

# MEADVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND  
STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES FOR A  
PROPOSED COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION  
CORPORATION FOR DOWNTOWN

MAY 2024

AN URBAN DEVELOPMENT ADVISORS REPORT TO THE MEADVILLE COMMUNITY  
REVITALIZATION CORPORATION STEERING COMMITTEE





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Urban Development Advisors LLC (UDA) was engaged by Allegheny College in partnership with a local steering committee and the City of Meadville. The purpose of the steering committee was to explore the creation of a Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC) to revitalize Downtown Meadville. UDA was tasked with providing a public engagement strategy to measure the community's interest in the creation of a CRC and to understand better the role a CRC could play in the revitalization of Downtown Meadville. Those recommendations would include advice regarding the composition, membership, governance, funding, and a strategic vision. This report is the result of the process used by UDA to obtain and synthesize a wide variety of inputs, including in-person stakeholder interviews, virtual interviews, public surveys, and public input sessions.

UDA's initial thought was that this effort would be focused on real estate intervention. It became clear after the interviews, meetings, and surveys that a more robust organization was needed that could focus not only on real estate but also business recruitment, marketing, placemaking and event coordination in the context of a broader strategic vision.

Primary observations and recommendations of this report include:

- Remarks on the current state of downtown.
- Summary of the public engagement initiative.
- Support for creation of the CRC.
- Advice on how to create a strategic vision, mission, and goals for the CRC.
- Suggestions on key projects, programs, and activities for the CRC.
- Initial creation and composition of the Board of Directors of the CRC.
- Identification of the staffing needs of the CRC.
- Funding opportunities (operational and capital) for the CRC.
- Creation of a Meadville Development Fund.

## **About Community Revitalization Corporations**

Community Revitalization Corporations (CRCs), often referred to as Community Development Corporations (CDCs), are nonprofit organizations that help improve neighborhoods and communities. They can do this by engaging in real estate projects (purchasing and renovating buildings or new construction), partnering with private developers, and by offering programs and services. These groups bring together different players— government, citizens, businesses, and civic leaders—to work together on making positive change happen.

## **About the Meadville Steering Committee**

Supported by funds and staff from Allegheny College with participation from the City and civic leaders, the Meadville Steering Committee is a group of community stakeholders and volunteers who are exploring creating a Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC) for Downtown Meadville.

## **About Urban Development Advisors LLC**

Urban Development Advisors LLC (UDALLC) provides expert advice to communities to help them understand what drives real estate investment, sustainable land use practices, economic development and ensures long-lasting community commitment. Led by former Mayor of Pittsburgh **Tom Murphy** and former Senior Vice President of Advisory Services at the Urban Land Institute **Tom Eitler**, Urban Development Advisors LLC is a team of experienced professionals that provide strategic advice to developers, governments and institutions on urban planning and real estate development issues.

## **About Altair Consulting Group**

Altair Consulting Group is the consulting arm of Altair Real Estate Services, formed in the Commonwealth of PA in November of 2005 to provide a broad range of real estate and planning, brokerage, and management services. Altair works for a diverse group of institutional, private sector, and non-profit organizations. Altair has a team of just over 40 employees working across the consulting, property management, maintenance, and facilities teams. The consulting group provides planning and real estate advisory services to a variety of municipal and government agencies, institutions and higher education, private sector developers, community, and economic development organizations, non-for profits, community development finance institutions, and philanthropic institutions.

## **About Blue Canopy Marketing**

Since 1999, Blue Canopy Marketing has been a beacon of innovation and expertise in the digital marketing landscape. Originally established to serve independent pharmacies across the United States and Canada, our team has successfully amplified the reach and impact of hundreds of healthcare businesses by broadcasting their unique services to a wider audience. Recognizing the evolving demands of the market, we have expanded our services beyond healthcare to encompass a diverse array of industries, including small and large businesses, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs. A local Meadville company, Blue Canopy provides website design and direct marketing for this effort.

## REGIONAL BACKGROUND

Western Pennsylvania was a center of manufacturing in the US for a hundred years. Beginning in the 1970s, because of global competition, manufacturing industries began to decline and by the mid-1980s many of them shut down completely. With the loss of thousands of jobs and no prospects for new ones, Western Pennsylvania communities suffered significant population losses.

Companies that had foresight to innovate to provide new products to a new generation of industries survived. Communities faced the same set of challenges, to either innovate and reimagine or decline. As traditional industries disappear, younger people often leave to find better opportunities. Community tax receipts decline leaving the community with little or no resources to effectively invest in the future.

Some communities in similar circumstances have made very deliberate decisions to invest in their futures. Leadership can come from the universities, the private sector, the philanthropic community, or the local government itself. Leaders in those communities stood up and said the status quo was not satisfactory and that the community needed to change their approach. In many of those communities, that leadership took the form of a development corporation, either a Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC) or Community Development Corporation (CDC), that created a strategic vision and created public/private/higher education partnerships that would implement the plans. Erie and Pittsburgh are two regional examples where these partnerships were formed to take on the challenges of change.

### A. CITY OF MEADVILLE

Meadville, the county seat for Crawford County, was settled on May 12, 1788, by a party of ten settlers led by David Mead. Its location, situated at the confluence of Cussewago and French Creeks, was chosen for its proximity to strategic transportation routes. Early canal development, though quickly obsolete, positioned Meadville to play a key role in future rail transportation. Meadville was incorporated as a city in 1866 and designated the Crawford County seat in 1880. By the late 1800s, Meadville's economy included logging, agriculture, and iron production. In the 1980's, the Great Lakes region saw a major decline in heavy industry. This blow to the local economy was softened by a subsequent surge in light industry, primarily tool and die machine shops, earning Meadville the nickname *Tool City*,

USA. Today, the Meadville area remains a leader in tooling, machining, and advanced manufacturing. The city also serves as the region's center for banking, education, and social services. The current population of Meadville is approximately 12,600.

## **B. ALLEGHENY COLLEGE**

Located in the city, Allegheny College was founded in 1815 and celebrated its bicentennial in 2015. The campus has 40 principal buildings on a 79-acre central campus located ½ mile north of downtown Meadville. Like many small liberal arts colleges, Allegheny recognizes that its future growth and success is, in part, dependent upon the success of Meadville; and further, that downtown is a vital component of Meadville's success. The funding to administer the Steering Committee and this report was provided by Allegheny College.

## **C. DOWNTOWN**

This report's geographic focus is the approximate seven-by-seven block area bounded by North Street, Pine Street, the Downtown Mall, and Diamond Park, which primarily constitutes the City's Central Business District. There is a burgeoning retail and service presence downtown, with Chestnut Street serving as the traditional, walkable commercial Main Street of the city. There are restaurants, clothing stores, boutiques and a bookstore interspersed with other retail uses such as games of skill parlors, tattoo establishments, furniture stores, banks, government offices and medical and professional offices. The Meadville Market House on Market Street is the oldest continuously run market structure in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Some of the larger office structures such as the Crawford County Trust Company building, and the Citizens Bank building are underutilized and/or vacant and will require substantial renovation to make them leasable for both traditional uses and opportunities for new uses.

The downtown focus area consists of a grid street pattern and is typical for smaller cities and boroughs throughout western Pennsylvania. A considerable number of vacant and underutilized commercial parcels are primarily used for surface parking. The feel and form of the city is two and three-story brick or composite buildings, typical of mill towns in the Great Lakes Region. The downtown, a portion of which is included in a National Register Historic District, has distinctive architecture, interesting shops, and a nice small grid pattern for walking. It provides a great foundation upon which to attract new businesses,



permanent residents, and visitors. It has the potential to be a great, walkable city, but it needs some help.

The current market demand for office and retail space downtown is limited. Some demand does exist for uses such as games of skill parlors, smoke/vape shops, and single-focus medical uses such as dialysis therapy, recovery, and hearing loss. Presently, the demand is for low-value uses that do not bring additional vitality downtown. These are often not aligned with traditional economic development and attraction-focused uses that many communities desire. The Downtown Mall, located between Water Street and French Creek Parkway is approximately 140,000 square feet of strip-style retail, with almost four acres of surface parking. Various parking or vacant lots offer the opportunity for redevelopment. The post office site and other parking sites represent large, underutilized space and give those portions of the downtown an underutilized and sometimes desolate look and feel and, in some cases, an unsafe perception.



## D. EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS

Urban Development Advisors was tasked with making recommendations regarding the need for and desirability of a CRC for Downtown Meadville. An important part of this analysis is taking stock of the existing organizations that either directly or indirectly affect downtown. The city and its functions of planning and zoning, code enforcement, parking enforcement, community development, and maintenance of public infrastructure play a key role in the management of downtown. However, it is clear that the City does not have the staff capacity and funding to proactively manage downtown or lead new revitalization efforts. The City's Redevelopment Authority is without staff and consistent recurring revenue. Its limited capacity is focused on blight remediation efforts and to develop city-wide housing strategies.

In other locales, a redevelopment authority might play a leading role in implementing the city's goals and desires to revitalize downtown, However, even if the Redevelopment Authority was well-funded and staffed, there are other roles in a revitalization initiative that a private, nonprofit CRC would be more appropriate to fulfill.

Other organizations that might typically play a downtown role in downtown revitalization include the Meadville-Western Crawford County Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County, the Crawford Heritage Community Foundation and the Crawford County Convention and Visitors Bureau, but all are focused on wider geographic issues within their specific mandates and are often constrained by their own limited staff capacity. Other organizations, while based in and, to some extent, focused on downtown, have a much narrower concentration of interests. These organizations include the Meadville Independent Business Alliance, the Academy Theatre, the Meadville Market House, and the Meadville Council on the Arts. While crucial to the success and civic life of the community, none has the specific mission or capacity to provide civic management or lead major redevelopment initiatives. It is UDA's opinion that no single organization wakes up every day thinking about the management, promotion, and redevelopment of the core city.

## **E. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

Urban Development Advisors has years of experience in providing communities with practical and candid advice regarding revitalization, real estate development strategies, and leadership skills. Drawing on the over 300 communities where we have worked and in which we provided analogs and examples in creating solutions, we also use a distinctive stakeholder interview approach to gain insight and understanding of a community. The approach permits stakeholder participants to speak freely and candidly with the UDA team in confidential, closed-door interviews. This process allows participants to express and discuss sometimes controversial opinions because the stakeholder is guaranteed anonymity. This process allows UDA to dig deeper into the issues and challenges facing a community.

In February of 2024, UDA conducted more than 60 individual and group interviews and hosted a public meeting to elicit and recognize the community's ideas and concerns. Interviewees represented a broad range of citizens, business owners, government officials, and organizations.

## **F. COMMUNITY SURVEY**

A survey was prepared by UDA and was conducted from March 8 to March 22, 2024. This ten-question, web-based survey asked a variety of broad questions about the state of downtown, the need for a CRC, personal preferences about retail needs, and opinions about parking. It also provided a comment section to allow participants to comment on additional issues. Three-hundred and twenty-five (325) individuals participated in the survey. The results of the survey confirmed many of the topics and concerns that we heard during the stakeholder interviews and at the public meeting. Some of the highlights include:

- Almost 70% of the respondents indicated that they visited downtown either every day or at least several times a week.
- Of the 325 respondents, 68% believed there was a need for a dedicated Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC) focused on Downtown.
- Regarding parking, 119 respondents believed that parking availability and/or the current meter system keeps them from frequenting Downtown, while 153 indicated that they usually find a place and 53 said it was not an issue.

- In the multi-choice question regarding what types of retail businesses are needed in Downtown, the two largest responses were for restaurants and clothing stores. There were also high responses for specialty retail, home goods and boutiques.

A complete summary of the survey is included in this report as **Appendix A**.

## **CONSENSUS OF NEED FOR A STRATEGIC VISION AND A CRC FOR DOWNTOWN**

UDA's observations from the interviews, surveys, and public meetings are that people overwhelmingly recognize a need for a leadership organization with a shared vision, reliable funding resources, and a sophisticated staff that can focus specifically on downtown revitalization. UDA sees a solid foundation for a "reimagination strategy" and the major elements of that foundation are:

- The deep commitment and affection the people have for Meadville. They have an earnest desire for the city and its institutions to do better.
- The involvement and interest of younger people in the governance of the city is unusual and important. They will bring innovative ideas and a willingness to challenge the status quo.
- The remaining architecture of downtown is attractive, historic, and distinctive and provides a template to fill in the blank spots, and underutilized and vacant buildings (We strongly suggest not tearing down anymore buildings). The CRC will be the vehicle by which to thoughtfully lead the efforts for preservation and re-use.
- Meadville's location itself is an attraction. The proximity to French Creek (though downtown is cut off by the mall and a four-lane bypass), the countryside surrounding Meadville, the growing trail network, public art, performance venues, and the Market House provide a solid foundation upon which to expand these assets and create new ones.
- Allegheny College is an enormous asset. Many of the community leaders with whom we met are Allegheny College graduates. The College and the City need each other. The status quo relationship is not acceptable. A collaborative effort between the city and college to build a unified vision is long overdue.
- 20,000 cars a day passing on the interstate provides an obvious opportunity. The city should market itself to invite those travelers to spend time downtown.
- Equally, the opportunity exists to recruit new businesses that complement the existing businesses.

## **ESTABLISHING A STRATEGIC VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS**

A successful CRC will need a strategic vision and to adopt a corresponding mission and goals to achieve that vision. UDA suggests as a starting point the following:

The Meadville Downtown Community Revitalization Corporation's mission is to focus on issues critical to downtown and community well-being, including civic management and dynamic programming, with a specific focus on adaptive reuse and new development that enhances and stimulates the vitality of the downtown.

The goals of the CRC should be:

- Preserve and enhance the historic character of the downtown.
- Promote environmental, visual, and physical improvements to the downtown.
- Promote housing (including market-rate, affordable and workforce housing) downtown.
- Promote employment and workforce development downtown by working with existing businesses and recruiting complementary new businesses.
- Undertake appropriate real estate intervention projects that improve the downtown and the city's tax base.
- Coordinate with government entities, especially the City of Meadville and the Meadville Redevelopment Authority, in achieving the above goals.
- Promote events, activities and projects that enhance, enrich, and improve downtown in partnership and coordination with the Meadville Independent Business Alliance and others.
- Tell the world about what Meadville has to offer.

The CRC will need to evaluate, draft, and adopt a mission and set of goals. The above represent a suggestion and a point of departure for discussion by the newly created CRC.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR KEY AREAS, PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS**

Any effort to effectively revitalize downtown must include both short and long-term strategies for physical improvement of properties as well as approaches to events, marketing, and business retention/recruitment. The following outlines several physical and programmatic strategies that could be considered by the CRC:

### **A. Priority Sites for Near-Term Commercial and Residential Rehabilitation**

Criteria for priorities for near-term commercial rehabilitation include key assets with proximity to the “main and main” (primary intersection of downtown main streets) intersection at Chestnut and Park Avenue which are:

- Owned by the City.
- Essential to the character of the downtown.
- Unique Architectural or historical resources.
- Able to be reactivated with relative ease and density.

### **B. Priority Sites for Long-Term Commercial and Residential Rehabilitation**

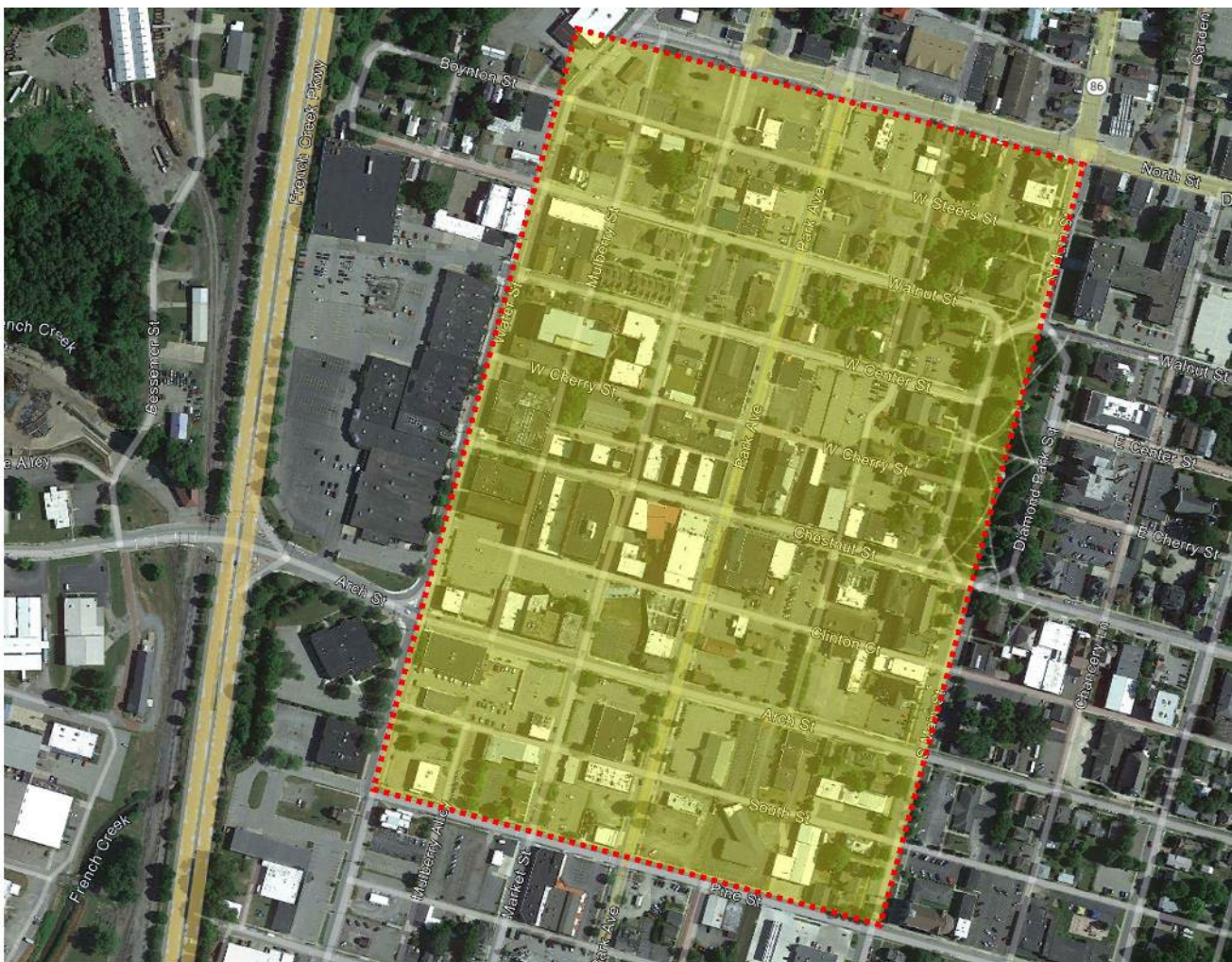
Criteria for priorities for long-term commercial rehabilitation include:

- Clusters of retail space downtown, especially in proximity to the “main and main”(primary intersection of downtown main streets) intersection at Chestnut and Park Avenue.
- Clusters of parking availability in strategic corridors to support reactivation near “main and main” primary intersection of downtown main streets) intersection at Chestnut and Park Avenue.
- Clusters of parking availability which can encourage main street and downtown development best practices for Chestnut Street and Park Avenue
- Key sites which better connect the Downtown to French Creek



## C. Comprehensive Strategy for Upper Floor Residential in the Downtown Core

All around the country, smaller downtowns are receiving a new lease on life because they offer locations where young workers and empty nesters, who are looking for an urban experience, can live. In Meadville, it appears that upper floor spaces above ground floor uses are currently underutilized due to code requirements related to fire safety and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements. These spaces need to be evaluated and, in coordination with the city, a set of responses prepared that will allow owners and investors to rehabilitate these spaces for new residential in the form of flats, rental apartments, and condominiums. A starting point for this strategy should be an inventory of available space. Solutions such as shared elevators, alternative fire suppression systems, and managed parking should be evaluated. This effort should initially start with spaces along Chestnut Street, but eventually extend to the entire downtown.



**Boundary for Strategy for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Residential Above Commercial**

## **D. New Downtown Residential**

An appropriate strategy for making downtown more vibrant and desirable is residential occupancy. UDA is suggesting several locations for new residential uses. These units could include a variety of styles such as apartments, rowhouse/townhome, stacked townhomes (condos), small-lot singles, and other forms. These units could be either owner-occupied or rental units. They would include market rate rental or for-sale units, and workforce housing.

## **E. Hotel in Downtown**

There is a perceived need for a boutique hotel downtown that can serve the business of the city, Allegheny College, Meadville Medical Center and the local business community. Anecdotally, the highway hotels are regularly full, and a hotel chain might consider a location downtown. The CRC should undertake a market study to evaluate the pent-up demand for hotel rooms. From our interviews it appears that no one is actively exploring this opportunity. The CRC could be the catalyst to revisit the work that was done by the Economic Progress Alliance and hire a consultant to conduct the market study to determine if such a use is feasible downtown.

## **F. Gateway Treatment**

An urban gateway is an entrance which acts as a transition between different spaces as well as a nexus for the people who inhabit and frequent these places. Gateways provide a meaningful entrance into the downtown allowing visitors to recognize they have arrived. The several primary gateway locations to downtown (Park Avenue at Pine Street on the south and Park Avenue at North Street on the north and the French Creek Parkway at Arch Street on the west) do not provide the landscape/hardscape, signage and entrance features that announce to a visitor that they have arrived in downtown.

Gateway treatments at these and other locations could be an early win for the CRC. There is typically signage and wayfinding components that will allow visitors to easily navigate to the Market House, Diamond Park, restaurants, retail and public parking. A landscape and streetscape plan that includes improved sidewalks, furniture, lighting, trees, planting, and signage should be coordinated closely with the city and impacted property owners. These schemes are comparatively inexpensive but could be an early success for the CRC.





### **G. Connectivity Strategy from Trail Network to Downtown**

Along the same lines as the road diet above, the CRC should explore opportunities to better connect French Creek with the sidewalks and activity centers in downtown.

French Creek, with its associated hiking, biking, birding, fishing, geocaching, and boating, could tap into a vast number of visitors who are looking for an uncomplicated way to access the retail services in downtown. Hikers and boaters who are undertaking both daytrips and through trips need a reason to cross the road and experience the downtown. As it stands today, there is no compelling connection or perceived connection from the creek and trail to downtown.

The CRC should collaborate closely with local stakeholders to provide a united front to the state, philanthropic organizations, and private landowners who may provide an opportunity for access. Another early win for the CRC could be a coordinated effort with the Downtown Mall to explore opportunities on their property. In locations all around the country, local property owners (who initially saw public access as a liability) have come to realize that more visitors mean more business. One suggestion is to consider temporary “pop-up” retail or food service facilities in the parking lot catering to hikers and boaters.

French Creek, a state recognized Water Trail, is an important community asset. The French Creek Parkway acts as a barrier to those who want to navigate between French Creek and downtown. This road already operates far below capacity and PennDOT has already begun the process of a road diet for that portion of the road between Spring Street and Baldwin Street Extension, just north of the primary downtown. The PennDOT website indicates one alternative is to reduce the number of lanes to two and to abandon the eastern lanes. As a long-term goal, the CRC should advocate for the continuation of the road diet from Spring Street to Mercer Street with the preferred alternatives eliminating two lanes. This reduction in road width would shrink both the actual and perceived distance between downtown and the proposed trail network and would have a positive impact and perception for downtown as a more walkable location. This advocacy needs to be combined with a shorter-term effort to find several safe, “walkable” crossing points from French Creek into downtown.

## **H. Identity, Branding, and Marketing**

As noted earlier, the Meadville-Western Crawford County Chamber of Commerce and the Crawford County Convention and Visitors Bureau, while not ignoring downtown, serve constituencies beyond the downtown and focus more on Crawford County and the larger region.

While individual merchants and organizations downtown have marketing programs that advertise their business and events, it appears that the only comprehensive marketing for downtown is being done by the Meadville Independent Business Alliance. Their Experience Meadville website and social media presence provide a glimpse of what could be done with a more robust effort. The CRC needs to part of the effort to promote downtown as a destination for everyone, residents of both the city and county and tourists/visitors who are looking for a unique experience. A robust marketing effort should be one of the important early efforts and concentrations of the CRC.

## **I. Business Retention and Recruitment Strategy**

The existing retail and restaurant core and the Market House are two great assets upon which to grow a broader business presence downtown. Regular meetings with the Meadville Independent Business Alliance, the Chamber, and others would provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to learn how they might support and grow downtown businesses. In discussions with existing retail owners and through the survey, UDA heard about other complementary businesses that could expand the shopping experience, for example, a hotel or an antique mall. These types of businesses are destinations that bring people downtown. The CRC should proactively cultivate and recruit businesses. This will involve an effort to determine what types of uses and business are desired, how to convince such businesses to start, move or expand to the downtown and, in some cases, provide support or other incentives. It will require going to other communities in the region to survey what they have and determine what is working in those communities and whether there is any opportunity for the same in Meadville.

## **J. Events Strategy**

Successful downtowns are places where people want to visit and spend time. They offer a mixture of magical ingredients of placemaking, history, art and culture, retail and restaurants, and events that, together, create vitality and invite people to enjoy.

Presently, Downtown plays host to several interesting activities, including Academy Theatre performances, the farmers' market at the Market House, concerts in Diamond Park, and other community events in the Arc Greenspace and other venues. There are regular events such as First Fridays (including the annual Catwalk on Chestnut, the Witch Walk, the Cookie Walk, etc.), Second Saturday Community Market, and seasonal parades and events such as Merry Meadville. Also, the college has a series of events, speakers, and concerts. But more can be done to more cohesively coordinate, promote, and build upon these events.

A community calendar focused specifically on downtown events should be developed to systematically promote them in a manner that identifies downtown as “the place to be.” Empty dates on the calendar should be filled. The CRC would not necessarily organize events itself initially; rather, it would work with community groups to expand or create

new programming and to find sponsorships. The programming should be varied and strategic, focusing on both local and regional audience participation. The CRC should be the catalyst that brings together ideas, funding, and energy to intentionally think about the history and uniqueness of Meadville to celebrate.

## **CREATING A COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION CORPORATION (CRC)**

The process for creating a CRC is regulated by Commonwealth law and requires filing a form called Articles of Incorporation with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations. It will require naming a registered agent, registering a name for the organization, filing a Docketing Statement and several other items including a filing fee. Separate, but just as important, is filing with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for both an Employer Identification Number (EIN) and completing a Beneficial Ownership Information (BOI) Report. The CRC will also need to file with the IRS for tax exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. There is a sequential order of the above-mentioned processes (i.e. you cannot get an EIN without first receiving your Certificate of Organization from the Commonwealth) UDA suggests retaining the services of a local attorney to prepare these documents. This attorney can initially function as the agent for the CRC until the board is up and running.

As a guide to the creation of the CRC, it is helpful to review the HUD guidelines for CRCs. While not strictly required for incorporation, these guidelines must be met if the organization expects to apply for and receive federal funds in the future. Key among those provisions is that the organization:

- is neither controlled by, nor under the direction of, individuals or entities seeking to derive profit or gain from the organization.
- is not an agency or instrumentality of a state or local government.
- has a tax exemption ruling from the Internal Revenue Service under section 501(c)(3) or (4) of the Internal Revenue Code.

### **A. CRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The CRC should be an independent organization and will need to have a Board of Directors. This board will serve as the decision-making body of the organization and will have ultimate authority to direct the actions of the organization and its employees. UDA



recommends an 11-member board, with an additional member representing the city that is non-voting.

UDA recommends that the existing Steering Committee appoint the initial Board of Directors. Subsequently, the bylaws adopted by the Board will determine eligibility, terms of office and the procedure for future appointments/reappointments.

## **B. BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMPOSITION**

Establishing the composition of the Board is an important task of the Steering Committee. The Board must represent a broad range of interest because the CRC will be doing much more than real estate intervention. The civic management and programming function for downtown requires representatives that will further the mission and goals of the organization. For these reasons, UDA recommends the following:

- 3 Business Owner Representatives
- 3 Property Owner Representatives
- 1 Cultural/Historical/Recreational Resource Representative
- 1 Performing Arts Representative
- 1 Real Estate Developer Representative
- 1 Community Representative
- 1 Anchor Institution Representative
- 1 City Official in an Ex Officio, non-voting capacity

## **C. BYLAWS**

The organization will need to adopt a set of bylaws. Bylaws provide a framework for the operation and management of an organization and are used to determine the rights and obligations of members and employees, and regulate various matters such as holding meetings, causes of dissolution, appointment of employees, process for dismissal and voting requirements. It also explains the officers of the organization and the duties of each officer. Typically, an organization will have a president and vice-president, a treasurer, and a secretary.

## D. CRC BOARD SUBCOMMITTEES

Most CRCs operate using a series of subcommittees that match board and community member talent with various activities. Those members of the CRC with the skills and understanding within a particular field will serve on subcommittees that are focused on those specific concerns. In our initial discussion, we thought that the focus of the report would be to suggest a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) real estate development organization.

Through UDA interviews and conversations, it became clear that, in addition to developing real estate, several other initiatives must happen concurrently. Presently, none of these activities are happening in an organized manner. Therefore, we are suggesting subcommittees in the following three areas:

**Communications, Marketing, Events, Business Recruitment** – This subcommittee is tasked with intentionally advertising and promoting the downtown’s assets to create vitality and to give people more reasons to come downtown. This subcommittee will be telling the world about Meadville with a relentless focus on promotion of activities that bring people downtown and recruiting complementary businesses downtown. They are also charged with the development and custody of a community calendar.

**Placemaking** – This subcommittee will focus on the look and feel of downtown and will have a deep understanding of the history and culture of the city. They will focus on landscaping, streetscape improvements, historical and cultural issues, and will also be the primary group focused on connectivity, trails, recreation, transportation, and parking.

**Real Estate Public-Private Partnerships** – This subcommittee will have substantial understanding and background in real estate development, finance, and property management. This subcommittee is envisioned as the group that “does the deals.” The subcommittee will begin to pursue deals, develop the knowledge of private-public financing mechanisms, and identify public funding sources available for gap financing. Concurrently, the subcommittee will pursue the creation of a Meadville Development Fund of at least \$5 million. This fund would be used for patient capital loans and equity, to acquire land and to invest in development that enhances downtown. It would permit the CRC to be nimble and bold.

## **D. BUILD MEADVILLE**

When the fundraising goal of the Meadville Development Fund goal is reached, we recommend that the real estate public/private partnerships subcommittee spin-off from the CRC to become Build Meadville, a separate organization, but with some shared board members and goals. Build Meadville should have a board, all of whom have contributed to the Development Fund. This organization will focus on real estate intervention, acquisition of strategic properties where necessary, and primarily on partnering with private and nonprofit developers and investors to create value. The separate nature of the organization will allow it to be nimble and entrepreneurial but retain its overall mission of improving the downtown.

## **F. CRC STAFF**

The CRC will need to have several full-time staff that can provide the professional knowledge and skills necessary to implement the board's vision and goals. UDA recommends the following:

- Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer
- Real Estate Public-Private Partnership Expert
- Events/Programing, Business Retention/Recruitment and Public Relations Expert
- Placemaking/Design Project Manager

These are the four essential full-time positions necessary for the CRC to function. Initially, contractors could be used to support the effort. The staff may be supported initially by Allegheny College, though funded by the CRC, who will retain management and hiring oversight.

## **G. FUNDING - INITIAL OPERATING**

Initial annual operating funding is estimated at approximately \$500,000. This amount is based on the initial start-up needed for an office and the staff recommended above. A portion of this funding may be allotted to consultants who help the CRC get up and running until the organization is fully staffed.

Sources for this initial funding can come from philanthropic foundations, the Pennsylvania Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP), earmarks from Congress and Commonwealth, and private contributions.

## **FUNDING – MEADVILLE DEVELOPMENT FUND**

UDA believes that the CRC will need a Meadville Development Fund to achieve their strategic vision. The current market conditions for real estate are comparatively weak. Properties are underperforming as evidenced by the quality and quantity of vacant retail space, surface parking, and undeveloped properties.

Cities like Erie, Cincinnati, Allentown, and others recognized that, given their weak markets, intervention was necessary; what could be financed through typical conventional loans and developer equity did not cover the cost of redevelopment. To stimulate the private real estate market, and to create confidence in the future of Meadville, flexible gap financing is an essential tool. Driven by their strategic vision, the CDCs in other cities created development funds that allowed them to be nimble, to strategically gain control of available property, rehabilitate buildings, and partner with private developers for uses that fulfill their strategic vision and changed the market economics equation. Also, the fund creates the opportunity to leverage significant additional sources of funding such as: New Market tax credits, historic preservation tax credits, and other state and federal programs. The expectation is that the economic success of redeveloped property will generate adequate revenue to repay loans or funds advanced by the Meadville Development Fund. This is the true function of the CRC - to take a share of the risk that prevents the private sector from acting, believing that the future Meadville will be better than it is today.

The goal for initial capitalization should be \$5 million. Sources for this development fund can come from a variety of private and philanthropic partners. Public dollars may also be injected into CRC projects to support investments from the fund. A more detailed approach to this funding will be provided by Altair Consulting Group.



## CONCLUSION

Because of the leadership of Allegheny College and civic and political leaders on the Steering Committee, Meadville is at a moment in time when it has an opportunity to reimagine a different future. Presently, downtown is doing OK. The retail and restaurant sectors are holding their own and there are many efforts and assets from which to build. But without coordinated and sustained action and intervention, the downtown stands to stagnate and suffer from slow decline. If the community wants to reach for the future, quite candidly, it needs to have a change in attitude. During our interviews we heard statements like "we can't do that," or "how do we pay for it?" or "I can't work with them; they are too liberal or conservative" or "we need to tear the building down, we need more parking" or "nothing ever changes in Meadville." There is enormous goodwill in Meadville that transcends these negative attitudes. The interviews, public meetings, and survey responses all overwhelmingly supported the creation of a downtown-focused CRC. People understand the need for such an organization and care deeply about the vitality of downtown and the larger community.

There is a certain urgency about moving forward in the Spring of 2024. Currently, funding is available through philanthropic, public, and private sources. Catalytic developments are possible, and there is momentum with the college, civic leaders, and citizens to make something happen. It is time to turn the creativity and energy of the citizens of Meadville into a strategic vision and implement it.

Meadville has a choice: stay the course and hope for the best or be bold. From our personal experience, having advised hundreds of similar communities around the country and after engaging with the civic and political leadership of Meadville, we are confident that you have all the ingredients to be bold and succeed.

Urban Development Advisors LLC



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## Appendix A

### Downtown Meadville Survey Results - March 2024

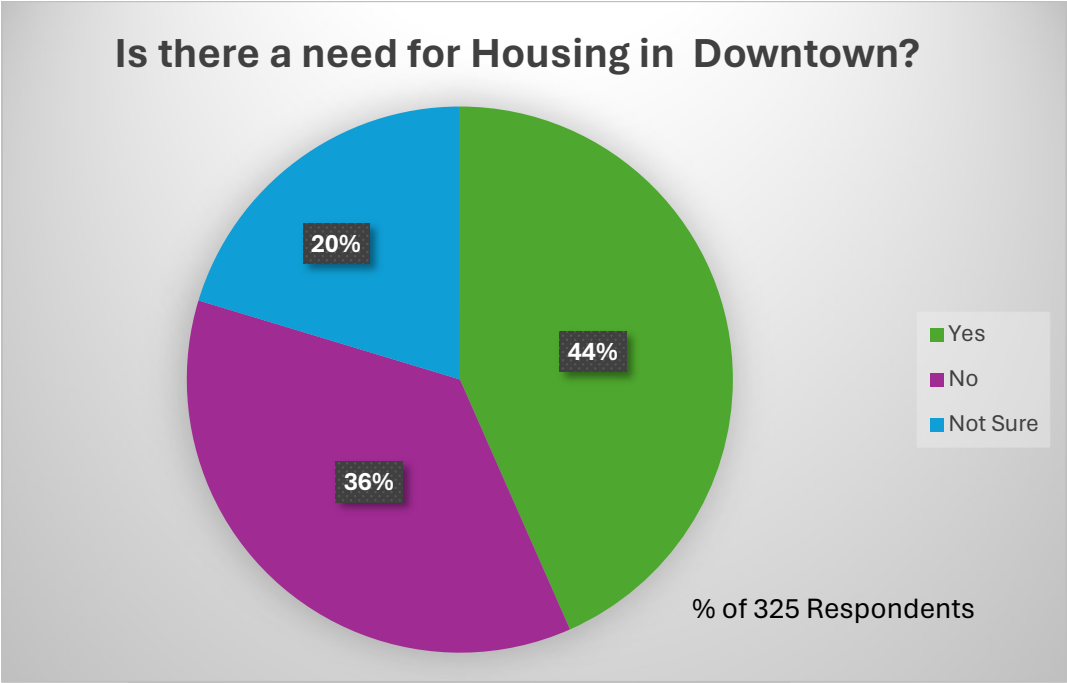
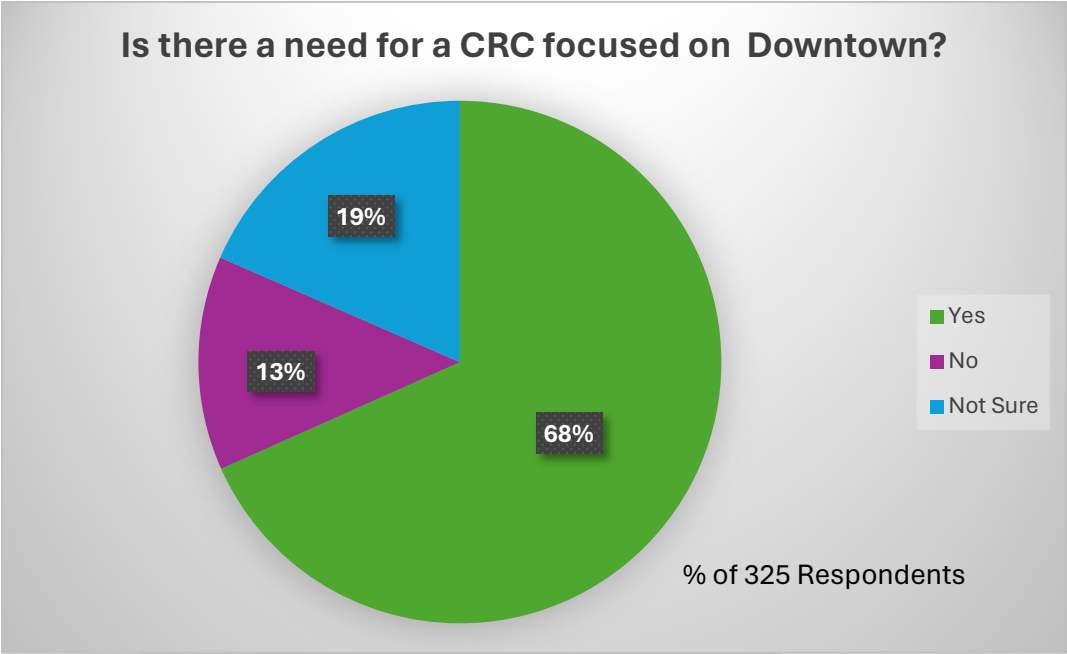
In March 2024, Urban Development Advisors conducted a short, on-line survey to get a better understanding of residents and business owners' opinions about assorted topics in Downtown Meadville. 325 people responded to the survey. The results of the survey are provided in graphic format in the following document.

#### Highlights

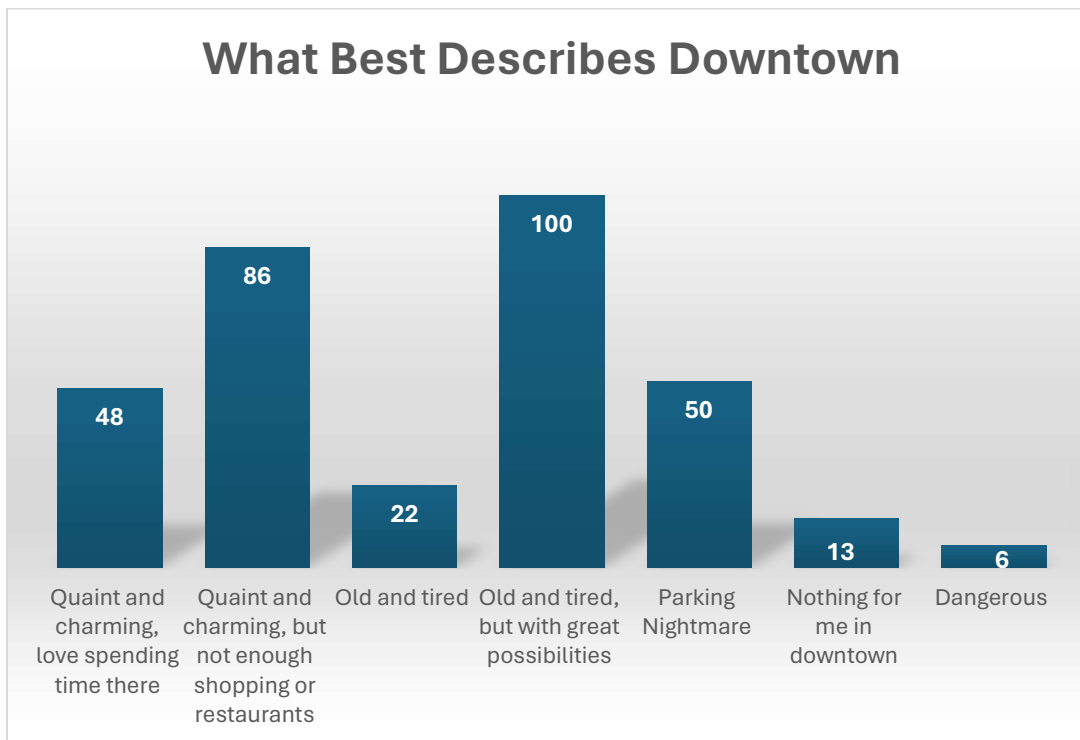
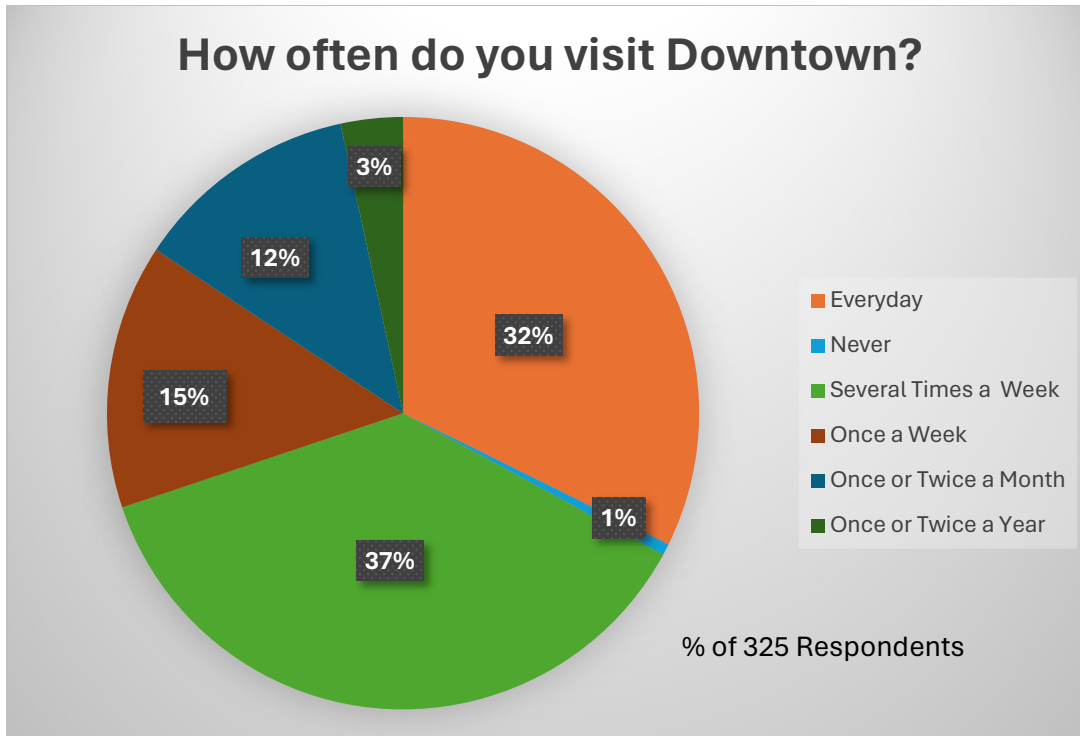
- Almost 70% of the respondents indicated that they visited downtown either every day or at least several times a week.
- Of the 325 respondents, 68% believed there was a need for a dedicated Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC) focused on Downtown.
- Regarding parking, 119 respondents believed that parking availability and/or the current meter system keeps them from frequenting Downtown, while 153 indicated that they usually find a place and 53 said it was not an issue.
- In the multi-choice question regarding what types of retail businesses are needed in Downtown, the two largest responses were for restaurants and clothing stores. There were also high responses for specialty retail, home goods and boutiques.

This survey was not comprehensive but was intended to provide the consultant team and the Steering Committee with a better understanding of how people feel about Downtown. As the Steering Committee (and eventually a CRC) delve deeper into the types of improvements, programs and activities needed to make Downtown more vibrant, additional surveys should be conducted.

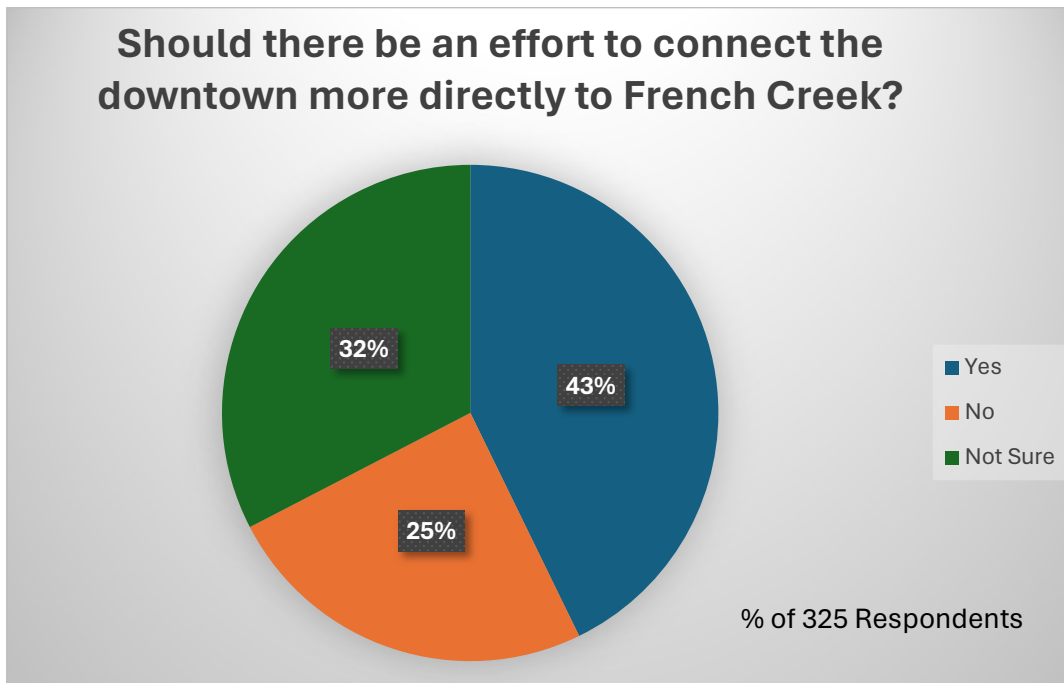
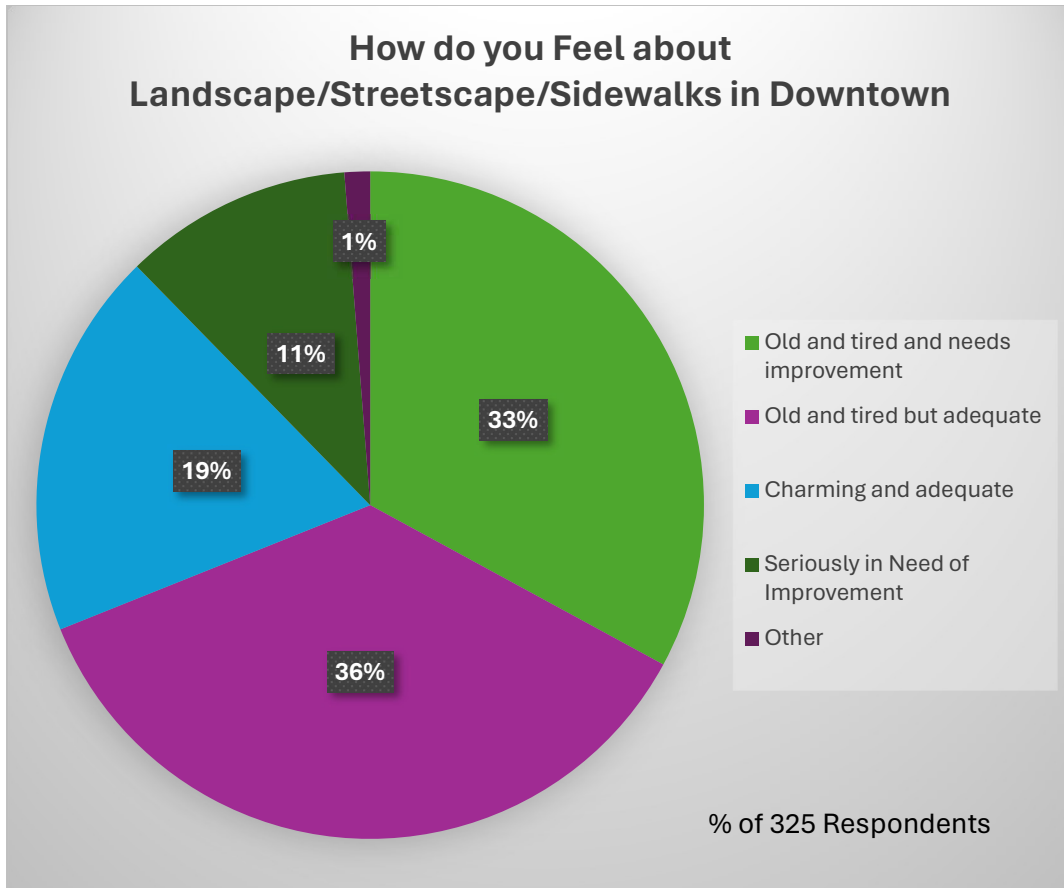
Appendix A



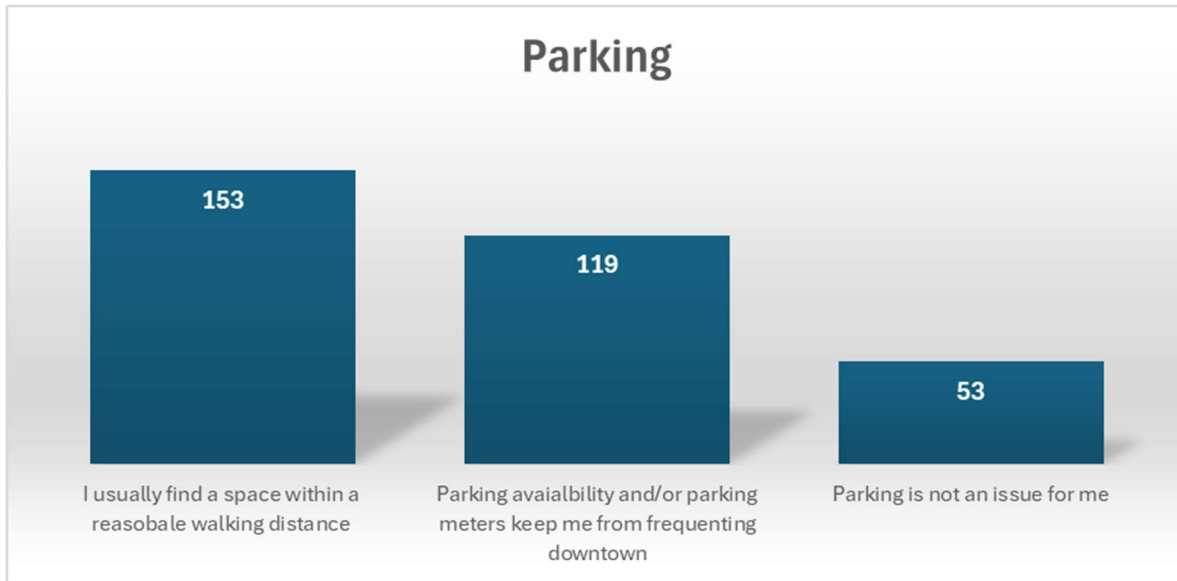
## Appendix A



Appendix A



## Appendix A



Two Multiple-answer questions invited respondents to “select all that apply.” The responses are depicted in the tables below.

What bring you to downtown (Select all that apply)?						
Shopping	Restaurants	Work	Live	Entertainment	Special Events (parades, festivals, First Fridays, Second Saturdays, etc.)	None
199	218	136	33	114	172	36

What types of retail business are needed in downtown (Select all that apply)?											
Restaurants (Casual, nonchain)	Restaurants (Fast Food)	Restaurants (White Tablecloth)	Bars/Drinking Establishments	Clothing and Apparel Stores	Bakeries	Ice Cream Parlors	Dry Cleaners	Specialty Retail (Crafts, Art, Gift)	Homes Goods	Bookstores	
191	23	123	53	184	84	73	40	99	131	79	
Antique Stores	Hotel	Furniture Stores	Discount Stores	Gaming facilities (skill games)	Gaming facilities (skill games)	Jewelry Stores	Boutiques	Supermarkets/Groceries	Other	Antique Stores	
42	84	48	67	44	7	42	112	82	57	43	