

Downtown Durango Wayfinding Poll

Community Feedback Summary Report | September 16–30, 2026

Executive Summary

The City of Durango conducted the Downtown Durango Wayfinding Poll from September 16 through September 30, 2026, to better understand how residents, visitors, downtown workers, and other community members experience navigating downtown. The poll gathered feedback on existing wayfinding conditions, navigation challenges, pedestrian and bicycle connections, potential improvements, and preferences for the visual design of future wayfinding elements.

A total of 115 responses were received through Engage Durango. Because participation was voluntary and respondents self-selected to participate, the findings represent feedback from those who completed the poll and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Durango residents or downtown users.

Overall, respondents indicated that Downtown Durango is relatively easy to navigate. Approximately 92% described finding their way around downtown as very easy or somewhat easy, while 88% described walking between downtown destinations as very easy or somewhat easy. These findings suggest that respondents generally understand the downtown layout and can navigate between destinations without significant difficulty.

Despite these positive perceptions, several opportunities for improvement emerged. Finding and understanding public parking was the most frequently identified navigation challenge, followed by interest in clearer orientation information, improved pedestrian and bicycle connections, and more accessible and visible signage. Respondents also expressed preferences for wayfinding elements that reflect Durango's history, architecture, and natural environment.

Taken together, the findings suggest that future wayfinding improvements may be most beneficial when they address specific navigation challenges rather than assume a widespread difficulty navigating downtown. The feedback also highlights the importance of distinguishing between challenges that can be addressed through signage and information and those related to broader transportation infrastructure, parking availability, and pedestrian safety.

1. Downtown Navigation and Existing Wayfinding Conditions

The majority of poll respondents reported that navigating Downtown Durango is relatively straightforward. Approximately 59% rated downtown navigation as very easy, while another 33% described it as somewhat easy. Only 1% indicated that navigating downtown was

somewhat difficult, and no respondents selected very difficult. Additionally, 46% reported that they rarely become confused when traveling through downtown.

Written comments reinforced these findings, with several respondents describing Durango's downtown as easy to navigate because of its compact size and established street grid. Respondents familiar with the community frequently indicated that they can locate businesses, public facilities, and other destinations without needing additional directional assistance. Some longtime residents questioned whether significant investments in new wayfinding infrastructure would provide sufficient benefit given the relative ease of navigating downtown.

However, familiarity with downtown may influence how people experience existing navigation conditions. While some respondents indicated that additional signage would be unnecessary, others emphasized that visitors and individuals less familiar with Durango may benefit from clearer identification of destinations, parking areas, and public amenities.

Opinions regarding the usefulness of existing wayfinding signage were mixed. Approximately 5% of respondents described current signs as very helpful, while 24% considered them somewhat helpful. Another 31% expressed a neutral opinion, 14% indicated that existing signs were not helpful, and 24% selected the response "What signs?" These results suggest that existing wayfinding elements may not be consistently visible, recognizable, or useful to all respondents.

Written feedback identified several potential improvements, including larger and more readable lettering, clearer directional arrows, consistent signage, and better identification of parking and transit facilities. Respondents also expressed interest in information that identifies nearby destinations and provides a clearer understanding of the surrounding area.

At the same time, some respondents cautioned against introducing additional signage that could contribute to visual clutter. Several noted that smartphones and digital navigation tools already provide sufficient information for many users. This difference in perspectives suggests that any future improvements should consider the placement, visibility, and usefulness of wayfinding elements rather than focusing solely on increasing the number of signs.

2. Parking as a Primary Navigation Challenge

Parking emerged as the most consistent concern across both the multiple-choice responses and written comments. Approximately 59% of respondents identified finding public parking as a navigation challenge, while 25% reported difficulty understanding

where public parking is located. Additionally, 35% indicated that looking for parking is a point at which they become uncertain about where to go. When asked which destinations should be easiest to find, 84% selected public parking.

Written comments provided additional context about the range of parking-related challenges experienced downtown. Respondents described difficulty locating public parking areas, identifying available spaces near their destinations, distinguishing public parking from other parking options, and understanding parking regulations. Comments also addressed parking costs, the availability of free and longer-term parking, accommodations for larger vehicles, accessible parking, and the need for clearer information about parking lots and meters.

Several respondents suggested improvements to online parking information, emphasizing that resources should make it easier to identify where parking is located and what options are available. Some indicated that existing information places greater emphasis on how to pay for parking than on helping users locate appropriate parking areas. Other suggestions included digital maps or applications that could provide information about parking locations and availability.

The written feedback also revealed an important distinction between parking availability and parking wayfinding. Some respondents viewed the availability and cost of parking as the underlying challenges and questioned whether additional signs would meaningfully improve their experience. Others focused on the difficulty of locating and understanding existing parking options.

These findings suggest that clearer parking information could address some navigation challenges, particularly for visitors and individuals unfamiliar with downtown. However, improvements to parking signage and information would not necessarily resolve concerns about the number, location, or cost of available parking spaces.

3. Opportunities for Improved Orientation and Destination Information

Beyond parking, respondents expressed interest in simple, accessible tools that help people understand their location and identify nearby destinations. A recurring suggestion in the written comments was the installation of "You Are Here" maps similar to those commonly found in shopping centers, airports, and other visitor-oriented environments.

Respondents described the value of maps that clearly identify a person's current location, surrounding businesses and attractions, nearby public amenities, and routes to destinations. Some comments indicated that even individuals familiar with downtown may occasionally have difficulty remembering which block contains a particular business or destination.

This feedback highlights a distinction between directional signage and orientation information. While directional signs guide individuals toward specific locations, orientation maps can provide a broader understanding of downtown and the relationship between destinations. Respondents' comments suggest that strategically located maps could be particularly useful in areas where people begin walking, transition from parking to pedestrian travel, or seek information about nearby businesses and attractions.

The findings indicate an opportunity to consider targeted orientation improvements that complement existing signage and digital navigation resources. Rather than introducing extensive new directional infrastructure, respondents' feedback suggests that clear, easy-to-read maps and destination information at strategic locations may address specific needs while minimizing unnecessary signage.

4. Pedestrian and Bicycle Connectivity

Although 88% of respondents described walking between downtown destinations as very easy or somewhat easy, the poll identified several concerns related to pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. These comments suggest that understanding how to reach a destination and being able to travel there safely and comfortably are related but distinct aspects of the downtown experience.

When asked about potential pedestrian wayfinding improvements, 49% of respondents selected better trail connections, making this the most frequently identified improvement. Additional preferences included more directional signs at 34%, more maps at 33%, additional informational kiosks at 21%, and walking-time information at 13%.

Written comments frequently referenced connections between downtown and the Animas River Trail, including the challenges associated with crossing Camino del Rio. Several respondents expressed interest in safer pedestrian and bicycle connections, with some specifically suggesting an underpass or other crossing improvements.

Other comments addressed bicycle lanes, connections to surrounding trails, sidewalk width, accessibility, intersection safety, and the need to improve conditions for people walking and bicycling through downtown. Respondents also raised concerns about interactions between vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists, particularly in locations where traffic movements or roadway conditions may create conflicts.

These findings suggest that improved wayfinding could help people identify walking and bicycling routes, trail connections, and nearby destinations. However, some of the concerns raised involve physical infrastructure and transportation safety rather than a lack of directional information. Addressing these issues may require consideration through broader pedestrian, bicycle, and transportation planning efforts.

5. Traffic, Accessibility, and the Downtown Pedestrian Environment

In addition to navigation and connectivity, respondents shared perspectives on how traffic conditions and the design of downtown streets affect their experience. Written comments identified concerns related to traffic congestion, vehicle speeds, intersection safety, and conflicts between different modes of transportation.

Some respondents described challenges navigating around larger vehicles or through areas where street design, outdoor dining, and other features influence the available space for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Others expressed interest in creating more pedestrian-oriented areas and improving the overall walking environment.

Opinions regarding existing pedestrian improvements were divided. Some respondents expressed support for bulb-outs, extended sidewalks, and other pedestrian-oriented features, viewing them as positive elements of the downtown environment. Others raised concerns that bump-outs reduce parking availability or make vehicle navigation more difficult.

These differing perspectives demonstrate that community members experience and prioritize downtown transportation conditions in different ways. The comments do not establish a clear consensus regarding specific roadway or pedestrian design features, but they do highlight the importance of considering multiple transportation needs when evaluating future improvements.

Accessibility also emerged as an important consideration. Respondents identified the need for readable signage, accessible parking information, adequate sidewalk space, and safer pedestrian crossings. These comments reinforce the importance of considering accessibility in both the design of wayfinding elements and the broader downtown environment.

6. Visual Design Preferences and Durango Identity

The poll also gathered input on visual elements that respondents would prefer to see incorporated into a potential downtown wayfinding system. The results indicate interest in designs that reflect Durango's recognizable landmarks, historic character, and natural surroundings.

The Strater Hotel was the most frequently selected visual element, receiving support from 40% of respondents. An image featuring the Durango train and river during summer was selected by 32%, while a metal parking directional sign was selected by 26%. A rustic multi-destination sign incorporating an art element also received 26%.

Other frequently selected options included train tracks and rustic metal signage, each receiving 23%, a rustic wayfinding sign incorporating an art element at 22%, and a parking symbol with a rustic metal arrow at 20%.

These preferences suggest that respondents value familiar visual references associated with Durango's identity, particularly historic architecture, railroad imagery, natural features, and rustic materials. The selection of parking-related signage also reflects the importance respondents placed on practical navigation information throughout the poll.

Color preferences showed a relatively clear pattern, with brick receiving the highest level of support at 45%, followed by sandstone at 30%. Red was selected by 18%, charcoal by 11%, and grey by 7%.

While the results indicate interest in warm, earth-toned colors and materials, written comments also emphasized the importance of functionality. Respondents identified the need for sufficient contrast, readable lettering, and designs that consider accessibility requirements and differences in color vision.

Together, these findings suggest an opportunity to develop a recognizable Durango wayfinding identity that balances local character with practical considerations such as visibility, consistency, accessibility, and ease of use.

7. Community Perspectives and Considerations for Future Planning

Across the poll, several areas of differing opinion emerged that are important to consider when interpreting the findings.

One of the clearest distinctions involved parking availability compared with parking information. While some respondents emphasized the need for clearer signage and more accessible information about existing parking, others identified the availability and cost of parking as the more significant concerns. This distinction suggests that improvements to parking wayfinding may address some challenges without resolving all parking-related frustrations.

Respondents also expressed different opinions about the need for additional signage. Some supported clearer and more visible directional information, particularly for visitors, while others questioned the value of additional infrastructure in a downtown area they already consider easy to navigate. Concerns about sign clutter and public spending were also reflected in the written comments.

Another area of differing perspectives involved the balance between vehicle movement and pedestrian-oriented improvements. Some respondents supported infrastructure that

prioritizes pedestrian safety and accessibility, while others raised concerns about the effects of these features on vehicle circulation and parking.

Finally, the responses suggest that familiarity with downtown may influence perceptions of wayfinding needs. Individuals who regularly travel downtown may rely on their knowledge of the street grid and existing destinations, while visitors and less frequent users may benefit from more visible orientation tools and destination information.

These perspectives reinforce the importance of interpreting the poll as a source of community input rather than a definitive measure of support for a particular design or improvement. The feedback identifies specific needs, concerns, and preferences that can inform future planning alongside other relevant information.

8. Key Findings and Implications

The Downtown Durango Wayfinding Poll identified four overarching themes that may help inform future planning and design considerations.

Parking information represents the clearest opportunity for improvement. Respondents consistently identified parking as the most significant navigation challenge. Clearer identification of public parking locations, more accessible information about parking options, and improved online resources may help address some of these concerns. At the same time, parking availability and cost remain separate issues that signage alone cannot resolve.

Strategic orientation tools may provide greater value than extensive additional signage. Because most respondents already find downtown easy to navigate, the feedback does not suggest a widespread need for additional directional infrastructure. Instead, respondents expressed interest in simple, visible, and accessible tools such as "You Are Here" maps, clear parking signs, and information about nearby destinations.

Pedestrian and bicycle connections are important components of the downtown experience. Respondents identified opportunities to improve connections between downtown, the Animas River Trail, and surrounding destinations. Concerns about Camino del Rio crossings, intersection safety, sidewalk accessibility, and bicycle infrastructure suggest that some navigation challenges may require transportation improvements beyond traditional wayfinding.

Future wayfinding design could reflect Durango's local identity while prioritizing functionality. Preferences for the Strater Hotel, train imagery, rustic materials, and brick and sandstone colors suggest interest in a visually recognizable system. Respondents also

emphasized that any design should remain easy to read, accessible, consistent, and useful for navigating downtown.

Conclusion

The Downtown Durango Wayfinding Poll provides insight into how participating community members experience navigating downtown and where they see opportunities for improvement. Overall, respondents generally find downtown easy to navigate and walk between destinations, suggesting that the existing street layout and compact downtown environment support relatively straightforward navigation.

The most consistent concern identified through the poll was finding and understanding public parking. Respondents also expressed interest in clearer orientation information, improved pedestrian and bicycle connections, and signage that is easy to see and understand. Visual preferences suggest an opportunity to incorporate recognizable Durango landmarks, historic character, and natural elements into potential future designs.

The results also demonstrate that community perspectives vary regarding the need for additional signage, the value of pedestrian-oriented improvements, and the relationship between parking availability and parking information. These differences are important considerations for future planning and suggest that no single improvement would address every concern identified by respondents.

As the City considers potential improvements to downtown wayfinding, the poll findings provide a foundation for evaluating approaches that are targeted, accessible, practical, and reflective of Durango's character. The feedback also highlights the importance of considering wayfinding alongside broader downtown transportation, parking, pedestrian safety, and connectivity efforts.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that improvements should focus on helping people more easily locate parking, understand their surroundings, and connect with downtown destinations, while recognizing that some concerns extend beyond what a wayfinding system alone can address.