

Fountain Hills Downtown Strategy

Town's Mission

The Town of Fountain Hills' purpose is to serve the best interests of the community by: providing for the safety and well-being of its residents and visitors; respecting its special, small-town character and quality of life; providing superior public services; sustaining the public trust through open and responsive government; and maintaining the stewardship and preservation of its financial and natural resources. To serve and respect and provide trust and stewardship.

Town's Vision

Fountain Hills is a distinctive community designed to invigorate the body, mind and spirit, and strives to: Be stewards of this unique enclave, dedicated to preserving the environment and visual aesthetic and to living in balance with the Sonoran Desert; Champion the diversity of experiences our residents bring to our community and rely on this depth of experience to innovatively address our challenges; Be economically sustainable and anchor our vitality in an active, vibrant town core that serves us culturally, socially and economically; and, Be civic-minded and friendly, taking responsibility for our Town's success by building partnerships and investing our talent and resources.

Executive Summary

The Downtown Strategy has not been updated since 2009. In September 2023, Council unanimously approved a three-year Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). One of the implementation strategies within the CEDS is to *"Create a new Downtown Strategy consistent with current economic trends."* In November 2023, Council provided support for a staff-driven process to update the Downtown Strategy.

For the purpose of developing this updated strategy, the area considered was north of El Lago, east of La Montana, and west of Fountain Park. This total area was divided into five sub-areas to consider some of the unique aspects of different portions of the downtown area.

Staff held six focus group meetings with residents and businesses, conducted four electronic surveys and a public open house. Based on the feedback received, the Downtown Strategy focuses on four focus areas:

- Land Use
- Infrastructure
- Economic Vitality
- Public Spaces/Placemaking

Background

A vision plan was developed for the Downtown (formerly Town Center) in 2009. Over the last 14 years, several elements have been implemented to include the installation of the Avenue Linear Park and Park Place I and II.

Focus Area 1: Land Use

Having the appropriate mix of uses in a commercial area is important to its success. The types of uses desirable in a given location vary depending on the intended nature of the area. The core of a downtown depends heavily on uses that attract pedestrians and relies on a high density of customers from nearby offices, residences, and entertainment activities.

The Fountain Hills primary urban core area is along the Avenue, particularly from Saguario to Verde River. This is an area that should have a predominance of restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment venues on the ground floor facing the street. Shade and outdoor activities such as sidewalk cafes and sitting areas should be readily available. Store fronts should be highly transparent to provide interest to the pedestrians on the sidewalk.

Moving away from the intense core of the Avenue, the uses can become broader with a greater mix of commercial and office uses that can be less pedestrian oriented.

One of the keys to a successful urban space is the energy that comes from activity that occurs consistently throughout the day and the week. Having residents in and near the area to provide activity and support for the businesses is essential.

Implementation Strategies:

- Improve the use and activity within the Avenue District by:
 - Amending ordinances to allow sidewalk cafes and developing standards for implementation.
 - Encouraging active front patio usage.
- Amend the zoning ordinance to require active first floor uses (restaurants, retail, entertainment) along the Avenue District.
- Improve maintenance of vacant properties by amending ordinances and enforcement practices for these properties.
- Remove obstacles to development and encouraging the right uses in different areas by:
 - Reviewing practices and procedures to assist with development.
 - Amending ordinances to allow up to 12 dwelling units by right on upper floors
 - Reviewing and amend ordinances as necessary to allow a wide range of businesses on Parkview.
- Improve the design quality of buildings in the Downtown through:
 - Developing design guidelines for the downtown.
 - Establishing a façade improvement program.
- Explore options to work with building owners to improve the amount and quality of shade through building awnings.

Focus Area 2: Infrastructure

A high-quality built environment that is safe, comfortable, and attractive is important to the success of a downtown area.

Through the focus groups, surveys, and open house, a consistent theme was the need for the Town to continue to improve the public space along our streets with outdoor gathering areas, room for sidewalk cafes, additional shade, and lighting. There is a strong desire for creating a place where people can gather

to dine, shop, and enjoy a variety of activities and walk comfortably throughout the downtown. The public right-of-way and the sidewalk system are key components of the urban fabric that provides a place for citizens to interact.

Providing a consistent sidewalk system that provides connectivity throughout the downtown is critical to the long-term viability of the area. The sidewalk system needs to be free of obstructions and include ADA access to buildings and public spaces. In our environment shade is also an important part of the sidewalk system. Shade can be from trees, building awnings, or other shade structures. Given our otherwise dark skies, pedestrian oriented lighting is also important for safety.

Implementation Strategies:

- Implement streetscape improvements to include:
 - More trees and shade along the Avenue
 - Add sidewalks and trees along Parkview
 - Fill in sidewalk gaps within downtown boundary
 - Provide shade over gathering areas along the streets
 - Provide lighting at street crossings
 - Add festive lighting in the Avenue entertainment area
- Create small, unique gathering places along the streets with shade and appropriate lighting.
- Explore options to improve pedestrian connectivity between downtown and Fountain Park.
- Evaluate options for improved event parking as recommended by the Downtown Parking Analysis.
- Partner with Plat 208 for redevelopment of the pocket parks along the Avenue.
- Coordinate with Plat 208 to improve connections from parking areas to streets within the downtown.
- Determine the feasibility of installing public restrooms in the downtown area through a public-private partnership.

Focus Area 3: Economic Vitality

Economic vitality involves taking a proactive and collaborative approach to building and growing a diverse economic base through smart new investment, cultivating a robust ecosystem for small businesses, focusing on the unique assets of the Fountain Hills community, and fostering an environment to help build local wealth.

Implementation Strategies:

- Create flexible zoning uses within the Business District to attract targeted industries and new skilled talent.
- Evaluate the current Entertainment District and modify to include uses such as dining, shopping and live entertainment.
- Continue to collaborate with Shea-Connelly on the completion of Park Place.
- Modify the Zoning Code to allow temporary uses on vacant properties.
- Determine the feasibility of creating programming within the Avenue Linear Park to attract residents, visitors and businesses.
- Continue small and large-scale events within the Avenue District and determine the feasibility of expanding event footprints to include other districts within the downtown.

- Partner with The Avenue Merchant Association (TAMA), local attractions and businesses within the downtown area to create a newsletter and schedule of events that can be promoted locally and regionally.

Focus Area 4: Public Spaces/Placemaking

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.

With community-based participation at its center, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being. Placemaking shows people just how powerful their collective vision can be. It helps them to re-imagine everyday spaces, and to see anew the potential of parks, downtowns, waterfronts, plazas, neighborhoods, streets, markets, campuses and public buildings.

During the April 2023 Economic Development workshop, the following question was asked:

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Where should Fountain Hills prioritize placemaking?

Below are the results:

1. Downtown
2. Four Peaks Plaza/Target Shopping Center
3. Town Hall Campus/Centennial Circle
4. Fountain Park

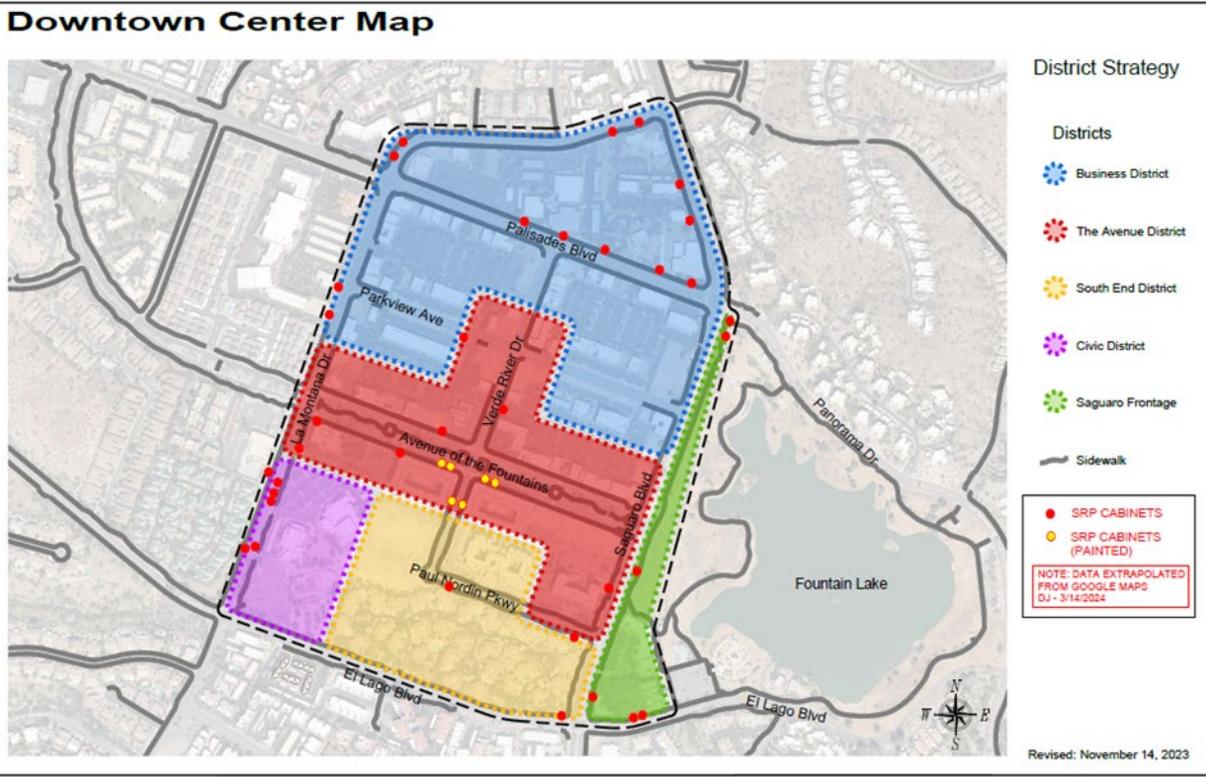
Implementation Strategies:

Arts

- Partner with the Southern Arizona Arts and Cultural Alliance (SAACA) to administer murals in strategic locations identified by the town.
- Partner with Plat 208 to streamline the architectural review requirements to install exterior murals on buildings located within Plat 208.
- Install murals on utility boxes located in Downtown Fountain Hills over the next six years, based on town funding. (Exhibit A).
- Modify the public art policy to allow for performing and temporary art.

Signage

- Implement Town-wide Wayfinding Signage by December 2025.
- Install entryway/monument signs within each district to identify and distinguish Fountain Hills' downtown area.
- Update the existing street banners along the Avenue District.
- Provide pedestrian oriented signage to direct people to businesses.
- Allow for additional temporary signage during special events.



Budget Implementation Plan

The Downtown Strategy will be a multi-year plan that will have budgetary impacts that will include one-time and ongoing expenses. Budget priorities and implementation plans will be part of the annual budget process.