

News Release

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Downtown Improvement Board votes to renew contract with executive director Walker Wilson

PENSACOLA, Fla. (July 25, 2023) — With three years of downtown Pensacola successes in mind, the board of directors of the Downtown Improvement Board (DIB) unanimously voted today to extend the contract of executive director Walker Wilson for another three year term. Wilson, who was selected in 2020 from a competitive pool of 53 candidates, assumed the position on October 1st of the same year. Within his first six months, he steered downtown through the challenges posed by Hurricane Sally and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, while simultaneously reducing overhead costs by 5% and launching significant initiatives for the 44-block downtown district.

Wilson's programs and changes over the past three years have not only benefited the DIB district but have also had a positive impact on Pensacola's residents and visitors. He prioritized the expansion of the Downtown Ambassadors program, employing a local, minority-owned business and increasing the number of crew members responsible for cleaning downtown sidewalks and public areas each day. This expansion enables the annual pressure washing of downtown sidewalks, a monumental task that enhances the overall cleanliness and appeal of the area.

Additionally, Wilson collaborated closely with the City of Pensacola over the past eighteen months to develop a plan for the installation of public restrooms downtown. Further, he successfully worked to amend a 35-year-old ordinance, clearing the path for the expansion of Palafox Market into a second location at Plaza Ferdinand in June. This expansion provides greater opportunities for local farmers and small business owners, contributing to the growth and vibrancy of the community.

Wilson's contributions extend beyond infrastructure improvements. Under his guidance, the downtown area has witnessed an expansion of holiday lights, creating a festive atmosphere over a broader footprint during the holiday season. He has also spearheaded the organization of several popular local events, including Foo Foo Festival's Bubble Alley and Son et Lumière, as well as Repast dinners, which have garnered significant community engagement and appreciation.

Despite the early challenges posed by Hurricane Sally and the COVID-19 pandemic, Wilson has consistently recognized the importance of Downtown Pensacola to the city's economy. "Downtown is the heartbeat of our community, a key indicator of broader social and economic trends," he emphasized. "A thriving downtown cultivates successful businesses, engaged citizens, cultural events, and job opportunities. It has been a tremendous honor to lead an organization that supports such a vital and flourishing part of our city," Wilson added. "I remain committed to all downtown stakeholders and ensuring they receive a substantial return on their investment in the Downtown Improvement Board."

Chris McKean, Chairman of the DIB board, acknowledged Wilson's contribution to the economic growth of downtown Pensacola over the past three years. "Walker Wilson's unwavering dedication to our downtown, coupled with his extensive experience and active involvement in the community, continues to provide a solid foundation for him to collaborate with community stakeholders, business leaders, and DIB staff. We eagerly anticipate a bright future for downtown with Walker at the helm."

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