
Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Memphis

Reimagining the Civic Commons

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a national initiative to advance ambitious social, economic and environmental goals through revitalized and connected public spaces.

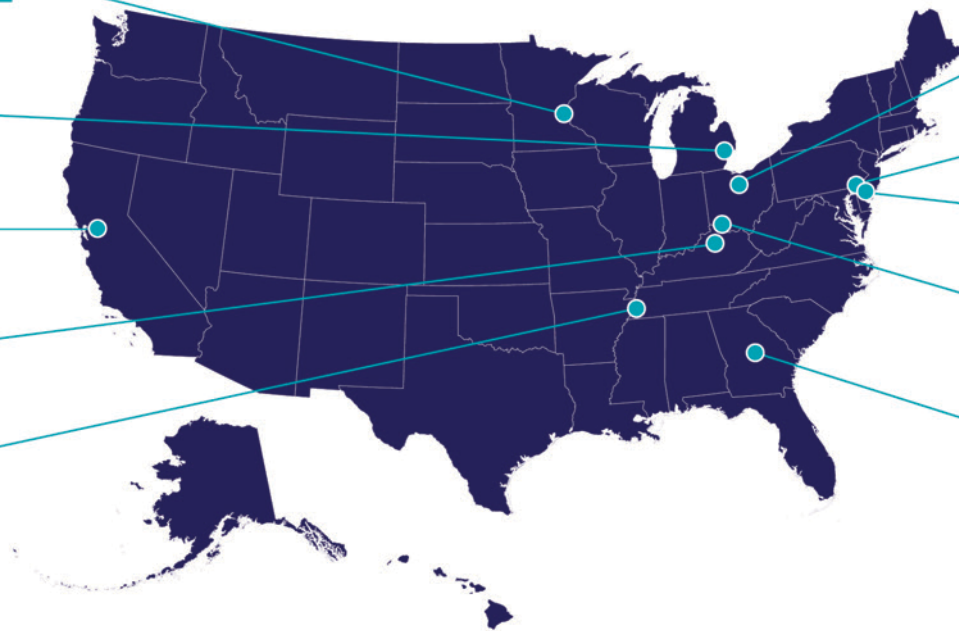
Minneapolis | St. Paul

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San José

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Memphis



Akron

Philadelphia

Camden

Cincinnati

Macon

The initiative is a collaboration of The JPB Foundation, Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation and William Penn Foundation, alongside local partners to demonstrate the multifaceted value of investing in civic assets.

Launched nationally in 2016 with 5 demonstration cities, including Memphis, the learning network has now grown to 10 cities participating in a robust community of practice.



**Civic
Engagement**



**Socioeconomic
Mixing**



**Environmental
Sustainability**



Value Creation

Outcomes are at the core of Reimagining the Civic Commons.

With a focus on four main outcomes:

- **Civic Engagement**
Building a sense of community that brings people of all backgrounds back into public life as stewards and advocates, shaping their city's future.
- **Socioeconomic Mixing**
Creating places where everyone belongs, and that generate opportunities for shared experience among people of all incomes and backgrounds.
- **Environmental Sustainability**
Increasing access to nature and creating environmentally friendly places, easily reached by walking, biking or transit.
- **Value Creation**
Encouraging additional investments in neighborhoods so that they are better places to thrive.

Cross-sector teams in cities across the U.S. are working to demonstrate that strategic investment in our civic assets is a smart approach to addressing the multiple crises we face.

The outcomes orientation is what defines this work.

Reimagining
the Civic Commons

Measuring the Civic Commons

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a three-year, national initiative that seeks to foster engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development by revitalizing and connecting public places such as parks, plazas, trails and libraries.



Using Data to Illustrate Impact

As we invest in connected sets of public places around the country, we recognize the importance of demonstrating—with data—the outcomes of a reimagined civic commons.

We've designed a measurement system to analyze the impacts of these investments on the sites and in surrounding communities and to track progress toward our four main goals.

This data-driven approach offers a new method for determining the health of our set of public places and the communities in which we live.

Goal: Civic Engagement

Signal: Public Life

Metric	Description	Source
Population density	Number of people living in the area	U.S. Census Bureau
Population growth	Change in population over time	U.S. Census Bureau
Population change	Change in population over time	U.S. Census Bureau
Population density	Number of people living in the area	U.S. Census Bureau
Population growth	Change in population over time	U.S. Census Bureau
Population change	Change in population over time	U.S. Census Bureau

Signal: Stewardship & Advocacy

Metric	Description	Source
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations
Number of events	Number of events held in the area	Local organizations

Signal: Trust

Metric	Description	Source
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls
Trust in government	Level of trust in government	Public opinion polls

Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Signal: Mixing on Site

Metric	Description	Source
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data
Age diversity	Range of ages in the area	Census data

Signal: Reputation

Metric	Description	Source
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage
Reputation score	Overall reputation score	Media coverage

Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Signal: Access to Nature

Metric	Description	Source
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government
Green space	Amount of green space in the area	Local government

Signal: Ecological Indicators

Metric	Description	Source
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies
Ecological health	Overall ecological health	Environmental agencies

Signal: Walkability/Bikeability

Metric	Description	Source
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government
Walkability	Level of walkability in the area	Local government

Goal: Value Creation

Signal: Safety

Metric	Description	Source
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police
Crime rate	Level of crime in the area	Local police

Signal: Retail Activity

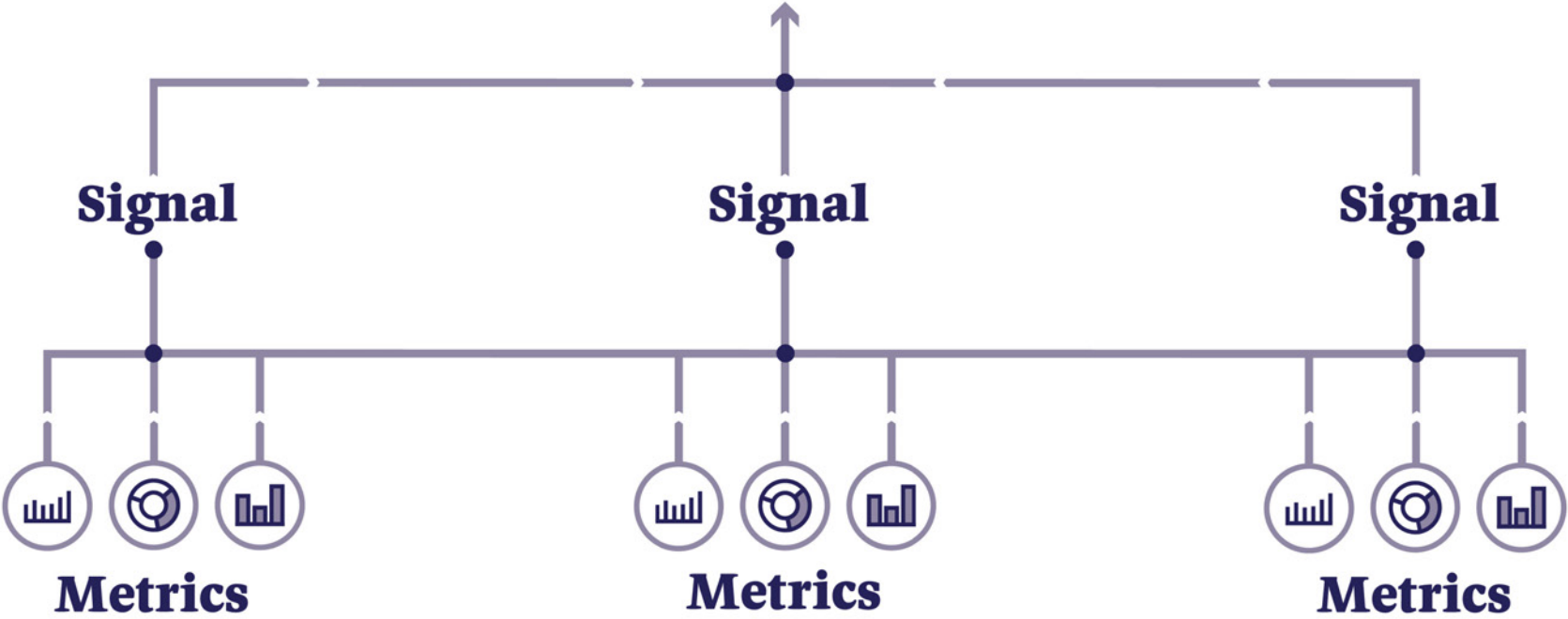
Metric	Description	Source
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government
Retail sales	Level of retail sales in the area	Local government

Signal: Real Estate Value & Affordability

Metric	Description	Source
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies
Real estate value	Level of real estate value in the area	Real estate agencies

Reimagining the Civic Commons designed a practical measurement system to analyze the impacts of investments in public spaces and in surrounding communities, and to track progress over time. This data-driven approach offers a new method for determining the multifaceted value of reinvesting in civic assets.

Goal



Metrics

Metrics

Metrics

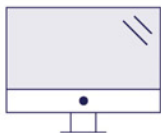
The metrics are organized by the four main goals of Reimagining the Civic Commons: Civic Engagement, Socioeconomic Mixing, Environmental Sustainability and Value Creation.

Within each goal are three to four signals: real-world indicators that relate to the project's overarching objectives. Each signal is associated with one or more metrics designed to measure change on everything from diversity of visitors to tree canopy to perceptions of a neighborhood.

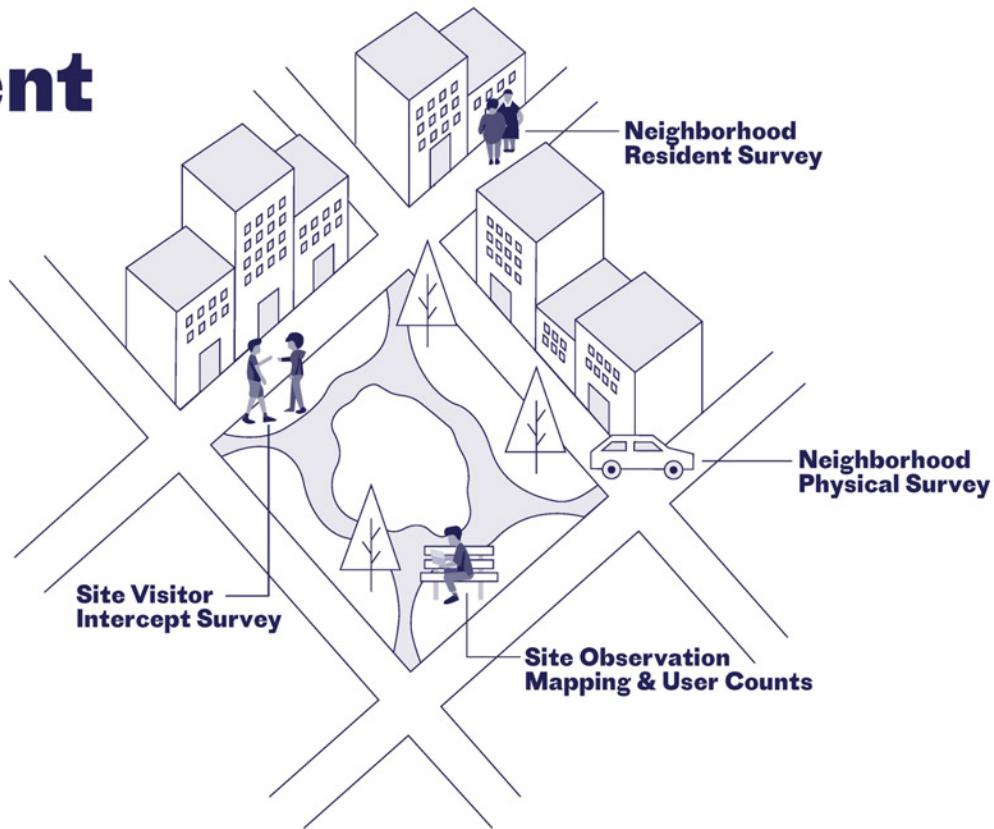
Measurement Tools



**Neighborhood
Focus Groups**



**Third Party
Research**



The following measurement tools are deployed for data collection:

- **Site Visitor Intercept surveys:** Surveys conducted at the project site with people who are engaging with the place
 - **Neighborhood surveys:** Surveys conducted with a sample of community members in a specific neighborhood
 - **Observation mapping:** Visual assessments of how people engage with civic assets
 - **Physical survey:** Visual assessments of the physical conditions of civic assets and surrounding neighborhoods
 - **Neighborhood focus groups:** Qualitative understanding of civic assets of focus and neighborhood conditions via facilitated small group discussions
 - **Third-party data analysis:** Assessment of data collected by outside organizations, such as the U.S. Census
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Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Ambition

In 2016, when Reimagining the Civic Commons kicked off in Memphis, the area now known as the Fourth Bluff — a four-block area along the Mississippi that is home to two parks, a historic library and other civic assets — was not on the mental map of most Memphians. The area lacked a name, and many early focus group participants did not realize that the vacant space then called Mississippi River Park (now River Garden) was even a park. Since then, the Fourth Bluff has become a series of connected, vibrant and dynamic civic spaces adjacent to downtown and the river.

After demonstration projects were completed, a citywide collaborative began advocating for robust civic infrastructure throughout Memphis.

Prior to Reimagining the Civic Commons, there were few places where Memphians of different backgrounds could come together and share space as equals. Memphis is a low-density city, making residential segregation even more likely to hinder socioeconomic mixing. Public spaces were home to divisive Confederate monuments. And although downtown Memphis is a relatively mixed-income neighborhood, it is adjacent to some of the poorest neighborhoods in Tennessee.

Memphis grew from the river and exists today because of the river. Now the city is building a riverfront to spur new connections and new value.

Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Timeline

-
- 2017:** RiverPlay pop-up on Riverside Drive
Construction on Cossitt Library begins
 - 2018:** River Garden opens
 - 2019:** Fourth Bluff Park opens
 - 2020-22:** Fundraising and engagement for Tom Lee Park
 - 2023:** Cossitt Library opens
Tom Lee Park opens
-



Before

River Garden



After

River Garden

Originally named Jefferson Davis Park, this small 1.8 acre patch of land was a park in name only consisting of a vacant lawn, some benches (that didn't even face the river) and a couple of trees. The transformation of the park focused on creating a beautiful, vibrant and natural space that could be an inclusive and welcoming gathering space. River Garden includes many features to attract users and inspire conviviality including: native meadow plantings with more than 30 different types of grasses and plants, swinging benches, an event pavilion and an unconventional adventure play structure. Augmenting the park features are three community-designed and built "bird nests" created by elementary, middle and high school students.



Fourth Bluff Park

Before

After

Fourth Bluff Park

Originally named Confederate Park, this park was home to a statue of Jefferson Davis, replica civil war cannons and a host of historical memorabilia that made many community members feel unwelcome. A renovation of the park removed all vestiges of its divisive past and replaced them with new convivial gathering spaces, inclusive public art, more than 50 new trees and a robust program schedule including swing dancing, concerts and Grizzlies Playoff Watch Parties.



Before



After

Cossitt Library

Cossitt Library

Cossitt is Memphis' first public library with an important civil rights history. To bring the library into the 21st century, the renovation centered community and created a space where creatives can thrive and where everyone is welcome. The downtown branch library now includes a podcasting studio, a chef-driven café, two flexible performance spaces, technology labs, plenty of soft seating and a prominent mural celebrating local civil rights activists. Cossitt welcomes all and inspires all.

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Period of study:

2017 - 2022

In 2017, the Memphis Civic Commons team, with technical assistance from the Civic Commons Learning Network and Interface Studio used the Measuring the Civic Commons framework to collect baseline data on the collection of assets in the Fourth Bluff: what is now known as River Garden, Fourth Bluff Park and Cossitt Library, and the nearby neighborhood.

These same metrics were collected again in 2021-22, using the same methodology (available as an appendix) in order to understand the impact of the investments on the sites and the surrounding neighborhood over a 5-year period.

Recognizing that the impact of the work spans years, if not decades, the following presentation highlights evidence of change over the study period of 2017 – 2021/22.

We encourage local stakeholders to consider measuring again in 2027 to capture the 10-year story of change.

*Note: Due to well-known abnormalities in the 2020 Census data, we did not provide comparisons on any Census-based metrics at this time. Any Census data referenced in this report is ACS 2015-2019 to avoid questionable data.



Goal: Civic Engagement

Signal:

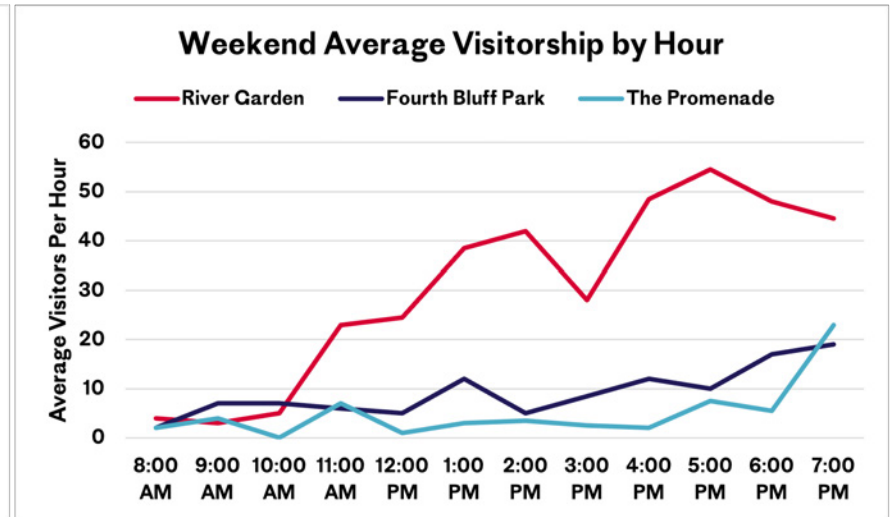
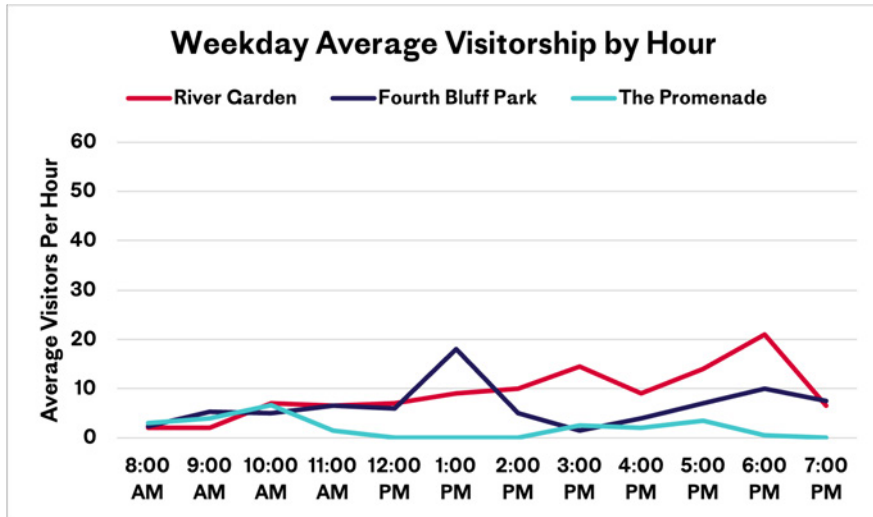
Public Life



Goal: Civic Engagement

Civic commons visitorship

↑ 57%



On average, hourly visitorship to each of the Fourth Bluff sites has increased by 57% since the baseline period.

Based on Placer.ai data, on average in 2017 Fourth Bluff Park and River Garden saw a combined visitorship of 983 per week, while in 2023 average weekly visitorship across the two parks was 2,203 people – more than doubling since baseline.

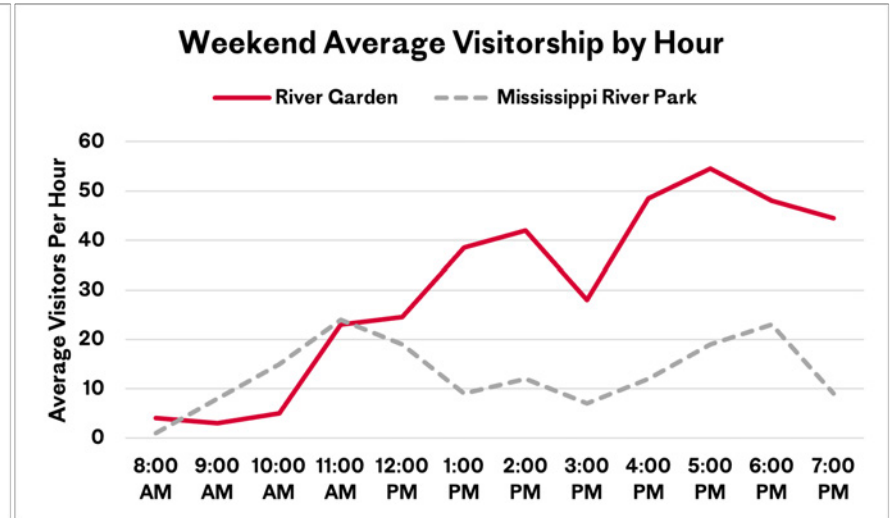
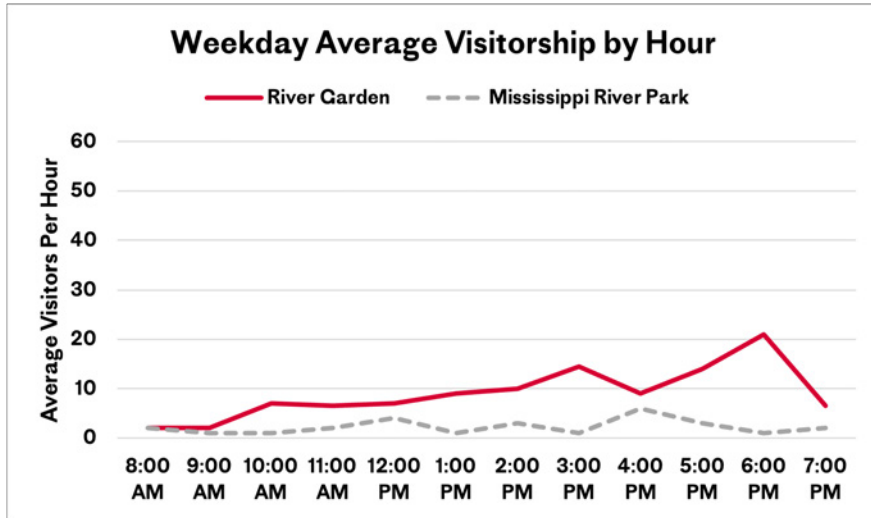
And while only 1 week in 2017 saw park visitorship that exceeded 3,000 people, in 2023 this level of visitorship was reached in 12 separate weeks.

*Note: Placer.ai tracks cell phones, so its data only captures visitors who carry a phone. The weekly counts are likely undercounting children, in particular.

Goal: Civic Engagement

River Garden visitorship (2017 vs. 2021)

↑ 229%



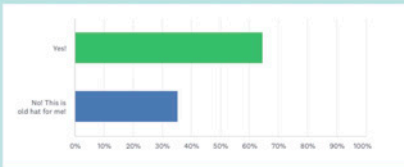
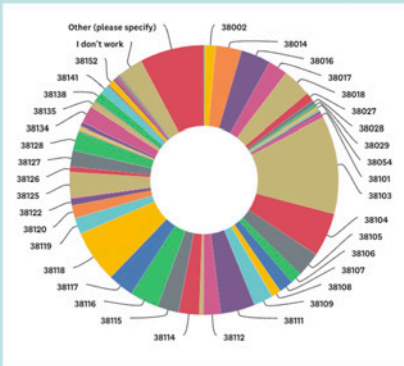
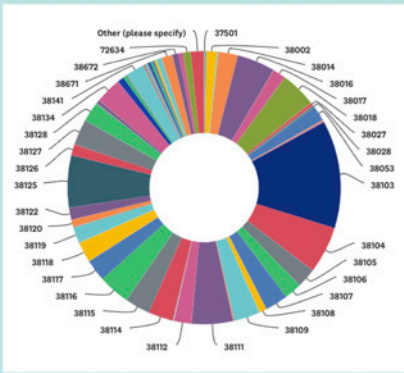
In River Garden, for instance on average there are three times as many people in the park at any given time than previously (from 7 people/hour to 23 people/hour).

Based on Placer.ai data, during the study period River Garden more than tripled its average weekly visitorship – from 278 visitors per week to 851 visitors per week. And while only 1 week in 2017 saw River Garden visitorship that exceeded 1,000 people, in 2023 this level of visitorship was reached in 20 separate weeks.

*Note: Placer.ai tracks cell phones, so its data only captures visitors who carry a phone. The weekly counts are likely undercounting children, in particular.

RIVER GARDEN

YOGA ON THE RIVER: TUESDAYS AT 6PM



MEMPHIS RIVER PARKS

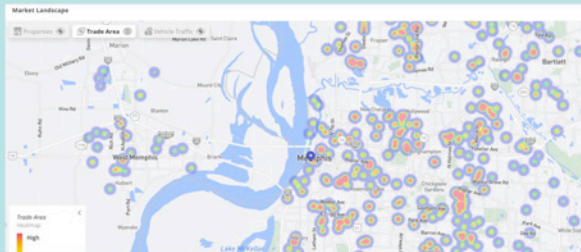


For instance, weekly yoga classes attracts hundreds to River Garden every Tuesday evening, with the 2023 yoga season drawing more than 5,000 visitors from 37 different Memphis area zip codes.

“Yoga classes were my first experience coming downtown and using the outdoor spaces. ... It was a big mix of people. ... I was coming from Midtown, it seemed like people were getting off work downtown and coming to the classes. ... It was fun!”

–Neighborhood Employee

FOURTH BLUFF PARK GRIZZLIES WATCH PARTIES



MEMPHIS
RIVER
PARKS



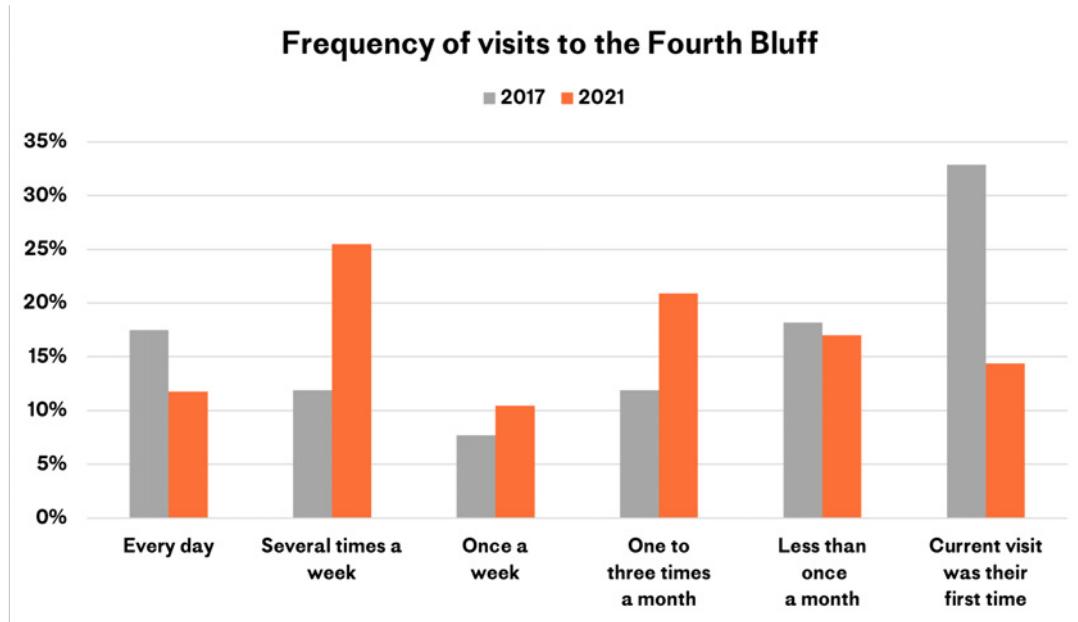
While Fourth Bluff Park remains primarily a peaceful passive space, it attracts a large mixed population during events such as Memphis Grizzlies Watch Parties, Soulin' on the River concerts and Juneteenth celebrations.

“The coolest event I saw was when the Grizzlies made it to the playoffs. There was a watch party ... I don't even watch basketball, but watching Memphis come to the park and everyone was just so excited and happy, and the space was totally filled. That was awesome.” –Neighborhood Employee

Goal: Civic Engagement

Fourth Bluff visitors who go weekly or more often

↑ 30%



In addition, people are visiting the sites more frequently with nearly half saying they visit the sites at least weekly (a 30% increase from 2017) and 92% of visitors report that they spend at least 30 minutes in the sites each time.



Showing the results of adding amenities that give people a reason to stay and a greater variety of things to do.

“They’re intentionally drawing people into the space, and that’s been really exciting. It’s been really cool especially since it’s been so targeted with the adjacent neighborhoods.” –Neighborhood Resident



**Downtowners who visit a public place at
least once a week**

78%

Overall downtown neighbors, workers and visitors are now more likely to visit a public place with more than three-quarters (78%) saying they go to a park, library, community center or other public place at least once a week (up 9 percentage points from 2017).

And again, this was during the construction period for Tom Lee Park and before Cossitt Library reopened to the public.



Goal: Civic Engagement

Signal:

Stewardship & Advocacy





Picked up a piece of litter at a Fourth Bluff site

47%

People are also caring about the sites more. Nearly half (47%) reported that they've picked up a piece of litter in the sites and nearly 1 in 5 visitors said they have volunteered a couple hours or more for Fourth Bluff sites.



Importance of civic commons sites to them, the community or the city

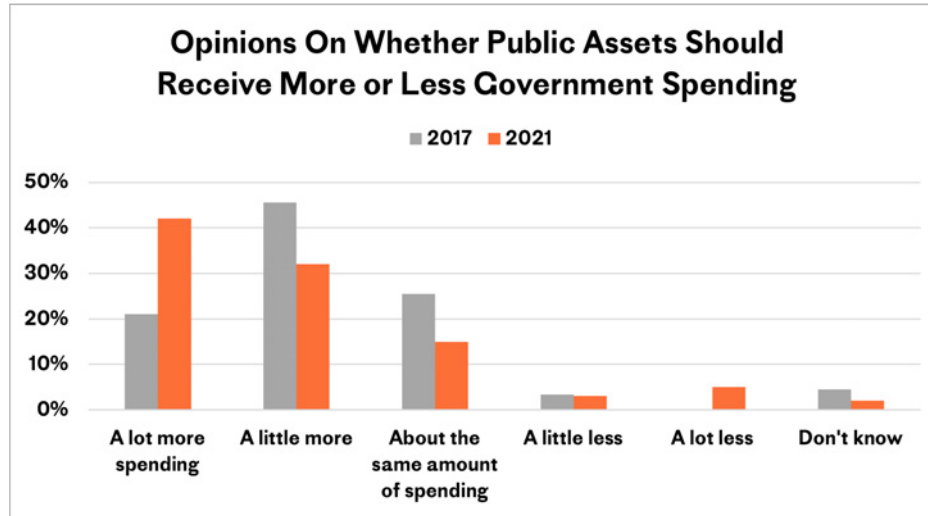
92 - 97%

It is now almost unanimous among site visitors who say the sites are important to them (92%), to their community (97%) and to their city (97%).

Goal: Civic Engagement

Support for public spending on the civic commons (2017 vs. 2021)

74%



At the same time, an increasing portion of downtown neighbors, workers and visitors are supportive of more government funding of the civic commons. Nearly 3 in 4 now say that they support increased government spending on these types of assets (74% up from 67% at baseline). And a doubling of the proportion of respondents who want to see a lot more spending (42% up from 21% at baseline).



Support for politicians who advocate for
the civic commons

73%

In addition, 73% of these downtown stakeholders are more likely to support a politician who advocates for policies to better support civic assets, up 18 percentage points from the baseline period.



Goal: Civic Engagement

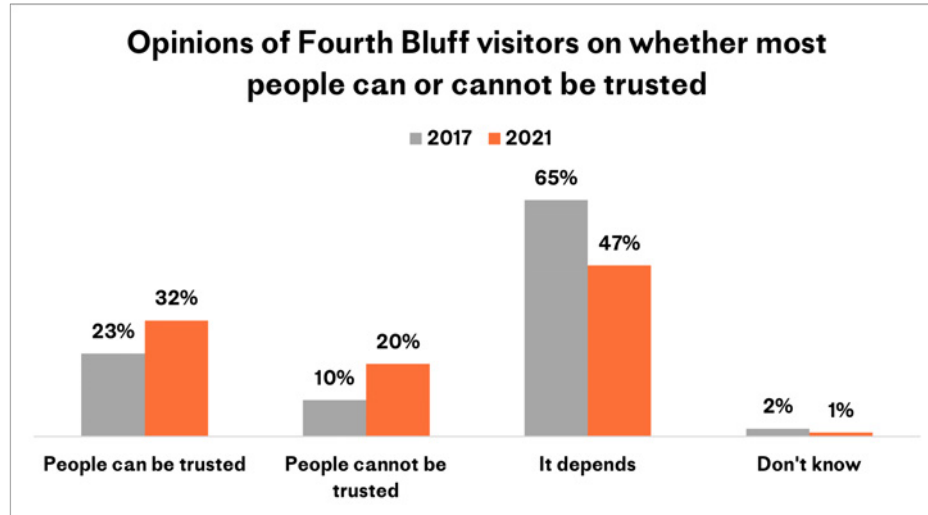
Signal:
Trust



Goal: Civic Engagement

Fourth Bluff visitors who say most people can be trusted (2017 vs. 2021)

32%



While overall measures of trust didn't perform well over this period, which was conflated with the COVID pandemic and global increases in distrust, there was one exception: the proportion of site visitors who say that most people can be trusted increased from 23% to 32%. This seems to indicate that those actively in the Fourth Bluff public spaces have more trust in others than those in the neighborhood as a whole (which saw a decrease in this same measure from 38% to 20% during this same time period).



Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Signal:

Mixing on Site

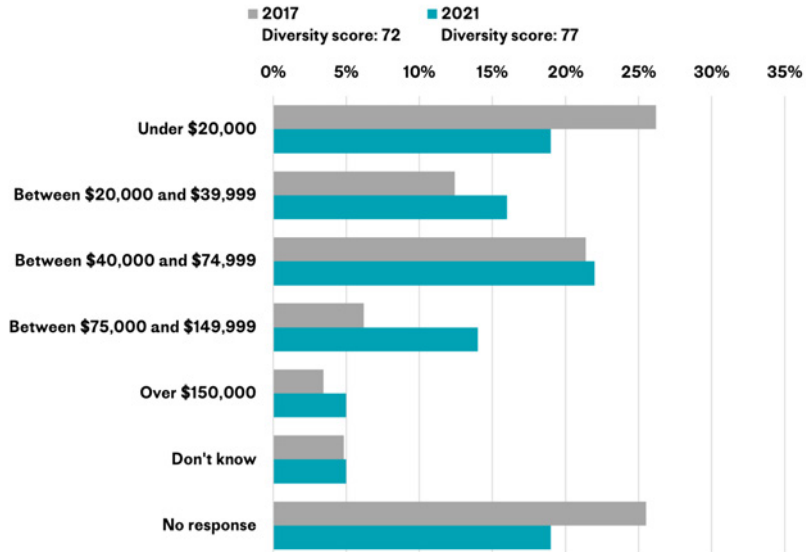


Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

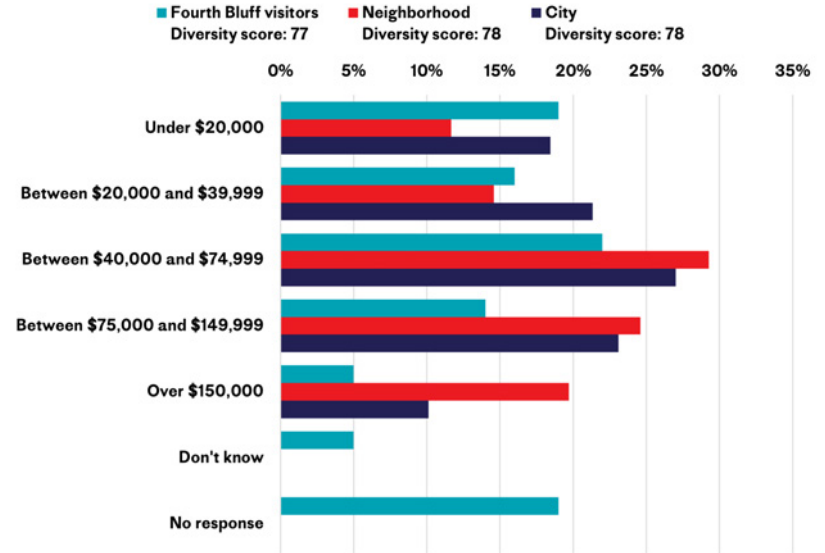
Income diversity of site visitors

77/80

Household income of Fourth Bluff site visitors
(2017 vs 2021)



Household income of Fourth Bluff site visitors
compared to neighborhood and city



Income diversity of site visitors increased from baseline and is at nearly the maximum level that can be reached at 77. This means that the likelihood of any two random people in the sites being from different income groups is very high.

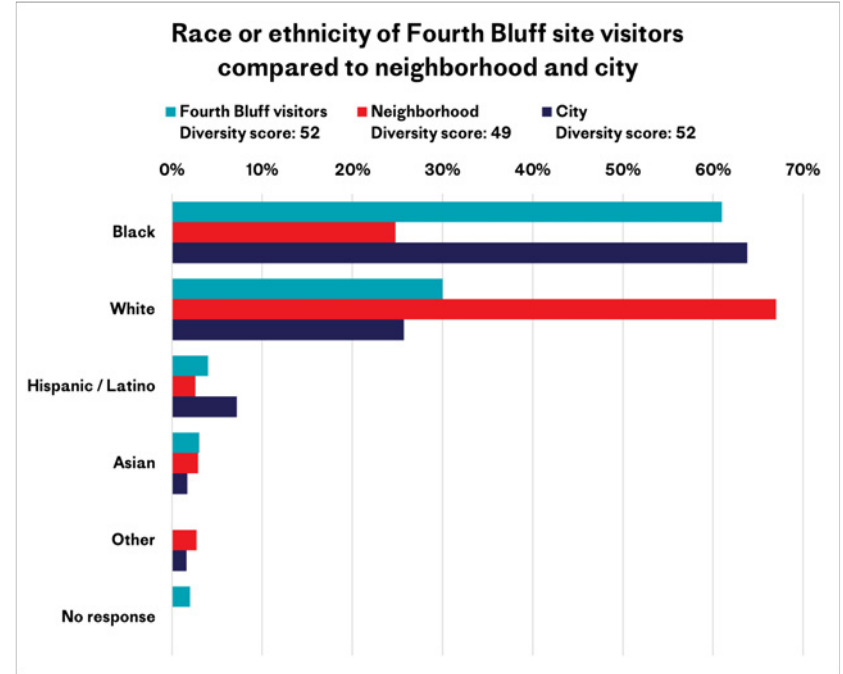
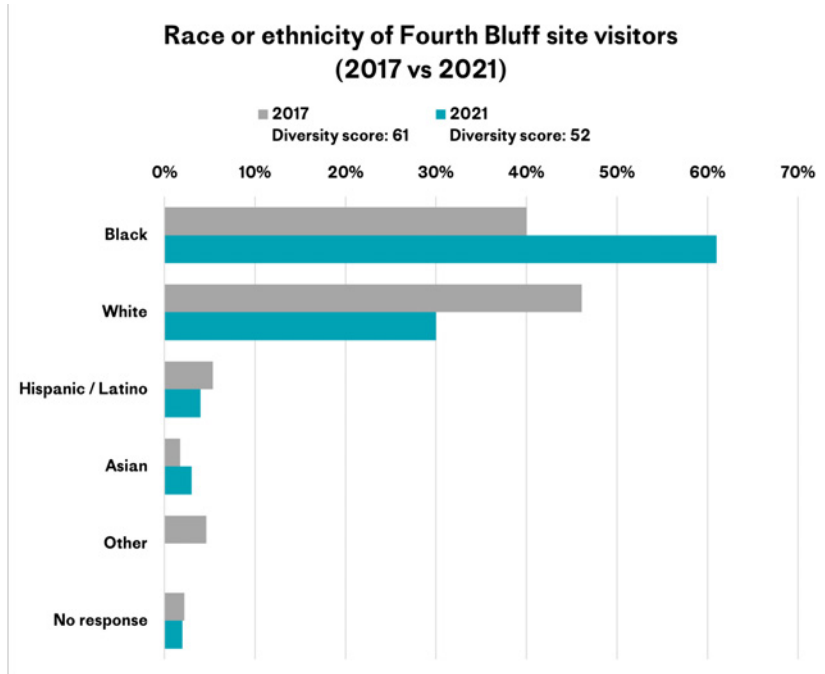
The income mix you see at the Fourth Bluff has become much more similar to the city's overall income diversity.

*Note: Using ACS 2019 5-year data for neighborhood and city demographics due to 2020 Census data peculiarities

Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Racial and ethnic diversity of site visitors

52/80



While the racial diversity of the sites has somewhat decreased since baseline, the current mix is extremely representative of the city's overall racial demographics. The Fourth Bluff has the same level of racial diversity as the city as a whole.

This means that those coming to the Fourth Bluff sites mirror the City of Memphis' overall population very closely.

*Note: Using ACS 2019 5-year data for neighborhood and city demographics due to 2020 Census data peculiarities



Citywide site
vistorship

78%

The Fourth Bluff has become a citywide destination. In fact, citywide site visitorship has increased with 78% of city resident visitors living outside of the downtown neighborhood. This increased 13 percentage points since 2017.

The Fourth Bluff has become a gathering place for people of all backgrounds from all different neighborhoods and who together represent a true cross-section of Memphis.

“Grandparents are coming to bring their kids skating. We got families coming to kayak or, when I go to Soulin’ on the River, I bring my whole family.” –Neighborhood Resident



Fourth Bluff visitors within
conversational distance of one another

62%

Along with gathering this mix of people in the Fourth Bluff, the sites have seen a significant increase in opportunities for impromptu interactions – nearly tripling from 21% to 62% of site visitors being within conversational distance of one another.

So, the Fourth Bluff is not only gathering a diverse group of Memphians together, but also the sites themselves are encouraging people to connect due to their design and programming.



Opportunities for meeting new people in
the civic commons sites

67%



And it is happening, 2 out of 3 site visitors say that they have met someone for the first time while in the Fourth Bluff.

“When you talk about the diversity of events, that’s very inclusive. We need more events that continue to shape this inclusivity.”

–Neighborhood Resident



Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Signal:

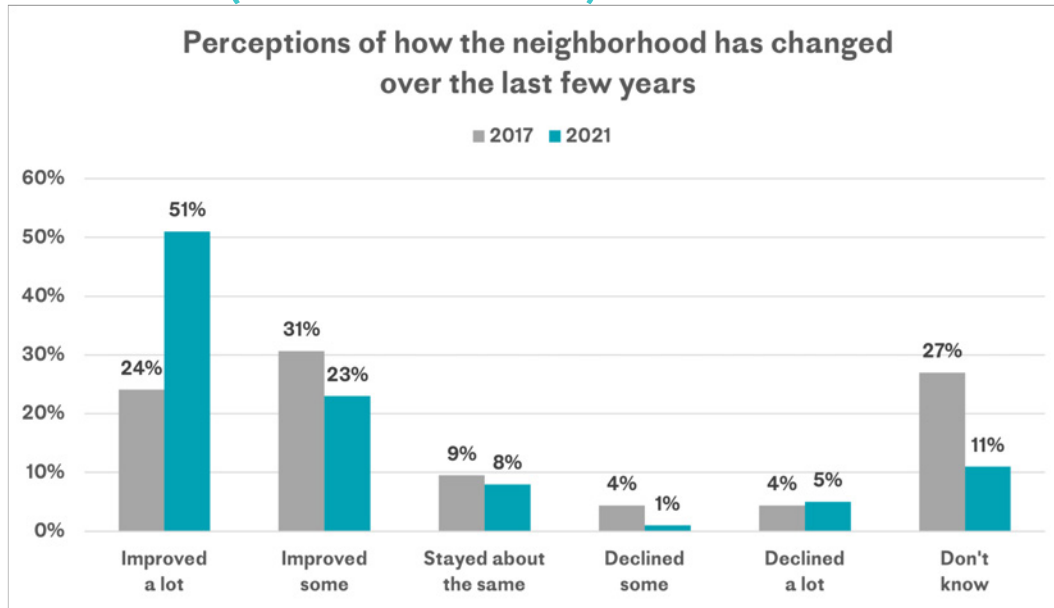
Reputation



Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Perceptions of neighborhood change among site visitors (2017 vs 2021)

74%



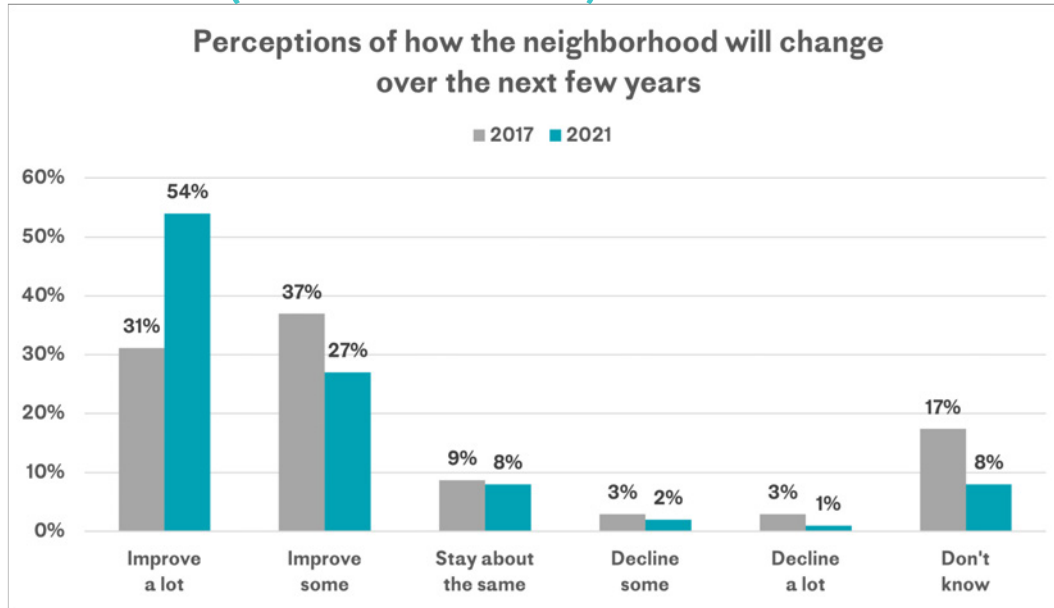
While fewer downtown neighbors, workers and visitors felt the neighborhood had changed for the better over the past few years – 59% down from 70% at baseline. 73% believe the neighborhood will improve in the coming years.

At the same time, the vast majority (74%), of Fourth Bluff visitors feel the neighborhood has changed for the better up from just 55% at baseline. And a major jump in those who feel the neighborhood has improved a lot in recent years – from less than one-quarter of site visitors in 2017 to more than one-half in 2021.

Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Perceptions of the neighborhood's future among site visitors (2017 vs 2021)

81%



And they believe that good things are coming for downtown. 81% of site visitors said they believe the neighborhood will improve over the next few years, up from 58% at baseline.

Again, you see a nice step up of visitors saying they feel the neighborhood will improve a lot in the coming years – 54% compared to 31% at baseline.

It is notable that public space visitors' views of the neighborhood and its future have grown more positive, despite the narrative of downtowns across the country struggling post-pandemic.



Local news articles with positive narrative
about sites and the neighborhood

91%

This is also reflected in the larger media coverage. 91% of local news articles about the sites and nearby neighborhood were positive (7/1/2022 – 6/30/2023) compared with 82% during the baseline period, and this news coverage has grown with 47 additional positive articles.



Posted on social media or talked to friends
about a Fourth Bluff site

52%

Meanwhile, more than half of Fourth Bluff visitors say they have posted on social media or talked with friends about Fourth Bluff sites (52% compared to 37% at baseline).

People tend to post and talk to their friends about things that are special or interesting, and that they're excited about. This in turn helps potential visitors feel interested and comfortable exploring the Fourth Bluff, which helps improve the perception of the sites and downtown.

“I would never have talked about Cossitt Library. Like, Oh, the homeless library? Because that’s who used it for 30 years. Nobody used it because of the perception of the things that happened there. So I think the library renovation is gonna totally blow it out of the water. I’m very excited about it. But it’s a lot of mindset shift. That’s the hard part.” –Neighborhood Resident



Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Signal:

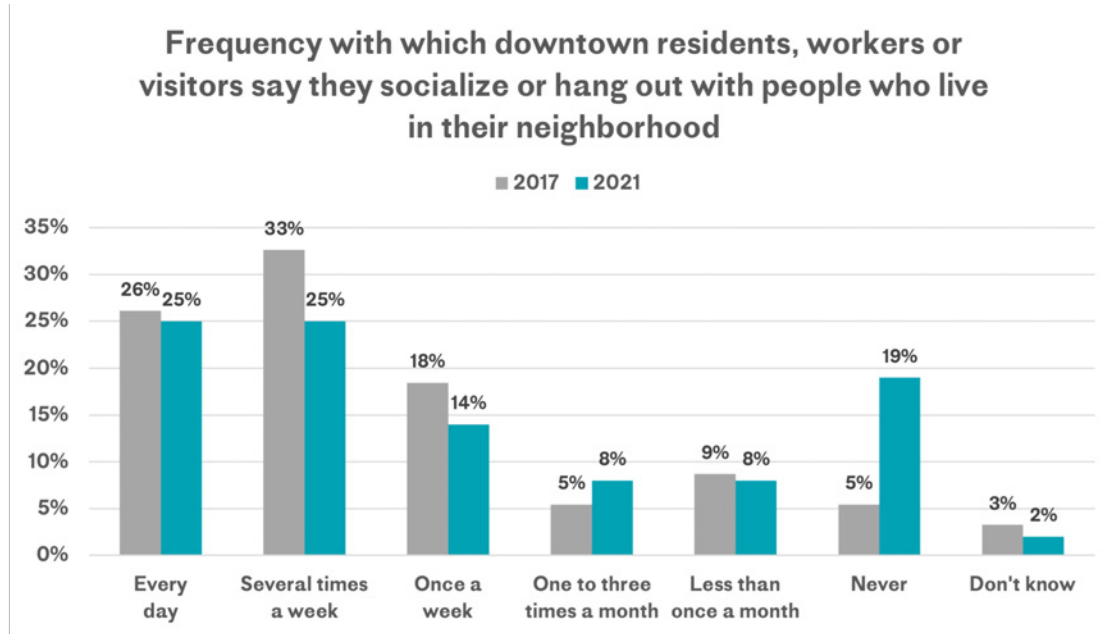
Bridging Social Capital



Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Time spent with neighbors (2017 vs 2021)

↓ 14% pts



One concerning note is a marked decrease in the portion of neighborhood residents, workers and visitors who report regularly spending time with neighbors. This fell 14 percentage points from 77% at baseline to 63% at this reporting period.

And the percentage of respondents who said they never spend time with people who live in their neighborhood increased nearly four-fold from 5% in 2017 to 19% in 2021.



CATCH
LOBS
NOT
FEELINGS.

It may be that the pandemic shifted neighborhood social behaviors and makes the case for strong public spaces as increasingly filling the human need for socializing.

This seems particularly urgent given the U.S. Surgeon General's recent advisory on social isolation that points to research on the negative impact of loneliness and disconnection on our health and wellbeing.



Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Signal:

Access to Nature





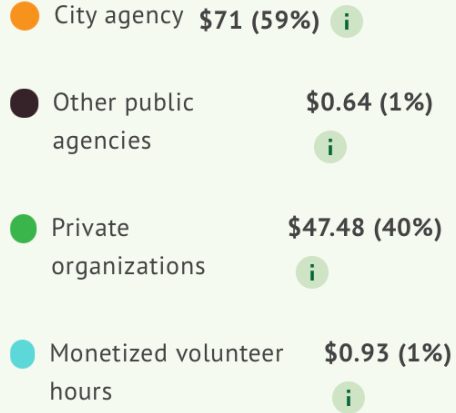
Citywide investment
in parks

↑ 126%

Memphis saw a significant increase in citywide investment in parks—more than doubling over this period from \$53/resident to \$120/resident.

This puts it above the national median of \$108/resident averaged over the time period 2021-2023.

PARK INVESTMENT (THREE-YEAR AVERAGE) i



National benchmark: Relative park spending by organization type

Average among 100 most populous cities

City agency: **85.5%**

Other public agencies: **7%**

Private organizations: **5.5%**

Monetized volunteer hours: **2%**

Total per capita spending: \$108 per person



However, it is important to note that only **59%** of Memphis' investment in parks came from the City's parks and recreation department, while **40%** came from private organizations. This varies significantly from the national benchmark of **85.5%** of funding coming from the City and only **5.5%** from private organizations.

This means the current public sector in Memphis is under-investing in parks – public spending is a full **\$20** per person below the national benchmark.



Jackson
Kayak

While not adequately captured in the metrics, through the Fourth Bluff investments, Memphis' access to its waterfront for recreation changed significantly throughout the study period. New programs offering kayaking, standup paddle boarding and other outdoor recreation on the harbor gave many Memphians' their first opportunity to interact with the river that defines the city.

“At our school, we don't have a playground. We didn't have a gym. So, Mississippi River Park is our playground. Using the parks is what we do every single day.” –Local Educator



Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Signal:

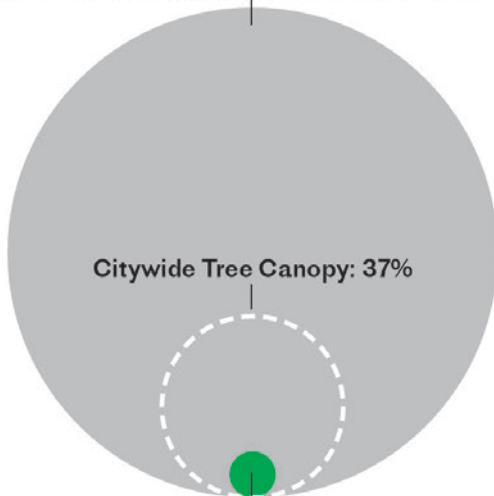
Ecological Indicators

Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Tree canopy in Fourth Bluff sites

41.8%

Total Downtown Neighborhood Area: +/- 200 Acres

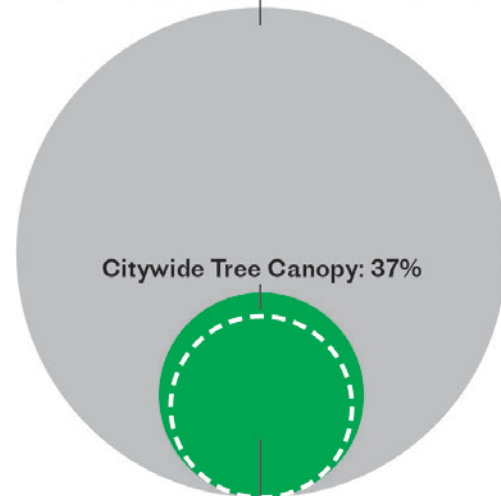


Citywide Tree Canopy: 37%

Downtown Tree Canopy: 9.4%

Carbon Dioxide Sequestered Annually: 97.85 Tons

Total Fourth Bluff Site Area: +/- 10 Acres



Citywide Tree Canopy: 37%

Fourth Bluff Tree Canopy: 41.8%

Carbon Dioxide Sequestered Annually: 20.23 Tons

While the tree canopy in downtown has basically stayed flat over the study period, within the Fourth Bluff sites the total number of trees has more than doubled (62 to 143) and the tree canopy has increased from 24.1% to 41.8%. The Fourth Bluff sites now have a tree canopy four times that of the downtown neighborhood, and now provide better shading than the citywide average.

Fourth Bluff trees will sequester more than 20 tons of carbon dioxide annually when they reach full maturity, representing one-fifth of the total carbon dioxide sequestered annually by trees in downtown.

This does not include the 1,000 new trees planted in Tom Lee Park and their impact on the riverfront district.



Perception of street trees by downtown residents and workers

93%

Meanwhile the overwhelming majority, 93%, of downtown residents and workers say street trees are beneficial to the neighborhood, up from 86% at baseline.



Increasing tree canopy in a dense neighborhood, like downtown, can be a difficult and long process; however, cities can do so more quickly by increasing trees in neighborhood public spaces to provide shade and increase access to nature. For instance, the significant investment in trees in Tom Lee Park, pictured here.



**Green stormwater management
features in square feet**

28,896

The Fourth Bluff sites incorporated a number of sustainable materials and features including LED lights in River Garden, 5400 sq. ft. of native plantings at River Garden and Cossitt, and 28,896 sq. ft. of stormwater management features including planters and drainage areas with native wetland plant species for native water filtration. In addition, 118,396 gallons of stormwater capacity were added to the sites from the newly planted trees (calculation based on trees at full maturity in 20 years).

“River Garden is quiet. It feels like a refuge for me, when I finally make it there. ... You see the kids playing. And I like to get myself a swing and breathe and just kind of relax.” –Neighborhood Employee



Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Signal:

Walkability | Bikeability





Neighborhood biking
infrastructure

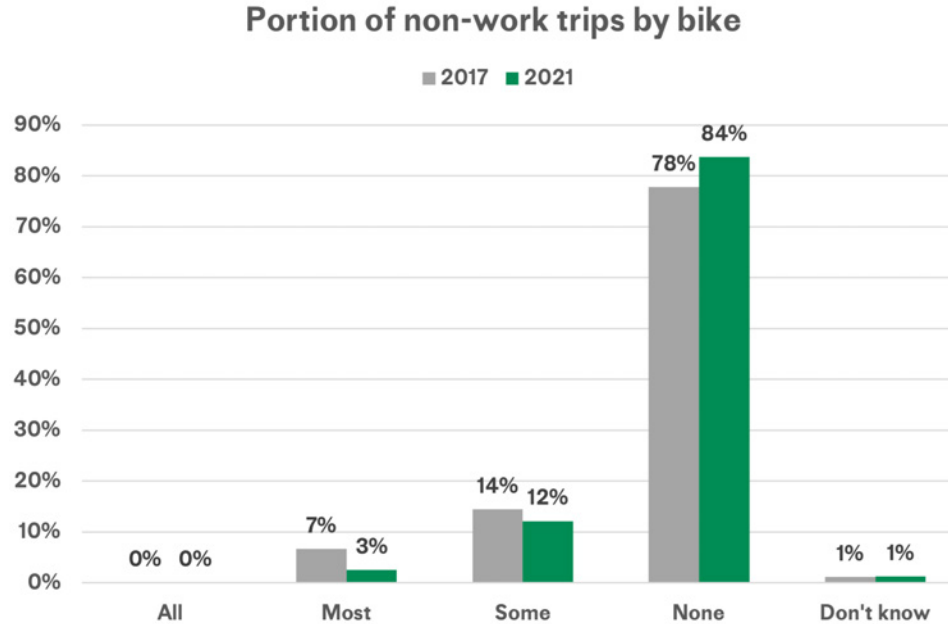
24%

While neighborhood walking infrastructure stayed fairly flat, downtown's bike infrastructure improved with a six-fold increase in the percent of neighborhood street lengths with bike lanes (dedicated or shared). While there is still a ways to go, Downtown Memphis saw a 20% point increase from 4% to 24% over the study period.

Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Neighborhood biking behavior

15%



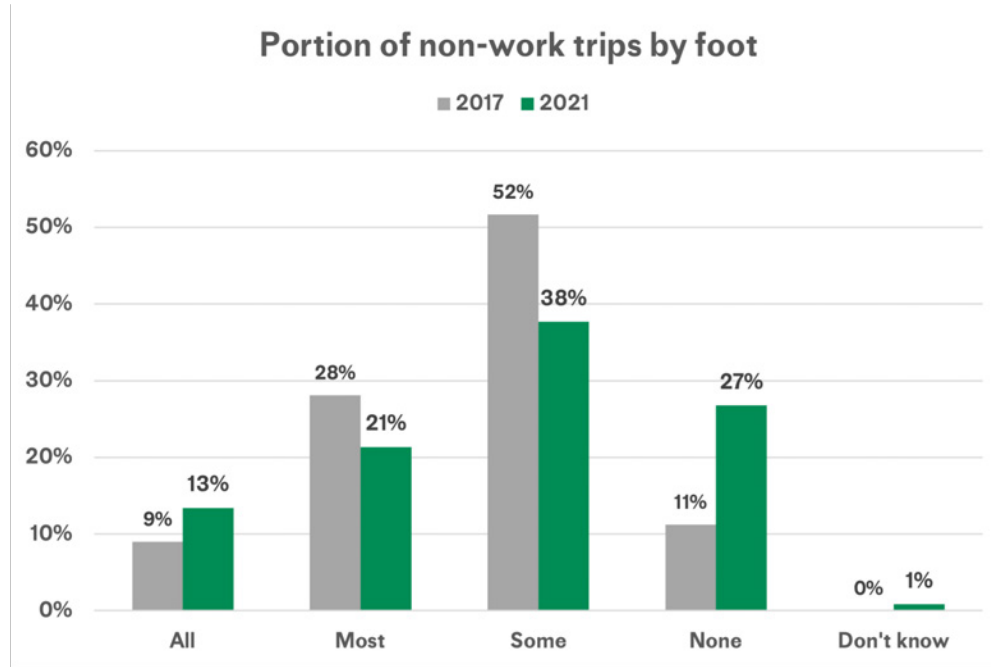
Despite this, fewer downtown residents, workers and visitors reported biking.

Downtowners who bike for some of their non-work trips decreased from 21% to 15% over the study period.

Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Neighborhood walking behavior

72%



Similarly, fewer downtown residents, workers and visitors reported walking for non-work trips. While 72% reported making at least some of these trips by foot in 2021, this is down from 89% in 2017. And 27% of respondents said they complete none of their non-work trips by foot, more than doubling since 2017. Though you do see a slight increase in the percentage of people who make all non-work trips by foot.

This change in biking and walking behaviors may be due to a change in who works and lives downtown post-pandemic, particularly since the survey was conducted in 2021.



Walking, biking and transit access to the
civic commons

↓ 30% pts

Visitors to the Fourth Bluff who arrive by foot, bike or transit also decreased from 66% to 36% between 2017 and 2021. Given the increase in citywide visitorship to the Fourth Bluff, it is likely unsurprising that more people are driving to the sites.

However, these stats collectively indicate a likely need for better pedestrian, bike and transit connections both across downtown and to the Fourth Bluff sites, in particular.



Goal: Value Creation

Signal:

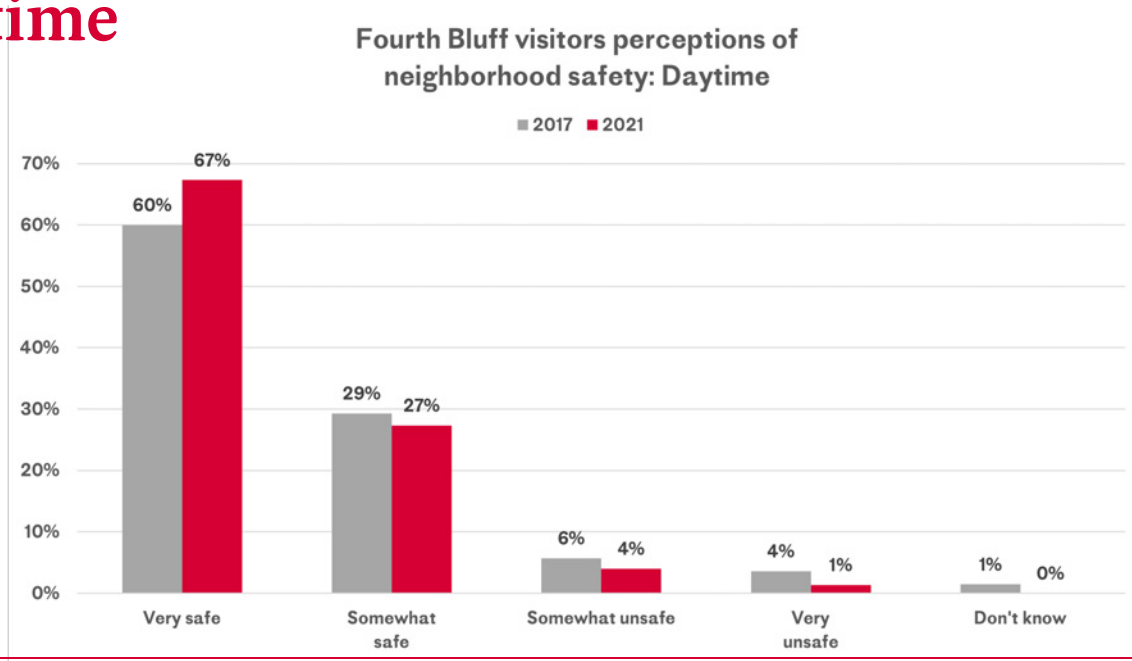
Safety



Goal: Value Creation

Perception of neighborhood safety in the daytime

95%



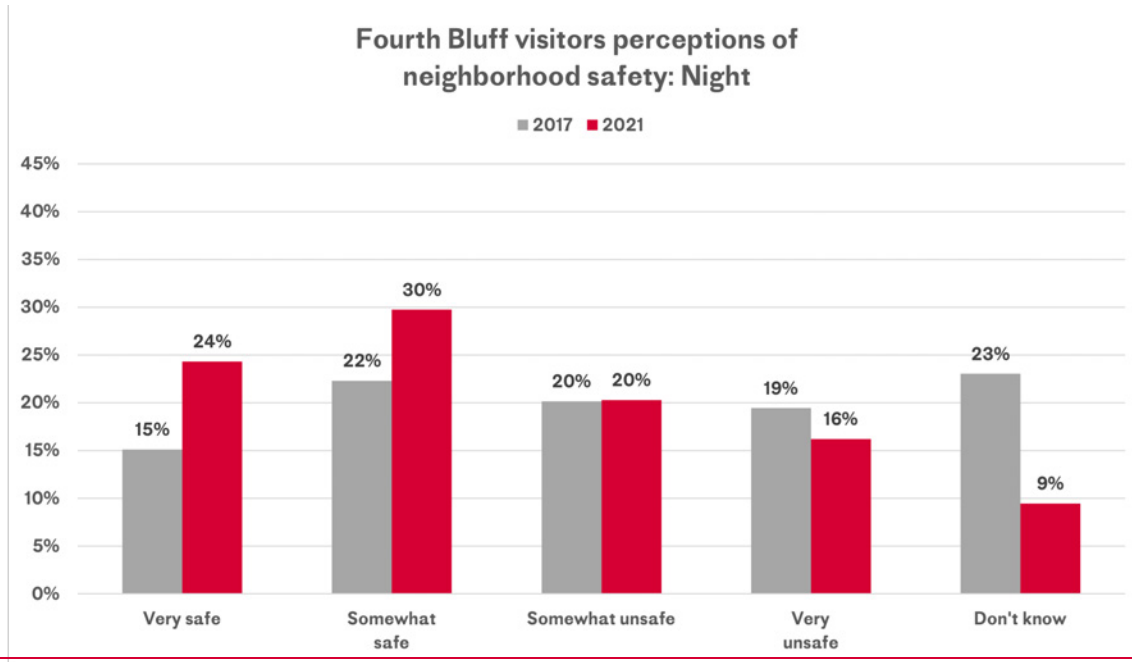
Perceptions of daytime neighborhood safety were very good with the vast majority of Fourth Bluff visitors saying they felt safe in the neighborhood during the day. This increased 6 percentage points between 2017 and 2021. And a larger proportion of respondents now say they feel “very safe” in the neighborhood during the day.

This feels particularly important given that it flies in the face of the narrative of an unsafe downtown that has emerged post-pandemic.

Goal: Value Creation

Perception of neighborhood safety at night

↑ 17% pts



At the same time, we saw marked improvement in the perception of neighborhood safety at night among Fourth Bluff visitors. This increased by 17 percentage points over the study period, from only 37% feeling a sense of safety at baseline to 54% who now say they feel safe in the neighborhood at night.



The significant change in attitude among Fourth Bluff visitors on their sense of safety downtown at night can likely be attributed to Fourth Bluff design, such as new lighting and firepits, as well as activities from sunset skate to Grizzlies Watch Parties, that regularly draw people to this portion of downtown in the evening hours.

Pointing to strategies the city may want to consider for increasing the public's sense of safety in other parts of downtown and beyond.



Goal: Value Creation

Signal:
Real Estate

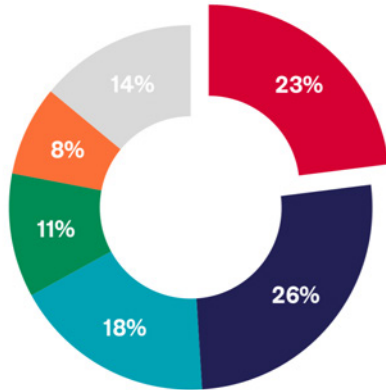


Goal: Value Creation

Commercial buildings in the neighborhood **18%**
that appear vacant (2017 vs 2021)

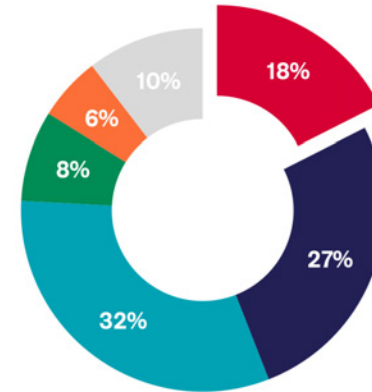
Downtown Memphis commercial types
2017

■ Vacant ■ Services ■ Food ■ Hotel ■ Retail ■ Other

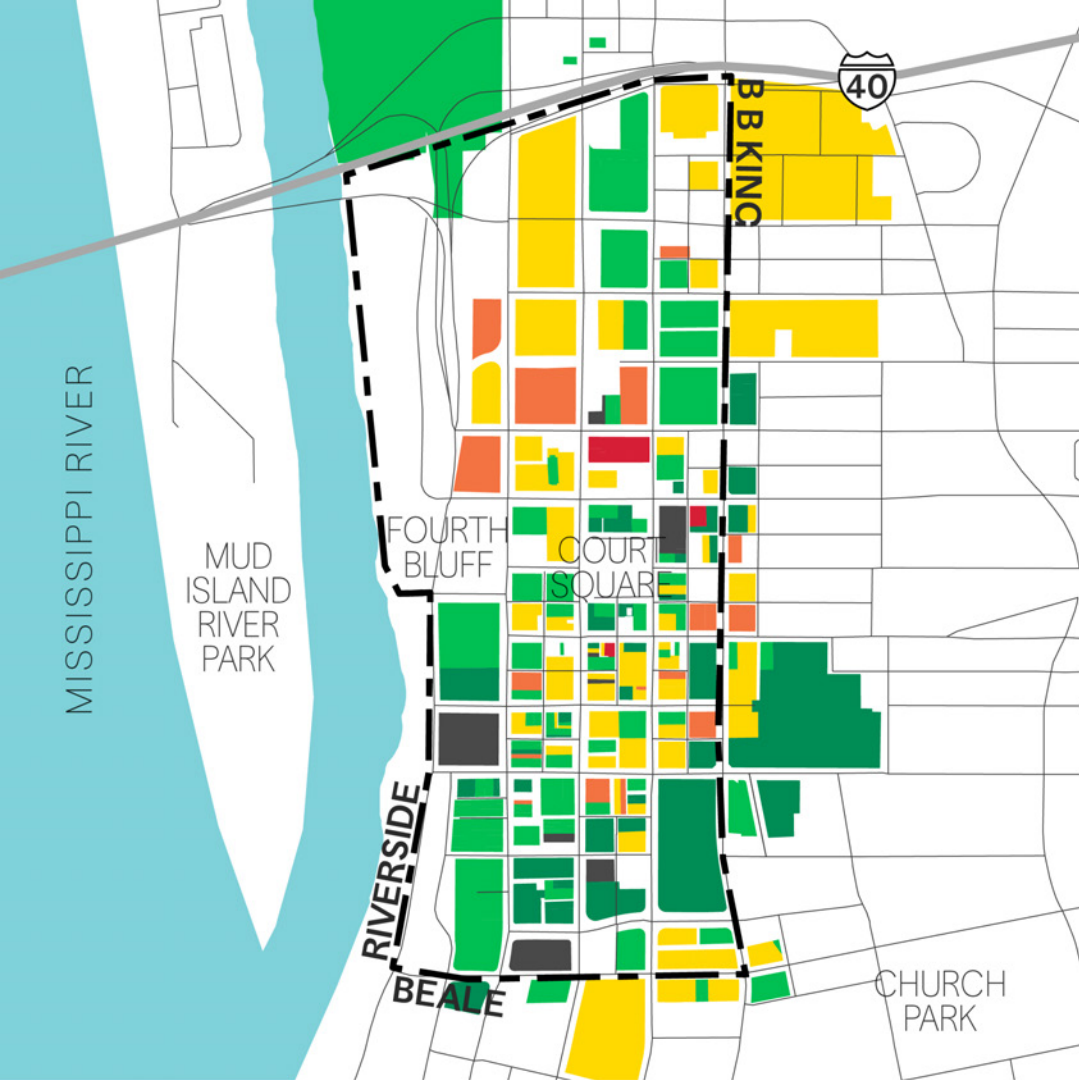


Downtown Memphis commercial types
2021

■ Vacant ■ Services ■ Food ■ Hotel ■ Retail ■ Other



The proportion of commercial property that appeared vacant decreased from 23% to 18% over the study period. Indicating that despite the pandemic, downtown Memphis commercial buildings appeared to stay active.



**Buildings that
appear in good or
excellent condition**

57%

A - Excellent

B - Good

C - Fair

D - Poor

F - Very Poor

Construction

Neighborhood building conditions also improved over this time period with the percent of buildings that appear in good or excellent condition increasing from 39% to 57%.

Underutilized land in the neighborhood, such as vacant lots or surface parking lots, also decreased from 11% to 9% of the parcel area.



Typical home values in the downtown neighborhood

↑ 68%

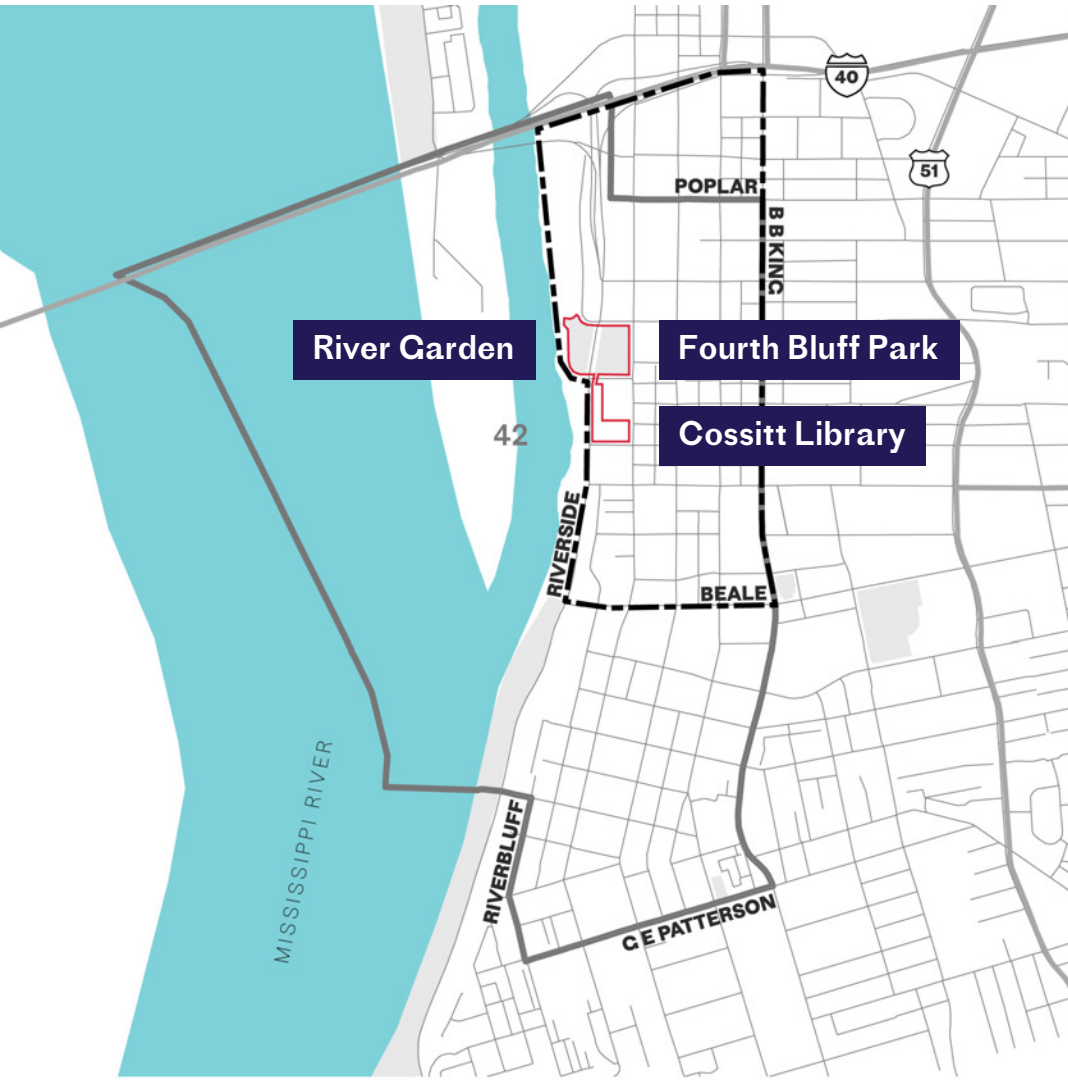
At the same time, typical home values in the downtown zip code increased by nearly \$150,000 or 68% from June 2015 to June 2022. During this same time period, typical home values across the city of Memphis increased by approximately \$80,000.

“In the next ten years, Downtown is gonna be very busy, very active, even more so than already is.” –Neighborhood Employee

*Note: Data from Zillow calculated as a weighted average of the middle third of homes in a given geography.


Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Methodology



Geographic Study Area

 Civic Commons site

 Core study area

 Core Census tracts

 1/2 Mile

Civic Commons Sites

- River Garden
- Fourth Bluff Park
- Cossitt Library

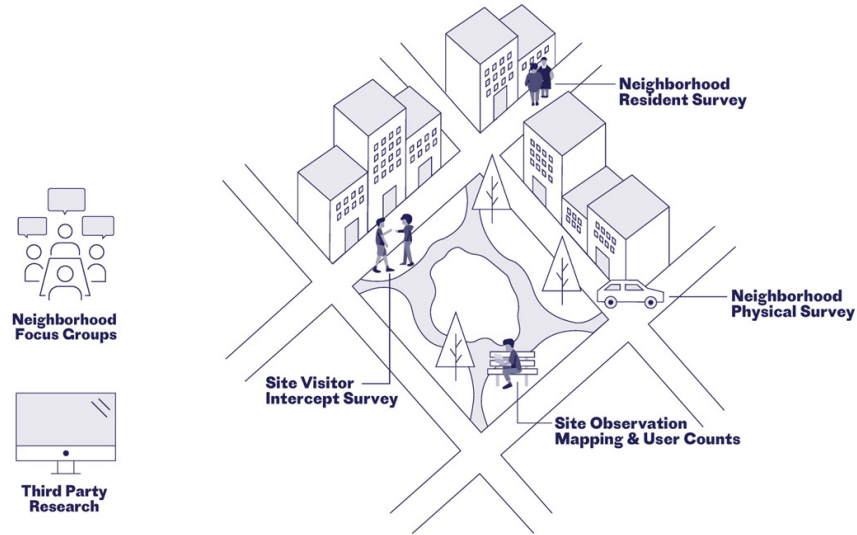
Core Study Area

- Approx. ¼ mile radius around sites

Census Tract: 42

Zip Code: 38103

Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final



Data Collection Tools

The following measurement tools were deployed for data collection in Memphis using the methodologies summarized below:

Neighborhood Physical Survey: Visual assessments of the physical conditions of civic assets and surrounding neighborhoods

Neighborhood Resident Survey: Surveys conducted with a sample of community members in a specific neighborhood

Site Visitor Intercept Survey: Surveys conducted at the project site with people who are engaging with the place

Site Observation Mapping & User Counts: Visual assessments of how people engage with civic assets

Third Party Research: Assessment of data collected by outside organizations, such as the U.S. Census

Neighborhood Focus Groups: Qualitative understanding of civic assets of focus and neighborhood conditions via facilitated small group discussions

Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Neighborhood Physical Survey

Neighborhood Physical Survey

The physical survey of Downtown Memphis was fielded from December 12, 2022 to December 14, 2022 and recorded conditions of 365 parcels. The boundary of the neighborhood used for the physical survey extended west of B.B. King Blvd. to the Mississippi River, north of Beale Street, and south of Interstate 40. For streets that defined the boundaries of the study, parcel conditions were recorded on both sides of the street centerline. Surveyors collected data on a range of topics, including: land use, building and yard condition, street trees, tree canopy, transportation infrastructure, defensive design measures, and any activity related to sale, construction, or condemnation. The survey was completed by two staff members trained to recognize applicable physical conditions of properties from the street.

Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Neighborhood Resident Survey

Neighborhood Resident Survey

The Memphis Neighborhood Resident and Worker Survey was fielded from October 3 to November 15, 2021 and May 21 to August 19, 2022 as an intercept survey at four locations on streets throughout the Downtown Memphis neighborhood, including:

- Zone 1: The area of Main St. B.B. King Blvd. and Adams St. to Court Ave. (including all of Court Square)
- Zone 2: The area of Main St. to 2nd St. and Court Square to Monroe St.
- Zone 3: The area of Front St. to 2nd St. and Monroe St. to Gayoso Square
- Zone 4: A defined walk route which started at Riverside Drive and Union Street going east on Union, south on Front St. east on Beale St. north on Main St. and west on Peabody.

199 respondents who live or work in Downtown Memphis completed the survey; though the total number of respondents for each question may vary slightly, as respondents were excluded from the data when they chose not to answer a question, unless otherwise noted. Surveyors were instructed to approach all individuals who passed their assigned surveying location. Individuals were offered the option to enter a raffle for a \$100 gift card as incentive to take the survey. Data in this report includes only respondents who reported working in Downtown Memphis or residing at an intersection or a ZIP code in the area extending west of Danny Thomas Blvd, north of Beale Street, and south of Interstate 40.

Site Visitor Intercept Survey

Site Visitor Intercept Survey

The Memphis Fourth Bluff Intercept Survey was fielded from October 5, 2021 to October 21, 2021 and from May 11, 2022 to June 11, 2022 in River Garden, Fourth Bluff Park, and the Promenade. 152 respondents completed the survey; though the total number of respondents for each question may vary slightly, as respondents were excluded from the data when they chose not to answer a question, unless otherwise noted. Surveyors were instructed to circulate through the sites on a set circuit at regular intervals and approach all visitors to the sites as they observed them. Surveyors were instructed not to approach individuals outside the sites on adjacent sidewalks or properties. Visitors to the sites were offered the option to enter a raffle for a \$100 gift card as incentive to take the survey. Basic demographic information – including gender, race, and general age – were collected on everyone who surveyors attempted to survey, including those who declined, totaling 288 individuals. Where noted, demographic data in this report includes data on individuals who declined the intercept survey.

Site Observation Mapping & User Counts

Site Observation Mapping & User Counts

Observation mapping and user counts were conducted on two weekdays and two weekend days in October 2021 in River Garden, The Fourth Bluff, and The Promenade. Cossitt Library was closed for renovations during the survey period. From 7:00 AM until 6:00 PM, at the top of each hour, surveyors walked about the Fourth Bluff and completed the following task:

Surveyors marked on paper maps the location and general activity of all people within the sites at the moment the surveyor observed them. Observation mapping data in this report were tabulated using predefined activity categories that surveyors used to mark down individuals' locations. Data for a small number of hours were incomplete when surveyors failed to complete the task; for those times, data was duplicated from equivalent times during the corresponding weekday or weekend day when possible. The final weekday and weekend day observation mapping data presented in this report are composite counts from the two weekdays and two weekend days on which data was collected.

Reimagining the Civic Commons Metrics Report - Final

Third Party Research

Third Party Research

A range of third party data sources were collected and analyzed for this report including:

- American Community Survey, 2011-15 | 2015-2019
- Placer.ai, 2023
- Reference USA business database, 2015
- The Trust for Public Land, 2016 | 2023
- Zillow, 2016 | 2023

Regular programming of the civic commons

In order to calculate the average hours of weekly programming per site, staff worked with local demonstration team members to catalogue applicable programming during one sample week from each month between July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023 for each individual site within the civic commons. The totals for each of the 12 weeks were then calculated to produce an average for the year.

Public perceptions of sites and of the neighborhood

For Downtown Memphis and its Civic Commons sites, mentions in general circulation papers, identified by Brink Communications, were tracked and identified by whether the article expressed an overall positive or negative sentiment. To track appropriate mentions, a list of keywords was developed relating to each neighborhood and site. A custom Google search was then created for each news publication to catalog local news mentions. Article sentiments were tallied on a monthly basis. Tabulation was first automated through the artificial intelligence platform ChatGPT, with each result checked by a member of the Interface team familiar with the sites and neighborhood. The number of positive mentions was divided by the total inventory to produce the average percentage of local news articles with positive narratives about the sites and neighborhoods.

Sentiments were analyzed on a yearly basis, starting on July 1, 2022 and concluding on June 30, 2023. The news publications tracked in Memphis included the Commercial Appeal, Memphis Flyer, and Memphis Business Journal.

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Third Party Research (cont.)

Third Party Research (cont.)

Income diversity of neighborhood residents

This income diversity index is computed as follows: Census data from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey on household income is used to divide the population into five income groups. We compute the share of the population in each census tract that is in each of these groups. The index is computed as 1 minus the sum of the squared shares of the five groups and corresponds to the probability that any two randomly selected persons in the neighborhood would be from different groups.

Racial and ethnic diversity of neighborhood residents

This racial and ethnic diversity index is computed as follows: Census data from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey is used that reports the number of persons in each of five racial ethnic groups (white, Black, Latino, Asian, and all other). We compute the share of the population in each census tract that is in each of these groups. The index is computed as 1 minus the sum of the squared shares of the five groups and corresponds to the probability that any two randomly selected persons in the neighborhood would be from different groups.

Tree canopy

The USDA Forest Service's i-Tree Canopy tool was used to estimate tree cover for Downtown Memphis. The i-Tree tool uses a random sampling process of publicly available imagery from Google Maps to classify land use types and calculate environmental and economic benefits from the percentage of tree canopy found in a given area.

For Downtown Memphis and the Civic Commons sites at the Fourth Bluff, a set of points for each geography were sampled using the i-Tree tool with a sampling goal of achieving an overall Standard Error of less than 3% for all land cover types. The number of points sampled for each geography included:

- Downtown (neighborhood): 1,000 points
 - Fourth Bluff Site: 300 points
 - Citywide tree canopy estimates were drawn from third party sources.
-

Neighborhood Focus Groups

Neighborhood Focus Groups

Two focus groups of approximately 8-12 people – one comprised of downtown residents and one comprised of downtown workers, were held during the week of December 12, 2022 to December 16, 2022 in Downtown Memphis. The goal of the focus groups was to gain a qualitative understanding of neighborhood conditions and Civic Commons sites from different populations that occupy it.

Local demonstration teams were asked to recruit 10-12 participants over the age of 18 for each focus group. Census data for the neighborhood was used to provide demographic recruitment targets with regards to age, race, and gender to ensure that participants were reasonably representative of the neighborhood population.

Focus groups were facilitated by 2 staff members for approximately an hour and a half without other members of the Civic Commons team or other local partners present. Participants were provided with a brief introduction to the Civic Commons project and the purpose of the focus group before discussion started. At the outset of some focus groups, local partners provided a brief introduction before departing.

Quotations from the focus groups presented in this report are edited for clarity.
