

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

August 18, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, Mayor Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Trisha Kidd, Rick Searing, Jessica Thompson

EXCUSED: Clarence Lloyd, Stanley Steppes

ABSENT: Kwame Gyimah

STAFF: Meghan Behymer (Downtown Coordinator), Erin Hahn (Community Investment Administrative Assistant); Jessica Wood (Legal Counsel); Rebekah Kik (Deputy City Manager); David Marquardt (Deputy City Manager); Bobby Boyd (Economic Development Supervisor)

OTHER:

A. CALL TO ORDER

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

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, Mayor Anderson, Jeff Breneman, Trisha Kidd, Rick Searing, Jessica Thompson

UNEXCUSED ABSENCE: Kwame Gyimah

EXCUSED ABSENCE: Clarence Lloyd, Stanley Steppes

THE AUGUST 18, 2025 ATTENDANCE INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES IS RECORDED.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

MAYOR ANDERSON MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE AUGUST 18, 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 MEETING ON JULY 21, 2025. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

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D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Notre Dame Downtown Kalamazoo West Gateway Report Presentation

Deputy City Manager Rebekah Kik presented the Notre Dame Downtown Kalamazoo West Gateway report, outlining strategies to reconnect WMU, Kalamazoo College, and downtown through street redesign, infill development, and stronger campus-community integration. Key proposals include simplifying and calming traffic on West Michigan Avenue, activating the St. Augustine Cathedral frontage with public-facing uses, and transforming Academy Street into a walkable residential corridor.

Concepts such as reworking complex intersections, expanding WMU's athletic facilities, adding new K-College housing, mid-block crossings, and three-story infill development were highlighted as catalytic opportunities. Kik explained that implementation will align zoning and incentives with the plan, with street design beginning in 2026 and construction anticipated in 2029.

Kik also stated that a \$38 million Protect Grant will support Arcadia Creek flood control, opening more than 70 redevelopment sites. Kik emphasized proactive planning and strong partnerships to avoid fragmented growth.

Board members expressed support, raised questions about construction timing with the 2027 arena and 2029 Spaghetti Bowl projects, and emphasized managing traffic impacts during multi-year improvements.

2. Financial Report – May and June 2025

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator, reported no DEGA revenue for May or June 2025, with year-to-date revenues at \$916,037. May expenses were \$42,986 (mainly Ambassador Program, Bigbelly, social media marketing, and legal services), bringing year-to-date expenses to \$235,436. June expenses totaled \$73,934, including Ambassador Program, Bigbelly, waste disposal, consulting, professional development, City Service Agreement, and legal services, raising year-to-date expenses to \$309,417.

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MAYOR ANDERSON MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE MAY 2025 AND JUNE 2025 FINANCIAL REPORTS. DIRECTOR KIDD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

3. Downtown Report – August 2025

Meghan Behymer presented the downtown report, highlighting several key initiatives and updates. BigBelly waste and recycling units are scheduled for installation this week, with five units' installation delayed as we resolve location preparations. Director Breneman emphasized the importance of actively marketing advertising opportunities on the units, potentially through an outside firm, and the board agreed that a formal advertising policy should be established.

Regarding public restrooms, a letter on the Portland Loo was sent to the City Commission. Mayor Anderson noted the Throne restroom brand in Ann Arbor as a potential alternative model.

Director Thompson provided an overview of recent and upcoming events, including Beats on Bates, Beats & Bites—which recently attracted approximately 700 attendees—WMU Downtown Welcome Day, which will bring hundreds of students downtown from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. on August 23, Sounds of the Zoo, Brush the Block Mural Festival, Tea in the Zoo, and 269 Fest.

Behymer stated that the parking plan implementation efforts continue, with significant strides in the plan come October 2025, involving the replacement of meter heads with kiosks, adjustments to paid and free parking spaces, and expanded accessible parking. Director Aardema suggested consolidating public and Board member feedback into a board letter for consideration. Meghan Behymer noted that city staff are actively communicating with businesses regarding these changes, with kiosk installation expected in late October or early November.

Behymer stated that placemaking projects at Rose Street Plaza and Farmers Alley are progressing through site plan review, with bidding anticipated in September, contracts expected in October, and construction scheduled for this fall, followed by landscaping in spring.

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Behymer also discussed the Q2 2025 Economic Vitality Study and has requested a joint presentation with Christina Anderson to connect the study's insights to the DDA/DEGA Strategic Plan.

Finally, the Ambassador Program report highlighted ongoing challenges with dumpster access in Farmers Alley, preparatory work for the Bigbelly rollout, and monitoring of downtown biohazards, with no significant changes observed from the City's pilot restroom program.

4. Committee Reports

Meghan Behymer stated that the **Events and Marketing Committee** reviewed the sponsorship policy, which is up for board approval today. She noted that the **Clean and Green Committee** is meeting on August 28; they are close to finalizing the contract and start date while continuing fund development efforts. Behymer also stated that the **Business Recruitment and Retention Committee** discussed the recent economic vitality study to inform strategies and explored a potential grant opportunity. Finally, she stated that the **Executive Committee** reviewed meeting materials, including the attendance policy for board consideration; conducted two interviews for an open board seat; finalized a board member recommendation for approval by the board today; and finalized the draft 2026 budget.

E. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. Acceptance of Board Member Resignation

The board discussed and acted on the resignation of Director Kwame Gyimah. His letter expressing the desire to step down was included in the packet. Although he remains engaged with downtown activities, personal commitments required him to step aside, with the possibility of returning later. His resignation will take effect when his successor is sworn in. The board acknowledged his valuable contributions and perspective as a downtown resident and professional.

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE RESIGNATION OF DIRECTOR GYIMAH FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY, EFFECTIVE THE DATE A SUCCESSOR IS SWORN IN, WITH

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**GRATITUDE FOR THEIR SERVICE AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ORGANIZATION.
DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

2. Recommendation of DEGA Board Member Nomination to Mayor and City Commission

The board discussed nominating Cheng Kidd Sun as a new DEGA board member to the Mayor and City Commission. After a thorough interview process with two candidates, Cheng Kidd was recommended due to his downtown residency, WMU connection, and community engagement. He would fill a partial term expiring March 31, 2029, and be eligible for two additional full terms. The recommendation will go to the Mayor and City Commission for approval at their September 2 meeting, with Cheng Kidd sworn in prior to the next DEGA meeting to replace Director Gyimah, who has resigned.

DIRECTOR THOMPSON MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE NOMINATION OF CHENG KIDD SUN FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD AND FORWARD THE RECOMMENDATION TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COMMISSION. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN ABSTAINED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

3. DEGA Board Member Attendance Policy

Meghan Behymer presented the DEGA board member attendance policy, explaining that while the bylaws reference non-attendance as grounds for termination, they lacked specific guidance. The new policy defines non-attendance issues as: two consecutive unnotified absences, three consecutive notified absences, or missing one-third of meetings within a 12-month period.

Ms. Behymer explained that the response process begins with the board chair contacting the member to discuss circumstances and offer support, followed by a board discussion to determine appropriate action. If termination is necessary, the chair notifies the member, requests a formal resignation within two weeks, and presents it for board acceptance. If the member fails to respond, written notice is sent, including the right to be heard, with non-response treated as a resignation.

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It was noted that terminations and appointments also require City Commission involvement, and Mayor Anderson requested a line be added to the policy to clarify this part of the process.

Ms. Behymer added that attendance will continue to be tracked monthly and the policy will be shared with all new members moving forward.

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD ATTENDANCE POLICY WITH THE ADDITION OF A LINE THAT STATES THAT TERMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS MUST ALSO GO THROUGH THE CITY COMMISSION, TO TAKE EFFECT IMMEDIATELY UPON APPROVAL. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

4. **2026 Events and Marketing Sponsorship Policy**

Meghan Behymer presented the proposed 2026 Events and Marketing Sponsorship Policy, noting it builds on the 2025 policy and incorporates lessons learned over the past year. The policy aims to grow downtown events, stimulate economic activity, and activate underutilized seasons and spaces. A key change is the shift to a quarterly review process, with specific application deadlines and post-event reporting timelines, providing more predictable planning and funding distribution. Funding levels remain \$2,500 for single-day events and \$5,000 for multi-day events, with the addition of a new \$1,000 category under development for smaller or late-submitted events.

The policy introduces a dual-track scoring rubric (55 points total), with a minimum of 40 points required for funding. Rubric criteria include strategic alignment, community impact, inclusion of underrepresented groups, event planning and feasibility, track record for established events, and seasonal activation bonuses. Geographic activation, support of local vendors/artists, and green practices are also considered.

Board members discussed timeline flexibility for early-year events and the ability to apply in advance. Behymer emphasized the concise format and clarity of the new policy, designed to simplify the process for applicants while formalizing a consistent evaluation system. Members praised the policy's thoroughness, professionalism, and potential to support continued growth of downtown events.

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DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE 2026 DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY EVENTS AND MARKETING SPONSORSHIP POLICY AS PRESENTED, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

5. DDA/DEGA Strategic Plan 2025-2027

The board reviewed the 2025–2027 strategic plan, noting that only minor updates had been made since the last presentation. Meghan Behymer highlighted adjustments based on board member feedback, including explicit recognition of ongoing downtown initiatives—placemaking, Streets for All, the downtown arena, and the transformational brownfield project. Updates also clarified roles and responsibilities, including “lead vs. support” alignments between the DDA, advisory committees, and the city, with parking no longer under DDA purview.

Looking ahead to 2026, Behymer stated that key priorities include launching a downtown-specific business retention and expansion program, formalizing a business database, conducting a pedestrian-focused wayfinding study, developing design guidelines, identifying impactful placemaking projects, evaluating and managing social district expansions, establishing clear maintenance processes, rolling out a Bigbelly sponsorship program, launching a new downtown brand, and implementing a communications plan aligned with upcoming recommendations.

Board members acknowledged the extensive work behind the plan, emphasizing that it is intended to be an active, actionable guide that aligns with the city’s economic development strategy and TIF plan.

DIRECTOR SEARING MOTIONED TO ADOPT THE 2025-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

6. 2026 DEGA Draft Budget

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO MOVE THE 2026 DEGA DRAFT BUDGET DISCUSSION ONTO THE DDA MEETING AGENDA. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

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F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

G. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

There were no director comments.

H. ADJOURNMENT

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 4:45 P.M. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.