



DOWNTOWN ACTION SERIES – MEETING #6 SUMMARY

From Thursday, April 23, 2026 • 4:30-6 PM • Union Depot (214 4th St E · Saint Paul, MN 55101)

Purpose of the Downtown Action Series

The Downtown Action Series continues to serve as a shared table for downtown Saint Paul—bringing together residents, public agencies, businesses, and partners to stay informed, hold each other accountable, and actively shape the future of downtown. The series is designed not just to share updates, but to build relationships, surface ideas, and create a sense of shared ownership over downtown’s next chapter.

Saint Paul City Council – Council President Rebecca Noecker

Council President Noecker opened the meeting by marking the one-year milestone of the Downtown Action Series and reaffirming that the work—and the meetings themselves—are ongoing. She emphasized that while there is always more to do, it is important to pause and take stock of what has been accomplished over the past year, particularly given the sustained cross-sector effort required to move downtown forward.

That progress spans multiple fronts and reflects a coordinated wave of investment and implementation. Downtown has seen significant public and private investment, including a tentative developer agreement for a \$130 million mixed-use redevelopment at the Central Station site, as well as the launch of a \$5 million Downtown Vitality Fund aimed at supporting housing conversion and strengthening street-level activity.

Public realm improvements continue to reshape the physical landscape, with the expansion of Pedro Park completed and additional redevelopment underway at Osborn and Hamm Plaza, all contributing to a more connected and active downtown environment.

At the same time, major infrastructure investments—including the once-in-a-century reconstruction of Robert and Minnesota Streets—are laying the groundwork for long-term durability, safety, and accessibility in the urban core. These efforts are paired with public safety trends moving in a positive direction, including sustained reductions in violent crime and improved clearance rates in key categories.

Council President Noecker also emphasized that these investments are not only structural, but deeply human in impact—shaping how people live, move, gather, and experience downtown daily.

Finally, she highlighted the continued growth of community ownership in this work. The Downtown Action Series has consistently drawn more than 100 participants per meeting, and it has served as a catalyst for new resident-led initiatives—from Friends of the Skyways to neighborhood-based organizing and beautification efforts. She noted that this momentum reflects a broader truth: downtown revitalization is not being driven by any single institution, but by sustained collaboration across residents, businesses, and public partners working in concert.

She closed by underscoring that this moment is not an endpoint, but a continuing chapter—one that builds on demonstrated progress while keeping focus on the work still ahead.

City of Saint Paul – Director of Intergovernmental Relations Jennifer O’Rourke

Director Jennifer O’Rourke provided an overview of the current legislative environment and the City’s ongoing work at the Capitol, noting the tight political margins this session and the complexity of advancing major priorities under those conditions. Despite that, she shared cautious optimism that meaningful progress is still possible, particularly given the number of major funding and policy opportunities under consideration.

A central focus for the City of Saint Paul is securing state support for the RiverCentre and Grand Casino Arena complex. Advancing this project would require both an extension of the local half-cent sales tax and inclusion in the state’s bonding bill. Additional key priorities include infrastructure investments along the West 7th corridor, particularly significant utility upgrades necessary to support future redevelopment and long-term corridor stability.

Director O’Rourke emphasized that city leadership, including the Mayor and staff team, has remained actively engaged at the Capitol, working in close partnership with legislators and stakeholders to advance these priorities. She underscored that sustained state-local coordination is essential to moving forward large-scale downtown investments, and that many of the most transformative opportunities for Saint Paul depend on continued collaboration across levels of government.

Her update reinforced a core theme: that downtown revitalization is not only shaped locally, but also significantly influenced by legislative decisions and partnership at the state level, making ongoing engagement at the Capitol a critical part of delivering long-term outcomes for downtown Saint Paul.

City of Saint Paul – Assistant Mayor for Housing, Economic Vibrancy, and Infrastructure Nick Stumo-Langer

Assistant Mayor Nick Stumo-Langer highlighted the breadth of work currently underway within the Mayor’s Office, pointing to recent milestones such as the State of the City address and ongoing internal budget planning efforts.

He focused on the effort to restore key skyway connections downtown, an initiative requiring coordination across multiple entities, including the Downtown Development Corporation, Metro Transit, and various city departments. While acknowledging that progress has taken longer than anticipated, he emphasized the importance of fully addressing legal, safety, and logistical considerations to ensure a durable and long-term solution.

More broadly, he reflected on the growing momentum in downtown and credited the collaborative environment—particularly convenings like the Downtown Action Series—for helping align partners across sectors, surface challenges, and support coordinated implementation across initiatives.

City of Saint Paul – Department of Parks and Recreation Staff: Kate Frye, Laura Winge, & Courtney Morris

Staff representatives from the City’s Department of Parks and Recreation shared an ambitious slate of programming and events aimed at activating downtown and adjacent park spaces throughout the summer season.

Their update highlighted a mix of signature regional events and ongoing local programming, including the potential return of July 4th fireworks, as well as major events such as the Minnesota Yacht Club Festival and Irish Fair, which continue to draw large regional audiences and activate nearby downtown and riverfront spaces.

Alongside these larger events, the department emphasized a strong focus on consistent, everyday activation across the downtown park system. Programming is planned across multiple spaces—including Pedro, Mears, Rice, and Kellogg Mall Park—with recurring offerings such as food truck events, block parties, pet-focused programming, and live music series designed to create regular activity throughout the week.

This approach reflects a broader strategy to treat downtown parks not only as venues for occasional large-scale events, but as a connected network of public spaces supporting daily use, community gathering, and sustained vibrancy across downtown.

City of Saint Paul – Department of Public Works Director Deb Barber & Sean Kershaw

Public Works leadership outlined a range of ongoing infrastructure projects impacting downtown, including floodwall improvements along Sibley Street, sewer system upgrades, and continued coordination with MnDOT on major corridors, bridges, and related right-of-way work.

A key theme of their update centered on improving public communication around construction activity. New standardized signage at project sites now clearly identifies who is responsible for the work, expected timelines, and contact information—an effort designed to reduce confusion, improve transparency, and make it easier for residents and businesses to stay informed.

Equally important is the increased coordination taking place behind the scenes between city departments, utilities, regional agencies, and contractors. This alignment work is focused on better sequencing projects, reducing overlapping disruptions, and minimizing overall impacts on mobility and access.

Overall, the update emphasized that while significant infrastructure investment is underway, equal attention is being paid to how that work is delivered—ensuring downtown remains accessible, functional, and supported throughout the construction process.

City of Saint Paul – Interim Director of Planning and Economic Development Melanie McMahon

The Planning and Economic Development team emphasized the importance of accurately reflecting the scale of investment and activity currently underway in downtown Saint Paul, and of continuing to align messaging with on-the-ground progress.

They highlighted the Downtown Vitality Fund as a key implementation tool, with the majority of resources directed toward housing-related strategies, including housing conversion and expansion. This focus reflects a core understanding that increasing the number of downtown residents is foundational to long-term success.

More residents, they noted, help generate more consistent street-level activity, strengthen local businesses through steady customer presence, and contribute to public safety through increased everyday activity and “eyes on the street.”

Taken together, this framing reinforces a broader shift in how downtown is understood—not only as a commercial and employment center, but as an emerging and growing residential neighborhood with increasing year-round activity and investment.

Downtown Development Corporation – President Dave Higgins

The Downtown Development Corporation continues to play a central role in acquiring, stabilizing, and repositioning key downtown properties. With several properties already acquired and others under control, the organization is advancing efforts to convert underutilized buildings into productive uses, including housing and active street-level space.

Near-term progress includes work to reopen the Central City Parking ramp, as well as continued planning for the redevelopment and long-term repositioning of additional sites within the downtown core.

Overall, their work reflects a broader strategy of stabilizing downtown assets, reducing vacancy, and reinvesting in the built environment to support long-term housing growth, economic activity, and street-level vitality.

Downtown Alliance – President Joe Spencer

The Downtown Alliance shared updates on the continued expansion of the Downtown Improvement District and the services it provides to support a clean, safe, and welcoming downtown environment.

This includes an expanded ambassador program, with increased visible presence on transit platforms and additional roaming support throughout the district. These teams focus on hospitality, wayfinding, safety presence, and supporting positive activity in public spaces.

They also highlighted continued progress toward establishing a dedicated downtown prosecutor role, which would provide more focused attention on addressing recurring public safety and quality-of-life issues within the downtown area.

Overall, their work continues to center on maintaining a well-managed downtown environment that is welcoming to residents, workers, and visitors, while supporting the broader public safety and activation strategies underway across partners.

Ramsey County – Manager Ling Becker

Ramsey County Manager Ling Becker outlined a significant new \$320 million economic development strategy, with a major portion of investments directed toward downtown Saint Paul.

The strategy centers on increasing density and maximizing the long-term value of limited land resources, recognizing downtown's essential role in supporting the county's tax base and overall fiscal stability. Investments will support housing development, public realm improvements, and broader redevelopment opportunities, including the strategic transformation and repositioning of county-owned properties.

Manager Becker also highlighted recent milestones, including the opening of the newly reimagined Ramsey County Government Center, as well as progress on new affordable housing development on a former county-owned site.

Overall, her update emphasized a coordinated approach to land use and investment—linking public assets, housing production, and downtown redevelopment as part of a long-term strategy for regional growth and fiscal sustainability.

Ramsey County – County Attorney Chris Tolbert

Chris Tolbert provided an update on public safety trends and ongoing work within the County Attorney's Office, noting that violent crime in Ramsey County continues to trend downward compared to recent peak years. He attributed this progress in part to the strong collaboration between local partners, including the Saint Paul Police Department, City Attorney's Office, Metro Transit, and Ramsey County services.

With those improvements, Tolbert shared that there is now increased capacity to focus on quality-of-life issues that more directly impact residents' day-to-day experience downtown. This includes continued coordination across agencies to address concerns such as disorder, nuisance activity, and other lower-level offenses that affect how people feel in public spaces.

He also addressed the County Attorney's Office's ongoing response to Operation Metro Surge, emphasizing that their office remains committed to investigating potential misconduct that occurred during that period. Tolbert noted that there are currently active investigations being conducted by the Saint Paul Police Department and the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, though cooperation from federal authorities has been limited. He made clear that the office intends to continue pursuing these cases and will not let those incidents go unaddressed.

City of Saint Paul – Saint Paul Police Commander Jake Peterson

Commander Jake Peterson shared an update focused on both current public safety trends and operational capacity within the downtown area. He noted that violent crime across the city continues to trend downward compared to prior years and emphasized that overall crime levels are improving while acknowledging there is still significant work ahead.

He highlighted a continued upward trend in police staffing, noting that the department has reached approximately 575 officers, marking the strongest staffing level in several years. While still below ideal capacity, he described this as a positive year-over-year improvement and encouraged ongoing recruitment efforts, emphasizing the importance of bringing in additional officers to sustain momentum.

Commander Peterson also outlined upcoming summer public safety initiatives, including a series of Safe Summer Nights events across the city, designed to increase positive engagement and visibility in neighborhoods during high-activity months. He noted that summer operations will involve increased deployment and activity across weekends and major events downtown.

Additional focus areas included expanded use of technology and camera systems in partnership with city staff, with ongoing efforts to strengthen situational awareness and investigative capacity across the downtown area. He encouraged continued coordination with partners working on these systems.

Finally, Commander Peterson announced his transition out of the downtown beat commander role after 21 months, moving into a new assignment as district chief overseeing a broader geographic area including downtown, Rice Street, West 7th, and the West Side. He introduced his successor, Eric Cameron, who will assume responsibilities for downtown operations and expressed confidence in the transition, while thanking the community and partners for their collaboration during his tenure.

Metro Transit – Lieutenant Kadra Mohamad

Lieutenant Kadra Mohamad provided an update on Metro Transit’s ongoing public safety and operations work within downtown Saint Paul and across the broader transit system. She highlighted continued coordination with local partners, including Saint Paul Police and Ramsey County, to maintain visibility and support on transit lines and in key downtown stations.

A key focus of her update was the ongoing presence of transit police and safety personnel across the system. She noted that transit officers are regularly deployed on trains, at platforms, and along high-ridership routes, with an emphasis on increasing visibility during peak summer months. This includes expanded bike and patrol presence and more frequent engagement on both rail and bus lines serving downtown.

Lieutenant Mohamad also described layered safety strategies currently in place, including coordinated fare enforcement efforts, outreach by transit officers, and the continued use of security personnel at stations. She emphasized that these efforts are designed to create multiple consistent layers of presence across the transit system, supporting both safety and a positive rider experience.

She noted that transit teams are also continuing to strengthen partnerships with community organizations and city partners through coordinated outreach efforts, including regular engagement at Central Station alongside Ramsey County and other service providers.

Overall, her update underscored Metro Transit’s focus on visibility, coordination, and proactive engagement as key components of maintaining a safe and accessible transit system for downtown residents, workers, and visitors.

Active Residents – Bill Hanly, Jess Fast, Jacob Ramos, and Jenny Welch

One of the most notable themes of the meeting was the continued strength and expansion of resident-led efforts, shaping downtown’s future in very tangible ways.

A standout example was the Skyway 5K, which drew nearly 1,000 participants, many from outside the region. The event not only showcased downtown in a new way but also introduced a broad audience to the skyway system and the city’s core, while demonstrating what is possible when residents, volunteers, and partners work together to activate public space at scale.

Building on that momentum, the Friends of the Skyways has quickly grown into a robust and highly engaged network of residents and advocates focused on improving, celebrating, and reimagining the skyway system. Their early work has already included sold-out community events, expanded membership, and ongoing organizing around long-term improvements and programming.

A major complementary effort is the newly launched interactive skyway mapping tool, which is already improving wayfinding and making the system more legible for both residents and visitors. Early feedback suggests it is also helping increase visibility for downtown businesses by making it easier for people to discover and navigate destinations they may not have previously known about.

Beyond the skyways, residents are also stepping into more place-based problem-solving across downtown. This includes the Exchange Street lighting proposal, which identifies safety and infrastructure gaps and puts forward a concrete, actionable solution, as well as ongoing alleyway beautification and activation efforts led through neighborhood and sustainability groups. These efforts reflect a consistent pattern: residents not only identify challenges, but organize practical, implementable solutions that improve one's everyday experience downtown.

Taken together, these updates highlight a growing ecosystem of civic participation—where residents are not just engaging with downtown revitalization, but actively helping design, test, and implement it.

Sustain Saint Paul - Downtown Revitalization Committee Co-Chair Cheyenne Violet

Sustain Saint Paul shared updates on the continued growth and refinement of its Downtown Revitalization Committee, which has expanded to better organize around its core priorities: abundant housing, sustainable land use, and low-carbon transportation. The committee has also restructured into focused subcommittees to better align work with these goals and increase implementation capacity.

A major area of focus is public realm activation and beautification, with early efforts centered on small but visible interventions that can quickly improve downtown spaces. This includes a proposed pilot project in the Prince Park area, along with plans to pursue a mural grant opportunity to enhance visual identity and vibrancy. The group is also organizing a tactical urbanism activation event, designed to bring together approximately 50–75 volunteers for a one-day effort to activate and improve the space through hands-on community participation.

Another active workstream is transportation and mobility, with the subcommittee beginning work around parking efficiency and utilization of existing infrastructure. Rather than expanding supply, the focus is on better coordination and more effective use of current parking resources to support access and reduce friction in the downtown experience.

On the housing front, the committee is beginning to surface early project ideas that align with broader city goals around increasing housing supply and supporting long-term affordability and density downtown.

Finally, the group highlighted engagement with broader sustainability initiatives, including support for the city's clean energy efforts and plans to tour the district energy system. This system—

focused on capturing and reusing waste heat to generate energy—is positioned as a leading example of urban-scale decarbonization and long-term infrastructure innovation.

DOWNTOWN ACTION SERIES: YEAR ONE IMPACT SUMMARY

Full list of accomplishments across all partners since our inaugural meeting, June 26, 2025 – April 23, 2026.

Cross-sector coordination & governance

- Established a sustained Downtown Action Series bringing together City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Metro Transit, SPPD, County Attorney’s Office, Visit Saint Paul, Downtown Alliance/DDC, residents, and community organizations.
- Created a structured, recurring forum for real-time coordination across public safety, infrastructure, housing, economic development, and placemaking.
- Improved interagency alignment on downtown issues that previously operated in silos (transit safety, construction, public realm management, redevelopment strategy).
- Strengthened collaboration between City leadership, County leadership, and incoming administration teams on downtown priorities.

Public safety improvements & coordination

- Documented significant reductions in violent crime (including a 53% decline from 2022 peak levels).
- Increased clearance rates for nonfatal shootings (reported increase from ~35% to over 70% in prior updates).
- Expansion and coordination of key public safety initiatives:
 - Safe & Strong Initiative (transit corridor enforcement + services)
 - Nonfatal Shooting Initiative / Violence Reduction Leadership Group
 - VIBE initiative (Visible, Intentional, Balanced Enforcement) in downtown policing
- Deployment of dedicated downtown police staffing (24/7 coverage; ~26 officers assigned downtown in SPPD initiative).
- Expanded Metro Transit Police staffing, beat coverage, and visibility downtown.
- Launch of retail theft prevention initiatives jointly between SPPD, City Attorney’s Office, and downtown businesses.
- Increased coordinated enforcement on quality-of-life issues (parking enforcement, disorder, open drug market areas, trespass enforcement).
- Continued high compliance rates with ambassador interventions (reported ~88% compliance when ambassadors engage).
- Strengthened event security planning across agencies (World Juniors, festivals, large-scale downtown events).

Downtown ambassador program & cleanliness/safety operations

- Expansion and sustained operation of Downtown Improvement District Ambassador program:

- Daily sidewalk cleaning and maintenance
- Safety escorts and welfare checks
- Graffiti removal and litter response
- Hospitality and wayfinding support
- Significant operational outputs reported (annual scale):
 - Thousands of graffiti removals
 - Thousands of sidewalk cleaning cycles
 - Thousands of safety escorts and welfare checks
- Expansion of Metro Transit and SPPD collaboration with DID ambassadors.
- Improved downtown cleanliness and rapid-response maintenance systems.

Major parks, plazas, and public space investments

- Completion and opening of Pedro Park expansion and ribbon cutting (major long-term community-driven project).
- Activation and programming growth in:
 - Mears Park (events, exhibits, Halloween programming, pet parade, cultural events)
 - Osborn Plaza redevelopment (contract awarded, construction beginning phases)
 - Hamm Plaza / Ecolab Plaza redesign planning and infrastructure upgrades
- Expansion of park activation programming:
 - Summer events (happy hours, block parties, partnerships with breweries and cultural institutions)
 - Holiday lighting coordination (Rice Park, Mears Park)
- Improved coordination between Parks & Recreation, Public Works, and community groups on programming and maintenance.

Housing development, conversion, and investment tools

- Advancement of major housing redevelopment strategies:
 - Office-to-residential conversion planning (Downtown core focus)
 - Historic tax credit policy adjustments to support downtown housing viability
- Launch of Downtown Vitality Fund (\$5M) to support housing, commercial activation, and redevelopment.
- Investment in affordable housing preservation (including Press House and Minnesota Park Apartments stabilization).
- County and City collaboration on affordability strategies targeting deep affordability (<30% AMI).
- Progress on multiple downtown housing projects (American House, Minnesota Place, Dorothy Day/Higher Ground area units).
- Expansion of Critical Corridors eligibility to include downtown Saint Paul.

Major redevelopment & catalytic real estate projects

- Progress on RiversEdge riverfront redevelopment:
 - Site readiness planning
 - Infrastructure design
 - Parking structure planning and phasing

- Acquisition and redevelopment activity by SPDDC:
 - Alliance Bank Center debt acquisition and evaluation
 - Empire Building + Endicott Arcade acquisition
 - Exploration of residential conversion opportunities
- Metro Square redevelopment and planning:
 - Preparation for relocation of ~1,000 county employees downtown (Q1 2026)
- US Bank Center / Metro Square building stabilization and management actions.
- Continued evaluation of underutilized downtown office buildings for adaptive reuse.

Infrastructure improvements & construction coordination

- Completion or advancement of major infrastructure projects:
 - Robert Street reconstruction phases
 - Minnesota Street reconstruction completion
 - 7th Street corridor improvements
 - Kellogg Boulevard bridge and bikeway construction progress
- Launch of Downtown Streets and Sidewalks planning process.
- Improved construction communication tools:
 - QR code signage at project sites
 - Weekly construction maps and updates
 - Business “survival kits” and outreach
- Coordination across Public Works, MnDOT, Metro Transit, Ramsey County, and city contractors.
- Improved pedestrian connectivity planning (5th Street as proposed civic spine concept).

Transit system improvements & coordination

- Increased Metro Transit Police staffing and community service officers (record hiring levels noted).
- Return to beat policing and increased presence on trains, platforms, and corridors.
- Deployment of Mobile Assessment Vehicle and outreach teams downtown.
- Restored and expanded security presence at key transit hubs (Central Station, Union Depot, 10th Street).
- Joint operations between Metro Transit Police and SPPD on University Avenue and downtown corridors.
- Focus on connecting enforcement with social service outreach for unsheltered individuals.

Economic development & downtown business vitality

- Opening and expansion of downtown businesses (retail, restaurants, hospitality, cultural spaces).
- Activation of vacant commercial spaces (e.g., former Black Dog Café redevelopment concept).
- Launch of targeted business support campaigns tied to major events and tourism cycles.
- Growth in downtown hospitality performance:
 - Hotel occupancy increases (up to 60%+ during peak periods)

- Significant revenue growth tied to festivals and conventions (e.g., Yacht Club Festival ~\$3M impact)
- Expansion of ground-floor activation strategy tied to 5th Street and core downtown corridors.

Tourism, events, and cultural programming growth

- Securing and preparation for 2026 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship:
 - 10 nations, 29 games, 100,000+ visitors expected
 - Downtown fan zones and “Bold North Breakaway” activations
- Major festival growth:
 - Minnesota Yacht Club Festival expansion (multi-day programming)
 - Minnesota Country Club Festival addition
- Expansion of downtown holiday programming:
 - European Christmas Market expansion
 - Tree lighting, holiday train, bazaar programming at Union Depot and Landmark Center
- Increased coordination between Visit Saint Paul, Parks, and private partners on event delivery.
- Launch of visitor kiosks at Landmark Center and RiverCentre.

Tourism marketing & destination strategy improvements

- Deployment of interactive visitor kiosks providing maps, dining, and activity recommendations.
- Increased tourism marketing integration with downtown economic development goals.
- Creation of hospitality engagement tools (e.g., “Puck Partners” initiative for World Juniors).
- Strong performance in regional and international tourism visibility through major events.
- Expansion of “Celebrate Saint Paulidays” seasonal tourism campaign.

Resident engagement & grassroots activation

- Formation of Active Residents coalition (18–20 core members) supporting downtown project incubation.
- Growth of resident-led initiatives:
 - Monthly blood drives (70+ events)
 - Skyway 5K event
 - Friends of Mears Park / Pedro Park / Skyway groups
 - Alleyway beautification pilot project (Lost Fox / 5th Street area)
- Launch of structured engagement pathways for residents to contribute ideas and implementation support.
- Strong participation in surveys, mapping tools, and “Reimagine Downtown” engagement (>500 surveys, >1,600 site visits).

Downtown Alliance / SPDDC strategic transformation

- Creation of SPDDC as a dedicated redevelopment arm for downtown real estate investment.

- Deployment of private capital for acquisitions (including Empire Building / Endicott Arcade).
- Strategic focus on 5th Street as a central civic-commercial spine.
- Launch of Reimagine Downtown Saint Paul: Transforming the Core initiative:
 - 4–6 month accelerated planning process
 - High participation engagement platform (survey + mapping tools)
- Transition from advocacy-only model to active real estate and redevelopment execution.

County workforce, services, and fiscal investment

- Metro Square renovation and consolidation of county services downtown.
- Planned relocation of 1,000 county employees to downtown (major foot traffic increase).
- Launch of unified service access points (Government Center / Metro Square).
- Continued investment in downtown housing stabilization and preservation.
- Expansion of county-operated venues programming (Union Depot, Landmark Center events).

Major policy, funding, and legislative actions supporting downtown

- Launch and funding of Downtown Vitality Fund.
- Passage/advancement of policies supporting housing conversion and tax credit alignment.
- Passage of public safety ordinances (gun violence prevention, crypto kiosk ban).
- Budget investments restoring and maintaining city services (fire, libraries, recreation, CARES).
- Continued advocacy for state/federal bonding and infrastructure support for downtown.