

# Agenda

## Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo (SPK) Organizing Committee



City of Kalamazoo

**Monday, September 8, 2025**

**12:30 PM**

**The Community Room at City Hall - 241 W. South Street**

**A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

**B. ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**(Action: Motion to approve the agenda)**

**C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Approval of the minutes from the Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Organizing Committee meeting on July 14, 2025 **(Action: Motion to approve)**

a.

**D. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**E. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

**F. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Future Structure and Sustainability of the Committee

**G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**H. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**I. STAFF REPORTS AND UPDATES**

**J. ADJOURNMENT**



# SPK Organizing Committee Staff Report

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City of Kalamazoo

**TO:** The Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo (SPK) Organizing Committee

**FROM:** Kevin Ford, Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Coordinator  
Prepared by: Jaime Marsman, Community Investment Administrative Assistant

**DATE:** September 8, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Approval of minutes

**SUMMARY:**

**BACKGROUND:**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

CITY OF KALAMAZOO  
Regular Meeting  
SHARED PROSPERITY KALAMAZOO (SPK) ORGANIZING COMMITTEE  
12:30 pm  
July 14, 2025

**Members Present:** Don Cooney, Alyssa Stewart, Brenda Hughes, Ben Damerow, Alonzo Wilson

**Members Absent:** Kym Hollars, Carol McGlenn, Bobby Hopewell, Patrese Griffin

**City Staff:** Kevin Ford, Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Coordinator, Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant

**CALL TO ORDER**

Brenda Hughes volunteered to facilitate the meeting in the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 12:35 p.m. by Committee member Brenda Hughes.

**ROLL CALL**

Kevin Ford conducted a roll call of the organizing committee and determined a quorum was present.

**A motion was made by Alonzo Wilson, to excuse the absent members, seconded by Don Cooney. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed.**

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**A motion was made by Ben Damerow, to approve the agenda of July 14, 2025 as presented, seconded by Alyssa Stewart. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**A motion was made by Don Cooney, to approve the minutes of March 10, 2025 as presented, seconded by Alonzo Wilson. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed.**

**COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

None.

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**NEW BUSINESS**

1. SPK Coordinator Updates

Kevin Ford announced that the City had hired a new Economic Development Supervisor.

Kevin Ford shared that a group from Kalamazoo went to Indianapolis for a Global Entrepreneurship event. He said it was a space where people talked about supporting entrepreneurs more and strengthening that ecosystem. Kevin indicated that different facets of economic development and local application methods were shared. He plans to meet with the Kalamazoo group to debrief.

Kevin Ford announced that the City of Kalamazoo got accepted to be a member of two different cohorts. The first cohort was through Learning Explore Activation and Place (LEAP) Opportunity, New Growth Innovation Network. It was a cohort for small- to medium-sized cities. They spent the week in Cleveland learning from each other and learning what was going on in Cleveland. They were able to visit Evergreen Cooperatives. Kevin said that each city was tasked with landing on something to bring back to their communities. Kalamazoo and the Jackson cohort decided to explore cooperatives. He said a big part of the experience was exploring community wealth building models and how to implement them. Kevin will meet with the Kalamazoo cohort to begin to explore options for implementation.

The second cohort was through the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Kevin said they applied for a grant (six months, \$20,000 grant). He and Laura Lam, Chief Operating Officer for the City of Kalamazoo, traveled to Baltimore, MD for an Economic Mobility and Opportunity Conference. Another part of being in that cohort is exposure to the Urban Institute and their Upward Mobility Framework. Kevin shared that he wanted input from the Committee about collaboration and implementation of the Framework. He plans to follow up and meet with people to discuss what they learned. Kevin said he will send the Committee the Framework.

Alyssa Stewart added that the Gates Foundation has been putting out money for network opportunities. She was interested in figuring out if there are elements of the Framework they could use as shared community measures to guide their work. Committee members agreed that there is collaboration happening in Kalamazoo in silos. There is no unifying plan or framework for Kalamazoo as a whole. Alyssa thought they needed to be strategic to make everything connect. She has talked with other communities that have overarching civic organizations. A place where all the hubs get connected back to a broader community perspective.

Don Cooney noted that the City and county have worked together on housing/homelessness and medical debt. He encouraged them to bring items like this to the City Commission. Don Cooney feels they have a Commission now that really wants to participate.

Alyssa Stewart talked about a previous organization, a coordinating council, that worked with community efforts. They established a score card and had a freestanding website that intersected

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with the community health needs assessment. There was a cost to being a member which helped sustain the council. Alyssa said there are models.

Kevin Ford asked Alyssa Stewart what she has been seeing/hearing as far as trust and trust building. He felt there was silo work because of distrust. Without that trust, nothing transformative will be built. Alyssa felt trust and clarity in what each is doing and to what end was important. She felt they build trust by showing up and doing something – not just talking. She noted that the community has a long memory.

Ben Damerow thought Kalamazoo was just big enough that natural partners become competitors – especially as federal resources shrink. Alyssa Stewart said that in comparison with other counties, Kalamazoo county is resource rich. There hasn't been a need for deep collaboration because people can start their own thing and sustain it.

Kevin Ford clarified that he was referring not only to individual trust, but also institutional trust. He feels it is not being addressed. There was conversation that often it is a new leader or a crisis that makes people collaborate. Brenda Hughes mentioned that even when they try to avoid emotions/feelings/biases by focusing on data, then the data is not trusted.

Alyssa Stewart shared that Cradle Kalamazoo used to partner with WMed every year to do a network analysis. People filled out a survey answering who they collaborated with and then they rated the collaboration. The results were then visually mapped. She thought it may be helpful to see who is connected and not connected.

Ben Damerow asked if the Economic Development Supervisor was a replacement. Kevin Ford explained how the position was created. He said he will be reporting to this person.

Alyssa Stewart reported that she has a template of a conference debrief form that she can share with Kevin. She spoke about models of an anti-displacement fund. Alyssa is following up to get more information. She felt it may help with concerns regarding the Northside neighborhood and the arena.

Kevin Ford stated that he would reshare the City's Economic Development Plan. The plan includes a toolkit for a small business anti-displacement network. He commented that they talk about gentrification/displacement for residents, but they rarely talk about it in reference to businesses. Kevin referenced a group session he attended, a conference coming up, and their willingness to help people to locally implement things like commercial tenant protections, and commercial community land trusts.

Brenda Hughes shared the difficulties they are having looking for land for a new Powell Library on the Northside. She requested any ideas they may have to help. They would like a 1400 square foot building, and the lot size could be a little under an acre. Kevin Ford suggested searching for developers who would be willing to have the library occupy the first floor and have residents on upper floor. Brenda clarified that they are hoping to own the building and not be a tenant.

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Kevin Ford said he and Ben Damerow attended an event at Battle Creek about housing and childcare intersection. He explained that a childcare organization purchased houses and employees that worked for them could live in them. Ben said they subsidized wages, so childcare workers were not paying for housing. Kevin Ford can send them information. If the group would like more information, they can reach out to the creators.

Kevin Ford stated that he, Alyssa, and Ben attended a regional childcare summit. He said there was a great keynote from Susan Rosas. Kevin is working with group from Detroit on childcare cooperatives. They are looking to host an in-person event – possibly the week of August 11. He will reach out to people, including those around the table, to assist. Kevin said if there is interest from stakeholders, the next phase would be to figure out what it would take to launch a childcare cooperation in Kalamazoo.

\*Ben Damerow left the meeting at this time.

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

#### 1. RX Kids Update

Alyssa Stewart said that as of July 8, \$1.2 million has gone out for the City of Kalamazoo. She said 517 families enrolled and there are 423 babies. Alyssa reported that there is some information on racial demographics and family household annual income. She shared that 33% of participants report an annual income of less than \$10,000; 28% report an annual income above \$50,000; there are several smaller subgroups in between. There is a stakeholder meeting next week. Alyssa said there is a story of a Kalamazoo Mom shared on the website. The program is rapidly expanding – communities up north are trying to get funding. Alyssa said she has heard positive things about it being included in the state budget next year. She noted that expanding the program nationwide may be difficult in the current political context. There is a proposal in the State Senate to make it statewide. She said they will start getting data in the next couple months. The program is fully funded for two years. Alyssa talked to Laura Lam and asked to be considered for funding from the City in 2027. They will continue fundraising for years 3-5. The goal is to get 5 years fully funded, and she is optimistic that they will complete that goal.

Don Cooney asked if people are connected with all the other services available. Alyssa Stewart said they are not seeing a huge uptick in home visitation. She was curious about doula numbers. They have had to work through concerns from people that the program is a scam. Alyssa said they will gather more information through a survey.

There was a conversation about if there was a need for doulas in Kalamazoo. Alyssa Stewart said that WMED is doing some research on the number and capacity of doulas.

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Kevin Ford stated that he applied for a National League of Cities grant. He didn't get the grant, but he did talk with them to gather feedback. Kevin said his application was centered on a mobile app for parents to pull up real time slot information for childcare. He thought it would take a lot to get providers in the mix, but this app doesn't currently exist. Kevin will share the idea with some other folks. There still may be an opportunity for that to materialize in the community.

**STAFF REPORTS AND UPDATES**

Several Committee members commented that it was a good meeting with good discussion.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Brenda Hughes adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:35 p.m.



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