

Vision Forward

A Planning Document for
Downtown Denison
2021-2030



Denison
TEXAS

Arts
Entertainment
District

Dive Right In!

Cartoon characters

Stairs on Main

RUGS & STAIRS BY NITIA, INC.

Janet Karem
artist



Hempkins Insurance

Denison
Arts
Entertainment
District

Dive Right In!

Kathy Storch
artist



Randy & Cindy
Truax

Dive Right In!

Downtown Denison Mission, Vision, and Unique Positioning Statements

Mission of Denison Main Street:

The Denison Main Street Program will attain Great American Main Street status utilizing the Main Street Approach™ and harness a cohesive spirit and the power of volunteerism to achieve our objectives of preservation-focused Downtown revitalization so that we will be a pedestrian-friendly regional hub with many diverse activities, an eclectic blend of commerce, and a livable environment.

Our Vision for the future:

Historic Downtown Denison is a vibrant shopping and living destination that is a magnet for business, arts, culture, and entertainment.

Unique Positioning Statement:

Downtown Denison is home to over 200 independently owned businesses and plays host to 681 events annually. It offers visitors opportunities to support and experience the extensive selection of locally owned shopping, eating, and drinking businesses while strolling through the longest Main Street district in the whole state of Texas.

Visitors can enjoy the 144 pieces of public art around Downtown Denison and experience the spirited energy and uniqueness defined through the spectacular events, rich historic roots, and small-town charm. The special character of Downtown Denison presents a different, exquisite adventure as compared with that delivered by large metropolitan cities most are familiar with.

Create authentic memories today in the heart of Denison.

The Unique Positioning Statement was collectively developed with guidance from independent business consultant and destination creation expert Jon Schallert.

Vision Forward for Downtown Denison, Texas

Downtown Denison recently celebrated 30 years as a Texas Main Street city and was named a Semifinalist for the Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) in 2020. GAMSA is Main Street America's top honor for excellence in comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization. To maintain this high level of success and standards, a guiding document has consistently been maintained. This document reveals the contents of Downtown Denison's "Vision Forward" that the Main Street Advisory Board hopes will guide progress from 2021-2030.

Introduction:

Vision Forward replaces Vision 2020 which was created through a public strategic planning session hosted by the Main Street Advisory Board in February 2014. To develop the new plan, the group wanted to learn more about what would make downtown a better place to have a business, shop, learn, be entertained, live, etc.

The survey took place online and was open December 1, 2020 through January 13, 2021. Normally, a public meeting would have been held for input and interaction. However, COVID-19 restrictions on public gatherings provided the opportunity to go virtual. Answers were collected through an online survey with a paper copy option. Details of how the audience was reached are as follows:

- The target market was shoppers, investors, loft dwellers, business owners, property owners, potential business owners, community partners, residents, and other interested parties.
- The survey was promoted on social media channels, the City's website, through traditional media, by e-mailing the Downtown business owners and property owners and loft residents, and by working with partners such as the Denison ISD and the Chamber of Commerce.
- Residents were made aware of the survey through the water bills, and printed copies were available by request and for pickup at City Hall.
- Tent cards and business-card size reminders were distributed through local businesses to their customers.
- Random drawings of gift certificates for shopping downtown were offered as an incentive of participation.
- E-mail addresses were collected as a way to award gift certificates and with the commitment to follow up with the results. Providing contact info was optional.
- Assistance with translating the form or having an audio version was available with multiple languages offered in the survey instructions.

A total of 542 participants completed the survey. The average time of 47:33 to complete the questions demonstrates the level of engagement and dedication people have on behalf of Downtown Denison. Common words and phrases are shown in the word cloud below:

- Entering the world as the son of a “Katy” mechanic in a humble part of town, Dwight David Eisenhower was commander of the Allied Forces at Normandy during World War II and President of the United States from 1953-1961.
- Captain Chesley B. (Sully) Sullenberger III became the hero of Flight 1549, when he saved the lives of more than 150 people onboard by safely making an emergency landing on the Hudson River.

Denison has structures of significance that are tourist attractions.

- Denison Dam, located north of Denison, is the structure that created Lake Texoma. The lake is well-known for its fishing, boating and other recreation. Visitors number more than 6 million each year.
- The Red River Railroad Museum located in Downtown Denison conveys the impact the railroad had in the sculpting of the town. Approximately 1,800 guests visit the facility each year.
- Eisenhower's Birthplace is now a well-visited Texas historic site. Hosting school groups to special events, over 15,000 people visit the world leader’s restored birthplace on an annual basis.

Strengths:

Denison is a historical showplace with strong architecture where loft residents and guests enjoy a walkable environment with a variety of green spaces including five park-like areas perfect for walking the dog or enjoying special events. Lofts are being developed and joining the vacation rental market where Denison was just named a top U.S. city for investors. A healthy event calendar showcases the downtown activities at Munson Stadium, churches, and individual businesses and public events held throughout the downtown.

Denison’s eclectic downtown spans a thirty-block area and is nothing short of a decorator’s dream. Artists enjoy Denison’s progressive flair and have woven themselves into the fabric of the culture through their custom textile creations, pottery, metalwork, paintings, and woodwork. The shops are lined with art in decorative settings, studios, galleries, antiques, retro furnishings, specialty retail, a historic theater, and a wine tasting room.

Food and drink is becoming increasingly popular in downtown Denison. Two breweries featuring craft beer join a wine tasting room, various coffee cafes, a food truck park, a food court featuring Texas craft beers and wine, and a variety of dining options. The night life offers additional beverage and cocktail options as well as a healthy music scene.

The visual and performing arts are also represented in Denison’s downtown through concerts, festivals, shows, recording studios, education, and instruction for music and all levels and ages of dance. The Texas Commission on the Arts named Denison one of the state’s original Arts & Cultural Districts in 2009. In 2020, the Texas Governor’s Office named Denison a Texas Music Friendly City. In 2021, the Governor’s Office also named Denison a Film Friendly City.

Goals from Original Visioning Session:

In 1989, Denison joined the Texas Main Street Program, expecting to:

- Heighten shopping activity
- Increase capital investment in downtown
- Sharpen public awareness of Denison's rich and varied history and architecture
- Preserve structures of historical significance
- Organize retail merchants efforts
- Rejuvenate the appearance of the central business district
- Develop tourist trade
- Combine all of these efforts into one common effort to restore community pride in the downtown area and, in doing so, improve the downtown economy.

Goals from 2021 Visioning Survey Analysis:

- ☆ 1. Remain vigilant of the Designing Downtown Denison project to ensure that the project remains on track for completion.
Attention will be placed upon expanding upon the concept of a thriving downtown district and careful selection of an appropriate branding effort.
- ☆ 2. Increase the number of commercial street level and residential loft level occupancies by 5% each with businesses and uses that promote and reinforce the vision for Downtown adopted by Denison's Main Street Advisory Board.
A priority will be placed on dining, night life, loft development and family entertainment-related businesses.
- ☆ 3. Create a healthy, clean, and safe environment that meets the needs of citizens, businesses, visitors, and residents of Downtown Denison.
Clean and safe plays an integral role in providing a welcoming environment.
- 4. Adopt a signature for the Downtown Denison experience that is easily identifiable, recognizable, and consistent with innovative marketing materials that demonstrate the engaging environment and unique experience that Downtown Denison offers.
- 5. Create an engaging environment that meets the needs of citizens, businesses, visitors, and residents of Downtown Denison.
- 6. Maintain the Denison Commercial Historic District's National Register Historic District status and work to protect the historical integrity of Downtown Denison and its historic assets

through thoughtful development of a greater preservation ethic.

7. Enhance music, the arts, and the overall entertainment experience.
8. Maintain the relevance of Downtown Denison in the regional economy through the development and growth of new and current local, regional, and national partners.
9. Identify and evaluate areas within Downtown Denison and adjacent areas to better utilize spaces and buildings, and to beautify these areas to improve the experience that Downtown Denison offers.
10. Encourage additional diversity in Downtown Denison's business environment

☆ Goals that will receive priority and will be addressed with primary concern

Top Ten Goals from the Vision Forward Survey

1. Remain vigilant of the Designing Downtown Denison project to ensure that the project remains on track for completion.
 - a. Maintain commitment to complete planned projects outlined in the “Designing Downtown Denison: Report 2017” prepared by Toole Design Group.
 - b. Focus on communication with businesses and education of the public while encouraging positive reinforcement of the projects.
 - c. Minimize the burden of construction on businesses and their customers through communication, signage, messaging, providing safe paths to entry, and addressing parking.
 - d. Continue “Alley Access Grant” incentives to businesses to provide business access.
 - e. Continue involvement in the design process of all project phases to ensure needs of the district are voiced.
2. Increase the number of commercial street level and residential loft level occupancies by 5% each with businesses and uses that promote and reinforce the vision for Downtown adopted by Denison’s Main Street Advisory Board.
 - a. Support the businesses identified in the Vision Forward survey results. (dining, nightlife, family/children-focused)
 - b. Capitalize on Downtown’s multi-level buildings by providing both short-term stays and residential opportunities in upper stories.
 - c. Continue financial incentives to encourage development and maintenance of properties throughout the TIRZ district.
 - d. Focus on best and highest use when looking for future occupants of vacant spaces.
 - e. Identify and implement a method to better utilize all vacant, undeveloped and underutilized buildings and public areas in Downtown.
 - f. Continue to provide and strengthen business development teams for Downtown Denison that offer support and expertise as needed.
 - g. Review zoning definitions and ordinances as necessary to determine suitability for Downtown Denison.
 - h. Address perpetually vacant buildings by examining barriers to occupancy issues and pursuing enforcement of ordinances.
 - i. Adoption of a railroad quiet zone across Main Street to become more pedestrian friendly.
3. Create a healthy, clean, and safe environment that meets the needs of citizens, businesses, visitors, and residents of Downtown Denison.
 - a. Continue to address homeless concerns.
 - b. Work with the Police Department to be able to support increased police presence & engagement.

- c. Create bike lanes and connectivity to trail systems.
- d. Address safety of crossing Austin Avenue.
- e. Make downtown more livable for loft dwellers by increasing lighting, adding a dog park, and improving parking options.
- f. Promote connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and city trail systems.
- g. Address dedicated bike lanes (with bike racks) within and leading into downtown.
- h. Improve lighting in parks and public spaces.
- i. Maintain dialogue with the Public Works Department to facilitate sidewalk improvements within and leading into downtown.
- j. Provide a well maintained district that is free of trash, weeds, graffiti, and sidewalk clutter.

4. Adopt a signature for the Downtown Denison experience that is easily identifiable, recognizable, and consistent with innovative marketing materials that demonstrate the engaging environment and unique experience that Downtown Denison offers.

- a. Develop an engaging brand for downtown.
- b. Create a transition plan for existing identities that draws social media followers to the new accounts.
- c. Continually look for innovative marketing techniques such as geofencing.
- d. Develop campaigns to showcase the downtown experience.
- e. Promote access to information about businesses and events.
- f. Utilize a calendar of events to showcase public and business related events.

5. Create an engaging environment that meets the needs of citizens, businesses, visitors, and residents of Downtown Denison.

- a. Create a thriving community that people are drawn to.
- b. Hold regular quarterly meetings with City of Denison staff available to building/business owners to answer questions, effectively communicate pertinent information, and address concerns.
- c. Utilize wayfinding signage, maps, and directories throughout Downtown Denison.
- d. Continue quarterly meetings and communication between partner organizations to follow-through with a common vision for Downtown Denison.
- e. Increase sidewalk dining and educate business owners on ways to best utilize this space.
- f. Implement a merchandising team to design engaging window displays with lighted storefronts at night.
- g. Determine feasibility of and need for mini-directories/maps for downtown businesses.
- h. Create a Visitor Center with a retail storefront in Downtown.
- i. Check into feasibility of electric vehicle charging stations.
- j. Encourage businesses to leave window lights on every night.
- k. Add outdoor sound throughout Downtown.
- l. Find creative ways to close gaps between vacant store fronts to enhance walkability.

6. Maintain the Denison Commercial Historic District's National Register Historic District status and work to protect the historical integrity of Downtown Denison and its historic assets through thoughtful development of a greater preservation ethic.

- a. Encourage building owners to preserve historic assets.
- b. Create awareness of grant programs and continue to offer grants for rehabilitation of historic facades.
- c. Work with the Planning Department to update the National Register Nomination of the entire downtown area to create a cohesive program of preservation.
- d. Create an historic marker program to provide history of different buildings, people, and events.
- e. Educate property owners throughout the entire Historic overlay district about Historic Preservation Ordinances.
- f. Support hiring an Historic Preservation officer to oversee the downtown historic district, conduct HP meetings, and help businesses with follow-thru for preservation.
- g. Work with property owners to remove slipcovers from buildings, unveil covered windows, and remove barriers to buildings contributing to the National Register District.
- h. Work with the City of Denison to craft a policy regarding Denison's historic brick streets and assets.
- i. Support review of potential to add other historic overlay districts that neighbor Downtown.

7. Enhance music, the arts, and the overall entertainment experience.

- a. Showcase our local, state, and national talent.
- b. Encourage busking and street performers to utilize downtown.
- c. Encourage usage of public spaces for music/entertainment.
- d. Promote music related businesses and venues.
- e. Establish downtown Denison as a leader in the development of entertainers.
- f. Promote photography, videos, movies, and music production in Downtown Denison.
- g. Address any necessary updates to the Entertainment District Ordinance.
- h. Educate businesses on the value and opportunities associated with the Entertainment District and Arts and Cultural District Status.
- i. Promote Denison's Music Friendly and Film Friendly designations.

8. Maintain the relevance of Downtown Denison in the regional economy through the development and growth of new and current local, regional, and national partners.

- a. Achieve Great American Main Street Status and increase community pride in Downtown Denison.
- b. Focus on participation in recognition by and support of Texas Main Street, Texas Downtown Association, and National Main Street Center.
- c. Encourage and preserve the continued charm and inviting culture of downtown.

- d. Foster relationship with the Downtown Denison Farmers Market.
- e. Ensure Downtown Denison continues to house important governmental facilities including City Hall, fire and police departments, churches, grocery stores, athletic facilities, etc.
- f. Address upcoming changes and growth and their potential effects on Downtown Denison.
- g. Communicate success within Downtown Denison including reinvestment numbers, new businesses, expansions, employees, impact on economy, etc.
- h. Ensure communication with the Main Street department about any relevant changes or information regarding downtown.
- i. Continue to celebrate the accomplishment of our Downtown businesses and organizations.

9. Identify and evaluate areas within Downtown Denison and adjacent areas to better utilize spaces and buildings, and to beautify these areas to improve the experience that Downtown Denison offers.

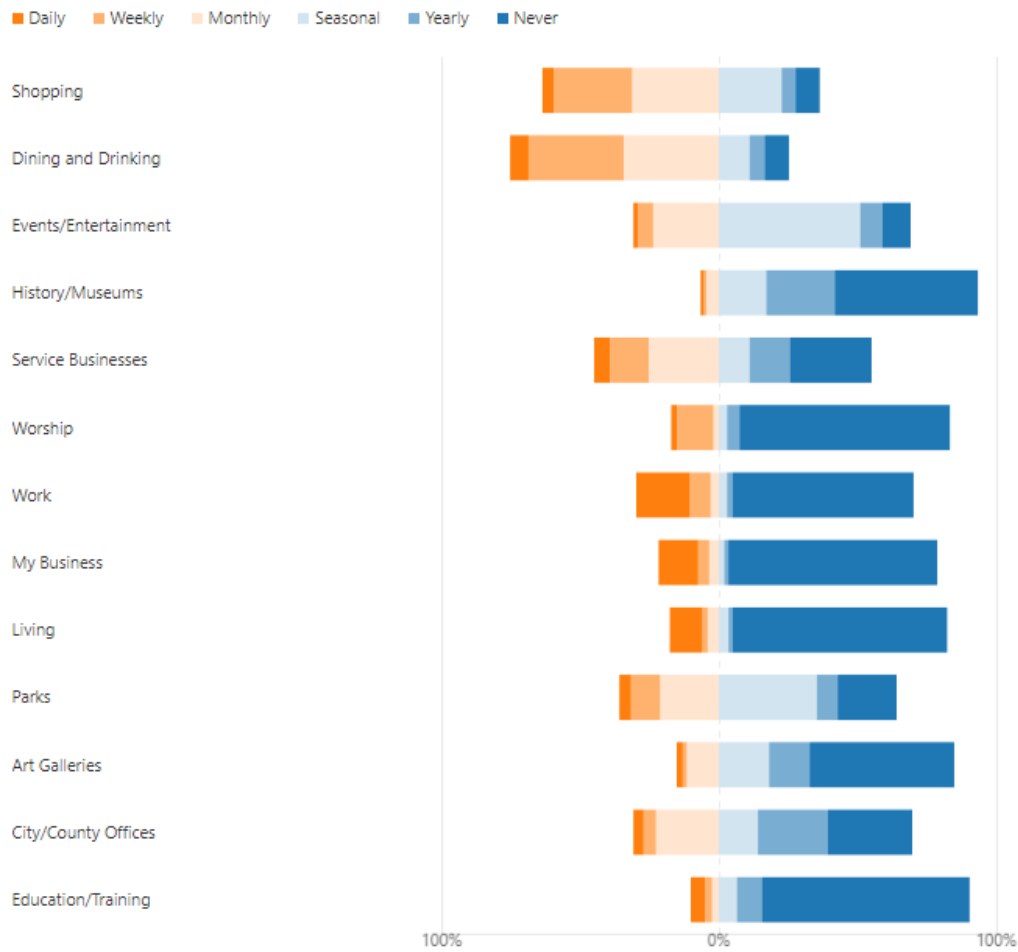
- a. Facilitate resources to cleanup areas surrounding and leading into downtown.
- b. Promote and support partnerships with our historic resources and assets including The Eisenhower Birthplace, Red River Railroad Museum, TV Munson and Sister Cities Experience.
- c. Develop gateways and promote themed areas (Depot District, Touchdown Alley, Auto Row, etc.).
- d. Develop methods and implement plans to better connect the East End to the West Side across Austin Avenue.
- e. Explore beautification of approaches including tunnels to Eisenhower Birthplace.
- f. Provide walkable sidewalks to and from neighborhoods into Downtown.
- g. Promote a mechanism to communicate areas in need of attention.

10. Encourage additional diversity in Downtown Denison's business environment

- a. Increase activity-based and experience-style businesses.
- b. Support diversification of music genres and cultural events.
- c. Embrace all age groups, ethnicities, and cultures.
- d. Encourage new and creative uses for downtown buildings and public spaces.
- e. Offer activities for all age groups to enjoy.
- f. Work to break down any cultural barriers to any diverse-owned businesses.

Vision Forward Survey Results

1. Feedback - How often do you come to Downtown Denison for the following reasons?

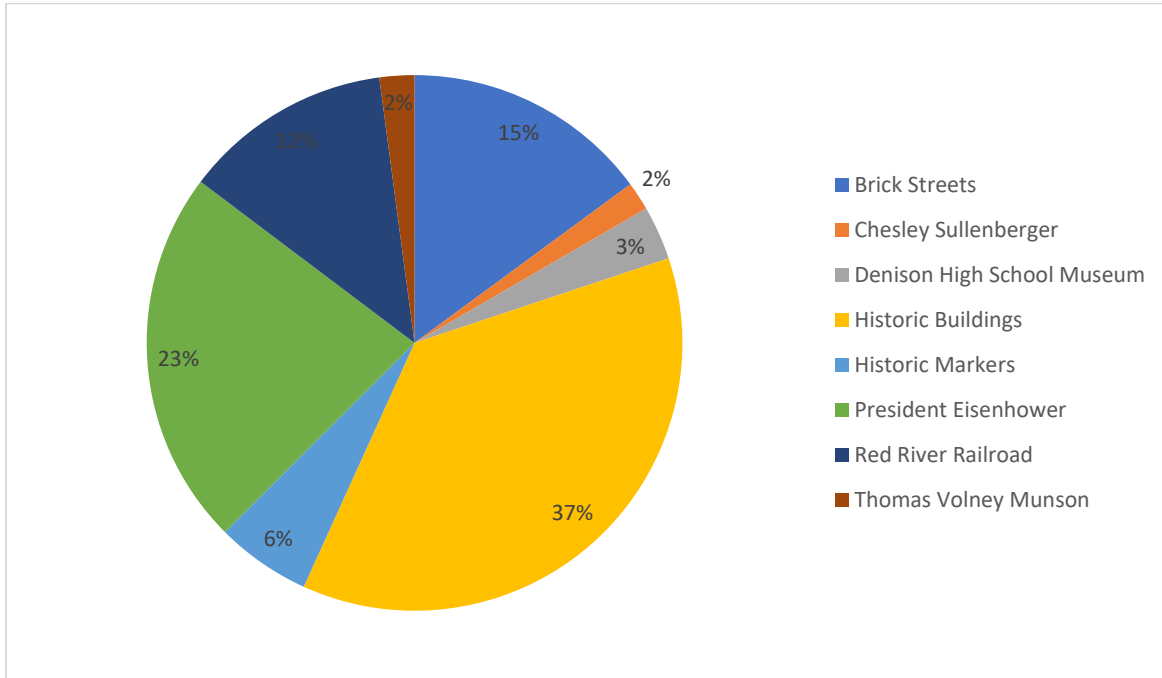


2. Which of the following efforts related to our heritage do you feel are most important? (Rank in order by sliding item up or down.)

A total of 523 answers were entered for this question. The results of #1 answers were as follows in descending numerical order:

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|
| Historic Buildings | 193 | 37% |
| President Eisenhower | 119 | 23% |
| Brick Streets | 78 | 15% |
| Red River Railroad Museum | 66 | 12% |
| Remaining Answers | 67 | 13% |
| Denison High School Museum | | |
| Chesley Sullenberger | | |
| Historic Markers | | |
| Thomas Volney Munson | | |

The following chart takes everyone's #1 answer into consideration.



3. How comfortable do you feel walking around in any area of Downtown Denison at any time? (1 is not safe, and 5 is very safe.)

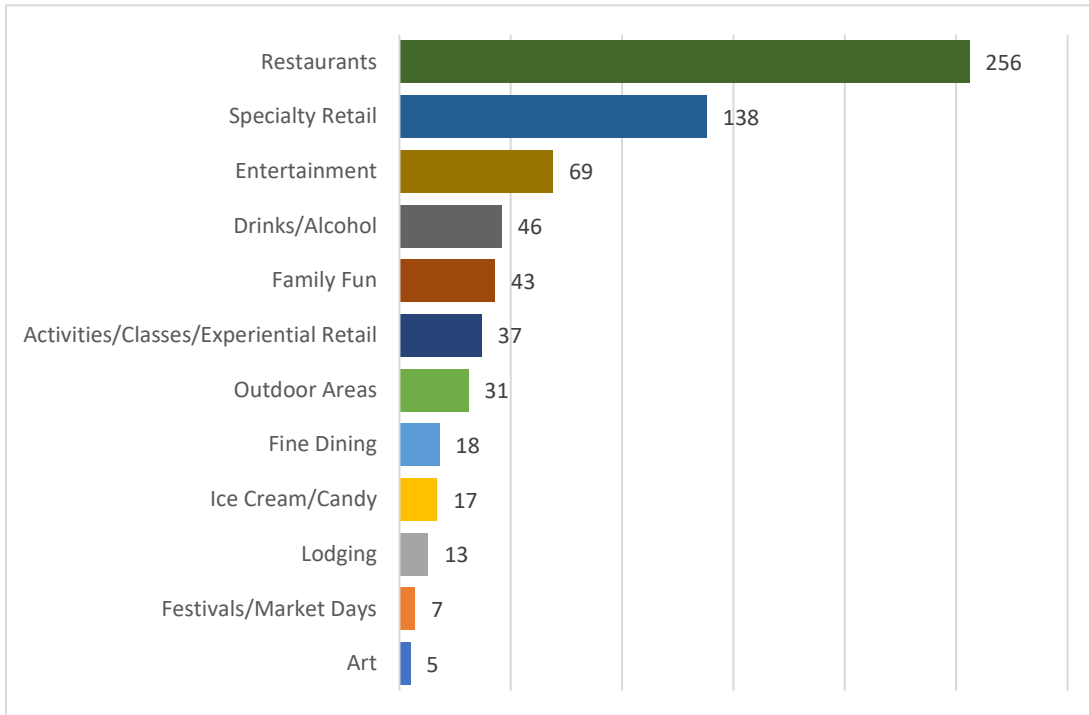
529
Responses

★★★★☆
4.14 Average Rating

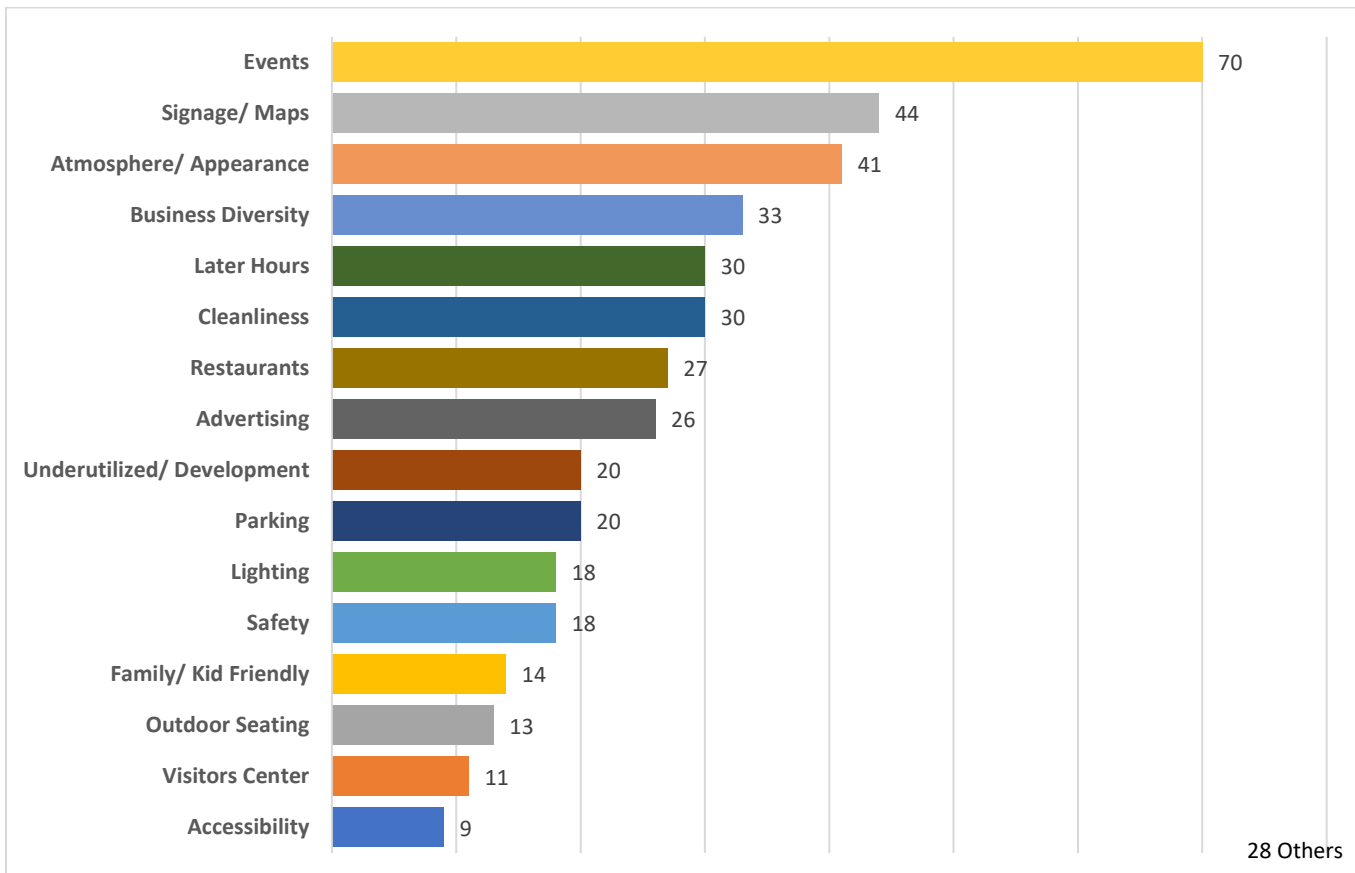
4. To capitalize on Denison's picturesque settings, which hashtag(s) do you prefer?

#downtowndenison 35
 #discoverdenison 25
 #denison 19
 #denisonTX 8
 #capturedenison 7
 #denisonlive 7
 #historicdowntowndenison

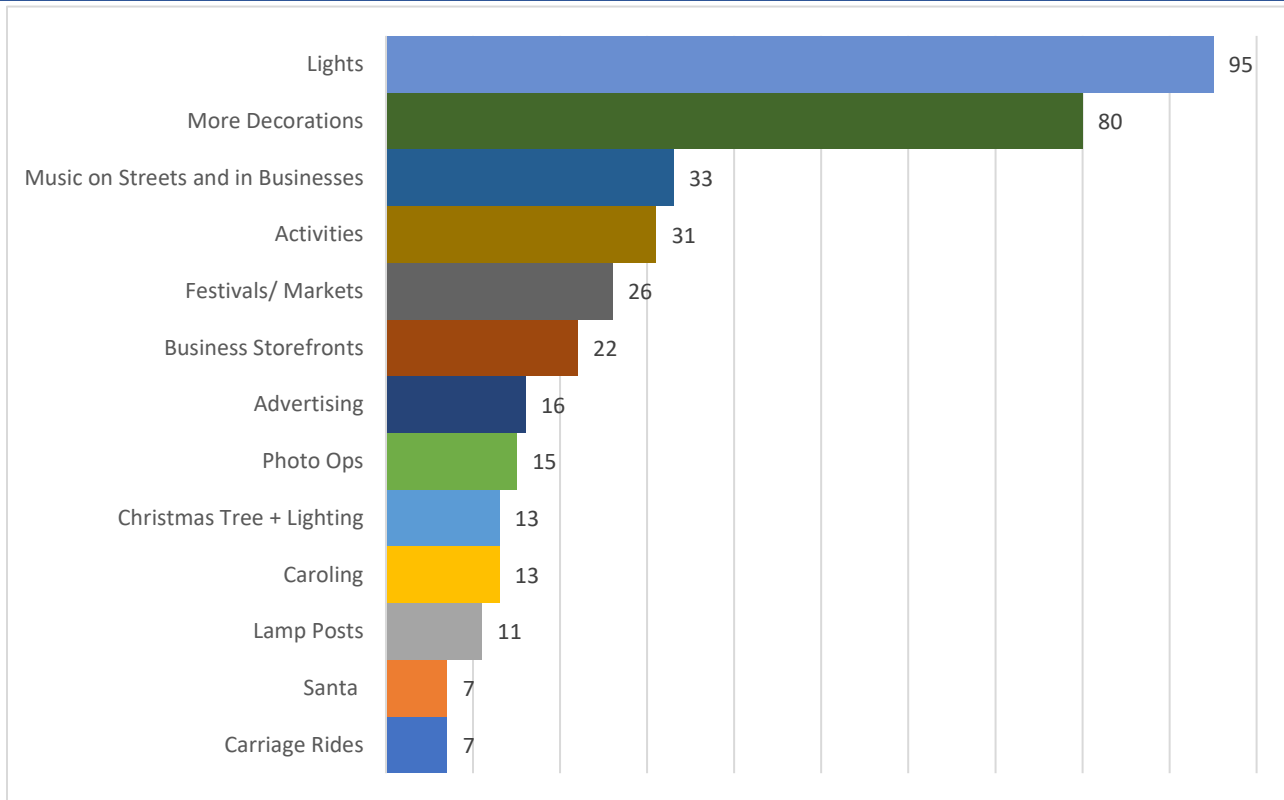
5. What business or amenity would you like to see more of in Downtown Denison?



6. What can be done to enrich the visitor experience?



7. What can be done to enhance our holiday decorations and/or activities?



8. Would you take a Staycation at an Airbnb Downtown or recommend to your friends and family?

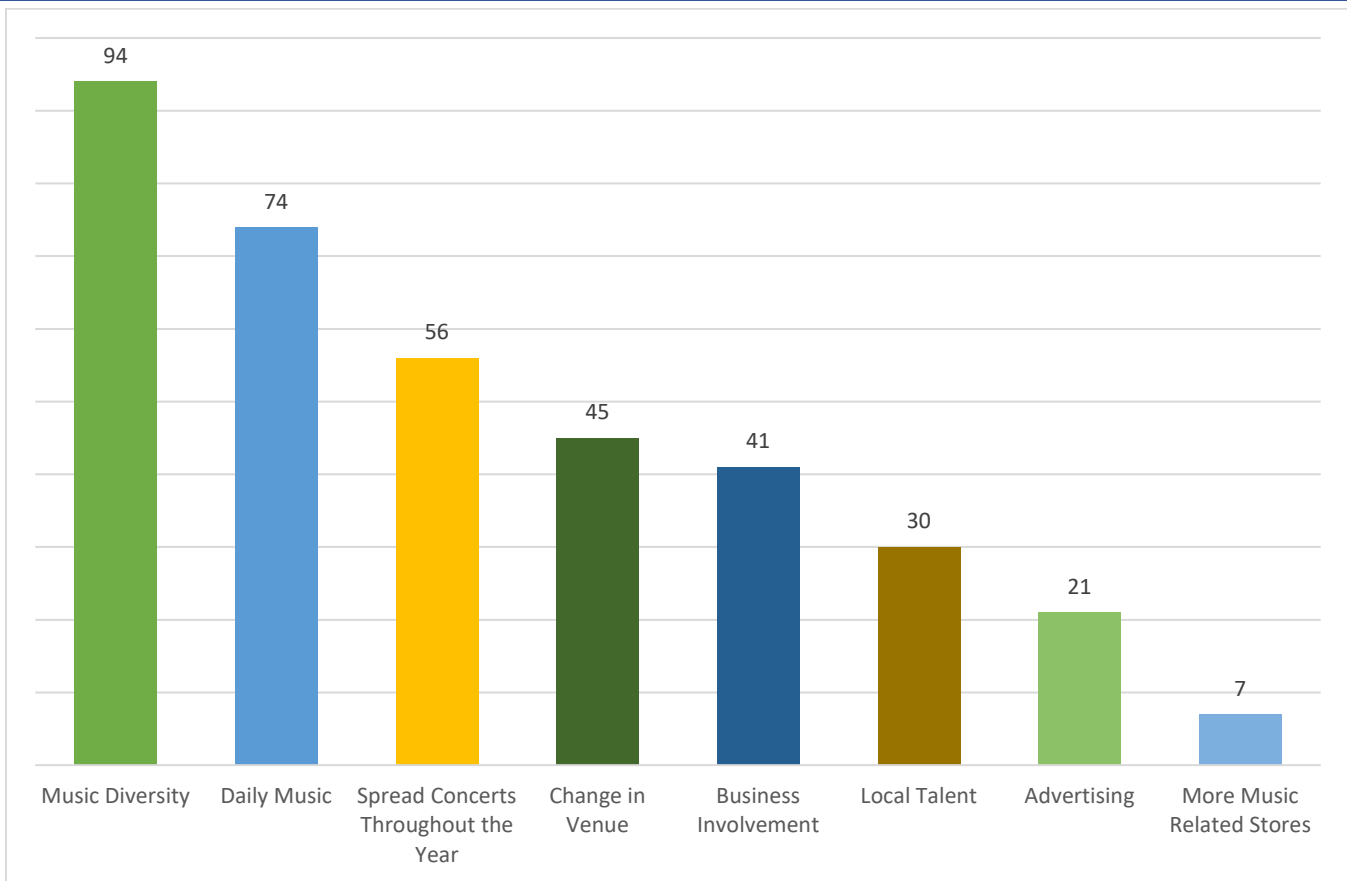


9. Where do you recommend visitors stay when they come to the area? (Rank in order by sliding item up or down.)

A total of 516 answers were received for this question. The results of #1 answers were as follows in descending numerical order:

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Family | 192 | 37% |
| Lake (Airbnb, cabins, camping) | 123 | 24% |
| Hotels | 109 | 21% |
| Airbnb Downtown | 60 | 12% |
| Airbnb Outside Downtown | 19 | 4% |
| Other | 13 | 2% |

10. How do you feel we could be more Music Friendly in Downtown Denison?



11. How important is public art in Downtown Denison? (1 is not important at all, and 5 is extremely important.)

529
Responses

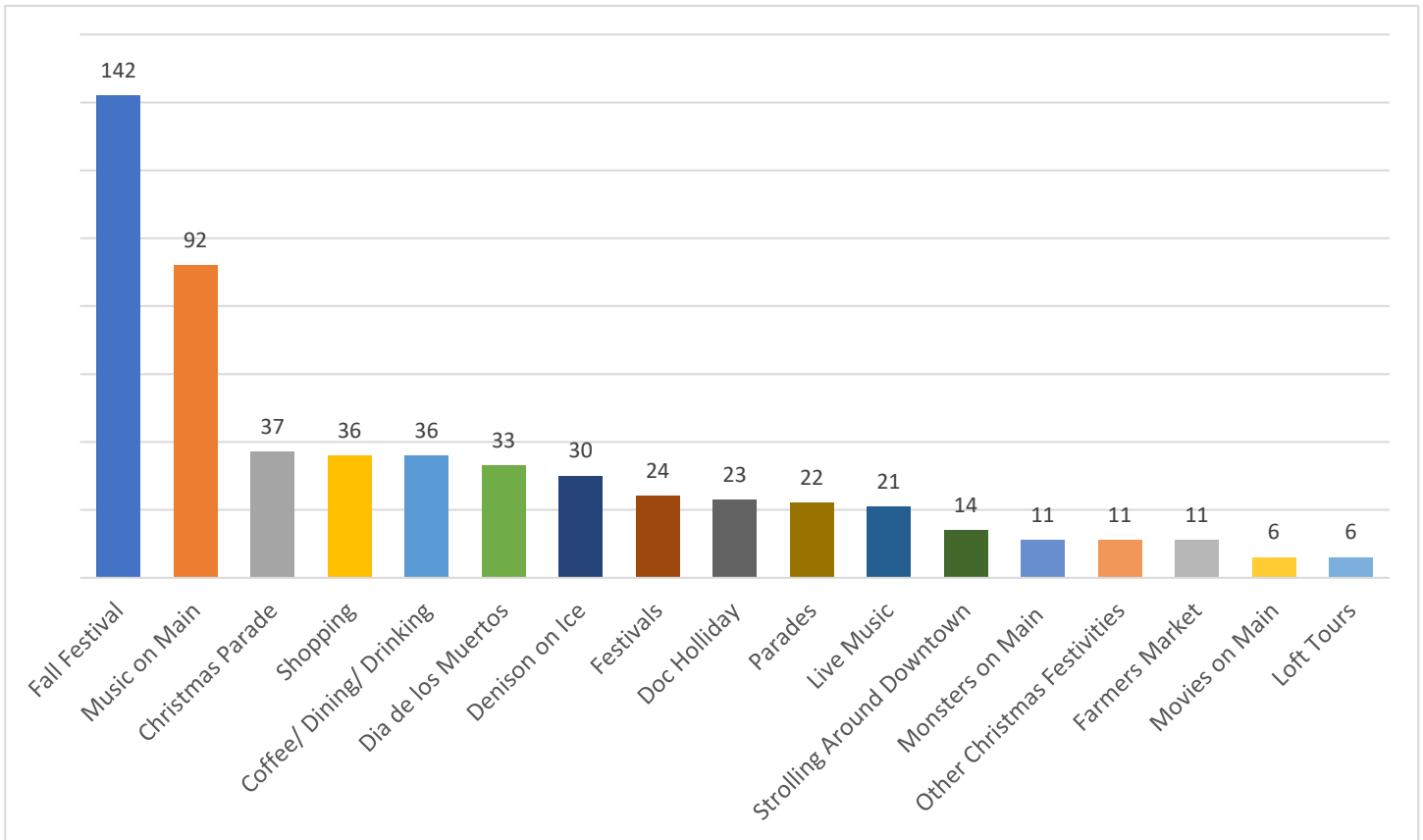
★★★★☆
3.98 Average Rating

12. Which artform would you like to see more of in Downtown Denison? (Check all that apply.)

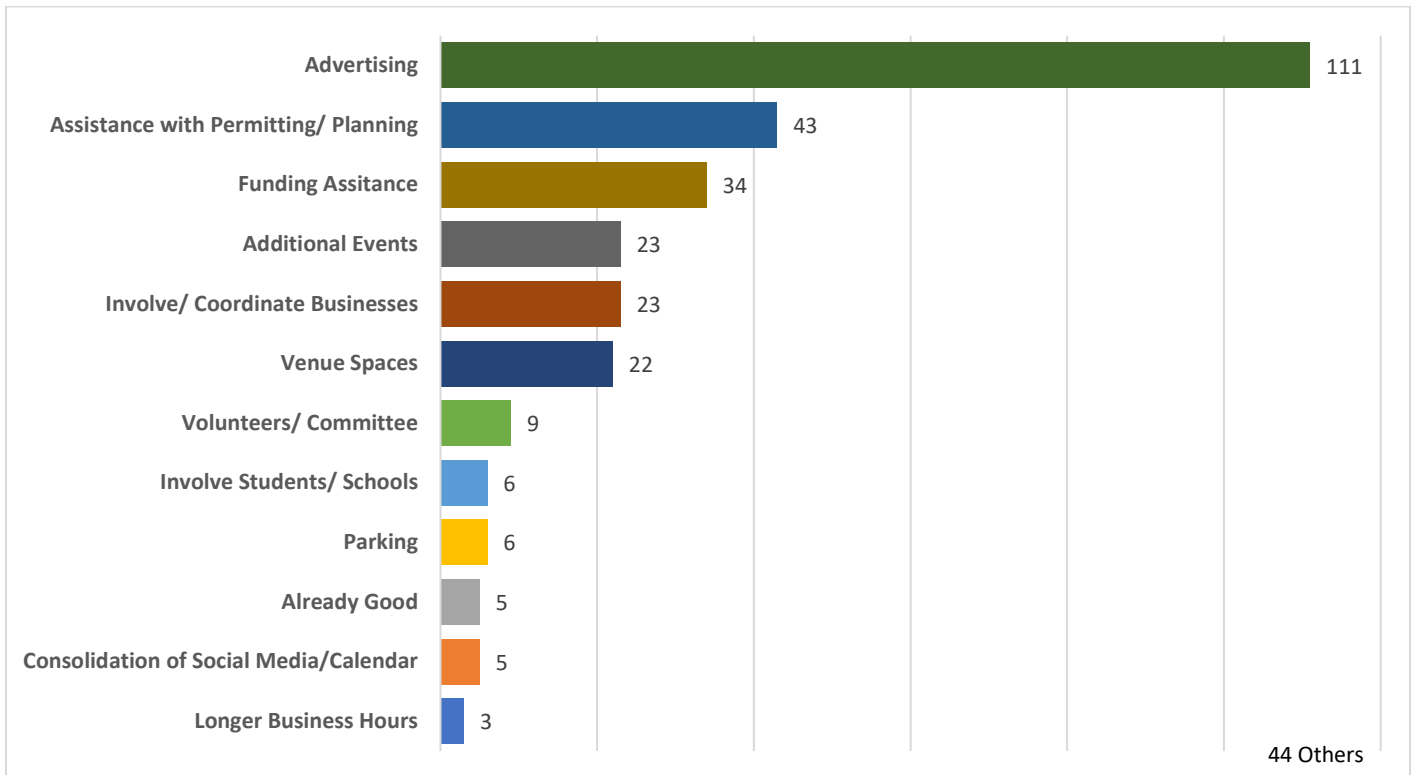
A total of 514 answers were collected for this question. The results of #1 answers were as follows:

| | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Murals | 140 | 27% |
| Street Performers | 129 | 25% |
| Live Music | 126 | 25% |
| Painted Dumpsters | 66 | 13% |
| Sculptures | 36 | 7% |
| Other | 17 | 3% |

13. What is your favorite event or activity in Downtown Denison?

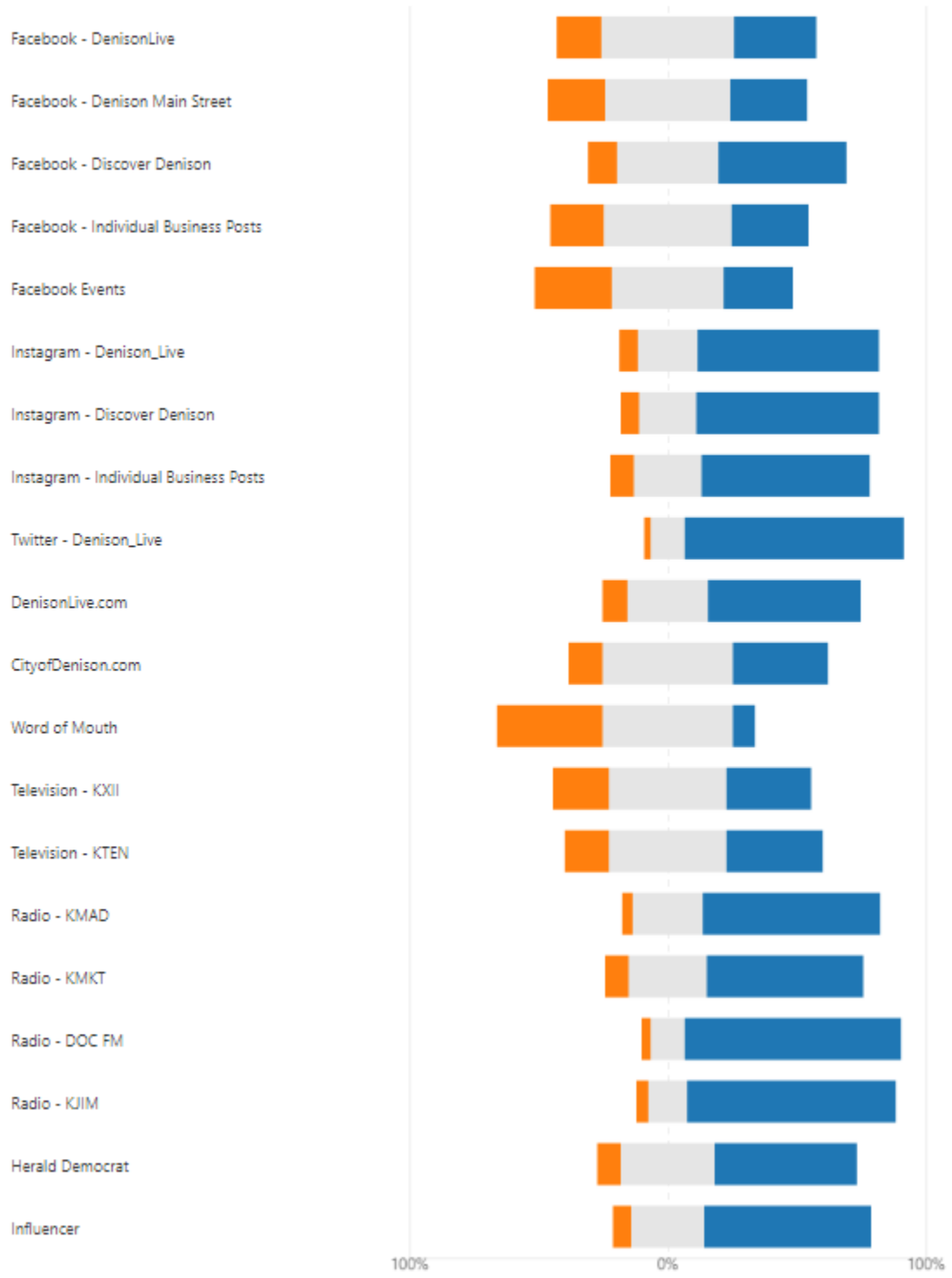


14. How could we assist individuals, businesses, and organizations with hosting events in our Entertainment District/Downtown?

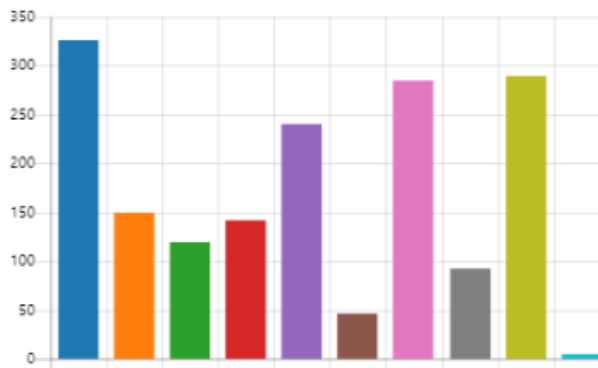
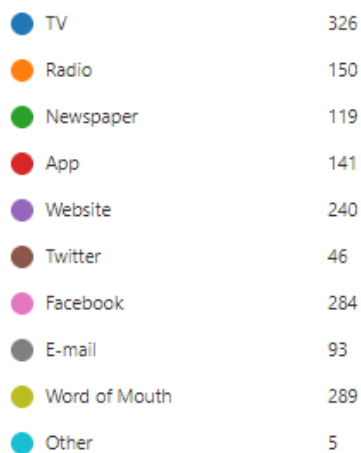


15. When you're looking for something to do, where do you go?

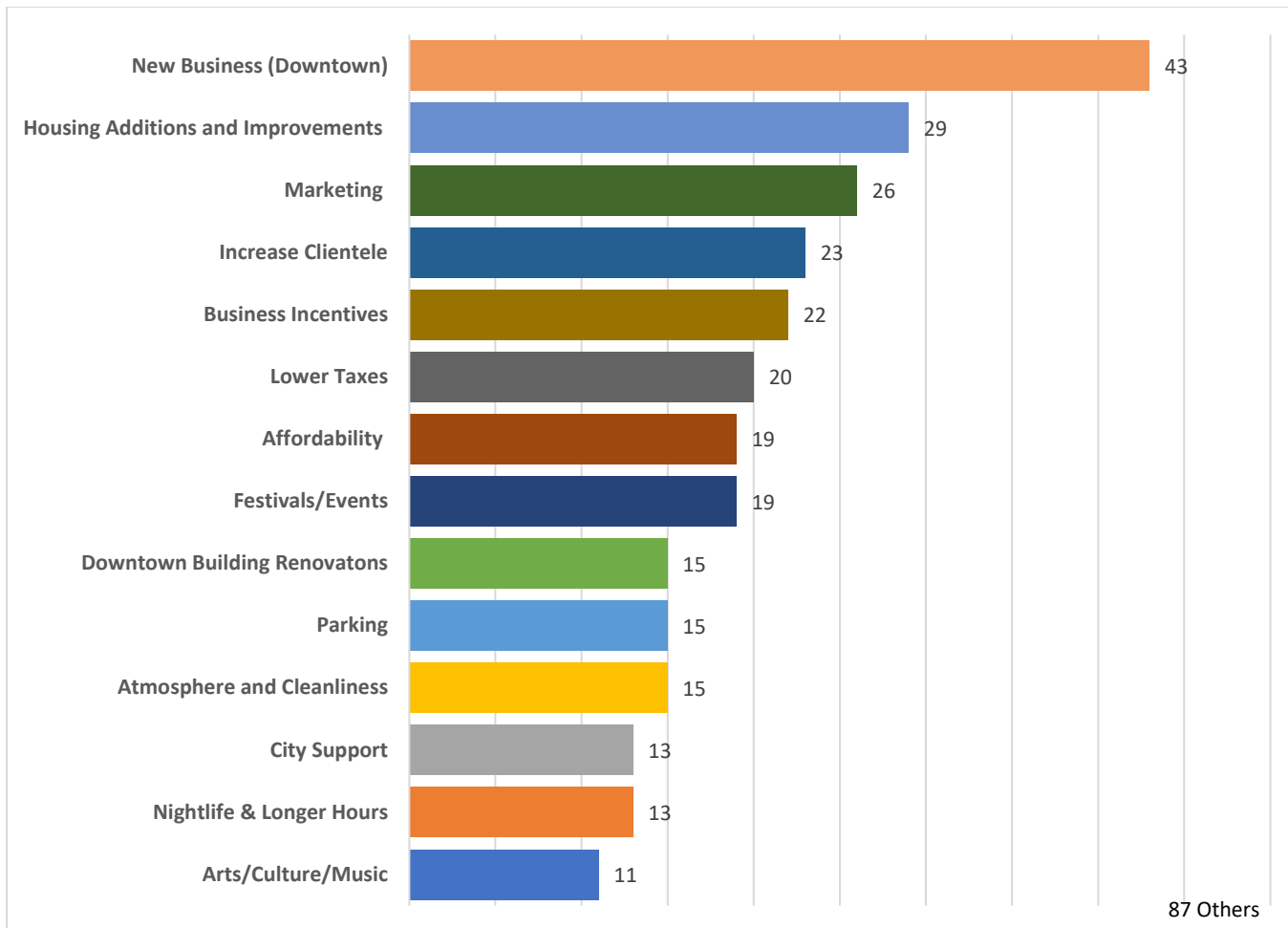
Always Sometimes Never



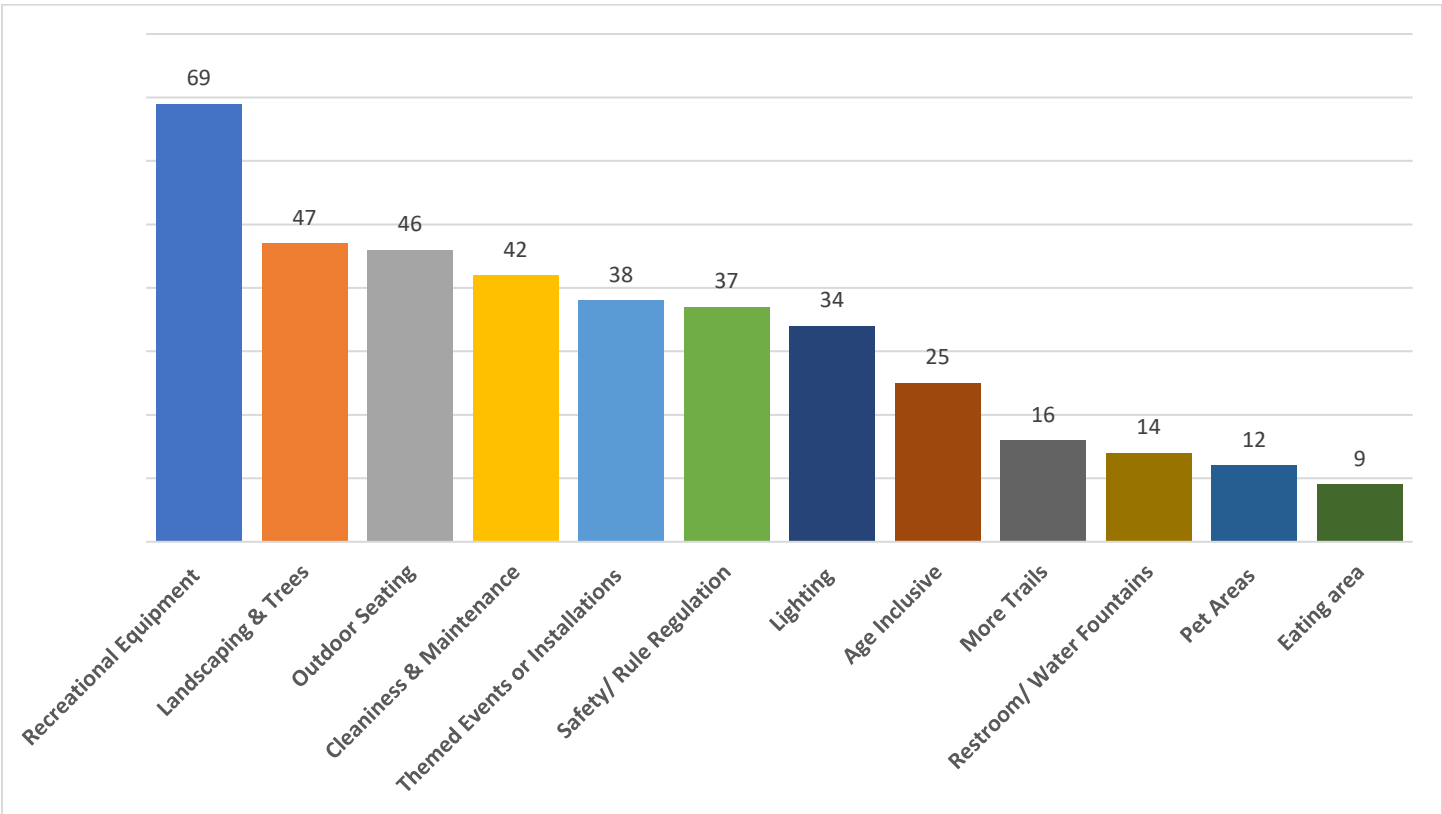
16. Where do you get your local news? (Check all that apply.)



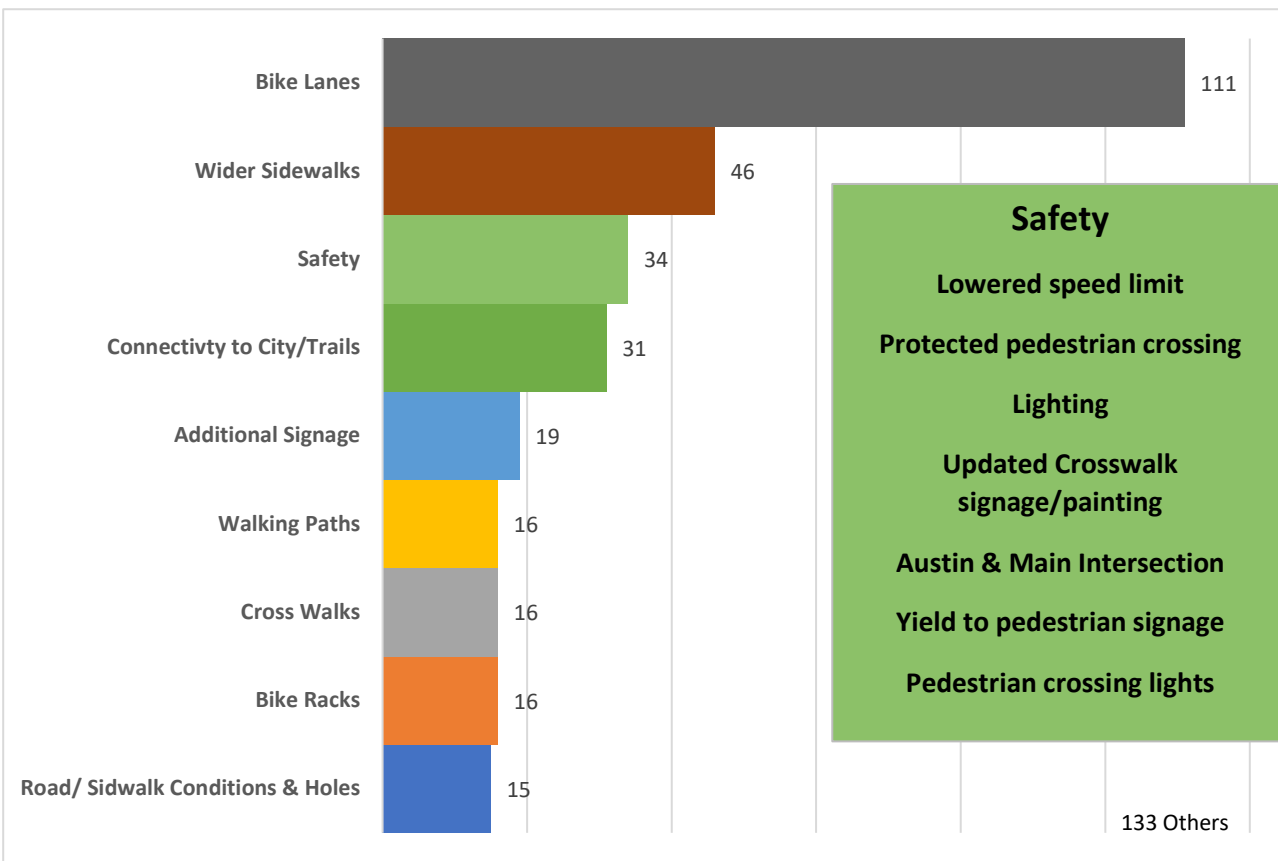
17. What would attract more live/work entrepreneurs to Downtown?



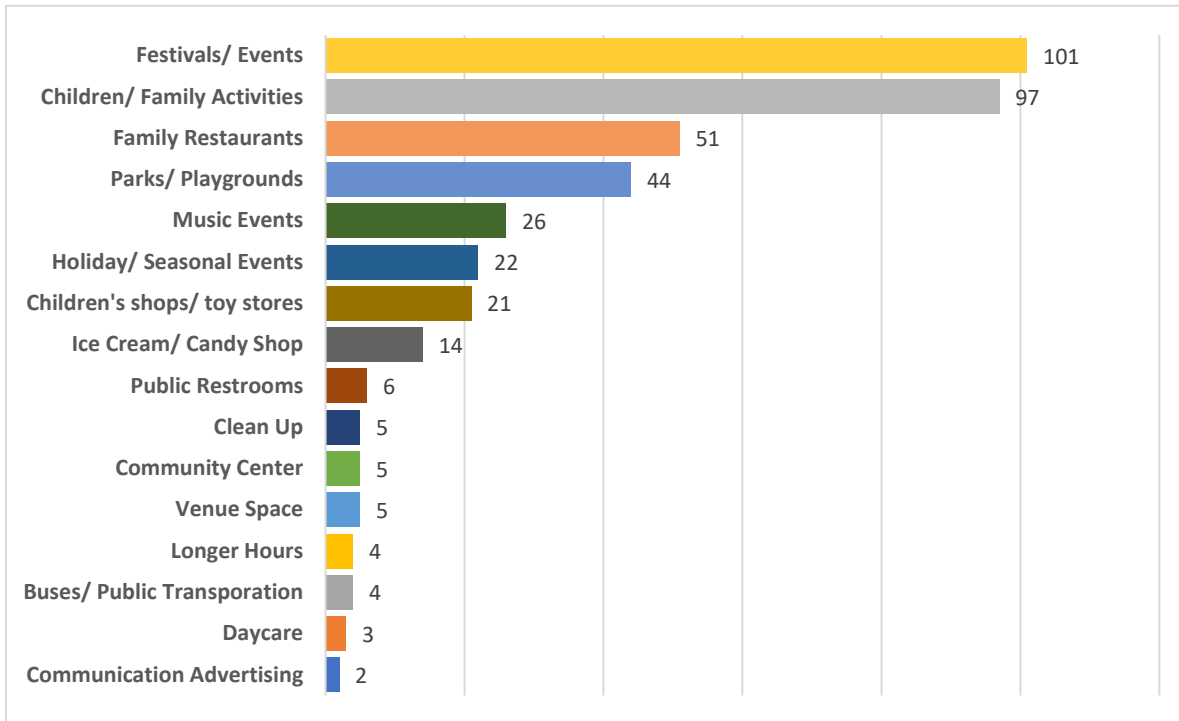
18. How can we make our Downtown parks and parklike settings better?



19. How can we improve connectivity with Downtown for pedestrians and bicyclists?



20. What event, business, public amenity do you feel would invite families and children to Downtown Denison?



Festivals/ Events

- Carnivals
- Monthly Downtown Festivals
- First Friday/Saturday
- Arts Festival
- Cultural Festivals
- Food Festivals
- Hot Air Balloons
- Home/ Loft Tours
- Kite Flying
- Dog Festival
- Sidewalk Sale
- Wine/Beer Festivals
- Historic events /railroad events
- Outdoor movies
- Magic show
- Light show
- Comedian
- Physical performers

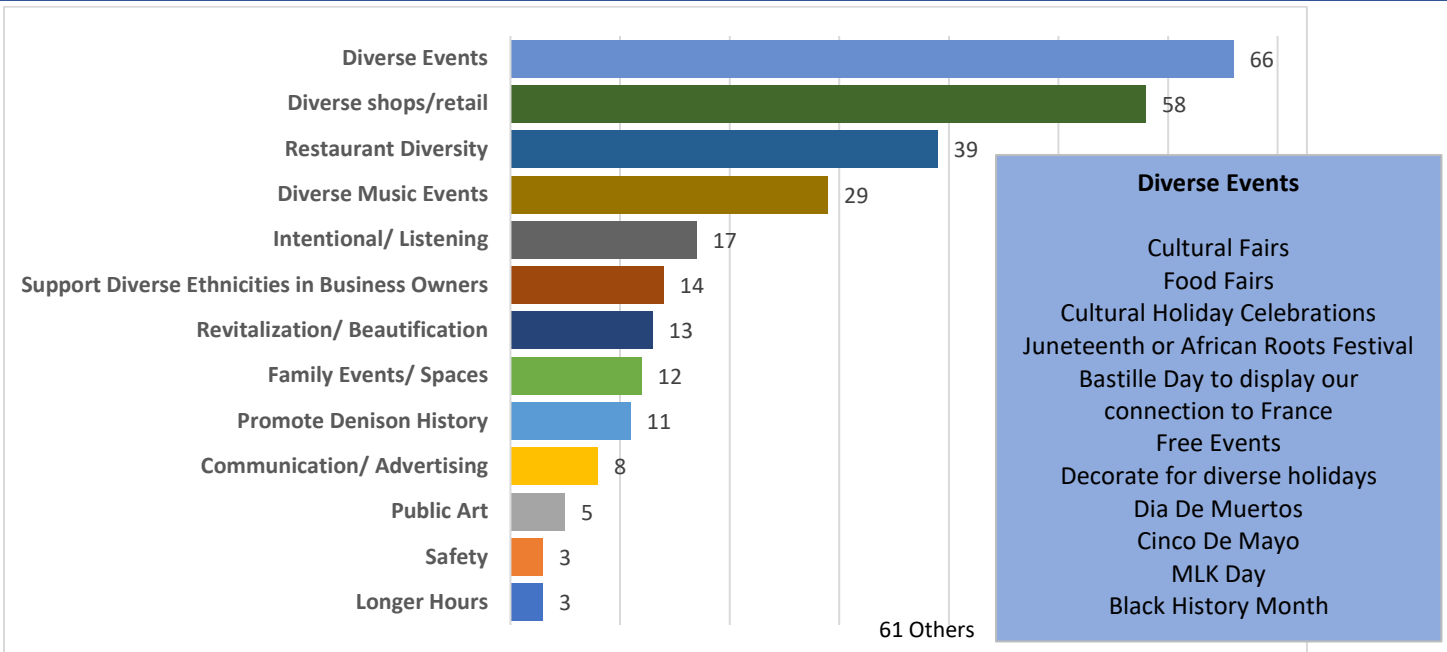
Children's Activities

- Children's Museum
- Children's Theater
- Science Museum
- Skating/ Roller blading
- Painting/DIY stores
- Bowling Alley
- Movie Theater
- Jump Houses
- Arcades
- Rock climbing
- Laser Tag
- Build a Bear
- Lego workshop
- Mini golf
- Paintball
- Treasure/ scavenger hunt
- Rock Hiding/ Finding
- Movies on Main
- Family classes
- Mother/son or father/daughter dance
- Mother/daughter tea
- Educational classes
- Book fairs

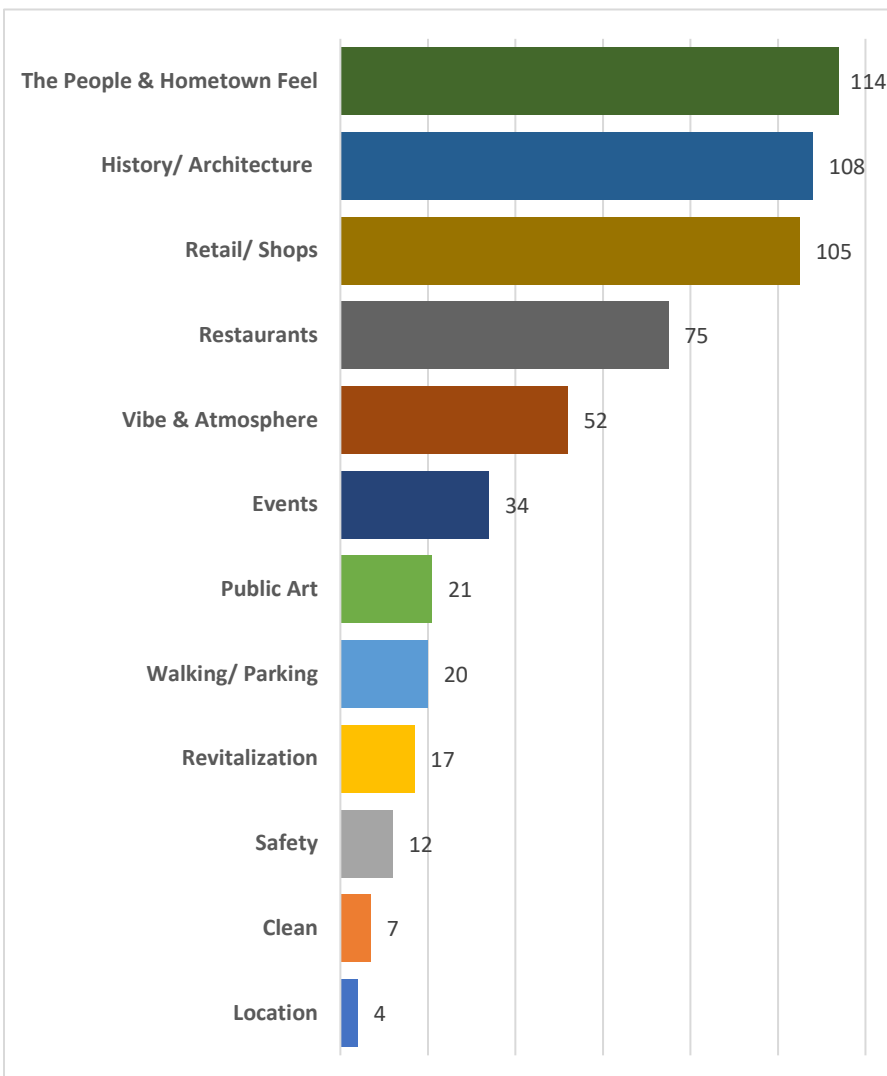
Parks/ Playgrounds

- Gardens
- Splash pad
- Picnic Area
- Water Park
- Dog Park
- Park with fountains/ water features
- Skate Park
- Astroturf park with food trucks
- Play town
- Amusement Park
- Bike trails

21. How could Downtown Denison have a more diverse appeal?



22. What do you like best about Downtown Denison?



The People and Hometown Feel

“I like how it feels homey and cozy, and when you go down there it feels like you are part of something important and unique.”

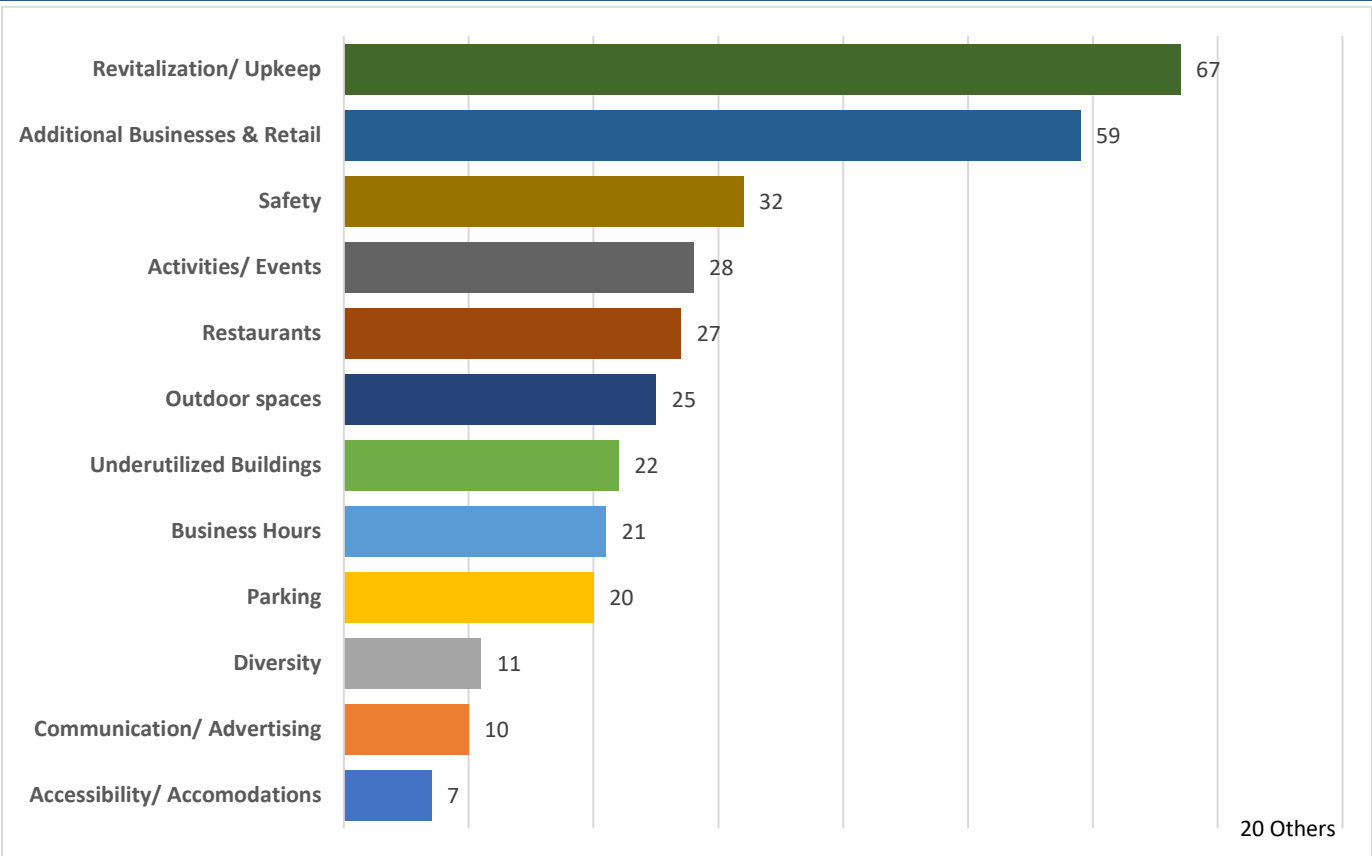
“Its amazing small business owners. I feel like I'm visiting family members every time I go into CJs, Two Chicks, the Railyard, Kaboodles, or to the Farmers Market.”

“The atmosphere. Very family friendly. The stores always have amazing workers and are so happy to see you.”

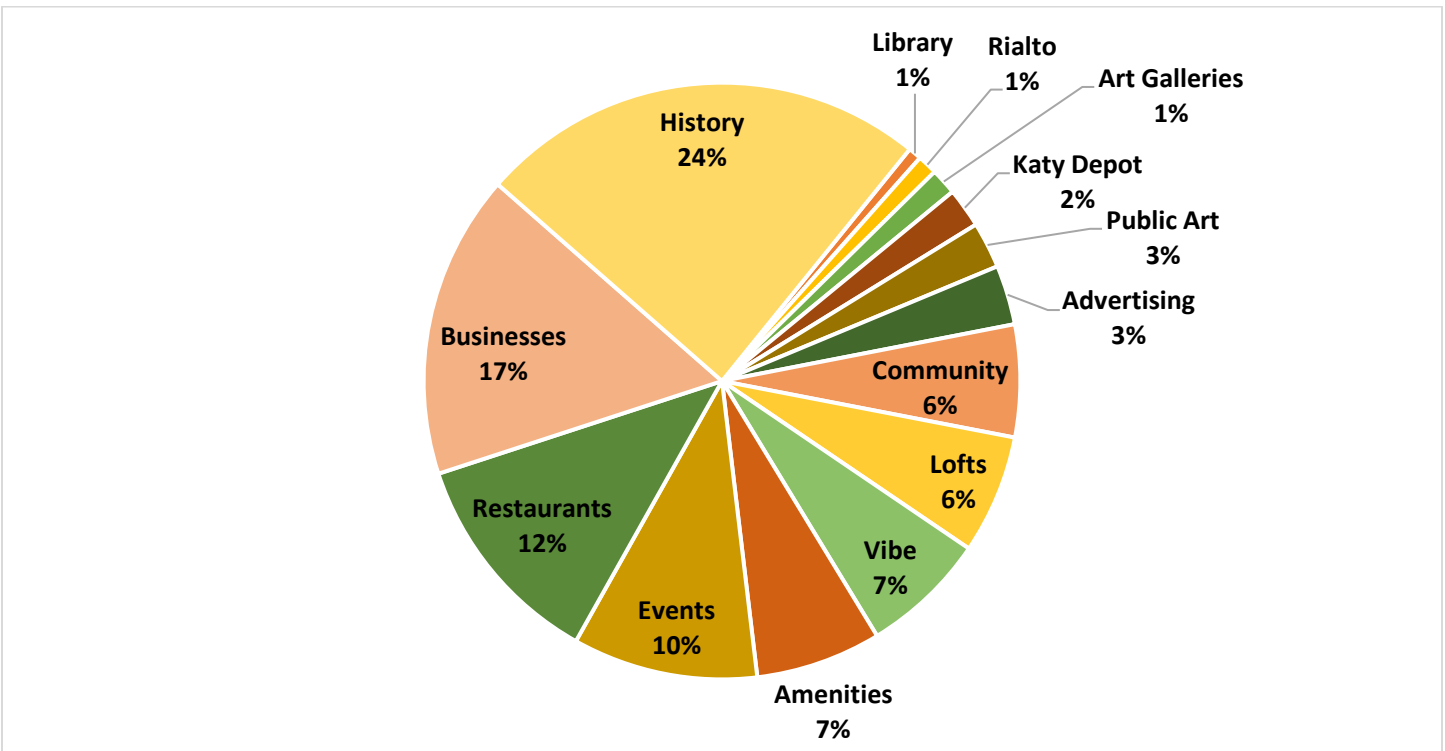
“The openness, yet closeness you feel in each store. Every store is happy to have you in and everyone is happy to help with any need you may have.”

“The small-town feeling, that everyone knows everyone or is a friend of a friend.”

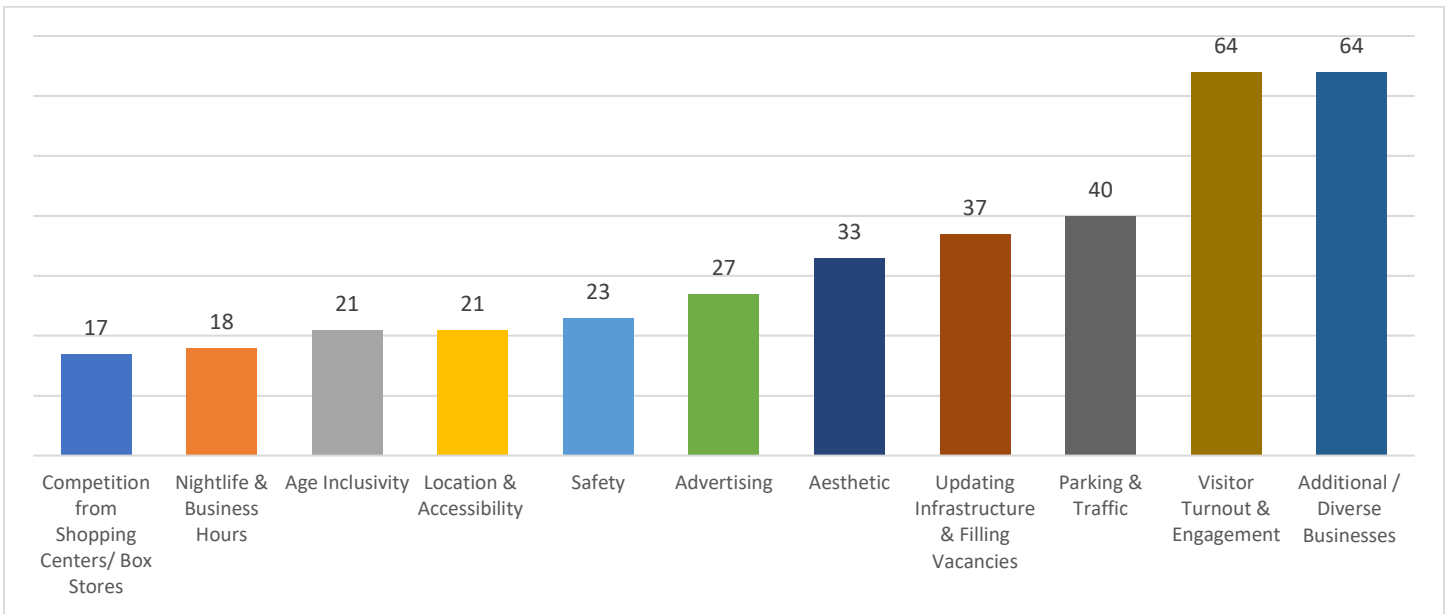
23. What, if anything, would you like to change about Downtown Denison?



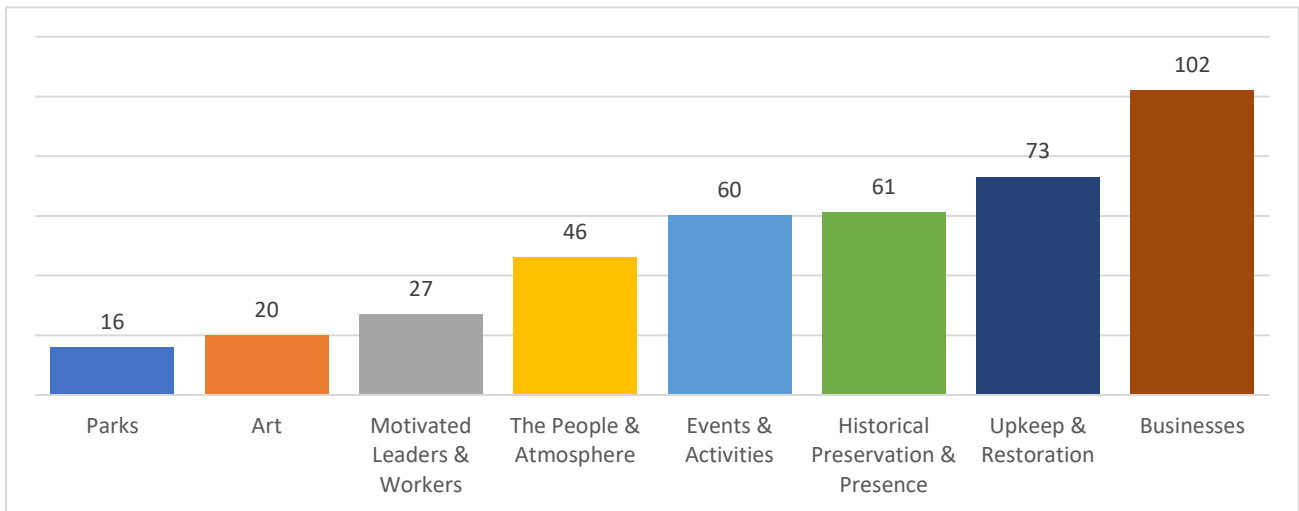
24. What is an aspect of Downtown that you feel we undersell?



25. What do you think is Downtown's biggest challenge?



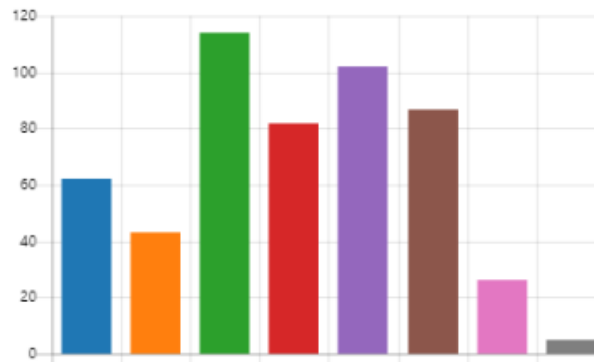
26. What do you see as Downtown Denison's biggest asset or accomplishment?



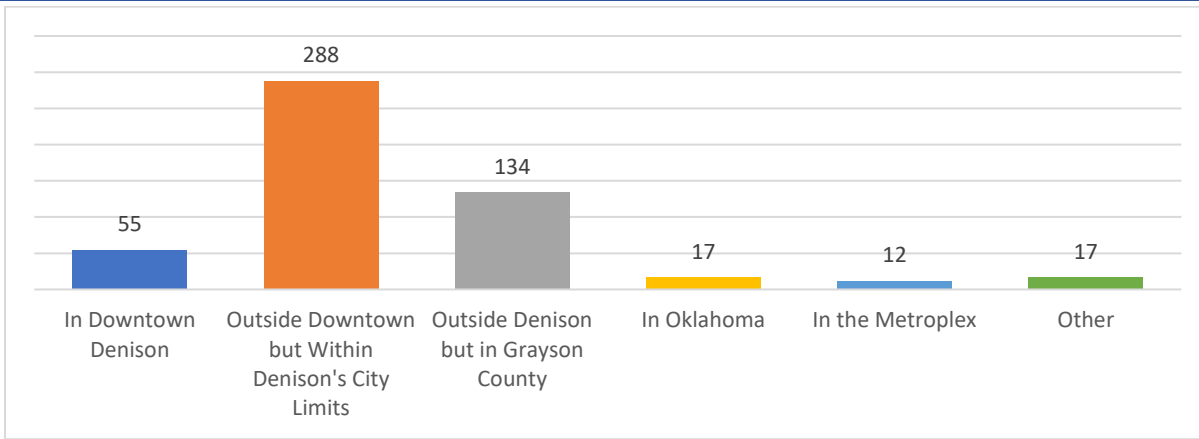
27. What age group are you in?

- 19 and Under
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80 and Over

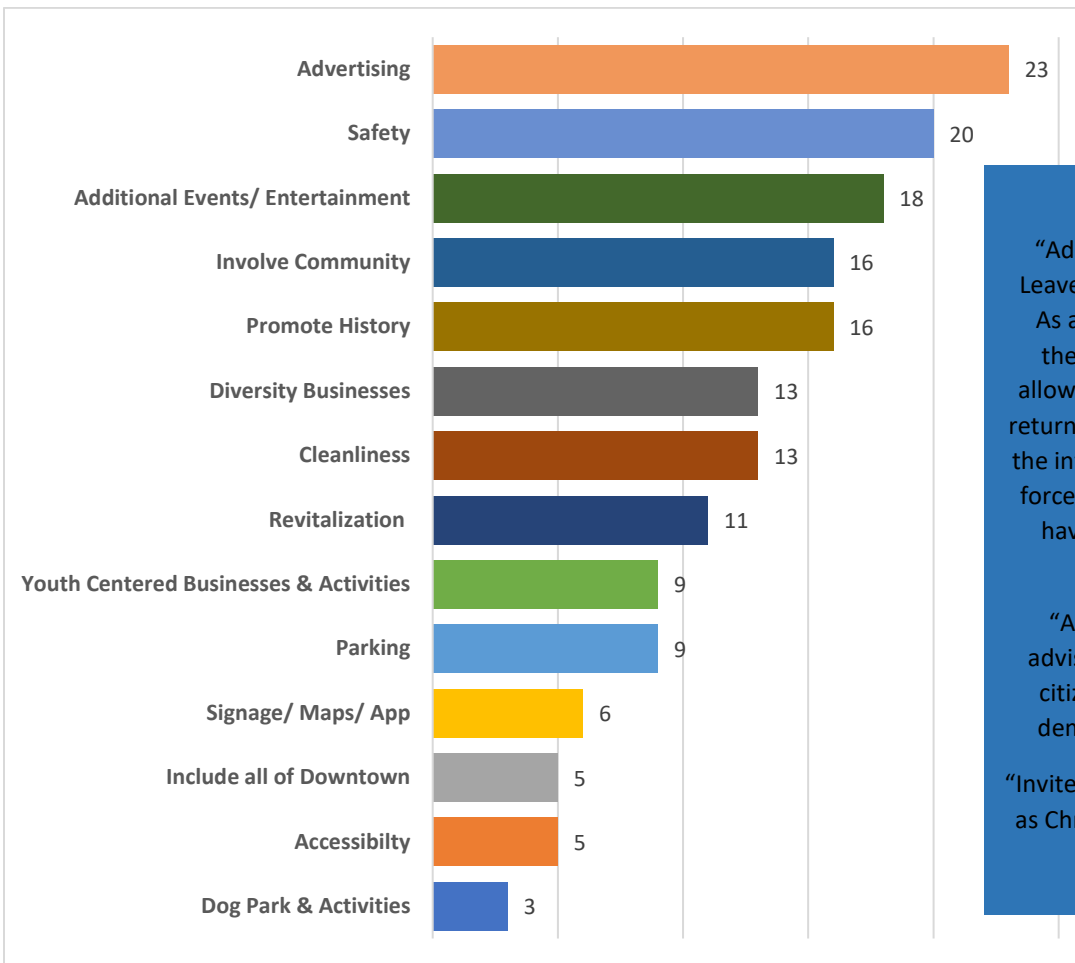
62
43
114
82
102
87
26
5



28. Which of the following best describes where you live?



29. What else do we need to know about Downtown Denison that you believe should be considered?



Involve Community

“Advertising. Join with the schools. Leave flyers, free kids meals, coupons. As a teacher, we are always leaving these items on the free tables and allowing the teachers to take them. In return they take their families and share the information with the students. Join forces with the educators and you will have a greater family turn out and promotions.”

“A voluntary Downtown Denison advisory board consisting of Denison citizens that truly reflect Denison's demographics and diversity goals.”

“Invite citizens to decorating events such as Christmas trees, or special dates like Valentine's Day, etc.”

30. Please share your e-mail to be entered in our drawings and so we can keep you involved in future aspects of this Visioning project?

We collected 352 individual e-mail addresses.