

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE WAYFINDING IN DOWNTOWN ST. PAUL

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES PROJECT

About the Partner

Capitol River District Council (CRC) is one of the seventeen district councils for the City of Saint Paul. CRC is a non-profit organization that seeks to engage residents, business owners, workers, and property owners in issues and projects that affect downtown Saint Paul and the Capitol area.



Project Description

CRC staff have received feedback from cultural institutions, businesses, visitors, and residents that there are several challenges to wayfinding in the downtown Saint Paul and Capitol area. First-time visitors to museums or entertainment venues sometimes struggle to figure out their route through the skyways or streets to their destination and zoning requirements that prevent exterior signage can make parts of Downtown seem confusing and desolate.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the community's goals included making Downtown more vibrant and its amenities more visible and accessible. This has become even more important as the pandemic has resulted in fewer visitors and many more people no longer working Downtown, which has caused many businesses to lose revenue or to permanently close.

Now, community goals include developing strategies for helping businesses recover and to help restore Downtown Saint Paul's reputation as a destination to visit for its entertainment venues, restaurants, museums, and proximity to the Mississippi River. As businesses start to re-open, and more workers go back to their Downtown offices, are the barriers to wayfinding making it more difficult for Downtown to recover from COVID-19?

This project seeks to identify opportunities to improve wayfinding in downtown Saint Paul and to identify how wayfinding can contribute to City goals that seek to:

- Activate streetscapes with active first floor uses, street trees, public art, outdoor commercial uses and other uses that contribute to a vibrant street life.
- Build and expand neighborhood economic and cultural assets and connect them to the Mississippi River.
- Make walking safe and comfortable
- Strengthen Downtown as a residential neighborhood that provides services and amenities to people of all ages.

Key Issues, Questions, and Ideas to Explore

1. Compare and contrast Saint Paul's historic building signage regulations to those of similar cities. What recommendations and case studies will assist the City in improving wayfinding?
2. What physical characteristics, traffic patterns, or other factors present opportunities or barriers to connecting people in downtown Saint Paul to the Mississippi Riverfront?
3. What do stakeholders of cultural institutions (museums, entertainment venues, etc.) say about wayfinding barriers and opportunities? What feedback are they receiving from patrons and what changes would they recommend?
4. As the residential population of Downtown Saint Paul is expected to grow, are there wayfinding issues identified by developers, particularly those that might discourage investment in Downtown projects?
5. Are there other opportunities for Saint Paul to create an improved wayfinding system that could improve the overall look and feel of Downtown and make it a more inviting place to spend time?

How Student Work Will Be Used to Build Community Resilience

- To help make Downtown Saint Paul more vibrant and connected and to improve economic resilience

Potential Community Partners or Stakeholders

- Saint Paul's Downtown Alliance
- Visit Saint Paul
- Building Owners and Managers Association
- Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
- City of St. Paul:
 - Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED)
 - Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI)
 - Heritage Preservation Commission
 - Department of Public Works

Existing Plans & Reports

- City of Saint Paul: Pedestrian Plan
- Greater Lowertown Master Plan
- River Balcony Master Plan
- Downtown Vitality Report
- Capitol City Bikeway
- 4th Street Market District
- Central Station Block Design Guidelines
- CRC Community Engagement

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