



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes

May 27, 2026 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Present: Joe Ahmann, Landon Burg, Brittney Clarke, Graig Cone, Jon Dusek, Jared Hanlin, Sarah Madson (virtual), Juliet Pae, Jake Ryan, Robin Sempf, Lisa Stephenson, Fred Timko

Absent: Ted Kepros, Randy Rings

Guests: Cari McCoy, YMCA; Julie Kraft and Steve Sovern, ConnectCR

City: Jennifer Pratt; City Liaison

Staff: Jennifar Basett, Peggy Degnan, Caleb Knutson, Phil Wasta, Audrey Wheeler

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Timko called the meeting to order at 3:01pm and welcomed new member, Lisa Stephenson from CRST. Stephenson shared her background and the group went around the room introducing themselves to her.

Approval of March Minutes

Dusek moved to approve the March minutes with Sempf seconding. The January minutes were unanimously approved.

Downtown YMCA

Cari McCoy, CEO of the Cedar Rapids Metro YMCA, presented an overview of the organization's mission and operations during her first 100 days in the role. She highlighted the YMCA's focus on total well-being, community building, and addressing local needs through programs like youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. McCoy also discussed the downtown Y's role in serving the surrounding area, particularly in the 52401 zip code, where over 31% of member individuals live at or below the poverty level and 44% under age 18. She noted the downtown location currently offers preschool programs with a waiting list due to space constraints of only being able to accommodate 20 children.

At the downtown YMCA, over half of preschoolers attend on subsidized payment plans and only 17 of 80 summer day campers are actual YMCA members, due to perceived high membership costs. She also mentioned if parents say the cost is too high, they are able to remove financial burdens based on need.

McCoy discussed plans for a new 96,000 sq ft. YMCA facility being built in partnership with College Community School District, which will feature a competition pool and indoor turf field and track without requiring significant debt for the nonprofit organization. She outlined future strategic planning efforts to expand beyond sports-focused programming to serve the full community, including non-sporting interests and addressing the need for a community recreation center.

McCoy mentioned there are more active older adults with memberships at the downtown YMCA as this helps fulfill a sense of community for them. "Strengthening community is our purpose. A lot of social and mental well-being come with just belong to the Y," stated McCoy. There are three YMCA locations in the Cedar Rapids/Marion and Camp Wapsie. Each location has an executive director that reports to McCoy.

She said they're shifting who they serve and how they serve them, by building partnerships and understanding the most pressing needs, with a focus on developing younger people.

ConnectCR

Julie Kraft introduced herself as the director of organization development. Kraft and Sovern presented an update on ConnectCR's public-private partnership project, saying it involves transforming two eyesores, Cedar Lake and a broken bridge in downtown Cedar Rapids, into community assets that will connect Czech Village and NewBo via the LightLine pedestrian bridge. Kraft gave updates including its construction status, design features, and plans for LED lighting and signage. The project has raised over \$20 million from 300+ donors and includes plans for a park on the east side with potential for a small challenge course. Also, part of the broken bridge will be recycled to hold donor and historical signage. The city will own and maintain the bridge and lake area.

Phase I of the Cedar Lake project is finished with the completion of a Jetty and trail around the lake. The trails is part of Cedar Valey Nature Trail and the of American Discovery Trail. Phase II includes current work on the Shaver Road cul-de-sac and trailhead along with upcoming amenities like an ADA accessible kayak launch and challenge course. Phase III will be a challenge course and nature area.

She also announced that Cedar Rapids will be part of the American Discovery Trail relay event that will be in Cedar Rapids on October 3-4. The relay starts July 4th in California and will end in Delaware, with the Declaration of Independence being carried across the country. This is expected to receive statewide and national attention. She requested input from the downtown district on potential involvement with a community celebration event in Green Square during this visit. It just so happens that a mural of the Discovery Trail is on the parking garage wall facing Green Square Park.

The event passing through downtown, which is expected to receive national and statewide attention. A welcome ceremony is being planned near Sag-Wagon on Cedar Lake for Saturday, October 3rd, and a sending-off ceremony near Mount Trashmore on Sunday, October. 4th. She mentioned it will be a busy because there is a Farmers Market, the Especially for You Cancer Walk/Race and Zach Jonnson's Foundation Gala all that same weekend in downtown.

Commission Chair

In the absence of a Chair, Knutson shared that he and Vice Chair Kepros met to discuss the next chair. Knutson stated that Timko had agreed to be the SSMID chair for the next year. Knutson announced that Ahmann's and Dusek's terms are ending in June. Timko and Knutson thanked them for their leadership and contributions and presented each with a gift card.

Sempf moved to approve the nomination of Timko as Chair for one year with Burg seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.

2027 Renewal

Knutson discussed the 2027 renewal process for the Downtown District which requires mailing and hand-delivering petition letters to property owners over the next year, with a goal of reaching 60% of property owners. Timko asked about bringing in Quaker.

Stephenson moved to approve support of the SSMID Renewal process with Clarke seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.

Program Manager Update

Bassett provided an update on downtown beautification and maintenance efforts. She highlighted a \$58,000 event budget that will sponsor 22 events, including the upcoming Cedar Rapids Expo & Marathon which is June 6-7. Downtown is having a drawing for two watches and gift cards that only athletes can enter.

She discussed ongoing construction projects including sidewalk repairs on 2nd Street and plans for a new planter at 425 Plaza, while noting new public art installations are being developed including murals by local students.

Recently, Bassett was a panelist at the IDA conference in Madison. She mentioned seeing Dane County's successful membership-based farmers market that attracts 25,000-30,000 visitors weekly and is the largest farmers market in the country. Stall prices are low at \$20.00 for 10' x 10' stall. She shared they have inside markets during the winter and five theme-night markets a year. Their market is 90% Wisconsin grown produce and they don't allow generators. Because of extra wide sidewalks, they don't have to block off streets.

Bassett also mentioned their downtown has Madison Inc., which has a President & CEO. Madison's BID has an operations manager and an executive director. Their BID consists of 250 properties and 360 small businesses.

Other conference insights she shared were about Madison's downtown operations and safety initiatives, including their ambassador program and maintenance practices. She is going to get more information about the safely initiative to possibly apply to our downtown.

Director's Report

The Executive Director's Report was included in the agenda packet. Knutson shared the Street Activation Team had met and discussed street activation plans, focusing on 3rd Avenue SE as a priority area due to existing retail opportunities and proximity to Green Square Park and the Third Avenue Bridge to connect with Kingston. While 3rd Street SE remains part of the vision plan, it was noted 3rd Avenue SE offers better potential for development with existing retail spaces and building opportunities.

An upcoming meeting to review retail consultant, Mike Byrne's final report, is scheduled for next week and will include findings from 45 interviews with downtown property owners and businesses.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.

/pd