

## History of Red Arrow Park

### A Prominent Downtown Public Space with Major Community Significance

*Following is a synopsis of the background of Red Arrow Park since its creation in its original location in the 1920's to its current status.*

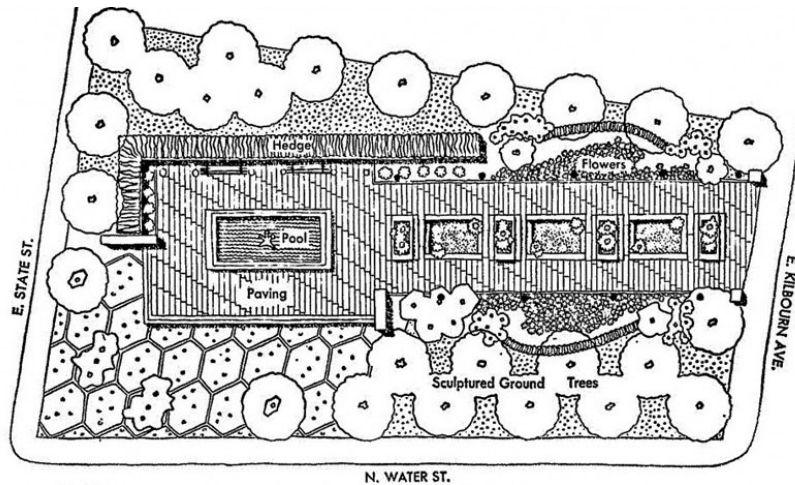
#### Red Arrow Park Background

Historically, since the 1920s, Milwaukee has had a park dedicated to the local soldiers who fought with the 32nd Red Arrow Division of the U.S. Army during World War I. The original location of Red Arrow Park was between 10th and 11th Streets just south of West Wisconsin Avenue, where the Marquette interchange is located today. The park was removed from that location in the mid-1960's. A new park, - located at 920 N. Water Street was built in 1970 on a former surface parking lot, situated between office buildings north of City Hall with frontage on three city streets and dedicated as the new Red Arrow Park.

Turn to recent events, following the adoption of the recent update to the Downtown Area Plan and its emphasis on improving downtown's public realm and parks, the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee adopted Resolution No. 231456 on February 6, 2024, designating funds from Tax Increment District #48 through Amendment #6 to develop redesign concepts for improvements to Red Arrow Park. The process will include extensive community engagement.

#### Existing Park Features and Memorials

Red Arrow Park is one of downtown Milwaukee's most important and prominent public spaces. Owned by Milwaukee County, Red Arrow Park is 1.2 acres. It opened in its current location in October 1970. At the time of opening, Red Arrow Park featured a 6-foot wall on the east side of the park, trees, lawn areas, garden plantings, and walkways. A fountain was planned to be built in the future; however, the water feature was never added.



Above image: Original 1970 Plan. Source: City of Milwaukee

Over time the park has evolved to include several different features that are found on the site today.

- In 1973, major changes came to the east side of Red Arrow Park with the construction of the headquarters building for Mortgage Guaranty Investment Corporation (MGIC) at 250 E. Kilbourn Avenue and its associated plaza. The MGIC headquarters also added a private plaza on an upper terrace to the east side of Red Arrow Park that is directly adjacent to the upper public plaza that was added in the early 2000's with the addition of the commercial space below it. Today, the upper public plaza is accessed by a staircase and overlooks the main portion of Red Arrow Park.
- In 1984, the Red Arrow Monument was placed in honor of the 32nd Infantry Division of the United States Army, known after World War I as the 32nd Red Arrow Division. The memorial consists of a polished red granite 8-foot-tall by 4-foot-wide vertical monument, a steel flagpole, and two bronze plaques on gray granite boulders.
- In 1999, a redesign of the park occurred, with more improvements for Red Arrow Park with the addition and opening of the ice-skating rink in the northern half of the park. A building with space for a food and beverage operator, equipment storage, skate rentals, public restrooms, and a warming area was added a few years following the opening of the ice rink. The addition would include the existing curving connecting stairs to the MGIC plaza above to the east. Since that time the ice-skating rink continues to be one of downtown Milwaukee's most popular winter attractions. Starbucks Coffee was the original tenant and occupied the building for more than 20 years. Under a recent new lease, Bigby Coffee opened in the building in 2024.
- In 2022, another memorial was added to Red Arrow Park honoring Dontre Hamilton. This memorial reflected on the tragic event of April 30, 2014, when Dontre Hamilton was shot and killed by a Milwaukee Police officer in Red Arrow Park. On April 30, 2022, friends, family members and community leaders gathered to unveil a memorial bench that is intended to generate conversations around mental health and lead to meaningful change. The plaque on the bench reads:
  - *"Dontre Hamilton was a man given to us to inspire, motivate, encourage, strengthen, love, and so much more. Every day he continues to manifest within our lives, to keep us united and strong not only as a community but as a family, to uplift us, to continue our fight towards justice. We also have used Dontre's name to shed light on the difficulties we face around mental health issues. We can challenge Milwaukee to be better educated and informed on how to bring more consciousness in supporting those who deal with mental health."*

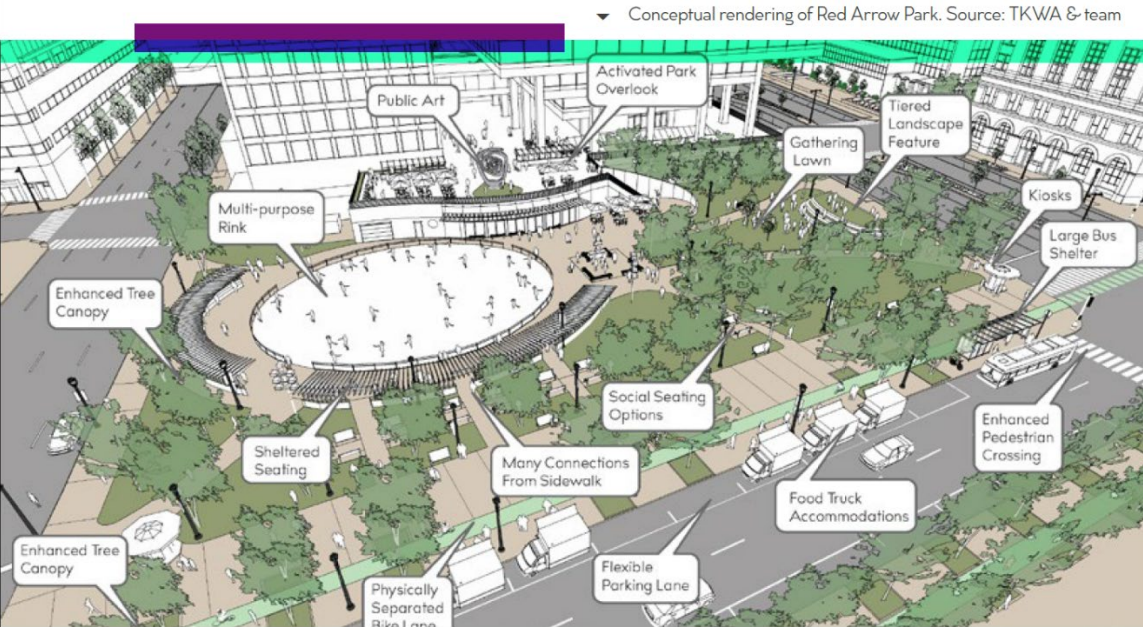
The Dontre Hamilton memorial and 32nd Red Arrow Division memorial are important and significant features of Red Arrow Park. The Memorials are to be further highlighted and enhanced in the future park improvements.

### **Recent Improvements and Programming**

In recent years, Business Improvement District #21, also known as Milwaukee Downtown, and its partners have worked closely together with additional private sector stakeholders to further invest in and program Red Arrow Park. Some of the main improvements and activations include:

- Since 2016, MGIC has entered a maintenance agreement with Milwaukee County to supplement the cost of additional landscaping and ongoing maintenance in the park.
- In 2021, a partnership with BID #21, MGIC, and the Hertzfeld Foundation brought downtown's first moveable bistro tables, umbrellas, and chairs to Red Arrow Park, providing flexibility, comfort and additional shade opportunities. BID #21's Public Service Ambassadors assist with maintaining and cleaning the tables.
- In 2022, BID #21 coordinated a series of new family-friendly events, including Ice Skating with Local Olympians, Downtown Ice CAPEade, Big Truck Day, Heart(beats) of the City, a summer food truck and concert series, Morning Zen & Blend, and the Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee. These events have since become annual activations at Red Arrow Park.

- Also, in 2022, as part of a multi-phased approach, "Art in the Park" initiated a series of changes to enliven the park. The program commissioned over a dozen local artists for live canvas painting and chalk murals in Red Arrow Park. In addition, new, colorful banners by local artist Emma Daisy Gertel were installed on the park's lamp posts and around the ice rink. The design celebrates the park's potential to be a four-season public space by depicting a variety of activities that can take place year-round. During the winter, ice sculptures complemented the ice rink experience.
- In 2023, Sculpture Milwaukee installed "Mobile Garden," by Lois Weinberger (1994/2022) on the park's upper terrace.
- In 2023, BID #21 created a partnership with Roll Train, Milwaukee Recreation, and Milwaukee County Parks to host Summer Spinz, a free roller skating events in June, July, and August on the ice rink.
- In 2023, the City of Milwaukee adopted an update to its Downtown Area Comprehensive Plan in late 2023. Coined *Connec+ing MKE: Downtown Plan 2024*, the planning process garnered unprecedented public engagement with over 50% of the comments submitted being related to downtown public spaces and streets. Red Arrow Park was named as a Priority Project in the Plan and it further stated: *"Improve Red Arrow Park as an active public space with year-round programming, improved park edges with more seating, places for protests and performances, and a large sculpture on the upper terrace."*



Source: *Connec+ing MKE: Downtown Plan 2040*. This rendering is intended only as a general illustration and should not be considered a final design.

- In 2024, Bigby Coffee opened in the Milwaukee County owned building on the east side of Red Arrow Park that was formerly occupied by Starbucks.
- In 2024, BID #21 continues its programming with the return of Big Truck Day, Heart(beats) of the City, and additional programming. Red Arrow Park also received new décor during the Holiday Lights Festival.

For more detailed background information on the history of Red Arrow Park and its current status, see the following websites:

- <https://milwaukee.notebook.com/2016/04/04/red-arrow-park/>
- <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Explore/Slice-of-Ice>
- <https://city.milwaukee.gov/cityclerk/hpc/War-Memorials-of-Milwaukee/Abraham-Lincoln-Memorial0Copy.htm>
- <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Property/HI16656>
- <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Administrative-Services/Land-Information-Office>
- <https://www.milwaukeedowntown.com/bid-basics/community-projects/reimagine-red-arrow-park>
- <https://city.milwaukee.gov/DCD/Planning/PlansStudies/AreaPlans/Downtown>