



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes
May 31, 2023 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.
Economic Alliance Conference Room A

Present: Joe Ahmann, Wendi Cigrand, Dave Drown, Jon Dusek, Emily Ellingson, Daryll High, Ted Kepros, James Klein, Sarah Madsen (via phone), Randy Rings, Jake Ryan, Craig Stephan

Absent: David Sorg, Joe Terfler

Guest: Rob Davis, City of Cedar Rapids; Michelle Jensen, Rayser Holdings/CarePro, Jaye Kennedy, Waypoint Services

Staff: Jesse Thoeming, Adrienne Tingba, Phil Wasta, Audrey Wheeler, Nikki Wilcox, Doug Neumann

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Ellingson welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

Approval of March Minutes

Cigrand moved approval of the March minutes with High seconding. The March minutes were unanimously approved.

City of Cedar Rapids Debrief Meeting

Klein gave a summary of meeting with the City of Cedar Rapids held a few weeks prior that included Klein, Ellingson, Dusek, Mayor O'Donnell, Jeff Pomeranz, Jennifer Pratt and Ann Poe. The focus was on improving communications and developing common goals. Klein then had a follow-up meeting with Pratt where they discussed key takeaways, use of a communication log, defined clear expectations on alley work which is a key concern for the City and developing list of five action items. Regarding alleys, Pratt will lead development of a joint letter to property owners and exploration of use of City equipment to assist with cleanup. Dusek noted that he had inquired about the City contributing security for outdoor events, but they declined expressing the challenge of then having to provide for everyone. Dusek feels this needs further discussion. Rings believes the City needs to enforce cleanup of construction sites as those are more visible than the alleys. Thoeming noted that he and Wasta had a standing meeting with Pratt. Klein will provide future updates and requested this be a regular agenda item.

PUMA Visit Debrief

Dusek shared that around 1,300 surveys were completed to date with 45% of residents indicating they would live downtown. Top three areas of importance so far were riverfront, rooftop/outdoor dining and a focus on repurposing vacant buildings. Wilcox noted that during PUMA's second visit a few weeks prior they held meetings with 13 stakeholder groups totaling about 120 individuals. She reminded the Commission that PUMA was selected because, in addition to proposing a plan, they also propose how to accomplish it. The planning phase is done, and plan development is in progress with a likely August return visit by PUMA to share and review plan for final changes. Wilcox shared that one PUMA representative had gone on a 30-minute scooter ride and returned with the feedback that it was a breath of fresh air to do that freely without having to worry about crime like they see in so many communities.

Kepros inquired about diversity concern with survey takers. Wilcox will inquire about that during the next meeting with PUMA, but noted that the diversity session had good input, likely because it was a smaller group. The survey remains open through Friday. Thoeming noted that the 2001 Development Corporation, City of Cedar Rapids, Downtown SSMID and possibly one additional organization will be splitting the costs from PUMA.

Blues Night Debrief

Stephan shared that the Blues night was fantastic with wonderful music and a crowd of about 700. A debrief meeting is scheduled. The surprises for Stephan were the size of Greene Square in relation to the crowd size and that they had planned for \$40-\$50k sales and sold only \$8k. Regardless, Iowa Brewing will participate again in July. Thoeming noted this was the first concert in Greene Square in a decade and he had great feedback. He shared that there were a few competing events. Klein inquired about why we expected 4k and Thoeming indicated that it was based on last year's Blocktoberfest event. Klein noted the demographic would be different based on the type of music and that maybe 700 is a good number. Thoeming shared that Linn County Blues Society was thrilled with it. Stephan shared that the lead group, The Keeshea Pratt Band, is returning later this year and wants to play at Iowa Brewing Company. Klein feels that one event doesn't make an event and doesn't think 700 is a bad number. Thoeming thanked Stephans for the support.

Future Events

Thoeming updated the Commission about Jazz Night which will be held on June 23 with \$5 at door admission. Additionally, attendees who want to be seated at a table for dining of a three-course meal from Cobble Hill can register for the \$90 cost online with a max of 175. The stage will be in the Pocket Park. Second Street will be closed, and food trucks will be available for those not eating the Cobble Hill meal. Talent includes Gabriel Espinosa, Cory Kendrick, and Ray Blue. Thoeming shared that Cobble Hill has been a wonderful partner.

Kepros inquired about security difficulties with Second Street and Thoeming responded that the gate to the Pocket Park was the concern if people needed to exit quickly. That gate will be open during the event. BlueSky will handle production.

Discussion followed about preselling tickets and increasing the cost of Cobble Hill meal to include the \$5 admission. Tingba indicated the ability to create a reservation for the \$5 non-meal tickets but warned that it may cause confusion with two separate reservation systems. Kepros inquired about why Cobble Hill wanted to use their system and Tingba responded that it was based on drink and meal pairings for the three-course meal. Decision was made to proceed with increase of meal ticket to \$95 to cover admission and to offer preorders of non-meal tickets to help determine potential audience size. High believes \$5 is too little for future events, but the consensus is it would be too late to change for July event.

Thoeming shared an update on the costs for the event series noting that the initial plan from March was for four events totaling \$140k or \$35k per event. Budget was for \$70k so a goal was set in March to obtain \$70k in sponsorship and the SSMID would backstop any shortage of funds from 2022 carryover up to \$70k. What is now known is that expenses will average closer to \$38-\$39k per event with a \$155k total and confirmed sponsorships are \$20k with only an additional \$15k likely for a total of \$35k. Thoeming presented two proposals to make up the difference:

- Cancel one event and do remaining three with existing resources
- Fund all four by trimming expenses, using SSMID reserves, reallocating from SSMID priorities and/or finding outside funding sources

Thoeming updated the Commission that the expense overages anticipated for the Vision Plan coupled with sponsorship shortages would be \$50k but that there are also known expense reductions in Programs and 7th Street Gateway of about that same amount to offset it. He further noted that for 2023, the Commission used \$200k of carryover to fund budget priorities, but with that being exhausted there will be \$200k less to allocate for 2024. When determining event needs for 2024, consideration should be given to the likelihood that the Commission will want to fund some PUMA Plan priorities.

Discussion followed about sponsorship attempts and challenges. Klein supports continuing to work on sponsorships. Cigrand inquired about less cost per event. Ellingson inquired about \$60 per person value to the SSMID. Rings would like to see a scorecard breaking down event information, but he encourages having one less event. Drown noted the difficulty of selling sponsorships, especially less than one year out as budgets have already been allocated for most companies. Dusek supports canceling an event and motions not to have the dance party with Klein seconding. Kepros would adjust putting a deadline by a certain date if we get a sponsorship or we don't move forward. Rings pointed to the challenge we already faced raising sponsorships. Klein said we shouldn't give up on sponsorships. Vote continues with

one day. Motion carries for cancellation of dance party. Suggestion was made to move that event to 2024. Klein requested detailed summary of last event and detailed projections for the remaining events.

Flood Control System

Davis provided update on Flood Control System and shared 2008 stats as well as flood risk reduction since then. Work on permanent system continues and interim flood controls remain in place. He noted that a large event may still require sand bagging and that the lowest building, the Paramount, has some remaining risk. Iowa Flood Center has on-line impact maps available. Davis is most pleased with the work you can't see which is underground, sharing that there are now gates on several storm systems. Approximately four miles of permanent system is planned for the east and 3 ½ on west for a total of 7.5 miles. The work right now is focused on making sure if it rains, it gets pumped out through pumping stations.

FEMA requires setting walls to at least at 100 year level but plan is to set top of wall to 200 year level for contingency. Davis shared a picture of knee wall system that is planned for downtown making the wall foundation look like part of the planned aesthetic. He reviewed the current projects for underground protection at GreatAmerica and Tree of Five Season and above ground protection from 1st Ave. to Quaker Oats and design of knee wall from 1st Ave. to 8th Ave. Real Estate acquisition downtown will begin in the Fall.

Dusek asked about insurance premiums and Davis noted that FEMA's barometer is 100-year flood plain and they don't currently care beyond that. There is discussion about the move to risk-based requirements. Davis noted that the design is above FEMA requirements so it would remove everyone in the 100-year flood plain from needing flood insurance. FEMA had wanted to remap the system but has agreed to hold off until the system is complete. Thoeming inquired about 8th Ave bridge. Davis thinks there is a good opportunity for funding. They are slowing the process down to see if they can get US DOT funding. The current bridge is projected to last another five years.

Alleyway Project Pivot

Thoeming shared that \$85k was allocated for alleyway by TCR. Cushman Wakefield has asked for this project to be paused as a potential development on the surface lot at 1st Avenue and 3rd Street is being considered. However, owner representation of the old Backpack property have approached Thoeming and Dusek about another alleyway beautification effort. Two new businesses are moving into the building., a non-alcoholic bar and a country bar. One of those businesses has a concept of making their entry way from the alley. Dusek and Thoeming will continue to flush that out. It was noted that the City is frustrated with this slowdown. Ellingson noted that since this helps an individual business, it should be low priority for assistance.

Ahmann shared that he wants to understand reserves better.

7th Street Gateway

Due to time, Thoeming to summarize to Commission in email.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m.