



Downtown Idea Exchange

Improving physical, social, and economic conditions downtown

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Inside this issue

More cities ban right turns on red 2

Public restrooms are a necessity — but so are trained attendants. 4

City reports ongoing benefits from recruiting effort 5

Main Street survey shows slight uptick in budgets, middling salaries. 5

High-speed rail could be a catalyst for downtown development 8

Chess park creates downtown “third place” . . 9

Downtowns invest in walking and biking trails. 10

Coffee shops, Shopping local, Coworking spaces, and more. 11

CLEAN AND SAFE

Cities increasingly turn to private security patrols

In Raleigh, NC (est. pop. 477,804), the city council recently extended the contract for a security firm whose armed officers patrol near a downtown transit hub.

In Los Angeles (est. pop. 3,822,224), the city council authorized private security for two long-abandoned buildings downtown.

In Long Beach, CA (est. pop. 451,319), the Long Beach Downtown Alliance hired private security officers who began patrolling in December.

And in Oakland, CA (est. pop. 430,531), major employers are spend-

ing \$10 million to hire off-duty police officers and ambassadors to make downtown feel safer for workers.

Amid a nationwide epidemic of homelessness and addiction, many downtowns are struggling to present an image of cleanliness and safety. Meanwhile, many cities have been unable to fill open positions on their police forces.

To shore up the gaps left by traditional police officers, downtown leaders have increasingly turned to private security firms.

(Continued on page 2)

ATTRACTION

How to make restaurant week a traffic driver and economic boon

In Millburn-Short Hills, NJ (est. pop. 21,699), Restaurant Week has turned into a springtime traffic driver.

The event debuted in March 2023, then returned in March 2024. Restaurant Week is organized by Explore Millburn-Short Hills, a special improvement district, and involves some 40 restaurants and boutiques offering 60 specials.

The offerings ranged from appetizers to full-course meals, and

participants ran the gamut from formal restaurants to casual eateries to a candy store.

Steve Grillo, executive director of Explore Millburn-Short Hills, says organizers took some important steps to make the event a success, and they learned valuable lessons.

Here are nine ways to make your restaurant week — or any other event — a success:

(Continued on page 7)

More cities ban right turns on red

Embracing a newly popular strategy to improve traffic safety, San Francisco is moving forward with a ban on right turns during red lights downtown.

While cities from Washington, DC, to Honolulu have cracked down on right turns on red, the concept isn't popular everywhere. In Indianapolis, the issue has taken on a partisan bent — Republican state legislators are trying to undo right-turn bans enacted by Democratic city officials.

In San Francisco, the city tested the concept in recent years in the Tenderloin district, then broadened it starting in April. Turning right during a red light will be illegal at most stoplight intersections downtown.

“We are one of a handful of cities leading the expansion of No Turn on Red to further walkability,” Mayor London Breed said in a statement.

That's not Breed's only strategy for improving safety. The mayor's actions have included other steps, such as directing police to step up enforcement of traffic violations.

The city's Municipal Transportation Agency plans to prohibit right turns on red at 200 intersections in the South of Market, Union Square, Chinatown, North Beach, and Financial District neighborhoods.

Once the agency finishes installing signs in 2025, motorists driving in the city's north-east quadrant will find that right turns on red are illegal at most stoplights.

Traffic safety experts say banning right turns on red can improve pedestrian safety. Some street safety advocates say the city's ban doesn't go far enough — they've asked for a

complete citywide ban on the practice.

The concept has been gaining momentum nationally. Right-on-red turns are already illegal in the tourist zone of Honolulu. After successfully testing no-turn-on-red rules at some traffic lights, Washington, DC, will ban nearly all of its right-on-red turns by 2025. The city of Ann Arbor, MI, banned right turns on red at 50 downtown traffic lights. And Seattle is phasing out many right-on-red intersections as it upgrades traffic lights.

While the concept seems an inexpensive and simple way to improve pedestrian safety, it can be politically fraught. In Indiana, the Republican-controlled state Legislature outlawed right turns on red after Democratic officials in Indianapolis voted in favor of the restriction. A key opponent there characterized the no-turn-on-red proposal as part of a Democratic war on cars.

The battle has continued this year — a Republican state legislator introduced a bill seeking to pre-empt cities from banning right turns on red. The move amounts to “forcing people to ride a bus service,” said the lawmaker, state Sen. Aaron Freeman.

A similar debate is playing out in Arizona, where Republican state lawmakers are pushing a law that would ban municipalities from enacting their own right-on-red bans.

To advocates, the safety rationale is straightforward: At a typical intersection, a motorist who plans to turn the vehicle right must pull into the crosswalk, then look left to gauge oncoming traffic and to find an opening. To the driver looking out the left window, a pedestrian crossing from the right becomes all but invisible. **DIX**

Cities increasingly turn to private security patrols

— *Continued from page 1*

For many cities, private security is a cost-effective option — third-party guards don't require the same investment in training, sala-

ries, overtime, equipment, health insurance, and pensions. But there are also downsides in terms of the quality of service provided.

“Most major U.S. cities now have at least three times as many security guards on the street as sworn police officers, even though guards typically operate with minimal oversight, less training, and little power to enforce the law,” the *New York Times* wrote recently.

Here’s how several cities are deploying private security guards, and funneling private funds into public safety.

A stopgap becomes permanent

The Raleigh City Council voted 5-3 in early April to approve a three-year contract with a firm known as Capital Special Police.

The \$3.3 million contract will pay for two officers to patrol the GoRaleigh transit hub 20 hours a day, from 4 a.m. to midnight, the same hours city buses operate.

Downtown merchants have complained about violence, drug activity, needles, and human feces in downtown.

In response, the city of Raleigh hired Capitol Special Police to a short-term contract. While that was seen as a temporary solution, a longer-term deal struck some skeptical council members as a bit too permanent.

Bill King, chief executive officer of the Downtown Raleigh Alliance, said he supports the creation of a transit police force. In the meantime, downtown needs a more visible security presence.

“It’s complicated,” King told the *News & Observer*. “There’s different kinds of overlapping populations here. There are those who are unhoused, but are not a security threat, or safety threat; they’re just not housed. There are those who are unhoused and having mental illness issues. Sometimes that can be a safety concern.

“And then there’s some people who are neither unhoused nor mentally ill who are just, you know, problematic, and that’s a different issue,” he said. “And so all of those require kind of different solutions, some of which are interconnected.”

No more babysitting

In Los Angeles, the city will no longer use police officers to guard the abandoned Oceanwide Plaza buildings. The downtown

skyscrapers had been repeatedly targeted by vandals.

The L.A. City Council in early April unanimously passed an ordinance that lets it outsource patrols of derelict buildings to private security.

The Oceanwide Plaza towers were abandoned in 2019, when a developer ran out of money to complete the buildings. The city’s police spent thousands of hours patrolling the properties, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

Private security would be cheaper than paying police officers to “babysit” the towers, said a spokesman for Councilmember Kevin De Leon, who represents parts of downtown Los Angeles.

A short-term solution

In late 2023, private security officers hired by the Downtown Long Beach Alliance began patrolling downtown.

The uniformed guards work for CSI Patrol Service Inc., which also has security contracts with other business districts in the city.

The security contract lasts six months, according to a news release from the Alliance. Guards are unarmed, but they are equipped with body cameras, handcuffs, and pepper spray.

“While we aren’t in the business of providing security long-term, we do want to respond to what we are hearing from both our business community and residents,” said Downtown Long Beach Alliance President and Chief Executive Austin Metoyer. “We believe that our long-term addition of adding a homeless outreach coordinator into our budget, and our short-term effort at providing enhanced security in core areas of the downtown, will complement the work the city is doing to continue a strong downtown recovery.”

Major employers pay for security

In Oakland, Blue Shield of California, Kaiser Permanente, Clorox, and Pacific Gas & Electric decided they had no choice but to spend millions to beef up security in Oakland.

Crime had grown so bad that in late 2023, Kaiser Permanente, Oakland’s largest employer, sent a memo instructing employ-

ees not to leave office buildings for lunch or breaks.

The new privately funded patrols will beef up security between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Workers can ask ambassadors to escort them to their cars.

“I did not ever think I would be in the

business of security and safety, and I hope not to be for very long,” Paul Markovich, president and chief executive officer of Blue Shield of California, told CBS News.

*Contacts: Bill King, [Downtown Raleigh Alliance](#), 919-832-1231; Austin Metoyer, [Downtown Long Beach Association](#), 562-436-4259. **DIX***

PATHWAYS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Public restrooms are a necessity — but so are trained attendants

The Hollywood Partnership is about to open the famed neighborhood’s first public restroom. The facility, going into an empty space in a building owned by the city Department of Transportation, is being funded with \$1.5 million from the Los Angeles mayor’s office.

The concept got some pushback from neighbors.

“Property owners sometimes have the belief that if you put in a public restroom, it will become the restroom for the unhoused,” says Kathleen Rawson, president and chief executive officer of the Hollywood Partnership. “That’s why you actively manage it.”

If the bathrooms are open to the public, then a safety ambassador will be on duty, Rawson said. The idea is that public restrooms need supervision at all times.

Rawson was previously the head of Downtown Santa Monica Inc., and she says the fully staffed restrooms there serve as a model for how to operate public facilities in a metro area with a large homeless population.

Indeed, when neighbors in Hollywood call her to complain about the new public restroom, she says, “I’m not going to talk to you until you go see the restrooms in Santa Monica.”

Having a public restroom is not just about serving the homeless, Rawson says. It’s also a way to make an area more inviting.

“You have a choice between having a public restroom or having people pissing in the

alley,” she says.

But choosing to open a public restroom raises new issues. For instance, should attendants be trained in CPR? Should they know how to administer Narcan, the treatment for opioid overdoses?

When it comes to balancing downtowns’ needs for public restrooms and public safety, there are no simple answers.

For example, Jeremy Ferguson, place-making director at Downtown Santa Monica, says one popular workaround — small public facilities known as Portland Loos — aren’t the solution that downtown leaders had hoped for. He previously worked for the city of Davis, CA, which installed several Portland Loos.

“It’s a cool design, but it has proven to be ineffective,” Ferguson says. “People have figured out how to occupy those without being seen.”

Hollywood’s restroom project is ambitious in its size and goals. “This first-of-its-kind restroom facility in the heart of Hollywood aims to serve as a model for our city,” says City Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martinez, “providing about 40 bathrooms for the public with the goal of having staffing, maintenance, and cleaning available to open the restrooms 24/7. We’re so excited for these amenities to be available for our tourists, housed residents, and unhoused neighbors alike.”

*Contacts: Kathleen Rawson, [Downtown Hollywood Partnership](#), 323-463-6767; Jeremy Ferguson, [Downtown Santa Monica Inc.](#), 530-219-5184. **DIX***

“You have a choice between having a public restroom or having people pissing in the alley.”

City reports ongoing benefits from recruiting effort

In Tulsa, OK (est pop. 411,938), the Tulsa Remote program says its strategy of paying young workers to move to town is paying off.

The initiative launched in 2018 as a way to reverse some of the brain drain from the heartland to the coasts. Tulsa Remote aimed to spark an influx of talent by paying a \$10,000 stipend to remote workers who bring themselves and their virtual positions to Tulsa.

Remote work was something of an outlier when the program started. But when the pandemic hit in 2020, Americans suddenly were free to take their jobs to more affordable parts of the country.

Through 2022, Tulsa Remote had recruited 2,165 workers to move to the city, and they brought with them \$306.7 million in income, or about \$142,000 apiece.

As of 2022, Tulsa Remote reports, 1,852 people who had joined the program were still living in the city.

“The \$10,000 stipends to remote-work pioneers have been repaid many times over to the city and state through tax revenues and multiplier effects,” Justin Harlan, managing director of Tulsa Remote, wrote in [a report](#) summarizing the project’s progress.

While Tulsa Remote recipients can leave town after cashing their checks, the program reports that most stay. Fully 76 percent have stayed beyond the one year required by the

program. Those who leave typically depart because they realize they don’t like being so far from family.

The program credits its “white glove service,” for its success. The service includes formal orientation and networking, regular events, and access to coworking space for up to three years.

While some of the grant recipients have come from New York and Boston, the biggest sources of residents have been California and Texas. About a third of Tulsa Remote participants came from those two states.

In all, the program attracted arrivals from 350 cities in 44 states, plus Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. The new arrivals typically work in technology or in corporate jobs that allow virtual work arrangements. Some Tulsa Remote grant recipients have launched businesses and hired local workers.

The new arrivals have brought racial and ethnic diversity — nearly half of recipients are nonwhite, Tulsa Remote said.

While economic developers have long recruited employers, paying incentives to individual workers is a strategy that gained momentum during the pandemic. Aside from Tulsa, others testing the tactic include Topeka, KS, Chattanooga, TN, and dozens of cities in Indiana. **DIX**

“The \$10,000 stipends to remote-work pioneers have been repaid many times over.”

MANAGEMENT

Main Street survey shows slight uptick in budgets, middling salaries

Most Main Street programs operate on budgets of less than \$300,000, and most Main Street directors collect salaries of less than \$60,000 a year.

That’s according to the [2024 Main Street Trends Survey](#) by Main Street America. More than 500 Main Street organizations responded to the group’s questionnaire.

In the latest survey, 60 percent of Main Street programs said their operating budget is between \$75,000 and \$300,000 annually. Some 21 percent have an annual operating budget of \$75,000 or less, while 20 percent have a budget of \$300,000 or more. Compared to last year, the 2024 data shows a slight increase in budgets.

Local government support is the most common funding source. Fully 88 percent of Main Street programs receive at least 20 percent of their operating budget from their local government, and 19 percent receive 90 percent or more of their budget from local government.

The second most reported source of funds is event and festival revenue from visitors and vendors, with 28 percent receiving at least 20 percent of their budget from event and festival revenue, and 6 percent of programs receiving most of their funding from this source.

The salaries of Main Street program managers make up a significant portion of the

programs' annual budgets. According to the 2024 survey data, the median annual salary of a local Main Street program manager is between \$50,000 and \$59,999—21 percent of survey respondents indicated this salary range. An additional 37 percent have annual salaries less than \$50,000, while 26 percent collect annual salaries greater than \$70,000.

And 5 percent of responding Main Street program managers said they were not being paid for their work.

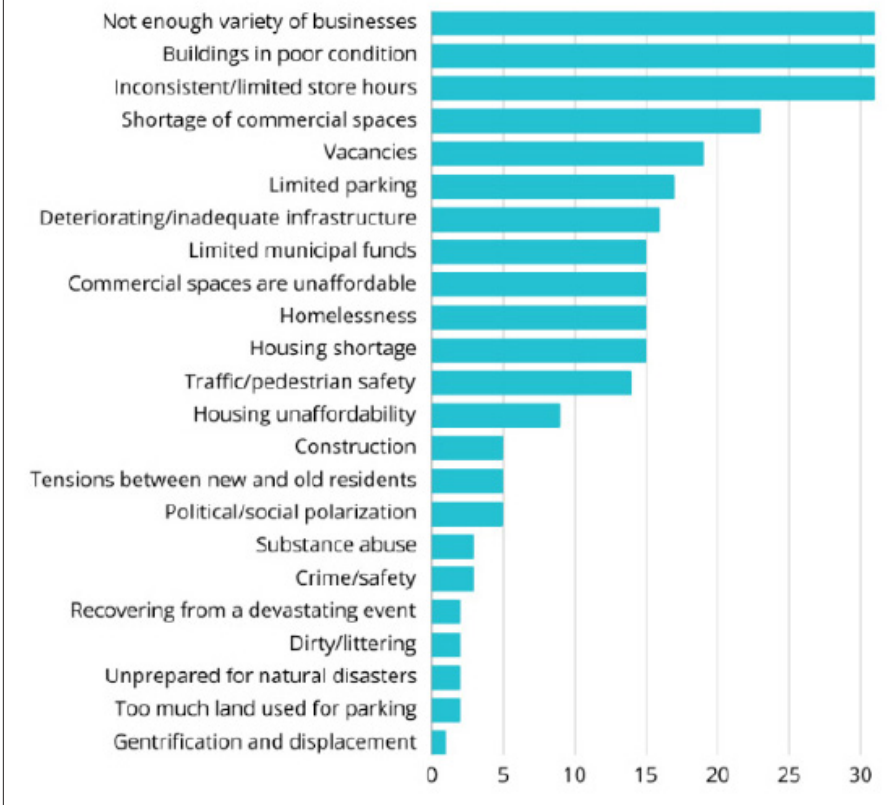
One caveat: Survey respondents were from smaller downtown organizations. Fifty-nine percent described their municipalities as rural, while 20 percent said they worked in suburban areas, and 16 percent were in urban areas. Fully 73 percent of respondents work in cities with populations below 25,000.

Meanwhile, Main Street asked downtown leaders to pinpoint their three greatest successes as they looked back on 2023. Most expressed pride they had “planned and hosted popular and successful events” (58 percent). About a third of respondents pointed to successes supporting existing businesses (34 percent) and more than one-in-four touted success building stronger partnerships (28 percent). Some respondents cited specific successes, writing in points of pride like: “ended the year with 100 percent of street front spaces leased,” “acquired grants to rehabilitate three downtown vacant buildings,” “began a new overlay that will offer flexibility to how buildings are used,” and “started a Main Street program.”

The trends survey data also clearly shows what a challenging job it can be to lead a local Main Street program. The survey asked about the current services or programs local Main Streets offer. Fully 96 percent of respondents indicated they manage public events/festivals, while 87 percent provide support for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Reflecting the long to-do lists of downtown leaders, many also said they're responsible for district beautification and cleanliness (80 percent),

Main Street district challenges



Source: Main Street America

grant programs (79 percent), and district/community branding or image campaigns (74 percent).

Given the wide range of things filling downtown leaders' job descriptions, it's probably no surprise how they answered the question, "What challenges is your organization currently facing?" Top issues were limited budget, cited by 61 percent, too many programs/responsibilities (48 percent), and burnout (33 percent).

When asked to identify their biggest challenges, downtown leaders came up with a three-way tie: Not enough variety of businesses, poorly maintained buildings, and inconsistent store hours were each cited by 31 percent of downtown leaders as their top challenges. Other top issues seemed to vary by downtown — while 23 percent named a shortage of downtown commercial spaces, 19 percent said they had too many vacancies. **DIX**

How to make restaurant week a traffic driver and economic boon — *Continued from page 1*

Tip 1: Create a charitable partnership.

Explore Millburn-Short Hills partnered with Opportunity Project, a local non-profit organization that supports individuals with brain injuries. March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, so the timing meshed. Explore Millburn-Short Hills offered Opportunity Project a way to fundraise directly through restaurant sales and donations. During the inaugural Restaurant Week, Opportunity Project raised \$6,000 from donations.

Some restaurants embraced the charitable angle. Jack's Lobster Shack, for example, created a line of branded apparel and donated a portion of the proceeds. At least two other businesses worked to hire staff from the organization.

"Having a partner who brought so much goodwill to the event elevated Restaurant Week's meaning and created a true feeling of community benefit," Grillo says.

Tip 2: Woo influential restaurateurs.

To organize the event, Explore Millburn-Short Hills cultivated a small cadre of influential restaurant owners to serve as a steering committee.

"While they played an important role in providing guidance and advice, the real value

was their buy-in," Grillo says. "When we approached restaurants about participating and they asked about who else was committed, mentioning some of the most popular spots in town made recruiting easy."

The tactic all but guaranteed other restaurateurs would sign up.

"Fear of missing out — FOMO — can be a powerful tool," Grillo says.

Tip 3: Schedule the event when it's needed most. There's no need to drive traffic in peak season. Explore Millburn-Short Hills took care to find a slow time on the calendar. Restaurant volumes typically reflect the schedule of the nearby Paper Mill Playhouse.

When planning for Restaurant Week, the organizing committee suggested the event take place between show runs, when there's a week or two of lower foot traffic.

"This meant a boost for business during a typically slower period and provided a better ability to handle larger crowds brought in by the event," Grillo says.

Strategic timing is a hallmark of the event management business — the savviest planners aim to smooth out the peaks and valleys of downtown visitation.

Tip 4: Invest in media, both new and old.

Explore Millburn-Short Hills had been looking for an Instagram-friendly event, and Restaurant Week fit the bill. The group paid local and regional food influencers to post about Restaurant Week, and it also partnered with traditional media.

“One of the major goals of Restaurant Week was to expand our social media followers by leveraging beautiful photos of food and drink and tagging numerous restaurants,” Grillo says. “Over the course of the event, we gained 300 new Instagram followers, which was invaluable to the growth of our social media reach.”

“Websites and QR codes only work if people know how to look for them and use them.”

Tip 5: Create a user-friendly website.

Attendees want to search for restaurant specials and promos before deciding where to dine.

“While our website had comprehensive information, much of the content was incorporated into images for each restaurant rather than text,” Grillo says. “Make sure that your event’s web interface is easy to navigate and searchable by specific keywords.”

Tip 6: Don’t rely solely on digital media.

Yes, younger visitors live on their phones and can figure out how to navigate your social media posts. But by marketing events on digital media alone, you run the risk of missing some of your potential audience.

“We received some criticism from older customers who did not know how to follow

Explore’s promotions on social media or navigate our landing page,” Grillo says.

Tip 7: Make sure restaurants promote their participation.

Repeat customers are the lifeblood of any restaurant — and they’re an obvious target for marketing leading up to restaurant week. In Millburn-Short Hills’ inaugural event, some restaurants missed an opportunity by not marketing to diners with onsite materials.

“Websites and QR codes only work if people know how to look for them and use them,” Grillo says. “Some participating restaurants did not have easily accessible information about their promotions, so customers did not take advantage of them.”


Tip 8: Bridge language barriers.

The best food scenes thrive because of their cultural diversity — but if you have restaurateurs who aren’t fluent in English, work with them to provide translation services.

“Some promotions and opportunities were lost in translation with a few of our ethnic restaurants,” Grillo says.

Tip 9: Work with restaurants to provide compelling specials.

“Not all promotions are created equal,” Grillo says. “While some restaurants went above and beyond, some offers had low perceived value or were so specific that appeal was limited.”

Contact: Steve Grillo, [Explore Millburn-Short Hills](#), 973-564-7000. 

ACCESS AND MOBILITY

High-speed rail could be a catalyst for downtown development

While the U.S. lags behind the rest of the world in investing in high-speed rail, a proponent of bullet trains sees rail projects as a way to breathe life into downtowns.

U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton, D-MA, in March

introduced the American High-Speed Rail Act, which calls for a \$205 billion public investment in high-speed and higher-speed rail projects.

“If you build more highways, you get a bunch of fast-food restaurants, chain stores,

and communities nobody wants to live in,” Moulton says. “If you build high-speed rail, you get activity in downtowns where people want to live.”

He sees high-speed rail stations as catalysts for more densely populated, walkable urban cores.

Republicans are generally skeptical of high-speed rail, and even Moulton says his bill is unlikely to pass in an election year. But the Biden administration has warmed to the idea.

Late last year, the U.S. Department of Transportation directed \$6 billion to two high-speed rail projects on the West Coast.

That included an outlay to Brightline West, a proposed 218-mile route between Las Vegas and Rancho Cucamonga, CA, that would be the nation’s first high-speed rail line.

Rancho Cucamonga is a bedroom community 40 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, so it’s not exactly a downtown-to-

downtown service.

However, proponents hope the service will succeed, and serve as a model for proposed high-speed rail projects in Texas, the Pacific Northwest, and elsewhere.

Brightline’s plans call for its trains to flirt with speeds of 200 mph, topping the 186 mph threshold for a train to be considered truly high-speed.

Brightline hopes the service will be ready in time for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. The Biden administration put \$3 billion in public money into the project and is also offering access to \$3.5 billion in tax-exempt bonds.

Much of the Brightline West route would be built in the Interstate 15 median, eliminating the safety concerns posed by grade crossings.

Proponents of high-speed rail in the U.S. say the systems would ease some of the burden on overloaded highways and airports. **DIX**

ATTRACTION

Chess park creates downtown “third place”

In West Palm Beach, FL (est. pop. 120,922), downtown leaders have generated outsized attention with a modest investment in public spaces.

The Fern Street Chess Park has served as a gathering place for chess enthusiasts for the past two years. The park includes three tables with chessboards painted on top and metal boxes holding chess pieces.

Small as the park is, the initiative was featured on the cover of *American Chess Magazine*, and it has won coverage from South Florida media.

The project was the brainchild of West Palm Street Chess founder Joshua Pariente Koehler. He persuaded the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority to back the project.

Koehler tells WLRN that weekly chess matches grew into a social club with more than 200 members. As a result, he cofounded the nonprofit [Street Chess Coalition](#).

“In these spaces, a lot of times the interaction is not necessarily the moving of the chess piece but a lot of it is just the smiling, the talking, the getting to know people,” Koehler says. “Where are you from? How did you guys meet?”

Fern Street Chess Park opened on National Chess Day in October of 2022.

The West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority has embraced the chess park as part of an overall strategy of creating parklets and other gathering places.

“When you’re connecting with others in these casual conversations, these places



can become like a home away from home,” says Sherryl Muriente, the Downtown Development Authority’s public realm director. “And so it is an unknown space at first, but it becomes a famil-

iar place with familiar people.”

Like many downtowns, West Palm Beach has embraced the concept of placemaking, which often uses art installations, live program-

ming, and other low-cost initiatives to create high-quality places where people want to live, work, and socialize.

And if the activation initiative comes from the community rather than from downtown leaders, that’s even better.

“Think of placemaking as the process of either creating or improving public spaces in a way that it reflects the needs of those who use it or the desires of the people that are inhabiting the space,” Muriente says. “The community engagement piece is the key, so it could be led by them or it could be initiated by them.”

Contact: Sherryl Muriente, [West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority](#), 561-833-8873. **DIX**

PATHWAYS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Downtowns invest in walking and biking trails

Urban trails are a hallmark of downtown livability. They can also be time-consuming, costly projects.

Consider the case of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. The eight-mile bike path and pedestrian walkway opened in 2013 — but only after years of fundraising and planning.

Downtown leaders first began exploring the concept in 1999, and the project opened 14 years later with \$63 million from philanthropy and federal transportation grants.

Now, the project serves as a case study for successful public pathways. Bikeshare stations are positioned along the trail, which serves as a backdrop for public art exhibits, scavenger hunts, and other placemaking activities.

In other cities, adaptive reuse of rail lines has created new pathways. Manhattan’s High Line repurposed a no-longer-used elevated rail line. Miami’s Underline converted the weedy spaces under the MetroRail commuter line into a public park.

Those sorts of successes have inspired other downtowns to invest in public pathways.

In Knoxville, TN, the city approved \$20 million for a pedestrian bridge across the Tennessee River. The long-discussed project would connect the University of Tennessee campus to a downtown greenway and a citywide trail system.

In Atlanta, the city council in April signed off on \$6.5 million for a one-mile trail connecting downtown to the Chattahoochee River. The trail is expected to be completed in time for the 2026 World Cup.

In Cleveland, the city council voted in April to build a 2.7-mile path that would let bikers and walkers travel in protected lanes from downtown to University Circle. Construction of the \$13 million project is scheduled to begin in August.

In Denver, the 5280 Trail has yet to take shape. Since 2017, the city and the Downtown Denver Partnership have been planning for a trail that would cover 5.280 miles (the distance refers to Denver’s elevation) and include public art, green space, and sweeping vistas. However, the \$7 million project has yet to be built. **DIX**

Idea Exchange

Promoting downtown coffee shops

Last year nearly 500 people completed the fourth annual Drip Drive in downtown Akron, OH, and surrounding neighborhoods. In this passport-style event, participants must make a purchase at 19 of 23 participating coffee shops. Everyone who completes the challenge receives a limited-edition coffee mug, along with entry into a grand prize drawing for a \$500 Drip Drive gift package.



the bill with its [Shop Marlboro Property Tax Reward Program](#).

Residents use a Shop Marlboro card to purchase goods or services from participating businesses. When they swipe their cards, they receive credits that are applied against annual property tax bills.

A number of cities, counties and states also offer tax holidays for limited periods of time and for specific purchases such as back-to-school supplies, emergency preparation supplies, and energy efficient products.

States support shopping local

To encourage local shopping on Small Business Saturday, New Mexico offers a special incentive. For just 24 hours, sales tax is waived on items purchased at non-franchise small businesses with 10 employees or less. A wide range of merchandise qualifies for tax-free status including toys, games, electronics, books, sporting goods, and more — as long as the price is under \$500 per item. Details are available on the [Department of Taxation & Revenue](#) website.

Meanwhile residents in New Jersey are shopping small and saving on their property tax bills. Assembly Bill 4806 permits municipalities to authorize programs encouraging local shopping through property tax rewards. Marlboro, NJ, takes advantage of

Food trucks move to brick-and-mortar locations

Rockford Region Restaurant Week was in full swing from January 25 through February 4. One of the many participating restaurants was Olivo Taco, part of a local chain of three brick-and-mortar locations and seven food trucks. Olivo Taco is just one of many local food trucks to build a following before opening a brick and mortar location in Northern Illinois. The *Rock River Current* notes that the move from food truck to eat-in restaurant is flourishing in the area. "In the past five years, there have been at least nine Rockford-area food trucks that have opened or will soon open brick-and-mortar locations." Another restaurant, Woodfire Pizza, started with an oven on wheels before opening a downtown location.

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Idea Exchange

Keeping monthly events fresh

First Friday is a long-standing event in Kokomo, IN. Monthly themes help the Greater Kokomo Downtown Association keep the event fresh. Each month, downtown venues embrace a new theme with discounts and activities at shops and restaurants, as well as live music, public art, family-friendly activities, and more.

Some of the monthly themes are:

Hoop it Up! The downtown association partners with the Kokomo BobKats for all kinds of basketball-related activities.

Art Task. Based on the British comedy game show Task Master, it features “wacky art” challenges which participants complete for prizes.

Shop & Stroll. The final First Friday of the year is a night of shopping and open houses before the winter holidays.

Food contests for all

Chili and barbecue contests have long been popular staples at downtown events, but the growing audiences of Food Network shows like Chopped, Iron Chef America, and Holiday Baking Championship have led to even more amateur and professional cooking contests. These competitions can be replicated in any community, and can be used to highlight the local dining scene, to raise funds, and to show-

Targeted coworking spaces benefit downtowns

Coworking spaces can be a useful tool to draw remote workers and start-up businesses downtown. Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. notes that these collaborative work models can be tailored to target specific industries such as retail, food and beverage, and art. Or they can target groups such as women and mothers, makers of color, and writers. Some examples are:

GalleryQ Artist Cooperative, Stevens Point, WI. Artist-owners pay dues to cover expenses as well as working gallery hours and actively participating in running the business. New artists join by application, which ensures quality as well as a wide variety of artistic styles and mediums.

Bronzeville Collective, Milwaukee, WI. The collective features more than two dozen local brands, with a focus on makers of color. All of the available products are crafted and/or designed locally.

The Nest, Green Bay, WI. Created to serve entrepreneurs, especially women and mothers by providing workshops, resources, office space, and community connection.

The Writers Room, New York, NY. A coworkspace dedicated entirely to the creation of literature in all of its forms.

case local heritage, regional food specialties, and locally grown and produced foods.

In Ithaca, NY, Cupcakes on the Commons brings together amateur bakers of all ages for a fundraising event. Contestants are asked to submit trays of six cupcakes, their recipes, and a brief story about their creations. Winners are eligible for dozens of prizes.

The 8th annual Soup Stroll hosted by the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corp. sees 32 downtown restaurants competing for the title of SOUPERSTAR! Guests can visit participating restaurants and sample soups for \$1 per 3 oz. cup.

Forty plus restaurants compete for the title of Burger Champion in downtown St. John, Newfoundland. The month long event features classic burgers and exotic new creations. Anyone posting photos of a burger to social media is entered to win a gift card from one of the participating restaurants.

In Logan, UT, the downtown association hosts an annual gingerbread homes contest. The event is open to amateur and professional bakers, the homes are displayed in local businesses, and the public is invited to vote for their favorites. Ballots and ballot boxes are on-hand at each gingerbread home location. **DIX**