

Downtown

CEDAR RAPIDS

Annual Report 2024



Downtown SSMID Commission

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James Klein, Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Vice Chair

Ted Kepros, Kepros Physical Therapy & Performance

Executive Team

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Graig Cone, Conveyor Engineering Co.

Jon Dusek, Armstrong Development

Jaren Hanlin, GreatAmerica Financial Services

Loren Hartelt, CRST

Sarah Madsen, United Fire Group

Randy Rings, TrueNorth Companies

Jake Ryan, ImOn Communications

David Sorg, OPN Architects

Craig Stephan, Iowa Brewing Company

Fred Timko, GRR DTE LLC

Dannette Tobin, Gray Media

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

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From the Board and Executive Director



James Klein
Downtown SSMID
Commission Chair

It has been an incredible year for the Downtown District, marked by collaboration, progress, and a shared commitment to creating a thriving, vibrant downtown Cedar Rapids. Our success is driven by the strong partnership we have with the City of Cedar Rapids, the Economic Alliance, and our dedicated property owners, all working together to bring our vision to life.

We are especially excited about the new Downtown Vision Plan. A great deal of work has already been accomplished, laying a strong foundation for a future filled with opportunity and growth. This plan reflects our collective aspirations and will guide us as we shape the next chapter of our downtown community.

I am also thrilled to welcome Caleb Knutson as our new Executive Director. Caleb brings years of experience, fresh ideas, and a passion for community development that will be invaluable as we move forward. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Jennifar, Colin, and Evan for their incredible work this past year.

Their dedication and effort have made a tangible impact, and we are fortunate to have such a strong team.

Looking ahead to 2025, the possibilities for downtown Cedar Rapids are truly exciting. With the momentum we've built and the talented team in place, I am confident that we can achieve great things together.

Finally, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our downtown property owners. Your unwavering commitment and investment continue to be the backbone of our success. Because of you, downtown Cedar Rapids remains a dynamic, welcoming, and inspiring place to live, work, and play.

Here's to a bright and exciting future for downtown Cedar Rapids!

Sincerely,
James D. Klein
*Chair, Downtown
SSMID Commission*



Caleb Knutson

Downtown District Executive Director

First, allow me a quick introduction as the new Executive Director. My name is Caleb. I came to Cedar Rapids from central Iowa. I am a Cyclone, and happy to add one more ISU alum to eastern Iowa. The community has been incredibly welcoming as I walk around downtown and throughout the community. I started on October 11th, and it has been a fantastic end of the year. I am not only excited to be here in Cedar Rapids, but my family is also excited to relocate. The City of Cedar Rapids is an amazing community. What drew me to the community is how innovative it is, and the community's willingness to think outside of the box.

The past year, Downtown SSMID has been fortunate to have amazing staff keeping the ship trending in the right direction. To quote the American poet Kendrick Lamar, "If I'm gonna tell a real story, I'm gonna start with my name." It's the people here who make our story truly remarkable. Without their hard work, we would not have successes such as the Trolley at the end of the year.

I look forward to 2025 and all the hard work that will be put into accomplishing the goals laid out in the downtown vision plan. The Downtown Vision Plan is more than just a plan that sits on the shelf, it is the foundation for our continued success, growth, and collaboration. Together, with the dedication and support of our community we will continue to build a vibrant and thriving downtown.

Sincerely,

Caleb Knutson

Downtown District Executive Director

Welcoming New Leadership in 2024

This year, we proudly welcomed Jennifer Bassett as District Program Director and Caleb Knutson as Executive Director. Chosen for their passion and dynamic vision, Jennifer and Caleb bring the energy and innovation needed to make downtown Cedar Rapids a hub of creativity, growth, and vibrancy. Together, they're driving initiatives that not only enhance our downtown but also inspire a ripple effect of economic and cultural vitality across the entire region and state of Iowa.



Caleb Knutson



Jennifar Bassett



Keeping Downtown Bright: Maintenance Ops



Evan McGuire



Colin Glandon



Gage Trimble

Evan McGuire, Maintenance Supervisor, and Colin Glandon, Maintenance Specialist, are the cogs that keep the downtown engine running smoothly. With a combined 15 years of experience, this team is the heart beat of downtown. From setting up street barricades to ensuring downtown remains clean, vibrant, and welcoming, their work is essential to our success. Their dedication and hands-on efforts create the beautiful and thriving environment our community enjoys. Simply put, the downtown team would not thrive without their expertise and commitment.

There is plenty of seasonality that accompanies the work this downtown team does, and with that additional workload comes the add of a new team member, Gage Trimble. Gage joined the team as the Seasonal Maintenance Specialist, and has responsibilities that include watering and maintenance of the planters and floral arrangements downtown, and jumping in wherever more hands are needed on special projects, events and seasonal priorities.

**432 yards
of Trash Removed**

**2,180
Hours of Cleaning**

**280
Hours of Event Assistance**

**205
Hours of Snow Removal**

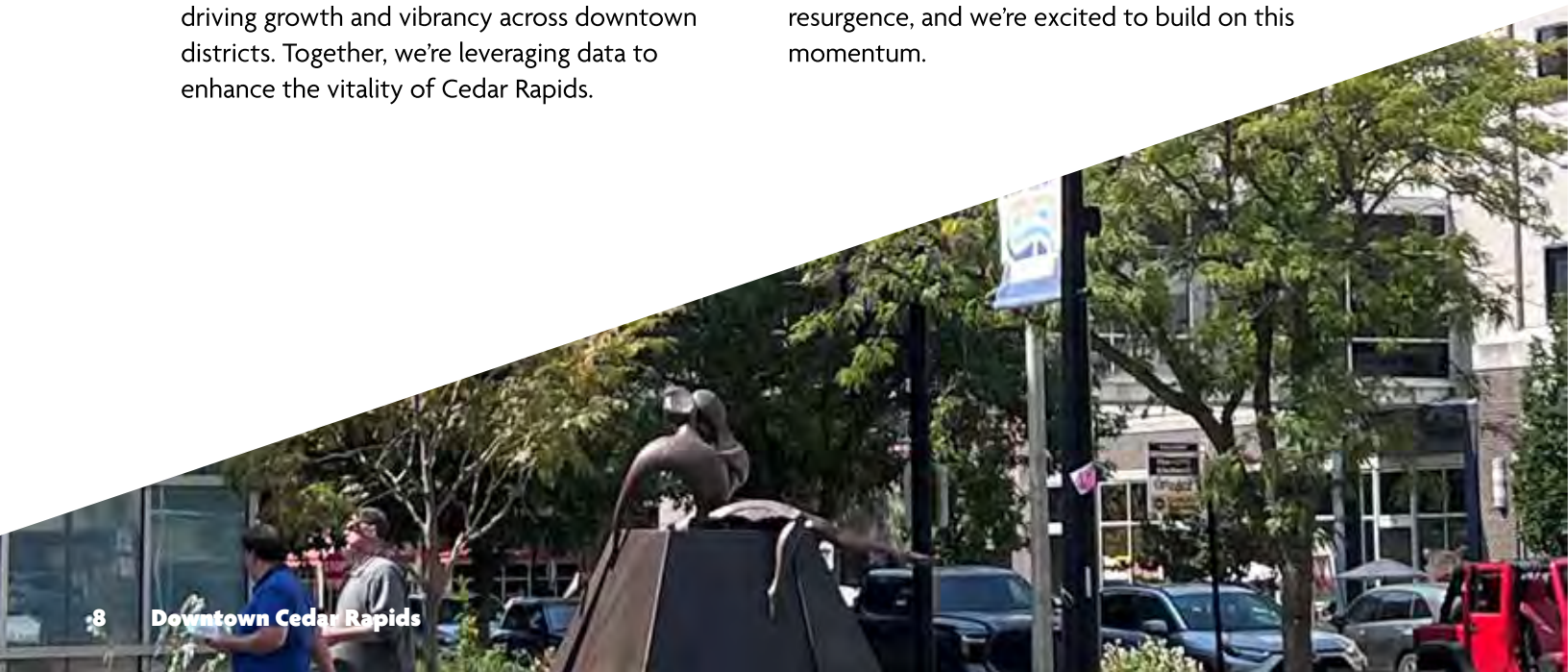


Placer.ai

Unlocking insights for a Vibrant Downtown

This year, we welcomed Placer AI, a cutting-edge location analytics platform, into our downtown toolkit. Thanks to a partnership with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and the MedQuarter SSMID, this powerful tool enables us to collaborate and take action on patron traffic trends. By understanding visit patterns, trade areas, and demographics, we can create experiences and initiatives that resonate with our community, driving growth and vibrancy across downtown districts. Together, we're leveraging data to enhance the vitality of Cedar Rapids.

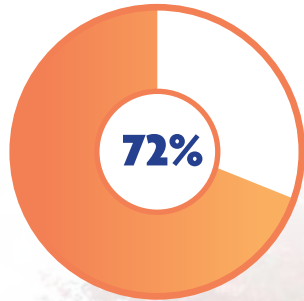
In addition to its many capabilities, Placer AI has provided key insights that reveal downtown traffic has returned to pre-pandemic levels—signaling that life is truly coming back to our city center. This data also highlighted the success of the 2024 Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market, which continues to thrive, drawing large crowds and supporting local businesses. It's clear that downtown Cedar Rapids is experiencing a vibrant resurgence, and we're excited to build on this momentum.



Downtown Foot Traffic in 2024

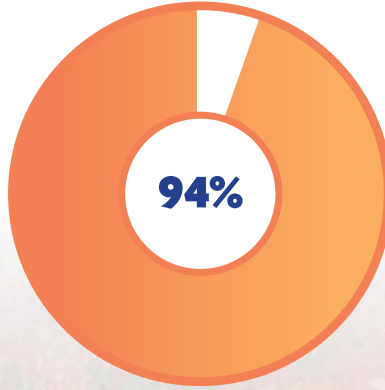
Placer.ai data has been instrumental in helping Downtown understand how traffic in 2024 has compared to pre-pandemic levels. Employees Downtown are back at 72% of pre-pandemic levels. Visits are 94% of what they were before the pandemic hit, and visitors are up over 100%!

Employees



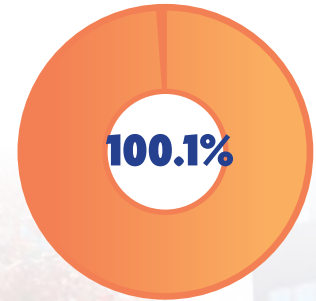
Pre-Pandemic 17.2k Employees
2024 Total 12.3k Employees

Visits

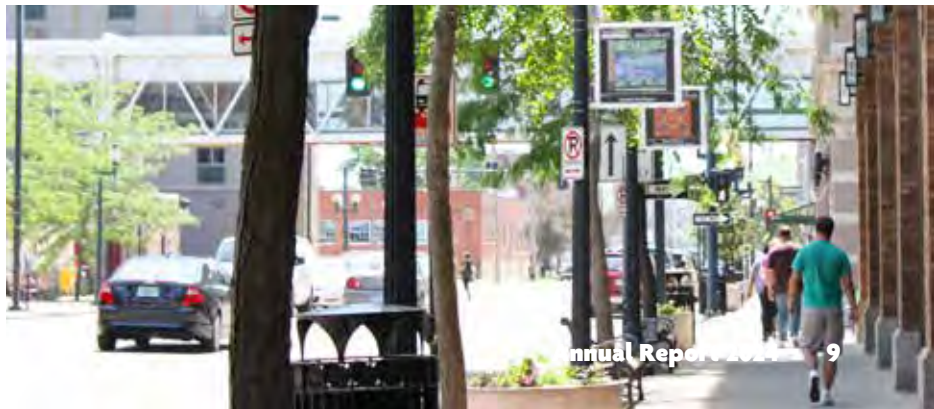


Pre-Pandemic 5.1M Visits
2024 Total 4.8M Visits

Visitors



Pre-Pandemic 745k Visitors
2024 Total 753k Visitors



Exciting New Additions to Downtown Cedar Rapids

2024 brought a wave of new businesses and restaurants to downtown Cedar Rapids, further enhancing our city's energy and appeal. Notable newcomers like City Walk Eatery, Studio 6, Lush Beauty Bar, and The District CR are adding fresh experiences for both residents and visitors. Dining spots like Big Grove and Pickle Palace have become standout additions, playing a key role in the success of Kingston Yard, the newly developed space on the other side of the river. Their presence is driving traffic and interest to downtown, making it an even more dynamic destination. Meanwhile, Amor Pizza continues to grow its presence in the heart of downtown.

Additionally, community-focused businesses such as UnityPoint Health's Abbe Health Center and Stamats have expanded into downtown, further strengthening the district's appeal. With creative spaces like 3rd St. Market, The Studio, and TRU Nightclub, downtown continues to thrive with new opportunities and experiences. These additions not only contribute to the area's economic growth but also make downtown a more exciting and engaging place to live, work, and explore.

A group of approximately ten people, including men and women, are gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. They are all wearing red jackets or aprons. In the center, a man in a grey suit and pink tie is cutting a red ribbon. To his left, a man in a black chef's uniform and a woman in a black apron are also participating. The background shows a brick wall and some greenery.

Fireside Tavern celebrates its grand opening.

Celebrating Emerging Entrepreneurs

Downtown Cedar Rapids is proud to be home to a growing number of minority-owned businesses that add depth, innovation, and cultural richness to our community. These businesses cater to unique markets, offering products and services that meet the specific needs of our diverse population. By supporting these entrepreneurs, we help foster an equitable business environment that ensures all have access to opportunities and resources. The success of minority-owned businesses strengthens our economy, enriches the local marketplace, and inspires future generations of entrepreneurs to follow in their footsteps.



Pickle Palace in Downtown Cedar Rapids



SSMID Partnerships

The success of downtown Cedar Rapids is fueled by the strong partnerships and sponsorships made possible through the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID). These collaborations have brought to life a variety of events that energize our community and showcase the spirit of downtown.

From supporting signature events like the Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market, Market After Dark, Blocktoberfest, and Freedom Festival, to sponsoring live music at Kingston Yard and Iowa Brewing Company, SSMID partnerships help create vibrant experiences for residents and visitors alike. Additionally, initiatives like Foundation 2's Putts for Prevention and Big Grove's first annual Oktoberfest highlight the community's commitment to fun, connection, and meaningful causes.

Downtown BLOCKtoberfest 3 was hosted in the streets of Downtown Cedar Rapids on September 27th for thousands of high-energy concert goers. The third iteration of this downtown concert event was supported by the Downtown SSMID and brought to life by Fun Not Fancy Restaurant Group, featuring The Pork Tornadoes as the headlining band.

Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market

Market After Dark

BLOCKtoberfest

Freedom Festival

Kingston Yard Live Music Stage

Iowa Brewing Co.

Foundation 2 Putts for Prevention

Oktoberfest by Big Grove





Love for

To mark 75 years of serving Linn County, the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation unveiled the “Love for Humanity” mural, a stunning celebration of philanthropy and community. Created in collaboration with Murals & More and the Cedar Rapids Downtown District, this vibrant public art piece was designed and painted by local artist Scott Takes of Underground Art Studios.

Inspired by the Greek roots of the word “philanthropy”—‘philos’ (love) and ‘anthropos’ (human)—the mural spells out “Love for Humanity” in bold metal letters. Each letter features airbrushed images of real Linn County residents enjoying moments made possible by nonprofit organizations. This artwork not only adds beauty to downtown Cedar Rapids but also serves as a tribute to the people and organizations that make our community thrive.





Introducing the Downtown Trolley Pilot Program

In December 2024, downtown Cedar Rapids launched the Downtown Trolley, a new pilot program designed to enhance connectivity and convenience for residents and visitors. Running every Friday and Saturday night from 5 PM to 11 PM through January 31, 2025, the trolley offers a unique way to experience downtown, showcasing the holiday lights and making stops throughout the district, including NewBo and Czech Village.

This initiative encourages riders to explore the fantastic locally owned restaurants, shops, and attractions that make our downtown special. Sponsored by the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and Cedar Rapids Bank and Trust, the trolley represents a significant step in improving access and driving engagement with the downtown area. Feedback from the community will help shape the future of this exciting service.



Illuminating Downtown: The Facade Improvement Program

The Downtown Façade Improvement Program continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing the appearance and functionality of downtown Cedar Rapids. Designed to encourage property and business owners to renovate building exteriors visible to the public, this program promotes high-quality improvements that add visual appeal and inspire further investments in the district.

This year, the Foundation 2 and Sokol Building received funding through the program, joining a growing list of

projects that have brightened downtown with impactful renovations. Recent efforts have emphasized exterior lighting, transforming buildings like Cedar River Tower, Theatre Cedar Rapids, and the Arco building into vibrant beacons that energize the streetscape and create a welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. Co-funded by the Downtown SSMID Commission and the City of Cedar Rapids, the program is a testament to the collaborative efforts driving the district's continued growth and revitalization.



This is Downtown

Downtown Cedar Rapids now greets visitors and residents with bold new signage in several areas of the city. The newest addition sits high in the city skyline on the Five Seasons Parking Garage. The “Welcome to Downtown Cedar Rapids” sign creates an inviting first impression, reinforcing the area’s identity as a dynamic and welcoming destination in a high traffic area of the city’s core.

Beyond this key addition, increased branding efforts have amplified downtown’s visibility across multiple touchpoints on both sides of the river. New signage in Kingston Village strengthens the district’s identity on the Kingston Village side, while branding support on outdoor igloos that live at Big Grove Brewery extends the downtown experience in creative and engaging ways on a smaller basis. These efforts work together to enhance Cedar Rapids’ presence, ensuring that downtown remains a vibrant, recognizable, and thriving hub for all who visit, work, and live in the community.



...and on Social

Downtown social media pages aim to provide “social proof” for the district’s efforts. They generate publicity and create excitement for news, initiatives and all-things downtown happenings. News about events, new businesses, and internal changes are also touched on. Highlighting Downtown’s people has been massively successful. Pictures of the downtown maintenance team in action and the announcement of new hires always creates engaging waves. Images of the Downtown area, activities, and history show that the digital community prefers to engage with visually driven content.

The timelier the content, the better the return on engagement. When downtown is at the forefront of breaking news, it is more likely to be shared not only on social media, but in traditional media as well. The best example of this was the Trolley Pilot announcement, which was shared not only by influential figures in the community, but by media outlets like the Gazette and Corridor Business Journal.

2024 allowed us to listen to our digital community and create a stronger understanding of what messages and content resonate with our unique audiences.

Facebook: Downtown Cedar Rapids

Instagram: @downtowncedarapids

X: @downtowncr



Top Posts

Downtown Trolley Reveal

310 reactions
41 comments
199 shares

Mural Photo Gallery

147 reactions
7 comments
38 shares

Executive Director Hiring Announcement

120 reactions
13 comments
6 shares



9.6k (5.4k facebook, 4.2k instagram)
Total Followers

1,842
Net Follower Growth

162k+
Post Views (112% increase YOY)

Iowa Downtown Conference Hosted in Downtown Cedar Rapids

Downtown Cedar Rapids had the honor of hosting the 2024 Iowa Downtown Conference on August 6-7 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Cedar Rapids. Presented by the Iowa Economic Development Authority and the Iowa Downtown Resource Center. This premier statewide gathering brought together professionals and volunteers dedicated to downtown revitalization.

The conference provided invaluable opportunities to network, share insights, and explore strategies that stimulate economic activity in commercial districts. Attendees participated in engaging plenary sessions, breakout discussions, and interactive tours showcasing the vibrancy of downtown Cedar Rapids. The event highlighted emerging trends in placemaking and economic development, equipping communities with fresh ideas and practical

tools to enhance their own downtown districts. Hosting this prestigious event reinforced Cedar Rapids' position as a leader in downtown innovation while giving visitors a firsthand experience of the energy and momentum shaping our city's future.

“The local planning team in Cedar Rapids showcased exceptional collaboration and dedication while supporting our effort to plan the conference, elevating the event to a standout success. Cedar Rapids serves as an exemplary model of urban development, demonstrating successful downtown rehabilitation efforts and quality-of-life projects that prioritize residents' well-being. Hosting a conference here combines accessibility with top-notch facilities and a vibrant local culture that fosters networking and collaboration, all wrapped in the city's renowned hospitality and charm.” - Carol Lilly, Main Street Iowa State Coordinator for Iowa Economic Development Authority

600
attendees

20
**communities
around Iowa
represented**

12
**downtown
locations
featured**

Downtown Vision Plan

As 2024 comes to a close, Downtown Cedar Rapids reflects on a year filled with impactful initiatives and successful milestones that have contributed to its vibrancy and growth. The progress made throughout the year was made possible by an incredible team dedicated to enhancing the downtown experience.

The Downtown District allocated its full event sponsorship budget of \$65,000 in 2024, funding ten outdoor events and twenty-five live music performances at various downtown bars and restaurants. While total sponsorship requests reached \$74,775, every available dollar was strategically distributed to enrich community engagement and increase foot traffic. These sponsorships played a pivotal role in solidifying Downtown Cedar Rapids as a premier destination for entertainment and culture in the state.

Beautification efforts also saw significant progress. Floral and greenery arrangements remained in place through early October and fall foliage were successfully tested in select planters at Economic Alliance and Ground Transportation Center. Twelve additional self-watering planters were purchased, bringing the total to twenty-four, while more than twenty outdated cement planters were removed. In collaboration with the City, a sustainable plan was established to maintain planters along 3rd Avenue moving forward.

To further improve cleanliness and sustainability, Downtown Cedar Rapids partnered with Big Belly to add ten more high-tech waste receptacles, increasing the total number of

receptacles to fifty. This investment has played a crucial role in maintaining a clean and welcoming environment.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Downtown Vision Plan will continue to serve as a guiding framework for progress. By elevating Downtown's appeal through continued event programming, enhanced beautification projects, and activation of key spaces, the district aims to build on the momentum of 2024, creating even more opportunities for growth, engagement and community pride.

A key focus for 2025 will be the revitalization of Mays Island, transforming it into a vibrant gathering space. Whether serving as a scenic spot for employees to enjoy lunch, a destination for visitors to take in views of the Cedar River, or a venue for community groups to host outdoor events, Mays Island will become an activated hub of downtown life.

In addition to enhancing public spaces, Downtown Cedar Rapids is committed to addressing vacancies through the Race for the Space initiative, which will see its iteration in 2025. In collaboration with the Economic Alliance and other key partners in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, this effort is strategically positioning new and expanding businesses for long-term success. Big things to come in the years ahead.

The continued collaboration with local businesses, community partners, and stakeholders is vital to driving Downtown Cedar Rapids' growth, ensuring it remains a dynamic hub for commerce, culture, and connection.



Downtown



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