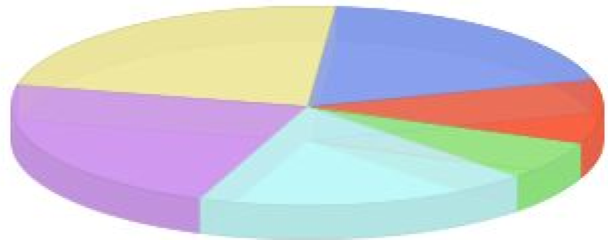
Downtown Whitewater 2014 Public Survey Results

As part of a strategic planning initiative, Downtown Whitewater conducted a public survey to determine how various local markets are currently using downtown, understand how downtown Whitewater is perceived in the marketplace, and to understand priorities and preferences of various demographic groups regarding future initiatives. The organization received 125 Responses to the survey. A summary of these responses is provided below.

Who responded?

Respondents were asked to identify their primary relationship to downtown Whitewater as part of the survey. Of the 125 responses, a majority (69%) are residents of the City, 15 are downtown property owners, 15 are business owners (not property owners), 24 are residents of the area, 10 are employed downtown, 9 live downtown, 8 are past visitors from outside the area and 6 are University students.

Participants represent a diverse cross section of ages, although individuals aged 35 and under are underrepresented, with only 17 percent of respondents. All other age groups received balanced participation relative to their concentration in the community. Information on the age and relationship to downtown will be used to compare priorities and perceptions among various groups frequenting downtown.

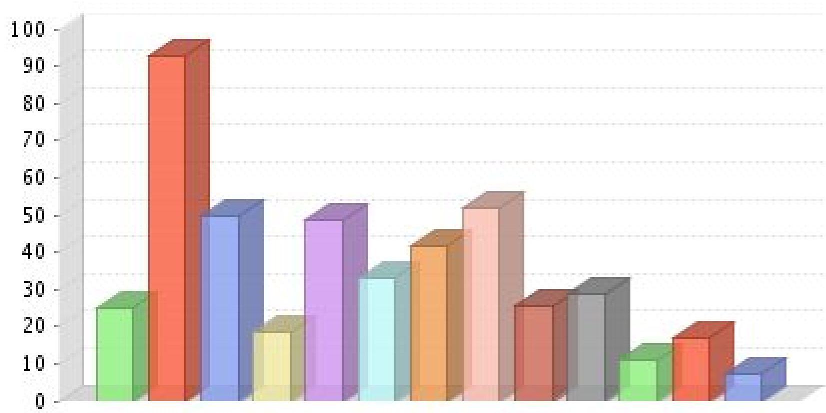


1.	Under 25	6.4% (8)	2.	26-35	10.4% (13)
3.	36-45	19.2% (24)	4.	46-55	23.2% (29)
5.	56-65	22.4% (28)	6.	66 and over	18.4% (23)

What they do downtown:

The visit frequently – 63% are downtown once a week or more. An additional 29% visit a few times per month. Only 1.6 percent rarely visit downtown, and an additional 6.4% visit one to four times per year.

When downtown, participants take advantage of a wide variety of businesses, services and activities.



Work	24.8% (31)	Dining	92.8% (116)
Shopping	49.6% (62)	Nightlife	18.4% (23)
Special events	48.8% (61)	Personal business (i.e. salon)	32.8% (41)
Government	41.6% (52)	Library	52% (65)

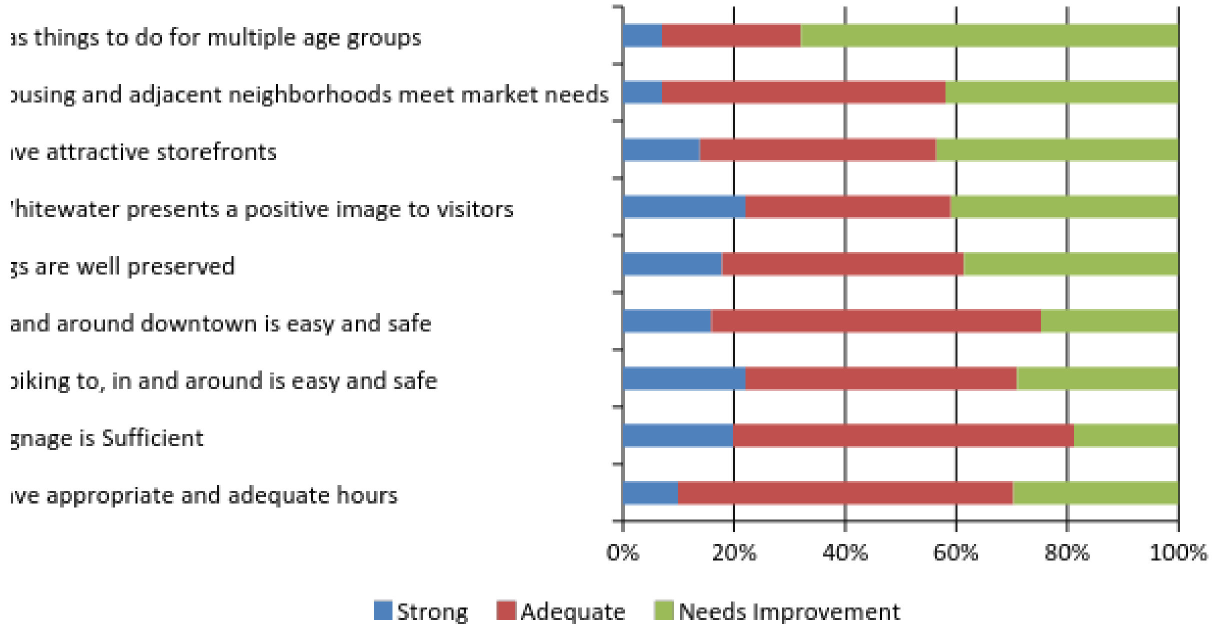
Recreation	25.6% (32)	Art & culture	28.8% (36)
Religious	11.2% (14)	Business purpose (legal, accounting)	16.8% (21)
Other [Detail]	7.2% (9)		

The top three destinations include a wide variety of well-known businesses and establishments. The most identified destinations feature most prominently in the word cloud below. The most frequently mentioned destinations include Jessica's, The Sweet Spot, Lakefront Pub, the Library, Dale's Bootery, Banks, the Lake (in general), and the Black Sheep. More than 5% of respondents selected each of the above businesses.

Although a majority of survey respondents come downtown frequently, when they choose other destinations it is most often because of a lack of relevant goods or service available downtown. 37% said that a lack of diverse shopping caused them to travel elsewhere, and 33% similarly indicated that businesses downtown are not relevant to their needs. Less than 4% each identified unappealing environment, lack of information, lack of dining or difficulty in traveling downtown as relevant considerations.

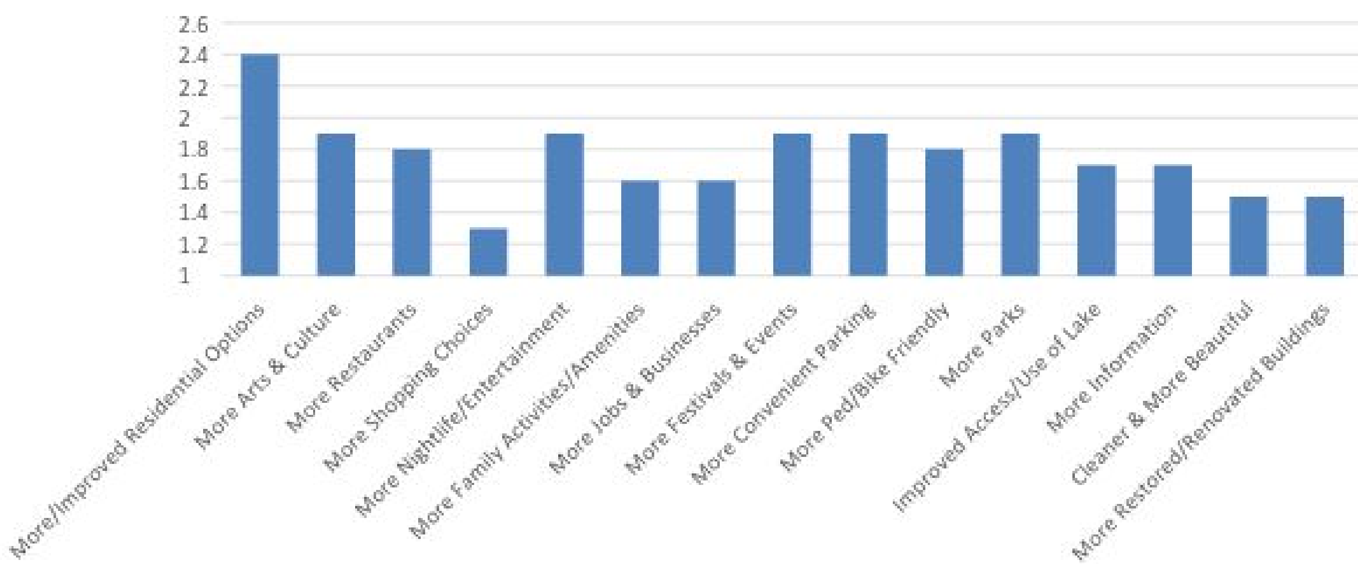
How are we doing?

The following are characteristics commonly associated with high-performing downtown districts. Respondents were asked to indicate how they feel downtown Whitewater is performing in each of these areas. The largest identified strengths are the positive appearance for visitors and the convenience of walking, biking and driving to and through downtown. Wayfinding and directional signage, a related amenity, was also identified as a strength of downtown. The biggest identified weakness was the lack of things for all age groups to do in downtown (68% identified this as a weakness). Based on responses to other questions, many people feel that kid-friendly destinations and amenities are lacking in downtown. The next two categories which were identified as weaknesses were business storefront attractiveness, building preservation and downtown housing options, all of which had 40-45% negative response. Interestingly, 40% of individuals felt that downtown Whitewater does not present a positive image, despite this category also receiving the largest share of 'strength' responses.



What would you like to see?

Participants were asked to rate the importance of various improvements in enhancing downtown Whitewater in the next five years. The average ranking for all 15 options is illustrated in the graph at right where lower numbers indicate greater perceived importance.



The top three activities identified as very important to work on in the next five years were:

- More shopping choices (76% identified as very important)
- More restored/renovated buildings (57%)
- More family/kids amenities/activities (53%)

The top three areas identified as not important in the next five years were:

- More/Improved residential options (56% rated as not important)
- More nightlife & entertainment (24%)
- More parks & green spaces (23%)

Category	Votes
Clothing (equal votes for men's and women's)	27
Gift/Specialty Stores	22
Children's Activities	11
Grocery (Coop/Health Food received 11 of these votes)	44
Upscale Restaurant	10
Arts (galleries & supplies)	10
Other Multiple Requests: ● Adult/Upscale Bar and Entertainment ● Coffee Shop ● Bakery ● Antiques ● Bookstore ● Butcher/Meat Market ● Candy/Ice Cream ● Deli/Café ● Dollar Store ● Drug Store ● Salon/Spa ● Sporting Goods	

When asked to select only one initiative as being most important to the success of downtown in the next five years, greater shopping choices remained the most popular selection with 28% of respondents selecting this option. The next most popular response was increased family and child amenities (13%), a cleaner and more beautiful downtown and more restored and renovated buildings (9% tie). Increased events and festivals, arts and culture and greater residential options were selected by only two individuals each. In the first two instances, responses to other questions indicate that people generally feel that events and arts and culture are existing strengths in downtown which may not need as much focus in coming years. However, residential options were rated as a weakness in downtown, yet was not identified as a top priority by many respondents.

Asked what amenities are missing downtown that they would visit if they were present, the top responses included a wide variety of business types, as illustrated in the table at right. However, many people also wrote in comments along with their recommendations, which provide additional insight. The most frequent request was for businesses which cater to non-college student markets. Upscale restaurants, adult bars, adult clothing stores, etc. Children's activities, which received significant votes, also had a number of specific write-ins, including museums, indoor amusement, kid-friendly restaurants (i.e. coffee shops with play areas), and the addition of kid-friendly amenities such as paddleboat rental, a playground, etc. The third most common write-in comment identified additional recreation or outdoor-oriented amenities including outdoor dining, playgrounds, increased green space, a splash park, improved bike paths and parking, a continuous path around the lake and other similar requests.

Variation by Age & Demographics

Of course, not all demographic groups use and view downtown in the same way. The top three priorities for downtown within each age group are indicated in the table below. While some elements such as shopping are important to everyone, other priorities vary based on the perception of the user. Older adults with limited mobility value close parking, while younger residents place a higher priority on entertainment and nightlife options while a variety of households with children prioritize family friendly activities. Additionally, although shopping choices are a priority for everyone, the spending patterns of these household types vary significantly, making it unlikely that a single establishment can successfully accommodate the needs of all demographic groups.

	Top Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority
Under 35*	More Shopping Choices	More Activities for Families/Kids	More Nightlife & Entertainment
36-45	More Activities for Families/Kids	More Shopping Choices	Improved Access to/Use of Lake
46-55	More Shopping Choices	More Restored Buildings	More Activities for Families/Kids
56-65	More Shopping Choices	More Jobs & Businesses	Cleaner Downtown
66 and Over	More Shopping Choices	Cleaner Downtown	More Convenient Parking

*Insufficient Data from Under 25

Other Thoughts

Participants were given the option of writing in additional comments or suggestions related to downtown revitalization. 52 individuals chose to provide additional insights. Common themes of these remarks can be summarized by the following direct quotes:

The Downtown is clearly not the focus of the City. There is a lot of newer development in the commercial strip area near the University as well as investments in suburban business parks and suburban housing. Resources would be better spent attending to the downtown streetscape, pedestrian and cyclist amenities, assistance for historic preservation, and facilitating new mixed-use development in and near the downtown.
If there was more focus pedestrians and cyclists, I would walk downtown and take my children down there more often. As is, cars don't pay attention to the temporary signs that are put up to alert them of pedestrians. I have to work really hard to make sure that my kids don't get run over. There is nowhere for them to go and spend time and run around safely. I usually rush them through our errands to the cleaners, post office etc, because the environment makes me feel like they are in the way.

The lake needs major improvement and needs to stay clean so that more people can enjoy walking the path. It is terrible when you try to sit by the train bridge and you are surrounded by overgrown weeds and garbage.

I do not necessarily think that MORE businesses is the answer. I think we have a good base of businesses in downtown Whitewater that are not attracting visitors for a number of reasons. I think that getting information out, getting people to the downtown and into these businesses will help the market improve-- either by giving business owners the opportunity and feedback to improve or by opening up storefronts for new businesses.