



NOTICE OF MEETING

Downtown Cedar Rapids Commission

Date: 3-25-26 Time: 3:00-4:30 PM

Location: Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust - 500 1st Ave NE

AGENDA

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

3. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES..... Pages 10-13

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

5. PRESENTATION

ImpactCR

Freedom Festival

6. REPORTS..... Pages 4-7

A. Third St SE

B. Retail Study

C. Commissioner Terms

D. Program Manager Update

E. Professional Development

7. DIRECTOR'S REPORT.....Page 8-9

8. OTHER BUSINESS

9. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, May 27

10. ADJOURNMENT

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 as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the event.



Reading Materials

2026 Report on Employer Firms – pages 14 -52

2026 Competitive Dashboard – 14 pages 53 -66

Homeless Systems Initiative – pages 67-68

Incrementalism as Innovation: Rethinking How Downtowns Build Momentum – page 69-74

MedQuarter Minutes (March meeting was cancelled)

Upcoming EA Events/Programs:

BizMix	April 9; 4 - 6pm	ARA Gallery & Interiors, Hiawatha
Biz Mix	April 16; 4 – 6pm	Spare Time Entertainment
Relish the Region (tickets on sale now)	April 30; 6-8pm	DoubleTree Hotel
Civics Bee	May 19; 1-4pm	Indian Creek Nature Center

Store Openings & Closings

Openings

Closings

Downtown SSMID Commission Members

Joe Ahmann, Landon Burg, Graig Cone, Brittney Clarke, Jon Dusek, Jared Hanlin,
Ted Kepros, Sarah Madsen, Juliet Pae, Jake Ryan, Randy Rings, Robin Sempf, Fred Timko

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Item No.: 6.A

ISSUE: Third St Activation

BACKGROUND:

The Downtown Vision Plan identifies Third Street as a key street in our Downtown, thus needing a “Catalytic Project”. The Vision Plan puts forward two long-term design concepts for the corridor: a Festival Street model, which would create a flexible, programmable space for events & community activation, & a Cycle Track model, which would prioritize protected active transportation alongside street-level amenities. Both represent permanent, capital-level investments. In the Executive Meeting, will reviewing the Vision Plan proposals their direction was to recommend the Festival Street concept.

Before permanent placemaking can be responsibly pursued, necessary infrastructure repairs & upgrades must be completed on Third Street. At this time, the City has not provided a confirmed timeline for that work, making permanent investment premature. In the interim, staff are exploring short-term activation opportunities to build momentum & visibility on the corridor. Staff are currently in conversation with partners about Color Bomb, a temporary public art & mural activation that has been used in other downtown contexts to rapidly transform a corridor's visual character & draw foot traffic. Staff will return to the board with a formal proposal as those conversations advance.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss the Third Street Catalytic Project, including short-term activation opportunities & the potential partnership. Executive Committee recommended the Festival Street concept.

STAFF CONTACT:

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Item No.: 6B

ISSUE: Retail Study Update

BACKGROUND:

The retail study is progressing well. Staff recently held a steering committee meeting with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance Economic Development team, the City of Cedar Rapids Economic Development team, Loren, Jon, & myself, during which we received an update on initial findings. The next phase involves small group discussions, & staff has been intentional about ensuring no developer or real estate group was excluded from the stakeholder list, given that this work is funded with public dollars. MJB Consulting is now organizing those sessions, & response to invites has been strong. Dates & times for all five developer/broker focus groups have been finalized, with one session scheduled for this Friday (3/20) & the remaining four taking place next week. Following those, sessions for restaurateurs & retailers will be held. After all small groups conclude, the steering committee will reconvene to review the study draft. Completion is scheduled for early June. Staff is also continuing to work with City staff on retail recruitment.

RECOMMENDATION:

None

STAFF CONTACT:

Caleb Knutson, cknutson@cedarrapids.org

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Item No.: 6C

ISSUE: Commissioner Terms

BACKGROUND:

This past weekend, Loren shared that he will be stepping down from his Chair position effective immediately, as he is transitioning to a new opportunity outside of CRST. We thank Loren for jumping in right away as a Commissioner & wish him the best in his next endeavor. In the interim, Ted will remain as Vice Chair, continuing serving through guidance & leadership. More updates to follow on how the Chair position will be filled. Sarah Madsen are agreed to server on the Executive committee.

This June we have Joe (Ahmann) & Jon (Dusek) who are both on their second term, thus they will need to roll off for a year. Staff have reached out to property owners that previously stated they are interested in the Downtown Commission to gauge if they are still interested.

STAFF CONTACT:

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Item No.: 6D

ISSUE: Program Manager Update

BACKGROUND:

The District Program Manager update highlights continued progress in downtown Cedar Rapids maintenance, beautification, programming, and strategic projects. Cleanup and beautification remain key priorities, including focused work along the 4th Street trail and the northwest corner of 1st Avenue near the DoubleTree. The team is optimizing downtown landscaping by reducing the total number of planters while transitioning to self-watering models and exploring opportunities to add trees and new planting areas, as all but 4 planters will be removed from the 3rd Avenue bridge. Repair on the 3rd Avenue bridge will commence this spring and continue into the summer. Maintenance operations are preparing for the busy spring and summer season with equipment servicing underway, staff completing traffic control and flagging recertifications, and the hiring of an additional part-time maintenance employee expected to start in early April. This is in addition to our seasonal waterer.

Downtown programming and events continue to expand, with strong momentum and support behind the Cedar Rapids Marathon, which already has 1,800 registrations and is expected to double by race day. The maintenance team will also support major community events such as the Farmers Market, Market After Dark, and other Downtown programming. The Events Subcommittee has begun allocating its \$58,000 budget for 2026, awarding \$24,000 in its first round of funding. Additional initiatives include new downtown merchandise, marathon promotional materials, and planning for a potential spring or summer music festival in partnership with Venuworks and Kingston Yard.

Public art and placemaking remain central to downtown development efforts. Several art initiatives are underway or planned for 2026, including student-led sidewalk art projects, new murals at multiple locations, a potential art installation at The Yard, and a collaborative "Color Bomb" project with the City to activate 3rd Street. Additional efforts include wrapping more Big Belly receptacles, supporting a \$10,000 façade improvement grant awarded to Great America, and continuing discussions about bringing the Crunch Berry Run back downtown. Construction updates include the 3rd Avenue bridge repairs, ongoing gateway work near 5th Avenue, and the AC Marriott project slated for completion in November 2026.

STAFF CONTACT:

Jennifar Bassett, jbassett@cedarrrapids.org

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Item No.: 6E

ISSUE: Professional Development

BACKGROUND:

I'm excited to share that I will be participating as a panelist at the 2026 IDA Place Matters Conference in Madison, WI taking place May 13–15. I'll be part of a session titled "**Incrementalism as Innovation: Rethinking How Downtowns Build Momentum,**" where we'll explore how small, strategic projects can create meaningful and lasting impact in downtown districts

RECOMMENDATION:

Attachment

STAFF CONTACT:

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Item No.: 7

ISSUE: Director's Report

BACKGROUND:

University of Iowa Journalism & Community has been provided a curated list of Downtown businesses & stakeholders. They will be reaching out in the coming weeks to gather information & tell the stories of our Downtown community. This is a fantastic opportunity to shine a spotlight on Downtown Cedar Rapids through a fresh lens & build meaningful connections between the university & our business community. The students will present their final project on April 6th 2-3pm at Adler Journalism and Mass Communication Building. The entire Commission is invited to their presentations.

Attached are the current P&L & Balance Sheet. On the financial reporting side, the EA is in the process of transitioning to QuickBooks Online, & as staff we now have access to the platform. We are actively working toward developing a reporting framework tailored specifically to the MOA, so that we can more precisely track MOA expenses going forward. At this time, there are no unexpected expenses to report.

We have brought back Downtown on the Road tour. Last year we visited Alliant & CRBT, & this year we have lined up Shive Hattery as our next stop. During the visit, we will present who we are & what Downtown Cedar Rapids has to offer, while also gathering feedback directly from their team. Shive Hattery is one of several engineering & consulting firms anchored in our downtown, & that cluster has become a deliberate focus for this year's tour. By engaging these firms directly, we aim to better understand what their employees want & need from downtown, insights that will help shape programming, amenities, & the overall downtown experience.

We have been working with a collation across Iowa on legislation (SF 22107 & HF 2325) on giving cities the opportunity to create Social Districts: *allowing for the possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages in certain public spaces*. Which would allow pedal trolleys, make it easier for events Downtown. This came about through a local couple looking to launch a pedal trolley business serving guests of the Downtown District. In working with Public Policy experts, originally the plan was to work through Transportation Subcommittee. However, this bill was championed by members of the House. There were zero issues coming out of the House subcommittee with broad support across the State from Cities, economic development organizations, & Trade organizations. We received word late Sunday, that it had stalled in the Senate. Collation support has not decreased.

We organized a small email campaign to key leadership on Senate side, detailing how such districts have been keys to success in Nashville, Raleigh, small towns in Ohio, West Virginia, Kansas, & Michigan. It cleared the first funnel with ease. It did not clear the second funnel, not due to a support issue on the

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Senate side, but more so a workflow issue. We still have a champion in the House to lead this next year; we have started already talking to partners on gaining more support on the Senate side. While disappointing, this is not surprising given all that still needs to be accomplished in this year's session.

We are proud to be working with community partners to cultivate a cohesive, vibrant music & storytelling scene in Downtown Cedar Rapids. Iowa Public Radio has reached out to collaborate on an initiative that brings their mission of public media & civic storytelling to the heart of Downtown. We are also working closely with the City Music Taskforce to ensure our efforts connect to a broader, coordinated vision for live music & cultural programming across the city. One exciting milestone on the horizon is the inaugural [Make Music Day](#), June 21st.

The City is bringing back Summer in the Square. As the Summer in the Square program lineup continues to take shape, there is a great opportunity for our Commissioners to get involved directly. We will have the chance to volunteer as a group at one of the events, whether that means handing out items or helping on the grill. More details to follow.

RECOMMENDATION:

None

STAFF CONTACT:

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