



OLYMPIA DOWNTOWN STRATEGY

VOLUME 1: SUMMARY

Adopted April 25, 2017



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Downtown Olympia is South Puget Sound's regional hub for economic and social activity. With eclectic shopping and dining, numerous arts and entertainment venues and a rich historic fabric, Downtown has much to offer. In addition, recent public and private investments totaling over \$180 million have set the stage for a budding renaissance that is realizing numerous community goals.

However, Downtown faces some important issues—development uncertainties related to sea level rise and site contamination, a continuing need for inclusive residential opportunities, a strong interest in maintaining and growing a vibrant business and retail environment, and the increasingly critical need to address homelessness and street dependency. The Olympia Downtown Strategy (Strategy or DTS) is the City's effort to address these concerns with a clear set of actions to sustain and improve Downtown for its residents, workers, businesses, and visitors.

PURPOSE

The Downtown Strategy:

- Identifies community priorities for Downtown,
- Outlines realistic and effective actions for the next five years,
- Guides City budgets and work plans,
- Builds community partnerships,
- Helps us market Downtown, and
- Moves our vision for Downtown forward.

CITYWIDE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN/ACTION PLAN OUTCOMES FOR DOWNTOWN

Not only does the Downtown Strategy reflect community goals raised in this process, but it also works toward the Comprehensive Plan's vision for Downtown:

- 1 A vibrant, attractive urban destination
- 2 A safe and welcoming Downtown for all
- 3 A mix of urban housing options
- 4 A variety of businesses
- 5 Connections to our cultural and historic fabric
- 6 Engaging arts and entertainment experiences

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Downtown Strategy's guiding principles were developed by the City Council while scoping the project and further refined during community conversations at Workshop 1 and Online Survey 1. The following ideals and themes should guide Downtown's development and improvements:

- **Effective.** Focus on actions that meet multiple goals at once.
- **Realistic.** Ensure that actions are realistic in terms of resources and timing.
- **Unique qualities.** Preserve Olympia's unique qualities, such as its waterfront and eclectic character.
- **Waterfront and natural setting.** Highlight these assets and physically or visually connect to them.
- **Family friendly.** Make sure Downtown is safe, fun, and accessible to children and families.
- **Pedestrian and people-oriented public spaces.** Create and promote lively and active outdoor spaces.
- **Walkable lifestyle.** Encourage development that supports living, working, and recreating in close proximity with easy pedestrian connections.
- **Vibrant, diverse economic center.** Reduce development uncertainties, encourage private investment, strengthen local businesses, make Downtown inviting, encourage more residents, improve Downtown's identity and perception, promote tourism, and connect to other community and economic development efforts.
- **Environmentally conscious design.** Encourage building, site, and infrastructure design that reduces Olympia's carbon, energy, and water footprint.
- **Historic character.** Preserve and enhance Downtown's historic character.
- **Diversity of housing.** Ensure that people from all socio-economic backgrounds can live Downtown.
- **Safe and comfortable bicycle routes.** Improve bicycling connections for commuters, tourists, and occasional cyclists.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGY INTENT

The Strategy presented in this document integrates current activities with new actions to achieve the vision articulated in the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Strategy's public process. This Strategy is:

- **Holistic:** Actions are directed toward the full range of public objectives and City functions.
- **Integrated and results oriented:** What makes this a strategy rather than a plan is that it focuses on specific near-term actions that build on and complement one another.
- **Equitable:** Special care was taken to ensure that all people using Downtown will benefit and to avoid displacement of less advantaged people.
- **Forward thinking:** Participants in the planning process recognized that change will happen, but also developed measures to retain the valued characteristics that distinguish Downtown as a special place to live, work, play and shop.
- **Timely:** The recommended actions in this Strategy are intended to occur over the next six years to take advantage of the momentum generated, previous work, current market opportunities, and new development projects.

The Downtown Strategy is a living document that will be updated every five years or so.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

Downtown Strategy actions will be included in the Comprehensive Plan Action Plan, which includes indicators to track and share our progress in accomplishing our Downtown vision.

In addition to the priorities and actions reflected herein, other Downtown issues and efforts will also influence Downtown and may be influenced by Downtown Strategy actions. These all have different timelines and decision tracks. Some are within the purview of the City of Olympia, while others are led by separate agencies. Our aim is to stay coordinated and connected to these efforts. An outline of efforts is included in [Appendix A.5](#).

This Strategy is not binding on future Comprehensive Plan and development regulation amendments; rather it provides general guidance on the drafting of future proposals. The City Council will consider such future actions based on public participation and records created at that time.

CONCEPT MAP

CHARACTER AREAS

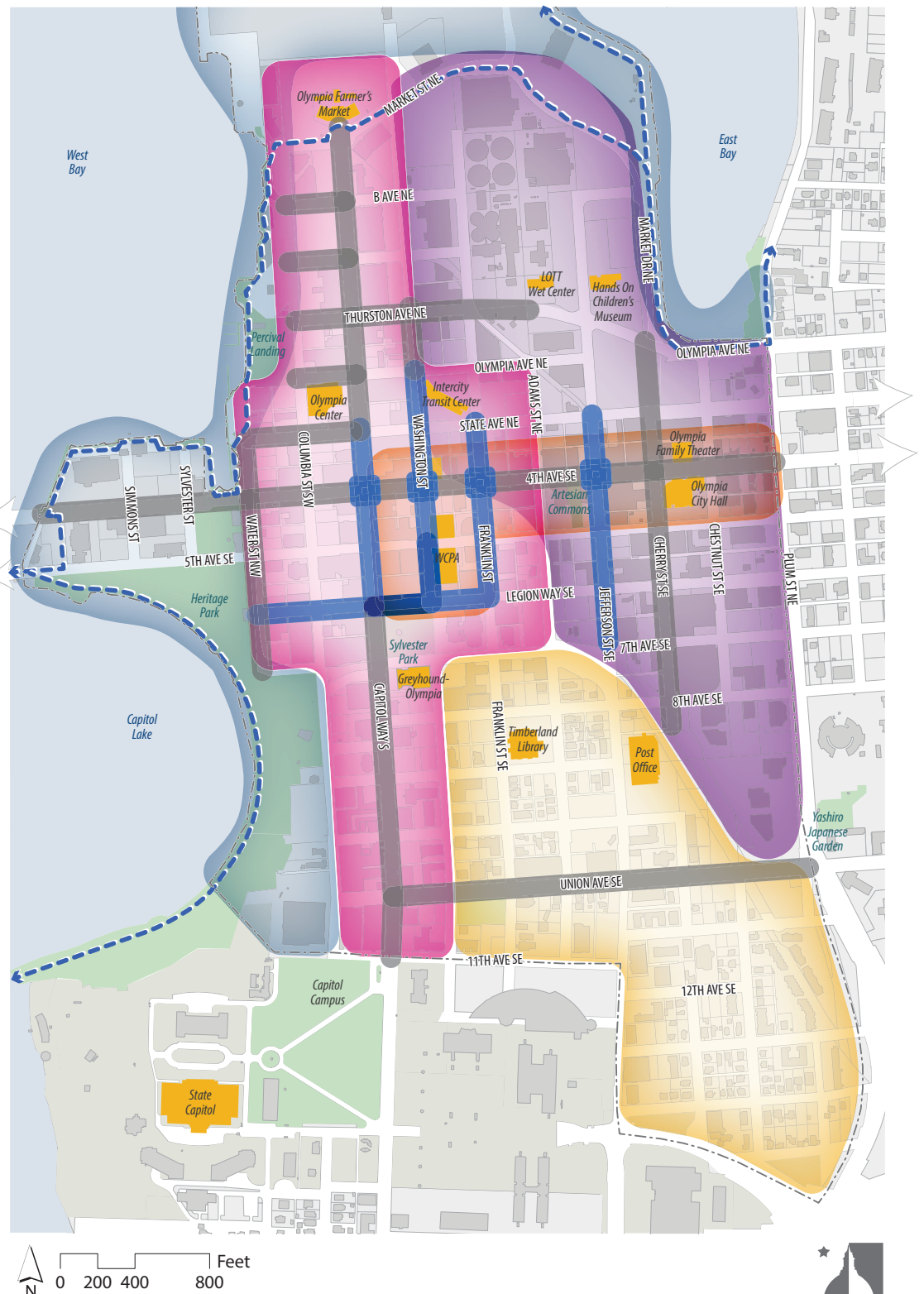
- WATERFRONT**
Enhance and connect to waterfront attractions.
- CAPITOL TO MARKET**
Encourage a high activity mix of uses from the Capitol to the Farmers Market.
- ARTISAN/TECH**
Encourage an eclectic mix of commercial activities and residences to support a creative neighborhood.
- ENTERTAINMENT**
Continue the core's energy eastward in a safe and lively entertainment district.
- SE NEIGHBORHOOD**
Build a holistic neighborhood with services and amenities.

KEY PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Short-term investments
- Long-term investment opportunities (looking for funding and partnerships)
- Olympia Waterfront Route trail planning and completion (immediate and long-term actions)

NOTE

Updated street standards and transportation master planning may lead to additional long-term street improvements.

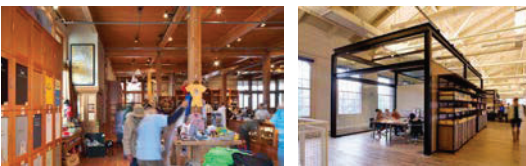




Land use and development code to be updated to better support mixed-use buildings with storefronts and amenities such as private open space.



City to work with partners to enhance waterfront recreation.



Development code and incentives (e.g., CDBG funds) encourage reuse of older buildings to preserve character while reinvigorating an area.



Example of a warehouse (before and after) adapted for re-use.

LAND USE

A thriving, mixed-use center

The following actions focus on the zoning and development regulations, and other City actions that encourage redeveloping properties to fulfill the vision and concept of connecting people, places, and spaces. These actions are closely related to the Design, Development Incentive Tools, Transportation, Housing, and Community and Economic Development (Retail) Elements.

LU.1 Form a Sea Level Response (SLR) Plan that identifies needs for protecting Downtown, risks, uncertainties, private and public costs, funding, and a response that can be implemented incrementally and modified as new information emerges.

LU.2 Develop and adopt a land use, circulation, design, and environmental enhancement plan for the isthmus, including determining the future of the City-owned land and identifying the possibilities for public/private partnerships and mixed-use development and/or park(s).

LU.3 Update zoning and development standards, including:

- Align standards with character areas (e.g., establish an overlay for desired uses in the Art/Tech area and allow more neighborhood-serving commercial in the Southeast Neighborhood),
- Simplify allowed use tables,
- Include appropriate standards for storefronts, retail space compartmentalization, private open space, and impact mitigation in mixed use areas, and
- Other small changes and housekeeping.

LU.4 Develop actions to enhance and promote waterfront recreation activities with partners including City Parks, Olympia Yacht Club, Port of Olympia, State of Washington, Hands on Children's Museum, and LOTT.

LU.5 Identify buildings and tools appropriate for adaptive reuse, and promote these tools to encourage older, character-defining buildings to be rehabilitated with housing, retail, office, and/or entertainment space.

LU.6 Apply for an EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant and

LAND USE ACTIONS MAP

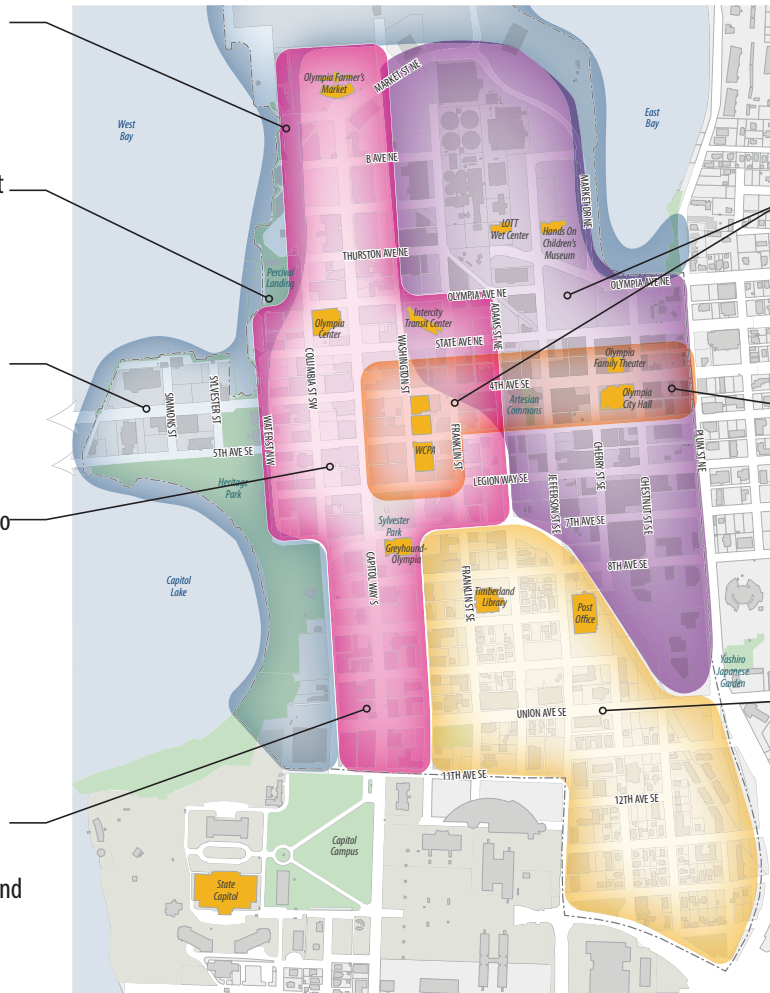
Form a Sea Level Response Plan (LU.1)

Enhance and promote waterfront recreation (LU.4)

Plan the isthmus (LU.2)

Update development standards to better support storefronts, retail space compartmentalization, private open space, and compatibility between a mix of uses (LU.3)

Update mixed-use development code to ensure compatibility between the historic retail core and Capitol Campus (LU.3)



Encourage adaptive reuse of older buildings, especially in the Art/Tech and historic retail core areas (LU.5)

Update development code to mitigate impacts and ensure compatibility between entertainment uses and residences (LU.3)

Allow more neighborhood-serving commercial uses and expand the Urban Residential (UR) boundary to stabilize residential property (LU.3)

other funds to assist with assessment or clean-up of soil and groundwater contamination, thereby reducing development and environmental uncertainties and risks.

LU.7 Explore how City-owned properties (e.g., parking lots, the old fire station, and library) could be redeveloped through public/private partnerships to meet City/community goals. Community supported ideas include a new YMCA/community pool, affordable housing, structured parking, and an improved library.



Pre-assessing soil and groundwater contamination in redevelopment areas sets the stage for future funding support.

See the Development Incentives Tool Box on **page X** for more information on how to encourage private investment for a variety of benefits.

DESIGN

An attractive and high-quality environment

The “Design” actions are intended to improve people’s experience as they move through Downtown by enhancing the look and feel of the environment around them. They include the visual characteristics of private development and some public realm features such as wayfinding and art. See the Transportation section for street-specific improvements.

The chart below summarizes visual elements that contribute to Downtown’s unique character and actions to enhance, protect, and connect them. See the Transportation actions for more detail on the connections.

IDENTITY-GIVING VISUAL ELEMENT	ACTIONS TO ENHANCE OR CONNECT THE ELEMENT
A variety of expansive waterfront settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete the “Olympia Waterfront Route” trail around the peninsula• Include guidelines that enhance character of the waterfront setting
Views of the Capitol dome, mountains, and water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most views will not be affected by new development• Additional view protection measures under consideration
Historic core and Sylvester Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historic preservation measures and design guidelines to enhance the character of the core• Streetscape improvements to Legion, Washington, and other core streets
Civic attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve streetscapes between attractions, especially the Hands On Children’s Museum, the Market, Transit Center and Percival Landing
Signature streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve Capitol Way to strengthen the visual and functional connection between the Capitol Campus and the Market• Establish or enhance gateway signage at key locations, most likely at Plum and Union and Capitol Way and Union
Eclectic/context-sensitive buildings and signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopt design guidelines appropriate to each character area• Update sign code to reflect character area goals (e.g., lively evening ambience in the Entertainment District)

Waterfront



Reinforce maritime and Percival Landing character.

Artisan/Tech



Encourage adaptive reuse, energy- and water-efficient architecture, and an eclectic, industrial character.

Entertainment



Emphasize pedestrian interest, small scale street facades, diversity, and art and creative architecture.

SE Neighborhood



Increase compatibility between new and older residences, avoid impacts of larger buildings, increase pedestrian activity, and enhance safety and security.

Capitol to Market



Reinforce historic character and link to Capitol Campus.

D.1 Update design guidelines to:

- Consolidate Downtown design guidelines in one section,
- Be flexible, focused, and not onerous,
- Reinforce unique character areas (see images to the left and “Character Areas” on page 12),
- Include new mixed use and improved historic guidelines,
- Promote active streetscapes,
- Protect important views based on 2016 analysis,
- Include illustrative sketches, photos, and diagrams,
- Address private open space, retail storefronts and parklets, and
- Address site planning and design, pedestrian access, amenities, open space, and building design.

D.2 Update sign code to address unique Downtown needs and character, with particular attention to enhancing the Entertainment Area and historic retail core. (This is part of the citywide sign code update.)

D.3 Inventory historic architecture in Downtown. The City was awarded a grant to identify historically significant buildings within a 75-block radius. This first step may lead to expansion of the historic district or register properties, along with opportunities to incentivize reuse of older buildings.

D.4 Examine potential expansion of historic district boundary and/or historic designation of additional structures to preserve key properties and make them eligible for tax credits.

D.5 Develop an art and wayfinding plan that adds more public art and wayfinding to the streetscape in a well-coordinated fashion. Some areas of focus include Downtown entry points, character area enhancement, parking options, Capitol Campus coordination, and City logo update to existing signs.

D.6 Upgrade or establish gateway features at key locations, including Plum Street and Union and Capitol Way and Union, to create a more defined entry into Downtown.

D.7 Implement view protection measures by memorializing important Downtown views in the Comprehensive Plan and taking moderate actions to protect views of concern.

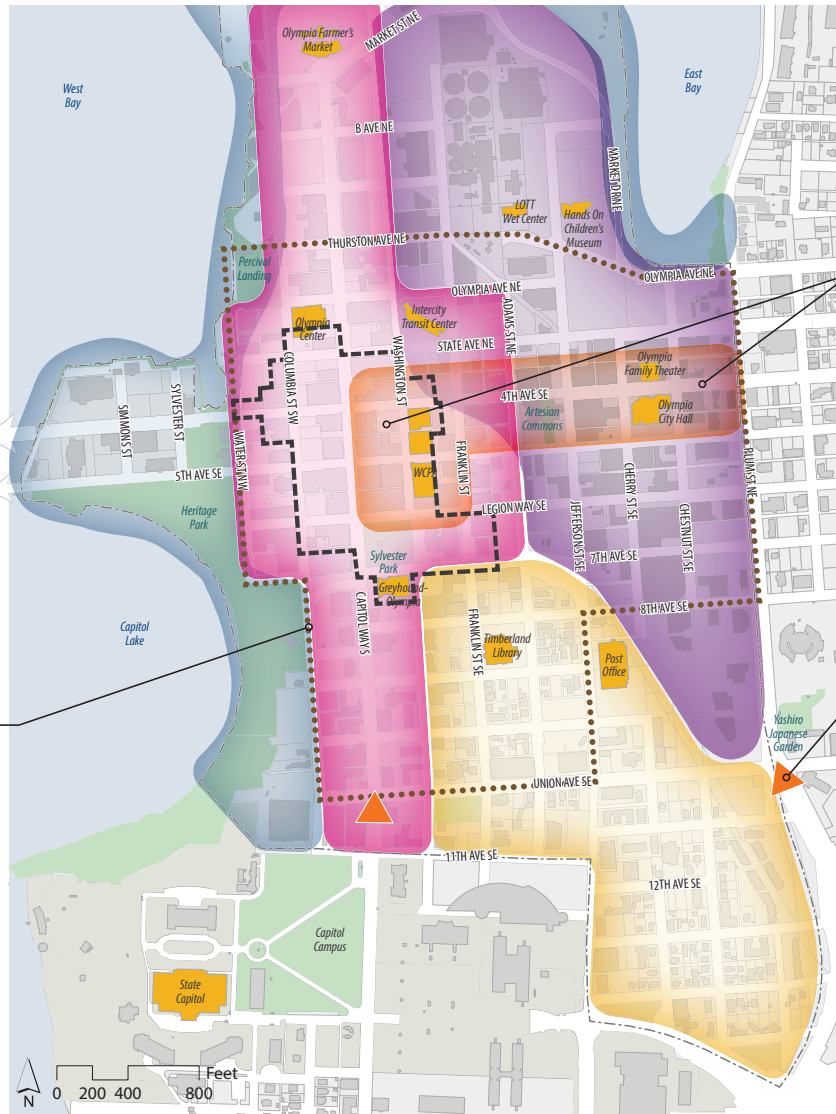
DESIGN ACTIONS MAP

Update design guidelines to reinforce unique character areas (D.1):

- Waterfront
- Capitol to Market
- Artisan/Tech
- Entertainment
- Southeast Neighborhood

Inventory historic architecture (D.3) and examine potential designation of additional structures or expanded historic district boundary (D.4)

- Historic buildings inventory area
- Existing Downtown Olympia Historic District



Our community has already taken steps to protect over 25 Downtown views through public ownership of the waterfront and regulations. The strategy recommends additional steps be taken to protect and enhance three additional views: 1) West Bay Park to Mt. Rainier, 2) East Bay Overlook to the Capitol Dome, and 3) Deschutes Parkway to Mt. Rainier.

DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA BUSINESSES BY THE NUMBERS

Nearly **1,000** businesses operate in
Downtown

75% of Downtown businesses have
less than 10 employees

10,000 employees work Downtown

56 new businesses have opened
since 2015 (**31** have closed
or moved)

18% of Downtown's housing stock
was built between 2012-2016

RETAIL, BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*A vibrant, dynamic business environment that attracts
people, activity, and investment*

As a capital with a historic, waterfront setting, Olympia's Downtown offers a unique retail environment. According to a recent market study, retail opportunities in Downtown are expected to grow based on estimated regional growth, additional residents, and potential for increased market capture in select sectors. While the City has little direct influence on the market, the City and partners can help promote an environment where small businesses can compete and thrive. Recommended actions to strengthen Downtown's retail and business environment are guided by these six strategic priorities:

1. **Strengthen existing and local business** so that Downtown's small businesses can stay and thrive as the local economy grows,
2. **Improve the streetscape** so that Downtown invites more pedestrian activity, patrons and investors,
3. **Encourage more residents** so that Downtown offers a more active and urban environment, more patrons and eyes on the street,
4. **Improve identity and perception** within Thurston County so that Downtown attracts more patrons and investment,
5. **Connect to other Community and Economic Development efforts** so that Downtown is supported by a strong local economy, and
6. **Actively promote tourism** so that Downtown is a well-known and sought-out destination.



Clean, safe, and lively streets support a vibrant retail environment and vice versa.



Programming and focused efforts at the Artesian Commons help the space feel welcoming to all users.