

The Heart of Our City: Seattle’s Downtown Activation Plan

“The actions we take now, and our plans for the future, are not about restoring the downtown of the past. We are completely reimagining what’s possible.”

- Mayor Bruce Harrell, April 2023 DAP Announcement

Purpose of this document

This memo is a reflection of the Downtown activation planning done as of April 15, 2023. It includes:

- Public opinion research
- Guiding goals and timeline for the plan
- Initial thinking of potential initiatives and big idea concepts that may be included in the plan
- Request for feedback as we make decisions on what to include
- Feedback shared by May 12, 2023 will have the best chance of influencing the Mayor’s proposed plan

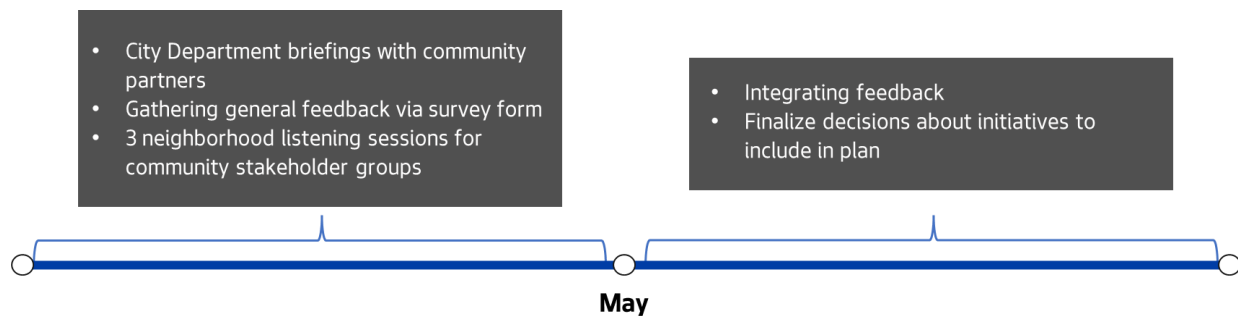
THIS IS NOT A FINALIZED PLAN. Not all elements you see here will be included in the final plan and not all additions shared during the request for feedback will be included come June. The final plan will feature near-term initiatives that:

- Are new or are existing initiatives that can scale for greater impact
- May require significant human and financial resources
- Require policy or legislative change
- Require significant cross-department or public-private coordination

While the plan will focus on Downtown, City departments are still committed to their work in neighborhoods across the city. There is broad recognition that a focused strategy Downtown will have positive impacts to the greater Seattle area.

Public engagement timeline

Between now and June, the DAP team will engage Seattleites to hear feedback on the developing plan.



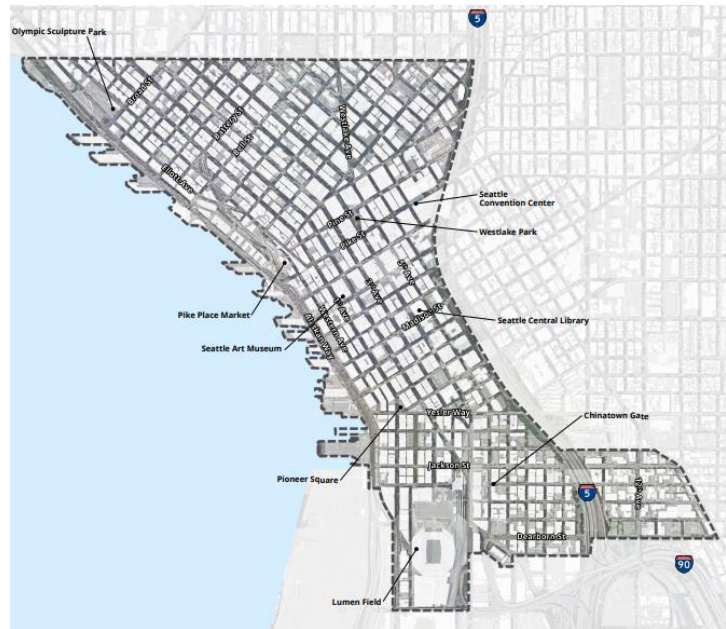
Purpose of the Downtown Activation Plan is to:

Bring people back to Downtown Seattle now, while designing a future of Downtown Seattle that works for you – especially working people, families, and small business owners.

Downtown Boundaries

“Downtown is the heart of the city – it pumps energy and life into every neighborhood across the city and draws us in to celebrate what makes Seattle different, what makes us unique, and yes, what makes us cool.”

Markham McIntyre
Director, Office of Economic Development
April 2023



Public Opinion Research

Research conducted by [Avalanche Insights](#) in February 2023 asked Seattleites and nearby King County residents, “How well does Downtown Seattle serve the following groups? The percentage of respondents (n=761) who said somewhat to very well:

- 80% believe Downtown serves tech professionals and office workers well
- 75% believe Downtown serves tourists and visitors well
- Only 58% believe Downtown serves small business owners well
- Only 57% believe Downtown serves families with children well
- Only 48% believe Downtown serves people who are working class and low-income well

Looking forward, Seattleites say they want a Downtown that is:

- Vibrant: A busy, **thriving** Downtown, for **families** and **small businesses**
- Beautiful: A **clean and environmentally friendly** Downtown experience with new and improved **parks** and **green-spaces**
- Accessible: A **diverse** and **affordable** Downtown that is literally accessible with **improved parking, transit,** and traffic conditions
- Safe: A Downtown that **fosters belonging with improved safety,** reduced crime, and more housing for the homeless

Realizing a new future for Downtown Seattle

The pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to reimagine Downtown and who Downtown is for. Embracing this opportunity, we envision a different future for the heart of our city, one that is:

- A place that fosters a sense of belonging, safety and support
- Accessible to families with young children
- Affordable for those on a budget
- Environmentally friendly, green, and beautiful
- A place where small businesses can be successful and thrive
- Vibrant, active, and full of life

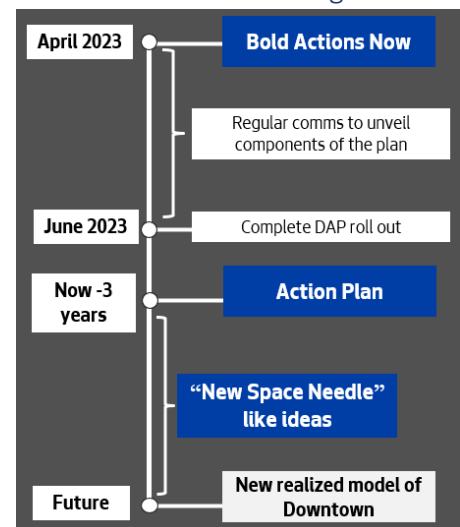
A Downtown that is YOU

Seven key goals will get us to that vision

1. Create a Downtown that is **safe and welcoming** for all
2. Transform Downtown into a **thriving residential neighborhood** for people from all walks of life to enjoy
3. Create a **vibrant and diversified Downtown worker ecosystem** that makes people want to work Downtown
4. Reinvigorate Downtown as the **commercial heartbeat of the city**
5. Re-envision Downtown as Seattle's **hub for arts, culture, and entertainment**
6. Make Downtown a **top destination for visitors** from the Puget Sound region and beyond
7. Commit to our ethos as the Emerald City by promoting a **healthy, sustainable, and green city**

The developing plan includes a continuum of actions and investments in three distinct categories

1. **Bold Actions NOW (April to June 2023):** to demonstrate forward movement even before the official launch of the DAP
2. **Action Plan:** Now-3-year tactical plan to increase activity Downtown and build the infrastructure for a more accessible downtown
3. **“New Space Needle” like ideas:** concepts and ideas that reach high and push us to think big for the transformation of Downtown Seattle



Acting now affirms our commitment to Downtown – The Heart of Our City

To do that, we are taking some **bold action now**. City departments and partners are working closely together to take three types of bold action now:

1. Filling vacant storefronts

- Establishing 16-20 new vacant storefront activations in the DAP zone by June

2. Cleaning and beautifying Downtown

- Placing MLB murals in key places Downtown to both beautify and generate buzz for the 2023 All Star Game
- Improve street and sidewalk lighting in areas where crime and disorder are concentrated

3. Activating public spaces

- Extending summer concert series into downtown Sound Transit tunnels with buskers
 - Increasing opportunities for food truck operators and pop-up food vendors to establish a presence downtown by waiving street-use permit fees
 - Submitting legislation to Council strengthening protections for industrial-maritime lands and allow the development of hotels, restaurants, bars, entertainment facilities, and approximately 3,000 new housing units
- Major events throughout the summer will drive foot traffic and create an opportunity for additional activating events
 - The Mayor is prepared to make public commitments now that stabilize Downtown and lay the groundwork for long-term, sustainable change, such as:
 - Mayor Harrell announced an Executive Order in April to disrupt fentanyl and open-air drug use. This will be coupled with SPD efforts aimed at narcotics traffickers.
 - Mayor Harrell will introduce an omnibus bill seeking legislative actions in the DAP zone, including changes to zoning, sign code, and other actions to stimulate investments Downtown.
 - Downtown workers are still an important part of the revitalization equation. Nordstrom, Microsoft, Amazon, and Starbucks have all announced plans for Seattle workers to return to office. Other private and public employers are also exploring plans to bring office workers back at least three days a week with an aim to announce intentions in the coming months.
 - The City is also putting resources toward beautifying and activating key public spaces right away, including:
 - **City Hall Park** - City Hall Park will reopen June 15 after significant renovation, with the potential for street closure community events.
 - **Public Art and Murals** - ARTS & OED are working with partners to get murals downtown to beautify the area as part of the graffiti abatement strategy. Seattle Sports Commission is also partnering on murals around the DAP zone.

- **Expansion of MID program & CID focused services**- Encourage City Council to approve 10-year extension of MID and make one-time contribution to expand service MID cleaning services and fund new trash, litter, and graffiti removal in CID.
- **One Seattle Day of Service, May 20** - Local leaders and residents of Seattle will join together to roll up their sleeves and give back with volunteer opportunities in neighborhoods across the City.
- **Third Avenue & Retail Core** - City staff are working with partners to explore creative use options to activate spaces, including storefront activations with Seattle Restored.
- **Pike between 1st and 2nd** - Make Pike, between 1st and 2nd a pedestrian zone for summer programs and activities.

Stabilizing Downtown in the near-term will lay the foundation for a future that serves *all* of us

Launching new and scaling existing initiatives over the next three years will set us on a course to achieving our seven goals.

1. Public Safety: Create a Downtown that is safe and welcoming for all

Strategies:

- A. Take action to address open-air synthetic drug use
- B. Redirect at-risk populations toward job opportunities
- C. Lay a foundation for behavioral health treatment in Seattle

Initiatives included in April 2023 Executive Order

- Expansion of Seattle Fire Department Health One pilot program to include overdose response unit dedicated to quickly engaging overdose survivors to increase acceptance of services or referrals
- Provide alternative incentives to synthetic drug users through contingency management funded through a state grant.

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Create **opportunity fellowships** for Downtown drug users and those have been involved in a misdemeanor to get connected with local employer for 1-2 years job pilot programs.
- **Scale outreach efforts** across Third Ave to provide a 24-hour presence to support visitors and provide connection to services for drug users, including the potential to deploy mobile stations.
- **Healthcare for the Homeless – Mobile Medical program** to provide walk-in care for people experiencing homelessness or recently homeless.
- Create a Seattle treatment center or **community crisis clinic** for synthetic drug users and individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis to receive immediate care and stabilization.

2. Residential: Transform Downtown into a thriving residential neighborhood for people from all walks of life to enjoy

Strategies:

- A. Enhance livability for existing residents
- B. Attract new residents to come live Downtown
- C. Increase supply and affordability of housing

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Organize Downtown **neighborhood night markets** with food stalls, performances, vendors, etc. at City Hall Park and other parks in Downtown
- Make **environmental enhancements and improvements** across Downtown, including lighting, vegetation, and cleaning
- Expand **satellite farmers markets** into Downtown
- Continue to work with developers to align city priorities with developer plans in order to drive the **expansion of affordable housing options** Downtown.
- Bring an **affordable grocery** store downtown
- Develop 8th and **Mercer Community Center**. A condition of the sale of the Mercer Mega-blocks included a provision that the developer would provide space for a new community center within the development.

3. Workers: Create an active and diversified Downtown worker ecosystem that makes people want to work Downtown

Strategies:

- A. Create a Downtown that people want to come to for work
- B. Build a diversified and resilient downtown worker economy
- C. Leverage office infrastructure to support businesses of all sizes

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Support remote work Downtown by establishing **coworking hubs in City-owned spaces**, such as Seattle Municipal Tower and the Central Library
- **Expand the range of street level uses** for real estate in order to support childcare, health and fitness, grocery stores and other commercial uses through the legislative package on more flexibility in building usage
- Improve development incentives for including **childcare or educational facilities** Downtown and communicate the incentives around exemptions that are currently allowed
- Pair major events at the Convention Center with proximate **street closures**

- Partner with Chamber and Momentum 2030 to host regular **public-private volunteer events**, with a focus on enhancing parks & green spaces

4. Retail: Reinvigorate Downtown as the commercial heartbeat of the city

Strategies:

- A. Enable new and creative uses to activate Downtown retail space
- B. Provide financial and regulatory support to help small and WMBEs succeed
- C. Attract new and retain existing Downtown retail establishments

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Leverage recently established permanent outdoor dining program and encourage creation of downtown **street eateries and outdoor dining spaces**
- Create a **new business recruitment team** to develop a formal retail recruitment strategy, engage with owners of vacant storefronts, fill office space, and diversify the types of businesses located and operating Downtown
- Push **legislation to allow development** of hotels, restaurants, bars, and entertainment facilities in the stadium area south of Pioneer Square and change zoning and land use policy to support small businesses through downtown
- Scale up **small business support** and legal assistance, including investing in an "anchor strategy" in partnership with UW, Seattle U, and Tabor 100 to accelerate growth of BIPOC entrepreneurs.
- Acquire new commercial space and create affordable leases for small businesses or pop-ups through **Master Leasing**
- Establish the **Downtown Rebuilding Fund** to seek external matching funds from businesses and philanthropy for various projects, such as Seattle Restored, Storefront Repair, and other specific projects

5. Art, Culture & Entertainment: Re-envision Downtown as Seattle’s hub for arts, culture, and entertainment

Strategies:

- A. Make Downtown a destination for performing arts experiences
- B. Invest in the Downtown artist community
- C. Enhance the visual/aesthetic appeal of Downtown spaces

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Create a **designated arts, entertainment, culture district** along the proposed streetcar line with more integrated public installations and experiences celebrating the history of Downtown Seattle and our deep connect to arts and entertainment

DRAFT – WORK IN PROGRESS – THIS IS NOT THE FINAL PLAN

- Fill empty retail spaces Downtown by **providing discounted rent to artists for studio space** over the next 3 years as an intermediate step to finding a full-time, market-rate renter. This can work in combination with Seattle Restored.
- **First Thursday Gallery Connector** (Shuttle that acts as a precursor to the culture connector streetcar). Connect the concentration of galleries around 3rd and Washington with galleries around Occidental and Jackson with a route along either S Washington St or S Main St during the first Thursday of each month
- Request the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board issue “**sip ‘n stroll**” permits for Downtown programs and events so patrons can carry a beverage as they walk through night markets, special weekend events, and activities leading up to major sporting and entertainment events.

6. Tourism: Make Downtown a top destination for visitors from the Puget Sound region and beyond

Strategies:

- A. Increase local and regional visitation to Downtown spaces
- B. Attract tourists from outside the region to visit Seattle
- C. Enhance connectivity to and from Downtown spaces, especially between waterfront, Seattle Center, stadia, and the Convention Center

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Install **network of kiosks** Downtown with digital programming (wayfinding, information about events, etc.) to help pedestrians navigate downtown.
- **Northwest Native Canoe Center.** Design and construct 2000SF building for the Canoe Carving Center. The building including indoor Canoe carving area, outdoor canoe carving area, indoor restroom, workroom to prep food and two closets and exterior restroom will be used by the park users.
- Integrate **transit passes into tickets for events** (exists with Climate Pledge arena, potential to expand to Lumen Field and T-Mobile park) in partnership with county and sports arenas
- Expand the scope and scale of the Special Events Office to create **a pipeline of ongoing festivals, markets, and events** that represent the diversity of Downtown and Seattle and create a steady state of energy year-round

7. Green City: Commit to our ethos as the Emerald City by promoting a healthy, sustainable, and green city

Strategies:

- A. Beautify Downtown through increasing connections to nature
- B. Invest in a sustainable, low-carbon future for Downtown

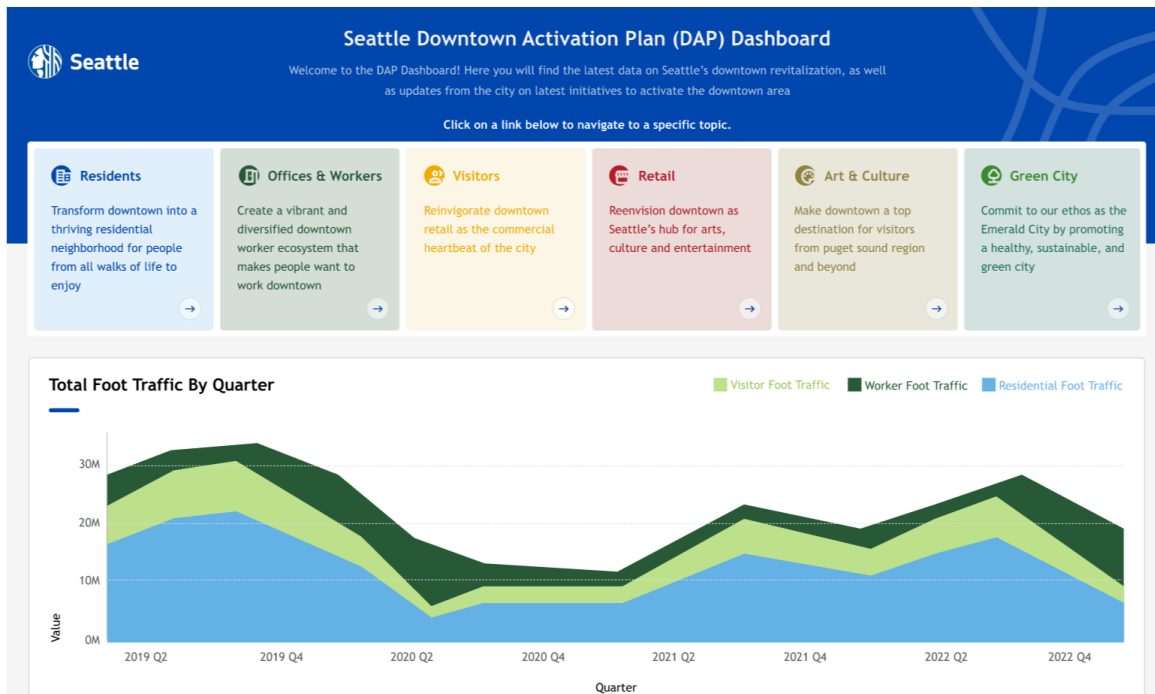
C. Activate Downtown greenspaces and parks

Ideas under consideration – for discussion purposes only

- Pilot **Green & Healthy Street** with permanent closure of streets like Pike from 1st to 2nd, Occidental Ave for pedestrians only, with deliveries allowed at certain times
- Encourage **repurposing of rooftops and underutilized urban land** for productive landscapes (e.g., rooftop design competition)
- Establish an **engaging pedestrian corridor connecting Pike Place Market to the Museum of History & Industry MOHAI**). The corridor will be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike as they commute to work, shop, and experience our vibrant, evolving city.
- **Hire a Seattle "City Urban Forester"** and improve tree canopy and street trees downtown
- Work with women and minority owned businesses (WMBEs), to provide support and incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles, to improve air quality downtown.
- Highlight, publicize, and activate **the publicly available decks, parks on private property, and rooftops in the City.**

Accountability

To create accountability, we will track progress and success via a public-facing dashboard.



Success will look like:

- Reduction in fentanyl / meth overdoses
- Reduction in emergency medical responses

- Increased housing occupancy
- 60% of people working Downtown 3+ days a week
- Increased retail spend downtown,
- Increased visits to cultural institutions
- Increased public transit ridership
- Increased foot traffic outside working hours
- ...and many other indicators

As we look to the future, “New Space Needle”-like ideas will transform Downtown

“Today, we find ourselves needing this kind of approach and bold vision yet again: a form of Space Needle Thinking that will put us on the cutting edge of building our future city.”

- Mayor Bruce Harrell, 2023 State of the City

We will build toward a clear vision for Downtown Seattle – a vision that makes Downtown the heart of our city.

Why “New Space Needles”?

Not literally a new Space Needle. These are concepts and ideas that reach high and push us to think big for the transformation of Downtown Seattle.

Each concept has an anchoring investment and is enhanced by an entire experience built around that anchor investment. They will require a significant investment of resources and coordination among public and private partners.

Downtown will look and feel different as a result. Downtown will be:

- A place for local, small businesses and entrepreneurs to expand their reach and be in community
- A neighborhood where residents and visitors of all ages can enjoy the outdoors in the city
- Engaging and interactive with intentional, accessible art installations and experiences

Concept 1: An arts, culture, & entertainment district built along the streetcar line

A sprawling arts, culture and entertainment district connected by the Culture Connector Streetcar. The public Culture Connector Streetcar will take people along an established route to arts, culture and entertainment destinations throughout downtown. Stops will be located along the route, allowing individuals to visit multiple venues with ease in a single day...or multiple! Imagine public and performance art curated along the route for more interactive programming and live experiences that will captivate streetcar audiences.

Concept 2: Vertical neighborhoods along Third Avenue

While downtown has historically been the center of business and commerce, it's time to transform downtown into a neighborhood. Changes to zoning codes will allow for the development of residential neighborhoods that can be built upwards and single buildings will serve multiple purposes. Code changes will incentivize mixed use buildings with street-level spaces dedicated to community assets such as K-8 schools, childcare facilities, community gathering spaces, or family services, and mixed-income residential options within the levels above.

Concept 3: Westlake Center – The Heart of the City

What connects the neighborhoods across the city? Before the Light Rail, it was the bus tunnel that brought commuter, visitors and residents alike to our city's central gathering place – Westlake Center. Now, we have a new opportunity to reclaim Westlake as the “Heart of the City”, making it a world-class plaza that reinvigorates Downtown Seattle's community commons, and connects people to Seattle Center. Westlake will become once again the central gathering place for Seattleites, brought to life with interactive art installations, state of the art technology, and year-round programming that welcomes Seattleites from all walks of life.

Concept 4: 24/7 District for nightlife and life at night

Even if we want to reclaim Downtown as a neighborhood and the Heart of the City, it's still Downtown – a busy place with lots of new and everyday things going on both day and night. Right now, there may be nightlife but there's not so much life at night. This is for the resident who needs to get some groceries after working the late shift to the visitors who want to grab a late dinner after a movie or show. What do you wish you could do if we could be “sleepless in Seattle”?

Concept 5: Creating a Green Canopy above the rooftops Downtown

Whether you're nature-obsessed or nature-averse, there's nothing like Seattle summers with 10pm sunsets and the massive trees changing color every fall all over the city. That's what makes us the Emerald City – a city that is committed to taking care of and enjoying the natural world around us. Reaching our goals of 30% canopy coverage will be more attainable by maximizing downtown rooftops. Creating more green spaces, and opportunities to engage young people in learning more about the natural ecosystem.

Concept 6: Building a massive all ages play space Downtown

What if you could play a pickup game of basketball with your favorite Storm player? Or learn some cool soccer tricks from the Sounders? While our beloved sports teams may have seasons, that doesn't mean we can't stay active and connected all year-round. With a state-of-the-art sports facility based in Downtown, we can bring people of all ages, families of all types, professional and amateur players alike, to keep loving the game – no matter the season. This could look like a massive recreation center, world class courts for tournament play, indoor/outdoor areas for play and recreation.

Concept 7: Establishing a BIPOC community market or “mercado” around the heart of the city

Are you a small business owner without a storefront? Are you looking to share your craft and products across the city and world? Mercados, translated to “markets” in English, are community-centric entrepreneurial spaces meant for connection, goods exchange and learning about those we share space with. This initiative could start with a Multimillion-dollar fund to support 100s of small CBOs over the

next four years for the development of brick-and-mortar mercados to create physical spaces, visibility, and shared resources (e.g., commercial kitchens) for small businesses that will bring life and culture to all Seattle.

Concept 8: A Makerspace for Innovation + Entrepreneurship in partnership with our flagship colleges

A city rooted in community must commit to providing access to resources for people to explore the possibilities of their future. How can we bring exploration, creative entrepreneurship and young people into the heart of our city? We can bring the worlds of work and education together in a makerspace where students can earn their degrees, participate in paid training, to see that their dreams can become a reality here, in Downtown Seattle, and wherever their dreams take them.

Concept 9: Home to the world’s tallest cross laminated timber high rise

As a leader in sustainability and center for the national timber industry, Seattle is uniquely positioned to be a leader in environmentally sustainable construction. In the spirit of the Space Needle, imagine Seattle being home to the world’s tallest high rise built from cross laminated timber. This would be a firm demonstration of our leadership and response to climate change, drawing visitors from around the globe to learn from our example.

But none of this will happen without you. Because Downtown is YOU

Here’s our invitation:

- Share your feedback. What do you think of this plan? Share via [this form](#).
- Be Downtown. Come to the heart of our city this summer and beyond.
- Make a commitment. Put resources toward bringing more life and vibrancy Downtown. Be a partner with us in advancing initiatives in the plan.
- Support this plan. When the full plan rolls out in June, show your support by attending press events and speaking out in favor of different components.

Invest in The Heart of Our City and we'll meet you there.