

Part 2.

Recommendations



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01

Introduction

This section transforms the findings from Part 1 into actionable recommendations to address downtown Tacoma's challenges and seize its opportunities. Building on the analysis and user insights presented earlier, it introduces a cohesive vision for the future of Tacoma's downtown and outlines initiatives designed to meet community needs while fostering vibrancy, inclusivity, and resilience.


The initiatives presented in this Action Plan are not isolated actions but interconnected strategies designed to activate Tacoma's urban core. Together, they form a cohesive framework guided by the principles of **Integration**, **Experimentation**, and **Collaboration**, ensuring that they remain flexible, adaptive, and rooted in the needs of Tacoma's diverse community.

This document begins with a forward-looking narrative to bridge the gap between strategic planning and lived experiences. By imagining a thriving downtown Tacoma in the near future, we aim to inspire the community with a vision of what is possible and demonstrate how the recommended initiatives can work together to create a vibrant Broadway. This narrative is not just aspirational but grounded in the guiding framework and initiatives presented in this plan.

02

Setting the scene

Imagine Tacoma in 2028—a vibrant, walkable, and inclusive downtown that has become a model of urban transformation. The following narrative envisions this future and provides a snapshot of everyday life in a reimagined Tacoma. The scene is part of an imaginary documentary series set in the near future that showcases how cities across the US transformed their downtowns after COVID-19.

This narrative serves as both a source of inspiration and a glimpse into the potential outcomes of the initiatives presented in the Action Plan. It reflects the community's aspirations, as identified in **Part 1** , and demonstrates how Tacoma leveraged experimentation, collaboration, and integration to create a thriving and inclusive urban core.

Let's step into the near future and experience downtown Tacoma through the eyes of its community. Welcome to Tacoma, Washington, in 2028!

Vision for the near future: “An (extra)ordinary day in Tacoma”

It's a crisp Thursday in April, and lunchtime has brought downtown Tacoma to life.

“We'll start our walk here at the Hotel Murano and make our way toward Market Plaza,” says Susan, a downtown resident who has volunteered to guide me through the area. She's in her early 30s, pushing her newborn son Frank in a stroller as we begin our tour. “This part of downtown has become so much more than a place to pass through—it's somewhere people want to stay.”

We head into the heart of downtown Tacoma. “Take a look,” Susan gestures, “the patios, the vibrant storefronts, and all these beautiful, fragrant plants. They're designed to invite people to walk—and to keep walking—along this stretch of Broadway, called the Broadway Trail.”

The area is alive with color and texture. “See, smell, feel, touch,” Susan continues. “That was the motto of a collaboration between local students, businesses, gardeners, and senior volunteers to make the area more welcoming. It's not just a street; it's an experience.

“Were you part of this project?” I ask.

“Yes,” Susan replies, smiling. “We'd just moved to Tacoma, and I was looking for ways to meet people. I took the initiative to get involved and was amazed at the energy and enthusiasm from the community.”

She points toward the side streets, where Broadway connects with Commerce Street and Court C.

“We've transformed our hill climbs into places where people can hang out, eat lunch, or shop.

This area has four hill climbs, each with its unique vibe. They've become a favorite spot for both the locals and visitors.

It's nearly lunchtime. “Let's head to that red building over there,” Susan suggests. “We can grab a sandwich and meet some students.”

The building she's referring to is the **Food Forest**, a hub of activity and culture. Susan explains that it's more than just a place to eat—it's a symbol of transformation. “This building turned Tacoma from a food desert into a rich landscape of food options, for all palates and wallets. Now, it's a destination for locals and visitors. Here you can sit down and have a quick lunch with your colleagues and fellow students, come for a beer after work, and do grocery shopping for the week. Visitors love to come here and grab Tacoma's local food specialty before they return home. It is also here, we hold Tacomas renowned Farmers Market indoors when the weather is bad. It results from a strong joint venture between the city, local developers, food entrepreneurs, and the culinary program at the local school.”

As we enter, the space opens into a bustling common area filled with people of all ages. Students, workers, visitors, and residents are having lunch, mingling at long tables or chatting in groups at the smaller round tables in the corner. Surrounding the dining area are market stands, food trucks, and small grocery shelves offering all kinds of food.

We sit at a small table and join a group of students. We call this room the big Downtown Canteen,” a student tells me as we sit down. “It's open to everyone. The four of us like to use it

outside peak hours or if we feel like socializing and mingling with others. Otherwise, we gather in this other room over here. Come – Let us show you the **Downtown Student Commons!**”.

The students lead us into a cozy space filled with activity. One group plays a quick table tennis round before their next class, while another focuses on their studies. “This is our space,” one of the students explains. “It’s student-run, and everything here—from the furniture to the design—was built by us as part of our practice-based learning programs. It’s a place we can come and be ourselves during school breaks.”

Back outside at Theater Square, Susan points to a superelevated passage connecting the plaza to downtown Tacoma’s Garage Hub. “This walkway was key to turning downtown into a **walkable destination**,” she says.

I glance toward a yellow building overlooking the square, where a group of people is busy preparing something on a balcony. Susan explains, “That’s the Pantages Theater. They’re rehearsing a collaborative piece with local amateurs and professional actors. It’ll be performed here in plain air in two days to kick off **Show Me Your Tacoma**, the festival of downtown Tacoma where the content is 100% crowdsourced.”

We continue to the tour’s final stop: the Pythian Temple, home to the **Open Tacoma** initiative.

“Open Tacoma is an entrepreneurship program for creative entrepreneurs to fill vacant spaces and develop new concepts while receiving support from top-notch business mentors. It’s been a launchpad for ten successful entrepreneurs from

different industries in just two years,” Susan says. “What I personally think is cool is the community involvement. For example, anyone can attend Pitch Day, hear new ideas, and offer feedback. It’s a great way to support local businesses.”

Before we part ways, I ask Susan one last question: “What do you enjoy most about living downtown?”

She smiles. “I think we’ve created something special here—a real neighborhood vibe where people feel like they belong and want to engage with the space. My husband and I love that everything we need is just a 15-minute walk away, from great work opportunities to everyday conveniences. We’re surrounded by incredible nature, and Seattle is close enough for a quick trip, yet far enough to feel like a different world. What’s even better is the sense of community—we interact with neighbors of all ages, and it feels like everyone has a role here.”

She looks at her son in the stroller. “When Frank grows up, I know he’ll have a safe place to skate, play table tennis, and make friends without us worrying about traffic or safety. That’s the life we dreamed of building.” She gestures to the bustling scene around us. “Look at this—life everywhere. That’s downtown Tacoma.”

03

Recommen- dations

This section outlines the recommendations for achieving a vibrant and active downtown Tacoma. Central to this effort is the concept of a Center of Gravity. By addressing the universal needs identified in **Part 1** ➔, the Center of Gravity serves as a foundation for sustained vibrancy and growth. The accompanying diagram illustrates these needs and their importance in shaping Tacoma's future.

To realize this vision, the Action Plan builds on the Playbook's three key principles: Integration, Experimentation, and Collaboration. These principles provide a strategic framework for designing interconnected, adaptable, and community-driven initiatives, ensuring their long-term impact and relevance.

A Center of Gravity

Establishing a Center of Gravity in downtown Tacoma means creating a place where diverse groups of people are drawn to spend time for multiple purposes—whether for shopping, dining, working, studying, running businesses, enjoying entertainment, or simply hanging out. The objective is to attract people and make downtown *irresistible*, encouraging as many as possible to visit, linger, and return. A critical mass of activity fosters vibrancy, sustains local businesses, and builds a sense of belonging and safety through consistent foot traffic.

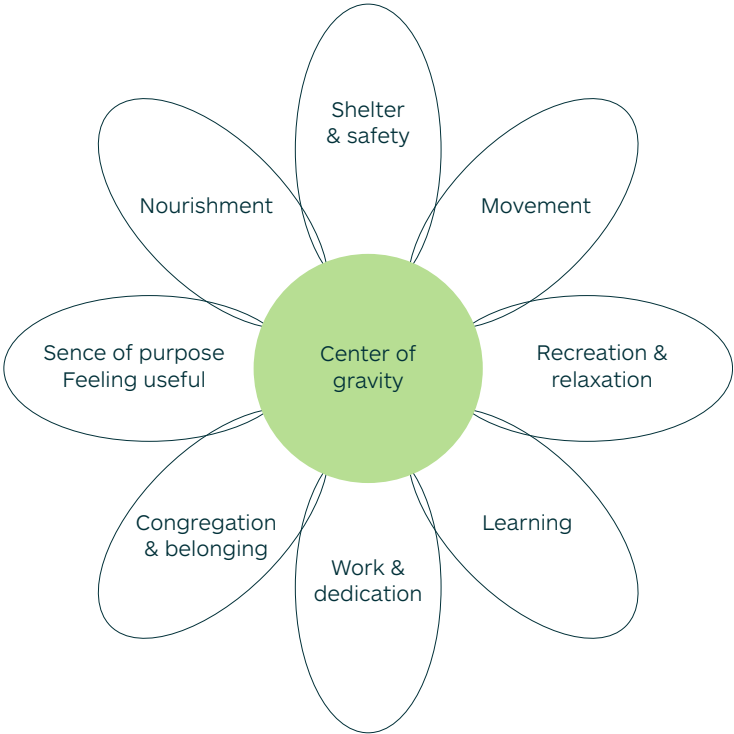
Meeting the universal needs of downtown users is central to this effort. The universal needs identified in **Part 1** ➔—such as access to safe and comfortable movement, affordable and diverse food options, recreation, and gathering spaces—are integral to establishing this Center of Gravity. By addressing these interconnected needs, Tacoma can create a people-centered downtown that fosters a sense of purpose and belonging. This ripple effect extends beyond the core, generating the density required to sustain activity, encourage community engagement, and support local businesses.

The Center of Gravity serves as the anchor for the initiatives outlined in the following chapters. Concentrating efforts along Broadway, a prominent street identified as our Center of Gravity, ensures the synergy needed to create momentum and scale impact to other parts of downtown Tacoma. This focused intervention acts as a model for broader development, demonstrating how interconnected initiatives can collectively transform the urban experience.

Integration

Integration ensures that the proposed initiatives are interconnected, working together to fulfill downtown's broader vision. By weaving

Fulfilling universal needs creates a well-functioning city in balance, laying the foundation for a strong Center of Gravity.



Tacoma downtown Center of Gravity



mobility, food, recreation, and social interaction into a unified framework, the initiatives support effective placemaking and foster vibrant, people-centered spaces. For example, food-related initiatives like the **Food Forest** not only fulfill food needs but also act as social magnets, encouraging informal gatherings. Similarly, mobility initiatives improve access while complementing other efforts to enliven public spaces. The proposed program of initiatives clustered along Broadway exemplifies how integration drives synergy. By aligning diverse elements—from dining options to recreational spaces—each initiative enhances the others as an ecosystem.

Experimentation

An experimental approach is key to achieving impactful and context-specific solutions for Tacoma. This principle emphasizes flexibility, encouraging quick, low-cost actions to test and refine ideas. Experimentation also mitigates the risks of long-term, fixed investments by allowing the city to learn and adapt based on real-world outcomes.

Each initiative in this plan includes phased rollouts, beginning with short-term, easily implementable actions. For example, temporary activations such as **Show Me Your Tacoma** provide opportunities to experiment with new uses for vacant spaces and engage community members. The Center of Gravity is an ideal testing ground, enabling Tacoma to pilot innovative ideas and scale successful strategies downtown. By embracing a culture of experimentation, Tacoma can remain agile, adaptive, and responsive to its community's evolving needs.

Collaboration

Collaboration ensures that the initiatives reflect and respond to the diverse needs of Tacoma's community. The principles of inclusivity and partnership drive key aspects of the proposed strategies, from concept development to implementation.

To achieve this, the initiatives specify potential partners, including developers, local businesses, community organizations, city departments, and other stakeholders. For instance, partnerships with schools and culinary programs can support food-related initiatives like the **Student Commons**, while collaborations with property owners and entrepreneurs can activate vacant spaces through programs like **Open Tacoma**. By engaging a wide range of partners, Tacoma can ensure that its downtown transformation is community-driven, sustainable, and aligned with local aspirations.

Collaboration also fosters a sense of ownership among stake-

holders, empowering them to actively contribute to Tacoma's future. Whether through co-creating public spaces, mentoring emerging entrepreneurs, or participating in civic initiatives, collaboration amplifies the impact of individual efforts and strengthens the collective vision for downtown Tacoma.

The recommendations provide a strategic framework for transforming downtown Tacoma into a thriving urban hub. By establishing a Center of Gravity and adhering to Integration, Experimentation, and Collaboration principles, the city can address universal needs, attract critical mass, and create a vibrant, inclusive downtown that reflects Tacoma's unique identity and aspirations.



BROADWAY
FARMERS
MARKET
THURSDAYS
May - Oct
Broadway

S 11th St

BROADWAY
FARMERS
MARKET
THURSDAYS
May - Oct
Broadway

WOOD WORTH

04

Guiding framework

Vision for downtown Tacoma

Tacoma's downtown is envisioned as a vibrant, inclusive urban hub. This vision outlines key principles to guide its transformation, addressing the universal needs of its community through innovative initiatives. Rooted in the findings of **Part 1** ➡, these principles respond to shared priorities and opportunities identified across user groups.

Food for all palates—and wallets

Access to healthy, affordable food is essential for individual well-being and community connection and was emphasized by all user groups (**Part 1** ➡). Tacoma's downtown will transform into a vibrant "Food Forest," turning its food desert into a rich and diverse food ecosystem. Public dining spaces and inclusive food initiatives will draw residents and visitors, supporting equity, engagement, and the local economy. By building on the success of the Farmer's Market and supporting local businesses, initiatives like the **Food Forest** ➡ and **Student Commons** ➡ will position food as a driver of vitality and community connection.

No vacant spaces

Every vacant space in downtown Tacoma represents untapped potential. These spaces should be reimagined as platforms for creativity, innovation, and productivity. **Open Tacoma** ➡ will activate empty properties, creating hubs for entrepreneurship and civic engagement, while a mobility transition **Destination Downtown** ➡ encouraging greater use of the garage hub will convert underutilized street areas into vibrant public spaces, such as **Unveiled Patios** ➡. To maintain consistent energy, multi-programming should be promoted, ensuring regular events and citizen-led initiatives activate spaces on days without major events. Shelter from rain and unpleasant weather, provided through patios, lodges, and indoor spaces like the Downtown Student Commons, will ensure that downtown remains active and inviting year-round. These efforts will boost economic activity and also foster a sense of connection, making downtown a place where people feel welcome and want to stay longer.

Collective entrepreneurial spirit

Tacoma thrives on the collective creativity and collaboration of its community. Entrepreneurship here is more than starting a business—it's about taking initiative and bringing ideas to life. Civic entrepreneurship will foster new gathering formats and public

activities, while commercial entrepreneurship will drive the creation of new businesses. Initiatives like **Open Tacoma** 📍 and **Show Me Your Tacoma** 📍 will provide mentorship, shared resources, and platforms for creative experimentation. Supporting small business growth will be key, with partnerships between property owners, local entrepreneurs, and community organizations creating opportunities for sustainable business development. Cultivating entrepreneurial talents, nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship among citizens from an early age, and creating favorable work-life balance conditions will ensure that Tacoma retains entrepreneurial talent. Integrating disadvantaged groups, such as homeless individuals, by offering small jobs can provide a gateway to empowerment and self-reliance.

Wandering and wondering

The ability to move freely and comfortably is fundamental for urban life as it shapes how people experience and interact with a city. The thoughtfully designed and artistic **Broadway Trail** 📍 will invite residents and visitors to engage with the city's unique character and history. **Tacoma StepScape** 📍 will make downtown an adventure, fostering both safety and connection through natural surveillance, interactive spaces, and vibrant activity. Enhancing walkability and safe, convenient pedestrian routes will ensure connections between amenities and surrounding areas, further encouraging movement and exploration downtown. Natural features and access to green spaces will improve physical and mental well-being and reflect Tacoma's identity as a city connected to nature.

These principles provide the framework for the proposed initiatives detailed in the following section.



05

The Initiatives

The initiatives outlined here translate the vision, principles, and user needs into actionable projects aimed at transforming downtown Tacoma. Focused on the Broadway corridor, these eight initiatives have been developed by **BLOXHUB experts** ➔ **Appendix 1** ➔ using insights from local stakeholders as described in **Part 1** ➔. The goal is to attract critical mass, enhance vibrancy, and leverage Tacoma's unique strengths.

A varied approach

Each initiative delivers individual impact, but their true power lies in their synergy—working together as a cohesive program to create a lively, inclusive, and resilient downtown core. Reflecting this, the initiatives vary in level of complexity, offering a mix of practical, immediate actions and broader, strategic efforts.

Experimentation and scalability

The initiatives are designed to begin with an experimentation phase of 2-3 months, concentrated around the **Center of Gravity** along Broadway. This area, chosen for its strategic location and existing assets, serves as an ideal testing ground for piloting projects. The experimentation phase provides an opportunity to learn, adjust, and refine initiatives based on real-world outcomes, ensuring that they are responsive to Tacoma's unique context and needs.

Although specific locations are suggested as starting points, the initiatives are designed to be flexible and scalable. Lessons learned during the experimentation phase can be applied to other parts of downtown Tacoma, creating a ripple effect that benefits the broader downtown and all of Tacoma.

Strategic themes

The initiatives are grouped into four interconnected themes that highlight their alignment with the overarching goals of downtown transformation:

- **Connectivity:** Enhances physical and visual links along Broadway, improving walkability, accessibility, and wayfinding to connect with other initiatives.
- **Activation:** Brings life and energy to the area through vibrant public spaces, cultural activities, and dynamic programming that encourage people to gather and linger.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Fosters innovation and supports local businesses, creating opportunities for creative and civic engagement that drive economic vitality.
- **Enablers:** Provides the foundational support necessary to

achieve critical foot traffic for the other initiatives, focusing on mobility and infrastructure improvements.

The following list outlines the initiatives and their related themes:

Expert support

The section below provides a concise overview of each initiative, offering an accessible overview of the proposed projects. BLOXHUB experts are available to further develop these concepts and provide consultancy for the design and implementation phases. The City of Tacoma also has dedicated specialists whose expertise and ongoing activities align with and support these initiatives.

BLOXHUB will facilitate these deep dives in a series of meetings following the Action Plan.

Initiatives overview

The Broadway Trail: Cues for navigating	Connectivity
Tacoma StepScape: Activated hill climbs	
Unveiled Patios: Transformed street parking	
Downtown Student Commons: Student space	Activation
Food Forest: Diverse food options	
Open Tacoma: Entrepreneurship support	Entrepreneurship
Show me your Tacoma: Activity program	
Destination Downtown: Mobility transition	Enablers

The map illustrates suggested locations for the initiatives, offering a visual overview of how they collectively contribute to activating Tacoma's downtown core.



The Broadway Trail

→ Why

Strolling areas benefit from landmarks and a visual identity to indicate the core walking zone. Exiting the Convention Center, pedestrians are uncertain about whether to continue walking north on Broadway and what destinations lie ahead. Similarly, it is unclear how far the core extends at the northern end. Where storefronts themselves are closed, dark, or vacant, visually interesting treatments in pedestrians' field of view can help encourage walkers to keep going and reassure them there's more to explore. By establishing a clearly defined "Broadway Trail," downtown Tacoma can transform this corridor into an engaging, navigable, and vibrant experience. This initiative will help guide and reassure visitors, signaling that there is more to see and discover while also establishing Broadway as an activity hub.

→ What

The Broadway Trail initiative introduces visual landmarks and cues to define the north and south ends of the Broadway area (7th to 13th street) to indicate what part of Broadway is best area for strolling. These features can include visual landmarks such as public art installations at both ends of the core, overhead catenary lighting, and wayfinding signage along the way and at the ends. These cues should be clearly visible from the entrance to the Convention Center at the south end and the Theaters at the north end. The northern boundary end is flexible and could be at 7th or 9th Street—or extend northward over time as the life of the district grows. Entry points from hill climbs and parallel streets should also be clearly marked with visual cues to guide pedestrians toward Broadway as the center of activity.

Vacant storefronts can be repurposed as visual attractions to enhance the area's vibrancy. These could include temporary or rotating art galleries showcasing local talent, decorative themes inspired by Tacoma's unique identity, history, and vision, or interactive pop-up installations that engage pedestrians.

Regular maintenance and safety measures should be priorities to make the trail feel welcoming and secure, establishing it as a well-known hub for activity.

Example of strolling zone.
Photos are shown for
inspiration but elements
should underline Tacoma's
identity, history and vision.
Photo: Unsplash



→ **How**

The implementation of the Broadway Trail should begin with an experimentation phase, during which boundaries, visual markers, and design elements are tested and refined based on feedback. This phased approach will allow for adjustments and optimization to ensure long-term success.

Collaboration with local stakeholders is essential to executing this initiative. For example, the DTP could lead concept development in collaboration with urban designers. Depending on the installation, the City of Tacoma could design, review, and permit it. The City of Tacoma Municipal Art Program could also be involved. Artists could

be commissioned for temporary or permanent installations.

Design elements may include overhead catenary lighting with artistic patterns, wayfinding signage and interactive digital maps highlighting local attractions, public art sculptures reflecting Tacoma's identity, and murals and creative displays that celebrate the community.

This initiative will serve as a foundation for creating Tacoma's Center of Gravity, helping attract feet on the street, fostering a sense of safety and vibrancy, and encouraging community engagement. By starting with an experimentation phase, the project will gather valuable insights and establish the Broadway Trail as a scalable model for downtown activation.

The BLOXHUB experts from Gehl 📍 are available for more inspiration.

Gehl

Example of overhead catenary lighting.

Foto: Unsplash





Example of wayfinding
signage.
Photo: Unsplash

Tacoma StepScape

→ Why

Downtown Tacoma's hill climbs are unique architectural and cultural features that hold immense potential to provide human-scale, intimate spaces free from traffic. Some of these spaces, like Broadway Court and the Spanish Steps, showcase this potential, but much remains untapped. With thoughtful activation, these hill climbs can serve as landmarks and destinations in their own right, offering a distinctive visitor experience and reinforcing Tacoma's identity. The Tacoma StepScape initiative will encourage exploration, generate foot traffic, and create memorable public space by transforming these stairs from simple connections between elevations into vibrant, engaging environments.

→ What

The Tacoma StepScape initiative seeks to activate downtown's hill climbs to establish them as key pathways and destinations, complementing "The Broadway Trail." Each stair climb will become an inviting and memorable space, transforming from mere connectors into vibrant places to stay and explore. Activating the hill climbs involves a combination of design, program and operational ingredients, which could include the following elements:

- **Names:** Assigning unique names to each hill climb will enhance their identity and make them easier to reference. These names can reflect Tacoma's history, culture, or vision, fostering a stronger connection to the place.
- **Announcement:** Signage at the base and top of each hill climb will guide visitors and introduce the stairs as distinct landmarks. Options range from simple sandwich boards to permanent blade signage integrated with "The Broadway Trail" visual elements.
- **Mood lighting:** Thoughtfully designed lighting, including overhead festival lights, building façade wash lighting, and accent spot lighting, will enhance the aesthetics, improve sense of safety, and mark the hill climbs as areas of special importance. Unlike typical harsh security lighting, these elements will create a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Connections into buildings:** Additional building entrances or

penetrations on landings should be added wherever possible when grades and floor plates align. Direct access to businesses and services is a critical component for activating the hill climbs, transforming the steps into vibrant, active streetscapes with doors and windows that engage pedestrians along their length.

- **Tactical furnishings:** Loose tables and chairs, strategically placed on landings, will encourage informal gatherings. Food and beverage (F&B) services can use these spaces for outdoor seating, while ephemeral merchandise (clothing racks, displays) can add vibrancy and attract visitors.
- **Signage, decoration and artwork:** Creative elements such as murals, sculptures, or decorative signage will give each hill climb its own unique identity and aesthetic appeal, making it interesting to climb the stairs.

When thoughtfully designed and activated, the hill climbs can serve as “breadcrumbs” that encourage exploration along the three-block Broadway core, becoming essential pathways to **The Broadway Trail** ➔ and fostering a vibrant sense of place.

Ideally, hill climbs are mostly activated with attractive, customer-serving entrances that open directly onto landings – at least one of these per hill climb – in addition to static elements like artwork and lighting.

➔ How

To implement the Tacoma StepScale initiative, the following phased approach is recommended:

Rollout

Each hill climb will require a tailored mini-plan identifying its unique opportunities and constraints, such as landing alignment and power. These plans will outline specific actions to maximize potential and designate responsible parties for implementation. A key contact from an adjoining business owner as well as a city planner could be appointed to steward the plan and oversee progress. Establishing hill climb committees for each hill climb could enhance collaboration and ensure that activations are considered holistically for each hill climb, not only as the effort of one business. Fundraising could be organized around individual hill climbs, with the mini-plan as a guide for what is needed.

Depending on the specific interventions, various permits may be required, such as county health permit for sidewalk service, permissions from building owners to attach lighting cables, or building per-

Example of small shop connecting to building.
Photo: Unsplash



mits for creating new entrances on a hill climb landing. Coordination with city departments and stakeholders will be essential.

Partnerships

Strong partnerships will be critical to the success of the initiative.

An urban design or planning consultant could analyze each hill climb, identifying potential, crafting unique identity concepts, and outlining necessary actions, permits, and investments for the small scope hill climb plans. These mini-plans would be developed collaboratively with Hill Climb Committees, with the City of Tacoma Urban Design Studio providing leadership and coordination.

The implementation of hill climb improvements would be a collaborative effort among adjacent businesses, the City of Tacoma, and the DTP. The latter could play a key role in securing grants for small-scale projects such as lighting, signage, or the addition of doorways. The County Health Department may also serve as a vital partner in the permitting and design phases.

For ongoing stewardship and maintenance, adjacent businesses and the DTP would work closely to maintain improvements, ensuring the hill climbs remain vibrant and aligned with downtown's vision while fostering a sense of shared ownership.

Adjacent businesses and the DTP will collaborate to achieve ongoing stewardship and maintenance, building on their existing partnerships and fostering shared ownership of these spaces.

The initiative will begin with an experimentation phase, during which temporary elements such as lighting, signage, and furnishings will be tested. Community feedback will guide adjustments and inform permanent installations.

Location

Suggestions for hill climbs included in the **Tacoma StepScape** ➔ initiative are listed below and shown on the map on the next page. The concept can be introduced and tested in all or some of these locations during the experimentation phase, and expanded to more hill climbs or unique spaces outside of the focus area on long term.

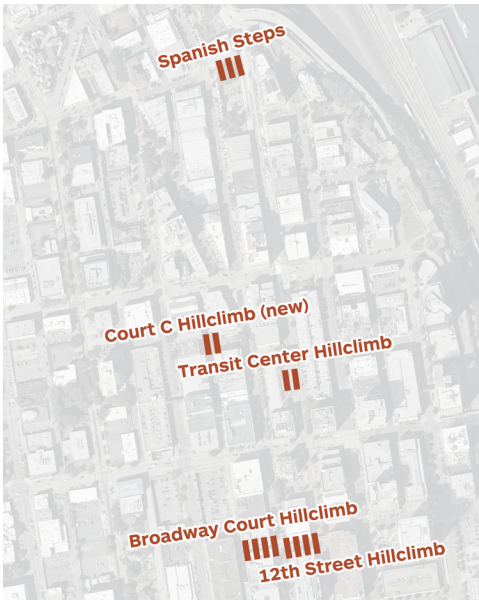
- 1130 Broadway aka Broadway Court
- 1134 Commerce aka 12th Street Hill Climb
- A potential new hill climb at 914 Broadway parking lot, connecting Downtown Student Commons and Court C, integrated with outdoor seating in Commons
- Pierce Transit Center Hill Climb
- 713 Broadway—Spanish Steps / McMenamins

Based on the success of these initial efforts, the concept can be expanded to additional hill climbs and unique spaces outside the focus area, ensuring long-term scalability and impact.

The BLOXHUB experts from Gehl ➔ **are available for more inspiration.**

Gehl

Suggested hill climb activations.



Example of hill climb activation (Dubrovnik).
Photo: Gehl





Example of hill climb
activation (Quebec City).
Photo: Gehl



Unveiled Patios

→ Why

Patios are valuable additions to downtown businesses, offering extended seating and service areas that cater to cafes, restaurants, bars, food halls, and grab-and-go options. They can express business identity and create a strolling experience. When clustered together, patios form a center of gravity, attracting visitors who can seamlessly move between destinations—a drink followed by dinner or coffee paired with lunch. This clustering effect boosts foot traffic and supports the growth of local businesses. Developing a nucleus of patio-based food and beverage (F&B) options can serve as an initial step towards repurposing Broadway's on-street parking for more dynamic and revenue-generating uses.

→ What

Broadway will someday become a vibrant walking street, even a plaza, where cars are just short-term visitors (see the **Destination Downtown** 🚶 initiative). Currently, many merchants view on-street parking as an essential convenience and lifeline for their businesses. However, parking alone does not drive economic vitality; the true measure of success lies in the health of small, dynamic businesses along the corridor (see the **Open Tacoma** 🚶 initiative). Today's parked cars block sightlines down the street, obscuring a view toward pedestrian landmarks and invitations to walk.

The suggested approach is a careful transition from using Broadway's parking spaces for long-term vehicle storage to utilizing them for revenue-generating activities like dining and shopping. This change should occur in tandem with increased outdoor business activity to avoid creating inactive zones. The goal is to strike a balance between maintaining functional, active spaces and enhancing the sightlines and space for new and engaging activities.

→ How

Rollout

Parking spaces offer a flexible and modular approach to accommodate this transition on a business-by-business basis. The diagonal spaces on the 1100 block of Broadway are dimensioned deeply enough to allow for covered and uncovered patio-style dining and other uses like ephemeral outdoor retail and general public seating

and hangout space. Where vacant or underperforming storefronts exist, parking can initially be retained but better regulated (see the **Destination Downtown** 📍 initiative). In contrast, spaces in front of high-performing businesses can be repurposed for patios to maximize activity.

Partnerships

Strong partnerships will be critical to the success of this initiative. The City of Tacoma can facilitate this transition in appropriate locations by supporting the clustering of patio-supporting businesses, and offer a streamlined and simple permit process. The city or DTP can also spearhead the development of non-commercial patios that offer seating or games in front of businesses that do not require parking or a commercial patio. These can help link patio spaces together even when commercial activities are not contiguous.

The City of Tacoma and Tacoma Urban Design Studio can lead the conduction of a streamlined patio permit program including F&B patio design standards (regulating circulation, standardized products, overhead shelter design, heat lamps, etc.). In collaboration with DTP and business owners, the partners can identify relevant sites for new uses and optimize clustering of patios, supported by technical design assistance.

DTP can be key in identifying sites and opportunities for clustering and supporting business owners with applications, permits, and licenses. Local businesses will be essential collaborators, actively participating in the planning and development of patio spaces to ensure these installations meet operational needs and enhance the street's vibrancy. Their involvement will help align patio designs with

Example for inspiration.
Photo: Gehl



the character and goals of the Broadway corridor.

Location

The 1100 block of Broadway, with its deep diagonal parking spaces, is an ideal location for the first wave of patio conversions. Expansion to the 900 block and other areas can follow as foot traffic and demand increase, ensuring a phased and balanced transition.

The BLOXHUB experts from Gehl  are available for more inspiration.

Gehl

Example of street-side
patio dining.
Photo: Unsplash



Example for inspiration
(Castro Street, Mountain
View, CA).
Photo: Gehl



Example for inspiration
(Noriega Street Parklet,
San Francisco).
Photo: Inhabitat



Student Commons

→ Why

Students form one of the most consistent populations regularly activating downtown Tacoma. However, there are no dedicated outdoor spaces tailored to their needs or reasons for them to spend time outside campus other than arriving at or leaving school. As a result, most of their activity is confined indoors, limiting their contribution to the “feet on the street” downtown. Unmet needs around studying, gathering, socializing, waiting for pickups or drop-offs, and eating could be addressed through targeted infrastructure, extending students’ presence downtown and creating more daytime activity.

→ What

The “Student Commons” will provide a welcoming outdoor and indoor gathering space near the Tacoma Flex/CTE/TSA campus, enabling students to spend time in the public realm downtown. The space will feature outdoor and indoor seating areas adjacent to Broadway, offering ergonomic workstations and informal gathering spots for waiting, eating, studying, and socializing. To accommodate Tacoma’s rainy climate, the Commons will include adjacent indoor spaces for wet weather. It will also provide healthy, affordable food and drinks for purchase while allowing students to bring their own lunches. The Commons will be equipped with amenities such as Wi-Fi and power outlets. The Commons is equipped with wifi and power throughout.

The design will blend practical features with an inviting aesthetic, drawing inspiration from best practices and existing examples of successful student-oriented spaces. The Student Commons will meet students’ needs and contribute to downtown Tacoma’s vibrancy.

→ How

Rollout

This project could be prototyped in successive iterations. Initial steps will include short-term prototyping to test and refine the concept. A design sprint can be organized in collaboration with a design firm and the school to explore potential layouts, locations, and furnishings. This temporary phase could involve low-fidelity prototyping, such as a weekend or week-long event, where stu-

dents participate in co-design and production activities. Food and beverage options during the prototype phase could be provided as pop-ups by vendors or entrepreneurs incubated through the **Open Tacoma** 🔄 initiative, fostering a sense of collaboration and local engagement. Prototyping may be most helpful in building enthusiasm and temporarily testing basic ideas.

For a permanent build, more extensive fundraising and planning will be required. The final design could incorporate permanent elements for outdoor shelter and the fit-out of the indoor space in the Pythian Temple building as a complementary indoor café, store, or hangout area. If the **Food Forest** 🔄 initiative identifies a suitable building, the Student Commons could also become an integrated part of its program, with designated zones for student use alongside spaces for broader public interaction (see floor plan below).

Partnerships

Strong partnerships will ensure the success of the Student Commons initiative. To engage students from an early point and give them a sense of ownership, the design and construction of the space, the schools can spearhead the prototyping phase. The Commons could be run by student staff as a part of the school's community-based learning program.

The concept and prototyping should be further developed by an architectural firm that can give specific advice and facilitate a detailed process for creating the concept. Students can co-design and develop furnishings. High schools may integrate space into the curriculum and provide facilities for producing prototypes.

Community entrepreneurs can operate the prototype phase through the initiative **Open Tacoma** 🔄. Students can run the cafes and shops, while the DTP can provide maintenance and operations assistance.

The concept and long-term development of the Commons will require collaboration with an architectural firm to refine designs and ensure the space meets both functional and aesthetic goals. A non-profit community partner could work with schools to employ students to manage the facility. Ongoing stewardship will depend on close partnerships between the DTP, local schools, and the City of Tacoma, ensuring the space remains a vibrant and well-maintained asset for downtown.

Location

It's essential that the **Student Commons** be co-located conveniently to the High School building, given that students need to stick to the bell schedule and have limited time for passing. Potential sites exist that can effectively function as extensions of the High School in the public realm:

- **North edge of the parking lot at 916 Broadway:** This site offers an opportunity to leverage its sunny exposure and create a grade connection, incorporating stairs or terraced seating, between Broadway and Court C. This connection could serve to integrate Court C into the downtown public realm, enhancing its accessibility and functionality as part of the downtown public realm along with Broadway. Additionally, the 916 Broadway parking lot could be reimagined as an active and versatile pop-up space as part of the **Open Tacoma** ➡ initiative.
- **East side of Broadway, south of the Pantages Box Office against Studio 3/Studio 2 wall:** Though smaller, this site offers decent solar exposure and currently occupies 3-4 parking spaces. However, it would require students to cross Broadway and does not accommodate adjacent indoor gathering spaces.
- **Parklet in front of the Pythian Temple building:** This option could occupy 2-5 parking spaces on the west side of Broadway and offers flexibility for integration with other downtown initiatives.

The final location could also complement the **Food Forest** ➡ initiative, providing students with their own dedicated space while fostering interactions with other user groups downtown.

The **BLOXHUB** experts from Gehl ➡ are available for more inspiration.

Gehl

Map of possible locations.



Example for inspiration
(Stanford University).
Photo: Stanford University

Below:
The High Line. Photo: Gehl



Food Forest

→ Why

Nourishment is a universal need and represents a strong pull factor for any city. A variety of food options—such as groceries, restaurants, and food markets—brings vibrancy, vitality and foot traffic to a city. Food plays a crucial role in attracting diverse groups to downtown Tacoma and increasing the time (and money) they spend there. Prioritizing a diversity of food options for different palates and wallets helps create consistent flow and activity throughout the day, all year round.

Currently, affordable food options in downtown Tacoma are limited. The existing food landscape is dominated by restaurants—most of which operate only four days a week—and an outdoor Farmers Market once a week, where prices have risen significantly recently.

Grocery businesses face challenges downtown due to the low margins on grocery products compared to the cost of rents and competition from large supermarkets in surrounding areas. However, access to affordable and diverse food options, including groceries, would significantly improve the quality of life for many user groups, making downtown a more attractive place to live, work, and study. Residents could save time and money by avoiding out-of-town grocery trips and reducing fuel costs. Students could enjoy quick lunches, snacks during school breaks, and a reason to extend time downtown after school. Workers could access convenient lunch options, socialize with colleagues over a beer after work, or pick up groceries on their way home without additional detours.

→ What

The **Food Forest** initiative aims to transform downtown Tacoma from a food desert into a rich landscape of food options, catering to a wide range of users with varied needs and budgets, including students, residents, workers, and visitors. It envisions a multifunctional, multi-story building in downtown Tacoma that serves as a hub for grocery shopping, dining, and social interactions around a food theme.

The initiative serves multiple purposes:

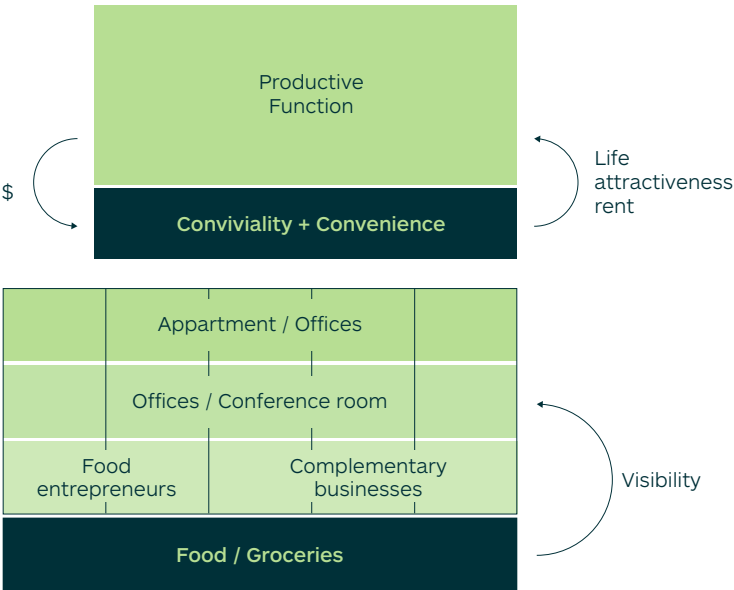
- Introducing accessible, affordable, and diverse food options to downtown Tacoma.

- Creating an economically viable model for operating a grocery business in the area.
- Programming a multi-story building downtown (yet to be identified) that can become a strong one-stop-shop attraction, a destination, and a meeting point for locals and visitors centered around food.

Program for the building

The building's program integrates complementary food-related functions and activities that enhance one another both operationally and financially, creating a dynamic and self-sustaining business model (see figures below).

Self-sustaining business model by hosting multiple functions.



- The ground floor (dark green rectangles) will focus on activities that generate foot traffic and attract people to the building and downtown. These could include grocery stores, micro-dining and convivial dining spaces, food-making workshops, and wine-tasting experiences (see floor plan figure ➡).
- The upper floors (light green rectangles) will mainly host productive functions that generate higher rent and can “subsidize” the lower-margin offerings on the ground floor. These spaces may include food production facilities such as microgreens, offices for

food entrepreneurs, catering companies, ceramics studios or furniture designers. Part of the ground floor could also be allocated to showcase and sell products created on-site.

Integrating concepts from the **Student Commons** and **Open Tacoma** into the building's program can also yield important synergies.

The **Food Forest** integrates food-related functions to create a varied and engaging program. For example, grocery and farmers market spaces address daily needs while enhancing downtown's appeal. Dining spaces offer high-margin services that sustain the business model, while food production facilities and entrepreneurial offices drive innovation and foster economic activity. This integrated structure ensures the initiative's economic viability and establishes a community-focused hub that promotes food innovation and entrepreneurship. For a detailed breakdown of these functions and their contributions, see **Appendix 2**.

A “Robin Hood” business model

The Food Forest adopts a “Robin Hood” business model, where high-margin activities on the upper floors subsidize affordable offerings on the ground floor. This model makes it economically viable to run a grocery business downtown, generating traction for all functions within the building.

Zooming in on the ground floor plan

The program integrates a variety of interconnected functions, creating a destination that meets diverse needs and offers unique food experiences.



Example of food market.
Photo: Unsplash





Example of social dining
and pasta-making.
Photo: Unsplash



Example of food specialties.
Photo: Unsplash



→ How

Rollout

Food on the agenda

The first step is to prioritize food as a key element in activating downtown Tacoma. An information campaign should be launched in collaboration with the city, building owners, and vendors to introduce and promote the concept effectively. Efforts should focus on affordable, healthy, and convenient options that appeal to diverse user groups.

Funding opportunities

Mapping available funding resources is essential to executing a comprehensive Tacoma Food Strategy and testing different food concepts, as suggested in the list above. The Tacoma Municipality would be a key actor in mapping the funding schemes to finance, subsidize, and/or support grocery experimentation and access to a broader food palette in downtown Tacoma.

Experimentation

Testing, evaluating and adjusting the program, especially for the floor plan, are crucial steps before committing to the final spatial layout and subdivision of the space. Local vendors, farmers, and producers from the farmers' market could be engaged to sell their produce indoors more often than just on Thursdays, providing valuable insights and building momentum for the initiative. Additionally, stakeholders should help identify relevant food options and food-related activities to test during this phase.

Curating the program for the floor plan

Curating the concept and programming the floor plan is a core activity that demands experience in this field, which specialists, in collaboration with local partners, can provide. Another task that can be outsourced is supporting the City of Tacoma in scouting relevant vendors and entrepreneurs and making agreements with them.

Partnerships

The success of the Food Forest depends on strong partnerships among public, private, and community stakeholders. Collaboration between the City of Tacoma, building owners, developers, and local organizations will help secure funding and guide the project's development.

Educational institutions and community organizations can contribute to programming and funding, ensuring the Food Forest meets diverse community needs. Urban food system specialists can provide expertise in designing the framework and integrating

food-related activities into the initiative. Partnerships with local vendors and entrepreneurs will help activate the space, contributing to its vibrancy and long-term sustainability.

Financing model

The Food Forest initiative brings substantial benefits to a wide range of stakeholders – including the municipality, developers, local businesses, and educational institutions – by sustaining activity and enhancing the appeal of working, studying, living, and conducting business in downtown Tacoma. Therefore, the initiative is ideally implemented as a joint venture, involving collaboration among the city, developers, local organizations, and institutions. Funding could be sourced from multiple sources, including:

- Municipal funding
- State funding
- Investments from real estate developers with a strategic interest in downtown Tacoma
- Financial contributions from schools and educational programs
- Other aligned funding streams.

Location

Finding a building

Identifying a suitable building is a critical step for the Food Forest. Multiple building owners have shown interest in activating their spaces in connection with food offers and the City of Tacoma could benefit from continuing the negotiations about realising a specific Food Forest concept. In close collaboration with building owners and investors, the city should identify a building where more food varieties can be provided and a Food Forest initiated. A building on the axis Broadway/ Court C crossing with S11th Street seems particularly ideal for this use but other buildings could be equally suitable.

The BLOXHUB experts from AGORA  are available for more inspiration.

AGORA

Open Tacoma

→ Why

Small-scale entrepreneurs in Tacoma lack clear pathways to realize innovative ideas due to the existing gap in support and governance. The Open Tacoma initiative seeks to bridge these gaps by creating a supportive ecosystem for creative entrepreneurship. It leverages the momentum generated by the Action Plan to offer a comprehensive roadmap for incubation and development that can be replicated across the city.

Recognizing that physical transformations alone cannot sustain urban vitality, Open Tacoma is established so that those in the community who have innovative and valid concepts see a pathway to implementation that can utilize their energy and personal investment. Open Tacoma focuses on advocating entrepreneurial energy and turning it into tangible, scalable projects. By addressing the lack of affordable and adaptable spaces downtown, the initiative aims to enhance urban vitality, build economic resilience, and create a unique sense of place that benefits the entire community.

→ What

Open Tacoma is an initiative focused on revitalizing downtown Tacoma through entrepreneurship support, collaborative partnerships, and strategic interventions. It aims to address urban challenges by fostering new businesses, programs, and events that contribute to the street atmosphere and generate engagement from across the region.

The **Open Tacoma** program provides a pathway for creative entrepreneurs to fill vacant spaces that no longer suit current market demands. By providing an incubation space, critical infrastructure, and a support network, the program helps creative entrepreneurs develop new concepts through a single, streamlined gateway. The program leverages different capacities across the downtown Tacoma community, from permitting to support in business development and planning. At the same time, neglected downtown spaces are refitted, supporting growth and diversification in retail and across the downtown area.

In summary, **Open Tacoma** aims to:

- **Spark entrepreneurial imagination** when creative entrepreneurs define unique identities for vacant spaces

- **Establish a cooperative framework** among key stakeholders including program providers, building owners, city planners, regulators, etc. who work cooperatively and cohesively through a framework that creates a single point of contact for creative entrepreneurs.
- **Ensure long-term financial sustainability** through innovative funding and revenue-sharing frameworks.
- **Stimulate ground-floor usage** and enhance urban vitality through constant visitor flow and economic activity by alleviating the peaks and troughs that characterize downtown pedestrian activity.
- **Continuously retrofit storefronts** and generate a sense of curiosity and optimism about downtown
- **Make it simpler** and more appealing for building owners to bring their empty spaces up to a baseline (for the warm shell) that can serve diverse programmatic demands.

Through these features, the **Open Tacoma** provides a framework for long-term urban development and stakeholder collaboration to foster a broader social and economic transformation of downtown Tacoma – becoming a safe and exciting destination with a unique identity in the region.

Photo: Matthew Claudel,
Field States



Photos: Matthew Claudel,
Field States



The program contains several concepts and elements: **Creative Concepts** from Tacoma's community of entrepreneurs are featured in biannual **Pitch Days** (one of the two in connection with the “**Show me your Tacoma**” 📍 initiative as a part of the activity program). A Jury composed of stakeholders who will be “judges” for the pitch day (city staff, regulators, building owners, and citizen representatives). A special-purpose **Launch Framework** coordinates a network of actors, assembled from regulatory bodies, investors, and mentors to support new entrepreneurs in developing their business case and operation. A **Pilot Space** on Broadway is developed from an empty building and nearby plaza, and supplied with the foundational infrastructure that enables these concepts to **Pop Up**. As they grow, creative entrepreneurs are supported through their expansion, with streamlined opportunities to **Plug In** to vacant sites.

The backbone of this initiative involves the following elements:

1. **Surfacing ideas:** Anyone can pitch an idea for creative spatial activation during public biannual pitch days. Ideas are assessed in an open event-based format where all relevant stakeholders are present, and offer their perspectives and critiques.
2. **Validating ideas:** When an idea “graduates”, a team of mentors with expertise in business, team-building, governance and marketing, grow their concept into a sustainable practice, refining their business model and making a plan for launching a full retail space. The mentorship team collectively solve obstacles to implementation through an organised Launch-Framework handling permitting, infrastructure, marketing, startup grants etc.
3. **Launching ideas:** Creative entrepreneurs establish pop-ups in a chosen downtown site (such as the Pythian temple). Here, they grow their audience, test the downtown market, establish basic protocols etc. with the support of the mentorship team (via Downtown Tacoma Partnerships and Make It Tacoma).
4. **Expanding ideas:** The main pilot space continuously incubates new retail concepts. This could be achieved through:
 - A) **A Playbook** for building owners to upgrade their spaces, making it easy for creative entrepreneurs to “plug in.” The playbook would include a methodology, a pool of contractors, designers, and other vendors, and a matchmaking function.
 - B) **A Retail Corridor Supertenant** operates as the “umbrella tenant” across all Open Tacoma retail spaces. This non-profit entity leases from building owners, absorbs risk, raises funds,

and subleases to creative entrepreneurs.

→ How

Rollout

The program will consist of activities that can be divided into three phases. Here, suggestions for these activities are described for the short, mid, and long term.

SHORT TERM activities:

- **Pitch Day:** Bring together key stakeholders (see inspiration below) who have the capacity to “invest” in commercial concepts – not just financially, but also in-kind (such as permitting support etc). These stakeholders will collaboratively choose selected winners to support going forward. The goal of the pitch day is to achieve a mix of initiatives that can fill critical gaps in the downtown retail offering.
- **Summer bazaar:** The selected winners will have the opportunity to place their business in the Pythian Temple (downtown Broadway area) for a period of e.g. four months. During this time, they will test their operations and market to gain momentum. This activity can happen in connection with the **Show Me your Tacoma** ➔ initiative as part of the activity program.
- **Mentorship:** Creative entrepreneurs are paired with local mentors who have expertise in business, team-building, governance, and marketing to refine their business model and make a plan for launching in an entire retail space. Local organizations like DTP and Make It Tacoma can coordinate this mentorship program and collaborate with external start-up community experts.

MID TERM activities:

- **From Popup to Retail:** Ideally 5-8 creative entrepreneurs will “graduate” from their pop-up into a full retail space along Broadway.
- **Co-investment:** Improvements to the spaces might be needed before the pop-up can be created or when the space is launched full scale. Local landlords, tenants, and the City of Tacoma may seek this investment to cover the most necessary costs of improvements. These enhancements will boost the downtown business environment and urban life to increase the value of available square footage and attract long-term tenants.

- **Matchmaking:** Develop a platform that pairs entrepreneurs with suitable spaces, optimizing building utilization and ensuring the program reaches a steady state.
- **Framework:** Establish a Creative Permits Committee with streamlined communication channels connecting key stakeholders, including the Health Department, the Mayor's Office, Commercial Permitting, and Business Support Services. This committee will facilitate seamless collaboration and coordination to develop an efficient framework that enables entrepreneurs to navigate regulatory requirements and operate effectively.
- **Funding:** Establish a public or PPP fund that offers grants to small businesses to help start-ups get started.

POTENTIAL LONGER TERM activities:

- **Retail Corridor Trust:** A trust to invest in upgrades to shopfront retail spaces is created. The trust serves as the “umbrella tenant” across all Open Tacoma retail spaces. The trust may raise a matching fund for warm shell improvements in partnership with the city (city pays , developer pays , Trust pays , or an agreement of this kind).
- **Upgrade spaces according to the “Shopfront API”** making it simple for a small business to plug into a string of shopfront spaces along Broadway. Activities include shortlisting vendors and specialists e.g interior architect, contractor, fabricator etc. Furthermore a long-term activity can be to establish or partner with a non-profit organization to serve as the umbrella tenant.

The **Open Tacoma** initiative is a model for kick-starting business activity, which demands a clear focus on supporting business life from the City and stakeholder perspective. To start the program, the process may be broken down into specific actions aimed at the city of Tacoma:

Initial steps (first 2 months)

- Identify developers and building owners, who are prepared to offer space, funds and expertise.
- Identify those in a regulatory position who create make/break outcomes for small businesses and choose those who are suited to the ‘pitch & mentor’ format

- Determine a pilot site, including a building and urban plot (the Pythian Temple building seems ideal for the purpose)
- Create a program fund with basic resources for the project (see estimated budget in **Appendix 3** ➡)
- Establish or gather relevant expertise, network and potential media partners

Launch Framework Development (3 months)

- Draft a charter of engagement (roles & responsibilities) & vision for what success looks like
- Partner with DTP, Make It Tacoma and/or external partners to find business navigators and mentors who can assist creative entrepreneurs in identifying capacity gaps, employ staff, and create partnerships
- Assemble a jury of stakeholders who will be “judges” for the pitch day (city staff, regulators, building owners, citizens representatives etc.
- Begin developing a pop-up sandbox space that facilitates short-term installations in the pilot site building, so they do not need to comply with all official codes.
- Create a public pitch day event in a location and setting with live broadcasting to reach a wider audience

Surfacing ideas (3 months)

- Create or use an existing outreach platform to create awareness and identify potential entrepreneurs with pitch ideas.
- Host the first pitch event
- Pair mentors with creative entrepreneurs

Launching ideas (6 months)

- Finish the pilot site (building and urban plot) to prepare it for pop-ups. Create a brand strategy and plan for the space's potential build-out.
- Stage and broadcast a kickoff event (series) to raise awareness of the new business in town
- Operate a mentorship & support course throughout the pilot

Expanding ideas (Beyond current scope)

- Procure new funds based on demonstrated success in the pilot phase
- A roadmap for each of the selected concepts is developed that matches the resource budget, timing & charter (including staffing, operations, maintenance, and employment contracts)
- Formalize the **The Retail Corridor Trust** to systematically invest in vacant retail spaces and enable creative entrepreneurs to give them a new purpose

Partnerships

The City can lead the framework and charter for **Open Tacoma** in collaboration with local and external partners. The project implementation will involve **DTP** ➡ and Community Entrepreneurs. The pitch day and program framework will involve a long list of stakeholders including **Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department** ➡, **City of Tacoma Planning & Development Services** ➡, **City of Tacoma Urban Design Studio** ➡, **City of Tacoma Mayor's Office** ➡, **Make It Tacoma** ➡, Building Owners & Developers, Funding/Grant bodies (e.g. **Community foundations** ➡), Financiers & Lenders, Community entrepreneurs and urban strategists (e.g. BLOXHUB experts)

Location

Any successful development requires the right partners willing to co-invest and open to finding collective solutions. For this reason, the city of Tacoma and involved partners should be open to developers and stakeholders with generosity and vision to bring a selected area to life.

One urban advantageous zone is marked by the Pythian Temple building and adjacent spaces at 914 Broadway and 930 Commerce

St, which connects Commerce and Broadway through the location of the existing farmers' market. It connects appealing vacant buildings on Commerce Street and planned developments on Court C. We see significant potential in crafting a cross-street focus area activated by this site as a locus for the pilot.

The BLOXHUB experts from Schmidt Hammer Lassen [↗](#) and Field States [↗](#) are available for more inspiration.

**SCHMIDT
HAMMER
LASSEN** Field States

Photo: Matthew Claudel,
Field States





Show Me Your Tacoma

→ Why

The logic is simple: the more citizens feel agency and belonging in their city, the more they invest their time, energy, and money in supporting local businesses and activities. The residents of Tacoma should be empowered to be active content-makers and civic entrepreneurs, creating a willingness for people to share their contributions with family, friends, and visitors. Engagement on this level is a key element to generate a flow of people into downtown, increasing economic, social, and cultural activity.

→ What

Show Me your Tacoma is a two-month festival celebrating Tacoma's community collective imagination and encouraging citizens to create their own content for activating unused public spaces. The festival has multiple objectives: it should stimulate people's imagination around possible uses of public spaces and draw attention and energy towards the city center and **The Broadway Trail** 🚶. The activities during the festival will attract different target groups to downtown Tacoma, and the invitation to experiment with creative projects in the urban realm will foster a sense of belonging and ownership. During two summer months, an increased downtown activity level will give visitors and residents a compelling reason to visit and extend their time downtown. The festival will also offer a variety of activities with an element of surprise and novelty, ensuring there are many reasons to go there, creating consistent foot traffic, which again contributes to a sense of safety and vibrancy that can impact new behavior and sense of place.

Citizens and professional entrepreneurs can participate in developing the festival program during its preparation. They will propose creative ideas about improving urban space; ideas that can be prototyped and tested during the festival. These ideas will demonstrate alternative uses of urban space in real life, prove feasibility, and build confidence among local businesses and residents that change is possible.

→ How

Initially, the festival could activate Theater Square on Broadway with various activities over two warm-weather months. These activities

will invite citizens and other stakeholder groups to ideate, prototype, and explore new, alternative, and complementary uses of existing spaces during the festival. A central component of this process is the **Open Call for Content** – a crowdsourcing campaign where anyone in Tacoma is invited to propose activities and content to be created and tested during the festival. The selected participants will be able to showcase their ideas and build a community around their initiatives with monetary or non-monetary support.

The geographical focus is suggested to begin at Theater Square, but applicants can also be encouraged to think about how their proposed activities could spread to other focal points in downtown Tacoma, nudging visitors to explore more parts of the area.

During the **Show Me your Tacoma** festival, **The Broadway Trail** ➡ will turn into a vibrant hot spot of programmed activities, and the City will introduce a new chapter for downtown. A chapter where experimentation, informality and community are in the forefront and where citizens and stakeholders are mobilized to take part in the ideation, planning and execution. The weekly Farmers Market on Thursdays will serve as a cornerstone event, anchoring the schedule with its established appeal. A programming team will collaborate with local stakeholders to propose additional entertaining activities, such as the Summer Bazaar in the **Open Tacoma** initiative and other relevant activities.

To ensure diverse participation individuals, groups, and organizations with talents, special interests, or creative ideas will be invited to contribute with event concepts, e.g. a glass-blowing event, a skate event etc.

As inspiration, the festival program could include activities such as:

- An outdoor long-table dinner open to everyone
- Concerts
- A skating event, glass-blowing event and/or ping pong day-tournament
- A craft market
- Outdoor seating for restaurants on Broadway
- Maker-events e.g. workshops open air, where people can build outdoor furniture
- Street theatre
- The Pitch Day from the **Open Tacoma** ➡ initiative, including presentation of business ideas and provided mentorship and support

To ensure a successful effect and outcome of **Show Me your Tacoma**, the program must be well-anchored in the existing communities, with 1–2 months dedicated to citizen engagement. This includes both offline efforts and online outreach through social

media to create awareness. A dedicated team will be responsible for curating content proposals and supporting participants in realizing the events. The latter includes mobilizing resources and funding opportunities for e.g. purchasing needed material etc. Significant reductions in car traffic and parking are needed to free space for activities, supported by the **Destination Downtown** ➡ initiative.

Rollout

The following process and timeline can guide the planning and execution of the **Show Me Your Tacoma** initiative:

Pre-launch (February-April 2025)

Organizational set-up and financial resources

- A **Show Me your Tacoma** task force is created composed of municipality employees (e.g. culture department), DTP, community representatives, retail advocate, volunteers to support with funding or offering practical help to realize initiatives
- This task force should be given an accessible place to work, located on the floor level on Broadway for people to come and visit during **Open Office** (see below)
- Gather resources and funding streams to finance temporary activations and make funding accessible to people who want to organise them. This could, for example, be done through a simple grant application system or by unlocking funding opportunities from local developers, municipalities' budgets devoted to culture, etc.
- Create seasonal paid job opportunities for homeless people, students and senior citizens to help set up the festival.

Research

- Look at archives to find inspiration for topics and content – what activities used to happen in this place? Did we celebrate any traditions and rituals? Can we propose them again in a modern light?
- Look at what was happening in earlier times when Downtown was vibrant for inspiration to reactivate what has been dying out.

Outreach, engagement & partnerships

- Convening local shop owners and stakeholders to get them involved and ideate on how synergies can be created with their planned activities and events. A dialogue with relevant partners (local businesses in Broadway, schools and young people) could be started with different groups and communities to invite them to contribute to the program e.g. through extracurricular activities.
- Create an **Open Office** – an office space open once or twice a week with representatives from **Show Me Your Tacoma** team collecting ideas for activations. People could go here to talk to local stakeholders involved in the planning of the festival, get sparring and share ideas. The open office should be located on Broadway, creating flow and activities during the pre-launch phase.
- Identify accessible parking options outside the festival area and demonstrate that they are within a 15-minute walk of downtown Broadway, encouraging new parking behaviors and ensuring convenience for visitors (see **Destination Downtown** 📍).
- Storytelling about the baseline of sales and other relevant parameters in Tacoma downtown today could be compared to the vision of Tacoma's potential to increase enthusiasm and engagement in the festival and experimental phase.

Managing the Open Call for Content process

- The “**Open Call for Content**” process includes creating branding and invitations, digital campaigns, and promotional materials. A participation guideline and application template should be developed to enable the submission of a content idea, along with a description of what should be realized and what is needed to do it.
- The launch of the festival could be in March and the announcement of the activity program in April 2025.

Execution of the festival (Maj - July 2025)

- Execution of entertainment activities and experimentation with selected creative urban space projects. During the experimentation phase, it is essential to collect data about e.g. all activities and tested solutions.

Evaluation of the festival (August 2025)

- Common reflections across stakeholders should be collected to register learnings on how the festival performed in terms of sales for local shops, foot traffic, effects on street parking versus garage parking in the area. Also learnings from the testing of urban initiatives should be registered and successful permanent installations considered.

In the longer term

- The **“Show Me Your Tacoma”** festival could be a recurring event, where citizens interact with local stakeholders and the city to share ideas and experiment on new uses of underutilized urban space.
- Experimentation with formats can unlock new funding opportunities and continuously strengthen synergies with other city activities and programs.
- Local stakeholders and the city should consider permanent locations for experiences like the festival to keep in contact with and activate the community inspired by formats tested during the two festival months, exploiting unused capacity among the citizens.
- The experiences from the reduced street parking on Broadway and other focal points downtown during the festival months could inspire and support the **Destination Downtown** ➡ initiative.

Location

Theater Square is suggested as the epicenter of the activation, but it spreads out alongside Broadway and in surrounding streets and alleys, overlapping **The Broadway Trail** ➡.

Partnerships

A festival and engagement like **Show me your Tacoma** requires partnerships with all kinds of citizens, students, business owners, organizations and the City administration. Students from graphic design could be involved in producing graphic identities and signaling for the festival and help local businesses with designing facades that illustrates a story about what happens inside. Young citizens can be engaged in producing content on SoMe and campaigns related to the 2 months' activation and collaborating with SpaceWorks could provide exhibition spaces for students.

Cultural associations, such as theater and art schools, can engage with new audiences, showcase what they offer, and test new formats and ideas.

Elderly and retired people could volunteer or receive small honorariums to help set up events and prepare for activities. Homeless people can be given small jobs to set up events, and the veteran community can also be activated by sharing skills, knowledge, or practical support.

The BLOXHUB experts from AGORA  are available for more inspiration.

ΔGORA

Tacoma Farmer's Market.



Examples of activities
for inspiration.
Photos: Unsplash





Destination Downtown

→ Why

Mobility must be reimagined in the post-COVID era to attract more visitors to downtown Tacoma and create a dynamic, inviting environment. How people travel to and from downtown is a critical factor in making the area a destination where they want to visit, linger, and return. However, post-COVID behavioral shifts have heightened mobility challenges, with many defaulting to car usage, leading to congestion and underutilized alternatives like public transport and cycling. Compounding this issue is the inefficiency of existing parking facilities, such as the Park Plaza North garage, which operates at just 60% to 80% capacity even during major events despite its proximity to key destinations.

This underutilization represents a missed opportunity to optimize mobility and accessibility. By increasing garage usage, street parking can be repurposed for dynamic uses like outdoor dining, green spaces, or pedestrian zones – enhancing the downtown experience and creating a safer, more welcoming streetscape. Strategic interventions and thoughtful placemaking will not only address immediate mobility issues but also influence long-term behavior, encouraging a shift toward sustainable transportation options and fostering a vibrant, thriving downtown.

→ What

This initiative seeks to redefine downtown Tacoma's mobility landscape, creating an accessible, sustainable, and inviting environment. At the heart of this transformation is the Commerce Street Transportation Hub (THub), which serves as a key switch point for multiple modes of transportation. A cornerstone of this effort is maximizing the utilization of existing infrastructure, particularly the underused Park Plaza North garage. By directing more users to the garage and converting more street parking to short-term use, the initiative will increase convenience for visitors, free up valuable street space for dynamic uses such as outdoor dining (see **Unveiled Patios** ➡) or green spaces, and enhance street quality and safety. These conversions will improve the downtown experience and contribute to real estate value, commercial life, and climate adaptation efforts, such as mitigating heat through greenery and improving drainage.

The THub will enable seamless transitions between travel modes—such as parking cars, using public transit, or cycling—while fostering long-term behavior changes toward more sustainable

transportation options. Visitors parking in the garage could be incentivized to use the LINK light rail for the remainder of their journey through discounts or free transit passes. Gradual improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, including well-lit and engaging walking paths (like **The Broadway trail** ➡), will encourage walking for shorter trips. Secure bike facilities and bike-sharing programs would allow cycling to be a practical and appealing alternative to driving, if the infrastructure is available and perceived as safe to use. Together, these measures aim to normalize sustainable mobility choices, reduce reliance on cars, and create a more vibrant and connected downtown experience.

→ How

This section presents actions, organized by theme, that can be implemented during the experimentation phase to address immediate mobility challenges and set the stage for long-term transformations in downtown Tacoma. The proposed steps are informed by an in-depth analysis of mobility-related challenges in Tacoma, detailed in **Appendix 9** ➡.

Coordination and engagement:

In the short term, re-engaging the Pantages Theatre or a representative of the Theatre District in the city's coordination committee is essential to align parking policies and mobility solutions with visitor and business needs. Publicly addressing how re-negotiating parking policy will enhance business attractiveness downtown can build support and awareness. The coordination committee can also be leveraged to inform customers about parking options, such as distributing parking information alongside theater ticket purchases.

Parking improvements:

Short-term actions include introducing a parking disc system distributed by local businesses to manage parking times more effectively. This system, made mandatory in specific zones, would encourage fair use of spaces. Additionally, color-coded loading zones for business deliveries should be introduced and monitored, with more two-hour spaces converted into 15-minute loading zones accompanied by clear guidance to longer-term parking options. Parking enforcement could be improved by equipping staff with bicycles or e-scooters to cover more ground efficiently.

Establishing new parking models for downtown workers and residents can also optimize parking, and pre-emptive dialogue with business owners and current and future residents should be initiated during the experimentation phase. This dialogue should focus on practical solutions, such as developing parking strategies

for business employees. For instance, off-downtown parking options combined with subsidized LINK light rail passes could free up valuable street parking for customer use. Additionally, dedicating a level of the Park Plaza North garage to residential parking at a favorable rate would not only increase the garage's utilization but also generate additional revenue and alleviate pressure on street parking.

Wayfinding and navigation:

In the short term, improved signage around the THub and Park Plaza North garage can encourage walking by displaying walking distances to nearby destinations with a clear, color-coded system. This could be implemented in connection with the **Broadway Trail** initiative. Highlighting LINK light rail destinations, such as museums, theaters, and universities, would make public transport more accessible and appealing.

Long-term actions include implementing a city-wide parking guidance system to display real-time availability and pricing zones through online platforms and physical signage. This would streamline visitor planning and reduce congestion.

Garage safety and placemaking:

In the short term, increasing security in the Park Plaza North garage should be prioritized. Measures such as installing CCTV, closing gates to deter car prowlers, and initiating a time-limited security surge with increased security staff would improve safety and provide valuable data for evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions. Improving lighting within the garage, including architectural lighting on roofed levels and along walls, can also enhance the sense of safety and reduce urination. Introducing an audio concept, such as playing music by local student bands, would make the space more inviting while discouraging loitering. Engaging local students to curate mobile exhibitions within the garage or along its access routes is another action that can increase the garage's attractiveness and integrate it into the downtown experience.

Digital tools and monitoring:

Long-term measures include developing a mobility monitoring platform to track and display transportation behavior metrics such as trips to downtown, CO2 savings, and economic benefits. This data could inform policy decisions and demonstrate the impact of mobility initiatives. Additionally, evaluating the cost-benefit of reallocating street parking to dynamic uses like outdoor dining or green spaces would provide evidence for sustainable space management.

The BLOXHUB experts from AFRY  are available for more inspiration.



Parking signage.
Photo: Unsplash.

Below:
The Tacoma Link light rail.
Photo: Matthew Claudel,
Field States.



06

Conclusion

The Tacoma Action Plan envisions a downtown alive with energy, connection, and opportunity. At its heart lies the concept of a vibrant hub along Broadway—a place where daily life comes together in harmony, offering spaces to shop, savor diverse cuisines, work, learn, and forge connections. This vision isn't just about infrastructure; it's about cultivating a thriving ecosystem that meets universal needs like safe mobility, inclusive public spaces, and culinary diversity. By creating this magnetic center of activity, Tacoma sets the stage for a flourishing downtown that not only sustains itself but inspires growth and belonging for generations to come.

The proposed initiatives reflect a holistic and interconnected approach to downtown transformation. For example, **The Broadway Trail** activates public spaces with visual landmarks and inviting walkways, while **Open Tacoma** fosters local entrepreneurship by creating pathways for creative businesses to thrive. **Show Me Your Tacoma** celebrates community creativity through engaging public events, and initiatives like the **Food Forest** and **Student Commons** ensure equitable access to amenities while fostering community pride and participation. Together, these initiatives create the foundation for a downtown that meets the needs of a growing community and reflects Tacoma's energy and ambition.

With these exciting proposals, Broadway is set to become a lively, welcoming destination. We look forward to seeing Tacoma's downtown flourish in the years to come, with streets full of activity and a community proud of what they have created. By 2028, Broadway will be a shining example of how great ideas and collaboration can transform a city.

Next steps: Supporting Implementation

Turning this vision into reality starts with collaborative action. BLOX-HUB will lead the way by facilitating an engaging support phase, bringing together the City of Tacoma and local stakeholders in focused deep-dive sessions. These sessions will center on critical priorities, including stakeholder engagement and actionable first steps for each initiative. By taking a phased and deliberate approach, Tacoma will build the momentum needed to drive progress and set a strong foundation for lasting success.

With the multi-disciplinary support from BLOXHUB experts and meaningful collaboration across the local community, Tacoma is ready to bring these transformative ideas to life. This Action Plan represents more than a set of projects; it is a blueprint for weaving individual efforts into a collective transformation. The future of Broadway starts now.

