

# DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER TASK FORCE UPDATE



City of Rochester  
Destination Medical Center (DMC)  
Experience Rochester  
Mayo Clinic  
Rochester Area Economic Development (RAEDI)  
Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
Rochester Downtown Alliance

## MARCH/APRIL 2024 EDITION

The following provides an update as of the end of February on some of the activities and progress made by the Downtown Task Force stakeholder informed Action Plan

**RPD Community Action Team News** - On January 18th, downtown stakeholders came together to congratulate Officer Dan Swanson on his retirement from the Rochester Police Department. This was a large gathering of stakeholders, city officials, and a few Dan Swanson's colleagues, expressed their respect and deep appreciation for what Dan, Jim Ratelle, RPD, and the Community Action Team have done to promote safety and security in Downtown. Chief Franklin spoke in tribute to Dan Swanson's public service and assured everyone of his strong commitment to community policing.

Dan's replacement, Officer Mike Goergen, was introduced. Mike started his law enforcement career in La Cross in 2017 and was hired by RPD in January of 2023. Mike said, "I am committed to getting to know everyone downtown on a personal level and work to strengthen and grow the already vibrant downtown area, improve the quality of life for citizens, the downtown workforce and visitors." Welcome Officer Mike Goergen – pictured below - when you see him on the street.





### **Downtown Promotion, Activation, and Programming**

- Experience Rochester's 2nd Annual Restaurant Week took place January 15 – 21 and featured several downtown restaurants, showcasing special menus and promotions. Participating restaurants reported a significant increase in traffic over previous weeks and last year.
- Under the leadership of Experience Rochester, the Downtown Taskforce is working with the Twin Cities Business Journal to do a comprehensive insert/long-form article to promote Rochester as a place to do business, invest, live, and visit. This special insert in the Twin Cities Business Journal gets coupled with ad space to further inspire tourism and investment.
- Consistent with stakeholder input, RDA continues to adapt its mission to promotion of Downtown as a destination. Holiday season promotion expanded geographically, including new outlets, such as MPR radio, display and local print advertising.
- RDA remains committed to producing its iconic events, including Social-Ice and nine Thursdays Downtown for 2024. Event production expenses have been reduced significantly allowing for increased investment in marketing and promotion of downtown as a destination with "great dining, unique/fun shopping, and lots to do!"
- Staffing for the specialty bars and the weather presented challenges, 2024 Social-Ice was successful drawing a crowd rivalling previous years. Many of the bars reported good traffic and downtown restaurants were at capacity most of the time during Social-Ice. RDA marketed Social-Ice heavily both locally and as a destination weekend event, including a Kahler Grand Hotel special weekend rate, through various channels including MPR, and media throughout southeastern MN and into the Twin Cities.
- Open this link to see a summary of and links to all the promotional efforts for Social-Ice: [bit.ly/3ONNpPG](https://bit.ly/3ONNpPG)

### **Access Safety Concerns**

- To ensure the aesthetic and safety value of the lights downtown, the Public Works team has implemented a new weekly review of the downtown decorative lighting. This crew checks lights after dark and enters non-functioning lights with pictures into our Elements work management system that shows them on GIS for tracking and corrective work orders. A review the week of February 2 identified 30 issues throughout the downtown district. This system will help the City stay on top of problems without relying on a complaint-based system. The new process should significantly reduce this issue going forward. The Clean & Safe Ambassadors are assisting in checking the lights for proper functioning.



- The City Council authorized Phase 1 uses for one-time Public Safety Funding provided by the state. This includes funding for additional non-uniform resources to work with homeless population to help connect them to services and will work in alignment with the camping ordinance and enforcement strategy.
- Camping/Encampment Ordinance passed the City Council, including “first read” of ordinance on February 5th. Many City departments commit considerable resources to addressing the needs and challenges involving people experiencing homelessness and the associated camping activities. This includes (but is not limited to) substantial commitments by Parks, Police, Library, and City Attorney teammates. Utilization of a new enforcement tool, such as a camping ban, could cause a near-term uptick in City resource commitment. This could be followed by a longer-term downward trend, as people experiencing homelessness better connect with appropriate resources in a dignified way and find alternatives to sheltering in public spaces. Ordinance: [https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2408904/8-15\\_Camping\\_Prohibited.\\_Ver.3.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2408904/8-15_Camping_Prohibited._Ver.3.pdf)
- The City and County are planning to hold a joint meeting in March for Olmsted County to provide an update and overview on their homelessness approach “Built for Zero.” This information on their long-term strategy will dovetail well with a clearer enforcement strategy for addressing homeless encampments.

### **Reduce Barriers to Doing Business Downtown**

·Simplify and streamline policies and processes. On February 5, 2024, the streamlining for most permit/licensing (administrative approval) passed its last hurdle. Most license types will now be able to be issued by staff once requirements are met without requirement for Council approval. More detail follows:

The span of license and permit types being brought forward for ministerial approval by staff team include:

1. Contractors (Sidewalk, Sewer & Drain, Master Installer, as well as Heating, Venting, & Air
2. Conditioning [HVAC])
3. Fireworks (Sales & Display)
4. Taxicabs (Businesses & Drivers)
5. Animal Permits (Chickens & Ducks)
6. Sidewalk Vending Carts
7. Massage Therapy Businesses
8. Massage Therapists
9. Liquor (Generally)
10. Temporary Gambling
11. Special Events