



The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
A 2025 IDA STUDY

A 2025 PUBLICATION CREATED BY
THE INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



**INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES**

ABOUT IDA



IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit downtown.org.

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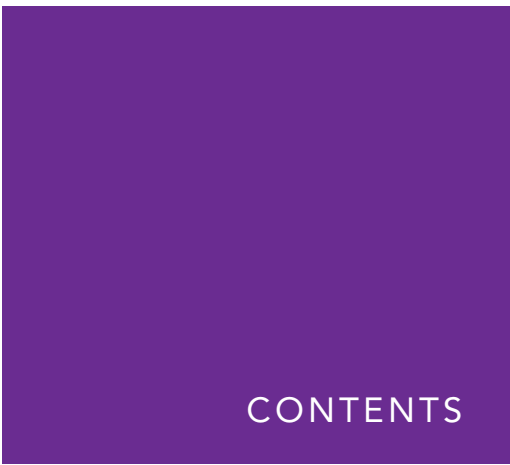


THE VALUE OF U.S.
DOWNTOWNS AND
CENTER CITIES

IDA would like to thank the following individuals for their efforts on the 2025 edition of this project:

- Teneka James-Freeman
- Tiffany Faublas
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- Sherryl Muriente





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SECTION ONE
PROJECT
OVERVIEW



Introduction

GREAT CITIES START DOWNTOWN

No city or region can succeed without a strong downtown. As urban researcher Bruce Katz says, in “bounded geographies that are rich with history and research and culture and amenities, magic happens. Ideas are generated. Innovation flourishes. Companies form. Enterprises grow. Quality jobs increase. Workers gain new skills. Paths out of poverty multiply.”¹ Despite the changes wrought by the pandemic, technological shifts and the polarization of the political environment, downtowns remain the key destination where people can come together for that critical human connection.

Despite a relatively small share of a city’s overall geography, a downtown delivers significant economic and community benefits across both the city and region. Our latest data showed that while study downtowns only made up 2% of city land area, they account for outsized shares of sales in key hospitality industries, including 38% of accommodation business sales while also hosting 24% of jobs. They also have some of the most valuable real estate in their cities, with a median assessed value of \$3.2 billion per square mile, compared to just \$205 million per square mile city-wide.

The changing nature of work has meant that visitation is taking on an increasingly important role in downtown economies, and ensuring that downtown has vibrant attractions and destinations, whether large-scale entertainment venues or a rich network of independent retailers, takes on increasing importance. Recent research from Cushman Wakefield on *Reimagining Cities – Disrupting the Urban Doom Loop* showed that while central business districts were built around having office space, and have more than 50% of their real estate in office uses, the ideal makeup now would be approximately 42% work, 31% live, and 26% play – which represents those attractors: retail, hotel, eating and drinking, sports and entertainment.²

Downtown serves as the epicenter of commerce, capital investment, diversity, public discourse, socialization, knowledge and innovation. In short, the proximity and density that downtown and center cities create are the engines which drive the city around them to thrive.



About the Value of Downtowns Study

Building on IDA's unique industry-wide perspective and expertise, this study quantifies the value of U.S. downtowns and center cities across more than 150 metrics organized under five core value principles, with a focus on how downtowns contribute to the city and region around them. The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study is a partnership between IDA and local urban place management organization (UPMO).

The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* research articulates the inherent value a downtown provides to the greater city, highlighting a district's contributions in the principles of Economy, Inclusion, Vibrancy, Identity and Resilience. Our data shows that study downtowns outpaced their cities in residential growth between 2010 and 2023, growing on median 38% against the study-wide median city growth rate of 7%.

The primary project goals are to:



Provide a **common set of metrics** to communicate the value of downtown.



Expand the **range of arguments** UPMOs* can make to their stakeholders using publicly available data.

IDA began this research in 2017, working with Stantec's Urban Places group and the first cohort of 13 UPMOs to develop a methodology for compiling and evaluating data from those 13 downtowns. In 2025, our analysis has expanded to include 57 downtowns and center cities across the U.S.

IDA and our UPMO partners work together to collect more than 150 individual metrics for the most recent year and over the past decade and three geographic levels (study area, city, and MSA/county). In addition, for employment data we collect three different jobs totals (primary, all jobs, and all private) for all years between 2002 and 2022 to show more nuanced employment trends over time. The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study also categorizes American districts into three development stages: *established*, *growing*, and *emerging*. These tiers are determined by various metrics, including population and job density, growth rate, and assessed land value per square mile.

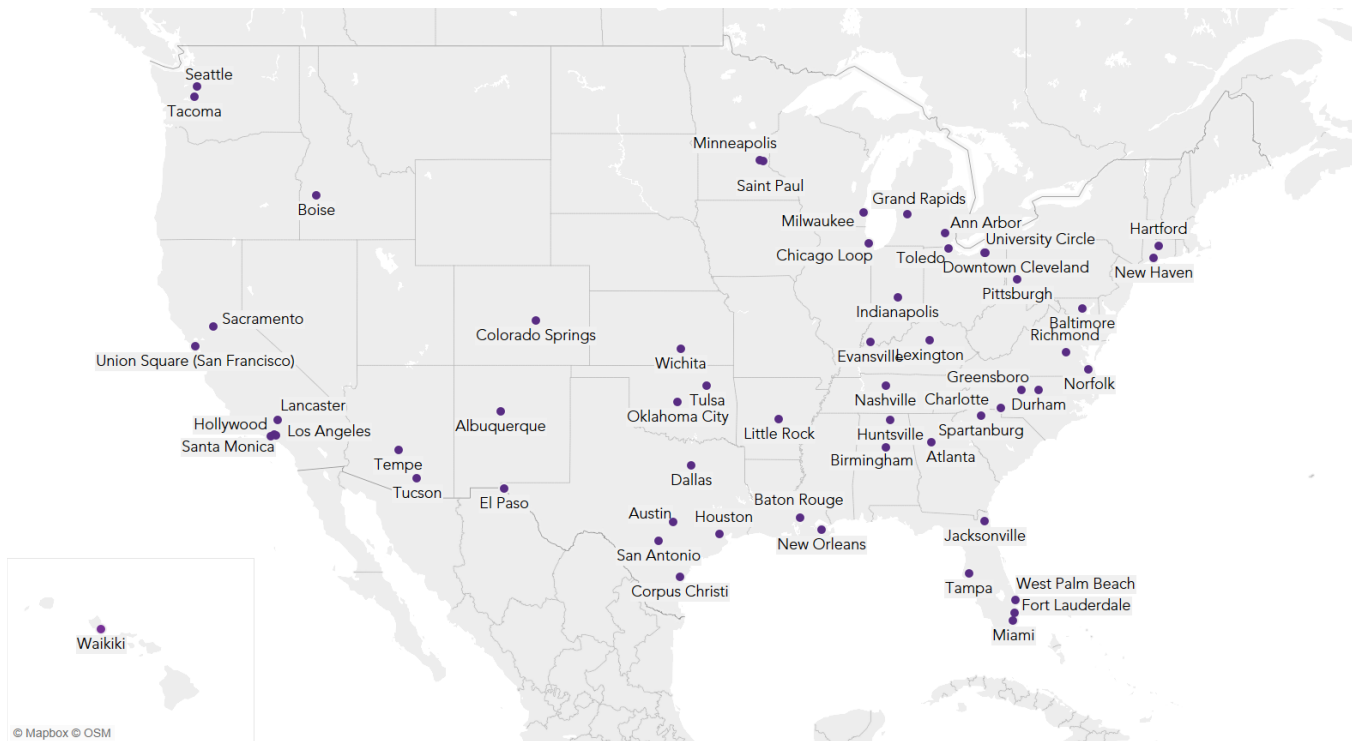
*Refer to the Appendix for the full methodology and list of metrics used in the study.

Urban Place Management Organizations

The place management industry brings the public and private sectors together to create vital, healthy, thriving cities for everyone — from residents to workers to tourists to business owners. We are downtown champions who bring city centers to life.

Since 1970, property and business owners in cities throughout the U.S. and other countries have realized that revitalizing and sustaining vibrant city centers and neighborhood districts requires special attention beyond the services city administrations could provide alone. These private-sector owners came together, with funding from the property and business owners, to form nonprofit management associations which deliver key services and activities within the boundaries of their districts. These place management organizations are often called Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Partnerships and Alliances.

Value of Downtowns Participants



ECONOMY



Downtowns and center cities are valuable due to their roles as economic anchors for their regions. As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns and center cities frequently serve as hubs of industry and revenue generators, despite their only making up a small fraction of the city's or region's land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of a relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors than investments elsewhere.

INCLUSION



As the literal and figurative heart of their cities, downtowns represent and welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Residents of strong downtowns often come from a wide range of racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and from across all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, downtown has a broad appeal to all users and a strong social fabric. Downtowns provide access to all to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment and civic activities.

VIBRANCY



The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base, creates value. Vibrancy means the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events. Many unique regional cultural institutions, businesses, centers of innovation, public spaces and activities are located downtown. As the cultural center of their cities, downtowns typically attract a large share of citywide visitors and account for a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms.

IDENTITY



Downtowns and center cities often serve as iconic symbols of their cities, creating a strong sense of place that enhances local pride. The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that other parts of the city can't easily replicate. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting regional identity. Downtowns and center cities serve as places for regional residents to come together, participate in civic life, and celebrate their region, which in turn promotes tourism and civic society.

RESILIENCE



Downtowns and center cities play a crucial role in building stability, sustainability, and prosperity for the city and region. Their diversity, concentration of economic activity, and density of services better equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks than more homogenous communities. They can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks, which often disproportionately affect less economically and socially dynamic areas.



P
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K



N OLIVE



A photograph of a man and a woman on a boat, looking out at a city harbor. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a floral dress. The man is behind her, wearing a fedora and a light shirt. The background shows a city with buildings and a bridge. A large white graphic element, resembling a stylized '2' or a large bracket, is overlaid on the right side of the image. The entire image has a purple tint.

SECTION TWO
DOWNTOWN
PROFILE

Downtown Profile | Overview

A city's strength and prosperity depend on a strong downtown and center city, which serve as centers of culture, knowledge, and innovation. The performance of districts and center cities strengthens an entire region's economic productivity, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience.

The influence of downtown West Palm Beach extends far beyond its compact 1.3 square mile footprint along Florida's Atlantic coast. Within just 2.5% of the city's land area, downtown holds more than 28,000 jobs—about one-third of all city employment—and 10,300 residents, nearly 9% of the city's population. This compact district combines density with diversity: 34 workers per acre, a mix of public sector and private industry employers, and \$3.8 billion in assessed property value, or roughly 16% of the citywide total. This concentration of jobs, residents, and investment positions downtown as an essential driver of the city's overall strength.

Downtown West Palm Beach has experienced steady employment growth over the past decade, shaped by a growing concentration of professional and knowledge-based industries. Between 2012 and 2022, total employment increased by 17%, while private-sector jobs rose by 29%. Public administration remains an anchor, but downtown's economy has diversified with strong gains in finance and insurance (up 45% since 2019) and professional, scientific, and technical services (up 14%). Nearly half of all downtown workers are employed by small and mid-sized businesses—an unusually balanced composition that reflects both local entrepreneurship and an evolving ecosystem of regional and national firms. This blend of stability and innovation has helped position downtown as one of South Florida's most dynamic and competitive employment centers.

Residential growth has accelerated alongside employment expansion. Since 2000, downtown's population has grown 169%, transforming a once primarily commercial core into a thriving mixed-use neighborhood. Between 2019 and 2023 alone, the residential population grew another 36%, a rate far outpacing that of the city and region. Including the Historic Northwest neighborhood deepens this picture,

Study Area



DOWNTOWN PARTNER

West Palm Beach DDA





CITY

West Palm Beach, FL

connecting downtown's rapid growth with efforts to ensure greater inclusion and equity. Today, residents span generations and income levels: nearly 20% are young adults aged 25 to 34, while adults aged 55 and older make up 41%, reflecting broad appeal of downtown's walkability, lifestyle amenities, and access to civic and cultural assets.

Cultural life plays an equally central role in defining the district's character. From the award-winning West Palm Beach GreenMarket to recurring programs like *Que Bacano!*, *Let's Vibe*, and *Sunset Sweat*, downtown West Palm Beach maintains a strong year-round calendar of arts, culture, and community activation. Institutions such as the Norton Museum of Art and the offerings of CityPlace contribute to a robust arts and entertainment scene that attracts visitors from across the region. Placer.ai data shows that visitation between September 2024 and August 2025 reached 93% of pre-pandemic levels, demonstrating sustained recovery and year-round appeal.

Downtown's hospitality industry reflects this vitality. Although it covers a small area, downtown accounts for nearly 22% of the city's hospitality businesses, generating roughly \$500 million in sales per square mile—more than seven times the citywide average. The hotel market remains strong, with eight properties offering 1,672 rooms and three

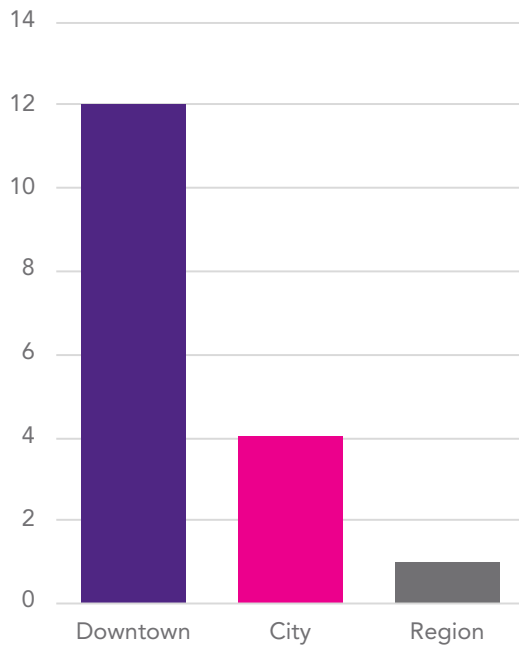
Inventory		Existing	Under Construction
	OFFICE (SF)	4.8M	1.6M
	RETAIL (SF)	1.7M	4.6K
	RESIDENTIAL UNITS	5.4K	735
	HOTEL ROOMS	1.6K	512

new hotels under construction that will add more than 500 rooms, a 30% increase in inventory. Occupancy rates average 82%, with revenue per available room reaching \$208—rank among the highest in the region, underscoring downtown’s strength as a visitor destination even within the competitive South Florida region.

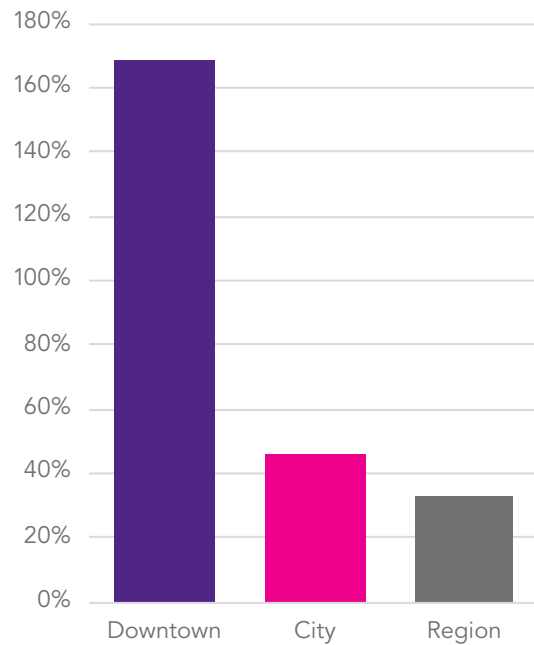
The continued strength of downtown West Palm Beach is supported by the leadership of the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The DDA is an independent taxing district through a special act of the Florida Legislature, and plays a central role in shaping the district’s vitality, advocating for policies that support growth, assisting local businesses, maintaining clean and safe streets, and curating a year-round calendar of placemaking programs and cultural events that build community and attract visitors.

Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development District (2025)

Population Density (residents/ac)



Population Growth 2000–2023



Ranking Downtown West Palm Beach

Using data collected for the *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study, we identified three tiers of districts, defined by their stage of development. We divided the study districts into *established*, *growing*, and *emerging* tiers based on the citywide significance of downtown population and jobs density of residents and jobs within the study area, assessed value per square mile, and the rate of growth in population and jobs from 2010 to 2022. This analysis places West Palm Beach among the *established* tier of downtowns, reflecting a change in status from 2021, when this body of research categorized the study area in the *growing* tier.

Downtowns in the *established* tier have high density and a high degree of citywide significance in terms of jobs, population, and land values. Most *established* districts continue to grow in these areas, though perhaps more slowly. In West Palm Beach, the sustained pace of growth that once marked it as a *growing* downtown has reached critical mass, firmly establishing the area as a driving force in the city's economy, identity, and regional influence.

Please view the Summary section of this report for data comparing downtown West Palm Beach to its peers within the *established* tier. For the full set of cities by tier, accompanying data points, and methodology, refer to the *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities Trends Report*, which is available on the IDA website, [downtown.org](https://www.ida.org/downtown.org).

Established Downtowns

- Chicago
- Fort Lauderdale
- Hartford
- Miami
- Milwaukee
- Minneapolis
- New Haven
- Pittsburgh
- Richmond
- Saint Paul
- San Francisco
- Seattle
- **West Palm Beach**



Residential Population

	Downtown	City	Region
Population	10.3K	120K	1.5M
Downtown's Share of Population	n/a	8.7%	0.7%
Residents Per Acre	12	4	1
Growth 2019–2023	36%	10%	4%
Growth 2000–2023	169%	46%	33%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)



Employment

	Downtown	City	Region
Primary Jobs	28K	87K	608K
Private Sector Jobs	17K	81K	596K
District Share Of Primary Jobs*	n/a	32%	5%
Employees Per Acre (Primary)	34	3	1
Primary Employment Growth 2012–2022	17%	28%	28%
Private Jobs Growth 2012–2022	29%	35%	32%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2012–2022)

* Primary Jobs are a worker's only job, or highest paying job if they have more than one.

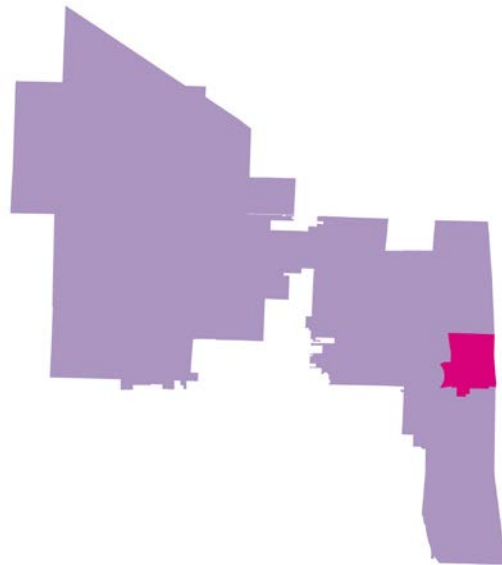
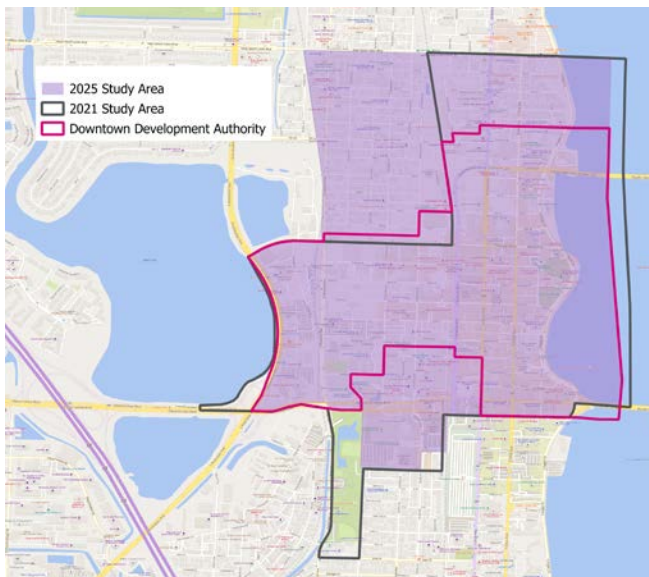
Defining Boundaries

IDA worked closely with the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority to align the study area with Census block group boundaries which closely matched both the public perception of downtown and municipal planning boundaries. This facilitates easy incorporation of publicly available data from a variety of sources while matching the boundary to hard edges such as major roads, water, natural features, and highways as much as possible.

In a significant change from the 2021 edition of the *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study of downtown West Palm Beach, the 2025 edition also includes the Historic Northwest neighborhood, a historically disinvested neighborhood to the north of the traditional central business district which was isolated from downtown by segregationist

policies. As conversations begin in West Palm Beach about how to reconnect this neighborhood to the opportunities in the traditional downtown, it is also a natural time to consider a broader view of downtown that also more accurately represents West Palm Beach overall. Therefore, IDA and the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority opted to include this neighborhood as a broader conception of downtown begins to form.

The study area is roughly bounded by Clear Lake on the west, Palm Beach Lakes Blvd. on the north, Lake Worth Lagoon on the east, and Okeechobee Boulevard on the south. For financial calculations, the smaller DDA taxing district of 0.75 square miles is used. Citywide figures refer to the City of West Palm Beach, and regional figures relate to Palm Beach County.



Economy | Impact, Innovation

While downtowns and center cities constitute a small share of citywide land area, they have substantial regional economic importance.

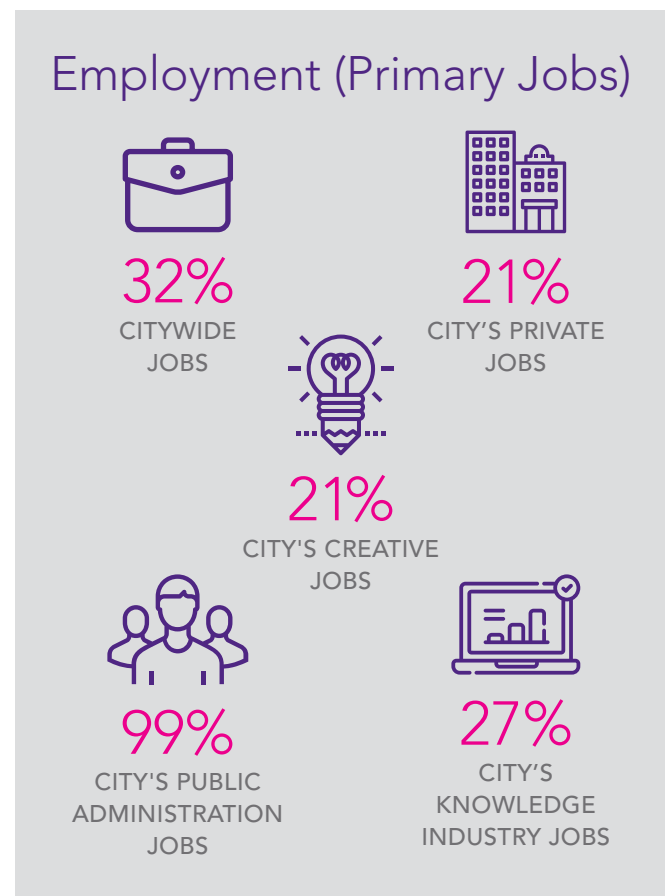
As traditional centers of commerce, transportation, education, and government, downtowns serve as economic anchors for their cities and regions. Thanks to highly concentrated economic activity, investment in the center city yields a high level of return per dollar. Urban centers across the U.S. were the first areas to recover from the Great Recession, and although the continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has raised many questions about the future, prior analysis of the role of downtowns and center cities highlights their unique ability to absorb and recover from economic shocks and stresses.

Benefits of Economy: Economic Output, Economic Impact, Investment, Creativity, Innovation, Visitation, Spending, Density, Sustainability, Tax Revenue, Scale, Commerce, Opportunity

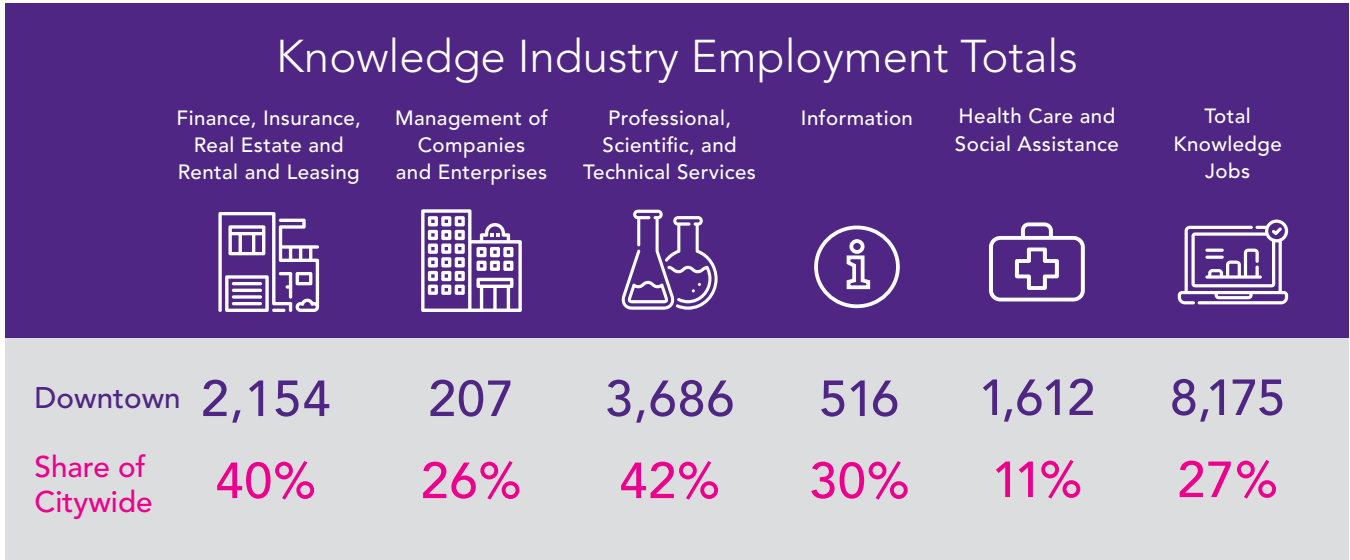
Jobs

Among participants in IDA's *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study, few downtowns demonstrate such strong employment concentration relative to their city size as downtown West Palm Beach. As of 2022, more than 28,000 people worked for downtown employers, representing about one-third of the city's workforce. Notably, downtown also holds 99% of the city's public administration jobs and 43% of those found across the broader region, underscoring its enduring role as a regional hub for government offices. This, along with the district's share of citywide employment (32%) and private-sector jobs (21%), emphasizes downtown's role not only as the employment core of West Palm Beach, but also as a major workforce center for Palm Beach County.

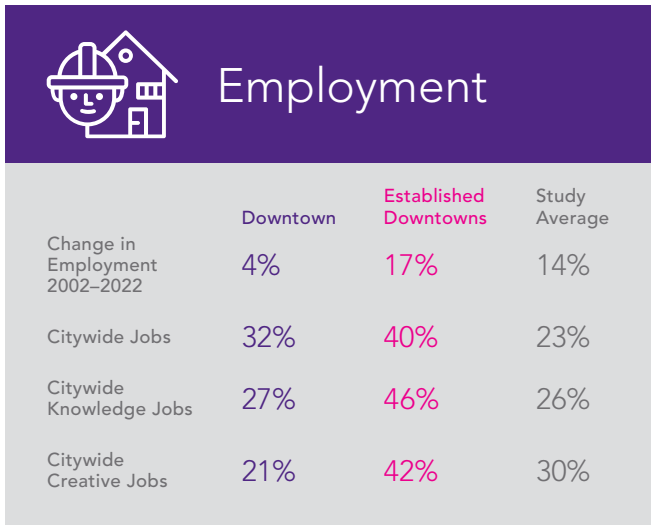
Employment in downtown West Palm Beach has grown consistently, increasing 16.7% from 2012 to 2022. Private sector employment has driven much of this increase, expanding by 29% over the same period. While public administration remains the single largest employment sector with approximately 11,000 jobs—largely stable since 2008—other industries have expanded rapidly. Professional, scientific, and technical services employ approximately 3,200 people downtown, having grown by 25% since 2010, while accommodation and food services, with just under 3,000 jobs, have surged by 66%. Other smaller sectors (each with fewer than 1,500 jobs in the area), such as wholesale



Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)

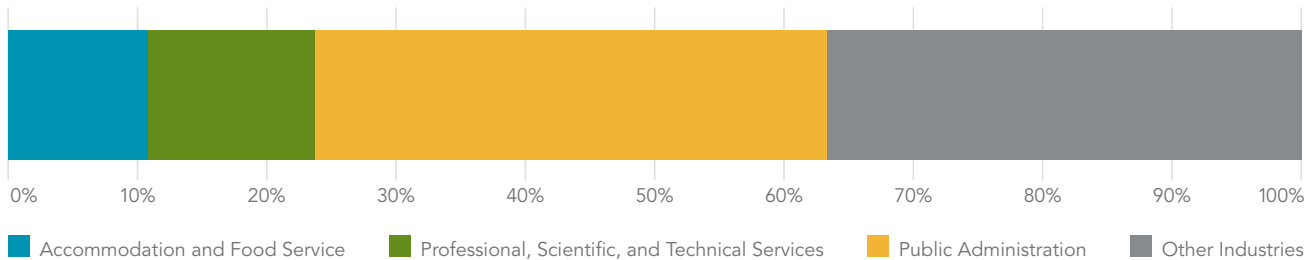


Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)



Source: LEHD On the Map (2000, 2022)

Top Downtown Industries



Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)

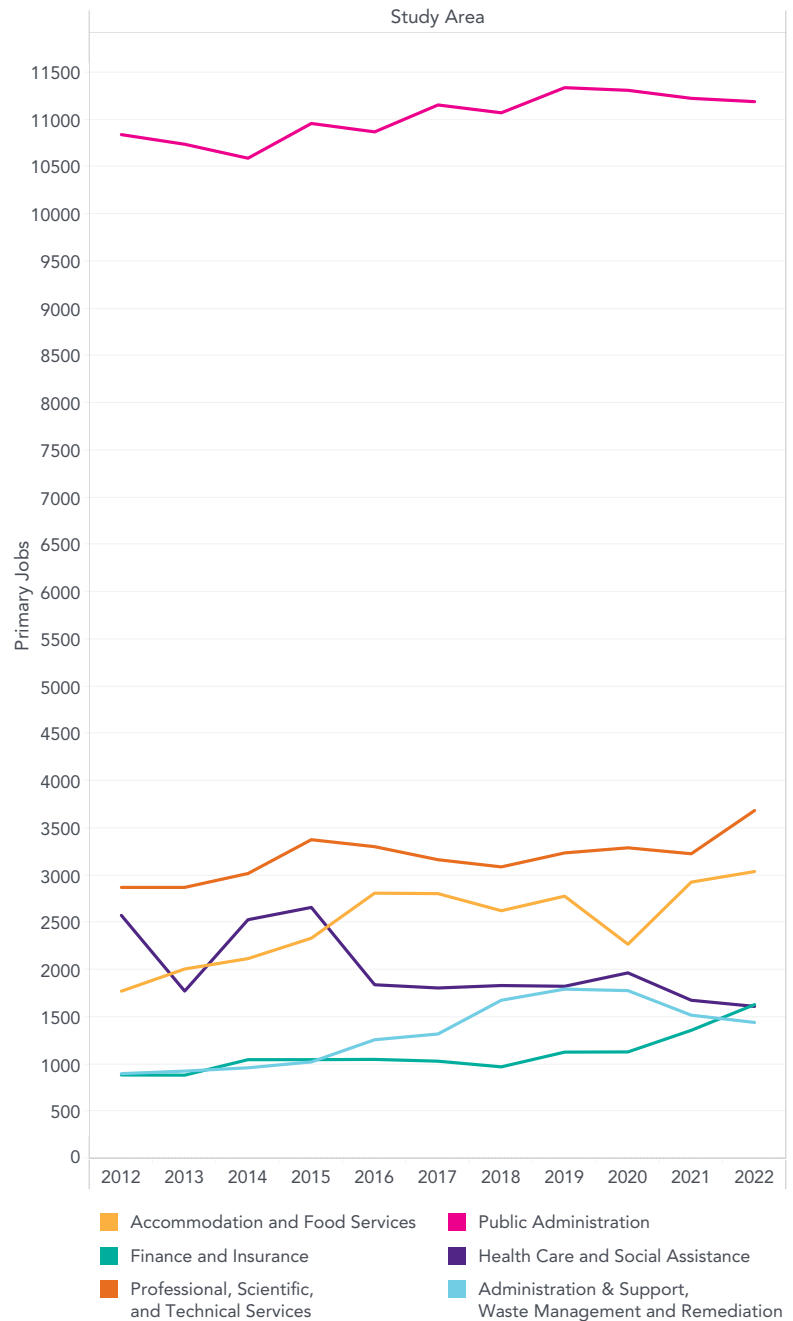
trade, transportation and warehousing, information, and administrative and support services, have each more than doubled their employment since 2010, signaling broad-based private-sector momentum within the district.

The knowledge industry—a cluster of sectors that rely on advanced skills and technology—plays a growing role in shaping downtown and the city’s economy. This group includes professional, scientific, and technical services; finance, insurance, real estate, and leasing; management of companies and enterprises; information; and health care and social assistance. Together, these sectors employ approximately 8,175 workers downtown, representing 27% of the city’s total knowledge-industry jobs. Particularly strong concentrations exist in professional, scientific, and technical services (42% of citywide employment in that sector) and in finance, insurance, and real estate (40%), signaling downtown’s role as a regional hub for high-skill employment. These trends reflect the district’s evolution into a high-skill employment center supported by the DDA’s investments in cleanliness, safety, mobility, and year-round activation.

Downtown now offers the region’s highest concentration of high-skill, high-wage employment opportunities. From 2012 to 2020, total downtown employment grew by 4%, while knowledge-industry employment expanded at a faster pace, signaling a shift toward an innovation-driven economy.

Although West Palm Beach’s overall employment concentration remains lower than that of other *established* downtowns, its accelerating private-sector growth and expanding base of professional and creative industries highlight its emergence as a dynamic and competitive urban employment center on Florida’s Atlantic Coast.

Top Downtown Industries Over Time



Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)



Small Businesses & Startups

A strong entrepreneurial environment that supports both small and large businesses in all industries is critical to a thriving downtown. While small businesses account for almost half of U.S. economic activity, larger and well-established firms provide stability.

In downtown West Palm Beach, the employment landscape differs from that of many *established* downtowns nationwide. While approximately 70% of jobs in major downtown districts are concentrated in firms with more than 250 employees, West Palm Beach reflects a more balanced ecosystem. Nearly half of all downtown workers are employed by small and mid-sized businesses with fewer than 250 employees.

This distribution of firm size and age closely mirrors the composition of the broader city and county, but it underscores how West Palm Beach's downtown diverges from larger, more mature urban cores. Here, the entrepreneurial environment is characterized less by dominance from major corporate anchors and more by a network of smaller firms that collectively generate substantial economic activity. Downtown's slightly higher share of mid-sized employers—those with 20 to 249 workers—suggests a healthy layer of established yet still locally rooted enterprises capable of scaling up over time. These companies often occupy the middle ground between the city's independent start-ups and its growing roster of national firms expanding into South Florida.

Several factors contribute to this unique mix. Downtown West Palm Beach's relatively limited Class-A office inventory may have historically made it less of a magnet for the largest firms that seek (and can afford) premium real estate in neighboring cities. At the same time, smaller, more entrepreneurial ventures have proliferated downtown, supported by an expanding mix of coworking hubs, shared offices, and flexible leases. With 1.6 million square feet of new office space currently under construction, the district is poised for a major expansion of its business ecosystem, offering an attractive environment where startups and longer-standing firms can coexist and collaborate within the same urban fabric.

This evolving dynamic speaks to the entrepreneurial energy shaping downtown West Palm Beach today. Organizations like the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (DDA) play an essential role in amplifying the voices of local entrepreneurs and ensuring that small businesses—though often limited in size—have access to the networks, exposure, and advocacy they need to thrive. Together, these efforts reflect a downtown that is not only growing in scale but also in opportunity, where innovation and community intersect to create a more inclusive and resilient economic core.

Fiscal Impact

Downtowns typically concentrate the densest development and highest property values in their regions, and downtown West Palm Beach is no exception. Downtown West Palm Beach functions as one of the city's most significant fiscal engines; within only 0.75 square miles, the district contains approximately \$4.3 billion in assessed property value, representing nearly 18% of the city's total taxable value. On a per-square-mile basis, downtown's assessed land value stands at an extraordinary \$5.7 billion, more than twelve times higher than the average across the rest of West Palm Beach. These figures reflect both the district's concentration of high-value properties and its central role in sustaining local government revenues.



Jobs by Firm Size

	Downtown	City	Region
< 20 PEOPLE	21%	18%	24%
20-249 PEOPLE	28%	23%	25%
250+ PEOPLE	51%	59%	51%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)



Jobs by Firm Age (2020-2022)

	Downtown	City	Region
< 3 YEARS	8%	8%	10%
4-10 YEARS	20%	16%	16%
11+ YEARS	73%	76%	73%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)



Jobs by Earnings Annually

	Downtown	City	Region
\$15K OR LESS	8%	13%	14%
\$15K TO \$40K	21%	28%	30%
\$40K OR MORE	71%	59%	56%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)



The pace of growth in downtown property values has been remarkable. Since IDA’s 2021 edition of this study, assessed property values within the DDA have increased by 65%, rising from \$2.6 billion to \$4.3 billion in just the past few years. Downtown properties generate a significant and growing share of the city’s total tax revenues—an outsized contribution given the district’s modest footprint. This value should continue to rise in the coming years; as of 2025 there was 1.6 million square feet of office under construction in downtown West Palm Beach, which will represent a 33% increase over current inventory once delivered. This rapid pace of construction shows that real estate investors see tremendous future demand for workspace in downtown West Palm Beach’s future. It will also further bolster property values by adding new trophy and Class-A quality office space, something that downtown West Palm Beach currently lacks relative to regional peer downtowns.

...as of 2025 **1.6 million square feet of office was under construction** in downtown West Palm Beach, which will represent a **33% increase** over current inventory once delivered.



Land Value and Assessment

	DDA	City
ASSESSED VALUE	\$4.3B	\$23.4B
LAND AREA (SQUARE MILES)	0.75	53.8
ASSESSED VALUE (PER SQUARE MILE)	\$5.7B	\$435M

In addition to its property value, downtown’s economic strength is reinforced by the quality of its employment base. Nearly three out of every four downtown workers earn more than \$40,000 annually, compared to just 59% citywide and 56% across the region. Only 8% of downtown workers earn less than \$15,000 per year, a much smaller share than the city (13%) or region (14%).

Altogether, the combination of high-value real estate, a highly-skilled and well-compensated workforce, and steady construction all position downtown West Palm Beach as a critical fiscal engine for the region. Despite its compact size, the district generates outsized economic returns, demonstrating that continued investment in downtown delivers significant returns for the broader community.

Source: West Palm Beach DDA
 Note: Assessed value figures are for the DDA.

Inclusion | Diversity, Affordability

Downtowns and center cities invite and welcome all residents, employees, and visitors by providing access to jobs, housing, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities.

Benefits of Inclusion: Equity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Civic Purpose, Culture, Mobility, Accessibility, Tradition, Heritage, Services, Opportunity, Workforce Diversity

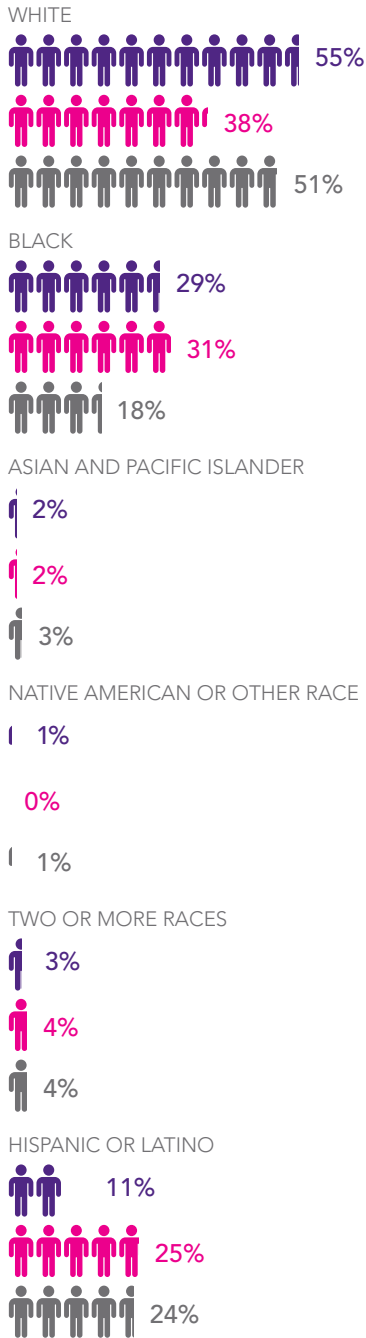
Racial Diversity

Downtown West Palm Beach's residential composition reflects both its historically established population and its ongoing evolution. While the broader city of West Palm Beach is home to a racially and ethnically diverse population, the downtown core currently shows a more limited range of representation. While 25% of city residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, only 11% of downtown residents do. Conversely, White non-Hispanic residents comprise 38% of the citywide population but represent more than half of downtown residents, meaning that the district is disproportionately White relative to the rest of the city.

When the Historic Northwest neighborhood, a historically Black neighborhood shaped by past segregation and disinvestment, is included in the study area, the demographic profile of Downtown West Palm Beach shifts significantly and more closely reflects that of the city as a whole. Despite its historic separation from downtown, the neighborhood's deep cultural ties to downtown make its inclusion key to accurately understanding the full downtown community. In that combined geography, Black or African American residents represent 29% of the population, closely aligning with the citywide share of 31%, and substantially higher than the regional average of 18%. As initiatives from organizations such as Palm Beach Venture Philanthropy, Purpose Built Communities, and the Knight Foundation's Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties work to bridge the physical and social divides between the Historic Northwest and downtown's traditional core, West Palm Beach is taking steps toward a more integrated and inclusive urban center.

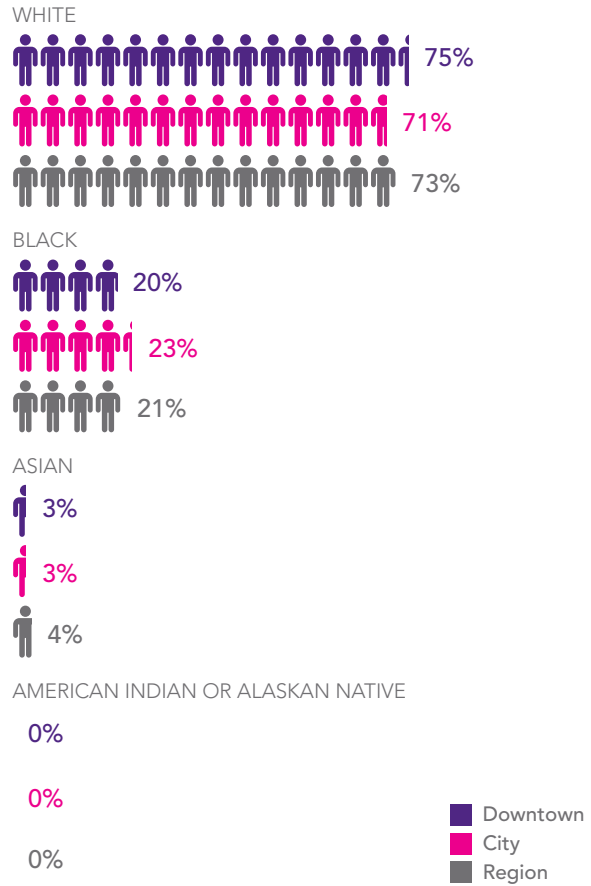


Residents By Race



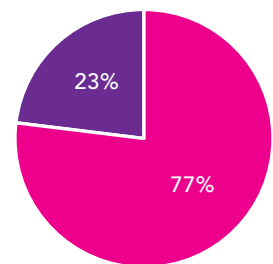
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Employment By Race



Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)

Downtown Workers by Ethnicity



Source: LEHD On the Map

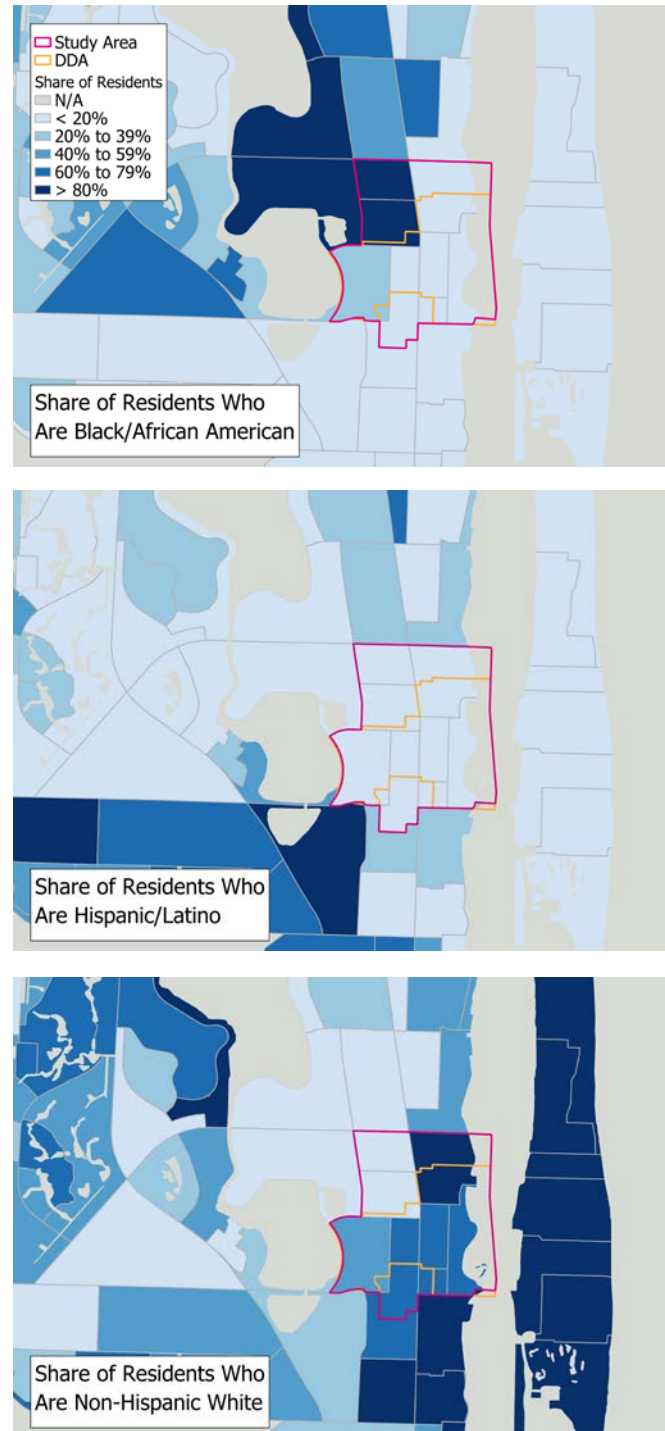
Workforce data presents a more inclusive picture. Downtown’s labor force closely mirrors the racial and ethnic diversity of the city: 23% of downtown workers identify as Hispanic or Latino, aligned with the city and regional averages, while 20% are Black, only slightly below the 23% share of workers across the city’s overall labor force. This parity suggests that the economic opportunities generated downtown—particularly in its expanding base of high-wage, professional, and service-sector employment—are accessible to a broad cross-section of the city’s residents.

Age Diversity

Downtown West Palm Beach stands out for its balanced mix of age groups, reflecting a community that appeals to both long-term residents and newcomers at different stages of life. Downtown has marginally more residents (19%) aged 25 to 34 than the city at large (15%), but notably fewer children and young adults. 18% of downtown’s population is under 24, compared to 27% citywide. The largest share of residents is aged 55 and older, who make up 41% of the downtown population, with those 65 and older comprising the majority at 28%. The concentration of older adults downtown differentiates it from many peer city centers, which are often dominated by younger populations. Downtown’s simultaneous appeal to young professionals and older adults reflects a walkable, amenity-rich environment that supports a broad range of lifestyles.

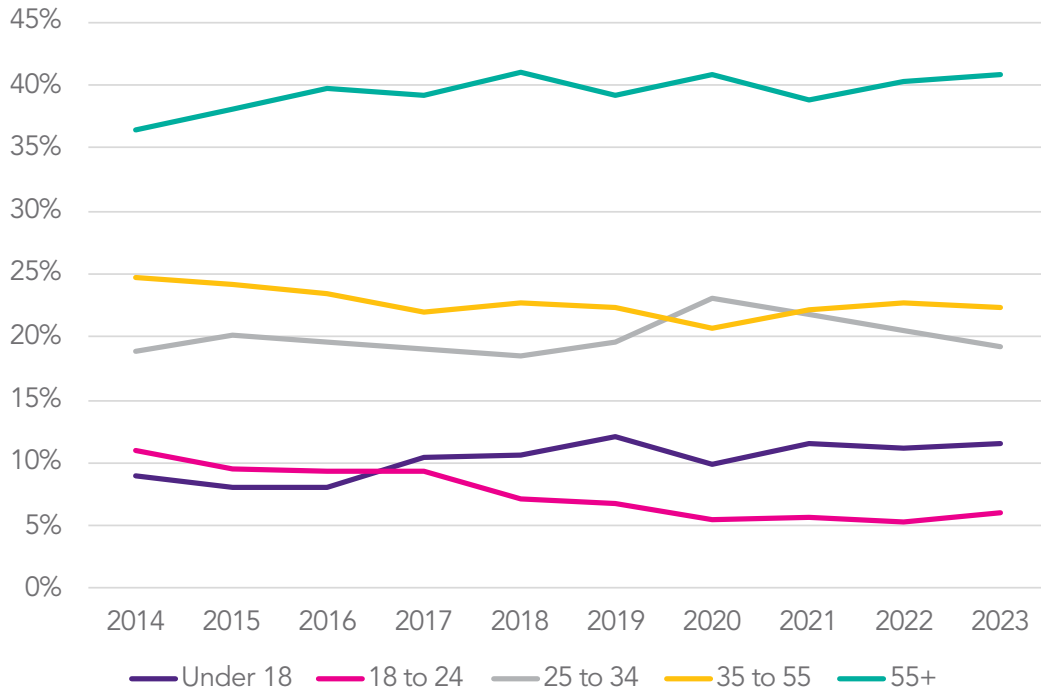
Over the past decade, older adults have been a driving force behind downtown’s growth. Since 2010, the number of residents aged 55 and over has nearly doubled—from just under 2,300 to more than 4,200—an increase of 87%. This surge reflects both the appeal of downtown living for retirees and empty nesters and demonstrates that the area offers a range of amenities that enable residents to remain in the urban core later in life.

Residents by Race



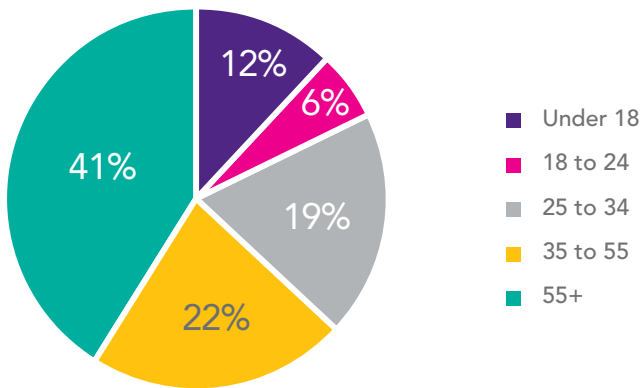
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Study Area Residents' Age Diversity

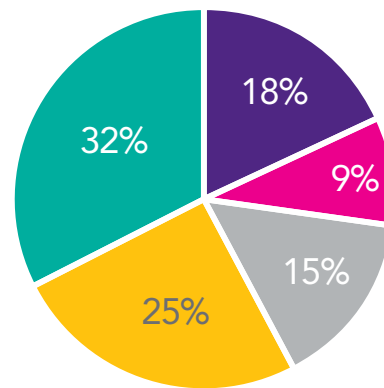


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014–2023)

Downtown Age Diversity



City Age Diversity

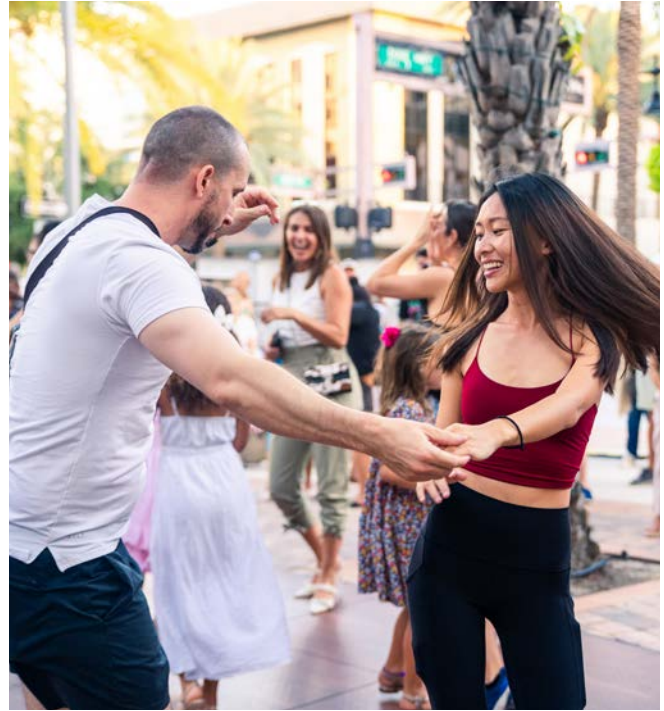


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

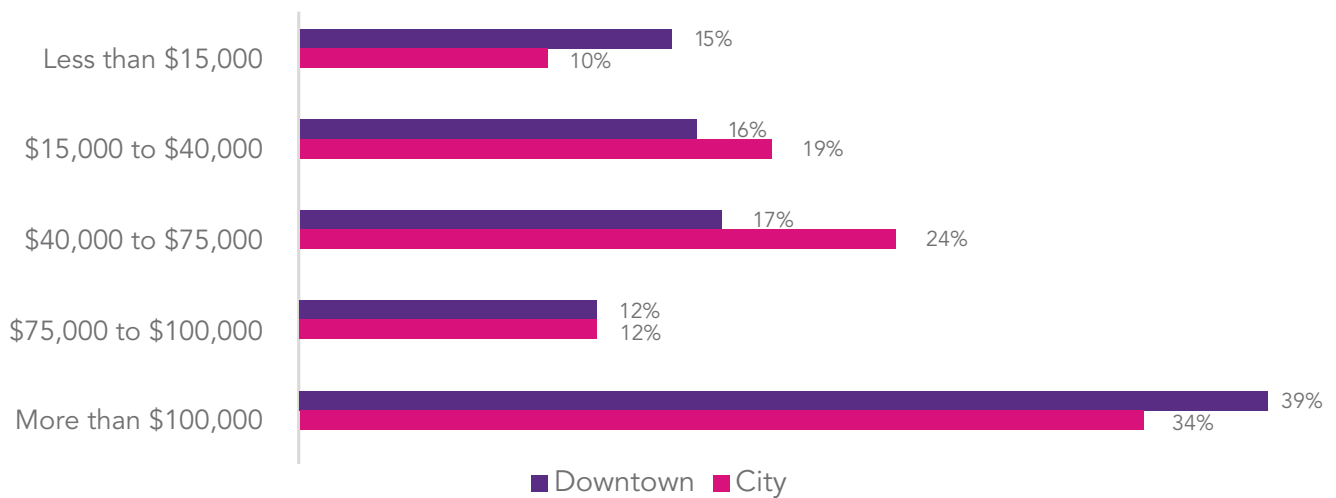
Socioeconomic Diversity

Downtown West Palm Beach presents a nuanced socioeconomic profile—one that combines growing affluence with ongoing economic diversity. The median household income downtown stands at just over \$78,000, notably higher than the citywide figure and approaching the regional median of \$81,115. This elevated earning power signals downtown's increasing appeal among higher-income professionals, yet disparities remain stark within the district. In the Historic Northwest neighborhood, long separated from downtown's core by both infrastructure and investment barriers, the median household income is just \$42,692, roughly half that of the broader area.

Rising incomes over the past decade have been accompanied by significant demographic shifts. Since 2010, the number of downtown households has grown by nearly 2,900, with over half of that increase—1,603 households—earning more than \$100,000 annually. Still, downtown remains home to a wide range of income levels: 31% of households earn less than \$40,000 per year, and 29% earn



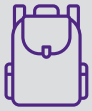
Household Income - Age 25 and Older



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Jobs by Educational Attainment

HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS



37% Downtown 41% City

SOME COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE



31% Downtown 31% City

BACHELOR'S OR ADVANCED DEGREES



31% Downtown 28% City

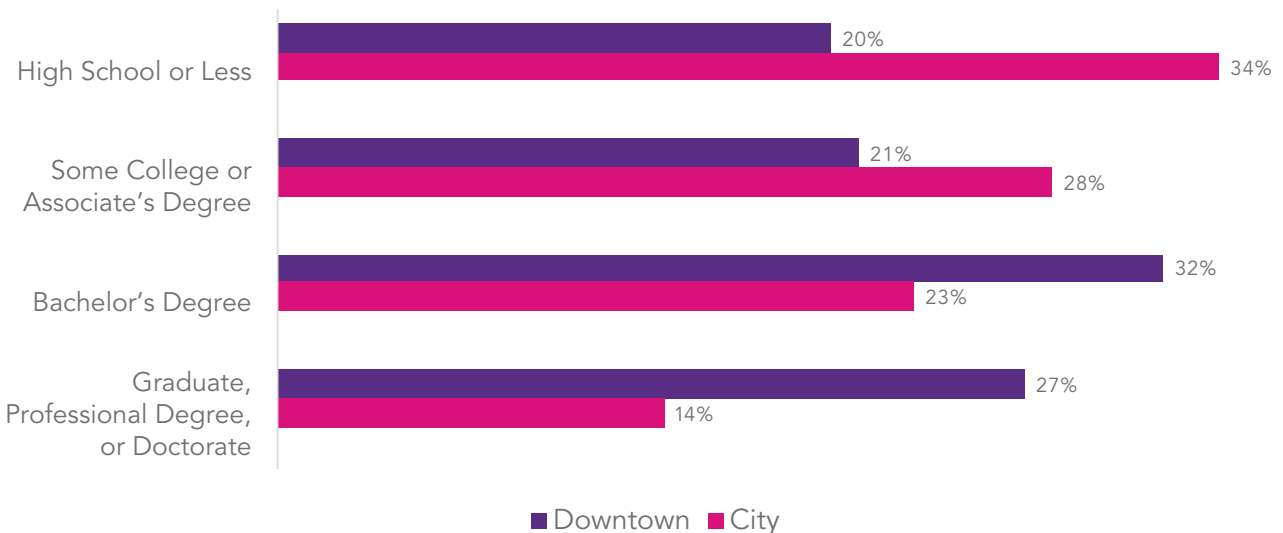
■ Downtown ■ City

between \$40,000 and \$100,000. Interestingly, downtown has a higher share of both very low-income households (15% earning under \$15,000) and high-income households (39% earning above \$100,000) than the city. This dual pattern underscores downtown's socioeconomic diversity, reflecting its role as both a destination for new investment and a home to long-term residents working across a variety of sectors, from hospitality to finance.

High educational attainment is likely one of the core factors shaping these income trends. 59% percent of downtown residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 37% citywide. The educational requirements for downtown jobs are surprisingly similar to the city at large, despite the concentration of knowledge industry employment and high salaries for downtown workers. Relatedly, the educational profile of downtown workers closely mirrors the city's; 37% have a high school education or less (vs. 41% citywide), and 31% hold at least a Bachelor's degree (vs. 28% citywide).

Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)

Educational Attainment for Residents 25+



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)



Housing and Affordability

While downtowns often have higher housing costs, their density and proximity to jobs and transit can reduce transportation expenses, sometimes lowering overall living costs. In Downtown West Palm Beach, however, higher rents offset these savings, resulting in households spending a greater share of income on combined housing and transportation costs.

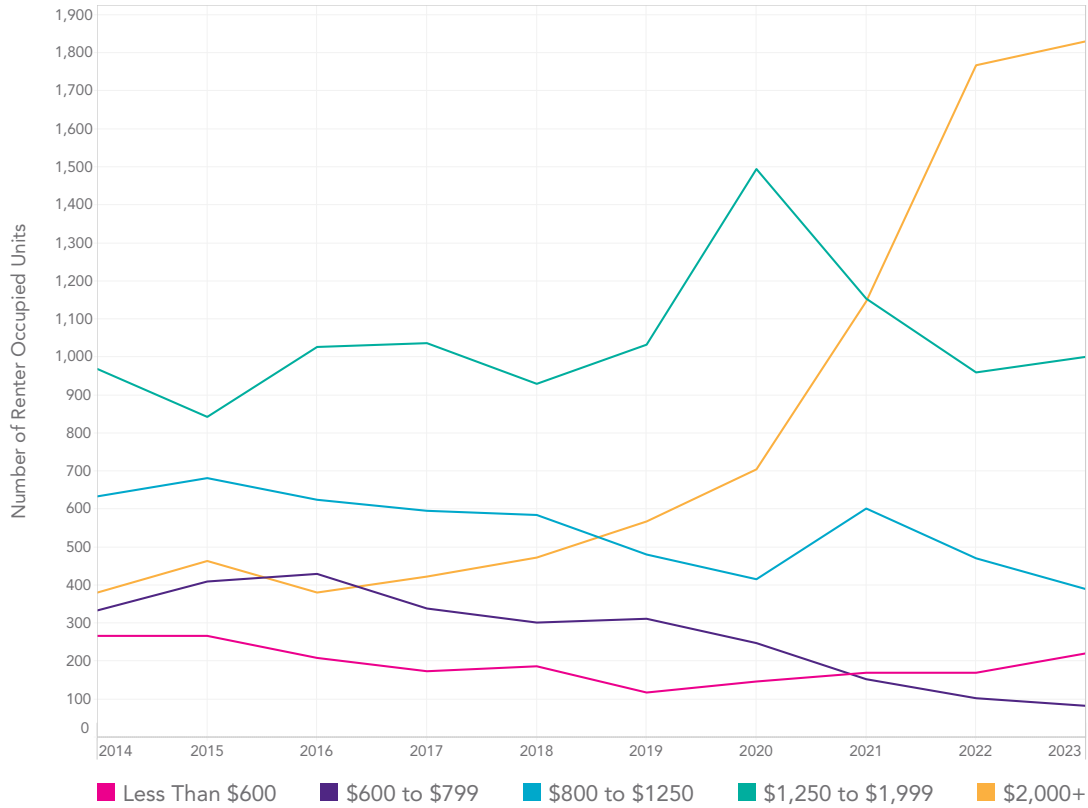
Between 2010 and 2023, median gross rent in the downtown area doubled. Median rent now sits at \$2,037, far exceeding both the citywide median of \$1,709 and the regional median of \$1,818. While 52% of renters downtown are considered “cost-burdened” under U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development standards—spending more than 30% of their income on housing—this share is actually smaller than in the city and the region overall, where 60% and 57% of renters, respectively, face similar strain. Higher local incomes help buffer many downtown households from the impact of rising rents, but affordability remains a concern.

Downtown Renters

	Downtown	City	Region
% RENTER OCCUPIED	63%	49%	29%
MEDIAN GROSS RENT	\$2,037	\$1,700	\$1,818
MEDIAN RENT INCREASE 2010–2023	100%	69%	61%
RENT-BURDENED	52%	60%	57%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)
Note: Affordability metrics reflect the entire study area, not the smaller DDA boundary.

Study Area Rent Prices



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010–2023)

At the same time, homeownership remains unusually strong in downtown West Palm Beach, distinguishing it from most peer downtowns across the country. 37% percent of downtown households own their homes, nearly double the typical downtown average of around 20%. This high rate of ownership offers a measure of neighborhood stability amid rapid development, ensuring that long-term residents have a stronger stake in the community and are less vulnerable to displacement from rising rents. The pattern, however, varies within the study area. In the historically disinvested Historic Northwest neighborhood, only 13% of residents are homeowners, highlighting ongoing inequities in housing access, wealth-building, and long-term security.

The broader context highlights the tension between prosperity and affordability. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation

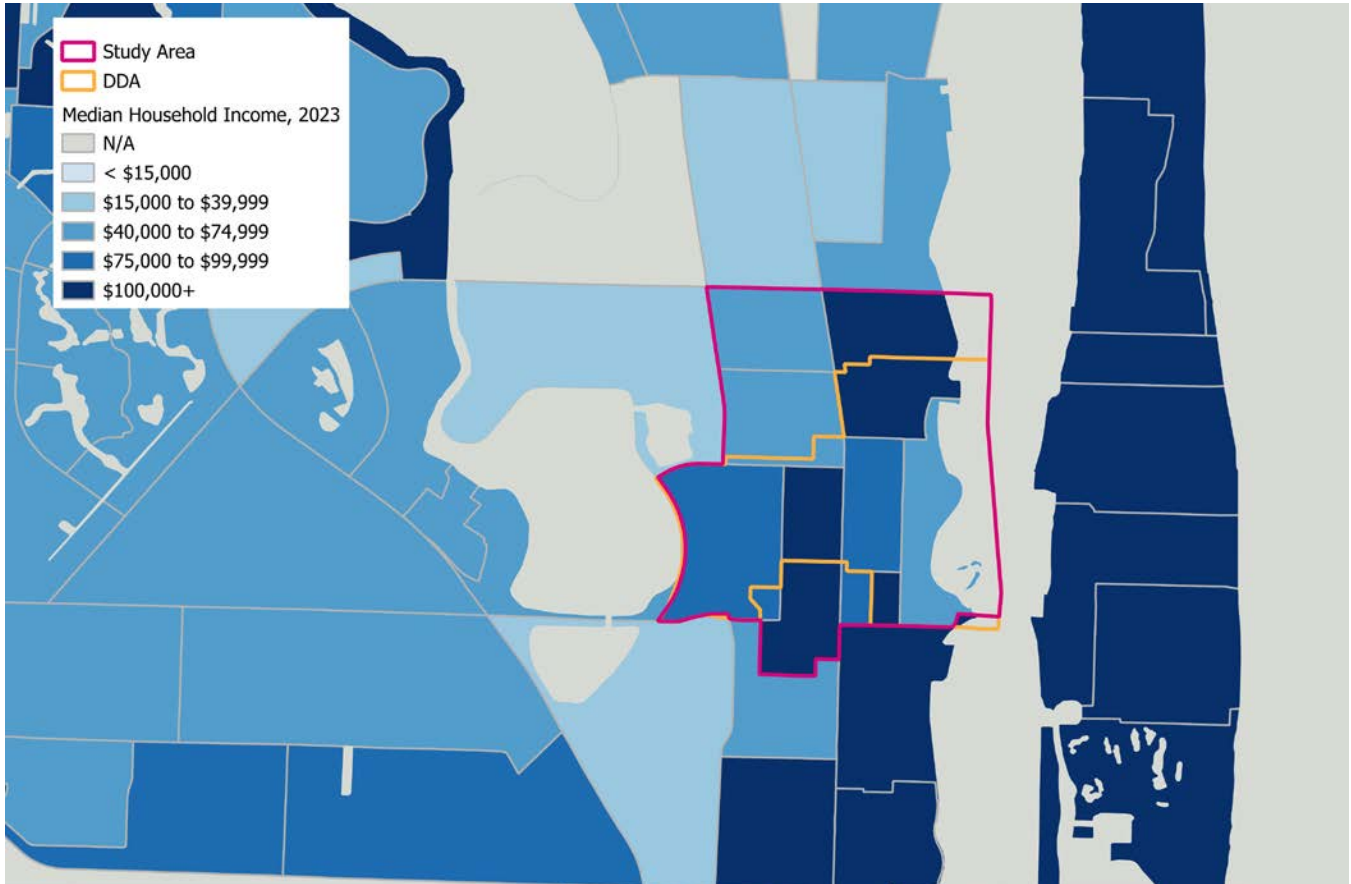
Housing and Transportation Index

Downtown	City	Region
65%	55%	60%

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology (2022)

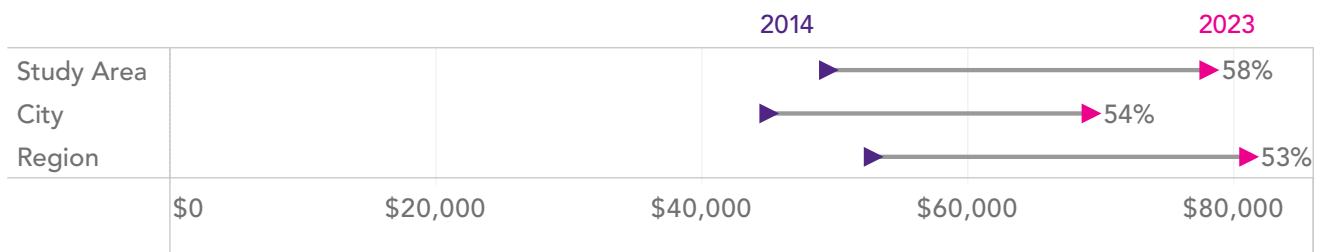
(H&T) Index—which measures the share of income spent on both housing and travel—most downtowns score lower (meaning more affordable) than their surrounding cities and regions despite higher housing costs. Downtown West Palm Beach stands out as an exception: its H&T Index ranks higher, indicating that total living costs are greater here than in the city or region as a whole.

Median Household Income



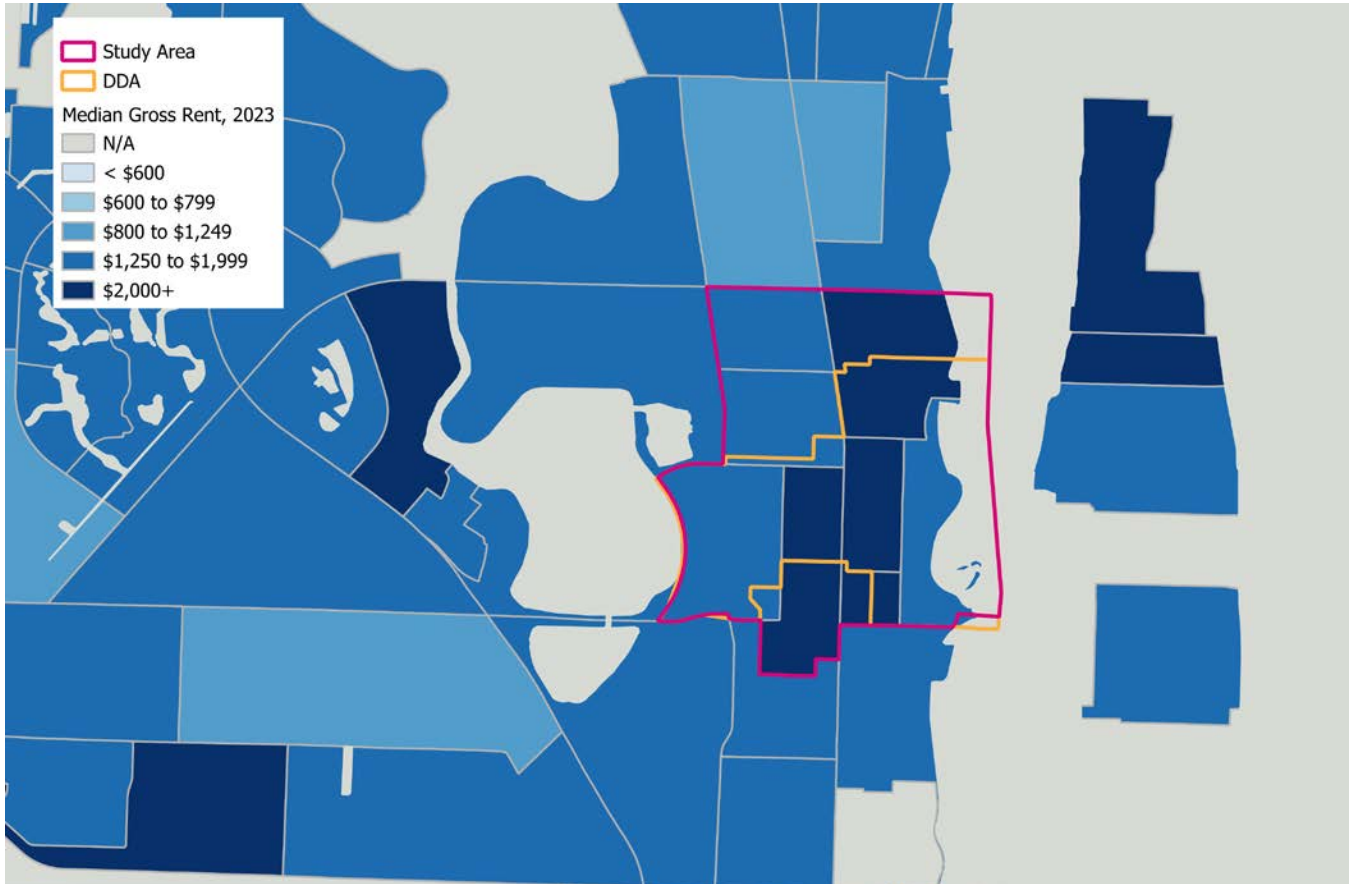
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Household Income Growth Over Time



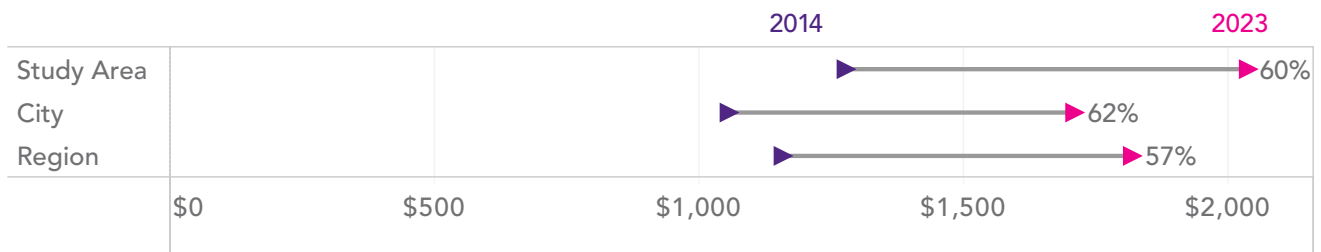
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014, 2023)

Median Household Rent



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Household Rent Growth Over Time



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014, 2023)

Vibrancy | Spending, Fun

Due to their expansive base of users, center cities can support a variety of unique retail, infrastructural, and institutional uses that offer cross-cutting benefits to the region.

Downtowns and center cities typically form the regional epicenter of culture, innovation, community, and commerce. Downtowns flourish due to density, diversity, identity, and use. An engaging downtown “creates the critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, brings people together in social settings, makes streets feel safe, and encourages people to live and work downtown because of the extensive amenities.”¹ This is further amplified by a high concentration of restaurants, concerts, outdoor events, plazas, parks, and festivals.

Benefits of Vibrancy: Density, Creativity, Innovation, Investment, Spending, Fun, Utilization, Brand, Variety, Infrastructure, Celebration

Residential Growth

Residential growth signals a fast-changing and vibrant downtown, one that supports a daytime working population and stays active with people and activities well into the evening. Downtown West Palm Beach has witnessed remarkable residential expansion in recent years, reflecting the growing appeal of its urban lifestyle. Since 2000, the number of residents has nearly tripled, transforming the area from a primarily commercial center into a true mixed-use neighborhood where people live, work, and play.

That momentum has only accelerated in recent years. Since 2019, the downtown population has grown by an impressive 36%, far surpassing growth rates across the city and the broader region. This surge underscores downtown West Palm Beach’s emergence as one of the county’s most desirable neighborhoods—a place defined by its walkability, waterfront amenities, and increasingly diverse housing options. The influx of residents strengthens the local economy, supports small businesses, and ensures that downtown remains active well beyond the traditional nine-to-five workday.



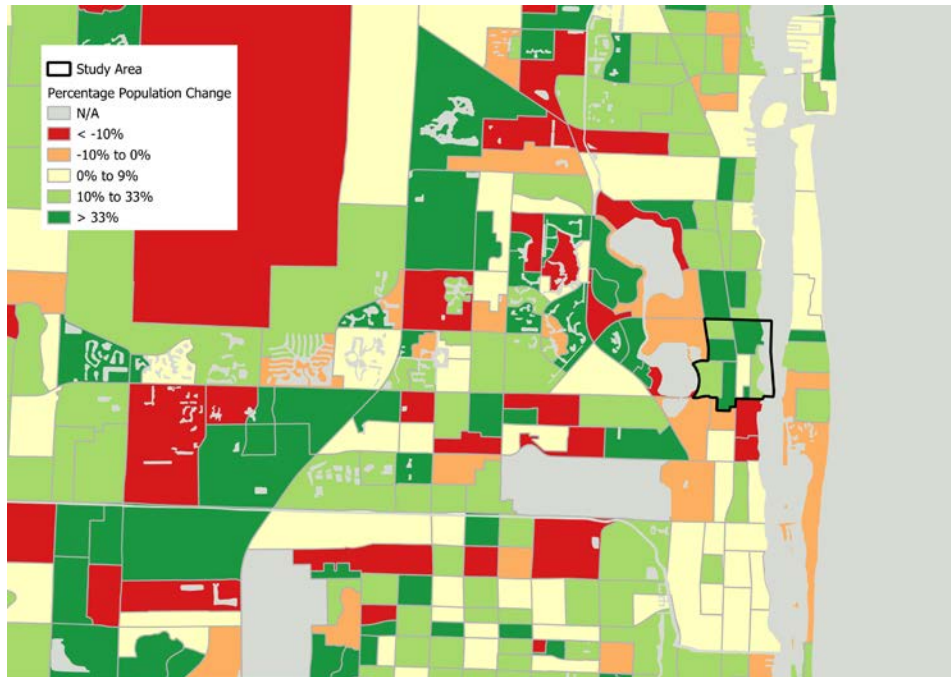
Residential Growth



	Downtown	City	Region
2019–2023	36%	9%	3%
2014–2023	53%	17%	11%
2000–2023	169%	46%	33%

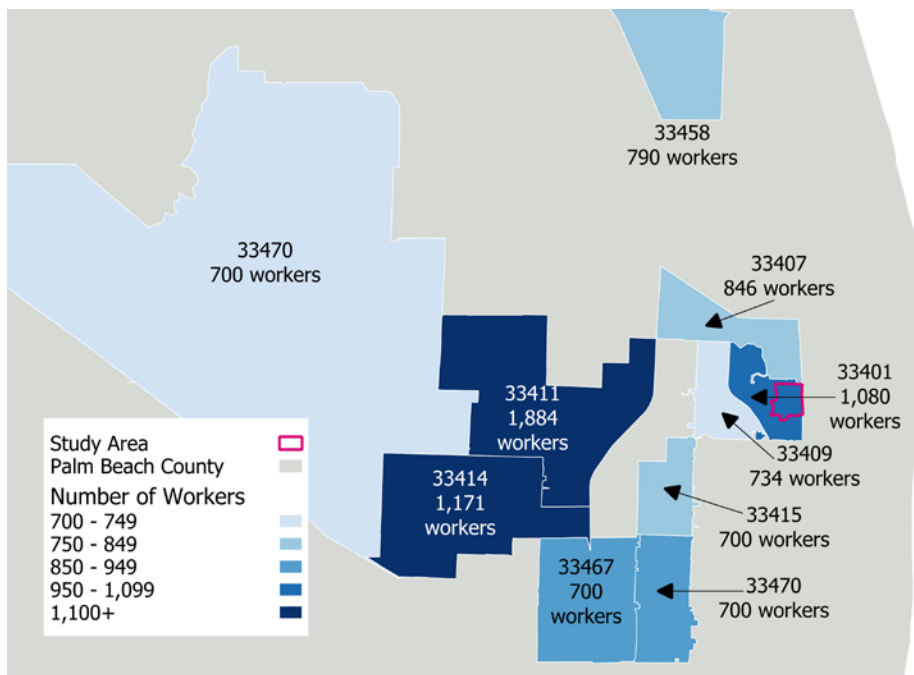
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2000, 2014, 2019, 2023)

Population Change 2010–2023



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010, 2023)

Where Downtown Workers Live



Source: LEHD On the Map (2022)

Retail Vitality

A downtown's retail environment acts as the heart of the community and is a key reason for residents, workers, and visitors to come downtown. It creates the sense of energy and discovery that defines an urban core, where everyday errands, social outings, and cultural experiences overlap. In West Palm Beach, retail, dining, arts, and hospitality establishments work together to make downtown not only a center of commerce but also a destination—one that reflects the city's identity and draws people in from across the region.

The experience industry encompasses a wide range of sectors that together drive visitation and foot traffic. These include retail trade, food and beverage service, arts, entertainment and recreation, and accommodation—all of which thrive in downtown environments. Downtown West Palm Beach exemplifies this pattern, serving as the city's gathering place for both locals and visitors from around the world. Its compact geography and walkable streets amplify the visibility and accessibility of businesses, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits that strengthen the district's economic base.

Although downtown makes up just 2.5% of the city's land area, it punches far above its weight in economic output. Nearly 22% of all hospitality-related businesses in West Palm Beach are located downtown, generating more than \$500 million in sales per square mile—over seven times the density of the rest of West Palm Beach. This remarkable concentration of business activity underscores downtown's role as the fiscal keystone of the city, sustaining jobs, tax revenue, and public investment while anchoring West Palm Beach's reputation as a vibrant, world-class destination.

The Experience Industry



Food and Beverage Service



Accommodations



Retail Trade



Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation

Retail Vitality

	Downtown	City
TOTAL EXPERIENCE INDUSTRY BUSINESSES	374	1,735
EXPERIENCE INDUSTRY BUSINESSES PER SQUARE MILE	283	32
TOTAL EXPERIENCE INDUSTRY SALES	\$785M	\$4.1B
EXPERIENCE INDUSTRY SALES PER SQUARE MILE	\$567M	\$75M

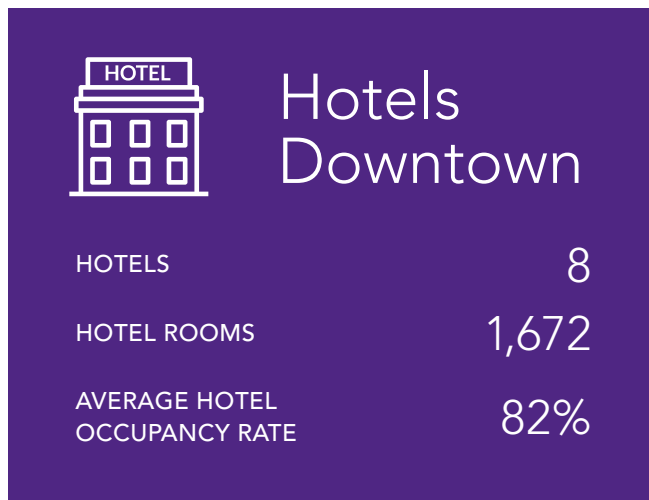
Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023)

Note: Hospitality businesses include Retail Trade, Food & Beverage Serving establishments, Arts, Entertainment & Recreation businesses and Accommodations businesses

Live Events and Activities

Downtowns often serve their cities as centers of culture and recreation, functioning as the gathering places for live events, performances, and public celebrations. These activities bring people together and infuse the urban core with vibrancy, identity, and community spirit.

In downtown West Palm Beach, this role is exemplified by the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority's year-round placemaking and event programming. From October to May—the city's peak season—downtown comes alive with a wide range of recurring experiences such as the lively *Que Bacano!* Latin dance party every first Friday, the Sunset Sweat fitness series that connects local gyms and wellness vendors, and the Let's Vibe arts-and-crafts activations, each transforming public spaces into lively community gathering spaces, not just a commercial district. These programs make downtown a destination for connection as much as for commerce.



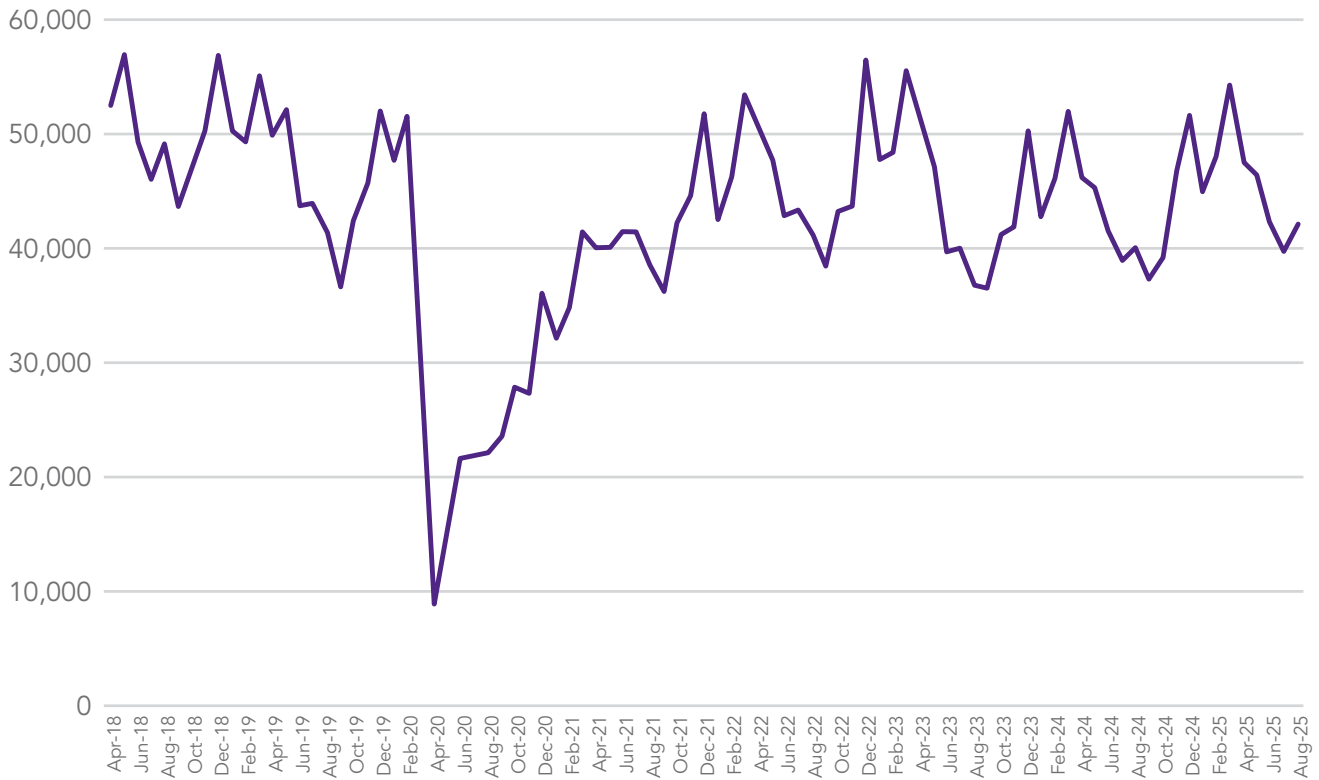
Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2025)

Visitation remains a key driver of downtown vibrancy, and its importance has grown in the post-pandemic landscape. With more than \$500 million in visitation industry sales per square mile, downtown West Palm Beach has proven both resilient and magnetic. Placer.ai data shows that visitation remains highly seasonal, with winter months drawing the largest crowds. Yet, overall activity has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels—93% of 2018–2019 visitation from September 2024 to August 2025. Signature events like the weekly combination West Palm Beach GreenMarket and Antique and Flea Market, a pair of events which are bridged together over four blocks on Clematis Street—serve as anchors of this vitality, drawing locals and tourists alike to downtown's streets, storefronts, and open spaces.


This resurgence has been accompanied by strong confidence within the hospitality sector. With more than 500 new hotel rooms currently under construction, developers and operators clearly see opportunity in the district's growing appeal. The diversity and frequency of downtown events, combined with its arts, retail, and waterfront attractions, create an experience that resonates with visitors year-round. Seasonal programming and community-led activations supported by the DDA's Placemaking Mini-Grants further sustain momentum by fostering collaboration among residents, cultural groups, and small businesses.

The hospitality sector illustrates how downtown's cultural ecosystem directly supports economic growth. Currently, downtown West Palm Beach offers 1,672 hotel rooms across eight properties, with three additional hotels underway that will add another 512 rooms, representing a 30% increase in supply. Post-pandemic metrics remain strong, with average occupancy at 82% and revenue per available room at \$208. Together, these investments and activations reinforce downtown's reputation as the heart of West Palm Beach—a place where arts, culture, and community spirit continually shape the city's identity and draw visitor's year-round.

Daily Out-of-Market Visitors



Source: Placer.ai (2018–2025)
 Note: Out-of-Market Visitors are those who are not downtown workers or residents.



District Events and Activities

10	2	11	10	1	39	17K	525
VENUES WITH LIVE ENTERTAINMENT	TOTAL THEATRES	GYMS AND FITNESS STUDIOS	ANNUAL FESTIVALS/ PARADES	FARMER'S MARKET	TOTAL CONVENTIONS	CONVENTION ATTENDEES	OUTDOOR EVENTS PERMITTED

Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2024)

Identity | Visitation, Heritage, Tradition

Downtowns and center cities preserve the heritage of a place, provide a common point of physical connection for regional residents, and contribute positively to the brand of the regions they anchor.

Downtowns are “iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most iconic landmarks, distinctive features, and unique neighborhoods. Given that most downtowns represent one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city’s past, present, and future.”² The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create a unique sense of place not easily replicated in other parts of the city.

Benefits of Identity: Brand, Visitation, Heritage, Tradition, Memory, Celebration, Fun, Utilization, Culture

Born out of affluence and opportunity at the turn of the 20th century, downtown West Palm Beach sits at the center of paradise in South Florida. Its waterfront setting, historic streetscapes, and year-round vitality have established it as a distinctive urban center in South Florida—a place where commerce, culture, and community converge.



Social Media

INSTAGRAM POSTS WITH HASHTAG #DOWNTOWNWPB

160K

X (FKA TWITTER) FOLLOWERS

22.5K

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

41.3K

Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2025)



Like much of South Florida, the land now known as West Palm Beach was inhabited for centuries by generations of Native Americans who were the first to recognize the bounty of the region. The modern city, brought into existence through the vision of oil baron and Florida railroad magnate Henry Morrison Flagler, was incorporated in 1894 just as the first railroad tracks to reach this far south were laid through what is now the city's downtown. Over the next century, the population of West Palm Beach grew to encompass more than 100,000 people, with popular thoroughfares like Clematis Street showcasing an eclectic mix of architectural styles that embody the spirit of progress in a turn-of-the-century downtown. Just to the north, the Historic Northwest emerged as one of Florida's earliest African American neighborhoods—a thriving center of entrepreneurship, culture, and civic life led by pioneering Black business owners, educators, and artists whose legacy remains a cornerstone of the city's identity.

Like many American cities, downtown West Palm Beach experienced a period of neglect beginning in the 1960s as shoppers, drawn to the convenience of suburban malls, turned their attention away from the center city. By the 1990s, investors began taking a fresh look at downtown, with major retailers like Gap, Loft, and Banana Republic opening flagship outposts in restored storefronts.

Nightclubs that once dotted Clematis Street gave way to chef-driven restaurants as new residents were drawn to the appeal of urban living and waterfront views. In 2000, developers transformed a desolate stretch of land northwest of Okeechobee and Quadrielle Boulevard into CityPlace anchored by luxury retail, offices, housing, cultural venues, and public gathering spaces.

Today, downtown West Palm Beach is home to more than 13 nationally-designated historic structures, 14 parks and natural areas, and over fifty public art works. Nearly half of the city's museums are located downtown, including the Richard and Pat Johnson Palm Beach County History Museum, housed in the city's historic 1916 courthouse, and the nearby Norton Museum of Art, which contains more than 8,200 works of art. Other popular destinations include the Mandel Public Library of West Palm Beach and the award-winning West Palm Beach GreenMarket—named the #1 farmer's market in the United States by USA TODAY 10Best. Together with the Historic Northwest, where the Sunset Lounge and the Heart & Soul Park celebrate the neighborhood's rich cultural legacy, these institutions and landmarks tell the full story of a downtown that continues to honor its past while embracing its future.

Destinations & Unique Features



2

DESIGNATED
HISTORIC
DISTRICTS



13

NATIONALLY
DESIGNATED HISTORIC
STRUCTURES



50

PUBLIC ART
INSTALLATIONS



10

PARKS AND
NATURAL
AREAS

Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2025)

Resilience | Sustainability, Diversity

At its broadest, resilience means a place’s ability to withstand shocks and stresses. Thanks to their diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their residents can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than other parts of a city. Diversity and economic vitality equip downtowns and center cities to adapt to economic and social challenges better than more homogenous communities. Similarly, density better positions downtowns and center cities to make investments needed to hedge against and bounce back from increasingly frequent environmental shocks and stresses.

Benefits of Resilience: Health, Equity, Sustainability, Accessibility, Mobility, Durability of Services, Density, Diversity, Affordability, Civic Participation, Opportunity, Scale, Infrastructure

Economic Resilience

Economic resilience refers to a downtown's ability to withstand adverse economic conditions by maintaining a mix of elements essential to long-term success. Downtown West Palm Beach demonstrates strong economic resilience, evidence by a rapid post-pandemic recovery in key industries, particularly finance and professional services. Bringing together a mix of industries with a talented workforce makes downtown a competitive and economically resilient environment. The COVID-19 pandemic tested this resilience in profound ways, disrupting commercial activity and reshaping how people work, shop, and gather. Like many urban centers, downtown West Palm Beach faced significant challenges during this period, experiencing negative or flat job growth between 2019 and 2021. Yet by 2022, the district began to rebound—posting a 3% increase in employment, an encouraging sign of stabilization and renewed economic momentum.

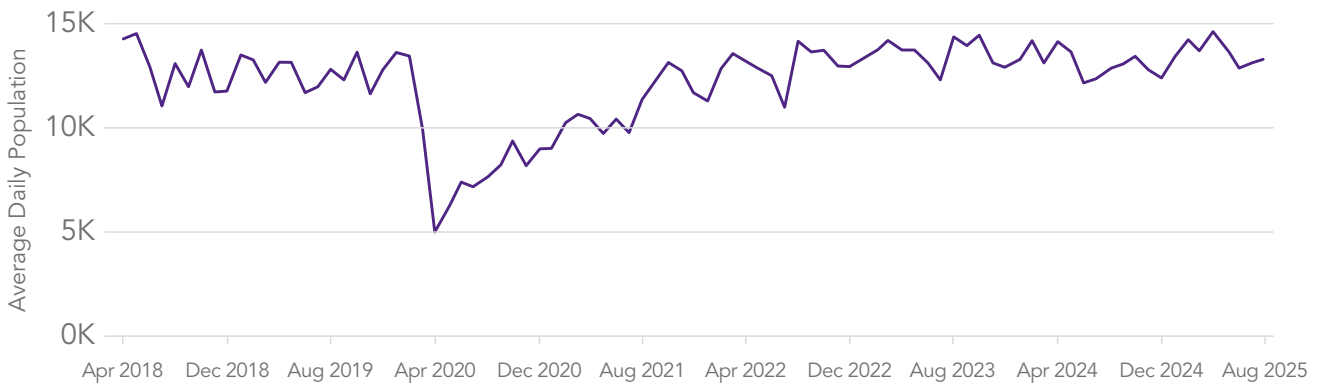
Much of the recovery is driven by the strength of key industries that define downtown’s economic base. The Finance and Insurance sector led the way, growing by 45% between 2019 and 2022—a remarkable surge that reflects the increasing presence of financial firms relocating or expanding within West Palm Beach’s urban core. The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector also posted a strong 14% gain over the same period, underscoring the district’s growing appeal to high-skill, knowledge-based employers. Together, these industries contribute not only to job growth but also to the diversification that underpins long-term stability, helping downtown weather future disruptions with greater agility.

Poverty	Downtown	City	Region
RESIDENTS UNDER THE POVERTY THRESHOLD	16%	15%	11%
RESIDENTS NEAR BUT NOT IN POVERTY	17%	20%	16%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT A COMPUTER	2%	3%	4%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS	11%	9%	7%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)

Another important indicator of resilience is the economic well-being of residents themselves. Downtown West Palm Beach has roughly the same share of residents living in poverty as the city overall, though slightly higher than the regional average. This suggests that while the district is on a strong trajectory toward economic recovery, continued investment in workforce development, housing affordability, and equitable access to opportunity will be essential. By fostering an inclusive recovery that benefits both workers and residents, downtown can continue to strengthen its position as a resilient, dynamic center for business and community life.

Daily Workers in Downtown April 2018–August 2025



Source: Placer.ai (2018–2025)

Downtown Community Resources



1

LIBRARY



1

RECREATION AND
COMMUNITY
CENTER



12

RELIGIOUS
INSTITUTIONS



14

PARKS AND
NATURAL AREAS


Source: West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2025)



Social Resilience

Downtowns act as hubs for social resilience. Their dense nature gives a diverse mix of residents and employees access to a multitude of community resources in a small area. In downtown West Palm Beach, this proximity translates to strong health outcomes and opportunities for connection. Health metrics among downtown residents closely mirror those of the wider city, with 77% engaging in leisure-time physical activity compared to 74% citywide, and an impressive 91% maintaining health insurance coverage compared to 85% citywide. These indicators point to a population that is both active and supported—key factors contributing to comparable life expectancies between downtown residents and those across the city. The abundance of public spaces, fitness programming, and health-oriented community events downtown further reinforces a culture of well-being and contributes to strong life expectancy outcomes.

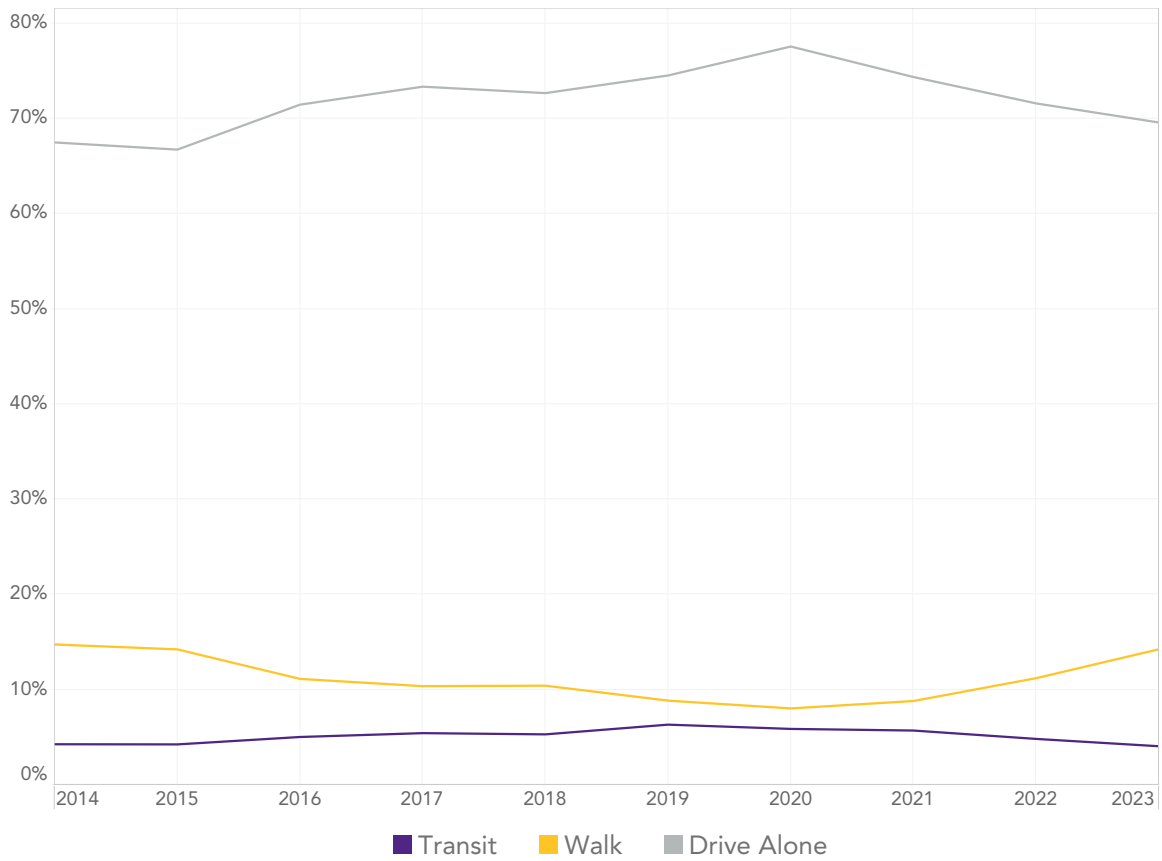
Digital connectivity represents another cornerstone of social resilience, particularly in a post-pandemic environment where access to online resources is critical for education, employment, and civic participation. Nearly all downtown households—98%—report having a computer, reflecting strong access to digital tools. While internet subscription rates are somewhat lower than the city average, this may reflect the easy availability of alternative connections in shared public spaces such as libraries, coworking hubs, cafés, and community centers. Together, these assets form a digital and social safety net, ensuring that downtown West Palm Beach remains an accessible, connected, and resilient urban community.

	DOWNTOWN	CITY
 Health		
AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY	81	82
NO LEISURE-TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	23%	26%
WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	9%	15%

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2020), CDC (2023), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023)



Downtown Commute Mode Share



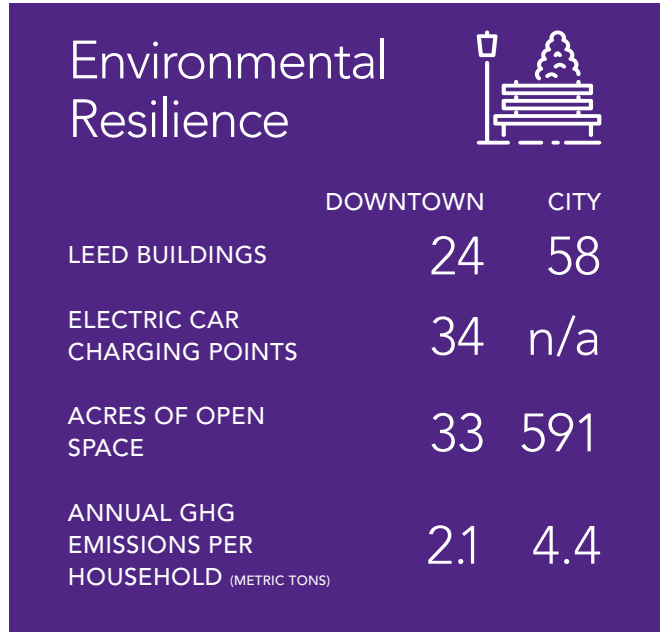
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014–2023)

Environmental Resilience

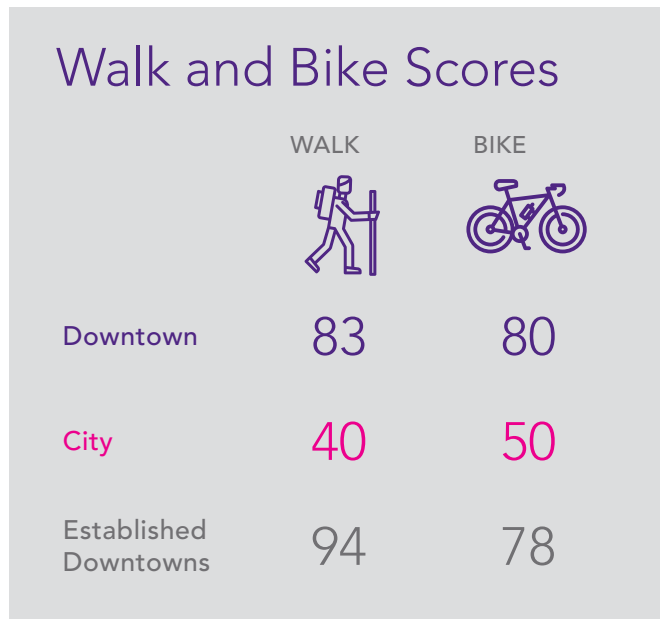
A downtown’s environmental resilience plays a major role in assuring long-term sustainability in its region. In downtown West Palm Beach, environmental stewardship has become a defining feature of its growth. The district contains 24 LEED-certified buildings totaling 3.8 million square feet—nearly half of all certified properties in West Palm Beach, concentrated within just over one square mile. This impressive density of green buildings reflects the area’s commitment to sustainable development and its role as a model for environmentally responsible urban design in Palm Beach County.

Living downtown also supports more sustainable lifestyles. Downtown households produce an estimated 2.1 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year—less than half the 4.4 tonnes produced by the average West Palm Beach household. This reduced footprint stems from the district’s compact, walkable environment and its growing mix of transit, biking, and pedestrian infrastructure. Walk and Bike Scores remain among the highest in the city, and walking to work has become seven times more common among downtown residents than elsewhere in West Palm Beach. While the city still has room to improve its pedestrian connectivity compared to other *established* downtowns, these trends demonstrate meaningful progress toward a less car-dependent, lower-emission future.

Complementing these efforts are broader city programs designed to strengthen climate resilience and urban livability. The “10,000 Trees in 10 Years” initiative, for example, offers residents and businesses up to four free trees annually, supporting canopy growth throughout downtown. This expanding green infrastructure mitigates the urban heat island effect, enhances stormwater absorption, and improves air quality, all while contributing to the beauty and comfort of the public realm. Together, sustainable buildings, active transportation, and greening initiatives illustrate how downtown West Palm Beach is positioning itself not only as an economic center, but also as a leader in environmental resilience and regional sustainability.



Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology (2022), West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (2025)



Source: Walk Score (2025)

Downtown Profile | Summary

The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study categorizes American districts into three development stages: *established*, *growing*, and *emerging*. These tiers are determined by various metrics, including population and job density, growth rate, and assessed land value per square mile. Downtown West Palm Beach has reached the threshold of an *established* tier downtown, characterized by a high concentration of employment, sustained residential growth, and a significant contribution to the city's overall assessed value. This reflects a change in status from 2021, when this body of research categorized the study area in the *growing* tier.

Downtown's elevation to the *established* tier reflects not only its sustained pace of growth but also its outsized influence within the city and region. Despite occupying just 2.5% of the city's land area, downtown captures 32% of citywide jobs and nearly 9% of its population—figures comparable to or exceeding many *established* downtowns across the U.S. Its assessed value per square mile, at \$3.8 billion, rivals the \$4.4 billion average among peer downtowns, underscoring the concentration of investment and high-value real estate within its compact 1.3 square miles. These metrics confirm downtown's role not just as a civic and economic center, but as the heartbeat of West Palm Beach's urban identity and affirm downtown's role as the city's civic, economic, and cultural engine.

By national standards, downtown West Palm Beach's population growth has been exceptional. Since 2000, its residential population has surged 169%, more than doubling the 78% growth seen across other *established* downtowns and far surpassing the 65% study average. While its residential density of 12 residents per acre falls below the 22 residents per acre typical of peer districts, this reflects a more balanced mix of high-rise, mid-rise, and historic housing types. The district's median household income of \$78,000 is just shy of the \$82,000 median across comparable downtowns, and its diversity index of 69 slightly exceeds that of its peers—suggesting an increasingly varied and inclusive downtown community.

Established Downtowns

CHICAGO	MINNEAPOLIS	SAN FRANCISCO
FORT LAUDERDALE	NEW HAVEN	SEATTLE
HARTFORD	PITTSBURGH	WEST PALM BEACH
MIAMI	RICHMOND	
MILWAUKEE	SAINT PAUL	


COMPARISON TO 2025 TIERS

	DOWNTOWN WEST PALM BEACH	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS	STUDY AVERAGE
LAND AREA (SQ. MI.)	1.3	2.5	2.4
PERCENT OF CITYWIDE LAND	2.5%	5%	3%
ASSESSED VALUE PER SQUARE MILE	\$3.8B	\$4.4B	\$3.4B
CITYWIDE POPULATION	8.7%	9%	5%
CITYWIDE 25-34 LIVING IN DISTRICT	10.9%	14%	7%



RESIDENTS

	DOWNTOWN WEST PALM BEACH	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS	STUDY AVERAGE
GROWTH AVG. 2000-2023	169%	78%	65%
DENSITY RESIDENTS / ACRE	12	22	12
MEDIAN INCOME HOUSEHOLD	\$78K	\$82K	\$65K
DIVERSITY INDEX	69	65	67




EMPLOYMENT

	DOWNTOWN WEST PALM BEACH	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS	STUDY AVERAGE
CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT (2002–2022)	4%	17%	14%
CITYWIDE JOBS	32%	40%	23%
CITYWIDE KNOWLEDGE JOBS	27%	46%	26%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	21%	42%	30%
RESIDENTS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER	59%	61%	52%

Downtown’s employment profile increasingly resembles that of larger, more mature urban centers. Knowledge and creative industries represent 27% and 21% of citywide employment respectively, compared to 46% and 42% among *established* downtowns—an indication of continued diversification into higher-value sectors. Meanwhile, 59% of downtown residents hold at least a bachelor’s degree, only marginally below the 61% benchmark for comparable districts. These figures point to a workforce that is both skilled and adaptable, supporting a balanced economy of public, professional, and service sectors.



In terms of livability and mobility, downtown West Palm Beach performs strongly. Its Walk Score of 83 and Bike Score of 80 place it close to or above the averages for other *established* downtowns (94 and 78, respectively), reflecting compact urban form and continued investment in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. Thirty percent of downtown residents use sustainable commute options—slightly above the study average of 28%—a reflection of both proximity to workplaces and the city’s ongoing improvements to transit and multimodal connectivity. These characteristics contribute not only to lower carbon emissions but also to a more vibrant, connected urban lifestyle.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUTE



	DOWNTOWN WEST PALM BEACH	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS	STUDY AVERAGE
	30%	40%	28%

Looking ahead, downtown’s continued momentum will depend on sustaining the balance that has driven its success: continued employment growth, steady residential investment, mobility improvements, and thoughtful urban design strategies that promote inclusion and environmental resilience. As the district continues to evolve, thoughtful leadership including strategic planning, placemaking, business support, and stewardship by the DDA will remain essential to sustaining momentum and ensuring that growth is inclusive, resilient, and authentically West Palm Beach. With coordinated effort, downtown West Palm Beach is well positioned not only to keep pace with peer cities, but to define what a vibrant, resilient, and distinctly Floridian downtown can be.

	DOWNTOWN WEST PALM BEACH	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
WALK SCORE 	83	94
BIKE SCORE 	80	78



APPENDICES

PROJECT
METHODOLOGY

DATA SOURCES

SELECTED
STUDY
DEFINITIONS

ADDITIONAL
IDA SOURCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Appendix I: Project Framework and Methodology



BACKGROUND

In 2017, IDA launched the *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study. IDA staff and the IDA Research Committee worked with the initial group of 13 downtown organizations, Stantec's Urban Places as a project advisor, and HR&A as an external consultant to develop the valuation methodology and metrics. Since 2017, IDA has added over 50 more downtowns or urban districts to the study database, and worked with their respective urban place management organizations (UPMOs) to collect local data, obtain data from agencies in their cities, and combine these metrics with publicly available statistics on demographics, economy, and housing. Data collected included publicly available census figures (population, demographics, employment, transportation), downtown economic performance, municipal finances, capital projects, GIS data, and the local qualitative context. The 57 total downtowns and urban districts studied to date represent diverse geographic regions and have relatively comparable levels of complexity and relationships to their respective cities and regions.

Guiding questions for this project included:

- What is the economic case for downtowns? What stands out about land values, taxes, or city investments?
- How do downtowns strengthen their regions?
- Can we standardize metrics to calculate the value of a downtown?
- How can downtowns measure their authentic, cultural and historical heritage?
- How does the diversity of a downtown make it inclusive, inviting, and accessible for all?
- What inherent characteristics of downtown make it an anchor of the city and region?
- Due to its mix of land-uses, diversity of jobs, and density, is downtown more socially, economically, and environmentally resilient than the rest of the city and region?

PROJECT PURPOSE

The project measured the performance of U.S. downtowns using metrics developed collaboratively and organized under five principles that contribute to a valuable urban center. This study:

- Provides a framework of principles and metrics to guide data collection for evaluating the value of downtowns and center cities.
- Standardizes key metrics for evaluating the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of American downtowns.
- Develops an industry-wide model for calculating the economic value of downtowns, creating a replicable methodology for continued data collection.
- Provides individual analysis and performance benchmarks for participating downtowns in this standardized framework, including supplemental qualitative analysis.
- Empowers and continues to support IDA members' economic and community development efforts through comparative analysis.



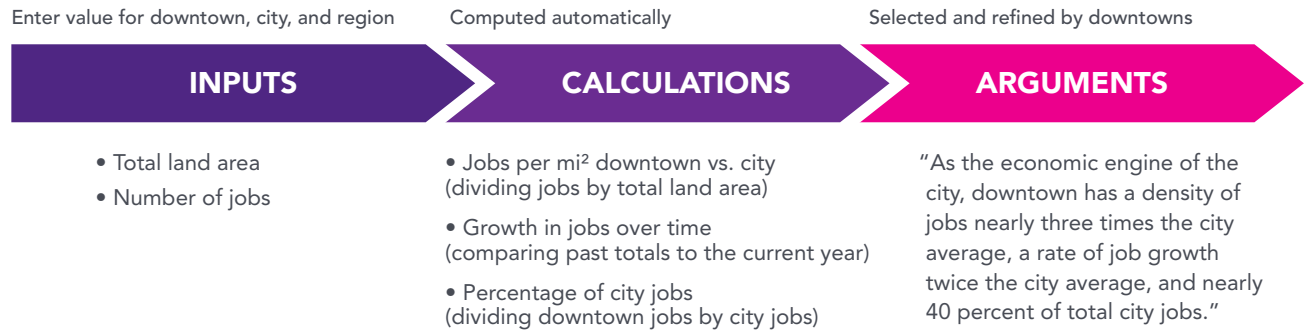
KNOWN LIMITS TO THIS PROJECT

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive quantification of the value of downtowns, there are still several limitations to our approach. Not all local sources consistently collect the same data, or collect it in the same way, which hinders our ability to make comparisons between downtowns. In some cases, the data we ask for simply does not exist or has not been collected on the relatively small scale of census tracts or downtown sub-area. This makes it challenging to rely on local data for analysis and can result in some missing pieces in our narrative. Our most recent data also comes predominantly from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), the 2022 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) On the Map tool, and ESRI Business Analyst. Due to the lag

in data availability, some metrics may not align with more recent data from local downtown, municipal, or proprietary sources. This will be especially true in coming years as the recovery in employment following the COVID-19 pandemic will not be fully observed in our data sources for a few years.

Finally, citywide context plays a large role in the analysis. Significant variance in overall city size (from Hartford's 18 square miles to Oklahoma City's 606) can skew comparisons of the proportion of citywide jobs or population in different districts. However, since downtowns operate within the context of their city, understanding the proportion of jobs, residents, and other metrics as a percentage of their cities still provides an important perspective on a downtown's contribution to its city and region.





BENCHMARKING TIERS

Based on the data collected for this study, we identified three tiers of downtowns, defined by stage of development. We divided the 57 downtowns that have participated to date into “established”, “growing” and “emerging” tiers. Downtown figures were compared to study-wide medians on three themes:

- Density
 - o Jobs per square mile
 - o Residents per square mile
 - o Assessed value per square mile
- Significance to city
 - o Percentage of citywide jobs
 - o Percentage of citywide residents
- Long-term growth
 - o Percent growth in jobs (2002–2022)
 - o Percent growth in population (2000–2023)

Established – These downtowns have high proportions of their cities’ jobs and residents, are dense and highly valuable to their cities.

Growing – These downtowns have not yet hit a critical level of density and citywide significance but are showing progress towards that critical mass. This group includes both larger downtowns with lower growth rates, and smaller downtowns with exceptional growth rates.

Emerging – These downtowns are a mixture of different sizes and growth rates, and are generally lower-density downtowns that have a low proportion of citywide significance on jobs and residents. Because growth rates are examined 2000 to current, many downtowns that struggled during the recession had a harder time demonstrating significant growth over the longer term despite encouraging growth in recent years.

The *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities Trends Report* has additional data on the performance of *emerging*, *growing*, and *established* tiers of downtowns.

Appendix II: Data Sources

NATIONAL DATA SOURCES FOR THE VALUE OF U.S. DOWNTOWNS AND CENTER CITIES

Source	Data Available	Pricing	Geographic Limitations	Most Recent Data Vintage in the Study
ESRI	Demographic, Housing, Detailed Establishments, market potential, and Consumer Spending	Proprietary	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census tracts	2017 to 2024 by data set (Annual Updates)
Social Explorer	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Health	Proprietary	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2023 (Annual Updates)
American FactFinder	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Health, Employment, Economy	Public	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2023 (Annual Updates)
LEHD On The Map	Labor: workers and firms	Public	None; allows for drawing of custom geographies; selection of sub-geographies down to census block group level	2022 (Annual Updates)
Center for Neighborhood Technology	Housing affordability, Sustainability, Income	Public	Allows for selection and exporting at as small as the block group level	2019 (Updates Unscheduled)
National Register of Historic Places	Historic structures and districts	Public	None	2024 (Annual Updates)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Life expectancy, physical inactivity and other health data	Public	ZIP Code	2021 (Annual Updates)
FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System	Crime Rates	Public	City and Metro	2024 (Annual Updates)
Geolounge	Map of Fortune 1000 companies	Public	None	2024 (Unscheduled Updates)

Appendix III: Selected Study Definitions

Assessed value

Assessed value is the dollar value assigned to a property to measure applicable taxes. This figure is an aggregate for all property within the study area, or for the closest match to the study area for which data is available.

Acreage of open space

This figure is the total acreage of designated public spaces like parks or plazas; it does not include vacant lots.

Census block group

A block group is a statistical division of a census tract, generally defined to contain between 600 and 3,000 people, which is used to present data and control block numbering in the decennial census.

Census tract

A census tract is a small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county or equivalent entity, updated by local participants prior to each decennial census.

Creative jobs

The study uses the NAICS industry sector of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation to count creative jobs.

Development pipeline

Development pipelines include projects and developments very recently completed, currently under construction, and planned projects anticipated to be completed within the next three years.

Diversity Index

The Diversity Index is a measurement of the likelihood that any two randomly selected individuals will be of a different race or ethnicity. The closer to 100, the more likely they will be different, indicating diversity.

Employment

The study uses the LEHD on the Map tool to count "primary jobs." Primary jobs differ from total jobs by designating the highest-wage job as the "Primary" one if an individual holds more than one job. This figure may

not accurately reflect less traditional types of employment like gig workers or small startups.

Event venue

Event venues include venues that are typically used for public events such as conferences, conventions, concerts, etc. (public access) As this metric is locally collected, it is somewhat subjective as the downtown has the final say on, for example, if there is a local venue that is more private, but that is part of the fabric of the event community, that would be included.

Farmers markets

The number of farmers markets is a count of both permanent and seasonal farmers markets.

Greenhouse gas emissions

The Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index includes an estimate of CO₂ per household within a given area.

Housing and Transportation Index

The Housing and Transportation Index is a tool that measures how much the average household spends on housing and transportation relative to income. This figure demonstrates how urban places often have higher base rents, but much lower transportation costs. This index is produced by Center for Neighborhood Technology.

Knowledge jobs

Knowledge jobs consist of jobs in the NAICS industry sectors of: Information; Finance and Insurance; Real Estate and Rental and Leasing; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Management of Companies and Enterprises; Health Care and Social Assistance.

Market Potential Index

ESRI Market Potential Index measures the likelihood of residents in a set area to spend money on specified categories of goods and services, indexed to a national average. Values below 100 indicate a below average demand from residents in the area, and above 100 an above average demand.

Media mentions

This study sometimes utilizes independent sources to add nuance to the data. Forbes' list of top 100 metro areas to start a new business is an example of this type of source. Another example might be a travel blog praising restaurants or entertainment options within the downtown. While not always quantitative sources, these media mentions add color and perspective to the report.

Middle-class

This study defines middle-class as 67% to 200% of area median income. This range was calculated for each downtown based on the median income of the region.

Millennial

This study defines residents between the ages of 18 and 34 as millennials.

No leisure-time physical activity

Presented as a percentage, no leisure-time physical activity is the share of residents within the geography who have not engaged in physical activity in their spare time within the past month from the time surveyed.

Private investment

Private investment is defined as the amount money from private sources is being invested in development. This figure is sometimes replaced by a sum of the largest development projects within the study area.

Public art installations

Public art installations counted can be owned by either public or private entities, be temporary or permanent installations, but are easily accessible by the general public.

Public investment

Public capital investment is open for definition by the specific downtowns but should generally include municipal, state, and federal investment in capital projects downtown (i.e. open space, infrastructure). If only a specific bucket of public investment is available for measurement (i.e. municipal public investment), this can be measured and footnoted in the profiles in lieu of capturing the entire amount.

Rent-burdened

Households paying more than 30% of their income to rent are considered rent-burdened.

Retail demand

Retail demand is a measure of the total spending potential of an area's population, as determined by residential population and household income characteristics.

Retail sales

Retail sales is a measure of the total sales by businesses within the observed geography. All estimates of market supply are in nominal terms and are derived from receipts (net of sales taxes, refunds, and returns) of businesses that are primarily engaged in the retailing of merchandise. Excise taxes paid by the retailer or the remuneration of services are also included, for example, installation and delivery charges that are incidental to the transaction.

Sales to non-residents

Sales to non-residents is a calculated estimate using the retail demand and sales figures to determine how much of downtown's retail sales are to people who do not live within the downtown. Simply put, retail sales – resident retail demand = sales to non-residents.

Sports teams

The number of professional teams within the geography. This figure does not include college teams.





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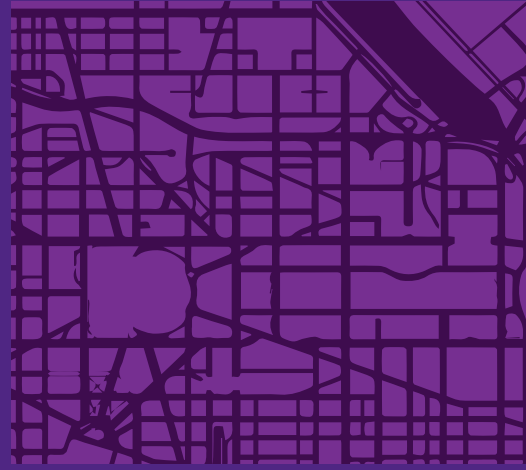
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