

Updates on 2022 Downtown Task Force Recommendations

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**Safety**

*We can improve the experience and perception of safety in our downtown. We support the Duluth Police Department and our community partners. We strive to be a dynamic, working neighborhood where all people feel welcome and safe and have their needs met. To achieve this, we recommend:*

- **Addition of a City prosecutor and prioritizing filling vacant police positions** – Adding a prosecutor will provide quicker response time in the criminal justice process while also supporting more intentional outcomes and increased focus on the challenges we are facing. Duluth is not immune to the national trend of low numbers of applicants for police positions. The City of Duluth and Duluth Police Department continue to prioritize filling vacant police positions – positions are fully funded and the department is working to quickly hire and train new officers.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth – City Attorney’s Office and Police Department
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Add prosecutor (completed – August, 2022)  Continued focus on returning police staffing levels to peak numbers
Progress (Jan 2023)	Completed.

- **Increasing the focus on chronic offenders and hold them accountable** - Increased communication and collaboration between key partners working with chronic offenders downtown. This includes follow up on individuals who create high levels of calls for service and tracking the court process. It also involves updates on change in supervision, custody, treatment or housing status. Sharing information, as legally allowable and appropriate, can have a positive effect on readiness and increased coordination between impacted partners and neighbors. The Sixth Judicial District Mental Health Summit Team, through Judge Tarnowski’s leadership, is expanding Mental Health Court to reach more individuals. This will provide court, treatment and supervision focus on high risk/high need individuals. We welcome and support these services and accountability and see it as a significant move by our criminal justice partners to address chronic offenders who threaten the safety of our downtown.

Responsible partners:	City Attorney’s office, County Attorney’s office, Courts, Police, St. Louis County Health and Human Services
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Support expanded mental health court
Progress (Jan 2023)	Recovery Alliance Duluth (RAD) funding has been approved. Substance Use Response Team (SURT) is fully engaged. Court-led Mental Health initiative is underway. The City Attorney’s office will continue communication and support the Court’s initiative.
Progress (April 2023)	Multi-agency group is meeting regularly to develop and launch Behavioral Health Court (BHC).

- **Continuing the embedded outreach worker within the Downtown Duluth organization** - With the Clean and Safe team often on the front end of skywalk and other pedestrian traffic flow areas, this position, funded as a three-year pilot program, is critical to making real-time connection to social supports and services for people who need them.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Maintain position through continued funding and support
Progress (Jan 2023)	Completed.

- **Prioritizing and enhancing mental health response** – Find financial path to continue and enhance community mental health response. Prioritize connections between St. Louis County, the City of Duluth, the Duluth Police Department Core Unit, Clean & Safe Team outreach worker and the Community Crisis Response team to coordinate and appropriately staff mental health response. This includes advocating for funding of an additional social worker with the Duluth Police Department’s CORE team to focus on the downtown. The Mental Health Court expansion will be a welcome partner and resource in these efforts as well.

Responsible partners:	Duluth Police Department, St. Louis County Health and Human Services, Downtown Duluth, Community Crisis Response Team
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Pursue and support completion of the Clarity Project  Continue support of existing mental health response funding and look for opportunities to extend short term funding and expand existing funding
Progress (Jan 2023)	Fire Chief Shawn Krizaj is the City’s point person for overall coordination with the Community Crisis Response team.  The Duluth Public Library is coordinating with in-house security and Downtown Duluth Outreach workers on a daily basis.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing. The Duluth Police Department has started partnering with probation, and has formed a new Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) to provide more services and better collaboration between (CORE) and (SURT).

- **Lobbying for an increase in chemical and mental health services and beds in the state of Minnesota** – We need services available for people in real time and believe that this should be a legislative priority for the City and the community.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, St. Louis County, Downtown Duluth, Duluth Chamber, BOMA
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Establish advocacy group to lead coordinated lobbying from stakeholders
Progress (Jan 2023)	City working with its lobbyist to track, advance and advocate.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is ongoing.

- **Clarifying panhandling expectations** –Panhandling (asking for money verbally and / or with a sign while on public right of way) is a protected freedom of speech as declared by the United States Supreme Court, not local leaders. Illegal behavior such as aggressive panhandling, blocking sidewalks, occupying space under private owner control, etc. is not tolerated and will be enforced.

Responsible partners:	City Attorney’s office, County Attorney’s office, Courts, Police
Timeline:	Immediate
Action items:	Schedule a “know your rights” training event for the public
Progress (Jan 2023)	Downtown Duluth is organizing and planning upcoming event.
Progress (April 2023)	Completed and ongoing. Downtown Duluth led and hosted the “Resources, Responsibilities and Rights” training 3/16/23 along with City staff and outside counsel. Additional training events are being discussed.

- **Strengthening coordination to address encampments** – MnDOT, St. Louis County, the City of Duluth, and non-profit partners all work to address public encampments – continued coordination will be crucial for consistent, safe response. The City of Duluth does not support encampments on public property and will move people off City land.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, St. Louis County Health and Human Services, CHUM, Affordable Housing Coalition
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item	Mayor Larson to advocate to Governor’s office for lower risk tolerance for camping on MN DOT land and request urgent action for removal (complete)  Training for stakeholders on how to address issues
Progress (Jan 2023)	The City’s multi-departmental Unsheltered Strategy Team meets regularly. The warming center is open, with additional funding from the City. “Safe Bay” is happening, though yet to launch. Authorized living zones have yet to launch but have been facilitated through land use changes and funding, pending non-governmental entities finding space. Governor’s office provided clear direction to Mn DOT and encampments were addressed. City and county continue to work together as appropriate.
Progress (April 2023)	Continuing and preparing for summer season. Safe Bay launched April 17 <sup>th</sup> 2023, and is operating daily at the Damiano Center.

- **Quarterly public safety meetings** – Downtown captains and stakeholders convened by Downtown Duluth with the Police Chief, Mayor, St Louis County, District Councilor and District Commissioner and others on the specific topic of public safety. We need to keep the conversation and contact with one another going in an intentional and planned way.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth
Timeline:	Immediate and ongoing
Action item:	Schedule quarterly meetings, with specific subjects / training topics
Progress (Jan 2023)	Downtown Duluth is organizing and planning upcoming meetings.
Progress (April 2023)	Completed and ongoing. Downtown Duluth has already hosted two trainings this year, and continues to surpass the goal of one training quarterly. Additional trainings are being planned and scheduled. Completed trainings include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2/05/23 “Working together on Creating a Safer Downtown with Police Chief Mike Ceynowa”</li> <li>• 3/16/23 “Resources, Responsibilities and Rights”</li> </ul>

- **Sharing of police strategies for the downtown** – Regular updates from police and partners on ideas, strategies, and plans for increasing the perception and experience of downtown safety with the community.

Responsible partners:	Police
Timeline:	Immediate (completed) and ongoing
Action item:	Request that the Duluth Police Department formulate and summarize strategies, then share with downtown stakeholders  Summarize changes to parking ramp security  Provide update on drug task force work and community role
Progress (Jan 2023)	Duluth Police Department is working with Downtown Duluth on upcoming meetings.
Progress (April 2023)	Completed and on-going. Duluth Police Department formulated and summarized strategies, and presented to stakeholders at “Working together on Creating a Safer Downtown with Police Chief Mike Ceynowa” 2/05/23. New ramp security team is in place.

- **Providing downtown stakeholders with clear expectations of community rights/roles** – Because of the varying jurisdictions and federal, state and local laws involved in addressing the most complex issues, providing downtown stakeholders with an understanding of the roles different community organizations play and guidance for how to address individual issues and emergency contact information is crucial to a coordinated response.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, City of Duluth, Saint Louis County, Duluth Police Department, St. Louis County Health and Human Services, Community Crisis Response, Clean and Safe Team
Timeline:	Immediate and ongoing
Action item:	Creation of safety card of easy to read and reference information
Progress (Jan 2023)	Completed - Safety Cards have been created and distributed.

- **Lighting dark areas, alleys, and facades and better identify problem areas within the downtown** – In areas where there aren't many windows to light and activate, encourage and assist property owners in adding additional secondary lighting so it feels less dark and cold. Anticipate where the dark corners and lighting might exist when the ground floor activation program (more information in the Activation section) launches and pre-emptively light while simultaneously investing in ground floor improvements.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Michelle Reeves
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Connect property and business owners with financial and professional resources
Progress (Jan 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing. Partners being identified and project is moving forward.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing. The initial ten businesses have been selected, with improvements anticipated to be completed by June.

- **Increased criminal justice system focus on downtown** – We see the future of our downtown neighborhood as critically in need of connected, focused, collaborative, and strong work involving our justice partners, community partners, and each of us as well. Our justice partners - including DPD, the City Attorney, the County Attorney, Courts, Probation, the Sheriff, and the Jail - are acutely aware of the issues and challenges and are meeting together and working to deliver increased focus and resources. Mental Health Court expansion will be a critical component to help going forward.

Responsible partners:	City Attorney's office, County Attorney's office, Courts, Police
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	City Attorney and Police Chief (or designees) to engage with Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee
Progress (Jan 2023)	Completed and ongoing.
Progress (April 2023)	Completed and ongoing. DPD and City Attorney's office continue to focus on prioritizing issues downtown, along with partnering with other stakeholders to support their work.

- **Residential strategy to intervene for high-risk and high-need community members** – Identification, with criminal justice and nonprofit partners, of the most high-risk and high-need people affecting the downtown neighborhood to specifically examine the possibilities for a group residential strategy to support and stabilize them.

Responsible partners:	City Attorney’s office, County Attorney’s office, Courts, Police, St. Louis County Health and Human Services, CHUM, Stepping on Up, Clarity, HRA, Center City
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	Mayor to convene potential partners to strategize for long term
Progress (Jan 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing. CHUM received \$2M earmark for expanded facility needs.
Progress (April 2023)	City continues to work with Stepping On Up partners to advance long term housing strategies. Mayor continues to engage with stakeholders.

- **Addressing critical housing needs** – Support for Stepping On Up, CHUM, and other partner organizations as they work to build an infrastructure that addresses our current housing shortage, including housing people living with mental illness and substance use disorder. This work is critically important and essential for people who are struggling and for our downtown neighborhood.

Responsible partners:	CHUM, Stepping On Up, Affordable Housing Coalition, City of Duluth, St. Louis County, State of Minnesota, Federal partners
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	Pursue housing development with focus on supportive housing  Encourage and support innovation in housing development to speed process  Utilize existing investments to subsidize housing development, including City ARP and Affordable Housing Trust Fund contributions
Progress (Jan 2023)	Underway and ongoing. Investments include \$19m in ARP funding for Affordable Housing, \$16m in affordable housing trust funds. The CHUM \$2M earmark and the possibility of \$1.4b from state (Governor’s proposed budget for housing) will be additional resources.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing.

## Activation

We believe that an active downtown is a vibrant and safe downtown. Our goal should be a downtown that feels active and alive at least 18 hours a day. To achieve this we recommend:

- **Increased focus on intentional design** – The design and use of buildings, sidewalks, streets, and other public infrastructure has a significant influence on whether people are drawn to downtown and whether people feel safe and welcome here. Several downtown partners contracted with Michele Reeves of [Civilis Consultants](#). She has worked at Minnesota Surplus to provide a redesign model for activation and provided training and tools to business and property owners for downtown revitalization. She is continuing to provide resources and expertise. Working with her to create an environment downtown that people are drawn to and want to spend time in is a win for everyone.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Economic Development Authority, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Continue to contract with Civilis and connect property and business owners with financial and professional resources to improve the downtown design environment
Progress (Jan 2023)	Downtown Duluth brought Michele Reeves in December for initial assessment, meetings, walking tour, training on merchandising, lighting, retail.
Progress (April 2023)	Urban Strategist Michele Reeves is returning in May for workshops devoted to property owners. She will focus on revitalization efforts and tenant recruitment. Additionally, with her guidance, the Storefront Window and Lighting Grant program has been created.

- **Establishing lighting and storefront improvement incentive program for business and property owners**  
Following the window and storefront best practices outlined by Civilis Consultants, establish a program to add building/sconce/entry lighting and storefront improvements to make downtown simultaneously more visually interesting, more inviting, and less hospitable for illicit activity.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Economic Development Authority, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Create and fund an ongoing incentive program and recruit and deploy a local team of activation partners
Progress (Jan 2023)	Underway and ongoing. 1200 Fund invested \$60,000 and the Entrepreneur Fund will administer \$2,500 individual grants.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing. First ten businesses have been selected, and improvements are anticipated to be completed by June.



- **Establishing a downtown activation grant fund** - Growing the scope and number of events that take place in downtown will encourage positive perceptions of the neighborhood and introduce downtown businesses to new customers. The fund will support activation initiatives that encourage participants to interact with downtown public spaces and/or businesses.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, Duluth Economic Development Authority, foundation partners, corporate partners, Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Establish funding partners and process for grant selection
Progress (Jan 2023)	Permitting needs to be addressed to eliminate barriers that exist for events. Review of event permitting underway.
Progress (April 2023)	Suggested permitting ordinance changes sent to key event partners for their review.

- **Identifying important times of movement and circulation in the downtown** – Clean and Safe Team and public safety staff can better time their checks on regular problem areas.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, Clean and Safe Team, Police
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Build strategies around increased presence at key times
Progress (Jan 2023)	Chief Ceynowa is leading work, to improve coordination and connection between DPD and Clean and Safe Team.
Progress (April 2023)	Underway and continuing.

- **Increasing communication and establish a neighborhood watch program using block captains, employers, and nonprofit partners** - Maintain communication among the downtown community using the block captain strategy. Block Captains are an efficient way to share information quickly, build social contact and goodwill among neighbors. Determine whether a block-by-block security strategy can be funded, built, or expanded to augment Clean and Safe and DPD. Focus on helping each other. Additional opportunities include utilization of walking groups, history tours, and exercise groups on a consistent schedule to enjoy and activate downtown together.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, City of Duluth Parks & Recreation
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Downtown Duluth identify and coordinate block captains, set regular meetings
Progress (Jan 2023)	Downtown Duluth is leading this effort. Progress is underway.
Progress (April 2023)	An Adhoc committee is being created to oversee this initiative. Downtown Duluth is targeting the month of June for securing and bringing together block captains.

## Vision

As we navigate a global pandemic and multi-year road construction, we believe that it is important to chart a clear, cohesive direction for our downtown. Downtown is the economic engine of the community. Investment in and the long-term success of the downtown is an investment in the success of the entire city. To achieve this, we recommend:

- **Aggressively target vacant buildings, blight, and graffiti within downtown** – Prioritize resolution of blighted privately-owned properties (ex. Shopper’s Ramp, additional downtown ramp) and force or take measures to remediate and rehabilitate them. Use regulatory tools to address persistent graffiti and vacant buildings contributing to downtown blight.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Utilize Clean and Safe Team graffiti removal service where appropriate  Explore ordinance-based solutions to blight issues  Encourage and assist owners and others in using art, lighting and activation to reduce graffiti  Finalize plans for US Bank ramp and Shopper’s ramp demolitions. City of Duluth pursue financial assistance of Shopper’s ramp demolition
Progress (Jan 2023)	Significant City staff work going into these action items.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing.

- **Assessing the skywalk system** - Our downtown is essentially two walking systems: the one outside and the one inside. We do not, with current and proposed work and building usage habits, have enough people and activity to vibrantly support both. Explore what can be done differently.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, City of Duluth, Duluth Chamber of Commerce, City Attorney’s Office, Duluth Economic Development Authority
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Mayor to convene discussion with property owners, BOMA, Downtown Duluth
Progress (Jan 2023)	Downtown Duluth working with Michele Reeves to bring downtown stakeholders and the City together to begin process.
Progress (April 2023)	Meeting scheduled for early May to begin assessing skywalk system.

- **Completing and implementing a new Downtown Plan** - Everything about how people use their downtown has changed in the past few years. The intersection of challenges and variables we currently experience make it an important time to develop a strong, collaborative vision with the downtown community.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, City of Duluth
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	Mayor and Downtown Duluth to convene stakeholders
Progress (Jan 2023)	Ongoing discussions underway to establish a plan.
Progress (April 2023)	This effort is continuing and ongoing.

- **Commissioning a new Housing Study for our downtown** – There are significant housing investments happening – since 2019, there have been 236 new units added in downtown, with 196 more under construction. Additionally, 150 units have been remodeled and preserved, with an additional 510 units possible through new development. Understanding the opportunities and needs in downtown is crucial for the future. The most recent housing study, completed in 2020, does not reflect the change in work habits and office space needs within our downtown. Downtown Duluth can become a housing location of choice for people in all income classes with thoughtful and creative development opportunities.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, City of Duluth
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	Mayor and Downtown Duluth to convene stakeholders
Progress (Jan 2023)	Zimmerman/Volk Associates have been contracted to do this work.
Progress (April 2023)	Ongoing, with study results coming, likely in early summer.

- **Evaluating the true need for parking** - Parking needs have shifted through the emergent sharing economy. Conducting an informed and educated evaluation of needs is critical, especially with expected development along the East First Street corridor. This should be evaluated as part of the Housing Study.

Responsible partners:	Downtown Duluth, BOMA, City of Duluth
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	City of Duluth work with consultant to better understand parking demand
Progress (Jan 2023)	Evaluation pending housing study.
Progress (April 2023)	Evaluation pending outcome of the housing study.

## Investment

*We believe that downtown Duluth is a good economic bet. Ensuring that all systems are working in concert with one another and that the unnecessary barriers for development are identified and removed is an essential step in making sure we are laying a clear path for continued investment in our downtown. To that end we recommend:*

- **Continuing to prioritize economic and business development** – Natural beauty and amenities, a diverse local economy, and an adventurous and entrepreneurial spirit all converge in downtown Duluth to bring unparalleled opportunity. Further, there is palpable energy around the new leaders and entrepreneurs our city has recently welcomed into the downtown community. Coordinated and aggressive economic development is key to the future of downtown and must be prioritized – both to capitalize on the opportunities and to address the challenges. The City of Duluth should continue to prioritize work to streamline processes to attract and encourage business development downtown. The City of Duluth and economic development partners should regularly convene to collaborate, coordinate, and communicate on current and future economic development opportunities.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, Duluth Chamber, Downtown Duluth, APEX, St. Louis County, BOMA, Duluth Economic Development Authority
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Economic development audit (already begun)  Targeting areas for redevelopment  Establish consistent opportunities for connection and coordination  Continued work with Civilis or another urban revitalization consultant to ensure the decisions and suggestions being made are consistent with best practices
Progress (Jan 2023)	Economic development audit underway. City and APEX strengthening partnership. Need more targeting of economic development areas.
Progress (April 2023)	Economic development audit process wrapping up and recommendations forthcoming.

- **Addressing ongoing permitting concerns** – Review City permitting processes to clarify requirements and identify reasons behind them. Seek ways to streamline permitting processes and publish clear expected timelines and permitting flow. Consideration of Pilot program to implement innovative solutions to streamlined processes.
  - Street closure for special events
  - Sidewalk permits
  - Busking
  - Temporary alcohol & food service permits as it relates to outdoor, physical adjacency
  - Permanent alcohol & food service permits as it relates to outdoor, physical adjacency
  - Activation zones and pop ups

Responsible partners:	Property owners, City of Duluth, Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Immediate
Action item:	Economic development audit (already begun)
Progress (Jan 2023)	Economic development audit underway.
Progress (April 2023)	Economic development audit process wrapping up and recommendations forthcoming.

- **Prioritizing housing development at all levels** – Find ways to change processes to allow for speed to market, predictability, and future investment. Explore transitioning vacant commercial spaces into re-use as residential spaces. Incentivize downtown housing development and continue to support and prepare for the significant downtown housing under construction and development.

Responsible partners:	City of Duluth, Duluth Economic Development Authority, Downtown Duluth, BOMA, Duluth Chamber
Timeline:	Ongoing
Action item:	Inventory of vacant office space or buildings  Survey of Duluth employers for housing needs  Utilize existing investments to subsidize housing development, including City ARP and Affordable Housing Trust Fund contributions
Progress (Jan 2023)	Underway and ongoing. APEX providing important convening role.
Progress (April 2023)	City continues to prioritize substantial number of impactful potential housing development projects, along with continued and ongoing partnerships with key stakeholders.