The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
A 2023 IDA STUDY

A 2023 PUBLICATION CREATED BY
THE INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

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ABOUT IDA

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IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit **downtown.org**.

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THE VALUE OF U.S. DOWNTOWNS AND CENTER CITIES

Stantec's Urban Places

Project Advisors for The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities

Stantec's Urban Places is an interdisciplinary hub bringing together leaders in planning and urban design, transportation including smart and urban mobility, resilience, development, mixed-use architecture, smart cities, and brownfield redevelopment. They work in downtowns across North America—in cities and suburbs alike—to unlock the extraordinary urban promise of enhanced livability, equity, and resilience.

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CONTENTS

Section One: Project Overview

Introduction 8
About the Value of Downtowns Study 9
Urban Place Management Organizations 10

Section Two: Downtown Profile

Overview 14
Economy 19
Inclusion 24
Vibrancy 31
Identity 35
Resilience 37
Downtown Profile 42

Appendices

Project Framework and Methodology 46
What factors make a vibrant downtown? 48
Principles and Benefits 54
Data Sources 59
Selected Study Definitions 60
Additional IDA Sources 62

References

Endnotes 64
Photo Credits 65

SECTION ONE

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1

Introduction

GREAT CITIES START DOWNTOWN

No city or region can succeed without a strong downtown, the place where compactness and density bring people, capital, and ideas together in ways that build the economy, opportunity, community and identity. Downtowns across the U.S. experienced unprecedented change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, in some ways the pandemic highlighted the importance of vibrant urban places. As urbanist Richard Florida describes, "downtowns today are not just places to live, work and shop: They are the very best places for people and businesses to connect to each other. In big metros and small, downtowns occupy the most central locations and have the highest concentrations of spaces where people can come together."[1]

Despite a relatively small share of a city's overall geography, a downtown delivers significant economic and community benefits across both the city and region. Downtown serves as the epicenter of commerce, capital investment, diversity, public discourse, socialization, knowledge and innovation. In short, the proximity and density that downtown and center cities create drives the city around them to thrive.

While remote work is likely to reduce the daily number of office workers in downtowns in the long-term, other downtown activities are now thriving. Restaurant reservations are exceeding pre-pandemic levels, stadiums and sports arenas are full, and residential real estate in dense, urban areas continues to be in high demand. Downtowns are more than a central business district, and are adapting to become more well-rounded live, work and play communities. The 15-minute city, the idea that everyone living in a city should have access to essential daily services within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, has gained in popularity as an indirect result of the pandemic and reinforces the value of the mixed-use nature of many of our downtowns and center cities.[2]

In the coming years the ways we use and evaluate downtowns and center cities may shift, but downtowns' resilience across economic, social, and environmental measures positions them well to lead citywide and regional transitions from recovery to growth. Downtowns have emerged from past crises even stronger, and there's no reason to think they won't this time.

About the Value of Downtowns Study

Building on IDA's unique industry-wide perspective and expertise, this study quantifies the value of U.S. downtowns and center cities across more than 150 metrics organized under five core value principles, with a focus on how downtowns contribute to the city and region around them. The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study is a partnership between IDA and local urban place management organizations (UPMO).

The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* research articulates the inherent value a downtown provides to the greater city, highlighting a district's contributions based upon 150+ key data points in the principles of Economy, Inclusion, Vibrancy, Identity and Resilience. Our 2020 data showed that study downtowns outpaced their cities in residential growth between 2000 and 2020, growing an average of 46% against the citywide average of 15%.

The primary project goals are to:

Provide a **common set of metrics** to communicate the value of downtown.

Expand the **range of arguments** UPMOs* can make to their stakeholders using publicly available data.

IDA began this research in 2017, working with Stantec's Urban Places group and the first cohort of 13 UPMOs to develop a methodology for compiling and evaluating data from those 13 downtowns. In 2023, our analysis has expanded to include 49 downtowns and center cities across the U.S.

IDA and our UPMO partners work together to collect more than 150 individual metrics for the most recent year and over the past decade and three geographic levels (study area, city, and MSA/county). In addition, for employment data we collect three different jobs totals (primary, all jobs, and all private) for all years between 2002 and 2020 to show more nuanced employment trends over time. The demographic and jobs data included in the study does not extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, but some real estate, tax, and assessment data include 2022 and 2023 figures.

*Refer to the Appendix for the full methodology and list of metrics used in the study.

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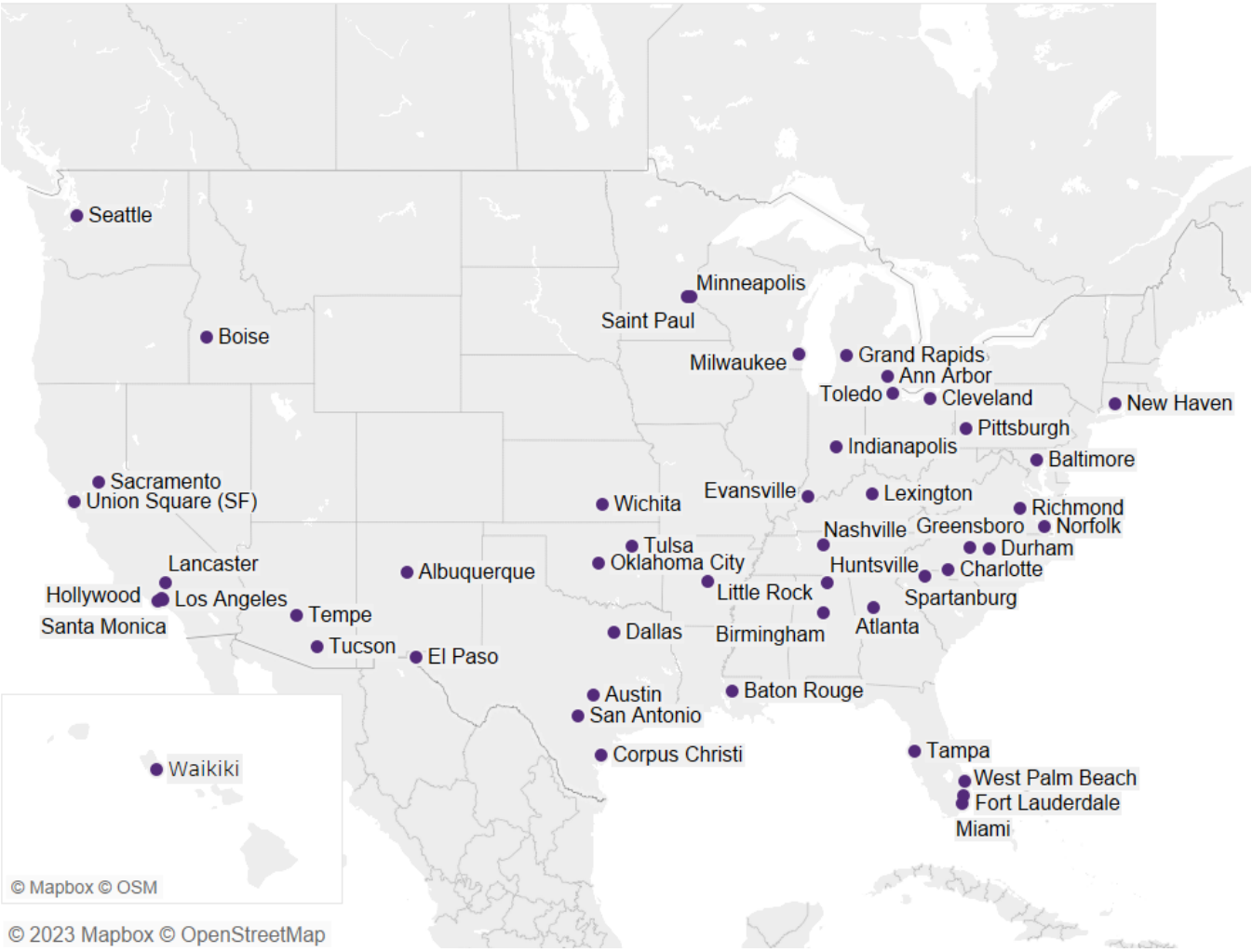
Urban Place Management Organizations

The place management industry brings the public and private sectors together to create vital, healthy, thriving cities for everyone — from residents to workers to tourists to business owners. We are downtown champions who bring city centers to life.

Since 1970, property and business owners in cities throughout the U.S. and other countries have realized that revitalizing and sustaining vibrant city centers and neighborhood districts requires special attention beyond the services city administrations could provide alone. These private-sector owners came together, with funding from the property and business owners, to form management associations which deliver key services and activities within the boundaries of their districts. These place management organizations are often called Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Partnerships and Alliances.

Value of Downtowns Participants



ECONOMY

Downtowns and center cities are valuable due to their roles as economic anchors for their regions. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns and center cities frequently serve as hubs of industry and revenue generators, despite their only making up a small fraction of the city's or region's land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of a relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors than investments elsewhere.

INCLUSION

As the literal and figurative heart of their cities, downtowns represent and welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Residents of strong downtowns often come from a wide range of racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and from across all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, downtown has a broad appeal to all users and a strong social fabric. Downtowns provide access to all to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment and civic activities.

VIBRANCY

The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base, creates value. Vibrancy means the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events. Many unique regional cultural institutions, businesses, centers of innovation, public spaces and activities are located downtown. As the cultural center of their cities, downtowns typically attract a large share of citywide visitors and account for a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms.

IDENTITY

Downtowns and center cities often serve as iconic symbols of their cities, creating a strong sense of place that enhances local pride. The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that other parts of the city can't easily replicate. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting regional identity. Downtowns and center cities serve as places for regional residents to come together, participate in civic life, and celebrate their region, which in turn promotes tourism and civic society.

RESILIENCE

Downtowns and center cities play a crucial role in building stability, sustainability, and prosperity for the city and region. Their diversity, concentration of economic activity, and density of services better equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks than more homogenous communities. They can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks, which often disproportionately affect less economically and socially dynamic areas.

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WATERMARK

SECTION TWO

DOWNTOWN PROFILE

2

Downtown Profile | Overview

A city's strength and prosperity depend on a strong downtown and center city, which serves as a center of culture, knowledge, and innovation. The performance of districts and center cities strengthens an entire region's economic productivity, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience.

Though it occupies only a small fraction of the city's land area, downtown Baton Rouge has a significant impact on the city's economic, cultural, and social fabric. The Downtown Development District (DDD) is made up of areas with significantly different characters ranging from the bustling Central Business District (CBD), which people typically refer to when referencing downtown, to the single-family neighborhoods of Beauregard Town, Spanish Town, Downtown East, and a portion of South Baton Rouge. For the purpose of this report, data was primarily compiled from the census tracts that intersect with the DDD, if data specific to the DDD boundaries was not available.

The downtown study area is approximately four square miles. It is home to approximately 10,500 people, translating to a density of residents that is roughly two and a half times greater than East Baton Rouge Parish's average of 1.6 residents per acre. This density extends to downtown's role as an employment hub, too. Its office buildings are filled with 29,700 primary jobs, making up roughly 20% of the city's employment base.

The economic influence of downtown Baton Rouge extends well beyond its boundaries. Despite comprising less than 0.5% of all land in the parish, downtown makes up 1.5% of the estimated property value in the parish, with land values

Study Area

DOWNTOWN PARTNER
Downtown Development District

CITY
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Ranking Downtown Baton Rouge

Using data collected for *The Value of U.S. Districts and Center Cities* study, we identified three tiers of districts, defined by their stage of development. We divided the study districts into *established*, *growing*, and *emerging* tiers based on the significance of their population and jobs to their respective cities, as well as density of residents and jobs within the district, assessed value per square mile, the rate of population growth from 2000 to 2021, and the rate of job growth from 2002 to 2020. This analysis places Baton Rouge among the *emerging* tier of downtowns.

Emerging districts like downtown Baton Rouge have a low proportion of citywide significance in terms of jobs and population (as a group they average 2.6% of overall population and 17% of jobs) and have lower densities. *Emerging* downtowns don't yet have the high citywide significance in jobs and residents found in other downtowns, and they have relatively lower densities. That also means that they have substantial potential; typically, property value per square mile remains low relative to other urban places, allowing developers to see greater returns on their investments. Similarly, lower rents make these downtowns attractive to small businesses and creators/makers.

Please view the Summary section of this report for data comparing downtown Baton Rouge to its peers within the *established* tier. For the full set of cities by tier, accompanying data points, and methodology, refer to *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* compendium, which is available on the IDA website, downtown.org.

Emerging Downtowns

- Albuquerque
- **Baton Rouge**
- Birmingham
- Cleveland
- Corpus Christi
- El Paso
- Evansville
- Grand Rapids
- Hollywood
- Lancaster
- Little Rock
- Oklahoma City
- San Antonio
- Spartanburg
- Tampa
- Toledo
- Tucson
- Tulsa
- Waikiki
- Wichita

2.5 times higher than the parish average, with assessed land values even higher within the CBD. Revenue from these taxes fund services throughout the parish, underscoring the importance of sustaining long-term success in downtown. By some of the most important measures analyzed for this study, investments downtown are paying off. Between 2013 and 2020, jobs in the private sector in downtown Baton Rouge rose by 19%, a period during which private employment declined in other parts of the city and parish. The residential population also saw a significant increase of almost 16% from 2012 to 2021, outpacing the parish's growth rate of less than 4%.

The downtown Baton Rouge study area is notable for its diverse population, both in terms of race and age. 70% of its residents identify as Black or African American, a higher percentage than the city's overall 53%. Meanwhile, contrasting with other downtowns examined as part of IDA's study, which typically skew younger, downtown Baton Rouge is home to a balanced distribution of ages, indicating its appeal to a diverse range of residents at different life stages. However, disparities are evident, particularly influenced by

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the dividing presence of interstates I-10 and I-110, which also denote stark differences in the socioeconomic outcomes of residents. In Census Tract 51, which mainly comprises the CBD, the poverty rate is noticeably lower—just under 30% compared to over 35% across the whole study area. These disparities highlight the need for increased connectivity and equitable opportunities for all within downtown.

Transportation improvements are likely to play a significant role in breaking down barriers that exist within downtown Baton Rouge. Recent enhancements in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as the Downtown Greenway and the Mississippi River Levee Trail, have markedly improved the quality of life for those frequenting downtown.[1] These developments not only make downtown Baton Rouge a more accessible and livable area but also contribute to its environmental resilience. Downtown's Walk Score and Bike Score ratings, which stand at 79 and 66, respectively, significantly exceed city averages, and downtown residents are far more likely to bike, use transit, or walk to work than those living elsewhere in the city.

The central role that downtown occupies in Baton Rouge's economy highlights the significance of entities like the Downtown Development District (DDD) in fostering and maintaining a robust local economy. Since 1987, the DDD has been a passionate advocate and catalyst for the growth and vitality of downtown Baton Rouge by initiating, incubating, and supporting partnerships that develop and enhance the district. These partnerships have been a driving force behind downtown's ascendance as a place to live, work, and play.

Employment

	Downtown	City	Parish
Primary Jobs	29,744	145,300	248,500
District Share Of Primary Jobs	n/a	20%	12%
Employees Per Acre	11.6	2.6	0.9
Private Jobs Growth 2013–2020	19%	-8%	-3%
Primary Jobs Growth 2013–2020	15%	-6%	-3%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2002–2020)

Residential Population

	Downtown	City	Parish
Population	10.5K	225.5K	455.4K
Residential Share	n/a	4.7%	2.3%
Residents Per Acre	4.1	4.1	1.6
Residential Growth 2012–2021	15.8%	-1.6%	3.6%

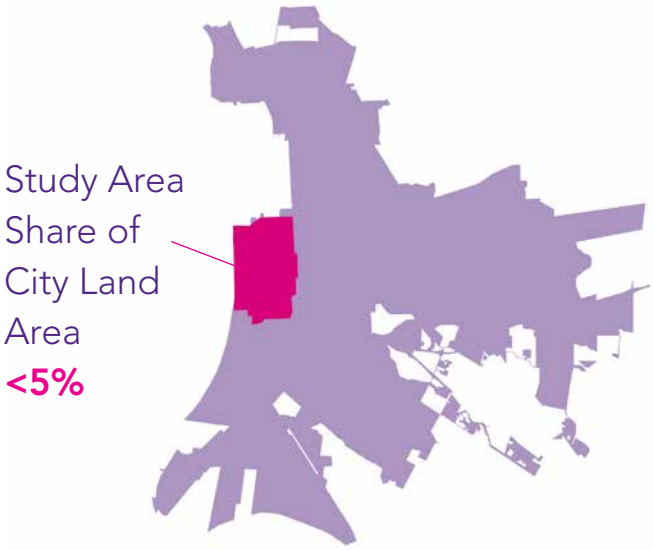
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

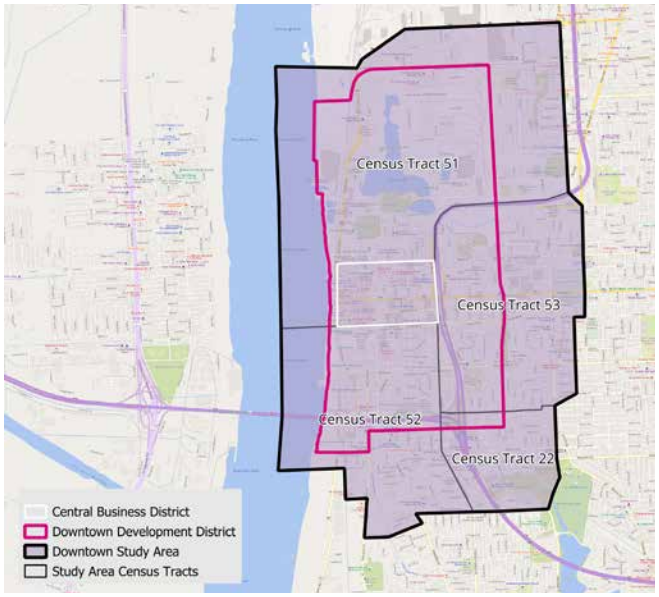
Defining Boundaries

The study area extends beyond the boundaries of the Baton Rouge Downtown Development District (DDD), as geographic parameters vary across data sources and don't typically align with boundaries designated at the local level. The study area boundary includes Census tracts 22, 51, 52, and 53, which allows for the interoperability of data from a variety of sources to match the same geographic area. When data was available at the local level aligning with the DDD boundaries, it is noted in this report. In some instances, the report also examines data within just the CBD boundaries.

Both the study area and the DDD boundary are split by highways I-10 and I-110. These interstate highways form dividing lines within the area, and their impact on the community is clearly visible in the data. Many efforts are currently underway downtown to improve access between these areas.

The downtown Baton Rouge study area is 4 square miles, slightly higher than the 2.75 square mile average of all study downtowns, but containing slightly less than 5% of the city's total 86.4 square mile land area. Downtown is less than 1% of the East Baton Rouge Parish, which is used for regional comparisons.





Inventory

	Downtown	% of City
OFFICE (SQ. FT.)	1.72M	22%
RESIDENTIAL UNITS	6,116	5.8%
HOTEL ROOMS	1,175	13%

Source: Visit Baton Rouge (2023), The Greater Baton Rouge Association of Realtors Trends Report (2023)

Note: Office square feet excludes buildings owned by the City-Parish and State governments

2023 Tier Comparison

	Land Area (square miles)	% of Citywide Land
Central Business District	0.2	0.8%
Downtown Development District	2.2	2.5%
Study Area	4.0	4.6%
Emerging Downtowns	1.8	2%
Study Average	2.7	3%

Source: US Census Bureau (2000), LEHD On the Map (2002–2020), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Economy | Impact, Innovation

Downtowns make up a small share of their city's land area but have substantial economic importance. Though downtowns and center cities constitute a small share of citywide land area, there's no understating their regional economic importance.

As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns serve as economic anchors for their cities and regions. Thanks to highly concentrated economic activity, investment in the center city yields a high level of return per dollar. Urban centers across the U.S. were the first areas to recover from the Great Recession, and although the continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has raised many questions about the future, prior analysis of the role of downtowns and center cities highlights their unique ability to absorb and recover from economic shocks and stresses.

Benefits of Economy: Economic Output, Economic Impact, Investment, Creativity, Innovation, Visitation, Spending, Density, Sustainability, Tax Revenue, Scale, Commerce, Opportunity

Downtown Employment

20%

CITYWIDE JOBS

17%

CITY'S KNOWLEDGE JOBS

29%

CITY'S CREATIVE JOBS

Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Jobs

Downtown Baton Rouge is the heart of both the city and the parish's economy. Despite occupying less than 5% of the city's land area and less than 1% of the land area of East Baton Rouge Parish, it is home to 20% of the city's jobs and 12% of the parish's jobs. This includes 87% of all public sector jobs in the city and 93% of these jobs in the parish, a result of Baton Rouge's role as the seat of Louisiana's state government.

Public administration is by far the largest single sector downtown, employing 10,000 workers and representing one in every three jobs downtown. Data indicates this industry's dominance is waning in the long term, however, with employment in this sector falling by 22% since 2011. Meanwhile, jobs in the knowledge industry are on the rise, increasing by 26% since 2010 to make up 17% of the city's jobs in this industry. Dependent on technology and demanding a highly skilled, technical workforce, the knowledge industry is made up of several sectors including information, which represents 2,000 jobs downtown and has experienced triple-digit growth downtown within the last decade. This growth was driven in large part by the expansion of the IBM Technology Center, a public-private

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partnership between the State of Louisiana, City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, and IBM, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in September 2023.[2] At the same time, downtown's jobs in another knowledge industry sector — health care and social assistance — declined by 41% within this same period. While significant as a percentage, this sector has never been a large industry in terms of the total number of workers. Most of this decline can be attributed to social services rather than health care, possibly speaking to a lack of availability of health services for downtown residents and downtown-adjacent neighborhoods.

Downtown's other leading industries include construction and professional, scientific, and technical services. There are 3,200 primary jobs in the construction sector downtown, which expanded by 42% between 2015 and 2020. The professional, scientific, and technical services sector has also experienced significant growth, with downtown's jobs in this industry increasing by 54% within this same period. Comprised of a variety of professions that are typically considered "white collar" jobs, this industry employed 3,100 people downtown in 2020.

Overall, job growth within downtown has been on a strong positive trajectory in recent years. Primary employment — defined as an individual's best-paying job if they have more than one — has increased by 15% downtown since 2013. This has been driven largely by the growth of the private sector, which expanded by 19% from 2013 to 2020. This strong growth in recent years has helped downtown recover from a period of decline in the early 2000s, when downtown employment fell by 9% in a seven-year period between 2006 and 2013.

Employment

	Study Area	Emerging Downtowns	Study Average
CITYWIDE JOBS	20%	17%	24%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	29%	26%	32%
CITY KNOWLEDGE JOBS	17%	18%	27%

Source: LEHD on the Map (2020)

Jobs by Firm Size

	Study Area	City	Parish
< 20 PEOPLE	13%	15%	14%
20-249 PEOPLE	26%	26%	25%
250+ PEOPLE	61%	59%	61%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Jobs by Firm Age

	Study Area	City	Parish
< 3 YEARS (2018–2020)	5%	5%	5%
4-10 YEARS	21%	14%	12%
11+ YEARS	75%	81%	83%

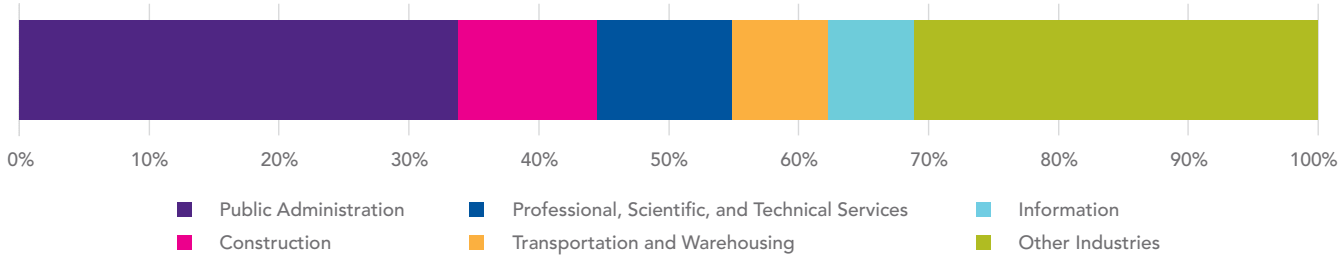
Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Knowledge Industry Employment Growth 2010–2020

	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	Management of Companies and Enterprises	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Information	Health Care and Social Assistance	Total Knowledge Job Change
Downtown	6%	236%	44%	208%	-41%	26%
City	-18%	50%	9%	71%	-12%	-3%
Parish	-10%	12%	13%	17%	16%	10%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Top Industries Downtown



Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

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Small Businesses & Startups

A strong entrepreneurial environment that supports both small businesses and startups in all industries is critical to a thriving downtown. Small businesses generate new jobs, promote innovation and competition, and account for almost half of U.S. economic activity.

Reflecting broader trends in the city and parish, downtown Baton Rouge is primarily home to older and larger firms. Roughly 3 in 4 downtown jobs are at businesses that are more than 11 years old, a slightly smaller share than in the city or parish. Meanwhile, a slightly larger share of downtown jobs — about 21% — are at businesses that are between 4 and 10 years old. This paints a picture of a downtown area that, while grounded in longstanding firms, also shows a slightly stronger inclination toward growing, mid-aged businesses.

In terms of employment distribution relative to the size of the firms, downtown Baton Rouge mirrors the city and the parish. The lion's share of employment opportunities — 61% — are found in larger firms with more than 250 employees, a figure closely paralleled by the city's 59%. Small businesses, those employing fewer than 20 individuals, play a vital but slightly smaller role in the downtown job market, representing 13% of employment compared to the city's slightly higher 15%. This similarity in employment distribution across firm sizes, coupled with similarities in firm ages, suggests that downtown fits well within the context of the region in which it resides.

Fiscal Impact

Downtowns typically concentrate the densest development and highest property values in their region. Downtown Baton Rouge exemplifies this trend, concentrating 22% of the parish's office space in less than 1% of its land area for a total in excess of 1.7 million square feet of office real estate. This heightens the value of downtown land, yielding both returns for investors and revenue that supports the City-Parish coffers.

Downtown's office market presents some of the best investments within the parish. Class A office rents downtown averaged $24.94 in 2022, 12% higher than parish-wide rental rates of $22.20. Despite rents that are higher, downtown

Occupancy

	CBD	City	Parish
OFFICE (A/B/C)	86%	76%	–
HOTEL	72%	60%	60%
RESIDENTIAL	92%	–	–

Source: Baton Rouge DDD (2023), Visit Baton Rouge (2022)

Cost

	CBD	City	Parish
OFFICE RENT (CLASS A (PER SQ. FT.))	$24.94	-	$22.20
HOTEL (AVERAGE DAILY RATE)	$149.09	$102.74	$105.55
RESIDENTIAL (RENTAL)	$1,800	$1,267	$1,223

Source: Baton Rouge DDD (2023), Visit Baton Rouge (2022), Greater Baton Rouge Association of Realtors Trends Report (2023)

Payroll and Wage

	Downtown	Parish
TOTAL PAYROLL	$729M	6.1% of East Baton Rouge Parish
AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE	$65,743	$56,526

Source: US Census Bureau County Business Patterns (2021)
Note: ZIP Codes 70801 and 70802 used for downtown

Land Value and Assessment

	CBD	DDD	City	Parish
ASSESSED VALUE	$49.8M	$98.2M	$2,699M	$6,554M
ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE	$1.25B	$710.3M	$19,731M	$48,584M
AREA IN SQUARE MILES	0.2	2.2	253	624
ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE PER SQ. MI.	-	$177.6M	$77.9M	$77.8M

Source: East Baton Rouge Parish Assessor's Office (2022). Note: CBD defined as area within the boundary of North Street, I-110, North Boulevard, and River Road.

Jobs by Earnings
Annually

	Downtown	City	Parish
$15K OR LESS	11%	21%	20%
$15K TO $40K	23%	30%	29%
$40K OR MORE	66%	49%	51%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

sustains an office vacancy rate of just 14%, which is roughly half of the parish-wide average, indicating that tenants are willing to pay more for centrally located downtown office space. This is in part due to the many investors which took advantage of State and Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits to undertake conversions to residential use, even prior to 2020. This has kept downtown office occupancy high by removing older, obsolete properties from the market while answering the high demand for downtown living, demand which is exemplified by the 92% occupancy rate of CBD residential properties. The same density of attractions and amenities that makes downtown attractive to residents also makes it attractive to visitors - downtown's hotels have both higher occupancy and higher daily rates.

Downtown property values are 2.5x higher than parish-wide average

These dynamics are combining to push the value of downtown real estate to all-time highs; as of 2022, properties in the DDD have a cumulative estimated market value of $178 million per square mile, two-and-a-half times higher than the parish-wide average. Though the DDD makes up less than 1% of the parish land, DDD properties make up a substantial portion of the parish's total property value, about 3.6% of it in total.

Downtown's fiscal impact is also felt through the quality of employment, which is generally high paying. Roughly two-thirds of downtown jobs pay $40,000 or more annually, compared to about half for the city and parish.

Downtown Baton Rouge generates a significant portion of sales tax revenue for the City-Parish. It is home to more than 660 businesses and 7 hotels. These businesses generate approximately $121 million in sales taxes, representing over 1% of the City-Parish sales tax revenue. Over half of this downtown sales tax revenue, 56%, is generated within just the CBD. Further, downtown's hotels generate $30.1M of the City-Parish's $202.8M hospitality taxes, 14.8% of the total. In other words, downtown is not just the center of regional employment—it is the backbone of the City-Parish budget.

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Inclusion | Diversity, Affordability

Downtowns and center cities invite and welcome all residents, employees, and visitors by providing access to jobs, housing, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities. A strong sense of inclusion and social cohesion keeps communities strong.

Racial Diversity

A significant majority of the study area's residents identify as Black or African American. According to the latest data from the American Community Survey, about 70% of the downtown population falls within this demographic, a figure that stands out even in the broader context of Baton Rouge, where 53% of the population is Black or African American. This concentration of the Black community is especially pronounced east of Interstate 110 and south of Interstate 10. In the census tracts located east of I-110, the Black or African American population reaches 75%, in contrast to 66% on the western side of the interstate, highlighting a distinct geographical divide within the city's demographic landscape.

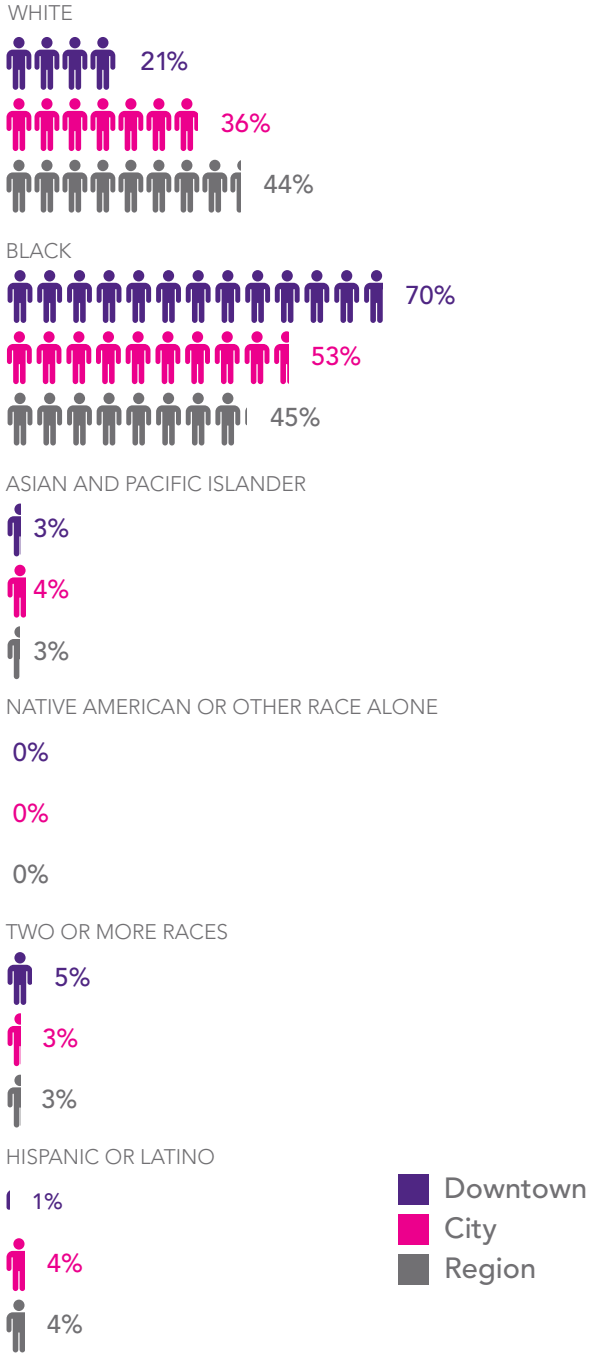
The demographic composition of the downtown workforce in Baton Rouge closely mirrors that of the citywide workforce, with some notable differences. Approximately 58% of those employed in the downtown area are White, a percentage that aligns with the share of White workers in the city. However, the proportion of Black or African American workers in the downtown area is slightly higher at 39%, compared to 37% in the broader city. This contrast becomes more striking when considering the residential demographics of downtown, where the majority of residents are Black or African American, yet the majority of the downtown workforce is White.

Benefits of Inclusion: Equity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Civic Purpose, Culture, Mobility, Accessibility, Tradition, Heritage, Services, Opportunity, Workforce Diversity

This discrepancy underscores the significance of various initiatives undertaken by the DDD to foster greater integration and accessibility within different parts of downtown. Efforts like expanding bike lanes on the Downtown Greenway, enhancing connectivity through the Louisiana Avenue Connection, and improving pedestrian pathways with better sidewalks and tree plantings are crucial.[3] These developments not only beautify the area but also play a vital role in bridging the gap between the residential communities and the employment opportunities in the Central Business District. These initiatives are instrumental in ensuring that the economic prospects of downtown Baton Rouge are accessible to residents from all parts of the city.

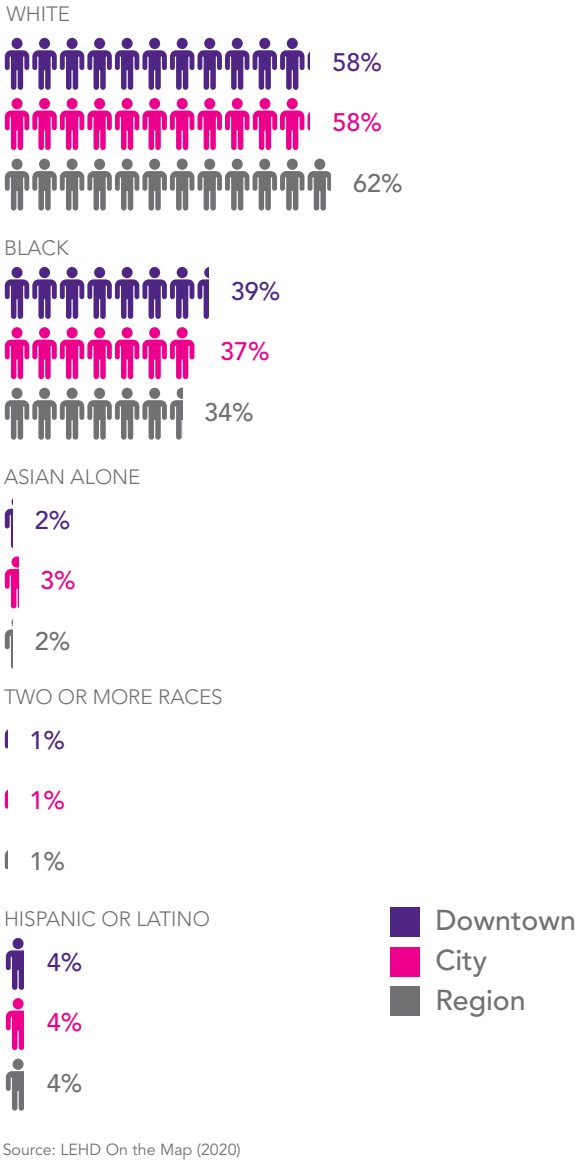
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Residents By Race and Ethnicity



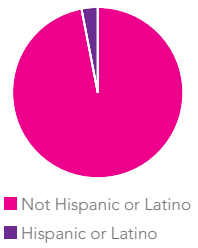
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Employment By Race



Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Downtown Workers by Ethnicity

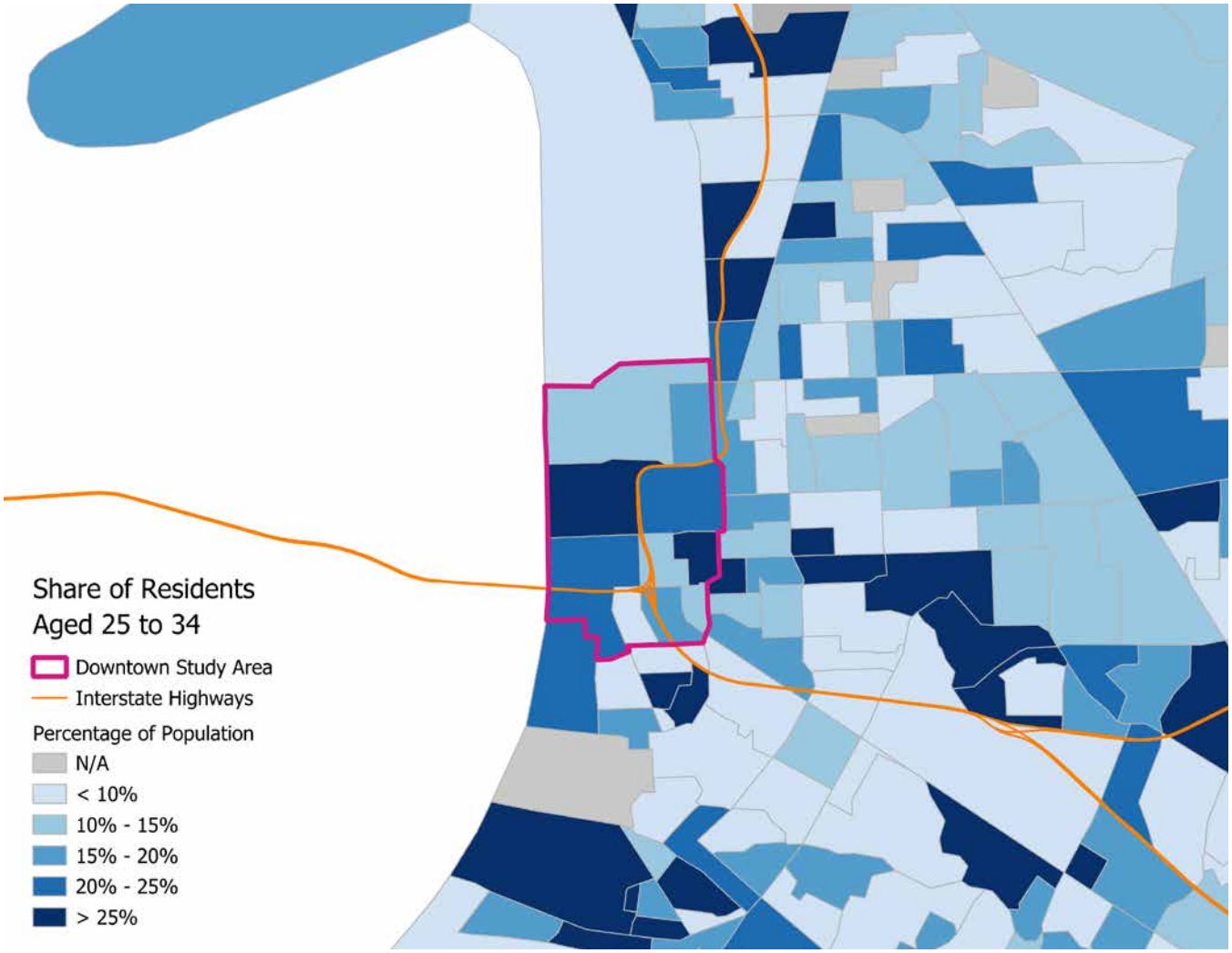


Source: LEHD On the Map (2020)

Age Diversity

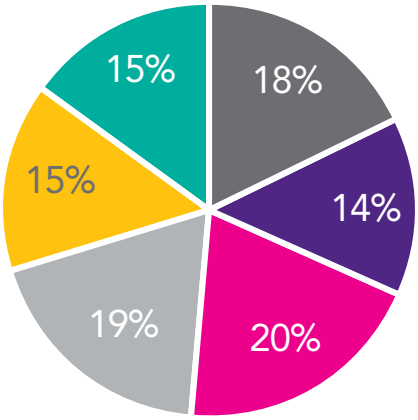
The age distribution of residents in downtown Baton Rouge presents a unique and balanced demographic profile. Unlike in other downtowns observed through IDA's study, where younger age groups, particularly those aged 18-24 and 25-34, predominantly reside, downtown Baton Rouge exhibits an almost equal distribution among all age groups. This diversity mirrors the city's overall age distribution, suggesting that the downtown area is an attractive living option for families and individuals at various life stages. This inclusive age range indicates a community that is welcoming and adaptable to many different lifestyles and needs.

Since 2010, there has been noticeable growth in the downtown population, particularly among the 25-34 and 65+ age brackets. The number of residents over 65 has surged by 600, while the 25-to-34-year-old demographic has seen a similar increase. This pattern of growth aligns with broader trends observed in many urban downtowns, where young professionals and older adults, often 'empty-nesters', are increasingly drawn to downtown living. This shift reflects a growing preference for the convenience, accessibility, and vibrant lifestyle that downtown areas typically offer, a trend reflected in downtown Baton Rouge. This pattern is another area where the impact of the interstate highways is visible. Within the downtown study area, the share of population aged 25 to 34 is generally highest west of the highways.



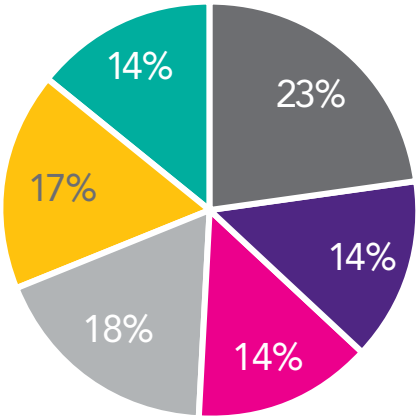
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Downtown Age Diversity



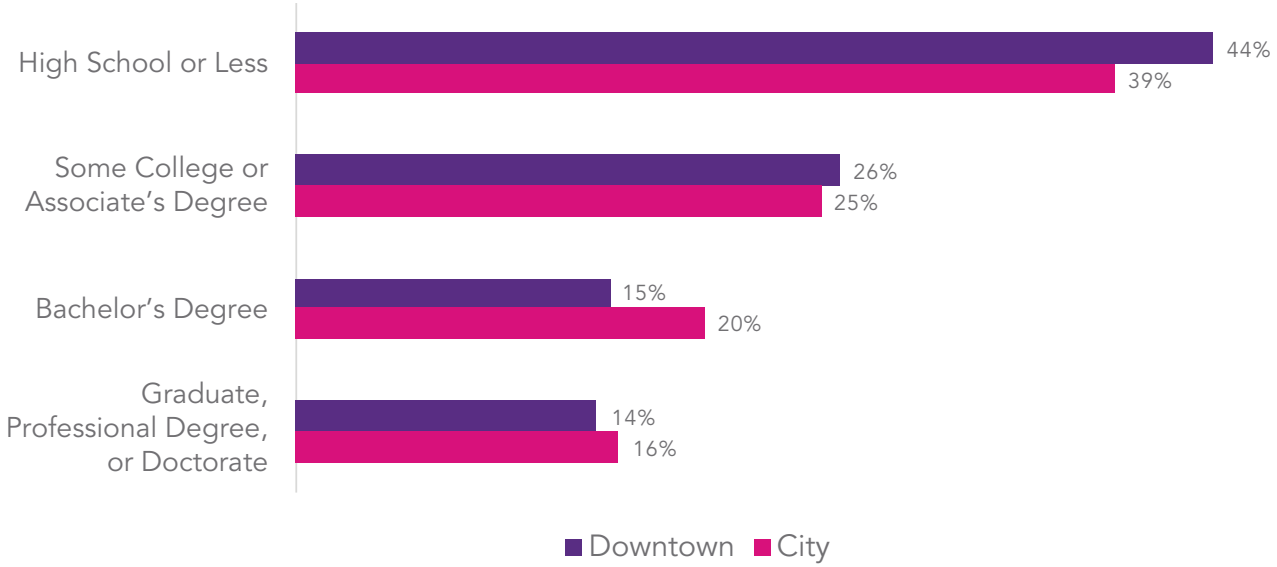
< 18 years
18 - 24
25 - 34
35 - 49
50 - 64
65+

Parish Age Diversity



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Educational Attainment for Residents 25+



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

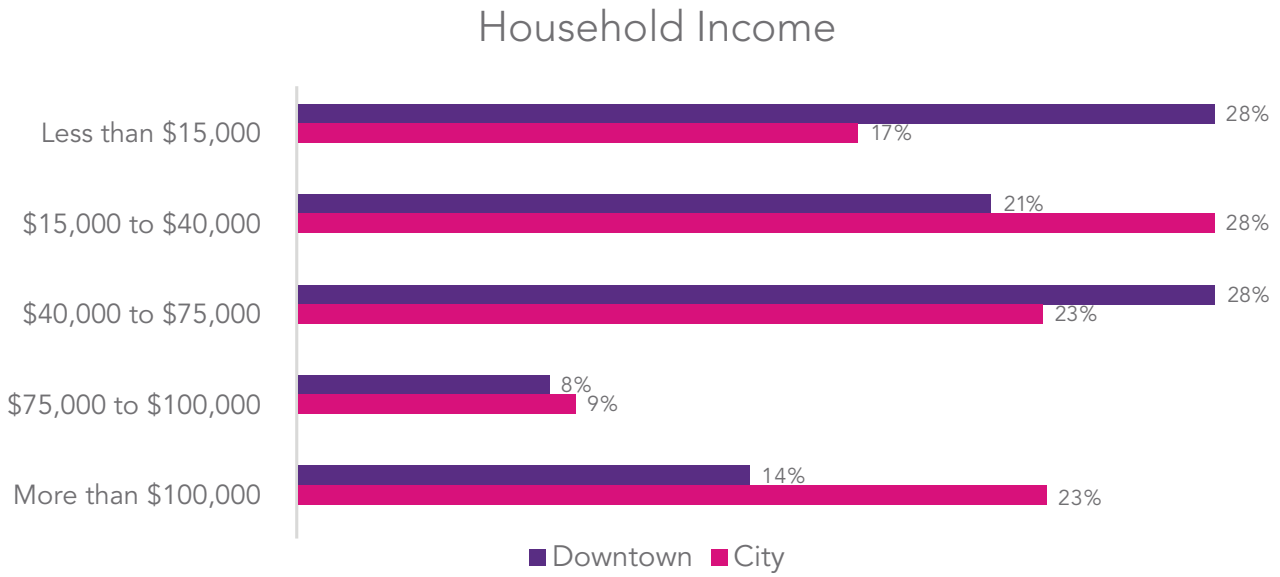
Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Socioeconomic Diversity

Downtown Baton Rouge presents a varied landscape in terms of household incomes, displaying notable differences from the citywide average as well as within its own area. The median household income downtown stands at $40,100, slightly below the citywide median of $46,300. However, this trend is not reflected equally across the downtown study area. In the eastern and southern parts of downtown, household incomes generally fall below the downtown median, with the area east of Interstate 110 recording a notably lower median income of just $24,700. In contrast, the area west of I-110 has a median income of $44,800, aligning more closely with the citywide average.

Median Household Income

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2017–2021)



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Another significant aspect of downtown's socioeconomic profile is the higher proportion of lower-income residents compared to the city as a whole. Around 28% of downtown households have incomes under $15,000, nearly double the city's rate of 17%. Conversely, Baton Rouge as a whole has a greater share of high-income households, with 25% earning over $100,000 annually, compared to just 14% in the downtown area. Outside of these extremes, the income levels downtown are more closely aligned with those across the city, reflecting a diverse economic community within the urban core of Baton Rouge.

In educational attainment, the residents of downtown Baton Rouge closely mirror the city's overall profile, with some slight variations. Approximately 44% of downtown residents have achieved a high school diploma or less, compared to the city's 39%. Conversely, the proportion of residents with a Bachelor's degree downtown is 5% less than the city's average. However, when it comes to intermediate and advanced levels of education, such as some college experience, and advanced degrees, including graduate, professional, or doctoral qualifications, the figures are roughly equivalent between downtown and the city as a whole.

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Housing Affordability

Despite downtowns generally being more expensive places to live, their density of housing, concentration of jobs, and access to public transportation can make living in a downtown less expensive than living in other neighborhoods when factoring in the cost of transportation. This trend is reflected in downtown Baton Rouge, where the median gross rent stands at $868, notably lower than the citywide median rent of $937, suggesting that downtown might offer more affordable living options compared to other areas of the city.

Affordability varies widely within downtown. Rental rates in the Central Business District are significantly higher, according to data collected by the DDD, which shows that the average rent within the CBD is around $1,800. This is almost double the median of the broader downtown area, another indication of the divides caused by I-10 and I-110.

Regardless of these nuances, the benefits of living in a central, accessible downtown lead to savings in other areas. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, the Housing & Transportation Index in downtown Baton Rouge is 37%, implying that a typical household is expected to spend just over a third of its income on combined housing and transportation costs. This is significantly lower than the citywide index of 43% and the regional level of 48%. This lower expenditure on essential costs reflects the economic advantage of living downtown, where reduced transportation needs and costs make it an attractive choice for a range of residents.

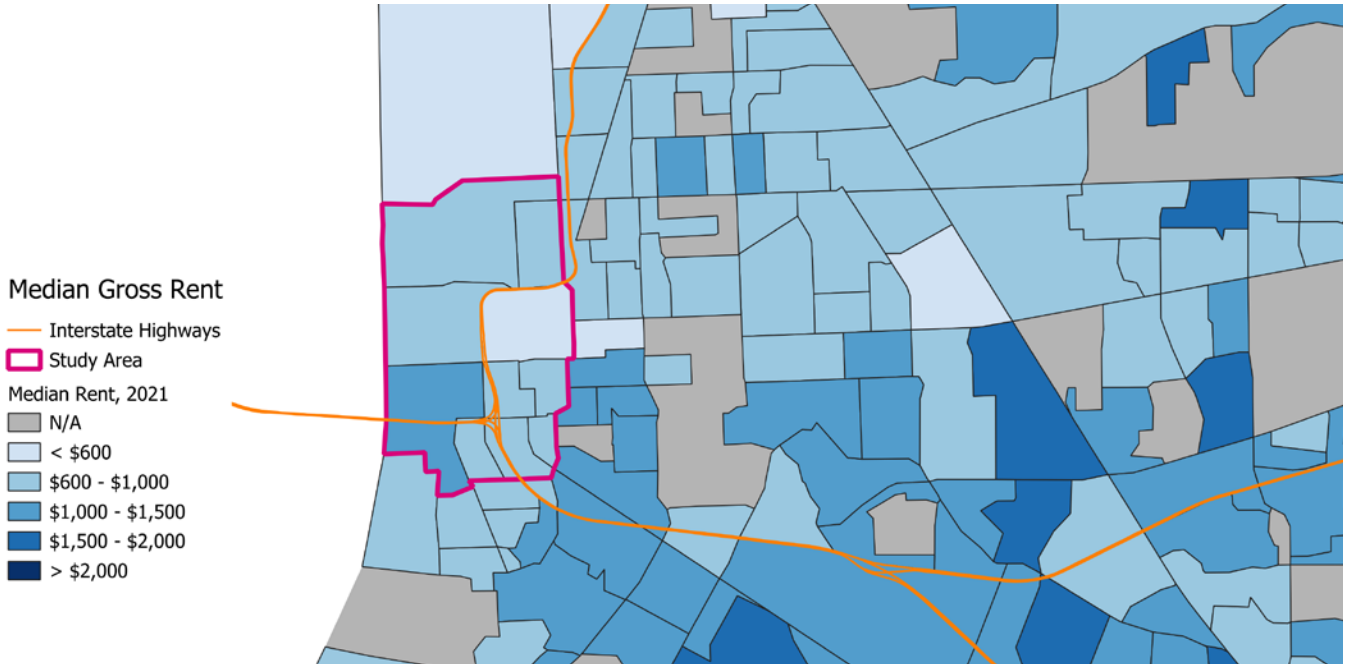
Downtown's relative affordability translates to a higher share of home ownership, with 27% of downtown homes owner-occupied. While this may seem like a small share, it ranks highly among our study downtowns. Housing within U.S. downtowns is typically mostly rental, and only seven of 49 downtowns in the study have homeownership rates above 30%. This places Baton Rouge among the top downtowns in our study for residential homeownership.

Housing and Transportation Index

Downtown	City	Parish
37%	43%	48%

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology (2019)

Median Rent



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2017–2021)

Vibrancy | Spending, Fun

Due to their expansive base of users, center cities can support a variety of unique retail, infrastructural, and institutional uses that offer cross-cutting benefits to the region.

Downtowns and center cities typically form the regional epicenter of culture, innovation, community, and commerce. Downtowns flourish due to density, diversity, identity, and use. An engaging downtown "creates the critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, brings people together in social settings, makes streets feel safe, and encourages people to live and work downtown because of the extensive amenities."[4] This is further amplified by a high concentration of restaurants, concerts, outdoor events, plazas, parks, and festivals.

Baton Rouge natives understand how important the vibrancy of downtown is to the health of the city. In a 2023 survey conducted by the DDD to guide their strategic plan, 97% of nearly 1,400 respondents said that they thought a vibrant downtown was "important" or "somewhat important" to the city.

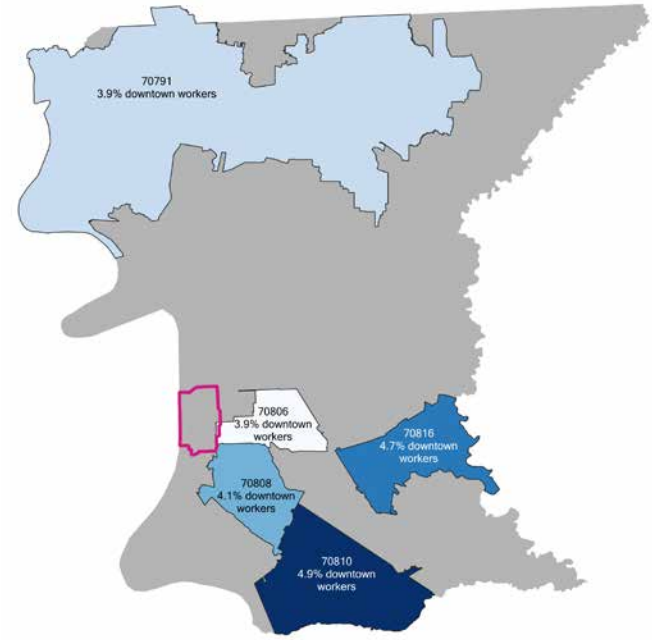
Benefits of Vibrancy: Density, Creativity, Innovation, Investment, Spending, Fun, Utilization, Brand, Variety, Infrastructure, Celebration

Residential Growth

Residential growth signals a fast-changing and vibrant downtown, one that not only has a working population in the daytime but also activities and people around throughout the day and night. While it has long been of pivotal importance to downtowns, it is of greater importance than ever as traditional workplace dynamics and patterns have changed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Downtown Baton Rouge has experienced a significant population boom, even as the total population of Baton Rouge shrank. While the city experienced a nearly 2%

Where Downtown Workers Live



Source: LEHD OnTheMap (2020)

Residential Growth

	Downtown	City	Parish
RESIDENTIAL POPULATION GROWTH 2017-2021	12.5%	-0.9%	2.1%
RESIDENTIAL POPULATION GROWTH 2012-2021	16.4%	-1.6%	3.6%

Source: U.S. Census (2000), American Community Survey 5-Year estimates (2013–2017, 2017–2021)

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decrease in its population between 2012 and 2021, downtown defied this trend, bearing witness to a more than 16% increase in its residents. This growth in downtown stands in stark contrast not only to the city's decline but also to the modest 3.6% growth in the broader region. Without such robust growth downtown, the city's population would have declined by an additional 0.5% between 2012 and 2021. This unique dynamic has positioned downtown as a distinct, attractive hub within the city, drawing new residents despite broader demographic challenges.

Downtown's economic significance extends well beyond its boundaries, influencing the entirety of East Baton Rouge Parish. Known as a bustling economic center, downtown concentrates some of the parish's high-paying jobs, attracting a workforce from well beyond its boundaries. Despite strong residential growth in the last decade, however, the number of downtown workers who choose to also live downtown has remained flat. In 2012, 540 downtown workers also resided in downtown, a figure that saw only a slight increase to 573 by 2020. This suggests that the increasing attractiveness of downtown as a place to live is not predominantly due to its employment opportunities. Instead, it highlights other compelling factors, such as the quality of life, proximity to cultural and entertainment options, and perhaps a growing desire for urban living experiences, which are drawing people to downtown Baton Rouge. Additionally, research by the Baton Rouge DDD found that 40% of those who work downtown would be interested in living downtown as well, but cited affordability as the main impediment to doing so.

Retail Vitality

A downtown's retail environment acts as the heart of the community and is a key reason for residents, workers, and visitors to come downtown.

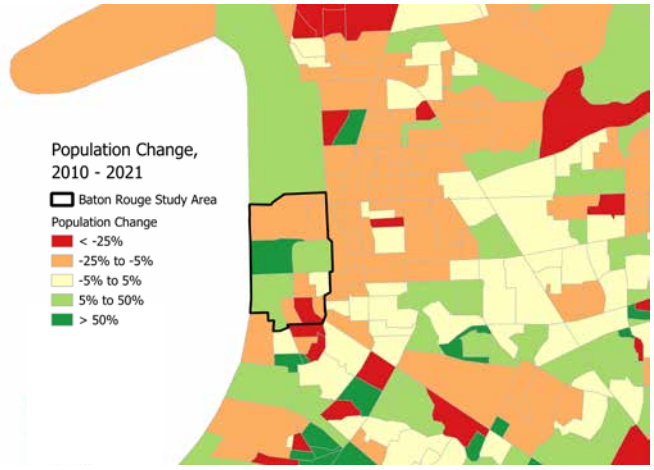
Downtown Baton Rouge's retail landscape presents a unique mix of challenges and opportunities. Its current retail market is generally in line with the city's overall performance, paralleling the city in terms of annual sales, which hover around $50 million per square mile. However, when compared to other downtown areas across various cities, downtown Baton Rouge's retail sector finds itself falling behind, situated in the lower 20th percentile in terms of retail sales and the number of businesses. This positioning is near similar metrics of cities like Little Rock, AR, and Evansville,

Residents

	Downtown Baton Rouge	Emerging Downtowns	All Study Downtowns Average
GROWTH 2012–2021	16.4%	16%	27%
DENSITY (RESIDENTS/ACRE)	4	8.8	11.8
MEDIAN INCOME	$40K	$42K	$57K
DIVERSITY INDEX	52.7	67	65.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2021), ESRI Business Analyst Online (2022)

Population Growth



Source: U.S. Census (2000), American Community Survey 5-Year estimates (2017–2021)

Retail Vitality

TOTAL RETAIL AND FOOD & DRINK BUSINESSES

129

RETAIL AND FOOD & DRINK BUSINESSES

32 per sq. mi.

TOTAL RETAIL AND FOOD & DRINK SALES

$201.7M

RETAIL AND FOOD & DRINK SALES

$50.4M per sq. mile

Source: City of Baton Rouge Finance Department (2023), ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023)

Retail

	Downtown Study Area	Emerging Downtowns	Study Average
CITYWIDE RETAIL SALES	4.6%	6%	11%
RETAIL SALES PER SQUARE MILE	$50.4M	$302.6M	$344.8M
BUSINESSES PER SQUARE MILE	32	191	240

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023)

IN, which report retail sales per square mile of $57 million and $58 million, respectively. On the contrary, the average *emerging* downtown generates retail sales per square mile that are six times as high, at roughly $300 million annually.

Recognizing the potential for growth and the need to invigorate the area, the DDD has partnered with the Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership. This collaboration aims to attract both new and existing businesses to fill vacant retail spaces, thereby fostering a vibrant and diverse retail environment in downtown Baton Rouge. This initiative signals a proactive step towards transforming the downtown area into a more dynamic and economically robust destination.

Live Events and Activities

Downtowns often serve their cities as centers of culture and recreation. With its 21 live entertainment venues and five theatres, downtown Baton Rouge's density of attractions draws visitors from across the region. In total, between 150 and 200 outdoor events are hosted downtown in a typical year. One of the marquee recurring attractions is the weekly Red Stick Farmers Market, a producers-only market that connects the community with local farmers.[5] In a 2023 survey conducted by the DDD as part of its strategic planning efforts, the farmers market and outdoor events were listed as the second and third most important attractions to downtown, respectively. Only downtown's vibrant dining scene was rated higher as an attraction, though an additional survey revealed even more dining options were a top desire for downtown improvements.

The prevalence of live events and activities drives a robust hotel business downtown that serves as a testament to the area's post-COVID resilience and appeal. With seven hotels offering a combined total of 1,175 rooms, the district has maintained a robust average occupancy rate of 73%, significantly outshining East Baton Rouge Parish's average of 58%. This high demand is largely attributed to the hotels' proximity to various cultural and entertainment attractions, making them a preferred choice for visitors. Additionally, these downtown hotels manage to command premium rates, with an average revenue per available room (RevPAR) of $105.89, a figure that surpasses the parish's average of $62.78 by a considerable margin.

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Though seemingly modest, the number of hotels and rooms in downtown Baton Rouge aligns well with trends observed in other *emerging* downtown areas. In fact, 8 out of 17 *emerging* downtowns also have fewer than 10 hotels or 2,000 rooms. This sector plays a crucial role in the local economy, attracting approximately 140,000 visitors annually, which translates to nearly 400 visitors each day. These visitors not only contribute financially to downtown businesses but also add energy to its streets and public spaces. The recent completion of The Queen Baton Rouge's $85 million renovation in October 2023, coupled with the anticipated $35 million renovation of The Belle Baton Rouge, suggests that an increase in visitation and further growth in the hospitality sector are on the horizon, reinforcing downtown Baton Rouge's status as a thriving destination.

District Events and Activities

21
VENUES WITH LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

5
TOTAL THEATRES

3
TOTAL GYMS AND FITNESS STUDIOS

150–200
OUTDOOR EVENTS PERMITTED

51
TOTAL FARMERS MARKETS

18,943
CONVENTION ATTENDEES

25
TOTAL ANNUAL FESTIVALS/PARADES WITH MORE THAN 1,000 ATTENDEES

Source: Baton Rouge Downtown Development District (2023)

Hotels Downtown

	DDD
HOTELS	7
HOTEL ROOMS	1,175
AVERAGE HOTEL OCCUPANCY	73%
AVERAGE HOTEL REVPAR	$105.89
VISITORS	140K
AVERAGE DAILY VISITORS	384

Source: Visit Baton Rouge (2023)

Hotels

	DDD	Emerging* Downtowns
HOTELS	7	15
HOTEL ROOMS	1,175	3,638

Note: Emerging Downtown figures exclude San Antonio, which is an outlier among Emerging downtowns.

Identity | Visitation, Heritage, Tradition

Downtowns and center cities preserve the heritage of a place, provide a common point of physical connection for regional residents, and contribute positively to the brand of the regions they anchor.

Downtowns are "iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most iconic landmarks, distinctive features, and unique neighborhoods. Given that most downtowns represent one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city's past, present, and future."[6] The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create a unique sense of place not easily replicated in other parts of the city.

Benefits of Identity: Brand, Visitation, Heritage, Tradition, Memory, Celebration, Fun, Utilization, Culture

Baton Rouge is a city steeped in history. From the Native Americans who first inhabited the land, to the generations of Louisianans who have lived under seven successive flags since the city's founding, their influence continues to shape all aspects of local life.

In the 1800s, before Baton Rouge was *Baton Rouge*, it was a booming trading post that thrived off the cotton and sugarcane industries. In the century that followed, it became an epicenter of the oil and gas industry. From 1940 to 1956, Baton Rouge's population boomed, increasing by 340% to 103,000, as thousands of workers relocated to the area. During this period of rapid expansion, downtown Baton Rouge became a bustling center of activity, with retailers like Sears and Rosenfield's, as well as Stroube's Pharmacy, occupying valuable real estate on historic Third Street.[7] It was here, in the heart of downtown, that the nation's first bus boycott was organized, catching the eye of Martin Luther King Jr., and later inspiring the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. It is also where student activists from Southern University took a defiant seat at a department store's lunch counter, joining a wave of civil rights era sit-ins that unfolded across the country in 1960.[8]

Baton Rouge is also the land of Huey P. Long, whose populist message famously served as the fodder for Robert Penn Warren's award-winning novel, *All the King's Men*. On the north end of downtown, the "King" met his fate, struck by a single bullet fired by a political foe in the halls of the tallest capitol building in the nation — a replacement that he himself commissioned. Today, downtown still buzzes with the activity of political operatives shuffling from place to place between meetings. The capitol grounds abut the perimeter of Capitol Gardens and Veteran's Memorial Park, two of downtown's largest parks.

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Stretching south from here is historic Third Street. Echoing the bustle of the mid-20th century, the street has reclaimed its glory with historic architecture, the iconic Coca-Cola sign, trendy restaurants, and bars. It offers a vibrant nightlife with venues like Mother's, Jolie Pearl, Boudreaux & Thibodeaux's, and Dark Thirty, featuring live music and dancing. For dining, options range from The Little Village and Stroube's Steak and Seafood for upscale meals, to Cecelia Creole Bistro for classic Louisiana cuisine, Tsunami Sushi for rooftop dining, and The Vintage for beignets. The street is a hot spot for live music, showcasing talents at venues like Boudreaux & Thibodeaux's and The Shaw Center for the Arts, and is close to the Raising Cane's River Center, which hosts larger events.

Unsurprisingly, Third Street is a popular destination for students from Baton Rouge's local universities. With enrollment topping 37,000 students and a campus south of downtown, Louisiana State University (LSU) has an outsized presence within Baton Rouge. However, LSU is hardly the only game in town. Southern University and A&M College, a public historically Black land-grant university, and Baton Rouge Community College collectively educate more than 16,000 students at their city campuses. Hosting sporting events in and around downtown, these colleges and universities draw large crowds to the city center to celebrate.

In addition to sports, downtown is a year-round destination for events and culture. From the lively Baton Rouge Blues Festival, which celebrates the city's deep musical roots, to the festive Mardi Gras parades that fill the streets with color and excitement, downtown is alive with events that honor the history of the region. Smaller events include the Live After 5 and Sunday in the Park concert series, and the Festival of Lights and Red Stick Revelry holiday celebrations. These events take place in the 11-acre Central Green, an IDA-award-winning network of connected public spaces that total 11 acres of accessible and continuous green space in the heart of downtown.[9] River Road also won an IDA award for its impact and transformation from an industrial road to a Complete Street.[10] Meanwhile, museums like the USS KIDD Veterans Museum and Louisiana Art & Science Museum attract families, while the Louisiana Civil Rights Trail honors the legacy of the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge.

Destinations & Unique Features

27 HISTORIC STRUCTURES

8 MUSEUMS

44 PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS

17 PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

Source: Downtown Development District Asset List (2023)

Social Media

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS	2,786
INSTAGRAM IMPRESSIONS	39,483
FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS	8,052
FACEBOOK REACH	51,085

Source: Downtown Development District Social Media Stats from June 2023 - December 2023

Resilience | Sustainability, Diversity

At its broadest, resilience means a place's ability to withstand shocks and stresses. Thanks to their diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their residents can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than other parts of a city. Diversity and economic vitality equip downtowns and center cities to adapt to economic and social shocks better than more homogenous communities. Similarly, density better positions downtowns and center cities to make investments needed to hedge against and bounce back from increasingly frequent environmental shocks and stresses.

> **Benefits of Resilience:** Health, Equity, Sustainability, Accessibility, Mobility, Durability of Services, Density, Diversity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Opportunity, Scale, Infrastructure

Economic Resilience

Economic resilience is the ability of a downtown to withstand adverse economic conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by having a mix of factors essential to continual long-term success. Bringing together a mix of industries with a talented workforce makes downtown both a competitive and economically resilient environment.

With secondary industries such as information, construction, and professional, scientific and technical services on the rise, the downtown employment landscape is becoming increasingly diversified and less driven by jobs in public administration alone. The ongoing conversion of office properties to residential uses, which has contributed to downtown's dramatic rise in residential population, particularly within the CBD, has further diversified the downtown stakeholder group. Additionally, increases in the downtown tourism industry, such as casino renovations, will draw visitors and outside dollars in, further improving downtown's economic resilience and providing new customers for local businesses as work-from-home continues to alter the makeup of downtown visitors. These changes complement the rapid population growth downtown, creating a complete live-work-play neighborhood.

Poverty is another important metric used to calculate a downtown's economic resilience. Downtown Baton Rouge has somewhat higher rates of poverty than the city, with 35% of downtown households considered in poverty status, compared to 24% for the city. However, this is one of many areas where the legacy of highway construction, which divided Baton Rouge, can be seen. In Census tracts 22 and 53, which comprise most of the eastern half of the study area, a noticeably higher percentage of households — nearly 40% — are experiencing poverty. Around the CBD, poverty rates are particularly low. This impacts the average for all of downtown when, in fact, a more nuanced understanding reveals a wide gap in the financial wellbeing of downtown residents.

Downtown Community Resources

2
LIBRARIES

16
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

17
PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

6
RECREATION AND COMMUNITY CENTERS

Source: Downtown Development District (2023)
Note: Downtown Development District Asset List (within DDD Boundary)

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Social Resilience

Downtowns act as hubs for social resilience. Their dense nature gives a diverse mix of residents and employees access to a multitude of community resources in a small area. With access to 17 parks and natural areas, 16 religious institutions, six recreation and community centers, and two libraries, residents of downtown Baton Rouge enjoy several "third places," which provide many physical and mental health benefits.

Crime rates are a critical indicator of social resilience, as they can significantly impact the trust and cohesion within communities. This aspect is particularly relevant in urban place management, as exemplified by organizations like the DDD. These organizations strive to maintain clean and safe environments, but factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and, at times, exaggerated media portrayals have amplified negative perceptions of crime in North American downtown areas. Traditional crime statistics methodologies compound this issue, often misrepresenting downtown areas by only considering resident populations. Downtowns, however, are unique in their composition of visitors and workers, alongside residents.

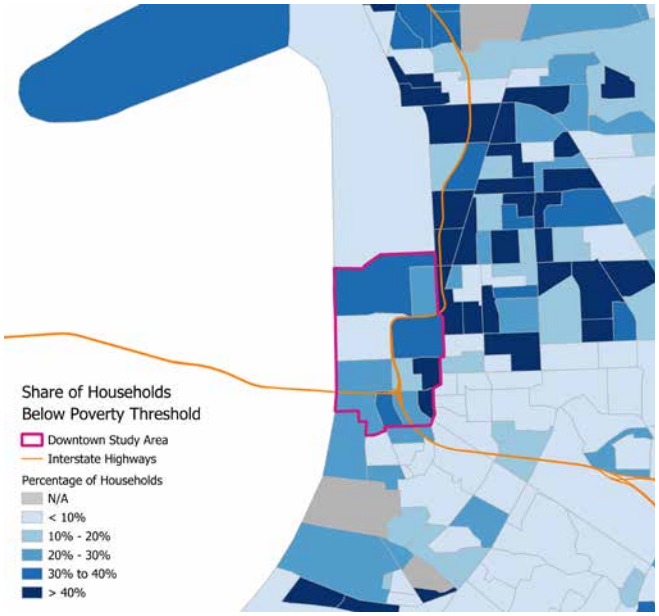
In Baton Rouge, downtown crime rates in 2022 were only about half the citywide rate of 11,740 per 100,000 even when only considering residents. A more holistic approach to calculating crime rates — incorporating residential, visitor, and employment populations — reveals an even more dramatic difference. Applying this methodology to 2022 statistics, the combined rate of property and personal crimes in the downtown area was significantly lower, at 1,634 crimes per 100,000 people, about 7 times less than the citywide rate. This nuanced understanding of crime statistics in urban areas, especially downtown areas, highlights how safe the downtown area is. Further reinforcing the notion of downtown safety, the Baton Rouge Police Department (BRPD) reports the 5th District, which covers the majority of the DDD, receives less than 2% of all BRPD calls.

Poverty can have an impact on digital connectivity, an aspect of social resilience whose importance was underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift of work, social interactions, education, and services online. This is evident in downtown Baton Rouge, where 12% of downtown households lack a computer, a figure slightly higher than

Poverty

	Downtown	City	Parish
RESIDENTS UNDER THE POVERTY THRESHOLD	35%	24%	18%
RESIDENTS UNDER 200% THE POVERTY THRESHOLD	56%	45%	35%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT A COMPUTER	12%	9%	7%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS	14%	8%	6%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Health

	DOWNTOWN	CITY
AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY	71	75
NO LEISURE-TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	40%	31%
WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	11%	11%

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2020); CDC (2017); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

the 9% in the wider city and 7% across the region. Similarly, internet access is absent in 14% of downtown households, compared to 8% citywide and 6% regionally. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has concluded that this digital divide is more pronounced in low-income households, with 17% of households living in poverty and 23% of households in Louisiana lacking internet access as of 2019. This data highlights a crucial gap in digital infrastructure, particularly affecting economically disadvantaged communities.

Research has also established a link between poverty and health outcomes. That may explain why downtown residents have a slightly shorter life expectancy than those living elsewhere in Baton Rouge. Despite its density and the availability of amenities like parks and natural areas, residents living in downtown Baton Rouge are also slightly less likely to partake in physical activity in their leisure time. Meanwhile, levels of health insurance coverage are on par with the city.

Environmental Resilience

A downtown's environmental resilience plays a major role in assuring long-term sustainability in its region. Relative to other areas of Baton Rouge, downtown's density of workplaces and residents, coupled with the expansion of transit systems alongside enhanced biking and pedestrian facilities, enables residents to opt for healthier and more environmentally friendly travel methods.

This commitment to alternative transportation is reflected in the downtown area's impressive Walk Score and Bike Score ratings, 79 and 66 respectively, which significantly exceed city averages. These scores are expected to improve as a result of projects like the Downtown Greenway and Mississippi River Levee Trail, and enhancements in ADA accessibility across downtown. These developments align downtown Baton Rouge with the trends observed in other *emerging* downtowns, which typically show similar or slightly lower walk and bike infrastructure compared to growing and established downtowns.

While driving remains the primary commute choice for many downtown residents, the range of available alternatives is broader compared to other city areas, which has led to a noticeable decline in driving-only commutes in recent years. Downtown residents are significantly more likely to bike, use transit, carpool or walk to work than those living elsewhere in the city. Although these alternative commuting methods still represent a small fraction of the total commute mode share, their growing popularity is a positive sign. Additionally, downtown's unique blend of work and residential spaces, coupled with its proximity to major transport routes, makes it a prime location for expanding electric car charging infrastructure. This expansion is a key aspect of Baton Rouge's Electric Vehicle Strategic Plan, illustrating a forward-thinking approach to commuting that balances convenience with sustainability.[11]

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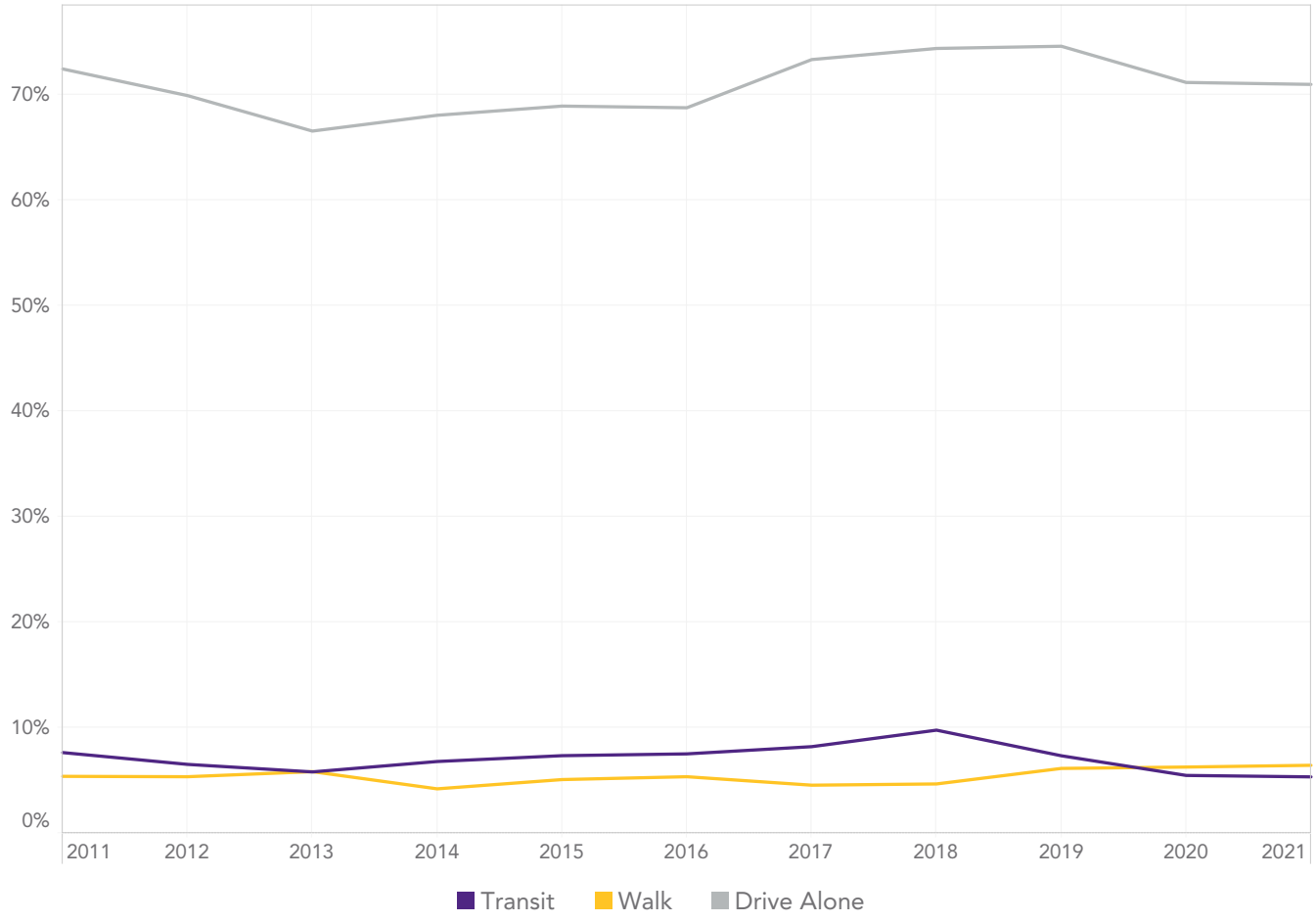
Downtown's commitment to sustainability is also expressed through its architecture and urban green spaces. Housing some of the region's most prized real estate, it also offers a significant concentration of LEED-certified buildings, including six of the 32 LEED-certified projects in East Baton Rouge Parish. It also boasts a considerable amount of open space, amounting to almost 2.5% of the land within the DDD boundary. This translates to 53 acres of green, open areas for residents, workers, and visitors to enjoy, featuring prominent spaces like the River Levee Walk and Capitol Gardens. These attributes underscore downtown Baton Rouge's role not only as a commercial and cultural center but also as a leader in promoting an environmentally conscious and healthy urban lifestyle.

New Mobility Options

	DDD
BIKESHARE STATIONS	16
TOTAL DOCKED OR DOCKLESS BIKES	80
TOTAL TRANSIT STOPS (INCLUDING RAIL AND BUS)	33

Source: Baton Rouge DDD (2023)

Downtown Commute Mode Share



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2021)

Environmental Resilience

	DDD	CITY	PARISH
LEED BUILDINGS	6	n/a	32
ELECTRIC CAR CHARGING POINTS	10	n/a	n/a
ACRES OF OPEN SPACE	53	1,492	7,551
ANNUAL GHG EMISSIONS PER HOUSEHOLD	4.7	6.4	7.5

Source: USGBC (2023), City of Baton Rouge Department of Information Services (2023), Baton Rouge DDD (2023), Center for Neighborhood Technology (2019)

Mobility Scores

	Downtown Study Area	Emerging Downtowns	Baton Rouge
WALK	79	80	39
BIKE	66	70	44

Source: Walk Score (2023)

Downtown Commuting Patterns

	Downtown	City	Parish
BIKE	4%	1%	1%
TRANSIT	5%	2%	1%
CARPOOL	13%	10%	9%
WALK	6%	3%	2%
OTHER	1%	1%	1%
DRIVE ALONE	71%	83%	86%

Source: American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates (2017–2021)

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Downtown Profile | Summary

The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities study categorizes American districts into three development stages: *established*, *growing*, and *emerging*. These tiers are determined by various metrics, including population and job density, growth rate, and assessed land value per square mile. Because it doesn't yet have the high citywide significance in jobs and residents found in other downtowns and has a relatively lower density, downtown Baton Rouge ranks in the *emerging* tier.

Downtown hosts 20% of Baton Rouge's jobs in less than 5% of the city land area, making it a crucial economic hub that concentrates a higher share of its city's jobs than average *emerging* downtowns. Its regional influence is only growing, backed by a notable increase in primary employment, defined as an individual's best-paying job if they have more than one. Since 2013, this important employment benchmark has seen a 15% increase within downtown. While public administration continues to dominate — downtown concentrates 87% of all public sector jobs in the city, which is Louisiana's State Capital — the knowledge industry is leading private sector job growth, as evidenced by the expansion of corporate offices by companies like IBM. This is driving the value of downtown real estate higher, with Class A office rents exceeding averages for East Baton Rouge Parish by 12%. Despite its small geographical footprint, downtown also generates a substantial portion of the city-parish government's property tax revenues, underscoring its role as the backbone of the City-Parish budget. With an estimated market value of $178M per square mile, downtown land is valued at almost four times that of land across the parish on average, filling the City-Parish coffers.

Downtown is also one of the city's fastest-growing residential areas, with a population that increased 16% from 2012 to 2021. That's in line with the average residential growth of all *emerging* downtowns and came at a time when the city's population actually decreased by nearly 2%. Approximately 70% of these residents identify as Black or African American, a significantly higher proportion compared to 53% in the citywide population. As a result, downtown scores roughly 15 points lower on the Diversity Index, which measures the likelihood that any two randomly selected people in a

Emerging Downtowns

ALBUQUERQUE	GRAND RAPIDS	TAMPA
BATON ROUGE	HOLLYWOOD	TOLEDO
BIRMINGHAM	LANCASTER	TUCSON
CLEVELAND	LITTLE ROCK	TULSA
CORPUS CHRISTI	OKLAHOMA CITY	WAIKIKI
EL PASO	SAN ANTONIO	WICHITA
EVANSVILLE	SPARTANBURG	

RESIDENTS

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
GROWTH AVG. 2012–2021	16.4%	16%
MEDIAN INCOME HOUSEHOLD	$50K	$42K
DIVERSITY INDEX	52.7	67

EMPLOYMENT

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
EMPLOYMENT GROWTH (2015–2020)	7%	-1%
CITYWIDE JOBS	20%	17%
CITYWIDE KNOWLEDGE JOBS	17%	18%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	29%	26%
RESIDENTS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER	30%	41%

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
RETAIL SALES PER SQUARE MILE	$50.4M	$303M

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
HOTELS	7	15
HOTEL ROOMS	1,175	3,347

SUSTAINABLE COMMUTE

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
	29%	22%

	DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
WALK SCORE	79	80
BIKE SCORE	66	70

location will identify as a different race or ethnicity, than the typical *emerging* downtown. On the other hand, downtown exhibits remarkable age diversity, with an almost equal distribution among all age groups. This diversity mirrors the city's overall age distribution, suggesting that the downtown area is an attractive living option for families and individuals at various life stages. However, it contradicts the trend seen in most areas analyzed in IDA's study, where younger age groups, especially those aged 18-24 and 25-34, have an outsized presence.

There is plenty of room for growth downtown. With a density of four residents per acre, downtown falls behind other *emerging* downtowns, which are more than twice as dense on average. There is also a need for greater connectivity within downtown, as evidenced by the stark contrasts that exist within downtown's residential population. For instance, in downtown's eastern and southern parts, household incomes typically fall below the median of $40,100, especially east of Interstate 110, where the median income is only $24,700. Here, approximately 40% of residents are experiencing poverty, a share that exceeds the average for all of downtown and is more than double the parish-wide average. Conversely, the area west of I-110 boasts a higher median income of $44,800, more in line with the citywide average. Affordability also varies widely within downtown, with rental rates in the Central Business District topping $1,800 — almost double the median of the broader downtown area. The DDD's efforts, including expanding bike lanes on the Downtown Greenway, enhancing the Louisiana Avenue Connection, and improving pedestrian pathways with sidewalks and tree plantings, are crucial for integrating different parts of downtown Baton Rouge and making the city's economic prospects more accessible to all residents.

Transportation also plays an important role in strengthening connectivity, and when it incorporates multi-modal options, it can also boost a downtown's environmental resilience. This is evident in downtown Baton Rouge, whose Walk Score and Bike Score ratings far exceed the city and parish, falling in line with the averages for *emerging* downtowns. While driving is still common, there's an increasing trend towards biking, walking, and using transit, supported by the area's unique mix of work and residential spaces and initiatives like expanding electric car charging infrastructure. Additionally, downtown's focus on sustainability extends to

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its architecture, with a significant concentration of LEED-certified buildings and over 53 acres of green spaces. These public spaces host large annual traditions like Baton Rouge Blues Festival and numerous Mardi Gras parades, along with smaller events like the Live After 5 and Sunday in the Park concert series, and the Festival of Lights and Red Stick Revelry holiday celebrations. Although downtown has a lower density of retail businesses per square mile than other *emerging* downtowns, streets like historic Third Street, with its mix of high-end and casual restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues, welcome crowds from local colleges and universities and nearby sporting events.

Because *emerging* downtowns don't yet have the high citywide significance in jobs and residents found in other downtowns, and have relatively lower densities, they have substantial potential. Lower property values allow developers to see greater returns on their investments, while lower rents make these downtowns attractive to small businesses and creators and makers. Downtown Baton Rouge embodies this potential well, and with the right balance of inclusive growth, it can continue its transformation into a dynamic live-work-play destination, attracting a mix of residents and businesses that contribute to its cultural legacy and bolster the local economy.

APPENDICES

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PROJECT METHODOLOGY

PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS

DATA SOURCES

SELECTED STUDY DEFINITIONS

ADDITIONAL IDA SOURCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appendix I: Project Framework and Methodology

BACKGROUND

In 2017, IDA launched the *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study. IDA staff and the IDA Research Committee worked with the initial group of 13 downtown organizations, Stantec's Urban Places as a project advisor, and HR&A as an external consultant to develop the valuation methodology and metrics. Since 2017, IDA has added over 40 more downtowns or urban districts to the study database, and worked with their respective urban place management organizations (UPMOs) to collect local data, obtain data from agencies in their cities, and combine these metrics with publicly available statistics on demographics, economy, and housing. Data collected included publicly available census figures (population, demographics, employment, transportation), downtown economic performance, municipal finances, capital projects, GIS data, and the local qualitative context. The 49 total downtowns and urban districts studied to date represent diverse geographic regions and have relatively comparable levels of complexity and relationships to their respective cities and regions.

Guiding questions for this project included:

- What is the economic case for downtowns? What stands out about land values, taxes, or city investments?
- How do downtowns strengthen their regions?
- Can we standardize metrics to calculate the value of a downtown?
- How can downtowns measure their authentic, cultural and historical heritage?
- How does the diversity of a downtown make it inclusive, inviting, and accessible for all?
- What inherent characteristics of downtown make it an anchor of the city and region?
- Due to its mix of land-uses, diversity of jobs, and density, is downtown more socially, economically, and environmentally resilient than the rest of the city and region?

PROJECT PURPOSE

The project measured the performance of U.S. downtowns using metrics developed collaboratively and organized under five principles that contribute to a valuable urban center. This study:

- Provides a framework of principles and metrics to guide data collection for evaluating the value of downtowns and center cities.
- Standardizes key metrics for evaluating the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of American downtowns.
- Develops an industry-wide model for calculating the economic value of downtowns, creating a replicable methodology for continued data collection.
- Provides individual analysis and performance benchmarks for participating downtowns in this standardized framework, including supplemental qualitative analysis.
- Empowers and continues to support IDA members' economic and community development efforts through comparative analysis.

KNOWN LIMITS TO THIS PROJECT

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive quantification of the value of downtowns, there are still several limitations to our approach. Not all local sources consistently collect the same data, or collects it in the same way, which hinders our ability to make comparisons between downtowns. In some cases, the data we ask for simply does not exist or has not been collected on the relatively small scale of census tracts or downtown sub-area. This makes it challenging to rely on local data for analysis and can result in some missing pieces in our narrative. Our most recent data also comes predominantly from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), the 2020 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map tool, and ESRI Business Analyst. Due to the lag in data availability, some metrics may not align with more recent data from local downtown, municipal, or proprietary sources. This will be especially true in coming years as the recovery in employment following the COVID-19 pandemic will not be observed in our data sources for a few years.

Finally, citywide context plays a large role in the analysis. Significant variance in overall city size (from Spartanburg's 20 square miles to Oklahoma City's 606) can skew comparisons of the proportion of citywide jobs or population in different districts. However, since downtowns operate within the context of their city, understanding the proportion of jobs, residents, and other metrics as a percentage of their cities still provides an important perspective on a downtown's contribution to its city and region.

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Discussion: What factors make a vibrant downtown?

Downtowns have differing strengths: some function as employment anchors, some as tourist hubs, and some as neighborhood centers. Some are all three. We distilled the factors for measuring the value from attributes common to all downtowns regardless of their specific characteristics. These included fun, diversity, density, creativity, size, economic output, mobility, brand, investment, resiliency, health, sustainability, affordability, fiscal impact and accessibility.

Fun	Diversity	Density	Creativity	Size
Economic Output	Mobility	Brand	Investment	Resilience
Health	Sustainability	Affordability	Fiscal Impact	Accessibility

DETERMINING PRINCIPLES FOR A VALUABLE DOWNTOWN

This project began with a Principles and Metrics Workshop held in 2017 with representatives of UPMOs from the 13 pilot downtowns. The workshop focused on developing value principles that collectively capture a downtown's multiple functions and qualities, and its contributions to the city and region. Through this discussion, the participants grouped the value principles into five categories, which provided the basis for determining benchmarking metrics.

Downtown advocates tailor their arguments to the interests of different audiences. For instance, within the economy argument, the figure for sales tax revenue generated downtown would have resonance for government officials but likely wouldn't hold much interest for visitors and workers. For these audiences, a UPMO might assemble data showing the types of retail available downtown, whether the offerings meet user needs, and how fully residents, workers, and visitors use these retail establishments. The study team sought arguments that would appeal to multiple audiences and worked to identify metrics that could support multiple value statements. The workshop identified these value statements:

1. Downtowns are typically the economic engines of their regions due to a density of jobs, suppliers, customers, professional clusters, goods, and services.
2. Downtowns offer convenient access to outlying markets of residents, customers, suppliers, and peers thanks to past and ongoing investment in transportation infrastructure.
3. Downtowns provide a concentration of culture, recreation, and entertainment.
4. Downtowns offer choices for people with different levels of disposable income and lifestyle preferences.
5. Because of their density and diversity, downtowns encourage agglomeration, collaboration, and innovation.
6. Downtowns are central to the brand of the cities and regions they anchor.
7. Downtowns can be more economically and socially resilient than their broader regions.
8. Downtown resources and urban form support healthy lifestyles.
9. Downtowns' density translates into relatively low per-capita rates of natural resource consumption.
10. Relatively high rates of fiscal revenue generation and efficient consumption of public resources mean that downtowns yield a high return on public investment.

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METRICS SELECTION

To meet the goal of providing metrics that allow comparisons across jurisdictions, we made sure necessary comparison data was available for every (or almost every) downtown, city, and region. Data would ideally be:

1. **Readily available** to most downtown management organizations (and ideally public).
2. **Replicable** (enabling year-to-year comparisons), and
3. **Scalable across jurisdictions**, allowing for benchmarking and regional comparisons.

Specifically, we were reliably able to obtain metrics like population, employment, or assessed value – less reliably obtaining downtown visitors, hotel tax revenue. For this reason, our comparisons across jurisdictions focus on those more commonly available metrics.

We expect most downtowns to rely on similar sources of proprietary data, but participating downtowns may prefer one choice over another when obtaining similar data on metrics like commercial real estate (e.g. Colliers vs CBRE). To the extent possible, instructions provide that data sources remain consistent across geographic scales (downtown, city, region) and consistent over time for longitudinal analysis.

Metrics and comparisons are analyzed to develop value statements of the downtown or district. Three types of data fully illustrate each argument:

1. **Absolute facts** provide quantitative context and a feel for the scale of the characteristic being used to make the argument.

   For example, under economy, a UPMO might want to make the argument that a thriving financial services sector plays a critical role in the city's economy. The number of financial services jobs, the share of the city's financial services jobs located downtown, and number/list of large financial services companies headquartered downtown will help make the case that downtown has great importance to that sector and therefore the city.

2. **Indicators** measure an argument at a secondary level by focusing on inputs or outputs and may reflect the subject geography or serve as benchmarks for comparison to peer downtowns or case studies of best practices.

At this level, a UPMO could argue that their financial services sector is healthy and thriving. Comparisons to the growth of this industry sector in other downtowns, or concentration of financial services jobs relative to other downtowns would highlight the strength of their downtown's appeal to the financial services sector.

3. **Qualitative assessments** inject anecdotal context and color into an argument.

   For this level, the UPMO could include news reports of new financial services companies choosing to place offices downtown. An interview with a company executive on why they chose to locate downtown would also be a powerful anecdote on downtown's appeal.

Together, these different types of information allow IDA and the UPMO to communicate downtown's unique value to the city.

DEFINING DOWNTOWN

This study developed a definition of the commercial downtown that moved beyond the boundaries of a development authority or a business improvement district. For one thing, geographic parameters vary across data sources and may not align with a UPMO's jurisdiction.

Urban place management organizations vary widely in terms of their geographic definition. To make boundaries replicable and comparable across data sources, the study team recommended aligning each downtown with commonly used census boundaries. In most cases this meant using census tracts, the smallest permanent subdivisions that receive annual data updates under the American Community Survey. They make ideal geographic identifiers, since new data is released regularly, and tract boundaries are only adjusted once every 10 years.

Employing census tracts may not accurately reflect the value of every downtown. In some cases, census block groups more accurately captured the downtown boundaries. Though the Census Bureau subdivide or combine block groups with each decennial census, block groups also receive annual data updates and are compatible with most data sources. We looked to the 2012 publication, *The Value of Canadian Downtowns*, for effective criteria:

1. The downtown boundary had to include the city's financial core.
2. The downtown study area had to include diverse urban elements and land uses.
3. Where possible, we sought hard boundaries such as major streets, train tracks, or geographic features like rivers.
4. An overarching consideration was that data compiled align with selected downtown study areas.

Each downtown provided IDA with the geography selection for its downtown, which IDA then worked to refine, given local conditions and UPMO needs. Customized shapefiles or census tracts defined the downtown boundaries. For city and regional boundaries, IDA worked with the downtown management organization to confirm the accuracy of the respective census-designated place or MSA.

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PROJECT PROCESS

DATA COLLECTION

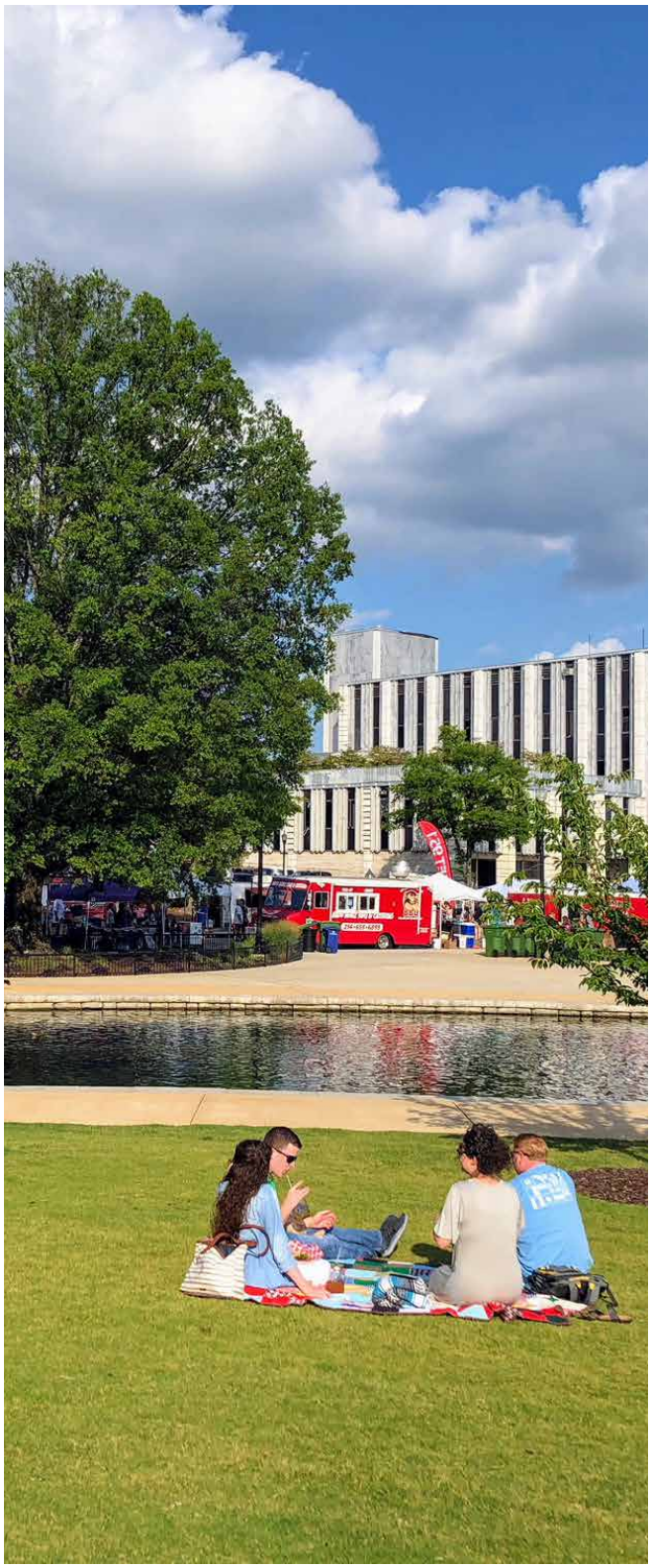
Both IDA and the local partner spend the first phase of the project collecting data for the study. IDA collects data primarily from national databases (see Appendix 3 for data sources), and the local partner works with its data partners to obtain other locally-specific data. In instances where local data was not available, we allowed substitution or approximation for some metrics if clearly noted and explained.

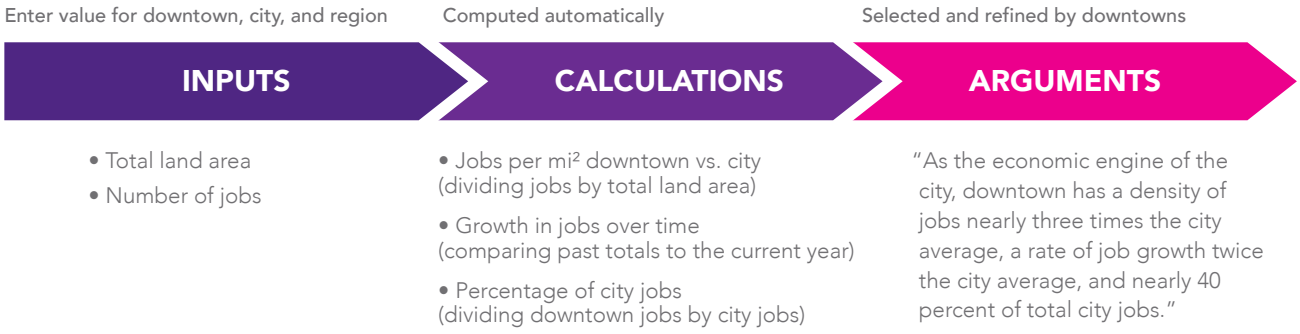
CALCULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

After compiling the data, all the information is entered into an IDA database for analysis. Data is organized by metric, year, and geography for each district. This specialized tool also tabulates numerous ratios, percentages, changes, and comparisons used to inform the report. As an example, after plugging in employment and land area data the tool can calculate the following:

- Percent of citywide and regional jobs
- Percent of citywide and regional land area
- Percent total job growth between specified years
- Percent job growth between specified years broken out by industry
- Average jobs per square mile
- Percent of employment in knowledge industries
- Percent of citywide and regional knowledge jobs located downtown
- Share of employment by race
- Share of employment by age
- Share of workers living and working within the selected area

This analysis is applied across all years collected and all applicable geographies to inform trends over time and within larger contexts. The flow chart of inputs, calculations, and arguments demonstrates how we go from raw data to making arguments in the report. Research staff also use their expertise and knowledge of downtowns to highlight key trends and draw connections between local insights and the trends in the data.





BENCHMARKING TIERS

Based on the data collected for this study, we identified three tiers of downtowns, defined by stage of development. We divided the 49 downtowns that have participated to date into "established", "growing" and "emerging" tiers. Downtown figures were compared to study-wide medians on three themes:

- Density
  - Jobs per square mile
  - Residents per square mile
  - Assessed value per square mile
- Significance to city
  - Percentage of citywide jobs
  - Percentage of citywide residents
- Long-term growth
  - Percent growth in jobs (2002–2020)
  - Percent growth in population (2000–2021)

Established – These downtowns have high proportions of their cities' jobs and residents, are dense and highly valuable to their cities.

Growing – These downtowns have not yet hit a critical level of density and citywide significance but are showing progress towards that critical mass. This group includes both larger downtowns with lower growth rates, and smaller downtowns with exceptional growth rates.

Emerging – These downtowns are a mixture of different sizes and growth rates, and are generally lower-density downtowns that have a low proportion of citywide significance on jobs and residents. Because growth rates are examined 2000 to current, many downtowns that struggled during the recession had a harder time demonstrating significant growth over the longer term despite encouraging growth in recent years.

The compendium report *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities: Third Edition* has additional data on the performance of *emerging*, *growing*, and *established* tiers of downtowns.

Appendix II: Principles and Benefits

ECONOMY: Within their regions, downtowns have substantial economic importance.

Downtowns and center cities are valuable due to their roles as economic anchors for their regions. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns and center cities frequently serve as hubs of industry and revenue generators despite only making up a small fraction of the land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of their relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors.

Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Annual private investment
- Annual public investment
- Assessed value
- Average office vacancy rate
- Average Class A office rent
- Average Class B office rent
- Average Class C office rent
- Employment (primary jobs)
  - By two-digit NAICS employment sectors
  - By earnings
  - By residence
  - By demographics
- Hotel tax
- Income tax
- Incubator and co-working spaces
- Invested in construction projects
- Number of approved building permits
- Number of Fortune 1000 headquarters
- Office inventory
- Office space under construction
- Office square footage in pipeline (to be completed in three years)
- Property tax
- Parking tax
- Sales tax

INCLUSION: Downtowns invite and welcome all residents of the region (as well as visitors from elsewhere) by providing access to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities.

As the literal and figurative heart of the city, downtowns welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Residents of strong downtowns often come from a wide range of racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, across all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, it has a broad appeal to all users and a strong social fabric. Downtowns provide access to all to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment and civic activities.

Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Average residential vacancy rate
- Demographics
- Diversity Index
- Employment diversity
- Foreign-born residents
- Homeless residents
- House value for owner-occupied housing units
- Households by income
- Median gross rent
- Median home price
- Median household income
- Rent-burdened residents
- Resident population
- Resident population by age
- Resident population by highest educational attainment
- Resident population by race and ethnicity
- Residential inventory
- Residential units in pipeline
- Residential units under construction
- Subsidized housing units
- Zillow median rental listing price by number of bedrooms
- Zillow median rental listing price per square foot by number of bedrooms

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VIBRANCY: Thanks to a wide base of users, downtowns and center cities can support a variety of retail, infrastructure, and institutional uses that offer broad benefits to the region.

The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base creates value. Vibrancy is the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events. within a downtown creates an attraction and buzz. As the cultural center of their cities, downtowns typically attract a large share of citywide visitors and are the location of a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms. An engaging downtown "creates the critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, brings people together in social settings, makes streets feel safe, and encourages people to live and work downtown because of the extensive amenities."[1]

Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Annual festivals/parades
- Average hotel occupancy rate
- Average retail rent
- Average retail vacancy rate
- Average visitor length of stay
- Convention centers
- Gyms and fitness studios
- Hotel rooms
- Hotels
- Outdoor events permitted by city
- Population
- Retail businesses (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail Market Potential Index (ESRI MPI)
- Retail sales (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail space in pipeline
- Retail space inventory
- Retail space under construction
- Theatres
- Venues with live entertainment
- Visitation by origin
- Visitors

IDENTITY: Downtowns preserve the heritage of a place, provide a common point of physical connection for regional residents, and contribute positively to the brand of the regions they represent.

Downtowns and center cities are often iconic symbols of their cities, and this strong sense of place enhances local pride. The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that is not easily replicable in other parts of the city. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting the region's identity. Downtowns and center cities serve as places for regional residents to come together, participate in civic life, and celebrate their region, which in turn promotes tourism and civic society. *Downtown preserves heritage, connects regional residents, and contributes positively to the regional brand.*

Downtowns are "iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most iconic landmarks, distinctive features, and unique neighborhoods. Given that most downtowns were one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city's past, present and future."[2]

Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Convention attendees
- Conventions
- Farmers markets
- Libraries
- Locally designated historic districts
- Locally designated historic structures
- Media mentions
- Museums
- National Register of Historic Places districts
- National Register of Historic Places structures
- Number of followers on Facebook
- Number of followers on Twitter
- Number of posts with Instagram hashtag
- Parks and natural areas
- Playgrounds
- Plazas/squares/amphitheater or other public outdoor gathering spaces
- Postsecondary institutions
- Postsecondary students
- Primary and secondary schools (public and private)
- Public art installations
- Public pools
- Recreation and community centers, both public and private (e.g., YMCA)
- Religious institutions
- Sports stadiums
- Sports teams

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RESILIENCE: Because of their diversity and density of resources and services, downtowns and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental, shocks and stresses.

As key centers of economy and culture, being resilient to city, regional, or even national shocks is highly important for ensuring stability, sustainability, and prosperity. Because of the diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than their surrounding cities and regions. The diversity and economic strengths of strong downtowns and center cities equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks better than more homogenous communities. Consequently, they can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks that disproportionately affect less economically and socially dynamic areas.

Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Acreage of open space
- Annual greenhouse gas emissions per household
- Average life expectancy
- Average property crime rate
- Average violent crime rate
- Bike Score
- Bike share stations
- Community gardens
- Commute mode for workers 16 and over
- Commute time for workers 16 and over
- Docked bikes
- Dockless bikes
- Electric car charging points
- Housing and Transportation Index
- LEED-certified buildings
- Miles of bike lanes
- No leisure-time physical activity among adults aged > 18
- Resident population in poverty
- Scooters
- Solid waste generation
- Transit Score
- Transit stops (including rail and bus)
- Unemployment rate
- Walk Score

Appendix III: Data Sources

NATIONAL DATA SOURCES FOR THE VALUE OF U.S. DOWNTOWNS AND CENTER CITIES

Source	Data Available	Pricing	Geographic Limitations	Most Recent Data Vintage in the Study
ESRI	Demographic, Housing, Detailed Establishments, market potential, and Consumer Spending	Proprietary	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census tracts	2017 to 2022 by data set (Annual Updates)
Social Explorer	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Health	Proprietary	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2021 (Annual Updates)
American FactFinder	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Health, Employment, Economy	Public	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2021 (Annual Updates)
LEHD On The Map	Labor: workers and firms	Public	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census block group level	2020 (Annual Updates)
Center for Neighborhood Technology	Housing affordability, Sustainability, Income	Public	Allows for selection and exporting at as small as the block group level	2019 (Updates Unscheduled)
National Register of Historic Places	Historic structures and districts	Public	None	2022 (Annual Updates)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Life expectancy, physical inactivity and other health data	Public	ZIP Code	2021 (Annual Updates)
FBI Uniform Crime Reporting	Crime Rates	Public	City and Metro	2022 (Annual Updates)
Geolounge	Map of Fortune 1000 companies	Public	None	2018 (Unscheduled Updates)
Zillow	Housing and rental costs	Public	The smallest geographies are arbitrarily designated "neighborhoods" some of which line up with the study areas while others do not or do not exist. In these cases, we got as close as we could with a zip code	April to June Annually (Monthly Updates)

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Appendix IV: Selected Study Definitions

Assessed value
Assessed value is the dollar value assigned to a property to measure applicable taxes. This figure is an aggregate for all property within the study area, or for the closest match to the study area for which data is available.

Acreage of open space
This figure is the total acreage of designated public spaces like parks or plazas; it does not include vacant lots.

Census block group
A block group is a statistical division of a census tract, generally defined to contain between 600 and 3,000 people, that is used to present data and control block numbering in the decennial census.

Census tract
A census tract is a small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county or equivalent entity, updated by local participants prior to each decennial census.

Creative jobs
The study uses the NAICS industry sector of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation to count creative jobs.

Development pipeline
Development pipelines include projects very recently completed, currently under construction, and planned for completion within the next three years.

Diversity Index
The Diversity Index is a measurement of the likelihood that any two randomly selected individuals will be of a different race or ethnicity. The closer the number comes to 100, the more likely the two will be different, indicating diversity.

Employment
The study uses the LEHD on the Map tool to count "primary jobs." Distinct from total jobs, primary jobs count only the highest-wage job when an individual holds multiple jobs at a time. This figure may not accurately reflect less traditional types of employment like gig work or small startups.

Event venue
Event venues include spaces typically used for public events such as conferences, conventions, concerts. This metric is somewhat subjective in that data is collected locally, and the downtown determines what qualifies for inclusion. For example, a downtown might include a venue that is largely private but represents a part of the fabric of the event community.

Farmers markets
The number of farmers markets is a count of both permanent and seasonal farmers markets.

Greenhouse gas emissions
The Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index includes an estimate of CO2 emissions per household within a given area.

Housing and Transportation Index
The Housing and Transportation Index, produced by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, measures how much an average household spends on housing and transportation relative to income. This figure demonstrates how urban places often have higher base rents, but much lower transportation costs.

Knowledge jobs
Knowledge jobs consist of jobs in the NAICS industry sectors of Information; Finance and Insurance; Real Estate and Rental and Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Management of Companies and Enterprises; and Health Care and Social Assistance.

Market Potential Index
ESRI Market Potential Index measures the likelihood of residents in a set area to spend money on specified categories of goods and services, indexed to a national average. Values below 100 indicate a below average demand from residents in the area, and above 100 an above average demand.

Media mentions
This study sometimes utilizes independent sources to add nuance to the data. Forbes' list of top 100 metro areas to start a new business is an example of this type of source. Another example might be a travel blog praising restaurants or entertainment options within the downtown. While not always quantitative sources, these media mentions add color and perspective to the report.

Middle-class
This study defines middle-class as between 67% and 200% of area median income. This range was calculated for each downtown based on the median income of the region.

Millennial
This study defines residents between the ages of 18 and 34 as millennials.

No leisure-time physical activity
Presented as a percentage, no leisure-time physical activity is the share of residents within the geography who have not engaged in physical activity in their spare time within the past month from the time surveyed.

Private investment
Private investment is defined as money from private sources being invested in development. This figure is sometimes replaced by a sum of the largest development projects within the study area.

Public art installations
This figure counts art installations that may be owned by either public or private entities and may be temporary or permanent. They must, however, be easily accessible by the general public.

Public investment
Individual UPMOs may define public capital investment differently, but the figure generally includes municipal, state, and federal investment in capital projects downtown (such as open space or infrastructure). If only a specific bucket of public investment is available for measurement (for example, municipal public investment), this can be measured and footnoted in the profiles in lieu of capturing investments by other levels of government.

Rent-burdened
Households paying more than 30% of their income to rent are considered rent-burdened.

Retail demand
Retail demand measures the total spending potential of an area's population, as determined by residential population and household income characteristics.[3]

Retail sales
Retail sales measure total sales by businesses within the observed geography. All estimates of market supply are in nominal terms and are derived from receipts (net of sales taxes, refunds, and returns) of businesses primarily engaged in the sale of merchandise. Excise taxes paid by the retailer or the remuneration of services are also included—for example, installation and delivery charges that are incidental to the transaction.[4]

Sales to non-residents
Sales to non-residents represents an estimate calculated by using figures for retail demand and sales to determine how much of downtown retail sales are to people who don't live in downtown. Simply put, retail sales – resident retail demand = sales to non-residents.

Sports teams
The number of professional teams within the geography. This figure excludes college teams.

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Additional IDA Sources

IDA's Vitality Index, powered by Stantec (2019): The IDA Vitality Index, powered by Stantec, is an interactive, online tool to benchmark the vitality of downtowns across the U.S. The Vitality Index reflects the pioneering IDA research in *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and City Centers*, and measures vitality through three principles identified in the VODT study: economy, inclusion, and vibrancy. Through these three principles, and five core indicators in each principle, the Vitality Index aims to capture the pulse of the downtown and enable urban place managers to quantify and benchmark their district's performance metrics among peer cities. The index uses a benchmarking system to understand how each of three vitality principles contributes to an overall combined score, calculated by comparing each metric to the national average. Most valuable, the index serves as a baseline and provides insights for the strategic evolution of a community.

Quantifying the Value of Canadian Downtowns: A Research Toolkit (2016): This toolkit represents a groundbreaking effort to provide a common set of data and processes to help Canadian place management organizations establish and sustain evaluation and compare progress among downtowns. While geared toward Canadian downtowns, the toolkit has value for urban districts outside Canada looking to move toward data standardization and best practices. In the toolkit, organizations will find directions and insights on collecting, organizing, storing, and presenting downtown-specific data to make the case for continued investment and support. The toolkit includes instructions and rationale for the choice of data metrics, and it recommends core, trend and pulse metrics. The kit organizes the core indicators around the principles of visibility (unique identity, brand, definition); vision (leadership, planning, collaboration); prosperity (economic data); livability (residential and uses); and strategy (types and values of public investment). The core indicators are population density (downtown/city); job density (downtown/city); number of new commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings; current value assessment of downtown properties (commercial, residential, institutional); capital investment (downtown/city); transportation modal split; number of large-format grocery stores; amount invested in parks and public realm; and number of annual cultural events and festivals.

The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns (2013): This study provides an extensive portrait of the contributions made by downtown areas across Canada, highlighting innovative approaches to revitalization and efforts being applied across the nation. It builds on an initial study phase, completed in 2012, that examined ten of those downtowns, and tracks population, population density, job density and average block size of the downtown core and the municipality. The study organized data under visibility, vision, prosperity, livability and strategy.

Defining Downtowns–Downtown Rebirth: This policy paper represents the culmination of a year-long effort by IDA and partners to develop an effective way of quantifying how many people and work in and around 231 job centers in 150 American cities. Without standard geographic definitions for downtowns and downtown residential neighborhoods, previous research relied on overly simplified boundaries that didn't capture the idiosyncratic shapes of urban employment nodes and thus failed to capitalize fully on existing federal data. For the first time, *Downtown Rebirth* suggests a way both to define and quantify downtown workforce and population numbers and document how these employment hubs and live-work environments are changing.

The Value of U.S. Downtowns & Center Cities study expands on the efforts of IDA's *"Downtown Rebirth: Documenting the Live-Work Dynamic in 21st Century Cities"* study, which provided guidelines for selecting downtown boundaries. This study uses these recommendations to define downtown beyond the boundaries of a district management organization using a definition of downtown commonly understood by those in that community.

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