



# The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO  
A 2021 IDA STUDY

A 2021 PUBLICATION CREATED BY  
THE INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



**INSPIRED LEADERS  
SHAPING CITIES**

## ABOUT IDA



### IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit [downtown.org](http://downtown.org).

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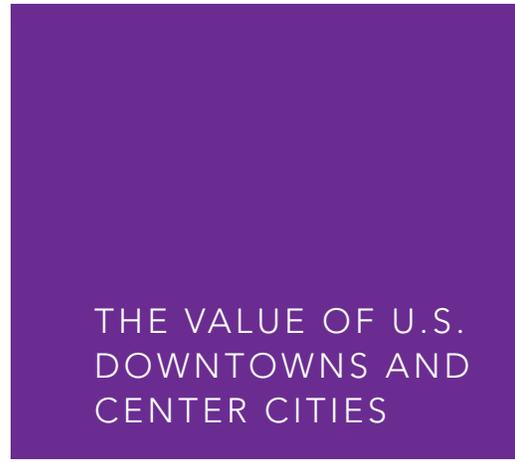
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# THE VALUE OF U.S. DOWNTOWNS AND CENTER CITIES



## Stantec's Urban Places

*Project Advisors for The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities*

Stantec's Urban Places is an interdisciplinary hub bringing together leaders in planning and urban design, transportation including smart and urban mobility, resilience, development, mixed-use architecture, smart cities, and brownfield redevelopment. They work in downtowns across North America—in cities and suburbs alike—to unlock the extraordinary urban promise of enhanced livability, equity, and resilience.

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IDA would like to thank the following individuals for their efforts on the 2021 edition of this project:

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SECTION ONE  
PROJECT  
OVERVIEW



# Introduction

## GREAT CITIES START DOWNTOWN

No city or region can succeed without a strong downtown, the place where compactness and density bring people, capital, and ideas together in ways that build the economy, opportunity, community and identity. Downtowns across the U.S. experienced unprecedented change in 2020 and 2021, which were fundamentally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In some ways the pandemic highlighted the importance of vibrant urban places. The prolonged absences from our favorite places and activities in some measure deepened our appreciation for them. As the pandemic recedes, downtowns will once again be focal points for commerce and activity.

Typically, despite a relatively small share of a city's overall geography, a downtown delivers significant economic and community benefits across both city and region. Downtown serves as the epicenter of commerce, capital investment, diversity, public discourse, socialization, knowledge and innovation. It provides social benefits through access to community spaces and public institutions. It acts as a hub for employment, civic engagement, arts and culture, historical heritage, local identity, and financial impact. In short, the proximity and density that downtown and center cities create drive the city around them to thrive.

While proximity and density were challenged in the short-term due to the pandemic, the urgency of responses in 2020 and 2021 also presented new opportunities to adapt downtowns and center cities to a more human-centric future. The success of open streets and outdoor dining in cities large and small have started to lead to permanent programs that prioritize people over cars. Stronger public-private partnerships have streamlined regulations for everything from new business permits to cocktails-to-go. Responding to the racial awakening of 2020, many organizations are working to address bias internally, and in their public programming. Several urban place management organizations are creating programs to specifically support minority entrepreneurs so that downtown better represents the community.

Longer-term, the effects of the pandemic on urban cores are still emerging. The permanence of remote work remains an open question. Richard Florida cites work by economist Nick Bloom that estimates that ultimately, remote work will account for one-fifth of all work-days, compared with just 5% pre-pandemic.<sup>1</sup> This shift will decrease the daytime population in urban centers and affect consumer spending downtown, but it also presents an opportunity to pare down auto-centric infrastructure and create justification for districts to evolve beyond a 9 to 5 worker-focused dynamic to more complete live, work and play communities. The concept of the 15-minute city, the idea that everyone living in a city should have access to essential urban services within a 15 minute walk or bike ride, has gained in popularity in the past year and reinforces the value of the mixed-use nature of many of our downtowns and center cities.<sup>2</sup>

In the coming years the ways we use and evaluate downtowns and center cities may shift, but downtowns' resilience across economic, social, and environmental measures positions them well to lead citywide recovery. Downtowns have emerged from past crises even stronger, and there's no reason to think they won't this time.



## About the Value of Downtowns Study

Building on IDA's unique industry-wide perspective and expertise, this study quantifies the value of U.S. downtowns and center cities across more than 150 metrics organized under five core value principles, with a focus on how downtowns contribute to the city and region around them. The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities study is a partnership between IDA and local urban place management organization (UPMO). UPMOs have invaluable insights into the areas they manage and have the relationships that help them unlock essential data sources for this study.

The study aims to emphasize the importance of downtown, to demonstrate its unique return on investment, to inform future decision making, and to increase support from local decision makers. The primary project goals are to:



Provide a **common set of metrics** to communicate the value of downtown.



Expand the **range of arguments** UPMOs can make to their stakeholders using publicly available data.

IDA began this research in 2017, working with Stantec's Urban Places group and the first cohort of 13 UPMOs to develop a methodology for compiling and evaluating data from those 13 downtowns. In 2021, our analysis has expanded to include 43 downtowns and center cities across the U.S.

The analysis focuses on how downtown provides value in the five organizing principles of economy, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience. IDA and our UPMO partners work together to collect hundreds of individual data points, including historic and current data, and three geographic levels (study area, city, and MSA/county). In addition, for employment data we collect three different jobs totals (primary, all jobs, and all private) for all years between 2002 and 2017 to show more nuanced employment trends over time. In total, we utilize more than 8,400 individual pieces of data for each participating downtown, and our downtown database now contains around 310,000 datapoints. The demographic and jobs data included in the study predates the COVID-19 pandemic, but some real estate, tax and assessment data include 2020 and 2021 figures.

## Urban Place Management Organizations

IDA's members are urban place management organizations that manage growing districts to create prosperous city centers, commercial neighborhoods and livable urban places for all—from residents to visitors to business owners. These UPMOs shape and activate dynamic downtowns, city centers and neighborhood districts.

Since 1970, property and business owners in cities throughout North America have realized that revitalizing and sustaining vibrant downtowns, city centers and neighborhood districts requires focused attention beyond the services municipal governments alone can provide. These private-sector stakeholders come together to form and fund nonprofit management associations that deliver key services and activities within the boundaries of their districts. UPMOs typically operate as business improvement districts (BIDs), business improvement areas (BIAs), partnerships or alliances.

### Value of Downtowns Participants



## ECONOMY



Downtowns and center cities are valuable due to their roles as economic anchors for their regions. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns and center cities frequently serve as hubs of industry and revenue generators, despite their only making up a small fraction of the city's or region's land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of a relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors than investments elsewhere.

## INCLUSION



As the literal and figurative heart of their cities, downtowns represent and welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Residents of strong downtowns often come from a wide range of racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and from across all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, downtown has a broad appeal to all users and a strong social fabric. Downtowns provide access to all to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment and civic activities.

## VIBRANCY



The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base, creates value. Vibrancy means the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events. Many unique regional cultural institutions, businesses, centers of innovation, public spaces and activities are located downtown. As the cultural center of their cities, downtowns typically attract a large share of citywide visitors and account for a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms.

## IDENTITY



Downtowns and center cities often serve as iconic symbols of their cities, creating a strong sense of place that enhances local pride. The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that other parts of the city can't easily replicate. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting regional identity. Downtowns and center cities serve as places for regional residents to come together, participate in civic life, and celebrate their region, which in turn promotes tourism and civic society.

## RESILIENCE



Downtowns and center cities play a crucial role in building stability, sustainability, and prosperity for the city and region. Their diversity, concentration of economic activity, and density of services better equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks than more homogenous communities. They can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks, which often disproportionately affect less economically and socially dynamic areas.

## Methodology Overview<sup>i</sup>

The first step to this study is to identify the right boundaries that capture a downtown district. Geographic parameters often vary across data sources and may not align with a UPMO's jurisdiction. This study has adopted a definition of the commercial downtown that moves beyond the boundaries of a development authority or a business improvement district. IDA's Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns report expresses the challenge well: "Overall, endless debate could be had around the exact boundaries of a downtown, what constitutes a downtown and what elements should be in or out. Yet it is the hope of this study that anyone picking up this report and flicking to their home city will generally think: Give or take a little, this downtown boundary makes sense to me for my home city."<sup>3</sup> IDA worked with each UPMO to identify the boundaries of their downtown for this project, giving priority to alignment with census tracts for ease of incorporating data from the U.S. Census.

To measure the value of downtowns relative to their cities, the analysis relies on data that could be collected efficiently and uniformly for a downtown, its city, and its region. IDA collects data from multiple national databases, such as the U.S. Census, LEHD, and ESRI. In addition, IDA gives each participating UPMO a list of metrics to collect from local sources like county assessors or commercial real estate brokers. IDA then analyzes the data to identify study area trends and benchmark the area against the city, the region, and other downtowns in the study.

The analysis includes meaningful qualitative observations to acknowledge unique features or add nuance and context to trends revealed in the data. As an example, universities often sit on the edge of a downtown study area. Even if not technically inside downtown, the university's students typically represent a large user and consumer base for downtown and the analysis describes how the student presence influences the downtown environment.

The analytical focus of the report is to make and support value statements about downtown by comparing it to the city, identifying its growth trends over time, and illustrating its density. For instance, data patterns revealed this for 2017 employment totals in downtown Seattle:

*Downtown is a strong employment and industry hub for the city, with a concentration of high-paying and high-growth employment sectors. 43% of all citywide jobs are located downtown, as are 58% of citywide knowledge jobs. Overall, employment has increased 14% since 2010, outpacing both the city and region. In addition, the number of knowledge jobs grew 28% during that period. Each square mile supports 85,924 workers on average, more than ten times the average job density citywide.*



<sup>i</sup> Refer to the appendix for the full methodology.

## Known Limits to this Study

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive quantification of the value of downtowns, there are still several limitations to our approach. Not all local sources consistently collect the same data, or collect it in the same way, which hinders our ability to make comparisons between downtowns. In some cases, the data we ask for simply does not exist or has not been collected on the relatively small scale of census tracts or downtown sub-area. This makes it challenging to rely on local data for analysis and can result in some missing pieces in our narrative.

Our most recent data also comes predominantly from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), the 2018 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map tool, and ESRI Business Analyst. Due to the lag in data

availability, some metrics may not align with more recent data from local downtown, municipal, or proprietary sources. This will be especially true in coming years as change in employment during COVID-19 will not be observed in our data sources for several years.

Finally, citywide context plays a large role in the analysis. Significant variance in overall city size (from Spartanburg's 20 square miles to Oklahoma City's 606) can skew comparisons of the proportion of citywide jobs or population in different districts. However, since downtowns operate within the context of their city, understanding the proportion of jobs, residents, and other metrics as a percentage of their cities still provides an important perspective on a downtown's contribution to its city and region.

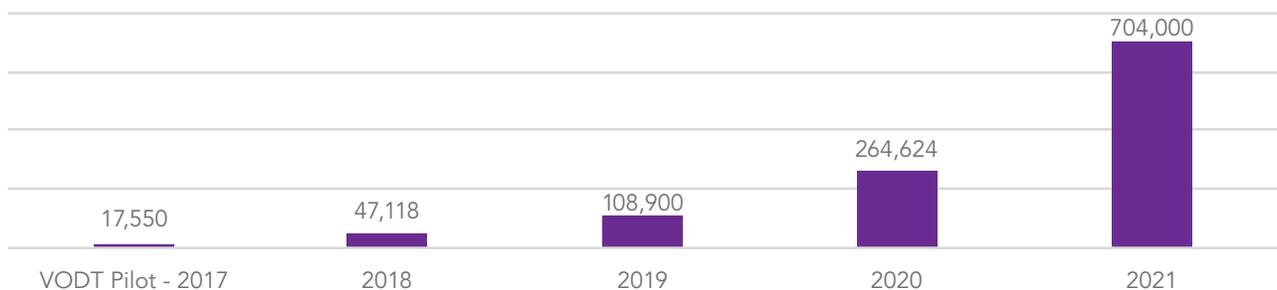
## Improvements Over Previous Years and Areas for Future Research

This year has seen yet another evolution of the Value of Downtowns product featuring new tools, more data, and new methods of analysis. Our Value of Downtowns database now integrates with Tableau, a data visualization software. With this software, we are able to make connections and draw comparisons between downtowns in a far more nuanced and intuitive way. This report includes some of these new visualizations. For example, charts like households by income over time, or housing units by gross rent over time reveal trends and relationships that we previously were not able to analyze.

The Value of Downtowns database has grown exponentially over past iterations, particularly as this year we have included demographic and jobs data for all years available since 2000, rather than only collecting four benchmark data years.

This level of additional data and capability has increased our ability to understand comparisons between downtowns and center cities. This is reflected within this report, as well as with the launch of IDA's newest research offering, the Value of Downtowns: Comparisons. The Comparisons study focuses on understanding how a given downtown's performance stacks up to its closest peers, and evaluates a smaller number of metrics than this Value of Downtowns study.

### Value of Downtowns Total Datapoints







SECTION TWO  
DOWNTOWN  
PROFILE

# Downtown Profile | Overview

A city's downtown and city center serve as centers for culture, knowledge, and innovation - key elements of a city's strength and prosperity. The performance of districts and center cities strengthens an entire region's economic productivity, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience. While the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be seen, in the short-term, the significance of downtown and how it intertwines with the rest of a city and region has never been more apparent. Many of the hardest-hit sectors—retail, food, entertainment, tourism, arts and culture, and nonprofits—are a compelling part of downtown vibrancy. Their return to business will mark the start of full recovery and accelerate the return of a strong economy citywide.

A small but valuable employment center for the city, Downtown Albuquerque has a unique charm and a passionate and creative community leading its revitalization. Covering just 0.5 square miles, or less than 1% of the city's total land area, downtown holds 6% of citywide jobs and 0.3% of citywide residents. Downtown, however, does face challenges. Compared to other downtowns, it has a very high worker-to-resident ratio of 13:1, showing a heavy bias toward office workers alone, rather than a more balanced live-work-

## Geography and Study Partner



STUDY AREA  
 Census Tract 21, Bernalillo County

DOWNTOWN PARTNER  
 Albuquerque Metropolitan  
 Redevelopment Agency

CITY  
 Albuquerque, NM

play environment. Further, Albuquerque's downtown relies heavily on public administration for employment; a 20% shrinkage in the private sector over the last two decades—a period during which that sector grew elsewhere in the city—has compounded the situation. These factors combine to paint a picture of an urban place that functions mostly as a center of government employment and that has difficulty competing with other parts of the city for private-sector jobs.



## Residential Population\*

	Downtown	City	Region
Population	1,316	559,374	912,108
Residential share	n/a	0.3%	0.2%
Residents per acre	4.1	4.7	0.2
Growth 2010-2019	60%	1%	1%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2000, 2010); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015 – 2019)

\*Excludes population in group quarters.



## Employment Population 2018

	Downtown	City	Region
Primary jobs*	16,622	277,415	371,612
District share	n/a	6%	4%
Employees per square mile	33,922	1,482	40
Employment decline 2002-2018	-3%	11%	16%
Private jobs decline 2002-2018	-20%	9%	13%

Source: LEHD On the Map – Primary Jobs and All Private Jobs (2018).

\* Primary jobs are the highest-paying job an individual has. Primary jobs therefore do not count an individual working more than one job more than once.

Primary jobs downtown declined from 17,100 in 2002 to 16,600 in 2018. Albuquerque shares this relatively flat growth trend with other downtowns of the same scale within our study, and extensive research shows that large cities continue to concentrate country-wide employment.<sup>1,2</sup> In addition, downtown’s heavy reliance on public administration jobs—48% of jobs downtown—ranks behind only one other of the 44 downtowns in our study, downtown Sacramento, CA. Public administration can be a steady employer, but a more diverse ecosystem of industry sectors would not only strengthen economic resilience in the face of economic shifts, but it would also attract and capture growth sectors. The loss of 1,700 information-industry workers in the early 2000s played a significant role in the sizable decline of private-sector employment over the last two decades. The accommodation and services sector fell even further, by 51%, although that translated to a smaller actual job total of close to 800.

By contrast, residential population\* has seen rapid growth in the past decade, rising by 60% and adding more than 500 residents. While population remains relatively low, at about 1,300, this growth has added to a burgeoning sense of vibrancy. From the limited data currently available from the 2020 Census, downtown’s population has reached 1,657 after excluding group quartered residents. This is continuing the growth trend of the last several years by adding another 341 residents to downtown since 2019. Vibrant places, flush with storefronts, art, amenities, and unique experiences, attract residents and workers alike.

The count of residential units shows a more positive trend: Starting from relatively low numbers overall, residential investments in the downtown study area have supported dramatic growth. Downtown housing stock grew by 70% between 2010 and 2019. That rate slightly exceeds the growth in population during those years. An SB Friedman

Inventory	Downtown	Share of City	Growth 2010-2019
 OFFICE (SF)	2,828,531	21%	1%
 RETAIL (SF)	247,096	1%	n/a
 RESIDENTIAL UNITS	1,096	0.4%	70%
 HOTEL (ROOMS)	784	5%	n/a

Source: CBRE (2020); CoStar (2020); U.S. Decennial Census (2010); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2015–2019); Visit ABQ (2020)

\*Downtown population figures in this report don’t include people living in “group quarters,” as defined by the US Census. According to the 2010 Census this group was primarily comprised of prisoners at a correctional facility who do not contribute to downtown’s community or economy. Before the correctional facility left downtown in 2013 the total group quartered population was 1,300 people, skewing downtown population counts. The 2020 Census now counts 469 people in group quarters, of which only seven are in an institutional facility of some kind. In the future group quarters should be included when talking about population but for the time frame in the study, primarily 2010 to 2019, including the group quarters population was preventing accurate depictions of population trends.

report on the larger “Central Area” of Albuquerque, which includes downtown, highlighted slow growth of new residential units in the six-square-mile geography the report examined. The report found an average annual growth of around 80 new units per year over the last decade, a slow rate for an area of that size. The report shows a very low vacancy rate—just 3%—suggesting a demand for more inventory.<sup>3</sup> Downtown, however, is only half a square mile and has averaged an increase of 50 units per year over the last ten years, apparently carrying housing inventory growth for the area around it. Development has slowed, however, with only 17 units currently slated for delivery over the next three years.

In terms of price, downtown median gross rent is around \$155 less than the citywide median. The affordability and presence of subsidized housing has attracted lower-income households but downtown has had only limited success attracting higher-income households, despite an increase in

households earning more than \$75,000 annually in the rest of the city. This is likely in part due to little development of housing for those higher-income households.

The office market has fluctuated little in the past decade, mirroring the flat trend line for job change. Office vacancy has hovered between 13% and 16% since 2010, and development has added only limited new office space. Downtown Class A office space rents for an average of \$23.25 per square foot, slightly lower than the comparable figure citywide. Typically, higher rents per square foot for downtown space indicate businesses’ willingness to pay a premium for proximity to a downtown’s amenities and connectivity. Albuquerque’s negative differential further demonstrates downtown’s struggle to distinguish itself from other locations citywide in the competition for office tenants. On the other hand, retail spaces downtown average slightly more per square foot than they do citywide and have a lower vacancy rate.

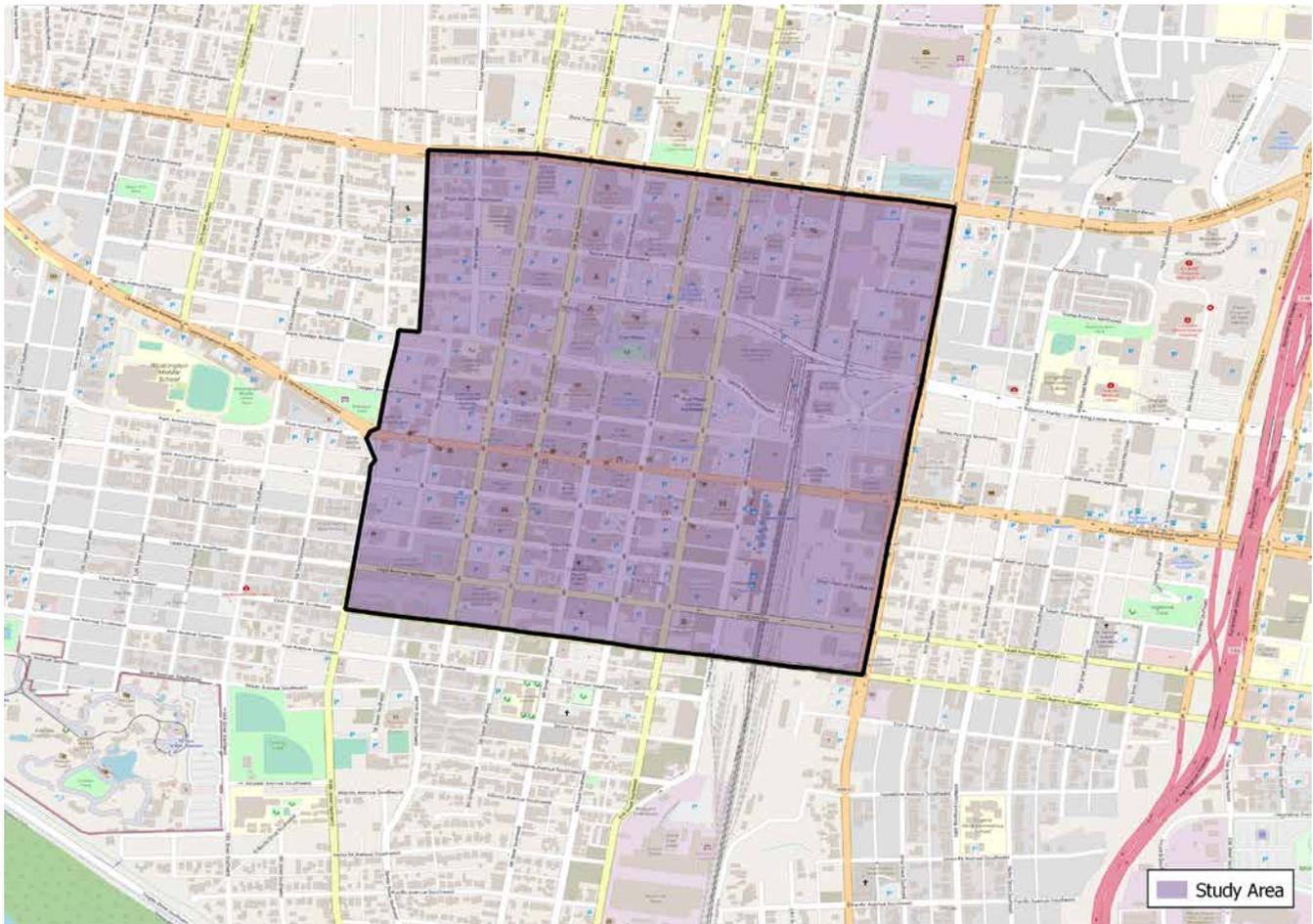


### Defining Boundaries

The downtown study area is Bernalillo County Census Tract 21. This tract's northern border runs along Lomas Boulevard Northwest from 8th Street to Broadway Boulevard Northeast. From there it runs south to Coal Avenue, which reconnects with 8th Street to the west. IDA recommended that the urban place management organizations participating in the Value of Downtowns study use the commonly understood definition of downtown and match boundaries to hard edges, roads, water, natural features or highways. IDA worked with each group to align its downtown study area with census tract boundaries for ease of incorporating publicly available data from the U.S. Census.



Downtown Share  
of City Land Area  
**less than 1%**



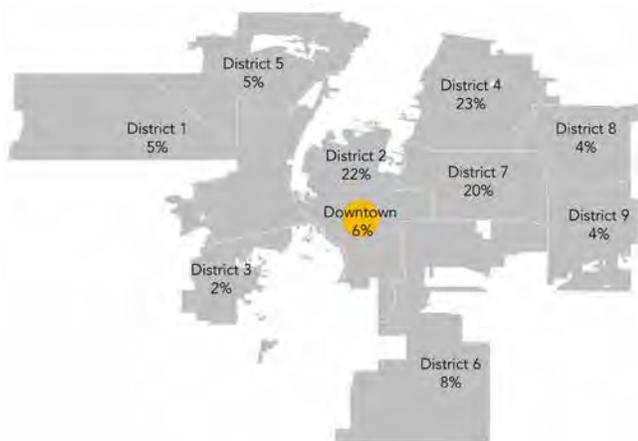
# Economy | Impact, Innovation

Downtowns make up a small share of their city's land area but have substantial economic importance.

While downtowns and center cities constitute a small share of citywide land area, there's no understating their regional economic importance. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns serve as economic anchors for their cities and regions. Thanks to highly concentrated economic activity, investment in the center city yields a high level of return per dollar. Urban centers across the U.S. were the first areas to recover from the Great Recession, and although the impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt, prior analysis of the role of downtowns and center cities highlights their unique ability to absorb and recover from economic shocks and stresses.

**Benefits of Economy:** Economic Output, Economic Impact, Investment, Creativity, Innovation, Visitation, Spending, Density, Sustainability, Tax Revenue, Scale, Commerce, Opportunity

## Jobs by Council District



Source: LEHD On the Map (2018) Primary Jobs. Because downtown overlaps District 2, the study removed downtown jobs from the District 2 total.

With 16,622 jobs, downtown contains 6% of all jobs in the city of Albuquerque. This percentage ranks low compared to other downtowns, but it far exceeds downtown's small footprint—only 0.3% of the city. Further, downtown hosts around 34,000 workers per square mile, 22 times the average worker density citywide. While this calculation may overstate density slightly, given downtown's small size, Albuquerque's job density puts it into the 75th percentile of all study downtowns. Downtown continues to accumulate more office space; proposed development would expand inventory by 50,000 square feet by 2024.

## Employment Primary Jobs



6%

CITY'S JOBS



5%

CITY'S KNOWLEDGE  
INDUSTRY JOBS



22%

CITY'S CREATIVE  
JOBS

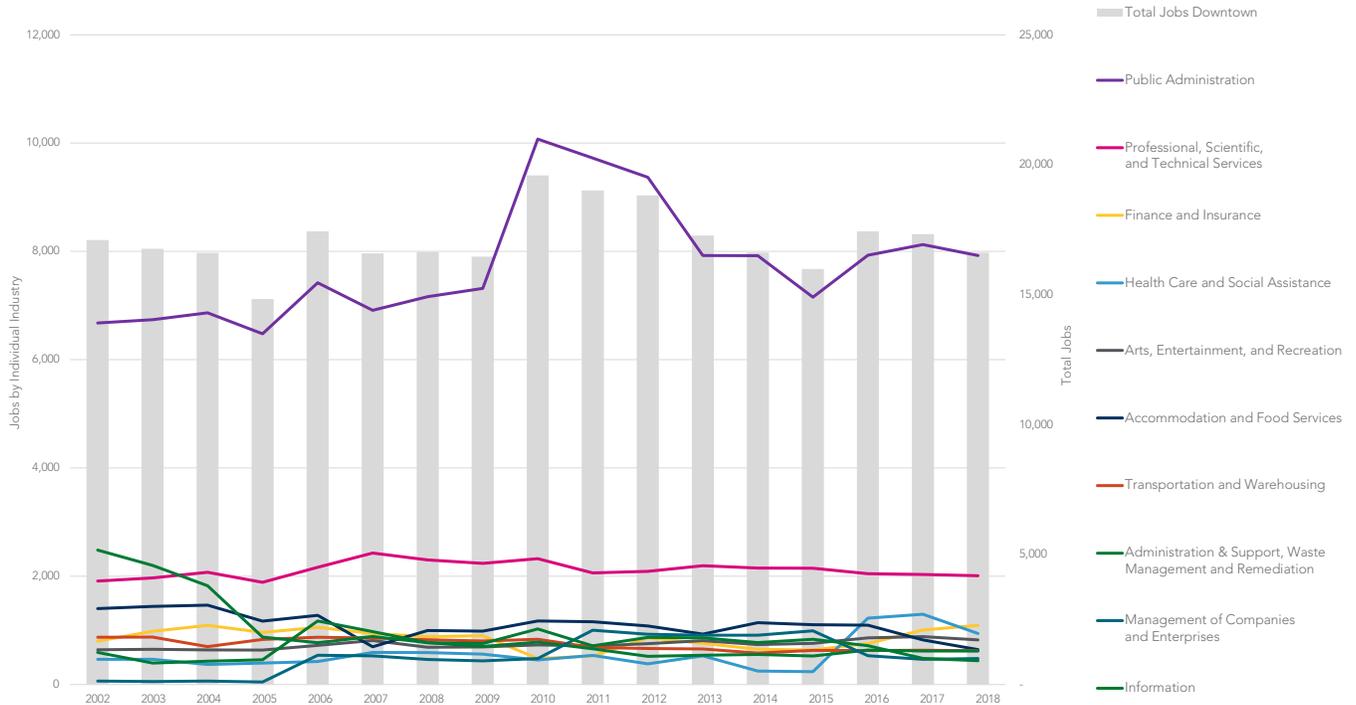


3%

CITY'S PRIVATE  
JOBS

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2018). Creative jobs are defined as those in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector (NAICS Code 71).

### Job Change in Top 10 Industries Downtown



Source: IDA Analysis of LEHD On the Map data (2018)

### Knowledge Industry Employment Growth 2010-2018

	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	Management of Companies and Enterprises	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Information	Health Care and Social Assistance	Total Knowledge Job Change
Downtown	96%	0%	-14%	-57%	108%	4%
City	27%	48%	-11%	-10%	22%	13%
Region	29%	30%	45%	-9%	24%	26%

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2018)

Public administration serves as the bedrock of downtown employment, accounting for about 7,900 jobs, or nearly half, of all primary jobs. In our study, only Sacramento's downtown has a higher share of its downtown employment in public administration (60%). This dependence on public jobs has helped to offset private-sector job losses over the past two decades, but the private sector must be coaxed back for meaningful and sustained growth.

Downtown's next largest sector is professional, scientific, and technical services (2,000 jobs, or 11% of the sector citywide). Surprisingly, downtown is also host to 22% of citywide creative jobs like artists, performers, or other forms of entertainment. Because downtown Albuquerque has a very small share of citywide jobs it follows that downtown also only has a limited share of citywide jobs in the various industry sectors.

In total, downtown has lost 3% of its jobs over the last two decades. Over the same period the city overall saw jobs increase by 11%, carried largely by health care and social assistance, which has developed into the city's largest sector by a significant margin. The accompanying chart of downtown employment change by sector illustrates the scale of public administration compared to other industries, and reveals how most sectors, with the exception of public administration, information, and health care, have stayed nearly unchanged since 2002.

Knowledge-economy jobs typically cluster in downtowns and rank amongst the fastest-growing job sectors nationally. They typically pay well and attract a highly educated work force. Downtown Albuquerque has only 5% of the city's jobs in the knowledge sectors, which include finance and insurance; real estate; management of companies and enterprises; professional, scientific and technical services; information; and health care and social assistance. Of these sectors, only health care has seen considerable growth, doubling since 2010. Finance and insurance jobs appear to have enjoyed substantial growth since 2010, but that reflects the industry's bouncing back to pre-recession totals. The information sector has seen a substantial loss; in 2002 it was the second-largest sector downtown.

The sheer scale of the health care and social assistance sector citywide drives the initial impression that downtown has few knowledge-sector jobs. With 55,000 workers, health care stands as the largest industry in the city by a margin of more than 20,000; downtown hosts only 2% of these positions. If we omit health care from knowledge-sector jobs, downtown's concentration of jobs in the knowledge sectors remaining jumps to 9%, yet the number of knowledge jobs in downtown has increased at a slower rate than in the city or the region. Over the last decade the finance, insurance, and real estate sector grew by 600 jobs and health care grew by 500. Unfortunately, the information sector lost 600 jobs, and the professional, scientific, and technical services sector lost 300 jobs. These gains and losses equal roughly a 200-job overall gain in knowledge sectors—despite apparent strong growth in certain subsectors in the accompanying table.

To guide downtown's job growth into the future it will be paramount to separate poor fits from real opportunities. The city has attracted major new developments by large companies like Amazon, Facebook, and Netflix, but these projects did not come downtown—nor would they have made good fits there. A fulfillment center, data center, and studio (respectively) each requires a large footprint and/or easy highway access, making downtown a poor match for their needs. Meanwhile, downtown does not have a monopoly on the types of firms that do enjoy urban locations. Citywide competitors for employment include suburban centers like the @25 Shopping Center area and Uptown. While Uptown retains a largely retail and restaurant focus, a sizable presence of other industries have located nearby. In fact, the Uptown area has more knowledge-sector jobs than downtown—7.2% of the city's total compared to downtown's 5%. The @25 Shopping Center hosts Blue Cross Blue Shield and Boeing, both of which would fit well in downtown office space, but which have chosen suburban offices instead. Factors feeding this competition include the growing suburban sprawl of the city and incentives like free and available parking for office workers in these suburban centers.

### Small Businesses and Startups

A strong entrepreneurial environment that supports both small businesses and startups in all industries plays a critical role in creating a thriving downtown. Small businesses generate new jobs, promote innovation and competition, and account for almost half of U.S. economic activity.<sup>4</sup>

The notable number of jobs at small and/or new firms suggests an active entrepreneurial presence in downtown Albuquerque. Downtown has a total of seven incubators designed to provide entrepreneurs accessible space for launching their business enterprises. Of 7,700 jobs in the private sector, firms with fewer than 20 employees account for 19%, and firms established in the last decade account for 17%. While these proportions are above average for study downtowns, they closely track the city and regional numbers, suggesting that downtown has not proved exceptional in attracting entrepreneurs from throughout the region.

Around 81% of the downtown workforce commutes from beyond the ZIP codes immediately adjacent to downtown (87102, 87107, 87106, 87104, and 87105). Variability in ZIP code size makes it difficult to pinpoint concentrations of commuters, but 41% of downtown workers live in the larger, more sprawling suburban-form ZIP codes west and south of downtown. The ZIP codes to the east of 87107/87106 have a combined 31% of downtown workers.

Downtown jobs tend to well-paying. Downtown has 9% of citywide jobs paying more than \$40,000 annually. Among downtown workers, 61% make more than \$40,000 annually, well above the citywide proportion of 41%. This does illustrate downtown's value, since well-paying jobs boost the regional economy, but the fact that downtown has relatively few households reporting earnings at this level does raise concerns about its ability to attract higher-income households.



### Jobs by Firm Size

	Downtown	City	Region
< 20 PEOPLE	19%	17%	18%
20-249 PEOPLE	26%	25%	25%
250+ PEOPLE	55%	58%	57%

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2017)



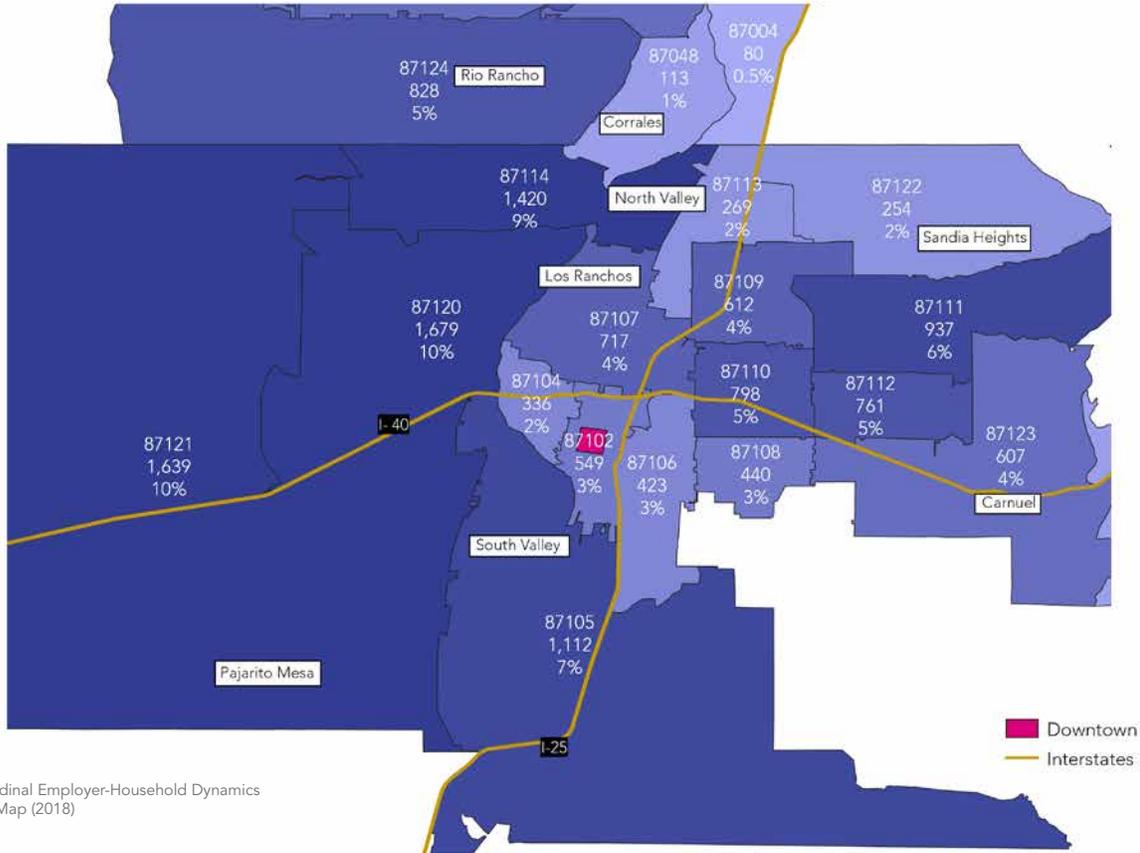
### Jobs by Firm Age (2014-2017)

	Downtown	City	Region	DT Totals
< 3 YEARS	6%	6%	7%	449
4-10 YEARS	11%	12%	12%	842
11+ YEARS	83%	82%	82%	6,414

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2017)



Where Downtown Workers Reside in the Region



Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2018)

### Jobs by Earnings Per Year

	Downtown	City	Region
\$15,000 OR LESS	10%	19%	19%
\$15,000-\$40,000	29%	40%	39%
MORE THAN \$40,000	61%	41%	42%

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2018)





## Land Value and Assessment

	Downtown	City
TAXABLE VALUE	\$116M	\$14.3B
ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE	\$637M	\$50.4B
LAND AREA IN SQUARE MILES	0.5	187
TAXABLE VALUE PER SQUARE MILE	\$232M	\$76.4M
ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE PER SQUARE MILE	\$1.3B	\$270M

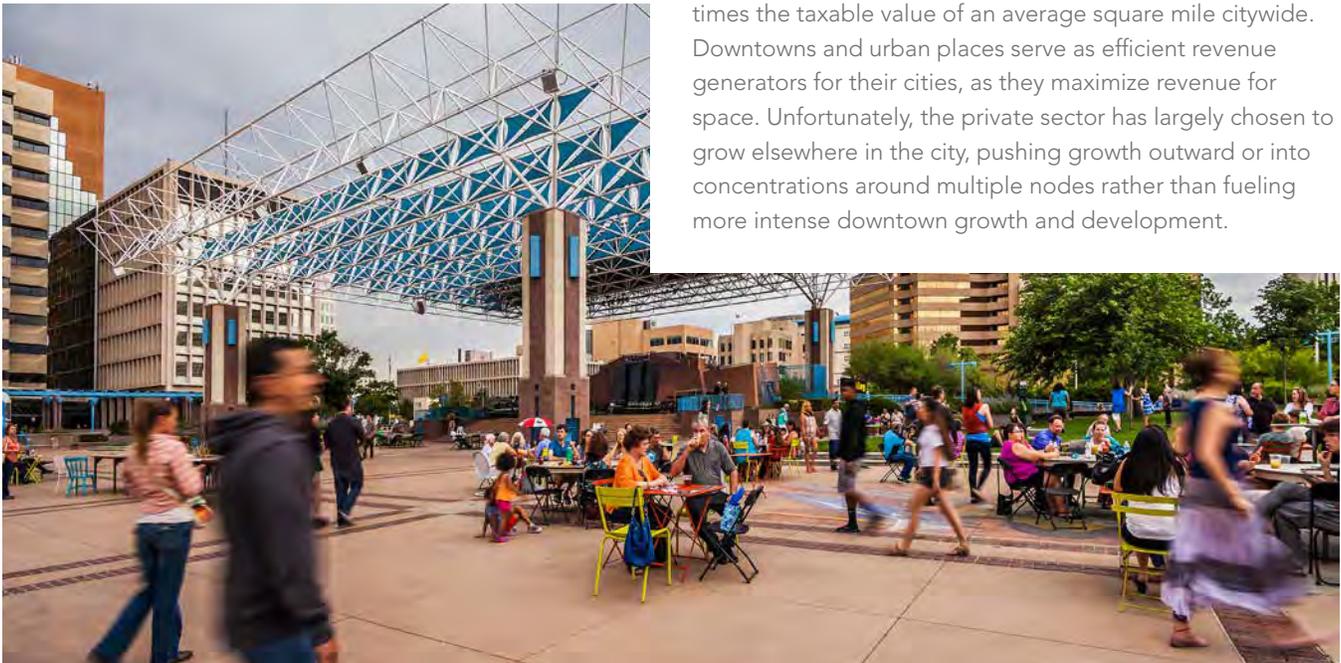
Source: City of Albuquerque (2021)

### Fiscal Impact

Downtown accounts for about 0.8% of the city’s total taxable value but accounts for 1.3% of estimated market value. The fact that much of downtown’s most valuable land is publicly owned—and therefore doesn’t contribute to taxable value—explains why these two values differ so widely. Going by market value, however, downtown land is worth 4.8 times more per square mile than the average citywide.

Downtown value has accumulated steadily, growing 26% since 2010, but the city grew in value by 27% during the same period, meaning downtown has only kept pace with citywide trends rather than exceeding them. The trajectories of property-value increase also look different. Citywide, value has increased by roughly 3% every year since 2015, but downtown’s year-over-year change has varied from a high of 9% to a low of -3%. Development, however, has stayed fairly steady; between 2015 and 2020 construction projects attracted an average of \$18.3 million annually, according to data on approved building permits.

Despite its not concentrating taxable value as strongly as market value, a square mile downtown still concentrates 3.1 times the taxable value of an average square mile citywide. Downtowns and urban places serve as efficient revenue generators for their cities, as they maximize revenue for space. Unfortunately, the private sector has largely chosen to grow elsewhere in the city, pushing growth outward or into concentrations around multiple nodes rather than fueling more intense downtown growth and development.



# Inclusion | Diversity, Affordability

Downtowns and center cities invite and welcome all residents, employees and visitors by providing access to jobs, housing, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities. A strong sense of inclusion and social cohesion keeps communities strong in times of crisis.

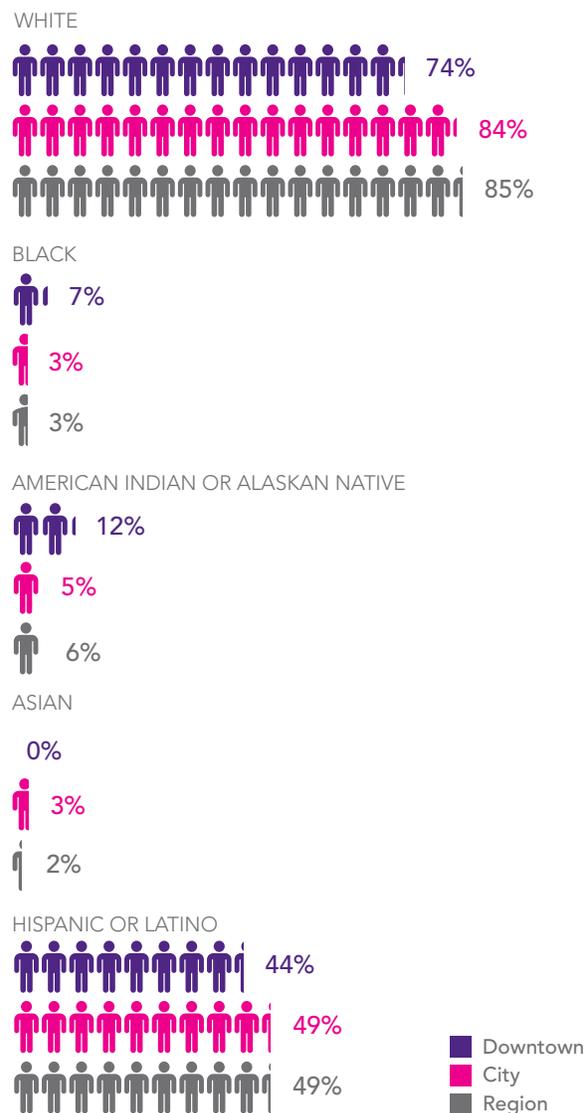
“Inclusive spaces in the public realm, particularly in our cities’ downtowns, can help break down the social barriers that often divide us. Thriving downtown districts and public spaces **promote** not only **economic prosperity**, but also **social cohesion**.”<sup>5</sup>

**Benefits of Inclusion:** Equity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Civic Purpose, Culture, Mobility, Accessibility, Tradition, Heritage, Services, Opportunity, Workforce Diversity

## Racial Diversity

The racial distribution of downtown residents looks fairly similar to the distributions for the city and region, but downtown has more diversity and a smaller proportion of white residents. As a result, downtown Albuquerque scores 78 on the diversity index, compared to the citywide score of 64. The diversity index measures the likelihood that any two randomly selected people in a location will identify as a different race or ethnicity. Since 2013 new Hispanic or Latino residents have largely driven population growth while the number of non-Hispanic White residents has stayed relatively stable. Despite some growth in the numbers of residents who identify as American Indian or Black, the overall proportions of these groups have remained relatively low. American Indians make up a larger share of downtown residents than they do citywide.

## Residents By Race

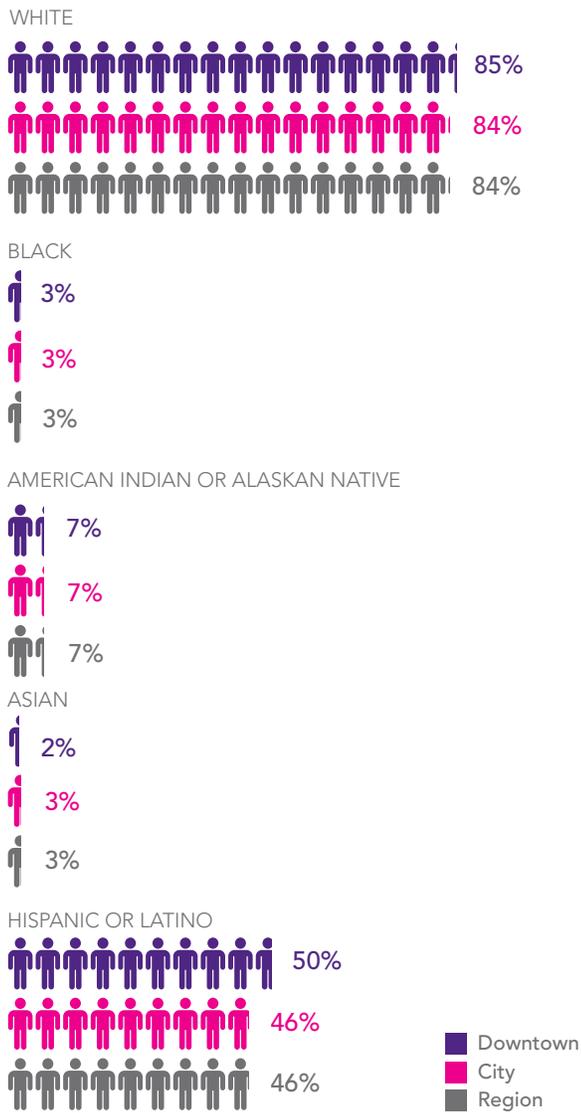


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015 – 2019)

Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% because this data includes people who may be of Hispanic ethnicity but identify as one of the other races (e.g. White, Black, Asian).

Workforce diversity profiles track one another closely among downtown, the city, and the region. Compared to resident demographics, more workers identify as white, creating a profile that more closely reflects the city's overall demographic breakdown. This makes sense, given that the vast majority of downtown workers commute from outside downtown.

## Employment By Race



Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map (2018)  
 Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% because this data includes people who may be of Hispanic ethnicity but identify as one of the other races (e.g. White, Black, Asian).

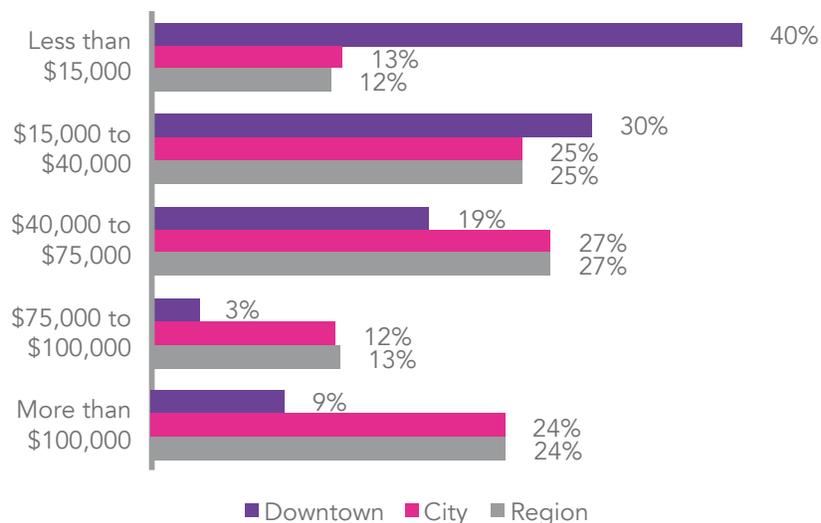
### Socioeconomic Diversity

Living downtown remains affordable and accessible to all incomes, although the study area has fewer higher-income households than the city and region. The median household income for downtown residents, \$23,000, falls significantly under the citywide median of \$53,000. Households earning less than \$15,000 annually constitute the largest income group downtown, followed by those earning between \$15,000 and \$40,000. These two groups account for 70% of downtown residents but only 38% of citywide population. The high share of lower-income households reflects a relatively large supply of subsidized housing; the 375 units downtown represent 28% of all subsidized units in the city. The concentration of affordable units ensures access to downtown's opportunities and resources for people of modest incomes.

Nevertheless, downtowns need a mix of household incomes to thrive, particularly as higher-income households can spend on amenities that can improve and create opportunities for everyone in downtown. Over the past five years, the city has seen a marked increase—50%—in households earning more than \$100,000 annually, but the vast majority of such households in Albuquerque haven't chosen to live downtown. Instead, households earning less than \$20,000 annually have made up the fastest-growing segment of downtown residents.

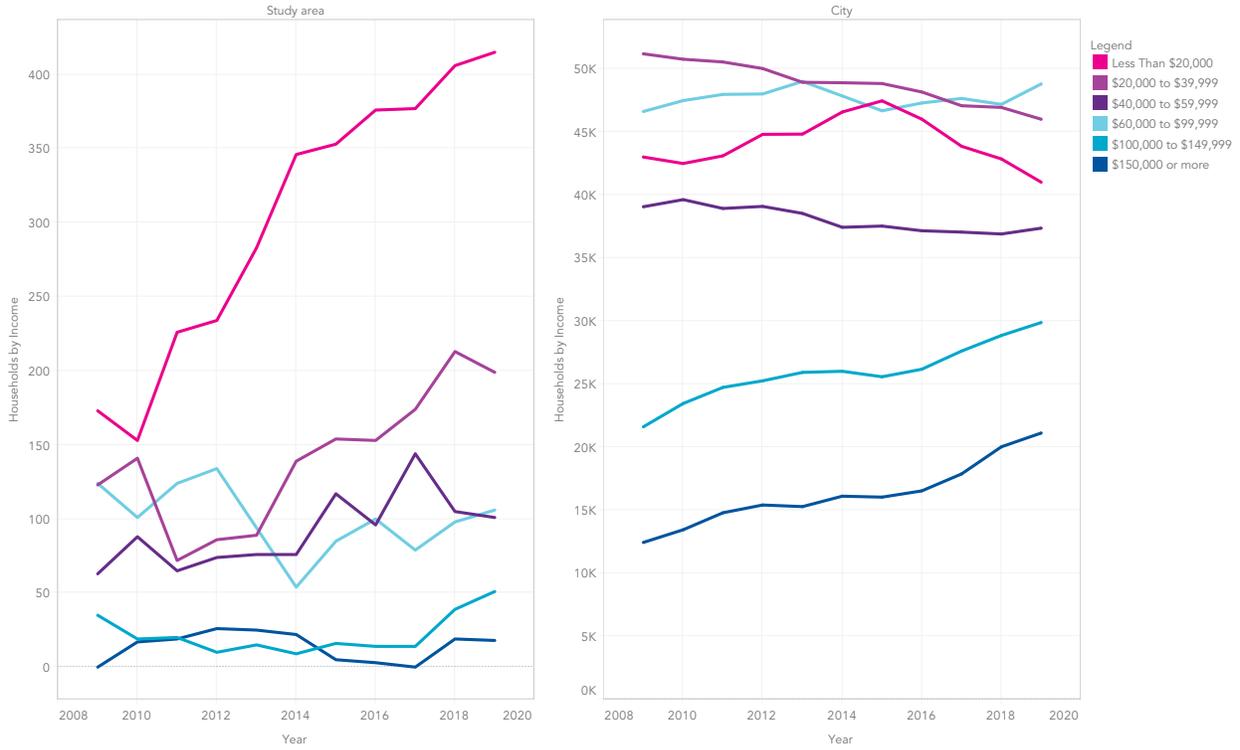


### Household Income 25+



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

### Households by Income

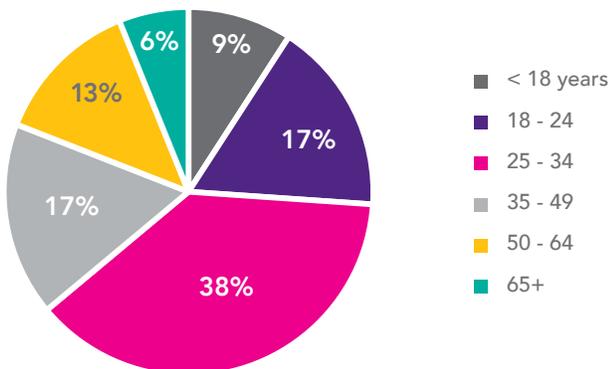


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2005–2009) to (2015–2019)

### Age Diversity

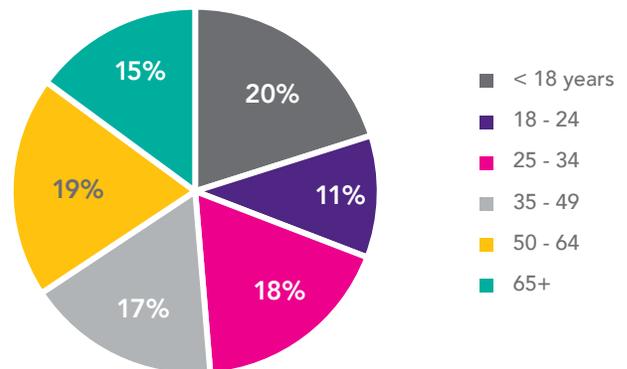
Mirroring the situation in many downtowns across the U.S.—and roughly half the participating districts in our study—young adults between 18 and 34 make up the majority of downtown residents. The largest group, at 38% of the population, comprises people between the ages of 25 and 34 who are just beginning their careers. By comparison, only 16% of residents citywide fall into this age range. Children and seniors have remained the smallest segments of downtown residents since 2002.

### Downtown Age Diversity



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

### City Age Diversity



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

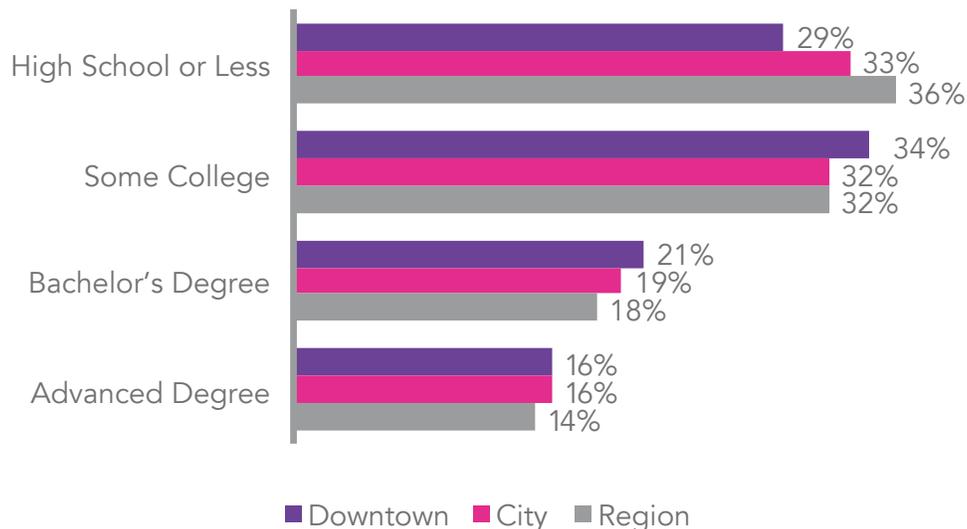
### Economic Inclusion

37% of downtown residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, slightly ahead of the city and regional proportions. However, compared to other study downtowns, downtown Albuquerque has the second-highest percentage of residents with an incomplete college degree. If we separated some college-no degree from associate's degrees in the chart we would see that 27% of residents have an incomplete college education.

Looking more closely, 17% of residents currently pursue some form of higher education. One key driver of that figure: 310 student beds in the University of New Mexico's mixed-use Lobo Rainforest building, which anchors the seven-acre Innovate ABQ campus in downtown. College training will play a key role for workers looking to land the higher-paying jobs concentrated in downtown, which more commonly require higher education than jobs across the city or region.



## Educational Attainment for Residents 25+



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

### Housing and Affordability

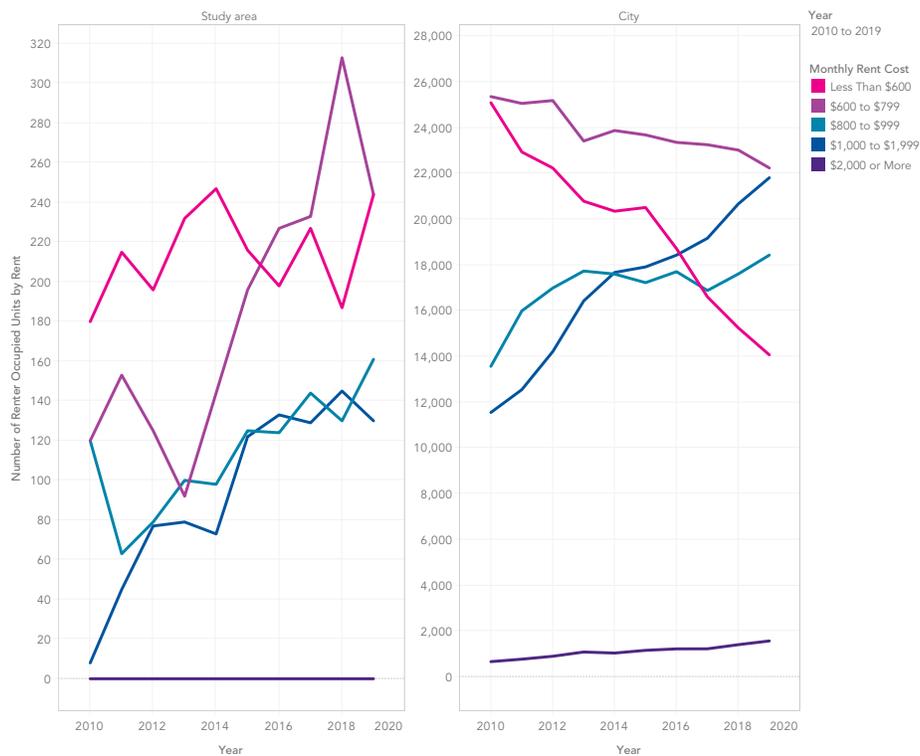
Like most urban places, Albuquerque’s downtown offers mostly rental housing, but rents rank among the most affordable in our study. Renters occupy 92% of housing, and the median gross rent, \$718, stands about \$150 less than the citywide or regional medians. The median rent falls in the lowest 20% of study downtowns, and only in Albuquerque has the median remained stable since 2010. During that time, rents across the city and region rose by 23%. The addition of new subsidized housing may account for the stability of the median rent figure, counterbalancing newer higher-rent units. The development of market rate housing units has been slow, and there may be the potential for higher-rent premiums once the market is proven. Unfortunately, the data from the American Community Survey does not show whether respondents report out-of-pocket costs or total gross rent payments, making it difficult to evaluate the impact of affordable housing on median rent.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past decade, rents for less-expensive housing have moved in opposite directions downtown and

citywide. Citywide, the number of rental units under \$600 has fallen rapidly (down 44% since 2010), while the number of units renting for between \$1,000 and \$2,000 has grown, including increases in the most expensive units. Downtown, the strongest growth occurred in units renting for \$600 to \$799 and \$800 to \$1,000, for a combined increase of 165 units in the same period, even as the under-\$600 inventory remained stable. There was also quite a jump in units at the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range. The relatively low number of downtown units in 2010 accounts for the tripling of inventory, from just 45 units in 2010 to 169 in 2019 for that range.

This could represent a burgeoning inventory of middle-income housing for middle-class households—or it could indicate lower-income households’ being pushed to pay higher rents. The “Households by Income” charts show significant growth of low-income households and only slight growth among middle-income households, making the second theory more likely. The number of residents who qualify as rent-burdened—devoting more than 30% of

### Renter Occupied Units by Rent



their income to rent alone—has tripled since 2010. While downtown units remain largely affordable in comparison to other study areas and the city and region, the growth in the number of rent-burdened households merits careful attention.

The Housing and Transportation Index combines the two necessary expenses of housing and transportation and compares those costs to area median income. The index illustrates how even in urban areas with high base rent, the dollars saved on transportation costs like gas, car repairs, and so on eventually makes dense, urban districts the more affordable option in the long run. In Albuquerque, a downtown household with a median income for the region can expect to spend 34% of its income on housing and transportation combined. Citywide, residents can expect to spend 51% of their income. This further reinforces that downtown is a highly affordable place to live in Albuquerque.

Looking at these costs more closely, we have already noted the greater affordability of downtown rents—but downtown living also offers significant savings on another expense. The typical downtown household spends \$700 per month on transportation, compared to a citywide average of \$950. Assuming transportation costs remained constant, downtown rents could, in theory, rise as high as \$1,350 and still match citywide affordability on this metric. To be clear, this report does not advise maximizing the rent to \$1,350. Downtowns usually score around 40% on the index, which would still indicate room for rents to increase to \$900 - \$950 to hit that mark. Even then downtown would remain unusually affordable. Another factor to consider on rent increases, the relatively high proportion of lower-income residents calls for carefully monitoring of rent increases on existing inventory to avoid displacement.

The study area contains 67 owner-occupied housing units with a median value \$120,000 above the citywide median. In the last decade, the median home value downtown more than doubled. While the total number of units remains small, almost all downtown homeowners are white—a sharp contrast to citywide and regional home-ownership rates.

## Housing and Transportation Index

Downtown	City	Region
34%	51%	54%

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology H&T Index (2018)

## Renters

	Downtown	City	Region
% RESIDENTS WHO RENT	92%	40%	32%
MEDIAN GROSS RENT	\$718	\$873	\$892
MEDIAN RENT INCREASE 2010–2019	-1%	23%	23%
RENT-BURDENED	55%	48%	47%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

## Homeowners

	Downtown	City	Region
% RESIDENTS WHO OWN	8%	60%	68%
MEDIAN HOME PRICE	\$318K	\$198K	\$193K
MEDIAN PRICE CHANGE 2010–2018	143%	5%	7%
HOUSING-BURDENED	60%	32%	29%
WHITE HOMEOWNERS	91%	52%	52%
NON-WHITE HOMEOWNERS	9%	48%	48%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

# Vibrancy | Spending, Fun

Due to their expansive base of users, center cities can support a variety of unique retail, infrastructural, and institutional uses that offer cross-cutting benefits to the region.

Downtowns and center cities typically form the regional epicenter of culture, innovation, community, and commerce. Downtowns flourish due to density, diversity, identity, and use. An engaging downtown “creates the critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, brings people together in social settings, makes streets feel safe, and encourages people to live and work downtown because of the extensive amenities.”<sup>7</sup> Physical distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic have only emphasized the value of a vibrant downtown with restaurants, concerts, outdoor events, and festivals. The eventual recovery of storefront businesses, event venues, and hotels post-pandemic will be essential for restoring a sense of vibrancy and community.

**Benefits of Vibrancy:** Density, Creativity, Innovation, Investment, Spending, Fun, Utilization, Brand, Variety, Infrastructure, Celebration

## Residential Growth

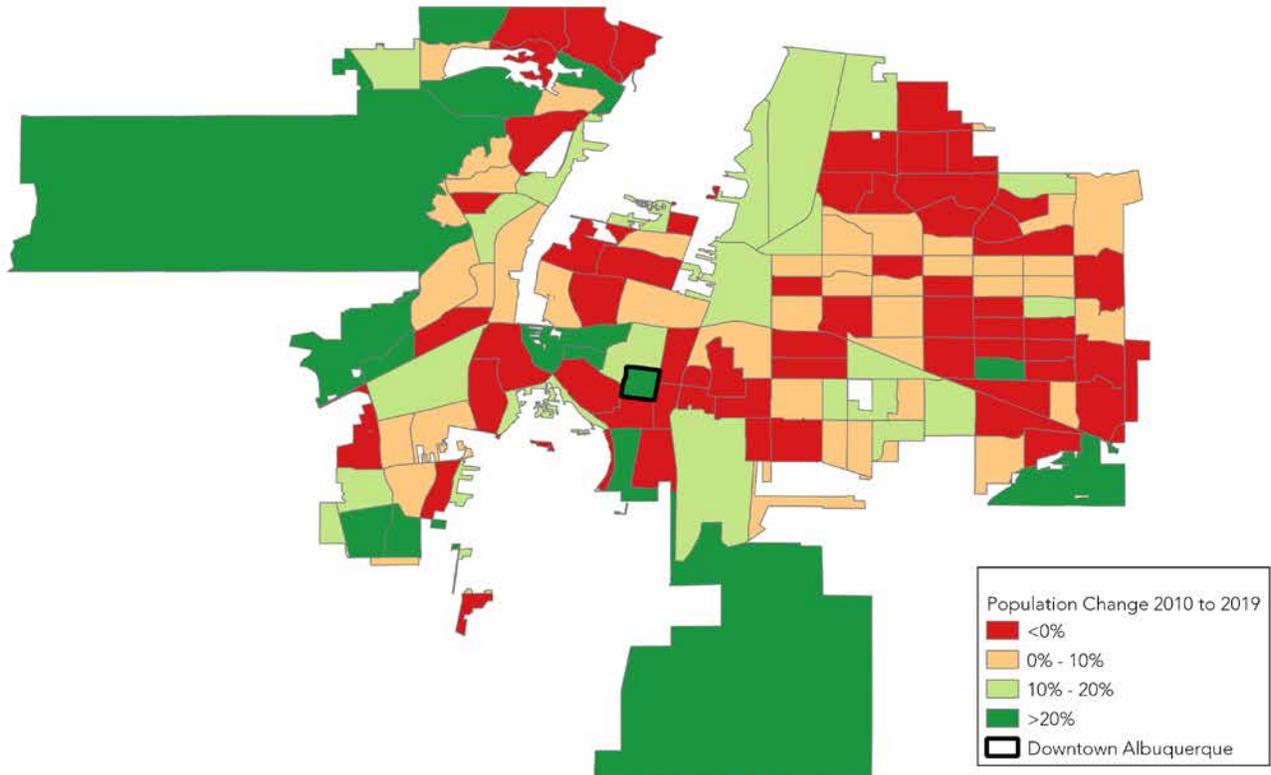
Measured by rate alone, downtown ranks as one of the fastest-growing locations in the city. Since 2010, close to 500 new residents have moved downtown, producing a growth rate of 60%. Through this period, housing inventory has kept pace and diversified, growing by 70% and including projects like One Central. Most census tracts around downtown saw population decline over the same period, except for a tract to the north that grew by 17% or 600 residents. Other high-growth tracts appear at the edges of the city, which suggests suburban sprawl. This rapid growth on the fringes reinforces earlier observations about competition with suburban centers for workers and, by extension, residents, too.

A vibrant downtown will require population growth. Residents bring activity at all hours and move a district from 9-to-5 employment center to a more multifaceted and active community. Encouraging residential growth will play a critical role in the years of pandemic recovery and recalibration. Working from home will become more widely practiced, and even employers who bring workers back to offices will offer hybrid arrangements. Both will reduce the number of workers commuting downtown daily, something that will matter greatly for a district where non-residents account for 79% of retail sales and 94% of food and beverage sales.



\*Excludes group quarters population  
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

### Population Change in Albuquerque, 2010 to 2018



Downtown population count excludes residents in group quarters.  
 Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006–2010), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)



## Retail Vitality



	Downtown	City
TOTAL RETAIL BUSINESSES	94	4,491
RETAIL BUSINESSES PER SQUARE MILE	192	24
TOTAL RETAIL SALES	\$80M	\$10.5B
TOTAL RETAIL DEMAND	\$17M	\$7.2B
RETAIL SALES PER SQUARE MILE	\$163M	\$56M
ESTIMATED SALES TO NON-RESIDENTS	\$63M	\$3.3B
ESTIMATED % OF SALES TO NON-RESIDENTS	79%	31%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst (2017)

### Retail Vitality

The presence of engaging retail and restaurant spaces serves as another key component of a vibrant district. Downtown has a denser concentration of storefronts than the city overall but the total number of retail and restaurant businesses is low compared to other study areas. CoStar data shows that the asking rental rate for a square foot of retail space downtown averages around \$17.61, and the 8% vacancy rate sits just below the citywide rate of 11%. As recently as 2015, downtown retail space rented for an average of \$10.87 per square foot, and 19% sat vacant. This shift shows a significant change in demand for retail space and may signal the emergence of a strong retail base. The 22,500 square feet of retail space that opened in the last five years, as well as 5,000 more in the development pipeline, further demonstrate a steady expansion of downtown's retail presence.

Downtown residents, however, only generate an estimated \$16.8 million in retail demand—a very low figure. This presents downtown with a chicken-and-egg conundrum. Generally, people who consider moving to downtowns and other walkable urban places want easy access to amenities and experiences and a shorter commute. Without enough residential retail demand, restaurants and stores—those amenities and experiences—struggle to survive. Yet, without those restaurants and stores, downtown doesn't look appealing to the prospective residents whose presence would help increase demand. Once downtown reaches a critical mass of amenities and storefronts residents will follow enthusiastically.



Cafes and breweries dot downtown, capitalizing on the tried-and-true attraction of coffee and craft beer. The rapidly growing neighborhood around the Alvarado Transportation Center, in the southeast corner of the study area, has a healthy presence and diversity of restaurants and bars, a grocery store, art galleries, theatres, and easy access to transit. It represents a model of downtown vibrancy; downtown proponents would do well to study it with the goal of spreading its spark to more of downtown.



## 2019 District Events and Activities



9

VENUES WITH LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

5

GYMS AND FITNESS STUDIOS

4

THEATRES

25

OUTDOOR EVENTS PERMITTED

1

TOTAL FARMER'S MARKET

3

TOTAL ANNUAL FESTIVALS/PARADES (WITH MORE THAN 1,000 ATTENDEES)

27

TOTAL CONVENTIONS

54,480

CONVENTION ATTENDEES

Source: City of Albuquerque (2019)

# Identity | Visitation, Heritage, Tradition

Downtowns and center cities preserve the heritage of a place, provide a common point of physical connection for regional residents, and contribute positively to the brand of the regions they anchor.

Downtowns are “iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most iconic landmarks, distinctive features, and unique neighborhoods. Given that most downtowns represent one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city’s past, present, and future.”<sup>8</sup> The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create a unique sense of place not easily replicated in other parts of the city.

**Benefits of Identity:** Brand, Visitation, Heritage, Tradition, Memory, Celebration, Fun, Utilization, Culture

	DOWNTOWN	CITY
 <b>Hotels</b>		
HOTELS	3	167
HOTEL ROOMS	784	15,436
AVG. 2019 OCCUPANCY	74%	68%

Source: VisitABQ (2020)

A strong identity, mixed with vibrancy and activity, could pay dividends for downtown. Albuquerque’s geographic isolation—several hours from the closest large cities—creates a captive audience for local tourism and an opportunity for downtown to establish itself as a regional center of great cultural experiences. Even if attracting private-sector office tenants continues to prove difficult, citywide population and job growth should expand the pool of new consumers for downtown experiences.

Albuquerque has seen several evolutions through history that have left their mark on downtown. Historic structures embedded around the study area catch the eye with their unique architecture. The KiMo Theater, one of the most well-known historic structures in the city, immediately stands out. The theatre was built in 1927 in part as a gift from an Italian-American entrepreneur to local Native Americans as thanks for their friendship. The theatre was designed with a combination of Aztec, Navajo and Pueblo architectural influences and features indigenous symbols and imagery inside and out. Even the name KiMo comes from the Native American word for mountain lion. After construction the theatre hosted Native American singers and dances. This is only one example of the history beneath the surface downtown.

In 1926 Route 66 ran north/south through downtown Albuquerque, a 506-mile stretch of mostly unpaved road. In 1931 the federal government invested in paving and reorienting the highway to create a shorter path through New Mexico, this time along an east/west axis. Route 66 earned its fame by being the only all-weather highway between Chicago and Los Angeles and it shaved 200 miles off the existing trip between the two cities. As the only paved road to cross New Mexico in its day, it brought growing numbers of tourists through the city and into downtown.

Today downtown contains 5% of the city's total hotel rooms, and before COVID, hotel occupancy rates outpaced rates for the rest of the city. Given its small footprint—just 0.3% of the city's land area—downtown's outsized share of citywide hotel rooms speaks to its power as a draw for visitors. In 2020 COVID had a severe impact on hotel occupancy, bringing the rate down to 33%. As urban places rebound from the pandemic and once consumers work up the confidence to travel again, we hope to see occupancy return to pre-pandemic levels by late 2021.

In a typical year downtown hosts high-profile annual events. SOMOS ABQ brings together hundreds of local collaborators for a celebration of food music, talent and creativity that draws around 25,000 attendees.<sup>9</sup> Other marquee events include Downtown SummerFest and several events hosted in Civic Plaza.

Downtown features a thriving local arts community. In fact much of downtown sits within the Downtown Albuquerque Arts and Cultural District boundary. Under a DowntownABQ Mainstreet program, the 30-block area benefits from a support program for artists to connect them to resources in the community and promote projects within the district. The ABQ Artwalk, launched in 2018, offers a monthly celebration of community and local artists by showcasing artists' works in non-traditional venues like breweries, bars, and other locales—essentially, getting art out of traditional galleries and museums and into the community. By helping more people encounter and appreciate art, the program brings more attention to its creators. Gabe Gallegos, one of ABQ Artwalk's cofounders and organizers, is a staunch supporter of downtown. In an interview about the event and his priorities he said that, "What's important for us is growing the community in downtown Albuquerque. [...] The Downtown is the heart of the city. If the Downtown is successful, the rest of the city is successful. So our focus is always gonna be the heart of Albuquerque—the heart of New Mexico, essentially."<sup>10</sup>



## Destinations and Unique Features



56

HISTORIC  
STRUCTURES

3

MUSEUMS



93

PUBLIC ART  
INSTALLATIONS

1

PARK AND  
NATURAL  
AREA

Source: City of Albuquerque (2021)

# Resilience | Sustainability, Diversity

At its broadest, resilience means a place's ability to withstand shocks and stresses. Thanks to their diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their residents can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than other parts of the city. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought resilience to the forefront of many people's minds. On the economic side, downtowns and their cities showed their ability to mobilize quickly to offer economic relief. Over the longer term, downtowns have proven able to bounce back quickly from economic downturns. Social resilience means that residents have access to necessary health services and health workers, but also that strong community support enables community residents and businesses alike, to depend upon each other for support. The green spaces and trails that contribute to environmental resilience took on added importance as safe outdoor respites during the pandemic. Each of these elements illustrates how downtown contributes to the holistic resilience of the community and the larger city.

## Economic Resilience

This report's Economy section describes downtown's heavy reliance on public administration jobs. Having a single industry as the dominant employer comes with risks and potential instability. Public administration doesn't typically suffer large disruptions the way other industries do, but diversifying employment can help make the downtown economy more dynamic and secure. In the early 2000s public administration accounted for only 39% of downtown's

**Benefits of Resilience:** Health, Equity, Sustainability, Accessibility, Mobility, Durability of Services, Density, Diversity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Opportunity, Scale, Infrastructure

employment, but that proportion has risen to around 50% since 2010, meaning reliance on this sector has grown over time. Increasing residential population, particularly with the addition of higher-income households, will also strengthen the downtown economy by expanding the customer base for local retail and restaurants.

## Social Resilience

Downtowns act as hubs for social resilience. Their dense nature means that a diverse mix of residents and employees have access to a multitude of community resources in a small area. With a library, eight religious institutions, and five schools, downtown packs into an easily walkable half square mile multiple valuable amenities that support lower-income residents and families.

A healthy population represents a central element of social resilience, especially critical in a public health crisis. Downtown residents score slightly worse than citywide residents on life expectancy and leisure physical activity but do score better on health care coverage.

A much higher share of downtown households qualify as impoverished than in the city or the region overall. The share of downtown residents in poverty has grown rapidly

## Downtown Community Resources



1

LIBRARY



8

RELIGIOUS  
INSTITUTIONS

1

PARK AND  
NATURAL AREA

5

POSTSECONDARY  
INSTITUTIONS

5

PRIMARY AND  
SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS

Source: City of Albuquerque (2021)

over the last decade since the Great Recession: from 15% in 2010 it grew to 34% in 2015 and 45% in 2020. The presence of 28% of the city's subsidized housing on 0.3% of its land area makes it very clear downtown has provided its fair share of affordable housing units. The Alvarado Transportation Center—yet another essential resource for lower-income residents, is located downtown and acts as the city's central point for public transit.

The percentage of residents with computer and internet access appears close to citywide and regional averages. These measures took on added importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many households needed the ability to work or attend school from home.

### Environmental Resilience

Downtown has a very limited amount of public space—just four acres in total. While the Civic Plaza serves as a central spot for community events, more green space and greater access to outdoor spaces for recreation and play could go a long way toward improving resident health by making it easier to pursue physical activity, better accommodating families with children, and creating more spaces for community interaction. On sustainable infrastructure and design, downtown is ahead of the curve on LEED construction and electric vehicle charging points; both having high shares of the citywide totals relative to land area.

A downtown's environmental resilience plays a central role in assuring its region's long-term sustainability. The average downtown household has an average of 1.18 cars, compared to the citywide household average of 1.63, strongly suggesting that people who live downtown have less need for a car. Lower car ownership is one reason downtown households emit lower levels of greenhouse gases than households citywide—37.5% less, totaling 3 tons fewer per household than the citywide average.

Downtown residents are far more likely to commute to work by transit or on foot. Most work within 10 miles of home— if not downtown, then at the medical campus, UNM Hospital, the University of New Mexico, or Uptown. As the core of citywide public transit, the Alvarado Transit Center connects downtown to all these key job centers. Albuquerque has continued to improve its transit network; it added a new bus rapid transit line at the end of 2019, cutting east/west travel times by transit through the city.

## Access to Economic Opportunity

	Downtown	City	Region
RESIDENTS IN POVERTY	45%	17%	16%
RESIDENTS NEAR POVERTY	19%	19%	20%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT A COMPUTER	9%	9%	11%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS	10%	10%	10%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)



## Health

	DOWNTOWN	CITY
AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY	76	79*
NO LEISURE-TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	20%	19%
WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	5%	8%

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2018); CDC (2017); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015–2019)

\* County

## Environmental Resilience



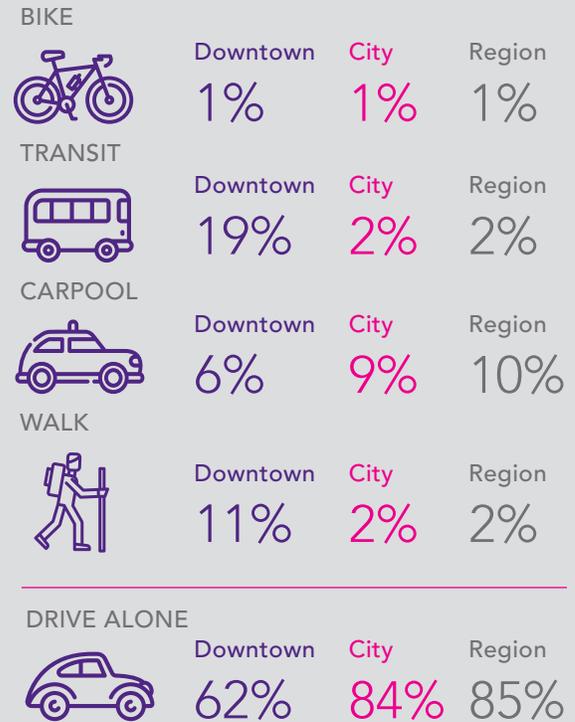
	DOWNTOWN	CITY	REGION
LEED BUILDINGS	17	223	-
ELECTRIC CAR CHARGING POINTS	5	11	-
ACRES OF OPEN SPACE	4	16K	29K
ANNUAL GHG EMISSIONS PER HOUSEHOLD	5	8	9

Source: City of Albuquerque (2021); Center for Neighborhood Technology H&T Index (2018)

Downtown should take pride in its growing embrace of public transit. In 2009, 86% of downtown residents drove alone to work and 0% used transit; the most recent assessment shows that only 62% drive alone to work and 19% take transit. Unfortunately, citywide use levels have moved in a different direction. In 2009 81% of commuters drove alone to work, a figure that has since increased.

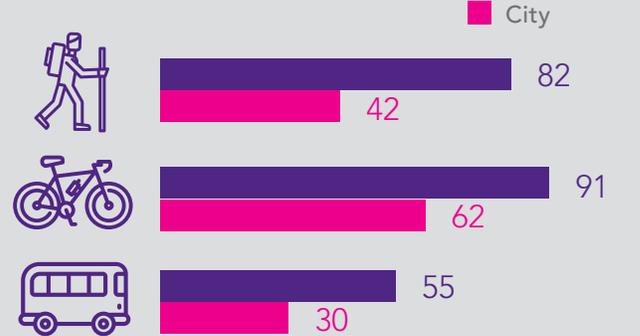
One transportation gap stands out, however: a low level of commuting by bike, which match rates across the city and region. At 91, downtown ranks very well on the Bike Score scale, where a figure above 90 indicates sufficient biking infrastructure to run daily errands and get around comfortably by bicycle. Given this infrastructure and ease, climate or other unmeasured factors are possible reasons for bikes' relative unpopularity. Whatever the cause, this mode hasn't caught on for commuting.

## Downtown Commuting Patterns



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019)

## Walk, Bike and Transit Scores



Source: Walk Score (2021)

# Downtown Profile | Summary

Using data collected for *The Value of U.S. Districts and Center Cities* study, we identified three tiers of districts, defined by their stage of development. We divided the study districts into *established*, *growing* and *emerging* tiers based on the citywide significance of downtown population and jobs, density of residents and jobs within the district, assessed value per square mile, and the rate of growth in population from 2000 to 2019, and jobs from 2002 to 2018.

These tables show how Albuquerque compares to its peers in the *emerging* tier and to the citywide averages for the tier. For the full set of cities by tier, accompanying data points, and methodology, please refer to *The Value of U.S. Districts and Center Cities* compendium.\*

Albuquerque ranks as an “*emerging*” downtown. *Emerging* districts have a low proportion of citywide significance in terms of jobs and population (as a group they average 2% of overall population and 17% of jobs) and have lower densities. *Emerging* downtowns don’t yet have the high citywide significance in jobs and residents found in other downtowns, and they have relatively lower densities. That also means that they have substantial potential; typically, property value per square mile remains low relative to other urban places, allowing developers to see greater return on their investments. Similarly, lower rents make these downtowns attractive to small businesses and creators/makers.

Downtown Albuquerque is one of the smallest footprints in this study. While the *emerging* tier includes the study’s smallest participants, on average they cover four times as much land as Albuquerque’s half mile. This goes a long way toward explaining Albuquerque’s statistical weakness on many “percent of citywide” measures, but distinct advantage on density measures. Compared to its peers, downtown far exceeds the tier average on per square mile, but it falls short on residents and retail sales per square mile.

Downtown Albuquerque has the lowest population total in the study and one of the highest ratios of jobs to residents along with Wichita. This is evidence of downtown’s dynamic as a 9-to-5 central business district and puts into context how this ratio varies among downtowns of similar size. Larger

\*The compendium report is available at the IDA website, [downtown.org](http://downtown.org).

## Emerging Downtowns

ALBUQUERQUE	GREENSBORO	TAMPA
BIRMINGHAM	HOLLYWOOD	TOLEDO
CLEVELAND	LANCASTER	TUCSON
EL PASO	OKLAHOMA CITY	TULSA
EVANSVILLE	SAN ANTONIO	WICHITA
GRAND RAPIDS	SPARTANBURG	LITTLE ROCK

Average of **2% of the citywide land area**; average assessed value of \$1.47 billion (7% of citywide taxable value); accounting for:

	DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
CITYWIDE POPULATION	0.3%	2.3%
18-TO-34-YEAR-OLDS LIVING CITYWIDE	0.6%	3.1%

	DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE*	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS	EMERGING CITY 2020
 <b>GROWTH</b> AVG. 2000–2019	143%	18%	10%
<b>RESIDENTS</b> RESIDENTS / ACRE	4	6.7	4.57
<b>MEDIAN INCOME</b> HOUSEHOLD	\$23K	\$36K	\$48K
<b>DIVERSITY INDEX</b>	78.3	63.9	68.0

\*Downtown excludes group quarters population



## EMPLOYMENT

	DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE	EMERGING DOWNTOWNS
GROWTH IN DOWNTOWN EMPLOYMENT (2002–2018)	-3%	-3%
CITYWIDE JOBS	6%	17%
CITYWIDE KNOWLEDGE JOBS	5%	19%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	22%	28%
RESIDENTS WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER	37%	38%

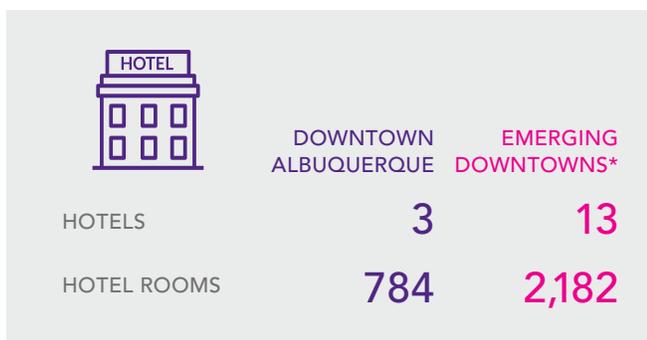
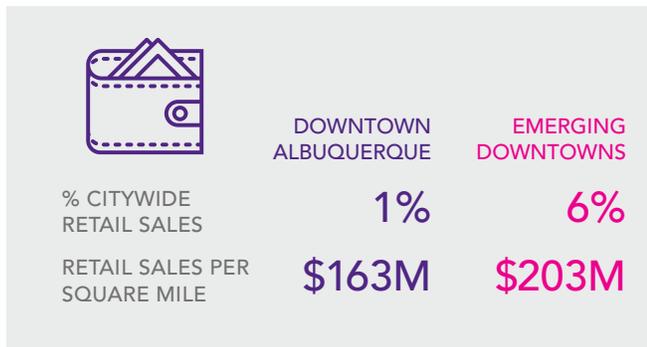
downtowns in the “growing” and “established” tiers see a closer balance between employment and residential as they evolve into more complete live, work, and play urban places.

Downtown has a 15% higher share of residents taking sustainable modes of transit to work than the average tier downtown. In fact, with 38% of downtown commuters taking sustainable modes of transit to work, Albuquerque ranks much closer to much more developed downtowns, like Seattle’s, in the *established* tier. Albuquerque beats the tier averages for Walk, Bike, and Transit scores, as well.

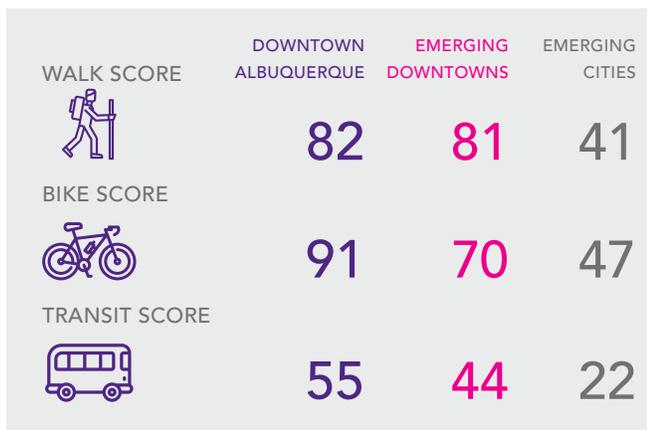
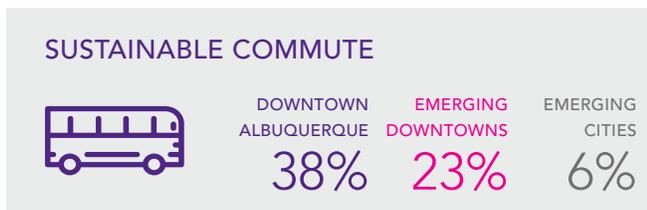
Downtown Albuquerque commonly compares itself to peers in downtown El Paso or downtown Tucson, and among the three, downtown Albuquerque has performed the best since 2002. On overall population, downtown has grown faster than Tucson, while downtown El Paso’s population has declined over the last two decades. Low-income residents make up a large share of all three downtowns’ populations. Downtown Albuquerque has added more low-income households, but Tucson and El Paso have seen their totals shrink. Downtown El Paso has not gained any wealthier households, but Tucson has seen notable growth in households earning more than \$40,000 annually. All three differ in racial demographics as well. Albuquerque has a slight Hispanic or Latino majority, El Paso has a very large Hispanic or Latino majority, and Tucson has a sizable White majority.

In economic factors, Albuquerque has suffered the least severe job losses since 2002. By comparison, Tucson lost 8% of its employment in that period, and El Paso lost 9%. Largely supported by public administration and educational services, Tucson’s mix of economic sectors looks similar to Albuquerque’s.

Where downtown really shines is in the momentum of its residential growth and accessibility. Many downtowns in the emerging tier have seen stalled growth in both jobs and residents, sometimes for decades, but downtown Albuquerque’s consistent residential growth over the last ten years is encouraging. Downtown has great value as an employment center and as a focal point for cultural experiences and local history. While suburban competition has created a drag on downtown’s ability to attract new employers, downtown has assets the suburban employment centers do not. The sense of vibrancy from a growing community combined with a distinct and creative local identity creates a potent combination for both new employers and prospective residents looking for someplace special.



\*This figure excludes downtown San Antonio, which is an outlier for emerging downtowns.





APPENDICES

PROJECT  
METHODOLOGY

PRINCIPLES AND  
BENEFITS

DATA SOURCES

ADDITIONAL IDA  
SOURCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY



# Appendix I: Project Framework and Methodology



## BACKGROUND

In 2017, IDA launched the Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities study. IDA staff and the IDA Research Committee worked with an initial group of 13 downtown organizations, Stantec's Urban Places as a project advisor, and HR&A as an external consultant to develop the valuation methodology and metrics. Since 2017, IDA has added another 30 downtowns or urban districts to the study database, and worked with their respective urban place management organizations (UPMOs) to collect local data, obtain data from agencies in their cities, and combine these metrics with publicly available statistics on demographics, economy, and housing. Data collected included publicly available census figures (population, demographics, employment, transportation), downtown economic performance, municipal finances, capital projects, GIS data, and the local qualitative context. The 43 downtowns and urban districts studied to date represent diverse geographic regions and have relatively comparable levels of complexity and relationships to their respective cities and regions.

Guiding questions for this project included:

- What is the economic case for downtowns? What stands out about land values, taxes, or city investments?
- How do downtowns strengthen their regions?
- Can we standardize metrics to calculate the value of a downtown?
- How can downtowns measure their distinctiveness, cultural and historical heritage?
- How does a downtown's diversity make it inclusive, inviting, and accessible for all?
- What inherent characteristics of downtown make it an anchor of the city and region?
- Due to its mix of land-uses, diversity of jobs, and density, is downtown more socially, economically, and environmentally resilient than the rest of the city and region?



## PROJECT PURPOSE

The project measured the performance of U.S. downtowns using metrics developed collaboratively and organized under five principles that contribute to a valuable urban center. This study:

- Provides a framework of principles and metrics to guide data collection for evaluating the value of downtowns and center cities.
- Standardizes key metrics for evaluating the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of American downtowns.
- Develops an industry-wide model for calculating the economic value of downtowns, creating a replicable methodology for continued data collection.
- Provides individual analysis and performance benchmarks for participating downtowns in this standardized framework, including supplemental qualitative analysis.
- Empowers and continues to support IDA members' economic and community development efforts through comparative analysis.

## THE FIVE PRINCIPLES



## What factors make a vibrant downtown?

Downtowns have differing strengths: some function as employment anchors, some as tourist hubs, and some as neighborhood centers. Some are all three. We distilled the factors for measuring the value from attributes common to all downtowns regardless of their specific characteristics.



### DETERMINING PRINCIPLES FOR A VALUABLE DOWNTOWN

This project began with a Principles and Metrics Workshop held in 2017 with representatives of UPMOs from the 13 pilot downtowns. The workshop focused on developing value principles that collectively capture a downtown's multiple functions and qualities, and its contributions to the city and region. They identified five principles that became the organizing framework for determining benchmarking metrics.

Downtown advocates tailor their advocacy to the interests of different audiences. For instance, the figure for sales tax revenue generated downtown would have resonance for government officials but likely wouldn't hold much interest for visitors and workers. For these audiences, a UPMO might assemble data showing the types of retail available downtown, whether the offerings meet user needs, and how fully residents, workers, and visitors use these retail establishments. The study team sought arguments that would appeal to multiple audiences and worked to identify metrics that could support multiple statements about downtown value. The workshop identified these value statements:



1. Downtowns are typically the economic engines of their regions due to a density of jobs, suppliers, customers, professional clusters, goods, and services.
2. Downtowns offer convenient access to outlying markets of residents, customers, suppliers, and peers thanks to past and ongoing investment in transportation infrastructure.
3. Downtowns provide a concentration of culture, recreation, and entertainment.
4. Downtowns offer choices for people with different levels of disposable income and lifestyle preferences.
5. Because of their density and diversity, downtowns encourage agglomeration, collaboration, and innovation.
6. Downtowns are central to the brand of the cities and regions they anchor.
7. Downtowns can be more economically and socially resilient than their broader regions.
8. Downtown resources and urban form support healthy lifestyles.
9. Downtowns' density translates into relatively low per-capita rates of natural resource consumption.
10. Relatively high rates of fiscal revenue generation and efficient consumption of public resources mean that downtowns yield a high return on public investment.

## METRICS SELECTION

To identify metrics that allow comparisons across jurisdictions, we made sure necessary comparison data was available for every (or almost every) downtown, city, and region. We favored data that would be:

1. Readily available to most downtown management organizations (and ideally public).
2. Replicable (enabling year-to-year comparisons), and
3. Scalable across jurisdictions, allowing for benchmarking and regional comparisons.

Specifically, we chose metrics like population, employment, and assessed value for which we could reliably obtain data. We used more specialized data—figures for downtown visitors or hotel tax revenue—when it helped tell a particular downtown story. Comparisons across jurisdictions, however, focus on commonly available metrics.

We expect most downtowns to rely on similar sources of proprietary data, but participating downtowns may prefer one source over another when obtaining similar data on metrics like commercial real estate (e.g., Colliers vs. CBRE). To the extent possible, instructions require that data sources remain consistent across geographic scales (downtown, city, region) and consistent over time for longitudinal analysis.

The study team analyzed metrics and comparisons to develop value statements about each downtown or district. Three types of data fully illustrate each argument:

1. **Absolute facts** provide quantitative context and a feel for the scale of the characteristic being used to make the argument.

For example, under economy, a UPMO might want to make the argument that a thriving financial services sector plays a critical role in the city's economy. The number of financial services jobs, the share of the city's financial services jobs located downtown, and the number/list of large financial services companies headquartered downtown will help make the case that downtown has great importance to that sector and therefore the city.

2. **Indicators** measure an argument at a secondary level by focusing on inputs or outputs and may reflect the subject geography or serve as benchmarks for



comparison to peer downtowns or case studies of best practices.

At this level, a UPMO could argue that its city's financial services sector is healthy and thriving. Comparing the growth of this sector in other downtowns, or the concentration of financial services jobs relative to other downtowns would highlight the strength of the downtown's appeal to financial services businesses.

3. **Qualitative assessments** inject anecdotal context and color into an argument.

For this level, the UPMO might include news reports of financial services companies choosing to open offices downtown. An interview with a company executive on why a firm chose to locate downtown would also be a powerful anecdote on downtown's appeal.

Together, these different types of information allow IDA and the UPMO to communicate a downtown's unique value to its city.



## DEFINING DOWNTOWN

This study defined the commercial downtown as extending beyond the boundaries of a development authority or a business improvement district. For one thing, geographic parameters vary across data sources and frequently did not align with a UPMO's jurisdiction.

Urban place management organizations vary widely in how they define their service geography. To make boundaries replicable and comparable across data sources, the study team recommended aligning each downtown study area with commonly used census boundaries. In most cases this meant using census tracts, the smallest permanent subdivisions that receive annual data updates under the American Community Survey. They make ideal geographic identifiers, since new data is released regularly, and tract boundaries do not change.

Employing census tracts may not accurately reflect the value of every downtown. In some cases, census block groups more accurately captured the downtown boundaries. Though the Census Bureau occasionally subdivides block groups over time, block groups also receive annual data updates and are compatible with most data sources. We looked to the 2012 publication, *The Value of Canadian Downtowns*, for effective criteria:

1. The downtown boundary had to include the city's financial core.
2. The downtown study area had to include diverse urban elements and land uses.
3. Where possible, we sought hard boundaries such as major streets, train tracks, or geographic features like rivers.
4. An overarching consideration was that data compiled align with selected downtown study areas.

Each downtown provided IDA with the geography selected for its downtown, which IDA then worked to refine, given local conditions and UPMO needs. Customized shapefiles or census tracts defined the downtown boundaries. For city and regional boundaries, IDA worked with the downtown management organization to confirm the accuracy of the respective census-designated place or MSA.

## PROJECT PROCESS

### DATA COLLECTION

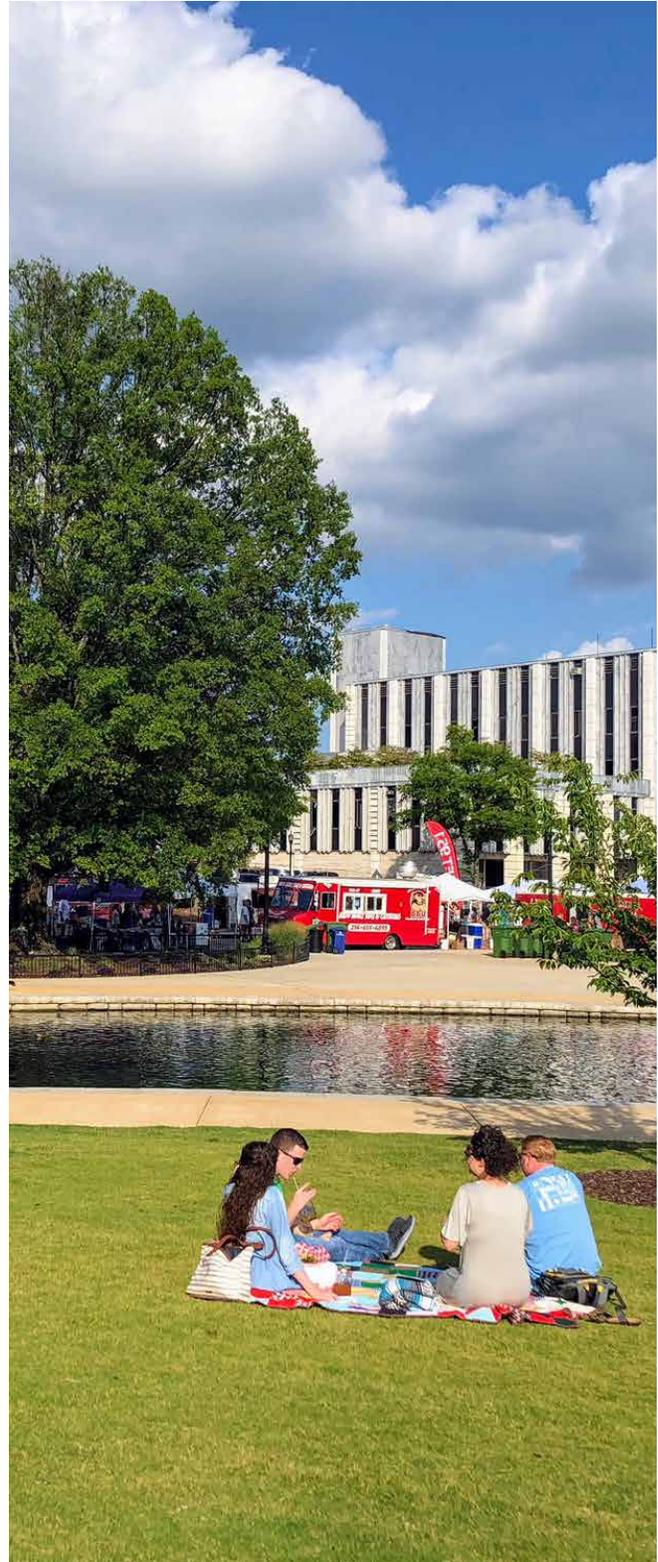
Both IDA and the local partner spent the first phase of the project collecting data for the study. IDA collected data primarily from national databases (see Appendix 3 for data sources), and the local partner worked with its data partners to obtain other locally-specific data. In instances where local data was not available, we allowed substitution or approximation for some metrics if clearly noted and explained.

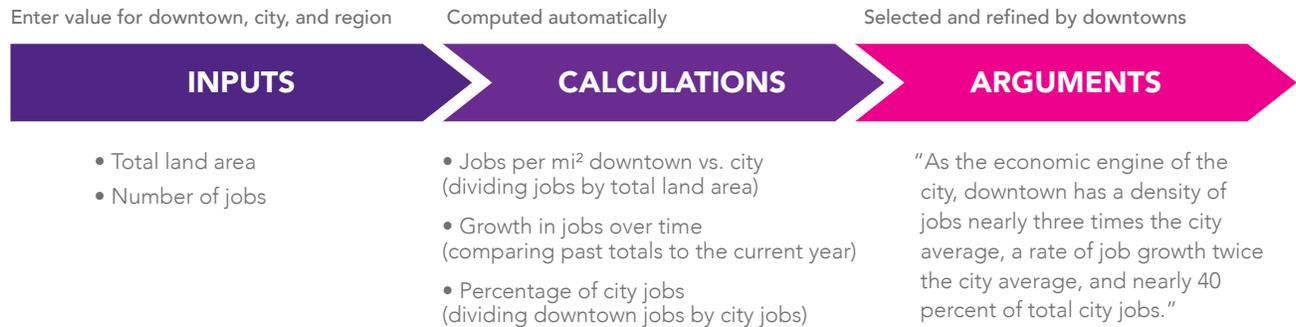
### CALCULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

After compiling the data, we plugged all the information into an IDA database for analysis. The database organizes the data by metric, year, and geography for each district. This specialized tool also tabulates numerous ratios, percentages, changes, and comparisons used in the report. As an example, after plugging in employment and land area data the tool can calculate:

- Percent of citywide and regional jobs
- Percent of citywide and regional land area
- Percent total job growth between specified years
- Percent job growth between specified years broken out by industry
- Average jobs per square mile
- Percent of employment in knowledge industries
- Percent of citywide and regional knowledge jobs located downtown
- Share of employment by race
- Share of employment by age
- Share of workers living and working within the selected area

Applying this analysis across all years collected and all applicable geographies captured trends over time and within larger contexts. The flow chart of inputs, calculations, and arguments demonstrates how we move from raw data to making arguments in the report. Research staff also use their expertise and knowledge of downtowns to highlight key trends and draw connections between local insights and trends in the data.





## BENCHMARKING TIERS

Based on the data collected for this study, we identified three tiers of downtowns, defined by stage of development. We divided the 43 downtowns that have participated to date into “established,” “growing” and “emerging” tiers. Our analysis compared downtown figures to study-wide medians in three areas:

- Density
  - o Jobs per square mile
  - o Residents per square mile
  - o Assessed value per square mile
- Significance to city
  - o Percentage of citywide jobs
  - o Percentage of citywide residents
- Long-term growth
  - o Percent growth in jobs (2002–2018)
  - o Percent growth in population (2000–2019)

**Established** – These downtowns contain high proportions of their cities’ jobs and residents, are dense and highly valuable to their cities.

**Growing** – These downtowns have not yet hit a critical level of density and citywide significance but show steady movement toward that critical mass. This group includes both larger downtowns with lower growth rates, and smaller downtowns with exceptional growth rates.

**Emerging** – Varying sizes and growth rates mark these downtowns, which generally have lower density and a low proportion of citywide jobs and residents. Because the study examined growth rates since 2000, many downtowns that struggled during the recession had a harder time demonstrating significant growth over the longer term despite stronger growth in recent years.

The compendium report that accompanies *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* has additional data on the performance of emerging, growing, and established tiers of downtowns.

# Appendix II: Principles and Benefits

**ECONOMY:** Within their regions, downtowns have substantial economic importance.

Downtowns and center cities are valuable due to their roles as economic anchors for their regions. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns and center cities frequently serve as hubs of industry and revenue generators despite only occupying a small fraction of citywide land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of their relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors.



## Illustrative metrics:

- Annual private investment
- Annual public investment
- Assessed value
- Average office vacancy rate
- Average Class A office rent
- Average Class B office rent
- Average Class C office rent
- Employment (primary jobs)
  - By two-digit NAICS employment sectors
  - By earnings
  - By residence
  - By demographics
- Hotel tax
- Income tax
- Incubator and co-working spaces
- Investment in construction projects
- Number of approved building permits
- Number of Fortune 1000 headquarters
- Office inventory
- Office space under construction
- Office square footage in pipeline (to be completed in three years)
- Property tax
- Parking tax
- Sales tax

**INCLUSION:** Downtowns invite and welcome all residents of the region (as well as visitors from elsewhere) by providing access to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities.

As the literal and figurative heart of the city, downtowns welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Residents of strong downtowns often come from a wide range of racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and represent all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, a downtown has broad appeal to all users and a strong social fabric.



**Illustrative metrics:**

- Average residential vacancy rate
- Demographics
- Diversity Index
- Employment diversity
- Foreign-born residents
- Homeless residents
- House value for owner-occupied housing units
- Households by income
- Median gross rent
- Median home price
- Median household income
- Rent-burdened residents
- Resident population
- Resident population by age
- Resident population by highest educational attainment
- Resident population by race and ethnicity
- Residential inventory
- Residential units in pipeline (to be completed in three years)
- Residential units under construction
- Subsidized housing units

**VIBRANCY:** Thanks to a wide base of users, downtowns and center cities can support a variety of retail, infrastructure, and institutional uses that offer broad benefits to the region.

The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base, creates value. Vibrancy is the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events. As the cultural center of its city, downtown typically attracts a large share of citywide visitors and holds a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms. An engaging downtown “creates the critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, brings people together in social settings, makes streets feel safe, and encourages people to live and work downtown because of the extensive amenities.”<sup>1</sup>



**Illustrative metrics:**

- Annual festivals/parades
- Average hotel occupancy rate
- Average retail rent
- Average retail vacancy rate
- Average visitor length of stay
- Convention centers
- Gyms and fitness studios
- Hotel rooms
- Hotels
- Outdoor events permitted by city
- Population
- Retail businesses (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail demand (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail sales (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail space in pipeline (to be completed in three years)
- Retail space inventory
- Retail space under construction
- Venues with live entertainment
- Visitation by origin
- Visitors

**IDENTITY:** Downtowns preserve the heritage of a place, provide a common point of physical connection for regional residents, and contribute positively to the brand of the regions they represent.

Downtowns and center cities are often iconic symbols of their cities, and this strong sense of place enhances local pride. The distinctive cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that other parts of the city can't easily match. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting the region's identity. Downtowns and center cities serve as places for regional residents to come together, participate in civic life, and celebrate their region, which in turn promotes tourism and civic society.

Downtowns are "iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most iconic landmarks, distinctive features, and unique neighborhoods. Given that most downtowns were one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city's past, present and future."<sup>2</sup>



**Illustrative metrics:**

- Convention attendees
- Conventions
- Farmers markets
- Libraries
- Locally designated historic districts
- Locally designated historic structures
- Media mentions
- Museums
- National Register of Historic Places districts
- National Register of Historic Places structures
- Number of followers on Facebook
- Number of followers on Twitter
- Number of posts with Instagram hashtag
- Parks and natural areas
- Playgrounds
- Plazas/squares/amphitheater or other public outdoor gathering spaces
- Postsecondary institutions
- Postsecondary students
- Primary and secondary schools (public and private)
- Public art installations
- Public pools
- Recreation and community centers, both public and private (e.g., YMCA)
- Religious institutions
- Sports stadiums
- Sports teams

**RESILIENCE:** Because of their diversity and density of resources and services, downtowns and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental, shocks and stresses.

As key centers of economy and culture, being resilient to city, regional, or even national shocks is highly important for ensuring stability, sustainability, and prosperity. Because of diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than the surrounding cities and regions. The diversity and economic strengths of strong downtowns and center cities equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks better than more homogenous communities. Consequently, they can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks that hit less economically and socially dynamic areas particularly hard.



**Illustrative metrics:**

- Acreage of open space
- Annual greenhouse gas emissions per household
- Average life expectancy
- Average property crime rate
- Average violent crime rate
- Bike Score
- Bike share stations
- Community gardens
- Commute mode for workers 16 and over
- Commute time for workers 16 and over
- Docked bikes
- Dockless bikes
- Electric car charging points
- Housing and Transportation Index
- LEED-certified buildings
- Miles of bike lanes
- No leisure-time physical activity among adults aged > 18 in the last month
- Resident population in poverty
- Scooters
- Transit Score
- Transit stops (including rail and bus)
- Unemployment rate
- Walk Score

# Appendix III: Data Sources

## NATIONAL DATA SOURCES FOR THE VALUE OF U.S. DOWNTOWNS AND CENTER CITIES

Source	Data Available	Pricing	Geographic Limitations	Most Recent Data Vintage in the Study
ESRI	Demographic, Housing, Detailed Establishments and Consumer Spending	Proprietary	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census block group level	2017 to 2021 by data set (Annual Updates)
Social Explorer	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Employment	Proprietary	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2020 (Annual Updates)
American Community Survey	Demographic, Housing, Employment	Public	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2019 (Annual Updates)
LEHD On The Map	Labor: workers and firms	Public	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census block group level	2018 (Annual Updates)
Center for Neighborhood Technology	Housing affordability, Sustainability, Income	Public	Allows for selection and exporting of sub-geographies down to census block group level	2017 (Updates Unscheduled)
National Register of Historic Places	Historic structures and districts	Public	None	2020 (Annual Updates)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Life expectancy, physical inactivity and other health data	Public	ZIP Code	2017 (Annual Updates)
FBI Uniform Crime Reporting	Crime Rates	Public	City and Metro	2020 (Annual Updates)

# Appendix IV: Selected Study Definitions

## Assessed value

Assessed value is the dollar value assigned to a property to measure applicable taxes. This figure is an aggregate for all property within the study area, or for the closest match to the study area for which data is available.

## Acreage of open space

This figure is the total acreage of designated public spaces like parks or plazas; it does not include vacant lots.

## Census block group

A block group is a statistical division of a census tract, generally defined to contain between 600 and 3,000 people, that is used to present data and control block numbering in the decennial census.

## Census tract

A census tract is a small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county or equivalent entity, updated by local participants prior to each decennial census.

## Creative jobs

The study uses the NAICS industry sector of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation to count creative jobs.

## Development pipeline

Development pipelines include projects very recently completed, currently under construction, and planned for completion within the next three years.

## Diversity Index

The Diversity Index is a measurement of the likelihood that any two randomly selected individuals will be of a different race or ethnicity. The closer the number comes to 100, the more likely the two will be different, indicating diversity.

## Employment

The study uses the LEHD on the Map tool to count "primary jobs." Distinct from total jobs, primary jobs count only the highest-wage job when an individual holds multiple jobs at a time. This figure may not accurately reflect less traditional types of employment like gig work or small startups.

## Event venue

Event venues include spaces typically used for public events such as conferences, conventions, concerts. This metric is somewhat subjective in that data is collected locally, and the downtown determines what qualifies for inclusion. For example, a downtown might include a venue that is largely private but represents a part of the fabric of the event community.

## Farmers markets

The number of farmers markets is a count of both permanent and seasonal farmers markets.

## Greenhouse gas emissions

The Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index includes an estimate of CO2 emissions per household within a given area.

## Housing and Transportation Index

The Housing and Transportation Index, produced by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, measures how much an average household spends on housing and transportation relative to income. This figure demonstrates how urban places often have higher base rents, but much lower transportation costs.

## Knowledge jobs

Knowledge jobs consist of jobs in the NAICS industry sectors of Information; Finance and Insurance; Real Estate and Rental and Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Management of Companies and Enterprises; and Health Care and Social Assistance.

## Middle-class

This study defines middle-class as between 67% and 200% of area median income. This range was calculated for each downtown based on the median income of the region.

## Millennial

This study defines residents between the ages of 18 and 34 as millennials.

### No leisure-time physical activity

Presented as a percentage, no leisure-time physical activity is the share of residents within the geography who have not engaged in physical activity in their spare time within the past month from the time surveyed.

### Private investment

Private investment is defined as money from private sources being invested in development. This figure is sometimes replaced by a sum of the largest development projects within the study area.

### Public art installations

This figure counts art installations that may be owned by either public or private entities and may be temporary or permanent. They must, however, be easily accessible by the general public.

### Public investment

Individual UPMOs may define public capital investment differently, but the figure generally includes municipal, state, and federal investment in capital projects downtown (such as open space or infrastructure). If only a specific bucket of public investment is available for measurement (for example, municipal public investment), this can be measured and footnoted in the profiles in lieu of capturing investments by other levels of government.

### Rent-burdened

Households paying more than 30% of their income to rent are considered rent-burdened.

### Retail demand

Retail demand measures the total spending potential of an area's population, as determined by residential population and household income characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

### Retail sales

Retail sales measure total sales by businesses within the observed geography. All estimates of market supply are in nominal terms and are derived from receipts (net of sales taxes, refunds, and returns) of businesses primarily engaged in the sale of merchandise. Excise taxes paid by the retailer or the remuneration of services are also included—for example, installation and delivery charges that are incidental to the transaction.<sup>4</sup>

### Sales to non-residents

Sales to non-residents represents an estimate calculated by using figures for retail demand and sales to determine how much of downtown retail sales are to people who don't live in downtown. Simply put, retail sales – resident retail demand = sales to non-residents.

### Sports teams

The number of professional teams within the geography. This figure excludes college teams.

## Additional IDA Sources

*IDA's Vitality Index, powered by Stantec (2019):* The IDA Vitality Index, powered by Stantec, is an interactive, online tool to benchmark the vitality of downtowns across the U.S. The Vitality Index reflects the pioneering IDA research in *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and City Centers*, and measures vitality through three principles identified in the VODT study: economy, inclusion, and vibrancy. Through these three principles, and five core indicators in each principle, the Vitality Index aims to capture the pulse of the downtown and enable urban place managers to quantify and benchmark their district's performance metrics among peer cities. The index uses a benchmarking system to understand how each of three vitality principles contributes to an overall combined score, calculated by comparing each metric to the national average. Most valuable, the index serves as a baseline and provides insights for the strategic evolution of a community.

*Quantifying the Value of Canadian Downtowns: A Research Toolkit (2016):* This toolkit represents a groundbreaking effort to provide a common set of data and processes to help Canadian place management organizations establish and sustain evaluation and compare progress among downtowns. While geared toward Canadian downtowns, the toolkit has value for urban districts outside Canada looking to move toward data standardization and best practices. In the toolkit, organizations will find directions and insights on collecting, organizing, storing, and presenting downtown-specific data to make the case for continued investment and support. The toolkit includes instructions and rationale for the choice of data metrics, and it recommends core, trend and pulse metrics. The kit organizes the core indicators around the principles of visibility (unique identity, brand, definition); vision (leadership, planning, collaboration); prosperity (economic data); livability (residential and uses); and strategy (types and values of public investment). The core indicators are population density (downtown/city); job density (downtown/city); number of new commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings; current value assessment of downtown properties (commercial, residential, institutional); capital investment (downtown/city); transportation modal split; number of large-

format grocery stores; amount invested in parks and public realm; and number of annual cultural events and festivals.

*The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns (2013):* This study provides an extensive portrait of the contributions made by downtown areas across Canada, highlighting innovative approaches to revitalization and efforts being applied across the nation. It builds on an initial study phase, completed in 2012, that examined ten of those downtowns, and tracks population, population density, job density and average block size of the downtown core and the municipality. The study organized data under visibility, vision, prosperity, livability and strategy.

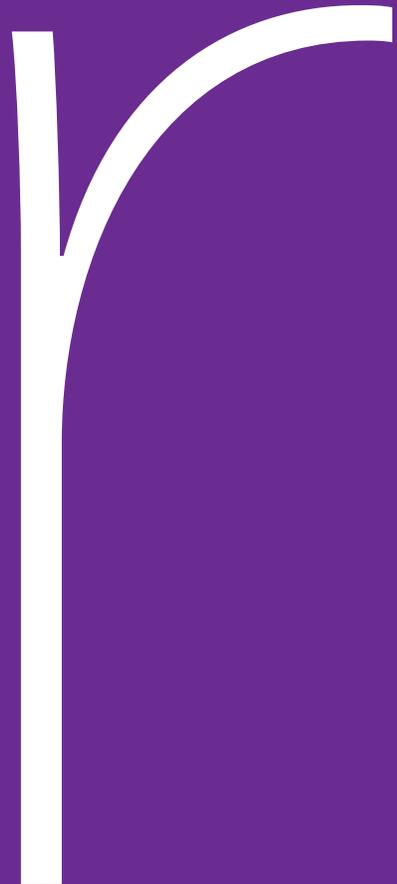
*Downtown Rebirth: Documenting the Live-Work Dynamic in 21st Century U.S. Cities:* This policy paper represents the culmination of a year-long effort by IDA and partners to develop an effective way of quantifying how many people and work in and around 231 job centers in 150 American cities. Without standard geographic definitions for downtowns and downtown residential neighborhoods, previous research relied on overly simplified boundaries that didn't capture the idiosyncratic shapes of urban employment nodes and thus failed to capitalize fully on existing federal data. For the first time, *Downtown Rebirth* suggests a way both to define and quantify downtown workforce and population numbers and document how these employment hubs and live-work environments are changing.

*The Value of U.S. Downtowns & Center Cities* study expands on the efforts of IDA's "*Downtown Rebirth: Documenting the Live-Work Dynamic in 21st Century Cities*" study, which provided guidelines for selecting downtown boundaries. This study uses these recommendations to define downtown beyond the boundaries of a district management organization using a definition of downtown commonly understood by those in that community.

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