

## Downtown Rochester's revival is well underway thanks in part to DRI funding

■ CAURIE PUTNAM

The minute the construction fencing went up on the northwest corner of East Main Street and North Clinton Avenue this spring, Dana K. Miller, Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business Development for the City of Rochester said he began hearing positive comments and buzz.



Miller

"I kept telling people it was coming and I kept hearing 'You've been saying that for years; yeah, yeah, yeah nothing's happening,'" Miller said. "But the minute the fence went up, all of a sudden people believed it."

The project, called Harper's Corner, includes extensive remodeling of four derelict but importantly located buildings in the heart of downtown Rochester into affordable housing units and commercial space. It is one of five projects receiving a portion of \$10 million in Downtown Revitaliza-

tion Initiative (DRI) funding from the state.

The others are:

- Redevelopment of the historic Edwards Building (26-34 St. Paul St.) into market-rate apartments and commercial space.
- Redevelopment of the Kresge Building (186 East Main Street) into a 28-room boutique hotel with anchor food and beverage establishments.
- Creation of Main Street Commons (170-172 East Main Street) as a new, pedestrian-friendly outdoor public space.
- Construction of Alta Vista (Corner of Franklin and Pleasant Street) as a 76-unit affordable mixed-use housing building on four vacant lots.

The DRI projects — which were named in December 2022, following the announcement of funding in December 2021 — are among the most exciting

developments with construction underway or beginning soon in downtown Rochester, Miller said.

He also points out that several transformational longer-term projects have begun or are in the works as well.

These include ROC the Riverway, which is aimed at revitalizing the Genesee River corridor for economic and recreational purposes; the creation of the High Falls State Park; and the Inner Loop North project, which will convert the moat-like highway on Rochester's north side into 25 acres for redevelopment and reconnection with neighborhoods that were severed from downtown 60 years ago.

"We're really excited about the Interloop North and believe that it is going to be another game changer in terms of what we're doing with our center city area," said Miller, who also would like to see the expansion of the Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center and an increase

in the number of hotel rooms downtown to help accommodate larger or multiple events simultaneously.

Galín Brooks, President & CEO of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Executive Director of the Partnership for Downtown Rochester



Brooks

has also found the biggest point of interest and excitement for people right now in terms of downtown revitalization are the

five projects in the DRI, especially with the work on Harper's Corner and Alta Vista now visibly underway.

"The impact cannot be overstated," said Brooks, about the DRI projects. "That investment and the projects that are going in will be quite transformative. They'll also be something that I think will be a symbol of revitalization for people"

Brooks also points to the three-downtown focused "mega projects" of the Interloop North, ROC the Riverway and the High Falls State Park (which is in scoping and preliminary design) as sources of great excitement and potential impact on everything from recreation to housing.

"It is hard to get excited about something until you see it in real life," Brooks said. "But in the next few years, we are going to start to see some of the results and fruits of the labor, efforts and vision that has been happening for many, many years."

Brooks believes that activity and volume of activity will affect people's perspective regarding the variety of things that Rochester's city center can offer and do for them, whether they're choosing to live, work, study or visit here.

From the building where he works on East Main, Alson James McKenna, a partner at Phillips Lytle LLP, can see firsthand the progress that's happening in downtown Rochester, including the work on the new headquarters of Constellation Brands which opened this month in the Aqueduct Building campus on East Broad Street.

"There's kind of this — just feeling of anticipation," McKenna said. "It's a little bit more excitement, I think, for the downtown area than in the past."

Among the drivers of this activity for developers, McKenna points to the availability of space downtown; community banks and credit unions interested in lending and a wealth of govern-



McKenna

ment financial incentives and grants available for projects.

"There are a lot of grants and incentives available, specifically if you

have a company that's looking to either relocate downtown or is looking to expand a facility downtown and are committed to really expanding employment for city residents," McKenna said. "There's also tax abatements and tax relief products available from the city and they work hand in hand with COMIDA [County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency] and things of that nature."

McKenna believes downtown development and redevelopment will continue to grow over the next few years and ultimately lead to a positive snowball effect.

"Once you see redevelopment like this happening and you see the vibrancy coming back and the foot traffic and the restaurants all starting to come into the area, that's where people want to start investing," McKenna said. "That's where people want to start spending time and it just makes the ability to go to events downtown easier because there's more around you to do. It kind of builds on itself."