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# **Community Engagement**

# Overview

- **3,600** Unique Website Visitors
- **125** Online Surveys
- **81** Stakeholders Interviewed
- **14** Solutions Group Members
- **6** Community Roundtables (over 115 participants)

...An international destination where millions of people visit each year.

...A place that **puts Birmingham on the map**

....A **national destination** for top talent

....A **vibrant** social atmosphere for locals and tourists

...A place **for black-owned businesses** to thrive.

...An area that **embraces all** and makes **all feel welcome**

# Seven Themes

## Community Engagement Summary

### **Be Bold, Be Courageous**

The NW Downtown Development Plan

### **Be Sure the Right Story is Told**

History & Culture

### **Fitting into the Whole City**

Public Realm & Connectivity

### **It Needs to Feel Like Community**

Neighborhood Character, Daily Needs & Community Life

### **Welcome, Clean and Safe Must be the Baseline**

Safety & Perception

### **Double-Down on Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

Economic Opportunity and Growth

### **Create the Infrastructure for All to Grow**

Investment & Development

# Be Bold, Be Courageous

## The NW Downtown Development Plan

"This should be a place where you can come here and start something that can change the world."



"Look ahead and put the pieces in place to make change over the next generation."



"We need a place where we can heal."

"Re-imagine everything; be bold, courageous."

"Be on the offensive of creating opportunity."



"Need this to be where someone looks around and says 'wow, this is Birmingham.'"

"We want people to be drawn-in by Birmingham culture and moved."

"My dream for the district is to put the City of Birmingham on the map."



# Be Sure the Right Story is Told

## History & Culture

"History is part of the asset base; the past needs to inform how we move forward."

"Some pieces of missing history that need to be lifted up."

"Telling stories can have real power."

"Don't displace the people and culture."

"People want to be sure the right story is told; sacrifice not in vain; We didn't just march here, we lived here, and worked here."

"Civil Rights destinations are often a once-in-a-lifetime visit; don't want to disappoint."

"Need to stay true to the fabric of Birmingham."

"Don't want civil rights message to get lost, muddled, or smothered."

"What happened in Bham cannot be replicated anywhere."

# Be Sure the Right Story is Told

## History & Culture

“Need to change the narrative of the CRD; not a district in the past tense.”



“Thanks for the history lesson, but what is bham doing now and in the future?”



“CRD needs to speak to the younger generation and inspire them to change the world.”

“Need to make CRD an exciting adventure, not just moaning and groaning; a sad place.”



“District needs to be interactive; not just a museum.”



“The CRD can be connected to today’s aspirations and thoughts.”



“CRD doesn’t relate to our current lives; no thread to today or tomorrow; like a fly in amber.”



# Fitting into the Whole City

## Public Realm & Connectivity

"Need to capitalize on and connect to things outside of the district."

"Civil Rights District is in isolation; needs to be connected to the wider community."

"Don't let the neighborhoods be detached; they must be connected; they are important to city."

"How do you keep the Switch from looking like any other place?"

"Improve the streetscape to make the District 'the place' to be."

"Even on sunny days it seems gray. More green spaces."

"Need walkability! Foot traffic is what makes cities vibrant."

"Proximity is misunderstood; things are not that far by foot or bike."

# It Needs to Feel Like Community

## Neighborhood Character, Daily Needs & Community Life

"We need vibrancy and energy; a place where people live and work; as it was historically."



"We need to create a full-day experience."

"Sadly there's not enough for families and teens."

"Need convenient access to daily amenities."



"Need a happening, bustling scene after 5; always something to do."

"My dream for the district is a place with buzzing nightlife and a rich, interactive area for learning about Birmingham's history and culture."



"The district needs to be a fun and safe place for children; more likely to learn stories through play."



"It needs to feel like community."

"Residents need to feel valued; loved."



"There are no restaurants; no place to sit down and have a meal with your family."





# Welcome, Clean and Safe Must be the Baseline

## Safety & Perception

"There is some hesitation of people to do business in the district."

"What's going on to help address vagrancy and panhandling?"

"Must feel safe in the district; must be a priority."

"It must feel welcome; safe."

"Approach to homelessness requires a human rights lens."

"Safety is a baseline! Need to extend CAP? Perception is key."

# Double-Down on Innovation & Entrepreneurship

## Economic Opportunity and Growth

"How do we define entrepreneurship?  
More than just tech."

"Local biz needs to be active and engaged in neighborhood."

"Economic opportunity needs to be the first tier: will provide return on financial capital as well as human and social capital."

"Double-down on innovation and entrepreneurship; social innovation."

"Need to empower locals to open businesses and tell the story."

"District development needs to build equity for the black community; where everyday citizens have the opportunity to be part of the economy."

"There is a tremendous legacy of entrepreneurship and innovation in the Civil Rights District."

"My dream for the district is a place where black-owned businesses thrive."

"Must take care with potentially exclusionary terms, i.e. 'innovation' and 'entrepreneurship.'"

# Double-Down on Innovation & Entrepreneurship

## Economic Opportunity and Growth

"How can we bring innovation out of the Depot and into the community?"

"Want to create a district that will be filled with people who move up through learning; growing personally and as a business opportunity."

"At Innovation Depot, we are building a community; a community of innovators."

"Innovation Depot grads want to stay; see things happen; be part of a bigger community."

"My dream for the district is a national destination for top talent and an incubator for many new businesses; so many that we can't remember them all."

"It feels like a community more than most business districts."

"Need to build a sense of community around small business."

"No one has told me 'no' for a meeting. Collaboration and sense of community is strong."

# Create the Infrastructure for All to Grow

## Investment & Development

"Need to 'paint picture' of potential to property owners."



"Barriers to investment include: unmotivated property owners, homelessness, cbd vacancy, lack of appealing/contributing historic structures."



"Hesitancy to raise rents keeps improvements and development potential suppressed." limitless potential."



"Create a clear pathway and the infrastructure for all to grow."

"District needs market-proving; need to reveal demand."



"There is a wait and see mentality right now with businesses and property owners; some stagnation, but limitless potential."



"There is the opportunity for meaningful, transformational use of city assets."



"Need to create an environment that draws investment."

# Community Roundtable

All groups **57** responses.

**Q: If you had to describe  
Birmingham in one word, what  
would it be?**



# Community Roundtable

Gen Y&Z + Innovation Builders **18 responses.**

**Q: What is the draw of  
Birmingham today?**



# Community Roundtable

Gen Y&Z

How can non-entrepreneurs connect to the area?

Rebranding can be a form of erasure. There has to be more thought to the story these brand identities tell, particularly around who's included, who's invited, and who's story is being told.

**Q: What is the perception of the Switch Innovation District?**

The Hub.

Didn't know it was called the switch. Innovation depot closes itself off to the general public. How are we defining entrepreneurs? Just tech and startup? So many entrepreneurs are closed out of that.

The Future

Holds a lot of potential but has not realized it yet. The Innovation Depot is the main event. Will it ever really become a district or just stay a building? This has been a hope for a while.

Vacant buildings , lots of homelessness.

Promising.

# Community Roundtable

Gen Y&Z

Birmingham has tons of amenities like bars, restaurants, general activities and I don't think we need more investment here. The Civil Rights District is unique. We need a sense of history and progress expressed by the soul of our city.

I think building a community that is connected to its character/history is important. Birmingham has character that does not need to be disregarded. Better streetscapes, lighting, and greenways to drive safety and walkability to this area.

**Q: What amenities, activities, types of neighborhoods and quality of place are most needed to attract young graduates, entrepreneurs, & creative minds?**

Good food, housing for young adults, experiences you can't get in other cities.

You're not going to attract BIPOC folks if they can't see themselves in the community you're inviting them to. Capitalizing native BIPOC businesses & creatives to create the place where BIPOC folks want to be.

Equitable salary, employers who are stuck in ancient mentalities, grants for creatives, funding needed to make upgrades.

Access to healthy food in walking distance, affordable housing.



# Community Roundtable

Civil Rights Leadership

**Q: What words would you use to describe how the civil rights story is best told to future generations?**



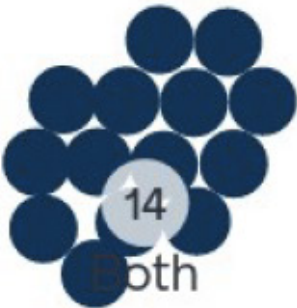
# Community Roundtable

Civil Rights Leadership

**Q: Is the future Civil Rights District a neighborhood full of energy where people live and work, or a quiet and reflective campus where people come for?**

0  
Learning

0  
Fellowship



# Community Roundtable

Civil Rights Leadership

Expand restaurants, nightlife, hotel, retail and seasonal events, residential.

Steady tours of the district museums and sites by qualified individuals telling our story. Sit down restaurants and jazz concerts.

**Q: What new amenities, attractions, events, etc. would make Northwest Downtown a bigger part of the daily life of all**

More after hours movie and music venues.

Negro League Museum, Railroad Park, Regions Field. Bring back City Stages!!! Let the BCVB do what they do best!!... give Sarah and her team free reign to showcase BHAM like only they can do!

Fun and safe spaces for children.

Renovated buildings, play area for children, festivals that unite the entire civil rights district and community.

Shared office space, regular schedule of activities in the parks, food trucks.

Black music festivals.

# Community Roundtable

Civil Rights Leadership

**Q: What words would you use to describe the ideal type and character of future development in the district?**

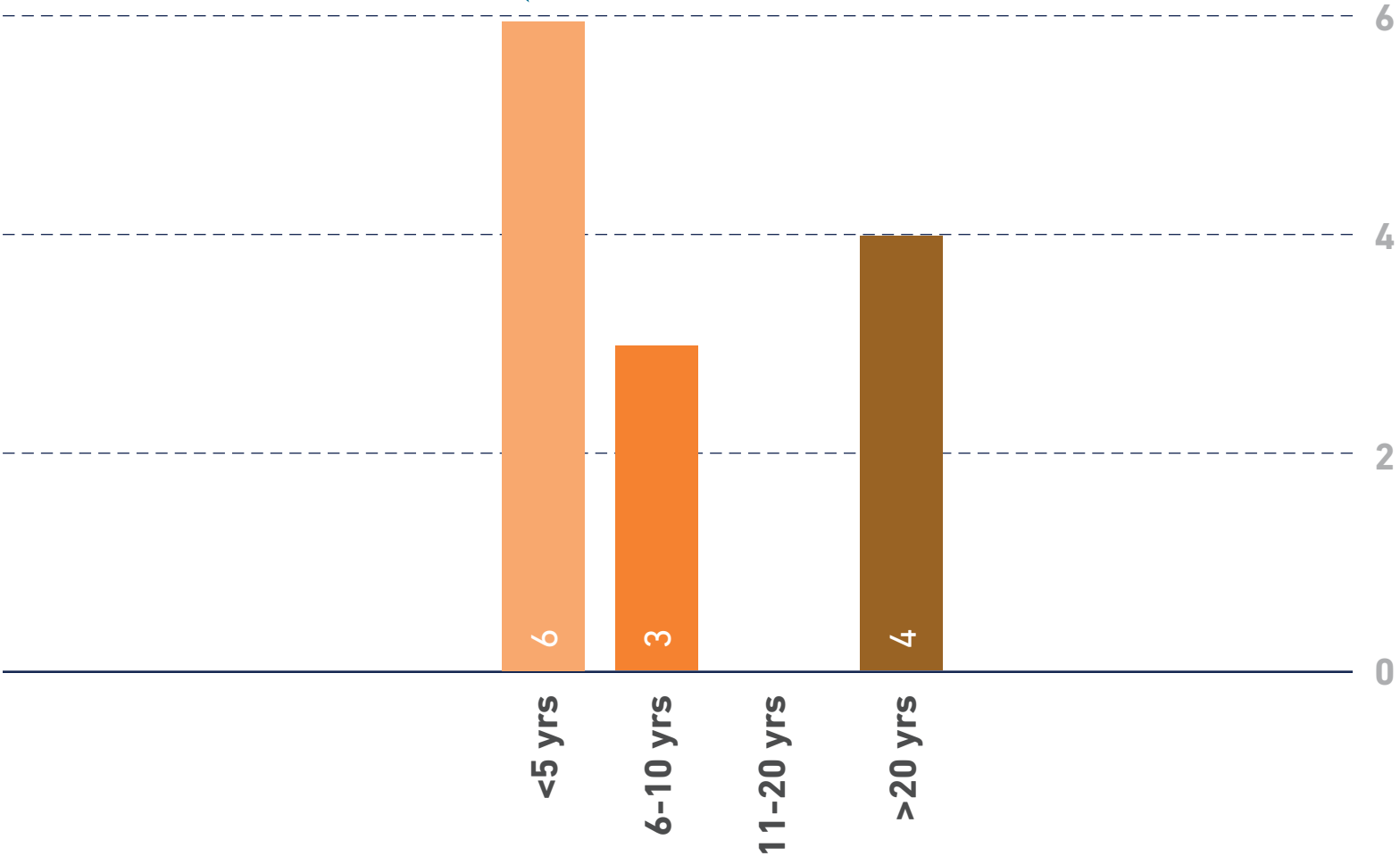


# Community Roundtable

Neighborhood

**Q: How long have you lived in the area?**

**"<5 yrs" tops the list**



# Community Roundtable

Neighborhood

**Q: How long have you lived in the area?**

Parks, recreation centers, gyms, museums, festivals and theaters.

Birmingham Museum of Art, Railroad Park and theatre district such as Alabama Theatre.

Our wonderful parks. They are amazing! The McWayne center, live productions.

Birmingham Historic sites

As a mom of 2 (and one on the way) we enjoy our rec center, park. Wish there was a safe, paved trail other than RRP & MCT.

fast track permitting assistance.

Sports

# Community Roundtable


Neighborhood

**Q: What is missing and most needed to serve daily needs?**




# Community Roundtable

Neighborhood




Connected, vibrant, cooperative, sustainable, diverse, affordable, engaging, inclusive.

Transparency —Working relationships between residents-contractors. Successful communication that's everyone can feel heard.



**Q: What words would you use to describe the ideal type and character of future development in the district?**


Bridge the past and present.




A proud heritage blazing into the future with confidence.




High density occupancy. Attractive affordable homes. Lots of people energy.



United! Collaborative. Preservation Of past with future vision. Community-oriented.



Inviting and welcoming to everyone.





# Community Roundtable

Business

**Q: Why are you located or have business interest in Northwest Downtown?**

home accessibility  
walkable legacy feasible  
local  
history(ic)  
vibrancy business culture  
opportunity  
visibility  
location

# Community Roundtable

Business

## Strengths



**Limitless potential**

**Good bones, rich history & culture**

**Gravitas**

**Long standing business owners and tenant**

**Strengths sense of family and community**

**Leading community economic development agency in Urban Impact that focuses on advocating for the District and it's businesses.**

## Weaknesses



**Stagnant**

**"Time has passed it by"**

**Disinvestment**

**Design focused on tourist - similar to comparable cities**

**Lack of plan/direction for the area**

**Perception of safety**

**Cleanliness, vacancy/blighted areas, underserved**

**Homelessness**

**Q: What are current perceptions of the Northwest Downtown area? Strengths? Weaknesses?**

# Community Roundtable

Business

**Q: What are currently the biggest barriers to additional investment, development, and business growth?**

Infrastructure, transit, perception of safety

City services, incentives, politics, red tape, regulation, code enforcement

Capital, funding, competition

Active association, support, ownership, mentorship

Lack of density, places to go

Covid

Over priced real estate owners not improving property failure to carry out plan

# Community Roundtable

Business

**Q: What words would you use to describe the ideal type and character of future development in the district?**

Variety of businesses, Residential density, walkability, consistent vibrant activities, and new technology for tourism and exposure.

Lively, diversity of businesses, historical context and signage, pedestrian friendly, walkable and bike able, clean, fewer one-way streets, trees, homes, safe.

Energy, vibrant area that feels safe and inviting.

Safe, close 20th Street to motor vehicles, more restaurants, shops.

Residential. Services follow people and we need more people in the district 24/7.

A bustling tourist district that is like a Harlem Renaissance

Business attractions

# Community Roundtable

Innovation Builders

**Q: What are the amenities and programs most needed to attract young graduates, entrepreneurs, and creative minds to the area?**

A variety of lifestyle amenities within easy walking distance of one another. Active public realm (run/bike trails, good ped, transit). Culture of design and creativity.

Vibrant city center, walkability, transit, continue reputation as foodie city, equity & inclusion, story telling.

Stabilization Programs, Inclusive Collaboration.

A niche; a deep workforce bench in that niche; visible pathways for opportunities beyond an entry level position.

Student Loan Forgiveness Programs

Film Industry Growth.

# Community Roundtable

Innovation Builders

**Q: What are the potential synergies between the Civil Rights District and The Switch?**

16th Street thematic and landscaping programming. Multiple types of business incubators that serve and scale, biz, esp B.O.B.

Telling the stories of the entrepreneurs of yesterday from the Civil Rights District, which would have direct applicability to the entrepreneurs of today (in The Switch). And again, we could make physical connections between the districts.

Innovation as it relates to tech AND entrepreneurship, more intentional inclusion in Bham's innovation/tech scene

Walkable between two districts; opportunity to better support black entrepreneurs and inclusive innovations.

Centering Birmingham's legacy of Black entrepreneurship in framing the future of innovation in the city is essential. We need to back up that past/present/future narrative with real support for Black entrepreneurs today (TA, capital, back-of-house).

Extending the resources in the switch to the district to grow minority businesses

Honest Collaboration, Diverse Productivity

# Community Roundtable

Innovation Builders

**Q: What words would you use to describe the ideal type and character of future development in the district?**

