

Listening to Durango

Community & Stakeholder Perspectives

April 2026 Focus Groups and the 2026 National Community Survey

Purpose This summary brings together qualitative themes from the City's April 2026 focus groups with findings from the statistically representative 2026 National Community Survey.

Prepared from the April 2026 Focus Group Report by Real Ideal Coaching and the NCS 2026 National Community Survey



Why We Are Sharing This

The City of Durango commissioned 10 focus groups from April 20–24, 2026 to hear directly from people who live, work, volunteer, operate businesses, and lead community organizations in Durango. The conversations were intended to inform the City's strategic and tactical planning efforts.

This summary brings together the portions of the report most relevant to the broader community especially downtown businesses and economic stakeholders, nonprofits and community organizations, and residents. It focuses on shared themes and opportunities rather than reproducing every comment from the full report.

How to read this: *The focus groups provide qualitative community and stakeholder input. They are not a statistically representative survey and should not be interpreted as a measure of how all Durango residents or businesses feel. Their value is in providing context, experiences and perspectives that can help explain issues identified through broader community research.*

At a Glance

Who participated	What the conversations were about
Residents	Quality of life, housing, growth, infrastructure, communication, community character, engagement and sustainability.
Downtown businesses & economic stakeholders	Downtown functionality, infrastructure, parking, access, business impacts, economic vitality, workforce housing and visitor experience.
Nonprofits & community organizations	Partnerships, funding, communication, housing, community services, local organizations, arts and culture, and connections.
Citywide residents – 2026 National Community Survey	Statistically representative measures of residents' perceptions of quality of life, economic conditions, housing, transportation, governance and community services.

A Common Message

Across the community-facing groups, participants expressed strong pride in Durango and a desire to see the community remain vibrant, welcoming, economically healthy, and livable. Participants also identified several recurring challenges: housing affordability, infrastructure maintenance, communication and transparency, coordination across City functions and community institutions, and the need to balance growth with the qualities that make Durango unique. Participants also identified safety, natural beauty, parks and recreation as important strengths that contribute to Durango's quality of life.

What We Heard: Six Themes

1. Keep Durango Functional—and Invest in What We Already Have

- Downtown businesses emphasized deferred maintenance of sidewalks, alleys, streets, landscaping and public spaces.
- Residents similarly urged the City to prioritize maintenance and completion of existing infrastructure before expanding into additional projects.

- Participants want a community that is attractive, but also works well for residents, businesses, employees, deliveries, visitors and people moving around the city.

2. Make City Communication Easier to Find, Understand and Act On

- Businesses described fragmented communication and a lack of timely notice about disruptions, construction, utility work, permitting and enforcement.
- Nonprofits and community organizations said they can receive conflicting or incomplete information and recommended a centralized resource hub with contacts, checklists and timelines.
- Residents said information often exists but can be difficult to locate or navigate. Across groups, participants called for more proactive, centralized and user-friendly communication.

3. Show How Community Input Leads to Decisions

- Participants generally valued the City's efforts to gather public input but wanted stronger follow-through.
- People want to know what was heard, what changed, what did not change, why decisions were made, and what happens next.
- This includes clearer explanations of priorities, trade-offs, timelines and implementation progress.

4. Housing Is an Economic and Community Issue

- Housing affordability was one of the most consistent concerns across the community-facing focus groups.
- Participants connected housing costs to workforce recruitment and retention, family stability, commuting, nonprofit capacity and the long-term health of the local economy.
- Participants called for sustained, long-term approaches rather than solutions that feel temporary or difficult to access.

5. Support a Diverse, Locally Rooted Economy

- Downtown businesses expressed concern about rising operating costs, vacancies and the difficulty of sustaining local businesses.
- Nonprofits and community organizations said small businesses, artists, musicians and local organizations can face significant administrative barriers and need clearer guidance.
- Participants emphasized the value of events, arts, markets, culture, nightlife and other activities that create energy downtown beyond traditional business hours.

6. Balance Growth, Access and Community Character

- Participants recognized the economic importance of tourism and development while also wanting to protect Durango's character, environmental quality and quality of life.
- Downtown stakeholders expressed mixed views about parking, bike facilities and traffic-calming approaches, with a desire to balance walkability and multimodal travel with access, traffic flow and business operations.
- Residents and community organizations also highlighted the importance of trails, parks, open space, environmental quality and strong connections between neighborhoods, downtown and community destinations.

What Each Group Emphasized

Downtown Businesses & Economic Stakeholders

Participants showed strong investment in downtown's future and appreciation for City staff, downtown events, and revitalization efforts. At the same time, they described a need for stronger operational focus and more consistent consideration of business impacts.

- Prioritize preventative maintenance and visible upkeep of sidewalks, alleys, streets, landscaping, lighting and public spaces.
- Provide earlier and more coordinated notice about construction, utility disruptions, permitting and enforcement.
- Consider the downstream effects of taxes, fees, parking policies and development decisions on small businesses.
- Balance pedestrian and bicycle improvements with parking access, traffic flow and day-to-day business needs.
- Explore additional parking and long-term parking options and more user-friendly permit systems.
- Use stronger economic indicators and direct small-business perspectives in strategic planning and growth discussions.
- Continue investing in events, arts, markets and cultural programming that create activity throughout the day and evening.

In their words: *"Yes, we make it pretty, but let's make it functional."*

Nonprofits & Community Organizations

Nonprofit and community leaders expressed strong commitment to Durango and appreciation for individual City staff who build relationships and follow through. Their concerns centered on systems, consistency, funding and partnership.

- Create a consistent point of contact or liaison who understands the nonprofit sector and can help organizations navigate City processes.
- Make grant programs more predictable and flexible, including consideration of multi-year funding, upfront or partial advances, and general operating support.
- Simplify applications and provide clearer funding timelines.
- Create a centralized resource hub for nonprofits, events, small businesses, artists and community organizations.
- Clarify the purpose and priorities of lodger's tax, prosperity-related and other discretionary funding.
- Strengthen connections among nonprofits, businesses, arts and culture, tourism, housing and other community sectors.
- Show more clearly how public input influences final decisions.

In their words: *"What would it look like for the city to have a liaison that could actually get to know us...?"*

Residents

Residents described deep appreciation for Durango's natural environment, recreation, culture, public spaces and sense of community. They also raised concerns about affordability, growth, infrastructure and access to information.

- Develop a clear, publicly accessible housing roadmap with projects, timelines, affordability goals and available resources.
- Create a centralized community information hub for City updates, events, engagement opportunities and public resources.
- Explain decisions more clearly including priorities, trade-offs, timelines and how public input influenced outcomes.
- Prioritize maintenance and completion of existing infrastructure, trails and transportation connections.
- Expand engagement approaches that reach younger residents, working families and people who may not participate in traditional meetings.
- Strengthen coordination among the City, school district, county, college, nonprofits and other major community institutions.
- Continue investing in parks, trails, recreation, libraries, events and public spaces that contribute to quality of life and economic vitality.
- Balance growth and tourism with preserving community character, environmental quality and quality of life.

In their words: *“Focus more on maintenance... before we start expanding.”*

How These Findings Fit With the Community Survey

The National Community Survey provides statistically representative information about the views of Durango residents as a whole. The focus groups provide deeper context from residents, downtown businesses, economic stakeholders, nonprofits and community organizations. Where the two sources align particularly around housing affordability, economic conditions and preserving Durango's quality of life the findings provide especially strong direction for future planning. Where they differ, the difference may reflect the distinct experiences of particular stakeholder groups and is important context for decision-making.

The statistically valid representative Community Survey shows that, citywide, residents view transportation and overall quality of life positively, while concerns about affordability, economic conditions and growth remain more prominent community-wide issues. Transportation ratings have generally improved since 2023, including traffic flow, public transportation and parking.

Quality of life

- 87% rate Durango positively as a place to live.
- 84% rate overall quality of life positively.
- 97% rate the natural environment positively.

Economic conditions

- 45% rate overall economic health positively, down from 54% in 2023.
- Only 16% rate employment opportunities positively.
- Only 5% rate cost of living positively.

Housing

- 15% rate variety of housing options positively.
- Only 5% rate availability of affordable quality housing positively.

Transportation

- About 70% rate the overall transportation system positively.
- 81% rate ease of walking positively.
- 72% rate ease of bicycling positively.
- 46% rate ease of public parking positively.
- Parking improved substantially from 2023.

Where the Findings Differ

The focus groups and the Community Survey generally point in the same direction, but they also reveal differences in how issues are experienced by different groups. These differences are important context rather than contradictions.

Downtown and parking

Downtown businesses identified parking, access and traffic flow as ongoing operational concerns, particularly in relation to customers, employees and deliveries. The Community Survey, however, found that **72% of residents rated downtown/commercial vibrancy positively**, although that was down from 78% in 2023. Resident ratings of public parking also **improved 14 percentage points** from 2023, even though only 46% rated it positively.

Transportation and mobility

Downtown stakeholders expressed mixed views about bike facilities and traffic-calming approaches and emphasized the need to balance multimodal improvements with access and business operations. In contrast, residents generally rated transportation positively: about **70% rated the overall transportation system positively, 81% walking, and 72% bicycling**. These findings suggest that transportation improvements may be experienced differently by residents and by businesses whose daily operations depend on access, parking and vehicle movement.

Communication and transparency

Focus-group participants expressed considerable frustration with finding information, receiving timely notice and understanding how decisions are made. The Community Survey presents a more nuanced picture: residents generally view the City as open and transparent and believe it considers residents' needs, while communication about issues facing the community is a weaker area. This suggests that the challenge may be less about whether the City is transparent and more about making information **timely, accessible, understandable and useful**.

Safety and community conditions

Residents in the focus groups identified safety as an important strength while also raising emerging concerns related to homelessness, growth and changing community dynamics. The Community Survey reflects a particularly strong overall sense of safety, including very high ratings for safety in neighborhoods and downtown/commercial areas during the day. This suggests that concerns raised in the focus groups may reflect **specific experiences or emerging issues rather than a broad perception that Durango is unsafe**.

What the differences tell us

These differences reinforce the value of using both sources. **The Community Survey provides the broader resident perspective, while the focus groups reveal how particular groups experience issues in their day-**

to-day lives. A resident may view walking and bicycling positively while a downtown business is focused on customer access and deliveries. Both perspectives can be true and both can be important to understanding the issue and making informed decisions.

Bringing It Together

The focus groups and the Community Survey offer two different but complementary ways of understanding Durango.

- **The Community Survey tells us how residents perceive and rate the community.** It shows that residents continue to rate Durango's quality of life, natural environment, parks, recreation and transportation positively, while housing affordability, cost of living, employment opportunities and economic health remain significant challenges.
- **The focus groups help explain those experiences.** Businesses described the day-to-day impacts of costs, access, infrastructure and City processes. Nonprofits described challenges with funding, coordination and navigating City systems. Residents described concerns about housing, communication, growth, infrastructure and preserving the qualities that make Durango special.
- **Together, the findings point to a community that values what it has while asking the City to address the pressures that come with growth and change.**

Durango residents and stakeholders care deeply about the community and value its quality of life, natural environment, parks, recreation, downtown and sense of community. At the same time, the community is experiencing pressures from housing costs, economic conditions and growth. Businesses, nonprofits and residents experience those pressures differently, but they share a desire for a community that remains livable, economically healthy, connected and welcoming. The Community Survey shows where these concerns are widespread among residents; the focus groups help explain what those challenges look like in people's day-to-day experiences. Together, they provide a fuller picture to inform the City's priorities and future decisions.