

Agenda

Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo (SPK) Organizing Committee



City of Kalamazoo

Monday, November 10, 2025

12:30 PM

CPED Office Rose St. Main Meeting Room - 245 S Rose, Suite 100

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 September 8, 2025 (Action: Motion to approve)

a. Approval of September Meeting Minutes

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

E. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

F. NEW BUSINESS

1. None

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Future Structure and Sustainability of the Committee

H. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

I. STAFF REPORTS AND UPDATES

J. ADJOURNMENT



SPK Organizing Committee Staff Report

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: November 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Approval of September Meeting Minutes

SUMMARY:

BACKGROUND:

RECOMMENDATION:

CITY OF KALAMAZOO
Regular Meeting
SHARED PROSPERITY KALAMAZOO (SPK) ORGANIZING COMMITTEE
12:30 pm
September 8, 2025

Members Present: *Don Cooney, Brenda Hughes, Ben Damerow, Alonzo Wilson, Kym Hollars, Carol McGlenn, Bobby Hopewell

Members Absent: Alyssa Stewart, Patrese Griffin

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

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 12:34 p.m. by Bobby Hopewell.

ROLL CALL

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

No motion was taken to excuse absent members.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus as presented.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Ben Damerow, to approve the minutes of July 14, 2025 as presented, seconded by Kym Hollars. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Future Structure and Sustainability of the Committee

Bobby Hopewell started the meeting by noting that the City is not involving the SPK Committee in the budget process or prosperity conversations. He wondered why the Committee exists if the

CITY OF KALAMAZOO
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City doesn't have anything for them to do. Bobby suggested that the City Commission should be asked if the Committee is needed and, if so, how they want the work done.

Alonzo Wilson asked if there was follow up or involvement after Kevin's participation in the City Commission retreat. Kevin Ford indicated that participation in the retreat and follow up is mainly for staff, although he does keep the SPK Committee informed.

Kevin Ford had questions for the SPK Committee members.

1. If the Committee dissolved or disbanded would the work of SPK stop?
2. If the work of SPK would stop, how do we keep that work going and what would that look like?

Kevin made it clear that he is not negating any contributions from the Committee. However, things have changed immensely, and he feels that all the Committee members can serve in different ways. The work is not going to stop - it has been fully embedded in Economic Development and CPED. Kevin said that wouldn't have happened without the SPK Committee. However, he wondered if the time had come to pivot and engage folks in a different way instead of a super formalized structure like the Committee.

*Don Cooney entered meeting.

Alonzo Wilson summarized for Don Cooney what had been said up to that point in the meeting.

Don Cooney thought the most important thing was for somebody to keep it before the City Commission. This work has to be a top priority of the City. Alonzo Wilson wondered, if they dissolved the committee, would it become easier to ignore the SPK work.

Don Cooney expressed concern about the new City Manager and City Commissioners making SPK work as a priority. Kevin Ford stated that staff commitment wouldn't change, that's the reason he was hired. He reminded Committee Members that it is a part of Imagine Kalamazoo and if the community says SPK work is important, it will remain a priority for the City.

Ben Damerow recounted the history of the Committee. He feels the original small group made progress. Now that it is more formalized, he feels they are making less progress.

Alonzo Wilson thought SPK work was a critical conversation to have in interviews for new City Manager.

Brenda Hughes felt they stopped feeling productive when their budget was expended. She fears that if the work is carried on only by City staff, they will lose the community's voice. Brenda also hated losing the expertise of the community and different sectors. Kevin Ford didn't feel they would lose the expertise from those around the table. He would still have a relationship with everyone there. Kevin also shared that he is in a lot of groups related to SPK work. Those group leaders are connecting with the community, and he gets to hear that information. Kevin cautioned about using the word, "fear," because this is not a scary situation. Everyone is a volunteer, and they are all still striving to make this a better community. He encouraged them to

CITY OF KALAMAZOO
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make comments at City Commission meetings and attend the City Commission retreats. Kevin felt there were plenty of avenues to keep things in front of the City Commission. Brenda Hughes expressed concern that, should Kevin leave his position, the next person won't be as dedicated and know as much as he does. Kevin assured her that the importance of the work will be stressed upon the next City Manager, and he doesn't have any worries about that.

Don Cooney expressed that when he started on the City Commission, poverty was not on the agenda. By one vote, they agreed to start an initiative around poverty. The biggest thing they did was to hire someone to focus on poverty and keep it before the City.

Carol McGlenn said her question to the City Commission would be about the value or purpose of the group. She wondered if they should just convene when there are issues or if they should be a standing committee. Carol felt some meaning was lost for the group when they didn't have funds. It's more about making sure this stays a part of the conversation. She questioned the point of the group if they were just going to get together and do updates.

Don Cooney agreed. They should be more involved in some way. Putting issues of the community on the agenda.

Alonzo Wilson asked about adding more internal staff to help with that work – building from within.

Ben Damerow thought it was more important that the work be formalized, and staff are thinking about it every day. He indicated he can see pros and cons with or without the Committee. Ben hoped the City Commission would come back and say this is your purpose and what you need to do. Kevin Ford didn't think the City Commission would direct a Committee like that – there are over 20 public boards in the City, and they don't tell them what to do. Kevin thought an additional staff member in the City would represent systems change.

Alonzo Wilson said he would like to see more focus internally. That shows progress, and systems change.

Bobby Hopewell gave a small review of what the Committee has done, and where they are now. He felt the Shared Prosperity Committee doesn't currently have a voice. Bobby said he felt their involvement in the conversation had been decreased. They are leaving it to staff, but even muting Kevin on some things. He felt it was up to the City Commissioners as to what they wanted the Committee to do. Bobby said they had a conversation with Commissioners, who nodded assent, but never came back with what that means - the how and the why of the work.

Don Cooney agreed – citing the issue of homelessness. It hasn't come to the City Commission, and it hasn't come to the SPK Committee. Don and Bobby spoke about cooperation between the City and the County. Bobby recommended getting the City Commission back in a room to have this conversation.

CITY OF KALAMAZOO
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Kevin Ford stated that they had already spoken with the City Commission. They had no clarity when they walked away from that conversation. He believes the Committee has to decide how to move forward or to dissolve and give that recommendation to the City Commission. Bobby Hopewell disagreed with Kevin.

Don Cooney cited some United Way statistics about how people in Kalamazoo can't meet their monthly bills. He suggested they come together around that issue. Kevin Ford stated that those conversations and work were already happening. United way is doing ALICE work. There is a lot of focus on SPK neighborhoods that wouldn't have happened without their SPK work. He indicated that he didn't want to replicate others work. Kevin said it wouldn't be an easy decision, but he thinks it should be made by the Committee and then they can alert the City Commission. Alonzo Wilson thought the City Commission would receive their recommendations well. He said the Civil Rights Board brought forth a similar concept when they were trying to redefine their board and strategy.

Kevin Ford said if they want to continue the Committee, he wants to be clear on what the work would look like. He's also fine if they want to dissolve. The work will continue either way. Kevin indicated that the group could be structured a lot of different ways – it doesn't have to be super formalized. It could be a small group of people.

Ben Damerow noted that Rx Kids got momentum through the group. He mentioned the housing situation downtown. He was told about a building owner that was attacked.

Carol McGlenn said she liked the idea of using the Committee as needed. They could take an issue, brainstorm and come up with solutions. She thought they needed to be more specific.

Brenda Hughes thought the City Commission needs to have a conversation about why they don't think of the committee when it comes to prosperity issues. She fears that government priorities will change as staff changes. Brenda thought, as far as public perception, that this was the worst time in history to back off of poverty. Kevin Ford shared that the main reason a second SPK Plan wasn't created is because SPK work was included in the Economic Development Strategy. He reiterated that none of those items were put in the document because of the work of the Committee. Kevin said they are not backing up on poverty, just using a different lens.

Don Cooney suggested they meet one more time.

Bobby Hopewell wondered what specific questions they wanted answered at that meeting. Should the Committee exist or not exist; what would the work look like? Don Cooney suggested what the work would look like if the Committee did or didn't exist.

Ben Damerow asked how the commitment to poverty reduction can be institutionalized; what actions can the City take to show that is their commitment?

Bobby Hopewell suggested they look at what they had included in IK 2025 and make sure the goals of Shared Prosperity are included in IK 2035.

CITY OF KALAMAZOO
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*Bobby Hopewell left meeting.

Ben Damerow stated that the social safety net is being disbanded piece by piece. He wasn't sure this was the right time to disband the Committee.

Don Cooney thought there was still a role the Committee could play for Shared Prosperity. One role could be to take all the work going on and make recommendations of the City's role in that. He thought the biggest role was to keep it on the City Commission agenda. Kevin Ford reminded them that the Committee hadn't ever presented anything to the City Commission. If we're talking about dissolution and now all this is coming up, he thought it was an indicator of a fear of losing something as opposed to thinking about better ways to move things forward. All citizens can make comments.

Carol McGlinn said she thought they needed another discussion at their next meeting. She also pointed out that the agenda stated the meeting was at 6:00pm.

Kevin Ford asked Committee members to think of three things for 2026-2028 that they could realistically see the body doing in relation to the City Commission and the work and send it to him. He asked them to provide some rationale. Kevin told them to keep in mind that they would never go back to where they started - with a massive cash injection.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Don Cooney thought it was a good discussion.

STAFF REPORTS AND UPDATES

None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Carol McGlinn adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:28 p.m.



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