



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

CLEAN, SAFE & WELCOMING

MISSION

We lead and inspire Milwaukee to engage in efforts that build Downtown as the thriving, sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and vibrant heart of the community.



VISION

Milwaukee Downtown is an economic catalyst creating opportunities for all. Downtown continues to be a premier destination of choice to live, work, learn, play, and stay. Milwaukee is a renowned world-class city adding value to the state and the Great Lakes region.

LETTER FROM CEO & BOARD CHAIR

This year was an exciting chapter in our organization's history. Several changes in leadership and the creation of new roles marked a new era for our team.

Beth Weirick, the organization's CEO since 1998, passed the torch to Matt Dorner at the end of June. Erica Green was elevated to Chief Operating Officer, and Daisy Perez joined the team in the new role of Placemaking and Program Manager to oversee key activations and events. Isabel Ullrich was promoted to Marketing, Events and Social Media Director, and Rachel Farina, an outside contractor who has worked with our organization for over 20 years, was hired as Director of Communications.

On the ambassador front, Brian Johnson was appointed director of the Public Service Ambassador program. An outstanding Public Service Ambassador for 15 years, he also served as our Homeless Outreach Ambassador for the past four years. Terence Lee now serves as our Homeless Outreach Ambassador under Brian's guidance.

In addition, we welcomed four new board members to our slate of officers. We look forward to their innovative ideas and supportive guidance. This new cohort of Downtown devotees demonstrates continuity, collaboration and a shared commitment to our mission.

This year, we continued to advance the goals of the Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040 and our own Five-Year Strategic Plan. Maintaining a clean, safe and welcoming Downtown through the passionate efforts of our Public Service and Clean Sweep Ambassadors remains paramount. Their on-street presence can be witnessed from sunup to sundown.

It was a banner year for placemaking, another priority in our Five-Year Strategic Plan. We made notable strides in activating public spaces and enhancing streets and parks. Our biggest win was the opening of Downtown's first public dog park. Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 and Historic Third Ward BID #2 were its catalysts, transforming a blighted space beneath I-794 after years of fundraising and public-private partnerships. August 20, 2025, is now officially known as Dog Park Heroes Day by Mayoral Proclamation.

Other examples of vibrant activation were implemented at Red Arrow Park, Baird Community Commons, the Milwaukee Riverwalk, the Marcus Performing Arts Center and Vel R. Phillips Plaza. They included a diverse mix of world-class art, free concerts and family-friendly activities. We also continued to market and promote Downtown as a premier location for arts, culture, dining and entertainment.

We're happy to report that Downtown business is booming. Since 2020, nearly \$3 billion has been invested in completed private and public development projects. Meanwhile, over \$2.5 billion is currently under construction or proposed to start soon, spurring significant momentum and reinforcing Downtown Milwaukee as the vibrant economic hub of Southeastern Wisconsin.

Additionally, recent foot traffic data indicates that we've fully rebounded from the pandemic, with current numbers of employees, residents and visitors comparable to 2019. Much of this can be attributed to strong business leaders and the work that Milwaukee Downtown has done to help motivate employees to report in person.

We highlighted our outstanding economic climate this year through our "Get Down to Business" testimonial campaign. Comprised of radio ads and a video, it features legacy and new-to-Downtown business leaders validating why Downtown Milwaukee is a great place to invest and do business.

We continue to serve as a national model for addressing homelessness in our community, through our work with the Key to Change campaign and the Community Intervention Team. The team includes partners from the City, County, Visit Milwaukee, universities, neighboring improvement districts and other nonprofits. Together, we've demonstrated how a public-private partnership can provide long-term solutions for the most vulnerable individuals in our community.

This year's annual report details all the transformational initiatives that have helped to foster a thriving, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and vibrant Downtown community. We are grateful for the support of our partners in government, business and the philanthropic community, as well as our stakeholders, for their continued confidence in our mission.

We look forward to continuing the momentum!



MATT DORNER
CEO



TAMMY BABISCH
Board Chair



CORE SERVICES

PUBLIC SERVICE AMBASSADORS

Best described as Downtown’s walking concierges, our PSAs are present throughout the district in all seasons, from morning until night. Their mission includes welcoming guests and providing them with directions and helpful suggestions.

One place where that’s evident is at The MOTOR (Milwaukee’s Own Traveling Outdoor Resource), our mobile information center, which is staffed by PSAs. Formerly at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue, it relocated to Vel R. Phillips Plaza this summer to better engage with convention attendees and out-of-town guests.



In fact, our PSAs provided hospitality assistance to guests on more than 157,000 occasions this year. They put nearly 60,000 brochures into the hands of Downtown visitors and employees, and made over 9,000 business contacts, as well. They further supported

hospitality efforts with event execution and staffing for both BID-owned and non-BID events such as the Milwaukee Night Market.

Our PSAs also continued to serve as extra sets of eyes and ears for Milwaukee’s police and fire departments, notifying them of key updates. In addition, they monitored and reported infrastructure issues in our public realm, logging over 2,100 maintenance requests. Those included issues such as light fixture outages, curbs that need maintenance, graffiti and debris in the public right-of-way, and more.

This year, Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 began to utilize Block by Block’s SMART System 2.0 devices to track the daily accomplishments of our PSAs. An acronym for Statistics Management and Ambassador Reporting Technology, the SMART System provides enhanced reports and shows the PSAs’ detailed walking paths.

Combined with input from the PSAs themselves, the system enables us to devise efficient solutions and prioritize our resources.

CLEAN SWEEP AMBASSADORS

Cleanliness is a hallmark of Downtown Milwaukee, largely thanks to our CSAs, who ensure the roughly 150 square blocks within BID #21 remain spotless. From panning and brooming to gum busting, vacuuming and power washing, the crew works tirelessly to maintain our shine.

Over the past year, the CSAs collected over 406,000 gallons of trash and emptied 58 BID-owned trash cans as needed, along with several Riverwalk containers. They also deployed seasonal Superblock Cleanings, intensive scrub-downs of the district’s sidewalks and public spaces. That included wiping down light poles, fire hydrants, utility boxes, parking meters, low signage, planter boxes, railings and bike racks, as well as washing and vacuuming pedestrian walkways, and removing gum.

In addition to their cleaning duties this year, our CSAs lent their muscle during Downtown Employee Appreciation Week, helping to set up and tear down tables, chairs, signage and games. They also refurbished, repainted, rebulbed and stored several BID-owned displays for the Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival, and they were responsible for installing the holiday décor in Cathedral Square Park and Pere Marquette Park.



LANDSCAPE CREW

Enlivening Downtown with floral color this year, our Landscape Crew maintained more than 375 flower beds and over 75 hanging baskets with seasonal plantings. Their efforts targeted Wisconsin Avenue, Broadway, the Riverwalk and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. In addition, they maintained the protective planter barriers for participants in our Active Streets for Business program, which extends outdoor dining onto streets and sidewalks.

GRAFFITI REMOVAL TEAM

Using their SMART System 2.0 devices, our Public Service Ambassadors logged graffiti tags and stickers that they discovered in the district and worked to promptly address them. As a result, 99% of all Downtown graffiti was removed within 24 hours by the PSAs. Additionally, Milwaukee Downtown enlisted an outside vendor to remove large, hard-to-reach tags. In all, 2,994 graffiti tags were removed this past year, while 37,746 tags have been removed from property within our central business district since 2000.



CORE SERVICES

HOMELESS OUTREACH

Milwaukee Downtown remains committed to enhancing the quality of life for every citizen in our district. For our unhoused population, that starts with the Housing First model. This model focuses on securing permanent housing, which serves as a platform to improve the individual's quality of life. As housing is established, the individual receives customized wraparound services that may include primary medical care, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment and job training.

This model has significantly reduced emergency and other tax-funded services this year, such as police response, EMS response, ambulances, emergency rooms, hospital inpatient treatment, psychiatric inpatient treatment, detox, municipal courts, public defenders and jail time.

Milwaukee Downtown continues to lead the fundraising effort for two key positions that contribute to this success: a Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator, located within Milwaukee County Housing Services, and a Community Prosecutor, based within the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office. Milwaukee's model for addressing homelessness was featured in the 2024 documentary *Beyond the Bridge* and highlighted in *Governing* magazine on February 26, 2025.



Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator

On any given week, the Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator connected with 50-85 individuals experiencing homelessness. During each interaction, the Coordinator sought rapid, permanent solutions to the individual's unique situation. As a result, more than 50 homeless households found permanent housing solutions this past year.

Beyond housing assistance, the Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator supported individuals by providing referrals for shelter and housing, procuring vital documents, helping to obtain or increase income, addressing physical and behavioral healthcare needs, and accessing resources to address any other identified needs.

In addition, the Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator provided a real-time response to community partners, including property managers, business owners, police and security officers, when there was an individual with an acute need in a public space. What's more, the Coordinator provided education and advocacy at community gatherings.

Community Prosecutor

The Community Prosecutor dedicated to Downtown Milwaukee addressed the needs of homeless and mentally ill individuals who were identified for their high use of law enforcement resources and medical services. During the past year, the Community Prosecution Unit made 88 place-based interventions and 178 person-based interventions. The Community Prosecutor took a strategic approach to dealing with these individuals, rather than simply having them arrested and charged with crimes.

At the same time, the Community Prosecutor carefully tracked and monitored repeat offenders who are not open to alternative options, ensuring that these individuals are prosecuted accordingly. Working in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders to identify the most urgent problems and address them in meaningful and impactful ways, the efforts of the Community Prosecutor brought much-needed relief to businesses, patrons and residents.



Homeless Outreach Ambassador

In addition, Milwaukee Downtown funds a Public Service Ambassador position dedicated to supporting the Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator. In the past year, the Homeless Outreach PSA made 292 homeless service referrals, 679 homeless outreach interactions, and 63 panhandling/public nuisance interventions. The Homeless Outreach PSA also distributed nearly 140 care packages consisting of water, socks, snacks, hand warmers and other supplies.

CORE EVENTS

MILWAUKEE HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL 2024

Our annual six-week festival of holiday happenings and brilliant decor brought "Peace, Love & Lights" to Downtown Milwaukee. Beginning November 21, 2024, and running through January 1, 2025, we highlighted four decorated parks – Cathedral Square Park, Zeidler Union Square, Pere Marquette Park and Red Arrow Park – all festooned with animated sculptures and interactive displays.

The mood was particularly jolly at Cathedral Square Park, dubbed "Community Spirit Park" for the holidays, as more than 70 trees were decorated by schools and community organizations. Plus, over 1,300 children dropped their wish lists into Santa's Mailbox at "Community Spirit Park" and received handwritten replies from Santa's team, which included participants from Serving Older Adults.

At the same time, more than 3,200 merrymakers hopped on the Jingle Bus and enjoyed a narrated tour, in English or Spanish, of all the sparkling scenes throughout Downtown. Meanwhile, cascading chandeliers with a new gold and silver motif soared above Wisconsin Avenue's intersections from 6th Street to Prospect Avenue.

Pere Marquette Park hosted the kickoff event for Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival 2024, which featured live music, dance performances and fireworks, all courtesy of the Festival's presenting sponsor, Johnson Financial Group. The event aired live on WISN 12 and was rebroadcast, netting 46,549 impressions among adults 18-plus.

In addition, we presented two Christmas Cavalcades, which featured Santa and Mrs. Claus riding through Downtown atop a vintage firetruck and waving to guests. Plus, the jolly couple hosted Cocoa with the Clauses, welcoming over 1,000 guests for cookies, cocoa and chats.

TASTE & TOAST 2025

We celebrated 10 years of Downtown's first-quarter happy hour event during the week of February 24-28 with five weekday evenings of sampling and sipping. This year's Taste & Toast featured 24 Downtown hot spots that offered generous specials on apps, mixers, brews, wines and spirit-free drinks. Plus, Milwaukee Downtown provided discounted parking for patrons, thanks to our partnership with Interstate Parking.

According to our 2025 patron survey:

- 39% of participants neither lived nor worked Downtown
- 41% of survey takers found out about the event through social media
- 87.9% rated food excellent or good
- 80% rated beverages excellent or good
- 90% rated service excellent or good
- 66% of diners had dinner at a restaurant, attended a sporting event or concert, shopped or went to a museum after Taste & Toast



CORE EVENTS

DOWNTOWN DINING WEEK 2025

Diners fed their cravings for variety during our 19th annual Downtown Dining Week, May 29-June 5. The eight-day event highlighted the fare at 29 restaurants. Diners chose from prix fixe menus priced at \$15 or \$25 for lunch, and \$35, \$45 or \$55 for dinner. Plus, we provided discounted parking to patrons at select lots operated by Interstate Parking.

As an added bonus, everyone who completed the Downtown Dining Week survey was entered into a drawing to win \$350.00 worth of Downtown dining gift cards. Four winning diners were chosen from the 733 survey responses.

According to our 2025 patron survey:

- 43% of diners indicated a first-time visit
- 51% originated from outside of Downtown
(did not work or live Downtown)
- 68% were aged 40+
- 88% rated food, environment and service excellent or good
- 54% of diners heard about the event from social media



DOWNTOWN EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION WEEK 2025

For the 20th year in a row, the denizens of Downtown demonstrated their unstoppable spirit during Downtown Employee Appreciation Week. This year's spirit week ran August 18-22.

Participants were urged to download a Downtown Employee Appreciation Week Passport, which promised a chance at cool Downtown prizes if the holder visited three or more of the week's official events. Favorite activities returned, including office-themed challenge games, thousand-item lunchtime giveaways, after-work socials and morning fitness sessions.

Plus, several new features debuted this year. Visit Milwaukee sponsored a "Service Industry Night" at Riverwalk Commons. Also, Milwaukee Downtown hosted "Bring Your Dog to Work Day" in celebration of the grand opening of the new Downtown Milwaukee Dog Park. A "Yappy Hour" was also hosted at the park, thanks to support from Fromm Family Foods.

Downtown Employee Appreciation Week 2025 had 80+ Downtown partners and/or prize contributors. Milwaukee Downtown gave away 16,000+ free lunch items and 3,000+ prizes.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MARKET DATA

Tracking Downtown's growth and investment remained a top priority for Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21. A strong Downtown is critical to the entire city and region, and it's imperative that we communicate its value.

Building upon last year's Value of Downtown report by the International Downtown Association, we continued to monitor key metrics. For example, BID #21 covers less than 1% of the City's land area, but comprises nearly 10% of the total property tax base.

Additionally, nearly \$3 billion has been invested since 2020 in completed private and public Downtown Milwaukee development. Meanwhile, more than \$2.5 billion is currently under construction or proposed to start soon. This has spurred significant momentum that reinforces Downtown's status as the vibrant economic center of Wisconsin.

Plus, employers have brought more than 7,800 new jobs to Downtown Milwaukee since 2020, or have announced plans to grow employment here. Enerpac Tool Group is just one of several companies that established their corporate headquarters (*below*) in Downtown Milwaukee in the last year.



Placer.ai is a new tool being used by Milwaukee Downtown to monitor foot traffic in our district. It tracks Downtown activity for various user groups and provides compelling data for the organization and our partners on Downtown demographics, trade area analysis and visitor journeys.

Using this technology, we compared January to August in 2019 to the same time period in 2025. The comparison revealed that the number of employees, residents and visitors is trending to nearly equal, signaling strong post-pandemic activity recovery in Downtown Milwaukee.

RETAIL STRATEGY

In alignment with the recommendations in Milwaukee Downtown's Five-Year Strategic Plan, we are updating our retail strategy. We are currently drafting an assessment report that will help us establish a baseline to better understand the role of different Downtown users in supporting retail and commercial activity. With phase 1 of this report complete, Milwaukee Downtown can begin to explore tactics to enhance the attractiveness of vacant spaces for new business activity and create a more welcoming environment for pedestrians.

INCENTIVE TOOLBOX

Milwaukee Downtown continues to stay informed about grants and incentives that help make doing business Downtown easy. In addition to assisting businesses in navigating the approval process, to date, our Business Development Loan Pool (BDLP) has distributed \$240,000 in loans to support over \$8 million in storefront and business reinvestment.

PUBLIC SPACE PROJECTS

Public spaces are vital to economic activity. For this reason, Milwaukee Downtown invested in a plethora of public space activations.

They included Active Streets for Business, a returning program that allows bars and restaurants to expand their outdoor dining footprint onto Downtown streets and sidewalks. We supported eight businesses in our entertainment districts this past summer by funding the installation and maintenance of protective barriers designed as flower beds, to create distinctive space between auto traffic and diners.

In addition, Milwaukee Downtown supported the property owner and led the effort for a sidewalk expansion outside Taylors, seizing an opportunity that was present during the Wells Street reconstruction.

Plus, we advocated for a 200+ foot Riverwalk extension under the Clybourn Street bridge that will connect the existing Riverwalk at Regal Rexnord Corporate Headquarters to the newly opened Downtown Milwaukee Dog Park. A project eight years in the making and spearheaded by Milwaukee Downtown and BID #2, Downtown's dog park opened and attracted the under-construction Foxtown Landing. The result will be the complete revitalization of over one acre of Milwaukee River frontage.

ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS

For the fourth year, Milwaukee Downtown partnered with Downtown Madison, Inc. on a series of virtual seminars called The Madison + Milwaukee Downtown Exchange. It brings together industry experts on a variety of topics to discuss strategies for building growth, investment and collaboration between the two cities.

Milwaukee Downtown also advocated for business on a variety of issues, including historic tax credits and tax increment finance, workforce housing support, 6th Street improvements and other infrastructure projects.

We promoted the Red Arrow Park Redesign RFQ and the Marcus Center parking garage RFP, and we advocated for a Nighttime Economy Office at the City to support our thriving nighttime economy. In addition, we participated in several events for CARW and many of our local commercial brokerage offices, and we managed social media, blog posts and newsletters for the Downtown Milwaukee Dog Park and other economic development activities.

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA

Milwaukee Downtown enjoys a very active following on Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn. With more than 163,900 followers in total, we created more than 4.1 million impressions over the past year. We then used that social presence to build community connections, invite engagement, spur customer purchases and support Downtown businesses.

We promoted several Random Acts of Kindness giveaways through social media this year. They included football-shaped stress balls during Milwaukee Tailgate Week, flower-themed cookies during Rainbow Summer, and ticket giveaway promotions with The Pabst Theater Group and Summerfest.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Downtown events and initiatives continue to be all the buzz for our PR efforts. We brought our media outreach efforts into the organization in January 2025, when we hired Milwaukee Downtown's first Director of Communications. We also invested in a new media monitoring service, which helped to capture and monetize digital and social mentions.

Thus, we can report that, between September 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025, we secured over \$14 million in earned media coverage.



“GET DOWN TO BUSINESS” CAMPAIGN

This year, Milwaukee Downtown rallied more than a dozen Downtown business leaders to participate in a radio and video marketing campaign. Its goal is to raise awareness of Downtown Milwaukee's competitive advantages, including factors like access to talent, a high quality of life, the variety of things to do, accessibility, affordability, innovation and opportunity.

The radio commercials began airing on AM620 WTMJ in late June 2025, with a message from Milwaukee Downtown's new CEO. This was followed by a testimonial message from a different business leader each week for a dozen weeks. The commercials touted the benefits of doing business Downtown, while also introducing the new leadership at Milwaukee Downtown. We'll release the video in fall of 2025, and the radio commercials will soon stream on additional platforms, including podcasts.

NEWSLETTERS

Milwaukee Downtown produces three newsletters:

- **E-Ripple Effect** (*stakeholder audience*):
12 issues, 4,500+ subscribers
- **Downtown Hotlist** (*general consumer audience*):
24 editions, 18,300+ subscribers
- **Real Results** (*developer audience*):
1 edition, 2,400+ subscribers

We will soon add the Downtown Navigator, which will inform stakeholders about parking, construction and street closures.

WEBSITE

The source for all things Downtown Milwaukee is www.milwaukee downtown.com. It's where visitors can learn about the district's competitive advantages, discover our top attractions, get details on Milwaukee Downtown's core events, and find maps that plot Downtown investment and public art.

Downtown Dining Week continues to drive peak traffic to the website, with a one-day high of over 4,800 users on the event's 2025 kickoff, May 29. This year, Milwaukee Downtown is engaged in a rebuild, with plans to launch a new website by early 2026.

PUBLIC SPACE ACTIVATIONS

BEST SEATS IN MILWAUKEE

Designed to spotlight our thriving Milwaukee Theater District, this activation starred 10 theater chairs donated by the Milwaukee Repertory Theater. They were refurbished into five pairs of working, reupholstered chairs that served as temporary public seating.

The chairs were stationed at five locations – Red Arrow Park, Vel R. Phillips Plaza, the Riverwalk at Chase Tower, Cathedral Square Park, and a Broadway parklet – during the month leading up to Milwaukee Theater Week, September 15-October 20, 2024.

Presented in partnership with Visit Milwaukee, Best Seats in Milwaukee visually brought to life the impressive fact that our city has the nation's largest number of theater seats per capita.



JACK-O-LANTERN JUBILEE & HALLOWEEN VILLAGE 2024

Baird Community Commons was simply spooktacular from October 12-31, 2024. It was the home of a new Halloween Village and the new location for our annual Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee presented by Baird.

The Halloween Village was a free, family-friendly lighting installation in the new Baird Community Commons, alongside the Baird Center on Vel R. Phillips Avenue. It featured interactive lighted décor and photo ops, including depictions of a 12-foot Great Pumpkin, Frankenstein's monster, a witch on her broom, a good witch and a ghost. Sponsored by Baird, the corridor received positive feedback and strong community interaction throughout the season.

Our popular Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee took place in the middle of Halloween Village, on October 26, 2024. Designed for families with kids ages 2-10, the one-day event included story time, live music performances, fall food vendors, free pumpkin decorating and more. During the event, we distributed 400 free pumpkins courtesy of Pick 'n Save and Metro Market, as well as 400 free bags of kettle corn and 400 free goodie bags.





PUBLIC SPACE ACTIVATIONS

RIVERWALK MURAL COLLECTION

This year, Milwaukee Downtown managed the installation of four new murals along the Milwaukee River, in partnership with the City of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Riverwalk District, Visit Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Theater District. An estimated 5,000 square feet of mural art was added along the Riverwalk.

The designs were chosen by the Downtown Placemaking Task Force to reflect the vitality and significance of the Milwaukee River and the Riverwalk, and the unique neighborhood context of each mural site. The goal was to activate the Riverwalk for pedestrian and boat traffic.

In the fall of 2024, three murals were completed. *Luminous Waters* by Unnaturell Design Co. (above) can be found at the Knapp Street Bridge. *Glimmer Pursuit* by CERA lives at the Juneau Bridge Tower. *Buoyancy* by Brian Kaspr (below) is located at 740 North by 3L Living. A fourth mural, titled *Vessels of Milwaukee*, was completed by La Bang Studio at the Marcus Performing Arts Center in June 2025.



LANDMARK LIGHTING

Milwaukee Downtown organized more than 25 landmark lighting initiatives to commemorate special occasions this year. Those included the Milwaukee Brewers’ postseason run, Milwaukee Theater Week, Domestic Violence Awareness, the Milwaukee Bucks’ home opener, Transgender Day of Remembrance, the Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival, the Bob Uecker memorial, and Pride Month, as well as many other holidays and events. More than 25 properties chose to participate in these initiatives.

STARLIGHT AT RED ARROW PARK

The stars aligned for Downtown Milwaukee this past winter, when *Starlight* made its home on the lawn of Red Arrow Park. A temporary art installation, it featured five colorfully lighted stars created by LeMonde Studio that provided an enchanting ambiance for skaters and passersby. Milwaukee Downtown presented *Starlight* from December 2024 through January 2025 in partnership with MGIC and Milwaukee County Parks.



ORNAMENT TRAIL

15 giant ornaments returned to the streets of Downtown Milwaukee for the 2024 holiday season. Debuting in 2023, the round, four-foot diameter baubles were hand-painted by 15 artists selected by the Downtown Placemaking Task Force. Once again, the trail adorned Wisconsin Avenue and Water Street, but this year it also extended into the Historic Third Ward. Milwaukee Downtown distributed 7,500 Ornament Trail activity guides, including many to area schools.

“WICKED” SKATE NIGHT

Things got “Wicked” in Red Arrow Park on January 25, 2025, when we held a free ice-skating event to celebrate the upcoming run of the award-winning musical at the Marcus Performing Arts Center. Ice Theatre MKE treated skaters to two performances of “Defying Gravity,” a song from the show, and free “Wicked”-themed face painting was available. More than 200 adults and children took advantage of free skate rentals, which were sponsored by WaterStone Bank (a \$2,100 value). Milwaukee Downtown also provided more than 160 free beverages from Biggby Coffee (a \$1,600 value).



BIG TRUCK DAY

Living up to the motto, “Go big or go home,” Milwaukee Downtown joined the City of Milwaukee to present the fourth annual Big Truck Day on May 17, 2025. The free event at Red Arrow Park provided families with the rare opportunity to check out dozens of jumbo vehicles from the Department of Public Works, the Milwaukee Fire Department, the Milwaukee Police Department and the Milwaukee County Transit System.

This year’s Big Truck Day was bigger and better than ever. Some 4,350 guests cued up to explore a fire engine, an MCTS bus, a front-end loader, a street sweeper, a plow truck and many other big rigs. Milwaukee Downtown gave away 1,000 child-sized construction hats and 1,000 construction-themed goodie bags.

Sponsored by Brooks Tractor, RNOW Inc., Truck Country, Monroe Trucking, Kriete Truck Center, Henderson, and Casper’s Truck Equipment, Big Truck Day was held in advance of National Public Works Week. The event celebrates the individuals at the forefront of keeping our community clean, safe and welcoming.

HEART(BEATS) OF THE CITY POWERED BY MGIC

Once again, Red Arrow Park became a summertime showcase for the area’s liveliest musicians as Heart(Beats) of the City returned for its fourth year. Held on Wednesdays at noon from June through September 2025, this year’s series starred the Jenny Thiel Group, Rhythm Kings, the Eddie Butts Band, Roots Renegades, and the Donna Woodall Group, among others.

Milwaukee Downtown made 59 food truck slots available to vendors during the 13 lunchtime concerts, and held giveaways for beach balls, sunglasses, tote bags, Biggby Coffee gift cards and more.

PNC PRESENTS TUNES@NOON

Some of the region’s most popular acts delivered the tunes at noon for the seventh annual lunchtime concert series. Each Thursday from June through August 2025, the 411 East Wisconsin Center’s gorgeous outdoor courtyard was the setting for lunchtime performances by a variety of artists, including Frogwater, Roxie Beane, Jorge Vallentine, Darryl Armistead, and the Mighty Ms. Erica.

Supported by a paid social media campaign aimed at the Downtown workforce, the 2025 edition of PNC presents Tunes@Noon introduced a weekly rotation of food trucks, plus monthly food specials by Davians at 411. It also featured a variety of giveaways for Milwaukee swag and Downtown gift cards.



PUBLIC SPACE ACTIVATIONS

PRICE SCULPTURE AT VEL R. PHILLIPS PLAZA



A compelling, 9-foot bronze figure of a casually dressed Black man was installed at Vel R. Phillips Plaza. Called *Within the Folds (Dialogue I)*, the sculpture by Thomas J Price returned to Downtown Milwaukee in June 2025. It originally debuted in Sculpture Milwaukee’s 2020 exhibition outside the U.S. Bank Center before it was purchased and donated to America’s Black Holocaust Museum.

Now the museum has returned it to the plaza for one year, to celebrate the historic contributions of Black leadership across disciplines, here at home and around the world. Milwaukee Downtown contributed to its installation, in partnership with America’s Black Holocaust Museum, the City of Milwaukee and Sculpture Milwaukee.

RAINBOW SUMMER

Folks who attended Rainbow Summer this year got “lost” – as in the internationally-renowned installation *Lost* by artist Amanda Parer. With a footprint of over 2,100 square feet and a height of up to 16 feet, this illuminated botanical fantasy land graced the Outdoor Grounds of the Marcus Performing Arts Center from July 14-20.

Rainbow Summer 2025 also featured seven nights of free live entertainment from top musical talent, including Digable Planets, Fool House and Brass Queens, as well as an art marketplace and food trucks. It was produced in partnership between the Marcus Performing Arts Center and Milwaukee Downtown.

RED ARROW PARK REDESIGN

Red Arrow Park, one of Downtown’s centrally located and most significant parks, is a vibrant, inclusive gathering place intended for everyone to enjoy. That’s why the accessibility and connectivity of Red Arrow Park was a focal point of the recently adopted Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040.

As a result, Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21, the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County hired a collaborative project team to lead a redesign process. Composed of Milwaukee-based The Kubala Washatko Architects (TKWA) and Philadelphia-based OLIN, the team is working on renderings and recommendations for enhancing the park and its surrounding streets.

The full design process will now focus on robust community engagement, led by P3 Development Group, to steer the creation of several concepts that will be refined through further public input. The design team began to collect community feedback this past summer through an online survey tool. The goal is to identify a preferred design with sufficient detail to seek conceptual cost bidding, which will help determine future fundraising needs and sources for construction.

Stay tuned for more public engagement opportunities to help shape the park for all seasons and all people.



DOWNTOWN MILWAUKEE DOG PARK

In September 2024, we broke ground on Downtown’s first and only dog park. We proudly hosted the ribbon-cutting ceremony for this much-anticipated amenity on August 20, 2025. A collaborative effort led by BID #21 and BID #2, the Downtown Milwaukee Dog Park was made possible by immense support from the Milwaukee community, public officials, philanthropic organizations, business leaders and thousands of donors.

Located at 103 W. Clybourn Street, it features more than 23,000 square feet of community space, including fenced-in exercise areas with water stations for both small and large dogs. Plus, a new segment of Riverwalk leads to the park.

Our title sponsor, Fromm Family Foods, played a crucial role in supporting this initiative. In addition to helping fund the project, a Fromm affiliate is developing the adjacent land, which will become home to the new Foxtown Landing. A distillery, pub, restaurant, cocktail lounge and ballroom event center, it’s slated to open in early 2027.

The park is now open Monday through Sunday from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm. Like other Milwaukee County dog facilities, access to the new Downtown location requires an official dog park pass that can be purchased on the County’s website.



THE FUTURE

The future of Milwaukee Downtown is bright. With strong leadership and staff in place, we continue to make strides in achieving the goals of our Five-Year Strategic Plan. We are entering year three and we've already made significant progress on some of the major initiatives. Focal points for 2026 and beyond include:

CLEAN, SAFE & WELCOMING

A clean, safe and welcoming environment is paramount to Downtown Milwaukee's success. We will continue to prioritize Ambassador resources to ensure an attractive environment for residents, employees and visitors. As outlined in the Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040, goals include growing Downtown's residential population to 40,000, growing Downtown jobs to 100,000, and adding 15,000 housing units, with 20% of those units being affordable.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Leveraging the "Get Down to Business" executive testimonial campaign and new data tools, Milwaukee Downtown will continue to cultivate a Downtown that is attractive to companies that desire to locate here. We are also building new public and private partnerships to identify a new wave of business opportunities for the district.



RED ARROW PARK REDESIGN

This past year, Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 partnered with the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County to further explore future improvements to Red Arrow Park. Community engagement is underway to gather ideas on how the new Red Arrow Park can serve as Milwaukee's "living room," i.e., a vibrant, inclusive gathering place for year-round connection, cultural expression and shared experiences.

PUBLIC SPACE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

One of the goals of the city's Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040 is to "invest in the public realm by improving streets, parks, and other public spaces in ways that encourage a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient Milwaukee."

To achieve this goal, the plan tasked Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 with leading the effort to create "a 'public space management organization' to help fundraise, maintain, program, and promote our Downtown parks and public spaces." This was also underscored in Milwaukee Downtown's recent Five-Year Strategic Plan process and was identified as one of the organization's "Big Moves."

Public space management organizations (PSMOs) are models used by urban centers nationwide. Milwaukee Downtown is currently exploring the creation of a PSMO to develop, maintain and activate Milwaukee's inclusive public spaces in a financially and environmentally sustainable manner.

This past year, we completed Phase I, which included research by MIG and Milwaukee Downtown into existing PSMOs in five cities: Center City District (Philadelphia, PA), Dallas Parks Conservancy (Dallas, TX), Hudson River Park Trust & Friends (New York, NY), Memphis River Parks Partnership (Memphis, TN), and NoMa Parks Foundation (Washington, D.C.).

We also facilitated a virtual panel of leaders from all five case study PSMOs, to inform our research and best practices. Phase I culminated in a Preliminary Scope & Objectives Memo, which applied lessons learned from our best practices research to Milwaukee. We look forward to future conversations around establishing a PSMO, and we will continue to seek public input for this catalytic initiative.

STREETFRONT RETAIL STRATEGY

A growing Downtown residential population is increasing the demand for goods and services, which is why Milwaukee Downtown is making a concerted effort to update its retail strategy. We are currently conducting a retail study. With its completion, we will identify ways we can activate vacant storefronts by making them more visually appealing to pedestrians and prospective tenants.

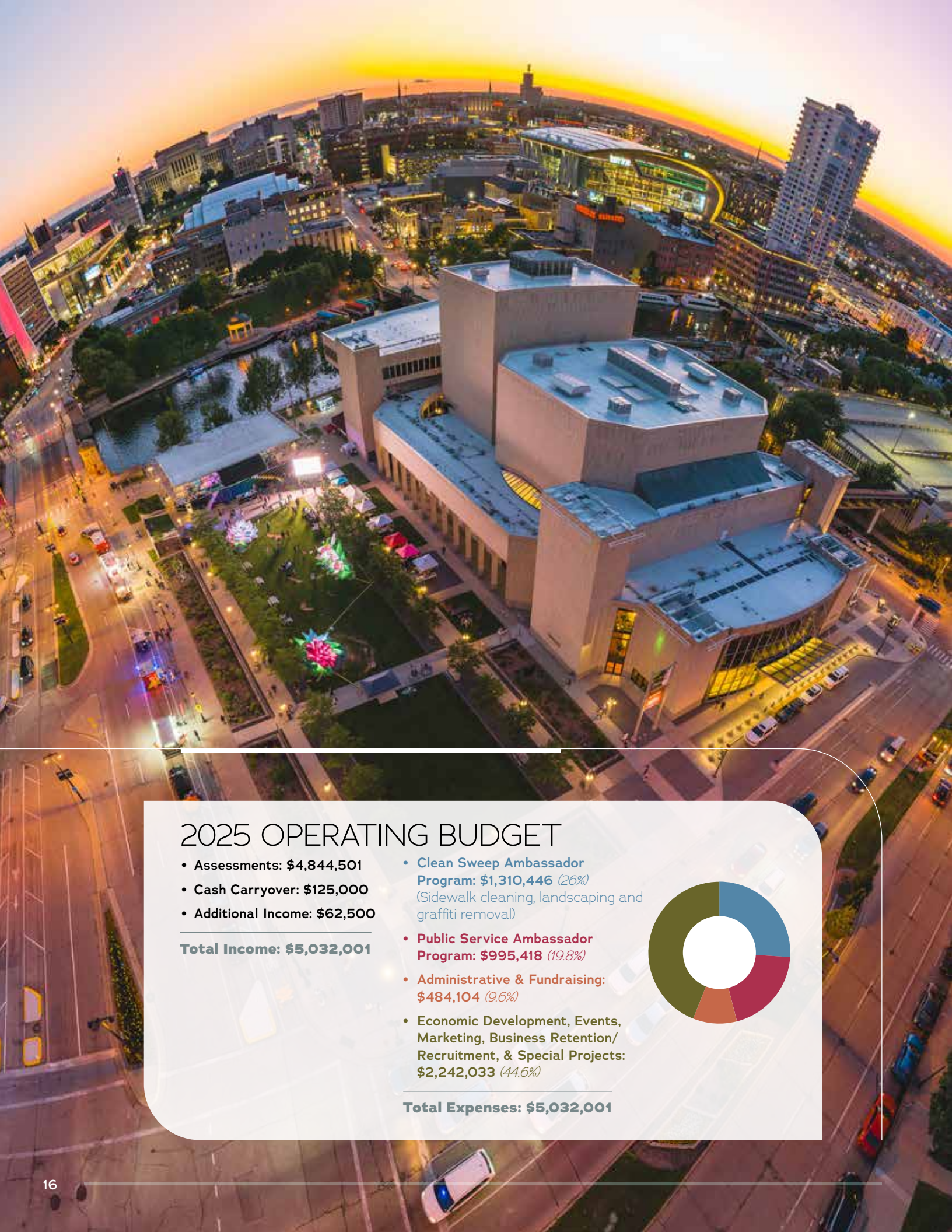


NIGHTTIME ECONOMY

Nighttime economies attract other economic development, as well as a diverse array of people. What's more, they provide the social necessities that are critical factors when businesses and the talent they attract choose where to live, invest and spend their time.

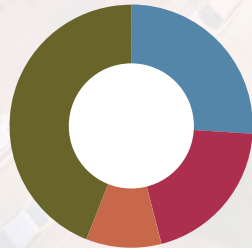
The nighttime economy has helped catalyze the renaissance of notable cities worldwide, and Milwaukee is no different. Downtown's nighttime economy represents the fourth highest concentration of business and jobs in the entire City of Milwaukee. It brings in over \$1.37 billion in annual consumer spending and is projected to grow 19% by 2027.

To continue this momentum, we want to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those who play here at night. Therefore, Milwaukee Downtown will continue to advocate for an Office of Nighttime Economy within the City, to ensure the long-term sustainability of a safe, vibrant social economy in Milwaukee.



2025 OPERATING BUDGET

- Assessments: \$4,844,501
 - Cash Carryover: \$125,000
 - Additional Income: \$62,500
- Total Income: \$5,032,001**
- **Clean Sweep Ambassador Program: \$1,310,446 (26%)**
(Sidewalk cleaning, landscaping and graffiti removal)
 - **Public Service Ambassador Program: \$995,418 (19.8%)**
 - **Administrative & Fundraising: \$484,104 (9.6%)**
 - **Economic Development, Events, Marketing, Business Retention/ Recruitment, & Special Projects: \$2,242,033 (44.6%)**



Total Expenses: \$5,032,001

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