



CEDAR RAPIDS DOWNTOWN

**VISION &
ACTION PLAN**

2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with gratitude that we express thanks to the over 1,600 individuals, groups, institutions, organizations, City staff, and appointed/elected officials who helped inform the development of the Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision and Action Plan. The plan was funded through a partnership between the City of Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID), Linn County, and the 2001 Development Corporation.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i> | <i>P. 4</i> |
| <i>INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND</i> | <i>P. 14</i> |
| <i>COMMUNITY OUTREACH</i> | <i>P. 26</i> |
| <i>MARKET</i> | <i>P. 35</i> |
| <i>KEY TAKEAWAYS</i> | <i>P. 48</i> |
| <i>PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK</i> | <i>P. 52</i> |
| <i>RECOMMENDATIONS</i> | <i>P. 56</i> |
| <i>IMPLEMENTATION</i> | <i>P. 75</i> |



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW & PLAN PURPOSE

In early 2023, the City of Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID), in partnership with Linn County and the 2001 Development Corporation, sponsored the Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision & Action Plan to help guide the growth and development of Downtown over the next five years.

Cedar Rapids has a strong history of creating, implementing, and regularly updating a vision for Downtown. The 2007 Downtown Vision Plan

directly informed planning efforts following the 2008 flood that caused catastrophic damage to Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. The Vision Plan was then updated in 2012 and 2017 to help guide flood recovery projects and public and private investment in Downtown. Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic forced downtowns throughout the country, including Cedar Rapids, to rethink how they function and respond to new ways that visitors, residents, and employees interact with urban cores.

The Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision & Action Plan builds on past planning efforts while providing a new guiding vision for Downtown over the next five years and a tactical roadmap for achieving it. Downtown had momentum prior to the pandemic, and this planning effort occurs at an opportune time to chart a refreshed course for Downtown, carrying forward many of the initiatives that have not yet been realized from previous planning efforts, while offering a more action-oriented implementation framework looking forward.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

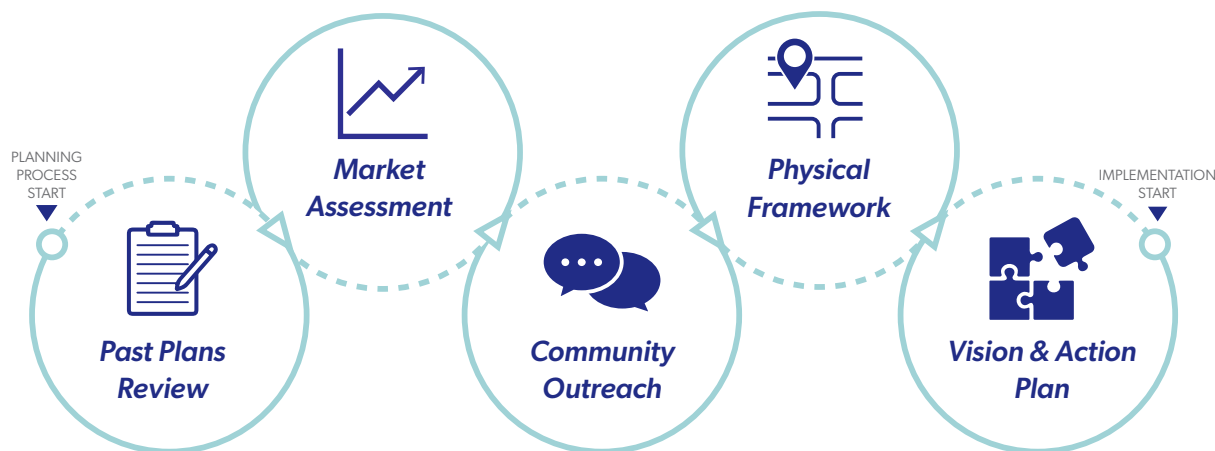
The Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision & Action Plan process included the following components:

- 1. Review and analysis of prior plans:** To understand recent planning efforts that impact Downtown Cedar Rapids and adjacent areas, a thorough review of 15 existing plans was conducted to ensure this process builds upon such efforts.
- 2. Extensive community engagement:** To understand Downtown's strengths and challenges, and to identify community priorities for the next five years, extensive engagement included more than 1,600 inputs from Downtown stakeholders, civic partners, City officials, SSMID board members, and the community-at-large.
- 3. Completion of a market assessment:** To analyze existing conditions, the plan includes a market assessment that identifies strengths,

challenges, and opportunities within four market sectors: Live, Work, Shop & Dine, and Visit & Stay.

- 4. A refreshed vision and roadmap for implementation:** The Vision & Action Plan lays out a vision for Downtown over the next five years that is supported by a physical

framework, goals, strategies, catalytic projects, and tactics to guide Downtown Cedar Rapids' evolution and provide actionable steps to achieve the community's vision.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUMMARY

Stakeholder engagement was key in developing and prioritizing the recommendations laid out in this plan. **More than 1,600 inputs** were gathered throughout the planning process in various formats, including interviews with Downtown stakeholders and influencers, roundtable meetings organized by topic area and geography, a community-wide online survey, a pop-up at Downtown's first Blues Night, and open house meetings where draft recommendations were presented for feedback. The process was guided by regular touchpoints and workshops with a Working Group comprised of representatives from the civic partners that sponsored the plan and Downtown influencers.

During the initial phases of the Vision & Action Plan process, Downtown stakeholders were asked to identify Downtown's strengths and weaknesses, and to brainstorm improvements for Downtown moving forward in roundtable meetings and during individual interviews.

Strengths

- Compact and walkable
- Ample parking
- Growing residential population
- Restaurants, bars, and expanding variety of entertainment venues
- Pro-growth environment with significant new development and redevelopment in Downtown and adjacent districts
- Extensive trail system, parks, and civic and cultural amenities

Challenges

- Gaps in retail, services (grocery, pharmacy)
- Lack of diverse event programming and kid-friendly destinations
- Limited mobility options
- Disruptions caused by the Union Pacific Railroad
- Too few hotel options
- Slow return of employees to offices following the pandemic
- Concerns with public safety

Improvement Priorities

- Bolster the storefront economy
- Enhance the physical environment
- Program and activate Downtown public spaces
- Improve mobility and connectivity
- Ensure Downtown is clean, safe, and welcoming

ONLINE SURVEY

The community-wide **online survey collected 1,414 responses**, a majority representing Cedar Rapids residents and Downtown employees. Respondents' top physical improvement priorities for Downtown Cedar Rapids are:

- **Embrace the Cedar River in the physical environment (25%)**
- **Redevelop/repurpose vacant buildings and lots (19%)**
- **Improve the parking experience (14%)**

Respondents' top service or program priorities for Downtown Cedar Rapids are:

- **Continue diversifying restaurant and bar offerings (19%)**
- **Provide more services to the unhoused population (19%)**
- **Create more family and kid-friendly features and places (11%)**



Respondents were asked for three words that best describe their long-term vision for Downtown Cedar Rapids. This word cloud shows words that were most frequently used – the larger the word, the more times it was listed.

MARKET ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

To understand existing conditions in Downtown, a market assessment was conducted to examine Downtown through the lens of four main topic areas: Live, Work, Shop & Dine, and Visit & Stay was conducted. Identifying Downtown's market opportunities and challenges then informed development of the plan's vision, physical framework, and recommendations.

LIVE

- New multi-family residential construction could nearly double the population of Downtown and the Primary Market Area over the next several years, as residential development projects under construction or planned could yield over 800 new residential units within the next several years.
- Housing will continue to be a strong market for Downtown moving forward. In line with national trends, there will likely be additional demand for more downtown housing options at all price points.
- Compared to peer markets, Cedar Rapids offers more attainable housing for first-time homebuyers. This may help with attracting a talented workforce, particularly as younger, educated households are being priced out of larger cities and peer markets.

60%

of survey participants indicated they would consider living Downtown, and a majority prefer ownership options (condominiums or townhouses)

WORK

- While Downtown's employment density is on par with peer cities, there are opportunities to increase employment density moving forward.
- There are opportunities to convert excess conventional office space to other uses, such as coworking and flex office space and housing.
- There could be potential to expand on Downtown's niche, small-scale manufacturing cluster by attracting additional manufacturing uses.
- There is an opportunity to preserve and celebrate Downtown Cedar Rapids' agricultural and manufacturing heritage through branding and place enhancements.

SHOP & DINE

- Many of the newer, successful street-level businesses that have emerged Downtown are restaurants and bars, particularly innovative concepts led by local entrepreneurs.
- Broadening the variety of restaurant and dining experiences is a key market opportunity.
- Downtown's business composition could better serve and reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the city and region. Supporting new business opportunities for underrepresented groups could help meet market demand while increasing cultural belonging, economic prosperity, and storefront activation.
- As Downtown's residential population base grows over the next decade, there will be market opportunities for more neighborhood-serving retail and service-based businesses.

70%

of survey participants stated the top reason they come Downtown is for restaurants, bars, food trucks, and coffee shops.

VISIT & STAY

- Visitation to Cedar Rapids declined sharply during the onset of the pandemic in 2020 but has since made a full recovery. Hotel-motel tax revenues in 2022 were at a 9-year high.
- There are near-term opportunities for additional hotel and lodging options in Downtown.
- According to community feedback, there may be an opportunity for a mid-sized venue to help expand Downtown's live music niche.
- Downtown and city partners should continue exploring ways to build on the outdoor recreation niche.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following extensive community engagement and analysis of market conditions, several key takeaways were identified. The following key takeaways served as a pivot point from existing conditions to recommendations for Downtown looking forward:



Downtown Cedar Rapids has proven to be resilient – rising from the flood and other challenges with an influx of private and public investment.



Embracing the Cedar River remains a clear community priority.



Key catalytic initiatives focused on the public realm are recommended to attract additional private investment, connect key activity areas, and help make Downtown a stronger regional destination.



Downtown has many assets, but needs more consistent activation and reasons to come Downtown for people of all ages.



Moving forward, Downtown should continue to evolve into a mixed-use neighborhood.



To optimize services and support plan implementation, and to align with national best practices, a strengthened public/private downtown management approach is needed.

PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

An overarching physical framework for Downtown was informed by community outreach and guided by findings from the market assessment, and is intended to guide future development and physical improvements in Downtown over the next five years. The physical framework is comprised of several key elements that serve as the building blocks for the recommendations and actions found in subsequent sections of the Vision & Action Plan:

1. Public / Entertainment Destinations

Existing civic and entertainment destinations, such as the Cedar Rapids Public Library, museums, the Convention Complex, the City and Federal government buildings, the Paramount Theater, and Alliant Energy Power House are cultural anchors that currently draw people Downtown, and could be better connected moving forward.

2. Public Parking Ramps

Downtown Cedar Rapids is fortunate to have an abundant parking supply. The amount of structured parking in Downtown is a strength,

as it provides a more efficient use of space than surface parking and creates an opportunity for infill development.

3. Opportunity Sites

Opportunity sites are areas where redevelopment or new development may occur during the 5-year life cycle of this plan and beyond, as these sites are either currently underutilized, were identified for redevelopment in the previous downtown planning effort, or were identified through outreach with Downtown stakeholders.

4. Manufacturing / Maker Hub

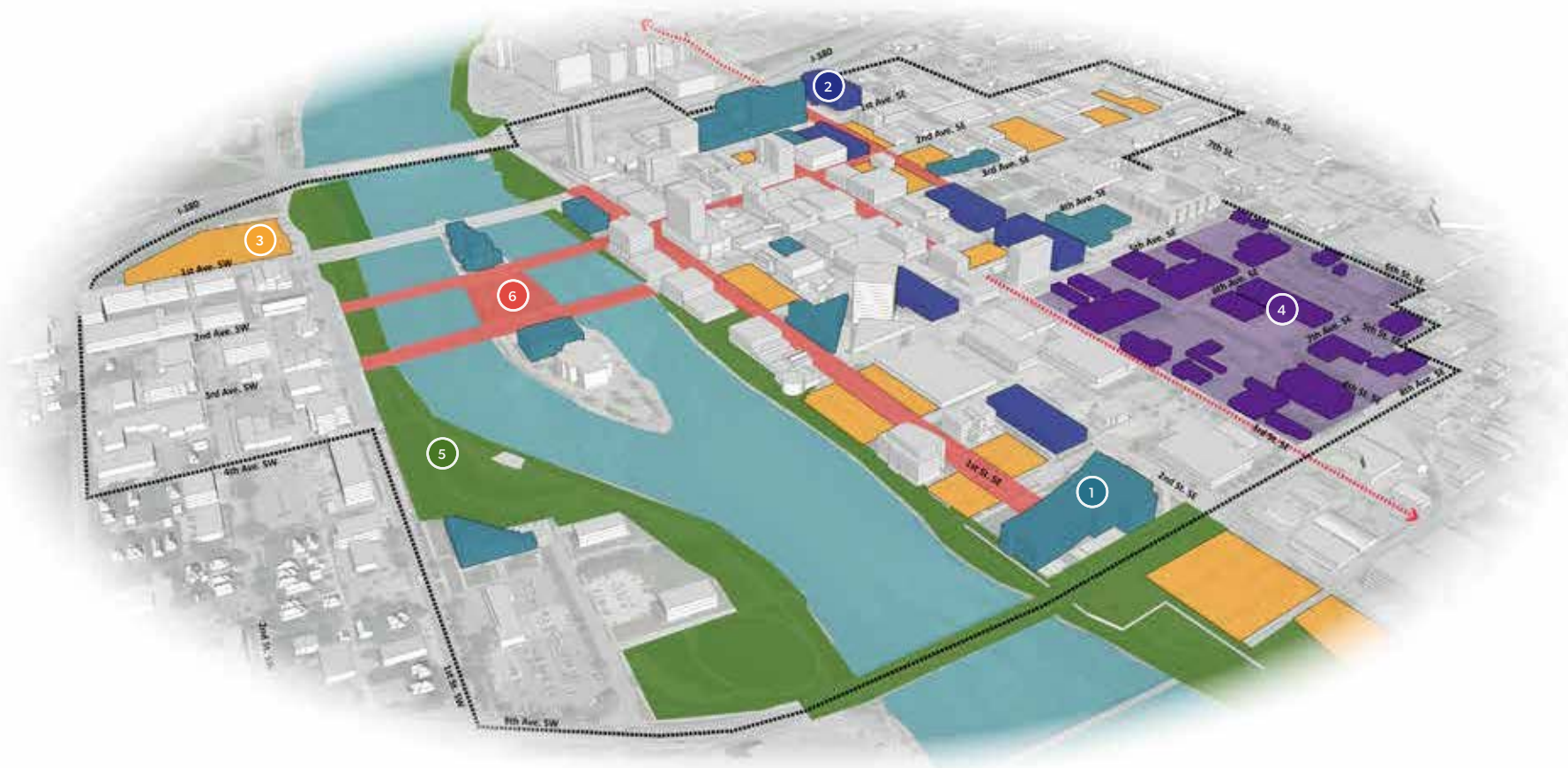
Cedar Rapids' primary industries have long been closely tied to agriculture and manufacturing, with notable large-scale agriculture-based manufacturers adjacent to Downtown and a smaller cluster of niche manufacturing in the area between 8th and 5th Avenues, from 2nd Street to 7th Street. There is an opportunity to build on the community's agriculture and manufacturing heritage moving forward.

5. Flood Recovery Projects

The Cedar River Flood Control System (FCS) Master Plan, created following the 2008 flood, identifies four areas in Downtown where extensive flood control improvements have been implemented, are in the process of being implemented, or are in the planning and design phase. This plan supports continuing the implementation of these efforts.

6. Catalytic Projects

Three catalytic public realm projects are recommended for Downtown over the next five years. These projects build on the elements of the overall physical framework outlined above, and align with the three goals laid out in the next chapter of this plan. If implemented, these projects can have a transformative impact on Downtown by not only creating new amenities and gathering spaces for the Cedar Rapids community and connecting existing amenities.



SSMID Boundary

3 Opportunity Sites

5 Flood Recovery Projects

1 Public / Entertainment Destinations

4 Manufacturing / Maker Hub

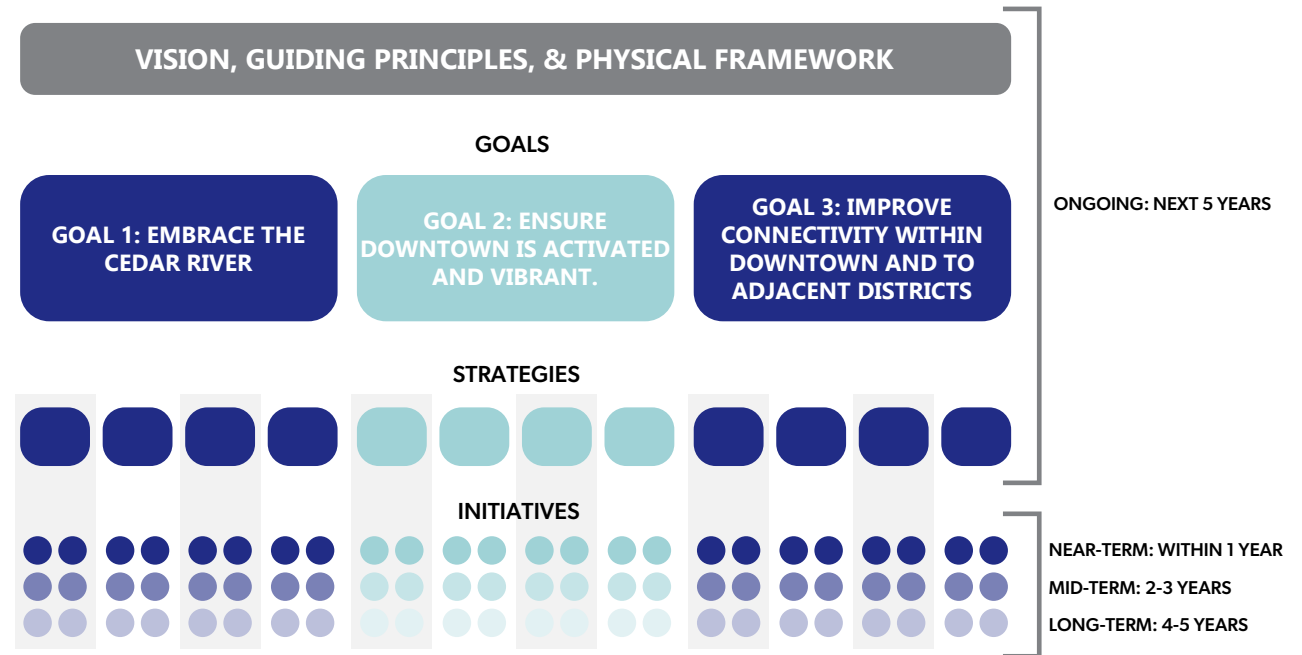
6 Catalytic Projects

2 Public Parking Ramps

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS STRUCTURE

The Vision & Action Plan recommendations are organized as illustrated by the following diagram. All plan recommendations are guided by a vision, guiding principles, and the physical framework. The plan then lays out three goals that each have corresponding strategies, catalytic projects, and short-, mid-, and long-term initiatives for physical improvements and policies.



VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Drawing on the input from the community outreach, market assessment and review of prior plans, a vision for Downtown Cedar Rapids was synthesized that forms the basis for subsequent plan recommendations:

Downtown Cedar Rapids is the vibrant hub of the Eastern Iowa region where the past meets the future, entrepreneurship flourishes, diversity is celebrated, and innovation is embraced.

In order to align with the City of Cedar Rapids' Comprehensive Plan, EnvisionCR, the Vision & Action Plan carries forward the guiding principles laid out in EnvisionCR. Recommendations found in the plan are supported by one or more of these guiding principles:

- Achieve a unified vision
- Live healthy
- Strengthen neighborhoods
- Keep business vibrant
- Connect the City
- Embrace the outdoors
- Streamline services

GOALS, STRATEGIES, & CATALYTIC PROJECTS

GOAL 1: EMBRACE THE CEDAR RIVER

Fulfill a top community priority by creating an activated Downtown waterfront and a reimagined Mays Island. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

1. Incorporate the Cedar River in the built environment.
2. Convert the 2nd Avenue Bridge to a flexible festival street in the short-term and a linear park in the long-term.
3. Activate Mays Island.
4. Continue to enhance public spaces adjacent to the Cedar River and support implementation of the Cedar River Flood Control System (FCS).

Catalytic Projects – River Activation Opportunity Sites and Mays Island Activation

River Activation Opportunity Sites: recommendations include encouraging infill development along the Cedar River and ensuring 1st Street East is pedestrian-friendly.

Mays Island Activation: recommendations include converting the 2nd Avenue Bridge into a flexible street, turning Plaza Park into a local and regional destination, and making 3rd Avenue more comfortable for bicyclists and pedestrians, illustrated by the visualization to the right.

Mays Island Activation Opportunities



EXISTING/PLANNED PROJECTS

- ❶ Whitewater Course
- ❷ Tree of Five Seasons Park
- ❸ Kingston Village Redevelopment
- ❹ Flood Recovery Riverfront Trails

2023 PLAN: PROPOSED PROJECTS

- ❶ Veteran's Memorial Building Reuse/Activation
- ❷ Plaza/Gateway to Plaza Park
- ❸ 2nd Avenue Festival Bridge and Linear Park
- ❹ Flower/Pollinator Garden
- ❺ Flexible Lawn Area
- ❻ Picnic/"Beach" Area
- ❼ Boardwalk/Fishing Area
- ❽ Iconic Public Art/Gateway
- ❾ 3rd Avenue Bridge Upgrade

GOAL 2: ENSURE DOWNTOWN IS ACTIVATED AND VIBRANT.

Create a lively and vibrant Downtown that draws people in from across the city on a regular basis. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

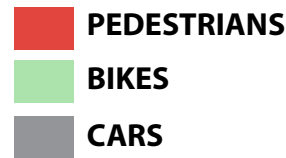
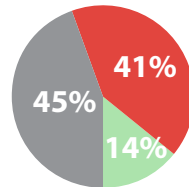
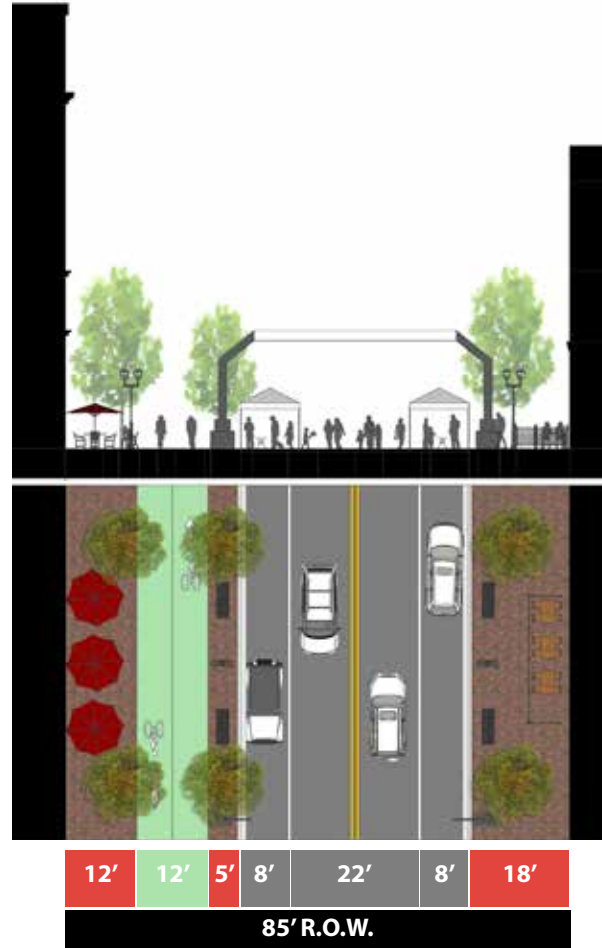
1. Enliven the storefront economy and diversify ground floor offerings.
2. Ensure Downtown is clean, safe, and welcoming.
3. Attract and retain primary jobs in Downtown.
4. Add public art and other physical place enhancements.
5. Provide regular programming in Downtown public spaces.
6. Explore opportunities for infill development, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of existing spaces.

Catalytic Project – 3rd Street Festival Street

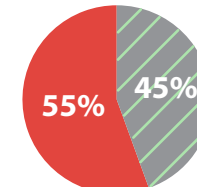
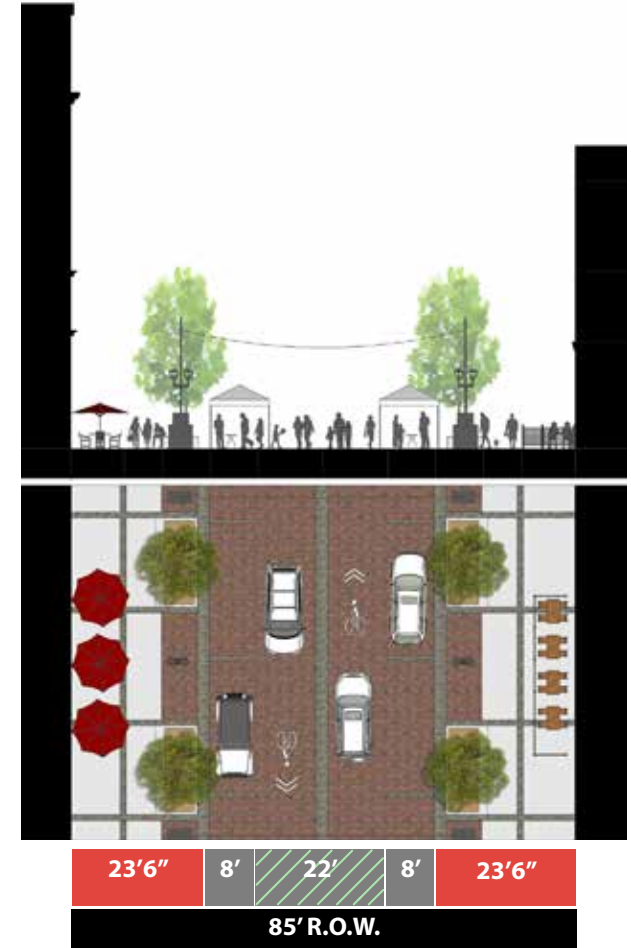
Recommendations include redesigning 3rd Street from 2nd to 4th Avenues as a festival street either by creating a curbless shared street or introducing a cycle track along the north side of the street and moving the primary Cedar Valley Nature Trail connection from the railroad tracks to 3rd Street (from 2nd to 7th Avenues), as illustrated by the diagrams to the right.

3rd Street Festival Street Options

Option 1: Cycle Track



Option 2: Curbless Shared Street



GOAL 3: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN DOWNTOWN AND TO ADJACENT DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.

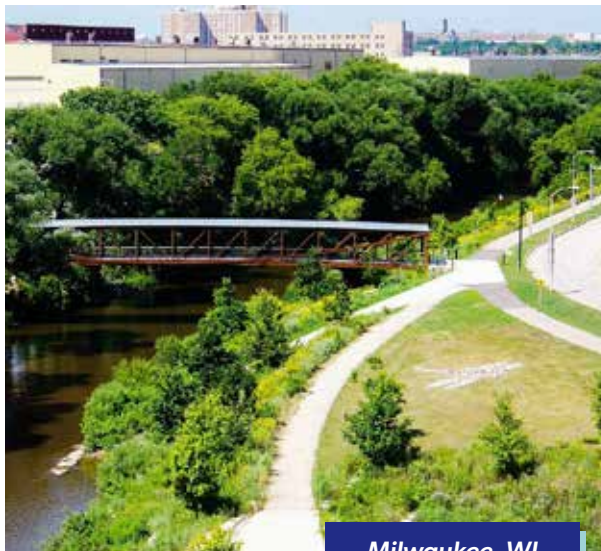
Encourage greater synergy between Downtown and surrounding districts to create a more consistent and cohesive urban experience. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

1. Ensure Downtown is accessible and easy to navigate by multiple modes of transportation including transit and/or a trolley or circulator, walking/rolling, biking, and driving.
2. Improve physical and economic connections to and synergy with adjacent districts.
3. Enhance the parking experience in Downtown.
4. Build on regional trail network and outdoor recreation scene.
5. Improve wayfinding signage and gateways leading into and out of Downtown.

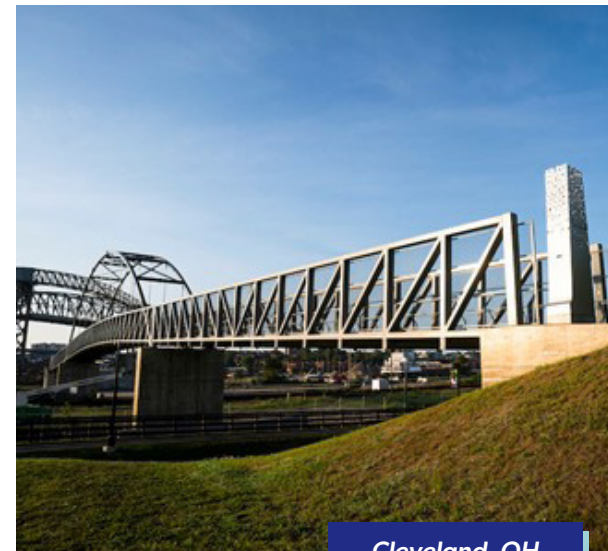
Catalytic Project – Rail to River Connection

Recommendations include building on ConnectCR, creating a safer Cedar Valley Nature Trail connection across the railroad tracks between the Quaker Oats and Cargill facilities, exploring both short-term, tactical solutions and longer-term, larger-scale investments.

Examples of Multi-Use Trail Connections



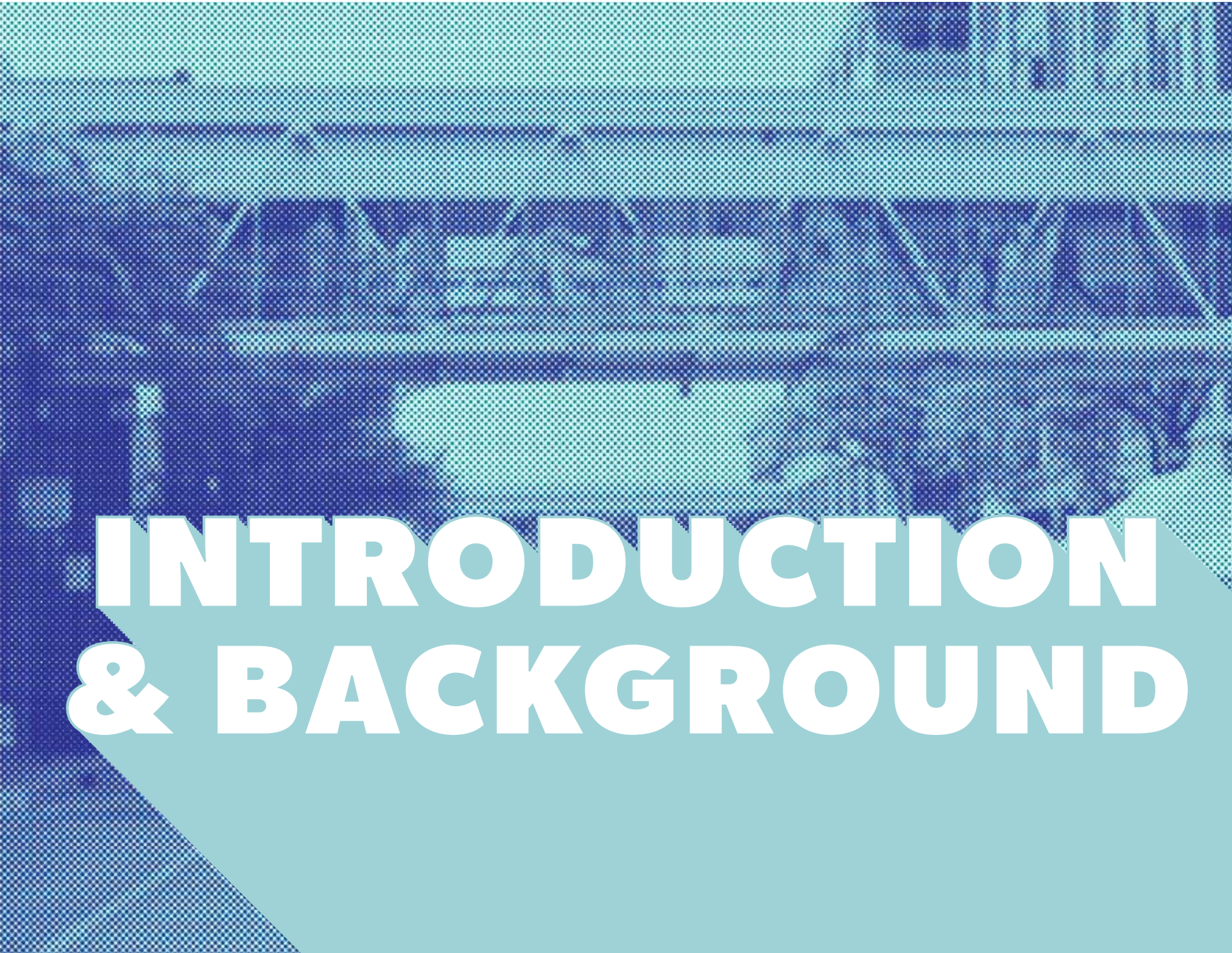
Milwaukee, WI



Cleveland, OH

IMPLEMENTATION

The final section of the plan provides a roadmap to guide investment and decision-making in Downtown Cedar Rapids over the next five years. This section of the plan is comprised of initiatives that are organized by the three plan goals and subsequent strategies. An advisory timeline lays out whether an initiative should begin within one year, in the next two to three years, or in the next four to five years. A lead organization or entity is also identified for each initiative, most of which will be piloted by the City of Cedar Rapids, the SSMID, and/or the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance. Many initiatives also require support from other civic partners that include public, private, and non-profit organizations in the Cedar Rapids region.



INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

PLAN PURPOSE

In early 2023, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance (Economic Alliance), the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID), and the City of Cedar Rapids, in partnership with Linn County and the 2001 Development Corporation, initiated the Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision & Action Plan Update to help guide the growth and development of Downtown for the next five years. This plan is intended to build upon past Downtown planning efforts while providing a refreshed, tactical roadmap for Downtown Cedar Rapids moving forward.

The Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance initiated the first “Vision Cedar Rapids” in 2007 to consolidate priorities from numerous independent studies and create a clear, unified vision for Downtown. The resulting 2007 Vision Plan directly informed the planning efforts in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 flood that caused catastrophic damage to Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. With the framework

for flood recovery in place, the Vision Plan was updated in 2012 to serve as a guide for project implementation and ongoing flood recovery and mitigation efforts. The Vision Plan was most recently updated in 2017 after many of the 2008 and 2012 recommendations had been implemented. The 2017 version was intended to capitalize on undeveloped impact sites in Downtown, to align efforts and partner institutions working in and around Downtown around a shared vision, and to build on the momentum created by through implementation of prior Downtown Vision Plan recommendations.

The world has changed in the three years since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Downtowns have been forced to rethink how they function and respond to the new way that visitors, residents, and employees interact with urban districts in a post-Covid era. While Downtown Cedar Rapids had momentum prior to the pandemic, and momentum in some market sectors such as housing has continued, now is an opportune

time to chart a refreshed course, carrying forward many of the larger-scale, visionary projects and initiatives that have not yet been realized from previous planning efforts, while offering a more action-oriented implementation framework for Downtown over the next five years. This plan is named the Downtown Cedar Rapids Vision & Action Plan to reflect the tactical nature of many plan recommendations.

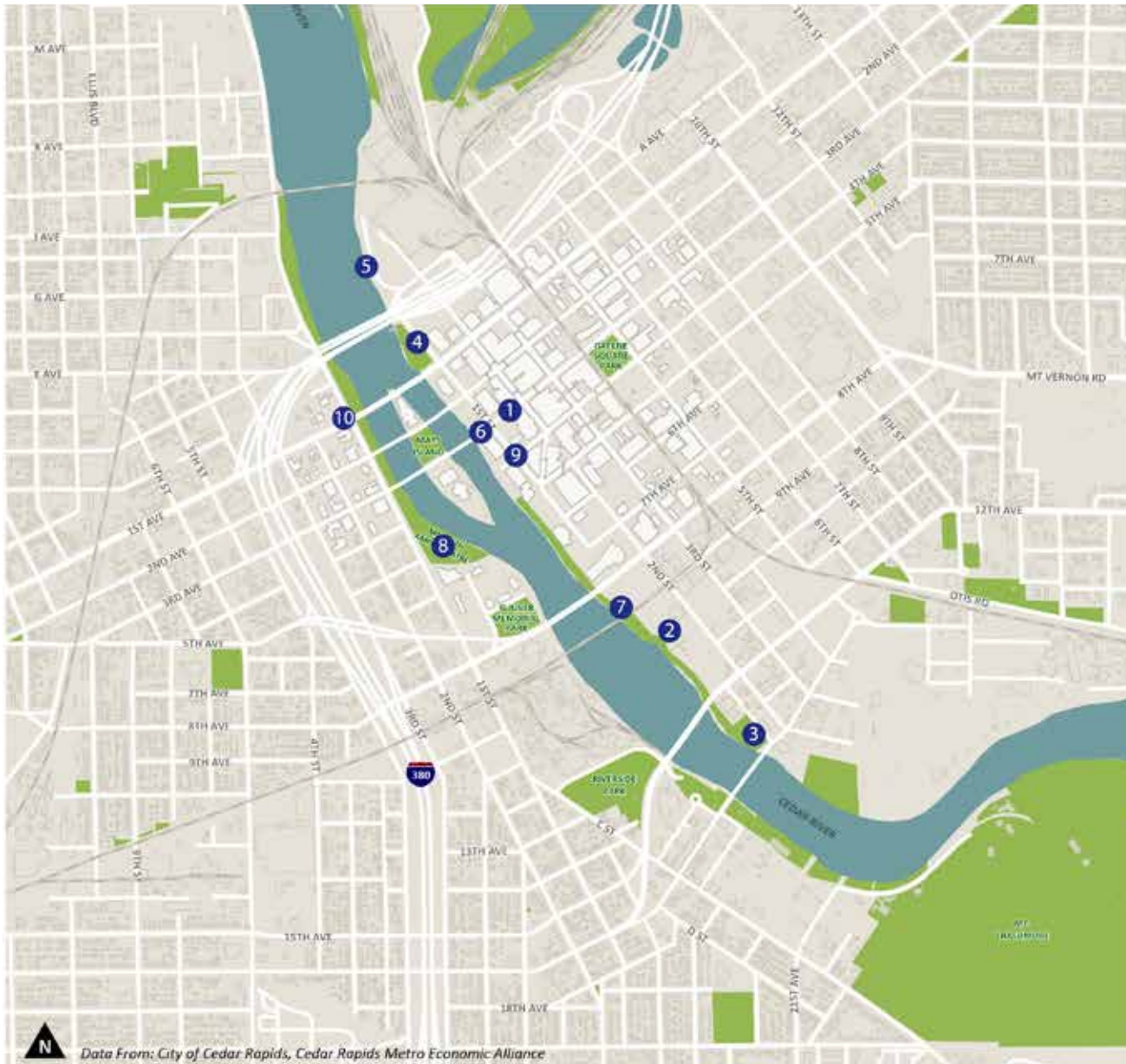
To assist in the Downtown planning process, the Economic Alliance, City, and 2001 Development Corporation conducted a competitive nationwide process to select a consultant and contracted with Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.), a Denver-based real estate economics and planning firm specializing in downtown planning, and StudioSeed, a Denver-based urban design firm with extensive expertise in downtown planning, public space design and activation, land use strategy, and visualization. P.U.M.A. also brought familiarity with Cedar Rapids, having guided strategic planning for the SSMID in 2007.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE THE 2017 VISION PLAN

Since 2017, Cedar Rapids and the Eastern Iowa region have experienced steady growth and new development and investment. The Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and the City of Cedar Rapids have been key partners in implementing many of the actions recommended in the 2017 Vision Plan. Both organizations’ role in implementing the Vision Plan has continued to strengthen Downtown Cedar Rapids’ status as a regional economic and civic anchor.

Public investment and private development that has occurred in Downtown is highlighted in the maps on the following pages.

PUBLIC INVESTMENTS SINCE THE 2017 VISION PLAN



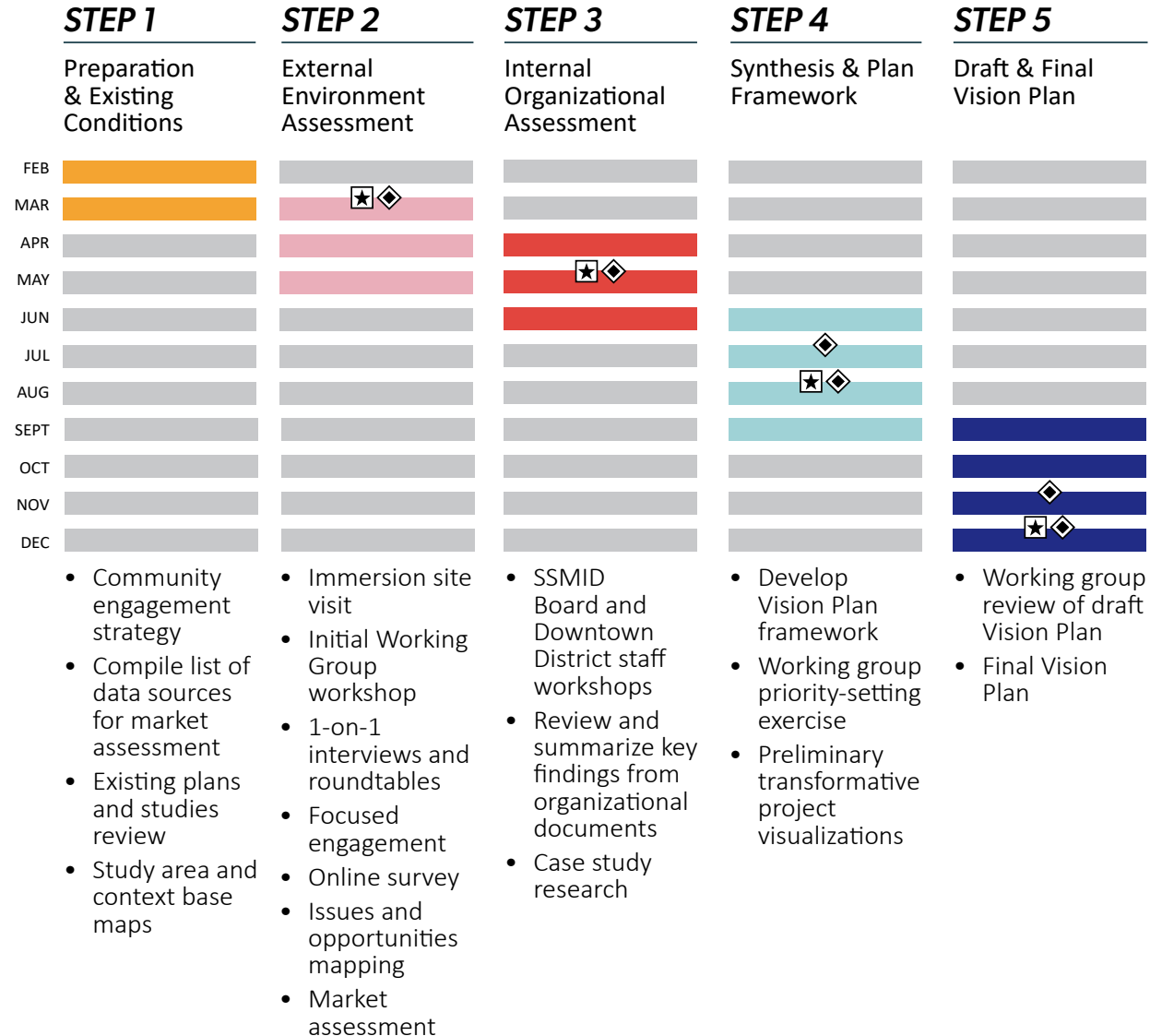
DOWNTOWN VISION & ACTION PLAN | INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND



VISION & ACTION PLAN PROCESS

The P.U.M.A. Team, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, SSMID board, City of Cedar Rapids, and 2001 Development Corporation worked collaboratively to complete a Downtown planning process with the following major components:

- Review and analysis of prior plans and studies conducted in Downtown Cedar Rapids over the past 10 years, including an in-depth review of accomplishments since the 2017 Vision Plan and identification of initiatives to carry forward in the 2023 plan;
- Completion of a foundational market assessment including identifying key opportunity areas in Downtown by market sector;
- Extensive community engagement with Downtown stakeholders, civic partners such as the City, SSMID board members, and the community-at-large that included over 1,600 inputs;
- Based upon the preceding analysis and inputs, the plan includes a physical framework, goals, strategies, and catalytic projects, and a detailed implementation plan to guide Downtown Cedar Rapids' evolution the next five years.



★ P.U.M.A. site visit ◆ Working Group meeting

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Both public agencies and private sector stakeholders will use this Downtown Vision & Action Plan to guide decisions and actions that affect the form and function of Downtown. The plan provides a basis for citywide decision-making and strengthening Downtown's role as the economic and cultural heart of the region. It educates the general public about Downtown's importance to the larger community and the region. This plan is also intended to become part of EnvisionCR, the City of Cedar Rapids' comprehensive plan, incorporating citywide policy while providing specific guidance around Downtown initiatives.

Chapter 2: Community Engagement summarizes findings from a wide array of community outreach efforts. **More than 1,600 Downtown and Cedar Rapids community members** provided feedback to help identify strengths and challenges in Downtown Cedar Rapids today and priorities moving forward. Additional detail on the methods used to engage the community, key themes from stakeholder engagement, and findings from the online survey can be found in this chapter. A full analysis of online survey results, including cross-tabulations by various demographics, can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 3: Market includes key findings from an extensive analysis of market conditions, while the full market assessment document can be found in Appendix C. This assessment has a wide range of data inputs, including primary and secondary sources, that offer a snapshot of existing market conditions in Cedar Rapids, a Primary Market Area, and Downtown, as well as comparisons with downtowns in peer cities. The market assessment provides an overview of four market segments, including Live (residential), Work (office,

manufacturing, and other primary employment), Shop & Dine (retail and restaurants) and Visit & Stay (hospitality, tourism, and recreation). This market assessment is intended to provide baseline data, before and after the beginning of the Covid disruption when possible, which will inform the community as the transition past the pandemic continues.

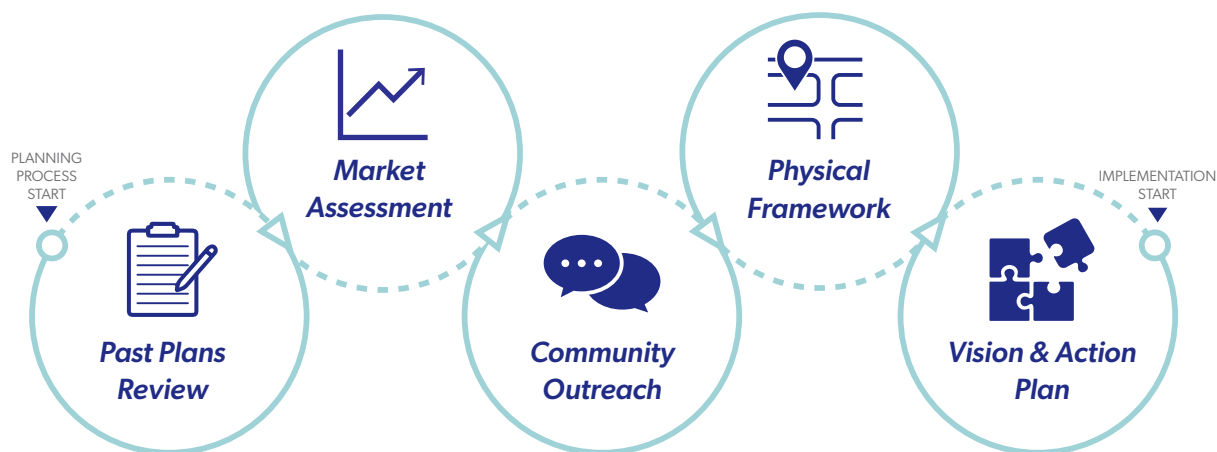
The findings from the market assessment and community engagement process were synthesized into **Chapter 4: Key Takeaways**, which serves as a pivot point into Vision & Action Plan recommendations.

Informed by community outreach and an in-depth analysis of market conditions, **Chapter 5: Physical Framework** provides an overarching guide for future development, investment, and public realm improvements for Downtown. This section explores opportunities to improve connectivity

within Downtown and to adjacent districts, identifies opportunity sites for potential infill development and new public realm amenities, and provides an overview of catalytic projects that can have transformative impacts on Downtown.

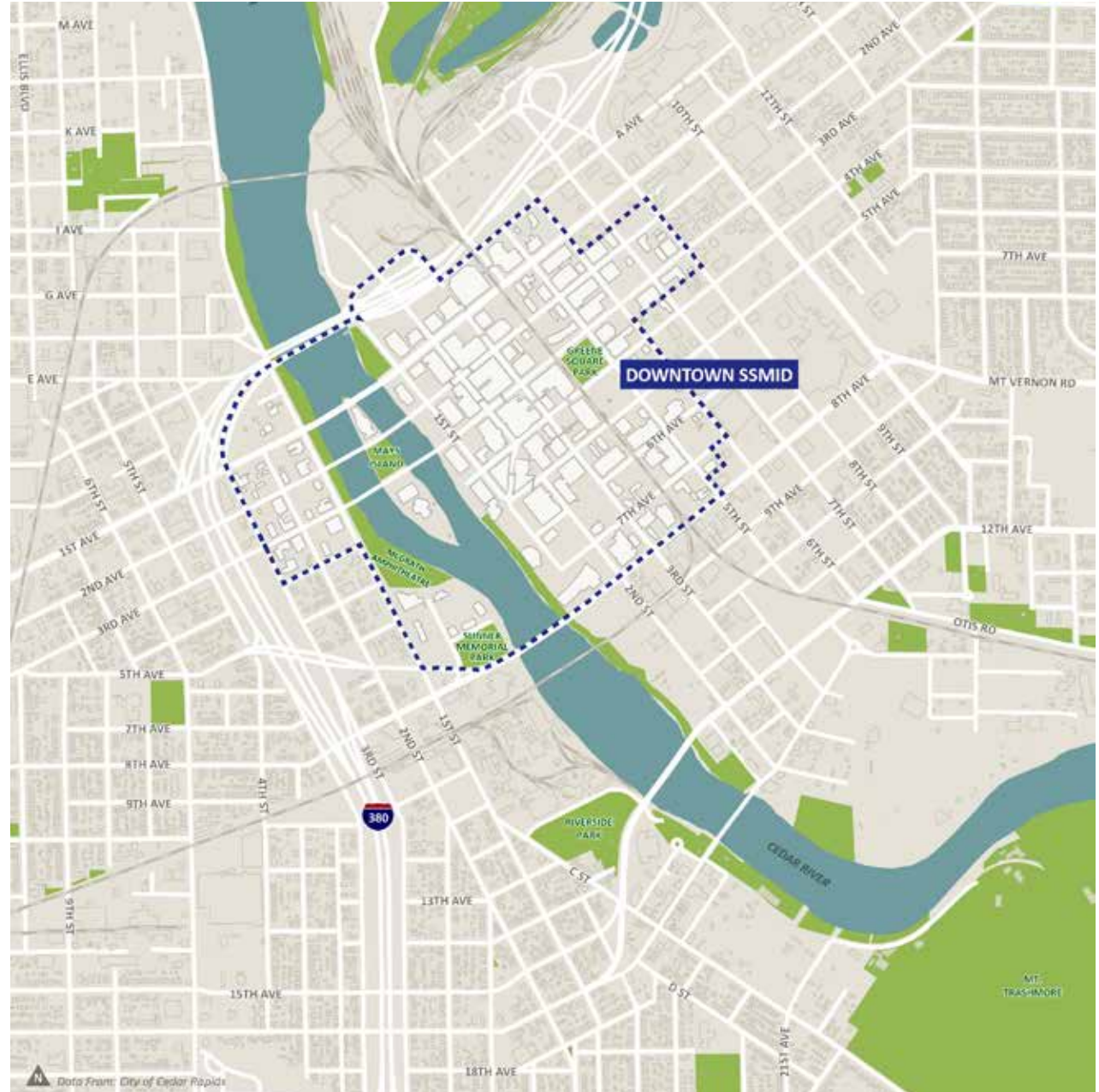
Chapter 6: Recommendations lays out the three primary goals of this Downtown Vision & Action Plan, identifies strategies for each goal, and provides detail about each of the catalytic projects previewed in Chapter 5.

The final chapter of the plan, **Chapter 7: Implementation**, provides detailed policy and physical improvement recommendations organized by the three plan goals. To align with EnvisionCR, this plan follows the same implementation framework, identifying a recommended schedule and lead and support roles for each action.



DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

The study area for the Vision & Action Plan is defined as the Downtown SSMID boundary, depicted in the map to the right. This area is the historic central business district of Cedar Rapids, and is characterized by office buildings, entertainment venues, the Cedar Rapids Convention Complex, storefront retail, restaurants, services, and, increasingly over the last several years, multi-family housing. The Downtown area is roughly bounded by Interstate 380 to the north and northwest, 6th Street to the northeast, 8th Avenue to the southeast, and 1st Street to the west.



ADJACENT DISTRICTS

While the primary focus of this Vision & Action Plan is the Downtown SSMID area, a key component of this plan is how the Downtown relates physically and economically to the adjacent districts that comprise the urban core of Cedar Rapids: Kingston Village, MedQ, New Bohemia, and Czech Village. Kingston Village partially overlaps with the Downtown SSMID area, but is considered a separate neighborhood. The MedQ District is a separate SSMID and abuts the Downtown SSMID to the northeast. New Bohemia and Czech Village are separate neighborhoods, but together form the Czech Village-New Bohemia SSMID and bound the Downtown SSMID to the northwest. Each of these areas has its own unique character, and their adjacency to and synergy with the Downtown core warrant exploration in this plan. Notable characteristics in each district include:

- **Kingston Village** – new multi-family housing (apartments and condos), restaurants, some retail east of I-380, new development that will include a brewery, hotel, multi-housing, and a pickleball facility at 1st and 1st, single-family housing with some retail and services west of I-380
- **MedQ District** – primarily medical uses, including hospitals, clinics, and related services
- **New Bohemia** – new and adaptively reused multi-family housing, boutique retail and services, restaurants, NewBo City Market
- **Czech Village** – eclectic mix of restaurants, bars, boutique retail, adjacent to Mount Trashmore recreation area



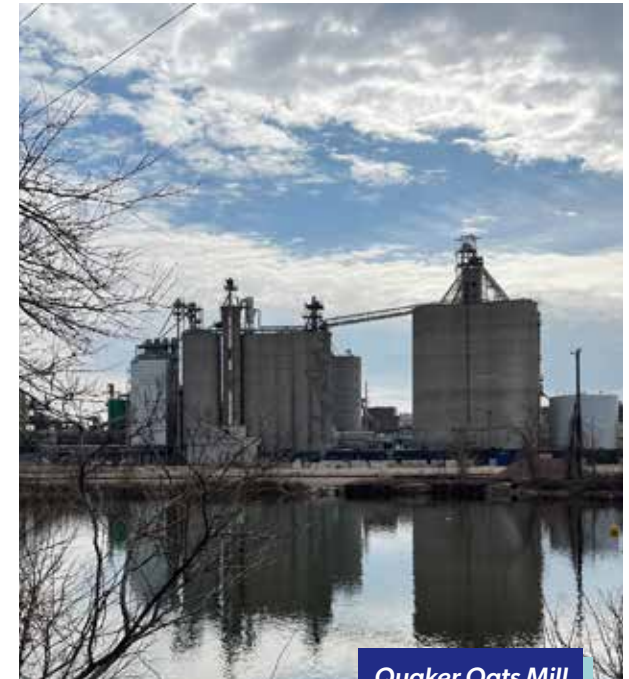
DOWNTOWN HISTORY & CONTEXT

HISTORY OF CEDAR RAPIDS

Beginning more than 11,000 years ago,¹ many of the original inhabitants of the area now called Iowa began developing into an agricultural society known as the Oneota, who the modern-day loway tribe likely descended from. The state of Iowa was named for this tribe of hunters and farmers.² As the colonial United States spread west and the 1803 Louisiana Purchase occurred, many native populations were pushed into Iowa territory, including the Sauk and Fox, resulting in intertribal conflict over scarce hunting resources. Starting in 1836, a series of treaties forced these tribes out of Iowa and onto a reservation in Kansas.³ The Sauk and Fox were the people settled in present day Cedar Rapids when the first settlers arrived in 1838.⁴

Cedar Rapids was first surveyed in 1841 as Rapids City before it was incorporated in 1849 as a settlement of around 300 people. In 1870, after consolidating with the town of Kingston on the west bank of the Cedar River, Rapid City was renamed Cedar Rapids.⁵ During this same period, city leaders incorporated Mays Island into Cedar Rapids as the civic heart of the community to unify Kingston with the rest of the city. The island eventually hosted City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Guard Armory, the Linn County Courthouse, the U.S. Post Office, and the county jail.⁵

Cedar Rapids' growth over time was largely shaped by industry and agriculture. The modern-day city may not exist without George Greene, one of its founders, constructing the first mill race on the Cedar River that powered several mills. The City of Cedar Rapids subsequently became a major railroad hub for the Midwest which helped to establish an agricultural industry that used the rail to connect to distant markets.⁵ In 1871, Sinclair established a meatpacking house between 4th and 5th Avenues in Downtown, which attracted a large Czech immigrant population. Czech immigration increased when Sinclair opened a new plant that spurred the development of housing in what would eventually become the New Bohemia neighborhood.⁶ The new plant remained in operation until 1990. Additionally, Quaker Oats operates the world's largest cereal plant, built in 1873, that currently employs around 1,000 people.⁷ To expand agriculture and industry over time, several dams have been created on the Cedar River, including the construction of a concrete dam in 1918 for the Quaker Oats Mill that would later become the existing 5-1 Dam.⁵



Quaker Oats Mill

HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN CEDAR RAPIDS

The growth of regional railroad lines and industrial development led to the first commercial buildings in what is now Downtown Cedar Rapids. The construction of a streetcar system and utilities after the Civil War and into the early 20th Century improved connections from elsewhere in the City of Cedar Rapids to Downtown, and spurred Downtown's evolution into a commercial and shopping district where people could travel by train from all over the region to purchase clothing, machinery, hardware, books, and other goods, or enjoy one of the many restaurants and cafes operating out of the large, plate-glass storefronts that lined downtown streets. The New Bohemia neighborhood also developed into a thriving business community that bled into the Downtown area during that time period.⁸

Beginning in the early 20th Century, banks and other companies began building eight story office buildings Downtown, as well as department stores and theatres.⁸ During WWII, Downtown benefited from two war time industries: the Collins Radio Company produced radio communication equipment and the Iowa Manufacturing Company produced road building machinery and tank parts.⁵

The end of WWII gave rise to the automobile, and buses replaced the streetcar system in Downtown. Following the war, Downtown continued to grow and the 1960s saw the building of the first parking garages. In 1978, construction of Interstate 380 through the northern part of Downtown created a barrier between the industrial and commercial core. Throughout the latter half of the 20th Century, Downtown office buildings that had previously been department stores or light industrial uses converted to offices. The skywalk system was constructed starting in the 1980s to connect many Downtown office buildings on their second floors.⁸ In 1986, Downtown property

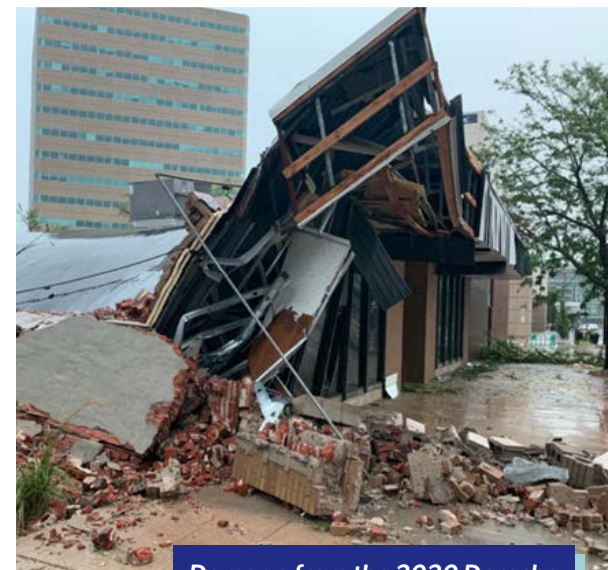
owners voted to create a Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District to encourage additional Downtown development and beautify the streetscape.⁹

On June 13th, 2008, the Cedar River reached a height of 31 feet, almost 12 feet higher than the previous record. 14%, or 10 square miles, of the city was impacted by flood waters, and 10,000 residents had to evacuate their homes. The 2008 floods and tornadoes in Iowa received the sixth largest Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declaration at \$848 million.¹⁰ The flood also destroyed many cultural assets, including the old Sinclair plant, which had been purchased by the city for redevelopment before the flood. Since the flood, the city has built out many parts of a Cedar River Flood Control System, including the McGrath Amphitheatre in 2014 that acts as a cultural asset and a flood wall for the Kingston neighborhood. Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods of New Bohemia, Czech Village, and Kingston Neighborhoods, have been revitalized with new development and infrastructure.¹¹

In addition to weathering the Covid-19 pandemic and all its impacts, on August 10th, 2020, a derecho hit the city with winds up to 140 miles per hour lasting for 45 minutes. The storm wiped out 65 percent of Cedar Rapids' tree canopy and damaged homes and properties in what would become the costliest thunderstorm in US history.¹²



2008 Flooding



Damage from the 2020 Derecho

PAST PLANS AND STUDIES

To understand recent planning efforts that impact Downtown Cedar Rapids and adjacent areas, and to ensure this process builds upon such efforts, a thorough review of 15 existing plans was conducted. Four plans are especially relevant to this planning effort: the 2017 Downtown Vision Plan, the EnvisionCR Comprehensive Plan for the City of Cedar Rapids, the City of Cedar Rapids' Flood Protection System Plan, and the East Central Iowa Regional Economic Development Plan. These four plans contain policy guidance and/or specific recommendations for Downtown, as highlighted in the section below. In-depth summaries of all 15 past plans are included in Appendix D.

Downtown Vision Plan (2007-2017)

In 2007, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance commissioned the first “Vision Cedar Rapids” study to review, coordinate, merge, and prioritize over a dozen independent studies that had been completed in order to help mold a clear, unified vision for Downtown, which directly informed the planning efforts in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 flood event. With the framework for flood recovery in place, the study was updated in 2012 and served as a guide for project implementation. Most recently, in 2017, with many of the recommendations realized and much of the Downtown and surrounding districts transformed, the 2017 Downtown Cedar Rapids Vision Plan identified over-arching opportunities for Downtown including impact sites, improved collaboration among the districts that comprise Cedar Rapids’ urban core, and momentum around investment and big ideas. The Plan was focused on creating a vibrant Downtown experience by looking at opportunities through the lenses of

ease, energy, and emotion by realizing eight priorities for Downtown: invest in impact opportunities, energize the connectors, activate Mays Island, embrace the River, champion urban living, create a cultural quad, distinguish the Downtown, and establish district coordination. The 2017 Vision Plan identified a number of projects and initiatives to improve Downtown. Many of these improvements have been made since 2017, while several are carried forward in this Downtown Vision & Action Plan.

EnvisionCR Comprehensive Plan

EnvisionCR provides a set of initiatives intended to guide Cedar Rapids’ evolution into a sustainable, healthy city that centers placemaking and efficiency. Under these four themes the plan sets out the more detailed guiding principles to achieve a unified vision, live healthy, strengthen neighborhoods, keep business vibrant, connect the city, embrace outdoors, and streamline services. These guiding principles are carried forward in the Downtown Vision & Action Plan. Initiatives are grouped within the six elements of StrengthenCR, GrowCR, ConnectCR, GreenCR, InvestCR, and ProtectCR. Many of the plan’s initiatives overlap with Downtown’s goals and borders. These include future area plans, expanding infill development, making streets safer for all users, improving Cedar Lake, helping small businesses, promoting workforce, developing cultural resources, and creating more services for the unhoused.

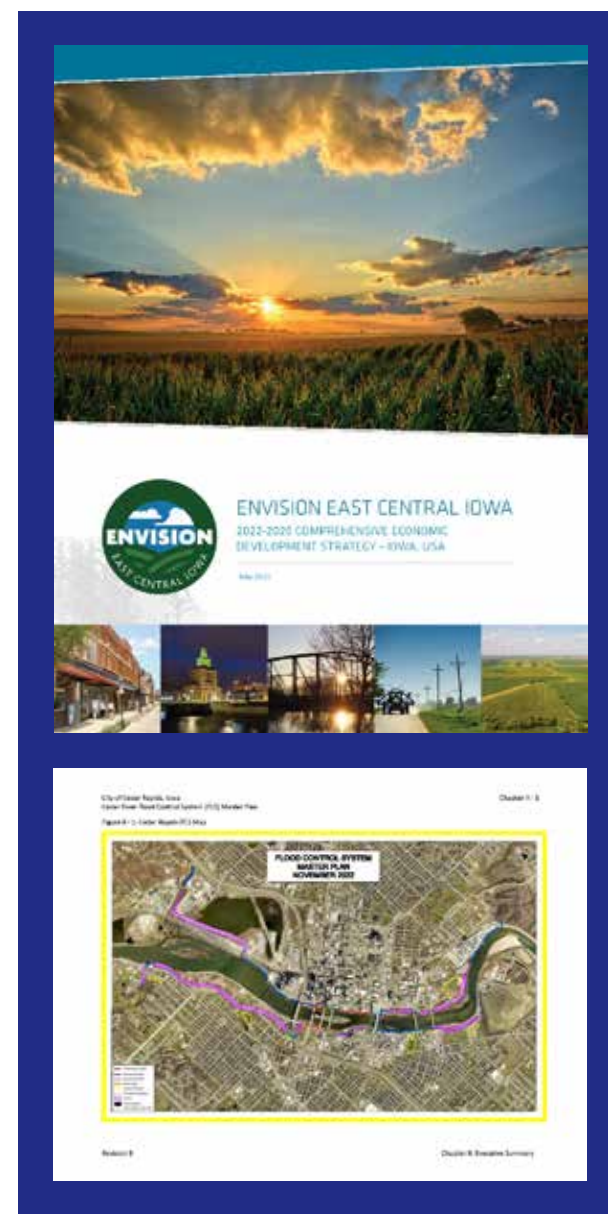


City of Cedar Rapids' Flood Protection System Plan

After the devastating 2008 flood that caused over \$5.4 billion in damages, the City of Cedar Rapids began working on a flood control system along the Cedar River that balances protection with recreation. The City worked to create a system that reflects the community's history and vision through projects like the McGrath Amphitheatre that doubles as a levee for the west side of the river. The plan has been updated periodically since its adoption in 2015 to give evolving technical guidance for implementation. Many of the improvements to Downtown and adjoining neighborhoods include extensions of the Cedar River Trail, turning public parking lots into parks, installing removable flood walls to maximize views, building floodwalls and levees to protect economic and culturally important resources like the African American Museum in NewBo, and an elevated 8th Avenue Bridge with a new multi-use trail to ensure access across the river during a flood event.

East Central Iowa Regional Economic Development Plan

The East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) updates this plan every five years to maintain their federal designation as an Economic Development District and to guide decision making for economic development in the region. ECICOG includes Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington Counties with the regional centers of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. The plan focuses on adapting to the preferences of a younger generation to prevent "brain-drain," capitalizing on the food producing potential of the region's high level of solid biomass resources and fresh water, and leveraging the region's innovation capacity to attract tech industries. Key strategies in the plan applicable to Downtown Cedar Rapids include taking advantage of the airport and highways to promote regional connectivity, attracting industries like energy and bioscience, creating innovation spaces and supporting entrepreneurship, transitioning buildings to clean energy and climate resilient design, addressing flooding risk, reducing car dependency through infill development and building more connected, walkable neighborhoods, stimulating development of unique cultural events and marketing for regional tourism, welcoming migrants through workforce development, creating affordable housing, and investing in a coordinated childcare plan.





COMMUNITY OUTREACH

OVERVIEW

Understanding the perspectives, needs, and desires of the community was fundamental to developing and prioritizing the recommendations explored in this plan. More than **1,600 inputs** were gathered from community stakeholders through a variety of engagement methods over the course of the planning process.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH METHODS

| METHOD | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Working Group | A Working Group was convened to provide oversight and direction to the planning process from beginning to end. |
| Roundtables | Downtown and adjacent district stakeholders were engaged through two rounds of in-person roundtable meetings during initial phases of the process. |
| Stakeholder Interviews | The consultant team also conducted several focused interviews with representatives of key organizations to understand day-to-day conditions in Downtown Cedar Rapids. |
| Online Survey | An online survey was developed to gather input from the broader Cedar Rapids community following the initial round of on-site roundtable meetings and individual interviews. The survey ran from April 24th to May 29th, 2023 and was open to anyone interested in participating. |
| Pop-Up at Blues Night | The consultant team attended the inaugural Blues Night in the Park in Greene Square on May 19, 2023 and gathered feedback from community members in attendance about physical improvement priorities for Downtown moving forward. |
| Open House Meetings | The consultant team hosted two open house presentations for the public to weigh in on draft Vision & Action Plan concepts, and then used feedback gathered in those meetings to further refine draft plan recommendations. |



Pop-Up at Blues Night

DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT THEMES

A Working Group was convened to provide oversight to the planning process, and was comprised of Downtown influencers, the City of Cedar Rapids including the Mayor, and representatives from the SSMID, Economic Alliance, and 2001 Development Corporation. The Working Group met with the consultant team at key milestones throughout this effort to guide and provide feedback on the process and draft plan recommendations.

In March 2023, an initial series of in-person roundtable meetings was conducted, during which approximately 100 individuals representing core Downtown constituent groups were engaged. Downtown-centric roundtable meeting groups included residents, arts and culture organizations, the SSMID Board, major employers, real estate professionals and developers, retail business owners, bar and restaurant owners, the Economic Alliance's Community Development Innovation Council, and City staff. The feedback gathered during the initial roundtable meetings and individual interviews was used to craft the online survey that was distributed to the broader Cedar Rapids community.

In May 2023, an additional round of stakeholder meetings was conducted with the intention of reaching voices from a broader swath of constituents, including stakeholders from adjacent districts. The second series of roundtable meetings included housing specialists, entrepreneurs,

Downtown and non-Downtown executives, cultural organizations, representatives from the MedQ and New Bohemia-Czech Village Districts, parks and trails advocates, non-profits, and young professionals. An additional 50 stakeholders were engaged during the second set of roundtable meetings.

The consultant team also conducted several focused interviews with representatives of key organizations, including City Council, City Economic Development and Planning staff, parking management, and SSMID maintenance staff. These interviews provided in-depth insight into the day-to-day operations and issues facing Downtown.

During roundtable meetings, individual interviews, and the first Working Group meeting, each stakeholder group was taken through a similar exercise that was focused on identifying Downtown Cedar Rapids' current strengths and challenges, and determining priorities for improvements moving forward.



Stakeholder Roundtable



Working Group Meeting

DOWNTOWN STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

STRENGTHS

Stakeholders feel that Downtown Cedar Rapids has continued to improve over the past 10 years despite substantial challenges. Downtown itself is compact, walkable, and has ample parking, which in turn supports a strong and expanding variety of entertainment venues, restaurants, and bars. Buoyed by a pro-growth and welcoming business climate, new development is occurring Downtown and in adjacent districts, bringing in new businesses and residents. Stakeholders enjoy the extensive trail and parks systems, along with the other civic and cultural amenities such as the public library.

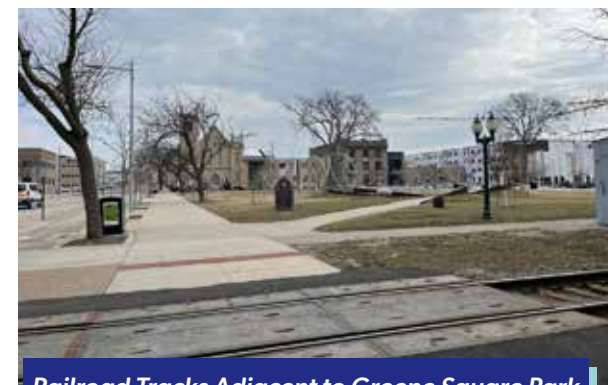
CHALLENGES

At the same time, stakeholders feel that Downtown is challenged in terms of retail options and they would like to see more retail and services such as grocery stores and pharmacies. People would like more exciting, diverse, and consistent event programming Downtown, and families are particularly interested in activities and destinations that are kid-friendly. Another common concern was the noise and disruption to traffic caused by the train, and overall lack of mobility options that make it difficult to access and move through the area. The inadequate number of Downtown hotel rooms is an additional frustration.

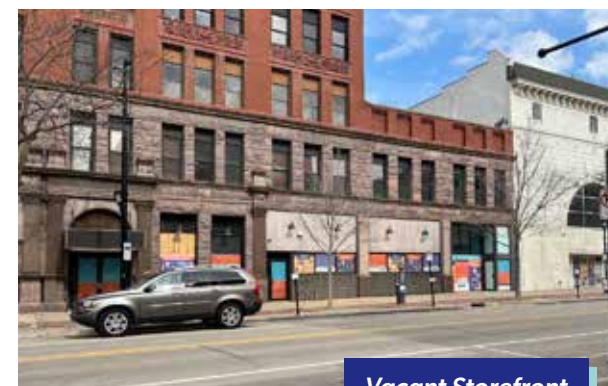
As for many downtowns, the slow return to office is proving an ongoing challenge for businesses that rely on this customer base. While new residents have arrived, the slow office market and lack of ongoing activation of public spaces leave many stakeholders feeling uneasy Downtown. There is a perception of declining safety as well as inconsistent cleanliness across the area.



Existing Outdoor Dining



Railroad Tracks Adjacent to Greene Square Park



Vacant Storefront

TOP PRIORITIES LOOKING FORWARD

The following priorities emerged from the roundtable, interview, and Working Group engagement.

Lively Streetscapes and Businesses

- Attract more retail at a variety of price points, including specialty and convenience stores
- Continue to diversify restaurant and bar offerings, including international options, at a variety of price points
- Encourage unique, modern, outdoor and rooftop dining/bar experiences
- Continue place enhancements and beautification, including festive lighting, landscaping and beautification, and public art
- Explore strategic street closures to create pedestrian promenades

Urban Design and Infill

- Embrace the Cedar River, leveraging planned Flood Protection System improvements and encouraging buildings to face the river
- Redevelop and repurpose underutilized surface parking lots and vacant lots
- Renovate and reactivate vacant buildings

Public Space Programming and Activation

- Expand the range of live music events for all ages and interests
- Create regular programming in existing Downtown green spaces including Greene Square, Mays Island, and McGrath Amphitheatre

A Neighborhood for All

- Create more activities and amenities for families, teens, and seniors
- Add public amenities that support residents, such as playgrounds, dog parks, and centrally-located green space
- Make Downtown more welcoming and inclusive to people of all cultural backgrounds
- Continue to add and diversify Downtown housing options
- Attract additional services for residents, including grocery and pharmacy

Mobility and Connectivity

- Continue to enhance bicycle facilities (bike lanes, bike racks, etc.) and pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.)
- Mitigate the noise and connectivity impacts of the railway
- Improve the parking experience
- Enhance connections between neighborhoods (Downtown, NewBohemia/Czech Village, Kingston, MedQ District), including visual connectivity in the public realm, wayfinding and signage, and branding
- Explore a Downtown trolley or shuttle

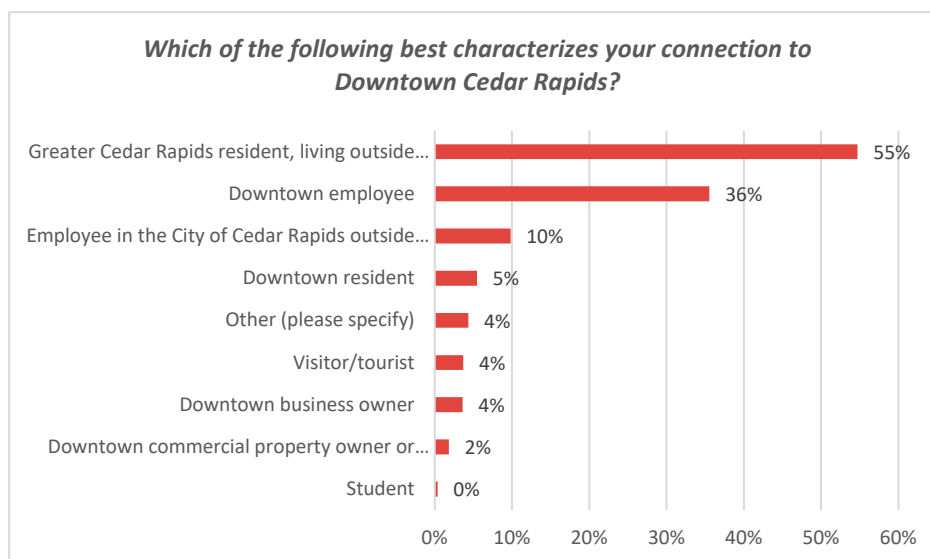
Clean, safe, and welcoming

- Address safety concerns, including providing more services for the unhoused population and promoting a more consistent police presence
- Ensure consistent cleanliness throughout Downtown
- Clean up and activate alleys

ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

An online survey was developed to help identify priorities and improvements for Downtown Cedar Rapids over the next five years. The survey ran from April 24th to May 29th, 2023, and collected **1,414 responses**. The following analysis presents a summary of key findings. A more detailed question-by-question summary of results and cross-tabulation analysis by demographics, including interest in Downtown Cedar Rapids, age, household income, and race and ethnicity, can be found in Appendix B.

Demographics: Just over half of respondents (55%) lived in Greater Cedar Rapids outside of Downtown, 36% were Downtown employees, and 5% were Downtown residents. Respondents reported having the strongest ties (living, working, or visiting most often) to Downtown SSMID (65%) followed by New Bohemia (51%). Respondents were reasonably well distributed by age between 25 and 64 years old. They were disproportionately female (61%) and white (95%). Just under a third (30%) reported an income of \$50,000 to \$99,999 and 41% reported making between \$100,000 to \$199,999.



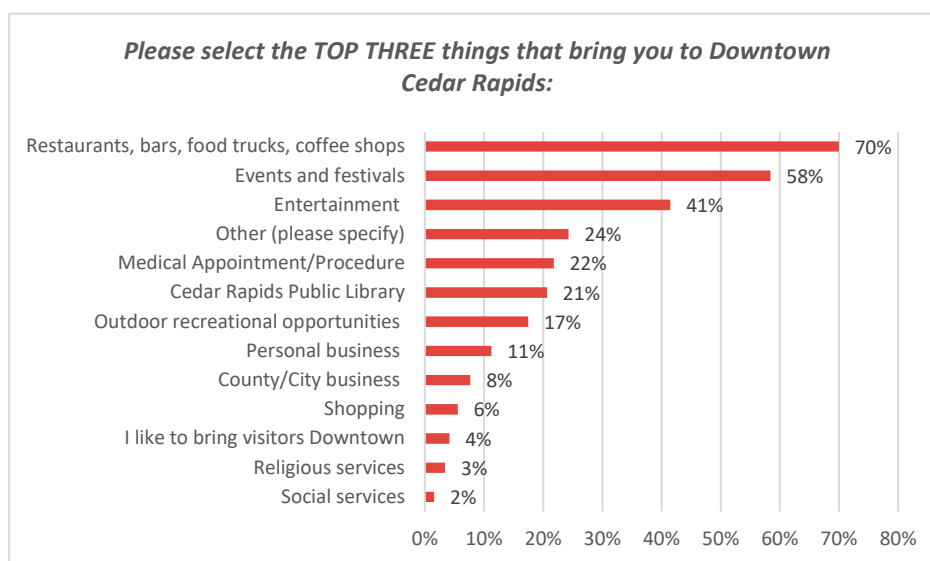
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

DOWNTOWN CEDAR RAPIDS TODAY

Respondents were asked to report how often they visited Downtown Cedar Rapids. Just over a quarter (28%) of those surveyed visited five or more days a week (cross-tabulation revealed these to be primarily Downtown residents, business owners, or employees). Over a third of respondents visited Downtown from once or twice a week to at least twice a month. Another 29% visited Downtown only a few times throughout the year.

When asked about their projected frequency of visiting Downtown during the next 12 months, the vast majority of respondents (74%) did not anticipate a change in their habits. However, 21% anticipated visiting more often in the future. This indicates a general sentiment of positivity and energy about Downtown.

When asked to select the top three things that brought them to Downtown Cedar Rapids (aside from work), respondents overwhelmingly reported visiting restaurants/bars (70%). This was followed by events and festivals (58%) and entertainment (41%).

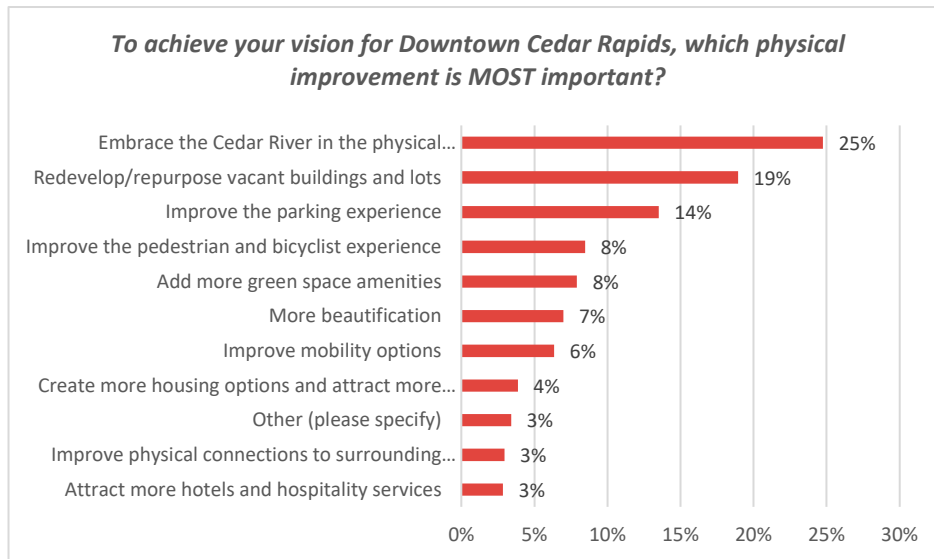


DOWNTOWN CEDAR RAPIDS TOMORROW

The most common words respondents used to describe their vision for Downtown Cedar Rapids in the future were *safe, clean, entertaining, fun, lively, and vibrant*.

When asked to rate the importance of ten possible projects for the future of Downtown, “Redevelop and repurpose underutilized surface parking lots and vacant buildings and lots” received overwhelming support, with 86% of respondents rating this as “Important” or “Very Important.” Closely following in support was “Embrace the Cedar River in the physical environment.” Respondents placed further emphasis on projects related to connectivity and beautification.

- When asked to choose just one physical improvement as MOST important, “Embrace the Cedar River in the physical environment” emerged as the clear leader. The following two most important improvements were, in order, “Redevelop/repurpose underutilized surface parking lots and vacant buildings and lots” and “Improve the parking experience.”



Respondents were asked for three words that best describe their long-term vision for Downtown Cedar Rapids. This word cloud shows words that were most frequently used – the larger the word, the more times it was listed.

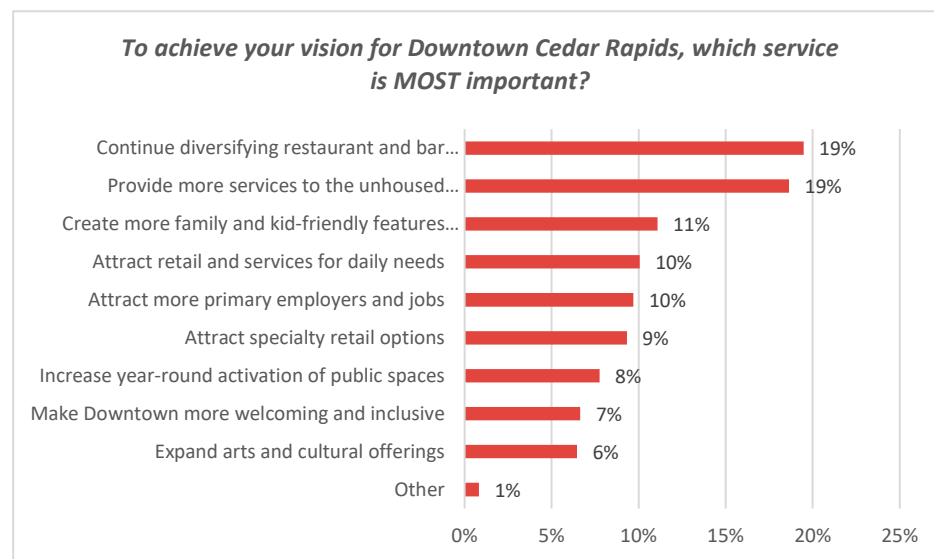
When asked to rate the importance of eight services or programs for Downtown Cedar Rapids in the future, all were rated as important to some degree. “Continue diversifying restaurant and bar offerings” emerged as the most highly valued service or program, with 77% rating it as “Important” or “Very Important.” “Provide more services to address the unhoused population” and “Make Downtown more welcoming and inclusive to people of all cultural backgrounds” had the second and third highest rankings of “Important” and “Very Important.”

- When asked to choose just one service or program as most important, respondents chose “Continue diversifying restaurant and bar offerings” and “Provide more services to address the unhoused population” at equal rates (19%). None of the remaining services or program were chosen by more than 11% of respondents.

Respondents were also given the chance to provide additional ideas for improvements to Downtown Cedar Rapids in an open-ended format. Ideas and common themes among responses included:

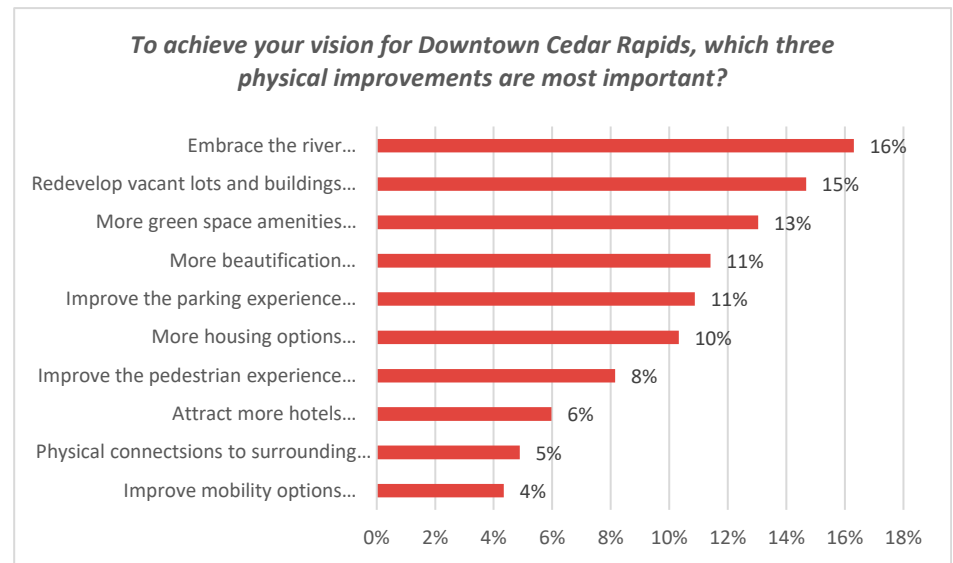
- Increased bus or circulator/trolley access around Downtown
- More housing attainable to middle-income households
- Enhanced urban design and streetscapes
- More events Downtown
- Amenities/destinations for teens and seniors
- A dog park
- Enhance/improve the skywalk system

Lastly, respondents were asked about their interest in living Downtown and the type of housing they would prefer. 60% of respondents indicated interest in living Downtown, with the greatest interest in ownership options in condominiums and townhouses.



POP-UP AT BLUES NIGHT

The consultant team attended the inaugural Blues Night in the Park in Greene Square on May 19, 2023. Engaging with community members during the event provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the Vision & Action Plan, answer questions about the plan, and encourage feedback both in-person and via the online survey. Approximately 60 individuals participated in an interactive voting exercise to help prioritize future Downtown improvements. Results of the voting exercise are provided below. The top two responses aligned with online survey priorities (Embrace the Cedar River and Redevelop vacant lots and buildings), while more green space amenities emerged as the third top response.



OPEN HOUSES

The consultant team hosted two open house presentations for the public to weigh in on draft Vision & Action Plan concepts. The open houses were held at the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and approximately 50 stakeholders participated, many of whom were engaged earlier on in the planning process. Feedback gathered at these open houses was then incorporated into the final recommendations and concepts found in this plan.



Open House



MARKET

OVERVIEW

An extensive market assessment was completed to help inform the Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision & Action Plan. Data was obtained from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including the City of Cedar Rapids, Linn County, the Downtown Cedar Rapids SSMID, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, Cedar Rapids Tourism, Esri, the U.S. Census, CoStar, and real estate research and interviews, among other available sources.

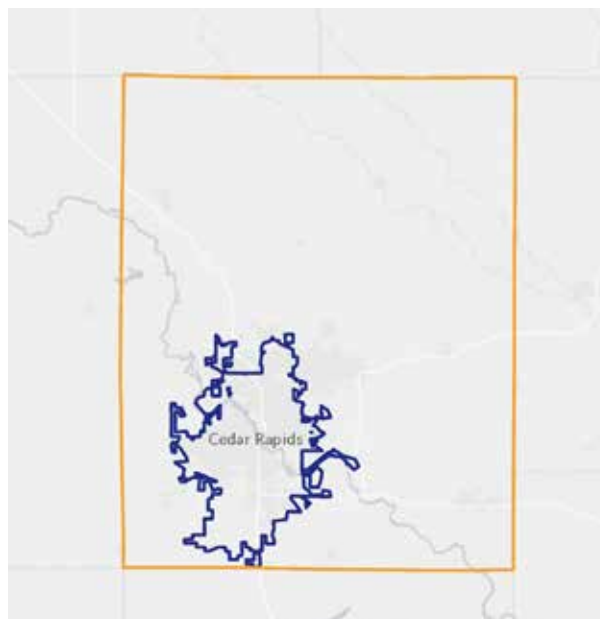
The market assessment is organized into two main sections:

- **The summary of findings provides an overview of key takeaways, organized by sector, and included in the main body of the Vision & Action Plan.** It provides a snapshot of existing conditions – in Cedar Rapids and Linn County, and in Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods – with implications for Downtown and the city moving forward. Within each market sector summary there is a map that highlights key opportunities in each sector by geography. These maps build on one another and provide the foundation for the overall physical framework found in the subsequent chapter of this plan.
- **Detailed supporting research is provided in four subsequent sections (“Live,” “Work,”**

“Shop & Dine,” and “Visit & Stay”), **which is included as Appendix C to the Vision & Action Plan.** The *Live* chapter summarizes demographic and housing trends for each of the market geographies, while the *Work* section assesses regional and Downtown employment and the office and industrial real estate sectors. *Shop & Dine* examines Downtown’s storefront economy and retail challenges and opportunities. *Visit & Stay* provides insights for Downtown and regional tourism.

MARKET AREAS

- Data was collected for four market areas: **(1) Downtown**, as defined by the Downtown Cedar Rapids SSMID boundaries, **(2) a Primary Market Area** that includes the MedQ SSMID, Kingston Village, New Bohemia, Czech Village, and the Downtown SSMID neighborhoods **(3) the City of Cedar Rapids**, and **(4) Linn County**.
- Cedar Rapids and Linn County (orange rectangle and the blue polygon in the regional context map, to the right) are key markets and points of comparison for Downtown.
- Downtown is a 0.43-square-mile area, shown on the map on the far right. The area outlined in red represents the Primary Market Area, while the black outline represents Downtown (the Downtown SSMID boundary).

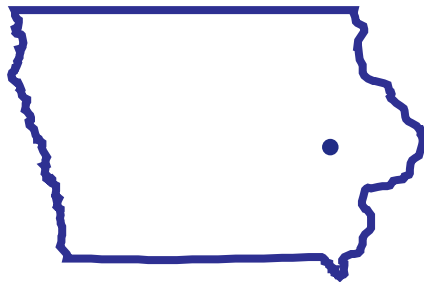


PEER CITIES

Peer cities and their downtowns offer a comparative lens for Downtown Cedar Rapids. Peer communities used in this assessment include Appleton, Wisconsin; Davenport, Iowa; Evansville, Indiana; Fargo, North Dakota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. All are Midwestern cities situated within similarly-sized metropolitan areas (except for Grand Rapids), have downtowns of comparable scale, and have many of the same economic underpinnings and market dynamics. These cities were selected through discussions with economic development experts and P.U.M.A.'s national work in downtowns.

Boundaries for peer downtowns were approximated and drawn in *Esri Business Analyst*, based on existing improvement district boundaries where available, or neighborhood boundaries and land use maps.

CEDAR RAPIDS, IA



276,500
0.43 sq. mi.

APPLETON, WI



239,100
0.29 sq. mi.

DAVENPORT, IA



384,600
0.37 sq. mi.

EVANSVILLE, IN



358,600
0.48 sq. mi.

FARGO, ND



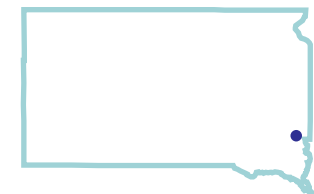
250,200
0.72 sq. mi.

GRAND RAPIDS, MI



1,087,592
0.66 sq. mi.

SIOUX FALLS, SD



276,700
0.76 sq. mi.

Regional population based on approximate values for metropolitan/micropolitan statistical areas, 2020 census. The following section highlights key findings for each of the market assessment's four topic areas: Live, Work, Shop & Dine, and Visit & Stay. It provides an overview of existing conditions and evaluates the strengths and challenges expected to impact Downtown Cedar Rapids over the next five years and beyond.

LIVE

CITY & REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW

10.5%

Linn County's population grew 10.5% between 2010 and 2022, while the city grew by 9.4%. Roughly half of the county's 230,000 residents live within the City of Cedar Rapids.



The region's predominant race/ethnicity is white, although the city and region have begun to diversify in the past decade.¹³ More than 82% of Linn County and more than 77% of the city's residents identify as "white alone."

50%

By some estimates, immigration accounts for about half of all growth Linn County has experienced since 2012.¹⁴ The region's immigrant and refugee populations include people from Sudan, Central African Republic, Burundi, Afghanistan, and many other nations.

DOWNTOWN DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW

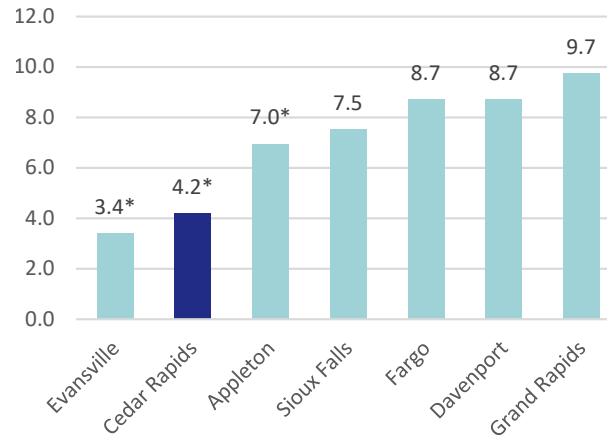
1,151

The larger downtown area (the Primary Market Area) grew by 36% between 2010 and 2022, adding 840 residents. The average growth rate among peer downtowns was 30% for the same time period.

The total population in the Downtown SSMID is approximately 1,151 people, which represents <1% of the city's total. The Primary Market Area represents 2.3% of the city's total.¹⁵

Downtown has smaller households on average and lower median household incomes, but its educational attainment rate is on par with the city and region.

*Downtown Residential Population Density
(residents/acre)*

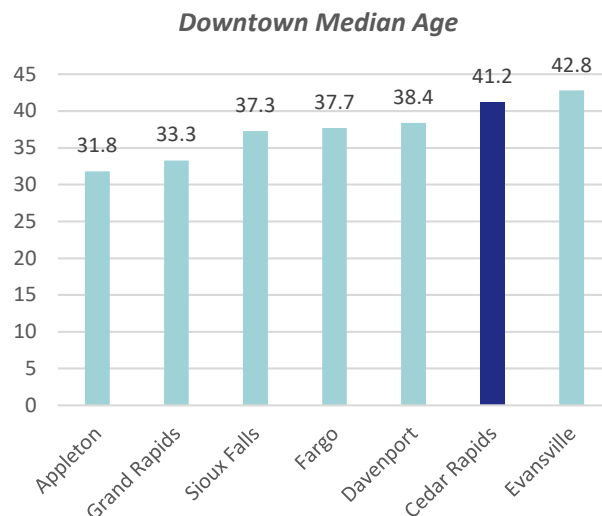


Downtown Cedar Rapids has low residential density compared to its peer downtowns.

21%

Downtown and the Primary Market Area are more diverse compared to the region, with about 21% of residents identifying as African American/Black, and 6% identifying as Hispanic.¹⁶

Downtown's median age in 2022 was 41.2, the highest among Cedar Rapids' market areas and the second highest median age among peer downtowns (the median age is even higher in the data report that excludes the correctional facility, which puts Downtown's median age at 43.8.). This trend is partly due to the existence of several senior housing complexes Downtown, including



Geneva Tower, an income-restricted property for seniors aged 62 and over. But it also denotes a trend upheld by anecdotal observation that the preference for the convenience and amenities of downtown living is growing among older, higher-earner workers and active older adults and retirees.

HOUSING MARKET OVERVIEW

\$191,000

Cedar Rapids is affordable compared to many peer markets nationally. The region has not experienced post-pandemic housing affordability and inventory issues to the same extent that many other cities have. However, some inflation of home prices and rental costs has been occurring locally over the last several years.

Cedar Rapids' median home value was \$191,000 in April 2023. This is just slightly lower than Iowa's statewide median home value of \$203,000, but well below the median value in the United States of \$343,000, and below most of Cedar Rapids' peers, except for Davenport and Evansville.

\$898

Rents increased from an average of \$697 in 2012 to an average of \$898 in 2022. This is lower than the average rental cost in most of the peer communities.

Most Downtown residents are renters (66%) compared to 20% who are owners.

Downtown and Primary Market Area ownership units and rental units tend to carry a premium over properties located elsewhere in Cedar Rapids, with the highest premium for New Bohemia and Kingston. For example, a two-bedroom, 900 square foot loft in the Depot Building in New Bohemia is listed at \$1,365/month. By comparison, the citywide average 2-bedroom rent is \$920/month.

300

Around 300 new multi-family housing units were built in the Downtown SSMID since 2021, with hundreds more built just outside of Downtown within the Primary Market Area (e.g., New Bohemia). There are several additional housing developments on the horizon that are planned or under construction.

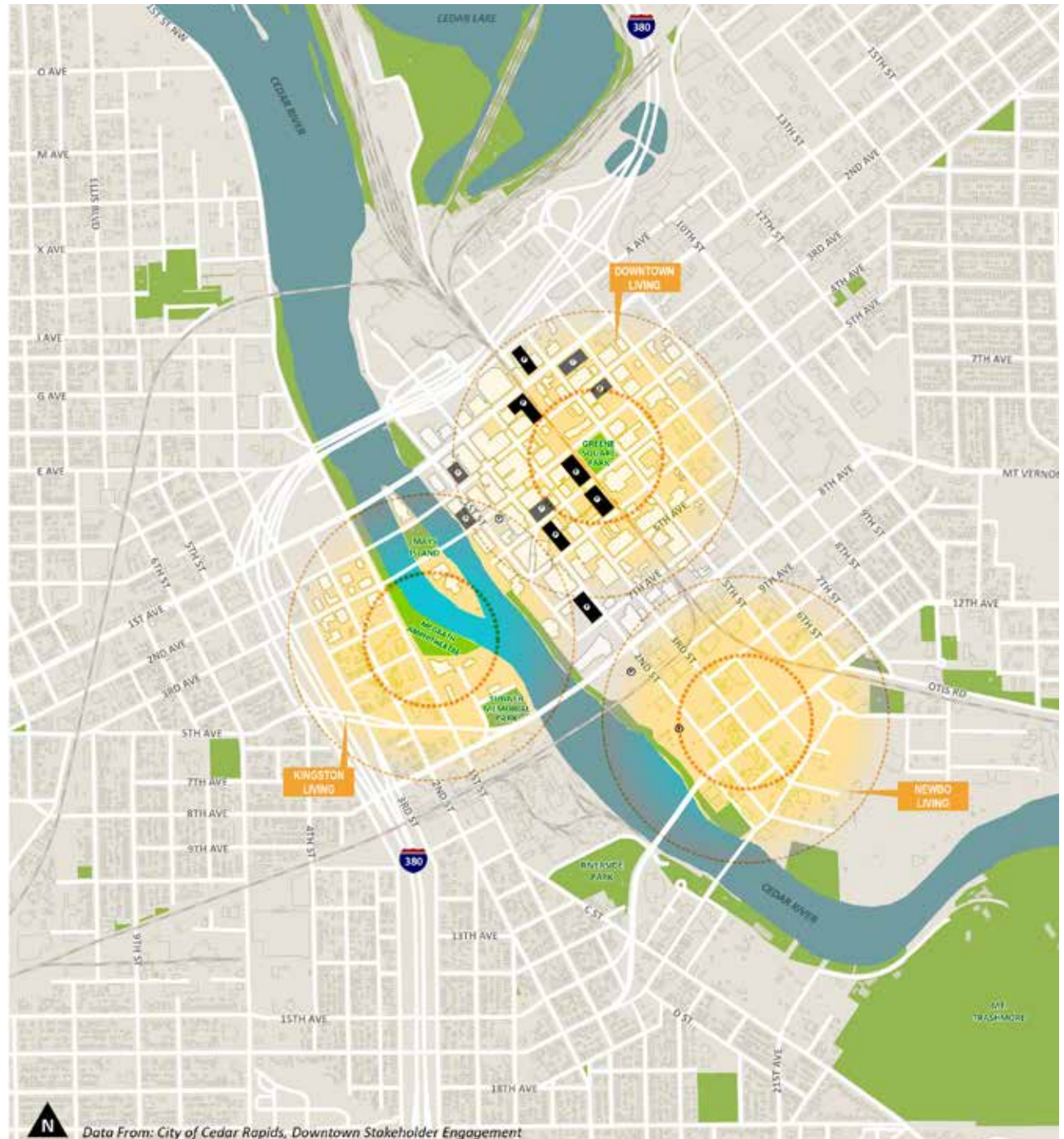
STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

New multi-family residential construction could nearly double the population of Downtown and the Primary Market Area over the next several years. Residential development projects under construction or planned in the Primary Market Area could yield over 800 new residential units within the next several years, substantially increasing Downtown's residential base.

Housing will continue to be a strong market for Downtown moving forward. According to the online survey, 60% of the 1,414 respondents indicated interest in living in Downtown Cedar Rapids. In line with national trends, there will likely be additional demand for more downtown housing options at all price points, particularly for demographics interested in being in closer proximity to jobs and entertainment, and for young professionals starting their careers and retirees downsizing from single family homes. Of the survey respondents who were interested in downtown living options, the majority were attracted to ownership options, including **condominium units** and **townhouses**.

Compared to peer markets, Cedar Rapids offers more attainable housing for first-time homebuyers. This may help with attracting a talented workforce, particularly as younger, educated households are being priced out of larger cities and peer markets. The city continues to grow in appeal particularly for young people drawn by its relative affordability, manageable pace of life, and quality of life amenities.

The map to the right illustrates opportunities to continue growing the residential base in strategic locations in Downtown and the adjacent districts, focusing on three sub-areas that have an already established or growing resident base – the Downtown core, Kingston Village, and New Bohemia. Each of these sub-areas also has green space, which is a key amenity needed for residents, and serves as an anchor point for future residential development.



WORK

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT OVERVIEW



Cedar Rapids and Linn County are the economic hub of Eastern Iowa. The region's largest employment sectors are **manufacturing, health care & social assistance, retail, finance & insurance, and educational services.**

2,000

The city has seen modest employment growth over the last decade – adding a net 2,000 jobs, equating to a 2.9% increase in total employment. However, this is a low growth rate relative to Cedar Rapids' peers.

34%

Compared to the six peer cities, Cedar Rapids is on the lower end of educational attainment, with 34% of its population with a Bachelor's degree or higher.

DOWNTOWN EMPLOYMENT OVERVIEW

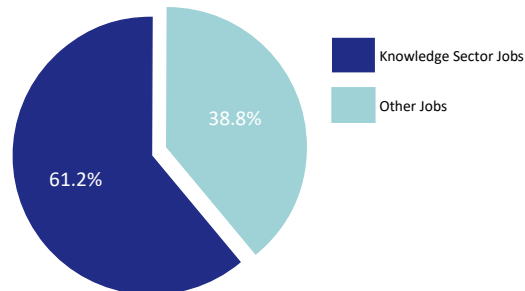
42.3

Downtown contains 11% of Cedar Rapids' businesses and 10% of its employees, while making up only 0.6% of the city's land area.

There are approximately 42.3 employees per acre in Downtown, compared to just 2.6 per acre citywide. This employment density is about average compared to the peer cities analyzed in this report.

Very few Downtown workers (<1%) both live and work in Downtown Cedar Rapids. 61% of Downtown workers live within 10 miles of Downtown (based on the "Downtown" zip code of 52401).

Knowledge Sector Employment



"Knowledge sector" employment represents approximately 61.2% of all Downtown jobs, or 7,122 jobs.¹⁷ The top contributing industries are Professional, Scientific & Tech Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Finance & Insurance. In terms of the downtown knowledge sector job share, Downtown Cedar Rapids outperforms all peers except for Appleton and Fargo.

Retail & accommodation and food services together represent 7% of Downtown employment.



Compared to the city and county overall, Downtown and Primary Market Area employees are much more likely to be male, slightly more likely to have an advanced degree, and more likely to earn over \$40,000. Both the city and Downtown lack racial and ethnic diversity in their employment base, with over 90% of workers identifying as white.

OFFICE MARKET OVERVIEW

45%

There is an estimated 6.2 million square feet of office space within a 1-mile radius of Downtown¹⁸, which represents **45% of all office space in Cedar Rapids**.¹⁹

The office sector continues to be the real estate sector with the most uncertainty post-pandemic, both locally and nationally. More flexible work environments and post-Covid work trends are still evolving, and the long-term impact remains to be seen.

The office vacancy rate Downtown is lower (4.2%) compared to citywide (6.3%). The 24-month lease renewal rate in Downtown is **91.1%**, a much more favorable rate than the citywide rate of 78%.



There are several large employers located within single-occupancy office towers, and a few of them have not yet implemented a return-to-work policy. Thus, there are several nearly empty office spaces as workers continue to work from home.

However, most small- and mid-sized companies in Downtown Cedar Rapids have implemented either a full or partial (hybrid, flexible) return-to-work policy.²⁰

INDUSTRIAL REAL ESTATE MARKET OVERVIEW

4,000,000

There is nearly 4 million square feet of industrial real estate within a 1-mile radius of Downtown, representing 14% of the city's industrial facilities. Most *new* construction occurring in the industrial real estate sector is outside of the Primary Market Area, particularly in the southwest part of the city near the airport, with major investment from BAE Systems.



There are notable **large-scale agriculture-based manufacturers** adjacent to the Downtown boundaries include Quaker Oats and Cargill. Downtown is also home to a cluster of **smaller scale, niche manufacturing** businesses as well as specialty businesses occupying repurposed industrial spaces. The area between 8th and 5th Avenues, from 2nd Street to 7th Street, exemplifies this land use.

0.2%

The Downtown area's industrial vacancy rate is just 0.2%. The 24-month lease renewal rate is 98.4%. Citywide, the vacancy rate is 2.5% with an **82.6% lease renewal rate.**²¹

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

While Downtown's employment density is on par with peer cities, there may be opportunities to **increase employment density moving forward**.

There may be opportunities to **convert excess conventional office space** to other uses, such as **coworking and flex office space and housing**.

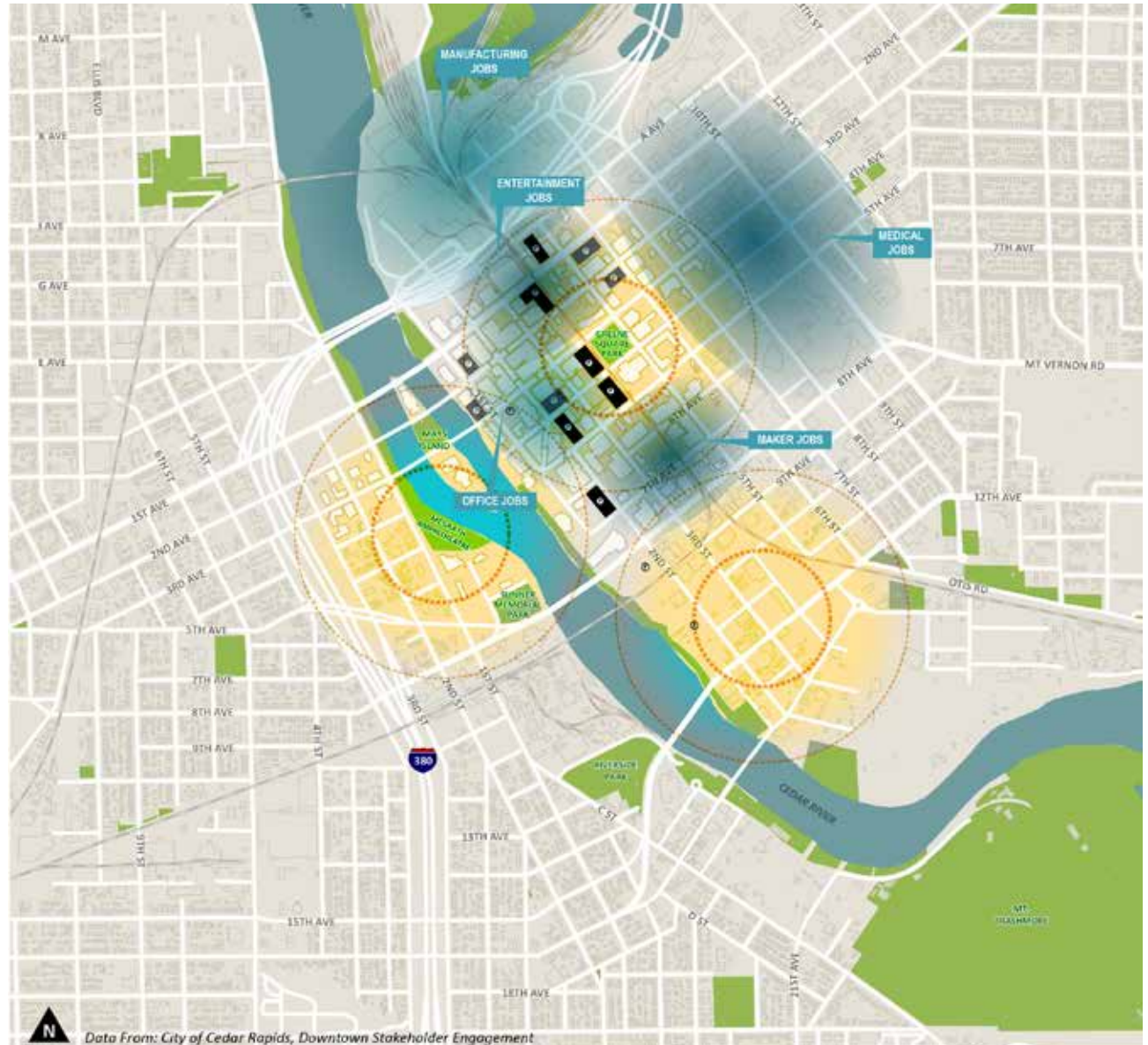
There could be potential to expand on **Downtown's niche, small-scale manufacturing cluster** by attracting additional manufacturing uses, which can help preserve a diverse job base and provide opportunities to incubate new, home-grown creative businesses.

There is an opportunity to **preserve and celebrate Downtown Cedar Rapids' agricultural and manufacturing heritage through branding and physical interventions**. For example, the bike trail connecting Downtown to Cedar Lake could feature educational wayfinding signage with information about facilities like the Quaker Oats plant, along with stories that convey agriculture's impact on the city over time.

The map to the right illustrates opportunities for continuing to attract different kinds of jobs to Downtown, building on the existing employment centers and types. The area furthest northwest outside the Downtown SSMID boundary and adjacent to the existing Cargill and Quaker Oats facilities provides an opportunity to retain and attract additional agriculture and manufacturing jobs, building on Cedar Rapids' legacy in those industries. The area in the northwestern portion of Downtown between I-380 and Greene Square Park provides a key opportunity to build on existing entertainment and cultural uses, such as the Alliant Energy Power House, the Cedar Rapids Convention Complex, and Theatre Cedar Rapids, and to attract additional small- to mid-sized entertainment venues. Office employers are scattered throughout the Downtown SSMID area, but are primarily concentrated between the Cedar River and 3rd Street in Downtown. Moving forward, there are opportunities to convert

underutilized, traditional office spaces in that sub-area into coworking, smaller and more flexible office spaces, or coworking to attract additional employers. In the area between the Downtown core and New Bohemia, there is an opportunity to reuse and revamp industrial buildings into

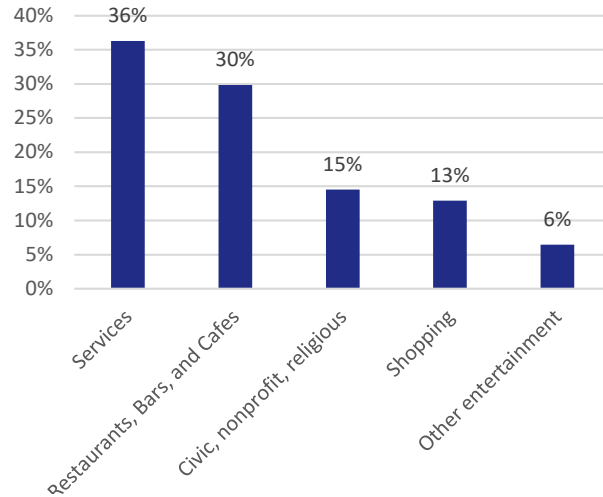
new uses that create jobs, like makerspaces, light manufacturing, or live/work spaces. The MedQ District northeast of Downtown is currently a strong hub for medical employment, and this should be built upon moving forward.



SHOP & DINE

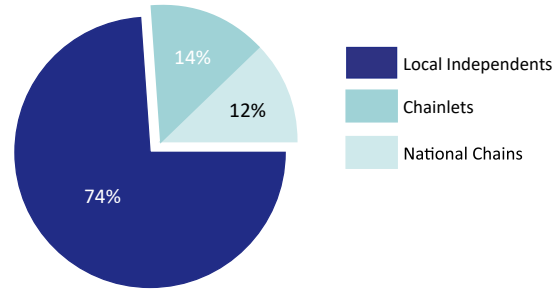
DOWNTOWN STOREFRONT ECONOMY OVERVIEW

Downtown Cedar Rapids Storefronts by Business Type



There are approximately **124 street-level businesses in Downtown Cedar Rapids** (including civic, nonprofit, and religious uses). **Services** (including beauty, fitness, banking etc.) are the most common category, comprising **36% of storefront units**. These services range from beauty and fitness to medical, banking, legal, and financial, and other professional services. **Restaurants, bars, and cafes** represent around **30% of Downtown ground-floor uses**.

Downtown Storefronts - Local vs. Chains



Only 12% of Downtown storefronts are national chains, while 74% are local independents, and 14% can be classified as “chainlets.”²²



Some of the most prominent commercial corridors that compete with Downtown are located within the Primary Market Area, including **New Bohemia** and **Czech Village**. Another competitor is **Marion**.

Downtown and the Primary Market Area have distinct sub-districts each with a unique flavor and competing offerings – which is both a vulnerability and an opportunity for greater collaboration and synergy.

\$11.86/SF

Average market lease rates for retail space in the Downtown area are \$11.86/sf, about one dollar per square foot lower compared to the city. The market real estate sales price is \$128/sf, which is about \$15 less per square foot than the city overall.²³

Downtown's storefront economy is critical to its success, in terms of attracting visitors, driving foot traffic, and creating vibrancy and activation. However, the **limited number and lack of diversity in existing retail businesses** needs to be addressed in order to **attract and appeal to both visitors and residents**.

2.0%

According to CoStar estimates, the retail vacancy rate in the 1-mile radius is 2.0%, which is lower than national comparisons. However, it is slightly higher than the citywide retail vacancy rate of 1.2%.

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the newer, successful street-level businesses that have emerged Downtown are restaurants and bars, particularly innovative concepts led by local, entrepreneurial owners. Many Cedar Rapids stakeholders interviewed in this planning process mentioned Downtown's restaurant scene very favorably. According to community feedback, the variety and sophistication of dining in Downtown Cedar Rapids has improved significantly in the last 10+ years. "Restaurants, bars, food trucks, and coffee shops" was selected by 70% of the 1,400 survey respondents as a reason they come Downtown, making it the top draw.

Improving the variety of restaurant and dining experiences is a key market opportunity. When asked to choose just one service as most important from a list of ten options, online survey respondents chose "continue diversifying restaurant and bar offerings" most frequently. Respondents desire greater variety of cuisines, price points, and experiences (including rooftop bars).

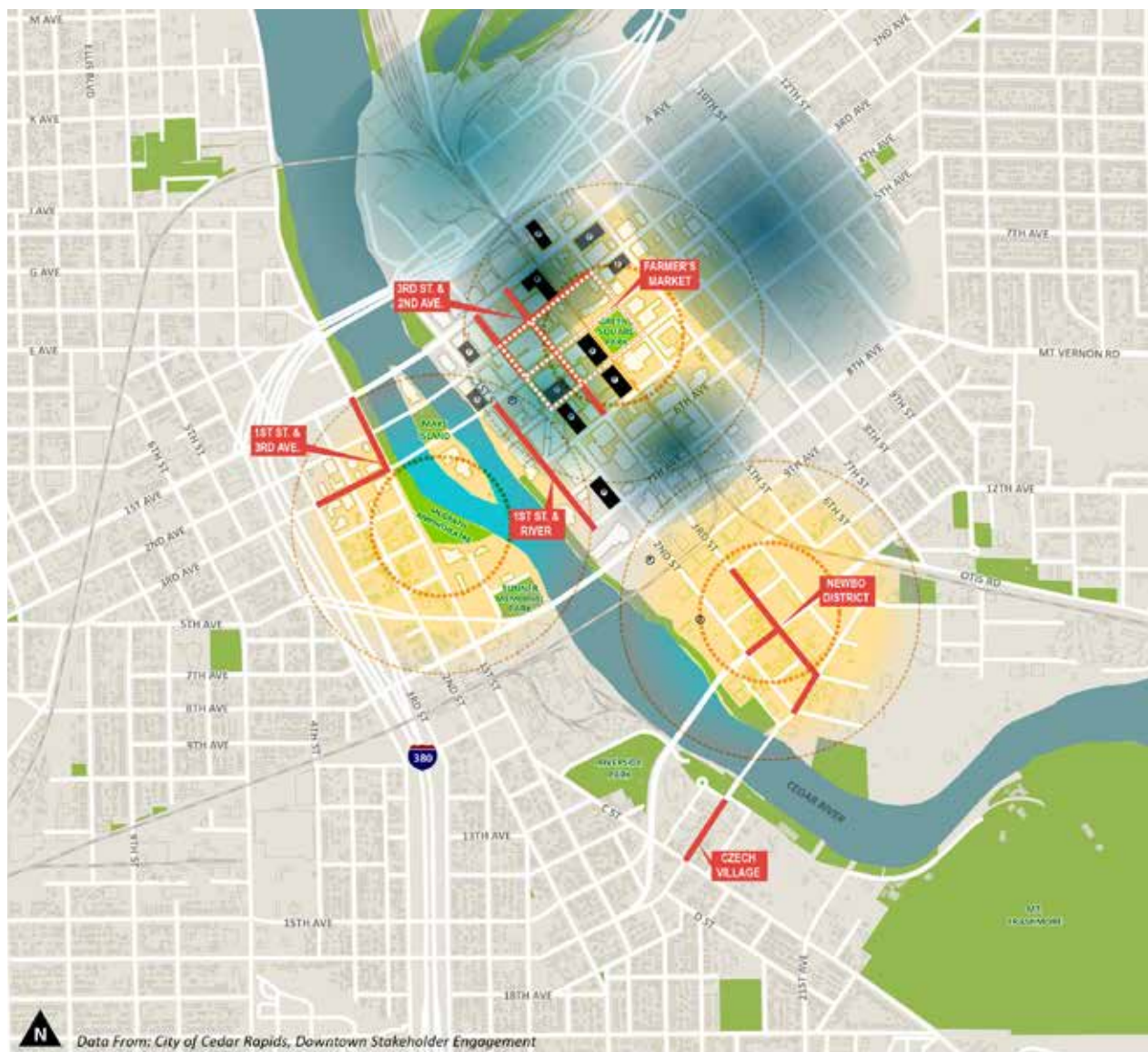
Downtown's business composition could better reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the city and region. There is demand for a wider array of dining and retail across market segments. Supporting new business opportunities for underrepresented groups, such as immigrants, for example, could help meet this market demand while increasing cultural belonging, economic prosperity, and storefront activation.

As Downtown's residential population base grows over the next decade, there will be critical market opportunities for more neighborhood-serving retail and service-based businesses.

The map to the right illustrates corridors (shown in red) that have existing pockets of active storefront uses, and where there is an opportunity to focus attention on the attraction of additional

businesses at the ground level. These corridors include 1st Street and 3rd Avenue in Kingston Village, 3rd Street, 2nd Avenue, 2nd Street, and 1st Street in the Downtown SSMID, 3rd Street, 12th Avenue, and 16th Avenue in New Bohemia, and 16th Avenue in Czech Village. The map

also highlights the location of the Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmer's Market, as it is one of the largest and most popular open-air markets in the Midwest, and aligns with where additional storefront activation should be focused moving forward.



VISIT & STAY

REGIONAL AND DOWNTOWN TOURISM OVERVIEW



Visitation to Cedar Rapids declined sharply during the onset of the pandemic in 2020 but has since made a full recovery. Hotel-motel tax revenues in 2022 were at a 9-year high.



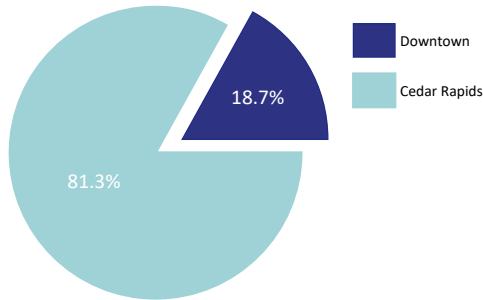
For a community of its size, Cedar Rapids offers a wide array of theaters, performing arts venues, and cultural amenities.



There are a variety of events that take place in and around Downtown Cedar Rapids each year, ranging from large-scale events to smaller festivals and activations.²⁴ The city also boasts a growing number of outdoor recreational opportunities in and around Downtown, including an extensive bike trail system that connects the riverfront, lakes, and neighborhoods.

LODGING MARKET OVERVIEW

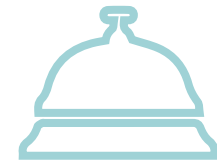
Downtown vs. Citywide Hotel Rooms



Cedar Rapids has 23 hotels, totaling 1,600 rooms, but only one hotel is in Downtown, the DoubleTree by Hilton. The 267-room Hilton also has an on-site conference center.

60.3%

Compared to March 2022, citywide lodging metrics have all improved. The occupancy rate of 60.3% is just shy of the national average of 65.3%.²⁵ Cedar Rapids has over 2,000 short-term rental listings, but less than 200 were active listings.²⁶



A new boutique hotel is slated for Downtown Cedar Rapids as part of the 1st & 1st development. This new hotel will help meet some of the demand for downtown lodging.

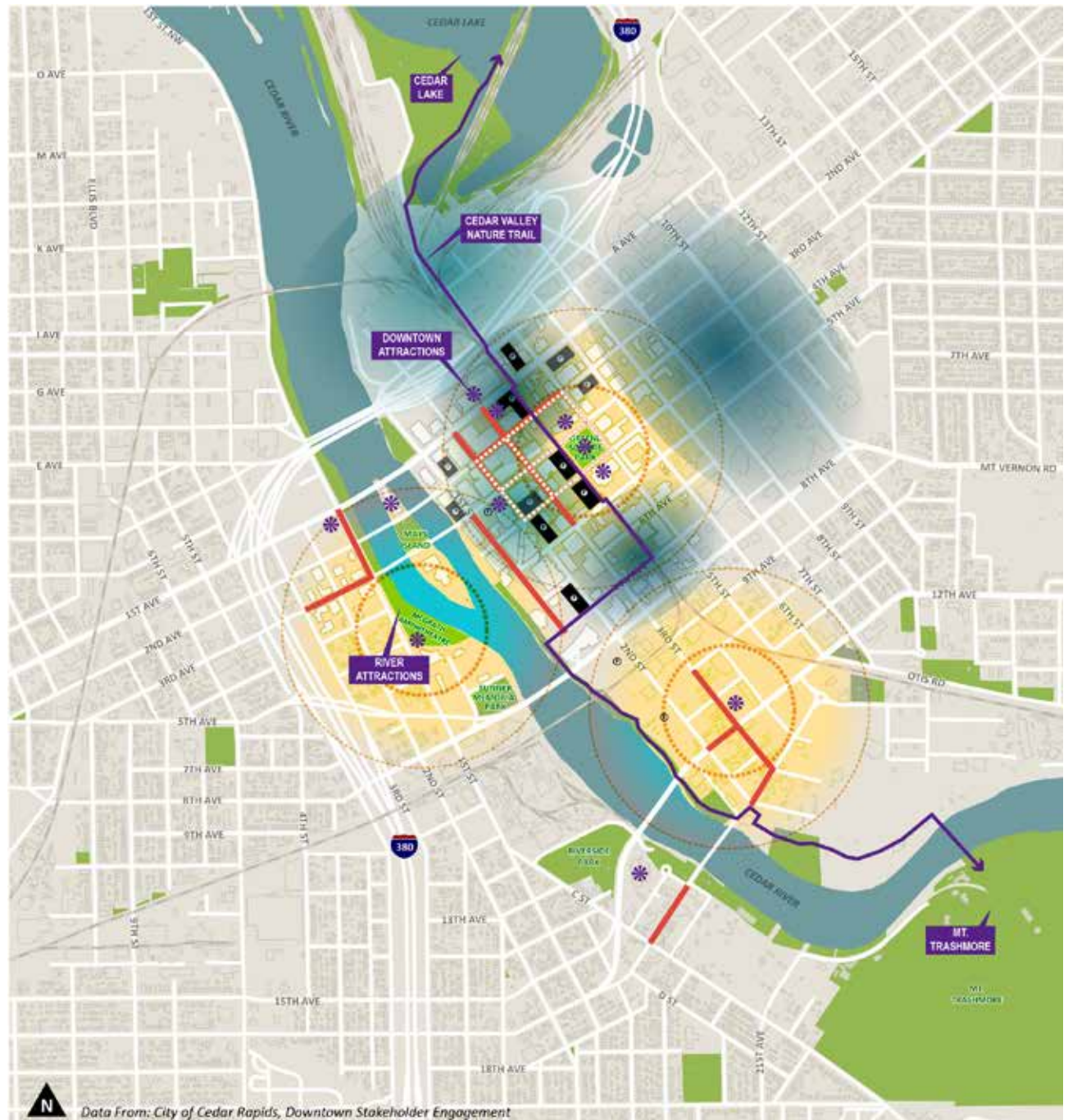
STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

There are near-term opportunities for additional hotel and lodging options in Downtown.

According to community feedback, there may be an opportunity for a **mid-sized venue to help expand Downtown's live music niche.**

Downtown and city partners should continue exploring ways to build on the outdoor recreation niche.

The map to the right illustrates existing entertainment and recreation amenities in and around Downtown, shown in purple. Key entertainment and cultural amenities located in the Downtown core and adjacent districts include Alliant Energy Power House, the Cedar Rapids Convention Complex, Theatre Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Greene Square Park, the Cedar Rapids Public Library, Mays Island, the 1st and 1st redevelopment, McGrath Amphitheatre, NewBo City Market, the Paramount Theatre, and the National Czech & Slovak Museum. Furthermore, Downtown has a number of recreation amenities that enhance the pedestrian and bicycle experience both within Downtown, and connecting to adjacent districts. Recreation assets include ConnectCR and the Cedar Valley Nature Trail, Cedar Lake, several parks and facilities adjacent to the Cedar River including the Tree of the Five Seasons and McGrath Amphitheatre, and Mt. Trashmore. This strong foundation of cultural, entertainment, and recreation facilities in and around Downtown are strengths, and the subsequent chapters of this plan provide recommendations on how to further leverage this asset base in conjunction with the other market opportunities outlined here.





KEY TAKEAWAYS



Downtown Cedar Rapids has proven to be resilient – rising from the flood and other challenges with an influx of private and public investment.

Downtown Cedar Rapids has recently faced two significant disasters that severely impacted the physical environment in Downtown – the devastating June 2008 flood that caused over \$5.4 billion in damages over 1,000 blocks in the heart of the city, and the August 2020 derecho that destroyed 60% of the City’s tree canopy and numerous homes and structures. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic substantially affected the office market and employee work patterns,

previously one of the primary drivers of foot traffic in Downtown, resulting in a sustained lack of vibrancy and challenges to attracting and retaining storefront businesses. Despite these challenges, Downtown Cedar Rapids has proven to be resilient. The Economic Alliance, City of Cedar Rapids, the SSMID, and other civic partners have continued to invest in Downtown’s infrastructure, leveraging flood protection efforts to create community amenities like the

McGrath Amphitheatre, implementing physical improvements like converting one-way streets to two-way streets, and adding new lighting and public art to cultivate a distinct sense of place. Similarly, the private sector has continued to invest in Downtown Cedar Rapids by building new housing, opening locally-owned businesses, and encouraging employees to return to Downtown office buildings on a regular basis.

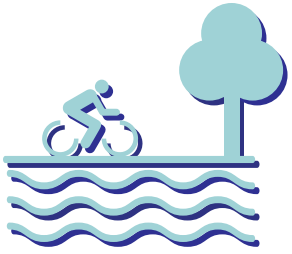


Downtown has many assets, but needs more consistent activation and reasons to come Downtown for people of all ages.

While Downtown Cedar Rapids has numerous assets that draw people for special occasions including live music and entertainment venues, theaters, museums, the McGrath Amphitheatre, the Cedar Rapids Public Library, and large-scale annual or semi-annual events like the Farmer’s Market, Freedom Festival, and the Night Market, many stakeholders expressed that there are not regular things to do in Downtown for people of all ages, particularly for families with small

children. There is also a growing concern about the perception and reality of safety issues as deterrents for some people to visiting Downtown. The loss of street level vibrancy and foot traffic is one contributing factor to these concerns around safety, compounded by an increase in the unhoused population in and around Downtown. The combined lack of consistent programming and a more visible presence of the unhoused population in Greene Square Park and other

public spaces have become deterrents for many community members to regularly come Downtown. In order to address both concerns, more regular, smaller-scale activations in Downtown public spaces could appeal to and draw a diverse swath of community members, while making people feel safer as foot traffic and vibrancy increases.



Embracing the Cedar River remains a clear community priority.

Like many downtowns, Cedar Rapids historically turned its back to the river running through the heart of the city, instead choosing to front buildings on adjacent streets and using the river corridor for surface parking and industrial activity. While Cedar Rapids has started to embrace the Cedar River and integrate it into Downtown's physical fabric, primarily leveraging flood protection infrastructure to create new public

space amenities along the river banks, the Cedar River is still not realizing its potential as a unifying component for the Downtown experience, particularly in the built environment. Embracing the Cedar River was a clear community priority in the most recent 2017 Vision Plan update, and continues to be an improvement priority for the community looking forward. The online survey administered as part of this Vision & Action Plan

identified "Embrace the Cedar River" as the top physical improvement priority to achieve participants' vision for Downtown over the next five years, with a quarter of participants selecting this option. This plan explores ways to better incorporate the Cedar River both into the built environment, and methods for better activating Mays Island, a unique but underutilized asset.

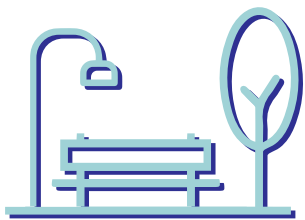


Moving forward, Downtown should continue to evolve into a mixed-use neighborhood.

During the pandemic, the downtowns that proved to be most economically resilient were those that were already becoming mixed-use neighborhoods. Mixed-used, or "complete", neighborhoods offer a balance of employment opportunities, housing, retail and restaurants, entertainment, and amenities. Downtown Cedar Rapids has been moving in the direction of becoming a complete neighborhood by adding new housing, offering a

variety of civic assets and entertainment venues, and investing in green space amenities like the revamp of Greene Square Park, the ConnectCR trail system connections, and new public spaces along the riverfront. However, Downtown is still heavily office-based, and has been struggling with street level vibrancy since the pandemic, as several large employers have not yet required the return of office employees, resulting in

less consistent foot traffic. To continue to build resilience, it is important that Downtown continue to explore opportunities for a mix of additional housing unit types, diversify the storefront economy by adding retail and expanding restaurant offerings, and add resident-serving amenities like convenience retail and dog parks as the residential population grows.



Key catalytic initiatives focused on the public realm are recommended to attract additional private investment, connect key activity areas, and help make Downtown a stronger regional destination.

A catalytic project is one that has the potential to have lasting positive impacts on Downtown and to spur additional public and private investment around it. Most Downtown property is owned by private entities, and improvements are dependent on multiple factors, such as property owner's willingness and financial means to redevelop, access to capital, partnerships,

existing leases, and more. However, publicly owned streets, sidewalks, bridges, and parks may also offer catalytic opportunities. Based on the assessment of Downtown market opportunities, property ownership and conditions, surrounding economic activity, and interviews with Downtown stakeholders and the broader community, three catalytic projects in the public realm were

identified, organized around the three goal areas that comprise the core of Vision & Action Plan recommendations. These catalytic projects, along with tactics to support each project, should serve as preliminary guidance to get conversations started and generate excitement about future possibilities.



To optimize services and support plan implementation, and to align with national best practices, a strengthened public/private downtown management approach is needed.

Cedar Rapids currently has many of the organizational players that are needed for successful implementation of a forward-looking Downtown plan. This planning process already demonstrates partnership and commitment between the City of Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, the Downtown-focused SSMID (self-supporting municipal improvement district), and the private sector. Each entity is a financial sponsor of this Vision & Action Plan (plus the 2001 Development Corporation),

and each is committed to continue to work together to realize Downtown's potential. The implementation of the Downtown Cedar Rapids Vision & Action Plan will require collaboration among the City, the private sector, and a variety of civic partners.

As part of the planning process, the current organizational alignment and focus on Downtown was analyzed. Pros and cons of the existing Downtown management structure are provided

along with two alternatives for optimizing community resources and energy to improve Downtown moving forward: either creating a more distinct business center for Downtown within the Economic Alliance, or having the SSMID contract with an independent non-profit Downtown organization, which is the most common model for downtown management nationally. A full analysis of each option is provided in the 'Organizational Alignment' section of Chapter 7: Implementation, along with recommended next steps.



PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The creation of this physical framework was informed by community outreach and guided by key findings from the market assessment. It provides an overarching guide for future development and physical improvements in Downtown over the next five years. The physical framework is comprised of several key elements that serve as the building blocks for the recommendations and actions found in subsequent sections of the Vision & Action Plan:




 SSMID Boundary

 1 Public / Entertainment Destinations

 2 Public Parking Ramps

 3 Opportunity Sites

 4 Manufacturing / Maker Hub

 5 Flood Recovery Projects

 6 Catalytic Projects

1 PUBLIC/ ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATIONS

Existing civic destinations, such as the Cedar Rapids Public Library, museums, the Convention Complex, the Ground Transportation Center, and City and Federal government buildings, are cultural anchors in Downtown. Additionally, there are several theaters and entertainment venues that serve as significant draws such as the Paramount Theater, Theatre Cedar Rapids, and the Alliant Energy Power House. These are important destinations that draw people in from elsewhere in the city and region. Improving physical and experiential connections between these assets is a key component of the recommendations in this plan.

2 PUBLIC PARKING RAMPS

Downtown Cedar Rapids is fortunate to have an abundant parking supply with roughly 5,300 off-street parking spaces, primarily located in parking ramps that are distributed throughout the urban core. The amount of structured parking in Downtown is a strength, as it provides a more efficient use of space than surface parking. Additionally, the entire Downtown parking system is currently not fully utilized, creating an opportunity for infill development on surface parking lots while retaining abundant spaces for businesses, residents, and visitors in the existing public parking ramps. Recommendations for public realm improvements and directional signage are intended to leverage the locations of and availability in existing public parking ramps. There may be opportunities to redevelop older parking ramps that are past their useful life cycle to add more uses to Downtown, while also providing public parking.

3 OPPORTUNITY SITES

Opportunity sites are areas where redevelopment or new development may occur during the five-year life cycle of this Downtown Vision & Action Plan, and beyond. A key community priority that emerged from online survey was to redevelop and repurpose underutilized surface parking lots and vacant buildings and lots within Downtown, which 19% of survey participants selected as their top physical improvement priority over the next five years. Opportunity sites were selected for one of three reasons:

- The site is currently underutilized, including surface parking lots, at key locations within Downtown that if developed or redeveloped, have the potential to make a positive impact on the overall vitality of Downtown.
- The site was identified in the 2017 Downtown Vision Plan and has yet to be developed or redeveloped.
- The site was identified through outreach to Downtown stakeholders and through the community-wide online survey administered during this planning process.

4 MANUFACTURING/ MAKER HUB

Cedar Rapids' primary industries have long been closely tied to agriculture and manufacturing, with notable large-scale agriculture-based manufacturers adjacent to Downtown, including Quaker Oats and Cargill. Downtown is also home to a cluster of smaller scale, niche manufacturing businesses as well as specialty businesses occupying repurposed industrial spaces. The area between 8th and 5th Avenues, from 2nd Street to 7th Street, exemplifies this land use, and this area provides an opportunity to build on the community's agriculture and manufacturing heritage while diversifying the types of manufacturing and agricultural activities that happen in areas adjacent to Downtown.

5 FLOOD RECOVERY PROJECTS

The Cedar River Flood Control System (FCS) Master Plan, created following the 2008 flood, identifies four areas in Downtown where extensive flood control improvements have been implemented, are in the process of being implemented, or are in the planning and design phase. These projects will not only protect Downtown Cedar Rapids from the impacts of flooding, but will create new public realm amenities for the community. Rather than duplicating the vision and recommendations laid out in the FCS Master Plan, this plan supports continuing the implementation of these efforts, which include:

- **Tree of Five Seasons:** located on the Cedar River west of 1st Street NE between 1st Avenue and I-380 – completed in 2023
- **White Water Course:** located on the Cedar River east of 1st Street NW between 1st Avenue and I-380
- **4th Avenue Plaza & Promenade:** located on the Cedar River west of 1st Street on 4th Avenue
- **Festival Grounds:** located on the Cedar River between 7th Avenue and the 8th Avenue Bridge and east of Valor Way

6 CATALYTIC PROJECTS

Three catalytic public realm projects are recommended for Downtown over the next five years. These projects build on the elements of the overall physical framework outlined above, and align with the three goals laid out in the next chapter of this Plan. If implemented, these projects can have a transformative impact on Downtown by not only creating new amenities and gathering spaces for the Cedar Rapids community and connecting existing amenities, but also by spurring additional private development and investment. The three catalytic projects are:

- **River Activation Opportunity Sites and Mays Island Activation** – Design 2nd Avenue as a flexible/festival street or “linear park” connecting Kingston to Downtown. Allow the 2nd Avenue Bridge to be shut down to cars during special events or permanently to expand activation and Cedar River engagement. Explore opportunities to better utilize Mays Island, turning it into a destination with broad community appeal. Pursue infill development on surface parking adjacent to the Cedar River.
- **3rd Street Festival Street** – Design 3rd Street to be a flexible/festival street that could be shut down to cars during unique times (weekends, Farmer’s Markets, special events, etc.). Focus storefront activation efforts in strategic locations in Downtown, focusing first on 3rd Street.
- **Cedar Valley Nature Trail Connection** – Pursue short- and long-term improvements to the trail connection from Downtown across the rail tracks to Cedar Lake.

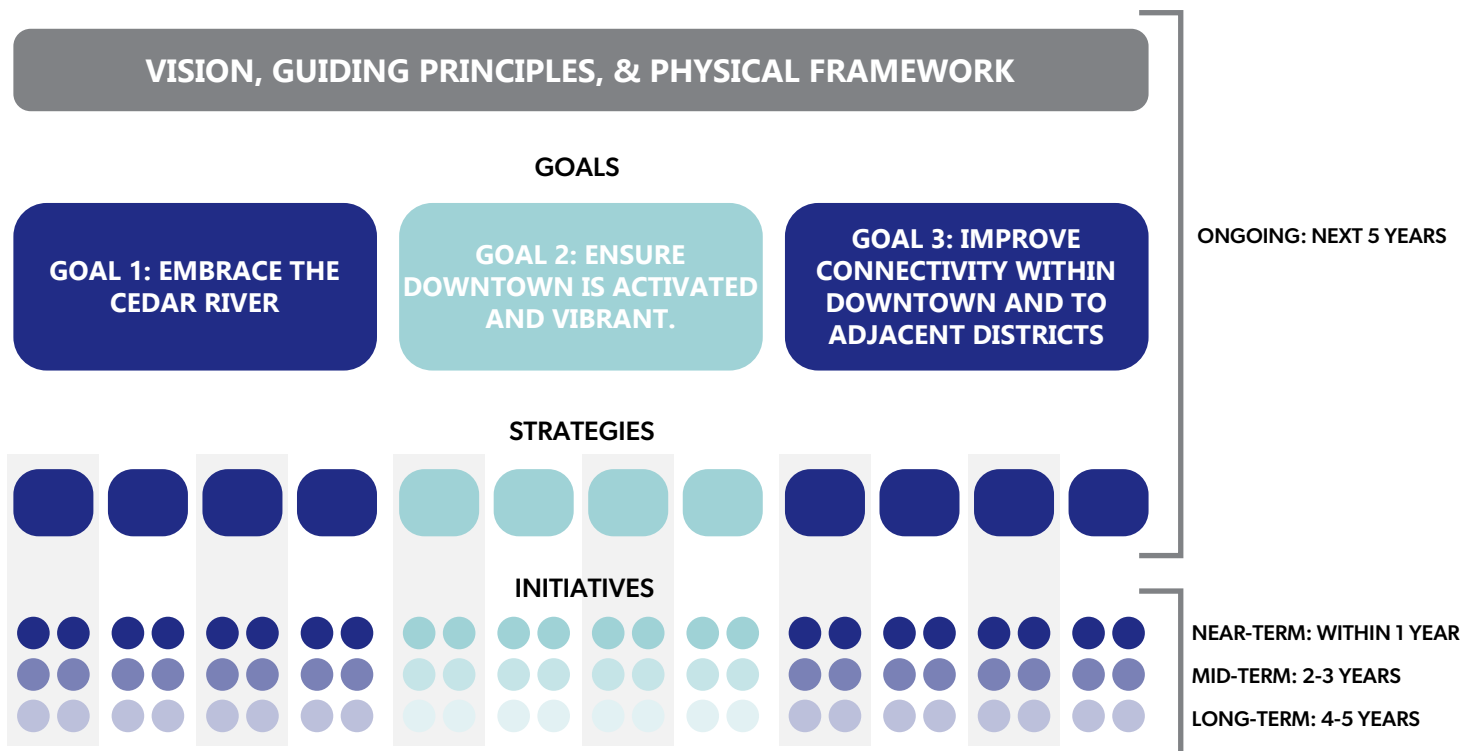
An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in downtown Los Angeles, showing a wide intersection with multiple lanes and a large, modern building in the background. The image is overlaid with a large, bold, white text box that reads "RECOMMENDATIONS".

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION STRUCTURE

Vision & Action Plan

recommendations are constructed as follows. The plan identifies three goal areas with corresponding strategies, catalytic projects, and short-, mid-, and long-term actions for Downtown physical improvements and policies. Recommendations are designed to guide the Economic Alliance, SSMID, City, the development community, and downtown stakeholders for the next five-year investment cycle. For actions and tactics within each goal and strategy, timelines and responsible parties are identified to aid in implementation.



VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

Community input received through the Vision & Action Plan process was collected and synthesized into the community's vision for Downtown Cedar Rapids:

Downtown Cedar Rapids is the vibrant hub of the Eastern Iowa region where the past meets the future, entrepreneurship flourishes, diversity is celebrated, and innovation is embraced.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To align with EnvisionCR, this Downtown Vision & Action Plan carries forward the guiding principles developed through stakeholder conversations and broad public input sessions that were part of the comprehensive planning process. These guiding principles, pulled directly from EnvisionCR, are intended to support both the City's vision statement and the vision for Downtown laid out in this plan, and to permeate through all recommendations found in the subsequent sections of this plan:

Achieve a Unified Vision

Cedar Rapids desires to facilitate a regional environment that supports not just individual community or neighborhood needs, but recognizes the importance of regional collaboration and regional vision. Cultural exchange, rather than single direction transfers, is essential to this vision. Cedar Rapids residents want to see New Bohemia, Paramount, Czech Village, the McGrath Amphitheatre, and more coalesce into a critical cultural mass with traction.

Live Healthy

Healthy places support residents' mental and physical health and in so doing, quickly attain a "buzz" – a distinction as a place for families and young professionals to call home. Cedar Rapids has been designated a Bicycle Friendly Community and recently named an All-American City. These designations confirm Cedar Rapids' alignment with this principle.

Strengthen Neighborhoods

Strong neighborhoods honor the traditions of the past, but keep a mindful eye to resident needs for the future – through social, cultural, work, health, learning and recreation opportunities. Developing neighborhoods rich in living options supports the community of choice theme and builds community character. Equity is a key component to building strong neighborhoods and communities. Inclusion of all, regardless of age, gender identity, race, income, and many other social characteristics, is an essential part of creating a more equitable society. Considering the needs of our most vulnerable residents helps build stronger neighborhoods for all.

Keep Business Vibrant

Cedar Rapids continues to support and benefit from the long-term employers, many with agricultural, technological, or other innovative roots. New opportunities emerge through entrepreneurship, incubators, and innovation corridors. Cedar Rapids has enjoyed success through attracting small satellites of larger businesses and encouraging their local growth.

Connect the City

Cedar Rapids' growth of the future includes increased linkages and/or bringing services and choices together for access, collaboration, and synergism. Connections between people are as important as connections between places. Residents seek physical connections that reflect the "community choice" theme. Walking, cycling,

and public transportation must be as accessible as options for the car. Closer proximity of areas where residents can live, work, learn, and play allow for easy pathways and/or merged services.

Embrace the Outdoors

A post-flood Cedar Rapids has already made great strides in embracing its natural systems. Relatively recent studies speak to the value of environmentally sensitive areas and large tracts of habitat to support diverse plants and wildlife. As the City develops the Flood Control System, it is important to maintain our connection with the Cedar River. We should recognize our river as an asset and enhance opportunities for residents to connect with nature and enjoy recreation opportunities on and around the river.

Streamline Services

Many see the public-private partnership, in varied configurations, as one of the paths to Cedar Rapids' future success. They see those partnerships most enriched through government systems that foster collaboration and coordination. One-stop shops, all stakeholder roundtables and consistency across boundaries in rules and rule-making surface as potential tools for Cedar Rapids' progressive future. The City of Cedar Rapids has a strong culture of innovation and adaptability, which has served well to allow the City to react to unanticipated events and circumstances. This philosophy should continue to grow as we strive to improve services and react to ever changing conditions.

GOALS, STRATEGIES, & CATALYTIC PROJECTS

GOAL 1: EMBRACE THE CEDAR RIVER

WHY IT MATTERS

Embracing the Cedar River has long been a top community priority, and was identified as the top physical improvement priority for Downtown in this planning process. There has been significant traction around embracing the Cedar River since the catastrophic 2008 flood, as numerous projects to enhance flood protection along the riverfront have also included public amenities like McGrath Amphitheatre and the Tree of Five Seasons Park. There are several additional projects in the pipeline that similarly leverage stormwater management improvements into new public spaces along the Cedar River. While riverfront design has come a long way, there are abundant opportunities for the existing built environment to better embrace the river through features such as creating a presence and frontage on both sides of buildings instead of just on 1st Street, or offering outdoor dining experiences, either as patios or on rooftops overlooking the Cedar River. There are also several great candidates for infill development on surface parking lots located between 1st Street SE and the Cedar River and at 1st Street SW and 1st Avenue, which offer optimal opportunities to showcase how the Cedar River can be embraced in the built environment by new development.

Another stakeholder priority that emerged during roundtable meetings is better utilization of Mays

Island. Mays Island is a truly unique and special asset, but is not being used to its fullest potential. Currently, the island is anchored by the Linn County District Court and Correction Center and adjacent parking on the southern portion of the island, and the Veterans Memorial Building on the northern portion of the island, with a green space in between called Plaza Park. The Linn County facilities on the southern portion of the island are unlikely to move during the life cycle of this plan, and as such, recommendations in this Vision & Action Plan focus on ways to better utilize Plaza Park, the Veterans Memorial Building, and the 2nd Avenue Bridge. This overarching goal and the subsequent strategies, catalytic project, and actions found in the next chapter offer extensive recommendations around how to better embrace the Cedar River and utilize Mays Island over the next five years.

Survey participants selected “Embrace the Cedar River” as their top physical improvement priority for the next 5 years.

STRATEGIES

To achieve this goal, the following strategies are recommended:

1. ***Incorporate the Cedar River in the built environment.***
2. ***Convert the 2nd Avenue Bridge to a flexible festival street in the short-term and a linear park in the long-term.***
3. ***Activate Mays Island.***
4. ***Continue to enhance public spaces adjacent to the Cedar River and support implementation of the Cedar River Flood Control System (FCS).***

CATALYTIC PROJECT – RIVER ACTIVATION OPPORTUNITY SITES

Encouraging new and infill development around the Cedar River will help activate the public spaces and catalytic capital improvements proposed in this plan. The yellow shapes on the following diagram indicate some of these development opportunities in Kingston Village (north of Kingston Yard development and south of McGrath Amphitheatre) and along 1st Street East (between 3rd and 8th Avenues.)

New development should consider:

- Preserving and celebrating views of the river within the development.
- Providing activation spaces that front onto the river, such as balconies, outdoor café seating, and semi-public spaces that blend into the riverfront park system.
- Building forms that are compatible with their surroundings.
- Development along 1st Street East should contribute to a unique skyline as viewed from I-380 and seek to activate both sides of the development – fronting both onto the river AND 1st Street East.
- Contributing uses that activate downtown such as residential, active ground floors, and office space.
- Contributing to proposed public realm improvements such as the 1st Street elevated streetscape.

River Activation Opportunity Sites Precedent: Milwaukee, WI



The Milwaukee RiverWalk project was initiated in 1988. Initial preparation steps included removing a dam at the beginning of the RiverWalk, building an underground sewage holding facility, and pollution clean-up. The RiverWalk has been constructed in phases and is currently more than 12,500 feet long and is activated with river-facing residential development, retail and dining, public art, and recreational activities like kayaking. RiverWalk construction is funded through a public-private partnership in which private property owners pay 22 percent of the cost of construction and the City of Milwaukee pays the remaining 78 percent. The City funds its portion of the RiverWalk through a dedicated development capital fund and nine tax increment financing districts. The City also partners with business improvement districts for regular trail maintenance. The total RiverWalk investment as of 2018 was between \$50 and 60 million, and the RiverWalk is estimated to have increased adjacent property values by around \$1 billion.

Image and information from city.milwaukee.gov



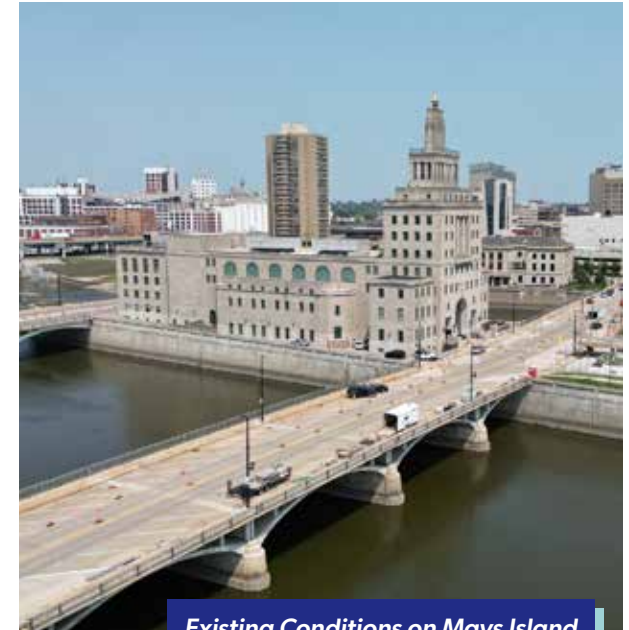
CATALYTIC PROJECT – MAYS ISLAND ACTIVATION

2nd Avenue Bridge

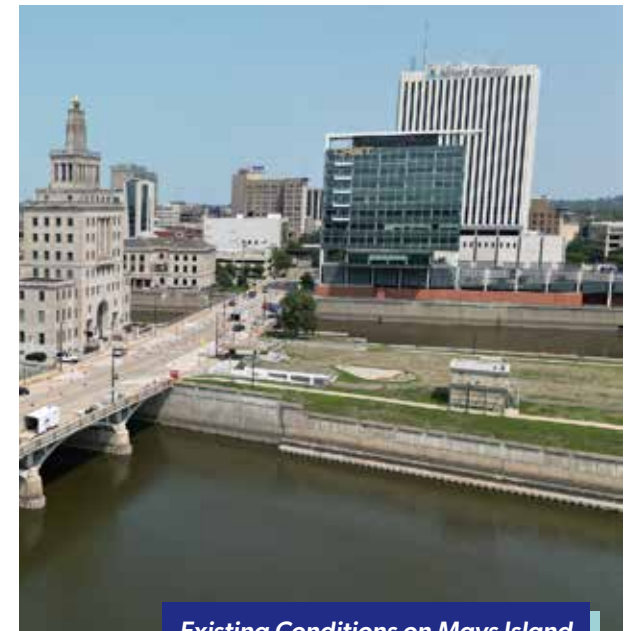
2nd Avenue and the 2nd Avenue Bridge across Mays Island present a unique opportunity to connect Downtown to Kingston Village and provide enhanced and activated public space for both districts. The 2nd Avenue Bridge is determined to have the greatest potential to be utilized as a pedestrian and bicycle connection, with vehicular traffic focused primarily on 1st and 3rd Avenue Bridges. As the Kingston Yard development takes shape, 2nd Avenue is the logical pedestrian and bike connector to access these new Downtown amenities. It should be noted that a pedestrian bridge was recommended in the prior Downtown Vision Plan around 4th Avenue crossing Mays Island to McGrath Amphitheatre (on the southern end of Mays Island behind the correctional facility). While this idea can remain a possibility for the future, it is not anticipated during the lifetime of this plan since the correctional center is still an active use and there is currently a lack of financial resources to construct a new bridge. Instead, this plan focuses on improvements to the 2nd Avenue Bridge while also acknowledging that pedestrian and bike improvements to the 3rd Avenue Bridge could also help improve connectivity between Downtown and the McGrath Amphitheatre.

The 2nd Avenue Bridge recommendations include:

- In the short-term, testing out closure of the Bridge to vehicles during regular days/times in certain seasons, or just for special events.
- During the closures, assessing the traffic and parking impacts to the 1st Avenue and 3rd Avenue Bridges to make sure there are no significant negative impacts to Downtown circulation and parking.
- In the long-term, designing the Bridge as a “flexible” space that allows vehicular travel lanes and parking but can also easily be shut down to cars and configured as a linear pedestrian plaza/park. This could include, but is not limited to: special paving, additional pedestrian-scaled lighting, trees and landscaping in planters, benches/seating areas, power distribution and locations for tents to set up during festivals.
- Funding a design plan for long-term improvements to the 2nd Avenue Bridge and Plaza Park so they are seamlessly integrated, as suggested in the following graphics.
- Exploring the feasibility of extending the 2nd Avenue flex street concept beyond the Bridge to 3rd Street.



Existing Conditions on Mays Island



Existing Conditions on Mays Island

PLAZA PARK AND VETERAN'S MEMORIAL BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Along with the physical improvements to 2nd Avenue and the Bridge, there are other opportunities to activate Mays Island to create a unique destination in Downtown. Mays Island is currently underutilized even though it is a visible and unique asset to Cedar Rapids. The City should focus on energizing the western portion of the island by redesigning Plaza Park and looking for opportunities to adaptively reuse the Veteran's Memorial Building.

Plaza Park and Veteran's Memorial Building recommendations include:

- Conducting an assessment of the structural integrity, utilization, and life span of the underground parking facility.
- In the short-term, after a structural assessment is completed, considering low-impact/low-cost improvements that can help activate the park without compromising the structural integrity of the parking facility, such as:
 - Improvements to the park edges that face onto the river that are not above the parking structure, such as: additional landscaping and trees, shade structures, picnic areas, boardwalks, and fishing and viewing areas.
 - Test out activation of the lawn area with uses such as: a dog park or pop-up events like a food truck festival where food trucks park on 2nd Avenue and people are invited to picnic in the park.
- In the long-term, if it is deemed that the underground parking facility is not needed, designing the park to become a central feature of Downtown with the ability to host festivals

and other events, install landscaping, add a significant public art feature/"selfie spot", and other park amenities that may be lacking in other locations Downtown. This park should feed into the larger flood recovery riverfront park projects and serve as a central feature for the riverfront park network.

- As stated in the previous section, funding a design plan for long-term improvements to the 2nd Avenue Bridge and Plaza Park so they are seamlessly integrated, as suggested in the following graphics.
- Identify and actively recruiting uses that could activate the Veteran's Memorial Building such as: a boutique hotel, coworking spaces, community arts center, a performance venue, food hall or indoor market, residences, non-profit space, offices, or other uses.

3rd Avenue Bridge

While 3rd Avenue has had recent investments in bicycle infrastructure, the 3rd Avenue Bridge could also benefit from additional improvements to complete the Mays Island transformation and to improve the pedestrian experience. These improvements could better connect people from Downtown parking ramps to the McGrath Amphitheatre during concerts and large events and to bring people into Plaza Park from 3rd Avenue.

3rd Avenue Bridge recommendations include:

- Implementing a raised crosswalk from the Linn County Correctional Center to Plaza Park.

- Formalizing the protected bike lanes with permanent curbs and landscaping (replace the planters.) Assess the structure of the Bridge and type(s) of trees/landscaping that could be added these medians.
- Add pedestrian-scaled lighting and signage directing bicyclists and pedestrians to downtown destinations.



Existing Conditions on the 3rd Avenue Bridge

MAYS ISLAND ACTIVATION OPPORTUNITIES



EXISTING/PLANNED PROJECTS

- ❶ Whitewater Course
- ❷ Tree of Five Seasons Park
- ❸ Kingston Village Redevelopment
- ❹ Flood Recovery Riverfront Trails

2023 PLAN: PROPOSED PROJECTS

- ❶ Veteran's Memorial Building Reuse/Activation
- ❷ Plaza/Gateway to Plaza Park
- ❸ 2nd Avenue Festival Bridge and Linear Park
- ❹ Flower/Pollinator Garden
- ❺ Flexible Lawn Area
- ❻ Picnic/"Beach" Area
- ❼ Boardwalk/Fishing Area
- ❽ Iconic Public Art/Gateway
- ❾ 3rd Avenue Bridge Upgrade

Bridge to Flexible Street/Linear Park Precedent: Spokane, WA



The Howard Street Bridges have connected northern Spokane across the Spokane River to Downtown since 1881. Over time they carried street cars, pedestrians, and automobiles. The three Howard Street Bridges never reopened for vehicular traffic after the creation of Riverfront Park for the Expo '74 World's Fair. In

2014, the city passed a \$64 million Riverfront Park bond that included a reimagining of the Howard Street Bridges into a series of promenades and plazas to connect people physically and visually in the heart of Spokane. Intended to host vendors and events, the project was completed after the Howard Street South Channel Bridge and Promenade opened in 2018.

The Utilities Department funded the Howard Street South Channel Bridge replacement cost of \$6.6 million through remaining, previously issued corridor bonds. The Howard Street Promenade cost \$8.7 million and came out of the \$64 million Riverfront Park bond.

Image and information from <https://www.bergerpartnership.com/activity/howard-street-promenade-opens-at-riverfront-park/>

Bridge to Flexible Street/Linear Park Precedent: Cincinnati, OH



Originally called the Newport & Cincinnati Bridge, the Purple People Bridge has connected Cincinnati, Ohio and Newport, Kentucky cities since its construction as a rail bridge over the Ohio River in 1872. After a streetcar that went over the bridge closed in 1940, the center track was turned into a pedestrian walkway. In 2001, the bridge permanently closed to vehicles due to structural deterioration and in 2002, the Kentucky legislature allocated \$4 million to fund the bridge's restoration. A partnership between the City of Newport and the Southbank Partners led the bridge's restoration, which included painting it purple and renaming it the Purple People Bridge. A new non-profit, the Purple People Bridge Company, was then created to maintain the bridge which now hosts regular events and concerts, and is available for private rentals. In 2022, the non-profit launched a go-fund me campaign and received a grant of \$175,000 grant from the Kentucky Department for Local Government's Recreational Trails Program to repair and repaint the bridge. The main source of funding for day-to-day maintenance is event and sign rentals on the bridge.

Image and information from <https://cincinnati.com>

GOAL 2: ENSURE DOWNTOWN IS ACTIVATED AND VIBRANT

WHY IT MATTERS

While Downtown Cedar Rapids has destination appeal and large-scale, signature events that periodically draw people in from elsewhere in the City and region for a few hours or a day, Downtown does not feel lively or vibrant on a consistent basis. There are several contributing factors, such as limited retail options, an absence of regular programming and activation, increasing competition from adjacent districts like Kingston Village, New Bohemia, and Czech Village, and a perception that Downtown is unsafe. These factors were exacerbated by the pandemic as the loss in consistent employee foot traffic accelerated these challenges, and has been coupled with a rise in the unhoused population in Downtown.

Given the breadth of these challenges, now is an opportune time to keenly focus storefront activation efforts along key corridors in the core of Downtown to create a more pronounced restaurant and retail destination, beginning with 3rd Street between 1st Avenue and 4th Avenue. 3rd Street is the historic main street spine running through Downtown, connecting several key assets such as the Convention Complex, Alliant Energy Power House, and Theatre Cedar Rapids through the heart of Downtown into New Bohemia. The groundwork for this recommendation was also laid out in the 2017 Vision Plan, which recommended

focusing on 3rd Street as a “signature street” in Downtown. Once success with this concept is demonstrated along 3rd Street and adjacent streets, there will be ample opportunity to spread storefront activation efforts elsewhere in Downtown. In order to differentiate 3rd Street and create a more distinct sense of place, public realm enhancements are recommended for 3rd Street between 1st Avenue and 4th Avenue. The overarching goal of increasing vibrancy in Downtown in a focused way, and the subsequent strategies, catalytic project, and actions found in the next chapter outline recommendations on how to spark more activation and vitality in Downtown Cedar Rapids over the next five years, focusing on 3rd Street as the catalyst.

Survey participants selected “Continue diversifying restaurant and bar offerings” as their top service or program priority for the next 5 years.

STRATEGIES

To achieve this goal, the following strategies are recommended:

1. ***Enliven the storefront economy and diversify ground floor offerings.***
2. ***Ensure Downtown is clean, safe, and welcoming.***
3. ***Attract and retain primary jobs in Downtown.***
4. ***Add public art and other physical place enhancements.***
5. ***Provide regular programming in Downtown public spaces.***
6. ***Explore opportunities for infill development, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of existing spaces.***

CATALYTIC PROJECT – 3RD STREET FESTIVAL STREET

3rd Street should continue to be a focus for connecting Downtown to NewBo and Czech Village. An opportunity presented in this plan is to help activate and bring economic development to 3rd Street by investing in the street design and moving the primary Cedar Valley Nature Trail connection from the railroad tracks to 3rd Street (from 2nd to 7th Avenues). Bike lanes were recently added to 3rd Street, which have created a multi-modal environment, yet there is still unused space in the middle of the street. This plan recommends taking the multimodal design a step further and creating a “festival” street from 1st to 4th Avenues. These three blocks could be redesigned to elevate the experience and encourage new, active uses. 3rd Street from 2nd to 4th Avenues is part of the existing farmer’s market route which already functions as a flexible street by redirecting vehicle traffic during the summer farmer’s market weekends. Additionally, the street terminates at the Alliant Energy Power House and Convention Center, which provides a significant concentration of pedestrian activity during events. Other streets were examined as potential candidates for a festival street as well, including 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue. 2nd Avenue is still considered a catalyst street to connect Downtown to Kingston Village (see page 68). 2nd Street has a concentration of restaurants and could still be considered for streetscape improvements, but was not selected as a festival street due to the need for that street to connect to the I-380 on-ramp. 3rd Street was also a primary focus of the last Downtown Vision Plan and this plan provides recommendations to further that vision.

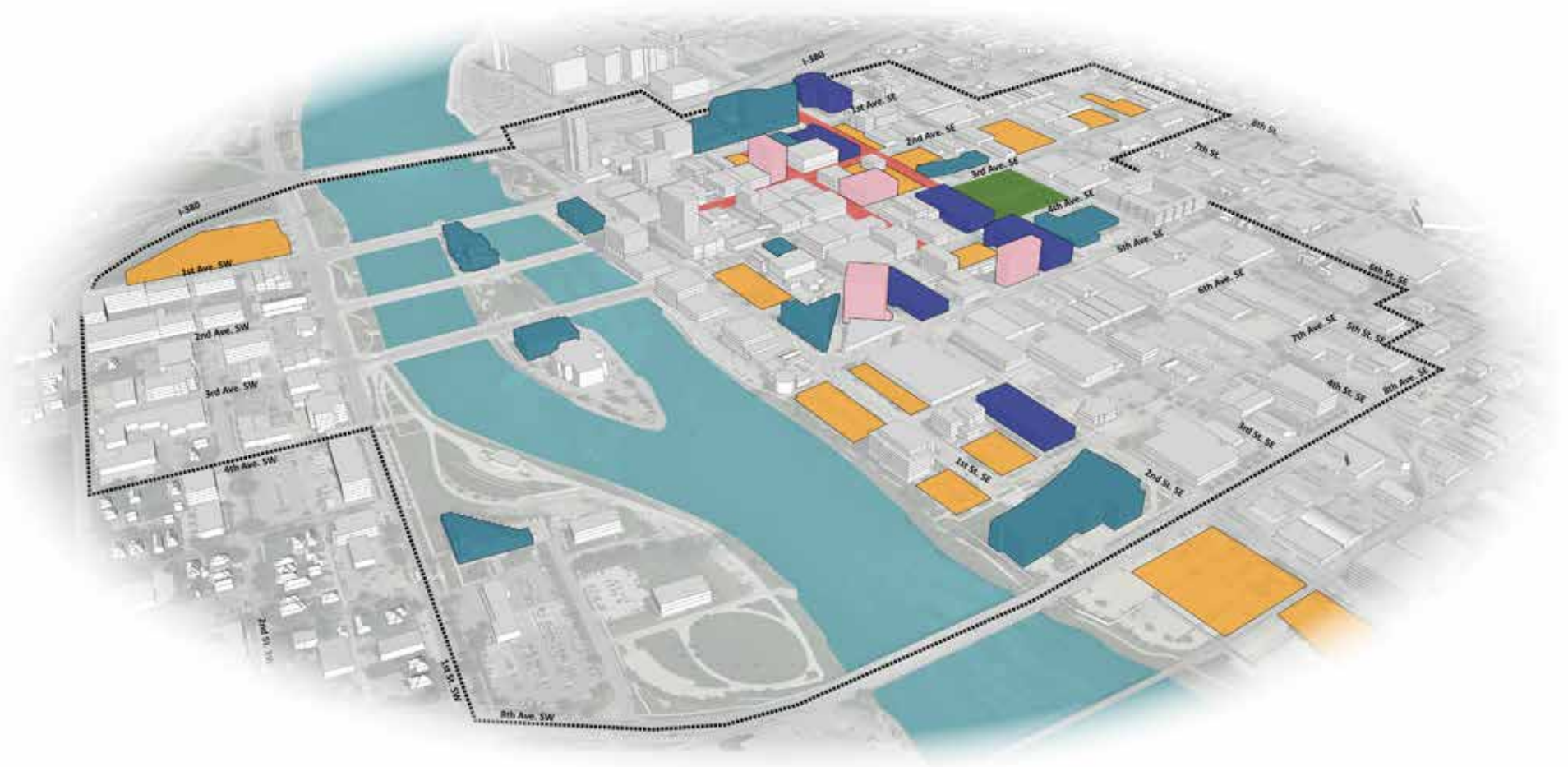
3rd Street Festival Street recommendations include:

- In the short-term, testing out closing the street to automobiles from 1st to 4th Avenues and hosting special events.
- Engaging property and business owners, as well as the general public, in the future design of the street. Two options are provided in this plan for consideration:
 - **Option #1** is a less-intensive design change that extends the north side (sunny side) of the street for pedestrians and bicyclists. It consolidates the two bike lanes into one “cycle track” which would serve as the Cedar Valley Nature Trail through Downtown with a related design theme to celebrate it as a unique urban part of the trail system. The west side of the street is also able to gain space to create wider sidewalks and outdoor dining opportunities. Travel lanes and parallel parking are also provided and would function as the street does today when cars are allowed. During festival configurations, pedestrians and market space would take over the center of the street allowing for expanded dining opportunities along the sidewalks. In this option, the existing street trees would be able to remain in their same locations to save existing healthy trees.
 - **Option #2** is a curbless street design that expands the sidewalk space adjacent to the buildings on both sides of the street substantially and then consolidates vehicular and auto traffic in the center of the street. In order to combine vehicular and bicycle traffic, the street would be designed in a way that travel speeds would be reduced to 15 miles per hour and special paving and signage would make clear that it is a shared space. Parallel parking is still provided as well. During festivals, the entire street would function as a plaza space with a level surface from building face to building face. In this option, street trees would need to be replanted.
- Other options may be explored during design development.
- The redesign and construction of the festival street should, to the extent possible, minimize construction impacts and the disruption of existing businesses. Other necessary improvements, such as utility upgrades, should be consolidated and constructed during the same window of time.



Existing Conditions on 3rd Street

3rd Street Festival Street Activation Opportunities



SSMID Boundary

Public / Entertainment Destinations

Public Parking Ramps

Opportunity Sites

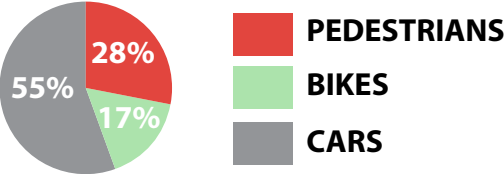
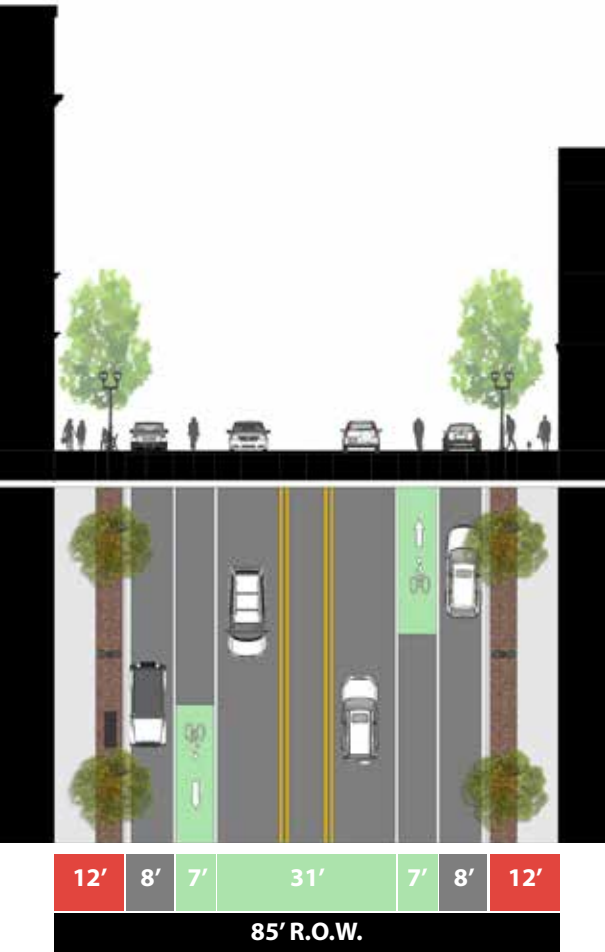
Reuse or Reinvestment Opportunities

Greene Square Activation

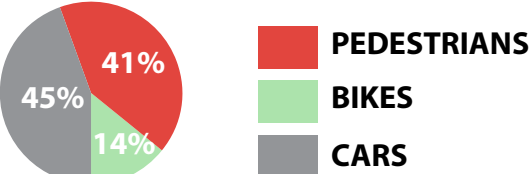
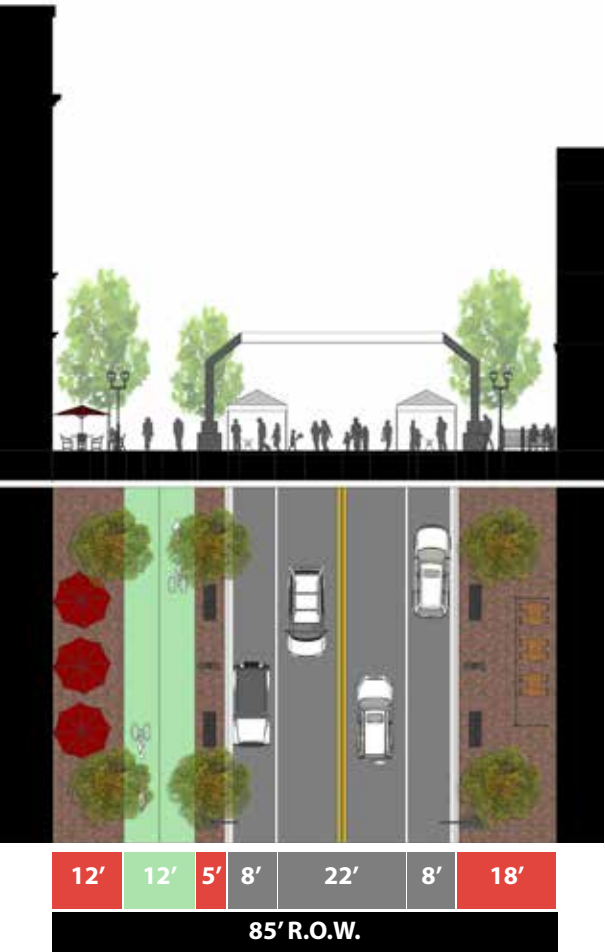
Catalytic Downtown Activation Projects

3rd Street Festival Street Options

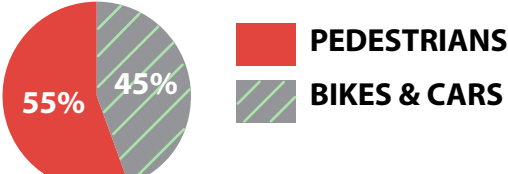
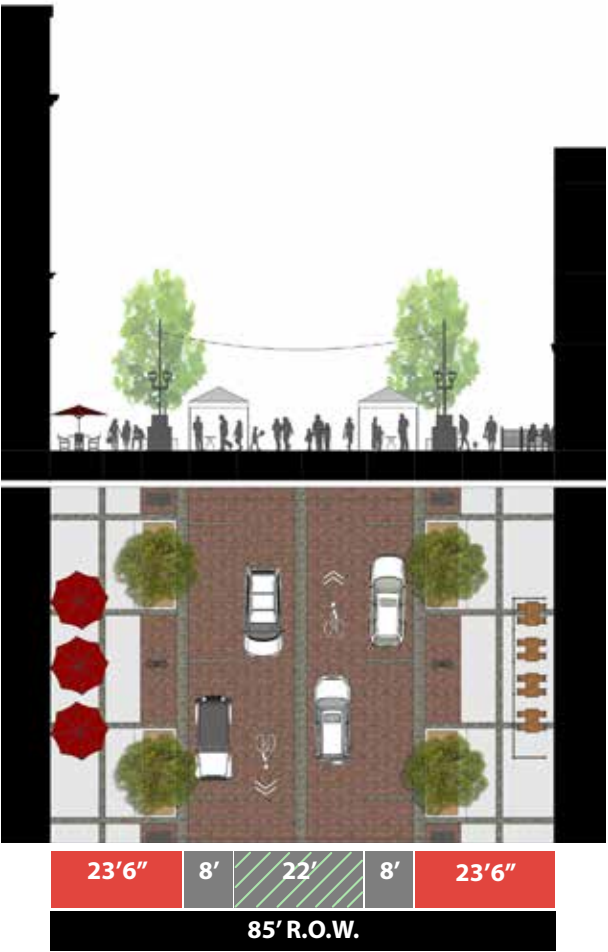
Existing Conditions



Option 1: Cycle Track



Option 2: Curbless Shared Street



Street Activation Precedent: Indianapolis, IN



After Indianapolis established six Downtown cultural districts in 1999, the Central Indiana Community Foundation developed a vision for an urban trail for pedestrians and bicyclists that would connect the districts. As a result, construction of the eight-mile Indianapolis Cultural Trail began in 2007, and the trail opened in 2013. The Cultural Trail showcases art tailored to each of the districts and oscillates between being a two-way cycle track next to a pedestrian path and a shared use path. The Trail has increased property values in adjoining areas by at least \$1 billion. It is managed by a non-profit entity, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. The Trail cost a total of \$63 million, with much of the funding coming from a \$15 million philanthropic donation and a \$20.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation through its Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant.

Information from <https://indyculturaltrail.org>

Image from https://assets-global.website-files.com/581110f944272e4a11871c01/5e597186aed0338a6c08d137_7V1A0311.jpg

Street Activation Precedent: Ann Arbor, MI



In August 2023, the Downtown Development Authority and the City of Ann Arbor completed a redesign of State Street in Downtown Ann Arbor. After several years of planning and two years of construction, the curbless design centers the pedestrian experience and improves safety for bicyclists. The new design also creates a more connected and accessible streetscape, with flexibility for businesses to expand outdoor dining into parking spaces and the ability to close the street to vehicles for events. Key streetscape amenities include raised intersections, audible pedestrian signals, pedestrian-timed street crossing signals, a widened sidewalk, a separated bike lane, and a removed lane of traffic. The curbless street cost almost \$10 million and was financed through a cost share agreement between the City and the Downtown Development Authority's tax increment financing. The University of Michigan also contributed just over half a million dollars.

Image and information from <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor>

GOAL 3: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN DOWNTOWN AND TO ADJACENT DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.

WHY IT MATTERS

Cedar Rapids already has strong momentum around multimodal connectivity and, by extension, economic connectivity, as evidenced by the ConnectCR initiative currently underway. The conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets throughout Downtown, and ongoing investments in bicycle infrastructure both within Downtown and throughout the region.

Moving forward, there is an opportunity to continue this shift to balanced, multi-modal connectivity both within Downtown and to adjacent districts and neighborhoods. Kingston Village, the MedQ District, New Bohemia, and Czech Village have all experienced revitalization in recent years through both public and private investment. These districts arguably now have greater vibrancy than Downtown, and rather than competing with these districts, there should be a focus on creating greater synergy between Downtown and the other districts that comprise Cedar Rapids' urban core. Infill development along key connecting corridors like 3rd Street, 1st Avenue, and 8th Avenue will aid in creating a seamless experience between these districts. Additionally, investments in the public realm along key corridors and collaborative efforts around programming and marketing can help bolster all the urban core districts simultaneously and create one cohesive urban experience. This overarching

goal and the subsequent strategies, catalytic project, and actions found in the next chapter of this plan provide recommendations around how to improve connectivity both within Downtown and to adjacent districts and neighborhoods over the next five years.

STRATEGIES

To achieve this goal, the following strategies are recommended:

1. ***Ensure Downtown is accessible and easy to navigate by multiple modes of transportation including transit and/or a trolley or circulator, walking/rolling, biking, and driving.***
2. ***Improve physical and economic connections to and synergy with adjacent districts.***
3. ***Enhance the parking experience in Downtown.***
4. ***Build on regional trail network and outdoor recreation scene.***
5. ***Improve wayfinding signage and gateways leading into and out of Downtown***

ABOUT CONNECTCR:

ConnectCR is a \$20 million community betterment effort to revitalize Cedar Lake (northeast of Downtown) and also build a pedestrian/trail bridge that connects the New Bohemia and Czech Village neighborhoods. The lake and bridge locations are connected by a trail that runs through the heart of Downtown Cedar Rapids. Local investors expect the project will spark development near both locations and along the trail connecting the lake and bridge.

The Alliant Energy LightLine will connect the New Bohemia and Czech Village district and on a larger scale it will connect the east side and west side of Cedar Rapids. This pedestrian/trail bridge will span the Cedar River at the site of an old railroad bridge that was wiped out in the historic flood of 2008.

Cedar Lake is an urban lake located north of Downtown and nestled in between Interstate 380 and the Cedar River. This lake is a nature oasis in the heart of the city and is home to many types of wildlife, including deer, fox, mink, pelicans, turtles, and many others.

CATALYTIC PROJECTS– RAIL TO RIVER CONNECTION

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail is a regional amenity that passes through Downtown. With planned and funded major improvements happening to the south with the Alliant LightLine pedestrian bridge and with Cedar Lake investments to the north, this trail presents a major economic development and recreational opportunity for Downtown to capitalize on. The “rail to river” connection is a vision to provide two unique pedestrian/ bike bridges along the trail – one across the railroad tracks between Quaker Oats and Cargill (a significant safety barrier) and one over the Cedar River (planned Alliant LightLine bridge.) The barrier between Quaker Oats and Cargill is a major impediment to creating a safe Downtown trail system for users of all ages and abilities. This area currently deters some users from the trail because there is no wayfinding or placemaking to make the trail system user-friendly and intuitive. With major investments planned for Cedar Lake, now is the time to invest in creating a safer trail connection through this industrial corner of Downtown Cedar Rapids.

Rail to River Connection recommendations include:

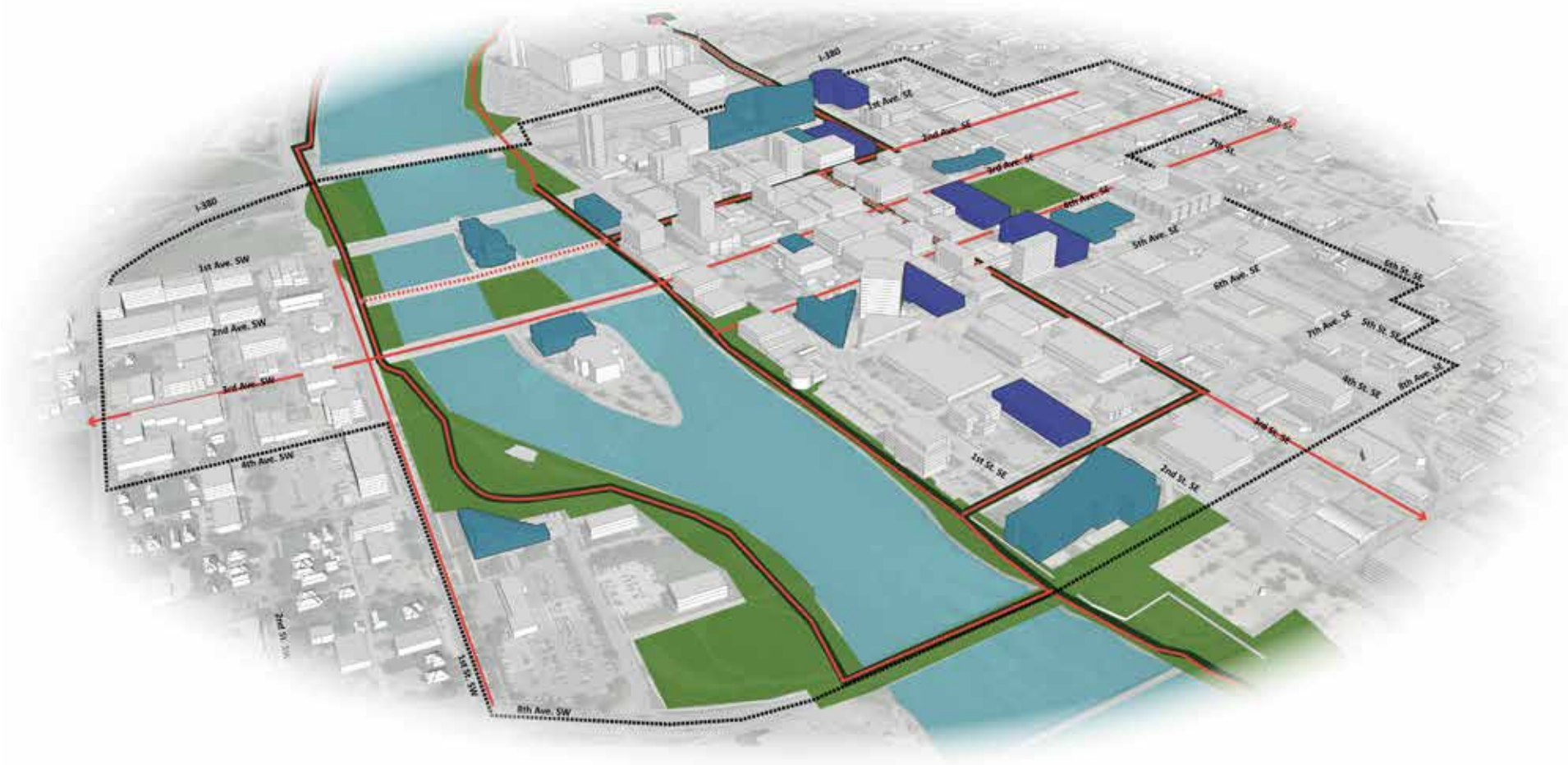
- Studying the potential to shift the trail from the railroad tracks to 3rd Street (between 2nd and 7th Avenues.)
 - The improvements made along the railroad tracks could remain, but the economic impact for the primary trail through Downtown would be stronger along 3rd Street where businesses could benefit from increased bicycle traffic. There could be perceived safety

advantages as well – by riding along a street in a protected facility where there is more activity than along the railroad tracks.

- Studying the potential to create a 1-mile “Downtown loop” to connect the Downtown trail to the river trail on 2nd Avenue, 7th Avenue, 3rd Street, and the river trail (refer to diagram.) This 1-mile trail could be branded and used by employees and residents for exercise and outdoor enjoyment, as well as help stimulate activation of storefronts.
- Enhancing the experience for cyclists and pedestrians going over the railroad tracks north of Downtown toward Cedar Lake.
 - In the short term, invest in enhancements like clear trail markings on the street over the railroad tracks, public art, landscaping, lighting, wayfinding and safety signage, and decorative fencing along the industrial use edges.
 - In the long term, an iconic pedestrian/bike bridge over the railroad tracks between Quaker Oats and Cargill is desired to enhance usability and safety of the trail system. An iconic bridge could incorporate storytelling about the manufacturing giants of Cedar Rapids. The City should initiate conversations with the industrial businesses and the Union Pacific Railroad immediately to determine feasibility. If determined as feasible, the bridge could be a “legacy” project for Quaker Oats and Cargill.



Existing Conditions on the Cedar Valley Nature Trail



SSMID Boundary

Existing Bike Lanes/Trails

Public Space

Public / Entertainment Destinations

Catalytic Connectivity Projects

Cedar Valley Nature Trail

Public Parking Ramps

Pedestrian/Bike Bridge Precedent: Milwaukee, WI



The Menomonee Valley Passage, completed in 2010, was made possible by a partnership between the Menomonee Valley Partners, the State of Wisconsin, the City of Milwaukee, and local business owners. The project included two components, a bridge over the Menomonee River and an underpass below the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks. Upon completion, these investments connected residents on the south side of the River to industrial jobs on the north side. The bridge and underpass also added a connection to the Hank Aaron State Trail that connects to Downtown Milwaukee. The project was part of a larger effort to revitalize and clean up the Menomonee River Valley, which has been lauded for its success and focus on developing a shared vision with stakeholders and community members. The bridge and underpass cost \$3.8 million and were funded through federal and state grants.

Information and top image from <https://urbanmilwaukee.com>

Bottom image from https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5b1738a7f8370aa49cd05cf8/1534546695982-F0GO1BE59X5GH2AFKG9I/PSX_20180810_144622.jpg

Pedestrian/Bike Bridge Precedent: Cleveland, OH



Part of a larger lakefront trail network, Cleveland's 500-foot-long Wendy Park Bridge connects pedestrians and bicyclists over the Old River and railroad tracks to Lake Erie waterfront. Residents of the adjacent neighborhood, which includes a large public housing complex, previously had to navigate over three miles of streets to get to the same location. The bridge was made possible by a partnership between Cleveland Metroparks, and the Trust for Public Land. Planning for the bridge was initiated years ago, but Cleveland Metro Parks acquiring Wendy Park in 2014 made the project possible, with construction beginning in 2019 and completion in 2021. The Bridge cost \$5.6 million and was funded by \$3 million from the Wendy Park Foundation, \$1 million from the State of Ohio, and \$1.8 million from a Federal Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant.

Image and information from <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor>



IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

The extensive community outreach conducted throughout this process, the market assessment, and the physical framework all serve as building blocks for the implementation section of the plan that will guide investment and decision-making in Downtown Cedar Rapids for the next five years. To align with EnvisionCR, this implementation framework embodies one or more of the plan's guiding principles, follows a similar format, and identifies initiatives for implementation organized by the three Vision & Action Plan goal areas and associated strategies. This implementation framework includes:

Goals, Strategies, and Initiatives

Downtown Vision & Action Plan initiatives are organized by each of the three goals identified in this plan, and the subsequent strategies that correlate to each goal. Initiatives fall into three categories:

- **Policies:** actions that require administrative or regulatory actions and support implementation of the Vision & Action Plan.
- **Actions:** actions that require specific efforts by the Downtown District, City of Cedar Rapids, or other civic partners.
- **Capital:** physical projects or improvements that require City, County, or philanthropic funding.

Schedule

An advisory timeline is provided for each of the initiatives identified in this plan. The schedule illustrates when the initiative should begin and falls into three categories: within one year, two to three years, and four to five years. Initiatives earmarked for the first year are considered high priorities and can serve as catalysts for subsequent policies, actions, and capital improvements.

Lead and Support Roles

A lead entity is identified for each of the initiatives provided below, most of which will be piloted by either the SSMID, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, or the City of Cedar Rapids. Many initiatives will require participation by supporting entities, including public, private, and non-profit partners in the Cedar Rapids region that can aid in implementing this plan.

Upon plan adoption, it is recommended that a Downtown Plan Implementation Committee be formed to provide oversight and track implementation of the Downtown Vision & Action Plan. The Downtown Plan Implementation Committee should be comprised of representatives from the various City of Cedar Rapids departments, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, the SSMID board of directors, Linn County, and other key civic partners. It is recommended this group meet quarterly to check-in on plan implementation progress.



Working Group Meeting



Downtown Mural

INITIATIVES

GOAL 1: EMBRACE THE CEDAR RIVER.

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|---|---------------|--|
| 1. Incorporate the Cedar River into the built environment. | 1.1.2 | Encourage new development along 1st Street East to embrace the river by providing active ground floor uses facing the river, outdoor patios or gathering areas, rooftop dining, and balconies. Consider creating design standards and/or guidelines to ensure this vision is met. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 1.1.2 | Provide incentives to property owners of existing buildings adjacent the Cedar River to better embrace the River by creating outdoor dining areas, enhancing entrances facing the River, and improving facades. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 1.1.3 | As infill development occurs on the block between the Cedar River and 1st Street East, maintain an enhance the streetscape along 1st Street East to make it more pedestrian-friendly. | 4-5 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) |
| 2. Convert the 2nd Avenue Bridge to a flexible festival street in the short-term and a linear park in the long-term. | 1.2.1 | Programming of 2nd Avenue Bridge as flexible/festival street, including design concepts, project scoping, and budget strategies. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development), Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 1.2.2 | Conduct detailed feasibility study on converting the 2nd Avenue Bridge into a linear park or flexible/festival street, including designs of 2nd Avenue Bridge as a “flexible” space that allows vehicular travel lanes and parking, but can also easily be shut down to cars and configured as a linear pedestrian plaza/park. This could include, but is not limited to: special paving, additional pedestrian-scaled lighting, trees and landscaping in planters, benches/seating areas, power distribution and locations for tents to set up during festivals. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation, Community Development), Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--------------------------|-------|---|---------------|--|
| 3. Activate Mays Island. | 1.3.1 | Programming of Mays Island, parking facility and Plaza Park, including design concepts, project scoping, and budget strategies. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 1.3.2 | Conduct an assessment to determine the economic and structural viability of the underground ramp and the ability of Plaza Park to be redesigned and activated. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Facilities) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Building Services) |
| | 1.3.3 | Design a study to develop conceptual designs for Plaza Park and 2nd Avenue Bridge, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to park edges that face onto the river that are not above the parking structure, such as: additional landscaping and trees, shade structures, picnic areas, boardwalks, fishing and viewing areas. Testing out activation of the lawn area with uses such as: pop- up events like a food truck festival where food trucks park on 2nd Avenue and people are invited to picnic in the park. Options for future improvements to make Plaza Park a central feature of Downtown with the ability to host events, plant install landscaping, add a significant public art feature/"selfie spot." Ensure design seamlessly integrates with the redesigned 2nd Avenue Bridge. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation, Community Development, Public Works), Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 1.3.4 | Work with the Veterans Memorial Commission to identify active, community-serving use for the Veterans Memorial Building, such as an arts center, children's museum, food hall and retail incubator, performance venue, event space, or similar. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 1.3.5 | Construct a plaza and gateway to Plaza Park in front of the Veterans Memorial Building. | 4-5 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Public Works) |
| | 1.3.6 | Continue exploring the feasibility of moving the County Jail from Mays Island. | 4-5 Years | Lead: Linn County |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|--|---------------|---|
| | 1.3.7 | Implement pedestrian-oriented 3rd Avenue Bridge improvements including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalizing the protected bike lanes with permanent curbs and landscaping (replacing the planters.) Assess the structure of the Bridge and type(s) of trees/landscaping that could be added these medians. Maintaining existing and pedestrian-scaled lighting and continue adding signage directing bicyclists and pedestrians to Downtown destinations. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation, Community Development), Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID |
| 4. Continue to enhance public spaces adjacent to the Cedar River and support implementation of the Cedar River Flood Control System (FCS). | 1.4.1 | Support phased, long-term implementation of (FCS) Master Plan public realm amenities and flood protection measures proposed for Downtown – the White-Water Course, 4th Avenue Plaza & Promenade, and Festival Grounds | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Parks & Recreation, Utilities) |
| | 1.4.2 | Conduct a study on the feasibility of reconfiguring or removing the 5:1 Dam to allow for recreation on the Cedar River. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Parks & Recreation, Utilities) |

GOAL 2: ENSURE DOWNTOWN IS ACTIVATED AND VIBRANT.

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|---|-------|--|---------------|--|
| 1. Enliven the storefront economy and diversify ground floor offerings. | 2.1.1 | Focus business recruitment and retention efforts in the core of Downtown, honing in on 3rd Street between 1st Avenue and 4th Avenue, and 2nd and 3rd Avenues between 2nd Street and 4th Street, before spreading energy elsewhere in Downtown. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.1.2 | Explore creating a staff position dedicated to managing the storefront economy in Downtown. This staff member can provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs and current and prospective business owners, such as business planning, location assistance, marketing, pathways to property ownership, and assistance in navigating permitting processes. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.1.3 | Be intentional to promote Downtown as the region's hub for locally-owned (and/or managed) and community-serving small businesses, exploring incentives like a gentle density bonus in return for the community benefit of providing small, divisible, and affordable retail spaces. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Cedar Rapids Tourism, City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.1.4 | Encourage (and recruit as needed) businesses to the Downtown core that diversify the storefront mix and fill important gaps, such as boutique retail, community-serving and convenience retail like pharmacy or grocery, and culturally diverse restaurant concepts. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Intercultural Center of Iowa, NewBo Market nonprofit business incubator, Entrepreneurial Development Center (EDC) |
| | 2.1.5 | Work with property owners to offer vacant storefronts in the short-term, at low/no costs to local artists or makers as studio and gallery space. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.1.6 | Build on the theater and live music niche that already exists in Downtown, identifying opportunities for small- to mid-scale venues. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Cedar Rapids Tourism, City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Parks & Recreation) |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|---|-------|--|---------------|---|
| 2. Ensure Downtown is clean, safe, and welcoming. | 2.2.1 | Continue to provide enhanced maintenance standards and beautification efforts in the Downtown public realm. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation, Public Works) |
| | 2.2.2 | Move forward with the joint City/Linn County community approach to effectively ending homelessness with establishment of a Local Oversight Board and staff person to monitor performance on a community-wide basis, ensuring efficient and effective use of resources and continued collaboration with social service providers, the Police Department and other City departments, Linn County, and neighboring communities. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID, Linn County, Social Service Providers such as United Way East Central Iowa, Cedar Rapids Library, Horizons, and others |
| | 2.2.3 | Improve communication and education around available resources and services for the unhoused population to business and property owners, residents, employees, and other Downtown stakeholders. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Police, Fire), Linn County, Social Service Providers such as United Way East Central Iowa, Cedar Rapids Library, Horizons, and others |
| | 2.2.4 | Support and adopt a holistic approach to addressing real and perceived Downtown safety concerns. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Police, Fire) |
| | 2.2.5 | Continue to develop tailored promotions, marketing campaigns, maps and directories, and outreach to institutions and employers to attract nearby residents and visitors from throughout the region to Downtown. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Cedar Rapids Tourism |
| | 2.2.6 | Continue pursuing a Quiet Zone to improve the overall experience of living and working downtown. | 4-5 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Union Pacific |
| 3. Attract and retain primary jobs in Downtown. | 2.3.1 | Recruit new office uses by reconfiguring space from large to small, creating smaller leasable spaces that new ventures can afford. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|---|---------------|--|
| 3. Attract and retain primary jobs in Downtown. | 2.3.2 | Provide incentives to add amenities to buildings that are relevant to today's workforce, such as tenant lounges, social space, and rooftop gardens. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) Support: Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.3.3 | Work with employers to retain jobs and their presence and recruit new employers to locate in the Downtown. Explore a variety of financial incentives to support business retention and recruitment efforts. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.3.4 | Work with property owners to create new or reconfigure existing commercial spaces for entrepreneurial ventures and startups (such as coworking spaces, and incubators). | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development, Building Services) Support: Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID, Entrepreneurial Development Center (EDC) |
| | 2.3.5 | Maintain an inventory of all available office and ground floor commercial space throughout Downtown. Use the inventory to better market existing Downtown spaces and to identify and fill gaps in the office space environment/continuum. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| 4. Add public art and other physical place enhancements. | 2.4.1 | Programming of 3rd Street, including design concepts, project scoping, and budget strategies to develop a preferred option for streetscape enhancements, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A separated cycle track with two-way auto travel and parking on both sides of the street. A curbless festival street concept that could accommodate two-way auto travel shared with bicycles and parking on both sides of the street that could easily be closed to automobiles during special events. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.4.2 | Pilot closing 3rd Street to automobiles from 1st to 4th Avenues for special events. During the closures, assess the traffic and parking impacts to the other streets to make sure there are no significant negative impacts to Downtown circulation and parking. | 2 – 3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.4.3 | Identify funding sources and implement the preferred streetscape enhancement option on 3rd Street between 1st Avenue and 4th Avenue. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Economic Alliance/ Downtown SSMID |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|---|-------|---|---------------|---|
| 4. Add public art and other physical place enhancements. | 2.4.4 | Incorporate art wherever possible throughout Downtown, including permanent and temporary installations, actively pursuing funding sources for new public art in Downtown, such as local and state grants, foundation dollars, and corporate sponsorships. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Public Art Commission, City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.4.5 | Add a dog park in Downtown, building on the new dog park opening in New Bohemia and recommendations in the Greenway Park Plan. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.4.6 | Incorporate art wherever possible throughout Downtown, including permanent and temporary installations, actively pursuing funding sources for new public art in Downtown, such as local and state grants, foundation dollars, and corporate sponsorships. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Public Art Commission, City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.4.7 | Work with property owners to clean up and enhance Downtown alleyways by adding features like landscaping, public art, outdoor dining, and festive lighting. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) |
| | 2.4.8 | Freshen streetscapes throughout Downtown through efforts such as adding more landscaping, repairing and enhancing sidewalks and crosswalks, and incorporating festive lighting. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) |
| | 2.4.9 | Build upon and promote the existing parklet program, modeled after national best practices, that allows businesses to apply for temporary conversion of parking spaces for outdoor dining or other use to aid in business expansion and activation of Downtown streets. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works, Police Department) |
| 5. Provide regular programming in Downtown public spaces. | 2.5.1 | Programming of permanent amenities that are oriented toward kids, like play equipment and splash pads, that encourage families to enjoy Downtown public spaces with evaluation of existing amenities, project scoping, and budget strategies. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID, City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |
| | 2.5.2 | Introduce regular, small-scale events and activations that are oriented to families with kids. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: CREventsLive, Cedar Rapids Public Library, Parks & Recreation, Museum of Art, Waypoint, etc. |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|---|---------------|--|
| 5. Provide regular programming in Downtown public spaces. | 2.5.3 | Curate and promote events and programming that showcase Eastern Iowa's growing immigrant and refugee communities and have multi-cultural appeal. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: McAuley Center, United Way Forward, Intercultural Center of Iowa |
| | 2.5.4 | Regularly offer weekday evening programming to draw and keep employees in Downtown after 5 p.m. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: CREventsLive, Cedar Rapids Tourism, VenueWorks, Freedom Festival |
| | 2.5.5 | Increase the frequency and variety of live music events and festivals in Downtown public spaces, and partner with local institutions and organizations to increase diversity of offerings. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: CREventsLive, Cedar Rapids Tourism, VenueWorks, Freedom Festival |
| | 2.5.6 | Explore ways to activate Greene Square including adding a space for performances, providing regular daily or weekly programming, and creating reasons for people to gather and spend time in the park. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: CREventsLive, Cedar Rapids Public Library, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art Waypoint, etc. |
| 6. Explore opportunities for infill development, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of existing spaces. | 2.6.1 | Continue attracting infill development of a diversity of housing types to the Downtown core, including both to-own and to-rent options. | 2-3 years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development), Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.6.2 | Encourage office-to-housing building conversions where feasible by streamlining permitting and approval processes, considering financial incentives like property tax abatements or development fee reductions, exploring opportunities for public-private partnerships, and relaxing building code requirements. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Building Services) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID, Entrepreneurial Development Center (EDC) |
| | 2.6.3 | Support opportunities for adaptive reuse and infill of housing, light manufacturing, and maker businesses within the Manufacturing/Maker Hub area, including experiential and craft manufacturing, artist studios, and small-scale food processing, | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Building Services) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 2.6.4 | Attract an additional hotel(s) in the core of Downtown to address the shortage of hotel rooms and expand capacity for larger-scale conventions. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Building Services) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |

GOAL 3: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN DOWNTOWN AND TO ADJACENT DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|---|---------------|--|
| 1. Ensure Downtown is accessible and easy to navigate by multiple modes of transportation including transit and/or a trolley or circulator, walk-ing/rolling, biking, and driving. | 3.1.1 | Explore the feasibility of a free or low-cost trolley or circulator that runs throughout Downtown and connects to adjacent districts and neighborhoods. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: New Bohemia Czech Village SSMID, MedQ District, City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) |
| | 3.1.2 | Conduct a self-assessment of accessibility (ADA and Universal Access) in Downtown. Identify barriers that prevent persons with disabilities and others from access to facilities, programs, services, and activities. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) |
| | 3.1.3 | Work together to improve messaging, marketing, and promotion of transit use in Downtown, particularly for employers and employees. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.1.4 | Support continued improvement and upkeep of the Cedar Rapids bicycle and pedestrian trails network, with particular attention to those routes and corridors that connect Downtown with the rest of the city. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID (per the MOA) Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation, Public Works) |
| 2. Improve physical and economic connections to and synergy with adjacent districts. | 3.2.1 | Identify opportunities to partner with the Czech Village New Bohemia SSMID and the MedQ District on physical improvements, programming, and shared marketing and promotions. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Czech Village New Bohemia SSMID, MedQ District |
| | 3.2.2 | Improve coordination and collaboration among partner organizations and non-profits working in and around Downtown. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Czech Village New Bohemia SSMID, MedQ District |
| | 3.2.3 | Add more wayfinding signage between the core districts that comprise Cedar Rapids' urban core – Kingston Village, MedQ, New Bohemia, and Czech Village. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: Czech Village New Bohemia SSMID, MedQ District |
| | 3.2.4 | Enhance the streetscape along key corridors connecting Downtown to adjacent districts. | Within 1 Year | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|---|---------------|---|
| 3. Enhance the parking experience in Downtown. | 3.3.1 | Continue improving wayfinding signage to existing parking facilities. | 2-3 Years | Lead: ParkCR, City of Cedar Rapids (Public Works) Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.3.2 | Promote the safety escort program offered through ParkCR that provides walking or golf cart rides from a destination to a parked vehicle. Explore renaming the program to broaden awareness and appeal. | Within 1 Year | Lead: ParkCR Support: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.3.3 | Continue monitoring parking supply utilization rates as infill development occurs within Downtown to ensure there is adequate on- and off-street parking. | 4-5 Years | Lead: ParkCR Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) |
| | 3.3.4 | Explore options for updating parking technology to ensure the user experience is as straightforward as possible. | Within 1 Year | Lead: ParkCR Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Economic Development) |
| 4. Build on regional trail network and outdoor recreation scene. | 3.4.1 | Add place enhancements such as public art, painted pavement, more signage, and landscaping to improve the user experience on the Cedar Valley Nature Trail from Downtown to Cedar Lake. | 2-3 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: ConnectCR, City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) |
| | 3.4.2 | Conduct a study on the feasibility of an elevated bridge that takes the Cedar Valley Nature Trail from Downtown to Cedar Lake over the rail tracks at 4th Street and C Avenue, including outreach to adjacent property owners to gauge feasibility. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: ConnectCR, Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.4.3 | If determined to be feasible, design and identify funding sources for the elevated bridge that takes the Cedar Valley Nature Trail from Downtown to Cedar Lake over the rail tracks at 4th Street and C Avenue. | 4-5 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: ConnectCR, Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.4.4 | Sponsor and participate in bicycling events and bicycle advocacy programs with the objective of increasing awareness of Downtown as a bicycling destination. | Within 1 Year | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) |
| | 3.4.5 | Study moving the Cedar Valley Nature Trail to 3rd Street and creating a 1-mile "Downtown loop." | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Parks & Recreation) Support: ConnectCR, Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |

| STRATEGY | NO. | INITIATIVE | SCHEDULE | LEAD/SUPPORT ENTITY |
|--|-------|--|-----------|--|
| 5. Improve wayfinding signage and gateways leading into and out of Downtown. | 3.5.1 | Programming of “underways” of I-380 at key entry points to Downtown, including design concepts, project scoping, and budget strategies to add public art, enhanced lighting, and wayfinding signage to Downtown amenities. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Public Works) Support: Arts Commission, Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.5.2 | Programming of key gateway points with public art or streetscape features, including design concepts, project scoping, and budget strategies create a sense of arrival to the Downtown. | 2-3 Years | Lead: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development, Public Works) Support: Arts Commission, Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID |
| | 3.5.3 | Improve wayfinding signage in the skywalk system to improve navigability. | 4-5 Years | Lead: Economic Alliance/Downtown SSMID Support: City of Cedar Rapids (Community Development) |

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

The implementation of the Downtown Cedar Rapids Vision & Action Plan will require collaboration among the City, the SSMID, the private sector, and a variety of civic partners. Fortunately, Cedar Rapids has many of the organizational players that are needed to be successful. This plan already demonstrates partnership and commitment between the City of Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, and the Downtown-focused SSMID (self-supporting municipal improvement district). Each entity is a financial sponsor of the plan (plus the 2001 Development Corporation), and each is committed to continue to work together to realize Downtown’s potential.

As part of the planning process, the P.U.M.A. team evaluated the current organizational alignment and focus on Downtown. We evaluated pros and cons, and suggest alternatives for optimizing community resources and energy to improve Downtown. Our findings are summarized below, and a chart comparing existing conditions to options for improvement is provided on page 90.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently, Downtown improvement efforts are coordinated by three lead agencies.

The **City of Cedar Rapids** provides basic services, leads capital improvements, and guides the implementation of civic plans such as the Downtown Vision & Action Plan. The City has many departments that touch Downtown, but lacks a central department or individual that is coordinating downtown-focused services and improvements.

The **SSMID** is a Downtown-focused special district that collects assessments from property owners to finance a variety of enhanced services, marketing, and cosmetic improvements. SSMIDs are common throughout the nation and have been created in

more than 1,000 downtowns. Originally formed to contribute to streetscape improvements in Downtown, the SSMID has diversified to support enhanced services that include maintenance, beautification, marketing, events, and public art. The SSMID raises about \$765,000 annually.

The **Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance** is a nonprofit regional economic development agency that offers a range of business support, workforce development, and marketing initiatives and advocates on behalf of its members. For the past 12 years, the Economic Alliance has been the administrator of the SSMID, managing Downtown services and improvements as part of its regional economic development strategy. With SSMID funds, the Economic Alliance

employs a Downtown programs coordinator and a maintenance team. The Downtown coordinator can access a variety of skillsets and administrative support that is housed within the Economic Alliance.

Unlike most cities, Cedar Rapids does not support a stand-alone nonprofit devoted solely to Downtown. Prior to the Economic Alliance becoming the administrator of the SSMID, the nonprofit Downtown District organization managed the marketing and maintenance of the central business district. The move to the Economic Alliance was seen to provide financial stability, improve the professionalism of programming, and elevate Downtown as a regional economic development priority.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROS AND CONS

While unconventional, the current placement of the SSMID and the Downtown program within the Economic Alliance offers several pros and cons:

ADVANTAGES

- Downtown is a central focus of the Economic Alliance and a visible regional economic development priority
- The Downtown improvement program has access to the substantial talent pool and resources housed within the Economic Alliance
- The Economic Alliance offers financial stability for the core programs funded by the SSMID

DISADVANTAGES

- It is difficult to discern the Downtown team within the larger Economic Alliance staff and the Downtown improvement program lacks a distinct identity found in stand-alone models
- Downtown stakeholder oversight is limited to property owners on the SSMID board and Downtown businesses that may be on the Economic Alliance board
- Many Downtown property and business owners stated concerns with a lack of direct

accountability and a perception that the Downtown program could be diluted within the larger organization

- There are missed opportunities to leverage SSMID assessments and City investments with sponsorships, grants, and contracts that often occur with a stand-alone nonprofit

OPTIONS MOVING FORWARD

In response to these existing pros and cons, the P.U.M.A. team has been working with each of the lead agencies to improve the Downtown program. There are numerous organizational options for the Downtown SSMID moving forward, and two alternatives are explored in detail below.

MORE DISTINCT BUSINESS CENTER WITHIN THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

The Economic Alliance is willing to adjust its Downtown program to address many of the disadvantages cited above. Key improvements would include:

- Boost dedicated staffing for the Downtown program beyond the coordinator and maintenance team by adding full time marketing and/or special projects managers
- Establish a storefront office location for the Downtown program to increase program visibility, access, and identity
- Utilize the Economic Alliance's existing charitable nonprofit affiliate (501c3) to aggressively attract grants and sponsorships for Downtown improvements
- Create a "Friends of Downtown" group to engage a broader cross-section of Downtown stakeholders – businesses, residents, advocates – and offer volunteer involvement opportunities throughout the Downtown work program

STAND-ALONE INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT DOWNTOWN ORGANIZATION

The next generation of Cedar Rapids former Downtown District could be a new independent nonprofit organization with its own board, staff and structure solely focused on Downtown. Key characteristics of the new stand-alone organization include:

- Create a new organization with 100% day-to-day focus on Downtown
- Maximize accountability and access to Downtown stakeholders
- Expand options to leverage and expand upon SSMID funding through aggressively seeking grants and sponsorships for Downtown improvements
- Would require start-up funds over a three-year period to establish a track record and solidify its financial footing

NEXT STEPS

There is interest in exploring downtown organizational options within Cedar Rapids. To commit to and create the best business model moving forward, it is recommended that an operational analysis be prepared to fully understand the consequences of a variety of organizational options for Cedar Rapids. A business plan for the preferred option and a collaboration commitment from the three key leaders – the City, Economic Alliance, and the SSMID – would be the desired result for moving forward. The operational analysis and business plan should be conducted after adoption of the Downtown Cedar Rapids Vision & Action Plan.

| SCENARIO | EXISTING: ECONOMIC ALLIANCE (EA) MANAGEMENT OF DOWNTOWN | MORE DISTINCT DOWNTOWN BUSINESS CENTER WITHIN EA | INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT DOWNTOWN ORGANIZATION |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Governance Structure | Downtown management and marketing housed within EA; SSMID contracts with EA | Downtown management and marketing housed within EA; SSMID contracts with EA | New 501(c)6 and/or (c)3 Downtown-focused non-profit organization to replace EA; SSMID contracts with the non-profit |
| Synopsis | For the past 12 years, Downtown management and marketing activities have been housed within the EA. Downtown staff embedded within the EA, overhead and supplemental expertise provided by EA. | Create a more distinct downtown business center within the EA to boost dedicated Downtown staffing and identity. Additional staffing exclusively dedicated to Downtown could include marketing and/or special projects manager(s). Dedicated office space recommended. Use of EA's 501c3 affiliate to leverage funding and creation of a "Friends of Downtown" group to engage more stakeholders. | The "Downtown District" non-profit that existed prior to the EA arrangement is the dominant national business model for downtowns. Would be an independent organization with its own board, staff and structure solely focused on Downtown. |
| Sources of Revenue | SSMID + PILOT: \$766,000 City MOA for Services: \$148,000 EA Staff Mgt/Rent: \$135,000+ EA Public Market Support: \$200,000 <i>TOTAL: \$1,249,000</i> <i>Less: \$135,000 to EA for overhead/admin</i> | SSMID + PILOT: \$766,000 City MOA for Services: \$148,000 EA Staff Mgt/Rent: \$135,000+ EA Public Market Support: \$200,000 <i>TOTAL: \$1,249,000</i> <i>Less: \$135,000 to EA for overhead/admin</i> | SSMID + PILOT: \$766,000 City MOA for Services: \$148,000 EA Public Market Support: \$200,000 <i>TOTAL: \$1,114,000</i> <i>Plus: Sponsorships, Grants, Contracts</i> |
| Pros | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown a central focus of EA & regional economic development Access to EA talent pool & resources Financial stability for core program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown a central focus of EA & regional economic development Increase dedicated staffing and identity for program to better connect with and respond to Downtown stakeholders Creates option to expand/leverage resources Financial stability for core program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown-focused organization – 100% board and staff dedicated to Downtown Maximizes accountability and access to Downtown stakeholders Creates options to expand/leverage resources |
| Cons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to discern Downtown team members and program identity Stakeholder oversight limited to SSMID & EA board members Downtown stakeholder concerns with accountability and program dilution Lack of financial leverage through sponsorships, grants, contracts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance oversight limited to SSMID & EA board members May need to reallocate program funds to pay for dedicated staffing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lose advantages of EA connection, including regional visibility, staff management & resources Less financially stable – organization must fund overhead/admin and all program costs – seed funding recommended Requires stronger financial participation from City and other key partners |
| Intangibles | One dedicated program manager problematic to build/maintain relationships with Downtown property owners, businesses, and stakeholders | Intended to maintain benefits of EA while in-creasing program visibility and reach to Downtown stakeholders, improving responsiveness, ongoing communications, and accountability | Maximizes accountability and focus to Downtown stakeholders through board, staff, and structure, but creates less financial stability |

The background image is a blue-tinted photograph of a downtown street scene at night. A large, illuminated sign for 'Downtown' is visible in the upper portion of the frame. Below it, a curved walkway or ramp is visible. At the bottom of the image, a 'HILLS BANK' sign is partially visible on a building facade. The overall scene is dimly lit, with some lights reflecting on the surfaces.

CEDAR RAPIDS DOWNTOWN VISION & ACTION PLAN 2023