

Downtown Frederick Partnership 2021 DEI Community Outreach Summary

The Partnership began this Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) outreach effort in late 2020 and has been fortunate to be guided in this work by Dr. Denise Rollins with The Whole Heart Center. The goal of the Partnership's efforts is to make Downtown Frederick a welcoming place for everyone.

This summary includes feedback and suggestions from 9 focus groups held in the spring/summer of 2021 with about 60 total participants as well as 295 responses to a community survey conducted in July 2021. Six focus groups were conducted with a diverse group of people who live, work and/or visit Downtown Frederick. An additional three focus groups were conducted with each of the following demographic groups: the deaf community, the LGBTQIA+ community and African Americans.

Of the 295 survey respondents (*with 2010 census percentages for Frederick County in parenthesis*):

- 67% are White (81.2%)
- 16% are African American or Black (10.4%)
- 10% are Hispanic (10.2%)
- 2% are Asian or Asian American (4.8%)
- 2% are American Indian or Alaska Native (.5%)

Survey respondents also identified as follows (*with 2010 census percentages in parenthesis*): 11% people with disabilities (7.4%), 68% female (50.7%), 25% male (49.3%), 1% non-binary or gender queer and 11% LGBTQIA+.

Focus Group and survey input is summarized under Identified Strengths (below) and Opportunities for Improvement (page 2). Based on both focus group and survey input, the Partnership has identified several initiatives to move forward beginning in 2021 which are outlined under Next Steps (page 3).

Identified Strengths: Overall, the survey and focus group participants had a high regard for both Downtown Frederick and efforts to address diversity. This feedback creates a strong foundation from which the Partnership can intentionally move forward.

- **Respondents see the value of Downtown Frederick focusing on diversity:**
 - 82% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that diversity should be an area of focus in Downtown Frederick
 - Positive responses by specific demographic groups include: LGBTQIA+ (97%), Hispanics (93%), African Americans (89%), women (88%), and those with disabilities (81%)
 - Focus groups expressed strong support for the value of diversity efforts
- **Respondents would recommend Downtown Frederick to a friend or family member:**
 - An overwhelming 91% of overall survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- **Respondents feel welcome downtown:**
 - 84% responded "excellent" or "good" about feeling welcome

- **Most respondents feel good about First Saturdays:**
 - 72% of survey participants feel First Saturdays are welcoming and inclusive for all people

Opportunities for Improvement: While several strengths were uncovered, one of the primary reasons for the survey and focus groups was to determine what can be improved. As such, most of this report focuses on those areas.

Overall Feedback:

- **Less than half of respondents felt Downtown Frederick was good at attracting diverse people:**
 - Only 47% said downtown was excellent/good at attracting people from diverse backgrounds and abilities
- **Perceptions of how welcoming Downtown Frederick is:**
 - While some expressed concern that it was difficult to determine how welcoming Downtown Frederick was for groups other than one's own, this question assesses the survey respondent's level of awareness and/or perceptions related to other people
 - Percentages of all respondents that felt Downtown Frederick was "very" or "moderately" welcoming for the following groups: people with physical disabilities (40%); people with cognitive disabilities (40%); people whose first language is not English (35%); people who are not U.S. citizens (36%); and people of lower socioeconomic status (33%)
- **Many saw a need to improve safety and security for people of all backgrounds:**
 - 40% expressed that Downtown Frederick was fair or poor at providing a safe and secure environment for people of all backgrounds
- **Increased diversity for Alive @ Five:**
 - Only half of respondents felt that entertainment appeals to diverse audiences
 - 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement
- **Follow-up from focus groups:**
 - Participants identified funding for underrepresented businesses, more diversity in business ownership and having more ethnic and cultural festivals as the top 3 areas of focus
 - Other areas to address were: having more signage welcoming diversity, safety/security and increased awareness.

Specific Feedback: For each of the self-identified groups below, survey responses are noted where the input from a specific group is significantly less positive than the overall survey responses or where the responses were less than 50% positive. The survey rating of all respondents is found in parenthesis for comparison. Each group's feedback on the level of discrimination personally experienced in Downtown Frederick is noted below as well.

African Americans/Blacks:

- 47% felt connected and integrated downtown (72% of all respondents)
- 21% felt Downtown Frederick was excellent/good at attracting people from diverse backgrounds and abilities (47% of all respondents)
- 64% felt welcomed downtown (84% of all respondents)
- 45% felt all people were made to feel welcomed in business establishments (64% of all respondents)

- 37% felt people of different cultures and backgrounds were respected downtown (54% of all respondents)
 - 36% felt that a safe and secure environment was provided downtown for all people (53% of all respondents)
 - 28% felt Alive @ Five entertainment was diverse (50% of all respondents)
 - 34% of African Americans felt there was diverse entertainment for First Saturdays (57% of all respondents)
 - 56% of African Americans encountered discrimination some or most of the time. An additional 25% of African Americans said they never experienced discrimination due to race while downtown.
- **Hispanics:**
 - 46% agreed that Downtown Frederick welcomes people from all backgrounds to attend local events (64% of all respondents)
 - 46% indicated First Saturdays offers entertainment that appeals to diverse audiences (57% of all respondents)
 - 39% indicated Alive @ Five offers entertainment that appeals to diverse audiences (50% of all respondents)
 - 42% of Hispanics encountered discrimination some or most of the time. 38% of Hispanics said they never experienced discrimination due to race while downtown.
- **LGBTQIA+:**
 - 48% felt Alive @ Five is welcoming and inclusive (61% of all respondents)
 - 48% indicated First Saturdays offers entertainment that appeals to diverse audiences (57% of all respondents)
 - 71% never or rarely experience discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity in Downtown Frederick. 29% experience discrimination some of the time and 0% experience discrimination most of the time.
- **Persons with Disabilities:**
 - 39% felt Alive @ Five is welcoming and inclusive (61% of all respondents)
 - 42% felt Downtown Frederick was welcoming for people who are deaf or hard of hearing (61% of all respondents)
 - 72% never or rarely experience discrimination in Downtown Frederick based on disability. 16% experience discrimination some of the time and 9% experience discrimination most of the time.

Next Steps: Listed below are the initial action steps for the Partnership. By working with other organizations and engaging with the community, the Partnership will begin to formulate future actions as these initial steps are completed.

- **Increase the diversity of business ownership and the products/services offered in Downtown Frederick by provide funding assistance for underrepresented businesses:**
 - Investigate whether to establish a retail incubator and other potential funding mechanisms to meet this goal. This research is underway.

- **Increase diversity in Partnership event entertainment and recruit more ethnic and cultural festivals:**
 - Recruit volunteers to increase the racial/cultural diversity of the Alive @ Five band selection committee
 - Increase outreach to increase the racial and cultural diversity of the Alive @ Five bands/band members
 - Increase First Saturday entertainment outreach with a goal of greater racial and cultural diversity
 - Continue to grow efforts with the Asian American Center of Frederick (AACF) to support the return of the Thai Water Festival and the launch of new Night Markets
 - Assist in promoting the Mountain City Lodge Elks Parade on an annual basis
 - Promote and support celebrations planned by AARCH, Soul Street and other organizations
 - Continue working with Centro Hispano to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month during October's First Saturday
 - Continue to work with The Frederick Center to promote the Frederick Pride festival

- **Make the sense of safety and security for people of all backgrounds a priority:**
 - Hire a contractor to implement an Ambassador Program in Downtown Frederick to help provide a clean, safe and welcoming environment for visitors, residents and businesses (the process of finding a contractor currently is underway and the program is anticipated to launch in the Fall)

- **Begin to address walkability and accessibility concerns in Downtown Frederick:**
 - Working with the City of Frederick, the Partnership will continue to pursue implementation of the Downtown Frederick Streetscape Study which, when implemented, will greatly improve the downtown sidewalks. Study goals include wider sidewalks and trip free walking surfaces.

- **Offer businesses awareness tools and trainings on diversity:**
 - Focus the annual Competitive Edge series (a total of 5 workshops over 5 months) on diversity related topics: hiring a diverse retail workforce, how to make ADA related accommodations at your business, how to best communicate with the deaf community and more

- **Address areas of concern identified for African Americans and Hispanics:**
 - Conduct follow-up meetings with representatives of these groups to gain additional information and insight on interpreting the survey results and moving forward effectively, related to creating a welcoming atmosphere, improving safety, respect and inclusion, understanding more about the discrimination experienced and learning how to better attract their demographic

- **Build on the momentum from the focus groups and survey:**
 - Expand upon this outreach to learn more from the deaf community, persons with disabilities and other demographic groups through periodic community discussions to continue addressing the strengths of and opportunities in Downtown Frederick

- Ask people representing various demographic groups and backgrounds to serve on committees to help implement the identified initiatives
- Solidify and leverage relationships with organizations representing diverse interests and people in order to achieve common goals from the survey and those that may arise in the future

The Partnership is very encouraged by the number of people who participated in the focus groups and survey who offered honest feedback about their experiences in Downtown Frederick. The input received to date provides a road map for the Partnership to both take on new projects and continue to learn more. The Partnership also looks forward to hearing from and partnering with community members – both new and old to the organization. If you are interested in getting involved in these efforts, please reach out to the Partnership at mainstreet@downtownfrederick.org or call the office at 301.698.8118.