

Board of Directors Special Meeting Minutes: DDA/DEGA Strategic Planning Retreat

August 5, 2026, 8:30 a.m. | City Centre Events, 125 S. Kalamazoo Mall

PRESENT: Curt Aardema, Mayor Anderson, Harvin Sandhu, Trisha Kidd, Clarence Lloyd,
Rick Searing, Stanley Steppes, Connor Sampson

ABSENT: Cheng Kidd Sun

STAFF: Meghan Behymer, Maria Smith, Katrina Davidson, David Marquardt

OTHER: Peter Dams, Jessica Wood, Rob Peterson

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 8:43 a.m.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

**DIRECTOR SANDHU MADE A MOTION TO ADOPT THE AUGUST 5, 2026, AGENDA SUPPORTED BY
DIRECTOR SEARING. MOTION APPROVED WITH NOONE OPPOSED.**

C. STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT

The meeting began with a welcome and opening remarks from Curt Aardema; Chair and Clarence Lloyd; Vice Chair. They explained that the intention of the retreat was to establish long term strategic direction for the DDA/DEGA. Board members reflected on the significant organizational changes that have occurred over the past several years, including the transition from the former Downtown partnership model to the current City-supported structure.

Director Kidd entered the meeting at 8:50 am.

It was noted that the organization has reached an important point where it can shift from rebuilding operations to proactive planning for Downtown Kalamazoo's future. Board members emphasized the opportunity to develop a forward-looking vision that better supports businesses, residents, visitors, and future investment.

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The facilitator Peter Dams provided an overview of objectives for the day including activities designed to:

- Review accomplishments achieved during the past several years
- Revisit the organization's mission and vision
- Discuss Downtown Kalamazoo's desired future over the next decade
- Evaluate strategic priorities and organizational structure
- Identify guiding principles and long-term objectives
- Begin developing a roadmap for future implementation

Board participants were encouraged to focus discussions on future opportunities, maintain authentic dialogue, and concentrate on priorities the organization can realistically influence.

The Board reviewed the existing mission and vision statements and discussed whether they continue to reflect the organization's evolving purpose. Discussion centered on expanding the organization's focus beyond traditional downtown management toward strategic leadership and long-term investment.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on defining Downtown Kalamazoo's fundamental purpose. The Board discussed several priorities necessary to achieve the desired long-term vision. Board members reaffirmed that business recruitment and retention remain central to the organization's mission. Emphasis was placed on continued investment in placemaking projects that improve the public realm.

The Board reviewed major accomplishments achieved over the previous several years. Members acknowledged that significant progress has been made in rebuilding organizational capacity following previous structural changes, and the importance of sustaining organizational momentum.

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The discussion emphasized that successful implementation requires dedicated staffing and long-term operational support rather than relying solely on volunteer leadership.

The Board reviewed the recently implemented Committee structure and discussed how Committee responsibilities align with the organization's strategic pillars. The discussion included aligning Committee work plans more intentionally with the organization's long-term goals while avoiding unnecessary expansion of Committee responsibilities.

Next steps for the Board and facilitator include:

- Incorporate Board feedback into revised planning materials.
- Continue refining strategic pillars and organizational priorities.
- Develop implementation strategies and measurable objectives.
- Present future drafts of the strategic plan for additional Board discussion and adoption.

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

E. DIRECTOR COMMENTS

None.

F. ADJOURNMENT

**DIRECTOR STEPPES MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN, SUPPORTED BY DIRECTOR LLOYD. NO
OBJECTIONS. MOTION CARRIED.**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m.