

APPENDIX A:
ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE PLAN KICKOFF

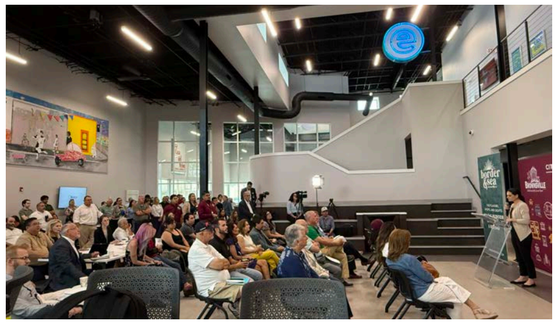
On August 1, 2025, the City of Brownsville in partnership with the design team officially launched the Brownsville Downtown Renaissance Master Plan (DTRMP) at a special announcement event. The kickoff was held at the eBridge Center for Business and Commercialization. The event invited various members of the community and Downtown stakeholders to learn more about the DTRMP's purpose and process, opening up an opportunity for people to share any initial questions or ideas. Engagement boards were also available for participants to share their intial vision for Downtown Brownsville.



Flyers directing community members to take the survey



Downtown Renaissance Plan Kickoff introduction by Mayor John Cowen, Jr.



Downtown Renaissance Plan Kickoff presentation by project team

Description of Event Activities

Information boards provided at the event included:

- Welcome board with QR code to the project website
- An overview of the DTRMP and process - what it is, the project schedule, why it's important, and who is involved
- Preliminary Downtown boundary map for review and discussion

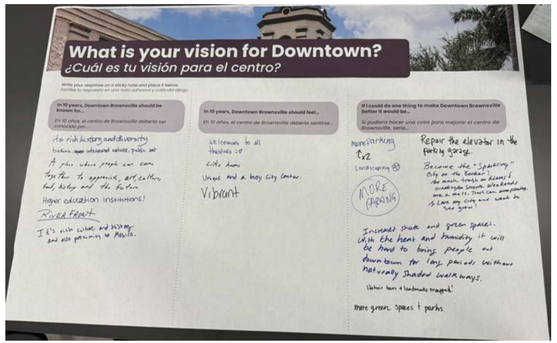
Interactive boards provided at the event included:

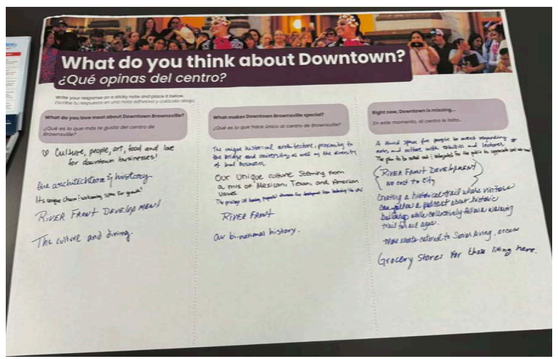
- Request for input related to Downtown assets, opportunities, what's missing, and if you could change one thing what it would be
- A vision board where people could write down or draw what they imagined for Downtown in the next 10 years

Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways from the event include:

- Love for Brownsville's rich history, diversity, and bi-national identity
- A place where people can come together to appreciate art, culture, food, history and the future
- Love for higher education institutions
- Love for the architecture and history of buildings
- Enjoy the dining options
- Need for more parking and repairs to existing parking garages
- Become the "sparkling" city on the border!
- Better cleanup of trash and improved landscaping to make Downtown more beautiful
- Increased shade and green spaces to combat the heat
- Introduce historic tours and landmarks
- A third space for people to meet
- Grocery stores for the people living in Downtown
- More events that are accessible to all ages





Results from the engagement boards at the event

FIRST FRIDAY TABLING EVENTS

Throughout the planning process, the project team engaged residents and visitors during the City's recurring First Friday events held at Market Square. These monthly tabling events provided an informal and accessible setting to gather input and build awareness of the Downtown Renaissance Master Plan. By returning consistently over time, the team was able to hear evolving perspectives and reach community members who may not attend traditional public meetings. The project team was present at the following First Friday events:

- August 2025
- September 2025
- October 2025
- November 2025




Images from the August 2025 First Friday




Images from the October 2025 First Friday





Images from the November 2025 First Friday

Description of Event Activities

Informational materials were updated throughout the planning process to reflect the evolving phase of the DTRMP. Interactive boards were similarly refined over time to gather more focused input and test emerging ideas.

Information boards provided throughout the First Friday tabling events included:

- Welcome board with QR code to the project website
- An overview of the DTRMP and process - what it is, the project schedule, why it's important, and who is involved
- Preliminary Downtown boundary map for review and discussion
- Emerging vision elements

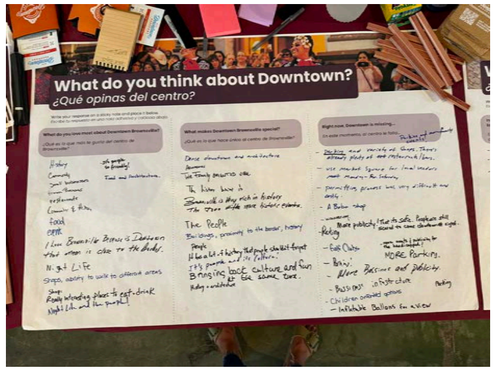
Interactive boards provided throughout the First Friday tabling events included:

- Request for input related to Downtown assets, opportunities, what's missing, and if you could change one thing what it would be
- A vision board where people could write down or draw what they imagined for Downtown in the next 10 years
- Presentation of the project's "Big Ideas" asking what is exciting, concerning or missing from the list
- A board requesting specific improvements at major Downtown corridors
- Preferences for furnishing styles and functions

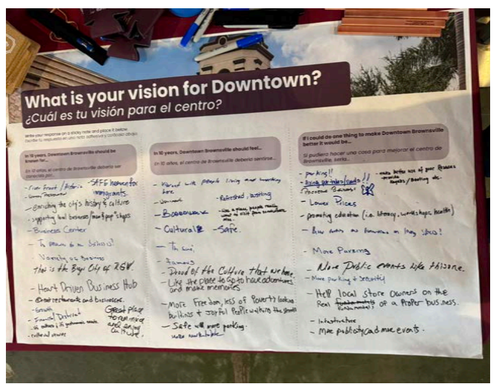
Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways across all First Friday tabling events include:

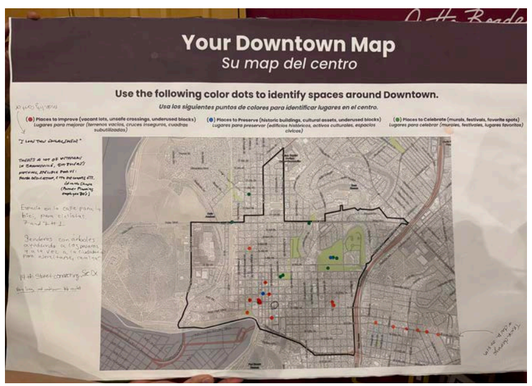
- Strong support for preserving and restoring historic buildings while ensuring new development reflects Brownsville's cultural character
- Interest in expanded cultural programming, historic tours, and celebrating the City's diverse heritage beyond existing festivals
- Improve lighting, cleaner streets, trash management, and addressing stray animals
- Desire for greater police presence and enhanced perceptions of safety throughout Downtown corridors and parks
- Parking emerged as one of the most consistent concerns, including requests for additional and more accessible options
- Support for more walkable streets, safer crossings and improved bike lanes
- More family-friendly amenities, kid spaces, and events like community yoga
- Increase collaboration with local artists for murals or public art
- Interest in corridor-specific identity elements, lighting enhancements, and public art
- Request for shaded rest areas and benches near bus stops and high-traffic areas
- Interest in public spaces with free Wi-Fi and charging stations
- Preference for integrating sculptural elements and furniture as public art, with a variety of styles that reflect Downtown's character
- Support for mixed-use housing and adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings
- Concurrent concern about maintaining neighborhood authenticity and avoiding displacement



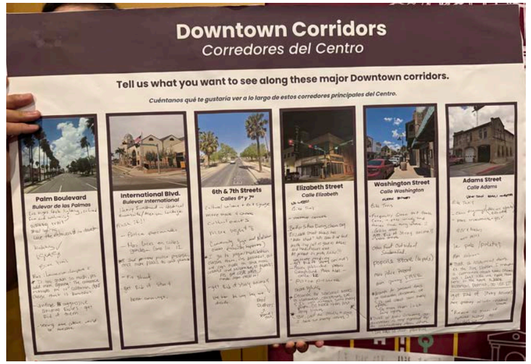




Boards from the August 2025 First Friday



Boards from the September 2025 First Friday



Board from the September 2025 First Friday



Board from the November 2025 First Friday



Board from the November 2025 First Friday

GLADYS PORTER ZOO DAY

As part of the community engagement process, the project team, alongside City staff, participated in Gladys Porter Zoo Day on September 2, 2025. The goal of this outreach activity was to meet community members where they were and share information about the DTRMP, while also increasing awareness of the community survey.

Postcards with QR codes linking to the project website and survey were distributed to more than 100 zoo visitors. Physical copies of the survey were also made available in both English and Spanish to improve accessibility. Over 30 completed paper surveys were collected during the event. Results of those survey responses are included in the overall online survey summary found later in this section.



Image of participants at the Gladys Porter Zoo Day



Image of the community art project asking “What would you like to see in the future for Downtown Brownsville?”

FARMERS MARKET

For one of the community tabling events, members of the project team and City staff, tabled during one of the City’s Farmers Market on October 4, 2025.

Description of Event Activities

Information boards provided at the event included:

- Welcome board with QR code to the project website
- An overview of the DTRMP and process - what it is, the project schedule, why it’s important, and who is involved
- Preliminary Downtown boundary map for review and discussion
- Emerging vision elements

Interactive boards provided at the event included:

- Request for input related to Downtown assets, opportunities, what’s missing, and if you could change one thing what it would be
- A vision board where people could write down or draw what they imagined for Downtown in the next 10 years
- Presentation of the project’s “Big Ideas” asking what is exciting, concerning or missing from the list
- A board requesting specific improvements at major Downtown corridors

Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways from the Farmers Market tabling include:

- Strong support for protected bike lanes, particularly along Palm Boulevard and International Boulevard
- Improve sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and safer crosswalk timing
- Interest in traffic calming measures, lower speed limits, and overall better traffic flow
- Desire for additional shade trees, landscaping, and more nature integrated into corridors
- Ongoing concerns related to street maintenance, sidewalk cleaning, vacant storefronts, and code enforcement
- Desire for improved way-finding signage and murals to enhance identity
- Need for improved street lighting to alleviate safety concerns, especially at night



Table set up at the Farmers Market

BEERFEST

On October 4, 2025, members of the project team, alongside City staff tabled during Beerfest held at Dean Porter Park as part of the community engagement process.

Description of Event Activities

Information boards provided at the event included:

- Welcome board with QR code to the project website
- An overview of the DTRMP and process - what it is, the project schedule, why it's important, and who is involved
- Preliminary Downtown boundary map for review and discussion
- Emerging vision elements

Interactive boards provided at the event included:

- Request for input related to Downtown assets, opportunities, what's missing, and if you could change one thing what it would be
- A vision board where people could write down or draw what they imagined for Downtown in the next 10 years
- Presentation of the project's "Big Ideas" asking what is exciting, concerning or missing from the list
- A board requesting specific improvements at major Downtown corridors

Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways from the event include:

- Interest in entertainment destinations, including restoring the historic movie theater, adding music venues, and a variety of bars and restaurants
- Desire for more parks, family-friendly gathering spaces, public art, coffee shops, and youth-oriented programming
- Interest in mobility options, including bike rentals, electric scooters, connected trails, and better parking management
- Continued requests for improved lighting, crosswalks, code enforcement, and overall corridor safety
- Clear emphasis on protecting historic homes and avoiding displacement while investing in Downtown improvements



ADDITIONAL TABLING EVENTS

As part of the broader community engagement process, the project team, alongside City staff, conducted tabling activities at a variety of community locations and events throughout Fall 2025. These efforts included outreach at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and Texas South-most College (TSC), as well as community events such as the Pumpkin Patch and Charro Days. The purpose of these tabling activities was to meet community members where they already gather, share information about the DTRMP, and increase awareness of the community survey.

Project postcards with QR codes linking to the project website and online survey were distributed at each location. To support accessibility and ease of participation, physical copies of the survey were also made available in both English and Spanish. These tabling efforts helped capture a broader range of community perspectives, including youth and event attendees, and all completed responses were incorporated into the overall survey summary presented later in this section.





Pictures from tabling at UTRGV



Photos from tabling at Charro Days

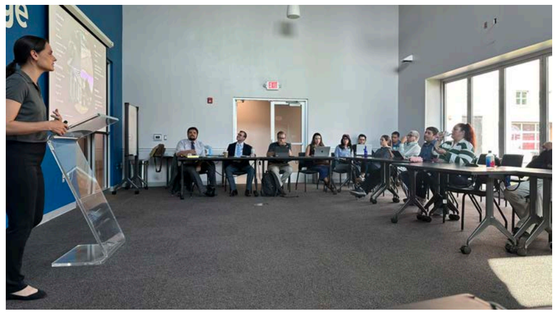


Photos from tabling at Charro Days

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

City staff and the project team conducted 10 stakeholder focus group meetings throughout the planning process to gather targeted input from key Downtown partners and community leaders. Meetings were held both in-person and virtually and included facilitated discussions supported by interactive tools and open dialogue. In addition, two Stakeholder & Community Open Houses were held at later dates to re-engage participants and share emerging concepts. A separate summary with the takeaways from those events can be found later in this section. Focus groups were composed of several representatives from the following groups:

- Mixed-perspective leadership group (2 meetings)
- Nonprofits for arts, culture, historic preservation and tourism
- Community-serving nonprofits
- City staff
- Business owners
- Property owners
- Local artists
- Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville (HACB)
- Catholic Diocese
- Mitte Cultural District consultant





Images of participants at the in-person stakeholder meetings held on September 4, 2025

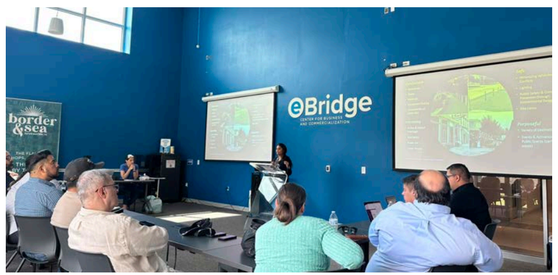
Emerging Themes Across Stakeholder Groups

- Strong support for expanding arts, culture, and event infrastructure, including restoration of historic venues and activation of public spaces
- Emphasis on affordable and mixed-income housing, with concerns about rising rents and displacement
- Consistent calls for improved lighting, cleanliness, safety presence, and corridor maintenance
- Desire for enhanced connectivity, including shaded pedestrian routes, bike infrastructure, trolley expansion, and better last-mile transit
- Recognition of Downtown's bi-cultural identity, historic character, and institutional anchors (UTRGV, Washington Park, Market Square) as major assets
- Need for streamlined permitting, clearer incentives, and policies to reduce vacancy and encourage reinvestment

Distinct Stakeholder Perspectives

- **Arts & Cultural Organizations:** Expansion of venues, creative incubators, public art, and tourism promotion
- **Community & Faith-Based Organizations:** Inclusive design, centralized resource hubs, and protection of vulnerable populations
- **Housing & HACB:** Affordable housing supply, mixed-income development, and long-term housing stability
- **City Staff:** Infrastructure upgrades, drainage, historic overlay flexibility, and coordinated maintenance
- **Property & Business Owners:** Investment incentives, parking solutions, business diversity, and improved perception of Downtown
- **Local Artists:** Formal City art programs, affordable studios, and stronger connections between creatives and City processes

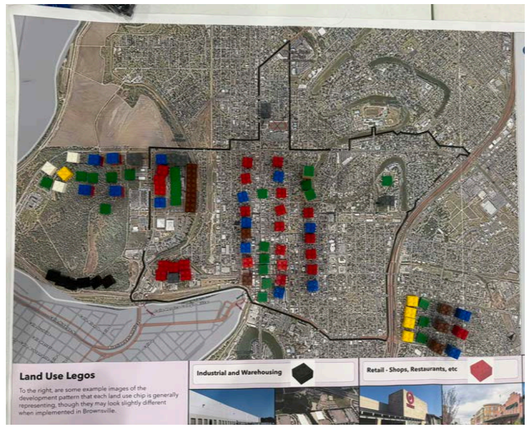




Images of participants at the in-person stakeholder meetings held between March 3-4, 2025

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD WORKSHOP

Members of the project team facilitated a hands-on workshop with the City's Youth Advisory Board as part of the DTRMP engagement process. This workshop was held on October 4, 2025. Participants were introduced to key Downtown focus areas and planning themes before working in small groups to build their ideas using LEGO models.



Results from one of the LEGO exercise groups

Description of Event Activities

Participants were guided through a series of conversation prompts focused on:

- How Downtown should be built out based residential and nonresidential uses
- Discuss the big decisions that were made during this activity and what was surprising

Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways from the event include:

- Participants envisioned a Downtown with a mix of housing, retail, entertainment, and community destinations.
- Youth emphasized the importance of walkability, connectivity, and public spaces.
- Many groups incorporated mixed-use development and entertainment uses to create a more vibrant Downtown.
- Participants expressed a desire for a Downtown that balances growth with preservation of Brownsville's identity.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

As part of the Downtown planning process, the City Commission served as the primary steering committee to guide major decisions and provide policy direction. The Commission's role was to ensure alignment between community priorities, City staff objectives, and the consultant team's recommendations.

Throughout the planning process, the consultant team provided updates during regularly scheduled public City Commission meetings, allowing for transparency and public input. In addition, three executive session work sessions were held to review draft concepts, refine strategic direction, and discuss implementation considerations in greater detail. The City Commission not only provided guidance, but also helped shape the overall vision for the Plan and offered insight into effective community engagement strategies.

Separately, the Historic Preservation Commission was engaged to provide guidance specific to historic preservation-related decisions. This body played a critical advisory role in evaluating recommendations affecting historic structures, regulatory considerations, and potential updates to preservation policies to ensure that Downtown's architectural character and heritage remain protected as reinvestment occurs.



Consultant team presenting at City Commission in September 2025

DESIGN CHARRETTE

The Design Charrette was conducted over three days between November 5-7, 2025 and served as a working session to refine and advance the Downtown Renaissance Master Plan's Big Ideas. The design team met internally to develop and test concepts, engaged with City leadership and stakeholders throughout the process, and concluded with a public open house report-out.

Prior to the public reveal, the team met with core members from the City staff to review progress and gather guidance. During the charrette, additional stakeholder groups were engaged to refine ideas in real time. The process culminated in a final public report-out session, where community members and stakeholders were invited to review draft concepts and share feedback. The design team gave a presentation of the initial concepts that were explored during the charrette, including:

- Emerging character areas and opportunities
- Focus corridors and context sensitive design
- Furnishings
- Parking solutions and trolley concept
- Adams Street and 12th Street shared street concepts
- Switchyards area
- New housing integration
- Plaza Mayor



Discussion of initial plan concepts during the charrette



LEGO exercise conducted with City Commission during the charrette

Description of Event Activities

The activities that took place during the three day charrette included:

- Open studio time with the design team
- LEGO exercise with City Commission
- Pin-up presentation and discussion with core City staff team
- Pin-up presentation and discussion with Mixed-Perspective Stakeholder Group
- Meeting with the Main Street of America
- Meeting with the Catholic Diocese
- Meeting with Mitte Cultural District consultant
- Final look with core City staff team
- Final report-out to City Commission
- Public report-out to stakeholder groups
- First Friday appearance

Key Takeaways from Final Report Out

- **Development Barriers:** High taxes, complex permitting, demolition costs, and second-floor build-out challenges are seen as obstacles to reinvestment. Concerns were raised about property maintenance and regulatory rigidity.
- **Code & Policy Improvements:** Support for stronger code enforcement, clearer policy recommendations, a vacant lot program tied to preservation, and identifying specific regulatory barriers. Preference for targeted, small-area improvements rather than broad citywide changes.
- **Parking & Access:** Parking remains a major concern, with resistance to paid parking and a need for more attractive, well-managed parking environments.
- **Downtown Vitality:** Strong interest in beautification and diversifying attractions beyond retail and restaurants. Approximately 80% of participants expressed excitement about the plan direction, while 20% expressed concern.
- **West Downtown Focus:** Interest in repositioning the west side/ Mexican Boulevard with improved public amenities, landmark features, and destination attractions rather than primarily housing.
- **Events & Partnerships:** Desire for stronger event coordination, deeper connections with UTRGV, and exploration of cross-border connections with Matamoros.
- **Attractions & Destinations:** Suggestions included sports complexes, pickleball facilities, arena-scale venues, theme park concepts, and other large-scale draws.
- **Shade & Comfort:** Strong emphasis on increasing tree canopy, greenery, and shaded pedestrian environments as foundational priorities.

MARCH COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

On March 4, 2026, the City, in coordination with the project team, hosted a community open house to share updates on the Plan and gather input from residents and stakeholders. This event followed a landowner meeting held earlier that day and was supported by a targeted outreach effort, which included approximately 3,109 mailed invitations to property owners encouraging participation in both the stakeholder meeting and the open house.

The open house began with a presentation from the project team that highlighted key findings to date, summarized community input received during earlier phases, and introduced the emerging big ideas that will help guide the Plan's direction. Following the presentation, attendees participated in an open question-and-answer session, allowing for direct dialogue with the project team and City staff on specific topics and areas of interest.

To encourage interactive participation, a series of engagement stations were distributed throughout the room. These stations were designed to gather more focused feedback on the big ideas and to help inform future implementation strategies. Activities prompted attendees to share priorities, react to proposed concepts, and identify areas of opportunity or concern. Additionally, the City provided several streetscape furnishing mock-ups, including benches and trash receptacles, allowing participants to interact with the options and vote on their preferred designs based on both aesthetics and usability.

Overall, feedback received during the event was positive and constructive. Participants expressed interest in balancing near-term, actionable "quick wins" with a forward-looking, visionary approach that positions the City for long-term success.





Photos from the property owners meeting on March 4, 2026

Description of Event Activities

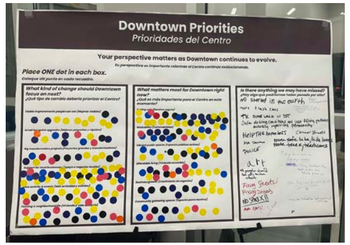
Participants were guided through a series of conversation prompts focused on:

- What kind of change should Downtown focus on next
- What matters most for Downtown right now
- Which of the 5 big ideas should the City invest in first
- Preferred options for trash cans and benches

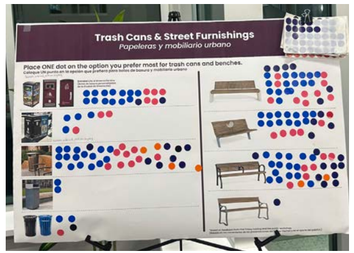
Summary of Event Feedback & Key Takeaways

Feedback and key takeaways from the event include:

- Improving safety and walkability emerged as the top priorities for Downtown
- Strong support was expressed for prioritizing investment in the Adams Street Paseo, followed by enhancements to the public realm, Downtown residential development, and mobility improvements
- Participants emphasized the importance of supporting local businesses and sustaining Downtown activity through events and programming
- A clear preference was shown for a classic bench style and the third trash can design option







Boards from the March 2026 Community Open House

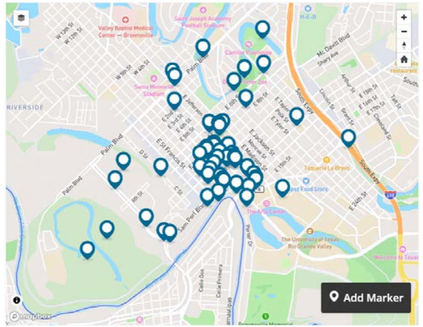
ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The primary mechanism for greater virtual engagement for the DTRMP was an online mapping activity where participants could leave georeferenced comments on a map of the Downtown Brownsville study area. In addition, an idea wall tool was made available on the project website, enabling participants to react to share broader ideas about the future of Downtown. These features helped the project team identify the comments that were most relevant and helpful for developing recommendations.

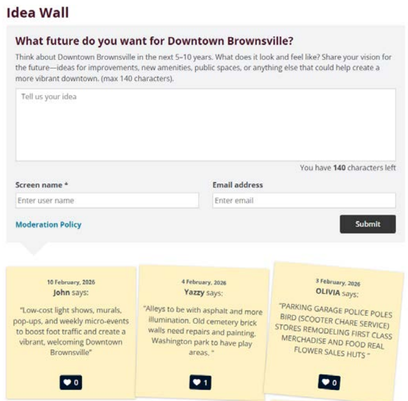
Key themes that emerged from the online engagement comments included:

- Historic and cultural assets are a major strength. Branding, way-finding, and gateway improvements can build on this foundation.
- Encouraged targeted, catalytic projects that can build momentum and demonstrate early success.
- Stressed the importance of safety, infrastructure improvements, and maintenance as foundational to revitalization.
- Demand for downtown living exists, but zoning and rehab costs are barriers. Building codes and financing particularly constrain upper-story reuse.
- Pedestrian and bike networks are fragmented; key intersections lack shade and safe crossings. Parking is available but not always convenient or well-managed.
- Retail is underrepresented compared to civic/government uses. Strong demand exists for dining, entertainment, and cultural experiences.

The online activities opened after the project launched in September 2025 and were available for continuous participation throughout the project's lifetime.



Screenshot of the online mapping tool on the project website



Screenshot of the online idea wall on the project website

ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY

From August 1, 2025 to October 18, 2025, an online community survey was hosted on the Brownsville DTRMP project website. The survey was open to all members of the community and was offered in multiple languages on both desktop and mobile devices. Outreach efforts to promote participation in the online survey included distributing flyers at various tabling events, social media, and by word of mouth. The survey received 731 responses while it was available to the public. Detailed results from the online survey are available as a separate attachment to this document. Key takeaways are listed to the right, providing an overview of feedback collected through this initiative.

This survey, as well as insights from public engagement events and the stakeholder groups, provided the project team with essential baseline data and community priorities to guide the project's development.

Key Takeaways from Online Survey

- **Downtown's strengths are clear:** Residents value local restaurants, culture, events, and historic buildings, with long-term residents providing much of the input.
- **Public realm gaps limit use:** Lack of shade, seating, restrooms, cleanliness, and nighttime lighting are the most significant barriers to comfort and activity.
- **Safety and maintenance matter:** Perceptions of safety, particularly after dark, and overall cleanliness strongly influence how often people visit Downtown.
- **High demand for activation and amenities:** The community wants family-friendly spaces, cultural venues, and more active storefronts, along with expanded dining, retail, and nightlife options.
- **Mobility and housing need targeted solutions:** Walkability potential exists but networks are fragmented, parking must be better managed, and interest in downtown living is constrained by zoning and rehabilitation costs.
- **Clear direction for visioning:** Future "Big Ideas" should build on historic identity while prioritizing shaded, walkable streets, public space activation, and catalytic mixed-use and housing projects.

STAFF IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

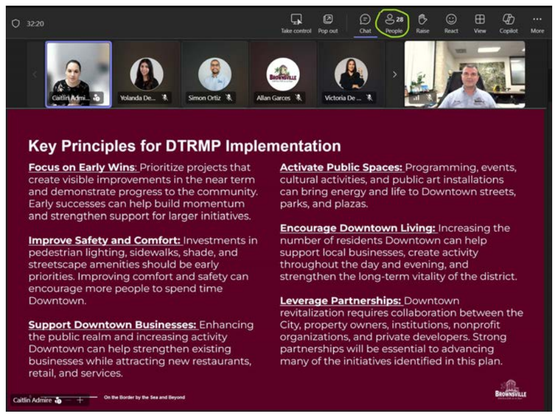
Project team members facilitated a hands-on implementation workshop with City staff to translate recommendations into actionable projects and identify key partnerships, funding opportunities, implementation steps, and potential barriers. Participants worked collaboratively to prioritize projects and discuss realistic strategies for advancing Downtown initiatives.

Participants were guided through conversations focused on:

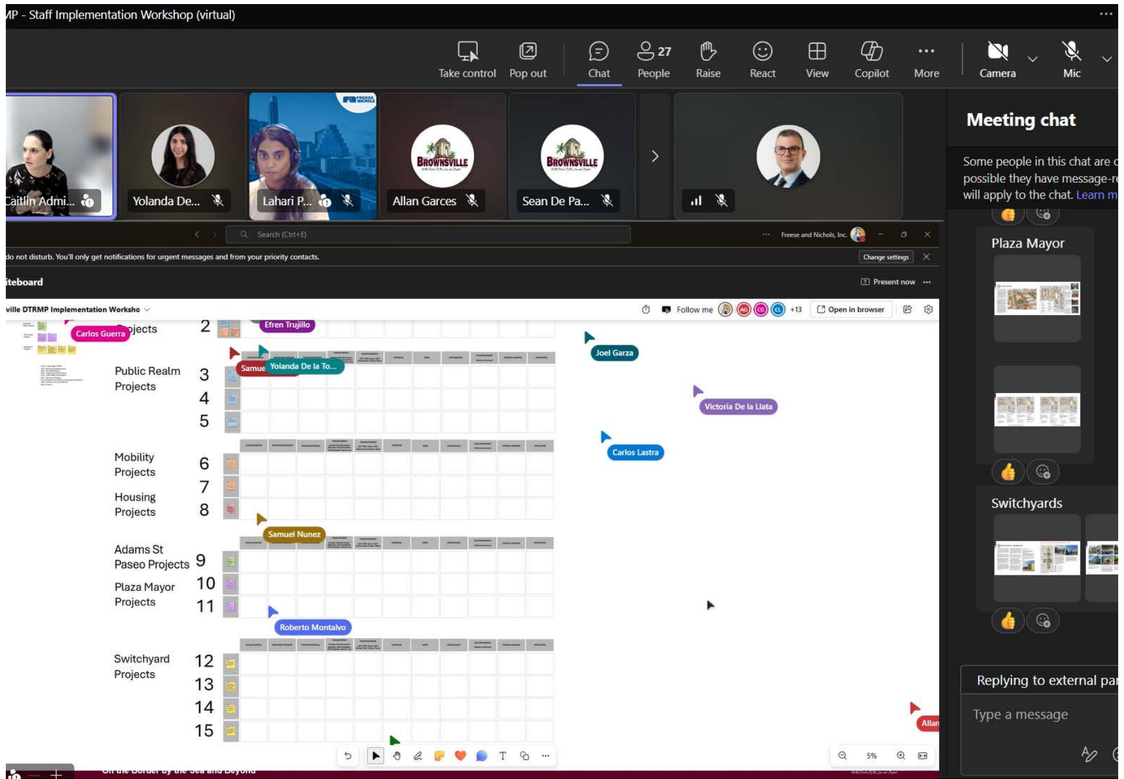
- Roles and responsibilities for implementing priority actions.
- Funding opportunities, partnerships, and sequencing of projects.
- Key challenges and dependencies affecting project delivery.

Feedback and key takeaways from the workshop include:

- Prioritize early wins that improve safety, comfort, and the public realm to build momentum for larger investments.
- Strengthen coordination among City departments, partner agencies, and private stakeholders to advance Downtown projects.
- Leverage grants, TIRZ funding, and partnerships to support implementation and maximize available resources.
- Emphasize Downtown living, business support, and activation of public spaces to strengthen long-term vitality.
- Recognize that many projects will require phased implementation and continued collaboration across agencies.
- Identify funding constraints, right-of-way issues, and coordination requirements as key barriers to project delivery.



Screenshot from Implementation workshop session



Screenshot from Implementation workshop session