

# Thank You to the Downtown SSMID Commission

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

### Cedar Rapids Downtown District

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Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

Thank you to the staff at the Economic Alliance!



## 2022 Annual Report



[www.cedarrapids.org/downtown](http://www.cedarrapids.org/downtown)



## Letter from the Downtown SSMID Commission Chair, Emily Ellingson

Appreciative, proud, and optimistic. Those are three key words of the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) Commission as we look back at 2022 and toward 2023 in this Annual Report.

First, thank you so much to so many for all of the incredible efforts supporting and working for downtown this past year. Our success comes from this unique collaboration of downtown commercial taxpayers, the City of Cedar Rapids, non-profit partners, and other stakeholders.

Reasons for our pride will be evident as the pages that follow shine a light on all the projects, initiatives and endeavors we either led, collaborated on, or simply championed with the aim to make this an even more attractive and iconic urban core for our community and region. There's no doubt those who invest their dollars in the Downtown District saw great return on that investment. We saw murals completed, streets and sidewalks cleaned, national best-selling authors showcasing our city, new business opening, and holiday lights sparkling in the streets. Farmers Markets came fully back to life. BLOCKtoberfest was the inaugural downtown party and rock and roll fest that people were looking for in the late summer. Race for Space helped bring three new businesses downtown, which will all launch in early 2023. New housing developments took shape.

Reasons for our optimism take shape on the horizon, as ConnectCR comes closer to reality and the multi-phased project at 1st & 1st West gets nearer completion. While the aforementioned projects and efforts all helped the cause, nothing is as important as the City's continued progress on the comprehensive flood control system. With the tumult and travails we've all lived through the past few years, it could be easy to take the eye off the ball with that gargantuan endeavor. Instead, leadership from City Hall and Public Works led the way in completing and starting key segments throughout the core.

While we celebrate the last year, we also look forward to what lies ahead in 2023. We will be partnering with the City of Cedar Rapids to create a vision plan for the future to prioritize our projects and initiatives moving forward. We are confident that, with your help, we will continue the progress made in 2022 into 2023.



Photo credit Gazette/Nick Rohlman

**Emily Ellingson is a partner at Lynch Dallas Law and serves as the Chair for the Downtown SSMID Commission**



## Standing with Ukraine

Lighting up downtown has been a tactical priority for the Downtown SSMID in recent years. Since 2019, the façade improvement grant selection committee has put a special emphasis on exterior lighting. Subsequently, seven properties have utilized the program to help offset costs for these kinds of projects. With the Alliant Energy Tower often leading the way, many of these properties agree to 'sync' their lighting schedules along with the Downtown SSMID's 3rd Avenue bridge lights to great effect. None was more impactful, however, than this February when several downtown properties went 'yellow and blue' following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



## Fragments

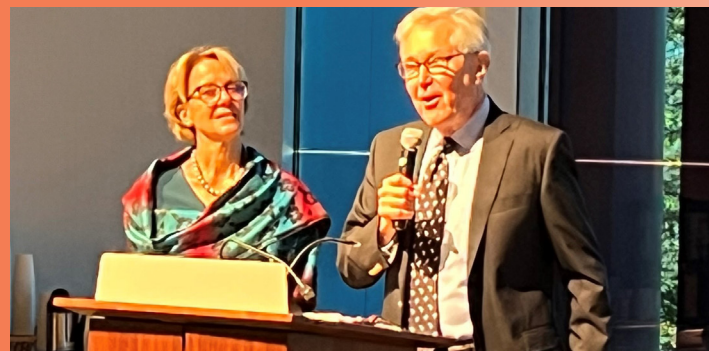
Back in 2020, the Downtown SSMID sought to pay tribute to the ConnectCR project by way of public art. In the spring of that year, the world-renowned artist duo, NEVERCREW, won a competitive bid for the project. With the pandemic raging, we knew they weren't going to be able to make it until the vaccines proved efficacious. We initially planned their arrival for the fall of 2021, but work visa issues delayed that timeline. Finally, due in large part to Murals & More's tireless efforts, we were able to get the 'crew' to Cedar Rapids in April 2022. It took them less than a week to paint the Fragments mural on the 2nd Avenue parking garage.





## Our Towns - CR

In October, Jim and Deb Fallows of *Our Towns* visited Cedar Rapids. We packed a full two-day itinerary for the bestselling authors all through our core districts and much of the greater Cedar Rapids community. The visit culminated with a special event at the Downtown Public Library with Mayor Tiffany O'Donnell, Emily Ellingson of Lynch Dallas and the Chair of the Downtown SSMID, along with Jim and Deb. Their insights—and the experience they had while in Cedar Rapids—lead them both to believe our community (a Goldilocks Zone) is well-positioned for the future when it comes to desired workforce and population growth.



## Race for the Space

Originally planned to launch in 2020, the inaugural Race for the Space program officially kicked off last spring. Launched as a business competition meant to help propel a new or secondary location off the ground while also filling current space downtown, Race for the Space drew twenty applicants with three finalists named in late summer. In September, the Economic Alliance hosted a 'Shark Tank' style event at the HarMac Building to name the winner. The KETO Kitchen came out on top that evening, but there was a surprise ending to the event as it was announced that the Downtown SSMID had budgeted enough for the program to support all three finalists. In December, The KETO Kitchen announced that it will take over a portion of the Armstrong Food Court. The other two finalists—We Dream Café and Excel Childcare Services are in the process of selecting their ideal downtown real estate.





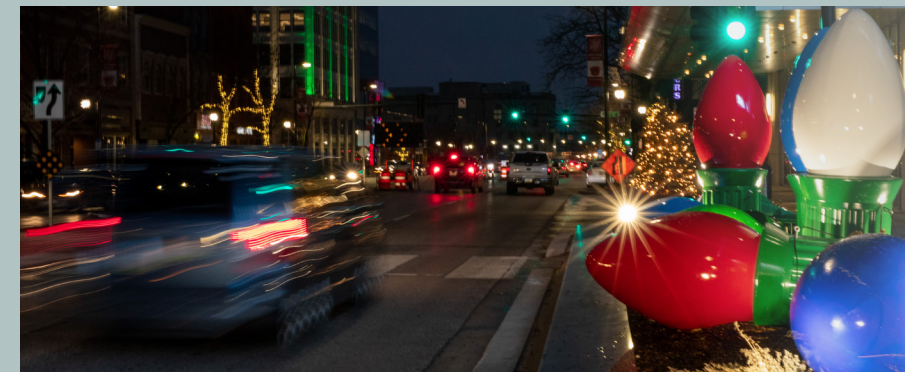
## Downtown Farmers Markets

The Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market was back for its 17th season and in full, in-person force. The 8-market season kicked off in May and spanned through the special fall market in September. Attendance numbers were back to an all-time, post pandemic high, with an average of 11,500 people per market. The community loved celebrating and supporting all the creative, talented, hard-working 150+ vendors that bring one of the Midwest's largest farmers markets to life. The iconic Market After Dark also returned on August 27, fully equipped with a main stage and two sub-stages that supported musical talents throughout the night. The evening event hosted 80 vendors and more than 20,000 people from the community.



## Another Spectacular Set Up for the Holidays

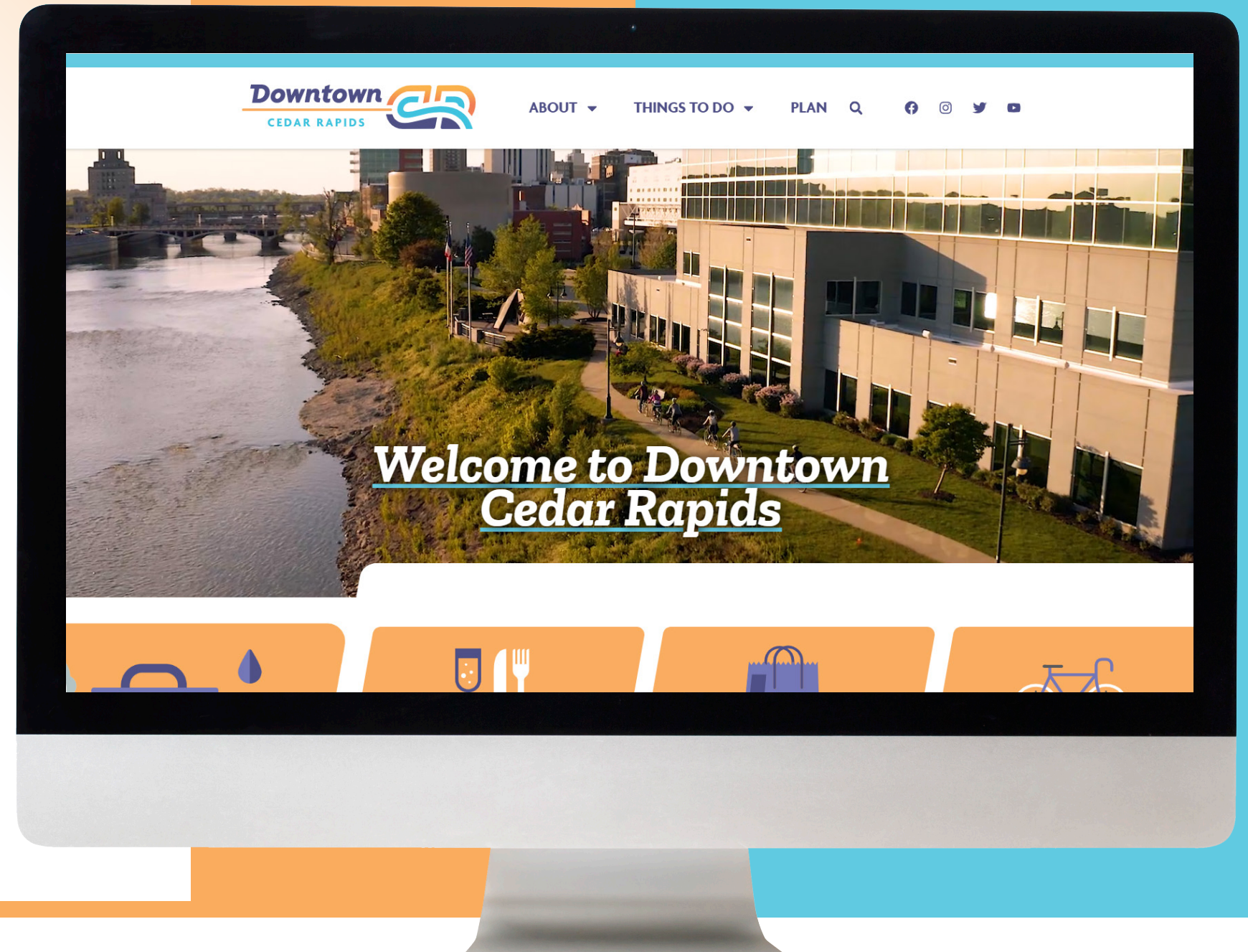
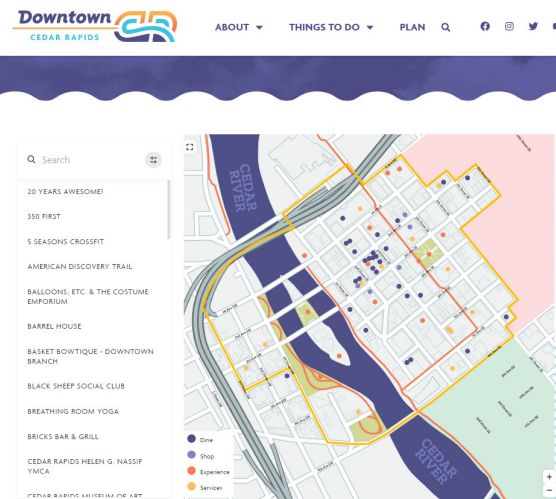
Downtown was once again illuminated with holiday lights, garlands, wreaths and bows. We've become one of the brightest spots for families to visit through November and December. In 2022, we wrapped over 300 trees in lights and installed a new 15-foot tree at the Town Center Plaza. We also garnered more involvement from businesses wanting to deck the halls and the projector at Generation Square continues to bring music, movies and animation to those walking and driving through the city. Each year, downtown continues to grow its displays, and with the many holiday events like concerts, theatre, and open houses, we've formed a new tradition that brings splendor and cheer to downtown Cedar Rapids.





## New Website

The Economic Alliance has partnered with a local marketing firm to build Downtown Cedar Rapids its very own website. This new site will give the community and visitors alike a centralized and engaging space to find downtown events, experiences, dining locations and shopping opportunities. It will officially launch in February of 2023 and serve a prominent role in our expanded communications and engagement efforts.





## Façade Improvement Program

Four façade improvement projects were supported in 2022 utilizing the Downtown SSMID and City of Cedar Rapids' façade improvement program. The Granby and Armstrong building installed programmable exterior lighting fixtures, while 20 Years Awesome and Bricks Bar & Grill both made significant improvement to the front of their locations along with new signage. There are already four new projects in the pipeline early in 2023.

## Downtown Housing

Urban living has never been as popular as it is these days. Late 2021 saw TWG Development's "Annex on the Square" kick off, which will bring 224 new apartment units to the old 'Banjo Block' area, east of the Downtown Public Library. That project is on track to be completed early 2024. Earlier this year, the Hach Development group broke ground on a new four-story multifamily building at the 600 block of downtown that will consist of 44 units set to come online in the fall of 2023.



## July 3rd w/ Alisabeth Von Pressley

There was a missing day of action during the Freedom Festival activities this summer. Downtown partnered with Blue Sky Productions and VenuWorks to bring Dalles Jacobus and Alisabeth Von Pressley to the McGrath Amphitheatre for a 'free to the public' dual performance. Both performances rocked the place on a picturesque July evening in downtown Cedar Rapids.

## Next Nature

In June, local artist Scott Takes, owner of the Underground Art Studio, got to work on a dual mural on the north and west sides of Fix Salon in the Kingston Village portion of downtown. Takes is a world-renowned talent known for his work customizing motorcycles. The completed work, Next Nature, is a fabulous addition to this burgeoning area in our city's core and an Instagram favorite for locals and visitors alike.





## BLOCKtoberfest

In mid-September, Slap & Tickle and the Pork Tornadoes rocked the streets of downtown Cedar Rapids for the inaugural BLOCKtoberfest. This event came to be via a partnership between the Fun Not Fancy restaurant ownership team and the Downtown SSMID. This inaugural rock and roll outdoor concert raised \$15K for local charities. Look for this to be an annual downtown tradition in the early fall timeframe.



## More Big Bellies throughout Downtown

Twenty new Big Belly trash receptacles were added throughout downtown last spring. These modernized units have sensor technology that informs our maintenance crew when they're at various levels of threshold and self-compact via a solar powered mechanism. Several have been in place since December 2020. In an effort to include the community, we reached out to local high school art programs and gave over a dozen young artists the opportunity to have their work prominently displayed downtown.

## RAGBRAI Tribute

In September, the Downtown SSMID partnered with Onview Gallery and Hall Bicycle to bring a RAGBRAI tribute to downtown Cedar Rapids. Street artist, CERA, was commissioned for the project. 2023 will mark the 50th anniversary of RAGBRAI and the 125th anniversary of Hall Bicycle being in business. The final product serves as a fantastic addition to both Hall and the downtown in general as RAGBRAI continues to be one of the hallmarks of the Hawkeye State.





## Generation Square

In late 2021, Downtown installed a projector at the 3rd and 3rd location that displays light art imagery, events, film, and the likes onto the Armstrong Center. Earlier this year, we partnered with Blue Sky Productions to assist with content, programming, and scheduling. As part of the content schedule, we also grant special requests for broadcasts, i.e. in mid-December, we showcased an Iowa Orchestra event to commemorate their centennial anniversary. The full content schedule is as follows:

- **Sunday Outreach** - local social service contact information and listings, the Sunday night NFL game
- **Monday Look Ahead** - local CR content - performance schedules at local theaters/venues
- **Tuesday Around Iowa** - Iowa Themed trivia game along with nature video
- **Wednesday Worldwide** - Interesting video from around the world, along with live YouTube camera feeds
- **Thursday Showcase** - Highlights an artist of the week
- **Friday Live** - All about a wide variety of music videos and music styles
- **Downtown CR Saturday** - Wide variety of live music performances from Austin City Limits, NPR Tiny Desk Concerts, Choral, Symphonies

As consistent foot traffic continues to rebound from the effects brought upon by the pandemic, this 'biggest screen in town' amenity should grow in creative usage and popularity.



## 1st & 1st West Groundbreaking



The 1st and 1st West project in Cedar Rapids had its official groundbreaking event in May. The highly anticipated \$81.5 million projects have been years in the making.

This critical piece of property will be a new destination-style development that sits perfectly in the heart of the Cedar Rapids community in a highly visible location. The mixed-use master plan will include multiple buildings, a boutique-style hotel, residential units, office/service and retail spaces. The first building in the project features “Pickle Palace”, a 43,530-square-foot building with pickleball courts, a bar and grill, event space, rooftop deck and games, and a third-floor bar. Also in phase one is an 8,000-square-foot Big Grove Brewery location and two four-story mixed-use buildings.

The first phase of the project is scheduled to be completed in 2023.



## Keeping Downtown Beautiful

While new public art, community events, flashy light installations and other ‘wow’ projects can make headlines and drive much of our strategic focus regarding downtown enhancement, it is the day-to-day work of our operations and maintenance team that remain the most essential of our core functions. With part time help via our partnership with Willis Dady, our two-man team accomplished the following in 2022:

- **4,100** hours of dedicated cleaning and troubleshooting of the seventy-two-block area that comprises the Downtown SSMID
- **200** hours of snow removal
- **6,000** plants and flowers planted in late spring with continual maintenance throughout the summer and early fall in downtown, NewBo/ Czech, and the MedQuarter
- **350** trees wrapped with holiday lights, partnering with BladeWorks on this annual endeavor
- **20** new Big Bellies installed
- Supported **4** new public art installations



## Creating Downtown Communications Role



While the normal Monday through Friday workforce has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, downtown is bouncing back. Our partners at VenuWorks continue to book world class shows at the Paramount, Powerhouse, and McGrath Amphitheater. Theatre Cedar Rapids returned with a full slate in 2022 and other entities like the Revival Theater Company have drawn scores of people to the urban core. The Downtown SSMID Commission felt it was important to continually capture the action and events taking place downtown along with promoting the districts’ business community in a more effective way. In November, the Economic Alliance hired Adrienne Tingba as the first Communications Specialist for Downtown. Along with the aforementioned duties, Adrienne will also play a key role in event planning and project management for Downtown CR in 2023.