



## **DOWNTOWN ACTION SERIES – MEETING #7 SUMMARY**

From Thursday, June 18, 2026 • 4:30-6 PM • Union Depot (214 4<sup>th</sup> 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 welcoming attendees and noting that the Downtown Action Series continues to maintain a comprehensive running record of updates from each meeting, which is available on the Ward 2 webpage. She encouraged participants to use the resource to stay informed about ongoing downtown initiatives and even as a tool for prospective downtown residents and businesses interested in learning about the momentum underway in Saint Paul.

She shared several updates from the City Council and her office since the previous meeting, including the launch of the Downtown Vitality Fund application process. The City is actively accepting applications and intends to distribute funding as quickly as possible to support continued investment and revitalization efforts in downtown Saint Paul.

Council President Noecker also highlighted the recent groundbreaking celebration for the new Aldi grocery store in downtown Saint Paul, noting that while the project is an adaptive reuse of an existing building rather than new construction, it represents a significant milestone for increasing access to everyday amenities downtown. She emphasized the importance of the store's location adjacent to Pedro Park and the role that new retail will play in supporting a growing residential downtown.

She also highlighted City Council approval of tax increment financing (TIF) for the Galtier Plaza office-to-residential conversion, which will create hundreds of new market-rate housing units downtown. She noted that while tax increment financing has received increased public attention in recent months, it remains an important redevelopment tool for projects that strengthen downtown's residential base.

Council President Noecker concluded her remarks with an update on efforts to restore a critical Skyway connection through the Alliance Bank Building, Central Station, and the Saint Paul Athletic Club. She thanked Friends of the Skyway for their persistent advocacy, and recognized the collaboration between the Mayor's Office, Saint Paul Downtown Alliance, Saint Paul Downtown Development Corporation, Metro Transit, Metropolitan Council, Department of Safety and Inspections, Saint Paul Police Department, and numerous other partners working to move the project forward. While a reopening date has not yet been announced, she shared that restoring this vital connection remains a top priority and that work is actively underway to reconnect the downtown Skyway system.

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

Assistant Mayor Stumo-Langer provided an update on the City's continued efforts to restore the downtown Skyway connection through the Alliance Bank Building, emphasizing that reconnecting the eastern and western portions of downtown remains a shared priority. He noted that the City is working in close partnership with multiple stakeholders to advance the project. While funding details are still being finalized and a reopening date has not yet been announced, he emphasized the City's commitment to moving as quickly as possible while ensuring expectations are set appropriately and comprehensive information is shared as it becomes available.

Assistant Mayor Stumo-Langer also shared that the Mayor's Office has launched its annual community budget engagement process. He noted that the City is currently facing a projected \$26 million budget gap and described the budget process as a shared "community math problem" that will require collaboration among City departments, the City Council, and residents. He encouraged attendees to participate in one of several community budget conversations being held throughout Saint Paul to help inform the City's 2027 budget priorities.

**Downtown Alliance – President Joe Spencer**

Joe Spencer provided an update on several initiatives underway at the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance focused on public safety, downtown activation, and long-term planning. He thanked the many partners collaborating to restore the Skyway connection through the Alliance Bank Building, noting that the effort has required extensive coordination amongst public and private partners. While work continues to finalize funding and operational details, he emphasized the shared commitment to reopening the connection as quickly as possible.

Spencer also announced that the Downtown Alliance expects to welcome a dedicated downtown community prosecutor beginning in early August. The position, which was established through the Downtown Improvement District (DID), will focus exclusively on downtown livability issues and is

expected to strengthen collaboration among law enforcement, prosecutors, residents, and businesses to address quality-of-life concerns.

He shared updates on the Downtown Alliance's summer activation efforts, including support for existing events such as Lowertown Sounds and new programming funded through the City's downtown activation grant. The Alliance is also exploring additional community programming throughout downtown, with several new activations expected to be announced later this summer.

Finally, Spencer provided an early update on development of the 2027 Downtown Improvement District budget, noting that the Alliance's goal is to keep any assessment increases at or below the rate of inflation while continuing to provide strong value to downtown property owners. He encouraged stakeholders to share feedback as the budgeting process moves forward.

### **Ramsey County – County Attorney Chris Tolbert**

Chris Tolbert shared updates from the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, highlighting the continued collaboration among Ramsey County, the City of Saint Paul, the Saint Paul Police Department, the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, the Office of Neighborhood Safety, and other regional partners to improve public safety throughout Saint Paul, including downtown. He emphasized that this coordinated approach has strengthened relationships across agencies and positioned the East Metro as a leader in collaborative public safety efforts.

Tolbert highlighted a successful outcome from the 2025 legislative session, where regional partners secured approximately \$1 million in state funding to support efforts addressing non-fatal shootings. He noted that the funding builds on an existing multi-agency strategy focused on increasing clearance rates for non-fatal shootings through enhanced investigations and coordinated prosecution. As a result of these efforts, the clearance rate for non-fatal shootings in Saint Paul has increased from approximately 38% to 71% over the past year.

He also recognized the recent launch of Metro Transit's Safe & Strong initiative, which brings together Metro Transit, the Saint Paul Police Department, the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, the Minnesota State Patrol, and other partners to improve safety throughout the transit system. The initiative combines enforcement with coordinated outreach and services to address quality-of-life concerns while helping connect individuals with appropriate resources.

### **State of Minnesota – State Senator Sandy Pappas**

Senator Sandy Pappas provided an overview of the recently concluded legislative session, highlighting several investments that will directly benefit Saint Paul and downtown. She encouraged attendees with questions about specific legislative issues to visit her during the networking portion of the meeting.

Among the projects she highlighted was \$13 million in state funding to begin replacement of the aging storm sewer infrastructure along West 7th Street. She noted that the project is a significant long-term investment in critical infrastructure that will ultimately extend to the Mississippi River and require multiple years of construction.

Senator Pappas also highlighted the Legislature's approval of \$40 million for renovations and HVAC upgrades at Roy Wilkins Auditorium, describing the investment as essential to maintaining one of downtown's premier event venues and preserving its role in attracting visitors and supporting the local economy. As Chair of the Senate Capital Investment Committee, she reflected on the importance of continuing to invest in public assets that strengthen Saint Paul and serve communities across Minnesota.

She concluded by thanking attendees for their continued engagement in downtown Saint Paul and encouraged them to enjoy Minnesota's summer season and the many outdoor recreational opportunities the state has to offer following the conclusion of the legislative session.

### **City of Saint Paul – Department of Public Works Director Deb Barber**

Public Works Director Deb Barber provided an update on ongoing infrastructure and construction activity throughout downtown Saint Paul, noting that multiple major roadway and utility projects are currently underway and will continue to impact travel throughout the construction season. She emphasized the importance of planning ahead, following posted signage, and anticipating changing traffic patterns as work progresses across downtown corridors.

Barber highlighted several key resources available to the public to stay informed, including the City's construction and road closure webpages, as well as the weekly downtown road closure map and email updates. She encouraged residents, workers, and visitors to use these tools regularly to stay up to date on shifting impacts across downtown.

For ongoing updates, Public Works encourages residents and downtown users to refer to the City's online resources, including:

- Construction updates: [www.stpaul.gov/Construction](http://www.stpaul.gov/Construction)
- Road closures: [www.stpaul.gov/RoadClosures](http://www.stpaul.gov/RoadClosures)
- Weekly downtown closure map and alerts: [www.stpaul.gov/downtownprojects](http://www.stpaul.gov/downtownprojects)

She also noted that construction activity is occurring across a wide range of downtown streets and adjacent corridors as part of coordinated infrastructure investments by the City and regional partners, including roadway maintenance, utility work, bridge reconstruction, and long-term capital improvements. She reiterated that timelines and traffic configurations are subject to change based on weather and project conditions.

In addition to construction updates, Barber highlighted an upcoming community litter cleanup event scheduled for July 15, inviting residents, businesses, and community partners to participate

in efforts to support downtown cleanliness and public space stewardship. She noted that all supplies will be provided and encouraged broad community participation.

She concluded by reiterating that while construction activity can be disruptive, these investments are essential to maintaining and improving downtown infrastructure, and encouraged continued public engagement and awareness throughout the construction season.

### **City of Saint Paul – Planning and Economic Development Senior City Planner Spencer Miller-Johnson**

Spencer Miller-Johnson introduced Downtown 2050, the City's new long-range planning initiative that will guide the future of downtown Saint Paul over the next 25 years. He explained that the project will establish a new policy framework for downtown that will be coordinated with the City's broader 2050 Comprehensive Plan and include updates to zoning and urban design standards to support high-quality, people-centered development.

He shared that the City's overarching goal is to create a downtown that prioritizes the people who live, work, and visit the area by fostering vibrant public spaces, thoughtful urban design, and sustainable growth. To support this effort, the City has engaged Gehl Studio, an internationally recognized planning and urban design firm known for its expertise in creating people-focused places, in partnership with a locally based consulting team to ensure the planning process reflects both global best practices and local community priorities.

Miller-Johnson noted that the planning process is now underway and will include multiple opportunities for public engagement over the coming months. He encouraged attendees to participate in the process and help shape a shared vision for the future of downtown Saint Paul.

### **City of Saint Paul – Department of Parks and Recreation Staff & Saint Paul Parks Conservancy Staff**

Staff from the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy, shared updates on a variety of summer programming, park activation efforts, and community events taking place throughout downtown Saint Paul. They encouraged attendees to take advantage of the many opportunities to experience downtown's parks and public spaces throughout the summer season.

They highlighted several signature events, including Lowertown Sounds at Mears Park, Twin Cities Jazz Festival, Summer Nights in Rice, Sip & Paint in Pedro Park, the Lunch on the Lawn series, and Yappy Hour in Kellogg Mall Park. Together, these events continue to activate downtown public spaces, support local businesses, and create opportunities for residents and visitors to gather throughout the summer.

Staff also shared updates from the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy, highlighting the launch of the River Balcony/Riverwalk interpretation project, which features a series of historical points of interest along the downtown riverfront. Temporary interpretive signage is currently installed, with permanent signage expected later this summer. Attendees were encouraged to explore the Riverwalk and experience the new interpretive features.

Additional Parks Conservancy initiatives include continued fundraising efforts for a new playground at Dousman Park, with a fundraising event scheduled at Mancini's later this summer, as well as ongoing fundraising and planning for the West Seventh Underpass Project, with hopes of completing the project's first phase this fall following the installation of new public artwork nearby.

Together, Parks and Recreation and the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy emphasized the importance of programming, placemaking, and public space investments in creating a vibrant, welcoming downtown and encouraged attendees to participate in the many events and volunteer opportunities taking place throughout the season.

### **City of Saint Paul – Office of Neighborhood Safety Director Toy Vixayvong**

Toy Vixayvong, the newly appointed Director of the City of Saint Paul's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), introduced himself to attendees and provided an overview of the department's work to improve community safety through prevention, intervention, and neighborhood partnerships. He invited attendees to stop by the ONS table following the meeting to learn more about the office and its initiatives.

Vixayvong highlighted the Office's three primary program areas. He first described Project PEACE, which partners with the Saint Paul Police Department, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Saint Paul Public Schools, and other community organizations to provide violence prevention, youth engagement, and family-centered support services. The program focuses on creating positive interactions with young people through mentorship, intervention, and wraparound services.

He also outlined the work of the Office's community outreach and response teams, which collaborate with partner agencies to respond to community needs, provide outreach, and connect individuals with appropriate resources and services. Finally, he highlighted the Neighborhood Safety Community Council, a resident-led advisory group that provides ongoing feedback to the Office of Neighborhood Safety and helps ensure community priorities continue to inform the department's work and strategic direction.

Vixayvong emphasized the Office's commitment to collaboration and community engagement as it works alongside residents, neighborhood organizations, and public safety partners to build safer neighborhoods throughout Saint Paul.

## **City of Saint Paul – Saint Paul Police Commander Erik Kammerer**

Commander Eric Kammerer provided an update on downtown public safety efforts, highlighting the Saint Paul Police Department's continued collaboration with local businesses and community partners to address crime and quality-of-life concerns throughout downtown. He noted that recent enforcement efforts have focused on areas around Fourth and Fifth Streets and are expanding to Mears Park, with increased proactive patrols in downtown parks throughout the summer to enhance safety for residents and visitors.

Kammerer also highlighted the department's ongoing partnership with Metro Transit through regular joint enforcement details at light rail stations and bus stops, as well as a recent narcotics investigation in Lowertown that resulted in multiple arrests and the seizure of fentanyl, methamphetamine, illegal firearms, and cash. He noted that investigators believe the operation disrupted a significant source of narcotics activity affecting downtown earlier this spring.

He provided an update on department staffing, noting that the Saint Paul Police Department currently has approximately 573 sworn officers, with additional officers progressing through field training, the police academy, and the recruitment pipeline. He encouraged community members to consider careers with the department and help spread the word about recruitment opportunities.

Commander Kammerer also highlighted several technology initiatives designed to improve public safety, including the launch of the department's Real-Time Information Center, expanded use of a camera integration platform - the Community Camera Registry Program, and continued growth of the department's drone program. Together, these technologies provide officers with enhanced real-time information, improve emergency response capabilities, and strengthen partnerships with businesses and residents through voluntary camera-sharing programs.

He concluded by encouraging participation in several upcoming community engagement opportunities, including Junior Police Academy, Citizen Police Academy, National Night Out, and neighborhood events throughout the summer, emphasizing the department's continued commitment to building relationships with the community while maintaining a visible presence at major downtown events.

## **Metro Transit – Lieutenant Kadra Mohamad**

Lieutenant Kadra Mohamad provided an update on Metro Transit Police Department operations within downtown Saint Paul, outlining a layered public safety strategy focused on transit hubs and surrounding areas between Union Depot Station and the Capitol/Rice Street Station corridor. She noted that this approach includes coordinated work among transit security officers responsible for fare compliance, Community Service Officers in gray uniforms supporting visible presence and

outreach, and contracted cleaning staff working in partnership with the Downtown Improvement District to maintain platform cleanliness, in addition to sworn law enforcement personnel.

Mohamad highlighted targeted attention at 10th Street Station due to an observed increase in activity and quality-of-life concerns, with increased patrols and coordinated enforcement and outreach efforts in the area. She emphasized that these efforts are designed to both address immediate safety concerns and connect individuals with social services and support resources when appropriate.

She also described Metro Transit's continued participation in joint "Safe & Strong" operations with local partners, including the Saint Paul Police Department and other regional agencies. These efforts focus on addressing low-level offenses, improving overall transit safety, and ensuring coordinated access to services and the court system where needed.

Lieutenant Mohamad noted several operational updates, including the deployment of new bicycle patrol units to increase officer visibility and mobility throughout transit corridors and downtown. She also shared that a new beat structure will take effect in late July, resulting in changes to officer assignments across transit areas, with updated introductions planned for a future meeting.

Finally, she provided a staffing update noting that Metro Transit Police remains below authorized strength, but continues to move candidates through ongoing academy cycles. She also highlighted the Community Service Officer program as nearing full staffing and serving as a strong recruitment pipeline into sworn law enforcement positions. She concluded by noting the upcoming launch of the Explorers Program in August for youth interested in public safety careers, and encouraged attendance at upcoming community events, including Special Olympics programming at CHS Field and Juneteenth observances at the Capitol.

### **Active Residents**

Members of the Active Residents group provided updates focused on community-led downtown activation, Skyway connectivity, small business support, and resident engagement initiatives. Speakers emphasized the importance of continued collaboration among residents, community leaders, and downtown stakeholders to strengthen connections across downtown Saint Paul and sustain momentum around ongoing revitalization efforts.

A key theme of the discussion was the role of residents in supporting downtown small businesses, with speakers underscoring that consistent local engagement is essential to ensuring long-term business success. Building on this, the group highlighted a community-led initiative known as the "Progressive \$5 Dinner," organized by Rob Mitchell. The inaugural event drew hundreds of participants and is returning with a second event scheduled for Wednesday, July 22 in the eastern portion of downtown, with hopes of fostering continued cross-downtown engagement.

The group also discussed emerging ideas for additional Skyway activation, including a potential music-based programming concept that could feature performances and a progressive, multi-stop format throughout the Skyway system. Residents interested in participating or contributing to the planning effort were encouraged to connect with the Friends of the Skyway group.

Updates were also shared on ongoing placemaking and community programming efforts, including activation of Mears Park and other public spaces. Susan Larson was recognized for her continued work supporting programming and fundraising efforts tied to downtown parks. Additional updates included ongoing improvements at Pedro Park as it continues to evolve as a neighborhood space, as well as the continuation of a long-running monthly downtown blood drive program, which recently marked its 74th consecutive month.

Speakers also provided context on Skyway system challenges and restoration efforts, noting that previous disruptions had significantly impacted downtown connectivity and that current efforts are focused on reestablishing key connections and improving access across the system. The group highlighted strong collaboration among elected officials, downtown partners, and advocacy organizations in moving these efforts forward.

Finally, the group shared excitement about upcoming community programming, including the Skyway 5K event, which will return following progress on Skyway restoration efforts. The event is intended to showcase downtown connectivity and highlight renewed energy across the system, with registration currently open.

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

Cheyenne Violet provided an update on Sustain Saint Paul's recent and upcoming programming focused on downtown sustainability, fiscal education, and placemaking initiatives. She highlighted the success of a recent presentation led by Heather Worthington, which drew more than 100 attendees through word-of-mouth promotion. The event focused on Saint Paul's fiscal structure and the long-term financial challenges facing the city, with particular attention to implications for downtown development and investment.

Violet noted strong community interest in the topic and shared that Sustain Saint Paul is planning additional educational programming, including an upcoming tour of District Energy Saint Paul in July. The tour will highlight the system's sustainable heating and cooling infrastructure, as well as its historical role in supporting downtown development and energy efficiency.

She also provided updates on the organization's subcommittee work. The Public Realm Subcommittee is advancing two primary initiatives: a tactical beautification and activation effort at a downtown park and a proposed mural installation on the Metro Transit building adjacent to the park. These projects are being developed in coordination with community partners, including Friends of Mears Park and other local stakeholders, as well as Metro Transit, which is engaged in early discussions regarding the mural proposal.

Violet further shared that Sustain Saint Paul has launched a Housing Subcommittee focused on identifying barriers to increasing downtown housing density and improving residential access. The subcommittee is examining topics such as housing typologies, conversion opportunities for existing buildings, and broader strategies to support residential growth in downtown Saint Paul.

Finally, she noted that the organization has continued its state-level advocacy efforts following the conclusion of the legislative session, including engagement on policy areas such as guest home regulations and land value tax discussions. She encouraged attendees to connect with Sustain Saint Paul for additional information and to participate in ongoing conversations related to downtown sustainability, housing, and public realm improvements.

## **Rasmey County – Manager Ling Becker**

### RiversEdge

The County Board recently approved critical engineering agreements with Union Pacific and CPKC railroads, building on an earlier agreement with Xcel Energy to relocate power lines. Together, these actions remove significant project barriers and reflect the county's commitment to keeping this important project moving forward with urgency.

With these key milestones in place, the county is shifting from planning to implementation. Over the coming months, multiple workstreams will move forward simultaneously, including the release of competitive solicitations for private development partners and continued advancement of project design. By pursuing these efforts in parallel, the county is accelerating progress, maintaining momentum and positioning the project for successful delivery.

### Eastbound Kellogg RiverCenter Bridge Reconstruction

The county recently supported the City of Saint Paul's federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration Bridget Investment Program for the Eastbound Kellogg RiverCenter Bridge Reconstruction for up to \$11M. The project would: Construct a new bridge system to replace the existing 85-year old bridge. Major improvements include providing a shared pedestrian and bike facility through the Exchange Street viaduct connecting the Sam Morgan Regional Trail (Shepard Road) to the future Capital City Bikeway on Kellogg Boulevard, improving the RiverCentre/Xcel Energy Center loading dock access ramps located under the bridge, and incorporating utility infrastructure improvements.

### New Economic Development Authority (EDA)

Ramsey County reached a major milestone in establishing its new Economic Development Authority (EDA), following municipal approvals that allow the authority to expand the eligibility of existing Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) investments to strengthen local businesses, commercial corridors and economic competitiveness across the county.

The milestone follows action by eighteen participating municipalities across Ramsey County, including the June 3 vote by the City of Saint Paul to join the EDA. Beginning in 2027, Ramsey County anticipates investing approximately \$1.5 million to \$2 million annually from existing HRA resources into business-focused programs and services that help communities thrive and expand access to economic prosperity.

### Train Days & 100 Years at Union Depot

We had an outstanding weekend for Train Days as part of our yearlong celebration of 100 years of Union Depot. Attendance exceeded 16,000 visitors, representing a remarkable 46% increase over last year and demonstrating the strong community enthusiasm for rail history, transportation, and this historic landmark.

The event featured an impressive collection of vintage locomotives and rail equipment, giving visitors the opportunity to experience the rich heritage of American railroads. The displays also helped kick off the nation's upcoming 250th anniversary celebration, connecting the story of rail transportation to the broader story of America's growth and development over the past two and a half centuries.

Saturday's Music Fest on the South Lawn proved to be a wonderful addition to the weekend. With beautiful weather and a vibrant atmosphere, families and visitors enjoyed live performances while taking in the Depot's historic surroundings. The festival added a new dimension to Train Days, showcasing Union Depot not only as a transportation hub and historic treasure, but also as a gathering place for community celebrations.

The weekend also marked the debut of several new visitor experiences tied to the Depot's centennial year. Guests were among the first to explore the new Historic Stair Museum, which highlights the building's architecture, restoration, and significance in the history of Saint Paul and the region. We also unveiled a new penny press, offering visitors a fun and memorable keepsake commemorating both Train Days and the Depot's 100th anniversary.

As we continue celebrating a century of Union Depot, Train Days demonstrated the enduring appeal of this iconic landmark and its role in connecting people, preserving history, and creating memorable experiences for future generations.