

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

May 19, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

PRESENT: David Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Trisha Kidd, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing

EXCUSED: Curt Aardema, Stanley Steppes, Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

STAFF: Meghan Behymer (Downtown Coordinator); Erin Hahn (Community Investment Administrative Assistant); Rebekah Kik (Deputy City Manager); Jessica Wood (Legal Counsel)

OTHER:

A. CALL TO ORDER

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 3:04 P.M.

PRESENT: David Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Trisha Kidd, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing

EXCUSED: Curt Aardema, Stanley Steppes, Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

THE MAY 19, 2025 ATTENDANCE INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES IS RECORDED.

DIRECTOR SEARING MOTIONED TO EXCUSE THE ABSENCE OF DIRECTORS WHO NOTIFIED THE BOARD OF THEIR ABSENCE IN ADVANCE. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE MAY 19, 2025 AGENDA AS PRESENTED. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MAYOR ANDERSON MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING ON APRIL 21, 2025. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

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1. Financial Report – March 2025

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator, presented the March 2025 financial report. DEGA received no revenue in March, keeping year-to-date revenue at \$0. Expenses totaled \$115,946, including \$31,795 for the Ambassador Program and Bigbelly, \$1,400 for strategic planning, \$31,250 for Q1 City Service Agreement, \$50,000 for Beats on Bates, and \$1,501 in legal fees. Year-to-date expenses total \$153,876.

DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE FINANCIAL REPORT. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

2. Committee Reports

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator, presented committee updates:

- a. **Events and Marketing Committee** is evaluating several sponsorship requests, refining the sponsorship process, and advancing discussions on a holiday lighting support request. The committee also participated in the kick-off of the A5 branding initiative.
- b. **Business Recruitment & Retention Committee** met for the first time in several months. The group revisited the marketing piece, with a goal of finalizing it to engage developers. They discussed analyzing successful retail models, referencing the Bob Gibbs study, and exploring strategies from the 2017 plan. Topics included circulation and parking, mall and Michigan Avenue recommendations, and coaching opportunities.
- c. **Clean & Green Committee** was unable to meet this month and is rescheduling for May 28 to discuss the Ambassador Program RFP. Clarence raised concerns about addressing the gap in the proposed scope increase. Meghan responded that once the agreement is signed, they'll reevaluate to identify non-negotiables and true cost needs. Clarence suggested identifying service costs to potentially bring in partners.
- d. **Executive and Finance Committee** met to review the May board agendas and discuss the broader strategic direction of the Authorities.

3. Downtown Report

Ms. Behymer shared the following program updates:

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The Ambassador Program collected over 11,000 pounds of litter in March, completed power washing, prepared Festival Place for transition to Parks & Recreation, and redeployed three Bigbelly units to the Kalamazoo Mall. Staff has also begun tracking litter found on the ground to better monitor cleanup needs.

The Bigbelly expansion project is moving forward, with 26 new units scheduled for installation by mid-to-late July, bringing the total number downtown to 51. Four existing units will also be relocated. Director Breneman asked whether temporary waste solutions would be in place for the large event weekend in June. Director Lloyd inquired about trash removal near the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts and the Arts Council. Staff noted that those responsibilities fall to the respective organizations but agreed to provide guidance and clarify expectations.

Downtown beautification efforts are ongoing, including partnerships for native plantings, new tree installations, mulch refresh in Bates Alley, and tree trimming. Director Searing asked about reopening the other end of Bates Alley, and Director Lloyd asked who is leading that project. Meghan will follow up with additional information.

Regarding parking, Director Searing raised concerns about morning parking availability near Caffe Casa, and Mayor Anderson inquired about parking for restaurants such as Rustica and Principle. Meghan stated that staff is collecting feedback and will continue to make adjustments. Director Breneman suggested providing signage for businesses to display parking information.

The WMU Economic Vitality Study is being refined in collaboration with downtown businesses to improve survey design and reduce the time between data collection and reporting.

In the Downtown Dollars program, the number of certificates sold is currently down, but redemptions have increased. Meghan confirmed there are no administrative fees for participating businesses. Director Lloyd suggested the creation of a downtown newsletter to share regular updates and opportunities. Meghan noted this is identified as a need in the strategic plan.

Lastly, in the Ambassador Report, Director Searing asked about an observed increase in unhoused individuals downtown. Meghan indicated this reflects a seasonal trend and is being evaluated weekly. Mayor Anderson raised concerns about biohazardous materials and the possible need for an additional public restroom. Meghan will consult with the City Manager's Office, review prior-year data, and assess whether current cleaning data aligns with potential locations for another public facility.

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4. Beats on Bates 2025 (Kim Guess)

Kim Guess provided an update on *Beats on Bates*, returning every Wednesday from June 4 to September 24, 2025. Now Kalamazoo's most attended free live music series, the event will feature a diverse lineup of performers, live DJs, and local vendors in Bates Alley. The 2025 season includes 12 sponsors, with new support from Jack 106.5, which will provide live community updates and pre-event promotion.

Vendors and downtown retailers were personally invited to participate at no cost. Guess encouraged businesses to engage by setting up in the alley or offering special promotions. Director Searing expressed concern about encouraging businesses to close during the event, suggesting not all can step away from storefronts. Guess clarified that participation is optional and that businesses can engage in other ways, such as offering coupons or having a representative present.

Five new bands with strong followings from Detroit, Grand Rapids, Chicago, and Muskegon will be featured. Attendance data from Discover Kalamazoo will help track engagement, and past data informed this year's bookings. Guess noted that local bars saw revenue increases of 25–35% during last year's series.

Improvements to the pavilion space are being explored in advance of the event's 10th anniversary in 2026. Beats on Bates will also serve as the official kickoff to June Jubilee and align with other events such as Caribbean Fest and Pride.

5. Downtown Placemaking and Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 (Rebekah Kik)

Deputy City Manager Rebekah Kik presented an update on *Imagine Kalamazoo 2035*, with a focus on the upcoming Downtown Design It Meeting. She outlined the planning phases and invited input on topics and speakers relevant to downtown's future.

Director Lloyd suggested covering nightlife planning, the State Theatre vacancy and its impact on downtown as an arts hub, and strategies to engage young professionals. Director Breneman recommended identifying a model city to illustrate what Kalamazoo could look like in 6–7 years. Director Lloyd also emphasized the need to educate and support retailers, referencing retail strategy expert Bob Gibbs.

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Director Searing proposed looking at successful retail models in other cities to fill vacancies and highlighted the importance of creating more third spaces. Director Breneman also recommended including best practices around safety, mobility, homelessness, and university-downtown integration.

Director Kidd cited Fort Wayne, Indiana as an example of a city that has successfully revitalized its downtown. Board members recommended hosting the Design It sessions in September to better engage students and emphasized making events focused, efficient, and actionable to respect participants' time.

E. ACTION ITEMS

There were no action items.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

G. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

There were no director comments.

H. ADJOURNMENT

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 4:45 P.M.