



**Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes
January 25, 2023 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.
Economic Alliance Conference Room A**

Present: Jon Dusek, Emily Ellingson, Jeff Janssen, Ted Kepros, Jake Ryan, David Sorg, Craig Stephan, Joe Terfler

Absent: Joe Ahmann, Wendi Cigrand, Dave Drown, Darryl High, James Klein, Sarah Madsen, Randy Rings

Staff: Brian Glick, Jesse Thoeming, Adrienne Tingba, Phil Wasta, Nikki Wilcox, Audrey Wheeler

Guests: Michelle Jensen, Rayser Holdings and Jaye Kennedy, Waypoint Services

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Ellingson welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. Guests were introduced.

Thoeming shared that Keto Kitchen will have their grand opening in the Armstrong Building on Thursday. The new website will launch early February. The City has committed to helping with holiday lights in the future and the lights will be removed for the year the first week of February. The annual report will be in inboxes next week.

Approval of November Minutes

Terfler moved approval of the November minutes with Janssen seconding. The November minutes were unanimously approved.

Communication Strategy and Schedule

Tingba shared the communication strategy for the year noting that the overall goal for 2023 is a year of growth offering new perspective on what the district offers. Highlights include:

- 40 press releases highlighting events, marketing initiative, projector content, etc.
- Will host events throughout the year
- 8 guest columns and op-eds from Jesse and other staff
- Monthly Experience Downtown itineraries focused on how to support local
- Downtown monthly newsletter with news affecting local businesses, stakeholders and consumers
- E-blast sent the first Thursday every month highlighting events and experiences
- "Story Behind the Story" social media campaign highlighting business owners and their journey
- "Work from Anywhere" campaign highlighting the importance of keeping workforce downtown
- Brand standard is business casual and still friendly, trendy, professional, informative and consistent
- Social media will shift to more videos as data shows that the audience is connecting more with that medium
- Facebook engagement has increased 182% from Dec until now and Instagram increased 89%
- Website will launch in February and will be referenced in all communications going forward.

Tingba shared her aggressive KPIs for the year to increase Facebook followers from 3,134 to 10k, Instagram from 2,778 to 8k, drive 1k unique visitors to the website monthly and to stay above 30% open rate on eblasts.

Events 2023 Plan/Proposal

Thoeming highlighted four potential events in various locations throughout downtown, each with a cost of approximately \$35k.

- Friday Night Blues would be held May 19 from 6-11 p.m. in Greene Square. Stage would be in front of the Art Museum. Iowa Brewing would provide beverage. BF Burt is tentatively scheduled, and two others would be booked with a plan to end the night with a jam session among all three. \$5 admission charge with proceeds donated to a local non-profit. Immersive lighting experience. About \$35k
- Jazz Night would be held on June 23 from 5-11 p.m. in the pocket park beside Cobble Hill and possibly on Second Street. This night would be an immersive experience with the focus on local dining specialty drinks and performances in a classy atmosphere. Cobble Hill could be the only restaurant but wouldn't be able to serve more than 1,200. Lighting would be on both buildings in that lot. Commissioners expressed a desire to explore different pricing points and selling in advance.
- Park Dance Party would be held in Greene Square on July 21 and would focus on college age featuring DJs and Hip/Hop performances. Commissioners inquired about age requirements and safety concerns.
- The fourth event would be BLOCKtoberfest II, following a successful first event last year.

The SSMID has enough budgeted to cover two events. Sponsorships were suggested for additional support. After discussion Sorg moved to support three events utilizing the budgeted \$70k with an effort to get the remaining \$35k in sponsorships but with an agreement that the SSMID would be the backstop for any funds not raised up to a cap of \$35k. His motion also included delaying a decision on a fourth event, ensuring equitability among vendors and further exploration on purchasing a stage. Kepros seconded and motion was unanimously approved.

Gateway/WOW Concepts

Ellingson shared that the SSMID has \$90k budgeted for the Gateway and WOW projects. Thoeming noted that the City is open to cost share. Thoeming shared the concept of a spire that could be placed across from the 1st on 1st project. A second option shared in the Master Plan by Confluence was lighting under the bridge. The next option shared was a revision to the previously shared broken trees concept with linear gateway feature that adds water and wind elements to the broken trees. Sorg noted he was not a fan of the broken trees and encouraged continued exploration and consideration for a look that will tie well with future elements. Commissioners expressed interest in the spire and under bridge lighting. Janssen reminded Commissioners of the Fallows feedback that the best success was when cities use art installations to tell their stories of resiliency. Exploration will continue.

Downtown Vision Plan

Dusek shared that the RFP process resulted in about a dozen responses. Three were interviewed and PUMA was selected. Work will start in February and wrap up in August. PUMA will be in town the week of March 20. The SSMID has agreed to contribute \$25k to the development of the plan.

Guests

Jensen shared that she is an officer for MedQ SSMID and plans to attend more meetings to stay connected. Kennedy noted that Waypoint lost a lot of kids in their childcare program before the pandemic and not everyone has come back. They are going to offer a 10% discount for employees of downtown companies. They will also be opening a private childcare with TrueNorth. She further shared that they will transition from a shelter program to offering permanent housing in about a year which means they'll have an empty building. They want to lease it out but with an organization that is aligned with their mission.

Commissioner Update

Commissioners provided organizational updates.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m.