



# City of Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Public Survey Summary Report

September 4, 2024

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- OVERVIEW ..... 2
  - Background..... 2
  - Survey Methodology..... 2
  - Survey Respondents ..... 3
  - Key Findings ..... 3
  
- SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS..... 4
  - Question 1: What best describes your relationship to downtown Tonawanda? ..... 4
  - Question 2: If you live in the City of Tonawanda, how long have you lived here?..... 4
  - Question 3: What brings you to downtown Tonawanda? ..... 5
  - Question 4: What type of housing would promote more development in downtown Tonawanda?..... 6
  - Question 5: What are the highest priorities for downtown Tonawanda? ..... 7
  - Question 6: What types of businesses would you like to see in downtown Tonawanda? ..... 8
  - Question 7: What is the biggest challenge that you believe Tonawanda is currently facing? 8
  - Question 8: What is the biggest opportunity to revitalize downtown Tonawanda?..... 9
  - Question 9: When you think of what downtown Tonawanda is like today, what word would you use to describe the area to your friends and families?..... 10
  - Question 10: When you think about what downtown Tonawanda might be like in 15 years, what word would you like to be able to use to describe the area to your friends and family? ..... 10
  - Question 11: Please note any additional comments or ideas you have relating to the Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative..... 10
  - Question 12: What is your home zip code?..... 11
  - Question 13: What is your age?..... 11
  - Question 14: What is your race or ethnicity? (please check all that apply)..... 12
  - Question 15: If you would like to stay involved in the Tonawanda DRI, please leave us your contact information below..... 12

# OVERVIEW

---

## BACKGROUND

The City of Tonawanda was selected to receive \$10 million through New York State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), a cornerstone of the State's economic development program. The DRI transforms downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and are magnets for redevelopment, business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity. The funding will be allocated to public, private, and/or nonprofit projects that will contribute to the City's ongoing revitalization.

Public engagement is a key component of the DRI planning process. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders in the community, including municipal government, key employers and institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the general public are invited to attend LPC meetings and public workshops to learn about the DRI process and its intended outcomes; to pose questions; to comment on findings, goals, and recommendations; and to contribute project ideas.

A critical aspect of the DRI engagement approach was a public survey to gauge community members' perceptions of issues and opportunities within downtown Tonawanda resulting in data that would inform the DRI vision, goals, and strategies and help identify investments that have potential to transform the downtown area. This document summarizes the results of the public survey administered as part of the DRI public engagement process.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The public survey was hosted online on Survey Monkey and in physical format from May 16 to August 2, 2024. Paper copies of the survey were available at three locations in the City of Tonawanda: Tops grocery store on Niagara Street, City of Tonawanda Public Library, and City Hall. The survey received 295 responses. The survey was promoted through the Tonawanda DRI website, social media, local news media, a public meeting, and two pop-up events.

The survey asked the fifteen questions outlined below.

1. What best describes your relationship to the City of Tonawanda?
2. If you live in the City of Tonawanda, how long have you lived here?
3. What brings you to downtown Tonawanda? (Check all that apply)
4. What type of housing would promote more development in downtown Tonawanda? (Check all that apply)
5. What are the highest priorities for downtown Tonawanda? (Check all that apply)
6. What types of businesses would you like to see in downtown Tonawanda? (Check all that apply)
7. What is the biggest challenge you believe Tonawanda is currently facing?
8. What is the biggest opportunity to revitalize downtown Tonawanda?
9. When you think about what downtown Tonawanda is like today, what word would you use to describe the area to your friends and family?

10. When you think about what downtown Tonawanda might be like in 15 years, what word would you like to be able to use to describe the area to your friends and family?
11. Please note any additional comments or ideas you have relating to the Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative.
12. What is your home zip code?
13. What is your age?
14. What is your race or ethnicity? (please check all that apply)
15. If you would like to stay involved in the Tonawanda DRI, please leave us your contact information below.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The top three zip codes where survey respondents reside were 14150 (City of Tonawanda), 14120 (North Tonawanda), and 14072 (Grand Island). As shown in the table below, 90% of respondents were City of Tonawanda residents.

Home Zip Code	Primary Location	Respondents
14150	City of Tonawanda	90%
14120	North Tonawanda	3%
14072	Grand Island	1%
Other	Other	6%

## KEY FINDINGS

High-level takeaways from the survey include an emphasis on the redevelopment of the waterfront and Main Street; demand for new businesses, particularly retail storefronts and restaurants; and the importance of developing vacant/underutilized sites while maintaining Tonawanda's historic amenities. These themes are summarized below.

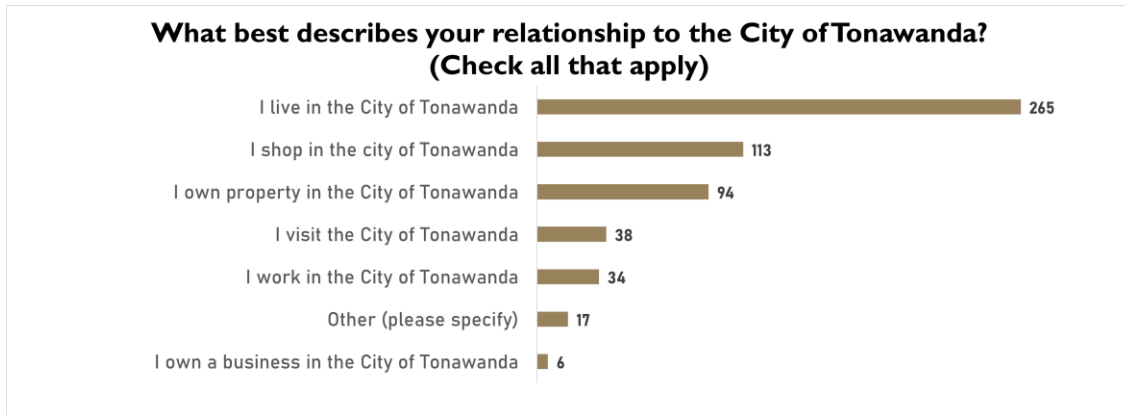
- **Emphasis on Waterfront and Parks:** Tonawanda's location at the confluence of three waterways uniquely poises it for waterfront-oriented revitalization. Continued investment in the waterfront and parks will not only improve these areas but will help attract visitors onto Main Street and other areas of downtown Tonawanda.
- **Historic Building Stock and Vacancy:** Respondents cited vacancy and underutilized areas in the downtown core as a major challenge to revitalization. While respondents want to see infill development on vacant sites, the preservation of existing buildings and emphasizing the historic elements of the city ranked as a high priority. Revitalization should ensure that both demands are met.
- **Economic and Business Development:** Respondents want a draw to downtown Tonawanda beyond recreational amenities. Retail storefronts and new restaurants ranked highly as demanded businesses. Respondents emphasized the importance of new businesses being family-friendly or youth-oriented.

These key findings clarify the community's vision for well-planned investment in downtown Tonawanda. The following pages contain a summary of survey results by question.

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

This section summarizes the results from each survey question.

## Question 1: What best describes your relationship to downtown Tonawanda?



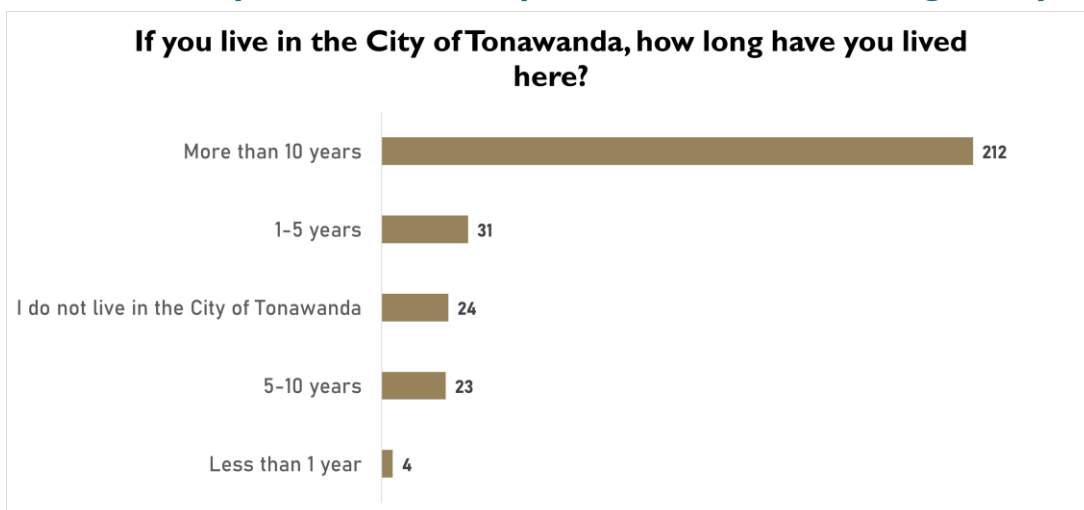
The survey data indicate that respondents have the following relationships with the City of Tonawanda:

- I live in the City of Tonawanda: 265 individuals (90% of question respondents)
- I shop in the City of Tonawanda: 113 individuals (39% of question respondents)
- I own property in the City of Tonawanda: 94 individuals (32% of question respondents)
- I work in the City of Tonawanda: 34 individuals (12% of question respondents)
- Other (please specify): 17 individuals (6% of question respondents)
- I own a business in the City of Tonawanda: 6 individuals (2% of question respondents)

Common themes from the written answers of the 17 respondents who answered with “other” are summarized below.

- Belong to Senior Citizens Center
- Grew up/lived in the City of Tonawanda, but moved elsewhere
- Use Tonawanda’s trails/parks system

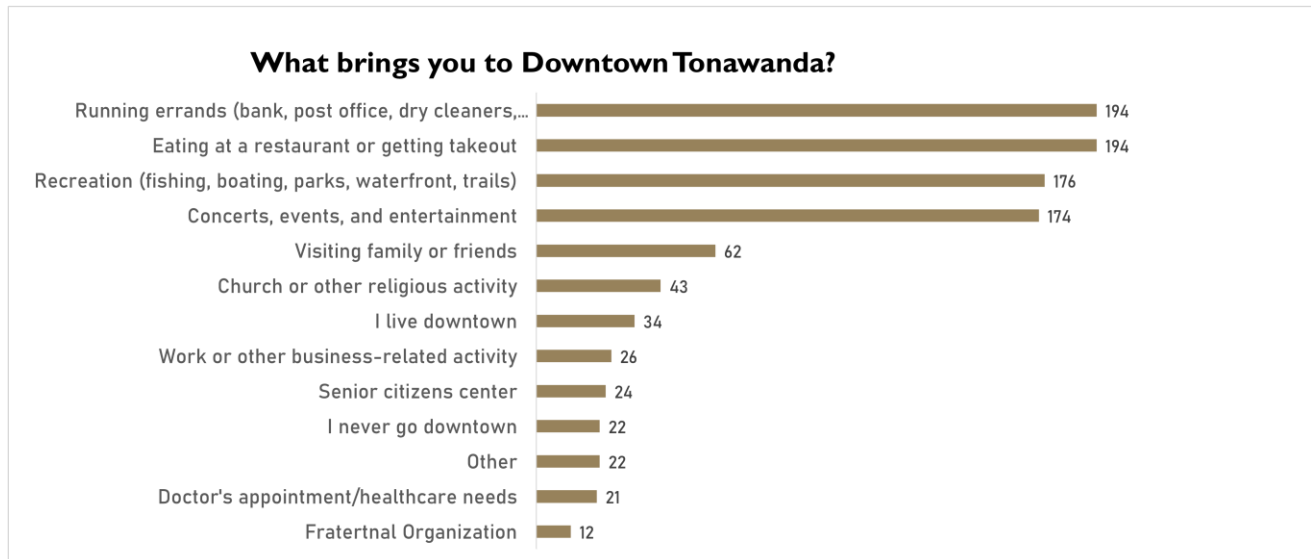
## Question 2: If you live in the City of Tonawanda, how long have you lived here?



The survey data indicate that survey respondents have lived in the City of Tonawanda for the following lengths of time:

- More than 10 years: 212 individuals (72% of question respondents)
- 1-5 years: 31 individuals (11% of question respondents)
- I do not live in the City of Tonawanda: 24 individuals (8% of question respondents)
- 5-10 years: 23 individuals (8% of question respondents)
- Less than 1 year: 4 individuals (1% of question respondents)

### Question 3: What brings you to downtown Tonawanda?



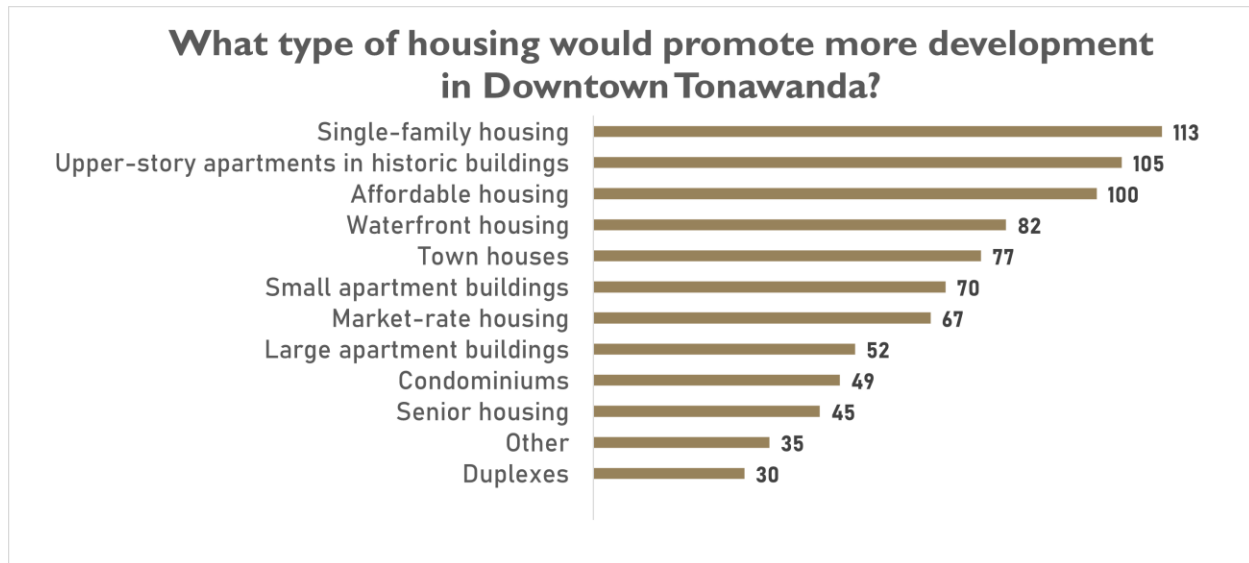
The survey data indicate the reasons respondents go to downtown Tonawanda as follows:

- Running errands (bank, post office, dry cleaners, shopping): 194 individuals (66% of question respondents)
- Eating at a restaurant or getting takeout: 194 individuals (66% of question respondents)
- Recreation (fishing, boating, parks, waterfront, trails): 176 individuals (60% of respondents)
- Concerts, events, and entertainment: 174 individuals (59% of respondents)
- Visiting family or friends: 62 individuals (21% of respondents)
- Church or other religious activity: 43 individuals (15% of respondents)
- I live downtown: 34 individuals (12% of respondents)
- Work or other business-related activities: 26 individuals (9% of respondents)
- Senior citizens center: 24 individuals (8% of respondents)
- I never go downtown: 22 individuals (8% of respondents)
- Other: 22 individuals (8% of respondents)
- Doctor's appointment/healthcare needs: 21 individuals (7% of respondents)
- Fraternal organization: 12 individuals (4% of respondents)

Common themes from the written answers of the 22 respondents who answered with "other" are summarized below.

- Visiting the Erie Canal
- Food Truck Thursdays
- Sports league

#### Question 4: What type of housing would promote more development in downtown Tonawanda?



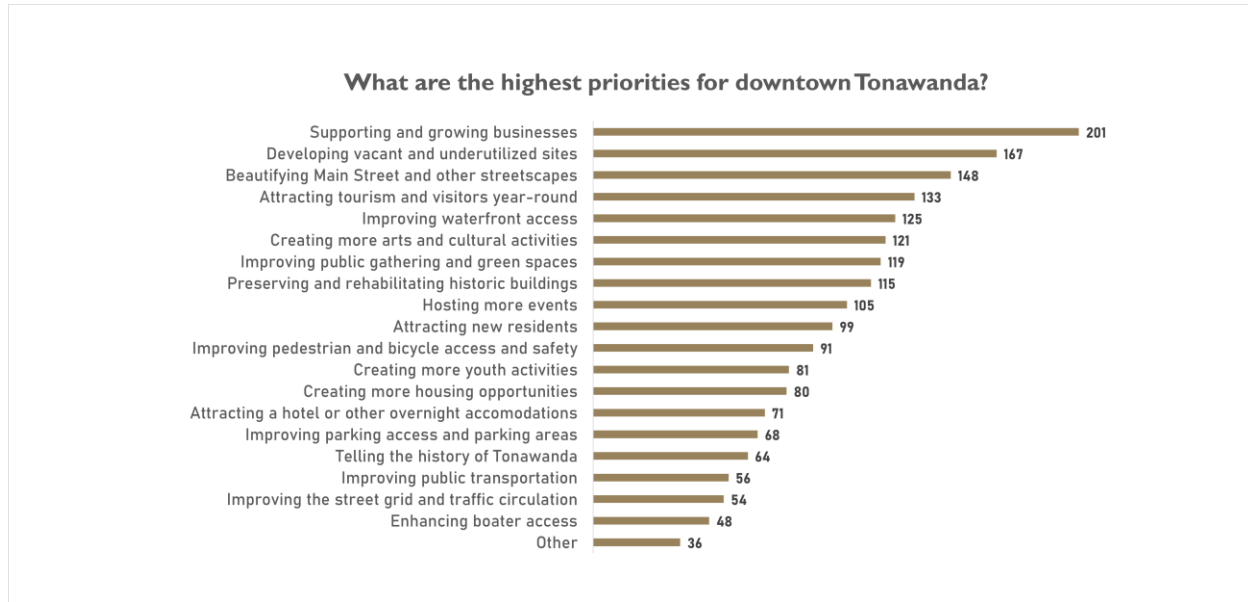
The survey data indicate that respondents believe that the following types of housing would promote more development in downtown Tonawanda:

- Single-family housing: 113 individuals (40% of question respondents)
- Upper-story apartments in historic buildings: 105 individuals (37% of question respondents)
- Affordable housing: 100 individuals (35% of question respondents)
- Waterfront housing: 83 individuals (29% of question respondents)
- Town houses: 77 individuals (27% of question respondents)
- Small apartment buildings: 70 individuals (25% of question respondents)
- Market-rate housing: 67 individuals (24% of question respondents)
- Large apartment buildings: 52 individuals (18% of question respondents)
- Condominiums: 49 individuals (17% of question respondents)
- Senior housing: 45 individuals (16% of question respondents)
- Other: 35 individuals (12% of question respondents)
- Duplexes: 30 individuals (11% of question respondents)

Common themes from the written answers of the 35 respondents who answered with "other" are summarized below.

- No additional housing is needed
- Transitional/shelter housing

## Question 5: What are the highest priorities for downtown Tonawanda?



The survey data indicate that the respondents think that the following are the highest priorities for downtown Tonawanda:

- Supporting and growing businesses: 201 individuals (69% of respondents)
- Developing vacant and underutilized sites: 167 individuals (58% of respondents)
- Beautifying Main Street and other streetscapes: 148 individuals (51% of respondents)
- Attracting tourism and visitors year-round: 133 individuals (46% of respondents)
- Improving waterfront access: 125 individuals (43% of respondents)
- Creating more arts and cultural activities: 121 individuals (42% of respondents)
- Improving public gathering and green spaces: 119 individuals (41% of respondents)
- Preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings: 115 individuals (40% of respondents)
- Hosting more events: 105 individuals (36% of respondents)
- Attracting new residents: 99 individuals (34% of respondents)
- Improving pedestrians and bicycle access and safety: 91 individuals (31% of respondents)
- Creating more youth activities: 81 individuals (28% of respondents)
- Creating more housing opportunities: 80 individuals (28% of respondents)
- Attracting a hotel or overnight accommodations: 71 individuals (24% of respondents)
- Improving parking access and parking areas: 68 individuals (23% of respondents)
- Telling the history of Tonawanda: 64 individuals (22% of respondents)
- Improving public transportation: 56 individuals (19% of respondents)
- Improving the street grid and traffic circulation: 54 individuals (19% of respondents)
- Enhancing boater access: 48 individuals (17% of respondents)
- Other: 36 individuals (12% of respondents)

The written answers from the 36 respondents who answered with “other” are summarized below.

- Supporting local sports teams
- Improving accessibility on Main Street and in parks



## Question 6: What types of businesses would you like to see in downtown Tonawanda?



The survey data indicate that the respondents would like to see the following business types in downtown Tonawanda:

- Restaurants: 232 individuals (80% of respondents)
- Retail/shopping: 188 individuals (65% of respondents)
- Coffee shop: 182 individuals (63% of respondents)
- Bakery: 177 individuals (61% of respondents)
- Breweries/wineries/distilleries: 153 individuals (53% of respondents)
- Hotels/overnight accommodations: 102 individuals (35% of respondents)
- Gyms/indoor recreation: 89 individuals (31% of respondents)
- Health care services/doctor's offices: 49 individuals (17% of respondents)
- Convenience stores/pharmacies: 45 individuals (16% of respondents)
- Other: 35 individuals (12% of respondents)
- Manufacturing: 21 respondents (7% of respondents)

Common themes from the written answers of the 35 respondents who answered with "other" are summarized below.

- Music venues
- Smoothie shops
- Hardware stores
- Sporting goods stores

## Question 7: What is the biggest challenge that you believe Tonawanda is currently facing?

Themes from the open-ended responses are summarized below in order of most- to least-mentioned:

1. High taxes for residents (22 comments): Many survey respondents feel that taxes in the City of Tonawanda are a burden on residents. Respondents speculate that tax rates may dissuade

potential new residents from moving to the City of Tonawanda despite otherwise wanting to live there.

2. Resistance to change from community members (21 comments): Many survey respondents fear that transformative new projects in the city will be pushed back against by a sizeable percentage of the City of Tonawanda's residents.
3. Lack of tax revenue from businesses and property owners (19 comments): 19 respondents believe that there is not a large enough tax base in the City of Tonawanda to sustain municipal goals. Many feel that there is too little tax revenue from profitable businesses and from high-value residential properties.
4. Vacancy and underutilized sites in the downtown core (18 comments): A sizeable number of individuals cite empty or underutilized areas in the downtown core as detracting from the city's overall cohesion, aesthetic, and walkability. Excessive parking lots were commonly referenced as unsafe areas that may be better suited as spaces for businesses or housing, like how the city was pre-urban renewal.
5. Few attractions beyond the waterfront that draw people downtown (18 comments): Many respondents believe that the city lacks an anchor beyond the waterfront that gives visitors and residents a reason to spend time downtown. Respondents feel that the lack of entertainment options on Main Street, the commercial corridor of downtown, encourages people to pass through the strip without having a reason to stay longer.

The consultant team suggested the Tonawanda DRI can address these challenges in the following ways:

- New businesses and housing will help to grow the tax base, a hallmark milestone in the revitalization process.
- Outreach and public engagement about proposed projects can build support for change within the community.
- Projects can be prioritized that involve repurposing vacant or underutilized sites.
- Projects can be prioritized that attract people to downtown and provide recreation and entertainment opportunities.

### **Question 8: What is the biggest opportunity to revitalize downtown Tonawanda?**

Themes from the open-ended responses are summarized below in order of most- to least-mentioned:

1. Utilizing the waterfront to attract visitors and welcome people into downtown Tonawanda (55 comments): The waterfront was the most cited opportunity among respondents. Responses highlight the attractiveness and liveliness of Tonawanda's waterfront parks and amenities, which they believe should be capitalized on to draw people into the downtown core.
2. Supporting infill development of vacant or underutilized properties in the downtown core (49 comments): Many respondents believe that vacant or underutilized properties in the downtown core can function as a canvas for new businesses or housing that would make downtown Tonawanda a destination for visitors and new residents.
3. Creating new retail or commercial businesses along Main Street (39 comments): Respondents would like to see more retail or commercial businesses on Main Street that will draw people downtown while also expanding the city's tax base.
4. Adding or expanding events throughout the city (18 comments): Respondents believe that adding or expanding events in the city will give people a reason to travel to Tonawanda and explore its downtown. Respondents cited the success of current events such as Canalfest of the Tonawandas as attestation to the demand for larger-scale events in the city.
5. Attracting new restaurants, especially ones that family-oriented, to the city (13 comments): Respondents feel that opening new restaurants in the city would invite people to spend more time and money in the downtown core. Respondents noted that new restaurants should cater

to all age groups (i.e., not primarily bars). Many feel that there are enough alcohol-serving venues in the city, but not enough family friendly, sit-down restaurants.

The consultant team suggested the Tonawanda DRI can address these opportunities by prioritizing projects that:

- Utilize or enhance the waterfront and its amenities to draw people further into downtown.
- Redevelop vacant or underutilized buildings within the downtown core.
- Create or renovate space for new businesses, especially restaurants and retail.
- Attract people downtown and provide recreation and entertainment opportunities.

### **Question 9: When you think of what downtown Tonawanda is like today, what word would you use to describe the area to your friends and families?**

The most repeated keywords in order of most-to-least-mentioned are:

1. **Boring** (17 mentions)
2. **Nice** (13 mentions)
3. **Potential** (12 mentions)
4. **Businesses** (10 comments)
5. **Old** (9 comments)

### **Question 10: When you think about what downtown Tonawanda might be like in 15 years, what word would you like to be able to use to describe the area to your friends and family?**

The most repeated keywords in order of most-to-least mentioned are:

1. **Vibrant** (24 mentions)
2. **Fun** (18 mentions)
3. **Thriving** (12 mentions)
4. **Beautiful** (11 mentions)
5. **Exciting** (10 mentions)

### **Question 11: Please note any additional comments or ideas you have relating to the Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative.**

The community is calling for improvements in Tonawanda's downtown area and waterfront to attract more businesses, residents, and tourists. Suggestions include:

- Adding more venues for live music in the city
- Repairing sidewalks and lighting on side streets
- Attracting a brewery to the city
- Expanding nightlife and attractions on the waterfront and on Main Street
- Incentivizing non-profits on Main Street to relocate and open the space for retail, restaurant, or entertainment purposes.
- Implementing traffic control measures that promote driver and pedestrian safety
- Enhancing the visual appeal of downtown through public art, repaving, and modest landscaping
- Preserving and restoring historic buildings that contribute to the historic look and feel of downtown

## Question 12: What is your home zip code?

Home Zip Code	Primary Location	Respondents
14150	City of Tonawanda	238
14120	North Tonawanda	7
14072	Grand Island	3

The top 3 most common zip codes in which respondents reside are:

- 14150 (City of Tonawanda): 238 individuals (90% of question respondents)
- 14120 (North Tonawanda): 7 individuals (3% of question respondents)
- 14072 (Grand Island): 3 individuals (1% of question respondents)

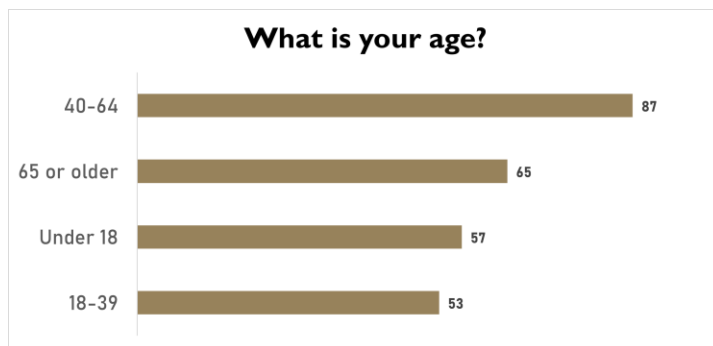
The following zip codes had two responses each (less than 1% of question respondents each):

- 14510 (Mount Morris, NY)
- 14534 (Pittsford, NY)

The following zip codes had one response each (less than 1% of question respondents each):

- 14159 (Buffalo)
- 14207 (Town of Tonawanda)
- 14210 (Buffalo)
- 14213 (Buffalo)
- 14217 (Kenmore)
- 14226 (Amherst)
- 22405 (Fredericksburg, VA)
- 98403 (Tacoma, WA)
- 07661 (River Edge, NJ)

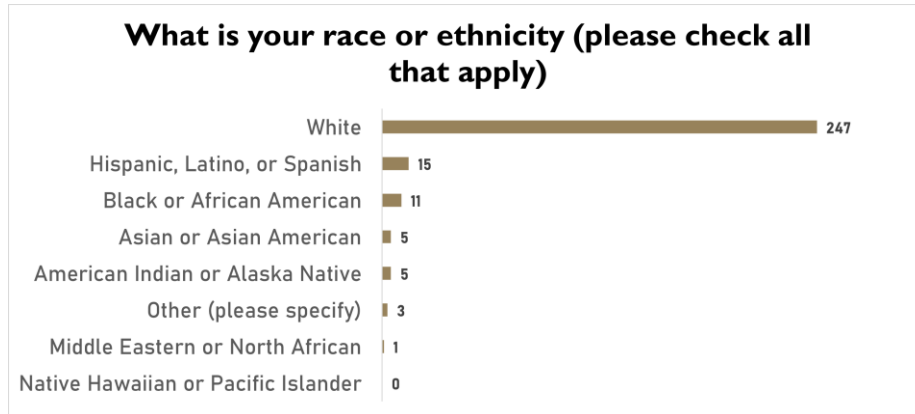
## Question 13: What is your age?



The survey data indicate that respondents fall in the following age categories:

- 40-64 years old: 87 individuals (33% of question respondents)
- 65 years old or older: 65 individuals (25% of question respondents)
- Under 18 years old: 57 individuals (22% of question respondents)
- 18-39 years old: 53 individuals (20% of question respondents)

## Question 14: What is your race or ethnicity? (please check all that apply)



The race or ethnicity of survey respondents are summarized below:

- White: 247 individuals (94% of question respondents)
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish: 15 individuals (6% of question respondents)
- Black or African American: 11 individuals (6% of question respondents)
- Asian or Asian American: 5 individuals (2% of question respondents)
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 5 individuals (2% of question respondents)
- Other (please specify): 3 individuals (1% of question respondents)
- Middle Eastern or North African: 1 individual (less than 1% of question respondents)

## Question 15: If you would like to stay involved in the Tonawanda DRI, please leave us your contact information below.

107 survey respondents left their email address to be included in the Tonawanda DRI mailing list to receive updates on project milestones, opportunities for engagement, and general updates.