

Downtown Village District Area Plan



Section 1: Discovery

January 5, 2023

DISCOVERY

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Discovery - Engagement

Introduction

The Downtown Village District Area Plan process began with learning from the community about their vision and goals for the district. A series of strategies, including an online survey, stakeholder meetings, advisory group meetings, elected official meetings, an open house, walking tours, and tabling at Holly Fest were employed to reach a diverse range of people. This chapter outlines each strategy and its results, ending with 5 themes that emerged.

Stakeholder and Advisory Groups

To ensure a variety of interests were represented, a group of diverse stakeholders was compiled to meet regularly throughout the planning process. An Advisory Group of 13 members also met early on in the process and will continue to be engaged at milestones throughout the project.

Town Council

The Town Council was included in the planning process early on to ensure alignment with Council goals and vision. At the time of publication, 1 of 4 meetings has been completed with elected officials.

Initial meetings with Council, and the stakeholder and the advisory groups set the foundation for the discovery phase of the project. The meetings served to build trust between the project team and all stakeholders. They also provided the opportunity for the project team to better understand the goals and desires of residents, developers, and elected officials.

Survey

An online community survey, was intended to

engage a diverse range of people, perspectives, and experiences, and help us obtain a baseline understanding of the public's perception of and vision for the Downtown Village District. There were 638 individual participants who generated 10,656 responses and 848 comments. The survey was available online and open to the public from November 2 to December 10, 2022 and was advertised through social media, the town newsletter, and the Town of Holly Springs' website. The survey focused on respondents' experiences with and impressions of the Downtown Village District.

Survey Key Metrics

When asked "How often do you visit the Downtown Village District?" 61% of respondents said, "once a week" or "several times a week." Only 4% of respondents said, "A few times a year." This means the survey is reflective of the opinions of people that are frequently using the space. It also means the survey has a small portion of opinions from people that do not use the space

When asked, "How do you usually get to the Downtown Village District?" 86% of respondents said "Driving" and 11% of respondents said "Walking."

The question, "I would visit the Downtown Village District more if there were: Select up to three," was answered by 528 respondents. Of those who responded, 55% of respondents said "More dining options," 49% said "More diverse shopping options," and 28% of respondents said "park/green space."

Nearly a third of respondents said, "More activities for me or my family," and a quarter of

respondents said “more frequent events.”

In response to the question, “What word(s) best describe the Downtown Village District today? Write up to three words.” The most consistent and prevalent response themes were: potential, small town charm, and traffic.

The most prevalent theme was potential. Many respondents contributed words such as up-and-coming, growing, great start, opportunity, want more, improving, emerging. There is recognition that change is occurring and a desire for more.

The second most common theme was “small town charm.” Frequent words include quaint, cute, and charming. Transportation and mobility were other common themes. Respondents noted that while there is too much/dangerous traffic, the district is walkable.

In response to the question, “What word(s) best describe the Downtown Village District today? Write up to three words,” participants were able to “like” other comments. The comments that received the most likes were:

- Incomplete, needs more restaurants and shops (22 agree)
- Great, want more! (22 agree)
- Great feel with potential for more (20 agree)
- Very cozy and friendly, need more shops restaurants (10 agree)

In response to the question, “What word(s) would you use to describe your vision for the Downtown Village District in the future? Write up to 3 words,” The most consistent and prevalent response themes were dining,

restaurants, and retail. Respondents expressed desire for more and diverse dining options, of various price points and cuisines as well as bar and brewery options. They also expressed desire for “shops”, with an emphasis on local businesses. Based on the data collected, it can be inferred that national retailers and large chains do not meet the desired characteristics for the Downtown Village District.

The second most prevalent theme was socialization. There is desire for places to gather, entertainment options (especially live music) and a vibrant nightlife with bars and restaurants open later.

The third most common theme was ‘family friendly’. Respondents expressed desire for restaurants, shops, events, and activities for kids, teens, and families.

The fourth most prevalent theme was walkability. Respondents expressed clear desire for a walkable downtown district that is safe and comfortable for pedestrians.

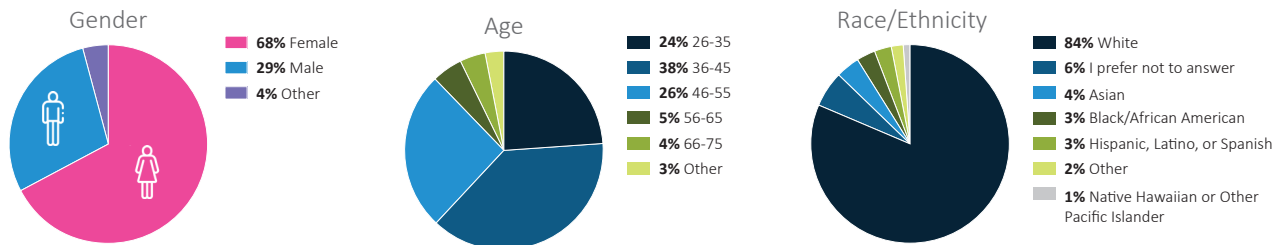
Respondents were asked which features the future Mims Park should have. The top responses were:

- Festivals/events
- Walking paths
- Play spaces
- Farmers market pavilion
- Natural landscapes
- Large gathering/picnic areas

Community Survey

Who Participated

638 individual participants generated 10,656 responses and 848 comments



What Was Said

How participants describe the Downtown Village District today:

up-and-coming Traffic
cute POTENTIAL
small town
good start Restaurants
car wash

61%
 of respondents visit the Downtown Village District "once a week" or "several times a week"

#1 DESIRED USE
 Retail & Dining

How do participants get to the Downtown Village District?

89% DRIVE
11% WALK

What do residents want the Downtown Village District to be in the future?



Engagement Schedule

COMPLETED

October 2022

10/11 Elected Officials Meeting #1
Project kick-off

November 2022

11/02 Advisory Group meeting #1
Advisory Group kick-off (in-person)

11/17 Stakeholder meeting #1
Stakeholder kick-off and walking
tour (in-person)

11/17 Community Workshop #1
Project introduction
- Drop-in Walking Tour
- Open House

UPCOMING (All dates tentative)

February 2023

02/09 Elected Officials meeting #2
Council retreat

02/21 Advisory Group meeting #2
(virtual)

March 2023

03/08 Community Workshop #2
Ideation
- Stakeholder focus groups
- Evening open house

May 2023

05/16 Stakeholder meetings
(in-person)

05/16 Advisory Group meeting #3
(in-person)

05/16 Elected Officials meeting #3
(in-person)

June 2023

TBD Community Workshop #3
Recommendations

August 2023

08/15 Advisory Group meeting #4
(virtual)

September 2023

09/05 Elected Officials meeting #4
(in-person) 80% Draft Plan

October 2023

TBD Council Adoption

Community Workshop #1

Community Workshop

A community workshop was held on November 17, 2022 as a way to introduce the project to stakeholders in the Downtown Village District and hear their perspectives. It was established that this planning process will result in an updated Village District Area Plan, replacing the previous 2006 version. Following an overview of the scope, existing project goals, and key takeaways from the previous Advisory Committee Meeting, there was a discussion among the stakeholders. Many questions came up about what happened after the previous planning effort, which means it will be important to follow up with participants and for residents to see visible changes in the Downtown Village District once the plan is approved. Many themes that emerged in the discussion are reflected in the overall themes presented on pages 16-17.

Open House

The event was well-attended, with approximately 50 participants. The overall feedback from participants was positive. Attendees appreciated the type of outreach and have positive feelings about the project. Attendees were able to learn about the scope of the project, provide feedback in the form of visual preference boards, and place pins on a large aerial map indicating the district's existing assets and opportunities for improvement. Some attendees spent up to 30 minutes talking with neighbors around the preference boards and map. Those neighbor-to-neighbor conversations are valuable for building community and project support.

The visual preference boards presented an opportunity for participants to respond to potential activities, amenities, and land uses.

Each participant was given 3 green dots to place on images that they thought appropriate, and 3 red dots to place on images to avoid. Feedback showed that most individuals responded to things that they want most, rather than things that they do not believe are appropriate.

At the map station, participants indicated excitement to see more family-friendly spaces to gather and celebrate events. Participants indicated a desire for more of a draw/reason to come downtown such as festivals, markets, restaurants, shopping, and more spaces to activate. Many yellow pins, indicating opportunities for improvement, were placed on vacant lots and office condos, highlighting the east side of Main Street in the downtown core.

Overall Open House Key Themes

1. Traffic calming on Main Street (not only in the core, towards 55 too).
2. Events and restaurants are a key reason people come to the Downtown Village District; currently there aren't enough of either to prevent people from going to other, more established downtowns in the region.
3. The Pack House is a key building to the Black community and history of Holly Springs. Efforts to rehabilitate it should focus on social functions that hearken to its history and not to for-profit uses that may not appeal to the neighbors.
4. Participants talked about the need for amenities, social spaces and "third places" to stay downtown for different activities.

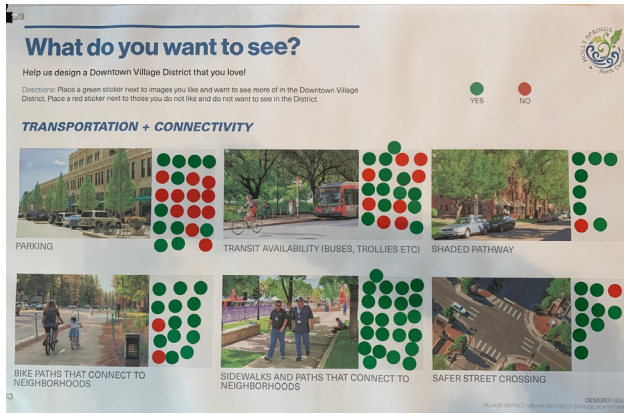
5. Gateways and defining the District will be important.
6. Participants don't know about the history embedded in the Downtown Village District – there may be a storytelling opportunity to build on with this plan.
7. We heard that the architectural character may not be consistent with what participants think of as 'downtown.' What is the next evolution of buildings? It is important to think about the public realm.
8. Excitement about Mims Park.



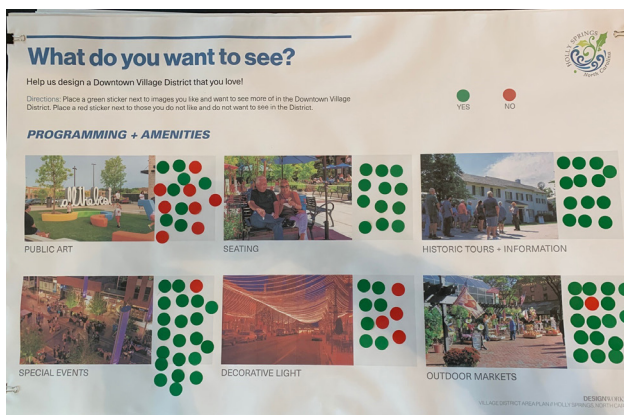
Participants at the Community Open House on November 17, 2022 .

Visual Preference Summary

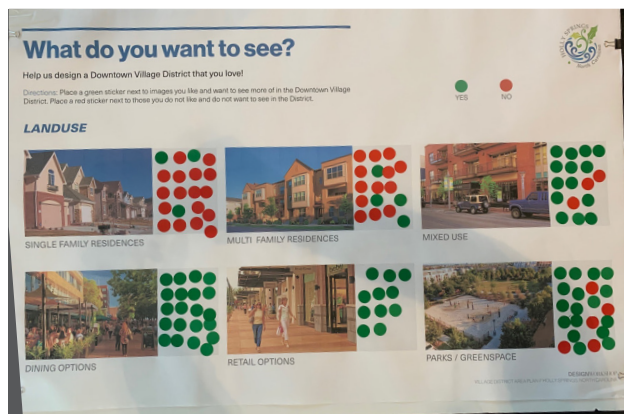
The visual preference boards were organized into three categories: transportation and connectivity, programming and amenities, and land use. Green stickers indicate concepts that participants want to see or see more of in the Downtown Village District plan, while red stickers indicate concepts participants do not want to see. The counts for each are listed below, with the category that received the most green stickers in bold.



TRANSPORTATION + CONNECTIVITY	●	●
Parking	11	12
Transit Availability	13	8
Shaded pathway	7	1
Bike paths	13	2
Sidewalks and paths	23	0
Safer street crossing	9	1



PROGRAMMING + AMENITIES	●	●
Public Art	8	8
Seating	12	0
Historic Tours + Information	13	0
Special Events	21	0
Decorative Light	7	4
Outdoor Markets	16	2



LAND USE	●	●
Single family residences	3	17
Multi-family residences	4	13
Mixed Use	14	2
Dining Options	21	0
Retail Options	11	0
Parks/Greenspace	17	5



Participants at the Community Open House on November 17, 2022 place pins on a large aerial map of the Downtown Village District indicating what is working well and where there is opportunity for improvement.

Community Mapping

Participants indicated a concentration of opportunity areas on the east side of Main Street in the core, particularly on un-utilized or underutilized properties (Figure 1).

- There are concerns about traffic speed and congestion along Main Street
- There is a perceived disconnection of the Cultural Center and downtown core.
- Participants view the medical center as a key asset to the district.
- Identification signs with distinctive landscaping welcoming people to the Town.
- There are questions about the development opportunities at Main and Earp Street.
- The Pack House was indicated as an opportunity to leverage the history and culture of Holly Springs.
- Mims Park was indicated as a key potential regional destination.

Figure 1: Open House Mapping Exercise



Open house participants placed pins on a large aerial map of the Downtown Village District. Green pins indicate good things and yellow indicate areas of opportunity.



Walking Tour

The key takeaways from the walking tour are listed below.

1. Mims Park is an opportunity zone. No one in attendance had visited the natural springs before. Possible future uses mentioned include: disc golf, farmer's market, outdoor adventure sports (mountain biking, zip-lining, pump track). Participants noted Mims Park does not need a playground or to be a catch all facility.
2. Parking is limited in the Downtown Village District and it was suggested for Town vehicles to move to a lot further from the district.
3. There a lot of parcels with title issues that make them difficult to develop.
4. Development is often deterred by high utility and infrastructure costs.
5. Participants would like to see the Town set an example by initiating development.
6. The idea of connecting Mims Park to the Farmer's Market was popular among participants.
7. There is opportunity for activation at the space from the Cultural Center to the Downtown Village District.
8. More bike infrastructure and parking is desired. The existing bike parking is hidden and not easily accessed. There are conflicting opinions on where or what type of bike infrastructure should be invested in by the town.
9. Participants indicated a desire for all-season landscaping, vegetation, and color.
10. There is a perception that walking from the downtown core to Holly Springs Road is a far walk.
11. Traffic north of the downtown core is unsafe. The area between the Main Street Mini Mart and Town Hall feels the most dangerous.



Open House Lessons Learned

1. Future engagement should ask specific question about parking such as location and typology (i.e. on street vs. structured).
2. It will be important going forward to define the geographic boundaries of the project as residents have different perceptions of the Downtown Village District.
3. There was some confusion, especially from participants who live in the district, about the scope of the project and whether the city was planning to do something with their property. Going forward, it will be important to message this correctly and clarify what will and will not be touched.

Pop-up Engagement

Boards showing the project area and overview were presented to attendees at HollyFest in October 2022. Because Holly Fest is a popular and well-attended event, the booth experienced lots of foot traffic and town staff was able to engage many members of the community about the project.



Town staff laughs with a participant as they place dot stickers on a visual preference board at the community open house on November 17, 2022.



Town staff presenting the Downtown Village District Area Plan to attendees at HollyFest in October 2022.

Discovery - Themes

Common themes were extracted from the initial engagement and review of other recent planning efforts. These five themes establish the foundation for design and policy recommendations.

An Authentic-to-Holly-Springs Downtown	A More Connected District	An Intact District
• Support events • Character (architectural and public realm) • Local shopping and restaurants • Family-focused activities	• Greenways • Increase modality infrastructure (walking, biking, transit) • Alternative routes to/through the District • Traffic calming • Connect Cultural Center and Downtown • Put adequate parking where it belongs	• Pursue and implement redevelopment • Design standards • Focus on public space (gathering, "sense of place" character) • Identify catalyst projects

Downtown	Acknowledge and Celebrate History	A Thriving Downtown
Incentivize ent ards lic realm sticky” spaces, yst sites	• Storytelling in the Public Realm • Define and protect residential neighborhoods • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)-focused engagement and opportunity	• A mix of land uses (commercial, civic, residential, hospitality) • Curate local business (catalytic businesses) • Incentivize vertical mixed-use • Parks as destination