



Retail, Services, Food & Nightlife

Goal: Create vibrant retail and entertainment districts with streets and public spaces that feature active uses and pedestrian friendly design.

Background

Downtown Milwaukee is fun! That's a big part of why over 20 million people visit our city each year. From world-class dining and exciting nightlife to the 2021 NBA Champion Milwaukee Bucks, Downtown Milwaukee has something for everyone. These activities add life to our streets and public spaces, and are a critical component of creating vibrant districts.

Downtown Milwaukee has several vibrant retail and nightlife districts with offerings that appeal to a wide variety of people and add life to our streets. The most successful districts are generally fine-grained with narrow lots, many closely spaced destinations, and doors and windows opening up to the street.

As Downtown grows, more opportunities for retail and services are needed to ensure that residents, employees, and visitors have access to their daily needs within walking distance. While current trends in retail present challenges nationally for brick and mortar establishments, Downtown is poised to retain and grow its retail and service offerings due to its strong employment base and growing residential population.

What We've Heard From You

- Ensure everyone feels welcome
- Encourage diversity of retail & entertainment options intended for a diversity of people
- Create inclusive & activated spaces
- Increase density of retail & entertainment — all price points
- Strengthen defined retail & entertainment areas
- More family restaurants and activities
- Fill downtown retail vacancies
- More activities for all — movies, bowling, theatre, etc.
- Design and activate for pedestrians
- Continue to strengthen the identities of downtown districts



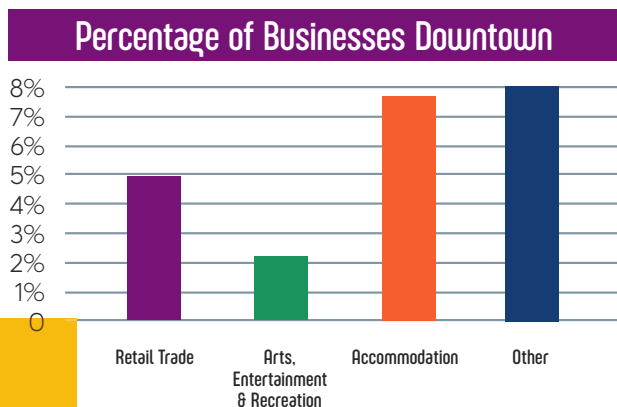
Concurrently, businesses are realizing that to remain competitive they must provide an authentic experience to their customers. Downtown is uniquely positioned to provide this experiential value added through the continued development of walkable, pedestrian-scaled commercial districts and enhancements to the public realm.

Our experience of Downtown places is greatly influenced by the character of development that shapes urban space. Safe streets and high-density development alone, while critical, are not sufficient to create vibrant places. Commercial districts with continuous ground floor storefronts built up to the sidewalk edge and filled with a diversity of businesses are key to creating, expanding, and connecting active places where businesses can thrive. These spaces offer local entrepreneurs a centralized location and access to a global marketplace, and the continued growth of Downtown will provide national retailers the data they need to feel confident investing in Downtown.

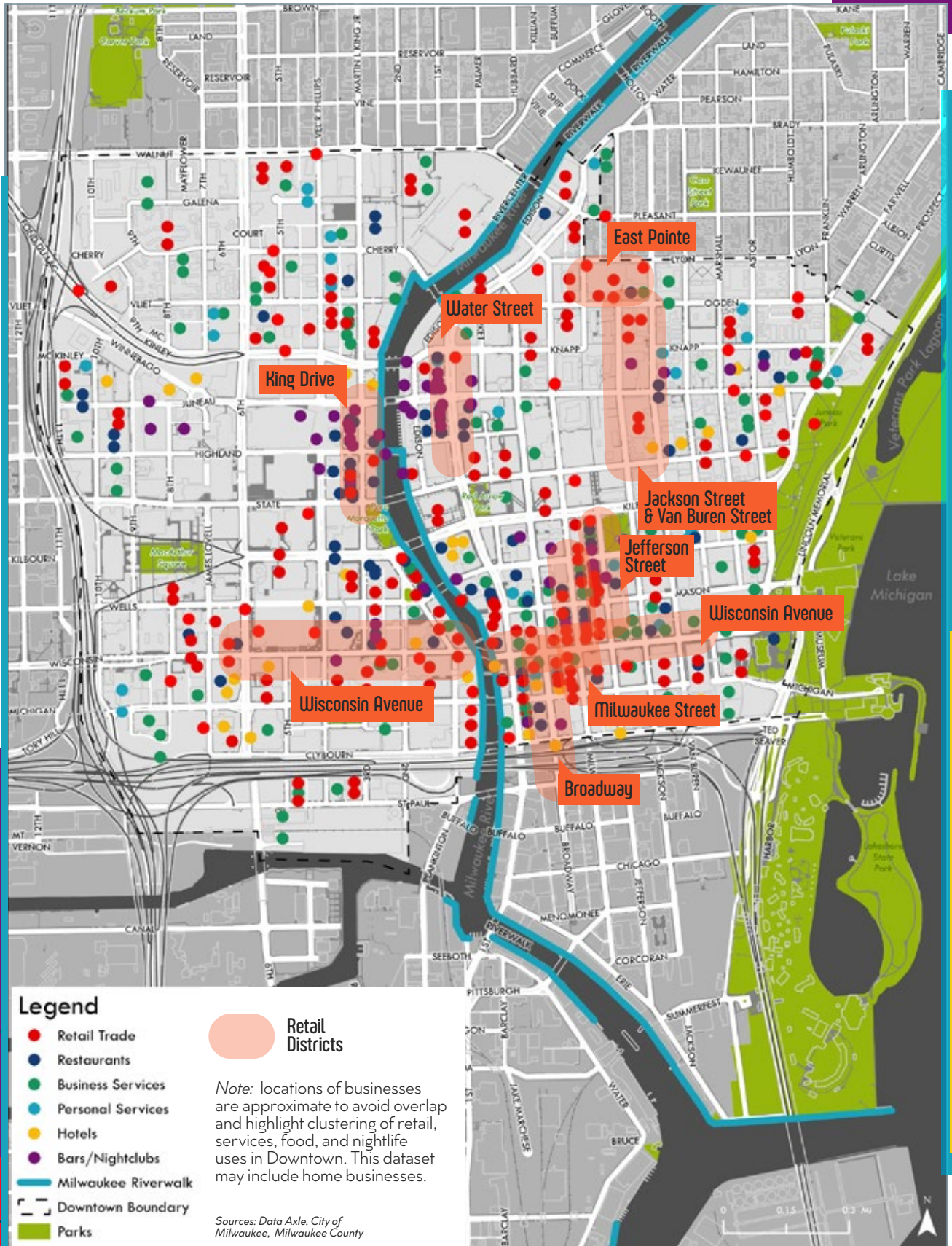
Pedestrian-oriented development and an enhanced public realm are also critical to the success of our social economy. Few places in Milwaukee maintain the density and diversity of Downtown’s food and nightlife offerings. This high concentration of unique social spaces attracts people from across the city and region, and reinforces Downtown’s role as a place to connect. We also need to create more safe spaces and social opportunities for youth to connect, and redesign streets in ways that encourage social interaction.

Connecting MKE envisions a thriving retail environment, with improved coordination among business owners, improvement districts, and the city – including a plan for the management of the nighttime economy and enhancements to streets and public spaces. The following recommendations seek to create vibrant retail and entertainment districts by providing enhanced streets and public spaces that feature active uses and pedestrian friendly façades.

Retail & Other Storefront Activating Business Summary		
Total Number & Percentage of Downtown Wide Businesses in the Retail & Entertainment Industries	667	27.3%
Total Number & Percentage of Downtown Wide Employees in the Retail, Entertainment Industries	11,729	19.6%



Retail, Services, Food & Nightlife + Key Downtown Districts



Retail, Services & Nighttime Economy Businesses & Employees

	Business #	Business %	Employee #	Employee %
Retail Trade	144	5.9%	1,725	2.9%
Motor Vehicle Parts and Dealers	8	0.3%	71	0.1%
Furniture and Home Furnishing Store	11	0.5%	98	0.2%
Electronics and Appliance Stores	3	0.1%	13	0.0%
Bldg Material & Garden Equipment & Supplier Dealers	6	0.2%	32	0.1%
Food and Beverage Stores	21	0.9%	482	0.8%
Health and Personal Care Stores	12	0.5%	108	0.2%
Gasoline Stations	0	0.0%	2	0.0%
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	29	1.2%	141	0.2%
Sport Goods, Hobby, Book, & Music Stores	11	0.5%	353	0.6%
General Merchandise Stores	3	0.1%	91	0.2%
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	29	1.2%	265	0.4%
Non-store Retailers	10	0.4%	67	0.1%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	63	2.60%	1,070	1.8%
Accommodation and Food Services	225	9.20%	5,711	9.5%
Accommodation	33	1.40%	2,045	3.4%
Food Services	192	7.90%	3,665	6.1%
Other services (except Public Administration)	235	9.60%	3,223	5.4%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Key Takeaways

- Nearly 10% (9.2%) of all the businesses and employees (9.5%) working in the downtown plan area are in the accommodations and food service industry.
- Over one quarter (27%) of businesses and one fifth (19.6%) of employees in the Downtown Plan area are in the four categories of retail trade, arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food services and other services.
- Milwaukee Downtown is home to over 1,000 (1,070) jobs in arts, entertainment and recreation.
- The Downtown Plan area is home to 144 retail businesses concentrated in the East and West Wisconsin Avenue, N. Milwaukee Street, N. Jefferson, N. MLK Jr. Drive, and N. Water Street corridors.

The Nighttime & Entertainment Sector is a Major Economic Engine in Milwaukee

Nearly 10% (9.2%) of all the businesses and employees (9.5%) working in the downtown plan area are in the accommodations and food service industry, and nearly 12% (11.8%) of all the businesses and over 11% of employees (11.3%) working in the downtown plan area are nighttime economy related sectors, making nightlife related industries the largest category of retail related businesses and employee base by a substantial margin.

A vibrant nighttime economy and a wide variety of entertainment offerings are an important consideration when people are choosing where to live, especially younger generations. This has been further amplified and accelerated during of the COVID-19 pandemic which has accelerated a growth in remote work, allowing people more flexibility in choosing the city in which they want to live while still maintaining their employment, regardless of location. When one can work from anywhere, the “sociability” of the city, which includes a variety of “third spaces” such as parks, arts, culture, entertainment, sports, and nightlife, are more important than ever before in attracting people to urban centers. In a recent survey of millennials living in southeastern Wisconsin, 60% of the respondents cite a variety of entertainment and nightlife options as important in considering whether to live in the City of Milwaukee.





New Nighttime & Social Economy Developments Bolster the Sector

Downtown Milwaukee’s nighttime economy is the largest cluster of businesses and jobs making it a critical employment sector for Milwaukee residents. The industry is only getting more important with several new large scale entertainment related developments and districts that are currently under construction, or expected to start soon, adding millions of dollars of new investment, thousands of jobs, and additional tourism attractions. These developments will also trigger additional investment by expanding the marketplace, attracting new ancillary development.



The Iron District

The \$160 million, 11-acre redevelopment in the largely underutilized southwestern quadrant of downtown, will bring the State of Wisconsin’s highest level of professional soccer to the City of Milwaukee. In addition, the District is adding new housing options, a hotel, retail opportunities including several new nightlife options.



FPC Live

The \$50 million, dual performance venue on the site of the former Bradley Center in the Deer District is expecting 50 shows in the large venue and 85 shows in the smaller venue with a projection of 220,000+ tickets sold in the first year of opening. FPC Live will have nearly 20 full-time and hundreds of part-time jobs and is anticipating a \$12.5 million annual economic impact from the development. The number of shows and economic impact is expected to grow as the venues stabilize.

Foxtown Landing & MKE Dog Park

Fromm Family Pet Foods and Foxtown Brewing are investing more than \$15 million in a new 30,000 SF brewery, distillery, restaurant, and event space with expansive outdoor seating areas that seamlessly connect to downtown's first dog park. The "Downtown Dog District" is a redevelopment will be a new social hub for downtown's growing population and their pets. The development will include the addition of over 400 feet of public riverwalk and be one of a kind in the region.



The Milwaukee Theatre District

The Milwaukee Theatre District campaign was launched in late 2022 to promote the 15,000 theater seats in the District as it ranks No. 1 in the United States for the highest number of seats per capita. With a combined 2,100 performances attracting 2 million attendees each year, the Milwaukee Theater District is a core part of Milwaukee's nighttime economy and entertainment industry, which generates an estimated \$400 million in visitor spending annually, according to Tourism Economics. As part of that impact, Milwaukee Theater District venues employ over 1,000 Milwaukeeans and even more volunteers, drawing from all neighborhoods in the City of Milwaukee and larger region.



MKE THEATER DISTRICT

9 WORLD-CLASS THEATERS | **15,000 SEATS**

2,000+ PERFORMANCES YEARLY

2 MILLION ATTENDEES ANNUALLY

ALL CONTRIBUTING TO MILWAUKEE'S \$400M IN ESTIMATED ANNUAL VISITOR ENTERTAINMENT SPENDING*

Recommendation 12

Increase the number and diversity of Downtown retail, dining, and service offerings.

Supporting Policies & Strategies

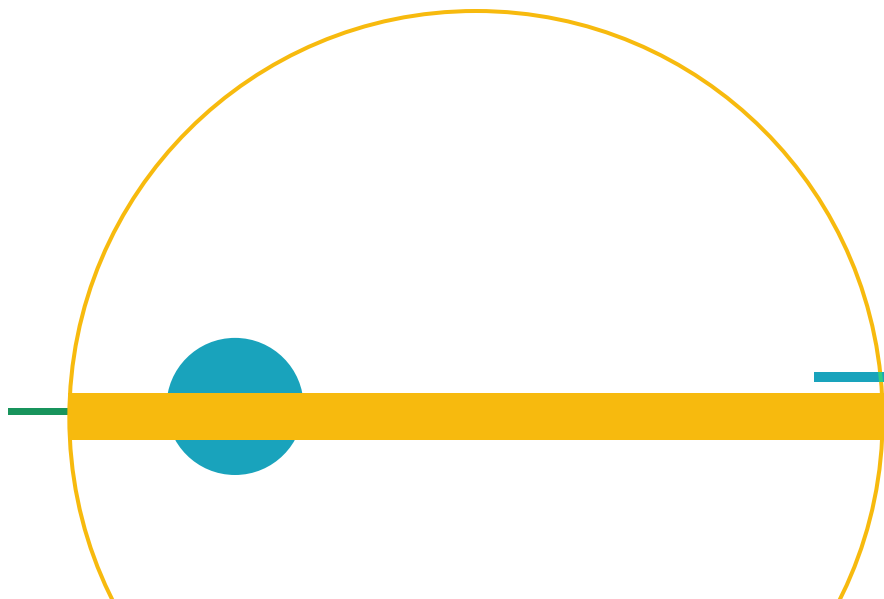
- A** Continue to monitor trends in retail and entertainment, and identify “retail gaps” to focus recruitment efforts. Proactively work to fill retail gaps and capture more spending across all categories. Develop a retail recruitment plan with a focus on diversely-owned (BIPOC) businesses and include a toolbox of incentives.
- B** Establish and reinforce a variety of local business districts throughout downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods so that residents, employees and visitors can access shopping, and services within a 5-minute walk (about 1/4 mile).
- C** Establish strong physical connections between districts, including pedestrian and bike friendly streets, in order to connect the various “5-minute neighborhoods” into “15-minute Downtown” where a wide variety of housing, jobs and services exist so that people can access their day-to-day needs without a personal automobile.
- D** Ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment within commercial districts, with a broad mix of businesses that reflect the diversity of the city as a whole.
- E** Allow for small neighborhood-serving commercial uses in residential areas to further increase walkability and access to services.
- F** Encourage and support businesses that act as “third spaces,” including places like coffee shops and small taverns.
- G** Support the provision of late-night convenience options, and allow extended hours of operation in commercial districts to promote 24-hour activity.

Recommendation 13

Prioritize the development of walkable, pedestrian-scaled commercial districts through enhancements to the public realm and by fronting streets and public spaces with active uses and pedestrian friendly façades.

Supporting Policies & Strategies

- A** Promote the establishment of defined retail and entertainment districts, each with their own authentic identities and unique mix of offerings.
- B** Require buildings along active commercial streets to provide large transparent storefront windows along the street frontage with regular pedestrian entries, and encourage active uses in the street level area such as retail or restaurants.
- C** Restrict auto-oriented uses such as drive-through restaurants and gas stations.
- D** Prohibit new parking areas along the street frontage.
- E** Focus on developing human scaled places designed to be accessed by foot.
- F** Allow parklets on all streets.



Recommendation 14

Embrace Downtown as the region's center for nightlife and social gathering, and ensure the proper management of the nighttime economy.

Supporting Policies & Strategies

- A** Identify and implement strategies that increase coordination and communication between businesses in the nighttime and culture sector and relevant City departments in order to facilitate safe, accessible and enjoyable places for nightlife. This would benefit nighttime businesses citywide, but have an especially positive impact on Downtown where more than 15% of the city's nighttime businesses are located. Long term, continue to explore the potential creation, funding, and location of an "Office of Nightlife & Culture" with partner agencies to support the social economy and promote safe, accessible and enjoyable places for nightlife.
- B** Improve the public realm within active social districts to enhance the nightlife experience, including new and/or improved gathering spaces, signature streetscaping, and improved pedestrian scale lighting.
- C** Support the coordinated efforts of local businesses and business districts to promote their districts and enhance the nightlife experience through programming and events.
- D** Continue efforts to engage business owners and other stakeholders to develop strategies for addressing public safety and quality of life concerns in and near active social districts.

Recommendation 15

Develop a high concentration of retail, dining and other active uses in the center of Downtown, and promote the Downtown core as a regional destination for experiential shopping and entertainment.

Supporting Policies & Strategies

- A** Build and maintain an authentic, walkable core of active storefronts in the center of Downtown that takes advantage of its unique context rather than trying to imitate suburban retail centers.
- B** Focus destination retail and entertainment uses in the center of Downtown — along Wisconsin Avenue, Water Street, and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, as well as portions of Broadway, Milwaukee Street, and Jefferson Street.
- C** Maintain a list of vacant retail space in the core of Downtown, and proactively work to fill retail vacancies, with a focus on local and diversely-owned businesses.
- D** Restrict blank walls and passive uses along active streets in Downtown, and mitigate gaps in the continuous retail environment by activating blank facades and adding creative interim "pop-up" uses or exhibits in vacant or less-active storefronts.
- E** Encourage large venues and other facilities that may necessitate blank walls to include "liner uses" along the street frontage.
- F** Monitor retail storefront best practices and require new construction to implement minimum ceiling heights to enhance the marketability of new storefront commercial spaces.