



retail strategies // downtown strategies

Downtown 5-Year Action Plan

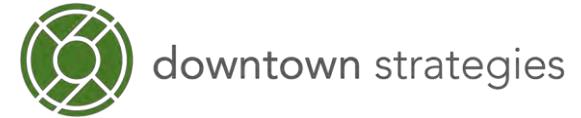
Bedford, Virginia



September 2025



About Us



Who We Are

Downtown Strategies, a division of Retail Strategies, exists to provide realistic, implementable strategies to communities for revitalizing their downtowns. Led by a team of downtown revitalization practitioners and real estate experts, our combination of real-world experience, plus expertise in real estate and retail uniquely qualify us to assist communities with backfilling vacancies, increasing tourism, and enhancing the sense of place in their downtowns. Serving rural communities in 25 states, Downtown Strategies is the leading national firm for downtown revitalization planning with an emphasis on real estate and retail.

5-Year Plan

At Downtown Strategies, we believe that action and implementation are more important than a flashy 20-year vision. Our process is based on our team's experience as practitioners. Our team members have been in your shoes as community leaders and know what it is like to manage downtown revitalization efforts.

Most communities do not suffer from a lack of ideas, they struggle with knowing where to start when it comes to implementing their ideas. Rather than brainstorming everything that you could ever potentially do in your downtown, we focus on a five-year timeframe. This plan is designed to help you identify where your community should focus its energy and effort in the near-term. Implementing these short-term, doable strategies will incrementally shift the trajectory of your downtown and create the spark that you desire.

Our Team



Jenn Gregory

President, Downtown Strategies

jgregory@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Team Management; Policy & Administration



Jeremy Murdock

Community Development Specialist,
Downtown Strategies

jmurdock@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Design; Tourism & Promotion



Laura Marinos

Director of Client Services, Downtown Strategies

laura.marinos@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Client Management; Scheduling



Taylor Johnson

Client Services Manager, Downtown Strategies

tturner@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Organization; Resources; Communication

Our Partnership

Downtown Strategies appreciates partnering with the Town of Bedford, VA on an action-focused 5-Year strategic planning process for Downtown Bedford.

In Bedford, Downtown Strategies conducted an in-market Strategic Visioning Workshop and provides strategies within this 5-year action plan that are implementable, practical, asset-based, and market-driven.

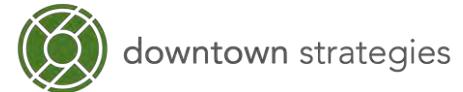
This action-oriented plan was informed by an extensive Market Analysis, comprehensive plan public input, and input from a Stakeholder Input Session. Below is an overview of the partnership schedule:

Partnership Began	November 2024
Kick-Off Call	November 2024
Strategic Visioning Workshop	March 2025
Strategic Plan Presentation	July 2025



downtown strategies

Focus Areas



In this 5-Year Action Plan created for Bedford, Downtown Strategies identified 4 Focus Areas for initiatives to support, strengthen, and enhance downtown. Each focus area was identified based on feedback received during the in-market Strategic Visioning Workshop, as well as the consultant team's expertise and analysis. The 4 Focus Areas for this 5-Year Action Plan include:



Policy & Administration

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for downtown.



Design

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that create a vibrant and inviting place for people.



Tourism & Promotion

Smart promotion initiatives position downtown as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases the community's unique characteristics.



Economic Vitality

Economic Vitality involves analyzing the retail and real estate as the foundation of downtown's redevelopment opportunities and creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators.



Policy & Administration

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

1.1

Action Teams

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

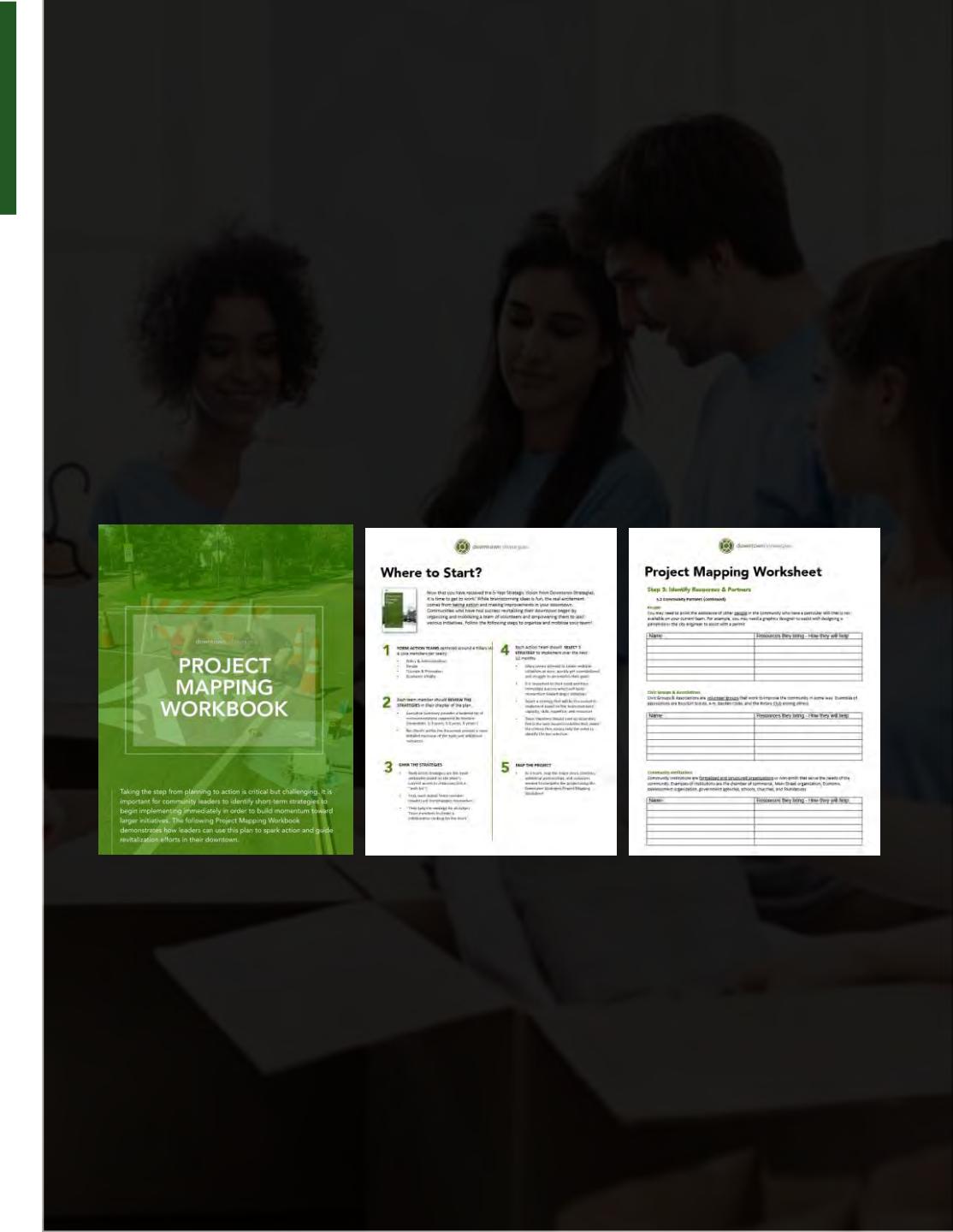
How many times has your community been through strategic planning? Are they jaded that not enough was accomplished afterwards? Implementation is a key focus of our process at Downtown Strategies. In our combined decades of practical experience, creating Action Teams is the most proven method to successful implementation. As the accompanying Project Mapping Workbook details, the Core Team should eventually assemble an Action Team for each Focus Area in this Action Plan. These teams may be represented by existing committees or boards, or they may be newly created groups of volunteers and staff. At the core, following the process of working through the workbook within each team will set your community up for maximum success.

In Bedford

In Bedford, the first Action Team should be formed with the mission to rejuvenate the downtown, thereby creating a vibrant atmosphere for business and social activities. The Action Team should identify areas of need and steps to take to move forward from the 5-Year Strategic Action Plan. Action Team structure should eventually follow the focus areas of this plan; thus, the following teams should be established over time: Policy & Administration, Design, Tourism & Promotion, and Economic Vitality.

The team should rely on recommendations and strategies within this plan as their work plan, meet regularly, encourage collaboration and diversity, and keep themselves accountable for realistic timing of implementation of their various work plan. Having merchant representation on the Action Team will be critical, and communication with stakeholders is key, and notes and minutes should be kept for accountability and transparency.

The consultant team has developed a Project Mapping Workbook, which will be provided during the Implementation Jumpstart and demonstrates how Action Team members can use this plan to spark action and guide revitalization efforts in the focus area of Downtown Bedford. The next phase of our partnership will provide support in getting the Action Team launched.



Establish a Downtown Coordinator Position

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Successful downtown revitalization requires dedicated, focused leadership that can coordinate multiple initiatives, build relationships with stakeholders, and maintain momentum over time. A downtown coordinator serves as the single point of contact for property owners, businesses, and developers while ensuring that revitalization strategies are implemented systematically and effectively.

The most successful downtown districts have dedicated staff who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of historic commercial areas. When properly supported, a downtown coordinator can leverage limited resources to generate significant private investment while building the organizational capacity necessary for sustained revitalization.

Bedford's downtown revitalization efforts currently depend heavily on Town economic development staff, which manages downtown responsibilities alongside broader economic development duties. This creates a significant capacity constraint and represents a vulnerability for sustained downtown progress. With limited marketing budget and no dedicated downtown organization, Bedford lacks the operational infrastructure necessary to implement comprehensive revitalization strategies.

In Bedford

Bedford should establish a dedicated Downtown Coordinator position to provide focused leadership for downtown revitalization while building organizational capacity for long-term success.

Position Structure and Responsibilities

Initial Part-Time Position (20 hours/week):

- Downtown project coordination and implementation oversight
- Property owner and business relationship development
- Marketing and promotional activities coordination
- Grant writing and funding resource development
- Event planning and programming support

Core Responsibilities

- Serve as primary contact for downtown development inquiries
- Coordinate between town departments for downtown projects
- Implement strategic action plan recommendations
- Manage downtown marketing and communication efforts
- Facilitate business retention and recruitment activities

Position Evolution Plan

Year 1-2: Start-up Phase (20 hours/week)

- Establish relationships with key downtown stakeholders
- Implement immediate action plan priorities
- Develop funding base and grant application portfolio
- Create downtown marketing and communication systems

Years 3-4: Growth Phase (30 hours/week)

- Expand programming and event coordination
- Develop comprehensive business development services
- Launch tourism marketing and visitor services
- Coordinate major development projects

Years 5+: Full Implementation (40 hours/week)

- Full-time downtown management and leadership
- Regional tourism and marketing leadership
- Major project coordination and implementation

Underperforming Properties

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Downtown areas are often seen as the economic and cultural heart of a city. Underperforming properties can have a negative impact on the overall economic health of the area. They may contribute to lower local tax revenue and economic activity, as well as the perception of blight, potentially affecting nearby businesses and property values.

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to elevate underperforming properties, and many times, a "carrot and stick" approach is most holistic and effective:



"Carrots" refer to positive incentives, such as financial incentives, recognition and awards, and support for redevelopment.



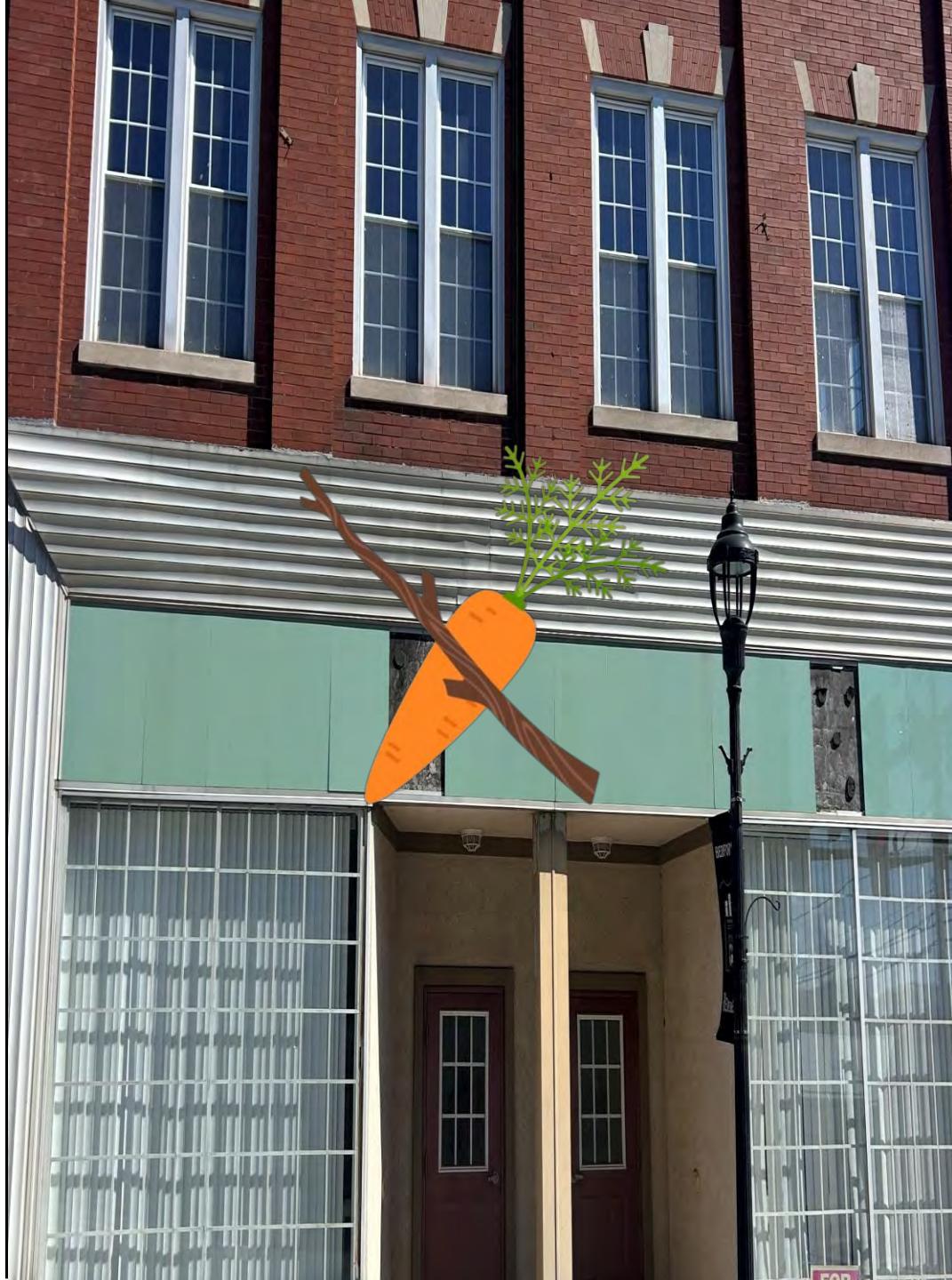
"Sticks" refer to negative consequences, such as code enforcement, taxes and assessments, and eventual loss of property.

In Bedford

In Bedford, the consultant team recommends a "carrot and stick" approach to elevating and improving underperforming properties. The mix recommended is:

Carrots: Better communicate and market existing incentives

Stick: Utilize Minimum Maintenance Requirements and a Vacant Property Registry Ordinance as a deterrent for holding dilapidated properties



Better Communicate Existing Incentives

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Effective communication of available incentives is critical for maximizing downtown property improvements and business development. Many property owners and entrepreneurs remain unaware of existing financial assistance programs, creating a significant gap between available resources and their utilization. When incentives are well-publicized and easily accessible, they can serve as powerful catalysts for private investment.

Bedford currently offers a comprehensive suite of incentives including Enterprise Zone grants (up to 20% for investments over \$100,000), downtown area incentives (10% for investments \$15,000-\$100,000), facade improvement grants (up to \$5,000 matching funds), real estate tax exemptions for rehabilitated properties (50% exemption for five years), and various EDA business incentives. However, based on stakeholder feedback and continued presence of underperforming properties, these valuable programs are not reaching their target audience effectively.

The challenge lies not in the availability of incentives, but in awareness and accessibility. Property owners consistently express frustration about vacant buildings and deteriorating conditions, yet many remain unaware of substantial financial assistance available to address these exact issues.

In Bedford

Bedford should implement a comprehensive incentive communication strategy that transforms awareness of available programs and simplifies the application process for property owners and business entrepreneurs. There are also opportunities to forge partnerships with contractor and architect associations, local banks, real estate agents, and the local and regional Chambers of Commerce to lighten the load of promotion and increase application and funding rates.

A multi-channel communication strategy is detailed to the right.

Multi-Channel Communication Strategy

Direct Outreach Campaign:

- Quarterly letters to all downtown property owners highlighting specific incentive opportunities
- Personal visits from Economic Development Coordinator to major property owners
- Targeted outreach to underperforming properties with customized incentive packages
- Follow-up calls to property owners who have received information but not applied

Digital Communication Enhancement:

- Dedicated incentives webpage with easy-to-understand program summaries
- Downloadable one-page fact sheets for each incentive program
- Online calculator tool showing potential savings and benefits
- Email newsletter featuring success stories and program updates

Success Story Marketing

Demonstrate Program Impact:

- Case studies of successful incentive recipients with before/after photos
- Financial impact data showing leveraged private investment
- Testimonials from participating property owners and business owners
- Annual report highlighting program achievements and community benefits

Property & Maintenance Initiatives

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Minimum Maintenance Standards

Minimum maintenance standards are essential for establishing baseline expectations for property upkeep and enBedford that all buildings contribute positively to the downtown environment. These standards protect public health, safety, and welfare while preserving property values and community character. When properties fall into disrepair, they can create a negative perception that affects neighboring businesses and discourages investment throughout the district.

Effective minimum maintenance standards provide clear, enforceable guidelines for property owners while offering a framework for consistent code enforcement. These standards typically address exterior conditions including structural integrity, façade maintenance, signage requirements, and basic safety features. Having such standards in place demonstrates a community's commitment to maintaining quality development and can serve as a powerful tool for encouraging property improvements.

In Bedford

Bedford's current municipal code does not include specific minimum maintenance standards for downtown commercial properties. Buildings in the downtown are vacant and in disrepair, which causes concern and negative economic impact for neighboring activated buildings. Bedford needs to establish clear minimum maintenance standards specifically for downtown properties that address both interior and exterior conditions. These standards should be designed to ensure that all downtown buildings meet basic safety requirements while contributing to an attractive, welcoming business district.

The community needs to establish clear minimum maintenance standards specifically for downtown properties that address both interior and exterior conditions. These standards should be designed to ensure that all downtown buildings meet basic safety requirements while contributing to an attractive, welcoming business district.

Key components of downtown minimum maintenance standards that should be included are detailed to the right.

Interior Standards

- Basic habitability requirements for occupied structures
- Safety and accessibility compliance
- Electrical, plumbing, and HVAC functionality
- Fire safety and emergency egress requirements

Enforcement Framework

- Regular inspection protocols
- Clear violation notification procedures
- Graduated enforcement measures
- Appeals process for property owners
- Coordination with existing state building code requirements

Virginia municipalities must adopt the Virginia Maintenance Code (VMC), which is largely derived from the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) published by the International Code Council (ICC). The VMC establishes minimum standards for safety, sanitation, security and general maintenance for existing structures.

Property & Maintenance Standards

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Vacant Property Registry Ordinance (VPRO)

Bedford should also consider implementing a Vacant Property Registration Ordinance (VPRO) to address abandoned or vacant properties that often become maintenance problems. Additionally, storage use in downtown B-1 zoning district buildings violates current zoning ordinances, as storage is only permitted as incidental to permitted business uses. Coordinated enforcement between zoning and building code officials, with Town Council support, will be essential to address both vacant property registration and unauthorized storage uses that undermine the commercial intent of the downtown district.

A VPRO typically requires owners of vacant properties to:

- Register vacant properties with the municipality
- Pay annual registration fees
- Maintain properties to minimum standards
- Provide local contact information for property management
- Submit maintenance and security plans

Virginia Code § 15.2-1127 specifically authorizes counties, cities, and towns to require vacant building registration by ordinance. The law allows municipalities to require registration for buildings that have been vacant for 12 months or more and meet specific criteria for "derelict building," "criminal blight," or unauthorized occupancy. Annual registration fees cannot exceed \$100.

The implementation of a VPRO and minimum maintenance standards provides Bedford with essential tools to address its most significant downtown challenge while supporting responsible property owners. By emphasizing incentives and assistance before enforcement, this framework can transform problem properties into community assets while protecting the substantial public and private investments being made in downtown revitalization.

Success will be measured through reduced vacancy rates, improved property conditions, increased private investment in property improvements, and enhanced overall downtown environment that supports business development and tourism growth.



Streamline Development Processes

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Efficient development processes can be the difference between a thriving downtown and one that struggles to attract investment. Complex permitting procedures, unclear requirements, and lengthy approval timelines often discourage property improvements and business development. When development processes are streamlined and predictable, they remove barriers to investment while maintaining necessary regulatory oversight.

Bedford faces a critical transition period with the retirement of its current building official, who has developed creative and flexible approaches to downtown development challenges, particularly regarding upper floor residential conversions and adaptive reuse projects. This institutional knowledge represents a valuable asset that must be preserved and systematized. Additionally, the community's National Register District status requires a development process that balances preservation goals with practical improvement needs.

In Bedford

Bedford should implement a comprehensive development process improvement strategy that captures existing expertise while creating systematic efficiencies for downtown projects.

Document Institutional Knowledge

Preserve Flexible Approaches

- Conduct exit interviews with retiring building official to document successful problem-solving approaches
- Create written guidelines for creative solutions to common downtown development challenges
- Document case studies of successful upper floor residential conversions with specific code interpretations
- Establish protocols for creative sprinkler system alternatives and other adaptive reuse solutions



Knowledge Transfer Program

- Mentorship period between retiring and incoming building officials
- Cross-training with planning and economic development staff
- Documentation of historic district compliance strategies
- Creation of "lessons learned" database for future reference

Fast-Track Permitting System

Expedited Review Process

- Establish 10-business-day review timeline for projects using pre-approved designs
- Create same-day permit issuance for qualifying facade and sign improvements
- Implement priority scheduling for downtown development applications
- Offer pre-application meetings to identify and resolve issues early

Qualifying Project Categories

- Facade improvements following pre-approved design standards
- Interior renovations for existing commercial spaces
- Upper floor residential conversions using documented approaches
- Projects utilizing existing incentive programs

POLICY & ADMINISTRATION Action Team

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Policy & Administration	1.1	Create a series of 4 action teams (Policy & Administration; Design; Tourism & Promotion; and Economic Vitality,) and provide each with the Project Mapping Workbook. Each team should complete the workbook to assist with implementing at least 1 strategy from this plan each year. Begin with one team at a time.	NOW	-	Town
Policy & Administration	1.2	Establish a dedicated Downtown Coordinator position to provide focused leadership for downtown revitalization while building organizational capacity for long-term success.	Years 1-5	\$\$\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.3	Implement a comprehensive incentive communication strategy that transforms awareness of available programs and simplifies the application process for property owners and business entrepreneurs.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.4	Establish clear minimum maintenance standards specifically for downtown properties that address both interior and exterior conditions. These standards should be designed to ensure that all downtown buildings meet basic safety requirements while contributing to an attractive, welcoming business district.	NOW	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.4	Implement a Vacant Property Registration Ordinance (VPRO) to address abandoned or vacant properties that often become maintenance problems. Additionally, storage use in downtown B-1 zoning district buildings violates current zoning ordinances, as storage is only permitted as incidental to permitted business uses. Coordinated enforcement between zoning and building code officials, with Town Council support, will be essential to address both vacant property registration and unauthorized storage uses that undermine the commercial intent of the downtown district.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.5	Implement a comprehensive development process improvement strategy that captures existing expertise while creating systematic efficiencies for downtown projects.	Years 3-5	\$	Town

* - No cost strategies | \$ Tactical/low-cost strategies | \$\$ Strategies that require resources that are typically within existing budget parameters \$\$\$ Strategies that may require funding outside of the typical budget parameters



Design

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the downtown district apart.

2.1

Activate Storefront Displays

Focus Area 2: Design

Many downtowns struggle with vacant storefronts that create a negative impression of the district and impact the economic viability of adjacent properties. Renovating and fully activating the properties with businesses often takes time, but short-term strategies can be implemented to improve the aesthetics of vacant storefronts and mitigate their impact on the overall downtown district. Storefront windows play a critical role in creating an interesting and vibrant downtown environment. It is important that every storefront display includes something of interest that offers “gifts to the street” for visitors and customers walking by.

Retail businesses understand the importance of window shopping, so their storefront displays are often activated with merchandise displays that are frequently updated based on the season. Restaurants often offer views into their dining space to showcase the environment and activity of the eatery. However, even non-retail businesses and vacant properties should add to the character of the downtown by activating their storefront displays with some type of installation. This could include a curated display of items relevant to the business (vintage barbershop equipment, law books and antiques, etc.); window clings showcasing historic photographs or artwork; or curated displays featuring photography, paintings, pottery, sculpture, or other forms of art from local artists. Anything that adds interest to the sidewalk.

The Bower Center for the Arts should establish an “Art in Public Places Task Force” which leads a public art initiative specifically focused on activating vacant and underutilized storefront display windows. The Bower Center’s network of local and regional artists creates tremendous opportunities for art displays in storefront displays. The task force serves as the liaison between the property/business owner and the artist to facilitate the displays which should rotate seasonally. Other installations could include window clings featuring historic photographs, artwork, or storytelling graphics about the Bedford Boys or other significant stories about the community.



Existing conditions

2.3

Activate Storefronts

Focus Area 2: Design



Curated display for non-retail business



Public art window cling installations



Historic photograph window cling installation



Local art display



Art display



Temporary window paintings

2.1

Activate Storefront Displays

Focus Area 2: Design

Case Studies

Seattle ReSTORED is a public art program in **Seattle, Washington** is a placemaking initiatives focused on revitalizing downtown neighborhoods by using local art to activate empty storefronts. The program is a partnership between the Seattle Office of Economic Development, Seattle Good Business Network, and other local partners. Seattle ReSTORED serves as a liaison between property owners and the artists to facilitate the installations. Cards are taped to the windows that highlight the artist, information about the artwork, and a QR code linked to a digital passport for the program. ReSTORED is a great example of an initiative that serves a a beautification, economic development, and tourism tool for downtown.



Centertown Pavilion Enhancements

Focus Area 2: Design

The current Bedford Farmers' Market is a weekly market hosted at the Centertown Pavilion every Saturday from May until October from 8:00 a.m. until noon. Two additional Holiday Markets are hosted in November and December. The market which features a variety of food and artisan vendors, has been wildly successful and well received from the local community. The site of the market is a public parking lot at the corner of Washington Street and Center Street which features a permanent pavilion structure which lines the site along Washington Street.

Input gathered from downtown stakeholders and the existing School-to-School Plan indicates that locals value the Centertown Pavilion and would like to see the site developed into a gathering space for additional community events and activities. Low-cost, short-term treatments can easily be used to enhance the site, add amenities for visitors, and enhance the visibility of the farmers' market.

Short-term treatments and enhancements should include:

- Add string lights along the Centertown Pavilion. This could include lights along the gutter of the structure as well as string lights to the underside of the pavilion on the interior ceiling.
- Prune existing street trees along market site to remove damaged limbs and raise the canopy. Severely damaged trees should be removed and replaced with appropriate shade tree species.
- Update damaged and aging planter boxes surrounding the existing street trees.
- Add a selfie wall installation to the street-facing portion of the quilt square.
- Add double-sided "Downtown Bedford, Virginia" banner signage to middle section of the pavilion (On either side of the quilt square). This could also serve as the selfie wall feature.

Future improvements could include enhancing portions of the parking lot to include amenities for people an activity. This could include:

- Using street paint to add street murals and color to portions of the parking lot. This will create a space that can be converted from parking to an activity area during certain time periods.
- Adding overhead string lights to the parking lot to create interest and increase the visibility of the site.
- Adding shade sails to a portion of the parking area so that it can be used for other activities throughout the year.



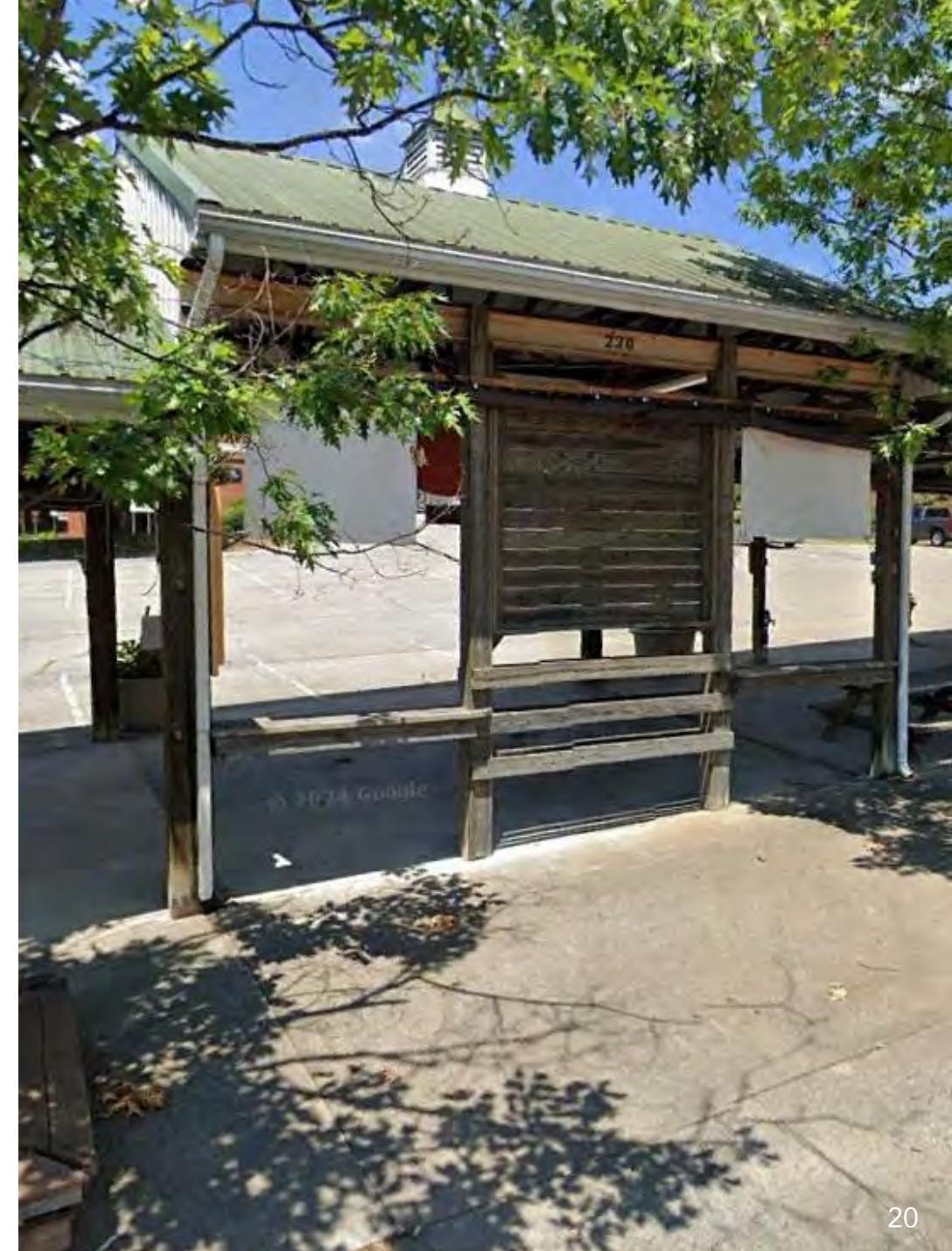
2.2

Centertown Pavilion Enhancements

Focus Area 2: Design



Existing conditions



2.3

Enhance Centertown Park

Focus Area 2: Design

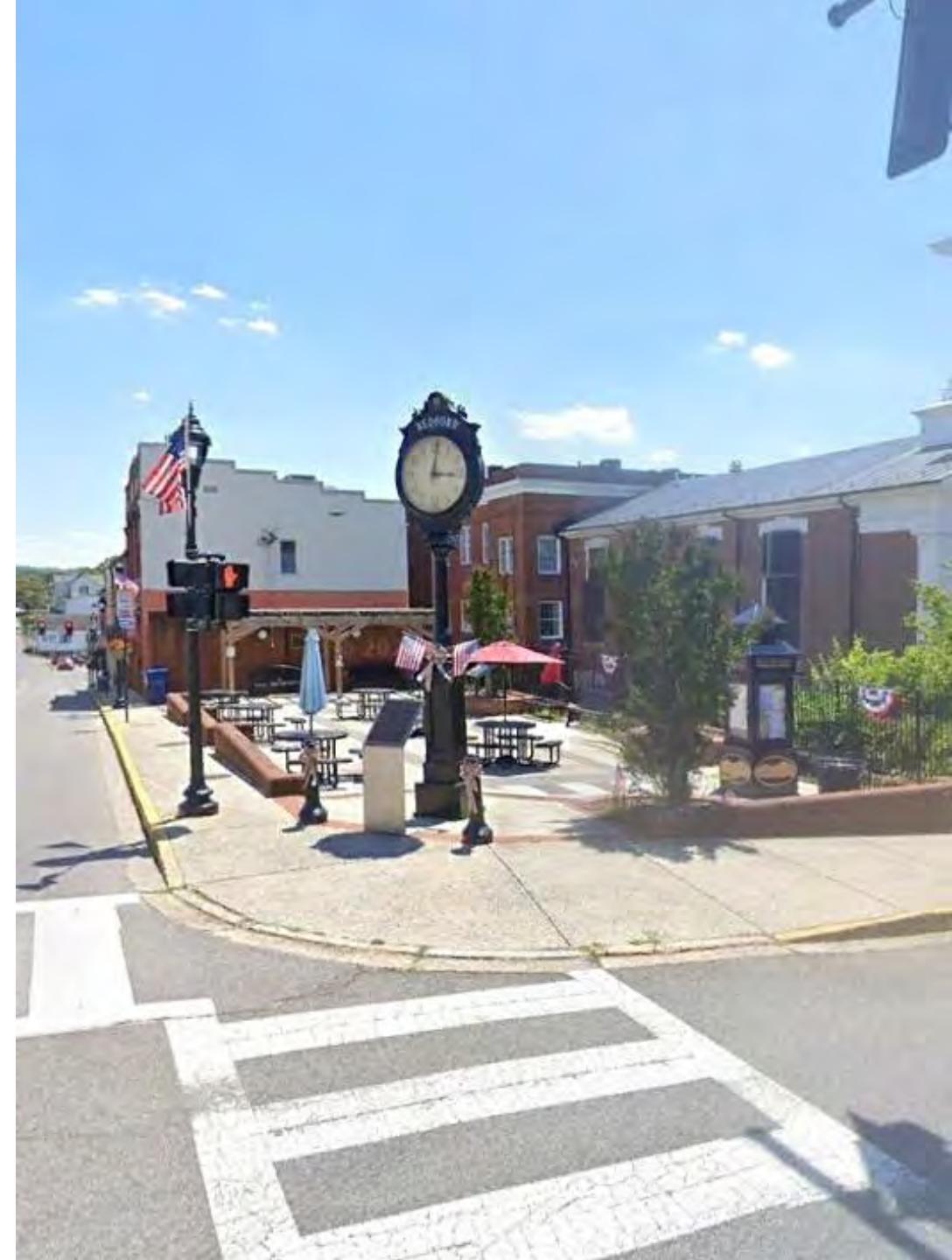
Centertown Park is a landmark community space in the heart of Downtown Bedford at the intersection of Main Street and Bridge Street. The plaza area contains outdoor seating with bistro umbrellas and a small pavilion and is home to the iconic Bedford clock. Centertown Park hosts the community Christmas tree as well as community events. The layout of the space was designed to be flexible which allows for a wide variety of uses and activities.

Many communities are proactively activating these types of parks and plazas with amenities to encourage visitors and residents to use the space throughout the year. The key is to make the space comfortable (shade and lighting) and interesting (color, landscaping, seating, activities, etc.) for people. Design inspiration can be taken from restaurants using outdoor spaces referred to as "social yards" or "beer gardens." These spaces have various types of seating; encourage outdoor dining; include outdoor games like Jenga or cornhole; and add interest through overhead string lights or colorful shade sails. Community leaders also proactively program activities such as live music nights, open mic nights, movie nights, etc. to encourage people to utilize the plaza.

Short-term enhancements should be used to further elevate the plaza and create a "wow" destination for Downtown Bedford.

Short-term enhancements should include:

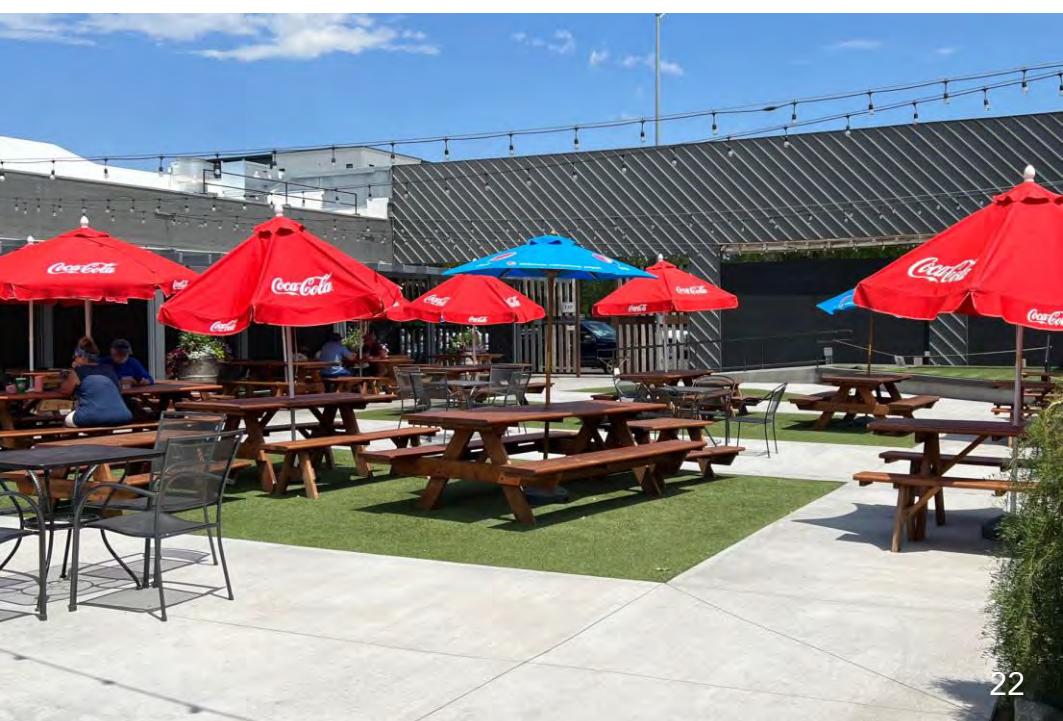
- Adding overhead string lights and colorful shade sails (preferably red and blue) to the space. Simple metal posts can be added to support the cables and equipment.
- Adding oversized planters or clusters of planters along the inside of the Bridge Street wall to soften the hardscape. Ideally the planters would be large enough to support small trees to provide shade and serve as a vertical feature.
- Consider adding outdoor games to the plaza to encourage passive activity from visitors and residents.



2.3

Enhance Centertown Park

Focus Area 2: Design



Bridge Street Corridor Enhancements

Focus Area 2: Design

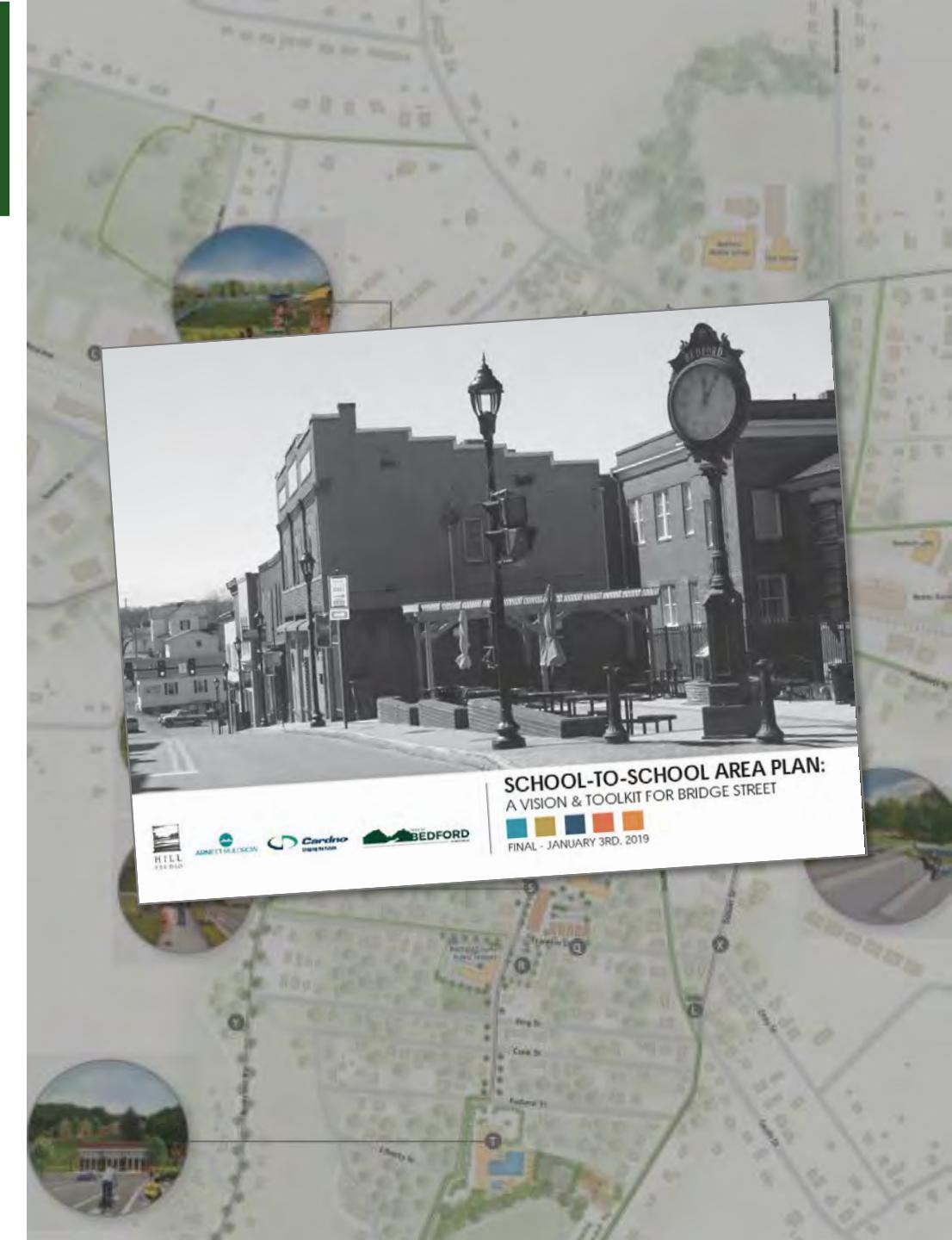
The School-to-School Area Plan: A Vision & Toolkit for Bridge Street was developed in 2019 by Hill Studio to provide a long-term vision for the corridor. The main goal of the plan was to provide a guide for development for the three main districts of Downtown Bedford which include North Bridge Street, the Central Business District, and South Bridge Street. The Central Business District is composed of the historic core of Downtown Bedford and is bookended to the north and south by the other two districts. The northern district is anchored by the former Bedford Middle School campus on Longwood Avenue which is being redeveloped through a [public-private partnership](#) into the Flora Apartments, a 62-unit market-rate apartment complex, and a 30-room boutique hotel called Hotel Fauna. The southern district is anchored by the historic Susie G. Gibson School facility, which was the first new high school for black residents in Bedford County. The facility currently serves as the Susie G. Gibson Science and Technology Center.

The Bridge Street Plan has served as a guide for various initiatives and decisions along the corridor in recent years. Since the plan provides a long-term vision for the corridor, it is often challenging to find clear next steps and doable projects given the comprehensive scope of the document.

It is important for progress to continue along Bridge Street in order to visually, physically, and programmatically connect the “Two Schools” with Downtown Bedford. Downtown Strategies reviewed the Bridge Street Plan and identified some **short-term projects that can be implemented** to further momentum along the corridor.

Streetlight Banners

The repetition and color of streetlight banners add visual impact and a high return on investment by creating a welcoming gateway experience and showcase community pride. Banners are also an excellent way to showcase the community brand, logo, and color palette. The town is currently in the process of installing updated streetlight banners which will add vibrancy to the downtown district.



2.4

Bridge Street Corridor Enhancements

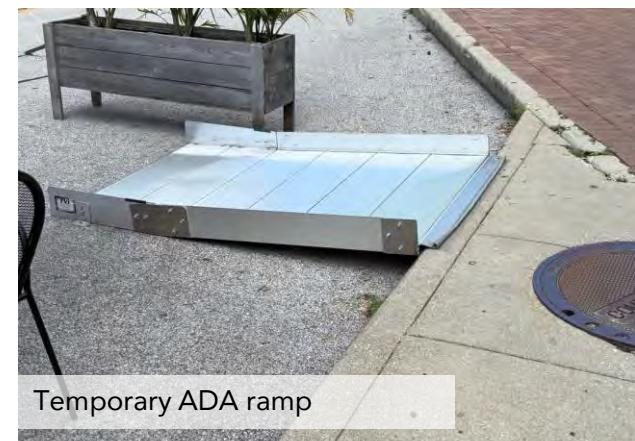
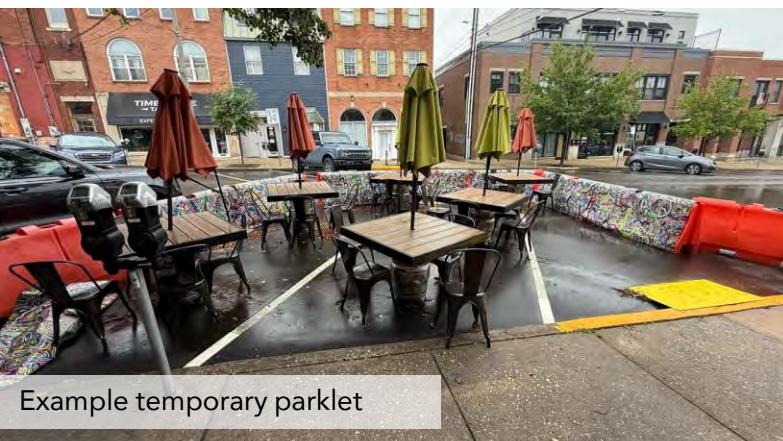
Focus Area 2: Design

Welcome Mural

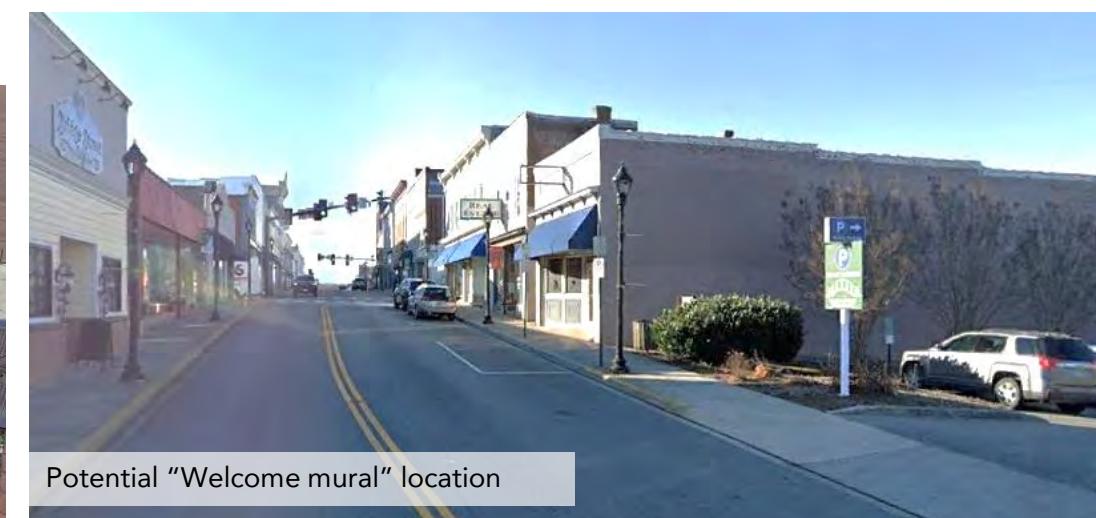
Public art was highlighted throughout the Bridge Street Plan as a way to engage local artists, showcase the arts community, and add vibrancy to the corridor. A welcome mural showcasing the updated Bedford logo should be installed on the northern wall of the 207 Bridge Street building to serve as a gateway entry feature for the downtown core. The mural would also serve as a "selfie wall" location that encourages engagement from downtown visitors. The mural should be placed between the existing landscaping trees and the front façade in order to maintain visibility and serve as a photo op backdrop.

Outdoor Dining

The Bridge Street Plan also references the importance of outdoor dining while recognizing that the existing dimensions of the downtown streetscape are restrictive. The plan recommended the use of parklets as a strategy to create temporary or permanent outdoor dining areas to activate the streetscape. One or two parklets should be piloted in key locations in partnership with existing restaurants. The town can provide the barricades and transition for ADA accessibility and the restaurant provides the seating and decorations. The [Outdoor Dining Streetery Program](#) in Downtown Bloomington, Indiana can be used as a model for the program.



Example "Welcome mural"



Potential "Welcome mural" location

2.4

Bridge Street Corridor Enhancements

Focus Area 2: Design

String Lights

String lights are a current trend seen in communities around the country because they add immediate vibrancy to an area. The return on investment is extremely high because the lights themselves are relatively low cost but provide incredible visual impact. The narrow Right-of-Way throughout Downtown Bedford restricts many revitalization strategies such as outdoor dining and street trees. However, string lights offer a creative opportunity to add interest and vibrancy to the district. The town should explore opportunities for overhead string light installations starting at the Main Street and Bridge Street intersection and expanding outward along both corridors as resources allow. The lights could be installed across the street in a zig-zag or diamond pattern or along the existing decorative streetlights.

There are pros and cons for each approach. The overhead installation would provide the most dramatic impact but would require legal agreements with each property owner. The streetlight installation is the easiest to complete since it is within the town's control but would provide a less impactful visual appearance. Hazard, Kentucky was able to create a cross-street installation by adding an extension post to the short, decorative streetlights. This allowed the lights to meet the 13'-6" height clearance needed for the corridor. Regardless, a string light installation will add vibrancy to the downtown core and immediately become a photo op destination.



Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Design	2.1	Partner with the Bower Center for the Arts to establish an "Art in Public Places Task Force" to lead a public art initiative specifically focused on activating vacant and underutilized storefront display windows.	NOW	-	Bower Center
Design	2.2	<p>Enhance the Centertown Pavilion through short-term treatments and enhancements which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add string lights along the Centertown Pavilion. This could include lights along the gutter of the structure as well as string lights to the underside of the pavilion on the interior ceiling. • Prune existing street trees along market site to remove damaged limbs and raise the canopy. Severely damaged trees should be removed and replaced with appropriate shade tree species. • Update damaged and aging planter boxes surrounding the existing street trees. • Add a selfie wall installation to the street-facing portion of the quilt square. • Add double-sided "Downtown Bedford, Virginia" banner signage to middle section of the pavilion (On either side of the quilt square). This could also serve as the selfie wall feature. 	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Design	2.2	<p>Enhance portions of the Centertown Pavilion parking lot to include amenities for people and activities which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using street paint to add street murals and color to portions of the parking lot. This will create a space that can be converted from parking to an activity area during certain time periods. • Adding overhead string lights to the parking lot to create interest and increase the visibility of the site. • Adding shade sails to a portion of the parking area so that it can be used for other activities throughout the year. 	Years 3-5	\$	Town
Design	2.3	<p>Short-term enhancements should be used to further elevate the plaza and create a "wow" destination for Downtown Bedford. Short-term enhancements should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding overhead string lights and colorful shade sails (preferably red and blue) to the space. Simple metal posts can be added to support the cables and equipment. • Adding oversized planters or clusters of planters along the inside of the Bridge Street wall to soften the hardscape. Ideally the planters would be large enough to support small trees to provide shade and serve as a vertical feature. • Consider adding outdoor games to the plaza to encourage passive activity from visitors and residents. 	Years 1-3	\$\$	Town

2

DESIGN Action Team

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Design	2.4	Install custom streetlight banners throughout the downtown district.	NOW	\$	Town
Design	2.4	Install a welcome mural showcasing the updated Bedford logo on the northern wall of the 207 Bridge Street building to serve as a gateway entry feature for the downtown core.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Bower Center
Design	2.4	Partner with local restaurants to pilot the installation of a parklet to allow for outdoor dining.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Design	2.4	Explore opportunities for overhead string light installations starting at the Main Street and Bridge Street intersection and expanding outward along both corridors as resources allow.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Town

* - No cost strategies | \$ Tactical/low-cost strategies | \$\$ Strategies that require resources that are typically within existing budget parameters \$\$\$ Strategies that may require funding outside of the typical budget parameters



Tourism & Promotion

Smart promotion initiatives position your Downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

3.1

Maximize Events & Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

The Bedford community hosts a variety of events and activities throughout the year. The events vary from community-wide festivals to art classes at the Bower Center for the Arts. The Destination Bedford website hosts a comprehensive community events calendar which is a great resource for locals and visitors. Additionally, the Bower Center hosts a full slate of activities and events throughout the year which is featured on their own events calendar on the website. Bedford has a very strong foundation in the arts and offers a diverse mixture of artistic events throughout the year, which are hosted by a variety of organizations.

Rather than adding more large events and festivals that require extensive planning and resources, Bedford should focus on expanding the impact of their existing calendar of events and hosting micro events that connect customers with the key downtown anchors. The artistic community in Bedford is amazingly strong so initial efforts should focus on highlighting the arts community in a variety of ways.

Cluster Existing Events into Seasonal Promotions

The existing web-based community events calendars are a great resource for showcasing events and activities in Bedford. Other promotional material should be created to promote the events and activities, especially for downtown. Consider organizing the events list into seasonal calendars by clustering events into Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter categories. Then, create easy-to-read graphics that can be used to promote each season through printed posters that can be displayed in storefront windows, table tents that can be added to tables in local restaurants, and social media graphics.



3.1

Maximize Events & Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Use Farmers' Market as a Catalyst

The Bedford Farmers' Market has been a wildly successful addition to downtown and showcases the local interest for authentic, community-focused events. Similar to the Holiday Markets in the winter, the market should continue expanding to include special themed markets throughout the year. This should include partnerships with other local organizations such as the Peaks & Pieces Quilt Guild, Bedford Women's Club, and other organizations that host events and activities. Potential markets could include a night market or makers market, which would include additional amenities and activities like live music, games, dancing, art and cooking demonstrations, etc.

Summer Concert Series

The recent stakeholder input sessions uncovered a local desire for a downtown summer concert series to be launched. This type of series could easily be piloted in the Summer of 2026 as a way to attract visitors into downtown. The events could be hosted at Centertown Park and expand into the farmers' market parking lot as it grows. Attendees should be encouraged to bring their own chair or picnic blanket. Local restaurants should be encouraged to promote the event and attract visitors before the concert. If restaurants are not willing to participate, food trucks could be invited. The series should be promoted heavily on social media, through storefront posters, and table tents. Starkville, Mississippi hosts a similar series called "Downtown at Sundown" and Romulus, Michigan hosts a concert series called the "Sounds of Downtown."



3.1

Maximize Events & Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Build on the Arts

Arts can be used as a foundation for fun micro-events and promotions. Art crawls, sip-&-shops, open mic nights, and other creative events can be used to create unique and engaging experiences for customers. These types of small-scale events can be organized and led by a small group of merchants (which could serve as the initial Tourism & Promotions Action Team outlined in Strategy 1.1). The Bower Center is an amazing facility and a unique anchor for Downtown Bedford. The center hosts a variety of events and activities including art classes, art camps, art exhibitions, and performances. It is important that downtown merchants and restaurants capitalize on Bower Center events by coordinating operating hours and collaborating on joint promotions tied to the arts.

As a pilot, downtown merchants should coordinate with the Bower Center's "Mistletoe Maker's Market" to host a Christmas Open House event. Storefronts should be decorated with seasonal decorations. Outdoor signage, displays, and creative sidewalk decorations should add vibrancy to the streetscape. Holiday music should be played on outdoor speakers. Each participating merchant should offer, hors d'oeuvres, cider, punch, and other seasonal snacks. Restaurants should add fun holiday-themed drink or food specials. After the open house concept is piloted during the Mistletoe Maker's Market, merchants should plan to host an open house during each season (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter). Participating merchants must commit to extended operating hours in order to create a predictable and positive experience for customers.

The "Bower After Hours" event series is an event series that could easily be expanded to include downtown merchants. Downtown merchants could coordinate an extended hours shopping and dining promotion such as "Downtown After Dark" or "Bedford Nights" on the nights of the Bower Center events. For example, Starkville, Mississippi merchants host quarterly "Open Late Til 8" extended hours promotions.



Bower After Hours: Salsa Night

The Bower After Hours: Salsa Night could be expanded to feature promotions such as:

- Salsa in the Street outdoor dance class in the street downtown rather than in the center.
- Downtown restaurants could feature "Dinner and Dancing" promotions with special menus or drink specials. Obviously, some type of salsa (as in chips and dip) would be a great addition.
- Retailers could offer discounts or specials for customers participating in the dance class.
- Merchants could decorate their storefronts in line with the dancing theme.
- Merchants should coordinate operating hours so they are open throughout the event.

Bower After Hours: Costumes & Karaoke

The Bower After Hours: Costumes and Karaoke could be expanded to feature promotions such as:

- Restaurants could also host karaoke so customers can explore various venues throughout downtown.
- Restaurant and retail employees could dress in costume to create a fun environment.
- Storefronts could be decorated for the theme of the costumes or for Halloween.
- Merchants could host acoustic live music performers or street buskers to add to the musical event.

3.2

Use Signage to Direct Visitors

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Bedford has an established vehicular wayfinding signage system that directs visitors to major destinations such as the D-Day Memorial and parks. These types of systems are important for directive visitors around the community and signage is important for connecting D-Day Memorial visitors with Downtown Bedford. The signs are effective, but do not include any branding for the Town of Bedford. If possible, [create vinyl stickers \(or other long-lasting, outdoor material\)](#) to add the new Bedford logo to the existing signs.

Once in downtown, signage should be used to direct visitors and customers to the various amenities throughout downtown. This could be accomplished through the addition of pedestrian-scaled signage like in Downtown Pikeville, Kentucky. Their signage included individual panels for specific businesses that could be easily updated when businesses changed. A more affordable alternative in the short-term is to utilize sidewalk stickers as a creative form of signage throughout the downtown core. Sidewalk stickers can be used to promote downtown events, direct customers to specific destinations, or highlight unique businesses like an ice cream parlor or coffee shop. Bedford should [explore the use of sidewalk stickers as a form of pedestrian signage and promotional tool](#).



Tourism-focused sidewalk stickers



3.3

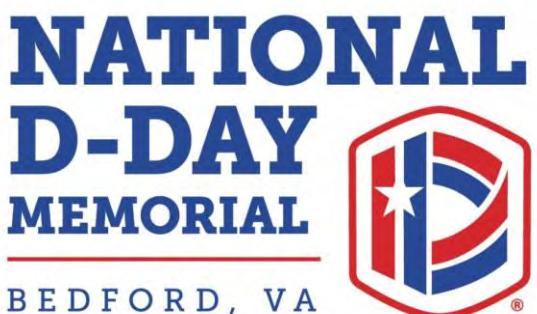
Connect Downtown with the D-Day Memorial

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Bedford is home to the National D-Day Memorial which is located slightly outside of downtown. The memorial honors the brave soldiers who faced unimaginable circumstances that changed world history forever as well as the story of the "Bedford Boys" which is an important part of the community's history. The site attracts over 60,000 visitors annually, but only a fraction explores Downtown Bedford during the visit. Downtown merchants have a strong desire to increase efforts to promote downtown and local businesses with memorial visitors.

Promotional strategies could include:

- Create glossy handouts listing downtown businesses and attractions that are distributed at the memorial and Bedford Boys Tribute Center.
- Develop walking route maps that connect memorial visitors with downtown.
- Develop a series of historical markers and/or interpretive signage that can be placed throughout downtown that highlight Bedford's WWII history. This series could start small with simple signs attached to streetlights and then evolve and expand over time. The first phase could include a sign for each of the Bedford Boys.
- Adding an interactive kiosk at the memorial to highlight dining, shopping, and tourism options in the community and county.



3.4

Launch “Gear Up Downtown” Campaign

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Bedford is perfectly positioned as the gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains, offering visitors seamless access to some of the region’s most spectacular outdoor adventures from hiking the Peaks of Otter to enjoying Smith Mountain Lake and exploring the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway. With its central location, authentic small-town charm, and vibrant local businesses, Bedford is an ideal “base camp” for outdoor enthusiasts. Whether it is a weekend escape or a longer stay, Bedford provides the comfort, character, and convenience that adventurers crave before and after a day on the trail.

To fully embrace this identity, Bedford can lean into a strategic tourism campaign that positions Downtown Bedford as the go-to place to gear up before heading out. A “Gear Up Downtown” campaign should be developed to spotlight local retailers, coffee shops, restaurants, and shops that cater to hikers, bikers, paddlers, and road-trippers. Creative signage, window displays, and seasonal events can highlight Bedford’s role as both a launch point and a landing place, offering everything from trail snacks and last-minute gear to a hearty post-hike meal and a cozy overnight stay.

The community’s artistic culture and strong arts community complements the carefree outdoors lifestyle of this target audience. It is important to connect the dots between outdoor recreation visitors and Downtown Bedford’s artistic assets. Bedford has a [featured landing page](#) on the Blue Ridge Parkway website that includes a list of Things to Do. “Downtown Bedford” should be added to the list to specifically highlight the district.

By embracing its identity as the Blue Ridge’s base camp, Bedford has the opportunity to create a strong, sustainable tourism brand rooted in its natural surroundings and small-town hospitality. With the right mix of branding, partnerships, and downtown-focused initiatives, Bedford can draw new audiences, increase overnight stays, and boost the visibility of its historic downtown as the place where the Blue Ridge adventure begins.



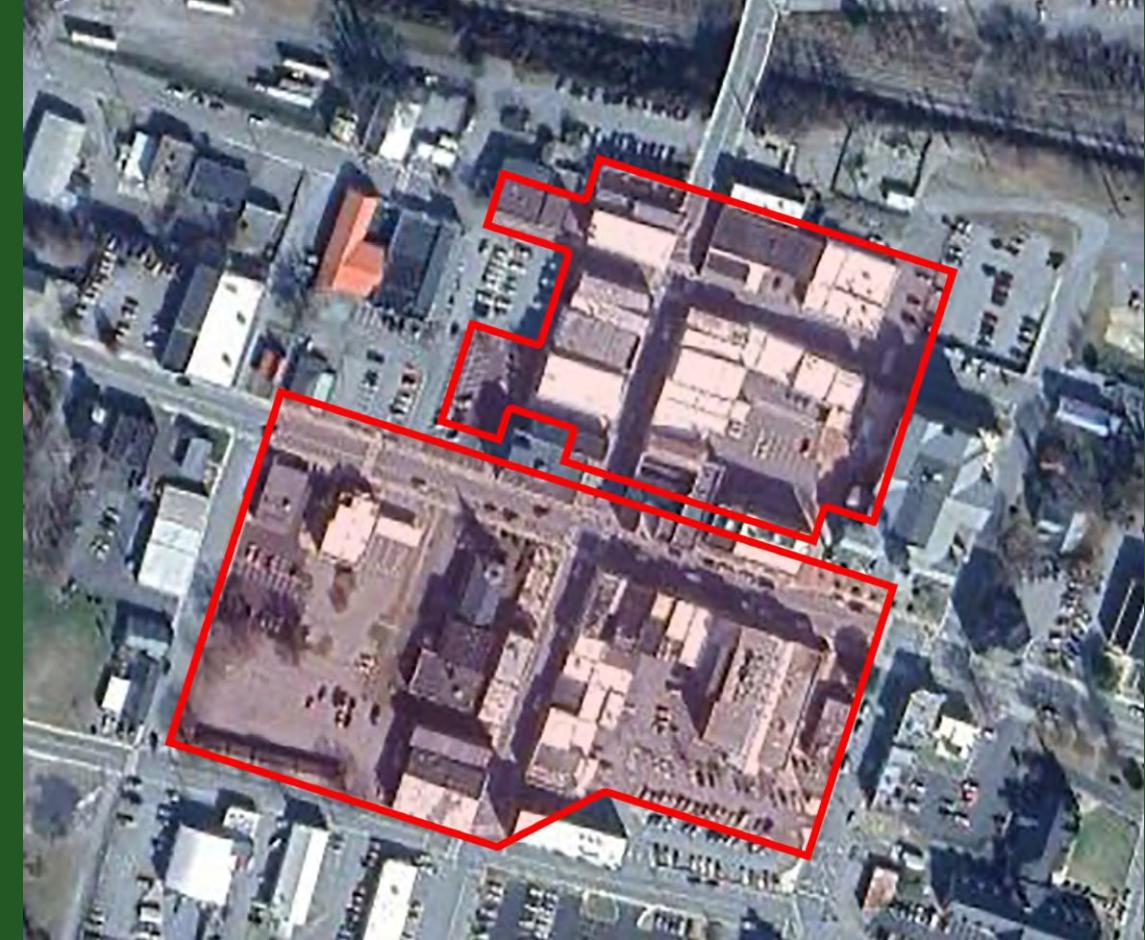
Dealing with the Perception of Parking

Nearly every downtown struggle with the perception of parking. Typically, the issue is related to customers' perceptions rather than the actual availability of parking, but it is a common complaint. Although on-street parking is challenging due to the narrow downtown streets, Downtown Bedford has an abundance of accessory surface parking lots throughout the district. The parking lots are well signed with consistent "Public Parking" signs, and each lot is named which provides clarity for visitors. As an on-going effort, the town should ensure that all public lots are properly striped, well-lit, and free of weeds, overgrown vegetation, litter, and debris.

Time-limited parking that is consistently enforced has proven to be the most effective approach to parking management if the goal is to create parking turnover throughout the day. A 2–3-hour limit is a timeframe that compromises the needs of the various types of businesses in a downtown district. It is critical that the time limit is consistently enforced. Free longer-term parking should be offered on side streets and/or in public parking lots.

Typically, downtown employees parking in prime parking spaces is the root cause of downtown parking issues. Employees occupy on-street parking adjacent to the storefronts rather than customers and visitors. A much more successful approach is to encourage downtown employees to park in the accessory surface parking lots while leaving on-street parking for customers.

Signs throughout Downtown Bedford indicate a 2-hour time limit for on-street parking, however, the time limit is not enforced. If town leaders feel there is significant issue related to the availability of parking, they should implement a plan to properly and, most importantly, consistently enforce the 2-hour parking limit between 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. The time limit should only pertain to the core blocks of downtown along Bridge Street and potentially Main Street.



The graphic above illustrates the size comparison of the Bedford Walmart property overlaid on downtown. The top red shape is the footprint of the building and the bottom red shape is the parking lot. Customers regularly walk from the parking lot to the store and from the grocery section to sporting goods without considering the distance. The red scale below represents the approximate distance of a single trip around Walmart, which is scaled to the map above for comparison. How many trips does the typical Walmart shopper take during a routine trip? Certainly, more than one. The distance from the railroad tracks to the farmers' market is an easily walkable distance when compared to the Walmart footprint.

Approximate distance of a single round trip through the Bedford Walmart.

3

TOURISM & PROMOTION Action Team

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Consider organizing existing events into seasonal calendars by clustering events into Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter categories.	NOW	-	Destination Bedford
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Continue expanding the farmers' market to include special themed markets throughout the year.	Years 3-5	\$	Farmers' Market & Key Partners
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Pilot a downtown summer concert series..	Years 1-3	\$	Bower Center & Action Team
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	As a pilot, downtown merchants should coordinate with the Bower Center's "Mistletoe Maker's Market" to host a Christmas Open House event.	NOW	\$	Bower Center & Action Team
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Expand the "Bower After Hours" event series to include downtown merchants. The series could be branded "Downtown After Dark" or "Bedford Nights."	Years 3-5	\$\$	Destination Bedford
Tourism & Promotion	3.2	Add vinyl stickers (or other long-lasting, outdoor material) to the new Bedford logo to the existing signs.	NOW	\$	Town
Tourism & Promotion	3.2	Explore the use of sidewalk stickers as a form of pedestrian signage and promotional tool.	Years 1-3	\$	Destination Bedford

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	<p>Create connections between D-Day Memorial visitors and Downtown Bedford through various promotional strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create glossy handouts listing downtown businesses and attractions that are distributed at the memorial and Bedford Boys Tribute Center. • Develop walking route maps that connect memorial visitors with downtown. • Develop a series of historical markers and/or interpretive signage that can be placed throughout downtown that highlight Bedford's WWII history. This series could start small with simple signs attached to streetlights and then evolve and expand over time. The first phase could include a sign for each of the Bedford Boys. • Adding an interactive kiosk at the memorial to highlight dining, shopping, and tourism options in the community and county. 	Years 3-5	\$\$	EDC
Tourism & Promotion	3.4	Launch a "Gear Up Downtown" promotional campaign to spotlight local retailers, coffee shops, restaurants, and shops that cater to hikers, bikers, paddlers, and road-trippers.	Years 1-3	\$\$	EDC

* - No cost strategies | \$ Tactical/low-cost strategies | \$\$ Strategies that require resources that are typically within existing budget parameters \$\$\$ Strategies that may require funding outside of the typical budget parameters



Economic Vitality

Economic Vitality focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

Property Owner Outreach Campaign

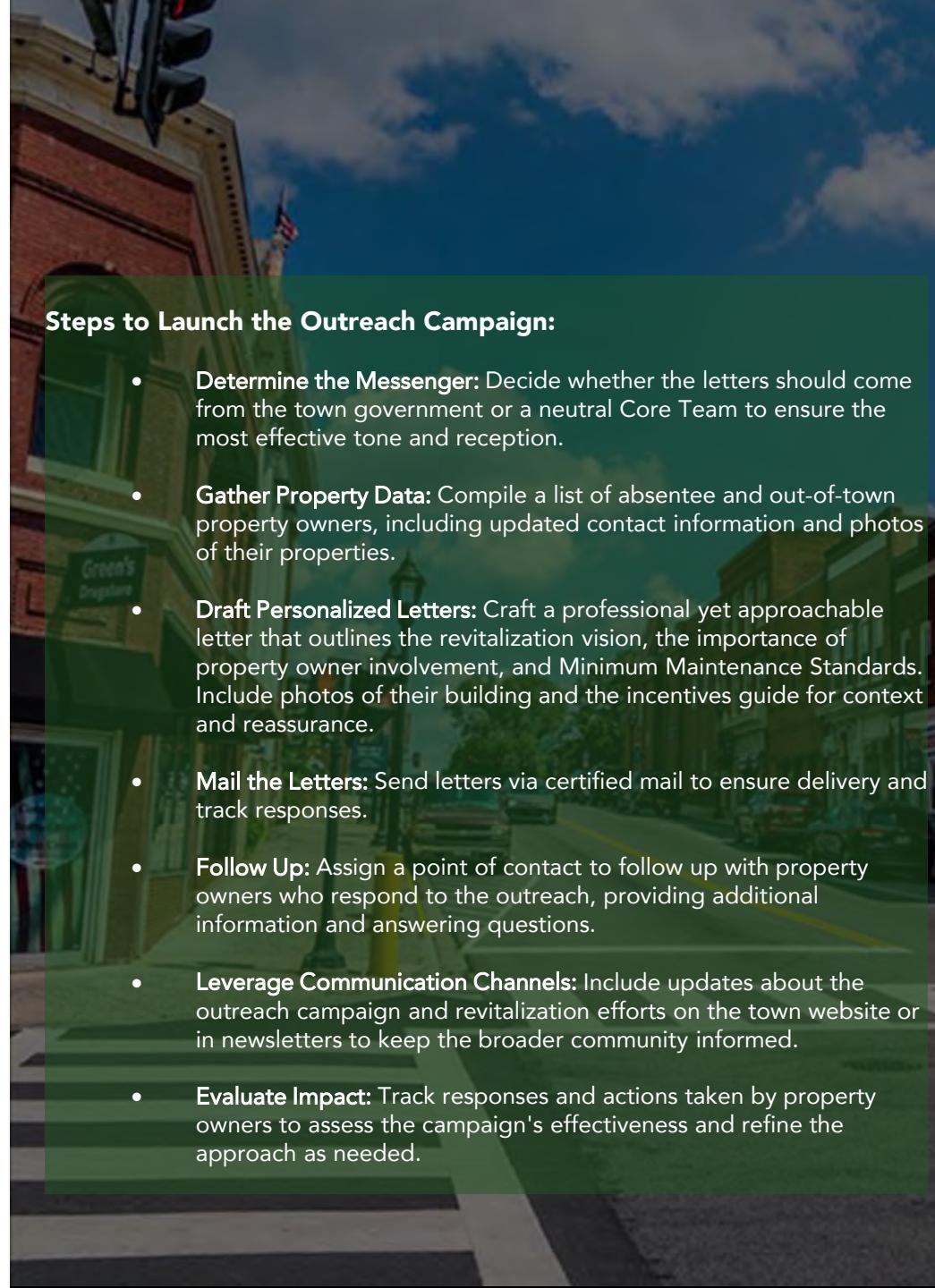
Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Engaging property owners, particularly absentee or out-of-town owners, is critical to the success of downtown revitalization efforts. These stakeholders play a significant role in shaping the appearance, functionality, and economic potential of the downtown area, yet their distance or lack of direct involvement often creates barriers to progress. Establishing open lines of communication helps build trust and ensures that property owners are informed about the community's vision, opportunities for collaboration, and available resources or incentives. By fostering their active participation, even from afar, communities can encourage investment, improve property maintenance, and align efforts to create a vibrant, cohesive downtown that benefits everyone.

In Bedford

The Town of Bedford can strengthen its downtown revitalization efforts by launching a "Property Owner Outreach Campaign" to engage unengaged, absentee and out-of-town property owners. Many of these owners may not be fully aware of the condition of their buildings or their role in the broader community revitalization. This campaign would serve as a proactive step to open communication, raise awareness, and build partnerships with property owners. The outreach effort would include a personalized letter to each property owner, accompanied by photos of their properties and a clear message about the town's vision for revitalizing Downtown Bedford. The letter would explain the importance of property owners' participation in these efforts, emphasizing the mutual benefits of improved building maintenance and enhanced downtown vitality.

To set a positive tone, the outreach would include resources like a guide to existing incentives and other positive touches. The campaign would also mention that the town is developing Minimum Maintenance Standards to address safety and aesthetic concerns downtown. Noting these upcoming standards demonstrates the seriousness of the effort while offering property owners the chance to be proactive partners in the process. This approach strikes a balance between encouragement and accountability, creating an opportunity for collaboration before enforcement becomes necessary. Whether the campaign comes directly from the Town or a neutral Core Team, the tone should be friendly and solution-focused to foster trust and cooperation.



Steps to Launch the Outreach Campaign:

- **Determine the Messenger:** Decide whether the letters should come from the town government or a neutral Core Team to ensure the most effective tone and reception.
- **Gather Property Data:** Compile a list of absentee and out-of-town property owners, including updated contact information and photos of their properties.
- **Draft Personalized Letters:** Craft a professional yet approachable letter that outlines the revitalization vision, the importance of property owner involvement, and Minimum Maintenance Standards. Include photos of their building and the incentives guide for context and reassurance.
- **Mail the Letters:** Send letters via certified mail to ensure delivery and track responses.
- **Follow Up:** Assign a point of contact to follow up with property owners who respond to the outreach, providing additional information and answering questions.
- **Leverage Communication Channels:** Include updates about the outreach campaign and revitalization efforts on the town website or in newsletters to keep the broader community informed.
- **Evaluate Impact:** Track responses and actions taken by property owners to assess the campaign's effectiveness and refine the approach as needed.

Business Recruitment & Expansion Program

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Existing businesses form the foundation of any downtown district, yet many struggle with coordination challenges, inconsistent operating hours, and limited marketing resources. Business retention and expansion programs help bridge these gaps by facilitating communication, encouraging collaborative marketing efforts, and establishing operational standards that benefit all participants. When businesses work together strategically, they can pool resources to achieve marketing reach and customer attraction that would be impossible individually.

Successful business retention programs focus on removing barriers to cooperation while providing practical tools that help businesses succeed collectively. This includes creating communication platforms that enable regular coordination, establishing operating standards that maximize customer convenience, and developing marketing initiatives that promote the entire district rather than individual businesses in isolation.

Bedford's downtown businesses currently operate with limited coordination and communication. Stakeholder feedback revealed frustrations about inconsistent business hours, lack of collaborative marketing, and insufficient cross-promotion between businesses. The Chamber of Commerce events page exists but is underutilized, and there is no regular forum for business owners to coordinate activities, share resources, or plan joint initiatives.

In Bedford

Bedford should implement a comprehensive business retention and expansion program that enhances communication, coordination, and collaborative marketing among downtown businesses.



Private Business Communication Platform

Facebook Group Establishment:

- Create private Facebook group exclusively for downtown business owners
- Facilitate introductions and relationship building among business owners
- Enable real-time communication about events, promotions, and opportunities
- Share resources, vendor recommendations, and operational best practices
- Coordinate responses to community issues and development opportunities

Group Management Structure:

- Economic Development Coordinator serves as initial group administrator
- Rotate administrative duties among active business participants
- Establish group guidelines for professional communication and resource sharing
- Schedule quarterly in-person meetings to supplement online communication
- Create subgroups for specific business categories or collaborative projects

Business Recruitment & Expansion Program

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Coordinated Business Hours Standards

Operating Hours Coordination

- Survey existing business hours to identify patterns and gaps
- Develop recommended minimum operating schedule (5 days per week as discussed)Create coordinated evening and weekend hours to maximize customer convenience
- Establish holiday and special event operating agreements
- Coordinate seasonal hour adjustments for tourism periods

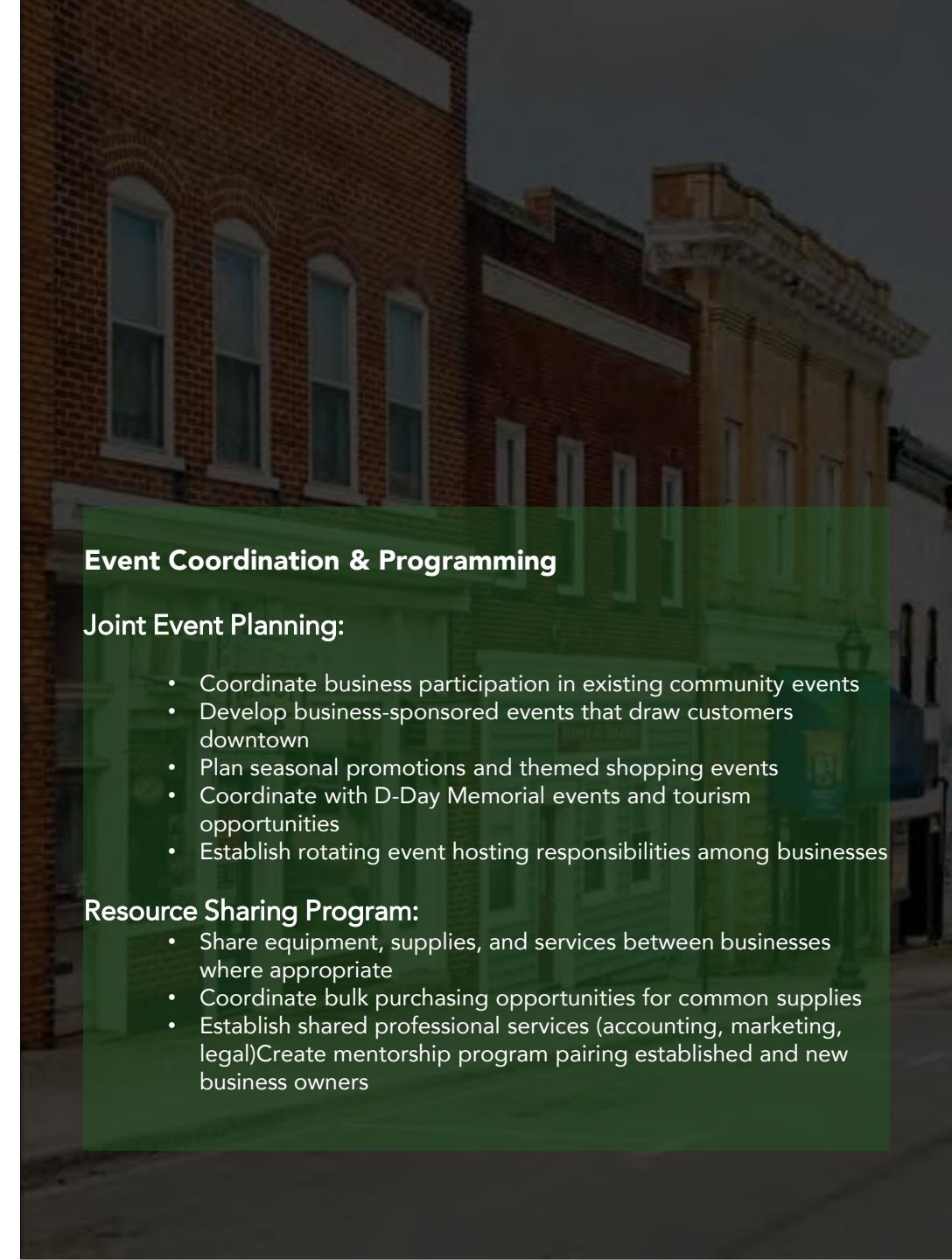
Shared Marketing Initiatives

Collaborative Marketing Program

- Pool marketing resources for joint advertising campaigns
- Develop shared downtown branding and promotional materials
- Create coordinated social media campaigns highlighting multiple businesses
- Establish shared website or online directory for downtown businesses
- Coordinate participation in regional tourism and marketing opportunities

Cross-Promotional Activities

- Develop customer loyalty programs that work across multiple businesses
- Create "downtown passport" or similar programs encouraging multi-business visits
- Establish referral incentives between complementary businesses
- Coordinate special promotions during events and peak tourism periods
- Share customer databases and email lists (with appropriate permissions)



Event Coordination & Programming

Joint Event Planning:

- Coordinate business participation in existing community events
- Develop business-sponsored events that draw customers downtown
- Plan seasonal promotions and themed shopping events
- Coordinate with D-Day Memorial events and tourism opportunities
- Establish rotating event hosting responsibilities among businesses

Resource Sharing Program:

- Share equipment, supplies, and services between businesses where appropriate
- Coordinate bulk purchasing opportunities for common supplies
- Establish shared professional services (accounting, marketing, legal)Create mentorship program pairing established and new business owners

4.3

Assistance for Start-ups & New Businesses

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Supporting new business formation is essential for downtown revitalization, particularly in communities where property ownership challenges create barriers to traditional development approaches. Start-up assistance programs can bypass problematic property owners by directly incentivizing entrepreneurs to locate in downtown, creating market pressure for property improvements while activating vacant spaces. These programs work most effectively when they address the primary barriers new businesses face: high upfront costs, lease negotiations, and initial cash flow challenges.

Successful business assistance programs focus on reducing financial barriers while providing ongoing support that increases the likelihood of long-term success. Rather than simply offering grants, the most effective programs combine financial incentives with technical assistance, mentorship, and market development support. This comprehensive approach helps ensure that public investment results in sustainable businesses that contribute to downtown vitality over time.

In Bedford

Given the challenges with some downtown property owners, Bedford should implement a comprehensive start-up assistance program that empowers entrepreneurs to negotiate directly with property owners while providing substantial support for business establishment. This approach creates market demand for vacant spaces and can incentivize even reluctant property owners to engage with potential tenants.

Start-up Business Incentive Program

Financial Assistance Package

Lease Assistance Component:

- First-year lease assistance up to \$6,000 (\$500/month maximum)
- Security deposit assistance up to \$2,000
- Lease negotiation support through town economic development staff
- Legal assistance for lease review (partnership with local attorney)



Infrastructure & Utility Support:

- Waived utility connection fees (water, sewer, electric hookups)
- Expedited permitting with waived permit fees for qualifying improvements
- Free business license for first year of operation
- Reduced parking requirements or shared parking arrangements

Interior Improvement Grants:

- Matching grants up to \$10,000 for interior build-out (50/50 cost share)
- Additional \$5,000 available for storefront improvements
- Equipment financing assistance through partnerships with local lenders
- Professional design consultation for space planning

Target Business Categories:

Focus assistance on businesses that will generate the greatest downtown impact:

- Restaurants and food service (highest priority given regional draw potential)
- Retail businesses serving daily needs (grocery, pharmacy, services)
- Professional services that generate daytime foot traffic
- Arts and creative businesses that complement existing cultural activities
- Service businesses needed by residents (childcare, fitness, personal care)

4.3

Assistance for Start-ups & New Businesses

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Program Structure

Eligibility Requirements:

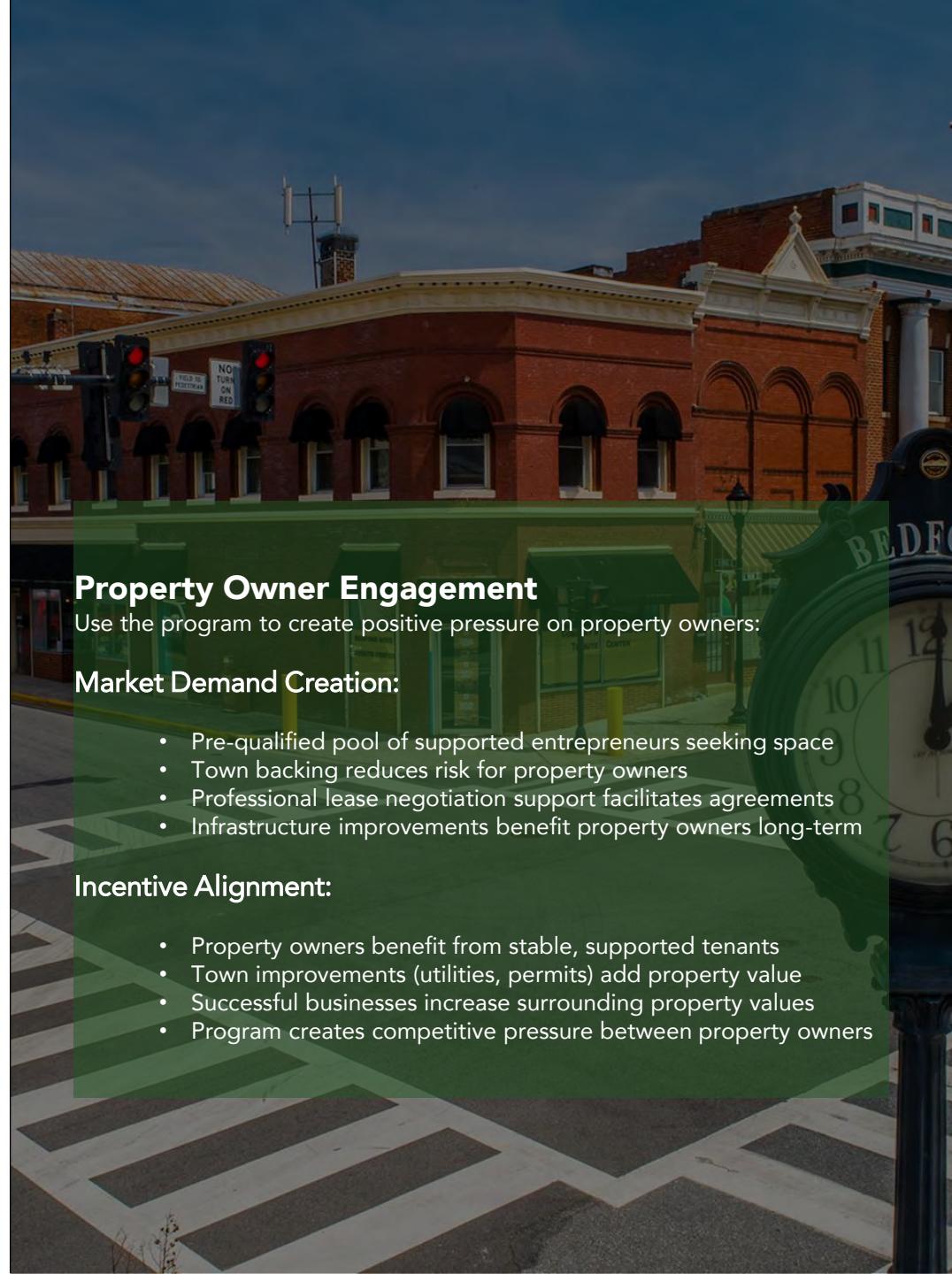
- New businesses locating in designated downtown district
- Commitment to minimum 3-year lease term
- Business plan review and approval by town
- Participation in mandatory small business development program
- Agreement to participate in downtown marketing and events

Application Process:

- Pre-application consultation with town staff
- Business plan and financial projection review
- Site visit and space assessment
- Lease negotiation support and assistance
- Ongoing mentorship and check-ins during first year

Accountability Measures:

- Quarterly business performance reviews
- Employment and revenue reporting
- Community engagement participation requirements
- Claw back provisions for early closure or non-compliance



Property Owner Engagement

Use the program to create positive pressure on property owners:

Market Demand Creation:

- Pre-qualified pool of supported entrepreneurs seeking space
- Town backing reduces risk for property owners
- Professional lease negotiation support facilitates agreements
- Infrastructure improvements benefit property owners long-term

Incentive Alignment:

- Property owners benefit from stable, supported tenants
- Town improvements (utilities, permits) add property value
- Successful businesses increase surrounding property values
- Program creates competitive pressure between property owners

4.4

Google Business Profile

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Having a current Google Business Profile is essential for a local mom-and-pop business because it enhances visibility and credibility in an increasingly digital marketplace. This profile allows businesses to appear in local search results and Google Maps, making it easier for potential customers to find essential information such as operating hours, location, contact details, and services offered. An updated profile can significantly influence customer decisions, as it provides an opportunity to showcase positive reviews and high-quality photos, helping to build trust and attract new clientele. Google Business Profile can differentiate a local business and contribute to sustained growth and customer loyalty in the following ways:

Increased Visibility: Businesses with a complete Google Business Profile are 70% more likely to attract local visits compared to those without.

Customer Engagement: About 56% of consumers who find a local business through Google search are likely to visit the business within a day.

Call to Action: Listings that include a phone number can see up to a 25% increase in call volume, as consumers prefer to connect directly for inquiries.

Positive Impact of Reviews: Approximately 84% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. A high number of positive reviews can significantly boost conversion rates.

Enhanced Local Search Rankings: Businesses with optimized profiles can rank higher in local search results, driving more traffic. Listings that rank in the top three local search results can account for 30% of click-through rates.

Click-Through Rate (CTR): Listings with photos receive 42% more requests for directions and 35% more click-throughs to their websites compared to those without images.

Conversions from Posts: Businesses that regularly post updates on their Google Business Profile can see up to a 10% increase in engagement from potential customers.

User Intent: Around 78% of mobile local searches result in an offline purchase, indicating that a strong online presence directly influences consumer behavior.

In Bedford

The Town should share the [Google Business Profile guide](#), provided by Downtown Strategies as a supplement to this Action Plan, with downtown business owners to encourage them to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile.



4

ECONOMIC VITALITY Action Team

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Implementation Partners
Economic Vitality	4.1	Launch a "Property Owner Outreach Campaign" to engage unengaged, absentee and out-of-town property owners.	Years 1-3	\$	Action Team
Economic Vitality	4.2	Implement a comprehensive business retention and expansion program that enhances communication, coordination, and collaborative marketing among downtown businesses.	Years 3-5	\$	Downtown Coordinator
Economic Vitality	4.3	Implement a comprehensive start-up assistance program that empowers entrepreneurs to negotiate directly with property owners while providing substantial support for business establishment. This approach creates market demand for vacant spaces and can incentivize even reluctant property owners to engage with potential tenants.	Years 3-5	\$\$\$	Town/ Bedford County EDA
Economic Vitality	4.4	Share the Google Business Profile guide, provided by Downtown Strategies as a supplement to this Action Plan, with downtown business owners to encourage them to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile.	NOW	\$	Town

* - No cost strategies | \$ Tactical/low-cost strategies | \$\$ Strategies that require resources that are typically within existing budget parameters \$\$\$ Strategies that may require funding outside of the typical budget parameters



Market Analysis

Assessing your consumers from multiple geographies allows you to uncover and define the economic potential in your downtown

Research Partners



 **the CRITTENDEN REPORT**

**Memberships, Subscriptions &
Customized Reports**



**Research Partners &
Geographic Information Systems**

Research Sources



Market Research

You have at your disposal thousands of variables from population and household incomes to spending patterns by retail category.

The information covered in this document represents the key highlights for your community from a data and analytics perspective.

Demographic Overview

Mobile Data Collections – Customized Trade Area Analysis

Tapestry Lifestyle Segmentation

Retail Gap Analysis

Walk Assessment & Commute Profile

10 Minute Drive Time

Each retailer has a specific set of site selection criteria they use to determine if they will have a profitable store. Municipal boundaries, radius rings, and drive time areas are a start.

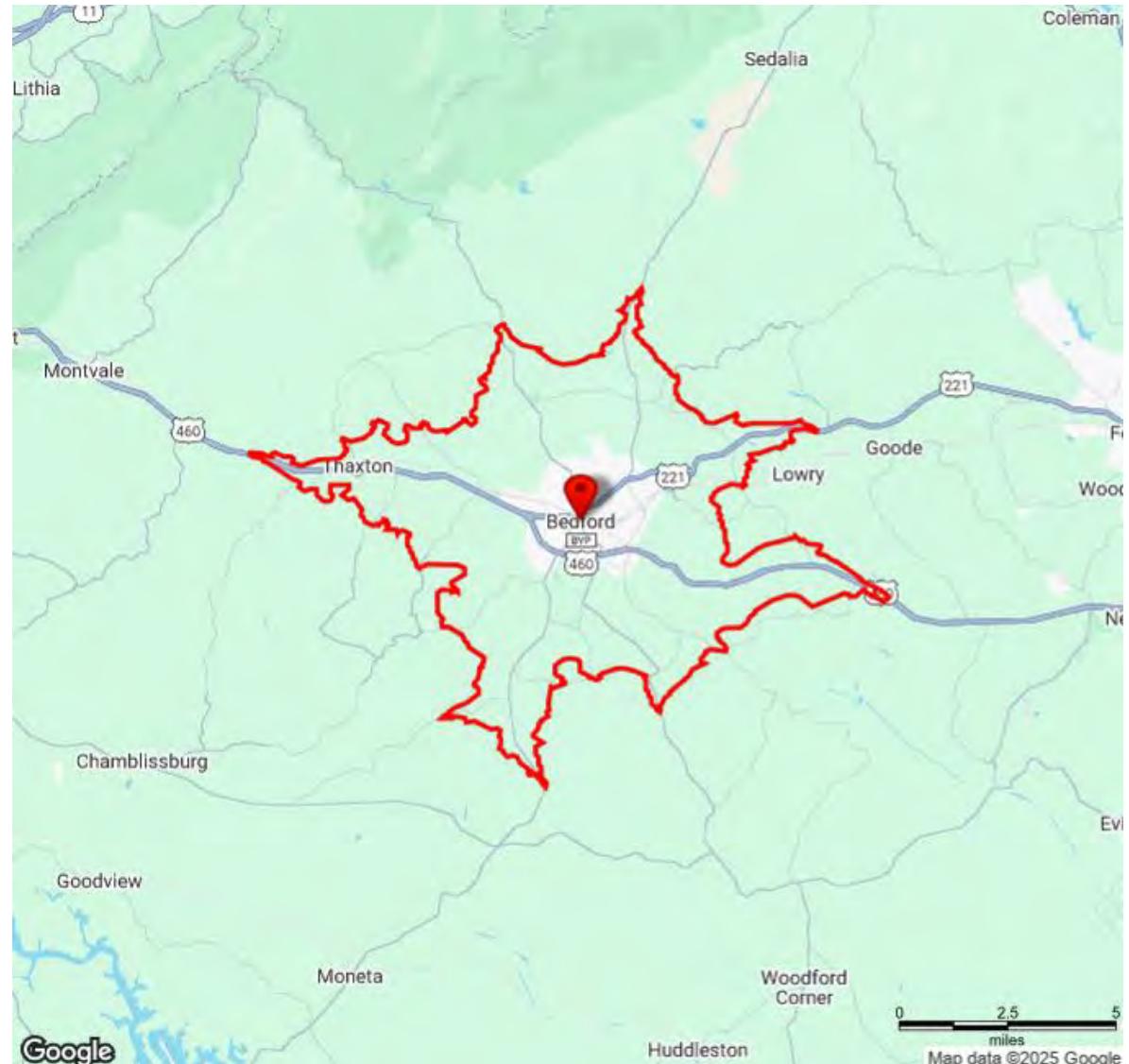
A customized trade area is the next step to analyzing a market. A trade area defines a core customer base of consumers highly likely to shop and eat in the market at least once a month.

Your trade area has been created by combining a series of drive times, mobile data analysis, geographic boundaries, and proximity to neighboring shopping destinations.

Each retailer will analyze their own trade area based on their existing stores, their competition, and site selection criteria.

**Bedford, VA–
10 Minute Drive Time**
Population – 11,822

*The following demographics reflect the Custom Trade Area (CTA) and not geographic community boundaries.



10 Minute Drive Time

12,057
Projected 2029 population



43
male average age

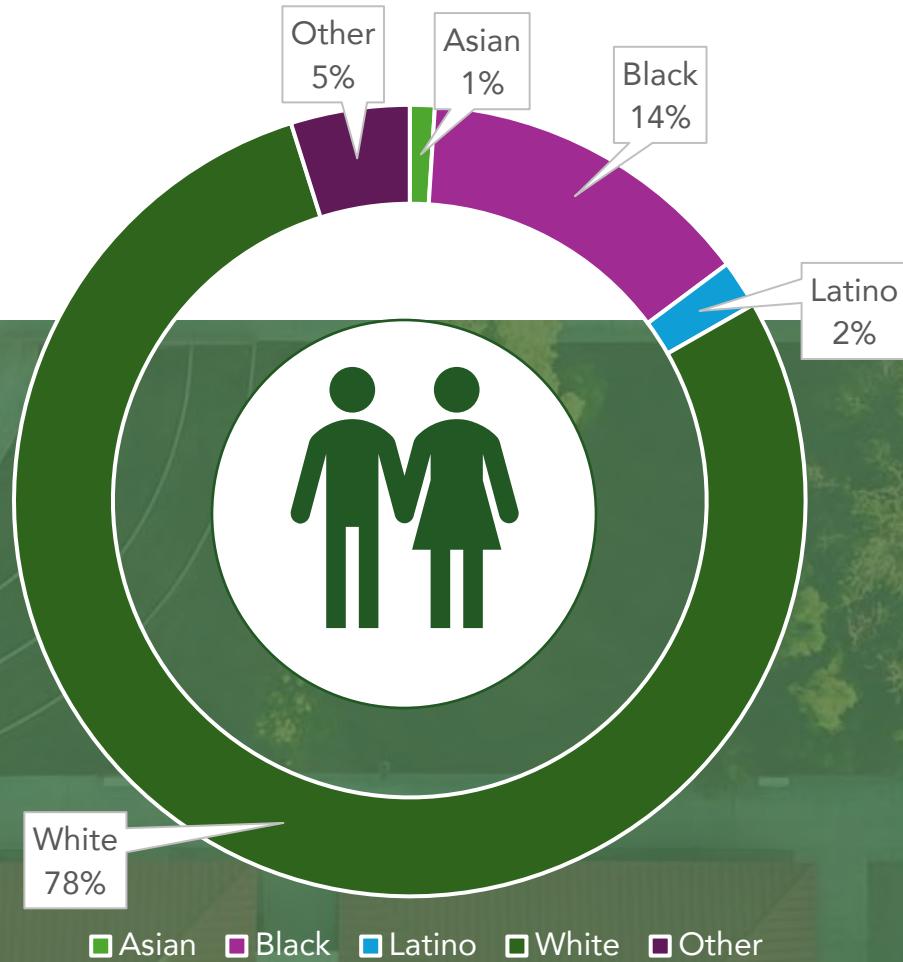
46
female average age

11,822

Estimated CTA population

10 Minute Drive Time

CURRENT YEAR ESTIMATED POPULATION BY RACE



10 Minute Drive Time

CURRENT YEAR ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE

1,646

1,814

739

474

237

32%

36%

15%

9%

5%

88

72

1-person household 2-person household 3-person household 4-person household 5-person household 6-person household 7 or more person household

5,607

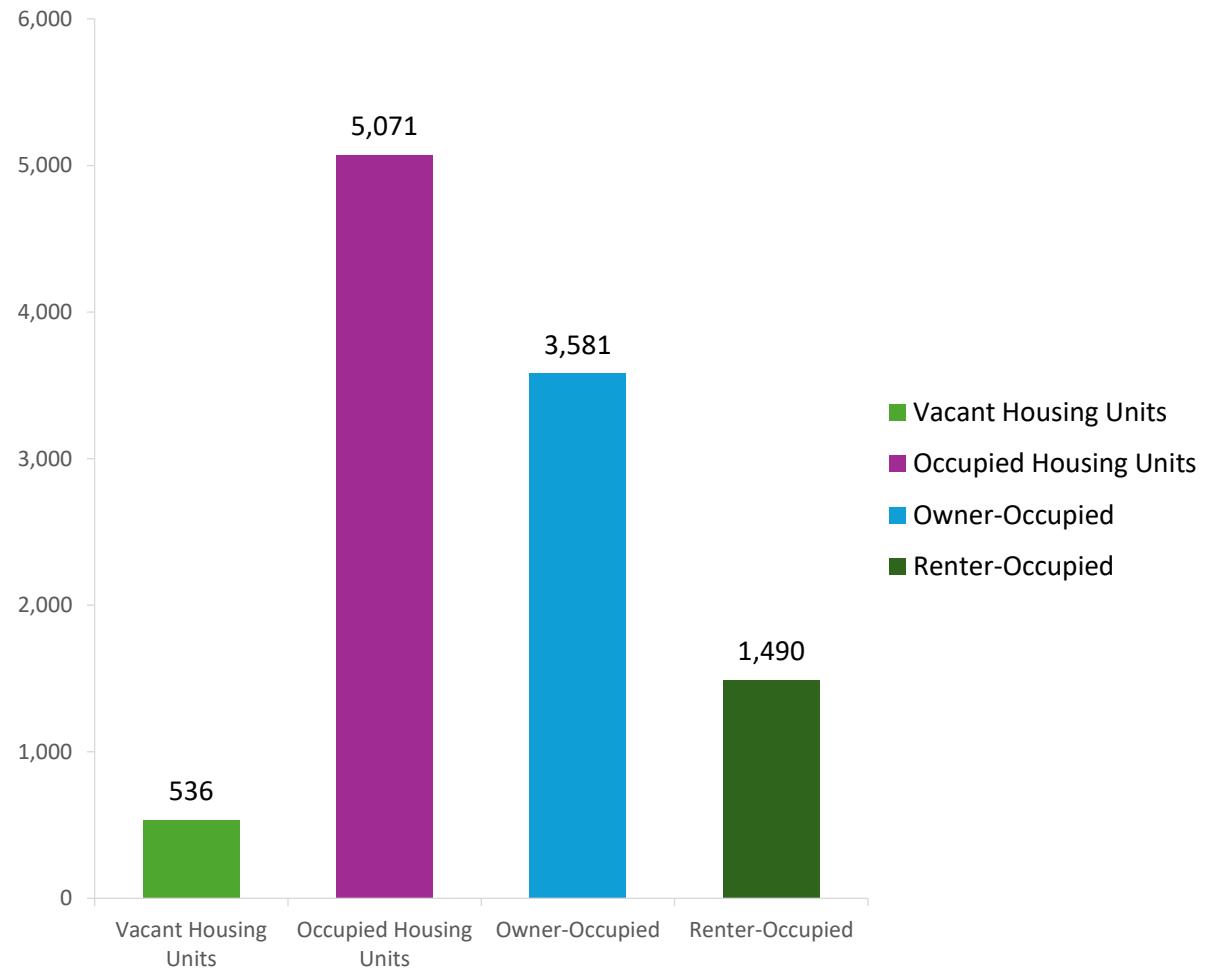
number of households

\$55,625

median household income

10 Minute Drive Time

CURRENT YEAR ESTIMATED HOUSING UNITS BY TENURE



2.26

Average people per household

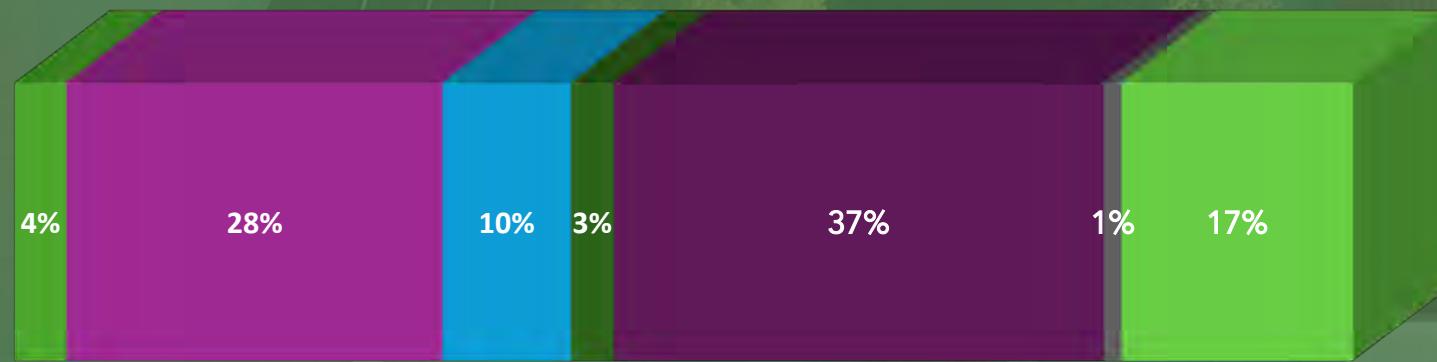
\$290,248
average housing unit value

10 Minute Drive Time

CURRENT YEAR ESTIMATED DAYTIME POPULATION

DAYTIME POPULATION

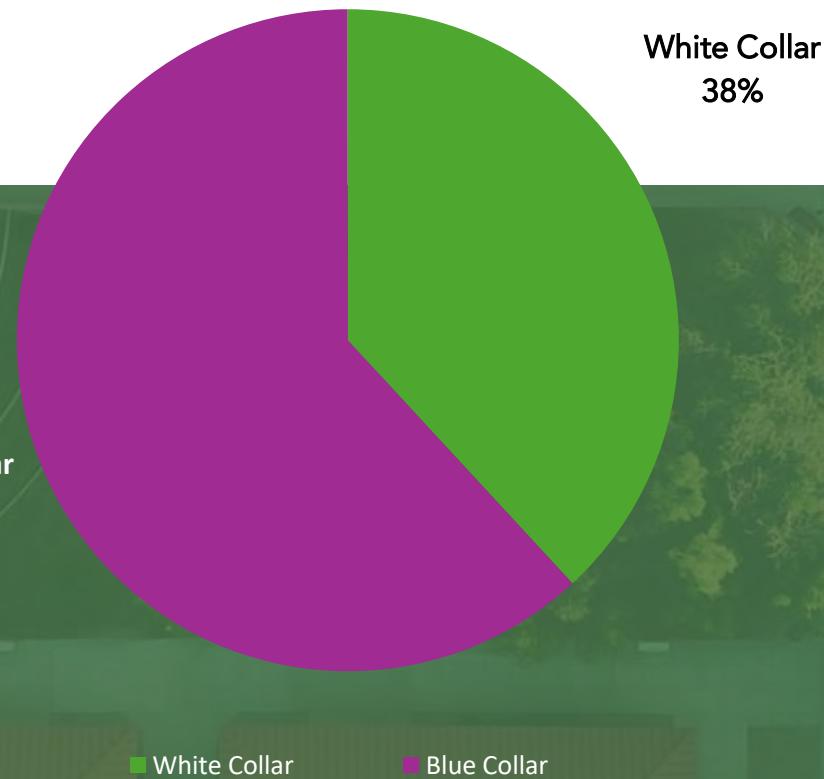
■ Children at home ■ Retired/Disable persons ■ Homemakers ■ Work at Home ■ Employed ■ Unemployed ■ Student Populations



12,393 daytime population

10 Minute Drive Time

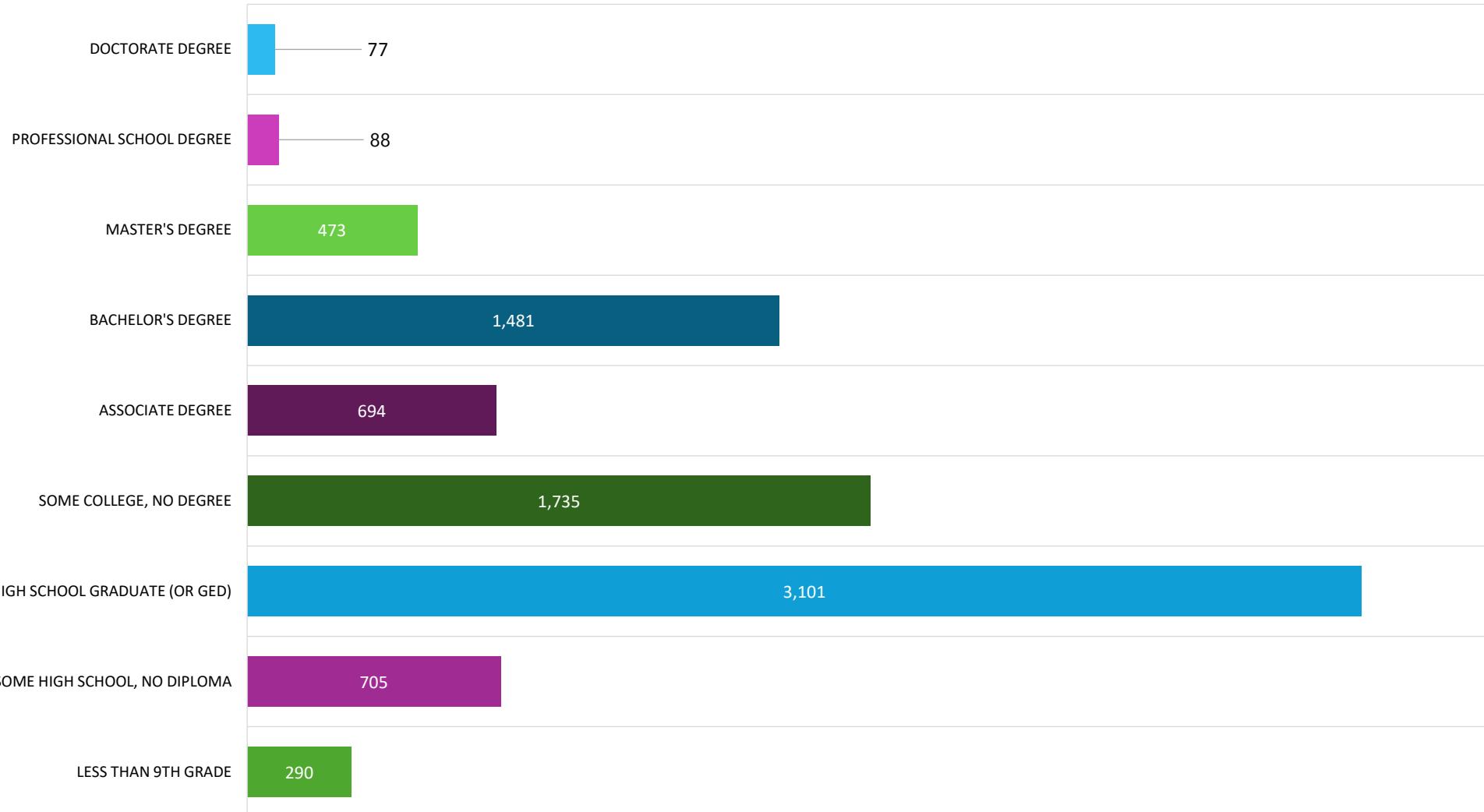
CURRENT YEAR ESTIMATED EMPLOYMENT TYPE



\$53,049
average employee salary

10 Minute Drive Time

Age 25+ by
Educational Attainment



10 Minute Drive Time Gap Analysis

Retail Strategies uses STI:PopStats as our provider of the Consumer Demand and Supply by Establishment (or GAP) information. Several demographers provide the data in a variety of ways. Following are the sources and methodologies used by STI:PopStats and Retail Strategies to draw conclusions for you.

The market supply data is derived from annual retail sales and expenditures from the source data. The source for market supply is U.S. Census Bureau's monthly and annual Census of Retail Trade (CRT) Reports; U.S. Census Bureau's Economic Census. The source for the establishment is Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The consumer demand data by establishment is derived from the BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE).

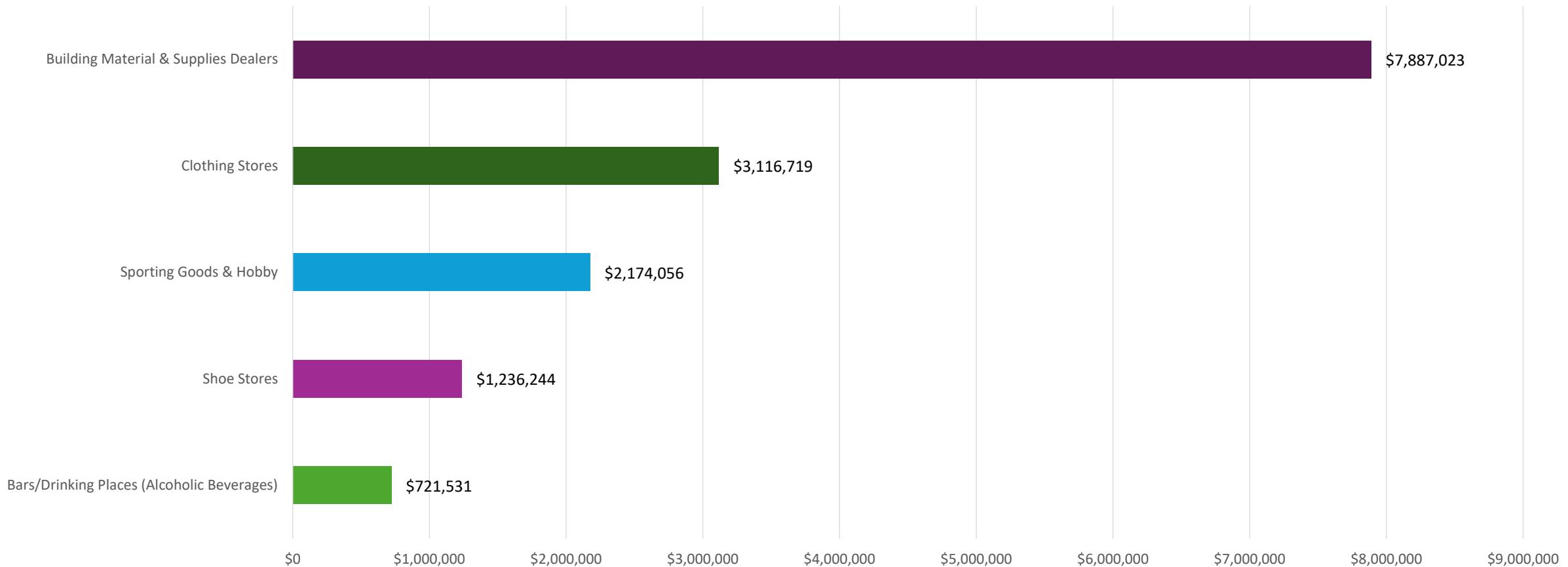
The difference between demand and supply represents the opportunity gap or surplus available for each merchandise line in the specified reporting geography. When the demand is greater than (less than) the supply, there is an opportunity gap (surplus) for that merchandise line. For example, a positive value signifies an opportunity gap, while a negative value signifies a surplus.

The **GAP Analysis** helps us uncover the number of dollars being spent outside of the community on an annual basis from a categorical perspective.

Industries for the consumer expenditures survey are categorized and defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Retail Strategies has narrowed down the categories to only those with real estate growth potential based on national trends.

Data is rarely perfect, but with proper analysis can get us a lot closer to the answer than we would be without it. This is one of several tools used to identify focus categories for recruitment. Our focus or more on the category than the actual dollar amounts.

10 Minute Drive Time Gap Analysis



Tapestry Segmentation

When asked to describe your community, often the leadership describes themselves rather than the dominate personality of the area. Understanding consumer shopping patterns based on personality allow Retail strategies to better align the retail prospects with the purchasing patterns.

Selection of the variables used to identify consumer markets begins with data that includes household characteristics such as single person or family, income, relationships (married or multigenerational), and tenure; personal traits such as age, sex, education, employment, and marital status; and housing characteristics like home value or rent, type of housing (single family, apartment, town house, or mobile home), seasonal status, and owner costs relative to income. In essence, any characteristic that is likely to differentiate consumer spending and preferences is assessed for use in identifying consumer markets.

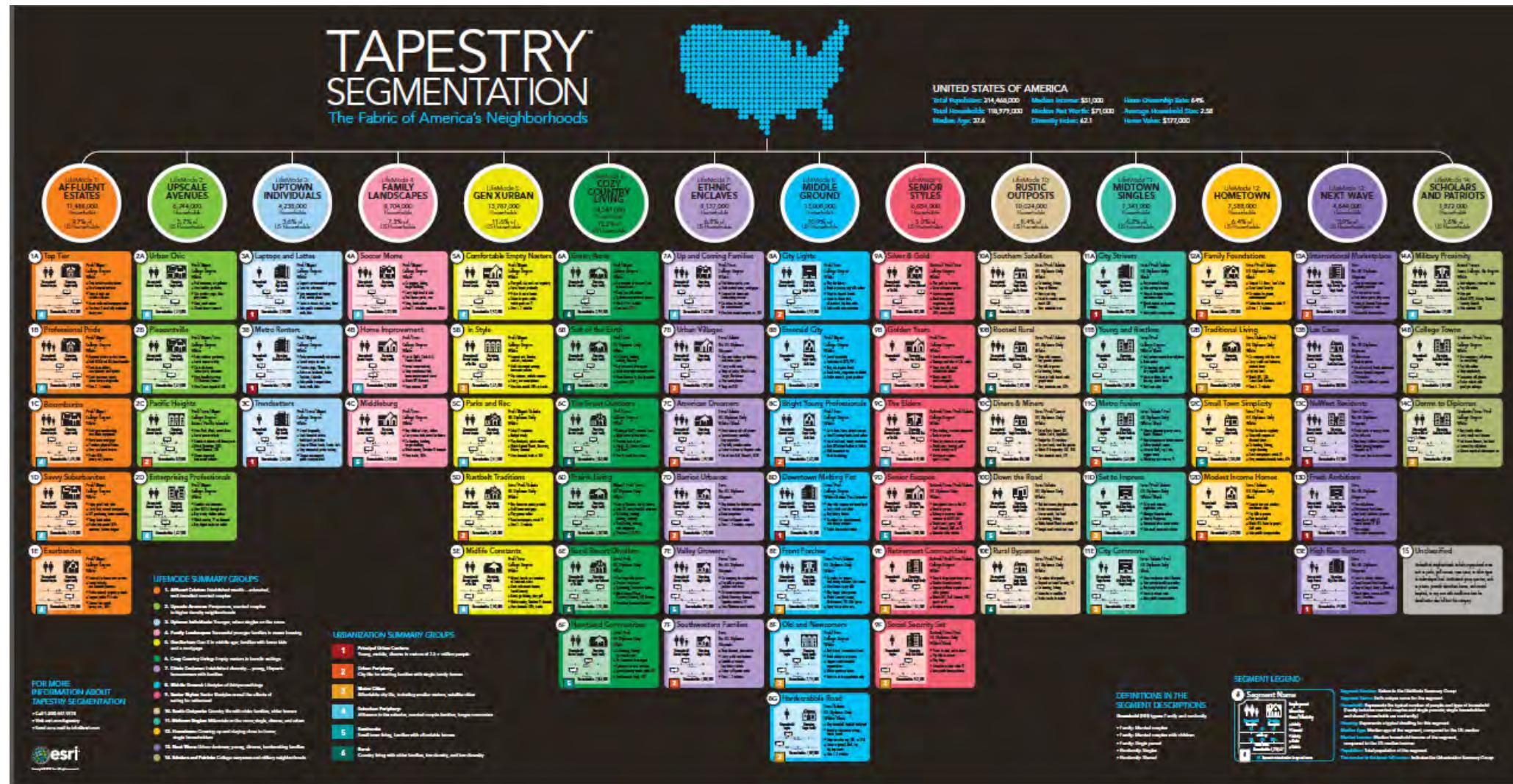


Lifestyle Reports allow **BIG DATA** to be summed up into a simple narrative on the personality of the majority of your households.

ESRI Tapestry Segmentation

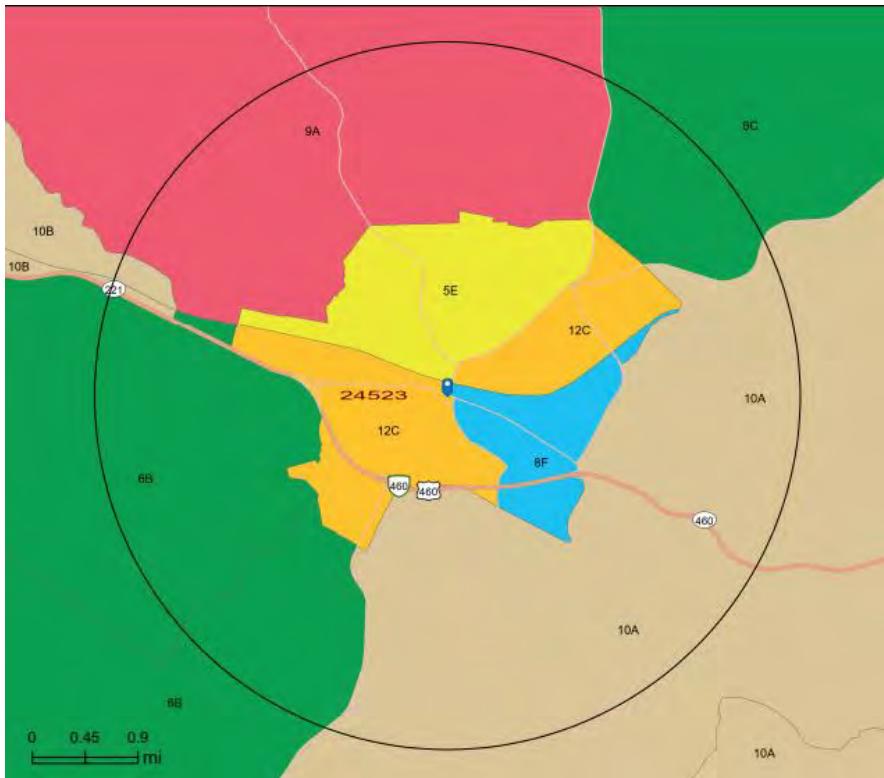
is a geodemographic segmentation system that integrates consumer traits with residential characteristics to identify markets and classify US neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with the most similar characteristics are grouped together, while neighborhoods with divergent characteristics are separated. Internally homogenous, externally heterogeneous market segments depict consumers' lifestyles and life stages. Tapestry Segmentation combines the "who" of lifestyle demography with the "where" of local geography to create a classification model with 67 distinct, behavioral market segments.

Tapestry Segmentation



Tapestry Profile

DOWNTOWN 3 MILE RADIUS



Tapestry LifeMode

L1: Affluent Estates	L8: Middle Ground
L2: Upscale Avenues	L9: Senior Styles
L3: Uptown Individuals	L10: Rustic Outposts
L4: Family Landscapes	L11: Midtown Singles
L5: GenXurban	L12: Hometown
L6: Cozy Country	L13: Next Wave
L7: Ethnic Enclaves	L14: Scholars and Patriots

Rank	Tapestry Segment	2024 Households		2024 U.S. Households		
		Cumulative Percent	Cumulative Percent	Cumulative Percent	Cumulative Percent	Index
1	Small Town Sincerity (12C)	31.6%	31.6%	1.8%	1.8%	1776
2	Midlife Constants (5E)	21.5%	53.1%	2.4%	4.2%	894
3	Southern Satellites (10A)	13.1%	66.2%	3.1%	7.3%	419
4	Salt of the Earth (6B)	12.4%	78.6%	2.8%	10.1%	445
5	Old and Newcomers (8F)	12.1%	90.7%	2.3%	12.4%	530
Subtotal		90.7%		12.4%		

Tapestry Profile



LifeMode Group: Hometown

Small Town Sincerity

12C

Households: 2,305,700

Average Household Size: 2.26

Median Age: 40.8

Median Household Income: \$31,500

WHO ARE WE?

Small Town Sincerity includes young families and senior householders that are bound by community ties. The lifestyle is down-to-earth and semirural, with television for entertainment and news, and emphasis on convenience for both young parents and senior citizens. Residents embark on pursuits including online computer games, renting movies, indoor gardening, and rural activities like hunting and fishing. Residents keep their finances simple—paying bills in person and avoiding debt.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Reside in small towns or semirural neighborhoods, mostly outside metropolitan areas.
- Homes are a mix of older single-family houses (61%), apartments, and mobile homes.
- Half of all homes are owner occupied (Index 79).
- Median home value of \$92,300 is about half the US median.
- Average rent is \$639 (Index 62).
- This is an older market, with half of the householders aged 55 years or older and predominantly single-person households (Index 139).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: 67% with high school diploma or some college.
- Labor force participation lower at 52% (Index 83), which could result from lack of jobs or retirement.
- Income from wages and salaries (Index 83), Social Security (Index 133) or retirement (Index 106), increased by Supplemental Security Income (Index 183).
- Price-conscious consumers that shop accordingly, with coupons at discount centers.
- Connected, but not to the latest or greatest gadgets, keep their landlines.
- Community-oriented residents, more conservative than middle of the road.
- Rely on television or newspapers to stay informed.



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Tapestry Profile



LifeMode Group: GenXurban

Midlife Constants

5E

Households: 3,068,400

Average Household Size: 2.31

Median Age: 47.0

Median Household Income: \$53,200

WHO ARE WE?

Midlife Constants residents are seniors, at or approaching retirement, with below-average labor force participation and below-average net worth. Although located in predominantly metropolitan areas, they live outside the central cities, in smaller communities. Their lifestyle is more country than urban. They are generous but not spendthrifts.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Older homes (most built before 1980) found in the suburban periphery of smaller metropolitan markets.
- Primarily married couples, with a growing share of singles.
- Settled neighborhoods with slow rates of change and residents that have lived in the same house for years.
- Single-family homes, less than half still mortgaged, with a median home value of \$154,100 (Index 74).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: 63% have a high school diploma or some college.
- At 31%, the labor force participation rate is low in this market (Index 91).
- Almost 42% of households are receiving Social Security (Index 141); 27% also receive retirement income (Index 149).
- Traditional, not trendy; opt for convenience and comfort not cutting edge. Technology has its uses, but the bells and whistles are a bother.
- Attentive to price, but not at the expense of quality; they prefer to buy American and natural products.
- Radio and newspapers are the media of choice (after television).

Tapestry Profile



LifeMode Group: Rustic Outposts

Southern Satellites

10A

Households: 3,856,800

Average Household Size: 2.67

Median Age: 40.3

Median Household Income: \$47,800

WHO ARE WE?

Southern Satellites is the second largest market found in rural settlements but within metropolitan areas located primarily in the South. This market is typically slightly older, settled married-couple families, who own their homes. Two-thirds of the homes are single-family structures; almost a third are mobile homes. Median household income and home value are below average. Workers are employed in a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, health care, retail trade, and construction, with higher proportions in mining and agriculture than the US. Residents enjoy country living, preferring outdoor activities and DIY home projects.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- About 78% of households are owned.
- Married couples with no children are the dominant household type, with a number of multigenerational households (Index 112).
- Most are single-family homes (67%), with a number of mobile homes (Index 509).
- Most housing units were built in 1970 or later.
- Most households own one or two vehicles, but owning more than three vehicles is common (Index 144).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: almost 40% have a high school diploma only (Index 140); 45% have college education (Index 73).
- Labor force participation rate is 59.1%, slightly lower than the US.
- These consumers are more concerned about cost rather than quality or brand loyalty.
- They tend to be somewhat late in adapting to technology.
- They obtain a disproportionate amount of their information from TV, compared to other media.



Tapestry Profile



LifeMode Group Cozy Country Living
Salt of the Earth

Households: 3,545,800
Average Household Size: 2.59
Median Age: 44.1
Median Household Income: \$56,300

6B

WHO ARE WE?

Salt of the Earth residents are entrenched in their traditional, rural lifestyles. Citizens here are older, and many have grown children that have moved away. They still cherish family time and also tending to their vegetable gardens and preparing homemade meals. Residents embrace the outdoors; they spend most of their free time preparing for their next fishing, boating, or camping trip. The majority has at least a high school diploma or some college education; many have expanded their skill set during their years of employment in the manufacturing and related industries. They may be experts with DIY projects, but the latest technology is not their forte. They use it when absolutely necessary, but seek face-to-face contact in their routine activities.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- This large segment is concentrated in the Midwest, particularly in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana.
- Due to their rural setting, households own two vehicles to cover their long commutes, often across county boundaries.
- Homeownership rates are very high (Index 133). Single-family homes are affordable, valued at 25% less than the national market.
- Nearly two in three households are composed of married couples, less than half have children at home.

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Steady employment in construction, manufacturing, and related service industries.
- Completed education: 40% with a high school diploma only.
- Household income just over the national median, while net worth is nearly double the national median.
- Spending time with family is their top priority.
- Cost-conscious consumers, loyal to brands they like, with a focus on buying American.
- Last to buy the latest and greatest products.
- Try to eat healthy, tracking the nutrition and ingredients in the food they purchase.

Tapestry Profile



LifeMode Group: Middle Ground **Old and Newcomers**

8F

Households: 2,859,200

Average Household Size: 2.12

Median Age: 39.4

Median Household Income: \$44,900

WHO ARE WE?

This market features singles' lifestyles, on a budget. The focus is more on convenience than consumerism, economy over acquisition. **Old and Newcomers** is composed of neighborhoods in transition, populated by renters who are just beginning their careers or retiring. Some are still in college; some are taking adult education classes. They support charity causes and are environmentally conscious. Age is not always obvious from their choices.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Metropolitan city dwellers.
- Predominantly single households (Index 148), with a mix of married couples (no children); average household size lower at 2.12.
- 55% renter occupied; average rent is lower than the US (Index 85).
- 45% of housing units are single-family dwellings; 45% are multiunit buildings in older neighborhoods, built before 1980.
- Average vacancy rate at 11%.

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- An average labor force participation rate of 62.6%, despite the increasing number of retired workers.
- 32% of households are currently receiving income from Social Security.
- 31% have a college degree (Index 99), 33% have some college education (Index 114), 9% are still enrolled in college (Index 121).
- Consumers are price aware and coupon clippers but open to impulse buys.
- They are attentive to environmental concerns.
- They are comfortable with the latest technology.

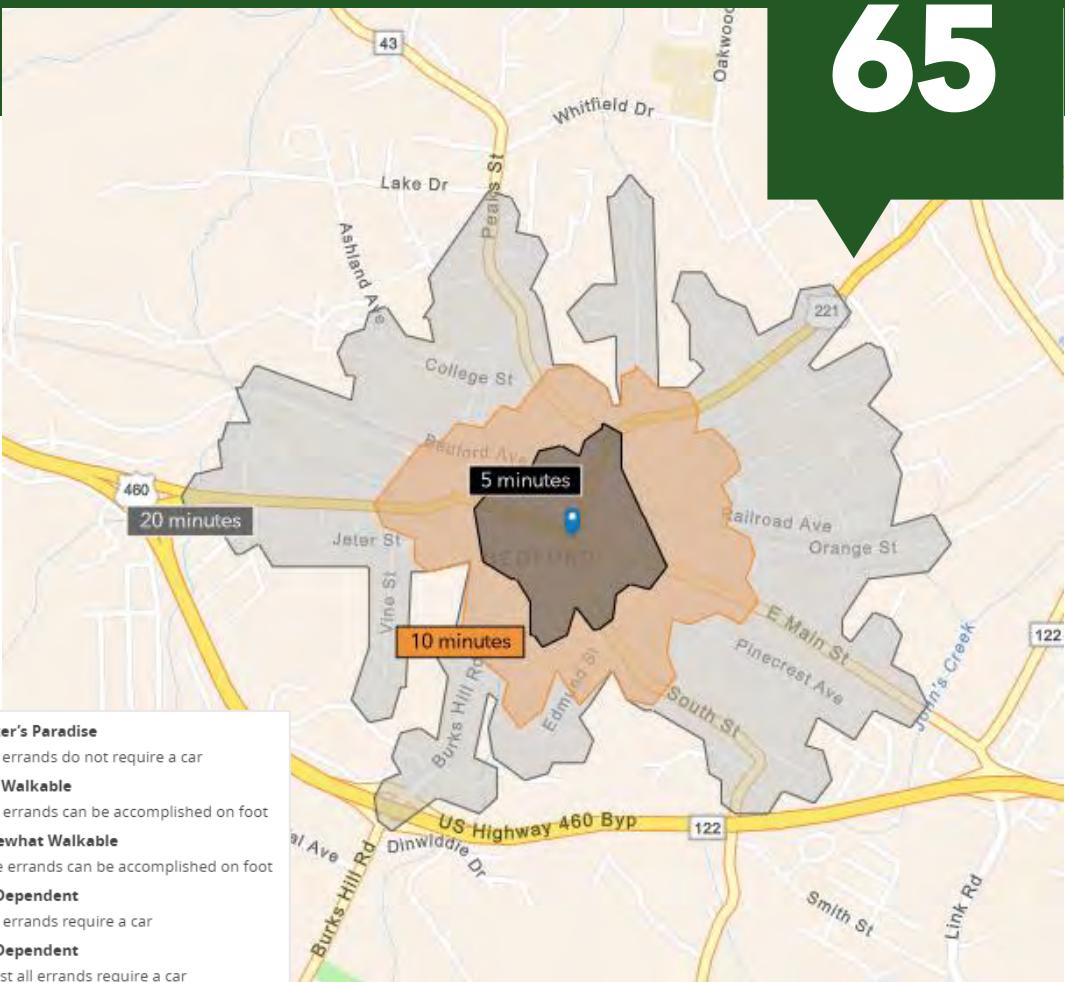
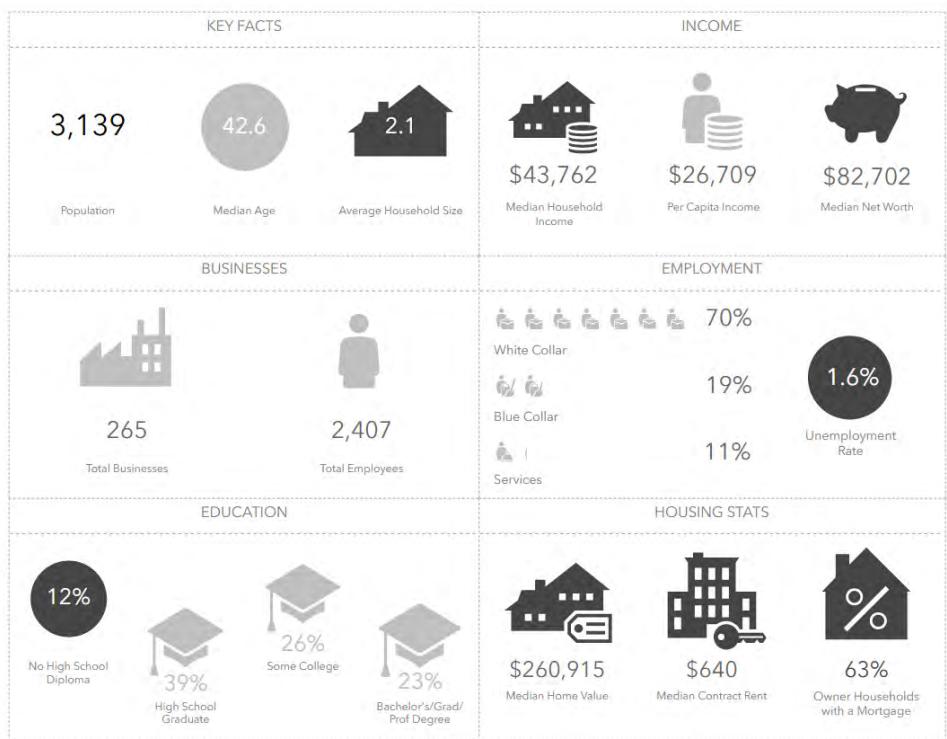
Walkability Assessment

65

What's your Community's Walk Score?

A walkable downtown is highly desirable by consumers, local businesses, and municipal leaders. But what makes a walkable downtown and how do you improve your community's walkability?

A community's walk score is determined by analyzing 3 factors: **walkable distance** between boundaries, presence of a **comprehensive network of pathways** designed for pedestrians and cyclists, and variety of restaurants, retailers, and service providers **necessary for regular life**.

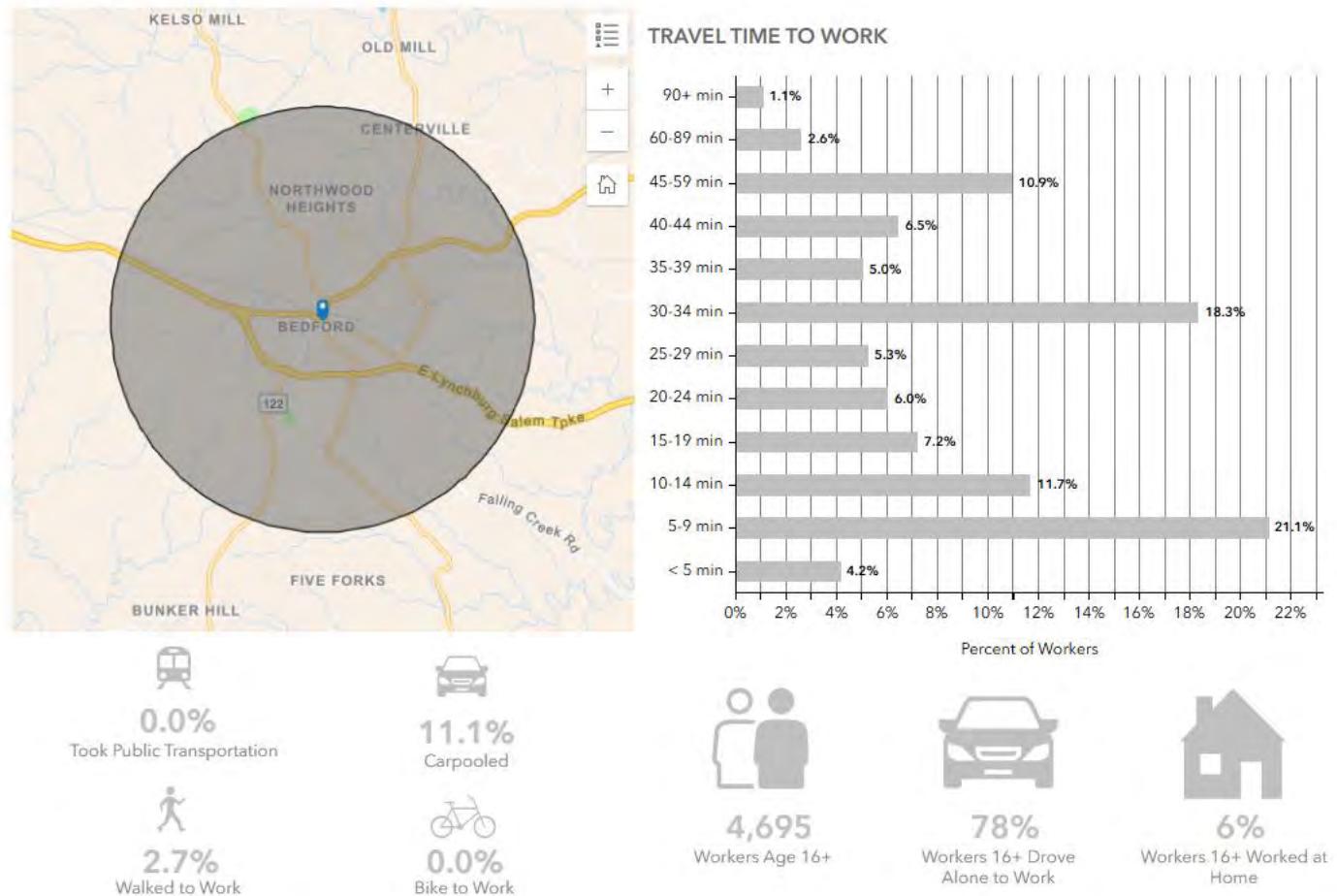


The following demographics represent the **population of residents** within a **20-minute walk time** of the Downtown Study Area.

Keep these figures in mind when imagining the possible economic impacts of developing your Downtown into a walkable destination.

Commute Patterns

DOWNTOWN 3 MILE RADIUS





downtown strategies