



**Cedar Rapid Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes**  
**March 24, 2021 | 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.**  
**Zoom**

*The Downtown SSMID Commission met virtually in regular session. Those present are listed below. The meeting was held as an electronic regular Commission meeting because a meeting in person was impossible or impractical due to concerns for the health and safety of Commissioners, staff and the public presented by COVID-19.*

**Present:** Joe Ahmann, Jon Dusek, Emily Ellingson, Darryl High, Dawn Jaffray, James Klein, Linda Mattes, Craig Stephan, Joe Terfler, Fred Timko

**Absent:** Dave Drown, Matt Miller, Andrew Morf, David Sorg

**Staff:** Ellie Evans, Melissa McCarville, Jesse Thoeming, Phil Wasta, Audrey Wheeler

**Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order**

High welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

**Approval of January Minutes**

Ellingson moved approval of the January minutes with Mattes seconding. The January minutes were unanimously approved.

**Downtown Farmers Market Update**

Evans updated the council on plans for the summer Farmers Markets noting that this is the 17<sup>th</sup> season and that the plan is to move forward with in-person markets with a later start date, slower ramp up of vendors and less marketing as efforts to control crowd and build in more time for vaccinations to reach herd immunity levels. She shared a draft of the first market map noting limited entry points and one-way pedestrian flow. She noted that she had been in contact with Linn County Public Health, U.S. Department of Agriculture, City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa Dept of Inspection and Appeals, and Iowa Valley RC&D and is building a plan that complies with all recommendations for outdoor markets.

Commissioners asked about limiting number of attendees and Evans noted that we would not be doing that but that attendees would be reminded of protocols at entry points and with signage. To a question about vendors being on both sides of the street, she noted that the start of the season would have vendors only on one side and spread out. When asked about number of vendors interested, she shared that there was only a slight dip in applicants over previous years. When asked what would cause the markets to not happen, she noted City Council approval scheduled for April Council meeting and changing pandemic numbers as the only factors that would cause cancellation.

**Brand Roll-Out**

Ellingson noted that is has been two years since brand discussions started and that work had been done with de Novo to develop and approve the logo and branding approach with next step being the roll-out. Thoeming shared that the June 19<sup>th</sup> Farmers Market has been selected as the start of the roll-out with swag being handed out and some signage being n place.

Thoeming shared a new development from the City, first reminding Commission members that the 2021 operating budget had \$150k allocated for vehicular street signage and wayfinding. The City announced they would be covering that cost and inquired about SSMID interest in reallocating funds to pedestrian signage which they are not funding. The City Engineer plans call for pedestrian signage in 16 locations with cost for each being about \$10k. The Commission could choose to do some, all or none of those locations. Vehicle signs are expected to be placed in late summer and pedestrian signage could be installed at the same time. Thoeming shared visuals of the MedQ pedestrian signs that were conceived but have not been produced. Mattes expressed support but inquired, along with other Commission members, about potential design tweaks. Wasta noted that the MedQ shelved the pedestrian signage with the desire to wait for electronic signage options. He shared that the maps on each sign are unique and indicate the pedestrian location along with a five-block radius possibly highlighting restaurant, retail and entertainment options. It was envisioned these would mostly be placed at intersections.

Timko wanted more time to review and would vote for waiting until after vehicular signage is installed. Mattes would like to move forward and believes it enhances the branding initiative and High agreed. Mattes pointed out that these are targeted to people for special events and not so much the community members.

Thoeming will follow up with the City Engineer to see if there is a sample pedestrian sign or better rendering that can be shared.

High requested the Commission members receive swag bags so they have awareness and can be ready for personal promotion when rollout begins.

## **Project Updates**

### Summer Beautification

Thoeming shared that great feedback has been received about the Downtown art installations, ranging from the American Discovery Trail mural in Greene Square to the one completed last fall on the Dash Roasters building in Kingston. Last year's ConnectCR themed art planned for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue garage is now rescheduled for late summer with the artist duo NeverCrew. The Community Spirit Mural on the Ad Craft building is close to being presented. Securian Advisors is moving into the former Rapids Reproduction building and the western facing side is available for art. Seven to eight rendering options are being developed with a target date of installation by June 19.

Thoeming noted that Dennis Hotka retired and Dyrrah Christon started on March 22<sup>nd</sup> to assist Evan with maintenance work downtown. One of Christon's initial projects will be to spruce up the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Trail on the 4-5 blocks that run through downtown prior to the June 19 first market.

### Gateways

High reminded Commissioners that \$200k is allocated for gateways. He and Thoeming participated in a meeting with Iowa DOT and City staff. I-DOT outlined the process and indicated interest and desire to assist in improving the look of the gateways. First step in the process is to canvas the area to remove old fencing, dead trees and brush and install new black vinyl fencing. The second phase will be design improvements. Thoeming has also reached out to Confluence who can assist with guidance through the process. High noted he will need help from Commission members and will reach out accordingly. The plan is to complete all gateways in 2-4 years with the first being along I-380 starting near the Five Seasons Ramp and running north to about UnityPoint Health – St. Luke's.

### Downtown CR Dollars

Thoeming updated the commission on the Downtown Dollars program which has about a week left, noting that collective impact has been about \$150k. Thirty-five businesses are participating in the program and although the app was never put in place as he had hoped, the participation has been active among 345 community members. 1,017 gift cards have been mailed worth \$25,425. Total receipts submitted by those 345 were \$98,711.59. Businesses report that it

was easy for them which was important. Press coverage has been good. Thoeming plans to implement version 2.0 in the fall through the holidays and will likely add it as a discussion item on the one of the next two meeting agendas. Timko brought up the idea of running the program for the next few months. Klein inquired about whether we are seeing new activity and Thoeming responded there was some. Mattes thought we should consult the staff about bandwidth to extend. Wheeler shared some concern from a marketing perspective of campaign burnout and the need for a gap between the dial up of a 2.0 version. After some discussion, Mattes motioned that the program be extended through June with a raise in the overall limit to \$750 with Klein seconding. The extension of the program and increase in limit was unanimously approved.

### **Downtown: One Year Later**

Thoeming shared there are only 2-3k working downtown right now. Pre-pandemic parking was at 90% and is now under 25%. Eight restaurants closed and one new one has opened. There is positive news with an engineering firm moving into the Hach building in late May, Securian Advisors moving from Hiawatha to the former Rapids Reproduction building, Ohnward Bank adding a downtown location by end of summer and a new tenant for the former Dublin City space. Housing occupancy remains high.

Dusek referenced the Economic Alliance Community Development Innovation Council presentation from Will Pattison, head of Real Estate, Research and Strategy for MetLife Investment Management who shared projections that 97% will return to the office. Of that 97%, they expect 25% will only work in the office part-time. He noted that the office market looked better than retail and hotel industry, but hotels are expected to come back fast with a lot of people working at home requiring more business travel. Thoeming will share Pattison's Power Point this Commission.

### **Other Business**

#### Façade Improvement

Thoeming shared that there have been five applications in the last 2 ½ months and three additional consultations which is an increase over previous year's activity. CRB & T and Cedar River Towers have building illumination projects and TCR is planning a new marquee.

#### Meeting Structure Moving Forward

High inquired about timing for a return to in-person meetings. Thoeming shared that staff was back fully this week. Commissioners expressed high interest in return to in-person with an option for remote access for those not ready to be in-person. High will proceed with the plan for May in-person with remote access option. Mattes will be via Zoom.

Jaffray shared that they had a female employee assaulted in the elevator at Armstrong Building at 8 am in the morning getting coffee and that the police only issued a warning and noted the assaulter had mental health issues. Communication and follow-up from police has been challenging. Timko said police have spoken to the Commission in the past. Commissioners expressed interest in doing so again. High will contact the Police Chief to inquire about a special meeting and include County Attorney and City Manager. This will likely be a separate meeting with all Commissioners invited. Jaffray encouraged Commissioners to remind their staff about awareness of surroundings.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 5:28 p.m.