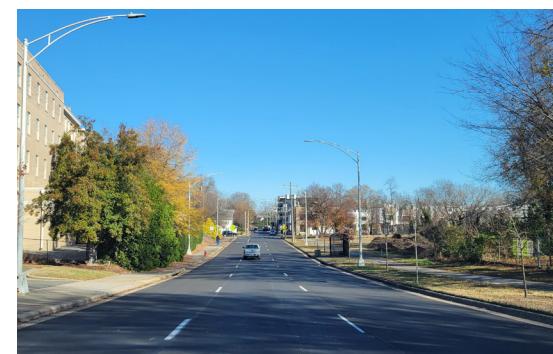


FIGURE 14: RESIDENTIAL CLUSTERS IN DOWNTOWN



Wide one-way streets act more like highways and encourage drivers to speed.

## DOWNTOWN OFFERS A DISJOINED STREET EXPERIENCE

A vibrant and engaging street experience is essential to a thriving downtown, yet much of downtown Durham's frontage remains inactive, creating gaps in energy and pedestrian activity. Only 10% of downtown frontages are currently active or have the potential to be, meaning they feature transparent storefronts, inviting streetscapes, or are well-positioned for future activation. In contrast, 29% are somewhat inactive, and 59% are fully

inactive, resulting in long stretches of streets that feel uninviting to pedestrians. According to the 2020 *Move Durham* study, over 13% of downtown's land area is dedicated to parking, totaling more than 19,000 spaces—yet only half are accessible to the public. These large, underutilized spaces disrupt the pedestrian experience and create "dead zones" that discourage exploring downtown.

**"SO MANY SPACES ARE SITTING VACANT AND HAVE BEEN FOR A LONG TIME."**

**FIGURE 15:** DOWNTOWN FRONTAGE CATEGORIES



### ACTIVE includes:

- > Street-level frontage
- > Transparent windows/doors
- > Short distances between entrances
- > High-quality and visible signage
- > Uses that generate foot-traffic



### GOOD POTENTIAL includes:

- > Unoccupied storefront
- > Transparent windows/doors
- > High-quality building/streetcape potential



### SOMEWHAT INACTIVE includes:

- > Raised/sunken frontage
- > Buffer between use and street
- > Low transparency windows/doors
- > Uses that generate little to no foot traffic
- > Long distances between entrances



### INACTIVE includes:

- > Parking garages and lots
- > Building loading areas
- > Blank, windowless walls
- > Vacant buildings and land

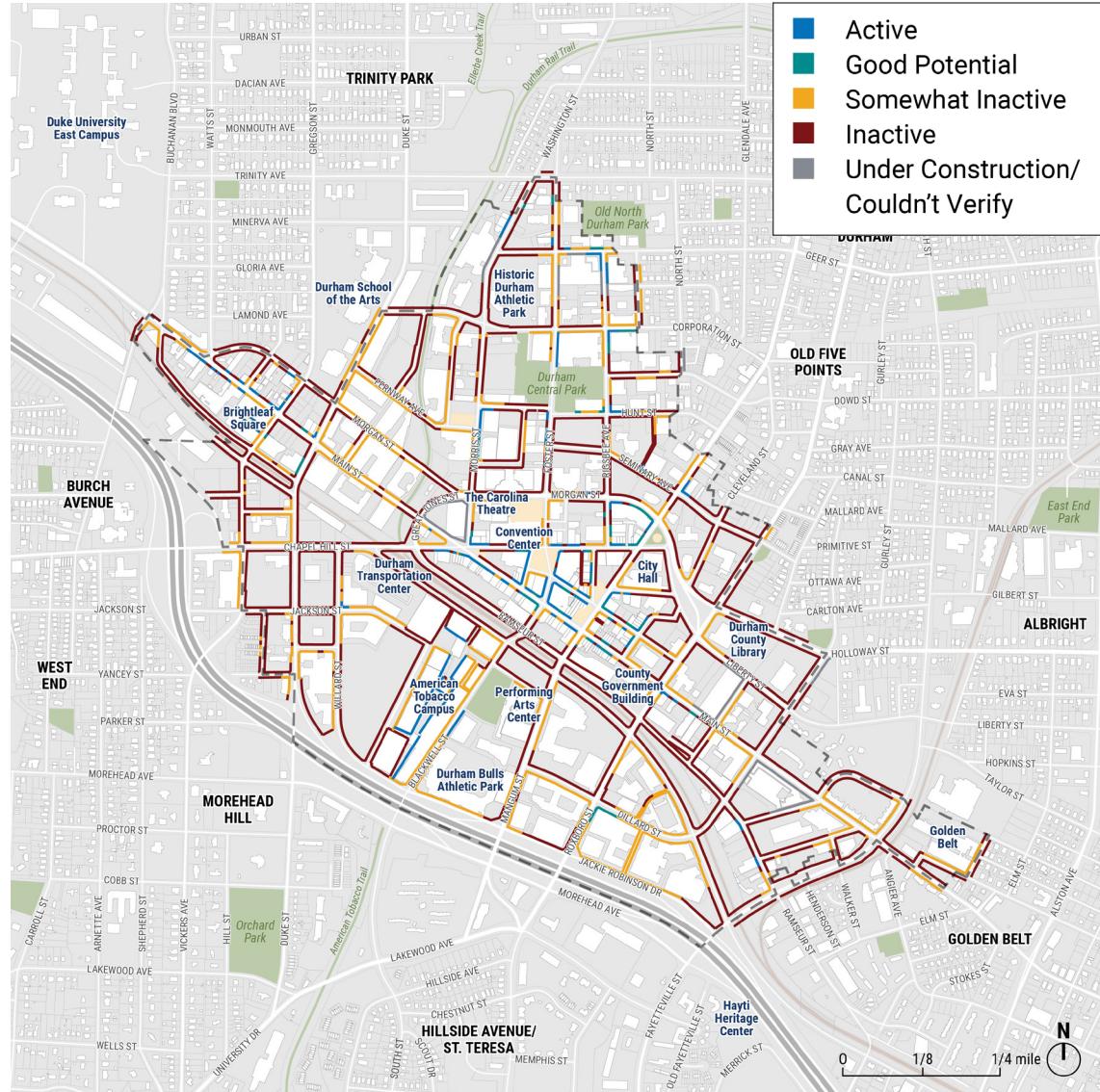
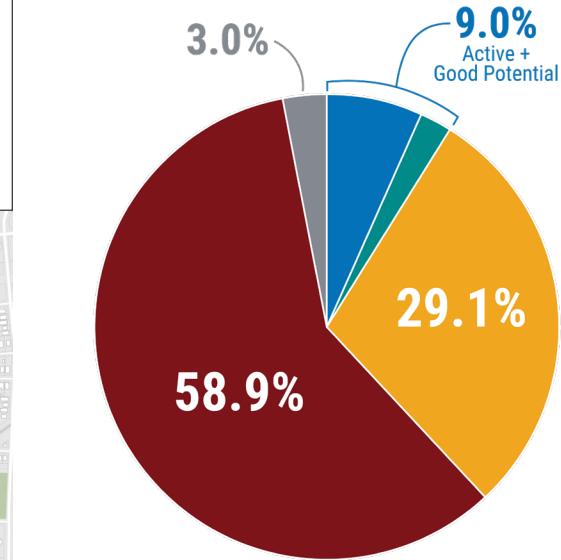


FIGURE 16: DOWNTOWN FRONTAGE ANALYSIS

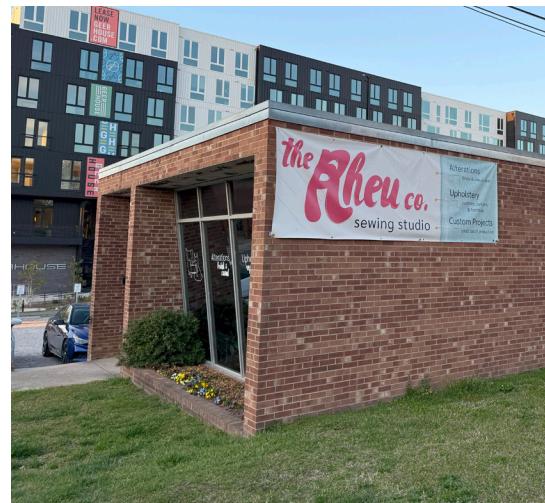


"I WOULD LIKE TO SEE FEWER DEAD ZONES IN BETWEEN PLACES OF INTEREST."

Even within the Loop, where the highest concentration of active frontage exists, vacant storefronts are still prevalent, weakening the overall street experience. Compounding this issue, downtown Durham has a higher percentage of retail vacancies and larger-sized vacant spaces than many of its peer cities, making it more difficult to attract small businesses that drive street-level vibrancy. In some cases, even well-maintained storefronts are occupied by offices or non-retail uses, where blinds or opaque window treatments obscure visibility and reduce engagement at the street level.

Despite downtown Durham's growing reputation as a destination for dining, shopping, and entertainment, many businesses struggle with visibility and accessibility. Major retail and entertainment hubs like Brightleaf Square and the American Tobacco Campus feature storefronts facing interior courtyards rather than primary roads, limiting exposure to potential customers passing by. While these destinations attract foot traffic, their orientation makes it harder for businesses to capture the attention of casual visitors or those unfamiliar with the area.

Many downtown businesses lack adequate signage that is visible to both pedestrians and drivers, making it difficult for potential customers to locate storefronts. Additionally, the street network within the Loop is difficult to navigate, with dead-end streets like Parrish Street experiencing lower traffic counts. This not only creates confusion for visitors but also reduces opportunities for businesses located on these less-traveled corridors to benefit from organic foot traffic.



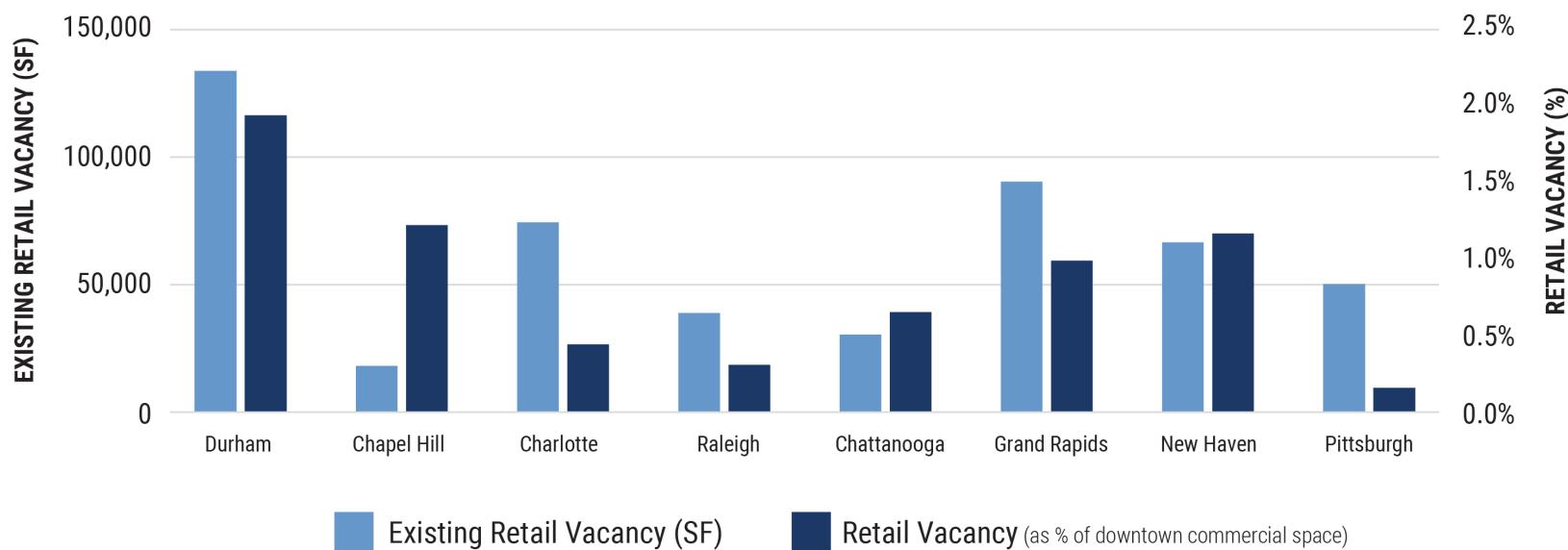
*Businesses lack adequate retail signage from vehicular and pedestrian vantage points.*

Addressing this challenge will require strategies to activate vacant storefronts, encourage a diverse retail mix, and improvements to both signage and the design of downtown's smaller streets and alleys all of which will drive retail sales and help business success!



*Prominent retail destinations, like American Tobacco Campus and Brightleaf Square do not benefit from visibility to primary roads*

**FIGURE 17: RETAIL VACANCY ANALYSIS**



	Average Space Size	Median Space Size	Average Size of Vacant Space
<b>Downtown Durham</b>	3,454 SF	3,456 SF	3,551 SF
<b>Downtown Chapel Hill</b>	2,557 SF	1,818 SF	2,478 SF
<b>Downtown Raleigh</b>	2,301 SF	1,700 SF	2,960 SF

Downtown Durham experiences higher vacancy and larger space sizes than nearby competing downtowns of Chapel Hill and Raleigh.

Data Source: Google

## PARKING IS AN ISSUE FOR BOTH DOWNTOWN EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS

Parking remains a significant concern for visitors, employees, and businesses in downtown Durham. Many visitors struggle to find street parking and often perceive parking garages as too expensive or unsafe, discouraging them from spending time downtown, or find it difficult to locate available garages due to the lack of auto-oriented wayfinding. Employees share similar concerns, particularly about walking to their cars at night, especially in parking garages where lighting and security are issues. While the City has introduced a Discounted Monthly Parking Voucher Program to provide affordable

garage parking for low-income downtown workers, accessibility and safety challenges persist.

Businesses outside of the Loop face additional difficulties, and have historically relied on surface lots that are now disappearing. Meanwhile, ongoing construction projects have exacerbated access issues, with blocked sidewalks and on-street parking spaces frequently occupied by construction workers rather than customers. Further squeezing parking is the need for curbside space to accommodate a variety of competing

needs including loading zones, delivery services, emergency access, and bike lanes.

To support a thriving downtown, Durham must enhance parking availability, improve garage safety, and optimize curbside management to balance business, visitor, and operational needs. Thoughtful strategies, including wayfinding improvements, shared parking agreements, and construction mitigation efforts, can help ensure that parking and access challenges do not hinder downtown's continued growth and vitality.



Construction frequently takes over the sidewalk and curb space, limiting opportunities for parking and loading.



Curbside space needs better management to facilitate the range of loading, delivery, and parking needs for businesses.

**"LACK OF PARKING HAS CHANGED HOW I INTERACT WITH DOWNTOWN - I LIVE ABOUT FOUR MINUTES AWAY AND NOW RARELY VISIT BUSINESSES BECAUSE I CANNOT PARK ANYWHERE."**

## DOWNTOWN'S ANCHORS AND FOOD/BEVERAGE ESTABLISHMENTS DRIVE TRAFFIC BUT WE NEED MORE VARIETY

Downtown Durham's economy is heavily shaped by its food and beverage sector, which makes up 66% of all retail tenants. Restaurants, bars, and breweries have become key attractions, drawing both locals and visitors, particularly in the evenings and on weekends. This strong hospitality presence has helped create a vibrant dining scene, but it also leaves downtown's retail mix overly reliant on a single industry, making it vulnerable to shifts in consumer habits, rising operational costs, and economic downturns.

One sector facing growing uncertainty is brewing, a key economic driver in downtown Durham, home to nine breweries. While these establishments contribute to the city's identity and foot traffic, industry challenges such as rising production costs, shifting market trends, and increased competition could threaten their long-term sustainability. In addition and even with a growing downtown population there is a noticeable lack of neighborhood-serving businesses, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and

everyday retail options, limiting the ability of downtown residents to meet their daily needs without traveling elsewhere.

To build a more resilient and balanced retail environment, downtown must support efforts to diversify downtown business offerings to include a mix of retail, service-oriented businesses, and hospitality establishments.

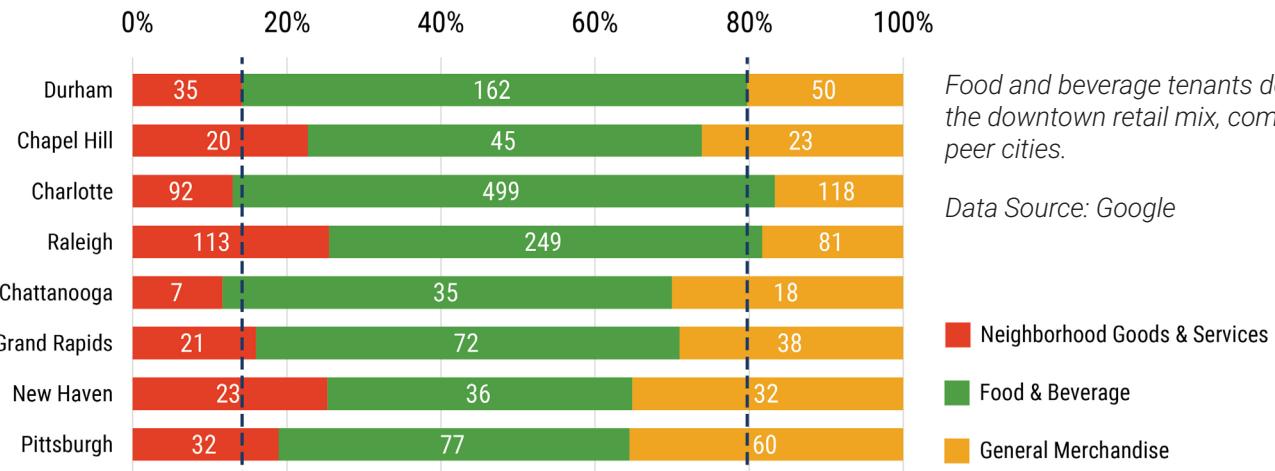


FIGURE 18: RETAIL MIX COMPARED TO PEER CITIES

## SAFETY CONCERNSS DISCOURAGE VISITORS FROM COMING DOWNTOWN

Downtowns across the country have collectively struggled post pandemic. Concerns around public safety, panhandling, and maintenance are compounding other issues related to a smaller number of office workers actually coming back to the office. With less street traffic, perceptions around the look and feel of downtowns are all the more important. Continued work is necessary to ensure that the basics of downtown Durham - that it feels clean and safe - are addressed.

As with other cities, homelessness has also increased. However, too often crime or perceptions of crime are applied to those experiencing homelessness even when that is not the case. Addressing the challenges around housing and those without housing options is one issue. Addressing criminal behavior is separate and requires dedicated strategies for downtowns that acknowledge their unique role.

Business owners in particular have noted their concerns about crime and nuisance behavior. Some physical strategies can help including better lighting but broader work is necessary to ensure business owners have an open line of communication with city leaders and law enforcement to discourage bad behavior. Recognizing these concerns, DDI is working to bring safety ambassadors downtown. As demonstrated in other downtowns, safety ambassadors provide a noticeable downtown presence that can discourage criminal behavior and help improve perceptions of safety by residents and visitors alike.

**"VISITORS FROM OUT OF TOWN TELL ME THAT DURHAM HAS A REPUTATION OF BEING UNSAFE."**

**"SEEMS THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN INFLUX OF HOMELESS AND MENTALLY UNWELL PEOPLE DOWNTOWN THAT MAKE IT FEEL LESS SAFE."**

## THERE IS A PERCEPTION THAT DOWNTOWN ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

Despite downtown Durham's reputation as a diverse and welcoming place, visitor and business ownership demographics suggest that not all Durham residents are equally represented or included. Compared to the broader city population, downtown sees an overrepresentation of white visitors and an underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic/Latino visitors. This disparity is also reflected in business ownership, where only 19% of merchants are Black and just 5% are Hispanic/Latino, despite these groups making up a significant share of Durham's overall population.

Income levels also play a role in shaping who visits downtown. Median household incomes of visitors to key downtown

attractions—such as Durham Bulls games (\$92,461) and the CCB Plaza (\$115,741)—skew higher than both the district and city medians (\$74,710). While some may perceive downtown businesses as expensive, many locally owned restaurants offer price points comparable to national chains like Chili's or Chipotle, suggesting that cost alone is not the primary barrier.

In addition to race, ethnicity, and income, some residents feel that downtown is not age-inclusive. During the engagement process, many Durham residents felt downtown lacks family-friendly attractions, discouraging them from visiting with their children.

Creating a downtown that feels welcoming and relevant to all will require intentional efforts to diversify business ownership, expand inclusive programming, and enhance connections between major attractions and local businesses. Strengthening partnerships, increasing cultural representation, adding more age-friendly attractions, and improving wayfinding can help ensure that all residents and visitors see downtown as a place where they belong.

	Black	White	Asian	Hispanic/Latino
<b>City of Durham</b>	36%	46%	6%	13%
<b>American Tobacco District</b>	24%	56%	6%	10%
<b>Brightleaf District</b>	24%	51%	9%	11%
<b>Durham Central Park District</b>	29%	48%	6%	12%
<b>City Center District</b>	25%	52%	7%	12%
<b>Golden Belt District</b>	30%	47%	6%	13%
<b>Government Service District</b>	27%	50%	6%	13%
<b>Warehouse District</b>	27%	51%	7%	11%

**FIGURE 19: DEMOGRAPHICS OF DOWNTOWN VISITORS BY DISTRICT\***

Source: 2022 American Community Survey, Placer.ai

\* Red indicates a lower proportion than the City's overall population, and Green indicates a higher proportion than the City's overall population.

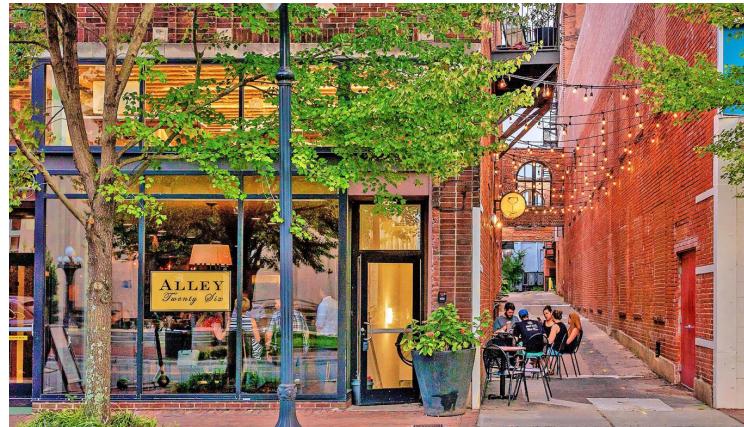
## DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES, DOWNTOWN DURHAM REMAINS UNIQUE, COOL, QUIRKY, AND FUNKY

Downtown's network of intimate and non-linear streets and alleyways give downtown an organic feel and provide the opportunity for the unexpected. Maybe you're downtown and get a recommendation for a cool new bar or restaurant you've never heard of before, maybe you turn down a small alley to find a unique piece of street art, or maybe you come downtown for a game or show and find yourself laughing with friends late into the evening. Durham is a place built for exploring, and it's home to a rich collection of creative businesses and people, unique architecture, one-of-a-kind attractions, and a sense of place and a diverse history that more corporate downtowns and new developments simply can't replicate.

Downtown Durham is simply not like other downtowns. It has its own vibe and history that should be visible on downtown streets, alleys, parks and buildings. Actions big and small can reinforce downtown's walkable street grid, its diverse retail offerings, its odd yet beautiful public spaces, its old and funky main street and industrial spaces - the list goes on. Building on these strengths requires appreciating all the little things that make Durham Durham and crafting strategies to take that to the next level.

**"I DO REALLY LOVE THAT HISTORY AND ART FEEL SO DEEPLY INTERWOVEN INTO THE MANY CORNERS OF OUR DOWNTOWN!"**

**"I LOVE THAT EVERYTHING \*FEELS\* LOCAL - NO CHAIN RESTAURANTS, LOTS OF UNIQUE CHARACTER. IT FEELS LIKE IT HAS AN ARTSY/CREATIVE FLAIR, BUT YOU CAN FEEL THE HISTORY OF IT TOO."**



Source: Downtown Durham Inc., Discover Durham, Interface Studio

# VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

The plan is organized around seven goals that encapsulate the comments and ideas generated throughout the public engagement. Let's dive in...

**GOAL 1**

**ROOTED & READY**

**GOAL 2**

**OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

**GOAL 3**

**WELCOME HOME**

**GOAL 4**

**WALK + ROLL**

**GOAL 5**

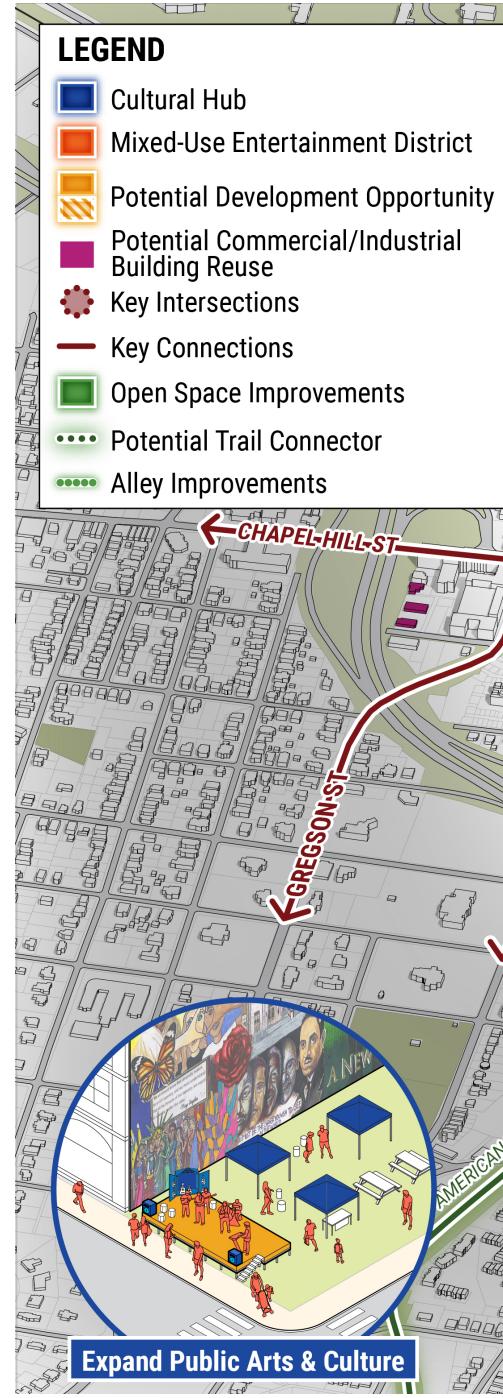
**COMMON GROUNDS**

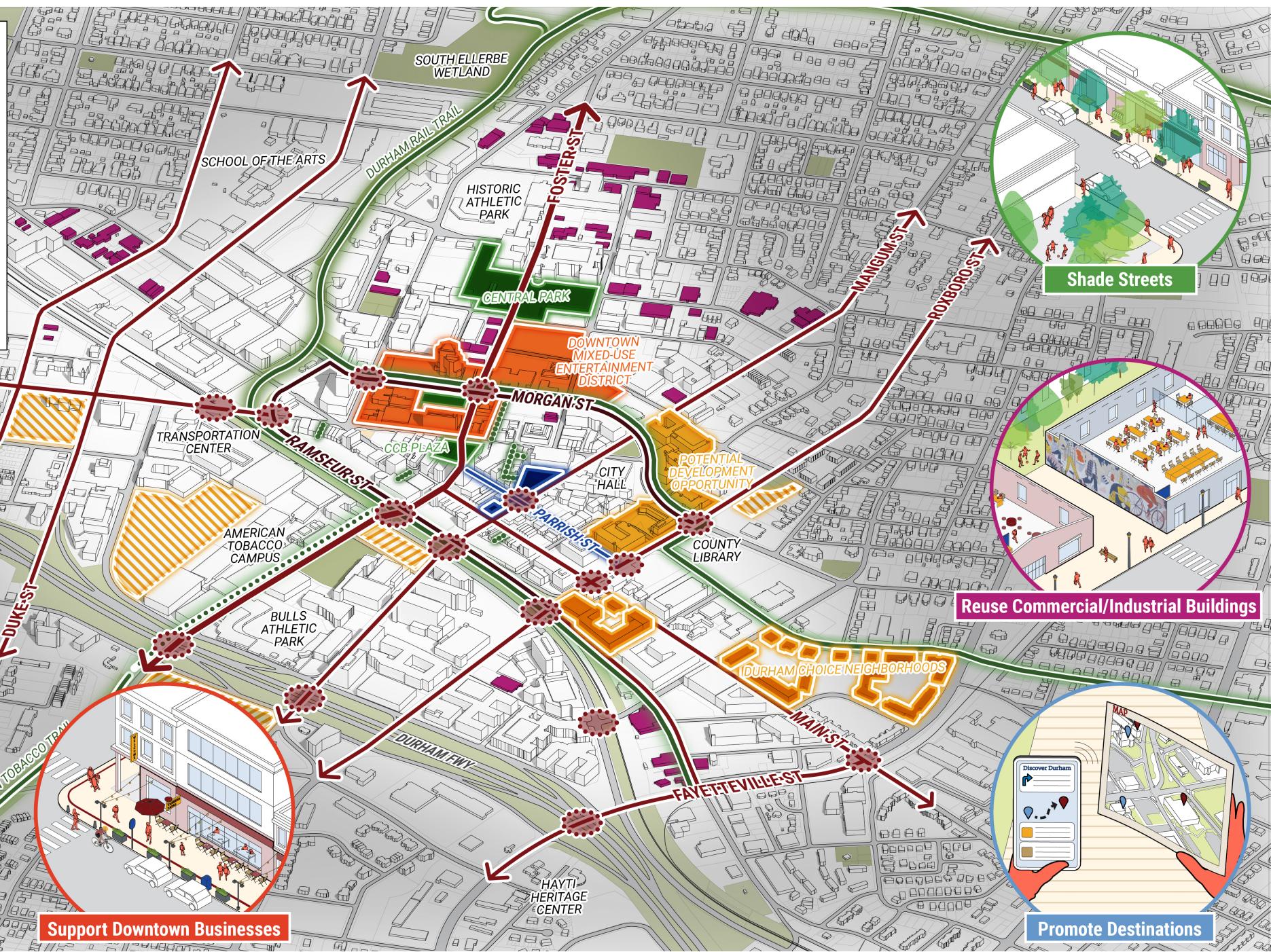
**GOAL 6**

**DOWNTOWN WORKS**

**GOAL 7**

**THE MORE YOU KNOW**





# ROOTED & READY

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**GOAL 1** *Downtown will be a welcoming space for people of all ages and backgrounds by celebrating Durham's history and rich cultural heritage and providing a diverse range of activities and experiences.*



“ENHANCE THE URBAN CULTURE AND ARTISTIC ATMOSPHERE AND ORGANIZE REGULAR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.”

“EVERYONE VISITING DURHAM SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW ABOUT DURHAM AND DURHAM RESIDENTS, YOUNG AND OLD, SHOULD HAVE A PLACE THAT SHOWCASES DURHAM HISTORY.”

“I THINK THAT ORIGINALITY AND DIVERSITY IS WHAT MAKES DURHAM SPECIAL.”

Durham has long been a home to diverse communities, with a deep-rooted Black history, a thriving LGBTQ+ presence, a growing Latino population, and a creative class that has shaped the city's identity through art, music, and storytelling. As downtown continues to evolve and the region attracts new residents from varied cultural backgrounds, it is essential to cultivate an environment where all feel represented, valued, and included—whether as visitors, residents, business owners, or employees.

Achieving this vision requires an intentional approach that integrates history and culture into downtown's public spaces, events, and economic landscape. This can be accomplished through strategic programming, placemaking initiatives, public art installations, and the establishment of cultural hubs that amplify diverse voices and traditions. By investing in these efforts, downtown Durham can strengthen its identity as an inclusive, vibrant, and ever-evolving community that honors its past while embracing its future.

# CELEBRATE PARRISH STREET AS A UNIQUE DESTINATION THAT REFLECTS BOTH PAST AND PRESENT IDENTITIES

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Parrish Street, known as Black Wall Street, emerged in the early 20th century as a thriving hub for Black-owned businesses. Today, Parrish Street remains an important commercial corridor at the heart of downtown Durham, and bisects Black Wall Street Gardens, a public space centered on the intersection of Parrish and Mangum Streets.

Despite its historical significance, multiple Black-owned businesses with a location on Parrish Street have shuttered or moved to more visible commercial corridors over recent years. Its history is memorialized, but in static forms such as historical plaques and sculptures that don't further engage today's Black residents, artists, and event organizers. Similarly, the design of Black Wall Street Gardens leaves little room for programming or events that could draw foot traffic to the corridor.

The rich history of Black Wall Street deserves a prominent presence in downtown. Parrish Street should be a local community space for residents and a national destination for cultural tourism. It should have a different look, feel and experience than other streets, paired with a strong storytelling component, a range of events and programming to support local businesses. It should establish strong pedestrian connections between public space assets such as the Main Library, Black Wall Street Plaza, and CCB Plaza.

## ACTIONS

### 1. Implement public realm improvements:

- Redesign Black Wall Street Gardens to honor the area's history while welcoming a greater range of visitors and foot traffic.
  - Explore redevelopment opportunities for the Chapel Hill Street surface parking lot, either as flexible open space or a new mixed-use building.
- Provide the ability for Parrish Street to convert to a shared street that can act as a linear public space, connecting CCB Plaza, Black Wall Street, and the Main Library.
- Research the naming rights to CCB Plaza to understand the viability of renaming the plaza to honor Durham's Black history.
- Commission local artists to paint a large asphalt mural on the street honoring Durham's Black history and future. This asphalt mural can serve as a visual signal of the street's pedestrian orientation prior to any permanent design changes.
- Involve today's Durhamites in Parrish Street's transformation in small but meaningful ways. For example, a brick campaign could serve as a way to connect with existing residents and as a fundraising opportunity.
- Explore complementary development opportunities on Parrish Street between Church and Roxboro, a block with publicly-owned parcels on both sides of Parrish Street.

CONTINUED →

## 2. Increase small business opportunities:

- Arrange regular networking events for Black-owned small businesses and Black developers.
- Improve access to capital for entrepreneurs, especially Black small business owners and developers who have historically had limited access to capital.
- Pair artists with existing business owners to tell the story of the businesses of Black Wall Street that used to be there.

## 3. Create a series of events and placemaking efforts that honor the street's history while making space for today's Black creative community and visitors:

- Host events that promote Black businesses and Black culture, such as Blacktober Fest or Black Farmer's Market.
- Provide storytelling opportunities through programming and temporary and permanent installations.

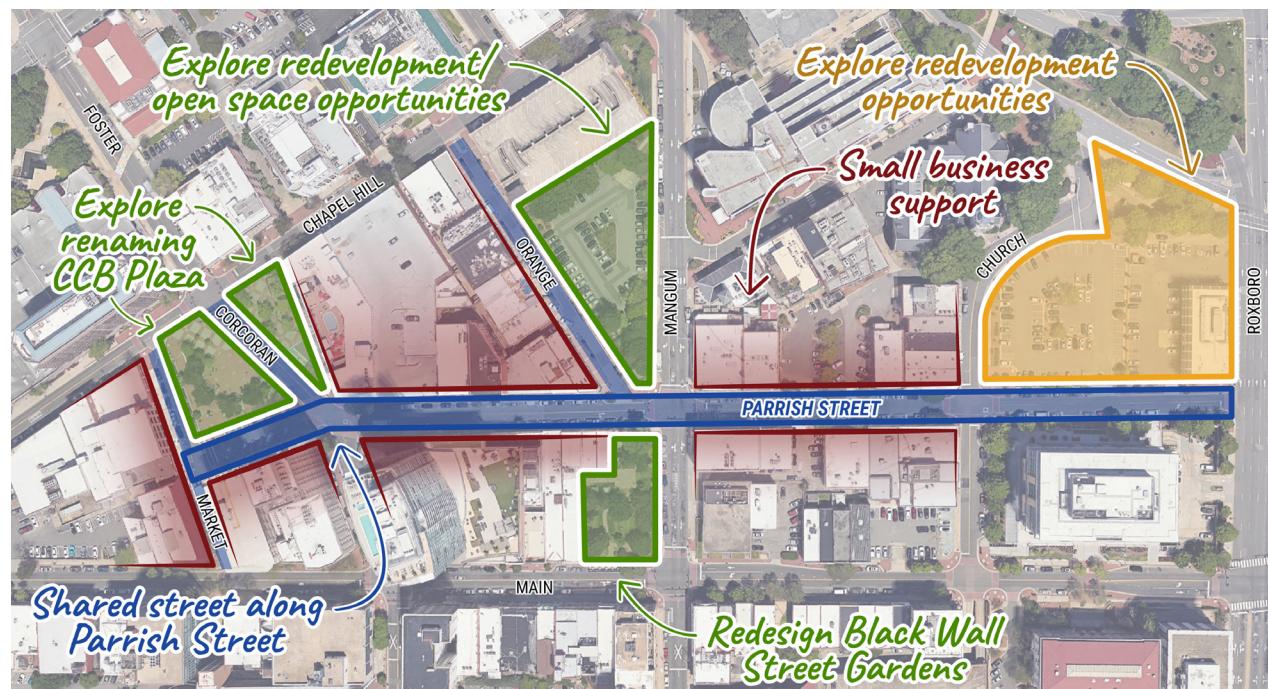


FIGURE 20: PARRISH STREET DIAGRAM

# STORYTELLING

## HONORING THE HISTORY OF BLACK WALL STREET

For Parrish Street to feel like an authentic expression of both past and present, it is important to acknowledge the Black-owned businesses that built up "Black Wall Street", such as **Mechanics and Farmers (M&F) Bank**, through creative placemaking and public art. For instance, one of the founders of M&F Bank, **R.B. Fitzgerald**, was also a brickmaker whose geometric bricks can still be found throughout Durham. Reusing or recreating the Fitzgerald bricks as part of a brick campaign on Parrish Street is just one way to think about how to creatively incorporate elements of the past in the celebration of Black Wall Street's present.



Source (left to right): North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives; Hayti History Blog

## GREENWOOD RISING—TULSA, OK

Greenwood Rising is a museum dedicated to telling the story of Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District, also known as Black Wall Street, and the infamous Tulsa Race Massacre. Its narrative-centered, multimedia approach uniquely highlights the Black businesses that formed the foundation of Black Wall Street. The exhibits include a recreation of a period barbershop with holographic barbers as storytellers and a dynamic installation of recreated Greenwood business signs with accompanying historic photos and text narratives.



Source: Greenwood Rising

# SMALL BUSINESS ACTIVATION

## MOMENT RETAIL ACTIVATION—SAN JOSE

Started in 2018, MOMENT San Pedro Square is a micro-retail project that converted 14 parking spaces in a downtown San Jose parking garage into four micro-retail storefronts with short-to-mid-length pop-up durations for local creative small businesses.



Source: Moment

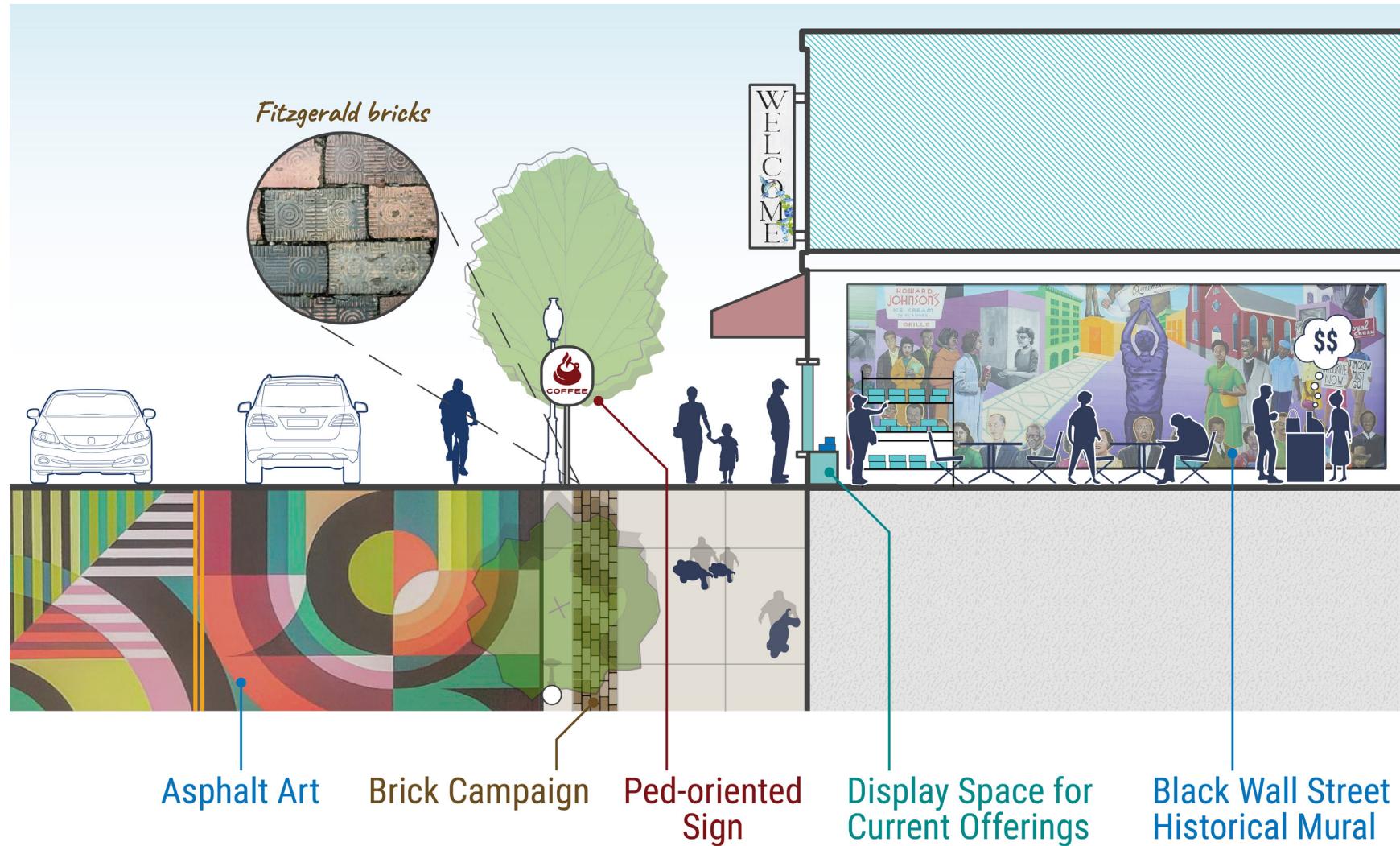
## CADY'S ALLEY—WASHINGTON D.C.

Cady's Alley is a retail destination in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. that utilizes its pedestrian-friendly alleyways and central courtyard to attract both retailers and visitors, anchoring Georgetown's Design District.



Source: Cady's Alley

FIGURE 21: PARRISH STREET SECTION



**FIGURE 22: BLACK WALL STREET ECOSYSTEM**

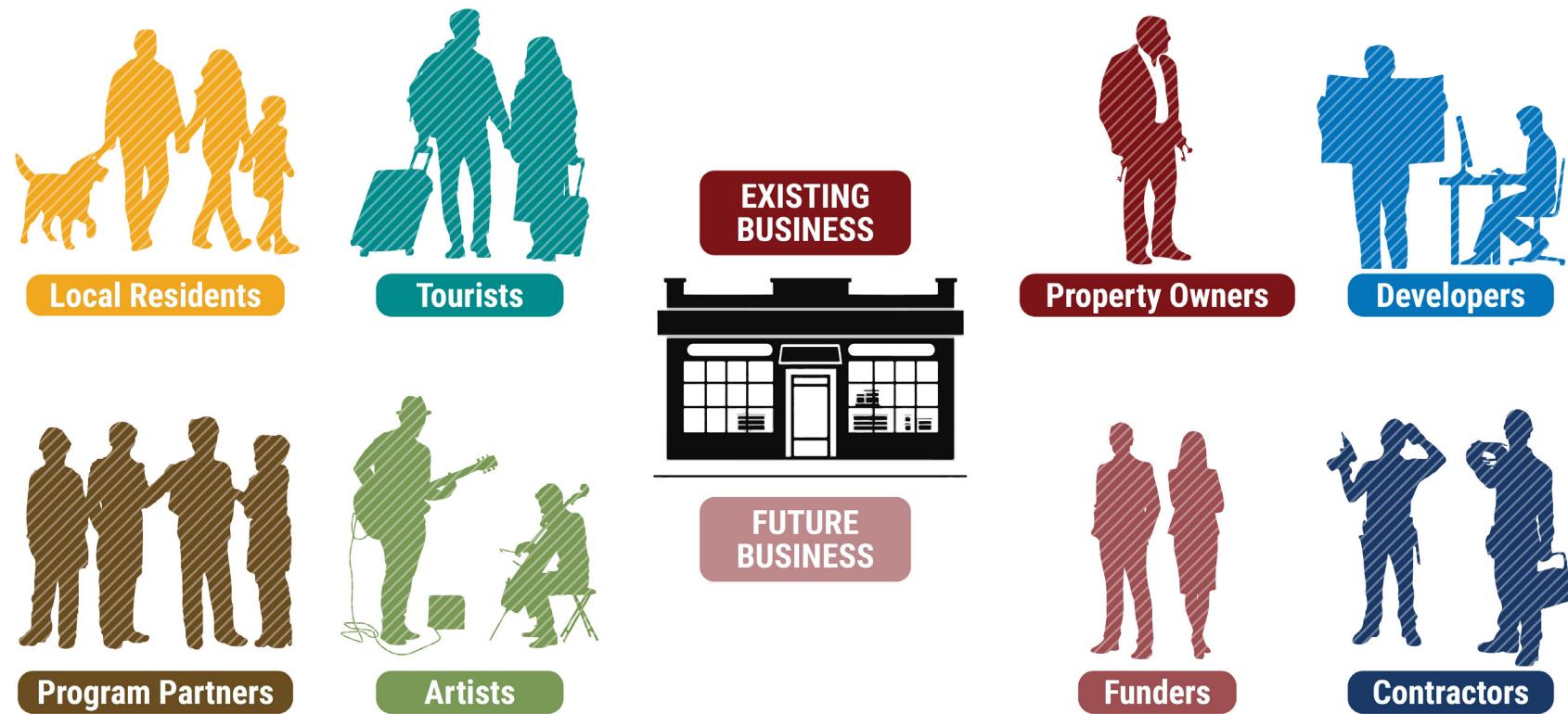
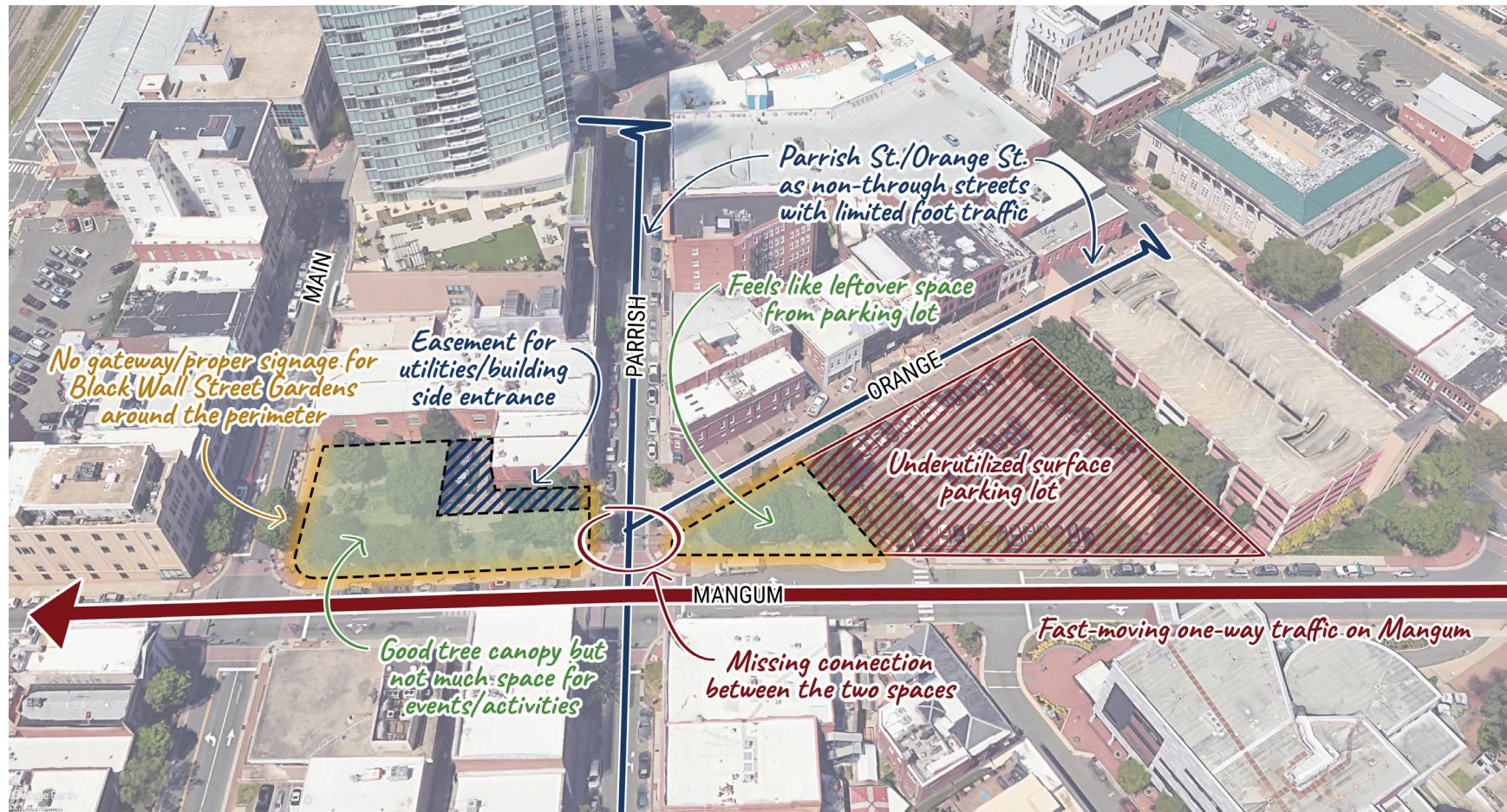
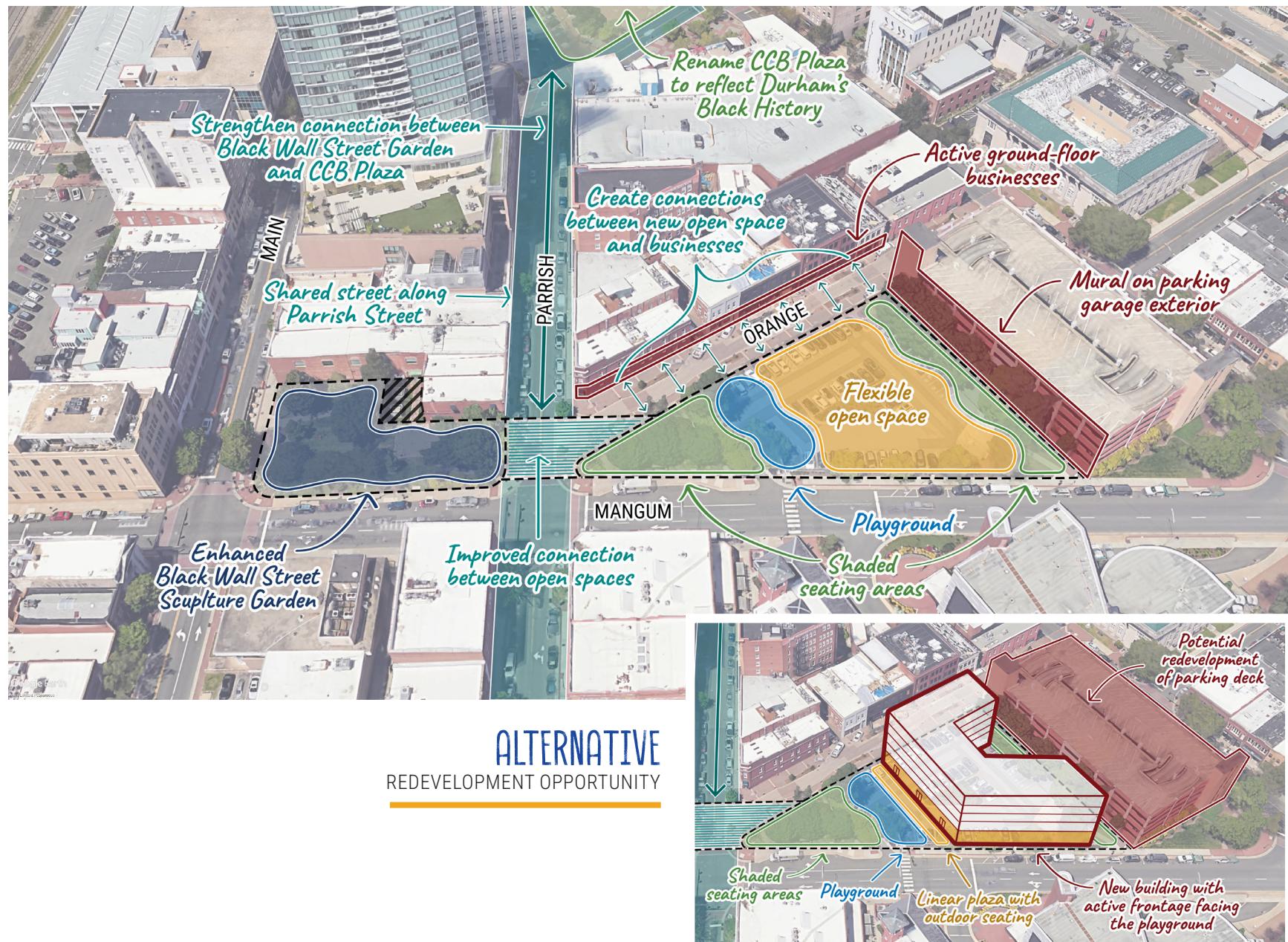


FIGURE 23: BLACK WALL STREET GARDENS - EXISTING ISSUES



**FIGURE 24: BLACK WALL STREET GARDENS - PROPOSED REDESIGN**





## CREATE A HUB FOR DURHAM'S GROWING LATINO COMMUNITY IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN DURHAM

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

As Durham continues to experience demographic shifts and a growing Latino population, investing in spaces that celebrate Latino heritage and entrepreneurship can reinforce Durham's reputation as a city that values diversity, inclusion, and equitable growth, making its downtown a place where all residents and visitors feel welcome and engaged.

A cultural hub could establish a visible and lasting presence downtown and provide expanded space for Latino residents and organizations, as well as space for arts, performances, athletics, and a small business accelerator, among other uses.

### ACTIONS

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1. **Assist in engaging stakeholders** from across the city to develop a vision for the cultural hub.
2. **Assist in securing funding** for the design and construction of a new cultural hub.
3. **Identify potential program partners and tenants.**
4. **Ensure that the design of a new cultural hub contributes to a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment** through a combination of architectural design, programming, and public spaces.

# 3

## CREATE MORE HIGH-QUALITY DESTINATIONS FOR FAMILIES

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Making urban downtowns more family-friendly enhances economic vitality and foot traffic. Durham Central Park's weekly Farmer's Market and the Durham Bulls Athletic Park exemplify this as family-friendly attractions that draw a significant amount of visitors to downtown on a regular basis.

Downtown should have more family-friendly destinations that could fill a need for Durham residents who said that more family-friendly activities would bring them downtown more often, especially members of the Latino community who expressed that downtown being family-friendly was one of their main concerns. It could also pull visitors from the region, increasing foot traffic for other downtown businesses. Discover Durham's recently released *Destination Master Plan* similarly identified the need for a major family attraction near existing downtown assets to increase downtown's appeal for families and increase visitor spending.

### ACTIONS

1. **Collaborate with partners to identify opportunities for new family-friendly destinations in downtown.**
2. **Help identify appropriate sites downtown that maximize the opportunity for visitors to patronize downtown's small businesses.**
3. **Ensure that the design of family-friendly destinations contributes to a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly streetscape.**
  - For example, downtown's Main Library incorporates public green spaces, seating areas, public art, first-floor transparency, and public art to foster an active downtown streetscape. However, it is important to also leverage the full potential of the library's green spaces and other similar downtown spaces through programming and activations and ensure safe connections to those spaces through streetscape and intersection improvements.

### EXAMPLES OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATIONS



Kaleideum in Winston-Salem, NC  
(Source: Gensler)



Meow Wolf in Denver, CO  
(Source: Alive Coverage)

## 4

## INFUSE THE PUBLIC REALM WITH ART AND CULTURE THROUGH A PUBLIC ARTS INITIATIVE

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Public art installations, cultural performances, and creative placemaking initiatives beautify spaces and foster a sense of identity and community pride. A public art initiative can drive visitors downtown throughout the year and at key times when businesses are most in need of foot traffic. This would benefit local artists, musicians, and performers by providing additional avenues to engage these creatives. Organizations like the Durham Arts Council foster and support the arts by providing programs, resources, and venues for artists, arts organizations, and the broader community and could serve as a key partners in this effort. With the recent loss of the Durham School of the Arts, ensuring the arts have a home downtown is even more urgent.

### ACTIONS

---

1. **Engage with community members**, including residents, businesses, artists, and other stakeholders to **understand the types of public art that would be most meaningful and impactful**.
2. **Establish partnerships with local artists, arts organizations, institutions, and economic development organizations** to help plan and execute the public art initiative.
3. **Identify funding sources** to support the initiative.
4. **Select locations downtown for performances and art installations** that enhance the pedestrian experience and activate underutilized spaces. Identify any necessary infrastructure upgrades to enable these spaces to host installations and programs.
5. **Develop a call for artists/artist selection process**, which may include a selection panel composed of artists, community members, and local officials to maintain inclusivity and quality.
6. **Create a long-term maintenance plan**, including responsibilities for cleaning, repairs, and potential decommissioning, in order to keep installations in good condition.
7. **Develop a strategy for marketing and programming around public art installations** to enhance their impact.

## DOWNTOWN KINSTON MURAL PROGRAM

The City of Kinston launched the Downtown Kinston Mural Program in 2019, which commissioned eight artists to complete seven murals across downtown. A selection committee of community members were tasked with choosing appropriate walls with property owner approval and selecting the final artists through an RFQ process. Artists were compensated for their design, installation, and two community events related to their murals, and property owners entered agreements with the City to keep the murals for at least five years with maintenance performed by the City.



Source: UNC School of Government



## BLACKSPACE'S ROWDY SUMMER CYpher

Blackspace is a digital makerspace that works with Black and brown youth through digital and arts-based "Wokeshops", African-centered events and rituals, and creative storytelling projects. Every first and third Friday of each summer month in CCB Plaza, they host the Rowdy Summer Cypher, a hip-hop fueled event that creates a safe space for kids to rap, sing, make beats, and create community together, building self-confidence and empathy in the process.

Source: Blackspace

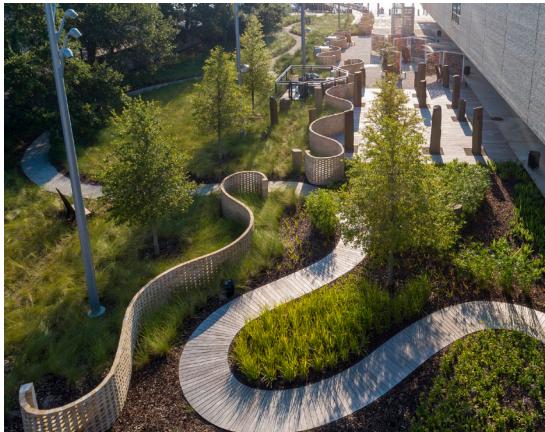
## HOW DOES THE PUBLIC ARTS INITIATIVE RELATE TO THE REST OF THE DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT?

Infusing the public realm with arts and culture is more than just a single recommendation, it is embedded throughout the Downtown Blueprint. Below are just a few examples of how the public arts initiative intersects with other recommendations and where you can go to learn more about these strategies.

### PARRISH STREET



Street mural  
(St. Elmo Village, Elizabeth Daniels/Getty Trust)



Enhanced sculpture garden (International African American Museum, Sahar Coston-Hardy)

See **Rooted + Ready Recommendation #1** for more information

### PARKING GARAGE IMPROVEMENTS



Garage mural (TGV Mural/Victoria Roussel)



Garage art and lighting (Liberty Street Collective)

See **Open for Business Recommendation #4** for more information

### ALLEY ACTIVATION



Alley dance party  
(Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association)



Alley music performance (Centro San Antonio)

See **Common Grounds Recommendation #4** for more information

## PLAZA REDESIGNS



Interactive art installations  
(Downtown Brooklyn Partnership)

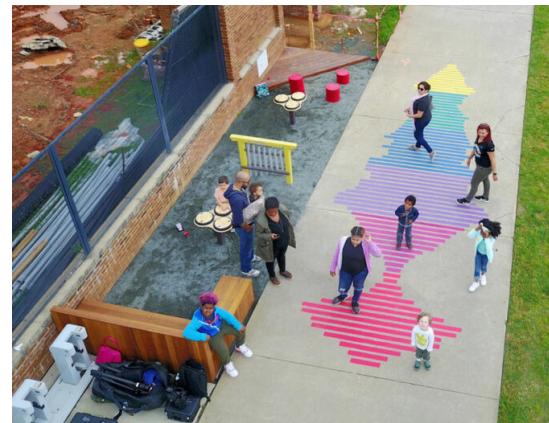


Playful swings  
(University of Pennsylvania Almanac)

## RAMSEUR SHARED USE PATH



Artistic fencing (Charlotte Rail Trail)

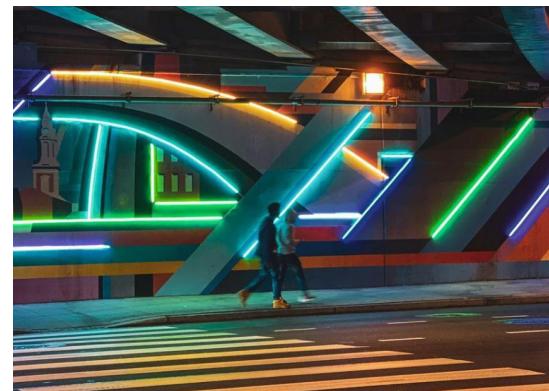


Children's play area  
(Charlotte Rail Trail/Kaboom!)

## FOSTER/CORCORAN/BLACKWELL CORRIDOR



Corridor banners  
(City of Mississauga/Alyah Holmes)



Artistic light installation  
(Electric Philadelphia/Secret Philadelphia)

See [Common Grounds #2 and #3](#) for more information

See [Walk + Roll Recommendation #1](#) for more information

See [Walk + Roll Recommendation #3](#) for more information

# 5

## STREAMLINE THE PERMITTING PROCESS FOR EVENTS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

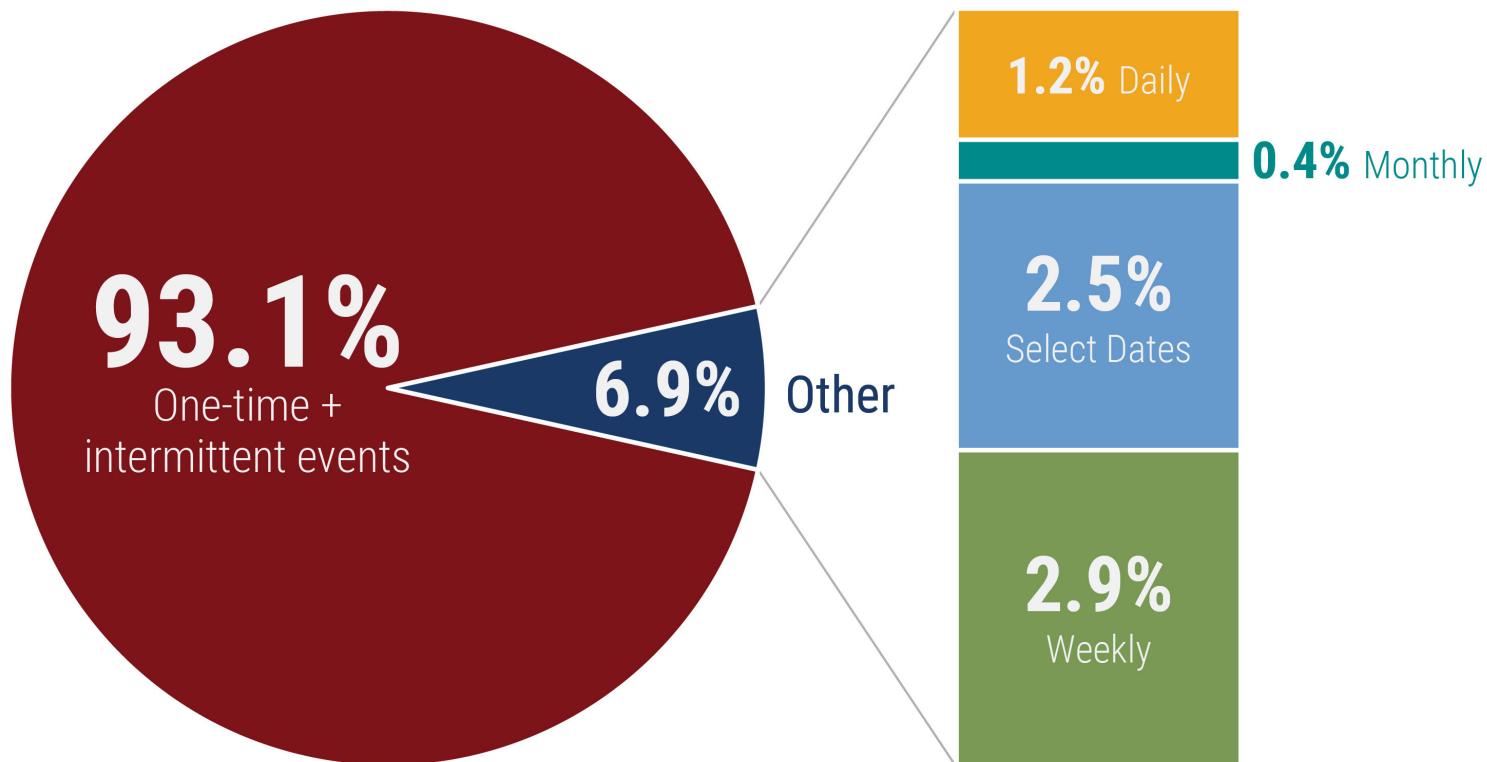
Downtown Durham thrives on dynamic cultural programming, yet the current special event permitting process is cumbersome, unpredictable, and costly for local event organizers. Promoters who bring thousands of visitors to the area each year face logistical barriers, unclear regulations, and inconsistent timelines, making it difficult to plan and execute successful events. Existing permitting structures primarily support a limited set of recurring events, leaving newer or community-driven festivals struggling to secure space and approvals.

A more efficient, transparent, and collaborative approach is needed to support a diverse range of events, ensuring they can contribute to downtown's vibrancy while minimizing unnecessary costs and administrative burdens. Establishing clear protocols, predictable timelines, and a more coordinated approval process would remove unnecessary obstacles and empower local organizers to bring unique cultural experiences to the city.

### ACTIONS

1. **Develop a comprehensive special events permitting guide.** Create a publicly accessible document outlining the full permitting process, including costs, expected timelines, key city contacts, and space-specific regulations.
2. **Create a standardized permit process for repeat events.** Establish a streamlined approval process for events with a successful track record to reduce redundancy and expedite approvals.
3. **Designate a single point of contact for event coordination.** Assign a dedicated city staff member or office to serve as a liaison between event organizers and relevant city departments, ensuring a consistent and efficient process.
4. **Expand the availability of downtown event spaces.** Identify and formalize a list of public and private spaces suitable for various event sizes, including underutilized parking lots, plazas, and parks, along with associated costs and requirements.
5. **Engage local promoters in process improvements.** Form an advisory group of experienced local event organizers to help refine permitting procedures, ensuring they are realistic, inclusive, and supportive of Durham's cultural scene.

## WHAT TYPE OF EVENTS HAPPEN IN DOWNTOWN WITHIN A TYPICAL YEAR?



**FIGURE 25:** BREAKDOWN OF 2023 DOWNTOWN EVENTS BY FREQUENCY TYPE

Source: *Discover Durham*

# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

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## GOAL 2

*Downtown will be a place where small businesses feel supported and customers feel safe and encouraged to explore all that downtown has to offer.*





**“WE NEED TO DO MORE TO SUPPORT THE NEXT WAVE OF MAIN STREET BUSINESSES.”**

**“WE NEED A VARIETY OF BUSINESSES SO WE BRING IN A DIVERSITY OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE.”**

**“I DO WISH THERE WERE BETTER TOOLS TO HELP EXISTING BUSINESSES STAY IN PLACE AS DOWNTOWN RENTS INCREASE.”**

---

Downtown businesses are the lifeblood of downtowns. Restaurants, bars, stores and services are what draw people and keep them coming back. Retail has changed significantly since the time when all shopping took place in a downtown. Today, people have more choice than ever on where to spend their dollars. For downtown Durham to compete, it is essential to support and expand local businesses through careful planning, management and programming. In addition, diversifying the types of businesses in downtown is increasingly important, particularly as more and more people call downtown home. Calls for a grocery store and other services grow as the downtown population grows.





# 1 DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED AND CENTRALIZED PROGRAM OF PUBLIC SAFETY INTERVENTIONS FOR DOWNTOWN AND OTHER URBAN DISTRICTS AS NECESSARY

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Addressing concerns about safety are critical for downtown's future, and are one of the primary considerations of existing and prospective residents, business owners, employees, and visitors. A number of high profile incidents have led to an increased urgency to better manage safety issues and concerns. Among survey participants, small business owners were among the most concerned about public safety and perceptions. Small business owners reported that individuals experiencing mental health crises, though small in number, were making it difficult to attract and retain customers and employees. This reflects a unique challenge in dealing with public safety concerns, felt in downtowns across the country, which is how to balance support services with enforcement, while addressing broader structural issues contributing to these challenges.

## ACTIONS

1. **Create an online safety resource for downtown businesses** to help businesses quickly and efficiently address issues when they arise.
2. **Increase foot traffic downtown and “eyes on the street”** through programming/activations and filling vacancies.
3. **Improve lighting both on the street and in parking garages** to create a better sense of safety for employees and visitors.
4. **Create an Adopt-A-Garage program** that develops partnerships between the City, County, and community-based organizations to “adopt” and upgrade public parking garages with public art, improved wayfinding, events, and programming.
5. **Partner with Block by Block to manage a dedicated team of Safety Ambassadors with a visible downtown presence** to support businesses and assist vulnerable individuals in getting the help they need. The presence of trained outreach staff can help de-escalate situations that business owners and residents perceive as unsafe while reducing the reliance on emergency services for non-criminal incidents.

## IN-PROGRESS

- DDI has launched an instant-messaging platform to offer business owners real-time communication with each other to discuss any issues that arise.
- Recognizing the importance of downtown safety, DDI is already taking action to bring more ambassadors downtown.



## 2

## PRESERVE AFFORDABLE SPACE FOR GROUND-FLOOR SMALL BUSINESSES

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Increasing commercial rents and a dwindling supply of vacant, older buildings is making it more difficult for ground-floor small businesses to stay downtown. Despite this, there remain vacant ground-floor spaces, many in relatively new apartment buildings, that have been difficult to fill. There is also a decreasing supply of the older one-story light industrial buildings that used to be ubiquitous outside of the downtown core, and that are home to some of downtown's creative businesses such as breweries, retail shops, restaurants, among others.

### ACTIONS

---

1. **Master lease existing vacant ground-floor spaces from the property owner** to lock in rent rates and provide entry points for small businesses.
2. **Acquire a portfolio of buildings that are entered into a commercial/light industrial land trust.**
3. **Create a model agreement where a small business tenant is guaranteed to have their lease continue for a certain period of time**, even if the building is sold to a new owner.
4. **Create a model right-of-first refusal or right-of-first-offer clause** that gives small businesses a leg-up in purchasing their building if the owner decides to sell.

3

## 3 PROVIDE TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO DOWNTOWN RETAILERS AND RESTAURATEURS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Downtown Durham's small, locally owned businesses are integral to its character and economic vitality. However, many of these ground-floor establishments operate with limited capacity to focus on essential business functions beyond daily operations, such as digital marketing, financial planning, or operational efficiencies. To ensure the long-term success of these businesses and maintain a diverse and resilient downtown economy, targeted support for retailers and restaurateurs is essential. Providing tailored technical assistance, financial guidance, and strategic marketing support can help small business owners expand their customer base, improve operational stability, and adapt to changing market conditions. By fostering an ecosystem that prioritizes small business success, Durham can reinforce its position as a hub for entrepreneurship, ensuring that its downtown remains both economically sustainable and culturally dynamic.

### ACTIONS

---

1. **Assist with storefront improvements**, such as a signage grant program, to upgrade signage for existing businesses and subsidize signage for new businesses.
2. **Increase advocacy for downtown's small business community** by creating a small business forum with elected officials, among others.
3. **Offer technical support to businesses through partnerships with philanthropic or corporate sponsors** to provide assistance with PR and marketing, leveraging press in major newspapers, influencer partnerships, and menu design and translation services to appeal to the diverse backgrounds of Durhamites. This support should aim to bridge relationships with corporate/destination entities to explore purchasing opportunities and spotlight on minority- and women-owned businesses.
4. **Provide more programming that promotes local businesses and directly drives customers into their doors.**

## FRENCH FRY FIGHT—MACON, GA

Downtown Macon hosts an event called the “French Fry Fight” on National French Fry Day on July 13 each year. The event features local restaurants crafting unique and creative french fry dishes, with prices ranging from \$10 to \$20. Participants and attendees can sample these special creations throughout the day and vote for their favorite. The restaurant receiving the most votes is awarded the “Super Spud” trophy and earns bragging rights until the next competition. The event not only showcases the culinary talents of Macon’s eateries but also aims to boost foot traffic in the downtown area during the typically slower summer months.

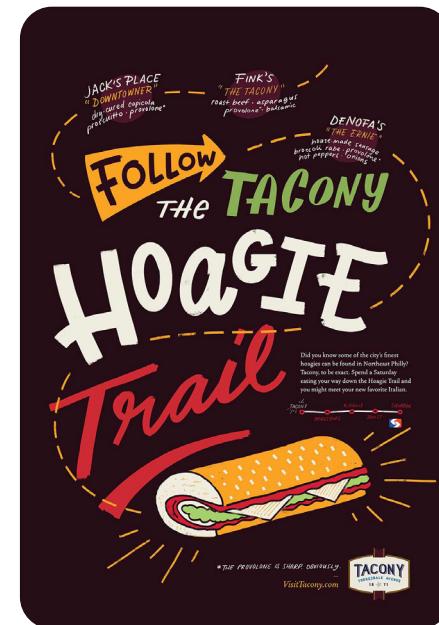


Source:  
NewTown Macon

## TACONY HOAGIE TRAIL—PHILADELPHIA, PA

The Tacony Hoagie Trail in Philadelphia is a unique initiative that celebrates the neighborhood's deep-rooted hoagie-making tradition while supporting local businesses. During the event, participants embark on a self-guided journey through Tacony to the area's local sandwich shops. They have the opportunity to taste a variety of hoagies at each stop, each crafted with fresh ingredients and distinct flavors that reflect Philadelphia's culinary heritage. The program is designed to encourage exploration, inviting participants to step into local, family-owned businesses they may not have previously visited.

Source:  
Tacony Community  
Development Corporation



# 4

## DEVELOP STRATEGIC PARKING AND LOADING MANAGEMENT FOR BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER USE

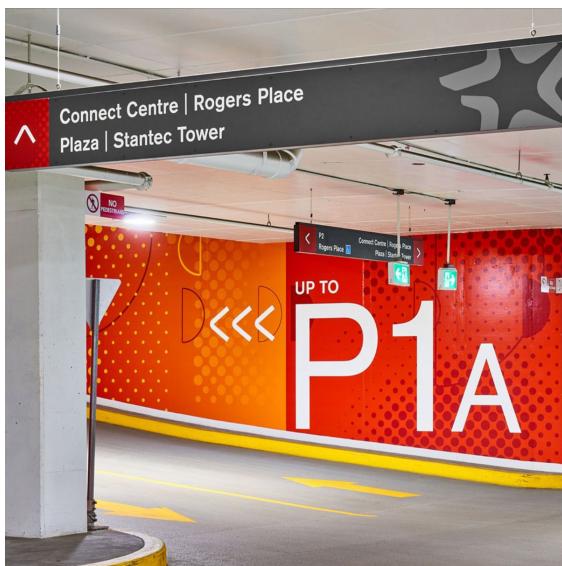
### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

During the engagement process, business owners cited parking and loading zone conflicts as major issues that impact their businesses. Perceived lack of parking discourages potential customers from visiting downtown. Employees struggle to find low-cost parking and often feel unsafe using the parking garages. Delivery drivers compete with active construction for loading space next to the curb. It is critical to both understand all of the competing uses for curbside space and find strategic and flexible solutions to accommodate both customers and deliveries for the businesses that make downtown a vibrant destination.

### ACTIONS

1. **Establish clear curb management and sidewalk standards for downtown.**
  - Review the locations and time limits of existing on-street parking and loading zones and work with business owners to make policy revisions that best support business and customer needs.
  - Create better regulations and enforcement for sidewalk and curb obstructions from active construction sites, including designating a clear walking path for pedestrians and temporary dedicated loading zones for affected businesses.
  - Publish guidelines and regulations for outdoor dining for both sidewalk seating and parklets.
2. **Encourage shared parking agreements with private garages and surface lots, especially in areas of downtown that don't have access to public parking garages.**
3. **Encourage employees to park in parking garages, reserving on-street parking spaces for customer use.**
  - Integrate new lighting, signage, and art at key public parking garages downtown to address safety concerns.
  - Work with downtown safety ambassadors to offer late night escorts to cars parked in garages for downtown employees.
4. **Market and consider expanding the recently approved employee parking program that offers reduced parking rates for middle- and lower-income downtown employees.** Consider a 2-hour free parking pilot in garages for downtown customers during weekdays.

## EXAMPLES OF PARKING GARAGE IMPROVEMENTS



Sources (top to bottom): Seaport District, Boston (Interface Studio); Edmonton ICE District (Entro); TGV Mural (Victoria Roussel); Cushing Co.

BUSINESSES NEED

# STRATEGIC PARKING AND LOADING MANAGEMENT

FOR BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER USE

#1

*Understand what businesses need from their curbside space*

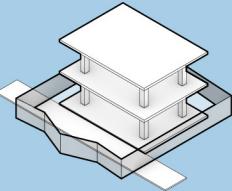
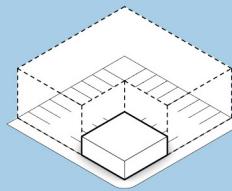
Category	Uses	Effective Hours	Time Limit	Can be shared with other uses?	Policy Change?
Parking	Customer Parking	All Day	2 hours	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Handicap Parking	All Day	None	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loading	Short-Term Loading	7am-6pm	+/- 30 minutes	Yes (transition to food delivery pick-up/drop-off in evenings)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Long-Term Loading	All Day	None	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Entertainment Loading	4pm-12am	Evenings only	Yes (can become loading/parking during the day)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Parklet	Outdoor Dining	All Day	Seasonally (as weather permits)	Yes (can become parking in colder months)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lounge Area	All Day	Seasonally (as weather permits)	Yes (can become parking in colder months)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

FIGURE 26: CURBSIDE MANAGEMENT &amp; POLICY CHANGES

# ...BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?

#2

*Manage external factors that put additional pressure on this hot commodity*

Issue	Details	Recommendation/Policy Change?
<b>Construction</b> 	Blocks the sidewalk for pedestrians, parking for customers, and loading for deliveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Create <b>better regulations and enforcement</b> for sidewalk/curb obstructions</li><li><b>Designate a clear walking path</b> around construction with physical barriers between pedestrians and the roadway.</li><li>If loading for nearby businesses is affected, <b>designate dedicated loading zones</b> as necessary.</li></ul>
<b>New Development</b> 	Developing surface parking lots reduces the amount of parking available for businesses and puts additional pressure on on-street parking spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Encourage shared parking agreements</b> with private garages and surface lots</li><li><b>Encourage employees to park in parking garages</b> instead of on-street parking spaces</li></ul>

#3

*Make regulatory and policy changes to support business needs*

## 5

## APPOINT A DEDICATED COORDINATOR TO GUIDE BUSINESSES THROUGH PERMITTING AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

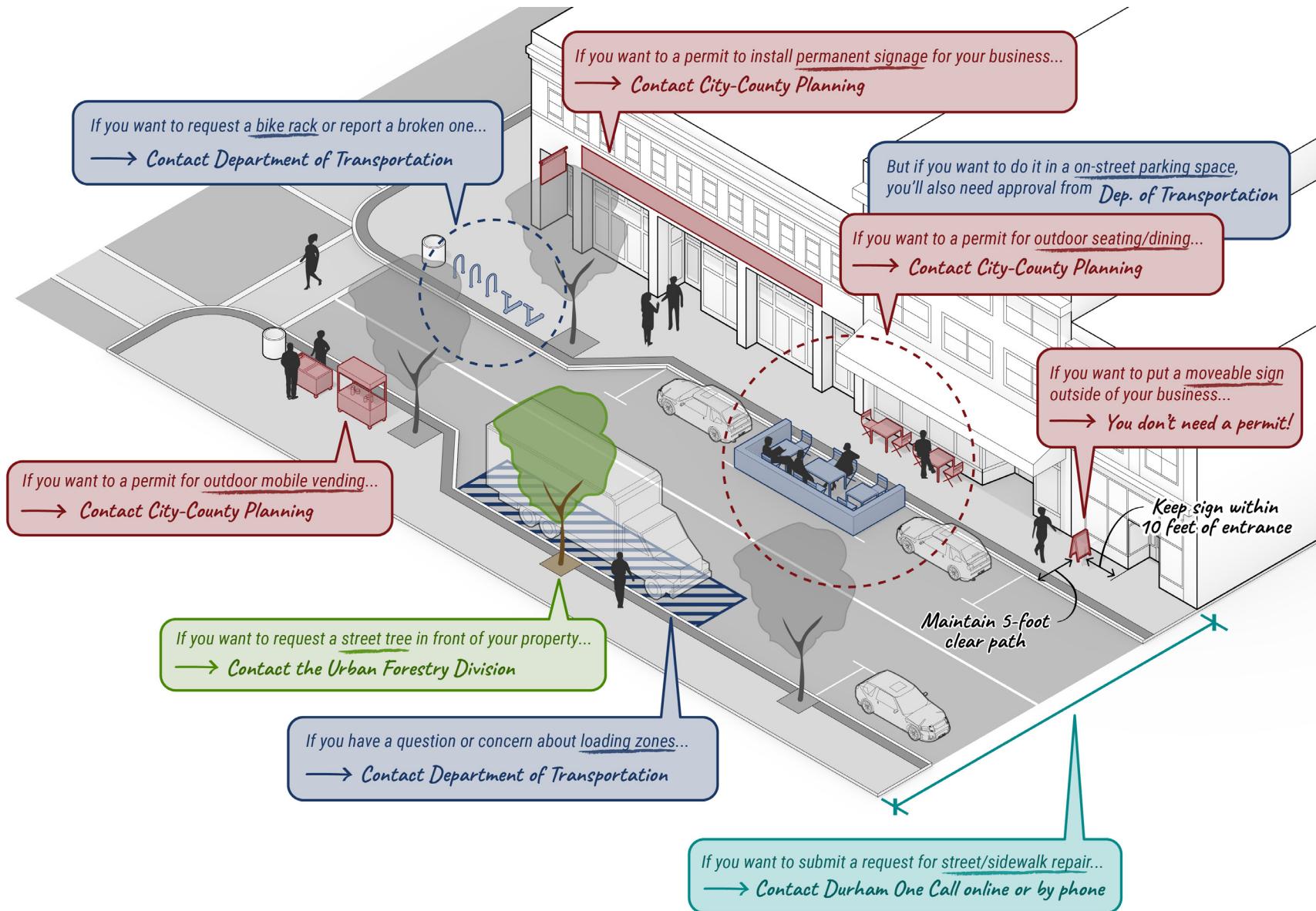
Many downtown business owners report difficulty navigating the permitting process, citing unclear points of contact and delayed responses from City and County departments, particularly when seeking guidance prior to application. Business owners also expressed frustration with resolving issues that fall outside standard procedures—such as modifying parking/loading zones to better support operational needs. Recent changes in State-level legislation, including new Health Department permit requirements for bars, have introduced further confusion and uncertainty, leaving businesses unsure of how to best comply. To improve support for local businesses and streamline interactions with regulatory entities, the City should consider appointing a dedicated coordinator to serve as a consistent point of contact to assist downtown businesses in both navigating the permitting process and addressing business-specific inquiries. By facilitating timely connections with the appropriate departments and staff, the coordinator could help resolve challenges more efficiently and support a more responsive and transparent regulatory environment.

### ACTIONS

1. **Convene focus groups of downtown business owners** to discuss the issues they have had with the permitting process and resolving business-specific issues with the City and County.
2. For recurring issues outside of the standard permitting process, such as parking and loading zone conflicts, **consider developing a clear process for collecting business inquiries and resolution of issues.**
  - If appropriate, undertake a curb management and benchmarking assessment to develop specific permitting goals and steps.
3. Create a **new dedicated coordinator position** to be the main point of contact to guide downtown businesses through the permitting and approvals process and address business-specific inquiries.

### INVEST ATHENS

Invest Athens, the Athens-Clarke County Economic Development Department in Georgia, created Plans Review Visioning Meetings, optional meetings where city and county staff all meet together to provide guidance about code requirements for potential projects prior to an official application submittal.



**FIGURE 27:** WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC REALM?



# 6

## EXPAND BUSINESS HOURS AND PROGRAMMING TO CAPITALIZE ON DOWNTOWN EVENTS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Durham Performing Arts Center and Durham Bulls Athletic Park are just two of the major downtown destinations that pull in visitors from across the region. It is important to find ways to get visitors to linger downtown, increasing foot traffic for other downtown businesses and leveraging the spending power of all these visitors. Some options include late night retail business hours and events for the post-dinner crowd and creating unique and kid-friendly activities that families can do before and/or after Bulls games.

### ACTIONS

1. **Coordinate programming with restaurants and entertainment venues** to schedule post-event downtown activities.
2. **Station ambassadors at destinations pre- and post-event** to direct visitors downtown.
3. **Encourage ticket-based discounts and late night menus** at restaurants, retailers, and entertainment venues.
4. **Launch marketing campaigns to highlight extended hours and special events.**
5. **Coordinate the digital delivery of marketing materials** highlighting extended hours and special event at destination ticket checkout.

### IN-PROGRESS

Downtown Durham, Inc. has recently launched the Bull Ride, a free, convenient, and friendly electric-powered transportation service designed to help residents, business owners, and visitors navigate downtown with ease. Service area spans Main Street from Brightleaf to Golden Belt and along Blackwell, Corcoran, and Foster Streets, covering the American Tobacco Campus to Central Park District.

## 7

## ADDRESS GAPS AND NEED FOR INCREASED VARIETY OF BUSINESSES THROUGH STRATEGIC TENANT RECRUITMENT

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Although downtown is home to a diverse collection of restaurants and breweries, there are some gaps that could be filled, including different types of food establishments (such as breakfast, lunch, and quick-service options) and neighborhood-serving businesses (such as a grocery store and nail salon). Downtown's residential population has grown significantly over the past decade, and residents expressed a need for amenities and businesses that meet their daily needs. Additionally, downtown currently has a limited variety of retail businesses (e.g., apparel, furniture, souvenirs) and struggles to create a central hub that attracts significant traffic. Coordinating strategically with owners of large, contiguous properties—such as those at Brightleaf District and the American Tobacco Campus—could foster sustainable tenanting and drive the necessary critical mass.

### ACTIONS

1. **Collaborate with brokers** to identify high-performing and/or expanding regional concepts in targeted categories.
2. **Work with owners of large, contiguous properties to develop retail opportunities** from kiosks to brick-and-mortar locations that can extend the time visitors spend in downtown.
3. **Encourage developers to budget for increased tenant improvement allowances** for business types that typically have higher fit-out costs.
4. **Collaborate with local lending institutions** to identify, expand, and market tenant improvement products to attract missing business categories.

“DOWNTOWN  
NEEDS A GROCERY  
STORE”

“WE NEED MORE  
RETAIL DOWNTOWN”

# WELCOME HOME

---

## GOAL 3

*Downtown will feel like a true neighborhood where diverse housing options, essential amenities, and development thoughtfully coexist.*



“EVERYONE IN DURHAM DESERVES A SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOME.”

“THERE SHOULD BE MORE MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS AND WRAP-AROUND SERVICES FOR THE DISPLACED COMMUNITY OF DURHAM.”

“WE NEED MORE COMMUNITY EVENTS TO GET TO KNOW NEIGHBORS.”

---

Downtown Durham has more residents than ever. Since 2017, over 4,000 units have been built, with 3,700 more in progress. The Durham Housing Authority plans to preserve and develop over 2,400 mixed-income units in the Downtown Development Tier, 74% of which will be affordable. This growing residential base supports local businesses, but a thriving downtown must offer a range of housing options at all income levels.

Currently, downtown primarily features high-priced new apartments and subsidized low-income housing, while surrounding neighborhoods provide more varied options. Upcoming changes to the City's zoning code (the UDO) will help to encourage new infill development for a range of incomes in these neighborhoods. In downtown, it will be important to strike a balance between new market-rate, workforce, and affordable housing while addressing the needs of the unhoused population.

A strong downtown is also about community. Resident engagement is essential to ensuring a vibrant, inclusive neighborhood where people can shape downtown's future as it evolves.



## RESERVE PUBLICLY-OWNED SITES FOR FUTURE MIXED-INCOME AND MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

A number of public buildings in downtown Durham are aging and may require major renovations or no longer serve operational needs, though a comprehensive assessment is still needed. The City should evaluate these facilities to determine whether to reinvest, redevelop, or relocate them—without compromising access to services for transit-reliant residents. When retained for civic use, buildings should be updated to activate street life and enhance downtown vibrancy. Underused public land also holds potential to spur equitable development, especially where market forces alone fall short. A strategic approach to public property can ensure it supports long-term community goals and a thriving downtown core.

### ACTIONS

- Evaluate the lifecycle of existing publicly-owned sites / buildings to determine when critical improvements are necessary.**
- Evaluate alternative sites outside of downtown for City and County departments that do not need to be downtown.**
- Contract services to prepare identified sites for future development and create a developer request for proposal (RFP) to dispose of the property.**

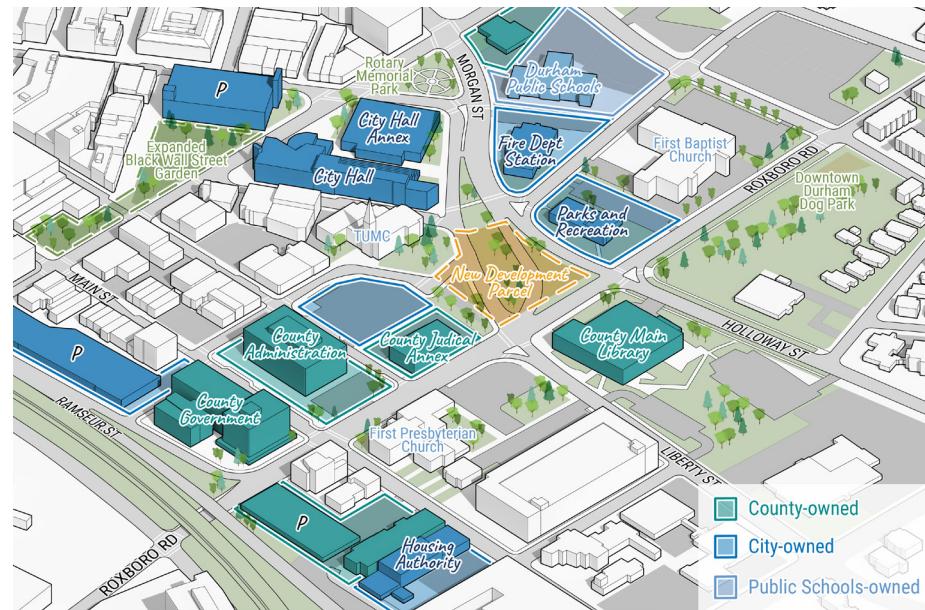
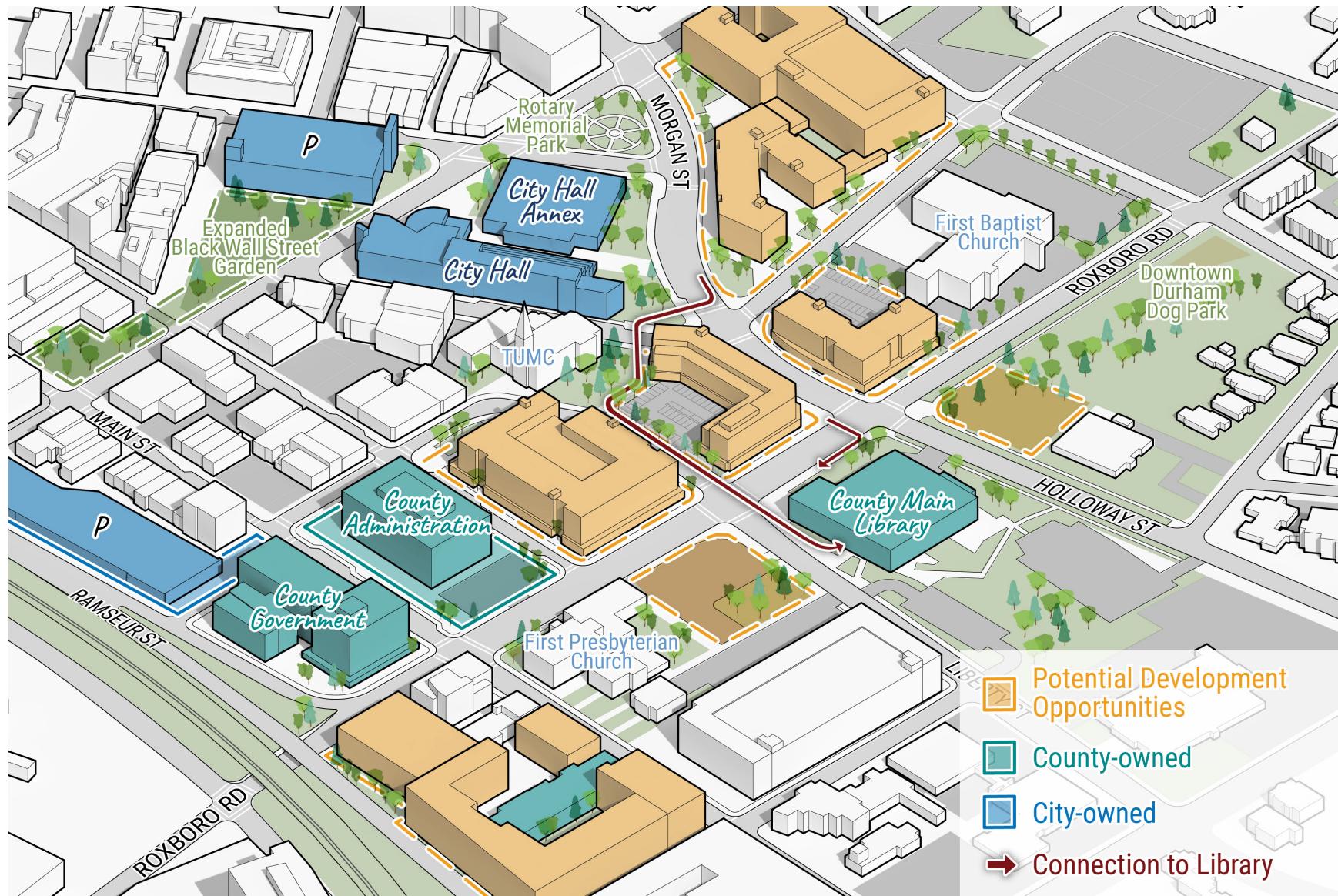


FIGURE 28: PUBLICLY-OWNED PROPERTIES

**FIGURE 29: POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES NEAR ROXBORO ON PUBLICLY-OWNED PROPERTIES**





## COORDINATE WITH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROVIDERS AND ADVOCATES TO ADDRESS NEEDS OF THE UNHOUSED POPULATION

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The sharp increase in the unhoused population (an approximate 300% rise since 2018) presents a critical need for enhanced coordination among downtown stakeholders, local organizations, service providers, and government agencies. This is a national concern stemming from a national housing crisis and while the percent increase is alarming for Durham, the actual numbers of chronically unhoused individuals is relatively low. Finding housing options for those that are temporarily unhoused and expanding services and outreach to those with additional challenges are important steps to address homelessness concerns downtown.

### ACTIONS

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1. **Establish a downtown case manager.** Station a dedicated case manager downtown to connect unhoused individuals with supportive services, reduce reliance on emergency responses, and coordinate with housing providers.
2. **Expand mobile outreach and mental health support.** Partner with HEART to develop a mobile outreach support team with mental health professionals and social workers to provide crisis intervention and connect individuals to treatment and housing.
3. **Establish a daytime shelter and access to resources.** While the existing downtown shelter operates overnight, individuals are left without access to services and a safe space they can go to during the day. In the interim, daytime access to resources could be immediately improved by piloting rotating service hubs that offer food, wifi, lockers, bathrooms, and access to resource providers, social workers, and health services.
4. **Enhance shelter and housing strategies.** Collaborate with housing providers to expand supportive housing, advocate for affordability policies, and create tailored solutions for individuals who struggle in traditional programs.
5. **Improve coordination and funding.** Strengthen collaboration between service providers, businesses, and local government while securing public and private funding for long-term, holistic homelessness solutions.
6. **Approach the local hospital system and payor organizations about supporting additional supportive housing** that could save money on emergency room expenses and unnecessary hospitalizations.

## HEART PROGRAM

The Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Team (HEART) in Durham is an initiative under the City's Community Safety Department, designed to enhance public safety through community-centered approaches that serve as alternatives to traditional law enforcement interventions. Launched in June 2022, HEART aims to connect residents experiencing nonviolent mental health crises or quality-of-life concerns with appropriate care and support.



Source: *City of Durham*

## TARRANT COUNTY PATHWAYS TO HOUSING

In Forth Worth, TX, stable housing and services reduce total costs to the hospital system. The John Peter Smith (JPS) Emergency Department and Medstar saved between about \$1,700 and \$3,800 per Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) resident per year over the past two years, according to an analysis by Directions Home, the city entity responsible for housing services and resources for homeless households.

As a result of this investment in Permanent Supportive Housing, total hospital admissions decreased by half over three years among PSH occupants, according to another study by Tarrant County Pathways to Housing.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tarrant County Pathways to Housing Evaluation, April 2019



# 3

## DEVELOP A MICRO-GRANT PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY-LED IMPLEMENTATION

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Micro-grant programs can have a meaningful impact by empowering all community members to develop creative ideas for improving neighborhoods with financial and promotional support. A micro-grant program open to everyone that focuses on downtown Durham could help shape its future by funding grassroots projects such as public art, community events, and public space enhancements. Aligning the program with the goals of the Downtown Blueprint neighborhood plan would provide a clear direction for community-led initiatives. Potential projects could include tree planting, public art installations, downtown events, and other ideas that foster a vibrant and inclusive community.

### ACTIONS

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1. **Fundraise to capitalize the program.**
2. **Explore local options for administering the program and dollars** - this could include a local community foundation or other entity.
3. **Develop a micro-grant rule book and simple application process** (less than a page) with clear guidance for submitting an application.
4. **Market the program widely** to ensure widespread participation.
5. **Convene an oversight board** to evaluate applications.

## MACON CHRISTMAS LIGHTS EXTRAVAGANZA

The Macon Christmas Lights Extravaganza started in 2017 as one resident's idea to attract visitors to downtown Macon and has quickly become one of the must-see holiday events in Middle Georgia, with over 1,000,000 lights strung along Poplar Street in downtown and free nightly concerts featuring local artists, spanning from the end of November to the beginning of January. The first iteration of the Extravaganza started with seed funding from the Downtown Challenge Fund, which provided grants for community-driven ideas to transform Macon's urban core, as well as funding from the Knight Foundation and Peyton Anderson Foundation. With the overwhelming success of the first year, more grant money, private donations, and sponsorships allowed for expansion of the event in subsequent years.



Source: Macon Christmas Lights Extravaganza

## SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOOD MATCHING FUND

Created in 1988, the Neighborhood Matching Fund provides matching grants to neighborhood groups, community organizations and business groups to implement unique and creative community projects. Funds are available through \$5,000 grants with applications reviewed on a rolling basis and \$50,000 grants with applications reviewed in two rounds per year.

### City of Seattle's Neighborhood Matching Fund Invests \$826,000 in 20 Community-initiated Projects

by SEAnighborhoods on June 10, 2021



2020 BLOOM Food Justice participants at Jimi Hendrix Park

Source: Front Porch, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

# 4

## CONTINUE TO ENGAGE DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS TO PROMOTE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Throughout the public engagement process, residents living in and adjacent to downtown expressed a strong desire for downtown to feel more like a neighborhood and for opportunities to connect with other members of the downtown community. Increasing programming designed to engage residents, building social connections between community members, and providing additional avenues for civic involvement can build a community beyond individual apartment buildings, many of which have their own amenities in internal courtyards.

### ACTIONS

1. **Provide support to develop a neighborhood association for downtown** to weigh in on zoning variances, develop an annual resident survey, and organize local events.
2. **Develop a slate of downtown resident events**, potentially including downtown studio tours, block parties and community service days.
3. **Create a downtown resident guide and “Welcome to Downtown” packet for new residents.** Engage property owners and realtors in the development and distribution of the packet.
4. **Continue the It’s Your Neighborhood Initiative and Neighborhood Comes to You programs**, managed by DDI.

## OLD NORTH DURHAM NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Located on the northern edge of downtown, the Old North Durham Neighborhood Association (ONDNA) is a resident-led community organization that hosts social events and neighborhood clean-ups and maintains an active neighborhood online community for residents. Additionally, the ONDNA has acted as another platform for residents to learn about citywide initiatives that may affect their neighborhood and informs them of opportunities to provide input, such as public outreach events led by the City and County.

## “IT’S YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD” INITIATIVE

Downtown Durham, Inc. hosts the “It’s Your Neighborhood” initiative to help downtown residents (and anyone living in the 27701 zip code) stay up-to-date on all the happenings downtown. The initiative includes a list of discounts, specials, and promotions from local businesses available exclusively to 27701 residents and “The Neighborhood Comes to You” events that bring small downtown businesses and organizations into residential buildings to introduce residents to the businesses and services in the downtown neighborhood, providing an opportunity for residents to meet each other.



## MEETUP—DURHAM YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

As new development brings more young professionals to live downtown, it’s important to consider other avenues of spreading information about events and happenings in downtown. The online platform Meetup connects people with similar interests and within similar geographic areas to create online communities. For example, the “Durham Young Professionals” Meetup group allows members to post social events going on in Durham and helps them meet other young people. Creating a Meetup group specifically for young professionals and residents living in downtown could help foster a better sense of community, especially among newcomers.

A screenshot of a Meetup group page for "Durham Young Professionals (~22-38)". The page features a blue header with the Meetup logo and a search bar. Below the header is a large blue banner with the group's name and a stylized orange "DYP" logo. The banner also includes a small profile picture of a person. To the right of the banner, there is a list of group details: "Durham, NC, USA", "4,244 members · Public group", and "Organized by Saurabh and 5 others". At the bottom of the banner, there are sharing options for social media platforms.

Source: Meetup.com

## 5

## SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR HOW KEY DEVELOPMENT SITES SHOULD BE DESIGNED

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Downtown Durham has seen rapid growth over the past two decades, but many residents have expressed concerns over this new growth, especially the “5-over-1” residential buildings criticized as cookie-cutter and lacking character. Although some new buildings include ground-floor retail space, many spaces remain vacant, while other buildings have long, inactive street walls. Despite the significant redevelopment that has already occurred, some opportunities remain, particularly south of the rail tracks west of the American Tobacco Campus, plus a few key opportunities that will have a significant impact on downtown like the Durham School of the Arts, the Historic Durham Athletic Park, the existing YMCA site, and the Convention Center. As these sites evolve, it is critical to establish guidelines that ensure new development enhances the public realm. Defining these parameters now will help shape a more vibrant, connected, and pedestrian-friendly downtown.

### ACTIONS

1. **Identify priority streets for active frontages and focus retail tenanting and ground floor investments along these corridors.**
2. **Build upon proposed UDO regulations for ground-floor uses that include trees or public art to help elevate these investments. Help curate local artists to activate empty storefronts and bring vibrancy to downtown.**
3. **Explore alternative ways besides retail to activate ground-floors and provide more attractive pedestrian experiences.**

### EXAMPLES OF ACTIVATION



Active ground floor uses  
(Source: Weinstein A+U)



Active plazas with landscaping and seating (Source: Studio dwg)



Public art (Source: SOFTLab)

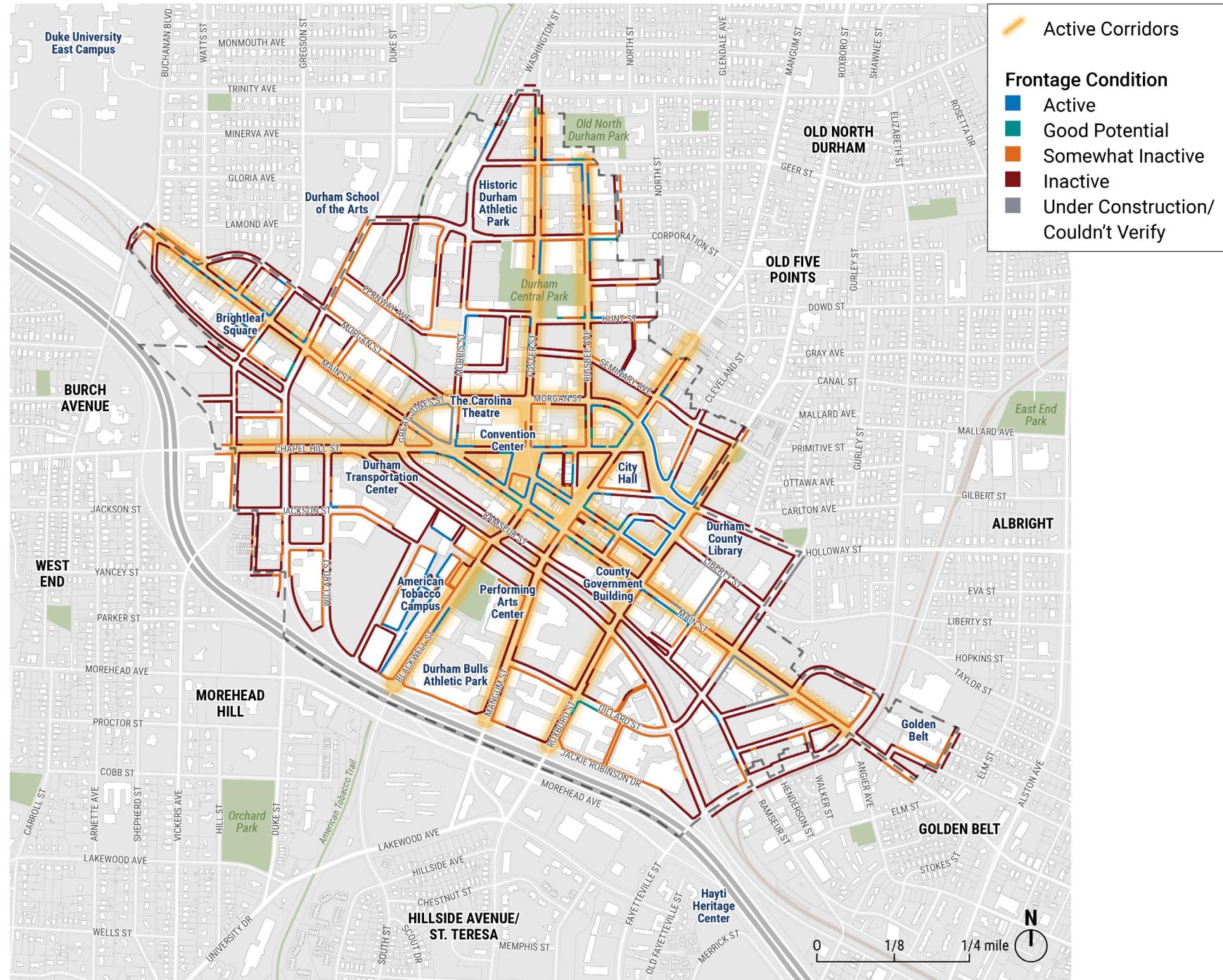


FIGURE 30: PROPOSED ACTIVE CORRIDORS

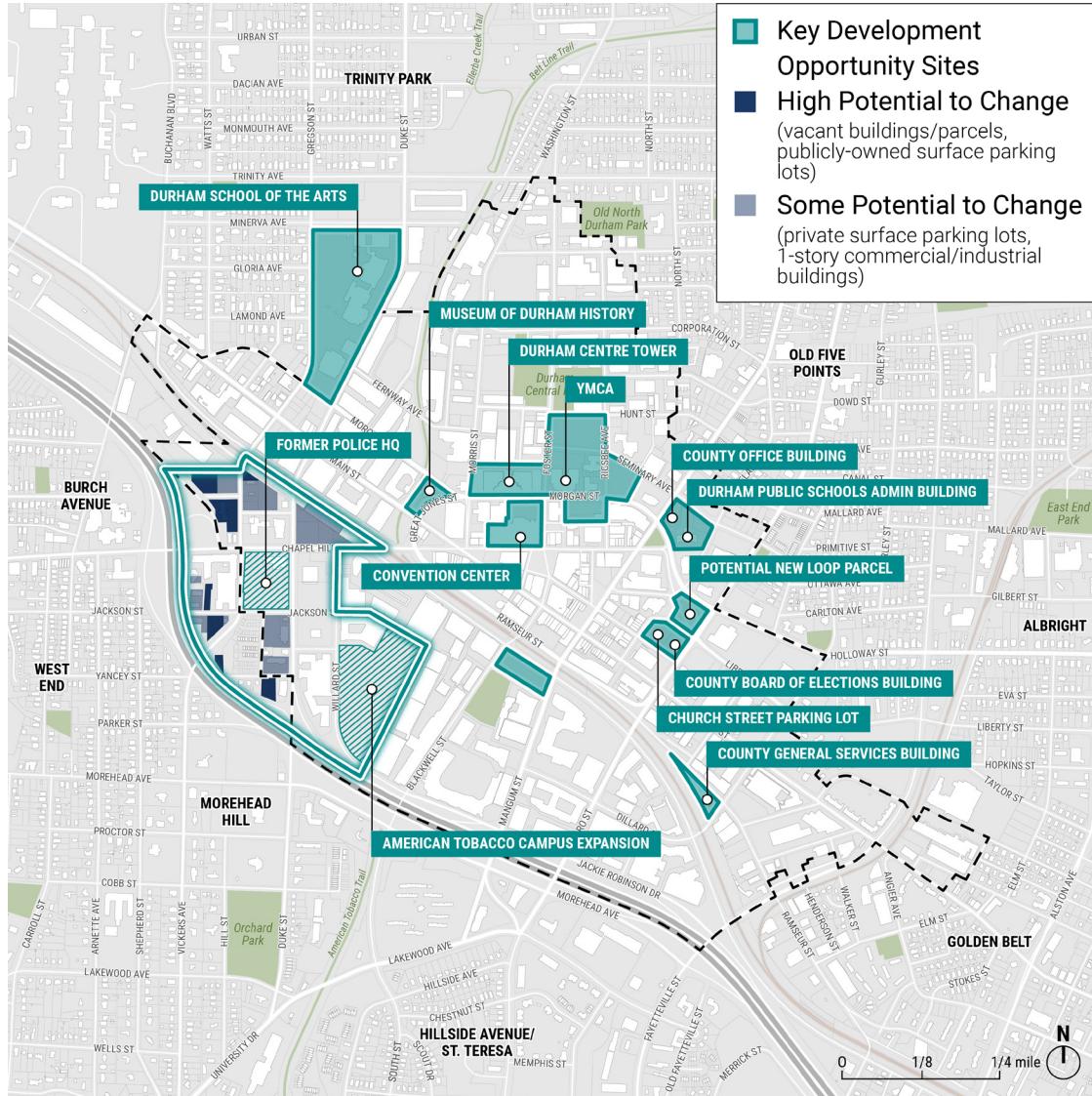


FIGURE 31: POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY SITES

## EXAMPLES OF KEY SITES



Durham School of the Arts

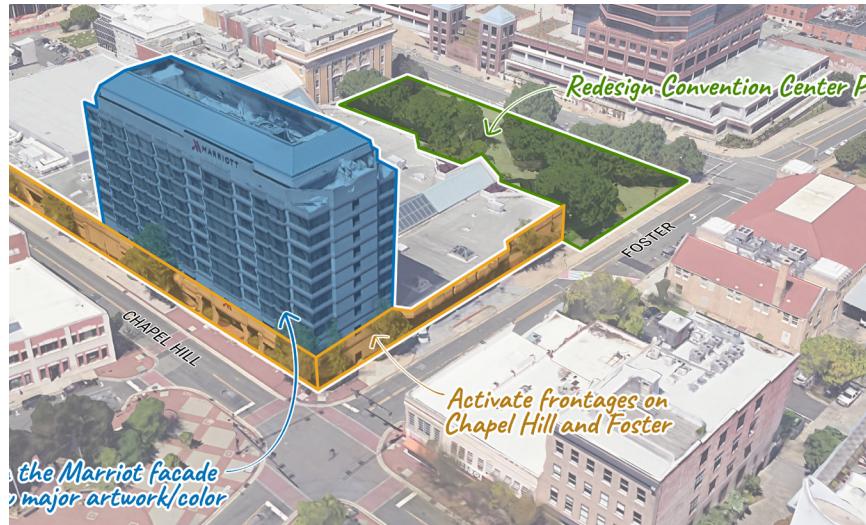


Area west of American Tobacco Campus



Foster Street/Morgan Street area

## IF THE CONVENTION CENTER STAYS...



## IF THE CONVENTION CENTER MOVES...

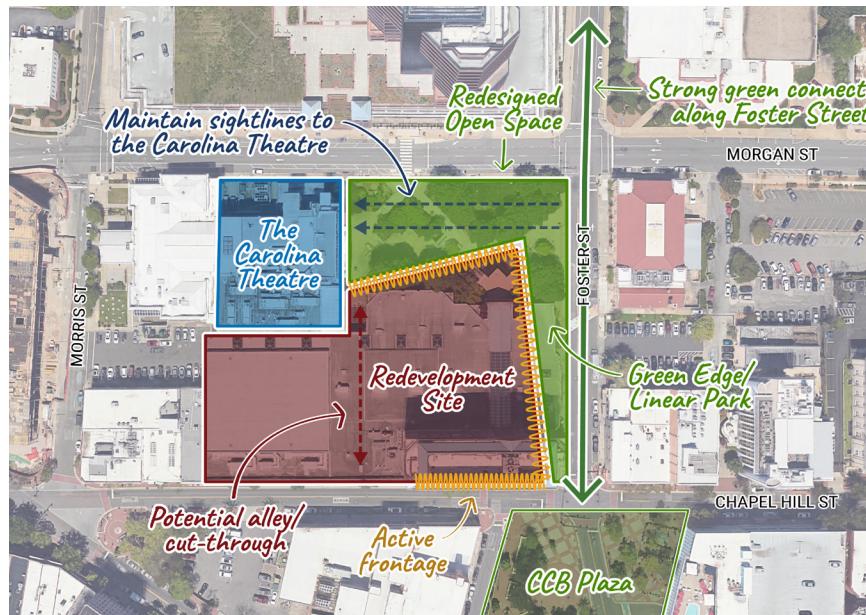


FIGURE 32: CONVENTION CENTER SCENARIOS



FIGURE 33: POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING YMCA SITE

## EXAMPLES OF LINEAR PARKS



Source (top to bottom): Cedars Sinai/Hensel Phelps; Architecture Magazine

# WALK + ROLL

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**GOAL 4** *Downtown will offer a safer and more attractive travel experience for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.*



“GETTING TO DOWNTOWN CAN BE BETTER BY IMPROVING THE BICYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE.”

“WE NEED BETTER SAFETY MEASURES, INCLUDING HEIGHTENED PUBLIC AWARENESS AND LIGHTED CROSSWALKS.”

“CONNECTING NEIGHBORHOODS INTO MAIN DOWNTOWN IS KEY.”

Wide, fast moving streets carve downtown Durham into smaller districts that too often feel disconnected from one another. At the same time, these large roads also prioritize the car over walking and bicycling. Safety and connectivity are essential ingredients in successful downtowns and Durham is no different. These roads can be redesigned just as Main Street was years ago. Turning some one-way streets to two-way would not harm traffic and improve accessibility to downtown businesses.

Reenvisioning these streets is a long-discussed topic but with little movement. Costs and State ownership among other factors remain impediments. However, it remains critical to address the current conditions and take action in creating a more walkable and connected downtown.



## 1 REDESIGN THE LOOP

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Converting the Loop to two-way would improve connectivity in and out of the downtown center, promote safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and create new opportunities for development and public space with leftover land. However, despite extensive studies and discussions, progress has stalled, partly because of state ownership of these roads. Meanwhile, private development, like the Novus on the former South Bank site, are locked in by the current Loop configuration, limiting redevelopment opportunities and reinforcing the tendency for buildings to turn their back on the wide, uninviting corridor. To prevent further disjointed growth, it is critical for the City to gain ownership of the Loop before the remaining development sites further solidify its disconnecting effect on downtown Durham.

### ACTIONS

- 1. Work with the State to allow the City to take ownership and control of the Loop roads**, including portions of Morgan, Great Jones, Ramseur, Liberty, and Holloway Streets.
- 2. Redesign the Loop roads and intersections to become two-way** and create a better pedestrian experience through improved sidewalks with enhanced landscaping and greenery.
  - Focus initially on improving key intersections to provide better safety and connectivity across the Loop roads.
  - If a two-way Loop design is determined as not viable, reduce the current space dedicated to cars and emphasize active recreation—walking, running, and bicycling—and greening.
- 3. Implement new bike infrastructure on Morgan and Ramseur Streets** for a better-connected bike network.
  - Explore the possibility of a cycle track on the north side of Morgan Street between the Durham Rail Trail and Cleveland Street, with additional bike lanes extending southeast along Liberty Street (see *Recommendation #1 under Common Grounds* for more details).
  - Coordinate with Norfolk Southern and the North Carolina Railroad Company about a potential shared use pedestrian/cyclist path along Ramseur Street adjacent to the rail, including fencing to deter unauthorized access on the rail tracks.
    - If a shared use path adjacent to the rail is not feasible, it can be placed on the opposite side of Ramseur Street.
- 4. Determine the best use for the new parcel** created by the two-way conversion along Roxboro Street between Morgan and Church Streets.
  - If open space is determined to be the best use, create a major destination park that can attract visitors and families from across the region.

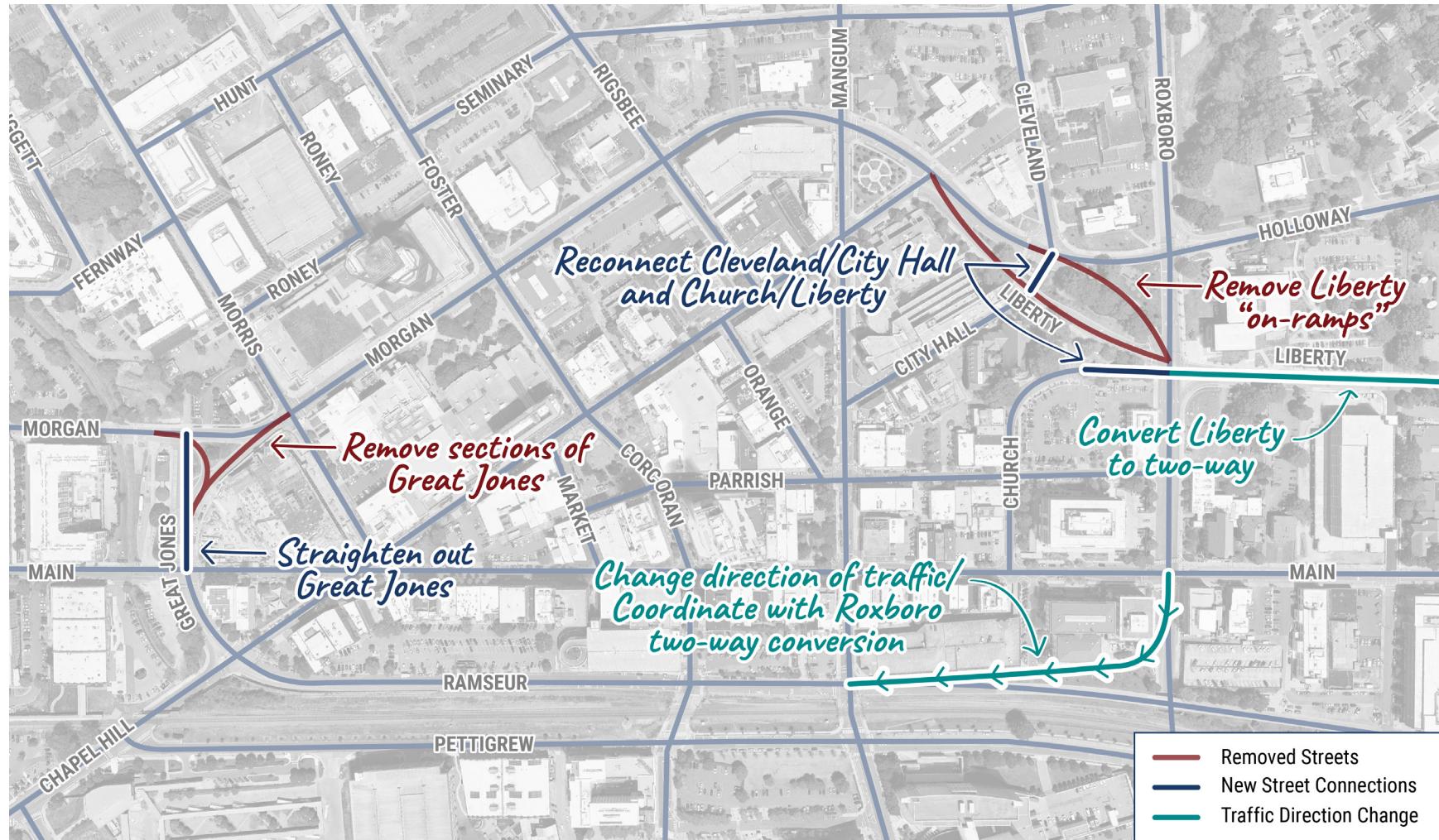


FIGURE 34: LOOP MODIFICATIONS

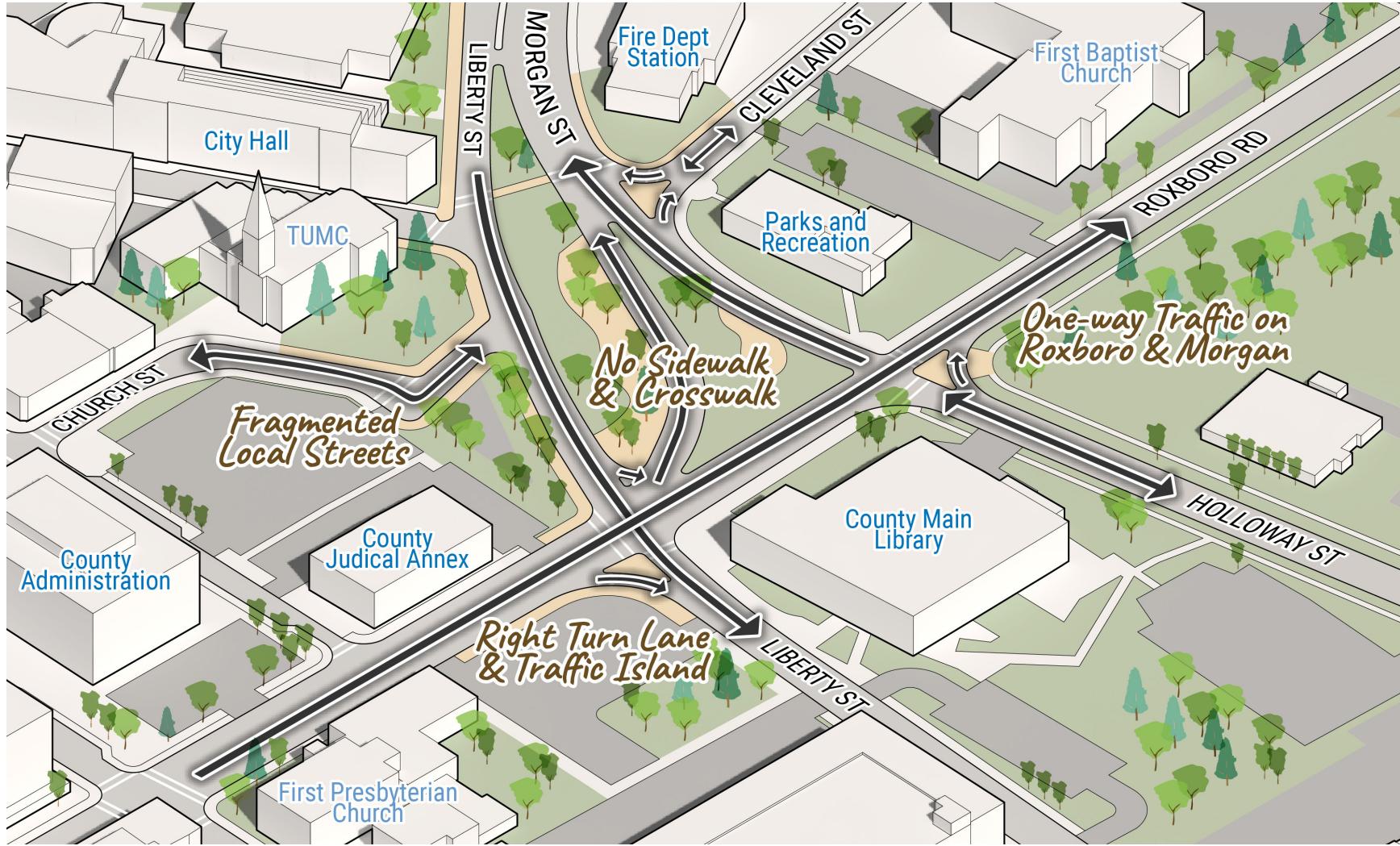


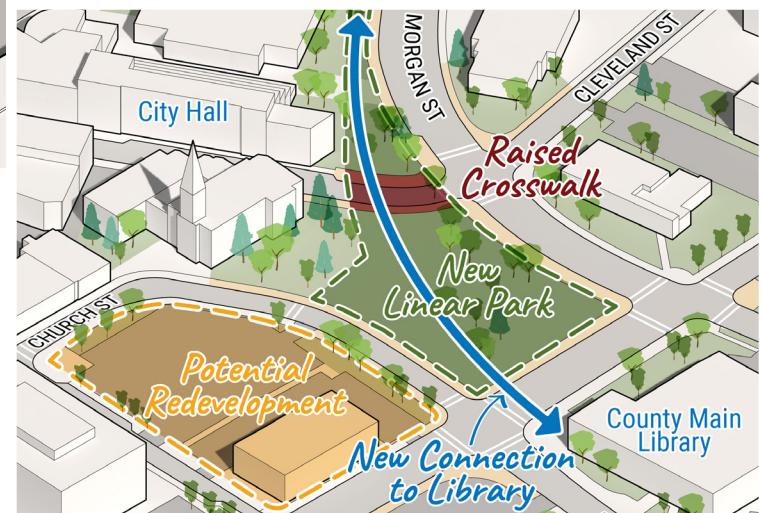
FIGURE 35: EXISTING ROXBORO/HOLLOWAY/LIBERTY INTERSECTION

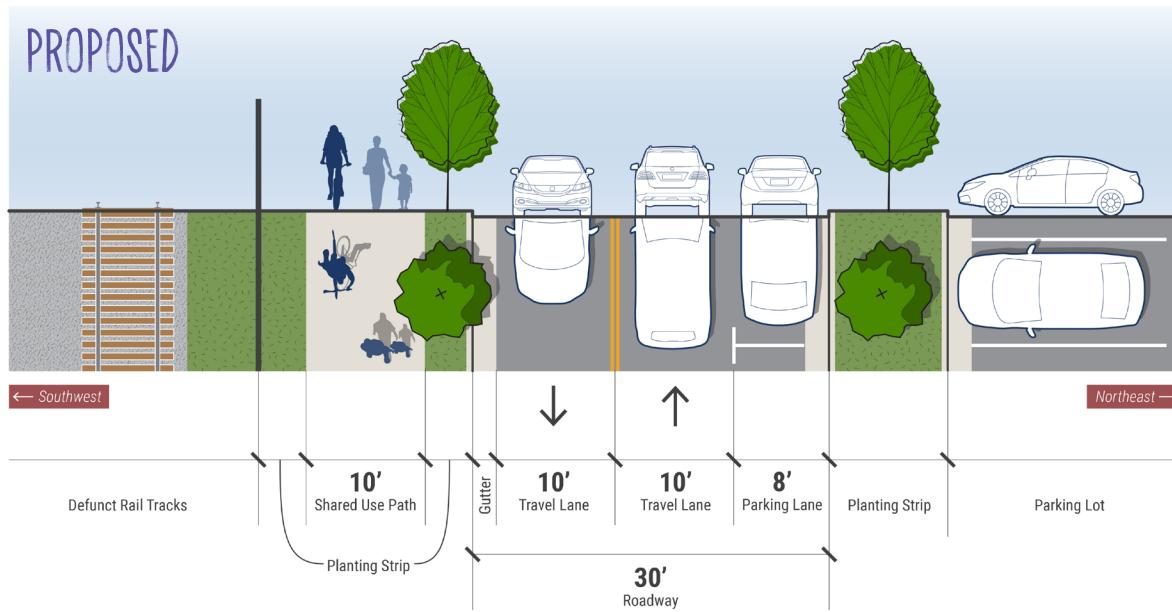
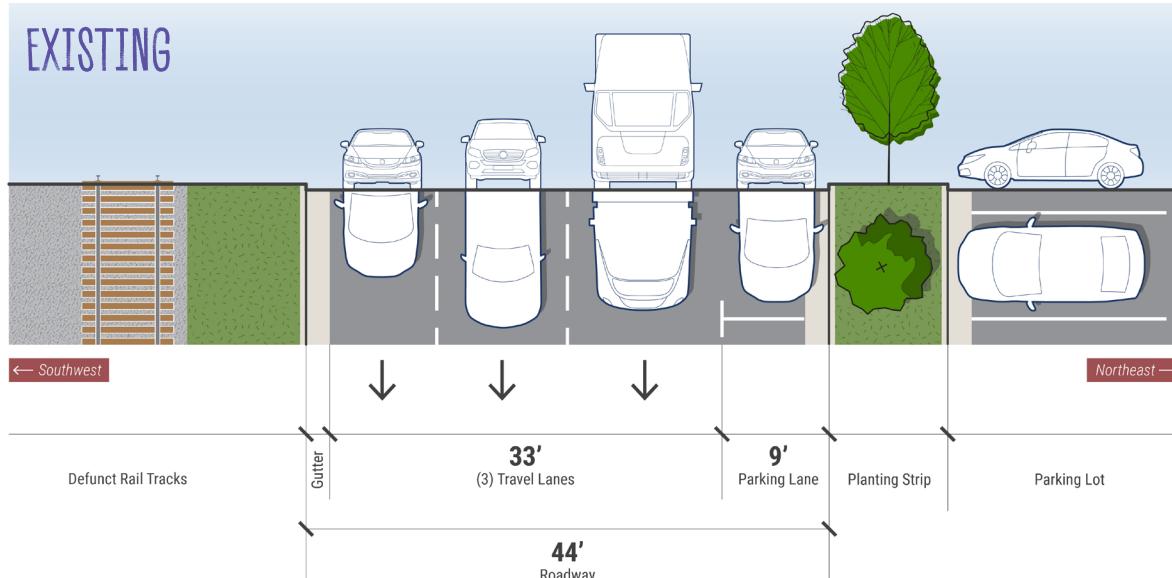


FIGURE 36: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ROXBORO/HOLLOWAY/LIBERTY INTERSECTION

## ALTERNATIVE NEW PARK & LIBRARY CONNECTION

This option would focus on adding open space, preserving existing trees, and creating a better pedestrian connection to the library.



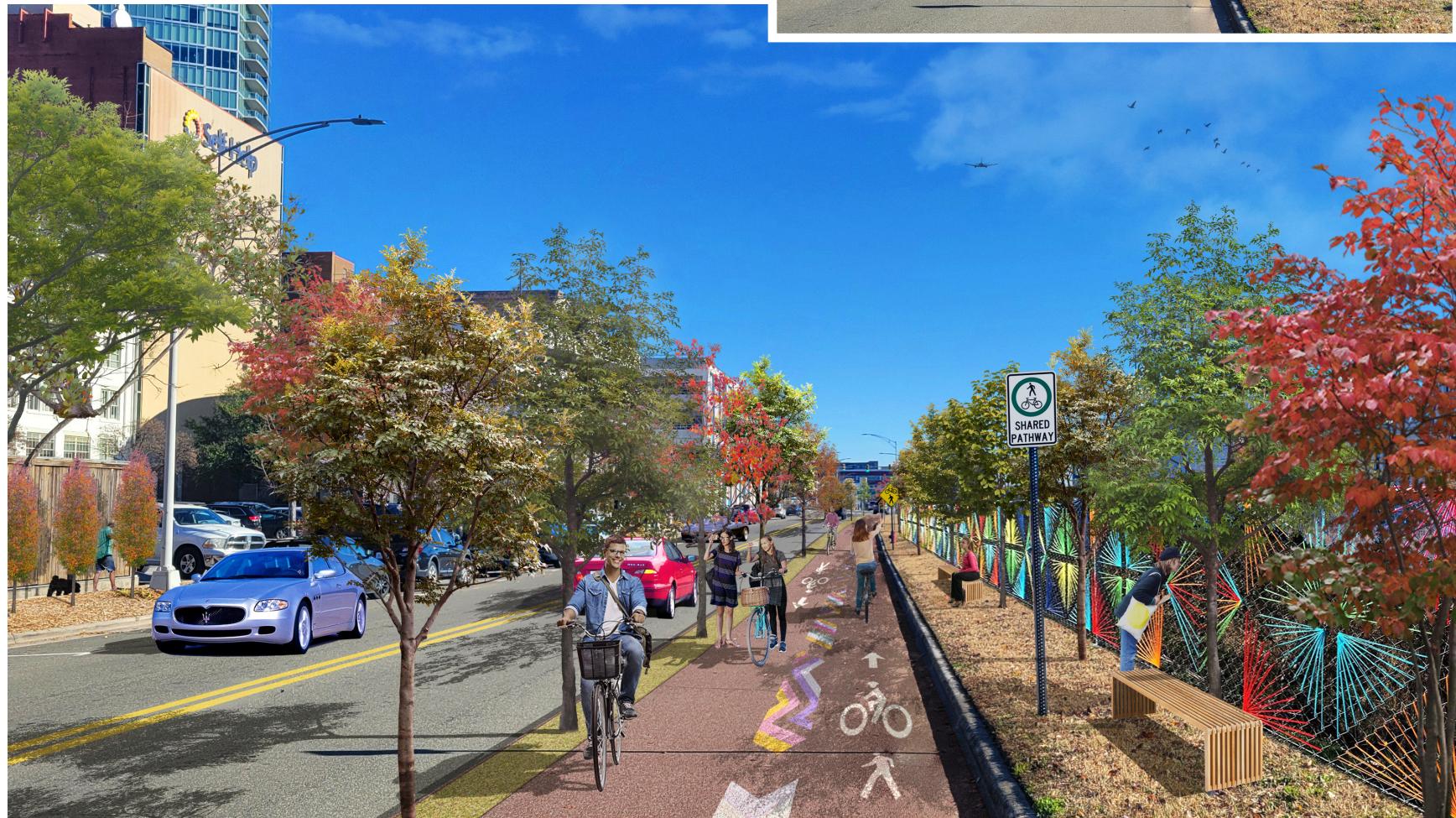
**FIGURE 37: EXISTING AND PROPOSED STREET SECTIONS FOR RAMSEUR STREET**

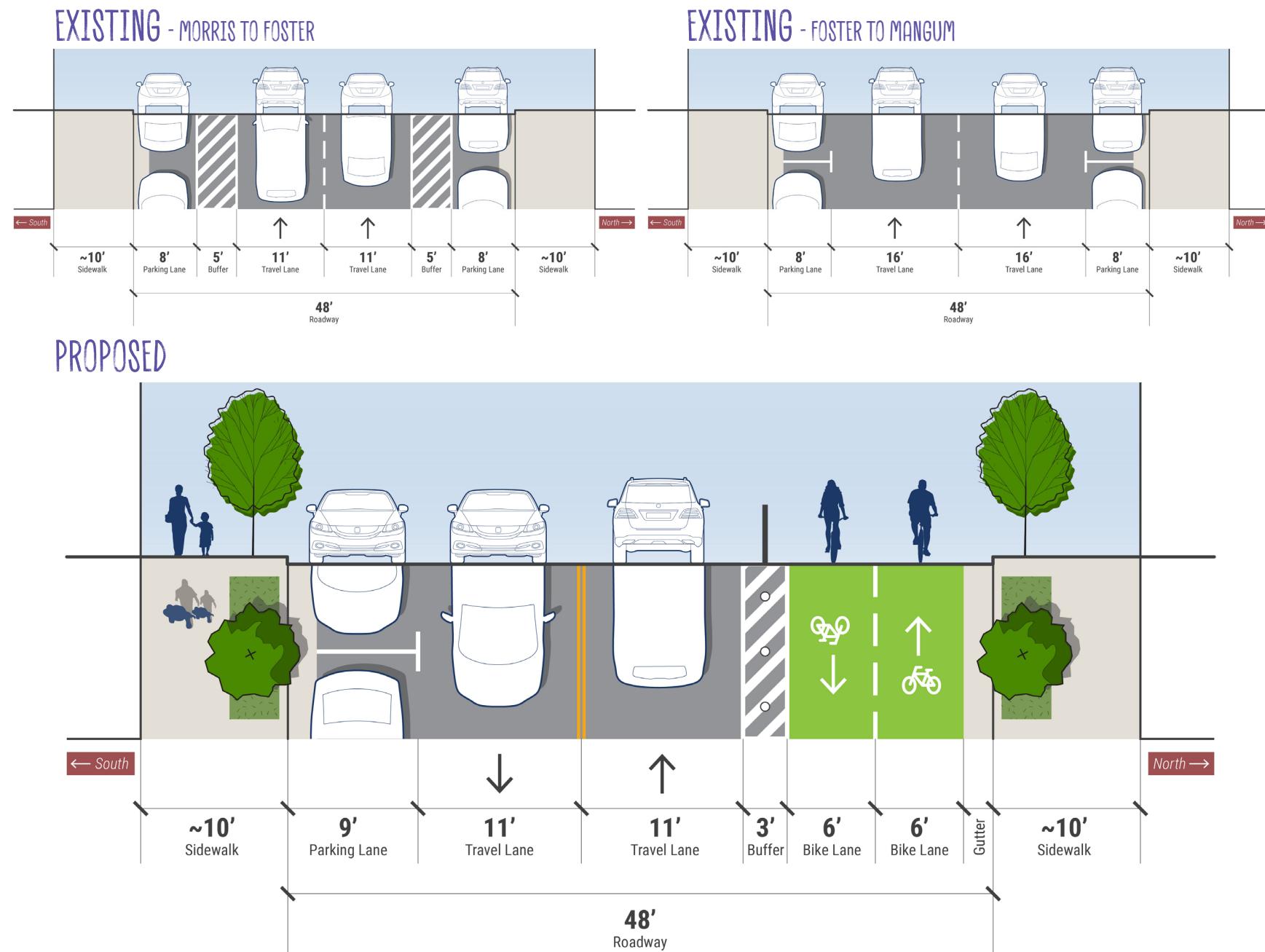
## EXAMPLES OF SHARED-USE PATHS



Source (top to bottom): Atlanta Beltline (The Mill Source); Charlotte Rail Trail (LandDesign); Denver 40 West Artline (40 West Arts District)

**FIGURE 38:** RENDERING OF RAMSEUR STREET SHARED-USE PATH



**FIGURE 39: EXISTING AND PROPOSED STREET SECTIONS FOR MORGAN STREET**

**FIGURE 40:** RENDERING OF MORGAN STREET IMPROVEMENTS



## STRENGTHEN MULTIMODAL CONNECTIONS ALONG KEY STREETS AND BETWEEN ANCHOR DESTINATIONS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

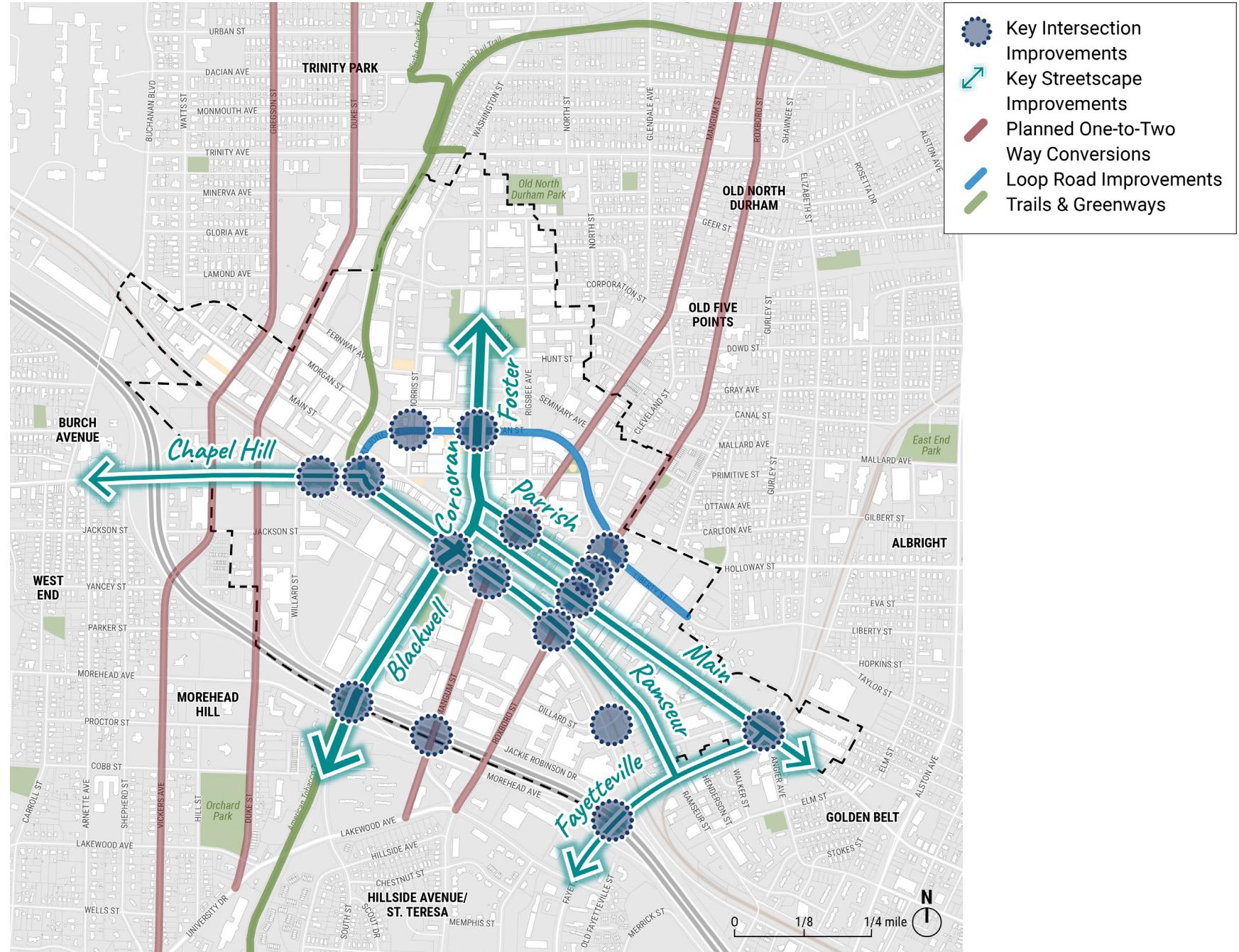
The Loop is not the only one-way road in need of improvements. Throughout the public engagement process, participants complained of feeling unsafe crossing Mangum and Roxboro Streets, where wide roadways encourage speeding. The City is currently exploring the feasibility of converting these two roads to two-way with the possibility of Gregson and Duke also undergoing the same process for two-way conversion in the future.

Beyond these two-way conversions, focusing streetscape improvements between anchor destinations, like Durham Central Park and American Tobacco Campus, and creating better pedestrian and cyclist connections between downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods would encourage people to come downtown and explore the businesses and public spaces that downtown has to offer.

### ACTIONS

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1. **Redesign Mangum, Roxboro, Gregson, and Duke as two-way streets** (in coordination with the NCDOT resurfacing schedule) focusing on calming traffic, providing safe pedestrian crossings, promoting walking and biking, increasing tree canopy, and providing on-street parking for businesses and customers.
2. In addition to proposed design changes to Parrish Street (see *Recommendation #1 under Rooted + Ready*), **pursue streetscape improvements along Chapel Hill and Fayetteville Streets** to create better connections between downtown and its neighbors.
3. **Coordinate with the Reimagine Durham Freeway Study** for potential improvements to the Durham Freeway underpasses and overpasses on the southern edge of downtown.
4. **Improve rail crossings with new sidewalks, public art, and additional greenery.**
  - A safer, more pedestrian-friendly rail crossing at Blackwell and Corcoran is essential for strengthening foot traffic between existing attractions and the downtown core. Its importance will only grow once the new YMCA opens at Blackwell and Pettigrew Streets.
5. **Explore the possibility of a shuttle that connects anchor destinations both within downtown and just outside of downtown**, such as the Hayti Heritage Center and North Carolina Central University.
6. **Work to strengthen connections between downtown and the rest of Durham.**
  - This could include improvements to bus service, intercity and regional passenger rail connections, and any Bus Rapid Transit investments that connect downtown to anchor institutions like Duke, NCCU, and Durham Tech.



**FIGURE 41: KEY STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS**

## EXAMPLES OF STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS AND DOWNTOWN SHUTTLES



High visibility crosswalks  
(Source: Bike Walk Wichita)



Enhanced landscaping  
(Source: Berger Partnership)



Raised crosswalks  
(Source: Recovery Law Center)



More bus shelters  
(Source: Golden Belt Bus Stop, Sharon Dowell Art)



Accessible pedestrian signals  
(Source: CNIB)



Curb bump-outs (Source: NACTO)



Underpass improvements  
Source (top to bottom): Barrett Doherty; Acrylic Community



Downtown shuttle  
Source: Grand Rapids Magazine

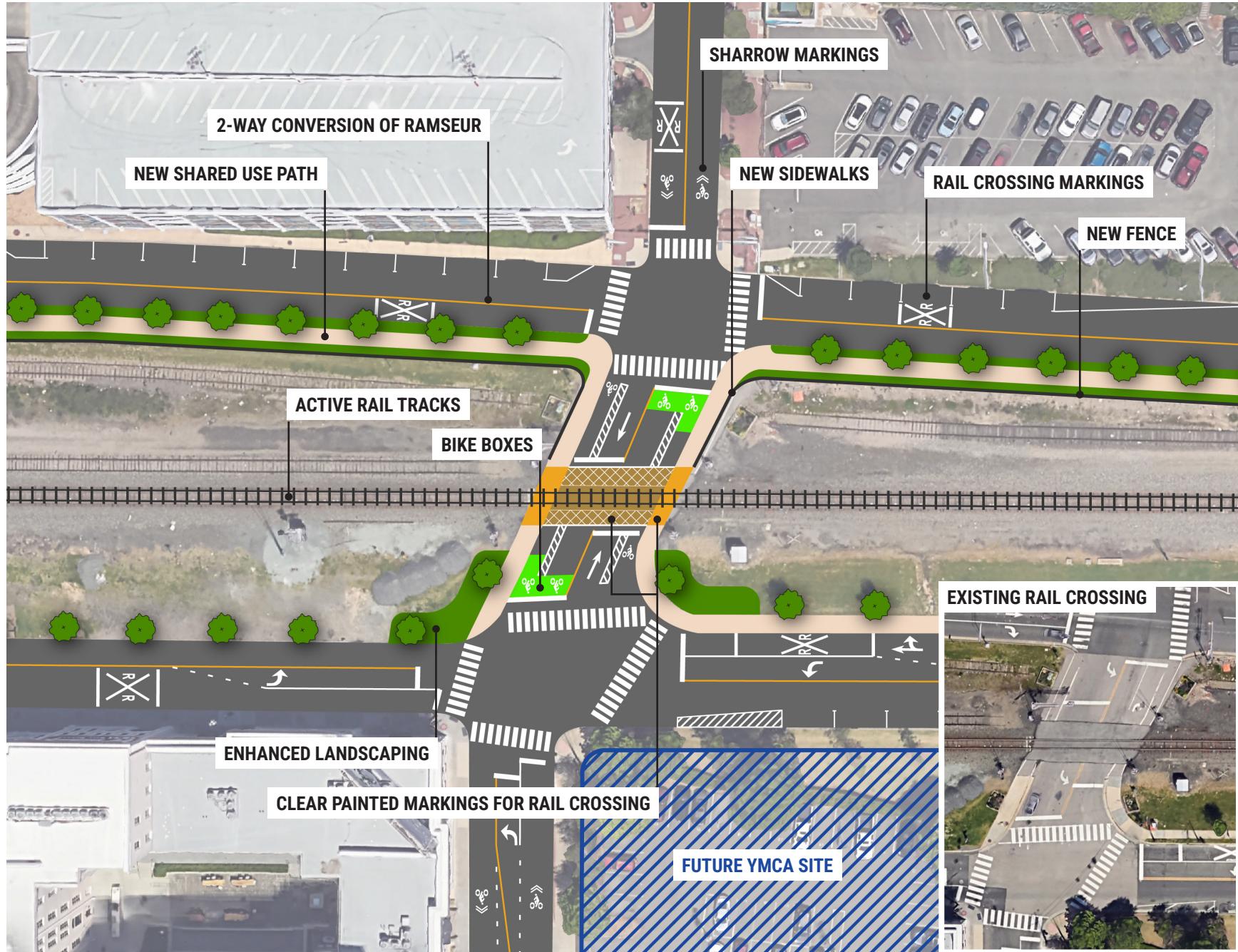


FIGURE 42: RAIL CROSSING IMPROVEMENTS

# 3

## STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS ALONG FOSTER/CORCORAN/BLACKWELL STREETS AS A MAJOR PATHWAY

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

This north-south spine links together some of downtown's major destinations, including American Tobacco Campus, Durham Bulls Athletic Park (DBAP), Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC), CCB Plaza, Durham Central Park, and the future home of the new YMCA facility. However, the experience on the street varies, from Corcoran Street's red brick sidewalks lined with trees and planters to Foster Street's dead zones next to the Durham Centre Parking Garage and the Convention Center. The 2015 *Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan* previously identified several public realm improvements along this downtown corridor, but unfortunately, very little has been implemented. Bridging the gaps along this corridor would encourage residents and visitors to explore many of downtown's exciting destinations by walking and biking, providing more opportunities to stop in a few local businesses along the way.

### ACTIONS

1. **Implement new bike facilities along Foster Street** between the beginning of the American Tobacco Trail on Morehead Avenue up to Old North Durham Park and Ellerbe Creek Trail near Trinity Avenue.
2. **Explore the potential of a shared street treatment between the two sides of Durham Central Park.**
3. **Create a safer and more attractive rail crossing at Blackwell and Corcoran Streets** with additional landscaping, sidewalk improvements, and public art.
4. **Improve the Durham Freeway underpass on Blackwell Street** with improved lighting, landscaping, and public art (originally suggested under the 2015 *SmART Vision Plan*).
5. **Integrate consistent wayfinding signage, banners, and public art** to help brand this corridor as downtown's main north-south spine.

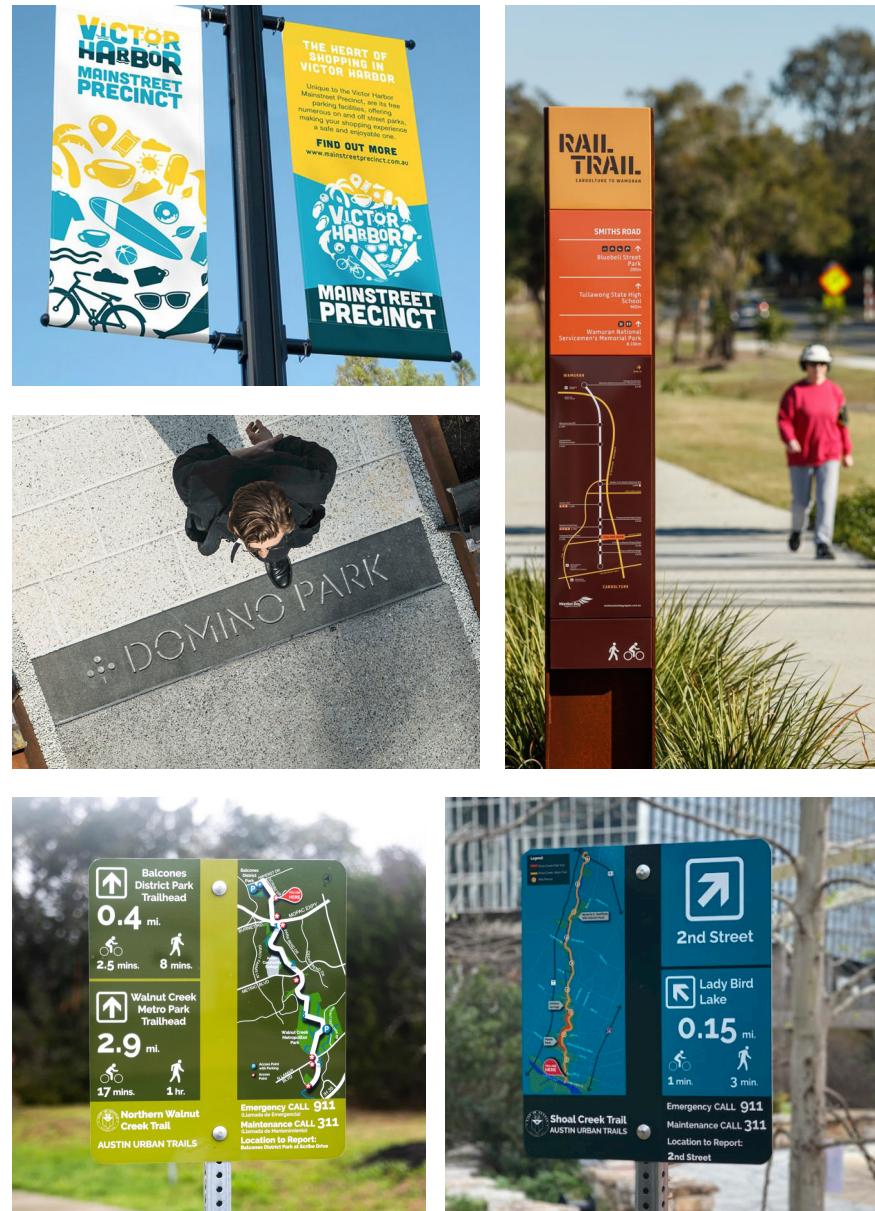
### IN-PROGRESS

The City's Transportation Department is already moving forward with bike facilities along the Foster/Corcoran/Blackwell Street corridor. As the design progresses, it is critical to include measures that improve walkability and the visibility of existing storefronts.



FIGURE 43: FOSTER/CORCORAN/BLACKWELL SPINE

## EXAMPLES OF BRANDING + WAYFINDING



Source: City of Victor/Corey Dodd; Noe & Associates; City of Moreton Bay; KUT News/Patricia Lim; Shoal Creek Conservancy

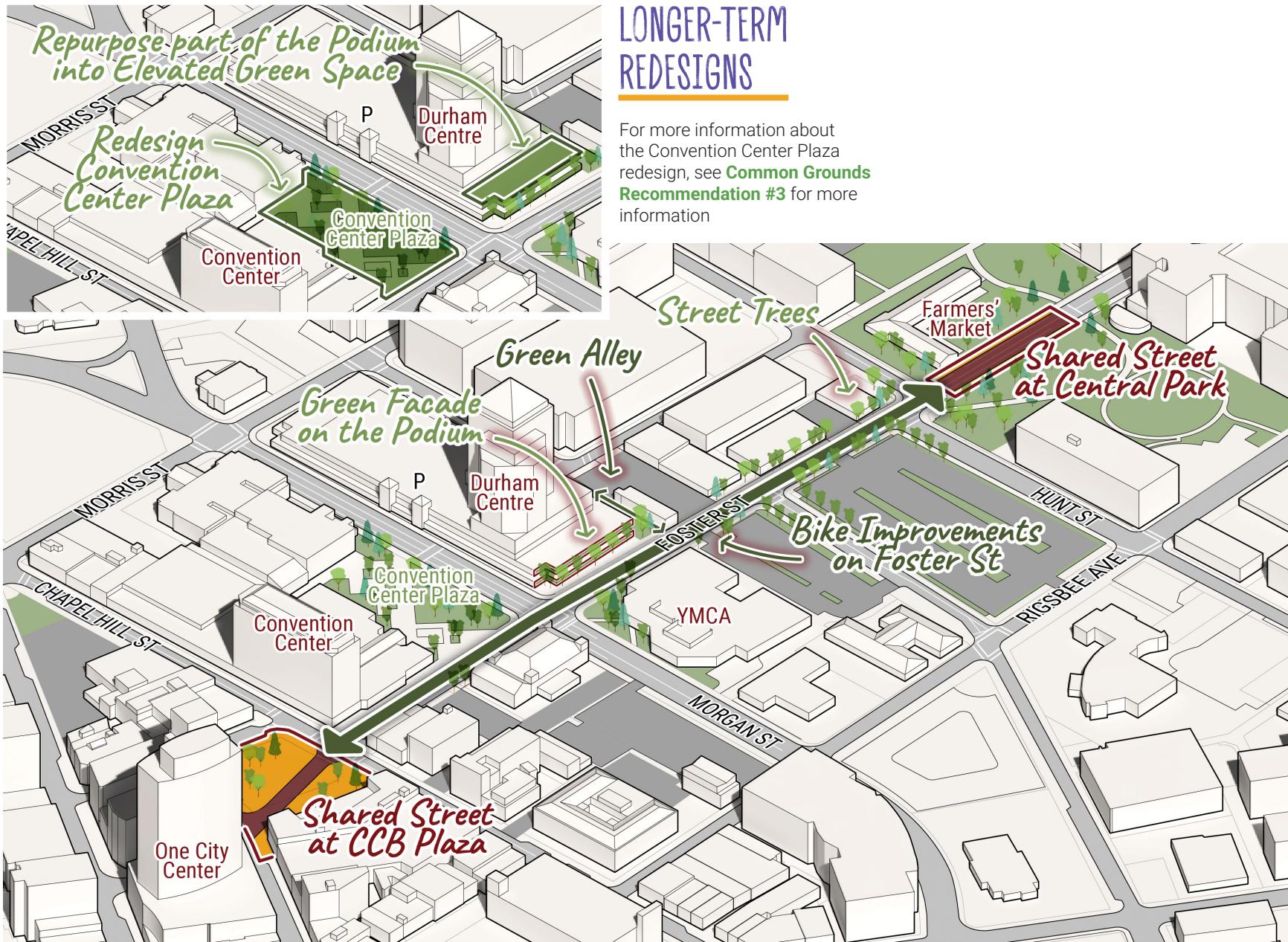


FIGURE 44: PROPOSED FOSTER STREET IMPROVEMENTS

## EXAMPLES OF PARKING GARAGE IMPROVEMENTS



Green facades on parking garages  
(Source (left to right): GSky; A.T. Flournoy)



Pickleball courts on the top deck of a parking garage  
(Source: Austin Pickle Ranch)

## CCB PLAZA & CENTRAL PARK SHARED STREETS



Proposed street redesigns from the 2015 SmartVision Plan  
(Source: Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan/  
Mikyoung Kim Design)

# COMMON GROUNDS

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**GOAL 5** *Downtown will be filled with inviting, connected, and well-utilized public spaces.*



“WE NEED MORE PLAYGROUNDS AND ESPECIALLY SPLASH PADS!”

“CREATE EFFECTIVE THIRD SPACES (PARKS, WATER PARKS, FOUNTAINS, OPEN AIR AMPHITHEATER, ETC.) THAT ALLOW PEOPLE TO CONGREGATE WHEN GOING DOWNTOWN.”

“BETTER DESIGNED POCKET PARKS AND OTHER PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES.”

Parks and plazas are where people relax, enjoy time with their families, gather and celebrate. Great downtowns have great parks that offer a variety of things to do. Downtown Durham has multiple open spaces, but most of the activity revolves around Durham Central Park, which acts as an activity hub and downtown playground, and CCB Plaza, which operates as downtown's central plaza for local events. Other spaces are dotted across downtown, and new amenities, like the Durham Rail Trail, promise to bring an exciting new recreational asset to downtown.

As expressed by many residents, they need “more” downtown. More places to play, to relax and to come together. Recognizing the importance of Durham Central Park as downtown's only formal park, Durham Central Park Inc. has an active plan to invest in this major asset. However, many of the other open spaces are privately-owned and operated and could be redeveloped in the future (and many already have). More work remains to be done to upgrade existing parks, identify locations for permanent open space, and bring more events, programming, and people downtown.



# 1 IMPROVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN OPEN SPACE ASSETS TO CREATE A STRONG DOWNTOWN OPEN SPACE NETWORK

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

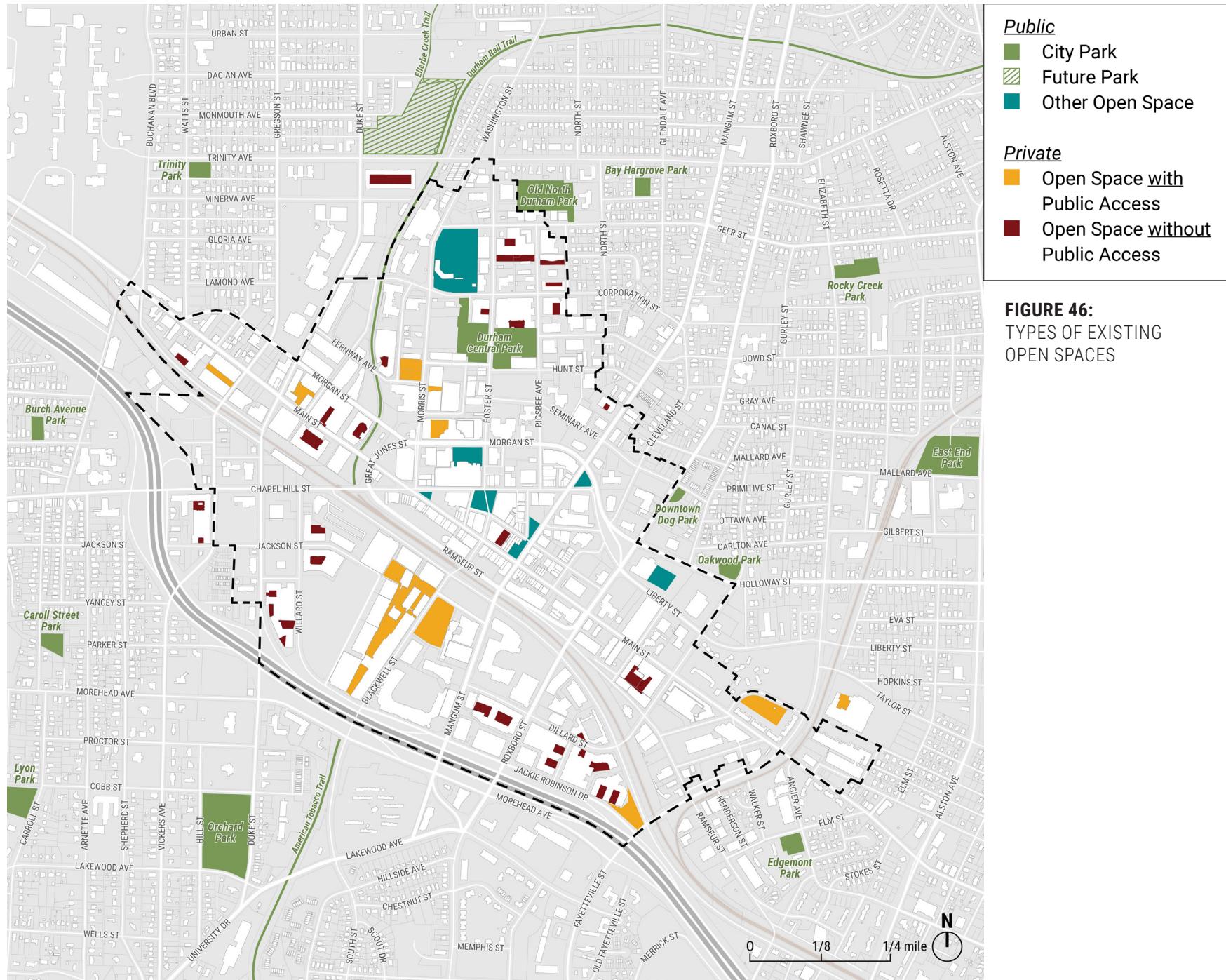
Downtown residents and visitors have expressed a strong need for more open space and gathering areas downtown. While Durham Central Park remains the primary downtown green space, it is landlocked by development with limited expansion potential. However, nearby parks, trails, and upcoming investments within and adjacent to downtown—such as the Durham Rail Trail, the East Coast Greenway, South Ellerbe Restoration Project, and Long Meadow Park and East End Park's Splash and Play Project—offer opportunities to enhance downtown's open space network. To meet the growing demand for open space, it is crucial to identify remaining opportunities for new green spaces and strengthen connections between existing parks, plazas, and trails to support recreation, gathering, and relaxation.

## ACTIONS

1. **Identify gaps in sidewalk and bike networks between major open space assets and create priority routes for walking and biking between them through new bike lanes, traffic calming, and intersection improvements.**
  - Add wayfinding signage and branding between the American Tobacco Trail and Durham Rail Trail along Blackwell and Ramseur Streets to create a stronger trail connection. For more details, see [Recommendation #3 under Walk + Roll](#).
  - Implement a new east-west bike connection along Morgan and Liberty Streets to connect the Durham Rail Trail and Long Meadow Park. For more details, see [Recommendation #1 under Walk + Roll](#).
2. **Explore new opportunities for downtown parks and open space.**
  - Encourage developers to provide publicly-accessible open space in new developments (in progress with new Unified Ordinance Development).
  - Incorporate cooling features, such as interactive fountains into new parks, playgrounds, and public spaces for year-round use, to provide safer spaces for children and the elderly, two groups most vulnerable to extreme heat.
3. **Create a privately operated public space (POPS) program.**
  - Work with the Planning Department to explore the creation of a POPS program for Durham, evaluating precedents in other cities (such as Boston, MA).
  - Integrate POPS into the development review process for downtown zoning districts in collaboration with the planning department.
  - Develop branding, digital maps, and other features to make POPS easier to discover by the public.



**FIGURE 45:**  
OPEN SPACE NETWORK



**FIGURE 46:**  
TYPES OF EXISTING OPEN SPACES

## UPCOMING PARK INVESTMENTS



Durham Rail Trail Public Plaza  
(Source: City of Durham/McAdams Company)



East End Park improvements (Source: City of Durham, Department of Parks and Recreation)



Long Meadow Park improvements (Source: City of Durham, Department of Parks and Recreation)

## EXAMPLES OF WATER FEATURES



Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston, MA (Source: Kennedy Greenway Conservancy)



## 2

## UPGRADE CCB PLAZA

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

CCB Plaza, named after a former bank, serves as the unofficial heart of downtown Durham and a key intersection of several major corridors. It is home to the iconic Major the Bull statue and hosts significant community events, such as the annual Christmas tree lighting.

To fully realize its potential as a premier public gathering space, targeted investment is needed to enhance its amenities and functionality. As outlined in the 2015 *Durham SmART Vision Plan*, improvements to CCB Plaza should focus on expanding its capacity for public programming while strengthening its role as a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly space.

A key consideration is enhancing pedestrian connectivity and integrating the plaza more effectively with its surroundings, particularly Parrish Street and Market Street. Given the already limited vehicle traffic in this area, exploring the potential for a permanently pedestrianized Market Street could significantly increase foot traffic and strengthen downtown's walkability.

## ACTIONS

1. **Rename CCB Plaza.** Initiate a community-driven renaming process to select a name that better reflects downtown Durham's history, culture, and evolving identity. This process could engage residents and stakeholders, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to the space.
2. **Expand the Shared Street Network.** Evaluate the feasibility of extending the shared street concept from Parrish Street to Corcoran Street between Parrish and Chapel Hill Streets. This extension would create a stronger connection between the two sections of CCB Plaza, enhancing pedestrian movement and reinforcing the plaza's role as a central gathering space.
3. **Enhance Comfort and Usability.** Integrate additional seating, shade elements (such as sunshades), children's play areas, electricity, sound system, and other amenities to improve the plaza's day-to-day functionality. These enhancements would provide a more comfortable environment for casual visitors while supporting a range of public programming and events.



FIGURE 47: CCB PLAZA IMPROVEMENTS

## EXAMPLES OF CCB PLAZA IMPROVEMENTS



Source (top to bottom): 30th Street Station Porch, Philadelphia, PA (Ground Reconsidered); Plaza de Las Islas Canarias, San Antonio, TX (RIOS)

Source (top to bottom): Bell Street, Seattle, WA (NACTO); West Palm Beach, FL (Congress for New Urbanism)



# 3

## REDESIGN CONVENTION CENTER PLAZA

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The current Convention Center Plaza is lushly landscaped but also rigid with walls and pathways. There is little space available for any kind of gathering or play. The 2015 *Durham SmART Vision Plan* identified the potential to open up the plaza and redesign it to create a cultural civic gathering space that can host a variety of programs throughout the year. Access can be improved by creating a direct access route from Foster Street to the lower plaza adjacent to the Carolina Theatre. A plaza redesign can also create clear site lines to the facade of the Carolina Theatre, with vegetation and rain gardens buffering the space from adjacent roadways.

### ACTIONS

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1. Coordinate the future of this plaza closely with the planning for an upgraded Convention Center facility.
2. If the Convention Center remains in place, evaluate options to create a better, multi-functional plaza that supports the Convention Center and the Carolina Theatre. See *Recommendation #5 under Welcome Home* for more details.
3. If the Convention Center moves, use that opportunity to re-design the plaza in the context of new development on the site. Ensure that the future plaza retains sight lines and access to the Carolina Theater. See *Recommendation #5 under Welcome Home* for more details.

## EXAMPLES



The 2015 SmART Vision Plan called for a redesign of the Convention Center Plaza (rendering shown above), including flexible performance and activity space, amphitheater seating, public art, water features, and enhanced landscaping/green stormwater infrastructure. Although this vision has yet to become reality, it's time to revisit these ideas and create opportunities for activation and recreation that can change seasonally as needed (see precedent images to the right).

Source (left to right): Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan/Mikyoung Kim Design; Dilworth Park, PhillyFamily.com; LittleGuide Detroit; Pioneer Courthouse Square)



Dilworth Park, Philadelphia, PA



Monroe Street Midway, Detroit, MI



Pioneer Square, Portland, OR

# 4

## LEVERAGE THE UNIQUENESS OF DOWNTOWN'S ALLEYS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Downtown's alleys act as a front door for many downtown visitors, connecting the parking garages to the street. However, many residents feel uncomfortable using the parking garages due in part to concerns about safety accessing them. Combined with improved lighting and wayfinding within the parking garages (see *Recommendation #1 under Walk + Roll*), public art, open space improvements, and new ground-floor businesses within the alleys can create a striking first impression for visitors, offering places that feel safer and encourage exploration of what downtown has to offer.

### ACTIONS

---

1. **Choose one alley as a pilot project for alley improvements**, including public art, decorative lighting, seating, and additional greening. Implement improvements for other alleys based on feedback from the pilot.
2. **Explore opportunities for developing small storefronts along alleys and/or commercial kiosks or mobile carts** for new and existing downtown businesses to be located in alleys for additional activation.
3. **Partner with local artists and designers for both temporary and permanent art installations within the alley right-of-way** and coordinate with adjacent property owners for public murals, string lighting, and artistic canopies that may impact their properties.

## EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE ALLEYS



Source: Gallery Alley (Greater Wichita Partnership); 20ft. Wide, Austin, TX (TBG Partners); Cooper's Alley, Chattanooga, TN (Benjamin Chase/SPORTS)

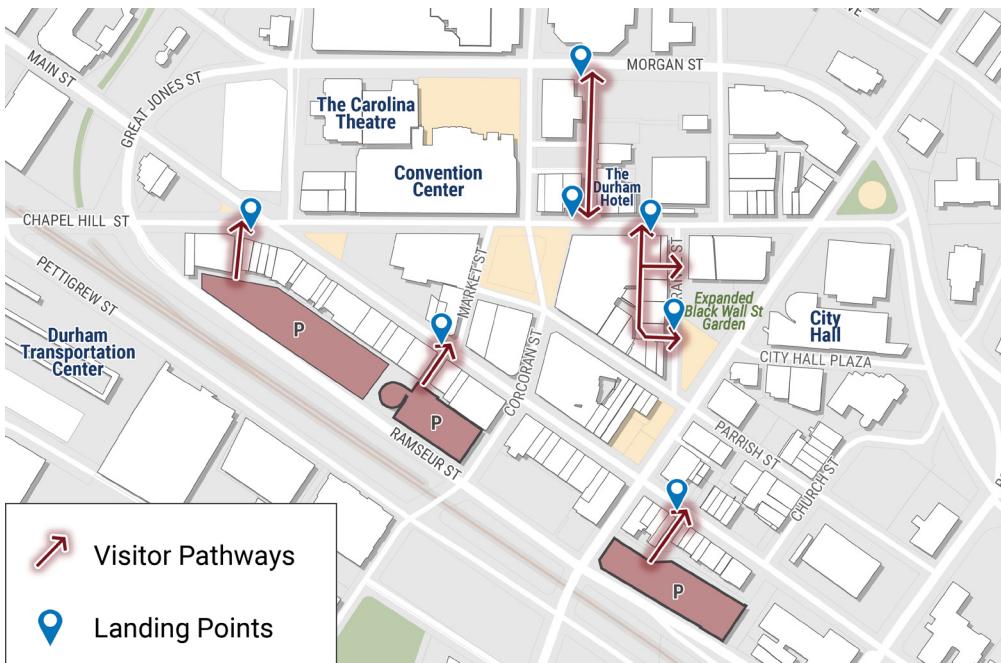


FIGURE 48: DOWNTOWN ALLEYS

### THE BELT—DETROIT, MI

Located in the heart of Downtown Detroit, the Belt is a revitalized alleyway that has transformed into an outdoor art exhibit featuring murals and installations curated by the Liberty Street Collective. The Belt also includes benches, planters, and an open air cocktail bar that spills out into the alleyway, further activating this pedestrian-friendly public space.



Source: Model D Media/Nick Hagen

# 5

## POSITION THE YMCA AS A DOWNTOWN ANCHOR

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The Downtown YMCA is a vital hub that brings together people of all ages and backgrounds—one of the few accessible and affordable recreation facilities in and around downtown. With the YMCA of the Triangle committing to a new, state-of-the-art facility at Blackwell and Pettigrew Streets (target opening 2029), the organization is reinforcing its long-term role as a community anchor.

The relocation is an opportunity to deliver upgraded facilities while enhancing downtown's public realm, improving pedestrian connectivity, and creating active frontages at the new site. Like the recently redeveloped Main Library, a thoughtfully designed YMCA and surrounding public spaces can anchor downtown life and reinforce Durham's inclusive, dynamic character.

### ACTIONS

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1. **Coordinate with YMCA leadership to track project milestones and support facility design elements** that enhance the surrounding urban environment (e.g. transparent frontages, outdoor amenities, welcoming entries).
2. **Implement pedestrian and infrastructure improvements around Blackwell and Pettigrew Streets**, including the rail crossing (in coordination with *Recommendations #2 and #3 under Walk + Roll*), to ensure safe, convenient access to the new facility.
3. **Identify funding and partnership opportunities** (public, private, and philanthropic) to support both the facility's construction and surrounding infrastructure upgrades.
4. **Collaborate with City and County agencies** to align transit service, bike connections, and parking strategies with the YMCA's relocation.
5. **Support interim solutions during the transition period**, ensuring continuity of services and minimal disruption to YMCA members and the broader community.

## BUT...WHAT HAPPENS TO THE EXISTING YMCA SITE?

Relocating the YMCA means that the existing YMCA site is an opportunity for smart redevelopment that improves pedestrian conditions and activates the public realm on Foster Street. For more information about potential redevelopment of the existing YMCA site, see **Recommendation #4 under Downtown Works** and **Recommendation #5 under Welcome Home**.

### TELLEPSSEN FAMILY DOWNTOWN YMCA—HOUSTON, TX

The Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA in Houston exemplifies how thoughtful design can activate the streetscape and foster community engagement. Replacing its 1941 predecessor, the 115,000-square-foot facility incorporates modern, community-focused design principles. A 40-foot glass curtain wall on the north facade creates a transparent connection between the YMCA's dynamic interior and the surrounding downtown streets, visually drawing pedestrians into the activity within. Anchoring its presence on the street, the YMCA's two-story "front porch" provides a welcoming café and outdoor seating area, reinforcing its role as both a wellness hub and a vibrant gathering place in downtown Houston.



Source: Kirksey Architecture; Tellepsen



# 6

## PROVIDE MORE SHADE DOWNTOWN

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The success of a downtown district is shaped not only by its economic vibrancy but also by the quality and comfort of its pedestrian experience. A dense, continuous tree canopy is essential to encourage foot traffic and visitors to downtown, especially during the warmer months of the year. The current tree canopy in downtown Durham contains significant gaps along a number of streets, especially those that connect the downtown core south to the Hayti community. Adequate shade is also critical for public spaces and commercial corridors, an issue which in the short-term could be alleviated by shade sails that add visual interest to the public realm.

### ACTIONS

---

1. **Integrate new trees along streets that are redesigned and within plazas and alleys that are seeing investment.**
2. **Require on-site tree plantings with new downtown development, in coordination with the new UDO.**
  - Explore the creation of a tree replacement program for any trees removed for new construction, either through new trees planted on-site or payments into a downtown tree planting fund that prioritizes street tree plantings on the blocks where trees were removed on adjacent private properties.
3. **Explore alternative methods of shade through creative placemaking, such as sails or decorative shade structures.**

## EXAMPLES OF SHADE ALTERNATIVES



FIGURE 49: DOWNTOWN TREE CANOPY



Source (top to bottom): Calle del Carmen, Madrid, Spain (NBC News); Umbrella Sky Project, Agueda, Portugal (Adam Rifkin); X-Dubai Kite Beach, Dubai, UAE (Convic)

# DOWNTOWN WORKS

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**GOAL 6** *Downtown will be a home for companies of all sizes, fostering job growth and cultivating a consistent daily workforce that enhances downtown vibrancy and sustains local restaurants and retailers.*



**“MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO SHOW UP TO THEIR OFFICES TO HELP CREATE A M-F GROWING, VIBRANT CITY AGAIN.”**

**“DAYTIME DOWNTOWN WAS PREVIOUSLY THRIVING AND NOW IS VERY QUIET.”**

**“I WOULD LIKE TO SEE VACANT RETAIL/OFFICE SPACES OCCUPIED.”**

A thriving downtown economy relies on the foot traffic and spending power of residents, workers, and visitors to activate public spaces and sustain businesses. Like a three-legged stool, losing one weakens the ecosystem. While housing is essential, downtown alone cannot solve broader housing challenges. With a footprint under one square mile, downtown's limited land supply must be strategically managed to support growth while preserving space for employment.

Downtown suffers from commercial vacancy and high lease rates, which create barriers for new, locally owned businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work have left many office spaces underutilized. While some have proposed converting these offices into housing, the high cost of retrofitting newer buildings makes this solution impractical in most cases. Instead, alternative approaches are needed to attract a diverse range of businesses, ensuring that downtown continues to serve as a dynamic economic hub.



# PRESERVE OLDER, FUNKIER DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS FOR AFFORDABLE OFFICE SPACE

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

As downtown grows, many of the older one-story commercial and light industrial buildings are at risk being demolished to make way for new development, a fate that many have already suffered. However, many of these older buildings provide affordable leases for small businesses that may not be able to afford more expensive leases in the newer, larger buildings. Today there are over 80 smaller, 1-story commercial and industrial buildings downtown.

While new development is inevitable in a growing area, it is important to preserve some of these older commercial buildings to help existing businesses to stay in their spaces and provide affordable spaces for new businesses, protecting long-term commercial affordability downtown.

## ACTIONS

---

1. **Explore the formation of an entity (a possible commercial land real estate trust) that can purchase and hold this type of property.** It should be capable of attracting a range of investment capital so some flexibility in its organizational structure and IRS status needs to be considered.
2. **Identify downtown properties aligned with the goals of the trust and perform due diligence** to assess which properties would be the best candidates for purchase.
3. **Explore if historic designations at the national or local level would be applicable** to the goal of purchasing and renovating these properties.
4. **Create standards for white-boxing spaces for customization** by a variety of tenants.
5. **Create policies for leasing, maintenance, and tenant selection and establish property management operations and leasing agreements.**
6. **Engage with the public and key stakeholders to promote awareness of the program.**

## EXAMPLES OF OLDER FUNKY BUILDINGS



323 Foster Street (Source: Google Maps)



602 Rigsbee Avenue (Source: Google Maps)



417-419 Foster Street (Source: Google Maps)



FIGURE 50: SOME OLDER, FUNKY BUILDINGS WITHIN DOWNTOWN

## 2

## RE-TENANT EXISTING OFFICE SPACE

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Durham is not a huge market for big office users. Compared to the Raleigh metro area, the Durham metro area has fewer firms with a high number of employees that require a large square footage of office space. Therefore, downtown must focus on recruiting more smaller-sized firms to fill the existing office space, rather than depending on a few large companies/organizations to keep the downtown office market afloat.

## ACTIONS

1. **Launch a marketing campaign to targeted small office users** in the Triangle.
2. **Create a database of available office space** to market opportunities to new and existing companies in the Triangle.
3. **Explore strategic opportunities to re-position existing office space for smaller, flexible office users** including co-working where appropriate.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES CAN HELP TELL YOU APPROXIMATELY  
HOW MUCH OFFICE SPACE IS NEEDED

Firm/Company Size (# of Employees)	Conceptual Square Footage Needed	# of Firms/Companies	
		Raleigh Metro Area	Durham-Chapel Hill Metro Area
Less than 5 employees	1,000	7,435	2,510
5 to 9	1,400	1,601	556
10 to 19	3,000	989	383
20 to 49	7,000	732	262
50 to 99	15,000	298	101
100 to 249	34,800	197	83
250 to 499	74,800	66	17
500 to 999	149,800	32	12
More than 1,000	200,000	13	7

DURHAM HAS FEWER BIG FIRMS



### 3

## EXPLORE CONVERSION OF EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS INTO LAB SPACE AND EXPLORE LOCATIONS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION LAB BUILDINGS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

It should be noted that, in the near-term, life sciences are not growing at the pace it has over the last several years. However, it will continue to be a significant economic engine for the region and is still one of the largest economic clusters in the country. It is critical for downtown Durham to have land and space available to accommodate future growth in this industry, along with the employment and tax revenue opportunities it brings. With limited land available, this means reserving space through zoning for industry-related uses, like new lab construction, and exploring how vacant office space can be retrofitted. Supporting life sciences downtown requires space in key locations for various growth stages, making it critical to proactively seek opportunities. This isn't about immediate conversion, but rather understanding options—balancing adaptive reuse with new construction.

### ACTIONS

1. **Hire an architect with experience in life sciences to evaluate which, if any, office buildings and converted warehouses can be used for life sciences.**
2. **Consider a zoning model** that controls the overall square footage of various uses in the Innovation District and nearby areas to promote the growth of innovation-focused businesses. See the Kendall Square example below for more details.

### KENDALL SQUARE ZONING—CAMBRIDGE, MA

The City of Cambridge in Massachusetts created the Kendall Center Mixed Use Development District to guide the growth of Kendall Square, a hub for biotech research and innovation-focused businesses and entrepreneurs with close proximity to renowned academic institutions such as Harvard University and MIT. The District regulates the aggregate amount of development that can occur within it, as well density limits for specific land uses, reserving the highest density limits for office, biotechnology manufacturing, and residential uses. The regulations allow Kendall Square to grow as an innovation hub while protecting the public interest in relation to land use and urban design.

# 4

## KEEP EVENT-DRIVEN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY DOWNTOWN

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Downtown Durham benefits from a number of unique event spaces that bring large groups of visitors downtown, including the Durham Convention Center, a smaller and older convention facility compared to many other cities.

It is critical that event-driven economic activity remains downtown as it brings a significant number of new visitors to support local businesses. A renovated or relocated multi-purpose event center within downtown provides the opportunity to create a true model for how to integrate large event and entertainment spaces into a dense, urban fabric. Plans should include clear design criteria to create an interesting and active center at all times of the week and year but also explore the possibility of integrating other commercial and entertainment uses to create a multi-functional facility in downtown.

### ACTIONS

1. **Advocate for the Convention Center to remain in or near downtown** by creating a business case around diversifying the downtown visitor economy.
2. **Develop a Small Area Plan for downtown that provides guidance on future development and public investment**, including a future multi-purpose entertainment venue.
  - If the Convention Center is relocated as part of a multi-purpose entertainment venue, **establish clear design guidelines for chosen sites** that identify key access points, loading areas, and the main street frontages of the new facility. There are only a few locations downtown that could fit a facility of this size. A primary opportunity includes the properties north of the Loop east of Foster Street. This area is an opportunity to become a mixed-use entertainment and commercial destination. Should a large facility or other uses land in this area, it is critical to ensure Foster and Rigsbee have active frontages that encourage people to walk and that parking and loading are carefully designed.
  - **Explore other complementary uses for the Convention Center** including indoor recreational space or other entertainment uses to create a national model for multi-purpose convention centers.

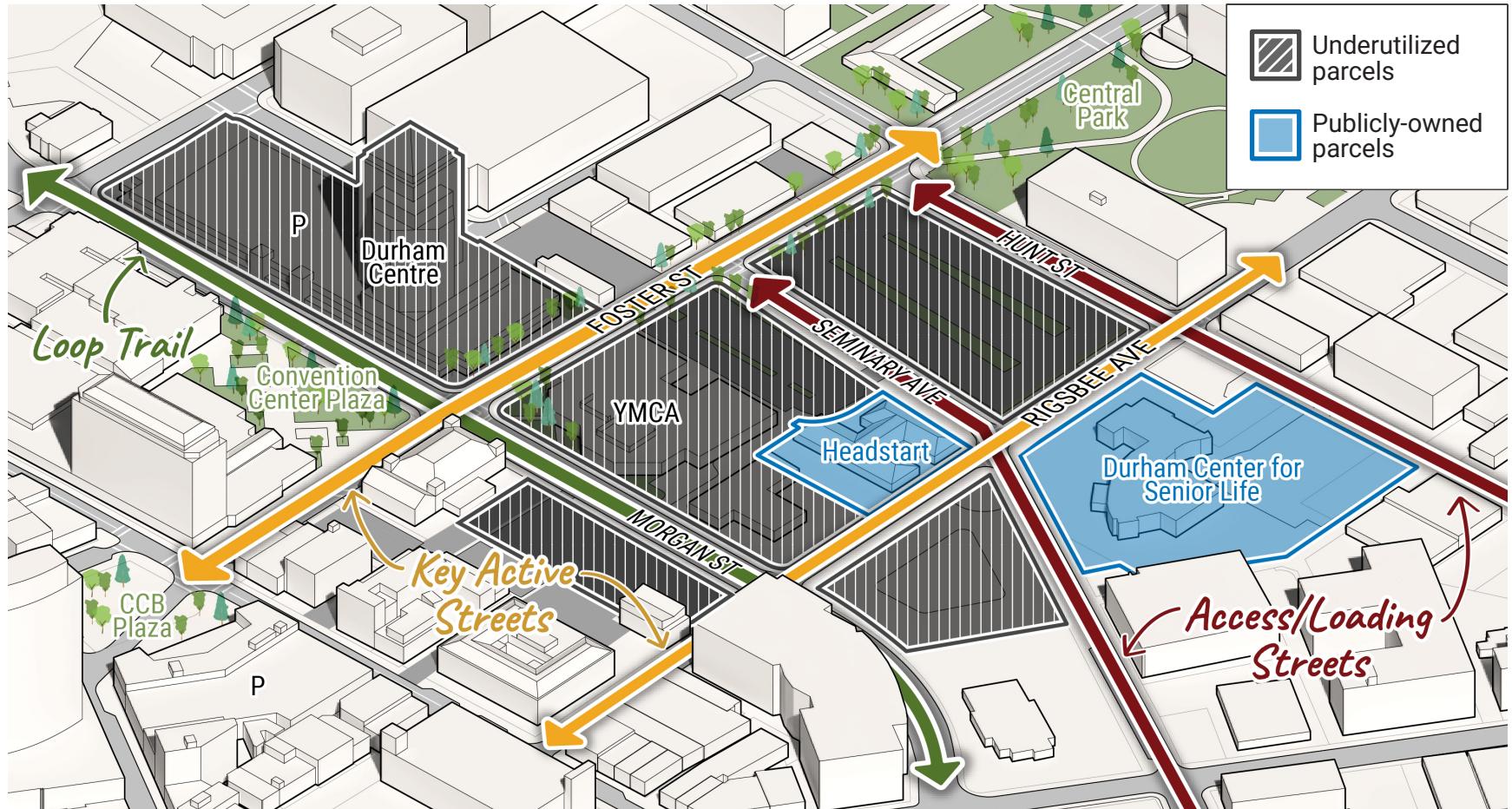


FIGURE 51: REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

# THE MORE YOU KNOW

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## GOAL 7

*Downtown will be perceived locally and regionally as a safe and welcoming destination that is easy to navigate and offers a variety of goods and experiences that are accessible to everyone.*



“EVERYTHING IN DOWNTOWN DURHAM IS TOO EXPENSIVE.”

“IT’S IMPORTANT TO ME THAT DOWNTOWN DURHAM IS A PLACE FOR EVERYONE!”

“MAKE DOWNTOWN FEEL SAFER.”

Perception drives people’s choices. If people perceive downtown as unsafe or not affordable, they won’t choose to come downtown. Marketing needs to tackle the misperceptions of downtown: for instance, that downtown isn’t affordable, isn’t safe, and doesn’t represent the community. We need better information to help people of all backgrounds realize what downtown has to offer.

At the same time, information needs to be readily available in downtown to direct people to parking, events, and local restaurants and stores. Downtown’s brand needs to be visible across downtown to encourage people to walk and explore.



## 1 IMPROVE PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN DOWNTOWN THROUGH MARKETING AND MESSAGING

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Concerns about safety downtown persist, especially among residents and visitors. Addressing this requires not only physical and programmatic improvements (see [Recommendation #1 under Open For Business for more information](#)) but also strategic marketing and messaging that highlight the safety initiatives in place and the positive impact of community efforts.

### ACTIONS

1. **Highlight safety programs in marketing materials.** Promote safety initiatives, such as the Safety Ambassadors, through all downtown promotional channels.
  - Dedicated web pages, social media posts, and physical brochures should inform the public about these efforts and investments. Featuring testimonials from community members who feel safer due to these programs will humanize the message and build trust.
2. **Collaborate with local partners for unified messaging.** Partner with local businesses, Downtown Durham, Inc., Discover Durham, and other community groups to promote safety as a shared value.

### CENTER CITY DISTRICT, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Philadelphia's Center City District highlights their Community Service Representatives (CSR) program through several platforms, including social media posts highlighting the CSR's and the services they provide, blog posts on their website highlighting individual CSR's to introduce them to the Center City community, and quarterly Safety Awards to recognize CSR's and safety patrol officers that have gone above and beyond their day-to-day duties.



Blog

**Community Service Representative Spotlight: Xavier Berrocal Mana**

Published February 28, 2025

Source: Center City District

## DOWNTOWN TULSA PARTNERSHIP

The Downtown Tulsa Partnership's blog post "A Day With A Downtown Safety Ambassador" shadows Evelyn, one of their Safety Ambassadors, as she performs her daily tasks and responsibilities. The blog provides a window into how Safety Ambassadors interact with the Tulsa community, how they document their interactions and pass along information to higher levels of management, and their dedication to making downtown Tulsa a safer and more welcoming place for all.

### A DAY WITH A DOWNTOWN TULSA SAFETY AMBASSADOR

August 15, 2024

Category: [WHAT'S NEW](#)



Source: [Downtown Tulsa Partnership](#)

## DOWNTOWN INDY, INC.

Local news station WTHR in Indianapolis produced a news segment and article about Downtown Indy, Inc.'s Safety Ambassador program, giving an overview on what the program entails and interviewing Joseph Fuller, one of the Safety Ambassadors, about the significance of his role in keeping downtown Indianapolis safe.

**13 WTHR** 

LOCAL NEWS

### Inside look at 'Downtown Safety Ambassador' program

The ambassadors act as the "eyes and ears" of the Mile Square area downtown.



Source: [WTHR](#)

## 2

## CHANGE THE NARRATIVE THAT DOWNTOWN ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

A significant challenge facing downtown is the perception that it isn't a place for everyone. While the area has experienced remarkable growth and development, visitor data indicates that the demographic of those frequenting downtown destinations does not reflect the broader composition of the city. A higher proportion of white visitors are attending downtown events and visiting businesses compared to Black, Latino, and Asian visitors. This disparity in who feels welcome in downtown is a critical issue, and addressing this imbalance requires intentional actions to change the narrative and ensure that downtown becomes a space where all residents—regardless of background—feel like they belong.

## ACTIONS

1. **Highlight and support diverse businesses.** Focus on promoting businesses owned by individuals from underrepresented communities, including Black, Latino, and Asian entrepreneurs.
  - Provide grants and support programs to attract diverse businesses, such as affordable spaces provided through a commercial land trust (see *Recommendation #1 under Downtown Works* for more details on a potential land trust).
  - Create marketing materials, such as guides or online directories, that feature these businesses prominently, and collaborate with City/County departments and downtown partners to create a joint marketing effort for these businesses.
2. **Conduct targeted outreach and engagement.** Build upon the engagement during this process to continue outreach to communities that have historically felt disconnected from downtown programming.
  - Use this engagement to understand the barriers to participation and find ways to engage underrepresented groups in a meaningful way. For example, create programs or events specifically tailored to Black, Latino, and Asian communities, offering spaces where these groups can connect with downtown businesses, organizations, and each other.
  - Provide more family-friendly spaces in downtown (See *Recommendation #3 under Rooted + Ready* for more details). During the engagement process, many Durham residents, especially members of the Latino community, frequently cited lack of family-friendly spaces as the main reason why they don't come downtown more often.

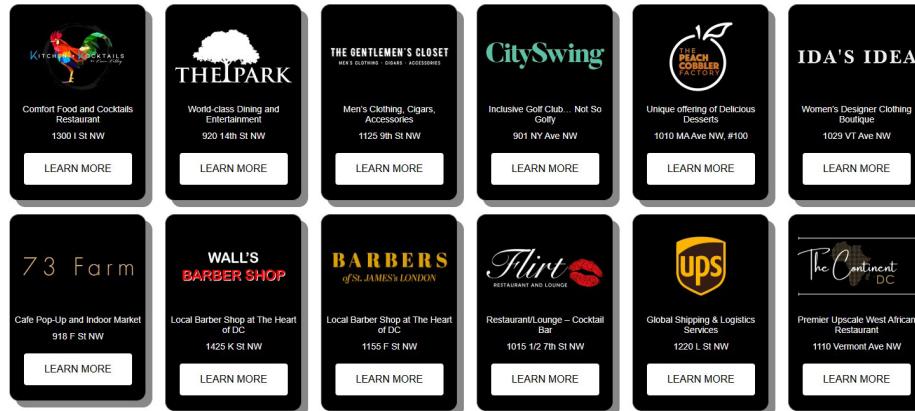
CONTINUED →

### 3. Culturally-Inclusive Marketing Campaigns: Launch a marketing campaign that emphasizes downtown as an inclusive, multicultural space.

- Highlight events, businesses, and initiatives that cater to diverse cultural interests and feature stories from residents of different backgrounds who feel a connection to downtown.
- Collaborate with local influencers and community leaders who reflect the city's diversity to amplify the message that downtown is a space for everyone.

## EXAMPLES OF MARKETING FOR DIVERSE BUSINESSES

### Showcasing Black-Owned Businesses in DowntownDC



Directory of Black-Owned Businesses in Downtown DC  
(Source: Downtown DC)

### DOWNTOWN EVANSTON REBRAND

The Downtown Evanston organization launched a rebrand with a flexible messaging system to ensure everyone saw themselves within downtown, especially the city's Black, Latino and LGBTQ+ communities.



3

## HIGHLIGHT THE AFFORDABLE OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN DOWNTOWN

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

During the engagement process, many people indicated that downtown businesses were too expensive, which discouraged them from coming downtown. However, many downtown restaurants, for instance, have price points that mirror those of recognized chain restaurants. Changing this perception is crucial to making downtown welcoming and accessible to everyone.

### ACTIONS

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- 1. Host downtown events that promote local businesses and are free or low-cost for participants.**
  - Organize a street festival with low-cost offerings from downtown restaurants and retailers, such as \$1 chicken wings, \$2 ice cream or a \$3 notebook, as a way to introduce Durhamites to the downtown businesses.
- 2. Use social media as a way to promote downtown's affordable offerings.**
  - Create blog posts about free and low-cost activities that are available downtown.
  - Use Instagram posts and reels to highlight discounts and specials from local downtown businesses.

## BALTIMORE AVENUE DOLLAR STROLL

The University City District in West Philadelphia partners with neighborhood businesses and community organizations for the Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll, a biannual street festival where businesses offer \$1, \$3, and \$5 deals. Combined with live music and arts and crafts activities, these low-cost deals introduce residents and visitors to local businesses, bringing the whole commercial corridor together in a family-friendly event.



Source (left to right): University City District; Visit Philadelphia

## TRIANGLE ON THE CHEAP

Created by freelance writer Jody Mace, Triangle on the Cheap is a website that highlights free and low-cost events, food deals, and destinations within the Triangle. Businesses and event organizers can submit events and deals to the website to be included in weekly posts and newsletters.



Source: [TriangleOnTheCheap.com](http://TriangleOnTheCheap.com)



# 4

## UNIFY DOWNTOWN BY PROMOTING DESTINATIONS AND NOT DISTRICTS

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Downtown has long been divided into seven rigidly defined districts, with many named after individual landmarks—like Brightleaf Square or the American Tobacco Campus—or using uninspiring labels like the “Government Services District.” However, public engagement revealed that residents rarely use these district names, reinforcing that they primarily serve visitors. This segmentation also creates a false perception that different parts of downtown are far apart and that downtown is less walkable than it actually is.

Instead of maintaining artificial district boundaries, shifting the focus to key landmarks would better highlight downtown’s diverse destinations and foster a more cohesive, unified identity.

### ACTIONS

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1. Remove the existing wayfinding signage and any online material that refers to the downtown “districts.”
2. Upgrade wayfinding systems with digital tools that direct visitors to landmarks, major attractions, businesses, and parking opportunities across downtown, emphasizing their proximity to each other and encouraging exploration.
3. Create new marketing materials that focus on notable landmarks and places of interest instead of “districts.”
  - Partner with local influencers and content creators to showcase downtown as a unified destination. Encourage them to highlight multiple locations in downtown through social media campaigns, videos, and blogs that emphasize the walkability and accessibility of the area.
4. Coordinate across organizations, including Downtown Durham, Inc., Discover Durham, and the City/County, to be consistent in how different parts of downtown are referred to and marketed.

## EXAMPLES OF DESTINATION-BASED MARKETING



### A Peek at What's Unique in Downtown Norfolk

There's no end of things to see, do and experience Downtown. Whether it's a night on the town, a table for two, an adventure in shopping or an inspiring taste of the arts, it's all right here.

#### 1 Harbor Park

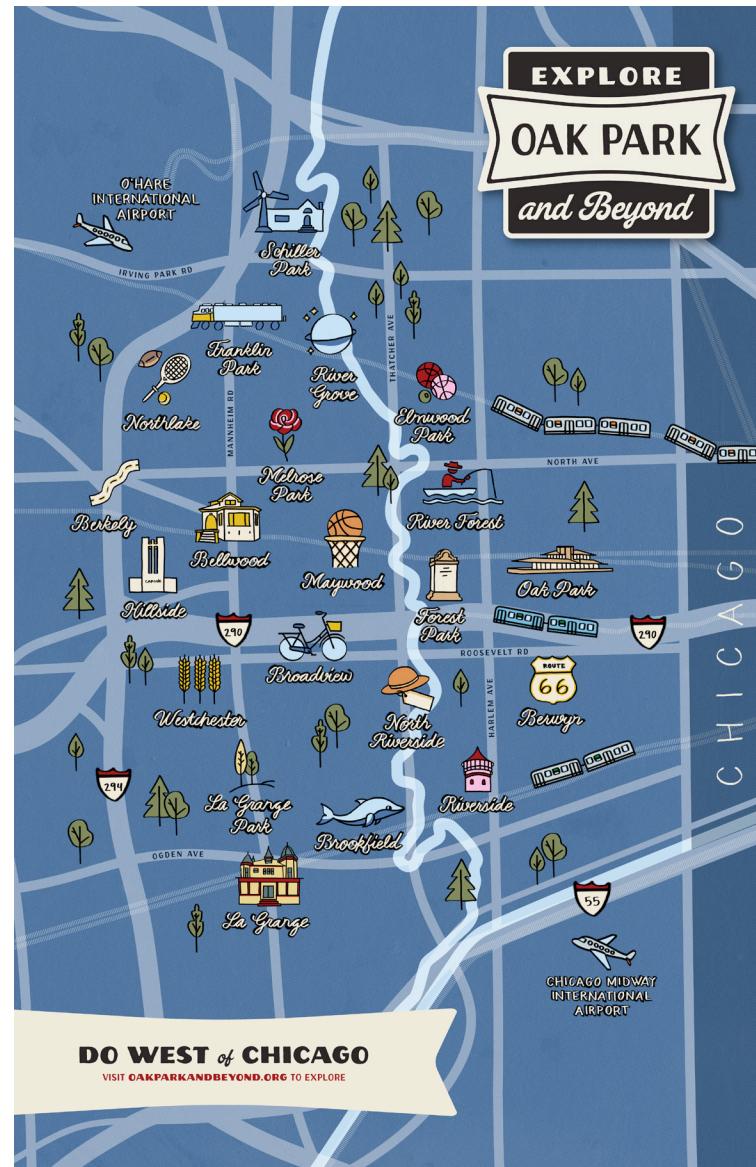
Take me out to the ball game! Harbor Park is proud to be the home of the **Norfolk Tides**, the Baltimore Orioles AAA baseball team. Catch a home game and get ready for some good old fashioned fun with Rip Tide and Triton, the mascots for the Norfolk Tides!

[LEARN MORE](#)

#### 2 MacArthur Center

MacArthur Center is right in the heart of Downtown on Monticello Avenue to cover all your shopping needs, including the region's flagship Dillard's department store. The mall always has something fun going on, from art galleries to holiday installations and outdoor activations.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Downtown Norfolk Experience Map (Source: Downtown Norfolk Council)

Map of Oak Park (Source: AllTogether Studio)



*Photo from Downtown Durham, Inc.*



# IMPLEMENTATION

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## APPROACH

The Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 presents a strategic and transformative vision for downtown Durham's future—one that builds on the achievements and lessons of three previous downtown master plans, addresses the pressing needs of today, and charts a bold course for tomorrow. To realize this vision, Downtown Durham, Inc. (DDI) will serve as a key leader, but the plan's success will ultimately depend on the collective commitment and coordination of a broad coalition. City of Durham and Durham County departments, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, business owners, residents, and other community stakeholders must work in concert with DDI to implement the plan's recommendations.

Implementation will require both focus and flexibility. Each of the strategies outlined in the Downtown Blueprint plays an important role, but progress will ultimately be shaped by the availability of resources—both time and funding. Recent cuts in federal funding may constrain what is possible through traditional channels. At the same time, downtown Durham is situated in one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, and with that growth comes opportunity: to strengthen downtown's role as an economic engine, cultural destination, and welcoming home for all.

Given this dual context of opportunity and constraint, downtown stakeholders must remain united, creative, and proactive. Success will require forging new partnerships, leveraging existing assets, and pursuing innovative funding models to bridge financial gaps. To guide sustained investment and keep the vision on track, a clear structure for collaboration and accountability must be established—one that aligns responsibilities across organizations, tracks progress transparently, communicates wins and lessons learned, and keeps momentum alive. The task is ambitious, but the benefits—for downtown Durham's economy, identity, and community—are well worth the effort.

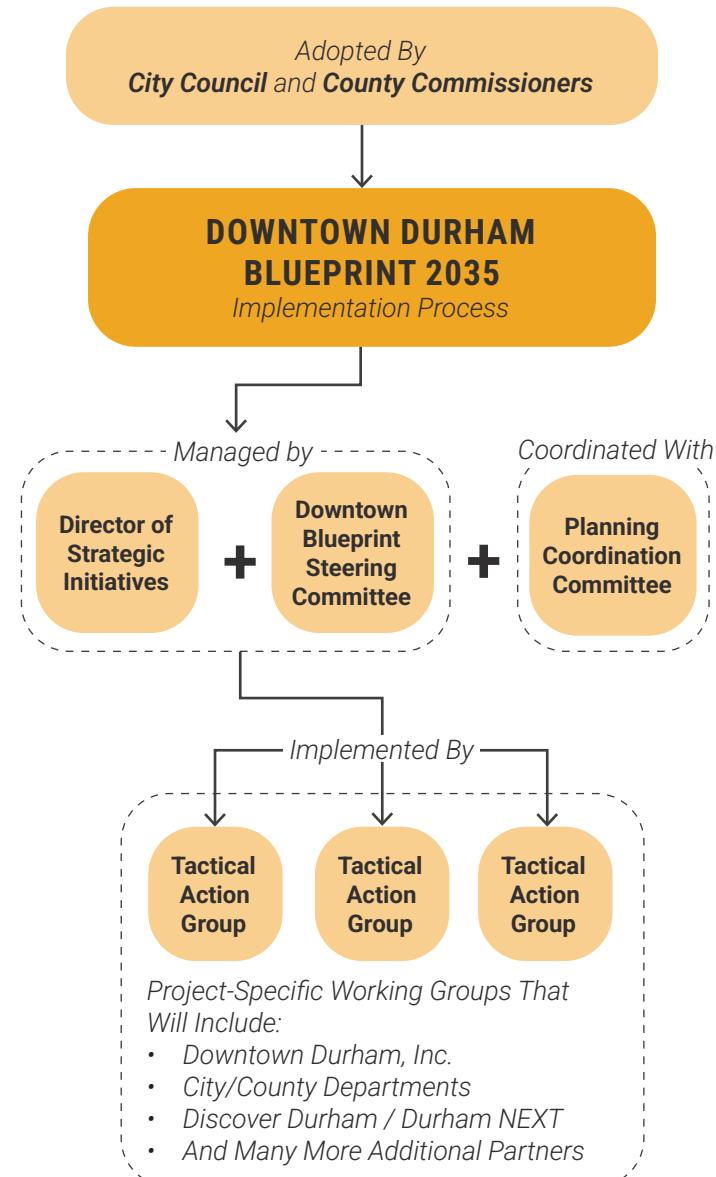


Source: Downtown Durham, Inc.

## KEY ORGANIZATIONS & ROLES

A wide range of organizations and individuals play a vital role in both the daily operations and long-term vitality of downtown. Central to the Downtown Blueprint's success is establishing a clear structure for collaboration among these key players to ensure that efforts are aligned. The following sections will outline many of the partners that will be involved in the Downtown Blueprint's early action projects, but a few new roles, in addition to these existing organizations, will be needed to support effective implementation:

- **Director of Strategic Initiatives:** A dedicated program manager within DDI that manages the day-to-day coordination and implementation of the Downtown Blueprint. This person will also give biannual updates to the Downtown Blueprint Steering Committee and organize quarterly public meetings to share progress from the Downtown Blueprint.
- **Downtown Blueprint Steering Committee:** An advisory group that meets 2-3 times a year to receive updates on the Downtown Blueprint's progress, establish priorities among the suggested early action projects (see below), and guide the long-term implementation of the plan. This group will include leadership from DDI and its governing bodies, Discover Durham, Durham Next, the City, the County, and members of the initial Downtown Blueprint Steering Committee.
- **Tactical Action Groups (TAGs):** One of the primary roles of the Downtown Blueprint Steering Committee is to identify and recruit key individuals to push specific recommendations forward. These Tactical Action Groups (TAGs) are temporary and dedicated to implementing one aspect of the Downtown Blueprint. TAG members should be those that are most aligned with each recommendation. For example, transforming Parrish Street would be led by one TAG while redesigning the Loop would be led by a different one. The membership of each would comprise those most aligned with the recommendation.
- **Planning Coordination Committee:** A group of representatives from ongoing planning initiatives related to downtown Durham that will meet 1-2 times a year to coordinate on overlapping projects and combine efforts.



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## IN PROGRESS PROJECTS

Because planning efforts inherently take time—often extending over several years—there can be a lag between the identification of key issues during public engagement and the implementation of solutions. Fortunately, DDI and its Downtown Blueprint partners have not waited for this planning process to conclude before taking action. Building on the early insights and priorities identified during outreach, several initiatives are already underway that will lay important groundwork for the implementation phase of the Downtown Blueprint.

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- DDI, in partnership with Block by Block, is developing a team of **Safety Ambassadors** to maintain a consistent and welcoming presence downtown. These ambassadors will be trained to support businesses and assist vulnerable individuals in accessing necessary services.
- DDI is also launching a **new retail incubator space** to make owning a store front in downtown Durham affordable and accessible. The space will open fall 2025 and is currently accepting applications from small business owners and entrepreneurs looking to share an affordable retail space with other up-and-coming retailers, participate in business counseling, and experience owning a business downtown.
- The City of Durham Transportation Department is finalizing an **update to downtown's wayfinding system**, including new signage for pedestrians, vehicles, and parking facilities to help improve navigation and accessibility.
- To enhance street connectivity and safety, the Transportation Department is conducting the **Mangum and Roxboro Resurfacing Study** to convert the pair of one-way streets to two-way.
- As part of a broader effort to reconnect communities along the Durham Freeway corridor, the Transportation Department is developing a community-driven vision for the corridor through the **Reimagine Durham Freeway Study**. This study will inform the Downtown Blueprint implementation process in identifying streetscape and mobility improvements along the southern edge of downtown.
- Additionally, the Transportation Department has released preliminary concept designs for **new bike infrastructure along Chapel Hill Street and the Foster/Corcoran/Blackwell corridor**. Construction on these facilities is anticipated to begin in Summer 2026, creating safer routes for cyclists in the heart of downtown.
- The City-County Planning Department is currently working on an **update to the Unified Development Ordinance**, with expected completion in Fall 2025.

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These active initiatives reflect the commitment of local partners to advance critical components of the Downtown Blueprint in parallel with the planning process. For more information about some of the projects and initiatives above, see “Key Plans & Initiatives Related to Downtown” on **pages 8 and 9**.

## EARLY ACTION PROJECTS

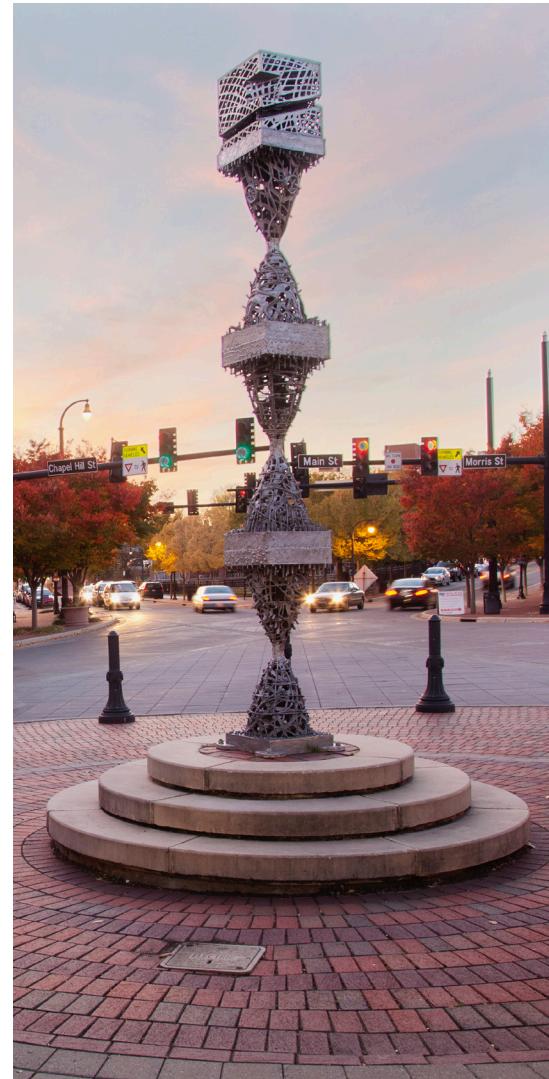
Turning vision into action requires a clear roadmap for implementation, especially in the early years following plan adoption. The Downtown Blueprint outlines dozens of recommendations and over a hundred individual actions slated for implementation over the next decade. This section provides guidance on which initiatives to prioritize—referred to as “early action projects.”

The following list of projects were selected based on the following criteria:

- Projects that can be **implemented relatively quickly to build early momentum** for the Downtown Blueprint’s implementation (such as public art)
- Projects that are long-term, requiring significant time and effort, but whose **groundwork should be laid early** in the Downtown Blueprint process (such as converting the Loop to two-way)
- Projects that are **time-sensitive**, because they either address immediate community needs (such as public safety) or may be subject to market forces that could make the initiative unfeasible if we wait too long (such as preserving older buildings in a commercial land trust before they are redeveloped)

Each goal area has several early action projects to ensure that progress begins across all priorities from the outset. This list of projects is intentional and strategic, but the Downtown Blueprint Steering Committee should review this list in their first meeting to confirm that these are the right early action projects to pursue.

Additionally, each early action project includes an initial list of partners, including a lead partner who will be the main contact and convener for the project. However, it must be stressed that these lists of partners are just a starting point. As TAGs are formed and these projects get off the ground, it is expected that many other partners will join in to help push these initiatives forward.



Source: Downtown Durham, Inc.

## ROOTED &amp; READY

1 **Form a TAG to guide the overall vision for Parrish Street as a must-see cultural destination.**

The first step in building up Parrish Street as a cultural destination is to determine who will lead this effort. This group should be thoughtfully composed to reflect the full richness of Durham's Black community, including Black business owners who will form the foundation of the enhanced Parrish Street experience, Black community leaders who have long served as stewards of Black Wall Street's history, and local Black artists whose public art and creative placemaking will ensure that Parrish Street authentically embodies the spirit and culture of Durham.

- » **Downtown Durham, Inc.** (Lead Partner)
- » Parrish Street business owners
- » Hayti Heritage Center
- » Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce
- » Former Parrish Street Forum members
- » City-County Planning Department
- » City Transportation Department
- » General Services Department
- » Public Work Department
- » Property owners

2 **Infuse the public realm with art and culture through a public arts initiative.** One of the most immediately visible ways to transform the public realm is the addition of public art. Durham is home to a large community of local artists, musicians, and performers that can beautify downtown spaces and foster a sense of identity and community pride. With the Durham Cultural Advisory Board's Cultural Roadmap and the Public Art Committee's Public Art Plan currently in the works, now is the perfect time to launch this downtown public arts initiative and combine efforts across City and County departments and arts organizations in order to maximize impact and create a cohesive, culturally rich downtown experience.

- » **City's Cultural and Public Art Program** (Lead Partner)
- » Public Art Committee
- » Durham Arts Council
- » Durham Next
- » Durham Art Guild
- » Durham Cultural Advisory Board
- » Other art-related organizations and collaborators

## OPEN FOR BUSINESS

### 3 **Create an online safety resource for downtown businesses that will be regularly updated as safety solutions are developed.**

In addition to the work of the Safety Ambassadors, it is essential to provide downtown businesses with the tools and support they need to address safety concerns effectively. Because businesses are often the first to interact with vulnerable individuals who may require specialized assistance, a centralized safety intervention resource hosted on the DDI website should be developed for downtown businesses to access whenever they need guidance.

Development of this resource should begin with a “table of contents” addressing common safety-related issues and identify partner organizations and departments responsible for specific topics. Early deliverables may include a “Who Do You Call?” reference magnet with contact information for various safety and support services, as well as a poster with a QR Code that links directly to the new online resource—both of which can be placed in employee-only areas. Although this will be an ongoing effort, it is imperative to start this resource immediately. Providing clear, accessible guidance will not only support the business community but will also contribute to a downtown environment that feels safe and welcoming for residents, workers, and visitors alike.

### 4 **Create a TAG to lead a master lease program for vacant ground-floor spaces and reach out to interested property owners.**

The large volume of vacant ground-floor commercial spaces poses a major challenge to downtown's vibrancy. Creating a master lease program for these spaces will not only improve the pedestrian and visitor experience, but it will also provide more accessible and affordable opportunities for small businesses to establish a presence downtown.

- » **Downtown Durham, Inc.**  
(Lead Partner)
- » HEART
- » Durham Police Department
- » Business owners

### 5 **Establish clear curb management and sidewalk standards for downtown.**

Curbside issues, including on-street parking and loading zone conflicts, were some of the top complaints among business owners, employees, residents, and visitors. Working closely with downtown business owners to review current curbside management issues and implement policy changes to reflect both business and customer needs will have a significant impact on day-to-day business functions and allow for more efficient use of limited curbside space.

- » **Downtown Durham, Inc.**  
(Lead Partner)
- » Duke University
- » NCCU
- » Interested property owners
- » City/County
- » Real estate brokers
- » Local attorneys

### » **City Transportation Department** (Lead Partner)

- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » City-County Planning Department
- » Business owners

## Early Action Project

## Partners

<p>6 <b>Create an event series and programs that promote local businesses, drive customers directly to their doors, and generate lively gatherings of people.</b> Events are an effective way to attract large numbers of visitors to downtown, but ensuring that downtown's brick-and-mortar businesses benefit from this increased foot traffic requires intentional programming. Crafting event series and programs that place these businesses at the center of the action is a great way to convert visitors into customers. These events should be developed around unifying themes that encourage broad participation from downtown businesses and occur on a single night or series of nights to draw a large crowd of visitors and create a concentrated hub of activity. Some ideas could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A 90's Throwback Night featuring retro pricing special from participating restaurants and retailers, accompanied by an outdoor block party with 90's music (attracting more cost-conscious visitors)</li><li>• A Hot Toddy night in the winter months, where bars and restaurants compete for the title of downtown's best warm beverage (attracting visitors in the colder seasons with typically reduced foot traffic)</li></ul> <p>These types of themed events offer compelling incentives for foot traffic while reinforcing downtown's identity as a lively and inclusive destination for shopping, dining, and community gathering. Over time, downtown Durham should have a full lineup of weekly programming so that people can come downtown any day of the week and find something fun to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» <b>Downtown Durham, Inc.</b> (Lead Partner)</li><li>» Discover Durham</li><li>» Downtown business owners</li><li>» City/County</li><li>» Social Media Ambassadors</li><li>» Potential event sponsors</li></ul>
<p>7 <b>Create an Adopt-A-Garage program.</b> Although Downtown Durham offers several public parking garages, many remain underutilized due to concerns about safety, visibility, and user experience. Addressing these perceptions is a critical early action that can make better use of existing infrastructure while improving access for downtown employees, visitors, and businesses. As a pilot, the City and County could partner with nonprofits or community-based entities to "adopt" and upgrade one public garage above and beyond already planned improvements. Improvements might include fresh coats of paint, murals or public art, enhanced lighting, improved wayfinding, welcoming signage, events and programming and integrated technology for easier access and payment. These changes—combined with increased and intentional promotion of affordable parking programs—can improve safety perceptions and drive greater usage. Measuring utilization before and after implementation will help assess the pilot's impact and inform expansion to other downtown garages, ultimately freeing up valuable on-street spaces for short-term parking and visitor use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» <b>City Transportation Department</b> (Lead Partner)</li><li>» Downtown Durham, Inc.</li><li>» Discover Durham</li></ul>

## WELCOME HOME

8 **Establish a downtown mobile outreach team led by a dedicated case manager.** To address the growing visibility of mental health and substance use crises among unhoused individuals in downtown, the City should establish a mobile outreach team led by a dedicated downtown Case Manager. Such a team would augment the work already being done by Durham's HEART program citywide by adding a dedicated unit focused on downtown. This team—comprising mental health professionals, social workers, and peer specialists—would offer proactive, trauma-informed engagement, crisis de-escalation, and direct connections to treatment, shelter, and long-term housing. The downtown Case Manager would provide consistent leadership, serve as a visible liaison across the downtown community, and ensure coordination among service providers, emergency responders, businesses, and government agencies. The team as a whole would be responsible for collecting and analyzing data to identify service gaps, monitor emerging trends, and inform future policies and funding strategies specific to downtown.

With a 300% increase in the unhoused population citywide since 2018 and heightened public safety concerns, this collaborative, street-level approach reduces reliance on emergency services and supports more stable outcomes for unhoused individuals. By convening City and County staff, healthcare partners, and nonprofits to define the team's structure and funding model, the City can pilot a solution that improves care pathways and strengthens downtown's safety, stability, and inclusiveness for all who live, work, and visit.

## WALK + ROLL

9 **Initiate conversations between the City and the State about the potential of obtaining ownership and control of the Loop roads.** The Loop two-way conversion has been discussed for decades, but progress has been limited by jurisdictional issues, design challenges, and cost. Moving this project forward is long overdue, so the Downtown Blueprint implementation process must make this a priority, laying the groundwork early by initiating conversations between the City and the State about transfer of ownership and control of the Loop. This will undoubtedly be a long-term project, but it's important to get the ball rolling now to finally achieve the dream of a two-way Loop.

- » **HEART**  
(Lead Partner)
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » Durham Police Department
- » City/County

**Early Action Project****Partners**

10 **Initiate conversations with Norfolk Southern and the North Carolina Railroad Company about potential improvements adjacent to the rail tracks**, including an improved crossing at Blackwell and a potential shared use pedestrian/cyclist path along Ramseur Street. In addition to gaining control of the Loop roads from the State, the City must work with Norfolk Southern and the North Carolina Railroad Company to create a safer and more welcoming edge along Ramseur Street next to the rail tracks. This is a crucial partnership for one of the Downtown Blueprint's most exciting pedestrian and cyclist amenities, so this collaboration should happen early on in the implementation process.

- » **City Transportation Department** (Lead Partner)
- » Norfolk Southern
- » North Carolina Railroad Company
- » Mayor
- » City Manager
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.

**COMMON GROUNDS**

11 **Pilot an “Open Streets” program on the weekends around CCB Plaza**. Although the vision of a shared curbless street where pedestrians are prioritized is a long-term vision that will require significant resources, a similar pedestrian-centered freedom can be achieved through temporary street closures for a much lower cost. Closing off Market Street and portions of Parrish Street to vehicular traffic for a predetermined number of hours on the weekends will temporarily expand the footprint of CCB Plaza and increase the amount of space available for events and programming. This pilot program will also be a great feedback opportunity to see if there are enough people and programming to make an investment in a permanent shared street design worthwhile.

- » **Downtown Durham, Inc.** (Lead Partner)
- » Bike Durham
- » City Transportation Department
- » Adjacent property owners

12 **Choose one alley as a pilot project for beautification, placemaking, and programming**. Downtown's alleys are an underutilized resource that have the potential to provide quality public space in a growing neighborhood with limited land for additional open spaces. A good starting point is to identify one alley as a pilot for public realm improvements, including public art, decorative lighting, seating, and additional greening. These physical improvements should also be accompanied by events and programming such as musical performances and interactive art installations that can help Durhamites reimagine their alleys as a place for community gathering.

- » **City General Services Department** (Lead Partner)
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » Public Works Department
- » City-County Planning Department
- » Potential property and business owners

## DOWNTOWN WORKS

13 **Explore the formation of a commercial land trust to preserve older buildings for affordable office space.** As downtown Durham grows, older one-story commercial and light industrial buildings are increasingly at risk of demolition, despite their role in offering affordable spaces for small, creative, and emerging businesses. Preserving a share of these buildings is a vital early action to maintain the diversity and affordability of the downtown commercial ecosystem. The first step is to explore the formation of a flexible real estate entity—such as a commercial land trust or mission-driven development arm—that can acquire, hold, and manage these properties. Initial efforts should include identifying downtown properties aligned with the goals of the trust and performing due diligence to assess which properties would be the best candidates for purchase. By stabilizing lease rates and prioritizing local tenants, this approach will help retain character-rich buildings and ensure that downtown continues to serve a wide range of entrepreneurs, artists, and nonprofit users who contribute to its vibrancy and economic mix.

14 **Launch a marketing campaign to target small office users in the Triangle.** With fewer large-scale office users compared to Raleigh, downtown Durham's office strategy must prioritize attracting small and mid-sized firms to keep its commercial core vibrant. As an early action, launch a targeted marketing campaign focused on entrepreneurs, remote teams, and growing businesses within the Triangle region. Highlight the unique advantages of downtown Durham—its walkability, character-rich buildings, and access to talent—and promote flexible leasing opportunities tailored to smaller tenants. Pair this effort with the creation of a centralized database of available office spaces and explore repositioning strategies, such as subdividing larger floor plates or integrating co-working concepts. This proactive outreach will help re-energize underutilized office inventory and align downtown's leasing strategy with regional market realities.

15 **Develop a Small Area Plan for downtown that provides guidance on future development and public investment.** There are several key opportunity sites for development in downtown, including the former police headquarters building, the current YMCA site, and a potential relocation of the Convention Center. Because the future use and design of these sites will have a significant impact on downtown and the experience of the public realm, it is critical to establish parameters for development that complement the existing context and contribute to a more vibrant and connected downtown.

- » **Durham Community Land Trust**  
(Lead Partner)
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » City/County
- » Local real estate brokers
- » Attorneys
- » Financial advisors

- » **Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce**  
(Lead Partner)
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » Local commercial brokers
- » City Office of Economic & Workforce Development

- » **City-County Planning Department**  
(Lead Partner)
- » Downtown Durham, Inc.
- » Department of General Services Real Estate Division
- » Other City/County departments

## THE MORE YOU KNOW

16 **Promote safety initiatives, such as the Safety Ambassadors, through all downtown promotional channels.** With the planned early investment in Safety Ambassadors and proposed safety resources for businesses, it's important that these investments are broadcasted through as many promotional channels as possible so that everyone knows that downtown Durham is prioritizing safety. These efforts can include a dedicated webpage on the DDI website about safety initiatives, social media posts about the Safety Ambassadors, and physical brochures that can be distributed to downtown residents, businesses, workers, and visitors to let them know what initiatives are taking place and how they can access these resources.

17 **Continue targeted outreach to the Black and Latino communities through additional pop-ups and outreach events.** The Downtown Blueprint engagement process was intentional in its efforts to reach underrepresented communities with a particular focus on the Black and Latino communities in Durham. Although targeted events such as the Black Voices for the Future Panel and pop-up events at the Latino Community Credit Union and the Super Compare Foods were great starting points to reach these communities, the engagement shouldn't stop there. Longer-term relationship building is critical for downtown to truly feel welcome to all. Hosting more outreach opportunities, such as informal pop-ups and focus groups about downtown issues, that are specifically tailored to these communities will keep the dialogue flowing and provide opportunities to build trust over time.

18 **Use social media as a way to promote downtown's affordable offerings.** Downtown businesses have something for everyone, and it's time to make that universally known. Social media is an effective and low-cost way to broadcast different discounts, deals, and specials from local downtown businesses and free activities available to all. Changing the perception of downtown being too expensive is crucial to making downtown welcoming and accessible to everyone.

» **Downtown Durham, Inc.**  
(Lead Partner)

» City/County  
» Discover Durham

» **Downtown Durham, Inc.**  
(Lead Partner)

» Local community organizations/  
nonprofits

» **Downtown Durham, Inc.**  
(Lead Partner)

» Local businesses  
» Discover Durham  
» City/County  
» Social Media Ambassadors

## SHARING PROGRESS

The Downtown Blueprint process takes pride in its intentional and iterative approach to community engagement. Each event was designed not only to solicit public input but also to reflect on lessons learned, using that insight to refine subsequent engagement opportunities. This continuous feedback loop ensured that community perspectives—concerns, priorities, and aspirations—were not only heard but embedded throughout the planning process and into the final plan. Although the planning phase has concluded, implementation should build upon this foundation. DDI, in collaboration with its implementation partners, will host regular public meetings to share updates on Downtown Blueprint progress. These gatherings will also provide ongoing opportunities for community members to offer feedback and remain actively involved as the work evolves.



## TAG, YOU'RE IT!

If you and/or your organization are interested in being part of a TAG for any of the early action projects or other recommendations listed in the Downtown Blueprint, please visit [www.downtowndurham.com/blueprint/](http://www.downtowndurham.com/blueprint/) to contact DDI.



Source: Downtown Durham, Inc.

