

Downtown Reno Partnership – Addressing A Significant Deficiency Oct 16, 2019

As a region on the rise, our community has come a long way toward diversifying the economy while addressing the many challenges associated with change and growth. From an economic development and image perspective, the one area that still holds us back is our downtown. While the City of Reno has invested in downtown revitalization, and we are seeing private investment increasing, our downtown remains an eyesore to visitors and residents alike. That is where the Downtown Reno Partnership (DRP) comes in. The DRP, established in July 2018, is a non-profit created to make downtown Reno a safer, cleaner, and friendlier place for businesses, visitors and residents. The DRP just released its first annual report, and the progress is encouraging.

What is the DRP, and what do they do? The mission of the DRP is to “lead and engage in efforts to revitalize downtown Reno and create a thriving, sustainable, innovative, and vibrant heart of our community.” The DRP is funded by business improvement district assessments to provide specific services like public safety, on-demand spot cleaning, crime deterrence, engagement with the homeless and visitors, litter and graffiti removal, public furniture and art cleaning and more. In short, they address the appearance and safety of our downtown, while presenting a friendly face to visitors and residents alike. They do this with several programs including: a marketing program to market the downtown; an economic development program to support downtown businesses; and an ambassador program to make the downtown safer and cleaner while connecting with other agencies to address issues that occur in a professional and timely manner. The ambassadors are trained by local agencies, law enforcement, and behavioral health organizations.

Real progress in their first year. In less than a year, the results are impressive. The annual report, just released, is online at www.downtownreno.org and highlights the significant impacts they had on the downtown environment. The ambassadors removed over 1,000 graffiti markings and 600 shopping carts, cleaned up over 1,000 syringes and human waste, while recording over 35,000 positive engagements with visitors. The presence of these ambassadors lessens the “broken window” effect we have had in the core of Reno for many years. With their friendly and helpful demeanor, the ambassadors make a real difference in how people perceive Reno and experience our downtown. What a great way to give our downtown a safer and more welcoming feel.

Great cities have great downtowns! We have all been there, a downtown that wows you with its vibrancy, culture, energy, and green space, a place that is clean and safe - representing the soul of the community and the people that live there. Great downtowns don't just happen. It takes a commitment by the community, investments by the private sector, and daily oversight and maintenance from organizations like the DRP. The economic future of Reno and our entire region is linked to the revitalization of our downtown, as we must be attractive to the creative class and the talent that will drive our economy to the next level.

More work to be done. We have come a long way in the past few years. We have a beautiful baseball stadium, small parks, walkways, and restaurants along the river with exciting and unique art and culture. We have an ever-increasing entrepreneurial presence in our downtown, especially along the river and in Mid-town, with significant projects moving forward that will remake the Reno landscape. While there is more work to be done, it is reassuring to know that we have the DRP in place to improve safety, address homelessness, and enhance the cleanliness of our downtown.