



Fort Collins, CO
Sept. 27-30, 2026



Program



Day 1

Sun., Sept. 27

Afternoon

Arrival in downtown Fort Collins and hotel check-in

Evening

6:30 PM

Sugar, Salt & Sand

Begin your Retail Study Tour by connecting with fellow downtown leaders over dinner at one of Fort Collins' most distinctive restaurants. This informal evening sets the stage for three days of meaningful conversations, collaborative learning, and behind-the-scenes access to downtown Fort Collins.



Day 2

Mon., Sept. 28

Morning

Breakfast on your own

8:30 AM - NOON

Setting the Stage for Downtown Retail Success

Visit Fort Collins Visitor Center

Hosted by Matt Robenalt, Executive Director, Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority. Every successful downtown begins with a shared vision and strong partnerships. Learn how downtown Fort Collins has evolved into one of the country's premier downtown destinations through strategic planning, thoughtful investments, and collaboration between the Downtown Development Authority, the City, businesses, and community organizations.

Topics include:

- Community and downtown evolution
- Retail ecosystem and business mix
- Public-private partnerships
- Lessons applicable to communities of every size

Walking Tour

Placemaking That Creates Place

Experience firsthand how intentional investments and partnerships in the public realm have elevated downtown Fort Collins. Explore the nationally recognized City of Fort Collins' horticulture program and discover how award-winning floral displays strengthen downtown identity, enhance the visitor experience, and support local businesses. Continue through the downtown public art collection and rotating sculpture program to learn how Fort Collins has transformed its streets into an outdoor gallery while creating opportunities for artists to sell their work.

12:15 PM - 1:30PM

The Emporium: An American Brasserie

Enjoy lunch at The Emporium the vibrant gathering place within The Elizabeth Hotel, where locally inspired cuisine and thoughtful design offer the perfect introduction to one of downtown Fort Collins' most celebrated redevelopment success stories.



Program

Afternoon

1:30-5:00PM

Meet innovative entrepreneurs and independent retailers who are growing successful businesses in downtown Fort Collins. Learn about entrepreneurship, branding, customer experience, expansion, and what it takes to recruit and sustain thriving independent retailers. Then join a candid conversation with a downtown property owner and commercial real estate professional about the realities of leasing, redevelopment, tenant recruitment, and the partnerships that drive downtown investment. Conclude the day with an exclusive tasting at Nuance Chocolate, an internationally acclaimed bean-to-bar chocolatier. Learn how craftsmanship, storytelling, and an unwavering commitment to quality have made this independent business a downtown destination.

Evening

6:30 PM

Maida Trattoria

Enjoy dinner at Maida Trattoria, the Callahan family's second hospitality concept, where Italian heritage, locally sourced ingredients, and warm hospitality come together in the historic Avery Building. Hear directly from the owners about their journey, expanding from Mugs to Maida, and what it takes to build a thriving restaurant in downtown Fort Collins.

Morning

Breakfast on your own

8:30AM - 11:15AM

Creativity, Entrepreneurship & Partnerships

Discover how Fort Collins transformed its alleys into vibrant public spaces through world-class murals, public art, and intentional placemaking. Learn how creative investments strengthen downtown identity, encourage exploration, and generate economic activity. The morning continues with conversations featuring local entrepreneurs and innovative retailers who are redefining shopping experiences through thoughtful curation, authentic branding, and creative business models. Participants will also have time to explore downtown independently, revisit favorite shops, and experience Fort Collins as a visitor.

11:30 AM - 1:00PM

Ginger & Baker

Gather for lunch in one of Fort Collins' most iconic adaptive reuse projects and hear the inspiring story behind Ginger & Baker's transformation into a destination that blends history, hospitality, and entrepreneurship.

Afternoon

1:30PM-5:00PM

Partnerships That Transform Communities

Colorado State University

Thriving downtowns and thriving universities are mutually beneficial. Hear how Colorado State University partners with the community to support economic vitality, innovation, talent attraction, and long-term redevelopment. Learn practical strategies for building meaningful partnerships between universities, downtown organizations, local government, and the private sector.



Day 3

Tues., Sept. 29



Program

Afternoon

1:30PM-5:00PM

Partnerships That Transform Communities

Bohemian Foundation

Meet the leaders behind one of Fort Collins' most influential philanthropic organizations and discover how strategic investments have helped shape the community's future. Learn how philanthropy can serve as a catalyst for partnerships, placemaking, and sustainable downtown revitalization.

The Story Behind The Elizabeth Hotel

Explore how vision, thoughtful partnerships, philanthropy, and quality design came together to create The Elizabeth Hotel—a project that has become both a catalyst for downtown investment and a destination that reflects the unique character of Fort Collins.

Evening

6:30 PM

Phillippe French Bistro

Gather with your fellow participants at Philippe French Bistro, where authentic French cuisine and gracious hospitality offer the perfect setting to reflect on the day's experiences and continue conversations about retail, entrepreneurship, and placemaking.

Morning

Breakfast on your own + hotel check-out

9:00AM - 10:30AM

Closing Roundtable & Action Planning

Conclude the Retail Study Tour with a facilitated discussion focused on the ideas, strategies, and relationships developed throughout the experience. Participants will share key takeaways, exchange resources and contacts, and identify practical actions they can implement to strengthen retail, placemaking, partnerships, and downtown vitality in their own communities.

Leave Fort Collins with new professional relationships, fresh inspiration, and a practical roadmap for bringing these ideas home.

11:00 AM

Depart Fort Collins for home



Day 4

Wed., Sept. 30

Please note: The schedule is subject to change as speakers and experiences are finalized.



Retail Study Tour produced by Imagine the Possibilities (ITP) Consulting