



Main Street America Transformation Strategy *Elgin, IL*

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About Main Street America

Main Street America has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for more than 40 years. Today it is a network of more than 2,000 neighborhoods and communities, rural, suburban, and big cities, who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through place-based economic development. Main Street America is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Since 1980, over 2,000 programs have used the Main Street Approach, our time-tested framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization.

Main Street America conducts research to document our impact by annually collecting statistical information on the preservation, revitalization, and economic activities in local Main Street programs throughout the country.



About the Main Street Approach

The Main Street Approach™ is Main Street America's framework for community revitalization. Centered around Four Points, the Approach offers community-based revitalization initiatives with a strategic, adaptable framework for downtown transformation that is easily tailored to local conditions.



Every community has a unique set of place-based assets, anchors, and consumer markets that can contribute to a healthy and vibrant business district. Leveraging those assets through a targeted economic development strategy requires a thorough understanding of the marketplace. One of the best ways to help retain existing businesses and recruit new ones is to prepare information about your existing customer base and better understand potential new customer segments that could be served by your business district.

Local Main Street Programs provide an important benefit by developing a comprehensive analysis of the district market that aligns community vision and consumer data with strategies that drive the organization's revitalization programming. Through the Main Street Approach, we work together with organization leaders to understand market data and develop comprehensive strategies to deliver comprehensive Main Street transformation. This approach accomplishes several goals:

- Builds local knowledge and understanding of your district's economy to create a foundation for successful revitalization;
- Identifies current strengths of the business mix and existing business clusters;
- Supplies relevant consumer data to the revitalization program so it can help existing businesses become stronger;
- Identifies opportunities for future business attraction and business cluster expansion; and
- Builds a strategic framework for niche development, including real estate development, business development, promotions, marketing, branding, etc.

This philosophy is encompassed by the Main Street Approach Refresh. At the core of the new Main Street Approach are economically grounded “**Transformation Strategies**.” These Strategies articulate a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing a downtown or commercial district’s economy. They are informed by a solid understanding of local and regional market data and sustained and inclusive community engagement. Most activities within an organization’s annual workplan as part of the Main Street Approach should then be guided by Transformation Strategies and aligned with a direction and outcome.

As part of our technical assistance, and to help make the new format easier to adopt, the National Main Street Center developed nearly 20 “*off-the-shelf*” strategies, known as Catalyst Strategies, that can be employed in a range of conditions across a variety of communities. These are, essentially, ready-made Transformation Strategies.

About Illinois Main Street

Since its inception, Illinois Main Street (IMS) has been extraordinarily effective at working with communities across the state to revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts through place-based economic development.

IMS works with communities across the state to foster local economic development and enhance overall quality of life. The program does this by providing hands-on training, statewide workshops, networking opportunities, and access to resources of community organizations focused on revitalizing their older or historic commercial districts.

Founded by Lieutenant Governor Bob Kustra in 1993, the program was administered by the Lt. Governor’s Office and received design services from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency until 2015 when the program lost all state funding. In 2018, with support from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, the National Main Street Center re-launched Illinois Main Street and is the current administrator.

Now, Illinois Main Street supports a network of communities across the state that are working to bring prosperity to their older and historic downtowns and commercial districts.

IMS programs have collectively secured nearly **\$1.2 billion in public and private reinvestment**, added over **11,000 jobs**, created **over 2,400 new businesses**, and **rehabilitated 1220 buildings** since 1993. Now in its 30th year, Illinois Main Street is entering a new phase of dynamic growth powered by collaboration and tenacious leadership.

Purpose of a Transformation Strategy Visit

A Transformation Strategy service is provided by Illinois Main Street in partnership with Main Street America. The purpose is to give the local Executive Director, Board Members, committees, interested parties, and city leaders, an opportunity to:

- (a) Discuss and digest community wide survey results
- (b) Understand current market data and trends through analysis
- (c) Gather feedback through focus groups of organization leaders, partners and stakeholders
- (d) Utilize all information collected to develop a strategy or strategies to guide program work

The Transformation Strategy process benefits from gathering and taking into consideration data and information from multiple sources that help provide a holistic view for decision-making. Data sources that informed the Elgin, IL Transformation Strategy process include information provided:

| ESRI | Community Engagement | Main Street | Existing Plans |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tapestry Segmentation• Market & Economic Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus Groups: 4 groups 56 people• Surveys: 1256 Responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site Visit• Network experiences, outreach and technical assistance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• City of Elgin• DNA internal document• Explore Elgin |

Visit Overview

Illinois Main Street in partnership with Main Street America met with the Downtown Neighborhood Association of Elgin (DNA Elgin) staff, board, partners, and stakeholders as a part of their overall downtown strategic planning. DNA Elgin distributed a community-wide survey ahead of the visit, which was reviewed with staff and board members. Onsite interviews were conducted with staff, board, committee members, city leadership and elected officials, as well as property and business owners. The purpose of the onsite interviews was to gather input to understand current perceptions of, as well as future vision for the downtown commercial district.

The Transformation Strategy Visit took place on May 8-9, 2023. Day one of the visit consisted of staff and board members reviewing survey and market data, a community tour and focus group meetings. The focus groups included the participation of 56 individuals. Day two consisted of a final debrief of all direct input received along with a recommendation for Transformation Strategies, which were determined by market-based research, business/asset inventory, existing community plans, and community input. Further discussion of implementation through existing and new workplans took place.

Focus Groups Participants

Business owners meeting

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Greg Shannon | Elgin Public House |
| Brandon Yaniz | The Adept Traveler |
| Joy Symonds | Symonds Madison funeral home |
| Brian Stanton | Arabica Café |
| Stan | Arabica Café |
| Erin Rehberg | Side Street Studio Arts |
| Kevin Echevarria | Dream Hall |
| Mark Lane | DPK Creative |
| Tom Hill | Steep n Clay |
| Betsy Kuhn | Elgin Knit Works |
| Grace Richard | Downtown resident |
| Karin Jones | Jones Insurance |
| Sarah Mooney | Funky Rooster Tattoo and art gallery |
| Amy Porter | Alchemy Tattoo and art gallery |
| Tom Hokenson | ETC Coworking |
| Ursula | Martini Room |
| Steve Kroiss | 79 Ratio technology .services |
| Patricia Williams | Literacy Connection |
| Parker Thompson | Elgin Community Bikes |
| Jamie Berry | Vern's Tavern |

Property owners and developers meeting

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Heidi Lapin | WT Group, 40 DuPage project |
| Patrick Sakolari SR | |
| Patrick Sakolari JR | |
| Neil Sakolari | |
| Tom Brockner | |
| Don Rage | |
| Jim Compton | |
| Vince Marrone | |
| Phil Marrone | |
| Grant Born | |
| Kyle Martin | |
| Chris Davis | |
| Ben Glunz | |

Elected officials meeting

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Tony Lucenko | Elgin Development Group |
| Carole Medal | Gail Borden Public Library |
| Mavilen Silva | Senator Cristina Castro, Chief of Staff |
| Krisilee Murphy | Explore Elgin Area visitors Bureau |
| Marc Mylott | City Community Development Director |
| John Steffen | City Councilor |
| Dave Kaptain | Mayor |
| Richard Kozal | City Manager |
| Dustin Good | City Councilor |

DNA Elgin meeting

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Steve Kroiss | President |
| Joy Symonds | Treasurer |
| Jennifer Fukala | Executive Director |
| Mark Novelli | Secretary |
| Brian Pinon | Vice President |
| Patricia Williams | |
| Jig Patel | |
| Will Dumas | |
| Marc Mylott | City Community Development Director |

Community members meeting

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Barbara Evans | Gifford Park Asso. board member and resident |
| Debra Vruble | Watch Factory Neighborhood president and resident. |
| Steve Fitzgerald | Northeast Neighborhood Asso. President and resident |
| Adrian Mesimo | Downtown resident |
| Emily Baughman | Downtown resident |
| Moriah Hoyt | Downtown resident |
| Eagon Siahaan | Downtown resident |
| Dan Alarcon | Downtown resident |
| James Harvey | Downtown resident |

Key Observations

Overall

- + Elgin has a Downtown with ***character and soul***
- + ***Artistic and creative vibe*** for both businesses and residents
- + ***Community pride*** exists from residents and small businesses within and adjacent to the district
- + New and existing property owners and developers are ***willing to invest***
- + Natural amenities intersect downtown: trails and riverfront, bikeable/walkable environments
- + ***City strategic planning in process and recent tourism plan completed***
- + Designated historic district, architecture and building stock
- + ***Businesses willing to collaborate***
- + ***Investments in streetscape and beautification efforts***, as well as both renovation and new construction is apparent

Organization

- + Multiple groups and organizations willing to partner together
 - Some challenges include crime and safety concerns, unhoused and homeless populations
- + Large Hispanic community and diversity, especially closer to the downtown core
- + Recent Tourism plan showcases strong alignment with downtown as a resource and amenity to drive destination spending and visitors
- + Neighborhood associations exist adjacent to downtown

Promotion

- + Growing Farmers Market with small businesses utilizing as an opportunity to connect with existing consumer base
- + Large number of assets exist at the core for various programming: murals and sculptures, riverwalk, Festival Park, Hemmen's Auditorium, Library, DuPage Ct., Casino, history museum, as well as multiple cultural arts businesses
- + Different organizations take on special events and activities to draw residents and visitors

Design

- + Streetscape and beautification efforts are noticeable throughout downtown
 - Beautiful historic lighting, banners, planters, trees, bricks, crosswalks etc.
- + Challenges with safety and lighting in the evening, specific areas in need of attention: some troubled parking lots and alleyways
- + Wayfinding: welcoming gateway and directional signage leading towards downtown missing from major throughfares

Economic Vitality

- + Strong entrepreneurial spirit with businesses willing to collaborate and support each other
 - Small businesses in various parts of their lifecycle: few years – 5 generations
- + Organic business sales, or transitions have happened

- + Challenges connecting with City Hall and clear directive on resources available
 - DNA of Elgin provides support, with support needed from municipality after “hand-off”
- + Growing farmers market helping to incubate businesses
- + Existing Dream Hall and ArtSpace Lofts: Incubating culinary and industry, as well as artists with live and workspaces respectively
- + Upcoming TIF project with 40 residential units to come

How to Use This Report

Main Street America’s Transformation Strategy Report aims to guide the reader through our Four-Point Approach. It is more responsive to the economic context, community input, and how outcomes are directly measurable to revitalizing the district. One of the best ways to understand how your district is performing, help retain existing businesses, and recruit new businesses is by preparing information about the specific customer base that is currently being served and who could be served by the downtown main street district. This report looks at the following factors that help the main street program develop a comprehensive analysis of the downtown that aligns vision and consumer data with catalyst strategies that drive revitalization programming.

- Create a foundation for successful revitalization by tapping into local knowledge to understand the district’s economy;
- Identify current strengths of the business mix with existing business clusters;
- Supply relevant and up-to-date consumer data to the local revitalization organization so it can help existing businesses become stronger;
- Identify opportunities for future business attraction, district programming, and business cluster expansion;
- Build a strategic framework for market niche development, including real estate development, business development, promotions, marketing and branding, etc.

The transformation strategy can serve as the foundation of the revitalization program’s work. Most activities in the local revitalization program should be guided by the recommended transformation strategy and aligned around an agreed direction and outcome.

Please remember the following:

- Stay on mission, keep everyone on the same page
 - As new partners and volunteers come onboard, communicate how you got here.
- Understand the market
 - As the local revitalization program pursues new businesses and customer segments, refer to the market data.
- Vet new project ideas
 - Do they fit/reinforce identified transformation strategy?
- Inspire
 - Use this report and previous reports, case studies, and best practices to inspire when you get stuck

Community Survey Results

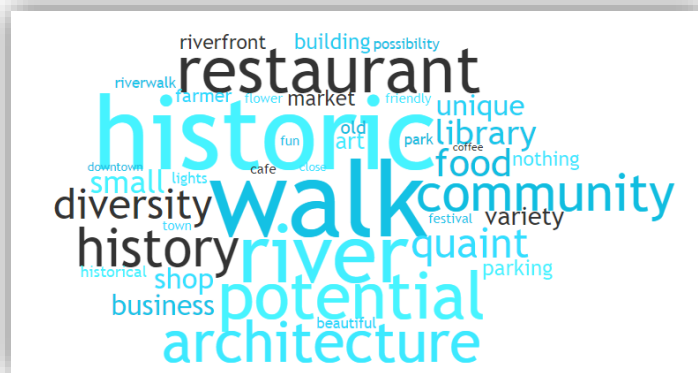
For Downtown Elgin a survey was employed to gather input from residents, businesses, and key stakeholders from the community. **The survey was available in both English and Spanish. DNA Elgin, with the help of various partners, distributed the survey across the community and received 1,256 responses, which is a fantastic response overall.**

Questions were geared toward surfacing viewpoints about the downtown, challenges and opportunities the downtown is facing, desired business types, purchasing habits and overall attitudes and perceptions about Downtown Elgin. The following represents an analysis of those responses. The PowerPoint presentation with each survey response is provided in the Appendix section of this report.

Why a survey?

Community Survey | Open to anyone who might live, work, or visit downtown Elgin. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information, seek knowledge people possess about the commercial district, understand community attitudes towards the district, find out shopping preferences, and learn when, why, and how often people visit the district. The following section highlights the responses to key questions in the survey:

What one word comes to mind as you think about things you like about downtown?



Analysis | Top words are **historic**, **(river)walk**, **restaurant**, **community**, **architecture**, and **potential**.

Comments focused on the environment, people, and businesses. Outdoor amenities like the river walk and bike trail were also mentioned along with architecture. There is an authentic sense of place in Elgin. People enjoy the small businesses, ambiance, and diverse community. Words also describe what

they appreciate about downtown and how they like to use their downtown district. Participants enjoy the historic architecture and nature of downtown, celebrating the history and culture of the district.

What one word comes to mind as you think about things you dislike about downtown?

Analysis | Top words are **homeless** and **empty** and to a lesser degree parking. Survey respondents do not like to see vacancies and would like to see more retail opportunities. There is an overall concern regarding business turnover.

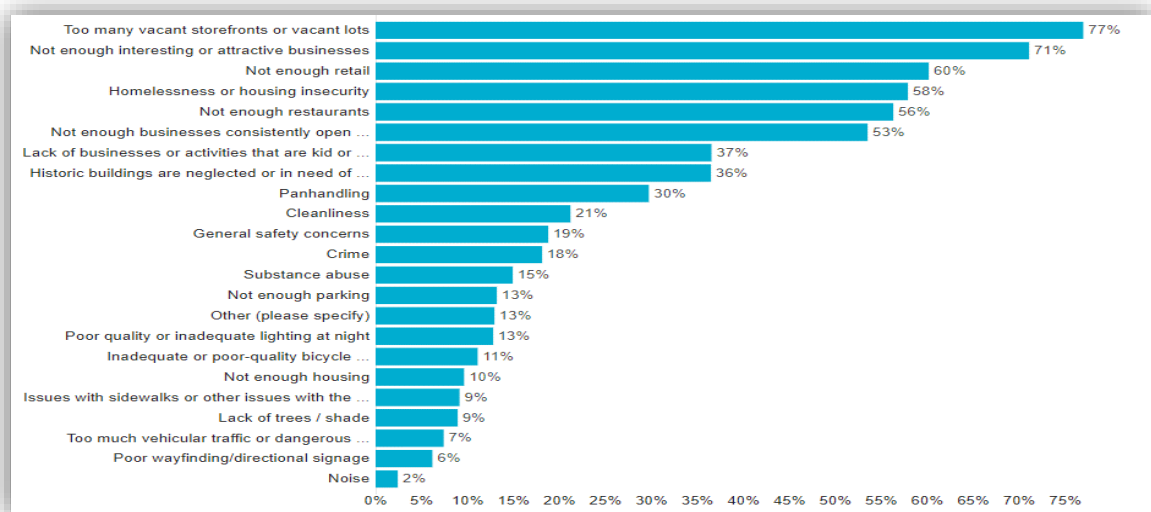


Safety, or feeling unsafe was also mentioned as a deterrent to a downtown experience. Some examples included traffic speeds and nighttime lighting. Solving to help with homelessness and housing insecurity is not the role of Main Street organizations. However, being a connector, advocating and understanding resources and providing opportunities to collaborate with other organizations are typical ways the downtown organization can participate working with their community.

Which of the following are issues in Downtown Elgin?

Analysis | When analyzing the overall rankings, the top concerns are:

1. Too many vacant storefronts or vacant lots 77%
2. Not enough interesting or attractive businesses 71%
3. Not enough retail 60%
4. Homelessness or housing insecurity 58%
5. Not enough restaurants 56%
6. Not enough businesses consistently open 53%



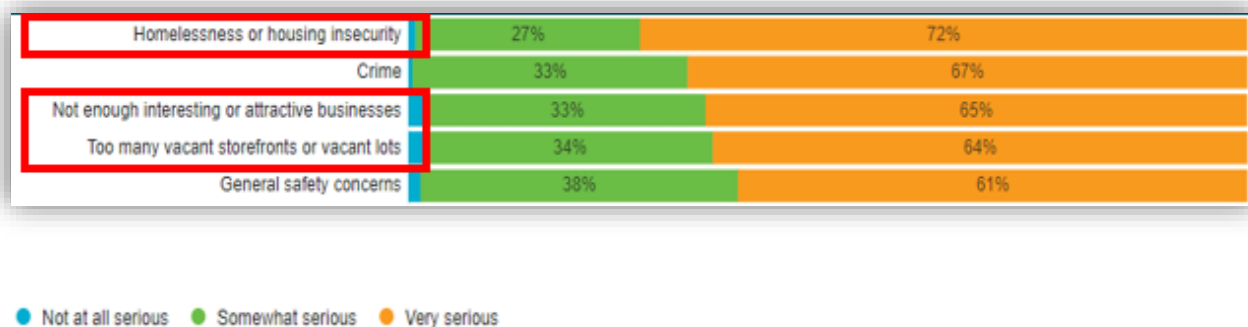
Sentiments on safety walking to and around downtown Elgin were mentioned. Consider prioritizing safety and security efforts including alleyway or street lighting on main corridors that access downtown such as: E. Chicago Street, Highland Ave, and Douglas Ave. Challenges can be highlighted with an evening lighting audit, as well as additional conversations with residents.

Parking is available in several locations throughout downtown, but there is a perception that there are not enough parking spaces. Uniform signage for all parking lots and information about parking available on websites and social media channels can help improve the perception. Improved lighting and pedestrian pathways to and from available parking, as well as lot infrastructure can aid in lot usage.

Overall vacancies and the business mix are on the mind of participants as it pertains to how they like to use downtown, which tends to be towards retail and restaurants. Businesses hosting inconsistent hours can also add to the frustration of customers when coming downtown to shop or eat.

How serious a challenge are these issues in Downtown Elgin?

As there can be multiple issues important to participants of the survey, when asked to prioritize the seriousness of the issues identified, respondents focused on homelessness, which can occasionally correlate to crime, vacant storefronts or vacant lots, and not enough interesting or attractive businesses. Additional alignment to the previous question can be found highlighted in homelessness or housing insecurity, not enough interesting or attractive businesses and too many vacant storefronts or vacant lots.



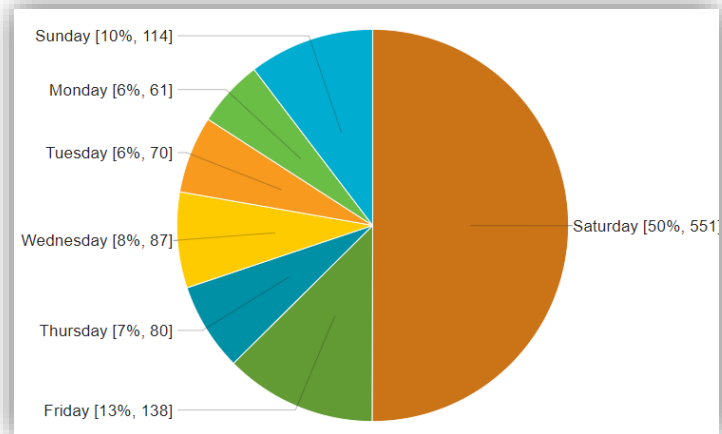
As demographics shift, there are new ways people patronize a downtown district. The survey suggests an opportunity for downtown, when considering business attraction, to dive deeper into the desired business mix and aligning business recruitment efforts with current demographic needs. Especially considering high residential density exists closest to downtown.

The following questions are regarding shopping in Elgin.

What day of the week do you most frequently shop (not just in Downtown Elgin)?

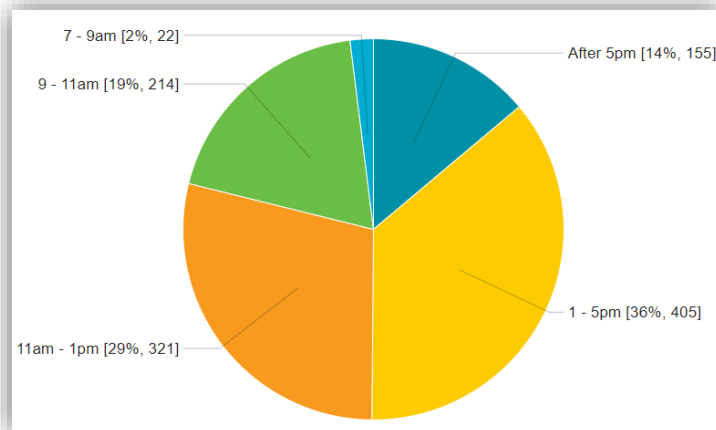
Analysis | When analyzing the overall rankings, the day to focus resident and visitor spending is Saturday.

Friday and Sunday are almost equal for the second most popular day to shop in downtown Elgin. Businesses should really focus on the weekend to capture the most consumers and consider evening hours for commuting residents.



What time of day do you most frequently shop (not just in Downtown Elgin)?

Looking at the survey, respondents prefer visiting downtown from 1:00pm – 5:00pm at 36%.



When combining the top timeframes, the preferred window of time is from 11:00am – 5:00pm accounting for 65% of survey respondents.

Businesses can use this information to understand what hours might work best. However, we must also consider the demographics of those who took part in the survey to know if respondents are in line with their target market, as well as new or growing markets.

The following questions are regarding housing in Downtown Elgin.

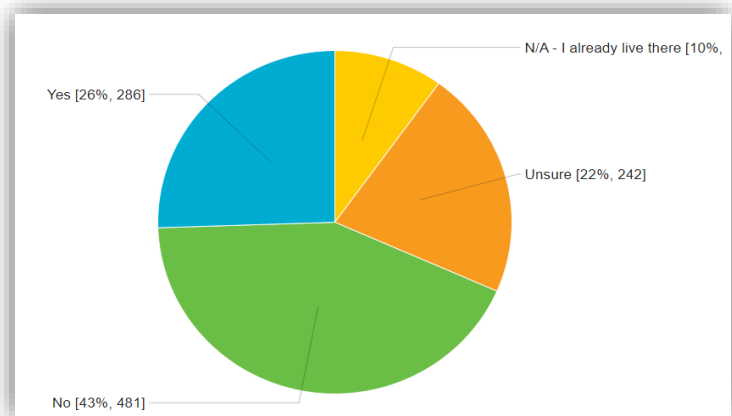
Would you live in Downtown Elgin if you could?



Analysis | Survey results show a majority “no” answers.

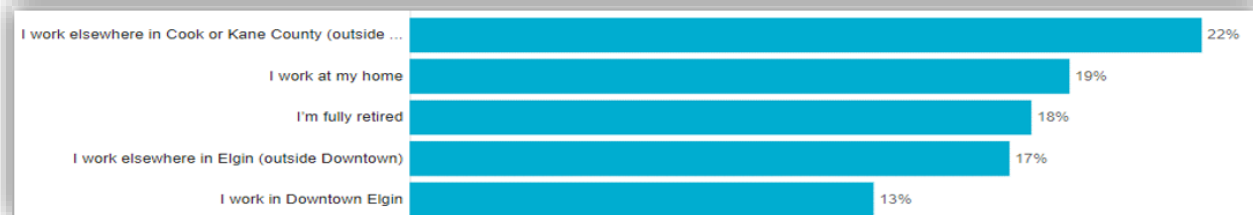
Top reasons someone would not live downtown are having a preference for a yard or larger home, safety, or that they already live in adjacent neighborhood close enough to downtown via walking or biking.

Other sentiments included noise levels, traffic and no residential amenities such as a grocery or dry cleaners. Immediate residential density in and adjacent to downtown would suggest an opportunity to recruit businesses or encourage products to include 24/7 residential amenities.



The following questions are regarding occupation or employment, residence, age, ethnicity, and gender of participants.

Which of the following statements below describe your current occupation / employment?



Analysis | Top inputs from community survey include

1. I work elsewhere in Cook or Kane County 22%
2. I work at my home 19%
3. I'm fully retired 18%

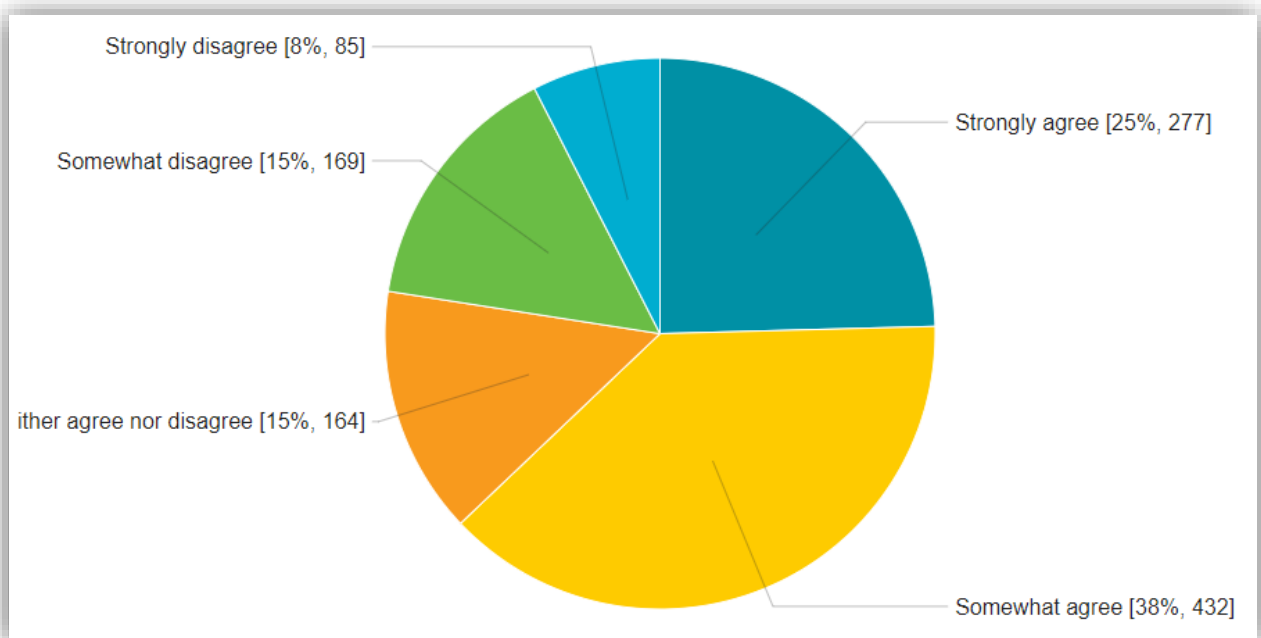
Most survey takers are full-time residents of Elgin (83% of respondents). In terms of age, 62% of respondents are between 35 – 64. Regarding gender, 67% of respondents identified as women, and 28% identified as men.

Regarding race and ethnicity, 75% of survey respondents identified as white, only 13% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino even though more than 60% of residents within a 5-mile radius of downtown are Hispanic/Latino. This is an opportunity for DNA Elgin to increase and improve their overall outreach efforts to connect, understand and involve the Hispanic/Latino community.

Please rate the degree to which you agree with this statement: “I personally feel welcome, comfortable, and safe in and around Downtown Elgin.”

Even though the positive responses to this question are a clear majority of respondents, there are 23% of respondents that don't feel welcome, comfortable, or safe in downtown Elgin.

The goal of every Main Street Program should be to have a commercial district that is welcoming and a hub for community activity.



Market Overview

The market overview section evaluates the market based on trying to ascertain the inherent competitive advantages of downtown Elgin, IL.

Together with community input, as well as current place-based assets and anchors we can develop Transformation Strategies.

Analysis | Most diversity found 5-10 min from downtown with a younger median age at the core. There is also a higher-than-average household Income than the state/US averages at the 5 min drive time. The highest average household size also exists closest to downtown, as well as service and blue-collar occupations.

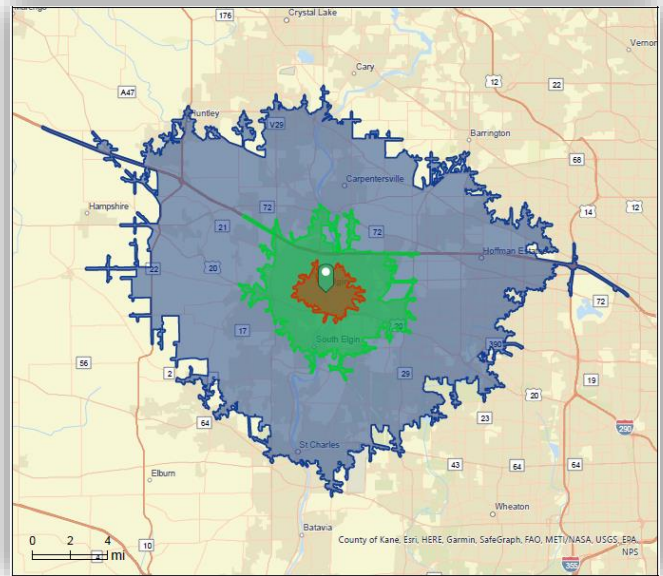


Figure 1: 5-, 10-, and 20-minute drive times

Although income levels are above average the highest unemployment can be found closer to downtown. Then, at the 20-min walk time, there is an aging population that can be found. 2027 trends indicate an increase in households and median household income levels with decreases in overall population, households and families. However, the 20-min drivetime indicates extremely competitive markets pulling residents from utilizing local businesses and amenities.

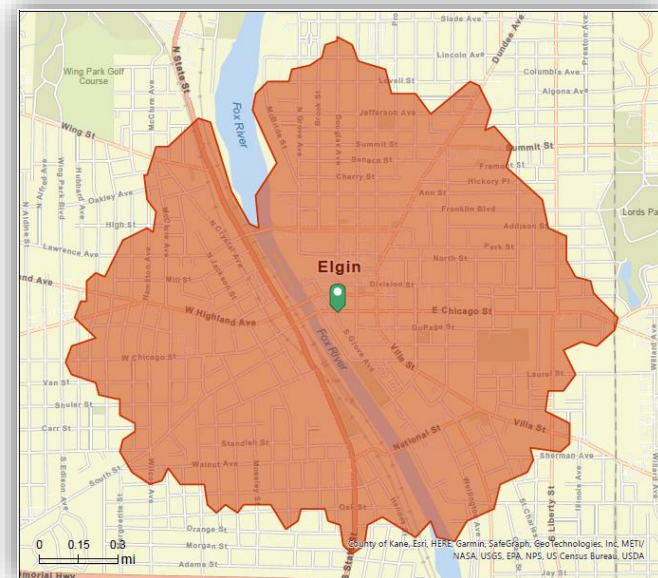


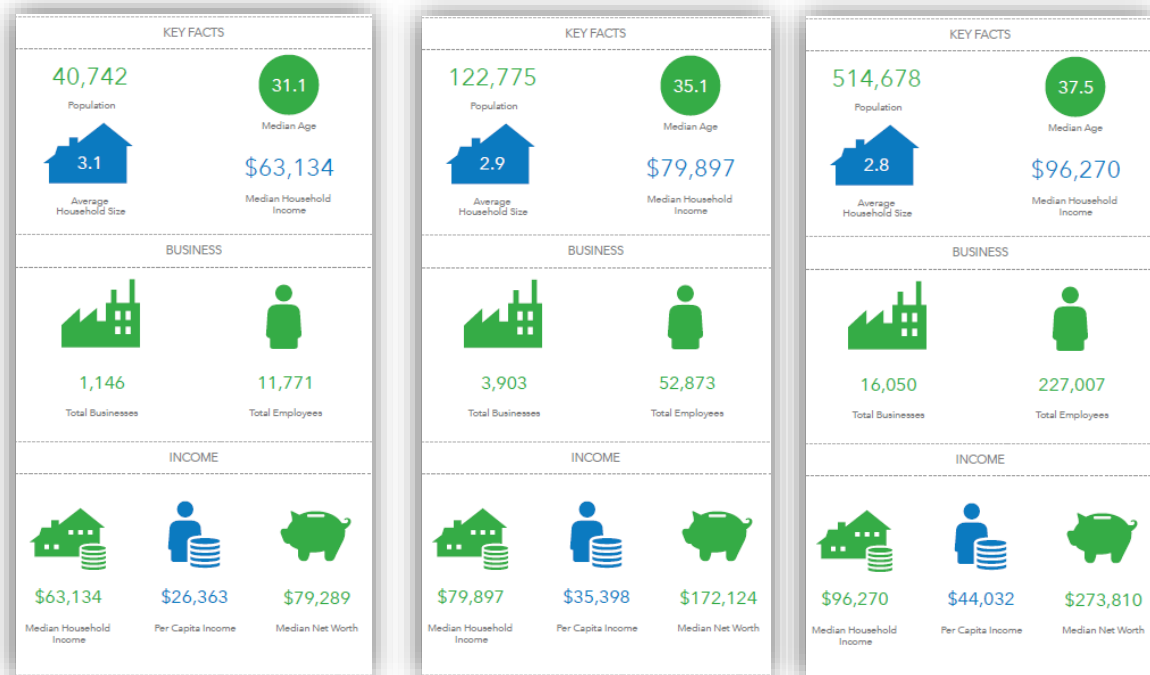
Figure 2: 20-minute walking radius

The 20-min walk, and 5-min drive have similar Key Facts, however there is a significant population difference with 20-min walk housing 20,793 people and the 5-min drive at 40,742.

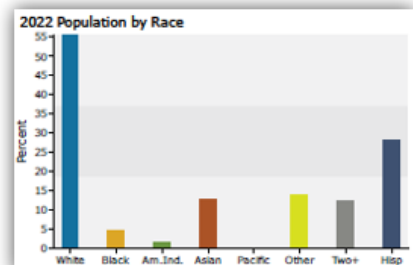
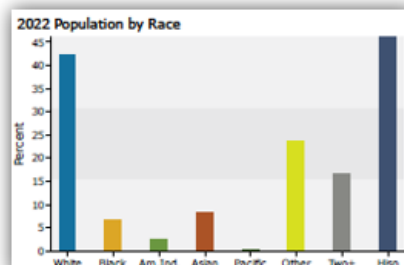
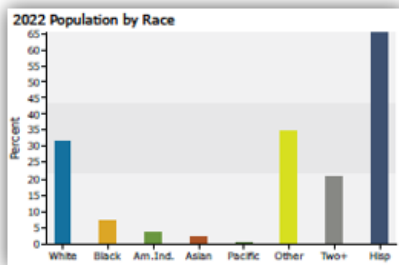
Data continues to show a large portion of the population reside within the 5-min drivetime.

Overall, there is also an aging population but increase in owner households with the youngest demographic and increase in household size found closer to downtown.

The following represents summary charts of collected market data based on a series of 3 drive times (5 min., 10 min., and 20 min).



When looking at population by race, the highest diversity can be found at the core. Majority of the population at the 5-minute drive time are Hispanic, followed by Other, White and Two +. The median household income numbers at the 5- minute radius is significantly higher than state and U.S. average, while the 5 and 10-minute radius are also both higher than the U.S. average. Closest to the core, 19.5% of household incomes range from \$100K-\$149K. The 20-minute walk demographic and income comparisons closely resemble the 5-minute drive time.



Tapestry Segmentation

Psychographics is the study of personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles. Psychographic studies of individuals or communities can be valuable in the fields of marketing, demographics, opinion research, prediction, and social research in general.

Tapestry psychographic data helps communities and businesses understand consumer lifestyle choices, what they buy, and how they spend their free time. Tapestry classifies US residential neighborhoods into 14 unique LifeMode groups and 67 unique segments based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and commonly shared traits.

The top psychographic profiles for Elgin, IL are used to gauge possible shopping characteristics of downtown's largest potential shopping demographic. *Featured are the top segments.*

Family Extensions

20 Min Walk – 24.2%

5 Min Drive – 24.8%

This segment has the largest average household size with a lower-than-average median age. 64.3% of this market are known to rent their home.

40% of this population was born abroad with family members who speak only Spanish. Many members of the family being immigrants and first generation.

Households are multigenerational, and extremely family-oriented with a lower-than-average median HH income and net worth.

However, even with a lower budget index (60-70), the segment tends to spend more on apparel & services than housing and food.

[Family Extensions Full Profile Link](#)



Diverse Convergence

20 Min Walk – 37.8%

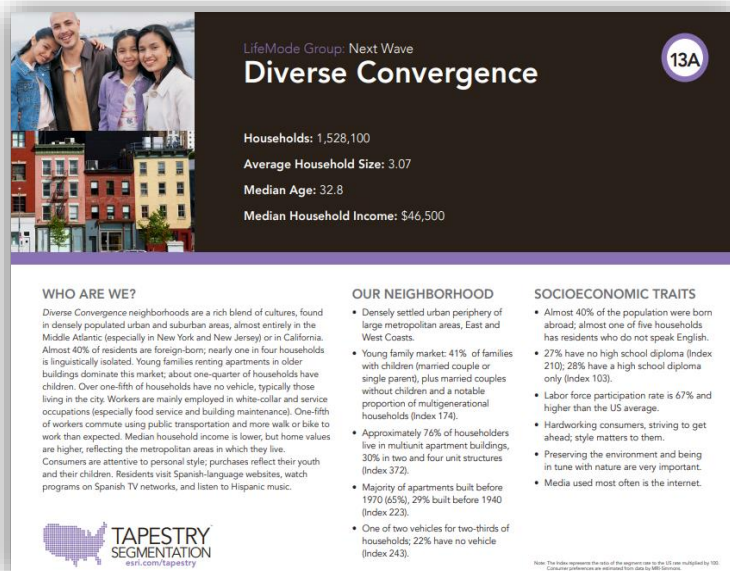
5 Min Drive – 20.6%

Market tends to be young families where almost 40% were also born abroad. For these households one in five have family who do not speak English, and do not use English as a primary language.

Of all the tapestries, this market is the highest diversity index with an average of 72% renting their home.

The median HH income of this segment is near the US average, however, known to be below median net worth.

[Diverse Convergence Full Profile Link](#)



Workday Drive

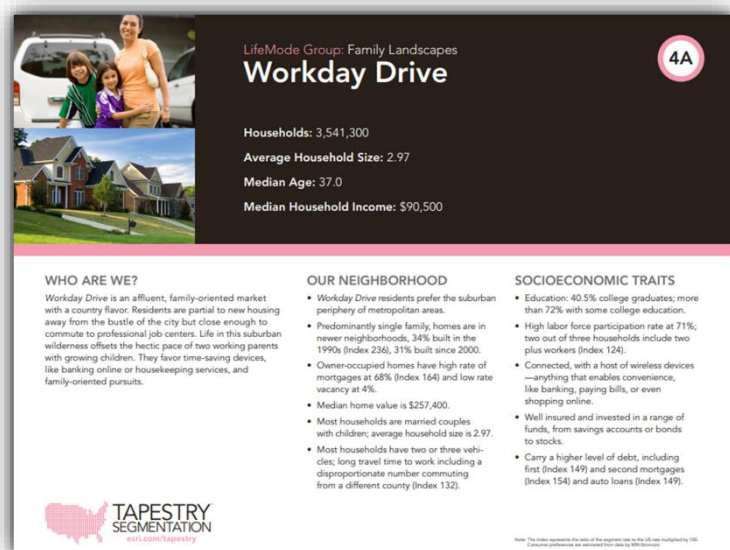
10 Min Drive – 10.9%

This segment is made up of young family-oriented households who prefer to live in suburban areas that are close to city districts.

Although the market is known to be the lowest diversity index compared to other segments, this segment has the highest median household income and net worth. Both are above the U.S. average with 85% homeowners.

Their average household budget is also above average and after expenses such as retirement and social security, budgets are used on apparel and services.

[Workday Drive Full Profile Link](#)



Community Input | Online Surveys + Focus Groups

Online Survey Observations

Overall, those who took the survey enjoy the historic character of downtown, unique small businesses and the natural outdoor and cultural amenities downtown has to offer. Downtown has a walkable environment and the community appreciates the restaurants, special events/activities, diversity and potential of downtown Elgin.

Safety, homelessness and building occupancy are top concerns. Those who took the survey want to find ways to strengthen small businesses, encourage property owner investment and reduce overall turnover to help retain and grow entrepreneurs.

Respondents note a desire for more family friendly businesses providing things to do for younger people and immediate residents. Downtown is currently underutilized by a large residential demographic closest to the core. Natural amenities like the riverwalk, certain public infrastructure and some buildings are observed to need maintenance and upkeep.

There are wonderful locally owned businesses and survey takers would like to see an increase in variety and consistency in hours to be able to patronize downtown more often. Existing demographics, along with the businesses and destinations most often visited, can provide insight as to how downtown is currently utilized and perhaps help businesses better understand what consistent hours to hold.

Even with communities in close proximity and competition, many respondents crave an opportunity to prioritize patronizing their local community by rediscovering downtown and what it has to offer.

| COMMUNITY INPUT THROUGH ONLINE SURVEYS | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| COMMUNITY VISION FOR DOWNTOWN | | | |
| ECONOMIC VITALITY | DESIGN | PROMOTION | ORGANIZATION |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Small Business Retention: Decrease turnover+ Business hours: Consistent or open outside normal 9-5 hours+ Business Variety: Enjoy locally owned small businesses. Embrace diversity. Consider family friendly things to do, food & drink strengths. Retail & restaurants are desired+ Filling available spaces: Business recruitment and overall development efforts+ Resources: Help with both exterior and interior improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Design safety: litter, cleanliness, lighting. Crime and safety concerns noted+ Built environment: Historic preservation of existing architecture+ Riverwalk development: Increased access to underutilized natural resource+ Façade: exterior improvements to buildings+ Walkability: Downtown and trails considered an amenity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Events: Arts and culture highlighted+ Outdoors: Continued connection with parks, riverfront and trails+ Marketing/promotions Enjoy existing events with a desire for additional retail and things for young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Partnership Cultivation: Resources and action for homelessness and unhoused populations. Crime and safety concerns+ Alignment: With city and tourism plans+ Business and Property Owner Engagement: for business retention and recruitment. Intentional development of entrepreneurs |

Focus Group Observations

Participation in focus groups shows strong community partnerships and special priority to finding more ways to align with each other. Elgin is felt to be an artistic and creative community with a diverse population and large Hispanic community. Residential density can be found in and adjacent to downtown with neighborhood community groups willing to participate in strengthening the vitality of downtown. There is overall support for building upon the character and uniqueness of downtown Elgin.

Focus groups touched on recent and upcoming developments noting community partnerships and collaborations, a growing arts presence, expanding farmers market and new residential and cultural investments. Participants enjoy what Elgin has to offer in terms of programs and activities but want to see extended vibrancy throughout the weekdays, or after events and not just attendance for a one-time special event. There are amenities in place that appear to be underutilized by the community.

Some of the larger challenges discussed with business and property owners were around communicating fully with the City and connecting with existing resources. Smaller businesses and developers felt they were at a particular disadvantage having less experience, coupled with lack of guidance. Although Elgin DNA has been a strong advocate and resource, there is a desire from the group for increased participation from the municipality to lead them fully through the process of understanding resources, streamlining the development process and overall working with the city.

Residents have global pride for their downtown community and its uniqueness. There was discussion around perception vs. reality with regards to downtown's past reputation, current safety and homeless challenges. There is a desire to investigate safety through design elements like targeted clean up and lighting to help with pedestrian foot traffic. Additionally, a desire for downtown to continue to foster businesses with residential amenities in mind.

Discussion took place on identifying core target markets to align economic development strategy and promotions towards the needs, wants and aspirations of the markets with highest economic returns.

| COMMUNITY VISION FOR DOWNTOWN | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| COMMUNITY INPUT THROUGH FOCUS GROUPS | | | | |
| ECONOMIC VITALITY | DESIGN | PROMOTION | ORGANIZATION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Small Business Retention: resources for existing businesses to help grow/scale+ Small Business Attraction: Public or private incubator spaces to test product market fit and align+ Streamline: Communication and processes+ Property Owner & Small Business Engagement & Resources: Recruitment ready spaces. One-stop-shop and consistent process to access available resources+ Business hours: Consistent or aligned with festival activities+ Business Mix: Consider existing markets / residents, young and multi-generational families, cultural diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Design safety: Street and alleyway lighting and activation. (Consider CPTED strategies). Traffic calming features.+ Wayfinding: Gateway/welcome and trail/bike path signage. Consistent/branded and visible signage (parking)+ Riverwalk development & Festival Park: Increased programming & access to underutilized natural resource. Beautify back building façade towards river.+ Walkability: Connectivity between cultural and natural assets throughout. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Community image building campaign: Generate community pride+ Branding Campaign: Reduce negative stereotype for residents, customers and visitors+ Events: Programming of underutilized spaces – riverwalk, Festival Park and Hemmens Auditorium. Alignment with large events with existing businesses.+ Farmers Market: continued investment for business incubation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Partnership Cultivation: Resources and action for homelessness and unhoused populations. Addressing crime and safety concerns+ Alignment: With city and tourism plans+ Community engagement: Connecting with existing residents to best understand local market | |

Suggested Transformation Strategies

Elgin has a good stock of buildings in the downtown core, easily accessible parking, natural assets including the riverwalk, as well as an established transportation hub. The assets are in place to support a comprehensive and robust economic development strategy. As growth and development is currently observed and, on the horizon, more focus needs to be placed on targeting new investments geared towards the population that lives in and is closest to downtown. Past strategies placed an emphasis on attracting visitor spending and competing with offerings of other nearby communities.

During the city officials' focus group, it was mentioned that strategies to attract visitors to downtown over the years have not provided the expected results. Past strategies placed an emphasis on attracting visitor spending and competing with offerings from other nearby communities. Downtown Elgin is in direct competition for that market segment with neighboring communities. While an overemphasis has been placed on attracting out-of-town visitors, a large population of households located within a 10-minute radius with purchasing power is not being effectively targeted.

Utilizing current strengths and uniqueness, while developing approaches to economic development with existing residential market segments in mind will lead to desired visitor attraction. To refocus on the nearby residents, those that live within a 10-mile radius, the following strategies are suggested as complementary to the Transformation Strategy. Demographic data for this radius shows a high concentration of Hispanic/Latino/a/x households. Ideas on how to address and focus on this target market:

- Get to know your target market: deeper understanding of this population's shopping habits, interests, and unmet needs is essential. Studying the ESRI Tapestry Segments (Family Extensions, Diverse Convergence) is a good starting point for understanding the characteristics of this demographic group across the country. It would be helpful to complement it with more local research, a survey or focus groups designed specifically for the Elgin Hispanic/ Latino/a/x residents for example.
- Involve your target audience: increase outreach and engagement with the community, meet community members where they are to involve them in programming and event design.

Strategy #1

Increase community engagement to inform authentic Elgin character and soul.

Involve the community, the target market, in what happens downtown. Implement a business retention and attraction strategy based on the businesses that the target markets want.

Image building campaign focused on generating community pride.

- Fine tune messaging towards future branding campaign: Consider implementing a social media content strategy with bilingual (English Spanish) content.
- Add events to the calendar to attract large segments of the population: involve the community in the decision of what events to add to the calendar. For example: Children's Day (*Día del Niño*) celebrated in Latin America.

- Identify/inform new business opportunities: Keep in mind 24/7 residential needs that can be added to an existing business.

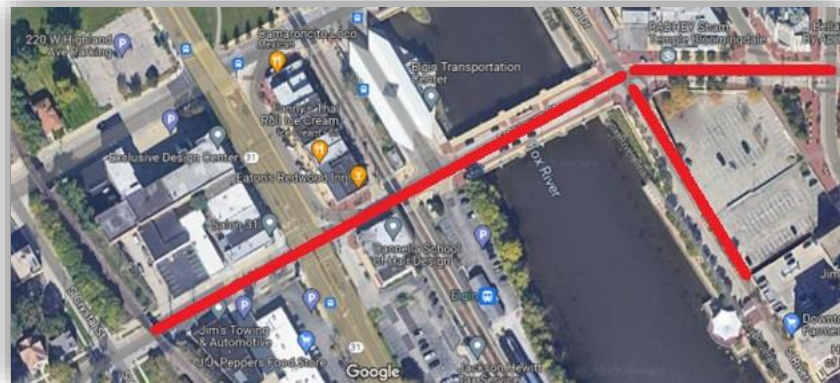
Downtown Perception Campaign: Increase positive opportunities for residents, customers, and visitors.

- Working with economic development partners to align messaging.
- Wayfinding for welcoming environment: gateway, trail connection, standard parking and other signage in every location.
- Considerations for safety corridors, street lighting, clean alleys.

Several participants in the focus groups mentioned getting to and from downtown by foot or bicycle from the residential neighborhoods west of the Fox River poses personal safety challenges. Examples mentioned included: negative loitering around the commercial plaza located at the intersection of W Chicago Street and N State Street, as well as around the Elgin Transportation Center and along the bridge (W Chicago Street).

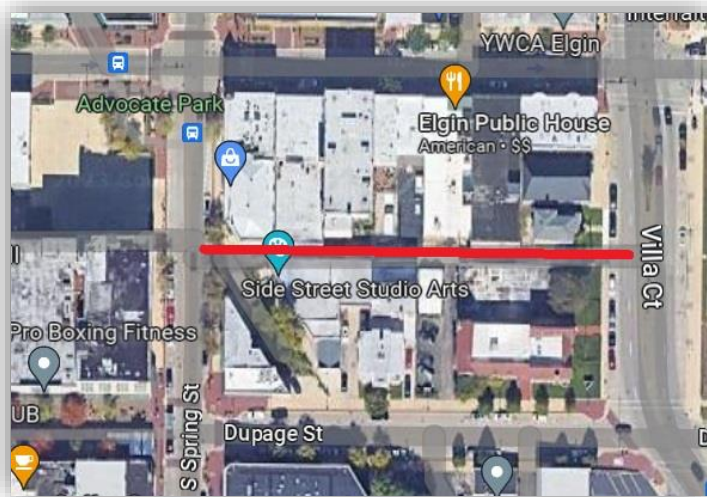
Enhanced safety measures along this access to downtown could increase visits to downtown from the adjacent residential areas. This would need to be coordinated with the Police Department, property owners

and transportation agencies for jurisdiction issues and roles. Examples of considerations include: improved lighting, camera systems, active patrol, outreach to property owners, outreach to individuals along the corridor regarding appropriate/inappropriate behaviors.



Residents also mentioned alleys and streets with poor lighting for moving from one location to another during a “night out”, for example the alley between S Spring Street and Villa Ct./St.

An evening lighting audit can also be utilized to address areas to increase residential and pedestrian safety.



Strategy #2

Informing and participating in a streamlined and clear process for property and small business development

Entrepreneurs and small businesses in general need more guidance for successful recruitment, growth, and retention. Economic development partners can work together on the overall process and approach for small businesses and developers, which can look different than that of larger or seasoned businesses and developers.

Business retention/expansion and attraction: homegrown entrepreneurial development

- Engage property and business owner community to assess needs with an equity lens.
- Working with community economic development partners to target projected spending growth trends.
- Young professionals and families, experiential economies: Focus on business retention and recruitment efforts geared towards youngest median age, young families, and largest average household size living closest to the core.
- Developer toolkit: improvement resources, current market analysis (partner with existing owners to inform toolkit).
- Collect data from district property and business owners to provide input, recommendations and review for possible downtown zoning and code reform.
- Resources and incentives for properties to be ready to recruit businesses.
- Coordinate available opportunities tour with owners and brokers.

Product-based Transformation Strategy Ideas

Strategies are informed by existing market segments within 5- minute radius, tailored to the needs, wants and preference of residents within a 10-mile radius.

- Lifestyle/Retail
- Community assets: cultural & natural amenities
- Restaurants



Recommendations for action

After evaluating existing community plans, community survey input, focus groups conducted and market evaluation, recommendations are made for committee and board consideration. Suggestions should start with using existing work plans and aligning efforts, as well as looking at existing businesses and partners and aligning efforts. Thereafter, additional work plans can be created, and actions taken.

Next action steps to consider

- + Continued advocacy and alignment with Explore Elgin Strategic Plan. Work with Explore Elgin on items pertaining to downtown Elgin called out in the Explore Elgin Strategic Plan to align or develop work plans and programming. Downtown Elgin is a known tourism asset. The Explore Elgin Strategic Plan provides insight as to how to enhance downtown Elgin in general, but also through the lens of tourism. Provide consistent opportunities to communicate, prioritize and collaborate on Explore Elgin downtown recommendations to align work.

Specifics referenced directly from Explore Elgin Plan include:

- Reinvigoration of Riverfront and bike trail
- Enhance Festival Park infrastructure and programming.
- Wayfinding and directional signage for trails and trailheads
- Collaboration on updating outdated zoning ordinances to encourage entrepreneurial investment and business growth.
- Work with city on enforcement of property maintenance ordinances to aid place making.
- More entertainment options: Axe throwing, top golf etc.
- Revitalize Downtown Elgin (ask Explore Elgin what success means to them specifically)
- More collaborative relationships with other orgs.
- Eliminate silos for cohesive message.
- Joint expenses. Consider where above alignment exists to pursue achieving goals together!

- + Deliver business and property owner survey to assess potential needs, resource gaps and priorities. Topics from the seven categories of an entrepreneurial ecosystem include: place & real estate; networking & relationships; financial opportunities; positive entrepreneurial culture; friendly regulation; education & training; and entrepreneurial talent pool.
- + Business retention efforts: Collaborate on one-stop-shop to help access available resources. Encourage small business growth by formalizing existing pipeline or cultivation network.
 - Promote farmers market, incubator space and other possible pop-up opportunities for budding entrepreneurs while working with property owners to ready their spaces for small businesses looking for permanent brick and mortar locations.
 - Focus on restaurant need and demand, as well as family friendly things to do.
 - Encourage existing businesses to carry 24/7 residential products and recruit for residents.
- + Property owner engagement to build awareness on overall community vision for downtown.
- + Review of existing building inventory and provide building stock baseline assessment noting maintenance issues or development and investment challenges. Provide data of common needs and suggest resources and incentives.
- + Safety challenges:
 - Continue connecting, growing and promoting resources for unhoused populations.
 - Consider lighting audit to review pedestrian journey from parking to evening destinations.
 - Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) training opportunity.
- + Promotion and connection with existing natural amenities: Riverwalk, trail and trailhead.
 - Walking and biking to access downtown with signage, bike racks, bike fix station etc.
 - Beautify the back building façade towards river and encourage alley remediation on S. Grove.
- + Evaluate existing events and activities to intentionally align with existing businesses to help increase foot traffic and consumer spending with existing businesses.
 - Programming for underutilized spaces: Riverwalk, Festival Park and Hemmen’s Auditorium.
- + Wayfinding: focus on gateway, directional signage from major throughfares leading downtown.
 - Additional consideration for trail and riverwalk ease of access.





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