

Planning for a Great Downtown

Dunellen and New Jersey Perspectives



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APA New Jersey

Acknowledgements

With special thanks to Mayor Jason Cilento of Dunellen and the executive board of the New Jersey Chapter of American Planning Association

OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

2. Attributes

3. Dunellen, NJ Survey

4. Toolkit

5. Dunellen at a Glance

INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- We identified several attributes of great downtowns, as well as strategies to make them great!
- Through our research, we have come to understand what attributes make a downtown great, how they can be achieved, and how we can learn from towns across the country
- A great downtown is, above all else, built by its residents.

GREAT DOWNTOWN AWARDEES of NJ APA 2012-2025

Bordentown, 2012	Somerville, 2016
Frenchtown, 2012	Morristown, 2017
Freehold, 2013	Cranford, 2018
Montclair, 2013	Westwood, 2019
Westfield, 2013	Summit, 2021
Haddonfield, 2014	Flemington, 2022
Hammonton, 2014	Hackensack, 2024
Atlantic Highlands, 2014	Dunellen, 2024
Clinton, 2016	Metuchen, 2025
Red Bank, 2016	

ATTRIBUTES

STUDIO IDENTIFIED ATTRIBUTES OF A GREAT DOWNTOWN

1 Economic Vitality

2 Accessibility and Connectivity

3 Arts, Culture, and Entertainment

4 Identity, Character, and Aesthetics

5 Diversity of Uses

6 Safety and Comfort

7 Public Space

8 Central Street

9 Public Amenities and Engagement

10 Sustainability and Resilience

11 Design Quality

DUNELLEN RESIDENT SURVEY

ENGLISH

DUNELLEN DOWNTOWN SURVEY

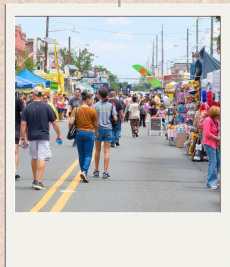
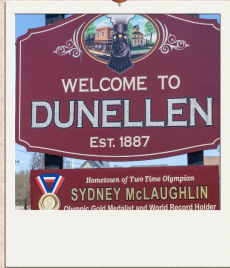
Share your thoughts on what characteristics make a great downtown by taking this short 10-minute survey!

Scan here to access survey:



Survey Closes:
DECEMBER 5, 2025

Conducted by Rutgers University, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Fall 2025, in collaboration with the Borough of Dunellen

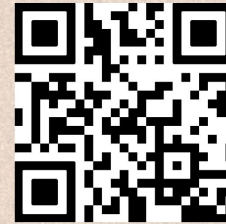


SPANISH

ENCUESTA DEL CENTRO DE DUNELLEN

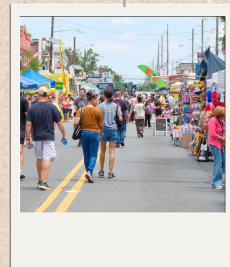
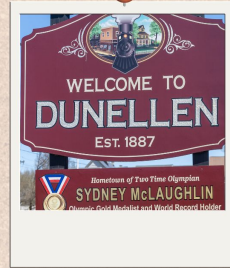
¡Comparte tu opinión sobre qué características hacen que un centro urbano sea excelente respondiendo a esta breve encuesta de 10 minutos!

Escanea aquí para acceder a la encuesta:

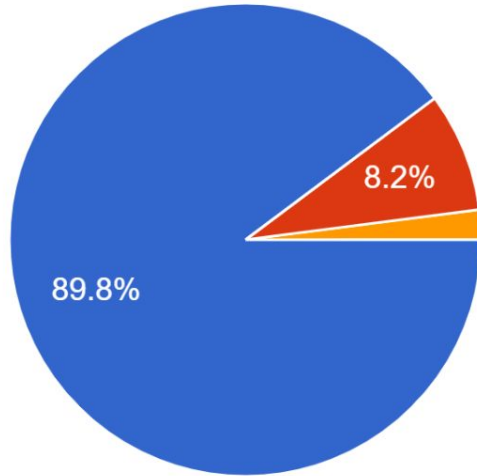


Cierre de la encuesta:
5 DE DICIEMBRE DE 2025

Realizado por la Escuela de Planificación y Políticas Públicas Bloustein de la Universidad de Rutgers, otoño de 2025, en colaboración con el municipio de Dunellen.

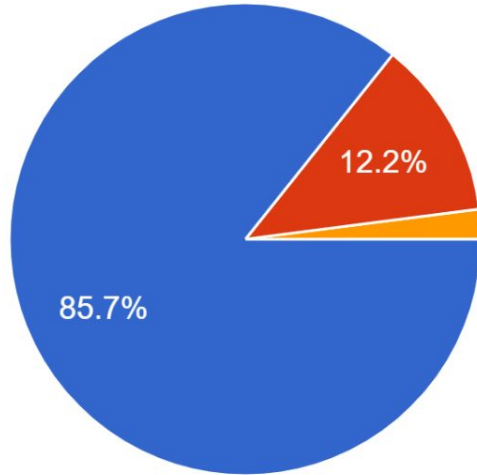


How Important is **Safety and Comfort** in Downtown Dunellen to you?



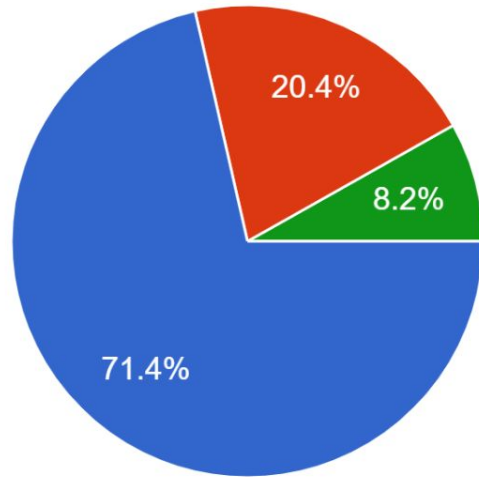
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not at all important

How important is having **Economic Vitality** in Downtown Dunellen to you?



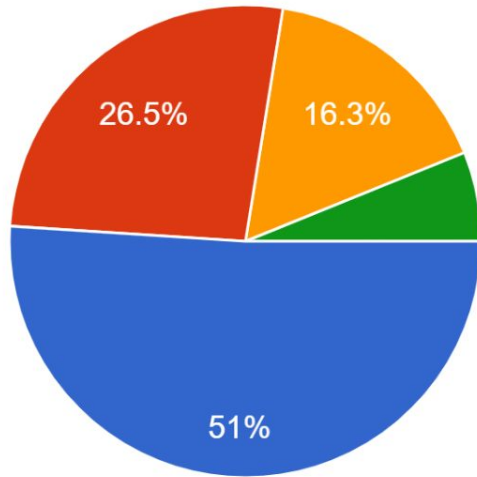
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not at all important

How important is **Accessibility and Connectivity** in Downtown Dunellen to you?



- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not at all important

How important is having Identity and Aesthetics in Downtown Dunellen to you?



- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not at all important

KEY PRIORITIES & OVERALL THEMES

Top Downtown Priorities

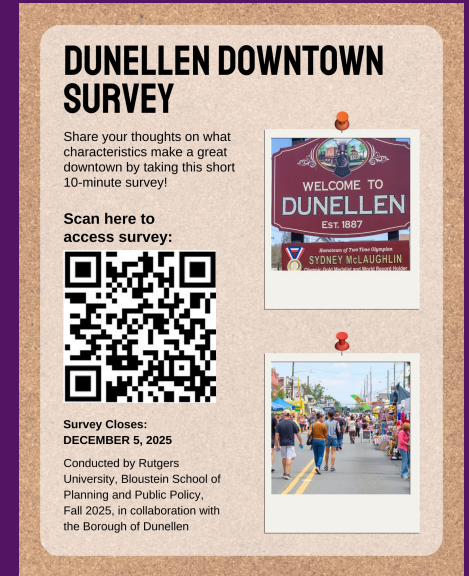
- Safety & Comfort - (90% Very Important)
- Economic Vitality - (86% Very Important)
- Accessibility & Connectivity - (71% Very Important)
- Identifiable Main Street - (59% Very Important)
- Identity & Aesthetics + Art/Culture - Valued but less universal

What Residents Value Most

- Walkability + transit access
- Small-town feel and community identity
- Local/legacy businesses

Challenges

- Traffic & congestion
- Parking shortages
- Redundant business types
- Weak downtown identity & outdated storefronts



WHAT PEOPLE WANT MORE OF

What Would Bring Them Downtown More

- Better leisure walking experience (67%)
- More arts & entertainment (53%)
- More public events (49%)
- Easier parking (42%)
- Grocer/specialty market (31%)

Most Desired New Uses

- Restaurants (57%)
- Grocer/specialty market (41%)
- Breweries/nightlife (33%)
- Clothing/apparel (30%)
- Maker spaces/art studios (27%)
- Public plaza/park spaces (18%)



Lowest Interest: gyms, salons, personal services, traditional offices.

TOOLKIT FOR A GREAT DOWNTOWN



DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT/REDEVELOPMENT
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS “(TOOLKIT)”



Fall 2025 Bloustein Downtown Studio, conducted for Dunellen NJ and the NJ Chapter of the
American Planning Association

ILLUSTRATIVE STATE OF NEW JERSEY PROGRAMS AND AGENCIES

1

Area Designations, Property Tax, and
Business Improvements

2

Development/Redevelopment
Incentives and Mandates
(Main Street NJ)

3

Department of Community Affairs
(DCA)

4

Economic Development Authority (EDA)

5

Housing and Mortgage Financing
Agency (HMFA)

6

NJDOT and NJTRANSIT (Transit Villages)

7

Department of Environmental Protection

8

Redevelopment Authority

9

Metropolitan Planning Organizations
(MPOs)

ILLUSTRATIVE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND AGENCIES

1 Federal Development /
Redevelopment Incentives & Supports

2 Federal Department of Housing and
Urban Development (HUD)

3 Federal Economic Development
Administration (EDA)

4 Federal Small Business Administration
(SBA)

5 Federal Highway Administration
(FHWA)

6 Federal Environmental Protection
Agency (EPA)

POTENTIAL DOWNTOWN AIDING REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

ANR designation

Façade and streetscape
improvements

NPP district

Aspire award cap

Historic district

NRTC nonprofit-led
revitalization

Aspire potential

Historic Tax Credit

PILOT

CLG designated

Main Street NJ

SID active

CLG eligible

NJHT grants

SSTT

Façade and signage grants

NJTPA pedestrian access

Transit-Friendly Planning

Façade and signage
upgrades

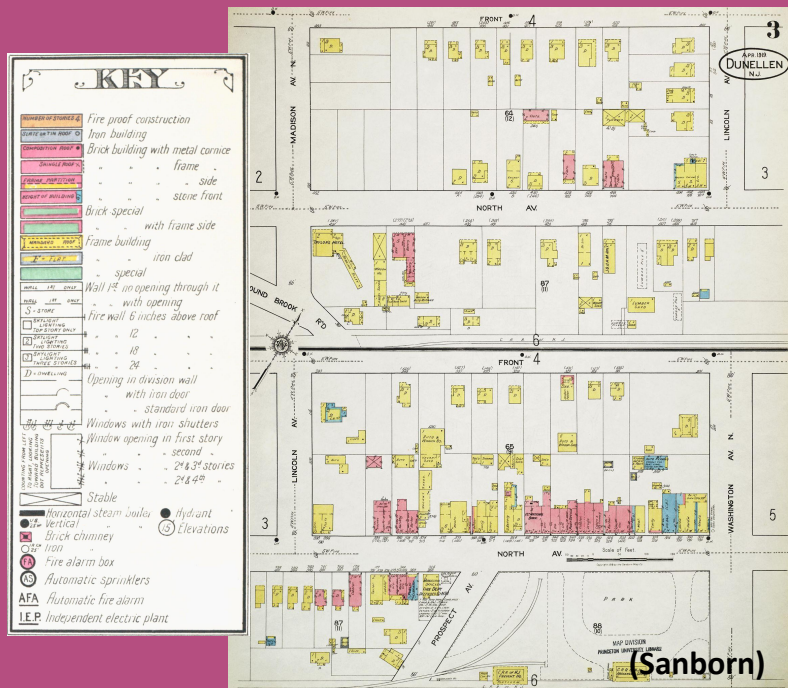
NJTPA support

Transit Village

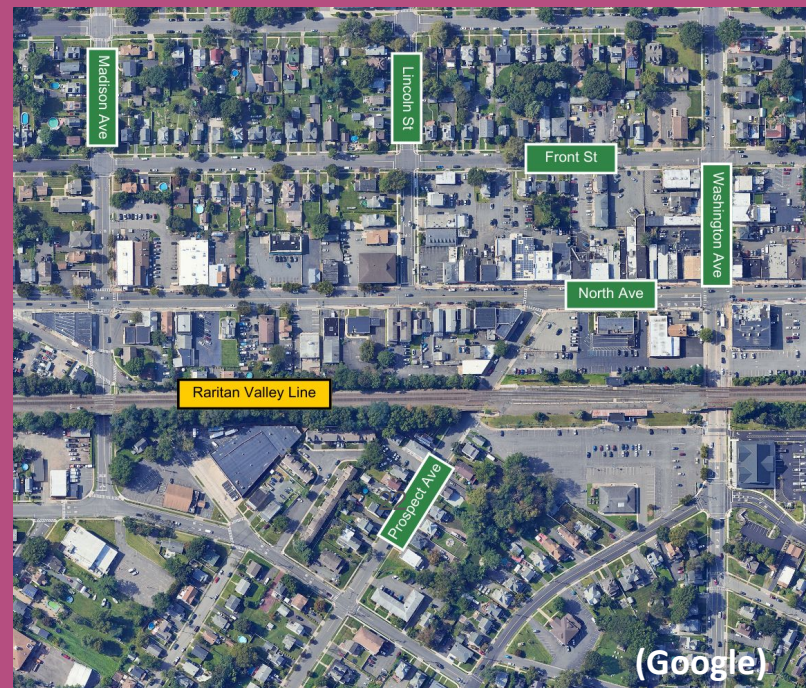
DUNELLEN AT A GLANCE

HISTORIC EVOLUTION OF THE DUNELLEN DOWNTOWN

Dunellen- Downtown (1919 and today)



1919



Today

DUNELLEN - REDEVELOPMENT

- Redevelopment efforts have been ongoing since 2001
- Over \$200 million invested in downtown Dunellen from 2017-2024
- Largest redevelopment project: Art Color Factory (Pictured at right, 2007)
- 13 other properties have been redeveloped in downtown Dunellen



DUNELLEN - COMMUNITY

- Downtown is also known as the “Miracle Mile”
- During COVID, Dunellen was one of few towns to keep outdoor programming

Challenges:

- 99.9% of the town is built up - little room for new developments
- Affordable housing mandates and “Missing Middle”/ Workforce Housing
- Parking / Car Dependency



DUNELLEN NJ EFFECTIVE (“EQUALIZED”) PROPERTY TAX RATE (EPTR) OVER TIME

- The EPTR in NJ shows the percentage of property market value that is owed annually for all government (in NJ municipal, school and county combined) total property taxes.
- Example, on a \$100, 000 market value property, an EPTR of 2.000 means an annual all government (municipal, school and county) total property tax of \$2,000.
- A declining EPTR means a lower effective property tax RATE (NOT \$ PAYMENT) over time and that is the case in Dunellen, NJ.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DUNELLEN TOTAL EPTR</u>
2025	2.399
2024	2.537
2023	2.679
2022	2.840
2021	3.122
2020	3.262
2019	3.265
2018	3.274
2017	3.115
2016	3.038
2015	3.094
2014	3.106
<hr/>	
1970	3.480

Source: Middlesex County Abstract of Ratables for indicated years

Thank you!

STUDENT BIOS

- Amy Allen - Environmental planning concentration
- Nicholas Atwell - Transportation concentration
- Imran Bukhari - Transportation concentration
- Kayla “KJ” Dodd - Urban development/redevelopment concentration
- Chris Gates - Urban development/redevelopment concentration
- Paul Hislip - Transportation concentration
- Harrison Janes - Transportation concentration
- Hailie Kovitch - Environmental planning concentration
- Justin Laumann - Community development & Housing concentration
- Daniel Marucci - Urban development/redevelopment concentration
- Alanna McDowall - Environmental planning concentration
- Ryan Paul - Transportation + Urban development/redevelopment concentration
- Carmen Santiago - Housing, Health & Equitable Community Planning concentration
- Ashlee Smith - Urban Design + Urban development/redevelopment concentration
- Amara Thompkins - Community Development and Housing + Urban development/redevelopment concentration

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