



The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF CHICAGO LOOP
A 2024 IDA STUDY

A 2024 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

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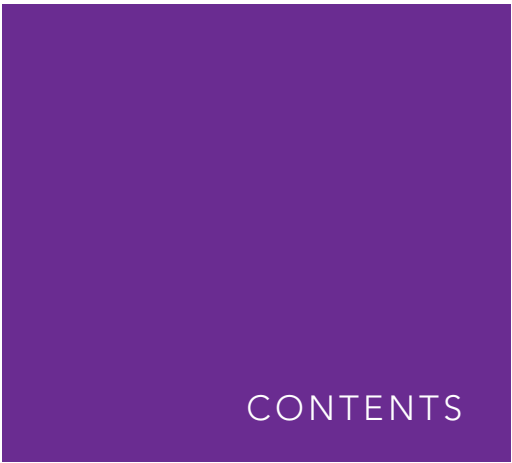
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SECTION ONE
PROJECT
OVERVIEW



Introduction

GREAT CITIES START DOWNTOWN

Strong downtowns are at the heart of any successful city or region. Their density brings people, firms, and ideas together in ways that grow the economy, create new opportunities, and form the basis of a community identity. As urbanist Richard Florida describes, “downtowns today are not just places to live, work and shop: They are the very best places for people and businesses to connect to each other. In big metros and small, downtowns occupy the most central locations and have the highest concentrations of spaces where people can come together.”

Downtowns spent decades orienting themselves around an office commuter population, however the continuing prevalence of hybrid and remote work makes it unlikely that those workers will ever return in the same numbers. In a post-COVID-19 world, downtowns everywhere will doubtless remain a critical part of their cities ecosystems, but they will need to adapt and change – as they have done before.

This study has found that many downtowns were already experiencing rapid residential growth in the 2000s and 2010s, with the median downtown growing by 24% in population from 2010 to 2022 as the plethora of amenities on offer in

downtowns generated renewed interest in urban living. The COVID-19 pandemic only heightened interest in walkable and mixed-use environments with ample public spaces, and it is altogether likely that trend of downtown population growth will continue as downtowns continue to adapt towards being well-rounded live-work-play communities rather than just central business districts; *Downtowns Rebound: The Data Driven Path to Recovery* found the median downtown population is 11% above pre-pandemic levels as of 2023.¹ While the coming years will bring many changes to downtowns across the country, their resilience and strength positions them to maintain their importance and continue leading the growth of their cities and regions.

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. 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 based upon 150+ key data points in the principles of Economy, Inclusion, Vibrancy, Identity and Resilience. Our most recent data showed that study downtowns outpaced their cities in residential growth between 2000 and 2022, growing an average of 54% against the citywide average of 13%.

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 2024, our analysis has expanded to include 54 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 2021 to show more nuanced employment trends over time. The demographic and jobs data included in the study is now beginning to extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, but some real estate, tax, and assessment data include 2023 and 2024 figures.

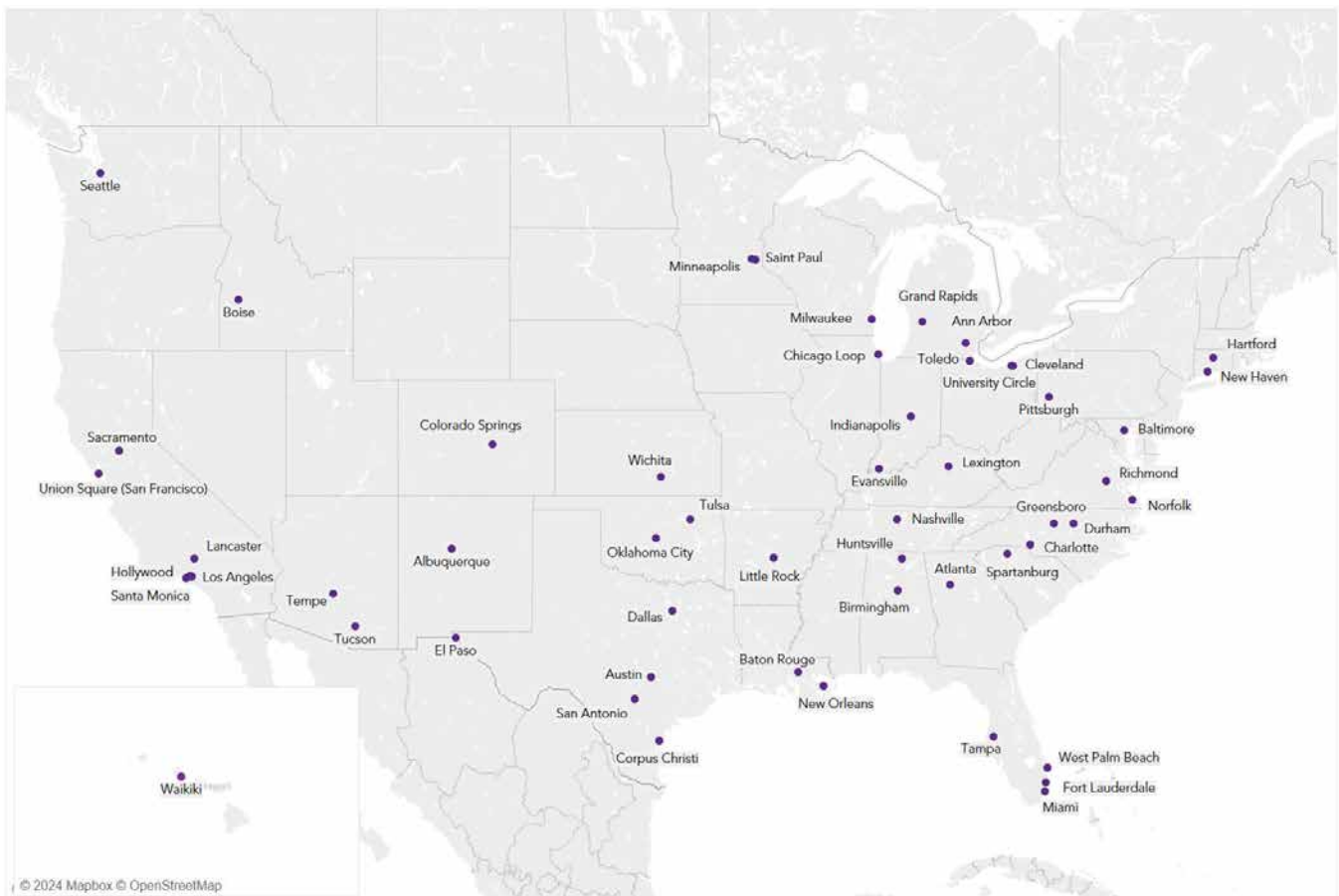
*Refer to the Appendix for the full methodology and list of metrics used in the study.

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.



A woman with blonde hair and sunglasses is looking at her phone. She is standing in front of a transit sign. The sign is for the State/Lake station and lists the Green Line, Brown Line, and Pink Line. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and cars. The entire image has a purple tint.

SECTION TWO
DOWNTOWN
PROFILE: THE LOOP

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 impact of the Chicago Loop reverberates throughout the Midwest. In less than half of one percent of Chicago's land area, the Loop's 25,365 residents make up approximately 1% of the city's population — a concentration of people that's twice as dense as the average acre elsewhere in the city. An additional 20,000+ residents live in the South Loop, the area between Roosevelt and Harrison Street which was previously included in the *2022 Loop Residential Impact Study*.¹ Together, this brings the population of the greater Loop area to 46,000.

Meanwhile, the 419,311 Loop workers represent more than one-third of the city's employment base, with a density of workers per acre that is roughly 75 times greater than the citywide average. This makes the Loop home to the highest concentration of workers of any city in IDA's *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study and a significant contributor to the city's economy, generating almost 15% of Chicago's tax revenues. Over the past two decades, the Loop has experienced a 27% increase in primary employment, a worker's best paying job if they have more than one. This increase was driven by growth in professional, scientific,

The Loop is **less than 1%** of Chicago's land mass but has **over 30%** of the city's jobs.

The Loop has approximately **14x** the **density** of retail and food beverage businesses as the city average.

Loop households produce **less than 1/3rd** as many greenhouse gas emissions as typical regional households.

Study Area



DOWNTOWN PARTNER

Chicago Loop Alliance

CITY

Chicago, IL

and technical services; and finance and insurance. These two sectors alone make up more than 40% of the Loop's employment, with the former representing 59% of such jobs in Chicago. Other sectors showing notable increases include the healthcare and social assistance sector, which has nearly tripled its numbers from 2007 to 2021.

Despite a general rise in employment, the return-to-office rate as of April 2024 is climbing, yet still below pre-pandemic levels, measuring 69% office occupancy according to Kastle System's Back-to-Work Index, which measures how many people are returning to the office following the COVID-19 pandemic. This is markedly higher than the 60% average across ten tracked metro areas. Encouragingly, data from Chicago Loop Alliance's Q1 2024 *State of the Loop* recovery report² shows that pedestrian traffic on State Street has recovered to 91% of its pre-pandemic (2019) levels during weekday work hours. Weekend foot traffic has reached 107% of its 2019 levels, denoting an impressive rebound for one of Chicago's premier retail streets.


As downtowns throughout the country continue to redefine themselves in the aftermath of the pandemic, the Loop is building upon its status as a sought-after residential destination. Its population has nearly tripled since 2000, increasing from 8,600 to 25,300 by 2022. This substantial growth, which contrasts with the city's overall 6% decline in population, means the Loop is one of the fastest-growing

downtown residential areas in IDA's study. Only three sunbelt downtowns in Dallas, TX, Durham, NC, and Nashville, TN, have seen faster growth out of IDA's study districts. The Loop's residents live in one of the most walkable, transit-rich downtowns in IDA's study, producing less than one-third of the 6.4 tonnes of greenhouse gasses emitted by typical households in the broader region. The Loop is the only participant in IDA's study to score perfect 100s in both its Walk and Transit scores.

Workers and residents, along with many of the city's 48 million annual visitors, flock to the Loop for its concentration of things to see and do.³ The Loop is a celebrated destination for arts and culture, exemplified by its theatre scene, which plays a significant role in the area's appeal. Hosting 12 venues and 8 theatres, including three Broadway In Chicago theatres known for their internationally acclaimed productions, the Loop draws a substantial crowd of locals and tourists alike. Notable among these is the Goodman Theatre, the city's oldest and largest not-for-profit theatre, and the Auditorium Theatre at Roosevelt University, a National Historic Landmark.

This cultural vibrancy is complemented by a thriving hospitality sector, with 30 hotels providing 13,474 rooms and an impressive average daily occupancy rate of 77% as of late 2023. Cultural and arts events in the Loop drew over 6 million visitors in 2023 alone, significantly impacting local economic activity with an estimated economic impact of \$1.65 billion.⁴ Additionally, the Loop's retail and dining sectors generate substantial economic output, totaling \$1.8 billion in sales, accounting for nearly 6% of Chicago's total retail and dining sales. This is indicative of a retail environment that is ten times more active than the city average, underlining the Loop's status as a central hub of economic activity in Chicago.


The central role that the Loop occupies in Chicago's economy highlights the significance of entities like Chicago Loop Alliance in fostering and maintaining a robust local economy. With roots dating back to the Great Depression, the organization has a long history of leading the community by creating and supporting inclusive programs that attract people and investment to the Loop. Chicago Loop Alliance services State Street's Special Service Area (SSA) #1-2015, the oldest and largest SSA in Chicago.



Residential Population

	Study Area	Study Area + South Loop	City	Region
Population	25,365	46,000	2.72M	9.56M
Study Area Share of Residents	n/a	55%	0.9%	0.3%
Residents Per Acre	36.4	47.59	18.7	2.1
Growth 2018-2022	6.0%	11%	-0.1%	0.3%
Growth 2000-2022	194%	306%	-6.0%	5.2%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2000, 2010); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022)



Employment

	Study Area	City	Region
Primary Jobs	419,311	1.23M	4.05M
Study Area Share Of Primary Jobs	n/a	34%	10%
Employees Per Acre (Primary)	601.1	8.5	0.9
Primary Employment Growth 2012-2021	9.8%	4%	2%
Primary Employment Growth 2002-2021	27%	9%	6%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2002-2021)

Ranking the Chicago Loop

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 district, assessed value per square mile, and the rate of growth in population and jobs from 2000 to 2022. **This analysis places the Loop among the established tier of downtowns.**

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, although more slowly than districts in the *growing* tier. They also tend to cover a larger proportion of citywide land area.

The accompanying list contextualizes the Loop alongside its peers in the *established* tier. It is worth noting that few downtowns across the United States can be compared to the Loop in terms of its economic impact. Additional comparative data is available in the Summary section of this report. For the full set of cities by tier, accompanying data points, and methodology, refer to *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* compendium, which is available on the IDA website, downtown.org.

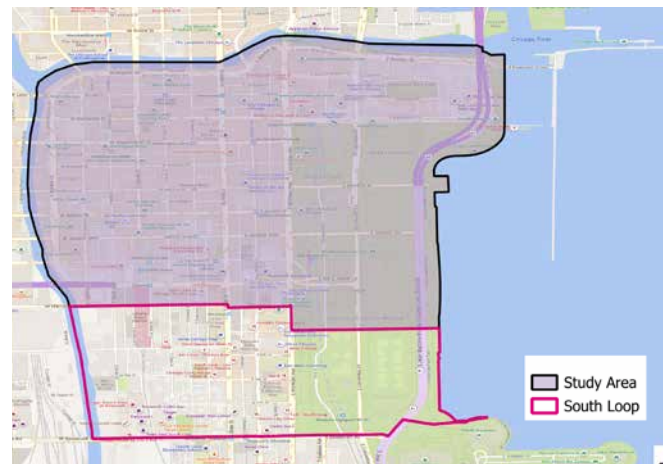
Established Downtowns

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

Defining Boundaries

IDA worked with Chicago Loop Alliance to align the study area with Census tract boundaries which closely aligned with the public perceptions of the Loop. This facilitates the easy incorporation of publicly available data from a variety of sources while matching the boundary to hard edges such as roads, water, natural features, or highways as much as possible. For this study, the study area is bounded by the Chicago River, Lake Michigan, and Harrison Street. Notably, this takes a more

targeted approach that diverges from the previously published *2022 Loop Residential Impact Study*, which extended the study boundary south to Roosevelt Road to include a portion of the South Loop area. These more selective boundaries allowed IDA to focus on the true economic and cultural heart of the Loop and Chicago. In this report, “the city” refers to Chicago, and regional figures correspond to the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin Metropolitan Statistical Area.



Economy | Impact, Innovation

Downtowns make up a small share of their city’s land area but have substantial economic importance. While downtowns and center cities constitute a small share of citywide land area, there’s no understating their 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.

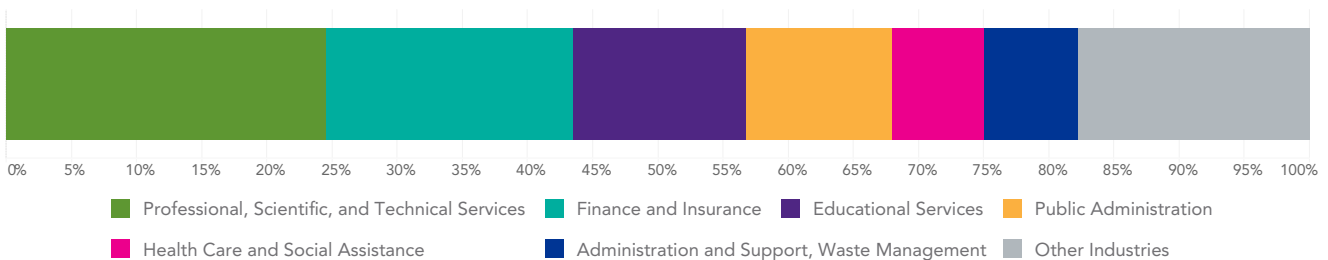
Benefits of Economy: Economic Output, Economic Impact, Investment, Creativity, Innovation, Visitation, Spending, Density, Sustainability, Tax Revenue, Scale, Commerce, Opportunity

Jobs

Among participants in IDA’s *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities* study, no other downtown concentrates as many workers within its boundaries as the Chicago Loop. As of 2021, when the most recent data is available, the Loop study area employed 419,311 primary workers, surpassing other major cities like Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco, each with fewer than 300,000 workers located downtown. Remarkably, however, the Loop covers just 1.1 square miles, making it the second smallest *established* district after downtown West Palm Beach, which spans 1 square mile. These Loop workers represent 34% of all employment within Chicago, placing the Loop in the top quarter of downtown areas studied for employment concentration.

Employment in the Loop has shown significant growth over the past two decades, as evidenced by a 27% increase in primary employment from 2002 to 2021. This marks the second-highest job growth rate among *established* downtowns within this two-decade span, behind only San Francisco, which posted a 50% increase in downtown jobs. Additionally, private employment grew by 16% over this period. The Loop’s two largest employment sectors are professional, scientific, and technical services and finance and insurance, which combined make up more than 40% of the Loop’s employment. The former includes a variety of skilled professions such as legal services, accounting, architecture, and marketing, and employs 103,000 people in the Loop, growing by 37% since 2002.

Top Downtown Industries



Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)

On the other hand, the finance and insurance sector employs 79,000 workers, making up 18% of the Loop's employment. Other significant sectors include educational services; administration and support and waste management and remediation; and health care and social assistance, with the latter nearly tripling its employment numbers between 2007 and 2021. Boasting 46,964 jobs, the public administration sector is also one of the largest employers in the Loop, with the City of Chicago, Cook County, State of Illinois, and federal government all having offices downtown. An impressive 95% of the city's jobs in this sector, along with 38% of the region's public administration jobs, are located downtown.

The knowledge industry within the Loop, which includes sectors like real estate, management of companies, information, and health care, employs nearly 232,000 workers. This industry accounts for 58% of Loop employment and 44% of the city's industry jobs. From 2012 to 2021, the knowledge industry experienced 23% growth, outpacing the overall job growth in the Loop by more than double, highlighting its crucial role in the area's continued economic expansion.

Employment (Primary Jobs)



34%
CITYWIDE
JOBS



29%
CITY'S PRIVATE
JOBS



67%
CITY'S FINANCE
& INSURANCE
JOBS



9%
CITY'S
ACCOMMODATION &
FOOD SERVICE JOBS

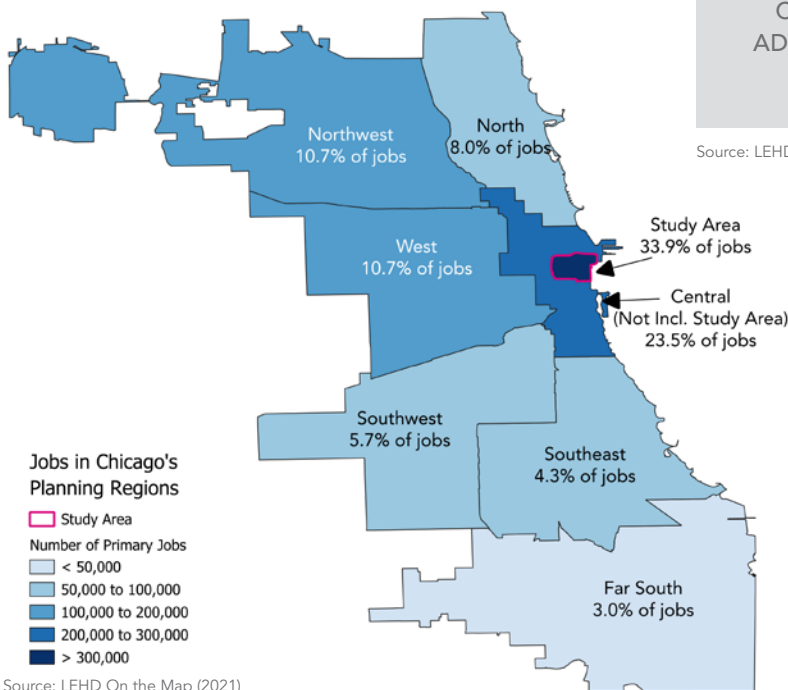


95%
CITY'S PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION
JOBS



44%
CITY'S
KNOWLEDGE
INDUSTRY JOBS

Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)



Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)

Employment

	Study Area	Established Downtowns	Study Average
CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT 2002–2021	27%	8%	6%
CITYWIDE JOBS	34%	41%	24%
CITYWIDE KNOWLEDGE JOBS	44%	47%	27%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	22%	42%	30%
RESIDENTS HOLDING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER	83%	60%	52%



Source: LEHD On the Map (2002, 2021)

Knowledge Industry Employment Growth 2012–2021

Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing



Management of Companies and Enterprises



Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services



Information



Health Care and Social Assistance



Total Knowledge Jobs



Study Area	17%	12%	24%	24%	50%	23%
City	8%	4%	32%	18%	11%	17%
Region	7%	-17%	18%	-13%	9%	7%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2012 and 2021)

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 and opportunity, to both their employees and to the downtowns they call home.

The job market in the Loop is largely dominated by the oldest and largest firms. This may not come as a surprise, given the high rents for the Loop's premium real estate. This trend is also observed in most *established* districts, which tend to feature some of the most expensive real estate in the United States and are often home to older and larger firms. 88% of private employment in the Loop is with firms that have been in existence for more than ten years. This figure aligns closely with the average of 84% seen in other *established* downtowns and is roughly equivalent to Chicago's overall percentage of jobs at firms of similar age.

Meanwhile, the Loop stands out in terms of the size of its workforce at individual large firms. Approximately 77% of private employment is with companies that have 250 or more employees, which is higher even than the 70% average found among *established* downtowns, showing that even among *established* downtowns, the Loop is pronounced with its sizable share of large firms. United Airlines, JPMorgan Chase & Co., and Molson Coors are among the Fortune 500 companies that all have headquarters in the Loop.

Taken together, this paints a picture of a downtown that serves, first and foremost, as a hub for major, global businesses. Yet, thanks to the efforts of organizations like Chicago Loop Alliance, there are still opportunities for smaller, local businesses to have a downtown presence through events, pop-ups, and other incentives aimed at lowering the bar of entry and creating a more equitable business mix. One of these events, Sundays on State, featured 91% underrepresented business owners in the 2024 series, including 78% women-owned businesses, 63% minority-owned businesses, and 14% LGBTQ+-owned businesses with overlaps in several categories.



Jobs by Firm Size

	Study Area	City	Region
< 20 PEOPLE	7%	13%	16%
20-249 PEOPLE	16%	21%	23%
250+ PEOPLE	77%	66%	61%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)



Jobs by Firm Age (2018-2020)

	Study Area	City	Region
< 3 YEARS	3%	5%	6%
4-10 YEARS	8%	11%	11%
11+ YEARS	88%	84%	83%

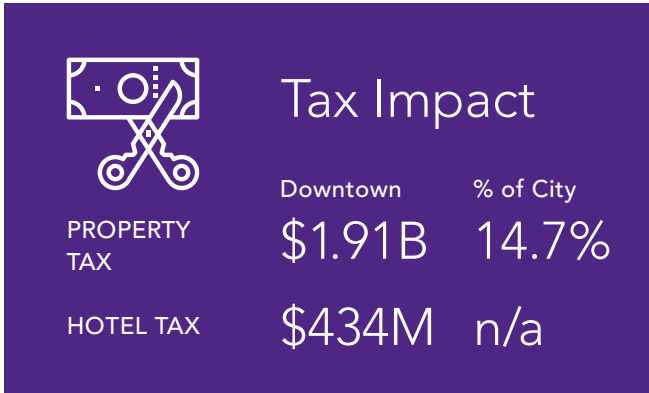
Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)



Jobs by Earnings Annually

	Study Area	City	Region
\$15K OR LESS	6%	10%	13%
\$15K TO \$40K	14%	24%	27%
\$40K OR MORE	80%	66%	60%

Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)



Source: Chicago CityScape, Cook County Assessor's Office, Choose Chicago, Chicago Loop Alliance (2022)

NUMBER OF ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE LOOP

Food & Beverage Serving	537
Retail Trade	577
Hotels	30
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	185
Health Care or Social Assistance	695

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023), Chicago Loop Alliance (2024)

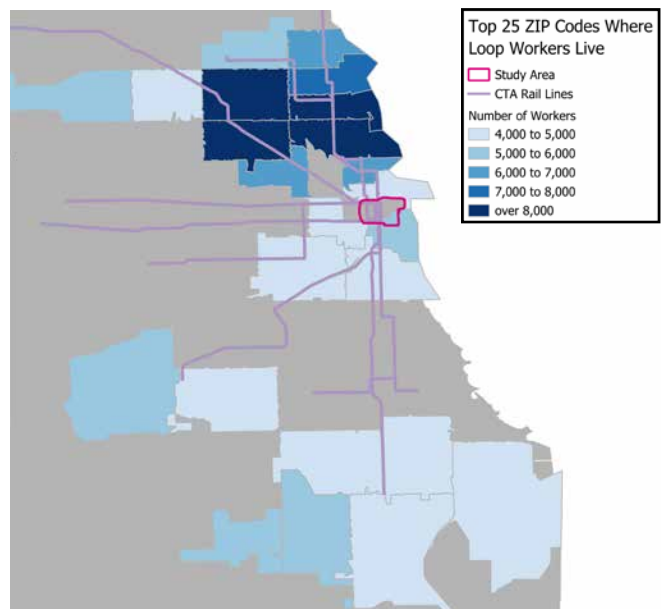


Source: Chicago CityScape, Cook County Assessor's Office, Chicago Loop Alliance (2022–2023)

Fiscal Impact

Downtowns typically concentrate the densest development and highest property values in their region, and the Chicago Loop is no exception. Despite occupying less than 0.5% of the city's land area, the Loop contributes significantly to Chicago's economy, generating almost 15% of the city's tax revenues. The area is not only economically impactful but also rewarding for its workforce; about 80% of jobs in the Loop offer salaries exceeding \$40,000 annually, compared to 66% across the city.

Recent development activity unfolding just outside the Loop has not diminished its economic significance. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted working models, leading to a spike in office vacancy rates to 25% as of the fourth quarter of 2023 — significantly higher than the 15.6% average of the previous five years. Nevertheless, the Loop's office spaces, which encompass 36 million square feet, still demand high rents of approximately \$45 per square foot according to Transwestern, a commercial real estate brokerage.⁵ In the Loop alone, the combined assessment value of all properties is over \$7.6 billion. This underscores its critical role in fueling local government budgets, with yearly property tax revenues of \$1.91 billion and hotel tax revenues of \$434.4 million. Within IDA's study, only Seattle, with a study area about three times larger, had a higher total assessed value for downtown properties.



Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)

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.

These values are represented in Chicago Loop Alliance's positioning of the Loop as "Everyone's Neighborhood," which reflects a reality in which the diversity of people from all backgrounds and walks of life who inhabit the Loop each day also share more equal access to the significant wealth and power of the central business district. This vision, which informed Chicago Loop Alliance's five-year strategic plan, also applies to the organization's efforts to diversify its staff and board, promote inclusive hiring practices, and advocate for accessibility in all public realm projects in the Loop.

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

Note: Many of the statistics regarding the Loop's residential demographics throughout this section may differ slightly from data in the 2022 Loop Residential Impact Study. That study used a different study area, which extended further south to Roosevelt Road.

Racial Diversity

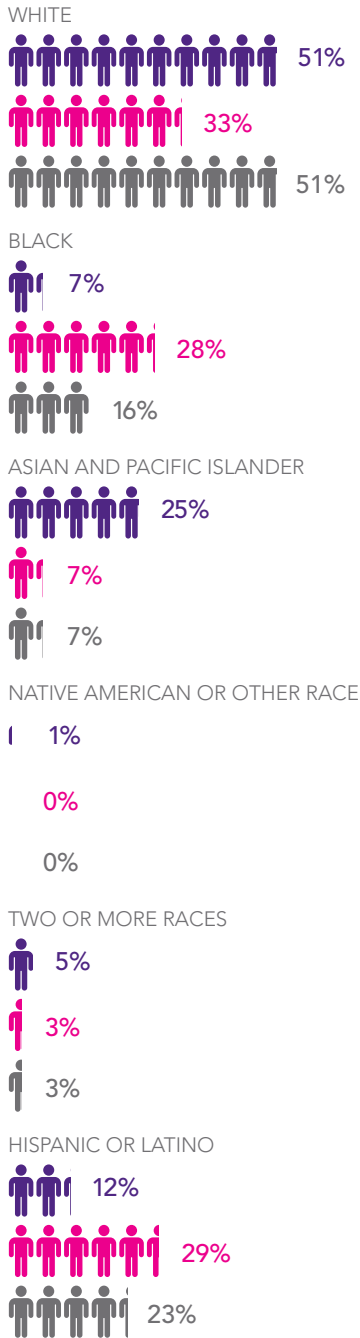
The Loop's residential demographics are distinctively diverse, albeit less so than the broader city, which is known for being one of the most diverse cities in the U.S., with an approximate 30/30/30/10 split in population between White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents, respectively. The Diversity Index, which measures the likelihood of two randomly selected residents having different racial or ethnic backgrounds, scores the Loop at 66, aligning with the average for established downtowns. Across the entirety of Chicago, the Diversity Index is nearly 20 points higher at 85.

The Loop is home to a smaller proportion of Black and Hispanic or Latino residents and a substantially higher Asian population. Asian residents make up 25% of the Loop's population, compared to 7% citywide. Furthermore, the presence of American Indian and Native Hawaiian residents in the Loop is double that of Chicago's (1.4% versus

0.7%). Over recent years, the area has seen a shift towards greater diversity, with a decrease in the White non-Hispanic population and growth among other racial and ethnic groups, suggesting a gradual trend toward mirroring the city's broader demographic changes.

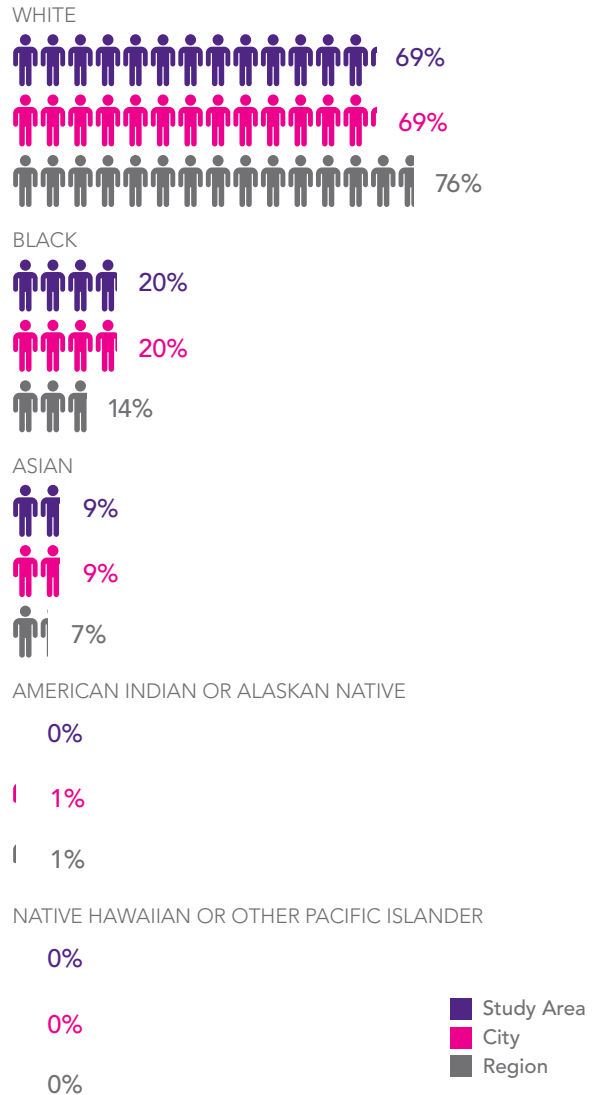
In terms of employment demographics, the racial and ethnic background of workers in the Loop closely resembles that of the city's workforce, indicating that the economic opportunities in the Loop are accessible to a diverse mix of Chicagoans. Additionally, while jobs in the Loop tend to demand higher educational qualifications, overall the educational profile of workers in the Loop is broadly aligned with the city's workforce. This implies that the Loop's well-paying jobs, requiring more specialized skills and knowledge, are still within reach for the city's residents, further integrating the Loop into the fabric of Chicago's diverse community.

Residents By Race



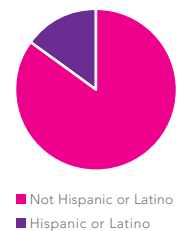
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Employment By Race



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2017–2022)

Downtown Workers by Ethnicity



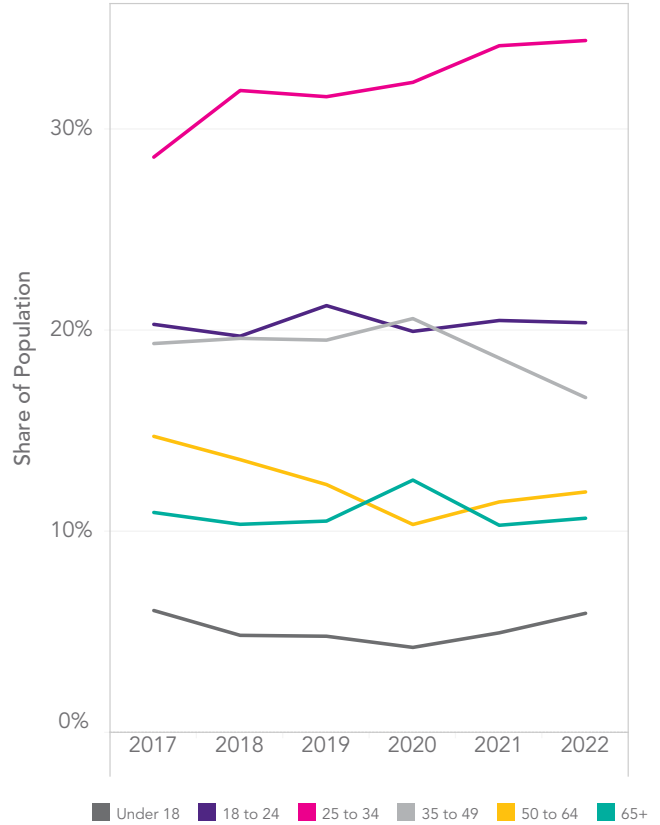
Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)

Age Diversity

Among Chicago’s neighborhoods, the Loop has become a popular place to live for young adults. It’s home to a considerably larger proportion of residents aged 18-34, who together account for more than half of the Loop’s population. This is a stark contrast to the city, where this age group constitutes just over a quarter of the population. This younger demographic is likely influenced by the significant concentration of colleges and universities within the Loop, which attracts both undergraduate and graduate students who prefer living close to their educational institutions.

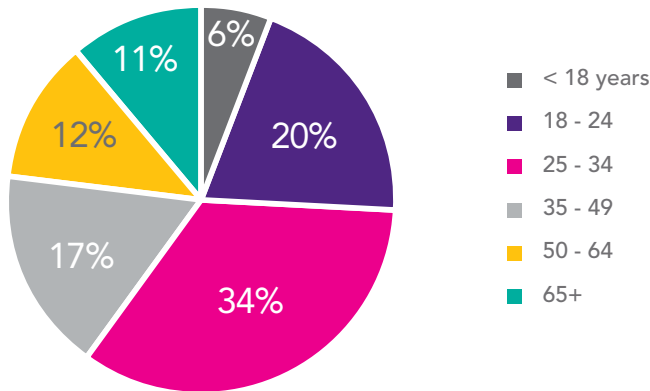
Conversely, the Loop has a relatively small percentage of minors; those under 18 comprise less than 6% of the area’s population, but this age group is growing rapidly. The number of minors living in the Loop more than doubled to approximately 1,500 residents between 2012 and 2021, indicating that more families are living within its boundaries. However, this remains just a small portion of Chicago’s youth — more than 135,000 people under 18 live in the city overall. In terms of age diversity, the distribution in other age brackets — 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and older — is roughly the same between the Loop and the city, highlighting a diverse age range despite the predominance of younger adults.

Downtown Residents' Age Diversity



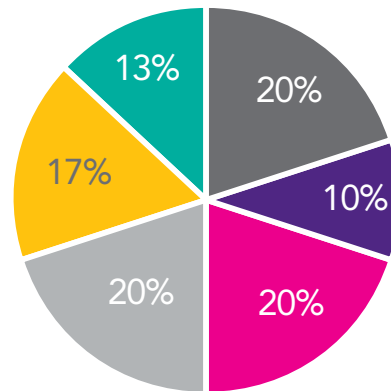
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Downtown Age Diversity



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

City Age Diversity



Jobs by Educational Attainment

HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS



29% 36% 37%

SOME COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE



27% 28% 29%

BACHELOR'S OR ADVANCED DEGREES



43% 36% 34%

■ Study Area ■ City ■ Region

Source: LEHD On the Map (2021)

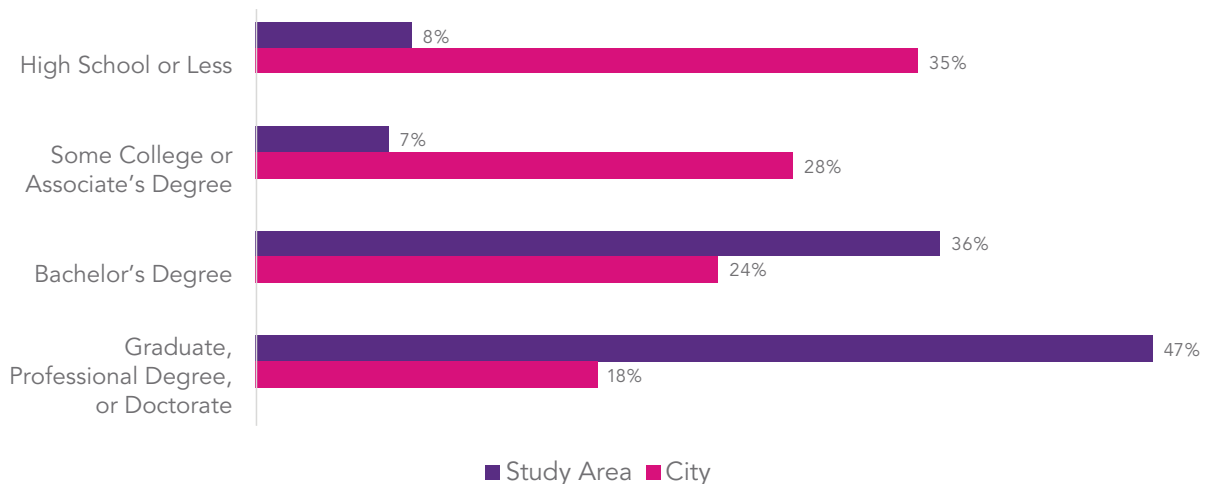
Socioeconomic Diversity

Household incomes in the Loop are notably higher compared to the city and region. The median household income within the Loop stands at \$124,000, significantly exceeding the citywide median of \$72,000 and the regional median of \$85,000. This wealth distribution is heavily skewed toward higher income brackets, with 70% of households in the Loop earning more than \$100,000 annually — nearly double the city rate of 37%. Additionally, only 9% of households in the Loop have incomes below \$40,000, which is less than one-third the citywide rate of 31%.

Residents of the Loop typically have high educational attainments that correspond with their elevated income levels. Approximately 47% hold a graduate, doctorate, or professional degree, which is substantially higher than the 18% observed citywide. Furthermore, 92% of Loop residents have received at least some college education, compared to 65% across the city.

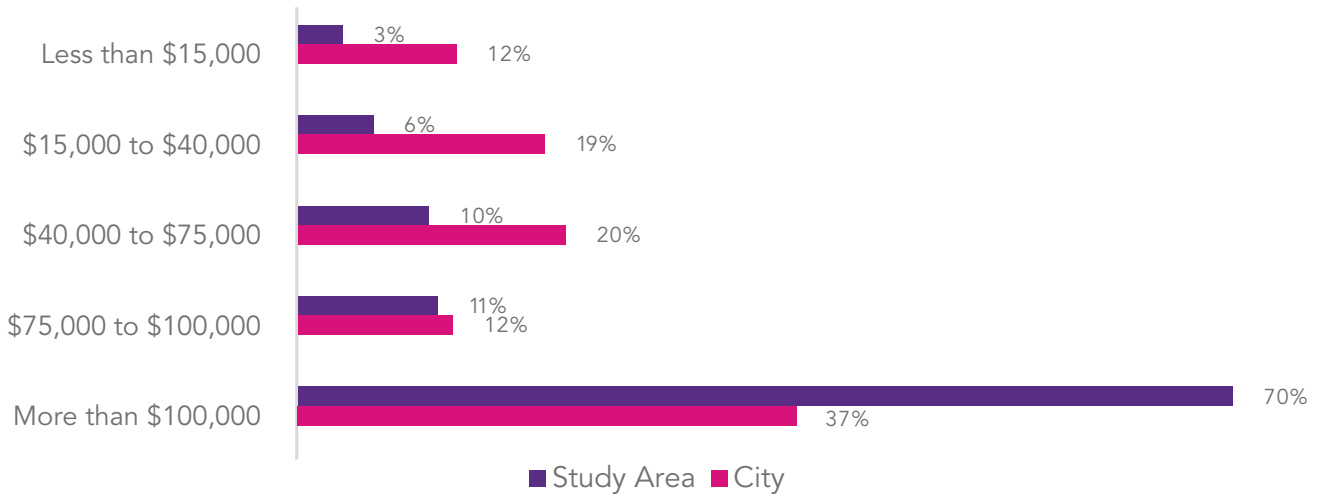
The educational profile of workers in the Loop generally mirrors that of the city, albeit with some distinctions: 29% of Loop workers have no college education, which is slightly lower than the 36% in the broader city, and 43% of Loop workers hold a bachelor's or advanced degree, compared to 36% citywide. This is indicative of a somewhat more educated workforce within the Loop.

Educational Attainment for Residents 25+



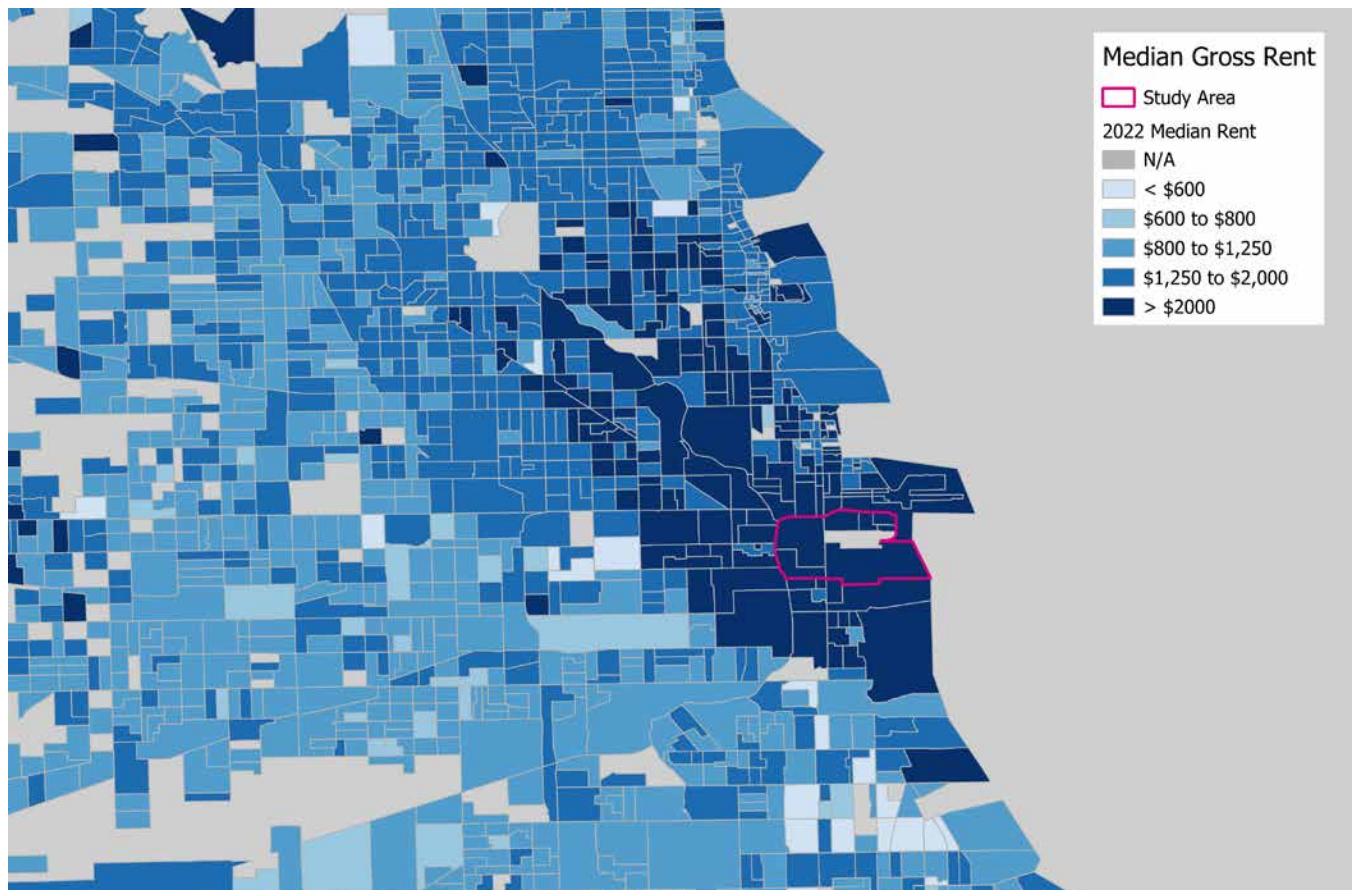
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Household Income - Age 25 and Older



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Median Gross Rent



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Housing and Affordability

Downtowns are generally more expensive places to live. Yet, their density of housing, concentration of jobs, and access to public transportation can make living downtown less expensive than living in other neighborhoods when factoring in the cost of transportation. While this pattern has been observed across many downtowns in IDA's study, this is not the case in the Loop, where combined housing and transportation costs exceed the citywide average, despite an extremely high degree of walkability and transit access within the loop.

This is in large part due to housing costs that are exceedingly high. The median gross rent in the Loop is \$2,485, nearly twice that of the city's median of \$1,314, according to American Community Survey data. This steep cost of living downtown is only attainable for residents with higher incomes, with lower-income households tending to gravitate towards more affordable neighborhoods. Further reflecting this trend, the proportion of renter households in the Loop deemed "cost-burdened" by Department of Housing and Urban Development standards is actually lower than the city and regional averages. In other words, the Loop's high income levels buffer residents from the financial strain of the area's high living costs.

Although the Loop is notorious for its high rents, the rate at which rents have increased over time is not significantly faster than in other parts of Chicago. In fact, citywide and regional rent increases have slightly outpaced those in the Loop. This suggests that while living in the Loop is expensive, it's cost has not been rising quickly compared to other areas. The Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing & Transportation Index further supports this finding, indicating that when housing and transportation costs are combined, the Loop's overall cost of living aligns closely with regional averages, thanks in part to its locational efficiency and abundant transit options. Still, these combined costs are notably higher downtown than elsewhere in the city.

Homeownership trends in the Loop also offer a unique perspective on the local real estate market. Although only 36% of housing units are owner-occupied, this rate is not far behind the citywide average and significantly higher than the median of just 19% across all study areas. Only 5 districts in IDA's study have higher rates

Downtown Renters

	Study Area	City	Region
% RENTER OCCUPIED	64%	54%	34%
MEDIAN GROSS RENT	\$2,485	\$1,314	\$1,310
MEDIAN RENT INCREASE 2010-2021	44%	48%	46%
RENT-BURDENED	38%	45%	45%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022); CNT Housing and Transportation Index (2019)

Housing and Transportation Index

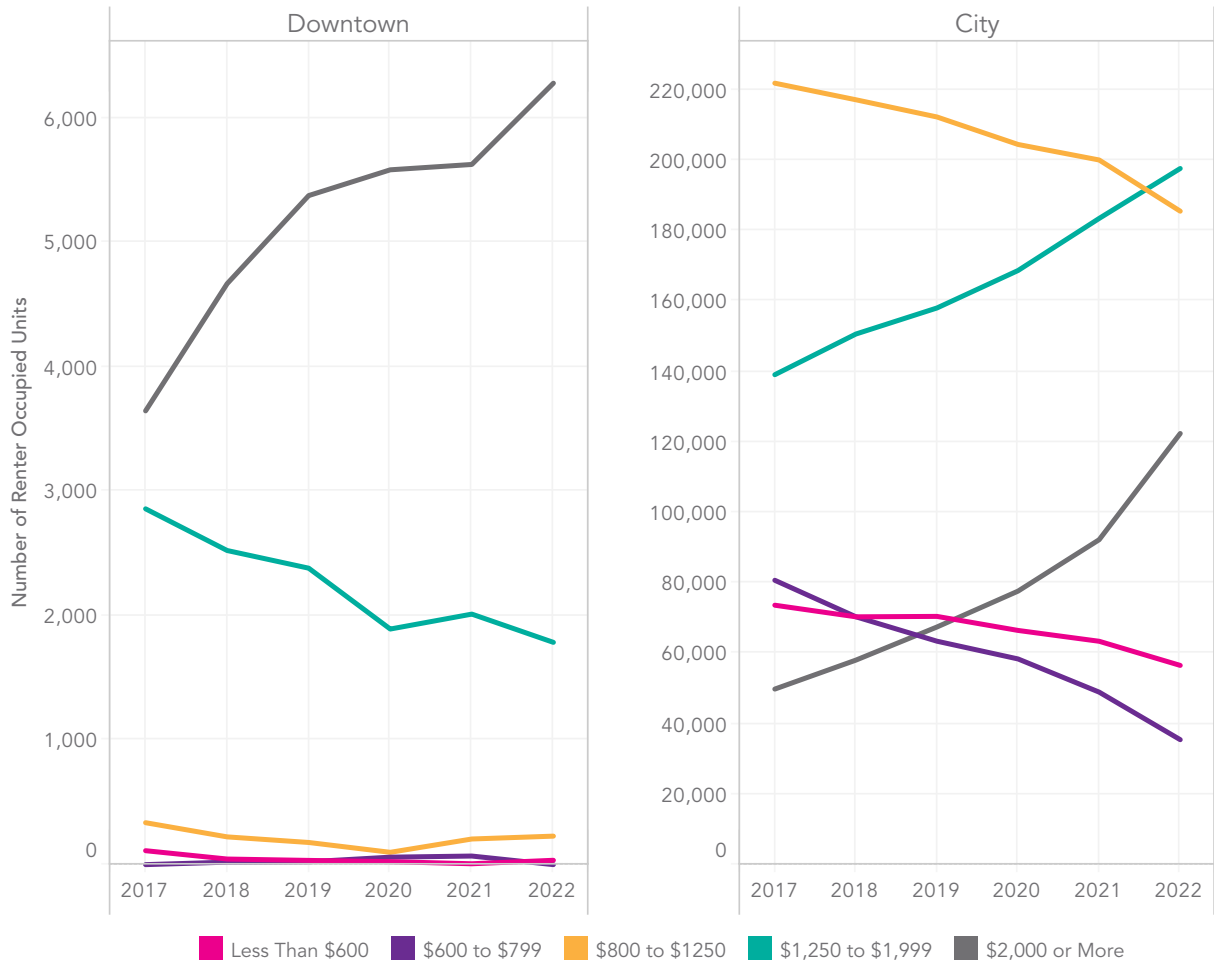
Study Area	City	Region
47%	40%	47%

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology (2019)

of homeownership: the downtowns of Huntsville, Spartanburg, Austin, Waikiki, and West Palm Beach. This suggests an unusually stable center city community where residents are more likely to invest in property and accrue wealth, especially as the area continues to develop.

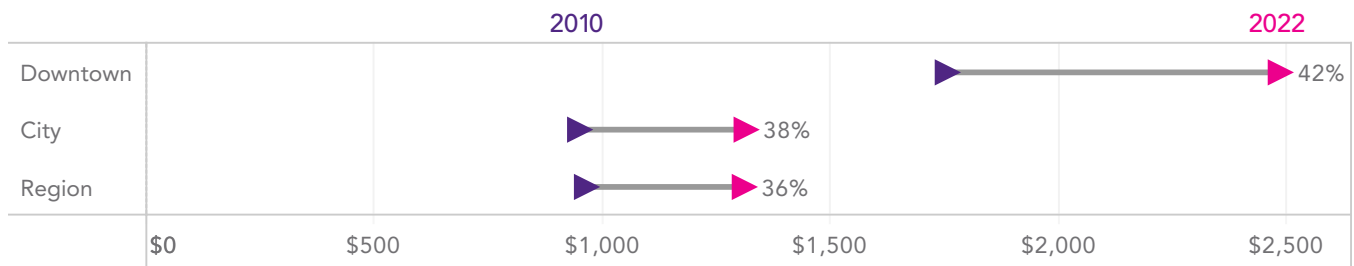
In an effort to make the Loop a more affordable neighborhood, the City of Chicago announced proposed city assistance for four adaptive reuse projects within the Loop,⁶ supporting the city's focus on mixed-use, mixed-income vitality downtown. These projects represent an investment of more than \$500 million into the Loop, and aim to convert underutilized office buildings into more than 1,000 new apartments. This includes at least 319 affordable units targeted at tenants earning around 60% of the area median income, roughly \$53,000 for a two-person household. The project is backed by more than \$150 million in tax increment financing (TIF) assistance and is part of a larger effort to address the 5 million square feet of vacant commercial space along the LaSalle Street corridor, reducing it by more than 25%.

Rent Price Change Over Time



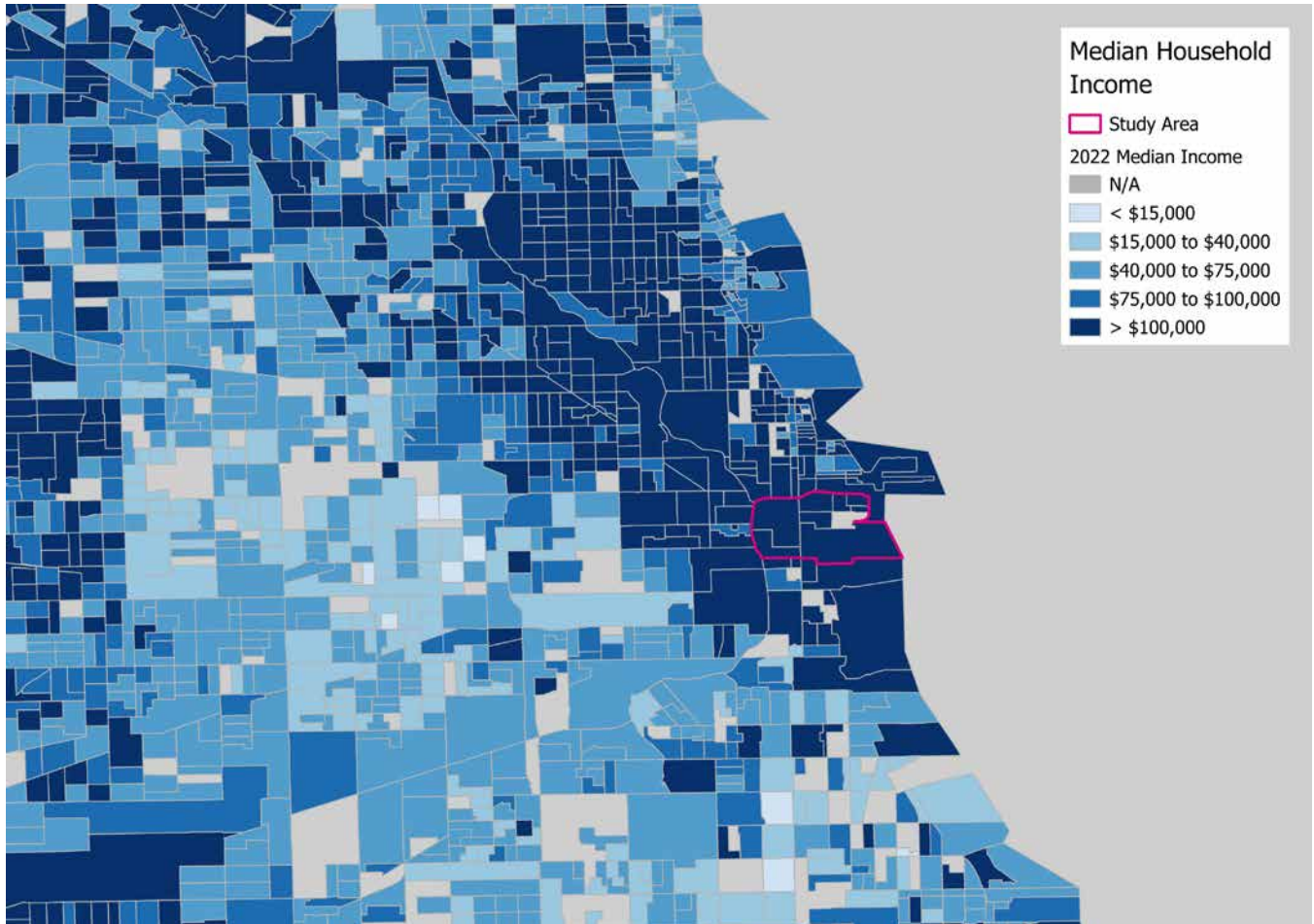
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Household Rent Growth Over Time



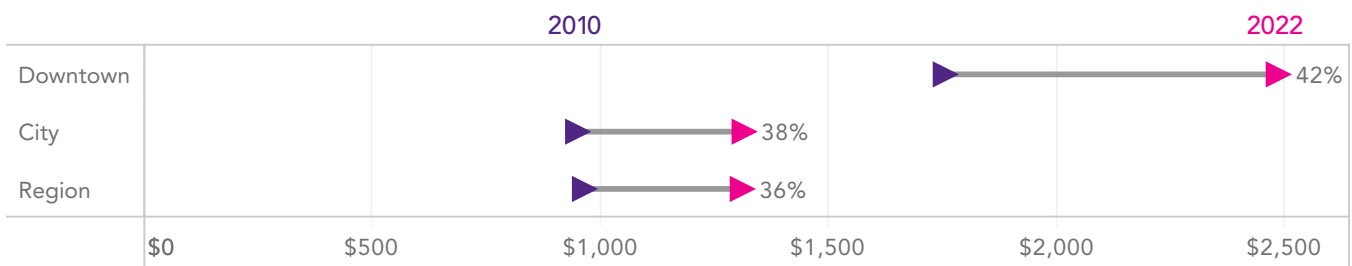
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Median Household Income



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Household Income Growth Over Time



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

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.”⁷ 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

Note: Many of the statistics regarding the Loop’s residential demographics throughout this section may differ slightly from data in the 2022 Loop Residential Impact Study. That study used a different study area, which extended further south to Roosevelt Road.

Residential Growth

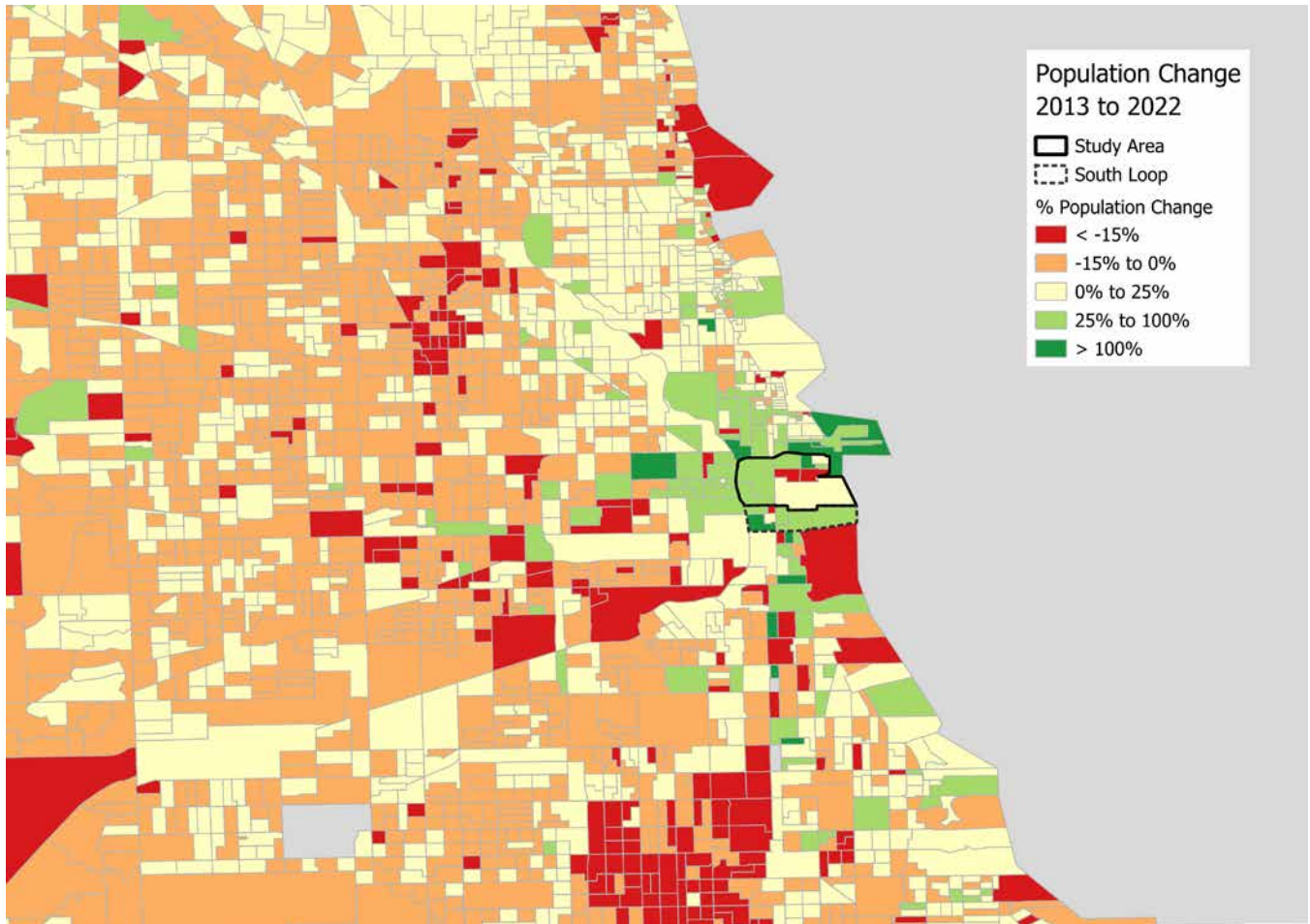
Residential growth signals a fast-changing and vibrant downtown, one consisting of a vast working population, and a dynamic downtown beyond just the “9 to 5,” drawn by and supporting the arts, culture, recreation, dining, and entertainment options available throughout the day and night. Though it remains a small part of Chicago’s overall population at around 1%, the Loop has seen its population nearly triple since the turn of the century, increasing from 8,600 to 25,300 between 2000 and 2022. When including the South Loop area between Harrison Street and Roosevelt Road, which was part of the 2022 *Loop Residential Impact Study*, the combined population reaches 46,000, similarly nearly tripling during the same period. This growth significantly outpaces the region-wide increase of just over 5% and stands in contrast to the city’s overall population decline of 6% during the same timeframe.



In addition to outpacing regional and citywide population growth, the Loop is among the fastest-growing residential populations of any district in IDA’s study. Only Dallas, Durham, and Nashville have exceeded the Chicago Loop’s 194% population growth since 2000. This is also by far the highest growth rate of any *established* downtown, with only Richmond and Miami also entering triple-digit territory among that peer group.

Continuing this trend, the Loop has maintained steady growth over the past decade, with approximately 5% annual growth recorded between 2013 and 2022. The areas immediately surrounding the Loop have also experienced strong growth over the past 10 years. The robust growth in these downtown areas reflects their increasing attractiveness and revitalization, contributing to the city’s dynamic urban core.

Population Change 2013–2022



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2013–2022)



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. With combined sales totaling \$1.8 billion, the Loop's vibrant retail and dining sectors position it as a central hub of economic activity not only in Chicago but also in comparison to similar urban districts across the country.

Despite encompassing less than half of one percent of Chicago's land area, the Loop accounts for about 5.6% of the city's total sales in retail and dining. This indicates that the retail environment in the Loop is approximately ten times more active than the city average, showcasing a highly concentrated area of economic activity. Even with the adjustments to a new normal in post-COVID office occupancy, the Loop continues to thrive, maintaining a density of more than 500 retail businesses per square mile, far outpacing most other neighborhoods in Chicago. This resilience highlights not only the Loop's importance to Chicago's economy but also its ability to adapt and attract consumers in changing times. Furthermore, recent data from Chicago Loop Alliance's Q1 2024 *State of the Loop* recovery report indicates that weekend pedestrian traffic on State Street has reached 107% of its 2019 levels, marking an impressive rebound for one of Chicago's premier retail streets.⁸

Taken together, these impressive statistics make the Loop one of the most prolific places for retail trade and food and beverage sales within IDA's study, placing it in the same sphere as other high-density retail downtowns like Seattle, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Waikiki. The vitality of the Loop's retail environment underscores its significance as a major commercial center, drawing shoppers and diners not just from the city but also from places far outside Chicago.

Retail Vitality



	Study Area	City
RETAIL BUSINESSES PER SQUARE MILE	529	40
ANNUAL RETAIL SALES PER SQUARE MILE	\$1.04B	\$97.7M

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023)

Food & Beverage



	Study Area	City
FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESSES PER SQUARE MILE	488	32
ANNUAL FOOD & BEVERAGE SALES PER SQUARE MILE	\$433M	\$22.3M

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online (2023)



Live Events and Activities

Downtowns often serve their cities as centers of culture and recreation. That's apparent in the Loop, which not only boasts world-class architecture and office headquarters but also serves as a significant destination for live events and activities year-round. With 30 hotels offering a total of 13,474 rooms, the Loop maintains an impressive average daily occupancy rate of 77% as of the fourth quarter of 2023.⁹ This high occupancy reflects the area's appeal and its ability to attract tourists and business travelers alike, who contribute to the district's lively atmosphere and robust economy.

Central to the Loop's allure are its live events and cultural activities — especially its thriving theatre scene. The area is home to Chicago's Theatre District, which includes 12 venues for live entertainment and 8 theatres, making it a major draw for both locals and visitors. The district features three Broadway In Chicago theatres known for hosting internationally acclaimed productions. Nearby, the Goodman Theatre stands as Chicago's oldest and largest not-for-profit theatre, renowned for its commitment to both classic and contemporary works. A few blocks south, the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, a National Historic Landmark, offers exceptional acoustics and hosts dance performances, concerts, lectures, and other events.

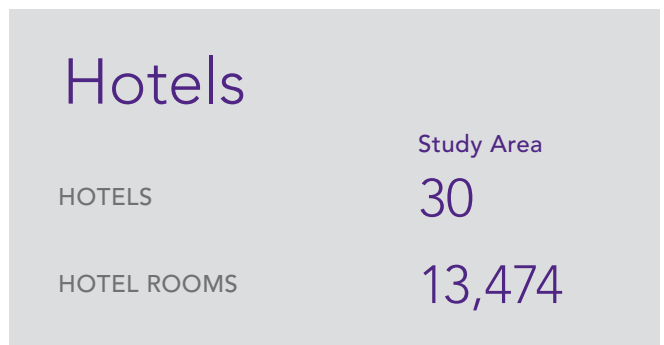
These cultural institutions not only enrich the community but also drive substantial visitor traffic to the Loop. In the fourth quarter of 2023 alone, theatre and arts events attracted more than 1.4 million people. That's nearly three



times as many fans as attended Chicago Bears home games in 2023 at Soldier Field in Chicago's adjacent South Loop neighborhood. This influx of arts enthusiasts contributes an estimated \$2.25 billion in economic activity, underscoring the significant impact of cultural institutions on the local economy.¹⁰ The Loop hosts a variety of other events that draw crowds, including the popular Sundays on State, an interactive block party on Chicago's iconic State Street, which was recognized by IDA's Downtown Achievement Awards program with an Excellence award in 2022. This event has welcomed more than one million attendees since it first premiered in 2021 and features a high participation rate from underrepresented business owners. Additionally, nearby Millennium and Grant Parks host major festivals such as Lollapalooza and the Taste of Chicago, further enhancing the Loop's role as a central gathering place for diverse events and festivals, supporting food and beverage establishments, driving foot traffic to local businesses, and supporting the overall vibrancy of Chicago's core.



Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (2023)



Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (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.”¹¹ 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

Ask anyone who has spent time in Chicago and they’ll tell you: the city has a heart. Those searching for a pulse can find it in the Loop, the city’s historic downtown. It manifests itself through the thumping and clapping of raucous theatergoers attending a sold-out show, a sound that spills out into the city’s network of alleys deep into the evening hours when the stage doors finally swing open. These passageways — coveted by older cities east of here — were carved out long ago from the ashes of a fire so horrific that it set a new standard for building construction that was then exported around the world. Filling the void, a downtown that is constantly reinventing itself. A welcoming place, full of all the amenities of your typical American neighborhood in a package that dwarfs the size of most other downtowns.

The Loop is by everyone, for everyone. It’s located at the nexus of the city’s transit network, its highways, and its regional and national train lines. Practically speaking, it’s the zero-zero point in a street grid that spans more than 200 square miles. In yet another sign of its accessibility, the Loop boasts transit ridership of 29% for commuters, second only to San Francisco in IDA’s study. But make no mistake: venturing downtown is more than a matter of convenience or necessity. It’s where people of all stripes come to marvel at some of the world’s earliest skyscrapers, shop some of retail’s most hallowed halls, explore centuries’ worth of art, and step



out on a glass ledge high above downtown. These offerings are as original to Chicago as a hot dog topped with sport peppers and celery salt.

To the east is the Loop’s front porch: a world-class urban park system. Fronting Lake Michigan, a trio of parks — Grant, Millennium, and Maggie Daley parks — come alive with year-round events and travelers who are eager to snap a selfie in Cloud Gate, a mirrored sculpture affectionately known as “the Bean.” In the summer, Lollapalooza, and Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events’ festivals like Chicago Jazz Fest and Taste of Chicago are among the dozens of traditions that draw hundreds of thousands of people from every corner of the globe to bask in the music, food, and culture of Chicago and beyond. In the colder months, these parks play host to holiday gatherings and winter activities, including the opportunity to skate along a winding, man-made river of ice that’s set against the backdrop of Chicago’s skyline.

To the north, a real river. Take one look, and it's anyone's guess why yesterday's Chicagoans would have turned their backs on this natural-born attraction. Thanks to the efforts of conservationists and visionaries alike, the once-industrial riverfront has been reclaimed as a space for recreation, with friends gathering along its banks at all hours of the day over food, drink, and conversation. There are opportunities for adventure, too. Sailboats meander up the river alongside kayaks and sightseeing cruises, all jockeying for epic views of the Loop, while runners and cyclists trek across its trails. Meanwhile, admirers of art might be lucky enough to catch Art on the Mart, the largest permanent digital art display in the world, projected against the exterior walls of the Merchandise Mart, one of the largest commercial buildings in the nation. It's just one of more than 100 pieces of public art on view downtown.

Within its borders, the Loop is, at once, a place to work, and a place to live. A place to visit, and a place to stay. A place

to learn, and a place to be somebody. By day, its 400,000-plus employees give credence to Chicago as the "city that works" — a place where careers, and fortunes, get made in high-rises and department stores that locals proudly refer to by their original names: Sears and Marshall Field's. On nights and weekends, the Loop's more than 25,000 residents and millions of visitors pour into historic theatres, museums, shops, bars, and restaurants, busting notions of the 9-to-5 downtown. And when school is in session, tens of thousands of students shuffle from class to class, coffee shop to dormitory, contributing a hopeful energy befitting of a downtown that's turning the page on its next great chapter.

The Loop is not your grandparents' business district. It's everyone's neighborhood — a place where world-class restaurants, shops, offices, schools, theatres, attractions, parks, and streets are meant to be experienced together.



Social Media

CLA FOLLOWERS ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS

101,799

SUNDAYS ON STATE MARKETING/MEDIA IMPRESSIONS ANNUALLY

1.3B

CLA SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS ANNUALLY

15.8M

Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (2024)

Destinations & Unique Features



50+

ARCHITECTURALLY SIGNIFICANT BUILDINGS



160

ACRES OF OPEN SPACE

250

CULTURAL ASSETS



120

PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS



12

TOTAL MUSEUMS

Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (2024)

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 is the ability of a downtown to withstand adverse economic conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by having a mix of factors essential to continual long-term success. Bringing together a mix of industries with a talented workforce makes downtown both a competitive and economically resilient environment.

During the Great Recession, the Loop displayed remarkable economic resilience, distinguishing itself from the broader national downturn. While many regions struggled with job losses and economic stagnation, the Loop saw employment growth continue without interruption throughout the period of the Great Recession and onwards. This trend underscored the robustness of the area's economic base, driven by a diverse range of businesses and industries. However, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a greater challenge, with employment in the Loop dropping by more than 8% from 2019 to 2020. Yet, the area demonstrated a swift recovery, regaining 96.7% of its 2019 employment levels within a year. This quick rebound highlights the Loop's capacity to adapt and recover from economic shocks.



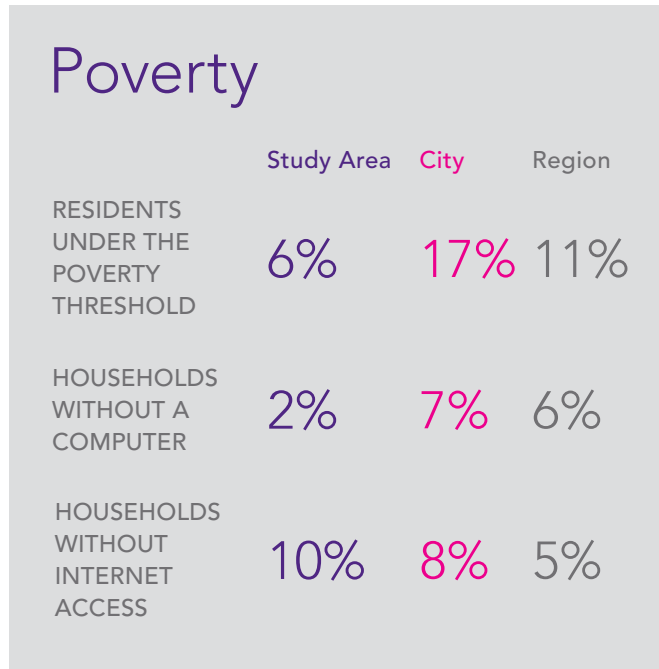
Downtown's vibrancy has been impacted by the sheer number of remote workers. According to Kastle System's Back to Work barometer as of April 2024, about 69% of workers are present on an average workday compared to pre-pandemic figures. The Loop is not alone; this shift has been felt by many downtowns, where a reduction in foot traffic poses challenges for local businesses such as cafes, restaurants, and retail stores, which once thrived on the daily influx of office workers. Consequently, businesses and property managers have had to rethink their strategies, leading to a greater interest in flexible workspaces and hybrid work models. Cities like Chicago, which is leading the adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized office buildings into residences, are at the forefront of this transformation. It has the potential to catalyze a transformation in commercial real estate, potentially revitalizing urban centers by aligning with the changing work culture and lifestyle preferences.

The Loop’s high incomes and relatively affluent residential community further contribute to its stability. According to American Community Survey data, only 6% of residents in the Loop are considered to be living in poverty, which is significantly lower than the city-wide poverty rate of 17%. This economic advantage is reflective of the higher incomes typical of the area, which not only buffers the local economy during downturns but also supports a higher standard of living. This disparity indicates a strong economic base that not only helps insulate the Loop from broader economic fluctuations but also supports a vibrant commercial and cultural district that continues to attract investment and development, reinforcing its economic resilience.

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. With 5 parks and natural areas, 12 museums, 16 primary and secondary schools, and 11 higher education institutions, the Chicago Loop offers a prime example of how urban centers can facilitate easy connections among culture, education, and recreation. This concentration not only enhances the quality of life for those who live and work in the area but also attracts visitors and businesses, contributing to a dynamic social ecosystem.

The Loop benefits significantly from its geographic location. Bordered by Lake Michigan and the Chicago River, its users enjoy access to both water-based activities and a network of scenic walking and biking paths. This strategic placement enhances the attractiveness of the area, drawing tourists and locals alike to vibrant, accessible public spaces like Millennium



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Park and the Chicago Riverwalk for concerts and celebrations. The parks join four other plazas, squares, and amphitheatres that host popular events year-round, including Daley Plaza’s farmers market in the warmer months and Christkindlmarket, a German Christmas market, in the winter.

Meanwhile, its location at the center of Chicago’s expansive street grid has made the Loop the natural epicenter of cultural life since the city was incorporated in 1837. World-class museums like The Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Cultural Center house galleries and exhibitions that feature



Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (2023)



Health

	STUDY AREA	CITY
AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY	83	79
NO LEISURE-TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	15%	29%
WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	6%	10%

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2020); CDC (2017); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

artwork from local and international artists. The Art Institute has been named the best museum in the world by TripAdvisor and welcomes more than 1.5 million visitors per year.¹² The Loop is also home to the Harold Washington Library Center, the main branch in Chicago's public library system. Dedicated in 1991, the playful, postmodern building is one of the largest library buildings in the world, housing approximately 70 miles of bookshelves inside.¹³

In addition to the Loop's cultural assets, residents of the Loop tend to live healthier lifestyles. Only 6% of Loop residents are without health insurance coverage — nearly half the rate of city-wide residents. Additionally, Loop residents are much more likely to participate in leisure-time physical activity. As a result, overall life expectancy for the Loop and citywide residents is significantly higher.

Meanwhile, as more work, schooling, and other daily activities continue to unfold online, access to a suitable computer, phone, or tablet and reliable internet service have grown increasingly important. Adapting to shifting trends, 98% of Loop households have a computer, slightly more than the 93% share of city households. Interestingly, slightly more Loop households — or 10% — are without internet access, compared to the city, where 8% of the households lack internet. Still, the Loop's comparatively high digital connectivity, when combined with other measures of social resilience, enables the downtown community with a high degree of resilience in times of crisis or emergency.

Environmental Resilience



	STUDY AREA
LEED BUILDINGS	261
ELECTRIC CAR CHARGING POINTS	45
ACRES OF OPEN SPACE	137
ANNUAL GHG EMISSIONS PER HOUSEHOLD	1.7

Source: USGBC (2023), DOE Alternative Fuels Data Center (2024), City of Chicago (2024), Center for Neighborhood Technology (2019)

Note: Electric car charging points refers to those that are widely accessible to the public, not including those in private residential buildings.

Note: LEED Buildings include all USGBC certified buildings in ZIP codes 60601, 60602, 60603, 60604, 60605, and 60606

Environmental Resilience

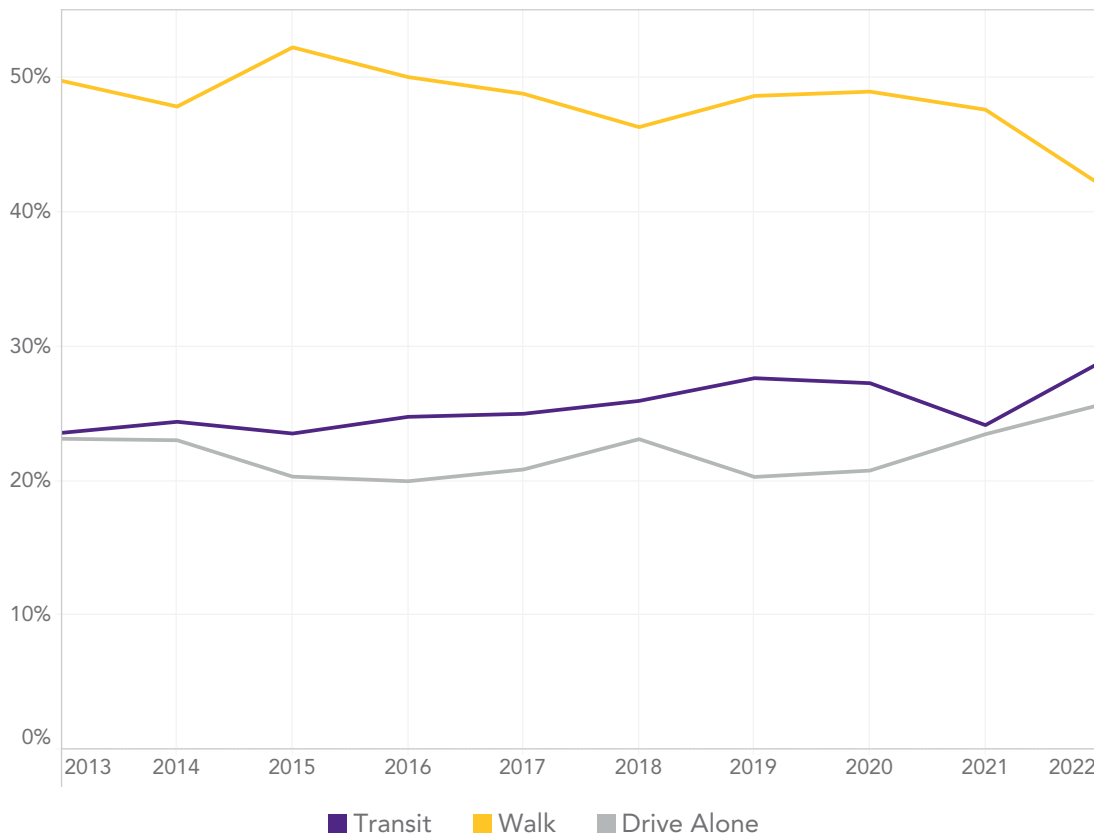
A downtown’s environmental resilience plays a major role in assuring long-term sustainability in its region, and by all measures, the Loop stands out as one of the most sustainable downtown areas in IDA’s study. Thanks to its superior walkability, comprehensive transit options, and a densely mixed-use environment that facilitates diverse commuting choices, only 26% of Loop residents drive alone to work. This is the second lowest proportion of solo drivers among the cities studied, with San Francisco leading the study. In contrast, commuting by transit and walking are far more prevalent in the Loop, with 29% of residents using transit and an impressive 42% walking to work. This pattern reflects a strong commitment to sustainable urban living and the effective integration of various transport modes that cater to a wide range of preferences and needs.

New Mobility Options

	Study Area
BIKESHARE STATIONS	25
BIKE & SCOOTER TRIPS PER YEAR STARTING OR ENDING IN LOOP	1.2M
MILES OF BIKE LANES	7.3
TOTAL TRANSIT STOPS INCLUDING RAIL AND BUS	137




Source: Chicago Loop Alliance (2023)

Downtown Commute Mode Share



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2013–2022)

Mobility Scores

	Study Area	Established Downtowns	Established Cities
WALK 	100	94	77
BIKE 	79	78	72
TRANSIT 	100	76	65

Source: Walk Score (2024)

SUSTAINABLE COMMUTE

	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS	STUDY AVERAGE
	74%	41%	28%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018–2022)

Reflective of its vibrant urban lifestyle, the Loop scores exceptionally well in terms of mobility. It notches a perfect 100 in both its Walk and Transit scores, the only downtown in IDA’s study to do so, indicating top-tier accessibility and convenience for pedestrians and public transit users alike. Furthermore, the Loop’s Bike Score of 79 surpasses Chicago’s overall score of 72, highlighting its bike-friendly amenities such as the two-way barrier-protected bike lanes on Dearborn Street. These features facilitate efficient movement within the Loop and enhance connectivity to other parts of Chicago. The comprehensive transit network includes dozens of bus routes, all eight Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) train lines converging through the Loop, and Metra commuter rail lines linking more than 100 communities to downtown.

The combination of sustainable commute options significantly reduces the environmental impact of those living in the Loop. Households here produce less than two tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, which is less than one-third of the 6.4 tonnes typically emitted by households in the broader region. This lower carbon footprint is a direct result of the Loop’s infrastructure, which supports one of the most environmentally friendly lifestyles in the metropolitan area. By living in the Loop, residents not only enjoy the convenience and vibrancy of urban life but also contribute to broader sustainability goals, making it an exemplary model for urban centers striving toward environmental consciousness and reduced carbon emissions.

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. As a result of its high density and significant citywide contributions in jobs, population, and land value, the Chicago Loop ranks in the *established* tier.

Within IDA's study, no downtown concentrates as many workers as the Chicago Loop. Occupying less than half a percent of Chicago's land, the Loop employs 419,311 workers, representing over a third of the city's total employment. That makes it roughly 75 times denser in terms of workers per acre than the city average, significantly boosting Chicago's economy by generating about 15% of the city's property tax revenues.

The Loop's economic influence has grown with time. Since 2000, employment in the Loop has risen by 27% — more than three times as fast as the average for other established downtowns. It has been driven largely by growth in the private sector, particularly in professional, scientific, and technical services, and finance and insurance. These sectors are part of the knowledge industry, which concentrates 44% of the citywide share of these jobs in the Loop, on par with other established downtowns. The healthcare and social assistance sectors have also seen significant growth, nearly tripling their workforce from 2007 to 2021.

The Loop continues to evolve post-pandemic, enticing people to live downtown with a mix of cultural and leisure activities. The study area's 25,365 residents account for about 1% of the city's population, creating a density of 36 residents per acre, with an additional 20,000+ residents living just outside the study area in the South Loop between Harrison Street and Roosevelt Road. This is twice as dense as the average acre elsewhere in the city and nearly three times as dense as all downtowns in IDA's study. Furthermore, with a population that has nearly tripled since 2000, the Loop's residential growth is happening at a rate that's more than three times as fast as all study downtowns. These residents are growing more diverse, too. The share of White residents has fallen as other racial and ethnic groups have become more prevalent in The Loop, suggesting a gradual trend toward mirroring the city's broader demographic changes. Still,

Established Downtowns

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

COMPARISON TO 2024 TIERS

	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
LAND AREA	1.09	2.58
PERCENT OF CITYWIDE LAND	0.5%	5%
ASSESSED VALUE PER SQUARE MILE	\$6.9B	\$6.2B
PERCENT OF CITYWIDE PROPERTY TAX REVENUE	15%	22%



RESIDENTS

	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
GROWTH AVG. 2000-2022	194%	72%
DENSITY RESIDENTS / ACRE	36	23
MEDIAN INCOME HOUSEHOLD	\$124K	\$78K
DIVERSITY INDEX	66	68
MEDIAN GROSS RENT	\$2,485	\$1,730



EMPLOYMENT

	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT (2002–2021)	27%	8%
CITYWIDE JOBS	34%	41%
CITYWIDE KNOWLEDGE JOBS	44%	47%
CITYWIDE CREATIVE JOBS	22%	42%
RESIDENTS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER	83%	60%

the Diversity Index, which measures the likelihood of two randomly selected residents having different racial or ethnic backgrounds, scores the Loop at 66, nearly 20 points behind the city's score.

Residents are drawn downtown to take part in the Loop's cultural scene, including its live events and festivals, which help shape the Loop's international reputation. Notably, its thriving theatre scene, which attracted more than 6 million visitors in 2023, and annual events like Lollapalooza, DCASE festivals, and more entice not only residents — but visitors — to the Loop. With 30 hotels and an average occupancy rate of 77%, along with robust retail and dining sectors generating almost \$1.8 billion in sales, the Loop attracts people from around the world.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUTE



	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
	74%	41%

Across measures of resilience — including economic, social, and environmental factors — the Loop has shown remarkable strength and adaptability. Although the COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant, ongoing challenge, the area demonstrated a swift recovery, regaining 96.7% of its 2019 employment levels within a year. Additionally, residents of the Loop tend to live healthier lifestyles and are much more likely to participate in leisure-time physical activity. With access to 5 parks and natural areas and a network of cycling and transit infrastructure, they are served with diverse commuting choices. Remarkably, only 26% of Loop residents drive alone to work — the second lowest proportion of solo drivers among the cities in IDA's study. As a result, the share of sustainable commutes among Loop residents is more than 30 percentage points higher than the average for established downtowns and nearly three times higher than the average for all study areas.

WALK SCORE



	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
	100	94

BIKE SCORE



	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
	79	80

TRANSIT SCORE



	STUDY AREA	ESTABLISHED DOWNTOWNS
	100	78

Considering these advantages, the Chicago Loop is poised for continued success in future years as an established downtown that is leading its peers across many of the metrics presented in this study. Its ability to evolve and grow over the past two decades, especially when faced with broader economic challenges, can serve as a template for other downtowns that are searching for ways to adapt into dynamic, welcoming places for all.



APPENDICES

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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 40 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 54 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 2022 American Community Survey (ACS), the 2021 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.



Discussion: What factors make a vibrant downtown?

Downtowns have differing strengths: some function as employment anchors, some as tourist hubs, and some as neighborhood centers. Some are all three. We distilled the factors for measuring the value from attributes common to all downtowns regardless of their specific characteristics. These included fun, diversity, density, creativity, size, economic output, mobility, brand, investment, resiliency, health, sustainability, affordability, fiscal impact and accessibility.



DETERMINING PRINCIPLES FOR A VALUABLE DOWNTOWN

This project began with a Principles and Metrics Workshop held in 2017 with representatives of UPMOs from the 13 pilot downtowns. The workshop focused on developing value principles that collectively capture a downtown's multiple functions and qualities, and its contributions to the city and region. Through this discussion, the participants grouped the value principles into five categories, which provided the basis for determining benchmarking metrics.

Downtown advocates tailor their arguments to the interests of different audiences. For instance, within the economy argument, the figure for sales tax revenue generated downtown would have resonance for government officials but likely wouldn't hold much interest for visitors and workers. For these audiences, a UPMO might assemble data showing the types of retail available downtown, whether the offerings meet user needs, and how fully residents, workers, and visitors use these retail establishments. The study team sought arguments that would appeal to multiple audiences and worked to identify metrics that could support multiple value statements. The workshop identified these value statements:



1. Downtowns are typically the economic engines of their regions due to a density of jobs, suppliers, customers, professional clusters, goods, and services.
2. Downtowns offer convenient access to outlying markets of residents, customers, suppliers, and peers thanks to past and ongoing investment in transportation infrastructure.
3. Downtowns provide a concentration of culture, recreation, and entertainment.
4. Downtowns offer choices for people with different levels of disposable income and lifestyle preferences.
5. Because of their density and diversity, downtowns encourage agglomeration, collaboration, and innovation.
6. Downtowns are central to the brand of the cities and regions they anchor.
7. Downtowns can be more economically and socially resilient than their broader regions.
8. Downtown resources and urban form support healthy lifestyles.
9. Downtowns' density translates into relatively low per-capita rates of natural resource consumption.
10. Relatively high rates of fiscal revenue generation and efficient consumption of public resources mean that downtowns yield a high return on public investment.

METRICS SELECTION

To meet the goal of providing metrics that allow comparisons across jurisdictions, we made sure necessary comparison data was available for every (or almost every) downtown, city, and region. Data would ideally be:

1. **Readily available** to most downtown management organizations (and ideally public).
2. **Replicable** (enabling year-to-year comparisons), and
3. **Scalable across jurisdictions**, allowing for benchmarking and regional comparisons.

Specifically, we were reliably able to obtain metrics like population, employment, or assessed value – less reliably obtaining downtown visitors, hotel tax revenue. For this reason, our comparisons across jurisdictions focus on those more commonly available metrics.

We expect most downtowns to rely on similar sources of proprietary data, but participating downtowns may prefer one choice over another when obtaining similar data on metrics like commercial real estate (e.g. Colliers vs CBRE). To the extent possible, instructions provide that data sources remain consistent across geographic scales (downtown, city, region) and consistent over time for longitudinal analysis.

Metrics and comparisons are analyzed to develop value statements of the downtown or district. Three types of data fully illustrate each argument:

1. **Absolute facts** provide quantitative context and a feel for the scale of the characteristic being used to make the argument.

For example, under economy, a UPMO might want to make the argument that a thriving financial services sector plays a critical role in the city's economy. The number of financial services jobs, the share of the city's financial services jobs located downtown, and number/list of large financial services companies headquartered downtown will help make the case that downtown has great importance to that sector and therefore the city.

2. **Indicators** measure an argument at a secondary level by focusing on inputs or outputs and may reflect the subject geography or serve as benchmarks for comparison to peer downtowns or case studies of best practices.



At this level, a UPMO could argue that their financial services sector is healthy and thriving. Comparisons to the growth of this industry sector in other downtowns, or concentration of financial services jobs relative to other downtowns would highlight the strength of their downtown's appeal to the financial services sector.

3. **Qualitative assessments** inject anecdotal context and color into an argument.

For this level, the UPMO could include news reports of new financial services companies choosing to place offices downtown. An interview with a company executive on why they chose to locate downtown would also be a powerful anecdote on downtown's appeal.

Together, these different types of information allow IDA and the UPMO to communicate downtown's unique value to the city.



DEFINING DOWNTOWN

This study developed a definition of the commercial downtown that moved beyond the boundaries of a development authority or a business improvement district. For one thing, geographic parameters vary across data sources and may not align with a UPMO's jurisdiction.

Urban place management organizations vary widely in terms of their geographic definition. To make boundaries replicable and comparable across data sources, the study team recommended aligning each downtown with commonly used census boundaries. In most cases this meant using census tracts, the smallest permanent subdivisions that receive annual data updates under the American Community Survey. They make ideal geographic identifiers, since new data is released regularly, and tract boundaries are only adjusted once every 10 years.

Employing census tracts may not accurately reflect the value of every downtown. In some cases, census block groups more accurately captured the downtown boundaries. Though the Census Bureau subdivides or combines block groups with each decennial census, block groups also receive annual data updates and are compatible with most data sources. We looked to the 2012 publication, *The Value of Canadian Downtowns*, for effective criteria:

1. The downtown boundary had to include the city's financial core.
2. The downtown study area had to include diverse urban elements and land uses.
3. Where possible, we sought hard boundaries such as major streets, train tracks, or geographic features like rivers.
4. An overarching consideration was that data compiled align with selected downtown study areas.

Each downtown provided IDA with the geography selection for its downtown, which IDA then worked to refine, given local conditions and UPMO needs. Customized shapefiles or census tracts defined the downtown boundaries. For city and regional boundaries, IDA worked with the downtown management organization to confirm the accuracy of the respective census-designated place or MSA.

PROJECT PROCESS

DATA COLLECTION

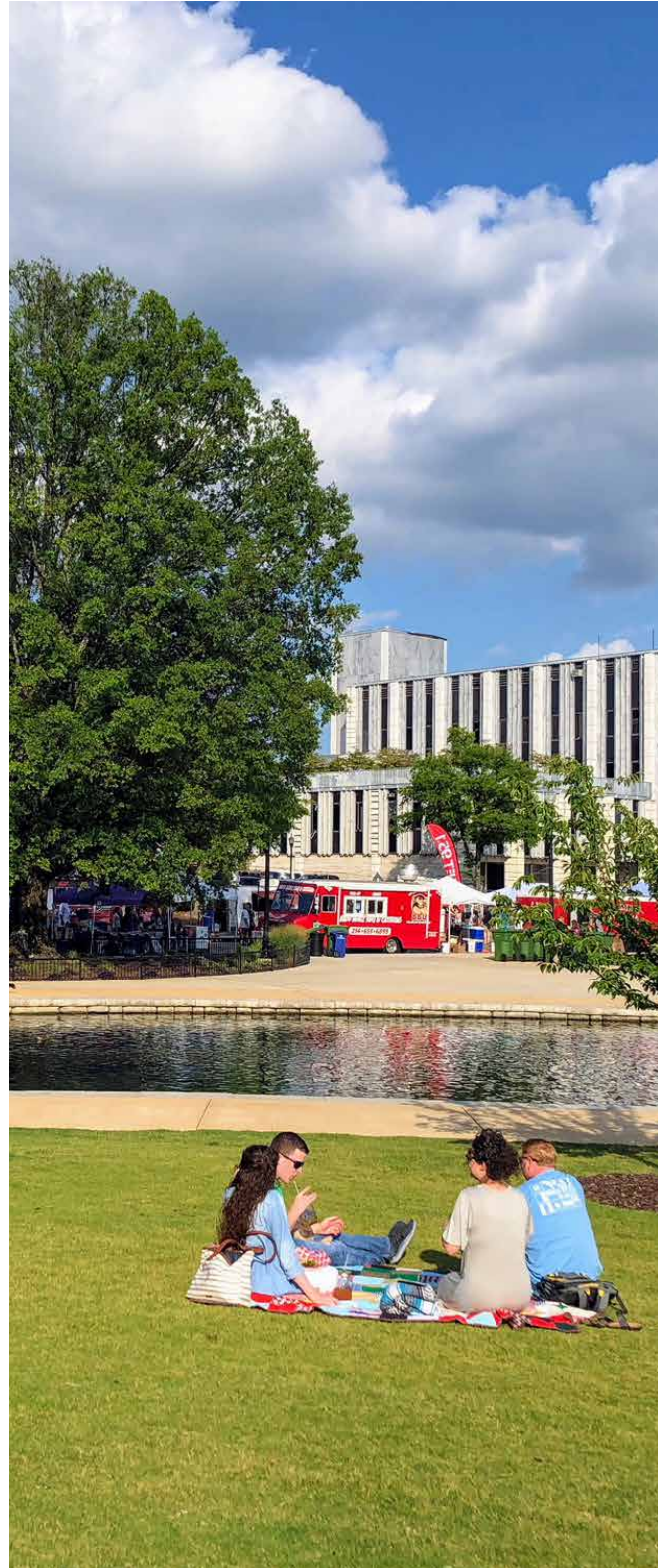
Both IDA and the local partner spend the first phase of the project collecting data for the study. IDA collects data primarily from national databases (see Appendix 3 for data sources), and the local partner works with its data partners to obtain other locally-specific data. In instances where local data was not available, we allowed substitution or approximation for some metrics if clearly noted and explained.

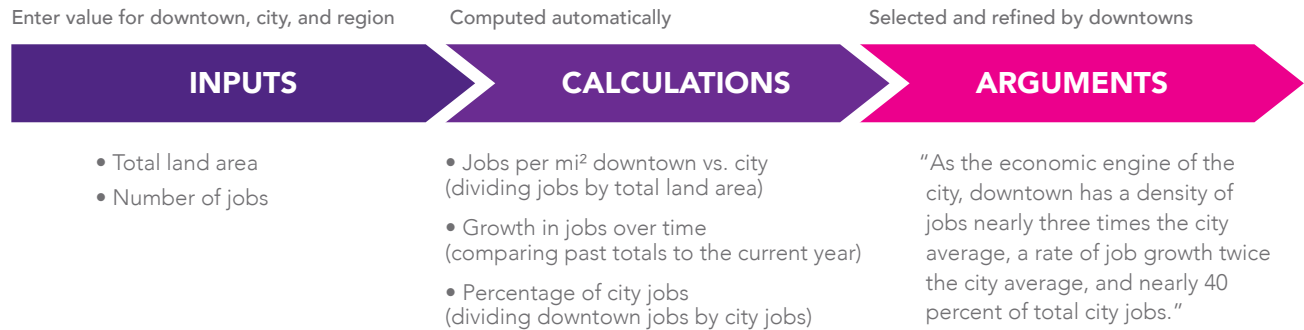
CALCULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

After compiling the data, all the information is entered into an IDA database for analysis. Data is organized by metric, year, and geography for each district. This specialized tool also tabulates numerous ratios, percentages, changes, and comparisons used to inform the report. As an example, after plugging in employment and land area data the tool can calculate the following:

- Percent of citywide and regional jobs
- Percent of citywide and regional land area
- Percent total job growth between specified years
- Percent job growth between specified years broken out by industry
- Average jobs per square mile
- Percent of employment in knowledge industries
- Percent of citywide and regional knowledge jobs located downtown
- Share of employment by race
- Share of employment by age
- Share of workers living and working within the selected area

This analysis is applied across all years collected and all applicable geographies to inform trends over time and within larger contexts. The flow chart of inputs, calculations, and arguments demonstrates how we go from raw data to making arguments in the report. Research staff also use their expertise and knowledge of downtowns to highlight key trends and draw connections between local insights and the trends in the data.





BENCHMARKING TIERS

Based on the data collected for this study, we identified three tiers of downtowns, defined by stage of development. We divided the 49 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 (2002–2021)
 - o Percent growth in population (2000–2022)

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 compendium report *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities: Third Edition* has additional data on the performance of *emerging*, *growing*, and *established* tiers of downtowns.

Appendix II: Principles and Benefits

ECONOMY: Within their regions, downtowns have substantial economic importance.

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 only making up a small fraction of the land area. Downtowns support high percentages of jobs across many different industries and skill levels. Because of their relatively high density of economic activity, investment in the center city provides a greater return per dollar for both public and private sectors.



Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Annual private investment
- Annual public investment
- Assessed value
- Average office vacancy rate
- Average Class A office rent
- Average Class B office rent
- Average Class C office rent
- Employment (primary jobs)
 - By two-digit NAICS employment sectors
 - By earnings
 - By residence
 - By demographics
- Hotel tax
- Income tax
- Incubator and co-working spaces
- Invested in construction projects
- Number of approved building permits
- Number of Fortune 1000 headquarters
- Office inventory
- Office space under construction
- Office square footage in pipeline (to be completed in three years)
- Property tax
- Parking tax
- Sales tax

INCLUSION: Downtowns invite and welcome all residents of the region (as well as visitors from elsewhere) by providing access to opportunity, essential services, culture, recreation, entertainment, and participation in civic activities.

As the literal and figurative heart of the city, downtowns 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, across all ages. This diversity ensures that as an inclusive place, it 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.



Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Average residential vacancy rate
- Demographics
- Diversity Index
- Employment diversity
- Foreign-born residents
- Homeless residents
- House value for owner-occupied housing units
- Households by income
- Median gross rent
- Median home price
- Median household income
- Rent-burdened residents
- Resident population
- Resident population by age
- Resident population by highest educational attainment
- Resident population by race and ethnicity
- Residential inventory
- Residential units in pipeline
- Residential units under construction
- Subsidized housing units
- Zillow median rental listing price by number of bedrooms
- Zillow median rental listing price per square foot by number of bedrooms

VIBRANCY: Thanks to a wide base of users, downtowns and center cities can support a variety of retail, infrastructure, and institutional uses that offer broad benefits to the region.

The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a regionwide consumer base creates value. Vibrancy is the buzz of activity and excitement that comes with high-quality experiential offerings like breweries, restaurants, theatres, or outdoor events within a downtown creates an attraction and buzz. As the cultural center of their cities, downtowns typically attract a large share of citywide visitors and are the location of a large share of citywide hotels and hotel rooms. 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



Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Annual festivals/parades
- Average hotel occupancy rate
- Average retail rent
- Average retail vacancy rate
- Average visitor length of stay
- Convention centers
- Gyms and fitness studios
- Hotel rooms
- Hotels
- Outdoor events permitted by city
- Population
- Retail businesses (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail Market Potential Index (ESRI MPI)
- Retail sales (retail trade and food & drink)
- Retail space in pipeline
- Retail space inventory
- Retail space under construction
- Theatres
- Venues with live entertainment
- Visitation by origin
- Visitors

IDENTITY: Downtowns 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 represent.

Downtowns and center cities are often iconic symbols of their cities, and this strong sense of place enhances local pride. The authentic cultural offerings in downtown enhance its character, heritage, and beauty, and create an environment that is not easily replicable in other parts of the city. Combining community history and personal memory, a downtown's cultural value plays a central role in preserving and promoting the region's 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. *Downtown preserves heritage, connects regional residents, and contributes positively to the regional brand.*

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 were one of the oldest neighborhoods citywide, they offer rare insights into their city's past, present and future."²



Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Convention attendees
- Conventions
- Farmers markets
- Libraries
- Locally designated historic districts
- Locally designated historic structures
- Media mentions
- Museums
- National Register of Historic Places districts
- National Register of Historic Places structures
- Number of followers on Facebook
- Number of followers on Twitter
- Number of posts with Instagram hashtag
- Parks and natural areas
- Playgrounds
- Plazas/squares/amphitheater or other public outdoor gathering spaces
- Postsecondary institutions
- Postsecondary students
- Primary and secondary schools (public and private)
- Public art installations
- Public pools
- Recreation and community centers, both public and private (e.g., YMCA)
- Religious institutions
- Sports stadiums
- Sports teams

RESILIENCE: Because of their diversity and density of resources and services, downtowns and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental, shocks and stresses.

As key centers of economy and culture, being resilient to city, regional, or even national shocks is highly important for ensuring stability, sustainability, and prosperity. Because of the diversity and density of resources and services, center cities and their inhabitants can better absorb economic, social, and environmental shocks and stresses than their surrounding cities and regions. The diversity and economic strengths of strong downtowns and center cities equip them to adapt to economic and social shocks better than more homogenous communities. Consequently, they can play a key role in advancing regional resilience, particularly in the wake of economic and environmental shocks that disproportionately affect less economically and socially dynamic areas.



Illustrative metrics collected for comparison:

- Acreage of open space
- Annual greenhouse gas emissions per household
- Average life expectancy
- Average property crime rate
- Average violent crime rate
- Bike Score
- Bike share stations
- Community gardens
- Commute mode for workers 16 and over
- Commute time for workers 16 and over
- Docked bikes
- Dockless bikes
- Electric car charging points
- Housing and Transportation Index
- LEED-certified buildings
- Miles of bike lanes
- No leisure-time physical activity among adults aged > 18
- Resident population in poverty
- Scooters
- Solid waste generation
- Transit Score
- Transit stops (including rail and bus)
- Unemployment rate
- Walk Score

Appendix III: 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 2023 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	2022 (Annual Updates)
American FactFinder	Demographic, Housing, Crime, Health, Employment, Economy	Public	Allows for selection of sub-geographies down to the census block group level	2022 (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	2021 (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	2022 (Annual Updates)
Geolounge	Map of Fortune 1000 companies	Public	None	2022 (Unscheduled Updates)
Zillow	Housing and rental costs	Public	The smallest geographies are arbitrarily designated "neighborhoods" some of which line up with the study areas while others do not or do not exist. In these cases, we got as close as we could with a zip code	April to June Annually (Monthly Updates)

Appendix IV: 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.³

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.⁴

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.

Additional IDA Sources

IDA's Vitality Index, powered by Stantec (2019): The IDA Vitality Index, powered by Stantec, is an interactive, online tool to benchmark the vitality of downtowns across the U.S. The Vitality Index reflects the pioneering IDA research in *The Value of U.S. Downtowns and City Centers*, and measures vitality through three principles identified in the VODT study: economy, inclusion, and vibrancy. Through these three principles, and five core indicators in each principle, the Vitality Index aims to capture the pulse of the downtown and enable urban place managers to objectively quantify and benchmark their district's performance metrics among peer cities. The index utilizes a benchmarking system to understand how each of three vitality principles contribute to an overall combined score, calculated by comparing each metric to the national average. Most valuable, the index serves as a baseline and provides insights for the strategic evolution of a community.

Quantifying the Value of Canadian Downtowns: A Research Toolkit (2016): This toolkit represents a groundbreaking effort to provide a common set of data and processes that will help Canadian place management organizations, such as BIAs/BIDs, establish and sustain evaluation and compare progress among downtowns. While geared toward Canadian downtowns, the toolkit has value for urban districts outside of Canada looking to move toward data standardization and best practices. In the toolkit, organizations will find directions and insights on collecting, organizing, storing, and presenting downtown-specific data to make the case for continued investment and support. The toolkit includes instructions and rationale for the choice of data metrics, and it recommends core, trend and pulse metrics. The kit organizes the core indicators around the principles of visibility (unique identity, brand, definition); vision (leadership, planning, collaboration); prosperity (economic data); livability (residential and uses); and strategy (types and values of public investment). The core indicators are population density (downtown/city); job density (downtown/city); number of new commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings; current value assessment of downtown properties (commercial, residential, institutional); capital

investment (downtown/city); transportation modal split; number of large-format grocery stores; amount invested in parks and public realm; and number of annual cultural events and festivals.

The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns (2013): This study provides an extensive portrait of the contributions made by downtown areas across Canada, highlighting innovative approaches to revitalization and efforts being applied across the nation. It builds on an initial study phase, completed in 2012, that examined ten of those downtowns, and tracks population, population density, job density and average block size of the downtown core and the municipality. The study organized data under visibility, vision, prosperity, livability and strategy.

Defining Downtowns—Downtown Rebirth: This policy paper represents the culmination of a year-long effort by IDA and partners to develop an effective way of quantifying how many people and work in and around 231 job centers in 150 American cities. Without standard geographic definitions for downtowns and downtown residential neighborhoods, previous research relied on overly simplified boundaries that didn't capture the idiosyncratic shapes of urban employment nodes and thus failed to capitalize fully on existing federal data. For the first time, Downtown Rebirth suggests a way both to define and quantify downtown workforce and population numbers and document how these employment hubs and live-work environments are changing.

The Value of U.S. Downtowns & Center Cities study expands on the efforts of IDA's "*Downtown Rebirth: Documenting the Live-Work Dynamic in 21st Century Cities*" study, which provided guidelines for selecting downtown boundaries. This study uses these recommendations to define downtown beyond the boundaries of a district management organization using a definition of downtown commonly understood by those in that community. For a small sample of downtowns in this study, IDA also expands upon and updates the data from the *Downtown Rebirth* report.

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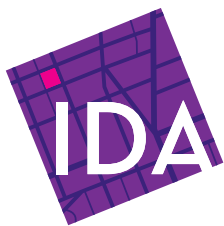
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