



Downtown
Seattle
Association

Metropolitan
Improvement
District



Plaza Management Agreement Activation Report

Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2025

Through a public/nonprofit partnership with the Seattle Department of Transportation, the Downtown Seattle Association, with funding from the Metropolitan Improvement District, works to manage and program five plazas in downtown neighborhoods through staffing, programming and amenities.



Key Findings

Reinvesting in Our Parks

Every dollar raised in First & Pike Plaza and McGraw Square is reinvested in plaza activation.

Leveraging Dollars

Every dollar of Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) funding generated an additional \$4.55 – providing a smart, efficient leveraging of SDOT dollars to enhance public spaces.

Initial Positive Perceptions

In Fall 2025, survey respondents saw First & Pike Plaza as clean, safe and welcoming, with 92% of plaza visitors finding the space safe and 97% feeling it was clean.

Assisting Visitors in Need

In 2025, between McGraw Square and First & Pike Plaza, MID ambassadors conducted 310 welfare checks on individuals in need in these public spaces.

Overview

In 2024, DSA entered into a three-year Plaza Management Agreement (PMA) with the city of Seattle to manage and program five plazas in downtown neighborhoods. The spaces named in this agreement are First & Pike Plaza, McGraw Square, Portal Porch, Westlake Square and Taylor Street Pickleball Court.

For the purpose of providing predictable activation and maintenance that is appropriately scaled, public spaces in this agreement were sorted into tiers. For the time period covered in this report, Tier 1 spaces include McGraw Square and First & Pike Plaza; Tier 2 includes Portal Porch and Westlake Square; and Tier 3 includes Taylor Street Pickleball Court. See Appendix A for further explanation of services provided to each tier. As additional spaces are identified, a tier will be assigned via an amendment to the plaza agreement.

In addition to city funding, this agreement requires DSA and the Metropolitan Improvement District to contribute significant financial and organizational resources toward this effort.

This public/nonprofit plaza-activation model enhances these downtown spaces by ensuring dedicated staffing, regular programming and investment in amenities to accomplish several key goals:

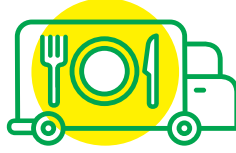
- Increase the overall number of visitors, including children
- Enhance the overall attractiveness of the plazas
- Establish a sustainable financial model to support plaza-activation efforts
- Explore the benefits that a community approach to plaza activation and management can offer

Programming



1,400

free flowers handed out
at First & Pike Plaza



366

hours of food truck programming
at McGraw Square



85%

WMBE programming partners
at First & Pike Plaza

TOTAL PROGRAMMING HOURS

801

First & Pike Plaza

372

McGraw Square



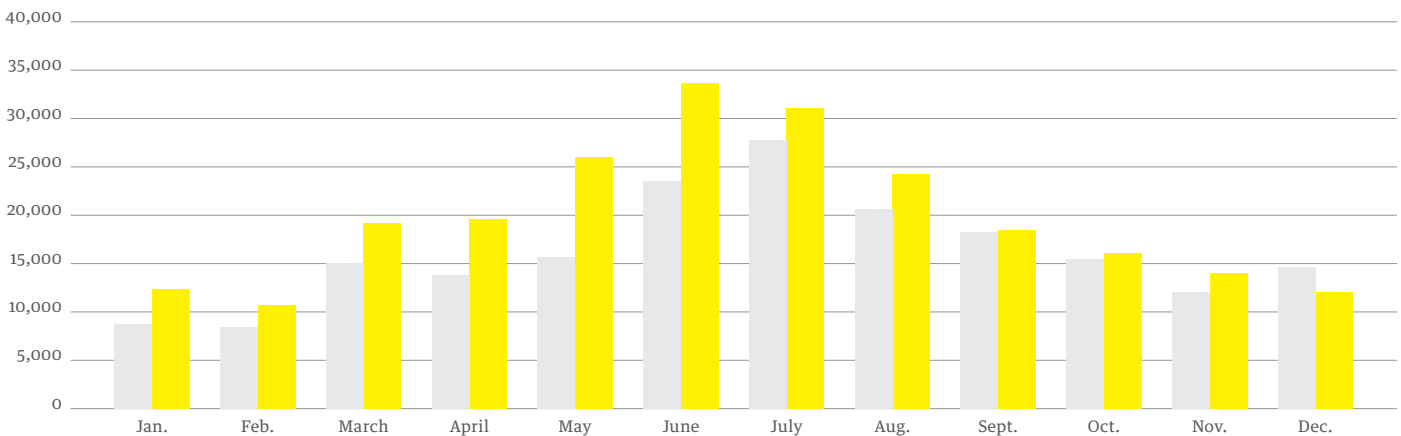
Estimated Plaza Visits

A key part of DSA’s plaza-activation strategy is daily staffing with downtown ambassadors. They are in the plazas almost every day of the year, rain or shine. Ambassadors are stewards of the public realm and help make it an inviting and welcoming place for all. Each day they set up and put away the daily amenities in the plazas such as furniture, signage and games, as well as provide support for programming and events. This past year, First & Pike Plaza hosted artists making live paintings, buskers, Double Dutch Divas performances, a Christmas Tree Lot, games and more. McGraw Square welcomed daily visitors with lunch and dinner time food trucks, table soccer and more.

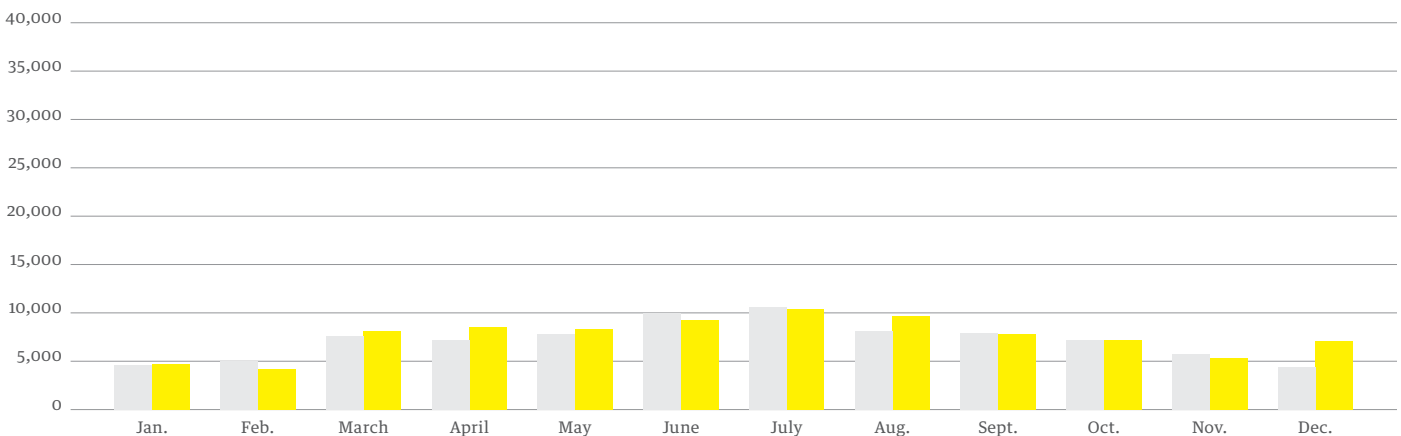
Key Findings

- In 2025, both plazas saw year-over-year increases in annual visits. McGraw Square and First & Pike Plaza saw visits increase 5% and 22% compared to 2024, respectively.
- McGraw Square saw an uptick in visits in the second half of 2025, increasing 8% year-over-year. First & Pike Plaza saw the largest gains in visits coming in the first half of 2025, when plaza visits grew 43% compared to the same period in 2024.
- Summer was the busiest time of year for both plazas, with peak visits for First & Pike Plaza coming in June (33,000), and McGraw Square in July (10,000).

FIRST & PIKE PLAZA



MCGRAW SQUARE





Plaza Perception Surveys

Surveys were conducted in First & Pike Plaza and McGraw Square in September/October 2025. These surveys are key to measuring visitors' perceptions of these plazas as clean, safe and welcoming public spaces. DSA sought a broad survey sample population of plaza visitors. Paper surveys were handed out in each plaza by MID ambassadors. Due to limited responses, the survey did not collect enough data to obtain a large enough sample for McGraw Square. Going forward, DSA commits to prioritizing getting a larger sample size, especially in McGraw Square, through additional marketing of the survey, and potentially broadening the communication channels to reach additional plaza visitors.

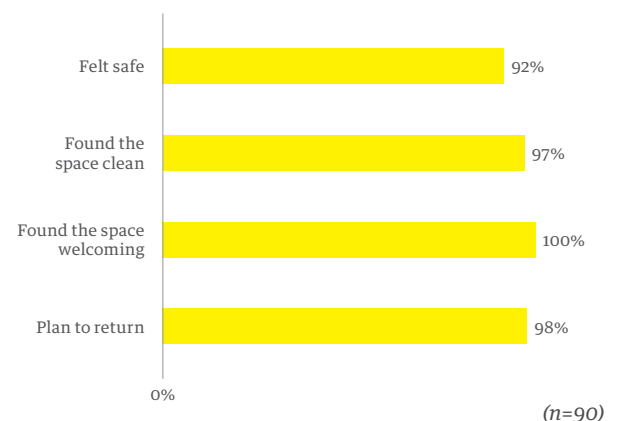
There have been so many people sitting and eating their food and just like enjoying this space. It is definitely a huge turnaround, even the benches, people sitting down and taking pictures and things like that, it has increased dramatically.

Deanna Cunningham
 Manager, Seattle Shirt Company

Key Findings

- First & Pike Plaza saw very positive perceptions of the plaza being clean, safe and welcoming.
- At First & Pike Plaza, 92% of respondents felt safe in the plaza.
- Due to the plaza's proximity to Pike Place Market, more than half of respondents (55%) lived outside of the Seattle area with 25% living outside Washington State.
- Being near a major tourist attraction, First & Pike Plaza is an important location informing tourists' perceptions of downtown Seattle.
- The limited survey responses for McGraw Square did not provide enough data for meaningful analysis. This suggests the need for alternative survey approaches at this plaza.

FIRST & PIKE PLAZA



(n=90)

Plaza Revenue & Expenses

REVENUE	Q1/Q2	Q3/Q4	2025 Total
SDOT funding	\$37,667	\$37,667	\$75,333
Food trucks	\$0	\$615	\$615
MID	\$206,179	\$136,291	\$342,470
Total revenue	\$243,845	\$174,573	\$418,418
EXPENSES	Q1/Q2	Q3/Q4	2025 Total
Park staffing and security	\$155,106	\$106,237	\$261,343
Activations (e.g., buskers, arts & crafts, planting services)	\$71,177	\$61,475	\$132,652
Equipment (e.g., lighting, planter boxes)	\$10,105	\$6,138	\$16,243
Fixed assets (e.g., furniture, bookcases)	\$6,256	\$0	\$6,256
Other expenses (e.g., marketing, uniforms)	\$1,201	\$723	\$1,924
Total expenses	\$243,845	\$174,573	\$418,418
Net income			\$0



Note: Numbers may not sum due to rounding. Staffing hours remained constant over the year, but costs differed due to changes in part-time/full-time position designations.



The activation at First & Pike breathed life into our community, bridging the gap between the local experience and the visitor's journey. There was a certain magic in seeing friends and neighbors meet in the plaza for live music under the summer sun. While our hotel guests loved the constant buzz of activity, it was often the simple beauty of the fresh flowers that they mentioned most. This plaza has established a genuine sense of belonging that resonates with locals and temporary guests alike.

Anne Johnson, Area Manager
The State Hotel | Columbia Hospitality

MID Outreach and Cleaning

Providing outreach and support to individuals in need is another key component of the public space-activation strategy. MID ambassadors often help visitors in need. The plazas are staffed daily by MID Public Realm Operations (PRO) ambassadors, and MID's Community Safety & Hospitality (CSH) ambassadors also make regular visits to the spaces.

In 2025, MID ambassadors conducted 79 welfare checks on visitors in need in McGraw Square, as well as 231 in First & Pike Plaza. These welfare checks allow ambassadors to provide basic necessities, toiletries and can help connect individuals in need with additional services.

All plazas within the PMA receive visual checks and cleaning throughout the day by MID ambassador staff. Cleaning services include garbage collection, ground and seating surface cleaning and graffiti/tag removal.



Observations, Challenges, and Future Improvements

Observations

- Partnered activations worked well (Walk Don't Run, Pines on Pike Christmas Tree Lot, Double Dutch Divas) to invite visitors to spend time in the plaza.
- Coordinated seating and aesthetic amenities also provide continuous invitations for people to enjoy the spaces.
- Visitors enjoyed and made use of affixed and movable seating options.
- At this time, movable seating can be left out without having to secure the chairs with cable as theft rates are observably low.
- Plazas serve different functional roles based on their location, adjacent uses, user group needs, and amenity sets. Each plaza should be assessed on what role it's serving in the public space mix of the area and provide distinct needs/desires for likely visitors.
- Catenary lighting installations were successful in providing a sense of place and security.
- Permitted vendors struggled when their visual branding wasn't obvious and placement is toward the interior of the plaza.
- Busking provides pleasant ambiance and occasionally draws in an audience, but is a secondary activation and not a primary driver of plaza dwell time.
- Differing in-ground and above-ground planter ownership/maintenance can lead to an uncoordinated aesthetic/feel and varying spatial quality within a plaza.
- Continuous presence of unpermitted bird feeding creates very unsanitary conditions and unpleasant visitor experience. In addition, it requires ongoing additional severe maintenance. Ongoing mitigation strategies to eliminate the situation have been unsuccessful.

Challenges

- Unpermitted vendors continued to be the most significant obstacle to successful activation. Competing buskers and food vendors drove the majority of complaints from adjacent residents and businesses, and enforcement was largely unresponsive or ineffective in addressing the problem.

Future Improvements

- Consider painting plaza ground surfaces with a bright, vibrant color to visually indicate their use as a pedestrian plaza and not standard roadway.
- Consider unifying signage that is primarily pedestrian focused rather than driver focused.
- Formalize plaza furnishings to elevate the visual appearance and give the space a better sense of permanence. For example: metal fencing bolted into the ground, more robust planters, more refined sign holders, etc.

The work that is being done in the area has been a huge improvement over the past years. The area is cleaned daily and is much safer than before. At first, I thought the maintenance would be short lived, sort of a PR thing, but has proven not to be true.

Hugh Munro
Resident, Newmark Tower





Appendix A: Service Tiers and Public Spaces

For the purpose of providing predictable activation and maintenance that is appropriately scaled, public spaces covered in this agreement will be sorted into three tiers. As additional spaces are identified, a tier will be assigned via an amendment to this agreement. While each space will have baseline expectations for amenities and activations, DSA/MID may provide, at its discretion, a higher-level service than the tier requires.

SERVICE	Tier 1 McGraw Square, First & Pike Plaza	Tier 2 Portal Porch, Westlake Square	Tier 3 Taylor Street Pickleball Court
Daily deployment of seating amenities (tables, chairs, umbrellas)	✓		
Installation and maintenance of above-ground planting features	✓		
Installation and maintenance of public art	✓		
Coordination of public activations	✓		
Coordination of mobile food vending	✓		
Twice per year deep cleaning of paving surfaces	✓	✓	
Regular cleaning and trash/graffiti removal at standard MID service levels	✓	✓	✓
Tracking of plaza condition and reporting of missing/broken features	✓	✓	✓
Annual SDOT investment	\$25,000	\$10,000	\$0

In partnership with

