

Fact Sheet | Sociable City Assessment

May 13, 2025

As part of a continued effort to reinvigorate Raleigh's Downtown urban core, City Council voted on January 2, 2024, to fund a Sociable City Assessment. The study, which utilized \$100,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, focused on analyzing the strengths, challenges and opportunities within the social economy of the Fayetteville Street and Glenwood South districts. The City's Office of Special Events (OSE) contracted the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI), a non-profit with decades of social economy management experience, to lead the assessment.

The Process

The Sociable City Assessment's in-depth analysis framework focuses on four building blocks (planning, safety, vibrancy and governance) and six core measures (mobility, public safety, quality of life, social venues, public space and venue safety). The study was conducted in four phases (engagement, evaluation, strategy development and action), which began in May 2024 and concluded in March 2025.

- RHI staff worked with nearly 100 stakeholders to complete the assessment, which included city government employees, hospitality industry operators, residents, community organizations and state government representatives.
- RHI connected with stakeholders through three site visits and 26 meetings (virtual and in-person) throughout the process.
- On-site meetings included listening sessions, roundtables, one-on-one meetings and a women's focus group. Site visits incorporated observational tours of public space, social venues and closing time procedures as well as a walk-along with the Raleigh Police Department.

Key Deliverables & Actions Recommended

The Sociable City Assessment produced a nearly [50-page document](#) that captures current efforts and investments, existing challenges, and future planning and development. It presents an action plan for the future, tied to assessment's framework.

GOVERNANCE

- Recommended more educational resources and support for businesses looking to open in the study areas.
- Suggested building better trust with venue operators by rebranding the OSE Hospitality and Nightlife team. This would better clarify its role in advocacy versus enforcement.
- Advocated sharing information, particularly ABC-licensed business openings and closures.
- Stated the need for consistent venue occupancy limits from the fire department and building inspectors.
- Recommended development standards for mixed-use areas, considering the quality of life of residents living in the study areas.

MOBILITY

- Parking – in particular, private lots – needs greater safety standards and practices to improve the perception and interest in parking in these decks.
- The R Line could benefit from a re-brand and additional communication to residents to increase ridership.
- Better marketing is needed for multi-modal initiatives and other methods of transportation.

QUALITY OF LIFE

- Residents expressed support for a central system to better track service issues in a centralized way.
- The study recommended revival of the Downtown Living Advocates group.

SAFETY

- Noise was a common complaint from residents, and venues needed clarification on the noise ordinance. This included uncivil commentary and verbal harassment from religious proselytizers.
- More proactive safety measures like those in place from Raleigh Police and Raleigh Fire would be welcomed.
- Other safety improvements mentioned more training on women's safety and interactions with unsheltered people, or those with substance use or mental health issues.

VENUES & PUBLIC SPACE

- Share the positive stories of business along Fayetteville Street and City initiatives that improve the space.
- A nightlife association could facilitate conversations with business owners and venue operators directly.
- Create consistency among event rules
- Create a streetscape plan for Glenwood South.

Staff will review the report and return with a recommendation to Council.
