



DOWNTOWN ACTION SERIES – MEETING #8 SUMMARY

From Thursday, August 27, 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.

Ramsey County – County Attorney Chris Tolbert

Chris Tolbert highlighted the public safety work undertaken ahead of the State Fair to proactively address concerns about potential group violence. Public agencies successfully secured court-ordered agreements preventing seven individuals from attending the Fair, while others identified as potential participants in group violence could be subject to arrest if they engage in defined gang-related activity. Tolbert described the effort as an important example of focusing on deterrence and early intervention, informed by violence that has occurred following Cinco de Mayo and other community events.

He also noted that Ramsey County continues to work closely with the Saint Paul Police Department, Metro Transit, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office, and Saint Paul City Attorney’s Office on ongoing downtown quality-of-life and public safety issues, with the goal of coordinating efforts and improving conditions downtown.

Saint Paul City Council – Council President Rebecca Noecker

Council President Noecker addressed several major issues affecting downtown, beginning with the Skyway system. She emphasized that the City Council has already allocated the necessary funding to support reopening the Skyways and that the current delays are not related to a lack of funding or budget cuts. Instead, there are logistical challenges involving some Skyway partners, including recent bankruptcies. She reiterated that the City understands the urgency of reopening the Skyways and that previously allocated funding will remain available. The City’s Skyway system currently has a partial closure at the Alliance Bank Center, while other east-west connections remain available.

She also discussed the ongoing encampment and unsheltered homelessness response following the Mayor's August 5 announcement regarding closure of the Pig's Eye encampment. Since then, residents have moved into housing and shelter as well as other encampments, including the Randolph and Shepard site. Council President Noecker noted that she has been hearing concerns from residents in Upper Landing and Waterfront Bay and invited attendees to share what they are experiencing and discuss next steps. While there is not yet a timeline for closing the Randolph and Shepard encampment, she said she remains in close communication with the Mayor's Office about identifying indoor spaces for residents and ultimately closing the site. She emphasized concerns about the safety of both people living at the encampment and surrounding residents, including the fact that portions of the site are polluted.

Finally, Council President Noecker highlighted the upcoming City budget process, noting that the City is facing a \$26 million budget deficit and will be considering significant proposed cuts. She emphasized the need to prioritize the frontline services residents rely on while also addressing the City's need for additional support from the State, including adequate Local Government Aid, as well as stronger partnerships with Ramsey County and other governmental partners. She encouraged residents to follow the Council's weekly Wednesday budget meetings and participate in the ongoing budget discussion. She also highlighted the upcoming Ward 2 budget conversation with the City's financial team as an opportunity for residents to engage directly in the process.

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

Nick Stumo-Langer provided an update on the Mayor's 2027 budget, noting that Mayor Her delivered her budget address on August 13. He emphasized that the projected \$26 million budget gap is more than a mathematical challenge because the City must balance maintaining core services that residents rely on—including street maintenance and economic development—with strategic investments needed to move the City forward, including climate-related work. He encouraged residents to engage with the City Council throughout the budget process and make their priorities known.

On the Skyway reopening, Stumo-Langer reiterated that funding is secured and that the City has a clear path toward completing the physical improvements needed for reopening. However, the bankruptcy of the Athletic Club has complicated some of the legal pathways involved. He said City staff and partners are working through those challenges and that there is a clear line of sight toward reopening, though he was not able to provide a specific opening date. He highlighted the work of PEDD, City Planning and Development, the Downtown Development Corporation, the Downtown Alliance, and other partners in moving the process forward.

Stumo-Langer also discussed the City's encampment response, noting that Assistant Mayor Cedric Baker has been conducting ongoing community engagement in addition to the public hearings and recent Public Safety Committee discussions. He encouraged residents to contact the Mayor's Office with concerns about the Randolph and Shepard encampment, the former Kmart site just north of downtown, and other locations. He emphasized that the City's approach continues to focus on service-based transitions, with the goal of connecting unsheltered residents to housing and other resources.

Finally, Stumo-Langer shared an update on the anticipated Aldi opening downtown, noting that the store is currently targeting a late September or early October opening. The City expects to receive approximately two to three weeks' notice once the opening date is confirmed and will share that information with the community.

Downtown Alliance – President Joe Spencer

Joe Spencer highlighted the recent launch of a community prosecutor position focused exclusively on downtown, describing it as a major breakthrough and addition to the downtown public safety toolkit. He explained that the concept grew out of 2024 conversations with downtown stakeholders about expanding the Downtown Improvement District (DID) to encompass the entire downtown area. The community prosecutor strategy resonated with stakeholders and was incorporated into the DID petitioning process, though it took additional time to move from concept to implementation.

Spencer credited Council President Noecker with championing the position, including advocating for it in the City budget and continuing to push for implementation; he also thanked Mayor Her and the Assistant Mayors for helping move the effort forward. Most importantly, he thanked the downtown property owners who supported the DID, emphasizing that the district is a self-imposed and self-managed fee district. He noted that property owners' willingness to fund services such as ambassadors, cleanup, and rapid response reflects their belief that these services provide value and a return on their investment. Spencer encouraged property owners to continue providing feedback to the Downtown Alliance about the services and value they are receiving.

Downtown Development Corporation – President Dave Higgins

Dave Higgins highlighted a new partnership with the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, which has stepped up to support the work happening downtown. He expressed enthusiasm about the Foundation's involvement and its partnership in the work ahead.

Higgins also reiterated that the Skyway remains a major priority for the Downtown Development Corporation. The DDC continues to work with both the Council President's office and the Mayor's Office on issues affecting the Skyway, including the Alliance Bank Center.

He also acknowledged recent challenges at the U.S. Bank Center, where a sprinkler issue caused significant water infiltration affecting both the Skyway and first floor of the building. Higgins apologized for the disruption and said a team of contractors is actively addressing the issue. He emphasized that maintaining Skyway access is a priority and that the DDC is working to mitigate the impacts and avoid additional closures.

Higgins did not have specific updates on other projects but noted that the DDC continues to work with its broader team on design concepts and is making progress on several projects, with additional updates expected in the near future.

American Institute of Architects (AIA) Minnesota, Saint Paul Prize Design Competition - 2025 Saint Paul Prize recipient: Alap Parikh

The Saint Paul Prize Design Competition is focused on supporting the next generation of designers while encouraging an open exploration of innovative ideas for places and public spaces in Saint Paul. The Downtown Alliance and Downtown Development Corporation worked with AIA Minnesota at the outset to help identify the focus of this year's competition. The 2025 Saint Paul Prize recipient, Alap Parikh, was introduced as part of the program, with Dante Saab of HGA Architects presenting the competition and its design concepts, which focus in particular on the river's edge, downriver areas, and beyond.

Saint Paul Port Authority - Director of Real Estate Kristine Williams

Christy Williams provided an update on the Saint Paul Port Authority's partnership with Fairview to redevelop the former St. Joseph's Hospital campus. Fairview recently awarded a demolition contract for the vacant hospital building, with work expected to begin soon. The initial visible work will likely be installation of a construction fence, followed by interior abatement to remove asbestos-containing materials and address other hazardous materials before the building itself is demolished. Major demolition is expected to begin in early 2027.

Williams noted that the Skyway crossing St. Peter Street will need to be removed as part of the demolition. Structural engineers determined that the existing Skyway cannot remain in place while the building is being taken down. However, she emphasized that its removal does not preclude a future redevelopment from incorporating a new Skyway connection.

The Port Authority, Fairview, and the City are still in the early stages of identifying a redevelopment partner for the site. An initial meeting with the Advisory Council is planned for the coming weeks to establish priorities and parameters for the future development, which could include job creation, tax base, housing opportunities, and other community benefits. The group will also begin discussing how and when to incorporate community feedback into the redevelopment process. Williams noted that while some activity may be visible at the site later this year, the most significant changes are expected to occur in 2027.

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

Spencer Miller-Johnson provided an update on the Downtown 2050 planning process, emphasizing the importance of pairing long-range planning with the City's short-term interventions so that downtown is prepared for future needs. Since June, the City has been working with Bell Studios, a planning and design consultant based in Copenhagen and New York City, which recently provided a draft working plan. City staff are now reviewing the proposed policies through a Technical Advisory Committee made up of City representatives and external partners, including Ramsey County, the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAP Board), the Downtown Alliance, and others.

With a draft set of policies now available for review, the City is beginning a broader community outreach process that will continue over the coming months. Staff recently conducted an in-person visitation survey at the Science Museum to better understand who is using downtown, what activities bring people downtown, and how visitors travel. Additional surveys will be conducted at other downtown locations, including the September 6 farmers market, with the goal of better understanding downtown users beyond residents and employees.

The City is also planning community workshops and targeted outreach to downtown residents, including engagement with Friends groups, neighborhood associations, and homeowners associations. Dates and formats have not yet been finalized, and Miller-Johnson encouraged residents to provide feedback on the most effective ways to engage the community and who should be included in the process.

City of Saint Paul – Department of Public Works Director Deb Barber & Assistant City Engineer Randy Newton

Public Works provided an update on the significant amount of downtown construction and associated closures/lane reductions, noting that getting around downtown will continue to be challenging through the end of October. The City is working with project partners to maintain as many transportation options as possible, including coordinating with Xcel Energy to keep one lane open in each direction during work on Eagle Parkway. There are also some positive developments, including strong progress on the Kellogg/Third Street Bridge project and an upcoming lane reopening on Jackson Street. Conditions are expected to improve after October, although not all construction will be complete.

Public Works also encouraged residents and downtown stakeholders to continue reporting street and infrastructure issues, including puddles, streetlights, and other maintenance concerns. The department is working toward creating more public-facing dashboards that would allow residents

to see what issues have been reported and where the City has completed work, but continued community reporting will be important to building that system.

The department is also exploring opportunities to use downtown as a pilot zone for testing new approaches to issues such as parking, loading zones, and street activation. Staff are discussing potential pilot projects that could be brought back to the Downtown Action Series for community input, with the philosophy that testing new approaches is necessary to determine what works.

Finally, Public Works provided an update on streetlight repairs and the planned Shepard Road lighting project. There are currently approximately 3,500 streetlights out across Saint Paul, and the City is increasingly focused on prevention in addition to repairing damaged lights. Public Works is working with SPPD to address ongoing wire theft, which has made it difficult to maintain lighting infrastructure.

The City has funding secured to install new lighting along Shepard Road in 2027, currently anticipated to extend from Sibley Street west toward Washington Street, potentially farther depending on the final design. A consultant will be brought on shortly to help develop the project. Given the ongoing threat of wire theft, the City intends to use the Shepard Road project as an opportunity to test more creative prevention strategies, potentially including enhanced security measures and coordination with police on surveillance. The goal is to develop a lighting installation that is both effective and resilient enough to remain operational after construction is complete.

Saint Paul Police Department – District Commander Jake Peterson

Commander Peterson provided updates on several ongoing public safety and quality-of-life issues downtown. He noted that police remain particularly busy during the State Fair and back-to-school period, while overall crime trends continue to decline. Bike and e-bike thefts, however, are increasing, and residents are encouraged to document bicycle serial numbers and take photographs at the time of purchase to improve the chances of recovery.

Peterson also discussed the growing presence of scooters and bikes downtown and the department's coordination with Lime and other organizations as technology and usage continue to evolve faster than existing laws and ordinances. The department's Real-Time Information Center has recorded more than 100 significant successes since opening just over a month ago and is now operating seven days a week, supporting public safety responses ranging from fire rescues to locating individuals involved in criminal activity.

SPPD continues to conduct targeted right-of-way cleanups with DSI and Public Works on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 6–8:30 a.m. Peterson also highlighted a recent increase in copper and wire theft, noting that community calls reporting suspicious activity near streetlights have helped officers make several arrests. He expressed appreciation for the new downtown

community prosecutor and shared informational materials on scooter and bicycle safety, the department's camera-sharing program, theft and burglary prevention, and camera/data questions.

Metro Transit Police Department – HAT Supervisor Sargent Maurer

Sargent Maurer provided an update on Metro Transit's downtown response efforts. The Response Team operates from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m., while the Support Team works from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The Homeless Action Team is now operating full-time, with a focus on assisting unsheltered individuals downtown, particularly around the train and bus stations. The Safe and Strong initiative also remains active.

Saint Paul Parks Conservancy – Great River Passage Director Jodi Massey

Jodi Massey provided an update on the Great River Passage Initiative and efforts to strengthen connections between downtown Saint Paul and the Mississippi River. The initiative encompasses programs, partnerships, and projects along the 17-mile stretch of river in Saint Paul. Downtown improvements currently underway include a two-mile loop connecting Kellogg Boulevard, Shepard Road, Wacouta Street, and the Science Museum, with trail and wayfinding signage, walking tours, and additional programming planned over the coming months.

Massey highlighted several opportunities to engage with downtown parks and riverfront programming, including Melodies on the Mississippi at Harriet Island on Wednesday evenings through September and Lunch on the Lawn at Rice Park through September 30. She also encouraged residents to consider the river as part of Saint Paul's identity as the City works on its place-branding initiative.

Massey also promoted We Are the River, an approximately 85-minute documentary about the Mississippi River in Minnesota produced by board member Peter Myers, which will air on TPT on September 1 at 8 p.m. Finally, she discussed efforts to improve the pedestrian experience through the Jackson and Sibley Street underpasses connecting downtown to the river. The Great River Passage team has been convening partners on potential improvements for the past year and a half, with an artist commission expected to be announced at the next meeting. A partnership with Public Art Saint Paul will also bring a temporary art activation to the underpasses as part of an upcoming fall festival.

Public Art Saint Paul – Office Manager Madeline Skjervold

Madeline Skjervold reminded attendees about the Wakpa Triennial Art Festival, taking place downtown this fall. The festival is free and open to the public, with opening weekend scheduled for September 12–13 and more than 30 artists showcasing original work, including a large-scale

installation on a downtown railroad wall. Attendees were encouraged to visit the festival website for the full calendar or pick up postcards and posters available at the meeting.

Ramsey County – Manager Ling Becker

Manager Ling Becker provided an update on Ramsey County's 2027 budget, the second year of the County's biennial budget cycle. She noted that the County uses the second year to evaluate whether budgeted dollars are producing the intended results, with budget hearings currently underway.

Becker highlighted the fiscal pressures facing the County. The current biennial budget included a 7.5% property tax levy increase and difficult reductions, including eliminating 43 positions, reducing Shoreview library hours, and transitioning the County detox facility to a community provider. For 2027, the County is proposing an 8.25% levy increase, driven in part by increased costs associated with federal policy changes and the need to add 32 correctional officer positions identified through an independent staffing study. Without the additional positions, the County would continue to face higher overtime costs and potential Department of Corrections penalties or costs associated with housing individuals in other facilities.

Becker noted that approximately 70% of the County's budget supports human services and public safety, much of which is administered under state and federal requirements. She emphasized that these responsibilities create costs the County has limited ability to control locally and encouraged residents to follow the budget process and participate in upcoming hearings.

Visit Saint Paul - Vice President Jenn Schaal

Jenn Schaal provided an update on the City and Visit Saint Paul's place branding project, which is currently in the public survey phase. The project aims to better understand how residents, workers, and visitors perceive Saint Paul and develop a shared citywide brand that brings together the distinct stories and identities of the city's neighborhoods while supporting a more unified approach to promoting Saint Paul.

Schaal encouraged attendees to complete and widely share the five-minute survey, which is available in multiple languages. She emphasized the importance of honest feedback, including about what is and is not working, and noted that the survey is open through the end of September. Additional updates on the branding project are expected over the coming months.

Active Residents - Bill Hanley & Robb Mitchell

The discussion highlighted the growing role of downtown residents as active partners in shaping the neighborhood. As the residential population grows, residents are increasingly contributing ideas, organizing initiatives, and supporting efforts that strengthen downtown—not simply participating as an audience for civic leadership.

The Skyway 5K drew 905 participants last year, including Council President Rebecca Noecker and Joe Spencer, and organizers are planning a second event for February 27, 2027, contingent on the Skyway being fully open. The Friends of the Skyway, led by Nancy K. Meyer, is also developing walking groups and other activities to bring residents together, including evening and early-morning walks. Other resident-led efforts include music and art programming in the Skyway and a planned Halloween event.

Residents are also exploring ways to expand healthcare resources downtown. The group has held 76 monthly blood drives and recently began conversations with Ramsey County Public Health about potentially expanding those efforts into broader healthcare partnerships serving downtown residents and workers. Additional resident involvement is taking place through Friends of the Parks groups and the ongoing development of Wabasha Park.

The discussion also highlighted the success of \$5 progressive dinners, an idea initiated by downtown resident Rob Mitchell. The dinners bring residents together to visit multiple downtown restaurants in one evening while encouraging people to meet their neighbors and support local businesses. The broader point was that creating a neighborhood requires more than adding housing: buildings provide the physical infrastructure, but residents create the connections, activity, and community that make a neighborhood function. The group encouraged residents to participate in upcoming dinners and other resident-led activities as a way to build those connections.

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

Cheyenne Violet provided a brief update on Sustain Saint Paul, an urbanist nonprofit focused on abundant housing, sustainable land use, and low-carbon transportation through education and advocacy. As co-chair of the organization's Downtown Revitalization Committee, she highlighted the group's recent tour of District Energy, a downtown system that provides heating and cooling services to approximately 80% of downtown Saint Paul. The tour drew one of the organization's largest groups to date, and additional tours are expected to be scheduled in response to continued interest.

Violet also highlighted Sustain Saint Paul's annual Highland walking tour, which explores the former Ford site and the organization's past advocacy for walkability and abundant housing in the area. Finally, she announced the organization's annual Sibling Rivalry fundraiser in October, a friendly competition with Minneapolis-based Neighbors for More Neighbors, which advocates for similar housing and transportation goals. Sustain Saint Paul won last year's competition and plans to participate again this year.