



# A Downtown Improvement District For A Safer and Cleaner Downtown Saint Paul

## What are DIDs?

A Downtown Improvement District (or DID, also known as a Special Service District by MN state law) provides improvements and activities – such as sidewalk cleaning, trash collections, graffiti removal, public realm safety and security, marketing, and more – to a commercial district. Its purpose is to supplement, not replace, government services. Downtown Improvement Districts have proven to dramatically improve public safety and security, enhance the upkeep and maintenance of the public realm, attract new businesses and help retain existing ones, increase property values, and stimulate overall community vitality. Plus, DIDs provide a mechanism for property owners and merchants to work collaboratively for their mutual benefit. Why are there thousands of these districts nationwide? Because they work.

## Why are DIDs so important, especially now?

Before COVID-19 city services around safety, cleanliness, and overall presentation were not meeting the needs of downtown Saint Paul. As with all cities across the country, the economic shut down to curb the virus has disrupted our downtowns. Now more than ever, we need to come together and work to save our downtown, our businesses, and our economy. A DID would deliver needed programs and services operating above and beyond what the city can provide. DIDs are based on a benefit assessment model whereby commercial property owners in a given area agree to self-assess dollars which are then pooled and used for the enhanced services in that area. **These revenues are not managed by the city, but by the property owners themselves.** The safety and security aspects of the Saint Paul DID program are especially relevant given the public safety needs and the economic situation we will face in the coming year. In response to the financial uncertainty of our current environment a two-year phased approach to implementation is planned. Phasing in programming over two years will allow our downtown community to benefit immediately from the services of a Fusion Center in year one, and add safety ambassador capacity in year two.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Of the sixty-five largest cities in the nation, Saint Paul at the present time is the only city that does not have an improvement district in their downtown. Duluth, Minneapolis, and Rochester all have successful districts and the vitality of those communities is attributable in large part to those organizations.

## WHAT YOUR ASSESSMENT WILL PROVIDE TO DOWNTOWN

In response to the effects of COVID-19 implementation of a Saint Paul DID will be phased in over two years.

Your money, leveraged with that of other commercial property owners, as well as voluntary contributions from the City, County, and other tax exempt property owners will provide:

### FUSION CENTER

- Included in first year budget
- Supports coordinated communications between:
  - Downtown Street Outreach Services
  - Private Building Security Teams
  - Saint Paul Police Department
  - Improvement District Ambassadors

### SAFETY PROGRAMS

- Limited first year
- Improvement District ambassadors on foot and bike patrols provide extra eyes and ears on the street to improve safety outcomes and perceptions.

### CLEANING

- Limited first year
- Sidewalk & gutter sweeping
- Sidewalk pressure washing
- Graffiti removal
- Trash removal
- Public space activations

 **IT'S TIME TO SIGN YOUR PETITION**

# DID FAQs

## WHAT IS A DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT?

A downtown improvement district (or DID, also known as a Special Service District by MN state law) is a private organization that is operated to promote business district revitalization and management. Funding comes primarily from charges determined by the organization's Board of Directors that are then assessed by the City and Ramsey County on a fiscal-agent basis TO eligible commercial properties within defined boundaries through the special assessment line of property tax invoices. Voluntary contributions can also be accepted by the organization from properties exempt from assessment, including government, certain non-profit, and residential parcels. The funds are used to provide services for the mutual benefit of the properties being assessed, such as:

- Creating a cleaner, safer and more attractive business district
- Helping to increase property values, sales and occupancies
- Providing non-bureaucratic and innovative management
- Promoting a distinct identity or brand for a business district
- Creating a unified voice to elevate a business district's influence
- Ensuring a stable and predictable funding base
- Responding quickly to market changes and community needs
- Leveraging additional improvement resources
- Maximizing accountability to stakeholders that pay

## ISN'T THIS SOMETHING THE CITY SHOULD BE DOING?

No. A DID is intended to provide an enhanced range of services within the designated district that the City is not financially able or professionally staffed to provide, including sidewalk sweeping and pressure washing, landscaping, signage, graffiti-removal, placing trained ambassadors in the field, and other desired services. DIDs throughout the country have been created because the private sector recognizes that the public sector cannot deliver the level of service on an affordable basis that private property and business owners demand. DIDs can provide quality, impactful services squarely in the control of private property and business owners already adept at leveraging investment into results. A DID would not relieve the City of its basic responsibilities for which property taxes are paid and would in fact provide a means for ensuring that the City actually performs its responsibilities.

## WOULD A DID MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE CITY TO REDUCE THEIR COMMITMENT WITHIN THE DISTRICT?

No. The formation of a DID would be conditional on a commitment from the City of Saint Paul to maintain its current levels of service within a potential downtown improvement district.

## OUR PROPERTY ALREADY PERFORMS SOME OF THE DID SERVICES, WOULD WE BE PAYING TWICE?

No. The overall image of downtown Saint Paul suffers from inconsistent standards of management. Without a method to provide consistent services this contrast will continue to be a detriment to the downtown economy and its ability to retain and attract employers and employees. A DID would aim to provide services that create a consistent high-quality user experience throughout downtown. Many properties within DIDs that perform a high level of maintenance for their property would still be able to find efficiencies in coordinating their work with that of a DID.

## WHO CONTROLS THE FUNDS A DID RECEIVES?

DIDs are business led and business managed. They are governed and directed by a Board of Directors and operating committees comprised of commercial property owners, property managers, employers and private sector stakeholders. DIDs often utilize private sector contracting policies and require exemptions to City procurement and labor requirements.



# STREETS OF SUMMER

PROOF OF CONCEPT

## During the summer of 2019

the Saint Paul Downtown Alliance brought friendly staff, music and activities to the streets of downtown. Streets of Summer was a pilot safe and clean program that covered about four square blocks that helped explore a potential Downtown Improvement District for Saint Paul's city center. In addition to hiring the full-time Street Team staff, Streets of Summer included placemaking activations, music and social engagements, providing a multiplier effect for all the efforts and investments aimed at building a vibrant downtown. For these services continue we need a DID to fund and manage those projects going forward.



273  
Escort  
assists



1717  
Hospitality  
assists



177  
Program  
info



151  
Business  
Contacts



547  
Graffiti  
removed



382  
Garbage  
cans  
cleaned



144  
Block faces  
of weeds  
removed



5300+  
Gum spots  
removed



84  
Bags of  
trash  
collected



**Streets of Summer demonstrates the necessity of enacting a Downtown Improvement District**



53  
Musical  
performances



12  
Local  
artists  
featured  
in outdoor  
gallery



32  
Trash can  
mosaics  
installed



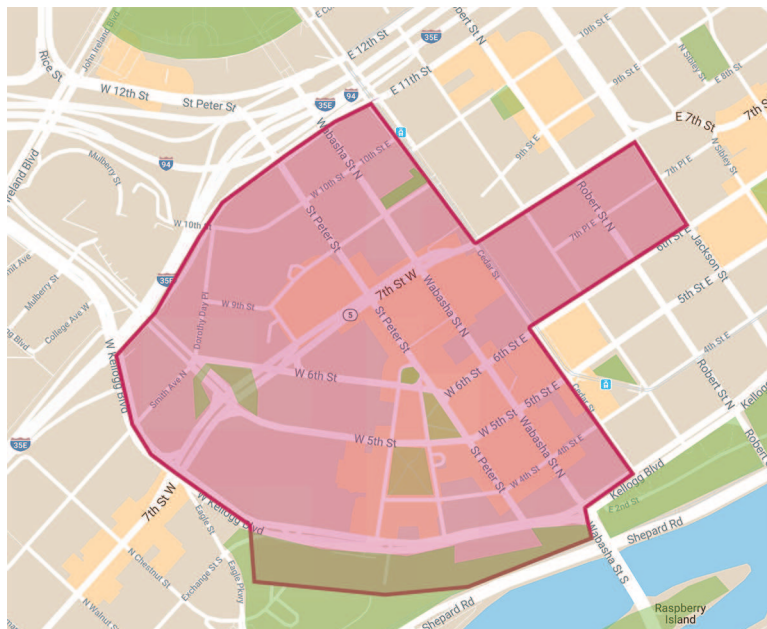
1  
Large  
scale art  
installation



# There's proof DIDs can make a difference

An outside study found the following:

- On average, DID-maintained streets were found to be cleaner than similar commercial streets located in the same area.
- DIDs have experienced declining crime prevalence similar to current citywide trends. In Philadelphia crime decreased by 40% within that DID.
- DIDs leverage significant community leadership to support their work from the City and others.
- DIDs have raised significant revenues from non-assessment sources like grants and donations.
- DIDs maintain lower commercial vacancy rates. In Red Bank, New Jersey the occupancy rate increased from 65% to 97%.
- During the 07/09 recession, DIDs retained more value in their properties, saw less reductions in shopping and business. In El Cajon, CA property values increased 20%.



Proposed Downtown Saint Paul boundaries

For questions or more information contact  
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**What to do to make downtown Saint Paul safe and clean**

**Sign and Return the Petition**