

Downtown



CEDAR RAPIDS

2021 Annual Report

www.cedarrapids.org/downtown

Downtown CR 2022

2021 was yet another opportunity to show the resiliency, innovativeness, and adaptability of Downtown Cedar Rapids. Despite some downtown employees working remotely from home at times, downtown showed it is still the central hub of our city and the place to be. This year more housing, new businesses, vibrant public art, and high-tech lighting enhanced downtown; while events and attractions, designed to showcase our city, brought people back to experience the liveliness of the city's core.

Downtown Cedar Rapids is in an excellent position to adjust with the changing times and stand out as an iconic regional hub. Demand for downtown housing is at an all-time high. Recreational outdoor sports and trail usage have never been more popular. Creative placemaking and programming are more salient now than ever in business and cultural districts.

Photo courtesy of Benjamin Farrar





While 2021 did not see the full bounce back and return to normalcy that we all clamored and hoped for, it offered a chance to assess our strengths and identify opportunities for further growth, development, and improvement in downtown.

To that end, it was inspiring to see the public-private partnership of ConnectCR officially kick off last fall, the Banjo block move forward with a big-time, mixed-use development, an assortment of partnerships create more art, contemporary lighting, and overall vibrancy throughout downtown and our community's core districts. We are grateful for the tireless efforts of our city officials and leaders in bringing the comprehensive flood control system another big step forward toward completion. While challenges abound, there is reason for genuine optimism as we turn over a new chapter into 2022.

Downtown Cedar Rapids Brand



In June, Downtown Cedar Rapids unveiled a new logo and brand. Its intent is to distinguish the district, embrace our strongest natural asset—the Cedar River—and celebrate downtown’s micro-districts like Kingston Village, 3rd & 3rd, Greene Square, and the McGrath Amphitheatre, while encouraging visitors to have their own unique *experience downtown*. The brand is featured prominently on the 100+ new banners installed throughout the district. It is also incorporated into graphic art displays that dress up currently vacant storefronts like the Dows building and the first floor of the Roosevelt. A new welcome sign showcasing the brand greets trail users coming from the Cedar Lake area into downtown.





Downtown Lights Up!



Going back to 2013 the Downtown SSMID and the City of Cedar Rapids have partnered on the façade improvement grant program, which incentivizes property owners to spruce up their building's exterior by offering them funding to help offset costs. Last year four properties utilized the grant program and installed modernized exterior lighting. The cumulative effect has had a tremendously positive impact on the overall vibrancy of downtown and the city's skyline.



Downtown CR Dollars

In November 2020, the Downtown SSMID launched a business-support program to incentivize people to spend money at businesses throughout the district—namely retailers, restaurants, bars, and local service providers. The program ran through the first half of 2021 and made a quarter-of-a-million dollars in economic impact for local downtown businesses. Downtown business patrons who participated in the program received more than 2,100 gift cards to be used at downtown businesses, which in turn encouraged those patrons to return to downtown to make more purchases.



PROGRAM
RESULTS
THROUGH
JULY 23, 2021



522
PARTICIPANTS



198,226
SOCIAL
IMPRESSIONS

2,130
GIFT CARDS
MAILED

\$64,250
DOWNTOWN SSMID
DIRECT CASH INFUSION



\$181,197 DOLLARS REDEEMED
FOR GIFT CARDS
2,701
RECEIPTS



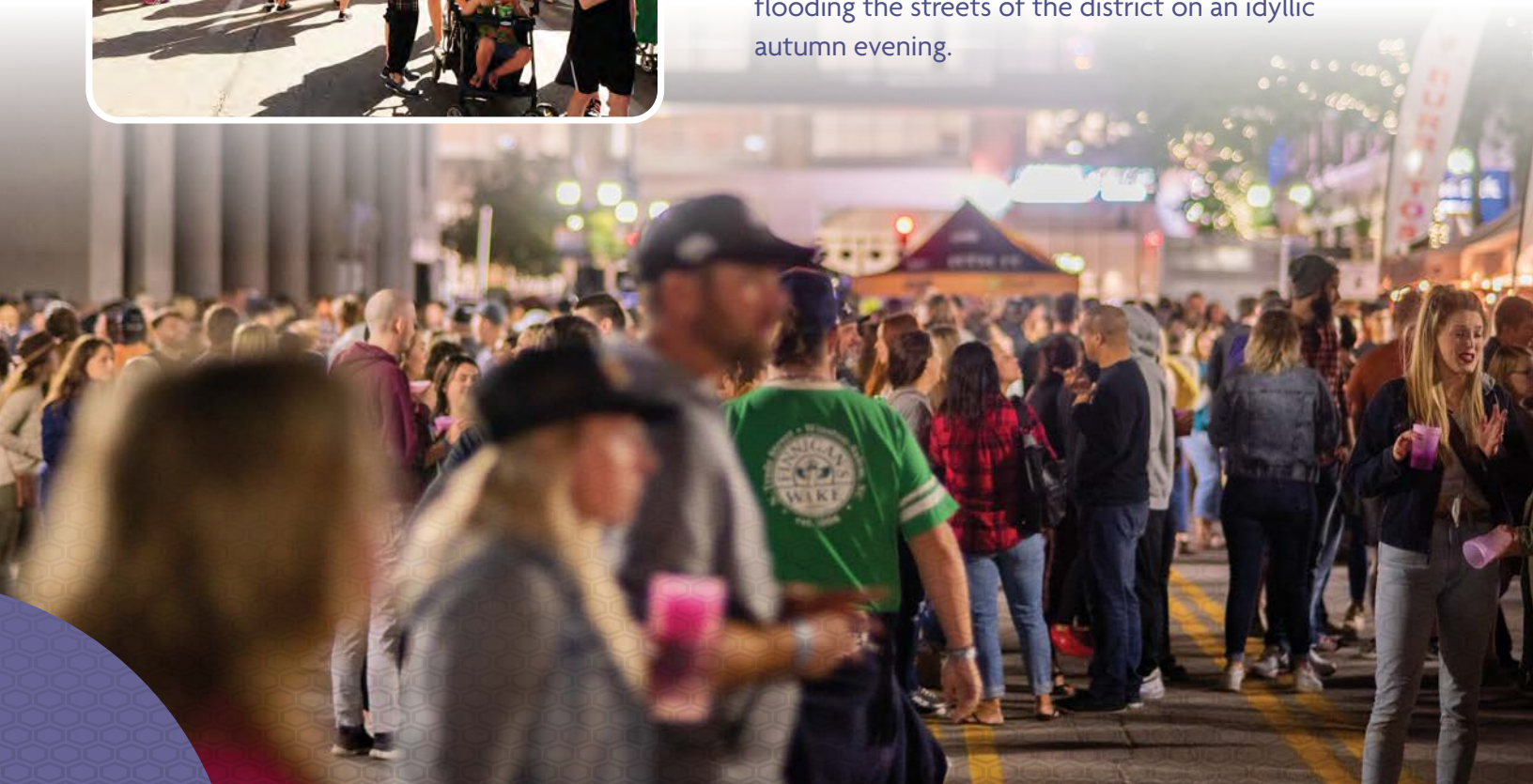
\$245,447 IN DOWNTOWN
ECONOMIC IMPACT



Return of In-Person Farmers Markets and Market After Dark



During the summer and fall, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance successfully brought back in-person Farmers Markets to downtown. The first half of the season drew an average attendance of 12,500 per market, while the second half saw a slight dip in overall attendance. On Saturday September 25, Market After Dark returned after the 2020 hiatus with 25,000 people flooding the streets of the district on an idyllic autumn evening.



It's Go Time: Solutions for a Future Forward Workforce

We're all keenly aware that the pandemic flipped the entire world upside down. With so many millions of Americans now working from home, what will the major ripple effects be within the commercial real estate market, especially in core districts and downtowns throughout America? Those questions and challenges were the impetus behind the program dubbed *It's Go Time: Solutions for a Future-Forward Workforce*. The Downtown and MedQuarter SSMIDs sponsored the event, featuring world renown economist Daniel Suskind from Oxford University, Van Meter CEO Lura McBride, and Armstrong Development President Jon Dusek. The purpose of the event was to dive into strategies and tactics that business and civic leaders can employ to help the ICR region seize opportunities for workforce and population growth in the wake of the pandemic.

Featured panelists included



Daniel Suskind
*Fellow in Economics
at Oxford University*



Lura McBride
*President & CEO,
Van Meter*



Jon Dusek
*President, Armstrong
Development*



Community Spirit Mural

2020 didn't just bring about a once-in-a-century kind of plague; we also saw social unrest not witnessed in this country since the late 1960's. While many protests throughout the United States turned violent and destructive, the ones that took place in Cedar Rapids were peaceful and impactful. We wanted to capture that sentiment by way of public art. Working with local artists, Thomas Clark and Chad Dozeinear, a new mural was painted on the western-facing side of the AdCraft building on 3rd Street SE in June.



Healthcare Tribute Collage

Doctors, nurses, and millions of health care workers have been on the frontlines battling the pandemic since March of 2020. Downtown CR felt it to be extremely important to honor those efforts and sacrifices, especially by our local health care work force. We worked with the On View Gallery, Rapids Reproductions, and artist Isaac Campbell to install a 'wheat-pasted' mural on the backside of the old Gazette building downtown which captures the images of five local health care workers and tributes them as being the heroes they are for such a prolonged and arduous battle with COVID-19.



#HEALTHCAREHEROES

Three Simple Words

A simple but poignant message was added to the front exterior of the downtown DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Cedar Rapids in September. An initiative started twenty years ago to spread a bit of positivity into the world came to Cedar Rapids just before the Labor Day weekend. Murals & More, Downtown CR, the DoubleTree, and the City's Visual Arts Commission collaborated with the *You Are Beautiful* team, based in Chicago, to add the installation to the front of the downtown hotel. We were the first in the state of Iowa to do so and now this art is one of 100 total installations of its kind worldwide.



Downtown Gateways

Creating signature and enticing gateways into downtown and our other core districts is strongly encouraged in the latest Downtown Vision Plan. The Downtown SSMID commissioned a local landscape architect to conceive a master plan and worked with a landscaping company to get the project started at the 7th/8th Street entrance/exit off I-380. While just the first step in a multiple-phase improvement plan, mowing, trimming, and pick-up vastly improved the gateway in the summer and fall. The vision plan focuses on improving eight gateway locations in 2022 and beyond.

BEFORE



AFTER



ConnectCR

Cedar Rapids' ultimate public-private partnership moved from the fundraising phase to project commencement in 2021 with the official groundbreaking at Cedar Lake and the bridge name unveiling along the American Discovery Trail on the south end of NewBo. With the popularity of bicycling and other outdoor recreational activities soaring in recent years, the completion of this dual project will help take Cedar Rapids, and most especially our core districts, to the next level of communities in the Midwest.



Banjo Block

For several years city leaders have been trying to have this key piece of land in downtown redeveloped for much-needed housing. In 2021 those efforts came to fruition when national real estate developer, TWG, purchased the properties and began work on a four-story, 224-unit apartment complex. The anticipated completion date is set for January 2024.



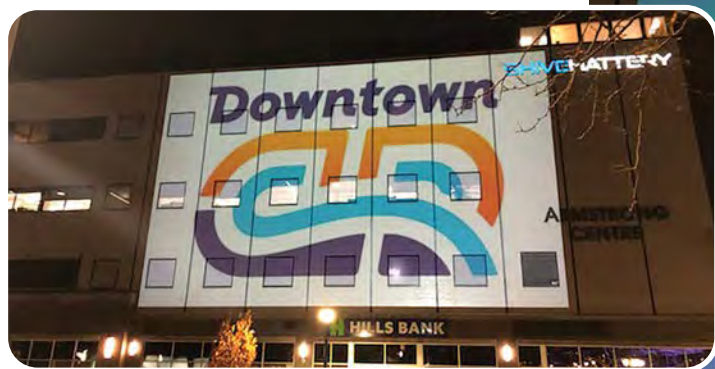
Holiday Lighting

Downtown partnered with the MedQuarter to 'connect' the districts by way of holiday lighting and décor during the 2021 season. Starting at the MedQuarter's signature 10th Street and flowing down 1st Avenue to 1st Street, the core lit up this year with thousands of bright LED lights along with unique displays in front of the DoubleTree, Central Fire Station, and the downtown portion of the American Discovery Trail illuminated with bright green lighting.



Armstrong Projector

In late 2021 the Downtown SSMID worked with a local service provider to install a high-tech projector at 3rd & 3rd. Throughout 2022, look for visual images, events, and film to be displayed on the 3rd Avenue side of the Armstrong Center in the evenings accompanied by full audio.



Keeping Downtown Beautiful

Increasing the vibrancy and attractiveness of downtown Cedar Rapids is essential to our mission. This is accomplished with decorative lighting, public art, and other “wow” factors. That said, our most important core function continues to be the ongoing, day-to-day cleaning, maintenance, and beautification efforts for downtown. Our two-person full-time crew, along with part-time help through a partnership with Willis Dady Homeless Services, work tirelessly on the upkeep of downtown.

A brief snapshot of these efforts by the numbers:

- Over 2,500 hours of dedicated cleaning of the 72-block boundary of downtown
- Over 250 hours of snow removal
- Plant and maintain over 6,000 flowers and plants throughout the district with the help of a local service provider
- Installation and wrapping of over 300 trees with holiday lights
- 20 Bigbelly trash and recycling receptacles installed last winter with 20 more coming in spring of 2022





2022 will be a crucial year for communities around the country as we collectively work to spring past the negative effects of the pandemic and utilize lessons learned, new norms, and best practices in its wake. With an infusion of federal dollars stemming from the 2021 federal infrastructure bill along with the potential for significant state funding, downtown Cedar Rapids is in an excellent position to seize upon these opportunities for the betterment of the entire community. Our current Vision Plan acutely focuses on the need to enhance our water recreation possibilities, including the Cedar River and Cedar Lake. It also shines a bright light on energizing our core districts' connectors, investing in our impact opportunities, and fully embracing district coordination. All of these have been taking shape in recent years and should start to blossom in 2022 and beyond. The Downtown SSMID and the Economic Alliance will continue to focus on day-to-day beautification and marketing efforts while also bringing more art, modern lighting, and other means of vibrancy and placemaking to downtown.

Supporting our local downtown business economy remains a priority. In 2020 we had planned to bring at least one new business to the district via a competition called *Race for the Space*. That program was shelved for the past two years due to uncertainty caused by the pandemic, but look for it to launch later in 2022 with its aim remaining the same: bring a new, exciting business to downtown Cedar Rapids that will be a staple for our urban core for several years to come.

Thank You to the Downtown SSMID Commission

CHAIR

Darryl High, *High Property Management*

VICE CHAIR

Emily Ellingson, *Lynch Dallas*

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Fred Timko, *Down to Earth Development*

Linda Mattes, *Alliant Energy*

James Klein, *Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust*

Dave Drown, *GLD Commercial*

Craig Stephan, *Iowa Brewing Company*

Joe Terfler, *GreatAmerica Financial Services*

David Sorg, *OPN Architects*

Jon Dusek, *Armstrong Development*

Jake Ryan, *ImOn Communications*

Jeff Janssen, *Skogman Companies*

Joe Ahmann, *Ahmann Companies*



Cedar Rapids Downtown District

(319) 398-5317

501 First St. SE

Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

The Downtown SSMID contracts with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance on services like beautification, maintenance, communications, and marketing.

Thank you to the staff
at the Economic Alliance!