

IMAGINE
DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE

This section of the Plan explores community voices, priorities, and lived experiences gathered through public events, surveys, workshops, and stakeholder conversations. It highlights what residents, businesses, and partners value most about Downtown and where they see opportunities for improvement.



VOICES OF BROWNSVILLE

Community Input

The Downtown Renaissance Master Plan was shaped through a community-driven process focused on listening and collaboration. In partnership with the City of Brownsville, the planning team engaged residents, business owners, students, artists, civic leaders, and other stakeholders to understand how Downtown is experienced and what improvements matter most. Participants emphasized the need for a more walkable, active, and welcoming Downtown, with consistent priorities around safety, lighting, shade, and cleanliness.

Community input also reflected strong pride in Brownsville's heritage and border identity. Recent investments in Market Square, Washington Park, and Downtown events were widely recognized as positive steps toward revitalization and helped inform future priorities and strategies.

From the outset, the planning process prioritized a bilingual engagement approach designed to meet people where they are. A mix of traditional outreach and more creative, interactive tools was used to engage participants in both English and Spanish, ensuring that diverse experiences, challenges, and aspirations were reflected in the Downtown vision.

Summary of Events

- Public Kickoff Event (August 2025): A well-attended event that introduced the planning process and invited residents to identify what makes Downtown special and what could make it better.
- First Friday Pop-Up Booths (August through November 2025): Monthly appearances at Brownsville's signature community event encouraged ongoing conversations with hundreds of participants and captured evolving feedback.
- Zoo, Beerfest and Sombrero Festival (October 2025 & February 2026): Engagement activities at major community events helped reach families, visitors, and residents in informal settings, expanding participation beyond traditional meetings and workshops.
- Stakeholder Focus Groups: Focused discussions with local business owners, property owners, nonprofit leaders, and cultural representatives explored redevelopment challenges, existing assets, and partnership opportunities.
- Youth Advisory Board LEGO Exercise (November 2025): A hands-on design activity where students reimagined Downtown streets and public spaces, sharing creative ideas for safety, play, and gathering.
- Online Pin Map and Community Survey (August through October 2025): More than 900 contributions were received through surveys, interactive maps, and visioning activities, offering detailed insights into priorities and opportunities.
- Survey and Website Postcards: Distributed through local businesses, public art, public events, and community partners to reach residents without digital access and encourage continued participation through the project website.

Engagement Highlights

2 PUBLIC FORUMS

14 POP-UPS & TABLING AT COMMUNITY EVENTS

17 STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

6 COMMISSION BRIEFINGS & WORK SESSIONS

(CITY COMMISSION, HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION, PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION)

1 YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD WORKSHOP

1 STAFF IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

1 PROJECT WEBSITE WITH ONLINE SURVEY & VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT









Images of Community Involvement





























WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback gathered through these efforts revealed a deep sense of pride, ownership, and optimism. Residents recognize Downtown as the cultural heart of the City, rich with architecture, stories, and cross-border identity, but also as an area ready to evolve for the next generation. Recurring themes included:

Heritage and Identity:

Brownsville's history and bicultural identity define its character. Residents emphasized preservation and storytelling as central to Downtown's future.

Shade, Safety, and Cleanliness:

The most consistent requests focused on comfort and safety, with calls for more lighting, trees, and well-maintained streets and public spaces.

Housing and Activation:

People expressed strong interest in mixed-use and upper-story housing to bring life to Downtown beyond business hours.

Public Amenities and Placemaking:

Participants called for more benches, restrooms, trees, and small plazas to make Downtown comfortable and family friendly.

Walkability and Connectivity:

Downtown's compact form is appreciated, but improved crossings, sidewalks, and shade are needed to make walking safer and easier.

Events and Festivals:

People want more year-round activities at Market Square, Washington Park, and other spaces to celebrate Brownsville's creativity and community.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Strong pride in local restaurants, shops, and cultural events.
- Historic buildings are valued as part of Downtown's identity.
- Walkability and cultural heritage create a strong sense of place.
- Long-term residents strengthen community stability.

Weaknesses

- Limited amenities such as restrooms, seating, and shade reduce visitor comfort.
- Safety concerns—particularly the lack of Brownsville Police Department presence and a Downtown substation, along with lighting issues—discourage activity.
- Cleanliness and lack of routine maintenance problems affect Downtown's image.
- Unused and unattractive storefronts lower visual appeal.
- Vacant buildings and limited housing options slow growth.
- Traffic congestion along key corridors reduces accessibility.

Opportunities

- Improved lighting, cleanliness, and shade can enhance comfort and safety.
- Family friendly spaces and cultural venues can attract more visitors.
- New restaurants, cafes, and nightlife can reflect local character.
- Reviving vacant storefronts and adding public art can boost activity.
- Broad support exists for preservation and placemaking.

Threats

- Safety and cleanliness issues may discourage visitors and investment.
- Limited amenities reduce appeal for families and young residents.
- Growing parking demand could affect walkability and public spaces.
- Promotion of resources and culture outside the RGV.

82% **Want improved lighting, shade, and cleanliness.**

73% **Rate Downtown's walkability as fair or good.**

88% **Feel proud of local restaurants and culture.**

78% **Say more public amenities are needed for comfort and use.**





VISION STATEMENT

The vision statement reflects the future that Brownsville residents and visitors want to see realized in Downtown. The vision statement was crafted based on input received from residents, the City, and other stakeholder groups during the initial engagement stages of the process. General themes were identified from the feedback received through public surveys, online engagement, community events, and conversations with stakeholders and residents. The City and project team helped refine the vision to make sure it matched the desires of the community.

Downtown Brownsville will be a vibrant, connected heart of the City, celebrating its culture, art, history, and people. Rooted in its border identity, it will offer safe, shaded, and walkable streets, active public spaces, and thriving local businesses. Downtown will support living, working, and gathering while reflecting community pride and advancing a resilient and inclusive future.

VISION ELEMENTS

A Downtown for Everyone

Downtown will offer welcoming spaces for residents, students, workers, and visitors of all ages, creating a sense of belonging and community pride.

Connected and Walkable

Comfortable streets, shaded sidewalks, and improved crossings will make Downtown easy to navigate by foot, bike, trolley, and transit.

A Place to Celebrate

Public plazas, cultural events, and local art will bring people together to celebrate Brownsville's creativity, music, and traditions.

Living Downtown

Downtown will offer a variety of housing options that support the local workforce, residents, and a lively mix of activity throughout the day.

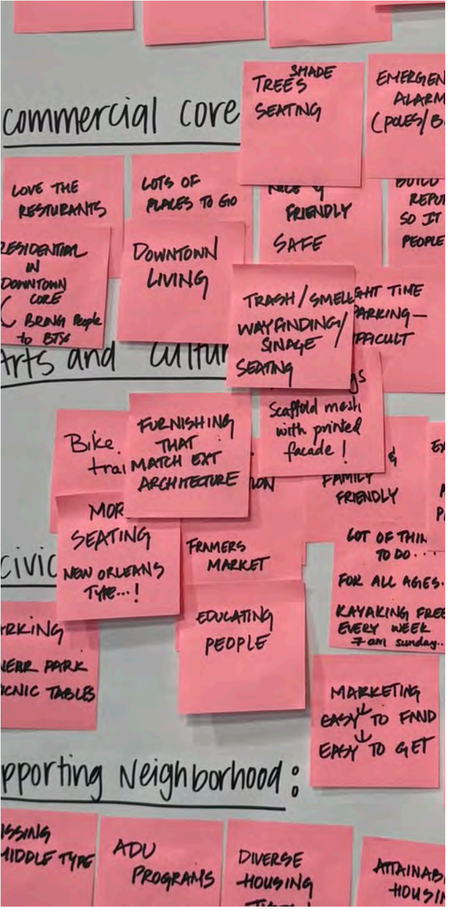
Balancing Heritage and Innovation

Downtown will honor its historic character while embracing new investment and development that strengthens its future.

Sustainable and Resilient Growth

New development will prioritize shade, greenery, and adaptive reuse to create a Downtown that is both environmentally and economically resilient.



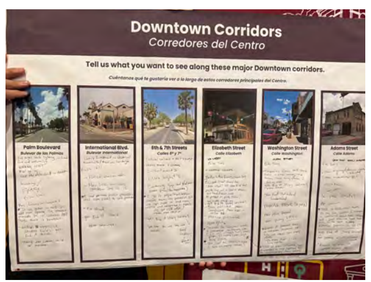


PRELIMINARY PLANNING OBSERVATIONS

The community feedback, on-the-ground analysis, and review of previous planning efforts helped reveal clear patterns in how Downtown Brownsville functions today and where opportunities for improvement exist. These preliminary planning observations summarize the most consistent needs and challenges identified early in the process and form the foundation for the next phase of the Plan.

Key Observations

- **Mobility:** Pedestrian and bike networks are fragmented, and shade and safe crossings are limited.
- **Public Realm:** Streets and plazas lack consistent amenities such as benches, lighting, and trees.
- **Safety:** Limited lighting and perceptions of danger reduce nighttime activity.
- **Housing:** Demand exists for living Downtown, but building regulations, rehab costs, and financing remain barriers.
- **Economy:** Retail and entertainment are underrepresented compared to community demand.
- **Identity:** Strong cultural and historic assets need stronger branding, gateways, and wayfinding.





BIG IDEAS

From these observations, the planning team identified a set of big ideas that reflect community priorities and Downtown's unique opportunities. These ideas begin to shape how Downtown Brownsville can evolve into a more active, connected, and people-focused destination. They also serve as the bridge to the next chapter, where each idea is explored in greater depth.



Safer, Shaded Streets and Plazas:

Improve comfort with lighting, shade, trees, and streetscape upgrades.

Pocket Parks and Public Spaces:

Create small plazas, courtyards, and flexible gathering areas throughout Downtown.

Housing in the Core:

Encourage adaptive reuse and new housing options to bring life and activity after hours.

Cultural and Historic Identity:

Strengthen Downtown's image through preservation, public art, branding, and gateways.

Improved Connections:

Upgrade corridors, enhance walkability, and introduce trolley and trail network opportunities.

