

Celebrating Anchorage's downtown benefits us all - Activating our public spaces creates a vital downtown.

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By Holly Spoth-Torres March 5, 2020 Publication: Anchorage Daily News (AK) Word Count: 882

When my husband and I have guests in town, or even better date night, we head downtown and “make the rounds.” For us, making the rounds include going to all our favorite places and getting all of our favorite things. So, it ends up not really being a meal, but a series of cocktails and appetizers.

The “rounds” include any combination of the following:

- A wedge salad and a martini at a 5th Avenue steakhouse
- Champagne and oysters at a hole-in-the-wall on D Street
- Pommes frites or another appetizer at our favorite Pacific Rim cuisine restaurant
- Sliders at our favorite below-zero bar
- A couple of slices at your dad's brother's pizza place
- Popcorn and cocktails at the locals' favorite bar
- The bar on the 20th floor for nuts and port
- The speakeasy for a nightcap

We are ridiculous and I love it. After two or three places, we really just go where the wind takes us!

The joy of making the rounds in downtown is parking and walking from place to place in a way you can't really do anywhere else in Anchorage. Sometimes we even take People Mover from our house and ride-share home. Additionally, you get a little bit of all the best downtown has to offer, and that list is long.

As board president of Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd (ADP), a non-profit dedicated to a clean, safe, and vital downtown, and as a small business owner who has committed to a downtown location, I find many connections between “making the rounds” and the work our board did to update our strategic plan.

The first component of our strategic plan is to ensure the successful completion of our 2020 Assessment Renewal. The board of directors and our executive director, Amanda Moser, ask our commercial property owners (who provide the financial backing for the Downtown Improvement District) for their continued support for the next 10 years.

As my husband and I walk the streets of downtown to “make the rounds,” we recognize the importance of ADP when we see the ambassadors shoveling snow, clearing litter, addressing safety concerns or assisting the public (locals and tourists). The ambassadors provide an invaluable service to downtown.

When we come downtown on a Thursday evening in the summer and see the crowd gathered for Live after Five, or when Fourth Avenue is packed with families for Trick or Treat Street, or this past summer in September we saw over 3,500 people gathered in Town Square Park for Movie in the Park, the value of ADP resonates throughout the entire district.

Activating our public spaces creates a vital downtown. There is a decrease in nefarious activity, as well as additional foot traffic to support our local brick and mortar businesses. When people

are in the park for a movie, they may also stop at the local ice cream shop, grab a piece of pizza or a cold beverage after the show.

The ambassadors providing a clean and safe community, and the vitality enhanced by ADP, lead me to the conclusion that it's critical we renew the primary funding source for this organization. The services ADP provides — to the downtown property owners, stakeholders and all of Anchorage — are invaluable. A strong and vital downtown supports a healthy and vibrant city.

The second element of our strategic plan is to be the voice of downtown. I would be remiss if I did not address the challenges downtown faces. From departing retailers (a nationwide trend also impacting Anchorage), the desire for more residential units, and the influence of local, state, and federal legislation, we need a strong advocate and supporter for the longevity and vitality of our downtown. Our board has committed to be the voice for downtown.

Finally, our team is focused on collaborating with partner organizations to implement a shared vision for downtown, which includes work with Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, Anchorage Chamber, Visit Anchorage and ADP as part of the Alliance to Activate Anchorage. Our team is also joining forces with other downtown stakeholders to pursue opportunities to transform downtown — this is a teaser. Stay tuned for exciting announcements about downtown.

A strong downtown is critical for a successful Anchorage and a vibrant downtown benefits everyone! Exciting things are happening, and we can't wait to share them with you. Downtown is rich with art-supporting businesses, and we hope to see you as we celebrate First Friday on March 6. Check out the map online and plan your route; maybe we'll run into each other "making the rounds."

Holly Spoth-Torres serves as board president for Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd. She is a principal at Huddle, which provides process navigation, project management and strategic vision services.

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The moon rises over 4th Avenue and the Chugach Mountains in Anchorage, Alaska, on Friday, November 11, 2016 in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. This Sunday's full moon will a Super Moon and the biggest one this century. (Bob Hallinen / Alaska Dispatch News) The buildings of downtown Anchorage reflect the color in the sky just after sunset back dropped by the Chugach Mountains and reflected in the calm waters of Knik Arm on Tuesday, April 11, 2017. (Bob Hallinen / ADN)

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