



Downtown

is



you

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Letter from Mayor Harrell

Downtown is the heart of Seattle and is powered by people – workers, neighbors, families, and visitors alike. Our Downtown Activation Plan is designed to bring Downtown into a new age. Downtown must be safe, welcoming, and a neighborhood for all.

This is an exciting time, where we all get to dream, partner, and create the future of our city's core together. Earlier this year, in my State of City address, I called for us to embrace bold, creative thinking to design the Downtown of tomorrow. This is not about restoring the Downtown of the past, but rather reimagining what is possible as our city evolves.

Our goal is a robust Downtown neighborhood with more housing and amenities – ensuring Downtown is more than just a great place to go for work, but also a place where residents can afford to live, learn, shop, play, and so much more. Like downtowns across the United States, ours faces complex challenges including the remote work revolution, an ever-evolving retail landscape, affordable housing pressures, crises of homelessness and addiction, safety, and environmental priorities. The problems are real, but they are not insurmountable, and together, we can work to make positive change for our city.

Collaborating across levels of government and with private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners, we are building a new Downtown that embodies our One Seattle values and vision. Our possibilities are endless, and together we will make them happen.

Bruce D. Harrell

Downtown is a rich collection of neighborhoods



Downtown Activation Plan Zone
Source: Seattle's Office of Planning & Community Development

- **Belltown** is home to nightlife, local restaurants, and entertainment venues boasting bookings over decades ranging from Nirvana to Lizzo. Located next to the Waterfront, Belltown includes the Olympic Sculpture Park and is home to a large selection of human services that support people living in this neighborhood.
- As the anchor of Seattle's Asian community for more than 100 years, the **Chinatown-International District (CID)** thrives as both a residential and business space. A resilient community, rich in history and culture, committed to self-determination despite the continuing impacts of development, public policies, and other structural inequities.
- The **Commercial Core** is the central neighborhood of the Downtown urban center, where much of the city's economic and civic activities take place. It includes the historic Pike Place Market, the oldest continuously operating farmers market in the country, the central waterfront, and attractions like the Seattle Art Museum, Benaroya Hall, the Seattle Central Library, and Westlake Center.
- **Denny Triangle** stretches from the edge of the Downtown core to the grounds of Seattle Center, next to the Pacific Science Center and Space Needle. This area is home to many new high-rise residential buildings, hotels, and corporate offices that cater to people living, working, and visiting the rapidly growing area.
- **Pioneer Square**, known as Seattle's "first neighborhood" is a draw for many with its historic architecture, King Street Station and events like the First Thursday Art Walk. Filled with art studios, galleries, bars, cafes, restaurants, and Occidental Park.
- The **Stadium District** supports major sports, entertainment, retail gatherings, and events while maintaining the surrounding bustling industrial and maritime functions that are critical to our local and regional economy.

Why Downtown Seattle Matters

And this is just the beginning

Seattle is worth fighting for - a healthy, thriving Downtown is critical to the identity and future of our city and region. People across the city and the region want Downtown to succeed, have a lot of pride in Downtown, and understand it is crucial for our economic recovery.

Downtown has not always been a welcoming place for all people. **Today, we aim to reimagine what our shared future will look like and how Downtown is You.**

We're not waiting to improve Downtown - in addition to announced actions, we will continue to work directly with Seattle communities to engage neighbors, refine our efforts, and advance new ideas and goals based on real input.

Use www.downtownisyou.com to send us your feedback and sign up for our newsletter so you can stay updated on our progress.

The Downtown Activation Plan will:

Bring people back to Downtown Seattle now...

...while designing a future of Downtown Seattle
that works for you - **working people, families with
children, and small business owners, and everyone
who calls our city home.**

We have the unique opportunity to reimagine Downtown Seattle and who Downtown is for.

Embracing this opportunity, Seattle is working toward a different future for the heart of our city...

A place that fosters a sense of **belonging, safety, and support**

Environmentally friendly, green, and beautiful

Accessible to **families with young children**

Affordable for those on a budget

A place where **small businesses can be successful** and thrive

Vibrant, active, and **full of life**

Values and design principles that guided the development of Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan

People First

The plan uses **language that is relevant to real people** and does not center the language of government or business. How we speak about the current state of Downtown and the future vision should be **aligned with what real Seattleites want** and center their needs.

Ambitious Vision that Takes a Stand

Our vision for Downtown Seattle forms an opinion of who/what Downtown is for and takes a **visionary approach** consistent with the changing trends in Downtowns nationally.

Race, Economic, and Social Justice

A plan that lives up to Seattle's **race and social justice values** by centering underrepresented voices and Black, Indigenous, and other Seattleites of color in the design of the future of Downtown.

Resilience and Climate Justice

The plan will focus on actions that improve Downtown air quality, address the impact climate change is having on Downtown, and plan for a **more resilient, fossil fuel free city**.

Humanity and Safety

While acknowledging the challenges facing too many Downtown, we want to **center people's humanity and ability to thrive**. The plan will reflect the need for Downtown to be a safe place for all people.

Balanced Timeline

Balance long-term transformation with quick win now, prioritizing those now to three year impacts intended to stabilize Downtown and build momentum for sustainable change.

Accountability

The plan needs to include **measurable outcomes, clear timelines, and accountability** to demonstrate an authentic commitment to achieving these goals.

Collaboration

Understanding that the future of Downtown requires **all sectors to be committed** and brought into the process, engaging and involving government, nonprofits, the private sector, and community is critical.

We listened to Seattleites to help build an equitable and inspiring vision for Downtown, then built out a plan to bring that future to life

We set out to reimagine a new future for Downtown ...



Goal of recovering foot traffic Downtown



Opportunity to create a Downtown that is:

- Family Friendly
- Affordable on any budget
- A hub for small businesses

... listening to Seattleites to help formulate a plan...

761

Seattleites polled on factors impacting their perceptions of Downtown

142

Downtown stakeholders and residents surveyed on what they want to see Downtown

116

Residents engaged in neighborhood listening sessions

60+

Leaders of City departments and external organizations interviewed

.... and built out a roadmap to make this vision a reality



Detailed roadmap to Downtown revitalization

Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan is organized around seven bold goals to implement now while also laying the foundation for a new future for Downtown Seattle.

This plan recognizes that success depends on **first addressing public safety**.



Make Downtown **safe** and welcoming



Transform Downtown into a lively **neighborhood** where more people can afford to live



Create a unique Downtown **retail** experience



Make Downtown a place where people want to **work** and that reflects the future of our economy



Celebrate Downtown Seattle's **arts, culture, sports, and entertainment**



Make Downtown **a top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round



Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown

Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan includes a continuum of action to balance quick, near-term progress with long-term systemic changes



Near-term Goals and Strategies

- The City is already taking **quick action Downtown** to address urgent challenges, including the Executive Order on fentanyl, the reopening of City Park Hall, and expansion of the services provided by the Metropolitan Improvement District
- The City has developed **a tactical plan for the next three years** to make progress on the seven bold goals. This includes already funded initiatives, as well as some aspirational planning

Visionary Ideas for the Future

- This plan also includes visionary ideas that signal a **transformational future** for Downtown Seattle but will take more time in order to strategize, secure investment, and build

A photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, featuring several tall skyscrapers. The image is partially covered by a large blue triangular overlay on the right side. In the foreground, a wooden pier or boardwalk is visible with a metal railing. Two people are standing near the railing: one wearing a bright yellow-green shirt and a bicycle, and another in a dark shirt. The sky is clear and blue.

Downtown Action Plan Initiative Executive Summary

Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives	Safety	Residential	Retail	Workers	Arts, Culture, Sports, & Entertainment	Tourism	Green
Goal 1: Make Downtown safe and welcoming							
1. Seattle Police Department will continue to arrest individuals who are distributing and selling illegal drugs	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2. Seattle Police Department will continue special operations to reduce gun violence throughout the city	●	●	●	●	●	●	
3. Increase service provider outreach in the Third Avenue, as well as creating a One Seattle station physical location	●	●	●	●	●	●	
4. Launch a contingency management drug abatement program	●	●	●	●	●	●	
5. Establish an opioid overdose recovery center	●	●	●	●	●	●	
6. Establish one Crisis Care Center for adults—and potentially one for youth—as part of a regional network of five total centers	●	●	●	●	●	●	
7. Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, including Pike Pine Streetscape improvements.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
8. Continue to support the 10-year renewal and expansion of the Downtown Seattle Association's Metropolitan Improvement District for ongoing service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
9. Deliver a one-time grant to Downtown Seattle Association to boost cleaning, safety, and hospitality services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
10. Improve street and sidewalk lighting across Downtown	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
11. Offer graffiti removal services on private property with owner permission.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
12. Work with WSDOT to remove graffiti from Downtown exit signs and along I-5 and I-90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives	Safety	Residential	Retail	Workers	Arts, Culture, Sports, & Entertainment	Tourism	Green
Goal 2: Transform Downtown into a lively neighborhood where more people can afford to live							
1. Upzone Third Avenue from Union to Virginia Street to allow for more affordable residential housing		○	○				
2. Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects		○					
3. Pass legislation and make regulatory changes to make it easier to convert underutilized office space to housing		○		○			
4. Bring satellite farmers markets into Downtown neighborhoods		○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Attract additional and affordable grocery stores Downtown		○	○	○		○	
6. Activate neighborhood alleyways to create more pedestrian-friendly experiences	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. Support the strategic vision defined by King County Executive Dow Constantine to redesign the County's Downtown campus		○	○	○	○	○	○
8. Complete the Downtown Subarea Plan as part of the major Comprehensive Plan update		○	○	○	○		○
Goal 3: Create a unique Downtown retail experience							
1. Launch The Liberty Project supporting underserved, particularly Black-owned businesses		○	○	○	○	○	
2. Grow Seattle Restored to fill vacant storefronts with artists and small businesses	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. Create a new Small Business Navigation Team to help small businesses successfully navigate City processes and connect them to resources.			○	○	○		

Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives	Safety	Residential	Retail	Workers	Arts, Culture, Sports, & Entertainment	Tourism	Green
Goal 4: Make Downtown a place where people want to work and reflects the future of our economy							
1. Convene public and private sector leaders to share strategies and drive effective return-to-office and hybrid work policies	●		●	●	●		
2. Create networking events that celebrate and welcome workers back Downtown, like the successful Black Tech Night			●	●	●	●	
3. Incentivize the development of childcare and education services by allowing greater building heights when these facilities are included in new buildings		●		●			●
4. Develop a "life at night" agenda to activate Downtown businesses in the late-night hours		●	●	●	●	●	
Goal 5: Celebrate Downtown Seattle's arts, culture, sports, and entertainment							
1. Hire a director of Citywide Special Events to implement the integrated and proactive strategy		●	●	●	●	●	●
2. Hire a creative economy manager		●	●	●	●	●	●
3. Provide capital funding for accessibility and other capital improvements to Benaroya Hall, a City-owned arts facility.		●			●		
4. Explore ways to bring Bumbershoot events Downtown		●			●	●	
5. Create more murals and other art installations throughout Downtown	●	●		●	●	●	●
6. Support community-driven activations and cultural celebrations Downtown	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives	Safety	Residential	Retail	Workers	Arts, Culture, Sports, & Entertainment	Tourism	Green
Goal 6: Make Downtown a top destination for Seattleites and visitors year-round							
1. Install a network of digital navigation kiosks Downtown	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2. Partner with Seattle Public Schools to build a new Memorial Stadium		●		●	●	●	●
3. Open a Tribal Interpretive Center at Waterfront Park		●		●	●	●	●
4. Connect Downtown neighborhoods with Waterfront Park	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
5. Modify the Seattle Tourism Improvement Area to expand advertising for leisure and Convention Center marketing			●	●	●	●	
Goal 7: Create a healthy, resilient, and green Downtown							
1. Pilot a green and healthy street by closing Pike Street between First and Second Avenues for pedestrians only	●	●	●		●	●	●
2. Reopen City Hall Park	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3. Finish improvements to Downtown parks	●	●		●	●	●	●
4. Complete the full construction of the Seattle Waterfront by 2025, including free, family-friendly programming		●	●	●	●	●	●
5. Explore the future use of Pier 48 as new open green space		●				●	●
6. Continue to explore the lidding of I-5 to create park spaces and pedestrian connections from Capitol Hill to Downtown	●	●				●	●
7. Pilot low-pollution neighborhoods Downtown by establishing low-emission delivery opportunities		●	●				●
8. Implement the Building Emissions Performance Standards Policy (BEPS)	●	●					●

A nighttime photograph of a city street scene. On the left, a large crowd of people is gathered, many looking towards the right. In the background, there are several buildings, including a tall one with 'BOYS' written vertically on its side. A Starbucks Coffee store is visible in the middle ground. To the right, a building is labeled 'WESTLAKE CENTER'. A large blue triangular overlay covers the right half of the image, and the title text is centered within this overlay.

Near-term Goals and Strategies

Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan is organized around seven bold goals to implement now while also laying the foundation for a new future for Downtown Seattle.

This plan recognizes that success depends on **first addressing public safety**.



Make Downtown **safe** and welcoming



Transform Downtown into a lively **neighborhood** where more people can afford to live



Create a unique Downtown **retail** experience



Make Downtown a place where people want to **work** and that reflects the future of our economy



Celebrate Downtown Seattle's **arts, culture, sports, and entertainment**



Make Downtown **a top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round



Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown

Each bold goal is aligned with a key metric to measure progress with the overall goal of bringing more people Downtown



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Make Downtown a **top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round



Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown

What success will look like



Reduction in synthetic drug overdoses

Metric: Drug Overdoses, Emergency Medical Calls



Increase number of people living Downtown

Metric: Housing occupancy, New Affordable Units



Increase in retail spend across Downtown

Metric: Sales Tax Revenue, Retail Retention



Increase number of people working Downtown

Metric: 60% working 3 days/week, Transit Ridership



Increase visits to cultural institutions

Metric: Foot Traffic at Museums, Galleries, Events




Increase in Downtown visitors

Metric: Foot Traffic, Hotel Occupancy



Increase public transit ridership

Metric: Carbon Emission Reduction

A photograph of the Seattle skyline at sunset, with a dark semi-transparent box overlaid on the left side containing text. The skyline includes the Smith Tower and other high-rise buildings. In the foreground, there is a wooden pier and water.

Stabilizing Downtown in the near-term will lay the foundation for a future that serves all of Seattle






Progress will be made on the seven bold goals through policy changes and new City initiatives made over the next three years.

45+ unique initiatives were identified based on benchmarks of 12+ peer cities and ideas gathered from City departments and community stakeholders

Initiatives include:

- 1 New initiatives the City hasn't done before
- 2 Expanded investments in initiatives that are working

Initiatives were prioritized based on the criteria below:

	Impact time horizon	<i>Balance the need for quick wins and planning over the next 3 years</i>
	Alignment to values	<i>Ability to create more equitable outcomes</i>
	Resource intensity	<i>Level of new funding & additional City resources needed (staffing, etc.)</i>
	City span of control	<i>The City's ability to control an outcome (vs the State, County, or private entity)</i>
	Alignment to key drivers	<i>Impact on foot traffic Downtown or other key metrics.</i>

Early Legislative Priorities

Legislative action is an important lever for **structural and systemic changes** Downtown that will support a more equitable future.

This list of policy change recommendations, initiated by Mayor Harrell, will be sent to City Council for consideration and formal adoption.

Rezone parts of Downtown

- Update zoning policies to allow for taller residential buildings along 3rd Ave from Union Street north to Stewart Street and east on Pike Street and Union Street toward 4th Avenue. This will allow for high-rise residential development with incentives for providing childcare and education facilities

Encourage Residential Development

- Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) are in the process of identifying potential changes to waive or modify development standards to facilitate office-to-residential conversions
- Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects. Following up on recent State legislation, SEPA review will no longer be required on any projects in the City of Seattle that include a residential component. This should significantly speed up permitting for Downtown projects

Temporarily Waive Permit Fees

- Temporarily waive fees for Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) Street Use fees for temporary and year-long food trucks and carts and small-to-medium scale street and sidewalk events and activities open to the public

Allow for Expanded Uses at Street-level

- Increase the flexibility for hotels in a two-block area in the Belltown neighborhood by applying residential housing standards to hotels

Early Legislative Priorities

Legislative action is an important lever for **structural and systemic changes** Downtown that will support a more equitable future.

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Invest in a Cleaner and Safer Downtown

- Pass supplemental budget legislation to expand Metropolitan Improvement District cleaning, safety, and hospitality services this summer and fall when major national and international events are being hosted Downtown

Extend Master Use and Building Permits

- Extend the term of existing Master Use Permits (MUP) to six years, if the applicant files a written request
- Allow more time for issued building permits to be developed for projects vested to the 2015 and 2018 Building Codes

Allow for expanded uses at the street-level

- Expand the range of street-level uses to include office, conference room, lab space, and residential building amenities
- Expand allowed uses for street-level spaces and retail and recreation uses on all floors
- Increase Floor Area Ratio levels in Belltown to increase hotel development, creating permanent jobs and providing more places for tourists and visitors to stay
- Waive building code retrofit requirements to install temporary uses or return to former use
- Extend retail, restaurant, and entertainment Floor Area Ratio exemption to all levels in a structure



Make Downtown **safe** and welcoming

Description

The open sale and use of dangerous drugs in public places in Downtown neighborhoods creates fear and disrupts daily life for residents, workers, small business owners, shoppers, and tourists.

The easy availability and low cost of synthetic drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine has led to a surge in overdose incidents and overdose deaths. Through June 23, Seattle Fire responded to 2,827 emergency medical events involving drug use, compared to 1,717 in the same period in 2022, an increase of 65%. Overdose deaths in the city this year have nearly doubled to 301 compared to 157 over the same period in 2022. The synthetic drugs flooding our streets are killing people daily in our city.

Integrating Our Values

This plan takes a values-based, dignity-focused approach to addressing the synthetic drug crisis, which disproportionately affects the unhoused, while enhancing public spaces as two ways to ensure all people feel safe Downtown.

Ensuring Downtown is safe and feels safe is at the core of the Downtown Activation Plan

"Essential to any long-term neighborhood revitalization is safety and health: The fentanyl crisis on our streets is causing death and disorder – we have an obligation to do more for those suffering from substance use issues and for all neighbors... There are no quick fixes to this complicated challenge, but our Executive Order takes urgent steps to decrease trafficking of deadly drugs and to deliver new, innovative, and sustainable approaches helping those suffering from substance use disorder."

Mayor Bruce Harrell

April 17, 2023 when announcing the Executive Order to Address Seattle's Fentanyl Crisis

Click to read the full [Executive Order](#)

Excerpt from Mayor Harrell's Executive Order (April 2023)

Mayor Harrell's Executive Order directs:

- **The Seattle Police Department to prioritize efforts to disrupt the distribution and sale of narcotics** in concert with other law enforcement partners, furthering enhanced collaboration between the Seattle City Attorney's Office, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington, the DEA, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security.
- **Launch a pilot expansion of the Seattle Fire Department's Health One program** to include an overdose response unit dedicated to quickly engaging overdose survivors to increase acceptance of services or referrals for support.
- **Pilot a research-based drug abatement program known as "contingency management,"** an effort to encourage individuals with substance use disorder to accept treatment services by providing incentives (low dollar gift cards). The 12-week program rewards individuals for not using, and, in a novel approach, is administered where people live instead of in a medical clinic.
- **Site, explore funding for, and work with public health partners to establish a post-overdose diversion facility** where people can be brought after non-fatal overdoses to recover, get stabilized on medications, and access resources.
- **Expand access to treatment services and overdose reversal medications,** particularly in high-overdose locations.
- **Form a Public Health Work Group and Law Enforcement Task Force** to analyze current strategies and programs and design improvements to increase effectiveness.
- **Seek additional Federal investments** announced by the Biden Administration on April 11, 2023 to expand the prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support services critical to our region's health.



Safety

Feeling safe is a fundamental part of living a full life. We acknowledge that for many, a sense of safety can look and feel different.

The City will enhance public safety Downtown through the following actions.

1

Seattle police will continue to arrest individuals who are distributing and selling illegal drugs. So far in 2023 through May, police have arrested 85 individuals Downtown for selling, delivering, or smuggling illegal drugs, a 12% increase from the same period in 2022. The King County Prosecuting Attorney has filed felony drug dealing charges against 150 people this year, a 93% increase compared to 2022. Most of the arrests and criminal filings involve fentanyl or methamphetamine, or both. (Not all of the Prosecutor's cases were referred by Seattle police.)

2

Police will continue special operations to reduce gun violence throughout the city, emphasizing Downtown and other areas with high levels of gun violence. Seattle Police recovered or seized 629 firearms through May 31, 2023, compared to 497 in the same period last year, an increase of 27%.

3

For individuals suffering from substance use disorder and using drugs in public places, efforts to encourage people to accept treatment services will be increased. The Third Avenue Project, in partnership with [We Deliver Care](#) outreach workers, will be extended through the end of the year, establishing relationships, and earning the trust of individuals while offering care and treatment services.



Safety

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The City will enhance public safety Downtown through the following actions.

4

A “contingency management” drug abatement pilot program will begin in July to incentivize abstinence by awarding low-dollar gift cards to those who enroll in the program. In partnership with Plymouth Housing, the Washington Health Care Authority, Washington State University, Public Health—Seattle-King County, and the King County Department of Community and Human Services, this program is an evidence-based strategy that is cited as a highly effective treatment for substance use disorders.

5

Cooperate with other government entities and the private sector to establish an opioid overdose recovery center. The center will be operated by the Downtown Emergency Services Center and the University of Washington’s Addictions, Drug and Alcohol Institute (UW ADAI). Center staff will evaluate clients and recommend available treatment services. This Center should be operational in early 2024.



Safety

Feeling safe is a fundamental part of living a full life. We acknowledge that for many, a sense of safety can look and feel different.

The City will enhance public safety Downtown through the following actions.

6

Establish one Crisis Care Center for adults—and potentially one for youth—as part of a regional network of five total centers made possible by voter approval of King County’s behavioral health levy in April. These Crisis Care Centers will accept any person with or without insurance and provide behavioral health crisis triage, 23-hour observation, and 16 crisis stabilization beds for short-term treatment of up to 14 days. The centers will be open 24 hours, seven days a week. Medical evaluation, behavioral health monitoring for up to 14 days, and referral to longer treatment services, when available and necessary, will be offered. It’s expected that the design, construction, and staffing of the first Crisis Care Center can be completed by early 2026.



Safety

Our physical environment signals whether an area is safe and encourages or discourages people from feeling welcome. That's why the City will significantly increase efforts to clean and better illuminate Downtown.

The City is taking the following steps to create a cleaner, brighter, and more inviting Downtown.

7

In May, the City Council authorized a 10-year renewal and expansion of the **Downtown Seattle Association's Metropolitan Improvement District**. This service provides cleaning, community safety, and hospitality services Downtown.

- The MID Clean Teams sweep and power wash sidewalks, curb lines, and alleyways, and remove graffiti. The MID Community Safety and Hospitality Teams assist visitors, residents, workers, and those in need seven days a week.

8

Mayor Harrell has proposed for City Council approval a one-time \$1.7 million grant to the Metropolitan Improvement District to boost cleaning, safety, and hospitality services this summer and fall when major national and international events will be hosted Downtown.

9

Improve street and sidewalk lighting across Downtown with an initial focus on the Chinatown-International District, Third Avenue from Yesler Way to Stewart Street, and areas with concentrated crime and street disorder. City Light completed a survey of the area, identified broken or burned-out lights, and assessed necessary infrastructure improvements. Many of the improvements are completed, especially in the Chinatown-International District; others are underway.



Safety

Our physical environment signals whether an area is safe and encourages or discourages people from feeling welcome. That's why the City will significantly increase efforts to clean and better illuminate Downtown.

The City is taking the following steps to create a cleaner, brighter, and more inviting Downtown.

10

With owner permission, graffiti removal efforts on private property will be expanded in partnership with [Uplift Northwest](#). The initial area of focus will be the Chinatown-International District. Uplift Northwest's program has multiple benefits beyond graffiti abatement, including job training, work opportunities, and support services to people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

11

Increase investment in ongoing graffiti removal efforts across Downtown, including removing graffiti from Downtown exit signs along I-5 and I-90.

12

Pedestrian and bicyclist safety will be improved by installing new diverters and traffic signals as well as expanding No Turn on Red restrictions at more than 40 Downtown intersections. These safety improvements to improve walkability and overall safety are aligned with [Vision Zero](#).



Transform Downtown into a lively **neighborhood** where more people can afford to live

Description

Seattle's Downtown is a collection of distinct neighborhoods — Belltown, Chinatown-International District, the Commercial Core, Denny Triangle, Pioneer Square, the Waterfront, and the Stadium District.

Currently over 100,000 people live Downtown, and the number of occupied residential units grew 11% since before the pandemic, but vacancy rates are still significantly above 2019 levels with affordability a key concern.

Integrating Our Values

Living Downtown remains unaffordable or unattainable for too many.

Part of Downtown's transformation needs to include thinking of Downtown as a community, made up of a collection of neighborhoods. One that meets the needs of different family types, incomes, and where all can feel a sense of belonging.



Residents

Downtown runs on people and the best way to strengthen resiliency Downtown is to grow how many people live in its neighborhoods.

The following actions will create more housing and add amenities for Downtown residents.

1

Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects. Following up on recent State legislation, SEPA review will no longer be required on any projects in the City of Seattle that include a residential component. This should significantly speed up permitting for Downtown projects. This will be reviewed as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan update.

2

Legislation will be submitted to the City Council in July to change zoning along Third Avenue from Union to Stewart Streets and east along Union and Pike Streets toward Fourth Avenue to allow for taller residential towers. This legislation will change zoning from the current maximum of 170 feet to 440 feet, incentivizing more affordable units and Downtown childcare and education facilities.

3

Conversion of office buildings to residential use will be made easier and less expensive through legislation to be submitted to the City Council this summer. The City's Office of Planning and Community Development completed a design competition in May where developers and architects showcased innovative designs and suggested legislative reforms to speed up these office-to-residential conversions. To minimize costs, the legislation will waive design review for converting existing buildings, among other changes.



Residents

Downtown runs on people and the best way to strengthen resiliency Downtown is to grow how many people live in its neighborhoods.

The following actions will create more housing and add amenities for Downtown residents.

4

The Pike Place Market will return satellite farmers' markets to Downtown neighborhoods with the first opening at City Hall Plaza later this summer.

5

In partnership with the Downtown Seattle Association, the City will seek to **attract an affordable grocery store Downtown.**

6

Streets and alleyways will be temporarily closed and activated to create more pedestrian-friendly experiences, including street closures for special events such as night markets, music concerts, sports competitions, and, perhaps, an alley converted into a "basketball lane" to celebrate the city's rich basketball history. The Seattle Department of Transportation and Seattle Parks and Recreation will host a street Pickleball and 3-on-3 basketball tournament later this year.



Residents

To date, the Seattle Office of Housing has 59 funded properties Downtown. **That includes a total of 4,289 income and rent restricted units. With an additional 3 properties including 244 new affordable units in the pipeline** that will come Downtown as soon as 3 years, with more expected to be added.

The [2023 Housing Levy](#), if approved, will create new affordable rental and for-sale units across Downtown.

7

The City is committed to supporting the strategic vision defined by King County Executive Dow Constantine to [redesign the County's Downtown campus](#). The city believes this is an opportunity to transform a portion of south Downtown into a hub for cultural, economic, and civic activity, including increasing walkability, promoting local businesses, and supporting a 24-hour neighborhood where people want to live and work.

8

Complete the Downtown Subarea Plan as part of the major [Seattle Comprehensive Plan](#) update. This plan will determine the City's next 20-year vision and roadmap for creating new jobs, housing, improve our transportation system, and where to make capital investments such as utilities, sidewalks, and libraries, to make the city more equitable, livable, sustainable, and resilient for current and future residents.

Conceptual Renderings of South Downtown Redevelopment Concepts



Concepts developed by Urban Visions





Create a unique Downtown **retail** experience

Description

Large retail businesses have found success moving online, which is changing the face of retail Downtown. A thriving economy requires creating opportunities for small businesses that reflect our city's rich diversity, uniqueness, and creativity. Retail vacancies are at their highest since before 2000 (12%), and new business openings are at historic lows (down 69% from 2019), but those vacancies can be turned into opportunities.

The City will support retail stores Downtown that provide a unique experience with a focus on small businesses which make up the majority of Downtown (81% of Downtown businesses have fewer than 10 employees).

Integrating Our Values

A thriving economy requires that we invest in businesses that reflect the rich diversity and uniqueness of our city. To do that, we need to ensure that we create accessible pathways for business owners, especially for small, BIPOC, and women-owned businesses to succeed and grow Downtown.



Retail

We need to make sure that we create pathways into our dynamic economy for businesses to succeed and grow Downtown, especially for small and diverse-owned businesses.

These action steps will help small and diverse businesses thrive Downtown and bring experiences you can't find elsewhere.

1

Launch The Liberty Project, a partnership between the City, the [University of Washington's Foster School of Business](#), [Tabor 100](#), and [Seattle University's Albers School of Business](#) to grow Black-owned and other underserved small businesses in Seattle. The Liberty Project will help qualified businesses to:

- Improve management skills.
- Improve access to money through loans and investments.
- Increase market success through contracts with larger businesses and government agencies and direct sales to consumers.

2

Grow [Seattle Restored](#) by hiring two additional Seattle Office of Economic Development staff to work with Business Improvement Areas and property owners to fill vacant ground-floor storefronts with small businesses and artists and develop innovative commercial affordability strategies. Seattle Restored projects benefit neighborhoods, small businesses, artists, and property owners by creating vibrant and engaging streetscapes encouraging the public to support local businesses and artists, particularly Black, Indigenous, and other entrepreneurs of color. There are currently 20 activated storefronts in Downtown. The goal is to complete a total of 40 activations Downtown by the end of 2023.



Retail

We need to make sure that we create pathways into our dynamic economy for businesses to succeed and grow Downtown, especially for small and diverse-owned businesses.

These action steps will help small and diverse businesses thrive Downtown and bring experiences you can't find elsewhere.

3

Create a new Small Business Navigation Team at the Seattle Office of Economic Development to help small businesses successfully navigate City processes and connect them to technical assistance resources, including legal, accounting, and in-language support.

- This team would also partner with neighborhood business districts and other stakeholders to focus on retaining existing businesses and understanding unique neighborhood nodes.



Make Downtown a place where people want to **work** and reflects the future of our economy

Description

Office space vacancy is high nationally as many companies have switched to hybrid or fully remote models. In Seattle, a higher percentage of remote-friendly occupations and policies have contributed to a slow return of office workers Downtown, in turn impacting the livelihood of service workers and other workers who rely on the people presence of those industries.

As companies have started to shift to encouraging more days in the office, they are [reporting](#) positive outcomes, including a decreased quit rate and decreased absenteeism. Currently, 62% of Seattle employers report employees coming into the office three or more days per week

Integrating Our Values

The future of the Downtown economy relies on all kinds of workers and must include an investment in a diverse set of industries to attract those workers. From retail to tech to all those who keep our city running, Downtown must be safe, affordable and accessible to anyone who works here, while reflecting the changing realities of how work is done.



Workers

Office workers are a key driver of Downtown's economy.

A higher percentage of remote-friendly occupations and policies have contributed to a slow return of office workers. Currently, 62% of Seattle employers report employees coming into the office three or more days per week.

1

Convene public and private sector leaders to share strategies and drive effective return to office/hybrid work policies. Employers across the city are struggling with a changing landscape of return-to-office policies and hybrid work. While most City workers continued to work in the field or in person throughout the pandemic, the City was one of the first major employers to bring office employees back Downtown two days per week. The mayor will convene public and private sector leaders to share strategies, learn the best lessons from the pandemic, and drive effective return-to-office/hybrid work policies, bringing office workers Downtown in a way that maintains flexibility while highlighting the benefits of working together in person.

2

In partnership with key industry sectors, **create affinity events that celebrate and welcome workers back Downtown, like Black Tech Night.** These events provide professional development and networking opportunities, while also supporting local businesses.

3

Incentivize the development of childcare and education services Downtown by allowing greater building heights when these facilities are included in new buildings.



Workers

Office workers are a key driver of Downtown's economy.

A higher percentage of remote-friendly occupations and policies have contributed to a slow return of office workers. Currently, 62% of Seattle employers report employees coming into the office three or more days per week.

4

Develop a "life at night" agenda that both supports our nightlife businesses and workers to ensure that amenities are available to the workers, residents, and visitors who live their life at night. For instance, partnering with Metro to get reliable transit options later at night.

- Part of this initiative will include a pilot event similar to [Philadelphia's Center City District Sips](#). This will combine support for brick-and-mortar restaurants and encourage people to experience Downtown's finest food and beverages at a discounted price.
- Giving workers more food options Downtown by **expanding opportunities for food trucks**. This includes providing more options and certainty for food trucks and linking vendors with existing events. This will support small retail businesses and enhance the food truck scene Downtown overall.



Celebrate Downtown Seattle's arts, culture, sports, and entertainment

Description

Downtown is home to a rich collection of arts, culture, sports, and entertainment that celebrates the beauty and diversity of Seattle.

The pandemic was challenging as in-person gatherings were not allowed and small venues and organizations were the hardest hit. Now we are seeing a resurgence of Downtown visitors attending sporting events and experiencing the diversity of cultural activities Downtown neighborhoods have to offer.

Integrating Our Values

Accessible avenues for expression of art, culture, sports, and entertainment are critical to building a sense of connection across people and communities.

By uplifting our artists and making arts, culture, sports, and entertainment readily available to the public, we honor the history, present, and future of Seattle.



Culture

The pandemic was challenging as in-person gatherings were not allowed, and small venues and organizations were the hardest hit. However, the resurgence of Downtown is underway.

The following actions will boost this resurgence to even higher levels.

1

Hire a director of Citywide Special Events to implement the recommendations of the City's Special Events Vision and Strategy. These recommendations include making it easier for artists and entertainers to hold events with dedicated support that helps them navigate permitting and access designated parking during these events.

- **Follow through with the [integrated and proactive strategy](#) for the City to advance special events, first published in July 2020.** This will help create a seamless pipeline of ongoing festivals, markets, and other events that represent the diversity of Downtown Seattle for a continuing series of events year-round.

2

Hire a creative economy manager at the Seattle Office of Economic Development to work with arts, culture, and tech sectors to promote and grow our creative economy, including film and television production.

3

Explore capital funding for improvements to Benaroya Hall including improvements to the façade and strengthening ADA accessibility at this City-owned facility.



Culture

The pandemic was challenging as in-person gatherings were not allowed, and small venues and organizations were the hardest hit. However, the resurgence of Downtown is underway.

The following actions will boost this resurgence to even higher levels.

4

Explore ways to bring Bumbershoot events Downtown. Build off the success of Bumbershoot at Seattle Center and celebrate its return in 2023 by exploring ways to support the organization's desire to grow into Downtown for music and entertainment year-round.

5

Create more murals and other art installations throughout Downtown and activate street corners, parks, and transit stations with buskers and other forms of entertainment to create a more beautiful and welcoming environment, mitigating the impact of graffiti and street disorder.

6

Support community-driven activations and cultural celebrations Downtown to scale the celebration of our local heritage, uplift our tribal communities, and feature our diverse communities.



Make Downtown a **top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round

Description

Downtown is home to many of Seattle's top 20 attractions that draw both local residents and visitors. Ensuring residents and visitors feel safe is key to encouraging tourism, while also making sure those who have not seen themselves Downtown historically feel welcome.

This will require a well-rounded approach to tourism that integrates elements of the other goals to honor our local heritage, uplift our tribal communities, and feature our natural landscapes .

Integrating Our Values

Families with children and people on a budget perceive major barriers to visiting Downtown, including rising costs and questions about availability of necessary family amenities.

By centering families and those on a budget, we aim to address the real and perceived inaccessibility to our City's greatest assets, to the benefit of all residents and visitors.



Tourism

By centering families and those on a limited budget, we aim to address the real and perceived inaccessibility to our City's greatest assets, to benefit all residents and visitors.

To achieve this, the City will take the following actions.

1

To make Downtown easier to navigate, in partnership with the Downtown Seattle Association, install a network of digital navigation kiosks

Downtown. These kiosks aim to maximize the economic impact of drawing visitors to popular attractions, historic districts, and neighborhood business districts that showcase Seattle's unique retailers and arts and cultural opportunities. The kiosks will start being installed in late 2023 and will include wayfinding, event information, 911 calling capability, and public service and other advertising.

2

Partner with the Seattle Public Schools to build a new Memorial Stadium,

creating a world-class venue for student athletics, music, and culture on the Seattle Center campus. Negotiations with a preferred development and operating partner are underway. Implementation agreements will be submitted to the School Board of Directors and the City Council for action in late summer.

3

Open a Tribal Interpretive Center at Waterfront Park to celebrate and honor commitments to provide facility space to the Muckleshoot and Suquamish Tribes.



Tourism

By centering families and those on a limited budget, we aim to address the real and perceived inaccessibility to our City's greatest assets, to benefit all residents and visitors.

To achieve this, the City will take the following actions.

4

Connect Downtown neighborhoods with the Waterfront Park by completing the [Overlook Walk](#) that will create an elevated public pathway from Pike Place Market to the Seattle Aquarium, the Marion Street pedestrian bridge for easier access to the ferry terminal, and a rebuild of [Railroad Way](#) as a pedestrian-friendly street linking the Stadium District to the park.

5

Revise the Seattle Tourism Improvement Area (STIA) legislation for Convention Center marketing. This will allow Visit Seattle to do more marketing for the new Convention Center to increase visitation, revenue and jobs.



Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown

Description

One of Seattle's greatest assets is our connection and commitment to nature. With awe-inspiring views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains, Downtown is uniquely positioned to be a continuation of that greenery and grandeur.

Our commitment to nature is underscored by our city's long-standing commitment to the environment and sustainability. Seattle will continue to be a leader that addresses the urgency of our global climate challenges.

Integrating Our Values

Seattle's resiliency through the impacts of climate change requires responsible stewardship of our natural resources. As Seattle experiences the impacts of climate change, we are committed to supporting neighbors impacted, advancing solutions that preserve our environment, protect our people, build resilience, and create new jobs and opportunities.



Green

Seattle will continue to be a leader that celebrates our connection to nature and addresses the urgency of our global climate challenges.

To achieve this, the City will take the following actions.

1

Pilot a green and healthy street by closing Pike Street between First and Second Avenues for pedestrians only. The new street will feature activations, music buskers, café-like seating areas for people-watching, and popup vendors. Accommodations for delivering goods and supplies to adjacent businesses will be allowed during certain times of the day to mitigate disruptions.

2

Reopen City Hall Park with activations throughout the summer to help keep the park vibrant, including concerts, food trucks, fitness classes, art programs, movie and sports viewing, and a satellite farmers market.

3

Finish improvements to Downtown parks happening now and extending throughout 2023, at Bell Street Park, Tilikum Place Park, and Freeway Park. Upgrades include new electrical and lighting systems, utilities, and storm-water infrastructure.



Green

Seattle will continue to be a leader that celebrates our connection to nature and addresses the urgency of our global climate challenges.

To achieve this, the City will take the following actions.

4

To create new community green spaces and areas designed for families and young children, open the remaining parts of the new **Waterfront Park** in 2025, including **Pier 58** with its public plaza and free programming by the [Friends of Waterfront Seattle](#). Open Habitat Beach at the Waterfront for a pilot period this summer before opening permanently in 2024.

5

Explore the **future use of Pier 48 as new open green space**. Pier 48 is a 4.5+ acre pier south of the Coleman Dock ferry terminal owned by the State.

6

Continue to explore the lidding of I-5 to create park spaces and pedestrian connections from Capitol Hill to Downtown. The City has received grant funding for this feasibility analysis. Successful examples of highway lidding can be seen in Dallas at [Klyde Warren Park](#)



Green

Seattle will continue to be a leader that celebrates our connection to nature and addresses the urgency of our global climate challenges.

To achieve this, the City will take the following actions.

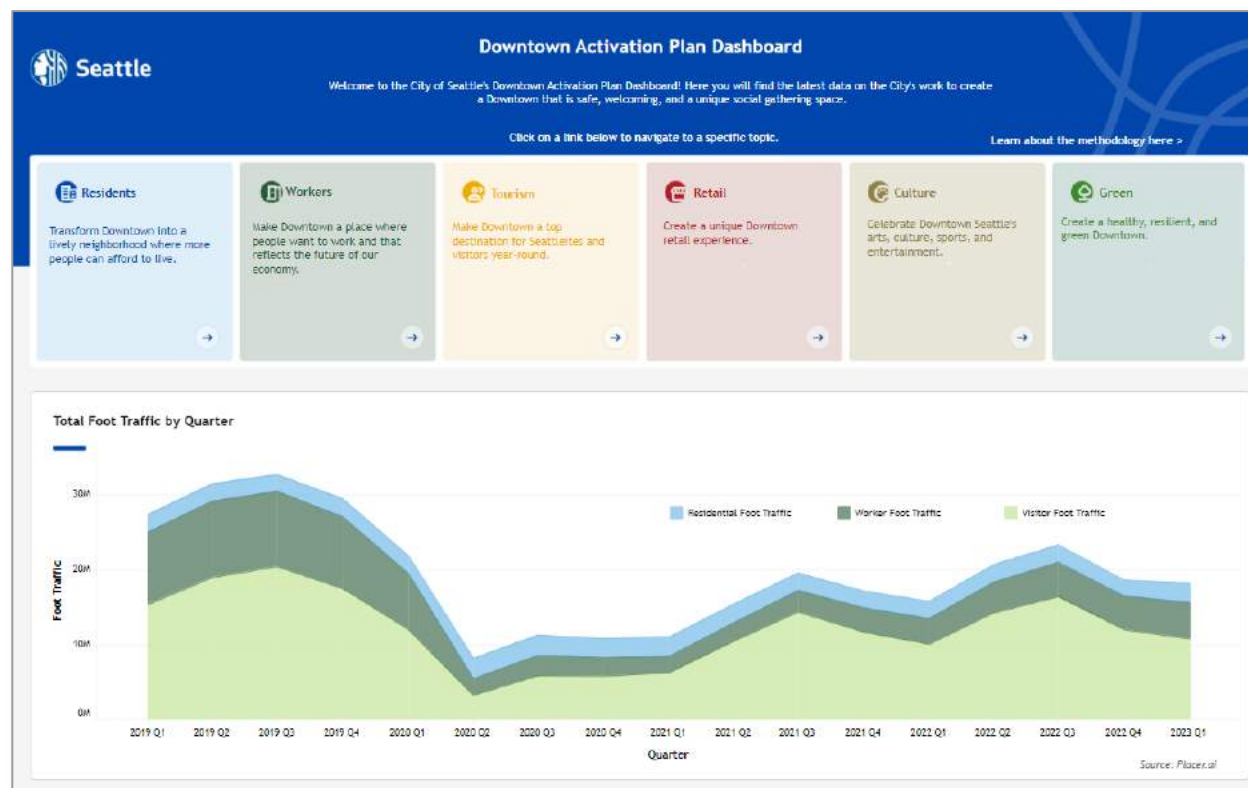
7

Pilot low-pollution neighborhoods Downtown by establishing low-emission delivery opportunities. These include delivery hubs, e-cargo bike delivery, infrastructure to support electric food trucks and street vending, electrification of our transportation system, incentives for the electrification of small business vehicles, and other policies, programs, and projects that support reducing harmful pollution for residents and workers.

8

Implement the Building Emissions Performance Standards Policy (BEPS). Relevant to existing nonresidential and multifamily buildings greater than 20,000 square feet, the [Building Emissions Performance Standard Policy \(BEPS\)](#) is expected to reduce annual building greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 325,000 metric tons by 2050 — a 27% decrease from a 2008 baseline. The reduction in emissions is the equivalent of taking 72,322 gasoline-powered cars off the road for a year.

To create accountability, progress will be tracked on a public-facing dashboard



In addition to a robust implementation plan that includes cross-departmental and cross-sector collaboration, the City is also tracking success Downtown through a public facing dashboard.

What does success look like?

- Increased overall foot traffic
- Reduction in fentanyl/meth overdoses
- Reduction in emergency medical responses
- Increased housing occupancy
- 60% of people working Downtown 3+ days a week
- Increased retail spend Downtown
- Increased visits to cultural institutions
- Increased public transit ridership
- Increased foot traffic outside working hours

[View the live dashboard on the Seattle Office of Economic Development's website.](#)

A nighttime photograph of the Seattle skyline, featuring the Space Needle and various illuminated skyscrapers. A large, semi-transparent blue geometric shape, resembling a stylized 'V' or a folded corner, is overlaid on the right side of the image. The text 'Visionary Ideas for the Future' is centered within this blue area in a white, sans-serif font.

Visionary Ideas for the Future

"Space Needle Thinking": Beginning of a community conversation about a more inclusive future of Downtown

The Space Needle is an iconic landmark of our city. It is a top attraction for locals and visitors alike and a galvanizing image for all who call Seattle home.

The Space Needle was built to symbolize humanity's great aspirations for the future and to reimagine what is possible. Seattle has continued to be innovative and "push the needle" on what the future can look like, and we continue to do that here with seven big ideas we aspire to, built through community engagement.

Through near-term revitalization efforts and legislative changes, Seattle will lay the foundation for Downtown. These long-term, transformational ideas will symbolize how Downtown is changing to serve everyone. **These concepts serve as a starting point for a broader conversation that will incorporate public feedback and explore viability and funding options with philanthropic and private partners.**

One day, these ideas may bring as much pride to Seattle as the Space Needle.



Visionary Ideas for the Future Built through Community Engagement

Downtown Arts, Culture, and Entertainment District



Year-Round Play



Heart of the City



Vertical Neighborhoods



An Urban Forest



Mercado: Market for Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color



Makers Campus for Experiential Learning





Downtown Arts, Entertainment, and Culture District

Develop a linear arts, culture, and entertainment district Downtown, securing funding to complete a connected streetcar route bringing together existing streetcar lines in South Lake Union and Capitol Hill that transports residents, workers, and visitors through the heart of Downtown.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Fully realize the potential of connected streetcar lines and fulfill historical commitments
- Prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders by making it easier to get around without a car and work towards Seattle's climate and sustainability goals
- Make Downtown a place to visit and live with public art, performances, and activations happening from South Lake Union all the way to Capitol Hill
- Uplift historically disadvantaged neighborhoods with new opportunities, connections, and resources grounded in Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative



Year-Round Play

Keep Downtown active and connected year-round with a state-of-the-art indoor/outdoor sports and recreation facility. We can bring people of all ages, families, and professional and amateur players alike to connect through sports, play, and fun.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Establishes a needed neighborhood amenity that would contribute to the residential feel of Downtown
- Builds community through unstructured play, community-led sports and exercise, and the sacred fandom among Seattle sports enthusiasts
- Provides free or low-cost opportunities for adults and families with children when they're Downtown.
- Has potential to meaningfully connect young people and community to local athletes
- Creates new intergenerational gathering spaces and opportunities for Seattleites to play and interact in the same area
- Improves health outcomes and builds healthy communities with affordable access to sports, recreation, and exercise equipment

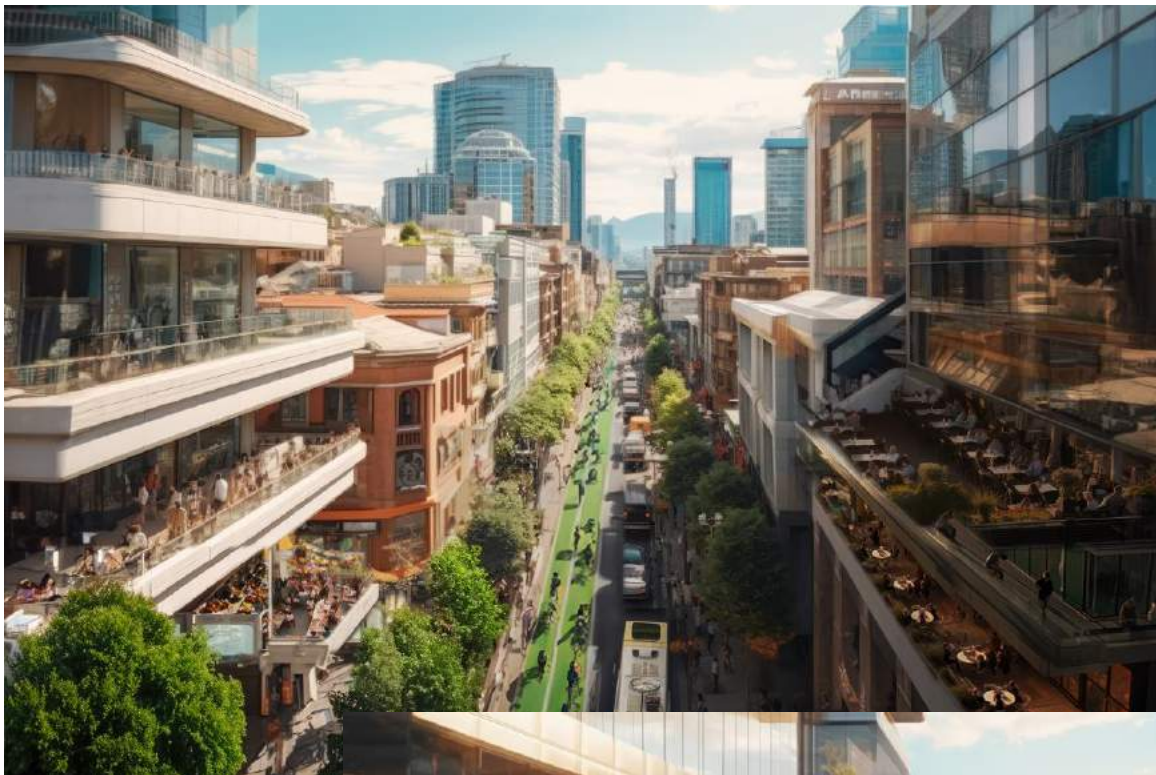
Heart of the City

Reinvigorate Westlake as the "Heart of the City" making it a world-class plaza with interactive art installations, state-of-the-art technology, and year-round programming that welcomes Seattleites and visitors.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Showcases Seattle's and our city's strengths - the people, arts, interactive technology, and community-focused programming
- Attention to commercial affordability in the near-term will create a clear pathway for Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color-owned businesses to establish themselves in Westlake with support of public-private partnerships
- Expands the range of gathering spaces and types of potential programs in Downtown for workers, visitors, and families who want to be able to socialize and relax without spending money
- Formalizes more spaces for artists and entertainers to have opportunities to perform and bring vibrancy and creativity Downtown



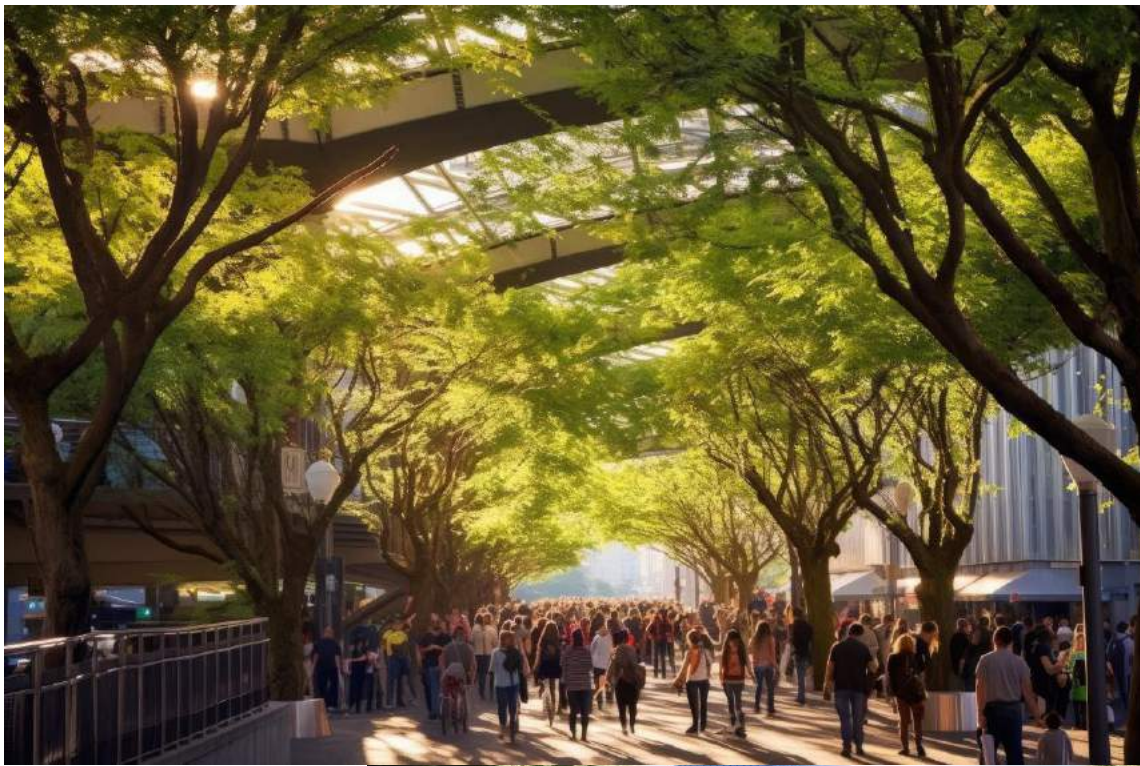


Vertical Neighborhoods

Change zoning codes to allow for the development of vertical residential neighborhoods within buildings, including the amenities and resources that make a neighborhood. This would incentivize mixed-use buildings with spaces for schools, childcare facilities, community gathering spaces, retail shops, and families.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Creates a Downtown that has all the elements that help support a vibrant neighborhood including schooling, more housing, spaces for children and family services
- Centers the lived experiences of Downtown residents by ensuring they have what they need to live, work and play Downtown with ease
- Mixed-income housing would allow for building deeper, more human connection across class and race.
- Maximizes the potential for repurposing vacant spaces throughout Downtown buildings
- Lays the foundation for Downtown to become a vibrant, accessible, safe living community for all



An Urban Forest

Reach a 30% canopy cover goal by maximizing trees and greenery to make Downtown an "Urban Forest." This could include big ideas like lidding I-5 and providing multiple spaces for people to be surrounded by nature and greenery in our city center. These efforts would further support residents by increasing climate resilience.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Provides multiple spaces for people to be surrounded by nature and greenery, even in our city center
- Prepares our Downtown to be more resilient and withstand impacts of climate change
- Blends the natural world with the human-made world in a thoughtful way that encourages co-existence
- Connects the distant mountains and nearby water with the city and expands the possibilities for electrification
- Ensures our current and next generation understands the natural world and is inspired to care for the environment

Mercado: A Market for Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color

Mercados, translated to "markets" in English, are community-centric entrepreneurial spaces meant for connection, goods exchange, and learning about those we share space with. This initiative could start with a fund to support small community-based organizations over the next four years to develop brick-and-mortar mercados that create physical spaces, visibility, and shared resources (e.g., commercial kitchens) for small businesses. The Mercado's value would be in creating a dedicated physical space for communities and small businesses to connect, share, and support each other, with an emphasis on underrepresented communities.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Develops dedicated physical space for BIPOC communities and businesses in Downtown to connect, share, and support each other
- Empowers community members to learn more about their neighbors and invest by being customers of local businesses
- Create more opportunities for BIPOC communities to feel welcome and see themselves Downtown
- Builds upon work being done in surrounding neighborhoods to uplift BIPOC small businesses and wealth-building
- Invests in a large population of underserved communities to further support the economic development of the region





Makers Campus for Experiential Learning

We envision a space where students, entrepreneurs, educators, and large and small businesses can work together to "make" the future of our city a reality. This "Makerspace" will bring the worlds of work and education together in a state-of-the-art facility where students can earn their degrees, participate in paid training, learn about career opportunities Downtown, and, importantly, perhaps start their own businesses.

The "Makerspace" would create an opportunity to bring Seattle's flagship educational institutions into Downtown where they can prepare their students for the jobs of the future with Downtown employers.

How does this build a better future for all of us in Seattle?

- Prioritizes young people and learners of all ages in the heart of the city
- Develops educational and economic opportunities for Downtown and nearby neighborhood residents
- Creates paid work-based learning opportunities that brings together students and employers
- Brings flagship educational institutions back to Downtown Seattle
- Empowers people to be innovative and entrepreneurial in actualizing their dreams
- Helps diversify the industries located in Downtown Seattle

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely San Francisco, with a prominent blue triangular overlay on the right side. The city lights are visible in the background, and a tall skyscraper with many lit windows is on the right. The text "Public Opinion and Insights" is centered in white.

Public Opinion and Insights

In order to build a plan that represents the needs of the Downtown community, residents, business owners, workers, and more we took a four-pronged engagement approach.

Large scale polling of Seattleites and nearby King County cities

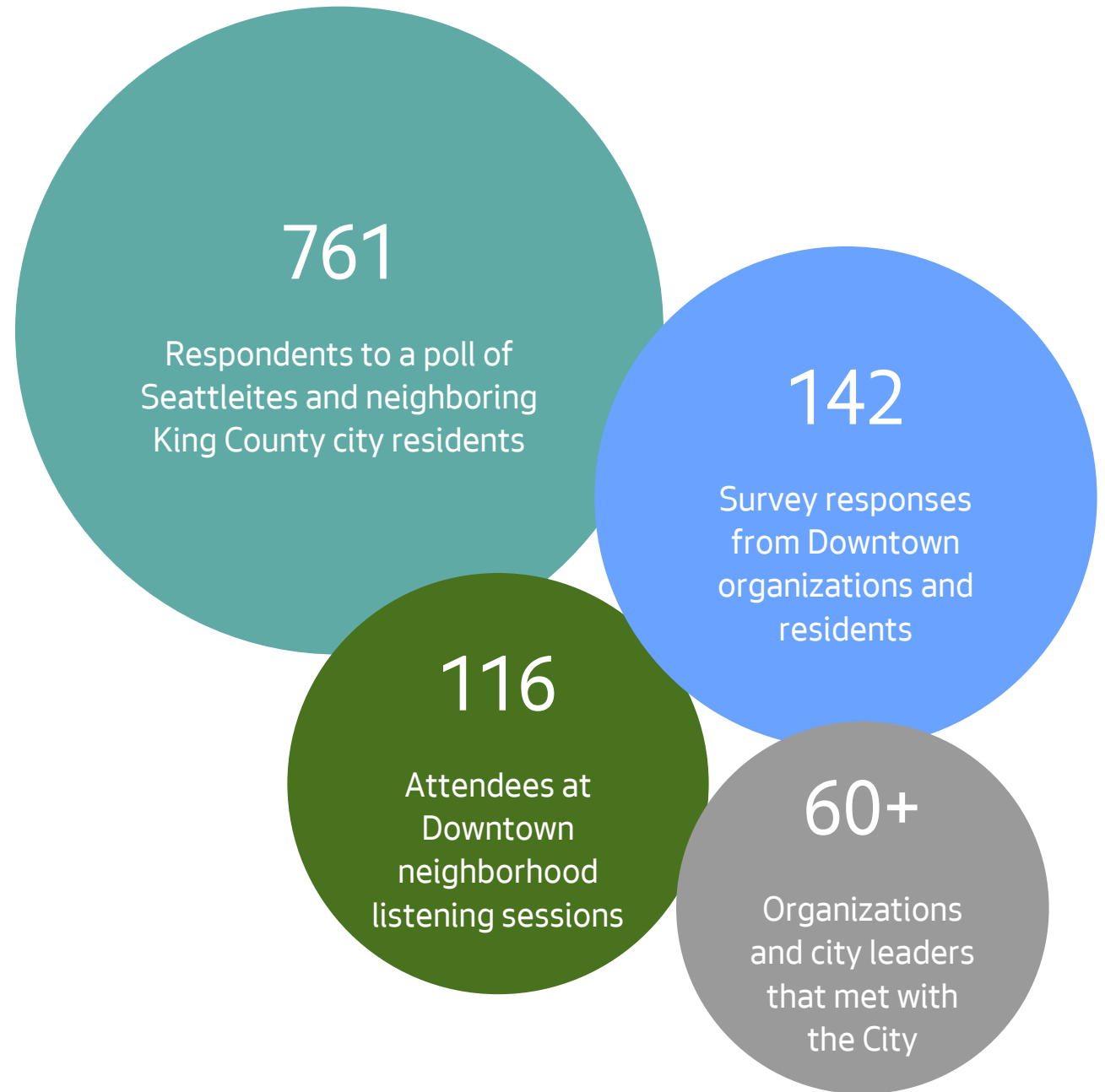
Online survey of the business community, community-based organizations, and other key Downtown organizations

Neighborhood listening sessions in Belltown, Chinatown-International District, and Pioneer Square

Individual conversations with City departments, community-based organizations, and other key Downtown organizations

Seattleites shared their hopes for the future of Downtown

From February to May 2023, the City asked the Downtown community and a diverse group of private and public stakeholders what their hopes were for Downtown.



Downtown serves office workers and tourists well, but it isn't serving small business owners, families with children, and working class or low-income communities very well...



"My ideal Downtown Seattle would **include more accessible public entertainment spaces for events and vendors**, as well as more public seating."

29, Female, Multiracial, Shoreline



"[I would like to see] a **city full of live, festivals, restaurants/bars**. A city that is beautiful in the day and fun in the night."

21, Female, Hispanic/Latina, Greenwood



"I think that **we could do a much better job of taking care of the homeless** community in our area."

28, Female, White, Renton/Maplewood



"[I would like to see] **mixed-income multi-family dwellings** with **small parks** located throughout Downtown"

56, Female, White, Magnolia



"The fact you must **pay for everything, parking, tolls, etc.**"

31, Male, Multiracial, White Center

What should the future of Downtown feel like?

Vibrant

Vibrancy is a leading theme among Seattle area residents who are seeking a busy, thriving Downtown fit for families with children and a place where small businesses can succeed. It is a key theme in the Seattle area as well as nearby King County residents.

What does that look like?

- Family friendly environment
- Thriving small businesses
- Diversity and community gathering spaces
- Parks & green spaces

Safe

Safety is table-stakes and Downtown cannot be successful without addressing concerns many hold. A Downtown that fosters belonging with improved safety, continued declining crime, and additional services and housing for the homeless. Safety is particularly salient for those who want to spend more time Downtown but are hesitant due to feelings of sadness and fear related to concerns about crime, homelessness, and drugs.

What does that look like?

- Services for the unhoused
- Affordable housing
- Mental health and drug addiction support
- Activated streets and eyes on the ground

Beautiful

Beauty and cleanliness show up in various way across Seattleites. Many reference the idea that Downtown should reflect more of the natural beauty around Seattle while others emphasize a desire for more cleanliness in Downtown.

What does that look like?

- Cleanliness
- Parks, playgrounds, & green-spaces

Accessible

A diverse and affordable Downtown that is literally accessible with improved parking, transit, and traffic conditions. Accessibility is a key theme residents reference when talking about how much time and resources they are willing to spend in Downtown. Seattle area residents emphasize the need for a more affordable Downtown, particularly for lower-income families while nearby King County residents reference parking, traffic, and transit.

What does that look like?

- Improved transit
- Better parking
- Better pedestrian walkways
- Welcoming of diversity
- Affordable experiences



Current State of Downtown Seattle

6 key analytical findings about Downtown Seattle

Current state and impacts from the pandemic

General trends: Foot traffic Downtown has nearly recovered for Residential but has struggled to recover for visitors and workers (which accounted for 92% of foot traffic in 2019) and vacancy rates are at historic highs for retail, office, and residential

- 1 **Public Safety:** In 2022, 153 overdose deaths occurred among people in Downtown, accounting for 15.1% of all overdose deaths in King County and 26% of overdose deaths in Seattle.
- 2 **Residential:** The number of occupied residential units has grown 11% since pre-pandemic, but vacancy rates are still significantly above 2019 levels, with affordability a key concern.
- 3 **Offices & Workers:** A higher percentage of remote-friendly occupations and policies have contributed to a slow return of office workers (currently 51% of 2019 levels) and historically high in-office space vacancies (currently ~20%).
- 4 **Retail:** Retail vacancies are at their highest since before 2000 (12%), and new business openings are at historic lows (down 69% from 2019), but opportunity remains to build in-person connections
- 5 **Tourism:** Visitor foot traffic is down as much as 65% at Downtown attractions, but cruise passengers have rebounded above pre-pandemic levels.
- 6 **Transit:** Transit to Downtown is down across major modes of transportation, except for weekend Link usage, which is above 2019 levels at some Downtown stops.

Sources:

1. [King County Medical Examiner's Office data](#) BCG Analysis - 2. CoStar, 3. Placar.ai, CoStar, 4. CoStar, [Seattle Open Data](#), 5. Placer.ai, 6. APTA; Sound Transit, King County Metro; [Seattle Transit Blog](#); [Commute Data and Mobility Innovation Center](#)

Date of analysis: March 2023



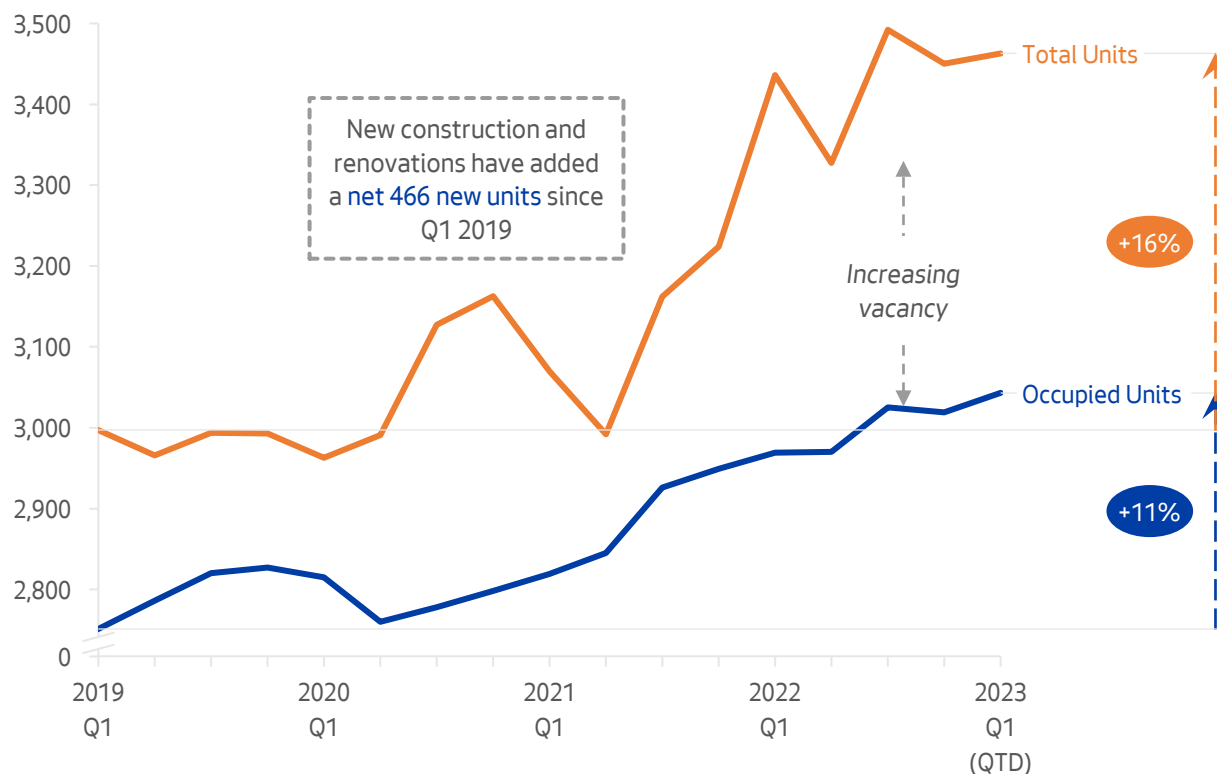
Residential

The number of occupied residential units has grown 11% since pre-pandemic, but vacancy rates are still significantly above 2019 levels, with affordability a key concern

Occupied residential unit growth is a bright spot, but growth in new construction has outpaced growth in demand

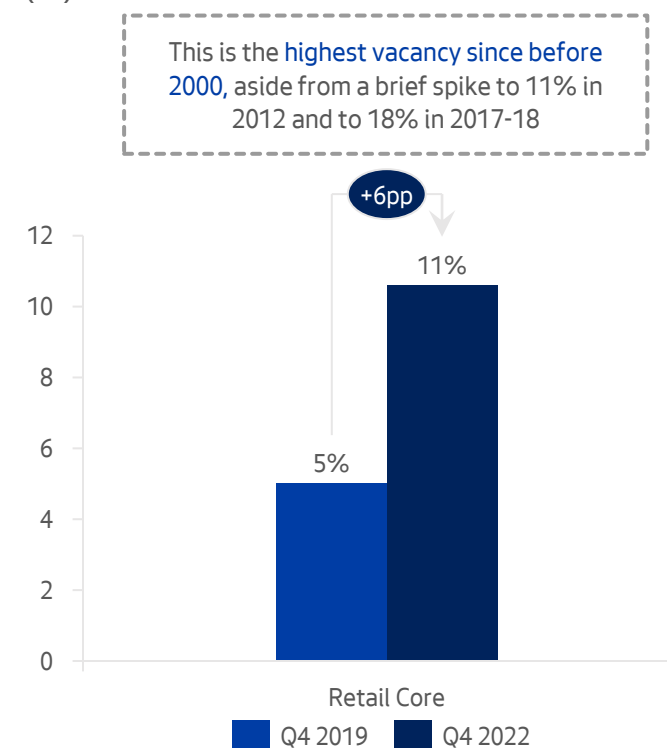
While the number of occupied residential units Downtown has increased 11%, total residential units Downtown have grown faster at 16%

residential units in retail core, Jan 2019 to Jan 2023



Because of this, the vacancy rate Downtown has more than doubled

Residential vacancy rate in retail core, Q4 2022 vs. Q4 2019 (%)



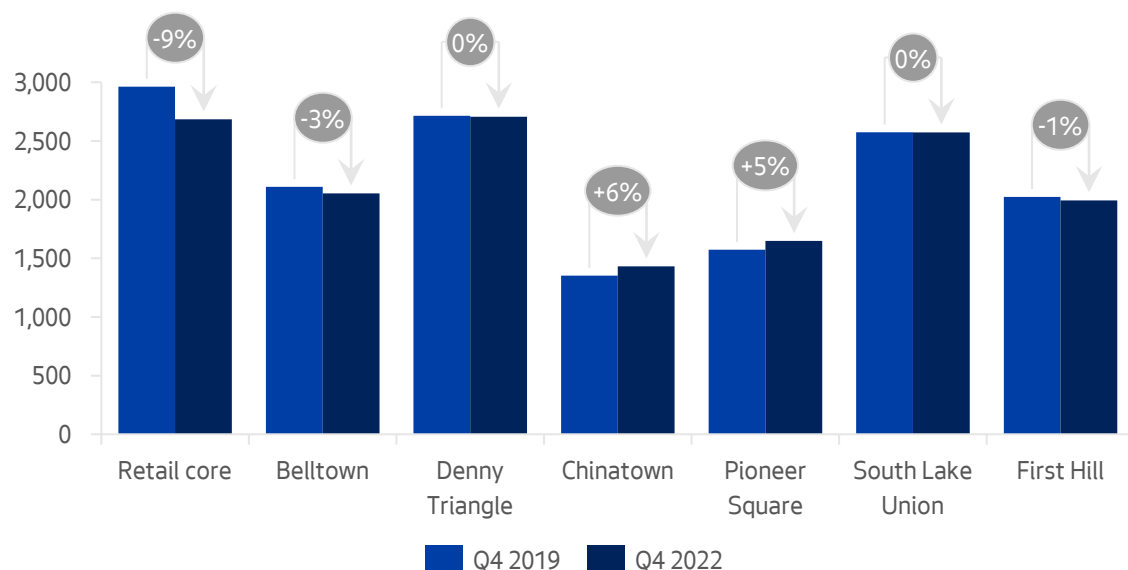
Source: BCG Analysis, CoStar
BCG analysis: March 2023



Despite an increase in vacancy across the board, rents in some neighborhoods have increased, demonstrating affordability squeeze for residents

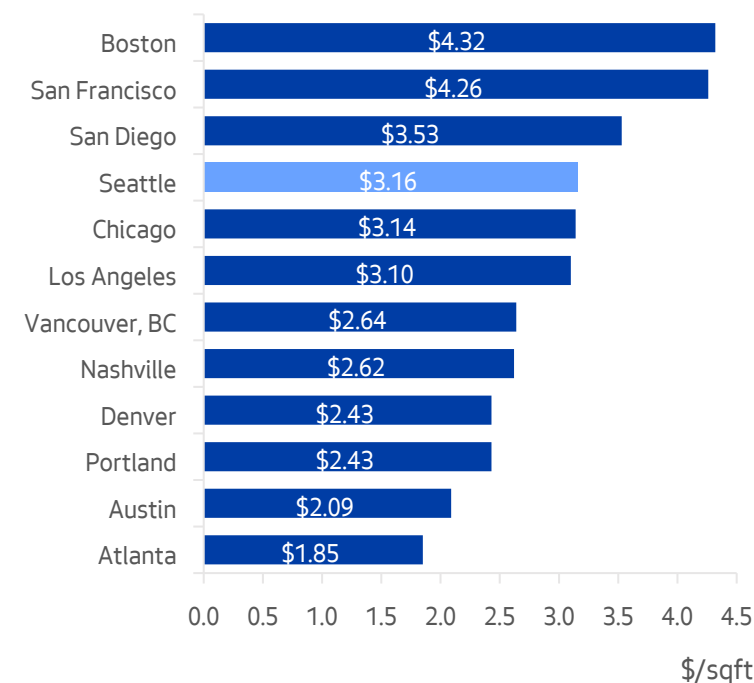
Despite a 9% decrease in rent, the retail core is still one of the priciest neighborhoods in the surrounding area

Average effective residential rent by neighborhood, Q4 2022 vs. Q4 2019 (\$)



Residential rent is higher in Seattle than in most peer cities¹

Average monthly rent (\$/sqft) as of February 2023



Source: BCG Analysis, CoStar

1. Includes average rent in CoStar residential submarket area; for Seattle this includes Belltown, CID, Denny Triangle, Downtown Seattle, First Hill, Pike Place Market, and Pioneer Square

BCG analysis: March 2023



Offices and Workers

A higher percentage of remote-friendly occupations and policies have contributed to a slow return of office workers (currently 51% of 2019 levels) and historically high in-office space vacancies (currently ~20%)

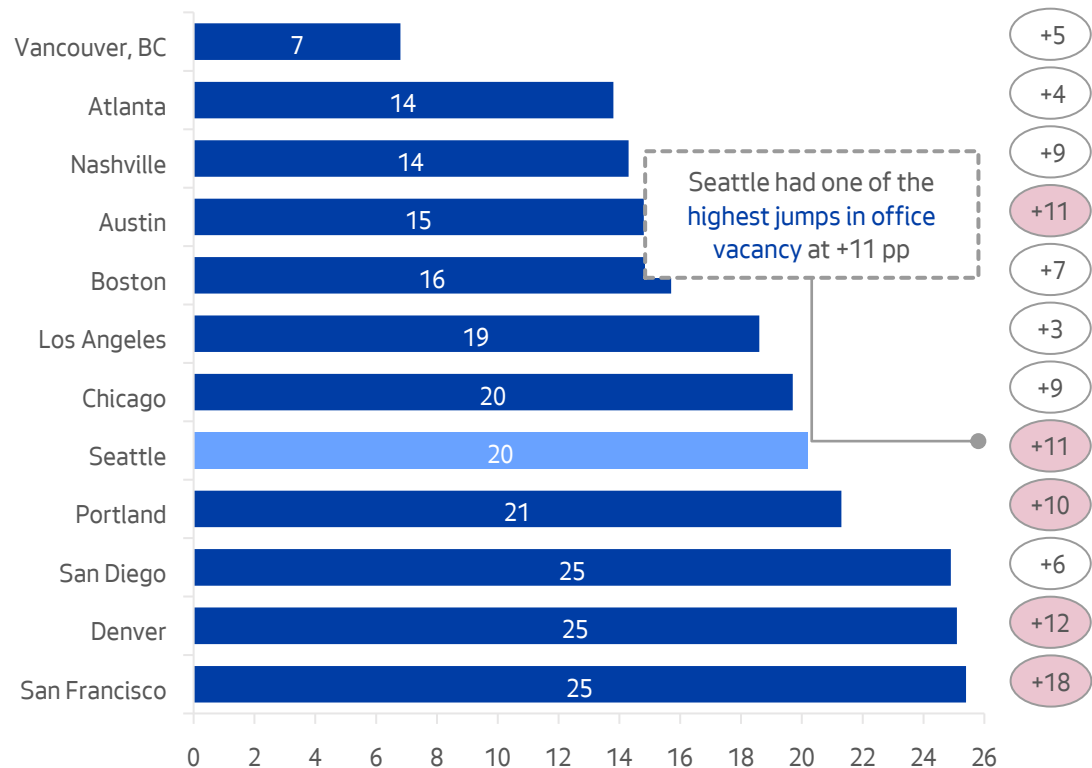


Office space vacancy is high nationally and well above historic levels in Downtown Seattle

Seattle's Downtown office space vacancy is near the median of peers, but well above pre-pandemic levels

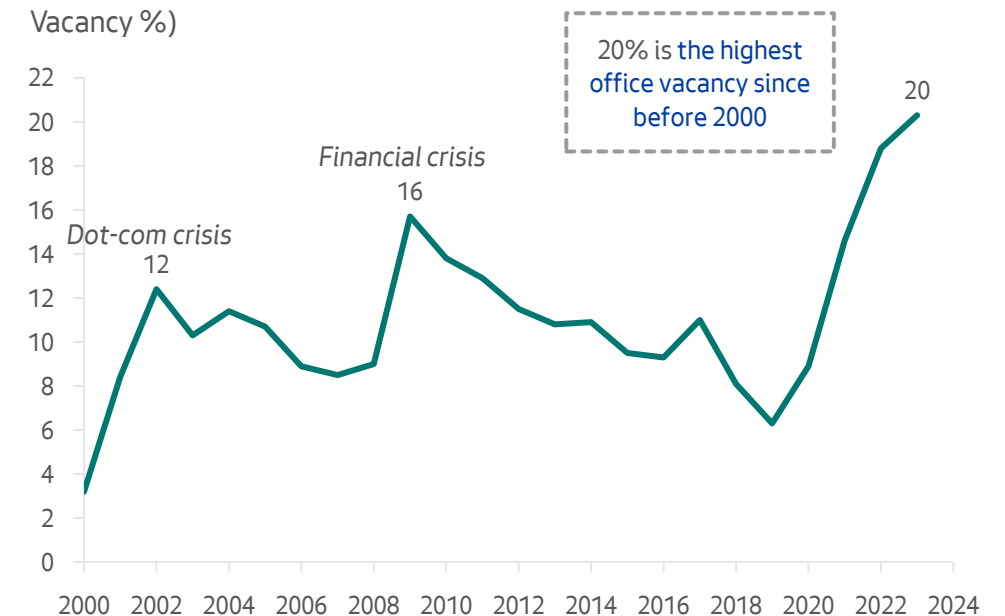
Current office vacancy rates in Downtown area, Jan 2023 (%)

Change from 2019 (pp)



Current vacancy (20%) is the highest in recent history

Historical office vacancy rates in Downtown Seattle, 2020-2023 YTD (%)

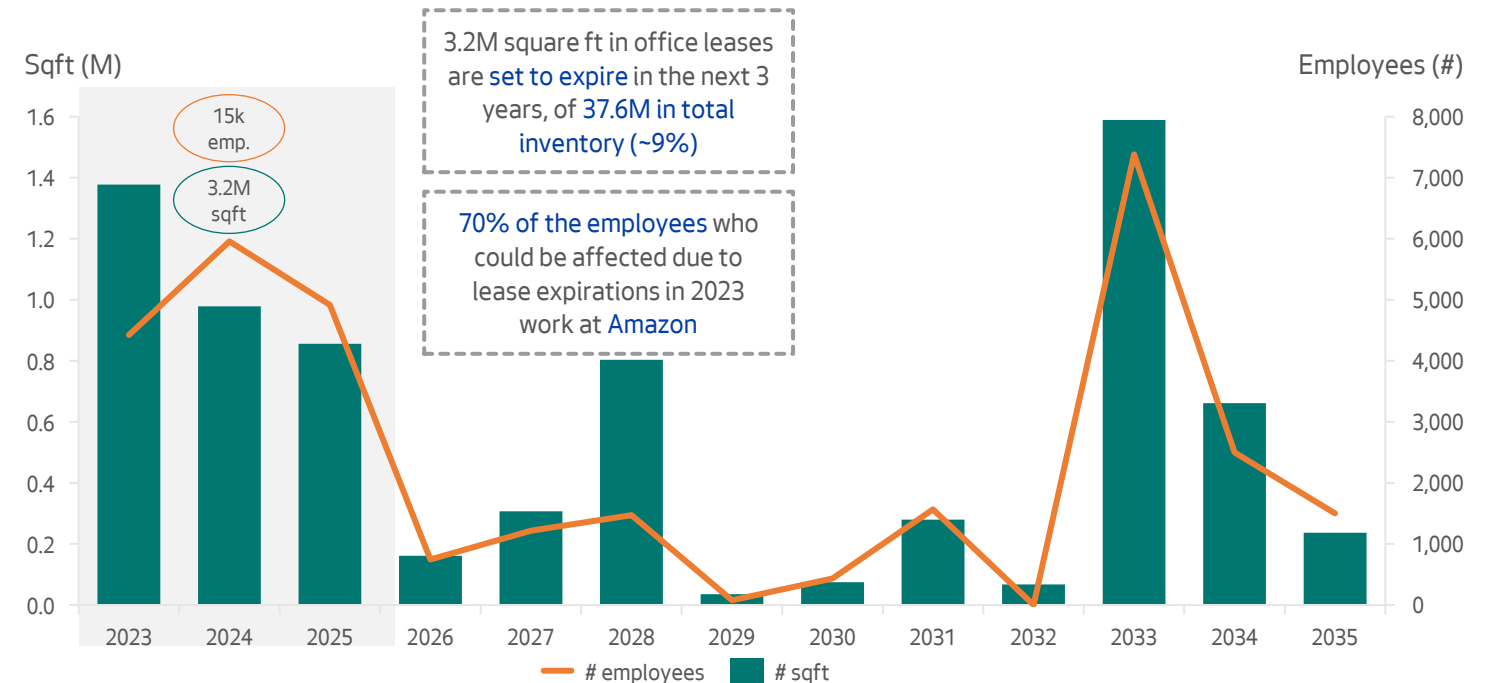




Upcoming lease expirations **signal the importance of near-term action** as businesses reevaluate their Downtown footprint

Leases covering 9% of office space in the retail core will expire in the next 3 years - within the near-term impact horizon of Downtown

sqft (M) and # employees on leases expiring each year



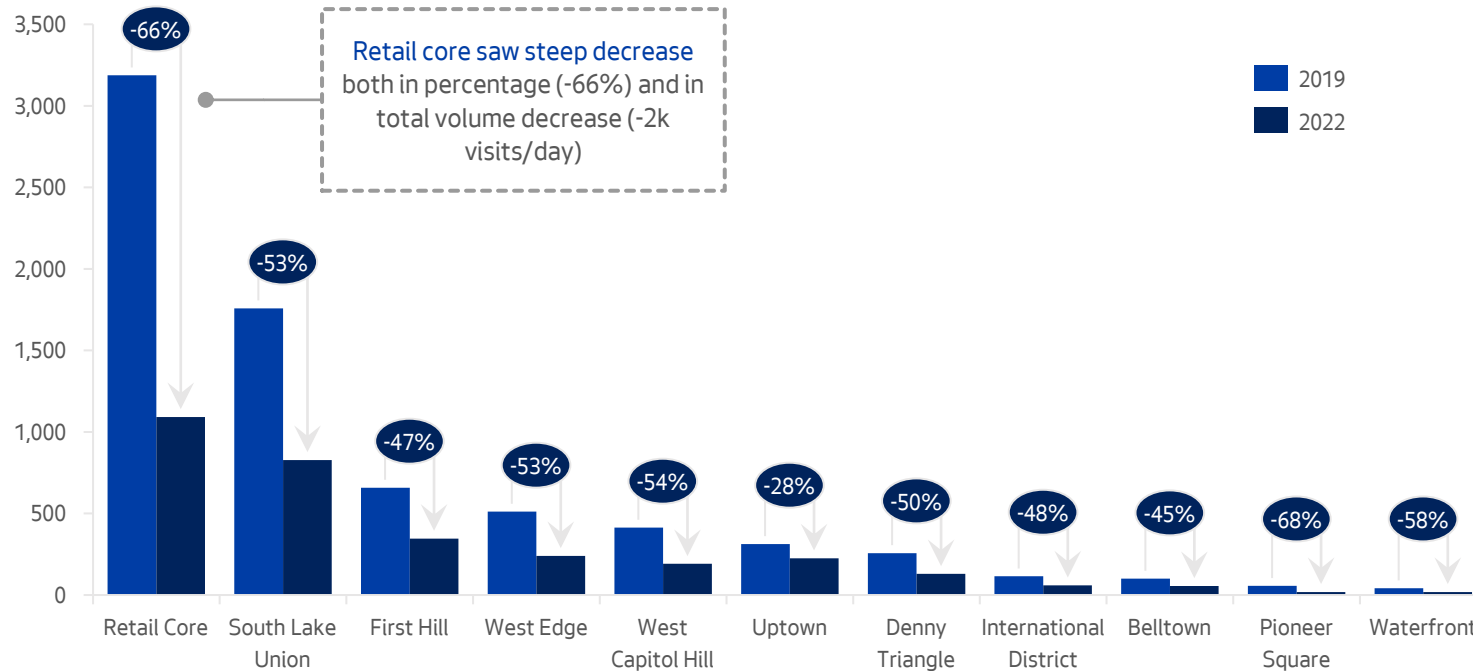
Source: BCG Analysis, CoStar
BCG analysis: March 2023



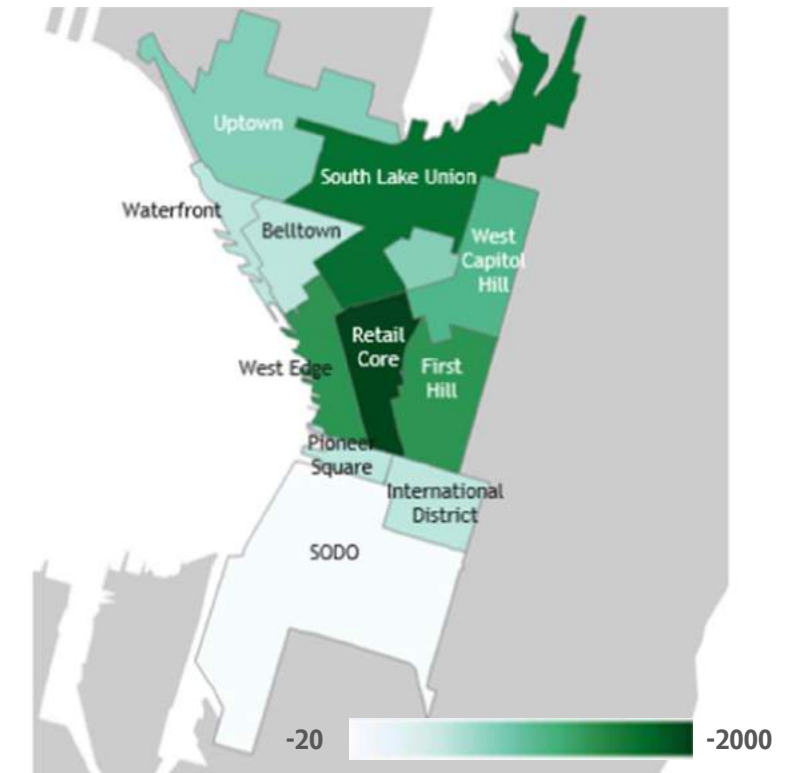
Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods saw significant declines in retail foot traffic, with sharpest decrease in the retail core

Decline in retail footfall has been more significant in the retail core than any other nearby neighborhood

Average daily retail visits¹ by neighborhood, Q4 2022 vs. Q4 2019



Change in average daily visits, Q4 2022 vs Q4 2019



1. Unique visits as measured by mobile data of visitors to sample of 324 retail locations
Source: BCG Analysis, Unacast
BCG analysis: March 2023



Retail

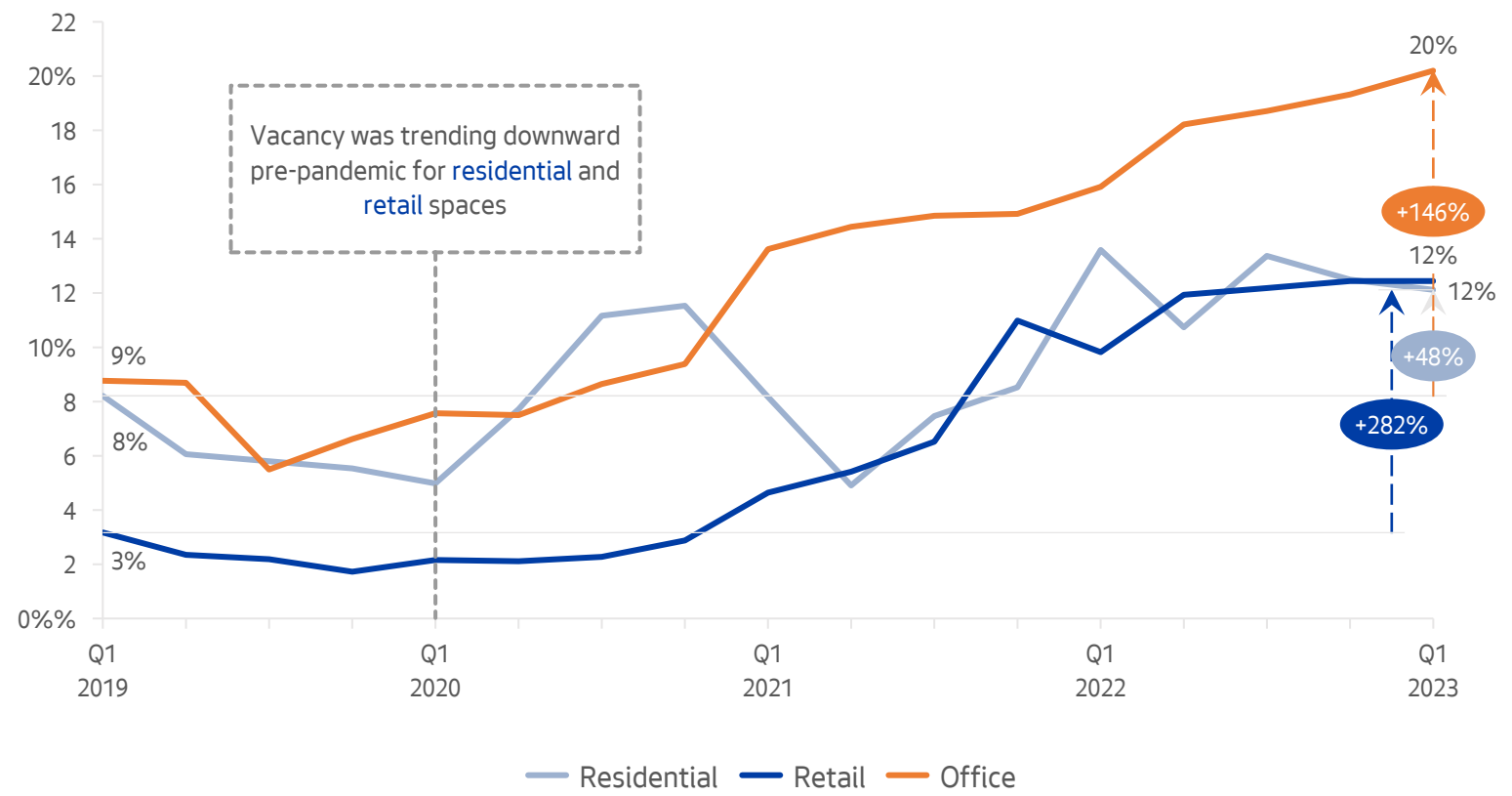
Retail vacancies are their highest since before 2000 (12%), and new business openings are at historic lows (down 69% from 2019), but opportunity remains to reinvigorate and reimagine brick-and-mortar presence Downtown.



Vacancy has increased significantly across all space types, with highest increase among retail spaces

Vacancy rates show similar upward trend across office, retail, and residential spaces

Retail core vacancy rate over time by type of space (%)



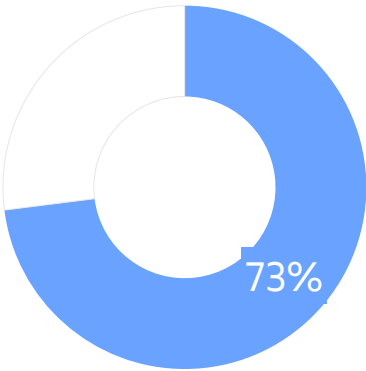
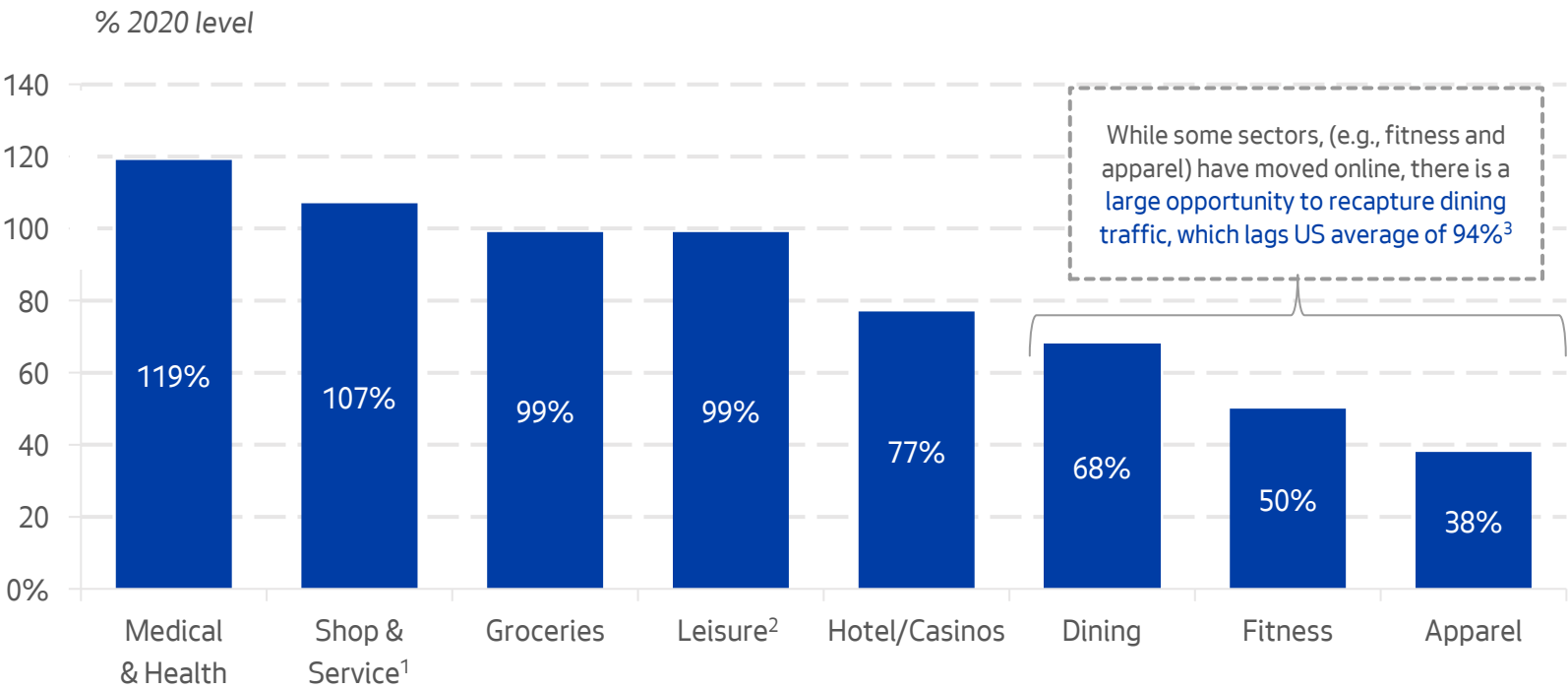
Source: BCG Analysis, CoStar
BCG analysis: March 2023

Retail foot traffic Downtown has only recovered in two sectors; dining, fitness, and apparel still lag significantly behind Jan 2020 levels

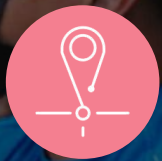
Medical and Shop & Service categories have recovered the most foot traffic, while apparel, fitness, and dining the least

Downtown retail foot traffic recovery as a % of Jan 2020 levels, by category, as of Jan 2023

Overall Downtown retail foot traffic recovery as a % of January 2020 levels



1. Shops and Service includes businesses such as gas stations, dollar stores, banks, and car shops; 2. Leisure includes attractions, bars & pubs, nature & landmarks, stadiums & event halls, and theaters & music venues; 3. OpenTable State of the Industry, 2022; Note: includes sample of businesses including retail chains only
Source: BCG Analysis, Placer.ai; [OpenTable](#)
BCG analysis: March 2023



Tourism

Visitor foot traffic is down as much as 65% at Downtown attractions, but cruise passengers have rebounded above pre-pandemic levels

Downtown is home to 12 of the top 20 Seattle attractions, which saw 25% fewer daily visitors in 2022 than in 2019¹

Top Seattle attractions as listed in the “Top Things to Do” in Seattle by TripAdvisor



Foot traffic down 11 to 65% in 2022 vs 2019 across top tourist locations Downtown, except for T-Mobile Park (Playoffs)
Comparison of annual visits²

Trip Advisor Attraction (by largest 2019 foot traffic)		2019 daily foot traffic	2022 daily foot traffic	% Change
3	Pike Place Market	20,274	14,795	-25%
20	Seattle Center ³	8,493	6,301	-26%
7	T-Mobile Park	7,397	7,945	7%
4	Space Needle	4,932	4,384	-11%
6	Washington State Ferries	4,658	2,408	-48%
17	Seattle Aquarium	2,740	2,266	-17%
1	Chihuly Garden and Glass	2,616	1,821	-30%
8	Sky View Observatory	2,470	853	-65%
10	Museum of Pop Culture	2,082	1,568	-25%
18	Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park	1,522	945	-38%
15	Seattle Public Library	1,192	511	-57%
13	Museum of History & Industry	484	424	-13%
Attraction Total		58,860	44,221	-25% (14,639)

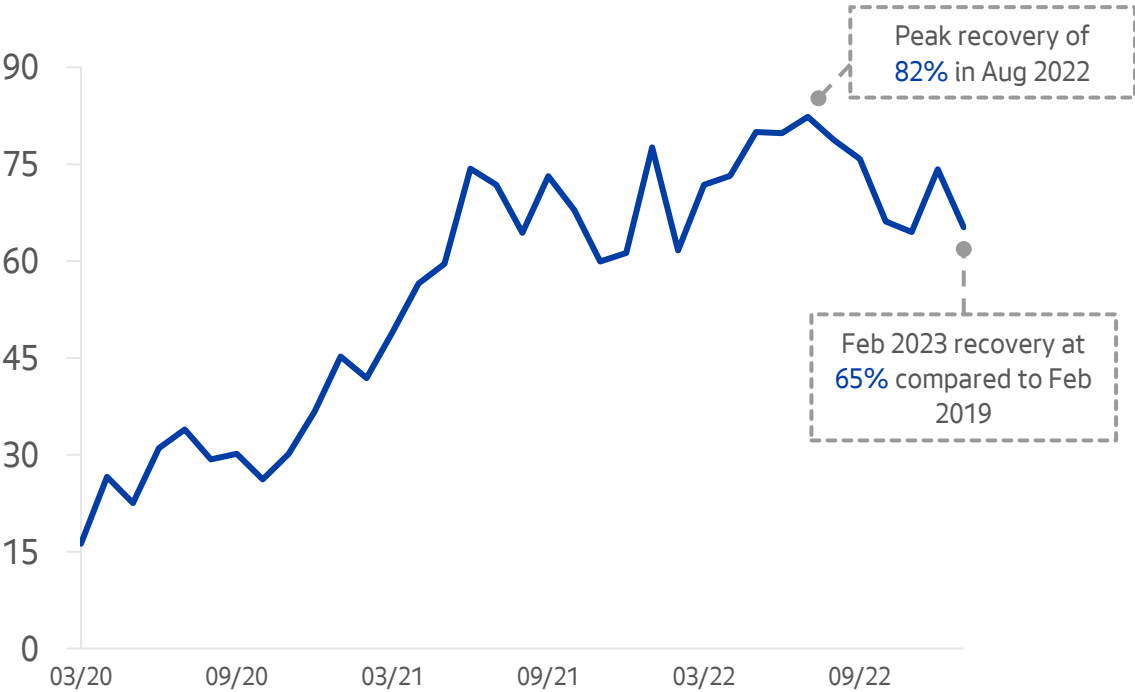
Mariners' playoffs!

1. Defined by [TripAdvisor](#); 2. Visit data based on exact location, with exception of Washington State Ferries, Museum of History & Industry, and Seattle Center; for these 3 sites, visits within a 250-ft radius surrounding area were included; 3. Seattle Center data does not include Climate Pledge Arena
Source: BCG Analysis, Placer.ai; TripAdvisor
BCG analysis: March 2023

Visitor traffic is rebounding, but has not yet hit pre-pandemic levels month-over-month, with major tourist sites still down

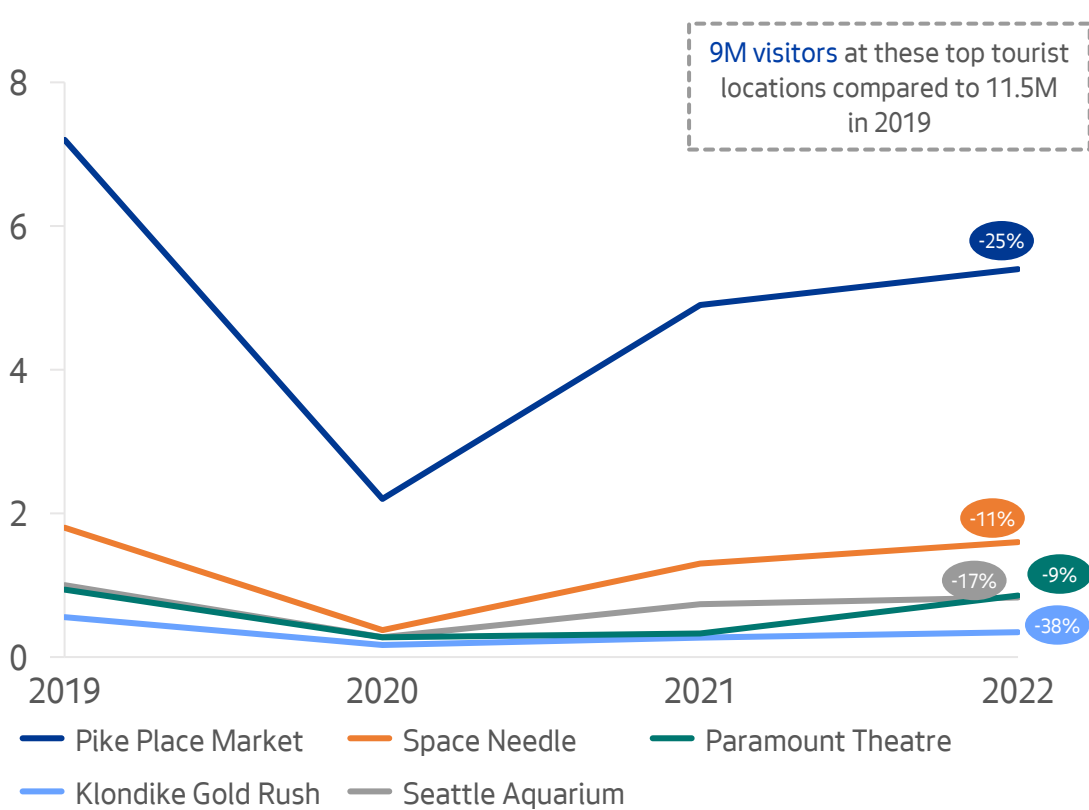
Despite strong recovery in summer 2022, overall visitor foot traffic¹ has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels²

Visitor foot traffic as a % of same month in 2019



Visits to popular Seattle tourist attractions across Downtown are increasing but have yet to fully recover

Annual visits (M) and percent change from 2019-2022



1. Visitor includes residents visiting to Downtown and tourists
 Source: BCG Analysis, Placer.ai
 BCG analysis: March 2023



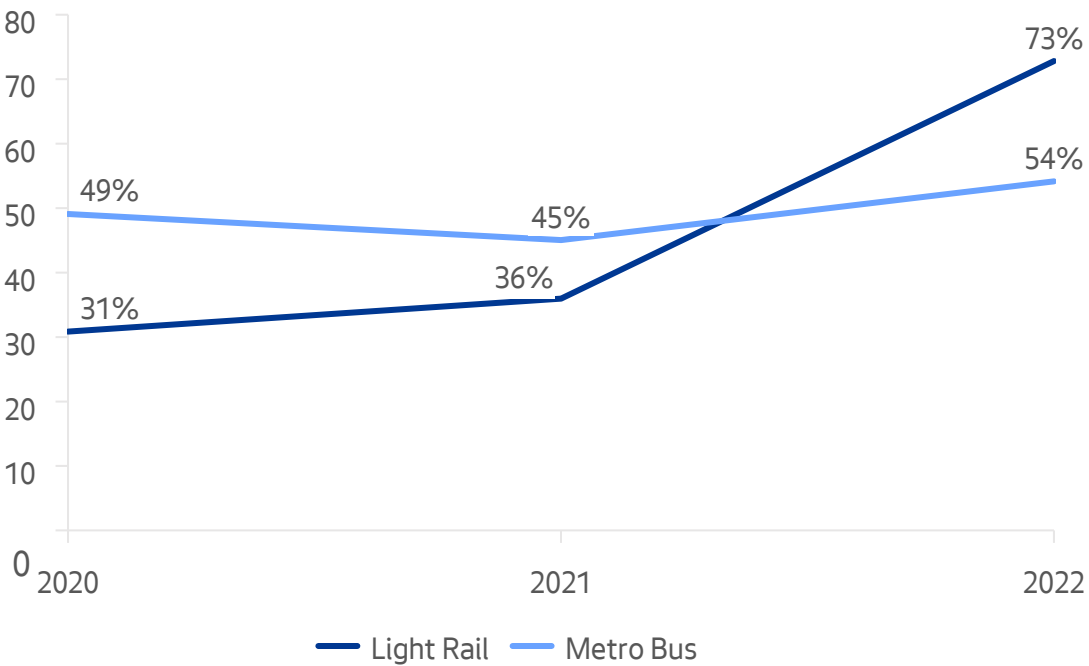
Transit

Transit to Downtown is down across major modes of transportation, except for weekend Link usage which is above 2019 levels at some Downtown stops

Downtown Metro and Link ridership remains down, as fewer Seattleites take public transit to commute post-pandemic

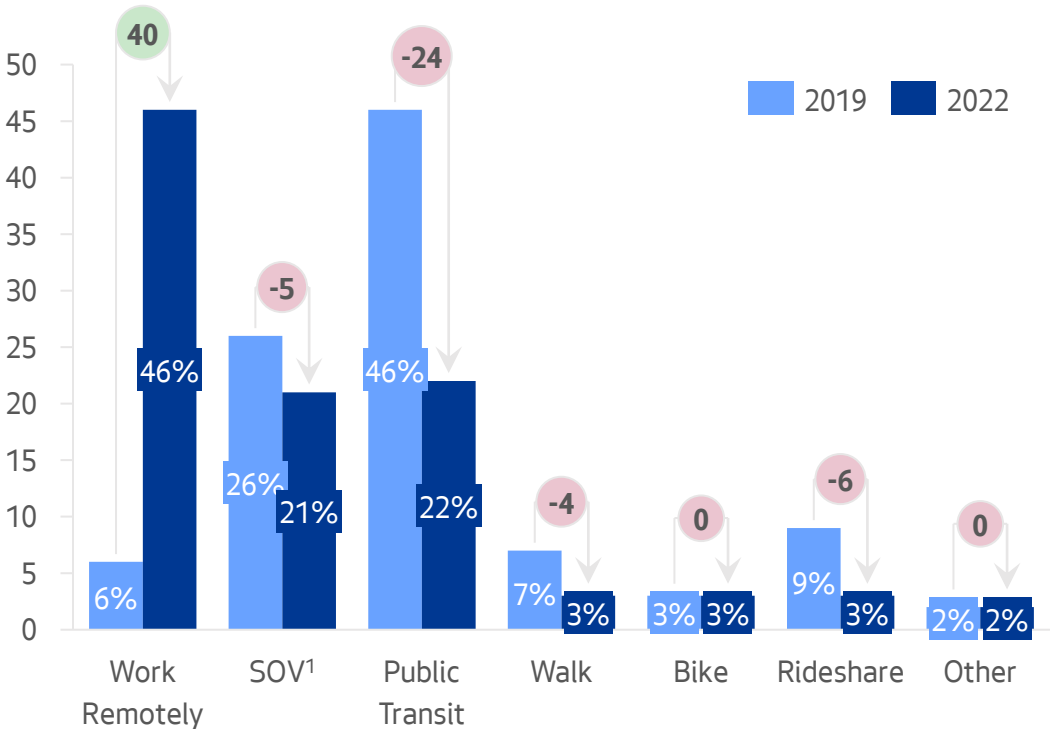
Rapid Ride ridership is 54% of 2019 levels, compared to 73% for Downtown Link ridership

Downtown boardings (Link) & Rapid Ride ridership as a % of 2019 volumes



In shift to remote work, public transit saw greatest commute share decline

Share of commuters by mode, 2019 vs 2021 (pp)



1. Single occupancy vehicle

Note: Metro bus data is for annual boardings on the Express C, D, and E lines which run to/through Downtown; light rail data includes annual boardings for the following Downtown stops: Sodo, Stadium, International District, Pioneer Square, University Street, Westlake, Capitol Hill

Source: BCG Analysis, APTA; Sound Transit, King County Metro; [Seattle Transit Blog](#); [Commute Data and Mobility Innovation Center](#)

BCG analysis: March 2023



Acknowledgments

Project Partners

Seattle's Downtown Plan was created through a collaborative process with Seattle City Departments, Community Partners, and a group of consulting partners who helped pull all the input together. Thank you to everyone who participated in varying ways and responded to the survey.

City Partners

- Mayor's Office
- City Budget Office
- Office of Arts and Culture
- Department of Neighborhoods
- Department of Construction and Inspections
- Human Service Department
- Office of Economic Development
- Office of Housing
- Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs
- Office of Sustainability and Environment
- Office of the Waterfront and Civic Projects
- Office of Planning and Community Development
- Parks and Recreation
- Seattle Center
- Seattle Department of Transportation
- Seattle Fire Department
- Seattle Police Department

Consulting & Creative Partners

- Avalanche Insights
- Boston Consulting Group
- Gaurab Bansal
- Kinetic West
- Milli Agency
- Monument Advocacy
- Olson Kundig

Community Stakeholders

2026 World Cup Organizing Committee
Alliance for Pioneer Square
Amazon
Belltown United
Board of Parks and Recreation
Building Owners and Managers Association
Business Impact NW
Challenge Seattle
CID Business Improvement Area
Classical KING FM
Climate Solutions
Civic Ventures
Community Roots Housing
Commute Seattle
Condo Connection
Dick's Drive In Restaurant
Downtown Transportation Alliance
Downtown Seattle Association
Downtown Works
Equitable Recovery and Reconciliation Alliance
Freeway Park Association
Friends of Waterfront Seattle
Gourmondo

HistoryLink
InterimCDA
MLK Labor
National Association for Industrial and Office Parks
Nordstrom
Parking and Access Review Committee
Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority
Pioneer Square Labs
Port of Seattle
Real Retail
River Seattle
Seattle Chinatown-International District
Preservation and Development Authority
Seattle Colleges
Seattle Convention Center
Seattle Kraken
Seattle Mariners
Seattle Metro Chamber
Seattle Music Commission
Seattle Neighborhood Greenways
Seattle Public Library
Seattle Restaurant Alliance

Seattle Sports Commission
Seattle Streetcar Coalition
Seattle Symphony
Seattle University
SODO Business Improvement Area
Starbucks
Tableau
Tabor 100
TASWIRA
Town Hall
Transportation Choices Coalition
University of Washington
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Urban Renaissance Group
Visit Seattle
Vulcan Real Estate
WA Technology Industry Association
Washington Roundtable
Washington State University
Wing Luke Museum

**...And the many other community organizations
and residents who participated in our surveys
and listening sessions**

Existing and in-progress plans reviewed

[Imagine Greater Downtown](#) (2019)

[Northeast Pioneer Square Framework Plan](#) (2022)

[Historic South Downtown Community Priorities Study](#) (2019)

[Jackson Hub Concept Plan](#) (2019)

[Chinatown-International District Neighborhood Strategic Plan](#) (2022-2032)

[Vision for Maynard Alley](#) (2019)

[Eval of 2 CID Parks: Donnie Chin International Children's Park & Hing Hay Park](#) (2019)

[Little Saigon 2030 Action Plan](#) (2022)

Belltown United projects

[Pike Place Master Plan](#) (In development)

[Stadium District Proposal](#) (2018/19)

King County Civic Campus Planning (In development)

City of Seattle One Seattle Comprehensive Plan (In development)