



DOWNTOWN EVANSTON 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

January 2026

DEAR DOWNTOWN EVANSTON STAKEHOLDERS...

Looking back on 2025, we extend our gratitude to the community for its ongoing support of the downtown Evanston business district. Our Board and staff have worked diligently over the past year to support our many downtown stakeholders and build a more vibrant, prosperous and welcoming special service area.

2025 was filled with many noteworthy accomplishments. In partnership with the City of Evanston and our contracted vendor, Downtown Evanston continued to oversee the maintenance and landscaping services within the central business district. Downtown Evanston staff also organized a variety of community events and promotional campaigns to drive more foot traffic to local businesses, create a heightened sense of place, and help build a more vibrant downtown ecosystem. We also partnered with other local organizations to support their special events within our downtown district, and helped to build awareness for their important community missions. Throughout the year, we continued to celebrate and leverage our Downtown Evanston brand through targeted advertising campaigns and an active and engaged presence across multiple social media platforms.

We hope that this 2025 Annual Report will provide you with an overview of how the Downtown Evanston Board of Directors and staff have worked to provide important services for local businesses and the entire downtown Evanston community. As we embark upon 2026, we look forward to further elevating our engagement with stakeholders, amplifying our outreach efforts to attract an even greater influx of visitors, enhancing the visual appeal of the downtown district, and strengthening our support for the many unique businesses within our special service area. Thank you for your continued support!

Best regards,
Downtown Evanston Executive Committee

- Angela Valavanis, **Chair**
- Nathan Kostant, **Vice Chair**
- Andrew McDonald, **Treasurer**
- Gretchen Brauer, **Secretary**
- Marty Cless
- Sarita Kamat
- Jim Nash

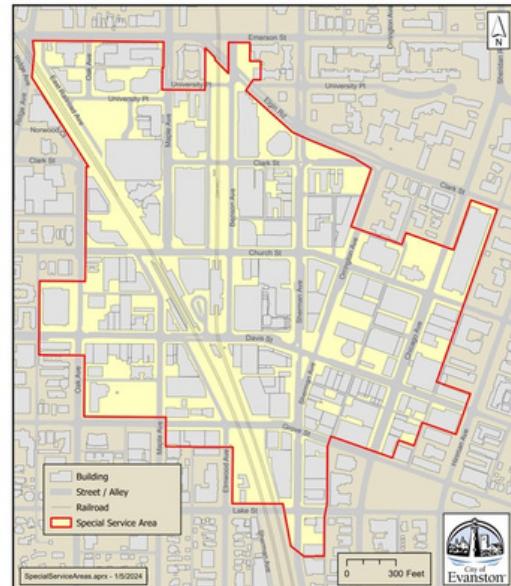


ANGELA VALAVANIS



ABOUT DOWNTOWN EVANSTON

Downtown Evanston is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation that provides marketing, special event, placemaking, and general management services for the downtown Evanston business district. The mission of the organization is to market, maintain, develop, and improve the vitality of the local economy and quality of life within the designated Special Service Area (SSA) boundaries. Established in 1987, Downtown Evanston is governed by a Board of Directors and works in partnership with local property owners, business operators, residents and visitors, the City of Evanston, and other organizations and community stakeholders.



SERVICES PROVIDED

- Marketing and promotion for the downtown district and its local businesses
- Producing a robust schedule of annual events and other programming activities
- Placemaking initiatives to engage visitors and activate the downtown district
- Maintaining the public spaces (landscaping & trash collection) within the district
- Collaborating with the City of Evanston on business attraction and retention efforts
- Advocating in support of commercial and residential development within the district

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Downtown Evanston primarily uses digital advertising to promote the business district through ads on local and regional news sites, extended reach retargeting campaigns, social media advertising, and earned media. In conjunction with our 2025 Downtown Summer Sounds concert series, we also printed and mailed a promotional postcard (see below) to 33,000+ Evanston households in the 60201 & 60202 zip codes. In addition, we promoted numerous downtown Evanston events through printed posters and sandwich boards, a centrally located kiosk at Fountain Square, and our biweekly e-newsletters to consumers and businesses.



DISTRICT BRANDING

Street Pole Banners



In 2025, we added 10 additional street pole banners to the more than 160 banners that were already in place from previous years.

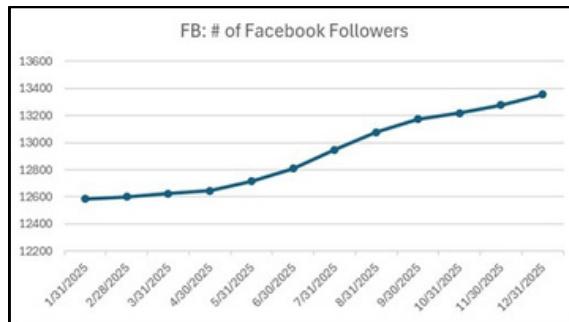
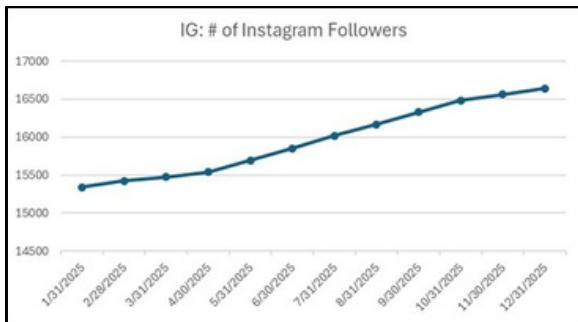
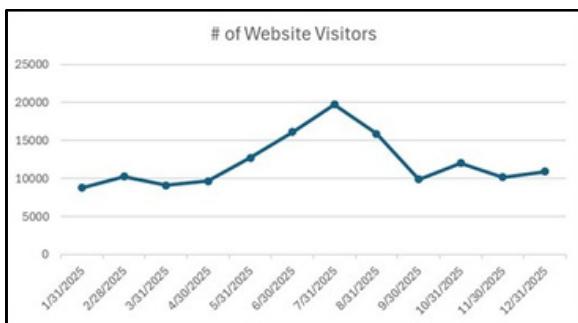
Fountain Square Kiosk



Throughout the year, we installed branded kiosk posters to help promote upcoming special events and raise awareness for Downtown Evanston's website and e-newsletter.

WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2025, we continued our relationship with Vibemap to provide an Interactive Map of downtown businesses on our website, and an online Upcoming Events calendar to help promote community programming in and around our Special Service Area. We also contracted with local business 1744 Marketing for SEO, digital advertising and social media support, and spent a considerable amount of staff time updating our website imagery and keeping our online content current and fresh.



PAID ADVERTISING

- **Google Ad Campaigns (Jun-Sep & Nov-Dec)**
 - Search & display ads
 - Targeted specific audiences for different events
- **Chicago's North Shore CVB (year-round)**
 - Monthly website and newsletter ads
- **The Daily Northwestern (August)**
 - Print ad to promote restaurants & events in the annual Orientation issue
- **Our Evanston (November)**
 - Quarter page ad promoting holiday events
- **Evanston Now (year-round)**
 - Annual social media stream on homepage
 - Display ads for special events
 - Direct email campaign to subscribers
- **Evanston Roundtable (seasonal)**
 - Digital ads on homepage
- **Around Evanston (event-based)**
 - E-newsletter ads promoting our concert series and holiday events
- **Social Media Advertising (year-round)**
 - Targeted specific audiences for events
 - Boosted posts throughout the year
- **Patch.com (event-based)**
 - Paid featured event advertising
- **Eventbrite (event-based)**
 - Boosted events



SOCIAL MEDIA



- **December 2025: 16,639**
- December 2024: 15,300



- **December 2025: 13,355**
- December 2024: 12,540

E-NEWSLETTER

Distributed 29 e-newsletters, on average 2-3 per month, featuring business promotions, community events, and other announcements to around 7,500 opt-in subscribers.



PR & MEDIA COVERAGE

- **Distributed 10 press releases to local and regional media outlets**
 - Encore Evanston (January)
 - S'mores on the Square (February)
 - Let's Eat Challenge (March)
 - Earth Day Clean-Up (March)
 - Evanston Rides! (April)
 - Spring Sip & Stroll (April)
 - Downtown Summer Sounds & Thursday Night Market (April)
 - Sidewalk Sale (July)
 - Downtown Trick or Treat Stroll (October)
 - Holiday Season: Small Business Saturday, Warm Bevvy Walk and Holiday Light Celebration (November)
- **Media Coverage**
 - Articles covering the various topics listed above appeared in the following publications. Articles are available at DowntownEvanston.org/media
 - Evanston Now
 - Evanston RoundTable
 - The Daily Northwestern
 - Chicago Tribune/Pioneer Press

BOARD & COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION

- Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau
- City of Evanston Economic Development Committee
- Evanston Chamber of Commerce
- Evanston Legacy Business Alliance
- Evanston Nouveau Rotary Club
- Margarita Inn Good Neighbor Advisory Council
- Stand Among the Stars

ANNUAL PROGRAMMING

- **Love Local Chocolate Crawl | February 13**
Shopping event to promote Valentine's Day shopping
- **S'mores on the Square | March 8**
Hosted a community multi-fire pit event at Fountain Square in partnership with the City of Evanston Parks & Recreation Department
- **Downtown Earth Day Clean-Up | April 27**
Community clean-up event hosted in partnership with The Woman's Club of Evanston and Brightview Landscaping to collect trash in downtown Evanston
- **Evanston Rides! | May to October**
Two community bike ride series for families (Saturdays) and adults (Tuesdays) in partnership with Evanston Transit Alliance and Chicago Family Biking/Kidical Mass
- **Spring Sip & Stroll | May 8**
Shopping event to promote Mother's Day shopping and preview summer items
- **Thursday Night Markets | June to September**
Hosted artist & maker market at Fountain Square the first Thursday of each month; 3 of the 4 hosted in conjunction with Downtown Summer Sounds
- **Evanston Cars & Coffee | June to August**
Three vintage car shows on Sundays in the parking lot behind the Public Library
- **Downtown Summer Sounds | July to September**
Series of nine outdoor concerts on Thursdays, 6-8PM at Fountain Square with sponsors, nonprofit partners, food trucks, dancing, and family-friendly activities
- **Find Waldo Local Scavenger Hunt | July**
Partner with Bookends & Beginnings to host a Waldo scavenger hunt with local businesses during Independent Retailer Month



S'MORES ON THE SQUARE



SPRING SIP & STROLL

ANNUAL PROGRAMMING

- **Sidewalk Sale & Chalk Art Contest | July 25-27**

Annual sidewalk sale with chalk art contest and live jazz at Fountain Square

- **Big Bite Night | October 5**

Self-guided walking tour and food-tastings from downtown restaurants for incoming Northwestern students

- **Trick or Treat Stroll | October 25**

Local businesses provided candy and giveaways to trick-or-treaters, and we hosted a fall-themed photo op and other activities at Fountain Square

- **Small Business Saturday | November 29**

Shopping Passport program with a \$20 Evanston Gift Card giveaway for shoppers who spent \$100 or more at downtown businesses. We also hosted a free holiday trolley in partnership with the Main-Dempster Mile SSA

- **Holiday Light Celebration | December 6**

Christmas tree lighting with elected leaders and holiday music at Fountain Square, followed by free photo ops with Santa & Mrs. Claus at The Merion

- **Warm Bevvy Walk | December 11**

Self-guided holiday stroll where participating businesses offered a free warm beverage and shopping specials



SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY TROLLEY



WARM BEVVY WALK



BIG BITE NIGHT

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING



Let's Eat Challenge

We partnered with Vibemap and their app-based digital platform to create an engaging culinary adventure designed to showcase Downtown Evanston's vibrant dining scene.



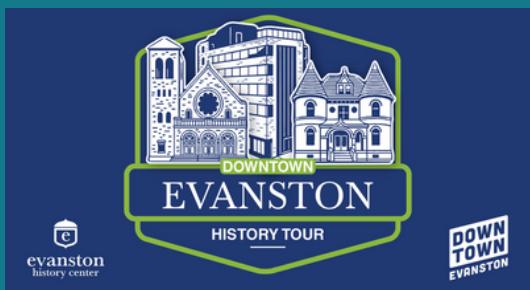
Encore! Evanston

We worked with three local restaurants & bars to program free live music on weekday evenings as a strategy to enhance the dining experience, draw in new customers, and increase sales.



Sunday Jazz at the Square

We sponsored a free weekly live music series at Fountain Square during the summer months that showcased a group of talented young jazz musicians from the local community.



Evanston History Tour

We partnered with Vibemap and the Evanston History Center to create a web-based historical walking tour of the Downtown Evanston business district and the surrounding area.



Northlight Theatre Welcome Event

To help celebrate the start of construction for the new Northlight Theatre venue, we hosted a reception at Five & Dime to welcome the theatre's leadership team and introduce them to local stakeholders.



PUBLIC WAY AESTHETICS

Streetscapes, Storefronts and More

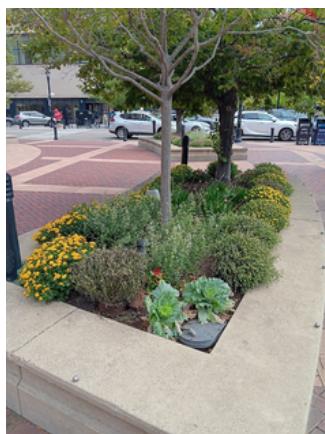
- Installed colorful welcome posters to brighten vacant storefront windows across from the Davis Street CTA station (pictured above)
- Partnered with Roycemore School to install student artwork in a local storefront
- Installed white holiday lights on tree trunks & branches throughout the district
- Sponsored a holiday-themed Window Decorating Contest

Public Art

- Worked with Evanston Mural Arts Program to co-sponsor a new sidewalk mural in front of the plaza at 1603 Orrington Avenue (pictured on report cover)
- Co-funded the restoration of the “Sea of the Ear” sculpture at Sherman & Davis

LANDSCAPING & MAINTENANCE

- Continued our contract with Brightview Landscaping to install seasonal plantings
- Assumed responsibility from the City of Evanston (on 5/1/25) for the management of the maintenance and trash removal contract with Brightview Landscaping
- Worked with Margarita Inn residents to provide additional trash collection support

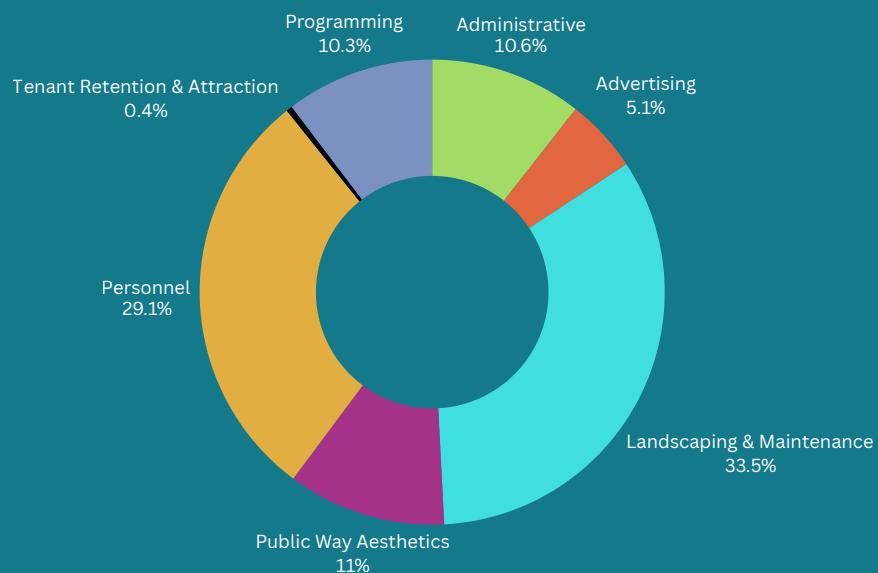


2025 BUDGET

INCOME: \$936,997

• SSA#9 Tax Levy	\$642,145
• Northwestern University	\$234,000
• Community Sponsorships	\$42,200
• Programs / Investments / Misc.	\$18,652

EXPENSES: \$878,177



2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

as of 12/31/25

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Angela Valavanis, Chair, Creative Coworking
Nathan Kostant, Vice Chair, Golub & Company
Andrew McDonald, Treasurer, Rotary International
Gretchen Brauer, Secretary, Wheel & Sprocket
Marty Cless, Core & Rind Hospitality
Sarita Kamat, Artem Pop Up Gallery
Jim Nash, Farnsworth Hill, Inc.

DIRECTORS

Carole Bass, Downtown Evanston Resident
Angelica D'Costa, Madison Grace
Anthony Espinoza, Evanston Place Apartments
William Flatt, Free Market Ventures
Brianna Gray, Evanston Chamber of Commerce
Warwick Johnson, ULRI-ULSE
Ben Kadish, Evanston Benson, LLC
Peter Kelly, Downtown Evanston Resident
Vivian Killebrew, Stepping Out on Faith Consignment Shop
Isabelle Libmann, Trufit Personal Training
Evan Meador, Continuum Capital
Gina Prokopeak, Hyatt House Chicago/Evanston
Wade Rodgers, Lincoln Property Company
John Rohrbach, Hilton Garden Inn Evanston
Jake Samuels, Evanston Resident
Luke Stowe, City of Evanston
Paul Zalmezak, City of Evanston

STAFF

Andy Vick, Executive Director
Laura Brown, Director of Marketing