

Downtown Activation Plan

Mayor Bruce Harrell’s Downtown Activation Plan outlines goals and initiatives to revitalize Downtown Seattle. The plan’s purpose is to stabilize and transform Downtown into a place where residents, workers, and visitors want to spend time.

The plan lays out actions across three different timelines:

- **Bold Actions Now** – Initiatives that are underway or starting soon.
- **Near-term Initiatives** – Efforts that will happen over the next three years.
- **Space Needle Thinking** – Visionary possibilities for the future of Downtown Seattle.

The Downtown Activation Plan maps out the future of Downtown for you. **Downtown is You.**

You can read the full plan and learn more at downtownisyou.com.

Downtown Activation Plan Goals

1. Make Downtown **safe** and welcoming.
2. Transform Downtown into a lively **neighborhood** where more people can afford to live.
3. Create a unique Downtown **retail** experience.
4. Make Downtown a place where people want to **work** and that reflects the future of our economy.
5. Celebrate Downtown Seattle’s **arts, culture, sports, and entertainment**.
6. Make Downtown a **top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round.
7. Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown.

Bold Actions Now

Initiatives that are underway or starting soon.

- Expanded the [Metropolitan Improvement District](#) service boundaries, increased cleaning services, and funded greater investments for unarmed security and Downtown ambassador salaries to maintain critical services Downtown.
- Reopened [City Hall Park](#) on June 13, 2023, with new programming, safety measures, lighting enhancements, and 24/7 security. Invested in ongoing activities designed to draw people to the park, including movie days, jumbo chess board, concerts, food trucks, and more.
- Filled 20 vacant storefronts through the [Seattle Restored](#) program to help small businesses, entrepreneurs, and local artists.
- Announced [The Liberty Project](#), a new innovative business growth program focused on increasing revenues for businesses owned by underrepresented communities – particularly Black-owned businesses.

- Increasing opportunities for food truck operators and pop-up food vendors to establish a presence Downtown by waiving street-use permit fees.
- Improving street and sidewalk lighting in areas of Downtown where crime and disorder are concentrated.
- Seattle Police Department continues to make impactful arrests of opioid and meth dealers and has seized millions of fentanyl pills. So far in 2023 through May, police have arrested 85 individuals Downtown for selling, delivering, or smuggling illegal drugs, a 12% increase from the same period in 2022. At the same time, the City is advancing innovative public health strategies for substance use treatment and other supports as defined in Mayor Harrell’s April Executive Order.
- Increasing trash and litter removal and expanding graffiti abatement with a focus on Chinatown-International District.
- Proposed updated [land use policies](#) that will create upwards of 30,000 new jobs, add more than 3,000 housing units in neighborhoods near Downtown, and activate the stadium area south of Pioneer Square by allowing more hotels, restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues.
- Completed the City’s [design competition](#) seeking innovative ideas for Downtown office space conversions to residential use, with winning proposals providing a roadmap for future legislative and regulatory action.
- Announced the [Building Emissions Performance Standard \(BEPS\)](#), a bold new proposal to reduce emissions for existing large buildings, which will apply to nearly 1,650 nonresidential buildings Downtown and other areas of the city.
- Streamlined the [environmental review process](#) for residential buildings Downtown with fewer than 200 units and buildings with up to 30,000 square feet.

Legislative Action

*Achieving our vision for the Downtown of the future will require **legislative action** by the City Council. This first set of six legislative proposals would expand business opportunities for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs, allow for the creation of more affordable housing, and provide fun things to do and see Downtown.*

- **Rezone Parts of Downtown**
 - Update zoning policies to allow for taller residential buildings along 3rd Ave from Union Street north to Stewart Street and east on Pike Street and Union Street toward 4th Avenue. This will allow for high-rise residential development with incentives for providing childcare and education facilities.
- **Encourage Residential Development**
 - Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) are in the process of identifying potential changes to waive or modify development standards to facilitate office-to-residential conversions.

- Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects. Following up on recent State legislation, SEPA review will no longer be required on any projects in the City of Seattle that include a residential component. This should significantly speed up permitting for Downtown projects.
- **Support More Food Businesses Downtown**
 - Temporarily waive fees for Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) Street Use fees for temporary and year-long food trucks and carts and small-to-medium scale street and sidewalk events and activities open to the public.
- **Bridge Uncertain Economic Conditions**
 - Extend the term of existing Master Use Permits (MUP) to six years, if the applicant files a written request.
 - Allow more time for issued building permits to be developed for projects vested to the 2015 and 2018 Building Codes.
- **Allow for Expanded Street Use Downtown**
 - Expand the range of street-level uses to include office, conference room, lab space, and residential building amenities.
 - Expand allowed uses for street-level spaces and retail and recreation uses on all floors.
 - Increase Floor Area Ratio levels in Belltown to increase hotel development, creating permanent jobs and providing more places for tourists and visitors to stay.
 - Waive building code retrofit requirements to install temporary uses or return to former use.
 - Extend retail, restaurant, and entertainment Floor Area Ratio exemption to all levels in a structure.
- **Invest in a Cleaner and Safer Downtown**
 - Pass supplemental budget legislation to expand Metropolitan Improvement District cleaning, safety, and hospitality services this summer and fall when major national and international events are being hosted Downtown.

Near-Term Initiatives Summary

Efforts that will happen over the next three years.

Goal 1: Make Downtown safe and welcoming

1. Seattle Police Department will continue to arrest individuals who are distributing and selling illegal drugs.
2. Seattle Police Department will continue special operations to reduce gun violence Downtown and throughout the city.
3. Increase service provider outreach along Third Avenue, as well as creating a One Seattle station physical location.

4. Launch a contingency management drug abatement program.
5. Establish an opioid overdose recovery center.
6. Establish one Crisis Care Center for adults – and potentially one for youth – as part of a regional network of five total centers made possible by voter approval of King County’s behavioral health levy in April.
7. Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, including Pike Pine Streetscape improvements.
8. Continue to support the 10-year renewal and expansion of the Downtown Seattle Association’s Metropolitan Improvement District for ongoing services.
9. Deliver a one-time grant to Downtown Seattle Association to boost cleaning, safety, and hospitality services this summer.
10. Improve street and sidewalk lighting along Third Avenue and in the Chinatown-International District.
11. Offer graffiti removal services on private property with owner permission.
12. Work with Washington State Department of Transportation to remove graffiti from Downtown exit signs and along I-5 and I-90.

Goal 2: Transform Downtown into a lively neighborhood where more people want to live

1. Upzone Third Avenue from Union to Virginia Street to allow for more affordable residential housing.
2. Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects.
3. Pass legislation and make regulatory changes to make it easier to convert underutilized office space to residential.
4. Bring satellite farmers markets into Downtown neighborhoods.
5. Attract additional and affordable grocery stores Downtown.
6. Activate neighborhood alleyways to create more pedestrian-friendly experiences.
7. Support the strategic vision defined by King County Executive Dow Constantine to redesign the County’s Downtown campus.
8. Complete the Downtown Subarea Plan as part of the major Seattle Comprehensive Plan update.

Goal 3: Create a unique Downtown retail experience

1. Launch The Liberty Project supporting Black-owned and other underserved businesses increase revenue.
2. Grow Seattle Restored to fill vacant storefronts with artists and small businesses.
3. Create a new Small Business Navigation Team to help small businesses successfully navigate City processes and connect them to resources.

Goal 4: Make Downtown a place where people want to work and that reflects the future of our economy

1. Convene public and private sector leaders to share strategies and drive effective return-to-office and hybrid work policies.

2. Create networking events in partnership with industry leaders that celebrate and welcome workers back Downtown, like Black Tech Night.
3. Incentivize the development of childcare and education services Downtown by allowing greater building heights when these facilities are included in new buildings.
4. Develop a “life at night” agenda to activate Downtown businesses in the late-night hours.

Goal 5: Celebrate Downtown Seattle’s arts, culture, sports, and entertainment

1. Hire a director of Citywide Special Events to implement the integrated and proactive strategy recommended in the City’s Special Events Vision and Strategy study completed in 2020.
2. Hire a Creative Economy manager.
3. Provide capital funding for accessibility and other capital improvements to Benaroya Hall, a City-owned arts facility.
4. Explore ways to bring Bumbershoot events Downtown.
5. Create more murals and other art installations throughout Downtown.
6. Support community-driven activations and cultural celebrations Downtown.

Goal 6: Make Downtown a top destination for Seattleites and visitors year-round

1. Install a network of digital navigation kiosks Downtown.
2. Partner with Seattle Public Schools to build a new Memorial Stadium at Seattle Center.
3. Open a Tribal Interpretive Center at Waterfront Park.
4. Connect Downtown neighborhoods with Waterfront Park.
5. Modify the Seattle Tourism Improvement Area to expand advertising for leisure and Convention Center marketing.

Goal 7: Create a healthy, resilient, and green Downtown

1. Pilot a green and healthy street by partially closing Pike Street between First and Second Avenues for pedestrians only.
2. Reopen City Hall Park.
3. Finish improvements to Downtown parks.
4. Complete the full construction of the Seattle Waterfront by 2025, including free family-friendly programming.
5. Explore the future use of Pier 48 as new open green space.
6. Further explore the lidding of I-5 to create park spaces and pedestrian connections from Capitol Hill to Downtown.
7. Pilot low-pollution neighborhoods Downtown by establishing low-emission delivery opportunities.
8. Implement the Building Emissions Performance Standards Policy (BEPS).

Space Needle Thinking

Visionary possibilities for the future of Downtown Seattle.

The City's engagement with community organizations, Downtown businesses, and residents regarding the Downtown Activation Plan generated tremendous excitement and energy, spurred by the Mayor's call for bold, innovative thinking. While urgent needs are a priority, there is a desire to have a community conversation about significant civic projects that could represent Seattle's innovative spirit for generations. We collaborated with community partners to develop initial Space Needle Thinking concepts included in this plan. These concepts serve as a starting point for a broader conversation incorporating public feedback and exploring viability and funding options with philanthropic and private partners.

- **Downtown Arts, Culture, and Entertainment District**
 - Develop a linear arts, culture, and entertainment district Downtown, securing funding to complete a connected streetcar route bringing together existing streetcar lines in South Lake Union and Capitol Hill that transports residents, workers, and visitors through the heart of Downtown.
- **Year-Round Play**
 - Keep Downtown active and connected year-round with a state-of-the-art indoor/outdoor sports and recreation facility. We can bring people of all ages, families, and professional and amateur players alike to connect through sports, play, and fun.
- **Heart of the City**
 - Reinvigorate Westlake Park as the “Heart of the City” making it a world-class plaza with interactive art installations, state-of-the-art technology, and year-round programming that welcomes Seattleites and visitors.
- **Vertical Neighborhoods**
 - Change zoning codes to allow for the development of vertical residential neighborhoods within buildings, including the amenities and resources that make a neighborhood. This would incentivize mixed-use buildings with spaces for schools, childcare facilities, community gathering spaces, retail shops, and families.
- **An Urban Forest**
 - Reach a 30% canopy cover goal by maximizing trees and greenery to make Downtown an “Urban Forest.” This could include big ideas like lidding I-5 and providing multiple spaces for people to be surrounded by nature and greenery in our city center. These efforts would further support residents by increasing climate resilience.
- **Mercado: A Market for Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color**
 - Mercados, translated to “markets” in English, are community-centric entrepreneurial spaces meant for connection, goods exchange, and learning about those we share space with. This initiative could start with a fund to

support small community-based organizations over the next four years to develop brick-and-mortar mercados that create physical spaces, visibility, and shared resources (e.g., commercial kitchens) for small businesses. The Mercado's value would be in creating a dedicated physical space for communities and small businesses to connect, share, and support each other, with an emphasis on underrepresented communities.

- **Makers Campus for Experiential Learning**

- We envision a space where students, entrepreneurs, educators, and large and small businesses can work together to “make” the future of our city a reality. This “Makerspace” will bring the worlds of work and education together in a state-of-the-art facility where students can earn their degrees, participate in paid training, learn about career opportunities Downtown, and, importantly, perhaps start their own businesses. The “Makerspace” would create an opportunity to bring Seattle's flagship educational institutions into Downtown where they can prepare their students for the jobs of the future with Downtown employers.