

Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met as a Committee of the Whole on Monday, April 3, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Don Cooney
Qianna Decker
Jeanne Hess
Stephanie Hoffman
Esteven Juarez
Chris Praedel

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

None

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Public Comments

An opportunity was given for general public comments, but no comments were offered.

2023-15-01

Presentation: Southwest Michigan First Update

Jonas Peterson, Chief Executive Officer of Southwest Michigan First (SWMF), delivered a presentation entitled *City of Kalamazoo Economic Development Update*. A copy of the slides from this presentation was filed with the papers for the meeting.

In response to questions and comments from City Commissioners, Mr. Peterson provided the following information:

- the 2023-2025 Action Plan would be presented publicly on April 12th at 7:30 a.m. at the Catalyst Center.
- the Event Center project was moving forward, but it was very early in the process. The final design and construction timeline will be coming.
- growth due to climate migration was being considered as a long-term strategy. southwest Michigan had an extreme competitive advantage in this area.
- it was unclear why southwest Michigan was growing slowly. The region had an incredible value proposition, with amenities, a high quality of life, and low cost of living. Community leaders needed to do more to sell that value proposition.
- in the past SWMF had not played a big role in the conversation about housing, but it was becoming a focus for the organization. Businesses had identified the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to attracting talent. SWMF did not have answers to the housing situation, but they wanted to play a part.
- SWMF had included Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) criteria in its internal and external measurements, and DEI was incorporated into its strategies. The Event Center project was a good example of how DEI considerations were changing the way SWMF did its work in the community.
- multiple sites were considered for the Event Center, but there was always a preference for a downtown location with public amenities like restaurants,

retail, and public transportation. Venues in downtown areas were more successful.

- the design of the Event Center had not been finalized, but those giving input had challenged the designer to make something unique and not “cookie cutter.”
- historically, early childhood education and childcare had not been a focus area for SWMF, but now businesses were making it a topic of conversation. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) was starting to close the connections between economic development, housing, and early childhood education.
- there may have been discussions about transportation for employees of the new electric vehicle battery plant in Battle Creek; this is good question for follow up.
- community leaders and public officials were among the stakeholders providing input for the SWMF strategic plan. SWMF reached out to a lot of groups during the development of the plan, but a comprehensive list was not immediately at hand.
- the Event Center project was privately funded but significant to the community. City Manager Ritsema was part of a concept design working group, and over 300 leaders or organizations had been contacted for input. The people involved had been asked to identify other leaders and organizations who should be included in the discussions but were left out.
- in a recent survey, SWMF employees self-reported about their diversity, but the results were not immediately at hand. The goal of the organization was to look like the community it served.

Commissioner Hess highlighted representations of education, industry, and progress on the City of Kalamazoo flag.

Commissioner Decker noted that the City and SWMF did not have a formal relationship, but the two organizations needed to work together to be a catalyst for business growth. Commissioner Decker expressed appreciation for the DEI elements of the Event Center plan.

Commissioner Praedel stated the jobs created by the Event Center were a big deal. Commissioner Praedel stated it would be unique to have such a large venue with walkability to the City’s core neighborhoods. Commissioner Praedel suggested free or low-cost transportation options for Event Center employees. Commissioner Praedel remarked on the need for conversations with the surrounding neighborhoods to address issues like traffic once the Event Center opened. Commissioner Praedel commented on the many amenities downtown and the need to make downtown attractive to families. Commissioner Praedel encouraged space-making and recommended the design of the Event Center include family-friendly elements. Commissioner Praedel urged SWMF to advocate at the state level for early childhood education.

Commissioner Juarez stated buzzwords in the presentation made him nervous, and he expressed concern that someone was always left behind when economic development happened. Commissioner Juarez stated he was glad that SWMF was

2023-15-01

Presentation: Southwest
Michigan First Update
(cont’d)

2023-15-01

Presentation: Southwest
Michigan First Update
(cont'd)

doing the work it was doing, but he encouraged the organization to look at things from the perspective of others. Commissioner Juarez questioned how real transformation took place in a community.

Vice Mayor Cooney thanked SWMF for their work and encouraged the organization to be involved with programs and events that addressed needs the City was facing: support for young people in school; living wage jobs, job training.

Mayor Anderson reported the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) held an event in Kalamazoo the previous week to talk about a regional housing plan. Mayor Anderson thanked SWMF for participating and stated they would be an important partner.

Commissioner
Comments

An opportunity was given for general comments from City Commissioners, but no comments were offered.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:11 p.m.

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: _____

This page was left blank intentionally.