



**Cedar Rapids Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes**  
**July 27, 2022 | 3:00-4:30 p.m.**  
**Economic Alliance Conference Room A**

**Present:** Joe Ahmann, Wendi Cigrand, Casey Drew, Dave Drown, Jon Dusek, Jeff Janssen, James Klein, Randy Rings, Jake Ryan, Craig Stephan

**Absent:** Emily Ellingson, Darryl High, Ted Kepros, Sarah Madsen, David Sorg, Joe Terfler

**Staff:** Jessica Komisar, Julie Kraft, Doug Neumann, Julie Redmond, Jesse Thoeming, Maddie Ward, Nikki Wilcox

**Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order**

Klein welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

**Approval of May Minutes**

Dusek moved approval of the May minutes with Ryan seconding. The May minutes were unanimously approved.

**Downtown Communications and Social Media**

Hiring a dedicated Downtown communications and social media position was a top priority out of the June strategic planning meeting. There's potential for this position to assist with Downtown programming as well. Ward and Woods presented on current Downtown social media and areas of improvement and provided comparisons to other nationwide communities. Key takeaways include:

- Social media goals include drive traffic to new website, build community around the Downtown brand, improve social media interactions/followers/likes, resident retention and growth
  - Post on average 3-5 times per week
  - Increase engagement from 1,500 to 4,000 accounts per month
  - Double following count to 5,500
- Target audience profile – young adults, Cedar Rapids residents, attract and keep people Downtown
- Posting eye-catching visuals, colors and clear photo quality
- Highlight locations for social outings
- Avoid too many words, drab photography
- On Instagram, utilize Reels and Highlights
  - Reels – short clips, attractive to young generation
  - Highlights – reposts from Downtown businesses/organizations

Until this position is filled, Woods will continue to schedule out posts. Commissioners discussed a “wish list” for what they would like this position to focus on. Those items include:

- Weekly e-blast to SSMID businesses with updates/events
  - Identify a point person at businesses to feed this individual content
  - Variety of news – economic development, events and programming
- Share events happening Downtown
- Plan Downtown events
- Tap into partnerships with VenueWorks, TCR and Paramount – but avoid duplications of efforts/event posting

- Research and implement a Welcome Kit for visitors at the DoubleTree
- Build a plan for external relations

**Follow-Ups** – Economic Alliance staff to draft a job description and budget for SSMID approval,

### **Downtown Alleyway Pivot**

Thoeming said the original alleyway improvement project connecting UFG and Alliant, which was supposed to be completed by Market After Dark, is on hold. Thoeming said UFG doesn't feel comfortable with the project with the pending building sale to the City. There was \$145k allocated from the budget for this project.

As a back-up plan, Thoeming received an estimate from Miron Construction on how to clean-up one of the more unsightly alleys Downtown – next to Pub 217, behind Rock Bar and Need Pizza, connecting 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. It would cost \$180k to repave the alley and Thoeming is working with ABC Disposal on solutions to number of dumpsters and pick-up schedules. Dusek said there are four property owners tied to the alley and the City owns the alley. Dusek added the major problem in this alley is the grease and would be nice to have in-ground grease traps. Rings suggested we discuss underground logistics with Alliant Energy and the City first for any utilities we would need to consider. If we decide to move forward with alleyway clean-up and aesthetic improvements, Klein asked how can we protect it moving forward, such as a contract with involved property owners?

**Follow-Ups** - Klein, Ellingson and Cigrand will meet with UFG to discuss the original alleyway project plan and to see if that project is truly not moving forward, then circle back with the Commission.

The alleyway discussion brought on conversations around other large scale “WOW” projects and initiatives such as a pedestrian bridge to connect to the Amphitheater utilizing Mays Island, improvements along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street for connectivity to the PowerHouse down to NewBo.

**Follow-Ups** – if Commissioners are interested in joining the previous WOW Project committee, e-mail Thoeming.

### **Downtown Programming**

In addition to the communications position, another top priority stemming from the strategic planning meeting was engaging more consistent Downtown programming or a “block party” concept. Thoeming said he hears from bars/restaurants they would like to see street closures to allow outdoor seating, but hears from people that they would like to see more live music such as re-engaging Uptown Friday Nights back to Greene Square.

Thoeming presented three locations/concepts for this type of programming:

1. Tailgate theme with Paramount Lot usage and projector to show evening games
2. UFG pocket park utilizing parking lot next to Cobble Hill on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to include some aesthetic improvements, small stage for live performances, could close portion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
3. Greene Square for Uptown Friday Nights

Commissioners liked components of all concepts and doesn't feel like we have to decide on just one at this time.

**Follow-Ups** – Thoeming will put together more details, scope and logistics needed for each concept and bring back to the Commission.

### **Project Updates/Other Business**

Thoeming thanked the Gateway committee (High, Sorg, Janssen, Toby Olsen) for their work. Confluence has completed their master plan and the committee will dive into that with the City and discuss implementation. Thoeming said the outcome of the \$72k Living Roadways grant is still pending. As a reminder, this grant will go towards the 380/A Ave exit gateway improvements presented at the previous meeting.

Race for the Space application has closed and we received 19 applicants. The selection committee from the Community Development Innovation Council will narrow down to top finalists to compete in a “Shark Tank” style event at The Harmac on Wednesday, September 14 from 4-6 p.m. Commissioners will receive an official e-invite with a RSVP link, Komisar to send a calendar invite.

**Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.