

Bridging the Digital Divide in Downtown Richmond

Richmond, CA, Kennedy High School
12th Grade IT Academy



ISSUE

Downtown Richmond has a rich history, serving as the center of Richmond’s cultural and business life through WWII and the 1960s. The post-WWII economic climate and the development of Hilltop Mall led to decades of disinvestment. As a result, many businesses closed and the area became rundown. Additionally, high crime rates in the city during the 1980s and 1990s created a negative perception of the area, which contributed to the lack of investment in the city. As a result, many aspects of community life suffered. Currently, the district is undergoing a revitalization effort led by Richmond Main Street Initiative (RMSI), a non-profit organization that is building on existing assets to make Downtown a safe, vibrant, thriving destination for arts, entertainment, businesses, and residents with an easily accessible transit center. In 2012, RMSI successfully rallied city government, property and business owners, residents and other community partners to form the Downtown Richmond Property Business Improvement District (DRPBID)—the first and only in the city of Richmond.

QUESTION

How can youth help downtown businesses bridge the digital divide now and in the future? What is the role of technology in achieving a healthy, vibrant, youth-friendly downtown? What do businesses need, and what infrastructure is necessary?

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Instructor: Dr. LaRue Moore
- Students: 12th Grade IT Academy (2 classes)
- Clients: Richmond Main Street Initiative and City of Richmond

- Community Partners: AC Transit, Rich City Rides

YOUTH DRIVEN DATA AND INSIGHTS

- It's obvious the city is working to revitalize downtown (improved sidewalks, streetscapes, signs, artwork)
- There are lots of empty spaces (buildings and lots) in the Downtown area where new businesses could be located
- There are established small businesses that could benefit from updated signage and advertising
- When we visited Berkeley, we noticed there were more people outside compared to Richmond. It was more lively and dynamic with parks, outdoor seating, etc.
- We need to bring more people into Richmond. There is lots of potential, but we need to build it up.
- There is a growing bike culture in Richmond – We noticed kids going into the bike shop and, in general, there are more people riding bikes in Richmond.
- Community members don't know about everything that is available in Downtown Richmond
- It's nice by the BART station but there could be more amenities/stores to keep people engaged
- Social media: Of the businesses we surveyed/researched, the largest had their own websites, while some had Facebook or Yelp pages
- Some businesses were interested in increasing their social media, while others were happy with the amount they had

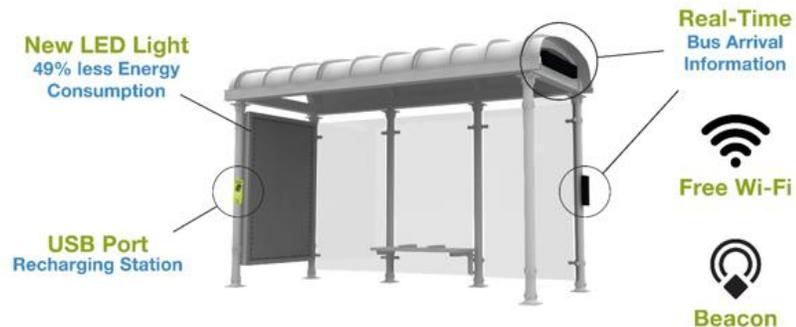
RECOMMENDATIONS

When thinking about how to make Downtown Richmond more youth-friendly and digitally connected, many of us began thinking about the importance of wi-fi access and how to leverage new technologies to make Richmond cleaner, safer, and more inviting to residents and tourists. Because public transportation is vital for young people's access to different parts of the community, our recommendations focus on improving transportation options and amenities in the Downtown area.

- Richmond Main Street could help businesses partner with student interns from the IT Academy to help build their social media presence (Yelp, Facebook, Instagram pages)

Y-PLAN Policy Brief 2016

- Create a free wifi network in the downtown area
- We want there to be a community-friendly bike culture in Richmond that helps businesses and citizens thrive
 - Work with the city to provide grants and other opportunities for Rich City Rides to expand their educational programs
- Provide healthier alternatives by providing healthy snack vending machines
- Install solar powered street lamp posts that include free wifi hotspots and charging outlets for phones
- Bus stops should have solar powered charging station and lights with wifi access: people will feel safer, be able to use the internet more, and it may increase use of public transportation



NEXT STEPS AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Rich City Rides has a bike club at Richmond High School and would like to have one at Kennedy
 - One student has a brother who will be attending Kennedy next year, so she will see if he can become involved
- Students would be interested in seeing pilots for their ideas to see if they would work on a larger scale
- Students are interested in possible internships to help local businesses with social media