



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes

March 25, 2026 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Present: Joe Ahmann, Brittney Clarke, Graig Cone, Jon Dusek, Jared Hanlin, Ted Kepros, Sarah Madson, Juliet Pae, Randy Rings, Robin Sempf

Absent: Landon Burg, Jake Ryan, Fred Timko

Guests: Cindy Stier and Michelle Davis; ImpactCR, Brittany Barnhart, Emma Ridder and Tori Freese; Freedom Festival.

City: Jeff Pomeranz; City Manager, Jennifer Pratt; City Liaison

Staff: Jennifar Basett, Peggy Degnan, Caleb Knutson

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Kepros called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

Kepros announced Hartelt resigned as Chair since he is no longer with CRST. Kepros said efforts are underway to identify a new representative from CRST.

Approval of Agenda

Kepros moved to approve the Agenda. The agenda was unanimously approved.

Approval of January Minutes

Madsen moved to approve the January minutes with Semph seconding. The January minutes were unanimously approved.

ImpactCR Presentation

Stier said she started serving on the Board of ImpactCR four years ago and during that time the board wanted to get away from hosting only happy hours since today's young professionals are looking for more. Young professionals are more interested in growing their skills, connecting with others and making an impact. Stier shared that 70% will stay in an area if they feel engaged in their community. ImpactCR events used to have 15-20 attendees, but currently Stier said they have 80-100 people attend their events.

ImpactCR's events schedule can be found on Facebook, EA's website and LinkedIn. Stier mentioned they have three pillars: Social Connections, Leadership Development and Civic Engagement. Their most popular event is the annual Foodie Crawl, which is coming up on May 6th and will probably have nearly 100 people. Other annual

events include Waypoint Wonderland and planting trees. They've seen an increase in overall attendance. In 2024 attendance= 500; 2025 attendance = 650 participants.

Stier stated attendees asked for a mentorship program. They have 31 mentor/mentee matches and they still need mentees to work with some mentors yet. The need is in finance, banking, operations and insurance employee benefits. You can find information on the EA website under the ImpactCR page. Stier asked to help spread awareness and if you know of anyone interested in a mentorship program, please let her know.

Freedom Festival

Barnhart stated they have changed from having a month-long celebration to one-week of festivities. This year's festival runs from June 25 – July 4. She said the drone show will be returning and they have hired a new Iowa-based fireworks supplier, because last year's show was disappointing. The fireworks will be back on the 2nd Avenue bridge. Many of the events planned will tie in America's 250th birthday celebration. Some new events this year will be a foam party and mini-golf. She shared that last year's pancake breakfast served over 5,000 people. Barnhart also shared data that Freedom Festival drew people from 10 other states besides Iowa last year, such as 7,309 visitors from Wisconsin.

An annual fundraiser named "Feastival" will take place on June 11th when many food trucks will be at Green Square Park during lunch time. Barnhart encouraged all downtown employees show support by having lunch at Green Square Park that day.

To recruit volunteers, Barnhart mentioned they will be donating \$25 to a non-profit when someone volunteers for a 3-hour shift. They are currently working with Venuworks to bring in a bigger act to the McGrath Amphitheater this year. Bassett recommended not to block entrances to the Kingston area businesses.

Barnhart stated the fireworks will last approximately 15-20 minutes. She also mentioned some sponsorship opportunities are still available if the SSMID is interested.

Reports

Third Street SE –

Knutson stated we're in year three of the Vision Plan and referred to Cone to talk about the work being done at his Clock House Brewing (formerly Iowa Brewing) establishment on Third Street. Cone explained it's a larger space than what Clock House currently has and that they've been brewing from this new location for approximately three months now and will be opening their taproom in June. Cone shared they will be adding a kitchen to this location and a canopy/pergola over the patio. He said they are halfway done with the remodel.

We want the connectivity and need placemaking on 3rd St. stated Knutson. Curb-less streets was favored during the creation of the vision plan. Third Street needs to be pedestrian and retail friendly per Kepros. Dusek is against losing street parking on 3rd St SE.

Pratt asked this group to help with outreach to property owners/stakeholders. If we can reduce cost and make a deadline, then Rings is in favor of talking with stakeholders. Cone feels 3rd Street doesn't need bike lanes as traffic moves slow enough already because of stop signs.

Retail Study

Knutson said they hope to have this addressed by early June.

Commissioner Terms

Kepros shared that Hartelt has stepped down as Chair. Knutson mentioned Madsen has moved onto the Executive Board. Ahmann and Dusek's second terms end on June 30th, so they need to be office the SSMID for one year before they can be appointed again.

Program Manager Update

Bassett reported she is hiring another part-time maintenance person. With more manpower she feels they can have a better cadence to make sure the bird droppings and other concerns are taken care of on a regular basis. She also said the planters that were on the bridge have been removed and will now extend all the way down 3rd Street SE.

Basset mentioned she is working with High Schools on public art projects to get the active in the community. Students from the STEAM Academy will be helping spruce up the 425 Plaza area.

A Mural festival partnering with Murals & More in September. Bassett is working with the City to get some color on 3rd St. SE. With the focus on beautification, one façade improvement grant has been approved and three more are waiting approval. Murals are planned for the Soko Building, Foundation2, Gazette and one in Kingston yard.

Bassett will be attending the International Downtown Association's smaller cohort conference. She was asked to serve as a panelist during the conference which will be held May 13 – 15 in Madison, WI.

Bassett reported the following:

- Banners: To commemorate this country's 250th Birthday, banners will be hung on First Avenue in partnership with MedQuarter.
- Pet waste: Will be testing poop bags soon that are to be attached to the Big Bellies.
- Union Pacific: During United Way's Day of Caring, the corner on First Ave and 4th St. will be cleaned up and sodded.
- 4th St. Trail: All trail trip hazards were repaired last year.
- Marathon: Attendance of 9,000 people is expected to be downtown on race day.

Director's Report

The Executive Director's Report was included in the agenda packet.

Knutson reminded the commission University of Iowa students will be reaching out to them to gather information about downtown. He also mentioned partnering with the City on a Make Music Day in Cedar Rapids taking place on June 21. The radio show on Z.102 FM, "Morning Scramble," will help promote this event.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:06pm.

/pd