



DOWNTOWN ALBANY STRATEGY

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

February 6, 2026

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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT

DOWNTOWN ALBANY STRATEGY

Albany is a city of promise and potential. As New York State's capital and part of a strong, growing region, it has unique assets—but Downtown has long faced challenges, including fragmented development, public safety concerns, and high commercial vacancies. In response, Governor Hochul launched the **Championing Albany's Potential (CAP) Initiative**, a State-led effort backed by a historic \$400 million investment to revitalize Downtown Albany.

The **Downtown Albany Strategy** is a central component of CAP. Shaped through a strategic community process, Downtown Albany Strategy provides a flexible, action-oriented framework to connect State investment to community needs and guide catalytic revitalization over the next five to ten years.

Downtown Albany Strategy was developed with urgency and strong community involvement. More than 2,300 residents, workers, students, business owners, and community leaders helped shape its priorities, sending a clear message: people care deeply about Downtown Albany and want visible progress.

This Summary summarizes engagement activities, documents how public input informed Downtown Albany Strategy's priorities, tools, and recommendations, and serves as a supplementary reference to the Downtown Albany Strategy as it moves toward implementation.

A MULTI-PHASED APPROACH TO LISTENING

The Downtown Albany Strategy followed a sequential engagement process where each stage of public input directly shaped the next. Detailed summaries of public input from Phases 1 and 2 are available on the [project website](#).

● PHASE 1: SET THE DIRECTION

Phase 1 of the Downtown Albany Strategy identified public priorities for growth, focusing on the desired goals and community impacts of future investment. These priorities shaped DTAS's Growth Principles, which were then paired with a market analysis and an evaluation of real estate opportunities and economic trends to translate community direction into a set of bold, smart, and equitable growth targets.

- **What we asked:** What are your priorities for Downtown Albany's growth and what benchmarks should be used to measure long-term success?
- **What we heard:** Feedback emphasized the need for clearly defined growth targets (e.g., more housing, fewer vacancies, cultural vibrancy, and equitable investments) and evaluation criteria to ensure accountability.
- **What changed in the Strategy:** Public input was used to establish the Growth Principles and define concentrated investment areas.

● PHASE 2: FOCUS THE STRATEGY

Phase 2 public engagement focused on identifying the investment opportunities and policies most likely to drive meaningful change in Downtown Albany. This stage was designed to test and refine draft strategy elements, implementation tools, and funding concepts. By evaluating these emerging building blocks, the process established a strategic framework for future development rather than a final selection of specific projects.

- **What we asked:** Building on the priorities identified in Phase 1, what is missing from the proposed investment opportunities and which opportunities have the greatest potential to positively impact Downtown Albany?
- **What we heard:** The feedback emphasized that success would depend on a diverse set of "building blocks" rather than a few isolated projects, emphasizing a need for a flexible but integrated framework for growth.
- **What changed in the Strategy:** Based on this input, the Strategy defined a set of strategies that were built on validated opportunities most likely to drive meaningful change.

● DELIVER AND SUSTAIN RESULTS

Based on the refined investment opportunities from Phase 2, the final phase established the long-term framework for how these investments will be managed, funded, and sustained over time.

COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

To facilitate an inclusive and responsive process that represents the diverse voices of Downtown Albany, the Strategy's engagement process was guided by core principles of **transparency, accessibility, flexibility, and trust**. The project team utilized a multi-layered engagement framework to remove barriers to participation and ensure geographic and sectoral representation.

- **Universal & Multilingual Access:** To foster an accessible, welcoming experience, all physical venues and digital platforms met Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Physical venues were also centrally located in Downtown Albany and transit accessible. The project team provided on-site translation (Spanish) and American Sign Language interpretation services at major public workshops and advertised events in English and Spanish to accommodate non-native English speakers.
- **Meeting the Community Where They Are:** Rather than relying solely on traditional meetings, the project team offered a series of engagement opportunities that went to the community. This included a presence at the Palace Theatre Community Block Party, door-to-door outreach to small businesses in Downtown Albany, and a series of focus groups held across Downtown.
- **Stakeholders & Geographies:** Engagement efforts spanned Downtown Albany to capture feedback from the City's diverse neighborhoods. Focus groups were held in the South End, Arbor Hill, Warehouse District, Central Avenue, and in the Central Business District. By consulting with over 50 organizations and 50 local businesses, the team captured the specific economic hurdles and opportunities facing Albany's community leaders, non-profits, residents, and small businesses.
- **Flexible Participation Models:** Recognizing that different people prefer different ways to engage, the project paired all in-person public meetings with online questionnaires.



Community members sharing Downtown needs at the DTAS Public Workshop



Community members at the DTAS Youth Focus Group

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Strategy was built on a foundation of inclusive outreach, reaching over 2,300 community members across two distinct phases of engagement. To ensure the Strategy reflected a diverse range of voices, engagement was conducted through a mix of large-scale public forums, targeted focus groups, and digital outreach.

PHASE 1

EVENT	ATTENDANCE	DATE & LOCATION
FOCUS GROUPS		
Gathered input on Albany's strengths, desired changes, opportunities for investment, and what "transformational" means for Downtown Albany; promoted the August 6 public workshop.	~100 Community members across 50 organizations	July 2025 12 focus groups were held across Downtown (10 in-person; 2 virtual)
BUSINESS DROP-IN VISITS		
Spread awareness of the planning process among small businesses Downtown; gathered input on Albany's strengths, desired changes, and transformational priorities; promoted the August 6 public workshop.	Over 50 Businesses across five Downtown districts	July 2025 In-person engagement at local businesses
PUBLIC WORKSHOP		
The workshop shared Strategy details and gathered community input on community benefits, desired changes, and priority development strategies.	~700 Community members	August 6, 2025 Albany Capital Center
ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE #1		
This questionnaire replicated the questions asked at the August 6 public workshop, offering an alternative mechanism to provide input.	~580 Public respondents	August 16 through September 12, 2025 Online
PALACE THEATRE TABLING EVENT		
Raised awareness of the DTAS; promoted the online questionnaire #1; gathered direct feedback from the community.	~200 Community members	August 16, 2025 Palace Theatre Community Block Party

PHASE 2

EVENT	ATTENDANCE	DATE & LOCATION
PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE		
Provided updates on the planning process; gathered feedback on proposed investment opportunities and policies to refine focus areas for Phase 3.	~300 Community members	November 12, 2025 Hilton Albany
ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE #2		
This questionnaire replicated the questions asked at the November 12 public open house, offering an alternative mechanism to provide input.	155 Public respondents	December 2 through December 16, 2025 Online
YOUTH FOCUS GROUP		
The workshop shared Strategy details and gathered community input on community benefits, desired changes, and priority development strategies.	40 Attendees	December 10, 2025 Washington Avenue Branch Library
STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS		
Meetings were held with local developers, property owners, banks and financial institutions, housing advocates, City departments and officials, cultural institutions, and mobility groups to understand the policies, investments, governance, and implementation strategies needed to make investment successful in Albany and advance the community's Growth Principles.	100 Participants across 50 organizations	August 27 through November 10, 2025 Online

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KEY FINDINGS: HOW PUBLIC INPUT SHAPED DTAS



WHAT WE HEARD ACROSS ALL PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOUSING & REUSE

Community members emphasized the need for diverse and inclusive housing stock with a focus on adaptive reuse and infill development. There was a strong call to revitalize vacant or unsafe buildings and transform existing historic assets into residential spaces. The public also advocated for small-scale housing options that are attainable to local households.

Note: Throughout this summary, “affordable housing” refers to income-restricted units (regulated affordability). “New housing” refers to adding homes of many types (including market-rate and mixed-income) to grow the downtown residential base and improve overall housing affordability through supply, reuse, and better unit mix.

PUBLIC SAFETY & COMFORT

Public input highlighted a vision for a multimodal and connected city that prioritizes people over cars. Key priorities include complete streets with pedestrian-scale lighting, improved sidewalks, and safer bike infrastructure linking Downtown neighborhoods and the waterfront. Additionally, the community requested public spaces that are safe, clean, activated year-round, and accessible to all ages and abilities.

STREET LIFE & SMALL BUSINESSES

Supporting the local business ecosystem emerged as a top priority. Public input emphasized activating vacant storefronts with a diverse mix of retail, dining, and essential services such as grocery stores and pharmacies. There was strong interest in revitalizing corridors into welcoming public spaces where people can gather. There were also calls for support for small businesses along with community-driven programming and local entrepreneurship. Feedback also called for expanding the nightlife economy and diversifying entertainment options to create a more vibrant, 24/7 Downtown experience, while using Albany's history as a foundation for cultural tourism.

EARLY ACTION & VISIBLE CHANGE

Early action emerged as a clear community priority, with strong support for focusing investment in places where change can be seen and felt quickly. Public feedback emphasized concentrating efforts where multiple improvements reinforce one another, building confidence and momentum. There was broad support for catalytic, mixed-use development over large, single-use projects.

PHASE 1

Community engagement during Phase 1 of the Downtown Albany Strategy was designed to align technical data with local lived experiences. The primary purpose of engagement in this phase was to:

- **Listen** to the community to understand existing challenges.
- **Define** the future potential of Downtown through collective visioning.
- **Identify** the desired outcomes and benchmarks that guided the Strategy's development.

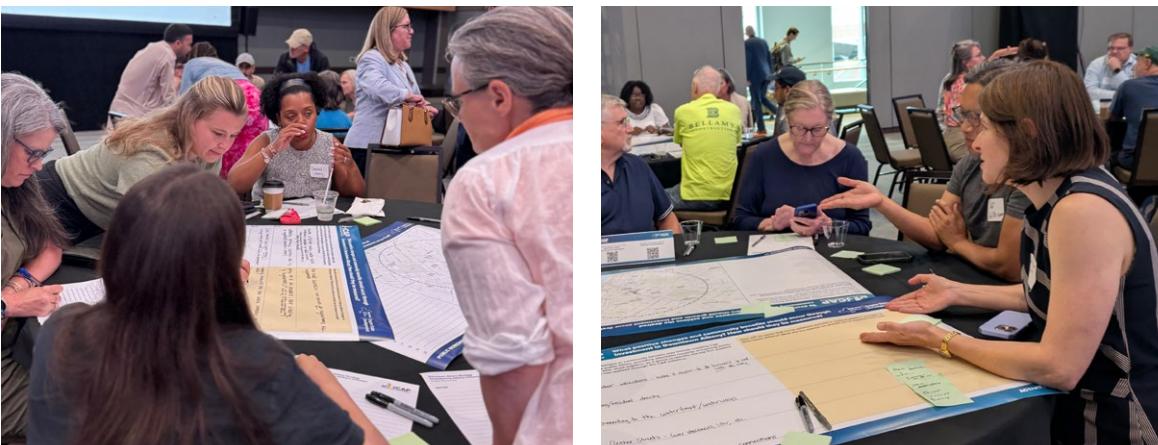
SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT IN PHASE 1

In Phase 1 of the Downtown Albany Strategy, the project team reached approximately 1,500 participants through a diverse range of touchpoints as described in Section 1: Engagement Activities. Public input gathered during Phase 1 shaped the growth principles and the seven investment areas that provide the foundation for the Strategy. More information about the growth principles and investment areas can be found on the project website (see www.downtownalbanystrategy.com).

WHAT WE LEARNED

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INVESTMENT AREAS

The first phase of public engagement invited participants to identify specific, neighborhood-level investment needs for Downtown Albany. The feedback collected during this process served as the direct foundation for the identification of seven investment areas.



Community members identifying needs for Downtown at the DTAS Public Workshop

ALBANY'S DOWNTOWN HEART & ALBANY'S NEW DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD

In Downtown Albany's Central Business District, participants prioritized mixed-use, mixed-income development to bring more residents Downtown. There were several calls for improvements to pedestrian safety, and better coordination among city agencies and business groups. Redevelopment sites like Liberty Park, State Street, and Pearl Street were frequently cited as opportunities for early investment.

WAREHOUSE DISTRICT

In the City's Warehouse District, participants called for high-density, mixed-use development that integrates housing, small businesses, and family-friendly activities. There was strong interest in redeveloping vacant industrial properties and addressing the Central Warehouse blight, while improving pedestrian connections, lighting, and safety under the Livingston Avenue Rail Bridge and along Broadway and North Pearl Street.

SOUTH END

In the South End and along Madison Avenue, the public recognized these areas as critical for neighborhood-scale investment and stressed the need for a stronger retail environment to support amenities such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and health services, as well as public gathering spaces, community gardens, and housing preservation.

In the Mansion Area specifically, participants called for essential neighborhood services such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and workforce development programs. There was a desire for infill development focused on housing and better maintenance of existing properties to strengthen the residential fabric and enhance safety.



Community members sharing neighborhood needs and learning how to participate in the DTAS at the Palace Theatre Community Block Party

INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT

In Arbor Hill, participants emphasized the need for housing, redevelopment of vacant and “Red X” buildings, and new drop-in and crisis support spaces. There was strong interest in small business and cultural investment, particularly along Henry Johnson Boulevard and Central Avenue, to support entrepreneurship and create safer, more welcoming streets.

In West Hill, participants expressed a desire for investment in housing, public safety, and stronger connections to employment and services Downtown. There was also a desire for youth programming, workforce training, and improved neighborhood maintenance to enhance the overall quality of life.

ALBANY’S NEIGHBORHOOD VILLAGE

In Center Square, participants recommended providing support for small and minority-owned businesses, improving pedestrian safety, and expanding arts and cultural programming. Participants also emphasized maintaining the area’s historic character while encouraging modest infill and ground-floor activation that connects to nearby activity on Lark Street and Washington Avenue.



Community members writing advice for Downtown Albany and Governor Hochul introducing the project at the DTAS Public Workshop



In Washington Square, participants emphasized the need for improved cleanliness, safety, and active storefronts along major corridors. Investments in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure were identified as ways to strengthen connections between the neighborhood, Downtown, and adjacent residential areas.

In Park South, participants sought stronger physical and social connections to Downtown, with new small businesses and local entrepreneurs around Albany Medical Center. They also expressed an interest in expanding access to neighborhood services.

CLINTON SQUARE ARTS & HERITAGE DISTRICT

In Sheridan Hollow, participants expressed interest in reactivating the historic steps and improving pedestrian connections to the Downtown core. Investments in walkability, lighting, and green spaces were seen as critical to enhancing neighborhood safety and linking residents to nearby amenities and employment opportunities.



Community members sharing neighborhood needs at the Palace Theatre Community Block Party



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROWTH PRINCIPLES

Public feedback established the growth principles that will guide Albany's future. These principles translate what the public identified as needs and opportunities into actionable goals to grow Albany's population, strengthen its economy, and enhance the quality of life for every resident.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #1: Attract and Retain Residents: Triple Downtown's Residential Base by 2035.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Housing:** Expand housing options in Downtown Albany through adaptive reuse of vacant buildings and infill development.
- **Education & Youth Support:** Provide youth with literacy support and programming to support families to stay Downtown.
- **Public Space and Green Infrastructure:** Modernize utilities to ensure long-term residential viability.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #2: Grow and Diversify Jobs: Add 1,500 Jobs Downtown in 5 Years; 3,000 in 10 Years.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Economic Development & Business Support:** Use grants and loan funds to help small businesses thrive and diversify the local economy.
- **Community Collaboration & Capacity:** Build partnerships between nonprofits and government to scale community-driven investments and resources.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #3: Create Vibrancy and Increase Visitation: Reach 5 Million Annual Visitors, 90-Minute Stays, and 150+ Event Days.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Public Spaces, Parks & Waterfront:** Activate existing public spaces with year-round programming to draw more visitors to Downtown.
- **Culture, History & Community Identity:** Leverage Albany's unique history through public art and cultural trails.
- **Public Infrastructure, Mobility & Streetscapes:** Improve bicycle/pedestrian linkages between neighborhoods and to the waterfront to make visiting easier and more attractive.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #4: Attract Private Funding: Achieve \$3 in Private Investment for Every \$1 of CAP Funding.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Governance, Equity & Implementation:** Ensure transparency and clear communication to build the investor confidence needed for phased, visible wins.
- **Public Infrastructure (Beautification):** Use streetscape improvements and pedestrian-scale lighting to create the curb appeal that triggers private interest.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #5: Stop Vacancy: Put 3 Catalytic Sites Under Construction Within 3 Years.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Housing (Adaptive Reuse):** Prioritize the rehabilitation of unsafe or vacant buildings into functional spaces.
- **Economic Development (Storefront Activation):** Specifically target the activation of vacant storefronts with retail and dining.

GROWTH PRINCIPLE #6: Ensure Growth Benefits All: Improve Positive Safety Ratings by 15%.

The following community-identified needs and opportunities helped shape this growth principle:

- **Public Safety & Cleanliness:** Implement community-oriented policing and sanitation programs to improve evening perceptions.
- **Vulnerable Populations & Social Services:** Expand mental health support, shelters, and food access (grocery stores) to support the entire community.
- **Governance, Equity & Implementation:** Prevent gentrification and ensure that implementation is equitable and inclusive.

PHASE 2

Community engagement during Phase 2 of the Strategy was designed to identify development opportunities, policies, and programs that will make the biggest difference for Downtown Albany. The primary purpose of engagement in this phase was to:

- **Evaluate** specific development opportunities, policies, and programs with the community to determine their potential impact.
- **Refine** the collective vision by prioritizing the strategies that will most effectively shape the future of Downtown.
- **Validate** the proposed strategies against desired outcomes and benchmarks to ensure they align with community needs.

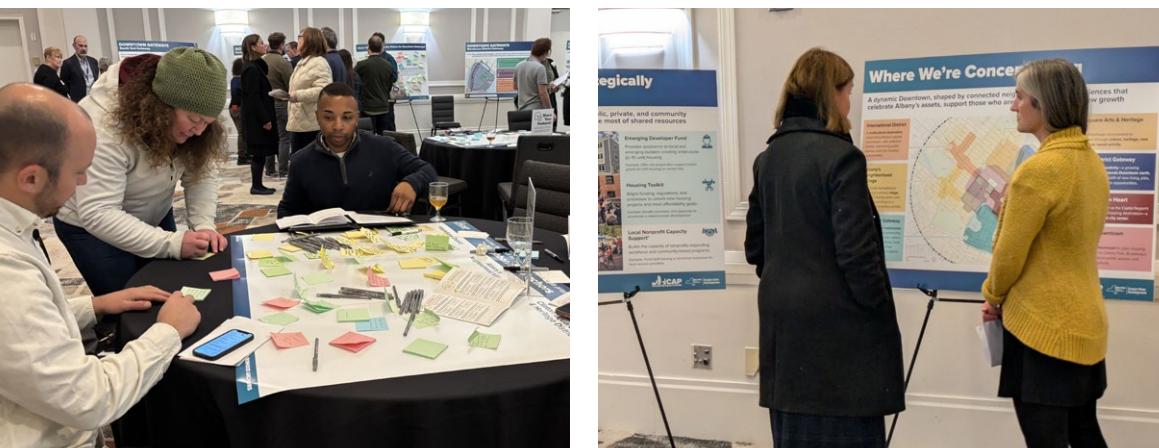
SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT IN PHASE 2

During Phase 2 of the Strategy, the project team engaged the public to test and refine draft Strategy elements, tools, and funding concepts. Nearly 600 people were engaged during Phase 2; the public input gathered was used to guide the proposed distribution of Downtown Albany Strategy funds.

WHAT WE LEARNED

COLLECTIVE VISION FOR DOWNTOWN INVESTMENT

The second phase of public engagement invited participants to provide input on the proposed vision statements and investment bundles for the seven Investment Areas across Downtown Albany, including The Core, Downtown Gateways, and Neighborhood Anchors.



Community members giving feedback on proposed investment opportunities and policies for Downtown at the DTAS Public Open House

Transformational Projects

Public feedback indicated a decisive shift away from large-scale stadiums and arenas in favor of catalytic investments that strengthen the urban fabric for year-round residents. The public envisioned a Downtown reconnected to its waterfront and rooted in its rich history and culture.

- **Central Warehouse Demolition & Redevelopment:** Participants identified this site as a critical catalyst, with an emphasis on transforming the site into high-quality mixed-use housing.
- **Liberty Park:** Public feedback envisioned this area as a livable downtown neighborhood asset with essential services, aligned with Albany's historic character and focused on long-term community benefit rather than a single-use destination.
- **I-787:** Public feedback identified I-787 as a major barrier, with significant interest in converting it into a boulevard or a street-level redesign to reconnect Downtown to the waterfront.
- **Waterfront:** While the Hudson River was seen as a top asset, the public was divided on timing, with many urging that Downtown residential density be achieved before committing to major marina or canal projects.

Downtown Housing

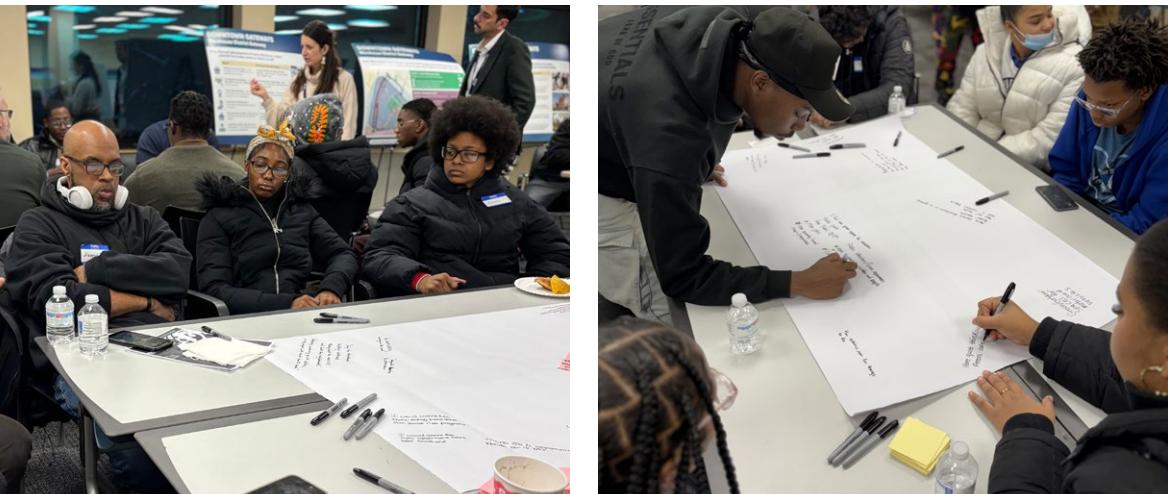
Public feedback emphasized the need for adaptive reuse of existing buildings over demolition to create a dense, stable residential core. The public called for a shift from a transient rental market to a more permanent neighborhood through diverse ownership models and stricter property oversight.

- **Adaptive Reuse and Housing:** There was strong preference for renovating and activating vacant storefronts and historic buildings. Mixed-use development was prioritized to eliminate blight while increasing Downtown's apartment supply without sacrificing character.
- **Tenure and Demographic Diversity:** The public emphasized that investment should prioritize a mix of income-restricted Affordable Housing, mixed-income options, and ownership models, such as condos and co-ops. There was a specific demand for family-sized units and residential amenities to support a multi-generational population.
- **Rehabilitation of Vacant Assets:** The public viewed the restoration of underutilized and vacant properties as a primary tool for neighborhood stabilization and wealth-building.
- **Management and Accountability:** Public feedback indicated that residential growth should be paired with increased developer and landlord accountability. This includes stricter oversight of property maintenance and a commitment to long-term community stability.

Public Realm Infrastructure and Activation

Public feedback emphasized that urban vibrancy requires clean and well-repaired streets, universal accessibility, and a sense of safety. The public prioritized a pedestrian-friendly environment where functional infrastructure serves as the backbone for a welcoming, active Downtown.

- **Multimodal Mobility:** Public feedback indicated that investment should prioritize people over vehicles through protected bike lanes, ADA-compliant pathways, and enhanced transit frequency. Notably, youth participants emphasized the need for stronger and more affordable transit access within the Downtown area to improve their ability to reach jobs and activities. Connectivity was viewed as a key driver for both resident quality of life and business accessibility.
- **Safety Through Design and Presence:** There was strong support for a multi-layered safety strategy. This includes physical improvements like pedestrian lighting and sidewalk repairs, alongside increased foot patrols and “street ambassadors” to manage the environment and improve perceptions of safety.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Public sentiment identified crime and drug activity as major barriers to investment. The community advocates for pairing physical infrastructure with social services and community-based resources that address poverty, mental health, and public health.
- **Routine Maintenance:** Consistent trash collection, blight reduction, and the upkeep of existing public spaces in all Downtown neighborhoods were seen as essential for building a sense of neighborhood pride and safety.
- **Active Public Spaces:** Feedback indicated public areas should be designed for year-round daily livability rather than occasional events, serving as third places that encourage community building and safe nighttime activity.



Youth community members sharing changes needed to make Downtown a place they would choose to build their live at the DTAS Youth Focus Group.

Economic Drivers

Feedback shared an interest in a human-scale economy that prioritizes local culture, family stability, and workforce development. The community envisioned a Downtown where economic growth is measured by the success of its people and the vibrancy of its social spaces.

- **Human-Scale Development:** The public shared that investment should focus on small-scale, high-impact growth rather than singular massive projects.
- **Cultural Placemaking and “Third Spaces”:** The public expressed strong support for creative anchors, such as galleries, community hubs, and social spaces, that link civic life with local commerce that will drive consistent foot traffic and spillover activity for nearby businesses.
- **Community-Centric Vitality:** There was clear interest in the return of neighborhood-scale festivals and events (e.g., Larkfest) that could help revitalize the local economy and restore a sense of identity and vibrancy to neighborhoods.
- **Family-Focused:** Public input stressed that economic drivers should invest in amenities and services that retain families.
- **Youth Workforce Development:** Community feedback indicated the need for paid opportunities for younger teens (ages 12–16), vocational training, and apprenticeships in the trades to ensure that Downtown’s economic growth provides tangible upward mobility for the next generation.

Neighborhood Small Businesses and Storefronts

Public feedback emphasized that local economic health depends on closing the gap in essential services while providing low-barrier opportunities for entrepreneurship. The community requested a vibrant street-level experience that balances modern necessities with Albany’s historic architectural identity.

- **Essential Services:** Public input identified the lack of daily retail, specifically full-service grocery stores and pharmacies, as a primary barrier to livability.
- **Diverse and Year-Round Activation:** There was strong support for filling vacant storefronts with a diverse mix of uses, including creative retail, thinking-spaces, and sober-friendly nightlife.
- **Preservation-Driven Improvements:** The public indicated the city’s unique architecture is a competitive advantage that should be enhanced, not obscured, by modern upgrades, with calls for new storefront investments preserving Albany’s historic character.
- **Equitable Neighborhood Reinvestment:** Feedback stressed that small business support must extend into the neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown core, especially to enhance food access, safety, and elevate the overall quality of life.
- **Support for Local Entrepreneurs:** Public input advocated for collaborative storefront models and direct mentorship to ensure that Downtown development translates into tangible business ownership opportunities for residents.

3

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS



The community engagement process provided a clear roadmap for the Downtown Albany Strategy, rooted in a desire for a livable Downtown that prioritizes residents and human-scale growth. While the public recommended specific long-term interventions, the implementation of the Strategy will remain focused on and prioritize the five core investment categories:

- **Transformational Projects** to support a limited number of catalytic projects that can change Downtown's trajectory by improving market confidence and enabling follow-on private investment;
- **Downtown Housing** to unlock housing delivery in Downtown by providing targeted, low-cost capital that is structured to make projects financeable and repeatable;
- **Beautification and Placemaking** to public space and corridor upgrades that improve comfort, safety, navigation, and everyday Downtown experience;
- **Community and Cultural Anchors** that strengthen key community destinations and priority projects rooted Downtown through targeted capital improvements;
- **Commercial District Enhancements** through storefront and corridor investments that help businesses open and succeed and improve the resident/visitor experience.

With the Downtown Albany Strategy now complete, engagement shifts from planning to implementation—sharing clear guidelines, inviting project proposals, and reporting back on what is selected, why, and how projects progress over time. ESD will lead the implementation of the Strategy and will enlist a variety of local partners to execute specific projects, ensuring investments achieve the Strategy's intended goals of economic stabilization and growth.

Community members can stay up-to-date on implementation activities at the official Downtown Albany Strategy website: www.DowntownAlbanyStrategy.com.

