



**Attendees:** Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID

**Date:** October 1, 2025 | **Time:** 3:00pm-4:30pm

**Location:** Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust - 116 6th St NE, Cedar Rapids

## **AGENDA**

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Welcome, Introduction Call to Order              | Klein/Knutson        |
| 2. Consent Agenda: July Minutes (pages 3-6)         | Klein                |
| 3. Race For the Space Winner                        | Dr. Tiffany Carr     |
| 4. Downtown Sidewalks<br>Public Works               | City of Cedar Rapids |
| 5. Designation of Authorized Signer: Incoming Chair | Knutson              |
| 6. Nominate to Fill Stephan's Seat                  | Knutson              |
| 7. PlacerAI Website Updates                         | Knutson              |
| 8. Staff Updates                                    | Bassett/Knutson      |
| i. Race For the Space                               |                      |
| ii. Vacant Space                                    |                      |
| iii. Other Subcommittees                            |                      |
| iv. Marketing                                       |                      |
| v. MOU/Beautification                               |                      |
| vi. Events & Programming                            |                      |
| vii. IDA Conference                                 |                      |
| 9. Other Business                                   | Knutson              |
| 6. Adjourn  | Klein                |

## **Upcoming Events/Programs:**

[Good Morning Cedar Rapids!](#) - Nov. 12; Breakfast 7am; 7:30am program - Doubletree Hotel

**Reading Materials**

MedQ September Minutes (pages 7-9)

August Financials (pages 10-11)

Econ Dev Slides by UNI (pages 12-26)

Location Subcommittee Summary pages 27-30)

**Store Openings & Closings****Openings**

n/a

**Closings**

n/a

**Downtown SSMID Commission Members**

Joe Ahmann, Landon Burg, Graig Cone, Jon Dusek, Jared Hanlin, Loren Hartelt, Ted Kepros,  
James Klein, Sarah Madsen, Jake Ryan, Randy Rings, Craig Stephen, Robin Sempf,  
Fred Timko, Dannette Tobin

**Next Meeting:** November 19, 2025

Anyone who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in this City activity, you should contact Caleb Knutson at 319.730.1427 or email [cknutson@cedarrapids.org](mailto:cknutson@cedarrapids.org) as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the event.



## **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 30<sup>th</sup>. 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency.

Klein referenced page six from the Iowa Business Council's report that was included in the Agenda Packet. Iowa ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency and 24<sup>th</sup> in 8<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 25<sup>th</sup>.
- 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

**Medical SSMID Commission Meeting Minutes**

**September 10, 2025, 8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m., Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust**

**Present:** Gordon Epping, Kim Grady, Casey Greene, Pauline Herb, Michelle Jensen, Suzy McGrane-Hop, Alejandro Pino, Josh Scott, Brian Steffen, Brad Thatcher, Barb Tupper, Amanda Zhorne

**Guests:** David Meier; City Council, Jennifer Pratt and Noah Zeker, City Liaisons

**Staff:** Juliet Abdel, Jennifar Bassett, Peggy Degnan, Caleb Knutson, Jodi Schafer, Phil Wasta

**Welcome & Call to Order**

Herb called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. The commissioners introduced themselves as several new people were in this meeting. Scott and Grady were introduced and shared some information about their backgrounds.

**Outgoing/Incoming Commissioners**

- The commission welcomed Josh Scott who will continue the term vacated by Dalton. (8/1/2025-6/30/27)
- Kim Grady, VP of Finance at Mercy, to assume Van Gerndersen's seat. (recommended by Dr. Tim Quinn)
- Thatcher announced he has accepted a new position with Healthcare of Iowa outside of the MedQuarter, so his seat will be vacant. Wasta has reached out to Rice to see if someone else from Tanager could be on this commission.

**Epping moved to approve the nomination of Grady to the commission with McGrane-Hop seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.** This nomination will now be sent to the Mayor for approval.

**Introduction of Juliet Abdel, President & CEO of Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance**

Abdel said she has been here for 7 weeks now and shared some information about herself and her background, with this being her fourth city working in the Chamber capacity.

**Make My Move**

Using dynamic economic modeling, Common Sense Institute projects the net loss of 3,445 college-educated Iowans in 2023 translates to a long-term economic loss of \$6.1 billion in GDP by 2060 and \$17.6 billion in cumulative personal income by 2060. The communities of Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha and Marion recognized this happening in their cities so they formed the Collaborative Growth Initiative along with the Economic Alliance. Thus, Schafer stated she was hired to be the Director of Talent Attraction. She mentioned brain drain has been going on since the 1980s and is more concerning now.

Schafer said there is no other metro in Iowa right now that is more poised to do this than we are. When going external, our metro area checks almost every box; therefore, there's a disconnect between outside people and those who live here. She said we'll need to fill all our future workforce needs, so this is a start. Comparatively, our metro has a good cost of living, commute time, education and healthcare. Iowa has the highest cumulative net outmigration of Bachelor degree ages 25-29 than any other Midwestern state. Mayor O'Donnell wanted immediate results so \$436K funding was approved.

Make My Move is a pilot program for us targeting remote workers, so they bring their jobs with them. Make My Move has already preapproved 59 applications, made 11 offers and six are ready to move here per Schafer. She shared Make My Move verifies a prospective mover's employment, income, lease/mortgage and conducts background checks. The campaign goal is to have 15 movers from July 7–December 31<sup>st</sup>, so Schafer feels they're off to a good start in the first two months. She announced our first mover's wife already acquired a job with Mercy. Some requirements are: movers must bring their remote job with them, reside outside of Iowa, make a minimum of \$55K and move within six months. The movers receive incentives such as \$5000 to move here and gift certificates, Kernels tickets, gym memberships and

so forth. Schafer said there are no trends showing as to where people are moving from. Movers are coming here from CO, FL, KS and MN.

Schafer shared Make My Move and our region are getting media attention with being in Forbes, Wall Street Journal, KCRG, CBJ, the Doug Wagner Show, etc. Currently, there are 22M remote workers in the United States.

Greene asked about referral bonus with Schafer responding they are thinking about how to partner with businesses to fill open positions. Perhaps businesses can help fund this and make it sustainable per Schafer.

### **Consent Agenda**

**Greene moved to approve the July minutes and the July and August financials with Steffen seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.**

### **New Commission Compliance Requirements**

Wasta reported there is new state law regarding sunshine laws/statutes. Pratt explained new legislation has established training for new board members will now be tracked and recorded by the city clerk. Therefore, the City will offer virtual training to make sure all are legally compliant. Eventually all board members will need to go through this training.

### **Discuss Reducing Executive Director Role**

Herb shared Wasta has served as Executive Director for the past 10 years. They want to begin discussions about reducing his hours since the majority of large projects for the MedQuarter are complete. Wasta has been the face of the MedQuarter and acted as a sponge and filter for this SSMID. Wasta mentioned how much the commission has evolved from 2012 and listed his key responsibilities and how he uses his time. He feels trimming back on duties is possible and the timing seems right, with working towards his own retirement. Therefore, he asked the commissioners to decide what they want most, because he said he works at the will and direction of this commission.

Conceptionally, this trimming back will take place January 1, 2026, but the date is still fluid. Steffen said we need a face for the MedQuarter of which Wasta had done well. Wasta stated he could continue on a part-time basis as he likes his work and likes what they have achieved. Greene clarified that the role is shifting from strategy and development to more of a maintenance role; thus, how do we leverage some of the resources? Jensen said we want Wasta to stay for as long as he has the capacity. Wasta stated there is still plenty to do, so tapering of his duties can be done if well guided.

Because a main focus for Wasta has been managing this commission, Pino wants to make sure this commission will still exist and he was assured it will not go away. Jensen emphasized they don't want to lose any ground, so perhaps the Economic Alliance can be more involved. Tupper asked about standards for commissions. Wasta said the SSMID essentially reports to the City, but they are not required to have an executive director. An executive meeting will occur in October to go over Wasta's responsibilities and to determine what the Economic Alliance can possibly provide.

### **MedQ Green Space Update**

Because of the loss of time and the cost increased by \$100K, even with the City offering \$50K towards it, the plans for a green space at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue will not be completed. Wasta had a candid conversation with the engineer over how an estimate for plaza pavers could be so inaccurate. Plus, the land is now owned by University of Iowa Healthcare. There is hope the green space can be implemented for the District someday, but right now there is cause for pause. Next steps will be to determine who at UIHC can make financial commitments and how to get them to be an engaged stakeholder.

### **Website Refresh Update**

Wasta stated the website is 12 years old. After considering options, the Brand & Marketing Committee did an RFP and chose JW Morton with a \$30K contract to overhaul the website. Zhorne mentioned the committee wants the website to be easy to navigate and to be responsive. The Economic Alliance manages the website, so they need the website to be done on a platform they can easily update, such as WordPress.



### **Committee Updates**

Branding & Marketing, Economic Development, Finance & Operations, and Standards reports were provided in the agenda packet.

### **Executive Director's Updates**

The Executive Director's Report was included in the agenda packet. Wasta called attention to pages 19-20 pages in the agenda packet that are the first financials for the MedQuarter Improvement Foundation which has zero assets right now.

### **Other Business**

The new mural is finished on First Avenue. Wasta said they may have a ribbon cutting for it when the artist is available in the future.

A meter will be located off of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue that will supply LED back-lighting and wall washers to the MedQuarter signage on the retaining wall by the Mt. Vernon/8th Avenue round about. This is expected to be done within the next 2-3 weeks per Wasta. Fall plantings and the railings are done as well.

### **Adjournment**

**Epping moved to adjourn with Greene seconding. The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 a.m.**

/pd

# Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement District Statement of Operations vs Budget August 2025

	Aug 25	Budget	\$ Over Budget	Jan - Aug 25	YTD Budget	\$ Over Budget	Annual Budget
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>							
<b>Income</b>							
Interstate Power & Light funds	0.00	0.00	0.00	23,631.19	23,631.00	0.19	47,262.00
MOA City Funding	0.00	26,313.00	-26,313.00	78,496.86	131,904.00	-53,407.14	237,156.00
Property Tax Revenue	68,239.25	63,719.42	4,519.83	544,467.96	509,755.36	34,712.60	764,633.00
Sponsorships	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100,000.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>68,239.25</b>	<b>90,032.42</b>	<b>-21,793.17</b>	<b>646,596.01</b>	<b>665,290.36</b>	<b>-18,694.35</b>	<b>1,149,051.00</b>
<b>Expense</b>							
Facade Improvement	0.00	3,000.00	-3,000.00	9,625.00	11,000.00	-1,375.00	25,000.00
Gateways	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30,000.00	-30,000.00	30,000.00
May's Island Improvements	0.00	0.00	0.00	81,683.07	75,000.00	6,683.07	75,000.00
New Event Sponsorships	6,370.00	2,500.00	3,870.00	49,792.99	40,500.00	9,292.99	65,000.00
Outside Services	71,938.08	71,938.00	0.08	575,504.68	575,504.00	0.68	863,257.00
Placer.AI	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,250.00	0.00	1,250.00	0.00
Self Watering Planters	0.00	0.00	0.00	6,149.30	10,000.00	-3,850.70	10,000.00
Signage and Wayfinding	0.00	4,900.00	-4,900.00	423.00	10,300.00	-9,877.00	30,000.00
Trolley Service	0.00	1,600.00	-1,600.00	20,309.96	23,600.00	-3,290.04	30,000.00
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>78,308.08</b>	<b>83,938.00</b>	<b>-5,629.92</b>	<b>744,738.00</b>	<b>775,904.00</b>	<b>-31,166.00</b>	<b>1,128,257.00</b>
<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<b>-10,068.83</b>	<b>6,094.42</b>	<b>-16,163.25</b>	<b>-98,141.99</b>	<b>-110,613.64</b>	<b>12,471.65</b>	<b>20,794.00</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>-10,068.83</b>	<b>6,094.42</b>	<b>-16,163.25</b>	<b>-98,141.99</b>	<b>-110,613.64</b>	<b>12,471.65</b>	<b>20,794.00</b>

**Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement District**  
**Profit & Loss**  
**August 2025**

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	<u>Aug 25</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
Property Tax Revenue	<u>68,239.25</u>
Total Income	<u>68,239.25</u>
Expense	
New Event Sponsorships	6,370.00
Outside Services	<u>71,938.08</u>
Total Expense	<u>78,308.08</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>-10,068.83</u>
Net Income	<u><u>-10,068.83</u></u>





Liesl Seabert, CEcD, AICP  
James Hoelscher, CEcD





# Let's Consider These...



- Role of Community Development & Downtown in Economic Development
- Discussion: Are You Playing to Win or to Look Good Losing?

# Let's Consider These...



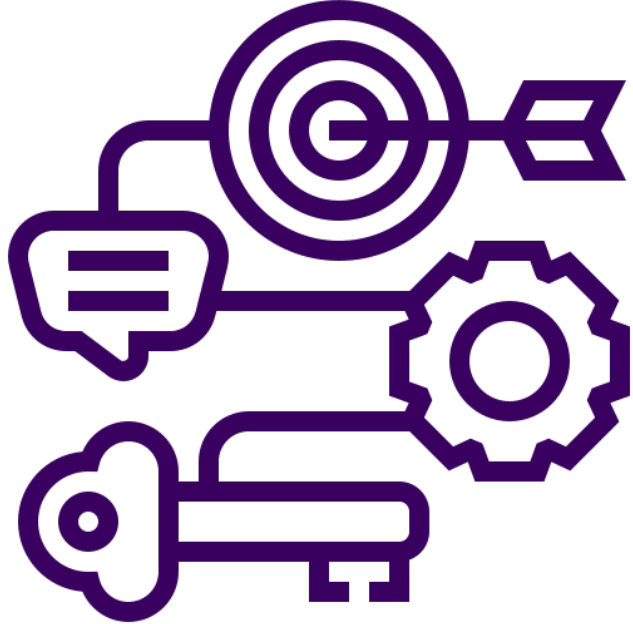
- What would you consider to be economic development?
- What isn't economic development?

# Economic Development can be described as:



- Implementing intentional activities to improve an area's economic wellbeing and quality of life
- The process of creating and sustaining prosperity through job creation and retention and an improved standard of living for all residents
- Encouraging a tax base that can keep pace with the cost of needed government services
- Growth that makes communities better – not necessarily bigger

# Why do we “do” it?



- Maintain, increase and diversify tax base
- Business expansion and retention (innovative, high-performing existing businesses)
- Economic vitality and diversification for commercial and industrial areas
- Create and retain jobs – increase per capita income
- Diverse, skilled, productive & adaptive workforce
- Sales of local products & services
- Partnerships between local governments, businesses and community members
- Culture of entrepreneurship and innovation
- High quality of “place” talent retention & attraction



# How does it work?



# Multiple Strategies or Areas of Activity

New Business Attraction & Development

*Basic "Duties" of ED*

Business Retention & Expansion

Serve:

Basic & Non-Basic

Industrial Development

Commercial/Retail Development

Start-ups & Entrepreneurs

What do "clients" need?

Site & Building Development

Financing/  
Financial Packaging

Research & Data

Advocacy

Workforce Development

Talent Attraction & Retention

Serve:

Existing Basic Businesses

Existing Non Basic Businesses

Community Development

Tourism

Culture

Aesthetics

Revitalization/  
Redevelopment

Housing

Childcare

Parks & Recreation

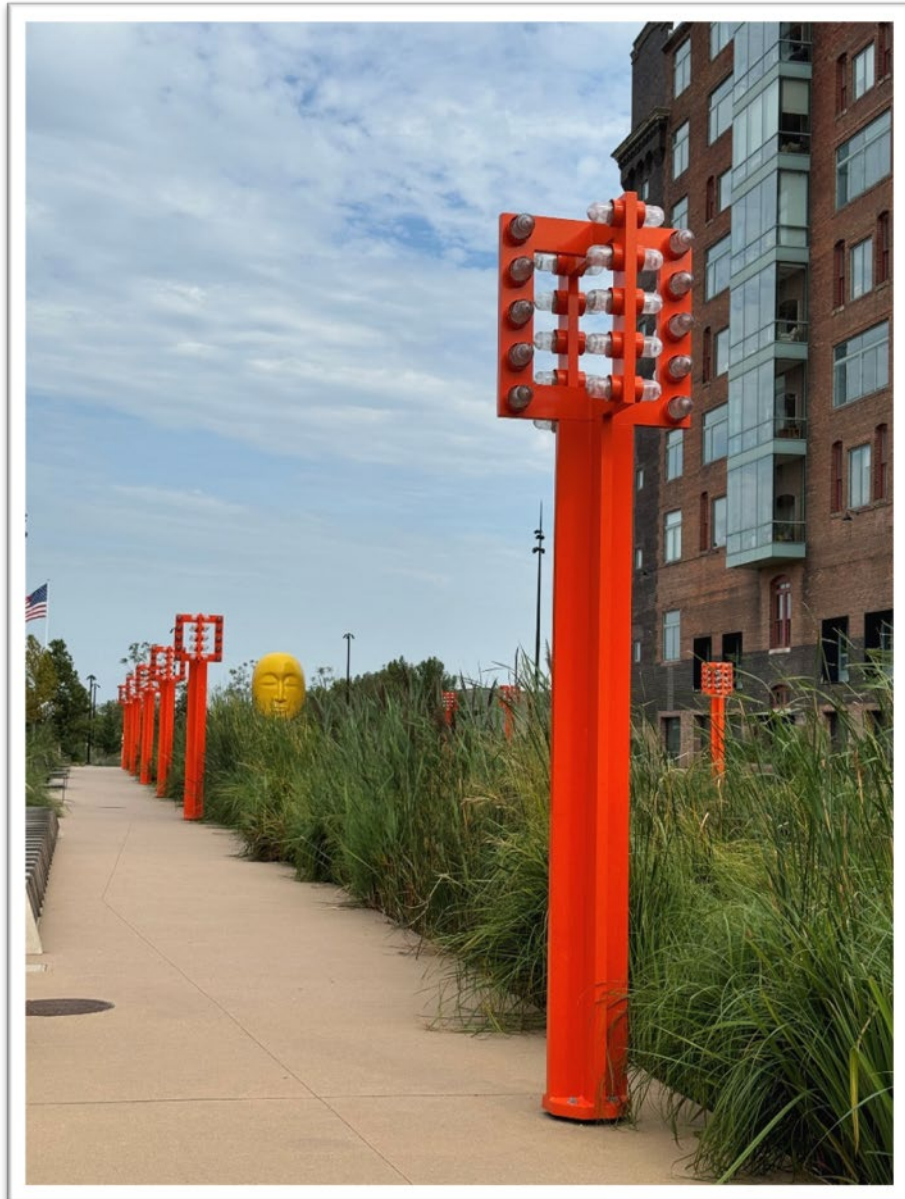


# Types of Assistance: Community Building & Organizing






# Types of Assistance: Place-Based Strategies





# Types of Assistance: Business-Oriented Development



## Municipal Façade Improvement Grant Program

Over 40 grants awarded in 3 years totaling \$217,000!

2025 Application Period is from March 17 - May 16

- ✓ 1:1 matching grant up to \$10,000
- ✓ Building located in Downtown or along West Pleasant or Lincoln Street

A full list of criteria and eligibility is available at [www.knoxvilleia.gov](http://www.knoxvilleia.gov)

Contact Glenn Lyons at 515-782-1723 or [glenn@571polson.com](mailto:glenn@571polson.com) to apply!



# Types of Assistance: Human Capital



# **This Meeting is Occurring Right NOW in:**

- Omaha
- Des Moines
- Davenport
- Dubuque
- Rochester
- Council Bluffs
- Sioux City
- Madison

**Are You Playing to  
Win or to Look  
Good Losing?**





# SWOT to Transform

- **S**trengths to Cornerstones?
- **W**eaknesses – Fix or Ignore
- **O**pportunities to Embrace Risk
- **T**rends – You Must be Students of the Game

Are You Playing to  
Win or to Look  
Good Losing?





Liesl Seabert, CEcD, AICP  
James Hoelscher, CEcD





## Location Subcommittee

### Executive Summary:

The Location Subcommittee, a group of five members—Ted Kepros, Randy Rings, Loren Hartelt, Fred Timko, and Jennifer Pratt—was formed with a single purpose: to find a new home for the Downtown Storefront and its staff. Their search began with an informal request for proposals sent to downtown property owners, which yielded eight responses.

Each of these submissions was carefully reviewed using a scoring matrix, a tool crafted with the expertise of committee members experienced in commercial development and leasing. The process of elimination narrowed the field to three finalists: the Arco Building, the Economic Alliance, and a City-owned space within the First Avenue parking garage.

Each of the final contenders provided renderings, virtual walkthroughs, and cost estimates. The Arco Building presented a functional and viable space, while the Economic Alliance offered a variety of creative layouts that would put the Downtown District front and center. However, the City space came with a significant caveat. A walkthrough with the Ryan Company confirmed that the required infrastructure improvements, specifically installing sewer lines and HVAC—would make the project financially unfeasible.

In addition to the infrastructure challenges, the committee learned that Cedar Rapids Tourism would not be relocating from the DoubleTree. This news sealed the fate of the City-owned space, as the committee had hoped to form a partnership that would have made the location more viable.

Ultimately, the Location Subcommittee's conclusion was to continue with the one-year agreement at the Economic Alliance. While committee members, including Randy Rings, expressed disappointment that Tourism would not be relocating, they agreed that the Economic Alliance provides the most practical option for the time being. It ensures the staff can remain effective, allows the Downtown District to continue its work, and maintains the flexibility to explore future opportunities.

### Committee Process and Evaluation

The Location Subcommittee was established to find a new home for the Downtown Storefront and its staff, with a focus on the Downtown Vision plan. The committee's members included Ted Kepros, Randy Rings, Loren Hartelt, Fred Timko, and Jennifer Pratt. Their journey unfolded over a series of key meetings:

- **First meeting:** March 10, 2025
- **Second meeting:** May 12, 2025
- **Comparison property meeting:** May 27, 2025
- **Meeting with Assistant City Manager Angie Charipar & Jennifer Pratt** (on sharing City space with Tourism): July 15, 2025

- **Ryan Company walkthrough of City Space:** July 17, 2025
- **Second walkthrough of City space:** July 21, 2025
- **Post walkthrough meeting:** July 28, 2025

Early in the process, the committee identified the needs of staff to operate efficiently. During the first meeting, staff were directed to send out an informal Request for Proposal (RFP) to downtown property owners. The request sought information on available space, photos, price per square foot, tenant build-out allowances, lease terms, and earliest occupancy, with a minimum size of 1,000 square feet. Staff then created a scoring rubric, which was refined by committee members with expertise in commercial development, leasing, and facilities management.

This process yielded eight different proposals. During the second meeting, the subcommittee worked through seven of the submissions using the location rubric, narrowing the search to two locations: the Arco Building and the Economic Alliance. An eighth submission arrived late but was ultimately added to the final three.

A central question the committee grappled with was how to balance the need for a dedicated storefront—a key component of the Downtown Vision plan—with the practical reality of maintaining staff continuity and collaboration with the Economic Alliance. The committee also debated the potential cost of hiring additional staff to manage a front desk, a necessity if the Downtown District were to have its own office space.

The committee also considered several other potential locations in their initial conversations:

- **City office by Train Tracks:** Currently a gravel floor, it would require a complete build-out.
- **Alliant Tower:** Space was available on the first floor.
- **Kubius building:** Owned by Jon Dusek.
- **Current Economic Alliance building:** Architects were already working on two potential designs.
- **Town Center (2nd & 3rd):** Randy Rings noted the entire first floor was empty and owned by Texans.
- **Corner next to Need Pizza:** Located across from UFG.
- **Higley Building:** Owner Scott Olson was willing to let them use the space for utilities only, but he was hesitant to see a retail spot taken up by a non-retail business.
- **CRST first floor:** CRST felt this was prime space, located across from City Hall and likely too expensive. Loren Hartelt mentioned that CRST was unsure what they wanted to do with the space or what they would charge.

Between the first and second meetings, staff collaborated with Loren Hartelt to craft the informal RFP and the scoring matrix used for the evaluation.

### How the Location Subcommittee reached their conclusion:

With the scoring matrix complete, the subcommittee carefully discussed and evaluated each submission. Several were quickly dismissed due to specific concerns:

- **Annex:** The location was deemed unfavorable.
- **Granby:** There were build-out concerns due to the small square footage.
- **Higley:** The space was not on the first floor.
- **Guaranty:** The cost of the build-out was a concern.
- **Kingston:** The price was high due to its prime real estate, and it was not centrally located.

After this initial review, three finalists were chosen for a more in-depth exploration: the Arco Building, the Economic Alliance, and the City-owned Space in the parking garage. The committee unanimously decided that a full meeting was required to compare the final three options before making a long-term decision.

Feedback from their second meeting highlighted some key points:

- The Downtown District had already established a distinct identity with the hiring of two dedicated staff members, Caleb and Jennifar.
- The committee acknowledged that if someone were to search for "Cedar Rapids," they would likely find the Economic Alliance first, making the current location a valuable asset.
- There were concerns that spending taxpayer dollars to improve a city-owned building could be perceived negatively and might send the wrong message about the committee's priorities.

During their third comparison meeting, the three finalists were asked to provide renderings, virtual walkthroughs, and cost estimates.

- The Arco building team provided an in-person walkthrough, with staff taking videos to share with the subcommittee.
- The Economic Alliance provided multiple renderings, each showcasing a unique layout that prominently featured the Downtown District.
- The City provided blueprints and directed staff to ParkCR for access to the building.

The subcommittee, having seen bids for other projects come in significantly higher than original projections, was not confident in their ability to estimate the build-out costs on their own. To get a more accurate understanding of the actual costs and timeline, they directed staff to consult with OPN and the Ryan Company.

The subcommittee also explored a potential partnership with Cedar Rapids Tourism, believing their similar missions and small staff sizes could be a great fit. This partnership, they thought, could eliminate the need for either organization to hire a dedicated front desk staff member. A meeting was arranged with Assistant City Manager Angie Charipar, who serves as the City's liaison to CR Tourism. During this meeting, it became clear that CR Tourism had no plans to leave the DoubleTree, a location that provides their staff with synergy and access to hotel teams, which is instrumental for bidding on and hosting conferences.

Subsequently, Dan Baxter of the Ryan Company walked through the space with committee members Fred Timko, Loren Hartelt, and staff member Caleb Knutson. Dan confirmed that while a build-out was not impossible, the project would face significant financial hurdles. His biggest concern was whether sewer lines were already in the building. After reviewing the blueprints, he confirmed they were not, meaning a huge cost would be incurred to bring them in from First Avenue. HVAC was another concern, though manageable. Dan also noted that the space's size presented challenges that good furniture could help address. Another idea—taking on both spaces—was also dismissed after the walkthrough due to the high cost of creating a vestibule to meet fire hook-up requirements.

A second walkthrough with Ted Kepros and Knutson confirmed these findings. Staff also reached out to other construction companies, and the consensus was that the Ryan Company's estimates were accurate.

Based on the insights from the walkthroughs and the confirmation that Cedar Rapids Tourism would not relocate, the committee determined that proceeding with the City-owned space was simply not feasible. After careful discussion, they decided against disbanding, choosing instead to remain active and continue with the one-year agreement with the Economic Alliance. During the conversation, Randy Rings noted his disappointment that Tourism would not be moving, but he reinforced the committee's commitment to the Economic Alliance space for now. The members agreed to keep monitoring and evaluating any new opportunities that might arise, ensuring due diligence is always a priority.

In conclusion, the Location Subcommittee decided that while multiple properties were considered, the high costs and infrastructure challenges of the City-owned space made it unfeasible. Cedar Rapids Tourism's decision to remain at the DoubleTree also removed a key partnership option. The Economic Alliance emerged as the most practical and prudent short-term solution, allowing the Downtown District to operate effectively without incurring prohibitive expenses. The subcommittee recommends continuing the one-year agreement with the Economic Alliance while remaining engaged to evaluate future opportunities that may better align with the long-term vision of Downtown.