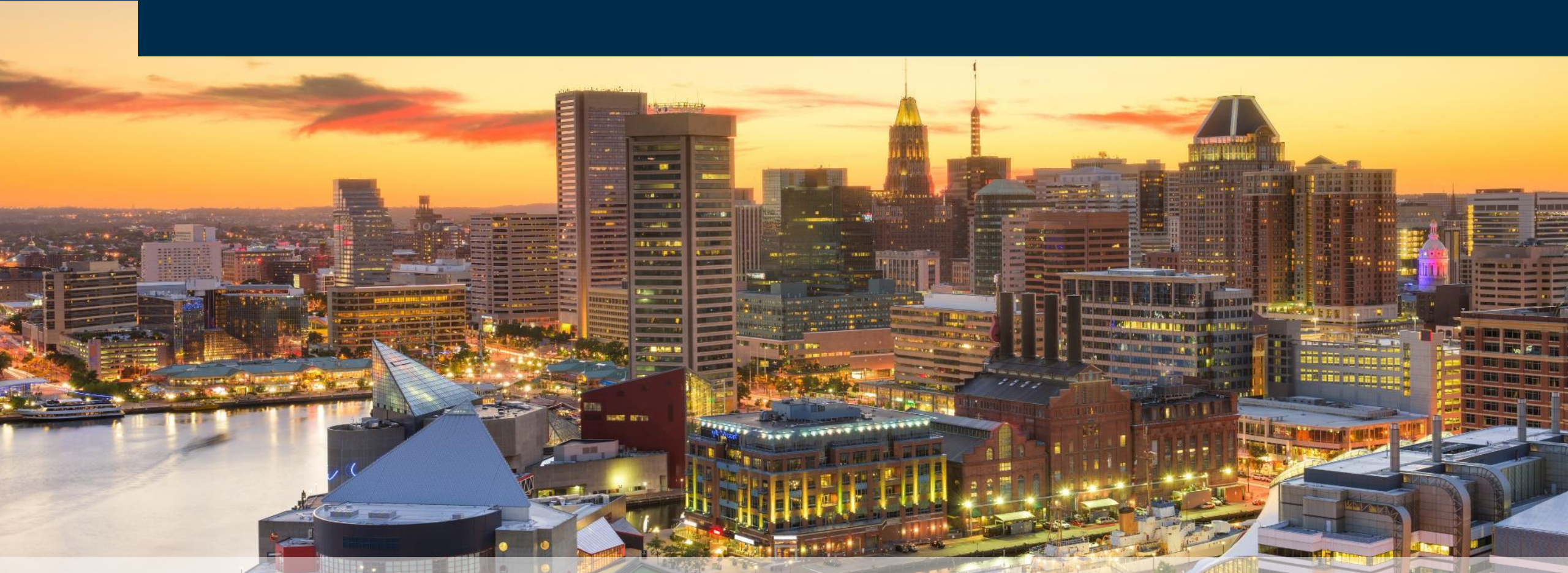


Breaking the Urban Doom Loop

Five challenges for the future of downtowns



Tracy Hadden Loh, Brookings Metro
Baltimore | April 10, 2024

BROOKINGS



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Manhattan More Than
\$12 Billion a Year**

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1

Public Safety

2

Adaptive Reuse

3

Future Transit

4

Homelessness

5

Tourism

#1 - Crime: both perceptions and reality matter

“Safety, security, substance use, and mental health—just the experience in public areas—are the number-one issues preventing return-to-office.” — Seattle

“Commuting on the Red Line, Blue Line, etc. is an experience that’s completely deteriorated. It’s drug use, smoking, and worse.”
— Chicago

“People are scared. They’re afraid to walk on the streets. A woman on the first day of [return-to-office] got punched to the ground on the way to work across the street from our campus.” — Philadelphia

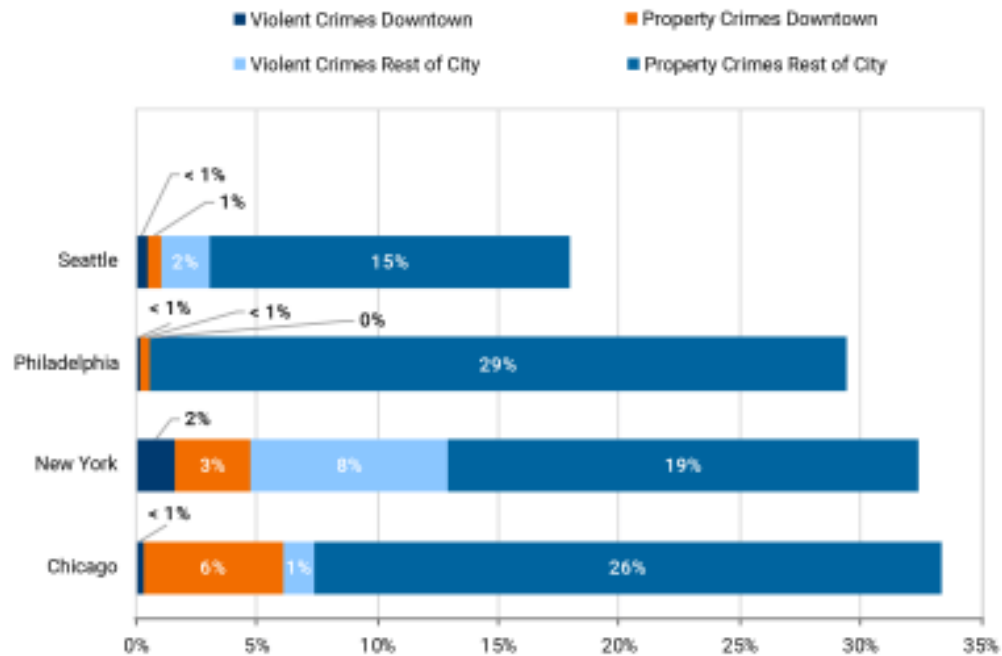
““There’s no question: The crime that’s gone up in this neighborhood is burglary, larceny. It’s all stealing. You can’t buy half-and-half anymore, it’s locked. You have to get an assistant to get half-and-half. Everything’s locked up.” — New York City

#1 - Crime: both perceptions and reality matter

FIGURE 2B

Change in crime by location

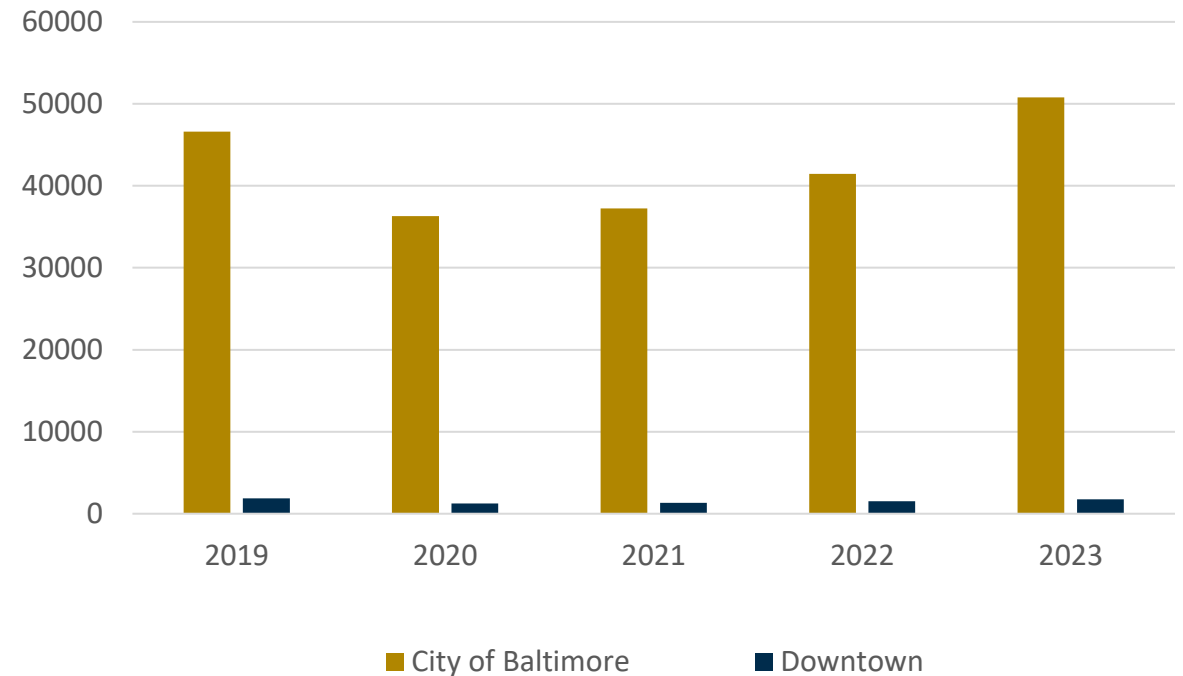
2019 - 2022



Source: Brookings analysis of city police department precinct-level data, 2019 - 2022.













Crime Trends in Baltimore, MD



Tailor crime response strategies to high- and low-crime areas, and **invest** in the built environment, placemaking, and place governance to promote **reassurance and belonging**.



#2 – The need to understand adaptive reuse and resilience

Offices are over			Office use continues
Too many offices are bad anyway			It's not too many offices – it's too little offices!
Demand from residents can replace demand from workers			Housing strengthens demand for offices – and other stuff.
Cities are about to go broke!!!			Many residential tax bases are stronger than ever
Office conversions can solve the housing crisis			Office conversions are a pricey way to add a fraction of what we need

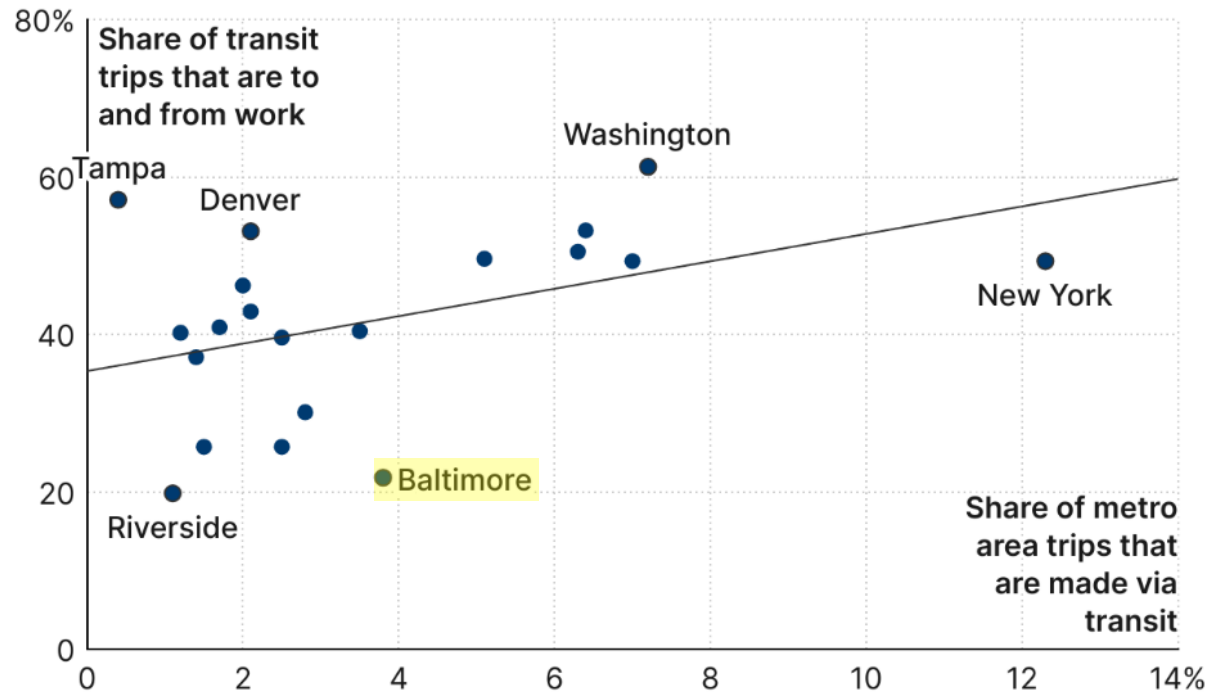


Consolidate jobs and other assets in activity centers including downtown. Make it easier to build new buildings and change old buildings. Make downtown somewhere people want to be. Be **flexible**.

#3 – The Future of Transit

Metro areas with high transit ridership had larger shares of transit trips to or from work pre-pandemic

20 largest US metro areas

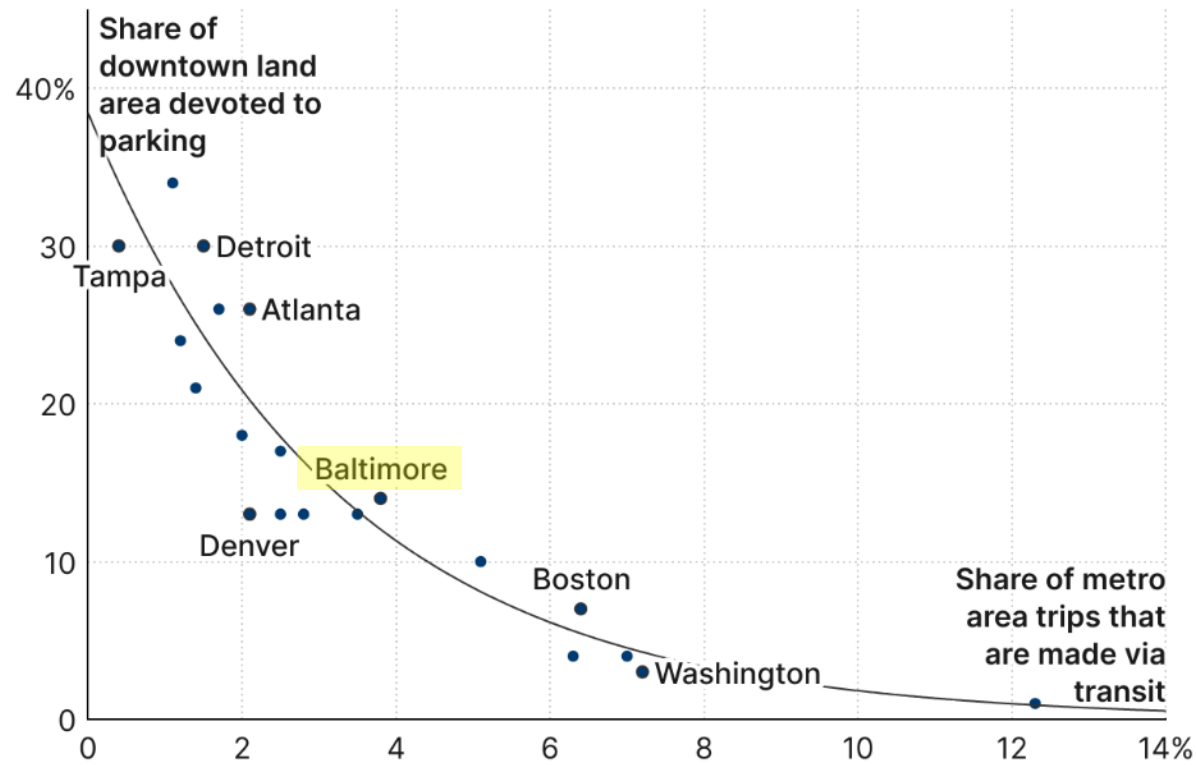


Source: 2017 National Household Travel Survey

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#3 – The future of transit

Transit ridership correlates with less land devoted to parking



Source: 2017 National Household Travel Survey and the Parking Reform Network



Establish **stable,**
ongoing funding for
transit and prioritize
building and
operating a modern
bus network.



#4 – Hope for homelessness

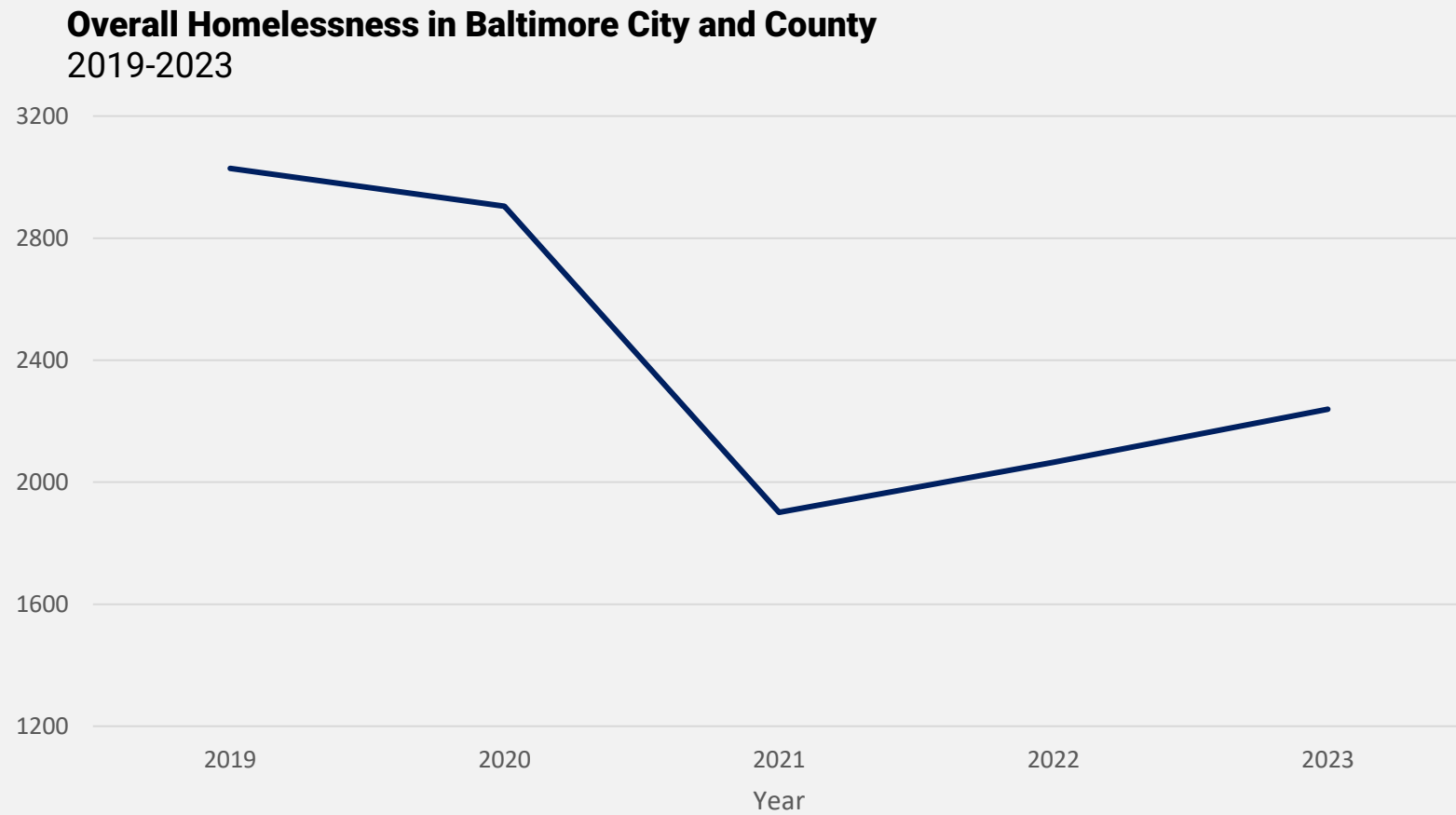
The prevalence of homelessness varies widely among major cities

Rank	HUD Continuum of Care (CoC)	Homeless per 100K	Unsheltered per 100K	% Unsheltered
1	New York City CoC	1,056	49	5%
2	Boston CoC	801	26	3%
3	Portland, Gresham/Multnomah County CoC	792	496	63%
4	Long Beach CoC	764	550	72%
10	Fresno City & County/Madera County CoC	382	235	61%
11	San Diego City and County CoC	313	158	50%
12	Metropolitan Denver CoC	309	85	27%
13	Philadelphia CoC	301	45	15%
14	Nashville-Davidson County CoC	301	83	28%
15	Baltimore CoC	285	20	7%
39	El Paso City & County CoC	128	19	15%
40	Milwaukee City & County CoC	115	10	9%
41	Jacksonville-Duval, Clay Counties CoC	100	32	32%
42	Raleigh/Wake County CoC	78	39	51%
43	Virginia Beach CoC	69	18	26%
44	Houston, Pasadena, Conroe/Harris, Ft. Bend, Montgomery, Counties CoC	52	20	38%
	HUD Major City CoC average	299	108	34%

Source: Brookings analysis of Department of Housing and Urban Development Point-in-Time Counts and 2023 American Community Survey 1-year population estimates

Note: HUD categorizes CoCs into four groups: major city, other largely urban, largely suburban, and largely rural. There are 49 "major city" CoCs. The Detroit, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Seattle/King County CoCs did not conduct unsheltered counts in 2023, and are excluded from this table.

#4 – Hope for homelessness

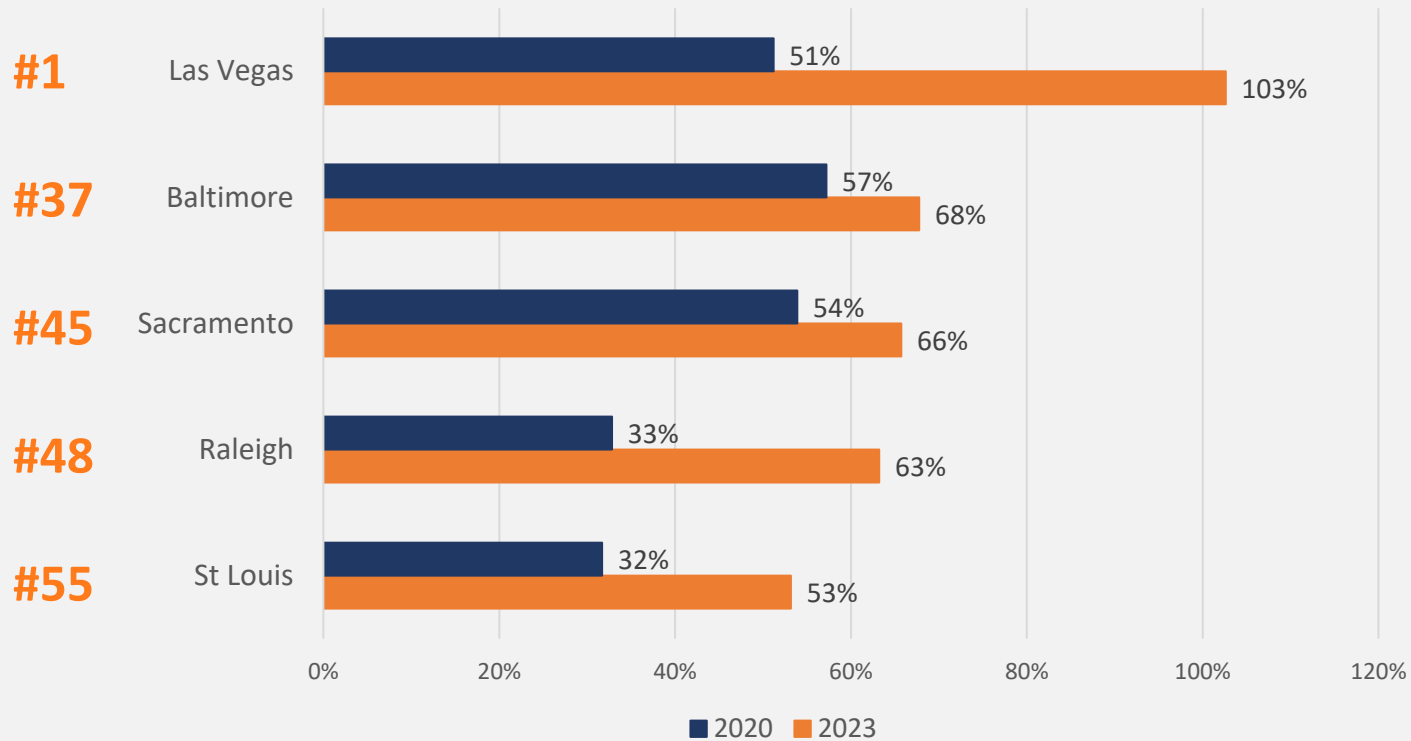




Stop looking for someone, something, or somewhere else to blame and **build for zero** by doing what we know works to prevent and reduce homelessness.

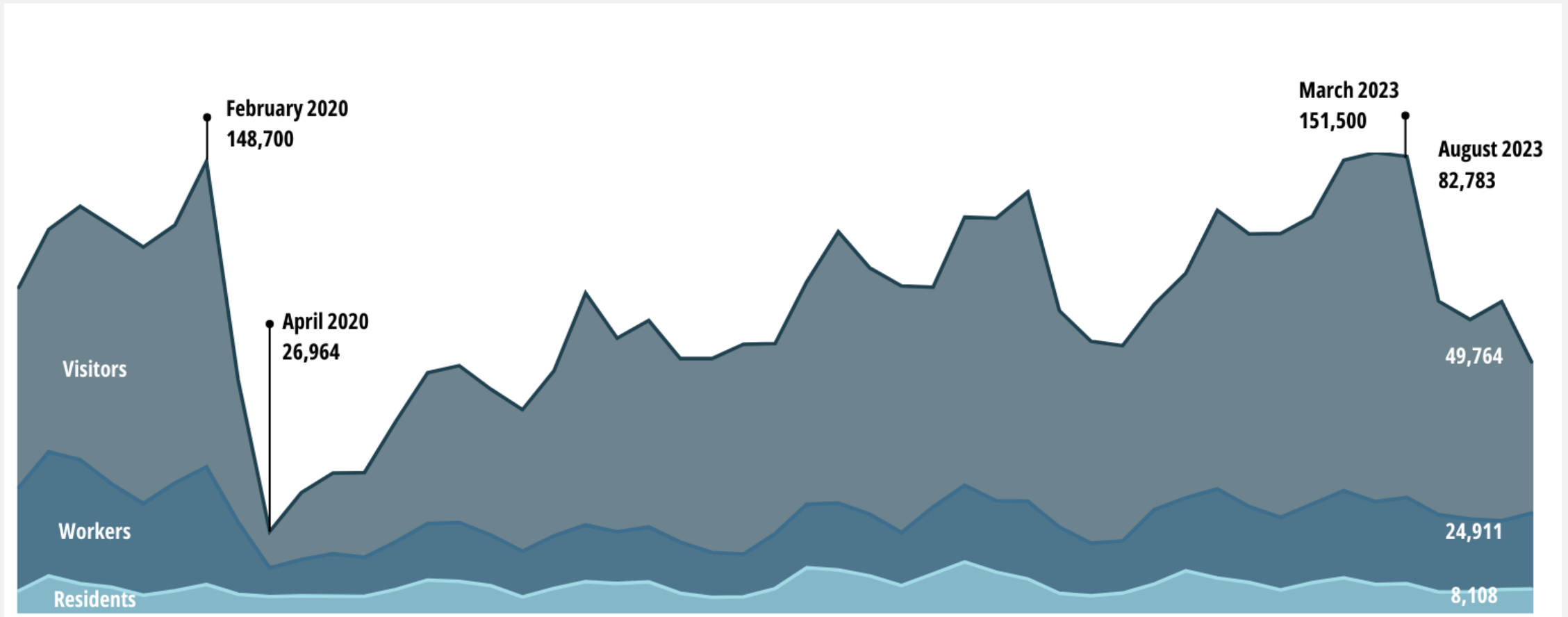
#5 – Defining “recovery”

Fig. 1 Downtown Foot Traffic Trends Relative to 2019



Source:
<https://downtownrecovery.com/charts/rankings>
https://downtownrecovery.com/charts/rankings_archived

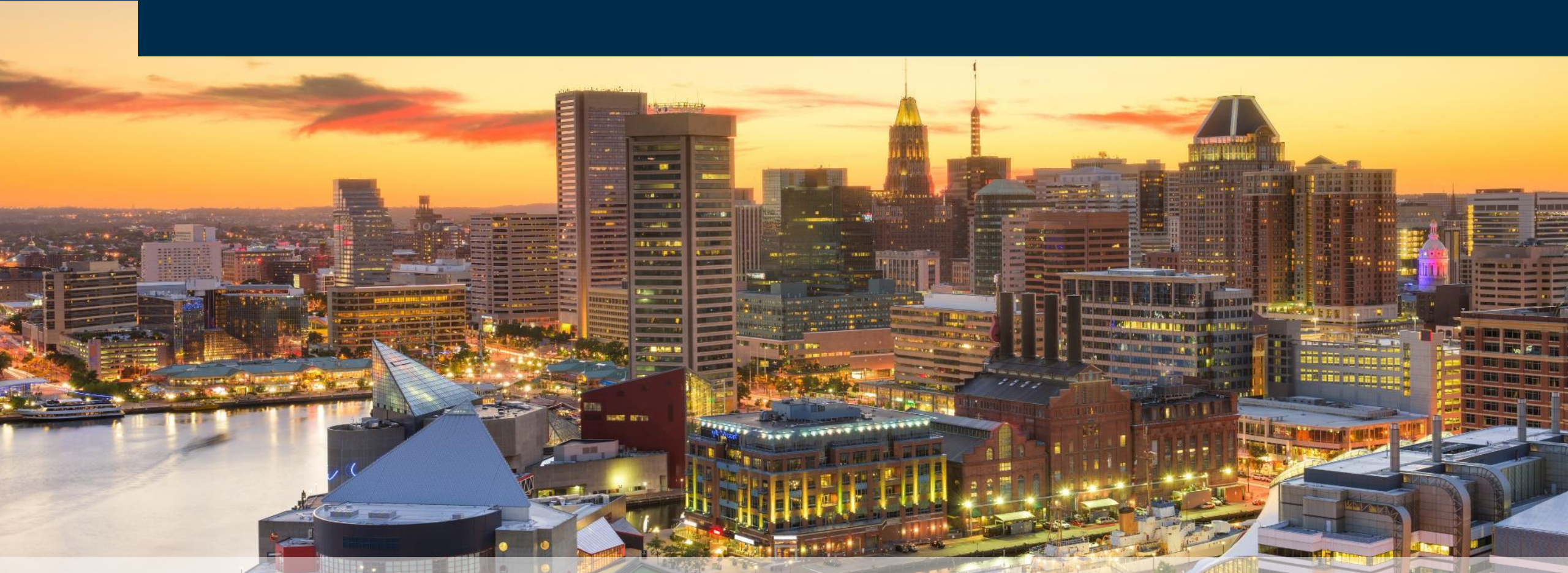
#5 – Defining “recovery”



Recovery doesn't have to mean a future that looks like the past – define it and create next-generation policies that **explicitly link** downtown prosperity and neighborhood well-being.



Five ways Baltimore is right about the future of downtowns – and how to enjoy it



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