



# EASTLAND MALL REDEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1 REPORT

JUNE 22<sup>ND</sup>, 2017

**JACOBS**

**Eastland Mall Redevelopment Consulting Services**

**Phase 1 Report**

Prepared for:



The City of Charlotte, North Carolina

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Challenges persist, yet perceptions are shifting positively and an alignment of ideals and principles across the neighborhoods, City staff, and the development community has taken shape.*

## INTRODUCTION

Phase 1 of the Eastland Mall Redevelopment consulting project was comprised of three discrete tasks:

1. **Development Forum** - The intent of the forum was to collect feedback from the development community that may help uncover perceived and real barriers to development, and on-site and off-site strategies that the City could employ to expedite positive outcomes on the property. Participants included members of the development community, including large and small developers, brokers, and related professionals.
2. **Lean (Urbanism) Scan** - The goal of the Lean Scan was to begin to uncover the “sweet spot” between those areas that are attractive to larger developers for larger projects, and those areas potentially better suited to incremental or small-scale development. The team brought together and interviewed people engaged in the community, neighborhood groups, small business owners, local officials, experienced small-scale builders and developers, potential investors, the Advisory Committee members, and nonprofits including local chambers of commerce.
3. **Tactical Urbanism Event** – The purpose of the event was to demonstrate how tactical urbanism can become part of the social landscape as a tool to both activate the site and initiate positive outcomes. Further to that purpose, the event sought to connect engaged community members and identify effective tactical urbanism measures to be scoped and deployed in the near term.

All three tasks took place in mid-May during an intensive one-week, on-site series of engagements targeting specific user groups. Phase 1 was not designed to be a complete effort. It was designed to stop at a key point in the planning process - after identifying points of consensus amongst private industry, the City, and an engaged public, and uncovering the development community's perceptions and barriers.

The following pages summarize the raw feedback, overarching perceptions, and the consultant team's analysis of these data. For a more detailed analysis from the team and comprehensive collection of feedback organized by category, refer to the appendix at the back of this document.

Many of the observations serve to validate previous studies and efforts, while some may represent altogether new or evolving understanding. By evaluating and prioritizing the commentary, there are a handful of clear actions the City may enact in the short-term to impart positive change on the property.



## OVERVIEW

After listening to over forty members of the development community, many local business owners, and community members, there is reason for cautious optimism regarding the future of Eastland. The variety of participants the team interviewed represented an engaged, diverse, and well-informed cross section of the community. As the redevelopment moves forward, broader, more inclusive engagement will be necessary. However, based upon recurring themes in the discussions, the team saw a positive alignment of ideas and several critical points of consensus.

Much of the consensus focused on aspects of the East Area Strategy Team's (EAST) and City's guiding principles, serving to confirm they are both valid and achievable:

1. **Enhancing the Perceptions of the Eastland Area and East Charlotte:** Attract visitors from other areas with unique opportunities for employment, housing, retail, cultural activities, entertainment and quality of life/wellness.
2. **Unifying Local Communities:** Provide retail and service amenities for local residents of all demographics (e.g., grocery store, coffee shop, bookstore, restaurants); build on the existing trends of the east side's cultural diversity and international communities.
3. **Creating Connectivity and Walkability for Surrounding Neighborhoods:** Integrate development into the existing Central Avenue corridor; promote connectivity to downtown by strengthening the relationship to mass transit options; increase safety through active streets.
4. **Taking Advantage of Natural Features:** Develop dedicated and flexible open space to include restoration and/or development of existing natural water feature to reinforce natural site connections, marketability and quality of life.
5. **Creating Opportunity for Civic Development:** Incorporate school, community center, athletic and recreation facilities such as "Express YMCA".
6. **Increase Equitable Economic Development:** Provide opportunities for businesses, small scale developers, and residents.

The following represent the consultant team's observations and analysis of the discussions with participants of the Development Forum and Lean Scan. The feedback from the participants was prioritized and organized into several categories and themes. Out of these themes, cogent actions were identified and developed into suggested considerations and recommendations. For an in-depth summary of the tactical urbanism event, please refer to the appendix section of the report.

## BARRIERS

Despite the alignment of ideas and the potential of the site, real barriers still remain for those interviewed.

- Achievable rents for non-residential land uses in the Eastland area are too low to support new construction. For organic or incremental development, the City may consider opportunities for tactical or semi-permanent urbanism to provide necessary commercial services while testing the market for longer term facilities.
- Although the (residential) market is moving toward the Eastland property, the development community is not in a position to hold land long-term awaiting future opportunities, especially as the economy shows signs of peaking.
- Barring intervention, the most viable near-term opportunities are for subsidized rental housing OR entry-level single family housing assuming access to infrastructure and low land cost to achieve adequate price points. These options in isolation do not advance City goals or the guiding principles.
- Destination retail or large-scale office space is not viable today or in the foreseeable future. However, community-oriented retail, small-scale office, office incubators, or co-working spaces were seen as potential uses. Considering these factors, residential will likely lead the redevelopment.
- Participants believe there is no alignment between the City and community around a vision or story, no financially viable plan in the current context, and no consensus around the way forward.
- Developer or investor interest, given these conditions and in the context of a weak market and perceived lack of security, will continue to be constrained. No developers expressed readiness to move forward with the site in its current condition.

## PERCEPTIONS

The perceptions of Eastland are evolving in a positive direction.

- Importantly, among participants, the perception of crime and the resultant lack of safety seem to have abated since the mall structure was demolished.
- Eastland enjoys a reputation as a rich, culturally diverse community, which means opportunity for many, but potential discomfort for others.
- Much of the Eastland site is considered desirable due to its size, its proximity to Uptown, the potential for future transit, and the surrounding population density. Therefore, if certain barriers are removed, it is an inherently strong site.
- For many participants, the Eastland area has a reputation for being a difficult place to conduct business. This sentiment is attributable by some to the frustration from the neighborhood and a perceived lack of leadership by the City to bring redevelopment to the site.
- The frustration in the neighborhood is partly based on the belief that no action or movement on the site has occurred in spite of the many plans. However, it is important to recognize the misconception of unsolicited plans as City efforts and that “concepts” are being misinterpreted for implementation plans.

## SYNTHESIS

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the aforementioned barriers and perceptions, risk (perceived or actual) and uncertainty must be reduced in order to attract private development that advances the guiding principles, creates a compelling return for all investors, and elevates the broader community.

The following recommendations reflect a proactive stance to meet the challenge of market realities, the needs and the desires of the community, and the current lack of an engaged, responsible development partner:

1. Show the market a clearly articulated vision and a financially viable implementation plan that the community, staff, and elected leaders will support. The implementation plan would operationalize the guiding principles, structure the development, plan the enabling infrastructure links, define any required investment from the City, and establish a realistic approach to attracting developer participation. The plan should include a preliminary land use mix and framework that establishes the street grid and a walkable development that ignites interest and removes uncertainty without constraining creativity or opportunism.
2. Bolster that plan by making an investment or, at a minimum, committing to do so. Such investments may include: the above-mentioned plan and entitlements; near-term activation of the site; or the construction of major infrastructure, civic amenities, or meaningful open spaces. Further study of the level and structure of investment, potential alternative funding sources, and financing models will be required.
3. Solicit developer interest, either from a diverse team for the mix of uses on the property, or from a variety of individual development entities focused on specific development parcels within the 69 acres. Steps 1 and 2 will yield results that are impossible to evaluate and may fall short of the City's financial and community objectives. The potential for developer solicitation was widely seen as a positive with a majority of the participants desiring simplicity in the deal, and clarity and predictability in the outcome.



## **Considerations**

Depending upon the decision of City Council, the following considerations may provide more clarity and become part of the redevelopment approach. Most, if not all, of these points are predicated upon the establishment and adoption of a shared vision based upon the guiding principles for the redevelopment of the Eastland Mall site:

- Divide the site into manageable pieces or development parcels to mitigate risk and provide an inherent structure to the plan
- Hold land for future development through which the City could recoup some/all/more than its investment
- Identify and empower an advocate (individual or group) for the project, someone who wakes up every day thinking about the Eastland Mall redevelopment
- Plan a first phase that includes housing and small-scale commercial opportunities, tactical, semi-temporary or otherwise
- Expect to partner with the private sector in ways including but not limited to some level of contribution of land, financial support for major infrastructure, and removing regulatory barriers
  - The entitlements process is considered a major hurdle for small developers or investors to enter the market in Eastland and within the broader community.
- Conduct further due diligence around transit, open space, civic and cultural facilities, and place-making, including identifying funding, and conducting studies on the return on investment, catalytic impact, programming and sizing, and placement/relationship of functions
  - Evaluate added expense of early transit improvements or planning provisions to minimize disruption and maximize connectivity.
- Develop a clear, consistent, and strategic communication plan
- Develop branding/marketing material to help the development community sell Eastland's assets and potential to capital partners
- Include commitments to employment with attainable jobs in the broader Eastland area in the return on investment analysis
  - This approach could include attracting a large employer on-site (e.g. healthcare), job training, or innovation spaces.
- Focus on small, incremental (lean) development having the potential to create an "authentic" destination which may foster larger scale redevelopment interest
  - Tactical and lean projects do not typically require traditional development incentives.
- Achieve small wins early, starting with continued tactical urbanism interventions to create momentum and build upon community excitement and engagement

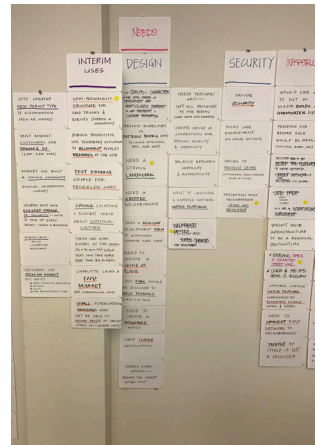
## CONCLUSION

Challenges persist, yet perceptions are shifting positively and an alignment of ideals and principles across the neighborhoods, City staff, and the development community has taken shape. The identified barriers may be the primary or only reasons that limited activity has occurred on the site. With those barriers partially or completely removed, the overwhelming majority of participants envision Eastland's future as a walkable neighborhood with a mix of uses, and good, local jobs.

This future reality can be quickly and efficiently initiated using tactical interventions and/or small, incremental development to create an authentic, culturally-rich destination that in time will accelerate large-scale development interest. Working in tandem, the two models of development will enhance each other if surrounded by quality urbanism - a dynamic public realm, cultural infrastructure, an ensemble of built form, meaningful open space and well-connected transit.

These ideals align strongly with the evolution of previous concept plans and community efforts to codify the six guiding principles. Working to assure a long-term, sustainable community and creating near term viability are not mutually exclusive enterprises. This modern, inclusive approach to development can serve as a catalyst for broad, positive change in East Charlotte.

Absent readily engaged large-scale developers with strong capital backing, the logical next phase of work would include a City-led implementation strategy. The strategy would culminate with the solicitation of development partners, integrating the needs of small and large developers with supporting documents such as market studies, master plan, regulating plan, and robust community/stakeholder engagement to ensure community and City goals are met with a realistic, feasible plan.



^ Photos from the Lean Scan and Development Forum events

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# APPENDIX

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following section reflects the comprehensive commentary from participants in the Development Forum and Lean Scan. These comments do not reflect the opinion of the consulting team or the City, but are a reflection of ideas, thoughts, and concerns shared by some community members. Bulleted text reflects commentary and opinions of the participants. Where appropriate, in call-out boxes, the consultant team has provided commentary to highlight critical points, provide context to the discussion, or acknowledge multiple/conflicting viewpoints.

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## BARRIERS

*Redevelopment of the site has been hindered by barriers related to access and connectivity, government and politics, and regulations. Identifying these barriers and creating targeted strategies to overcome them is essential to an implementable redevelopment plan that adheres to the guiding principles.*

*> Access to the site is thought by some to be average and insufficient for a regional destination. Further analysis is required to determine the level of impact access will have on future development. Differences of opinion on the type and the role of future transit use point toward a need for a more comprehensive look at the corridor and maximizing connectivity.*

### ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

What we heard:

- Detached from Uptown.
- Lacks infrastructure for a regional destination.
- Natural bottleneck at Central Avenue and Albemarle Road, making transit critical.
- Independence Boulevard as limited access creates a barrier.
- Poor traffic counts limit retail potential.
- Separated from primary tourism infrastructure and destinations.
- Access and congestion are weak, but similar to any other nearby corridor.
- May not be the “next” Plaza-Midwood because most people use Independence Boulevard, not Central Avenue, to get to the site.
- Premium bus service on Central Avenue better suited than proposed streetcar; need to overcome bus perceptions.
  - Lower scale development will not have ridership to justify rail investment.
  - Create a signature, high-quality transit experience with modern buses and amenities such as Wi-Fi.
  - Route 9 already has efficient service and high ridership.

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

What we heard:

- This is a political issue, not a development issue.
  - Lack of coordination between the City and County.
  - Developers want consensus and a shared vision, but the messaging is fragmented.
  - Lack of predictability makes developers fear investing in pre-development costs.
- Government staff structures are layered and inefficient.
- The city is being too picky about proposals and focused on public reaction.
- Need support from other quadrants of Charlotte to get city funding.
- Focus more on what the community is for instead of what it is against.

*< Lack of government coordination was consistently discussed and considered a primary perceived barrier to entry.*

## REGULATIONS

What we heard:

- The regulatory and approvals process has become complicated, time consuming, and expensive.
  - Zoning process typically takes 12 to 18 months.
  - Stormwater regulations are overly complex.
- Sewer and water tap/capacity fees are high.
- Building permitting process is inconsistent.
- Sidewalk requirements are time consuming and inflexible.
- Need to make sure value added warrants burden imposed.
  - Regulations are not designed to encourage small-scale development.
- Permitting a 5-unit project is as hard as a 50-unit project
- Change of use permits require professional services and inhibit small businesses.
- Charlotte Commercial Technical Assistance Center (CTAC) does not provide useful support.
  - Regulations for temporary uses inhibit site activation.
- Requirements for police staffing at events are burdensome and not required for similar events in other locations.
- County regulations are even more burdensome than City regulations.
- City needs code enforcement on older homes.

*< Cumbersome development regulations and approval processes add expense.*

## PERCEPTIONS

*Eastland's diversity is known and praised throughout the Charlotte community, but other elements of its reputation have kept developers at arm's length. To overcome these perceptions, the City will need to deliver a clear, coordinated message about the future of the site.*

## NEIGHBORHOOD

What we heard:

- Eastland has fallen off people's confidence radar.
  - Neighborhood reputation for opposing developers at public meetings.
  - Need to build trust through education and messaging.
  - High percentage of renters gives the impression that people aren't committed to the neighborhood's future.
  - Perceptions of the area as unsafe are tied to the former mall.
- Reputation for cultural diversity can create both adventure and discomfort.
- Embrace the neighborhood personality rather than impose an artificial theme.
- Division over whether or not to change the Eastland name.
  - Keep: Changing the name may disrespect neighbors and confuse people. – –
  - Change: The name Eastland refers to the mall, not the neighborhood and has negative connotations.
- Keep "East," not "Eastland."
  - East Charlotte
  - Charlotte East
  - Eastside
  - East End

*< See the Tactical Urbanism Section on page 30 for more feedback on the Eastland name.*

*Momentum in the private market is moving east along the Central Avenue corridor, which will organically reach the Eastland Mall site at some point in the future. Demand for reasonably priced renter and owner-occupied housing in the Charlotte market is high.*

## MARKET

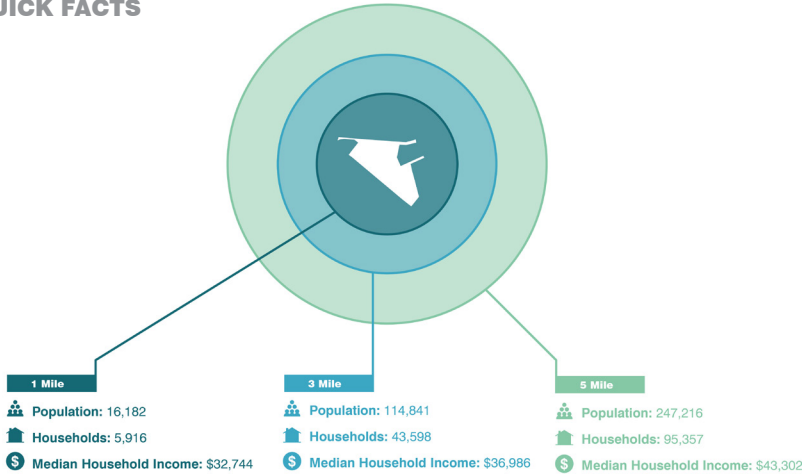
What we heard:

- The Central Avenue corridor is a "hot" market from Uptown to Eastway Drive.
  - The city should be patient, interest is heading this way.
  - Plaza-Midwood is at capacity. Will see a "quality creep" toward Eastland.
- Demand for owner-occupied residential is there, if they can afford it.
  - Renovations, tear-downs, and infill housing are common just west of the site.



# DEMOGRAPHICS

## QUICK FACTS



## HOUSING OCCUPANCY



## HOUSEHOLD SIZE



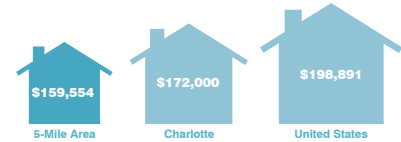
Average household size is 2.52 in the Charlotte MSA and 2.65 for all U.S. households

## MEDIAN INCOME



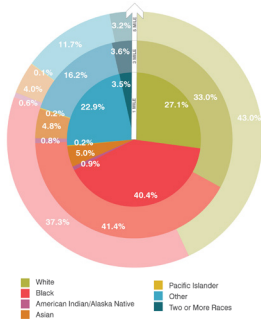
Median household income is \$53,919 in the Charlotte MSA and \$54,149 for all U.S. households

## MEDIAN HOME VALUE

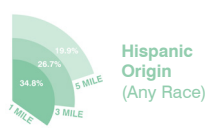


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1, 2016 Esri Forecasts for study area statistics unless otherwise stated; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for Charlotte MSA and U.S. data.

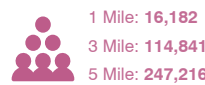
## RACE



## ETHNICITY

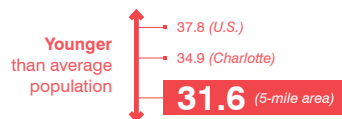


## POPULATION



The City of Charlotte had an estimated population of 827,097 in 2015.

## MEDIAN AGE



Median age is 34.9 in the Charlotte MSA and 37.8 for all U.S. households

- Could probably sell single-family here today, if incentives supported or market conducive to lower price points, especially if part of a master plan.
- Houses priced under \$200,000 (~\$120/sf) are selling well in the broader area.
- Need options closer to the \$160,000 price point to compete with the affordable older housing stock nearby.
- Millennials are looking for affordable locations near Uptown.
- Need for lower price points is part of a national trend.
- There is a gap between the cost of a new apartment and the budget of area residents.
  - Typical rent for new construction in Charlotte is \$1,350.
  - Median income for the 3-mile area is \$36,986, which equates to a manageable monthly rent of \$925.
- Achievable rents for most land uses in the Eastland area are too low to support new construction.
- Difficult to get retail tenants due to limited purchasing power in the area.
- Mixed-use in a modest context won't work with mainstream model.
- Developers are not in a position to hold land long-term awaiting future opportunities, especially as the economy shows signs of peaking.
  - City will have more profitable opportunities to sell in 10 years.
  - Starting work now doesn't mean sacrificing future opportunities. Take a both/and approach and be deliberate about phasing.
- Charlotte lacks:
  - A food market, especially for international food.
  - Places for families to go without spending a lot of money.
  - Genuine experiences.

## LEADERSHIP

What we heard:

- Success will require strong and committed civic leadership.
- Elected officials need political courage.
- There is a lack of clarity on City Council's vision, priorities, and agenda.
- Charlotte needs to focus less on glamorous projects and more on social need.
- Neighborhood, City, and County need to work together.
- Good intentions, but unaligned.
- Coordinated parks and recreation strategy is needed for the City, County, and private organizations, such as the YMCA.
- East Area Strategy Team (EAST) is an existing organization working to improve the neighborhood's future and should be engaged and leveraged.
  - Unfunded, volunteer-run, 501(c)3 organization.
  - 23 board members and 6 committees.
  - Board member backgrounds include real estate, small business ownership, finance, and nonprofits.
  - Want to focus on supporting the broader neighborhood, not only the mall site, but have limited capacity.
  - Want to show they are “Charlotte's hidden jewel, not the depressed area that needs to be saved.”
  - Interested in facilitating dialogue between the City, County, and other stakeholders, but feels it is often left out of these conversations.
- Encourage local property owners to use the City's facade grant program.
- Site needs an advocate with the passion and capacity to be dedicated to moving the vision forward full time.
- Consider a public/private task force.
- Need for capacity building to support homegrown leadership in the neighborhood.
- Desired change happens in the neighborhoods with the loudest voices.
- New, small developers need a support network.
- Connect individual entrepreneurs and residents to community organizations.
- Make sure residents support the redevelopment and help it thrive.

*< Existing leaders at the neighborhood, City and County level should develop a coordinated strategy and speak with a unified voice to attract development and push the project forward. To see real progress, the site needs a dedicated advocate to advance the day-to-day work of redevelopment. The project not only requires leadership to move forward, but offers an opportunity to build leadership capacity through the redevelopment process. Intentional training, mentoring, and networking for participating developers and entrepreneurs will cultivate a community of leaders able to leverage their skills, insights, and connections for the good of the neighborhood.*

## ASSETS

*The Eastland neighborhood's convenient location, diversity, affordability, and growing momentum provide fertile ground for redevelopment. These assets must be communicated and leveraged to attract quality development.*



What we heard:

- Central location with a short commute to Uptown.
- City owns the land and can control how it develops.
- Neighborhood is already changing and transforming.
- Diverse and entrepreneurial residents.
- Hub of Charlotte's immigrant community, but not majority immigrant.
- International restaurants are the big draw to the area.
- Affordable commercial building stock.
- Nearby homes are generally well-built and affordable, but prices are rising.
- The City's apartment and home facade program is easy and helpful.
- Easy and free parking is available.
- Local magnet schools have a strong reputation.
- K-8 language magnet school on site will be a big asset.

## POTENTIAL

*The convenient location, affordable price point, and lack of regional infrastructure make multi-family housing and entry-level, single-family homes the most viable near-term opportunities. To create a mixed-use, town center more representative of the neighborhood's vision, coordination, partnerships, and civic investment will be necessary to make commercial, civic, and recreational uses feasible components of a development that advances the guiding principles.*

### HOUSING

What we heard:

- Attractive location for housing because of convenience and affordability.
- High quality schools, amenities, access, and security will drive residential demand.
- Housing should focus on market rate.
  - Affordable housing needs to be part of a broader, attractive environment.
  - Mixed-income housing development preferable to standalone affordable (subsidized) housing
  - Target affordable housing at 60 to 100 percent area median income (AMI).
- Multi-Family
  - Well suited to multi-family, but some fear end of the current real estate cycle. May have to wait until next cycle, which could fit with the timing for the planned Gold Line.
  - Large site provides a unique opportunity for surface-parked workforce housing. This product type would likely require 10 acres and create 200-250 units of ~3-story units at a cost of \$120-130/sf.
- Single-Family
  - Large developers would be interested in building 50 to 200 homes.
  - Small developers would need the option to buy only a few lots, more along the scale of an infill housing project.
  - Some developers would be willing to disperse their product across the site, rather than in one large pod, to make the overall development more varied and interesting.
- Millennials want to live near work. Need jobs nearby to attract housing.
- Strong demand for senior housing, but they want safety.

*< Potential location for reasonably priced multi-family and single-family given the right circumstances, level of investment by the City, or low land costs. The time frame for these developers is uncertain, though none were prepared to move forward given the current barriers.*

*> Retail and office must be secondary uses focused at the community-serving scale.*

## **COMMERCIAL**

What we heard:

- Retail or office space of significant scale is not viable today or in the foreseeable future.
  - Need a regional draw to make larger retail work, and for that you must have better infrastructure.
- There may be a need for community-serving retail.
  - Many small retailers looking for space in East Charlotte and rents are rising.
  - Desire for commercial space with a very small footprint to accommodate startup businesses, potentially in a commercial condominium structure.
  - Want a no frills market hall to provide cheap retail space for vendors.
  - Relocate the Billy Graham Farmers Market.
  - Financing for speculative space will be more difficult, so may have to subsidize.
- Appetite for co-working spaces and tenant-owned opportunities.
- Need for healthcare facilities in Charlotte.
- Incubator space to educate small business owners may help create an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Harlem incubators-- including the Lillian Project and Harlem Garage-- were cited as examples for focusing on community empowerment.
- Developers don't see a traditional mixed-use development as realistic.

*> There are good opportunities for recreation on-site, but need to be coordinated with a regional strategy.*

## **RECREATION**

What we heard:

- Redundancy in existing and proposed recreation facilities.
  - Mecklenburg County planning a 100,000 sf regional recreation center at Eastway Park, two miles northwest of the site.
  - Already have two nearby YMCA locations (Simmons in East Charlotte and Johnston in NODA), which are sufficient based on YMCA's 10-minute drive time (2,200 household) service area.
  - Need to work together to determine best location and structure.
- Potential for partnership with the YMCA.
  - YMCA would need to be invited into the community.
  - If invited in and the plan made sense, would be willing to divest existing properties to relocate here.



- Open to creative recreation center formats.
- Willing to own or rent the facility.
- Connect with the adjacent magnet school.
  - Include a universal childcare program, like at the West Boulevard location.
- Promote proximity to the nearby planned trails, the Carolina Thread Trail and Campbell Creek Greenway.

## **CIVIC**

What we heard:

- Potential partnership with the library as an anchor.
  - Need a library (approximately 45,000 sf) in this area because Independence Boulevard cuts it off from other library resources.
  - County wants a community resource center on the east side, and the library wants to co-locate.
  - Would feature strong resources for Spanish-speaking residents.
  - Moving toward a programming, education, and digital resource approach.
  - Open to several models, including the ground floor of a mixed-use building, like in San Jose, California.
- Arts and Science Council (ASC) interested in locating auxiliary rehearsal, performance, and art storage space on site.
  - Plans are not currently funded
  - Desire for a cultural center on the east side.
  - Auxiliary space identified as the city’s top arts and culture need.
  - Desired space would be approximately 200,000 sf and include, rehearsal space for dance schools, symphony, opera, orchestra, and other performers.
  - Rehearsal space is currently rented in various facilities across the city. Would prefer a consolidated location.
  - Make performance space visible to engage the street.
- Secure climate-controlled art and document storage.

*< Strong interest in partnering with library and arts facilities as civic anchors. Civic anchors seen as a catalyst for tax-accruing, market-based development.*

- Black box theater space needed for the ~35 small theater companies in Charlotte.
  - Critical mass of artists and musicians already living along the Central Avenue corridor, making Eastland a convenient location for rehearsals.
  - Potential funding source from ASC or the North Carolina Arts Council.
  - Developer willing to lobby in support of these cultural facilities.
  - ASC has already drafted a proposal of their space needs.
- Local community theater wants to sell its current site and needs new space.
- City can't afford to invest in cultural facilities elsewhere in Charlotte because the land costs are prohibitively high.
- Combine civic and recreational uses into shared facilities for the library, YMCA, ASC, and other cultural organizations.
- Leverage synergies between the arts, skills training, and education.
  - Expand the magnet school impact by creating an education system.
  - Create professional training opportunities, especially in the tech and construction fields.
- Unable to fill the local pipeline for skilled construction workers.
- Solicit sponsorships from construction firms to support trade training and apprenticeships.
- Identify potential partnerships with local colleges and universities.
- Locate foreign consulates here with exhibit space about national cultures.

## **TOURISM**

What we heard:

- Charlotte doesn't have a major tourism destination.
- For tourism to work here, need a major attraction, landmark, and access to Uptown.
- No competing hotels in the area.
  - Hotel development will require a draw/attraction
- The arts, sports, and entertainment could draw people into the area.

## **IMPACT**

*Redevelopment will be a long-term process with the potential to transform East Charlotte and empower local residents. Careful attention must be paid to the social, economic, and environmental impact of the site to ensure the City operates as a good steward of public funds and maximizes the potential benefits of redevelopment.*

- "This is a project for the next generation."
- Elevate East Charlotte as a global center of excellence in diversity.
  - How can the Eastland site help solve problems facing the broader city?
  - Small retailers and restaurants may not be able to afford rents as new development and transit comes in. How can they be retained?

## NEEDS

*Elements of design, security, infrastructure, philanthropic support, regulations and policies, and perception must be in place to create a feasible plan that meets the community's standards for development and provides social and economic returns for the city and its private partners.*

### DESIGN

What we heard:

- Need to blend with and enhance the existing neighborhood.
- Create an iconic destination and sense of place to attract potential residents and tenants.
- Quality and character of the initial phases of development will set a precedent and change perceptions.
- Strike a balance between certainty and authenticity.
- Provide guidance (i.e. design guidelines), but don't prescribe an architectural style (i.e. pattern books).
- Form-based code may be appropriate here.
- Encourage grit and texture by making sure it reflects the hands of multiple designers.
- Create a resilient form with a connected street network to withstand change over time and accommodate various types of development.
- Create a "walkable world."
- Enhance streetscape to improve perceptions and maintain the rhythm of Central Avenue.
- Uncover and embrace natural water features.
- Any major park should be designed to hold festivals.
- Create a sense of competition for design quality and creativity.

*< Create a unique sense of place with signature public elements, a connected road network, design guidelines, and variety.*

### SECURITY

What we heard:

- Design to prevent crime through activation, a family-friendly environment, and a pride-inducing sense of place.
- Perception that neighborhood crime has decreased in recent years.
- Focus neighborhood code enforcement on crime hot spots.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

What we heard:

- Infrastructure investments—including major roads, utilities, stormwater management, and public spaces-- would be big incentives.
  - Prefer for the site to be prepped prior to sale.
  - A central, green infrastructure storm water amenity is positive for development
  - Facilities need to be better than elsewhere to improve confidence.
  - Attractive park space would support residential development.
- Connecting premium transit service—either streetcar or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)—to the site will increase its appeal, but transit itself is not a panacea.
- Reconnecting the primary street grid is considered critical to development success.

< Help fund and install major infrastructure on-site and improve transit connectivity. The opportunity to create green infrastructure storm water elements at the interface of the new school and the future redevelopment was considered positive.

## **PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT**

What we heard:

- Apply for grant funding for a Business Improvement District (BID) or similar organization that can guide the effort. (There is not a sufficient tax base to fund it traditionally.) The Knight Foundation's support for the Charlotte Center City Partners' expansion to the West End was cited as an example.
- Connect with philanthropies and nonprofits, such as the Knight Foundation, Foundation for the Carolinas, Urban League, and Goodwill.

## **REGULATIONS AND POLICIES**

What we heard:

- Lighten permitting and review of code for renovations.
- Use the place type concept to pre-approve desired and appropriate uses and allow by right zoning to improve the efficiency of the approval process.

## **PERCEPTION**

What we heard:

- Opportunity to change perception of the site and neighborhood.
- Need a theme, such as cultural diversity, to build on and help people buy into the vision.
- Needs to be a place where a diverse group of people needs to feel comfortable.
- Developers would like the City to create a marketing package about the site and neighborhood to help explain the story to capital partners and potential retail tenants.



## ACTIVATION

*Immediate activation of the site will require temporary and innovative approaches while a permanent development strategy is put in place. These short-term interventions can build a sense of momentum; provide opportunities for community engagement; introduce a new identity for the site; and begin to draw in people from across the metro area, making potential future users more familiar and comfortable with the site.*

What we heard:

- Use temporary activation to reconnect people to the site and begin changing perceptions.
- People are supportive of temporary uses in the interim, but the neighborhood is ultimately looking for permanent development.
  - Need to be clear about messaging the long-term strategy and vision.
  - Link to other local examples of Tactical Urbanism to help people understand its role and potential.
  - Provide a long-term development schedule and demonstrate momentum to show progress to goal.
- Prefer a series of temporary events to a one-time event, as this approach better demonstrates a commitment to redevelopment.
- Potential temporary test driving course for driverless cars.
- Skateboarders practice regularly on-site.
- Charlotte Open Air Market is already activating the site on weekends.
  - Begun in August 2015 by Theodore Williams, a Guyanese immigrant, to empower both sellers and buyers.
  - Chose the location because of pavement quality. City originally wanted it closer to the transit center.
  - Cleaned up standing water, overgrown vegetation, and broken glass on the poorly maintained site.
  - Operates Saturday (3,000 to 4,000 attendees) and Sunday (5,000 to 6,000 people) from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.
  - Most market customers are driving in, and there are 2,000 to 3,000 cars parked on site on a typical weekend day.
  - Family shopping and social experience.
  - Strong community amongst vendors and attendees.
  - Started with 44 vendors and now have approximately 120 vendors on a typical weekend day.

- Vendors include small retailers, prepared foods, and produce sellers.
- Market vendors are growing and employing locals.
- With its low barriers to entry, the market gives the average person an opportunity to start a business.
- Sees the Yellow Green Farmers Market in Hollywood, Florida as an example for what the market can become and how it can help fill the neighborhood's fresh produce need.
- Capacity for additional events.
- Brought Hippie Fest to the site to attract a wider range of people. Drew 400 vendors (in addition to the market's ~120 regular vendors) and 10,000 attendees.
- Notifies nearby businesses when events will occur, because they generate major business and owners need to prepare.
- Event growth is limited by regulations.
- Want a semi-permanent or permanent market structure. Vendors don't have enclosed storage or security, so they have to pack everything up at night and reset the next day, which limits vendor interest.
- Many neighbors like the Open Air Market, but want a more attractive presentation, artisans, music, and a greater variety of product types.

## PRECEDENTS

*Building on best practices in creative, socially-conscious, empowering development in the Charlotte area and across the country will inform potential strategies and set the bar for the development impact of the Eastland Mall site. Participants suggested precedents for developments, markets, programs, businesses, and services.*

## DEVELOPMENTS

What we heard:

- Brightwalk is a local, 98-acre, master planned community with mixed-income housing, greenway connections, and plans for commercial uses.
  - City financial commitment was critical (Community Development Block Grant, etc.)
  - Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership was master developer.
  - Residential development includes multi-family, townhomes, single-family homes, and senior housing.
  - Market rate townhomes begin around \$125,000 and single-family homes are now selling for up to \$400,000.
  - Current waiting list for homes demonstrates demand for this type of development.
  - Retail has been the hardest piece to finance and attract because the area's purchasing power is low.
- Bedrock Real Estate Services in Detroit is known for incorporating cultural facilities into mixed-use developments and using them to attract tenants to a location.
- Camp North End in Charlotte has hired a community manager and used temporary activation and public relations to bring users to the site and begin changing perceptions about the industrial area in preparation for its redevelopment.

## MARKETS

What we heard:

- The San Antonio Mercado is one of the top outdoor markets in the country and celebrates the area's Mexican heritage. It features shops in a covered market as well as a Farmers Market Plaza.
- The farmers market in Downtown Raleigh is a regional example of excellence for outdoor markets. It is operated by the Downtown Raleigh Alliance.

## ***PROGRAMS***

What we heard:

- Mesa, Arizona has strategically invested in education and skills training for the construction and technology industries.

## ***BUSINESSES AND SERVICES***

What we heard:

- Nile Ethiopian Restaurant and Grocery on Sharon Amity Road is an example of local business maturation. It started in an inexpensive space and with its success is now relocating to a larger space.
- The Midwood International and Cultural Center is a nonprofit that provides services for immigrants and raises awareness for Charlotte's cultural diversity.

## DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE

*An implementable redevelopment plan that provides opportunities for developers and entrepreneurs of all scales will require a flexible master plan framework. This will provide structure to a developer solicitation effort, which will divide the site into manageable segments that fit into a cohesive master plan.*

### FRAMEWORK

What we heard:

- Abide by the original guiding principles, which have been vetted and supported.
- Leverage existing assets.
- City partnership and clear commitment will be critical to private investment
- Developers want to see a master plan with a strong vision.
  - Start with phased master plan and City-provided infrastructure.
  - Keep the master plan lean and flexible.
  - Need a big idea and catalyst (civic investment).
  - Create smaller parcels that can be undertaken by multiple, smaller players.
  - Master developer to put in infrastructure first.
  - Attract developers with future street frontage, amenities, and activity adjacent to parcel.
- Anchor the development with an urban node before building single-family.
- Commercial along Central Avenue, fading into higher density residential and single-family residential in the back.
- Lead with market rate and hold land for affordable development after momentum has been built.
  - Get an affordable developer in the mix; don't make everyone include affordable housing in their projects.

### DEVELOPER SOLICITATION

What we heard:

- Residential developers looking to take on 50-100-unit chunks, but would like not to have to buy the land all at once.
- Provide a master plan and phasing strategy along with a development partner.
- Developers would like to communicate their vision, have the City select the partners that best align with its vision, and then discuss how to make the financials work.



- Avoid overly restrictive plans or a plan that is visually compelling without supporting rationale
- Limit complexity in the deal.

### ***PRIVATE FINANCING***

What we heard:

- Access to loans for properties in the area is not a perceived problem.
- May become a project for the next real estate cycle based on finance timing.
- Engage family and generational investors.
- Can get a good return and quality of place with medium density development (e.g. 4 to 5 stories with a 1.5 FAR).
- Grameen Bank, the Nobel Prize winning pioneer of micro lending, has a location on Central Avenue. It offers small loans (\$1,500) to low-income, female entrepreneurs, as well as mentoring, peer group support, and financial literacy classes.

### ***INCENTIVES AND PUBLIC FINANCING***

What we heard:

- City needs to have skin in the game.
- Provision of necessary entitlements in place or pre-approved represent an incentive.
- City may need to have a lower land valuation to make costs work for developers.
- Prefer tax abatements and incentives to density bonuses in this context.
- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district would help, but isn't enough alone.
- New Markets Tax Credits for the cultural "back of house" facilities.
- Consider a bigger story for Eastland related to employment generators.
- Prioritize Eastland as a site for subsidized corporate relocations.
- Incentives and a coordinated strategy to attract jobs at a state level.
- Need affordable housing incentives, such as low interest loans, for the broader neighborhood.
- Promote available financial support for individuals and tenants and consider additional mechanisms.
- Connect potential buyers with city home-buyer support programs.
- Provide incentives and grants for new businesses .

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# TACTICAL URBANISM EVENT – EASTLAND RISING

## WHAT IS TACTICAL URBANISM?

Tactical Urbanism is a broad approach to place-making using temporary, low-cost interventions to the built environment to test and build momentum for long-term changes. Pop-up parks, temporary bike lanes, open streets events, and any other short-term design solution intended to scale up to a more permanent installation falls under its umbrella. The approach can help test big ideas with little investment, build a sense of pride and momentum, and include the ideas and workmanship of a range of community members, making it a strong initial strategy for reengaging the Eastland Mall site.

## HOW DOES TACTICAL URBANISM APPLY TO EASTLAND?

To introduce and demonstrate the concept of Tactical Urbanism, the City of Charlotte Planning Department and the consultant team held the well-attended Eastland Rising event on the site. The goal of the Thursday evening event was to draw people to the site and create momentum for the potential redevelopment, as well as to educate people about Tactical Urbanism and build support for future, community member-led events at the site. The event used Tactical Urbanism strategies themed around the past, present, and future of the Eastland Mall site, including a storytelling booth, a temporary cycle track, food truck vendors, games, and a trivia competition hosted by the Queen City Quiz Show. As part of the event, the planning team set up a “questionnaire village” comprised of booths to speak to attendees about Tactical Urbanism, the neighborhood, and the Eastland Mall site.



^ Photos from the Eastland Rising Event



## **SUCCESSIONAL SKETCHES**

A popular stop in the questionnaire village were the sketches produced during the week, which focused on the successional evolution of the existing weekly Charlotte Open Air Market that takes place on site. From beginning to define a market square with a neater arrangement of tents and trucks (tactical), to the addition of a few containers (semi-permanent) to actual construction (ultimate condition), the three key perspectives proved very compelling for City staff and the Open Air Market organizer. As a bonus, the kids loved coloring the black and white print-outs of the market stall drawings.



## WHAT DID WE HEAR?

At the Tactical Urbanism booth, participants learned about that approach to place-making and the concept of successional development. They reviewed examples of different tactical interventions and voted on their preferred tactics for the Eastland site. PARK(ing) Day, small scale interventions (e.g. bus stop improvements or a Little Free Library), pop-up parks, pop-up bike lanes, open streets, and pop-up retail were frequently selected choices. 24 people signed up to help put on future tactical events at the site.

Other booths asked participants to answer free response questions about their experiences in the neighborhood and on the site and to share some of their ideas for how the site may be used in the future. Responses included:

### WHERE DO YOU PLAY?

Plaza-Midwood; NoDa; East Charlotte; Uptown; University; Cotswold; Oakhurst; rollerskating facilities; Reedy Creek Park; YMCA

### WHERE DO YOU PRAY?

Christ Central Church; Charlotte Hindu Center; Baps Temple; St. John Neumann Catholic; St. Peter's Episcopal; St. Martin's Episcopal; Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church; Temple of Christ; East Charlotte Presbyterian; St. Gabriel

### WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

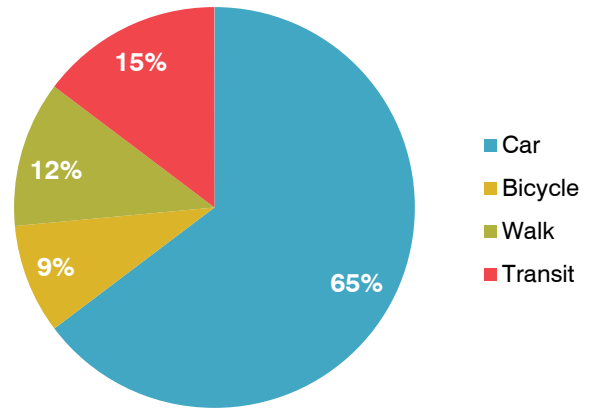
Wilora Lake; Idlewild Farms; Winterfield; Windsor Park; Indian Trail; Grove Park; Shamrock; Pineville; Forest Ridge; Old Stone Crossing; Plaza-Midwood; Greenbryre Apartments; Shamrock; Coventry Woods; Hickory Grove; Verndale Farms

### WHERE DO YOU SHOP?

**Places:** South Park; Cotswold; University; Northlake; Pineville; Matthews; Eastland; Mint Hill

**Stores:** Harris Teeter; Aldi; Food Lion; Farmers Market; Harvey's; Compare Foods; Concord Mills; Super G Mart; Walmart; Save-A-Lot; Publix; Amazon

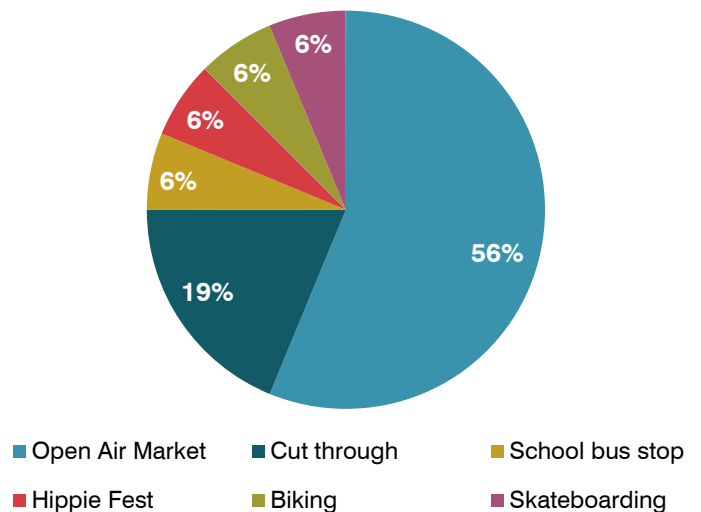
## HOW DO YOU MOVE AROUND?



## WHAT WAS THE BEST REASON TO COME HERE IN THE PAST?

Shopping; ice skating; eating; first date; hanging out; community meetings; networking; errands; movies; Santa Claus; skateboarding

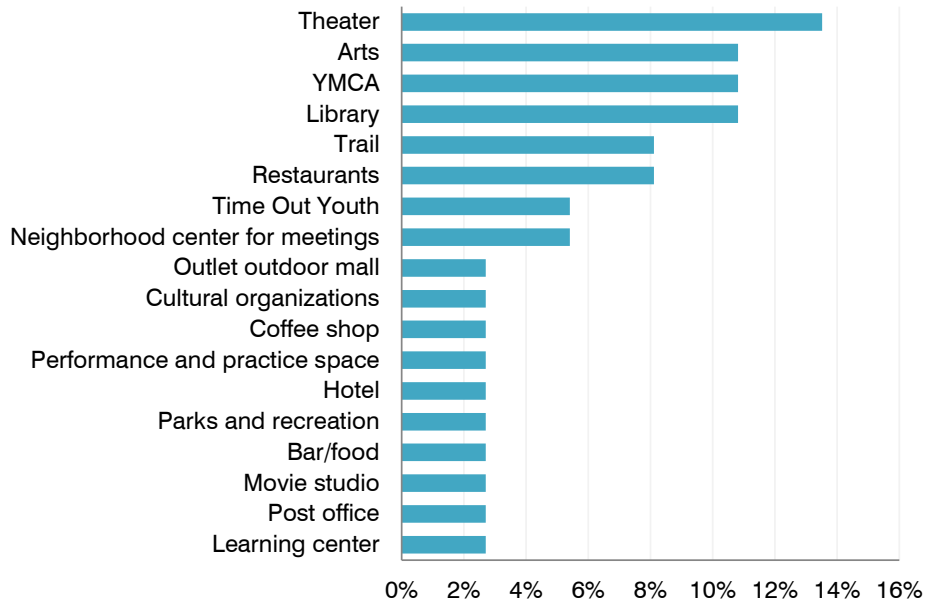
## WHY DO YOU VISIT THE SITE NOW?



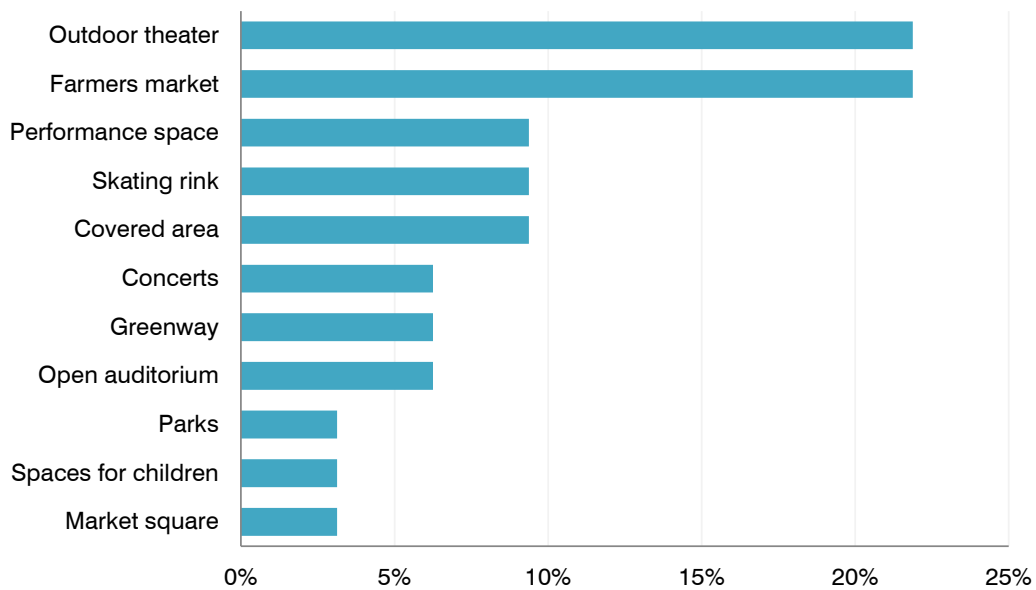


**WHAT CIVIC/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD HAVE A HOME HERE?**

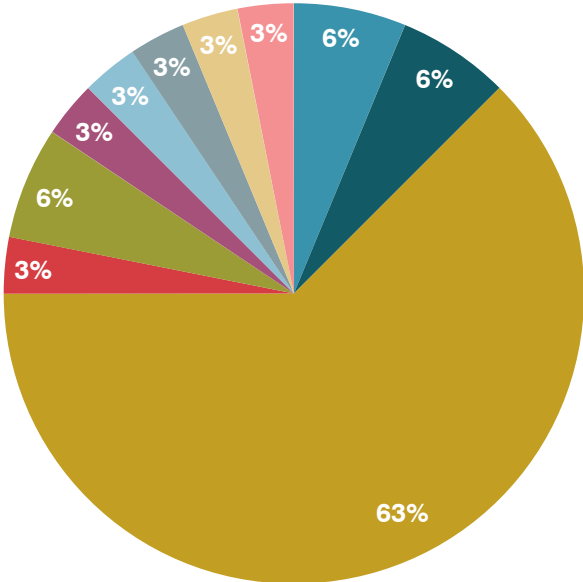
*Note: Some responses included suggestions for commercial activities.*



**WHAT PERMANENT SPACES FOR EVENTS SHOULD BE HERE?**

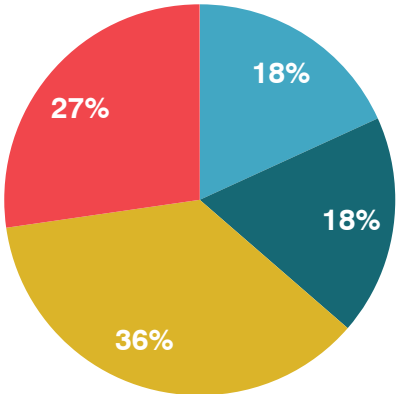


**WHAT SHOULD THE NAME OF THIS NEW PLACE BE?**



- Charlotte East
- Eastland
- Eastland as part of the name
- Smart Place
- Eastland Village
- East Charlotte
- EaLa
- Charlotte East Town Center
- New Eastland
- International Center of Charlotte

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU WANT TO SEE MORE POP-UP EVENTS HERE?**



- Seasonally
- Quarterly
- Monthly
- Weekly

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