



How we can ensure that Burlingame retail remains vibrant in a changing landscape

The Burlingame City Council and Community Development Department have been working on a combination of policies and incentives to help keep the City's commercial districts vibrant. As part of this effort, the City and the Burlingame Chamber of Commerce co-hosted the "Burlingame Talks Shop" event on April 17th, 2019. The event was a community conversation where nearly 100 residents, business owners, property owners and others discussed trends in retail, as well as options for entertainment, services and more. There were two panels that detailed:



- Market-wide trends, throughout the nation and beyond
- Local trends, summarizing changes more local to Burlingame

These panels were followed by Breakout Group discussions, with overall feedback summarized below, as well as key points mentioned by each group.

Background Information:

- **Public Outreach:** To advertise for the event, the City contacted community members by email, distributed notices in the City's eNews, and had coverage in the local newspaper.
- **Minute Surveys:** Using the City's eNews letter, a series of online surveys reached a total of 301 respondents who live and/or work in Burlingame. These short surveys were distributed weekly from March 21st to April 11th, 2019. The responses gauged the community's frequency of online retailers versus shopping locally, desire to support local businesses, and revealed preferences for some goods (groceries, apparel, etc.) in-person over online. (The results of the Minute Surveys are included as Appendix A.)
- **Round Table Discussion:** This educational community dialogue brought together close to 100 people at the Masonic Hall on April 17th, 2019.



Co-sponsored by the
City of Burlingame and the
Burlingame Chamber of Commerce



Panelist Presentations: Major Talking Points

The first panel focused on the “big trends” including retail world and trends, coworking, and considerations for attracting businesses to locate in Burlingame.

Panelists:

- Julie Taylor – Retail Leasing
- John Schmid – Retail Architect
- Amy Feldman – Coworking

Panel Questions:

1. *Please tell us some of the industry trends you are seeing in your industry.*
2. *How would you see these trends applying to the various commercial districts here in Burlingame?*

The second panel focused on “local trends” including business retention and expansion, types of leases, and types of tenants that can make Burlingame unique.

Panelists:

- Steve Cutter – Leasing Broker
- Ryan Guibara – Commercial Developer
- Carl Martin – Retailer
- John Scarcella – Local Restaurateur

Panel Questions:

For the brokers:

1. *What types of tenants are you receiving inquiries from these days?*
2. *Are there changes to the City’s regulations that could help fill spaces and bring qualified tenants?*

For the businesses:

1. *As long-term Burlingame business owners, what is the secret to your success? What kinds of things have you done to keep up with changes in the local market?*
2. *Are there trends you’ve been hearing about or experiencing that we should be aware of as we think about the future of our commercial districts?*
3. *(If time permits) Are there businesses you would like to see nearby that would be complementary to your business?*

Notable points made by the panels included:

- Larger retail spaces have become less desirable to retailers as companies reassess their number of stores and occupied square footage.
- Retailers are focusing on a tailored consumer experience, and are willing to split larger vacancies into smaller spaces that are more fitting to this approach.
- The emergence of coworking spaces such as WeWork allows properties to even further reduce their retail square footage, and repurpose the balance of space into coworking uses.
- Notable benefits of shared spaces and coworking spaces include additional consumers to support

existing businesses, reduced number of vacancies, and parking demand patterns that are complementary to retail and restaurant patterns.

- Commercial recreation/health and wellness businesses are reportedly seeing strong demand in commercial districts as well, and offer similarly complementary benefits.

Breakout Group Discussions: Major Talking Points

Following the panels, attendees gathered at round discussion tables. City Council members and senior staff attended as listeners, allowing the opportunity to hear from a wide range of people who live and/or work in Burlingame.

Each group recorded their input on flip charts. The notes from the flip charts are attached as Appendix B.

Major talking points included suggestions of how the City can help, creating a wider array of experiences, and challenges to be considered:

How the City Can Help

- Community members suggested the following to promote a diversity of uses and overall vibrancy:
 - Promote a wide variety of businesses to cater to all consumer types
 - Have the City explore ways to promote a business-friendly environment, such as expediting the permitting process or relaxing zoning and development restrictions
 - Providing greater certainty for potential businesses by allowing a greater range of uses to be allowed “as of right” as opposed to the uncertainty of a conditional or discretionary permit
 - Encouraging having active storefronts, but not having rigid square footage or dimension requirements that could disincentivize potential new businesses



Creating a Wider Array of Experiences

- In addition, community members expressed interest in a greater entertainment/nightlife presence in the commercial districts. Suggestions included a local theater, a cinema, street closures for music events, pop-up spaces, etc.
- Local business owners noted the necessity of providing customers an experience, rather than simply a place to make purchases

Challenges to be Considered

- Community members noted a number of challenges for attracting new business to the City:
 - Residents believe there is not enough parking in the commercial districts - a sentiment also echoed by business owners
 - Rising commercial rents may be prohibitive for smaller businesses hoping to locate in the major commercial corridors
 - Vacancies (particularly those with less aesthetically pleasing frontages) can serve as a deterrent for some larger businesses; a number of community members were in favor of a vacant property tax, or requirements for window decals, artwork, etc. to improve the appearance of vacant storefronts



Next Steps:

The Economic Development Subcommittee of the City Council will review the input received at the community meeting, and consider policies and programs that promote vibrant commercial districts. This may include façade programs, “shop local” promotional campaigns, guidelines for maintaining vacant storefronts, and business recruitment strategies.

Furthermore, over the next year the City will be preparing a comprehensive update to its Zoning Code. This will include each of the City’s commercial districts, providing an opportunity to consider the many suggestions proposed in Burlingame Talks Shop.

**[For more information about retail and economic development resources, visit
www.burlingame.org/economicdevelopment](http://www.burlingame.org/economicdevelopment)**

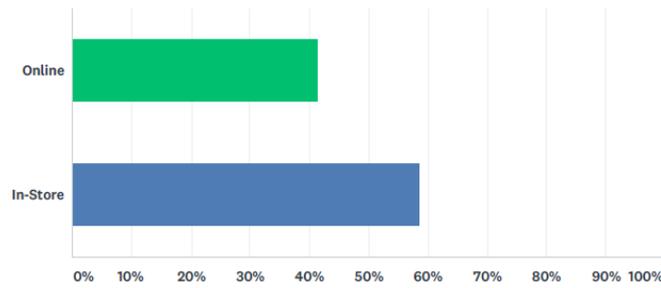
Appendix A:

“Minute Survey” Results: Using the City’s eNews letter, a series of online surveys reached a total of 301 respondents who live and/or work in Burlingame. These short surveys were distributed weekly from March 21st to April 11th, 2019. The responses gauged the community’s frequency of online retailers versus shopping locally, desire to support local businesses, and revealed preferences for some goods (groceries, apparel, etc.) in-person over online.

Minute Survey #1

Q1 Do you prefer to do most of your shopping online or in-store?

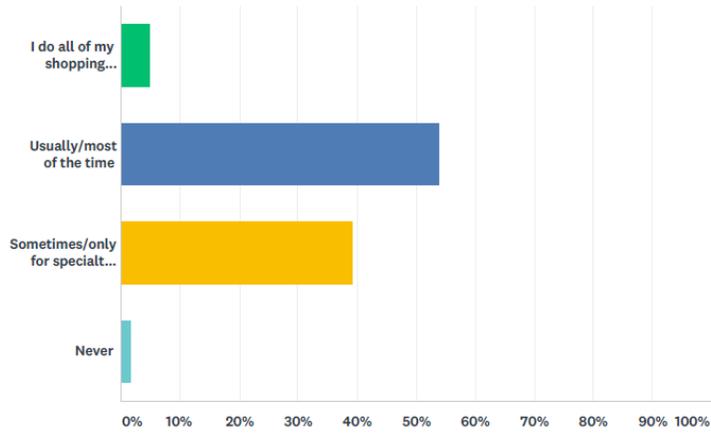
Answered: 307 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Online	41.37%	127
In-Store	58.63%	180
TOTAL		307

Q2 How often do you do your shopping in-store?

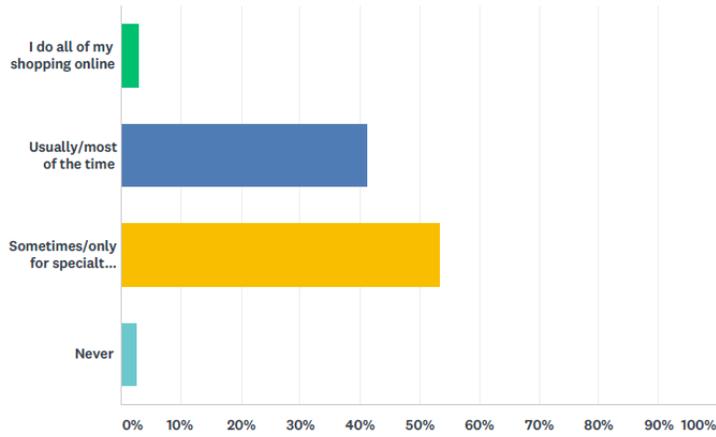
Answered: 307 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I do all of my shopping in-store	4.89%	15
Usually/most of the time	54.07%	166
Sometimes/only for specialty items	39.41%	121
Never	1.63%	5
TOTAL		307

Q3 How often do you shop online?

Answered: 308 Skipped: 1

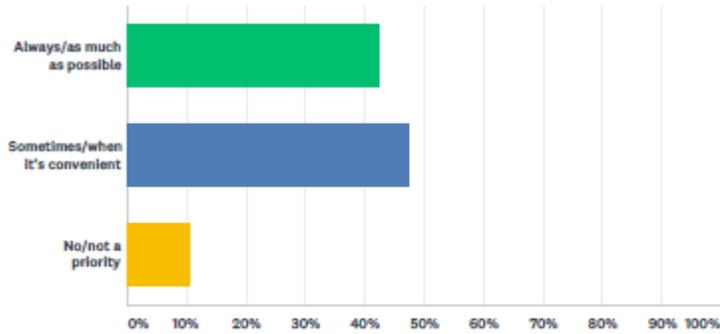


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I do all of my shopping online	2.92%	9
Usually/most of the time	41.23%	127
Sometimes/only for specialty items	53.25%	164
Never	2.60%	8
TOTAL		308

Minute Survey #2

Q1 When shopping for goods in stores, do you try to “Shop Local” – in particular, within Burlingame?

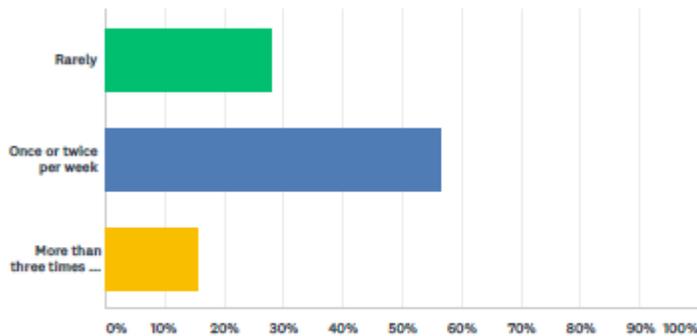
Answered: 154 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Always/as much as possible	42.21%	65
Sometimes/when it's convenient	47.40%	73
No/not a priority	10.39%	16
TOTAL		154

Q2 When shopping for goods in stores, how often do you shop in communities outside of Burlingame?

Answered: 154 Skipped: 1

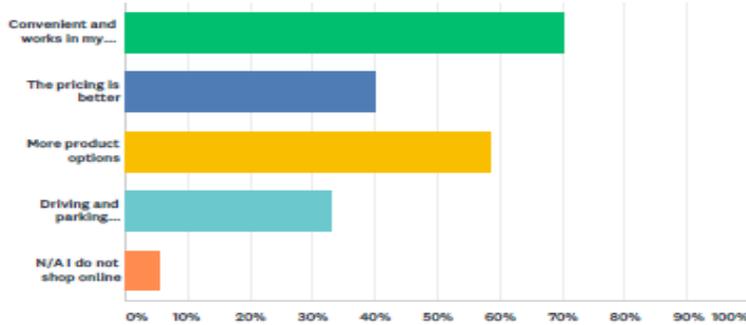


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Rarely	27.92%	43
Once or twice per week	56.49%	87
More than three times per week	15.58%	24
TOTAL		154

Minute Survey #3

Q1 When I shop online it's because (check all that apply):

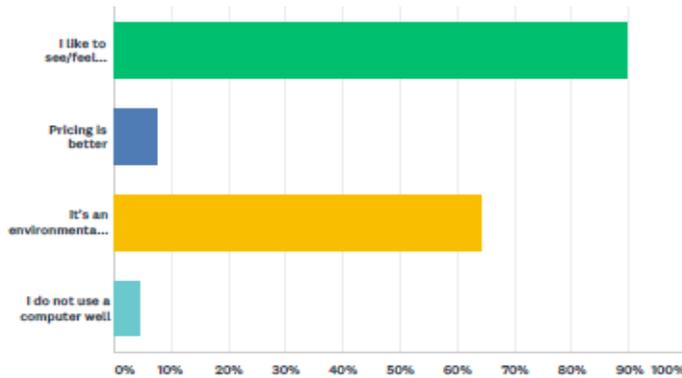
Answered: 70 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Convenient and works in my schedule	70.00% 49
The pricing is better	40.00% 28
More product options	58.57% 41
Driving and parking discourage me	32.86% 23
N/A I do not shop online	5.71% 4
Total Respondents: 70	

Q2 When I shop in person it's because (check all that apply):

Answered: 67 Skipped: 3

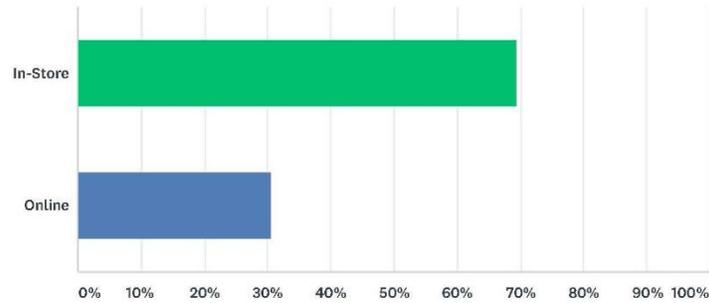


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I like to see/feel merchandise	89.55% 60
Pricing is better	7.46% 5
It's an environmental or "shop local" decision	64.18% 43
I do not use a computer well	4.48% 3
Total Respondents: 67	

Minute Survey #4

Q1 When shopping for clothing or shoes, do you usually prefer to do most of your shopping online or in-store?

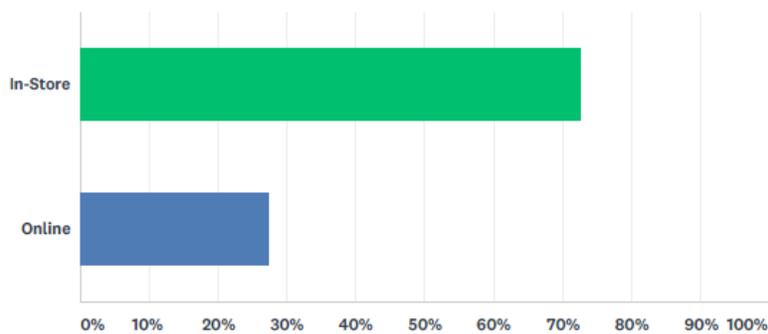
Answered: 62 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
In-Store	69.35% 43
Online	30.65% 19
TOTAL	62

Q2 When shopping for household goods, do you usually prefer to do most of your shopping online or in-store? ("Household goods" are things found in your home that are for maintenance and for all-around general use, such as furniture, appliances, linens, televisions, etc.)

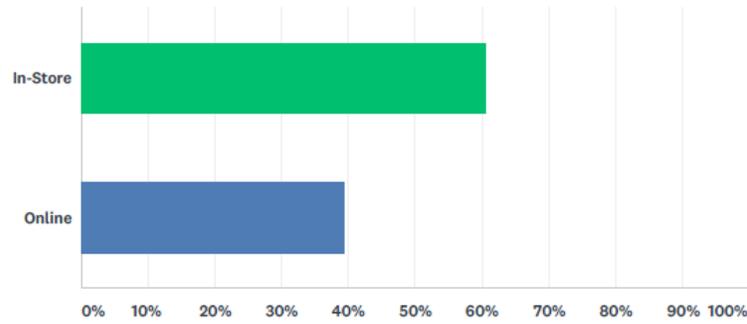
Answered: 62 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
In-Store	72.58% 45
Online	27.42% 17
TOTAL	62

Q3 When shopping for specialty goods and gifts, do you usually prefer to do most of your shopping online or in-store? ("Specialty goods" refers to items that are extraordinary or unique enough to motivate people to make an unusual effort to get them. Examples include exotic perfumes, professional photographic equipment, unusual artwork, or specific brands.)

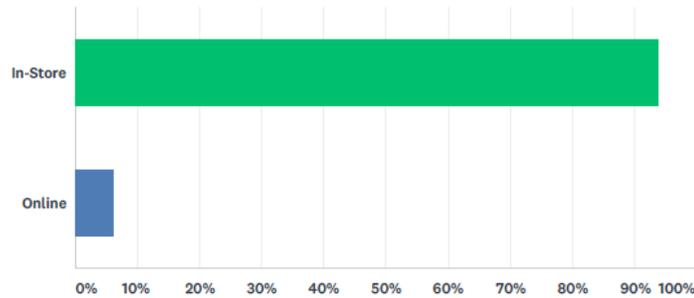
Answered: 61 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In-Store	60.66%	37
Online	39.34%	24
TOTAL		61

Q4 When shopping for groceries, do you usually prefer to do most of your shopping online or in-store?

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In-Store	93.65%	59
Online	6.35%	4
TOTAL		63

Appendix B:

Breakout Group Discussions

Attendees gathered at round discussion tables to share their thoughts on a range of topics. Each group was provided with the following questions to guide the discussions:

1. *What brings you to Downtown Burlingame? Broadway? Burlingame Plaza? The Bayfront?*
2. *What uses are we missing in each of the four areas? (Downtown Burlingame Avenue, Broadway, Burlingame Plaza, Bayfront)*
3. *How do we get vacant stores filled? Consider for example pop-ups, vacant store fees, storefront improvements, maintenance guidelines.*
4. *Are there obstacles to certain uses – zoning, land use, financial?*
5. *What are your thoughts regarding including Commercial Recreation as a use in the retail areas? (“Commercial recreation” means a recreation facility operated as a business and open to the public for a fee. Such uses may include group fitness studios, gymnasiums, theaters for live performances, yoga and pilates studios, martial arts studios, etc.)*

Each group recorded their input on flip charts. Most groups focused on particular areas of interest to the group, rather than discussing all of the questions provided. The following notes are transcribed from the flip charts:

Group 1

- Broadway is close to home. Walks to Broadway.
- Go to Starbucks, parking is convenient
- Broadway has different ethnic restaurants
- California Avenue – Rezoning to use a building for a food establishments. Needs rezoning.
- Starbucks too crowded with computers
- No movie theater or bowling alleys
- No live music scene
- No live theater
- Need more children-oriented areas
- Need more pop-ups
- Galleria idea for large spaces for independent retailers and designers
- Obstacles include permit process, rents are too high, regulations.
- Commercial recreation yoga studio, Pilates studio works.
- Raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour in San Mateo County and Burlingame.
- No more auto shops

Group 2

- Restrict storefront size
- Facilitate the division of larger storefronts
- Limit number of “types” of businesses
- Encourage or incentivize the types of retail that the community desires including residents and visitors
- More affordable housing options (to attract and retain employees)
- Lower rents or help with tenant improvements
- Make vacant storefronts look better – art instead of papered windows
- More flexible zoning – i.e. smaller retail in front, office in back, mixed uses in one space
- City should consider zoning based on demographics, parking, open space, permit/meters
- Fitness facility patrons don’t patronize neighboring businesses
- Need for more entertainment
- Public space in front of train station helps activate downtown’s experience. Can City fund this?
- More visible presence of police (beat cops)
- Monthly penalties for property owners who leave storefront vacant for extended periods
- Short-term parking only in front of new post office (5 minutes)

Group 3

- Missing from Downtown Burlingame: After dinner entertainment, evening concerts, outdoor areas, sections of downtown closed to cars, food trucks and music, town square at post office would be amazing, grassy area at library in Campbell is successful with music. Music and bars, wine tasting, vineyards, art studios. Apple is a gift – use it. “First Fridays” and more closed street events.
- Commercial recreation: yes but don’t worry about too many. Allow fitness only in block near El Camino Real and train station. Apple and Sephora is high priced inducers.
- Streetscape is huge benefit.
- Obstacles: zoning, speed, uncertainty, high rents, parking.

Group 4

	Downtown Burlingame	Broadway	Burlingame Plaza	Bayfront
Question 1	Restaurants, galleries, post office, groceries, & gyms.	Restaurants and groceries	See's Candy and groceries	Running park, dog park, watch planes, and sports fields
Question 2	Quick food, Chinese restaurant, entertainment movies, live music, theater, Japanese groceries	Art & wine festival spread between two main streets	Need informational pamphlets at hotels on what's in Burlingame (for all 4 business areas)	-
Question 3	Smaller spaces (split bigger spaces) City help for a new business coworking.	Better transit Caltrain daily. Shuttle between Broadway and Downtown Burlingame frequent or public bikes.	Something more friendly to single people – going to restaurant alone millennials staying single longer. (for all four business areas)	-
Question 4	Sweaty gym people don't try on clothes. Parking subsidize? Multiple construction zoning: co-working.	Construction parking needs facelift others like mom/pop shops.	-	Crossing the highway
Question 5	Sweaty people not great customers but need mixed martial arts & yoga. Entertainment.	-	-	-

Group 5

- How do quantify vacancy in Burlingame?
- Vacancy fee or tax?
- Pop-ups could work
- More parking needed
- Developers to create more experiential use vs retail
- Live theater (not movie) that has universal appeal to kids, adults, and seniors. It can bring jobs, culture and jazz club.
- Pop-up art space for artists to hang or display their art – PS: SF does it.
- Burlingame needs to ‘loosen’ restriction
- Bayside/Facebook side – how can businesses address their needs?
 - Put big box stores on bayside
 - Help drive foot traffic to the avenue
 - Make it convenient to shop and stay on the avenue
- Are we losing the “soul” of Burlingame?
 - high rents?
 - loss of charm?

Group 6

- Downtown Burlingame: love the location, community open market, entertaining Steelhouse and Vinyl Room businesses.
- Broadway: not tangible goods, vacant spaces (not ready and difficult to lease), smaller spaces, needs some help, maybe new streetscape.
- People living home experience (food and beverages), music, dance, movies, and sport production.
- Trying to change the entitlements
- Burlingame Plaza not really engaged needs update
- Bayfront has no housing, only offices
- Encourage companies to be part of the community
- Vacancy tax to help for outreach, improve shopping district
- More entertainment
- Keep businesses open later

Group 7

- What brings you to Burlingame Avenue?
 - No bookstores - sad
 - Shoppers not buyers
 - Coffee shops and restaurants
 - Burlingame Plaza groceries
- What don't we need:
 - No more salons
 - No more eyelash places
- Supporting new companies work spaces

- Want to maintain small town feel
- How do we fill stores?
 - Love vacant store fees
 - Hate vacant store fees
 - Make vacant store fronts more appealing
 - Pop-up retail
- Any obstacles to zoning?
 - Make zoning broader
 - Still control architecture and feel
- What are your thoughts including commercial recreation?
 - Generally thought it was a good idea, fitness studios, etc.

Group 8

- Burlingame Avenue
 - Filled spaces
 - Parking
 - Density in Downtowns
 - Agree with flexibility
 - Live in downtown area ○
More housing density ○
Co-working
 - Child care
 - Entertainment
 - Offices nearby
 - Office complementary with housing (quiet at night)
 - 2-hour parking on main streets, especially on Broadway
 - More flexible zoning, long permit times, and lower costs to occupy
 - Parking for recreation
 - Quotas by block
- Broadway
 - Bakery, Indian & Mexican restaurants
- Bayfront
 - Mixed use, lofts, restaurants
- Burlingame Plaza
 - Hours of operations
 - Shorter leases with options for smaller spaces

Group 9

- Access to parking difficult
- Types of businesses i.e., restaurants, entertainment
- Service business i.e., Broadway financial, shoes
- Local, walking, neighborhood
- Entertainment, use industrial area, night time act.
- Obstacles – Landlords vs. tenants leases

- Boutique stores, entertainment

Group 10

- Smaller spaces maybe better for boutiques, not chain stores
- City to be more flexible
- Office space in back is ok
- Expedite permitting process, less detailed propose/plans, etc.
- Uses missing:
 - Burlingame Avenue: Boutique stores, permit live musicians (try out but don't charge them)
 - Broadway: More restaurants with live entertainment
 - Bayfront – smaller theater similar to Alamo Drafthouse, foreign cinema. Encourage Bayfront hotels to offer free parking at night for live bands and entertainment and performers. Have performers coordinate with City so people know.
 - Coworking spaces not on first floor or big proportion – Burlingame and Hillsborough residents don't benefit from this.
 - Regulate number of yogurt, bobba tea, and pizza stores so not to oversaturate, overwhelm, and then go out of businesses which leads to vacancies.

Individual Responses

A couple of attendees also provided individual written responses on the discussion question sheets:

Individual Response 1:

- There is a nexus between rising rents and the departures of some of the merchants. It is difficult for merchants to pay wages, which would sustain the rents in Burlingame given that the rents are unreasonable.
- Disabled parking spaces are missing from Downtown Burlingame Avenue, Broadway, Burlingame Plaza, and Bayfront. Burlingame should develop a program whereby certain spots are designated for older persons, e.g. 70 and older. Residents who are aged 70 and up should be able to register their vehicles with Burlingame Police Department and gain access to specific spots for their use. This registration should then give them access to specific, designated spots that are set aside for their use. There seem to be a lot of people contending that older people should be using ride shares, etc. personally, I think if older people are being strong-armed into ride shares they will be more likely to just stay home. The War Generation members in my family want to remain independent and parking spaces/access to parking would enable them to do so.
- One of presenters mentioned more law enforcement presence is needed. While I'm not sure I agree with that assertion, Burlingame has a great police office Clark Vinegard. Also, several times I've noticed that Burlingame's starting salary for officers is significantly lower than neighboring cities/municipalities. Mediocre officers are a major liability – just ask the LAPD. It is better to start them at a higher salary and attract talent.

Individual Response 2:

- What brings you to the four business districts? Restaurants, bank, occasional shopping.

- How do we get vacant stores filled? Raise the minimum wage to bring more workers, offer space to arts organizations.
- What uses are we missing in each of the four areas? Theater/public space. Broadway – bakery, hardware store. All areas – more good restaurants (not too \$), cooking supplies, and bookstore.
- Thoughts on including commercial recreation as a use in the retail area? Need more information, need more free community meeting spaces, revamp Burlingame Plaza – looks like the 1950s, Broadway property owners need to spruce up their storefronts.