

Report: Lower-income downtowns hit harder by pandemic

By: [David Winzelberg](#) May 13, 2021



While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every Long Island business district, a new report found that downtowns in lower-income and communities of color have suffered more.

The report, sponsored by the Rauch Foundation and written by HR&A Advisors, found that permanent closures in lower-income communities were significantly higher than the average across 30 downtowns that were surveyed. In addition, more than a third of all downtown businesses projected a loss of more than 50% of revenue in 2020 compared to prior years.

Among the report's key findings, nearly one in five downtown businesses were facing challenges of high rents, competition from online commerce, and staffing issues before the pandemic hit. Post-COVID, the report found that businesses in lower-income communities and businesses of color were more likely to be impacted by the pandemic, due to lack of access to capital and online marketing, difficulty accessing federal aid and lack of information.

Downtowns that rebounded more quickly were generally leisure and food and beverage destinations and downtowns that embraced "innovative uses of streets and public spaces" were able to more successfully reattract visitors, according to the report that was presented to the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

The report also outlined how downtowns could thrive in a "new normal" environment. It suggested that creatively reimagining storefronts and open spaces, exploring innovative street usage and deploying solutions for new multifamily housing will be ingredients for success. Additionally, the report said that new solutions for flexible office space will be key to re-energizing suburban downtowns and allowing local businesses to embrace post-pandemic cultural and economic changes.

"This study shows that there has been much pain and disruption in most Long Island downtowns, especially those at the center of low income and minority communities," Nancy Rauch Douzinas, president of the Rauch Foundation, said in a written statement. "This report outlines clear and actionable steps that our elected officials and leaders from other sectors can take today to aid recovery in all communities and get Long Island's businesses back on track."

John Cameron, chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Council, said Long Island's downtowns are critical in driving the regional economy.

"Combining creativity and determination with the full support and vision of our local and regional leaders will ensure that each of our downtowns will have a speedy and sustainable recovery," Cameron said in the statement. "The Rauch Foundation's report provides us with both an analysis of the pandemic's impact on our downtowns and concrete recommendations to move forward."

The report included quantitative analysis of 10 focus downtowns: Baldwin, Bay Shore, Central Islip, Greenport, Mineola + Garden City, New Hyde Park, Northport, Port Washington, Riverhead, and Roosevelt. It also included online and in-person surveying of businesses in 30 downtowns.

The full report can be viewed here:

https://www.rauchfoundation.org/files/1016/1972/3410/HRA_Final_Report.21.05.01.pdf