



DOWNTOWN ALBANY STRATEGY

PUBLIC WORKSHOP 1

August 06, 2025 | 4:30 - 7:30 PM

Albany Capital Center
55 Eagle Street, Albany, NY 12207

Phase 1 Public Workshop Summary : Part 1
08. 22. 2025

Prepared by Highland Planning



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OVERVIEW

In Spring 2025 Governor Hochul launched the Championing Albany’s Potential (CAP) Initiative, a historic \$400 million State-led investment to revitalize the city’s core. A central component is the Downtown Albany Strategy, a public process to create a blueprint for high-impact investment opportunities that strengthen economic vibrancy, housing, public safety, and quality of life. Led by Empire State Development (ESD), CAP dedicates \$200 million to investments that reinvigorate commercial corridors, expand housing, support small businesses, and transform underutilized spaces, ultimately diversifying Albany’s economy, attracting new investment, and delivering visible results for the community. It will go beyond identifying priorities - it will guide local, regional, and State action over the next 5-10 years to ensure Albany’s revitalization is not just inclusive, but enduring.

The Downtown Albany Strategy is being developed with support from the consulting team led by MIG and including Highland Planning, Streetsense, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Metropolitan Urban Design Workshop, STC Design, and Sherpa.

WORKSHOP PURPOSE

The purpose of the workshop was to share information about the Downtown Albany Strategy and invite community input to help shape the Strategy. Specifically, the workshop helped to define the Strategy’s purpose, goals, timeline, expected outcomes, and opportunities for public involvement. The workshop also served as a forum to gather community feedback on desired community benefits and positive changes as a result of Downtown growth and priority areas for future investment in Downtown Albany. All input received during the workshop will inform the development of investment evaluation criteria and help shape the recommendations contained in the Downtown Albany Strategy.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

With an exceptional turnout of nearly 700 participants, this public workshop was one of Albany’s largest public meetings in recent memory, clearly demonstrating the level of public interest in this historic investment. The workshop was the first large-scale public event in a series of three rounds of public engagement to be held during the planning process to ensure diverse and broad public participation in the development of the Downtown Albany Strategy (DAS). In Fall 2025, the Downtown Albany Strategy will enter Phase 2, Catalytic Development, and will include Public Workshop #2.

Each round of engagement includes several project team-led focus groups and pop-up opportunities to facilitate conversation with interested and impacted parties to understand neighborhood-specific concerns across Downtown Albany. Prior to the public workshop on August 6th, the project team hosted 12 geography-based focus groups engaging with about 100 individuals in all. All input gathered through this process will be shared back publicly on the DAS website and in additional summary documents. This ensures that community voices are visible and helps reinforce transparency at every step. Each round of engagement will align with the three phases of the planning process:

- **Phase 1: Growth and Positioning**
Define and deliver catalytic investments and opportunities
- **Phase 2: Catalytic Initiative Development**
Align public programs and policies to unlock private investment
- **Phase 3: Implementation and Governance Strategy**
Create an actionable blueprint targeting key areas and sites

Hosted by Empire State Development (ESD) at the Albany Capital Center (55 Eagle St, Albany), this event was scheduled from 4:30pm – 7:30pm on Wednesday, August 8, 2025.

Attendees were welcomed at the main entrance to the Capital Center and invited to sign in and contribute to a “Live, Work, Play” mapping activity before proceeding to the second-floor open house event space.

4:30 PM

The open house (scheduled from 4:30pm - 5:30pm) featured a partner agency resource fair, informational boards about the CAP Initiative and Downtown Albany Strategy, an “Advice for Albany” activity, and opportunities to engage directly with project team members. Partners included but were not limited to the City of Albany, NYS Office of General Services, Empire State Plaza, NYS Department of Transportation, Re-imagine 787, and various other agencies/ organizations.

5:30 PM

The presentation portion of the workshop began at 5:30pm and included a welcome and introduction from the honorable NYS Governor Kathy Hochul, who summarized the current administration’s transformational investments in Albany thus far and highlighted the importance of believing in the capital city’s resurgence. ESD President and CEO Hope Knight addressed the audience, and reaffirmed the momentum this initiative can and will create in Downtown Albany.

Directly following, lead consultant MIG kicked off the formal presentation, providing an overview of the CAP Initiative and the Downtown Albany Strategy. MIG highlighted that the Strategy is a growth plan, described the three phases of the planning process and engagement touchpoints, the role of public input in refining evaluation criteria, and that ESD/the State will ultimately make any funding decisions. Interactive polling was used throughout the presentation to engage audience members, asking them about their connection to Downtown and their priorities for future growth.

6:30 PM

Following the presentation, the consultant team guided participants into small group/table discussions, which were facilitated by staff from MIG, Highland Planning, and ESD. Each facilitator supported four to five tables, ensuring all groups (50 tables of about 8-10 participants each) had guidance as they worked together to identify responses to the following questions on large activity sheets and maps of the investment area:

- What positive changes and community benefits should occur through investment in Downtown Albany? How should they be measured?
- To evolve and grow with purpose and achieve the desired community benefits, where should growth and investment occur first?

The workshop closed with a thank you message from the project team to all participants, and the project team documented all materials that were left behind including the small group discussion work products.

7:30 PM

Two Spanish language translators and two American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters were available on demand for any workshop participants who would require/benefit from their services. The presentation was recorded by event staff and is accessible on the DAS website: <https://downtownalbanystrategy.com/>.

The workshop was publicized through a coordinated outreach effort led by ESD, Highland Planning, and the MIG Communications Team. Promotional materials included a save-the-date flyer and palm cards distributed at focus groups and business drop-ins, as well as social media posts, ESD email announcements, the DAS website, and an Eventbrite page collecting optional RSVPs for the workshop.

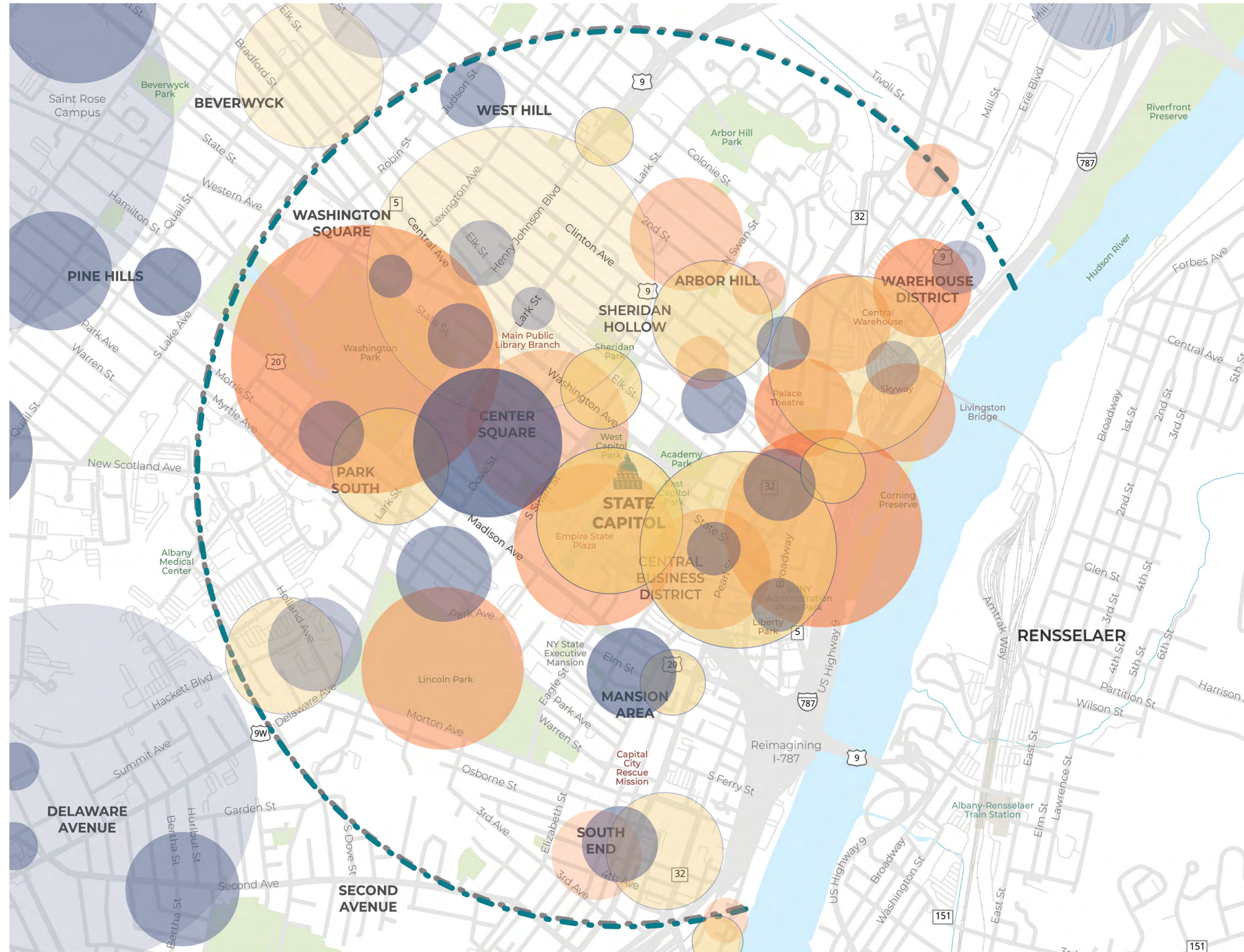


Figure: Heatmap showing the spread and density of “live”, “work” and “play” pins placed by participants

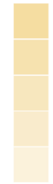
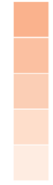
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Workshop attendees were asked to participate in several interactive activities designed to gather feedback that directly informs the development of the Downtown Albany Strategy. The results are summarized in the following sections.

LIVE - WORK - PLAY

The “Live, Work, Play” activity was included at the sign-in table and asked attendees to share where they live, work, and play in Downtown Albany. Attendees used orange push pins to mark where they play, blue push pins to mark where they live, and yellow push pins to mark where they work. There were 703 total pins placed across four identical maps. A heat map showing the concentration of all pins is shown to the left.

LEGEND

-  Investment Area
-  ‘Live’ pins in order of decreasing density
-  ‘Work’ pins in order of decreasing density
-  ‘Play’ pins in order of decreasing density

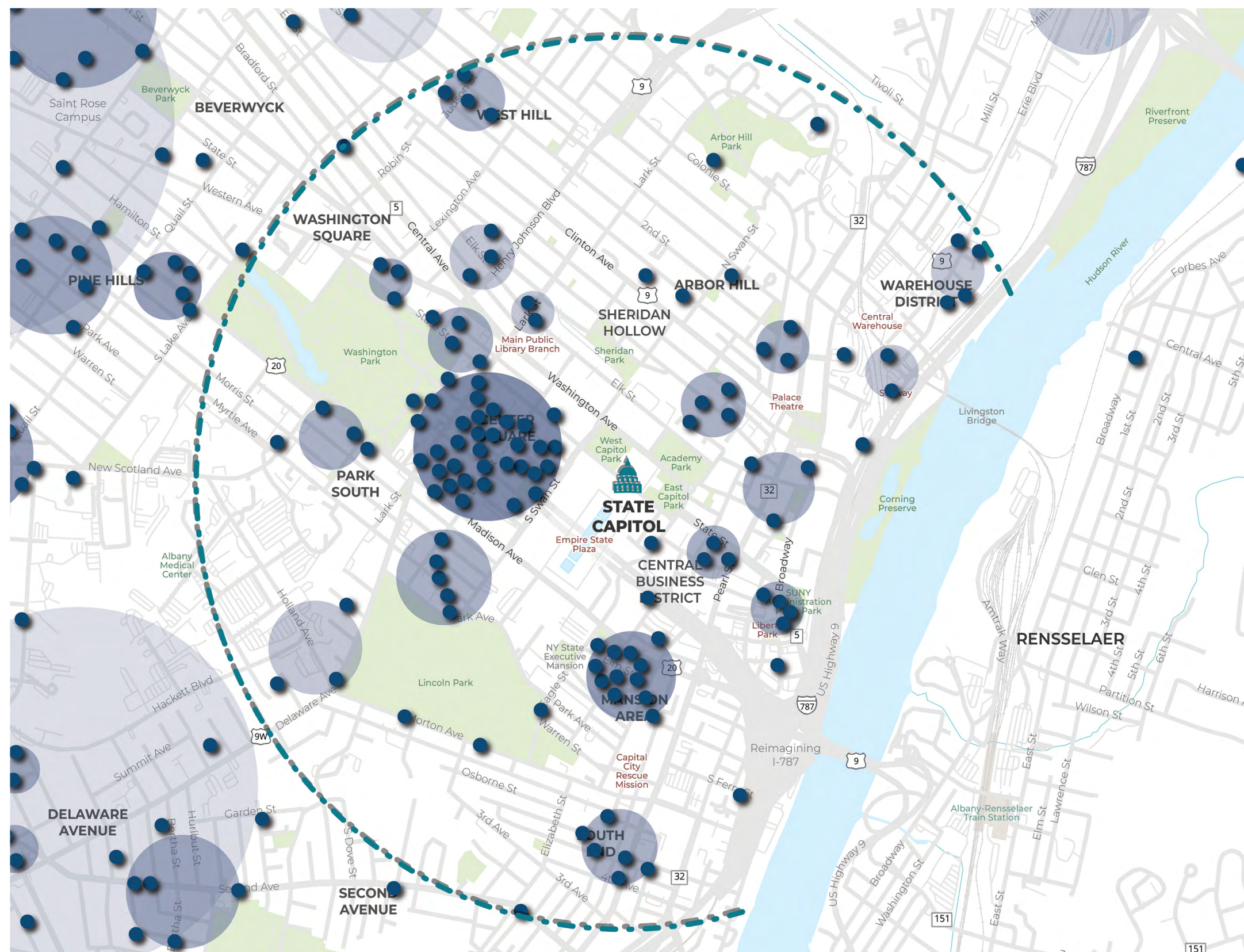


Figure: Heatmap showing the spread and density of “live” pins placed by participants

WHERE PEOPLE LIVE

While some workshop participants live in Downtown Albany, many live outside Downtown, showing broad citywide and regional interest in its future. Downtown Albany’s future matters to people across the city, not just those who live within the Strategy area, underscoring its role as a shared center for living, working, and gathering.

“Live” pins totaled 222, with the most pinned areas being Center Square, the Mansion Area, and Pine Hills. A significant number of “live” pins were placed outside the delineated Downtown Albany Strategy Area and off the printed map.

LEGEND

- Investment Area
- ‘Live’ pin locations
- Visually observed distribution of ‘Live’ pins in order of decreasing density

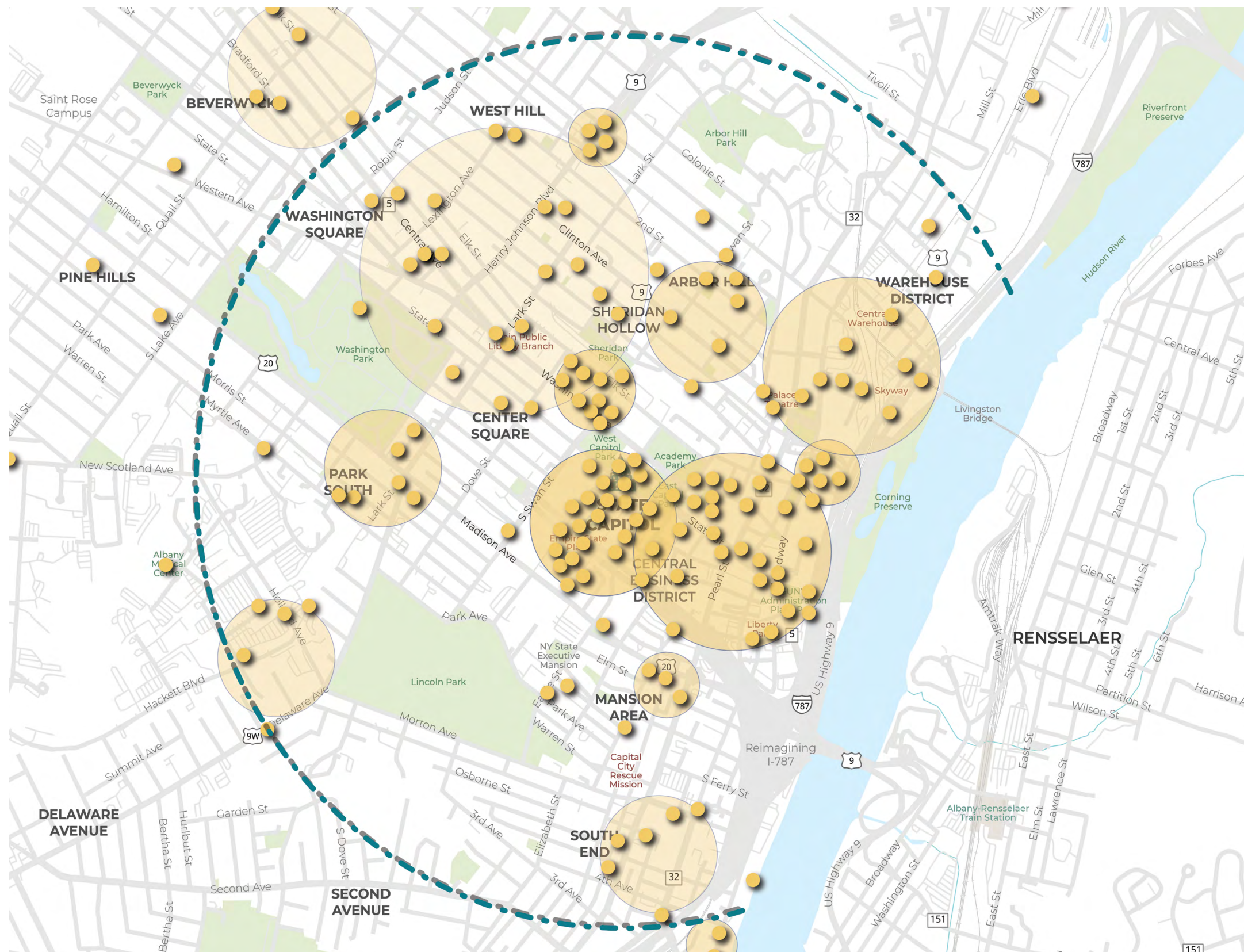


Figure: Heatmap showing the spread and density of “work” pins placed by participants

WHERE PEOPLE WORK

The highest concentration of “work” pins were located near the State Capitol building, Empire State Plaza, and the Downtown Business District. A total of 198 “work” pins were placed in the Downtown Albany Strategy area by workshop attendees. This reflects Downtown’s role as a hub for jobs, though it does not necessarily mean that half of attendees themselves work there.

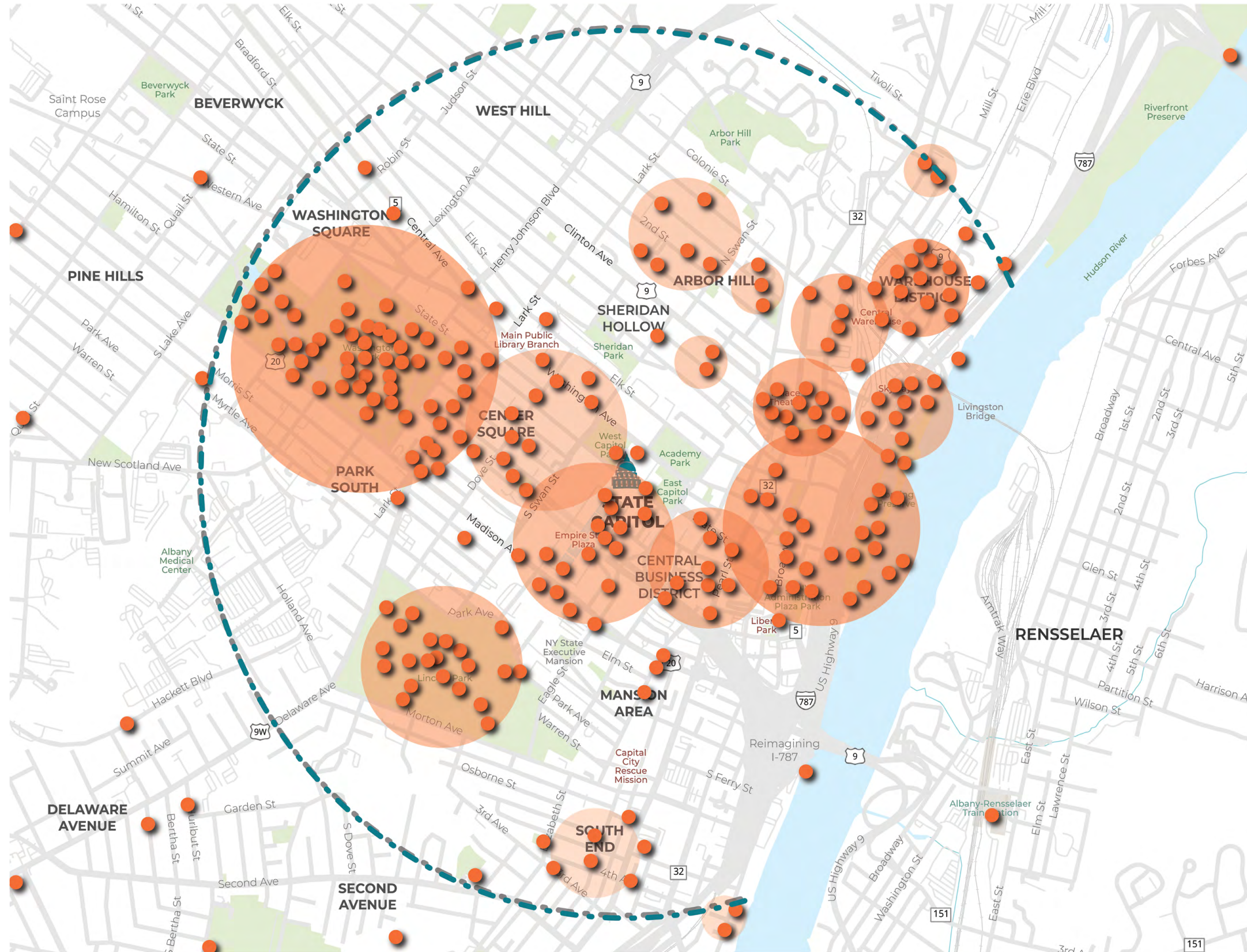


Figure: Heatmap showing the spread and density of “play” pins placed by participants

WHERE PEOPLE PLAY

The majority of pins in Downtown were concentrated in “play” locations, with the highest concentrations in Washington Park, Lincoln Park, the Corning Preserve, and the Warehouse District. The distribution of the 282 “play” pins highlights key Downtown attractions and also notable gaps. There was a lack of pins in the South End, West Hill, Sheridan Hollow, Arbor Hill and along Central Avenue.

ADVICE FOR ALBANY ACTIVITY

During the open house resource fair, participants were invited to share “One piece of advice for Downtown Albany’s growth” by writing their thoughts on sticky notes and posting them on one of two identical vertical banners for all to see. A total of 165 notes were collected, reflecting a wide range of perspectives. The input is organized into key themes below, which highlights the community’s priorities and ideas for shaping Albany’s future.

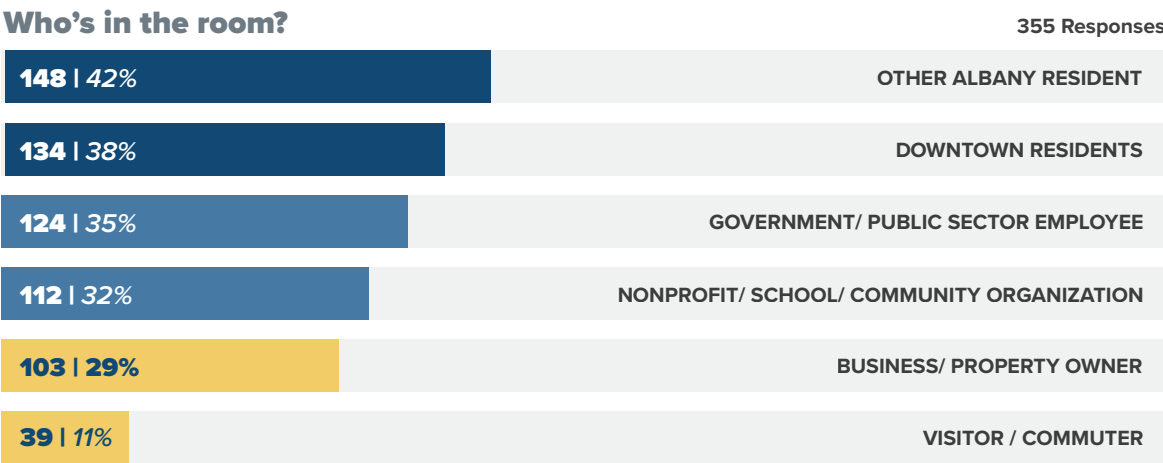
THEMES FROM RESPONSES

- **Tackle poverty and social needs**
Many responses urged action on drug use, poverty, and related social determinants of health.
- **Support residents and small businesses**
Calls for genuine community engagement, prioritizing residents’ voices over outside interests, and respecting small business needs.
- **Make Downtown cleaner, safer, and more welcoming**
Ideas included improving lighting, cleaning streets, adding public amenities, and making spaces feel safe and welcoming.
- **Grow jobs and attractions**
Encouragement to grow businesses, attract visitors, host events, and provide entertainment that draws people downtown.
- **Improve transportation and accessibility**
Suggestions ranged from better transit and bike/scooter options to more parking and walkable connections.
- **Expand housing and affordability**
Calls for affordable housing options, increased housing access, mixed-income developments, and solutions for the unhoused.



PARTICIPANT POLLING ACTIVITY

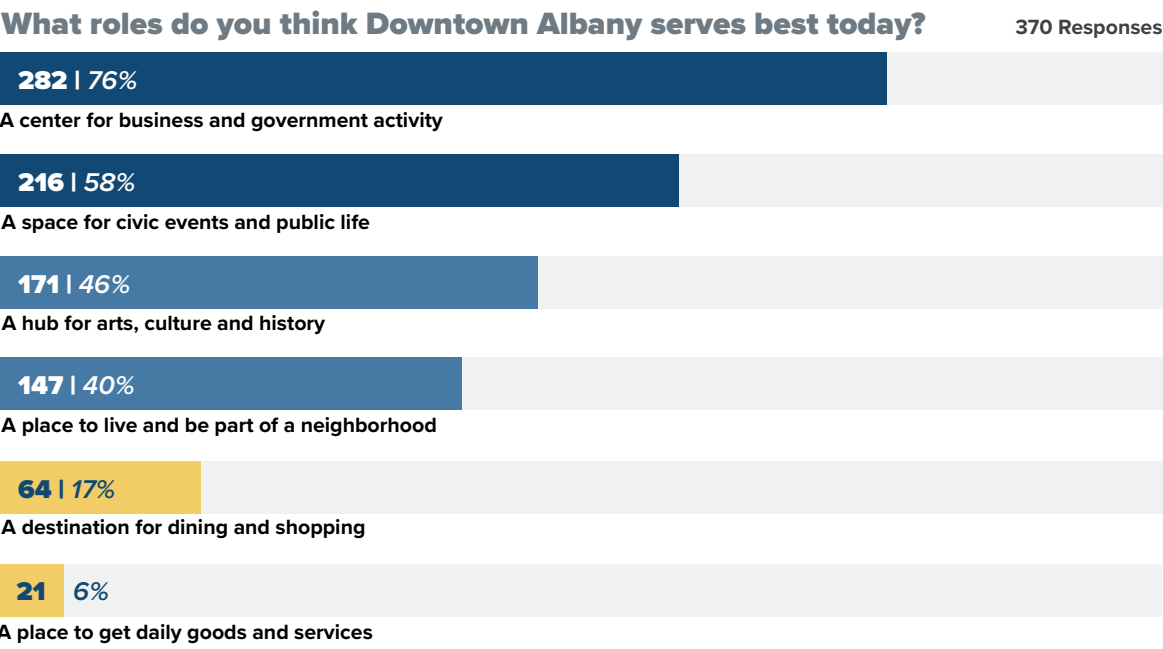
During the presentation portion of the workshop, interactive polling (using Mentimeter online software) was used to engage participants. A number of demographic questions were asked, and a few questions to identify priorities for downtown growth, such as retail, restaurants, cultural venues, parks, or civic anchors.



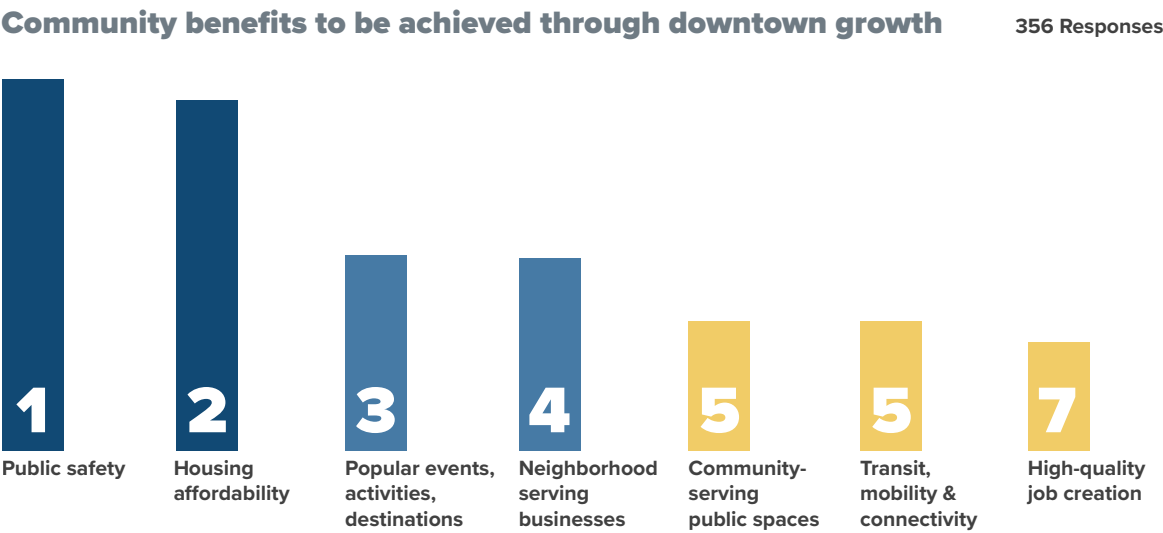
355 people responded to the question of who was in the room. The largest groups were other Albany residents (148) and downtown residents (134). Government or public sector employees (124), representatives of nonprofits, schools, or community organizations (112), and business or property owners (103) were also well represented, while a smaller group identified as visitors or commuters (39).

When asked about the roles Downtown Albany serves best today, 370 participants most frequently selected a center for business and government activity (282). Other top responses included a space for civic events and public life (216), a hub for arts, culture, and history (171), and a place to live and be part of a neighborhood (147). Fewer respondents saw downtown as a destination for dining and shopping (64) or a place to get daily goods and services (21).

The responses suggest that most participants were local, with many living in Albany or downtown specifically. A diverse mix of stakeholders (government employees, nonprofit representatives, and business owners) were well represented. Downtown Albany appeared to be most commonly seen as a center for business and government, followed by a space for civic life and cultural activities. Fewer respondents viewed it as a destination for shopping, dining, or daily services.



In ranking community benefits to be achieved through downtown growth, 356 participants placed the highest priority on public safety (89 votes) and housing affordability (84). These were followed by popular activities and destinations (49) and neighborhood-serving businesses (46). Community-serving public spaces (31), transit, mobility, and connectivity (31) and high-quality job creation (26) were ranked lower as top priorities compared to core needs like safety and affordability.



COMMUNITY BENEFITS ACTIVITY

During small group activities, participants were invited to share more regarding their perspectives on what “community benefits” meant and how they should be measured when evaluating potential investment opportunities. Using a large sheet, table groups documented their input, ideas, and recommendations, helping to define locally relevant criteria that reflected community priorities and values. This process was aimed to help define success in terms that go beyond technical measures, emphasizing outcomes that directly support community well-being and ensure that evaluation will be responsive to community needs.

The chart below highlights the frequency with which different community benefits were identified by table groups. The top five most cited community benefits related to **transit, mobility, and connectivity; housing; neighborhood-serving businesses; public spaces; and activities, events, and, destinations.**

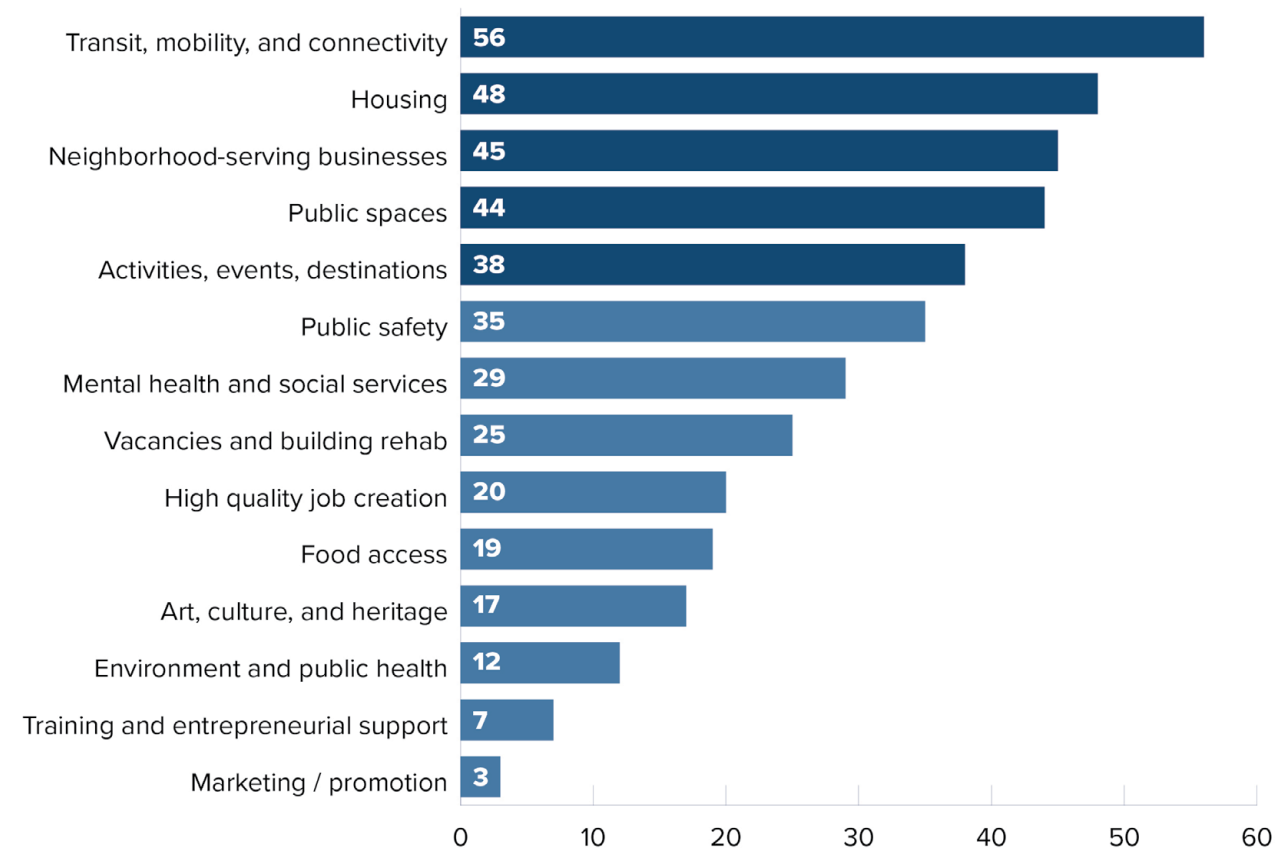


Figure: Frequency of topics/themes addressed as part of the community benefits activity

TOPIC (Desired benefits)	SUCCESS MEASUREMENTS
Transit, Mobility, and Connectivity • Increase availability of transit and bike infrastructure • Improve accessibility • Provide safer multi-modal options	• Greater availability of public transit after business hours • Better transportation and inter-neighborhood accessibility • Walkability between the waterfront, Arbor Hill and Washington Park • Reduced car commuters • More stops for buses and trains and increased ridership • Presence of trams/monorails connecting from Amtrak to Capital Region inter-municipal transit hubs such as the Airport • Protected bike lanes
Housing • More housing • Improved housing affordability and access • Increased diversity of housing stock	• Percentage of affordable units created • Increased housing diversity • Increased mixed income housing ownership • Downtown population growth • Decrease in unhoused population • Higher percentage of people who live and work in Downtown Albany • New housing investments made without displacing current residents
Neighborhood-Serving Businesses • Job creation • New businesses • Existing business retention	• Reduced vacancy rate for Downtown storefronts • Increase in number of small businesses opened and sustained • Increase in local sales tax revenue increase and business diversity index • Increase in the number of businesses receiving support from local organizations (e.g., BID) so they can expand and evolve • More customers and tourists attracted to Albany • Increase in the number of establishments that address food, medicine, clothing, and other basic needs

TOPIC <i>(Desired benefits)</i>	SUCCESS MEASUREMENTS
Public Spaces - Enhanced public spaces - Celebrate local arts culture, and heritage	- Increase in the number of Downtown visitors and residents enjoying and utilizing public spaces - Increase in shade trees, plantings, and green spaces - Continued and increased support of neighborhood organizations and non-profits working to beautify public spaces - Clean sidewalks and streets - More refuse/recycling receptacles evenly distributed across Downtown
Activities, Events, and Destinations - Connect communities - Build pride - Make Albany a destination	- Number of community events, programs, spaces (attendance/participation rates) - Resident satisfaction, sense of belonging, and improved perception of safety - Increased volunteer/civic engagement levels - More programming / facilities for youth - Better attendance downtown equals accessibility for everyone - Increase in year-round / evening events and attractions
Public Safety - Improve real and perceived safety - Familiarize community with public safety efforts	- Reduction in crime rate - Increased pedestrian scale lighting - Crime or nuisance behavior decreases - Communities are safer for all demographics - Increased presence of neighborhood beat cops - Increased communication opportunities between public safety workers and members of the public

TOPIC <i>(Desired benefits)</i>	SUCCESS MEASUREMENTS
Mental Health and Social Services - Available and responsive supportive services - Address unhoused population challenges	- Mental health services readily available to those in need - Increased presence of trained outreach workers on the street - Increase in youth-focused services and facilities - More affordable childcare options - Connect healthcare providers with aftercare support services to prevent pathways to decline - Partner with Albany Medical Center and other anchor institutions to find solutions to mental health service gaps in city
Vacancies and Building Rehabilitation - Reduction in vacant buildings - Rehabilitate existing building stock	- Increased mixed-use or infill development - Vacant lots become community assets (e.g., new homes, community gardens, seasonal markets) - Neighborhoods are welcoming - Outdated public infrastructure is upgraded
High Quality Job Creation - Opportunities to work and live in the same place - Job options that create opportunity	- More jobs in Downtown Albany - Increased recruitment of underrepresented communities - Creation of workforce pipelines for youth
Food Access - Diverse options - Affordable options	- Neighborhood grocery stores opened - Affordable and nutritional options offered - Increase in Downtown farmers/fresh food markets - Multiple cuisine/cultural options available that reflect the neighborhood(s)

TOPIC <i>(Desired benefits)</i>	SUCCESS MEASUREMENTS
Art, Culture, and Heritage • Celebrate local culture • Honor local history	• Neighborhood identity established • Walkability/connectivity within neighborhoods • Historic neighborhoods are highlighted • Connect homeowners to historic preservation options/funding • More arts/cultural centers
Environment and Public Health • Identify connections between historic disinvestment and public health decline • Address inequities across neighborhoods	• Indoor and outdoor recreational spaces are walkable for families city-wide • Regular air and water quality measurement • Mapping flood prone areas and addressing outdated related infrastructure • Clean transportation options available/implemented city-wide
Training and Entrepreneurial Support • Public and private partnerships • Mentorship opportunities	• Increased number of residents trained and certified in various technical skills • An increase in a variety of employment opportunities within the Downtown • Public and private partnerships between school district/community organizations/colleges and local/regional businesses
Marketing/Promotion • Promote Downtown Albany as a regional destination • Bolster community pride	• Welcoming gateways established at all entrances to Downtown Albany • Year-round activities, a vibrant city that feels active • Increased wayfinding signage to promote destinations • Visitors and regional residents can easily navigate Downtown

GROWTH AND INVESTMENT ACTIVITY

The second small group activity focused on identifying participants’ collective priorities for where growth and investment should be concentrated in Downtown Albany. Across 52 small groups, 109 nodes in Downtown Albany were identified, along with a series of desired areawide investments and opportunities. Participants were able to annotate a large scale map during this activity. The investment areas identified are mapped utilizing an online platform (ProxiMap) here: map.proxi.co/r/-Cfqje__8qrp5v5L66as

AREAWIDE INVESTMENTS AND PRIORITIES

Participants identified several areawide or larger-scale priorities for investment. These have been categorized by theme and are listed below.

Connectivity and Streetscape

- Improve and maintain streets – make them safer for driving, walking and biking
- Increase bike connectivity throughout downtown
- Organize more street events, summer streets or other occasions for pedestrian-only access on the streets
- Pedestrian-only access on Lark Street
- More art and murals across downtown
- Streetscape improvements and beautification – pedestrian-scale lighting, planters, bins, clean bus shelters
- Public transportation - improve reliability and connectivity
- Pedestrian and bike connections to Rensselaer, particularly the Amtrak station and riverfront esplanade
- Public boat launch at the Corning Preserve
- Create better and safer pedestrian and biking connections between Downtown and the Warehouse District
- Develop Henry Johnson Boulevard as a gateway into the city
- Create a historic trail highlighting Albany’s historic and cultural assets starting at Liberty Park (similar to Boston’s Freedom Trail)

Parks and other Public Spaces

- Create more community gardens, parks and green spaces – and provide a platform for locals to learn about and grow native plants
- Provide permanent park infrastructure at Washington Park and Lincoln Park, including more and better maintained amenities for children
- Prevent private vehicles from entering Washington Park

Housing and Mixed-Use Development

- More affordable / mixed-income housing
- Invest in and revitalize existing cultural institutions, libraries and historic landmarks
- Demolish condemned buildings and use space for public benefit
- Reuse of vacant buildings and activation of sidewalks by supporting small businesses and storefronts
- Introduce grocery stores and healthy food access across downtown, particularly in the Warehouse District and South End
- Free parking close to business clusters (CBD, along Pearl and State)
- Demolish Central Warehouse and replace with a community facility

Public Safety and Sanitation

- Increase police patrolling and create a more community-facing PD culture
- Sanitation and street cleanliness programs
- Safety call boxes throughout downtown

Community Development Initiatives

- Community Loan Fund
- Satellite offices for neighborhood services
- Consistent community engagement
- Better City and County services (DSS, DMV)
- Universal basic income pilot program
- Cultural community advocacy plan
- Generate well-paying jobs and provide opportunities for job training
- Affordable and accessible childcare throughout downtown
- Youth empowerment programs

Sustainability and Resilience

- Invest in clean energy infrastructure across downtown
- Update utilities and infrastructure – water, sewage, electricity, internet wiring

SHARED PRIORITIES BY FOCUS AREA

A number of nodes and neighborhood investments were recorded as priorities across multiple groups of participant tables and are listed below in alphabetical order.

FOCUS AREA	INVESTMENT PRIORITIES
Park South Neighborhood	• Create stronger connections to downtown • Encourage small businesses and local entrepreneurs to establish storefronts around Albany Medical Center • Foster a partnership between Neighborhood Services and Albany Medical Center to create small clinics and primary care centers in key parts of downtown Albany
Arbor Hill	• Improve public safety • Support more affordable, mixed-use development • Pedestrian-scale improvements and investment
Center Square	• More support for small businesses • Increase bike connectivity
Central Ave	• Improve public safety • Sanitation - trash pickup and street maintenance • Small business support for sidewalk activation • Pedestrian safety and amenities
Central Business District	• Improve public safety • Free parking • More active nightlife • Support existing businesses and incentivize new businesses to take over empty stores • Small business incubator with shared commercial kitchen / food court style setup • Increase pedestrian and biker safety • Improve bike connectivity

FOCUS AREA	INVESTMENT PRIORITIES
Clinton Ave / Skyway / Palace Theater	- Establish and maintain as a hub for small businesses and creative entrepreneurs - Improve pedestrian and biker safety
Corning Preserve	- Create stronger connections and better access to downtown - More activities for all age groups - Public boat launch
Dunn Memorial Bridge	Establish pedestrian and biking connections between downtown Albany and Rensselaer, particularly the Amtrak station and the waterfront esplanade
Empire State Plaza	- More activities on the Plaza for all ages and communities - Create a softer landscape with more trees and planting
Greyhound Bus Terminal and Liberty Park	- Redevelop as a multimodal transit hub - Integrate retail and entertainment to create a positive, welcoming experience at this gateway into the city - Mixed-use development with access to high quality affordable housing - Create a history trail connecting downtown's landmarks, starting at Liberty Park - Leverage their proximity to one another and welcome visitors to explore Albany's history and architecture - Consider community-centric uses other than a potential stadium
Henry Johnson Boulevard	- Develop the boulevard as a gateway into the city - Support more affordable, mixed-use development
I-787 Circle Interchange	- Demolish and replace with boulevard - Create a welcoming and safe public space with retail - Improve public safety

FOCUS AREA	INVESTMENT PRIORITIES
Lark Street	- Pedestrianize Lark Street - Improve public safety - Redesign the intersection of Lark Street and Delaware Avenue to improve pedestrian safety and connectivity - Promote pedestrian safety in and around Dana Park through reduction of vehicular speed, pedestrian-scale lighting and other measures
Lincoln Park / Towers	- Improve public safety - More activities for senior populations and children - Redevelop Lincoln Towers into a new, high-quality affordable housing complex
Morton Avenue	- Promote mixed-use development - Increase availability of housing for a range of incomes
NY State Museum	- Create more programming for all ages - Activate the museum after hours with summer events, 'First Friday' events and other events to mark special occasions
South End	- Grocery store with access to fresh, healthy food - Pharmacy - Improve public safety - Youth engagement and skill development opportunities - Incentivization of local homeownership - Make the South End more welcoming and walkable with safer streets, [pedestrian-scale lighting, and streetscaping elements such as planters - Invest more resources into Capital City Rescue Mission
South Swan Street	- Improve pedestrian and biker safety - Improve bike connectivity

FOCUS AREA	INVESTMENT PRIORITIES
Ten Broeck Mansion / Van Rensselaer Park / St Joseph’s Church	• Highlight Ten Broeck Triangle as a historic asset • Activate Rensselaer Park as a community gathering space
Warehouse District	• Safer and stronger pedestrian and biking connections to the rest of downtown and city • High density mixed-use development to incentivize and support more small businesses • Grocery store and access to fresh, healthy food • Address Central Warehouse blight and replace with a community-centric use or space
Washington Ave	• Activate storefronts and sidewalks • Improve public safety • Sanitation • Improve pedestrian and biker safety
Washington Park	• Prevent private vehicles from entering the park • More permanent seating and other recreational amenities, especially for children • Activate the park in the evenings and on weekends to bring the community together
West Hill	• Create more high quality affordable housing • Increase connectivity to the Central Business District • Improve public safety

NEXT STEPS

An online questionnaire has been launched on the DAS website as of August 27, 2025 to provide opportunity to individuals that couldn’t attend Public Workshop 1 to share ideas and input for the future of Downtown Albany. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify the positive changes the community would like to see realized as part of the Downtown Albany Strategy, gather public input to define priority areas for future investment and ensure recommendations reflect the voices and insights of those who know Albany best.

As the Downtown Albany Strategy advances into the next phase this Fall, public engagement will continue to be a critical part of the process. All are encouraged to visit the DAS website and sign up for email updates to stay up to date on all DAS-related activity and various upcoming multiplatform engagement opportunities.

Empire State Development (ESD) will determine how the funds are invested, guided by the Downtown Albany Strategy final product. ESD will continue to rely on input from the public, downtown business community, government, and many other stakeholders to prioritize areas for investment.

