



Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes

July 22, 2026 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust

Present: Landon Burg, Ted Kepros, Randy Rings, Robin Sempf, Lisa Stephenson, Fred Timko, Steve White, Kyle Zimmerman

Absent: Brittney Clarke, Graig Cone, Jared Hanlin, Sarah Madson, Juliet Pae, Jake Ryan

Guests: Professor Ty Rushing; University of Iowa

City: Jennifer Pratt and Noah Zeker; City Liaisons

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

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Timko called the meeting to order at 3:03pm and welcomed new members, Steve White with Skogman Companies and Kyle Zimmerman with Guide Wealth Partners. They each shared their backgrounds and the group went around the room introducing themselves to her.

Approval of May Minutes

Today's attendance was one short of a quorum, so the May Minutes could not be approved.

Community Media Project by University of Iowa Students

University of Iowa Professor, Ty Rushing, presented the media project his students did for the Downtown District in his Community Media class this past Spring. This course is for non-journalism majors to better understand how media works. It is designed to increase cultural competency in media production and consumption. The class partners with local non-profits for story telling projects. The students worked with 10 downtown Cedar Rapids companies, of which one was Kepros PT. Therefore, Kepros shared he had a good experience with the students. The commission then watched a video students created for the downtown retailer, 20 Years of Awesome and Sole Street.

Rushing will be teaching this course again this coming Fall starting in August, so he is looking for the next non-profit to consider. Downtown District can distribute the videos as they see fit.

Action Item: Knutson will share the remaining student business videos with the commissioners and possibly post on the website.

Vision Plan

The commission discussed the downtown vision plan as a joint effort among the City, the Downtown District and the Economic Alliance. An implementation team has been formed to keep progress moving forward, track priorities and address challenges. A shared spreadsheet is being used to monitor implementation items.

Timko reviewed the Street Activation Team concept and discussed how downtown spaces, including 3rd Avenue, could be re-envisioned.

Burg shared his team at OPN has developed preliminary renderings using downtown building views to help illustrate possible improvements. He and his team are approaching the effort like a real work project, moving from programming and vision into design. The importance of setting goals and generating work quickly so that concepts can begin moving was discussed. Burg also shared that he has distributed a survey to his co-workers asking them to identify downtown's biggest challenges, biggest opportunities, desired retail stores, potential design improvements and who they feel are peer cities that are performing well.

Timko stated that the effort reflects the type of visioning the Mayor has encouraged, with City staff also involved. The next step is to clarify the vision and concept, then determine how best to execute it.

Knutson noted that the retail study is expected to help validate the direction of the Street Activation Team. The retail study was described as a tool to help move the work forward. Kepros commented on the importance of strengthening the downtown core as a pedestrian-oriented village and noted the need for accountability structures and transparency.

Timko mentioned the City's parking study recommends paid parking from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. along with paid parking on the west side of the river. Data cited during the discussion showed parking occupancy at approximately 35%, with daytime downtown occupancy at approximately 31%.

Pratt noted that a draft parking report is available on the City's website. She clarified that there are no proposed meters for NewBo or Czech Village. Related items will be brought to Council as they are ready for action.

Action Item: Bassett will provide new commissioners with a copy of the Vision Plan.

Program Manager Update

Safety and placemaking updates included the installation of an art project on the Town Center building. A yarn bombing installation on 3rd Avenue is also expected soon. Staff plan to promote the project through social media.

3rd Street was discussed as part of the Vision Plan. The street will be resurfaced from 5th Avenue to 8th Avenue, with curb and sidewalk preparation included. Work is also beginning to extend the 4th Street Trail from 7th Avenue to connect with the Alliant LightLine Bridge.

The floodwall project behind the Economic Alliance has been delayed until 2028. GreatAmerica has expressed concern about the unhoused living near the river and requested brush removal. It was noted homelessness activity has shifted toward the 425 Plaza and the Cedar River from Greene Square Park.

Bassett said the downtown agreement with the City will require amendments, including adjustments to holiday lighting zones. The proposal would move from three zones to two zones, with approximately 150 trees in each zone. Staff also discussed sidewalk and property owner responsibilities, planned sidewalk repairs for 2026 and stakeholder input regarding alleys.

Marathon Update:

- Staff reported an estimated economic impact of \$910,000.
- The event raised \$18,000 for charity.
- There were approximately 3,000 registered athletes and 400 volunteers.
- 27% of participants were from Cedar Rapids.
- Participants represented 42 states and six countries.

Budget

The Commission discussed moving portions of downtown accounting outside of the Economic Alliance. Several firms were mentioned as possible options. Because the organization receives tax dollars, commissioners emphasized the importance of direct and transparent reporting.

The group discussed salary-related costs, including the addition of approximately 30% for taxes and related expenses. Payroll would remain with the Economic Alliance, which would become a vendor for downtown payroll services. Timko reported that he had spoken with the Mayor and James Klein, Board Chair of the Economic Alliance, and that the proposed direction was supported. Per Timko, the change could result in an estimated long-term savings of approximately \$20K/year. Jake Ryan offered to assist with the transition.

Knutson noted social media performance is trending upward this year and discussed opportunities to continue telling downtown's story more effectively.

The new drone technology being used by the Cedar Rapids Police Department to support officers and first responders was presented to some staff and commissioners of the Downtown District and MedQ. Drones are intended to complement officer response and are not intended for surveillance. A drone can be on site in less than two minutes, and 29 police officers are trained drone operators. Kepros provided examples of how the technology has been used. Others may grant Cedar Rapids Police Department access to their cameras if they choose to participate.

A local station contacted staff regarding downtown foot traffic. Bars and restaurants are reportedly seeing increased patronage, in part related to data center activity.

The Commission discussed homelessness and the network of nonprofit organizations providing support, including winter shelter services. It was noted that Cedar Rapids is the only community in the state where the number of unhoused individuals is decreasing.

Other Business

- Knutson will conduct onboarding with the new commissioners.
- Staff noted upcoming attendance in September at the IDA conference in Toronto.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:14 p.m.

/pd