

Phase 2 Engagement Findings

December 2024

CENTRAL AREA PLAN

Update

A 20-YEAR VISION FOR EQUITABLE
DOWNTOWN GROWTH



Phase 2 (2024) community engagement included two online surveys and multiple in-person events as outlined in this report. A summary for two rounds of focus groups meetings is provided in a separate report.

General Survey Pages 3-17

Online survey from September through November

735 total responses

- Residents and visitors were invited to take 10-minute survey about priorities they want to see downtown
- Advertised in multiple DPD emails and social media
- Publicized at pop-up events

Youth Survey Pages 18-23

Online survey in September

67 total responses

- Worked with My Block My Hood My City to promote
- Advertised in multiple DPD emails and social media
- Publicized at pop-up events
- Respondents ages 14-24 had a chance to enter a sweepstakes to win a Visa gift card of up to \$100 in value

Pop-up Events Pages 24-31

5 regional pop-up events from July through September

Over 1,200 participants

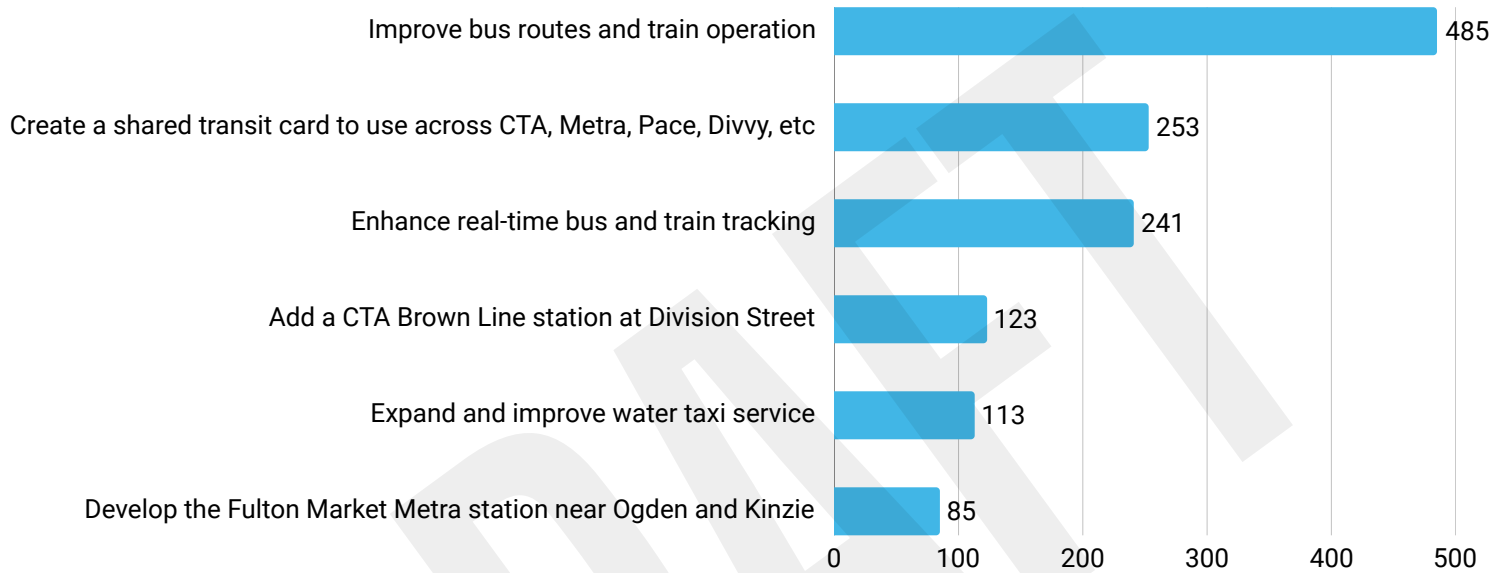
- At neighborhood festivals and farmers market throughout the city
- Participants provided feedback through the surveys
- An interactive wheel was used to offer prizes such as candy, pens and tote bags



General Survey

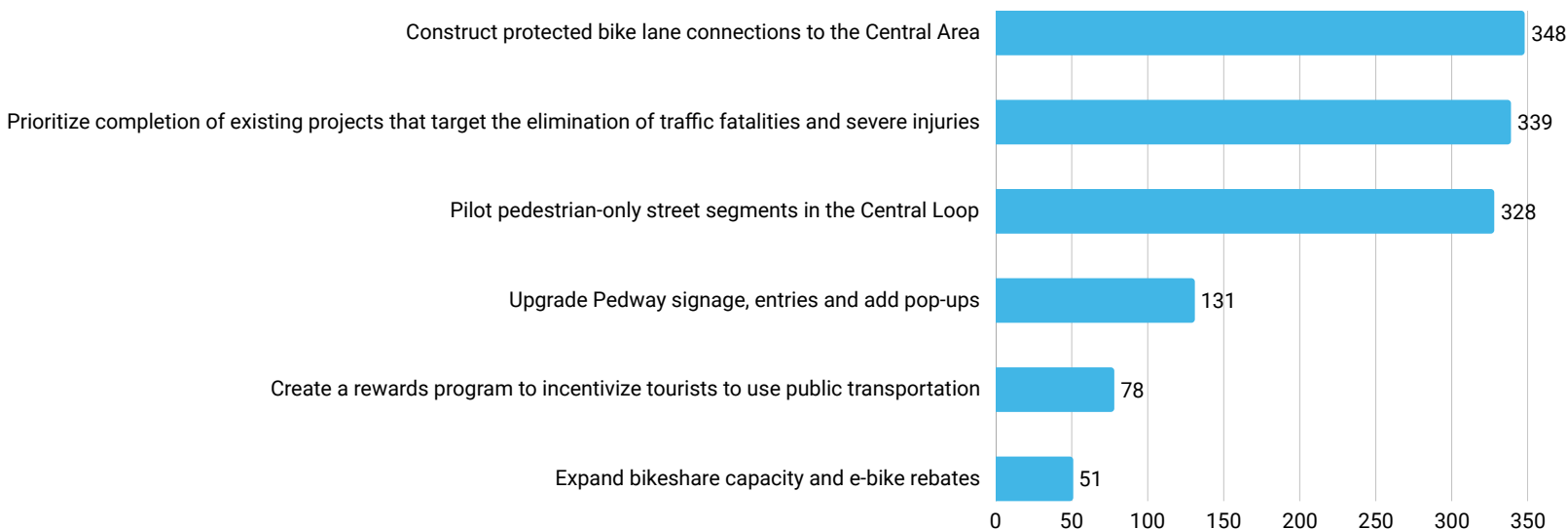
Top actions to increase availability, consistency and ease of public transportation

• 37% of respondents selected improving bus routes and train operation in the Central Area.



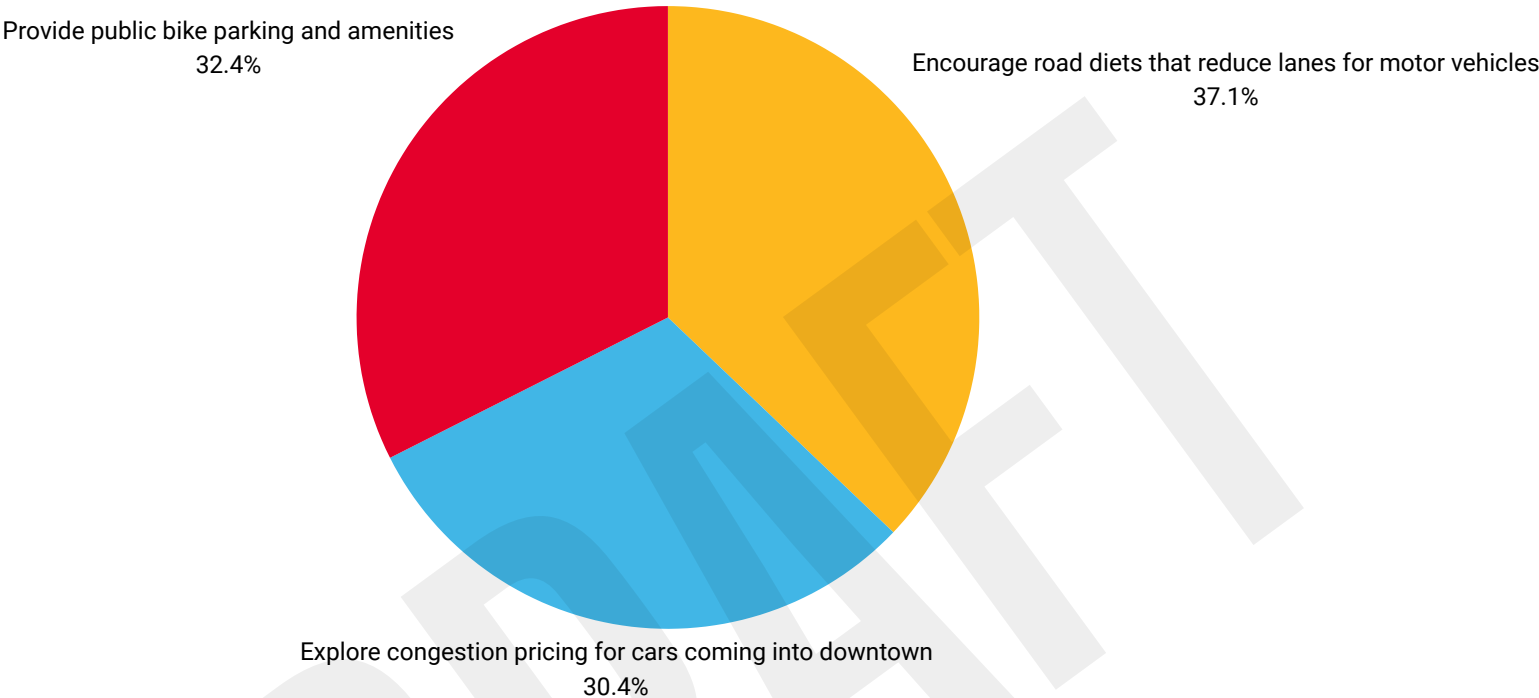
Top actions to enhance safety and create comfort for pedestrians, cyclists and other active transportation users

• 80% of respondents identified prioritization for bike lanes, projects that target the elimination of traffic fatalities, and pilot pedestrian-only streets



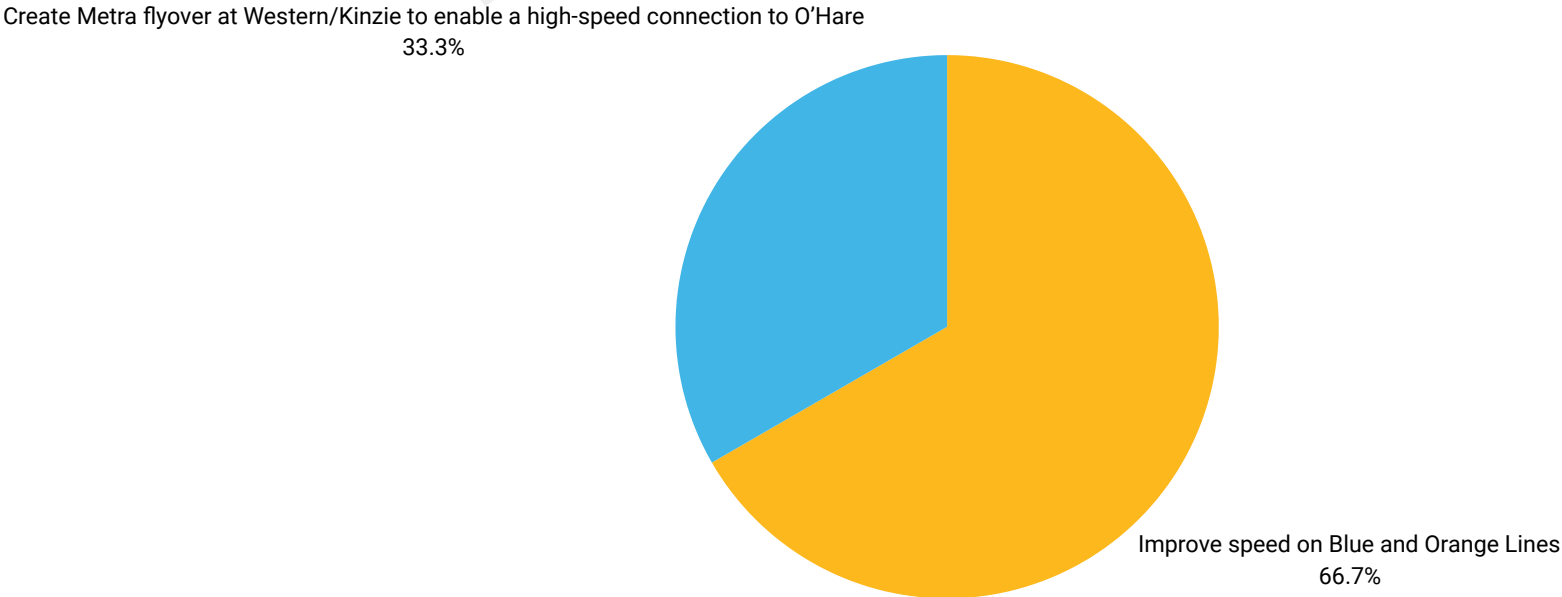
Top actions to encourage the use of public transit and active transportation instead of cars

- There was a generally even response between the three options.



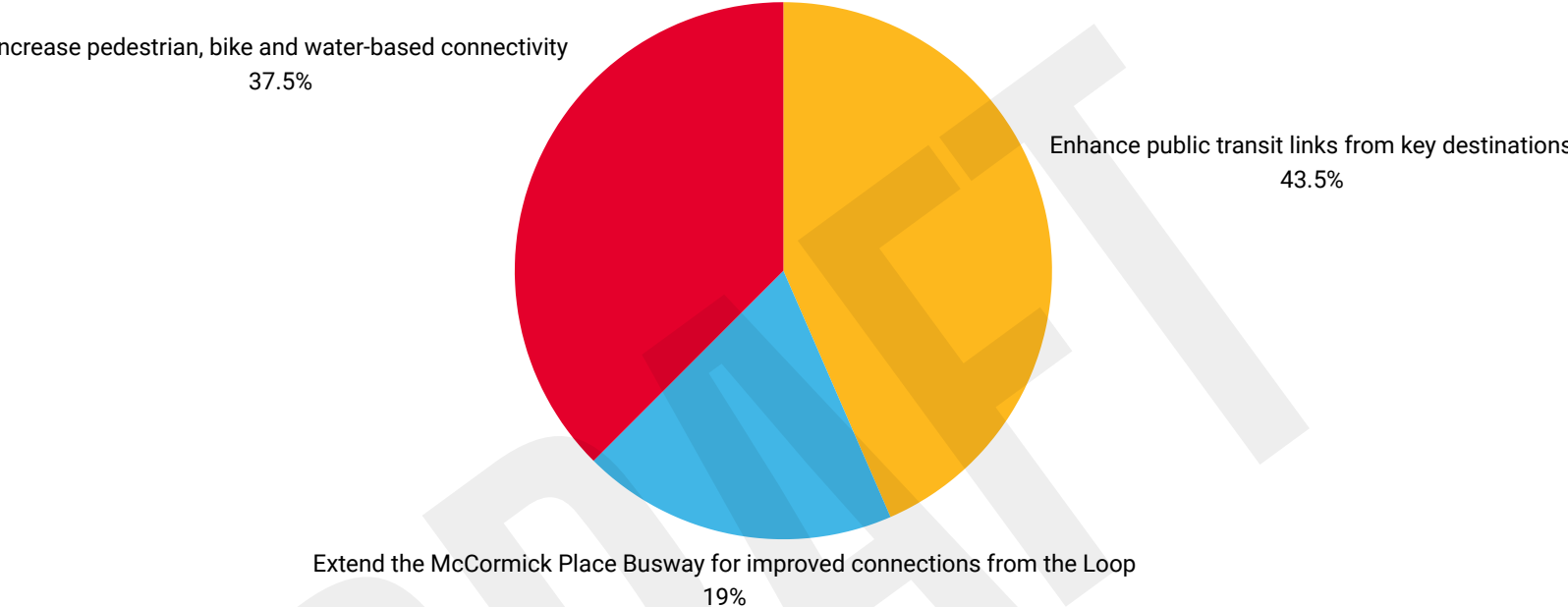
Top actions to improve on public transit connections to Chicago airports

- Over 65% of respondents agreed that they want to see an improvement in speed on Blue and Orange Lines.



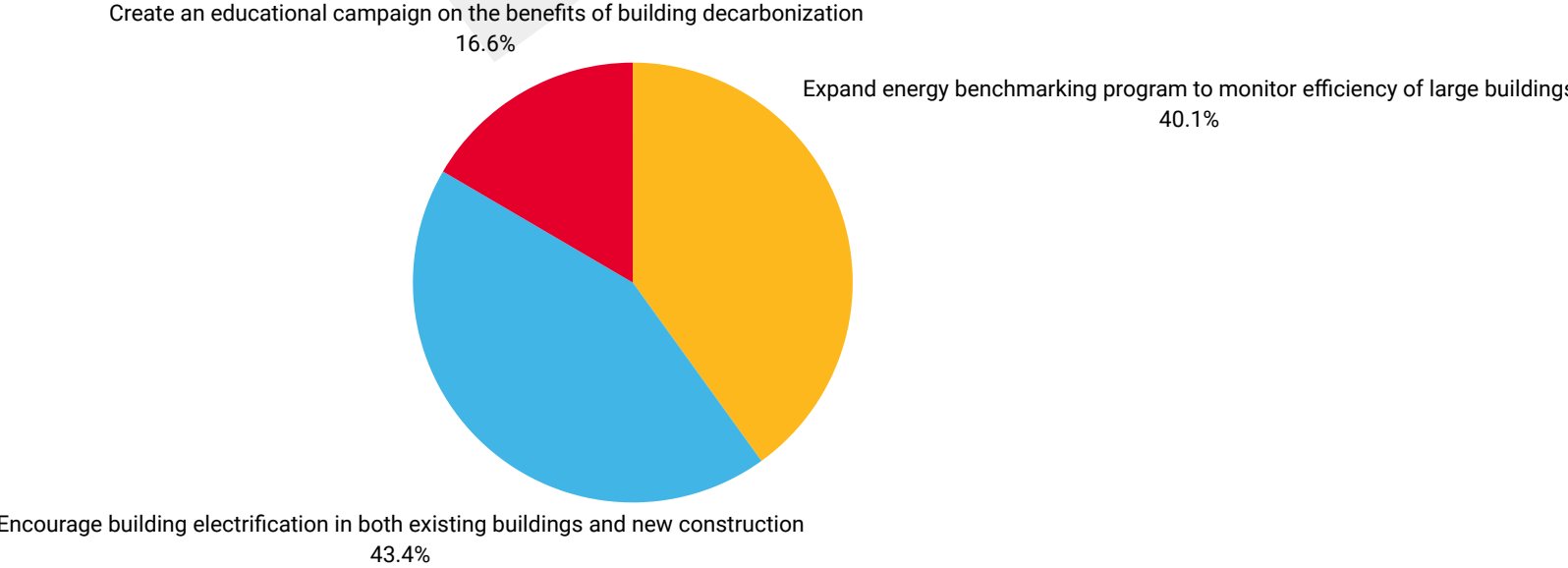
Top actions to improve connectivity to the Museum Campus

• 80% of respondents want to see an enhancement of public transit links and pedestrian, bike and water-based connectivity.



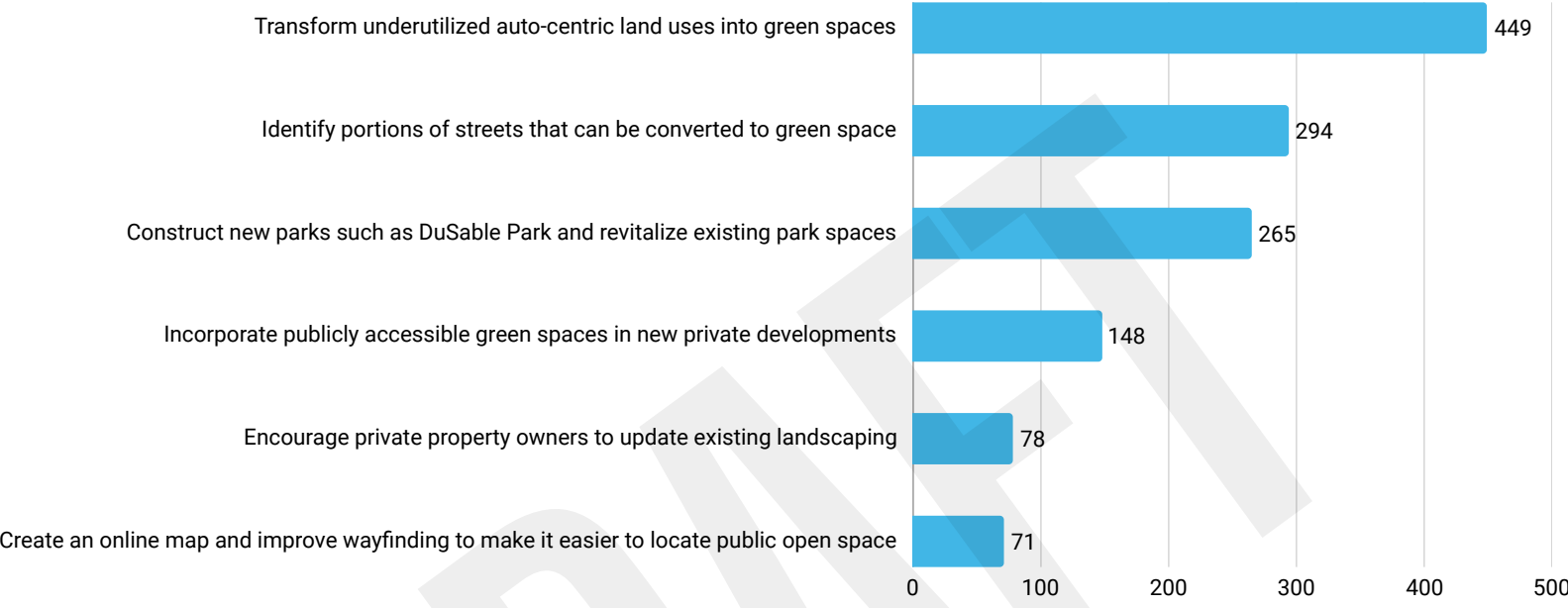
Top actions to accelerate of building decarbonization

• 43% of respondents encourage building electrification in both existing and new buildings.



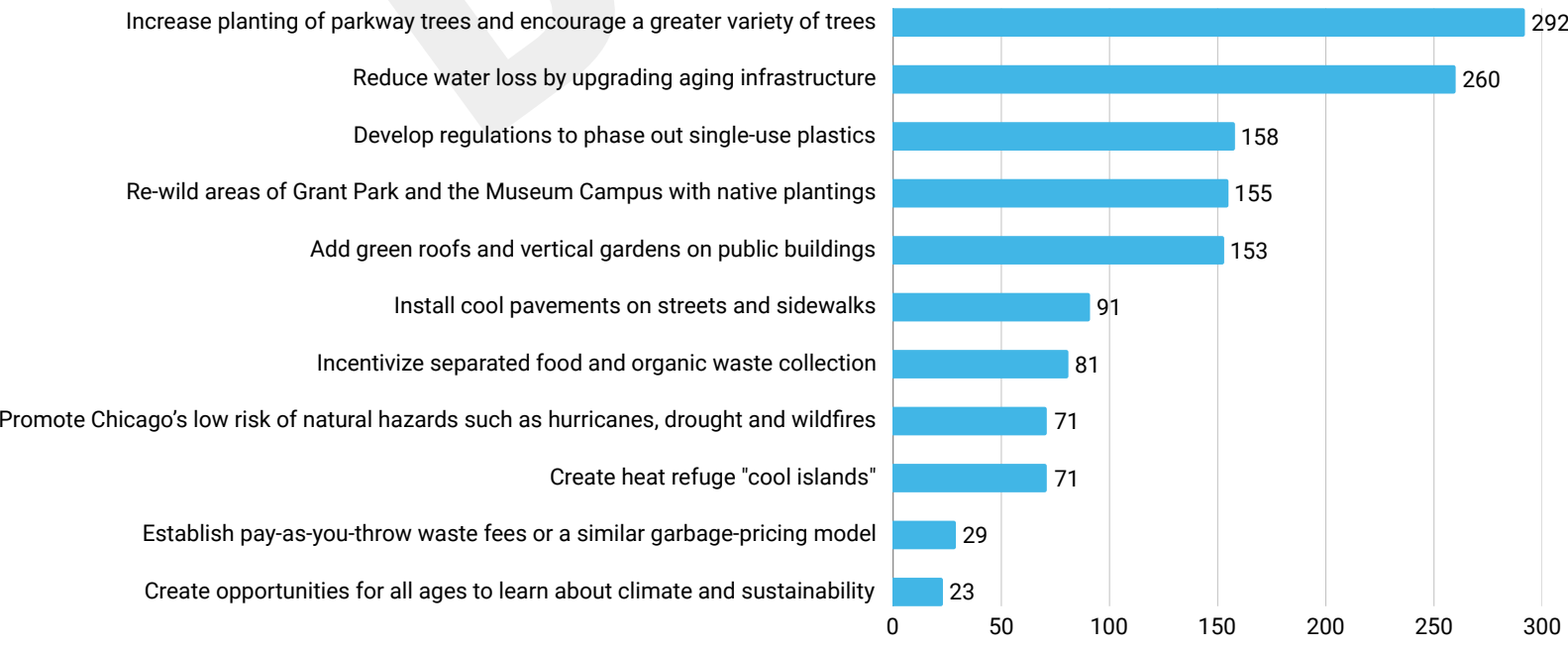
Top actions to maximize open space

• 34% of responders preferred a transformation of underutilized auto-centric land uses into green spaces.



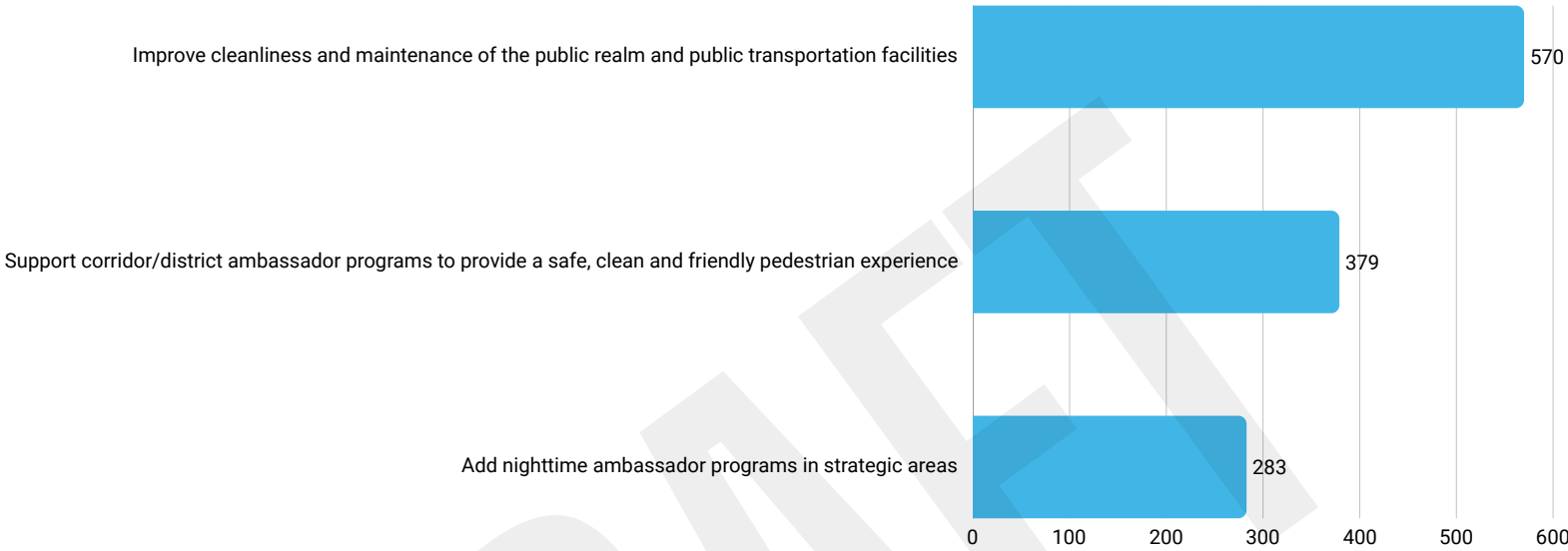
Top actions to build climate resiliency

• Respondents selected increasing planting trees and reducing water loss by upgrading aging infrastructure as top two actions.



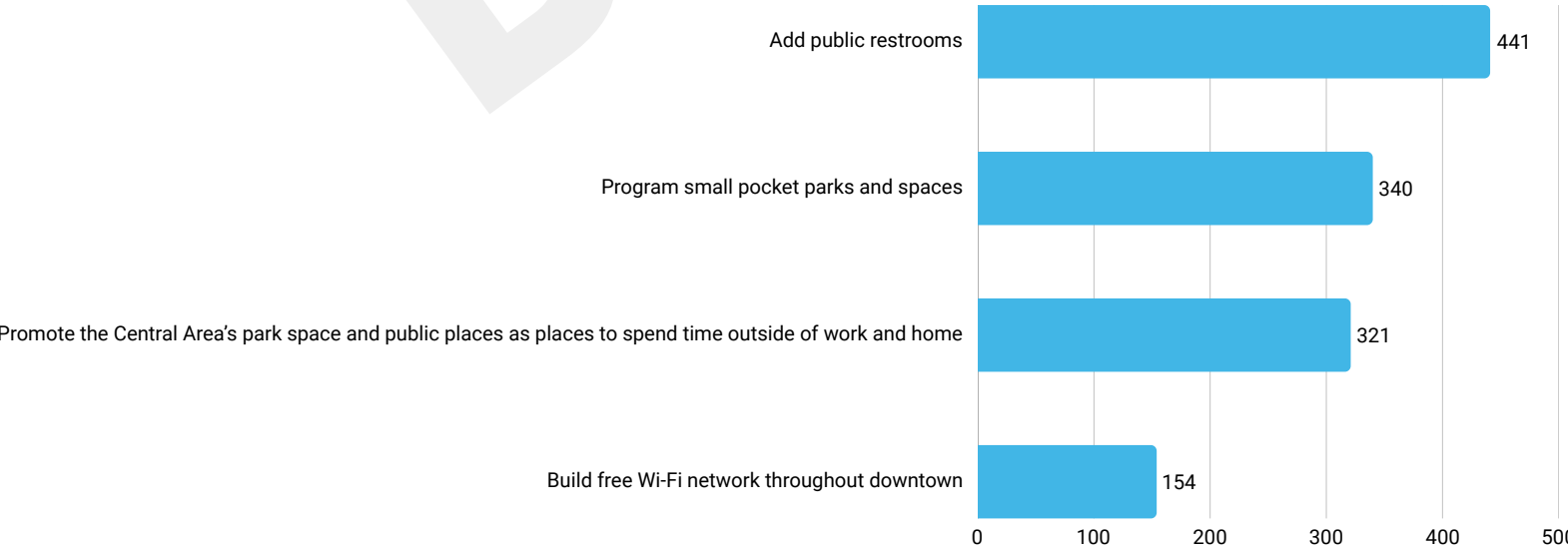
Top actions to increase the perception of safety

- Approximately 40% of respondents selected improving cleanliness and maintenance of public realm and public transportation



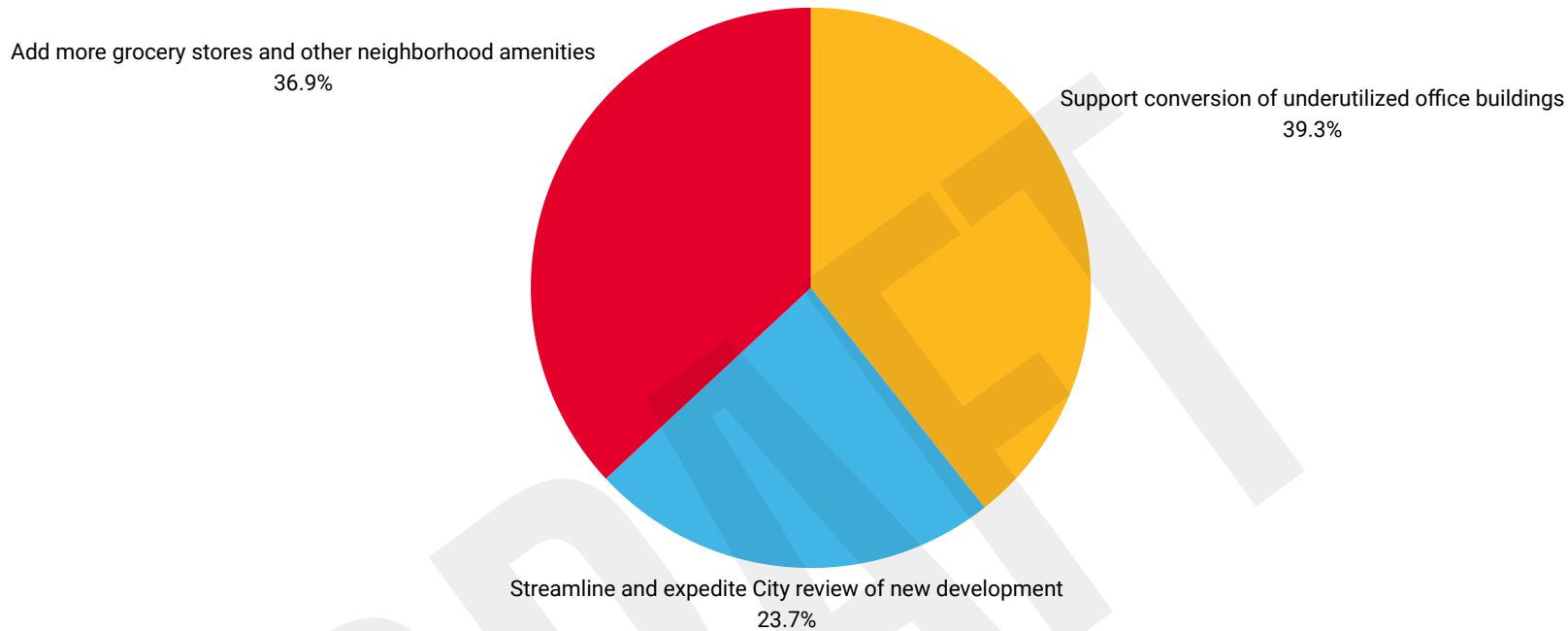
Top actions to improve “Third Places” throughout downtown

- Respondents selected public restrooms as their top action.



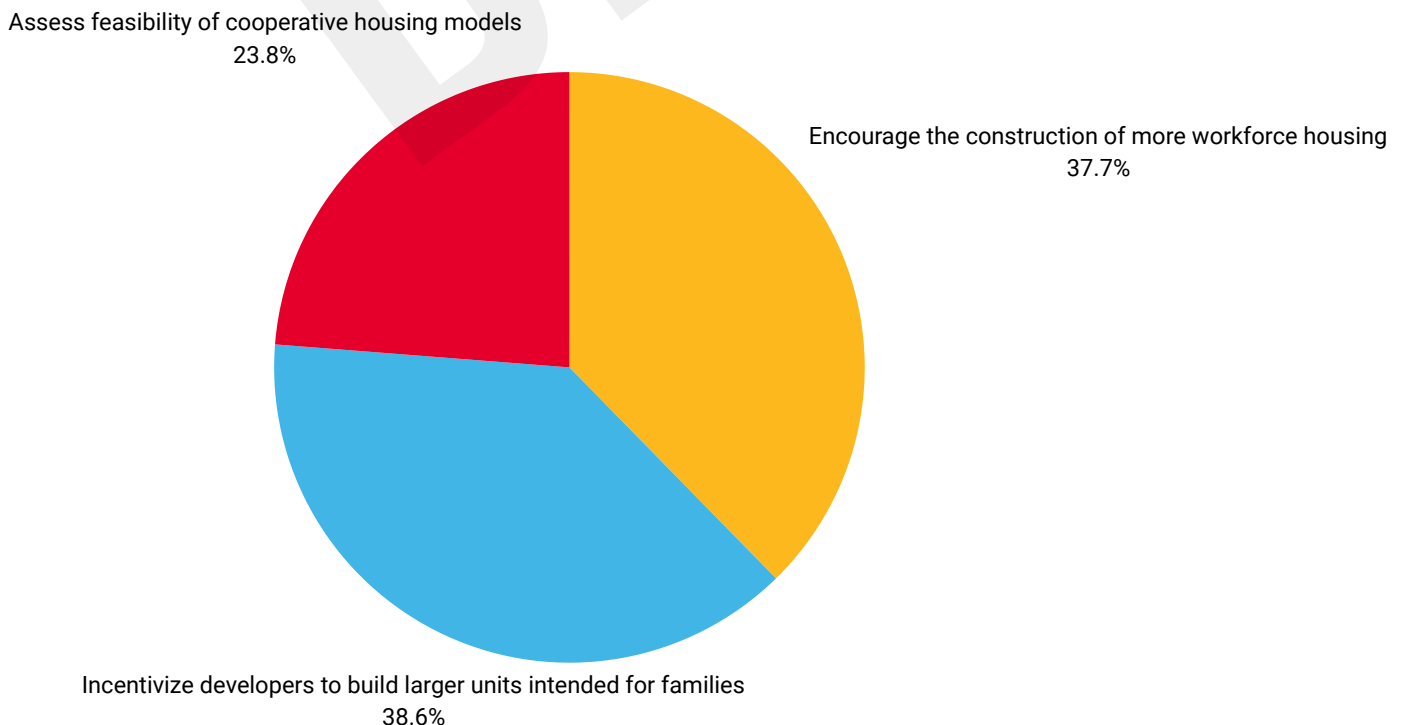
Top actions to create a thriving neighborhood in the Central Loop

- Approximately 75% supported the conversion of underutilized office buildings and adding more grocery stores.



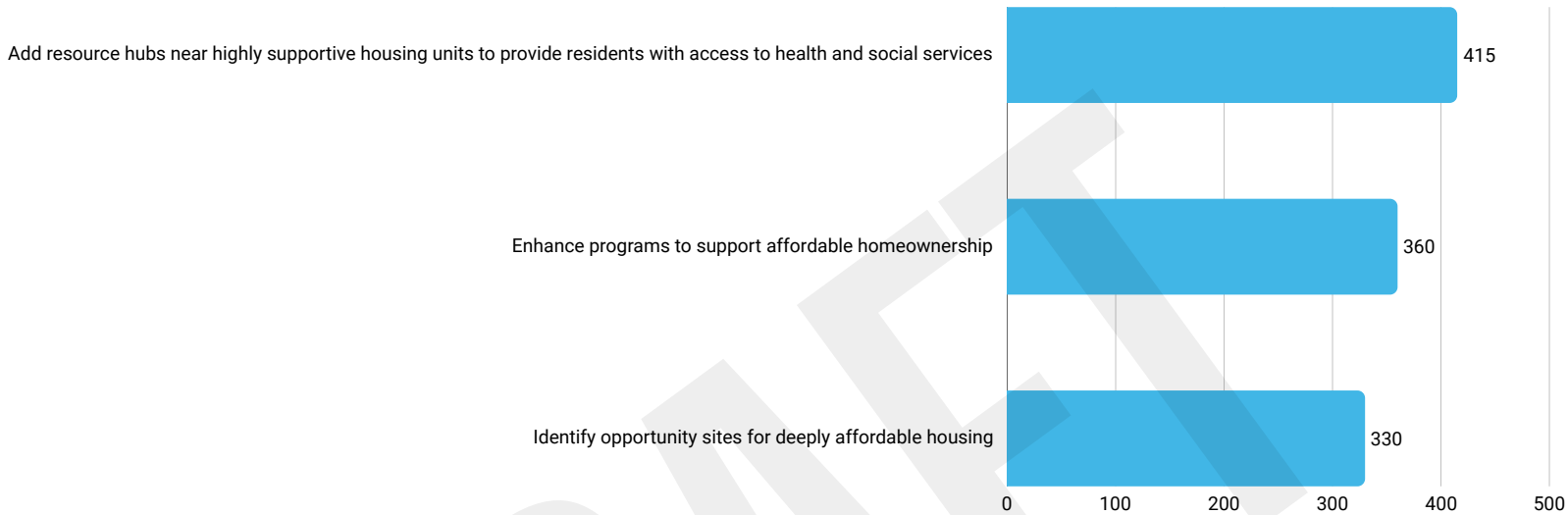
Top actions to develop a more diverse mix of housing

- Over 70% of respondents agreed on encouraging the construction of more workforce housing and incentivizing developers to build larger units for families.



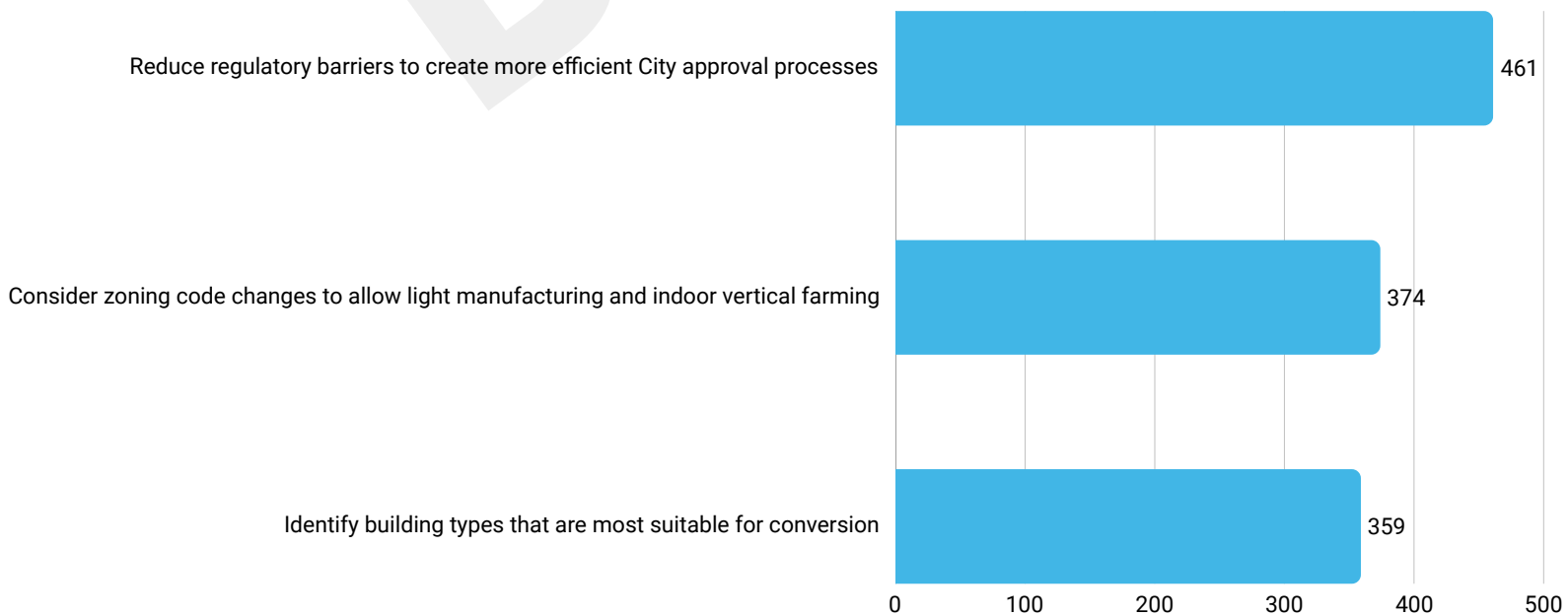
Top actions to expand access to permanent supportive housing

- The majority of respondents identified adding resource hubs near highly supportive housing as their top action.



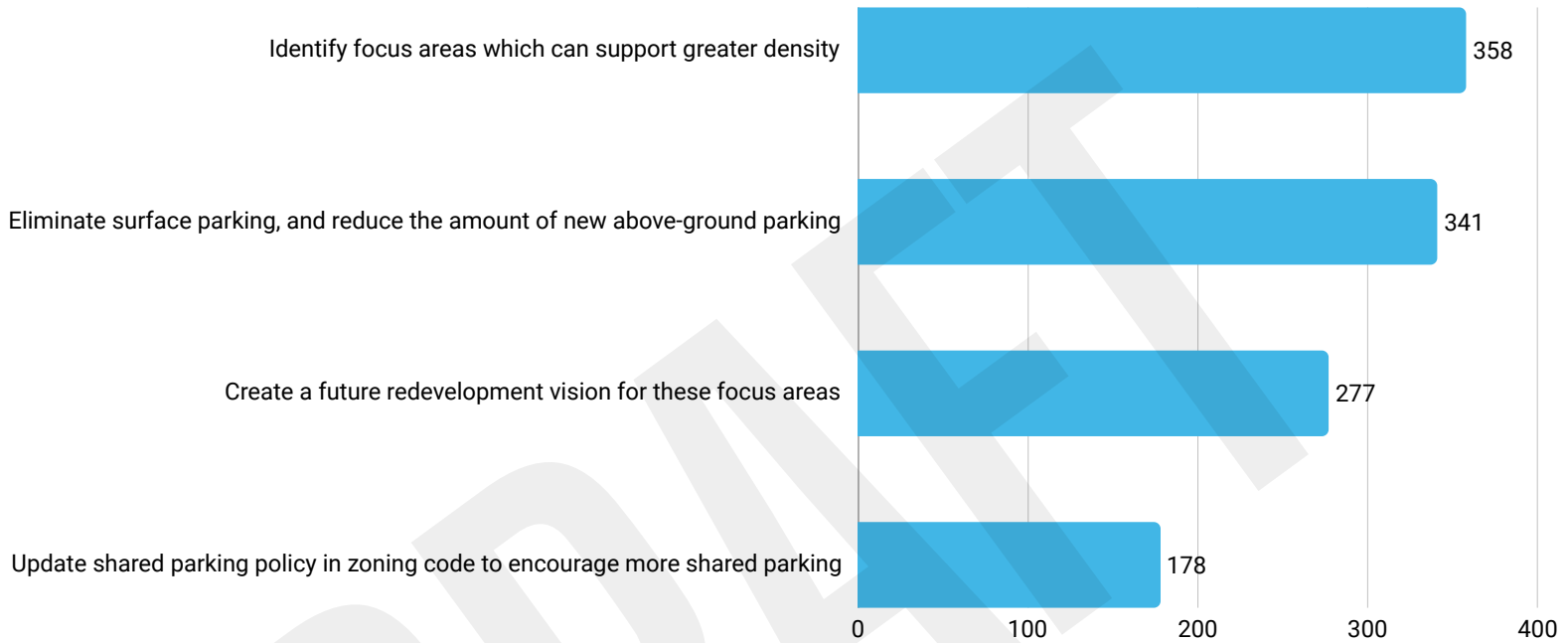
Top actions to encourage conversion of obsolete office space to housing and other uses

- 38% of responders selected a reduction of regulatory barriers to create a more efficient City approval processes as top action.



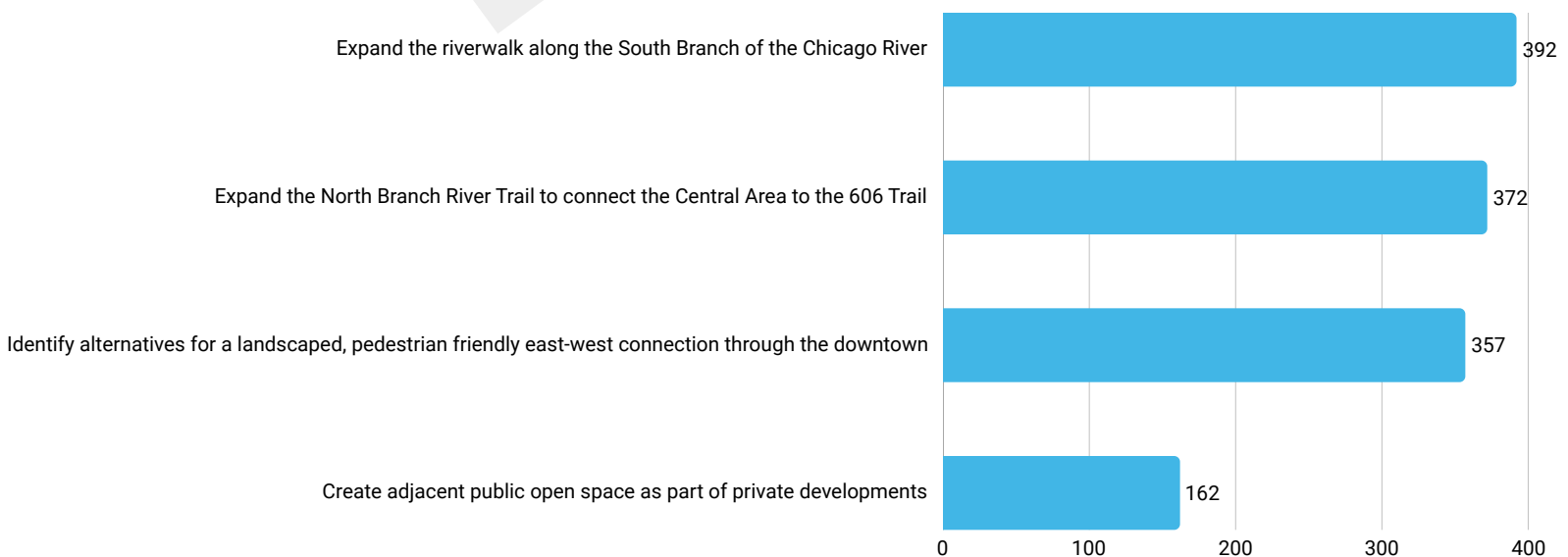
Top actions to facilitate the redevelopment of underutilized properties.

- Eliminating surface parking and identifying focus areas which can support greater density were the top two actions for respondents.



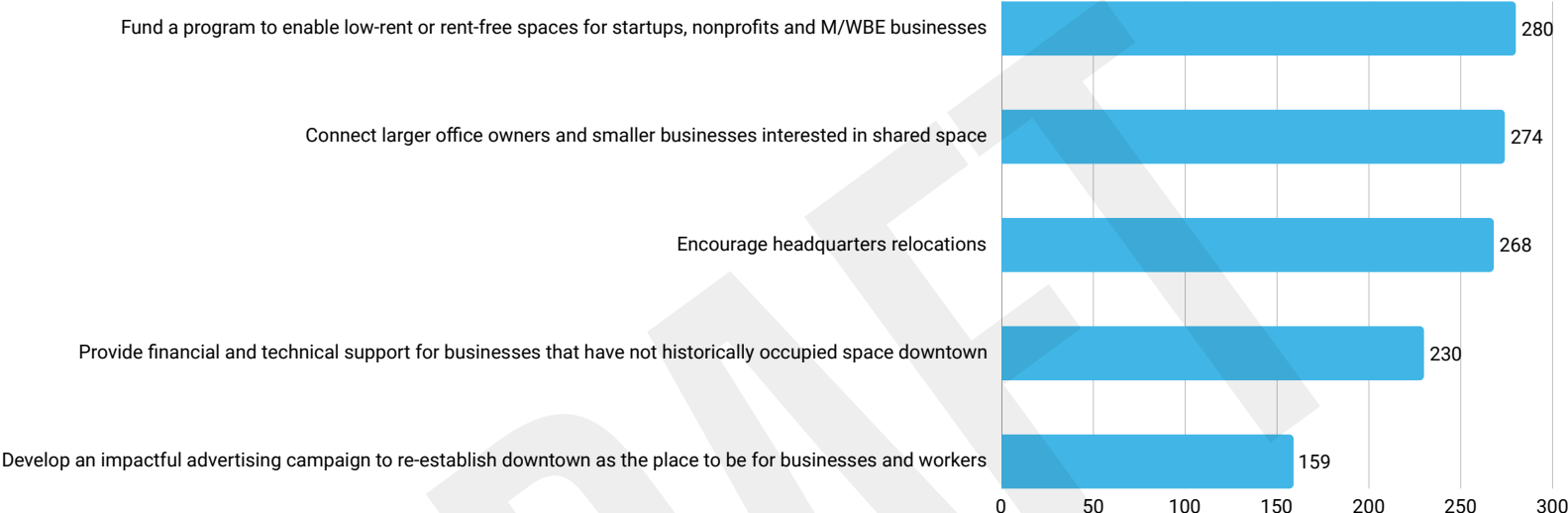
Top actions to create an interconnected network of open spaces, trails and active transportation routes

- 30% of responders selected an expansion of the riverwalk along the South Branch of the Chicago River as top action.



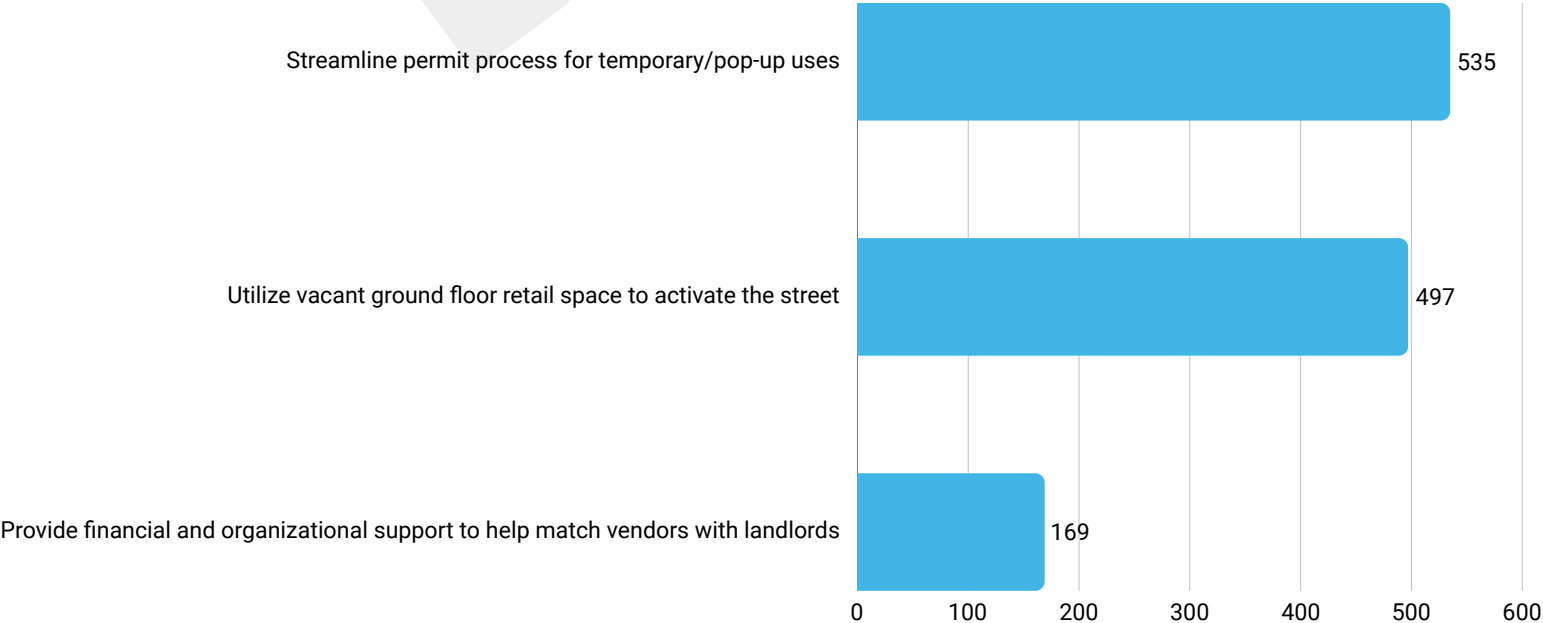
Top actions to attract new businesses and retain large downtown employers.

- Funding a program to enable low-rent or rent-free spaces for startups, nonprofits and M/WBE was selected by 1 in 4 respondents.



Top actions to make it easier to locate pop-up uses in vacant storefronts.

- 86% of respondents identified a streamlined process for pop-up uses and utilizing vacant ground floor retail space to activate the street as top two actions.



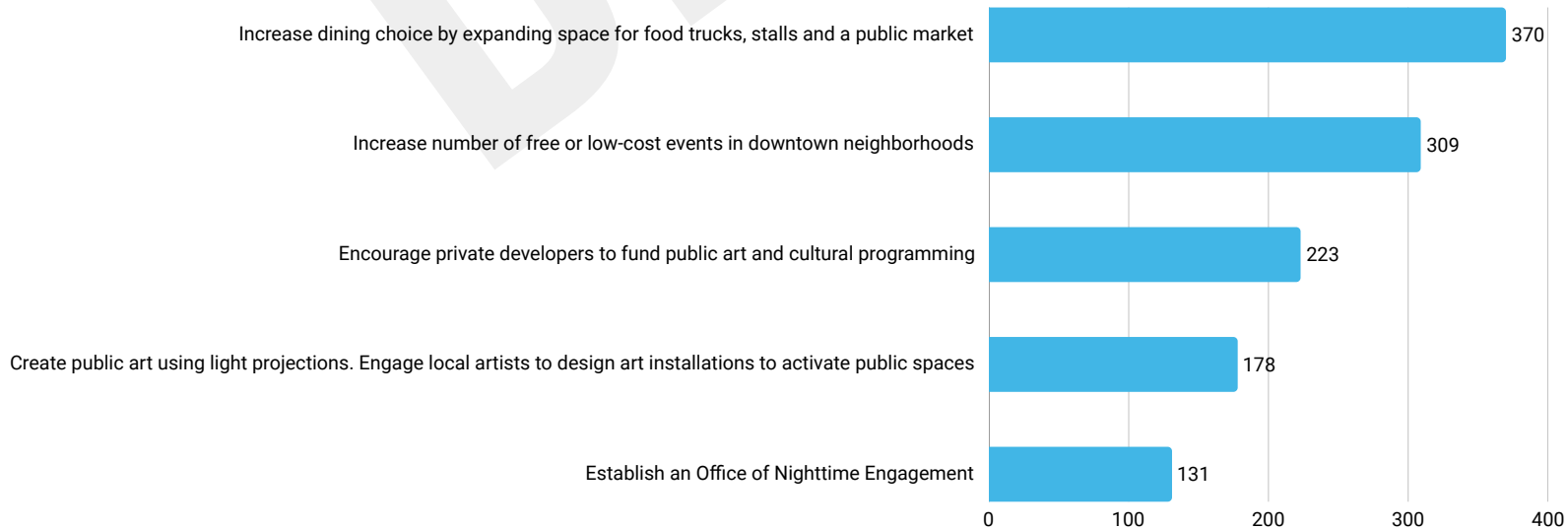
Top actions to enhance Chicago's economic diversity and vitality

• 39% of respondents preferred partnering with higher-education institutions, workforce development and mentorship organizations to create a talent pipeline for high-growth sectors as their top action.



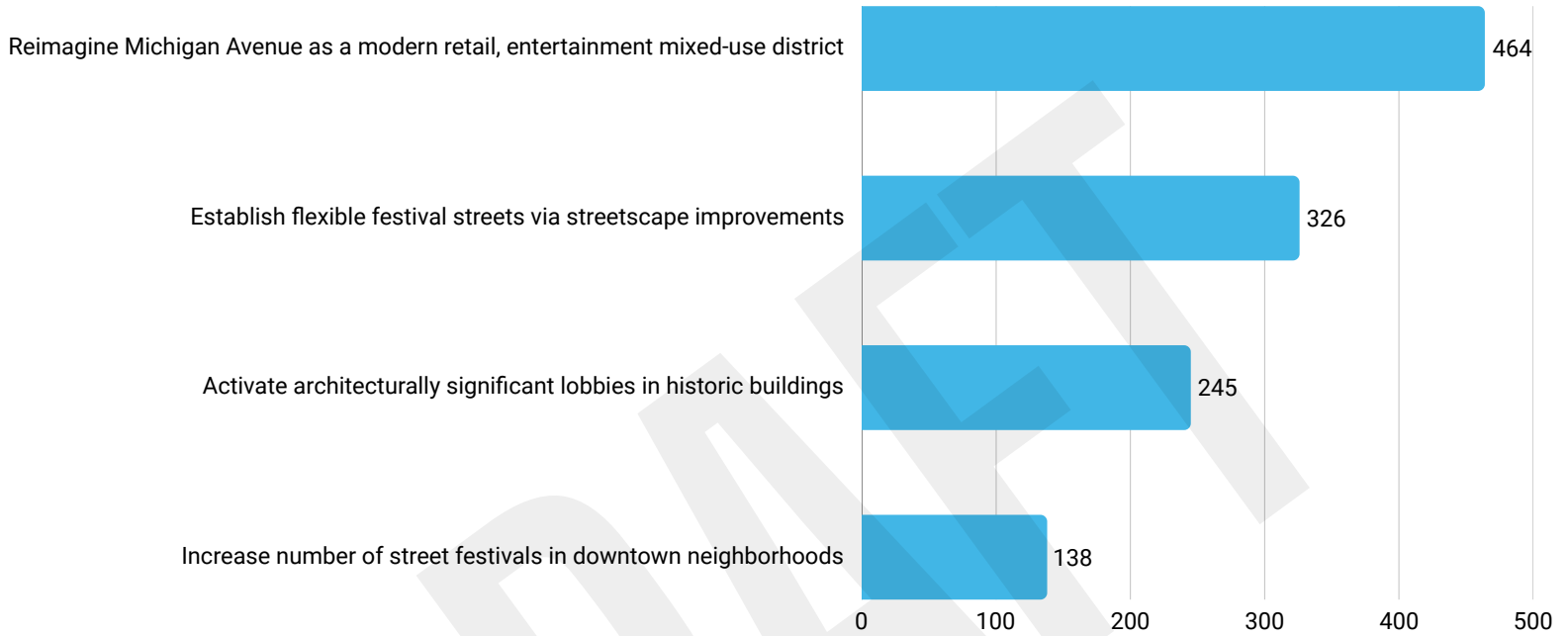
Top actions to create a vibrant 24/7 downtown

• 56% of respondents identified increasing dining choice by expanding space for food trucks and increasing number of free or low-cost events in downtown as top two actions.



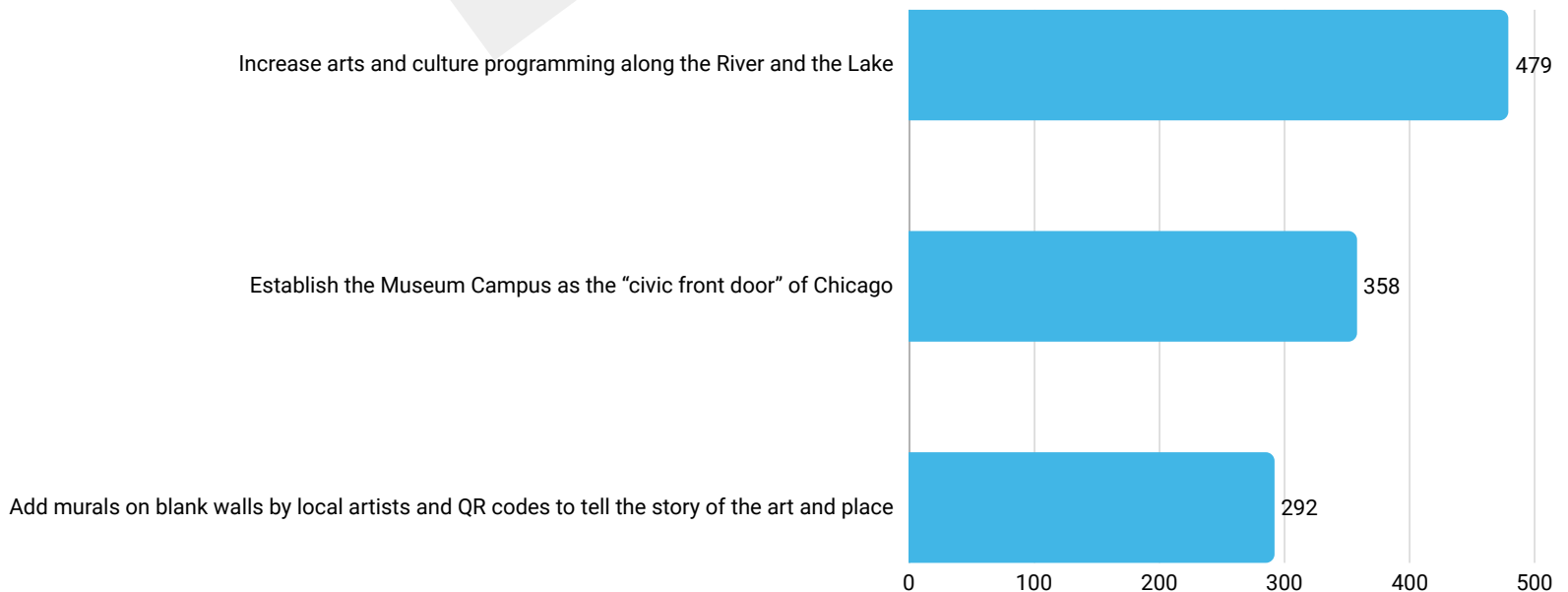
Top actions to re-energize iconic streets

- Reimagining Michigan Avenue as modern retail, entertainment mixed-use district and establishing flexible festival streets as top two actions.



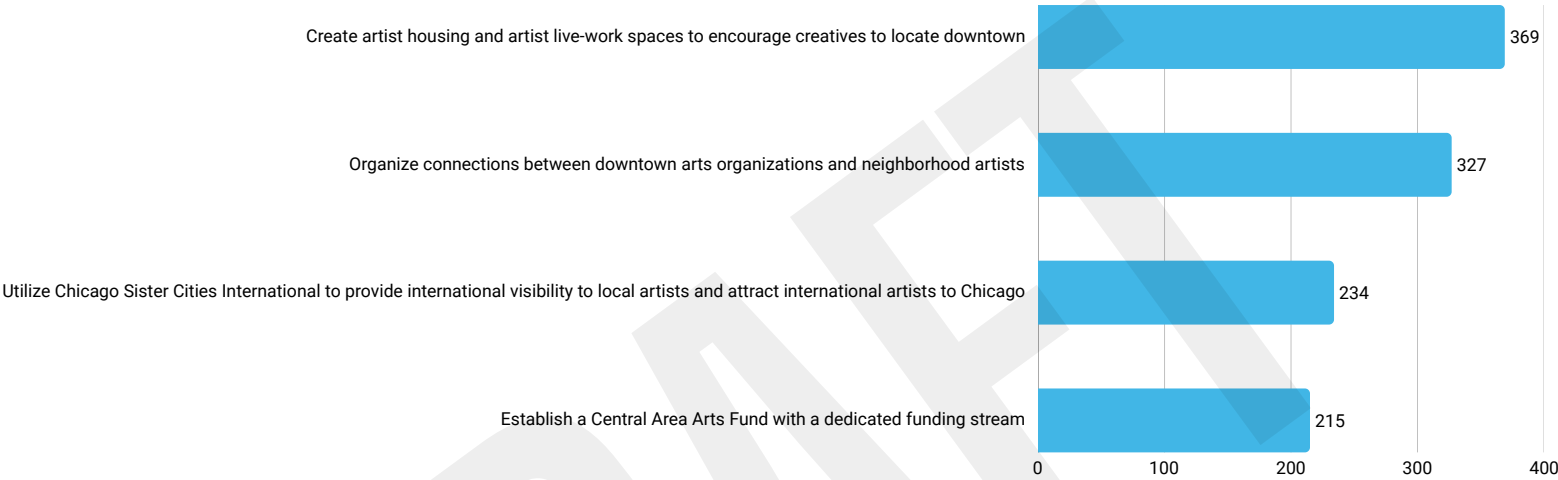
Top actions to enhance active public spaces and repurpose underutilized spaces for arts and culture

- The majority of respondents selected an increase in arts and culture programming along the River and the Lake as top action.



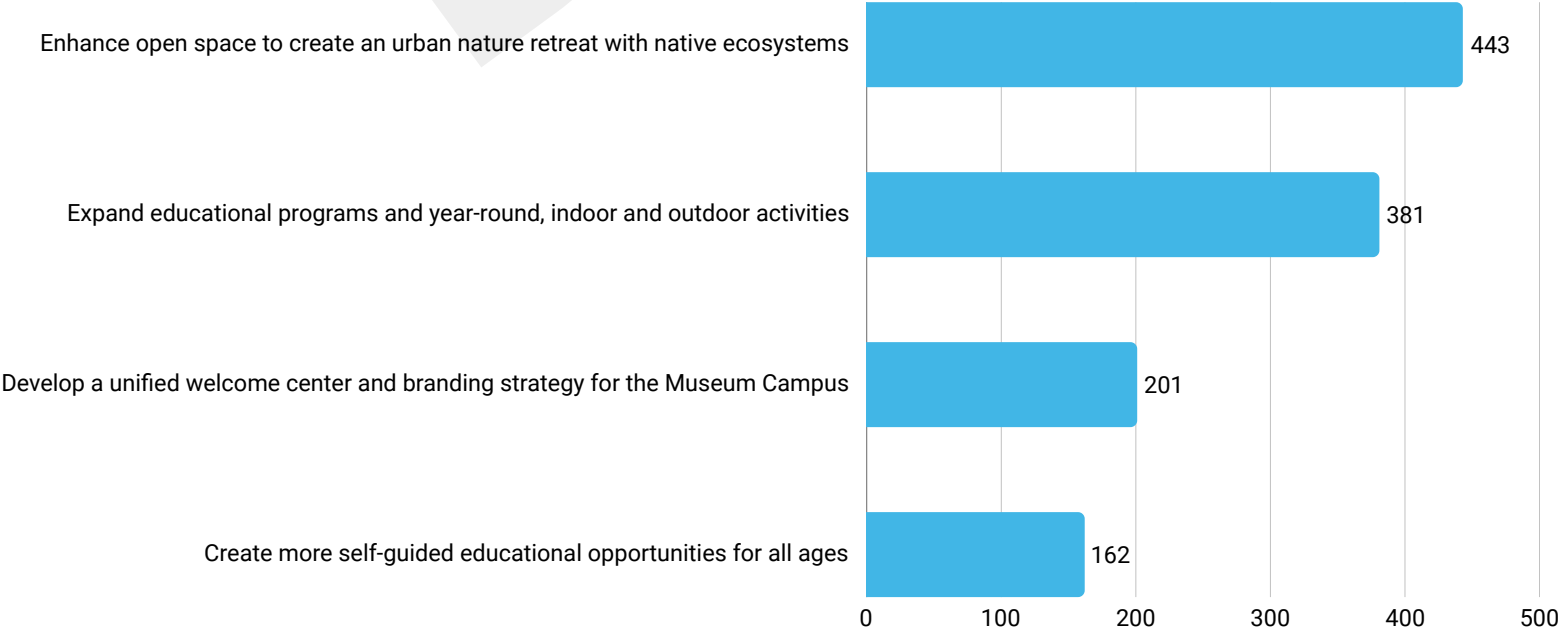
Top actions to cultivate and build capacity for a stronger art scene

- 32% of respondents identified creating artist housing and artist live-work spaces to encourage creatives to locate downtown as top choice.



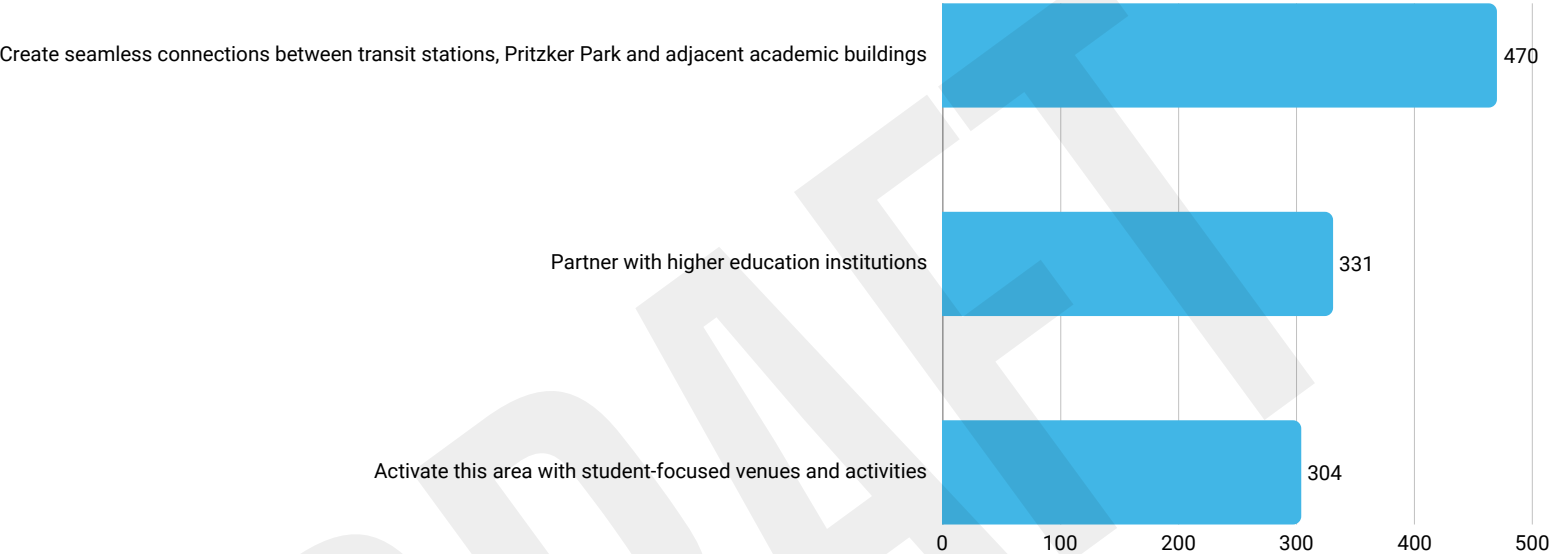
Top actions to establish downtown as an urban classroom and reimagine Museum campus

- Approximately 70% of responders preferred enhancing open spaces to create and urban nature retreat and expanding educational programs as their top two actions.



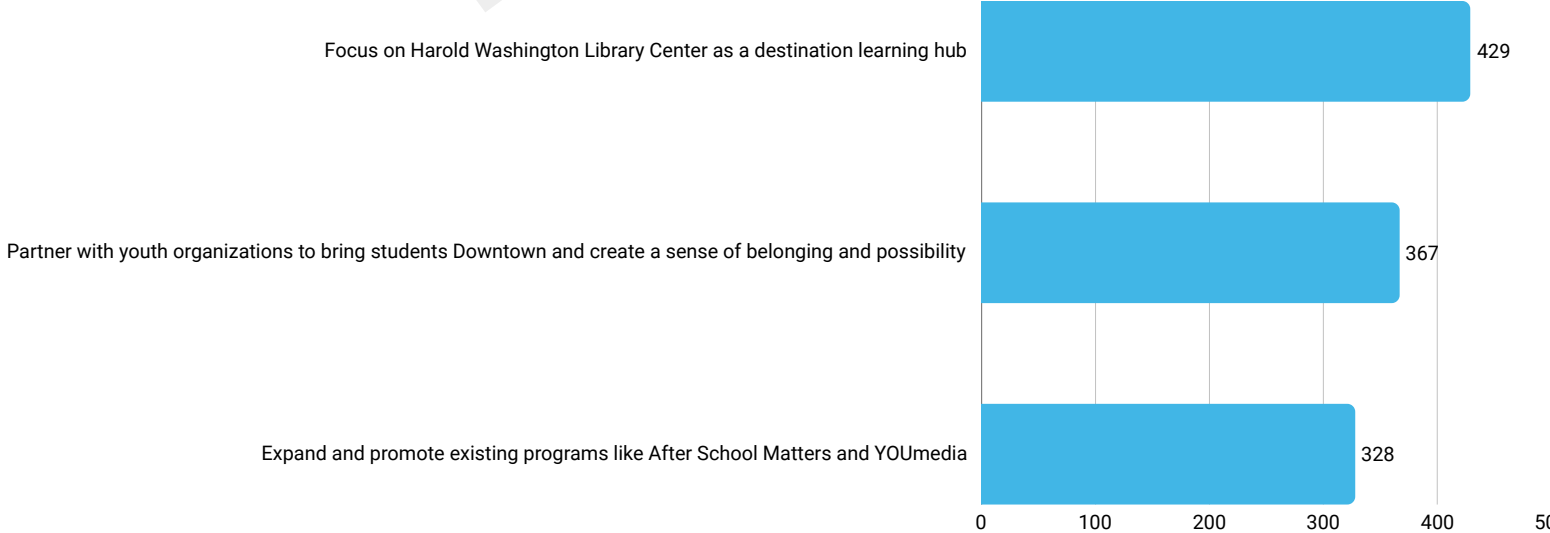
Top actions to create cohesive urban campus in the South Loop and around Pritzker Park

- Partnering with higher education institutions and creating seamless connections between trains stations and academic buildings were top two choices.



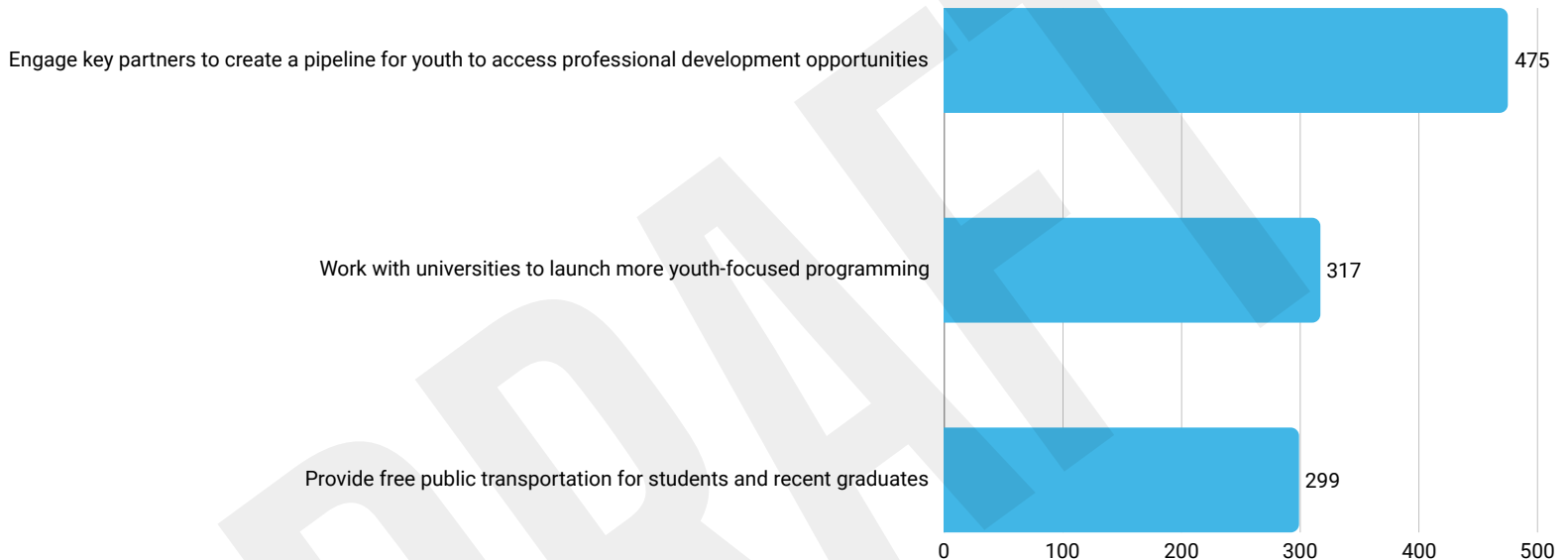
Top actions to make downtown a hub for after-school and youth programming.

- 38% of respondents identified focusing on Harold Washington Library Center as a destination learning hub as their top action.



Top actions to connect youth from neighborhoods across Chicago to private sector career opportunities in the downtown

- Respondents selected engaging key partners to create a pipeline for youth to access professional development opportunities as top choice.

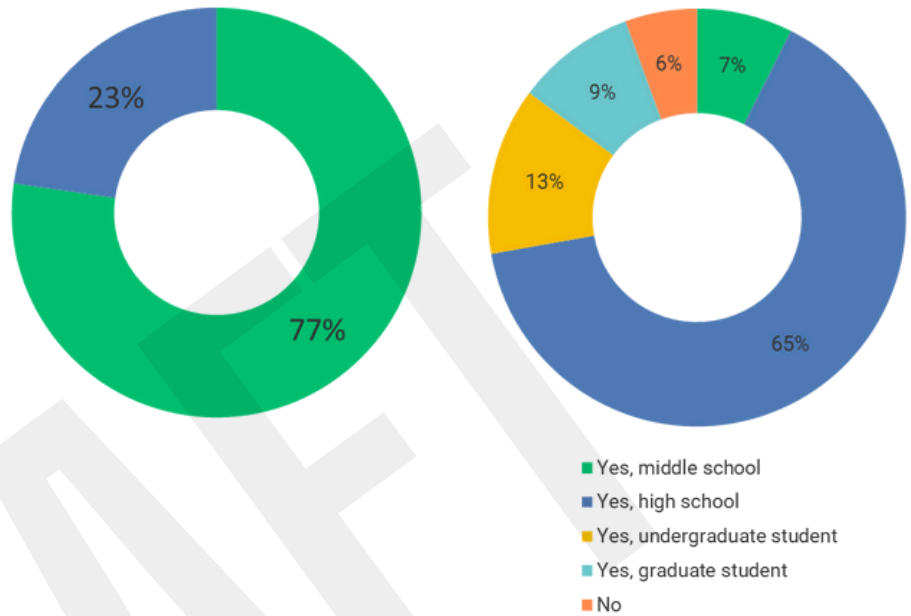




Youth Survey

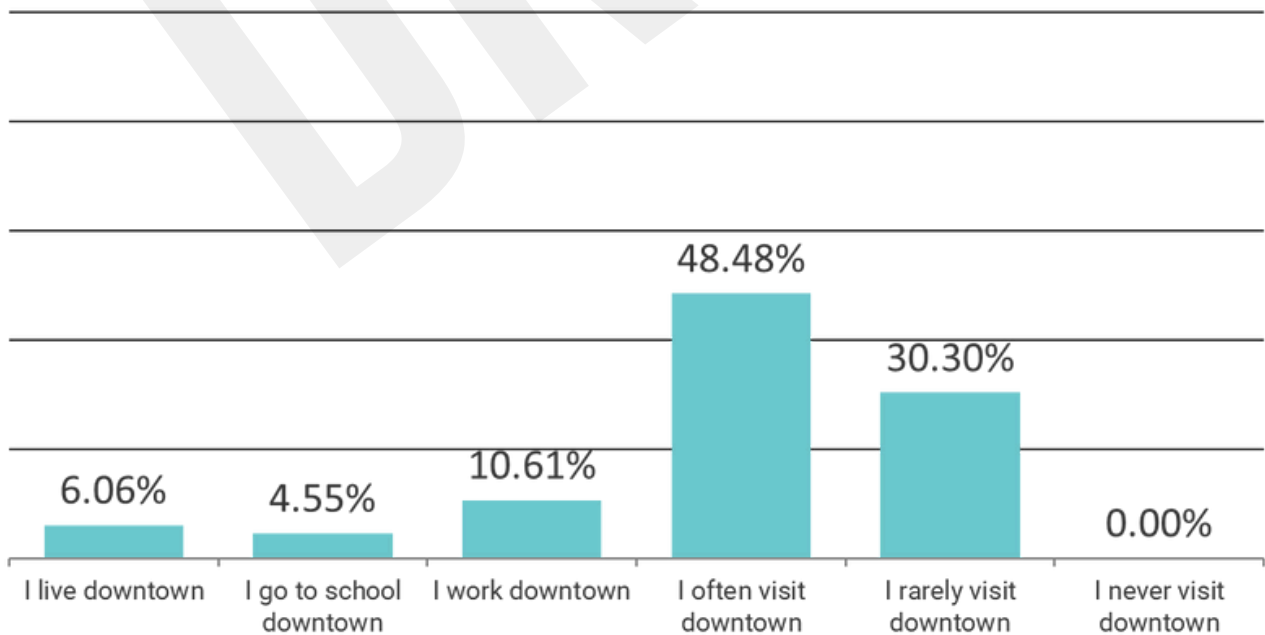
Respondents' ages and student status

- Approximately 77% of respondents were 14- 18 years old and the remaining 23% were 19-24 years old.
- Of those who responded to the question, more than 78% were either high school or undergraduate students.



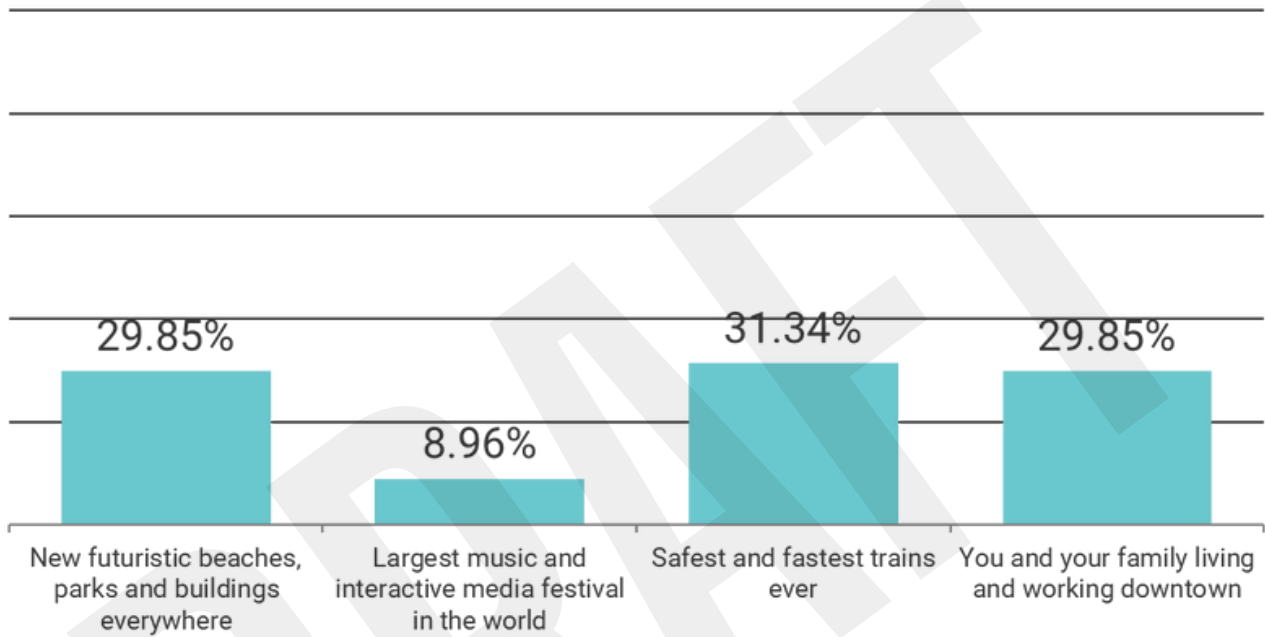
Visiting downtown

- Nearly 1/2 of respondents often visit downtown, and very few live downtown.



What respondents want to see downtown in 20 years

- Nearly 1/3 of respondents hope to see the safest and fastest trains ever.
- Approximately 30% of respondents want to see new futuristic beaches, parks and buildings everywhere



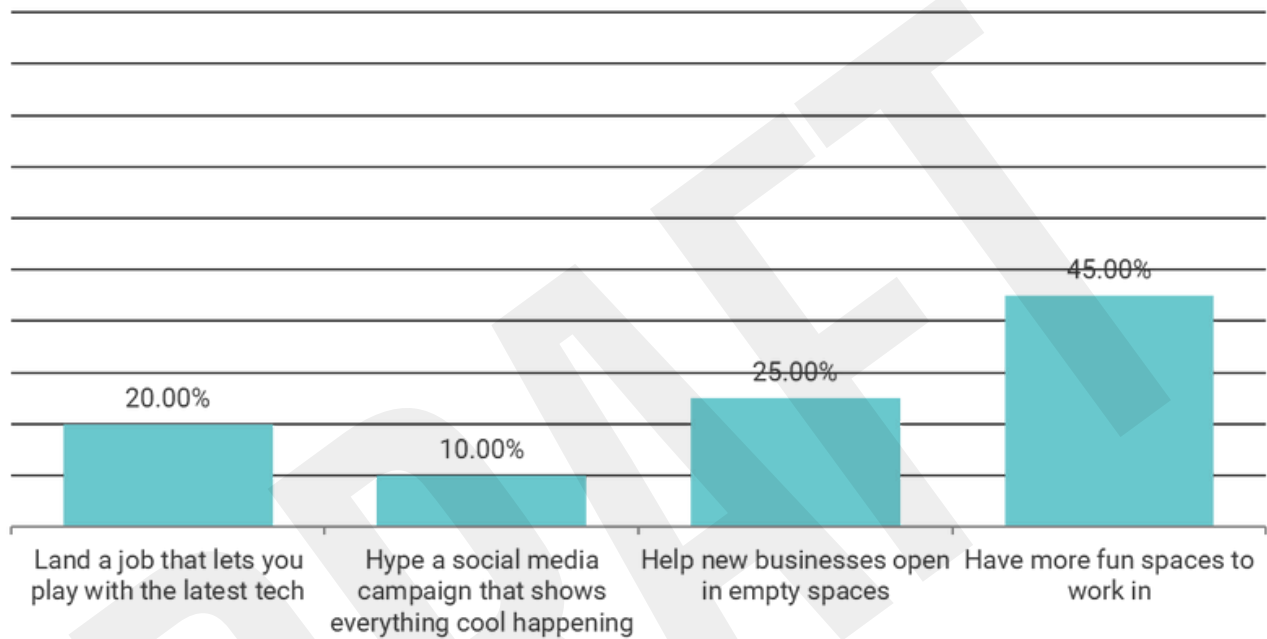
Respondents' priorities for housing downtown

- 40% of respondents indicated that downtown needs to offer rents that anyone and everyone can afford



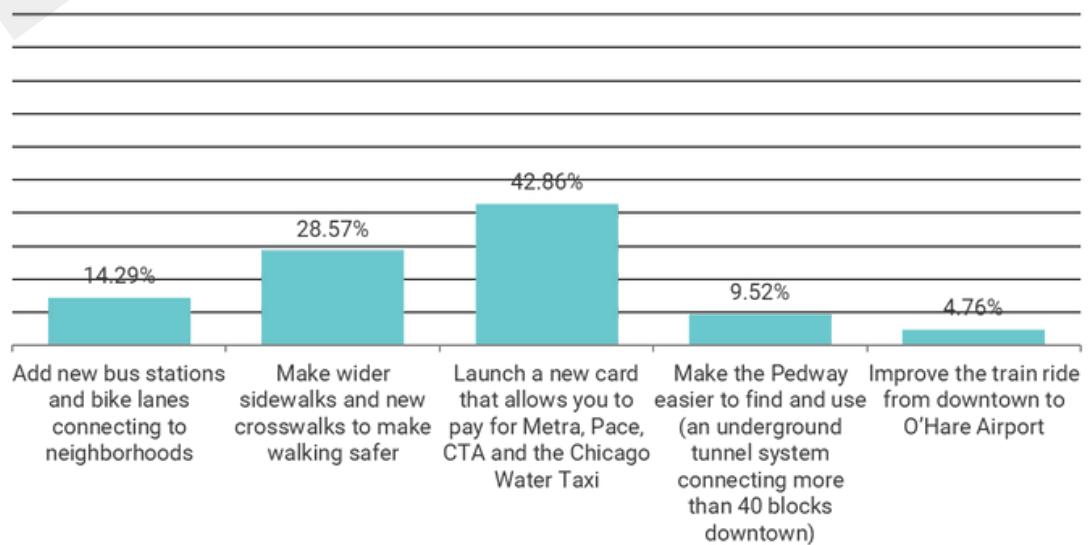
Respondents' priorities for economic development downtown

- Approximately 45% of respondents want to see more fun spaces to work in.



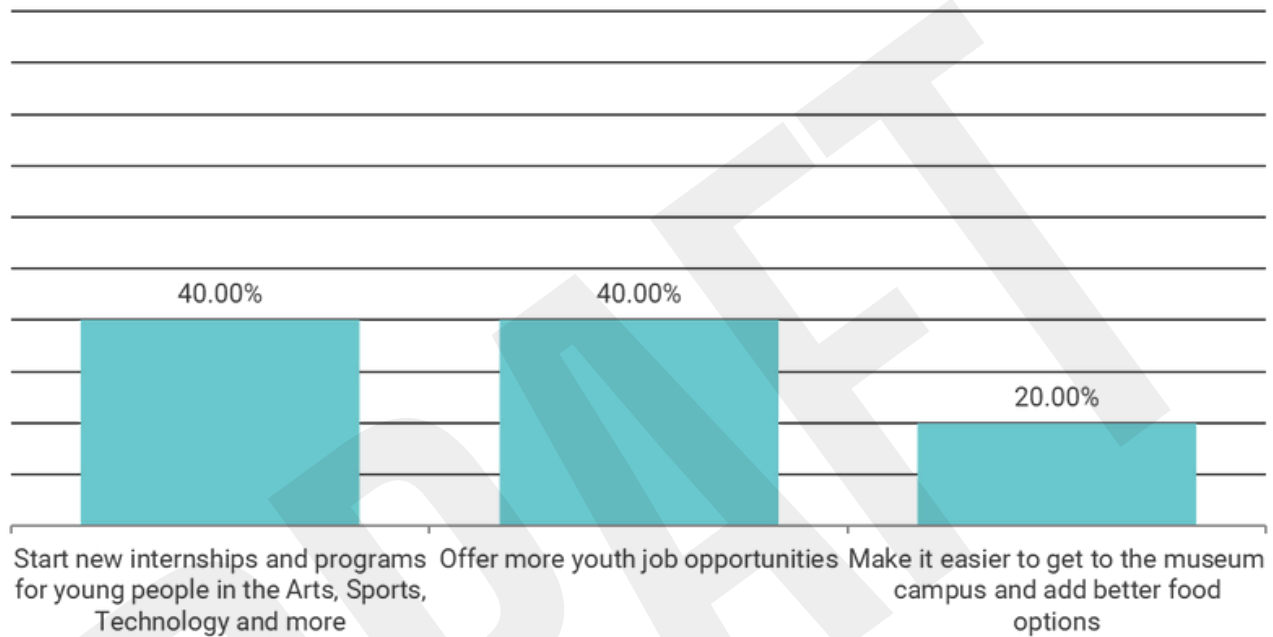
Respondents' priorities for transportation downtown

- Over 40% of respondents indicated a need for a new card that allows you to pay for Metra, Pace, CTA and the Chicago Water Taxi.



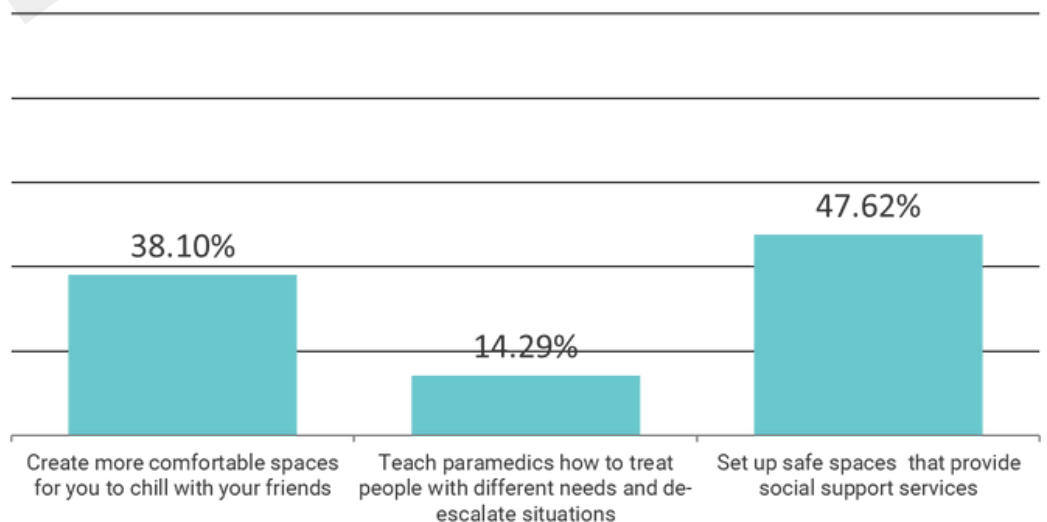
Respondents' priorities for lifelong learning downtown

- Approximately 80% of respondents want more youth job opportunities and new internship programs for young people.



Respondents' priorities for public health and safety downtown

- 47% of respondents shared they want to see safe spaces that provide social support services

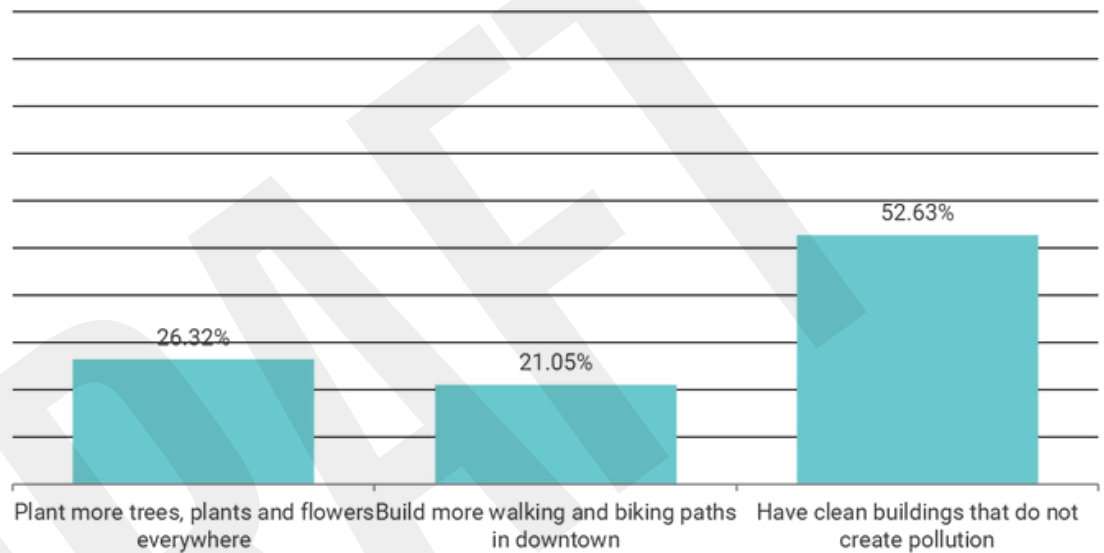


Respondents' priorities for arts and entertainment downtown

- All of the respondents indicated a need to create more nighttime events, parades and concerts over helping artists find spaces to work and closing big streets for concerts.

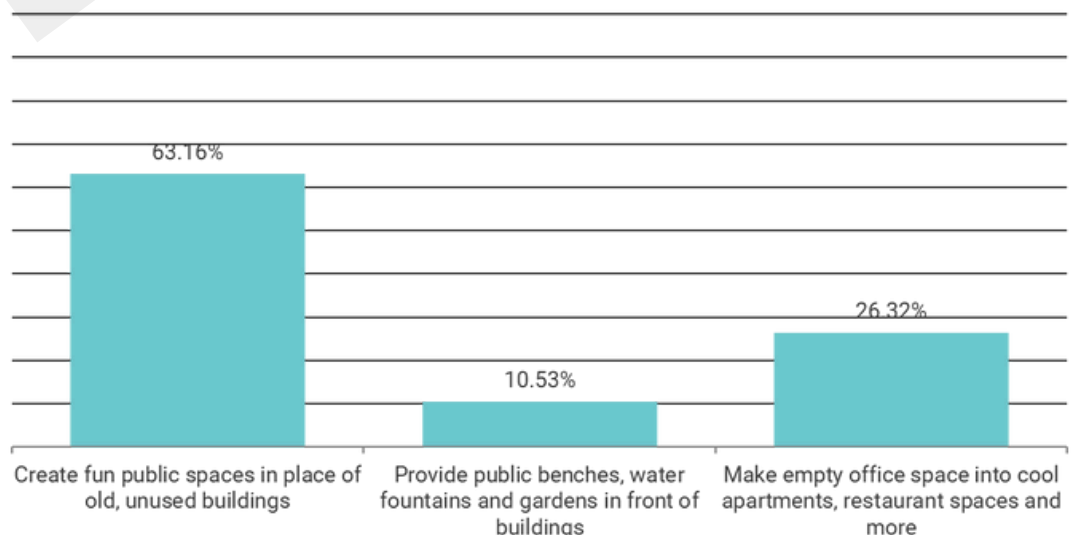
Respondents' top priority for the environment downtown

- Over 50% of respondents shared that downtown should have more clean buildings that do not create pollution.



Respondents' top priority for land use downtown

- 63% of respondents indicated that there needs to be more fun public spaces in place of old, unused buildings.





Pop-up Events

My Block My Hood My City Downtown Day

July 13, 2024



INTRODUCTION

- Over 1,000 youth from all over the city were able to visit downtown companies and museums to see where they fit in and how they can shape the future.

SURVEY RESPONSES TAKEAWAYS

- There was a consensus that the downtown should be more walkable and a safe space for all.
- Plan for a variety of career and educational opportunities that can support youth in a holistic manner.

SURVEY COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM EVENT

- “The trains should be much faster. There should also be more safe spaces for children.”
- “I believe downtown needs a building that has temporary housing for the homeless but also an area where you can start to add a center where you can find work and income that will be able to provide opportunities for you to make money to support yourself.”
- “Make Chicago safer for youth and maybe invest more in youth guidance.”

Sundays on State

July 14, 2024

INTRODUCTION

- Around 900 people engaged with the Central Area Plan Phase 2 activity stations at the July 14th Sundays on State, located downtown. Attendees were asked to evaluate 24 strategies meant to advance the Central Area based on the vision established in Phase 1. The ideas were developed after a thorough review of input from previous engagement efforts undertaken during the first phase, work already proposed or ongoing in Chicago, efforts undertaken in other US cities or proposed in similar downtown plans, and unique examples of strategies implemented by international peers. Strategies representing various pillars were grouped together into three different stations (see below) and supported by representative examples that either highlighted ongoing work in Chicago or showed an existing best practice.
- Participants at the pop-up were randomly assigned to one of the three stations and asked to use stickers to select their priority level for each of the strategies—low, neutral or high priority.
- Participants could also write down additional thoughts or ideas on a card.

PRIORITIZATION OF IDEAS

- Based on the input from pop-up attendees, the ideas are listed by highest and lowest prioritized, calculated from the percentage of votes cast as high or low within each idea, respectively.

PILLAR LEGEND	
ABBREVIATION	DESCRIPTION
AE	Arts + Entertainment
ED	Economic Development
ECE	Environment, Climate + Energy
HN	Housing + Neighborhoods
LU	Land Use

Sundays on State

July 14, 2024

LLL	Lifelong Learning
PS	Public Health + Safety
TI	Transportation + Infrastructure

STRATEGIES BY HIGHEST PRIORITIZED

PILLAR	STRATEGY	% HIGH	RANK
PS	Create mental health first responder program	93.2%	1
LLL	Support after-school and youth programming	92.3%	2
HN	Expand access to permanent supportive housing	91.6%	3
PS	Establish safety hubs	90.3%	4
ECE	Accelerate decarbonization of existing buildings	87.7%	5
ECE	Improve access and stitch together green spaces	86.8%	6
HN	Prioritize affordable housing development	86.5%	7
ECE	Reduce the heat island effect	85.4%	8
TI	Enhance the pedestrian experience	85.0%	9
PS	Improve "third-places"	84.5%	10
AE	Re-energize iconic streets	84.3%	11
LU	Facilitate the redevelopment of underutilized areas and obsolete buildings	81.4%	12
TI	Bolster east-west mobility	76.5%	13
HN	Create a thriving neighborhood in the Central Loop	73.0%	14
ED	Invigorate vacant storefronts	70.5%	15
LLL	Enhance professional development opportunities	70.1%	16
ED	Attract and support jobs in cutting-edge technology	69.1%	17
TI	Improve multimodal connectivity	67.5%	18
ED	Reduce office vacancy	66.1%	19
TI	Modernize the pedway	65.4%	20
LU	Promote more privately-owned publicly accessible open spaces	62.4%	21
TI	Develop express train to O'Hare	60.8%	22
LLL	Make the museum campus more welcoming	49.4%	23
AE	Encourage nightlife	46.4%	24

Sundays on State

July 14, 2024

STRATEGIES BY LOWEST PRIORITIZED		
PILLAR	STRATEGY	% LOW
LLL	Make the museum campus more welcoming	21.1%
AE	Encourage nightlife	15.0%
TI	Develop express train to O'Hare	13.9%
LU	Promote more privately-owned publicly accessible open spaces	10.4%
TI	Modernize the pedway	10.1%
TI	Improve multimodal connectivity	6.6%
ED	Attract and support jobs in cutting-edge technology	6.6%
LLL	Enhance professional development opportunities	6.0%
ED	Reduce office vacancy	5.8%
TI	Enhance the pedestrian experience	4.9%
ECE	Accelerate decarbonization of existing buildings	4.2%
TI	Bolster east-west mobility	3.6%
HN	Create a thriving neighborhood in the Central Loop	3.4%
ED	Invigorate vacant storefronts	3.3%
ECE	Reduce the heat island effect	2.6%
PS	Improve "third-places"	2.3%
HN	Expand access to permanent supportive housing	2.3%
ECE	Improve access and stitch together green spaces	2.3%
PS	Establish safety hubs	1.8%
HN	Prioritize affordable housing development	1.6%
LU	Facilitate the redevelopment of underutilized areas and obsolete buildings	1.5%
AE	Re-energize iconic streets	1.3%
PS	Create mental health first responder program	1.1%
LLL	Support after-school and youth programming	0.7%

Sundays on State

July 14, 2024

COMMENT CARDS RECEIVED AT EVENT

- Over 200 people attended the festival and were able to scan the QR code for the youth Central Area Plan survey.
- Older condominium and apartment buildings should offer electric car charging to residents to stop charging anxiety and to accommodate those who are paying to reduce carbon emissions into the environment.
- Create more pedestrian and transit 1st spaces for people and affordable housing; people + community > cars/offices
- Composting options; decarbonization; public power will help energy democracy! The first 6 cities to 100% renewables had public power
- Talk to us at Better Streets Chicago! We want to help
- Less private-owned public space; improve bike + ped infrastructure (not just paint on a pavement); prioritize/incentivize reuse of existing (not just "historic") buildings; update CHRS now, emphasize affordable housing development item; expand Riverwalk north and south; close Lakeshore Drive to cars; emphasize need for public restrooms
- There's a need for increased subsidized housing for families and permanent supportive housing
- Downtown/South Loop needs a good neighborhood high school
- In order to meet climate targets, it is imperative that our transit options make driving less convenient. Chicago should have a bike lane on every street within the Central Area, and parking structures and real estate should be heavily taxed to encourage productive development.
- 63rd Street Metra station: should be nice to use for the people who live there. A lot of focus on future tourism. Currently leaky ceilings and a lot of trash.
- I appreciate the inclusion of nightlife in the ideas. We need to make the permitting process for venues and bars easier and more streamlined. Many third spaces for the LGBTQ+ community have closed and they likely won't be replaced. I would love to open my own nightclub one day but the permitting is too expensive and complicated. We need to improve permitting and designate spaces specifically for nightlife.
- Activate Couch Street alleyway. Use it like how we had the alley activation events.
- More residential— more locals walking around.

T.I.P (Teens in the Park) Fest

September 7, 2024

INTRODUCTION

- Over 200 people attended the festival and were able to scan the QR code for the youth Central Area Plan survey.

SURVEY RESPONDENT TAKEAWAYS

- Many of the participants were youth and shared their experiences on safety in the downtown.

SURVEY COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM EVENT

- “More playgrounds and updates to current parks in the downtown.”
- “Consider different ways of incorporating seating areas.”



Englewood Music Fest

September 14, 2024

INTRODUCTION

- Over 300 people participated in the festival and were able to scan the QR code for the Central Area Plan survey.

SURVEY RESPONDENT TAKEAWAYS

- People expressed their priorities on housing and transportation. These are two important themes to make it easier for them to live and commute to the Central Area.



North Lawndale Community Farmers Market

September 21, 2024

INTRODUCTION

- Over 50 people attended the market and were able to scan the QR code for the Central Area Plan survey.

SURVEY RESPONDENT TAKEAWAYS

- Many of the participants shared their desire to prioritize more spaces to enhance connectivity and allow for more access between the downtown and neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Overall, the pop-ups engaged a diverse audience in different locations around strategies and actions that will help better serve them. This input was essential to ensure the involvement of youth and different neighborhoods in the strategies for the Central Area Plan. Our participation in these events provided an integral part of getting Chicagoans to evaluate 24 strategies. Participants were able to share their direct input on comment cards and fill out the youth and general survey.

DRAFT