



**Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes  
March 23, 2022 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.  
Economic Alliance Conference Room A**

**Present:** Joe Ahmann, Jon Dusek, Emily Ellingson, Darryl High, Jake Ryan, Craig Stephan, Joe Terfler

**Absent:** Dave Drown, Jeff Janssen, James Klein, Linda Mattes, David Sorg, Fred Timko

**Guests:** Casey Drew, City of Cedar Rapids

**Staff:** Julie Kraft, Doug Neumann, Jesse Thoeming, Phil Wasta, Audrey Wheeler, Nikki Wilcox, Caleb Woods

**Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order**

High welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. He publicly acknowledged Mattes who will be rolling off into retirement after the next meeting.

**Approval of January Minutes**

Terfler moved approval of the January minutes with Ellingson seconding. The January minutes were unanimously approved.

**Projector Update**

Thoeming updated the Commission on the projector project noting that the issue with cost of content was resolved by developing a partnership with ImOn. We can now display anything aired on ImOn. He shared a video of the Alisabeth Von Presley feature on American Song Contest highlighting a lot of great downtown footage. The projector is programmed to begin at dusk each evening.

**Downtown Survey Results**

Thoeming reviewed the downtown stakeholder survey results noting that there was a 10% participation rate from 1,200 surveys with just under 60% of respondents working for a downtown organization but only 5% living downtown. 62% of organizations anticipate employment growth. Top five things all respondents wanted to see achieved in downtown were developing riverfront properties and amenities, attracting new businesses, supporting existing businesses, continued success of Farmers Market and other events, and fill vacant commercial space. All respondents felt the SSMID should focus on strategic planning, attracting new business, filling vacant commercial space, helping develop riverfront and supporting existing businesses. The survey presentation also included a breakdown of these items by people who work downtown, Commission members and downtown property owners.

**Race for the Space**

Thoeming reminded the Commission that the launch of Race for the Space was initially set for March 30, 2020 but put on pause due the pandemic. It is based on a program out of Ithaca, NY. He feels 2022 is the ideal year for reinvigorating this program with so many people re-envisioning their career and an anticipated surge in entrepreneurship. An RFP was distributed for property owners with five responses and a potential for a few additional. Thoeming expressed a desire to facilitate possible further opportunities if the quality of the applicant pool warrants it. The winner will receive \$20k to be

used for things such as rent, build out or marketing. The primary lesson learned from Ithaca was to treat the winning organization as an infant and provide a lot of support so that they can be successful.

Downtown SSMID has agreed to fund the \$20k. Terfler inquired about whether SSMID is the only funder and Thoeming confirmed. Discussion ensued about the potential for additional funding sources like incubator funds should we expand beyond one winner. Dusek agreed that leveraging our dollars is important as \$20k is just enough to get someone started.

Wilcox updated members on current and planned activities. Focus is currently on building the bull pen of property owners. Two RFPs have been sent – one for development of a landing page and one for social media planning and execution. The landing page will include the application, beautiful downtown photography, and a map of property locations. The messaging will promote coming to this community where you have much support. Ads will run in the Midwest. EntreFest and other Midwest entrepreneurial conferences will also be a target audience. The goal is to get 40 applicants with the hope of having a solid final four.

Tentative timeline is to go live with the application on April 27, accepting them through June 20. A 6-week selection process will follow with having a “shark tank” style event on August 11<sup>th</sup> where the final candidates will pitch their concepts. Stakeholders and media will be invited with a goal of gathering public input and support. Current activity includes finalizing the application and scoring rubric, creating press release, and developing the social media campaign and landing page.

Ellingson inquired about how we prevent movement from within the region and Thoeming responded that the rubric will include a way to prevent those situations from rising to the top of the list. Wilcox shared that more updates will be provided at the next meeting. Thoeming asked the Commission to share the information as soon as it's published.

### **Budget Adjustment Request**

High asked for discussion on moving It's Go Time dollars to partially fund some quality second or third choice Race for the Space candidates. Thoeming shared that he has made inquiries on costs for some major level speakers, and they are significantly more than was budgeted. He is looking for additional speaker options or other ideas on how those dollars should be used.

Dusek favors the idea of reserving the funds and seeing how things go with Race for the Space. Terfler favors having an event focused on how to help obtain quality workforce. Ellingson agrees getting qualified talent would be a great topic. Wasta suggested the core districts host a celebration of what Cedar Rapids has to offer to the workforce. High inquired about what that might look like and Ellingson suggested a think tank type of event so there is something that the businesses can execute on. Kraft shared that generational research is showing that placemaking is a huge component and suggested a look at fresh data on what is attracting millennials. High suggested that a smaller group come up with some ideas that run parallel with someone who can come in and speak. Terfler, Ryan and Thoeming will discuss and bring ideas to the next meeting.

### **Commission Vacancies**

High shared Rings is coming back on board and is Mattes rolling off. Alliant would like to maintain a spot. There will be two more commissioners whose terms end in June. Mattes was a part of Façade Improvement committee. The Commission is also looking for new members to the Gateway and alleyway project committees.

### **Status on Other Projects**

Thoeming gave a report on other projects.

Downtown Gateways – Eight gateways are identified in the Downtown Vision Plan. One area was worked on last year and maintenance will continue this year. Confluence has been hired to conduct a study on the gateways and it will be presented next month. High reminded the Commission that SSMID dollars were matched with City funding. He also asked for two more people from this group to work on the gateways committee. Dusek suggested we look for leverage dollars since it's DOT property.

Alleyways – Work began last year. The UFG and Alliant alley will be the focus this year. Construction will prevent work on the US Bank alley. Bids are out with the goal of having completion by end of summer. This could be viewed as WOW project for 2022.

Signage and Wayfinding – City is overseeing/installing this later in the year.

Art Projects – Four different projects are paid for and on the schedule. Second Ave parking garage will be done soon. An artist will start on the previously approved Kinston project the week of Memorial Day.

Tree – Thoeming will share the streetscape plan.

### **Commissioner Updates**

Terfler – Their fiscal year ends in March. Supply chain remains a challenge. Their workforce is required to be in office 50% of the time now.

Wasta – 32 self-watering planters are scheduled to be placed in the MedQuarter. Partnering with Kirkwood for a May 26 mental health event.

Ahmann – Shared rendering of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> project. Pickle Palace slated to start this summer, followed by Big Grove in July or August. Central plaza will allow for open containers. Project includes 80-90 residential units in mixed used buildings. Hotel development is planned for 2023 along with additional mixed-use facilities.

Ryan - Goldman Sachs purchase will elevate the speed of their build out significantly.

Stephan – Recently had their biggest weekend in over two years. Looking to hire 3-4 people.

Dusek – Thanked the board for the façade program and shared that light are now up on the Granby building.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.