To examine WPB’s current mix of ground floor businesses, a list of existing ground floor businesses within WPB was compiled. This list represents a compilation of data from four (4) sources: City of Chicago business licenses for businesses located within the WPB boundaries; the Chamber’s business list; internet resources; and BDI’s field observations. Most businesses with City of Chicago business licenses were identified by their floor location, such as first or ground floor. Those businesses without a floor designation were included in the final list. The resulting list of 952 ground floor businesses serves as the basis for the following mix analysis. This same list is also the basis for the Market Share and Leakage Analysis. (The methodology for that analysis is described in that section.)

WPB’s current, overall mix of ground floor uses is shown graphically below.

Figure 29: WPB Ground Floor Business Mix
The mix percentages are calculated using the number of business units by category, or sector. Service uses include office uses and are dominated by traditional services, including dry cleaners, medical or other professional practices, automotive, real estate offices, and financial institutions. At 34%, this is a fairly typical proportion of overall service uses. Separate from these service uses is WPB’s large collection of personal services businesses, including nail salons, hair salons or barbers, and spas. This personal services sector represents 9% of overall ground floor uses.

Retail uses represent 35% of the overall mix. This segment is dominated by apparel retailers but includes 120 retailers selling unique and varied types of merchandise. Particularly among WPB’s apparel retailers, the diversity of goods for sale, from vintage to international name designer, and their price points represent a clear competitive advantage in attracting consumers, both visitors and Chicago area residents. Among the retail segment, food purveyors are equally varied, encompassing some of the area’s most highly regarded purveyors, such as Red Hen Bakery, and small convenience markets, many independently owned. No major grocers, with the exception of Aldi, are located within WPB. Most major grocers have locations surrounding WPB, and the lack of a suitable development site within WPB currently precludes the likelihood of any larger format grocers locating in WPB.

Restaurant and bars, at 17%, includes all food and beverage formats—neighborhood bars, cocktail lounges, fast food, quick casual, and fine dining. Of these restaurants and bars, only 22.4% are nationally recognized chain outlets. (Successful Chicago restaurant owner groups operate multiple WPB restaurants and bars.) Most traditional commercial districts and corridors have about 25-33% food and beverage within their overall business mix by unit. At 17%, WPB’s restaurant component is slightly low by numbers of units.

In considering WPB’s overall mix, certain uses and business types have greater opportunities for success in certain areas of WPB. These uses reflect the character of each of WPB’s eight (8) commercial nodes and contribute to individual business success within each node. West Division Street will remain restaurant-focused. The street’s wide sidewalks permit seasonal, outdoor dining, which, in turn, can increase individual restaurant revenues by up to 30%. Automotive and auto-oriented uses work best on Ashland, Western, and WPB’s small segment of Fullerton. The blocks of Milwaukee Avenue more proximate to Division Street include varied ground floor tenancies—arts groups, non-profits, ethnic businesses, and discounters. The Milwaukee/Damen/North intersection functions as WPB’s 100% corner, with desirable ground floor locations extending southeast on Milwaukee and north on Damen. Other commercial areas, such as Armitage Avenue, include both destination and neighborhood serving businesses.
Strategic Implications for Wicker Park Bucktown

Managing WPB’s mix as a whole and by commercial area will be key to both commercial and recruitment success. The WPBCC can use the business list developed for this mix analysis as a basis for understanding WPB’s tenancies and ground floor real estate and in matching market-supported uses to available space in the optimal commercial locale. (The list will be provided as a tool to WPBCC.) A market-supported use does not necessarily equate to a format-driven tenant. It means a business owner tenant that understands how to operate a successful and profitable business in a neighborhood commercial district, regardless of what is sold.

Ongoing communications with property owners, brokers, and developers represents another aspect of mix management. New development financing typically requires credit tenants to support financing requests, particularly in a conservative lending environment. Brokers and property owners want strong tenants that can help them make money. Accumulated mix data is valuable to the local real estate community and for the WPBCC’s future retention and recruitment efforts. For its future growth, WPBCC also gains the opportunity to use this data to advocate for the business community and to expand its programmatic reach to WPB’s businesses and its membership within WPB.