

EVANSTON THRIVES

RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

WHAT WE HEARD | SEPTEMBER 2022 - JANUARY 2023

WHAT IS A RETAIL ACTION PLAN?

The Evanston Thrives Retail District Action Plan is a highly focused, community engagement and business district market analysis to improve the quality and mix of retail, food and entertainment offerings in Evanston's eight business districts.

- 1 Downtown
- 2 Central Street
- 3 Hill Arts
- 4 Noyes Street
- 5 Central Evanston
- 6 West Village/West End
- 7 Main-Dempster Mile
- 8 Howard Street
- 9 Southwest Evanston



PROJECT GOALS

- Reimagine our neighborhood business districts, balancing market realities with bold and creative design.
- Protect and reinforce our city's most precious assets at the neighborhood level.
- Celebrate the unique identity of each district—past, present and future stories—through branding and placemaking.
- Identify the ideal use of ground floor space for each district and citywide.
- Build a toolkit to ensure more equitable investment and support for local businesses
- Inform the City's business recruitment and retention efforts in these areas.



WHO DID WE TALK TO?

Interviews:

- Evanston's Council People
- Mayor Biss + Leadership
- Parks & Recreation Leadership
- SSA Managers (Central, MDM, Downtown)
- Local Commercial RE Broker Interviews

Focus Groups:

- Open Call to Businesses (breakouts by Districts: MDM, Central, Downtown, Howard, and West End)
- Creative, Arts, & Entertainment Businesses
- Newly-opened Businesses
- Black Business Consortium representatives
- Downtown Residents

Business-owner Task Force:

A group of 30 business - and/or property-owners in Evanston who volunteered to participate in regular project input sessions.

Other interviews + listening sessions:

- Kick-off presentation to Department heads
- Update presentation to the City of Evanston Economic Development Committee
- Pop-Up at MDM, Church & Dodge, and Downtown Fall Fests
- Participation in Monthly/Quarterly meetings: Hill Arts District, Howard, and Central Evanston (CEBA)
- Presentation to representatives from the leadership of major companies
- Northwestern University leadership
- Engagement with ETHS (Superintendent & Director of Safety)

City of Evanston Staff Work Sessions:

City work sessions included staff related to signage permitting, event coordination, and infrastructure.

TASK FORCE GUIDANCE

Example Questions:

- Does the area around your business have a strong identity, and can you describe it in a few words?
- What is the single biggest priority to the success of your business in Evanston, today?
- Which geographies outside of Evanston are in competition for your business?
- Would you start your business in Evanston again?
- What do you hope to learn from this process?

What we heard:

1. **City policies** and staff disposition are not leveraging the creativity of local business owners.
2. Evanston has lost its strength as a **destination** on the North Side.
3. **The Lakefront** is an incredible, undervalued/under celebrated asset in Evanston.
4. **Tax Structure** affects Evanston's ability to compete.
5. **Crime and panhandling** are impacting businesses.
6. It is difficult to host **events** in Evanston.
7. Some districts get more **love** than others.
8. **Parking** is a pain point, but the issue varies by district.
9. Success equates to visible change to the **physical environment**.

Task Force feedback shaped the public survey tool.

FOCUS GROUPS GUIDANCE

What we heard:

- Participants want to see action resulting from this plan.
- Industries and Information are siloed; information is difficult to find.
- Evanstonians appreciate local, unique, and quirky businesses.
- Desire for more to do, third places, and entertainment.

About Downtown:

- There **needs to be a clearer idea for the future of Downtown.**
- **Panhandling continues to be a problem** in Downtown. Residents feel the issue is not receiving sufficient attention.
- Downtown may be catering to the functional needs of students, but **missing the entertainment and third places** that would improve the general appeal of Downtown.
- Evanston - particularly Downtown Evanston - **no longer has cache in the region** that it once had and COVID isn't the only thing to blame.
- There is **no advocate for Downtown** within the City / Sense that no single political entity or staff is focused on Downtown.
- There is a perception that the increase in medical buildings Downtown is **diminishing street-level activity.**

NOW IT'S ALL GENERIC. "LOCAL OWNER, AMBIANCE, QUIRKS, AND PLACE YOU WANT TO BRING OUT OF TOWNERS" -

Downtown Resident, about Downtown

"ABOUT 20 COLLEGE TOWNS TO VISIT THIS FALL, I WANT TO SEE EVANSTON ON THAT LIST." - *Downtown Business Owner*

"PEOPLE DON'T WANDER THE CITY TO EXPLORE- THEY HEAD TO EXACTLY WHERE THEY WANT TO HEAD TO." - *Business Owner*

"DAVIS STREET USED TO BE THE NORTHSORE LEADER IN RESTAURANTS; USED TO BE MORE CHARMING" - *Downtown Resident*

"EVERY INDUSTRY HAS ITS OWN LITTLE SILO. IT IS THE GREATEST FAILING OF OUR CITY... IT IS THE SAME THING WITH THE ARTS. WE HAVE TRIED TO BRING RESOURCES TO THE TABLE AND FIND SYNERGIES BETWEEN MULTIPLE GROUPS. THE ARTS IN EVANSTON RUN UP AGAINST CERTAIN OBSTACLES - PARK PEOPLE DON'T WANT ANYTHING BUT GREEN AND BEACH PEOPLE DON'T WANT ANYTHING OTHER THAN SAND AND WATER. BUSINESSES DON'T WANT TO HAVE THINGS IN THE PUBLIC REALM." - *Arts, Creative, and Entertainment Business Focus Group*

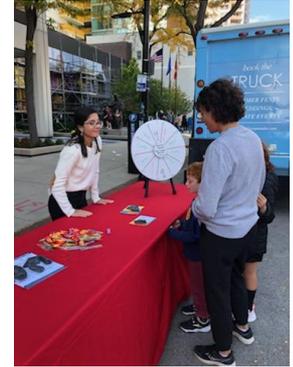
EVANSTON THRIVES COMMUNITY SURVEY

2,098 Surveys Completed

Public Survey was available July through November 2022.

It was available in English and Spanish. The survey was publicly announced by the City and distributed by City and SSA District communication channels.

- **Participation by all Wards**
- **All age groups and income categories are represented**
- **31% respondents are parents of children under 18 years**
- **Diverse participation** (optional self-identifying question)



COMMUNITY SURVEY PROMOTION | DIGITAL

Ebony

CENTRAL EVANSTON THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

CENTRAL THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

DOWNTOWN THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

THE PRACTICAL THEATRE CO.

HOWARD THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

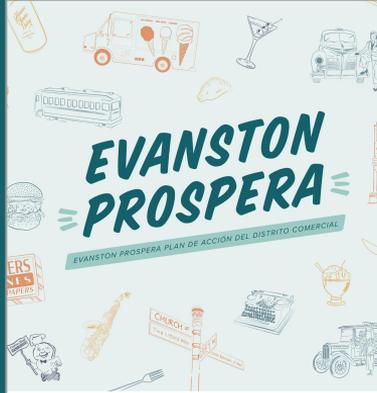
DID YOU KNOW?



Crush International Inc. was headquartered at 2201 Main Street in the 60s and 70s. The plant bottled both Orange Crush (created by a scientist) as well as Hines Root Beer (concocted by a pharmacist).

WWW.CITYOFEVANSTON.ORG/BUSINESS/EVANSTON-THRIVES

EVANSTON PROSPERA
EVANSTON PROSPERA PLAN DE ACCIÓN DEL DISTRITO COMERCIAL



WWW.CITYOFEVANSTON.ORG/BUSINESS/EVANSTON-THRIVES

DID YOU KNOW?



The Peacock Ice Cream Co. factory was housed at 2144 Ashland. Their signature flavor was peach, and they created other custom flavors for Ravinia and the Drake Hotel.

WWW.CITYOFEVANSTON.ORG/BUSINESS/EVANSTON-THRIVES

EVANSTON THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

Evanston Thrives! is an action plan to revitalize our retail districts.



#1. Central Street 2022 Central Street	#5. Downtown 710 Church Street
#2. Noyes 910 Noyes Street 824 Noyes Street	#6. West End 2000 Dempster Street
#3. Hill Arts 2121 Ashland Avenue	#7. Main-Dempster 860 Chicago Avenue
#4. Central Evanston 1901 Church Street 1823 Church Street	#8. Howard 623 W Howard Street

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NOYES THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

WEST END THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

HILL ARTS THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

FIREHOUSE
NEWSPAPERS
DATSUN

MAIN-DEMPSTER THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

COMMUNITY SURVEY PROMOTION | PUBLIC REALM





BUSINESS OWNERS

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

OVERVIEW

202
Business
Owners

30%
16-20+
Years of
Business

60%
Rent
Space

53%
Women-
Owned

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | CITY OF EVANSTON

- On average 51.5% of business owners selected “*I don’t know*” when asked about the effectiveness of the Evanston Economic Development Group.
- **MAINTAINING THE STREETScape** and **IMPLEMENTING MURAL/LOCAL ART** were the two categories where owners selected the most “*very effective*” and “*somewhat effective.*”

PRIORITIES FOR COMMERCIAL AREA

1. Supporting business and economic growth **(55.8%)**
2. Improving the pedestrian experience **(34.7%)**
3. Marketing your commercial area or retail district within Evanston **(28.4%)**

GRANT PROGRAMS

- Only **2% of owners have participated in or received funds** from the Great Merchants Grant Program.
- Only **7% of owners have participated in or received funds** from the Storefront Modernization Grant Program.

“From my understanding new businesses usually do not qualify for the storefront program, at least mine doesn’t, so how can we improve or repair storefronts when the buildings are old and property management doesn’t do it either.”

NORTHWESTERN AFFILIATED

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

GENERAL STATISTICS | NORTHWESTERN

71.5%

of NW affiliated surveyed are faculty,
staff or administrators

55.4%

want to use their campus cards off campus

50.9%

use walking as primary mode of travel



GENERAL

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

WHEN IT COMES TO EATING...

43.7%

prefer Downtown Evanston

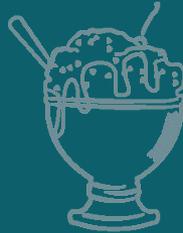


28.7%

prefer Main-Dempster

18.1%

prefer Central Street



"It would be great to have a casual and lovely coffee shop or restaurant on the lake for daily and evening options!"



WHEN IT COMES TO SHOPPING...

38.3%

prefer Downtown Evanston

26.2%

prefer Central Street

23.4%

prefer Main-Dempster

“I prefer shopping in Evanston, but I cannot always find what I need.”



WHEN IT COMES TO VISITORS...

48.8%

take visitors to
Downtown Evanston

22.6%

take visitors to
Central Street

16.9%

take visitors to
Main-Dempster

*"We take visitors to the lakefront,
Northwestern's campus (especially
Shakespeare Garden), Five & Dime, and
Union and Space."*



WHICH DISTRICT DO PEOPLE KNOW BEST?



34.2%
Main-Dempster



30.6%
Downtown Evanston



28.0%
Central Street

DOWNTOWN	HOWARD	CENTRAL STREET	NOYES
<p>"walkable" "friendly"</p> <p>"high concentration of restaurants and retail in small, walkable area"</p> <p><i>People want to make an evening out of the area - more events and nightlife.</i></p>	<p>"potential" "underdeveloped"</p> <p>"really missing pedestrian space without cars"</p> <p><i>People want investment in their community with more space for people.</i></p>	<p>"charming" "small-town feel"</p> <p>"diverse and unique mix of small shops, restaurants and services"</p> <p><i>People want a pet store, library, outdoor dining options, and experiential opportunities.</i></p>	<p>"chill atmosphere"</p> <p>"cozy & quiet"</p> <p>"It is quaint, small, and convenient"</p> <p><i>People want more reasons to visit Noyes - nightlife scene, events, and upscale options.</i></p>
HILL ARTS	CENTRAL EVANSTON	WEST END	MAIN DEMPSTER
<p>"neglected" "emerging"</p> <p>"industrial character"</p> <p><i>People want awareness that there are local spots worth visiting.</i></p>	<p>"residential" "easy"</p> <p>"I like the lights in the trees, as well as the flowers"</p> <p><i>People want more bars and restaurants to balance the residential feel.</i></p>	<p>"essential" "diverse"</p> <p>"convenient and affordable with plenty of free parking."</p> <p><i>People want larger sit-down restaurants, streetscape improvements, and public art.</i></p>	<p>"diverse" "neighborhood"</p> <p>"Very walkable and close to many public transit sources."</p> <p><i>People want outdoor seating and improved streetscape elements with more bars, restaurants, and bookstores.</i></p>



DOWNTOWN

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

DOWNTOWN EVANSTON | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- ***“The high concentration of restaurants and retail in small, walkable area.”***
- ***“I miss the ethnic arts festival and events with live music, Barnes & Noble, and the movie theater.”***
- ***“We need the movie theater back and dramatic theater and music. People need to be able to make an evening out of being in this area.”***
- ***“Street guides - signs at key intersections that have a map of what is nearby.”***
- ***“Fountain Square - when working, was a wonderful addition to downtown”***
- ***“Evanston is special because it has big-city amenities within a small-town atmosphere. The small-town feel is what makes Evanston stand out. Preserve it! Don't overdevelop the town. Support stand-alone retail businesses.”***

DOWNTOWN EVANSTON | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Bold + Confident

Downtown's Story

Downtown Evanston features the city's most diverse mix of retail brands, over 60 restaurants, and rooftop bars with a view. Its world-class arts and entertainment—including Evanston's cinema and entertainment complex and the Northlight Theater (coming soon)—are ripe for (re)discovery. Only a ½ mile from the shores of Lake Michigan and Northwestern's campus, you can see why over 6 million people visit downtown every year.

**These stories were crafted by the project team to capture the personalities and unique characteristics for each district.*



MAIN- DEMPSTER

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

MAIN-DEMPSTER MILE | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“Walkable from my home; enjoy being able to run errands without needing to get in the car.”*
- *“So many shopping and dining options”*
- *“It's close, and the shops located there are very nice. That is part of the reason I moved to this area specifically.”*
- *“It is very walkable/bikeable. There are many small, independently owned businesses frequented by folks from the neighborhood so that it has a lovely small-town feel.”*
- *“Evanston SPACE is a big draw and brings people from surrounding neighborhoods and suburbs.”*

MAIN-DEMPSTER MILE | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Walkable + Eclectic

MDM's Story

This walkable district features something for everyone—from vegetarian fare to Detroit style pizza to Argentine gelato. Check out a live show at Space or browse the many eclectic retail shops, galleries, and studios that line both Main and Dempster Streets.

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CENTRAL STREET

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

CENTRAL STREET | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“Eclectic mix of shops, restaurants, bakeries, and sweet shops, and places to take my grandchildren including pizza, chocolate, bakery, children's clothing, musical instruments, and a play park.”*
- *“It's charming and convenient, and it feels safe”*
- *“Feels neighborhood-y and I like that most of the businesses are close to each other. It's very walkable and with the multiple coffee shops, it gives me a reason to visit almost daily.”*
- *“Now that the North Branch Library is gone, Central Street lost public it's only bathroom facilities.”*
- *“My son loved the apple pie at Great Harvest so much that he bought one and carried it with him on the plane to NYC.”*

CENTRAL STREET | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Independent + Creative

Central Street's Story

This neighborhood district's name says it all— it's a corridor chock-full of independent stores, bakeries, coffee shops, boutiques, and restaurants. Bookended by two museums—the Evanston Arts Center and the Mitchell Museum—as well as Northwestern University's stadium, you'll find plenty of cultural, creative, and Big Ten inspiration here.

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HILL ARTS

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

neglected

locally mixed food

forgotten

rejuvenated
destination

abandoned

coming

emerging
brewery

small use

owned
convenient

ignored

What are the first three words that come to mind?

HILL ARTS | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“No one knows where Hill Arts is or why we’re not included with the rest of Simpson. We’re in the 5th ward but maybe we’re trying to pretend we’re not part of it?”*
- *“We want awareness that there are stores behind Walgreens.”*
- *“Industrial Character.”*
- *“It has my favorite takeout place, my favorite bar, and it's right by my house.”*
- *“A non-profit in the area partnered with 5th Ward neighbors and hosted a 5th Ward festival. The evening event was held in the Double Clutch, and everyone had an amazing time listening to live music and meeting people from across the city.”*

HILL ARTS | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Independent + Creative

Hill Art's Story

This hidden gem of Evanston is just waiting to be discovered. Several warehouses have been reimagined to house Double Clutch Brewery, Soul + Smoke BBQ, a Native American wellness center, and various art studios. With new investments in the area, including the City's skatepark and a community school, the district is poised to become a haven for families, foodies, and makers.

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HOWARD

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

HOWARD | THREE WORDS



What are the first three words that come to mind?

HOWARD | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“I’m really missing pedestrian space without cars. Once you create that, local businesses will thrive.”* - Local business owner
- *“It’s the city limits, so the north side of the street is Evanston and the south side is Chicago, which not everybody knows. The Evanston side has some great businesses - Good to Go, Peckish Pig, Palmhouse, and Sweet Temptations come to mind. The CTA stop is where you transfer from the purple line to the red line, but there’s also a lot of crime and drug activity near there.”*
- *“It’s underutilized because of the Chicago/Evanston divide.”*
- *“My husband and I had one of our first dates on the patio at Peckish Pig!”*

HOWARD | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Vibrant + International

Howard Street's Story

This vibrant commercial corridor district connects Evanston and Chicago and offers an impressive array of international food, including Jamaican, Cambodian, Central American, and good ol' fashioned Wisconsin-style fish fry. Grab a drink from Peckish Pig or Ward 8, stroll the street checking out an amazing collection of murals, and then check out a live performance at Good to Go Jamaican or Theo Ubique Cabaret Theater.

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NOYES

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

NOYES | THREE WORDS



What are the first three words that come to mind?

NOYES | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“Sleepy vibe convenient to the train, anchored by a solid grocery store, a good coffee, and a few good restaurants. Almost nothing is open late though.”*
- *“High amount of local, independent businesses with a Northwestern student vibe.”*
- *“Has grocery, CTA, restaurants, parks, and a civic center.”*
- *“Everyone wants a late night bar!”*
- *“We want festival lights, firepits, and an al fresco dining area.”*
- *“The owners of D&D go above and beyond for the neighborhood and have also planned special events in their parking lot. All of the owners love the street and seem to thrive here.”*

NOYES | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Cozy + Quaint

Noyes's Story

A stone's throw from Northwestern University, this cozy district is home to long-standing Evanston eateries, including Al's Deli and Dave's Italian Kitchen. After grabbing some hot brew from Coffee Lab, walk through Tallmadge Park and the Noyes Cultural Center, which hosts several performances, exhibitions, and events throughout the year.

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WEST END

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

WEST END | COMMUNITY QUOTES

- *“Ease of access - parking is plentiful.”*
- *“More working class families and more laid back. Less of the ultra privileged.”*
- *“For me, it has one store with strong appeal - Valli, where I shop weekly - otherwise, it's pretty barren.”*
- *“West Village is a unique blend of commercial, retail, healthcare/healing center, shopping mall, and arts district.”*
- *“It needs better dining options and patio dining.”*
- *“We love Mike at Play it Again Sports! My kids feel so comfortable going there alone to window shop.”*

WEST END | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Essential + Convenient

West End's Story

This area has historically been home to Evanston's industrial and manufacturing businesses. Today, the neighborhood includes Temperance Brewing Company, Ward Manufacturing, and other manufacturing companies. Sit out on Temperance's patio and play board games or check out the district's collection of businesses focused on recreation, wellness, and the arts. And while there, don't forget to visit the Valli Produce grocery store, featuring ingredients from all over the world.

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CENTRAL EVANSTON

WHAT WE HEARD | EVANSTON THRIVES RETAIL ACTION PLAN

- *“This is mostly residential. There is a shop for food, but otherwise it could be a food desert. We actually do most of our shopping elsewhere.”*
- *“Not much retail here. Wish there were more restaurants and bars.”*
- *“I like the lights in the trees, as well as the flowers.”*
- *“We hope this area grows.”*
- *“C&W started their store to help the community.”*

CENTRAL EVANSTON | ITS FUTURE STORY*

Personality

Cultural Heart + Soul

Central Evanston's Story

In the heart of Evanston, this district has had a long history as cultural center for the city's African American community. Many of the first black-owned businesses in the city were started in this district, and some have been passed down through generations, like Ebony Barbershop. Indulge in homemade ice cream from C+W Market and Ice cream Parlor and explore the district and its legacy.

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Stay tuned for more
project updates
coming soon!

