

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVANSTON THRIVES

RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

Prepared for the
City of Evanston

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

From the moment I started running for mayor half a year into the pandemic, we've spoken of change amid recovery. Over the past few years, we've found that it's not enough to mitigate the harms of the virus and simply rebuild what we had before. The world is changing and our community's success will be defined by our ability to anticipate and adapt to those changes. This is perhaps most true of our business districts, which will be forever transformed by the explosion of remote work as well as new consumption patterns.

The great news is that our city offers so much. We are home to renowned global institutions, growing companies, and over 30,000 households. Families, young professionals, and new businesses move to Evanston because they want to experience our city's dynamism—the multiple forms of transit throughout the city and into Chicago, the density, the lakefront, and, most importantly, our diversity and cultural vibrancy. Our business districts—eight of them!—are gems of our neighborhoods and economic engines for our community.

It's time for Evanston to own its position as the big city on the North Shore. While being a big city does come with challenges, it's time for us to lean into the opportunities that come with this position. Our size, density, and physical and cultural connection to urban life set us apart from every other community on the North Shore. Our city is also strong, and we need to embrace changes that will make us even stronger and more resilient in the coming years. Change is difficult, but we are prepared to push through a period of discomfort for the betterment of Evanston.

Our businesses are the engine for placemaking and activation in Evanston. In order for them to thrive, the City must support them in their efforts to innovate and adapt. Now that workers largely no longer have to show up to the office and shoppers have limitless online options, we have to rethink things—how we design places that foster walkability and encourage residents and visitors to stay awhile and how we create new opportunities for cultural and entertainment options within each one of our beloved districts. This will require us to improve City processes and ensure a culture that will embrace change. It will require Evanston being a city that hears an innovative idea, and instead of responding with “no we've never done it that way”, says “here's how we can make that work”.

This is why I am excited to announce the launch of the Evanston Thrives Action Plan. Its fundamental message is that Evanston's business districts should be celebrated and tied together through strong City support, communications, and design. Now that we have this roadmap, it's time to start implementing—not because every word of this will be easy or uncontroversial, but because in these complex times, bold change is required to achieve the success that we know lies within our grasp.

I hope you share my enthusiasm to get to work and create Evanston's next exciting chapter!

Best,



Daniel Biss
Mayor
City of Evanston



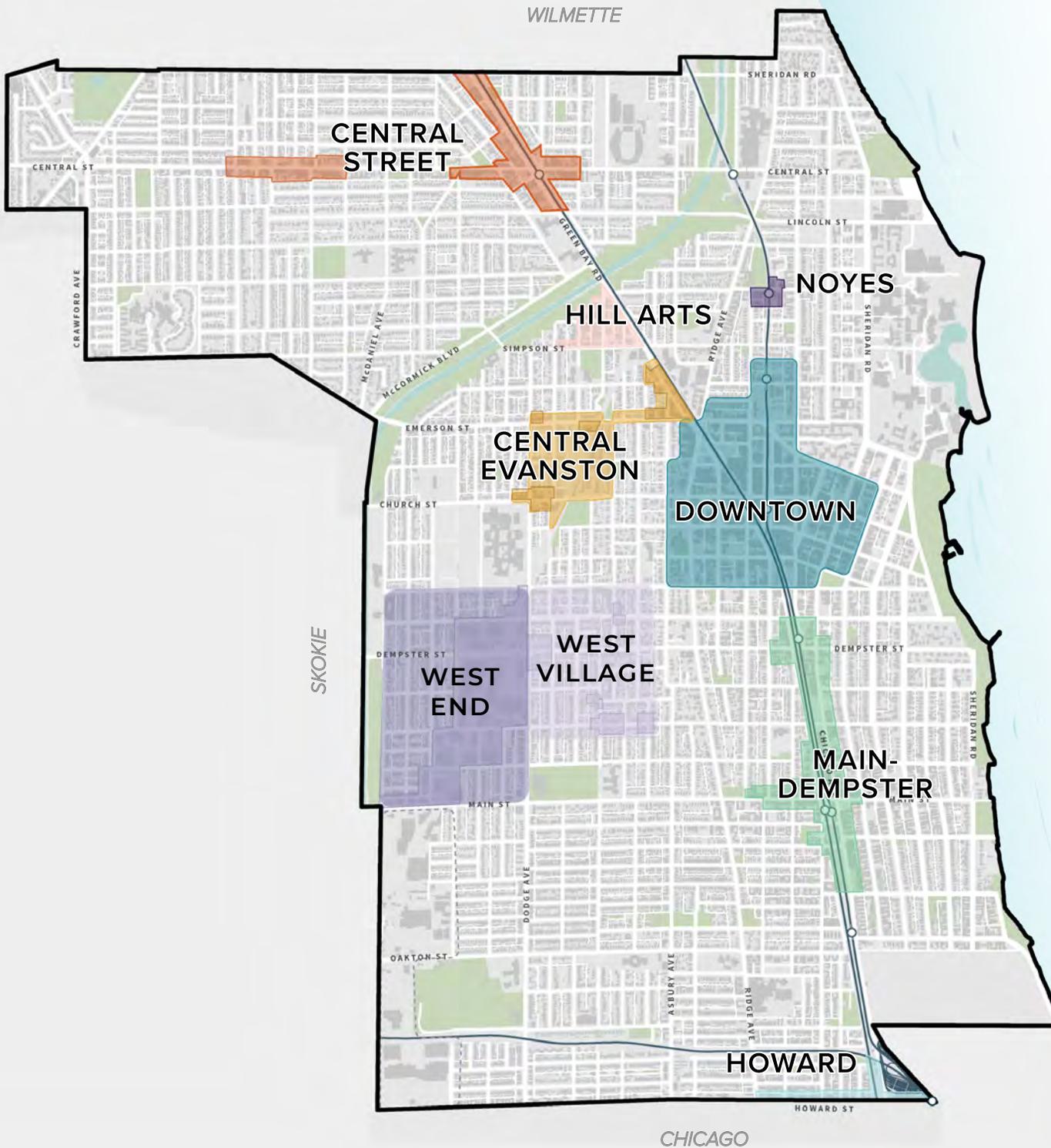
GOALS & PROCESS

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan was initiated in July 2022. It involved thousands of unique voices throughout the community, including business owners, residents, visitors, and City staff and elected officials. The result? A detailed Action Plan for business supports, events and programming, tenant attraction, placemaking and marketing.

At the project outset, the Evanston Thrives team worked with the City to establish the following 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.**



EVANSTON'S RETAIL DISTRICTS

The city of Evanston's Economic Development Division (ED) administers business-related grants and programs and manages business registration citywide. Within each of the City's eight retail districts - including Downtown - ED also helps to coordinate and champion physical improvements to the streets, sidewalks, and public spaces as they move through budgeting, permitting, and implementation by other city departments. Three of Evanston's retail districts are also designated "Special Service Areas" (SSA) - Downtown Evanston, Central Street, and Main-Dempster Mile. SSAs are financing tools often used to support and implement a wide array of services, physical improvements, and other activities in retail districts.

An SSA is a tax levy established by ordinance for a defined area for a defined period (10 years) with support from local property owners which allows the City to tax and deliver services to these defined districts. Each SSA has a designated managing organization, and the tax collected goes directly toward funding for the SSA's administration, marketing, and business development, and to fund and maintain public way improvements specific to that area. This means that for Central Street East and West, Main Dempster Mile, and Downtown, the business owners have an additional advocate and resource working on behalf of the district as a whole. One critical goal of the Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan is to ensure that the businesses operating in non-SSA districts have equitable access to resources and support provided by the city of Evanston.



WHO SHAPED THE PLAN

Thousands of voices were heard throughout the Evanston Thrives process—from residents to business owners to business district representatives to city staff and elected officials. A Task Force of over 30 businesses throughout Evanston helped to guide the process and resulting vision and action items. Pop-up workshops, a community survey with over 2,100 responses, and stakeholder interviews also helped to identify the biggest challenges, priority areas, and placemaking interventions featured in this Plan.

CITY WORK SESSIONS

Mayor Biss + Council Members
City Manager + Departmental Leadership

SSA MANAGER ONGOING GUIDANCE

SSA Managers (Central Street, Downtown Evanston, Main-Dempster Mile)

FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

Open call to businesses (breakouts by district: MDM, Central, Downtown, Howard, and West End)
Creative, arts, and entertainment businesses
Newly-opened businesses
Black Business Consortium
Downtown residents
Local commercial real estate brokers

BUSINESS-OWNER TASK FORCE

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

LISTENING SESSIONS

Project kick-off with department heads
Presentations to the City of Evanston Economic Development Committee
Pop-up at Downtown Evanston, Church & Dodge, and Main-Dempster Mile Fall Fests
Participation in monthly/quarterly meetings: Hill Arts, Howard, and Central Evanston Business Association
Presentation to representatives from the leadership of major companies
Northwestern University leadership

CITY OF EVANSTON STAFF WORK SESSIONS

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

"Local owner, ambiance, quirks, and place you want to bring out of towners"
- Downtown Resident, about Downtown

"I saw an article 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 Northshore 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."
- Arts, Creative, and Entertainment Business Focus Group

Citywide Survey

General public responses:

- ▶ The Survey was **available July through November 2022** in both English and Spanish.
- ▶ A total of **2,098 surveys** completed.
- ▶ Participation by **all Wards**.
- ▶ **All age groups and income categories** were represented.
- ▶ 31% respondents were **parents of children under 18 years**.



Business-owner responses:

- ▶ A total of **202 business owners** participated.
- ▶ 30% have been in business **16-20+ years**.
- ▶ **60% rent their space**.
- ▶ **53% are owned by women**.
- ▶ On average 51.5% of business owners selected **“I don’t know”** when asked about the effectiveness of the **Evanston Economic Development Division**.
- ▶ The top categories where owners selected the most “very effective” and “somewhat effective” were **maintaining the streetscape** and **implementing mural/local art**.



Responses from Northwestern students, staff, & faculty:

- ▶ 72% of Northwestern-affiliated surveyed were **faculty, staff or administrators**.
- ▶ Students were asked to consider a scenario in which they could use their campus card for payment at off-campus businesses. **55% of students surveyed would want to use their campus cards if they were an accepted form of payment at off-campus retailers and restaurants**.
- ▶ 51% of students **walk as primary mode of travel**.



WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

Evanston offers a density and variety within the retail environment unrivaled on the North Shore. With access to local and regional transit networks, Evanston's market is bolstered by its connectivity in the region. Evanston is home to a Big Ten University with 18,000 diverse, high-performing students. Perhaps most notably among North Shore communities, Evanston balances desirable elements of urban and suburban lifestyles by offering the benefits of a "big city"—like multiple theater venues and entertainment destinations and retail amenities, which are substantial (e.g. two Whole Foods, a Trader Joe's, two Target's, and more)—and the high-quality and family-friendly amenities that appeal to those seeking a calmer pace and quieter settings, including the nationally renowned lakefront beaches of the North Shore. The product that Evanston offers is unique and fundamentally different in variety and scale than other North Shore downtown areas, and competitively unique when compared to the largest retail node in direct competition, Old Orchard Westfield Mall in Skokie.

The stores and destinations anchoring downtown today are enviable staples for a downtown area. An urban format Target, Whole Foods, and the newly reopened AMC theater play a critical role in generating foot traffic for other nearby businesses as well as affirming the submarket's viability within the tenant community. These types of retailers reinforce the flexibility to live, work, and play in Downtown. Downtown areas like Evanston's, which exist as mixed-use centers, have the highest adaptability due to their physical and social infrastructure.

City support for retail businesses must follow the evolution of retail recovery.

Downtown areas and commercial districts across the country are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, many downtown areas and retail districts were competing with retail growth farther afield in surrounding suburban areas. In many cities, downtowns were already losing—not gaining—retail market share before the pandemic closures hit. The pandemic furthered this trend. Cook County data indicates that visits to 'Retail & Recreation' and 'Workplaces' destination categories were each down 11% in late 2022 from the baseline value (Jan-Feb 2020).

Although several restaurants and retailers have returned to more typical hours, some impacts of the pandemic will linger much longer and continue to impact the experience of operating customer-facing businesses, including (1) lower or slower sales, (2) online ordering, pick-up, and delivery services, (3) strong customer preference for open-air seating, and (4) reduced daytime population related to loss of major employers and remote work of office-workers.

The Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan was initiated by the City of Evanston in July 2022 to develop a framework to enhance the quality and mix of retail, food, and entertainment offerings throughout Evanston's eight retail districts. The pandemic forced cities to be more flexible and adapt quickly—two things municipal entities aren't widely known for. The cities that are performing best today are those that institutionalized policy changes, invested strategically, and recommitted to their downtown and retail districts. The recommendations included in this plan respond to the needs of Evanston's businesses in the current moment to better equip the City to respond as retail recovery evolves.

Despite what you may have heard, this is not the retail apocalypse.

Despite much hand-wringing in the national media about the dominance of e-commerce and its impact on bricks and mortar retail, statistics show that brick-and-mortar retail leasing has been robust. Roughly the same amount of retail space has been leased in the last twelve months nationwide as in 2019. Meanwhile, 2022 was the first year since 2016 that store openings exceeded closures, with the latter declining by 61% year-over-year in the first eleven months of 2021. And despite early-pandemic projections of ten years of e-commerce growth, e-commerce's share of total retail is roughly 12.9%, representing just an increase of 150 basis points from 1Q 2020.

The pandemic forced cities to be more flexible and adapt quickly—two things municipal entities aren't widely known for. The cities that are performing best today are those that institutionalized policy changes, invested strategically, and recommitted to their downtown and retail districts.

Now is the time for Evanston to critically evaluate the next steps in the evolution of Downtown and retail districts across the city. This research, engagement, and strategies are grounded in helping the City and their partners support and grow the corridors, districts, and centers that make Evanston unique.



WHO SHAPED THE PLAN

Thousands of voices were heard throughout the Evanston Thrives process—from residents to business owners to business district representatives to city staff and elected officials. A Task Force of over 30 businesses throughout Evanston, helped to guide the process and resulting vision and action items. Pop-up workshops, a community survey with over 2,100 responses, and stakeholder interviews also helped to identify the biggest challenges, priority areas, and placemaking interventions featured in this plan.

It's time for Evanston to own its position as the big city on the North Shore.

To realize this, the City must drive toward creating **more action** and **more investment** in four critical ways:

- 1. Invest in events and programming that provide more to do to attract customers and bring residents together.**
- 2. Fund placemaking initiatives that strengthen and reinforce the identify of retail districts across Evanston.**
- 3. Shift toward a proactive economic development strategy to get ahead of local business needs and attract new businesses to Evanston.**
- 4. Forge a symbiotic relationship with Northwestern University that will benefit both residents, students and businesses.**

The Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan is organized into five chapters: Business Supports, Events & Programming, Tenanting & Attraction, Marketing, and Placemaking. Each of these chapters focuses on the city as a whole with a specific focus on the Downtown area integrated throughout. The plan includes 60 actions, each with incremental steps that advance toward these four fundamental outcomes.

Actions outlined in the plan will feed directly into the City's Economic Development Division's work plan for the next 10 years. But, implementation of the Retail District Action Plan will require far more collaboration among the City's departments and external partners.

MORE THAN ATTRACTION STRATEGY

The Evanston Thrives process held a mirror up to the City's policies, processes, and funding strategy to evaluate how the City can be a better place for businesses and entrepreneurs, a stronger competitor for retail growth, and a more enticing destination for customers. What was revealed through market analysis and input from thousands of unique voices throughout the community, including business owners, residents, visitors, City staff and elected officials is that Evanston's Retail Action Plan must address much more than retail attraction and leakage.

- The City's staff and partners want clear direction from leadership and commitment of resources to implement changes.
- Businesses want better communication, more support and collaboration, and an Economic Development Division that plays a role in business development and entrepreneurship.
- Brokers and developers want a competitive retail environment and compelling incentives to choose Evanston
- Merchant organizations want a higher quality physical environment for their customers and relief from real and perceived safety concerns and vacancies detracting from the experience of their Districts.
- Everyone wants more to do and see in Evanston.

Evanston has many desirable attributes in the retail marketplace - scale, connectivity, density, and variety. Without a more strategic and comprehensive approach to marketing, business support, and economic development, Evanston will not see the greatest benefit from its enviable position.

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

This document provides guidance for policy changes, new and expanded marketing initiatives, and specific improvements for districts across the city. Underlying all of this work are a number of critical factors that must be acknowledged and addressed to see [more action](#) and [more investment](#).

1. DON'T ALLOW YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE CITY TO BE A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY.

Evanstonians are down on the city and Downtown—the negativity is palpable. The business-owners, residents, and even local leaders are perpetuating a narrative that Evanston is “dead” or “empty,” which overlooks a lot of the market strengths and uniqueness the city has to offer. Even if Evanston isn't as vibrant or active as it once was, a community that has given up on itself has no hope for a better future. Public perception and morale are everything.

2. POSITIVE CHANGE REQUIRES COMMITMENT AND RESOURCES.

If the City is unwilling or unable to commit funding, there's a limit to what can be accomplished. Placemaking is seen by many as a “frivolous” investment and not a core city function. The retail environment *is* the Evanston experience. Investing in these places and the business community is an economic necessity.

3. CREATING GREAT PLACES REQUIRES CITY STAFF AND PARTNERS TO WORK TOGETHER IN A COORDINATED AND INTEGRATED WAY.

Without coordination, efforts will fail. Business stakeholders and internal staff expressed the same sentiment during the Evanston Thrives engagement—one department making changes won't make a difference. Commitment must come from the top of the organization, and changes must be made across departments involving all facets of the City that touch Evanston's retail districts.

4. A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTHWESTERN IS CRITICAL TO ACCOMPLISH THE GOALS OF THIS PLAN.

The University is an economic engine for the City of Evanston; and a strong, healthy, vibrant city is in the interest of the University. The City needs Northwestern University as a partner and champion for Evanston. In return, the City should see the growth and success of Northwestern as a mutual benefit for the city as a whole.

5. INVESTING IN BETTER DATA IS CRITICAL TO SHIFT FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.

The City must be equipped with information to make informed decisions. Investments in systematizing data will not have immediate return, but these systems will be critical to guide and sharpen the City's economic development strategy in the years to come.

6. DOWNTOWN DOESN'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR OFFICE WORKERS TO RETURN TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

7. This is a post-pandemic issue. The turn to remote and hybrid work models has impacted downtowns across the country, but there are a number of opportunities for increasing foot traffic in Downtown Evanston, even if office workers never return. Northwestern students play a crucial role in downtown activity and sales, along with Evanston's growth in reputation as a destination in the North Shore region.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Evanston's economic development initiatives don't address the full spectrum of needs articulated by local business owners. The Mayor, Councilpersons, City Manager, and Economic Development Division are all working hard to improve and retain Evanston's businesses, but the resource allocation strategy is not coordinated among all interested stakeholders and the messaging around decision-making is not planned or controlled. The City acts reactively while the business community seeks proactive support and communication. Small business owners and Evanstonians at large want to see stronger support for local businesses.

City policies and staff disposition are not leveraging the creativity of local business owners: Business owners have identified arduous, limiting, and costly policies and procedures that inadvertently disincentivize businesses from pursuing a related project or improvement to benefit their business. Business owners have creative ideas and community knowledge on how to market their businesses and are key collaborators in this process.

A stronger relationship between Northwestern University and the City of Evanston is warranted. Strengthening that relationship could be good for businesses and Downtown Evanston. The entrepreneurial community in Evanston could be more actively engaged to support Evanston's retail districts.

ACTIONS

What needs to happen:

Improve data collection tools and processes.

Priority Action

- Manage business license requests & complete the city's records of businesses, types, and locations.
- Systematize data management and presentation using new internal systems or a third party tool acquisition.

What needs to happen:

Simplify internal processes and policies to better support business owners.

- Pursue policy / permitting changes to benefit local business & commerce.
- Refine ED management and response strategy for business communication.
- Better market available resources for local businesses.

What needs to happen:

Strengthen partnerships with Northwestern University and other institutions that can help achieve entrepreneurship goals.

- Establish regular communication and shared goals with Northwestern University.
- Raise the profile of Evanston among the tech and NU entrepreneurship community.
- Coordinate efforts with Chamber, key partners & business affinity groups.

What needs to happen:

Re-balance and more equitably distribute City resources to better support business needs.

- Conduct a review of all grant programs administered by ED Division to align with equity and economic goals.
- Restructure the Storefront Modernization Program.
- Allocate funds for retail district improvements.
- Grow the reach of the Legacy Business Program.
- Promote Sustain Evanston.

What needs to happen:

Pursue strategic opportunities in property redevelopment.

- Position City-owned properties for redevelopment.
- Build tools that make it easier for the City to guide new development.

Check out some of the ways that other cities are proactively supporting local businesses:

ENGLISH ESPAÑOL BENGALI العربية MORE

SEARCH MENU

Where am I: [Home](#) / [Mayor's Office](#) / [Office of Immigrant Affairs](#)

Start a Business

Entrepreneurship is key for economic growth of the City of Detroit, and more importantly, an opportunity for its residents to realize their goals. Listed below are necessary tools to start your business, from planning and development to growth and expansion.

Getting Started

- [Before you apply for license checklist](#)
- [Business license fees](#)
- [Business license forms](#)

Start or Grow Your Business

- [ACCESS](#)
- [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation \(DEGC\)](#)
- [Motor City Match](#)
- [Minority Business Development Agency](#)

Small Business and Start-Up Incubators

- [Tech Town](#)
- [Foodlab Detroit](#)
- [Green Garage](#)
- [New Economy Initiative](#)

Business Development and Support Institutions

- [Minority Business Development Agency Detroit](#)
- [Detroit Development Fund](#)
- [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation](#)

How to Apply for permits online

Watch some helpful videos that will walk you through the application process and plan review process.

Step 1. Create an eLaps account
Step 2. Submit an application for permit online
Step 3. Access your ePlans account and upload drawings.
Step 4. Check the status of your project in ePlans
Step 5. Submit corrections or download approved plans
Step 6. Download your permit from eLaps

[Click here for a Step-by-Step Guide that breaks down the process](#)

Building Permits

Make sure you submit the appropriate & required documents to obtain your building permit.

- [Commercial Building Plan Checklist](#)
- [Residential Building Plan Checklist](#)

DOING BUSINESS IN DETROIT

The City of Detroit provides an example of a web interface that anticipates user needs. Links to quick guides help the visitor navigate through our processes whether you want to start a new business, bid on a contract, or purchase land for development.

SMALL BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS CAMBRIDGE, MA

The Small Business Enhancement (SBE) Program is a reimbursement grant program that helps eligible retail, food, home-based and creative for-profit businesses purchase equipment and materials associated with growing their business in Cambridge. The Program has a storymap that markets businesses participating in the program.



"For Detroit's comeback to be a true success, there must be opportunity for the Detroiters who stayed."

– Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan

ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR FUND - DETROIT, MI

A new source of business capital for Detroit businesses owned by entrepreneurs of color and businesses that primarily hire people of color.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Events can be a powerful driver of change, and many cities strategically use events to draw different target audiences to their retail districts. They can generate foot traffic with spillover benefits to nearby local retailers. They can raise the spirit in a tangible, immediate format when public opinion and positivity is low. Events can draw people from outside of Evanston to explore and rebuild the city's reputation as a unique destination on the North Shore.

Many stakeholders involved in the Evanston Thrives process recall a time years ago when the City had staff dedicated to special events and Evanston had more cachet in the region as a destination for family fun and unique events.

Heard (loud and clear) through the Evanston Thrives public engagement were two key messages: The people want more to do and the City isn't a great collaborator to get new or unproven ideas off the ground. The process to apply for a permit, costs and time involved, and uncertainty around request evaluation and approval were cited as pain points.

By unlocking the ability for the City, SSA Managers, local organizations, and local businesses to host high-quality events, Evanston can draw audiences to its retail districts, improve local and regional perceptions of the city, and appeal to diverse communities in new ways.

ACTIONS

What needs to happen:

Drive increased activity in retail districts with high quality and frequent events and programming.

Priority Action

- Adopt Downtown Evanston event as a signature City happening or bring a major event to the heart of Downtown.
- Evolve / Expand regular Downtown events and marketing to better support brick-and-mortar businesses.
- Draw sponsorship and partners to Evanston.

What needs to happen:

Encourage more events, programming, and entertainment in Evanston.

- Invest in an improved user experience for the City's events calendar.
- Rewrite information related to the event permitting review and approval process.
- Simplify the process to permit events in pre-approved locations.
- Re-evaluate local policies that present real and perceived burdens to entertainment businesses and community event sponsors/hosts.

What needs to happen:

Activate Evanston's most unique public spaces more often.

- Coordinate programming among districts to activate Evanston all year long.
- Double down on Fountain Square and the lakefront at Church Street as premier event locations.
- Consider a pilot to host the Evanston Farmers Market in Fountain Square.

What needs to happen:

Engage Northwestern University in event planning and promotion of Downtown & events.

- Partner with NU to produce one event or programming series each year.
- Increase student awareness of the Downtown area and use of downtown spaces for events and activities.

FOUNTAIN SQUARE - WINTER UPGRADE!

Businesses in Evanston experience a slow sales period in the winter called the "winter slump". To counteract this, Fountain Square should be activated with seasonally appropriate activities that invite active participation and passive enjoyment as an onlooker.

Fun for all at Fountain Square in the winter...



... and the summer!

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Evanston's retail environment is stronger than perceived. While Evanstonians lost some beloved businesses in recent years, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the future.

The rise of remote and hybrid work means that the daytime office population is unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels anytime soon. However, the importance of this submarket to Downtown's retail vitality pales in comparison to two others: 1) Northwestern students, who are concentrated to its immediate north and have few other alternatives; and 2) the larger regional trade area, which, according to Placer.ai data, encompasses not just the southern zip code of Evanston but the northern neighborhoods of Chicago, including Rogers Park. Also, the AMC Evanston 12 and the return of Northlight Theatre represent two important new anchors that will promote increased activity Downtown, especially in the evening hours.

Finally, Evanston's elevated population density, exceeding 10,000 persons per square mile in 2020, provides a much stronger foundation citywide than exists in other, more conventionally suburban North Shore communities.

The City is poised to become a better partner to the broker community, more effectively market Evanston to the region, and provide more support for businesses looking for commercial space in this competitive market.

ACTIONS

What needs to happen:

Keep Evanston competitive.

- Monitor the regulatory environment within the context of nearby municipalities and respond by adjusting local politics.

Priority Action

- Create incentives to draw businesses to Evanston.

What needs to happen:

Market Evanston to the retail development, leasing and tenant community.

Priority Action

- (Re)introduce and sell Evanston as a retail location to retail brokerage community
- Generate positive news coverage about Evanston & the business community
- Create a central clearinghouse for information that is valuable to the retail development, leasing, and tenaning community
- Lead a series of interactive "Retail 101" workshops with SSA's, non-SSA organizations, and other community stakeholders.

What needs to happen:

Promote street-level vitality by tapping Evanston's entrepreneurial and creative energies.

- Promote street-level vitality by tapping Evanston's entrepreneurial and creative energies
- Initiate a window treatment art program for vacant storefronts.
- Create a pop-up leasing program.
- Develop and operate entrepreneurial platforms for micro/start-up businesses on or in underutilized, publicly-owned properties in or adjoining existing districts.
- Promote non-traditional tenaning strategies to get spaces filled.

What needs to happen:

Enact policies that encourage or incentivize access for small, local, and legacy businesses.

- Identify which of the proposed approaches makes the most sense for Evanston.



"One issue is lack of diversity. I know that's a function of who lives there and high prices of shops, but I do wish that our business districts reflected the overall diverse makeup of our town"

- Survey Respondent

MARKETING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY THIS MATTERS:

One of the most valuable assets of the Evanston community is the sheer number of organizations, residents, and businesses that are actively working to market, program, and celebrate each of the districts. Significant efforts are underway to coordinate events and communication across the community, and this plan recognizes these efforts and seeks to bolster them.

While coordination between SSAs and the City is underway to market events and business promotions, residents and visitors expressed frustration around the lack of a one-stop-shop for all happenings throughout the community. Evanston needs a unified identity and narrative for the collective of Evanston's business districts and programs, while celebrating the unique character of each. The City should work with communication partners and their networks to push out this unified identity through digital, physical, and placemaking activations.

ACTIONS

What needs to happen:

Create an identity and narrative for the collective of Evanston's business districts and programs.

- Implement Enjoy Evanston brand in the digital realm.
- Implement the Enjoy Evanston brand in the physical realm. *[Actions presented in District Placemaking Plans]*
- Implement district brands at the district level. *[Actions presented in District Placemaking Plans]*

Priority Action

What needs to happen:

Design all of Evanston Business District marketing and communications to engage with the targeted audiences.

- When drafting marketing and promotional materials for the business districts, consider customer attributes. *(refer to Marketing chapter, page 76)*

What needs to happen:

Redesign the City and Economic Development websites and newsletters to better support marketing and business development assets.

- Enhance navigation on the city website.
- Update City of Evanston social media accounts.
 - Refocus City newsletter and Economic Development Division newsletter.

What needs to happen:

Improve the organization and promotion of non-SSA business districts.

- Build on existing efforts to bring together groups of business owners to create assigned roles.
- Establish low-maintenance social media accounts for all districts.
- Invest in and showcase photography of all districts.

ENJOY EVANSTON BRAND FAMILY

The average visitor does not think of Evanston as a collective of districts—it's perceived as one place, whether that is to a favorite restaurant in one district or an event Downtown. When these visitors do not see or understand the breadth of offerings outside of their one destination, they do not explore other areas. The Enjoy Evanston brand family presents one story and identity, serving as an umbrella for all eight business districts.

Enjoy
EVANSTON



WEST
VILLAGE
DISTRICT BANNER
TO COME

PLACEMAKING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Vibrant districts can benefit from improved public spaces and connections between destinations. However, within the City, there are limited tools to support placemaking and district identity outside of SSA Districts initiatives. Although public space activation is a priority for many staff and City leaders involved in this planning process, there is no existing, regular budget allocation for placemaking initiatives in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), nor is there a formalized prioritization for public space enhancements outside of parks (i.e. plazas, parklets). The City can play a stronger role in defining expectations for how retail districts look and feel, as well as guiding businesses towards best practices such as food trucks policies, parklet design, signage, and design guidelines.

A District Placemaking Plan created for each of Evanston's retail districts, which present unique features and attributes for the subject district, market attributes, and a placemaking strategy and district brand identity coordinated with the overall parent brand introduced in the Marketing chapter of the plan. Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.

ACTIONS

What needs to happen:

Coordinate City investments in equipment, infrastructure, and signage to enhance Districts and Downtown.

- Upgrade infrastructure into improve the visitor experience.
- Invest in connections with Northwestern University.

Priority Action

- Invest to achieve three primary placemaking goals in each District and Downtown:

Placemaking Goals:

- Maintain superior standards for the upkeep, and maintenance of public spaces.
- Create a mix of permanent and temporary central gathering spaces for events or seasonal activations.
- Invest in new, cohesive equipment and infrastructure for retail districts and Downtown.

What needs to happen:

Provide better design guidance and support for pedestrian-facing elements of small businesses that contribute to a great public realm.

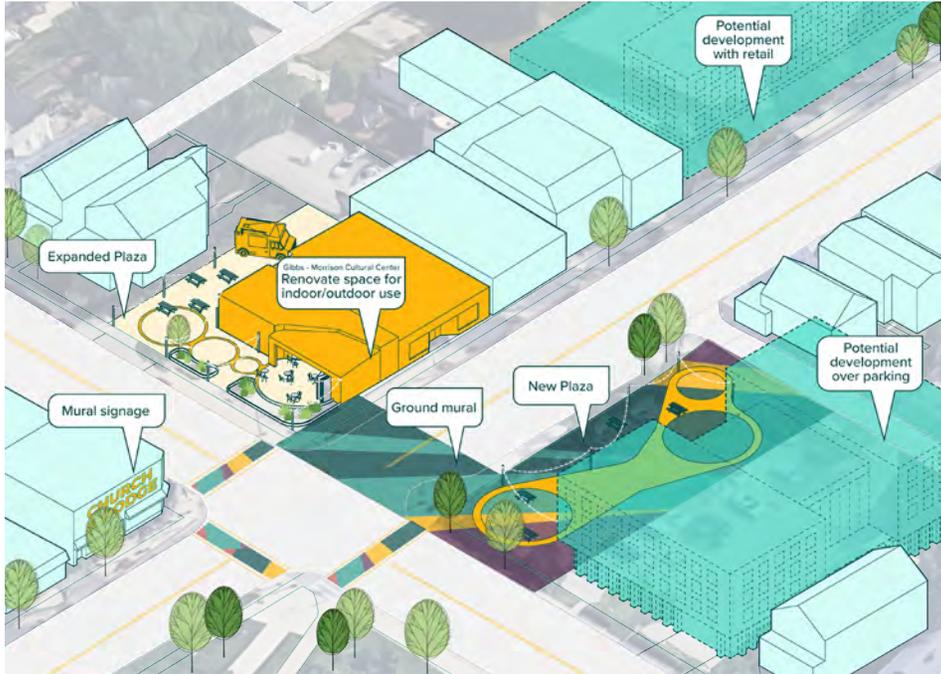
- Encourage Parklets & Sidewalk Cafes
 - Create clear expectations for Business Signage
- Redesign the food truck policy

What needs to happen:

Redraw the District Maps to better reflect goals to achieve more equitable resource distribution and build identity.

- Redraw the district maps to focus on the most identifiable/legible blocks and nodes.

CHURCH & DODGE: PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



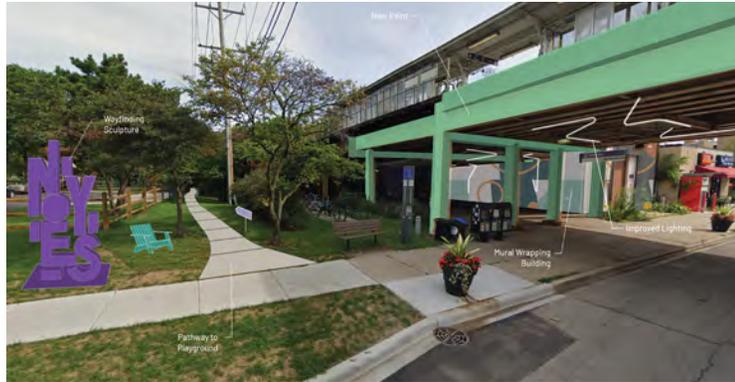
ASHLAND ARTS: PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



WEST END: PLACEMAKING CONCEPT



NOYES: PLACEMAKING CONCEPT



HOWARD STREET: PLACEMAKING CONCEPT



PLACEMAKING EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES



DISTRICT PLACEMAKING PLANS

Placemaking is more than maintenance and seasonal decorations. Effective placemaking and placekeeping require a strategy that lifts the most identifiable characteristics of a place to the surface. They should be creative and designed to bring people together and support local businesses. They require collaboration among business owners, residents, and the City to make strategic investments that help distinguish and feature what makes them special and unique. Placemaking interventions presented in the Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan are tailored to each individual retail district.

EVANSTON
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RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN