

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, David Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing, Stanley Steppes, Jessica Thompson

EXCUSED: Trisha Kidd

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

STAFF: Meghan Behymer (Downtown Coordinator); Erin Hahn (Community Investment Administrative Assistant); Jessica Wood (Legal Counsel)

A. CALL TO ORDER

DIRECTOR AARDEMA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 3:03 P.M.

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, David Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing, Stanley Steppes, Jessica Thompson

EXCUSED: Trisha Kidd

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

THE JUNE 16, 2025 ATTENDANCE INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES IS RECORDED.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE JUNE 16, 2025 AGENDA AS PRESENTED. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING ON MAY 19, 2025. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. DIRECTOR AARDEMA ABSTAINED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Financial Report

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator, presented the April 2024 financial report for the Downtown Economic Growth Authority. DEGA received \$916,037 in revenue

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

for the month, including \$874,337 in tax capture, \$1,700 in sponsorship from the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, and a \$40,000 City contribution in support of the Bigbelly expansion. Expenses totaled \$38,573, with major expenditures including \$28,220 for the Ambassador Program, \$3,575 for Bigbelly, \$2,000 for website hosting, \$155 for board onboarding materials, and \$4,623 in legal services. Year-to-date revenues total \$916,037, with year-to-date expenses of \$192,450.

Director Lloyd asked whether all anticipated tax revenue for 2025 had been received; Ms. Behymer confirmed that it had. Director Searing inquired about the “Other Revenue” category, and Ms. Behymer clarified that it includes the ISG Foundation contribution and solid waste funding for the ambassador program. Director Breneman questioned why the ISG contribution wasn’t listed under “Contributions,” and staff noted the need to clean up and clarify revenue classifications going forward.

DIRECTOR SEARING MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE APRIL 2024 FINANCIAL REPORT AS PRESENTED. DIRECTOR STEPPES SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

2. Committee Reports

Ms. Behymer stated that the Events and Marketing Committee approved funding for the Canadiana and Caribbean Festivals and advanced a \$25,000 holiday lighting recommendation.

Ms. Behymer reported that the Business Recruitment and Retention Committee discussed incentive strategies, long-term funding models, and peer city approaches to support downtown retail and restaurant growth. Director Aardema shared takeaways from a national retail conference, noting that most national brands prioritize suburban sites like Westnedge, West Main, or Gull Road over downtown. He emphasized the need to strengthen Kalamazoo’s downtown brand and visibility, as other cities had strong representation at the event. Aardema noted that foot traffic, events, and overall downtown vibrancy are key selling points, and attracting one successful retailer could help build momentum. Parking availability and ease also remain important factors for prospective businesses.

The Clean and Green Committee discussed potential adjustments to the Ambassador Program to align with the Board-approved budget.

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

Director Lloyd requested putting something together to share about the ambassador program to different organizations.

The Executive and Finance Committee reviewed June board materials, discussed strategic priorities for 2025–2026, and explored funding opportunities, vision alignment, and program capacity needs.

3. Downtown Report

Ms. Behymer provided May updates. Ambassadors removed over 9,000 lbs. of trash, 575 lbs. of litter, completed 58 restroom cleanings, pressure-washed the Kalamazoo Mall, and refreshed Bates Alley with mulch and planting adjustments ahead of Bigbelly unit installation.

Director Lloyd inquired about maintenance responsibilities in Bates Alley. Ms. Behymer confirmed no formal agreement exists and that staff are reviewing next steps. Board members discussed the need for clear roles, consistent maintenance, and cost-sharing by businesses benefiting from alley activations and parklets. This topic will be reviewed further by the Executive Committee.

The Board was informed that the City Commission approved the purchase of a Portland Loo, with installation expected in early 2026. Staff are coordinating a pilot to identify potential downtown locations.

A new sustainability partnership with WMU will involve student-led audits of Bigbelly recycling bins and updated signage to reduce contamination.

Ms. Behymer reported that \$3,740 in Downtown Dollars were sold in May (up 30% year-over-year) and \$1,425 were redeemed (up 13%). Nineteen businesses participated, with increases likely driven by large employer purchases. Board members suggested growing event-based promotions and partnerships with Discover Kalamazoo to reach visitors and conference attendees.

An updated Ambassador zone map was included in the report, addressing prior board requests for better spatial data on service areas.

E. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. DDA/DEGA Strategic Plan 2025-2027 DRAFT

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

Ms. Behymer presented the draft 2025–2027 Strategic Plan, noting that it reflects input from the January board retreat, Executive Committee feedback, and builds upon the 2022 Yard & Company framework. The plan is an update—not a full rewrite—intended to align with current community goals and the evolving downtown landscape.

The updated vision emphasizes a vibrant, welcoming downtown where people feel connected and businesses thrive. While walkability remains a core value, the focus has broadened to include six strategic pillars:

1. Downtown is Built for Business
2. Downtown is a Place with Purpose
3. Downtown is Clean, Safe, and Welcoming
4. Downtown is Streetwise and Connected
5. Downtown is Vibrant and Visible
6. Downtown is Strong and Sustainable

The “first 16 feet” remains a foundational concept, referring to the critical zone of interaction between buildings and the public realm. Clarification was provided on its definition as a three-dimensional space including the facade, sidewalk, and adjacent elements.

Board members emphasized the need to communicate what work will no longer be prioritized as a result of the strategic focus. There was also strong interest in creating new opportunities—such as a placemaking-focused group or community coalitions—to engage a broader and more diverse set of voices, especially younger professionals.

Implementation priorities for 2025 include placemaking projects, updates to the ambassador and maintenance agreements, and downtown branding. For 2026, efforts will center on business support, design guidelines, wayfinding improvements, and organizational capacity building.

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

Funding strategies will rely on TIF revenue supplemented by grants, sponsorships, and partnerships. Staffing growth was also identified as key to long-term implementation.

Board members encouraged greater storytelling and public communication around completed projects and ongoing progress to counter negative downtown narratives.

2. 2025 Holiday Lighting

Ms. Behymer presented an update on the 2025 holiday lighting request. In April, the City of Kalamazoo formally requested \$29,300 to support seasonal lighting in downtown, specifically along South Street, Michigan Avenue, and the Kalamazoo Mall. This request is part of a broader holiday lighting initiative supported by \$64,000 in city funds, a pending \$80,000 grant from the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation, and \$25,000 in private sponsorships.

The funding request covers the installation of existing light inventory along South Street and Michigan Avenue, and the replacement of worn lights on the Kalamazoo Mall. Due to year-round exposure, the lights on the mall often require annual replacements. The city conducted a competitive bid process; the bid for downtown lighting was \$26,312 for installation, with the remaining approximately \$3,000 allocated for replacement lights.

The Events and Marketing Committee reviewed the request and recommended a reduced allocation of \$25,000 due to budget constraints. This amount will cover installation but result in 160 fewer light strands downtown and no replacement lighting on the Kalamazoo Mall. The Executive Committee supported moving this recommendation to the full board.

During the discussion, board members expressed concerns about maintaining partially lit trees, suggesting that non-functional lights be removed if they cannot be replaced. Ideas were raised about longer-term solutions, including community sponsorship of lighting, volunteer efforts, and pursuing additional funding for future improvements. It was clarified that the City owns the lighting inventory, and the selected vendor, Elite Creations, will handle installation using lights from inventory.

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

The board approved the allocation of \$25,000 with the understanding of the reduced scope and the need to revisit replacement lighting options. Broader conversations about holiday lighting strategy and potential future improvements will continue at the committee level.

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE ALLOCATION OF \$25,000 FROM THE EVENTS AND MARKETING COMMITTEE BUDGET TO SUPPORT HOLIDAY LIGHTING. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

3. Mavcon Update

Jessica Wood provided a brief update regarding the MAVCON settlement. The final agreement is expected to be approved at the City Commission meeting later that evening. Jessica confirmed she will attend the meeting and report back if anything unexpected occurs.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

G. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Mayor Anderson noted that the portable restrooms are now in place downtown and emphasized the importance of collecting empirical data during the pilot period. He stated that usage would be measured daily to help determine optimal future placement. Additionally, he mentioned that this data may help evaluate whether the presence of portable restrooms reduces the frequency of biohazard cleanups, of which there have already been several hundred reported by the ambassador team this year. He affirmed that cleanup data is being tracked and mapped by the city and can inform decision-making on restroom placement and related sanitation efforts.

H. ADJOURNMENT

DIRECTOR AARDEMA ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 4:33 P.M.