

Downtown Topeka Inc.

INNOVATION

The purpose of Everygy Plaza is to create a vibrant “gathering place for all” in the heart of Downtown Topeka and to bring back a sense of community to the downtown and help facilitate growth for local businesses. Everygy Plaza offers programming that is rich in appeal, cultural heritage, arts and entertainment, as well as host large events, concerts, and festivals intended to increase the economic vitality of downtown Topeka and overnight stays from Topeka visitors. It provides an open and versatile space that can be utilized year-round. The Plaza offers programmed events, rentals, and self-directed programming through access to picnic tables, green space, free internet, pavilions, fire pit, and show fountains/splash pad.

OUTCOME

Everygy Plaza has driven an increase in foot and vehicle traffic to the area. Given the recent challenges and limitations in public recreation during the pandemic, the Plaza has provided a new place to explore and utilize. Once open in summer of 2020, while under “COVID-19 gathering restrictions,” Everygy Plaza hosted dozens of events and programs throughout the fall. Events ranged from fitness classes to family movie nights, to interactive fountain activities, to choreographed musical fountain shows and concerts, both large and small. With attention being paid to the Plaza, many downtown businesses have benefited from the added amount of interest, with new foot traffic and patrons finding their way to downtown Topeka. Everygy Plaza is a year-round, self-run operation. Currently funding for the Plaza comes from self-funded efforts and public support; however, there is a possibility, should the Plaza be able to book more larger, long-term events, that Everygy Plaza could become self-funding.

EXECUTION

In 2013, community leaders were presented with a consultant’s findings on how to recharge downtown Topeka, and the primary recommendation from that study was to build a community gathering space where the citizens of Topeka could come together and take pride in their city at a central hub. The leadership of the Topeka Lodging Association began early discussions in 2014 about the possibility of increasing the existing lodging tax by 1% to provide funding to design and build a public plaza. This effort was ultimately approved by the Topeka City Council and as a result \$3.435M in transient guest taxes was set aside for the construction of a plaza. This revenue stream will stay in place for a period of 12 years. Later in the timeline, the Topeka Lodging Association also approved the establishment of a Tourism Business Improvement campaign which is a voluntary assessment of \$1.00 per room on every hotel room sold in Topeka. This will generate approximately \$400,000 each year for ten years and the Lodging Association has committed approximately 80% each year to subsidize the daily operation of the Plaza.

REPRESENTATION

In January of 2017, momentum for the downtown plaza caught on in Topeka when Roger Brooks with Destination International was asked to come to Topeka and be the keynote speaker at the annual Downtown Topeka Inc. banquet. After successful groundwork was laid by the Topeka Lodging Association, the Downtown Topeka Foundation stepped in to take on the role as owner and developer of the downtown plaza. With the Downtown Topeka Foundation now leading the project, Capitol Federal Savings and Loan and Everygy stepped in to donate \$2.5 million each. In addition to major donations from the community, the Joint Economic Development Organization in Topeka committed to a \$1.25 million donation. The downtown plaza was now a reality for Topeka. And in January of 2019, construction officially began on what would soon to be known as Everygy Plaza. Everygy Plaza is home to: CapFed® on 7th Stage, Topeka Lodging Association Crossroads Fountains, a 30’ Digital Video Board and small stage (sponsored by Stormont Vail Heath and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas), Mars Wrigley Courtyard, three shade pavilions, a 16-foot fire pit and many other features.

REPLICATION

Creating the Tourism Business Improvement District was key to the development of this project. Too often tourism business improvement districts are used solely for marketing efforts. While marketing is a critical part of the success of any project, this is

a unique situation in that these dollars were used to design and construct a brick and mortar venue. This has been recognized as unique and can be replicated in any location that currently does not have a tourism business improvement district or the funding could be expanded to other improvements or projects.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

One of the key successes was the buy-in up front from other key stakeholders that had ideas of their own and their ability to step aside momentarily and commit themselves and their organization to the success of this one project. Without that buy-in and commitment, the effort could have been fragmented and taken much longer to accomplish.