

2024



2024 BROOKINGS COUNTY CONSUMER SURVEY REPORT

Brookings Economic
Development Corporation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The retail sector continues to play a pivotal role in Brookings County's economic landscape. Evolving consumer preferences and technological advancements have reshaped the way people shop and dine. This year's survey, conducted by the Brookings Economic Development Corporation (BEDC), provides insights into consumer habits, community perceptions, and areas of opportunity for local development.

Key Findings:

- Dining Preferences: Over 55% of respondents at each life stage reported dining mostly or always within Brookings County, with dinner being the most popular meal.
- Online Shopping: Clothing and electronics were the top categories for online purchases, particularly among younger demographics.
- Retail Leakage: Clothing/Accessories and Sporting Goods showed the highest levels of retail leakage outside Brookings County.
- Community Improvements: Respondents highlighted the need for more diverse shopping, affordable housing, and improved infrastructure, including road maintenance and snow removal.
- Community Attractiveness: A majority of participants appreciate Brookings' small-town charm, safety, and community spirit. Over 85% would recommend Brookings to family and friends.

Brookings' unique blend of small-town atmosphere and big-city amenities continues to attract families, students, and retirees. However, there remains a significant need to address retail leakage and meet the evolving demands of residents.

INTRODUCTION

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Purpose of the Report

The 2024 Brookings County Consumer Survey was created to better understand how people in the community shop, dine, and feel about living in Brookings. The goal was to gather insights that can help local businesses, community leaders, and policymakers make informed decisions about future growth and development. The survey looked at things like where residents prefer to shop and eat, what services they feel are missing, and how they rate the overall quality of life in Brookings. By analyzing this data, leaders can identify opportunities for new businesses, improve existing services, and address community needs.

The survey provides a clear picture of what residents want and need, helping to support local businesses, strengthen the economy, and make Brookings an even better place to live and work.

Background and BEDC's Role:

As the leading economic development organization in the region, BEDC is committed to fostering growth and enhancing the quality of life for residents. This report builds upon previous surveys, incorporating historical data to identify trends and opportunities. The survey serves as a critical tool in understanding the factors influencing retail recruitment and resident retention.

Survey Design

The 2024 survey was distributed online via multiple channels, including social media, email campaigns, and local media outlets. Over 600 residents and workers participated, representing a wide range of demographics and life stages. The questionnaire comprised 50+ questions, segmented into: Demographics, Shopping and dining habits, community satisfaction, and improvement suggestions.

Target Audience

The survey targeted residents, workers, and students in Brookings County. Special attention was given to capturing data from key life stages: Young Adults/Students, Early-Mid Career individuals, Young Families, Adults with Older Children, Empty Nesters, and Retirees.

Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed using statistical methods to ensure a representative understanding of community needs. Where possible, data was cross-referenced with historical surveys from 2013 and 2019 to identify trends.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The 2024 Brookings County Consumer Survey offers a comprehensive look into the characteristics, preferences, and needs of the local population. By analyzing responses from a diverse cross-section of residents, the survey provides key insights into community strengths, areas for improvement, and emerging trends that will shape future economic and community development efforts.

Part 1. Who Took the Survey?

The survey reached a broad and representative group of Brookings County residents, capturing a well-balanced mix of perspectives across age groups, income levels, and professional backgrounds. A significant portion (60%) of respondents live within the city limits of Brookings, reinforcing the survey's relevance to urban development efforts. However, the remaining 40% were divided between neighboring communities (25%) and rural areas (15%), ensuring that voices from outside the city center were also heard.

Table 1. Residency Breakdown

RESIDENCY LOCATION	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Brookings City Limits	60%
Neighboring Communities	25%
Rural Areas	15%

Age distribution in the survey was well-balanced, with responses reflecting input from individuals across different stages of life. This variety helps paint a more complete picture of consumer behavior and community needs, as younger residents, working professionals, and retirees all bring unique perspectives.

Who Took the Survey Cont.

Education levels among respondents were notably high. More than 70% reported having earned a bachelor's degree or higher, reflecting the county's strong connection to South Dakota State University and its influence on local workforce dynamics. Income levels varied, but the most common household earnings fell within the \$50,000–\$99,999 range, accounting for 32.6% of survey participants.

Table 2. Income Levels of Respondents (585 responses)

INCOME LEVEL	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
\$0 - \$24,999	3.2%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	6.3%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	16.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	16.2%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	15.4%
\$125,000 - \$149,999	13.7%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	11.8%
\$175,000 - \$199,99	5.6%
\$200,000 and Up	11.3%

Who Took the Survey Cont.

Table 3. Education Level of Respondents (596 responses)

EDUCATION LEVEL	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
Did not graduate high school	0.7%
High school diploma or equivalency	5.9%
Some college or technical school, no degree	10.4%
Associate's degree or other certification or training	11.9%
Bachelor's degree	44.6%
Graduate or professional degree	26.5%

Part 2.

Brookings as a Place to Live and Work

Brookings County has a well-established reputation as an excellent place to live and work, and survey responses largely reinforced that positive image. Residents repeatedly emphasized the community's unique ability to blend small-town charm with big-city amenities, making it an attractive place for families, students, and professionals alike. The welcoming atmosphere was a recurring theme, with many respondents highlighting Brookings' friendly and supportive community as one of its biggest strengths. Safety was also a top-rated factor, with low crime rates making Brookings a desirable location for families and retirees.

Despite these positive attributes, the survey also shed light on areas where improvements are needed. One of the most frequently mentioned concerns was retail variety. 20% of respondents expressed a desire for more diverse shopping options. Many residents feel that while essential goods are readily available, certain retail categories remain underserved, leading them to shop outside of Brookings or turn to online retailers.

Infrastructure was another area flagged for improvement, with 18% of participants specifically calling for enhanced road maintenance. Additionally, 12% of respondents pointed to a lack of family-oriented activities, suggesting a need for more entertainment and recreation options tailored to children and parents. Many comments from respondents are directed towards the possibility of a YMCA. Public transportation also emerged as a concern, with some residents advocating for expanded transit services to better connect different parts of the county.

Table 4. Areas for Improvement

IMPROVEMENT AREA	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
More Diverse Retail Options	20%
Improved Road Maintenance	18%
More Family-Oriented Activities	12%

Part 3. Shopping and Dining Habits

Understanding where and how residents spend their money provides valuable insights for local businesses and economic planners. The survey revealed that while certain categories of goods are primarily purchased locally, others experience significant retail leakage.

For essential purchases, local businesses remain the top choice. An overwhelming 85% of respondents buy their groceries in Brookings, and an even higher percentage (92%) purchase home improvement materials from local stores. These strong numbers highlight the stability of the grocery and home improvement sectors in the county.

However, other retail categories face challenges. Clothing and electronics, in particular, show significant online purchasing trends, with 40% of respondents preferring e-commerce for these items. Additionally, retail leakage is evident in specific sectors. 40% of residents purchase clothing and accessories outside Brookings, while 23% do the same for sporting goods.

Table 5. Shopping Habits - Local vs. Online

PRODUCT CATEGORY	% PURCHASED LOCALLY	% PURCHASED ONLINE
Groceries	85%	15%
Home Improvement	92%	8%
Clothing & Accessories	60%	40%
Electronics	60%	40%

Shopping and Dining Habits Cont.

Dining habits provide further insight into local spending patterns. Eating out is a common activity in Brookings, with 45% of respondents dining at restaurants at least once per week, particularly for dinner. While many residents enjoy the existing restaurant options, there is a strong demand for more variety. Family-friendly restaurants and ethnic dining options were frequently mentioned as areas where Brookings could improve.

Consumers were asked to provide feedback on the reasons to shop outside of Brookings County using a list of identified topics and indicate their importance (Table 6).

Table 6. Reasons to Shop Outside Brookings County

FACTOR	RANK
Price/Affordability	1 (Highest Factor)
Variety of Stores	2
Product Availability/Options	3
Overall Experience (trips includes dining, other activities)	4
Convenience/Ease of Access	5 (Lowest Factor)

The same question was asked of consumers regarding dining outside of Brookings County (Table 7).

Shopping and Dining Habits Cont.

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Table 7. Reasons to Dine Outside Brookings County

FACTOR	RANK
Restaurant Type/ Variety	1 (Highest Factor)
Overall Experience (trip includes shopping, other activities)	2
Quality	3
Price/Affordability	4
Dining Atmosphere	5
Convenience/ Ease of Access	6 (Lowest Factor)

The 2024 Brookings County Consumer Survey also asked questions about a consumer's preference on certain topics. Consumers are more likely to shop for non-grocery items near where they live rather than near where they work, showing a strong desire for retail and household shopping to be closer to residential development (Table 8) and are currently shopping for non-grocery items on Weekdays from 5:00PM – 7:00PM and desire to have extended hours available on Saturdays Afternoons from 2:00PM – 7:00PM. The biggest pulling factors that attract Brookings's consumers to shopping/business areas are a variety of products and services and the price, while the lowest (still desired) pulling factor was shopping at independent stores over chains.

Table 8. Shopping Preferences (Near Where Consumers Live vs. Where Consumers Work)

PREFERENCE	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Near Where You Live	71.6%
Near Where You Work	28.4%

What Brookings Wants

A major theme from the survey is demand for a larger variety of retail stores, particularly in the categories of grocery and general merchandise. Brookings's consumers identified that the top establishment types desired in Brookings County are Clothing/Clothing Accessories/Shoes and Groceries/Specialty Food/Beverage Stores along with highly ranking Fine Dining Restaurants. The lowest desired establishments were Electronics & Appliances and Bars/Nightlife (Bars/Nightlife was still very popular in the younger demographic responses).

The top retail stores requested by consumers are listed in Table 9 comparison from 2024 to 2019. In December 2024, the City of Brookings announced the plan development of the Brookings Marketplace to include both a Target department store and ALDI's grocery store, the top two requested retailers by consumers.

Table 9. Top Requested Retail Stores 2024 and 2019

2024	2019
Target (40.9%)	Target (29.1%)
Grocery Store (ALDI, Whole Foods, etc.) (33.2%)	Kohl's (7.8%)
Clothing Stores (Men's Attire, Kohl's, etc) (8.2%)	Grocery Store, Whole/Organic Foods (7.0%)
Menards/Home Depot (3.8%)	Shopko (5.9%)

What Brookings Wants Cont.

The top restaurants requested by consumers are listed in Table 10 comparison from 2024 to 2019.

Table 10. Top Requested Restaurants 2024 and 2019

2024	2019
Steakhouse/Fine Dining/Texas Roadhouse (27.2%)	Olive Garden (12.3%)
Italian/Olive Garden (17.4%)	Panera Bread (7.3%)
Independent/Local Diner (10.5%)	Texas Roadhouse (6.3%)
HuHot Mongolian Grill (4.3%)	HuHot Mongolian Grill (6.2%)

Part 4.

How Needs Differ Across Demographics

While many survey findings apply broadly to all residents, certain needs and preferences vary significantly by age and life stage.

Table 11. Needs By Demographic Group

DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP	KEY CONCERNS & INTERESTS
Young Adults/Students	Affordable housing, nightlife, frequent dining out
Young Families	Family-friendly dining, recreational activities, housing affordability, childcare availability
Retirees	In-store shopping, local dining, safety, quiet atmosphere

Part 5.

How Brookings Is Changing Over Time

Comparing current data to past survey results highlights both progress and new challenges. Since the last major survey in 2019, retail leakage in certain categories—such as clothing and electronics—has increased slightly, suggesting that local businesses may need to adapt to changing consumer habits. Additionally, community satisfaction with public services has declined marginally, indicating potential areas for improvement in government and municipal services.

Looking further back to 2013, a particularly encouraging trend emerges seeing that recommendations for Brookings as a desirable place to live have increased by 15%.

A Roadmap for the Future

The 2024 Brookings County Consumer Survey provides a valuable roadmap for local leaders, businesses, and community planners. While the county continues to be a highly desirable place to live and work, the findings highlight clear opportunities for growth and improvement. Expanding retail diversity, addressing infrastructure concerns, and enhancing family-friendly services are all key priorities for the future.

By using this data to inform decision-making, Brookings can continue to evolve in ways that align with residents' needs and preferences. Whether it's through targeted business recruitment, public service enhancements, or new community initiatives, these insights will help shape a more vibrant and sustainable future for the county.

Fundamentals of Retail Recruitment

Bringing new retail businesses to small communities like Brookings comes with both challenges and opportunities. Unlike big cities, smaller towns don't have the same large customer base or foot traffic, which can make it harder to attract national retailers. Brookings also faces competition from nearby shopping hubs like Sioux Falls and Watertown, where people often go for a wider variety of stores and restaurants.

Brookings has a lot to offer retailers. The town has a strong, supportive community, a safe environment, and a steady economy. The presence of South Dakota State University (SDSU) brings in thousands of students, faculty, and visitors who help drive local business. Brookings is also known for being business-friendly, with organizations like the Brookings Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) working to help new and existing businesses succeed.

For retail recruitment to be successful, the focus should be on using data to understand what businesses are missing, promoting the strengths of the local market, and actively reaching out to retailers who align with the needs of the community. Highlighting Brookings' economic stability, consumer demand, and strong sense of community can help bring in both national chains and independent businesses looking for a supportive market.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BROOKINGS MARKET

Brookings is a great place to live and work, but there are some obstacles that make retail growth more difficult. At the same time, there are also key opportunities that can help drive success.



Challenges

- Competition from Sioux Falls and Watertown – Since these cities have more shopping and dining options, many Brookings residents choose to shop there, making it harder for local businesses to compete.
- Slower population growth compared to job creation – While Brookings continues to add jobs in industries like healthcare, education, and manufacturing, the population isn't growing at the same pace. This means there aren't as many local consumers as possible to support retail businesses.



Opportunities

- Strong community support for local businesses – Many Brookings residents prefer to shop and eat locally when they have good options, creating a strong customer base for businesses that focus on quality service and unique offerings.
- Room to grow retail and dining choices – Survey results show that residents want more variety in shopping and dining, especially family-friendly restaurants and specialty stores. Bringing in businesses that meet these needs could reduce the number of people shopping outside the community.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the survey results, there are several key steps Brookings can take to strengthen its retail sector:

1. Work with retailers to keep spending more local

- Help existing businesses expand their product lines to compete with out-of-town stores.
- Reach out to national and regional retailers that fit the needs of Brookings consumers.
- Provide resources and incentives to encourage local entrepreneurs to start new businesses.

2. Improve infrastructure to support business growth

- Fix road and parking issues that affect access to shopping areas.
- Add better signage and walkable spaces to make it easier for customers to navigate local businesses.
- Explore ways to improve public transportation to connect more people to retail areas.

NEXT STEPS

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3. Focus on young families and students

- Develop more retail and entertainment options that appeal to these groups, such as affordable restaurants, student discounts, and interactive stores.
- Partner with SDSU to create business opportunities that connect students with local retailers.
- Expand childcare services to make Brookings more attractive for families looking to settle down.

4. Promote Brookings as a great place to shop and do business

- Use social media and marketing campaigns to encourage residents to shop locally.
- Highlight Brookings' strengths, including its business-friendly atmosphere and quality of life.
- Organize events and promotions that bring more people into local stores and restaurants.
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By following these steps, Brookings can create a thriving retail environment that supports both businesses and residents. A strong local retail sector not only strengthens the economy but also makes Brookings a more vibrant and convenient place to live.