



Downtown

is



you

2023 Downtown Activation Plan
Progress Report

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On June 28, 2023, Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell announced details of Seattle's comprehensive Downtown Activation Plan – a bold and ambitious roadmap to revitalize and transform Downtown Seattle now and for the future.

Joined by hundreds of civic, community, business, social service, and neighborhood leaders from the core of Downtown in Westlake Park, Mayor Harrell elevated critical ongoing efforts and detailed a path of action to create the Downtown of the future.

Today, the City is reporting on its progress in the first six months of the Downtown Activation Plan.



Over the last six months, the City took quick action to make progress across our key focus areas. This report reviews how the City is actively delivering on its promises.

We will showcase the wins and momentum building around the Downtown work.

We will also highlight where work is still in progress.

The first six months of the Downtown Activation Plan focused on...

Effectively launching the Downtown Activation Plan to the public and external stakeholders and continuing to **build awareness and excitement around the plan**

Collecting feedback on the Downtown Activation Plan from community and diverse stakeholders and **sharing it with fidelity to the City**

Galvanizing a conversation on the Future of Downtown Seattle (“civic big think”) with community

Updating the *Downtown is You* website to integrate updates on progress and share public input

Reporting out on progress on the Downtown Activation Plan to **inform 2024 implementation strategies and priorities**

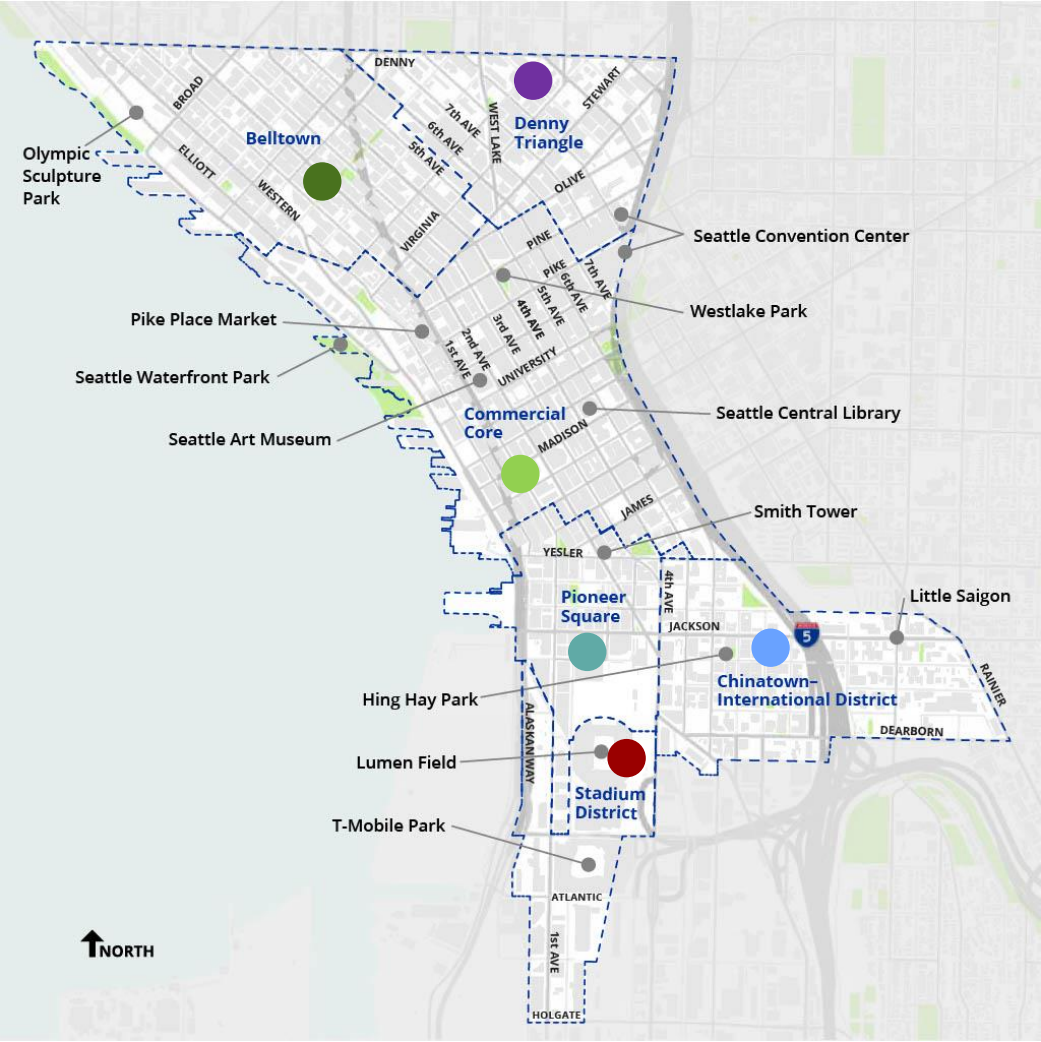


The Downtown Activation Plan aims to:

Bring people back to Downtown Seattle now...

...while intentionally designing a future of Downtown Seattle that works for you – working people, families with children, small business owners, and everyone who calls our city home.

Downtown includes a rich collection of neighborhoods



Downtown Activation Plan Zone
Source: Seattle’s Office of Planning & Community Development

- **Belltown** is a dense, urban neighborhood that is home to nightlife, local restaurants, and entertainment venues. Located next to the Waterfront, Belltown includes the Olympic Sculpture Park and is home to a large selection of human services that support people living in this neighborhood.
- As the anchor of Seattle’s Asian community for more than 100 years, the **Chinatown-International District (CID)** thrives as both a residential and business space. A resilient community, rich in history and culture, committed to self-determination despite the continuing impacts of development, public policies, and other structural inequities.
- The **Commercial Core** is the central neighborhood of the Downtown urban center, where much of the city’s economic and civic activities take place. It includes the historic Pike Place Market, the oldest continuously operating farmers market in the country, the central waterfront, and attractions like the Seattle Art Museum, Benaroya Hall, the Seattle Central Library, and Westlake Center.
- **Denny Triangle** stretches from the edge of the Downtown core to the grounds of Seattle Center, next to the Pacific Science Center and Space Needle. This area is home to many new high-rise residential buildings, hotels, and corporate offices that cater to people living, working, and visiting the rapidly growing area.
- **Pioneer Square**, known as Seattle’s “first neighborhood” is a draw for many with its historic architecture, King Street Station and events like the First Thursday Art Walk. Filled with art studios, galleries, bars, cafes, restaurants, and Occidental Park.
- The **Stadium District** supports major sports, entertainment, retail gatherings, and events while maintaining the surrounding bustling industrial and maritime functions that are critical to our local and regional economy.

Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan is organized around seven bold goals to implement now while also laying the foundation for a new future for Downtown Seattle.

This plan recognizes that success depends on **first addressing public safety.**



Make Downtown **safe** and welcoming



Transform Downtown into a lively **neighborhood** where more people can afford to live



Create a unique Downtown **retail** experience



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



Celebrate Downtown Seattle's **arts, culture, sports, and entertainment**



Make Downtown **a top destination** for Seattleites and visitors year-round



Create a healthy, resilient, and **green** Downtown



Stabilizing Downtown in the near-term
lays the foundation for a future that serves
all of Seattle.

The City is making progress on the seven bold
goals through policy changes and new City
initiatives over the next three years.

Six Months of Progress: Legislation



2023 Downtown Activation Plan legislative accomplishments

Rezoned parts of Downtown

- Updated 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 allows for high-rise residential development with incentives for providing childcare and education facilities.

Encouraged residential development

- Waived State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects. Following 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 will significantly speed up permitting for Downtown projects.

Temporarily waived permit fees for food trucks and smaller special events

- Temporarily waived 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.

Allowed for expanded uses at street-level

- Increased the flexibility for hotels in a two-block area in the Belltown neighborhood by applying residential housing standards to hotels.

2023 Downtown Activation Plan legislative accomplishments

Activated cultural spaces with a focus on youth

- Approved a lease agreement with Cultural Space Agency for Station Space, a new arts and culture hub on second floor of King Street Station that will be home to five nonprofits, all focused on youth and the arts, and led by people of color.
- Affirmed the City of Seattle's support for a public-private partnership between the City, Seattle Public Schools, and the One Roof Partnership to redevelop Memorial Stadium.

Expanded partnerships for parks activations

- Approved an agreement with the Downtown Seattle Association to bring new activation activities to Bell Street Park and Pioneer Park, in addition to DSA's existing work in Occidental Square and Westlake Park.

Increased resources for travel and tourism promotion

- Passed new legislation for the Seattle Tourism Improvement Area that includes an updated, more equitable assessment formula for the fees generated from overnight guests at Downtown hotels. This legislation also broadens the use for this funding, so Visit Seattle can promote Seattle for business travel and conventions, as well as leisure travelers.

Downtown legislation already underway for early 2024

Encourage residential development

- Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) are in the process of identifying potential changes to waive or modify development standards to facilitate office-to-residential conversions.

Increase wayfinding Downtown

- Looking to update sign code to install digital kiosks across Downtown to maximize the economic impact of drawing visitors to popular attractions, historic districts, and neighborhood business districts that showcase Seattle's unique retailers and arts and cultural opportunities.

Extend master use and building permits

- 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.

Six Months of Progress: Seven Bold Goals



Progress Reporting Language

Complete

The Downtown Activation Plan seeks to create sustainable activations. Many initiatives marked “Complete” denote that an initiative, activation, or event took place AND will continue in the future.

In Progress

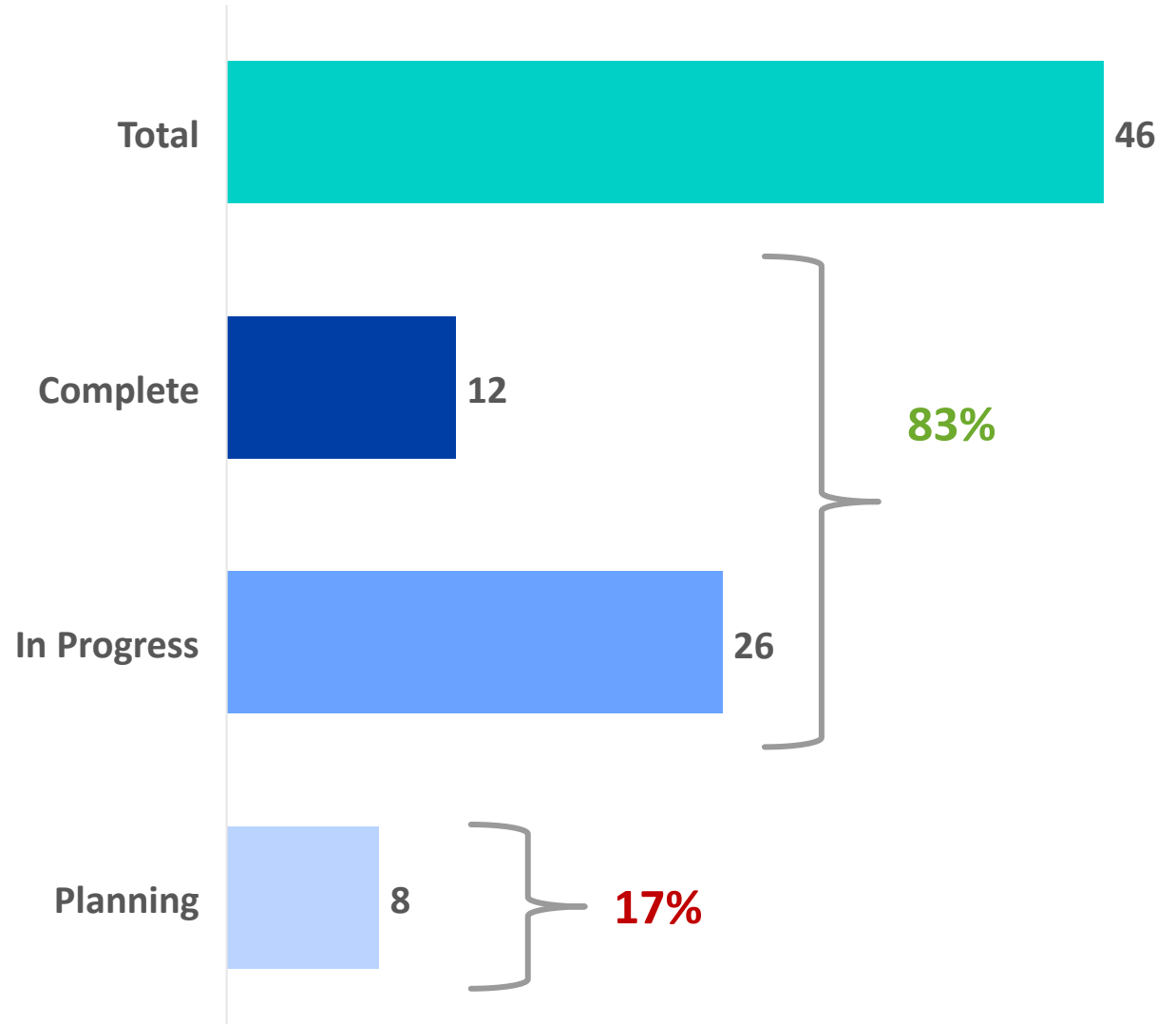
Initiatives marked as “In Progress” started but are not completed as of the publication of this report. The plans for these exist and execution is at various stages of implementation.

Planning

“Planning” describes initiatives that are still in the early planning stages. Many of these are long-term and capital investments that require a longer timeframe or are partnerships.

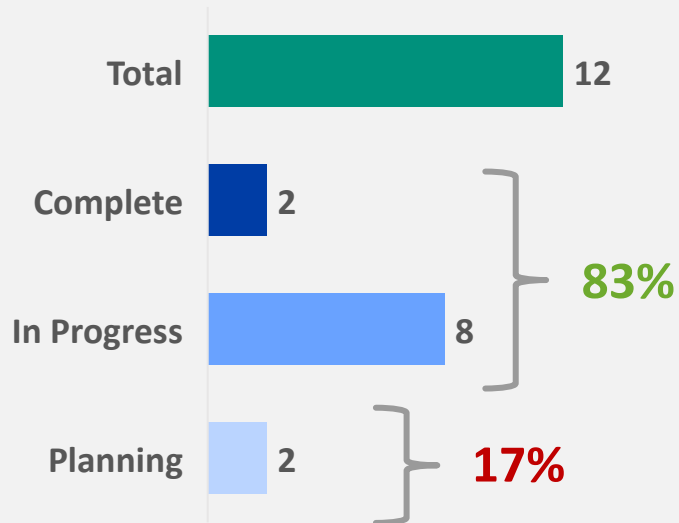
Of the 46 initiatives introduced in the Downtown Activation Plan...

- 26% are complete
- 57% are already in progress





Make Downtown safe and welcoming



Downtown cleaning efforts progressed through the renewal and expansion of the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID). Downtown continues to struggle with the [synthetic drug epidemic](#) that we are seeing nationally across large cities.

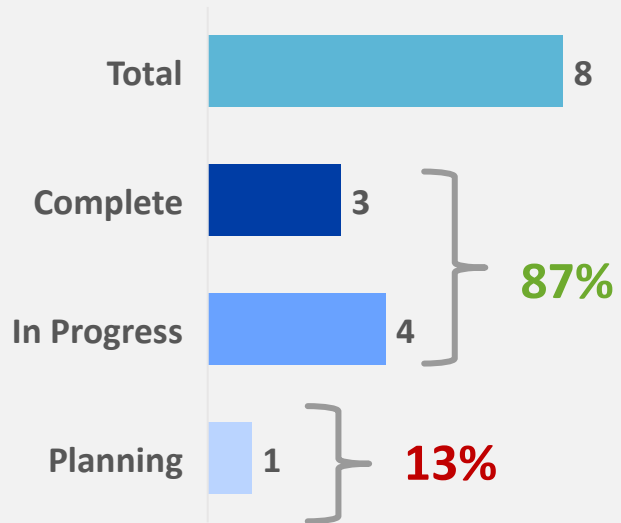
- [The Mayor established a 24-member work group](#) to address open air synthetic drug use.
- In partnership with [Uplift Northwest](#), the City **relaunched the [Graffiti Abatement Program](#)**. Through November 2023, Uplift NW cleaned 289 sites, mostly in the Chinatown-International District.
- A [renewed and expanded MID](#) allowed Downtown Seattle Association to increase their Clean Team Ambassadors' program by [66%](#).
- The City committed an **additional \$1.7 million in one-time funding for cleaning**, \$200,000 of which is specifically allocated to the Chinatown-International District.
- **Plymouth Housing Authority was granted funding by the City to start their contingency management pilot.**



Photo by Downtown Seattle Association



Transform Downtown into a lively neighborhood where more people can afford to live



The Downtown population increased 61% since 2013, with more than 106,000 residents now living Downtown. The number of occupied apartment units maintained a post-pandemic high, surpassing **57,000 occupied units** for the first time ever.

- The Seattle City Council passed [zoning changes](#) to create more housing Downtown, including changes to the [design review process](#) to increase the long-term production of affordable housing.
- Following the [Office-to-Residential Conversion Competition](#), the Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development is actively working to identify the first office building to be transitioned into housing.
- In partnership with Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority, FAS, and OED, the [City Hall Farmers Market](#) returned in July and August 2023.

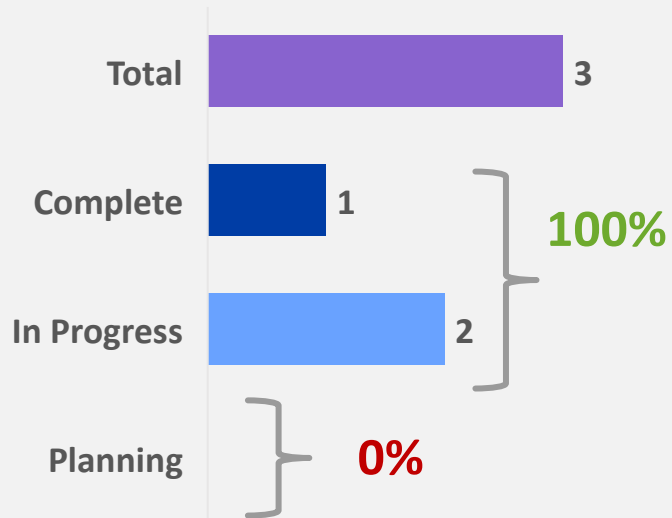


Photo by Pike Place Market

- The City's Downtown Subarea Plan is expected in 2025 and aligns with the Downtown Activation Plan, building on large-term civic planning.



Create a unique Downtown retail experience



In 2023, first quarter retail sales across Seattle went up nearly 8% compared to the first quarter of 2022. While there are bright spots in retail recovery, like Pike Place Market, recovery is uneven across Downtown.

- The [Liberty Project](#), a new business growth program for unrepresented communities in Seattle, launched and is now [accepting applications](#) from local businesses to increase growth and expand opportunities for businesses owned by underrepresented communities.
- We saw old spaces become new again as new businesses moved into well-known buildings like [Hometeam](#) and [The Monkey Bridge](#) in Pioneer Square, [SIFF acquiring the Cinerama building](#) in Belltown, and [Ben Bridge Jewelry](#) opening its new flagship in the Retail Core.
- This year, nine Seattle Restored participants **gained stability through long-term leases**.
- The City also developed the **Small Business Navigation Team** to help small businesses successfully navigate City processes and connect them to resources.

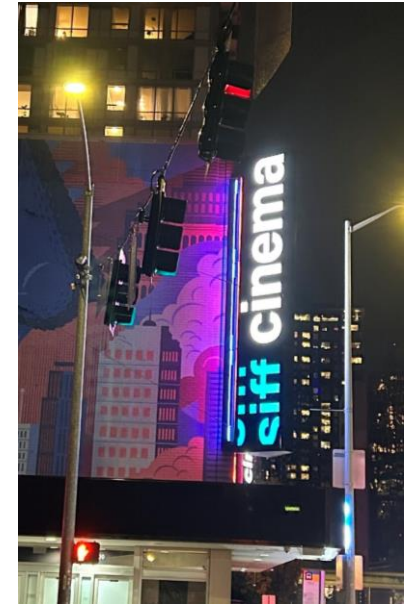
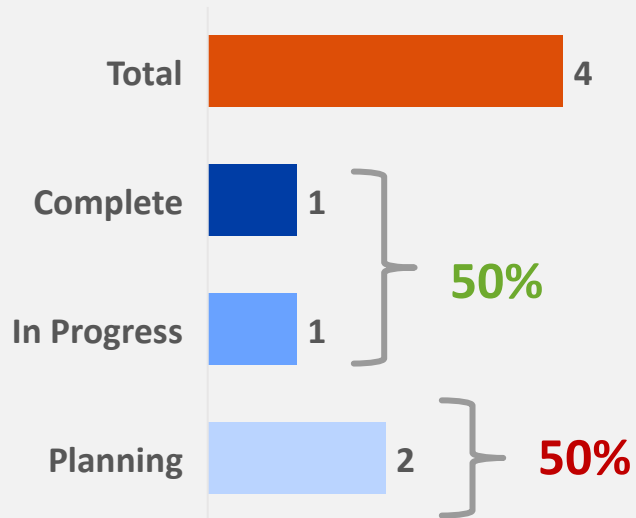


Photo by Kinetic West



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



Downtown averaged more than 85,000 daily workers in October 2023. This is the second-highest daily average since the start of the pandemic and marks the sixth straight month where worker foot-traffic levels have surpassed 50% compared to the same period in 2019.

- Many large employers recognized that coming back to work Downtown is a great thing. They are using hybrid options in collaboration with City efforts to bring folks back to work while still offering flexibility to workers.

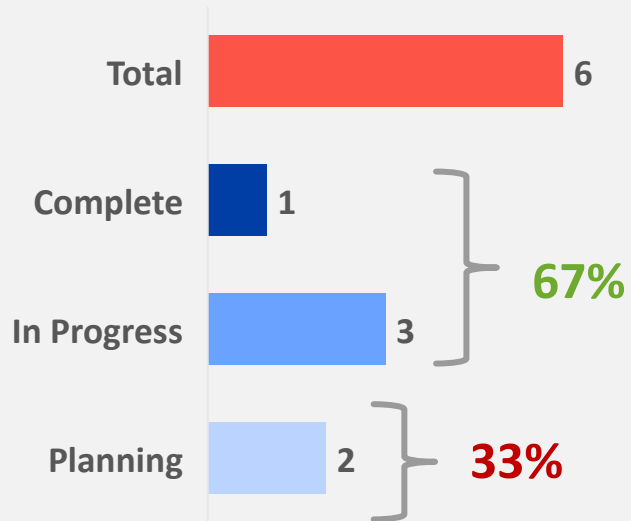


Photo by Seattle Office of Economic Development

- In 2024, the City will develop a “Life at Night agenda” in 2024 with some initiatives already taking place, including nighttime worker safety trainings facilitated by the Seattle Police Foundation.
- Continued Black Tech Nights and other networking activities across Downtown.
- Based on stakeholder feedback, the City will conduct a retail analysis in 2024 to better understand the needs of residents and workers and how to retain and attract those amenities in partnership with Downtown stakeholders.



Celebrate Downtown Seattle's arts, culture, sports, and entertainment



Weekend foot traffic climbed in the summer months and into the fall, and [sales tax revenues](#) associated with art and culture activities continue to increase.

- [King Street Station opened a new youth arts hub](#), called Station Space with a 60-year, rent-free lease from the City. It provides creative and cultural spaces for youth groups, focusing on underserved communities of color, especially Indigenous youth.



Photo by Karen Ducey, The Seattle Times

- Seattle Parks and Recreation hosted [two outdoor events](#), Youth 3x3 Basketball tournament and Pickleball-For-All. Three blocks were closed at Taylor and 5th Avenue for the events with two permanent pickleball courts now open in the Denny Triangle neighborhood.
- [Bumbershoot returned to Seattle Center](#) after a three-year hiatus to an estimated 40,000 attendees.
- The Seattle Office of Arts & Culture continues investing in the City's creative future, [awarding \\$1.13 million to more than 75 local artists and organizations, including 60 new Downtown murals.](#)

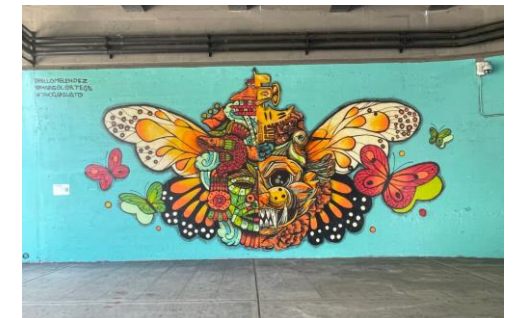
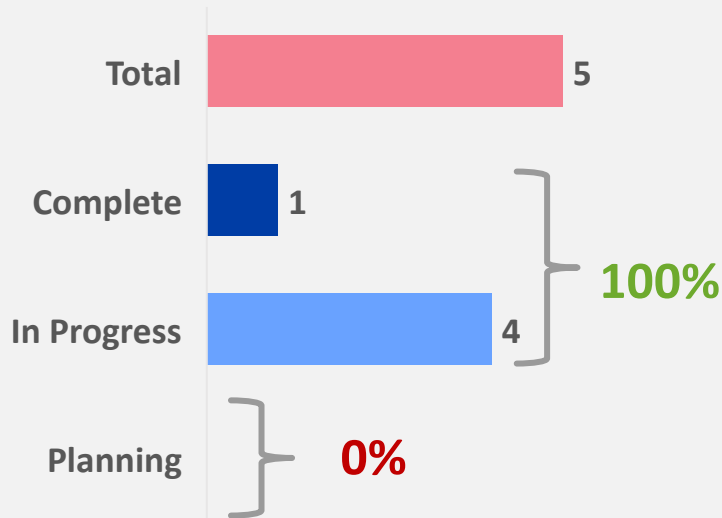


Photo by [Mexam NW Festival](#)



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



Over 11 million visitors came Downtown in summer 2023 across four months. This represented about 91% of the visitors seen in summer 2019. Summer 2023 also saw the highest number of hotel rooms sold Downtown since 2019.

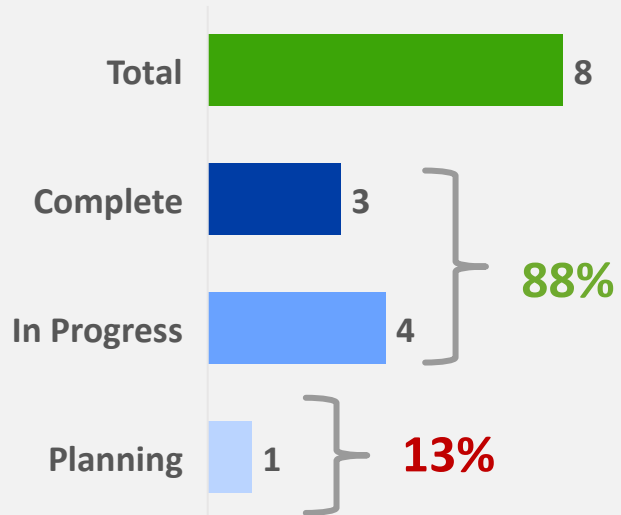
- [Record-shattering 2023 summer](#) with over 3 million visitors in July alone for the MLB All-Star game and major concerts.
- [DSA's Summer Sounds concert series](#) brought more than 12,100 attendees to 10 different Downtown outdoor venues for 37 free shows across nine weeks. That's a 50% increase over last season's series.
- **Seattle's Memorial Stadium is progressing.** The project plans to break ground by the end of next year with a goal of opening the stadium by May or June 2026.
- **Legislation is in development to allow the installation of 30 digital kiosks** around Downtown in 2024 that will help visitors with navigating to attractions, businesses, parks, retail and more.



Photo by Downtown Seattle Association



Create a healthy, resilient, and green Downtown



Early data shows that the green goal is one of the most popular among survey respondents. The summer saw ongoing activations in Downtown parks, including the reopening of City Hall Park, and new creative uses of public space to drive foot traffic.

- An unprecedented public-private partnership to connect, restore, and revitalize parks along the Elliott Bay waterfront. Privately funded, the [Elliott Bay Connections](#) project creates a new greenway and park improvements by June 2026, when Seattle co-hosts the FIFA World Cup.



Photo by Downtown Seattle Association

- The City's new [Building Emissions Performance Standard](#) to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions 27% from Existing Buildings was signed on December 13, 2023.
- The Mayor included investments in his 2024 budget to increase support for the recently launched **Seattle Electric Trucks Incentive Pilot**.

Six Months of Progress: Space Needle Thinking





All photos by Jonathan Boone (Boone Media)

Space Needle Thinking: Ideas with community

On November 27, 44 community members joined the City's engagement team, [Kinetic West](#), at the Space Needle to think about the future of Downtown. During a half-day session, community shared their vision for the future and how Downtown can become more equitable for all. Below are some of the most prominent themes shared:

Downtown needs more public spaces for people to convene and connect, spaces to sit and be in community, block parties and celebrations of art and music, spaces for young people to interact with the city, and “[Nature play and learning places](#)” parks for children and families.

Community wants robust, art-filled community centers that are welcoming and allow people to experience cross-cultural engagement, access resources like childcare, and form community bonds. (e.g., [United Indians – Daybreak Star Center](#)).

They want to see a city that more clearly connects to, and honors, nature and Indigenous history.

- A Seattle that is integrated into the natural landscape (water, greenery) and infrastructure serves as art, not just utility.
- Rather than a city of tall, glass buildings - one with unique and varied bridges, green rooftops, and vertical landscaping.
- Expand the green spaces to create a Seattle Central Park, creating reservoirs that protect the Puget Sound from urban runoff.
- Highlighting the cultural routes of Seattle's Indigenous history and heritage through art.

Progress is underway... turning visionary ideas into reality

**Downtown Arts, Culture,
and Entertainment District**



Year-Round Play



Heart of the City



Vertical Neighborhoods



An Urban Forest



**Mercado: Market for Black, Indigenous,
and Communities of Color**



**Makers Campus for
Experiential Learning**





Appendix



Detailed Initiative Tracker

	Planning	In Progress	Complete
Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives			
Goal 1: Make Downtown safe and welcoming			
1. Seattle Police Department will continue to arrest individuals who are distributing and selling illegal drugs		X	
2. Seattle Police Department will continue special operations to reduce gun violence throughout the city		X	
3. Increase service provider outreach in Third Avenue, as well as create a One Seattle station physical location		X	
4. Launch a contingency management drug abatement program		X	
5. Establish an opioid overdose recovery center		X	
6. Establish one Crisis Care Center for adults – and potentially one for youth – as part of a regional network of five total centers	X		
7. Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, including Pike Pine Streetscape improvements		X	
8. Continue to support the 10-year renewal and expansion of the Downtown Seattle Association’s Metropolitan Improvement District for ongoing service			X
9. Deliver a one-time grant to Downtown Seattle Association to boost cleaning, safety, and hospitality services			X
10. Improve street and sidewalk lighting across Downtown		X	
11. Offer graffiti removal services on private property with owner permission.		X	
12. Work with WSDOT to remove graffiti from Downtown exit signs and along I-5 and I-90	X		

	Planning	In Progress	Complete
Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives			
Goal 2: Transform Downtown into a lively neighborhood where more people can afford to live			
1. Upzone Third Avenue from Union to Virginia Street to allow for more affordable residential housing			X
2. Waive State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements for all residential projects			X
3. Pass legislation and make regulatory changes to make it easier to convert underutilized office space to housing		X	
4. Bring satellite farmers markets into Downtown neighborhoods			X
5. Attract additional and affordable grocery stores Downtown	X		
6. Activate neighborhood alleyways to create more pedestrian-friendly experiences		X	
7. Support the strategic vision defined by King County Executive Dow Constantine to redesign the County's Downtown campus		X	
8. Complete the Downtown Subarea Plan as part of the major Comprehensive Plan update		X	
Goal 3: Create a unique Downtown retail experience			
1. Launch The Liberty Project supporting underserved, particularly Black-owned businesses			X
2. Grow Seattle Restored to fill vacant storefronts with artists and small businesses		X	
3. Create a new Small Business Navigation Team to help small businesses successfully navigate City processes and connect them to resources.		X	

	Planning	In Progress	Complete
Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives			
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	X		
2. Create networking events that celebrate and welcome workers back Downtown, like the successful Black Tech Night		X	
3. Incentivize the development of childcare and education services by allowing greater building heights when these facilities are included in new buildings		X	
4. Develop a “life at night agenda” to activate Downtown businesses in the late-night hours	X		
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	X		
2. Hire a creative economy manager			X
3. Provide capital funding for accessibility and other capital improvements to Benaroya Hall, a City-owned arts facility.	X		
4. Explore ways to bring Bumbershoot events Downtown			X
5. Create more murals and other art installations throughout Downtown		X	
6. Support community-driven activations and cultural celebrations Downtown			X

	Planning	In Progress	Complete
Downtown Activation Plan Initiatives			
Goal 6: Make Downtown a top destination for Seattleites and visitors year-round			
1. Install a network of digital navigation kiosks Downtown		X	
2. Partner with Seattle Public Schools to build a new Memorial Stadium		X	
3. Open a Tribal Interpretive Center at Waterfront Park		X	
4. Connect Downtown neighborhoods with Waterfront Park		X	
5. Modify the Seattle Tourism Improvement Area to expand advertising for leisure and Convention Center marketing			X
Goal 7: Create a healthy, resilient, and green Downtown			
1. Pilot a green and healthy street by closing Pike Street between First and Second Avenues for pedestrians only			X
2. Reopen City Hall Park			X
3. Finish improvements to Downtown parks		X	
4. Complete the full construction of the Seattle Waterfront by 2025, including free, family-friendly programming		X	
5. Explore the future use of Pier 48 as new open green space	X		
6. Continue to explore the lidding of I-5 to create park spaces and pedestrian connections from Capitol Hill to Downtown		X	
7. Pilot low-pollution neighborhoods Downtown by establishing low-emission delivery opportunities		X	
8. Implement the Building Emissions Performance Standard Policy (BEPS)			X