

# Ottumwa Better Block Survey Summary



## **WHAT**

The Better Block team visited Ottumwa, Iowa on July 24th and 25th, 2017 to kickstart the October project in Ottumwa. During that time, we met with over 50 local groups and individuals to discuss how best to apply the Better Block process to the 300 block of Downtown, with a focus on public art, health, transportation, and economic development. The trip culminated in a public presentation with over 100 community members present. Since then, we've been gathering survey responses from those same community members on how to improve Downtown Ottumwa quickly and from the ground-up. As of August 15th, 2017, the survey garnered 345 responses, which are summarized in this report.

## **WHO**

Jason Roberts, Founder, Better Block

Patrick Blaydes, Senior Project Manager, Better Block

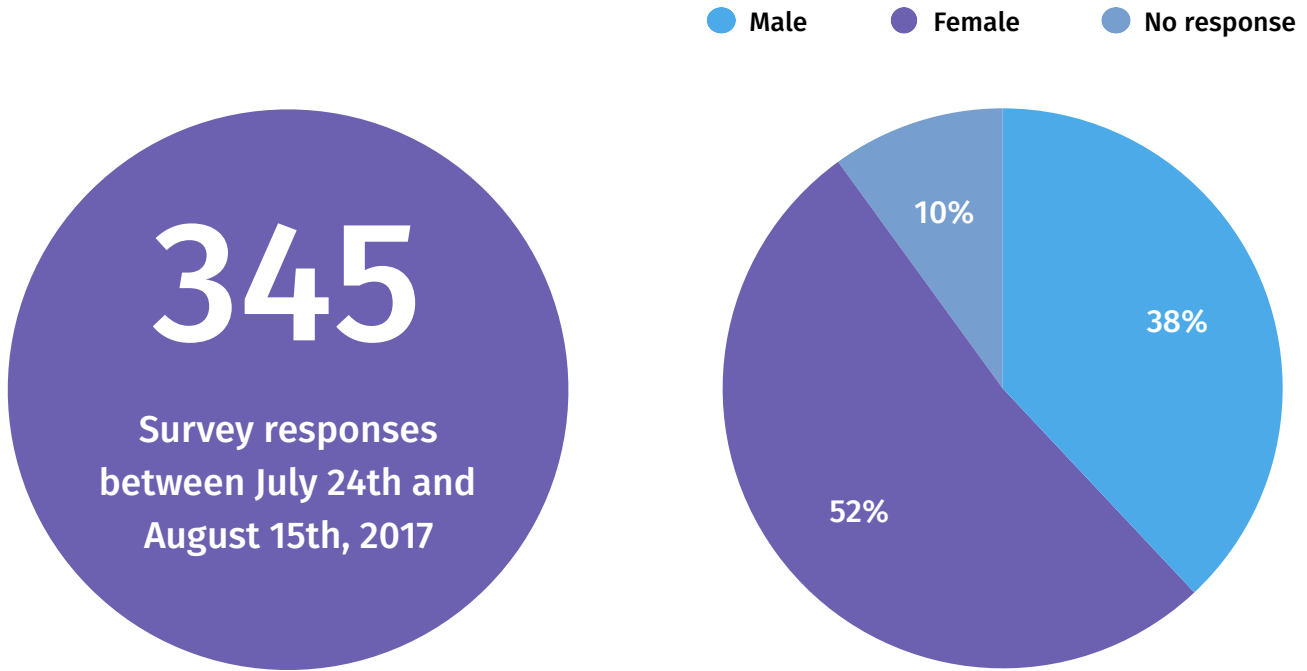
Monica Diodati, Project Manager, Better Block

## **WHEN**

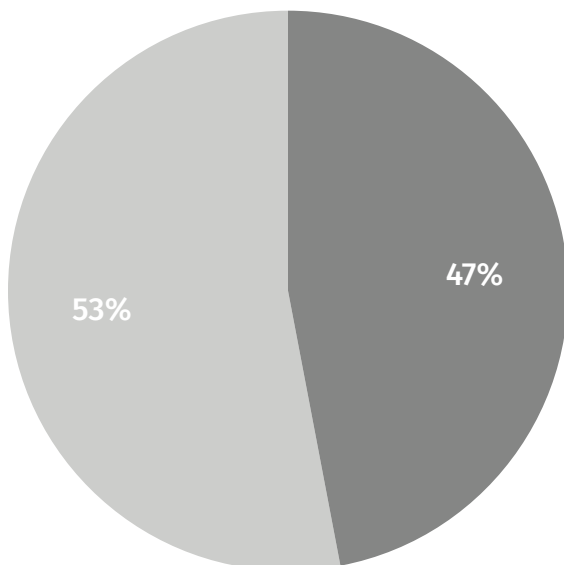
July 24th-August 15th, 2017

# 1.

## Who took the survey?



● Lives Near Downtown ● Doesn't Live Near Downtown



Survey respondents included 162 residents in or near Downtown Ottumwa, whose daily lives would be affected by any permanent developments on Main Street.

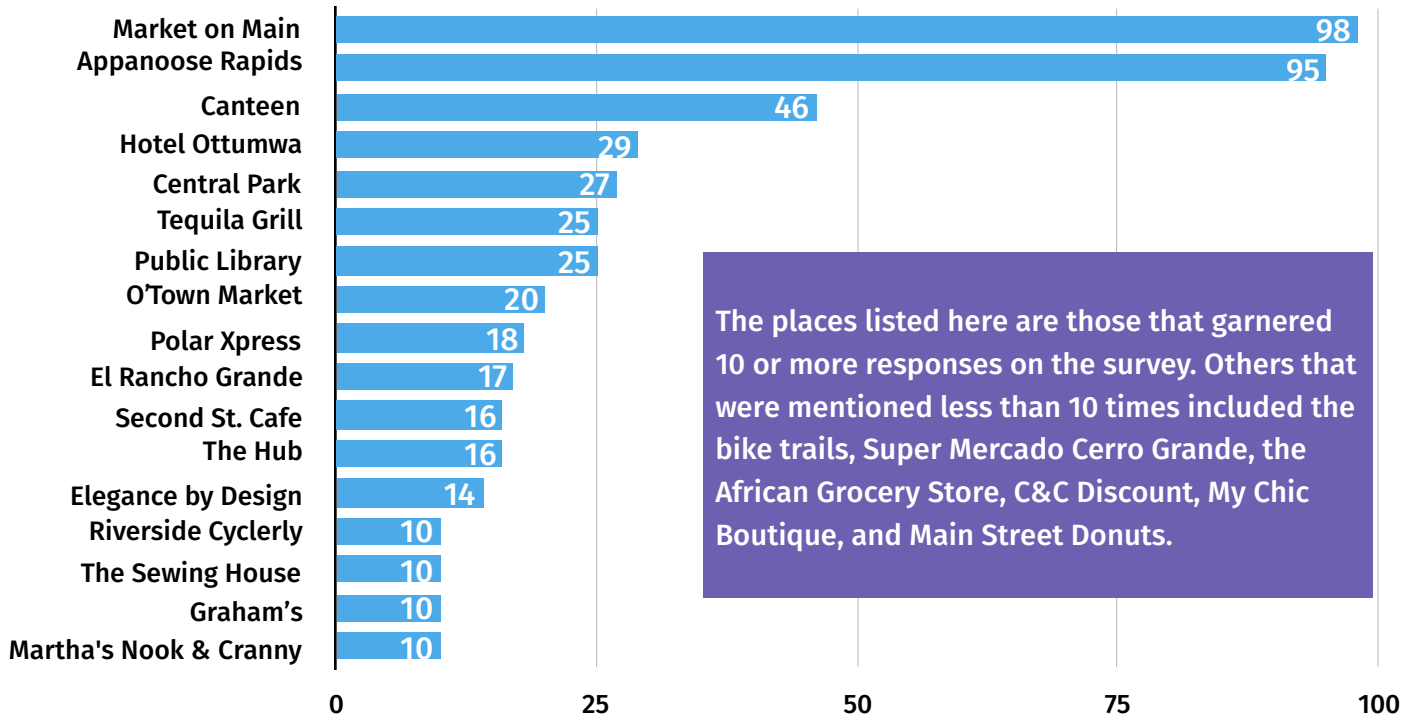
Gender data gathered was based on names of those who participated, so may be slightly inaccurate. The ratio of males to females in Ottumwa is 0.9:1\*, so males were somewhat underrepresented during the survey process.

\*Demographics data from city-data.com and US Census Bureau

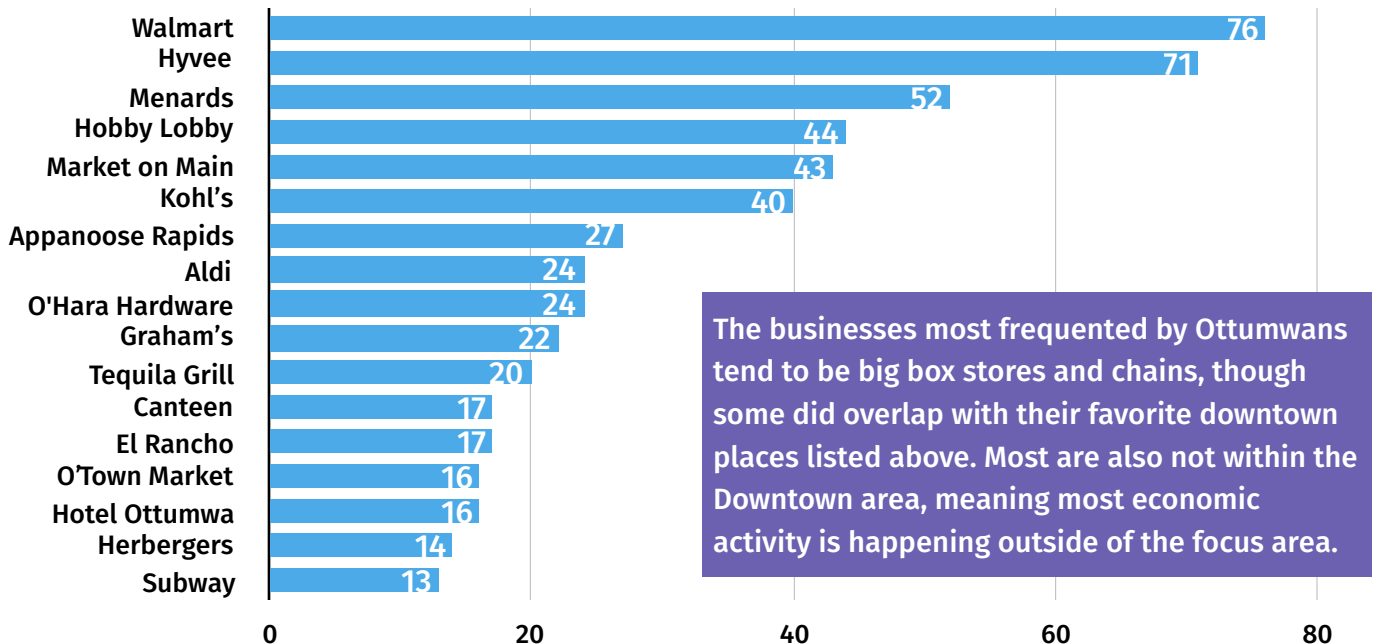
# 2.

## Downtown Data

What are your favorite places in Downtown?



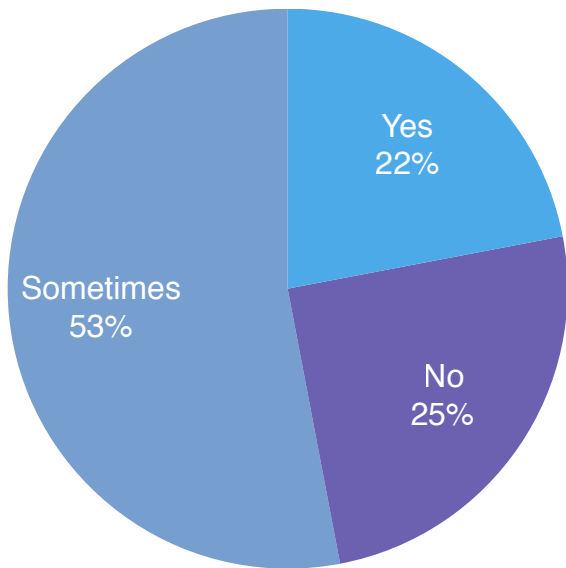
What businesses do you frequent in Ottumwa?



# 2.1

## Downtown Data

### Do you frequent Main Street in your free time?



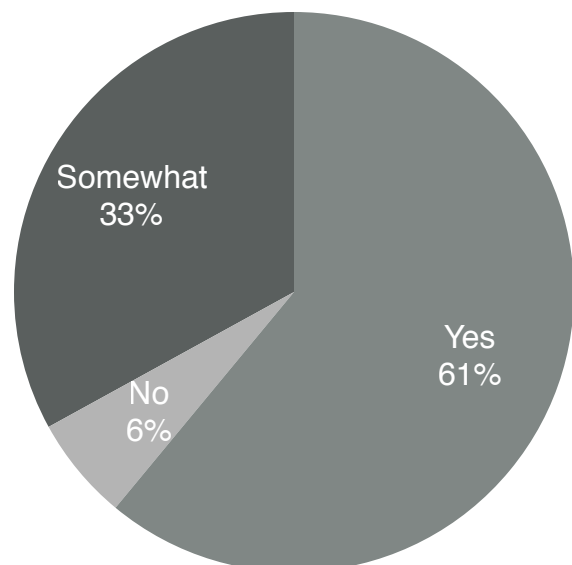
The most common response for why survey respondents did not frequent downtown was a lack of options, especially shopping. Other deterrents were too many thrift shops, not enough to do with the whole family, problems with parking, and too much vacancy.

Common reasons for those that do frequent downtown included getting lunch during the work day, visiting restaurants on weekends and special occasions, or going for specific purposes like shopping for a particular item or visiting the eye doctor.

Reasons cited for lack of safety included poor sidewalk conditions, drivers neglecting crosswalks and stop signs, loitering at night on street corners and at bus stops, vandalism and graffiti, low pedestrian activity, poor lighting, lack of police presence, and reported violence and drug activity downtown.

Others said that downtown feels perfectly safe during the day, but not so at night, speaking to the need for better lighting and businesses that activate the pedestrian realm during the evening hours.

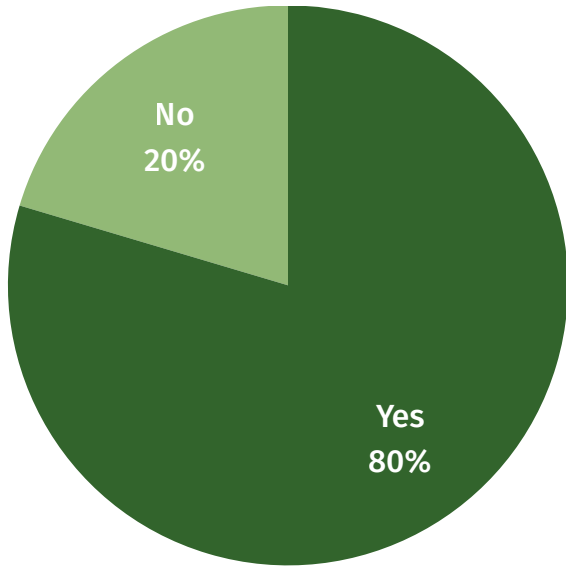
### Do you feel safe walking in Downtown?



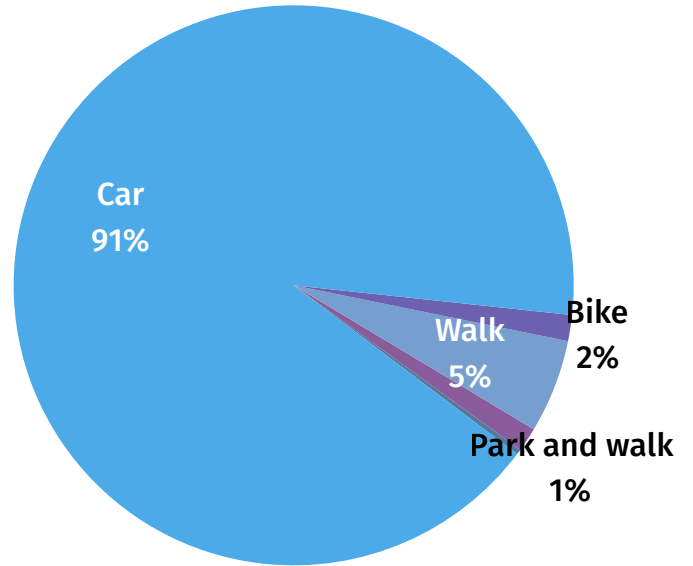
# 3.

## Connectivity

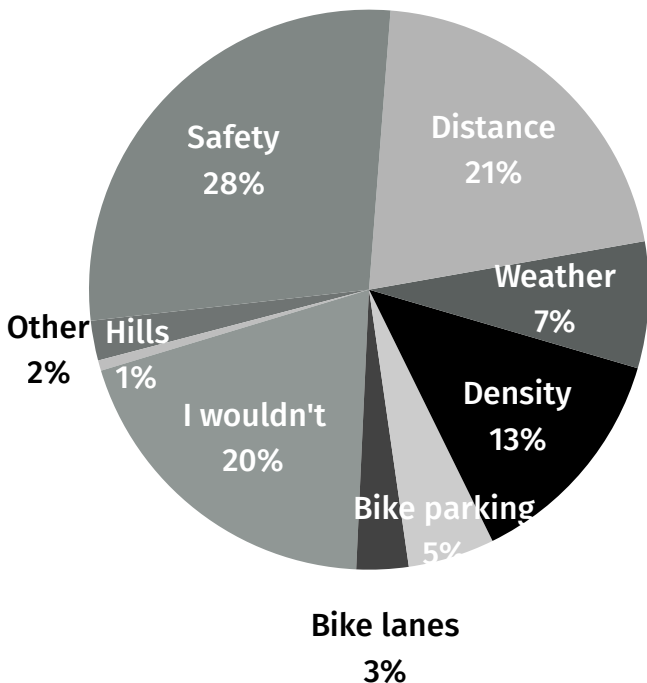
Do you work in Ottumwa?



How do you usually get around?



What would make you walk or bike more?

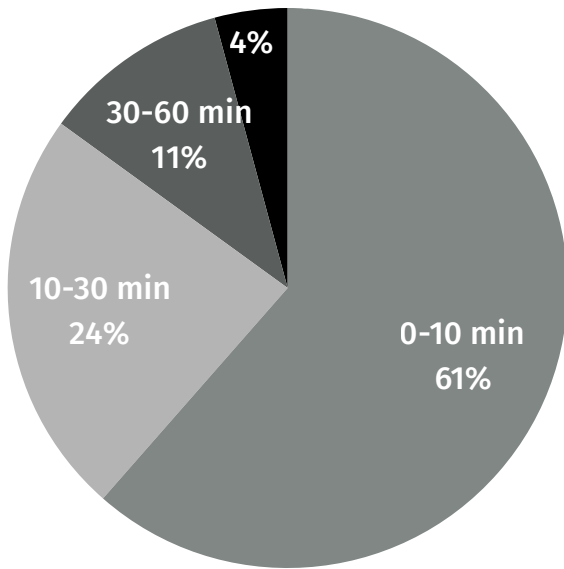


Cars dominate the transportation landscape of Ottumwa. Most people don't bike or walk, citing a need for more places to walk or bike to within a dense area, invitations for bikes in the form of bike lanes, trails, or bike racks, and logistical concerns like lack of time, lack of a bike, living too far from downtown, having to pedal uphill, or traveling with kids.

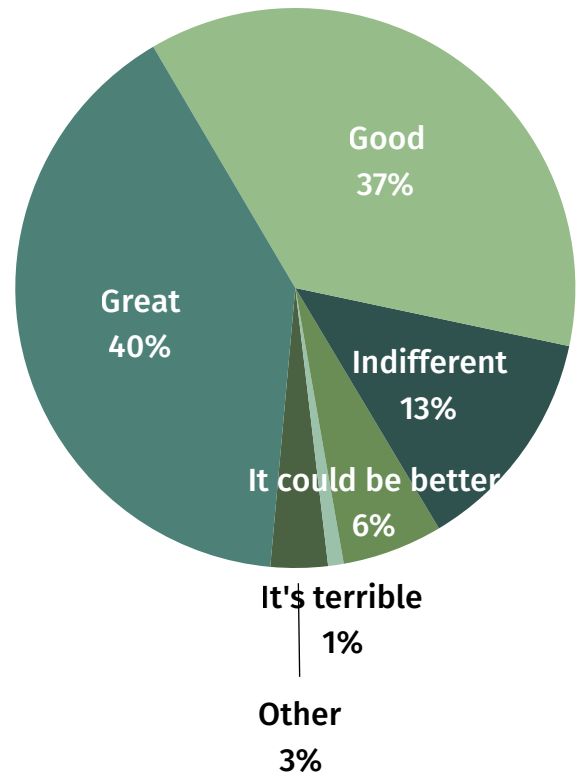
# 3.1

## Connectivity

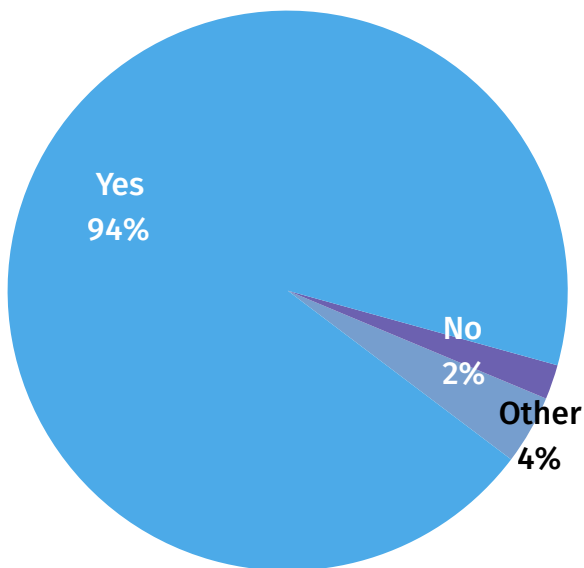
What's your average commute time?



How do you feel about your commute?



Is it easy for you to get to the businesses you frequent?

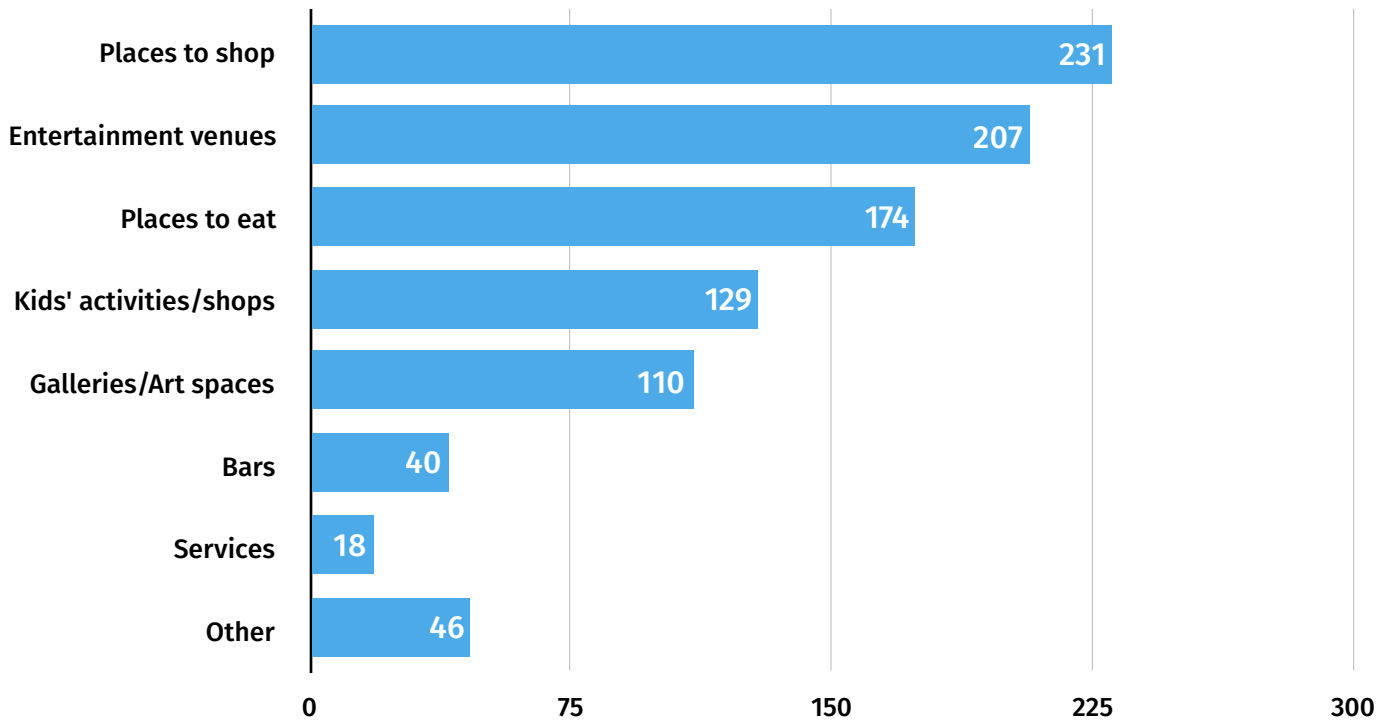


By and large, Ottumwans have relatively short and pleasant commutes. This can mean that there's not a demand for wider streets to counter complete streets efforts. These survey respondents may also expect a high level of convenience when considering what type of development occurs in and around Downtown Ottumwa.

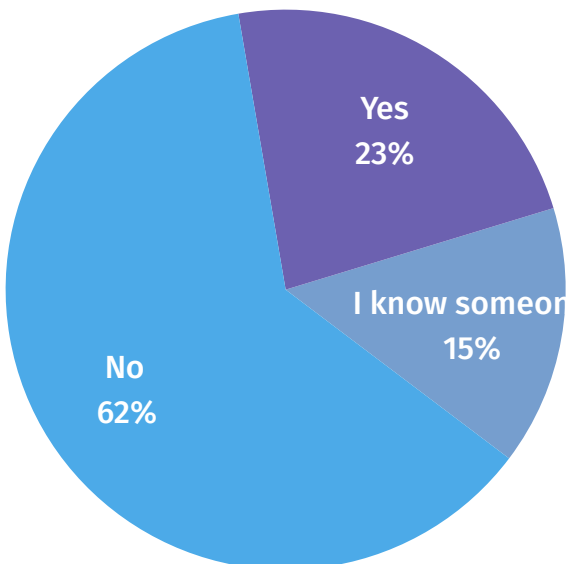
# 4.

## Future Development

What businesses do you wish existed that don't?



Would you or someone you know like to start a pop-up business for the Better Block weekend?



Survey respondents interested in testing out their business ideas included a sculpture gallery, farm to table restaurant, brewpub, used bike shop, Reiki, boutique, casket showroom, and breakfast spot.

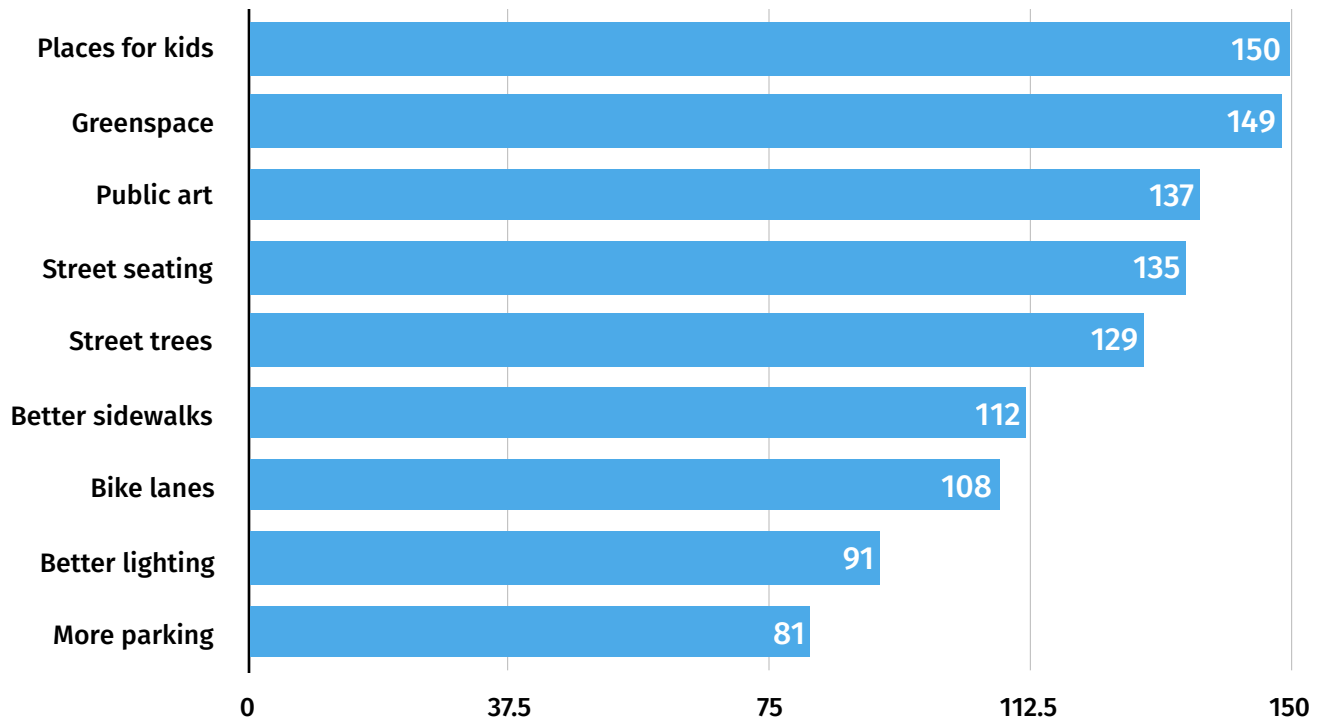
Of those that responded “other” above, suggestions were made for kids’ daycare, art supply stores, more outdoor activities, exercise studios, grocery stores, pet supplies, brunch, and coworking space.



# 4.1

## Future Development

Which public amenities do you think residents need the most in Downtown?



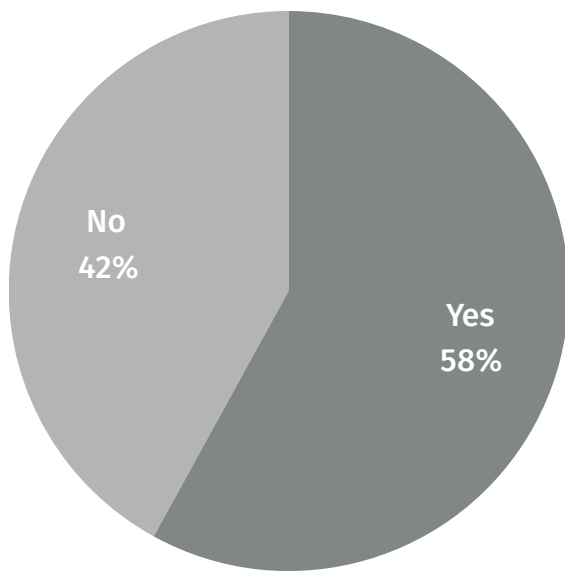
The survey responses showed a clear demand for outdoor, public areas that can accommodate kids, greenspace, and public art. Beautification projects like street trees and sidewalks also ranked high, as well as places to sit.

Of those that responded “other,” sidewalk cafes, riverfront activations, wayfinding, a splash pad, angled parking, public restrooms, free outdoor music, trash cans, ethnically diverse businesses, and areas for sports are some example responses.

# 5.

## Getting involved

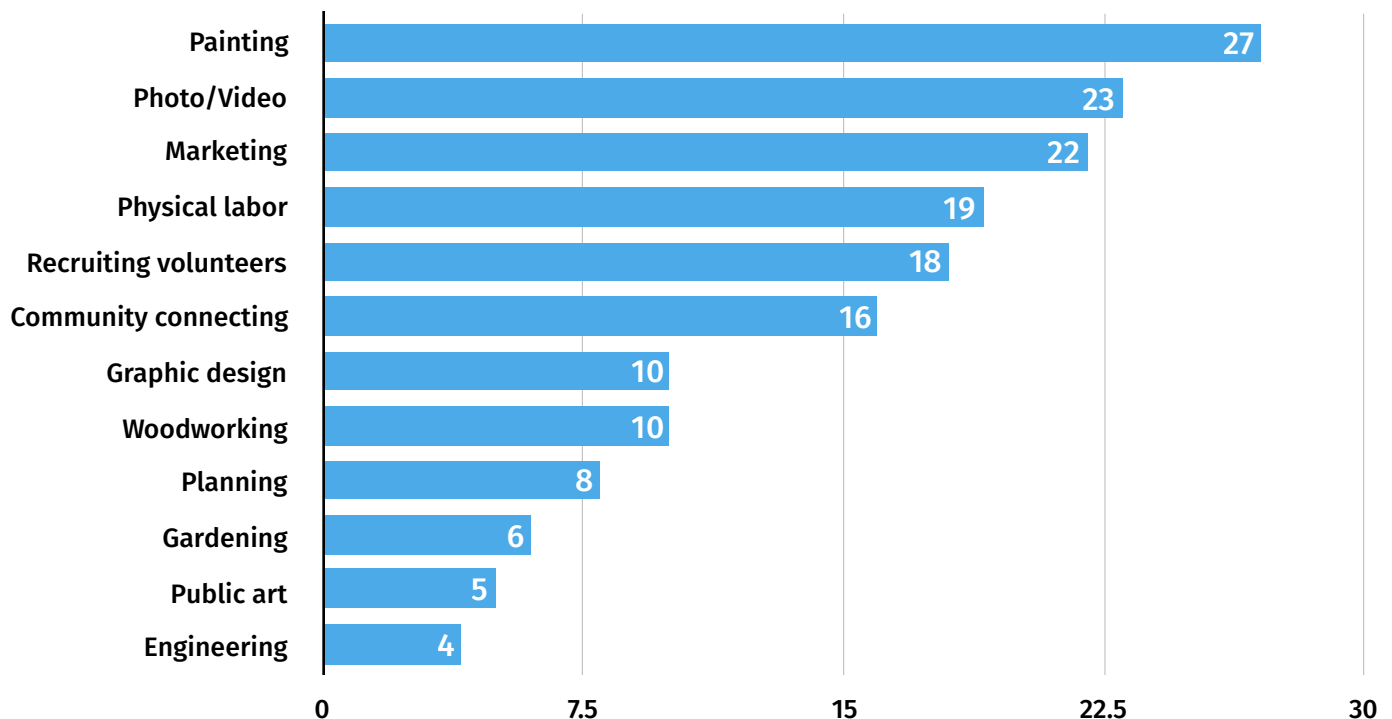
**Would you like to be involved in improving Downtown Ottumwa?**



58% of the 310 participants in this questions responded “yes,” translating into 180 Ottumwans interested in being involved in the project.

Skills in the community lean heavily toward the creative and the hands-on, with many volunteering their marketing and social media expertise, photography and filmmaking, fabrication and carpentry, painting and physical labor. Some notable skills offered that did not make the chart below include beekeeping, music recording, urban foraging, and life coaching.

**If so, what skills could you share?**



# 6.

## If you could change one thing about Downtown Ottumwa, what would it be?

“Fill the storefronts with a variety of businesses”  
**29%**

“Make it more clean and beautiful”  
**10%**

“Change the perception of Downtown”  
**7%**

“More events for all ages and cultures”  
**6%**

“Make it a place young people want to be”  
**4%**

“More greenspace”  
**2%**

“Bring it back to the quaint town it used to be”  
**2%**

These responses represent the major themes that repeated in this open-ended question. Many of the responses did not fit into a particular category, and can be read in full on the survey results spreadsheet.

The overwhelming majority expressed desire for the Downtown to be somewhere they could frequent with their families and friends and feel safe and welcome while doing so.

# 7.

## Who should we be reaching out to?

- Ottumwa Community Schools
- Labor unions
- Area high school students
- Boy/Girl Scouts
- Panera
- YMCA
- Iowa State Extension Office
- Master Gardeners
- First United Methodist Church
- Heartland Humane
- Kiwanis
- Rotary
- Lions Club
- Table 20
- The Bridge
- 100 Men with a Mission
- Omricon Tau Sorority
- Ottumwa Public Library
- Lee's Photography
- Faithe Built Architecture
- 4H
- Seida Community Action
- World of Wonders Wood Design
- Make Ottumwa Shine
- Local churches
- Winger
- M&J Art and Frame
- The League of Women Voters
- Iowa Association of Energy Efficiency
- American Federation of Musicians, Local 75
- The Ottumwa Wildflower Project
- NoCoast Beer Co.
- IowaW
- Ron Durst (photographer)
- Sarah Olsen (artist)
- Gail Roberts (vendor coordinator)
- Wapello County Democrats
- South Central Behavioral Health Region
- Steve Huffman
- Lisa Fritz
- Mika Sorak
- Blaine Rupe
- Ajinomoto Heartland
- Clayton Mooney

Organizations and individuals on this list are only those that I am not aware we have or are already speaking with. Many mentions were made for organizations that we met with during our July 24th visit, or the main partners on the project.

