

Downtown development authority has helped revitalize Grand Rapids

By Matt Vande Bunte, The Grand Rapids Press
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Grand Rapids Press File Photo

Music fans flock into Van Andel Arena for a concert. The Grand Rapids DDA oversaw construction of the arena, which is credited with helping to revive the city center.

Skaters glide across ice in Rosa Parks Circle; lunchtime crowds stroll along the Grand River and crowds stream into Van Andel Arena.

The Grand Rapids DDA played an important role in all of these projects that make the city center a magnet.

With about \$10 million per year in revenue and more than 1 square-mile within its boundaries, Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority is **by far the area's largest**.

"You can stand anyplace in downtown Grand Rapids and see something that the DDA has contributed to. The evidence is everywhere," said DDA chairwoman Kayem Dunn.

Grand Rapids DDA has a complex funding base that includes property tax increments, parking revenue and a special assessment.

Recent expansion of the DDA boundaries sparked objections from some other government entities, such as the county, which would lose taxes captured by the DDA.

The solution?

Some of the \$13 million collected annually now is rebated to those entities, said Jay Fowler, DDA director.

Another \$6 million pays debt, mostly on Van Andel Arena. About \$3.3 million is available each year for administration and new projects, he said.

“Eventually, we will ratchet back our tax increment to perhaps 75 percent of what we’re allowed to capture,” he said.

Here are Fowler’s Top 10 Grand Rapids DDA projects:

- Construction of Van Andel Arena.
- Support for more than 2,000 new downtown housing units.
- Riverwalks and pedestrian bridges.
- Building Reuse Incentives Program support for renovation of about 60 obsolete buildings.
- DASH parking lots and shuttle bus program.
- Construction of Monroe Center NW and Rosa Parks Circle.
- Streetscape beautification and walkability.
- Infrastructure upgrades.
- Public-private partnerships on JW Marriott Hotel.
- Long-term planning.

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Jay Fowler