

# IOWA CITY DOWNTOWN DISTRICT MISSION REPORT

2022-2023  
THE YEAR OF  
THE RABBIT



Dear Downtown Stakeholder,

This 2023 Mission Report shares information and service points that indicate a continuing strong economic recovery and notable shifts in the downtown inventory of uses. It provides key milestones of the Iowa City Downtown District organization.

The business and cultural environment, coupled with bold Downtown District initiatives, continues to attract off the charts visitation (8.1M visitors). Above and beyond, the ICDD team successfully implemented two important new initiatives this past year: (1) the new Local Rewards system that engages and connects customers with our local retailers and (2) Winter Night Lights, a self-guided lighting and art installation that encouraged foot traffic in February's colder, darker nights. 2023 will be a year to remember thanks to International artist Amanda Parer's giant inflatable rabbits, along with local artist Ali Hval's "Doodle Trees" adorning the downtown landscape.

We are especially thankful this year for the increase in the levy rate of our Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) by 50 cents; this increase will help us keep our foot on the gas and ensure that the recovery of the downtown economy has full ICDD support. We will continue to champion our "Welcome, Shape, and Draw" initiatives that have resulted in high vibrancy and low vacancy downtown.

2023 also marks a year of leadership change. We have made great strides over the past decade under the current leadership (ICDD Board President Charlie Nusser, Executive Director Nancy Bird, the ICDD Board, and ICDD staff). Now is an opportune and healthy time to invite new leadership with a fresh voice and inspiration to the organization's forefront to keep the momentum going. With that — welcome Betsy Potter, the ICDD's new Executive Director, and Wendy Zimmerman, new Board President. We are excited to see where you'll take us!



Sincerely,  
Nancy Bird,  
Executive Director

Charlie Nusser,  
President of the Board of Directors  
Iowa City Downtown District

8.1M  
↑ 8% INCREASE  
TOTAL VISITS

856,500  
UNIQUE VISITORS

6.32M  
↑ 22% INCREASE  
PEOPLE VISITED MORE THAN 12 TIMES

1.78M  
PEOPLE VISITED  
UP TO 12 TIMES

LOYALTY INCREASES! AVG. STAY:

186 MINUTES

DATA IS AVERAGED BETWEEN MAY 1, 2022 TO MAY 1, 2023

25% VISITS  
AFTER 10PM

75% VISITS  
BETWEEN  
10AM-10PM



## BOLD IN 2022-2023

- Funding secured for the Iowa Private Alley Repavement Project
- Environmental night audit for Downtown safety
- New alley lighting in partnership with UI Harm Reduction Coalition
- Intrude public art installation (the rabbits!)
- Winter Night Lights (February self-guided event)
- Local Rewards loyalty program launch
- Downtown Cultural & Entertainment District designation
- Northside Outside — opening of N. Linn Street to public
- Full Blast mural by Jamie Boling
- Raygun mural by Drew Etienne
- CoSign+ — signage grant program
- 20+ district events & First Round events
- Holiday campaign and retail pop up shops





# DOWNTOWN IOWA CITY

WELCOME TO OUR  
Downtown

**DOWNTOWN.**  
LIGHTS ON BUILDINGS  
& EVERYTHING THAT  
MAKES YOU  
WONDER.  
STEPHEN CHBOSKY

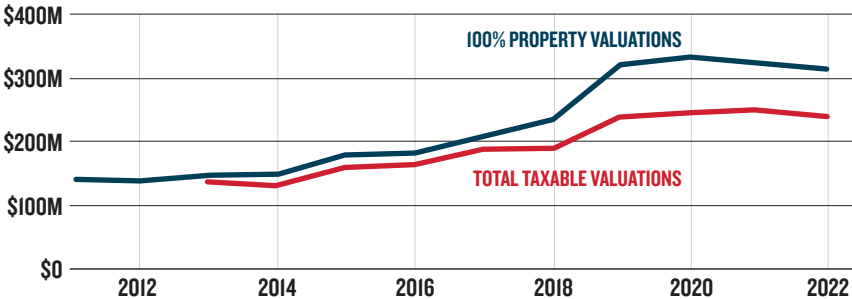
quacity.COM

Be  
**DOWN**

Downtown Iowa

downtown

## PROPERTY VALUATION TREND



## RANK VISITATION: NUMBER OF VISITATION 2022–2023 (MAY TO MAY)

13.4M	UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
8.1M	DOWNTOWN IOWA CITY
7.4M	CORAL RIDGE MALL
4.2M	IOWA RIVER LANDING
1.0M	NEWBO
746.4K	CZECH VILLAGE
476.7K	BIG GROVE BREWERY



HIGHEST NUMBER OF VISITORS IN 2022

68,200

19% INCREASE

SEPTEMBER 10: IOWA VS IOWA STATE FOOTBALL GAME

## GIFT CARDS



\$174,734

WORTH OF DOWNTOWN GIFT CARDS WERE SOLD IN 2022

72% RATE OF REDEMPTION

# INVENTORY SHIFTS 2013–2023

ICDD efforts to retain existing independent stores, restaurants, and services as the impacts of remote working and online shopping to the retail sector expedited by the COVID pandemic have largely been successful. 2023 boasts record low vacancy rates and several industry clusters in the creative and health sectors have strengthened. With this change, a noticeable shift in the mix of uses has occurred over time.

The ICDD inventory suggests there are fewer entities (roughly 300 businesses and nonprofits) than a decade ago (335) but/and today's tenants are using more of the total downtown space (for employees or other uses) and drive the current low vacancy rate of 3%.



2013	333	2023	294
160	PROFESSIONAL & OTHER SERVICES	134	
106	RETAIL: FOOD & BEVERAGE	105	
67	RETAIL: SOFT GOODS & APPAREL	55	

## SERVICES

Of 134 entities in the this category, the following sectors have strengthened Downtown over the last decade:

- 16 Architectural & engineering and creative services
- 11 Banks and financial services
- 30 Health & beauty and health services
- 21 Law firms
- 15 Arts & culture
- 8 Hotels and bed & breakfasts
- 3 Schools: Tamarack Elementary, ICON Performing Arts High School, University of Iowa facilities

Some offices in the general downtown area, including the University of Iowa, have employees now working remotely and need less physical space. This has impacted the number of employees that typically eat out at restaurants over the lunch hour. In other services, however, the physical plant remains important for innovation and collaboration. The A&E / creative service firms and arts & culture have quadrupled the growth in leased space downtown over the past decade.

## RETAIL: FOOD & BEVERAGE

The overall number of restaurants, bars, grocery and other food and beverage outlets has remained steady at 105 businesses. Several major redevelopments, such as the Tailwind Group redevelopment of the historic structures that housed the old Union Bar, have made way for improvements to the overall quality of restaurants, bars, and the introduction of ReUnion Brewery. Similarly, there has been a push by investors to introduce more chef-driven concepts. The quality of the offerings have changed for the better.



## RETAIL: SOFT GOODS & APPAREL

The merchandise mix of first floor tenants has shifted over the last decade resulting in a decrease in the number of soft goods retailers to 55 from 67 in 2013. The maturity of the current store mix, however, has demonstrated their resilience by surviving through major disruptions to the retail market, including floods, the pandemic, area competition, and the growth of Amazon. The introduction of Target was also a great win for downtown even though two commercial bays were combined to make the store work.

The ICDD has supported these businesses as a cornerstone to the entire balance of downtown with a retail service package that rivals any shopping district in the country. Preserving spaces that do not have ventilation hoods for commercial kitchens through grant incentives and recruitment have also kept this cluster an independent shopping destination.

Fortunately, demand from soft good retailers looking for space downtown is on the uptick – the challenge is finding available retail space with the current low vacancy.

THE CURRENT VACANCY RATE IS 3%



## THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**President:** Charlie Nusser, Hands Jewelers

**President-Elect:** Wendy Zimmermann, Get Fresh Cafe

**Treasurer:** Greg Turner, Midwest *One* Bank

**Secretary:** Tony Branch, United Action for Youth

**Past President:** Nick Lindsley, Neumann Monson Architects

Maka Pilcher Hayek, Hayek, Moreland, Smith & Bergus LLP

Ding Ding, Teamo Tea

David Kieft, University of Iowa

Nina Lohman, I.C. Downtown Arts Alliance, *Brink* Literary Magazine

Jason Paulios, Iowa City Public Library

Jigna Jani, AKAR

Susan Felker, Prairie Kitchen Store

Diego Lasansky, Lasansky Gallery

Josh Immerfall, Donnelly's Pub

Jeet Saini, Om Gifts

## EX-OFFICIO

Rachel Kilburg, City of Iowa City

Kim Casco, Iowa City Area Business Partnership

Austin Korn, Iowa City Area Development Group

Monica Nieves, Think Iowa City

Abby Restko, Summer of the Arts

Keaton Zeimet, UI Student Government

Nancy Bird, Iowa City Downtown District

Chastity Dillard, Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:

University of Iowa

City of Iowa City

Better Together 2030

Iowa City Area Business Partnership

Iowa City Area Development Group

Think Iowa City

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:

Midwest *One* Bank

GreenState Credit Union

Hills Bank

Collins Community Credit Union

Exile Brewing Company

FilmScene

FlyCID

Graduate Iowa City

Hilton Garden Inn

iBev

ImOn Communications

John's Grocery

KZIA

Martin Construction

MidAmerican Energy

Neumann Monson Architects

OPN Architects

Pagliai's Pizza

Performance Food Service

Phelan Tucker Law LLP

Phoebe Martin, Realtor

RDG Planning & Design

ReUnion Brewery

The Highlander Hotel

The Tuesday Agency

Thompson & Co. Salon

Blank and McCune

Underground Printing

University of Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition

University of Iowa Campus Activities Board

## THANK YOU TO OUR STAFF:

Nancy Bird, Executive Director

Betsy Potter, Director of Creative Services

Christopher Hunter, Director of Special Events

Joe Reilly, Nighttime Mayor

Julie Watkins, Events and Admin Coordinator



# UP NEXT

## CLEANER

The October 2022 property owner survey indicated there was clear support for additional cleaning services. While the ICDD has well-coordinated power washing services to enhance the City's traditional street cleaning and garbage services, there remains opportunities for improvement. In the upcoming year, the ICDD will increase clean services to target bio-waste cleanup (removal of feces, urine, vomit, and food spills), improve cleanliness and actively monitor the alleys for illegal dumping, provide support to property owners for graffiti, and manage outdoor furniture, lighting and special projects.

## CONTINUED FOCUS ON HEALTHY NIGHTLIFE

In January 2023, a committee of UI students, ICDD staff, and the Iowa City Police Department conducted an "environmental scan" of the Downtown area. Since then, the ICDD has begun working with property owners to better secure doors and rooftops, add lighting, or utilize public art interventions to enhance late night safety. The ICDD intends to prevent mischief and/or harm by matching investment to the inventory of areas that need support and ensure that all of downtown meets Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

## ENHANCED MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

New retail marketing endeavors can be expected in the upcoming year as the ICDD continues to invest in a new Local Rewards loyalty program specifically designed for downtown businesses. This is a service whereby local businesses pay a small fee to participate in and customer databases are leveraged to enhance their reach and promote rewards, offerings and deals to a targeted, loyal clientele. This and other marketing campaigns help us get back to our core services that were disrupted by the 2020 pandemic.

## CULTURAL & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT COLLABORATIONS

On the heels of the newly designated Downtown Cultural & Entertainment District by the State of Iowa in 2022, a new cultural collaborative has been born. Directors from over 30 downtown cultural and entertainment venues (such as the Englert Theatre, Riverside Theatre, Public Space One, Film Scene, etc) and University of Iowa Performing Arts (including Hancher, the Voxman School of Music, the Stanley Arts Museum, etc.) are working in unison to promote the City's vibrant cultural core in the coming year. The campaign and new collaborations will roll out summer / fall 2023.

## ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVED TRANSIT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOWNTOWN WITH BETTER TOGETHER 2030

Better Together 2030 is ramping up regional initiatives to improve Johnson County's resiliency and livability. One of the primary pillars of their work focuses on a well-connected mobile region. Look for the ICDD to play a role in advocating for improved mass transit options for employees to easily access downtown. Goals include improving the regional bus hub and adding more and timelier routes to downtown.



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