



Montgomery Planning Upcounty Division



# Damascus Placemaking Festival

Final Report to the Planning Board



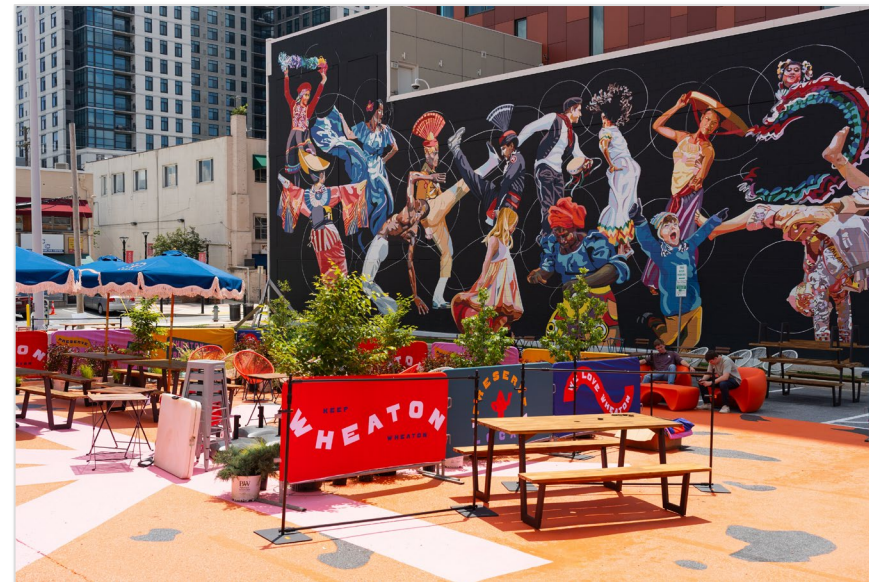




# What is Placemaking?

- Channels the community's assets, **vision** inspirations, and potential
- Strengthens **connections** between people and the places around them
- Creates vibrant public spaces that **reflect the community's** identity
- Inspires **long-term change** by testing short-term on-the-ground possibilities
- Placemaking is **planning in action**

“Placemaking is the act of improving a common space to make it welcoming and attractive, so it better serves the needs of the people who use it.”





# Report Contents

Project Background

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Measuring Impact

Recommendations





# Team + Partners

## Montgomery Planning Team

Audrey Vogel - Lead Planner  
Florence Dwyer - Transportation Lead  
Mark Beall - Planner IV  
Don Zeigler Planning - Supervisor  
Patrick Butler – Upcounty Division Chief  
Atul Sharma - Chief of Design, Placemaking & Policy

## Consultant Team

PJ Benenati - Design Collective  
Dayanara Padilla – Design Collective  
Tiara Rachman – Design Collective  
Graham Coreil-Allen - Graham Projects  
Melvin Jadulang – Graham Projects

## Agencies

Montgomery Parks  
Montgomery County Department of Recreation  
Upcounty Regional Services Center  
MDOT State Highway Administration  
MCDOT & Ride On  
Montgomery County Police Department  
Montgomery County Fire & Rescue

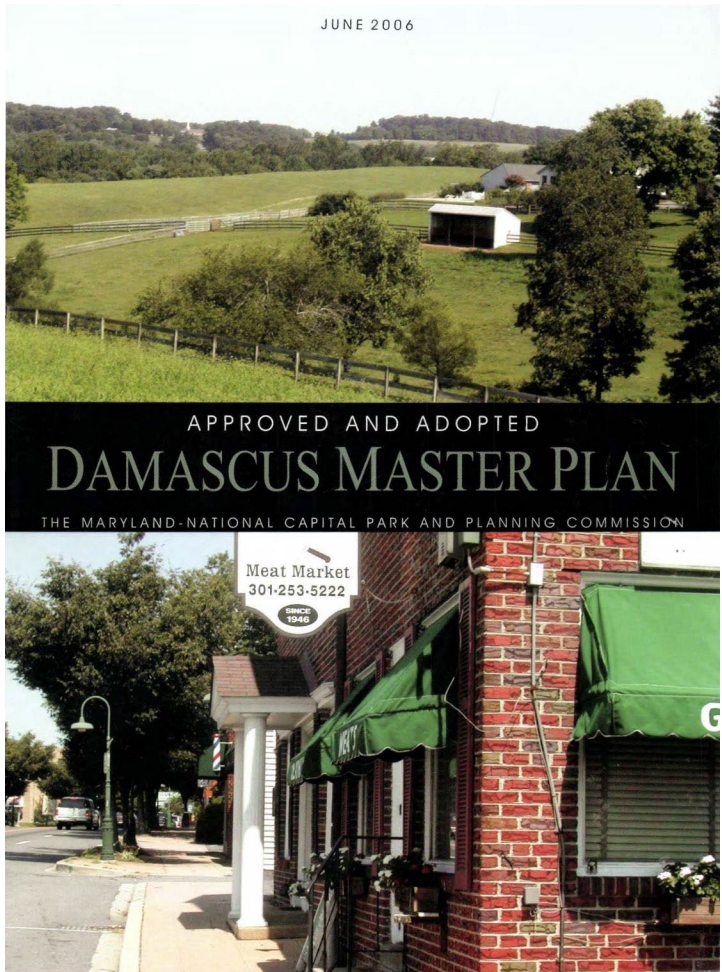
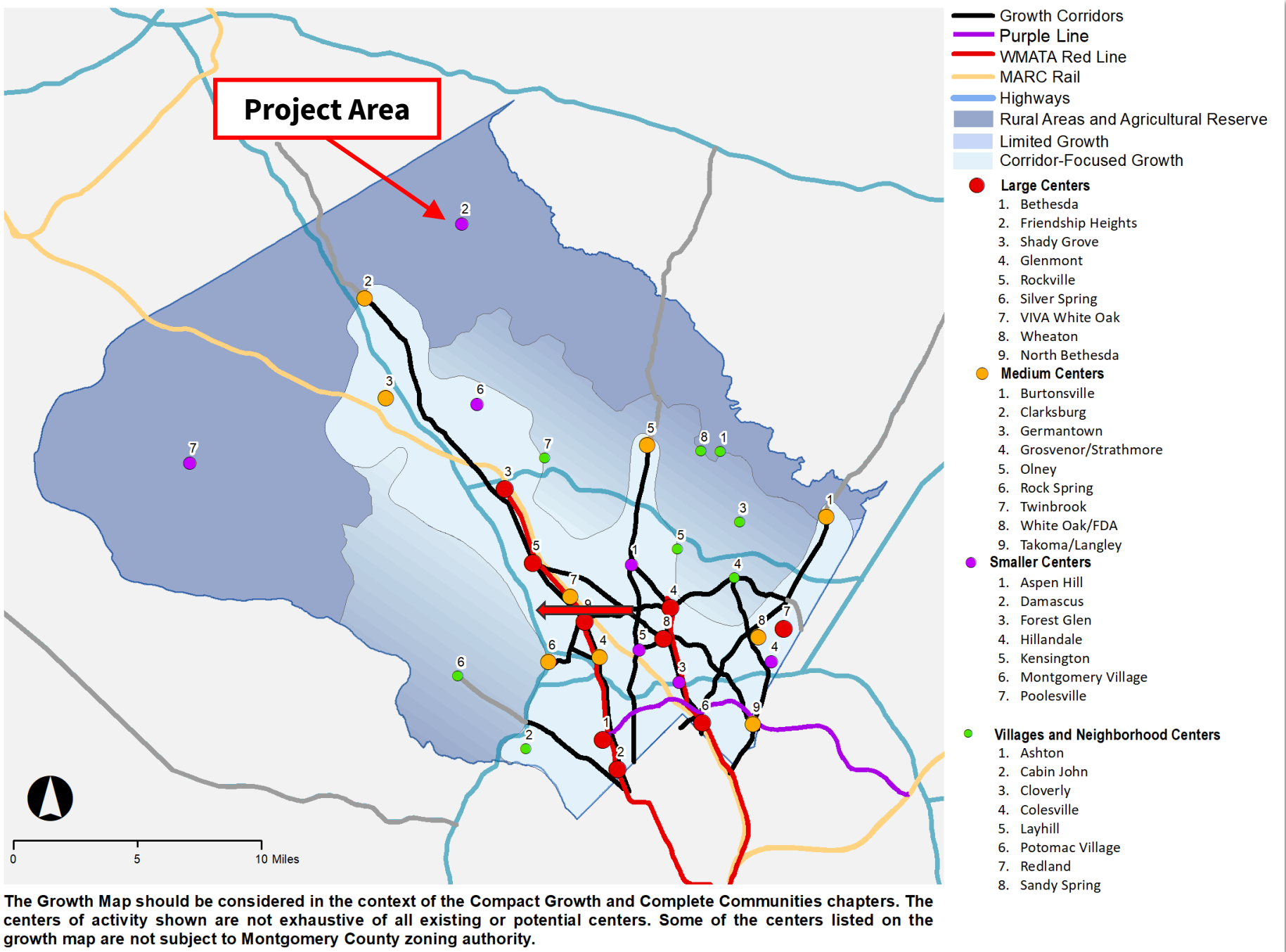
## Local Partners

Damascus Lions Club  
Damascus Heritage Society  
Gaithersburg Germantown Chamber of Commerce



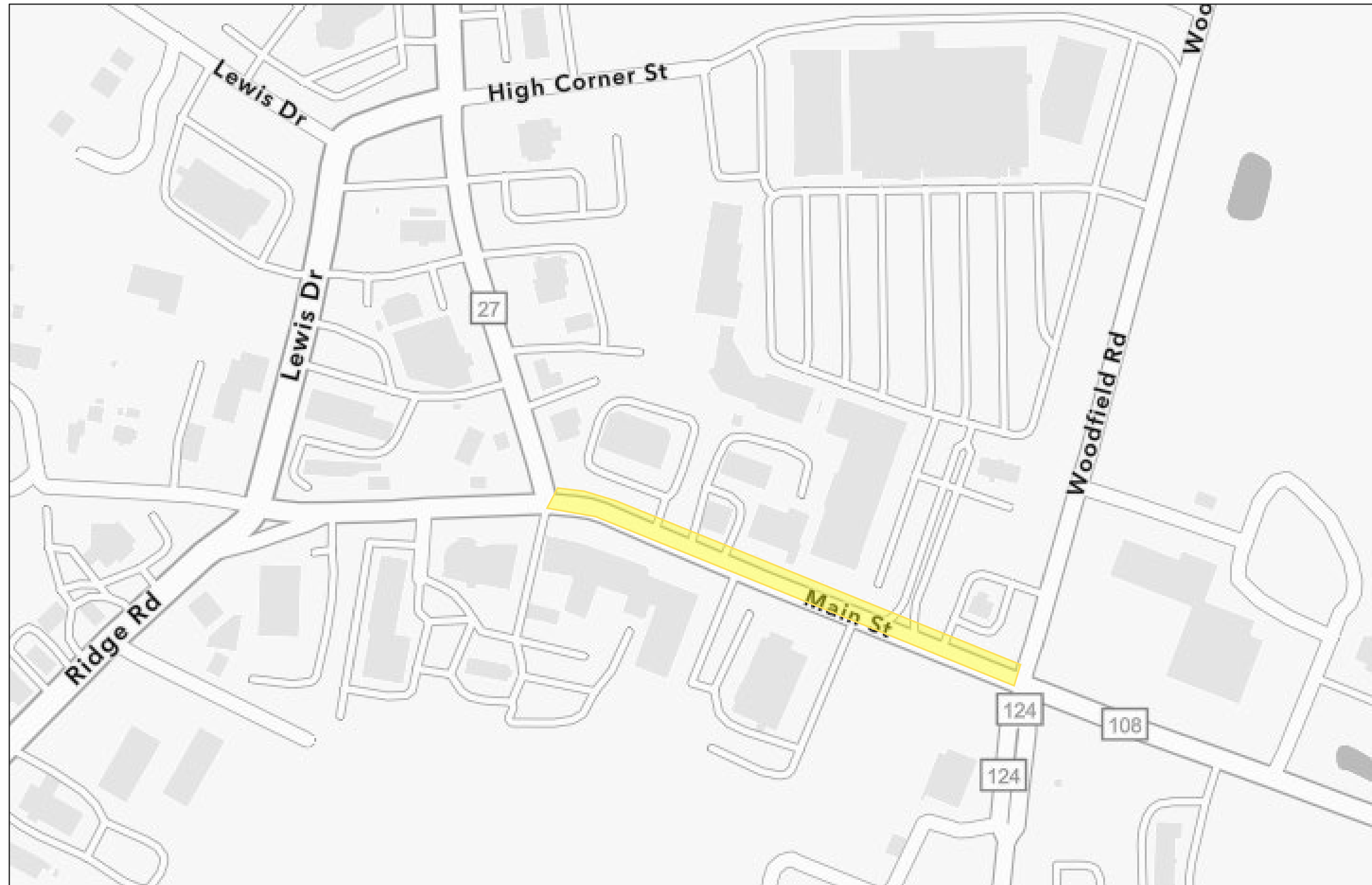


# Background

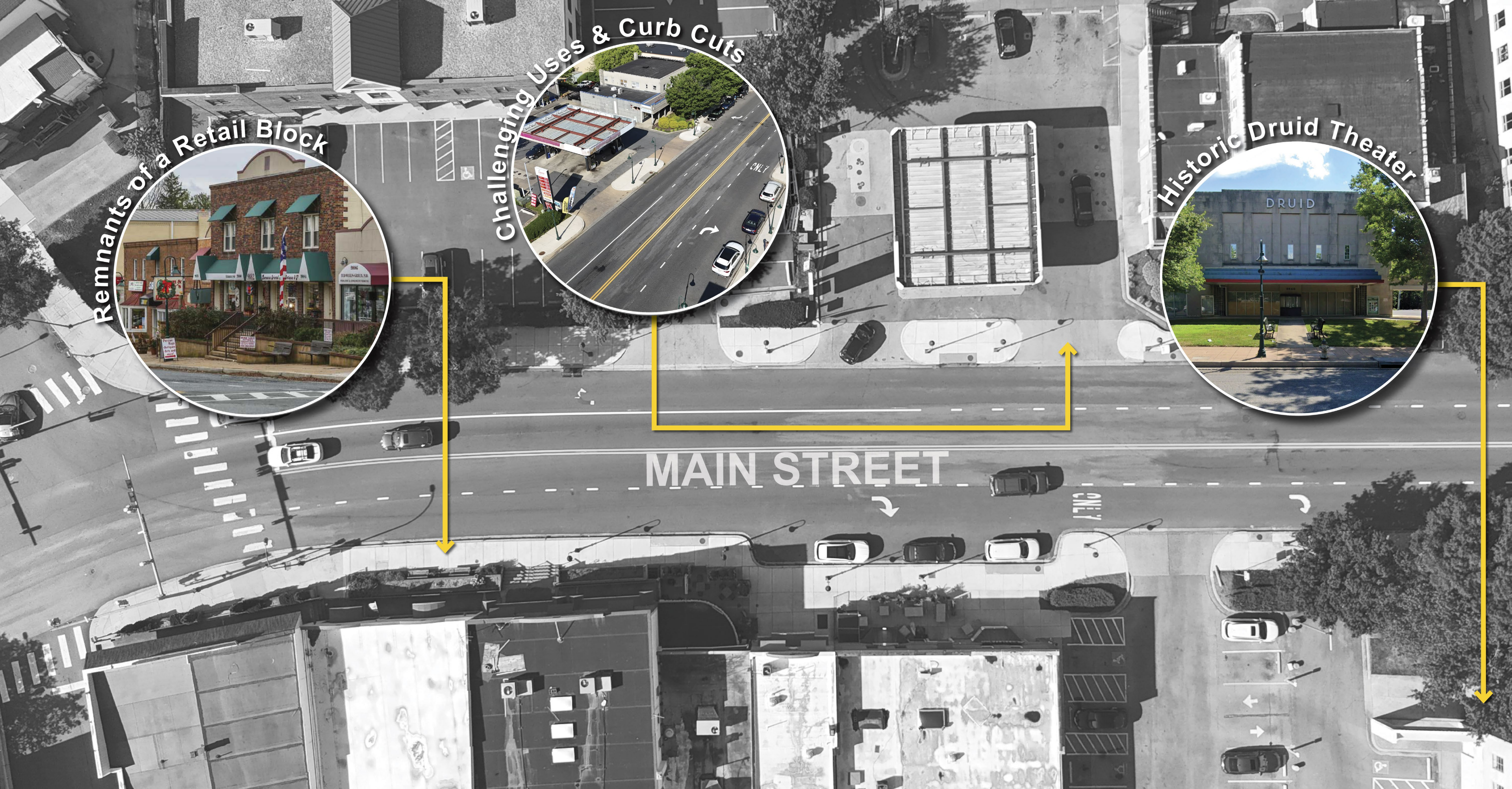




# Location









# Goals

Re-envision Main Street through a community-led placemaking festival to explore temporary or semi-permanent improvements

Engage community members in a dialogue about the longer-term role of public spaces, especially downtown, and streetscape designs within their community

Enhance the streetscape for pedestrians, cyclists and non-vehicle users

Create a sense of place that reflects the community identity

Highlight the recommendations of the Damascus Master Plan

Demonstrate the potential for long term, lasting improvements



PHASE 1

Site Visit • Community Kickoff Event • Outreach

MAY JUNE JULY

PHASE 2

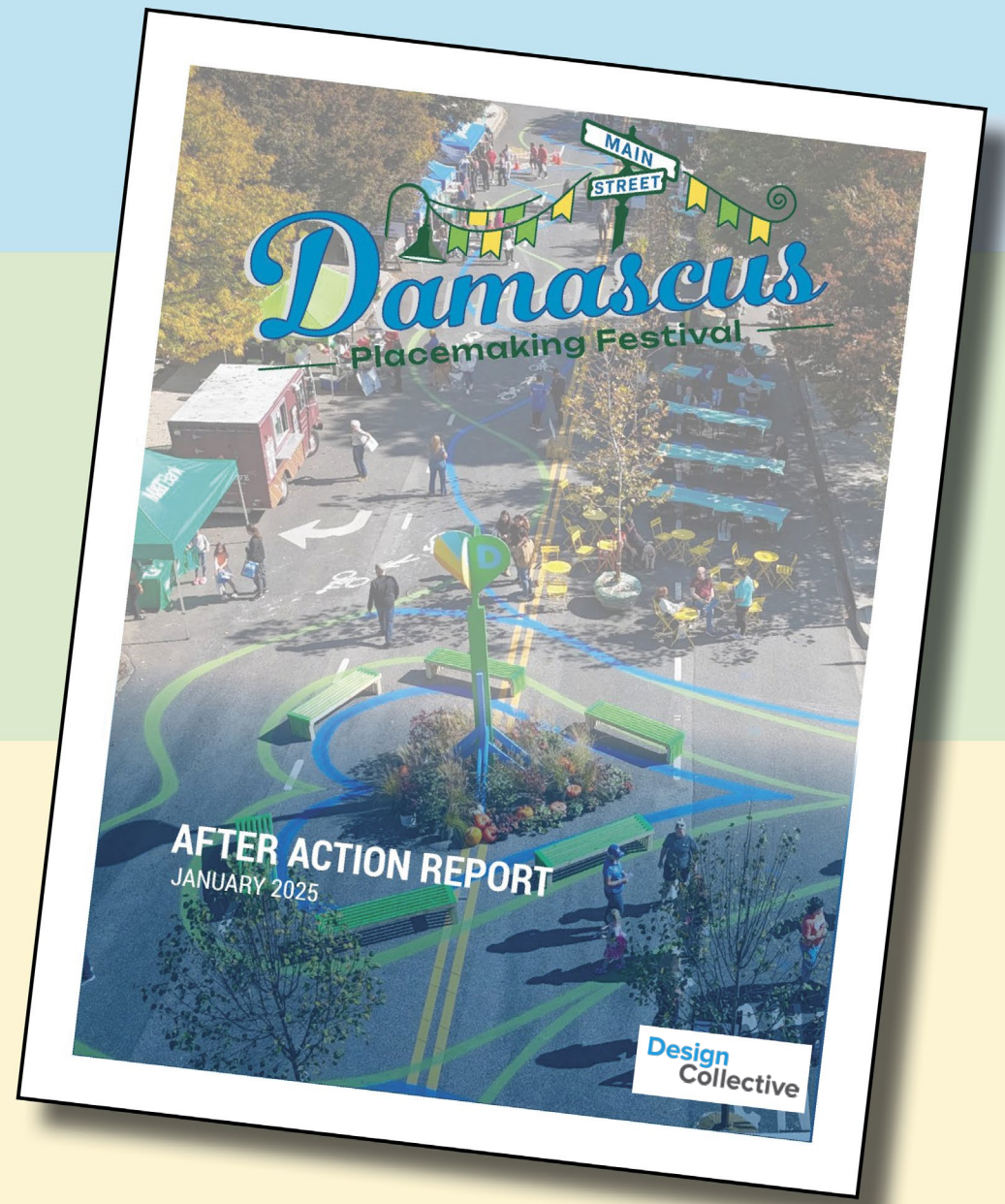
Planning • Concept Designs

AUGUST SEPTEMBER

PHASE 3

Festival Planning  
Implementation

OCTOBER

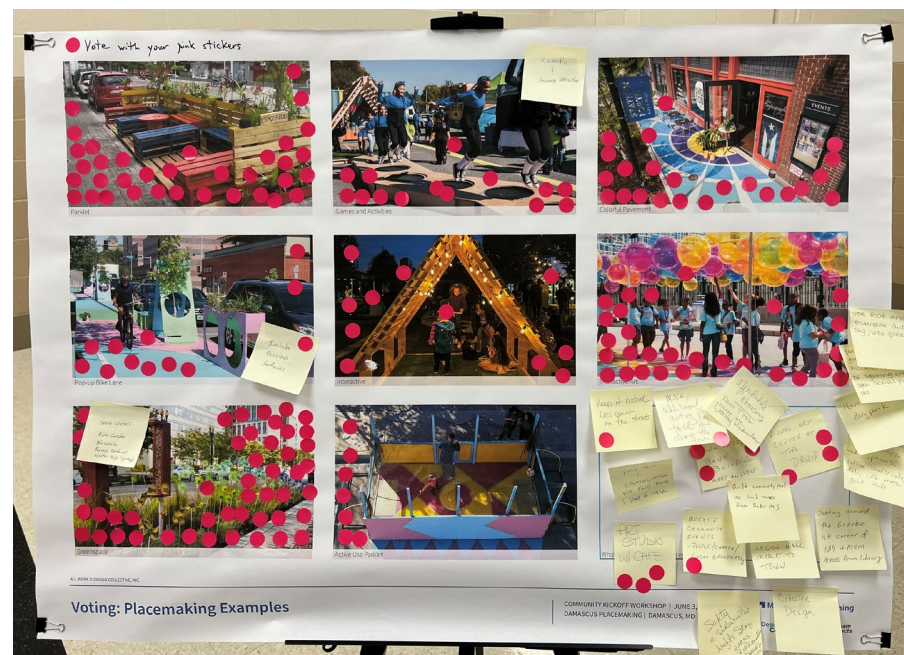


★ After Action Report & Recommendations

Timeline

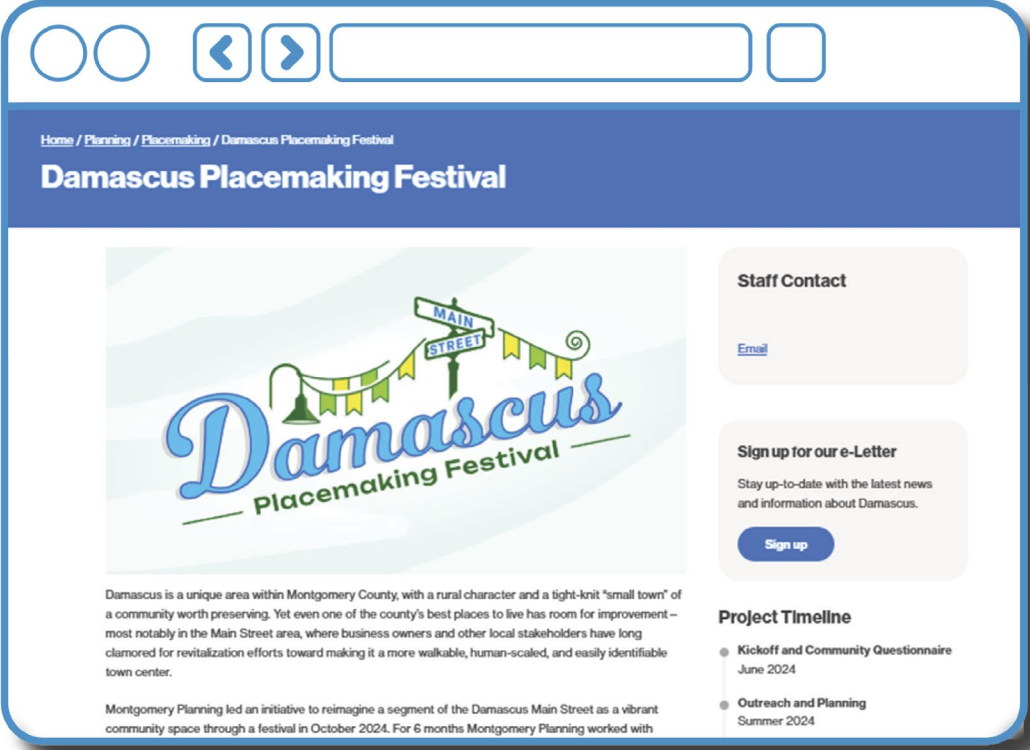


# Community Driven Process





# Community Engagement



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

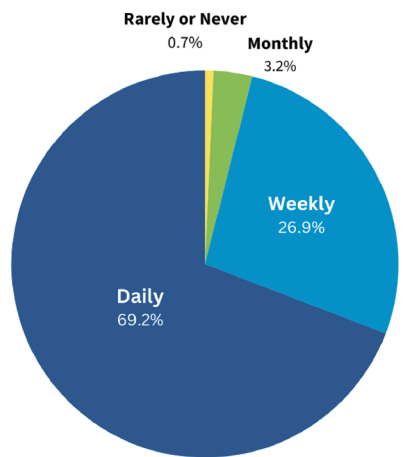




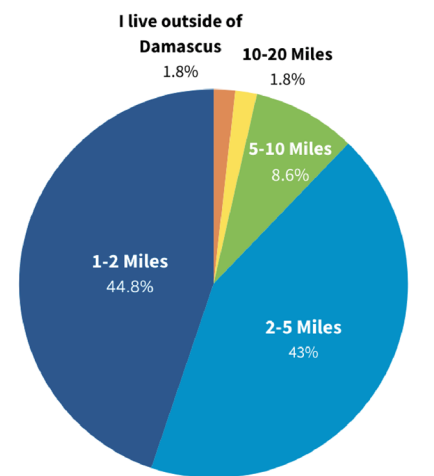
# What we learned

## COMMUNITY KICKOFF EVENT & QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS:

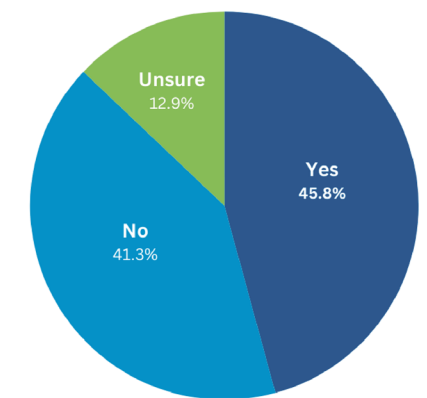
HOW OFTEN DO YOU COME TO MAIN STREET?



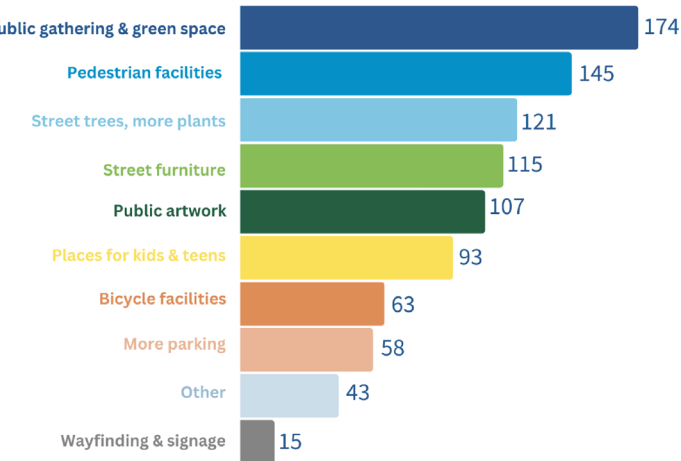
HOW FAR DO YOU LIVE FROM MAIN STREET?



DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WALKING OR RIDING A BIKE ON MAIN STREET?



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF NEAR & ALONG MAIN STREET?(SELECT UP TO 4)



279

QUESTIONNAIRE  
RESPONSES

98

COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS

18

FACILITATORS

18

WORKING  
GROUPS

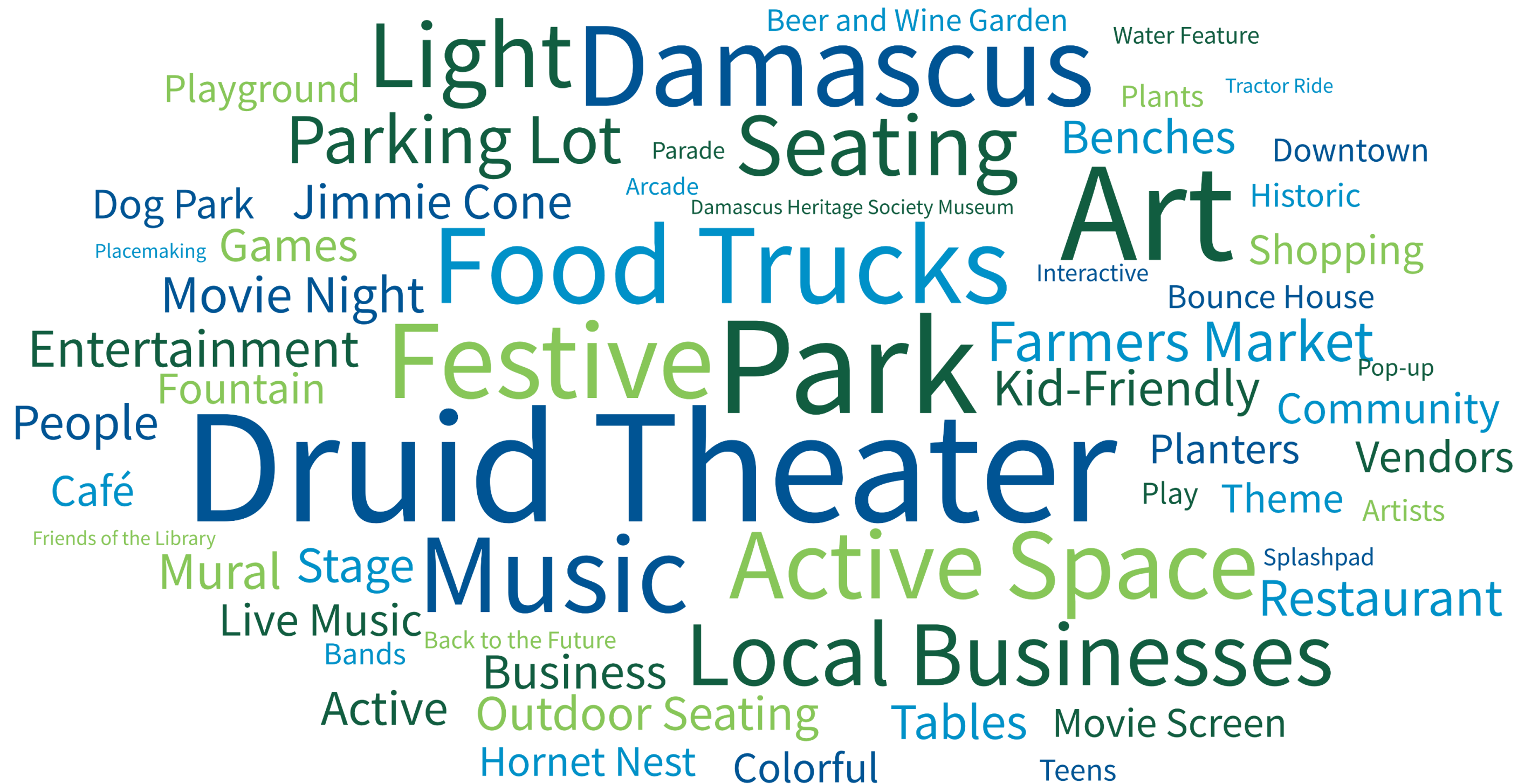
## Key Themes

- 1. Pedestrian Safety and Connectivity** – Reduce vehicle speeds, curb cuts, and auto-oriented businesses. Also add pedestrian connections and safer crossings.
- 2. Gathering Spaces and Activities for All Ages** – Create more green space and other places with activities for younger children, teens, and seniors.
- 3. Community Identity** – Provide art, wayfinding, and design elements that reflect a strong sense of hometown pride and character.





# Reimagining Main Street







CENTERPIECE HEART



PERFORMING ARTS



FOOD AND BEVERAGE

## Festival Highlights

- 2,500** linear feet of chalk art
- 190** linear feet of flag banners
- 28** trees & **180** potted plants
- 150-foot-long** bike lane
- 10** constructed benches
- 250-square-foot** mural with **11** gallons of paint
- 40,000 SF** of ROW and Parking areas transformed
- 51** total craft vendors, food vendors, local businesses, and community organizations



CRAFT RETAIL CORRIDOR



COMPLETE STREETS



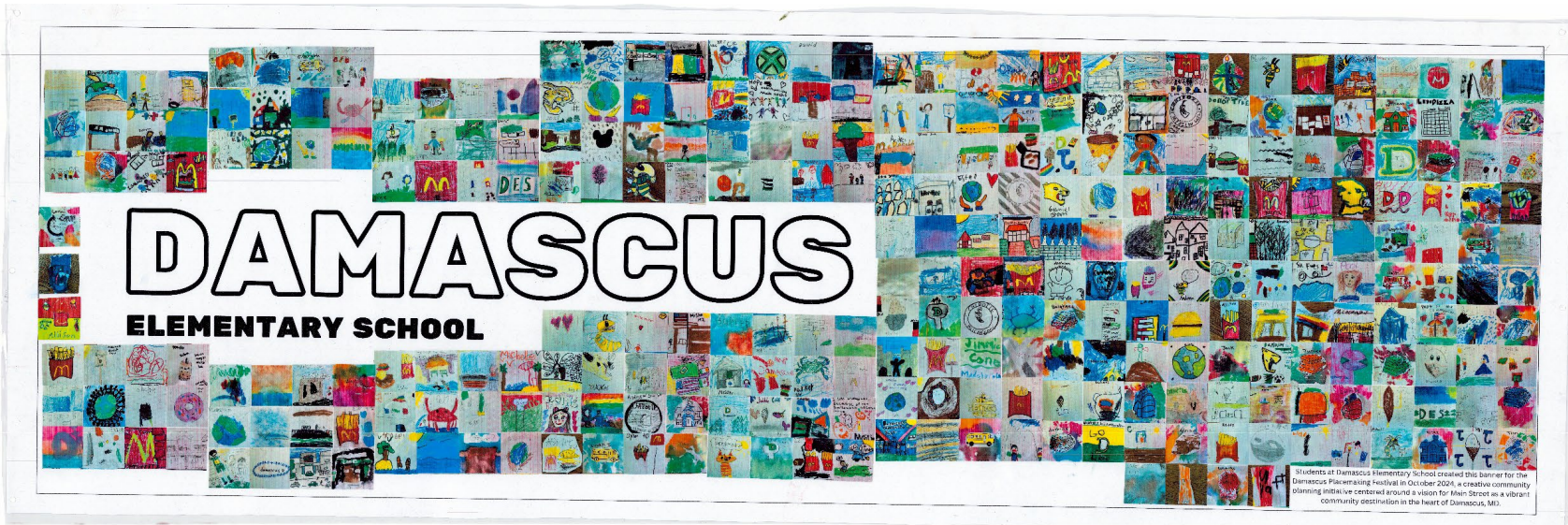
MURAL



GATEWAY



# Festival Highlights







# Measuring Impact

- 384 unique comments
- 1576 Rating Dots
- 129 survey responses
- 3000 festival attendees



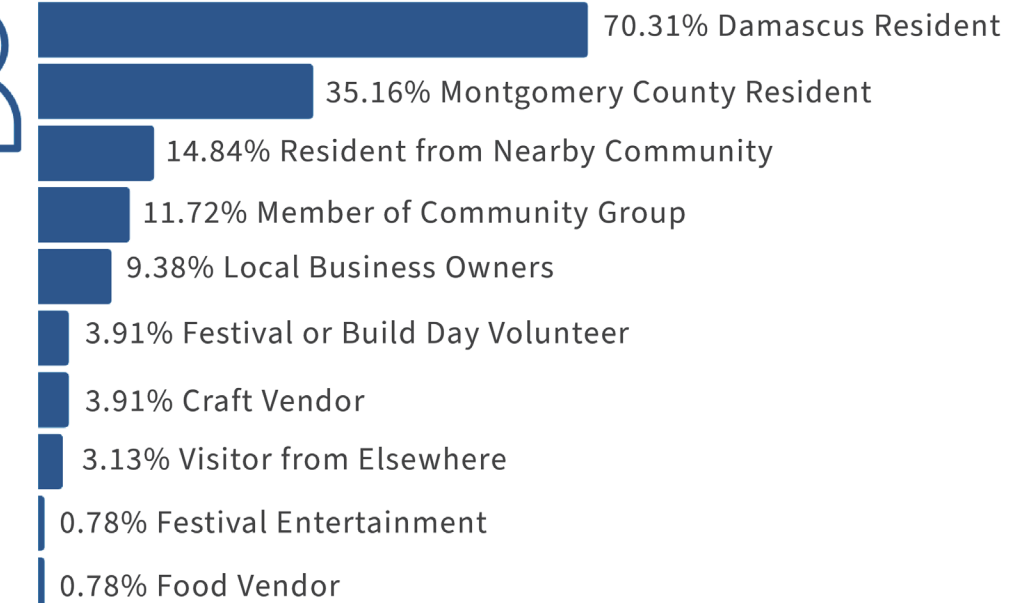


# Measuring Impact

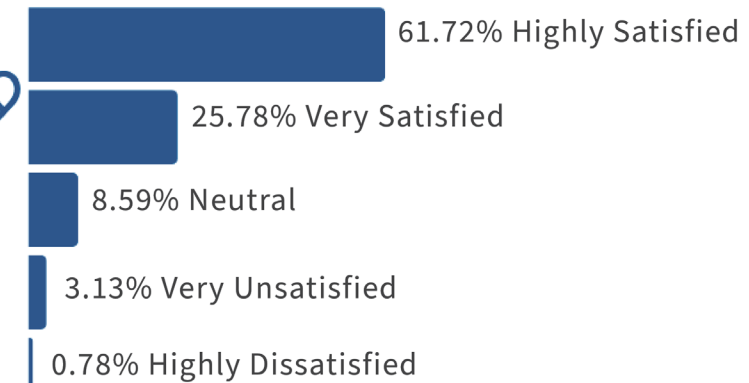


## 129 Survey Responses

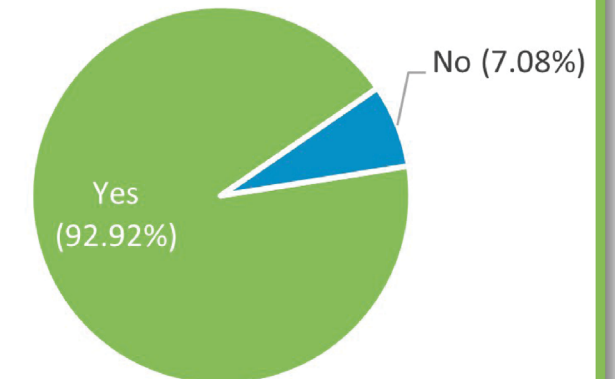
Source: Festival Questionnaire



### Festival visitors rate their festival experience



### Do you feel more positive about the future of Main Street?



### TOP 5 RATED PLACEMAKING ELEMENTS



PEDESTRIAN  
FRIENDLY  
STREETScape



PUBLIC GATHERING  
SPACES



MULTI-  
GENERATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES



OUTDOOR DINING  
AREAS



DIVERSE FOOD &  
BEVERAGE

Source: Festival Questionnaire



# Long Term Impact

TAKEAWAYS



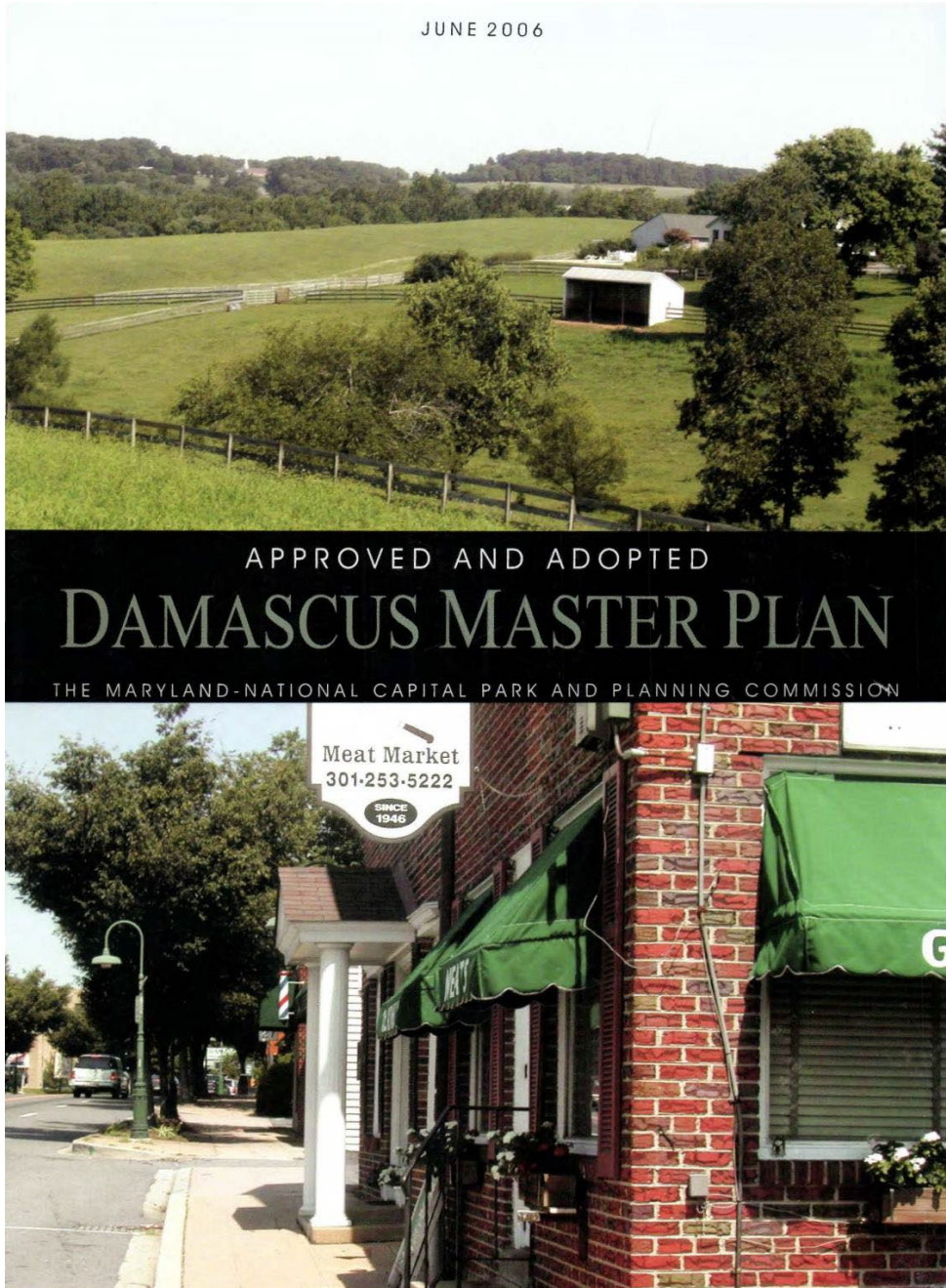
SUSTAINED PARTNERSHIPS



PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS



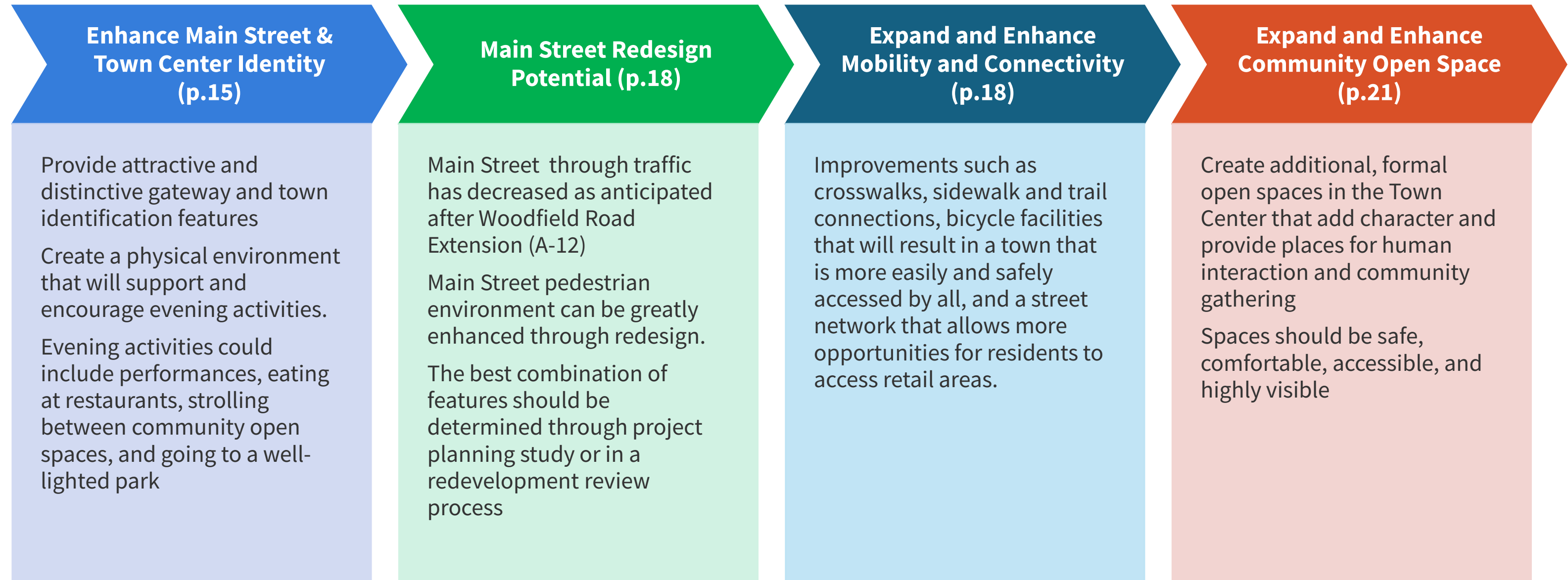
PUBLIC INVESTMENT



KEY TAKEAWAYS & RECOMMENDATIONS | 49



# 2006 Damascus Master Plan Town Center Framework





# After Action Report Recommendations

## Phase I

**Relatively short-term**, low-cost, solutions to maintain community engagement and project **momentum**.

## Phase II

Next step studies, plans, and projects to better **connect** downtown **pedestrian infrastructure** and improve **streetscape**

## Phase III

Community gathering space for long-term Main Street success.





# Phase 1

Public Art and continued placemaking

Capacity building through Civic Association and staff liaison

Grants to fund murals, façade improvements, signage and wayfinding, landscaping, beautification, etc.

## Enhance Main Street & Town Center Identity

*Provide attractive and distinctive gateway and town identification features. Create a physical environment that will support and encourage evening activities.*

2006 Damascus Master Plan, Town Center Framework (p.15)



### Recommendation 3: Commission Community-Focused Murals.

During this study, two feasible locations were identified for potential future mural or public art. These included the East facade of 9870 Main Street (adjoining Tobacco Hut) and the West facade of 9890 Main Street (adjoining Style Me Sue Consignments). Preliminary conversations with property owners and/or adjoining business owners have been initiated during this study with favorable feedback, however additional approvals from property owners would be required. Each mural should be identified as a separate RFP, and each would include cost for design, community engagement and implementation. Preference to local artists is recommended.



Location 1: 9870 Main Street



Location 2: 9890 Main Street



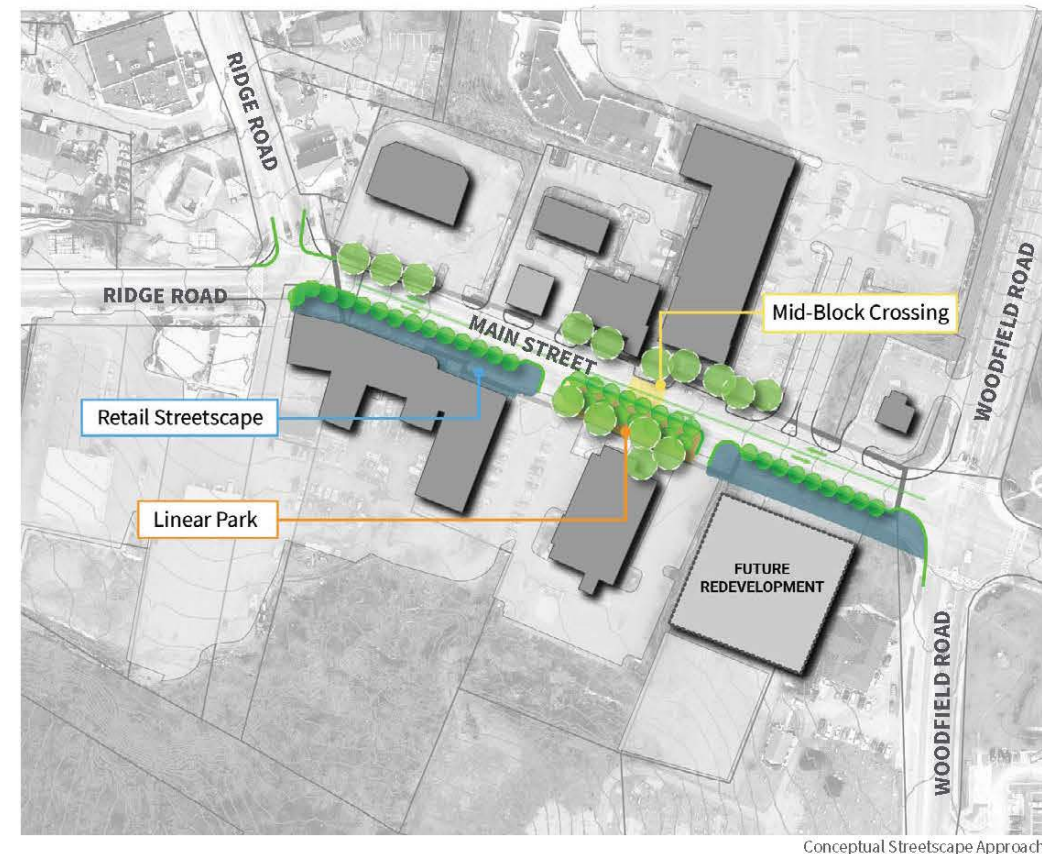
# Phase 2

Studies, plans, and projects to better connect downtown pedestrian infrastructure, reconfigure Main Street, and improve streetscape

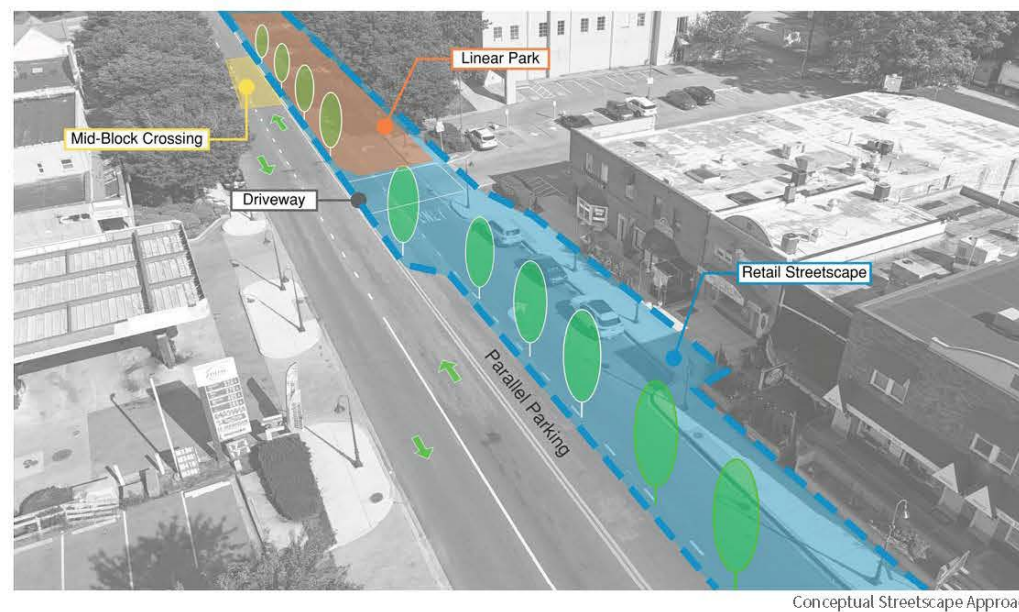
## PHASE II

### Recommendation 6: Streetscape Improvement Plan

This recommendation focuses on improving pedestrian safety along Main Street by establishing a pedestrian-friendly and accessible downtown streetscape. The proposed plan should study the conversion of two vehicular transit lanes to a pedestrian-oriented streetscape and open space. This should include areas for walking, biking, and socializing, along with additional parking for nearby retail. Reducing road widths and adding green spaces or seating areas will calm vehicular traffic and encourage people to spend more time in the area, contributing to the economic and social vitality of Main Street. This scope of work should include continued community engagement, traffic studies, design and engineering, and cost for implementation. This investment will spur private investment along the corridor and establish Main Street as a core feature within the Town Center.



A well-designed, pedestrian-friendly streetscape in Damascus would create a vibrant and inviting environment that supports community interaction and local businesses. Key features could include a safe, walkable retail experience with ample outdoor seating, a central plaza, additional street parking, wider sidewalks for multiple modes of travel, a mid-block crossing, signature lighting, and a linear park. These elements work together to enhance accessibility, safety, and the overall appeal of Main Street, transforming it into a welcoming destination for residents and visitors alike.



## Expand and Enhance Mobility and Connectivity

*Improvements such as crosswalks, sidewalk and trail connections, bicycle facilities that will result in a town that is more easily and safely accessed by all, and a street network that allows more opportunities for residents to access retail areas.*

2006 Damascus Master Plan, Town Center Framework (p.18)

## Main Street Redesign Potential

*Main Street pedestrian environment can be greatly enhanced through redesign. The best combination of features should be determined through project planning study or in a redevelopment review process*

2006 Damascus Master Plan, Town Center Framework (p.18)



# Phase 3

## Provide Space for Community Gathering and Cultural Arts

### Expand and Enhance Community Open Space

Create additional, formal open spaces in the Town Center that add character and provide places for human interaction and community gathering. Spaces should be safe, comfortable, accessible, and highly visible

2006 Damascus Master Plan, Town Center Framework (p.21)

### Recommendation 7: Provide Space For Community Gathering and Cultural Arts

The final phase focuses on establishing a central Community Gathering space. This space should be centrally located in the Town Center boundary and should accommodate indoor and outdoor public recreation opportunities. Opportunities to incorporate existing buildings or sites that hold significant historical, cultural, or social value to Damascus should be explored. Additional public engagement will be needed to identify specific uses and programming for this public facility. It should cater to a wide range of demographics including but not limited to age, race, ethnicity, and financial income. On-site parking should be incorporated for easy access. This project will provide a flexible space for arts, culture, and community events, which is essential for establishing a Town Center anchor and drawing people to Main Street; re-establishing it as a cultural hub. This phase will require careful planning and investment to ensure that the project aligns with the broader vision for a vibrant, people-centered Town Center.



46 | Design Collective



# Leveraging Success



**Temporary Activations, Long term Impacts:**  
Learnings from the Damascus Placemaking Festival



## Temporary Activations, Long-term Impacts: Lessons from the Damascus Placemaking Festival

BY AUDREY VOGEL

The Damascus Placemaking Festival emerged from an aspiration to bring to life the community's vision for a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented Main Street in Damascus, Maryland, through temporary public space activation. While this was a relatively short-term planning initiative, it was truly years in the making. Residents, small business owners, and civic organizations in Damascus have long clamored for revitalization within the historic Main Street core of their community. The approved and adopted 2006 Damascus Master Plan reflects this sentiment, providing a vision and planning framework for a mixed-use, walkable, and human-scaled town center that is easily identifiable as the heart of the community.

The festival was a community-driven initiative to reimagine Main Street by transforming one block of a busy roadway into a walkable public gathering space for two days in October 2024. Here, placemaking is defined as "planning in action," where ideas from the community were enacted through temporary public art, landscaping, urban design installations, and cultural activities. Over the course of six months, the Montgomery County Planning Department, along with a team of consultants from Design Collective and Graham Projects, engaged the Damascus community in a hands-on design process to develop and test public space and streetscape improvements that brought to life their vision for Main Street.

The initiative culminated in a two-day community street festival that brought together more than 2,000 participants, including Damascus residents, local businesses, visitors, and community organizations. The transformation was unbelievable, and the community response was beyond expectations. An area roughly the size of a football field and typically dedicated to cars

came alive with joy, excitement, music, and appreciation for what the community believed reflected its identity. The Damascus Placemaking Festival exemplifies placemaking as an effective engagement tool to channel a community's assets, vision, inspirations, and potential. These types of efforts, even in a rural setting, ultimately strengthen connections between community members and the public realm.

### Project Background

Damascus is a small unincorporated town in northern Montgomery County. Although just 35 miles (56.3 kilometers) north of the U.S. capital, Damascus is surrounded by the rural open space of the county's Agricultural Reserve. It's also well known for its small-town charm, tight-knit community, and lively hometown pride. The historic Main Street core has a long and rich history as an important convergence of physical, cultural, and social connections but falls short of the vision in the community's 2006 Damascus Master Plan. Main Street is part of a regional commuter



The existing conditions of Main Street, where the project team hosted the Placemaking Festival.



Another view of Main Street.

40 June 2025 **the journal**



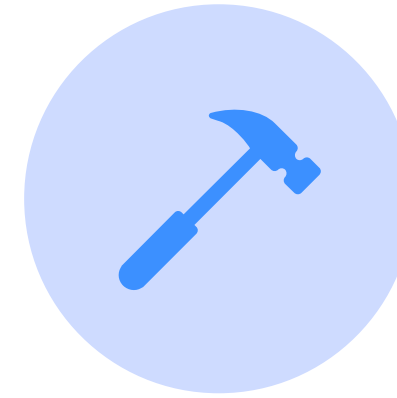
# What does implementation look like?



DEDICATED STAFF



INTERAGENCY  
COLLABORATION



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT  
PROJECTS



GRANT FUNDING  
OPPORTUNITIES



PLANS AND STUDIES



PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT  
PROCESS



# Stay Connected

Visit the project page to view the report and subscribe to e-letter updates:

[montgomeryplanning.org/planning/placemaking/damascus-placemaking-festival/](https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/placemaking/damascus-placemaking-festival/)

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