KALAMAZOO DOWNTOWN
ECONOMIC GROWTH
AUTHORITY

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, Mayor Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Stephanie Hinman, Matt Hollander, Susan Lindemann, Clarence Lloyd, Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

STAFF: Meghan Behymer, Erin Hahn, Chelsie Downs-Hubbarth, Rebekah Kik

OTHER: Steve Glista, Kim Guess

A. CALL TO ORDER

DIRECTOR LINDEMANN CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 3:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, Mayor Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Stephanie Hinman, Matt Hollander, Susan Lindemann, Clarence Lloyd, Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

EXCUSED:

THE MARCH 17, 2025 ATTENDANCE INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES IS RECORDED.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator stated that an additional action item needed to be added to the agenda – a Streets For All funding support letter.

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE MARCH 17, 2025 AGENDA AS AMENDED. DIRECTOR HINMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING ON FEBRUARY 17, 2025. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

a. Financial Report – January 2025

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Ms. Behymer presented the financial report, stating that in January, DEGA received no revenue, leaving year-to-date revenues at $0. Ms. Behymer stated that January expenses totaled $4,565, with key expense categories including Professional and Contractual Services, Memberships and Subscriptions, and Professional Development, bringing year-to-date expenses to $4,565.

DIRECTOR HOLLANDER MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 2025 FINANCIAL REPORT. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

b. Committee Reports

Ms. Behymer stated that the **Events and Marketing Committee** meeting on March 3 was repurposed as a meeting of the Marketing RFP Evaluation Committee to discuss and make a final recommendation on the marketing firm, which is before the Board today for approval.

Ms. Behymer stated that the **Clean and Green Committee** met on February 19 to finalize the Ambassador Program RFP Evaluation Committee and discuss interview/presentation requirements as part of the RFP process.

Ms. Behymer stated that the **Executive and Finance Committee** met on March 10 to review the March Board Agenda Packets.

c. Downtown Report

Ms. Behymer presented the Downtown Report, beginning with an update on the Streets for All project. Ms. Behymer highlighted a new map outlining street updates for all planned projects. It was noted that construction has been delayed until 2026, with Kalamazoo Avenue set to begin that year and Michigan Avenue aligning with the opening of the event center. Concerns were raised about the impact of these delays on the event center timeline. Ms. Behymer confirmed there would be some overlap, and Director Breneman requested a formal update. Director Lloyd mentioned that businesses are already inquiring about the impact of construction, and Director Aardema confirmed that conversations are ongoing but agreed an official update should be provided. Leadership from the event center will be engaged in further discussions on this matter.

Miss Behymer also shared an update on the Western Michigan University Economic Vitality Study, which continues to assess the impact of street projects on local businesses. Additionally, the Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 "Plan It" Phase is set to begin, with events scheduled for March 18 and 27 to refine strategic vision goals. Updates were also provided on Rose Street Plaza, where improvements are progressing, and coordination is ongoing with adjacent property owners to enhance both public and private spaces.

The Downtown Dollars Program report showed that in February 2025, $620 was purchased and $850 was redeemed, with a total of $136,265 still in circulation. Since the program's inception in 2019, a total of $511,530 has been purchased and $357,915 redeemed.

In the Downtown News segment, Director Aardema addressed concerns regarding the recent Economic Blackout Protest, noting that while it was not intended to negatively impact local businesses, some were affected. Director Lloyd mentioned that marketing efforts, including an upcoming RFP and support from the marketing committee, would help.

Ambassador Report
Ms. Behymer presented the Ambassador Reports for January and February. In January, snow removal was a primary focus, with 122 hours logged, particularly in Bates Alley. The team also cleared areas where snowmelt appeared not to be working on the Kalamazoo Mall and maintained Whiskey Alley, which has continued to experience challenges related to the unsheltered population. These concerns were shared with KDPS, and citations have been issued as necessary.

The new SMART system was officially launched in fall 2024, refining data tracking and adding new district zones. However, a glitch in the system is causing reports to show "NO ZONE" in some areas. The SMART team is working on a fix.

In February, efforts shifted to graffiti removal as the weather improved, with a goal of reaching a zero-tag baseline by early spring. The team also addressed abandoned property, balancing sensitivity to the unsheltered population while keeping the area clear. Director Lloyd inquired whether the SMART system could help with the backlog of maintenance requests, and Ms. Behymer stated that it could be integrated into the maintenance process as they continue to build out workflows with the proper contacts.

E. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

a. 2025-2026 Slate of Officers

Director Lindemann stated that the first action item is to approve the 2025-2026 slate of officers as nominated by the executive committee. The proposed slate is as follows:

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- Chair – Curt Aardema
- Vice Chair – Jeff Breneman
- Treasurer – Jessica Thompson
- Secretary – Clarence Lloyd

DIRECTOR HINMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE 2025-2026 SLATE OF OFFICERS. DIRECTOR HOLLANDER SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

b. 2025-2026 Committees

Ms. Behymer stated that this resolution formally establishes three DEGA committees for the 2025-2026 term: the Business Recruitment and Retention Committee, the Events and Marketing Committee, and the Clean and Green Committee. Ms. Behymer stated that these committees will focus on attracting and supporting downtown businesses, promoting events and marketing initiatives, and maintaining a clean, safe, and welcoming downtown environment. Ms. Behymer stated that the resolution also appoints committee chairs – Director Lloyd for Business Recruitment and Retention, Director Thompson for Events and Marketing, and Director Aardema for Clean and Green – along with committee members.

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH 2025-2026 COMMITTEES AND APPOINT COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS AND MEMBERS. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

c. Downtown Marketing and Promotion Vendor Approval

Ms. Behymer stated that this action item seeks board approval for a one-year agreement with a5 Branding & Digital to lead downtown marketing and promotion efforts. The base contract is $50,000, covering a Brand Communications plan, event promotions, brand messaging, design, media relations, and digital engagement. An additional $19,500 is requested to expand services, including community listening sessions, a new logo and style guide, and digital press kits, bringing the total to $69,500. Funding will come from the Events and Marketing Committee's budget, with no additional financial impact.

During the discussion, Director Aardema inquired about the additional $19,500 and its impact on the committee's budget. Ms. Behymer clarified that the event sponsorship category was adjusted to support these efforts, ensuring similar level of event funding as the previous year. Director Lindemann noted that much of this work is foundational and will provide long-term benefits moving forward.

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO APPROVE AN AGREEMENT WITH a5 BRANDING & DIGITAL FOR DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO MARKETING AND PROMOTION SERVICES (PROPOSAL REFERENCE #: 91522-001.0) IN THE AMOUNT OF $50,000, APPROVE AN ADDITIONAL $19,500 FOR SERVICES NECESSARY TO EFFECTIVELY COMPLETE THE SCOPE OF WORK, FOR A TOTAL NOT TO EXCEED $69,500, AND AUTHORIZE THE BOARD CHAIR TO FINALIZE THE NECESSARY CONTRACT TERMS AND EXECUTE THE AGREEMENT ON BEHALF OF DEGA. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. THE MOTION CARRIED.

d. Donation from Arts Council for Beats on Bates

Ms. Behymer stated that the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo was approached with an ask to support the Beats on Bates program, as the organization supported the event in years past, and has agreed to provide a donation of $1,700 to the Beats on Bates program.

DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE ACCEPTANCE OF A $1,700 DONATION FROM THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREATER KALAMAZOO TO SUPPORT 2025 BEATS ON BATES. DIRECTOR AARDEMA SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

e. Downtown Marketing Support

Director Thompson excused herself from the room for this discussion.

Ms. Behymer stated that this action item requests board approval for a $10,000 agreement to retain Jessica Thompson (Bee Joyful Shop) for social media marketing and management from March to September 2025. Ms. Behymer stated that Jessica has voluntarily managed Downtown Kalamazoo's social media for the past 74 weeks, significantly increasing engagement, growing our following, and consistently promoting events and businesses. Her continued support will ensure a smooth transition to a new marketing firm while maintaining a strong digital presence. Ms. Behymer stated that funding will come from a mix of the Arts Council donation, reallocated website funds, and the Community Promotion Budget, with no additional financial impact.

A discussion was held regarding the perception of a board member receiving compensation for work performed for the board. It was noted that the individual had been doing this work prior to joining the board and had done so without compensation. The importance of transparency and clearly defining roles when engaging with external entities was emphasized. Legal considerations were discussed. It was determined that a written agreement be established to outline the scope of responsibilities and ensure clarity.

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO GIVE THE BOARD CHAIR, IN CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL, THE AUTHORITY TO SIGN AN AGREEMENT APPROVING $10,000 TO BEE JOYFUL SHOP TO SUPPORT DOWNTOWN MARKETING AND PROMOTION EFFORTS. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. DIRECTOR THOMPSON ABSTAINED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

f. Short-term Extension to Ambassador Program Agreement

Ms. Behymer stated that this action item requests board approval for a short-term, month-to-month extension of the existing Ambassador Program agreement with Block by Block. Ms. Behymer stated that the extension maintains the same cost and scope of services currently in place, and that since the RFP process for selecting a long-term vendor is nearing completion, this measure ensures there is no disruption to Ambassador Program services while we finalize the new contract.

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE SHORT TERM, MONTH-TO-MONTH EXTENSION OF THE EXISTING CONTRACT WITH BLOCK BY BLOCK FOR AMBASSADOR PROGRAM IN A FORM APPROVED BY BOARD CHAIR AND SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY LEGAL COUNSEL. DIRECTOR HINMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

g. Downtown Waste and Recycling Program Expansion

Ms. Behymer stated that this action item seeks board approval for a three-year agreement with Bigbelly to expand the downtown waste and recycling program. This expansion will add 26 new units, bringing the total to 51, while removing outdated traditional trash bins that have become difficult to maintain. The Bigbelly units have proven effective in reducing overflow, improving cleanliness, and supporting sustainability goals. This agreement ensures a modern and efficient waste management system while also exploring sponsorship and advertising opportunities to offset costs. Approval of this agreement will allow the project to move forward with installation as contract negotiations continue for a more favorable termination clause.

During the discussion, questions were raised regarding the cost of expansion, pricing negotiations, and delivery timelines. Ms. Behymer provided an estimated delivery date of the second week of May. The cost of pouring concrete pads for the units will be covered by the DDA/DEGA, and it was suggested that a "not to exceed" clause be included in the motion. The board reviewed previous and current costs, with clarification that some expenses are one-time costs. While time savings from the new units are difficult to quantify, the program is expected to improve efficiency for ambassadors by reducing time spent on trash collection.

The conversation also touched on sponsorship and advertising opportunities, with confirmation that the DDA/DEGA will oversee this aspect, with input from the Events and Marketing Committee, City Solid Waste staff, and Clean & Green Committee. Broader considerations regarding support for other communities were raised, with a suggestion to reference Metro's policy as a potential guideline. The possibility of engaging a local partner to collaborate on the initiative was highlighted, and there was interest in continuing discussions with Landscape Forms should they develop a similar solution in the future.

DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE AGREEMENT WITH BIGBELLY FOR EXPANSION OF SERVICES IN A FORM APPROVED BY BOARD CHAIR AND SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY LEGAL COUNSEL. DIRECTOR HINMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Director Thompson excused herself at 4:05 p.m.

h. Budget Amendment

Ms. Behymer stated that a budget amendment was needed in order to incorporate the donation from the Arts Council for the support of Beats on Bates.

DIRECTOR HOLLANDER MOTIONED TO APPROVE A BUDGET AMENDMENT TO INCREASE BOTH REVENUE AND EXPENSES IN THE 2025 DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BUDGET BY $1,700. MAYOR ANDERSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

i. Board Member Reappointment

Director Lindemann stated that Director Gyimah has agreed to sign on for a four-year term, so this motion would be to recommend his reappointment to the City Commission.

DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO RECOMMEND THE REAPPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR GYIMAH TO A FULL TERM ON THE DEGA BOARD FOR NOMINATION BY THE MAYOR AND APPROVAL BY THE CITY COMMISSION. MAYOR ANDERSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

j. Streets for All Funding Support Letter

Rebekah Kik, Deputy City Manager, provided an update on grant opportunities and the impact of federal funding on local projects. Ms. Kik discussed the Unleashing American Energy Act and the importance of communicating with state representatives and senators by providing them with talking points to understand the broader vision, current project status, and the need for funding. The same information will also be shared with congressional representatives. Director Breneman recommended expanding the recipient list to include the Speaker and the Governor.

Director Aardema inquired whether any grants had been withdrawn, and Ms. Kik confirmed that a forestry grant has been pulled. Further discussion addressed who would be signing the letter, with Ms. Kik stating that support would come from boards and commissions, Southwest Michigan First, Western Michigan University, and Kalamazoo College, among others. Director Aardema also inquired about private sector letters.

DIRECTOR AARDEMA MOTIONED TO AUTHORIZE THE BOARD CHAIR TO SIGN A LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM THE CITY OF KALAMAZOO TO STATE SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES, EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF STREETS FOR ALL FUNDING AND REQUESTING THEIR ADVOCACY FOR SECURING THIS FUNDING. DIRECTOR HOLLANDER SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

G. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

There were no director comments.

H. ADJOURNMENT

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The meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.