



Cedar Rapid Downtown SSMID Commission Minutes
May 20, 2020 | 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: Emily Ellingson, Darryl High, James Klein, Linda Mattes, Matt Miller, Randy Rings, Craig Stephan, David Sorg, Joe Terfler, Fred Timko

Absent: Dave Drown, Dawn Jaffray, Andrew Morf

Guests: Jen Neumann & Ryan Shenefelt – de Novo, Casey Drew – City of Cedar Rapids

Staff: Ellen Bardsley, Jessica Komisar, Doug Neumann, Jesse Thoeming, Phil Wasta

Welcome, Introductions & Call to Order

Mattes welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

Approval of March Minutes

Klein moved approval of the March minutes with High seconding. The March minutes were unanimously approved.

Terfler clarified for the MedQuarter SSMID minutes which were included in the packet that it says the Downtown SSMID is committing \$100k to build an app but if it could be re-phrased to \$100k for a Downtown business support program in general. Wasta said he can get that amended.

Branding Project Update

J. Neumann and Shenefelt provided an update on the Downtown branding process.

- Steps that have been completed so far include:
 - Kick off meeting with SSMID Commissioners
 - Commissioner survey – 9 out of 13 responded to
 - Creative Escape Room – individuals invested or who have a lot of affection for Downtown and the community in general. Talked about how much it would take to re-brand Downtown and there was some push back and discussion on how it might not be effective 10 years later and there is a lot of brand equity in “Downtown” as it is.
 - Downtown “quiz” – to understand what people thought was in Downtown, what isn’t in Downtown or what is in Downtown that isn’t, didn’t show a whole lot of confusion. 500 responses.
- Downtown is not a District, it’s an Experience
- Allow micro-districts to emerge and thrive – Downtown experiences and landmarks are our micro-districts
 - Kingston Village, 3rd and 3rd, River Loop, Greene Square, etc.
- “Framing the Experience” with placemaking opportunities at the Downtown experiences with a type of framing signage or sculpture. Helps communicate the experience and allow people to take a picture with it.
- Wanted to make sure they were headed in right direction before any new work on the logo or design
- Next steps include:
 - Receiving approval from Commissioners on the direction

- Community survey to gain insight into what the community values and the micro-district locations
- Develop a visual identity (brand)
 - Will work with current signage and wayfinding plans to make sure nothing looks out of place
- Campaign development and re-introduction of district brand and narrative

Commissioners agreed that de Novo is moving in the right direction and gave permission to continue to move forward.

Business Support Program Update

Thoeming reminded Commissioners that we are using \$100k via reserves to build and launch a business support program and focus on Downtown sectors that have been strongly impacted by COVID-19 – restaurants, retailers and bars. Thoeming listed 3 challenges that this program has to overcome in order to be successful: 1) create an attractive and effective program that people will want to use 2) ensure incentive dollars are being spent only at Downtown businesses and 3) onboard the 50-60 businesses that will fit program criteria and not have it be a heavy lift for them or their employees.

Thoeming has been working with an independent developer to create a phone app for consumers to download. The steps for a consumer and business are:

1. Consumer downloads the “Downtown CR Dollars” app (will be in Apple and Android app stores – a little more lag time with Android but by the time we publicly announce the program, it will be available in both stores)
2. Consumer spends \$100 at participating Downtown businesses and submits receipts through the app. This does not have to be a singular purchase, it can be a collective \$100.
3. Once the purchase is verified by the Economic Alliance, the consumer will receive \$50 incentive dollars via a QR code to spend at participating Downtown businesses. These incentive dollars don’t have to be spent in one fell swoop either.
4. When the consumer is ready to spend their incentive dollars, they will notify the owner/employee that they have the Downtown Dollars app and want to utilize it with the pending purchase
5. The business will scan the consumers QR code to verify the incentive dollars and upon a successful scan, it will automatically generate an ACH payment to the business based upon the amount entered

Thoeming will be testing the app and procedure with 5 Downtown businesses in the following weeks and will roll it out to all 50-60 businesses following successful tests. There will be a toolkit built for businesses including window deals, posters, social media graphics, etc. and there will be a landing page on the Economic Alliance website. After an RFP was released to local firms for quick how-to videos, KCRG stood out and will be working with them to create these videos. In conjunction with successful testing, potential marketing and campaign will launch mid to late June. All marketing and app development costs will come from the 2020 regular budget and reserve dollars will only be utilized for incentive dollars.

Mattes asked if we need to put a timeline on this program, i.e. consumers spend up until the end of 2020 and can redeem incentive dollars through the end of 2021 and what our response would be if we ran out of the \$100k in the first week. Bardsley said we could have a deadline of when they can spend the dollars. Ellingson asked if the app can track on the back-end how much in incentive dollars has been sent out to consumers. Thoeming said we do have the capability to track that. Terfler asked if we could include a list of participating businesses within the app and Thoeming said that is possible.

The main concern of several Commissioners is the cyber security of ACH payments to businesses and if a business’s bank account gets compromised. Thoeming said Stripe is the company that handles the vast majority of Apple apps that have a financial transaction for security purposes. Mattes suggested not using ACH payments but to write checks on a monthly basis. Klein said he agreed and added Commissioners could help deliver checks for a personal touch. Mattes said she is currently uncomfortable with the automated ACH payments and would like some more research on that process and alternatives before it goes into testing.

New Commission Roles

High announced 2 new Commissioners will join the SSMID beginning July 1 – Joe Ahmann with Ahmann Companies and Jon Dusek with Armstrong Development. Ellingson motioned approval for Ahmann and Dusek to join the SSMID with Timko seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.

High also announced that Ellingson will move into the Vice Chair role beginning July 1. Terfler motioned approval with Timko seconding. The motion was unanimously approved.

Business/Organizational Updates

Mattes – Alliant hasn't decided when the employees working from home will be returning to the office. Mattes said 60% of employees don't want to come back before there's a vaccine and they will continue to survey employees to work around hurdles.

Klein – Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust has created a 3-phase plan and will implement phase 1 on June 8th. Most banks are planning on opening to the public within the first 2 weeks of June.

Timko – Popoli is open for dine-in at 50% capacity and had a decent crowd on Friday and Saturday and had about 4 guests on Monday and Tuesday. Popoli's struggle is relying on corporate and high-end dining.

Rings – TrueNorth is following a similar schedule to the banks and will be coming back in phases beginning the first week of June with work from home and in-office rotations.

Other Business

Thoeming said this will be Mattes last meeting as Chair of the Commission and thanked her for her service in that role.

Thoeming provided updates on other Downtown projects:

- 2nd Ave mural – moving forward and working on a schedule for the team of artists
- ConnectCR – fundraising is now complete
- Greene Square Ambassadors – launched earlier this month, working in isolation and trained in COVID-19 talking points
- Willis Dady Downtown cleaning crew – starting this week with three individuals daily to help clean and be sure Downtown is looking sharp and inviting
- Joint district loop – a lot of energy behind this project from the districts and the City of Cedar Rapids
- Projector WOW project – was ready to install but committee decided to put a hold on it for 90 days since it will attract people and we want to be mindful of social distancing

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.