



MOVING MERRIAM FORWARD · DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

Update

Joint work session — Planning Commission and City Council

Three vision frameworks · community survey results · funding tools · what comes next

September 14, 2026 6 pm – 7 pm at City Hall

Five Updates



1 A statistically valid survey

471 residents and business owners responded to the mailed and online survey conducted in July.

2 Public Workshop #2

About 60 people worked through the three visions and implementation priorities on Sept. 1.

3 Funding tools identified

Five potential main funding sources described, with no source yet attached to any vision.

4 Three vision frameworks

The community narrowed the direction to three scales of change — A, B and C — released Aug. 8.

5 Path Forward

All three scales brought forth to Planning Commission & City Council with plans for each.
Scale selected for Comprehensive Plan Update in 2027

Where this sits in the process

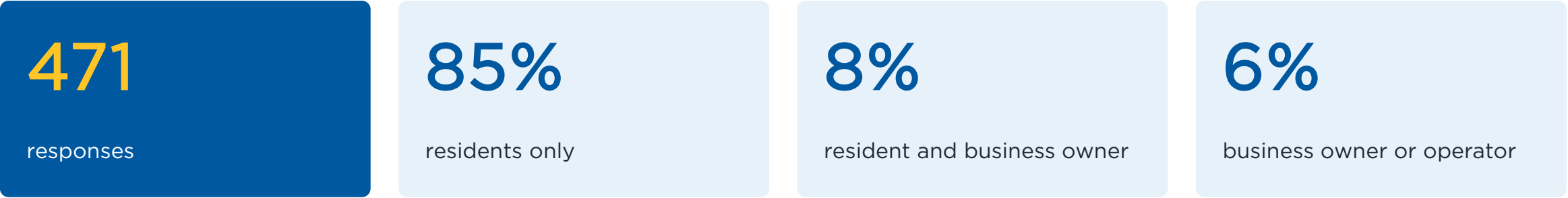
JUL 13	AUG 8	SEP 1	SEP 29	OCT 4	NOV 4 / NOV 23
Council briefing	Three visions released	Public Workshop #2	Steering Committee #4	Online tool closes	PC and Council
Existing conditions and work plan	Boards, handout and online survey	About 60 participants	Vision preference by written ballot	Vision framework online results	Each body receives the final draft

The Nov. 4 Planning Commission meeting and the Nov. 23 City Council meeting are each meetings to receive the final draft. The formal Comprehensive Plan 2040 amendment is scheduled for 2027.

Two Steering Committee sessions and two public workshops preceded this briefing.



A statistically valid survey of residents and businesses



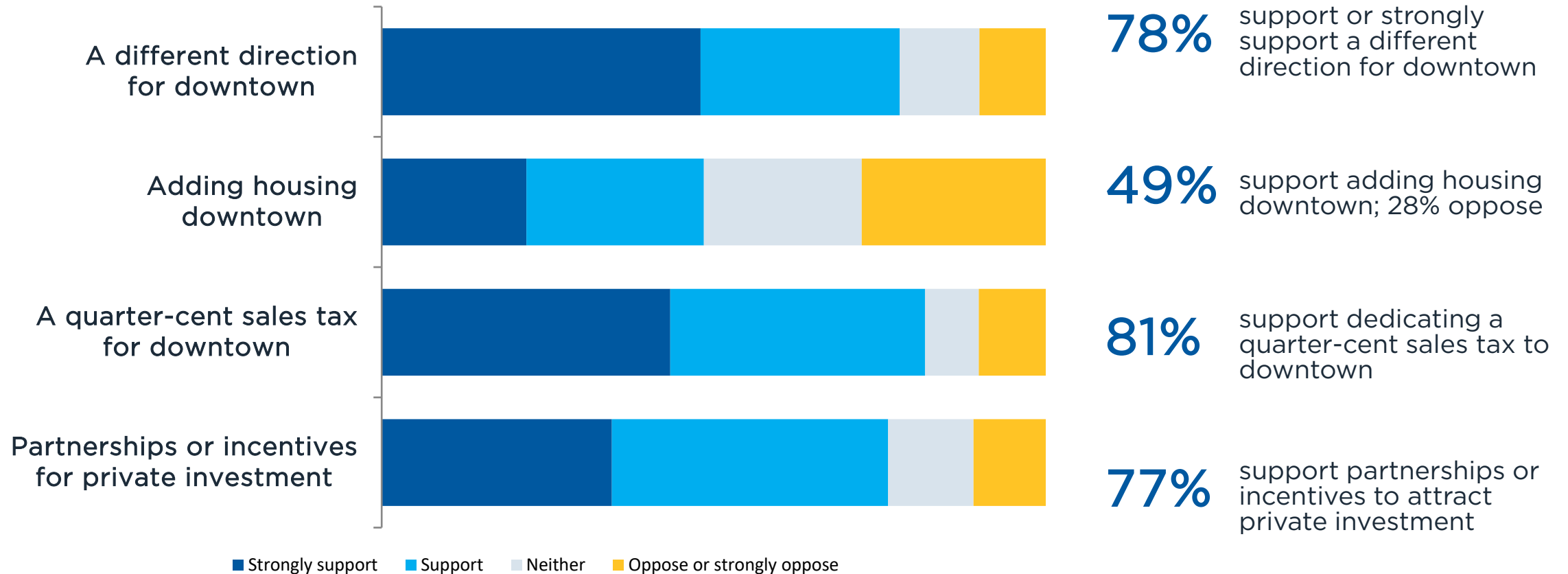
- **How it was done**

ETC Institute mailed a survey packet — cover letter, survey and postage-paid return envelope — to residents and business owners, followed up to encourage participation, and offered an online option.
- **Why it matters here**

This is a different instrument from the online vision framework survey. It measures the priorities of the community as a whole, including people who do not attend meetings.
- **Who answered**

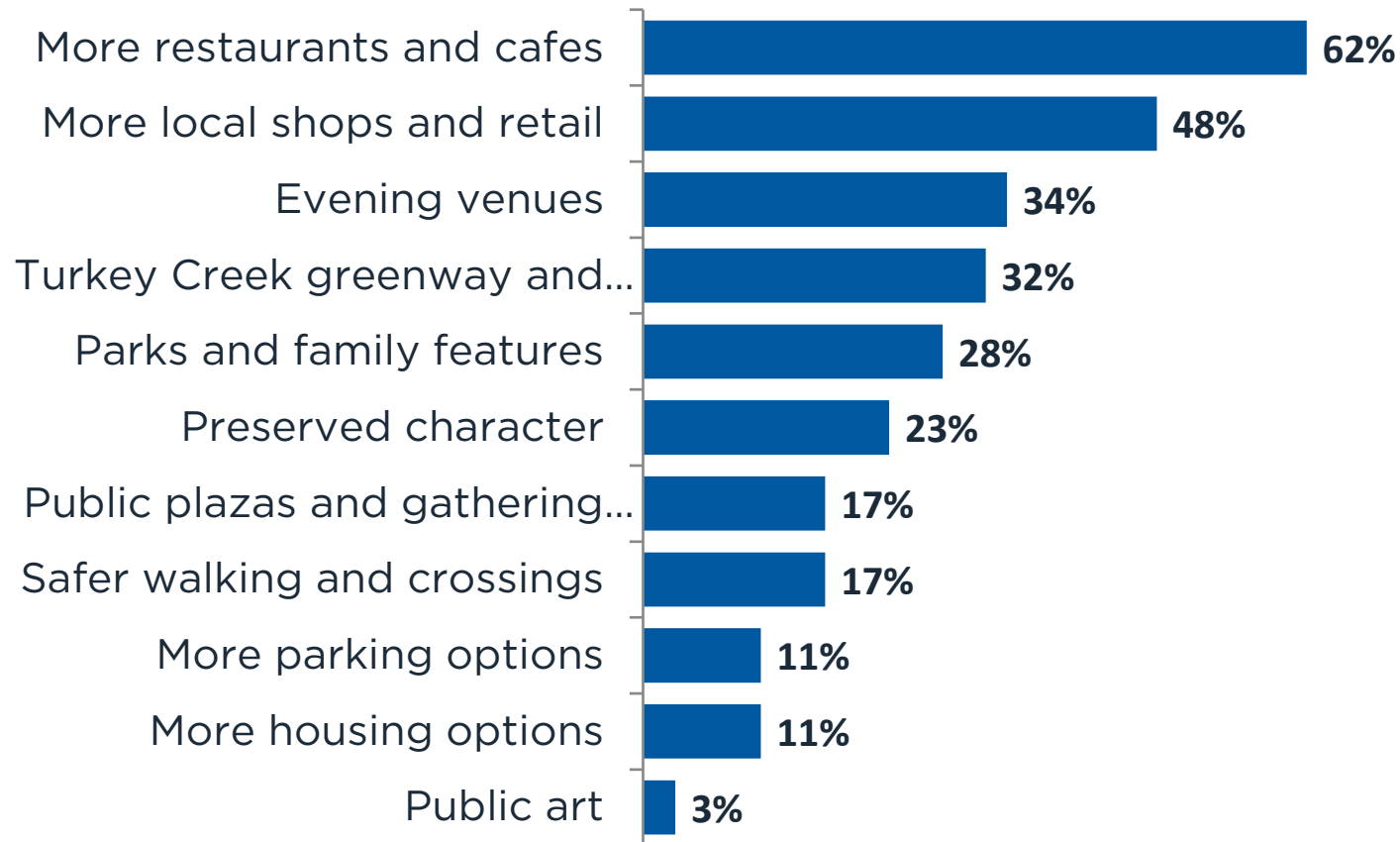
Respondents were spread evenly across age groups: 18 to 34, 18%; 35 to 44, 21%; 45 to 54, 20%; 55 to 64, 20%; 65 and over, 21%. Tenure was long — 40% have been in Merriam more than 20 years.

Residents support a different direction for downtown



Also: 65% say it matters that downtown be a place to go in the evenings and on weekends. On building scale, 40% see one to two stories as most appropriate and 37% a mix of heights depending on location.

What residents most want to see downtown



Food and drink lead

91% would be likely to visit sit-down restaurants and cafes if they were available downtown.

Then the market and local shops

84% would use an expanded or year-round farmers market; 83% locally owned shops and artisan goods.

Maker space has support

55% support live-work space for artists and makers; 47% a shared commercial kitchen or food business incubator.

Parking and housing rank lower as wishes

Both were named by 11% — but they remain conditions for the rest of the list to work.

What business owners said

89%

Respect for existing business locations and property rights is important or very important — 71% called it very important

86%

Safety in commercial areas, especially in the evening

72%

Reliable parking for customers and employees

68%

Reduced flood risk

67%

Support or strongly support a different direction for downtown; 15% strongly oppose

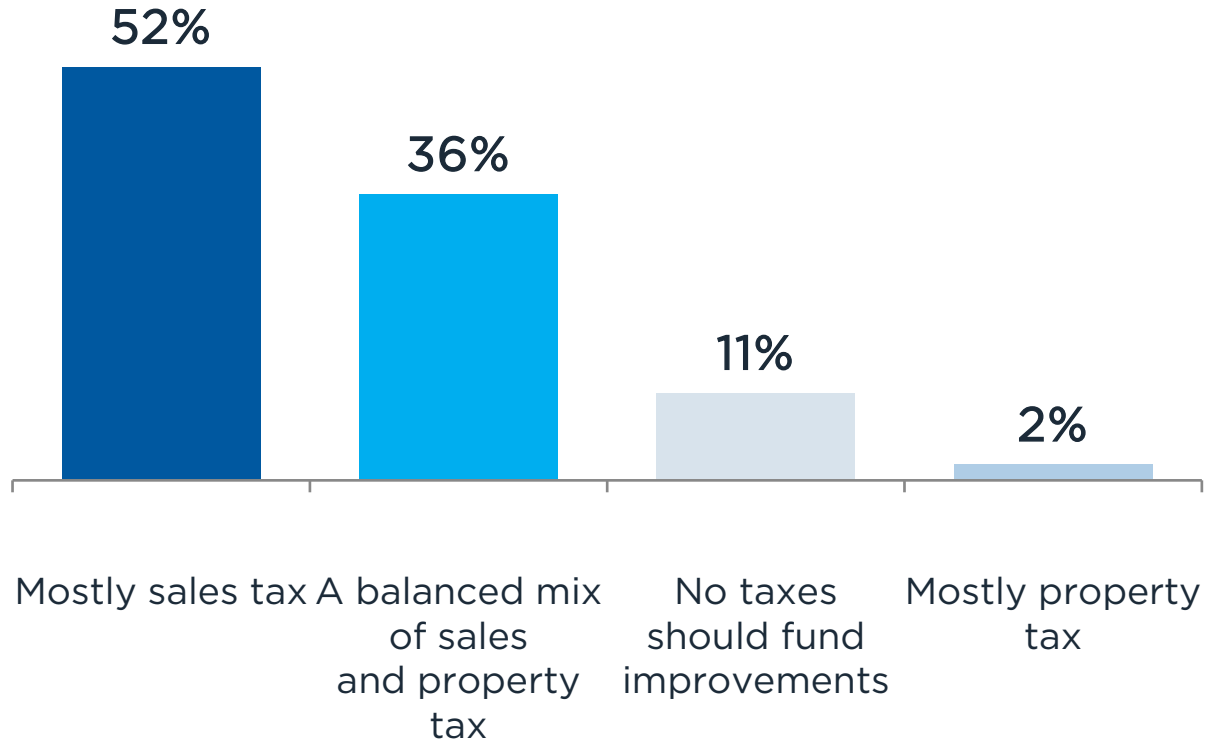
Most impact, top two choices

1. Streetscape and public realm improvements that bring more people downtown — 36%
2. The City's respect for existing business locations and property rights — 35%

Next five years

48% expect their business to stay about the same · 32% expect to grow or expand in Merriam · 12% are considering closing or selling · 9% are considering relocating outside Merriam

How residents would pay for downtown improvements



81%

Eighty-one percent of residents would support dedicating sales tax to downtown.

Why sales tax polls the way it does

Residents who chose sales tax cited that much of it is paid by people who shop in Merriam but live elsewhere. Merriam's 2025 retail pull factor of 5.71 is the highest of any city in Kansas, which means retail activity here far exceeds what the resident population alone would produce.

Five potential main funding sources

This is an overview of the tools. No funding strategy is recommended, and no source is attached to Vision A, B or C. That work is underway.

- 1 County stormwater cost share (SMAC)**

The largest single outside contribution available. Pays only for flood risk reduction — not land, buildings or streetscape. Percentage and schedule are still being confirmed in writing.
- 2 County road cost share (CARS)**

Pays 50% of construction and inspection on eligible arterial and collector projects; the City pays design and right of way. Merriam Drive from 55th Street to Antioch is already funded at \$7.58 million, with \$5.2 million from county, state and federal sources.
- 3 A dedicated annual amount in the capital improvement program**

The current five-year program carries downtown revitalization at \$300,000 a year, alongside \$12.5 million for Upper Turkey Creek drainage and \$14.4 million of Merriam Drive work held for this plan to direct.
- 4 Dedicated sales tax**

The quarter-cent sales tax that built the community center expires Dec. 31, 2027. A separate new quarter-cent for downtown could go to voters and, if approved, begin Jan. 1, 2028 — roughly \$2 million a year.
- 5 Private investment and development-based tools**

Tax increment financing, community improvement and transportation development districts, industrial revenue bonds, and tax credit programs. Most depend on a specific project or on new value being created first.

Flood safety is the top priority, and residents want both tracks



9 in 10

say keeping people safe during floods, including safe routes in and out, is important or very important



54%

say the City should invest in major flood improvements that keep Merriam Drive open during floods



44%

would pursue flood control and downtown improvements at the same time; 38% would do flood control first



71%

favor a moderate flood-protection option that balances cost and benefit; 14% the most protection regardless of cost

Awareness is already high. Eighty-one percent of residents are very aware (48%) or somewhat aware (33%) that downtown sits in the Turkey Creek floodplain and that this limits expansion and redevelopment.

One question drives everything else

How much change does the community want downtown?



The flood pathway follows from that choice

Each vision carries a different scale of flood works as a consequence — not as a starting assumption.

Each vision carries a different flood pathway

VISION A

No project, or limited

- The regulatory floodplain does not change.
- Merriam Drive remains in the floodway.
- Change is limited to land already out of the regulatory floodplain.

Flood Control = \$0

VISION B

No-Rise concept

- Flood works west of Merriam Drive, with compensating storage on the west side.
- Merriam Drive and land to its east come out of the regulatory floodplain..

Flood Control = \$84 M

VISION C

Two large-scale options

- A federal core levee, or a full build-out of the No-Rise concept.
- The levee option carries low funding likelihood given its cost-benefit ratio.
- Cost and access to Turkey Creek differ between the two options.

Flood Control 2 Options
= \$147-\$247 M

Flood risk is reduced, never eliminated. No vision solves flooding. Each one changes how much land can be built on, how safe access is during a major storm, and how long that takes.

The three visions at a glance

	VISION A — Refine	VISION B — Grow	VISION C — Transform
Scale of change	Small — downtown stays mostly as it is	Medium — new buildings on land taken out of the floodplain	Full — a complete walkable downtown on both sides of Merriam Drive
Acres out of the regulatory floodplain	24 of 44	33 of 44	44 of 44
Flood pathway	No project, or limited	No-Rise concept west of Merriam Drive	Large-scale flood control project — two options
People live downtown	No new housing in the core	About 250 homes in one mixed-use building	Homes throughout downtown
Merriam Drive	Stays in the floodway	Removed from the floodplain	Entire core out of the floodplain
When change happens	Can start now	Most change after flood works (2034)	Most change after flood works (2036+)
Disruption	Least change for existing owners	Impacts to existing businesses	Most change and most impacts

All three visions include these features

Drawn from community engagement to date. What differs between visions is how much of each is possible — not whether it is in the plan.

● GETTING AROUND

- Safe, well-lit streets with good sidewalks and landscaping
- Easy walking routes throughout downtown
- Clear wayfinding signage
- Good roads and functional utilities
- Adequate, attractive parking

● PLACES AND PEOPLE

- Farmers market
- Housing — townhomes, condos, apartments
- Local businesses serving community needs
- Artisan and maker spaces
- Public art, art alleys and murals
- Outdoor seating and gathering areas

● CREEK AND OPEN SPACE

- Turkey Creek trail connection
- Splash pad and family play area by the creek
- Open spaces with shade and natural features
- Rain gardens and natural stormwater management

● SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIP

- Flood warning system and evacuation plan in place before major development, if floodplain remains
- Regular events and programming
- Ongoing partnership with residents, businesses and property owners

Five strategies divide the same 44 acres



Refresh

Building stays in the floodplain; light updates only, minimal change



Reuse

Building stays and gets a new use; out of the floodplain



Redevelop

Building removed; new development built on the site; out of the floodplain



Build

New construction on vacant ground; out of the floodplain



Open Space

Parks, plazas, water features, gathering spaces; in or out of the floodplain

Build stays at 4 acres in every vision.



Downtown boundary shown in blue. Hatched area = regulatory floodplain. Label colors match the five strategies below.

What do the five strategies mean?

Refresh

Building stays in the floodplain; light updates only, minimal change

Reuse

Building stays, gets a new use; out of the floodplain

Redevelop

Building removed; new development built on the site; out of the floodplain

Build

New construction on vacant ground; out of the floodplain

Open Space

Parks, plazas, water features, gathering spaces; in or out of the floodplain

Refine: Small Scale

Downtown stays mostly as it is — refreshed, with activity concentrated in the small area already out of the regulatory floodplain. Mostly a daytime place, 9 to 5.

24

of 44 acres out of the regulatory floodplain



Out: 24 ac · In floodplain: 20 ac

FLOOD CONTROL

None or limited — the regulatory floodplain does not change

PEOPLE LIVE DOWNTOWN

No new housing in the core of downtown

WALKABLE MAIN STREET

No — Merriam Drive stays as is

SAFE ACCESS

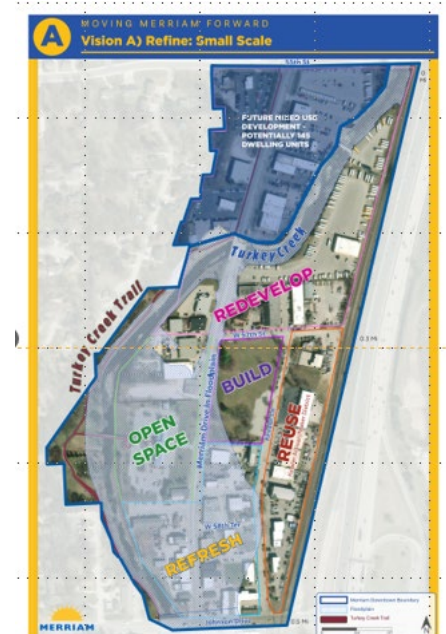
Merriam Drive stays in the floodway; access to the core can be difficult

SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS

In reused buildings and the area out of the regulatory floodplain

TIMELINE

No need to wait for flood works; change depends on owners changing use or voluntary sale



Grow: Medium Scale

New buildings on land taken out of the regulatory floodplain — including downtown's first new homes. Activity extends into evenings and some weekends.

33

of 44 acres out of the regulatory floodplain

Out: 33 ac · In floodplain: 11 ac

FLOOD CONTROL

Flood works west of Merriam Drive take Merriam Drive and land to its east out of the regulatory floodplain

PEOPLE LIVE DOWNTOWN

Yes — about 250 new homes in one mixed-use building

WALKABLE MAIN STREET

Partly — development mostly on one side of Merriam Drive

SAFE ACCESS

Merriam Drive removed from the regulatory floodplain

SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS

More retail and dining than today, still limited by the regulatory floodplain

TIMELINE

Most change after flood works (2034); grading plan and voluntary transactions can start now



Transform: Full Scale

A complete, walkable downtown — housing, shops, restaurants and open space on both sides of Merriam Drive. Active 18 hours a day, seven days a week.

44

of 44 acres out of the regulatory floodplain

Out: 44 ac · In floodplain: 0 ac

FLOOD CONTROL

Large-scale project takes the downtown core out of the regulatory floodplain

PEOPLE LIVE DOWNTOWN

Yes — homes throughout downtown

WALKABLE MAIN STREET

Yes — buildings on both sides, a more classic main street

SAFE ACCESS

Entire core out of the regulatory floodplain

SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS

Full shopping and dining street with anchors and local shops

TIMELINE

Most change after flood works (2036+), depending on which project is selected



What we heard at Public Workshop #2

Reaction was mostly positive or curious

A small number of participants were strongly opposed. Comment cards showed some duplicate handwriting; most unique comments were positive for change.

Broad support for three moves

Removing heavy truck and bus traffic from Merriam Drive, reusing the Kessler District buildings and preserving open space.

The top concern was time, not direction

Project timeframe and disruption during implementation drew the most comment.

What this confirms

The elements common to all three visions — walkability, parking, creek access, character — are where agreement already exists.

Downtown character matters

Strong interest in preserving downtown character and creating something different for weekend and evenings.

Still to come

The online vision framework survey closes Oct. 4. Those results are folded into the draft plan.

WHAT COMES NEXT

From here to the final draft



Sept. 29

Steering Committee #4 — members record a vision preference by written ballot, with updated costs, timelines and common elements in hand

Oct. 4

The online vision framework survey closes; results are analyzed and folded into the draft

Oct. 28

Final draft delivered to the City for the Planning Commission packet

Nov. 4

Planning Commission receives the final draft

Nov. 23

City Council receives the final draft

2027

Formal Comprehensive Plan 2040 amendment



**Take the survey
and learn more**

Scan with your
phone camera