



# CENTER CITY Digest

## Staying the Course for Full Recovery

Two competing story lines are shaping the national narrative of downtown recovery. In the first, city centers are empty and dangerous places, plagued by crime and social disorder. Neither workers, visitors, nor residents will return until these conditions are addressed. While often exploited for political purposes and sensational headlines, even ardent supporters of downtowns acknowledge the uncomfortable experiences that underlie this point-of-view and recognize the power that virtual technologies have to render some downtown functions obsolete.

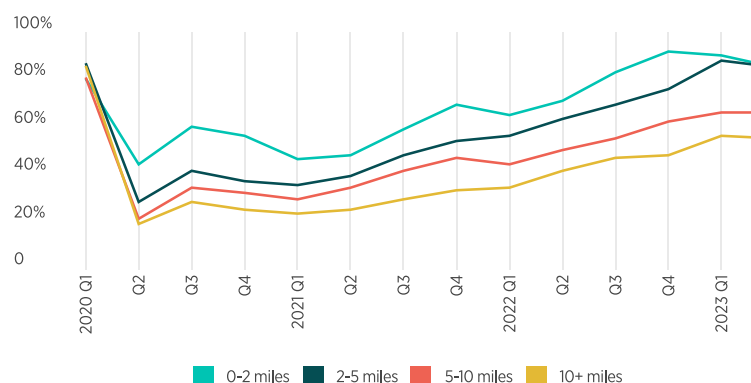
A second narrative builds from data that many, including CCD, have generated, documenting a process of recovery that is robust in most major downtowns. It shows visitors and residents back at volumes that equal or exceed 2019 levels and a rate of worker return that is more influenced by length of commute and industry type than by fear of crime.<sup>1</sup> Most important, this narrative recognizes that downtowns have long had to respond to challenging, new technologies and transportation trends and that successful places continually adapt.

### Start from the numbers

For the last three years, CCD has analyzed anonymized cellphone data generated by Placer.ai, cross-checking against counts from pedestrian sensors we installed on a dozen dense, commercial blocks within the District. October 2023 Placer.ai data documents daily volumes within core Center City reached 83% of 2019 levels, with residents at 126%, visitors, convention attendees, shoppers and restaurant patrons at 82% and non-resident workers at 68%.<sup>2</sup> Weekday evening volumes have rebounded to 87% and hit 95% on weekends. Retail occupancy has responded accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 tracks workers in the Philadelphia region from the first quarter of 2020 through the second quarter of 2023, suggesting that the closer a worker lives to downtown, the more frequently they come to work. *Downtowns Rebound* documents a similar trend across the country, not only in Midtown Manhattan but even in allegedly desolate San Francisco, where more than 80% of workers who live within two

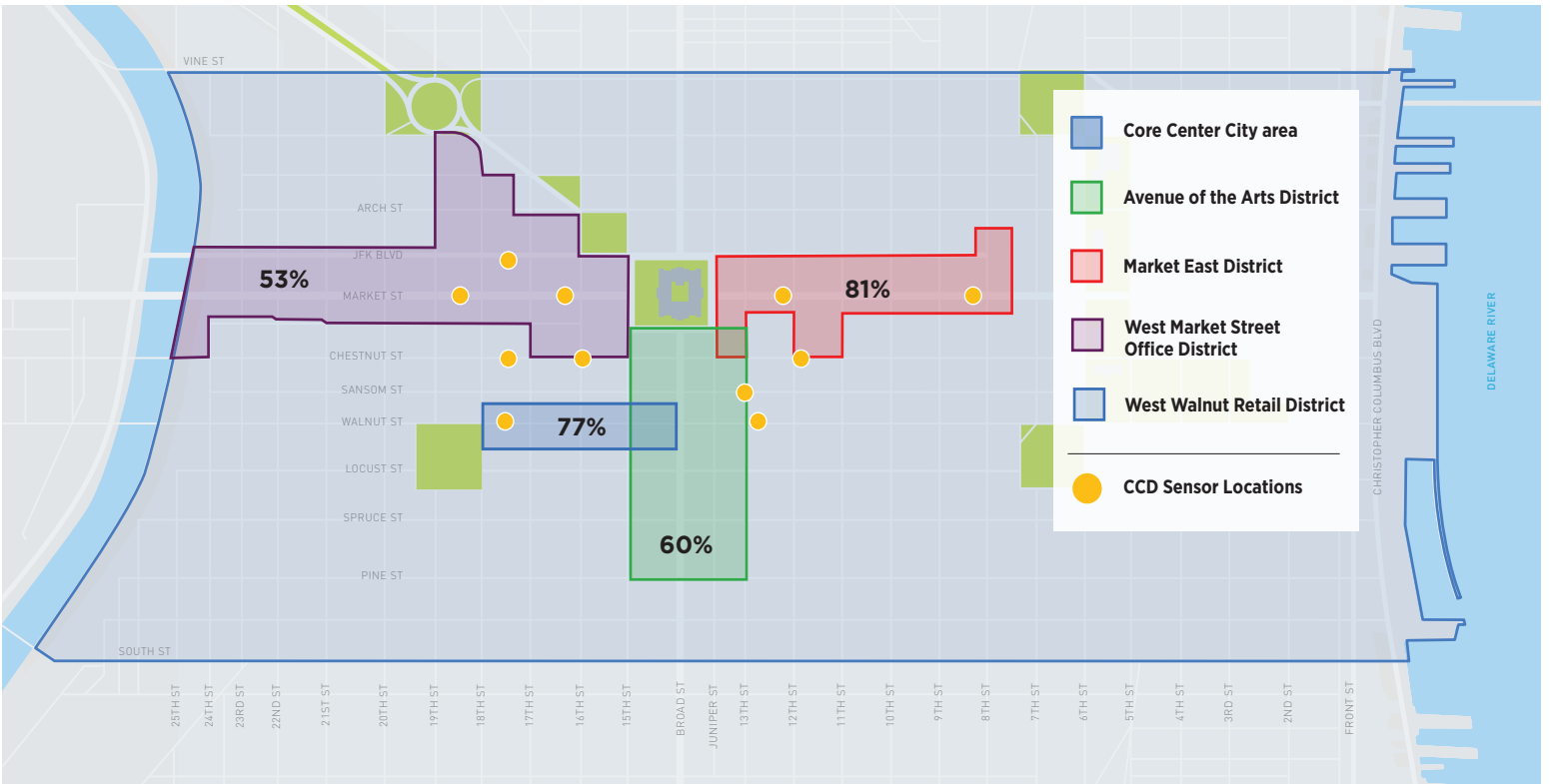
Figure 1: Philadelphia Core Downtown Non-Resident Worker Recovery Rate by Commuting Distance



<sup>1</sup> *Downtowns Rebound: The Data Driven Path to Recovery*, Center City District, October 2023 <https://centercityphila.org/research-reports/downtowns-rebound-report-2023>

<sup>2</sup> The significantly higher number of residents is a combination of an actual net increase in the number of people living downtown and the greater tendency of those residents to be home more nights - instead of on business trips or leisure travel.

Figure 2



miles of their jobs are back routinely at their desks.<sup>4</sup> The convenience of walking or biking to work, rather than driving or taking public transit, overrides many other factors. But it’s also likely that daily, first-hand familiarity with the diverse, troubled personalities lingering on sidewalks provides downtown dwellers with a more fine-tuned radar that distinguishes between distressed individuals who need help, but are harmless, and those who might provide grounds for concern.

**Job Mix Matters**

National surveys highlight how certain professions, like information technology and financial services, are more easily performed (and were more frequently practiced pre-pandemic) remotely. By contrast, health care, education, tourism and dining are grounded in personal interaction and customer service.<sup>5</sup> Independent of perceptions of safety, a city’s employment mix thus has a major impact on the rate of recovery. This plays out geographically even within individual downtowns.

Figure 2 depicts how the worker recovery rate in October on East Market Street, where hotel, health care and retail jobs are clustered, reached 81%. It climbed to 77% on the regional retail shopping destination of West Walnut Street, but lags on office-dominated West Market and JFK Boulevard (53%). There is little difference in actual crime rates among these distinct zones.

**Perceptions of Safety**

Still, safety remains the most-cited barrier to return. For decades, CCD has surveyed downtown workers, residents and visitors about their views on a wide range of topics. As Figure 3 suggests, long before 2020, comfort levels with downtown were declining, as retail theft and some forms of social disorder increased. Still, 2020 was a landmark year.<sup>6</sup>

**Q1: Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your perception of safety in Center City. “I feel safe....”**

Figure 3

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023
Always	23%	23%	23%	19%	18%	12%	7%	7%
Most of the time	60%	59%	57%	60%	58%	48%	40%	44%
Occasionally	14%	14%	17%	17%	18%	31%	31%	31%
Often Unsafe	3%	3%	2%	3%	5%	10%	20%	18%
Not sure	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%

<sup>3</sup> Center City Retail Report, November 2023, <https://centercityphila.org/research-reports/ccd-retail-report-11-2023>

<sup>4</sup> See page 28 of *Downtowns Rebound*

<sup>5</sup> José María Barrero, Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis, *The Evolution of Work from Home*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Fall 2023

The contrast is even more stark when the degrees of *safe* and *unsafe* are compressed into just two categories in Figure 4. There can be no denying the ramifications of these trends, though small progress has been made in the year currently ending.

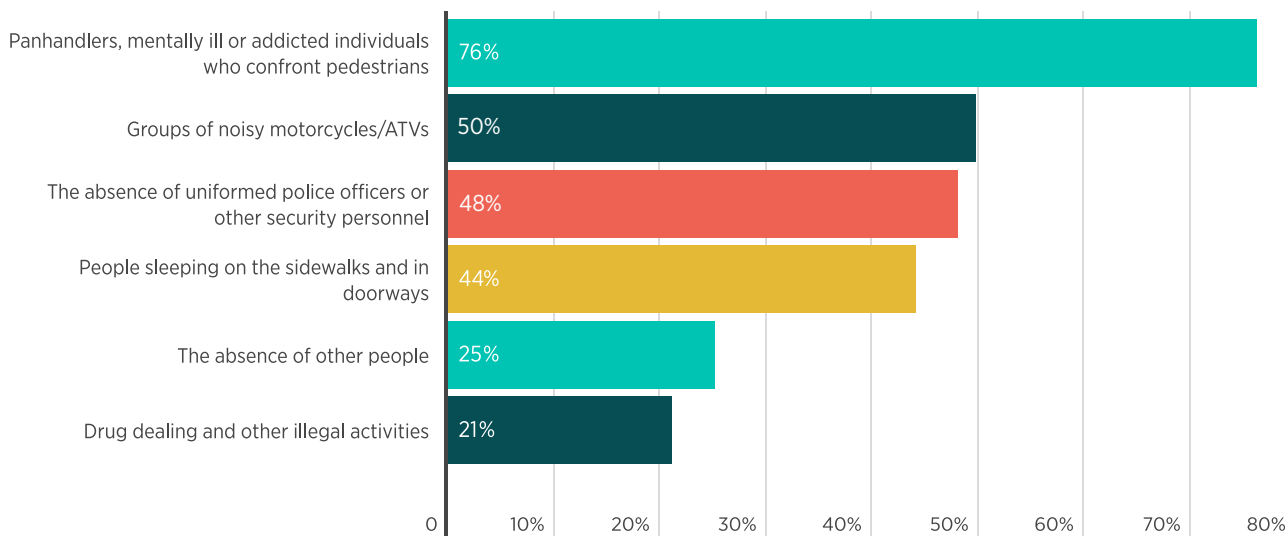
Figure 4

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023
Safe	83%	82%	80%	79%	76%	60%	47%	51%
Not Safe	18%	18%	20%	21%	24%	41%	52%	49%

The results from almost 3,000 responses to the 2023 survey help clarify what shapes these negative perceptions. From a list of six options, respondents were asked to select their top three:

**Q2: What situations/conditions make you feel most unsafe in Center City?**

Figure 5



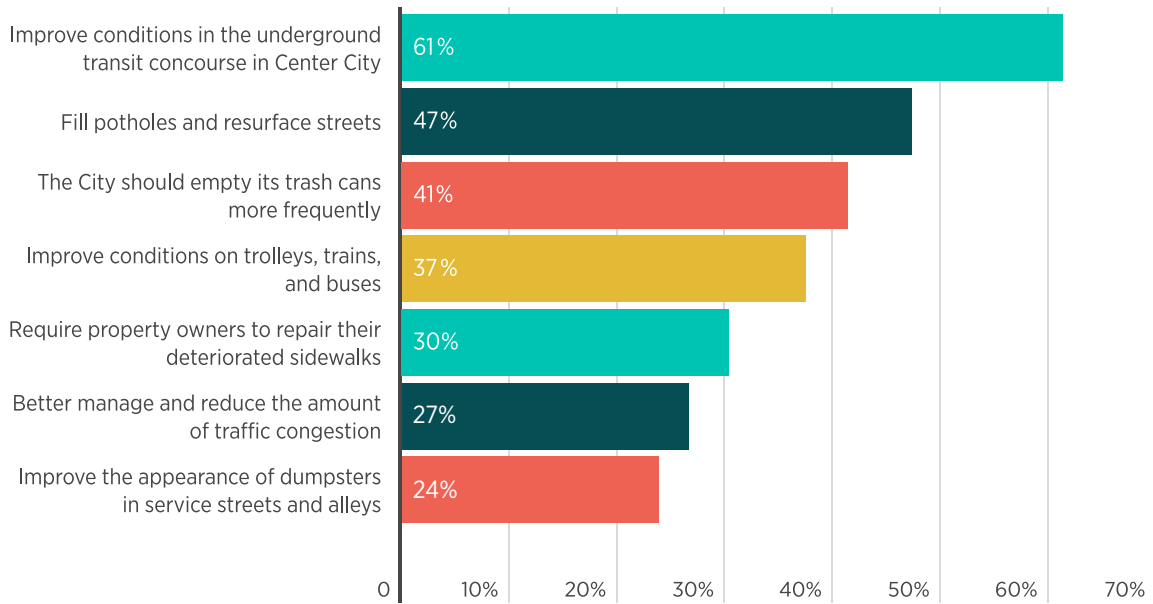
The top response was consistent across all age categories. Those over 65, however, ranked the absence of *police and uniformed personnel* second (57%), while those 25-34 ranked this option fifth (32%), capturing the generational divergence of opinion about appropriate solutions to safety challenges.

ATVs ranked second or third as a source of concern across all age groups. However, with just one exception, the issues on this list that produce anxiety and fear are not actual criminal behavior, but rather *quality of life* challenges, a sense that things are out of control.

The prominence of *quality-of-life* challenges becomes even more apparent in the responses to the question: **Which three improvements would most enhance the competitiveness of Center City as a place to work or start/expand a business?** Seventy-two percent (72%) responded: *improve public safety*; 65% answered: *reduce the number of people living and/or panhandling of Center City sidewalks*. Both scored well above more anticipated answers, which were virtually tied: *improve public schools* and *reduce the wage tax*. This is not to suggest these issues aren't central to the success of the city, but it's a reminder to take care of basics before seeking to solve higher order challenges. This is reinforced by responses to two other questions, one focused on problems and one on solutions.

**Q4: There are challenges that go beyond the scope and authority of the CCD. If you could pick only three of the following changes to the public environment, which three would most improve Center City Philadelphia as a place to work or live?**

Figure 6

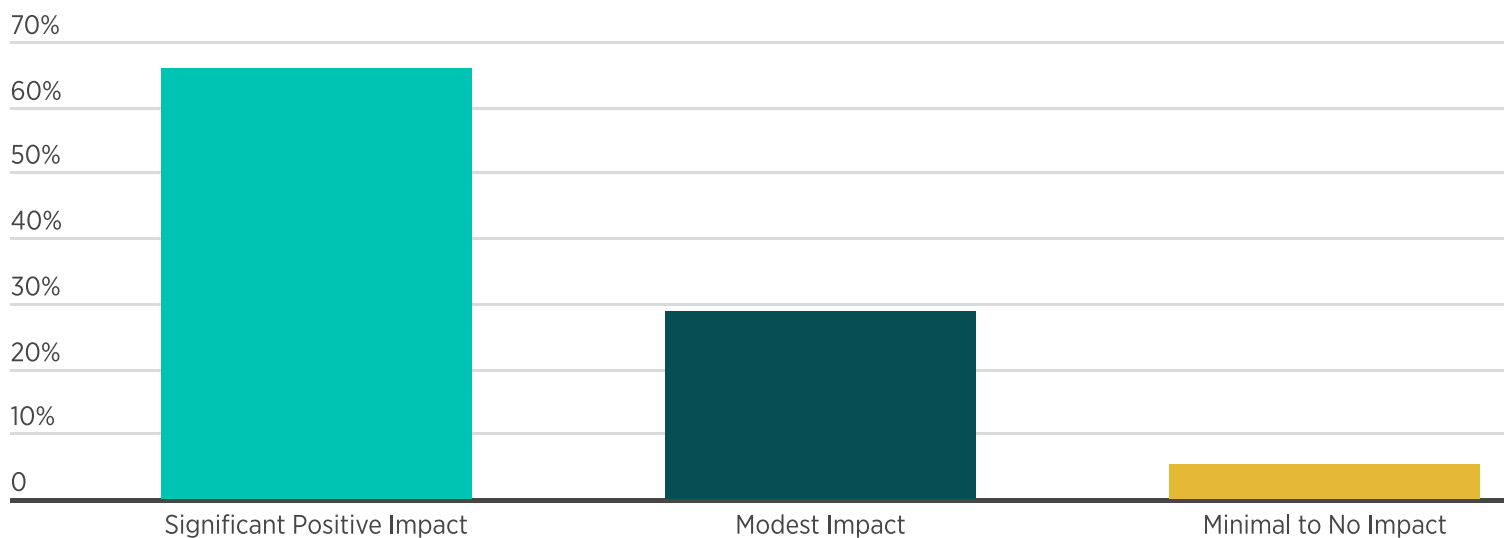


Again, nearly all responses focus on elements in the public environment that seem poorly managed or out of control; only the first one has a distinct public safety dimension. This also suggests how easily *deficient management of the public environment* and *a sense of safety* are conflated, even though solutions require quite different responses. Similarly, answers to the next question document the positive feelings elicited by well-managed public spaces.



**Q5: Center City District maintains and programs four parks in Center City, installed and maintains 400 on-street planters and hundreds of trees. Do these efforts to green Center City have:**

Figure 6



Two-thirds of respondents indicated they had recently visited Dilworth Park and 26% had visited Sister Cities Park, CCD’s two largest parks.

**Addressing these Challenges**

CCD’s response to the crises of the last three years was strongly shaped by the primary lesson learned during the founding of the organization in 1990 and 1991: the cleanliness, safety and attractiveness of the public environment—*doing the job and being seen doing the job*—has a significant impact on perceptions and on decisions to work, live, shop, dine or visit Center City.

CCD kept all its sidewalk cleaning and graffiti removal teams fully operational throughout 2020. To our deployment of cleaners and uniformed Community Service Representatives, we added in 2021 a new bike patrol, funded initially with private sector donations. We increased our homeless outreach effort, the Ambassadors of Hope, from two teams to three. This program is a co-service delivery partnership between CCD, Project Home and crisis intervention trained (CIT) police officers. It is founded on the assumption that solutions to some our most complex challenges must be multi-disciplinary in approach, blending social services and criminal justice to overcome previously siloed, tactical responses.<sup>7</sup> We organize a bi-weekly roundtable of the operational managers of all public police and private security deployed downtown to ensure continuous communication and coordination.

CCD continued to manage and program the four parks we built in the last 20 years, continued *Restaurant Week* and *Center City Sips* and organized special events on office plazas and at transit stops to welcome workers back. Securing grants from the state, contributions from generous donors and spending CCD reserves, set aside for a

rainy day, we improved landscaping on West Market Street and JFK Boulevard, West Walnut Street, East Market Street and Jewelers’ Row.

The response to question 4 about challenges beyond the scope and authority of CCD underscores how essential a strong partner in City government is to the success of the downtown, which holds 42% of all jobs in Philadelphia, provides on average 25% of the jobs held by all neighborhood residents living outside downtown, generates the lion’s share of hotel tax, more than 40% of wage tax revenue and 20% of the real taxes that support public schools and services.

Mayor-elect Cherrele Parker has put public safety at the top of her agenda, emphasizing her priority for *community policing*, focused on quality-of-life challenges of greatest concern to neighborhood residents, seeking to draw new officers from the communities they serve, and endeavoring to blend prevention and treatment with sensitive enforcement.

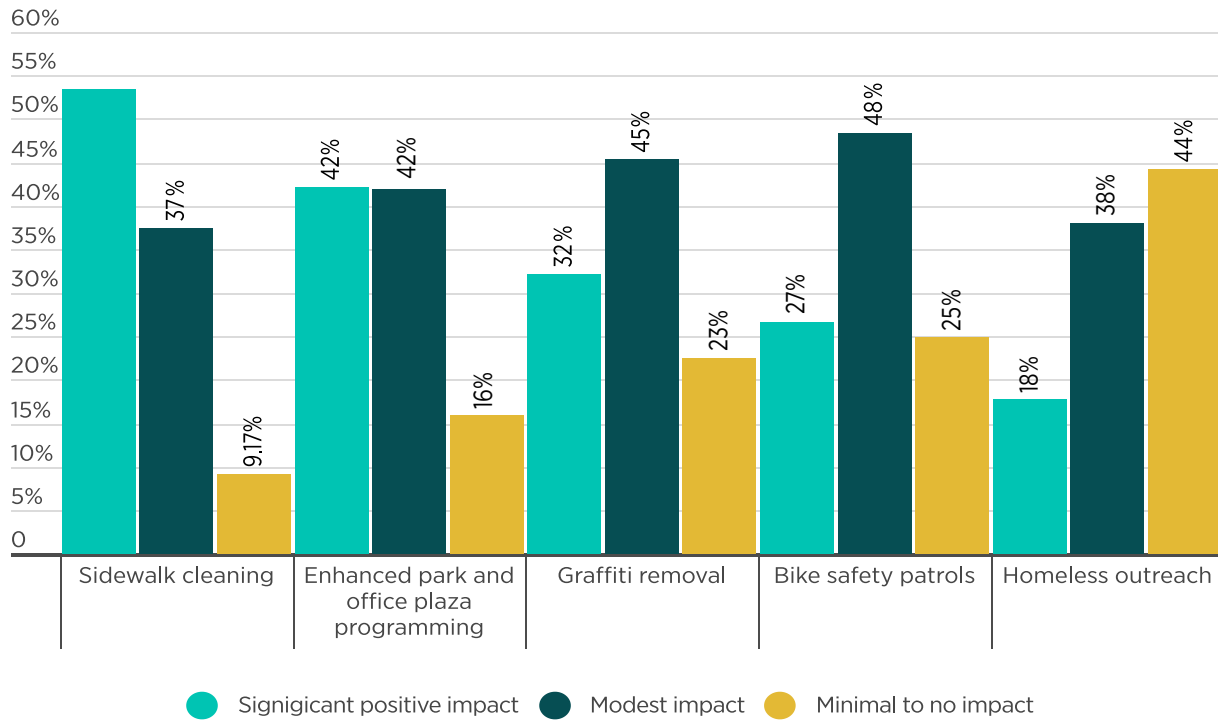
The last three years created extraordinary challenges for all cities. Recovery will require nothing less than extraordinary coordination between local government and transit agencies, businesses and civic organizations and more than a dozen other improvement districts like the CCD across the city. The public doesn’t distinguish between responsibilities that belong to property owners, to the City, to CCD or to PennDOT, SEPTA or PATCO. We’re all in this together.

**Final Thoughts**

The respondents to our survey were tough critics who felt that most of CCD’s efforts were having a significant to modestly positive impact, but more needed to be done around homelessness and panhandling (Figure 7).

<sup>6</sup> The 2023 survey was conducted on-line in the fall with emails sent to almost 100,000 downtown workers, residents and shoppers who frequent downtown. The survey had an approximate 3% response rate. CCD did not conduct this survey in 2021.  
<sup>7</sup> For more information on this partnership between CCD, Project Home and crisis intervention trained police officers, see <https://centercityphila.org/ccd-services/public-safety/homeless-outreach>

**Figure 7: How much of an impact do you feel of CCD's operational functions, including the programming of CCD parks, is having on improving conditions in Center City?**



This is a fair judgment based on numbers alone, since CCD deploys on a seven-day schedule approximately 100 staff for sidewalk cleaning functions,<sup>8</sup> 100 for public safety and community service patrols, but the homeless outreach partnership with Project HOME and CIT police involves no more than 10 individuals. There are many reasons for this constraint, the largest of which is the limitation on the number of beds to which teams can bring individuals who choose to come off the street.

CCD's rate of placement through this program was higher before the unresolved challenges in Kensington spilled into Center City via the Market-Frankford Line. Just as the vibrancy of our neighborhoods depends on success downtown, Center City's competitiveness relies on local government's ability to respond to citywide social challenges, to the job training and educational needs in our neighborhoods and to fashion a tax policy that supports robust and inclusive citywide growth. These are not either/or choices. On so many fronts, we need to overcome the current climate of polarization and blend diverse story lines, perspectives and programs to achieve full recovery. There is much from the past to be sustained and enhanced.

But Center City also needs to continue to evolve in directions quite different from the downtown of 1990 or 2020.

The year 2024 brings new leadership to both the City and CCD. I wish Mayor-elect Parker (CCD's 6th partner in that office) and incoming District CEO Prema Katari Gupta (CCD's 2nd) the best of success working together. Much remains to be done.

**Paul R. Levy**  
 President  
 plevy@centercityphila.org

<sup>8</sup> Our graffiti removal is limited to the first floor of building facades.

# Welcome to Winter at Dilworth Park

## ONGOING

**Made In Philadelphia  
Holiday Market**  
Daily  
**Through January 1**  
Sundays – Thursdays  
12 pm – 8 pm  
Fridays & Saturdays  
12 pm – 9 pm

**Cocktails And Cold Ones**  
Wednesdays  
**Through February 21**  
5 pm – 7 pm

**College Nights**  
*presented by Temple University*  
Thursdays  
**Through February 22**  
5:30 pm – 9 pm

**Rothman Orthopaedics Ice Rink  
& Rothman Orthopaedics Cabin**  
Daily  
**Through February 25**  
Visit [dilworthpark.org](http://dilworthpark.org) for hours

**Wintergarden On  
The Greenfield Lawn**  
Daily  
**Through March 17**  
Visit [dilworthpark.org](http://dilworthpark.org) for hours

## COMING IN 2024

**Ice Festival**  
**Saturday, January 20**  
3 pm – 7 pm

**Superhero Skate**  
**Saturday, February 3**  
1:30 pm – 3 pm

**Free In February**  
*presented by Rothman  
Orthopaedics*  
**February 5-20**  
Mondays & Tuesdays

**Big Game Tailgate**  
**Saturday, February 10**  
3 pm – 5 pm

**Love On Ice**  
**Wednesday, February 14**  
5 pm – 7 pm

**Lunar New Year Celebration**  
*presented by Temple University*  
**Saturday, February 17**  
5 pm – 7 pm



VISIT  
**DILWORTHPARK.ORG**  
FOR MORE EVENT DETAILS



**Host your next event at a  
Center City District park!**

**Contact** [rentals@centercityphila.org](mailto:rentals@centercityphila.org)  
**for information.**

# Feather Friendly at Sister Cities Park

Have you noticed the new dotted pattern on the glass at Sister Cities Park Café? The subtle, light gray dots are decorative, but they serve a bigger purpose that benefits our local and migratory feathered friends. The dotted film, created by the Canadian company Feather Friendly, makes the glass visible to birds so they're far less likely to fly into it. CCD and the organization Bird Safe Philly partnered on the effort.





# A Plan for the Enhancement of Market East

The Market Street East Improvement Association has released the results of its independent master plan evaluation of Market Street East and the role the proposed 76ers arena can have on the future of Market East District.

Commissioned by CCD and conducted by Sasaki & Associates, the impact study assesses current conditions and outlines a vision for Market Street East focused on diversifying business uses, enhancing access, connecting neighboring communities and creating a vibrant mixed-use corridor that connects Market Street to other iconic destinations across the city.

To see the Market Street East Vision Plan, visit [centercityphila.org/mseplan2023](http://centercityphila.org/mseplan2023)



# Thank You For Your Generous Support

After three years of unprecedented challenges in our own communities and around the globe, Center City Philadelphia is once again animated with people — residents, workers, visitors, and shoppers. Generous contributions to the Center City District Foundation (CCDF) and the Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC) have been essential to support the downtown recovery.

CCDF donations supported the creation of the Wintergarden in Dilworth Park in addition to our Arts on Center Stage and Parkway Pals events, which have offered dozens of free performances and programs in CCD-managed parks in partnership with Philadelphia's arts and cultural organizations. Contributions also enabled us to plant more trees and install new planters throughout the downtown — beautification efforts that are good for businesses and for everyone who spends time in Center City.

Additionally, contributions to the Foundation allowed us to expand our Ambassadors of Hope homeless outreach program — a successful partnership with Project HOME and the Philadelphia Police Department — and to continue our effective new bicycle safety patrol teams.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without our supporters, whose generosity fosters the resurgence of Center City and whose investments continue to activate our parks and streets. Sponsors and donors listed here represent gifts of \$100 or more made from Nov. 1, 2022, through Nov. 1, 2023.

**Make an impact today!**  
**Give online at [supportccdf.org](https://supportccdf.org)**  
**or via the enclosed envelope.**



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# A Life of Service, in Center City and Around the World

If the saying is true that everyone has a book in them, then Dasmuth Pratapsingh has a small library's worth.

"Das," as he is known to his CCD colleagues, retired in November after nearly seven years as a Community Service Representative (CSR). He was born in Mauritius and left at age 19 to travel the world as a volunteer for a humanitarian organization.

"I read about the slums of Africa and India, and I was thinking maybe I can go and help. And I contacted an organization looking for volunteers. I just took a plane in the unknown to Bombay. And I dedicated myself to serve mankind."

That was in 1976. His travels took him all over India and eventually to 17 countries over the next dozen or so years.

"I was in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Holland, England, Belgium, Italy. ... Some European people had met me in India, and they were happy with my (vegetarian) cooking and they took me to Europe. So I was 10 years in Europe, and during my service in Europe, I was housed by the famous Beatle George Harrison. I lived in his house for three years."

Das gained fluency in about eight languages during the course of his travels, knowledge that proved invaluable as a CSR meeting people in Center City who hailed from many of the places he called home over the years. He wanted to live in America since witnessing Neil Armstrong's 1969 moon landing on television and eventually settled in Philadelphia to be near his daughter, who works in an administrative role for the Kimmel Center. He was drawn to the CSR job because of its service component, which over the years entailed using his language proficiency to assist visitors as well as getting urgent medical assistance for a pedestrian who suffered a stroke.

He recently returned to Mauritius — where he hasn't lived since that trip to India at 19 and last visited seven years ago — and plans to spend time catching up with his large extended family, pursuing his longtime pursuits in art and photography, staying physically active, and continuing his lifelong commitment to service.

"I'm sad to leave but, you know, I woke up and saw I'm 67 years old," he said with a laugh. "I don't feel I'm old but it's just time to ground myself."

Das has also gotten plenty of requests to write a book (or two) about his fascinating journey. "I've lived in so many countries, I have seen everything. I've seen war, I've been in middle of wars and I've been in the best and worst places. I have had a heck of a life."



# New Improvements On Jewelers' Row

Center City District has completed a series of streetscape improvements to create a more welcoming and pedestrian friendly shopping experience on Jewelers' Row. The improvements, developed in partnership with the Jewelers' Row District, include new lighting and banner poles on the 600 and 700 blocks of Sansom Street, new sidewalk planters, in-street planters on the northern side of the 700 block and will soon include overhead gateway signage on the 700 block of Sansom.

In addition to enhancing the appearance of historic Jewelers' Row, the nation's oldest diamond district, the beautification project will help to create better pedestrian connections to Independence National Historical Park and to Market East and Walnut Street. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania awarded a \$500,000 Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grant for the project and CCD contributed \$1.5 million from its reserves to fund the improvements.



# Prema Katari Gupta Makes ‘Most Influential Philadelphians’ List



Erin Ingrassia

Center City District’s incoming President and CEO Prema Katari Gupta has been named one of the city’s most influential people by Philadelphia magazine. Check out the publication’s November issue, where she shares her views on the importance of a thriving Center City and her key priorities in 2024.



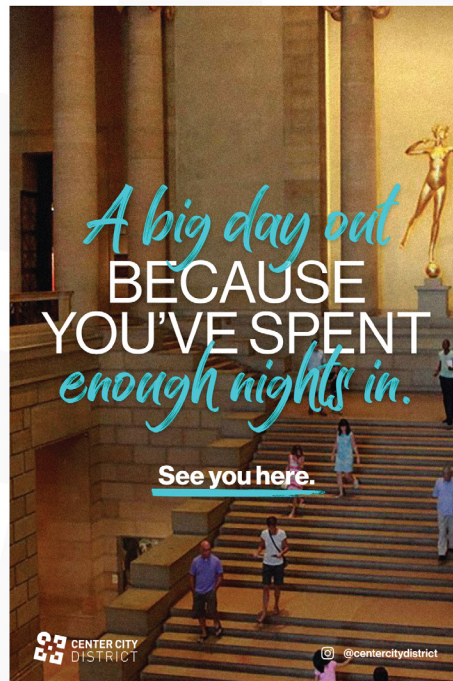


# Center City: See You Here

CCD has launched a new advertising campaign to promote the return of downtown workers and visitors and to promote the unique variety of shopping, dining, arts and culture and other exciting attractions that can be found only in Center City.

The campaign features brightly-hued graphics and color-saturated images showing people enjoying the vibrancy and attractions of Center City, along with the signoff line "See you here."

The campaign will be deployed in phases in a variety of media over the next several months to highlight events, business promotions and seasonal activities including the winter edition of CCD Restaurant Week kicking off next month.



### The Afternoon Cup

<b>1:48PM</b>	Boss chats... "Coffee?"	<b>2:15PM</b>	Talk shop over a cheeky croissant.
<b>1:49PM</b>	"Yep," because caffeine.	<b>2:30PM</b>	Just found your new fav coffee spot in Philly.
<b>2:00PM</b>	You lead the way. A new place just opened.		

See you here.

CENTER CITY DISTRICT @centercitydistrict

WHY RUSH *for an hour* WHEN YOU CAN *stay a minute?*  
See you here.

CENTER CITY DISTRICT @centercitydistrict

### The Office Cardigan

<b>10:55AM</b>	This office is freezing.	<b>11:45AM</b>	Quick pit stop over lunch. Treat yourself.
<b>11:28AM</b>	You thinking what I'm thinking? New sweater!	<b>12:50PM</b>	New sweater? Check. But also... this dress? check.
<b>11:30AM</b>	Oh, what about that little boutique down the block?		

See you here.

CENTER CITY DISTRICT @centercitydistrict

### The Work Dinner

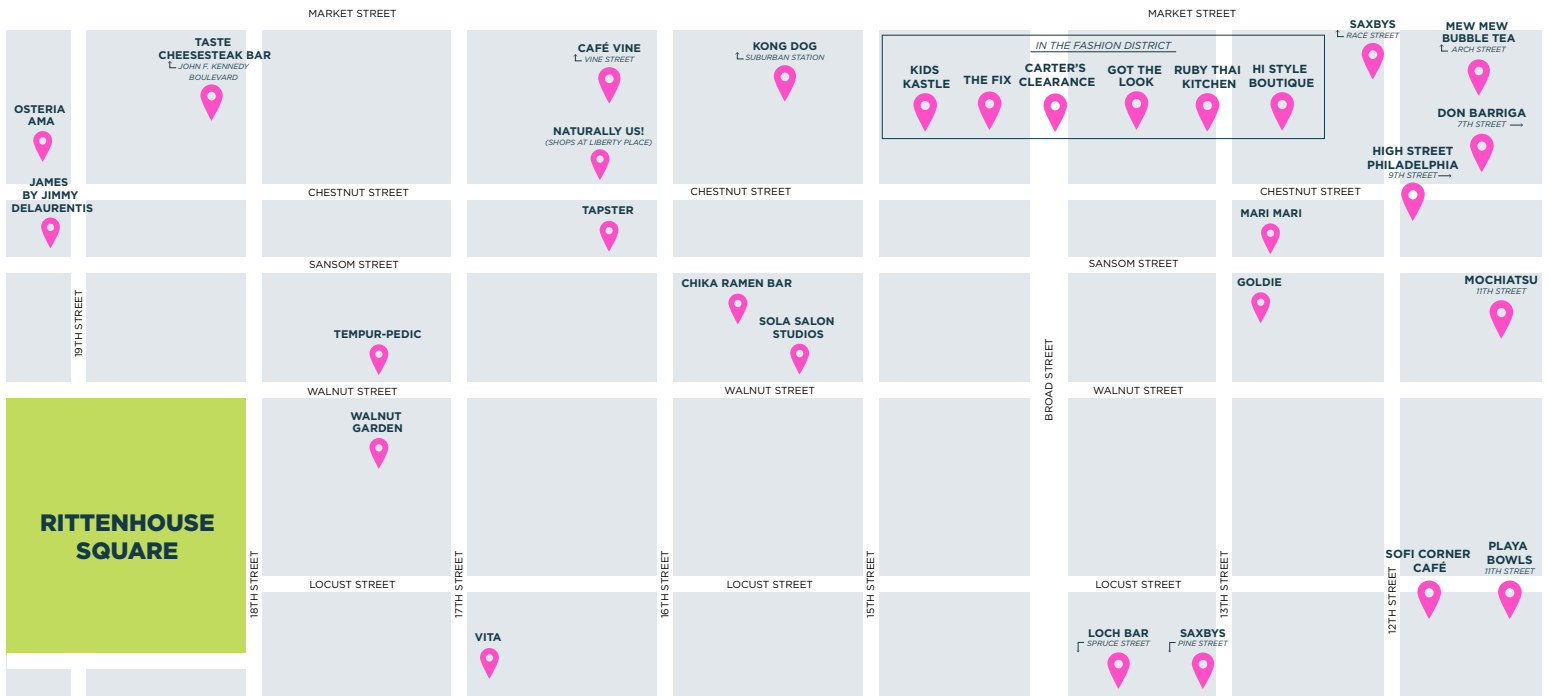
<b>8:38AM</b>	Caught a later train. Staying after for a work dinner.
<b>10:35AM</b>	Boss sends around the menu. We're eating good tonight!
<b>1:58PM</b>	Is it dinner yet?
<b>5:30PM</b>	Why yes...I would like a starter.
<b>6:45PM</b>	Hopping on the 6:45 train home. 20 minutes of "Me Time."

See you here.

CENTER CITY DISTRICT @centercitydistrict

NEVER SQUARE

# New Openings In Center City



**Café Vine**  
1600 Vine Street

**Loch Bar**  
301 South Broad Street

**Sola Salon Studios**  
1503 Walnut Street

**Carter's Clearance**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**Mari Mari**  
105 South 13th Street

**Tapster**  
1601 Sansom Street

**Chika Ramen Bar**  
1526 Sansom Street

**Mew Mew Bubble Tea**  
927 Arch Street

**Taste Cheesesteak Bar**  
1809 JFK Boulevard

**Don Barriga**  
703 Chestnut Street

**Mochiatsu**  
132 South 11th Street

**Tempur-Pedic**  
713 Walnut Street

**Goldie**  
1218 Sansom Street

**Naturally Us!**  
1625 Chestnut Street  
in the Shops at Liberty Place

**The Fix**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**Got the Look**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**Osteria Ama**  
1905 Chestnut Street

**Vita**  
261 South 17th Street

**High Street Philadelphia**  
101 South 9th Street

**Playa Bowls**  
236 South 11th Street

**Walnut Garden**  
1708 Walnut Street

**Hi Style Boutique**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**Ruby THAI Kitchen**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**JAMES by Jimmy DeLaurentis**  
114 South 19th Street

**Saxbys**  
Convention Center & 401 South Broad Street

**Kids Kastle**  
901 Market Street in the Fashion District

**Sofi Corner Café**  
1112 Locust Street

**KongDog**  
Suburban Station

**Did we miss any new openings or are you opening soon within Center City District's boundaries? Please email us at [shop@centercityphila.org](mailto:shop@centercityphila.org) with more information.**

# The Latest Research from CCD/CPDC

CCD researches, produces and distributes reports year-round to assist a variety of stakeholders in their efforts to attract businesses from outside the region, encourage new startups, retain businesses within Center City and expand the residential population.

## Downtowns Rebound:

*The Data Driven Path to Recovery*

**October 2023**

Can downtowns rebound and prosper? This fundamental question lingers more than three years after the global pandemic, after public mandates to work from home and following civil unrest and crime increases that occurred in many cities in 2020. This report looks at 26 U.S. downtowns and seeks to counter misinformation and provide some of the data that can assist when making decisions and choosing actions that best support a robust and inclusive process of recovery.

## Center City Retail Report

**November 2023**

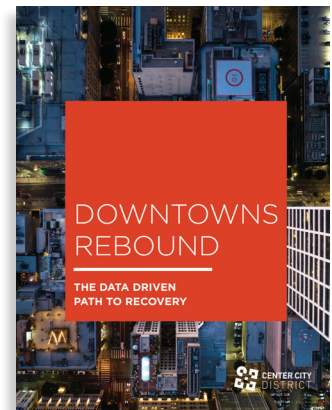
Retail occupancy within Center City District boundaries recovered to 84.5% in September 2023, approaching the 2019 level of 89%. Weekday evening pedestrian volumes are at 87% of 2019 levels, showing Center City's strength as a retail, dining and entertainment destination after work despite the slower return of office workers.

## Center City Recovery Update

**November 2023**

The total number of workers, residents and visitors in Center City continued to rise in October 2023 to a daily average of 382,300, 82% of October 2019 levels, with the largest increases among workers and residents.

[Read and download CCD reports at centercityphila.org/research-reports](https://centercityphila.org/research-reports)



## Become a CPDC Member Today

Business leaders who are members of the Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC) have access to year-round programs and events from panel discussions to behind-the-scenes hard hat tours of some of Center City's most exciting projects.

CPDC membership pays for research and member engagement, and enables CPDC to continue to provide reliable marketplace information and enhance the competitiveness of Center City.

To learn more about CPDC and how to join, visit [centercityphila.org/cpdc](https://centercityphila.org/cpdc) or contact CPDC Executive Director Prema Gupta at [pgupta@centercityphila.org](mailto:pgupta@centercityphila.org)

# CENTER CITY Digest



CENTRAL PHILADELPHIA  
DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION

WINTER 2023

Center City Digest is a publication of the Center City District (CCD), a private-sector-sponsored municipal authority committed to providing supplemental services that make Philadelphia's downtown clean, safe and attractive; and of Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC), with more than 60 years of private-sector commitment to the revitalization of downtown Philadelphia.

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## CENTER CITY DISTRICT RESTAURANT WEEK

The 2 Weeks You've  
Been Waiting For

DINNER: **\$45** LUNCH: **\$20**  
STARTING AT