Downtown Cedar Rapids is full of life! The district features a strong business core with a growing number of businesses now employing an estimated 15,000 people. Downtown also is the center of many government services and some of the area’s most essential non-profit organizations. Amid all of that is a variety of dining and shopping options, a vibrant arts and culture community, and exciting nightlife. Great progress has been made on a Downtown Vision Plan that has guided development for more than a decade of tremendous achievement and that continues to provide a guidepost for additional housing options, riverfront development and urban core vibrancy for all ages.
2019 Annual Report

2019 was a successful year for Downtown, marked by several highly visible improvement projects. This Report reflects on a few of the accomplishments and improvements that the Downtown Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) led this year. Our success, though, cannot happen without partnerships. Many exist but two were particularly noteworthy for us in 2019. We owe a huge thank you to our partners at the City of Cedar Rapids for taking on enormous challenges such as the Third Avenue project, and to Alliant Energy for their work on transitioning to new, brighter and more energy-efficient streetlights for the district. Those two initiatives were huge investments that are making a transformative difference to the Downtown experience.

It has been said that cities are either rising or falling in America. As we move into this new decade, it is because of our elected officials and city leaders that the City of Cedar Rapids is assuredly moving in the right direction.
Downtown Streetscape Summary

In the fall of 2018, the Downtown SSMID Commission allocated funds for a streetscape project in 2019. It was determined that the existing 140 wooden benches needed some improvement, as they required constant upkeep and repair.

Our solution was to remove the older benches and install 70 new metal benches that align with the beautification efforts taking place on Third Avenue. 14 of these newer models have a middle armrest to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
Downtown Cedar Rapids Sucks

In July 2018, the ironically titled “Downtown Cedar Rapids Sucks” series debuted on social media. These videos featured Downtown housing, events, small businesses, and the benefits of working in Downtown Cedar Rapids. The video series garnered more than 400,000 views and was shared about 300 times on social media. The videos were designed to pique interest and draw attention to Downtown Cedar Rapids and what resides here. Each video revolved around a different component of Downtown Cedar Rapids. Housing developers, bars, and restaurants, event spaces, small businesses, and large employers all received special attention across the videos.

The videos were released starting just before the 2018 holiday season, reiterating an ongoing message to shop local. The campaign’s landing page, DTCRSucks.com, was updated with facts and figures about the small businesses behind the Downtown district.
Downtown Cedar Rapids and The Gazette launched the Cedar Rapids Downtown Summer Passport, a buy local initiative aimed at encouraging consumers to support small, locally-owned businesses in the district. The Downtown Cedar Rapids Summer Passport gave Cedar Rapidians an incentive to shop locally by allowing them to fill up their Downtown Passport with stamps from small businesses and community events in the district.
950 passports were distributed as part of this initiative.

Those who filled their Passport by obtaining stamps from all 12 businesses that participated were eligible to win prizes, including a $1,000 Cedar Rapids Staycation Package, a $900 Country Music Fan Package, and an $800 Pamper Package.
Storm Drain Art

To increase awareness of the storm drain water cycle, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, with support from the City of Cedar Rapids, coordinated the creation of eight storm drain murals in Downtown Cedar Rapids. This project began in 2018 with the transformation of seven storm drains. New in 2019, storm drain murals were placed in more prominent locations throughout the district, including Kingston Village.

Not only did this project inform the public that the storm drains empty straight into the Cedar River, but public art creates a more vibrant and welcoming district.
New Mural

A new mural was added to Downtown Cedar Rapids in September. The mural, created by artist Ali Hval, is on the side of the Third Avenue parking ramp facing Greene Square. The mural celebrates Cedar Rapids’ inclusion in the American Discovery Trail, a 6,800+ miles trail that spans from California to Delaware. The American Discovery Trail connects existing trails, and the Cedar Rapids section aligns with the Cedar River Nature Trail, cutting through Downtown Cedar Rapids. The Downtown SSMID partnered with Murals & More to bring this project to fruition.
Food Truck Fridays

Food Truck Fridays had an added feature this year. $500 worth of “Food Truck Bucks” were allocated in our program amenities budget, allowing us to distribute $5 gift cards to large employers in Downtown Cedar Rapids. Businesses were encouraged to submit a request for up to $50 and they were awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until they were gone. The goal of Food Truck Fridays was to encourage people to venture outside over the lunch hour and experience Downtown Cedar Rapids.

Market After Dark

Market After Dark, produced by the Economic Alliance, returned for a fifth year to offer a variety of vendors, a lively stage, street entertainment, food, beer, wine, art, and more. The event created unique nightlife opportunities for Downtown Cedar Rapids. In 2019 Market After Dark saw its highest attendance to date, with nearly 50,000 people coming to Downtown Cedar Rapids for the event.
Farmers Market

2019 marked the 14th season of the Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market presented by Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust, an event that brings on average 14,000 people to Downtown Cedar Rapids per market. The Downtown Farmers Market is produced by the Economic Alliance and has been long supported by the Downtown SSMID. In total, 267 vendors were featured throughout the season and many vendors shared that they saw some of their highest sales numbers to date.
Sidewalk Repairs

Downtown SSMID contributed over $80,000 in sidewalk repairs.
A new core district amenities map - to complement the popular housing map - was created in late 2019 and added to the Economic Alliance’s website in early 2020.

www.cedarrapids.org/amenitiesmap
Sponsorships
Greene Square Ambassador Program

With disturbance calls and recordable incidents in the Downtown area increasing in the last three years, an innovative pilot program set out to proactively curb violence Downtown and ensure that all feel safe in the district. The Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, via the Downtown SSMID, Willis Dady, the City of Cedar Rapids, Linn County and the Cedar Rapids Downtown Library created the Downtown Ambassadors pilot program. Downtown Ambassadors had a presence throughout the district but worked primarily in and near Greene Square and the Cedar Rapids Ground Transportation Center. Duties of Downtown Ambassadors centered foremost on:

- Creating a respectful and peaceful environment within the Downtown area
- Identifying potential conflicts prior to arising and engaging in the pre-conflict resolution
- Acting as a liaison between disputing parties
- Providing peer support to individuals and/or groups

Ambassadors were also responsible for picking up trash and recycling, reminding individuals and/or groups of the rules in Greene Square, and calling emergency services if needed. Ambassadors were trained in First Aid/CPR, Narloxene handling and use, de-escalation tactics and mental health first aid.
Sponsorships

Bike Share Kickoff

In May the City of Cedar Rapids unveiled the first bike share program in the city. The program launched with an initial 45 electric-assist bikes and 22 stations. Additional bikes and stations were added, bringing the total fleet to 150 bikes and 90 bike stations. Commuters and visitors can download the VeoRide app on their smartphone, walk through instructions to sign up and unlock a bike through the app. It costs $1 to start plus 15 cents per minute for their ride.

Free bike helmets were given away at the kick-off event and educational safety videos were filmed and created by Iowa BIG students. This program was made possible through contributions from each district, including the Downtown SSMID, the MedQuarter SSMID, the Czech Village/New Bohemia SSMID and the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance.

The first year of this program proved to be quite popular! As of October 6, the total system (e-bikes and e-scooters combined) saw over 27,000 rides, with an average 165 rides per day. Thank you to the City of Cedar Rapids for sharing this information.
Holiday Lights

The holidays were bright with Downtown Cedar Rapids wrapped up in lights, garland and bows. Greene Square glimmered with lights, city sidewalk planters were popping with color and skywalks felt warmer with wreaths dotting the way. Overall, the Downtown SSMID doubled the amount of trees, lighting, and decor throughout the district as in previous years while also attempting to present a consistent look and feel with the layout.
Operations & Maintenance

1,500+ hours spent on

- Cleaning
- Garbage removal
- Street sweeping

In addition, we led 3 volunteer days.
Third Avenue City-Led Construction Project

The Third Avenue project stretched from the bridge to 19th Street SE, and included more than transitioning it to two-way traffic. Third Avenue between First Street to Fifth Street included repairs to the surface of the roadway, pedestrian bump-outs to reduce crossing distance at intersections, new railroad gates and crossing arms at the Fourth Street trail, protected bike lanes with raised medians separating the bike lane and the parking lane, and conversion from one-way to two-way traffic.

Third Avenue between Fifth Street and 19th Street included roadway repairs, bike lanes, new flashing pedestrian signal at Park Court, a net-gain in on-street parking, intersection modifications, and a conversion from one-way to two-way traffic.

This completes the conversions of the downtown avenues from one-way to two-way traffic. In 2015, the City began converting one-way streets to two-way streets to make the downtown district easier to navigate, enhance opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists, and support the district’s ongoing economic development. Two-way streets have also been shown to reduce travel speeds and create an environment that is pedestrian friendly.
What’s Next in 2020

As we close the chapter on another year and turn the page to a new decade, we also want to shine a light on some of the upcoming projects and initiatives that will have more attention and focus in 2020.

- Race for the Space is a new initiative that aims to bring an exciting, experiential and/or start-up retail store to Downtown Cedar Rapids.

- A new light installation will soon illuminate the Armstrong Center beginning in spring 2020. Third Avenue Lighting that will display art patterns and films will be operational by spring. The goal of the project is to fortify the Third Street and Third Avenue intersection as a primary hub for Downtown Cedar Rapids while having the potential to be a signature space for various events and celebrations in the coming years.

- Plans for an all-district collaborative endeavor between the Downtown, MedQuarter, and Czech Village/New Bohemia SSMIDs that will focus on connectivity and district beautification.
Thank You to the Downtown SSMID Commission

CHAIR
Linda Mattes, Alliant Energy

VICE CHAIR
Chris Lindell, Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

EXECUTIVE TEAM
Randy Rings, True North
Fred Timko, Down to Earth Development

Dave Drown, GLD Commercial
Emily Ellingson, Lynch Dallas
Darryl High, High Properties
Dawn Jaffray, UFG Insurance
Matt Miller, Select Structural Engineering
Andrew Morf, Acumen Advisors
Craig Stephan, Iowa Brewing Company
Joe Terfler, Great America Financial Services
David Sorg, OPN Architects

The Downtown SSMID contracts with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance on services like beautification, maintenance, communications, and marketing.

Thank You to the staff of the Economic Alliance!