



NOTICE OF MEETING

Downtown Cedar Rapids Commission

Date: 5-27-26 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 11-13

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

5. PRESENTATION

A: Downtown YMCA: Cari McCoy

B. ConnectCR:

6. REPORT & VOTE

A. Commission Chair

B. 2027 Renewal

7. REPORTS..... Pages 5- 7

A. Program Manager Update

B. IDA Place Matters Conference Update

C. Street Level Activation

8. DIRECTOR'S REPORT.....Pages 8-9

9. OTHER BUSINESS

10. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, July 22

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



Reading Materials

2025-26 Overflow Report (pages 10 -13)
Co Start Services (pages 14-19)
Services Megatrend WSJ (pages 20-27)
Street Outreach Referral Flyer – page 28)
Street Team Notes (page 29-30)
Oak Hill Jackson (page 31)
Balance sheet (page 32)
Profit & Loss (page 33)

Upcoming EA Events/Programs:

Farmers Market - May 30; 7:30am -12pm
Cedar Rapids Marathon – June 6-7

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: Commission Chair and Commissions Terms

BACKGROUND:

Following the vacancy in the Chair position, the search began for new leadership for the Downtown SSMID Commission. We are pleased to announce that Fred Timko has agreed to serve as Chair for a one year term. Fred has been brought up to speed by Ted and Caleb and has already met with the Mayor and Juliet at the Economic Alliance. We welcome Fred into this leadership role and look forward to the year ahead under his guidance.

We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to Loren for his service as Chair and for his willingness to step in as a Commissioner when needed. We wish him all the best in his new opportunity outside of CRST.

In addition, we would like to thank Jon Dusek and Joe Ahmann for their service to the Downtown SSMID Commission. Both have completed two consecutive terms and are rolling off the Commission. Their time, talent, and commitment to Downtown Cedar Rapids have been greatly appreciated.

Lisa Stephenson will serve as the new CRST representative, and Kyle Zimmerman of Guided Wealth Partners will also be joining the Commission.

RECOMMENDATION:

Vote to affirm Fred Timko as Downtown board chair.

STAFF CONTACT:

Caleb Knutson, cknutson@cedarrapids.org

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Item No.: 6B

ISSUE: 2027 Renewal

BACKGROUND:

Iowa Code Chapter 386 dictates every ten years Self Supported Municipal Improvement Districts must renew their districts. This is to provide the taxpayers with the opportunity to reevaluate their support of the efforts that have been undertaken.

The Downtown SSMID is up for renewal. We last went through this process in 2017, under the leadership of Fred, & Casey Prince. In the past decade Downtown District has championed placemaking through murals holiday lights, storm drain art, the modernization with placing Big Bellies around the district.

Creating programs to move the needle in the district: the façade improvement grant where we partner with the City to assist property owners upgrade their spaces with investment from Downtown and City dollars. Supporting the creation of holding events in the district boundaries through sponsorship. Pandemic recovery and support with the Downtown CR Dollars program, which generated \$245,477 in economic impact in Downtown.

Derecho recovery, the operations team lead volunteers in clean up that amounted to nearly 500 volunteer hours. Coordinating volunteers on United Way's Day of Caring for projects within Downtown. Have

As we look forward to the next decade, we highlight the work that has been accomplished, and the partnerships that have been forged.

RECOMMENDATION:

Vote to affirm renewal efforts

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Item No.: 7A

ISSUE: Program Manager Update – Beautification & Street Activation

BACKGROUND:

Downtown beautification efforts are underway as seasonal enhancements, and infrastructure improvements continue throughout the district. Annual flower plantings have commenced throughout downtown, bringing renewed color and visual interest to public spaces and streetscapes. In addition, seven new trees have been planted to strengthen the downtown canopy and enhance the pedestrian environment. Fourteen additional Big Belly units have also been wrapped, continuing efforts to improve the appearance and consistency of downtown amenities. Public art initiatives are expanding as well, with new window murals recently completed on the Smulekoff's building and students from Iowa BIG completing a mural on Foundation 2's building, adding additional creativity and visual activity throughout the district. 425 Plaza will be a focus along with adding additional plantings to the 4th St trail.

Operational improvements have also progressed this season. All necessary repairs and maintenance for the Toolcat, tractor, and other equipment assets have been completed to ensure the maintenance team is fully equipped for the season ahead. Both Evan and Collin have renewed their Flagging certifications to be able to assist with moving barricades for our Farmers Markets. Staffing support is now in place with both our seasonal maintenance staff members and additional year-round part-time Maintenance Specialist beginning work, allowing for expanded maintenance capacity as activity increases downtown. Work is also continuing in partnership with the city on the proposed pedestrian crosswalk serving Abbe Health along 5th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue, which remains in progress.

Activation efforts continue to gain momentum across downtown. The 3rd Street "Color Bomb" project is currently in progress under the leadership of Lona ("The Crazy Yarn Lady"), with Downtown sponsoring both the public art installation and associated community programming. Interest has been strong, with the initial eight-week crafting library session already filled and plans underway to add an additional session. Downtown merchandise initiatives also continue with new shirts, hats, pins, and stickers being developed. Excitement is building around the inaugural Cedar Rapids Marathon, which has reached approximately 3,000 registrations. Downtown is serving as the Team Relay sponsor, which is now sold out, and 5SF is partnering by donating two gift certificates and two Garmin watches for athlete giveaways, further strengthening community excitement and engagement surrounding the event.

STAFF CONTACT:

Jennifar Bassett, jbassett@cedarrrapids.org

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Item No.: 7B

ISSUE: IDA Place Matters Conference, Madison, WI May 13-16

BACKGROUND: Below you will find a high-level synopsis of the conference. I am happy to provide additional information on request.

Operations, Maintenance and Safety – Central Business District - The Madison BID serves approximately 250 properties and 360 businesses with a strong focus on downtown operations and maintenance. Their approach prioritizes hardscape maintenance, seven-day-a-week service, dedicated cleaning efforts, and coordinated work across multiple agencies. Specialized staff and operational investments support a highly visible and active downtown environment.

Operations and Public Safety - Communities across the country shared a range of public safety and operational strategies, including ambassador programs, specialized downtown safety teams, community partnerships, and activation efforts. The overall emphasis was on creating safe, welcoming environments while addressing economic challenges and improving the visitor experience. Block By Block has expanded its scope, adding safety ambassadors. I have scheduled a meeting.

Town & Gown: Leveraging University Partnerships and Assets - Discussion focused on the role universities play in strengthening regional economies and communities through collaborative relationships, student retention efforts, and partnerships that connect education with community priorities.

Case Making to Influence Downtown Decisions / Incrementalism as Innovation - Sessions emphasized using data and small, intentional improvements to demonstrate value and support larger long-term goals. Jennifar participated as a speaker during the Incrementalism as Innovation panel discussion.

Closing Keynote – Dr. Alfonso Morales - The closing keynote explored the evolving role of food systems and farmers markets as community assets, emphasizing their importance beyond commerce as spaces that support health, social interaction, and quality of life.

Farmers Market - The Madison Farmers Market demonstrates how large-scale, year-round programming can serve as a major community and economic driver through a structured vendor system and strong attendance that consistently attracts significant activity downtown.

RECOMMENDATION:

NA

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Item No.: 7C

ISSUE: Street Activation

BACKGROUND:

As incoming Chair, Fred Timko established a Street Activation Team comprised of representatives from the Commission, the EA, and the City. Staff were tasked with conducting a ground level block by block analysis of 3rd Avenue, 2nd Street, and 3rd Street to identify existing retail, potential retail opportunities, locations unlikely to transition, and areas for future activation efforts.

The team includes Fred, Ted, Jon, Brittney, Landon, Audrey Wheeler (EA), Jennifer Pratt (City), and Scott Mather (City). The first meeting was held on May 11, during which the group reviewed the street level mapping analysis and discussed areas with the strongest potential for targeted, tactical activation efforts.

Third Ave became the focal point, after a discussion and review of the current landscape. The intersection of 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street was identified as anchor within the consensus focal point. Meeting notes attached.

The retail study will inform how to move forward with retail attraction strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discussion

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Item No.: 8

ISSUE: Director's Report

BACKGROUND:

I am looking forward to continuing the Street Team approach to Downtown development and activation. This strategic and tactical approach will help move the needle forward as we identify opportunities block by block and focus efforts where they can have the greatest impact. I appreciate the collaboration and engagement from the Commissioners, EA, and City staff as we work together to create a stronger, more active, and more connected Downtown Cedar Rapids.

It was great to work with the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication Community Journalism class led by Ty Rushing. I had the opportunity to attend their final class session of the year, where student groups presented their final video projects focused on businesses in Downtown Cedar Rapids.

The projects highlighted a variety of Downtown businesses and told authentic stories about the people, culture, and entrepreneurial spirit that continue to shape our district. It was encouraging to see students engage directly with our Downtown community and produce thoughtful, high quality content that showcases the energy and momentum happening throughout the district. We will continue to look for ways to leverage the University of Iowa and build partnerships that create additional opportunities to support and promote Downtown Cedar Rapids.

I presented at the City Council's Finance & Administrative Services Committee meeting on 5/14. The presentation went well, and we received positive feedback regarding Downtown activation efforts, specifically art activation initiatives. Questions from Council focused on how we are approaching alley clean ups and how we continue messaging that sidewalks are the responsibility of the property owner.

The Downtown retail study continues to move forward. To date, presentations on retail trends and Retail 101, field work, research tasks, stakeholder outreach, merchant focus groups, and public/non profit engagement have all been completed. A total of 43 stakeholders have participated in the process, including landlords, brokers, merchants, City leadership, economic development professionals, tourism representatives, arts and cultural organizations, and financial institutions. Current efforts are

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focused on reviewing preliminary recommendations and gathering additional feedback ahead of the final recommendations presentation in June. The final written deliverable, anticipated in August, will outline realistic short and long term retail opportunities for Downtown Cedar Rapids, tenanting and positioning strategies, stakeholder roles and responsibilities, infrastructure and capacity needs, and recommendations related to catalytic incentives, placemaking, pedestrian connectivity, and activation strategies throughout the Downtown district.

RECOMMENDATION:

None

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