

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarizes the efforts to engage community members throughout the comprehensive planning process, which aimed to gather diverse community input to shape the vision, goals, and strategies for the City's future development.

PUBLIC INCLUSION PLAN

The public inclusion plan included the following activities and events:

- 1. Project Meetings:** Plan Commission, Public Hearing, and other committee meetings to review and give feedback on plan development
- 2. Public Input Meeting & Visioning Workshop:** In-person community meeting to obtain input and direction on a new/ updated mission and vision statement for the City
- 3. Online Engagement:** Community survey
- 4. Promotional Methods:** Use of City website, fliers/posters, newspaper, emails, and social media platforms to reach community members on updates during the planning process
- 5. Public Hearing:** Steps for recommendation and adoption of the updated Plan

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The City of Berlin facilitated a variety of efforts to garner input for the Comprehensive Plan:

PROJECT MEETINGS

A project kick-off meeting was held on July 10, 2025. The discussion highlighted issues and opportunities in Berlin for the City to address in the Comprehensive Plan. Through the rest of the planning process, meetings were held with the Plan Commission to review draft elements of the plan as it was developed.

At the kickoff meeting with the Plan Commission, key priorities for the Comprehensive Plan included:

- Strengthening community trust through active engagement and listening to residents' priorities.
- Revitalizing underutilized downtown commercial spaces by promoting diverse, vibrant retail and business offerings with enhanced curb appeal.
- Reestablishing the Economic Development Corporation and fostering strong public-private partnerships.
- Identifying and addressing opportunities for improvement across the community.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

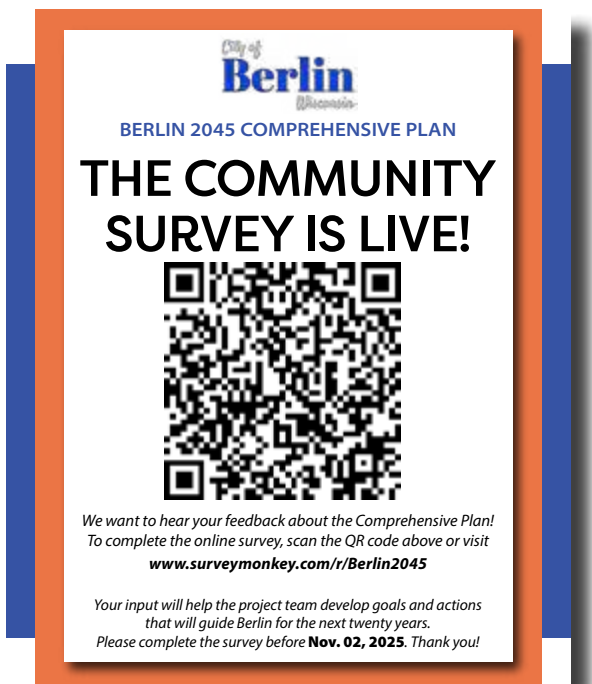
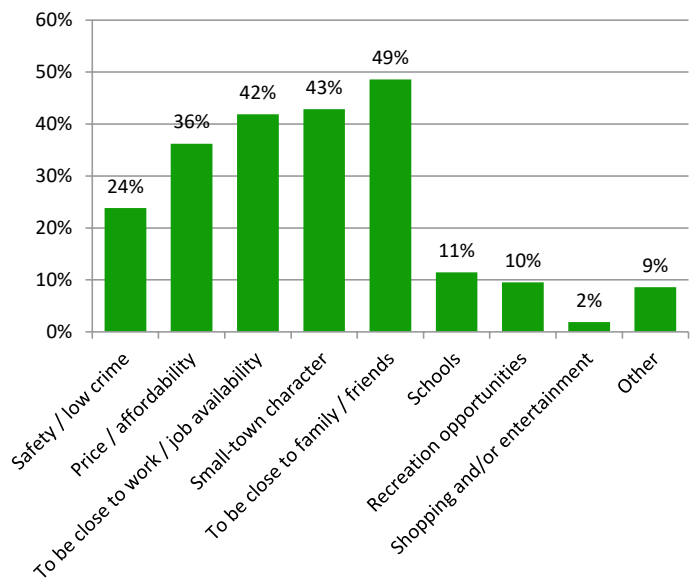
An online community survey was active from September 10, 2025 through November 2, 2025 and received 108 responses. The survey provided 31 questions with some open-ended responses to inform the Plan’s policy direction. A link to the survey was provided on the City’s website, posted on the City Facebook, and shared out to community members through the other engagement opportunities. Full survey results are provided in Appendix A of this Plan.

Seventy-three percent (73%) of survey responses came from City of Berlin residents. In comparison to the greater community, most respondents were between 35-54, more female, and mostly homeowners. Overall, the responses reflect a strong appreciation for Berlin’s small town character and sense of safety, along with a clear desire for improve housing options and reinvest in the downtown area—while preserving the City’s character.

Living in Berlin

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents reported that they have lived in the Berlin area for over ten years. The most frequently cited reasons for living in Berlin included proximity to work, proximity to family and friends, small-town community character, and the sense of safety provided. Respondents commonly expressed satisfaction with the City’s street trees, property upkeep, and public utility services; City parks, safe walking routes, and personal safety were highly rated. Respondents were not satisfied with the overall appearance of the downtown area and parking convenience within downtown.

Figure 2.1 - Top Reasons for Living in Berlin



Flyer advertising the online survey

Housing

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents are homeowners. If respondents were to move in the next five years, 65% would prefer to purchase a home over renting a home, with 79% of respondents preferring single-family detached housing over other unit types; respondents indicate desire for larger housing options with 2-3 bedrooms (68%) or 4+ bedrooms (29%).

The table below highlights survey responses to the question, “Rate the following housing conditions in Berlin.” Categories rated overall as “satisfactory” included ownership housing costs, ownership housing quality, rental housing costs, and rental housing quality. The results indicate room for improvement in housing supply for both owners and renters, with open comments highlighting cost and quality concerns for rental stock in addition to need for stronger building code enforcement.

For the development of new housing supply, responses showed support for single family homes on small lots (79%), duplexes (61%), and apartments (52%); many respondents are open to learning more about options for accessory dwelling units (40%).

Figure 2.2 - Avg. Rating City Services & Facilities

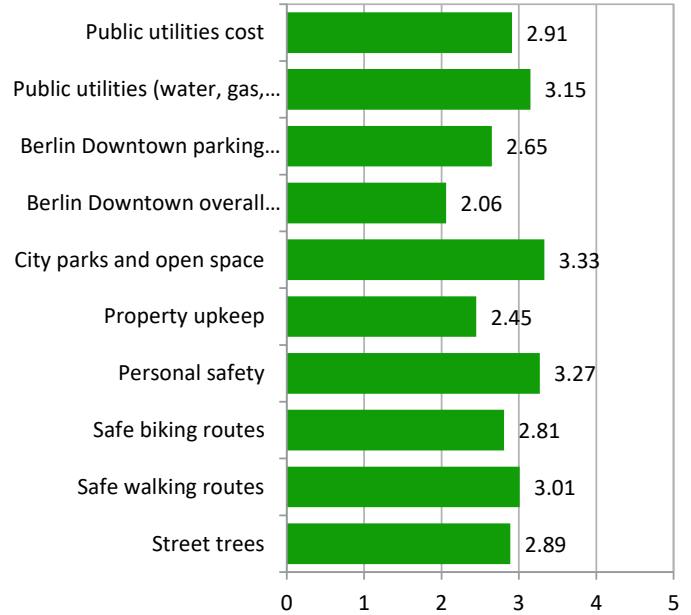


Table 2.1 - Survey Responses on Housing Conditions

	POOR	UNSATISFACTORY	SATISFACTORY	EXCELLENT	N/A
Ownership housing costs	10%	23%	54%	5%	9%
Ownership housing supply	13%	29%	50%	1%	7%
Ownership housing quality	12%	28%	52%	2%	6%
Rental housing costs	20%	25%	19%	2%	34%
Rental housing supply	28%	32%	11%	1%	29%
Rental housing quality	22%	32%	13%	1%	32%

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Employment

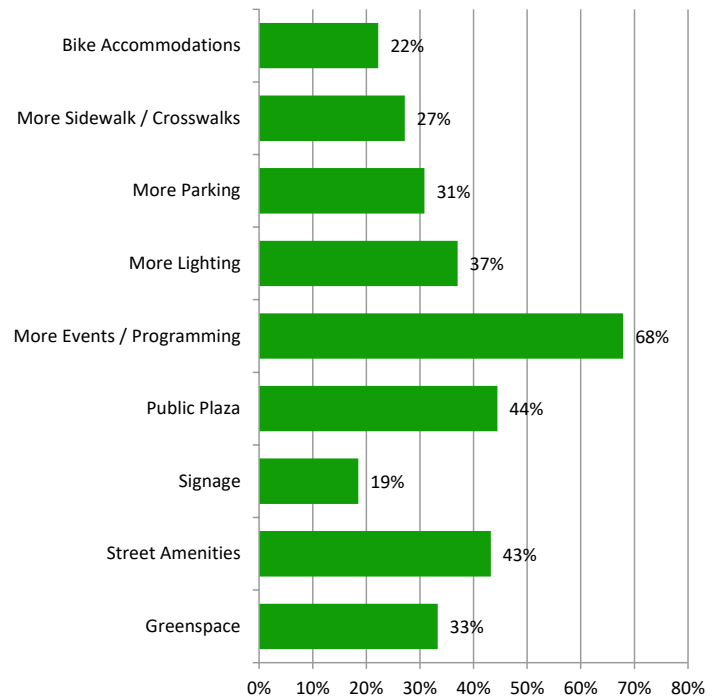
The employment share response indicates 88% of respondents work full-time; 80% of respondents work one day or less from home, while 14% work remotely for 4-5+ days per week; this aligns with the national trend shifting towards hybrid employment. Of those respondents who want to work remotely, most would benefit from more flexible work options and better internet service. Within non-working respondents, 4% identified as retirees.

Additional Investment & Development Needs

Street repair and maintenance, sewer and water services, and sidewalks were identified as the highest priorities for future City investments. Respondents indicated dissatisfaction with retail shopping, entertainment, and drive-thru restaurants in the City; responses indicate overall satisfaction with the City's gas stations, pharmacies, medical / dental care, and broadband internet. Respondents would like to see the City prioritize reinvestment in downtown sites and existing homes.



Figure 2.3 - Top Amenities/Improvements you would want to see in Downtown Berlin



PUBLIC VISIONING WORKSHOP

About twenty-three members of the public attended a community visioning workshop on October 28th, 2025, twenty-one of whom identified as Berlin residents. The workshop featured a presentation and a series of activities to introduce attendees to the comprehensive planning process and garner public input.

Crafting a Vision Statement

During discussions with community members in the workshop, attendees were asked to reflect on a vision for Berlin 20 years from present. Community members reflected on the roots of the community and desire to balance growth and small-town feel. Berlin has a rich history and community members emphasized the welcoming community atmosphere. Many identified their vision specifically for the downtown area, hoping that in twenty years, Downtown Berlin has active storefronts with local businesses to support the economy and attract residents and visitors.

Feedback Wall

Attendees were asked to identify Berlin's Strengths, Issues, and Opportunities by adding comments to sticky notes on a wall. The responses are summarized below:



Strengths

(What you want to preserve in Berlin)

- **Strong Community and Volunteer Spirit:** Many residents care deeply, assist when asked, and maintain active volunteer groups that support local initiatives.
- **Quality Education and Youth Opportunities:** Good schools, accessible facilities, and programs like Boys & Girls Club encourage youth involvement and participation.
- **Health, Safety, and Essential Services:** Hospital and emergency services, food pantry, and a safe environment where kids can walk to school contribute to community well-being.
- **Vibrant Cultural and Social Life:** Family events, farmers markets, library programs, and traditions like tree lighting foster connection and attract visitors.
- **Small-Town Charm and Identity:** Historic character, older-style homes, and a welcoming atmosphere create a sense of belonging and pride.

Issues

(What you want to change in Berlin)

- **Affordable and Quality Housing:** Increase affordable housing options for seniors, low-income families, and young families, while balancing multifamily development and holding landlords accountable for property upkeep.
- **Youth and Community Programs:** Restore and expand recreational programming, childcare, and enrichment activities for all ages—especially for youth outside of the Boys & Girls Club.
- **Infrastructure and Transportation:** Repair streets, address potholes, improve public transportation access, and manage traffic flow (e.g., truck bypasses, apartment traffic concerns).
- **Public Services and Engagement:** Enhance City employee interaction with residents, enforce ordinances, and support services like the senior center, homelessness programs, and tree maintenance.

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- **Economic Development and Local Business:** Attract better-paying jobs, diversify retail and restaurant options, limit oversaturation of similar businesses, and explore creative funding opportunities.
- **Community Identity and Inclusion:** Foster a positive self-image, ensure newcomers feel welcome, and revitalize Main Street and civic institutions like the chamber of commerce.

Opportunities

(Your ideas to make Berlin better)

- **Community Amenities & Recreation:** Maintain and improve the recreational offerings for community members of all ages and abilities.
- **Youth Engagement & Education:** Offer opportunities for youth programming and enhance collaboration between the City of Berlin and the Berlin Area School District
- **Local Economy & Downtown Revitalization:** Attract diverse businesses, restore historic storefronts and foster new retail and commercial offerings.
- **Childcare & Senior Support:** Increase housing options, including options for seniors, and attract high-quality childcare options for families.
- **Environmental & Aesthetic Improvements:** Plant more trees, beautify roads and entrances, and leverage the riverfront as a focal point for the City

Mapping Activity

Attendees were given the opportunity to identify community assets (areas to preserve), challenges, and opportunities for redevelopment on various maps of Berlin. General comments from this exercise addressed:

- Desire for increased activity in Downtown Berlin
- Prioritization of greenspace and amenities, including signage towards the Mascoutin State Trail, including space for parks and green space in development and redevelopment in the City
- Identifying opportunities for connecting the City of Berlin to the Fox River.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT KEY TAKEAWAYS

ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Housing Availability:** There is a clear need for more housing options, and considering a range of options, including single-family homes, duplexes, apartments, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs), would provide added support and options for first-time buyers, renters, and the local workforce.
- **Downtown/Commercial Revitalization:** The community sees downtown as integral to the City, and wants to see new retail and commercial businesses that encourage foot traffic and evening/weekend activity.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Aging infrastructure, particularly water mains, streets, and sidewalks, is a major concern. Residents support investments that improve safety, accessibility, and long-term sustainability.
- **Economic Development:** There is a desire to attract and retain businesses, residents support small business growth, entrepreneurship, and manufacturing jobs which have been the backbone of stable employment for City residents.
- **Workforce and Employment:** Limited job opportunities and the City's distance from neighboring job centers pose challenges for workforce attraction. Fostering engaged relationships with local institutions like the hospital and schools are seen as key to addressing this.

COMMON THEMES

- **Community Character:** Residents deeply value Berlin's small-town charm, safety, and sense of connection. There is a strong desire to preserve these qualities while allowing for thoughtful and sustainable growth.
- **Downtown Revitalization:** The community envisions a more vibrant and walkable downtown with diverse businesses, restaurants, cafés, and public gathering spaces that encourage activity throughout the day and into the evening.
- **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Upgrading aging infrastructure, particularly water mains, streets, and sidewalks, is a top priority. Residents also want improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to better link neighborhoods, parks, schools, and commercial areas.
- **Youth and Families Support:** The need for more youth-oriented spaces, family-friendly programming, and childcare services was a recurring theme. Residents want Berlin to be a place where families can thrive and young people feel engaged.
- **Public Spaces and Events:** Enhancing parks, trails, and public amenities, along with hosting more community events, will be essential to fostering social connection and improving quality of life.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Residents recognize the value of working with local institutions like the hospital, schools, and reviving the Chamber of Commerce to address economic development needs.