



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes

July 23, 2025 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Present: Joe Ahmann, Landon Burg, Graig Cone, Jon Dusek, Loren Hartelt, James Klein, Robin Sempf, Craig Stephan, Fred Timko, Danette Tobin

Absent: Jared Hanlin, Ted Kepros, Sara Madsen, Jake Ryan

Guests: Ron Corbett, Ex VP and Jodi Schafer, Talent Attraction Director; Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance

City: Jennifer Pratt; City Liaison, Noah Zeker

Staff: Jennifar Basett, Peggy Degnan, Lillian Jones (intern), Caleb Knutson, Doug Neumann, Audrey Wheeler, Phil Wasta

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Klein called the meeting to order at 3:01pm and acknowledged the number of guests in attendance. He introduced Landon Burg with OPN because David Sorg's term ended on June 30th. Burg shared a bit about himself.

Consent Agenda/Approval of May Minutes

Hartelt moved to approve the minutes with Cone seconding. The May minutes were unanimously approved.

School Bond Presentation

Corbett talked about the Cedar Rapids Community School Bond Referendum. He explained the Economic Alliance is behind this effort because having good schools will attract families and workforce here. This bond issue will be on the November 4th ballot.

Corbett stated there are four factors needed to make for a great community: 1) vibrant economy, 2) good quality of life 3) excellent healthcare and 4) strong schools. The original plan was for \$211M, but polling showed it was too costly with the uncertainty of today's economy. Therefore, the school board listened and came back with a revised plan of \$117M to include renovations being made to Wilson, McKinnley and Roosevelt, not tearing down Harrison and some improvements to Kennedy. Thus, focusing on safety, access and modernizing those buildings. Corbett shared we need 60% in Iowa to pass instead of 50%. He mentioned all other area school districts have made great improvements such as College Community, Alburnett, Linn Mar, et al. If passed, Cedar Rapids will still have the lowest property taxes of all the districts and taxes will only increase \$7.50/month.

Currently, over \$300K has been raised so far and we need to reach 6000 signatures per Corbett. He said many have made endorsements including all three Mayors plus the Mayor of Palo, Supervisors, Zach Johnson

Foundation, The History Center, Tanager Place, etc., because cities with good school systems have better economic development and better workforce.

Rings directed the SSMID to draft a letter so those who wish to sign it could, with encouragement to others to sign it. Klein referenced page 26 from the Iowa Business Council report which was included in the Agenda Packet. The report stated Iowa was ranked at a 4th grade reading proficiency.

Klein referenced page six from the Iowa Business Council's report that was included in the Agenda Packet. Iowa ranks 32nd in 4th Grade Reading Proficiency and 24th in 8th Grade Math.

Timko asked about the original bond issue. Corbett explained this proposal has removed building a new school, but it may come back up in the future. He said the last bond issue was 25 years ago, so they probably won't wait another 25 years. The vote is on this package only. Dusek asked how long payments would last with Corbett answering 20 years.

Regarding an endorsement, Rings directed the SSMID to draft a letter and would encourage others to sign it.

Collaboration Growth Initiative

Schafer, Talent Attraction Director, shared the Mayors of Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha are behind this since we are losing young people after educating them here. She has a two-tier approach to what she is doing: 1.) Building a brand for the region to include talent attraction website launch and collateral development followed by 2.) A targeted marketing campaign creation and execution. She hopes to see some quick wins with *Make My Move*, a website where potential movers can go to decide where to move. *Make My Move* does the qualifying of individuals. Schafer explained they are starting with remote workers because they can move right away. She said 1.5M people visit this site.

Schafer shared what the *Make My Move* audience looks like:

- Average household income = \$115,970
- Bring a spouse who will also work = 54%
- Move within 180 days = 77%

She explained this is a 15-household campaign, so we're looking at \$19M in economic impact. The website is www.makemymove.com/getpaid/greater-cedar-rapids-iowa Schafer emphasized they are developing a Community Champion Program because if a mover doesn't make a connection here, they won't stay.

The first two weeks have already resulted in 26 active applicants thus far, with four people accepted out of a total of 70 people = \$3.4M/year.

After the remote campaign, Schafer said they'll need to determine who their target market. She said they need to utilize and engage our community since the three cities gave a significant amount of money, so the Mayors will help with the fundraising to support the campaign. She mentioned Forbes will be doing an article soon.

Timko asked how long *Make My Move* has been around with Schafer answering it was started during Covid. They are based out of Indiana, so many towns in Indiana are currently running campaigns and are seeing good results. Eastern Kentucky is also doing well.

Sempf said Alliant is finding it hard to recruit here if they don't already have a connection here. Schafer stated almost all that are interested in moving to this area do have a family member or an Iowa connection already.

Staff Updates

Location Subcommittee

Knutson explained how the space at the First Avenue parking garage would be cost-prohibitive as it doesn't have HVAC, sewer or no studs and has only a gravel floor. Thus, currently the Downtown offices are staying with the Economic Alliance for one year. The space will incorporate Downtown's branding. All Downtown signage, including the vinyl signage, should be in place by the end of August. He mentioned they are currently exploring like-minded organizations to share space with, noting Cedar Rapids Tourism is not interested.

Race For the Space

The pitch will be held on August 13th at CRST. He said it is free to attend but asked all to please register if you plan to come in order to have an idea of how many to expect.

Mays Island

Structural engineers are involved for load bearing concerns. Thus, this outcome will determine how May's Island will look in the future.

Vacant Space

They are in the process of beta testing a map that shows vacancies and for sale or lease properties downtown.

Stakeholder and Workforce Engagement

Knutson and Bassett started to conduct a "road show" to engage downtown employees. So far they have made a visit to Alliant and will continue to visit other companies.

Other Subcommittees

The trolley is paused while the City's Trolley Study is taking place. The study is expected to be completed by the end of October and will declare who is the organization to champion the trolley.

MOU/Beautification

Basset said a letter will be going out to stakeholder regarding their responsibilities for sidewalks and curbs. Curb repairs are done in the Fall.

Events & Programming

5SeasonsFit: Bassett reported it was successful event and registrants exceeded their expectations.

Marathon Qualifier: Bassett shared there will be s 5K, 10K, full marathon and kid's run downtown that is expecting 2000 runners and spectators. She said a press release will run on August 6th and the event will be on June 7, 2026. Knutson mentioned this has been in Des Moines before and they saw 8K - 10K for this. Bassett will keep us posted.

A Look Ahead

- Bassett reported Bills Brothers wants an art installation at the corner of 8th Avenue and 3rd St.

- The Crunch Berry Run is not happening this year because they lost Quaker Oats as a sponsor. Quaker said they would cereal, but monetarily.
- Bills Brothers would like an art installation at their corner of 8th Avenue and 3rd Street.
- Bassett said it's time to think about the next Wow Project for 2206. She had thought about a Cereal Square with Quaker Oats and General Mills. Also, something with American Gothic.
- Comments were made about how many and how nice the flowers look on the bridge. It was mentioned Linn County needs to contribute to the flowers downtown.
- Homeless going through dumpsters in Kingston.
- JazzFest Update: Bassett said The Gazette will take on and own the event, but the timing was too tight for the top organize a September event. The Gazette is considering a music fest.

OTHER

- Knutson shared they are starting a Finance Committee with the first meeting to be held on August 25th.
- Timko asked about the rescheduling of rained out Saturday Farmers Markets to rescheduled on Sundays. Due to permits and vendors committed to other markets, it would be challenging said Wheeler.

ACTION ITEMS

Knutson to draft an endorsement letter for the School Bond Referendum for Rings to review. Others are encouraged to sign the letter if they choose.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:28pm.

/pd