



# Virginia Main Street Transformation

## *Main Street Buena Vista*

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Facilitated by Main Street America

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## About Main Street America

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Main Street America leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. For more than 40 years, Main Street America has provided a practical, adaptable, and impactful framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization through the Main Street Approach™. Our network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Since 1980, communities participating in the program have generated more than \$101.58 billion in new public and private investment, generated 168,693 net new businesses and 746,897 net new jobs, rehabilitated more than 325,119 buildings, and levered over 33.7 million volunteer hours. Main Street America is a nonprofit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, visit [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

## About the Main Street Approach

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The Main Street Approach™ is Main Street America’s framework for community revitalization. Centered around Four Points (see below), the Approach offers community-based revitalization initiatives with a strategic, adaptable framework for downtown transformation that is easily tailored to local conditions. The Main Street Approach underwent a refresh in 2015 to become more responsive to economic context, strategy-driven, and outcome-oriented.



Every community has a unique set of place-based assets, anchors, and consumer markets that contribute to a healthy business district. Leveraging those assets through a targeted economic development strategy requires a thorough understanding of the marketplace. One of the best ways to help retain existing businesses and recruit new ones is to prepare information about your existing customer base and better understand potential new customer segments that could be served by your

business district. Your local commercial revitalization program provides an important benefit by developing a comprehensive analysis of the district market that aligns community vision and consumer data with strategies that drive the organization’s revitalization programming. Through the Main Street Approach, we work together with organization leaders to understand market data and develop comprehensive strategies to deliver comprehensive Main Street transformation. This approach accomplishes several goals:

- Builds local knowledge and understanding of your district’s economy to create a foundation for successful revitalization;
- Identifies current strengths of the business mix and existing business clusters;
- Supplies relevant consumer data to the revitalization program so it can help existing businesses become stronger;
- Identifies opportunities for future business attraction and business cluster expansion; and
- Builds a strategic framework for niche development, including real estate development, business development, promotions, marketing, branding, etc.

This philosophy is encompassed by the Main Street Approach Refresh. At the core of the new Main Street Approach are economically grounded “Transformation Strategies.” These Strategies articulate a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing a downtown or commercial district’s economy. They are informed by a solid understanding of local and regional market data and sustained and inclusive community engagement. Most activities within an organization’s annual workplan as part of the Main Street Approach should then be guided by Transformation Strategies and aligned with a direction and outcome. As part of our technical assistance, and to help make the new format easier to adopt, the National Main Street Center developed nearly 20 “off-the-shelf” strategies, known as Catalyst Strategies, that can be employed in a range of conditions across a variety of communities. These are, essentially, ready-made Transformation Strategies.



## About Virginia Main Street

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Since 1985, the Virginia Main Street (VMS) program has been helping to pave the way for successful and enduring community revitalization driven by the National Main Street Center's (NMSC) Main Street Approach. Currently housed under the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) Community Vitality Office (CVO), VMS integrates seamlessly with the greater work of the agency as it supports and promotes healthy, vibrant and sustaining downtowns and business districts across the Commonwealth. As a Main Street America State Coordinating Program, VMS offers a range of services and assistance to communities interested in revitalizing their historic commercial districts.

While the program was designed to address the need for revitalization and on-going management of smaller to mid-sized downtowns, aspects of the Main Street Approach may be applied successfully in other commercial settings.

The Main Street Approach provides a flexible framework that puts the traditional assets of downtown, such as unique architecture and locally-owned businesses, to work as a catalyst for economic growth and community pride. Like thousands of communities across the country, VMS communities have successfully used the time-tested Main Street Approach and embraced a comprehensive, incremental approach to revitalization to address the complex and changing issues facing their downtown business environment and stimulate long-term economic growth and pride in the traditional community center.

- From 1985 to 2022, the VMS program has created 7,955 businesses; 26,483 jobs; and generated more than \$3.1 billion in public and private investment in Virginia.
- In 2022 alone, VMS designated communities reported:
  - Over \$49 million in privately funded improvements to downtown historic buildings;
  - Over \$49 million in public improvements to help encourage private investment in downtowns;
  - More than 241 unique businesses created, expanded or retained in historic commercial districts, and;
  - More than 825 jobs created or retained for local community members seeking employment.

## Purpose of Transformation Strategy Visit

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A Transformation Strategy service is provided by the statewide Main Street coordinating program in partnership with Main Street America. The purpose is to give the local Executive Director, Board Members, committees, city leaders, and interested parties an opportunity to:

- (a) Digest community wide survey results
- (b) Understand current market data and trends through analysis
- (c) Gather feedback through focus groups of organization leaders, partners and stakeholders
- (d) Utilize all information collected to develop a strategy or strategies to guide program work

## Visit Overview

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Virginia Main Street in partnership with Main Street America met with Main Street Buena Vista (MSBV) staff, board, partners and stakeholders as a part of their overall downtown strategic planning. MSBV distributed a community-wide survey ahead of the visit, which was reviewed with staff and board members. In addition, previous asset mapping, work from home pilot information, as well as existing business mix list, Rockbridge Outdoors plan and Town Square Design were utilized and reviewed.

Onsite interviews were conducted with staff, board, committee members, city leadership, elected officials, property and business owners. The purpose of the onsite interviews was to gather input to understand current perceptions of, as well as future vision for the district.

Day one of the visits consisted of staff and board members reviewing the survey and market data, a community tour and focus group meetings. The day ended with a review of recommendations and observations and working through some examples of implementing and aligning work plans with overall community goals and initiatives.

## Participants

### **Business**

Madeline Wells and Andrew – The Beeve  
Ruthie Lawhorne – Vinyl Cuts  
Bobby Slagle – Rockbridge Recovery  
Johanna Shiraki – Scattered Sunshine Massage and White Tree Inn  
Brent Styler – Coiner Country Store  
Mel Henson – City Council  
Greg Johnson – Straws

### **City**

Jessi Mays – Rockbridge Area Health Center  
Tom Roberts – Planning and Zoning  
Wayne Handley – Chief of Police  
Brent Styler  
Mel Henson

### **Community**

Erin Terapane – Chamber of Commerce  
Josh Elrod – Rotary Club  
Brent Styler  
Mel Henson  
Ben Fly – SVU Student Government  
Jennifer Moore – SVU Swimming  
Bobby Slagle – Rockbridge Recovery

# Key Observations

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## Overall

- + There is a strong sense of pride and community engagement in Buena Vista, with a desire to attract and retain residents who appreciate the town's unique qualities.
- + Buena Vista is experiencing growth, but there is a need to balance change and preserve the town's character while encouraging new businesses and residents.
- + There is a tension between established residents and newcomers, with some fearing changes in the community. Addressing this fear and promoting the benefits of growth are essential.
- + Initiatives like The Gauntlet and other supportive programs contribute to the growth of small businesses and the local economy.

## Organization

- + Partnerships between key stakeholders highlight energy downtown and note the successful engagement between the school and town.
- + Leaders who call Buena Vista home enjoy recruiting people to live in Buena Vista by emphasizing the quality of life, outdoor activities, and sense of community.
- + There is a need for resources to initiate and support volunteer development.

## Economic Vitality

- + Small business owners express pride in owning their buildings, demonstrating a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the community.
- + Buena Vista has a supportive city and programs instrumental in helping small businesses and entrepreneurs start and grow with an understanding that entrepreneurs will help drive economic growth.
- + Residents are attracted to Buena Vista due to the cost of living, quality of life, and access to outdoor recreation, which can potentially attract new residents.
- + There are incentives for small businesses like technology zones, low-interest loans, and real estate tax rebates to promote business growth.
- + Small businesses seek more resources to enhance business performance.
- + Overall sentiment is to aim to balance the commercial offerings with retail and restaurants to support a more diverse population.

## Design

- + Small businesses emphasize the need for wayfinding and signage to guide people to less-known parts of the overall district.
- + Participants suggest continuing to develop a city center, or gathering place for additional programming, making downtown livelier.
- + The walkability of the area and the presence of community amenities and outdoor recreational spaces are valued by community members.

## Promotion

- + Participants acknowledge the success of events such as the Farmer's Market and small businesses encouraging a place to gather for all ages, with increased evening activity and community engagement.
- + Suggestions include promoting tourism with an emphasis on the town's offerings and "secrets."



## How to Use This Report

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Main Street America's Transformation Strategy Report aims to guide the reader through our Four-Point Approach. It is more responsive to the economic context, community input, and how outcomes are directly measurable to revitalizing the district. One of the best ways to understand how your district is performing, help retain existing businesses, and recruit new businesses is by preparing information about the specific customer base that is currently being served and who could be served by the downtown main street district. This report looks at the following factors that help the main street program develop a comprehensive analysis of the downtown that aligns vision and consumer data with catalyst strategies that drive revitalization programming.

- Create a foundation for successful revitalization by tapping into local knowledge to understand the district's economy;
- Identify current strengths of the business mix with existing business clusters;
- Supply relevant and up-to-date consumer data to the local revitalization organization so it can help existing businesses become stronger;
- Identify opportunities for future business attraction, district programming, and business cluster expansion;
- Build a strategic framework for market niche development, including real estate development, business development, promotions, marketing and branding, etc.

The transformation strategy can serve as the foundation of the revitalization program's work. Most activities in the local revitalization program should be guided by the recommended transformation strategy and aligned around an agreed direction and outcome.

Please remember the following:

- Stay on the same page
  - As new partners and volunteers come onboard, communicate how you got here.
- Understand the market
  - As the local revitalization program pursue new businesses and customer segments, refer to the market data.
- Vet new project ideas
  - Do they fit/reinforce identified transformation strategy?
- Inspire
  - Use this report and previous reports, case studies, and best practices to inspire when you get stuck!

## Community Survey Results

A community-wide survey was employed to gather input from residents, businesses, key stakeholders, and other interested parties. Main Street Buena Vista with the help of various partners, received 169 responses from visitors, residents, employees, as well as business and property owners. Questions were geared toward surfacing attitudes about the downtown, challenges and opportunities the downtown is facing, desired business types and attitudes and perceptions about the Main Street program. The following represents an analysis of those responses. The presentation with each survey response is provided with this report.

### Why a survey?

**Community Survey** | Open to anyone who might live, work, or visit downtown Buena Vista. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information, seek knowledge people possess about the district, understand community attitudes towards the district, find out shopping preferences, and learn when, why, and how often people visit the district.

### The following questions are regarding participant demographic information and relationship to Downtown Buena Vista.

What is your relationship to Downtown Buena Vista?

1. **62% I visit Downtown BV regularly**
2. 35% I live in Downtown BV

How long have you been a member of this community?

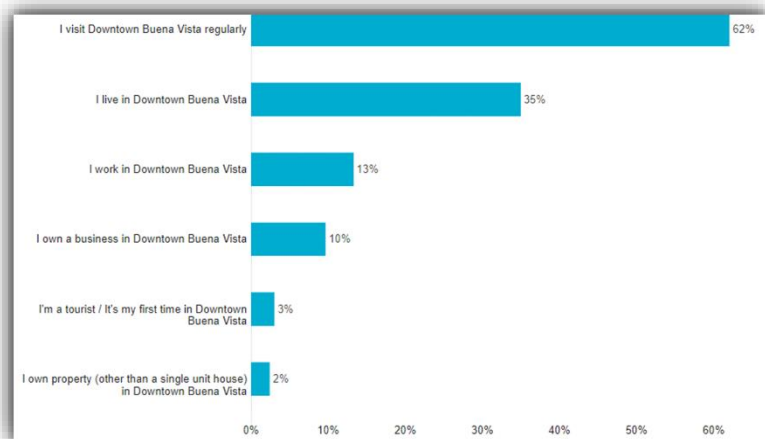
1. **41% responded more than 10 years**
2. 35% responded 1-5 years

How frequently do you visit Downtown Buena Vista?

1. **41% responded weekly**
2. 30% responded daily

How old are you?

1. **24% responded 18-24**
2. **24% responded 25-34**
3. 15% responded 35-44
4. 15% responded 45-54



**Analysis** | A significant portion of respondents (62%) indicated they visit Downtown BV regularly. Among those who regularly visit, 41% have been members of the community for more than 10 years. This suggests that many long-term residents are actively engaged with Downtown. Among respondents, 41% reported visiting Downtown weekly, and 30% visit daily. These high-frequency visitors are likely more engaged in the community and may include both long-term and more recent residents. The age distribution shows a relatively even spread showing downtown's appeal to a diverse range of residents.

**The following questions were directed specifically to those who identified as business owners.**

As a business owner in Downtown Buena Vista: What types of support do you receive from your local Main Street program? Which of the following factors concern you? Of the factors you selected, which is your top concern?

**Analysis |** The survey asked business owners about the types of support they receive from Main Street Buena Vista. Among the responses, 33% of business owners mentioned Marketing of Downtown Buena Vista and its businesses as a type of support they receive. This indicates that marketing assistance is perceived positively by a significant portion of business owners.

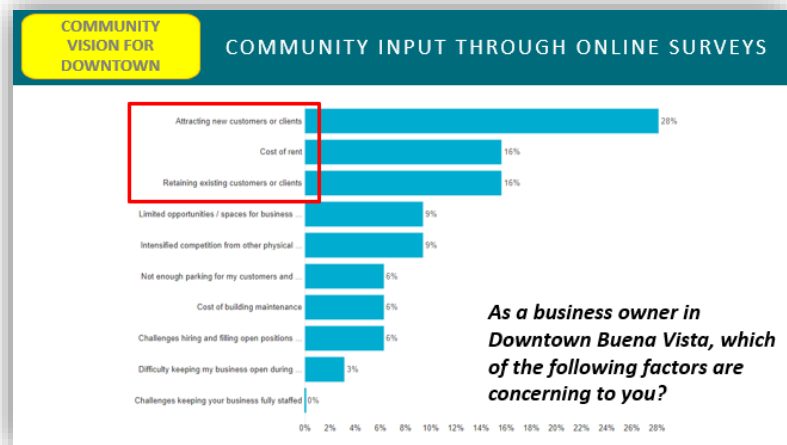
24% of respondents also indicated that they receive Networking opportunities as support from Main Street Buena Vista. This demonstrates that Main Street Buena Vista is actively involved in facilitating connections among business owners. The 29% who mentioned, they do not receive support from Main Street Buena Vista. Some businesses genuinely feel they do not feel they receive support or may not be aware of available support.

As it pertains to factors concerning business owners, the top concerns include:

1. **45% Attracting new customers of clients**
2. 18% Cost of Rent

Attracting new customers is a concerning factor for business owners at 28% along with cost of rent and retaining existing customers or clients, both responses at 16%. The survey then inquired about the top concern among the factors chosen, and the majority (45%) of respondents selected Attracting new customers or clients as their primary concern with cost of rent falling to 18% of responses.

In summary, the data indicates that business owners in Downtown Buena Vista primarily value marketing and networking support from Main Street Buena Vista. Their top concern as business owners is related to attracting new customers or clients. This suggests a desire for more assistance in this area to address their primary concern and improve business sustainability and growth. The concerns related to rent costs, limited expansion opportunities, and increased competition are also significant, but attracting new customers remains the most pressing issue for these business owners.

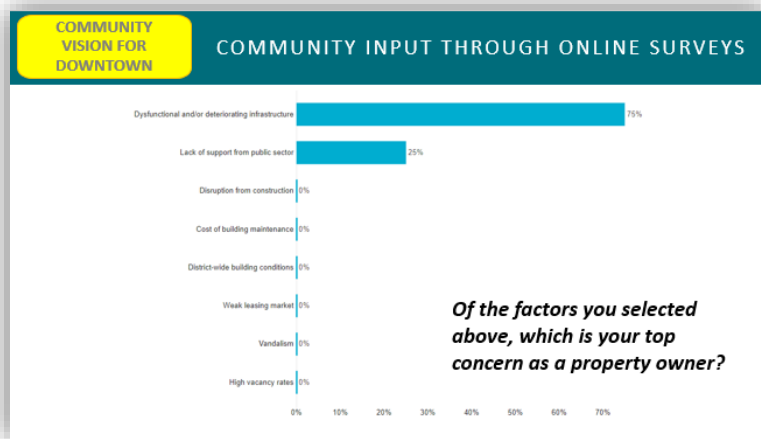


## The following questions were directed specifically to those who identified as property owners.

As a property owner in Downtown Buena Vista: What types of support do you receive from your local Main Street program? Which of the following factors concern you? Of the factors you selected, which is your top concern?

**Analysis** | Property owners were asked about the types of support they receive from Main Street Buena Vista. Surprisingly, the responses show a three-way split among property owners, with 33% each for the following: "N/A I do not receive support from Main Street Buena Vista", "District beautification and cleanup", and "Insight into upcoming developments".

Property owners were also asked about their concerns. The top concern, cited by 50% of respondents, is Dysfunctional and/or deteriorative infrastructure suggesting that a majority of property owners are worried about the condition of the infrastructure in the district. Other concerns include "District-wide building condition" (25%), "Lack of support from the public sector" (13%), and the "Cost of building maintenance" (13%).



As it pertains to factors concerning property owners top responses include:

- 1. 75% Dysfunctional and/or deteriorative infrastructure**
- 2. 25% Lack of support from the public sector**

The data suggests that property owners in Downtown Buena Vista may have concerns about infrastructure and building

conditions that aren't directly addressed by the support they receive from Main Street Buena Vista.

While some property owners do receive support related to district beautification and development insights, a substantial portion still feel they are not benefiting from this support. Therefore, addressing the concerns about infrastructure and building conditions could be an important focus area for local economic development efforts, potentially in collaboration with other public sector entities.



## Which of the following are issues in Downtown Buena Vista?

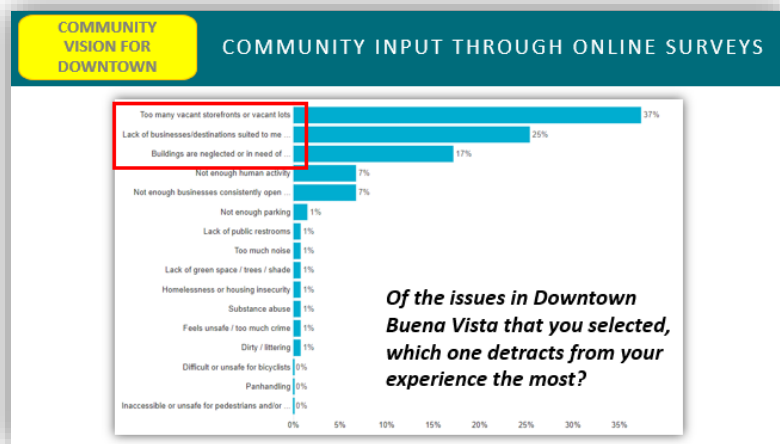
When analyzing the overall rankings, the top concerns are:

1. **20% Too many vacant storefronts or vacant lots**
2. **19% Buildings are neglected or in need of rehabilitation**
3. 15% Lack of businesses/destinations suited to me and/or my household
4. 12% Not enough human activity
5. 11% Not enough businesses consistently open when I'm out

The issues in Downtown Buena Vista identified by survey respondents encompass a variety of concerns that primarily center around the appearance, vitality, and the relationship between safety and accessibility of the area. The top responses emphasize a perceived overabundance of vacant storefronts and neglected or deteriorating buildings, which raises questions about the overall maintenance and aesthetic appeal of the downtown.

Respondents also highlighted the need for businesses and destinations that cater to their specific preferences and the importance of consistent business hours, indicating an opportunity to understand residents and consumer habits better. Other issues mentioned include concerns about available parking, green spaces, pedestrian safety, and overall accessibility for different modes of transportation. These responses reflect a range of factors that can affect the livability and attractiveness of Downtown.

Of the issues in Downtown Buena Vista that you selected, which one detracts from your experience the most?



**Analysis** | The previous question regarding issues in Downtown Buena Vista is considered. Respondents ranked the following as top issues that detract from their experience:

1. 37% Too many vacant storefronts or vacant lots
2. 25% Lack of businesses / destinations suited to me and / or my household
3. 17% Buildings are neglected or in need of rehabilitation

The responses show that the prevalent concern among respondents is the presence of too many vacant storefronts or vacant lots. This indicates that the visual and commercial appeal of the downtown area may be hindered by the high number of empty spaces. Following closely is the lack of businesses and destinations suited to the respondents' preferences. Neglected or deteriorating buildings were also noted as a significant concern by 17% of respondents. These findings underscore the importance of attracting new businesses and revitalizing empty spaces to enhance the downtown environment.



## Honorable Mentions

4. 7% Bookstore
5. 6% Casual family restaurant
6. 6% Grocery

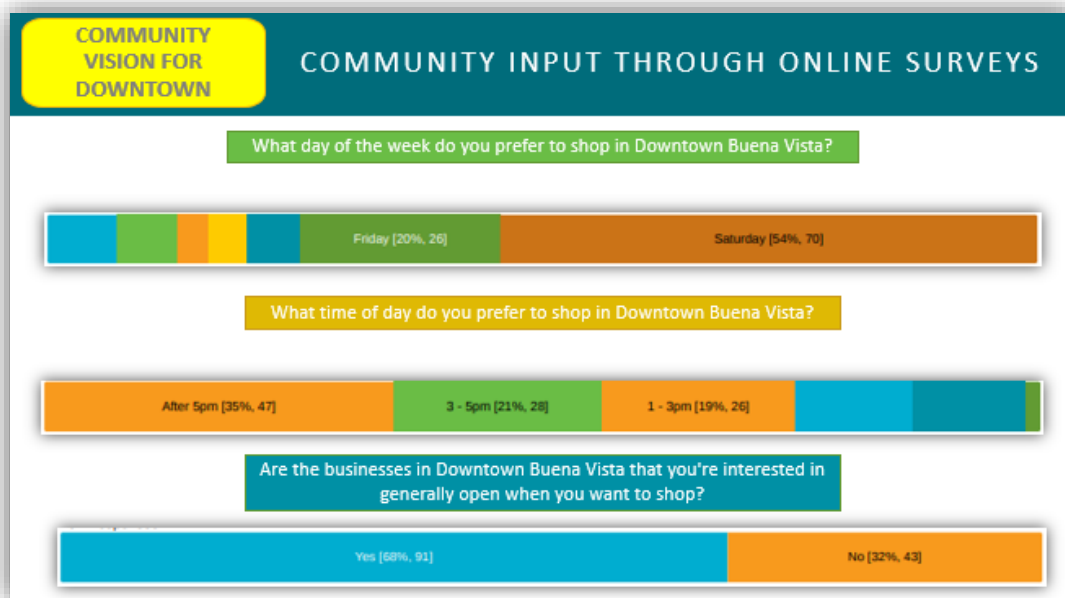
The top choices included family entertainment options and things to do, which could enhance the area's appeal as a family-friendly destination. Coffee shops or bakeries were also a popular choice, providing cozy spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy a cup of coffee and pastries.

Additionally, respondents showed an interest in arts and cultural venues, such as music, movie theaters, and art galleries, which could contribute to the town's cultural vibrancy. These preferences reflect a diverse range of interests and suggest opportunities for diversifying and enriching the local business landscape in Downtown Buena Vista.

## The following questions are regarding shopping.

If business hours weren't a barrier, what time of day would you prefer to shop in Downtown Buena Vista? What day of the week? Are the businesses you're interested in generally open when you want to shop?

**Analysis** | When analyzing the overall rankings, the preferred day for shopping in Downtown Buena Vista is Saturday at 54%, and Friday at 20%. The ideal timeframe is after 5:00 p.m. at 35%, then 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. at 21%, and 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. at 19%. Times suggests shopping in the afternoon into the early evening hours. At 68%, most respondents feel businesses they are interested in are generally open when you want to shop. An evaluation should be made on respondent shopping preferences along with the top businesses and destinations most often visited.



## The following questions are regarding housing downtown.

Would you like to see more housing available in Downtown Buena Vista?

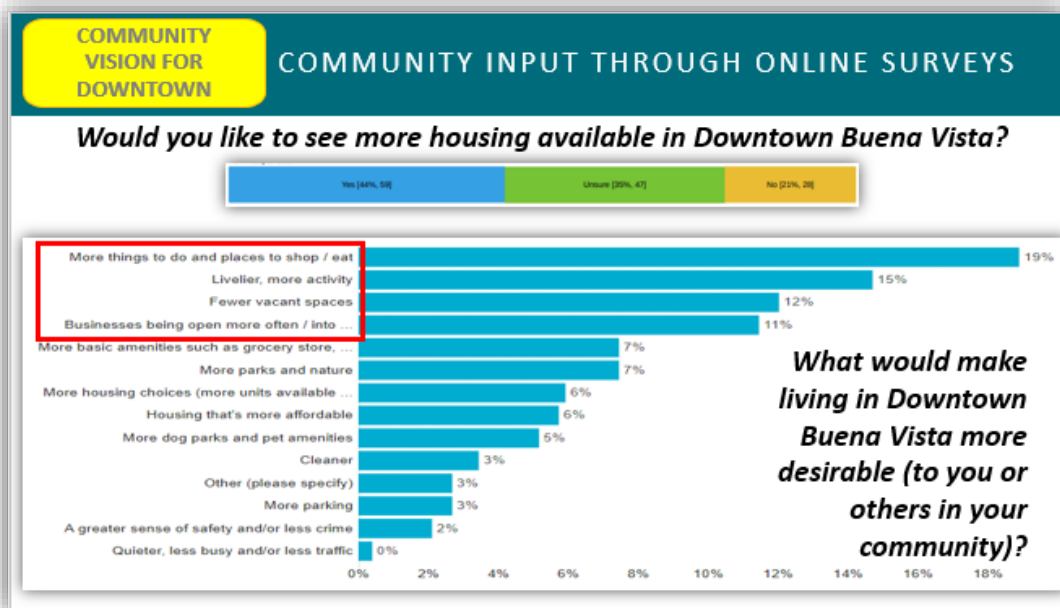
**Analysis |** A significant portion of respondents (44%) expressed a desire to see more housing available in the downtown area. It indicates potential demand for housing opportunities and could be a positive sign for local developers or investors looking to expand the housing options.

What would make living in Downtown Buena Vista more desirable (to you or others in your community)?

**Analysis |** Top inputs from community survey include

1. 19% More things to do and places to shop/eat
2. 15% Livelier, more activity
3. 12% Fewer vacant spaces
4. 11% Businesses open more often / into weekends and evenings

The responses to what would make living in Downtown Buena Vista more desirable offer valuable insights into the community's preferences. Many respondents highlighted the importance of a livelier and more active atmosphere (15%) and fewer vacant spaces (12%). These sentiments reflect the desire for a vibrant and bustling downtown area that can attract both residents and visitors. Additionally, the need for more things to do and places to shop and eat (19%) aligns with the goal of creating a more engaging and livelier downtown environment. It's also worth noting that a part of the community is interested in improved basic amenities and affordable housing, suggesting that addressing these needs could contribute to the desirability of downtown living.



## The following questions are regarding employment, volunteerism and feeling welcome in Downtown Buena Vista.

Which of the following statements below describe your current employment status? How often do you volunteer? Agree or disagree: “I personally feel welcome, comfortable, and safe in and around Downtown Buena Vista.”

**Analysis |** The majority of survey responses are employed full time at 42%. Then, being employed part time at 15%. Other responses reiterated being self employed and nearing or at retirement.

Approximately 32% of respondents indicated they volunteer weekly or monthly, showing a significant portion of the community is actively engaged in volunteer activities. This is a positive sign for community involvement and potential collaboration in downtown revitalization efforts. Encouraging volunteering can help tap into local resources and promote a sense of ownership and responsibility for the area's well-being.

The majority of respondents (88%) expressed feeling welcome, comfortable, and safe in and around Downtown Buena Vista. However, the additional comments reveal some concerns about unwelcoming businesses, blighted properties, and drug-related issues. Addressing these concerns is critical to maintain and enhance the positive perception of safety and comfort.

Are you familiar with Main Street Buena Vista? How important is Main Street Buena Vista to Downtown Buena Vista as a place to be?

**Analysis |** An overwhelming majority (95%) of the respondents are familiar with Main Street Buena Vista. This high level of awareness indicates that the organization has a notable presence and is actively engaged with the local community. This strong level of importance reflects the positive impact and value that Main Street Buena Vista brings to the downtown area.

How do you identify in terms of your race and ethnicity? Your gender?

**Analysis |** Overall, the survey respondents are predominantly White at 85% and include a higher proportion of women at 74%. However, it's important to note the survey sample does not represent the broader demographics of Buena Vista, VA. To work towards a more comprehensive reflection, based on ESRI market data, outreach towards “Black Alone” residents within the 10-20 min mark would have to be at 4.1% and 4.6% respectively and “Hispanic Origin (Any Race)” at 3.5% and 3.6% respectively.

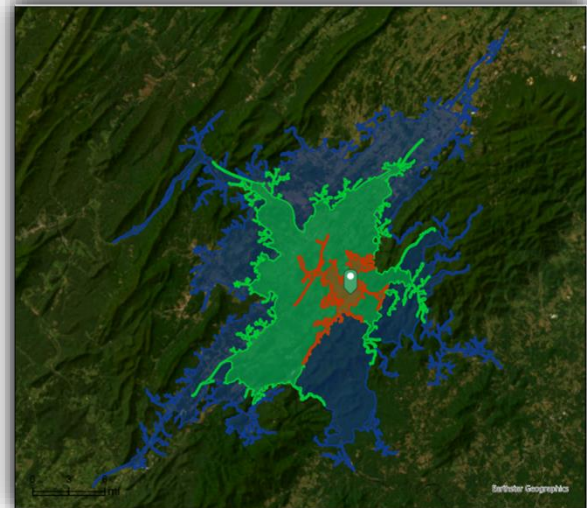
*Please refer to the ESRI Report Included containing demographic information at the 10-20 and 30-minute radii*

# Market Overview

The market overview section evaluates the market based on trying to ascertain the inherent competitive advantages of downtown Buena Vista.

Together with community input, as well as current place-based assets and anchors we can develop Transformation Strategies. The following represents summary charts of collected market data based on a series of 3 drive times (10-min., 20-min., and 30-min).

All comprehensive data is provided to the local program. The Map is where data was extracted.



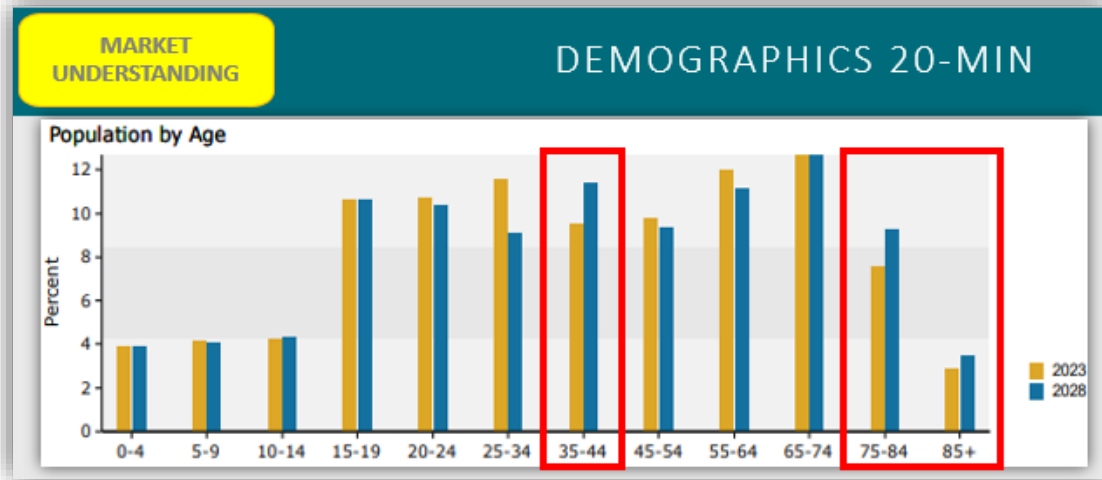
**Analysis** | The data indicates that areas closer to the city core experience lower unemployment rates. This suggests that the city center may offer more job opportunities or easier access to employment. However, despite being closer to employment opportunities, the core has a slightly lower median household income, indicating possibly service industry jobs that may not pay as highly. Higher average household sizes can also be found in the 10-minute radius, possibly reflecting the presence of families and potentially a more residential character in this zone.



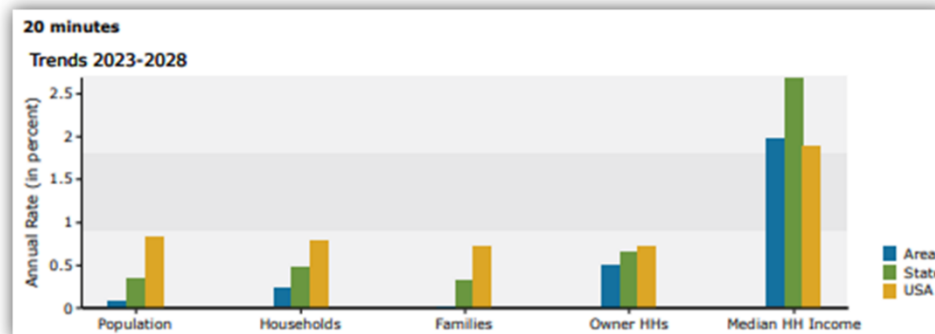
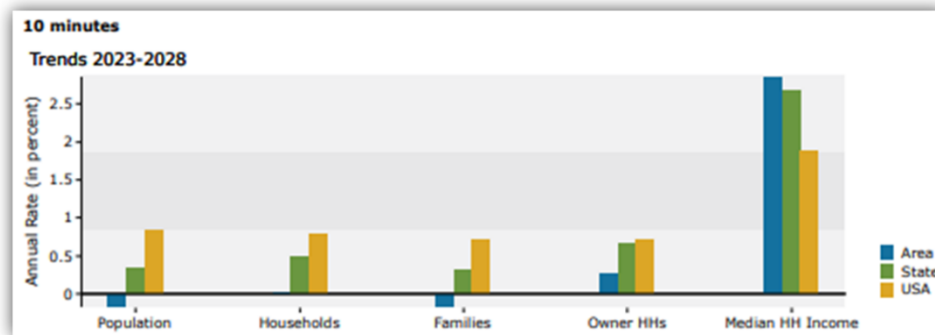
*Represented are charts from the 10-20-30-minute drive time*

**Overview Cont.** A significant portion of the population resides within a 10-minute radius of the city core with increased median household income at both the 10-minute and 20-minute radius, perhaps indicating the region attracting high-income residents.

2028 trends boast slight increases in households and owner-occupied households, as well as the largest increase in median household income. This signals potential positive growth in the residential real estate market and homeownership, which can be an attractive sign for economic development. Additionally, trends find a decrease in population and families within the 10-minute radius.



*20-minute drive time representation*



*Represented are charts from the 10 & 20-minute drive time.*

# Tapestry Segmentation

Psychographics is the study of personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles. Psychographic studies of individuals or communities can be valuable in the fields of marketing, demographics, opinion research, prediction, and social research in general.

Tapestry psychographic data helps communities and businesses understand consumer lifestyle choices, what they buy, and how they spend their free time. Tapestry classifies US residential neighborhoods into 67 unique segments based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The top psychographic profiles for Jacksonville are used to gauge possible shopping characteristics of downtown's largest potential shopping demographic. *Featured are the top segments.*

## Midlife Constants

**10 & 20-Minute Radius** | This segment is predominantly composed of seniors on the brink of retirement or already enjoying it. These residents deliberately choose to reside in smaller communities on the outskirts of central cities. Notably, this group boasts above-average median household income and net worth, positioning them comfortably above the norm in Buena Vista's demographic landscape.

Married couples dominate this segment, with 73% owning their homes, reflecting a penchant for stability and an aversion to rapid change in their neighborhoods. Their preference for a traditional way of life accentuates convenience and comfort over chasing cutting-edge trends. They're diligent about pricing without compromising quality, favoring American-made and natural products.

Their leisure activities revolve around home-based pursuits like watching movies, reading, and gardening, coupled with robust social engagement through active participation in church and community organizations. These residents play vital roles in their communities and are actively involved.

In the Buena Vista context, the Midlife Constants represent the most mature demographic, with a median age of 47. While diversity is relatively low, their financial stability places them comfortably above the city's average, underscoring their traditional and comfortable lifestyle.

Therefore, any economic development endeavors aimed at this group should emphasize practicality, community engagement, and their prudent financial behavior to strike a chord with this unique segment.

[Midlife Constants Full Profile](#)



## Small Town Sincerity

**10 & 20-Minute Radius** | The segment encompasses both young families and senior semirural households, bound together by strong community ties. Their lifestyle leans toward down-to-earth, semirural living, with convenience as a common thread uniting both young parents and senior citizens.

One key characteristic of this group is its straightforward approach to finances, preferring to pay bills in person and maintain minimal debt. They are price-conscious consumers who shop with an eye for discounts.

In terms of their neighborhood, residents primarily reside in small towns or semirural areas, often located outside metropolitan regions where around half of the residents own their homes. The segment is also community-oriented and lean more conservative, relying on traditional media sources like television and newspapers to stay informed.

In Buena Vista these residents embrace outdoor activities and stands out as the youngest in terms of median age, with lower median household incomes and net worth yet boast the highest diversity index.

### [Small Town Sincerity Full Profile](#)

## Rooted Rural

**20 & 30-Minute Radius** | This group characterized by their concentrated presence in rural and forested areas. Their lifestyle is rooted in strong community bonds, a preference for traditional values, and a practical, frugal approach to living. Residents embrace an affordable housing market.

They also enjoy outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and working in their gardens, placing a high value on self-sufficiency, DIY, and simplicity in their daily lives.

This group is practical in their shopping habits, looking for American-made and generic products and predominantly consists of married couples, often without children at home.

### [Small Town Sincerity Full Profile](#)



# Community Input | Online Surveys + Focus Groups

## Online Survey Observations

One key theme throughout the online survey is the desire for more vibrant and attractive downtown spaces. The business community is looking for improvements in marketing, promotions, and attracting new clients to support small businesses. Property owners are particularly concerned about the condition of buildings, indicating a need for interior and exterior assessments. Small business recruitment and retention, as well as consistent business hours, are other top priorities.

To coincide with overall appearance concerns, the survey also highlights a possible need for additional façade and beautification efforts along with historic preservation of existing architecture. Outdoor infrastructure, including cleanliness, greenspace, trees, and improved wayfinding, is another area of desired focus, especially geared towards outdoor spaces and a stronger connection between parks and the downtown area.

Residents also seek enhanced programming and family-friendly amenities as well as the need for more shopping options and improved housing options or updated accommodations. Respondents understand the negative impact of blighted properties on the community with a desire for the city to improve infrastructure while enforcing regulations.

Overall, the downtown community recognizes the potential of Downtown Buena Vista but seeks several key improvements to create a more welcoming, vibrant, and thriving city center.

COMMUNITY VISION FOR DOWNTOWN				COMMUNITY INPUT THROUGH ONLINE SURVEYS			
ECONOMIC VITALITY		DESIGN		PROMOTION		ORGANIZATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <b>Small Business Needs:</b> Marketing and networking. Overall knowledge of assistance.</li> <li>+ <b>Small Business Retention:</b> New clients, stand out from competition and workforce.</li> <li>+ <b>Building assessment:</b> Inventory of conditions, needs and new uses.</li> <li>+ <b>Business hours:</b> Monday consideration. Consistent and past 5:00 p.m.</li> <li>+ <b>Business Variety:</b> Consumer price point concerns. Prefer locally owned small businesses. Suited towards household.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <b>Parking:</b> not enough, less restrictive</li> <li>+ <b>Beautification:</b> murals, different décor, community cleanup</li> <li>+ <b>Infrastructure:</b> Outdoor dining options, trees and greenspace (shade), increase pedestrian friendly atmosphere, accessibility. Trail connectivity.</li> <li>+ <b>Safety:</b> speeding</li> <li>+ <b>Built environment:</b> Historic preservation of existing architecture</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <b>Events:</b> Family activities and things to do for young people</li> <li>+ <b>Programming:</b> Cultural amenities affordable options, younger demographic</li> <li>+ <b>Marketing/promotions:</b> Overall for downtown businesses and events. Local small business development</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <b>Alignment:</b> With economic development partners</li> <li>+ <b>Partnership Cultivation:</b> Understanding of resources for unhoused populations.</li> <li>+ <b>Business and Property Owner Engagement:</b> Understand and develop resources for business retention and recruitment as well as property maintenance and development</li> </ul>	

## Focus Group Observations

In a series of focus groups, participants discussed their experiences and aspirations for the town. Small business owners expressed pride in business owners purchasing their buildings, fostering a sense of long-term commitment. They celebrated businesses like The BeeVe and Straws for providing a safe space for kids and the increased evening activity downtown. Nostalgia, safety, and the allure of outdoor recreation attracted people to Buena Vista.

Various resources are in place to help entrepreneurs and small businesses. Specifically, the support from assets like The Gauntlet, a 10-week program to prepare small businesses with an opportunity to win additional prizes and assistance. Additionally, there are several other connections with the public school, college and other pop-up entrepreneurial spaces, which could align with helping small businesses start and grow. Although note that businesses face the challenge of identifying their niche markets.

Wayfinding, signage, and marketing were highlighted as necessary for bringing more people downtown. Participants expressed a desire to offer services for outdoor enthusiasts, like hostels and gear shops. Still, they encountered obstacles due to limited usable spaces downtown.

Key stakeholders and city officials took pride in the quality of life and overall community in Buena Vista, calling out cost of living and access to outdoor recreation. There were aspirations for more people living and working downtown, as well as increased cultural and recreational activities or connecting to existing amenities.

They emphasized the need for more people to invest in the town and an infusion of capital and resources. Discussions revealed a positive shift in recent years, with increased prosperity and staff presence, although some long-term residents clung to a scarcity mindset. Suggestions included better engagement with the school system, incentives for business expansion, and stronger support for entrepreneurs.

Participants proposed more student engagement, offering tourism incentives, and exploring opportunities for business expansion to enhance Buena Vista's appeal. Overall, these conversations revealed both the progress BV has made and the challenges it faces in its journey towards revitalization.

## Suggested Transformation Strategies

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Buena Vista is an independent city located in the central part of Virginia, within the Shenandoah Valley and is known for its scenic location along the Maury River, offering outdoor recreational opportunities such as kayaking and fishing. Historically, Buena Vista's economy was heavily reliant on industries like manufacturing and textiles. There has been a shift toward diversification in recent years, with an emphasis on tourism and outdoor recreation to capitalize on the city's natural beauty and proximity to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The city hosts various events and festivals, many of which are around recreational and cultural activities and has existing natural amenities such as Glen Maury Park, offering camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities. Buena Vista is also located near the Blue Ridge Parkway, a scenic highway that attracts tourists and outdoor enthusiasts.

Within the downtown, the new outdoor spaces are being developed for organizations and businesses to be able to host various kinds of community programming and new businesses, or locations with educational ties have emerged to engage the existing student population and young families.

Looking ahead, there are property owners in need of resources to help with building rehabilitation, and additional areas to continue connecting with students and families, which can both lead to a business recruitment and retention strategy for downtown Buena Vista.

### Engaging youth through entrepreneurship

Youth and entrepreneurship: Maximizing relationships with young families and student population to enhance small business cultivation and grow entrepreneurs.

### Increasing connection with natural amenities

Natural Amenities and Recreation: Tying in with historic downtown and businesses.

Leaning into what Buena Vista, Virginia is most known for

- Strong existing youth programs teaching leadership development.
- Southern Virginia University (SVU), a private liberal arts university, which contributes to the educational and cultural vibrancy of the community.
- Strong local public school with a location featured within the downtown district.
- Other amenities downtown for cultivating robust entrepreneurs and small business networks.
- A gateway to outdoor adventures and serves as a hub for those exploring the surrounding mountains, trails, and recreational activities.
- Picturesque location in the Shenandoah Valley, nestled near the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- Stunning natural surroundings, including scenic mountain views, hiking trails, and outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Adjacent Glen Maury Park and nearby Blue Ridge Parkway and George Washington and Jefferson National Forests make it a popular destination for nature enthusiasts.
- Charming small-town atmosphere and a sense of community. Rich history and historic downtown area.

## Recommendations for action

After review and analysis of community survey input, focus groups in person engagement and market evaluation, recommendations are made for committee and board consideration. Suggestions should start with using existing work plans and aligning efforts, as well as looking at existing businesses and partners and aligning efforts. Thereafter, additional work plans can be created, and actions taken.

### Next step actions to consider

- + Building organizational capacity
  - Adopt Transformation Strategy and align existing or establish new work plans. Lean into tying in with natural amenities, families and student populations.
  - Board and staff review and fill out Main Street America Accreditation Assessment.
  - Continue advocacy with city leadership and other organizations. Have board members provide “Main Street Minute” update to showcase broad range of community support.
  - Cultivate volunteer network with residents, students and partner organizations to foster a sense of ownership and pride in downtown area.
- + Economic Vitality
  - Business survey to assess needs
  - Resource Audit: assemble list of existing resources through the lifecycle of a small business
  - Business toolkit: how to start a business and best practices welcoming new businesses
  - Provide businesses with survey results and market analysis information pertinent to them
  - Use market data to guide business recruitment efforts.
  - Collaboration with Educational Institutions: Partner with nearby colleges and schools to create internship programs that benefit both students and downtown businesses.
- + Design:
  - Property owner relationship: building assessment and survey for needs
  - Continued efforts towards creating green space and streetscape enhancements. Work with other organizations and businesses to develop programming for public spaces.
  - Promote the preservation of historic buildings, ensuring they are maintained and repurposed for modern uses while preserving their architectural character.
  - Collaborate with local government to address dysfunctional and deteriorating infrastructure, including roads, sidewalks, and parking lots. Work in conjunction with building assessment.
- + Promotion:
  - Continued highlight of existing and new businesses emphasizing re/discovering downtown
  - Work with businesses to tie in with natural amenities and student life
  - Leverage small business resources that have been assembled to promote pipeline for small businesses and entrepreneurs
  - Cross promotions between businesses using flyers (with QR code directing to website), events, activities, online presence. Drive foot traffic between businesses.



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