

The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition wants downtowners to think boldly

The group continues to evolve in its journey to reimagine downtown Minneapolis



A rendering of a vision for the future of the Warehouse District (Photo courtesy: Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition)

Glittering billboards towering over a redesigned, pedestrian-friendly 1st Avenue N.

A centrally located skate park, green space and performance plaza.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of affordable housing units in converted prewar mid-rise buildings.

A Target Center — its site, at least — reimaged for a post-hoops future.

Some details are subject to change, but one thing is clear: The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition wants downtowners to think boldly about the future of the Warehouse District.

“We need to have a tech mentality,” Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition Executive Committee President Dario Anselmo says of the two-year-old organization. “We are here to do things, maybe to break things, and to make them better.”

Though it’s comparatively new on the scene, the Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition is growing fast. It boasts more than 75 member organizations representing over \$300 million in economic value, from top real estate and design firms like Sherman Associates to professional sports franchises like the Minnesota Twins to nightlife pillars like First Avenue. Several city departments are onboard too, including the mayor’s office. All appear to embrace the coalition’s vision for a more dynamic, inviting downtown that’s less dependent on unpredictable office traffic, hit-or-miss special events or even nightlife itself.

The coalition is emerging amid what feels like a transitional period for downtown’s civic and cultural scene.

Last month, the Minneapolis Downtown Council [said it would no longer produce large-scale events](#) like Holidazzle and Aquatennial. MDC will support an effort by the Minneapolis Foundation, Meet Minneapolis and others to put on a longer-duration and more dispersed winter events series dubbed “Winteropolis,” but it will no longer take the lead on the event, according to the Minnesota Star Tribune. It’s not yet clear what will become of Aquatennial, which has run in one form or another for nearly 85 years.

Also in October, the Itasca Project said it would [wind down operations](#) after more than two decades as an influential if largely behind-the-scenes

<https://www.downtownvoices.news/posts/the-minneapolis-renaissance-coalition-wants-downtowners-to-think-boldly> Page 2 of 5
The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition wants downtowners to think boldly 11/15/25, 11:19 AM

convener for business, nonprofit and public-sector initiatives in the metro area.

“The work of cross-sector civic engagement is best carried forward by numerous other organizations that have grown over the past two decades — especially those led by folks with different lived experiences and identities than those who have predominantly led those efforts historically,” outgoing Itasca Project managing director Jake Blumberg wrote in a [LinkedIn post](#).

Anselmo says the Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition intends to complement rather than replace older institutions like MDC and Itasca, let alone better resourced standard-bearers like Meet Minneapolis and Greater MSP. He likened the coalition’s work to “rocking the boat without tipping it over, and ideally making it a better boat.”

But he allows that some may be put off by the coalition’s approach, which favors urgency over deliberation and transparency over closed-door decisionmaking. The former state representative — Anselmo represented Edina as a moderate Republican from 2017 to 2019 before leaving the legislature and the GOP — says moving in Minnesota’s civic circles demands more discretion than surviving at the Capitol in St. Paul.

“I like real politics because it’s easier to figure out than civic politics... everywhere you say there’s not supposed to be politics, there’s politics,” he says.

Anselmo owned the Fine Line music club for 20 years before running for

office, so leading an effort to reimagine the Warehouse District is something of a homecoming for him. He joins Erin Fitzgerald, coalition founder and CEO of Minneapolis-based real estate investment firm Willow Peak, as co-chair of the Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition's steering committee — pulling double duty while president of the coalition's expanded executive

<https://www.downtownvoices.news/posts/the-minneapolis-renaissance-coalition-wants-downtowners-to-think-boldly> Page 3 of 5
The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition wants downtowners to think boldly 11/15/25, 11:19 AM

committee.

In a statement, Fitzgerald said the new organizational structure would help professionalize the largely volunteer-run coalition.

“It allows us to take the momentum and relationships we’ve built and channel them into a structure with long-term capacity,” she said. “By bringing more leaders into key roles, we expand our ability to collaborate, influence outcomes, and keep advancing the priorities that matter most for Minneapolis’s revival.”

Rounding out the executive committee are Kristen Anderson of Hempel, an Eden Prairie-based real estate investment firm with a growing downtown portfolio; Nancy Aleksuk of Swervo, a longtime downtown landlord and developer; Randy Larson of design firm Shinebox; Nathan Evan of GBBN Architects; and Alyssa Carlson of the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

The new leaders hope to turn words into action soon.

For ideas, they’re looking to similarly-sized cold-weather cities like Denver and Milwaukee. Denver’s colorful billboard district provides valuable revenue for smaller property owners, supporting vibrant street life with well-kept residential and commercial spaces all around, while its downtown-adjacent arts district has the sort of public space the coalition wants to see more of in the Warehouse District, Anselmo says.

Like other downtown boosters, the coalition is pushing for more mixed income housing conversions in the old offices and lofts lining 1st, 2nd and 3rd Avenues — and trying to drum up legislative support for the [Converting Underutilized Buildings state tax credit](#), which they say would make many such projects financially viable. The CUB credit did not make it into end-of session legislation this year, but it has broad support from statewide

<https://www.downtownvoices.news/posts/the-minneapolis-renaissance-coalition-wants-downtowners-to-think-boldly> Page 4 of 5
The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition wants downtowners to think boldly 11/15/25, 11:19 AM

municipal leaders and its backers are likely to try again in 2026.

“Converting that real estate into affordable housing would be amazing so that people who work at Pizza Luce and Fine Line can live in the area...and not just the owners,” Anselmo says. Three or four converted buildings could really liven up local streets outside peak restaurant and bar hours, he adds.

A lot can be done in the meantime, like laying the groundwork for a skate park off 2nd Avenue and reimagining Warehouse District Live, Anselmo says. Both are among the many improvements that a [detailed report posted on the coalition’s website](#) says could be completed in the next 12 months. Revised signage regulations — key to a potential billboard district — would likely come in the next one to three years, the report says.

The Minneapolis Renaissance Coalition knows it isn’t the only group with ideas about the future of downtown Minneapolis. Anselmo says it’s ready to consider other ideas — like architecture firm [Gensler’s two-concept vision for a new professional basketball arena](#) replacing surface parking lots and aging buildings near the Warehouse District light rail stop — and push back with proposals of its own. (Anselmo’s personal preference is for a “river stadium” somewhere near downtown.)

“We just want to see our city have better stuff than it already has,” he says.