

City of King Downtown Economic Development Strategic Plan



2026

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Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Acknowledgements



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City of King Board of Commissioners

- Mayor Rick McCraw
- Mayor Pro Tempore Jane Cole
- Council Member Terri Fowler
- Council Member Michael Lane
- Council Member Tyler Bowles

The North Carolina Main Street & Rural Planning Center (MS&RP)

NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center’s Rural Planning Program, which is responsible for facilitating strategic economic development planning and implementation services, worked with the City of King staff to facilitate the strategic planning process for the City of King Downtown Economic Development Strategic Plan (2025—2030).

Main Street & Rural Planning (MS&RP) staff would like to thank and recognize all who contributed their time and efforts to the development of the City of King Downtown Economic Development Strategic Plan. The plan centers around economic development strategies that adopt a place-based approach to economic development. This refers to strategies that build upon existing assets, take incremental actions to strengthen the community, and build long-term value to attract a range of investments.

The plan identifies strategies, goals, objectives, priority project development and implementation actions.

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NC DEPARTMENT
of COMMERCE
 RURAL ECONOMIC
 DEVELOPMENT



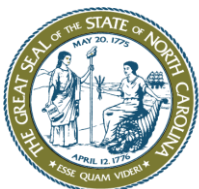


Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Plan Review & Adoption

A draft of the City of King Economic Development Strategic Plan (2026—2031) was produced in January 2026 and shared with the City of King’s Local Work Group for review.

Following review, the City Council adopted the plan on **Insert Date**.



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Economic Positioning/Visioning Statement:

Historic Downtown King is nestled in the rolling foothills of the Sauratown Mountains, where Southern hospitality meets leisurely exploration. Featuring thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences, curated specialty shops, and convenient access to outdoor adventure, King is the ideal place to reconnect with community.

Executive Summary

The City of King, with an approximate population of 7,764, is located in Stokes County in North Carolina's Piedmont Triad region. Serving as a gateway to outdoor recreation assets such as Hanging Rock State Park and Pilot Mountain, King also maintains a strong small-town identity rooted in community pride, local businesses, and hometown character. Downtown King plays a central role in the city's economy, functioning as a hub for dining, destination retail, community events, and local services that support both residents and visitors.

Through collaboration with local stakeholders, The Downtown King Partnership, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the City of King initiated a strategic planning process to identify opportunities for targeted economic development and downtown revitalization. The plan emphasizes strengthening Downtown King as a walkable, vibrant district that supports small business growth, encourages reinvestment in historic and underutilized buildings, and enhances the overall quality of life.

The strategic planning process reflects input from King's leadership, business owners, residents, and community partners. It identifies three core economic development strategies to guide the city's future growth: fostering thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences, cultivating artfully curated specialty shops, and providing convenient access to outdoor adventure. Together, these strategies focus on reinforcing Downtown King as a dynamic destination and ensuring long-term economic vitality, community connection, and a strong sense of place for residents and visitors alike.

This plan is organized around three priority strategies and six SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, & Time-Bound) goals that define Downtown King’s direction for the next five years. These strategies and goals guide the overall framework for economic development and are supported by a phased implementation timeline that outlines short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions.

➤ **Strategy 1: Historic Downtown King offers thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences.**

SMART Goal 1: Establish Downtown King as a recognized culinary destination by increasing dining-related downtown visitation by 25% and launching at least one recurring, signature food-focused event by 2030.

SMART Goal 2: Strengthen Downtown King’s culinary offerings by supporting existing food and beverage businesses and delivering a minimum of three food-focused programs or events annually by 2030.

➤ **Strategy 2: Historic Downtown King enjoys artfully curated specialty shops.**

SMART Goal 3: Reduce long-term vacant downtown storefronts by 20% and recruit 3–5 anchor or destination specialty retail businesses by 2030.

SMART Goal 4: Complete at least one streetscape and/or three public space improvements and increase downtown pedestrian activity by 15% by 2030.

➤ **Strategy 3: Historic Downtown King provides convenient access to outdoor adventure.**

SMART Goal 5: Increase downtown lodging options by supporting 1–2 new or expanded lodging facilities that connect outdoor recreation visitors to Historic Downtown King by 2030.

SMART Goal 6: Improve connections between Historic Downtown King and the regional outdoor recreation economy by completing at least 3 downtown-to-outdoor connectivity projects (such as trail links, wayfinding, or streetscape improvements) by 2030.



This plan outlines three strategies with six goals to be carried out over a five-year period.

Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Current Conditions

Setting

The City of King is located in northern Stokes County within North Carolina’s Piedmont Triad region, offering a strategic balance of regional access and small-town character. With an estimated population of approximately 7,700 residents according to recent U.S. Census data, King has experienced steady, incremental growth driven by its affordability, quality of life, and proximity to larger employment centers such as Winston-Salem and Mount Airy. The community is primarily residential with a population that is largely family oriented.



Photo courtesy of the Downtown King Partnership

King was established in the early 20th century as a railroad and agricultural community, with its development closely tied to tobacco, textiles, and regional trade. The arrival of the railroad helped shape the city’s original downtown street grid and commercial district, many elements of which continue to define Downtown King’s character today.

The community benefits from direct access to U.S. Highway 52 (future Interstate 74), providing efficient north–south connectivity throughout the region. Its location near outdoor destinations such as Hanging Rock State Park and Pilot Mountain positions the city as a gateway between recreation assets and urban markets. These geographic advantages contribute to King’s appeal for residents seeking small-town living with access to employment, recreation, and tourism opportunities.

Downtown King serves as the historic and economic core of the city. The downtown district supports a mix of locally owned restaurants, specialty shops, professional and civic services that provide everyday amenities and foster community connection. Its walkable scale, traditional

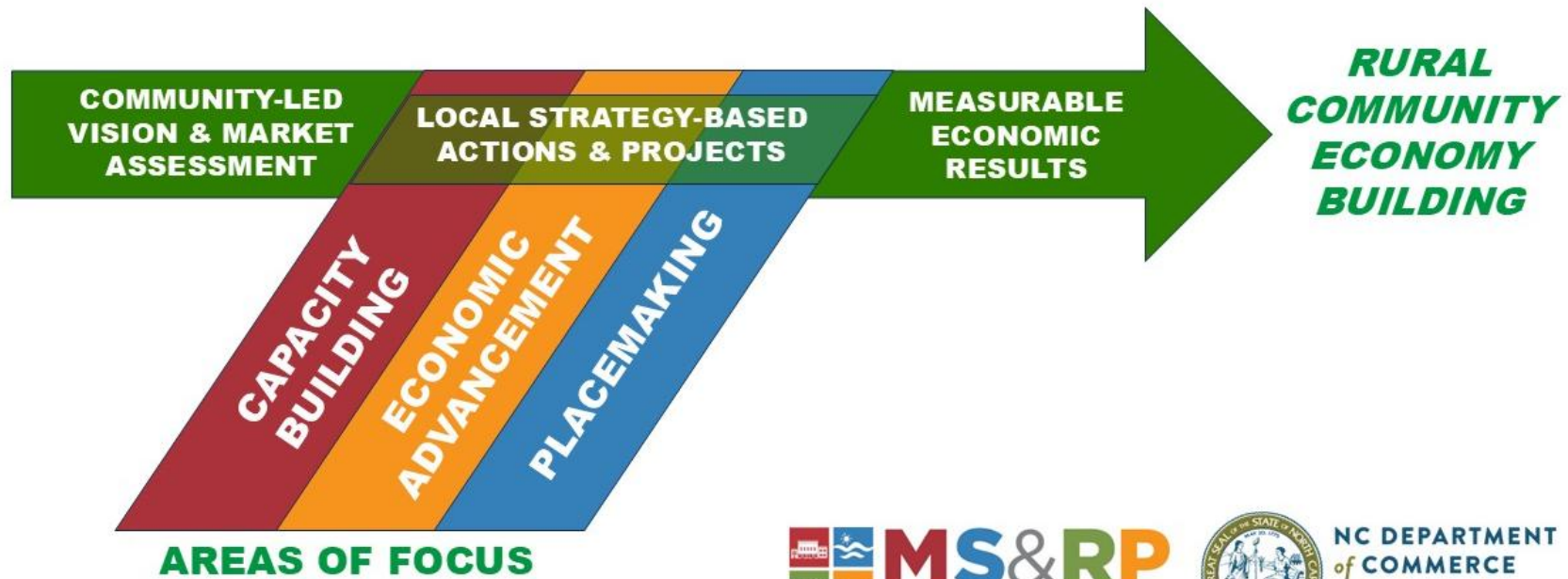
building fabric, and visibility along regional travel routes create opportunities for reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and small business growth.

Economically, King functions as a local service and small business center while leveraging tourism and outdoor recreation to diversify its economy. Downtown King plays a central role in advancing the city’s economic development strategies by supporting thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences, artfully curated specialty shops, and convenient access to outdoor adventure. Together, these assets position Downtown King as a place of opportunity, identity, and long-term economic resilience within the Piedmont Triad.

Map of Downtown King Focus Area for Strategic Planning



NC Commerce Rural Planning Program Approach to Community Economy Building

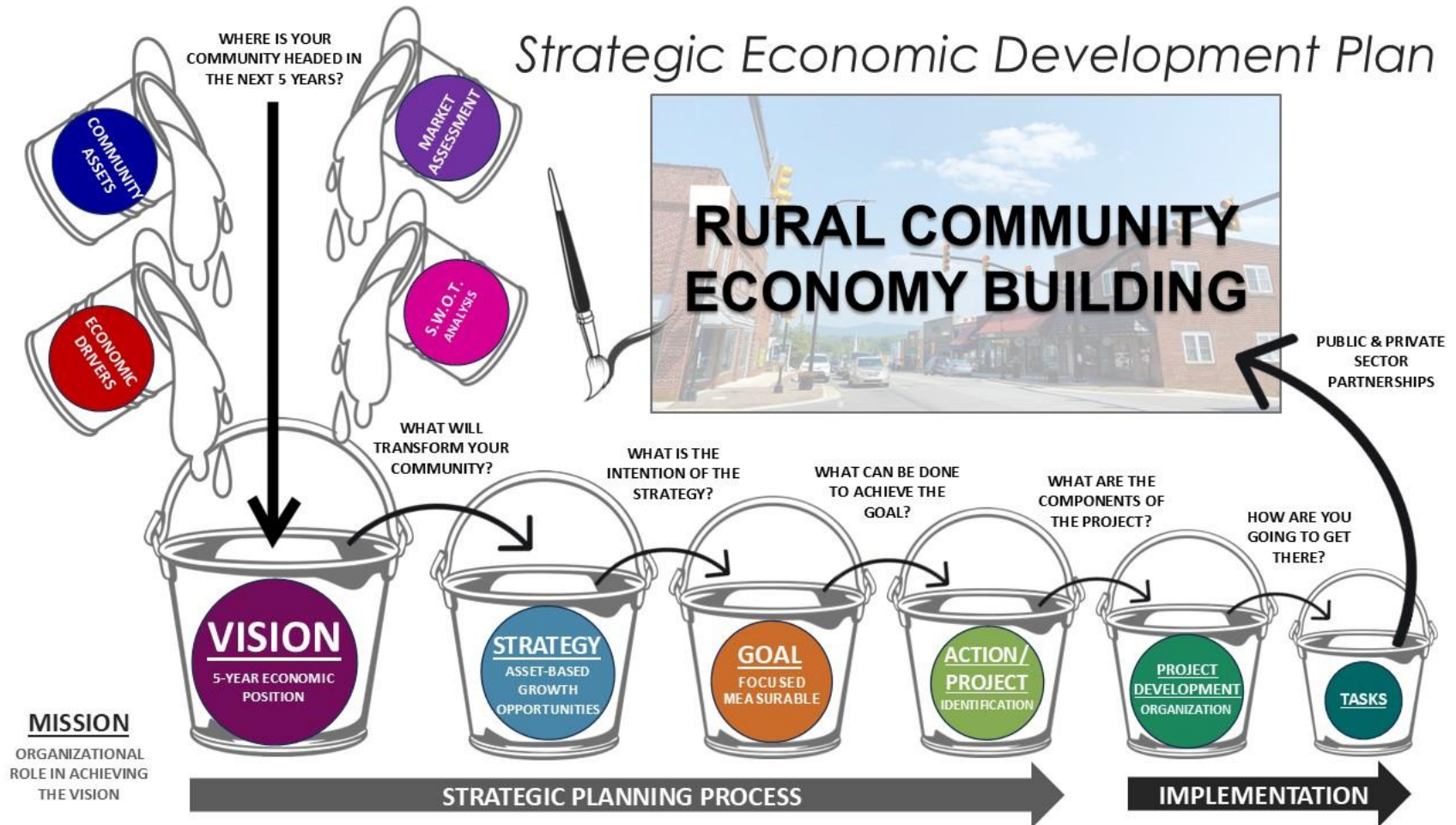


Updated 2/9/2026

NC Commerce Rural Planning Program Approach

The Rural Planning Program's Approach to Community Economy Building is an economic development framework focused on three key areas: Capacity Building, Economic Advancement, and Placemaking. When this approach is applied through locally coordinated actions with public and private sector stakeholders, rural communities can improve their quality of life, strengthen strategic partnerships, cultivate civic pride, and drive investment. This approach is designed to be community-led and partnership-driven, not a service provided by a single organization. Rural Community Economy Building serves as a holistic foundation for a consensus-driven plan guided by a shared community vision and asset-based strategies.

Planning Process



NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Strategic Plan Development Process

Under the REDD (Rural Economic Development Division), MSRP Center staff facilitated the strategic planning process with participation from the local government and an established local work group. This work group was comprised of individuals with a vested interest in leveraging King’s assets to enhance economic development. The planning process employed established planning methods including economic and associated data, asset mapping, economic driver identification, SWOT (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, & Threats) analysis, a community survey stakeholder interviews, local work group discussions, and more. The planning process was tailored to meet the specific needs, goals, and opportunities that local stakeholders identified.

Strategic Planning Definitions

This page outlines the key terms used throughout the strategic planning and implementation process. By clearly defining each element—from the community’s economic positioning statement to strategies, goals, projects, actions, and tasks—we create a shared understanding of how the plan is organized and how its pieces fit together. Having consistent definitions ensures that everyone involved is working from the same foundation, improving communication, guiding decision making, and supporting effective, coordinated implementation.

Economic Positioning Statement (Vision)

An economic positioning/vision statement is the vision for the economic role that the community will play in the greater economy (local, county, regional) over the next five years. It demonstrates what the community can achieve and how it will distinguish itself from other areas in the county or region. It is grounded in realistic growth opportunities and built through community consensus. All economic development strategies should connect directly to this vision.

Economic Development Strategy

A strategy is a broad, asset-based approach or method the community will use to achieve its vision. Strategies define *how* the community intends to leverage opportunities, address challenges, and move toward the desired future. They provide direction but are not specific enough to be measured on their own.

Strategies answer the question: *What is the broad approach we will take?*

Example: Position the community as a premier outdoor recreation destination.

Goal

A goal defines a clear, measurable, and time-bound outcome the community aims to achieve in support of a specific strategy. This combines the traditional goal (broad desired outcome) and objective (specific measurable target) into one SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, & Time-Bound), action-oriented statement.

Goals answer the questions: *What outcome do we want, and why does that outcome matter?*

Example: Increase trail connectivity by completing 8 additional miles of multi-use trails within three years.

Project

A project is a focused initiative made up of multiple coordinated actions that collectively achieve a goal. Projects are larger efforts that require planning, resources, and sequencing. They typically span months or years and involve multiple partners or stakeholders.

Projects answer the question: *What initiative will we carry out to accomplish the goal?*

Example: Implement the Southeast Greenway Expansion Project.

Or

Action

An action is a concrete step that moves a project forward. Actions are smaller than projects, more specific and usually can be completed by a single team or department.

Actions answer the question: *What concrete steps will we take?*

Example: Install uniform trail signage and wayfinding at all major access points.

The defined terms referenced under implementation are not identified within the strategic plan's implementation chart on page 38 but instead relate to work that occurs after the plan is formally adopted. While the chart outlines priority strategies, goals, actions and projects, the detailed work of project development (project scopes, timelines, and responsibilities) is developed during the post-adoption implementation phase. This approach allows the plan to remain flexible and responsive, enabling the community and its partners to refine implementation details as conditions, funding opportunities, and local priorities evolve.

Implementation

Project Development

Project development is the phase in which a planned initiative or action is designed, organized, and prepared for implementation. It involves defining the scope, objectives, resources, timeline, and steps necessary to successfully carry out the project. During project development, tasks are identified, assigned, and scheduled to ensure the action progresses efficiently toward achieving the broader goal.

Project Development answers the question: *How will we organize and prepare a specific project or action so it can be successfully implemented?*

Task

A task is a specific, actionable step taken during the implementation phase of a project. It breaks an action into smaller, detailed activities that can be assigned, tracked, and completed. Tasks outline the exact work needed to move actions/projects forward and contribute to the overall progress of the project. Tasks answer the question: *What are the specific tasks required to complete the project?*

Example: "Order materials from supplier," or "Paint the new signage."



Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Existing Plans Review

To compliment and build upon subsequent community planning efforts, staff assembled and reviewed other relevant plans and documents. This review provides valuable insight and helps avoid duplication or contradictions of past planning proposals. The following documents were reviewed and considered during the planning process:

Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan

The Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan positions Downtown King as one of the county's primary urban centers and a critical focus area for reinvestment, infill development, and economic vitality. The plan's Land Use Framework designates Downtown King within the G-4 Downtown Transect, identifying it as an efficient, infrastructure-served area appropriate for mixed-use redevelopment, higher-density infill, and pedestrian-oriented design. Emphasis is placed on reinforcing traditional downtown form, buildings oriented to sidewalks, active street edges, and a walkable public realm, while discouraging sprawl by directing growth toward existing municipal cores. From an economic development perspective, the plan highlights Downtown King's small-town Main Street character, proximity to Highway 52, and role in supporting small business, entrepreneurship, and local services. Recommended strategies include façade improvement programs, streetscape enhancements, downtown park improvements, and the development of a new King Town Hall and civic block to strengthen downtown as a civic and activity hub. Transportation and infrastructure policies further support downtown revitalization by encouraging traffic calming, wayfinding, sidewalk connectivity, and targeted corridor planning at key gateways leading into downtown. Recreation initiatives, particularly greenway and trail planning, are framed as opportunities to better connect Downtown King to surrounding neighborhoods and regional outdoor assets, reinforcing downtown's role as a gateway to recreation and tourism. Overall, the plan provides a strong county-level policy foundation for Downtown King, aligning land use, infrastructure investment, and economic development tools to support a more vibrant, walkable, and on as economic drivers while economically resilient downtown core.

Stokes County Economic Development Action Plan (2021)

The Stokes County Economic Development Action Plan, prepared by Creative Economic Development Consulting in 2021, provides a strategic framework to broaden and strengthen the county's economy while improving quality of life and community vitality. The plan prioritizes business retention and expansion, small business and entrepreneur development, recreation development, marketing, opportunity sites and infrastructure, and organizational capacity. It recognizes Stokes County's strong small-town character, natural assets, and outdoor recreation opportunities as key competitive advantages for attracting residents, visitors, and workforce. The plan calls for targeted investment in infrastructure such as broadband and site readiness, along with coordinated marketing to better tell the county's story. It supports implementation of the Stokes County 2035 Plan, including downtown and streetscape improvements that would apply to Downtown King to enhance walkability, commercial activity, and overall attractiveness. Quality of life is further addressed through recommendations for expanded recreational programming, park and trail improvements, wayfinding, and partnerships that leverage tourism and recreation as economic drivers while reinforcing Stokes County's livability and sense of place.

Community Tour



Photos taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

On March 3, 2025, staff from the NC Commerce Rural Planning Program participated in a site visit to downtown King to better understand local assets, opportunities, and challenges. Prior to the tour, staff attended a City of King Economic Development Committee meeting to provide an overview of the strategic economic development planning process and to meet directly with committee members and key stakeholders. That meeting was followed by a guided tour of downtown, led by leadership from the Downtown King Partnership, which included visits to several businesses, walking the downtown area, and on-site discussions about early priorities and problems to be solved.

The site visit was an essential component of the research process, helping establish a clear baseline understanding of current conditions, gain context that does not appear in reports and to hear directly from stakeholders, ensuring the planning process is grounded in local reality from the very beginning.

Data: Retail Market and Visitor Analysis

As part of the strategic economic development planning process, a retail market assessment was completed for downtown King to better understand existing conditions, market demand, and opportunities for growth. The assessment analyzed local demographics, consumer spending patterns, retail leakage and surplus, and the current mix of downtown businesses to identify retail and service gaps that could be realistically supported by the local and visitor market. In addition, visitor behavior and foot traffic trends were evaluated using Placer.ai analysis, providing insight into visitation patterns, dwell times, and downtown activity. Together, the retail market assessment and Placer.ai data provide a data-driven foundation to guide downtown business recruitment, retention, expansion, and small business support strategies. Both analyses are included in the appendices beginning on page 51 of this plan.

Placer.ai Visitation Data Summary

Downtown King's visitation analysis is based on anonymized mobile device mobility data from Placer.ai, which uses opt-in smartphone location information combined with statistical modeling and census calibration to estimate visitation patterns, visitor origins, dwell time, and demographic characteristics while protecting individual privacy; full reports are available upon request from the City of King. The data shows strong growth in downtown activity between 2024 and 2025, with total visits increasing from approximately 336,000 to 422,100 (+25%), unique visitors rising from 64,700 to about 83,000 (+28%), and average dwell time increasing from 53 to 60 minutes, indicating that more people are visiting and staying longer. Visitation peaks on Fridays and Saturdays between noon and early evening, reflecting dining, retail, and social activity rather than commuter-driven traffic, while Sundays remain the slowest day. About 36 percent of visits originate within King itself, with additional visitors coming from nearby communities, confirming downtown's role as a locally driven commercial hub with gradually expanding regional reach. Cross-shopping patterns show strong connections between downtown visits and nearby anchors such as Walmart, Food Lion, and Sheetz, suggesting many trips occur alongside routine errands but increasingly result in longer stays and greater economic engagement. Visitors are primarily middle-income households with a median age around 43, largely composed of Gen X and Baby Boomers with growing Millennial participation, and most arrive by car, reinforcing downtown King's function as a community-centered, automobile-oriented downtown where convenient access, dining, and experiential businesses are key drivers of continued growth.

Market Retail Report Summary

The demographic data highlights downtown King as a primary economic engine for Stokes County, with implications for both current strength and future growth. King's population has grown by 7.7 percent since 2020, outpacing county growth, and residents have higher educational attainment and lower poverty rates than the county overall. Most notably, King generates nearly 58 percent of all retail sales in Stokes County while representing less than 17 percent of the population, with retail sales per capita far exceeding county, state, and national averages. This confirms downtown King's role as the county's dominant retail and service center, drawing spending from a broad regional trade area. For the current downtown economy, this indicates a strong and resilient customer base that supports existing businesses. Looking ahead, continued population growth, relatively strong incomes, and high retail productivity point to opportunities to expand downtown offerings, attract new businesses, and capture even more discretionary spending through additional dining, specialty retail, and experience-based uses that build on King's role as the county's commercial and community hub.

Local Work Group Establishment and Involvement

A discussion on the composition of the Local Work Group was held with City of King leadership, including staff, elected officials, and members of the Downtown King Partnership. The Local Work Group was set up by the City of King and intentionally structured to reflect a broad cross-section of the community, including representatives from the Stokes County Economic Development office, Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown King Partnership, the Stokes County Arts Council, Habitat for Humanity, other civic and faith-based organizations, small business owners, property owners, residents, as well as individuals bringing a wide range of lived experiences and perspectives. The group actively participated in strategic planning meetings held from April 2025 through December 2025. Activities from each meeting are summarized on the table below.

Meeting Date	Topics
12-20-2024	Met with the City of King and Downtown King Partnership to discuss MS&RP services and re-engaging in the strategic planning discussion for Downtown King.
2-3-2025	City of King and NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center execute a MOU for strategic planning services.
2-6-2025	Met with Downtown King Partnership to discuss downtown development opportunities.
3-4-2025	Attended a City of King Economic Development Committee Meeting and Opportunities/Assets Site Tour of Downtown King.
4-4-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening Session • Data Review • Overview of Strategic Planning Process • Asset and Economic Drivers Decision
6-17-2025	Community Economic Positioning/Visioning Workshop at The Dalton (Meeting 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming Assets • Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis • Strategy Development • Vision Development
6-19-2025	Met with DKP and the City of King to Debrief Community Visioning Workshop.
7-23-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Draft Vision • Review Draft Strategies • Draft Goals • Project Development Discussion
9-3-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Planning Process to Date • Project Development: Preliminary Actions/Projects
12-16-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and Revise Draft Strategic Plan/Framework

Asset Mapping: Types, Definitions, and Examples

Asset-based economic development is critical to rural community economy building because it leverages existing local strengths, resources, and identity to create sustainable growth that is grounded in place and community capacity. The chart below defines key types of assets and provides examples of assets that may fall within those categories. This chart is meant as a baseline summary of asset types not specific to King. The following chart on pages 19 – 20 lists King’s specific assets.

Asset Type	Definition	Examples
Economic Assets	Goods, services, information, etc., produced, exchanged & consumed in/by a community.	Businesses/Industries, Services, Business Clusters, Buildings/Structures/Districts, Downtowns, Commercial Activity Nodes, Industrial Parks/ Warehouse Districts, Infrastructure, Workforce.
Cultural Assets	Tangible, such as: buildings, sites or places. Intangible, such as the stories and traditions that define a community’s identity	Museums, Mills (Former), Buildings/Architecture, National Register Districts/ Properties, Music/Art/Dance, Writers, Festivals and Events, Language, Occupations, Traditions/Values, History/Heritage.
Natural Assets	Relating to/of the natural environment. Recreational — relating to/denoting activity done for enjoyment.	Scenic Beauty, Water Bodies, Blueways, Wetlands, Fish/ Wildlife (Types), Forest (Types), Geology/Minerals, Soils/Prime Farmland, Greenways/Trails, Recreational Activities (Types), Sports (Types).
Institutional Assets	Public or private entities and places devoted to a particular cause, program, or social purpose.	Universities/Colleges, Community College, Pre-K—12 Schools (Public & Private), Technical Schools, Vocational Schools, Hospitals.
Community/Human Resource Assets	Accumulated knowledge and skills that make a community productive. Individuals and organizations.	Community/Human Service Agencies and Nonprofits, Civic Groups, Community Clubs, Youth, Seniors, People with Special Skills/Expert Knowledge, Faith-Based Organizations, Social Fabric.
Governmental Assets	Any governmental unit, department, agency, special purpose district, or other public entity.	City/Town, County, State, Federal, Tribal, Water/Sewer District, Airport, Municipal Service District, Central Business District, Business Improvement District, Redevelopment District.

City of King’s Assets

During the strategic planning process, both in the community visioning workshop, and refined later with the Local Work Group, staff facilitated asset mapping exercises to identify key assets in the community. Asset mapping is a process that identifies the strengths of a community, highlights areas for growth opportunities, and brings together key stakeholders. While it does not necessarily include every asset, it provides a good starting point for the process. Identifying King’s unique assets helped to establish clear economic development strategies to achieve measurable growth.

Asset Type	
Economic Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurial culture with locally owned, independent businesses • Affordable commercial lease rates relative to nearby metros • Opportunity for niche retail and experiential businesses not saturated in nearby markets • Emerging food, beverage, and hospitality scene with growth potential • Supportive environment for start-ups, pop-ups, and small-format retail • Proximity to regional workforce and employment centers
Cultural Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King Historic District • Public Murals & Street Art, Art Galleries and Arts Activities • Festivals and Events • Recognizable downtown landmarks and gathering places beyond King Drug • Strong local stories tied to outdoor recreation, heritage, and hometown pride • Community-scale authenticity that differentiates King from larger cities
Natural Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanging Rock State Park • Sauratown Mountains & Sauratown Trail (connecting Hanging Rock and Pilot Mountain State Parks) • Pilot Mountain State Park • Recreation Acres • King Central Park • Proximity to Belews Lake • Positioned as a “gateway community” to regional outdoor destinations
Institutional Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King Public Library • King Elementary School, Chestnut Grove Middle School, West Stokes High School, Calvary Christian School, Forsyth Technical Community College (Stokes County Program)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of King Municipal Government Offices • Growing regional collaboration within Piedmont Triad
<p>Community/Human Resource Assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Fairgrounds & American Legion Post • LifeBrite Medical Center of King, Village Care of King, Daymark Recover Services – Stokes Center • King Chamber of Commerce, Downtown King Partnership, Habitat for Humanity, Stokes County United Way, Stokes County TDA
<p>Governmental Assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged municipal staff and elected officials supportive of downtown investment • City Council, City Staff • Public Safety: King Police Department & King Fire Department • Public Services: Public Works/Utilities/Water, Parks & Rec, Planning & Zoning, Finance/Administrative



Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

During the Community Visioning Workshop, staff facilitated a SWOT analysis exercise that identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the community. This analysis is an essential tool in strategic economic development planning because it provides a clear, organized way to understand a community's current conditions and future opportunities. By identifying strengths and weaknesses as internal factors, such as local assets, infrastructure, workforce, leadership capacity, and existing businesses, communities can realistically assess what they do well and where gaps exist. Opportunities and threats are external factors shaped by market trends, regional competition, state and federal policies, demographic shifts, and broader economic forces. Evaluating both internal and external conditions together helps communities make informed, place-based decisions, prioritize strategies that build existing strengths, and proactively respond to challenges that may impact the local economy.

SWOT Analysis Summary

Downtown King has a strong foundation rooted in historic character, a growing economy, successful events, and a convenient regional location. Key challenges include pedestrian safety, limited parking, inadequate lighting, and infrastructure constraints at major intersections. Vacant buildings, alleyways, retail recruitment, lodging, and arts and entertainment present clear opportunities for growth, while DOT-controlled roads, regional competition, and safety perceptions highlight the need for coordinated, pedestrian-focused investment and community buy-in.

Strengths (Internal)

- New Growth
- Location/Transportation Convenience
- Landmarks (King Drug)
- Historic Assets and Character
- Successful Downtown Events
- Economic Strength/Growing Economy
- Family Values & Numerous Churches
- Good People
- Healthy and Planned Growth, Community Buy-In
- Strong Public Sector Leadership and Investment
- Compact, Walkable Downtown Footprint
- Locally Owned Businesses and Historic Properties
- Active Downtown King Partnership
- Strong Community Pride and Civic Participation

Weaknesses (Internal)

- Intersection (Dalton/Main), Unsafe Crosswalks
- Low Power Lines
- Limited Parking
- Aging Infrastructure
- Vehicular-Oriented Development Patterns Not Prioritizing Pedestrians
- Limited Wayfinding, Branding, and Gateway Signage
- Lack of Community Involvement/Resistance to Change/Perception Challenges/Limited Awareness of Consumer Offerings and Investment Opportunities
- Limited Activities for Young Adults/Lack of Weekend Activities
- Lack of Public Restrooms
- Lack of Previous Development Downtown, Under Utilized Vacant Buildings, Limited Investment Capacity
- Limited Downtown Business Mix, Specifically Gaps in Retail, and Leakage in Consumer Spending to Nearby Communities
- Poor Lighting at Night

Opportunities (External)

- Vacant Buildings & Undeveloped Land
- Alleyways to Develop Public Spaces and Connections
- Adaptive Reuse of Underutilized and Vacant Buildings
- Expansion of Destination Dining, Brewery, and Specialty Retail
- Development of Downtown as a Gateway Hub for Outdoor Recreation
- Better Parking
- Improved/Targeted Façade and Small-Scale Redevelopment Incentives
- More Public Art and Arts Programming
- Entertainment, Expanded Programming and Signature Events
- Improved Wayfinding and Branding
- Hotel or Bed & Breakfast (Need Downtown Lodging)
- Strengthening Downtown Housing Options (Growing Population and Residential Development)
- Entrepreneurship and Small Business Support Programs
- Social District Formation and Programming

Threats (External)

- Growing Unhoused Population/Perception of Safety Issue
- Dangerous Intersection (Dalton/Main) for Pedestrians and Vehicular Traffic
- DOT Owned Roads (Lack of Local Control)
- Poor Sidewalk Conditions/Not ADA Compliant
- Lots of Vehicular Traffic, Pedestrians Not Prioritized, Transportation Patterns Prioritize Pass-Through Traffic
- Other Growing Communities/Economic Competition from Larger Retail Centers
- Rising Construction, Renovation, and Operating Costs
- Economic Uncertainty and Inflation
- Changing Retail and Consumer Behavior
- Downtown is Landlocked and Limits Expansion Opportunities



Photo taken by staff from the community site tour in Downtown King on March 3, 2025

Downtown King's SWOT analysis shows a district with strong local identity, historic assets, and promising opportunities for revitalization.

Community Engagement

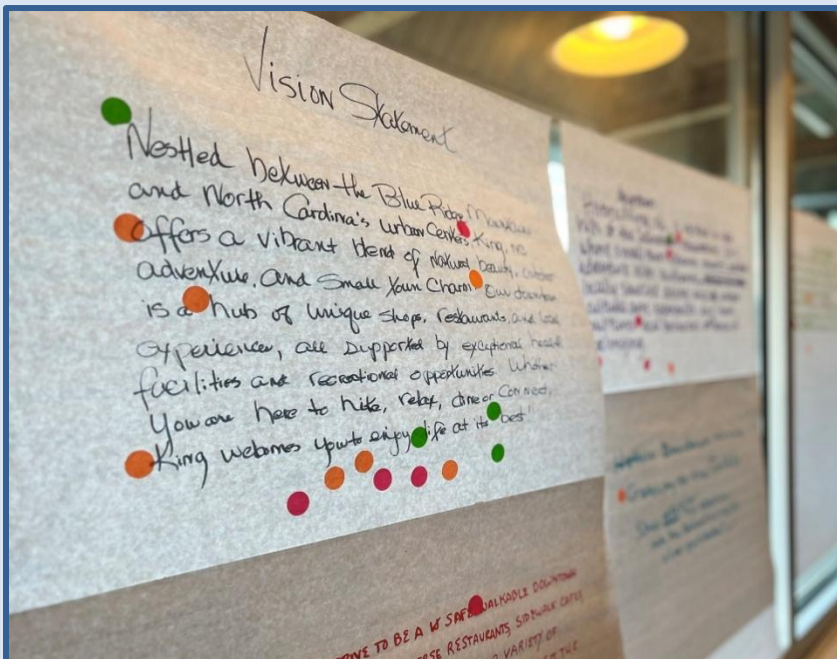
Community Visioning Workshop

Community visioning workshops are a critical part of the strategic planning process because they give residents and stakeholders a shared space to imagine what the community can become in the next five years. These workshops also generate excitement by making the future feel tangible and achievable, turning abstract ideas into clear asset-based strategies. Just as importantly, visioning workshops build coalitions by bringing together people who do not always sit at the same table, helping them find common ground, identify shared assets, and hopefully, commit to working together to see the vision through.

A Community Visioning Workshop was held on June 17, 2025, at The Dalton (102 E Dalton Road, King, NC 27021). The workshop was advertised on the City of King Website, City of King communications, and Downtown King Partnership social media platforms. Approximately 40 people were in attendance and participated in a series of economic development exercises and discussions:

- Asset Mapping
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis
- Economic Development Strategy Development
- Vision Development

Strategy and vision development exercises were facilitated to encourage collaboration and creative thinking, with participants working in small groups to develop shared visions grounded in asset-based strategies. Each group presented its consensus-built vision to the full group and displayed them on the wall, after which participants were given three sticker votes to select the vision or phrase that best presented the future of Downtown King's economy. The highest-supported ideas informed the vision statement included in this plan.



Photos from the Community Visioning Workshop on June 17, 2025

Community Survey

A total of 510 people completed the Downtown King survey, representing a significant level of community participation. Based on a City of King population of 7,764 residents, approximately 6.6 percent of the city's population responded to the survey, indicating strong public engagement in the future of downtown.

The results show that downtown primarily serves residents, with 69 percent of respondents living in King and an additional 24 percent visiting regularly. Downtown is used frequently, as 68 percent of respondents visit daily or several times per week. Dining is the primary reason for visiting downtown at 40 percent, followed by pass-through traffic at 28 percent, highlighting both economic activity and ongoing traffic pressure. Overall perception of Downtown King is moderately positive, with 51 percent of respondents rating it positive or very positive and 30 percent rating it neutral. Safety is a clear strength, as nearly 89 percent of respondents report feeling very safe or somewhat safe downtown, reinforcing its role as a viable community gathering place.

Across nearly all survey questions, parking, traffic flow, and pedestrian safety emerged as the most pressing challenges. These issues were consistently cited as barriers for businesses, top priorities for physical improvements, and major concerns about downtown's future. Looking ahead, respondents expressed a desire for a downtown area that is walkable, family friendly, vibrant, and active, with more retail, activities for children and teens, arts, and community events, while preserving King's small-town character. Overall, the survey data reflects broad support for continued revitalization, paired with a clear expectation that growth be managed intentionally and supported by appropriate infrastructure improvements.

The survey results can be found on pages 59 - 84 in the appendices of this document.



NC DEPARTMENT
of COMMERCE
RURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

Downtown King 5-Year Strategic Economic Development Plan SURVEY

Complete by
February 2, 2026

Prepared by NC Commerce Rural Planning
Program. Scan the QR Code to take the survey or
visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MPJWRBQ>



Across nearly all survey questions, parking, traffic flow, and pedestrian safety emerged as the most pressing challenges. These issues were consistently cited as barriers for business, top priorities for physical improvements, and major concerns about downtown's future.

Plan Implementation

The City of King will work collaboratively with partners during implementation to track progress, evaluate outcomes, and share accomplishments related to this plan with the NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center, helping ensure priority projects continue to move forward. Implementation of this plan is designed to be community-led and partnership-driven, not reliant on a single organization. The NC Commerce Rural Planning Program's approach to Rural Community Economy Building serves as a holistic foundation for a consensus-driven plan guided by a shared community vision and asset-based strategies.

Plan Implementation

Maintaining a dedicated group to follow through on implementation after the planning process to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan is critical to attaining the potential economic impact of these strategies. These efforts could be led by the same local work group that helped develop this plan, or another similar group, such as the Downtown King Partnership, that is representative of the city and its downtown district and can advance the goals of this plan. The sustained presence of such a group builds social capital within the group that improves their ability to work together and effectively address common goals. Furthermore, a dedicated group ensures continuity from planning stage through implementation, provides accountability to ensure that objectives are being met, and allows the community to react and respond quickly when an opportunity is presented. To clarify, this group should not be the sole entity responsible for implementing all the goals of the plan. Instead, the group should function as a convener and point of contact to connect to other stakeholders, organizations, and resources to help the broader community achieve these goals. Maintaining a regular meeting schedule will also help increase the effectiveness of the group, and the plan.

The implementation of the plan is designed as a collaborative and community wide effort. While the plan was developed with the City of King's downtown district as the primary geographic and administrative focus, the strategies and projects identified within it are intentionally designed to be undertaken by a varied set of partners. This approach reflects the deeply interconnected nature of economic development and community vitality across the city. Rather than placing the sole responsibility for implementation on the city government, this plan recognizes and embraces the strength of shared ownership. During the planning process, a variety of local, regional, and state stakeholders were engaged—including government leadership, non-profits, business leaders, tourism and recreation organizations, educational institutions, and civic groups. As a result, each project identified in the plan should include partners whose expertise, capacity, and community ties make them well-positioned to lead or support implementation efforts.

This distributed responsibility model ensures that implementation builds stronger, more sustainable partnerships while increasing local capacity. By aligning the work of various entities under a shared vision and strategy, the plan supports the creation of a more cohesive and resilient outdoor recreation economy. Each project has an identified lead or key collaborator, and in many cases, cross-sector coordination will be critical to success. The City of King government plays a vital facilitative role but is not the sole entity responsible for plan implementation. Ultimately, the success of this strategic plan depends on the collective engagement of all partners involved.

Resources and Support

The City of King Downtown Economic Development Strategic Plan is intended to be a living, working document that guides action, supports decision-making, and helps prioritize community needs over time. Regular reflection on the plan's goals, objectives, and actions through periodic review sessions with the Local Work Group and community leadership is encouraged to ensure the plan remains relevant, achievable, and responsive to changing conditions.

Rather than serving as a rigid checklist, the value of this plan lies in its ability to help the City of King and its partners set realistic priorities, measure progress, and adapt strategies as opportunities or challenges emerge. Pivoting, refining, or re-sequencing actions over time is not only expected, but essential to successful implementation.

Local Work Group and/or Dedicated Community Development Organization Expectations

To support accountability and momentum, it is recommended that the Local Work Group meet at least quarterly or be otherwise formalized as a standing implementation body. These meetings provide an opportunity for:

- Track progress on priority projects and actions
- Identify capacity or resource gaps
- Coordinate roles among partners
- Share updates internally and with the broader community

The City of King plays a supportive coordination role by helping monitor progress related to project management, timelines, communication, and use of available resources, while implementation itself remains a shared, collaborative effort among public, private, and nonprofit partners.

A Network-Based Approach to Implementation

Successful implementation is most effective when approached through a network-based model, rather than a traditional top-down structure. In this approach, leadership, responsibility, and expertise are distributed across a broad group of partners, allowing the City to respond more nimbly to opportunities and challenges as they arise. By intentionally leveraging relationships with regional, state, and local partners, City of King can expand its implementation capacity beyond staff and budget limitations, tap into specialized knowledge, and better align local projects with broader economic development, workforce, tourism, and placemaking initiatives already underway across the region.

Key partners may include organizations such as the North Carolina Department of Commerce, regional economic development organizations, nonprofit and philanthropic partners, educational institutions, small business support providers, and public and private funding agencies. Each partner brings unique assets to the table, whether technical expertise, data and market insight, funding opportunities, programmatic support, or convening power. When these partners are engaged early and consistently, projects are more likely to be feasible, well-coordinated, and competitive for external resources.

Continued collaboration through this networked model allows the community to build momentum around shared goals while remaining flexible and opportunity driven. Rather than relying on a fixed sequence of actions, King can advance multiple efforts simultaneously, adapt to changing market conditions, and pursue catalytic opportunities as they emerge. This collaborative structure also strengthens relationships, increases transparency, and fosters shared ownership of outcomes—ensuring that implementation is not only effective, but resilient, inclusive, and aligned with the long-term vision for downtown and the broader community.

Two Buckets of Implementation

Implementation actions generally fall into two complementary buckets:

1. Near-Term and Ongoing Actions

These include projects, programs, and organizational efforts that can be initiated or advanced using existing capacity, partnerships, or resources. Examples may include coordination activities, small-scale downtown improvements, marketing efforts, or organizational development.

2. Longer-Term or Opportunity-Based Actions

These actions may require additional funding, staffing, technical assistance, or external partnerships. Progress on these initiatives may depend on grant cycles, private investment timing, or future conditions, and should be revisited regularly as opportunities arise.

Both buckets are equally important, and movement between them over time is expected as projects mature or conditions change. A suggested implementation timeline is listed on page 46 of this document. This timeline is meant to be a flexible framework to prioritize actions and projects on an annual basis.

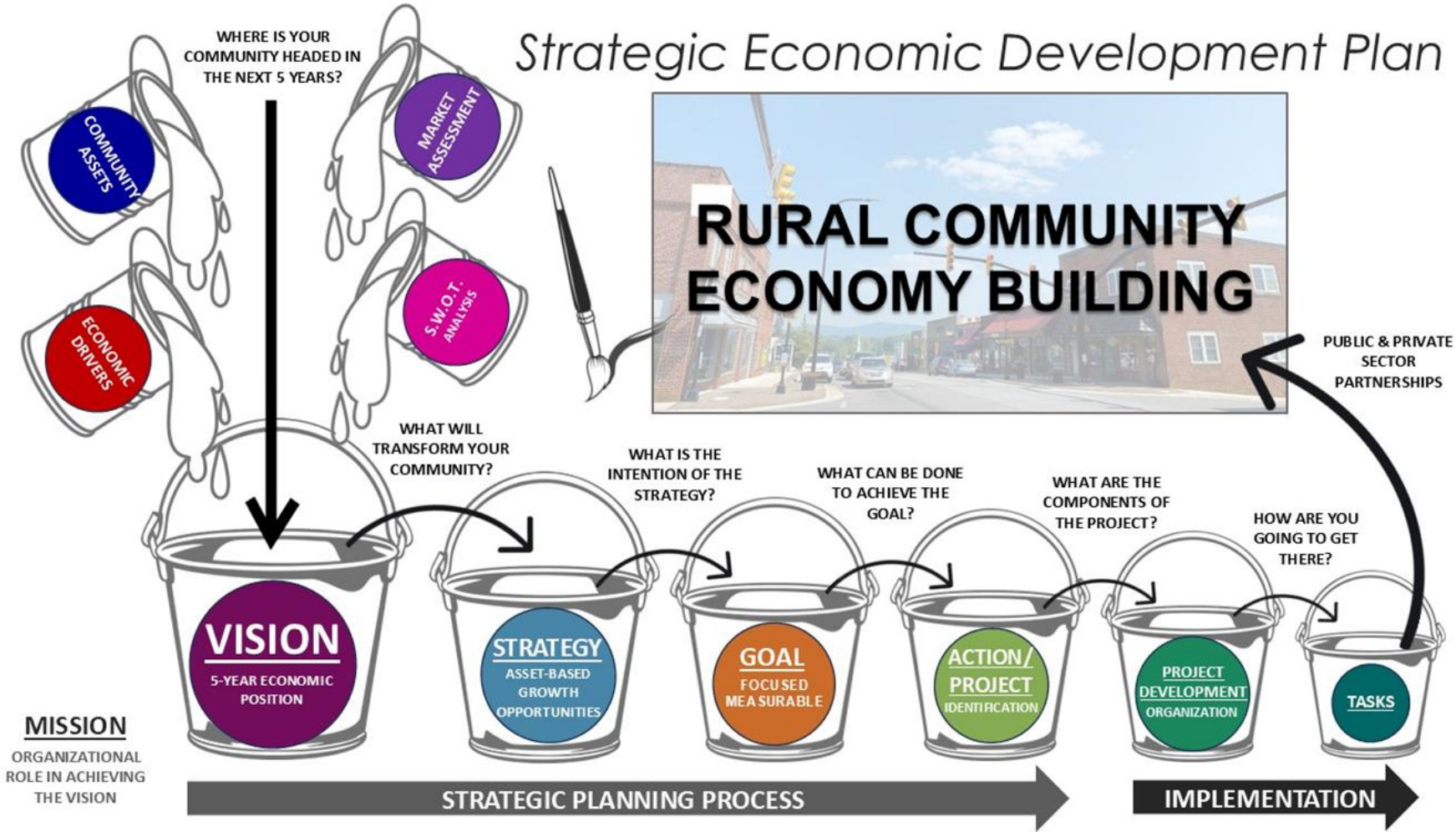
Ongoing Support and Technical Assistance

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center offers comprehensive services that can directly support plan implementation over time. These services include hands-on strategic planning assistance, one-on-one technical support for specific projects or challenges, professional development and training opportunities for staff, board members, and volunteers, and guidance related to funding strategies, grant readiness, and alignment with state and federal programs. In addition, the Center provides annual implementation plan templates and tools designed to help communities clearly track progress, document wins, identify obstacles, and recalibrate priorities as conditions, capacity, or funding opportunities change.

To reinforce accountability and long-term success, it is recommended that the Local Work Group or designated implementation committee maintain an ongoing relationship with the Piedmont Triad Community Economic Development Planner with North Carolina Department of Commerce, with at least one formal check-in each year. These annual touchpoints create space to review progress on priority actions, troubleshoot challenges, assess organizational capacity, and explore additional technical assistance, partnerships, or funding resources that may support next steps.

Through consistent collaboration, regular reflection, and a shared commitment to adaptability, the City of King can ensure this plan remains a living, community-driven tool rather than a static document. This approach supports sustained downtown vitality, strengthens partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders, and helps translate long-term vision into tangible improvements that enhance quality of life for residents while creating a welcoming, engaging experience for visitors.

Strategic Economic Development Plan



NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Strategic Plan Development Process

The implementation of the plan is made up of the project development and tasks phases. Project development is the phase in which a planned initiative or action is designed, organized, and prepared for implementation. It involves defining the scope, objectives, resources, timeline, and steps necessary to successfully carry out the project. During project development, tasks are identified, assigned, and scheduled to ensure the action progresses efficiently toward achieving the broader goal. A task is a specific, actionable step. It breaks an action into smaller, detailed activities that can be assigned, tracked, and completed. Tasks outline the exact work needed to move action forward and contribute to the overall progress of the project. This phase is done through, strengthens, and creates public and private partnerships within the community.

Economic Positioning/Vision Statement:

Historic Downtown King is nestled in the rolling foothills of the Sauratown Mountains, where Southern hospitality meets leisurely exploration. Featuring thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences, curated specialty shops, and convenient access to outdoor adventure, King is the ideal place to reconnect with community.

A Community Visioning Workshop was held on June 17, 2025, at The Dalton (102 E Dalton Road, King, NC 27021). The workshop was advertised on the City of King Website, Downtown King Partnership social media platforms, and posters for the event were printed and distributed to downtown King businesses. Approximately 40 people were in attendance and participated in a series of economic development exercises and discussions:

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Strategy 1: Historic Downtown King offers thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences.

Strategy 1: *Historic Downtown King offers thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences.*

This strategy positions food and dining as a central driver of downtown vitality, visitation, and identity. Culinary experiences are often one of the strongest and most immediate ways people connect to place, linger longer, and return more often. By intentionally supporting restaurants, food entrepreneurs, and food-focused experiences, Downtown King can build a reputation that complements its walkable historic core and proximity to outdoor recreation assets while strengthening small businesses and evening activity.

Goal 1: *Establish Downtown King as a recognized culinary destination by increasing dining-related visitation by 25% and launching at least one recurring signature food-focused event by 2031.*

This goal focuses on shifting downtown from a place people pass through to a place they intentionally visit to eat, gather, and celebrate. Measurable increases in visitation and the creation of a signature event provide both accountability and momentum, helping local businesses justify expanded hours, new menus, and reinvestment while signaling to residents and visitors that downtown dining is a defining part of King's identity.

Goal 1 Actions/Projects:

Actions under this strategy emphasize coordination, visibility, and experience. A Promotions Committee will align restaurant owners and food entrepreneurs around shared marketing, events, and advocacy. Exploring a social district and piloting temporary outdoor dining will increase foot traffic, enhance street-level vibrancy, and encourage people to linger. Wayfinding and streetscape improvements will highlight dining clusters and walkability, while small grants will support façade, equipment, or kitchen upgrades that enable growth and quality improvements. Additional initiatives such as a downtown dining trail or passport, exploration of a neighborhood bodega or boutique grocery, and featuring restaurants in regional tourism and outdoor recreation marketing will encourage multi-stop visits, strengthen local sourcing, and elevate downtown King's culinary identity through human-centered storytelling.

- 1.1** Create a Promotions Committee and include restaurant owners, breweries, and food entrepreneurs to coordinate events, shared marketing, and advocacy.
- 1.2** Assess the feasibility of establishing and programming a social district. Draft a social district management plan.
- 1.3** Implement temporary outdoor dining pilots (parklets, street closures, shared patios) during peak weekends and events.
- 1.4** Install cohesive wayfinding and streetscape elements highlighting dining clusters and walkability.
- 1.5** Provide small façade, equipment, or kitchen upgrade grants to support downtown restaurants, menu expansion, and extended hours.
- 1.6** Explore market opportunities for a neighborhood bodega or boutique grocery option to support locally sourced ingredients. This potential business could be an expansion of an existing business.
- 1.7** Create a Downtown King Dining Trail or Passport program to incentivize multi-stop visits.
- 1.8** Feature downtown restaurants in regional tourism, outdoor recreation, and social media campaigns. Highlight locally sourced resources through branding campaigns to generate community buy-in. Focus on human-centered storytelling.

Goal 2: *Strengthen Downtown King’s culinary offerings by supporting existing food and beverage businesses and delivering a minimum of three food-focused programs or events annually by 2031.*

This goal focuses on strengthening Downtown King’s culinary ecosystem by prioritizing the success and sustainability of existing food and beverage businesses while creating consistent, food-focused programming that keeps the district active and relevant year-round. Supporting current businesses is often the most effective and efficient way to grow a local economy, as it builds on established relationships, customer bases, and local knowledge. Delivering a minimum of three food-focused programs or events annually by 2030 helps create predictable reasons for residents and visitors to return downtown, smooth seasonal fluctuations, and foster collaboration among businesses. Together, these efforts reinforce downtown as a lively gathering place, support business resilience, and lay the groundwork for long-term growth without overextending local capacity.

Goal 2 Actions/Projects:

The actions under Goal 2 focus on strengthening Downtown King’s culinary ecosystem by building business capacity, reducing risk for operators, and improving the conditions that support food-related activity. Mentorship, business training, and support for farmers markets, food trucks, and pop-ups help existing and emerging businesses grow sustainably while creating a pipeline for future brick-and-mortar dining.

Targeted physical improvements, outdoor dining opportunities, and flexible event infrastructure make downtown more comfortable and active, especially in the evenings. Consistent food-focused programming and strategic connections to reputable culinary voices create repeat visitation, build community buy-in, and reinforce food as a defining part of downtown King’s identity.

- 2.1** Establish a food and beverage mentorship program pairing new operators with experienced restaurateurs. Facilitate relationship building.
- 2.2** Explore feasibility of a weekly/monthly farmers market in Downtown King. Consider moving farmers market to a more central location.
- 2.3** Enhance lighting, seating, and pedestrian comfort near dining establishments to support evening activity.
- 2.4** Evaluate downtown for potential outdoor dining spaces. Create visuals to generate community buy-in for outdoor dining and consider a sidewalk dining ordinance.
- 2.5** Add flexible event infrastructure (power access, portable stages, vendor hookups) for food programming.
- 2.6** Offer business training workshops on profitability, menu engineering, and seasonal tourism capture. Consider partnership with local educational institutions.
- 2.7** Support food trucks and pop-ups as incubators (recruitment opportunities) for future brick-and-mortar dining.
- 2.8** Deliver at least three annual food-focused programs (chef pop-ups, themed dining nights, restaurant weeks, Chicken Stew Festival, etc.)
- 2.9** Consider reputable culinary experts and how to connect them to downtown King’s reputation and branding through events and promotions.
- 2.10** Assess improvements needed to the Dalton Street & Main Street intersection including the corner gas station. The project should coordinate with NC DOT to add a left-turn lane and safer crosswalks to improve safety. The City of King should explore reuse of the corner gas station as a downtown welcome center with public restrooms, a possible farmers market, and flexible event space.

Strategy 2: Historic Downtown King enjoys artfully curated specialty shops.

Strategy 2: *Historic Downtown King enjoys artfully curated specialty shops.*

This strategy focuses on strengthening Historic Downtown King as a destination for artfully curated specialty shops that offer unique, locally rooted retail experiences. Destination retail plays a critical role in differentiating downtowns from highway and online alternatives, giving people a reason to explore, browse, and shop. By intentionally supporting a diverse mix of distinctive shops, this strategy helps reinforce downtown's character, encourages longer visits, and increases cross-shopping between retail, dining, and events. A strong specialty retail environment also supports local entrepreneurship, keeps dollars circulating within the community, and enhances downtown's overall sense of place, making King more resilient, memorable, and competitive as a small-town destination.

Goal 3: *Reduce vacant storefronts by 20% and recruit 3-5 anchors or destination specialty retail businesses by 2031.*

This goal focuses on reducing vacant storefronts and recruiting a small number of anchor or destination specialty retail businesses that can help stabilize and energize Historic Downtown King. Vacancies weaken downtown perception and disrupt momentum, while strong anchor businesses drive foot traffic, attract complementary shops, and encourage longer visits. Reducing vacancies by 20 percent and recruiting three to five destination retailers by 2031 builds a critical mass of activity, increases confidence among property owners and entrepreneurs, and signals that downtown King is a viable place to invest, with an emphasis on quality businesses that fit the district's character.

Goal 3 Actions/Projects:

The actions and projects under Goal 3 focus on creating a coordinated, proactive approach to reducing vacancies and strengthening specialty retail in Historic Downtown King. An Economic Advancement Committee, detailed property inventory, and clear recruitment materials help match the right businesses to the right spaces and respond quickly to opportunities. Targeted incentives, façade grants, and vacant storefront activations improve building quality and perception, while coordinated promotions and branding position downtown as a curated shopping district and signal that King is a strong, investable place to do business.

- 3.1** Form an Economic Advancement Committee including property owners, brokers, and business leaders to focus on business retention, recruitment, and priority economic advancement projects.
- 3.2** In addition to a property inventory, create a short business recruitment document outlining benefits of locating in Downtown King with resources available to new businesses.
- 3.3** Promote new businesses through coordinated grand openings and seasonal shop-local campaigns.
- 3.4** Brand downtown as a distinct shopping district with curated retail shopping.
- 3.5** Create promotions plans and social media calendar to prioritize promotions of economic opportunities and the downtown vision to encourage investments. Include a business of the month feature to support existing businesses.

- 3.6 Review, update, and promote façade grant program to improve building design and activation. Prioritize historic integrity of the buildings.
- 3.7 Offer targeted incentives for priority retail categories (outdoor gear, artisan goods, lifestyle retail).
- 3.8 Create and maintain an internal inventory of downtown properties noting property type, original building date, parcel number, property address, business name and current use, property owner name and contact, square footage, total assessed value, value per SF, value per acre, # of floors, occupancy, # of SF occupied, and property condition. The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center can provide a template.
- 3.9 Launch a vacant storefront activation program with window displays, art installations, or temporary uses.

Goal 4: *Complete at least one streetscape and/or three public space improvements and increase downtown pedestrian activity by 15% by 2031.*

This goal supports strategy 2 by recognizing that successful specialty retail depends on a downtown environment that is comfortable, attractive, and easy to explore on foot. Streetscape and public space improvements enhance the everyday experience of being downtown by improving safety, accessibility, and visual appeal, which directly influences how long people stay and how many shops they visit. Increasing pedestrian activity by 15 percent reflects the understanding that foot traffic is a key driver of retail success. Investing in streets and public spaces helps turn downtown King into a place where people enjoy walking, browsing, and gathering, reinforcing retail visibility, supporting small businesses, and strengthening downtown’s overall sense of place.

Actions/Projects:

The actions/projects under Goal 4 use streets and public spaces as active tools to support retail success and increase pedestrian activity in Historic Downtown King. Encouraging outdoor displays, seating, and small events help create a lively, welcoming downtown while supporting longer stays and increased spending. Tracking pedestrian counts demonstrates momentum and builds confidence for continued investment, while a Placemaking Committee helps prioritize projects and coordinate partnerships. Targeted investments in public art, lighting, seating, and planters, including in alleyways and side streets, encourage movement throughout the district and reinforce a people-first downtown that builds civic pride and supports specialty retail.

- 4.1 Encourage downtown businesses to extend storefront activity outdoors (displays, seating, events).
- 4.2 Leverage public space improvements to support longer stays and increased spending.
- 4.3 Program upgraded public spaces with art markets, performances, and seasonal events. These events do not necessarily need to be large events, just small, programmed spaces for everyday activation.
- 4.4 Track and share pedestrian counts to demonstrate downtown momentum and impact.
- 4.5 Establish a Placemaking Committee to prioritize projects and partnerships. Coordinate volunteer and civic groups for placemaking and maintenance initiatives.
- 4.6 Install asset-based public art, seating, planters, and pedestrian-scale lighting in key corridors. Consider alleyways and side streets to encourage movement throughout the district.
- 4.7 Assess the feasibility of a streetscape improvement plan to prioritize the pedestrian experience and to improve public spaces with areas that provide reprieve and cultivate civic pride through storytelling-centered design. Evaluate the existing Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan and confirm feasibility and community buy-in.

Strategy 3: Historic Downtown King provides convenient access to outdoor adventure.

Strategy 3: *Historic Downtown King provides convenient access to outdoor adventure.*

This strategy focuses on positioning Historic Downtown King as a natural gateway to outdoor adventure, recognizing the strong connection between recreation, tourism, and downtown economic vitality. Easy and visible access to outdoor assets encourages visitors to start and end their trips downtown, increasing foot traffic for local businesses while reinforcing King’s identity as an active, lifestyle-oriented community. By intentionally linking trails, parks, and recreation amenities to the downtown core, this strategy helps capture visitor spending, supports outdoor-oriented retail and dining, and enhances quality of life for residents. Convenient access to outdoor adventure also differentiates King within the region, leveraging its natural assets to create a more competitive, memorable, and experience-driven downtown.

Goal 5: *Increase downtown lodging options by supporting 1-2 new or expanded lodging facilities that connect outdoor recreation visitors to Downtown King by 2031.*

This goal recognizes that lodging is critical to capturing the full economic benefit of outdoor recreation and tourism. By increasing downtown lodging options, King can convert day visitors into overnight guests who spend more time and money in local restaurants, shops, and experiences. Supporting one to two new or expanded lodging facilities by 2031 helps strengthen downtown as a basecamp for outdoor recreation while reinforcing walkability and convenience. Lodging located within or near downtown also extends activity into evenings and mornings, supports year-round visitation, and enhances downtown’s role as a hub for both visitors and residents.

Actions/Projects:

The actions under Goal 5 focus on aligning lodging development with outdoor recreation, tourism partners, and downtown investment to capture overnight visitation. Convening property owners, developers, and partners helps build coordination and trust, while identifying viable sites, updating zoning guidance, and recruiting boutique or adaptive reuse lodging makes development more feasible and appropriate for downtown.

Coordinating with regional recreation partners and the Stokes County TDA to market downtown as a gateway, create stay-and-play packages, and link lodging with dining and outdoor experiences helps convert day visitors into overnight guests. Together, these actions reduce development risk, strengthen walkability and connections, and support the addition of one to two downtown lodging options by 2031.

- 5.1** Convene property owners, developers, and tourism partners to align lodging opportunities. Work with Stokes County TDA. Prioritize cooperation with park rangers, wildlife commission, NC Outdoor Commission for Youth, etc. – building strategic partnerships with outdoor recreation leaders to help

connect visitors to King.

- 5.2 Identify potential lodging opportunities (vacant buildings, upper floors, vacant lots for infill) and compile a list of local and regional developers as potential investment leads. Engage property owners to build trust and facilitate local investment.
- 5.3 Coordinate with regional outdoor recreation partners to package King lodging with recreation experiences.
- 5.4 Consider updating zoning or design guidance to support small-scale downtown appropriate lodging.
- 5.5 Enhance streetscape connections/walkability between lodging sites and dining/shopping areas.
- 5.6 Recruit boutique lodging, inns, or adaptive reuse hotel concept to vacant or underused property.
- 5.7 Support public-private partnerships for feasibility studies that support priority projects within this plan and redevelopment planning.
- 5.8 Assess potential greenway or connections from the downtown district to King's outdoor recreational/natural assets and nearby lodging sites (Airbnb's near downtown).
- 5.9 Market downtown lodging as the gateway to Hanging Rock, Pilot Mountain, and regional trails.
- 5.10 Create stay and play packages linking lodging, dining, and outdoor recreation. Consider partnerships with Stokes County TDA for this effort.
- 5.11 Create outdoor recreation-based itineraries that link outdoor activities to downtown King's food and beverage establishments while supporting retail and services.

Goal 6: *Improve connections between Historic Downtown King and the regional outdoor recreation economy by completing at least three downtown-to-outdoor connectivity projects by 2031.*

This goal focuses on strengthening the physical and experiential connection between Historic Downtown King and the region's outdoor recreation assets. Improving downtown-to-outdoor connectivity helps ensure that hikers, cyclists, paddlers, and other recreation users naturally move through downtown before and after their activities, increasing foot traffic and local spending. Completing at least three connectivity projects by 2031 reinforces downtown as the primary gateway to nearby trails, parks, and natural areas, improves wayfinding and safety, and enhances quality of life for residents. These connections help integrate outdoor recreation into everyday downtown life, making King more competitive as an outdoor destination while supporting long-term economic vitality.

Actions/Projects:

The actions under Goal 6 focus on intentionally linking Historic Downtown King to the region's outdoor recreation economy through coordination, infrastructure, design, and programming. Establishing a local Outdoor Alliance Committee and coordinating funding across local, state, and federal sources helps align partners and move projects forward efficiently. Physical improvements such as trail connections, bike routes, sidewalks, and gateway enhancements make it easier and safer for outdoor users to move between downtown and nearby recreation assets.

Design elements and amenities reinforce this connection by visually and functionally integrating outdoor culture into downtown through art, furnishings, bike parking, water stations, and other outdoor-friendly

features. Supporting outfitter and guide services, improving parking awareness, and promoting downtown as the region's basecamp through maps, marketing materials, and digital tools help capture visitor spending. Outdoor-themed events that start or end downtown further activate the district, drawing recreation users into the heart of King and strengthening downtown's role as the gateway to outdoor adventure.

- 6.1** Create a local Outdoor Alliance Committee including parks, tourism, transportation, outfitters, and outdoor adjacent partners.
- 6.2** Coordinate funding strategies across local, state, and federal sources.
- 6.3** Implement trail connections, bike routes, sidewalks, and gateway enhancements linking downtown to outdoor assets.
- 6.4** Identify an outdoor-inspired motif to incorporate into downtown design improvements (murals, sculptures, functional art like benches, electric box covers, etc.) helping to visually connect the district to the region's outdoor adventure assets. Examples might include the Sauratown Mountains, a native animal species, biking elements, etc.
- 6.5** Support downtown businesses in outfitter, guide, and recreation-support services.
- 6.6** Encourage outdoor-friendly amenities (bike parking, gear storage, water stations, dog friendly).
- 6.7** Evaluate available parking and increase awareness of current available parking through signage and promotions. Consider parking study and/or areas for public parking.
- 6.8** Promote Downtown King as the basecamp for outdoor adventure through maps and digital tools. Create brochure and marketing materials for Downtown King and share them at regional visitor centers, businesses, and parks.
- 6.9** Host outdoor-themed events (trail races, ride-ins, adventure festivals) starting or ending downtown. This may look like a race/fun run, a festival, music event, or athletic competition with some event component held in the downtown district.

Implementation Chart

The strategic economic development plan’s implementation chart translates the City of King’s vision into action by identifying three core economic development strategies, each supported by clear SMART goals, actions, and projects. Every action and project is labeled by the focus area it most directly supports Capacity Building, Placemaking, or Economic Advancement providing clarity on how individual efforts contribute to broader objectives. This visual framework is designed to guide decision making, track progress, and ensure a balanced, coordinated approach to implementation across all focus areas.

Economic Positioning/Vision Statement: Historic Downtown King is nestled in the rolling foothills of the Sauratown Mountains, where Southern hospitality meets leisurely exploration. Featuring thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences, curated specialty shops, and convenient access to outdoor adventure, King is the ideal place to reconnect with community.

STRATEGY 1 <i>Historic Downtown King offers thoughtfully crafted culinary experiences</i>	STRATEGY 2 <i>Historic Downtown King enjoys artfully curated specialty shops</i>	STRATEGY 3 <i>Historic Downtown King provides convenient access to outdoor adventure</i>
<p>Goal 1: Establish Downtown King as a recognized culinary destination by increasing dining-related visitation by 25% and launching at least one recurring signature food-focused event by 2031.</p> <p>Actions/Projects:</p> <p>1.1 Create a Promotions Committee and CB include restaurant owners, breweries, and food entrepreneurs to coordinate events, shared marketing, and advocacy.</p> <p>1.2 Assess the feasibility of establishing and EA programming a social district. Draft a social district management plan.</p> <p>1.3 Implement temporary outdoor dining P pilots (parklets, street closures, shared patios) during peak weekends and events.</p> <p>1.4 Install cohesive wayfinding and P streetscape elements highlighting dining clusters and walkability.</p>	<p>Goal 3: Reduce vacant storefronts by 20% and recruit 3-5 anchors or destination specialty retail businesses by 2031.</p> <p>Actions/Projects:</p> <p>3.1 Form an Economic Advancement CB Committee including property owners, brokers, and business leaders to focus on business retention, recruitment, and priority economic advancement projects.</p> <p>3.2 In addition to a property inventory, EA create a short business recruitment document outlining benefits of locating in Downtown King with resources available to new businesses.</p> <p>3.3 Promote new businesses through P coordinated grand openings and seasonal shop local campaigns.</p>	<p>Goal 5: Increase downtown lodging options by supporting 1-2 new or expanded lodging facilities that connect outdoor recreation visitors to Downtown King by 2031.</p> <p>Actions/Projects:</p> <p>5.1 Convene property owners, developers, CB and tourism partners to align lodging opportunities. Work with Stokes County TDA. Prioritize cooperation with park rangers, wildlife commission, NC Outdoor Commission for Youth, etc. – building strategic partnerships with outdoor recreation leaders to help connect visitors to King.</p> <p>5.2 Identify potential lodging opportunities EA (vacant buildings, upper floors, vacant lots for infill) and compile a list of local and regional developers as potential investment leads. Engage property owners to build trust and facilitate local</p>

STRATEGY 1 CONTINUED...

- 1.5** Provide small façade, equipment, or kitchen upgrade grants to support downtown restaurants, menu expansion, and extended hours.
CB
- 1.6** Explore market opportunities for a neighborhood bodega or boutique grocery option to support locally sourced ingredients. This potential business could be an expansion of an existing business.
EA
- 1.7** Create a Downtown King Dining Trail or Passport program to incentivize multi-stop visits.
P
- 1.8** Feature downtown restaurants in regional tourism, outdoor recreation, and social media campaigns. Highlight locally sourced resources through branding campaigns to generate community buy-in. Focus on human-centered storytelling.
P

Goal 2: Strengthen Downtown King’s culinary offerings by supporting existing food and beverage businesses and delivering a minimum of three food-focused programs or events annually by 2031.

Actions/Projects:

- 2.1** Establish a food and beverage mentorship program pairing new operators with experienced restaurateurs. Facilitate relationship building.
CB
- 2.2** Explore feasibility of a weekly/monthly farmers market in Downtown King. Consider moving farmers market to a more central location.
EA

STRATEGY 2 CONTINUED...

- 3.4** Brand downtown as a distinct shopping district with curated retail shopping.
P
- 3.5** Create promotions plans and social media calendar to prioritize promotions of economic opportunities and the downtown vision to encourage investments. Include a business of the month feature to support existing businesses.
CB
- 3.6** Review, update, and promote façade grant program to improve building design and activation. Prioritize historic integrity of the buildings.
CB
- 3.7** Offer targeted incentives for priority retail categories (outdoor gear, artisan goods, lifestyle retail).
CB
- 3.8** Create and maintain an internal inventory of downtown properties noting property type, original building date, parcel number, property address, business name and current use, property owner name and contact, square footage, total assessed value, value per SF, value per acre, # of floors, occupancy, # of SF occupied, and property condition. The MS&RP can provide a template.
EA
- 3.9** Launch a vacant storefront activation program with window displays, art installations, or temporary uses.
P

Goal 4: Complete at least one streetscape and/or three public space improvements and increase downtown pedestrian activity by 15% by 2031.

STRATEGY 3 CONTINUED...

- investment.
- 5.3** Coordinate with regional outdoor recreation partners to package King lodging with recreation experiences.
CB
- 5.4** Consider updating zoning or design guidance to support small-scale downtown appropriate lodging.
CB
- 5.5** Enhance streetscape connections/walkability between lodging sites and dining/shopping areas.
P
- 5.6** Recruit boutique lodging, inns, or adaptive reuse hotel concept to vacant or underused property.
EA
- 5.7** Support public-private partnerships for feasibility studies that support priority projects within this plan and redevelopment planning.
EA
- 5.8** Assess potential greenway or connections from the downtown district to King’s outdoor recreational/natural assets and nearby lodging sites (Airbnb’s near downtown).
EA
- 5.9** Market downtown lodging as the gateway to Hanging Rock, Pilot Mountain, and regional trails.
P
- 5.10** Create stay and play packages linking lodging, dining, and outdoor recreation. Consider partnerships with Stokes County TDA for this effort.
P
- 5.11** Create outdoor recreation-based itineraries that link outdoor activities to downtown King’s food and beverage establishments while supporting retail and services.
P

STRATEGY 1 CONTINUED...

- 2.3** Enhance lighting, seating, and pedestrian comfort near dining establishments to support evening activity. **P**
- 2.4** Evaluate downtown for potential outdoor dining spaces. Create visuals to generate community buy-in for outdoor dining and consider a sidewalk dining ordinance. **EA**
- 2.5** Add flexible event infrastructure (power access, portable stages, vendor hookups) for food programming. **P**
- 2.6** Offer business training workshops on profitability, menu engineering, and seasonal tourism capture. Consider partnership with local educational institutions. **CB**
- 2.7** Support food trucks and pop-ups as incubators (recruitment opportunities) for future brick-and-mortar dining. **EA**
- 2.8** Deliver at least three annual food-focused programs (chef pop-ups, themed dining nights, restaurant weeks, Chicken Stew Festival, etc.) **P**
- 2.9** Consider reputable culinary experts and how to connect them to downtown King's reputation and branding through events and promotions. **CB**
- 2.10** Assess improvements needed to the Dalton Street & Main Street intersection including the corner gas station. The project should coordinate with NC DOT to add a left-turn lane and safer crosswalks to improve safety. The City of King should explore reuse of the corner gas station as a downtown welcome center with public restrooms, a possible farmers market, and flexible event space. **EA**

STRATEGY 2 CONTINUED...

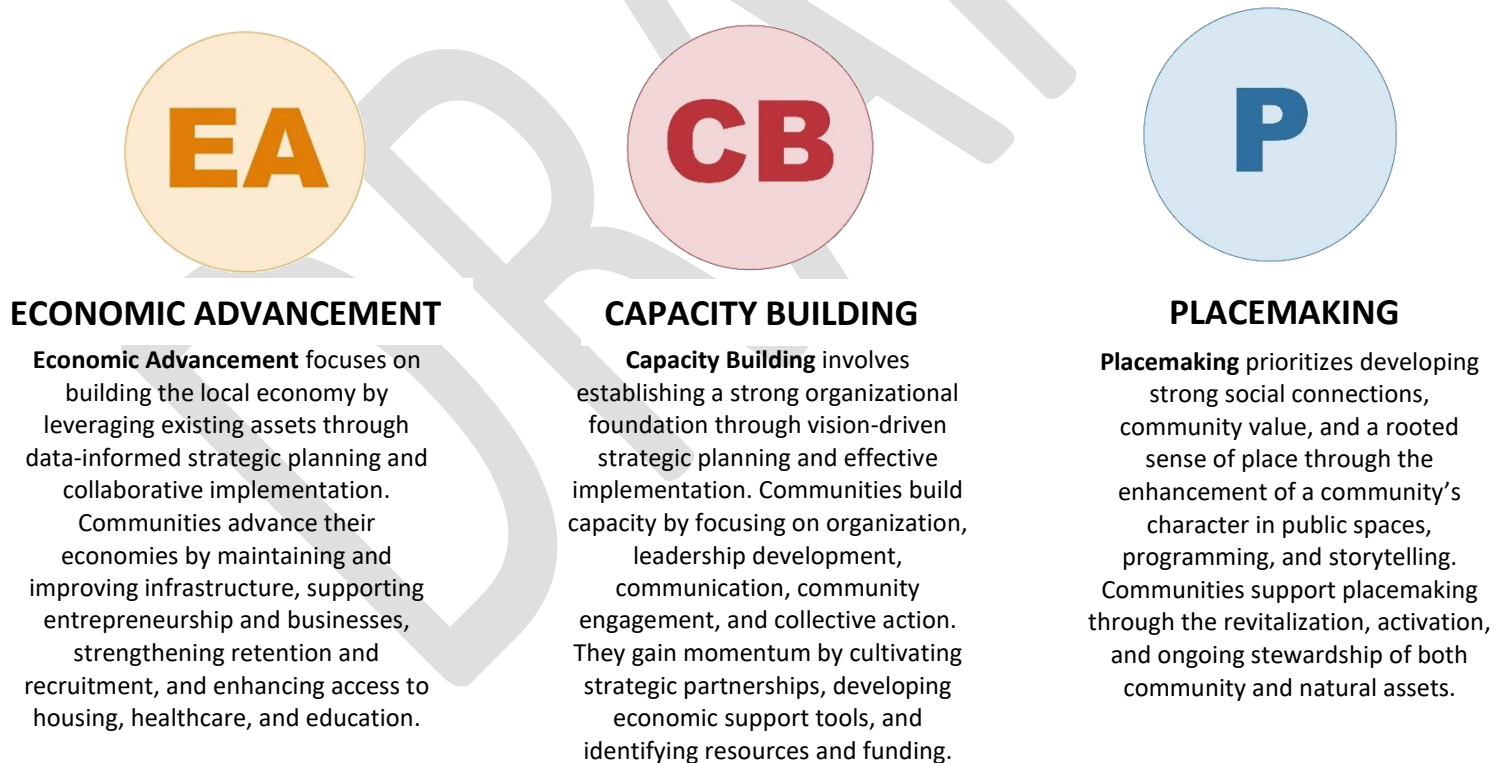
- Actions/Projects:**
- 4.1** Encourage downtown businesses to extend storefront activity outdoors (displays, seating, events). **P**
 - 4.2** Leverage public space improvements to support longer stays and increased spending. **EA**
 - 4.3** Program upgraded public spaces with art markets, performances, and seasonal events. These events do not necessarily need to be large events, just small, programmed spaces for everyday activation. **P**
 - 4.4** Track and share pedestrian counts to demonstrate downtown momentum and impact. **EA**
 - 4.5** Establish a Placemaking Committee to prioritize projects and partnerships. Coordinate volunteer and civic groups for placemaking and maintenance initiatives. **CB**
 - 4.6** Install asset-based public art, seating, planters, and pedestrian-scale lighting in key corridors. Consider alleyways and side streets to encourage movement throughout the district. **P**
 - 4.7** Assess the feasibility of a streetscape improvement plan to prioritize the pedestrian experience and to improve public spaces with areas that provide reprieve and cultivate civic pride through storytelling-centered design. Evaluate the existing Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan and confirm feasibility and community buy-in. **EA**

STRATEGY 3 CONTINUED...

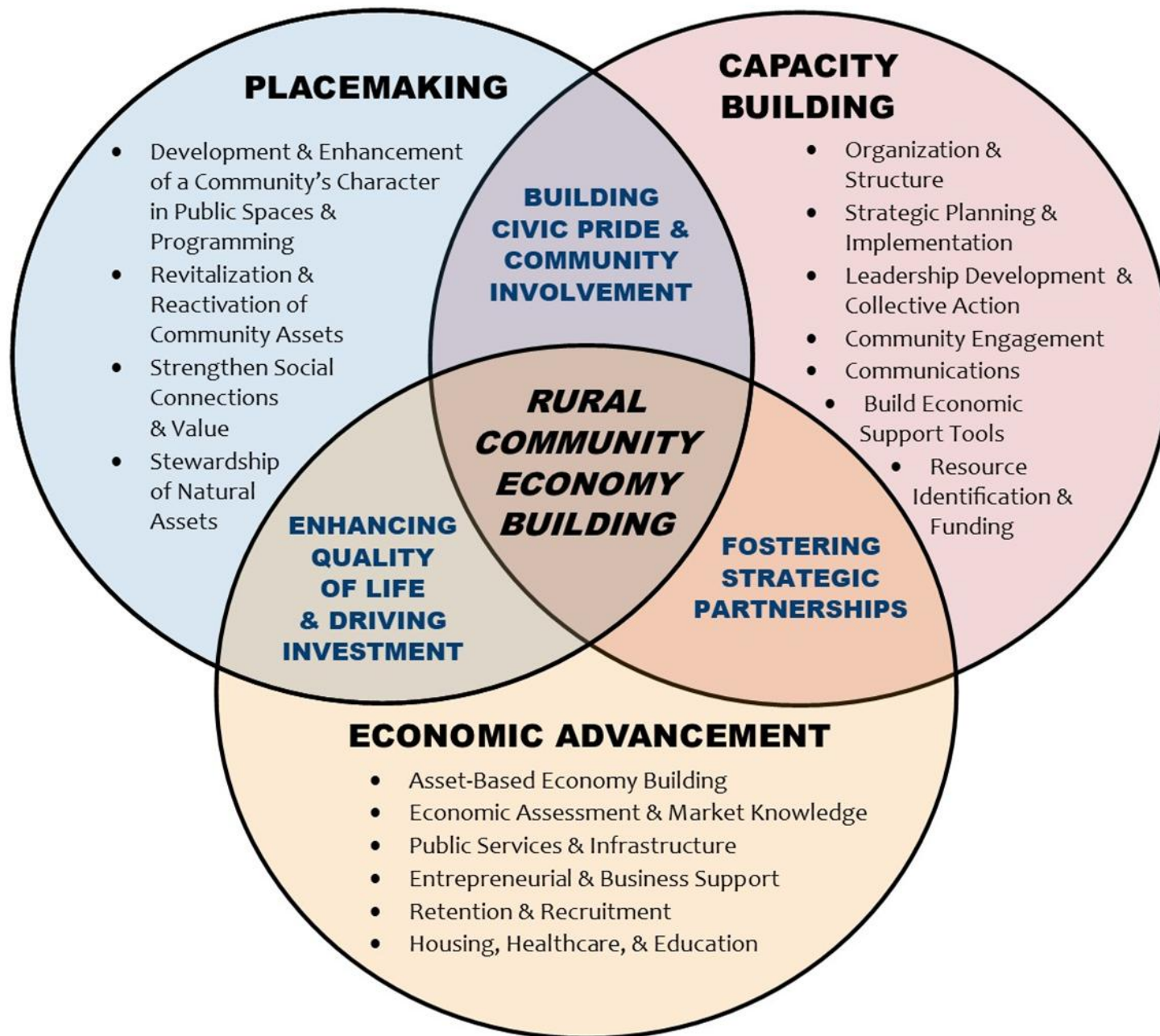
- Goal 6:** Improve connections between Historic Downtown King and the regional outdoor recreation economy by completing at least three downtown-to-outdoor connectivity projects by 2031.
- Actions/Projects:**
- 6.1** Create a local Outdoor Alliance Committee including parks, tourism, transportation, outfitters, and outdoor adjacent partners. **CB**
 - 6.2** Coordinate funding strategies across local, state, and federal sources. **CB**
 - 6.3** Implement trail connections, bike routes, sidewalks, and gateway enhancements linking downtown to outdoor assets. **P**
 - 6.4** Identify an outdoor-inspired motif to incorporate into downtown design improvements (murals, sculptures, functional art like benches, electric box covers, etc.) helping to visually connect the district to the region's outdoor adventure assets. Examples might include the Sauratown Mountains, a native animal species, biking elements, etc. **P**
 - 6.5** Support downtown businesses in outfitter, guide, and recreation-support services. **CB**
 - 6.6** Encourage outdoor-friendly amenities (bike parking, gear storage, water stations, dog friendly). **P**
 - 6.7** Evaluate available parking and increase awareness of current available parking through signage and promotions. Consider parking study and/or areas for public parking. **CB**

		<p>6.8 Promote Downtown King as the basecamp P for outdoor adventure through maps and digital tools. Create brochure and marketing materials for Downtown King and share them at regional visitor centers, businesses, and parks.</p> <p>6.9 Host outdoor-themed events (trail races, P ride-ins, adventure festivals) starting or ending downtown. This may look like a race/fun run, a festival, music event, or athletic competition with some event component held in the downtown district.</p>
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Rural Planning Program Approach to Rural Community Economy Building: Implementation Key



Rural Planning Program Approach to Rural Community Economy Building:



Priority Projects

Strategy 1: Thoughtfully Crafted Culinary Experiences

Goal 2: Strengthen Downtown King’s culinary offerings by supporting existing food and beverage businesses and delivering a minimum of three food-focused programs or events annually by 2031.

Priority Action/Project 2.8: Deliver at least three annual food-focused programs (chef pop-ups, themed dining nights, restaurant weeks, Chicken Stew Festival, etc.)

Priority Action 2.8 advances Strategy 1: Thoughtfully Crafted Culinary Experiences by supporting Goal 2 to strengthen Downtown King’s culinary offerings through consistent programming and support for existing food and beverage businesses. By delivering at least three annual food-focused programs such as chef pop-ups, themed dining nights, restaurant weeks, and signature events like the Chicken Stew Festival, the City of King will create opportunities for local restaurants and entrepreneurs to showcase their offerings, attract new customers, and build sustained community engagement. These programs are designed to increase collaboration among businesses, encourage repeat visitation, and provide regular activation that supports downtown establishments throughout the year. Through intentional, recurring events that highlight local talent and culinary traditions, this action reinforces downtown as an active, welcoming gathering place while strengthening the long-term viability of King’s food and beverage sector.

- **Chicken Stew Festival:** The proposed Chicken Stew Festival could serve as an annual signature event centered in Downtown King, building on the long-standing tradition of chicken stew gatherings that are deeply rooted in Stokes County’s community culture. This theme and project idea consistently emerged during the strategic planning process as residents and stakeholders identified food-centered traditions as an authentic way to bring people together and celebrate local identity. Structured as a walkable downtown experience, the festival could feature stew tastings hosted by local restaurants, civic groups, and community organizations, complemented by live music, artisan vendors, and family-friendly activities. In connection with strategies 2 and 3, the event could encourage visitors to explore artfully curated specialty shops through retail promotions and extended shopping hours while also connecting to nearby outdoor recreation through guided hikes, cycling meetups, or trail-to-table programming. By blending food, shopping, arts, and outdoor adventure, the Chicken Stew Festival would create a uniquely local signature event that advances multiple strategies within the plan while reinforcing Downtown King as a vibrant community gathering place.
- **Restaurant Week:** Downtown King Restaurant Week could be structured as a coordinated, multi-day promotion highlighting local restaurants, cafés, and food businesses through prix fixe menus, specialty dishes, or limited time offers designed to attract both residents and visitors. Participating businesses could offer tiered price points to encourage accessibility while showcasing the diversity and quality of King’s culinary scene. The event could be supported by a shared marketing campaign, dining passports, and cross-promotions with downtown retailers to encourage guests to shop and explore between meals. Scheduled during a traditionally slower season, Restaurant Week would help increase dining-related visitation, introduce new customers to local establishments, and reinforce downtown’s growing identity as a welcoming and emerging culinary destination.

Strategy 1: Thoughtfully Crafted Culinary Experiences

Goal 1: Establish Downtown King as a recognized culinary destination by increasing dining-related visitation by 25% and launching at least one recurring signature food-focused event by 2031.

Priority Action/Project 1.2: Assess the feasibility of establishing and programming a social district. Draft a social district management plan.

From the very beginning of the strategic planning process, the City of King and the Downtown King Partnership consistently identified the creation of a downtown Social District as a priority action because it represents a practical, near-term tool to increase foot traffic, support local restaurants and beverage businesses, and create a more vibrant and connected downtown experience. In North Carolina, a Social District is a locally designated, contiguous area established by ordinance where individuals may carry and consume alcoholic beverages only if they are purchased from a participating ABC permitted business and served in a compliant Social District cup. Districts must have clearly defined boundaries, set days and hours of operation, and be registered with the NC ABC Commission, along with required signage and management expectations. Rather than requiring a permanent commitment at the outset, the City could consider implementing the Social District through a defined trial period or pilot program, allowing leaders to evaluate impacts, gather community feedback, and adjust before long term adoption. Several North Carolina communities, including Mount Airy, Hickory, Monroe, and Kannapolis, have successfully introduced Social Districts using phased or pilot approaches to test operations and community response. When implemented thoughtfully, Social Districts provide a clear framework that encourages responsible use while extending visits, increasing cross shopping between businesses, supporting downtown events, and strengthening overall downtown vitality. There are currently more than 70 Social Districts operating across North Carolina, and several participating communities have shared best practices and key takeaways with the North Carolina Main Street and Rural Planning Center, summarized below.

- Start small and be incremental: Launch with a pilot or limited footprint to build confidence, test operations, and refine policies based on real-time feedback.
- Prioritize communication and partnerships: Early and ongoing coordination with public safety, local businesses, Main Street organizations, and community leaders is critical.
- Be intentional about branding and culture: Successful districts are family-friendly, welcoming to non-drinkers, and centered on arts, events, and community gathering rather than alcohol alone.
- Use placemaking to define the district: Public art, music, outdoor seating, lighting, and flexible gathering spaces help visually and functionally anchor the district.
- Measure and share impact: Track baseline data such as foot traffic, incident calls, business sales, and investment to demonstrate outcomes and build long-term support.
- Require reusable or branded cups: This reduces litter, encourages responsible behavior, and reinforces district identity.
- Stay flexible and adaptive: Policies, boundaries, hours, and programming should evolve based on community response and changing needs.
- Leverage social districts as catalysts: When done well, districts support business recruitment and expansion, private and public investment, workforce attraction, and inclusive social and cultural programming.

Strategy 2: Artfully Curated Specialty Shops

Goal 3: Reduce vacant storefronts by 20% and recruit 3-5 anchors or destination specialty retail businesses by 2031.

Priority Action/Project 3.2: In addition to a property inventory, create a short business recruitment document outlining benefits of locating in Downtown King with resources available to new businesses.

Priority Action/Project 3.6: Review, update, and promote façade grant program to improve building design and activation. Prioritize historic integrity of the buildings.

Priority Action/Project 3.8: Create and maintain an internal inventory of downtown properties noting property type, original building date, parcel number, property address, business name and current use, property owner name and contact, square footage, total assessed value, value per SF, value per acre, # of floors, occupancy, # of SF occupied, and property condition. The MS&RP can provide a template.

To achieve Goal 3 of reducing vacant storefronts by 20% and recruiting three to five anchor or specialty retail businesses by 2031, the City of King and Downtown King Partnership will implement coordinated tools that support strategic recruitment and building reinvestment. Priority Action 3.2 establishes the creation of a concise business recruitment document highlighting the benefits, incentives, and resources available to prospective businesses, while Priority Action 3.6 calls for reviewing, updating, and promoting the façade grant program to encourage high-quality building improvements that preserve historic character and enhance storefront activation. Supporting these efforts, Priority Action 3.8 includes developing and maintaining a comprehensive internal inventory of downtown properties to guide recruitment efforts, track vacancies, and inform targeted outreach. Together, these actions provide a proactive framework for attracting complementary businesses, activating underutilized spaces, and strengthening Downtown King's retail ecosystem.

- **Priority Action 3.2** focuses on creating a concise, visually engaging business recruitment document that highlights the benefits, incentives, and resources available to businesses considering Downtown King. Designed as a practical outreach tool, it will help City staff and partners proactively recruit businesses that align with the vision for artfully curated specialty shops while reducing barriers to entry and supporting strategic retail growth.
- **Priority Action 3.6** emphasizes reviewing, updating, and promoting the façade grant program to enhance Downtown King's appearance and economic vitality. By supporting storefront improvements such as restoration, signage, lighting, and accessibility upgrades while preserving historic character, the program will strengthen storefront activation, improve the pedestrian experience, and encourage continued reinvestment downtown.
- **Priority Action 3.8** establishes the creation and ongoing maintenance of a detailed internal downtown property inventory to guide recruitment, track conditions, and inform strategic investment decisions. Together, these actions position Downtown King to attract complementary specialty businesses, improve the built environment, and create a more walkable and engaging destination.

Strategy 3: Convenient Access to Outdoor Adventure

Goal 6: Improve connections between Historic Downtown King and the regional outdoor recreation economy by completing at least three downtown-to-outdoor connectivity projects by 2031.

Priority Action/Project 6.4: Identify an outdoor-inspired motif to incorporate into downtown design improvements (murals, sculptures, functional art like benches, electric box covers, etc.) helping to visually connect the district to the region's outdoor adventure assets. Examples might include the Sauratown Mountains, a native animal species, biking elements, etc.

This action supports the development of a cohesive outdoor inspired design motif that visually links Downtown King to the region's natural and recreational assets while strengthening the district's identity and economic vitality. A recommended motif is the Sauratown Mountains and native wildlife corridor, incorporating stylized mountain silhouettes, trail and biking elements, and native species found in the surrounding landscape. Implemented through a phased placemaking approach, this motif could begin with a unifying color palette and graphic language applied to murals, sculptures, electric box wraps, wayfinding elements, and functional art such as benches, bike racks, and seating areas. Engaging local artists, schools, and community volunteers in the design and installation process would build local ownership, while partnerships with outdoor recreation groups and tourism stakeholders would help ensure authenticity and alignment with regional branding.

Public art, both functional and non-functional, has a significant impact on downtown districts by creating a strong sense of place and making downtowns feel memorable, welcoming, and distinct. Visually compelling art communicates local stories, values, and identity, fostering community pride and deepening emotional connections between residents, businesses, and visitors. Functional public art improves comfort and walkability, encouraging people to linger, explore, and return, which can lead to increased foot traffic, longer visits, and greater support for local businesses. Thoughtfully designed and intentionally maintained public art also contributes to positive perceptions of safety and care, reinforcing downtown as an active and vibrant place. Over time, a coordinated public art strategy can link blocks, gateways, and public spaces, guide movement through the district, and position downtown as the cultural and social heart of the community while supporting tourism, private investment, and long-term revitalization.

North Carolina Examples of Painted Sculpture or Motif-Based Public Art:

- Hendersonville – Painted Bear Statues (“Bears in the City”)
- Lexington – Painted Pig Statues (“Pigs in the City”)
- New Bern – Painted Bear Statues (“Swiss Bear namesake”)
- Asheboro – Zoo Animal Sculptures
- Lenoir – Furniture-Themed Sculptures (“Furniture Capital of the South”)
- Mount Airy – Old-Time Music Cultural Motifs (Fiddle Crawl, Banjo Crawl, Guitar Crawl, Whittling Wall)

Strategy 3: Convenient Access to Outdoor Adventure

Goal 5: Increase downtown lodging options by supporting 1-2 new or expanded lodging facilities that connect outdoor recreation visitors to Downtown King by 2031.

Priority Action/Project 5.5: Assess the feasibility of a streetscape improvement plan to prioritize the pedestrian experience and to improve public spaces with areas that provide reprieve and cultivate civic pride through storytelling-centered design. Evaluate the existing Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan and confirm feasibility and community buy-in.

Priority Action/Project 5.8: Assess potential greenway or connections from the downtown district to King's outdoor recreational/natural assets and nearby lodging sites (Airbnb's near downtown).

Downtowns serve as the heartbeat of a community. They are the places where people gather and what residents think of when they tell others where they are from. These shared spaces shape individual and collective identity, generating either civic pride or civic apathy depending on how they are experienced. When communities invest in their downtown areas and strengthen the health of this shared heart, the result is not only measurable economic impact but also a tangible shift in community energy and connection. The more a community works collectively to preserve, reactivate, and revitalize its downtown district, the more residents take pride in where they live and visitors choose to return.

Priority Actions 5.5 and 5.8 support this vision by improving the everyday downtown experience while strengthening connections to King's outdoor recreation economy. Assessing the feasibility of a streetscape improvement plan represents a high-impact opportunity because it directly influences whether people choose to move through downtown quickly or linger and engage with the district. By prioritizing the pedestrian environment first including safe crossings, continuous and ADA-accessible sidewalks, appropriate traffic calming, shade and seating, lighting, wayfinding, and attractive street edges King can convert pass-through traffic into stay activity while improving comfort and accessibility for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. A storytelling-centered design approach can further elevate these improvements by incorporating public art, murals, gateway features, and interpretive elements that reflect local history, businesses, and community values, transforming ordinary public spaces into meaningful places that cultivate civic pride and repeat visitation.

Complementing these efforts, Priority Action 5.8 calls for assessing potential greenway and trail connections linking downtown to nearby outdoor recreation assets and lodging options, including short-term rentals located near the district. Strengthening these connections helps position Downtown King as a natural basecamp for outdoor visitors, allowing recreation users to easily access dining, shopping, and community experiences before and after outdoor activities. Together, these actions reinforce downtown as both a destination and a connector between recreation, lodging, and local businesses.

Feasibility is strong because improvements can be phased and designed around existing right-of-way constraints, combining quick wins with long-term capital investments. Near-term actions such as planters, branded banners, temporary curb extensions, pop-up seating, and story panels can build momentum and test concepts, while longer-term investments including curb and drainage upgrades, permanent street trees, plaza nodes, activated alleyways, public parking enhancements, and upgraded materials can be coordinated with resurfacing schedules, utility work, and grant cycles. This approach aligns closely with the Stokes County

2035 Vision Plan by advancing shared goals related to livable communities, economic vitality, tourism-ready amenities, quality of life, and sense of place.

A Downtown King streetscape plan is therefore not simply a beautification effort, but a practical implementation tool that translates broader community aspirations into a focused and measurable downtown strategy. Community buy-in is achievable through inclusive engagement such as stakeholder interviews, business and property owner work sessions, walk audits, and targeted surveys that help validate priorities and address considerations related to parking, deliveries, and maintenance. With a phased concept plan, realistic cost ranges, identified funding pathways, and a clear stewardship approach, Downtown King can move forward confidently with improvements that are implementable, community-supported, and essential to long-term downtown vitality.

DRAFT

Suggested Timeline of Actions/Projects

The projects outlined below are organized within a suggested 2026–2031 timeline to help guide implementation and sequencing, with the understanding that many initiatives will span multiple years and require consistent, intentional effort from early project development through full implementation. This plan is intended to remain flexible and responsive to changing conditions, capacity, and opportunities. Regular evaluation and check-ins are encouraged so priorities can be adjusted over time, allowing the community to respond to new partnerships, funding sources, and evolving needs while staying aligned with the overall vision for Downtown King.

The sequencing of actions from 2026 through 2030 is intentionally structured to build a strong foundation first, then layer in physical improvements, programming, and market-facing investments as capacity, partnerships, and momentum grow. Early actions focus on organization, data, branding, and policy groundwork by forming committees, creating inventories, refining grant programs, assessing zoning and social district feasibility, and establishing clear narratives around dining, retail, and outdoor identity. This groundwork ensures that later investments are strategic, coordinated, and aligned with community values.

As the timeline progresses, efforts shift toward activating businesses and public spaces through pilots, incentives, mentorship, and coordinated promotions, allowing ideas to be tested and refined before scaling. Mid-phase actions emphasize feasibility studies, partnership building, and early recruitment for lodging and outdoor-oriented businesses, reducing risk and preparing sites for investment. Later years prioritize visible, high-impact projects such as streetscape improvements, wayfinding, outdoor connections, event infrastructure, and signature programming that reinforce downtown as a dining destination, curated shopping district, and outdoor basecamp. Overall, the timeline reflects a deliberate progression from planning to activation to transformation, ensuring each phase builds logically on the last and supports long-term, sustainable implementation.

2026 - 2027

- **1.1:** Create a Promotions Committee and include restaurant owners, breweries, and food entrepreneurs to coordinate events, shared marketing, and advocacy.
- **1.2:** Assess the feasibility of establishing and programming a social district. Draft a social district management plan.
- **1.8:** Feature downtown restaurants in regional tourism, outdoor recreation, and social media campaigns. Highlight locally sourced resources through branding campaigns to generate community buy-in. Focus on human-centered storytelling.
- **2.8:** Deliver at least three annual food-focused programs (chef pop-ups, themed dining nights, restaurant weeks, Chicken Stew Festival, etc.)
- **2.9:** Consider reputable culinary experts and how to connect them to downtown King's reputation and branding through events and promotions.
- **3.6:** Review, update, and promote façade grant program to improve building design and activation. Prioritize historic integrity of the buildings.
- **3.8:** Create and maintain an internal inventory of downtown properties noting property type, original building date, parcel number, property address, business name and current use, property owner name and contact, square footage, total assessed value, value per SF, value per acre, # of floors, occupancy, # of SF occupied, and property condition. The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center can provide a template.
- **5.4:** Consider updating zoning or design guidance to support small-scale downtown appropriate

lodging.

- **6.4:** Identify an outdoor-inspired motif to incorporate into downtown design improvements (murals, sculptures, functional art like benches, electric box covers, etc.) helping to visually connect the district to the region's outdoor adventure assets. Examples might include the Sauratown Mountains, a native animal species, biking elements, etc.

2027 - 2028

- **1.5:** Provide small façade, equipment, or kitchen upgrade grants to support downtown restaurants, menu expansion, and extended hours.
- **1.7:** Create a Downtown King Dining Trail or Passport program to incentivize multi-stop visits.
- **2.4:** Evaluate downtown for potential outdoor dining spaces. Create visuals to generate community buy-in for outdoor dining and consider a sidewalk dining ordinance.
- **3.1:** Form an Economic Advancement Committee including property owners, brokers, and business leaders to focus on business retention, recruitment, and priority economic advancement projects.
- **3.2:** In addition to a property inventory, create a short business recruitment document outlining benefits of locating in Downtown King with resources available to new businesses.
- **3.5:** Create promotional plan and social media calendar to prioritize promotions of economic opportunities and the downtown vision to encourage investments. Include a business of the month feature to support existing businesses.
- **4.5:** Establish a Placemaking Committee to prioritize projects and partnerships. Coordinate volunteer and civic groups for placemaking and maintenance initiatives.
- **4.7:** Assess the feasibility of a streetscape improvement plan to prioritize the pedestrian experience and to improve public spaces with areas that provide reprieve and cultivate civic pride through storytelling-centered design. Evaluate the existing Stokes County 2035 Vision Plan and confirm feasibility and community buy-in.
- **5.5:** Enhance streetscape connections/walkability between lodging sites and dining/shopping areas.
- **6.1:** Create a local Outdoor Alliance Committee including parks, tourism, transportation, outfitters, and outdoor adjacent partners.
- **6.2:** Coordinate funding strategies across local, state, and federal sources.
- **6.7:** Evaluate available parking and increase awareness of current available parking through signage and promotions. Consider parking study and/or areas for public parking.

2028 - 2029

- **1.3:** Implement temporary outdoor dining pilots (parklets, street closures, shared patios) during peak weekends and events.
- **1.6:** Explore market opportunities for a neighborhood bodega or boutique grocery option to support locally sourced ingredients. This potential business could be an expansion of an existing business.
- **2.1:** Establish a food and beverage mentorship program pairing new operators with experienced restaurateurs. Facilitate relationship building.
- **2.7:** Support food trucks and pop-ups as incubators (recruitment opportunities) for future brick-and-mortar dining.
- **3.3:** Promote new businesses through coordinated grand openings and seasonal shop local campaigns.
- **5.1:** Convene property owners, developers, and tourism partners to align lodging opportunities. Work with Stokes County TDA. Prioritize cooperation with park rangers, wildlife commission, NC Outdoor Commission for Youth, etc. – building strategic partnerships with outdoor recreation leaders to help connect visitors to King.
- **5.2:** Identify potential lodging opportunities (vacant buildings, upper floors, vacant lots for infill) and

compile a list of local and regional developers as potential investment leads. Engage property owners to build trust and facilitate local investment.

- **5.7:** Support public-private partnerships for feasibility studies that support priority projects within this plan and redevelopment planning.
- **6.8:** Promote Downtown King as the basecamp for outdoor adventure through maps and digital tools. Create brochure and marketing materials for Downtown King and share them at regional visitor centers, businesses, and parks.

2029 - 2030

- **1.4:** Install cohesive wayfinding and streetscape elements highlighting dining clusters and walkability.
- **2.3:** Enhance lighting, seating, and pedestrian comfort near dining establishments to support evening activity.
- **2.6:** Offer business training workshops on profitability, menu engineering, and seasonal tourism capture. Consider partnership with local educational institutions.
- **3.9:** Launch a vacant storefront activation program with window displays, art installations, or temporary uses.
- **4.3:** Program upgraded public spaces with art markets, performances, and seasonal events. These events do not necessarily need to be large events, just small, programmed spaces for everyday activation.
- **5.6:** Recruit boutique lodging, inns, or adaptive reuse hotel concept to vacant or underused property.
- **5.8:** Assess potential greenway or connections from the downtown district to King's outdoor recreational/natural assets and nearby lodging sites (Airbnb's near downtown).
- **5.10:** Create stay and play packages linking lodging, dining, and outdoor recreation. Consider partnerships with Stokes County TDA for this effort.
- **5.11:** Create outdoor recreation-based itineraries that link outdoor activities to downtown King's food and beverage establishments while supporting retail and services.
- **6.5:** Support downtown businesses in outfitter, guide, and recreation-support services.

2030 - 2031

- **2.2:** Explore feasibility of a weekly/monthly farmers market in Downtown King. Consider moving farmers market to a more central location.
- **2.5:** Add flexible event infrastructure (power access, portable stages, vendor hookups) for food programming.
- **3.4:** Brand downtown as a distinct shopping district with curated retail shopping.
- **3.7:** Offer targeted incentives for priority retail categories (outdoor gear, artisan goods, lifestyle retail).
- **4.1:** Encourage downtown businesses to extend storefront activity outdoors (displays, seating, events).
- **4.2:** Leverage public space improvements to support longer stays and increased spending.
- **4.4:** Track and share pedestrian counts to demonstrate downtown momentum and impact.
- **5.3:** Coordinate with regional outdoor recreation partners to package King lodging with recreation experiences.
- **5.9:** Market downtown lodging as the gateway to Hanging Rock, Pilot Mountain, and regional trails.
- **6.3:** Implement trail connections, bike routes, sidewalks, and gateway enhancements linking downtown to outdoor assets.
- **6.6:** Encourage outdoor-friendly amenities (bike parking, gear storage, water stations, dog friendly).
- **6.9:** Host outdoor-themed events (trail races, ride-ins, adventure festivals) starting or ending downtown. This may look like a race/fun run, a festival, music event, or athletic competition with some event component held in the downtown district.

Appendices

1. NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center's Resource and Funding Guide
2. Downtown King Market Data Report
3. Downtown King Placer AI Report
4. Community Survey Results
5. Project Development Vision Boards
6. Project Development Worksheet
7. RC2 Worksheet about Funding Assistance
8. Downtown King Asset Map

DRAFT

Appendix 1: Resource and Funding Guide

This resource and funding guide was developed by the NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center to help communities, local governments, nonprofits, and partners quickly identify relevant grant programs, technical assistance offerings, and funding opportunities that can support downtown revitalization, economic development, planning, and placemaking efforts. The guide is designed to be practical and easy to use, organizing opportunities by focus area and eligibility so communities can more efficiently match projects with potential resources. It is a living document and is regularly updated by the Center as new funding opportunities become available, program guidelines change, or deadlines shift, ensuring users have access to the most current information possible when planning projects or pursuing implementation funding.

If you are seeking resources for a local project, we encourage you to explore the [MS&RP Comprehensive Grant Funding & Resource Guide](#), (linked and available under the Organization & Resources section of our website).

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Appendix 2: Market Data Report



City of King, NC Demographics

Source: U.S. Census

	<u>City of King</u>	<u>Stokes County</u>
Population:	7,764 (2024) 7,207 (2020) +7.7%	45,857 (2024) 44,568 (2020) +3.0%
Race and Ethnicity:	White: 81.9% Black: 6.0% Two or more: 9.6% Hispanic: 6.3%	92.8% 4.5% 1.6% 4.3%
Median Household Income: (2020-2024)	\$57,817	\$62,969
% with bachelor's degree:	22.8%	18.2%
% living in poverty:	7.0%	11.8%
Annual Retail Sales: (\$1,000) 2022	\$223,877	\$388,293
Retail sales per capita: \$19,567(NC) and \$20,928(U.S.)	\$30,168	\$8,603
% in Labor Force:	54.8%	53.5%

King functions as the county's economic engine

King captures 57.6% of all retail sales in Stokes County while housing only 16.9% of the population. This confirms King's role as the county's primary commercial and service hub. Downtown investments therefore have countywide economic implications, not just local ones, and should be framed as regional infrastructure that supports residents, visitors, and businesses from across Stokes County.

Strategic implication: Downtown King should be positioned as the place for higher-impact retail, dining, services, and experiences that serve a broad trade area. This supports stronger recruitment targets, higher design expectations, and justification for public investment.

Exceptional retail sales per capita signal leakage capture and growth potential

King's retail sales per capita (\$30,168) are:

- 3.5× higher than Stokes County
- 54% higher than North Carolina
- 44% higher than the U.S.

This indicates strong pull from outside the city limits, likely tied to King's central location, accessibility, and retail mix.

Strategic implications:

- Downtown has an opportunity to capture even more spending by expanding food, beverage, specialty retail, and experience-based uses that extend dwell time.
 - Recruitment should prioritize complementary businesses rather than duplicative low-impact services.
-

Population growth supports near-term demand

King's population has grown 7.7% since 2020, outpacing Stokes County's 3.0% growth. This suggests King is absorbing new households faster than surrounding areas.

Strategic implications:

- Downtown planning should anticipate continued local demand, not just visitor demand
 - Mixed-use, housing-adjacent retail, and everyday services downtown become increasingly viable
 - Growth strengthens the case for phased infrastructure, streetscape, and placemaking investments
-

Income and education levels support downtown-oriented businesses

King's median household income (\$57,817) is slightly lower than the county, but:

- Bachelor's degree attainment (22.8%) exceeds the county (18.2%)
- Poverty rate (7.0%) is significantly lower than the county (11.8%)

This points to a more economically stable and educated population base within King.

Strategic implications:

Downtown can support:

- Entrepreneurial and locally owned concepts
 - Professional services and creative businesses
 - Higher-quality dining, retail, and cultural offerings
- This also supports messaging around quality over quantity in tenant recruitment

Workforce participation is stable but signals daytime activation opportunity

Labor force participation in King (54.8%) is slightly higher than in the county, suggesting a stable working population but also potential for daytime activation gaps.

Strategic implications:

Downtown strategies that encourage:

- Remote work hubs
- Coffee shops, lunch spots, and third-space environments
- Events and programming during weekdays
can help maximize spending throughout the day, not just evenings and weekends

Community Representation and Market Responsiveness

King's population includes a wider range of backgrounds and experiences than the county overall, reflecting ongoing demographic change within the community.

Strategic implications:

Downtown branding, programming, and business recruitment should:

- Align with the full range of residents and visitors who use downtown
- Encourage locally owned and small business growth from a variety of operators
- Design public spaces and events that appeal to and are comfortable for a broad audience

Bottom line for Downtown King's Strategic Economic Development Plan

The data strongly supports a downtown strategy that:

- Treats Downtown King as a regional economic driver
- Prioritizes high-impact, experience-based, and destination businesses
- Invests confidently in placemaking and infrastructure
- Focuses on intentional tenant mix, not just occupancy
- Aligns downtown growth with population trends and spending power

Appendix 3: Placer.Ai Report Summary

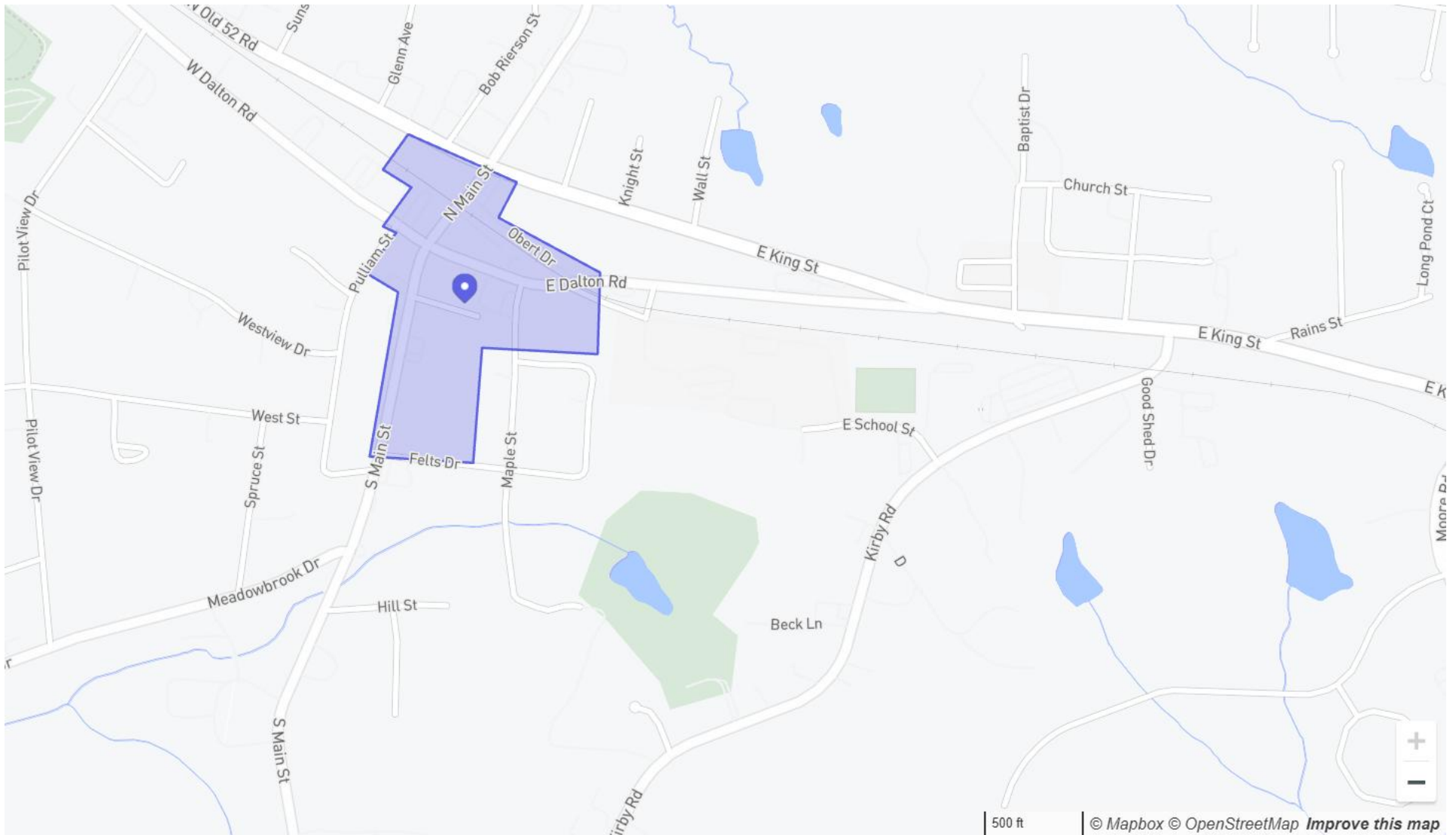
Downtown King's visitation analysis is based on mobility data provided by Placer.ai, a location analytics platform that aggregates anonymized mobile device location data to measure visitation patterns, consumer behavior, and trade area characteristics. The platform gathers information through opt-in smartphone applications whose users consent to location sharing and applies statistical modeling, machine learning, and census calibration to estimate visits, visitor origins, dwell time, and demographic trends. Individual users are never identified; instead, the data reflects aggregated movement patterns that help communities understand how people access and use downtown areas over time, making it a widely used tool for economic development and downtown planning. The full Placer.Ai reports are available upon request at the City of King.

Downtown King, North Carolina experienced strong and measurable growth in visitation between 2024 and 2025, demonstrating increasing economic activity and strengthening consumer engagement within the downtown district. Total visits increased from approximately 336,000 in 2024 to 422,100 in 2025, representing a 25 percent year-over-year increase in foot traffic. Unique visitors grew from 64,700 individuals to roughly 83,000, an increase of nearly 28 percent, indicating that downtown is attracting new users while maintaining its existing customer base. Average dwell time also rose from 53 minutes to 60 minutes, suggesting visitors are spending more time downtown and engaging in multiple activities per trip. Visit frequency remained steady at just over five visits per person annually, reinforcing a strong pattern of repeat visitation alongside overall growth.

Daily and hourly visitation patterns clarify how downtown functions economically. The strongest visitation occurs on Fridays and Saturdays, with peak activity concentrated between 12:00 PM and 7:00 PM, aligning with dining, retail, and after-work social activity rather than commuter traffic. Sundays remain the lowest visitation day, indicating downtown's role as a weekend gathering and service destination rather than a traditional employment center. Increased afternoon and evening activity corresponds with longer dwell times, suggesting visitors are lingering for meals, shopping, and social experiences rather than completing quick errands. Trade area analysis shows that downtown King remains primarily locally driven while gradually expanding its regional reach. Approximately 36 percent of all visits originate within the King ZIP code (27021), with additional visitation coming from nearby communities such as Pinnacle, Rural Hall, Tobaccoville, Pilot Mountain, and parts of Winston-Salem. Most visitors travel short distances, confirming downtown's role as a community-serving commercial hub rather than a tourism destination, though modest increases in outside visitation suggest growing regional awareness.

Visitor behavior data indicates strong connections between downtown activity and everyday consumer trips. Cross-shopping patterns show frequent overlap between downtown visits and nearby anchors such as Walmart, Food Lion, Sheetz, and national quick-service restaurants, meaning many visits occur as part of larger errand chains. This reflects a typical and healthy small-town pattern in which convenience trips support downtown spending, and the rise in visitation alongside stable repeat visits suggests downtown is increasingly converting routine trips into longer stays and expanded economic activity.

Demographically, downtown visitors represent a stable middle-income regional consumer base with a median age of approximately 43 years. The largest segments include Gen X and Baby Boomers, with a growing Millennial presence. Household incomes generally range from \$65,000 to \$86,000, supporting family-oriented dining, services, and experiential retail. Households are primarily married, employed, and homeowner-based, averaging two to three people. Transportation data shows roughly 85–87 percent of visitors arrive by driving alone, reinforcing downtown King's automobile-oriented access patterns and emphasizing the importance of convenient parking and short-distance walkability improvements.



The map above shows the focus area of the plan and the area used to geofence for data from Placer.ai. Placer.ai uses location intelligence and data science to generate accurate foot traffic analytics (96%) that allow provide actionable insights to retailers, real estate professionals, civic sector stakeholders, advertisers, CPG strategists, and more to closely analyze visitation patterns and better understand visitors' behavior and preferences.



2025 Downtown King Visitation

Jan 1 - Dec 31, 2025

Metrics

City of King, NC Downtow...

S Main Street, King, NC

Visits	422.1K	Avg. Dwell Time	60 Min
Visits / sq ft	0.38	Panel Visits	52.8K
Size - sq ft	1.1M	Visits YoY	+25.6%
Visitors	83K	Visits Yo2Y	+32.4%
Visit Frequency	5.09	Visits Yo3Y	+48.2%

Jan 1st, 2025 - Dec 31st, 2025

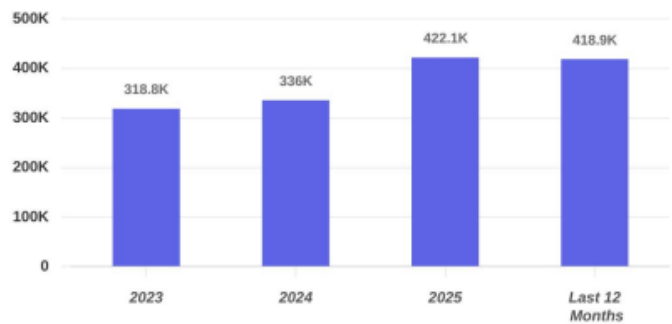
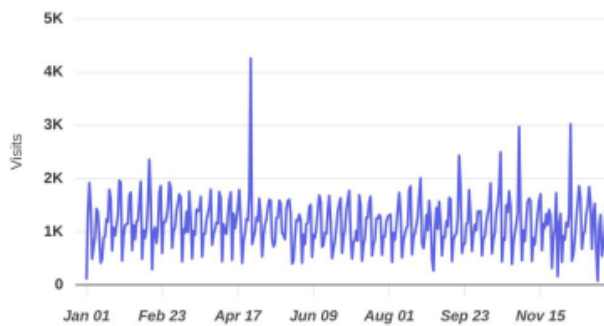
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)



Visits Trend

City of King, NC Downtown Focu...

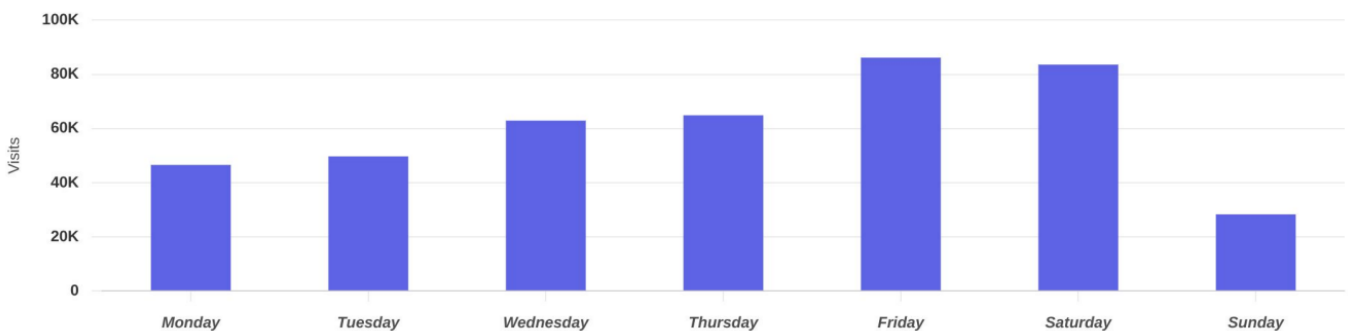
S Main Street, King, NC



Daily Visits

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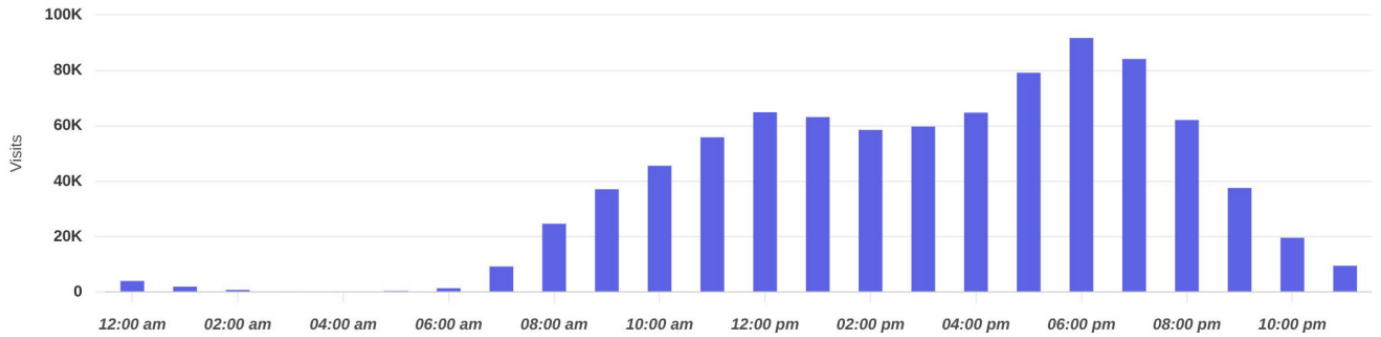
S Main Street, King, NC



Hourly Visits

City of King, NC Downtown Focu...

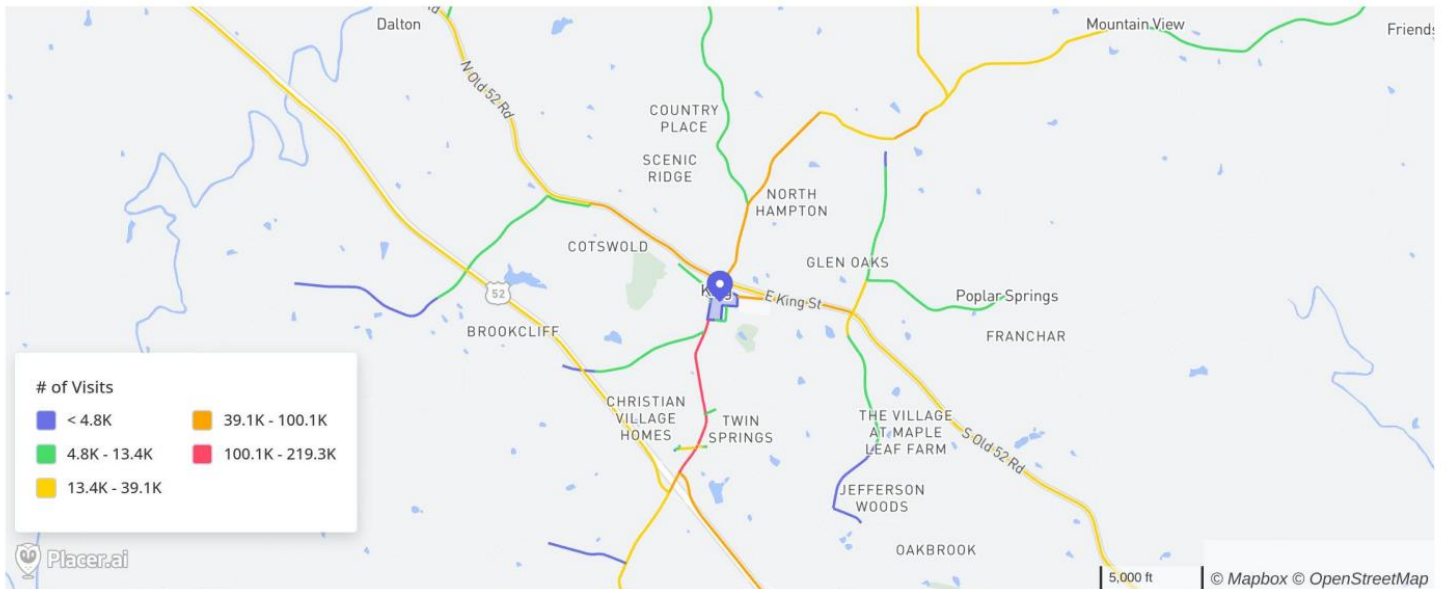
S Main Street, King, NC



Visitor Journey - Routes

City of King, NC Downtow...

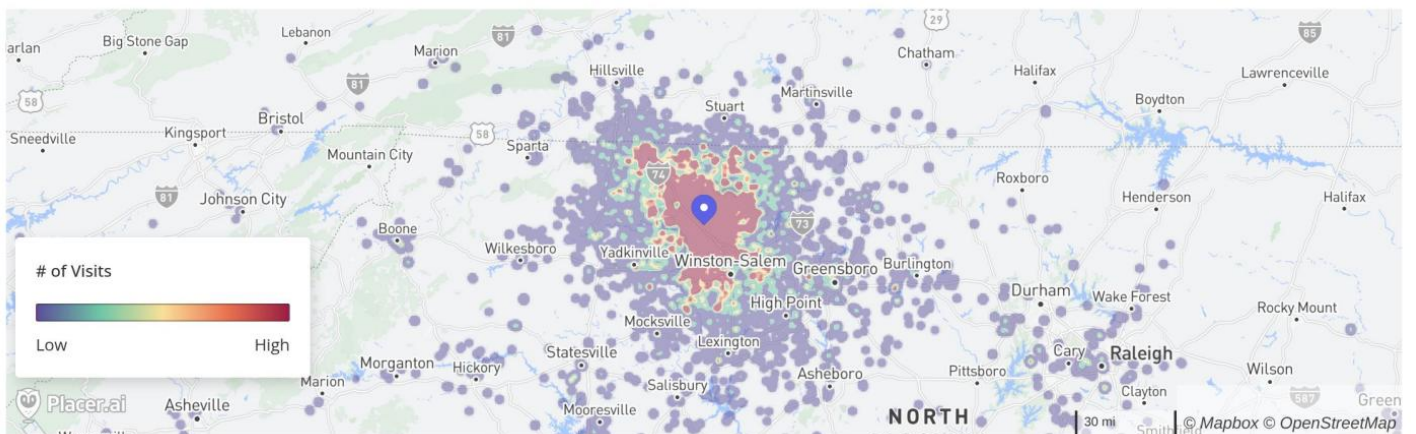
S Main Street, King, NC



Trade Area

City of King, NC Downtow...

S Main Street, King, NC



Vehicle Traffic Volume

City of King, NC Downtown...
S Main Street, King, NC



Jan 1st, 2026 - Dec 31st, 2026
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

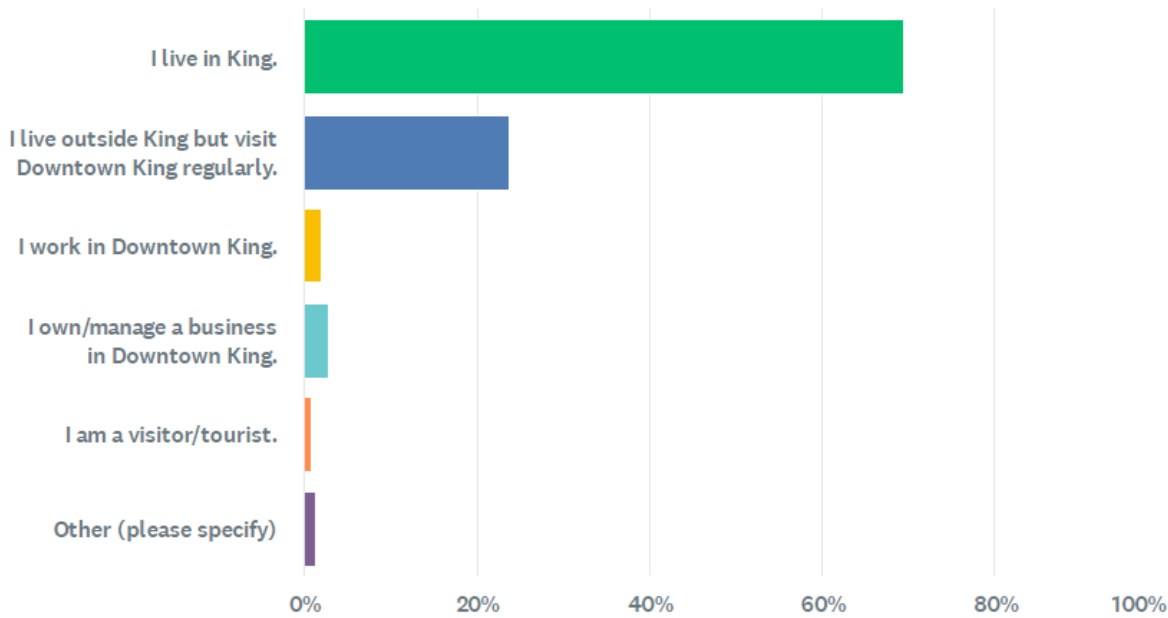
Placer.ai

Appendix 4: Community Survey Results

A total of 510 people completed the Downtown King survey, representing a significant level of community participation. Based on a City of King population of 7,764 residents, approximately 6.6 percent of the city’s population responded to the survey, indicating strong public engagement in the future of downtown. Below are the results:

Q1 What is your relationship to Downtown King?

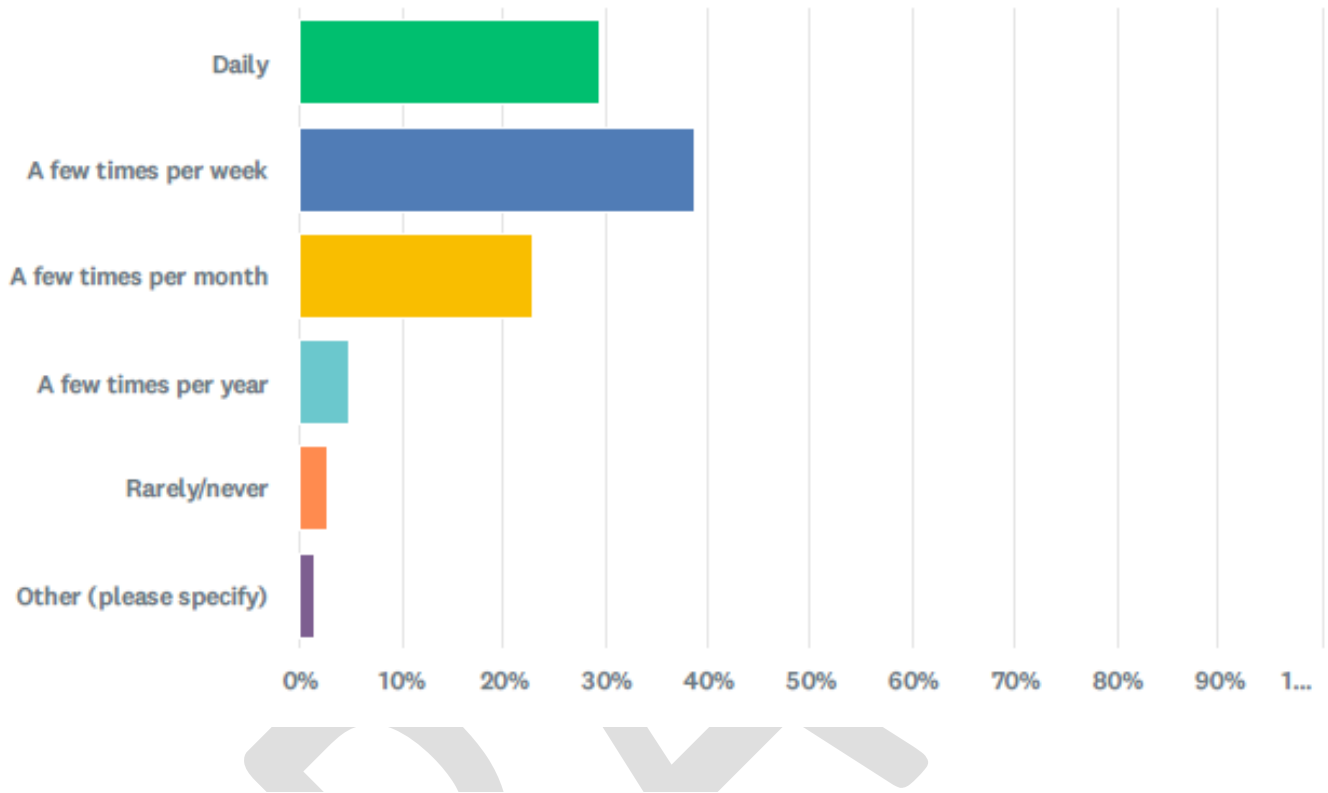
Answered: 510 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
● I live in King.	69.41%	354
● I live outside King but visit Downtown King regularly.	23.73%	121
● I work in Downtown King.	1.96%	10
● I own/manage a business in Downtown King.	2.75%	14
● I am a visitor/tourist.	0.78%	4
● Other (please specify) Show responses	1.37%	7
Total		510

Q2 How often do you visit Downtown King?

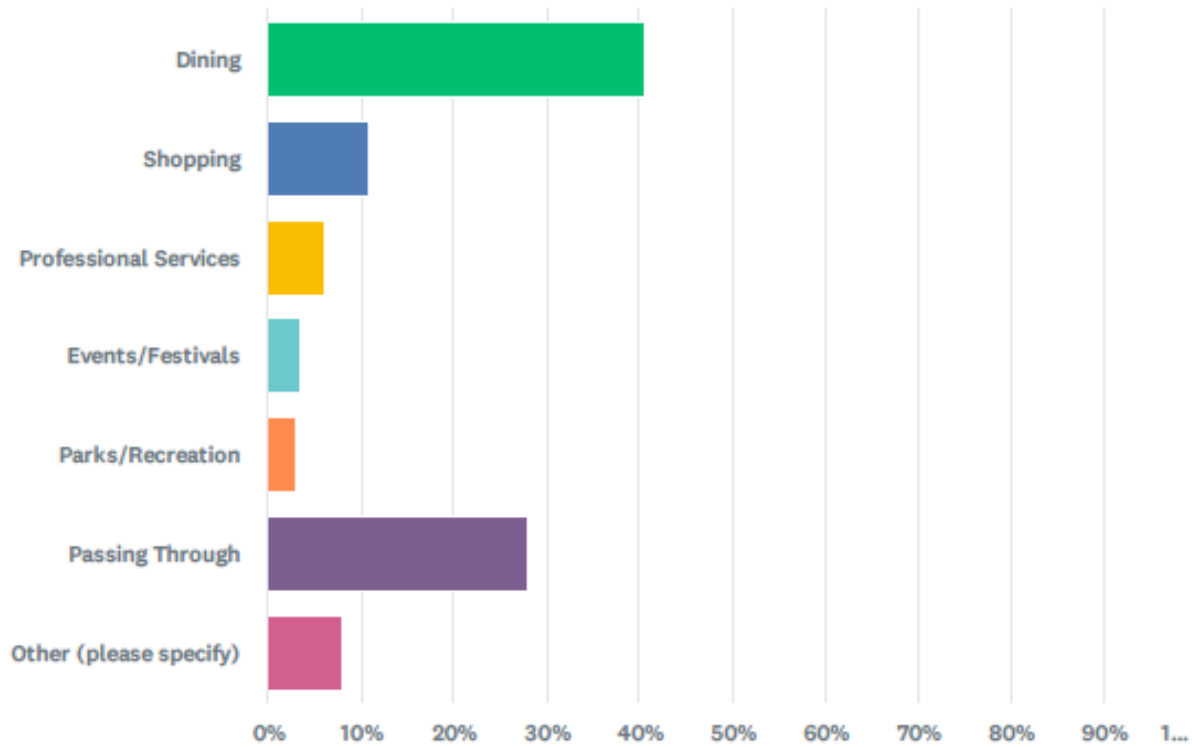
Answered: 510 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
● Daily	29.41%	150
● A few times per week	38.63%	197
● A few times per month	22.94%	117
● A few times per year	4.90%	25
● Rarely/never	2.75%	14
● Other (please specify) Show responses	1.37%	7
Total		510

Q3 When you visit Downtown King, what brings you downtown most often?

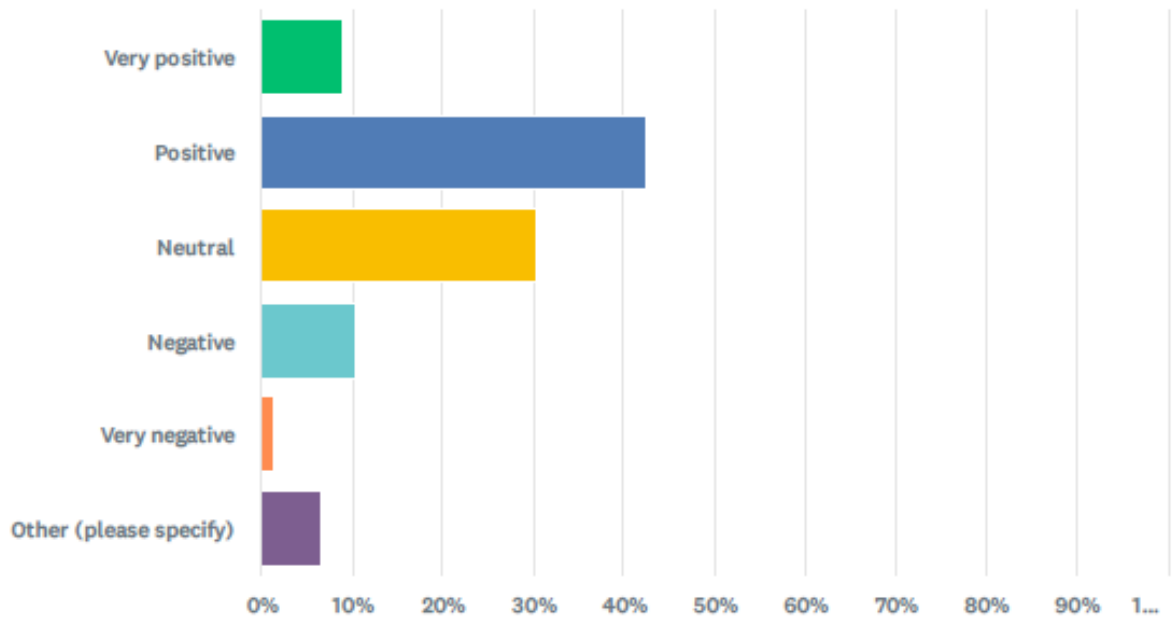
Answered: 509 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
● Dining	40.47%	206
● Shopping	10.81%	55
● Professional Services	6.09%	31
● Events/Festivals	3.54%	18
● Parks/Recreation	3.14%	16
● Passing Through	27.90%	142
● Other (please specify) Show responses	8.06%	41
Total		509

Q4 How would you describe your overall impression of Downtown King?

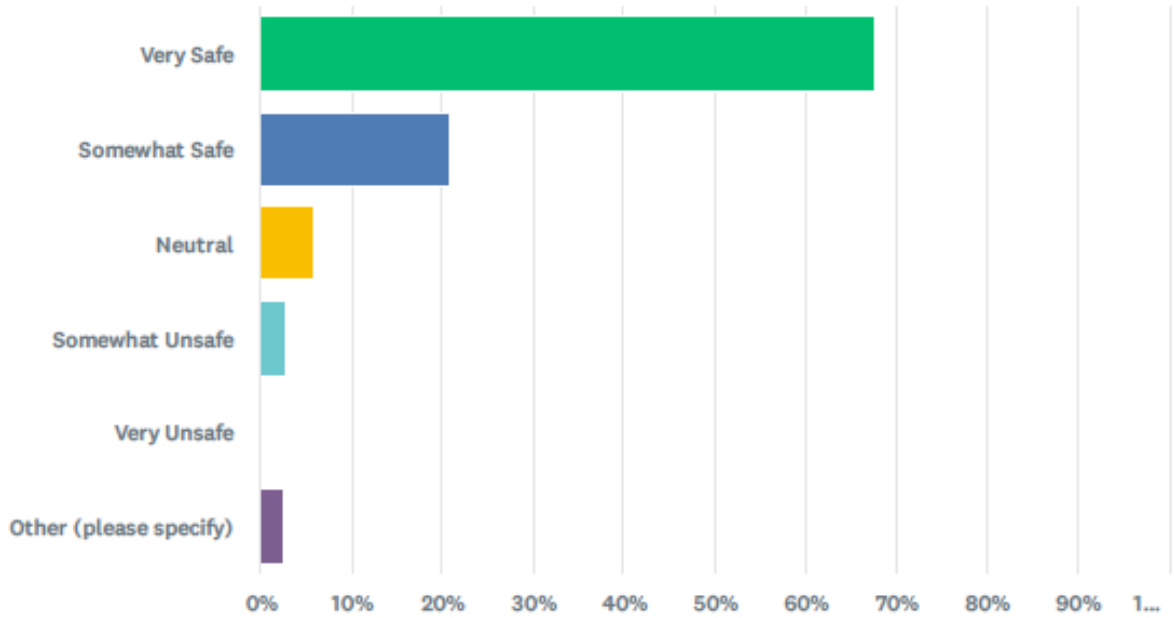
Answered: 507 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
● Very positive	9.07%	46
● Positive	42.41%	215
● Neutral	30.37%	154
● Negative	10.26%	52
● Very negative	1.38%	7
● Other (please specify) Show responses	6.51%	33
Total		507

Q5 How safe do you feel in Downtown King?

Answered: 510 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
● Very Safe	67.65%	345
● Somewhat Safe	20.78%	106
● Neutral	5.88%	30
● Somewhat Unsafe	2.94%	15
● Very Unsafe	0.20%	1
● Other (please specify) Show responses	2.55%	13
Total		510

Q6 How would you rate Downtown King on the following?

Answered: 510 Skipped: 0

	VERY POOR	POOR	NEUTRAL	GOOD	VERY GOOD	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Cleanliness	0.39% 2	2.95% 15	19.65% 100	53.05% 270	23.97% 122	509	3.97
Walkability	3.35% 17	16.93% 86	24.41% 124	40.16% 204	15.16% 77	508	3.47
Parking Availability	26.77% 136	40.16% 204	16.34% 83	13.78% 70	2.95% 15	508	2.26
Lighting	4.54% 23	21.70% 110	36.69% 186	31.95% 162	5.13% 26	507	3.11
Beautification (Landscaping, Planters, Murals, Public Art)	4.72% 24	20.24% 103	33.40% 170	34.38% 175	7.27% 37	509	3.19
Public Amenities (Restrooms, Wayfinding (Signage), Benches, Trashcans/Recycling Cans, Public Spaces)	12.97% 66	41.26% 210	32.61% 166	12.18% 62	0.98% 5	509	2.47
Variety of Businesses	8.04% 41	27.25% 139	33.53% 171	26.86% 137	4.31% 22	510	2.92
Quality of Businesses	1.38% 7	3.93% 20	28.49% 145	51.08% 260	15.13% 77	509	3.75
Historic Character and Charm	3.33% 17	15.10% 77	26.27% 134	41.76% 213	13.53% 69	510	3.47
Available Opportunities for New or Expanding Businesses	8.09% 41	22.49% 114	39.05% 198	24.65% 125	5.72% 29	507	2.97

Q7 What three words describe how Downtown King feels today?

Answered: 397 Skipped: 113

The following summary synthesizes the 397 open-ended responses to Survey Question 7, which asked participants to describe how Downtown King feels today using three words. Rather than listing individual responses, this narrative distills recurring themes, shared perceptions, and common points of agreement expressed across the dataset to provide a clear, high-level understanding of community sentiment reflected in the survey results.

Overall Themes

Responses reveal a downtown that is widely perceived as active and evolving but also strained by growth-related challenges. The most frequently repeated descriptors fall into four broad categories: growth and

momentum, congestion and access challenges, character and sense of place, and gaps in diversity of uses and experiences.

Growth and Momentum

Many respondents describe Downtown King as growing, improving, revitalizing, up-and-coming, or changing for the better. These responses suggest broad recognition that recent investments, new businesses, and increased activity have positively shifted downtown's trajectory. Several respondents explicitly note that downtown feels "better than before" or is "headed in the right direction," indicating community awareness of progress and momentum.

Congestion, Traffic, and Parking

At the same time, traffic congestion, limited parking, and constrained street space emerged as the most dominant negative themes across responses. Words such as crowded, congested, cramped, hectic, traffic-choked, and hard to navigate appear repeatedly throughout the data. Many respondents express frustration with peak-time conditions, pedestrian safety, and the difficulty of moving through downtown comfortably by car or on foot. These concerns point to infrastructure and circulation challenges that may increasingly affect visitor experience, business access, and resident support as downtown activity continues to grow.

Character, Charm, and Identity

A strong sense of small-town character and emotional attachment is also evident in the data. Respondents frequently use words such as quaint, historic, cozy, charming, hometown, and feels like home. These comments highlight downtown's role as a place of identity, nostalgia, and community connection. However, some responses reflect tension between growth and preservation, with concerns that rapid change may erode the small-town feel that many residents value.

Gaps in Use Mix and Experience

Another recurring theme relates to limited variety in downtown offerings, particularly outside of dining and alcohol-focused uses. Several respondents describe downtown as food-centric, bar-heavy, or lacking in retail, shopping, family-oriented, or daytime activities. This suggests opportunities to broaden the business mix, support additional destination retail and services, and better balance uses to appeal to a wider range of ages, lifestyles, and visitation patterns.

Strategic Implications

Taken together, these responses portray Downtown King as a place with strong momentum, community pride, and emerging vibrancy, but also clear pressure points related to capacity, accessibility, and balance. The feedback reinforces the importance of pairing continued investment and activation with thoughtful planning for traffic, parking, pedestrian safety, public space design, and business mix to ensure downtown remains functional, welcoming, and reflective of community values as it continues to evolve.

Q8 What three words describe your vision for Downtown King in the next five years?

Answered: 377 Skipped: 133

The following summary synthesizes the 377 open-ended responses to Survey Question 8, which asked participants to describe their vision for Downtown King over the next five years. Rather than presenting individual comments, this narrative distills the most common themes, priorities, and aspirations expressed across the responses to capture a shared, high-level community vision for downtown's future direction.

Core Vision Themes

Across the responses, a clear vision emerges of a downtown area that is vibrant, walkable, welcoming, and economically active, while still maintaining its small-town charm and historic character. Many respondents express optimism and hope for continued improvement, using words such as thriving, lively, inviting, charming, fun, and destination. These responses reflect a desire for Downtown King to function as a true community hub that supports daily life, social activity, and local pride.

Walkability, Accessibility, and Infrastructure

One of the strongest and most consistent themes centers on walkability and accessibility. Respondents frequently reference improved sidewalks, safer pedestrian crossings, better traffic flow, and easier navigation through downtown. Parking availability and management also remain a top priority in future vision statements, with many respondents explicitly naming parking, traffic, access, and circulation as essential elements that must be addressed to support continued growth and downtown usability.

Business Mix and Activity

Many respondents envision a downtown with greater variety in businesses and experiences, particularly expanded retail, shopping, arts, entertainment, and family-oriented activities. While dining remains important, respondents repeatedly note a desire for more non-food destinations, including boutiques, cultural spaces, events, and places to gather throughout the day. Words such as variety, shopping, experiences, arts, music, and events appear frequently, signaling interest in a more balanced and diversified downtown economy.

Family-Friendly and Community-Oriented Focus

A strong emphasis on family-friendly, inclusive, and community-centered spaces runs throughout the responses. Many respondents express a desire for Downtown King to be safe, welcoming, and appealing to all ages, with activities and amenities that support families, children, and intergenerational use. Terms such as family-friendly, safe, inclusive, welcoming, and community underscore the importance of downtown as a shared civic space rather than solely a nightlife or tourism destination.

Managing Growth While Preserving Character

While growth is widely supported, many respondents stress the importance of intentional, well-managed growth that does not overwhelm infrastructure or erode the town's identity. Several responses express concern about overdevelopment, congestion, and loss of small-town character, emphasizing the need to balance expansion with preservation. Words such as controlled growth, preserved, historic, quaint, and right-sized reflect a desire for thoughtful planning that enhances downtown without fundamentally changing its scale or feel.

Strategic Implications

Overall, the responses to Question 8 outline a shared vision for Downtown King as a walkable, vibrant, and well-balanced downtown that supports local businesses, fosters community life, and accommodates growth through intentional infrastructure and design improvements. This vision highlights the importance of aligning future investments with accessibility, business diversity, family-friendly programming, and preservation of downtown's character to ensure long-term success and community support.

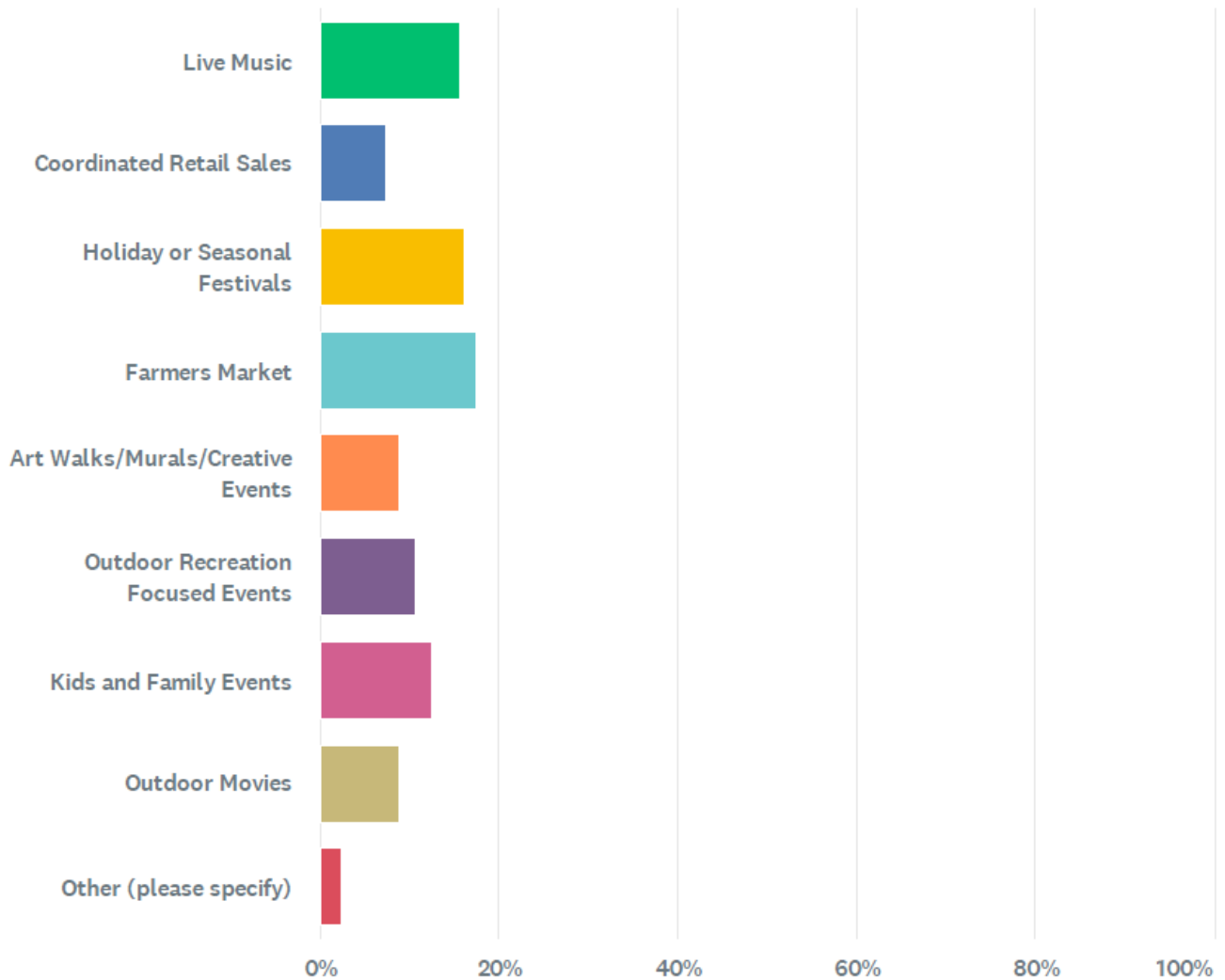
Q9 What types of businesses would you most like to see in Downtown King?

Answered: 506 Skipped: 4

	DON'T NEED MORE	NEUTRAL	NEED MORE	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Restaurants	32.18% 158	27.09% 133	41.34% 203	491
Coffee Shops/Cafes	52.65% 258	25.51% 125	21.84% 107	490
Retail Boutiques	18.26% 90	31.03% 153	51.12% 252	493
Outdoor Recreation Oriented Shops	14.40% 71	38.34% 189	47.67% 235	493
Family Friendly Entertainment	6.97% 35	20.32% 102	72.71% 365	502
Arts/Creative Studios or Galleries	24.10% 120	39.76% 198	36.55% 182	498
Professional Services	33.67% 167	48.39% 240	18.15% 90	496
Grocery/Specialty Foods	31.26% 156	28.66% 143	40.48% 202	499
Wellness/Fitness Businesses	41.01% 203	37.58% 186	21.82% 108	495
Lodging (Boutique Hotel or Short-Term Rentals)	29.14% 146	27.94% 140	43.31% 217	501

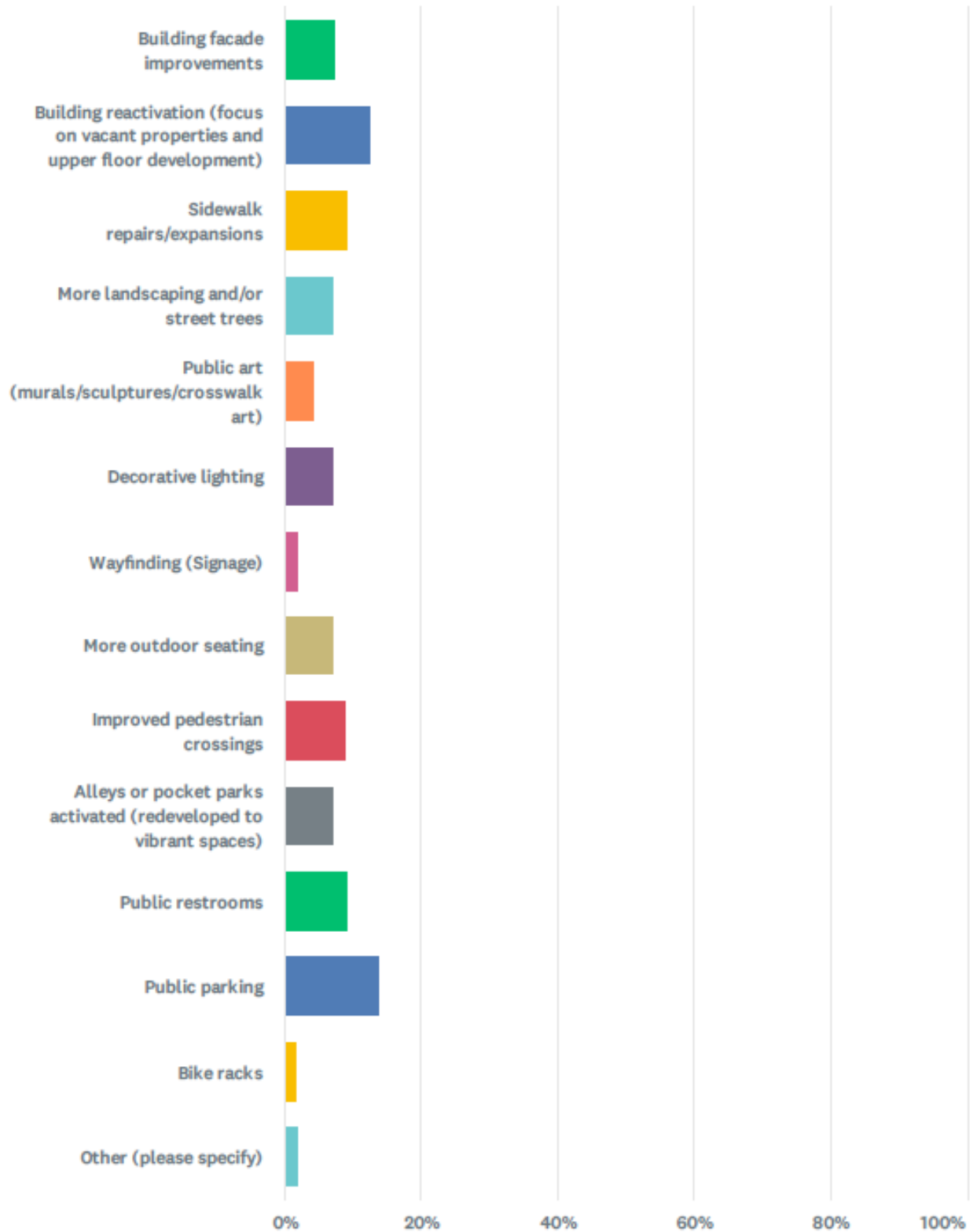
Q10 What types of events or activities would draw you to Downtown King more often? (select all that apply)

Answered: 495 Skipped: 15



Q11 Which improvements would make Downtown King more inviting? (Select up to 5 most important improvements)

Answered: 499 Skipped: 11



Q12 What physical improvements to the Downtown King area should be prioritized first?

Answered: 366 Skipped: 144

The following summary synthesizes the 366 open-ended responses to Survey Question 12, which asked participants to identify the physical improvements that should be prioritized first in the Downtown King area. Rather than listing individual comments, this narrative distills the most frequently cited needs and shared priorities expressed across the responses to provide a clear, high-level understanding of community-identified physical improvement priorities.

Parking as the Dominant Priority

Across nearly every page of responses, parking emerges as the most consistently cited and urgent need. Respondents repeatedly reference the lack of convenient, clearly marked, and sufficient public parking as a major barrier to downtown access and usability. Many comments emphasize the need for additional off-street parking, better signage directing visitors to existing parking areas, and clearer rules around shared or time-limited parking to reduce confusion and frustration.

Traffic Flow and Congestion Management

Closely tied to parking concerns are persistent issues related to traffic congestion and circulation, particularly at key intersections such as Main Street and Dalton Road. Respondents frequently reference unsafe or inefficient traffic patterns, excessive delays at stoplights, left-turn conflicts, and narrow roadways that struggle to accommodate current traffic volumes. Many responses suggest operational solutions such as turn restrictions, signal timing adjustments, dedicated turn lanes, or rerouting through-traffic to improve flow and safety.

Pedestrian Safety and Walkability

Another dominant theme is the need to improve pedestrian safety and walkability. Respondents commonly cite insufficient or unsafe crosswalks, lack of pedestrian signals, narrow or uneven sidewalks, and challenges for people with disabilities. Requests for ADA-compliant crossings, better lighting, safer nighttime conditions, and improved sidewalk continuity indicate strong community support for prioritizing pedestrians alongside vehicular traffic.

Building Conditions, Facades, and Vacant Properties

Many respondents emphasize the importance of building reactivation and façade improvements as a visible and immediate way to improve downtown's appearance and economic potential. Comments frequently reference vacant or underutilized buildings, deteriorating facades, and inconsistent aesthetics as detracting from downtown's appeal. Respondents express interest in restoring historic character, improving storefronts, and ensuring buildings are maintained in a way that supports business recruitment and community pride.

Lighting, Streetscape, and Beautification

In addition to functional infrastructure, respondents identify lighting, landscaping, streetscape elements, and general beautification as important complementary investments. Improved lighting is frequently linked to safety and nighttime comfort, while landscaping, street trees, planters, benches, trash receptacles, and outdoor seating are viewed as ways to make downtown more welcoming and usable for longer stays.

Strategic Implications

Responses to Question 12 point to a clear need for sequenced, infrastructure-first investments that address parking, traffic flow, and pedestrian safety before or alongside higher-level placemaking efforts. The data reinforces that successful downtown revitalization in King will require balancing growth with functional improvements that make downtown easier to navigate, safer to use, and more attractive for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

Q13 What is the most important outcome you want to see in Downtown King over the next five years?

Answered: 348 Skipped: 162

The following summary synthesizes the 348 open-ended responses to Survey Question 13, which asked participants to identify the single most important outcome they want to see in Downtown King over the next five years. Rather than listing individual responses, this narrative distills the most frequently cited outcomes and shared priorities expressed across the dataset to capture a clear, high-level picture of what residents and stakeholders most want downtown's future success to look like

A Thriving, Active, and Sustainable Downtown

The most common desired outcome is a downtown that is thriving, active, and economically sustainable. Respondents repeatedly reference successful local businesses, consistent foot traffic, and a downtown that feels lively throughout the day and week. Many express a desire for Downtown King to be a place where businesses can remain open long-term, attract customers, and contribute to a stable local economy rather than short-lived or underutilized spaces.

Parking, Traffic, and Functional Access as Preconditions for Success

Across the responses, parking availability and traffic flow are framed not just as improvements, but as prerequisites for nearly every other desired outcome. Parking is by far the most frequently cited single issue, often mentioned on its own. Respondents consistently note that without adequate parking, safer intersections, and smoother traffic flow, other goals such as increased visitation, shopping, events, or walkability will be difficult to achieve. This reinforces the community's view that infrastructure challenges are currently limiting downtown's potential.

A Family-Friendly and Community-Centered Destination

Another major outcome theme is the desire for Downtown King to function as a family-friendly, community-oriented destination. Respondents frequently reference places and activities that appeal to families, children, teenagers, and older adults alike. Many express a desire for more reasons to spend extended time downtown beyond dining, including shopping, entertainment, events, gathering spaces, and casual activities that support everyday use by residents.

Balanced Growth That Preserves Small-Town Character

While many respondents support continued growth and revitalization, there is strong and consistent emphasis on controlled, thoughtful growth that preserves King's small-town identity. Numerous responses stress the importance of maintaining historic buildings, avoiding overdevelopment, and preventing downtown from becoming overcrowded or overly urbanized. The desired outcome is not growth for growth's sake, but growth that enhances quality of life, protects local character, and feels appropriate to King's scale and context.

Expanded Retail, Experiences, and Daytime Activity

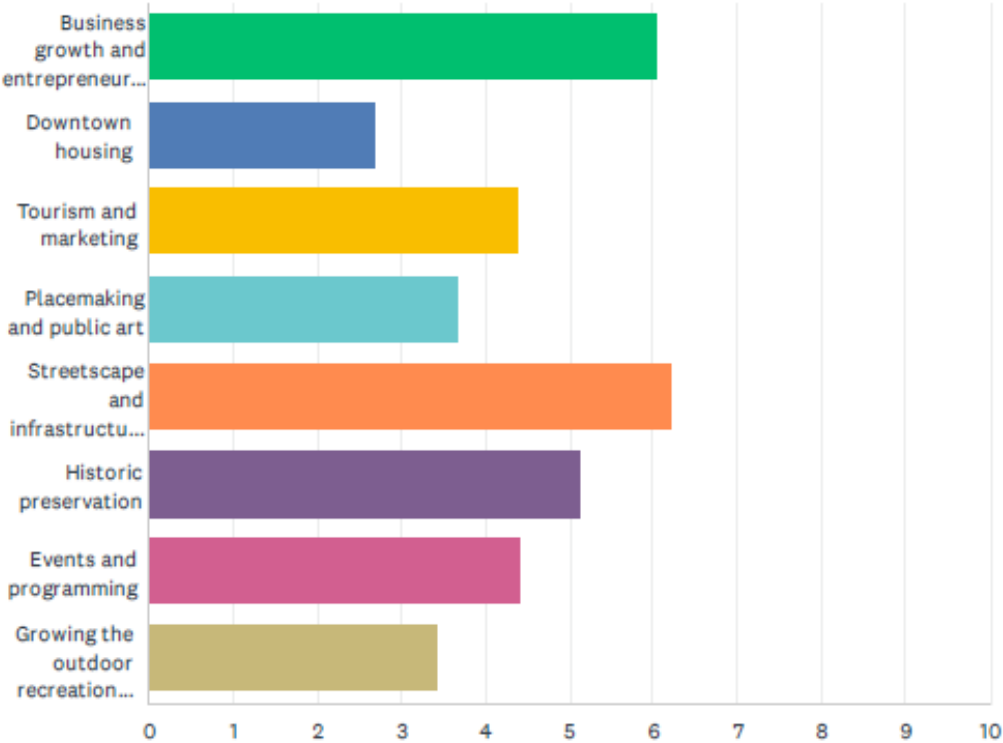
Respondents repeatedly identify the need for greater variety in retail, services, and experiences, particularly daytime and non-alcohol-focused uses. Many express a desire for shopping, arts, entertainment, and family activities that encourage people to linger, browse, and return frequently. Several comments frame success as being able to meet everyday needs locally, reducing the need to travel to Winston-Salem or Mount Airy for shopping and entertainment.

Strategic Implications

Collectively, responses to Question 13 define success for Downtown King as a well-functioning, welcoming, and economically healthy downtown that balances growth with livability. The data underscores that the most important outcomes business success, community use, and destination appeal are tightly linked to resolving infrastructure constraints, broadening the mix of uses, supporting families and residents, and preserving the town's character. These priorities provide clear guidance for aligning strategies, investments, and sequencing decisions throughout the implementation of the Downtown King 5-Year Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Q14 Rank these potential strategic priorities in order of importance.

Answered: 498 Skipped: 12



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL	SCORE
Business growth and entrepreneurship	28.71% 143	22.89% 114	17.47% 87	10.44% 52	5.82% 29	6.83% 34	5.22% 26	2.61% 13	498	6.04
Downtown housing	4.02% 20	7.83% 39	4.22% 21	4.82% 24	9.24% 46	6.02% 30	12.85% 64	51.00% 254	498	2.68
Tourism and marketing	4.22% 21	12.85% 64	16.06% 80	16.27% 81	12.85% 64	18.27% 91	12.65% 63	6.83% 34	498	4.40
Placemaking and public art	1.20% 6	2.81% 14	11.65% 58	17.07% 85	19.68% 98	20.28% 101	17.47% 87	9.84% 49	498	3.69
Streetscape and infrastructure improvements	32.33% 161	21.89% 109	14.46% 72	12.25% 61	10.04% 50	4.22% 21	4.02% 20	0.80% 4	498	6.21
Historic preservation	21.08% 105	15.46% 77	12.25% 61	8.63% 43	11.24% 56	16.47% 82	11.04% 55	3.82% 19	498	5.14
Events and programming	5.82% 29	8.84% 44	16.27% 81	19.08% 95	16.06% 80	12.65% 63	16.27% 81	5.02% 25	498	4.41
Growing the outdoor recreation economy	2.61% 13	7.43% 37	7.63% 38	11.45% 57	15.06% 75	15.26% 76	20.48% 102	20.08% 100	498	3.43

Q15 What concerns do you have about the future of Downtown King?

Answered: 355 Skipped: 155

The following summary synthesizes the 355 open-ended responses to Survey Question 15, which asked participants to identify their concerns about the future of Downtown King. Rather than listing individual comments, this narrative distills the most frequently expressed worries and shared points of concern across the dataset to provide a clear, high-level understanding of community apprehensions related to growth, infrastructure, character, and long-term sustainability

Growth Outpacing Infrastructure

The most pervasive concern is that Downtown King is growing too quickly without the infrastructure needed to support that growth. Respondents consistently cite traffic congestion, limited roadway capacity, inadequate parking, and constrained intersections, particularly at Main Street and Dalton Road, as major threats to downtown's functionality. Many express fear that continued development without corresponding infrastructure improvements will make downtown difficult to access, unsafe for pedestrians, and frustrating for both residents and visitors.

Traffic, Parking, and Accessibility

Traffic and parking are overwhelmingly the most frequently mentioned concerns, often cited together and sometimes as the sole response. Respondents describe congestion, lack of turning lanes, unsafe crossings, blocked travel lanes during deliveries, and insufficient parking during peak hours and events. Many note that these issues already deter them from visiting downtown and worry that unresolved access challenges will lead to declining foot traffic and struggling businesses over time.

Loss of Small-Town Character and Historic Identity

A strong emotional theme throughout the responses is a concern over losing King's small-town charm and historic character. Many respondents fear that unchecked growth, inappropriate building design, or demolition of historic structures will make Downtown King feel generic or overly urbanized. Preserving historic buildings, maintaining a modest scale, and protecting the town's unique identity are repeatedly emphasized as essential to downtown's appeal and community pride.

Business Mix and Overconcentration of Certain Uses

Respondents frequently express concern about an overconcentration of bars, alcohol-focused businesses, and low-impact or appointment-based uses, often at the expense of retail, family-oriented destinations, and everyday shopping options. Many worry that an imbalanced business mix could limit downtown's appeal to families and daytime visitors, reduce dwell time, and weaken long-term economic resilience.

Safety, Affordability, and Quality of Life

Additional concerns include pedestrian safety, potential increases in crime, affordability pressures related to housing and taxes, and the fear that rising costs could displace long-time residents and small businesses. Some respondents also note concerns about aging or deteriorating buildings, lack of maintenance, and insufficient investment in utilities such as water and sewer systems.

Fear of Stagnation or Poorly Managed Change

While many respondents fear rapid growth, others express concern that Downtown King could lose momentum or fail to evolve in meaningful ways. These respondents worry that without clear leadership, strategic planning, and follow-through, downtown could either stagnate or experience poorly coordinated change that benefits only a narrow set of interests.

Strategic Implications

Collectively, responses to Question 15 highlight a strong desire for intentional, infrastructure-led growth that protects Downtown King's character while addressing real and perceived constraints. The data underscores that community support for revitalization is closely tied to managing traffic and parking, preserving historic identity, ensuring a balanced business mix, and maintaining quality of life for residents. Addressing these concerns proactively will be critical to sustaining trust, momentum, and long-term success as Downtown King continues to grow and evolve.

Q16 If you own or operate a business or property in Downtown King, what barriers are faced by your business and what support or resources would help you succeed?

Answered: 136 Skipped: 374

The following summary synthesizes the 136 responses to Survey Question 16, which asked downtown business and property owners to identify the barriers they face and the types of support or resources that would help them succeed. Rather than listing individual comments, this narrative distills the most common challenges and requested supports expressed by respondents to provide a clear, high-level understanding of conditions affecting downtown business viability.

Parking and Access as the Primary Barrier

Parking emerges overwhelmingly as the most frequently cited barrier to business success. Respondents repeatedly reference insufficient public parking, lack of convenient or accessible spaces, and customer frustration related to parking availability. Many note that parking constraints directly limit foot traffic, reduce customer dwell time, and discourage repeat visits, particularly for retail and service-oriented businesses.

Traffic, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety

Closely connected to parking concerns are issues related to traffic volume, sidewalk safety, crosswalks, and overall walkability. Respondents describe a perception that downtown is difficult to navigate on foot and unsafe at certain times of day. Improved pedestrian infrastructure, safer crossings, and better traffic management are viewed as necessary to support business visibility and customer comfort.

High Rents and Affordability Challenges

Another recurring theme is concern over rising rents and operating costs, particularly in older or under-improved buildings. Several respondents express frustration that lease rates are comparable to larger markets without offering the same foot traffic or infrastructure support. This creates barriers for small businesses, local entrepreneurs, and potential investors who might otherwise consider downtown locations.

Infrastructure, Streetscape, and Building Conditions

Respondents frequently cite unfinished or outdated infrastructure as a barrier to success, including lighting, streetscape conditions, utilities, and building maintenance. Many express support for continued city investment in streetscape improvements, façade enhancements, lighting, and completion of surrounding infrastructure as essential tools for improving downtown's appearance and functionality.

Support for Existing Businesses and Local Ownership

Some respondents emphasize the importance of supporting long-standing local businesses and ensuring that revitalization efforts do not disproportionately benefit new development at the expense of existing operators. Requests include tax relief or incentives for historic property owners, flexibility in allowable building uses, and programs that recognize and sustain locally owned businesses.

Marketing, Events, and Visibility

Several respondents identify a need for stronger marketing, coordinated events, and promotional activities that drive foot traffic and increase awareness of downtown businesses. Suggestions include regular events, better signage, storefront promotions, and collaborative marketing efforts that highlight the downtown district rather than individual businesses in isolation.

Strategic Implications

Responses to Question 16 underscore that downtown business success in King is closely tied to resolving practical, day-to-day barriers. The data points to the importance of pairing physical infrastructure investments with business support tools such as parking solutions, affordability strategies, marketing coordination, and policies that support local ownership. Addressing these needs will be critical to sustain existing businesses, attract new investment, and ensure long-term economic vitality in Downtown King.

Q17 What's one big idea you'd love to see happen in Downtown King?

Answered: 275 Skipped: 235

The following summary synthesizes the 275 open-ended responses to Survey Question 17, which asked participants to identify one big idea they would love to see happen in Downtown King. Rather than listing individual suggestions, this narrative distills recurring concepts, shared aspirations, and frequently mentioned ideas to provide a clear, high-level understanding of the community's most desired catalytic projects and experiences for downtown's future.

A Walkable, People-Focused Downtown Core

One of the most consistent big ideas is the transformation of downtown into a more walkable, pedestrian-prioritized environment. Many respondents envision temporary or permanent street closures, particularly along Dalton Road, to allow for outdoor dining, strolling, events, and social activity. Ideas frequently include rerouting traffic, limiting turning movements, and creating pedestrian-only or pedestrian-first zones that encourage people to park once and spend extended time downtown.

Events, Festivals, and Regular Programming

Respondents strongly emphasize the desire for recurring events that bring people downtown on a regular basis. Common ideas include weekly summer concerts, outdoor movies, seasonal festivals, farmers markets, holiday events, block parties, and themed street fairs. These responses reflect a belief that consistent programming, rather than one-off events, is key to building momentum, supporting local businesses, and creating a vibrant downtown atmosphere.

Family-Friendly and Youth-Oriented Attractions

A major theme across responses is the need for more activities for families, children, and teenagers. Suggested ideas include splash pads, playgrounds, arcades, bowling alleys, mini golf, indoor play spaces, teen hangout spaces, and family entertainment facilities. Many respondents note that providing things for younger residents to do downtown would increase visitation, lengthen stays, and strengthen downtown's role as a community gathering place.

Arts, Music, and Cultural Spaces

Many respondents envision Downtown King as a center for arts and culture. Frequently mentioned ideas include public art, murals, galleries, performance venues, music halls, amphitheaters, community theaters, and live music spaces that are not centered on alcohol service. These ideas highlight strong community interest in creative placemaking and cultural programming as drivers of identity and economic activity.

Expanded Retail and Everyday Destinations

Another dominant theme is the desire for more retail businesses. Respondents commonly mention boutiques, bookstores, hardware stores, specialty shops, markets, and locally owned retail that meet daily needs. Several

responses emphasize keeping spending local and reducing the need to travel to nearby cities for shopping and entertainment.

Public Spaces, Parks, and Outdoor Amenities

Respondents frequently suggest the creation or enhancement of public gathering spaces, including downtown parks, green spaces, outdoor seating areas, water features, splash pads, and connections to existing parks and recreation assets. These ideas reflect a desire for downtown to function as a place to linger, relax, and socialize beyond transactional activities.

Preserving Small-Town Character While Creating a Destination

While many ideas are ambitious, there is a strong and recurring emphasis on preserving King's small-town charm and historic identity. Respondents frequently note that big ideas should be scaled appropriately, protect historic buildings, and reinforce the town's unique character rather than replicate nearby downtowns. Several responses explicitly stress the importance of nostalgia, authenticity, and a hometown feel as defining elements of any future transformation.

Infrastructure as the Foundation for Big Ideas

Across many responses, infrastructure improvements are framed as necessary enablers of larger ideas. Parking solutions, traffic signal improvements, pedestrian safety enhancements, buried power lines, improved lighting, and upgraded streetscapes are repeatedly cited as prerequisites for successful events, walkability, and business growth.

Strategic Implications

Responses to Question 17 demonstrate a strong appetite for bold but community-centered ideas that activate public space, support families, strengthen local identity, and create reasons to visit downtown regularly. The data suggests that the most supported big ideas combine pedestrian-friendly design, consistent programming, cultural and family-oriented attractions, and infrastructure improvements. These themes provide clear direction for identifying catalytic projects that can anchor implementation efforts while remaining aligned with community values and downtown's small-town character.

Q18 Please share your additional thoughts here.

Answered: 112 Skipped: 398

The following summary synthesizes the 112 open-ended responses to Survey Question 18, which invited participants to share any additional thoughts related to Downtown King and its future. Rather than presenting individual comments, this narrative distills recurring sentiments, overarching concerns, and reinforcing themes that emerged across the responses to provide broader context for community perspectives not captured in earlier survey questions.

Strong Desire to Preserve Small-Town Character

A dominant theme across responses is concern about Downtown King losing its small-town identity. Many respondents express apprehension about becoming overly urbanized or resembling larger nearby cities. There is strong emphasis on maintaining a community-oriented, historic, and family-friendly downtown that feels authentic and rooted in local identity rather than driven by trends or external comparisons.

Concerns About Overconcentration of Alcohol-Oriented Uses

Numerous respondents reiterate concern about what they perceive as an overabundance of bars or alcohol-focused businesses. These comments frequently emphasize the desire for a broader mix of family-friendly, daytime, and non-alcohol-centered destinations. Respondents often connect this issue to perceptions of safety, inclusivity, and downtown's appeal to residents of all ages.

Infrastructure and Growth Management

Many responses highlight frustration with growth occurring faster than infrastructure improvements. Traffic congestion, parking shortages, roadway capacity, water and sewer systems, and utility infrastructure are repeatedly cited as needing attention before additional development occurs. Several respondents stress that infrastructure should be addressed as a prerequisite to continued residential or commercial growth.

Traffic, Parking, and Pedestrian Safety

Consistent with other survey questions, traffic flow, intersection safety, and parking remain top concerns. Respondents frequently reference left-turn movements at Main Street and Dalton Road, red light running, pedestrian safety, and overall walkability. Sidewalk connectivity, safer crossings, and improved circulation are viewed as essential to both quality of life and downtown success.

Support for Beautification, Arts, and Visual Appeal

Many respondents express support for continued beautification and placemaking efforts, including murals, decorative lighting, façade improvements, streetscape elements, and landscaping. Positive feedback is often given for recent improvements, with encouragement to expand these efforts in ways that respect downtown's historic character.

Mixed Views on Events and Street Closures

While some respondents strongly support more events, live music, and festivals, others express concern about frequent street closures and disruptions to daily travel. These responses highlight the importance of balancing activation and programming with accessibility and the needs of residents who rely on downtown streets for regular travel.

Desire for Broader Business Variety and Local Ownership

Several respondents emphasize the importance of attracting businesses that meet everyday needs, support local ownership, and encourage residents to spend money locally rather than traveling to nearby cities.

Suggestions include retail, services, markets, and spaces that allow local makers and entrepreneurs to participate in downtown activity.

Strategic Implications

Responses to Question 18 reinforce that community support for downtown revitalization is closely tied to trust, transparency, and balance. The data underscores the need for intentional growth that prioritizes infrastructure, preserves character, diversifies uses, and maintains affordability and accessibility. These additional perspectives provide important context for interpreting earlier survey results and highlight areas where careful communication, sequencing, and community engagement will be critical as Downtown King continues to evolve.

Q19 If you have any Downtown King memories or historic stories you'd like to share, please use this space to share with us. We may want to share your stories in a storytelling campaign via social media or in print materials. Please only share information in this section that you don't mind being shared publicly.

Answered: 49 Skipped: 461

The following summary synthesizes the 49 open-ended responses to Survey Question 19, which invited participants to share personal memories, historic stories, or reflections related to Downtown King that they would be comfortable having shared publicly. Rather than presenting individual stories verbatim, this narrative distills recurring memories, shared emotional themes, and commonly referenced places and experiences to highlight how residents remember and emotionally connect to downtown. Question 19 provides a deeply personal lens into how Downtown King has functioned historically as a place of memory, connection, and identity. While responses vary in tone from nostalgic to concerned, several consistent themes emerge that reinforce the cultural and emotional significance of downtown.

Strong Nostalgia for a Small-Town Downtown Experience

Many respondents reflect fondly on a time when Downtown King felt quieter, simpler, and more personal. Memories often reference a walkable, close-knit environment where people recognized one another and downtown served as a natural gathering place. These reflections frequently emphasize friendliness, familiarity, and a slower pace of life as defining characteristics of the downtown experience.

Iconic Businesses and Places as Memory Anchors

A large share of memories center on long-standing businesses and institutions that shaped everyday life in King. King Drug, Gentry's Store, Grogan's Hardware, Gordon's Hardware, Pickett's Dime Store, Miss Joyce's Dance Studio, the old bank building, and the original Dari-O are repeatedly referenced. These places are remembered not only for the goods or services they provided, but for the rituals and relationships they

supported, such as sitting at the soda fountain, walking downtown with family members, or spending time after school.

Intergenerational Experiences and Family Connections

Many responses highlight intergenerational memories involving parents, grandparents, and children. Walking downtown with grandparents, visiting the pharmacy or library, attending dance lessons, and participating in parades and festivals are common recollections. These stories underscore downtown's historical role as a shared space across generations rather than a destination limited to a specific age group.

Emotional Attachment to Historic Continuity

Several respondents express strong feelings about the importance of preserving historic buildings, businesses, and the overall character of downtown. There is concern that continued change or redevelopment could erase meaningful connections to the past. These comments often emphasize that historic continuity is not only about architecture, but about maintaining the emotional and cultural fabric that makes downtown recognizable and meaningful to long-time residents.

Mixed Reflections on Change and Revitalization

While some respondents express frustration or sadness about changes over time, others note optimism and appreciation for recent revitalization efforts. Several responses acknowledge that downtown feels more active today than in past decades and express hope that future changes can create a family-friendly destination while honoring historic roots. This balance reflects a community that values progress but remains deeply protective of its identity.

Strategic Implications

Responses to Question 19 highlight that Downtown King's identity is rooted as much in memory and emotion as it is in physical space. The data reinforces the importance of incorporating storytelling, historic preservation, and community memory into revitalization efforts. These narratives suggest strong potential for heritage-based placemaking, interpretive signage, oral history projects, public art, and marketing efforts that celebrate local stories while reinforcing continuity between past, present, and future downtown experiences.

Appendix 5: Project Development Vision Boards

The vision for Downtown King serves as the foundation for the project development vision boards included in the appendices, grounding them in the community's shared vision. These vision boards are not intended as literal recommendations or prescriptive designs, but as inspirational tools that help King's leaders, partners, and stakeholders visualize what transformative, well-aligned investment could look like over time. By translating the vision into visual examples of placemaking, business development, streetscape enhancements, and gathering spaces, the boards encourage big-picture thinking and pursuit of catalytic actions and projects that can meaningfully strengthen Downtown King's economy and sense of place.

➤ Improving Facades and Public Spaces to Prioritize the Pedestrian Experience & Curb Appeal for Businesses.



➤ *2025 Photo*



➤ *Rendering*

➤ **Considering Improvements to Rear Facades, Parking Areas, Lighting, and Public Art.**



➤ **2025 Photo**



➤ **Rendering**

➤ **Prioritizing the Pedestrian Experience with Improved Sidewalks, Facades, Lighting, and Attractive Decorative Elements.**



➤ **2025 Photo**



➤ **Rendering**

➤ **Activating Upper Floors with Housing or Lodging Opportunities. Improved Facades.**



➤ **2025 Photo**



➤ **Rendering**

Appendix 6: Project Development Worksheet

[The Project Development Worksheet can be downloaded on the NC MS&RP website here.](#)

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Appendix 7: Downtown King Asset Map

Insert Asset Map Here

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