



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes

May 28, 2025 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Present: Jon Dusek, Loren Hartelt, Ted Kepros, James Klein, Sarah Madsen, Randy Rings, Jake Ryan, Robin Sempf, Craig Stephan, David Sorg, Fred Timko

Absent: Joe Ahmann, Graig Cone, Jared Hanlin, Danette Tobin

Guests: Hannah Coyle; Big Grove, Katie Curtis; Vice Chair of Community Development Innovation Council/Foundation 2, Isaac Davis; resident, Robert Ferrin; Kimberly Horn Consultants, Cale Henderson; Chair Community Development Innovation Council/Fun Not Fancy, Tim Kindle; Fun Not Fancy, Grace Nieland; The Gazette

City: Jeff Pomeranz; City Manager, Jennifer Pratt; City Liaison, Jeff Wozencraft; City Planner

Staff: Jennifar Bassett, Peggy Degnan, Caleb Knutson, Doug Neumann, Tyanna Stephenson, Audrey Wheeler

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Klein called the meeting to order at 3:01pm and acknowledged the number of guests in attendance.

Consent Agenda/Approval of March Minutes

Dusek moved to approve the minutes with Madsen seconding. The March minutes were unanimously approved.

5SeasonsFit Presentation

Bassett and Coyle presented details of *5SeasonsFit*, taking place June 22 – 28, to activate downtown. The event will feature various activities including group fitness classes, pickleball tournament, golf outing, healthy happy hour, walk/run and a mental health panel. Most events will happen in Kingston Yard. Registration is open and being handled by The Gazette, which is producing the event. About 150 people are registered so far. The event aims to reach all demographics and includes partnerships with local businesses and organizations. All events are free, except for pickleball and golf. They are working with Ellis Golf Course on a \$15 golf fee (a \$50 value). Street banners are hung and advertising is going on now at Kernels Games, CBJ, etc. Bassett requested volunteers and encouraged participation in the events. She also mentioned this event could continue year after year.

Location Subcommittee Final Three Presentation

Knutson reminded everyone the vision plan calls for Downtown offices to have a more distinct business identity than being co-mingled upstairs in the Economic Alliance building with no discernable signage or office presence. Numerous submissions for potential office locations were submitted, and a subcommittee then narrowed the finalists to Arco Building, City Convention Center Parking Ramp and the Economic Alliance. The subcommittee recommends negotiating a one-year lease at the Economic Alliance building, with plans to explore potential

space-sharing partnerships with other organizations during this period. The subcommittee favored the Economic Alliance option for its cost advantages and existing synergies with support staff, while acknowledging the need to further evaluate long-term options. The importance of identity and visibility was emphasized, with plans to install signage and branded offices to create a much more distinct presence than previously. The subcommittee agreed to continue its work over the next year to evaluate the feasibility of co-locating with CR Tourism and/or other organizations. The subcommittee also may look more comprehensively at the actual costs of build-out of the parking ramp space.

Klein thanked the committee for their time and diligence. **Hartelt moved to approve the subcommittee recommendation to negotiate a 1-year lease with the Economic Alliance. Kepros seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.**

VenuWorks Proposal/Jazz Fest

Bassett presented a proposal to continue their downtown promotion partnership with VenuWorks for \$15K and receive an in-kind stage donation for a jazz festival on September 20th. She presented a plan to underwrite the entire event and potentially earn the money back with 2000 in attendance at \$15/ticket, with The Gazette Event Services handling the event planning and operations. The board agreed to move forward with the \$15K sponsorship and stage donation. Bassett is to communicate to The Gazette the SSMID will contribute \$5k plus the stage to another entity, such as The Gazette, to plan and front JazzFest in its entirety. The SSMID does not want to produce events, and wants to be sure it continues to be seen as a contributing funder of live music and other entertainment that others are producing. **Sempf moved to approve paying \$15k to VenueWorks as a sponsorship that would provide the Downtown District with advertising at their local facilities and the use of McGrath amphitheater. Madsen seconded, and the proposal was unanimously approved.**

Staff Updates

Race for the Space: Applications are under review with all applicants having existing businesses. They would like at least 15 applicants, but only have four or five so far. The pitch event is on August 13th at CRST.

Vacant Space: A vacant property map has been developed with University of Iowa students and the City. Knutson said they'd like this on the website as a tool kit to show we're actively wanting to fill empty space downtown.

7th Street Gateway – Funding for this grant is still available so we just need to resubmit signatures. A Fall planting is planned.

Other Sub-Committees:

- Marketing & PR Subcommittee- Chaired by Sempf.
Short term goal: Guest columnist for CBJ and enhancing social media engagement.
Long term: Hold a *State of Downtown* event or reception.
- Finance Committee: A committee has been created and will meet quarterly.

MOU/Beautification:

Bassett provided updates on downtown maintenance, including the hiring of a seasonal waterer and a part-time intern. She highlighted ongoing sidewalk and curb repair projects, noting four of the 11 identified as urgent have been addressed. Dusek suggested the need for a comprehensive 5-year plan to prioritize and repair deteriorating sidewalks, with suggestions to involve city officials. Rings recommended forming a quarterly subcommittee with city staff/officials to identify and track progress. It was clarified property owners are responsible for fixing their sidewalks. If they don't, the City will repair and bill the property owner accordingly.

Bassett shared City View and IowaBIG students have been tasked with art projects to be displayed in some empty storefronts.

Events & Programming:

Installation of the *Cedar Rapids* sign on Mays Island will start on June 12. The City will start planting trees next week and then media day is scheduled for June 24th. TCR will be undergoing a façade Improvement.

Pomeranz said there's a bank or credit union wanting to make a substantial donation for a project downtown. He asked if Mays Island can support sculpture park. Knutson said they'd welcome this idea and investment, so he'll check on any structural issues.

Other

Downtown Crime

Henderson, with Fun Not Fancy Restaurant Group, discussed the need for increased police presence and safety measures in downtown areas, particularly addressing concerns about large crowds causing chaos and safety issues for businesses and employees. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a clean and secure environment to support downtown restaurants and bars, expressing that the current situation is unsustainable for another summer season similar to last year. He said the people committing gunplay and fights are not patronizing local restaurants and bars. The commission agreed to consider these concerns and explore solutions to improve safety and encourage patronage in the downtown district.

Kindle, also with Fun Not Fancy, said he's been downtown since 2011, but things have gotten worse the last four years. He said decisions on whether to stay downtown or not hinge on a proactive approach to improvements. He feels additional resources and creative strategies for public safety are needed due to lack of police presence. Pomeranz acknowledged the need for urban crime prevention.

Parking Study

Please encourage people to take the survey on the City's website. The study encompasses on and off-street parking in the downtown core, Czech Village, Newbo and Kingston. A draft plan is expected in the Fall and final plan by the end of this year per Ferrin, consultant with Kimberly Horn.

Sorg's Term Ending

Klein thanked Sorg for his extra efforts and time on the SSMID Board as his term will end June 30th. Landon Burg with OPN will be taking his place.

ACTION ITEMS

- SSMID Board to negotiate lease terms with the Economic Alliance.
- Knutson to verify Mays Island can handle weight load for a potential sculpture park.
- Bassett to communicate to The Gazette that the SSMID will contribute the stage plus \$5000 to them (or to another entity) to plan, fund and operate JazzFest.
- Consider subcommittees for sidewalk repair and tracking progress and for the downtown crime issues articulated by Fun Not Fancy.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:35pm.

/pd