

To: Deer Lodge Economic Growth & Development Committee
From: Matthew Rohrbach, AICP & Jessica Holdren, PLA
Date: June 20, 2017
Re: Deer Lodge Downtown Master Plan – Community Feedback

Purpose

As part of Deer Lodge’s Downtown Master planning effort, Land Solutions and Deer Lodge staff have spent the past two months collecting background information and conducting public outreach to help inform the development of the plan. This work has included developing a community wide survey, a business owners survey, and holding a public kickoff meeting. The purpose of this memo is to present a condensed overview of the feedback received during these efforts.

Public Meeting Results

On Wednesday May 24th a public meeting was held at the Deer Lodge City Hall to kick off the planning process and obtain feedback from the community. At the meeting, attendees were broken into small groups and asked to brainstorm and prioritize what they saw as Deer Lodge’s greatest assets and challenges. The prioritized assets and challenges will be used to focus the planning effort on the issues of greatest interest to Deer Lodge residents. The number of assets and challenges identified are too numerous to list, yet there were several common themes that did emerge among the different groups – see below.

Commonly Identified Assets

- Historic downtown
- City is anchored by Grant-Kohrs and Old Prison/Auto Museum
- Arrow Stone Park and trail system
- Outdoor recreation opportunities (fishing, hunting, biking, & river activities)
- Opportunely situated close to population centers and midway between Glacier and Yellowstone
- Cultural entertainment (Rialto Theater & Cutler Bros. Theater)
- Proximity to Clark Fork River

Commonly Identified Challenges

- Design of Main Street (too wide, not pedestrian friendly, vehicles travel too fast)
- Lack of financing tools
- Few living wage jobs
- Lack of restaurant and lodging options
- Public perception – “Deer Lodge is a prison town”
- The look and feel of 2nd Street
- Vacant land and buildings
- Curb appeal of Main Street
- Appearance of residential properties (lack of pride of ownership)
- High restoration costs for downtown historic buildings
- Lack of parking

Community Survey Results

Since mid-April a community survey has been available at www.downtowndeerlodge.com. The survey was closed on Wednesday, June 14th with 244 responses, after removing duplicate entries. Similarly to the public meeting feedback, the results from the survey will be used to identify the focus areas for the plan. The survey results also provide added insight into how residents feel about detailed aspects of downtown and what specific items they would like to see addressed. In this sense, the survey will aid in developing specific, and actionable, recommendations that are tailored to Deer Lodge and address the interests of its residents. Below are several key findings from the community survey.

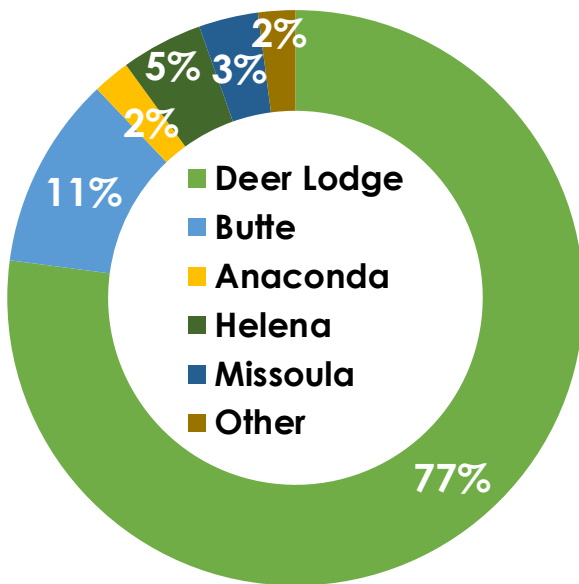
Where are Respondents From?

- 78% of respondents live in Deer Lodge, while 12% live outside Deer Lodge in Powell County.

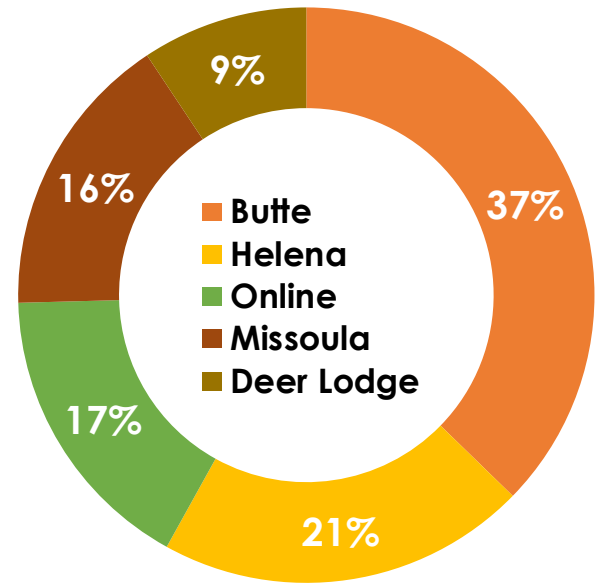
Where do Respondents Shop?

- 77% of respondents do most of their grocery shopping in Deer Lodge while only 9% of respondents do most of their non-grocery item shopping in Deer Lodge. This indicates that Deer Lodge has a lack of retailers selling durable goods.

Where Do You Do Most of Your Grocery Shopping?



Where Do You Do Most of Your Non-Grocery Shopping?



What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Shopping Downtown?

- When asked about the advantages of shopping downtown, 75% of respondents checked “support of local businesses” and 58% checked “knowing store owners and employees.” These results indicate respondents value supporting the local downtown economy.
- When asked about disadvantages of shopping downtown, 90% of respondents checked “limited selection of goods and services,” further indication of the lack of durable goods available in Deer Lodge.

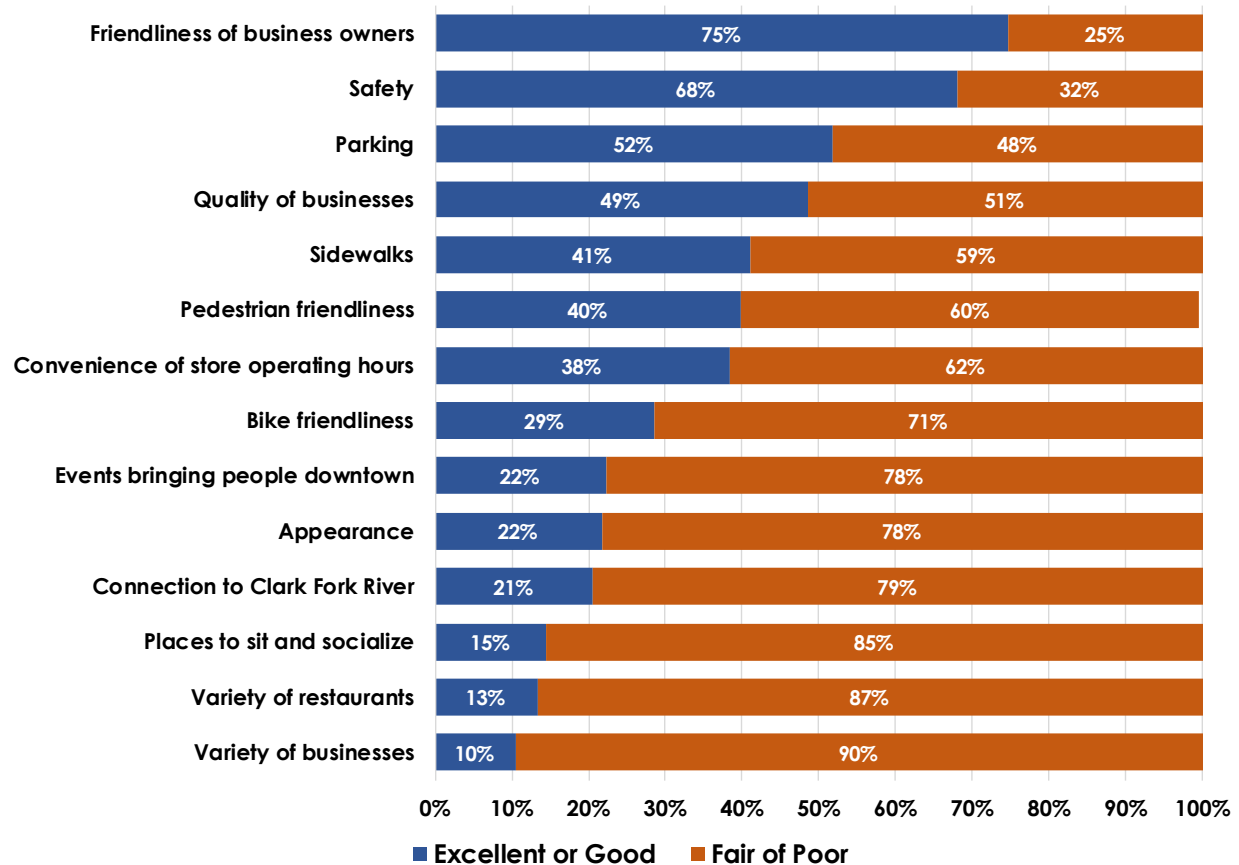
What Additional Businesses do Respondents Want to See Downtown?

- When asked about what additional businesses they would like to see downtown, a majority of respondents noted a clothing store (78%) and restaurants (54%).

How do Respondents Rate Downtown?

- Over 60% of respondents rated downtown as *excellent* or *good* in the categories of *friendliness of business owners* (75%) and *safety* (68%).
- Over 70% of respondents rated downtown as *fair* or *poor* in the categories of *variety of businesses* (90%), *variety of restaurants* (87%), *places to sit and socialize* (85%), *connection to Clark Fork River* (79%), *appearance* (78%), *events bringing people downtown* (78%) and *bike friendliness* (71%).

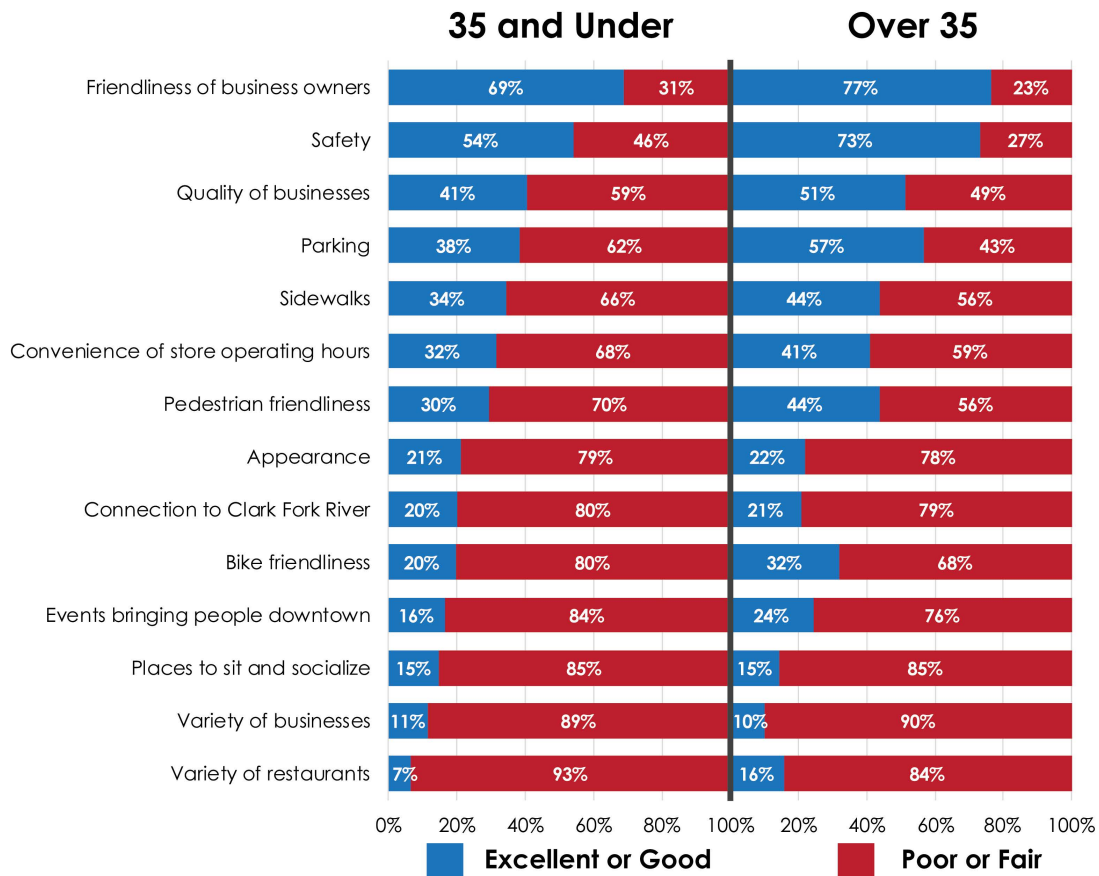
Rate Downtown in the Following Categories



How do Ratings of Downtown Differ by Age Group?

- In the categorical ratings for downtown, there were differences between the over 35 and 35 and under age groups, notably in the categories listed below.
 - Safety – 73% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group rated as *excellent* or *good* compared to 54% for the ≤ 35 age group
 - Parking – 57% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group rated as *excellent* or *good* compared to 38% for the ≤ 35 age group
 - Pedestrian Friendliness – 56% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group rated as *fair* or *poor* compared to 70% for the ≤ 35 age group.
 - Bicycle Friendliness – 68% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group rated as *fair* or *poor* compared to 80% for the ≤ 35 age group.

Rate Downtown in the Following Categories



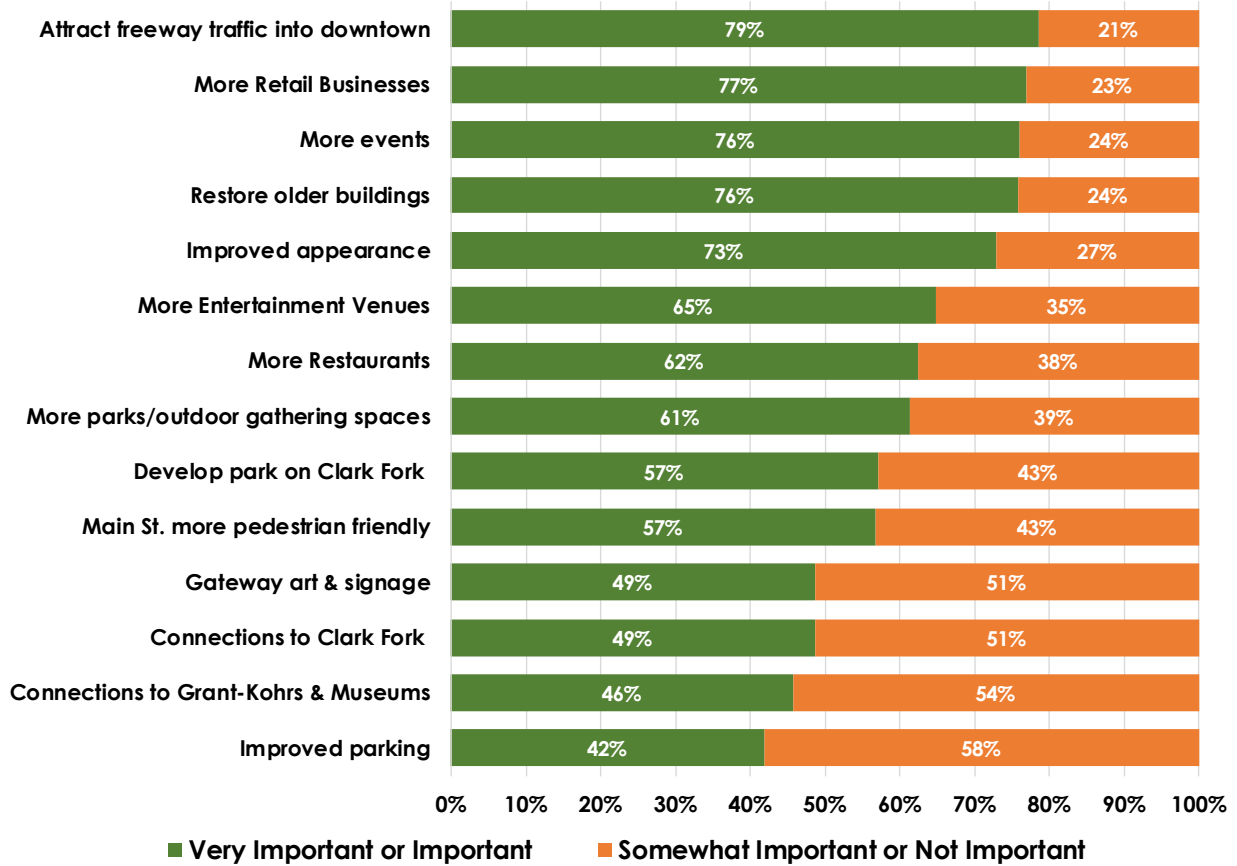
What Activities for Improving Downtown do Respondents Feel Are Most Important?

- Over 75% of respondents rated the following activities as *very important* or *important* – attract freeway traffic downtown (79%), more retail businesses (77%), more events (76%), and restore older buildings (76%).
- A slight majority of respondents rated the following activities as *somewhat important* or *not important* – improve parking (58%), connections to Grant-Kohrs & Museums (54%), connections to Clark Fork River (51%), gateway art and signage (51%).

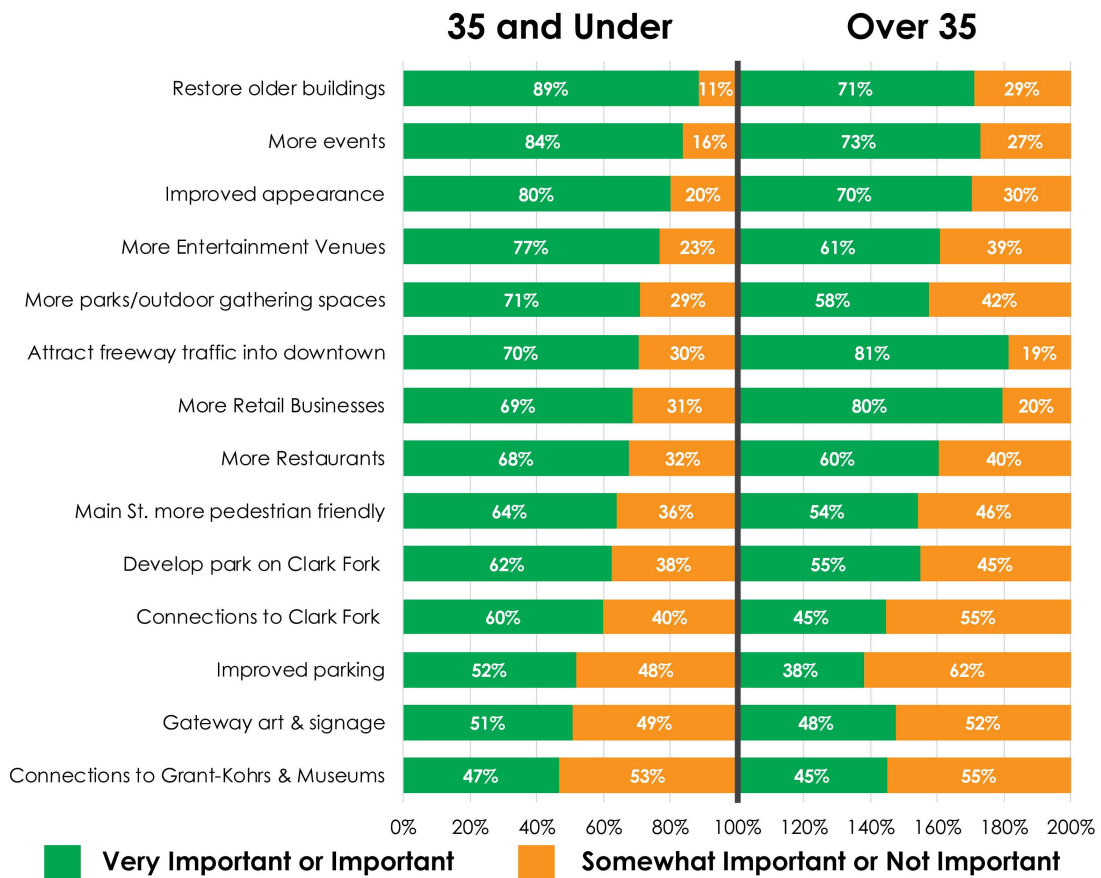
How do Age Groups Differ on their Views of Activities for Improving Downtown?

- The over 35 and 35 and under age groups differed slightly in what activities they feel are most important for downtown, notably in the categories listed below.
 - Restore Older Buildings – 71% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group felt this was *very important* or *important* compared to 89% for the ≤ 35 age group.
 - More Entertainment Venues – 61% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group felt this was *very important* or *important* compared to 77% for the ≤ 35 age group.
 - Connections to Clark Fork River – 45% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group felt this was *very important* or *important* compared to 60% for the ≤ 35 age group.
 - More Parks/Outdoor Gathering Spaces – 58% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group felt this was *very important* or *important* compared to 71% for the ≤ 35 age group.
 - Improved Parking – 62% percent of respondents in the 35+ age group felt this was *somewhat important* or *not important* compared to 48% for the ≤ 35 age group.

Rate the Importance of the Following Activities



Rate the Importance of the Following Activities



What other action items do you feel are important to improving downtown Deer Lodge? (Summary)

- Clean up the appearance of Deer Lodge.
- More activities for youth and families after 5:00 P.M. on weekdays and during weekends.
- Fill up vacant buildings.
- Public art.
- Historic Preservation.

If you could PRESERVE two things about downtown Deer Lodge what would they be?

- Historic buildings (overwhelming majority).
- Arrow Stone Park.
- Rialto Theater.
- Deer Lodge Hotel.
- Small town atmosphere.

If you could CHANGE two things about downtown Deer Lodge what would they be?

- A place for kids to hang out.
- Appearance of Main Street.
- More residential on Main Street.
- People smoking on the sidewalk.
- More businesses occupying Main Street storefronts.
- More restaurants.
- Parking.
- Sidewalks.
- The mural on Missouri Street.

Business Owners Survey Results

At the same time as the community survey was available, a business owners survey was also released to business owners in Deer Lodge and property owners on Main Street. The survey was closed on Monday, June 19th with 20 responses. The intent of the business owners survey was to hear directly from business owners as to what they see as the most pressing issues facing downtown and how best to solve them. The survey was also used to gather information on business trends in downtown and to gauge support for two different funding mechanisms for downtown improvements. Below are several key findings from the business owners survey.

- 45% of respondents indicated that over the past year their business was *growing rapidly* or *growing slightly*.
- 37% of respondents stated they plan to expand their business in the next two years, while 11% stated they plan to sell.
- 50% of respondents felt that downtown parking was adequate, while 22% felt that it was inadequate only during summer months.
- 63% of respondents were *very supportive* or *supportive* of a voluntary membership fee for a downtown association.
- 32% of respondents were *very supportive* or *supportive* of a tax levied on downtown properties for downtown improvements (Business Improvement District), while 42% were *undecided*.
- Several respondents indicated a need to improve the appearance of Main Street.
- Several respondents felt Deer Lodge needs to better capitalize on tourists visiting Grant-Kohrs and the Old Prison/Auto Museum.
- Respondents indicated a need for affordable workforce housing.

- When asked about infrastructure needs, several respondents stated pedestrian amenities are needed, including sidewalk repair, signage, and lighting.

Next Steps

Going forward there are two primary tasks ahead per the scope of work. The first is the development of the economic and market analysis, which will be released by June 30th. This work will include an analysis of key demographic and economic indicators, an inventory of current land uses and development patterns in downtown, an analysis of transportation in downtown, opportunities by economic sector, and opportunities for repurposing vacant parcels and buildings in downtown. The second task will be the development of goals, objectives, and action strategies for improving downtown. This work will build on recommendations from the Growth Policy and Resource Team Assessment, as well as feedback received from the public meeting and surveys, to develop a series of detailed draft recommended action strategies and conceptual designs for downtown. The draft action strategies will be presented to the community at another public meeting, in July or August. Following public feedback the draft action strategies and conceptual designs will be refined and incorporated into a draft downtown master plan by September.