

Appendix 1: Downtown Visioning Exercise Results

Executive Summary: Downtown Visioning Results

From January 30 and March 1, Administration engaged with the public in the following formats:

- Two workshops (105 total participants)
- Two mobile workshops (Airdrie Youth Committee and Cedarwood Station)
- Five focus groups (97 unique participants)
- Online surveys (434 total survey participants)
- Six one-on-one meetings, small group meetings or major e-mail submissions

The questions posed to participants in each of these formats were specifically designed to address the following major questions/topic areas:

1. Where should the boundary line for “downtown” be drawn?
2. What is the opinion of the current state of the downtown and what is the vision for it?
3. What land uses and services are expected to be found within our downtown?
4. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our downtown?

For the purposes of this summary, the responses on the “current state” have been placed under a separate heading from the comments received regarding the “vision” for downtown. Including miscellaneous comments on topic areas that did not have enough data to be reported as part of this summary, there were over 7,500 comments from the combination of engagement formats provided, and the analysis of these comments allows for some broad conclusions to be drawn, including:

Downtown Boundary Delineation

1. The areas on which 75% - 90% of the visioning exercise participants agree to be “downtown” is much more related to the Main Street commercial core than the current Downtown Plan boundary. This area of collective agreement is only +/- 50 acres in size, as opposed to the 205 acres currently contained within the existing Downtown Plan (2008) boundary.
2. Participants more frequently included some areas to the east of the current Downtown Plan boundary within their individual boundaries than not, and discussions during the workshops and focus groups raised the idea of having certain “transition zones” from a “downtown core” area.
3. The areas that were seen by 75% to 90% of the visioning exercise participants to be “downtown” could be used as an area of focus for future planning and civic improvements, based on the overall desire to see something positive happen within the downtown that became clear in analyzing the responses to other survey, workshop and focus group questions.

Current State of the Downtown

1. The data suggests that there is a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of the downtown. Responses pulled from Questions 1, 11 and 12 from the survey, as well as the workshop and focus group sessions, indicate respectively that:
 - a) 87% of the survey opinions about the current state of the downtown are negative vs. positive;
 - b) 43% of the survey respondents indicated that there is ‘nothing’ unique about the downtown;



- c) the current state of the downtown receives a score ranging between 4.47–4.62 out of 10, and;
 - d) workshop participants made far more negative comments about the downtown than positive in that particular consultation format;
2. Respondents from the survey, workshops and focus groups collectively agree that there is potential and desire for the downtown be improved. Overall, the majority of residents would prefer to see action taken to improve the downtown as opposed to leaving it in its current state. This is reflected in the approximately 80/20 ratio of comments received which stated a desire to see unique downtown items (or lack thereof) improved – rather than left in the current state.

Downtown Vision Statements

1. The desire is there from the public and stakeholders to see the current state of the downtown be improved and transformed into a place that has – in particular – increased vibrancy, excitement, and action. Many participants desire to see the downtown modernized in some respects, with excellent accessibility and walkability throughout. The aspiration, for many respondents, is to have downtown become a prime destination, rather than just a functional service centre and to have high quality gathering places and social hubs located within the downtown area.

Expected Downtown Land Uses and Services

1. The primary activities and services that residents presently use in downtown are discretionary in nature, and are led by shopping, dining and library services (seen as being distinct from other municipal services). Less frequently mentioned, but still a primary reason to go downtown are more functional-style uses, such as visits to City Hall, financial institutions and workplaces.
2. Collectively, the participants in the visioning exercise reported a desire to see enhanced shopping, dining and cultural activities downtown. Most of the desired uses and activities were also discretionary in nature, with some improved or additional institutional uses referenced.
3. The vast majority of respondents desired new or improved uses/activities within the downtown (vs. doing nothing), with ratios of those in favour of new or augmented activities/services (rather than doing nothing) ranging from 88:12 to 99:1, depending on the consultation format.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

1. There were more comments provided about weaknesses (918 comments) than there were strengths (663 comments). This was particularly true in the workshops and focus groups. However, there were also far more opportunities stated by participants (816 comments) than there were threats (627 comments). This was also true of the workshops and focus groups.
2. The data point to the central location, easy access and key civic institutions as being the main strengths of downtown. The most frequently cited weaknesses are a lack of parking, outdated and unattractive buildings and infrastructure, challenges for pedestrians and a lack of a major draw or destination. The greatest opportunities are seen as being new local and boutique retail shops/experiences and redevelopment of vacant and under-utilized sites. Threats seen by the public include traffic/pedestrian conflicts, parking issues and a combination of internal and external commercial competition.



Where should the boundary line for “downtown” be drawn?

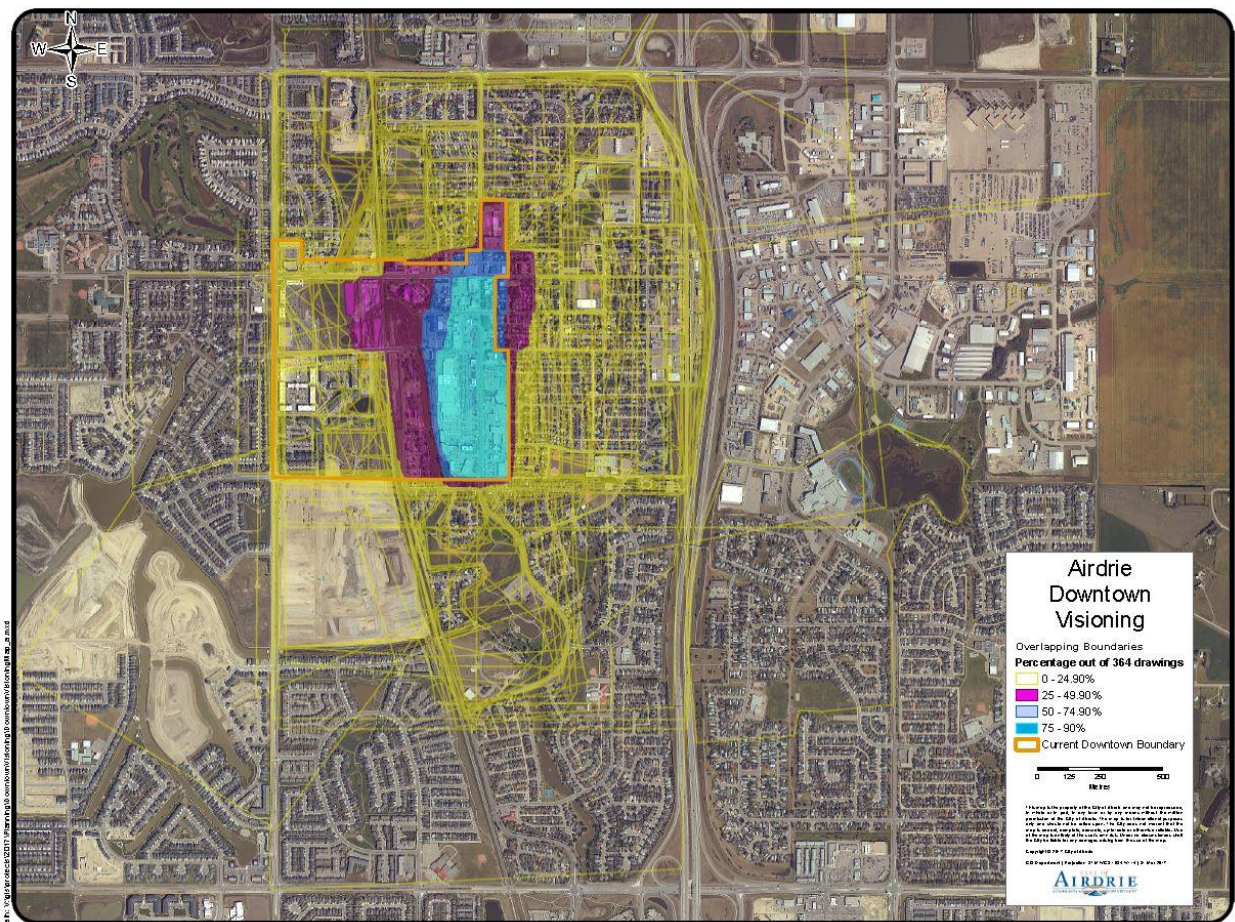
Mapping Exercise:

Draw on a map where you feel the downtown boundaries are.

The mapping exercise was completed by a total of 368 participants through various platforms, including:

- the online survey (January 30 to March 1);
- a workstation at the rotating workshops (January 30 and February 1);
- two focus groups devoted to establishing downtown boundaries (February 9 and February 28);
- an “on-site” workshop at Cedarwood Station (February 23), and;
- a presentation and discussion with the Airdrie Youth Affairs Committee (February 27)

There were four (4) substantially outlying responses that were removed from the data analysis. Participants at the focus groups on February 9 and February 28 that had already prepared a map at the previous workshops or online were discouraged from submitting additional maps for analysis. Anecdotally, several participants at the focus groups indicated that they had changed their minds about the boundary of what they would consider as downtown as a result of participating in this downtown visioning exercise; as such, their updated maps were recorded and analyzed as part of the 364 accepted responses. Obvious duplications were difficult to determine and not eliminated from this analysis.



Map 1: Summary of Overlapping Boundary Areas for Downtown



Map 1 (above) provides a yellow outline of every one of the 364 individual boundaries analyzed as part of this downtown visioning exercise. The coloured areas on the map indicate the degree to which there is overlap in each of the individual boundaries. The light blue area centred on Main Street between First Avenue in the north and Ridgeway and Elk Hill in the south represents an area that is contained in the boundary of 75-90% of the mapping exercise participants. Thus, it can be stated, with a high degree of confidence, that any point within the light blue area shown in Map 1 would be considered as part of “downtown” by 75% to 90% of Airdrie residents. Cascading out from the area highlighted in light blue, the area highlighted in royal blue represents an overlap that is in 50% to 75% of all of the downtown boundaries submitted during the downtown visioning exercise, while the purple area is found in at least 25% of all individual downtown boundaries.

The existing boundary of the Downtown Plan (2008) is highlighted with a single orange boundary on Map 1. While there were many individual boundaries that matched or approximated the existing downtown planning boundary, the full boundary was included in less than 25% of all of the individual assessments of what Airdrie’s Downtown boundary should be. Table 1 below provides an assessment of the respective areas in the existing Downtown Plan boundary, as well as the highlighted areas in Map 1:

Planning Area	Area (sq. m.)	Area (ha)	Area (ac)
75% to 90% Individual Boundary Overlap Rate	192,447	19.25	47.55
50% to 75% Individual Boundary Overlap Rate	280,916	28.09	69.42
25% to 50% Individual Boundary Overlap Rate	547,093	54.71	135.18
Existing Downtown Plan Boundary (2008)	830,273	83.27	205.16

Table 1: Comparison of Participant Downtown Boundary Map Areas against 2008 Downtown Plan Boundary Area

During the workshops and focus groups, the following comments were made with great frequency:

- Downtown is centred on Main Street
- The northern limit is Jensen Drive; southern limit is commercial edge at Ridge Gate Way/Elk Hill
- Certain natural boundaries exist, such as Nose Creek, and the railway/highway corridors

Direct assessments cannot be made as easily with this information as there are fewer (168) comments to analyze. Additionally, many of the comments recorded during the workshops and focus groups simply reflected the drawings submitted by the participants at those respective exercises. However, based on the information collected as part of the mapping exercise, it is generally fair to say that the 168 comments received during the workshops and focus groups are generally well-reflected as part of the boundaries shown in Map 1 and would not alter the conclusions drawn from that comprehensive map.

Downtown Boundary Delineation: Conclusions

The data suggests that less than 25% of Airdrie residents would consider the whole of the existing Downtown Plan boundary to be their version of the downtown. In order to have 75% - 90% confidence of the area truly considered by residents to be “downtown”, the planning area would likely need to be less than one-quarter of the size of the existing planning area (+/- 50 acres). Based on the individual maps provided as part of this visioning exercise, such a modified planning boundary could also include some areas slightly to the east of the existing downtown planning boundary. The areas of boundary overlap generally reflect the existing natural boundaries of Nose Creek and railway line to the west, each of which were frequently cited as a downtown planning boundary during the workshops and focus groups. Anecdotally, many workshop and focus group participants articulated the idea of working on creating a small and focused downtown core and expanding from there, with some potential “transition zones” to be considered. The accumulation of all of the data confirms the validity of these suggestions.



What is the opinion of the current state of the Downtown?

Survey Question 1:

Describe, in a word or phrase, your current impression of downtown

This online survey question had 434 responses and no skipped responses. There were seven (7) responses that appeared to be duplicates and which were removed from the analysis. The remaining 427 survey responses generated an equivalent number of comments that aligned primarily into 12 categories, as shown in the chart below:

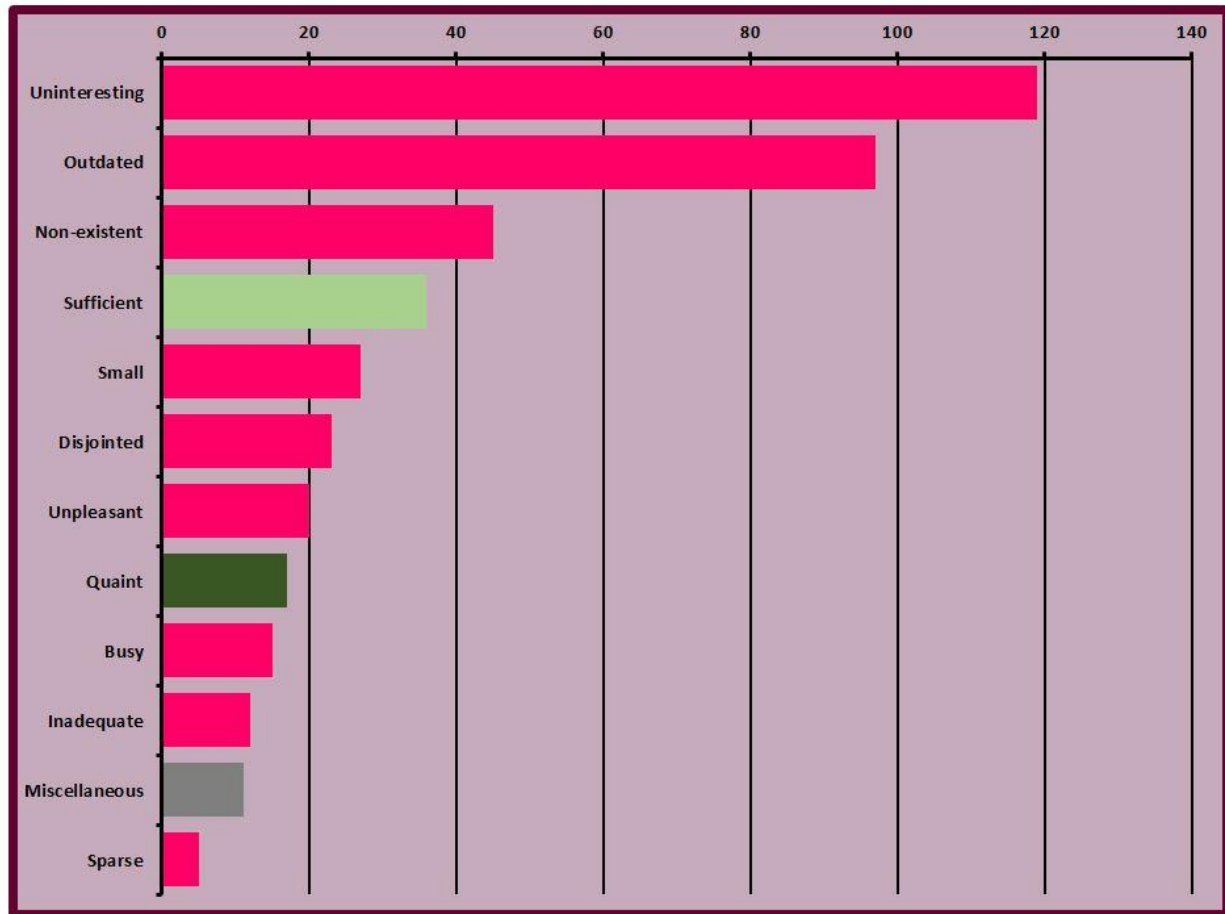


Chart 1: Breakdown of Comments on Unique Characteristics of Downtown

For the purposes of analyzing these responses, all comments were treated as “mutually exclusive” and therefore were not placed in multiple categories. An explanation of how the responses were collected into these twelve categories can be found in the table located on the following page.

General sentiment from the more descriptive answers to this survey question provided strong feedback for the municipality to upgrade and/or modernize the public realm. Respondents saw value in enhancements to the streetscape, especially in the forms of public art, street trees, paths and pedestrian markings that lead to amenities and public spaces. Guidelines and incentives to provide improved building and public space designs would be welcomed by many of the respondents. Though the same direct question was not posed in the workshops and focus groups, participants in those formats were asked about current positives and negatives seen in the current downtown. More negative comments were provided (n = 256) than positive (n = 125). A summary is provided in the coming pages.



Descriptive Word/Phrase	Category Words and Phrases	Occurrence
Uninteresting	"boring", "bland", "uninviting", "lackluster", "no identity" and "drab"	119 (29%)
Outdated	"old", "outdated", "tired"	97 (23%)
Non-Existent	"non-existent", "where is it?", "what downtown?"	45 (11%)
Sufficient	"functional", "adequate", "just fine", "perfect as is"	36 (8%)
Small	"small" (referenced as a negative connotation, separate from "quaint")	27 (6%)
Disjointed	"sparse", "scattered", "disconnected", "unorganized"	23 (5%)
Unpleasant	"depressing", "terrible", "sad", "sketchy"	20 (5%)
Quaint	"quaint", "hometown", "comfortable", "quiet"	17 (4%)
Busy	"congested", "crowded", "cramped"	15 (4%)
Inadequate	"inefficient", "missing things", "lacking", "unfinished"	12 (3%)
Miscellaneous	unique or seldom repeated responses	11 (3%)
Sparse	"empty", "deserted"	5 (1%)

Table 2: Categorization of Descriptive Words and Phrases on Current State of Downtown from Online Survey

Overall, the data provided by the survey respondents suggests that there is general dissatisfaction with the current state of the downtown. Excluding the 11 miscellaneous comments received, only 53 of the remaining comments (representing 12.7% of the total, see chart below) labelled the downtown with a positive word or phrase, such as "sufficient" or "quaint". The remaining 363 comments (representing 87.3%) used negative words or phrases to describe the downtown. A significant number of comments stated a desire to improve some aspect of the built form – especially the streetscape and public realm.

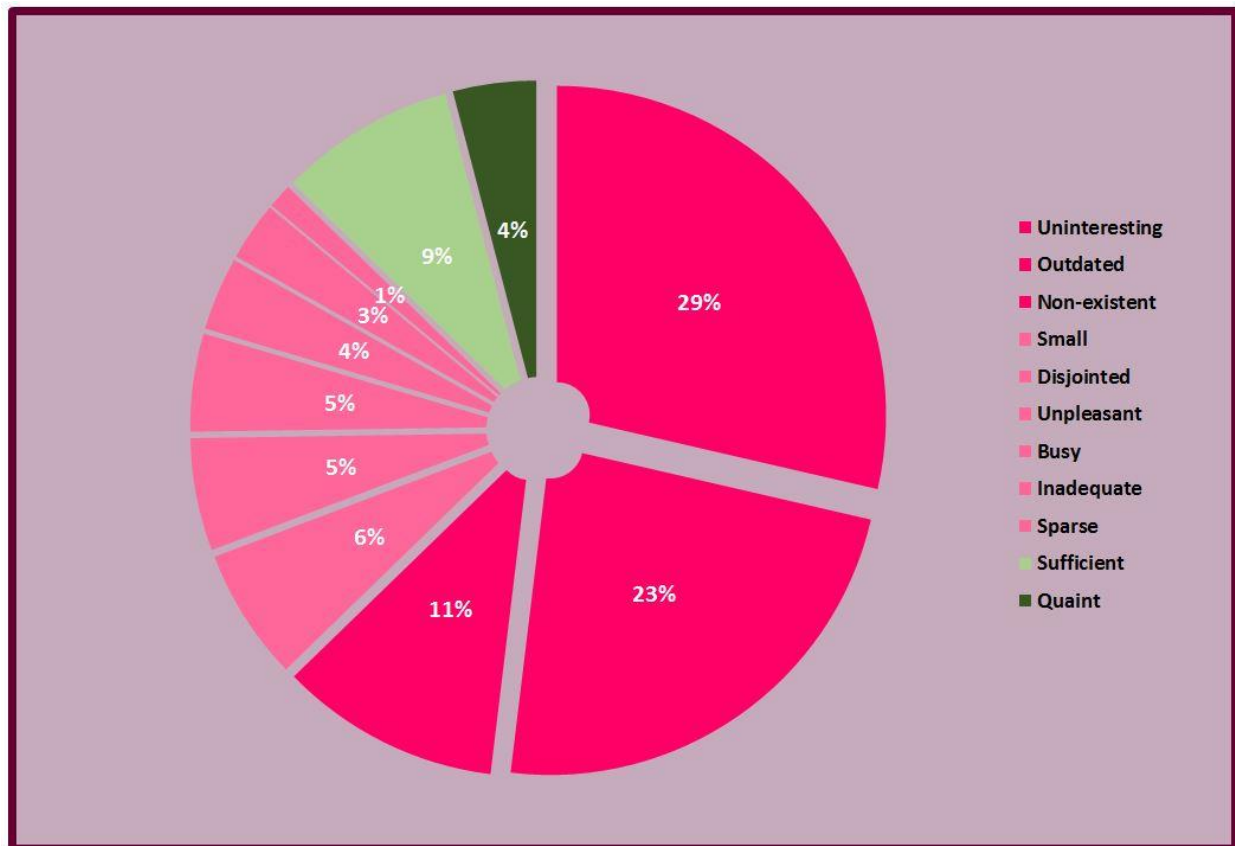


Chart 2: Breakdown of Positive and Negative Comments on Current State of Downtown from Online Survey



Statements of positive and negative emotions generated by the current state of the downtown were made during both of the workshops on January 30 and February 1 (in the “Current State of Downtown and Visioning” table) as well as at the “Vision Statement” focus group on February 15. More than twice as many negative comments were provided by the participants than positive comments, seen below:

Workshop and Focus Group – Positive Comments	
Category 1: “Small Town Feel”	Response Quantity
small town feel/friendly people/belonging/closes at night	18
no Tim Horton’s/small businesses/limited chain stores	12
convenient/good experiences (and frequently visited for that reason)	9
quiet	8
small (size of downtown area)	7
functional	3
low density	2
miscellaneous (non-repeated responses)	7
Total Category Responses	66
Category 2: “Specific Buildings and Places”	Response Quantity
City Hall (seen as being good/great)	10
Roxy Theatre	2
Waves Coffee	2
miscellaneous (non-repeated responses)	7
Total Category Responses	21
Category 3: “Professional Services”	Response Quantity
convenient and friendly bank services	5
major services (including health services) are centrally located	3
good restaurants	2
miscellaneous (non-repeated responses)	4
Total Category Responses	14
Category 4: “Walkability and Connectivity”	Response Quantity
pathways (generally good and well-maintained)	6
general ease of accessing downtown	1
recreation opportunities	1
walkability to all services	1
Total Category Responses	9
Category 5: “Festivals and Events”	Response Quantity
AirdrieFEST	2
Festival of Lights	2
parade route	2
Canada Day festivities	1
festivals (in general)	1
Total Category Responses	8
Category 6: “Décor and Other Things”	Response Quantity
flower baskets/gardens/street trees	3
art work	1
good park maintenance	1
lampposts	1
on-street parking	1
Total Category Responses	7
Workshop and Focus Group Positive Comments: Total Count	125

Table 3: Categorization of Positive Words and Phrases for Current State of Downtown from Workshops and Focus Groups



Workshop and Focus Group – Negative Comments	
Category 1: “Lack of Identity”	Response Quantity
no identity/bland/boring/lack of theme or vision	34
lacking definition and focus	18
lack of attractions, destinations and/or amenities	13
Inadequate/non-existent/generally lacking	10
fragmented/lack of flow	9
uninviting	6
lack of vitality	3
Total Category Responses	93
Category 2: “Traffic and Vehicular Focus/Related Issues”	Response Quantity
lack of parking overall	16
poor vehicular accessibility	10
made for cars, not for people	9
lack of on-street parking specifically	8
lack of intersections along Main Street	6
lack of parking in specific spots	5
too much vehicular traffic/traffic problems	4
poor road standards, alignments and turning lanes	3
no delineation between vehicular and pedestrian areas	1
one big parking lot (too much parking available)	1
Total Category Responses	63
Category 3: “Miscellaneous Issues”	
lack of residential uses	7
not dense enough	7
poorly functioning civic services (including City Hall)	6
too quiet	6
business exodus/lack of retail district	5
empty after 10pm	4
poor integration of old and new as well as certain land uses	4
lots of strip malls	3
no room for patios	3
Towerlane Mall not a community player	3
conflicts on Canada (lack of access to Urgent Care facility)	2
miscellaneous (non-repeated responses)	5
Total Category Responses	55
Category 4: “Old and Rundown”	Response Quantity
old/dingy/dated/tired	16
dying/failing/forgotten/vacant	6
unattractive	3
Total Category Responses	25
Category 5: “Lack of Accessibility”	Response Quantity
not pedestrian friendly/poor sidewalks	11
generally disconnected	5
generally inaccessible to other areas of town (i.e. east side)	2
poor transit service to downtown	2
Total Category Responses	20
Workshop and Focus Group Negative Comments: Total Count	256

Table 3: Categorization of Negative Words and Phrases for Current State of Downtown from Workshops and Focus Groups

Of additional interest is the divide on parking/vehicular issues. Adding together the nine comments from “Positive: Walkability and Accessibility” as well as the 25 comments from “Negative: Traffic and Vehicular Focus” that cite the downtown being designed for cars and easy parking, then there are 34



comments supporting less vehicular focus against just 42 comments desired more attention on vehicular parking and movements, for a near even split of public opinion on this issue.

Survey Question 11: ***What makes Downtown Airdrie unique?***
Would you like to keep that aspect of it?

This online survey question had 378 responses against 56 skipped responses. Of the 378 respondents, three (3) responses appeared to be duplicates and were removed from the analysis. The remaining 375 survey responses generated a total of 443 comments that aligned primarily into five general categories (total comments in parentheses), shown graphically in the chart below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Lack of Unique Characteristics (163) | 4. Historic Character and Walkability (50) |
| 2. Buildings and Things (97) | 5. Urban Greenery and Décor (47) |
| 3. Small Town Feel (86) | |

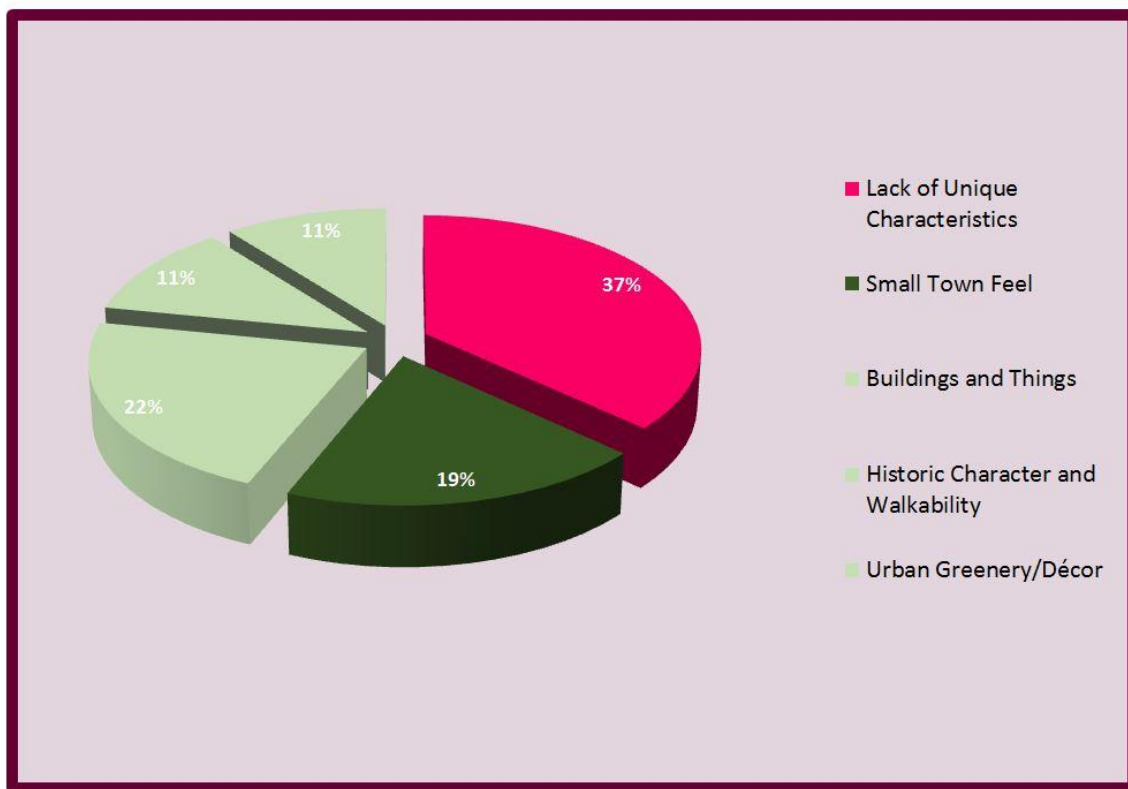


Chart 3: Breakdown of Comments on Unique Characteristics of Downtown Airdrie from Online Survey Respondents

It is noted that comments about buildings/things, historic character, walkability and urban décor are part of what make the downtown feel unique to many participants. Accordingly, “small town feel” is displayed in dark green above, with buildings, character and décor shown in complementary light green in clockwise fashion. It is also worth noting that while the 163 comments citing a “lack of unique characteristics” represent 37% of the total comments generated, they actually represent the opinions of 43% of the individual respondents. Since the comments of those who felt that there was “nothing unique” about the downtown did not elaborate further, their comments were not used to expand the 375 responses into 443 total comments, hence the higher percentage rate out of the 375 validated responses. Certainly, it is concerning that 43% of survey respondents indicated that there was nothing



unique about the downtown. However, it is encouraging that the remaining 57% of respondents did find some aspects to appreciate. Though rarely stated in specific responses, allusions were made in several instances that it was the combination of things and people that made Airdrie's downtown unique. This was also stated anecdotally in several of the focus group sessions, indicating that there is an intangible charm that should be retained and that, with investment and effort, downtown can be improved.

The responses to Question 11 in the online survey also showcase a desire to see improvement in the downtown. Of the 163 comments within the "Lack of Unique Characteristics" category, there were:

- 35 comments noting that the respondent was "disappointed that there was nothing unique"
- 12 comments noting that the respondent saw "nothing unique, but wanted it to be better"
- 12 comments noting that the respondent saw "nothing unique, but wanted it left alone"

In a similar vein, of the 97 comments in the "small town feel" category, there were:

- 26 comments stating a "love of the small town feel, but seeing the need for change"
- 7 comments stating a "love of the small town feel and a desire to leave it alone"

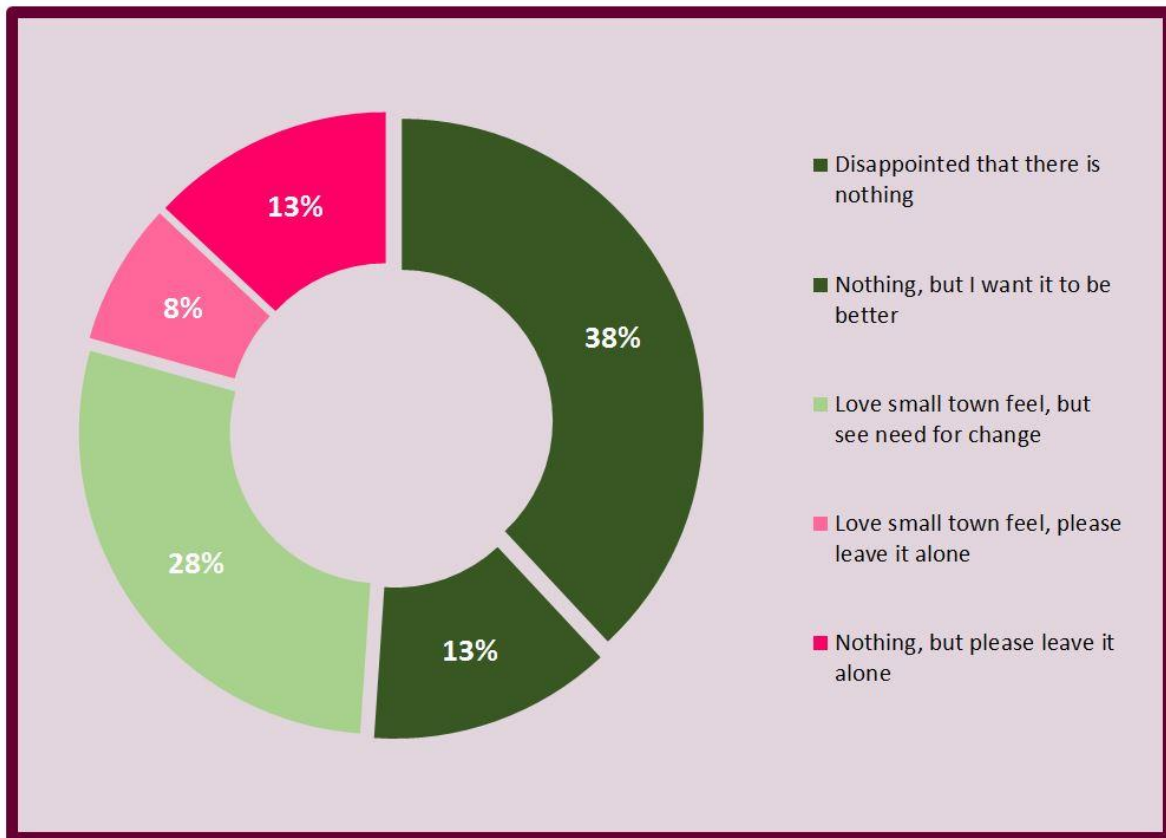


Chart 4: Breakdown of Desire to See Change or Keep Current Downtown Status from Online Survey Respondents

The chart above provides a graphic description of the divide between the desire to see change and the desire to retain the status quo for downtown. Of the 92 comments that provided a more detailed description of the response of seeing "nothing unique" in downtown or appreciating the "small town feel" of Airdrie's Downtown, the divide is 79% in favour of improving the downtown and only 21% in favour of keeping the status quo.



Survey Question 12:

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means that the downtown achieves everything you want it to achieve and 1 means that it meets none of your needs, how would you score our current downtown?

A total of 429 survey participants responded to this question. As responses for this question are not provided as short answers, it is more difficult to determine duplicate responses. However, as there were never more than seven (7) survey responses suspected of being duplicates on any other question, an assumption was made that this is the maximum number of duplicate answers for this question also.

Since such potential duplicates cannot be pulled directly from the responses, the direct impact of the most extreme responses has been analyzed. As the chart below indicates, the mean average score from the survey responses is 4.56 out of 10. If the seven intentional duplicate responses were entered with a score of “1” and are thus removed, then the average score climbs to 4.62. If seven duplicate responses were entered as “10” and are then removed, then the average score falls to 4.47. Accordingly, the average score for the current state of the downtown lies between a range of 4.47 and 4.62, as scored out of a maximum of 10 points.

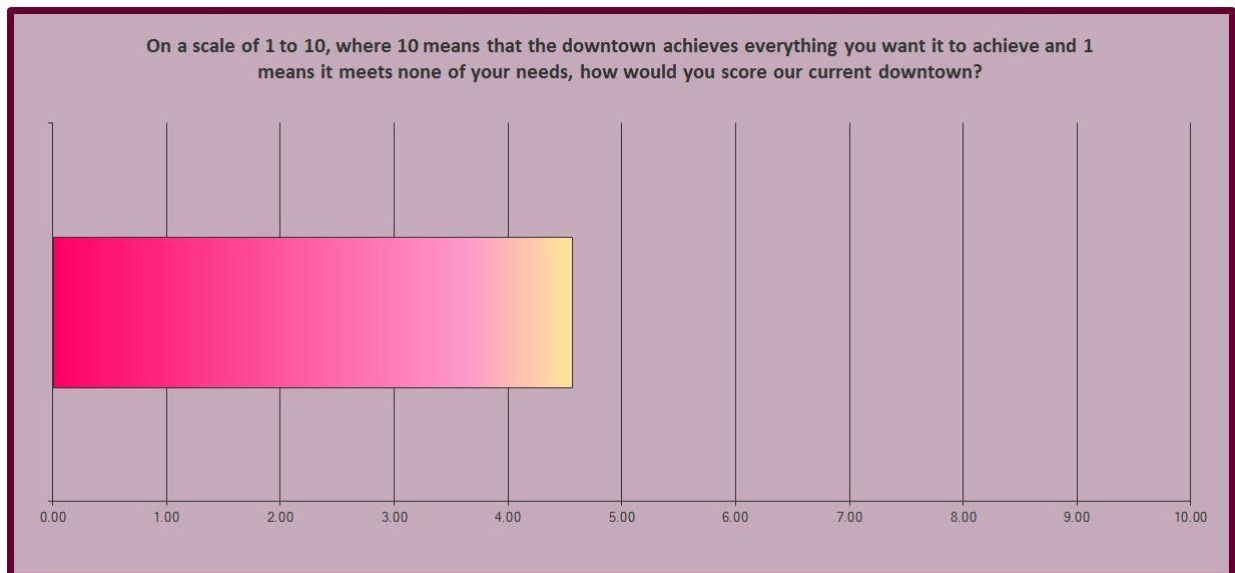


Chart 5: Breakdown of Desire to See Change or Keep Current Downtown Status

The chart on the next page provides a graphic presentation of the frequency of each response option between the lowest possible score (1) and the highest possible score (10). As the chart indicates, the most frequently cited response is five (5) and there are significantly more responses (total of 306 responses) between 1 to 5 than there are between 6 and 10 (123 responses).

It is also relevant to note that in a normal distribution of responses, the expected value of this survey question would produce a mean average score of 5.50 out of 10. However, in the case of this survey, the mean average score of 4.47 to 4.62 is less than the expected value score of 5.50. This is a strong indicator that there is general dissatisfaction with the current status of Airdrie’s Downtown.



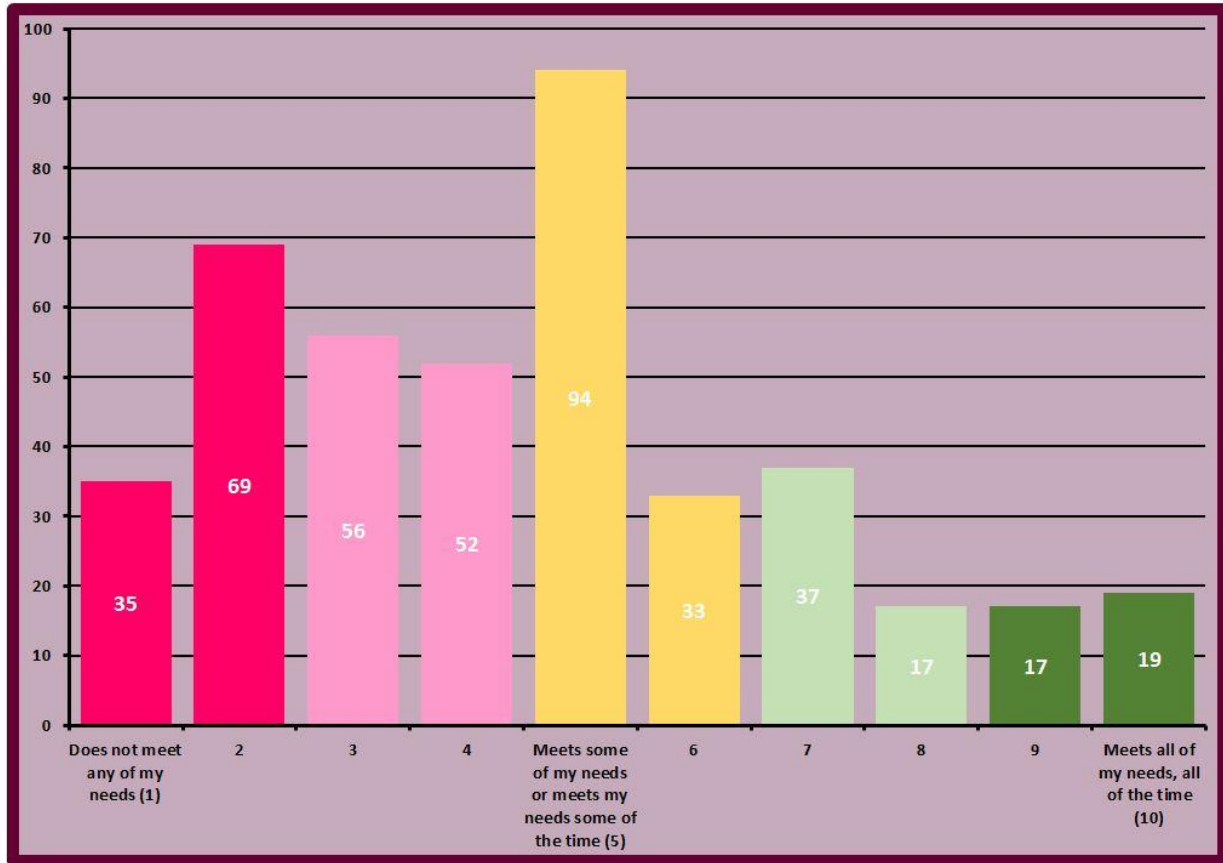


Chart 6: Overall Distribution of Scores for the Current State of Downtown Airdrie

Current State of the Downtown: Conclusions

In general terms, the data presented in this portion of the Downtown Visioning exercise suggests that there is a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of the downtown. Central in reaching this conclusion are the data pulled from Questions 1, 11 and 12 from the survey, as well as the workshop and focus group sessions, which indicate respectively that:

- 87% of the opinions about the current state of the downtown are negative, rather than positive;
- 37% of the comments received indicate that there is 'nothing' unique about the downtown;
- the current state of the downtown receives an average score ranging between 4.47–4.62, and;
- workshop participants made far more negative comments were made about the downtown vs. positive in the workshops;

Respondents from the survey, workshops and focus groups collectively agree that there is potential and desire that the downtown be improved. Overall, the majority of residents would prefer to see action taken to improve the downtown as opposed to leaving it in its current state. This is reflected in the approximately 80/20 ratio of comments received which stated a desire to see unique items in downtown (be it "nothing" or "small town feel") improved – rather than being left in the current state.



What is the vision for Downtown?

Survey Question 2:

Describe, in a word or phrase, your ideal future downtown

This online survey question had 434 responses and only three (3) skipped responses. There were five (5) responses that appeared to be duplicates and which were removed from the analysis. The 426 valid survey responses generated an equivalent number of comments, for which there were 59 miscellaneous and non-repeated comments that could not be appropriately categorized. The remaining 367 comments dispersed into ten main categories, as shown in the chart below, with the frequency of response indicated along the gridlines:

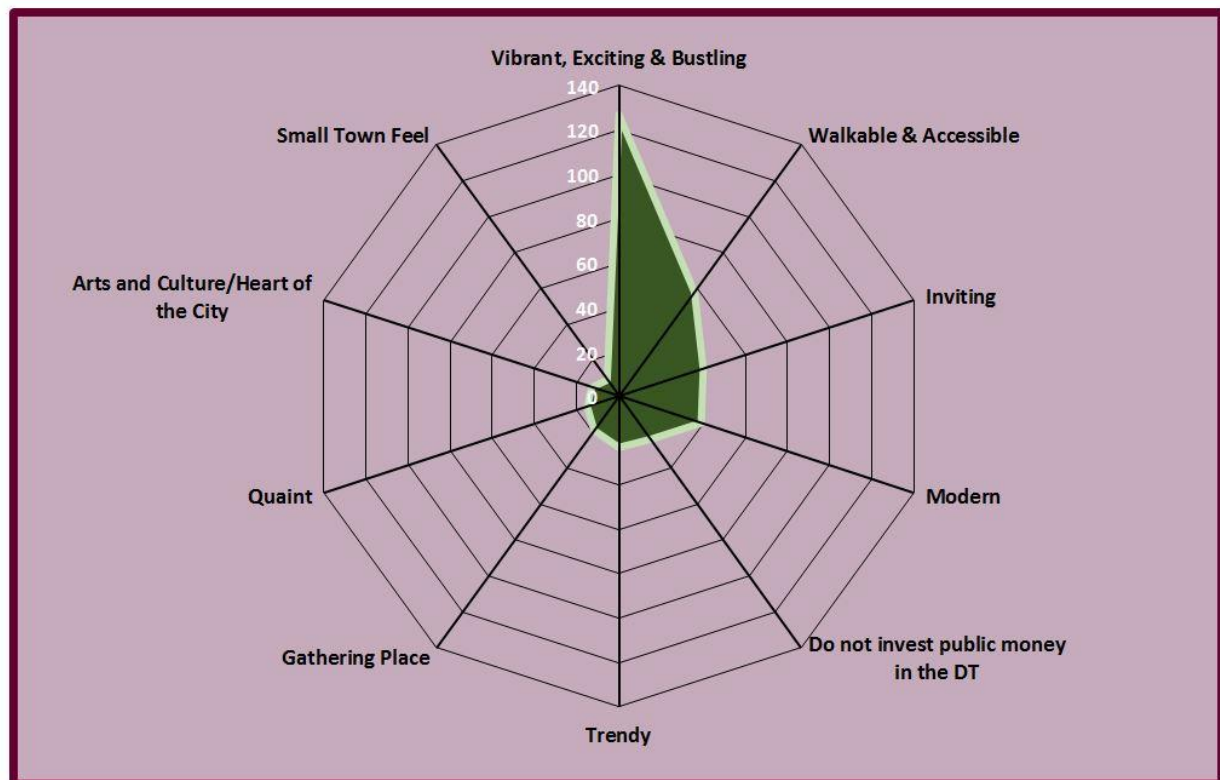


Chart 7: Distribution of Words and Phrases for Ideal Downtown from Online Survey

Statements of the ideal future downtown were offered by participants as part of the workshops on January 30 and February 1 (in the “Current State of Downtown and Visioning” table) as well as at the “Vision Statement” focus group on February 15. The responses offered a total of 333 comments, for which 278 fit into ten main categories (see chart on following page). There are some overlaps in the comments raised in the focus groups and workshops with those that were stated most frequently in the completed online surveys. In particular, the following themes showed up in all participation formats:

- vibrancy/entertainment
- more modern
- walkability and accessibility
- gathering place
- arts and culture/markets, festivals and tourism





Chart 8: Distribution of Words and Phrases for Ideal Downtown from Workshops and Focus Groups

Combining the overlapping information produces a clearer picture of the fifteen most frequently cited visions and vision statements of the ideal downtown for Airdrie:

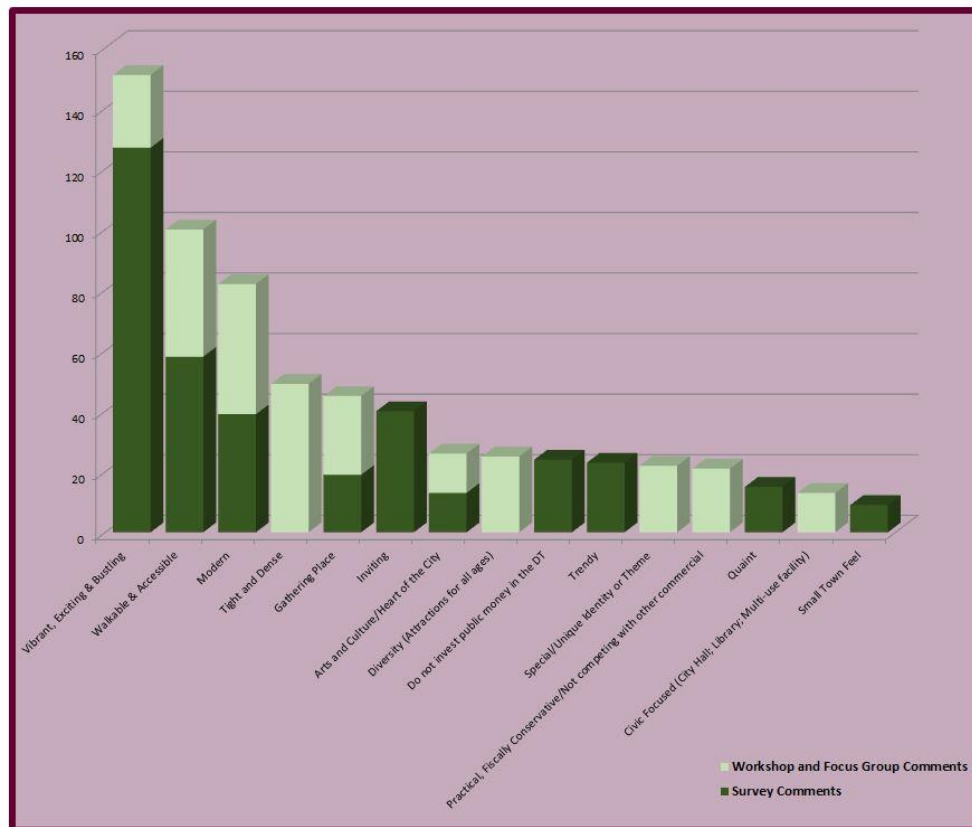


Chart 9: Combined Distribution of Words and Phrases for Ideal Downtown from All Participation Formats



In total, 645 of the 759 comments received from the combination of surveys, workshops and focus groups could be placed into the top fifteen vision statement categories, as shown in the chart above. The key words that came up frequently included the following:

- “vibrant”
- “exciting”
- “accessible”
- “action”
- “modern”
- “gathering place”
- “inviting”
- “hub”
- “walkable”
- “trendy”
- “variety”
- “destination”

Some of the responses received in the surveys articulated these themes particularly well and were stated in a similar fashion by several participants in the workshops and focus groups. These are graphically displayed in the image below:

A destination with amenities that are easy to get to on foot or [by] vehicle and [which] is fresh, clean and friendly to look at.

People might want to go there.

Pedestrian friendly; a place to sit and relax and shop.

Unique storefronts combined with natural spaces and landscaping.

Active, exciting, vibrant. A destination.

Someplace to stroll in the summer, with lots of different shops and interesting things to see.

Image 1: Sample of Vision Statements Provided Through Online Survey Responses

Downtown Vision Statements: Conclusions

Participants of the various visioning exercise formats provided a total of 759 comments, with very few negative responses and only 114 comments that could not be categorized into one of fifteen major vision statement categories. Interestingly, between the surveys, workshops and focus groups, there are slightly more visioning statement comments (759) than there were total negative statements (619 total comments) made about the current state of the downtown via the online survey (363 comments) and the combination of workshops and focus groups (256 comments).

While there is still a need to pay attention to the fact that there were more negative comments than positive comments raised about the existing state of the downtown, it is encouraging that the desire is there from the public and stakeholders to see the current state of the downtown be improved and transformed into a place that has – in particular – increased vibrancy, excitement and action. Many participants desire to see the downtown modernized in some respects, with excellent accessibility and walkability throughout. The aspiration, for many respondents, is to have downtown become a prime destination, rather than just a functional service centre and to have high quality gathering places and social hubs located within the geographic downtown area.



What land uses and services are expected to be found in downtown?

Survey Question 7:

What activities do you do downtown now?

Survey Question 9:

What services do you use downtown now?

There were a total of 419 valid responses for Question 7 of the online survey. This total removes the nine participants that skipped the question and the six obvious duplications that were observed in completing the data analysis. Multiple activities were identified by many respondents, and so the 419 question responses generated a total of 708 total comments. These comments generally lent themselves into placement into one of fifteen categories, as noted in the chart below:

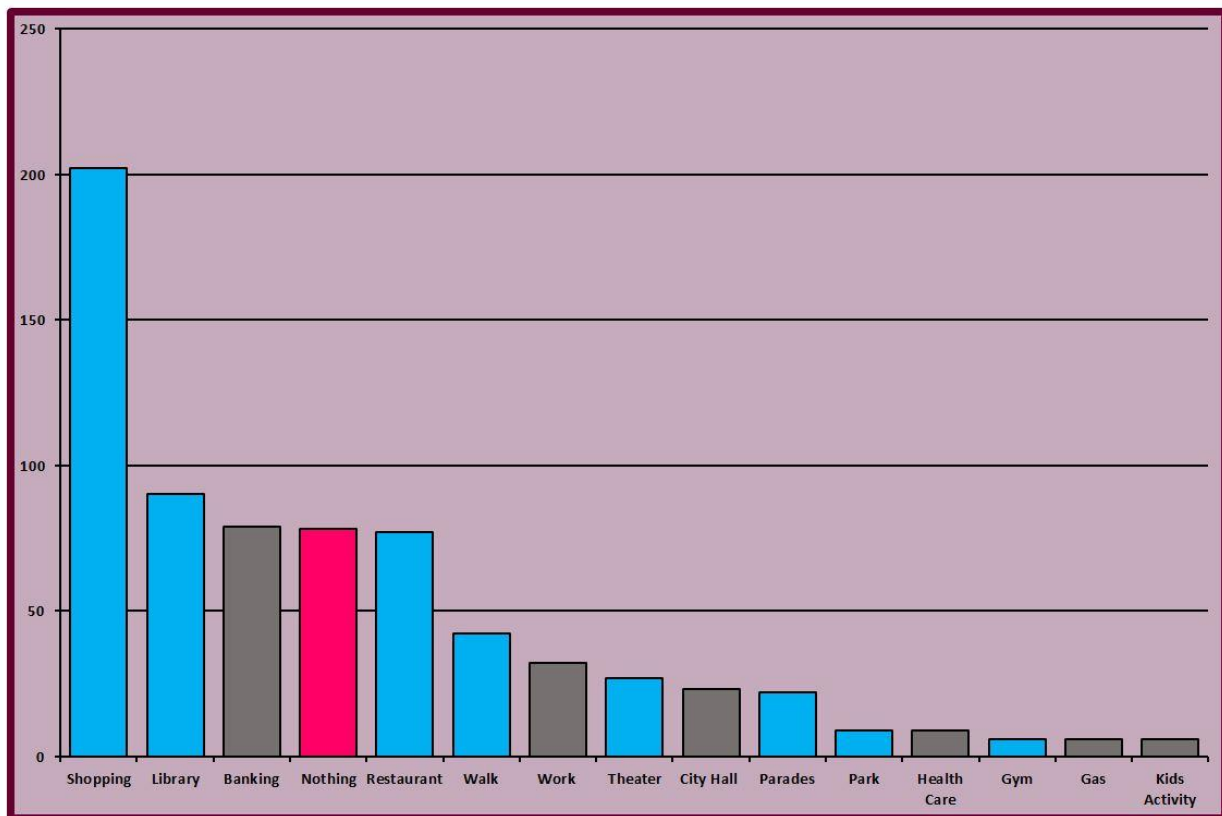


Chart 10: Categorization of Current Downtown Activity Comments from Online Survey

The chart above broadly identifies the comments received on current downtown activities into “discretionary activities” (light blue, n = 475), “functional activities” (grey, n = 155) and “no activities conducted downtown” (pink, n = 78). The data present two major findings:

1. The determination to conduct an activity downtown is still largely a matter of “choice”, and;
2. There is a substantial portion of the community that will not conduct uses/activities downtown

The fact that so many of the uses – especially “shopping” – are discretionary in nature, is an important reminder that residents make a choice to go downtown and conduct activities. In total, there were 341 survey responses that generated 630 comments, for which “shopping”, “library”, “banking” and “restaurants” topped the list of current downtown activities. However, it is worth noting that there were 78 responses which stated that there was “nothing” that they currently did as an activity downtown (highlighted in pink in the chart above). Since participants that provided a response of “nothing” to this



question did not provide additional activities, their responses did not form part of the expansion from 419 valid responses into 708 total comments. It is therefore fair to say that the 78 responses of “nothing” in fact represented 18% of the 419 total valid responses for this question. Similar to the findings in Question 11 of the survey, which noted that 43% of respondents (37% of total response comments) found there to be nothing “unique” about the downtown, this is a potentially alarming finding. If the decision to go downtown is largely discretionary, then a competitive advantage – such as having unique features or opportunities – is a critical aspect in viability. Reviewing this data in conjunction with that of Question 11 leads to the potential conclusion that the only reason that the number of “no downtown use/activity” responses aren’t higher rests in the fact that there are certain “functional uses”, such as banking, employment, conducting business at City Hall, or receiving medical treatment that are exclusively located, at present, within the general area that residents currently define as “downtown”. A change, either positively or negatively, in the number of functional uses in the downtown could therefore have a substantial impact on the amount of traffic/activity conducted there.

Question 9 of the online survey asked participants to identify the services that they currently conduct downtown. There were 418 valid responses for this question, after discounting for 14 skipped responses and two obvious duplications. However, it became apparent in analyzing the information received from this question that most participants considered a downtown activity and a downtown service to mean the same thing to them. The data trends that materialized in the analysis of the responses to Question 9 were so similar to those found in reviewing the comments made to Question 7 that they were determined not to be worth publishing separately in this report. The uses/activities of “shopping”, “library” and “banking” once again topped the list for those that responded to Question 9, and there were a substantial number of respondents that again indicated that they conduct no uses downtown.

Similar questions about the types of uses and activities currently conducted by residents in the downtown were also asked during the both of the workshops (at the “Expected Land Uses and Services” table) and again at the “Expected Land Uses and Services” focus groups (held on February 8 and February 23 respectively). The portions of these events produced a total of 91 comments, of which 89 could be reviewed and analyzed for general trends. The results are provided in the chart found on the following page, divided again between “discretionary” uses/activities (light blue, n = 62), institutional activities (grey, n = 26) and “no uses/activities” (pink, n = 1). The discretionary activities included 53 comments about conducting commercial activities/affairs in the downtown, with “small retail”, “large retail (including grocery)” and “small scale retail” leading the way. The uses/activities of “banking” and “dining/theatre” also featured prominently. The 29 comments provided about functional activities in the downtown focused primarily on institutional activities, with references to “the library”, “health care” and “city hall” topping the list in this category. There were just seven comments raised about recreational activities (paralleling the frequency of responses for “gym” and “kids activities” raised in the online survey) and two references to residential uses in the downtown that had not been raised with a similar frequency in the online survey. Perhaps most interestingly, there was only one reference to conducting little or no uses/activities in the downtown from the combination of workshops and focus groups (1% of responses), versus the 18% response rate for this category in the online survey responses.

The dramatic reduction in citing “no downtown activities” could indicate a self-selection bias by the participants who were willing to take the time to attend a workshop or focus group, the potential of “group think” in the conversation formats inherent to the workshops and focus groups, the prompting of the facilitators at the workshops and focus groups, or a simple statistical anomaly. However, it remains the case that in all consultation formats, the primary uses and activities that people participate in within the confines of downtown are firstly discretionary in nature (i.e. retail, entertainment), secondly functional (i.e. library and municipal services), and then thirdly, no activities/services at all.



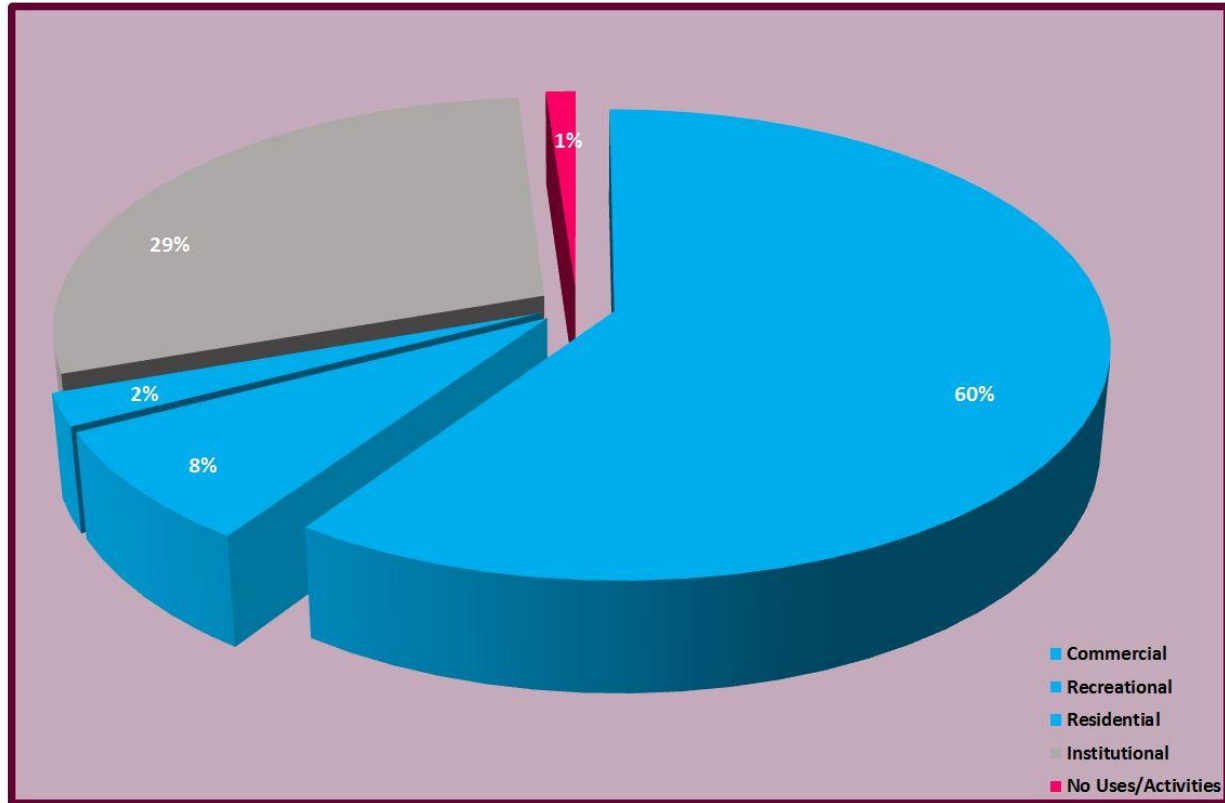


Chart 11: Categorization of Current Downtown Use/Activity Comments from Workshops and Focus Groups

Survey Question 8:

What activities do you want to see in the downtown?

Survey Question 10:

What services do you want to see in the downtown?

Question 8 of the online survey had a total of 401 responses, with 31 skipped responses and three obvious duplicate responses. Again, as a single survey participant could provide multiple comments within their short answer response that could be divided into separate categories, these 401 responses created a total of 561 comments to analyze and categorize. On review of the 561 comments provided in response to this question, it was determined that they all fell into one of ten major categories (see chart on the next page). Similar to the responses for Questions 7 and 9 of the survey, there was a contingent of respondents that did not see the need to add any new uses to the downtown. The 36 responses indicating that there was no need to add anything new represented 9% of the total valid responses and just less than 6.5% of the total comments received for this question. All of the remaining responses (n = 525, 93.5%) desired either discretionary uses or discretionary improvements in design and gathering places that would improve the quality of experience in downtown.

As the chart on the next page indicates, respondents sought improved or different shopping opportunities/experiences, better variety in restaurants, cafes/patios, pedestrian-friendly designs, cultural events/cultural centres, parks and other gathering places within their ideal future downtown. The data suggest that the functional activities are either well-established in Airdrie's downtown, or perhaps always expected by residents to be there. The vast majority of respondents to the online survey stated their clear desire to have their downtown experience enhanced through discretionary land uses and improved design. The ratio of the online respondents that want to see change versus those that would like to see the status quo in the downtown is approximately 91% in favour and only 9% opposed.



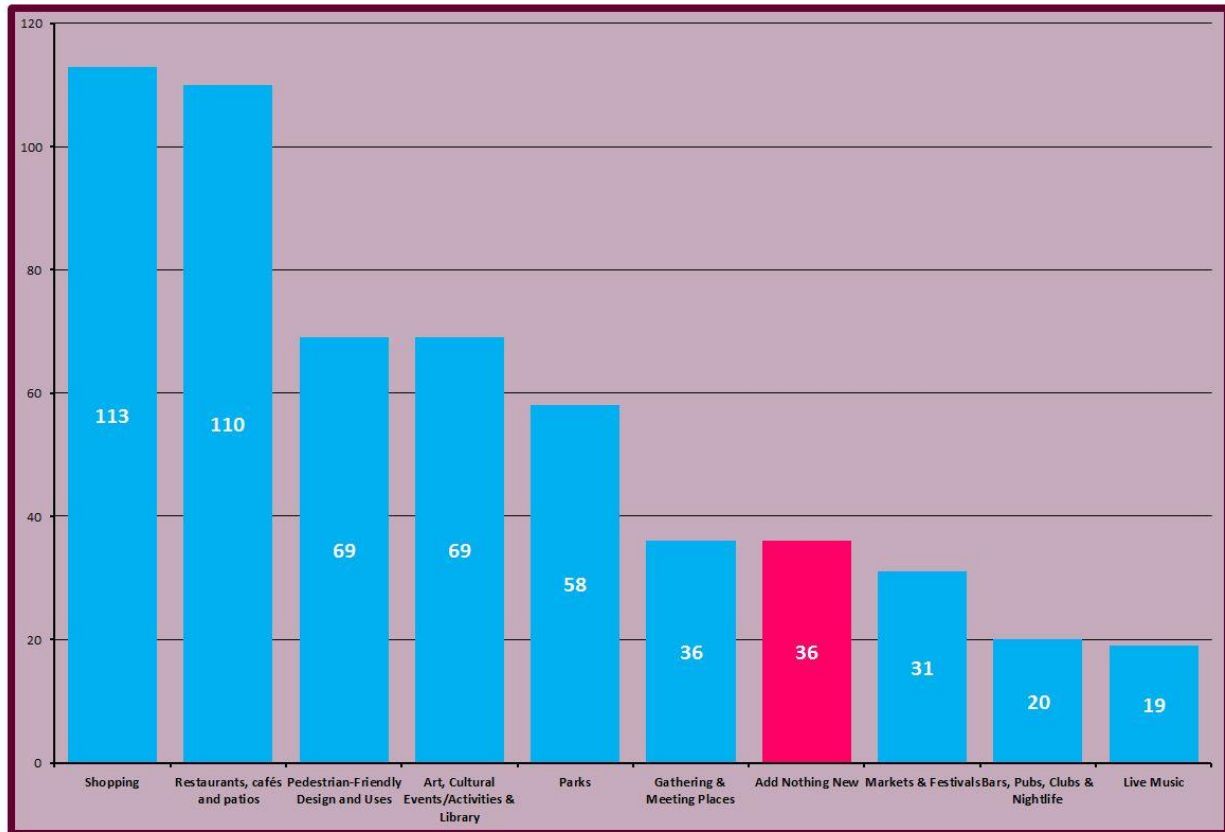


Chart 12: Categorization of Desired Downtown Activity Comments from Online Surveys

Of the 434 people that took the online survey, 31 skipped Question 10; most likely due to the similarity between Question 10 and Question 8 for most respondents (stated within up to 47 of the completed responses). There were also four obvious duplicate responses that were eliminated from the analysis. This left a total of 353 valid survey responses. Akin to the analysis performed for Question 8, the individual survey responses were divided into eleven categories based on the general themes of their responses. Since it was possible for a respondent to desire more than one additional service within the downtown, the 353 valid survey responses produced a total of 420 categorized comments.

The vast majority of categories for responses to Question 10 line up well with Question 8. However, there is enough disparity between the category types, as well as the frequency of certain responses (especially “no new services”), to warrant inclusion in this summary report. Charts indicating the differences in responses between Questions 8 and 10 can be found on the following page. Interestingly, there is a more significant gap between the percentage of respondents (11.6%) that stated a desire to see nothing changed – in terms of land uses – within the downtown, than there were when asked about desired activities within the downtown under Question 8. Because of the dispersion of comments to Question 10, the ranking of the “add nothing new” responses is significantly increased. However, the actual count ($n = 41$) of “add nothing new” responses in Question 10 is almost identical to the actual count ($n = 36$) received in Question 8. The higher ratio for Question 10 is almost certainly due to the number of respondents that skipped this question because of its similarity to Question 8. Overall, the ratio of those that wanted to see new or additional uses added to the downtown is similar to that of Question 8, calculated at approximately 88:12. The only major difference between the types of uses and activities that residents want to see in the downtown between the questions rests in the inclusion of certain “functional (institutional)” land uses noted under Question 10 (see chart on the following page).



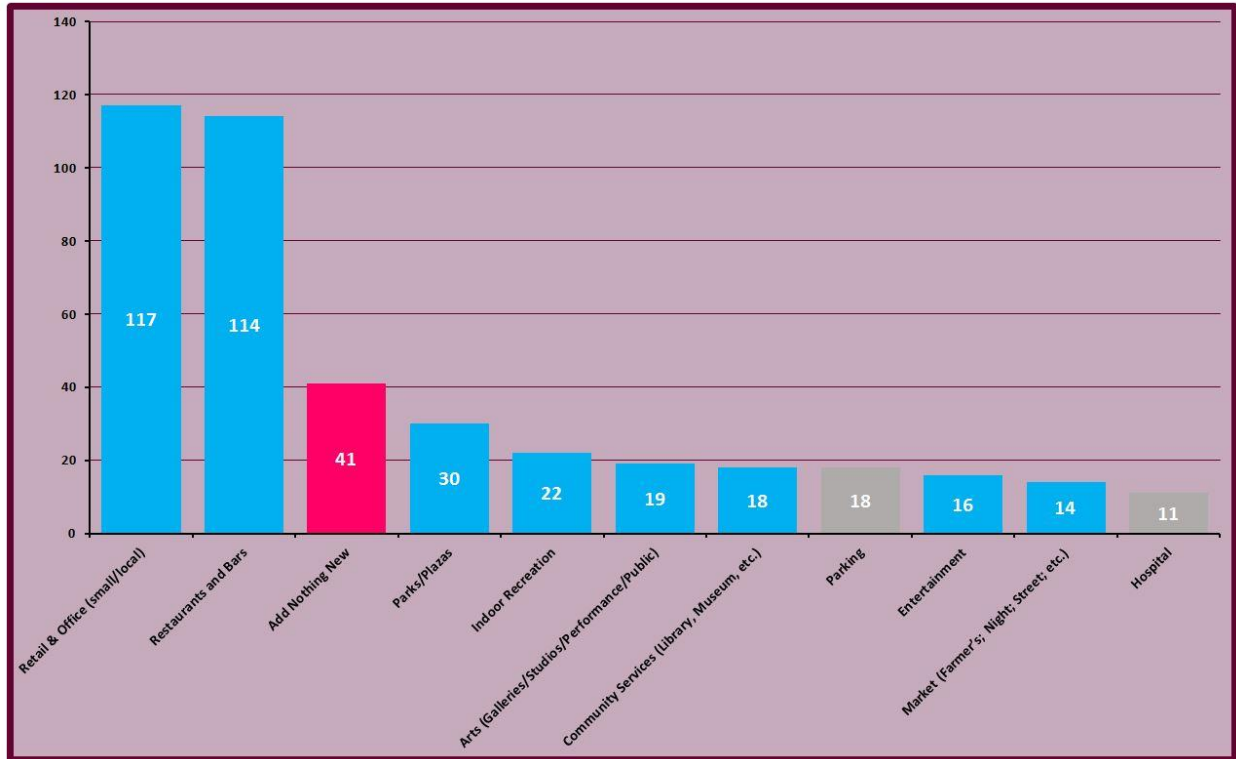


Chart 13: Categorization of Desired Downtown Services Comments from Online Surveys

During the workshops and focus groups, the questions about desired activities and land uses were generally phrased together and therefore generated responses that were grouped together and summarized as part of Chart 11 on a previous page. There is no additional information from the workshops or focus groups specific to services (as opposed to that which was reported for activities as part of Chart 11 above) needing to be analyzed and reported here.

Expected Downtown Activities, Land Uses and Services: Conclusions

The data from the combination of surveys, workshops and focus groups indicate that the primary activities and services that residents presently use in downtown are discretionary in nature, and are led by shopping, dining and library services (seen as being distinct from other municipal services). Less frequently mentioned, but still a primary reason to go downtown are more functional-style uses, such as visits to City Hall, financial institutions and places of employment. There are those that do not conduct any activities downtown, but this group is relatively small – expressed as 18% of online respondents and 1% of in-person respondents. Still, the fact that activities and services in downtown are generally discretionary in nature gives credence to this subset of respondents that report no downtown activities and makes the review of the **desired** uses and activities potentially all the more important.

Collectively, the participants in the visioning exercise reported a desire to see enhanced shopping, dining and cultural activities downtown. Most of the desired uses and activities were also discretionary in nature, with some improved or additional institutional uses referenced. The vast majority of respondents desired new or improved uses/activities within the downtown (as opposed to doing nothing), with ratios of those in favour of new or augmented activities/services ranging from 88:12 (as reported under Question 10) to 99:1 (in the focus groups and workshop responses).



What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

Survey Question 3:

What are the top 1 or 2 strengths of downtown currently?

Survey Question 4:

What are the top 1 or 2 weaknesses of downtown currently?

Survey Question 5:

What are the top 1 or 2 opportunities for downtown currently?

Survey Question 6:

What are the top 1 or 2 threats facing downtown currently?

Question 3 had 417 responses and 17 skipped responses, with three obvious duplicate responses that were removed from the analysis. Again, because it was possible for an individual respondent to provide multiple comments within their response, the number of comments received (625) exceeded the number of valid online survey responses (414).

Question 4 had 429 responses and just five skipped responses. Again, there were three obvious duplicate responses removed from the analysis. There were a total of 705 comments received from the 426 valid survey responses.

Question 5 had 404 responses and 30 skipped responses. Once again, there were three obvious duplicate responses removed from the analysis. The 401 valid responses generated a total of 583 comments for analysis.

Question 6 had 413 responses and 21 skipped responses. Three obvious duplicate responses were removed from the analysis. The 410 valid survey responses generated 541 total comments.

The questions asked at the workshops (“SWOT Analysis Table”) and the focus groups (all focus group sessions, time permitting) were so similar that the comments received during these formats have been added to the summary and analysis for this section. Accordingly, it is noted that the following additional comment counts have been added for this section from the workshops and focus groups specifically:

- Strengths (80 comments from workshops and focus groups)
- Weaknesses (222 comments from workshops and focus groups)
- Opportunities (251 comments from workshops and focus groups)
- Threats (106 comments from workshops and focus groups)

It is instructive to note the number of comments received in the “current weaknesses” category as part of the SWOT analysis overall, but stemming from the workshops and focus groups in particular. The participants themselves largely directed the amount of time to be spent on each of these topic areas as part of the workshops and focus groups, depending on the nature of their responses and where they seemed keen to take the conversation. Despite this, there were nearly three times as many “weaknesses” pointed out about the downtown than there were current “strengths”. This is corroborated to a certain extent that Question 4 received the highest valid response rate (n = 426 out of a possible 434) and generated the highest number of comments in the online survey.

However, in analyzing the cumulative responses, it was important to note that sometimes there were responses that should be discounted from the total or placed into other sections of the SWOT analysis. For example, it was found that there were 42 “strength” comments that were actually articulated as a lack of strengths, reducing the total number of “strength” comments to 663. Similarly, there were nine comments that were listed as a “weakness” that can be reasonably interpreted as a “strength” (i.e. “downtown is fine the way that it is”), reducing the number of comments under the “weaknesses” portion of the SWOT analysis to 918. A total of 18 comments were made under the “opportunities”



section to indicate that the respondent wasn't sure what the opportunities were, or, that he/she didn't see any. This reduced the total number of comments in this section from 834 to 816. The number of "threats" articulated by the combination of workshop, focus group and survey participants was reduced from 647 to 627, as there were 20 responses indicating that they were not sure what the threats were, if any.

However, it is very encouraging to note that even the number of "weaknesses" noted in the workshop and focus group discussions (n = 222) was actually surpassed by the number of "opportunities" cited by the participants (n = 251) during those same workshops and focus groups. The number of comments related to both strengths and opportunities were also very high in the online survey. Anecdotally, workshop and focus group facilitators often reported that their participants often built on each other's comments for finding ways to improve the downtown. Perceptions of, and potential solutions for, the downtown changed dynamically for participants within the workshop and focus group events as a result of direct engagement with other residents.

Strengths		
663	Aesthetics	
	Clean and well-maintained	14
	Hanging baskets and street trees	10
	Amenities	
	Nose Creek Park and other park systems/areas	23
	Special events and festivals	12
	Public Institutions	
	Library	45
	City Hall	43
	Urgent Care and medical services	12
	Perceptions and Feelings	
	Not busy/little congestion/easy to get around	22
	Small town feel/small	20
	Friendly people/atmosphere	7
	Accessibility	
	Good/easy access	47
	Central location	41
	Good/ample/sufficient/convenient parking	34
	Land Use and Building Development	
	Diversity/variety/amount of shops	22
	Local/independent businesses	21
	Financial district/banks	18
	Other	
	Nothing/no strengths	42
	Potential/blank canvas/room for improvement	14

Table 5: Combined Top Responses from Workshops, Focus Groups and Surveys in the "Strengths" Category of SWOT Analysis

The 663 comments provided in this part of the SWOT analysis (after subtracting the 42 comments which indicate that there are "no strengths") point to the central location, general accessibility, and certain civic/institutional uses as the top strengths of Airdrie's Downtown at the current time.



Weaknesses			
918	Activity and Recreation		
		No activities/attractions/places or support for activities	10
		No events or culture (after 7pm)	5
	Aesthetics		
		Outdated/old/boring/run down/neglected	59
		Unattractive/unappealing	28
		Lacks character/not/unique	25
		Lack of theme/identity/vision	24
		Not cohesive/fragmented	18
	Amenities		
		No gathering spaces/core/centre	16
		Lack of diversity/variety	10
		No night life/dead at night	8
	Perceptions and Feelings		
		No reason to go there/lack of draw/no reason to stay	52
		Lack of downtown/lack of definition	18
	Accessibility		
		Lack of parking/lack of parking at right times in right places	96
		Not pedestrian friendly	56
		Poorly planned transportation infrastructure	45
		Lack of connectivity/accessibility	22
	Land Use and Building Development		
		Vacant lots	43
		Lack of shops/retail/restaurants	22
		Design is bad/poorly orientated	20
	Governance/Government Policies		
		Library is too small/need better library	5
		Lack of post-secondary education	2
	Other		
		No weaknesses/fine the way it is	9
		Everything is a weakness/blank canvas	5

Table 6: Combined Top Responses from Workshops, Focus Groups and Surveys in the “Weaknesses” Category of SWOT Analysis

The 918 comments provided in this part of the SWOT analysis (after subtracting the nine comments which indicate that there are “no weaknesses”) point to the lack of parking, outdated and unattractive aesthetic nature of the current state of downtown, the lack of a major draw or destination and the fragmented nature of downtown, as the primary weaknesses at the current time. Anecdotally, many participants in the workshops and focus groups did agree that the issue relating to lack of parking tended to focus on certain places and certain times. Additional analysis on parking issues would be beneficial for the municipality to complete.



Opportunities			
816	Activity and Recreation		
		Concerts/festivals/general events	8
		Repurpose parking lots for festivals/markets	5
		Sport tourism/tournaments	4
	Aesthetics		
		Heritage/history/add character (i.e. Cochrane, Okotoks	11
		Remain small and charming	5
	Amenities		
		Central/public/gathering spaces and community plazas	31
		Additional/better greenspaces and parks	14
		Arts gallery/arts and cultural centre/museum	13
	Public Institutions		
		New/bigger/expanded library	29
		Attract post-secondary institution	3
	Perceptions and Feelings		
		Lack of connection/destination	7
	Policy, Governance, Political Will		
		More consistent/better master plan/create vision	11
	Accessibility		
		Create walkability/be more pedestrian friendly	34
		Create better parking options	25
	Land Use and Building Development		
		More boutique/local/unique shops and restaurants	80
		Build on empty lands/great potential for redevelopment	61
		Build up/add mixed uses and residential	28
	Other		
		There is room to grow/expand	38
		Not sure/none	18

Table 7: Combined Top Responses from Workshops, Focus Groups and Surveys in the “Opportunities” Category of SWOT Analysis

The 816 comments provided in this part of the SWOT analysis (after subtracting the 18 comments which indicate that there are “no opportunities”) point primarily to a desire for more local and boutique shopping opportunities and experiences as well as the development and redevelopment of vacant and under-utilized lands within the downtown. Improving parks and gathering spaces, as well as the pedestrian connections to them were often highlighted by the visioning exercise participants as key opportunities for Airdrie’s Downtown. Certain land uses, such as a new/improved library and the introduction of more residential within the downtown rounded out the most frequently mentioned opportunities.



Threats		
627	Activity and Recreation	
	No evening activities	3
	Aesthetics	
	Run down/empty/old buildings/dirty looking	27
	Not attractive/not inviting for investment or visitors	17
	Amenities	
	Nothing to keep you/lack of destination	36
	Proximity and expansion plans of Cross Iron Mills	6
	Lack of green spaces	5
	Public Institutions	
	Crime/safety/attracting the “wrong crowd”	8
	Lack of fire hall and emergency services	4
	Policy, Governance, Political Will	
	Lack of political will/vision	7
	Poor planning/allowing unplanned development	6
	Accessibility	
	Dangerous intersections/parking lots/high traffic volumes	47
	Parking issues	39
	Land Use and Building Development	
	Big box stores/major commercial on N/S ends of Main Street	31
	Ghost town/empty retail/closing businesses	30
	Urban sprawl/suburban growth	19
	Other	
	None/can't think of any	20
	Forgotten/not prioritized/lost to other parts of the city	12

Table 8: Combined Top Responses from Workshops, Focus Groups and Surveys in the “Threats” Category of SWOT Analysis

The 627 comments provided in this part of the SWOT analysis (subtracting the 20 comments which indicate that there are “no threats”) point to a range of potential threats for Airdrie’s Downtown. These include poor road and pedestrian connections/relationships, parking issues, a lack of a major draw, and competition from commercial areas at both ends of Main St., as well as externally from Cross Iron Mills.

Downtown SWOT Analysis: Conclusions

Overall, there were more comments provided about potential weaknesses (918 comments) than there were potential strengths (663 comments). This was especially true as part of the workshops and focus groups, where participants provided a total of 222 weaknesses in those formats against just 80 strengths. However, there were also far more opportunities stated by participants (816 comments) than there were threats (627 comments). This was also true of the workshops and focus groups, where there were 251 opportunities noted against just 106 threats. The data point to the central location, easy access and key civic institutions as being the main strengths of downtown. The most frequently cited weaknesses are a lack of parking, outdated and unattractive buildings and infrastructure, challenges for pedestrians and a lack of a major draw or destination. The greatest opportunities are seen as being new local and boutique retail shops/experiences and redevelopment of vacant and under-utilized sites. Threats seen by the public include traffic/pedestrian conflicts, parking issues and a combination of internal and external commercial competition.



Other Miscellaneous Comments from Workshops and Focus Groups

As seen in the data summaries above, there were specific topic areas that were covered by the twelve online survey questions and supplemented with some of the general questions asked during the workshops and focus groups. These questions were specifically designed to answer the four major questions to be answered as part of the downtown visioning exercise:

1. Where should the boundary line for “downtown” be drawn?
2. What is the opinion of the current state of the downtown and what is the vision for it?
3. What land uses and services are expected to be found within our downtown?
4. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our downtown?

However, there were a few additional questions and topic areas that were asked at some of the workshops, focus groups and small group meetings (i.e. Airdrie Board of Youth Affairs, Cedarwood Station) that did not necessarily relate to the four major topic areas, but which were raised out of general interest and to guide potential next steps. Such questions included the following:

1. What time or times do you use downtown the most?
2. How would you describe the past character of downtown?
3. What characteristics make you feel like you are in downtown?
4. Do we need a downtown plan?
5. How should we promote downtown?
6. What should the role of government be?
7. To what level should downtown planning be prioritized?

In addition, participants at the “Expected Land Uses” focus groups on February 8 and February 23 provided some suggestions for developing current vacant parcels and redeveloping other parcels that had been noted as “underutilized” as part of the workshops held on January 30 and February 1.

There were relatively few comments received for these questions/exercises as compared those that related more directly to the four major questions posed as part of this downtown visioning exercise. As such, the data has not been analyzed for major trends nor placed into graphic display. However, a brief summary of the comments received under each of these questions is provided below:

What time or times do you use downtown the most?

There were only 14 recorded comments in response to this question, but virtually all responses indicated that there are specific times that the participant would travel to downtown and also when they would not. Often the travel times were dictated on when downtown was perceived as being too busy, but other reasons included attendance at specific meetings, festivals and activities.

How would you describe the past character of the downtown?

Administration recorded 70 comments in response to this question when it was raised to spur discussion at the “Downtown Vision Statement” focus group held on February 15. Responses varied depending on when the individual participant had first moved to Airdrie, but references to a specific commercial location (such as Dusan’s department store, the local hardware store, the Old Hotel, and the previous configuration of the Towerlane Centre) were common. It was noted by a few participants that



downtown used to be the only place to do shopping in Airdrie and that there were some social problems (especially loitering) perceived to be found there in the past.

What characteristics make you feel like you are in downtown?

Twenty-three (23) comments were recorded under this question and the responses paralleled those given in response to Question 11 from the online survey, which had asked participants to define what is “unique” about the downtown presently. This meant that there was an approximately even split between elements of “small town feel”, “buildings and things”, “walkability” and “urban décor”. However, when participants were in face-to-face conversation with each other, there were no references to there being “no characteristics” that made them feel like they were in the downtown.

Do we need a downtown plan?

Answers varied as part of the 62 comments recorded to this question, which was posed in a general way at most of the focus groups (time permitting). The most frequent responses indicated a desire to “develop a vision/plan and stick to it”. However, there were approximately 10% - 15% of respondents who indicated that it was not a priority for them (or, that it didn’t seem to be a priority of the municipality).

How should we promote downtown?

There were only 4 recorded comments in response to this question, and therefore no recorded trends.

What should the role of government be?

There were 115 recorded comments in response to this question, and the responses ranged considerably – from “do nothing” to physical improvements (i.e. plant more street trees) to other types of actions (i.e. facilitate, make connections, start conversations, etc.). However, similar to the responses under the question of “*Do we need a downtown plan*”, the most frequently provided response was to “develop a vision/plan and stick to it”.

To what level should downtown planning be prioritized?

There was a near equal split between “low”, “moderately low”, “moderately high” and “very high/important” among the 31 comments received on this question, which was posed at the focus groups exclusively.

During the “Expected Land Use” focus groups on February 8 and February 23, participants were asked to consider development and redevelopment options for a series of parcels that had been noted as possible sites for improvement within the downtown during the workshops held on January 30 and February 1. Due to the limited time spent discussing these parcels at each of the workshops, there are no major trends to report. However, the majority of comments received about the “Old Fire Hall site” liked the idea of placing a civic/institutional building there (i.e. library, cultural centre, or museum) while there were a few participants that liked the idea of having the City of Airdrie contact landowners with vacant parcels about the possibility of creating “temporary parks” until redevelopment opportunities made financial sense to them.

There are no final conclusions to be drawn from the relatively limited amount of information provided to these questions and vacant parcel discussions.

