



Collaborating to create a community-based framework for moving downtown Rochester forward and continue down the path of recovery.

Action Plan Recommendations:  
6 Month Update  
Date: 11/2023

## Downtown Rochester Task Force: 6 Month Update

The City of Rochester, Destination Medical Center (DMC), Experience Rochester, Mayo Clinic, Rochester Area Economic Development Inc. (RAEDI), Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce, and Rochester Downtown Alliance united to create a community-based framework for moving downtown Rochester forward toward continued post-pandemic recovery and economic vitality.

This document provides a brief description of the process the Task Force used to create the action plan recommendations and an update on progress since May 2023.

### Background:

The pandemic interrupted many aspects of our lives – changing how and where people work, shop, and conduct other activities. In many cases, downtowns will not return to how they were before the pandemic.

Downtown Rochester, like almost all cities, has suffered because of these disruptions and long-term changes. While several new businesses have opened and many have pivoted, more can be done to help during continued recovery. The Downtown Rochester Task Force was established to help accelerate Rochester's path forward and build a more resilient downtown.

The goal of the Task Force is to collectively create a community-based action plan that identifies (1) immediate and short-term recommendations while considering long-term needs (2) responsible organizations/partners, and (3) timelines associated with each recommended action item.

### Process:

The Task Force took an intentional collaborative approach to build the action plan recommendations. A 90-day outline guided the work and included three phases:

- Phase 1 (February – March): Stakeholder engagement to build consensus on key themes/issues.
- Phase 2 (April – May): Determine immediate and short-term action steps and accountability.
- Phase 3 (May): Implement immediate and short-term action recommendations.

Four public working sessions included in Phase 1 were held with the downtown stakeholder community to gather input. All information gathered during these sessions was reviewed and organized into four larger themes. The Task Force used these themes to begin to identify sub-themes to inform potential action plan recommendations. The themes and sub-themes were shared with the community as part of Phase 2 in April and community members were asked to provide additional feedback through a short survey.

Using community input and feedback from Phases 1 and 2, action recommendations were identified for each theme. As part of Phase 2, three public working sessions to provide more opportunities to provide additional input on the action plan recommendations.

## Downtown Stakeholder Informed Action Plan Themes:

- Downtown Promotion, Activation, and Programming:
  - *Strengthen promotion, marketing, and communications*
  - *Activate downtown in a variety of ways*
- Access to Downtown:
  - *Improve public parking*
  - *Improve downtown wayfinding and navigation*
  - *Address safety concerns*
  - *Mitigate the impact of construction*
- Barriers to Doing Business Downtown:
  - *Simplify—improve and streamline—policies and processes*
- Downtown Growth:
  - *Retention of small businesses*
  - *Recruitment of new businesses*

## 6 Month Update:

The Task Force has continued to meet on a regular basis to address the four action plan areas of focus and emerging issues.

### Key Takeaways: A New Way of Working

- The formation of the Task Force created an opportunity to collectively listen to community stakeholders and turn concerns into actions.
- The Task Force has also created a new way to work together every day – from simple to complex challenges, communications, urgent matters, and regular updates.

### Task Force Progress

Task force members have worked together to identify and take action on solutions to the challenges downtown stakeholders shared during the 90-day intake process. Actions include:

- Downtown Promotion, Activation, and Programming:
  - Promotion
    - The RDA has added marketing/promotion of downtown as a destination to its mission and continues “*Explore Rochester’s Downtown – Great Dining! Fun Shopping! And Always Lots to Do!*” campaign
    - The RDA completed a summer multi-channel media campaign leveraging the popularity of Thursdays Downtown to drive weekend and return visits to downtown.
    - The RDA changed its social media strategy from event promotion to destination promotion by using video storytelling of downtown restaurants, shops, and programs.
    - Experience Rochester featured downtown messaging including Thursdays Downtown and Down by the Riverside and weekend getaways in its regional advertising.

- Activation
  - Continue commitment to iconic downtown events while collaborating with other organizations to enhance their events' success. Committed to using all RDA promotional capacity to support and enhance the success of other organizations' events to increase the vitality of downtown (Start-up Event Grant, etc.).
  - Modify the approach of downtown activation from single event to seasonal activation. For example: this year's holiday season still includes traditional downtown events but will include weeks of paid advertising, social media, and earned media to promote downtown as a great destination for holiday fun, dining, shopping, and lots to do.
  - Task force members are committed to including family-friendly activities in iconic and smaller events, to increase family traffic downtown, particularly at lunch and early dinner hours.
  - Coordination of lighting of trees throughout the downtown by task force organizations.
  - Coordination of temporary riverfront lighting activation (coming 2024)
- Programming
  - Experience Rochester, in partnership with RDA, Rochester Civic Theatre and Rochester Art Center, continued to activate downtown on Thursday nights after the end of Thursdays Downtown with a free event - Alive After Five on Mayo Civic Center Plaza, featuring live music, recreation and food.
  - Mayo Civic Center continues to see strong growth in City Wide Conventions including the return of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses after a three-year absence.
  - Increase collaboration with Mayo Clinic to assist patients and visitors to increase ease of navigating downtown and accessing retail and dining options.
  - Working with Mayo Clinic on volunteer training to ensure optimal awareness of dining options, retail opportunities, and events within walking distance of the clinic.
  - Partner with Experience Rochester and Mayo Clinic to create a "hospitality package" of welcome signage, materials, and information to increase knowledge and access to downtown restaurants, retail, and entertainment.
  - Coordination of maintaining Peace Plaza (Parks + Rec, RDA, and Threshold Arts)
  - 2024-25 city commitment to adding additional resources to help maintain downtown spaces.
- Access to Downtown:
  - Parking:
    - The City Council recently approved the winter/holiday parking program
    - The city is continuing to explore the feasibility of parking adjustments; and has engaged Walker Consultants to consult with downtown stakeholders and report on potential actions
  - Wayfinding:
    - Task force members are continuing to invest in wayfinding tools and evaluating new capabilities and trends

- Task Force members are working closely with Mayo Clinic and their Bold. Forward. Unbound. team to align future wayfinding (during and after construction)
    - Safety:
      - There was positive feedback about increased downtown beat patrol and parking ramp security during the summer months.
      - Increase parking ramp security is currently in place.
      - The City and Mayo Clinic are working on the final details to open a temporary police substation on First Avenue and Second Street
- Barriers to Doing Business Downtown:
  - Permitting:
    - City staff are finalizing supportive material to bring forward to the City Council for modifying and further streamlining the Parklet, Street Café, and Sidewalk Café applications and developing a quick reference guide
    - The City Clerk’s office has completed a comprehensive review of the licensing process and identified ways in which to reduce approval time. City teammates will be bringing forward to the City Council a recommendation for positive changes to the process underway for the following licenses:
      - Trades - HVAC Contractor, signs, master installer, trees, sidewalks, sewer, and drain
      - Liquor licenses
      - Massage therapists and businesses
      - Special events
      - Animals - pigeons, chickens, ducks
      - Transportation - taxi, bus, TNC companies
  - Downtown Construction Coordination:
    - Continued commitment to Business Forward and coordination of all downtown construction (Discovery Walk, BRT, Bold. Forward. Unbound), both public and private projects
    - Development of new grouping of tools to support coordination including GIS, Storyboard, CRM, and others
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- Downtown Growth:
  - Retention and Growth:
    - DMC and READI have convened a Grow Downtown Together working group to guide action in this focus area. The group meets on a regular basis to make recommendations on strategies.
    - The Grow Downtown Together working group has reviewed tools such as Placer.ai that provide insights including visitation, customer demographics, competitive benchmarking, industry trends, and more.
    - Mayo Clinic, DMC, and the task force team members are researching and actively working on ways to repurpose the street-level spaces that are currently vacant and are currently leased.

### Retail/Entertainment:

Existing businesses have shown tremendous strength as they adapted and pivoted during the pandemic, while new retail/services businesses continue to choose downtown as their preferred location. Some examples include:

- SEMVA Gallery – new location in Kahler Grand Hotel
- Nordic Shop – expansion in the Galleria
- New Spin – new (second) location
- This is Food Union – new location
- Handmade Natural Beauty Boutique – opening soon
- Pebble Spa – opening soon

### Dining:

Downtown Rochester continues to attract a variety of new and updated restaurants.

- Marrow
- The Well
- 507 (Pub)lic House
- Our Paladar
- Bebap
- Fresh n Green
- Uni Uni Tea
- Latitude 44
- Ruth Chris (opening 2024)
- Mill Valley Kitchen (opening 2024)

### Life Science Businesses:

Diversifying our local economy by attracting new life science companies to join in growing a healthy ecosystem is a core tenant of Rochester's long-term downtown planning.

- Nucleus RadioPharma – 2 Discovery Square
- Seer Medical – Conley Mass Downs Building
- AiFora – 1 Discovery Square

### Additional Growth:

Downtown Rochester is experiencing growth in a variety of sectors.

- Mayo Clinic - expansion
- Computer Danamics – relocation
- Housing – multiple potential projects