



**DOWN  
TOWN**  
Rochester, MN

# RDA Annual Report 2021

## **Mission:**

To create, enhance, and promote a downtown experience that is welcoming, fun, and livable.



## 2021 RDA board chair letter

2020 and 2021 have been tumultuous years for our community and, in particular, our stakeholders. Downtown districts globally were impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including reductions in downtown visitors, employees, and events. Rochester was no exception. As our downtown business owners worked tirelessly to adapt and innovate, RDA took on the work of supporting our downtown residents, employees, visitors, and business owners under constantly changing circumstances.

RDA created Downtown Dialogues, a virtual venue for accurate and timely communications on public health measures, construction updates, and COVID-19 relief grants. Our Clean and Safe Ambassadors cleaned, sanitized, and beautified downtown and were critical team members in the execution of our outdoor events.

Our superhuman staff of five (at times just four) worked with community members to create new events or programs or modify existing ones. These included Fresh Air Fitness, Roller Disco, and, through our Start-Up Event Grant, events like the Night Market created by Tiffany Alexandria and her collaborators. All these events brought new faces and new experiences to downtown.

Through this tumultuous year, I am proud of the work our staff and our Ambassadors accomplished and the contribution RDA has made to support our stakeholders and create joy for our community in the midst of a pandemic. More importantly, I am very excited about the year ahead. We have students, employees, and visitors returning; a growing downtown residential population who seek out our walkable urban experience; new businesses who have opened or are opening their doors; and the re-opening of improved public spaces to gather. There is much to accomplish together in downtown Rochester.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Shruthi Naik, PhD  
Associate consultant  
Mayo Clinic

## RDA executive director letter

Greetings to our stakeholder community!

2021 was a year of adaptation, recovery, and rediscovering the joys of being together downtown. We flexed our longstanding strengths in marketing, promotion, and events; more firmly established our Clean and Safe Ambassador Program and public space enhancement work; and strengthened community relationships. Our efforts focused on raising downtown's visibility and enhancing the daily experience of all who come here.

A highlight for me was working closely with our apartment building managers on our Downtown Residential Research study. It was energizing to learn that more and more young professionals, families, and empty nesters are seeking out housing downtown to be close to everything our neighborhood offers. We look forward to connecting this growing population with our downtown business community.

It was an honor to work alongside our talented team to serve downtown Rochester for another year. I look forward to an even brighter 2022 together.

Sincerely,



Holly Masek  
RDA executive director

## Services delivered

RDA enhances and promotes downtown through these key service areas:



### Clean and Safe Ambassador Program



### Festivals and large events



### Placemaking and programs



### Direct SSD support (grants, technical assistance, etc.)



### Marketing and external communications



### Internal communications to stakeholders



### Public space management (rentals, flowers, furniture, etc.)

**Karli McElroy,**  
Director of operations

"My highlight of the year is a tie between our Clean and Safe Ambassador's clean-up of the Zumbro River downtown and the Stakeholder Appreciation Night. The river clean-up happened on a day that was beautiful, and it felt good to do something knowing it had such a positive impact on the downtown. The Stakeholder Appreciation Night was also a fun way to connect with downtown businesses and partners in person after a difficult year."

**Katie Adelman,**  
Director of content and communications

"I think two of the most impactful highlights of 2021 for me were the general marketing campaign, #TogetherDowntown in spring and Roller Disco in October. The #TogetherDowntown campaign reminded people how great it can feel to be downtown again and we had the opportunity to bring in downtown consultants – and businesses – to create the content. The second highlight was the inaugural Roller Disco, bringing a giant outdoor roller rink and people of all backgrounds, demographics, and locales to unite around a nostalgic activity. I look forward to the many more positive impacts we, our partners, and downtown community will have in 2022!"

**Kanika Couchene,**  
Director of events and strategic partnerships

"Being new to the RDA in 2021, I found it to be a joy to be able to see the execution of the events that I planned and secured funding for in such a short amount of time. This year we had abnormal challenges such as construction, power issues, a pandemic and supply chain issues but we made stronger partnerships and helped the vitality of downtown. I look forward to what 2022 has in store for our team!"

## 2021 RDA board of directors

The RDA is governed by a board of directors which includes downtown property owners, businesses, and partners. The board meets monthly and provides financial and strategic oversight to the organization. The board strives to represent the best interests of RDA's stakeholders, which include property owners, businesses, partners, and users.

### Executive committee

Shruthi Naik, Vyriad and Mayo Clinic, Chair  
Cyle Erie, ISG, Vice Chair  
Kayla Shurson, Shurson Group, Treasurer  
Will Forsman, Café Steam, Board Development Chair  
Angie Richards, Avra Hospitality, Activities, Culture and Engagement Committee Chair  
John Beatty, Dunlap & Seeger, Policy Chair  
Naura Anderson, Threshold Arts, Space and Place Chair  
Jeanine Gangeness, Winona State University Rochester, Past Chair

### Directors

Paul Armon, Armon Architecture  
Jamie Radke, Titan Development & Investments  
Bucky Beeman, Realty Growth Inc.  
Jody Chambers, Bremer Bank  
Chris Fierst, The Half Barrel Bar and Kitchen  
Omar Nur, Somali American Social Service Association

### Ex officio directors

Mayor Kim Norton, City of Rochester  
Josh Johnsen, City of Rochester  
John Murphy, Mayo Clinic  
Tessie Burley, University of Minnesota Rochester



Zumbro River Clean Up  
Clean and Safe Ambassadors

# 2021 Strategic priorities

## COVID-19 response

RDA adapted programming to the realities of COVID-19, ramping up from smaller outdoor programs in May to larger festivals later in summer, and then scaling down again with adapted Here Comes Santa Claus and Hiawatha Homes Festival of Trees Downtown events.

Fresh Air Fitness, a new spring program, highlighted Central Park as an essential public space and safely launched our event season in May.

Thursdays Downtown returned in July, coinciding with widespread COVID-19 vaccine availability and bringing over 193,000 visitors downtown.

## Strategic relationships

RDA continued to work closely with the City of Rochester and Mayo Clinic and focused on developing relationships with University of Minnesota Rochester and residential buildings downtown.

## Stakeholder engagement

RDA launched the Downtown Dialogue information series hosting 23 weekly, then monthly, meetings with timely presenters from across the community. Over the year, the program evolved to include in-person coffee hours.

## Public space management

COVID-19 spurred a renewed appreciation for outdoor spaces, and RDA responded with enhanced horticulture, new furniture and banners, and frequent cleanings in key public spaces.

## Research and advocacy

Over 900 residential units have been added to downtown since 2010. With a consultant team, RDA studied what this group of residents wants from their new neighborhood.

## Daily downtown services

RDA's Clean and Safe Ambassador Program offered cleaning and customer service 361 days of 2021.

- 8 customer service, hospitality, social service, and local knowledge trainings completed
- 231 block faces power washed
- 2,086 hospitality assists performed
- 1,111 pieces of graffiti removed
- 1,830 corners cleared of snow
- 801 bags of trash collected
- 815 blocks weeded

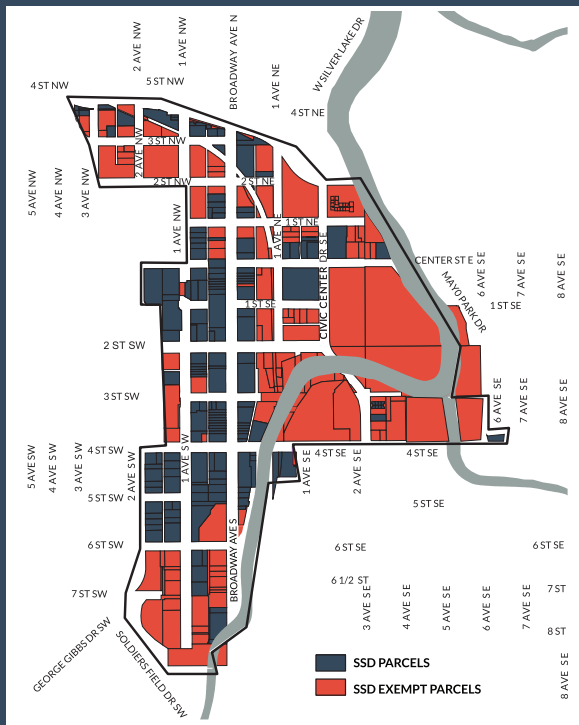
## Organizational sustainability

RDA continued to explore new financial partnerships, streamline operations, and find ways to improve staff retention.

## Diversity and inclusion

RDA set a goal for 20 percent of booked talent and grant recipients to come from underrepresented communities. In some programs we exceeded this goal, with over 40 percent of Thursdays Downtown musicians being female or minority led acts.





## 2021 financials

The Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA) special service district (SSD) is a Minnesota 501(c)(6) non-profit established in 2005. The district's boundaries cover 44 blocks and encompass much of the city's downtown.

The RDA is funded through SSD levy dollars; general contributions from the City of Rochester and Mayo Clinic; restricted funds for the Clean and Safe Program pilot from Mayo Clinic and the City of Rochester; and revenue generated from events, space rentals, and project administration. SSD district levy is assessed annually based on commercial property tax values and apportioned to each property based on their share of the total SSD value. The total assessed for the district may increase annually between four (4) and eight (8) percent.

## RDA 2021 income

General income		% of total income
Special service district	\$324,750	21%
City of Rochester contribution	\$90,000	6%
Mayo Clinic contribution	\$125,980	8%
Other (grants, partners, etc.)	\$5,537	0.5%
Federal pandemic relief aid	\$165,028	11%
<b>Clean and Safe restricted income</b>		
City of Rochester	\$125,000	8%
Mayo Clinic	\$265,225	17%
Other partners	\$5,700	0.5%
Other	\$10,250	1%
<b>Event and program income</b>	\$412,145	27%
<b>Total income</b>	<b>\$1,529,615</b>	<b>100%</b>

## RDA 2021 expenses

		% of total expenses
<b>Operating expenses</b>	\$205,605	14%
<b>Clean and Safe</b>	\$453,626	32%
<b>Programs *</b>		54%
Marketing	\$69,591	
Placemaking and programming	\$53,588	
Public space management	\$4,174	
District support / research	\$52,609	
Events and festivals	\$585,246	
<b>Subtotal expenses</b>	<b>\$1,424,439</b>	<b>100%</b>
Addition to reserves	\$8,500	
Carryover to 2022 in anticipation of pandemic / construction / inflation expenses	\$96,676	
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$1,529,615</b>	

\*Per RDA's audit, RDA allocates staff costs as follows: 83% program delivery, 4% fundraising, 13% organizational administration.



## IMPROV-ICE

annual SocialICE improv-ICEd

Nine ice sculptures, 15,800 meals  
donated to Channel One Food Bank

## Fresh Air FITNESS

37 classes | 1,346 attendees



50 live lunchtime performances



10 weeks | 193,000 attendees

## MOVIES ★★★★ IN THE PARK

Six showings | 2,000 attendees



Two days | 11,100 attendees

## D&GS DOWNTOWN

10,800 attendees

## Here Comes Santa Claus

8,700 attendees



## 2021 Impacts and highlights

# 228,000

program and event attendees

# \$6.6 million

estimated economic impact from events

# 218

days of public  
programming

# 361

days of Clean and Safe  
Ambassador services

# 72.4 million

estimated earned media reach

# 761

estimated earned  
media stories

# 53,529

social media followers  
and new subscribers

# 19

new businesses  
welcomed to downtown





## Sidewalk Cafe Extensions

Nine extended patios assisted

## Stakeholder Appreciation Night

Refresh to annual meeting

## Winter Snow Removal Brochure

A how-to guide for upgraded Peace Plaza



## Central Park Improvements

Nine planters enhanced, twice

## Start-Up Event Grant

\$10,000 distributed, creating five new events

## Enhanced Horticulture

57 planters supplemented



## Residential Research Project

966 housing units added since 2010

## Zumbro River Cleanup

20 bags of trash and 52 golf balls removed



## Hiawatha Homes Festival of Trees

84 trees across 30 storefronts

## Façade Improvement Grants

\$54,000 over six projects

## Downtown Dialogues

23 meetings, 900 attendees,  
over 160 presentations



## Drop-in coffee hours

Hosted eight in-person meet-ups

## Peace Plaza improvements

73 pieces of furniture added, new  
welcome banners in six languages

## Small Business Saturday

20 participating businesses

## #TogetherDowntown

General marketing campaign with 551,637 impressions





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