



## **Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes**

**September 27, 2023 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.**

**Economic Alliance Conference Room A**

**Present:** Joe Ahmann, Wendi Cigrand, Jon Dusek, Daryll High, Ted Kepros, James Klein, Mayor Tiffany O'Donnell, Jennifer Pratt, Jeff Pomeranz, Randy Rings, Jake Ryan, Craig Stephan, David Sorg, Joe Terfler

**Absent:** Joe Ahmann, Sarah Madsen, Jake Ryan

**Other:** Marissa Payne, Gazette

**Staff:** Peggy Degnan, Doug Neumann, Jesse Thoeming, Phil Wasta, Audrey Wheeler, Nikki Wilcox

### **Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order**

Klein welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

Jesse Thoeming announced his resignation from the Economic Alliance. Klein thanked Thoeming and acknowledged his passion, dedication and many contributions to downtown Cedar Rapids.

### **Approval of July Minutes**

Kepros moved approval of the July minutes with Rings seconding. The July minutes were unanimously approved.

### **Wilcox and Thoeming Job Responsibilities**

Wilcox and Neumann talked about the transition of job responsibilities given Thoeming's departure. Wilcox stated there will be a listing for a District Program Manager posted on Thursday, September 29. She also announced that Adrienne Tingba is no longer with the organization. Carissa Johnson will be hired on a contract basis to focus on social media and downtown eblasts beginning in October.

### **City Update**

Klein said he and Pratt have a good relationship and are bridging the gap between the SSMID and the City. He noted that this City Update will be a standing agenda item going forward.

### **BLOCKtoberfest Recap and Future Events**

Thoeming reported that they moved the event back about an hour due to weather with attendance of approximately 2,000-3,000 attendees. Klein said the Fun Not Fancy Restaurant Group has a great dedication to downtown and is looking forward to solidifying that relationship. Dusek mentioned the expensive insurance policy. Pomeranz said this is the kind of vitality they want to see in downtown and mentioned the Fun Not Fancy group is meeting with he and the Mayor soon regarding their concern about groups forming in the downtown area. Wilcox said more partnering rather producing events is under consideration. We would help by supporting events with marketing but let Fun Not Fancy handle the event logistics. Does the BLOCKtoberfest model work best for SSMID? The event cost the SSMID \$35K in sponsorship dollars.

### **Financial Overview for Remainder of 2023**

As of August 30<sup>th</sup>, there is \$75k left to spend for the remainder of the year. We are \$70K over but we had 85K left in budget and \$60K carried over from last year, so there is \$75K left to spend.

### **Holiday Lights**

Bladeworks wraps 291 trees with lights for the holidays at \$265/tree; thus, just under \$100K. Unwrapping the trees is \$171/tree. The City has agreed to only mandate 1/3 of the lights be taken down each year, not all of them. This will provide substantial savings moving forward. Terfler asked if this ever went out for bid with Thoeming responding Bladeworks is the only company that does it the safe and right way without damaging the trees. He did contact Culver's a few years past, but they did not respond. Wasta said the Med Quarter is on the same 1/3 plan and that he observed how Bladeworks does this and it's very labor intensive. Wilcox presented different cost options, such as only decorating every other tree on certain streets, etc. Klein and Wasta both said they hear more comments about holiday lights than anything else. Dusek motioned to decorate in full with Rings seconding. Mayor O'Donnell thanked the SSMID for the holiday lights.

### **Alleyway/Gateway/Kingston Village Sign Updates**

The current Popoli's sign in Kingston will be replaced to read "CR Kingston Village." Fred Timko will pay for half and is asking the SSMID to pay for half; thus, he's asking for \$12K. Terfler recommended ensuring the CR Kingston Village sign stay up for a number of years. If we pay for it, we should make sure it stays for a certain amount of time. The Mayor asked about logo and was told DeNovo developed the logo June of 2021. Pomeranz said to lock it in. Rings moved to pay the \$12K to replace the sign as long as it stays for 10 years. Terfler seconded. Motion passed.

Dusek asked about signage entering downtown with Rings commenting that he asks every meeting about 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Rings would like to see the same signage/archway there as Newbo and Czech Village. He said the First Avenue Parkade would be a good place to hang a sign.

### **PUMA Update**

The International Downtown Conference will be held in Chicago next week where Wilcox, Thoeming and PUMA will be in attendance.

PUMA is to present the Vision Plan to City Council on November 7th. There will be some kind of celebratory function planned on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Klein said we should approach Linn County and have them make an annual contribution to the budget because the county should be contributing to the SSMID. Sorg suggested since Linn County wasn't involved in the plan, they shouldn't have to pay the first year. Klein replied to the City Manager regarding that the SSMID will make the decision.

How do we educate the city council on the vision plan because the council doesn't understand what SSMID means asked Klein, as businesses are overwhelming the majority of this SSMID. Pomeranz said Council is going to approve the vision plan ideas, but if there's an option of how the SSMID is going to be managed in the future, then that will take some time. Terfler asked about private and public funds. Neumann said 2/3 of SSMID funds have to do with Economic Alliance. He said you can pick more than one service provider. The work entails streetscapes, event and meeting management, administration, auditing, finance, etc. In theory, if you separate these you can have different service providers. The Economic Alliance has underutilized strengths from our non-profit status. Pratt asked whose decision drives who sits in the seat of that office? Klein said the SSMID contracts services through the Economic Alliance. Neumann said we are obligated to provide services so you don't want us to stop now as it would put a pause on streetscapes, etc. Klein expressed "No Pause" saying he wants his services provided per the contract that is in place.

Dusek asked about alleyways, with Pratt stating US Bank has been shut down for now. She said the new owner is looking at outside space, but the alley is City owned so they are figuring it out with them. The Mayor referred to homelessness, saying we have an amazing set of social services but they are not coordinated together so someone is going to be hired to oversee it. The funding will be equal partnership between county and city with the goal being to equally fund that position by summer 2024. This admin data position will provide oversight. Agencies are moving away from shelters and looking long term. They are looking to continue immediate services and grow long-term support. Understand that this is going to be a long-term process with complex challenges said the Mayor. She shared this is a priority of the Council and said homelessness could decrease by 40% if we provide the right resources right before they become homeless. Dusek asked if there is a law about people sleeping in city parks? Mayor O'Donnell answered saying the ordinance states it is not allowed to sleep in a park. A homeless person was found in the river, so when the City pushes them out, people become more at risk. Public safety is for all, including those who experience homelessness. We need to meet people

where they are and understand there are places to get help, said Mayor O'Donnell. Pomeranz mentioned they have a contract with Willis Dady to pay clients to pick-up trash and that this program is getting national attention.

Pomeranz toured the First & First project and feels it will be a great amenity for the entire town with 500 new parking stalls, hotel, public space, Big Grove Brewery and Pickleball Palace and will add positive energy to downtown. Rings asked if the new hotel would put Cedar Rapids over the threshold to attract more conventions. The answer was no, not yet. Klein thanked the City for their update.

### **Other Business**

Klein asked the group to share what is going on with their businesses.

- CRB&T's new building is coming along well.
- Armstrong Centre had great turnout at their ribbon cutting. Go Daddy is anchor tenant so ramp parking increased.
- Town Center ramp is closing because of safety issues.
- United Fire is leasing four floors to another company.
- Hotel room rate at Doubletree was \$475 on a close to sold out situation.
- Lost Cuban is opening a convenience store.
- Sorg loves seeing students downtown.
- Kepros has two new U of I people joining him in Feb. He has nine employees commute from Iowa City.
- GreatAmerica has a monthly lunch bunch that drives hundreds of their employees to eat at downtown restaurants."
- Iowa Brewing is creating new Fall beers. Mexican lager is #1 in nation.
- Rental market has slowed, new units opened and hired new people.
- Alliant Tower and others will be pink for breast cancer.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.