



NOTICE OF MEETING

Downtown Cedar Rapids Commission

Date: 7-22-26 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 8-10

4. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

6. PRESENTATION

A: Student Findings on Downtown - Professor Ty Rushing; University of Iowa

7 REPORTS & DISCUSSION.....Pages 3-6

A. Vision Plan

B. Program Manager Update

C. Budget

8 DIRECTOR'S REPORT.....Pages 7

9. OTHER BUSINESS

10. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, September 23

11. 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@cedar-rapids.org as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the event.



Reading Materials

Executive Committee Minutes (page 11)
Med Q Minutes Executive Committee Minutes (pages 12-13)
Homeless Systems Initiative (page 14)
2026 Cedar Rapids Marathon Weekend Recap (pages 15-21)
Block by Block Safety Ambassador Program – (page 22-34)

Upcoming EA Events/Programs:

Farmers Markets: Saturdays--August 1 & 15 and Sept. 5 & 19 (7:30am–12:00pm)
Biz Mix: Thursday, August 20, hosted by at Honkamp, P.C., at new downtown location (4:00pm–6:00pm)
Market After Dark: Sat., August 29 (6:30–11:00pm)

Store Openings & Closings

Openings

Closings

Downtown SSMID Commission Members

Landon Burg, Graig Cone, Brittney Clarke, Jared Hanlin, Ted Kepros, Sarah Madsen, Juliet Pae, Jake Ryan, Randy Rings, Robin Sempf, Lisa Stephenson, Fred Timko, Steve White, Kyle Zimmerman

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Item No.: 7.A

ISSUE: Vision Plan Update

BACKGROUND:

The Downtown Vision Plan was adopted by City Council December 2023, in a joint effort with the Downtown SSMID and Economic Alliance. The Vision Plan established three clear goals: Embrace the River, Ensure Downtown is Active & Vibrant and Improve Connectivity within Downtown and to Adjacent Districts and Neighborhoods.

To ensure that the Vision Plan does not collect dust, an Implementation Team was created. It is comprised of Downtown staff and City staff from: Community Development, Communications, Economic Development, Public Works, Parks & Rec, along with representation from ParkCR, VenuWorks and the Downtown SSMID Executive Committee. As the Implementation Team, we meet monthly updating the team on progress, work through challenges and discuss upcoming ideas and projects. This is a holistic approach. When talking to peers, many Downtowns have new plans, but very few have the Implementation Team or post process framework.

A tracking system was created in a Google drive for which items are tracked by the year. We are currently on the Year 2-3, of which all of the initiatives Downtown is responsible for are marked as "On Track."

We currently have two large Vision Plan Initiatives: The Street Activation Team and Retail Study.

The street activation team has met twice. During the second meeting, Landon's team at OPN presented a table-sized map marked with areas and buildings of interest, along with hand-drawn renderings of facade updates for approximately 13 different buildings and locations. The group has continued to focus on the May's Island to Greene Square corridor, with additional attention to 2nd and 3rd Avenue, both of which are already high-energy corners in downtown.

On July 6, Fred and I met with Landon at the OPN office to discuss moving the project forward. Fred has been in conversation with elected officials with several asking when they can see project materials. Downtown has since entered into a contract with OPN for visioning services. Downtown is now officially a client of OPN, engaging them through the full process. At the next Street Activation Team meeting on August 6, the OPN team will bring research, concepts and current trends for similar projects.

On the retail study, MJB Consulting met with over 50 stakeholders to gather feedback on downtown and its current state. MJB returned to town on July 14 to brief stakeholders on his findings, with about 40 people in attendance. His draft

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recommendations include having the City, Economic Alliance and Downtown jointly hire a retail recruitment person, as well as developing incentives for buildouts and facade improvements (which we already have a facade improvement grant which we partner with the City on). The final report of the retail study is on time for end of fall. This is excellent timing as one of the Year 2-3 Vision Plan Initiative is *"Encourage (and recruit as needed) businesses to the Downtown core that diversify the storefront mix and fill important gaps, such as boutique retail, community-serving and convenience retail like pharmacy or grocery and culturally diverse restaurant concepts."*

These two projects/ initiatives are directly tied to the playbook and guidance that the Downtown Vision Plan provides. We will continue to lean on the Vision Plan for all actions we take. If we can't tie it to the Vision Plan, we are hard pressed to undertake the actions. Both initiatives use the Vision Plan play book in which the EA and City both have seats at the table. The collaboration is key to the success of Downtown.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discussion

FISCAL IMPACT:

For the services with OPN \$10,000. These dollars came out the line item "Catalytic Project"

STAFF CONTACT:

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Jennifar Bassett, jbassett@cedarrapids.org

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Item No.: 7B

ISSUE: Program Manager MOU Update – Beautification, Safety & Street Activation

BACKGROUND:

Beautification efforts are well underway throughout downtown with seasonal planters, landscaping, power washing, and enhanced cleaning efforts. The Downtown maintenance team continues to do an outstanding job maintaining a clean, welcoming environment while also providing operational support for the Cedar Rapids Downtown Farmers Market in partnership with the Economic Alliance.

Public art and street activation continues to be an important part of downtown's placemaking efforts. This spring, artist Whimsical Twist completed a vibrant window installation at the historic Smulekoff building and has since added a second installation at the Town Centre property at 3rd and 3rd. Downtown also continues to engage local youth through creative placemaking initiatives. Iowa Big's **Murals of Meaning** project completed at the end of May at Foundation 2, while students from Metro STEAM Academy designed and constructed a custom planter inspired by the Cedar River, adding another unique and locally created feature to the streetscape.

Momentum is also building around Downtown's ColorBurst initiative, a community-driven public art project that brings color and creativity to public spaces through yarn installations. In partnership with ImpactCR, downtown hosted a volunteer community event at Big Grove to create colorful yarn art for installation for the ColorBurst project. To further expand community participation, Downtown sponsored an eight-week art class at the Cedar Rapids Public Library, providing residents with the opportunity to learn yarn art techniques and contribute directly to the project. Installation of the first ColorBurst displays began at 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue, with additional installations planned as the project continues to grow.

Several key infrastructure projects continue to move forward. The 3rd Street resurfacing project, from 5th Avenue to 8th Avenue, was released for bid on July 15 and is scheduled to begin and be completed this fall. The project includes asphalt pavement removal and resurfacing; curb and gutter replacement; storm, sanitary, and water utility improvements, as well as driveway and alley approach replacements. The total estimated project cost is approximately \$590,000.

Progress is also being made on the 4th Street Trail Segment 1 project. A pre-construction meeting was held on July 7 for the trail extension, which will connect 7th Avenue SE in downtown Cedar Rapids to the new Alliant Energy Light Line pedestrian bridge over the Cedar River. Once complete, the project will strengthen connections between Downtown, New Bohemia, Czech Village and the Cedar Valley Nature Trail. Construction is expected to begin soon pending final permit approvals.

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Additional improvements include the completion of the Gatewell project behind the Economic Alliance along the Riverwalk Trail, enhancing the river corridor. Due to funding constraints, construction of the floodwall is now anticipated to resume in the spring of 2028. Lastly, there are various sidewalk repair projects scheduled for downtown. Please refer to [City of Cedar Rapids construction projects](#) for additional information.

One final note; I have inquired with the team at [Block by Block](#) about their new safety ambassador program and have attached information for your review.

RECOMMENDATION:

Attachment(s)

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Item No.: 7C

ISSUE: Budget

BACKGROUND:

Staff continue to work through a series of accounting changes at the EA that were prompted by recent staff turnover in the accounting/finance. Downtown Staff have explored a few options to help stabilize and support the accounting function going forward.

At Executive Committee, we discussed the possibility of contracting out accounting and financial reporting services to ESG Professional Accountants, the same firm that currently provides financial reporting services to the Parking Board. The belief is that engaging in a firm already familiar with the reporting needs of a related public agency may allow for a more efficient transition and help address gaps created by the recent staff turnover. The budget proposal was unanimously supported by the Executive Committee.

As part of this engagement, staff anticipate that some forensic accounting work will be needed to review and reconcile records affected by the turnover, before ongoing reporting responsibilities can be fully transitioned to the contracted firm.

TIMELINE / NEXT STEPS:

Staff's current next step is to move forward with hiring ESG. Once engaged, the firm's initial work will include the forensic accounting review described above, followed by transition to regular financial reporting support. Staff will return to the Board with further updates as this process progresses.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The estimated annual cost of contracting with ESG for these services is \$13,000. This estimate will be refined as staff finalize the scope of the engagement.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discussion

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Item No.: 8

ISSUE: Director's Report

BACKGROUND:

We have a new Commissioner, Steve White. Steve reached out to Fred to see how to get more engaged with the Downtown SSMID. Steve and I got together to talk about the Downtown SSMID's charge, focus, what projects we are working on, and where we see the District heading. Steve turned in his application and was appointed to the Commission at the July 14th Council meeting. Both Brittney and Fred were reappointed to serve on the Commission. Bringing the Commission back up to full strength of 15 Commissioners.

Our social media analytics for the year are trending in a positive direction. In Q2, Downtown Cedar Rapids' total social media reach grew to 135,013 views/impressions, up from 119,299 in Q1 — a 13% increase. Instagram was our standout performer, with views jumping from 19,550 to 33,842 (a 73% increase), while LinkedIn impressions nearly tripled, rising from 1,300 to 3,713. Facebook views held essentially flat at roughly 97,000–98,000 across both quarters, remaining our largest single channel by volume. Our data shows strong momentum on emerging channels (Instagram and LinkedIn) while our Facebook presence remains steady as the foundation of our reach.

At the end of June, Phil (MedQ), Fred, Ted, Jennifar, and I attended a presentation at the Police Department on their drone capabilities. The PD showed promo videos showcasing what drone technology can do. We were also given a live demonstration, from the drone's charging station through flight, as well as a demonstration of the camera's capabilities. Throughout, it was emphasized that drones are not intended to replace patrol officers, but rather to provide a faster first response.

KGAN ran a [story](#) in early July on how Downtown & NewBo businesses are seeing increased foot traffic tied to the major construction projects in town, with the influx specifically tied to the data centers development. I was interviewed for this piece and noted the influx of out-of-town employees has been a noticeable boost for Downtown businesses.

RECOMMENDATION:

None

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