



IDA Award Category: Public Space

Project Title: **Downtown Topeka Redevelopment Project**

Organization Name: **Downtown Topeka, Inc. (DTI)**

Annual Operating Budget: **\$450,000**

Through private and public investments of the Downtown Topeka Redevelopment Project has enhanced the urban design, transportation methods, physical function, and economic viability of downtown Topeka.

Challenge:

Like many communities dealing with economic shifts, Topeka's downtown had fallen into despair with decaying infrastructure, empty buildings, no businesses open after 5pm, evenings and weekends void of people.

Solution:

In 2008 Heartland Visioning led a public forum asking... "What's next for Topeka?" thousands of Topeka citizens gathered over several months to prioritize their vision for the community. The number one priority was a revitalized downtown.

In December of 2012, the Topeka City Council approved \$5 million to improve the physical function and infrastructure on Kansas Avenue. These improvements included:

- New gas and water lines replaced 75-100-year-old lines,
- Replacement of electrical, storm sewers, curbs, sidewalks and mill overlay,
- Widened sidewalks for better walkability, and
- New landscape beds.

The citizens were pleased with the commitment but wanted more than just infrastructure changes. The City agreed but did not have additional dollars.

Downtown Topeka, Inc. established a committee to raise additional dollars to enhance the City's infrastructure project. Managed by DTI's 501(c)3 entity, The Downtown Topeka Foundation, a campaign called "Imagine Downtown" was created with a goal of \$1.8 million.

The goal was to create unique public spaces, highlight Topeka's history, restore community pride, encourage quality of place activity and establish confidence in the future of downtown Topeka for investors and future development.

Results:

\$4.2 million was raised from the private sector, businesses and individuals. Private sector enhancement started in 2016 and completed in 2017. Improvements in transportation methods included:

- Efforts that would improve and encourage downtown walkability
- Incorporated shared 24/7 Metro Bikeshare Services into downtown

Funding by top community businesses, individuals and organizations improving the urban design and economic vitality of Downtown Topeka included:

- Two mid-block lighted arches,
- Eight pocket parks,
- Two mid-block pavilions,
- Three public art installations
- Two fountains,
- Six Statues of famous Topeka leaders,
- Sixteen bronze medallions of four different designs with one on each corner,
- Fifteen state symbols designed in bronze along the avenue.

The capital improvements have led to major investments by private businesses and renewed energy to the downtown, including:

- The Cyrus Hotel a 107-room boutique hotel to be completed in November of 2018,
- Increased loft development and living
- New restaurants and new retail space
- Increased pride and a renewed focus on investing in quality of place
- Design of the new Top City Plaza to open in 2020

“The 900 block of Kansas Ave went from a 4 million tax revenue base to \$32.5 million tax revenue base.”

The improvements also made way for over 30+ events hosted throughout the year in downtown Topeka. Top events include:

- St. Patrick’s Day Celebration – 30,000 in attendance
- Cruisin’ the Capitol Car Show - 15,000 in attendance
- Tap That Craft Brew Festival – 5,000 in attendance
- Touch-A-Truck – a Celebration of Labor – 12,000 in attendance
- Kansas Chocolate Festival – 12,000 in attendance
- Capital City Jazz and Food Truck Festival – 7,000 in attendance
- Downtown Candy Crawl – 9,000 in attendance
- Miracle on Kansas Avenue Parade & Activities – 25,000 in attendance

Today:

These efforts have delivered a resurgence and interest with plans for a downtown plaza, lighted water tower, more pocket parks and statues. There is renewed interest and more people living downtown. The business is continuing to invest in new opportunities for the community to enjoy the renewed vibrancy of downtown Topeka.