



Annual Report 2025

# Downtown SSMID Commission

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## Vice Chair

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## Executive Team

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Graig Cone, Conveyor Engineering Co.

Jon Dusek, Armstrong Development

Jared Hanlin, GreatAmerica Financial Services

Loren Hartelt, CRST (incoming chair)

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 D. Klein**  
Downtown SSMID  
Commission Chair

2025 marked a year of incredible momentum for Downtown Cedar Rapids. We moved beyond recovery, with visitor traffic officially surpassing pre-pandemic levels, a milestone achieved by few downtowns nationwide.

Throughout the year, we strengthened our strategic governance by leaning on existing subcommittees Events, and Façade Improvement while also establishing new subcommittees Marketing & PR, and Finance. Leveraging the expertise of Commissioners, and stakeholders ensuring that Downtown is firing on all cylinders.

Continuing our role as a partner in the Cedar Rapids Downtown Vision Plan, we are committed to the key components laid out: Connectivity, Embracing the river, and ensure Vibrancy. We also saw continued improvements in safety and cleanliness, which remain essential to sustaining long-term growth.

Business and community vibrancy accelerated as the return of Race for

the Space successfully welcomed new businesses downtown, and 5 Seasons Fit fostered meaningful partnerships between local businesses and the community.

Summer brought enhanced beautification through floral displays and a full slate of music and events, while the new Cedar Rapids sign quickly emerged as a beloved community icon and gathering place for celebrations. With significant development activity underway across the district, Downtown Cedar Rapids is well-positioned for continued expansion. As a lifelong Cedar Radian, I am honored to witness this evolution firsthand, the momentum is undeniable, and the best is truly yet to come.

As my time on the Downtown Commission has come to an end, and I turn the keys over to Loren Hartelt, I know that Downtown Cedar Rapids is positioned to continue thriving with momentum. I look forward to what the future holds.



**Caleb Knutson**  
Downtown District  
Executive Director

If you spent time Downtown in 2025, you felt it. More people. More activity. More reasons to stay awhile. With one year in this role, I can say confidently that Downtown Cedar Rapids is trending in an exciting direction. Visitor traffic has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, and that momentum is showing up across the district in a way that is both visible and measurable.

This progress did not happen by chance. Downtown is being shaped by entrepreneurs who are taking risks, businesses that are investing in growth, partners who are activating public spaces, and teams doing the daily work that keeps Downtown clean, welcoming, and ready for visitors. That combination is powerful. It creates confidence in the district, and confidence drives opportunity.

This report captures the story of 2025 through the work, the partnerships, and the results. You will see highlights from economic development and new business activity. You will see programs that supported small businesses and filled spaces with new ideas. You will see community events that brought tens of thousands of people together. You will

also see the behind-the-scenes work that makes Downtown function well. Maintenance. Beautification. Sponsorship support. Storytelling that helps more people discover what is here.

This past year the Downtown Commission has welcomed two new business leaders, Landon Burg from OPN, and Robin Sempf from Alliant. Both jumped in and started contributing right away. The Downtown Commission will also welcome another two new faces: Juliet Pae from Fix Salon, and Brittney Clarke from CRBT. We look forward to welcoming these new members, and their unique perspectives to the Downtown Commission. Given the Commission's charter, we want to ensure representation of various perspectives from the district. Adding new voices helps us achieve this.

Downtown Cedar Rapids is a place where the community meets itself. Thank you for investing your time, energy, and resources in the heart of our city. The momentum is real, and we are ready to keep building.



**Jennifar Bassett**  
Downtown District  
Program Manager

## Downtown Team

As Downtown District Program Manager, one of my core responsibilities is ensuring that Downtown Cedar Rapids remains clean, safe, and fully functional—and that work would not be possible without the Downtown Maintenance Team. Behind every clean sidewalk, every successful Farmers Market, every strong partnership, and every visible improvement is a team committed to the details that shape the downtown experience. In 2025, this team consistently showed up with energy, professionalism, and pride in the place they serve, both on the street and behind the scenes. Their day-to-day efforts are the foundation of a vibrant, welcoming downtown, and the following highlights reflect the impact of their work throughout the year.



Evan McGuire      Colin Glandon      Gage Trimble

Downtown maintenance is often invisible when it is done well, but everyone feels the difference. In 2025 year-to-date, Downtown's 50 BigBelly trash receptacles and 40 recycling receptacles collected 33,750 gallons of waste and 12,518 gallons of recycling. This work supports a cleaner district, a better visitor experience, and public spaces that feel cared for every day.



## Keeping Downtown Bright: Maintenance Ops

**33,750 gallons  
of Trash Removed**

**12,518  
Gallons of Recycling**

**270  
Hours of Event Assistance**

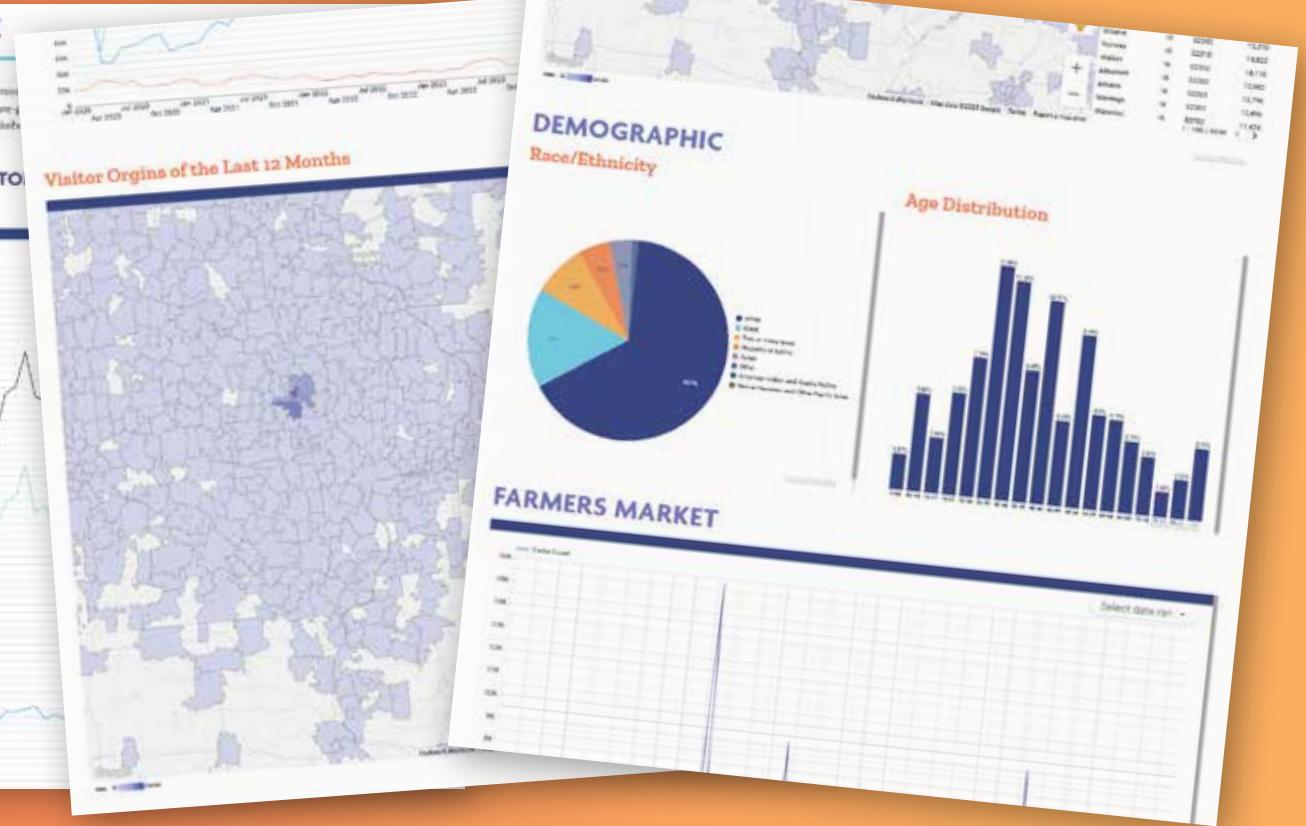
**143  
Hours of Snow Removal**

## Downtown Data

The Downtown Data is an initiative of the Downtown Commission. The Downtown District is back to pre-pandemic visitor and community trends, and can assist stakeholders with workforce, visitor, and community trends, and can assist stakeholders.

### OVERALL AT A GLANCE: DOWNTOWN VISITOR TRAFFIC

Monthly Visitor Trends



## Downtown Data & Visitor Traffic

Downtown is back in motion. In 2025, visitor traffic in the Downtown District returned to pre-pandemic levels, reinforcing what we see and feel across the district. Downtown is lively. Downtown is active. Downtown is drawing people in for food, entertainment, shopping, workdays, and community moments.

These insights that we are able to draw through a tracking software PlacerAI, help us make smarter decisions. Tracking trends helps us understand what draws people Downtown, when activity peaks, and where opportunities exist to strengthen the experience. When we pair real data with strong partnerships and strategic investment, Downtown becomes easier to navigate, easier to activate, and easier to grow.

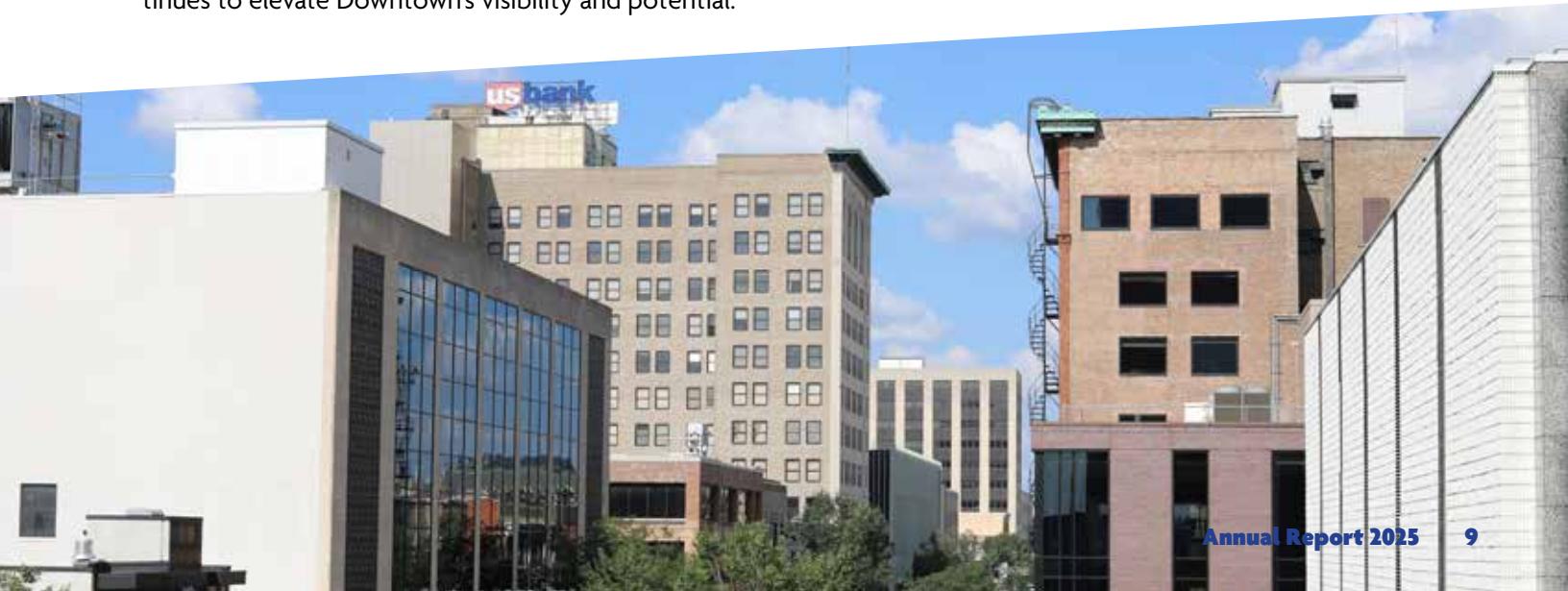
## Economic Development in the District

Downtown Cedar Rapids is experiencing an exciting wave of economic development. New activity and continued investment are bringing fresh energy to the district and strengthening Downtown's role as a destination for the city and the region.

Kingston Yard continues to evolve as a place for gathering, programming, and community connection, creating more opportunities for people to spend time Downtown. At the same time, the growing interest and conversation around Cedar Crossing Casino continues to elevate Downtown's visibility and potential.

Together with investment happening on both sides of the river, these developments are building momentum for redevelopment, new business growth, and long-term opportunity.

Downtown works best when it offers a complete experience. Places to meet friends. Places to bring visitors. Places to build a business. Places to live. In 2025, progress across the district continued to move that vision forward.



## Race for the Space Creates Buzz Downtown

Race for the Space returned in 2025, putting local entrepreneurs in the spotlight and helping turn empty downtown storefronts into real possibilities.

Tailored to Cedar Rapids' unique business community, the program emphasized mentorship, expert celebrity judges, & structured guidance to help small business owners refine their ideas, strengthen operations, & prepare for sustainable growth. Participants ranged from early-stage entrepreneurs to established businesses expanding into Downtown, fostering both innovation & stability.

ThirdSpace Create earned first place, with Downtown Dogs Social Club as runner-up, each reflecting the

creativity & resilience that define our city's small business spirit. More than a contest, Race for the Space invested in long-term success through mentorship, monthly check-ins, & targeted business education, ensuring that entrepreneurs had the tools & resources to thrive. By supporting startups & growing ventures alike, Downtown Cedar Rapids continues to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that transforms empty spaces into thriving destinations & reinforces that investing in local talent is the foundation of a vibrant downtown.



## Downtown Partnerships

Downtown momentum is built through partnerships that turn ideas into action. In 2025, collaborations across events, wellness initiatives, and community programming created stronger visitor experiences and helped more people connect with Downtown.

### 5SeasonsFit

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# Downtown Partnerships



## Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market

The Downtown District is proud to support the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance in hosting two of the community's most beloved events. The Downtown Farmers Market and Market After Dark. Together, these events welcomed more than 180,000 attendees throughout the season and created consistent energy downtown week after week. Local food. Local makers. Music. Culture. The markets prove what is possible when strong partners align around experiences that people love.



## Health and Wellness Walk

In October, partners came together for a one-mile community walk through Downtown that concluded with lunch at Greene Square. Hosted by the Downtown District, the MedQ, and the City of Cedar Rapids, the event celebrated connection, movement, and the simple power of gathering in the center of the city. It was a reminder that Downtown is a place for events and for everyday wellness and community pride.

## Downtown Sponsored Events and Activations

Downtown feels alive when there is something happening, and in 2025 the district supported that energy through direct event sponsorships and programming investments. Excluding the Markets, the Downtown District sponsored 21 community events and allocated \$65,000 toward events, programming, and live music that brought people Downtown and strengthened activity in public spaces.

These sponsored moments created a ripple effect of more foot traffic, more visibility for local organizations, and more reasons to visit Downtown for the first time, then come back again.

Sponsored events included SaPaDaPaSo, Freedom Festival, Impact CR Foodie Crawl, Breakthrough T1D Walk, Waypoint Plunging for a Purpose, IgniteCR Young Professionals Kick Off, F2 Putts for Prevention, Cody Coaching Tap Into Fitness Bootcamp, Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation Back to School Social, Movies at The Yard, Pickle Palace Dueling Pianos, Big Grove pop ups, Walk to End Alzheimer's, House It Up, American Heart Association Cycle Nation, City Brew Coffee Cart, Theatre Cedar Rapids Groundbreaking, Blocktoberfest, Need A Pizza and Beer Run, plus live music at Iowa Brewing.

\*21 listed above as it does not include markets; \$65k was allocated for events, programming, and live music.

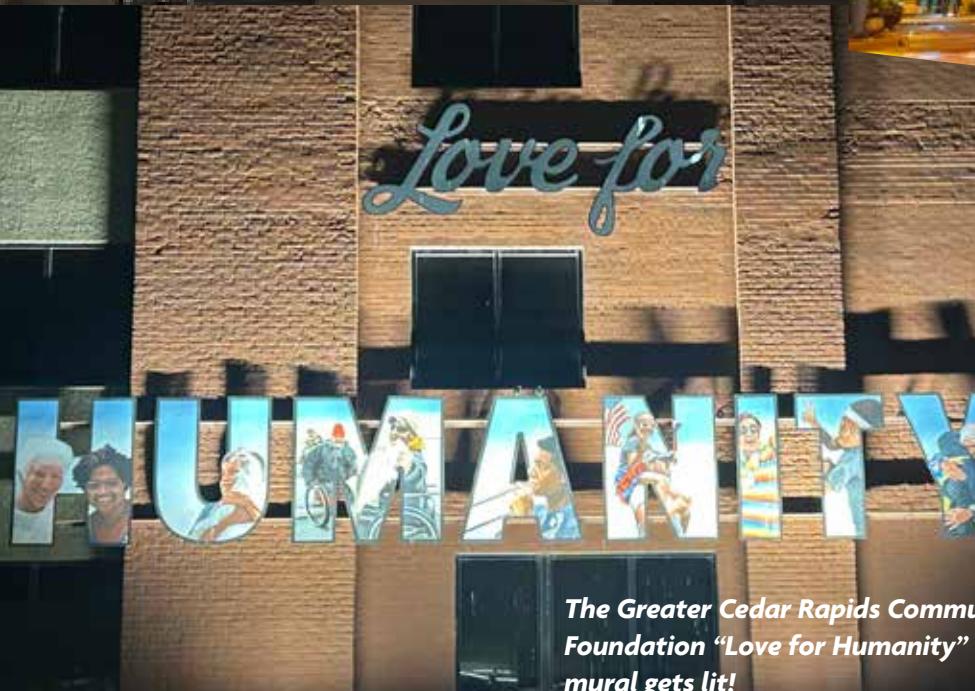


## Downtown Art and Facade Improvements

A strong Downtown experience is built not on destinations alone, but on the feeling you get as you walk through the district. In 2025, Downtown investments in public art and facade improvements helped strengthen visual identity, add creativity to key spaces, and make the district more inviting for residents and visitors.

## Facade Improvement Grant Recipients

In 2025, facade improvement support helped advance meaningful upgrades for community-facing spaces, including Theatre Cedar Rapids and the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation. These improvements contribute to Downtown's character and reflect the pride organizations take in their place within the district.



The Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation "Love for Humanity" mural gets lit!

## Public Art and Creative Projects

Window Wonderland brought fresh visual energy through new window art installations by artist Taylor Jaso on the Town Centre building and the Smulekoff's building. These creative touches add color, surprise, and a sense of place during seasonal moments.

Murals of Meaning is a youth-led initiative powered by Iowa BIG students focused on raising awareness and sharing resources related to homelessness in Cedar Rapids. Through posters placed around the city, the project highlights realities faced by neighbors experiencing homelessness and connects people to local resources. Students also coordi-

nated a winter clothing collection at Craft'd, House of Iron, and Groundswell Cafe, with distribution planned for January 8, 2026 in partnership with NAMI and Green Square Meals. The project reflects a Downtown value we are proud of. Creativity paired with community care.

A new student mural initiative is also planned for Spring 2026, bringing together multiple high school groups to create large-scale sidewalk artwork tied to the "Five Seasons" theme. Final program name and details will be confirmed ahead of launch.



# Downtown Beautification and Community Pride



Downtown's look and feel is shaped by everyday effort. In 2025, the Downtown District continued to invest time and resources into beautification projects, volunteer-driven improvements, and consistent maintenance that keeps Downtown clean and welcoming.

## United Way Day of Caring

United Way Day of Caring is a community-wide volunteer initiative that brings together individuals and organizations to complete projects that enhance neighborhoods, beautify public spaces, and support local nonprofits. The Downtown District proudly participates each year, working alongside partners and volunteers to strengthen the community we serve and improve shared spaces.

Participating companies included: Bankers Trust, Collins Aerospace, ImOn Communications, Simmons Perrine PLC, TrueNorth Companies, and UnityPoint Health.



## Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust Employee Appreciation Day

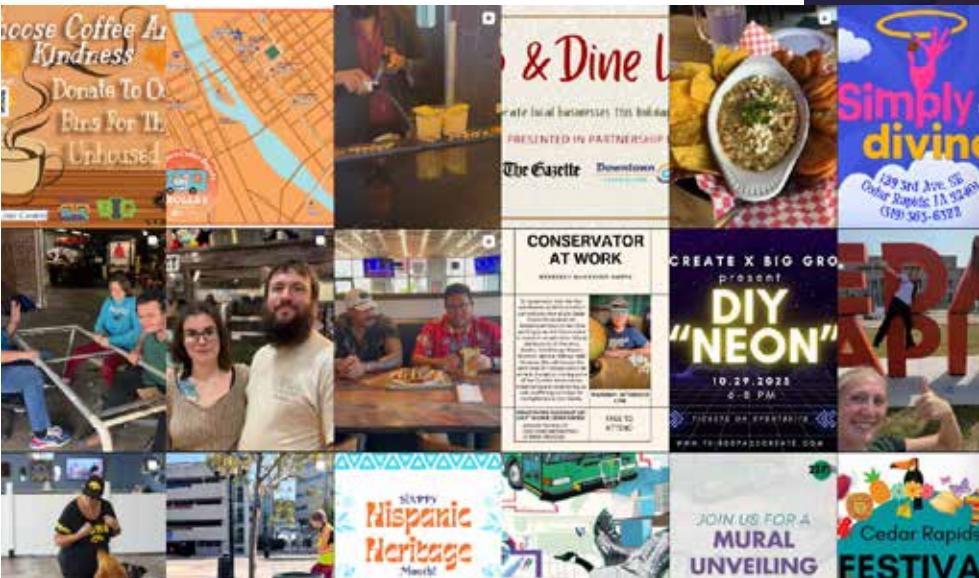
Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust hosts an annual Employee Appreciation Day on Columbus Day, when the bank is closed to give employees the opportunity to volunteer in the community. In 2025, 15 CRBT employees supported Downtown Cedar Rapids through hands-on beautification efforts, cleaning up trash along the 4th Street Trail and the railroad tracks and assisting with landscaping along the Cedar River Trail. Their work saved the downtown team an estimated 30 hours of beautification labor while helping enhance the appearance and appeal of key public spaces.

## ...and on Social

In 2025, Downtown's digital storytelling reached more people and helped drive awareness of what's happening in the district. Across platforms, the Downtown audience grew steadily and engagement climbed, reflecting strong community interest in Downtown news, openings, events, and visual moments.

Total followers reached 11.3K, including 6.3K on Facebook, 4.9K on Instagram, and 200 on LinkedIn, a brand new page in 2025. Net follower growth totaled 1,694, a 9.1 percent year-over-year increase. Post views reached more than 1.3 million, a 61 percent increase year over year.

Top-performing posts included the Cedar Rapids Sign Reveal with 2,389 reactions, 698 comments, and 109 shares. The Marathon Announcement with 735 reactions, 244 comments, and 52 shares. The Fireside Tavern Opening with 431 reactions, 73 comments, and 29 shares.



**Top Posts**  
**Cedar Rapids Sign Reveal**  
2,389 reactions  
698 comments  
109 shares

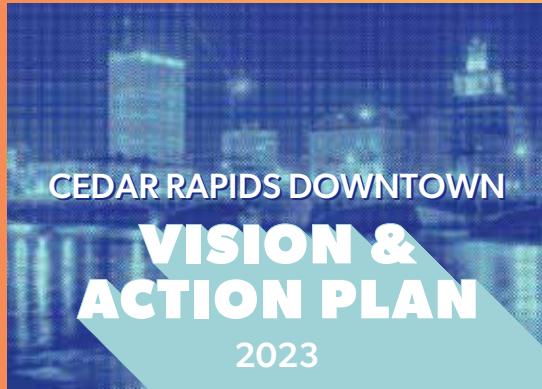
**Marathon Announcement**  
735 reactions  
244 comments  
52 shares

**Fireside Tavern Opening**  
431 reactions  
73 comments  
29 shares

**11.3k (6.3k facebook, 4.9k instagram)**  
Total Followers

**1,842**  
Net Follower Growth  
(9.1% increase YOY)

**1.3M+**  
Post Views  
(61% increase YOY)

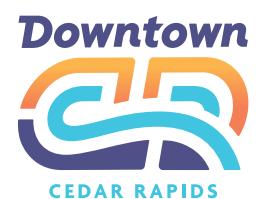


# Downtown Vision Plan

As we head into year three of implementation of the Downtown Vision Plan, the focus remains on continuing to advance the outlined initiative of Embracing the River, Ensure Downtown is Activated & Vibrant, & Improve Connectivity. With the guidance of the Implementation Team our efforts are underway to ensure downtown remains vibrant, welcoming, and economically resilient, with an emphasis on sustaining progress rather than slowing it. We already have strong foundation in place and continued commitment to the Vision Plan, Downtown is well positioned to continue on with our momentum and success in the years ahead.

The Downtown Vision Plan continues to serve as a roadmap for guiding investment, programming, and decision making across our amazing district. Over the past two years, meaningful progress has been made on key priorities, with clear momentum building around placemaking, community support, and downtown activation. Collaboration with partners, property owners, and community stakeholders has strengthened implementation efforts, ensuring that initiatives align with both the long term vision and day to day needs of downtown.





**319.398.5317**  
**501 First St. SE**  
**Cedar Rapids, IA 52401**

**[www.downtowncr.org](http://www.downtowncr.org)**