RIPON SURVEY RESULTS

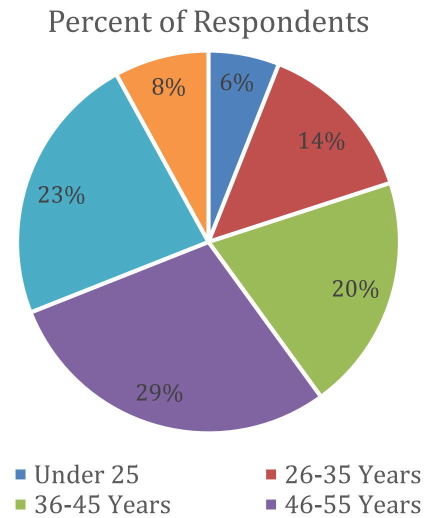
As part of their annual work planning process, Ripon Main Street hosted a community survey during late summer of 2015. The survey was available online and in hard copy format for a period of five weeks, during which time 123 individuals provided feedback on the current state of downtown, the performance of various aspects of the downtown environment, and ideas for future revitalization projects or initiatives that will help move the downtown forward as a vibrant commercial environment. The results of this community survey are presented in the following paper.

Key Findings:

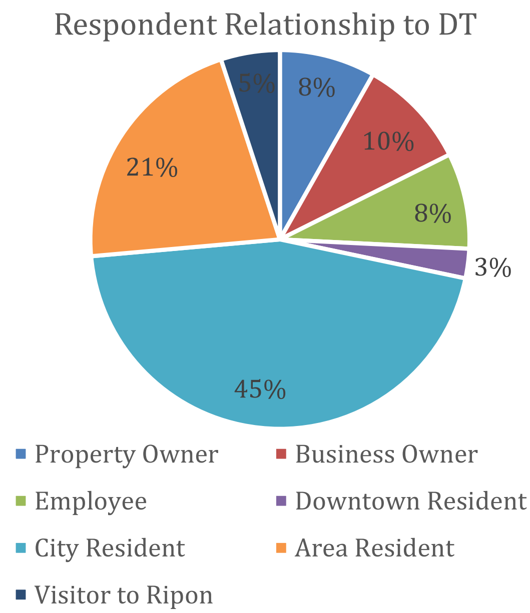
- Dining, events and shopping are the most popular downtown activities. Respondents identified more than 67 different businesses that draw them to downtown Ripon. The top five draws were:
    - Fat Bruce's
    - Ripon Drug
    - The Roadhouse
    - Mugs
    - The Treasury
- Additional business types desired in the district include butcher/deli/bakery establishments, outdoor/sports stores, shoes and clothing and books and music shops.
- Most respondents prefer to shop on weekdays, but there is significant variation based on age, with younger households preferring weekends, middle aged households preferring weekday evenings and older households preferring weekdays. The preferred evening for nearly every group was Friday (53%), followed by Thursday (17%).
- The top strengths of Ripon's downtown include safety, well-maintained historic buildings, pedestrian friendliness and special events (82% of respondents have attended at least one event in the past year).
- Areas where downtown received the lowest grade include the presence of family friendly activities and amenities, a perception that Ripon presents a poor image to visitors and limited business hours constrain customer activity.
- Five year priorities for improvements to downtown include additional property restoration, additional shopping choices, more activities and amenities for families and children and efforts to improve downtown aesthetics. Many comments related to property restoration are a reflection of the desire to return the Boca buildings to productive use.
- Priorities are slightly different for individual demographic groups, with younger individuals placing a priority on nightlife and entertainment and family friendly amenities while older households prioritize shopping and downtown aesthetics, and also express the greatest interest in downtown housing. Younger households also indicated a desire for more marketing and information on downtown businesses and events.

DEMOGRAPHIC MIX

Of the 123 responses to the survey, the vast majority have extensive knowledge of and experience with downtown. 70 percent of respondents visit downtown at least once per week and 26% go downtown at least a few times per month, while only 4% visit a few times per year or less. Respondents have also largely lived in the Ripon area for some time, with 64% residing in the area for more than 20 years, 15% for ten to twenty years, 12% from five to ten years and 9% from one to five years. Only 2% have lived in the area for one year or less.



In addition to having extensive knowledge of the community, respondents comprise a wide variety of demographic groups. Just under half (48%) of the respondents have children under 18 living at home, and most age groups are represented in survey results in proportion to their presence in the community, as indicated in the graph at right. It should be noted that college students, which have a significant economic and social impact on the community, are specifically NOT represented in the survey. The timing of the survey during the summer months was intentional to obtain only responses from local residents and frequent shoppers. A separate study of students only will be completed later in the school year once new students have an opportunity to become acquainted with the Ripon community.



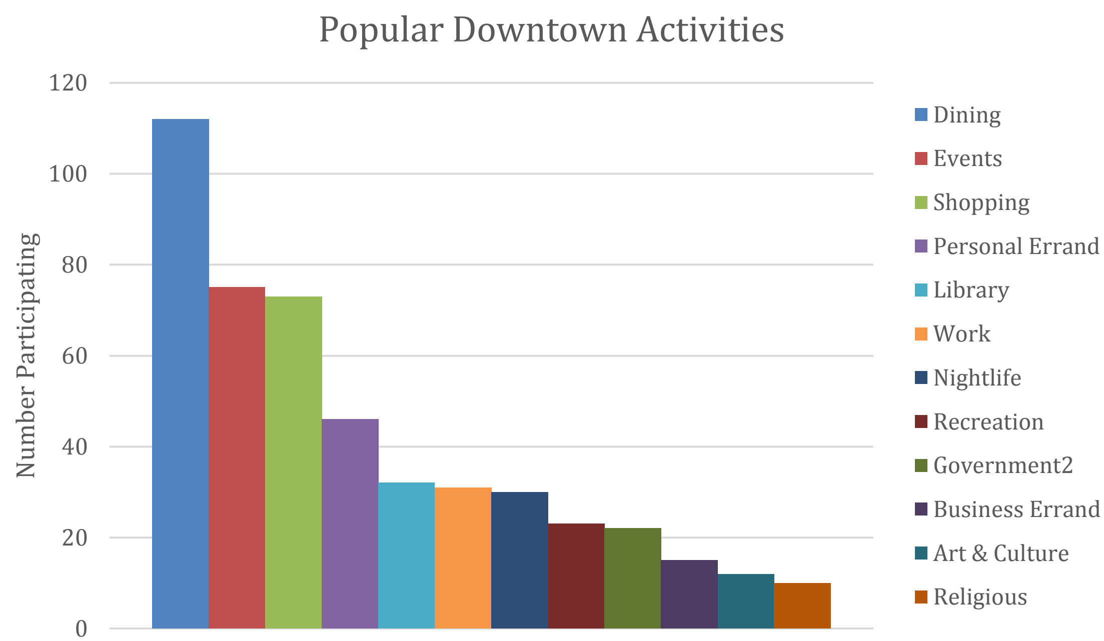
Survey results also include multiple perspectives of the downtown. Respondents were asked to define their relationship to downtown, including whether they were residents, property or business owners, employees, etc. The lower graph indicates the relative number of responses from within each segment of the population.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on their current activities downtown, limitations to the current environment which caused them to select other locations, and to evaluate the performance of various aspects of downtown necessary to creating the sense of a vital commercial district.

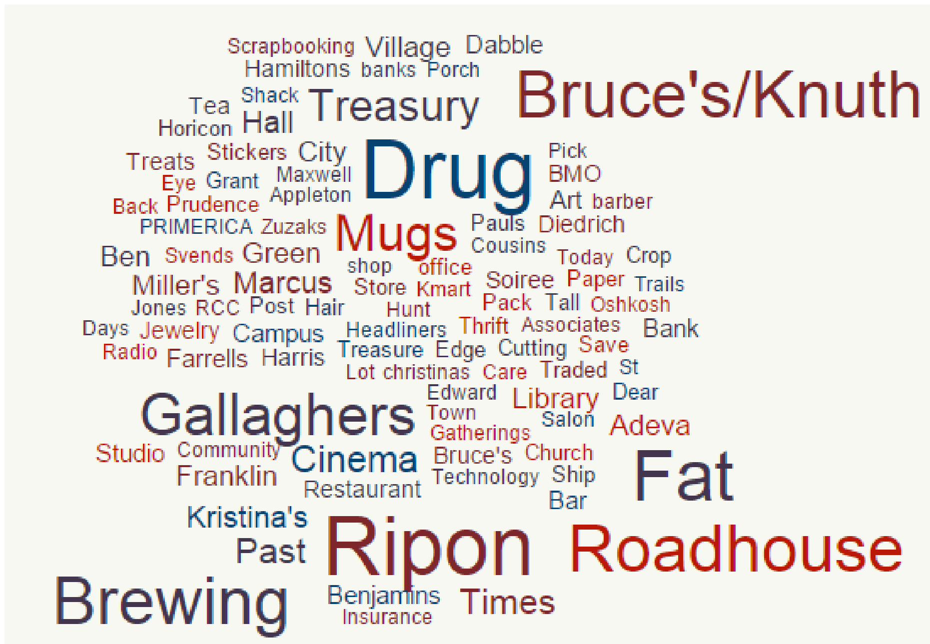
Current Downtown Experience

As would be expected from a customer base familiar with the area, respondents visit downtown for a wide variety of activities, including shopping, dining and services. The following table identifies the activities most commonly associated with downtown visits.



Respondents identified 67 distinct businesses or destinations which draw them downtown on a regular basis. The mix of businesses reflects the response to prior questions which demonstrate that Ripon visitors partake in a number of activities downtown on a frequent basis. The most commonly identified businesses/destinations which serve as destinations/draws for the downtown include:

- Fat Bruce's / Knuth Brewing (63 mentions)
- Ripon Drug (46)
- Roadhouse (35)
- Mugs (24)
- The Treasury (19)
- Movies (14)
- Pastimes (12)



Most respondents conduct errands and shopping on weekdays during the day (44%), and weekdays during the evening (35%). Weekend activity was concentrated on Saturdays (18%) with less than 3% of individuals frequenting downtown on Sundays. When asked which evening they prefer to shop downtown (regardless of current patterns, and given appropriate store hours), Friday evenings were the most popular choice at 53% followed by Thursday at 17% and Wednesday at 10%. Other evenings received less than 10% favorable responses.

Unsurprisingly as long-time residents, respondents are largely familiar with local events and activities and participate on a regular basis. Nearly all attended the most recent summer concert series and Dickens of a Christmas (82 and 83%), and 44% participated in Septemberfest last year. However, only 16% said that they went ice skating, and only 10% participated in Women on Watson.

District Strengths & Limitations

Although respondents are regular visitors to downtown Ripon, there are several factors which prevent them from frequenting the area more often. When asked what prevents them from coming downtown more often, the top response was a lack of diverse shopping/shopping that meets their needs (49%). The only other response identified by more than 10% of respondents was a generally appealing environment in which to linger (14%). Few respondents identified a lack of information, lack of dining, difficulty parking or convenience as limiting factors and zero respondents identified a concern for safety or difficulty locating downtown. Several individuals wrote in a lack of evening hours as a limiting factor.

In addition to providing information on their personal preferences, respondents were asked to evaluate the district's vitality and function as a whole. When provided with a list of 13 characteristics of high-performing downtown districts, respondents identified a number of local strengths and accomplishment. The most notable strengths are the district's overall safety, both in terms of perception of crime and also as a place for pedestrians and cyclists. Downtown's overall appearance also ranked highlight in terms of a clean and inviting appearance with well-preserved properties. However, other aspects associated with appearance such as storefront appearance and the ability to present a positive image to visitors were ranked significantly lower. The area identified as most in need of improvement was the presence of amenities or activities to appeal to children and families. This is a common element in downtown surveys for communities throughout Wisconsin, however it can also be easily addressed through specific enhancements and marketing, provided that safety and security are not also areas of concern.

The following table indicates respondent feedback on aspects of downtown which are strong, adequate or needing improvement. Responses are listed in the table in order of relative strength, with top local strengths listed at the top of the table and areas most in need of improvement at the bottom.

Downtown Characteristic	% Indicating Area of Strength	% Indicating Needs Improvement	Average Score (1 = Strength, 3 = Improvement)
I feel safe downtown, even at night	69%	4.2%	1.35
Older buildings are well preserved	37%	6%	1.69
Walking and biking to, in and around downtown is easy and safe	36%	14%	1.78
Special events create a sense of vibrancy in downtown	36%	18%	1.82
Downtown Ripon is clean and inviting	29%	23%	1.94
Directional signage is sufficient	19%	14%	1.95
Housing and adjacent neighborhoods meet market needs	14%	19%	2.05
Businesses have attractive storefronts	11%	40%	2.29
Businesses have appropriate & adequate hours	7%	37%	2.3
Downtown Ripon presents a positive image to visitors	9%	46%	2.37
Downtown has things to do for multiple age groups	9%	51%	2.42

FUTURE VISION

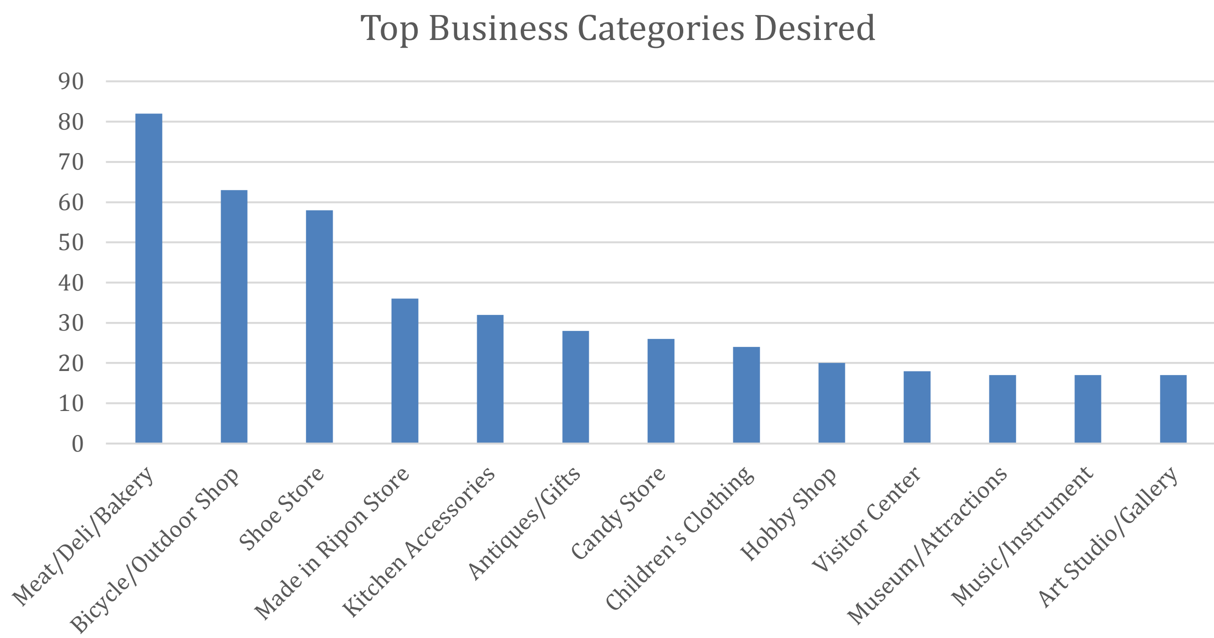
Although Ripon's downtown received high scores in a number of areas, there were also elements that were identified as needing improvement. The table below indicates the degree to which respondents felt it would be important for Ripon to work on addressing the following areas in order to enhance downtown's function in the community. Keep in mind that participants were raking areas that they felt needed attention, so a ranking of not very important may reflect a general consensus that downtown is performing well in that area and additional activities are not necessary. It should also be noted that, based on the comments, the presence of the Boca buildings as 'unrestored and unkempt' significantly influenced the focus on restored and renovated buildings as a priority. The majority of properties themselves seem to be viewed as well maintained. Responses are listed in the table according to their average ranking, with activities identified as most important listed at the top.

Potential Area of Focus	% Very Important	Average Score (1= very important, 3 = not at all)
More shopping choices	76%	1.28
More restored & renovated buildings	64%	1.41
More jobs & businesses	54%	1.56
Cleaner & more beautiful downtown	50%	1.57
More information/marketing of downtown shops and events	47%	1.59
More activities/amenities for families & children	46%	1.61
More nightlife & entertainment	41%	1.69
More arts & culture	27%	1.79
More restaurants	37%	1.83
More festivals & events	31%	1.86
More convenient parking	26%	2.0
More pedestrian / bike friendly	21%	2.07
More parks & active green spaces	23%	2.09
More downtown residential options	11%	2.33

While respondents identified a number of areas of limitation and desired improvement, not all areas can be addressed simultaneously, and individual communities may place priorities on specific aspects of revitalization over others. In order to help prioritize among the areas identified for improvement, respondents were asked to select just one improvement as a top priority to address in the next five years. This question resulted in two clear top priorities and two secondary priorities for the community, which were:

- More restored and renovated buildings (27% identified as top priority)
- More shopping choices (20%)
- More activities/amenities for families & children (11%)
- Cleaner & more beautiful downtown (11%)

Despite recognition of a substantial number of valued local businesses by respondents, there were a number of business types that were identified as good complements to the existing business mix, if recruited to downtown. Respondents had several opportunities to provide feedback in this area, including the ability to select four priority business categories that they would like to see, as well as the opportunity to write in three more specific desired business types. The top graph indicates the varying amount of support for specific business categories introduced in the survey, while the below table highlights more specific requests provided in the open ended question.



Business Category	Number of Responses	Example Businesses
Retailers	132	• Book/Music Store (24) • Shoes (24) • Men's Clothing (18) • Children's Clothing & Toys (8) • Pet Store (5) • Affordable Clothing (5) • General Store/Discount (5) • Hobby, Game, Craft (4) • Local Goods/Foods (4) • Antiques (4) • Other (Jewelry, Office Supply, Cookie Outlet, Tech, Floral)

Restaurants	60	• Bakery (13) • Deli/Sandwich Shop (10) • Mexican/Ethnic (8) • Ice Cream/Confectionery (8) • Butcher/Meat Market (7) • Casual Family/Supper Club (4) • Drive Through Coffee (3) • Open Late (2)
Services	22	• Bike/Sports Shop (17) • Nail Salon (3) • Art Studio (2) • Other (Dry Cleaning, hotel, maker space, yoga studio)
Entertainment	6	• Young Adult-Oriented Pub • Dance Club • Video Arcade • Beer Garden • Sports Bar • Wine Bar
Amenities	3	• Bike Lanes • Public Restroom • Information Center

Several individuals took the time to provide additional feedback at the end of the survey. Some useful feedback that is representative of the tone of these comments is reflected in the excerpts below:

- Improvement of the gateway along Highway 23 and downtown is necessary to entice visitors to explore Ripon.
- The little things should be a priority – more trees, flowers and well maintained green space, painted light posts, repaired benches, weeds killed, sidewalks swept, etc.
- Downtown needs more residential to be vibrant 24-7. Events are great, although some could use sprucing up or more variety to attract different audiences/maximize attendance.
- Businesses need to engage in more joint marketing. There is a great diverse mix of businesses, but they do not seem engaged or coordinated.
- Ripon needs a thriving business environment at all hours, including evening. Outdoor dining or temporary uses of vacant lots as beer gardens or popup restaurants would be a good strategy. Businesses should be open later, at least some nights.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATION

Although the results presented above indicate the general consensus opinion, individual demographic groups have varying opinions regarding aspects of performance and relative importance of various aspects of downtown.

Strengths & Challenges

Surprisingly, newer residents were most likely to indicate that downtown does NOT present a positive image to visitors, and were also (unsurprisingly) most likely to indicate that improved wayfinding is needed. Younger residents were most likely to identify hours of operation as a weakness of the current downtown, and also identified the pedestrian and cycling environment as a significant strength, versus older groups which selected adequate. Individuals in and approaching retirement were most likely to identify residential options as an area needing improvement, and were also most likely to state that they would recommend that their friends and family shop downtown.

From the perspective of event attendance, newer residents are more likely to take advantage of ice skating and women on Watson, while longer term residents are most likely to attend concerts. Septemberfest and Dickens of a Christmas attract equal numbers of attendees from all demographic groups.

In addition to variations in experience and perspective, different demographic groups also had varying opinions on the priorities for downtown in the next five years. The table below shows the top three priorities for each age group. While there is some consensus (more restored buildings), there is also substantial variation among age groups based on personal circumstances.

	25 & Under	26-35 Years	36-45 Years	46-55 Years	56-65 Years	66 and Over
Priority 1	More Restaurants	More Family Friendly Amenities	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings
Priority 2	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Shopping	More Shopping	Cleaner & More Beautiful	Cleaner & More Beautiful
Priority 3	More Information & Marketing	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Family Friendly Amenities	More Jobs & Businesses	More Shopping	More Shopping

In addition to trends in top priorities, there were some other interesting observations when examining priorities by age. For instance, individuals 66 and over were the top group identifying downtown housing as a priority. Arts and culture were also most valued by individuals over age 56, while increased parks and green space were only identified as a priority by those under 25.

Surprisingly, newer residents were not any more likely to select information and marketing as a priority, although individuals aged 35 and under were significantly more likely to want more information on downtown. A desire for restored and renovated buildings and increased beautification was popular among all age groups and tenures, while shopping was more important the older the individual, and also the longer they have lived in the community. Restaurants were more important or as important as shopping for individuals aged 26-45, and were also more in demand by newer residents. Newer residents were also more likely to value arts and culture, while only long-time residents prioritized jobs and businesses.

When asked why they don't visit downtown, younger audiences had the most varied reasons for not visiting more often, although lack of information is more often cited by those under 45. Conversely, parking was only identified by older individuals (though still infrequently). Those in downtown most often (property and business owners and downtown residents) were most concerned about expanding restaurant, shopping and nightlife options to expand the activity level in downtown into the evening, while residents of other areas of the City were more interested in adding jobs, family friendly amenities and festivals, although additional retail and entertainment offerings were also desirable for this audience.

Another notable demographic variation is the time of day at which various groups conduct a majority of errands and shopping. Those 56 and over are the only group selecting weekdays during the day as a primary period for running errands. The table below summarizes the preferred shopping window for each group.

	Preferred Activity Period	**Preferred Evening**
Under 25	Saturdays, Weekday evenings	Friday
26-35	Weekday evenings, Saturday	Friday, Thursday
36-45	Weekday evenings, Weekdays	Friday, Thursday
46-55	Weekday evenings, Weekdays	Friday, Wednesday
56-65	Weekdays, Weekday evenings	Friday, Thursday
66 and over	Weekdays	Friday