



CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

TO: City Council

DATE: May 26, 2026

DEPARTMENT: City Manager's Office

PREPARED BY: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

PRESENTER: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

AGENDA TITLE: Presentation of Community Retail Survey Results and Consideration of Retail Recruitment and Commercial Revitalization Strategies, Including Approval of a Professional Services Agreement with The Retail Coach

RECOMMENDATION

Receive presentation of the City's Community Shopping and Retail Needs Survey results, discuss redevelopment and economic activation opportunities related to vacant storefronts, including the former Rite Aid building located at 490 S. Franklin Street, and provide direction to staff regarding:

1. Adopt the attached Resolution approving a Professional Services Agreement with The Retail Coach for Retail Recruitment Consulting Services;
2. Provide policy direction regarding vacant storefront activation and redevelopment priorities, including opportunities for the former Rite Aid site; and
3. Direct staff to continue implementation of proactive business attraction and recruitment strategies to support economic development and downtown revitalization efforts.

BACKGROUND

The City of Fort Bragg continues to prioritize economic development, downtown revitalization, and business attraction through its broader Business Expansion, Attraction and Retention (BEAR) Strategy and 2024–2028 Strategic Plan.

Vacant commercial properties can create economic and visual challenges for a community, reducing pedestrian activity, limiting tax generation, and impacting overall business confidence and community vibrancy. Conversely, strategic redevelopment and business recruitment efforts can transform vacant properties into catalysts for economic activity, employment opportunities, and enhanced quality of life.

One of the most visible vacant commercial sites within the City is the former Rite Aid building located at 490 S. Franklin Street, which has remained vacant since 2025 following the closure of the business.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8A

Recognizing the importance of community-driven economic development, the City recently conducted a Community Shopping and Retail Needs Survey to better understand:

- Where residents currently shop;
- Retail and service gaps within the community;
- Desired business types; and
- Community preferences regarding the future use of vacant commercial spaces, including the former Rite Aid site.

The survey generated 293 responses from residents living both within Fort Bragg and the surrounding Mendocino Coast region.

The City is also evaluating the use of professional retail recruitment assistance as part of a proactive strategy to fill vacant storefronts and strengthen local economic activity.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Community Retail Survey Findings

Survey results indicate strong community interest in expanding local retail and recreation opportunities and reducing the need to travel outside the community for everyday goods and services.

Survey respondents indicated they frequently travel to Ukiah, Santa Rosa, and online retailers to purchase goods not readily available locally.

The survey identified two dominant community needs:

1. Clothing and Apparel Retail – Highest Identified Need

The most significant unmet retail demand identified through the survey involved clothing and apparel options. Respondents consistently cited the lack of affordable and practical clothing choices serving local residents and families. Clothing and apparel ranked as the top category residents leave Fort Bragg to purchase and emerged as one of the most requested business types desired within the community.

Open-ended responses referenced interest in:

- Affordable clothing retailers
- Family-oriented apparel options
- Mid-size retail concepts
- Ross, TJ Maxx, Marshalls, Kohl's and similar formats
- General merchandise and household goods offerings

Residents repeatedly expressed concern that many current retail offerings cater primarily toward tourism-oriented shopping rather than day-to-day resident needs.

2. Recreation and Entertainment Opportunities – Second Major Need

A second significant theme involved family entertainment and recreation opportunities.

Residents identified a desire for:

- Bowling and arcade uses
- Indoor recreation facilities
- Family entertainment venues
- Youth-oriented activity spaces
- Indoor sports and recreation concepts

Entertainment and recreation uses ranked among the highest desired business categories and appeared repeatedly in Rite Aid-specific responses. Numerous respondents specifically referenced the prior loss of bowling opportunities and identified indoor recreation as a major community need.

Survey responses demonstrate that community members are seeking not only shopping opportunities but also experiential and quality-of-life amenities that create year-round activity and strengthen local community life.

Former Rite Aid Site – 490 S. Franklin Street

The former Rite Aid property located at 490 S. Franklin Street represents not only a prominent vacant commercial site but also a historically important contributor to the City's local economy.

Prior to its closure and resulting vacancy in 2025, Rite Aid consistently ranked among the City's top 25 sales tax producers, serving both local residents and the broader Mendocino Coast region. Its closure created not only a highly visible vacancy along South Franklin Street, but also represented the loss of a significant retail anchor and sales tax generator within the community.

The building's strategic location, established infrastructure, parking availability, and commercial footprint make it one of Fort Bragg's most consequential redevelopment and business attraction opportunities.

As a former high-performing retail site, redevelopment of the property presents an opportunity not only to reactivate a vacant building, but also to restore economic activity, support nearby businesses, increase customer traffic, and recapture local spending that may otherwise leave the community.

The building's:

- Large floorplate
- Existing parking supply

- Visibility
- Established infrastructure
- Flexible commercial layout

create opportunities for adaptive reuse and redevelopment.

Survey respondents identified several preferred concepts for the former Rite Aid building, with strongest support for:

1. Mid-size retail/general merchandise concepts
2. Entertainment and recreation venues
3. Community-oriented or mixed-use activation models

Examples suggested through community feedback included:

- Affordable clothing retail
- Bowling or indoor recreation
- Community recreation uses
- Grocery or specialty retail
- Indoor market or mixed-use concepts
- Youth and family entertainment destinations

While no single use has been identified or proposed by the City at this time, the survey findings provide valuable market and policy direction regarding community priorities.

Vacant Storefront Activation and Retail Recruitment Strategy

Historically, communities have often taken a passive approach to retail recruitment, relying on market conditions alone to fill vacancies.

Increasingly, cities are adopting more proactive economic development strategies involving:

- Market analysis
- Retail recruitment
- Property marketing
- Site readiness
- Stakeholder coordination
- Direct outreach to retailers and developers

As part of this effort, staff has received a proposal from The Retail Coach, a nationally recognized retail recruitment and market analysis firm. Their proposal emphasizes moving beyond static studies and actively recruiting businesses that align with community demand and market conditions.

The Retail Coach proposal includes:

- Retail market and leakage analysis
- Consumer spending analysis
- Mobile location and trade area data
- Retail target identification
- Site inventory and vacancy marketing
- Recruitment outreach to retailers and developers
- Stakeholder engagement
- Conference representation and recruitment support
- Ongoing recruitment tracking and coaching services

The proposal describes an action-oriented recruitment approach designed to help communities capture retail leakage and improve local quality of life through new retail, restaurant, entertainment, and service opportunities.

Staff views this proposal as one potential tool within a broader strategy to:

- Activate vacant storefronts
- Strengthen downtown vitality
- Support property owners
- Recruit businesses aligned with community demand
- Reduce retail leakage and increase local spending

STRATEGIC PLAN/CONSISTENCY

This item supports several City Council Strategic Plan priorities including:

Economic Development and Vitality

Supporting business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts to create a resilient and diverse local economy.

Downtown Revitalization and Community Experience

Encouraging investment and activation of commercial properties to strengthen downtown vibrancy and quality of life.

Fiscal Sustainability

Increasing local spending and expanding the City’s long-term sales tax and economic base.

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of the Resolution would authorize the City Manager to enter into a Professional Services Agreement with The Retail Coach for retail recruitment consulting services.

No fiscal impact is associated with receiving this presentation and providing direction. The Retail Coach proposal estimates a base cost of approximately \$24,000 plus reimbursable expenses for a 12-month recruitment engagement. Some of the funds will be built into FY 26-27 Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has been central to this effort.

The City conducted a bilingual Community Shopping and Retail Needs Survey during Spring 2026 to gather public input regarding shopping habits, unmet retail needs, and preferences for future business recruitment and redevelopment opportunities.

Survey findings will continue to inform future economic development policy discussions and business attraction efforts.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This project is exempt under the Common sense exemption pursuant to section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that approval of the recommended actions will result in no significant impact upon the environment.

ATTACHMENTS

- Survey Responses
- Resolution Approving Professional Services Agreement with The Retail Coach
- RetailCoach Proposal