



Partnership for Downtown Rochester
Community Engagement Event Summaries
August 2022 – December 2023

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Survey #1 (Conducted 9/9/22 — 11/30/22)

About The Survey

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted an initial community survey from 9/9/2022 to 11/30/2022. Respondents were asked about their behaviors and perceptions related to the downtown core of Rochester, NY. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish and was available digitally and in-person. In addition to digital outreach, the Partnership conducted 10 in-person events, including tabling at 5 downtown residential buildings, 3 monthly Office Hour drop-in sessions, and 3 interactive downtown WalkShops, where the survey was distributed and promoted. A highlighted data summary follows below.

A full report of the survey data can be found on the Partnership for Downtown Rochester's website.

Residential Tabling

About Residential Tabling

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted residential tabling sessions at 7 separate buildings downtown from October 2022 to September 2023. The buildings included The Metropolitan, Sibley Square, Andrews Terrace, Union Square, Charlotte Square, Park Square, and VIDA. These tabling sessions served as an opportunity for staff to learn from downtown residents, capture their feedback on downtown Rochester, as well as encourage them to complete the downtown Rochester experience survey. Residents were asked about their behaviors and perceptions related to the downtown core of Rochester, NY. A highlighted summary of feedback is below.

- ACTIVATION & PLACEMAKING

- Residents shared that they enjoy free downtown events and would like more programming and activities.
- Residents shared that they enjoy living near Parcel 5, and see it as a hub of positive community activity.
- Residents shared they feel the bars in the east end are loud and disruptive on the weekends.
- Residents shared that they like public art downtown and believe it should be invested in more heavily.

- AMENITIES

- Residents shared a desire for more local retail and amenities, including grocery stores and pharmacies.
- Residents shared that they believe local businesses do not adequately cater to lower-income individuals who live downtown. Residents shared they would like to see more retailers who provide equitable access to necessities.
- Residents shared they enjoy the Central Library and believe it is an integral resource downtown.

- ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Residents shared they would like to see improved litter and trash pickup, and increased dog cleanup stations.
- Residents reported negative effects on small businesses downtown due to road work and construction.
- Residents shared excitement surrounding the future High Falls State Park.

- PARKING

- Residents cited parking concerns, specifically: not enough parking spaces for residents, expensive on-street parking, and lack of free street parking for low-income residents.
- Residents parking on-street cited problems with snow removal in winter.

- SAFETY & SUPPORT

- Residents cited concerns about crime, including robberies, vandalism, break-ins, and automobile theft.
- Residents shared that they would like more supportive services for the downtown community.
- Residents reported feeling uneasy at the Transit Center and stated that it has concentrated activity and creates space for potentially negative interactions, including violence and drug use.
- Residents reported feeling safer in downtown than in previous areas of the city they have lived.
- Residents reported feeling a lack of community downtown.

Office Hours

About Office Hours

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducts open Office Hours on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the Bausch & Lomb Central Library. These sessions began in September 2022 and continue to the present (September 2023). Office Hours are an opportunity to meet the community in person and learn more about their experiences in downtown Rochester. Additionally, information was available to those interested in learning more about Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the potential benefits they offer. A highlighted summary of Office Hours feedback is below.

- ACTIVATION & PLACEMAKING

- Participants shared a desire for more around-the-clock activity downtown.
- Participants shared that they would like to see more active first floor uses that are open to the public and cited frosted first floor windows to be unwelcoming.
- Participants noted a general feeling of vacancy.
- Participants shared that they enjoy free events downtown and would like to see more.
- Participants shared that they think downtown is walkable and the proximity to amenities is convenient.
- Participants shared that they feel the westside of downtown does not receive enough attention.

- AMENITIES

- Participants reported a general lack of retail amenities (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc).
- Participants reported current retail amenities are lacking in quality and reliability.
- Participants shared that they believe some restaurants downtown are too expensive for the average person.
- Participants shared a desire for more amenities that stay open later.
- Participants cited the Central Library as a favorite destination.
- Participants reported an appreciation for the transit access provided by the Transit Center.

- DEVELOPMENT

- Participants expressed desire for more dense downtown development.
- Participants expressed desire to see a mix of uses and housing types, as well as an increase in affordable and workforce housing.
- Participants shared that they feel there is an excess of surface parking lots.
- Participants shared that they like the Neighborhood of Play and would like to see similar development happen in other areas of downtown.

- ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Participants shared they want better investment in public seating and bus shelters.
- Participants shared they want to see public restrooms downtown.
- Participants shared that they feel downtown sidewalks are not adequately maintained in winter.
- Participants shared they would like to see modernized lighting downtown.

- SAFETY & SUPPORT

- Participants shared that they feel pedestrian safety could be improved downtown.
- Participants noted ATVs and other off-road vehicles present danger and felt operators are not held accountable.
- Participants cited concerns regarding unhoused individuals and shared a desire to see more supportive services.
- Participants noted the Transit Center has safety issues, which discourages them from using public transit.



WalkShops

About WalkShops

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted monthly WalkShops starting in October 2022, and concluded in June 2023. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area they walked. Each WalkShop was held on a different route, each a different node of activity within the downtown core. Additionally, information was available to those interested in learning more about Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the potential benefits they offer. WalkShop feedback is below.

WalkShop Summary
October 1st, 2022
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 10/1/22 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began at Parcel 5 and traveled west along the north side of E Main St. The WalkShop doubled back on the south side of E Main St, stopping at the corner of Franklin St. and East Ave, before heading down East Ave. The WalkShop concluded at the corner of East Ave. and Chestnut St.

Attendance: 13

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Northeast corner of E Main St. and Clinton Ave.

- *Curiosity over what is happening with abandoned buildings on this corner*
- *You can't get into the police station on Clinton Ave*
- *Police station windows are opaque*
- *The street has no window activity*
- *More convenience stores are needed*
- *More color is needed in the built environment – the buildings look drab*
- *Can temporary facades be constructed for empty buildings?*
- *The brightest colored item is the pedestrian crossing sign - signals that this is an environment for cars, not people - like a deer trying to cross the road*
- *Cars speed down Clinton Ave.*
- *The entire Rochester region knows Main St. and Clinton Ave. is a blighted block*
- *The crossing signal in front of the Mercantile on Main does not work properly – it takes too long*
- *Desire for more outdoor restaurant seating – gives a reason to stay*
- *Driving through downtown, it feels like nothing's going on*
- *The parking that was added to E Main St. is good*
- *Streets should be narrowed*
- *Curiosity if something good is coming, because this block [Main St. and Clinton Ave.] is an improvement from past decades*
- *We need services for our homeless population*

Northeast corner of St. Paul St. and E Main St.

- *More blacked out windows – are they not following transparency guidelines?*
- *In Ithaca, ground floors need to leave the lights on until 9 PM*
- *Participants showed interest in the new zoning code that is being written*
- *Sometimes feels like no one gives a damn about downtown*
- *The neighborhoods think the city spends too much on downtown, participant disagrees*
- *Mayor [Evans] knows downtown is languishing and he wants to change it*
- *Downtown is the face of Rochester*
- *If a BID [Business Improvement District] was created in 1991, downtown would be completely different*
- *There is a fear that BIDs privatize public space*

Franklin St. and East Ave.

- *Street looks unsafe to cross*
- *Street needs more curb and less road*
- *Would like to see a restaurant at the base of One East Ave*
- *A grocery store is needed*
- *A brewing company here would be nice*
- *General lack of amenities*
- *We need a ground floor experimental performance space – Focus Theatre in Sibley Square is not accessible from the street*
- *Feels like buildings are blockaded from the street level instead of being open*
- *There are great spaces within buildings that you wouldn't know unless you have an invitation*
- *Feels like the building owners are scared of the people on the street*

East Ave. and Chestnut St.

- *All the windows at ground level are mirrored, it is not friendly*
- *Desire for more pop-up retail opportunities*
- *The Little Theatre is a gem*
- *What is this parking lot for?*
- *Do we need to keep parking lots for events?*
- *Events should ideally happen in park spaces*
- *Downtown is a sea of parking lots*
- *Desire for pop-up farmers market in a parking lot*
- *There are no food options other than restaurants*
- *Desire for small vending kiosks*
- *Interest in the idea of an urban co-op farm in a parking lot – community gardens*
- *Why don't we close parts of downtown on the weekends and make them pedestrian only?*
- *The Fringe Festival Spiegletent could go in the street if you close it down*
- *Why are we not putting parking lots behind buildings instead of in front?*



WalkShop Summary
October 19th, 2022
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 10/19/22 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began at the Roc City Skatepark and traveled north on the pedestrian trail and promenade to the Court St. Bridge. The WalkShop continued east to the corner of Court St. and South Ave., heading north along South Ave. and continuing on to St. Paul St. The WalkShop concluded at the corner of Bragdon Pl. and St. Paul St.

Attendance: 6

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Roc City Skatepark and the Genesee Riverway Trail

- *Excitement over future skatepark expansion, specifically the addition of entry level features*
- *Would like the skatepark to be more inclusive of all ages and abilities*
- *Landscaping could be better*
- *Desire for more outdoor lighting*
- *Desire for more safety mirrors*
- *There are safety concerns walking alone without adequate lighting*
- *This is a nice area to walk in the daytime*
- *More work should be done to prevent and remove graffiti tagging*
- *Interest in creating a pipeline of connectivity from The Strong Museum to the skatepark*
- *The path from The Strong Museum to the library was not maintained*

Genesee Riverway Trail Promenade

- *Graffiti tagging*
- *Display of Rochester's history is spectacular*
- *Not a lot of pedestrians*
- *Desire for year-round intentional programming*
- *Downtown should research apps that already exist to build a consistent calendar of year-round programming*
- *Cobwebs on light poles*
- *Downtown should have a standardized method of cleanup, maybe a maintenance schedule for all four quadrants*
- *Once arriving on the Court St. bridge, there is a lack of continuity of the bike path*
- *This area is not de-iced in the winter*

Southwest corner of Broad St. and South Ave.

- *Love the landscaping*
- *Signage should be more colorful*
- *Desire for fountain included in Aqueduct design*

South Ave. between Broad St. and Main St.

- *Feels unsafe, no street activity*
- *Feels disconnected from river, can't see the water*

Northwest corner of Main St. and St. Paul St.

- *Feces on the ground*
- *No public restrooms*
- *Three different lamp post styles indicate confused sense of place*
- *No ground floor retail*
- *Could retail bays be added against blank walls?*
- *The wayfinding sign is nice*
- *Old National Clothing Store billboard is a nice historical asset*

Bragdon Pl. and St. Paul St.

- *The architecture in this area feels more historic*
- *The block size is smaller*
- *Ground level spaces are boarded up*
- *This is a busier area with the Transit Center*
- *This section feels unsafe*
- *Fast moving cars do not stop for pedestrians*
- *Many people hangout along this street*
- *The murals on the buildings are beautiful*
- *Need for better crosswalks and more pedestrian safety*



WalkShop Summary
November 9th, 2022
9:00 AM — 10:00 AM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 11/9/22 from 9:00 — 10:00 AM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of City Hall and moved east toward State St. The walk continued south down State St. and then west down W Main St. The WalkShop doubled back heading east on Main St., concluding at the Main St. Bridge over the Genesee River.

Attendance: 20

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

State St. between Church St. and W Main St.

- *Construction [on State St.] has been bad for many people*
- *Construction [on State St.] has hurt small businesses in the corridor*
- *Very little retail activity on this block*
- *This street reconstruction and utility upgrading is necessary, but is expected to take a long time*
- *Participants worry that street trees would be negatively impacted by construction and/or not replaced*
- *Little to no landscaping*
- *Inconsistent walkway surfaces (pavers are not level)*

Northwest Corner of N Fitzhugh St. and W Main St.

- *Beautiful architecture*
- *Green metal street lamps are pretty but are being replaced with plainer street lamps*
- *Main St. should be a hub — need for more small, local businesses lining the street*
- *Many government offices line Main St. and do not activate the street level experience*
- *More bike racks are needed*
- *On-street parking should be added to W Main St. in a similar fashion to E Main St.*
- *Participants noted many cars drive down Main St. but do not stop - endless parade of cars*
- *Downtown should be a destination, not a thoroughfare*
- *Desire to see more breakfast establishments on W Main St.*
- *No on-street weather protection. Buildings could add sidewalk canopies or protected walkways for all weather use*
- *Downtown is full of history, but it is not showcased in our public spaces*
- *E Main St. gets more attention than W Main St.*
- *Participants noted many frosted windows at street level*
- *Founder's Café is great but it is hidden*
- *Desire for an entity to help promote hidden businesses located inside buildings*
- *More pocket parks would be nice, creating an open space network*
- *Desire for parking lots to be converted to active uses such as playgrounds*
- *Adaptive reuse of historic buildings may be challenging because they are not designed for ground floor retail*
- *There are no cigarette butt holders*
- *Sidewalk pavers are a trip hazard*
- *The sidewalks are hard to walk on in winter. More plowing and salting would help pedestrians*

Northeast corner of Plymouth Ave. and W Main St.

- *Feels like an orphaned place*
- *Transitional area, the density has diminished on this block*
- *Participants describe area as an opportunity*
- *Crosswalks are wide to cross by foot*
- *Street appears overbuilt*
- *Blank wall on the NE corner of Plymouth and W Main St would be a good location for a mural*
- *Looks like nothing was planned here*
- *Participants noted future planned buildings will change the atmosphere*
- *Better pedestrian striping on the roadways may improve walkability*
- *Main St. used to be a transit corridor, but the Transit Center has changed that.*
- *Hopr bikes and scooters are not available in cold weather. Hopr racks are empty*
- *Participants suggested possibility of a free downtown circulator, such as a trolley or light rail to encourage pedestrian activity*

Southwest corner of the Main St. Bridge

- *Restaurants along Main St. need more visible signage*
- *Nice to see the transformation presently occurring on the Main St. Bridge. Downtown is moving toward a better future, even if it is inconvenient in the moment*
- *Desire for street vendors, but acknowledge the need for more people on the street to support these*
- *Desire for downtown-wide free Wi-Fi*



WalkShop Summary
January 11th, 2023
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 1/11/23 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of the Eastman Theatre and moved East along East Main St. to University Ave. The WalkShop continued down Richmond Street, cutting through the pedestrian crossing to Charlotte St. The WalkShop concluded walking west along Charlotte St. back to the Eastman Theatre.

Attendance: 12

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Northeast Corner of Main St. and Windsor St.

- *The block felt more active when the YMCA was open*
- *Mosaic art on East End Garage is attractive*
- *Uncomfortable walking experiences on Swan St., citing poor sanitation and litter*
- *Hazardous sidewalk conditions, possibly concrete remnants from a removed bus shelter*
- *Several participants were curious to discover what will become of the former YMCA space. A desire for more physical fitness options was expressed*
- *There are many surface parking lots, in addition to the East End Garage across the street*
- *This block is not aesthetically pleasing*
- *The restaurant Orange Glory looks inviting and welcoming on this block*
- *Cars don't stop for pedestrians around the school*
- *In the spring and summer people drag race down East Main St.*
- *Desire for speed bumps on East Main St.*
- *Inconsistent sidewalk surfaces*

Northeast Corner of Main St. and University Ave.

- *Lack of garbage cans*
- *Building facades could be improved*
- *Car rental is convenient for those who live downtown without cars*
- *No green space*
- *The Richmond is lovely*
- *It is not easy to park on the street here*
- *Desire for more outdoor seating*
- *Desire for more bike racks*
- *Main St. is too wide*
- *Not enough cross walks between Windsor St. and University Ave.*
- *University Ave. cross walk across Main St. feels long and dangerous*

Richmond St.

- *Sidewalk is blocked by dumpsters*
- *Street is littered*

Charlotte St.



- *Nice mix of architecture styles, new construction and preserved*
- *Landscaping is well tended*
- *Pedestrian-scale lighting is attractive and beneficial*
- *Convenient location to cultural amenities*
- *Nice mix of shops nearby (Redd, Ugly Duck, The Op Shop, Chick'n Out)*
- *Desire for neighborhood-centered amenities: pharmacies and grocery stores - can't eat out all the time*

WalkShop Summary
February 15th, 2023
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 2/15/23 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of Martin Luther King Jr. Park, 353 Court St., and moved west along Court St. The WalkShop turned south along St. Mary's Place, and then west along Woodbury Blvd. The WalkShop doubled back on Capron St., and continued east along Woodbury Blvd., concluding inside MLK Jr. Park. Participants engaged in discussion on a potential Business Improvement District in the downtown core of Rochester, NY, asking questions on process, timeline, and long-term vision for the effort.

Attendance: 15

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Corner of Chestnut St. and Court St.

- *Participants shared a desire for more wayfinding directing them to other areas of downtown*
- *Participants shared a belief that MLK Jr. Park does not feel welcoming*
- *Participant shared they enjoy the water features in MLK Jr. Park*
- *Participants shared a desire for additional seating and landscaping*
- *Participants shared a desire to integrate MLK Jr. Park into the surrounding sidewalks*

St. Mary's Pl. and Court St.

- *Participants shared that the skyway could be a lighting feature or wayfinding feature*
- *Participants shared disappointment in the grass and landscaping of Washington Square Park*
- *Participants shared a desire for more landscaping to reflect Rochester's "Flower City" name*
- *Participants shared a desire for more ground floor retail in this area, such as a pharmacy or grocery store*
- *Participants shared that they believe the parks are not well maintained*
- *Participants shared that they feel this area is "desolate" and would like more activity*
- *Participants shared a desire for traffic calming measures on Clinton Ave.*
- *Participants feel this area is a gateway to downtown*

Corner of South Ave. and Woodbury Blvd.

- *Participants shared that they believe there to be too many surface parking lots in this area*
- *Participants shared that the area did not feel pedestrian friendly*
- *Participants shared disappointment at the lack of street level activation in nearby buildings*
- *Participants believed that parking for Geva can be confusing and difficult*
- *Participants believed the on-ramp to 490 creates a difficult pedestrian environment*

Corner St. Mary's Pl. and Woodbury Blvd.

- *Participants expressed a desire for more retail amenities in this area, such as "shipping container" vending areas*
- *Participants expressed a desire for Washington Square Park to feature intentional programming*

Inside MLK Jr. Park

- *Participants expressed a fondness for public art in this area*
- *Participants shared that they view this park as a gathering place*
- *Participants shared they do not feel safe in this park, as you are not visible from street level*



WalkShop Summary
March 24th, 2023
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 3/24/23 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of The Hochstein School, 50 N. Plymouth Ave., and moved west along W. Main St. The WalkShop continued west to Broad St., turning east and continuing along Broad St., turning south on Exchange Blvd. The WalkShop then turned east on Court St., concluding at the Blue Cross Arena Memorial Park. Participants engaged in discussion on a potential Business Improvement District in the downtown core of Rochester, NY, asking questions on process, timeline, and long-term vision for the effort.

Attendance: 15

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

N. Plymouth Ave., in front of The Hochstein School

- *Participant notes architecture is beautiful in this area, more should be done to celebrate it*
- *Participant notes lack of pedestrians in this area*
- *Participant would like more music on the streets*
- *Participant notes historical signage needs maintenance*
- *Participant believes this area to be littered*
- *Participant notes roadway appears to be overbuilt*
- *Participant expressed desire for more greenery and landscaping*
- *Participants would like to see more outdoor seating*
- *Participant notes there is a sense of disconnection between the west and east sides of downtown*

Corner of N. Washington and W. Main St.

- *Participant notes this is the first trash can they have seen since walking*
- *Participant notes this area feels safe*
- *Participant wants to know how to bring more retail to this area*
- *Participant would like to see downtown honor it's historical significance in photography*
- *Participants would like all-weather protection along sidewalks, such as awnings*
- *Participant feels retail signs are not eye-catching, encourages signs that stick out from buildings*

Corner of Cascade Dr. and W. Main St.

- *Participant questioned if this area is still considered downtown*
- *Participants could not agree if this area should be considered part of the traditional downtown core*
- *Participants believe neighborhoods are defined by community and are living and changing*
- *Participant would like to see more public art in this area*
- *Participant feels this area has no sense of personality and is missing a sense of place*

Corner of Fitzhugh St. and Broad St.

- *Participant notes the number of older buildings being converted into residential uses*
- *Participants feel there are too many surface parking lots in this area*
- *Participants desire more landscaping and greenery in this area*
- *Participants note historical signage is weathered and badly taken care of*
- *Participant notes the Broad St. Heritage Trail is fading from the sidewalk*

Blue Cross Arena Memorial Park

- *Participants believe sidewalks in front of parking lots are in bad shape*
- *Participants would like to see more seating options outside the Blue Cross Arena*
- *Participants would like to see more garbage cans in this area*
- *Participant does not like the architecture of new buildings that have been constructed*
- *Participants would like this park to receive more attention*

WalkShop Summary
April 19th, 2023
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 4/19/23 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of Java's, 16 Gibbs St., and moved east along East Ave. The WalkShop continued south on Union St. and west along E Broad St., concluding at the traffic circle at Broadway and E Broad St. Participants engaged in discussion on a potential Business Improvement District in the downtown core of Rochester, NY, asking questions on process, timeline, and long-term vision for the effort.

Attendance: 8

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Gibbs St., in front of Java's

- *Participants feel area is inviting and intimate*
- *Participants express appreciation of streetscape*
- *Participants believe area grew organically*
- *Participants believe area growth has been supported by Eastman School of Music*

Northeast Corner of East Ave. and Broadway

- *Participant remarked they have always felt safe here*
- *Participant noted foot traffic has increased over the past 15 years*
- *Participants feel the East End has grown organically*
- *Participants shared desire to keep, grow, and nurture small diverse businesses*
- *Participant observed pedestrian safety to be good*
- *Participants believe there are too many surface parking lots within the vicinity and this contributes to a lack of walkability*
- *Participants believe parking is a perception problem for those who live in suburbs*
- *Participants share experience of drivers not paying attention to pedestrians and feeling unsafe in the right-of-way*
- *Participant noted East End area businesses were hesitant of a BID in 2014*

Northeast Corner of East Ave. and Union St.

- *Participant cited first floor parking in new construction to be an issue*
- *Participants would like more public uses of first floor spaces*
- *Participants feel new Inner Loop buildings to be a wall*
- *Participants feel new Inner Loop buildings could be more aesthetically pleasing and diverse in architecture*
- *Participant notes the lack of green space in the final Inner Loop East project*
- *Participant shared their desire for an unbuilt Inner Loop lot to become a permanent green space*
- *Participants like dedicated bike lanes but note potential hazards due to traffic flow and lack of education on bicycle safety for drivers*

Traffic Circle at E Broad St. and Broadway

- *Participants like the façade improvements of Park Square*
- *Participants note the excessive number of surface parking lots*
- *Participants would like to see rehabilitation of small park along Broadway*



WalkShop Summary
May 17th, 2023
12:00 PM — 1:00 PM

Summary:

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted a WalkShop on 5/17/23 from 12:00 — 1:00 PM. This outdoor workshop was facilitated by Galin Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester. Participants were led in a collaborative exercise to share their thoughts, feedback, and impressions of the area. The WalkShop began in front of Squatcho's, 17 E Main St., and moved east along Main St. The WalkShop continued north on St. Paul St., then heading south on Bittner St. The WalkShop continued south down N. Clinton Ave., turning east on Main St., concluding at the Liberty Pole. Participants engaged in discussion on a potential Business Improvement District in the downtown core of Rochester, NY, asking questions on process, timeline, and long-term vision for the effort.

Attendance: 7

Feedback from participants is highlighted below. Comments are notated by location.

Southwest Corner of South Ave. and E. Main St.

- *Participant wants vacant building on NW corner to be redeveloped*
- *Participant notes attractive architecture in this area*
- *Participant shares excitement over Frederick Douglass Museum*
- *Participants note new restaurant on the SE corner, Astor on Main*
- *Participant notes a Starbucks within walking distance*
- *Participant feels this area is busier than years past*
- *Participant believes apartments in this area to be unaffordable*

Northwest Corner of St. Paul St. and Bragdon Pl.

- *Participants note more people on the street*
- *Participants note a sense of community in this area*
- *Participant likes the energy in this area*
- *Participants note retail is lacking in this area*
- *Participants believe a stronger connection to the river is lacking in this area*

Southwest Corner of St. Paul St. and Inner Loop North

- *Participants feel the street ends and is not friendly to pedestrians*
- *Participants believe it prevents you from continuing to the adjoining neighborhood north of the Inner Loop*
- *Participants would like to see a stronger investment in landscaping and green spaces in this area*
- *Participant shares this area will be redeveloped in the future Inner Loop North transformation project*
- *Participants enjoy shops along the west side of St. Paul St.*
- *Participant notes there is a density of housing in this area*
- *Participant wishes there was more outdoor seating*

Corner of Bittner St. and Andrews St.

- *Participant asks if this area used to be a gathering place*
- *Participants note there are employees collecting litter in this area*
- *Participant feels some buildings could be power washed to improve appearance*
- *Participant notes empty surface parking lot across the street*

Northwest Corner of E Main St. and Clinton Ave.



- *Participants note there is more traffic in this area*
- *Participants note there were not many amenities or street level spaces on N. Clinton Ave.*
- *Participant feels this intersection is the Times Square of Rochester*
- *Participant feels Parcel 5 is Rochester's version of NYC's Central Park*
- *Participant believes RIT should have a stronger student connection to downtown*

Meeting Summary

Project Title: Partnership for Downtown Rochester

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 12:00pm – 1:00pm

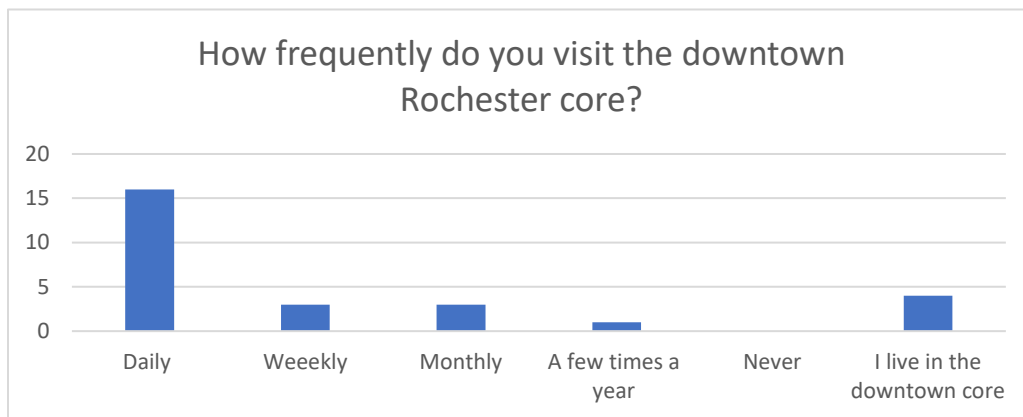
Venue: Zoom

Topic: Community Meeting

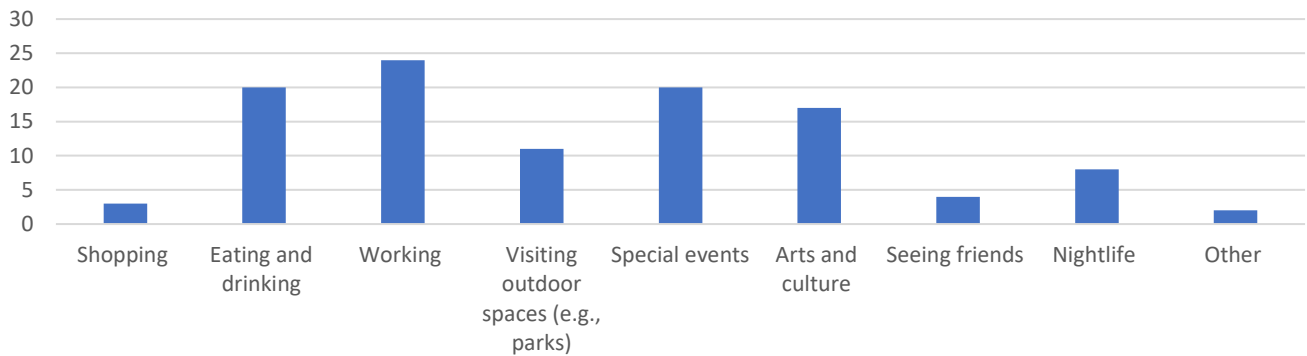
Introductions

Highland Planning and City Council President Miguel Melendez began the meeting with a brief welcome and introduction to the meeting. Galin Brooks and Brian Scott led a presentation on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the variety of services they can offer, and the process for forming a BID in the state of New York. Meeting participants were invited to participate in several polls and ask questions. 63 people registered for the meeting, with Zoom reporting 50 total users.

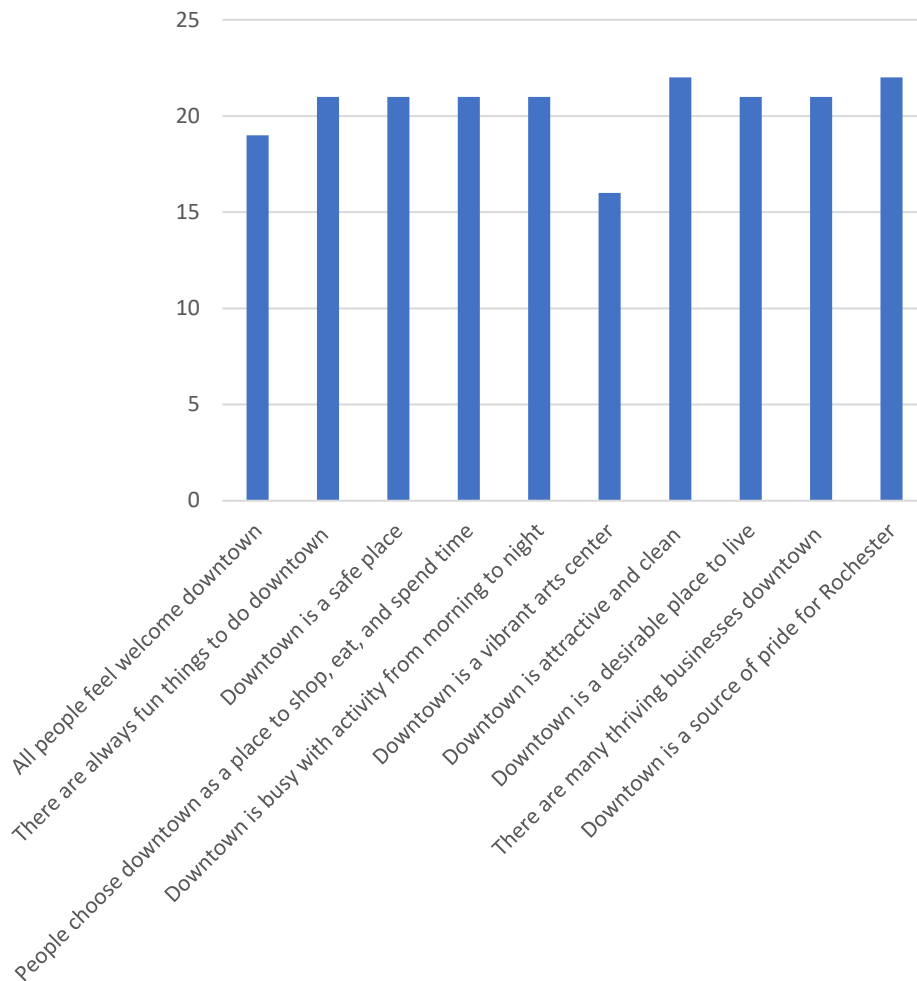
Poll Results from Participants



Which of these activities do you frequently engage in downtown (select all that apply)



Which of these describe your vision for the downtown core 20 years from now?



[SEE VIDEO LINKED HERE FOR FULL CONTENT](#)

MEETING PRESENTATION BELOW

Welcome!

Business Improvement District Effort

Community Meeting, 3.29.23

Organizations

Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (non-profit)

- Founded: 1977
- Mission: To drive economic vitality in downtown Rochester
- Board: Business, non-profit, and community leaders

Partnership for Downtown Rochester (non-profit)

- Founded: 2021
- Mission: "...to increase private sector participation to better activate public spaces and help guide the revitalization of [downtown] Rochester..."
- Board: Elected Officials, Non-profit/Community-Based Leaders, Property Owners



Origins

ROC the Riverway

- Management Entity Need Identified
- City of Rochester Study Recommendation: Pursue a Business Improvement District (BID)
- Allocation of State Funding to Support Effort for BID Formation

Pandemic Era Recovery

- Historic Levels of Vacancy
- Facilitate the Recovery of a Resilient, Thriving, Dynamic, and Inclusive Downtown Core

Activities To-Date

- **Grassroots Community Engagement**
 - Monthly WalkShops and Office Hours
 - Community Survey
 - 700+ Engaged in Effort To-Date
- **Formal Process Launched**
 - Community Engagement Plan
 - Local Community Engagement Experts, Highland Planning
 - National BID Formation Experts, BDS Planning & Urban Design



Timeline Ahead

Spring 2023

- Community Meeting #1
- Small Group Interviews
- Monthly WalkShops & Office Hours
- Small Group Interviews

Summer 2023

- Small Group Interviews
- Draft District Plan
- Community Meeting #2
- Pop-up Events
- Monthly WalkShops & Office Hours
- Revised District Plan
- Community Meeting #3

Fall/Winter 2023

- Revised District Plan
- Petition Process
- Continued Community Engagement

Winter-Summer 2024

- Petition Process
- Legislative Process
- Public Hearing
- Remainder of Legislative Process

Thank You!

- Community Input, Research, and Guidance to Inform Vision and Proposal
- ~1.5 year Process Reliant on Public Participation and Support
- Responsive to Community Needs, Priorities, and Preferences



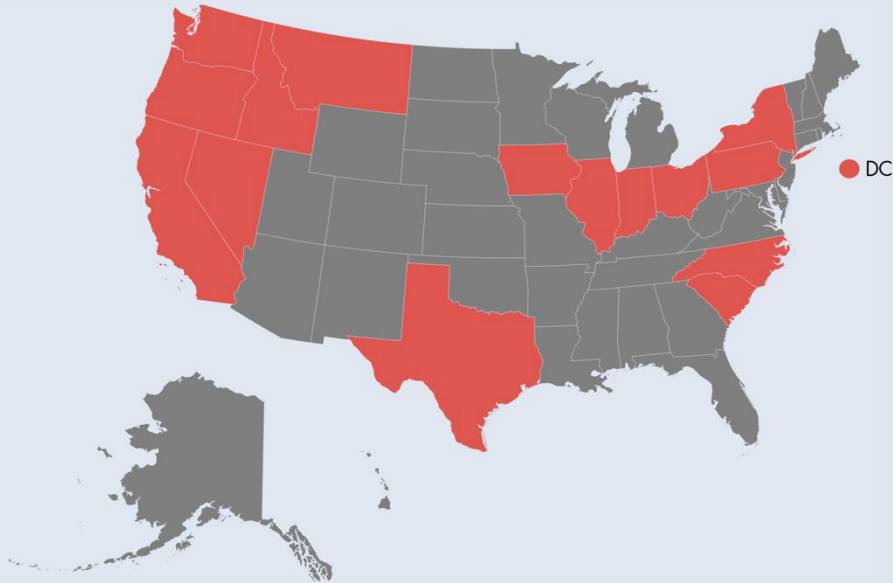
ROCHESTER
BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT
FORMATION

March 29, 2023



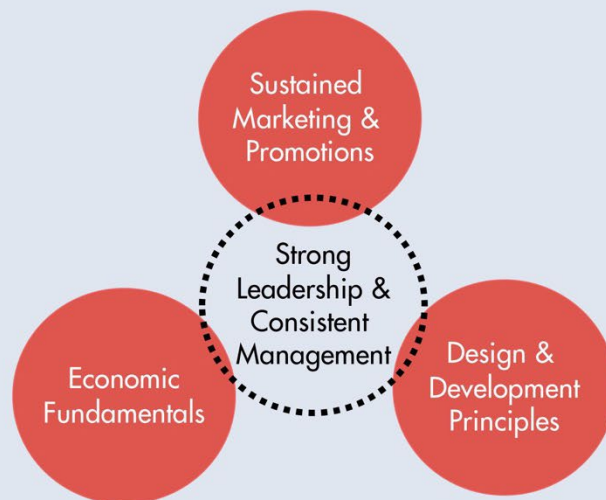
BDS

ABOUT BDS



BDS

SUCCESSFUL DISTRICTS REQUIRE



BDS

VITALITY DEPENDS ON

MARKETING & PROMOTIONS



ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



HOSPITALITY & SAFETY



STRONG MANAGEMENT



PLANNING & DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS



RETAIL & BUSINESS STRATEGIES

WHAT IS A BID?

- Enacted by City Council
- Assessment on properties and/or businesses
- Assessment is a local preference:
 - Square footage
 - Value
 - Sales
 - Etc.
- Managed in the neighborhood
- Uses are also local preferences:
 - Maintenance
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Environmental Services
 - Marketing & Promotion
 - Events
 - Etc.



23rd & East Union Business Improvement Area

Operating Committee:
 Tom Gendron, Chair
 Dan Gendron, Vice Chair
 Matt Gendron, Treasurer
 Dan Gendron, Secretary
 Dan Gendron, Member
 Dan Gendron, Member
 Dan Gendron, Member
 Dan Gendron, Member
 Dan Gendron, Member

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA CONCEPT

The property and business owners at 23rd & E. Union have worked together to improve the neighborhood on an informal basis for many years. We all know that sidewalk cleaning, garbage pick-up, and other fall removal are persistent needs. We also know that our properties and businesses benefit from working together on special events, holiday lighting, and other activities. We think the most effective way to continue these efforts in a consistent and equitable manner is through the formation of a Business Improvement Area (BIA).

How will the assessment be calculated?

The proposed 23rd & E. Union Business Improvement Area (BIA) assessment will be based on the square footage of each property and will be assessed annually. The assessment will be used to fund the BIA's operating expenses, including sidewalk cleaning, garbage pick-up, holiday lighting, and other activities. The assessment will be based on the square footage of each property and will be assessed annually. The assessment will be used to fund the BIA's operating expenses, including sidewalk cleaning, garbage pick-up, holiday lighting, and other activities.

Who will pay the BIA assessment?

The BIA assessment will be paid by all property owners within the BIA boundaries. The assessment will be based on the square footage of each property and will be assessed annually. The assessment will be used to fund the BIA's operating expenses, including sidewalk cleaning, garbage pick-up, holiday lighting, and other activities.

The planned expenses for the proposed BIA include:

Cleaning, Labor & Graffiti Removal	\$30,000
Holiday Lighting	\$5,000
Events	\$2,000
Management & Overhead	\$10,000
Total	\$57,000

BDS

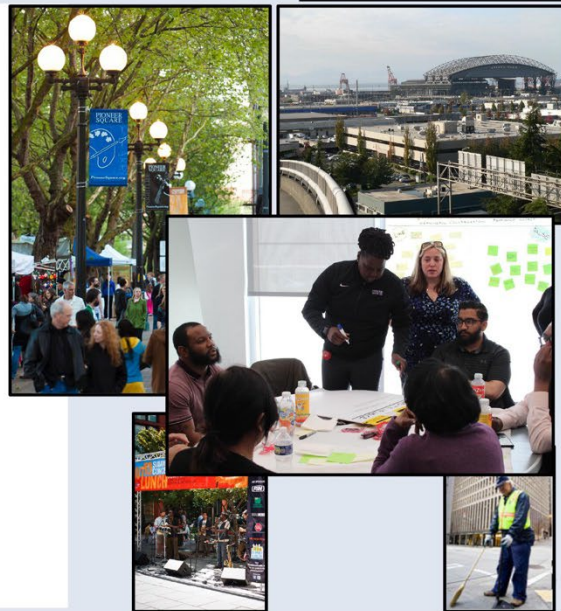
"MAYOR OF THE PLAZA"

- *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, William Whyte
- **Pedestrian-centric design** elements are not enough to attract users and make them feel comfortable
- Deliberate **programming** and encouraging **human interaction** to give a space life
- This is fundamental to Place Management today, like parks "concierges" **activating public space**.



PLACE MANAGEMENT HISTORY

- **1950s:** Downtowns Decline
 - G.I. Bill
 - Interstate Highway System
 - Urban Renewal
 - Redlining
- **1960s:** Downtown Organizing
- **1970s:** Public Area Management (mostly physical)
- **1980s & 1990s:** Assessment Districts (clean & safe)
- **2000s:** Neighborhoods; programming; social service
- **Today:** Thousands of Place Management organizations



PITTSBURGH, PA

- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$9.1M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Outreach & Hospitality
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events

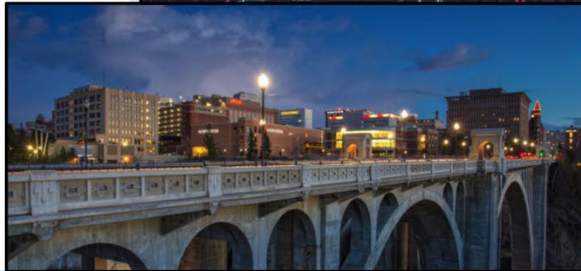
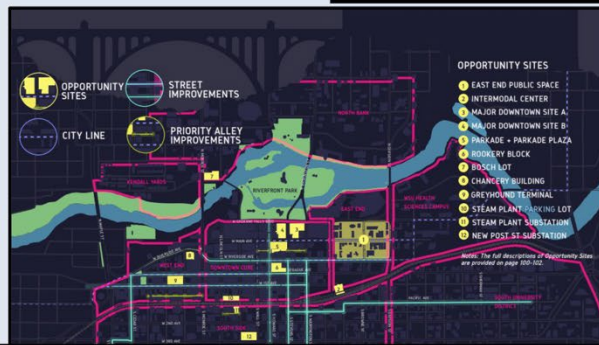
DOWNTOWN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS
 ARTS + CULTURE
 ATTRACTIONS
 CO-WORKING + SHARED OFFICE
 EDUCATION
 ENTERTAINMENT
 FAMILY FUN
 FAST FOOD
 HEALTH + BEAUTY
 HOUSING + RESIDENTIAL
 NIGHTLIFE
 PARKING



SPOKANE, WA

- Created: 1995
- Budget: \$1.2M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Ambassadors
 - Marketing and Promotions
 - Parking and Transportation
 - Maintenance Services
 - Special Events
 - Economic Development Support



BDS

DOWNTOWN DC

- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$15.4M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Homeless Services
 - Public Space
 - Transportation
 - Economic Development



BDS

BERKELEY, CA

- Created: 1990
- Budget: \$1.7M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Clean & Beautification
 - Hospitality & Outreach
 - Marketing & Business Support



BDS

CHICAGO, IL

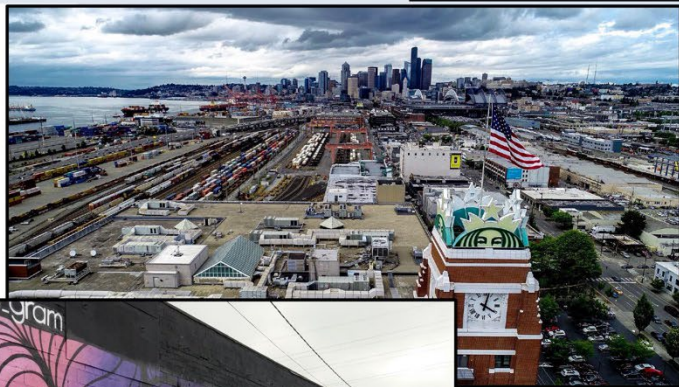
- Created: 2005
- Budget: \$5.3M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Beautification
 - Economic Development
 - Marketing
 - Events



BDS

SODO (SEATTLE)

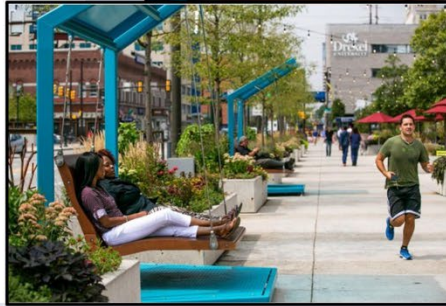
- Created: 2014
- Budget: \$2M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Business Community
 - SODO Tract Murals



BDS

UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT (PHILADELPHIA)

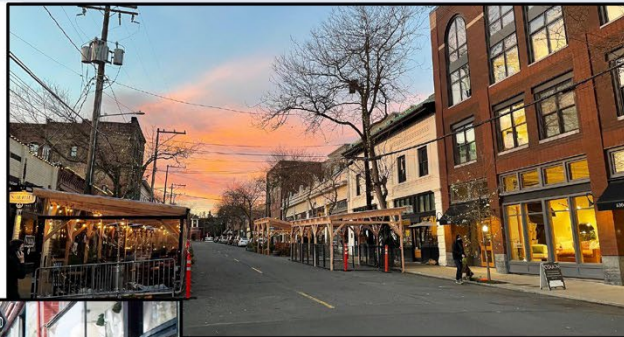
- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$11.5M (+ large capital projects)
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Economic Development
 - Events
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Job Training



BDS

BALLARD (SEATTLE)

- Created: 2015
- Budget: \$500K
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Public Realm
 - Advocacy
 - Business Support
 - Events
 - Tourism Program



BDS

MEMPHIS, TN

- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$3.3M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events



**DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS
DEVELOPMENT LOAN**



A low-interest loan for permanent building improvements in the Central Business Improvement District.

Maximum Loan of \$200,000, based on a project's eligible costs.

A one percent interest loan, amortized on a 20-year schedule for low monthly payments.

Loans for permanent improvement, not temporary furnishings and fixtures.

BDS

CENTER CITY DISTRICT (PHILADELPHIA)

- Created: 1991
- Budget: \$31.5M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Homeless Outreach
 - Marketing & PR
 - Streetscape



BDS

HOUSTON, TX

- Created: 1995
- Budget: \$18.6M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality
 - Homeless Outreach
 - Public Spaces
 - Streetscape
 - Economic Development
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events



*Street Art for Mankind Nonprofit Makes
Houston Its Canvas*



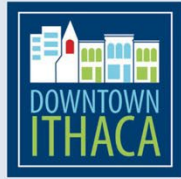
BDS

GENEVA, NY

- Created: 1986
- Budget: \$495K
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Large Scale Events
 - Beautification
 - Environmental Services



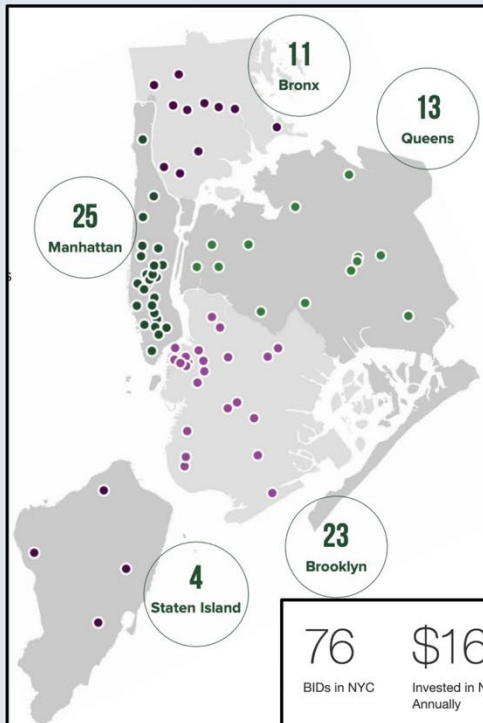
BDS



BDS

BIDS IN NEW YORK STATE

- Manhattan
- Lark Street (Albany)
- 125th Street
- Downtown Ithaca
- DUMBO
- Downtown Auburn
- Downtown Albany
- Downtown Geneva



BIDS IN NEW YORK CITY

- 76 Business Improvement Districts in NYC
- 39 BIDs established in NYC since 2000

76	\$162.7M	24K	177	4.01M
BIDs in NYC	Invested in NYC Neighborhoods Annually	Storefronts Served	Public Spaces Maintained	Trash Bags Collected

BDS

POTENTIAL BID SERVICES

BDS

POTENTIAL BID SERVICES

Environmental Services & Hospitality	Parks & Public Spaces	Homeless Services	Economic Development	Beautification	Marketing, Promotions & Events	Transportation
Street Sweeping	Park Activation & Management	Outreach	Real Estate Development	Hanging Flowers	Signs & banners	Connectivity
Pressure Washing	Storefronts	Care Centers	Market Opportunities	Planters & Street Furniture	Festivals	Pedestrian Safety Improvements
Litter & Graffiti Removal	Green Spaces	Mental Health Services	Development Loans – Small Business Grants	Landscaping	Farmers Markets	Parking Improvements
Ambassadors	Streetscapes	Skill Development	Data & Research	Seasonal Décor	Advertising Campaigns	Non-motorized initiatives
Lighting	Emergency Preparedness	Workforce Development	Affordability	Public Art	Business Directory	Encourage Public Transit

BID FORMATION PROCESS

BDS

BID FORMATION PROCESS

ARTICLE 19-A

Business Improvement Districts

General Municipal (GMU) CHAPTER 24

SECTION 980	Definitions
SECTION 980-A	Contents of the district plan
SECTION 980-B	Local adoption of article
SECTION 980-C	Local legislative powers
SECTION 980-D	District plan
SECTION 980-E	Notice and hearing
SECTION 980-F	Establishment or extension of the district
SECTION 980-G	Review by the state comptroller
SECTION 980-H	Publication; filing; judicial review
SECTION 980-I	Amendments to the district plan
SECTION 980-J	Expense of the district
SECTION 980-K	Tax and debt limitations

Community
Engagement
Throughout



- Initial vote to begin development of district plan
- Development of district plan
- Support of 51% of Property Owners AND 51% of Assessed Value required to petition for approval
- City Council vote to authorize hearing
- Hearing on proposed district plan
- City Council vote to approve and adopt district plan
- State Comptroller review and certify district plan
- City Council vote to approve assessment district and District Management Association contract

BDS

Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?



Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?

1. Write it down on a large sticky note



Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?

1. Write it down on a large sticky note
2. Share in your group



Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?



Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?
2. What challenges and issues downtown do you see in downtown today?



Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?
2. What challenges and issues downtown do you see in downtown today?
3. In 20 years, how do you want to be able to describe downtown to your grandkids, friends, etc.?



Question and Answer



Meeting Summary

Project Title: Partnership for Downtown Rochester

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Venue: Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County

115 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604

Kate Gleason Auditorium

Topic: Community Meeting

Introduction

City Council President Miguel Melendez began the meeting welcoming attendees. Highland Planning introduced presenters and consultant team members, including Galin Brooks (RDDC) and Brian Scott (BDS Planning & Urban Design). Galin Brooks and Brian Scott led a presentation on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the variety of services they can offer, and the process for forming a BID in the state of New York. On the meeting sign-in sheet, 44 people signed in.

Presentation

The meeting presentation is included in Appendix A.

Following the presentation, meeting attendees participated in two discussion-based activities led by Highland Planning:

Exercise 1: Storytelling – share a downtown memory or experience you have at your table.

NOTES:

- The Jazz Festival at Parcel 5, the ROC Holiday Village, the 1st origami exhibit at Sibley Square, and Midtown Plaza.
- Street festivals, Party in the Park, Fringe Fest, lunchtime vendors, street time activities, fireworks, daytime river trail, monorails, Dinosaur BBQ, sports events, High Falls Park, and Genesee Brewery.
- Sibley's, Midtown, movies with a downtown view, Fringe Fest, Parcel 5, and MLK Park.
- Red Wings games, shopping at Sibley's and Midtown Plaza, nightlife, film festivals, Blue Cross Arena, and parades.
- Monorail, auditorium, Jazz Festival, Hart's Grocery, Midtown Plaza, ROC Holiday Village, and the Eastman Theater.
- Sibley's (bakery), the Midtown (monorail, clock), and the Fringe Festival.

Exercise 2: At your table, discuss your vision for downtown Rochester.

NOTES:

- Many people are working downtown, vibrant, full of vitality, diverse, have a presence of locally owned businesses, and resources available.
- Weekly music festivals, retail spaces & commerce, restaurants, and ice-skating rinks.
- Public art, connectivity, and better parking for people who don't live and work downtown.
- Open green spaces, more river access, natural beauty, and inclusive.
- Vibrant and attracts gatherings, new restaurants, and a grocery store.
- All scales and sizes of businesses, retail, and housing, more friendly, less petty, and the economic development base of the region.
- Riverfront access, shops and retail, stores that meet local needs, recognized as everybody's downtown: inclusive, public cultural programming: parades & heritage festivals.

- Home ownership options, specifically affordable home ownership options.

1) What do you love about downtown and want to retain?

- a. History, authenticity, new events, many people working downtown, and Parcel 5.
- b. Skate Park, Eastman Theatre, and architecture.
- c. Skate Park, coffee shops: Java's & Spot.
- d. Historical buildings & character, overall history, the value in culture & taste.
- e. Mercantile on Main, skate park, the Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County.

2) What challenges and issues do you see in downtown today?

- a. Emptiness: lack of people and pedestrians, vacant buildings, unaffordable rents for a large part of the population.
- b. Too much asphalt: would like more green space, too much real estate being taken over by car storage, downtown is not as vibrant as it can be.
- c. Perception of public safety and crime, homeless population, lack of services, and lack of parking.
- d. Not enough retail (grocery), connectivity/transportation needs to be convenient and easy to bring people in and out of downtown, lack of parking, perception of public safety.
- e. Perception of public safety and crime, delayed vacancies and developments, fear of change, and absentee landlords (real estate monopoly).
- f. Close problem corner stores.
- g. Vacancies, and lack of street safety.
- h. Perception of lack of safety, fear of gentrification, lack of affordability.
- i. Insufficient street-level activation, no destinations or draws on Main Street, insufficient broadcasting and coordination of what there is to do, not pedestrian focused, and no connectivity of green spaces.

3) In 20 years, how do you want to be able to describe downtown to your grandkids, friends, etc.?

- a. The place to be – live, work, and play.
- b. Downtown is where it's at – something for everyone, equitable, inclusive, diverse, and a place for unique experiences.
- c. Vibrant, diverse, pedestrian-oriented, bicycle-friendly, walkable, destination, lots of commerce (retail, etc.), outdoor programming, art/cultural exchange.
- d. Vibrant, varied retail, "a delicious, layered cake" – serves different people at different points in time, rich history and civic-minded, connected with transportation, four-fold population, people can get what they need and do the things that they want to do.
- e. Better public transit, better work/life balance, sustainable/functioning, population boom, vibrant, people are everywhere, better place to do business/work/worship, grocery store with pharmacy.
- f. Walkable, single focal point, grocery/pharmacy, exploit river.
- g. Thriving, funky, organic, quirky (not generic), something for everyone, enviable, high percentage of ownership and satisfaction with downtown, connected and collaborative.
- h. Vibrant, exciting, fun, #1 walkable/bikeable city, equitable/diverse/accessible, recognized as music/art city, downtown as point of regional pride.
- i. City of opportunity, city that changes.

Questions & Comments

In a questions and answers session moderated by Highland Planning, questions were taken by RDDC and BDS Planning.



Question: The city has identified ROC the Riverway as potentially the identifier, the central major thing, to make downtown the center of the metropolitan area again. Can a BID get retail downtown and make a street experience? The overwhelming amount of people go to the East End, and if the street experience isn't one with things to buy or see, people won't come.

Answer: A BID is a funding mechanism, so to address the challenge you identified, you can use the funding to pay for staff to recruit businesses and build a vision and work with property owners to make that happen. Whether it's retail attractions or pop-up programs, we think about the amenities that will help draw people in but serve the neighborhood first.

Question: Rochester is particularly characterized by all of us living in bubbles. There is severe crime, homelessness, and a struggling school district. I was interested in seeing districts in the presentation where there were efforts to provide services for the homeless and youth and employment. Do BIDs help, instead of fancy housing and festivals?

Answer: Some programs have tangible, measurable outcomes. Philadelphia and Washington D.C. are thriving districts with a lot of good things happening. Downtown DC has a lot of people experiencing homelessness – it's not like you create a BID and everything is then fine.

Question: Who is funding tonight's program?

Answer: RDDC

Question: Will the City fund a more neutral meeting?

Answer: There will be a public hearing if the process gets to that phase as part of the effort. We would be open to the City hosting that.

Question: How will the City Council be involved if a BID is formed? City Councils usually have oversight on this, and if they are not involved, people may have issues that a BID will not be responsive to the needs of the people.

Answer: All the BIDs I'm aware of have a governing board that is charged with overseeing budget, overseeing staff, and carrying out programs, in addition to the municipality or the local city council's oversight. In Rochester, the City Council approves a BID, its budget, and funding on an annual basis. Ultimate authority is with the City Council, but the BID board is making day-to-day decisions. The board is composed differently in different places – every situation I am aware of has a considerable number of taxpayers running that board. [In NYS, property owners make up not less than a majority of the board.](#) Sometimes not-for-profits and governments must be represented – we must discuss how an oversight board would look here.

Question: Who funds a BID?

Answer: A BID is funded by assessments on properties in a specific area.

Question: Would this cause rents to go up for people who live within the BID? People, small businesses, and renters have been pushed out because of cost. How is this supposed to help small businesses and the average person? When I visited Pittsburgh, New York, and Seattle and spoke with people about how they have been impacted by BIDs, they say they are in the process of being pushed out because they cannot afford rent. These were some businesses that had been there for 17 years, and you have nothing but gigantic housing units being put up that are extremely overpriced. Most people here are desperate to find any solution and are well-meaning, but I have experience being a renter who has had to move multiple times because rents are going up too high. Seattle now has a shortage of workers because nobody can afford to live there. I've seen this in every city, including Pittsburgh where I went to college.



Answer: The rate is paid by property owners. Like any additional fee, it is up to them if it makes sense to build it into their rents – we are nowhere near getting to rates or what that rate would be at this point. You are describing the market conditions of extremely vital business districts with a lot of business happening. What BIDs do that's beneficial to small businesses is to do things that bring people to district, which will get more people through their door. Additionally, they often help small businesses deal with city regulations and issues with city governments.

Question: How will the BID help address the free rider problem and vacant properties? The BID will collect taxes from all property owners. How are they bringing property owners together so we can make group improvements? It may be helpful to have legal counsel at these meetings, as well.

Answer: If they enact a BID, all properties within the boundary will be required to pay the assessment and the City will collect those funds. So, it is a mandatory assessment. For many of those who are involved in trying to make improvements, it helps to bring more to the table. BIDs are governed by local law. We are at the onset of this process to figure out what this proposal for what this could be. New York State law says properties that are not deemed to benefit would not be assessed a fee if they do not pay property taxes.

Comment: I want to make sure this is an inclusive process. The other piece of that is the homeless services that are currently in Rochester. We have several organizations that are good with homeless services and want to make sure they are incorporated within this process. There is the potential of rent going up, and typically, in a perfect world, you'd have people involved in this who are normally interested in improving the property around their property. This allows owners to pool their funds to create an environment in the district that will bring more tenants and activity – that is in an ideal world. I've looked at many BIDs, listened to 6/7 webinars, talked to different exec directors, it depends on who the management team is, who it is that operates this and operates daily services. I talked to downtown Albany, who does a fantastic job. It's well managed, not taxing to the greatest extreme. I am a developer, I understand them, but they're going to raise rents always. I wouldn't claim that a BID is what forces people out.

Comment/Question: I'm an artist and as you can imagine it is challenging to get funding for arts. When we want to get something done, I'll get together some of my artist friends to pool resources and get it done. We do not need a formal structure, as dictated by NYS, to get things done. Why are we pursuing a legislative solution to people who have far more resources than the average person? I disagree with the description that this is a funding scenario – this allows for quite a bit of control over taxation without representation of the people who are paying those fees. I take great umbrage in the idea that someone could find themselves one day in a circle that has been drawn where, maybe their landlord didn't want to be part of this situation, but because they were the minority of the map you guys will go and draw using the tax data and mathematical information that shows you that you will have 51% of this map, that they will be included and they will be forced to have additional taxes that will pay for private security and other things they won't want. There's the possibility of moving if you don't want to live in the district, and that is a privileged perspective. A lot of wealth in this community is based on connections in neighborhoods, and when we displace people because their rent is going to go up and they're going to get kicked out – that's cruel, and that is not the home I wanted to create here. I want to make sure that, as we're talking about our warm and fuzzy memories of Rochester, we're not being lulled into thinking that this is the only way we can get things we want. I would like to know, where did that study come from that said that this was the only solution? What were the other solutions that were on the table? Why were people hired to create this BID conversation before this legislation was passed? There are a whole lot of questions that have not been asked. There are lots of questions, I agree with having

a neutral opportunity to have this discussion. Honestly, I didn't want to participate in this discussion, because I feel like anything I say is going to be used as a datapoint toward the creation of a BID.

Answer: I heard two questions. The first question is why would privileged property owners do this when they could get things done without it: that's a great question, and to my mind if the property owners could get their act together do this without getting the city involved, I would highly recommend that they do that. It creates more structure. There are thousands of these in place because folks have figured out that they couldn't do it, or the folks that were willing to participate and pitch in got tired of doing that when others didn't. The study that was done in 2020 to evaluate a potential management entity for ROC the Riverway sites downtown did a community process: there were some stakeholder interviews, the city worked with city council and led project management, and looked at local development corporations, in particular the Canalside Corporation in Buffalo, and other like entities that have done that work. I believe we have some people who were involved in that effort here if they would like to follow up as I was not here.

Question: A big chunk of downtown is tax exempt properties. What does state law say about this? Is this considered an embellishment, so it can still be imposed upon a nonprofit? How do the properties that are tax-exempt play a role in the BID?

Answer: My understanding of the state law is that tax-exempt property owners can be assessed if the owner is deemed to have received a benefit from the BID. If the ordinance is enacted so that they are required to pay, they will be required to pay. Lots of communities do assess nonprofits.

Comment: When it came to being on the ROC the Riverway Advisory Committee and thinking about the fact that the heart of everything is our water, and how we get people connected and create vibrancy along our waterways, it was realized that there needed to be something that could help program, sustain, and give things to people who have been living on the water for many years who have not been noticed, may not have the highest incomes and to reach people in different ways. This is how we viewed it as we thought about how we can improve downtown for everybody, not just for those who own buildings, but those who may be sitting outside having a beer and a nice conversation. This is what was looked at and thought about. We believe one of the most viable ways to move forward is with the BID, and I will stand by that.

Question: Have proposed boundaries been discussed? What is the process for drawing a boundary?

Answer: This information will help inform this. The area of focus is the downtown core. A helpful rule of thumb is no more than a 15-minute walking distance from the Central Library.

Question: What was done to get to this point?

Answer: A number of different organizations have been interviewed, along with tabling events, a survey, monthly office hours, and WalkShops.

Question: Can the city government just levy a tax in the central district?

Answer: Yes. We already have one in the downtown enhancement district. I am not sure you would call it a tax, you would call it an assessment, but yes is the answer to your question.

Question: Does the City government not want to manage the downtown enhancement district? Does the City want to offload this to a private interest? Why?



Answer: The reason these districts exist is often because properties and businesses in the places that created them were not satisfied with what the city was doing. They decided they were willing, and chose to pay more, to get more services.

Comment: That is a fundamentally problematic notion. We are in America today. They don't like what's going on, so we're going to privatize?

Question: How many cities in the U.S. do not have a BID – can downtowns be successful without a BID?

Answer: A possible reason why downtowns create BIDs is because there is a dissatisfaction with existing services and a desire and need for more to create a successful business environment.

Comment: From my perspective, the spirit of where I am coming from is a public-private partnership. I am recognizing these unprecedented times that as citizens we can't just look to the government to take care of our needs, provide and do everything. Citizens have to get involved and we need to continue to go down this road of public engagement, and there's examples all around the world about positives and negatives. But this is our opportunity to write our script about our downtown. And whatever we call it, or label it, it is important that at the end of this process, we come together and create a downtown that is equitable for all. We don't have the answers here today, but I believe we are on the right path.

Comment: Rochester has a long history of being open to the process of input. That has receded in recent years as we've gone through a lot of hardship. Don't say there's only a public hearing; there were several other instances of interaction among ourselves and with some of the actors we may or may not appreciate for the process they've chosen. Be a part of it, push for more input. Do not wait for a public hearing. That is a passive approach and standing at a public hearing for 45 minutes with objections and without assurance to oneself, that other avenues have been tried, and that final vote, is very important for all of us. Bring that other tenant, business owner, property owner, the manager of the Salvation Army. Bring them as stakeholders, observers, and holders of a reality that may vary from someone else's. Do not wait, push the process. Be a part of the process, and then, whether it comes out, maybe there will have been compromises and evolution that are particular to Rochester. It is obvious that we are not cookie cutters of other cities. We have similar challenges of similar balances. I am proud of Rochester's history of public input, and trusting one entity or other entity is not the key. Trusting in the dialogue is important now, and after the formation. We need to have a push for input and more hearings. We need to bring the property owners, small business owners, residents, and organizations all to the table. We are not cookie cutters – we have similar challenges in different balances.

Welcome!

Business Improvement District Effort

Community Meeting, 3.29.23

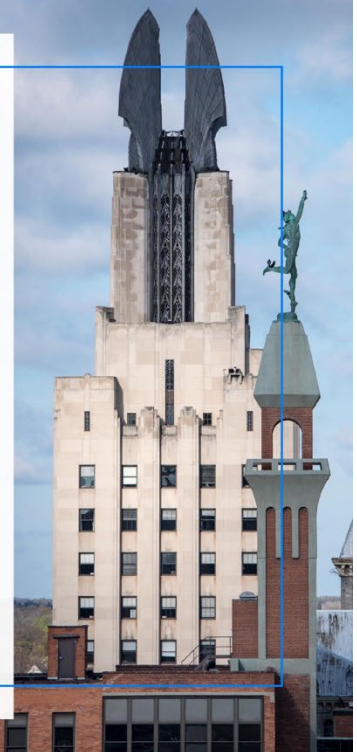
Organizations

Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (non-profit)

- Founded: 1977
- Mission: To drive economic vitality in downtown Rochester
- Board: Business, non-profit, and community leaders

Partnership for Downtown Rochester (non-profit)

- Founded: 2021
- Mission: "...to increase private sector participation to better activate public spaces and help guide the revitalization of [downtown] Rochester..."
- Board: Elected Officials, Non-profit/Community-Based Leaders, Property Owners



Origins

ROC the Riverway

- Management Entity Need Identified
- City of Rochester Study Recommendation: Pursue a Business Improvement District (BID)
- Allocation of State Funding to Support Effort for BID Formation

Pandemic Era Recovery

- Historic Levels of Vacancy
- Facilitate the Recovery of a Resilient, Thriving, Dynamic, and Inclusive Downtown Core

Activities To-Date

- **Grassroots Community Engagement**
 - Monthly WalkShops and Office Hours
 - Community Survey
 - 700+ Engaged in Effort To-Date
- **Formal Process Launched**
 - Community Engagement Plan
 - Local Community Engagement Experts, Highland Planning
 - National BID Formation Experts, BDS Planning & Urban Design



Timeline Ahead

Spring 2023

- Community Meeting #1
- Small Group Interviews
- Monthly WalkShops & Office Hours
- Small Group Interviews

Summer 2023

- Small Group Interviews
- Draft District Plan
- Community Meeting #2
- Pop-up Events
- Monthly WalkShops & Office Hours
- Revised District Plan
- Community Meeting #3

Fall/Winter 2023

- Revised District Plan
- Petition Process
- Continued Community Engagement

Winter-Summer 2024

- Petition Process
- Legislative Process
- Public Hearing
- Remainder of Legislative Process

Thank You!

- Community Input, Research, and Guidance to Inform Vision and Proposal
- ~1.5 year Process Reliant on Public Participation and Support
- Responsive to Community Needs, Priorities, and Preferences



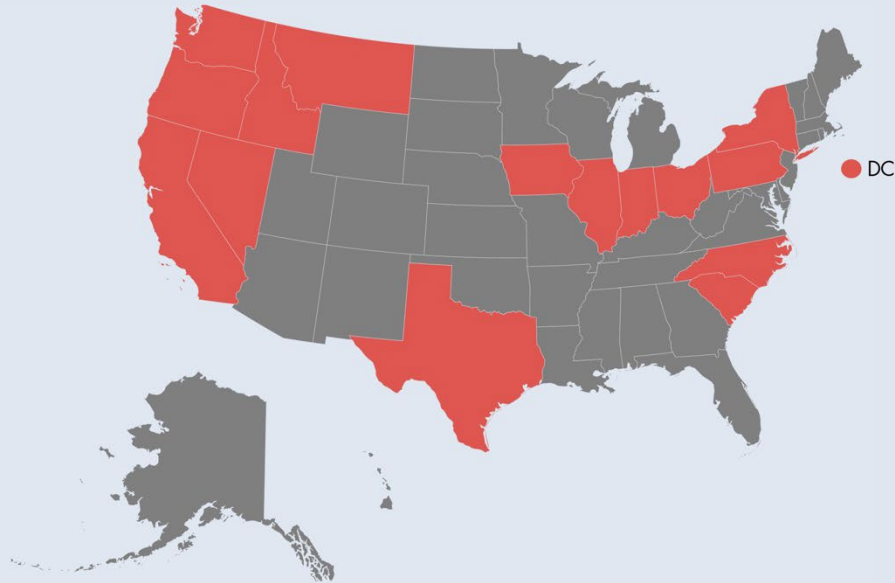
**ROCHESTER
BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT
FORMATION**

March 29, 2023



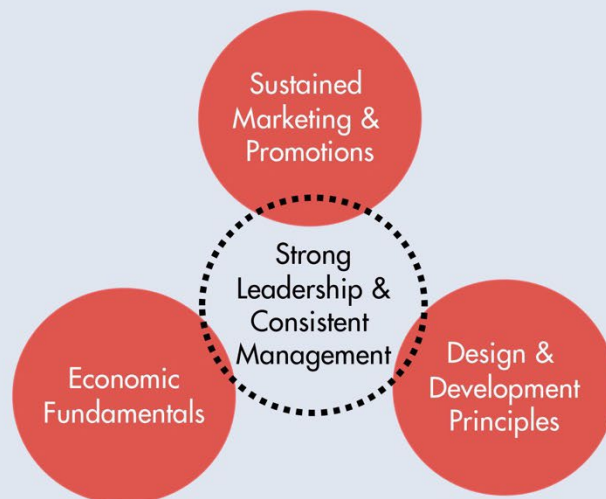
BDS

ABOUT BDS



BDS

SUCCESSFUL DISTRICTS REQUIRE



BDS

VITALITY DEPENDS ON

MARKETING & PROMOTIONS



ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



HOSPITALITY & SAFETY



STRONG MANAGEMENT



PLANNING & DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS



RETAIL & BUSINESS STRATEGIES

WHAT IS A BID?

- Enacted by City Council
- Assessment on properties and/or businesses
- Assessment is a local preference:
 - Square footage
 - Value
 - Sales
 - Etc.
- Managed in the neighborhood
- Uses are also local preferences:
 - Maintenance
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Environmental Services
 - Marketing & Promotion
 - Events
 - Etc.



23rd & East Union Business Improvement Area

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA CONCEPT

The property and business owners at 23rd & E. Union have worked together to improve the neighborhood on an informal basis for many years. We all know that sidewalk cleaning, garbage pickup, and graffiti removal are persistent needs. We also know that our properties and businesses benefit from working together on special events, holiday lighting, and other activities. We think the most effective way to continue these efforts in a consistent and equitable manner is to form a Business Improvement Area (BIA).

Who will pay the BIA assessment?

The BIA assessment will be paid by all commercial and residential properties within the BIA. The BIA assessment will be levied on all properties within the BIA. The BIA assessment will be levied on all properties within the BIA. The BIA assessment will be levied on all properties within the BIA.

Planned expenses for the proposed BIA include:

• Cleaning, Litter & Graffiti Removal	\$30,000
• Holiday Lighting	\$5,000
• Events	\$5,000
• Management & Overhead	\$50,000

BDS

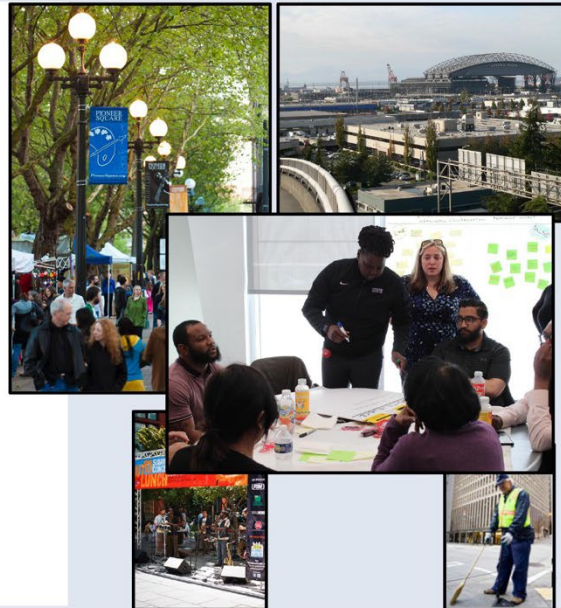
"MAYOR OF THE PLAZA"

- *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, William Whyte
- **Pedestrian-centric design** elements are not enough to attract users and make them feel comfortable
- Deliberate **programming** and encouraging **human interaction** to give a space life
- This is fundamental to Place Management today, like parks "concierges" **activating public space**.



PLACE MANAGEMENT HISTORY

- **1950s:** Downtowns Decline
 - G.I. Bill
 - Interstate Highway System
 - Urban Renewal
 - Redlining
- **1960s:** Downtown Organizing
- **1970s:** Public Area Management (mostly physical)
- **1980s & 1990s:** Assessment Districts (clean & safe)
- **2000s:** Neighborhoods; programming; social service
- **Today:** Thousands of Place Management organizations



PITTSBURGH, PA

- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$9.1M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Outreach & Hospitality
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events

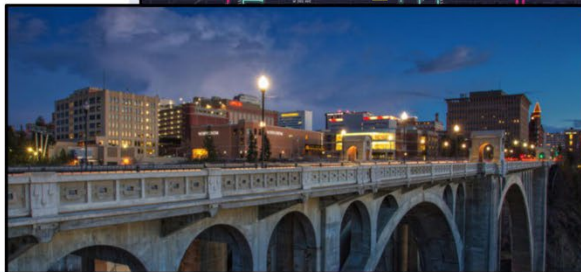
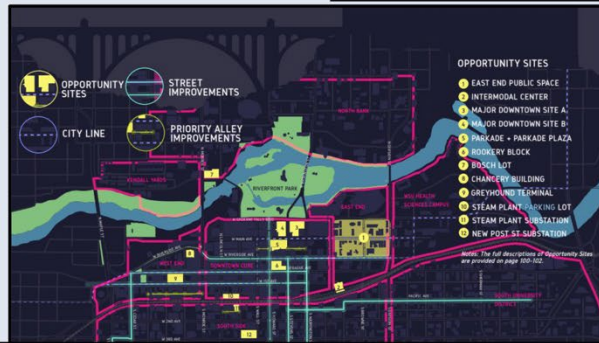
DOWNTOWN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS
 ARTS + CULTURE
 ATTRACTIONS
 CO-WORKING + SHARED OFFICE
 EDUCATION
 ENTERTAINMENT
 FAMILY FUN
 FAST FOOD
 HEALTH + BEAUTY
 HOUSING + RESIDENTIAL
 NIGHTLIFE
 PARKING



SPOKANE, WA

- Created: 1995
- Budget: \$1.2M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Ambassadors
 - Marketing and Promotions
 - Parking and Transportation
 - Maintenance Services
 - Special Events
 - Economic Development Support



BDS

DOWNTOWN DC

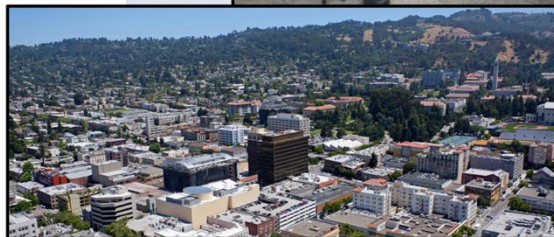
- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$15.4M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Homeless Services
 - Public Space
 - Transportation
 - Economic Development



BDS

BERKELEY, CA

- Created: 1990
- Budget: \$1.7M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Clean & Beautification
 - Hospitality & Outreach
 - Marketing & Business Support



BDS

CHICAGO, IL

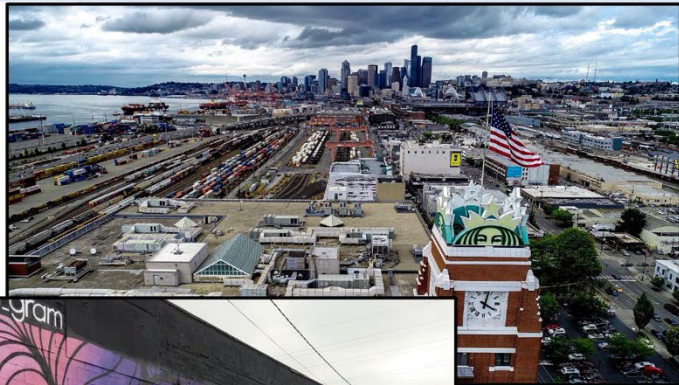
- Created: 2005
- Budget: \$5.3M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Beautification
 - Economic Development
 - Marketing
 - Events



BDS

SODO (SEATTLE)

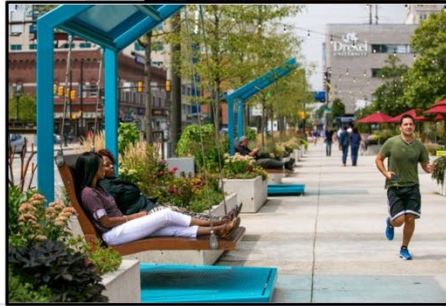
- Created: 2014
- Budget: \$2M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Business Community
 - SODO Tract Murals



BDS

UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT (PHILADELPHIA)

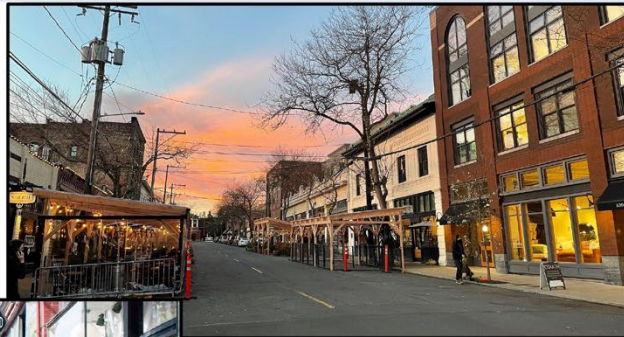
- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$11.5M (+ large capital projects)
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Economic Development
 - Events
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Job Training



BDS

BALLARD (SEATTLE)

- Created: 2015
- Budget: \$500K
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Public Realm
 - Advocacy
 - Business Support
 - Events
 - Tourism Program




BDS

MEMPHIS, TN

- Created: 1997
- Budget: \$3.3M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events



**DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS
DEVELOPMENT LOAN**



A low-interest loan for permanent building improvements in the Central Business Improvement District.

Maximum Loan of \$200,000, based on a project's eligible costs.

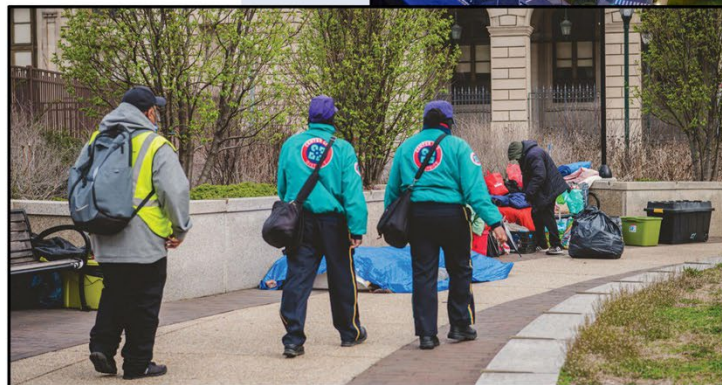
A one percent interest loan, amortized on a 20-year schedule for low monthly payments.

Loan is for permanent improvement, not temporary furnishings and fixtures.

BDS

CENTER CITY DISTRICT (PHILADELPHIA)

- Created: 1991
- Budget: \$31.5M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality & Safety
 - Homeless Outreach
 - Marketing & PR
 - Streetscape



BDS

HOUSTON, TX

- Created: 1995
- Budget: \$18.6M
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Environmental Services
 - Hospitality
 - Homeless Outreach
 - Public Spaces
 - Streetscape
 - Economic Development
 - Marketing, Promotions & Events



Street Art for Mankind Nonprofit Makes Houston Its Canvas



BDS

GENEVA, NY

- Created: 1986
- Budget: \$495K
- Activities:
 - Professional Management
 - Large Scale Events
 - Beautification
 - Environmental Services



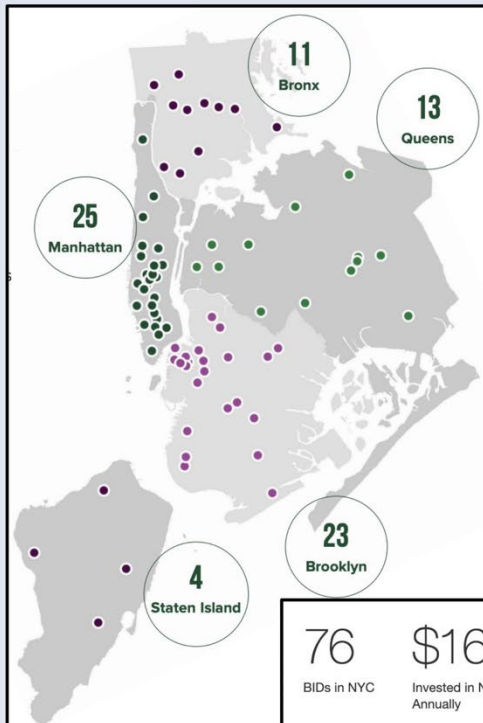
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BDS

BIDS IN NEW YORK STATE

- Manhattan
- Lark Street (Albany)
- 125th Street
- Downtown Ithaca
- DUMBO
- Downtown Auburn
- Downtown Albany
- Downtown Geneva



BIDS IN NEW YORK CITY

- 76 Business Improvement Districts in NYC
- 39 BIDs established in NYC since 2000

76	\$162.7M	24K	177	4.01M
BIDs in NYC	Invested in NYC Neighborhoods Annually	Storefronts Served	Public Spaces Maintained	Trash Bags Collected

BDS

POTENTIAL BID SERVICES

BDS

POTENTIAL BID SERVICES

Environmental Services & Hospitality	Parks & Public Spaces	Homeless Services	Economic Development	Beautification	Marketing, Promotions & Events	Transportation
Street Sweeping	Park Activation & Management	Outreach	Real Estate Development	Hanging Flowers	Signs & banners	Connectivity
Pressure Washing	Storefronts	Care Centers	Market Opportunities	Planters & Street Furniture	Festivals	Pedestrian Safety Improvements
Litter & Graffiti Removal	Green Spaces	Mental Health Services	Development Loans – Small Business Grants	Landscaping	Farmers Markets	Parking Improvements
Ambassadors	Streetscapes	Skill Development	Data & Research	Seasonal Décor	Advertising Campaigns	Non-motorized initiatives
Lighting	Emergency Preparedness	Workforce Development	Affordability	Public Art	Business Directory	Encourage Public Transit

BID FORMATION PROCESS

BDS

BID FORMATION PROCESS

ARTICLE 19-A

Business Improvement Districts

General Municipal (GMU) CHAPTER 24

SECTION 980	Definitions
SECTION 980-A	Contents of the district plan
SECTION 980-B	Local adoption of article
SECTION 980-C	Local legislative powers
SECTION 980-D	District plan
SECTION 980-E	Notice and hearing
SECTION 980-F	Establishment or extension of the district
SECTION 980-G	Review by the state comptroller
SECTION 980-H	Publication; filing; judicial review
SECTION 980-I	Amendments to the district plan
SECTION 980-J	Expense of the district
SECTION 980-K	Tax and debt limitations

Community
Engagement
Throughout



- Initial vote to begin development of district plan
- Development of district plan
- Support of 51% of Property Owners AND 51% of Assessed Value required to petition for approval
- City Council vote to authorize hearing
- Hearing on proposed district plan
- City Council vote to approve and adopt district plan
- State Comptroller review and certify district plan
- City Council vote to approve assessment district and District Management Association contract

BDS

Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?



Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?

1. Write it down on a large sticky note



Exercise: Downtown Memories

What's your favorite downtown experience or memory?

1. Write it down on a large sticky note
2. Share in your group

Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?

Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?
2. What challenges and issues downtown do you see in downtown today?



Exercise: Your Downtown Vision

1. What do you love about downtown and want to retain?
2. What challenges and issues downtown do you see in downtown today?
3. In 20 years, how do you want to be able to describe downtown to your grandkids, friends, etc.?



Question and Answer



Focus Groups

About Focus Groups

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted four focus groups in May 2023, as an effort to hear directly from specific subsets of the local community. These focus groups were facilitated by local community engagement firm Highland Planning. The four categories were: *Arts & Culture*, *Downtown Small Business Owners*, *Downtown Residents*, and *Suburban Residents*. Participants were asked to describe their thoughts and impressions of downtown Rochester.



RDDC Focus Group – Arts and Culture
June 6th, 11:30-12:30 PM
B-hive Room, 115 South Ave., Rochester, NY 14604

Introduction

The Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC) hosted a focus group facilitated by Highland Planning. The Highland Planning team welcomed the attendants, and everyone introduced themselves. Highland Planning facilitated a discussion about Downtown Rochester's opportunities and issues from the perspective of Rochester Arts and Culture community and how those might inform the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Rochester.

Discussion

Participants expressed criticism towards BIDs and requested that the BID effort be taken off the table. Participants shared a desire for a just and sustainable downtown and a view that BIDs empower wealthy developers and property owners. Participants shared that they view a BID as a privatization of downtown and modern-day redlining or urban renewal.

Participants explained that they are resistant to give any information about what artists want in Rochester because they don't trust the RDDC since they will be using this process to put forward a plan for a Business Improvement District.

- Participants felt that this discussion aimed to support the design of a BID, despite their expressed reluctance.
- Participants expressed that they would only feel listened to if the BID was no longer considered and alternative solutions were explored.
- Participants reported disgust over process and idea.
- Participants shared that they believe conversations aren't centered on the community, but on a BID.
- Participants shared that they feel the process has no transparency and gives power to the wealthy.
- Participants questioned why those funding the BID effort aren't at the table.
- Participants believe trust has not been established and won't be until RDDC stops pushing for a BID.
- Participants won't come to these meetings if they waste their time and there isn't change.
- Participant remarked that organizing groups can draw the map for the BID based on getting 51% in favor.
- Participant mentioned a previous incident where the ninth-floor artist's collective was incorrectly listed as a partner.
- Participants requested a map of the BID area, a clear definition of the governance structure, and information on the potential activities of the BID.
- Participants raised questions about RDDC's role in addressing displacement issues and expressed concerns.

Participants expressed concern that those making decisions aren't representative of the community.

- Participant shared they feel input for ROC the Riverway wasn't representative, was selectively chosen, and this should be stopped.
- Participants remarked that decisions shouldn't be made when the decision makers aren't representative of the community.
- Participants believe community isn't prioritized nor at the table.
- Participants shared that they feel the community hasn't heard about the BID and what the structure of it is, and feel the structure of a BID is fundamentally flawed at a legislative level and can't be rectified at a local level as it is based on property ownership rather than co-governance with the people who live in the communities.

Participants shared concerns that "art-washing" will be used to make a BID seem agreeable.

- Participants shared that they feel that "art-washing" can mask the negative impacts of BIDs. Some believe in other areas, "art washing" worsens the situation as businesses benefit, not artists. Some were offended by the use of arts in BIDs, and expressed concern that artists will be taken advantage of.

- Participants discussed low funding for the arts, leading to a devaluation of artists' time. They reported that the arts community is currently under stress, and artists are struggling. Participants shared experiences with federal funding decline and said the city hasn't been helpful.
- Participant remarked that the name Business Improvement District shows that it isn't about the arts.

Participants view Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as a privatization of a downtown, financially benefitting property owners rather than the downtown community.

- Participants shared that they feel BIDs are a form of privatization of the downtown.
- Participants expressed beliefs that business owners and property owners are often from the suburbs or aren't local to Rochester, and that suburban interests are influencing downtown decisions at the decision-making table.
- Participant shared they are completely against BIDs because they see them as benefiting property owners but not artists or renters.

Participants feel that there are false perceptions about downtown being unsafe and that a BID could lead to unjust policing or security measures. Concern was expressed that there is a risk that a BID could create unjust policing systems using police or private security.

- Participants shared that they believe there are negative perceptions of the city because of the media and local news.
- Participants feel safety is created when people are on the street and businesses are open / not vacant.
- Participants feel Rochester is the most friendly, loving, and welcoming community; those who move here stay; those who leave come back.
- Participant shared that downtown workers haven't been able to park in the spots they have been permitted for because of construction and have said they don't feel safe walking to other parking lots.
- Participants said they feel safe when people are on the street doing things and local businesses are operating, not in clean or polished cities with chain stores and police.
- Participants felt that when RDDC gave tours around the city and asked if people felt safe, that it precipitates the perception that downtown is unsafe.
- Participants shared that they are not interested in red shirt ambassadors.
- Participants shared that some people feel safer when cops and security are not present, and concern for harassment by police.
- Participant recounted an experience of an artist targeted by the police in Allentown, PA when something similar to a BID was formed.
- Participants shared that private security is bordering on fascism.

Beautification was discussed as a possible action of a BID.

- Participants expressed a desire for more street lighting, especially at night.
- Participants expressed the desire for more landscaping and greenery, and better care taken to public areas.
- Participant felt that downtown areas can be littered.
- Participants shared that they feel strongly about retaining green spaces downtown.

The group discussed the strength and success of grassroots efforts to improve downtown. Some of these efforts included Parcel 5, skate park, murals, and First Fridays.

- Participants noted that Parcel 5 was obtained through grassroots community efforts. They mentioned that the space is currently being utilized by those involved in the BID to host free, public events.
- Participants remarked that they have been doing this better than most for decades and they do not want this squandered by rich white men.
- Participants want the people of the community to lead the process.
- Participants shared that artists have worked hard to create what they have in Rochester.
- Participants highlighted the origins of First Friday as an initiative spearheaded by artists with limited resources. They posed the question of what additional impact artists could achieve with increased financial support.

Participants shared concern that a fee for property owners downtown will cause rents to increase and could exacerbate inequities in downtown Rochester.

- Participants shared they are against a BID because they believe costs will go up.
- Participant expressed that a BID could threaten artists' livelihoods and access to affordable spaces in Rochester, which is seen as a place where artists can sustain themselves.
- Participants shared comments about other cities where rising rents have made it difficult for artists to thrive and caused events to fail.
- Participants highlighted Rochester as one of the few places artists can make it as a full-time musician.
- Participants shared that they feel the city has not adequately supported artists.
- Participant shared a concern that raising property values can destabilize the community and push people out.
- Participants shared that they believe the Inner loop is an example of inequity and a focus on corporate interests.
- Participants shared that they don't want anything that isn't community and equity based. There can be improvements in every city, but it must be done in an equitable way.
- Participant shared they believe homelessness won't be addressed with just a warming shelter downtown, the barriers need to be removed to make sure people have what they need, the rest of the community will benefit when we all do better.
- Participants remarked if people aren't reflected in spaces, they will feel pushed out.

Participants also shared that they feel a BID is an outdated framework and a co-governance / community-centered approach should be explored.

- Participant shared that when downtown was quiet 20 years ago a BID may have been needed, but no longer.
- Participant observed that a BID involves decision-making by property owners, but suggested that a co-governance model is needed, where diverse voices and community perspectives are prioritized.
- The suggestion was made to pay people who deserve it to improve neighborhoods and downtown – coffee shops, music venues, artists, restaurants.
- Participant shared that they believe that the BID framework is outdated, and that the community should explore alternative solutions that align with the city's current context and existing investments.
- Participant proposed that the funds should be directed into a dedicated fund to directly support individuals. They expressed confidence that these individuals, who have a strong connection to their neighborhoods, would be able to use the funds wisely and effectively, without any restrictions or obligations.

RDDC was asked to summarize the meeting. Galin Brooks of RDDC responded by explaining the origins of the effort for the BID as a management entity for the ROC the Riverway and downtown core initiative. There is a grant from the state for \$2.5 million over 5 years to help launch a BID, and many things have happened to ensure community dialogue. They are working to produce a proposal that will go to the City Council and will need four additional votes. If a BID becomes a reality it would need to be approved by the City Council on an annual basis. Galin said she heard a lot of fear around policing and said that a private security force is not something that often happens. She said we need to evolve and have a good awareness of the reality of the communities we want to help serve and not redo the wrongs of the past such as underfunding the arts community. Increasing inclusivity and activity downtown with a broader level of amenities is a need. A participant asked what RDDC's role is in providing those things and Galin responded that RDDC is and will continue to be a small non-profit with a budget of less than \$2 million per year. An artist pointed out that this is still a guaranteed support structure. An artist asked if Galin heard the "no BID" message and she said she did. Artists urged RDDC to let the community know this is happening through broader channels.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded and everyone was thanked for attending and participating in the discussion.



RDDC Focus Group – Downtown Residents
June 12th, 5:30-6:30 PM
YWCA, 175 North Clinton Ave., Rochester, NY

Introduction

The Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC) hosted a focus group facilitated by Highland Planning. The Highland Planning team welcomed the attendants, and everyone introduced themselves. Highland Planning facilitated a discussion about Downtown Rochester's opportunities and issues from the perspective of Rochester's downtown residents and how those might inform the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Rochester.

Discussion

Participants voiced issues and opportunities that are faced by downtown Rochester residents. Participants placed a strong emphasis on safety and crime in downtown, followed by common themes of inadequate cleanliness and beautification in downtown public spaces, a desire for additional affordable housing, expansion of support services for those experiencing homelessness, and the lack of retail and activities.

Participants raised concerns over safety and crime in downtown Rochester.

- Participants recounted experiencing shootings, violence, harassment, and aggressive panhandlers in the downtown area.
- Participants shared a desire for additional support services and mental health professionals to support downtown's unique challenges.
- Participants shared that they feel comfortable hanging out at MLK Jr. Park, Parcel 5, the Central Library, and the Strong Museum, while noting the area around the river, Worldwide News, and the Inner Loop as "trouble areas".
- Participants shared that they do not like to leave their home because of safety concerns.
- Participants explained that they like to travel in groups, as they feel more secure.
- Participants shared they do not like ATVs and moto bikes on the street and want them to be stopped.
- Participants shared that they feel Clinton Ave. in downtown is not a safe or pleasant walking experience.
- Participants shared that they perceive security and crime as one of the biggest issues in downtown Rochester.
- Participants shared that they believe it is dangerous around the Transit Center, citing problems with violence and drug use.
- Participants noted that there are issues with vandalism and theft throughout downtown.

Participants believe there are not enough housing options for people downtown.

- Participants voiced concern over a lack of affordable housing options for people downtown, and expressed that mixed-income housing is preferable.
- Participants cited a lack of affordable housing as the driving factor in increased homelessness.
- Participants shared they believe more buildings should be renovated and turned into housing.
- Participants shared they believe housing should contain a mix of affordability levels to promote diversity.

Participants expressed frustration with public safety services.

- Participants voiced concern over slow response time from local law enforcement when called.
- Participants shared they do not feel the police care about their issues when they are called, and that they do not matter to them.
- Participant described feeling hesitant to call the police as they fear how they may react.

Participants expressed hope for the future of downtown Rochester but feel there is much to improve.

- Participants shared they believe that downtown has the potential to be great.



- Participants shared that they believe downtown to be beautiful but not well cared for.
- Participant shared "I'm embarrassed...I've been to other cities and their downtowns are immaculate."
- Participants shared they believe downtown is what you make of it.
- Participants noted that while crime does happen, it is not a constant.
- Participants shared they feel downtown is not as clean as other cities, and more maintenance is needed.
- Participants desired more activities, including family-friendly activities.
- Participants shared that they feel downtown needs more community pride.

Participants shared they are encountering drug use and mental health problems in downtown Rochester.

- Participants reported finding drug paraphernalia such as needles on downtown streets.
- Participants shared they believe the county and city have dropped the ball on mental health services. Participants shared they feel police are not equipped to handle the unique challenges of these situations. Participants shared they desire supportive services to help those in need.

Participants shared that they believe there is a lack of amenities and support for residents downtown.

- Participants shared a desire for downtown job opportunities.
- Participants shared they would like less corner stores and more diversified, local, small businesses, including a grocery store.
- Participants reported disputes with corner store owners and describe predatory pricing practices.
- Participants described difficulty accessing shopping and amenities without transportation.
- Participants shared that they believe retail amenities are not within walking distance.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded and everyone was thanked for attending and participating in the discussion.



RDDC Focus Group – Suburban Residents
June 6th, 6:30-7:30pm
Zoom

Introduction

The Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC) hosted a focus group facilitated by Highland Planning. The Highland Planning team welcomed the attendants, and everyone introduced themselves. Highland Planning facilitated a discussion about Downtown Rochester's opportunities and issues from the perspective of Rochester's suburban residents and how those might inform the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Rochester.

Discussion

- Participants shared what typically brings them to downtown Rochester. Responses included shows at the auditorium theater and Geva, church, baseball games, hockey games, restaurants, business meetings, events and concerts. A participant reflected on a time when High Falls had a lot to offer including a museum, a pool bar, a brewery, and a laser light show.
- Participants shared that they view parking as a challenge for downtown. Participants said they don't think more parking needs to be added downtown but would prefer better wayfinding so it's easy to figure out where to park. Parking garages close to destinations were also expressed as preferred.
- Participants were asked what their vision for Downtown Rochester is for the next 5 years. Responses included buildings with nicer architectural design and better lighting. The East End and Strong Museum were identified as popular attractions in addition to the Parcel 5 area, especially during Jazz Festival.
- When asked what issues exist in Downtown Rochester, participants reflected on comfort and safety. Examples of places frequently visited that do feel safe include Hochstein, the Central Library, Dinosaur Barbeque, and the Public Market. One issue raised was that Main Street and the area around the convention center could be improved so that more businesses open.
- The Freedom Trail in Boston was highlighted as an attraction that could be replicated in Rochester with Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass. Participants shared that going to historic places without a tour guide is preferable.
- Clean streets and sidewalks with lots of trees, shrubs, and planters and the availability of public restrooms was shared as desirable in addition to efficient public transportation.
- Attendees highlighted the desire to be with people rather than alone for safety.
- Downtowns with a node of commercial and cultural activity were cited by participants as appealing – attendee cited parts of Rochester such as the Auditorium Theater, Village Gate, and Geva as local examples. The observation was shared that Rochester's suburban residents rarely go downtown without a reason, whereas in other cities people tend to spend time in their downtowns without a reason.
- Participant shared that they generally feel safe within the Inner Loop core of Rochester.
- There was a discussion about having something specific downtown that would bring in people from the suburbs. A suggestion was made for Whole Foods.
- Participants shared that it feels like they must dig for information about things to do downtown. Eventbrite and City Magazine were shared as resources participants currently use. Participants suggested Instagram and Facebook as ways to advertise events happening downtown – especially if organizers are trying to reach younger generations.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded and everyone was thanked for attending and participating in the discussion.



RDDC Focus Group – Downtown Small Business
June 12th, 3:30-4:30 PM
Zoom

Introduction

The Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC) hosted a focus group facilitated by Highland Planning. The Highland Planning team welcomed the attendants, and everyone introduced themselves. Highland Planning facilitated a discussion about Downtown Rochester's opportunities and issues from the perspective of downtown Rochester small business owners and how those might inform the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Rochester.

Discussion

- Participant shared frustration with construction on State St. which is supposed to be done in November, and that it has been hard to stick it out through the tail end of the pandemic and construction.
- Participant shared that there is a glimmer of more life coming back to this block and that they work with their neighbors to help their area come up.
- Participant shared that more recognition and help getting the word out that construction is coming to an end would be helpful – also something to get the word out about State St. businesses in downtown would help. It does take a month and a half or two months to realize traffic is getting back to normal. Getting the word out a little bit sooner than when construction is done would be great.
- Once construction is over, participant shared, it would be helpful to have celebratory events on State St. and maybe have the City do a block party for the opening of the businesses in that area with food trucks and music.
- Suggestion was made to potentially host an event where businesses that are open in the day, also open in the evening, so people can stroll and see what is available within that corridor. More of this activity was shared as something that would be beneficial for the State St. and West Main St. corridor as well.
- Participant shared that having the area around State St. and West Main St. benefit from different events, like the Jazz Festival, would be helpful. Participant shared that there are a lot of things to tie in to thematically downtown, for example, a promotional wine and beer trail.
- Participant shared recent challenges with RG&E. Participant also shared observations related to parking, there is no street parking currently, so people have to park near City Hall or on Fitzhugh St., which doesn't often have an available spot. Participant shared marketing and parking as areas where support could be beneficial.
- Participant listed examples of things that would help including tying in the marketing for the Blue Cross Arena and the Red Wings, getting vacant storefronts activated, and having more activities for people to do.
- Participant shared receiving complaints from customers about area accommodations and not having more to do when walking around. Visitors ask where they can go. Participant remarked customers want more options on State St. and W Main St. in downtown. It was observed that if you give people things they want to do, they will walk to them as long as they know where they are going.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded and everyone was thanked for attending and participating in the discussion.

Community Tabling

About Community Tabling

The Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted tabling sessions at each Downtown Definitely Event in the 2023 season, as well as events in the community including the Puerto Rican Festival and Roc Summer Soul Fest. These tabling sessions were an opportunity to meet the community in person and learn more about their experiences in downtown Rochester. Additionally, information was provided to those interested in learning more about Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the potential benefits they offer. A highlighted summary of tabling feedback is below.

- ACTIVATION & PLACEMAKING

- A majority of respondents report they enjoy free events, festivals, and music downtown, and these are driving factors that bring them downtown. Family-friendly activities were also popular.
- Respondents enjoy the Downtown Definitely events and believe they bring the community together.
- Respondents cite art-based events, public art, and architecture as enticing.
- Respondents report the East End and the Neighborhood of Play to be exciting destinations.
- Respondents cite a lack of activity downtown to be off putting and desire more programming.
- Respondents report downtown to be confusing, and believe better marketing and promotion is needed.

- AMENITIES

- Respondents note the Central Library, Transit Center, The Strong Museum, and Mercantile on Main as central amenities. Respondents believe downtown to be convenient, within walking distance to multiple amenities.
- Respondents report a lack of retail amenities and shopping.
- Respondents report frustration with parking, including cost and confusion.
- Respondents report food, restaurants, and nightlife as driving factors in their decision to frequent downtown.

- DEVELOPMENT

- Respondents believe downtown has improved and evolved and cite this effort to improve as a positive force.
- Respondents believe downtown is underdeveloped and needs work; others report development is too slow.
- Respondents believe the influx of housing downtown is beneficial.
- Respondents believe diversified housing options at a range of affordability levels are needed.
- Respondents cite construction as confusing and detrimental to downtown vitality.

- ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Respondents view downtown as beautiful.
- Respondents believe downtown to be clean but would like more landscaping.
- Respondents believe downtown to have more litter than other areas.
- Respondents desire more street lighting.
- Respondents desire traffic calming measures such as speed bumps.

- SAFETY & SUPPORT

- Respondents view downtown as “scary” at night and in certain areas and believe improvements in public safety are necessary. Respondents also view downtown as “safer than people think”, and safer than other city neighborhoods.
- Respondents cite incidents of aggressive street confrontations.
- Respondents believe more should be done to eliminate drug use/sale downtown.
- Respondents desire to see more supportive services for those who need them.
- Respondents desire to see more community and less “divide”.
- Respondents cite off-road ATVs on city streets as problems.

One-on-One Meetings

About One-on-One Meetings

Beginning in July 2022, The Partnership for Downtown Rochester has conducted over 200+ meetings with downtown stakeholders to gain insights, impressions, and feedback as it relates to downtown Rochester, and the effort for a potential Business Improvement District. These meetings represented a large cross-section of downtown stakeholders, and included representatives from downtown nonprofit organizations, business owners, property owners, residents, arts and cultural leaders, and government officials. A highlighted summary of one-on-one meetings is below.

- **ACTIVATION & PLACEMAKING**

- Participants desire more compelling reasons to stay in or frequent downtown Rochester.
- Participants desire additional programming that creates a sense of place.
- Participants believe programming and activation should focus on downtown and riverfront spaces.
- Participants desire more programming that activates downtown year-round and attracts a variety of demographics.
- Participants believe downtown could be a vibrant live/work destination.
- Participants believe downtown to be an authentic place with the ability to bring people together.

- **AMENITIES**

- Participants share a joint sense of appreciation for Parcel 5.
- Participants desire downtown retail amenities including a grocery store.
- Participants desire support for small businesses downtown.
- Participants believe downtown is the cultural capital of the Greater Rochester region.

- **DEVELOPMENT & ACCESSIBILITY**

- Participants believe residential redevelopment to be a positive force and would like to see more.
- Participants believe public transportation should be emphasized downtown.
- Participants desire a walkable and bikeable environment.
- Participants note concerns about parking, including pricing and accessibility.

- **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

- Participants believe cleanliness and landscaping downtown could be improved.
- Participants desire more green spaces.
- Participants share a general excitement around the ROC The Riverway initiative.

- **SAFETY & SUPPORT**

- Participants believe safety to be a real and perceived concern.
- Participants believe public safety should be a priority.
- Participants desire programs or services for those experiencing homelessness.
- Participants desire direction on who to call and what to do in a variety of situations.

- **ENGAGEMENT & INCLUSIVITY**

- Participants want to ensure the future of downtown Rochester is inclusive and caters to all types of people.
- Participants believe a successful downtown BID should be forward-thinking and true to the essence of Rochester.
- Participants believe consistent communication is needed regarding BIDs and the potential benefits they offer.
- Participants believe inclusivity and engagement should be prioritized in downtown revitalization efforts.
- Participants believe there is too much competition for a small amount of arts funding from the city and county.

Draft District Plan Pop-ups and Residential Tabling

About Draft District Plan Pop-ups and Residential Tabling

In December 2023, the Partnership for Downtown Rochester conducted two pop-up outreach events at the City of Rochester Lighting of the Liberty Pole and at the RTS Transit Center, as well as five tabling outreach events at downtown residential buildings.

The purpose of the pop-up events was to:

1. Raise awareness of the Draft District Plan and BID effort
2. Solicit verbal feedback on the Draft District Plan and BID effort
3. Encourage people to provide feedback on the Draft District Plan through a survey
4. Promote the December 13th public meeting, when conducting outreach in advance

A table, poster boards with information about the BID effort, paper copies of the survey, and a sign-up sheet were set up. The team provided handouts including the Draft District Plan, an executive summary of the Draft District Plan, a frequently asked questions information sheet, and links to the survey and information about the second public meeting.

The events engaged 140+ community members. A majority of the community members had not heard of the potential BID effort. A few were eager to learn more about the potential BID and had an interest in attending the second public meeting. Key themes that emerged from conversations included:

- Desire to see downtown Rochester revitalized
- Concern about gentrification and a need to focus on the people who live downtown
- Support and excitement for this project
- Desire for retail amenities (e.g. grocery store, clothing stores) and local businesses
- Desire for more events at Parcel 5
- Desire for an expansion of the Convention Center
- Desire for protection of the Genesee River watershed
- Desire for workforce development and training opportunities
- Desire to see infill development and renovation that will attract excitement to the city
- Desire to maintain low rents and improve existing housing
- Support for the plan and services proposed
- Desire to feel a sense of safety and security, citing various incidents
- Desire for increased vibrancy
- Concerns around parking for building residents and visitors
- Support for social services and people care, specifically for the unhoused within downtown
- Desire for events that cater to residents
- Desire for workforce development and training programs
- Desire for more attention in the St. Paul Corridor, with residents expressing a view that most attention paid to the Parcel 5 area
- A desire for more attention and care to plantings in tree boxes and parks, including support for additional labor and materials (mulching, perennials, etc.) and coordination with city services
- Desire for a sense of place and gathering space similar to what Midtown Plaza offered
- Uncertainty that a potential BID would benefit residents and those who do not own property
- Concern over potential increases in rent