

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

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

EXCUSED: Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Stanley Steppes, Kwame Gyimah

STAFF: Meghan Behymer (Downtown Coordinator), Erin Hahn (Community Investment Administrative Assistant), Jessica Wood (Attorney)

OTHER:

A. CALL TO ORDER

DIRECTOR AARDEMA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 4:22 P.M.

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

EXCUSED: Jessica Thompson

ABSENT: Stanley Steppes, Kwame Gyimah

THE SEPTEMBER 15, 2025, ATTENDANCE, INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES, IS RECORDED.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO ADD AN ECONOMIC VITALITY STUDY PRESENTATION TO THE REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS SECTION. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MAYOR ANDERSON MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING ON AUGUST 18, 2025. DIRECTOR KIDD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

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1. Financial Report – July 2025

In July 2025, the DDA earned \$15,804 in revenue and spent \$15,702 on audit fees, legal services, plantings, and utilities, with year-to-date totals of \$77,513 revenue and \$98,483 expenses.

**DIRECTOR LLOYD MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE JULY FINANCIAL REPORTS.
DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

2. Economic Vitality Study Presentation

Behymer shared key findings from the Economic Vitality Study, led by WMU, and connected them to the 2026 downtown work plan and future opportunities. The study collects data from businesses, visitors, residents, and employees to track economic performance, mobility, visitor and resident patterns, and public perception, with the goal of guiding investments, strengthening vibrancy, and monitoring the impacts of downtown projects over time.

Findings show downtown Kalamazoo has over 15,000 employees, the highest in three years, with visitor numbers up 22 percent year-over-year, primarily for dining. Residents are mostly long-term, housing occupancy is high at 92.6 percent, and transportation surveys indicate most people drive downtown. Property occupancy remains strong at 95 percent, but 45 percent of businesses reported revenue declines, and satisfaction with construction communication is low.

These insights inform the 2026 work plan, emphasizing support for businesses through retention programs, clean and safe streets, improved signage and wayfinding, social district expansion, and marketing and branding support. Future opportunities include enhancing communication and collaboration with the city and partners, promoting programs like Downtown Dollars, exploring parking initiatives, and engaging students and young adults to further strengthen downtown vibrancy and resilience.

E. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. 2026 DDA Budget

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Behymer stated that the 2026 budget will go before the board for approval in October.

2. Michigan Talent Partnership Program – Letter of Support

MAYOR ANDERSON MOTIONED TO AUTHORIZE THE BOARD CHAIR TO SUBMIT A LETTER OF SUPPORT ON BEHALF OF THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY FOR THE CITY OF KALAMAZOO'S GRANT APPLICATION TO THE MICHIGAN TALENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

3. Bates Alley Deck Repairs

Board members discussed the need to repair the five existing Bates Alley decks, which have not been consistently maintained since their installation in 2018–2019 due to suspended lease payments and COVID-related interruptions. The proposed repairs, based on a contractor's quote, would cost up to \$9,000. Rather than simply funding the repairs, the board emphasized the importance of establishing a long-term policy to ensure clarity and fairness moving forward. To achieve this, an ad hoc committee was formed to engage both business and property owners and develop recommendations for future maintenance responsibilities. The board agreed that the chair would authorize repairs only after reviewing an itemized contractor estimate alongside the committee's guidance, ensuring that the decks are restored responsibly while setting a framework for sustainable care in the years ahead.

DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE UP TO \$9,000 FOR REPAIRS TO THE FIVE EXISTING DECKS ALONG BATES ALLEY AND TO AUTHORIZE THE BOARD CHAIR TO GIVE FINAL APPROVAL UPON RECEIPT AND REVIEW OF AN ITEMIZED LIST OF NEEDED RPAIRS FROM THE CONTRACTOR AND THE APPROVAL OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

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DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO CREATE AN AD HOC COMMITTEE TO HANDLE BUSINESS RELATED TO THE BATES ALLEY DECK REPAIRS. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

G. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Director Lloyd noted that the Chamber is stepping away from Restaurant Week and looking for a new partner to take over the event moving forward. Director Lloyd also discussed the new Shop Local Greater Kalamazoo program, which allows small, locally owned businesses to sell online for free, increasing marketing visibility and accessibility during construction periods.

Director Kidd noted the success of Big Brothers Big Sisters' "Paint the Town Green" initiative, a public engagement project that brought energy and creativity to the community.

Director Searing highlighted ongoing arts programming, including the mural festival and the upcoming 269 Fest, both of which are coordinated with other downtown events like Sounds of the Zoo and Canadiana to enhance vibrancy and attract visitors.

Director Aardema shared that he attended the Horizon Bank open house and outlined plans to send welcome letters to new businesses downtown, providing information on DDA support and reinforcing connections with the business community.

H. ADJOURNMENT

Director Aardema adjourned the meeting at 5:15 P.M.