

# Downtown Development Survey Report

## **Introduction & Purpose**

The following report details the methods and results of The Dalles Downtown Development Survey, which was conducted from October 2009 through January 2010. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from businesses and property owners on development options for the future of downtown The Dalles.

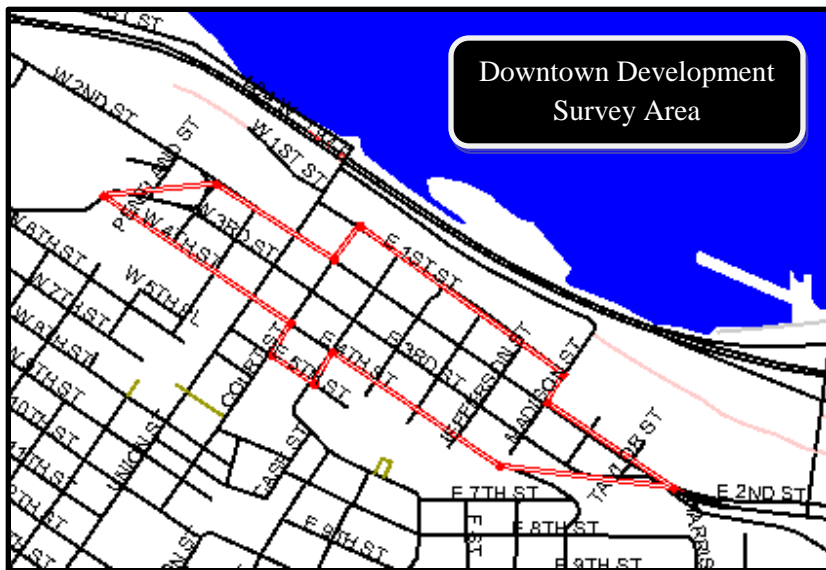
These development options were proposed as part of a continuing effort to revitalize the downtown in light of its economic and cultural importance to the community. The primary goal of this type of development would be to promote downtown as an attractive destination for residents and visitors as well as existing and new businesses. Considering the historic character of downtown The Dalles, another goal would be to preserve and enhance the area's historical assets.

Downtown development has a long history in The Dalles. For decades, the combined efforts of public agencies, private businesses, and dedicated volunteers have created new opportunities for the downtown and the community as a whole. More recently, downtown development has continued in the form of physical improvements implemented by Urban Renewal as well as construction of new buildings and restoration of historic buildings for new uses. In addition, the downtown also organizes and hosts several local festivals and events.

In order to support these efforts and to plan for the long-term economic sustainability of downtown, the City undertook a survey process. The survey was used to determine whether downtown stakeholders wanted to complement physical improvements with organizational improvements. Such organization—whether done by the City, the Chamber, or a nonprofit group—would serve to combine and focus all local efforts to promote and improve downtown.

## **Methodology**

The survey process began with an inventory of downtown, which included location and contact information for all downtown property owners and tenants. Downtown was defined as the area from 1<sup>st</sup> Street to 4<sup>th</sup> Street and from Pentland Street to Brewery Grade (please see map). A portion of 5<sup>th</sup> Street between Court and Washington Streets was also included. This broad definition of downtown was



chosen intentionally to make the survey as inclusive as possible.

Using this inventory as a guide, personal visits were made to over 200 businesses and organizations in the downtown, some of whom also owned the property where their businesses were located. The proposed development was discussed with each of these stakeholders and they were offered the opportunity to take the survey online or on paper. In the case of property owners who leased their buildings to others, a paper survey was sent via mail.

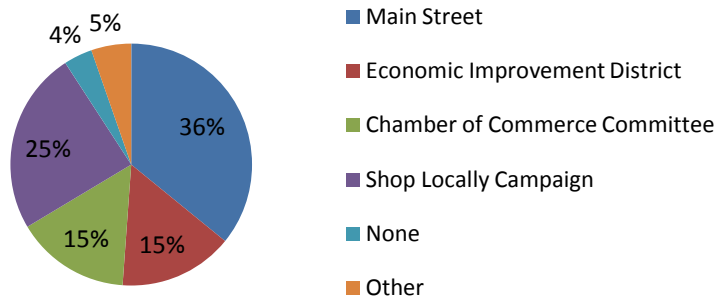
Once developed, the survey was distributed to just over 300 recipients, 91 of whom responded (30% return rate). Of the respondents, 14% were property owners exclusively, 51% were business owners exclusively, and 35% owned both the property and the business.

## Survey Results

Survey respondents were asked 9 questions: 5 involving downtown development and 4 demographic questions. The first three questions regarding downtown development and project funding are detailed below in charts. The remaining results are summarized, but a full record of each question and answer is available.

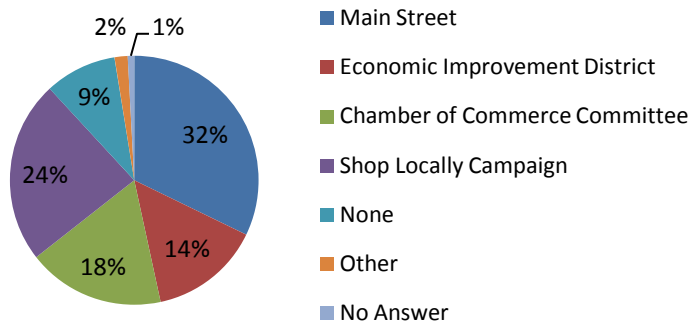
Which of the following options do you think would **work best** for downtown development in The Dalles?

### Best Option



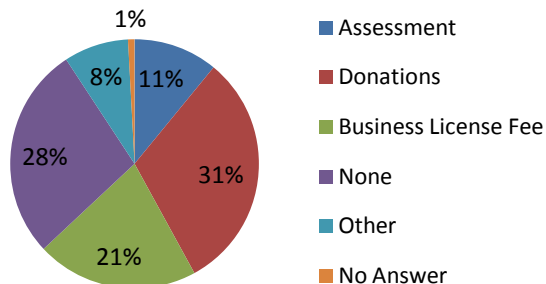
In which of the following options would you be most likely to **participate**?

### Would Participate



In addition to grant funding, which of the following **funding options** would you support?

### Funding



Have you been involved with any downtown projects in the past?

More than 75% of respondents had *not* previously participated in the Downtown Development Association (1983), the Convention and Visitors Bureau (1989-1994), or the Trade Center Association (1986-2001).

Would you be interested in having more public gathering spaces (parks, plazas, etc.) in downtown The Dalles?

Approximately two-thirds of respondents answered yes to this question.

Where is your downtown business and/or property (physical address)?

The majority of survey respondents were property or business owners on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Just under one-third of those surveyed were from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and just under one-quarter were from 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Only three of the respondents had property on 1<sup>st</sup> Street.

Are you a member of The Dalles Chamber of Commerce?

Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they were Chamber members. It should be noted that respondents who are property owners only (i.e., those who do not also own a downtown business) were equally as likely as other respondents to be Chamber members. For this reason, their responses were not omitted.

Are you a member of the Chamber's Downtown Committee?

16% of those surveyed considered themselves members of this committee.

Do you volunteer with any organizations in the community/region?

Several of the downtown development scenarios presented in the survey rely on volunteerism. Therefore, the purpose of this question was to ascertain the frequency and type of volunteering done by downtown stakeholders. It is unlikely that any direct correlations can be made between existing volunteerism and potential future volunteerism, this is nonetheless useful information.

## **Comments**

Most of the comments made during personal visits with downtown businesses addressed: support for continued downtown promotion/revitalization, concern about the potential costs of future development projects, and opposition to redundant development efforts. For the most part, businesses were pleased to be able to speak in-person with a City representative.

In addition to these informal discussions, respondents could also write comments on their surveys. A full record of all written comments is available, but the following is a summary of the most frequent comments (organized by the three most frequently occurring themes):

1. The current downtown atmosphere does little to attract residents/visitors/expanding businesses/new businesses
  - Shops should be open more hours and days
  - All downtown businesses need to offer more to draw and keep people in the area
  - The visual aspect of downtown is not appealing enough to attract visitors
  - Parking is insufficient
  - More public spaces/gathering spaces will keep people downtown once they are there
2. The downtown should not be a development priority given current economic circumstances
  - Funding would be wasted on further downtown development
  - Additional taxes would hurt business
  - Funding should be used instead to attract jobs/industry
  - There is not a consumer base to support a redeveloped downtown
3. Organization is vital to successful, long-term downtown development
  - A paid, full-time director is required
  - Local businesses willingness/participation is essential
  - A coordinated effort will result in a better "look and feel" for downtown