

# Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2025, 3 p.m. | Community Planning & Economic Development, 245 N Rose Street

**PRESENT:** Curt Aardema, Jeff Breneman, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing, Jessica Thompson, Cheng Kidd Sun, Mayor David Anderson

**EXCUSED:** Trisha Kidd, Stanley Steppes

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

## A. CALL TO ORDER

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

**PRESENT:** Curt Aardema, Jeff Breneman, Clarence Lloyd, Rick Searing, Jessica Thompson, Cheng Kidd Sun, Mayor David Anderson

**EXCUSED:** Trisha Kidd, Stanley Steppes

**THE NOVEMBER 17, 2025 ATTENDANCE, INCLUDING EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES, IS RECORDED.**

## B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Meghan Behymer, Downtown Coordinator, stated that the agenda should be amended to move the Downtown Branding presentation to be first, after approval of the minutes and the financial report.

**DIRECTOR SEARING MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

## C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY BOARD ON OCTOBER 20, 2025. DIRECTOR SEARING SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

## D. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

### 1. Financial Report

Behymer presented the September 2025 Financial Report, stating that the Downtown Economic Growth Authority (DEGA) received no revenue, leaving year-to-date revenues

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at \$928,000. Key expense categories included Professional and Contractual Services, Consulting Services and Fees, Legal Services, Professional Development, and Administrative Fees. Year-to-date expenses total \$488,551.

**DIRECTOR THOMPSON MOTIONED TO ACCEPT THE SEPTEMBER 2025 DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH AUTHORITY FINANCIAL REPORT. DIRECTOR BRENEMAN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

## 2. Downtown Branding

The board received an updated presentation from a5 Branding & Digital on the Downtown Kalamazoo branding work, building on feedback from the previous meeting and the Events & Marketing Committee. a5 reviewed refinements to the positioning statement and key messages, including stronger emphasis on education and lifelong learning, Kalamazoo's role as a cultural hub, and the blend of historic character and modern energy. They also presented updates to the visual identity, including the hand-rendered K, expanded color palette, patterns, and examples of how the brand could appear on construction fencing, placemaking signage, window clings, wayfinding elements, and promotional materials. Board members noted the improvements, especially shifting secondary taglines ("Sincerely," "Let's Go," etc.) to a supporting role and incorporating education more prominently. One board member raised concern about the term "small city," noting Kalamazoo's role as the region's primary urban center. Overall, the board felt the revisions aligned with prior feedback. The board then amended the agenda to move forward with a vote on the item immediately following the presentation.

**DIRECTOR SEARING MOTIONED TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO VOTE ON THE DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO BRANDING IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION. DIRECTOR SUN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

**DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO BRANDING RECOMMENDED AND OUTLINED BY A5 BRANDING & DIGITAL. DIRECTOR SUN SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

## 3. 2025 Beats on Bates Presentation

Kim Guess presented an overview of the 2025 Beats on Bates season, which ran weekly from June 4–September 24 on Bates Alley. She reported that the event remains one of downtown Kalamazoo's strongest summer draws, featuring 17 weeks of free concerts with a diverse lineup of 16 bands and 6 DJs. Attendance continues to rise, up 16% over the past

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two years, averaging 2,500 visits per week with high-dwell times. Businesses on the alley reported a 15–25% revenue boost, and two additional bars are expected to open in 2025, expanding the corridor’s economic impact.

Guess noted strong out-of-town attendance and emphasized that visitors frequently comment that comparable cities lack similar programming. She highlighted zero safety incidents over the past two years and credited growth to strong partnerships and sponsorships. She also outlined future needs, including a formal safety plan, possible event footprint expansion, improved coordination with KDPS, avoiding over-commercialization, and exploring volunteer crews and business tie-ins.

Director Thompson provided marketing updates, noting major growth in social reach following the launch of standalone Beats on Bates social channels, expanded media coverage, and highly successful cross-promotion among partners, performers, and local organizations.

Board members praised the program’s inclusivity, community impact, and economic value, and suggested exploring additional metrics, volunteer incentives, and ways to engage more businesses. Concerns were raised about business reliance on the event and ensuring equity for businesses not located on the alley. Guess noted ongoing conversations with business owners and potential expansion concepts for future seasons.

**DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO VOTE ON THE BEATS ON BATES AGREEMENT DIRECTLY FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION, AND TO AUTHORIZE THE BOARD CHAIR TO AMEND AND EXTEND THE BEATS ON BATES AGREEMENT WITH GUESS WHO’S DANCING FITNESS, LLC FOR A PERIOD OF ONE YEAR IN CONSULTATION WITH THE AUTHORITY’S LEGAL COUNSEL. DIRECTOR LLOYD SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

#### 4. Downtown Report

Behymer presented the Downtown Report, highlighting that downtown business activity and recruitment continue, with recent outreach and marketing underway. The Downtown Dollars program shows \$705 redeemed and \$138,000 remaining in circulation.

Ambassadors are supporting maintenance, leaf collection, lighting, and snow melt system repairs. Placemaking projects include Bates Alley Parklets (recommendations

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expected December), Portland Loo installation (open by December 30), and coordination for downtown festivals, some temporarily relocated due to construction. Farmer's Alley and Rose Street Plaza projects are progressing, but work may not begin until spring.

Wayfinding updates are planned in early 2026 with new branding, and Streets for All construction communications are in the planning process. Board vacancies and a new staff position will be addressed in Q1 2026. Cross-branding opportunities for Big Belly containers are being explored to enhance downtown visibility.

## 5. Downtown Parking Plan Update

The board reviewed updates on the downtown parking plan. Key points included delaying the rollout of premium paid parking zones until early 2026 to accommodate the 2025 holiday season, shifting enforcement hours to 10 a.m.–8 p.m., introducing short-term “flex” spaces for quick pickups, and removing select side streets from premium zones. There was agreement on the need for clear communication and marketing to both businesses and customers before implementing changes.

Concerns were raised about the disconnect between financial operations and the customer experience, emphasizing that the system should be user-friendly and not feel punitive. The City has agreed to quarterly meetings with the board, but there's a desire for more proactive involvement and alignment on goals. The board discussed the importance of clear messaging about free or easy parking options, coordinating with the city, and ensuring leadership engagement with upcoming changes. Next steps include scheduling regular meetings with city planners and parking staff, followed by a January meeting with the new city manager before any implementation occurs.

## 6. 2026 Board and Committee Meeting Calendar

The board reviewed and approved the 2026 meeting and event calendar.

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**DIRECTOR BRENEMAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE 2026 BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETING CALENDAR AS PRESENTED. DIRECTOR THOMPSON SECONDED. NO OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

**7. Public Comments**

None.

**8. Director Comments**

None.

**9. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 5 P.M.