

GEORGIA

MAIN STREET



A GUIDE TO HOSTING A
COMMUNITY VISIONING SESSION

Growing Business. Preserving History.



— A GUIDE TO HOSTING A —
COMMUNITY
VISIONING SESSION

A community visioning session provides the local Main Street program an opportunity to invite a diverse and varied representation of the public to contribute ideas, recommendations, and resources to the vision, which will ultimately shape downtown. While the size and scope of the community visioning session will vary from town to town, the purpose it plays in work plan development remains the same. The ideas expressed here will serve as a framework for the manager, the board of directors, and the downtown's strategic plan for years to come. When done correctly it can encourage citizen buy-in and support, grow stakeholder engagement, and leverage financial resources. On the following pages we have outlined a step-by-step guide to planning your community's visioning session keeping in mind that a visioning session should serve solely as an opportunity to listen and to gauge involvement. This is one of the first steps in a multi-step process that will shape your Main Street program's strategic plan.





PLANNING YOUR MEETING

When you begin to plan your meeting, the Main Street program should first identify who needs to be involved in the community visioning session process. It is essential to consider how different people bring different perspectives, understanding that all opinions are valuable. With your visioning session, it is important to identify the target audience who will be impacted by the Main Street program's decisions. While deciding what groups and organizations to engage, consider potential partners with whom the Main Street program is most likely to work with directly in the upcoming year. Make sure to seek out and include under-represented groups and voices in your community. Having the right people at the table can go a long way to mitigating potential conflicts, addressing questions and dealing with issues that may arise throughout the course of the event. Having elected officials and city staff present is important because often citizens aren't able to differentiate

between city, county, and partner organizations' responsibilities. Having representation present from these groups can provide the facilitator the opportunity to address topics brought up during the meeting, which may fall into categories beyond the scope, reach or responsibility of the Main Street program.

Questions to ask yourself may include:

- Who will work most often with the Main Street program?
- Whose input is needed to create a vision for your downtown?
- Which stakeholders and organizations in your community need to be at the table?
- Which partners will be important to support Main Street-driven projects?
- How do we reach out to under-represented groups and voices in your community?

Example stakeholders include:

Local residents	Local churches	Merchants association
Chamber of Commerce	Industrial development authority	Potential volunteers
City council members	Tourism board	Recreation authority
Downtown business owners	Planning or zoning board	Historical/preservation society
Economic development org.	Urban redevelopment authority	Local financial institutions
Mayor	Planning commission	Historic preservation commission
City development authority	Regional commission staff	City staff
Convention and visitors bureau	Housing authority	Local media

PICKING A TIME AND LOCATION

The location of the meeting space is extremely important. The community visioning session should be held in a publicly accessible site whose facilities meet ADA standards. When selecting a location, consider a space that is comfortable and large enough to accommodate the projected number of attendees. If you are planning to use technology, make sure to select a space that can accommodate all your presentation needs. Ensure there is adequate parking or close access to public transportation for all attendees, and make sure to arrive early on the day of the event to confirm the room set-up will meet your needs.

Upon arrival at the meeting space, note how seating is arranged. Consider a room setup that will be favorable to participation. The seating arrangement will depend on the number of participants, but make sure the room is situated so that everyone can easily view the screen if you are giving a presentation.

With large or diverse communities, the idea of multiple meetings at multiple locations may need to be considered. It is important to meet people where they are, and that sometimes means holding meetings outside of downtown. This can mean going to where the people are versus waiting for them to come to us. Churches, community centers, senior centers and schools can all be good places to host visioning sessions because their core purpose is to serve the broader community. No matter the meeting place, the most important thing is to

gather input from multiple people with diverse backgrounds, ensuring all voices are heard.

Meetings should be held at a time most convenient to the public and at times that encourage the greatest number of participants possible. If you plan to host your visioning session during the evening hours, it can be valuable to provide childcare options as well as complimentary food and beverages to encourage attendance. For optimum engagement, we recommend holding multiple meetings in different locations and times of day. By offering an online survey, you provide an opportunity to engage with different demographics while offering the benefit of anonymity. In the appendix section of this workbook, we have provided two example survey forms that can be used to build a unique program evaluation specific to your community. The surveys have been developed to target both the downtown business and the citizens in a unique way. The analysis of these surveys should be used in conjunction with the results from the community visioning session to form the basis of the Main Street program's strategic plan.

SETTING THE AGENDA

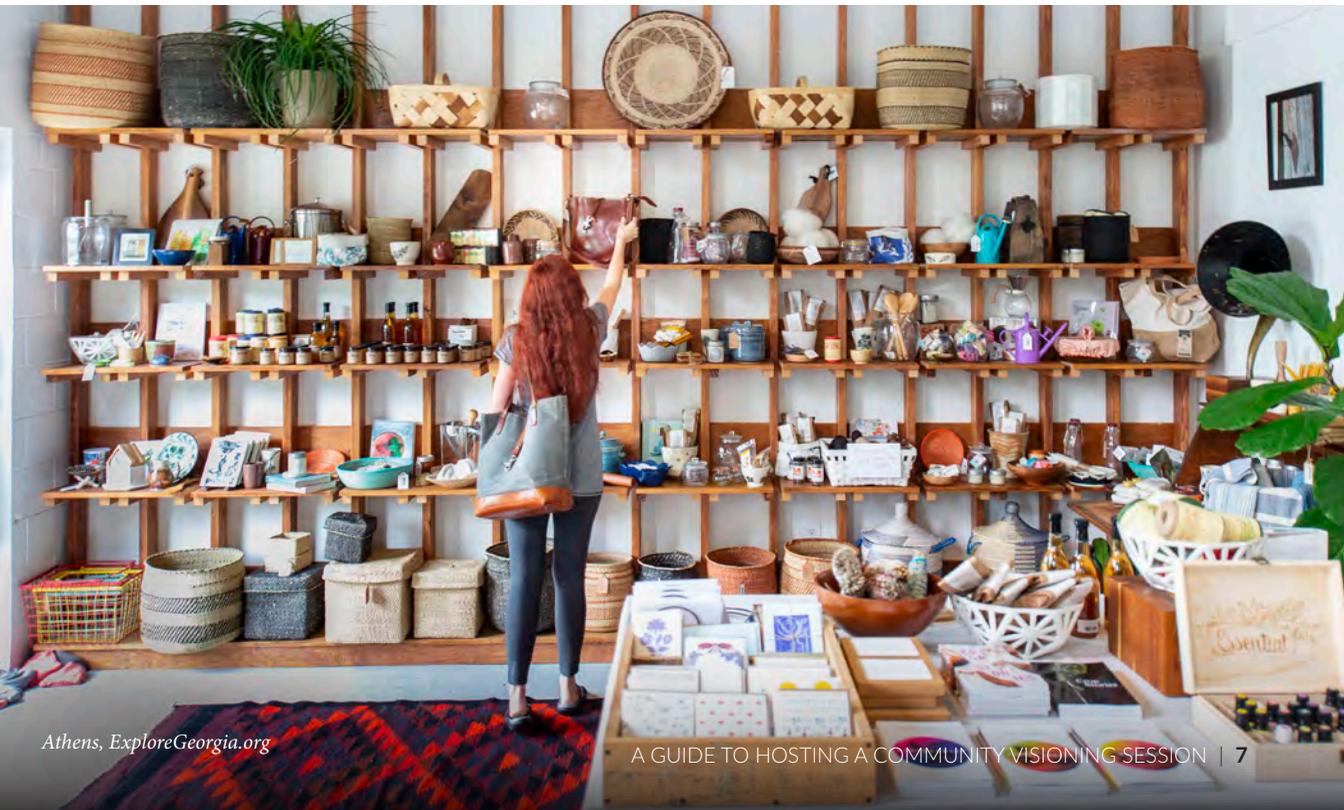
One of the most important factors driving participation in your visioning session will be the agenda. The agenda should help guide your meeting and ensure engagement, effective communication, and efficient time management. It is important to work with the board of directors to select the topics and subjects to be discussed, along with the role they

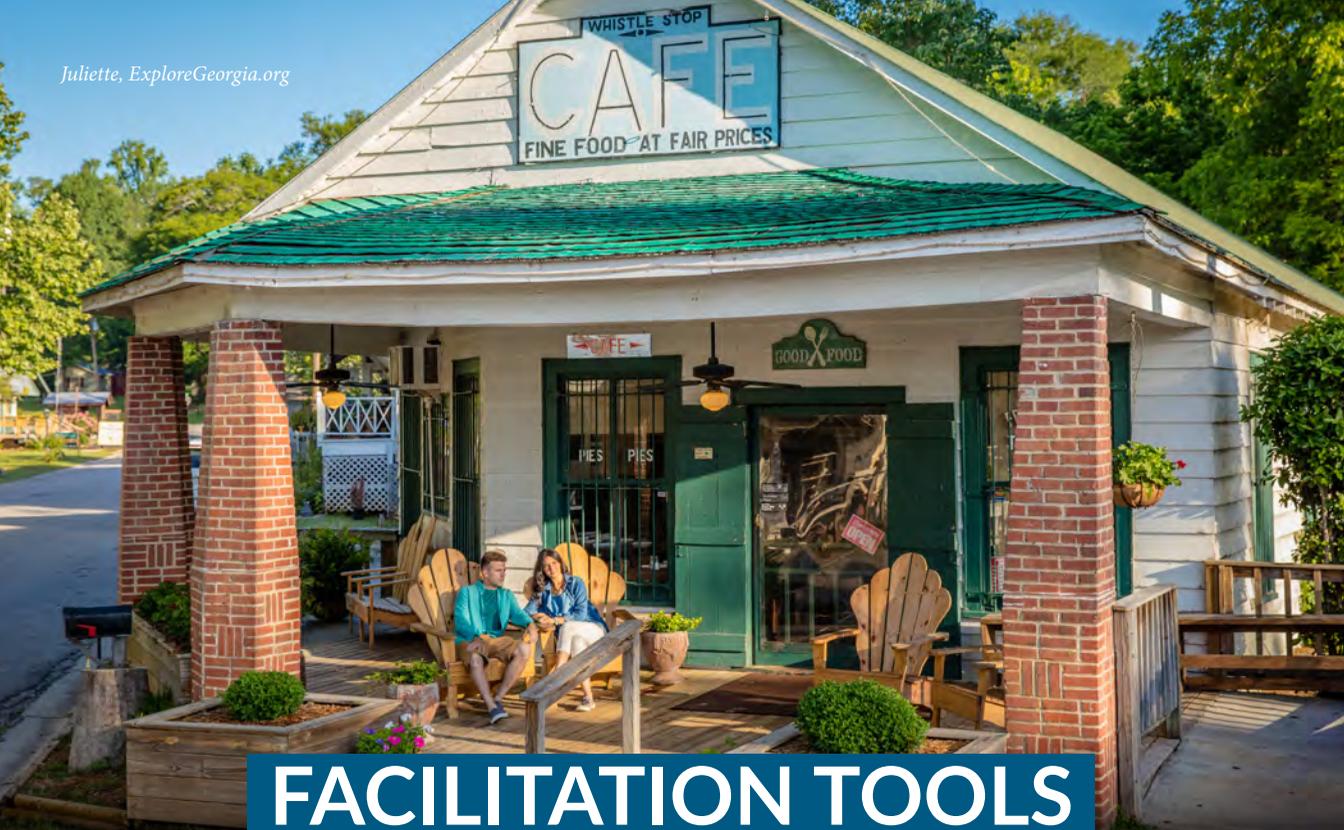
will play in the presentation. In the appendix section of this workbook, you will find an example agenda developed for your use. This agenda can be adjusted as needed but has been constructed to reflect the typical topics of conversation covered at these types of meetings. While the sample agenda contains only a few limited questions for discussion, it has been crafted this way to encourage dialogue and feedback. The facilitator will need the opportunity to feel out the discussion and shape the direction the conversation is moving. When working with larger groups, it can be easier to ask these questions and have answers reported out by table scribes versus having everyone participate or weighing-in at one time. This can also ensure more participation from citizens who are typically soft-spoken or reserved in group settings. The example agenda, available in the appendix, has been intentionally crafted to keep the discussion on track with a positive and constructive focus. Take time to identify any potential issues or topics that might become controversial so that you have adequate time to put safeguards in place to address these concerns.

In an ideal situation, the Main Street manager or the board chair will serve as the visioning session's meeting facilitator. This can be intimidating for

An effective facilitator never gets defensive, knows when to move the conversation along, and understands this is an opportunity to listen, not to solve problems.

new Main Street managers, but this key leadership role can go a long way towards building trust, encouraging open dialogue and solidifying the Main Street program's relationship with the business community. The meeting facilitator should be able to empower discussions, direct the conversation, and gather feedback from all participants. The facilitator should always remain unbiased and stay open to all topics of conversation. It is important for the facilitator to be comfortable with public speaking, presenting information before groups, and communicating with the media. An effective facilitator never gets defensive, knows when to move the conversation along, and understands this is an opportunity to listen, not to solve problems. If the visioning session has the potential to be hostile—or if leading this dialogue is out of the Main Street Manager's comfort zone—it can be beneficial for the community to bring in a professional facilitator to lead the discussion.





FACILITATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

PARKING LOT

A meeting parking lot recognizes topics of discussion that are not the focus of the current meeting. It is a great visual way to acknowledge a topic but to keep the meeting on track. As subjects come up that don't relate directly to the question being discussed, they are added to the group's parking lot. The parking lot can easily be created using a piece of blank paper. The parking lot should be reviewed at the close of the meeting to see if any of the topics can play a supporting role on previously made decisions.

SPIRIT STICK

A spirit stick is a tool that ensures each person has a turn to share his or her comments with the rest of the group. The person holding the stick is the only one who can speak while everyone else listens. When the person with the spirit stick finishes talking, he or she passes the stick to someone else.

ICEBREAKER

An ice breaker is an activity or game used to help participants get to know each other in a meeting

and to create a warm environment for discussion. They can range from simple introductions to a quick participation game. Examples are Two Truths and a Lie, Draw a Pig, Visualize a Stove, and Introductions with One Fun Fact about Yourself.

SPOTLIGHT

The spotlight goes around the room, and each person has a brief turn to speak. This meeting tool ensures that all attendees can contribute their thoughts and comments. A time limit of one minute maximum per person (depending on the meeting attendance) helps ensure that everyone has equal time to speak. A time limit also controls "soap-boxing".

DOT VOTING

Dot voting is a simple and effective polling tool used to identify opinions regarding the highest-priority items on a list. Votes are cast by placing a sticker, dot or other marking method to indicate one's vote next to an item on a list posted on a wall or flip chart. In most situations, it is recommended to give each meeting participant up to three votes.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis helps to develop recommendations and strategies based on a review of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats identified by the group. Strengths and weaknesses are often internal, while opportunities and threats concern factors outside of your organization.

To begin, have participants write down at least three items in each category on post-it notes.

- 1 Have participants **post their ideas** on designated wall areas for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
- 2 Once everyone is finished, **group similar items together** under each category.
- 3 **Notice any “natural” prioritization** that has occurred via commonly repeated items.
- 4 **Discuss the common comments** under each topic and how to either leverage (strengths/ opportunities) or overcome (weaknesses/threats) them.

POST-IT NOTE METHOD

This technique works in many situations to help create a shared vision and to build consensus around priorities for future planning.

Present the topic or define the question clearly.

- 1 Participants **silently write down ideas** (one per sticky note) that pertain to the topic or question.
- 2 Participants **take turns sharing** their ideas and posting the sticky notes to the wall, while not repeating items.
- 3 When posting on the wall, **group similar ideas** together.
- 4 Review groups and **make sure all items fit their designated group**.
- 5 Once groups are finalized, **define each group** with a word or phrase.
- 6 Each participant gets **a set number of voting dots** to use to vote for which items they care about the most. Voting can be focused on the overarching topics or the more detailed items nested under the topics, depending on end goal of the exercise.
- 7 **The items that receive the most votes “win.”**







EXECUTING THE PLAN

Once the agenda has been set, prepare handouts, reports or presentations to assist in effectively communicating the Main Street program's message during the meeting. All printed publications should be of high quality and visually attractive to draw the attention and interest of the audience. We recommend providing materials for citizen groups with special needs, such as language translation or larger print. Make sure text and graphics in PowerPoint or other displayed presentations are large enough to be read by everyone in the room. Don't forget a microphone if your meeting will be conducted in a larger space. A sign-in sheet will also become an important component of the visioning session. This provides an opportunity for participants to express interest in volunteering and is a way to capture contact information for newsletters and email blasts. Name tags for attendees can also be a great way to encourage group dialogue and social networking between participants before, during, and after the session.

Effective advertising of your visioning session will help to ensure good attendance for your

meeting. The meeting date(s) should be set and advertised throughout the community, including the business community, at least 30 days in advance. Managers should work with the local media to publicize the event and encourage media attendance at the event itself. Meeting announcements should be advertised in multiple locations, including print, digital, and radio, to reach the widest audience possible. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter can be great online resources and an inexpensive way to market your meeting and online survey. A Facebook event or a calendar listing on the local Main Street program's website or partner websites can be set up easily so that viewers may access relevant information regarding the meeting time, location, and agenda. More traditional forms of media, such as print and radio, can be used to reach members of the community who don't use the internet or prefer not to. Flyers, mailings, or announcements in the city newsletter or utility bills can be an impactful, low-cost way of spreading the word.



WUXTRY RECORDS

BUY • SELL • TRADE

since 1976

TEL. (706) 369-9428

TURNTABLES
RECORDS
STEREOS

CD-TAPES
VINYL RECORDS

WUXTRY



Thomasville, ExploreGeorgia.org

NEXT STEPS

All input collected during the community town hall meeting should be consolidated into a summary including the list of participants, agenda, and general meeting notes. It is important during the meeting and in the meeting notes to identify who will be responsible for carrying out any next steps. It is important that the information collected during the visioning session process be shared and reviewed at the next available board meeting. The feedback and information gathered should serve as a resource to shape the Main Street program's annual plan of work while creating a baseline measurement which can be used to select a transformation strategy that is best for your downtown district.

Main Street Managers are encouraged to capitalize on the energy created around hosting a successful community visioning session. It is essential to the Main Street programs long term success that they take time to follow-up with participants, demonstrating how their input has shaped the direction and decisions of the work plan. The community should be able to see and hear their voices in the new strategic plan developed by the board of directors and Main Street staff. By following up with those who attended the visioning session you will have an opportunity to build consensus, grow support for programmatic initiatives and identify volunteer opportunities to support the strategic plan's task and goals.



APPENDIX



COMMUNITY VISIONING SESSION AGENDA

[Insert Date] • [Insert Time]
[Insert Location, Meeting Room and Address]

Refreshments and Networking

Introductions and Recognition

Recognize Mayor and City Council

Introduce Main Street Director

Role of the Manager

Mission and Vision of the Main Street program

Meet the Board

Introductions of Main Street Board Members

How is the board appointed?

Map of the Main Street district boundaries

Getting Involved

Upcoming Events

Committees and Task Forces

Community Input

What can we do better, as a Main Street program, to assist your business?

What is our most marketable asset as a community? As a downtown?

What will be our biggest challenge downtown, moving forward?

What do you think should be our program's top priority for the next two years?

Next Steps

Discuss actions and timeline for developing a strategic plan

What you as a business owner or community member can do to be more involved
In this process

Adjourn

BUSINESS SURVEY

When answering the following questions, please, provide only responses pertaining to your operations in downtown. If you have more than one downtown location, please, complete the survey for each one separately.

BUSINESS NAME

OWNER NAME

MANAGER NAME (IF DIFFERENT FROM OWNER)

COMPANY ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

WEBSITE

1. General Business Description

- Entertainment
- Retail
- Food and Beverage
- Service (Law, Accounting, Design, Salon, etc.)

2. Which of the following best describes the principal industry of your organization?

- Advertising and Marketing
 - Agriculture
 - Architecture, Urban Planning and Design
 - Automotive
 - Beauty, Hair, Nails and Spa
 - Business Support
 - Construction
 - Education
 - Arts, Entertainment and Leisure
 - Finance and Insurance
 - Food and Beverage
 - Government
 - Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals
 - Law Practice
 - Manufacturing
 - Non-Profit
 - Retail and Consumer goods
 - Real Estate
 - Computer, IT and Electronics
 - Transportation and Delivery
 - Utilities, Energy and Extraction
 - Other (please specify)
-

3. How long has your business been in operation in downtown?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10+ years
- 20+ years
- 30+ years

4. How many employees work at your downtown business?

Full-time:_____ Part-time:_____ Seasonal/occasional employees/interns _____

5. Do you own or lease your space?

Own Lease Other (please specify): _____

6. How would you describe the general business climate of downtown over the past two years?

Significantly Declined Declined Stable Improved Significantly Improved

7. Are you expecting or actively planning changes to your business in the next 2-3 years?

Planning to Expand Planning to Downsize
 No Changes Planned Planning to Close
 Planning to Sell Business Planning to Move
 Uncertain Other (please specify): _____

**8. Do you plan to make any of the following investments or improvements in the next two years?
Select all that apply.**

Mechanical Systems Improvements and/or Upgrades (electrical, plumbing, etc.)
 Facility Improvements Interior
 Facility Improvements Exterior (Façade Improvements)
 Building Expansion
 Add New Employees
Other (please specify): _____

9. What are some of the biggest challenges facing your business operation in downtown?

Lease Rates General Operating Costs
 Municipal Regulations Public Safety/ Crime
 Parking (Availability/Cost) Earnings Tax
 Insurance Costs Talent Recruitment
 Not Applicable Other (please specify): _____

10. Please explain or expand on any other the issues selected above:

11. Please rate the following aspects of operating your business in downtown.

	very dissatisfied		neutral		very satisfied
	1	2	3	4	5
Overall cost of doing business	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Office building amenities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Parking availability	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Public safety	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Lease rates and terms	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Accessibility (ADA, deliveries, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

12. What are three advantages of operating a business downtown?

1

2

3

13. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with downtown as a place for doing business?

very dissatisfied somewhat dissatisfied neutral somewhat satisfied Very satisfied

COMMENTS

14. To make downtown a better business environment, how important is it to focus on the following?

	very unimportant		neutral		very important
	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Events and Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Green Spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Infrastructure (Sidewalks, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
New Development	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Public Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Transportation Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Public Investment and Support	<input type="checkbox"/>				

OTHER

15. What programs or financial resources available downtown have you utilized for your business?

	Aware – not used	Aware – used	Unaware	Would like information
Façade Grant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historic Preservation Tax Credits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Zone Tax Credits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Utility Incentives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marketing Assistance/ Grant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boost Grant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. What can the Main Street program do to better assist you as a downtown business/ owner?

17. Please share any additional comments for concerns you may have.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Please, take a moment to fill out this survey. The information collected will be used to guide the future of downtown. Your participation is invaluable and greatly appreciated!

1. Where do you live?

City: _____ County: _____ Region _____

Other (please specify): _____

2. How old are you?

18-24 25-34 34-44 45-54 55-64 65 or over

3. Gender

Female Male N/A

4. Race

Caucasian African-American Native American Asian Pacific Islander

Other (please specify) _____

5. Are you currently employed? Yes No

6. If yes, your employment is: Full-Time Part-Time Seasonal

7. How often do you visit to downtown?

Daily Weekly Monthly A few times a year Annually

8. What most frequently brings you downtown?

Work Entertainment Dining Government

Shopping Festival/Special Events Professional Services

Other: _____

9. What time do you typically shop?

7-9 a.m. 9-11 a.m. 11 a.m-1 p.m. 1-5 p.m. After 5 p.m.

10. What days of the week do you typically shop?

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

11. How important is it to have a thriving downtown?

- Very unimportant Unimportant Neutral Important Very important

12. What is your general opinion of Downtown?

- Very poor Poor Neutral Good Very good

Explain: _____

13. How would you describe the changes happening downtown over the past two years?

- Significantly declined Declined Stable Improved Significantly improved

Why? _____

14. Do you feel safe downtown?

- Very unsafe Unsafe Neutral Safe Very safe

Why? _____

15. What areas downtown could we improve upon?

	Weakness	Average	Strength
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Events and Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Green Spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infrastructure (Sidewalks, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pedestrian and Biker Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transportation Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Investment and Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. What additional businesses/ amenities would you like to see in Downtown?

Please select no more than 3 choices, and rank from 1-3 with 1 representing the most desired.

- _____ Parks and Open Space
- _____ Outside Entertainment
- _____ Bars
- _____ Restaurants
- _____ Coffee/Ice Cream Shop
- _____ Residential Living Options
- _____ Women's Clothing
- _____ Professional Services, specifically: _____
- _____ Cultural activities, specifically: _____
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ Men's Clothing
- _____ Antique Market
- _____ Sports Outfitter
- _____ Specialty Gift/Boutique Shops
- _____ Hobby/Craft
- _____ Home and Garden

17. What activities would you participate in if they were offered in Downtown?

Please rank from 1-6, with 1 representing the most desired.

- _____ Market
- _____ Movies
- _____ Music
- _____ Food Events and Diversity in Restaurants
- _____ Outdoor and Recreational Activities
- _____ Craft/Art Shows
- _____ Other: _____

18. What is your favorite thing about downtown? Why?

19. What is your least favorite thing about downtown? Why?

20. Describe your ideal downtown 10 years from now. Share with us any visions, ideas or thoughts for the future.

21. What would you like downtown/ Main Street to focus on in the next 3-5 years?

	Yes	No	Maybe	N/A
Agricultural Tourism and Business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts and Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beautification Initiatives and Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Activation and Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ecotourism and Recreational Economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Downtown Living	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Greenspace Improvements and Additions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historic Preservation and Maintaining Authenticity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Placemaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Health and Wellness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amenities and Businesses to Serve Residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sharing your Community's History and Character	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing Transportation and Pedestrian Experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



ATLANTA OFFICE | 60 Executive Park South, NE, Atlanta, GA 30329 | 404-679-4859
georgiamainstreet.org |  gamainst |  gamainst |  gamainst