

Introduction

How influential is community interest for the revitalization of degraded malls?

Retail vacancy can be a sign that cities are losing community interest, economic stability, and a safe position within the city

The mall's initial function was to conveniently serve the community. As the mall model has changed in the last couple of decades, this study focuses on the connection of community interest and its relationship with the success of brick-and-mortar retail today.

Can this understanding of interest prevent these “ghost malls” from happening? Or provide a list of symptoms a city is experiencing to determine if these recommendations can benefit them?

Three main points of interest for this study:
Crime, Economy, and Community
These points determine the effect mall/retail vacancy, the overarching symptoms a jurisdiction can exhibit, and how revitalization can benefit both the community and cities themselves.

There is little research showing the connection between community intervention, crime, and economic status influence on the growing retail vacancies. Prioritizing focus on independent forces like vacant spaces within a city can provide a flexible degree of implementation. It is important to understand the differing levels of need each city provides with these recommendations. Past solutions have been to introduce more big-box stores to fill space, but for the long term, it creates a further divide.

2020 rise of ecommerce and unfortunately the rise of big box stores that small businesses were having a hard time competing with. After COVID-19 happened, brick and mortar shopping was left behind with it, there has been an economic decline over the last decades, mostly due to the unofficial recession patterns making their way through local agencies.

Key Findings

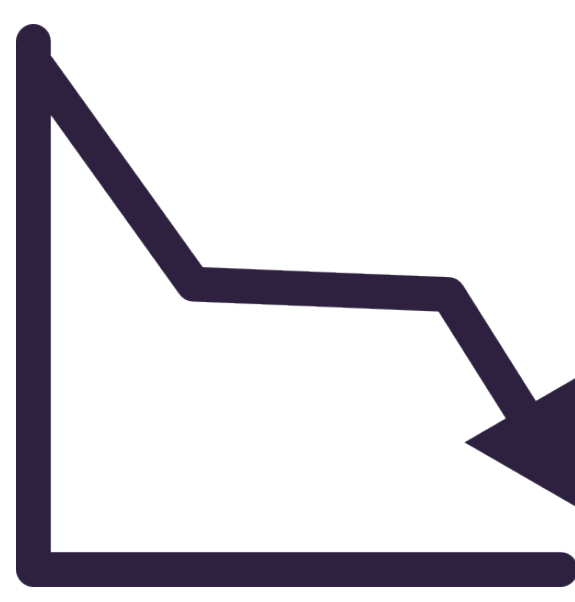
Overall, Both Corona and Riverside struggle with higher than average crime rate. From 2010-2022 averaging 2,372 thefts and 648 burglaries a year for Corona and an average of 6,839 thefts and 1,763 burglaries a year for Riverside. Corona notes for 2022, only 22.1% of businesses are victims of crimes in general and Riverside only notes there is overall a 1/194 chance of being a victim of a crime. The Open Response questions noted Community Interest as the category most influenced by mall degradation with Crime and Revitalization tied for second.

Survey results showed these were the most influential variables:
Revitalization --> Crime Improvement and Higher Community Interest
Vacant Retail --> Higher Crime Rates
Low Retail Variety --> Low Community Interest

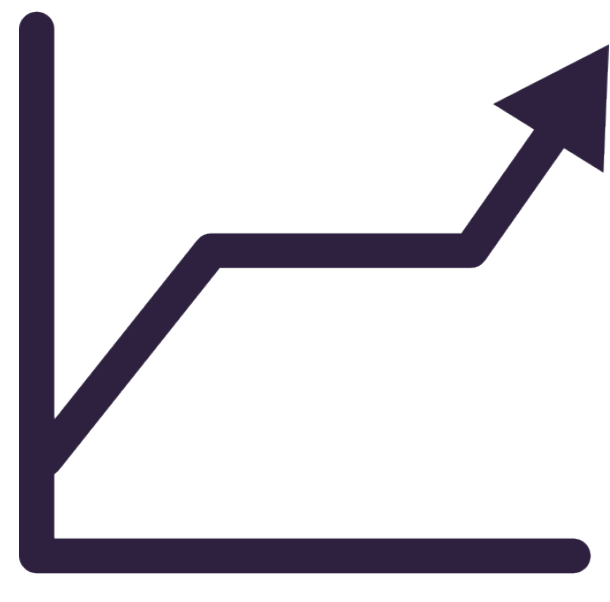
Implement Revitalization

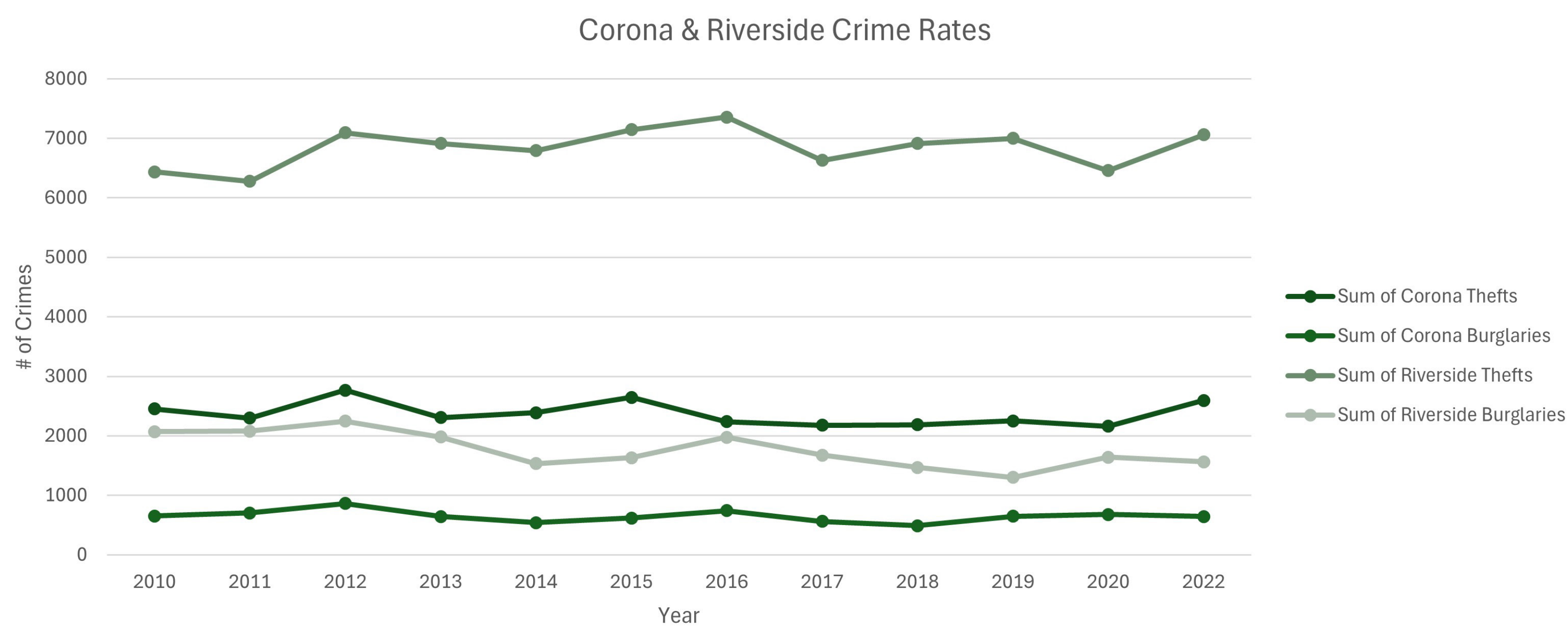


Decrease Vacant Retail



Increase Retail Variety







Methodology

The cities of Riverside and Corona were chosen for the survey process of this study. There areas were picked for their similar experiences with retail and its decline. These cities were chosen as well as their planners specifically. I focused on surveying the city planners directly because of this complex topic. Providing me with insight into a city's primary issue when it comes to community interest. Whether or not it is a top concern, to what degree is it discussed for general project approval, and or how influential it really is within the jurisdiction.

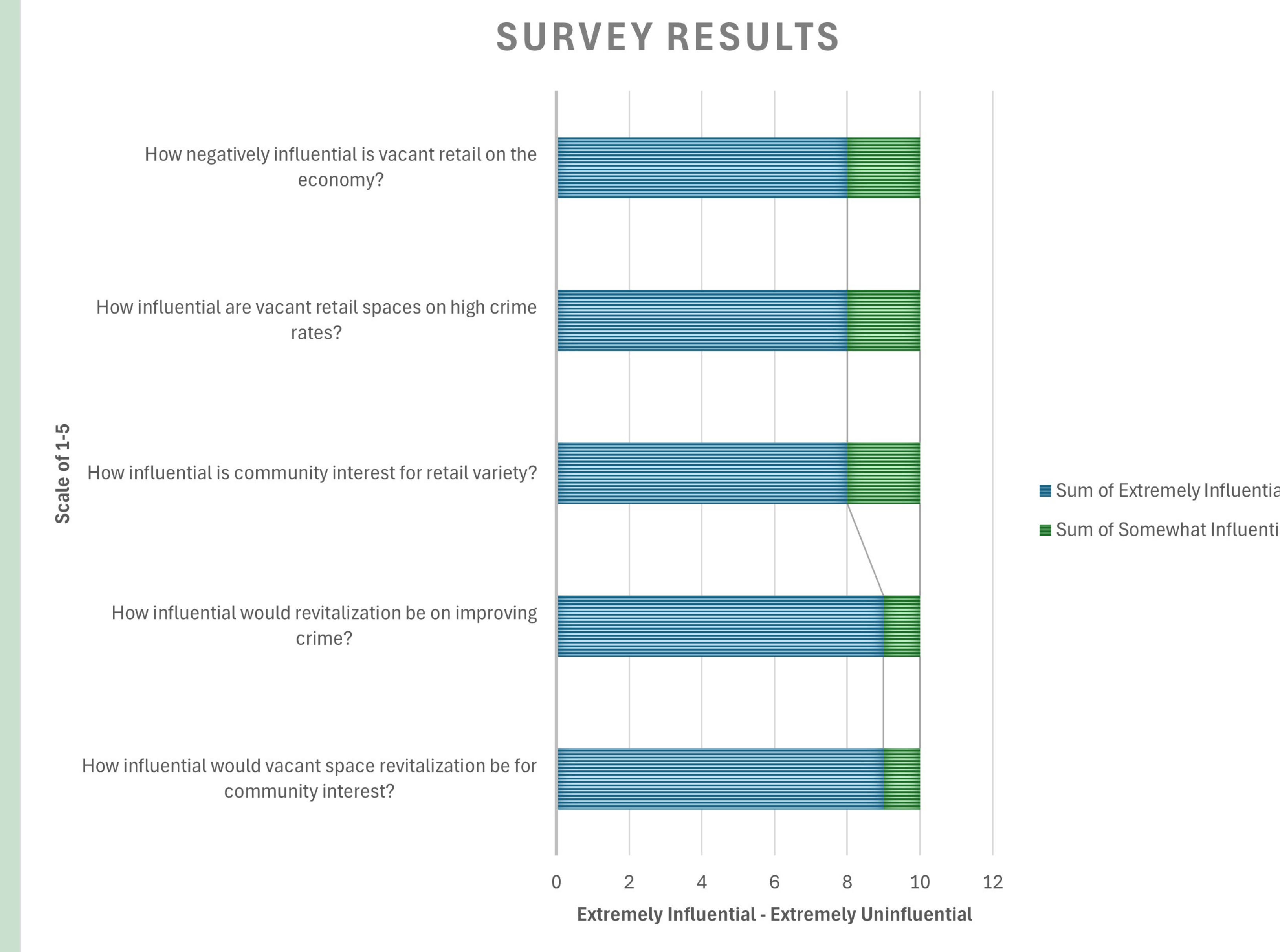
This is a mixed methods project that includes a numerical 1-5 rated community interest, crime, and economy questions, as well as 2 open ended responses:

Which category is most influenced by mall degradation and why?
What strategies and/or policies should be implemented to relieve this impact?

Secondary data was collected for each cities crime and economic data spanning the last 20 years for a clear fluctuation rate in these same variables.

The survey was shared through Microsoft form links and their QR codes. They were distributed by email to each city and their respective Senior Planners. The Survey all together contained 19 questions in total with 4 demographic and contact questions at the start, and the last 2 open ended questions presented at the end. Overall, the average time to take was from 4-15 minutes to complete.

Utilizing all data received, this project uses a thematic style data analysis that integrates the quantitative statistics from each city and survey responses along with the qualitative open-ended responses. This analysis creates both consistent themes for the total responses, respective city outlooks, and solution based or preventative city recommendations.



Recommendations

City Solutions

Many cities are now living with the effects of degrading malls and other major retail vacancies; these recommendations are geared towards solution-based plans. These properly consider the existing land use, vacancies, and retail within these bounds.

Revitalization Implementation:

- Improve public right of way control
 - Using local government investment measures
- Zoning changes to incentivize private retail and housing investment
 - Primarily to ensure consistent walkability and smart growth elements

City Prevention

For newer cities or developments that are not necessarily struggling with mass vacancies or crime issues, these recommendations provide a larger basis for implementation efforts. As these suggestions are meant to bring attention to the often-overlooked points of building a sustainable community.

- Flexible Zoning & Mixed-Use Implementation
 - Broad project use and easily changes with the city
- Community Participation
 - Promoting & incentivizing public engagement for valuable input on high demand retail