



## NOTICE OF MEETING

### Downtown Cedar Rapids Commission

Date: 9-23-26 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 10-12**

#### **4. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **5. PUBLIC COMMENT**

#### **6. REPORTS & DISCUSSION.....Pages 3-8**

**A. Accounting Update**

**B. Program Manager Update**

**C. IDA Recap**

**D. Street Activation Team Update**

#### **7 DIRECTOR'S REPORT.....Pages 9-10**

#### **8 OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **9.NEXT MEETING DATE: Wednesday, November 18, 2026**

#### **10. 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](mailto:cknutson@cedarrapids.org) as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the event.



### **Reading Materials**

SSMID Profit & Loss Statement (pages 13-14)

Daytime Market Report (page 15)

[Click Here for upcoming EA Events/Programs](#)

### **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.: 6.A**

**ISSUE:** Accounting Update

**Background:**

As reported at the July Commission meeting, staff had been exploring accounting firm options for contracted services. Following that review, and at the direction of the Executive Committee, Downtown Cedar Rapids contracted with Pearson & Virlee, PC for accounting and financial reporting services. This engagement will help stabilize the accounting function following recent staff turnover and address the resulting reporting gaps.

**TIMELINE / NEXT STEPS:**

Staff are continuing to work with Pearson & Virlee, PC as part of the onboarding process. Their work has focused on stabilizing the accounting process, streamlining financial operations, and ensuring staff, the Board, and stakeholders have access to the most up-to-date financials. All bills are paid, checks are being cut in a timely matter, and accounts are up to date. Staff will return to the Board with further updates as we continue through this process. We will have a full reconciliation from the Economic Alliance in early November.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The estimated cost of contracting with Pearson & Virlee, PC for accounting services is \$250 a month.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Discussion

**STAFF CONTACT:**

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Jennifar Bassett, [jbassett@cedarrrapids.org](mailto:jbassett@cedarrrapids.org)

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**Item No.: 6.B**

**ISSUE:** Program Manager - IDA Conference – Highlights – September 1-4

**BACKGROUND:**

Toronto currently has 86 established Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), according to a City of Toronto report adopted in April 2026. One of those, Historic Queen East, is currently inactive, so there are 85 active BIAs. They represent more than 30,000 businesses and 22,000 commercial property owners across Toronto. Toronto describes itself as having the largest number of BIAs of any urban center in the world.

**Downtown BIA - Waterfront District**

The Waterfront District is part of one of the largest urban waterfront revitalization efforts in North America. Led by Waterfront Toronto, the project has transformed former industrial and underutilized lands into a mix of public spaces, parks, housing, businesses, cultural destinations, and pedestrian connections to Lake Ontario. A major emphasis is placed on public realm, accessibility, sustainability, design, and reconnecting people with the water. The broader waterfront area encompasses approximately 2,000 acres and includes more than 106 acres of parks and public spaces and 16 miles of waterfront access. One thing that may be particularly relevant to Downtown Cedar Rapids is that Toronto treats the waterfront as more than a development project—it is viewed as a long-term city-building strategy, with public spaces and connections established alongside private development and new neighborhoods.

The IDA Annual Conference was held at Westin Harbour Castle, located directly on Toronto's waterfront at 1 Harbour Square. Staying at the hotel made it easy to experience the waterfront district firsthand, as the hotel sits within the revitalized area and provides direct access to the lakefront, parks, trails, and downtown attractions. The conference itself also incorporated tours and sessions throughout downtown Toronto, giving attendees an opportunity to see how different districts and public spaces are being managed and activated.

**Downtown BIA - Financial District - PATH, Public Realm, and Connectivity**

One of the most interesting takeaways from the conference was seeing how Downtown Toronto has developed the PATH system into a major piece of its downtown infrastructure and economic ecosystem. The PATH is a more than 18 miles of underground pedestrian network connecting over 75 buildings, six subway stations, retail, restaurants, services and major destinations. The City estimates that the network includes approximately 1,200 businesses and generates roughly \$1.7 billion in annual sales, demonstrating how pedestrian connectivity can directly support downtown commerce. The presentation also highlighted how downtown development continues to incorporate privately owned

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public spaces (POPS) and other shared spaces as part of the overall pedestrian experience. While Cedar Rapids is obviously very different in scale, the takeaway for me was the importance of looking at downtown as a connected system—streets, sidewalks, buildings, public spaces and businesses all contributing to how people experience and move through the district.

### **Bloor-Yorkville BIA – Luxury District**

The Bloor-Yorkville BIA provided another interesting example of how a downtown organization can use its resources to support both businesses and the physical environment. The district includes nearly 1,200 businesses and has a strong concentration of retail, restaurants, hotels, galleries and other services. Its scale is reflected in its budget: the City of Toronto approved a 2026 operating budget of approximately \$5.87 million, with nearly \$4.69 million raised through the BIA levy. What stood out was the significant investment in the public realm—Bloor-Yorkville has invested more than \$20 million in streetscape improvements, including wider sidewalks, trees, seating, landscaping and upgraded lighting. It reinforced for me that successful downtown management is not just about promotions and events; sustained investment in the physical environment, maintenance, pedestrian experience and business district identity can play an important role in supporting the overall health of a downtown.

### **How Public-Private Collaborations Help Districts & Downtowns Thrive – Breakout Session**

The session, “How Public-Private Collaborations Help Districts and Downtowns Thrive,” focused on Oklahoma City’s transformation of its downtown, including the Upper Bricktown Entertainment District and the broader MAPS program. MAPS 4 is a debt-free public improvement program funded by a temporary one-cent sales tax, projected to generate approximately \$1.07 billion over eight years. Rather than concentrating the funding on one major project, MAPS 4 spreads investment across parks, transit, sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, streetlights, beautification, entertainment venues and other community improvements. More than 70% of the funding is directed toward neighborhood and human needs, while the remaining investment supports quality-of-life and job-creating initiatives. The session illustrated how these public investments can help create the infrastructure and environment needed for private development to follow. Oklahoma City’s downtown planning also intentionally connects public infrastructure decisions with private development, using projects and districts to build momentum and create stronger connections between entertainment, businesses, housing and public spaces. For Downtown Cedar Rapids, the takeaway is less about replicating MAPS 4 and more about considering how strategic public improvements can support and encourage private investment when both are working toward a shared vision.

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## **Active Alleyways – Breakout Session**

The “Active Alleyways” session looked at how downtown districts in Melbourne, Fort Wayne and Philadelphia are rethinking alleys as more than service corridors. Downtown Melbourne focused on four principles: human scale, active edges, neighborhood connections and creating the unexpected. In Fort Wayne, alleys have been transformed through public art, lighting, seating and other amenities, creating destinations that connect surrounding businesses and neighborhoods. Public art has also helped generate private investment; in one example, a property owner purchased an adjacent lot and developed it into an outdoor bar after seeing the potential created by the artwork in the alley. Fort Wayne also uses its alleys for programming, including food trucks and lunch gatherings, demonstrating how relatively simple improvements can bring people into underused spaces. Philadelphia approached the issue from a different angle, examining how dumpsters, waste storage and multiple waste haulers can negatively affect the appearance and function of downtown alleys. Its Center City District surveyed 45 alleys and is exploring changes to dumpster regulations, consolidation of waste services, locking dumpsters, stakeholder outreach and potentially underground waste storage. For Downtown Cedar Rapids, the session provided both creative and practical ideas for looking at our alleys as opportunities for improved connectivity, public art, lighting, seating and business activation, while also considering how waste storage and maintenance affect the overall experience.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Attachment(s)

### **STAFF CONTACT:**

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**Item No.: 6.C**

**ISSUE:** Program Manager - MOU Update

**BACKGROUND:**

The Downtown Maintenance Team has wrapped up the Farmers Market season and is transitioning into fall and winter maintenance work. Our college intern has returned to school, and our high school intern through City View High School has started and will work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday for a total of 8 hours each week.

As we wind down the summer season, planning for the holiday lighting program is already underway, with plans to expand the display to Mays Island and 3rd Avenue West. Construction continues to be a significant focus downtown, particularly the improvements planned along 3rd Street from 5th Avenue to 8th Avenue. The project will bring changes to an important downtown corridor, and the Downtown team continues to assist businesses and property owners with communication, access and other impacts associated with construction. We also assisted with the setup and outreach for a public meeting regarding the 8th Avenue Bridge project, helping provide an opportunity for downtown stakeholders to learn more about the project and ask questions.

Downtown continues to collaborate with the Economic Alliance on two upcoming initiatives, District Dish, September 22 and the American Discovery Trail Relay, which will come through Greene Square on October 3. Collaboration with the City and MedQ SSMID stay strong with the Healthiest State Walk on October 7. Along with these efforts, the team continues to address challenges related to the unhoused population and ongoing construction while maintaining a clean, safe and functional downtown and supporting our downtown stakeholders.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Attachment(s)

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**Item No.: 6.D**

**ISSUE:** Street Activation Team Update

**BACKGROUND:**

In August, the Downtown SSMID contracted with OPN for visioning services related to the Street Activation Team's initiatives. OPN's team has presented to the Street Activation Team twice. The first presentation was held to gather feedback from the group and help establish the foundation for the visioning process. At the second meeting, OPN staff provided the team with renderings illustrating potential outcomes for the corridor.

This has been a collaborative effort. Downtown leadership and staff have been meeting with City staff to ensure alignment and figure out how to make this project a reality. EA staff have started engaging business owners throughout the targeted area to gather their feedback on the project. Downtown staff have also begun engaging property owners to inform them that their properties fall within the targeted area for improvements, and to gauge whether they are on board with the project moving forward.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

This project will have major budget implications for calendar years 2027 and 2028. With the Street Activation initiatives and recommendations now taking shape, staff have begun adjusting the budget to include these items.

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**Item No.: 7**

**ISSUE:** Director's Report

**BACKGROUND:**

The retail study has been pushed back because we made the decision to expand the focus groups to include Emerging Professionals and Coe College students. These two demographics are giving us insight and perspective that we did not previously have access to, and we felt it was important to incorporate their input before moving forward. At the in person report out session with MJB Consulting, we had a great turnout along with equally great conversations, which reflected strong engagement from the community. These dialogues have since been carried into one on one conversations with several stakeholders who were in the room that day. I have been following up individually with them to further pick their brain, dig deeper into their perspectives, and better understand how their feedback can help shape and strengthen the direction of the retail study going forward.

As part of my ongoing practice, I check in quarterly with local commercial lenders in Downtown to get a sense of what they're seeing and feeling about the economy. I ask about current client and prospect activity, whether borrowers seem hesitant or confident, and how they and their institutions are approaching risk right now.

These lenders describe strong demand for multifamily projects, fueled largely by data center expansion in the area and the housing needs that expansion is creating, which has translated into a generally upbeat outlook among clients and prospects. At the same time, they noted they're most comfortable extending credit to borrowers with an established relationship and a proven track record, even as they remain confident in the broader lending environment. That said sectors tied to the data center buildout are thriving, with hospitality businesses, related service providers, and real estate investors all seeing stronger demand, improved performance, and in many cases room to raise rental rates and cash flow, while rising funding costs and interest rates, plus climbing material costs, have made some clients wary, prompting a handful of businesses to delay expansion plans or new investments.

On balance, I'd call the sentiment cautiously optimistic: companies tied to growth sectors are doing well, but many are staying disciplined and selective about taking on additional risk.

PlacerAI has been a great tool to staff to be able to analyze what is happening in the Downtown SSMID. We have not only used Placer data to track the foot traffic we have for major events, but we have also been able to run reports, and gather data that MJB Consulting, and the City's Retail Coach are able to use and inform their reports and recommendations. Attached in reading materials is the report we ran this week, on our Daytime population. As more and more businesses bring their employees back to the office these numbers will continue to rise.

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On a personal note, at this year's American Planning Association's National Planning Conference in Detroit, I was recognized as the recipient of the Outstanding Chapter Volunteer Award for the Iowa Chapter. I was nominated for this honor by Madeline Sturms past president in "*recognition of your exceptional dedication, hard work and significant contributions to your local (Iowa) chapter.*"

**RECOMMENDATION:**

None

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