

DOWNTOWN ACTION SERIES – NOTES FOR MEETING 6

ACTIVE RESIDENTS

Downtown Saint Paul is home to a growing community of engaged and active residents who contribute to the vibrancy, culture, and safety of the city's core. These residents participate in neighborhood initiatives, community events, and local planning efforts, helping shape a welcoming and thriving downtown for all who live, work, and visit.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Downtown Saint Paul residents can get involved by joining neighborhood groups – like the Friends of the different parks around downtown, attending city/community meetings (like this Downtown Action Series), attending an evening or weekend event (like Ordway's upcoming Inside Out series), or joining the Skyway Walkers. To learn more about any of these events or to get more involved, email Bill at skywayblooddrive@gmail.com

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Bill Hanley, Downtown resident and neighborhood champion

Downtown residents are leading the way in making our city center feel like a true neighborhood of 30,000:

- Parks & Public Spaces – Gardening, trash removal, and safety monitoring in Mears Park and beyond.
- Skyway Safety & Access – Supporting one of downtown's most valued assets for both residents and workers.
- Community Giving – Hosting monthly Red Cross blood drives at Union Depot (64 completed since 2020).
- Arts & Culture – Partnering with the Ordway and SPCO to boost attendance and explore creative community solutions amid declining support for local arts.

Business & Resident Partnerships – Finding ways to strengthen the connection between local businesses and the growing residential community.

New Ideas – From history lectures to movie screenings, residents are creating new ways to connect and build community.

Support for Projects – Groups like Friends of Pedro Park help neighbors navigate city processes and bring ideas to life.

Get Involved: Every small step matters. Connect at skywayblooddrive@gmail.com

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Bill Hanley, Downtown resident and neighborhood champion

- Community-driven initiatives: Downtown residents continue to launch creative projects that enhance downtown's livability and sense of community. Examples include the grand opening of the new Pedro Park, Friends of Mears Park events (like the upcoming Halloween movie night and pet parade), and the monthly Skyway Blood Drives hosted at Union Depot supported by local partners like the StP Chamber Orchestra, Children's Museum and Minnesota Roller Derby.
- New downtown ventures: Downtown residents urged to support downtown businesses like the redevelopment of the former Black Dog Café space into a Farmers Market / Country Store.
- Arts partnerships: Conversations are underway with the Ordway and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra about developing new support and engagement models with downtown residents as the residential population grows.
- Skyway activation: Working with the organizers of the Food Truck Festival on ideas to activate the Skyway System year-round.
- Indoor Park concept: The Deputy Mayor has asked Hanley's "Active Residents" group, Parks Director Andy Rodriguez and others to assist her in exploring the creation of a year-round indoor park & play space --- designed to attract residents, workers, families and energize the Skyway System and its adjacent businesses.
- Call to Action: Encouraged attendees to connect with him (skywayblooddrive@gmail.com) if they have ideas for downtown projects or small group collaborations that could help build community and vibrancy.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Bill Hanley, Downtown resident and neighborhood champion

Supporting Resident-Led Initiatives

- Bill Hanley emphasized the value of individual residents taking initiative to improve downtown. The group acts as a loose coalition that facilitates communication, provides guidance and resources, and helps residents navigate barriers, connect with partners, and take practical steps to turn their ideas into action, including overcoming logistical or regulatory challenges.

Recent and Upcoming Projects

- **Friends of Mears Park:** Collaborated with the Downtown Alliance to enhance Mears Park, making it a vibrant, community-centered space.
- **Ordway & Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Collaboration:** Residents are helping cultural institutions engage new downtown residents, fostering long-term participation and community connection.
- **Monthly Blood Drives:** Coordinated by residents, now in their 68th month, providing a recurring community health service in downtown spaces.
- **Skyway 5K Race:** Residents are helping organize a 5K race through the skyways on February 28, demonstrating the group's role in enabling unique, community-driven events downtown.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Bill Hanley, Downtown resident and neighborhood champion

A broad update was shared highlighting the strong culture of resident-led initiatives in Downtown Saint Paul and the continued efforts to support grassroots ideas that enhance vibrancy and community connection.

Downtown residents continue to play a significant role in initiating and sustaining projects that improve public spaces and strengthen neighborhood identity, including activation efforts around parks such as Mears Park and Pedro Park. To further support this energy, an informal "Active Residents" group of approximately 18–20 experienced community members has formed to help residents who have ideas to improve downtown but may need guidance, connections, or assistance gaining traction. The group serves as a resource hub to help move ideas from concept to implementation.

One longstanding example of resident leadership is the monthly Red Cross blood drive, which recently marked its 70th occurrence. Organized by a small team of resident volunteers, the effort is supported by local partners including ticket donations from the St. Paul Saints and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra to help incentivize participation. This initiative reflects the strong collaboration between residents and downtown institutions. Residents are also working to deepen connections between Lowertown and downtown arts and cultural organizations. Conversations and engagement efforts are underway with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts to foster a stronger sense of ownership and participation among residents. Similar discussions have recently begun with the Network Center to encourage cross-neighborhood engagement and greater utilization of programming.

Overall, the update underscored the ongoing leadership of downtown residents in shaping initiatives, building partnerships, and strengthening community life.

Update presented by Nancy Kehmeier, Downtown resident and skyway champion

An update was shared regarding the formation of a new resident-led initiative focused on bringing renewed energy and creativity to the downtown skyway system.

Modeled loosely after “Friends of the Parks”—style efforts, the emerging “Friends of the Skyway” concept aims to bring residents together to imagine and implement ways to make the skyway more vibrant and welcoming. Early ideas include incorporating more music and art installations, encouraging greater evening activity, and exploring improved wayfinding. The overall goal is to reimagine the skyway as a more engaging and community-oriented space.

The group is actively seeking residents who have creative ideas and are interested in helping bring them to life. Participants do not need to have fully formed plans—just an interest in contributing and collaborating. Organizers emphasized that there will be opportunities both for hands-on involvement and for those who simply want to provide feedback and share ideas.

Residents were invited to sign up via email or QR code distributed at the meeting, with the intent of quickly gathering input and building momentum around next steps. The tone of the initiative is intentionally collaborative and fun, with an emphasis on creativity, accessibility, and shared ownership of the space.

Update presented by Jess Fast, Co-Owner/Organizer of the MN Food Truck Festival

An update was shared regarding the upcoming Skyway 5K, taking place next Saturday, with the start and finish located at Union Depot. The race route will guide participants through 16 buildings and 16 skyway bridges, looping from Union Depot toward Wells Fargo and TRIA before returning. The event has been more than a decade in the making and represents a significant milestone for organizers who have long envisioned showcasing the skyway system in this way.

The goal of the Skyway 5K is twofold: to bring new visitors downtown and to reintroduce the skyway system as a unique and valuable asset. Organizers hope participants will experience the skyway not simply as a corridor between destinations, but as a destination in itself—one that is memorable, engaging, and worthy of return visits. As with most 5K events, runners are expected to bring friends and family, further increasing downtown foot traffic and post-race activity.

Strong early registration numbers reflect broad interest, with approximately 700 participants registered at the time of the update and projections exceeding 800 by race day.

Safety and logistics are a top priority. Organizers are personally supplying approximately 300 traffic delineators and will have around 15 course marshals stationed along the route to ensure a smooth and secure experience. Volunteers are assisting with route setup and event operations. The event will also incorporate music and lively programming elements throughout the course to create a vibrant atmosphere.

In addition to activating the skyway and downtown spaces, the race includes a charitable component, with proceeds supporting CapitolRiver Council.

Overall, the event represents a creative and large-scale effort to animate the skyway system, attract visitors, and generate positive energy in downtown Saint Paul.

CITY OF SAINT PAUL

The City of Saint Paul plays a central role in supporting a safe, vibrant, and thriving downtown through coordinated efforts across its departments. Through the Downtown Action Series, hosted by Council President Noecker, the City brings together key departments — including public safety, public works, parks and recreation, community development, and others — to share updates, address challenges, and collaborate on initiatives that improve the downtown experience for residents, workers, and visitors. These gatherings provide a forum for City leaders to engage directly with partners and the community, ensuring that downtown remains a welcoming and well-supported hub of activity.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

A \$130 million mixed-use development is planned for Central Station, featuring a 20-story apartment tower with 300 units, retail space, and a skyway over the Green Line. The project aims to boost transit access and downtown vitality, with construction expected to begin by late 2026.

City planners and the Downtown Alliance recommended elevating 5th Street to become the main pedestrian thoroughfare, linking landmarks like Rice Park, Mears Park, the Central Station, and CHS Field.

Ecolab Plaza, now known as Osborn Plaza, is undergoing a significant transformation in downtown Saint Paul. Originally a concrete sidewalk and plaza area between Ecolab’s headquarters, the Landmark Center, and the Hamm Building, the space is being reimaged into a vibrant green community area.

Hamm Plaza is being redeveloped to enhance transit access, pedestrian infrastructure, and green space. Key upgrades include an expanded Metro Transit Gold Line stop, improved bike and pedestrian connections via the Capital City Bikeway, and new landscaping with trees and benches. Ecolab, headquartered nearby, is contributing to the project with a \$2 million investment to transform the area into a vibrant community green space. The City’s Parks and Recreation Department is leading the redevelopment to create a more welcoming hub for residents, workers, and visitors.

Pedro Park is nearly doubling in size—from 0.45 to 0.87 acres—transforming into a true urban oasis. The expanded park is designed to cool downtown heat islands, boost property values, and bring new life to the street level. It marks the culmination of over 20 years of community-driven advocacy. Construction is ongoing, with infrastructure and amenities rolling out first, and a grand opening anticipated in spring or summer 2025.

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Director Andy Rodriguez

Volunteer & Community Partnerships: Acknowledged the critical role of volunteers and community groups, including Friends of Mears Park, in maintaining and activating downtown parks.

Park Activation & Events: Summer initiatives included happy hours, block parties, and collaborations with local businesses (e.g., Gambit Brewing) to bring more visibility and engagement to park spaces.

Public Safety Collaboration: Partnering with city departments and the Police Department to support unsheltered residents and mitigate drug use, ensuring safer, more enjoyable parks.

Pedro Park Grand Opening: Ribbon-cutting scheduled for September 4th, 4–6 p.m. The park features vibrant spaces, a new dog park, and programming supported by Downtown Street Team ambassadors and placemaking consultants.

Other Park Projects:

- Osborne Plaza: Significant renovation planned within 12–18 months, possibly breaking ground this fall.
- Ham's Plaza: Re-envisioning in collaboration with Ecolab; timeline nearly finalized
- Mears Park: Improvements including replacement of the retaining wall to enhance existing spaces.

Active Recreation Planning: Exploring opportunities for pickleball courts and other active recreation downtown.

Written update prepared and shared by City of Saint Paul Public Works Department

Project Timelines:

- Robert Street: Substantially complete this year; some items continuing into 2026.
- 7th Street by the Downtowner: Expected to wrap up in September.
- Minnesota Street: Scheduled for completion this season.

Coordination & Communication:

- Outreach to businesses and residents, weekly construction updates.
- Collaboration with partners including Ramsey County, MnDOT, and Metro Transit.
- Plans to improve on-site communication and information at major construction sites.

Public Works Focus Areas:

- Completing ongoing construction projects (e.g., Kellogg Bikeway, Robert, Minnesota).
- Developing the Downtown Streets and Sidewalks Plan.
- Implementing improvements at key downtown intersections.

Maintenance & Accessibility:

- Supporting the Downtown Alliance Ambassador program.
- Regular trash sweeps in high-need areas.
- Enhanced graffiti removal, vegetation management, and painting.

Call to Action: Check out and bookmark the following resources –

- www.stpaul.gov/construction
- <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/public-works/downtown-projects>
- <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/public-works/transportation-and-transit/downtown-streets-and-sidewalks-plan>

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Deputy Mayor Jaime Tincher provided an overview of current city initiatives and investments designed to enhance downtown Saint Paul, highlighting public-private partnerships, infrastructure improvements, and beautification efforts.

Downtown Roadmap & Goals

The City has developed a two-page roadmap outlining departmental priorities with three core goals:

- Ensure a safe, welcoming, and vibrant downtown experience (public safety focus)
- Advance public infrastructure improvements
- Enhance vibrancy through community and placemaking initiatives

Public Infrastructure & Construction Updates

- Garbage and Recycling Containers: 81 new BigBelly containers will replace existing downtown litter bins. Equipped with compactors, each bin will increase capacity to 150 gallons, improve public works efficiency, reduce labor risk, and unify streetscape aesthetics. Installation begins the week of November 17, and existing city-owned bins will be removed. The Downtown Alliance is partnering to repurpose the existing mosaic containers, which will be stored and repaired at the City's Solid Waste and Recycling Facility.
- Construction Updates & Communication:
 - New banners with QR codes are being deployed at construction sites to provide real-time updates, explain project goals, and encourage public understanding.
 - Minnesota Street Reconstruction (Kellogg Blvd to 11th Street) is complete and open.
 - Robert Street and 10th Street intersection has reopened, with robust business engagement supporting the recent Pedro Park opening. Discussions are underway with Robert Street businesses about a potential "soft opening" from 10th to 7th Street.
 - The City continues to gather community input on the Downtown Streets and Sidewalk Plan to develop a shared vision for key streets.
- Construction Support: Public works is providing "survival kits" to minimize disruption for businesses and residents and maintains a weekly downtown construction map, highlighting road or lane closures. These maps are shared through the Downtown Alliance and weekly construction updates.

Parks, Placemaking & Public Art

- Pedro Park: Officially opened with a ribbon-cutting; the park has been well-used by the neighborhood and downtown community. Several events have already been hosted, with more planned for next year.
- Osborn Plaza: A contractor bid was awarded this week. Initial work is expected before winter, with a celebration planned. The project aligns with nearby housing development in the former Ecolab building and future Alliance Bank Center plans.
- Downtown Utility Box Art: Parks and Public Works partnered with Forecast Public Art to wrap 16 utility boxes throughout downtown.
- Mears Park: Recently hosted the photo exhibition "By a Thread: Downtown Series" by Katie Howe, showcasing downtown residents, employees, and business owners. The exhibit will remain on display through winter.
- Rice Park & Mears Park Holiday Preparations: Partners and community groups are finalizing dates for holiday lighting celebrations.

Downtown Businesses

- Reckless Swagger, a high-end clothing store, opened this summer at 523 Jackson Street
- St. Paul Farmer's Market has taken over a lease at 308 Prince Street. They will eventually have a commercial kitchen and indoor farmer's market open year-round. They will have a soft opening for the indoor market November 1 and 2 during regular market hours.
- Eagle Street reopened in its new location on West 7th! It's great to re-welcome them to the neighborhood, just in time for hockey season.
- Downtown Robert Street businesses (in collaboration with Public Works) hosted a block party to celebrate part of Robert Street Reconstruction being complete.

Community Engagement

Residents and businesses are encouraged to sign up for construction updates and share questions or feedback as new projects move forward.

Update presented by Saint Paul City Council President Rebecca Noecker

Council President Noecker is proposing an amendment to the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) to align with new federal tax law and better support downtown housing development. The amendment would allow downtown housing projects using Historic Tax Credits to qualify for the federal qualified contract rule after 15 years of affordability.

This change would make better use of limited resources, encourage private investment, and support downtown revitalization—converting underused office space into new housing, strengthening the tax base, and benefiting residents citywide.

Arena Complex Bonding Project — Legislative Presentation

- Presented to the House Capital Investment Committee on the downtown arena/multifacility bonding proposal, underscoring the need for critical upgrades to a major regional economic engine that supports jobs, events, and downtown vitality.

Additional Citywide Progress:

- Gun Violence Prevention Ordinance: Led the introduction and passage of Saint Paul's new Gun Violence Prevention Ordinance — the first adopted by any city in the statewide coalition — strengthening local enforcement tools and advancing proactive, community-centered public safety.
- Citywide Ban on Cryptocurrency Kiosks: Advanced and passed an ordinance prohibiting cryptocurrency ATMs/kiosks citywide in response to scam activity disproportionately impacting seniors and low-income residents, prioritizing consumer protection and responsible regulation.
- 2026 City Budget Adoption: Approved the 2026 City Budget, restoring critical services residents rely on — including firefighter staffing, BLS night shift, CARES, recreation center and library hours — while maintaining a modest 5.3% levy. The budget also includes targeted downtown investments through increased HRA funding, continued Commercial Corridor support, and public realm improvements.

Downtown-Focused Updates:

- Skyway System Resident Discussion: Convened downtown residents to discuss skyway closures, connectivity gaps, and the status of reactivation efforts.
- Saint Paul Business Awards: Celebrated the 9th Annual Saint Paul Business Awards, including recognition of Lost Fox (213 E 4th St., Ward 2) as “New Kid on the Block,” highlighting downtown’s growing small business community.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Saint Paul City Council President Rebecca Noecker

Council President Rebecca Noecker provided an update outlining recent actions by the Saint Paul City Council to protect residents and businesses and respond to federal enforcement activity impacting the community.

Recent Council actions include formally calling on the Governor to issue an eviction moratorium for both residential and commercial tenants, advancing legislation to prohibit federal agencies from staging operations in city-owned or city-controlled parking lots, and requiring visible identification on the outermost layer of uniforms for all law enforcement officers operating in Saint Paul. The Council also passed restrictions on masked law enforcement officers.

The City of Saint Paul has joined the City of Minneapolis and the State of Minnesota in litigation against the federal government related to recent ICE enforcement actions. Additional measures are expected to come before the Council, including strengthening the City's separation ordinance and allocating additional funding for emergency rental assistance. The Council emphasized that ensuring safety and stability for residents and businesses remains a top priority, particularly in areas of the community experiencing ongoing strain.

The update also highlighted major redevelopment activity in downtown Saint Paul. The Saint Paul Port Authority recently brokered a redevelopment agreement at the former St. Joseph's Hospital campus. The project includes approximately \$6 million in public investment for demolition and site preparation, which is expected to leverage roughly \$60 million in future taxable development value on the five-and-a-half-acre site. Fairview is assuming most holding and related costs. This project represents a strategic, small public investment that is projected to generate substantial private and public return and is the result of a long-term collaboration among the Port Authority, City Council, and private partners.

The Council also welcomed the transition to a new mayoral administration, expressing strong early collaboration with Mayor Her's team. Engagement between the Council and the Mayor's Office has focused on downtown priorities, including skyway activation and ongoing planning around a downtown grocery store. While no formal grocery store announcement was made, attendees were advised that an update is anticipated within the next two to three weeks and were encouraged to ensure their contact information is correctly noted on the sign-in sheet to receive forthcoming communications.

Update presented by City of Saint Paul Director of Public Works, Sean Kershaw

An update was provided on current snow operations, downtown infrastructure improvements, and major construction projects.

The City declared its first snow emergency of the season in response to higher-than-anticipated snowfall, particularly on residential streets. With sustained cold temperatures forecasted and a major tournament bringing visitors downtown, Public Works is prioritizing thorough street clearing to ensure safe and accessible conditions. Residents were reminded to follow snow emergency parking rules and monitor city notifications.

Downtown sanitation infrastructure has also recently improved with the installation of new “Big Belly” garbage and recycling containers. These self-compacting, sensor-equipped units hold significantly more waste than previous bins and automatically notify crews when they reach approximately 60% capacity. As a result, collection efficiency has improved substantially, reducing the time required for servicing and freeing up staff capacity to address issues such as illegal dumping in other parts of the city. The upgrade represents a coordinated effort between Public Works leadership, solid waste and recycling staff, the City Council, and the Mayor's Office.

Major construction activity was also highlighted. Work on the Kellogg Boulevard bridge project over I-94 recently reached a milestone with the installation of large structural beams spanning the interstate. The project continues with additional span work over

Commercial Street. In addition, construction of a new bike lane along Kellogg Boulevard—from St. Peter Street to 7th Street—is expected to begin this year and will be one of the most visible downtown construction projects aside from the ongoing bridge work.

Overall, the update emphasized the City's continued focus on maintenance, modernization, and infrastructure improvements to support downtown vitality and safety.

Update presented by City of Saint Paul Economic Development Supervisor (PED), Daniela Lorenz

An update was provided on current funding opportunities and upcoming investments focused on business support and downtown revitalization.

The City's Neighborhood STAR Program—funded through the voter-approved half-cent sales tax reauthorization—is currently open for applications, with a deadline of March 13. The program provides grants for capital improvement projects, including support for small businesses, nonprofits, and cultural organizations through the Cultural STAR program. Eligible applicants seeking funding for physical improvements or capital investments are encouraged to apply and to reach out to the Planning and Economic Development (PED) team with questions in advance of the deadline. [STAR application and resources](#)

In addition, the City is preparing to launch a new Downtown Vitality Fund. Approximately \$5 million has been reserved to support downtown-focused investments, including housing conversions as well as street-level revitalization and commercial building improvements. The proposal is scheduled to be introduced to the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) on the 4th, with anticipated approval on the 11th. If approved, application materials are expected to be released shortly thereafter. Funding will primarily target projects within the Downtown Improvement District.

To further inform City planning and investment, business impact surveys were recently released to help understand the collective impact of the Federal immigration surge on Saint Paul businesses. These surveys were shared in multiple languages and highlighted in the February Small Business Newsletter (February 20). PED and the Mayor's Office will also send an additional communication about the survey, and staff are sharing the surveys with community groups and district councils. There is no deadline for responding, and businesses with questions or comments are encouraged to reach out. Available survey translations include:

- [English](#)
- [Hmong](#)
- [Karen](#)
- [Somali](#)
- [Spanish](#)

Overall, the update highlighted the City's continued commitment to leveraging public resources to support capital improvements, strengthen small businesses and cultural institutions, and accelerate downtown recovery and reinvestment.

Update presented by the Mayor's Office, Mayor Kaohly Her and Assistant Mayor Stumo-Langer

Mayor Her and Assistant Mayor Stumo-Langer provided an overview of the administration's first weeks in office, highlighting structural changes, downtown-focused initiatives, and intergovernmental coordination.

The Mayor emphasized the value of cross-sector collaboration and ongoing engagement with downtown stakeholders. In the first month, the administration implemented a new leadership structure to streamline city operations. Rather than a traditional mayor–deputy mayor system, responsibilities are now divided among four assistant mayors overseeing: housing, economic vibrancy, and infrastructure; public safety and justice; community services including libraries, parks, and human resources; and internal operations, allowing urgent matters and longer-term priorities to advance simultaneously.

Key accomplishments and initiatives include:

- **Planning Commission Restructuring:** Reduced the Commission from 21 members to a smaller, ward-based structure with citywide alternates to improve efficiency and responsiveness.
- **Process Improvements:** Enhanced interdepartmental coordination for permitting, program tracking, and issue response, including a new complaint system for skyway-related concerns.
- **Downtown Vitality Fund:** Launch of a \$5 million fund to encourage new housing growth, strengthen the tax base, and revitalize downtown activity.
- **Investment and Redevelopment Programs:**
 - Announcement of a \$30 million downtown investment initiative to support long-term economic growth.
 - Partnership with the Saint Paul Port Authority to extend program eligibility to northern downtown areas, including the Fitzgerald neighborhood.
- **Public Safety and Legislative Priorities:** Coordination with Police Chief Axel Henry on targeted strategies, requests for continued state funding for youth programs shown to reduce recidivism, and advocacy for resources to support constitutionally protected public demonstrations.

The Mayor highlighted ongoing intergovernmental collaboration with state and federal legislators to secure bonding and appropriations for critical downtown infrastructure and programs.

The update also noted upcoming housing, development, and business announcements designed to grow the tax base, expand commercial activity, and support downtown revitalization, emphasizing that the administration continues to listen to stakeholders and respond to community priorities.

DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE / DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Downtown Alliance and Saint Paul Downtown Development Corporation (SPDDC) work together to promote a vibrant, thriving downtown. The Downtown Alliance focuses on enhancing the day-to-day experience downtown through clean, safe, and welcoming streets, business support, and community engagement. The SPDDC drives long-term economic development by managing key properties, attracting investment, and supporting revitalization projects that strengthen downtown as a hub for business, culture, and community.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

The Saint Paul Downtown Development Corporation (SPDDC) is a nonprofit created in February 2025 by the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance to lead downtown revitalization efforts. It focuses on acquiring and redeveloping key properties, driving office-to-residential conversions, and serving as a central hub for coordinating investment and partnerships—all under the leadership of an experienced real estate developer. The DDC has purchased the debt on the Alliance Bank Building and intends to take control of the building soon.

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Dave Higgins, President of the Downtown Development Corporation

Acquisition of Alliance Bank Center Bank Note: The DDC purchased the debt for this central downtown property, part of the Madison Equities portfolio.

Next Steps: Over the next 12 months, the DDC plans to gain control of the property, conduct evaluations, and explore redevelopment opportunities, including potential residential conversion, in alignment with the Downtown Investment Strategy.

Key Partners:

- City of St. Paul: Provides guidance and support, including involvement with the Alliance Bank Center.
- Ramsey County: Engaged in downtown growth projects such as the River's Edge development.
- Local Employers & Investors: Actively supporting downtown revitalization initiatives.

Outlook: The DDC is positioned to accelerate downtown St. Paul's redevelopment by combining strategic investment, collaborative partnerships, and long-term planning.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Joe Spencer, President of the Downtown Alliance

Alliance Bank Building Update

- The Downtown Development Corporation has officially acquired the Alliance Bank Building after purchasing the bank note several months ago.
- Goal: Evaluate potential redevelopment options for the property over the next 12 months.
- Upcoming work includes:
 - Conducting demolition estimates (partial or full).
 - Assessing structural systems within the building.
 - Exploring eligibility for historic tax credits.
- Immediate concern: Security and damage prevention.
 - Staff discovered water damage in the basement after someone broke in and opened a pipe.
 - The Skyway connection will remain closed for now due to ongoing security issues and to prevent unauthorized access.

Reimagining Downtown Core

- Work continues to define what a "reimagined" downtown core will look like.
- A formal announcement of a community / downtown user engagement process with more details is expected within the next 30 days.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Dave Higgins, President of the Downtown Development Corporation

Skyway System

SPDDC emphasized that skyways remain a priority and an ongoing, near-daily focus. Where SPDDC has ownership or involvement, efforts are underway to reopen closed segments as quickly as possible, with continued coordination anticipated.

Strategic Property Acquisitions

SPDDC announced the acquisition of the Empire Building and adjacent Endicott Arcade along 5th Street — former Madison Equities properties that have been vacant for several years. The \$745,000 purchase was fully funded through private investment, with no public funds required. Cushman & Wakefield will serve as property manager.

5th Street Revitalization & Downtown Core

The acquisitions advance SPDDC's Downtown Investment Strategy, with a particular focus on revitalizing 5th Street as a key connector between downtown's major civic destinations. The Empire Building includes approximately 12,000 square feet of ground-level commercial space, presenting near-term opportunities for street-level activation and retail uses.

Reimagining the Downtown Core

SPDDC noted that parts of the downtown core require a fundamentally new approach — not a return to what existed previously. The organization is assembling a strong team to lead this work and emphasized the need for a higher level of engagement to reimagine how these spaces function moving forward.

Community Engagement Ahead

SPDDC will be engaging residents, stakeholders, and businesses as plans develop through the broader *Reimagine Downtown Saint Paul: Transforming the Core* initiative, ensuring community aspirations are balanced with market realities.

Additional updates presented by Joe Spencer, President of the Downtown Alliance, and Zakcq Lockrem of MEND Collaborative

Downtown Alliance Overview

The Saint Paul Downtown Alliance is a nonprofit organization launched in 2018 with a mission to drive vitality in downtown Saint Paul. Over the past 7.5 years, the Alliance has led major initiatives including the Downtown Improvement District (DID), which deploys street ambassadors focused on safety, cleanliness, and hospitality; produced and sponsored events that activate downtown; and served as a central advocate for increased resources and investment in the downtown core. More recently, the Alliance launched the Saint Paul Downtown Development Corporation to directly address real estate challenges and opportunities downtown.

Reimagine Downtown Saint Paul: Transforming the Core

The Alliance, in partnership with Creative Catalyst and Mend Collaborative, is leading *Reimagine Downtown Saint Paul: Transforming the Core* — a fast-paced, community-driven planning and engagement effort focused on approximately 12 blocks at the heart of downtown. This initiative is not a traditional long-term plan, but a targeted, 4–6 month process designed to respond to rapid changes and emerging opportunities in the downtown core, particularly in light of recent strategic property acquisitions and evolving market conditions.

Community Engagement & Early Participation

The initiative launched with an online community survey and interactive mapping tool, allowing participants to share ideas, highlight assets, identify challenges, and react to others' suggestions. Early engagement has been strong, with more than 1,600 website visits, 500+ completed surveys, and approximately 300 comments submitted via the interactive map.

Upcoming Engagement Phases

- **December–January:** Continued survey outreach and pop-up engagement events throughout downtown, including in skyways and at community gatherings.

- **February:** A series of “Design Sprint” events where community members will review what was heard, collaborate with design professionals, and help shape actionable ideas and concepts for the downtown core.

Participants are encouraged to sign up for the project mailing list to receive updates, event invitations, and opportunities for topic-specific engagement (e.g., business, public realm, landscape, activation).

What Success Looks Like

Success for this process means developing a clear, actionable short-term direction for activating downtown’s core over the next several years — not a rigid step-by-step plan, but a shared sense of priorities, values, and direction that can guide decision-making, investment, and future projects. Community input will help establish a common vocabulary and framework to inform both public and private efforts moving forward.

Call to Action

Residents and stakeholders are encouraged to:

- Take the online survey
- Explore and contribute to the interactive map
- Sign up for updates
- Share the survey with friends and neighbors to broaden participation

All of these action items can be achieved via this link: <https://engage.mendcollaborative.com/reimaginedowntownstp>

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Dave Higgins, President of the Saint Paul Downtown Development Corporation (DDC)

Dave Higgins, President of the Downtown Development Corporation, provided an update on recent activities and initiatives supporting downtown St. Paul’s revitalization.

At the end of December, the Downtown Development Corporation acquired the debt on the US Bank Center. While the organization did not acquire the property title, this acquisition allows DDC to have a more influential role in the future of the property. In the near term, ensuring responsible operation of the property, through a court appointed receiver, while enabling greater access to assist with evaluation and long-term planning for the site. Significant operational challenges shortly after the acquisition were noted, including major pipe freezing during the recent low temperatures, requiring round-the-clock work to maintain building operations.

The DDC highlighted the launch of a downtown investment fund supported by early investors, including Security Financial and the Bush Foundation. The fund is structured as an investment vehicle rather than a grant, providing capital for acquisitions, pre-development work, and carrying costs to support redevelopment projects across its downtown properties.

Update presented by Joe Spencer, President of the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance (SPDA)

Joe Spencer, President of the SPDA, provided an update on recent SPDA/Downtown Improvement District (DID) activities and initiatives supporting downtown St. Paul’s revitalization.

Operational and community support highlights include:

- Continued expansion of ambassador services on light rail platforms through Metro Transit partnerships.
- Engagement with residents and stakeholders through the “Reimagine Downtown St. Paul” initiative, including over 1,000 survey responses and hundreds of interactive map submissions.
- Civic maintenance and public service metrics for 2025, including:
 - 4,918 graffiti tags removed
 - 629 needles collected
 - 7,319 instances of sidewalk cleaning
 - 2,766 welfare checks conducted
 - 52,000 instances of general civic assistance
 - 2,909 snow corners cleared
 - 1,125 safety escorts provided to individuals in public spaces

Spencer emphasized the SPDA/DID’s commitment to enhancing downtown St. Paul’s safety, cleanliness, and vibrancy, noting the essential and often challenging work of the team in supporting both property owners and the broader community.

DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

The Downtown Saint Paul Downtown Improvement District (DID) works to keep the heart of the city clean, safe, welcoming, and vibrant for everyone who lives, works, and visits downtown. Through enhanced services like daily sidewalk cleaning, public space maintenance, hospitality support, and placemaking efforts, the DID helps create an environment where downtown can thrive.

At the front line of this work are the DID Ambassadors — a visible, friendly presence throughout downtown. Ambassadors provide directions and assistance to visitors, connect individuals to resources, report maintenance needs, and help ensure public spaces feel safe and inviting. Trained in de-escalation and community-oriented engagement, Ambassadors play a key role in supporting businesses, residents, and visitors while strengthening a sense of care and connection downtown.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

The Downtown Improvement District (DID) is a special service district that focuses on enhancing the cleanliness, safety, and overall appeal of the downtown area. Funded by assessments on property owners within the district, the DID provides services like street cleaning, security patrols, graffiti removal, landscaping, and public space maintenance. Its goal is to create a vibrant, welcoming environment that supports businesses, residents, and visitors, helping to drive economic development and improve quality of life downtown.

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Dave Higgins, President of the Downtown Development Corporation

At the August 13 City Council Meeting, Council President Noecker recognized the Downtown Ambassadors for their dedication to keeping downtown Saint Paul safe, clean, and welcoming. Their work supports businesses, residents, and visitors, making the city a more vibrant and accessible community.

DID Ambassadors are easily recognized in their bright yellow uniforms and are available 7 days a week, from 7 AM to 11 PM. They can:

- Assist with directions & safety escorts
- Report and address graffiti, litter, and broken glass
- Offer wellness checks and non-emergency assistance
- Help keep parks and public spaces safe & clean

Need Assistance? Contact the Safety Communications Center via call or text at 651-236-0284 for non-emergency needs, safety escorts, or to report issues.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Joe Spencer, President of the Downtown Alliance

Downtown Improvement District & Public Safety

- Shared praise for the Saint Paul Police Department for strong recent crime statistics and encouraged everyone to help amplify the positive news, noting that “bad news spreads fast on its own.”
- The Alliance continues to partner with SPPD through contracted overtime, supporting the work of Downtown Ambassadors to address livability issues and improve compliance.
 - Current compliance rate when ambassadors make requests: 88%.
 - This demonstrates that ambassadors play a strong, active role in maintaining downtown order—not just greeting or litter pickup.
- Efforts are also underway to improve compliance and safety on the light rail, in partnership with Metro Transit.
- The Downtown Alliance is renegotiating its contract with Metro Transit to continue and possibly expand these efforts into next year.
- The Safety Communications Center Dispatch and Ambassadors are available from 7 am-11 pm 7 days a week, call or text 651-236-0284 to report concerns or request assistance.

METRO TRANSIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Metro Transit Police Department works to ensure the safety of riders, transit employees, and the public across the Metro Transit system, including in downtown Saint Paul. Through patrols, coordinated response, and community-oriented policing, Metro Transit Police support a safe, reliable transit experience while working closely with local partners to address safety concerns and connect people to resources.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Metro Transit Lieutenants Mohamed & Malland

Staffing & Visibility: Both Metro Transit Lieutenants acknowledged ongoing staffing shortages but highlighted that new officers are being hired. As staffing increases, expect greater presence downtown.

Resource Strategy: Currently focusing on high-priority areas such as University Avenue and the downtown corridor. Officers are increasingly on foot this summer with plans to continue bike patrols too. Will also continue efforts to have officers on different beats so that they become more familiar with their assigned geographical area and provide proactive policing as a service.

Guiding Mottos: “Presence matters” / “Leaders of presence” – emphasizing visibility so the public feels safe.

Security Enhancements: Restoring security positions at Central Station, Union Depot, and 10th Street. Transit agents spending more time on trains, especially with the upcoming BRT Gold Line and B Line.

Coordination: Working closely with St. Paul Police through joint downtown details to align goals across agencies.

Homeless Action Team: Recognizes many transit riders use trains and stations as shelter. Strategy focuses on combining necessary enforcement with connecting people to resources to avoid simply displacing individuals.

Outlook: The agencies are still adjusting and improving, with ongoing efforts to increase community presence and address underlying challenges, not just symptoms.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Written update sent by Lieutenant Kadra Mohamed from Metro Transit

- **Staffing and presence:** We have had an increase in Community Service Officer hiring. We are at 28 which is a record high for our department. We have also had officer academies about every month to increase our officer presence on the system which includes us returning to the beat policing model.
- **Downtown focus:** Our Homeless Action Team has begun conducting outreach efforts on board trains starting from the Central Station. Residents should see our Mobile Assessment Vehicle downtown providing resources to our unsheltered clients along with Ramsey County social workers and our contractors Mental Health Minnesota.
- **Coordination with partners:** Our officers regularly coordinate with SPPD on enforcement efforts around University Ave. We also partner with different social service agencies to provide unsheltered resources.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Metro Transit Lieutenant Malland

Lieutenant Malland provided updates on transit system safety and quality-of-life initiatives.

Crime & Safety:

- Efforts to address quality-of-life issues on transit have shown positive results, including reductions in smoking, drug paraphernalia, and other disruptive behaviors.
- Collaboration with Metro Transit cleaners and area safety officers continues to maintain safe and clean transit spaces.

Seasonal Strategy Adjustments:

- As the weather shifts toward summer, enforcement strategies will adapt, with officers present on trains, buses, and platforms in strategic locations to maintain public safety.

RAMSEY COUNTY

Ramsey County provides a wide range of services and programs that support residents, businesses, and communities, including public health, safety, social services, and infrastructure. The County works to promote equity, economic vitality, and quality of life across its communities, partnering with cities, organizations, and stakeholders to strengthen neighborhoods and support a vibrant downtown Saint Paul.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Ramsey County Manager Ling Becker

County Investments in Downtown

- Ramsey County owns and actively invests in several key downtown properties:
 - Union Depot
 - Landmark Center
 - 5th and Wacouta Building, purchased to house the County Attorney’s Office

- o Metro Square Building, undergoing significant renovation to accommodate county employees
- Highlighted the success of the Borealis train service to Chicago, which has already carried nearly 250,000 passengers since July, underscoring its role in connecting Saint Paul regionally.

Federal Shutdown Impacts on County Services

- On Tuesday 10/14, the County received notice of a significant risk to SNAP (food assistance) benefits due to the ongoing federal government shutdown. As of that day, 1,500 residents were waiting for staff assistance at County service centers.
- Initial federal guidance indicated eligibility processing would stop, but temporary reopenings have since allowed limited continuation through the end of October.
- If the shutdown persists, no SNAP benefits will be issued in November, and similar risks exist for:
 - o WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) programs
 - o MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program) cash assistance
- The County is operating in emergency management mode, working to prepare for the potential loss of benefits and mitigate impacts for vulnerable residents.

County Budget Overview

- Ramsey County operates on a biennial budget and is currently developing its 2026–2027 budget.
- County Manager Becker described this as the most difficult budget in decades, requiring significant reductions, including:
 - o Reduced library hours
 - o Program closures
 - o Staff reductions and layoffs
- These challenges stem from what national experts are calling a “\$10 trillion shift” in responsibilities from the federal government to local governments.
 - o The County is contending with new federal mandates, executive orders, and budget constraints—many of which have been challenged through the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office.
 - o The House reconciliation bill is expected to have major impacts on Medicaid funding, beginning in late 2026, with Minnesota particularly vulnerable due to its unique administrative structure.
 - o The state budget also faces structural deficits and unfunded mandates that fall to counties to implement without matching funding.

Funding Realities & Property Tax Pressures

- Counties have limited financial tools, and Ramsey County is funded 47% by property taxes (compared to about 37% in Hennepin County).
- As costs and responsibilities rise, County Manager Becker emphasized that expanding the tax base through economic development is essential to:
 - o Maintain core services
 - o Relieve pressure on property taxpayers
 - o Fund transformative, community-building initiatives
- Downtown reinvestment (such as RiversEdge) and new development in Rice Creek Commons/Arden Hills are vital for long-term fiscal sustainability.

Call to Action

- County Manager Becker urged attendees to share accurate information about the County’s financial challenges and to support economic development as a long-term strategy for community stability.
- She called on residents, businesses, and community organizations to help maintain the social safety net, emphasizing that government alone cannot meet every need.

Her closing message: this is a critical moment for partnership and investment, to ensure a stronger, more resilient community for the future.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jennifer O’Rourke, Director of Government Relations for Ramsey County

Legislative Update

Director O’Rourke provided an overview of upcoming legislative priorities and opportunities for community engagement. She emphasized collaboration with city government relations staff, particularly during the transition in the mayor’s office.

2026 Legislative Session

- The short session begins February 17 and is expected to run through mid-May, consistent with election-year schedules.
- Ramsey County has a delegation of approximately 25 legislators, including mostly Democrats and one Republican from the northern suburbs. Many local legislators are generally supportive of Ramsey County priorities such as homelessness and community services.
- Residents and stakeholders may be asked to make phone calls or send emails to legislators to support key initiatives.

Commercial Underutilized Building (CUB) Tax Credit

O’Rourke highlighted the CUB credit, a tax incentive for revitalizing underutilized commercial buildings downtown. The credit did not pass last year due to budget constraints but is expected to be a focus again in collaboration with business partners and the city this session.

Community Engagement

Ramsey County staff encouraged attendees to stay involved and be ready to act on legislative opportunities as details emerge over the coming months.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

The Ramsey County Attorney’s Office serves as the chief prosecutor for Ramsey County and provides legal counsel to the county and its departments. The office works to promote public safety, uphold the law, and pursue justice through fair, ethical prosecution, victim support services, and collaborative approaches that strengthen community trust and accountability.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

The Ramsey County Attorney’s Office is focused on reducing violence in downtown Saint Paul through initiatives like the Nonfatal Shootings Initiative, which treats nonfatal shootings with high priority; the Healing Streets Project, offering support to those affected by violence; and collaborations to improve sexual assault response and survivor support. These efforts aim to increase public safety and provide trauma-informed care.

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Ramsey County Attorney John Choi

Community-First Public Safety: The County Attorney's Office is a key pillar alongside police in promoting safety, combining enforcement with upstream prevention and community partnerships.

Collaboration is Key: Progress happens when agencies work together. Over the past five years, collaborative efforts—including the Violence Reduction Leadership Group—have improved outcomes such as nonfatal shooting clearance rates and reduced auto theft and carjackings.

Safe and Strong Initiative: Launched in 2024 with Metro Transit Police, this program focuses on enforcement plus connecting individuals to services. It targets persistent challenges along the University Avenue corridor and downtown transit areas.

Focused Case Management: Cases in the corridor receive special attention, with options like stay-away or trespass orders. Low-level offenses (e.g., fifth-degree drug possession) focus on connecting individuals to treatment rather than long-term incarceration.

Upstream & Family-Focused Approach: Success in reducing auto theft involved identifying key youth offenders, engaging families, and providing supportive services. This collaborative, relational model is applied to current downtown challenges.

Information-Sharing & Innovation: Emphasizes cross-agency communication and plans to implement tools (like shared service apps) to track individuals' connections to supports, improving interventions and continuity of care.

Goal: Restore safety and confidence in downtown and transit spaces, combining enforcement with prevention, supportive services, and community engagement.

Call to Action: County Attorney Choi encourages residents to report concerns, ask questions, and engage directly with his office.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Chris Tolbert of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Update provided on recent trends in violent crime and ongoing collaborative efforts among law enforcement and city partners to improve public safety and quality of life across Saint Paul and Ramsey County.

- Violent crime is down 53% in Ramsey County compared to the 2022 peak (Jan–Aug data).
 - This reduction follows several years of coordinated work between the County Attorney's Office, Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD), the Mayor's Office, City Council, and the Sheriff's Office.
- Nonfatal shootings: Clearance rates have jumped from 35% in 2023 to over 70% this year, thanks to SPPD's new Nonfatal Shooting Unit, which treats nonfatal incidents with the same seriousness as homicides.
 - Results: Nonfatal shooting incidents are down 50% from last year, and the County Attorney's Office is charging 90% of presented cases—a sign of strong investigations and coordination.
- Homicides: The city continues to see historically low homicide numbers this year, which Tolbert attributed to these same joint efforts.
- Quality of life issues: The County Attorney's Office is also supporting ongoing work on downtown quality-of-life and livability challenges—particularly the open drug market and disorder issues—led by the City, Ramsey County, SPPD, Metro Transit, and others.

Emphasized that these outcomes are the result of collaboration and shared leadership across jurisdictions.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Chris Tolbert of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Safe & Strong Initiative

Chris Tolbert highlighted the Safe & Strong Initiative, a collaborative effort launched by Metro Transit, Saint Paul Police, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, and the City Attorney's Office to reduce both crime and fear of crime along light rail corridors, from Snelling Avenue to downtown platforms.

Crime Trends & Focus Areas

- The initiative primarily tracks felony-level offenses, including:
 - Drug possession and sales
 - Weapons violations
 - Felony assault
 - Domestic assault
 - Terroristic threats
- Misdemeanor or quality-of-life offenses are generally not prosecuted by the County Attorney's Office but are addressed by law enforcement.

Technology & Coordination

- Ramsey County is exploring the use of the Guides app (originating in Long Beach, CA) to provide officers with real-time information on repeat offenders and stay-away/no-contact orders.
- The app is intended to improve officer safety, enforcement consistency, and coordination among multiple law enforcement agencies on the light rail and surrounding areas.

Partnership & Goals

- The initiative emphasizes interagency collaboration to enhance public safety, reduce crime, and improve community confidence in downtown transit areas.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Chris Tolbert of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Chris Tolbert shared key updates from the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, highlighting successes in youth justice and collaborative public safety initiatives.

Reimagine Youth Justice Program:

- In 2021, the Office launched Reimagine Youth Justice, a new approach to youth referrals aimed at supporting young people in becoming productive members of society.
- The program emphasizes wraparound services through collaboration with the public defender's office, law enforcement, social services, families, and community partners.
- Tolbert noted the philosophy: just as a child who cannot read continues to be taught, youth who struggle to behave continue to receive guidance and support.

Program Impact:

- Five years of data indicate that youth crime in St. Paul has dramatically decreased, alongside general crime reductions, demonstrating the program's effectiveness.
- The approach has received support and recognition from local law enforcement, including St. Paul Police, Ramsey County Sheriff, Maplewood Police, and Metro Transit Police.

Recognition & Community Engagement:

- Chiefs and law enforcement leaders attended a recent press event to highlight the success of the initiative and affirm their support for continued collaborative efforts in youth justice.

Chris emphasized that these outcomes represent a significant positive impact for youth and public safety in St. Paul, and the office remains available for follow-up questions.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners is the governing body for Ramsey County, setting policy, approving budgets, and guiding county programs and services. District 5, which includes downtown Saint Paul, is represented on the Board and plays a key role in addressing the needs of the city's core. The Board works to advance public health, safety, equity, and community well-being across the county while partnering with cities, organizations, and stakeholders on initiatives that impact downtown Saint Paul and the broader region.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

The RiversEdge project in downtown Saint Paul is an \$800 million mixed-use development featuring a 9-acre riverfront park, office and residential towers, retail, and public amenities like an amphitheater and riverwalk. Led by Ramsey County and AECOM, it aims to revitalize the riverfront with sustainable design and boost economic growth. Schematic designs for the park and infrastructure are complete and community engagement is underway.

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Written update prepared by the Office of Rafael E. Ortega, District 5, Board Chair

Downtown Housing Projects

- Ramsey County has an urgent and evident need for affordable housing, especially for individuals and families with household incomes less than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI).
- A key strategy to meet this need is to retain existing affordable housing and the county board just voted to support two projects located in downtown Saint Paul to complete critical maintenance and upkeep projects to ensure 10 units of affordable housing at 30% - 60% are maintained for decades to come.
- Using Local Affordable Housing Aid, \$1.55 million was invested into the Minnesota Park and Presshouse apartments which will ensure 10 households have access to affordable housing for another 30-years.

RiversEdge

- The county continues to focus on site readiness by clearing the path for the private development opportunity, designing the underlying infrastructure of the future public space, and addressing various financial, legal, and technical obstacles.
- Current work is focused on a phasing plan, including verifying the appropriate size and timing of the parking structure, a foundational piece of the redevelopment. The investment in parking for both the site and downtown is being evaluated to best serve the project and broader downtown needs.
- Additional activity has been around making some short-term modest improvements to the look of the jersey barriers along Kellogg. Keep an eye out for additional beautification efforts to the site as an interim use while the site is readied for development.

Critical Corridors expansion into downtown

- The Critical Corridors Development and Infrastructure program facilitates inclusive redevelopment and public infrastructure to support projects that incorporate efficient land use and compact built form.
- The program geography (eligibility) will be adjusted to now include Downtown to support the important work of facilitating redevelopment in our capital city. This will better allow us to respond to the changing landscape and recognizing the large-scale opportunity to leverage existing energy around redevelopment projects.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Ken Iosso, Commissioner Assistant to the Office of Rafael E. Ortega - District 5, Board Chair

Metro Square / County Workforce Relocation

- Ramsey County was the first government entity to bring employees back to the office in 2022, recognizing the importance of in-person collaboration and downtown vitality.
- The County will move 1,000 employees into the Metro Square building in the first quarter of 2026.
 - This will significantly increase foot traffic, energy, and customers for surrounding downtown businesses.

Downtown Housing Investments

- In spring 2025, Ramsey County invested over \$5 billion to help revitalize distressed properties across the county.
- Downtown Saint Paul projects supported through this investment include:
 - American House on Wacouta Street
 - Apartments above the Dorothy Day and Higher Ground (on the Catholic Charities campus)
 - Minnesota Place at 4th & Cedar
- This year's funds will focus on:
 - Rehabilitation and operating reserves for the Press House Apartments (144 units at 4th & Cedar)
 - Conversion of office space and efforts to make rents more affordable at Minnesota Place (77 existing units)

RiversEdge Project

- The County shares the public's impatience for progress on the RiversEdge development.
- Updates are expected to be shared at the December Downtown Action Series meeting.
- Behind the scenes, negotiations and complex work are actively underway to advance the project.

Landmark Center Events

- The County operates the Landmark Center, which will host:
 - Great Pumpkin Halloween Festival – Sunday, October 26
 - Gangster Ghost Tour – Wednesday, October 28
 - Annual Holiday Bazaar – First weekend in December

Union Depot Events & Activities

- The County also operates Union Depot, which will host:
 - Regular blood drives are held every other month at Union Depot — attendees are encouraged to participate.
 - Ghost Tours will take place throughout Halloween week.
 - The Tree Lighting Ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, December 5, a popular annual event.
 - The Canadian Pacific Holiday Train will arrive December 13, offering a family-friendly celebration.
 - The European Christmas Market returns for its biggest year yet, taking place the last weekend in November and the first two weekends in December.

Ken Iosso, Commissioner Assistant

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December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Ken Iosso, Commissioner Assistant to the Office of Rafael E. Ortega - District 5, Board Chair

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Ordinance (MRCCA)

Chair Ortega's office shared that the City Council recently passed the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Ordinance, incorporating an amendment allowing for taller buildings along the riverfront. This change creates new opportunities for development along the river while balancing community input and environmental considerations.

Bronze Line Bus Rapid Transit

The office highlighted the recent renaming of the Purple Line to the Bronze Line, a key bus rapid transit project extending to Maplewood. This milestone underscores the importance of multijurisdictional collaboration and support from regional partners, including the Mayor of Maplewood, to advance critical transit infrastructure.

Downtown & Holiday Highlights

- The European Christmas Market is ongoing, offering residents and visitors a local alternative for holiday shopping.
- The Canadian Pacific Holiday Train will take place Saturday at 7:00 PM, with Commission Ortega scheduled to speak.
- Chair Ortega encourages support for local businesses at Union Depot, including 1881 and DG Pilot, which offer meals, drinks, and specialty gifts.

Community Engagement

Chair Ortega's office emphasized accessibility and responsiveness, inviting residents to reach out with questions or concerns via their online contact channels.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Ken Iosso, Commissioner Assistant to the Office of Rafael E. Ortega - District 5, Board Chair

Ken Iosso provided updates on behalf of District 5 and Chair Rafael E. Ortega, covering county responses to federal enforcement activity, service improvements, fiscal updates, and upcoming community programming.

Operation Metro Surge & Community Response:

- The Ramsey County Board unanimously condemned aggressive federal immigration enforcement methods as harmful and traumatic to residents and communities.
- The Board also expressed concern over recent fatal incidents involving Rene Good and Alex Preddy and called for independent investigations.
- County leadership continues a structured response, partnering with community organizations on eviction prevention, food security, and other support services, while enhancing communication and staff training to protect client and public safety.

Metro Square & Service Access:

- The Metro Square building downtown has undergone significant renovations and now houses the downtown service center and a career force location.
- Staff from the East Building will move to Metro Square in the coming weeks, providing residents with consolidated access to county services.
- Effective March 1, Metro Square will be officially renamed the Ramsey County Government Center.
- Ramsey County launched Call for All, a new 911/non-emergency system designed to streamline service delivery and connect residents with the right resources.

Fiscal Update:

- The biennial Ramsey County budget was passed unanimously in December, including a 1.5% lower general property tax levy increase than initially proposed.
- The 2026 general property tax levy will increase 8.25% to support additional staff (80 new hires) required to manage higher caseloads and complex rules post-COVID, and to remain competitive for key county positions.
- County leadership continues to monitor pressures from unfunded federal mandates, state budget deficits, and high proportions of tax-exempt property, while maintaining a focus on fiscal responsibility.

Community Highlights & Events:

- Upcoming programming at the Depot and Landmark Center continues, with encouragement for residents to support local businesses like 1881.

Attendees were encouraged to reach out to the Ramsey County office via email or phone with questions or comments, with responses promised within 24 hours.

SAINT PAUL POLICE

The Saint Paul Police Department's Downtown District works to ensure public safety in the city's core through community-focused policing and coordinated response. Officers assigned to the Downtown District build relationships with residents, businesses, and visitors while addressing safety concerns, responding to calls for service, and supporting a safe, welcoming downtown environment.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by SPPD Downtown District Commander Jake Peterson

Commander Peterson has served with the Saint Paul Police Department for 26 years, with a commitment to revitalizing downtown and strengthening community connections. Saint Paul Police recently launched a new downtown initiative, VIBE (Visible, Intentional, with Balanced Enforcement), that is now five and a half weeks underway. The initiative emphasizes intentional presence, community involvement, and ongoing improvements to the downtown experience.

Key points of this initiative:

- Objective: Increase visible, intentional policing while maintaining balanced enforcement downtown.
- Implementation: 26 officers are dedicated full-time to the downtown area, providing coverage 24/7.

Community Engagement: Residents are encouraged to meet at least one downtown officer by name, fostering familiarity and trust.

Call to Action: Commander Peterson challenged attendees to actively connect with law enforcement as part of a broader strategy to improve downtown safety and community relationships.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by SPPD Downtown District Commander Jake Peterson

Downtown Safety Efforts & Enforcement Activity

- SPPD recently mobilized additional officers citywide to focus on downtown spaces, parks, and quality-of-life crimes.
- During this focused enforcement period, officers made 142 additional arrests and issued 4,375 citations in the downtown area.
 - Many of these were parking-related, addressing frequent community complaints.

Event & Public Safety Preparedness

- SPPD is actively preparing for the World Juniors tournament, with a focus on ensuring a safe, welcoming downtown environment for all visitors.
- SPPD continues to partner with Department of Safety & Inspections (DSI), Parks, and Public Works on morning cleanups (6–8 a.m.) across downtown parks and public spaces.

Retail Theft & Business Engagement Initiative

- SPPD is launching a new retail theft prevention initiative in collaboration with the Mayor's Office and downtown partners.
 - The goal is to standardize communication and procedures between businesses and law enforcement.
 - The effort builds on recent trespass training sessions and aims to ensure shared understanding of rules, reporting, and engagement.
- The department is exploring assigning a temporary detective dedicated to downtown to support these efforts and address retail and property crimes more directly.

Community Resources & Training

- Upcoming virtual public safety trainings hosted by SPPD Crime Prevention:
 - Personal Safety Class – October 23
 - Fraud & Identity Theft Prevention Class – October 30

Staffing & Recruitment Updates

- A new police academy class of 30 recruits begins Monday 10/20
- Many officers currently seen downtown are in field training, paired with veteran officers for 4–5 months.
- SPPD continues to actively recruit, encouraging community members to share opportunities with friends or neighbors interested in law enforcement careers.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by SPPD Senior Commander Nicole Spears

Event Planning & Coordination

- Commander Spears highlighted the collaborative planning for World Juniors, bringing together all agencies involved to run through scenarios ranging from lost children to more serious incidents.
- This coordination ensures effective problem-solving and rapid response during large events downtown.

Community Collaboration

- The department engages with local organizations such as Catholic Charities, Assumption Church, and nearby medical providers to improve safety and community outcomes in downtown neighborhoods, including around Dorothy Day.

Downtown Staffing & Event Support

- Downtown precincts remain fully staffed, even amid department-wide shortages, with additional personnel deployed during major events to manage increased activity and maintain public safety.

Retail Theft Prevention Initiative

- The department is partnering with the City Attorney's Office to combat retail theft through:
 - Educational flyers for downtown businesses
 - Proactive outreach and meetings with store owners on prevention and response strategies
- Flyers are available for interested businesses, and proactive collaboration aims to reduce incidents and improve response times.

Community Engagement & Feedback

- Residents are encouraged to complete the Saint Paul Police survey to provide feedback on interactions with officers and help guide department improvements.
 - <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/police/police-community-feedback-survey>

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by SPPD Downtown District Commander Jake Peterson

Commander Jake Peterson provided an overview of downtown public safety priorities and ongoing initiatives for 2026.

Crime & Enforcement:

- 2025 crime statistics show reductions across all major categories, with particularly significant decreases in downtown incidents.
- Quality of life crimes and parking complaints remain top priorities; efforts from 2025 will continue into 2026.
- A retail theft initiative has been launched in partnership with downtown retailers, clarifying trespassing, theft, and burglary statutes.

Community & Resources:

- Distributed frequent contact lists including Downtown Alliance, Metro Transit Police, and St. Paul Police Department for improved coordination.
 - Information regarding federal law enforcement roles downtown continues to be circulated to stakeholders.
- Event & Parking Management:**
- Planning continues for major events, including St. Patrick’s Day and the Minnesota Yacht Club, with extra downtown parking enforcement in place over the coming months.
- Property & Technology Initiatives:**
- Focus on vacant and at-risk properties in collaboration with city departments and the Downtown Development Corporation.
 - 2026 is being emphasized as the “year of technology” for SPPD, with initiatives aimed at leveraging technology to enhance public safety.
- Community Engagement:**
- Commander Peterson encouraged attendance at the Harding High School police academy graduation, showcasing 28 young people committed to serving the community.

SUSTAIN SAINT PAUL

Sustain Saint Paul is a leading grassroots urbanist advocacy group focused on abundant housing, low-carbon transportation, and sustainable land use in the city. The organization promotes dense, walkable neighborhoods, vibrant local businesses, and a thriving city tax base.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Susan Larson, Downtown resident – Chair of Friends of Mears Park and Sustain Saint Paul Committee Member

A member of the Downtown Revitalization Committee of [Sustain Saint Paul](#) shared upcoming downtown community events and ongoing neighborhood initiatives to strengthen connection and vibrancy in Lowertown.

- Halloween Pet Parade event: Scheduled for Halloween night, 5:00–6:30 p.m. in Mears Park, offering trick-or-treating for kids and adults.
- Tree Lighting Ceremony: Planned for November 22 in Mears Park, with preparations well underway.
- Community engagement: Residents were encouraged to follow “Hello Lowertown” on Facebook for updates on downtown events and opportunities to get involved.

Looking ahead: Planning is underway for the first-ever Lowertown Art Fair, anticipated for next year. Additionally, the Downtown Revitalization Committee of Sustain Saint Paul will provide an update from their 10/20 meeting at our next convening on December 11.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jacob Hooper, Director of Advocacy for Sustain Saint Paul, and Cheyenne Violet, Co-Chair of Sustain’s Downtown Revitalization Committee

Volunteer Engagement & Committees

- The group has expanded volunteer opportunities through rising committees focused on housing, transportation, ecological sustainability, and downtown revitalization. Use this link to learn more and sign-up! <https://www.sustainstpaul.org/get-involved>

Downtown Revitalization Committee

- The Downtown Revitalization Committee brings together residents, workers, and local businesses as key stakeholders in shaping downtown’s future.
- The committee launched in September 2025 and is establishing priorities for activating change in downtown Saint Paul.
- Partnerships are being developed with existing downtown actors, including the Downtown Alliance, city leadership – like Council President Noecker, and Ramsey County, to ensure collaborative, community-driven initiatives.
- The committee’s work aligns with Sustain Saint Paul’s broader urbanist mission, with a targeted focus on downtown, amplifying the voice of those who live, work, and run businesses in the core to inform and activate positive change.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jacob Hooper, Director of Advocacy for Sustain Saint Paul, and Cheyenne Violet, Co-Chair of Sustain’s Downtown Revitalization Committee

Jacob Hooper, Director of Advocacy, and Cheyenne Violet, Co-Chair of the Downtown Revitalization Committee, provided updates on downtown-focused sustainability and placemaking initiatives.

Advocacy & Policy:

- Sustain Saint Paul champions funded housing, sustainable land use, and low-carbon transportation citywide.
- Currently advocating for state legislation to provide cities with tools to address vacant ground-level lots, including the promotion of a revenue-neutral land value tax. This ensures underutilized parcels contribute fairly or are redeveloped by responsible owners.

Downtown Revitalization Projects:

- The Downtown Committee is launching an alleyway beautification project, starting with the space in front/behind Lost Fogs along 5th Street, across from Muir’s Park.
- Plans include adding lighting, seating, and other placemaking elements to create vibrant, safe, and welcoming public spaces.
- Collaboration with local placemaking experts, including Max Musican, informs design and activation strategies.
- Success in this alleyway project may lead to expansion to other alleyways throughout downtown St. Paul.

Community Engagement:

- Co-chairs Cheyenne Violet, Joe, and Chris are available to connect with stakeholders and businesses interested in downtown placemaking efforts.

VISIT SAINT PAUL

Visit Saint Paul is the city’s official destination marketing organization, promoting Saint Paul as a vibrant place to visit, work, and play. The organization supports local tourism, events, and cultural attractions, helping drive economic activity downtown and throughout the city while highlighting Saint Paul’s unique neighborhoods, arts, and hospitality offerings.

June 26 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

The Lowertown Social Hour is a free, monthly networking event in downtown Saint Paul hosted by the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance. Held at various venues throughout Lowertown and open to all, it’s a great way to connect with the community and explore local businesses. [For updates, visit the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance’s event calendar.](#) This summer, Lowertown Social Hours will be held twice a month, on the first and third Wednesdays. Join us on the patio at 1881 at Union Depot on Wednesday, July 2, from 4–6 p.m. for our next stop! [Sign up to learn more about future socials via this link.](#)

August 21 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jenn Schaal Vice President, Operations & Strategy at Visit Saint Paul

New Visitor Kiosks: Two interactive kiosks now available at Landmark Center and River Center, offering maps, dining suggestions, and things to do. Feedback is encouraged to improve the program.

Minnesota Yacht Club Festival: Downtown hotel occupancy hit 96% on peak days, with a significant economic impact on local hospitality and retail. The festival added a third day, attracting a mix of local (56%) and regional visitors (33%).

Call to Action: Check out and provide feedback on the two new visitor kiosks noted above to improve the program. Save the date / plan to attend these upcoming events -

- State Fair (Aug 29, NPR Day): Visit Saint Paul booth at Danpatch Park with Pride swag and info on the World Juniors Hockey Tournament.
- World Juniors Hockey Tournament (Dec 26–early Jan): 50th anniversary; 10 countries, top U20 players; all U.S. games at soon-to-be-renamed Grand Casino Arena; fan fest in Rice Park and River Center; volunteer opportunities forthcoming.

October 16 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jenn Schaal Vice President, Operations & Strategy at Visit Saint Paul

- Minnesota Yacht Club Festival: The event generated an estimated \$3 million in economic impact through spending on hotels, restaurants, retail, and recreation — underscoring the importance of major events to Saint Paul's economy.
- Holiday season preview: Visit Saint Paul will host a hospitality meeting (open to all) on November 12 at Union Depot, featuring updates on holiday events and the upcoming World Juniors Hockey Championship.
- World Juniors Hockey Tournament: Running December 26–January 5, the 10-nation international tournament is expected to draw over 100,000 hockey fans to the region, with championship games at the newly renamed Grand Casino Arena (formerly Xcel Energy Center).
- Business engagement – “Puck Partners” initiative: Local restaurants and retailers are invited to share updated hours, special offers, and promotional details for inclusion in visitor guides and hospitality outreach during the tournament period.

December 11 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Written update sent by Jenn Schaal Vice President, Operations & Strategy at Visit Saint Paul

- [Celebrate Saint Paulidays](#) - Winter Fun, Festive Events, Holiday Shopping, Where to Eat, Dine, Holiday Bars, Play Hockey
- [IIHF World Juniors Hockey Championship](#) - 10 Nations, 10 Days, 29 Games: December 26 - January 5
 - [World's Largest Hockey Puck](#) - as seen in today's Pioneer Press: [In Downtown St. Paul, World's Largest Hockey Puck Seeks Sponsors](#)
 - Visit Saint Paul, the city's official convention and tourism bureau, has skated out a plan to assemble the world's largest hockey puck — a 5,000-pound testament to the excitement around the international round-robin style tournament.
 - The puck, which is being made at the Wonder Studio fabrication shop on St. Paul's old Hamm's Brewery campus and at TC Rigging/Allied Productions in Oakdale, will be displayed as part of the Bold North Breakaway Fan Fest from Dec. 26 to Jan 5.
 - Visit St. Paul is asking sponsors, including everyday residents and small businessowners, to donate between \$25 and \$5,000 to help roll out the giant puck, which will be, in a word, large. Donations of any amount will be accepted, and sponsors will be recognized on a webpage “Hall of Fame,” which is coming soon. The webpage will include an option to [donate \\$25 on behalf of a youth hockey player](#), which earns the player a commemorative vinyl sticker.
 - [Tickets](#)
 - [Bold North Breakaway \(Fan Festival\)](#) - Free and open to the public!
 - Rice Park: Outdoor zone with trolley rides, Skills skating rink, bonfires, bumper cars on ice(!), food trucks, fireworks, etc
 - Saint Paul RiverCentre: immersive indoor hockey festival with hands-on exhibits, local vendor market, DJ, Street Hockey Rink, watch party rooms, giant snow globes, etc

Update presented by Kate Frye, City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Citywide Special Events Coordinator

World Junior Hockey Championship Coming to Downtown Saint Paul

The 2026 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship, an international U20 hockey tournament, will take place in downtown Saint Paul from December 26 through January 5. Saint Paul successfully won the bid to host this major global event, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary and will feature 10 nations competing across 29 games. The majority of games involving Team USA, along with the medal rounds, will be hosted at Grand Casino Arena, with additional games at Mariucci Arena.

Fan Fest Activations: “Bold North Breakaway”

A series of free, public fan-fest events — branded as Bold North Breakaway — will activate downtown throughout the tournament.

Activations will take place in Rice Park, Landmark Plaza, RiverCentre, and surrounding areas, and will include:

- Synthetic ice rinks for skating and skills activities
- Securian Financial bumper cars on ice
- Tria Skills Rink with host various activations ie. Mini golf on ice, etc.
- Health Partner Breakaway Box is a warming tent with food and beverages hosted by Tom Reid's
- A bonfire and s'mores in Rice Park hosted by PNC Bank

These events are designed to create a festive, family-friendly atmosphere and draw residents and visitors into downtown throughout the tournament.

Downtown Impacts & Opportunities

There will be some road closures associated with the event, particularly in the downtown core. In addition, Parks & Recreation highlighted numerous volunteer opportunities, with volunteers receiving event swag including scarves, hats, jackets, and mittens.

Regional & International Significance

This marks the seventh time the World Junior Championship has been hosted in the United States. While teams and fans will largely be based downtown, exhibition games will also take place in communities across Minnesota, including Duluth, Bemidji, and Rochester, expanding the event's reach statewide.

February 19 Progress Updates & Ways to Help

Update presented by Jenn Schaal Vice President, Operations & Strategy at Visit Saint Paul

Jenn Schaal, Vice President of Operations & Strategy at Visit Saint Paul, shared recent tourism, hospitality, and event highlights for downtown St. Paul.

Key metrics from the holiday period showed strong year-over-year growth, including a 60% increase in hotel occupancy and a 73.2% increase in hotel revenue, contributing to the city's hotel occupancy tax, which supports city programs and Visit Saint Paul's operations.

Upcoming events and initiatives highlighted include:

- Minnesota Yacht Club Festival returning July 17–19, with an additional weekend (Minnesota Country Club) on July 10–11.
 - [Minnesota Country Club Festival](#)
 - [Minnesota Yacht Club Festival](#)
- High school tournament season beginning imminently, featuring hockey, wrestling, and gymnastics, bringing students, families, and visitors downtown over the next month and a half.
 - [Guide to the 2026 MSHSL Tournaments](#)
- A targeted marketing campaign to drive direct support to downtown restaurants and retail, responding to recent challenges faced by businesses during periods of disruption.
- Collaboration with the Planning and Economic Development Department on a business survey to assess the impact of recent events on St. Paul businesses.

Schaal also encouraged attendees to use Visit Saint Paul as a resource for downtown event information, noting St. Patrick's Day festivities are approaching and directing participants to visitspaul.com for details.

- [Sign up](#) for the Saint Paul Insider's Newsletter (latest issue [here](#))
- [Guide to St. Patrick's Day in Saint Paul](#)
- [Events in Saint Paul](#) (add your public facing event [here!](#))