

COLUMBIA

Civic Dialogue Results



Change.org and Mayor Rickenmann teamed up to start a conversation that crossed boundaries:

“What would **positive change** look like in Columbia?”

Get hundreds of people to share their ideas, and vote on the ideas of others.

Identify their **common interests**, despite differences on other issues.

Bring 100 people together for a conversation about those resonant issues.

Through our combined efforts,* our online platform engaged residents across the entire city.

64% of participants were from neighborhoods further from the heart of the city.

NORTH, NE, AND SOUTHEAST

DOWNTOWN, SHANDON, ETC

BLACK (39%)

WHITE (48%)

OTHER (13%)

18-24 25-39 40-64 (51%)

65+ (33%)

***social media ads, flyers, mailing lists, etc**

Housing not for the students downtown or ones who can afford. We need more low income living in downtown Columbia and our seniors.

Greenways need to connect around Columbia, allowing people to walk, run and bike between isolated developed areas currently accessible by car and limited parking.

Rent control, and implement programs that favor tenants instead of landlords. Many landlords are not held accountable for providing the services obligated to a tenant by the SC Code of Laws.

In Phase 1, we received

696 IDEAS

from over **1.8K residents.**

Saint
desired. We
ions and

Try to attra
store to mo
within wall
Street resic
bus depot t

Funding and volunteer resources for homeowners who are cited or ticketed for ordinance violations. Not everyone can afford the many repairs that the enforcement officers insist on.

Add public restrooms and access to clean water stations throughout the city - convenient for tourists/shoppers, increases dignity for the homeless and creates jobs for maintenance...

Clean up vacant lots in low-income neighborhoods in the city. This will lead to less pests and bugs, safer neighborhoods, and better visual appeal so that those lots may be built upon.

HOUSING
(44 ideas)

TRANSPORTATION
(39 ideas)

PEDESTRIAN ISSUES
(34 ideas)

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
(29 ideas)

...INFRASTRUCTURE, RECREATION, THE ENVIRONMENT,
TRAFFIC, AND MORE

The ideas reflected a
comprehensive vision of
what Columbia needs to
thrive.

*not to scale

Not everyone has the same priorities...

Our analysis identified **three groups** with different voting patterns:

The Pragmatists

Generally more hesitant to vote for big changes.

Unique priorities: homelessness, parking

The Good-Lifers

Most enthusiastic about change across the board – low pass rates, high agreement.

Unique priorities: bike and pedestrian issues, beautification

The Urbanists

Often in favor of ideas related to urban development and green transportation.

Unique priorities: housing, transportation, trash & recycling.

The goal wasn't just to see what is popular—it's to find where people agree even when they disagree elsewhere.

We are looking for the specific ideas that receive support across residents with different priorities and perspectives.

These are called “unifying ideas.” Unifying ideas can help communities move forward together.

Unifying Ideas

These are the ideas that were popular across all groups, regardless of other differences.*

#1

Ensure that we're providing opportunities for local businesses to flourish and not just large chains **(81% SUPPORT)**

*Scores reflect the minimum support across the groups; rankings account for pass/rates.

**Duplicates not included in this list.

2. Beautify Columbia's entry points, not just the newly designed and installed Welcome to Columbia sign but with attractive landscape features and fixed up roads and bridges—particularly the entry off 126 **(70%)**
3. Build a safe, wide, well-lit sidewalk/path connecting Main Street, Finley Park, and the canal Riverwalk park, with revamped pedestrian crossings at Huger and Assembly and trees along the path **(69%)**
4. Beautify Elmwood as a key entryway, improving medians and overall appearance to make a better first impression **(64%)**
5. Prohibit smoke and vape shops around any schools **(63%)**
6. Focus on dense, walkable, and mixed-use development to build communities and reduce traffic **(63%)**
7. Plant more trees—especially nut- and fruit-producing trees—to help address food deserts, reduce allergens, and leverage partnerships and grants **(62%)**
8. Enforce traffic laws, especially red light violations **(62%)**
9. Attract and diversify corporate headquarters in high-tech sectors like programming, fintech, graphics, cybersecurity, and medtech **(61%)**
10. Hold slumlords accountable with stronger tenant protections, including limits on large rent increases and addressing poor housing conditions **(61%)**

Unifying Ideas

These are the ideas that were popular across all groups, regardless of other differences.*

#1

Ensure that we're providing opportunities for local businesses to flourish and not just large chains. **(81% SUPPORT)**

*Scores reflect the minimum support across the groups; rankings account for pass/rates.

**Duplicates not included in this list.

2. Reduce homelessness by pairing housing-first programs with coordinated services—while keeping parks, sidewalks, and neighborhoods safe and accessible. **(81%)**
2. Make it easy for Columbians to travel between neighborhoods without a car **(78%)**
3. Modernize Columbia's infrastructure by coordinating road work, utilities, and resurfacing to reduce repeat construction and wasted dollars **(74%)**
4. Grow a diverse housing stock—starter homes, workforce housing, and family units—so teachers, workers, and seniors can afford to live in Columbia **(74%)**
5. Beautify Columbia's entry points, not just the newly designed and installed Welcome to Columbia sign but with attractive landscape features and fixed up roads and bridges—particularly the entry off 126 **(70%)**
6. Build a safe, wide, well-lit sidewalk/path connecting Main Street, Finley Park, and the canal Riverwalk park, with revamped pedestrian crossings at Huger and Assembly and trees along the path **(69%)**
7. Implement a comprehensive and realistic plan to repair and update the aged, derelict infrastructure of the city water/sewer delivery systems and road repair/replacement, requiring better agency coordination **(67%)**
8. Provide home-buying assistance to Columbians who intend to stay in the neighborhood for a long time **(66%)**
9. Beautify Elmwood as a key entryway, improving medians and overall appearance to make a better first impression **(64%)**

Finding common ground on practical improvements is the first step in moving past the noise of typical social media. However, listening at scale also reveals deeper "resonant" themes—issues that appeared frequently across all groups, even when neighbors disagreed on the specific solution.

Resonant issues represent the core challenges the community faces, and help us to decide what will work through together as we move from digital voting to a live deliberation.

Resonant Issues

Based on the unifying ideas, we found **specific topics** that were backed up by other statements:

Small Business Corridors: Support small, local businesses in fulfilling neighborhood needs.

Affordable Housing: Make housing accessible to seniors and people with lower incomes.

Pedestrian Safety: More and safer sidewalks to connect the city.

Riverfront Development: Business and recreation on the Congaree.

Food Deserts: Make healthy food easier to access.

Better Infrastructure: Improve Columbia's roads, bridges, utilities, etc.

Parks: Funding and activating green spaces for everyone's benefit, especially youth.

Housing

Be inclusive with the housing that is being built and ensure that it is open to and affordable for all; whether USC students or working people or seniors. Housing must be available and affordable for everyone.

90% ✓

Rent caps! No one's rent should increase more than \$25 a month. People cannot afford these 100+ a month yearly increases when leases renew.

91% ✓

We don't need any more luxury apartments or student apartments. Build more market-rate and attainable housing instead.

91% ✓

Sidewalks

Create more/expand existing pedestrian pathways (especially in high traffic areas around Rosewood/USC) to allow safer foot travel. Fund more accessible public transit that reaches ALL areas of the city!!

98% ✓

Create a few key bicycle/pedestrian overpasses so the flow can move more safely and quickly across Gervais, Huger and connect the parks.

98% ✓

Make the city more walking friendly and less motorized by creating larger and more pavements for pedestrians to walk between neighborhoods and strip malls. The stores in Harbison are extremely unsafe for pedestrians walking between stores

91% ✓

Riverfront

Downtown riverfront needs to be developed, with a natural setting, but also as a destination. Shops, restaurants further back, but with ample parking, benches and restrooms. The whole city would benefit.

92% ✓

Develop a Riverside District that enhances public access, supports local businesses, and creates a vibrant destination for residents and visitors along the river.

91% ✓

Bring businesses/development to the river-similar to Greenville, Chicago, Pittsburgh, etc. We have three gorgeous rivers that are underrepresented.

91% ✓

Food Deserts

Repair food deserts by ensuring public transport from areas without grocery stores within a 10 min walk. Incentivize local grocers to open and operate in underserved areas.

94% ✓

Try to attract another grocery store to move in downtown within walking distance of Main Street residents.

95% ✓

Have a local grocery store from local farmers (Publix is too expensive).

91% ✓

Infrastructure

Fix the potholes in the roads in a timely manner!

99% ✓

Bury power lines and mast arm traffic signals wherever possible, but especially in the main tourism corridors - Devine Street, Gervais Street, Assembly, etc...

93% ✓

Modernize Columbia's infrastructure by coordinating road work, utilities, and resurfacing to reduce repeat construction and wasted dollars.

97% ✓

Parks

Fix up the playgrounds that are already there. Make it more inclusive for younger children. Add swing sets to some of these parks. I shouldn't have to pay \$4 so she can play outside safely.

100% ✓

More green spaces! More parks. More areas for people to be outside and active, with places for them to cool off during the summer.

93% ✓

Evaluate quality/distribution of parks & green spaces in the city with resident input; list short-term/long-term goals to make sure every resident has easy access to a park; leverage local dollars with other funding sources to implement.

88% ✓

Of everything we heard,

Business Revitalization

emerged as the topic to talk about next.

- **RELEVANT**

All groups consistently responded to this topic more than others, and tended to agree with the proposals (around supporting small businesses, addressing gaps in neighborhoods, etc).

- **ACTIONABLE**

The city has more direct control over policies and programs to support businesses development via the Office of Business Opportunity, Economic Development, and others.

- **COMPLEX**

There are important tradeoffs to consider regarding where and how “revitalization” happens, how to sustain a stable and supportive small business presence, and more.

Running the Civic Dialogue

On March 21, 2026, 88 Columbia residents came together on Zoom to discuss what the city could do to revitalize neighborhood business corridors throughout the city. [Change.org](https://www.change.org) specifically recruited a group that reflected the city in terms of age, sex, race, and political leaning.

The set of policy options they discussed was determined through community input and expert conversations. Participants were provided briefing material to ensure a more informed discussion.

Discussions were held primarily within small groups of 6-8 residents, over the course of four focused breakout sessions. Each session was focused on a different aspect of the problem: neighborhood needs, public vs private control, funding mechanisms, and shorter-term interventions.

What the participants wanted to talk about...

When these Columbia residents came together to discuss this issue, they tended to agree that these topics were important concerns regarding the city's business corridors.

Note that this is a non-exhaustive list, but represents some of the major themes – [many of which were eventually addressed by the policies they supported.](#)

Walkability as Economic Development

Participants consistently linked walkable streetscapes — sidewalks, shade trees, lighting, safe crossings — directly to business viability. When people feel safe walking, they patronize local businesses; when they don't, they drive to Harbison or Lexington and spend money there instead.

Oversaturation of Low-Value Businesses

Dollar stores, car washes, payday lenders, and gas stations were cited across groups as overwhelming certain corridors. Many residents argued these businesses extract value from neighborhoods without providing the services communities actually need.

Unequal Investment Across Neighborhoods

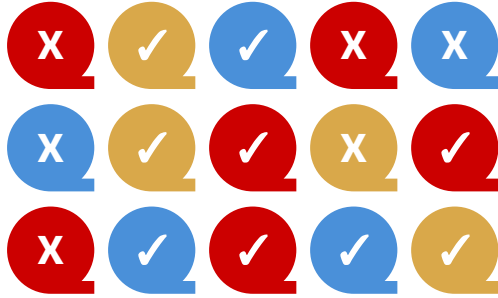
Participants noted that areas like the Vista, Five Points, and Forest Acres receive sustained investment while neighborhoods like North Main, Broad River, Garners Ferry, and the Northeast are left behind. There were strong calls for the city to distribute development incentives to areas that need it.

The Need for Community Voice

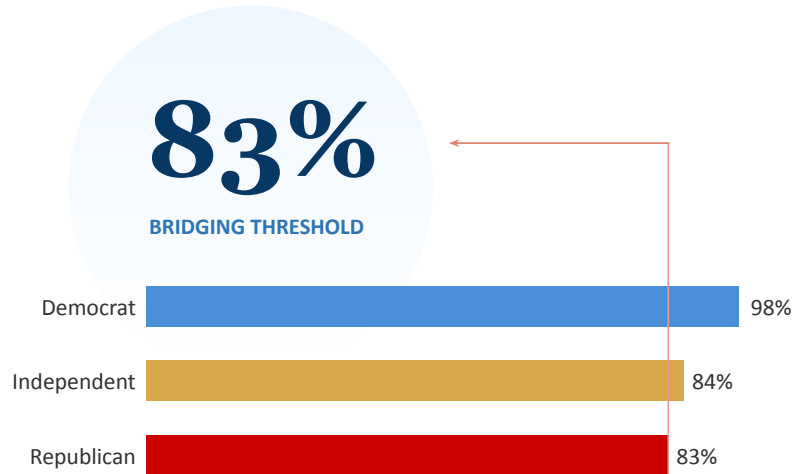
Residents across Columbia want meaningful input into what businesses open in their neighborhoods. The current approach — letting the market decide — has created corridors filled with businesses nobody asked for and nobody wants, while the services communities actually need go unfilled.

UNDERSTANDING THE Bridging Score

WE SHOULD PLANT MORE TREES IN COLUMBIA.



After the Dialogue, we polled all participants on **24 unique policy positions** related to business revitalization, derived from our research on the issue.



We found the percentage of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans who supported these statements, and then used the lowest of those as the “bridging score”. **This way, we only presented policies that all groups had significant support for** (though all policies have been included in the final report).

13 Policy Recommendations For Columbia's Commercial Corridors

Infrastructure & Design

Invest in Walkable Commercial Streets	89%
Invest in Infrastructure in Priority Corridors	83%
Create Mixed Use Corridors through Zoning	81%

Funding Mechanisms

Require Community Benefits Agreements	89%
Negotiate Payments in Lieu of Taxes	87%
Invest in Underserved Neighborhoods	77%

We polled all participants on relevant policy options to this issue, and for each one we took the lowest level of support across political orientations as the “bridging score.”

13 out of 24 policies had supermajority support (67%+).

Modifying Business Mix

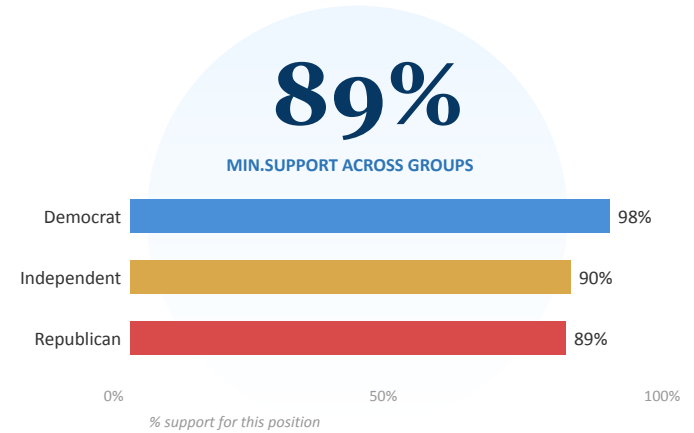
Restrict Oversaturated Business Types	87%
Create Targeted Business Incentives	81%
Formal Resident Input on Business Mix	78%
First Right of Refusal for Local Developers	78%

Stimulating Business

Expand Temporary Use Permits	81%
Fund Business Recruitment Staff	77%
Fund the Commercial Facade Loan Program	68%

#1 Walkable Commercial Streets

Invest in redesigning commercial streets to be more walkable and inviting — including continuous sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, and burying overhead utility lines.



Why Columbia residents support this:

“The main issue that I think prevents me from patronizing local businesses as much as I would like is the fact that Cottontown is very boxed in, because you have Main to the west, Bull to the east, and Elmwood to the south, and those are all very wide, very driver-centric corridors. And if you're trying to cross any of those, you feel like you're taking your life in your own hands a little bit. There's not very many crosswalks, there's not very many facilities for that — it's designed to get people in and out of town. So I definitely think there's a need to think about making areas more walkable.”

“I also think there's so much in this area, like the Five Points kind of area, and there's like no parking for any of it, and it's just kind of overcrowded. No sidewalks, no parking spaces, and if you go out at nighttime there's barely any light, so you're just like in the dark and you're walking in the middle of the road because there's no sidewalks. So I would think, just safety-wise — more lights, parking spaces, and sidewalks. Because mixing all of that while being nighttime, it's kind of like — I think it's a hazard.”

— Male, 40–65, Hyatt Park
Group 3

Female, 18–24, Olympia-Granby
Group 2

#2 Infrastructure in Priority Corridors

Invest in upgrading water, sewer, and transit infrastructure in priority corridors so these areas can support the denser housing and commercial development needed to attract new businesses.

Why Columbia residents support this:

"My biggest sort of hope out of all of this is just the city recognizes that we need to invest in the infrastructure and the environment to make this happen. The basic city services to keep everything going are what's going to make it attractive to business, rather than just sort of paying them to get here. At least, that's the way I feel."

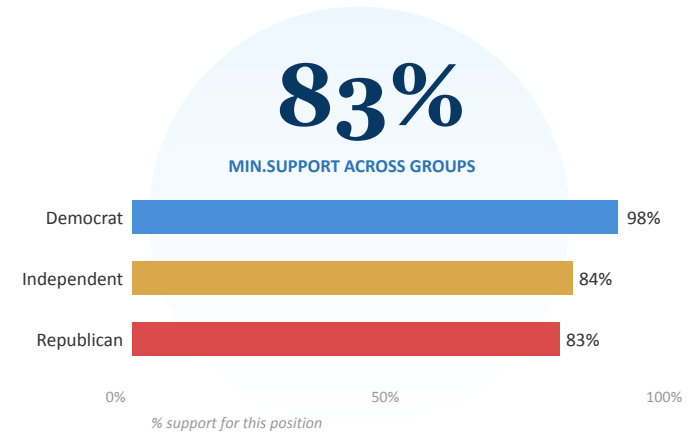
"Throughout the city of Columbia, we have a lot of housing coming up. Oftentimes they even would tear down old housing and build up new housing, which is a good idea, but if you don't have the roads to support you, if you don't have the infrastructure to support all of the increase in the cars and the increase in traffic, that's not helping."

"The public transport is fairly lacking out here, and there's a few bus stops. Houston is a good example — they've done a huge revitalization of their metro and they cover a much wider area than Columbia does. They have dedicated bus lanes, there's fewer stops that makes the buses go faster, they revamped the stations."

— Male, 25–39, Earlewood
Group 2

— Female, 40–65, Northeast
Group 11

— Male, 25–39, Northeast
Group 1



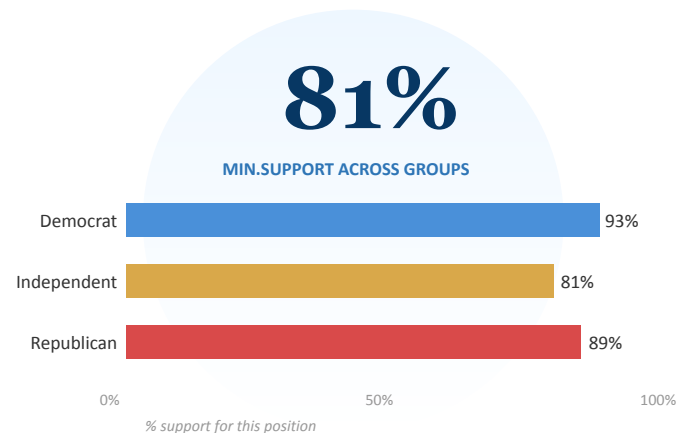
#3 Expand Mixed-Use Zoning

Expand mixed-use zoning to allow housing, shops, and offices within the same building or block in more parts of the city, creating a built-in customer base for local businesses.

Why Columbia residents support this:

"That's where they're putting their medium- and high-density housing. There's apartments behind Cardinal Crossing, the new mall development is going to include some denser apartment-style housing. So they're doing it the right way: where there are larger centers of commerce, more businesses, you're trying to also deliver more residents directly to that area. I think that's a good growth strategy."

— Male, 25–39, Earlewood
Group 2



"The city I grew up in... did what they called a "one-three," where they converted the bottom floor to city-owned retail and then the next three floors above were all converted to condos or apartments. And the city would either rent or sell the condos and then they would manage the businesses underneath. So your landlord would be the city — it's easier to deal with than having an independent. And they found that their downtown expanded three times as fast organically, because a lot of the red tape was kind of cut out."

— Male, 25–39, Harbison
Group 6

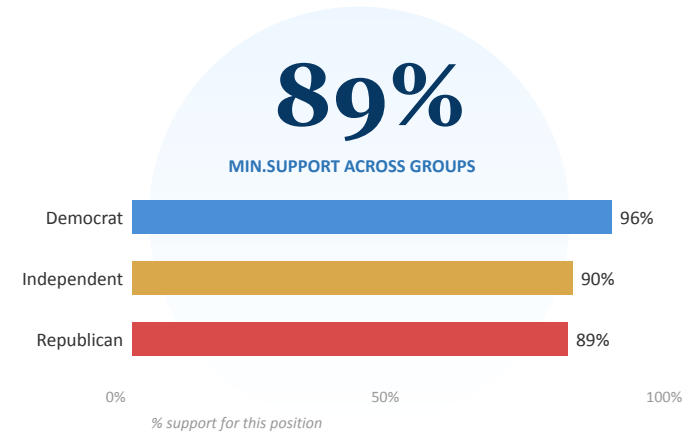
#1 Community Benefits Agreements

Require developers who receive tax breaks or subsidies from the city to provide specific community benefits in return — such as affordable commercial space, local hiring, or public amenities — through formal Community Benefits Agreements.

Why Columbia residents support this:

“Community benefits agreements may be more suitable for having a mutually beneficial relationship with corporations — say Walmart. So if we wanted to bring a new Walmart in, we should mandate the community benefit agreements for, say in this instance, Walmart, so that they are required to provide something of substantial and consistent nature to the community beyond just...”

— Female, 25–39, Southeast
Group 1

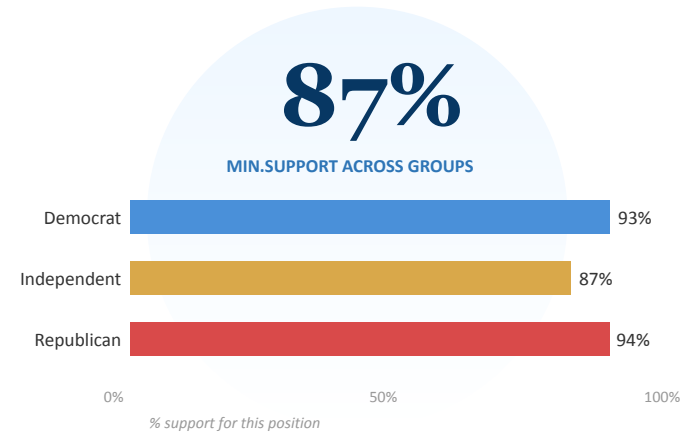


“I think that when we go back to the conversations about bringing Walmarts and Target into our neighborhoods and city, I think we should start to hold these places accountable — hold these places accountable by saying that if you're going to come into our neighborhood, you should be able to give something back to the community. Because a lot of these big chains like Walmart, Target, et cetera... they don't really do anything with the community. They don't invest anything with our school districts or anything like that.”

— Male, 25–39, Northeast
Group 6

#2 Payments in lieu of Taxes

Negotiate agreements with major tax-exempt institutions — like the University of South Carolina — to make regular payments toward city services and neighborhood investments.



Why Columbia residents support this:

“One of the problems that we had with development in the city is the churches and universities do not pay taxes. They can enter voluntary agreements — such as USC does contribute a little bit, and they pay for police and fire, but not nowhere near [proportional to] the size that they take up.”

“Does a place like USC — is there a level of obligation we should set because of the volume of economic development that they bring to the city? Are they going to counterbalance that? If they're buying up 10 buildings, are they reinvesting anywhere around it, or are they just letting things shake out as they shake out? I just think there needs to be some accountability there instead of just throwing up apartments and buildings.”

“We deal with the added traffic and the added people, and one thing about transient people that come in — they don't always value what we value the same. So it becomes a little difficult. If we've got to put up with the change of lifestyle, I guess would be the best way to put it politely, there should be some incentive from them to help us who have to deal with it all. And I think the payments in lieu of taxes would be a great way for the college, for sure.”

— Male, 65+, University Hill
Group 5

— Male, 40–65, Shandon
Group 10

— Male, 25–39, Harbison
Group 6

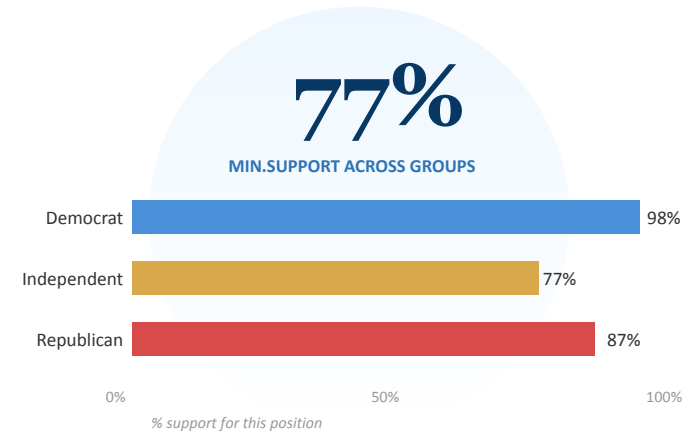
#3 Equitable Neighborhood Investment

When the city offers development incentives, historically underserved neighborhoods should receive at least the same level of support as wealthier areas.

Why Columbia residents support this:

"It seems like they do take some of these approaches in certain areas versus other areas. And so then I guess my question would be, I wonder what are the requirements, or how does the city decide which areas they want to build up and want to invest in versus others? What does that process look like?"

— Female, 25–39, Eau Claire
Group 5

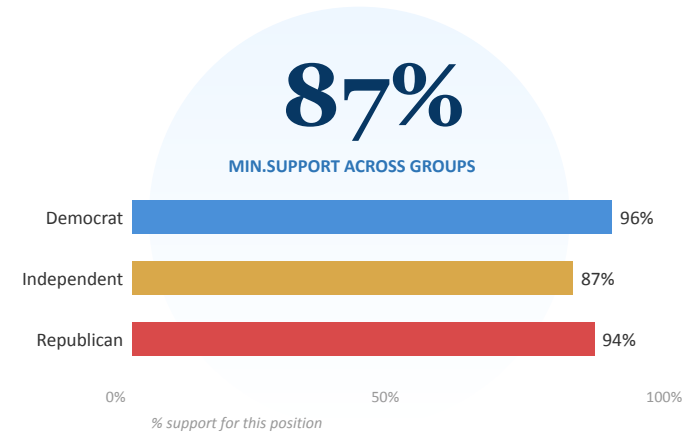


"I think too, if the city were to approach these corridors — the people that live in those areas — just that approach, just them coming to the people and saying, "We're looking into this and we want your input," it would make people feel better about where they live."

— Female, 65+, near Dutch Square Mall
Group 3

#1 Restrict Oversaturated Business Types

Restrict or limit specific types of businesses (e.g., gas stations, car washes, etc.) in certain areas when there are too many of them.



Why Columbia residents support this:

"What everybody's saying about encouraging certain kinds of businesses and discouraging others — I mean, as I said before, we've got two predatory title loan places, a dollar store, and two auto parts stores in our neighborhood, and that's pretty much all we've got. We just need to find — the market is not working to bring the things that we need."

"We need less Dollar Generals and less vape shops. I see a lot of lower-income people, and I see Dollar General, which is full of very processed food that's not good for you — some of it's kind of expired because it's like the stuff that was left over — and then there's vape shops out the wazoo, and they're bright and loud and ugly, and they're just everywhere here, and it makes our neighborhood not look friendly or inviting."

"I think absolutely the city needs to have more control over that. Otherwise, what do we see? We see what we have always seen, and that's predatory businesses that show up, especially in neighborhoods where they have the least amount of advocacy power to keep them out. And that's alcohol-related, tobacco-related, these predatory stores — rent-to-own places, payday loans — things that even shouldn't be allowed but are. So I'll make my vote there: the city needs to have more control."

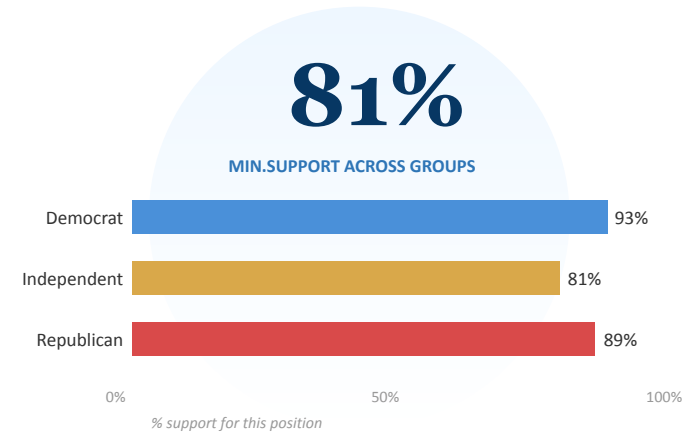
— Male, 65+, Hyatt Park
Group 1

— Female, 25–39, Northeast
Group 10

— Male, 40–65
Group 15

#2 Targeted Business Incentives

Offer targeted incentives (tax discounts or waivers) for businesses that meet specific community needs, such as stores selling fresh produce or neighborhood health clinics.



Why Columbia residents support this:

"So [Atlanta] partnered with this private retailer, and the city provided basically all the startup costs for this grocery store — the building, the equipment, things like that — but the private retailer, they're the ones who were running the store the whole time. And so this took a huge load off that company, because — what's the stat, like 20% of businesses fail in the first year and half within five years? And so the city's goal is for them to be fully self-sustaining within three years."

"You're going to have to have incentives to get businesses to come in. And for smaller mom-and-pop businesses, you're going to probably — and most people don't like to think about it — but you're going to have to think about maybe some sort of incentives, just like they do with the developers that took over Bull Street. They've got incentives. Scout Motors, they've got incentives. You've got to have a way to kind of level the playing field for that business until it can become stable and then find its own path."

"It has to be some type of a tax break, as well, for some of these small businesses to come into these places. I'm surrounded by North Main and Farrow, and there's a lot of empty spaces on Farrow that could really go — from Harden going down to I-20, what could be done in those places? That would be a great place for a coffee shop, and I'm not talking about the Starbucks..."

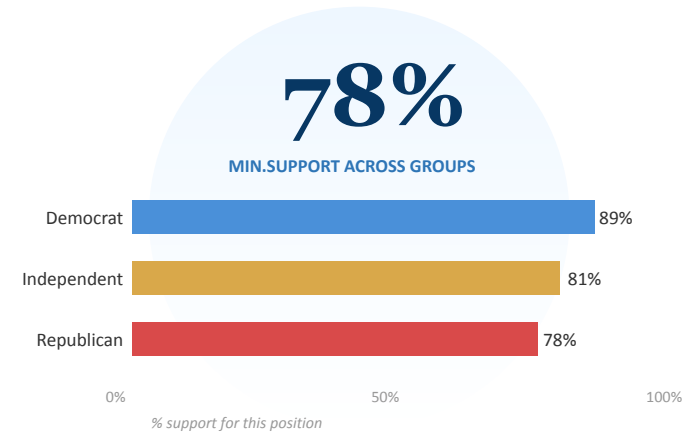
— Male, 25–39, Northeast
Group 1

— Male, 40–65, Waverly District
Group 15

— Male, 40–65, Greenview
Group 11

#3 Local-First Bidding Window

Give Columbia-based developers and community organizations a window to bid first on newly available commercial properties in priority corridors before outside developers can compete.



Why Columbia residents support this:

"I think Columbia focused so much on small business community, which is great — I love that, because a lot of cities of this size don't really even care about small businesses. But also we have to broaden that and look beyond South Carolina. Like the Bull Street development — why is that a Greenville developer? Why couldn't that be a Columbia developer?"

"I also want the city and other local government — if they're going to take over a space like that, have it not all just be their offices. Like, if you have a land trust of Columbia Mall, put grants or applications out for people to go in there, and not just it being the magistrate's office or the police station. Because I feel like Sand Hills is such a good opportunity for a government entity to buy that as a land trust and then fill it with incubator spaces."

"Our landlords, they had moved somewhere to China, so they weren't even in the United States anymore, and they hadn't been in the United States for over two years. So why is somebody in China the one handling the rent and stuff that we're having to put in Columbia? And it's just being funneled out of Columbia into a different area. And then they buy up a bunch of places and none of the revenue goes back into Columbia."

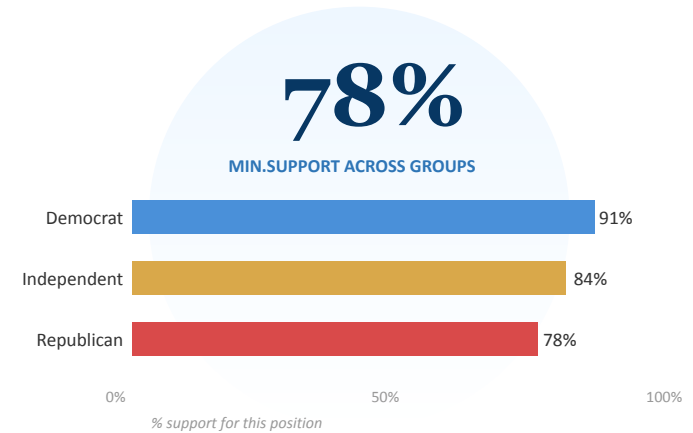
— Male, 25–39, Wood Creek Farms
Group 2

— Female, 25–39, Northeast
Group 10

— Female, 18–24, Northwest
Group 16

#4 Formal Resident Input on Business Mix

Residents should have a formal role in decisions about what types of businesses are allowed to open in their neighborhoods.



Why Columbia residents support this:

"We are operating from a conviction that our neighborhoods are not just economic zones ripe to be extracted. North Main particularly has had bad experiences with tax incentives that get abused, and then the ten-year contract ends and the business leaves. Or these stores come in and they don't actually care for the grounds or the community that they're based in."

"I saw... a post about how the city or governing organization put out a questionnaire by putting a little chart in a common place in a community, where community members took a sticker and put their vote via the sticker on the type of business that they would want in said building. They just literally voted using stickers from people who commuted in that area to select the business they want. I think that's a great, direct approach to kind of figure out what the immediate residents want."

"I just wanted to circle back, because they were like, 'Do we let the market decide, or does the city have a say?' And I think the city definitely should have a say, but with community input, because I think we've seen what the natural market is — you'll get five vape shops, 10 auto body shops, 10 AutoZones, and a high concentration of a lot of stupid things and nothing of what the community needs."

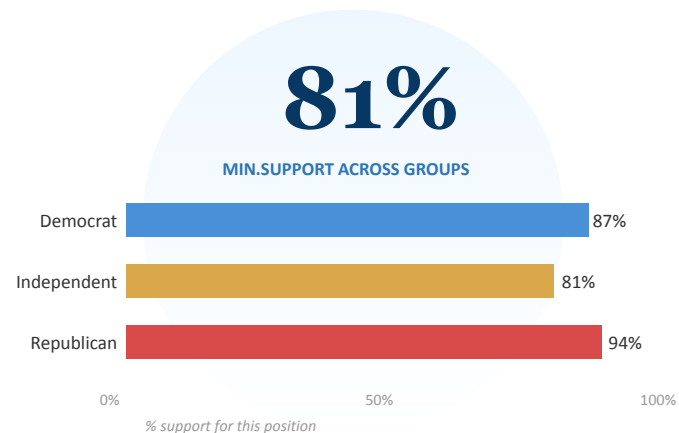
— Male, 25–39, Hyatt Park
Group 11

— Female, 25–39, Southeast
Group 1

— Female, 40–65, Northeast
Group 14

#1 Expand Temporary Use Permits

Expand the use of temporary use permits to allow pop-up retail, markets, and events in vacant storefronts and empty lots.



Why Columbia residents support this:

“If there are empty lots, doing something with them and not just letting them sit there — seeing if we can bring mobile markets out, maybe having the pop-up shops there, or resource fairs where businesses can come and share what they’re doing, share their services. Or if it’s in a food desert, bring the mobile markets out, bring the gardeners out...”

“Like you said with Soda City — people kind of test the waters at those once-a-week markets, and they see what they’re able to actually sell. A lot of those food trucks go and become restaurants and brick-and-mortar shops. I wonder if weekly markets could be a good way to assess what a certain area is able to support.”

“When I lived in Atlanta, they had — they called them flea markets, but it was kind of like an indoor market. They took an old grocery store, like an old Walmart or old grocery store, and there were tons of independent small businesses or vendors inside. Each side of town had one. You could get literally whatever you wanted — fresh fruit, clothes — there were restaurants inside. So it was kind of that thing, but it wasn’t a temporary thing. The vendors would kind of come and go sometimes, but the actual space itself was always available.”

— Female, 25–39, Eau Claire
Group 6

— Female, 25–39, North Main
Group 10

— Female, 40–65, Hopkins
Group 12

#2 Hire More Support for Business Recruitment

Fund dedicated staff and programs — similar to what the Main Street District does downtown — to actively recruit and support businesses in underserved commercial corridors across the city.

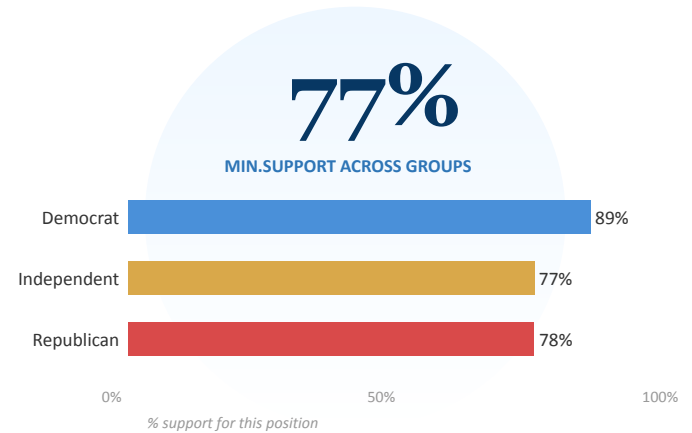
Why Columbia residents support this:

"I think the city should also recruit. They should try to actively get out there and recruit different types of businesses. And they've got a vision — they can say, 'We'd like to have X amount of grocery stores and X amount of retail spaces, pop-ups.' But I think absolutely there needs to be some sort of recruiting. We recruit other large businesses to come into the state — why can't we do [that with] smaller business within the city?"

— Female, 40–65, Downtown
Group 15

"The other thing I was kind of struck by is the potential we have, especially in the North Main area, of buildings that are sitting vacant — that if the city could set up some type of micro business incubator, so people can not only spend their money in this neighborhood but also make money in this neighborhood."

— Male, 40–65, Hyatt Park
Group 1



"The most successful thing that the city has ever done was the development of the Vista. It was actually featured in a national magazine as one of the worst slums in the United States, and now it's a thriving neighborhood. It was done through what's called a PUD — it's a special district that is given tax incentives and usually also has a recruiter-developer, which is a city employee trying to manage that."

— Male, 65+, University Hill
Group 5

#3 Re-fund the Commercial Facade Loan Program

Fund the "Commercial Retention & Redevelopment" program which provides forgivable loans to commercial property owners or tenants to upgrade building exteriors (windows, lighting, signage, awnings).

Why Columbia residents support this:

"The idea of requiring — if you give a property owner a tax break, to require them to put money back in the buildings — that makes sense too, right? A way to avoid neglect. Again, I remember downtown 25 years ago and everything was falling apart, and now a lot of the places that were looking really, really terrible look much better because of incentivizing repairing stuff."

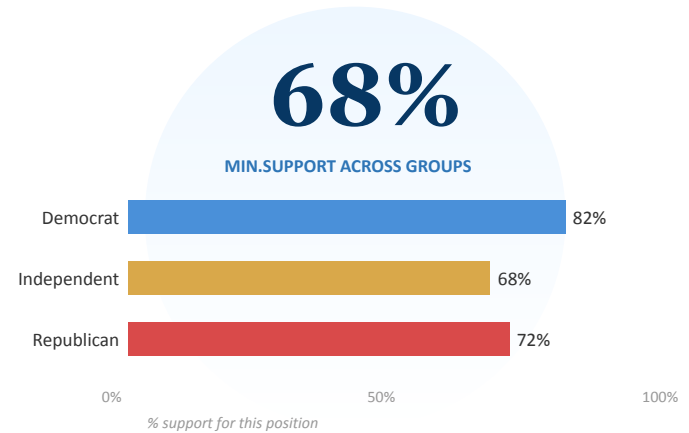
"Sometimes it's not about how much money we can spend — it's maybe reallocating where things are located so people will take pride in where they actually are. If you have a storefront that's got litter and junk all around it, you're not going to want to go in that storefront."

"I'm big on beautification. When you come into a city — say you're driving down I-26 and you're coming into Spartanburg — you want to see a nice... Beautification says a lot about the city. When you're coming in and you don't see any abandoned, broken-down buildings — because when you drive into small cities, that's what you see a lot of."

— Male, 40–65, Bradley
Group 7

— Male, 25–39, Harbison
Group 6

— Male, 40–65, Northeast
Group 8



These policies & positions did **not** meet the bridging threshold.

In other words, at least one group (of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents) had **less than 66% support** for these policies.

Long-term public investments — like sidewalks, street lighting, and streetscaping — do more for neighborhood revitalization than short-term business incentives like tax breaks or grants.	65%
Create publicly managed land trusts — organizations that buy and hold commercial property on behalf of a community — in priority corridors to prevent speculation and give neighborhoods more control over what opens there.	61%
Freeze property tax increases for commercial property owners who invest significantly — at least 20% of their building's assessed value — into rehabilitating their properties in priority corridors (aka Bailey Bill).	61%
When a neighborhood lacks essential services, getting those services filled quickly matters more than whether the businesses are locally owned.	61%
The city should actively influence what kinds of businesses open in different neighborhoods, rather than leaving those decisions entirely to market forces.	58%
The city should adopt a formal policy requiring that a minimum share of development incentives — such as tax abatements, infrastructure spending, and forgivable loans — be directed to underserved commercial corridors before wealthier areas.	58%
My neighborhood's primary business corridor is lacking essential services like grocery stores, restaurants, or community gathering spaces	56%
Place limits on the number of national chains for retail, food, and services in priority corridors.	56%
Some public investment in business corridors is justified even if it means redirecting funds from other priorities.	52%
Allow the city to borrow money through bond financing to make large, concentrated investments in priority corridors now, with repayment spread over time.	48%
Revitalization efforts should prioritize locally-owned businesses over national chains, even if national chains could fill gaps faster.	44%

Now that we're done, What's Next?

- We've already shared these results with Mayor Rickenmann, who will be using this information to inform his priorities for business revitalization throughout the city.
- The data from both phases – all of the ideas, votes from Phase 1 plus recommendations from the Civic Dialogue – will be available at www.ideasforchange.org/columbia. Members of the public are encouraged to follow-up.

Thank you!

To Mayor Rickenmann, his office, all our community partners, and every person who shared their ideas and enthusiasm throughout this process.

If you have any questions, reach out at info@ideasforchange.org.