

Iowa City Downtown District

Board of Directors Meeting

Meeting Minutes from February 23, 2023

Voting Members Present: Charlie Nusser, Susan Felker, Tony Branch, Jason Paulios, Josh Immerfall, Diego Lasansky, Wendy Zimmerman, Maka Pilcher-Hayek, Greg Turner, Nina Lohman, Jeet Saini, Jay LeaVesseur

Non-Voting Members Present: Abby Restko, Rachel Kilburg, Monica Nieves, Keaton Zeimet, Austin Korn

Staff Present: Nancy Bird, Christopher Hunter, Joe Reilly, Julie Watkins

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Charlie Nusser at 9:04 am.

Following Nancy Ginsberg's resignation, Nancy Bird approached the board seeking a new secretary. As a dedicated member of the board, Tony Branch agreed to fill the spot. We are very grateful to Tony for taking on this role!

On motion by Greg Turner, seconded by Maka Pilcher-Hayek, Tony Branch was confirmed in the position of secretary.

January Minutes: On motion by Maka Pilcher-Hayek, second by Susan Felker, the minutes of the January meeting were unanimously approved.

Financial Updates:

Greg Turner shared the balance sheet with the board along with the information that MidWestOne's operating account looks normal. He went on to discuss the January Profit and Loss summary. ImOn has confirmed their sponsorship for the Block Party, and Neumann Monson is a sponsor for placemaking and public art. On the second page of the Profit and Loss summary, Greg noted that we are still working on supporting security cameras downtown. Eventually, this will be under the city's jurisdiction but presently is our responsibility.

Nancy just learned that the ICDD will be charged 3-4x the estimate she received from Martin Construction for the canopy alley lighting project. This change wasn't communicated until after the fact, and it remains to be seen if the ICDD will be able to pay for the entire bill. The ICDD will find a solution for this at a later time.

January Financials: On motion by Maka Pilcher-Hayek, seconded by Diego Lasansky, the January Financials were unanimously approved.

Winter Night Lights: Christopher Hunter gave updates on the Winter Night Lights experience as it comes to a close. Christopher expressed that there was a superb response from the community to Amanda Parer's *Intrude* installation, including a comment from Betsy Potter that the bunnies have elicited a greater response than any other public art installation of ours. Christopher confirmed this by saying that

the bunnies provided the most engagement we've ever gotten on social media. The bunnies themselves are very resilient, as they weathered the snow and wind well along with all of the other harm they withstood, whether inflicted by people or the elements. Christopher also shared that he heard from multiple people that this was their favorite project that the ICDD has ever done. Thanks again to OPN, Axiom, and Mid-American for sponsoring Buster, Hippie T. Hop, and Watt-son respectively.

Julie Watkins provided an update on Hello Lamp Post's integration into the *Intrude* installation, sharing that visitors are able to have a 'conversation' with the bunnies while admiring them. Data up to February 16th shows the following: 2855 total interactions, 1259 total conversations, and 864 total users.

The larger group went on to discuss why the bunnies were so engaging, and how we can replicate that for the future. The general consensus was that people were not expecting the bunnies at all; they just showed up, which created a sense of whimsy. Christopher also noted that the businesses themselves have been posting and engaging with the bunnies more on their business pages as compared to other art installations.

Beyond the bunnies, the silent discos have gone well, though each Friday has been cold. That being said, people have still been coming out to enjoy the event. Ali Hval's Doodle Trees have been a hit and people have said they want them up all year long. While being featured at First Round, Ali described ideas she has to expand on the Doodle Trees.

Julie shared that the third phase of the Hello Lamp Post project will include interaction with murals downtown. Next month, the ICDD will provide metrics for social media engagement, Hello Lamp Post, and Placer data.

Nancy added that Bertha the rabbit was stolen, but was ultimately retrieved with the help of Officer Fowler's work with security footage and anonymous tips. The wrap-up for those who took the rabbit will be a restorative justice circle with affected parties, including staff who installed the bunnies, sponsors, and children who visited the bunnies. The University of Iowa will lead on the restorative justice circle; Maka suggests holding the session at 7:30am.

Moving forward, the board discussed the possibility of providing messaging to incoming students about how families live in this community, would like to treat it with respect, and that it's not a playground. The board brainstormed on how this might be implemented, whether during campus visits, the required rhetoric class, or another means.

Board Member Updates: Following a request from Greg Turner, the board members shared out about happenings in their businesses and organizations.

Charlie Nusser, Hands Jewelers

Hands celebrates its 175th anniversary this year. Their clientele is both local and national. Charlie discussed how jewelers need to responsibly source their items, and that Hands takes this seriously. The

jewelry industry has a bad reputation in this regard but wants to do better. Charlie gave the example of jewelers coming together to create a women's driving school in Botswana to address the issue of women working in the mines but not provided the resources for learning how to drive; this is one example of the international jewelry community coming together to give back to the places and people that they extract from.

Monica Nieves, Think Iowa City

Monica shared that Think Iowa City is the county's convention and visitor's bureau, and that their goal is to get people to come visit and hopefully come stay ultimately; it's a destination marketing organization. Their work is in part funded through the hotel-motel tax and involves drawing people in with sports and retail as well as getting large conferences and groups to come to the area. Monica works to help people realize that Iowa City is a great place to work, play, and live.

Maka Pilcher-Hayer, Hayek Law Firm

Maka says that the firm has been operating for almost 100 years doing much pro bono work. Maka wears multiple hats, one of which is informed by her being on the ICCSD school board. She discussed the inextricable relationship between downtown and our school district, as our schools and downtown are both draws and anchors for the community.

Abby Restko, Glassando and Summer of the Arts

Abby shared the impacts of COVID on her work both with Glassando and Summer of the Arts. Her storefront has been affected by some of her artists that she stocks passing away from COVID and trade shows being shut down. She talked about how initially there were a lot of grants and goodwill initiatives for businesses federally, but now that is not the case as much. Foot traffic is still not fully back in the Old Capitol Mall.

In terms of Summer of the Arts, large scale event planning had to look different during the pandemic with drive-in movies and socially distanced concerts. She also shared that the University cut their funding to SotA during COVID and still hasn't funded to that degree since. There will be a fundraiser March 8th at Stella in which 15% of profits will go to SotA.

Diego Lasansky, Lasansky Corporation Gallery

Diego Lasansky is an artist in Iowa City located downtown in the Lasansky Corporation building on Washington Street. The Lasansky Corporation was formed in the mid 1970's and is made up of Diego's grandfather Mauricio Lasansky's art and archives. After his father Phil's death, Diego has taken over running operations of the gallery and family corporation. Today, Diego runs the family gallery and works in his studio. His clientele is half based in Iowa and the other half is from the coasts.

Greg Turner, MidWestOne

The bank was originally family-owned back in 1934, and was founded by a rancher who is depicted in the mural on the side of the building. MidWestOne is headquartered in Iowa City, and Greg has been with the bank for 14 years. The size of both the bank and community have provided the opportunity for scale and diversification. Average branch traffic is down 90% and that's because of technology; they're doing

their best to embrace it. There's the push and pull of local vs. online, but 'bank on your terms' is the overall sentiment coming out of MidWestOne. It's the largest bank headquartered in Iowa.

Keaton Zeimet, USG

Keaton's role is to work on initiatives and funding things that will better student life. For example, the USG recently funded the \$20,000 renovation of IMU rooms.

Nina Lohman, Mission Creek Festival

Nina shared that Mission Creek, a three-day music and literature festival, is in its 19th year and that ticket sales are higher than pre-COVID. She has had students come out for the festival and say that they had no idea it existed. Nina is also the publisher at the literary journal, Brink. Nina and Nancy do a lot of work together with the arts downtown. Arts are resilient; they have adapted to people's needs throughout the pandemic.

Jay LeaVesseur, Graduate Iowa City

Jay opened by saying that Graduate Iowa City will be five years old on June 1st, for which they will have a birthday celebration. COVID devastated the travel industry with a loss of 21 million in 2021 in Johnson County alone. The market should exceed 80 million this year which is closer to where it should be. Rates need to be higher for hotel rooms, Jay says, as the market rate for rooms was higher in 2009 than it is now. It will take three years to get back to that. Poindexter expects revenues to increase 150%, and the Food Hall will be relaunched by the end of Q1. Jay says they won't be back to 2019 standards but getting close as they move forward. Corporate travel and trainings are not back, though he hopes Zoom fatigue will create business trips again. Sports travel has been huge and was the first thing that came back. Jay feels pessimistic about corporate travel returning as Zoom saves employers a lot of money.

Jason Paulios, Iowa City Public Library

Jason started by saying that the library was seeing huge numbers prior to the pandemic. Their events are doing well and the second floor is getting more computer use than ever, which also alludes to people not having access to computers. The last two weeks have included nonstop learning about lobbying in Iowa and state house bills. They are getting hit left and right with reforms. The Iowa Library Association does lobbying and bill tracking. Current bills are trying to move the State Library of Iowa from 'Education' to 'Administrative Services' at the whim of the governor. This would alter things greatly; the governor would then be able to appoint and remove the state librarian, whereas it was a commission that decided that before. Bill SF356 concerns the library levy. The ICPL gets roughly just over a million dollars a year from the library levy, and wants to protect this voter-decided appropriation as it's currently about a fifth of their operating budget. The Senate bill wants to put the levy into a general levy fund which would be controlled in a much tighter way and also require it to be shared among other entities. There is also the issue of state interference with drag shows and policing the presence of children, an example being a recent Nebraska bill for which businesses can be fined up to \$10,000 and can be sued. This is all without discussing book banning. The ICPL will table on the Ped Mall at the end of March to encourage people to reach out to legislators regarding these issues. There is a tie to school libraries with all of this; students can use their school ID as a way to check out books at public libraries. If schools ban a book, there is a

question of if the student would be able to check out that book at the public library. ICDD staff encouraged Jason to come to the next legislative meeting.

Austin Korn, ICAD

Austin explained that ICAD is the interstate commerce and economic development organization for the region. It was formed in the 80s due to the opportunity to bring a Saturn production plant here. The organization's focus is to bring money from outside Johnson County into Johnson County, as well as facilitate businesses retention, expansion, and attraction.

ICAD also runs rural economic development and ed tech initiatives. COVID made it clear that the lines between interstate commerce organizations and main street economic development organizations are getting more and more blurred. That being said, it's time for a marriage of organizations between ICAD and the business partnership on July 1st. Both organizations are working on figuring out what that might look like.

Wendy Zimmermann, Get Fresh Cafe

Get Fresh has been in business for 10 years and serves locally-sourced healthy food. Wendy said she serves a lot of athletes. Buying local insulates them from shortages and price changes, which she said she was grateful for. There is a trend in the industry as a whole that green juice will overtake orange juice soon. Tonight is the Souper Bowl for DVIP; Get Fresh will be serving Chickpea Turmeric Stew tonight at 5:30 in Coralville.

Josh Immerfall, Donnelly's Pub

Josh is the owner of Donnelly's and Goldfinch in Marion. He discussed that labor shortages and the cost of goods are affecting many in the restaurant industry right now. He also mentioned that there's a squeeze in the market right now because it's hard to find middle and upper management in the industry. 2019 was the last normal bar and restaurant year. He said that sales are up 24% but that the cost of labor increased by 65%.

Susan Felker, Prairie Kitchen Store

Prairie Kitchen Store got its start during the pandemic. This is their first year where they've been able to focus on profitability after coming out of debt. They will be expanding and offering new products this month. There are challenges with manufacturing and disruptions in the supply chain, though those are evening out. Shipping charges remain high. Susan is the representative for the Northside.

Tony Branch, UAY

Tony is the UAY Youth Engagement Director. UAY has a 53 year legacy, ranging from intervention and prevention programs to the more recently formed wing of engagement. UAY's largest service provided is the Youth Development Program which entails hangouts, queer-supportive programming, and the Spark program, which is outdoor experiences and safe spaces for conversation. He shared statistics from last year: 258 have been served through their crisis program, 240 seen in counseling programs, and 140 in the young parent program with a long waitlist. 56 were served in their homeless youth program. They produced 697 hours of programming last year and served 57 youth who used the recording studio. They

have their divergent program which works with the court system to avoid having a mistake stay on kids' records. Last year, UAY also expanded their youth center hangouts. They have been dealing with the challenge that many nonprofits experience, which is a stream of funding. They have had to be creative with how they fund programs despite government grants. Upcoming events include Festival of Flowers on May 25th and Ride For Youth on September 17th.

Rachel Kilburg, City of Iowa City

Rachel shared that the city has been most impacted by two things recently: that people are angry, and that the state legislature is not friendly to cities now with its new government. Regarding the anger of citizens, Rachel said that parking attendants have been assaulted and that bus drivers are being called slurs daily. She says that our city government really cares and wants to help, but has been feeling burnt out from these obstacles.

Jeet Saini, Om Gifts for Body and Soul

Jeet has owned Om for 20 years and has been in Iowa City for 30 years. The pandemic was difficult for business but Jeet saw a positive outlook from the community with regular customers checking in on them. She also commented that running a small business is far from easy, and that the happenings of other places affect business here.

In all, everyone's sentiment seems to be that they're grateful for downtown Iowa City and while there are struggles, things are looking up. Charlie agrees with this sentiment and said that we need to engage with one another and stay connected.

Next meeting will be March 23, 2023 at 9am.

On motion by Maka Pilcher-Hayek, second by Tony Branch, the meeting of the Board was adjourned at 10:22 am.