



DOWNTOWN ACTIVATION INITIATIVE

A one-time \$135,000 investment to improve, activate, and program downtown Whitewater

Why This Matters

This proposal responds directly to Council direction and consistent community feedback.



Council Direction

The Common Council identified downtown revitalization as a priority during its recent Visioning Session.



Community Feedback

Residents, students, and downtown stakeholders want a cleaner look, more active public spaces, and more regular events.



Near-Term, Not Long-Term

This is a plan for immediate near-term action. Real downtown transformation realistically takes 2-3 years, followed by ongoing programming and maintenance.



Complementary, Not Duplicative

Designed to work alongside existing CDA programs and other resources, rather than duplicate them.

Three Outcomes We're Aiming For



Improve Perceptions

Create visible, immediate improvements to downtown's appearance and first impressions.



Activate First Street

Turn First Street into a recognizable, welcoming gathering space through low-cost, tactical placemaking. This is identified and recommended already in Whitewater Forward Draft Comprehensive Plan Update

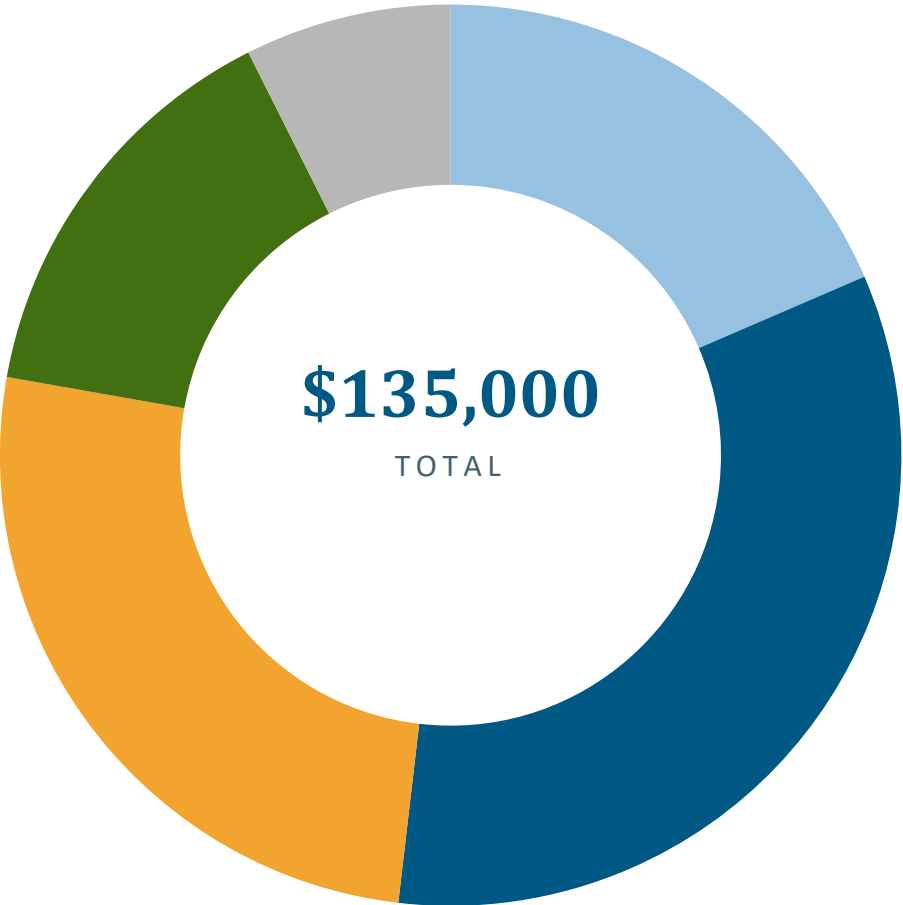


Build Recurring Activity

Establish regular programming that drives consistent foot traffic and supports downtown businesses.

One-time \$135,000 investment • Visible results targeted within 6-12 months

Approved Investment: \$135,000



	Downtown Appearance & Maintenance	\$25,000
	First Street Activation & Placemaking	\$45,000
	Downtown Programming Series	\$35,000
	Business Participation & Window Activation	\$20,000
	Strategic Reserve	\$10,000

Funding source: \$110,000 reallocated via budget amendment from FY2026 underspending (IT & Patrol lines); \$25,000 (seasonal maintenance position) absorbed within the existing budget. Recommended for approval by the Finance Committee on July 28, 2026 & approved by Common Council August 4, 2026.



PRIORITY 1

Downtown Appearance & Maintenance

\$25,000

Goal

Improve first impressions and address one of the most frequently cited concerns about downtown.

Actions

- Hire a seasonal downtown maintenance worker
- Sidewalk power washing, weed removal, graffiti removal
- Add trash receptacles and other fixtures (as needed)
- Reissue the downtown power-washing RFP (late 2026) for future years

Why this matters: This is expected to be the most immediate, visible improvement residents will notice — and it requires minimal new program administration.

PRIORITY 2

First Street Activation & Tactical Placemaking

\$45,000

Largest single allocation

Goal: Create a recognizable downtown gathering space and test long-term concepts before committing to significant capital investment.

Phase 1

Inventory public assets — benches, planters, storefronts, and street furniture.

Phase 2

Pilot tactical improvements: movable seating, string lighting, wayfinding, and a possible seasonal street closure.

Phase 3

Incorporate recommendations from the UW-Madison Bachelor of Landscape Architecture Program (applied for – response expected by October 2026) and Whitewater Forward



Whitewater Forward concept rendering: First Street plaza — RDG Planning & Design

Goal

Increase foot traffic during periods of lower activity by establishing consistent reasons to visit downtown.

Potential Activities

- Small live music events
- Open mic nights
- Outdoor movies & arts events
- Pop-up markets
- Student & community collaborative events

Delivery model: City funding covers production costs, equipment, and marketing. Will be done in conjunction with Parks & Rec. Programming is delivered primarily through partners — Downtown Whitewater, the Chamber, etc — so City staff are not the event producers.



PRIORITY 3

Downtown Programming Series

\$35,000

Business Participation & Flexibility — \$30,000

Encouraging businesses to participate in activation efforts, and preserving flexibility for opportunities that arise along the way.



\$10,000

Window Activation Program

Small grants (\$1,000-\$2,500) for window art, murals, and temporary displays. Suggested preferred partners: UW-Whitewater Art & Design, Whitewater Arts Alliance, WUSD, Downtown Whitewater.



\$10,000

Event Activation Partner Pilot

Event based grants (up to \$500/event or \$2,000/business/year) for businesses hosting new activation events — live music, sidewalk sales, art displays.



\$10,000

Strategic Reserve

Flexible funds for matching private investment, sponsorships, or small placemaking enhancements identified through the First Street process, or for shifts in priorities as the program progresses.

The above will have straightforward application forms and process, with internal approvals by Department staff.

How It Will Work



City's Role

- Project management
- Grant administration
- Procurement
- Coordination



Partners' Role

- Event production
- Volunteer recruitment
- Programming
- Business outreach

Potential Partner Organizations

Downtown Whitewater, Inc. • Whitewater Area Chamber of Commerce • UW-Whitewater • Whitewater Arts Alliance • Whitewater Unified School District

No new City staff positions beyond one temporary seasonal worker • Program sunsets December 31, 2027

Measuring Success

Staff will report back to the Common Council after Year 1 on the following:



Number of downtown events conducted



Estimated event attendance



Number of participating businesses



Number of activated storefront windows



Downtown vacancy rate trend



Recommendations for potential Phase II investment

FINAL THOUGHTS

To be successful, this program requires the support of downtown property owners and business participation

Next steps:

- Engagement with stakeholder groups
- Open House for interested downtown participants
- Marketing materials
- Communication through City social media and other channels

Thank you...
Questions?

Mason Becker, Community Development Department • mbecker@whitewater-wi.gov

