

Downtown Steering Committee

Meeting Notes
May 26, 2026

ATTENDEES:

Committee Members Present: Zeke Reister, Mike Bedard, Rob Eaton, Kevin Rieke, Oliver Brulotte, Kirstie Miethe, Laurie Brenan, Lindsay Boyd, and Troy Campbell

Committee Members Absent: none

Staff: Matthew “Selby”, Brantley Bain, and Courtney Porter.

Public: none

MEETING:

1. Approve March 24, 2026 meeting notes

Meeting notes were approved.

2. Comments from the public on items not on the agenda

None.

3. Updates on Front Street Temporary Improvements

City Engineer Brantley Bain reported that contractor is actively performing temporary improvements on Front Street this week. The large concrete dance floor in front of the gazebo was being excavated and will be replaced with two stamped, colored concrete pads to replicate the existing brick appearance, with completion expected by Friday. The following week, the concrete crosswalk in front of Stein will be removed and repaved with asphalt. Seal coating of the entire length of Front Street, from Festhalle through to Gustav’s, is scheduled to begin Wednesday, with completion targeted by Thursday night. Several settled stormwater catch basins throughout Front Street that posed trip hazards are also being raised and repaired concurrently.

City staff are separately working to convert irrigation in the downtown bulb-out planters from pop-up heads to drip irrigation, with planting in those areas and the planter bed behind Festhalle anticipated by the end of the following week. New sod is also planned for Front Street Park within the coming weeks to address damage from vehicle and event activity. Bain noted that business owners had been notified of the work through flyers, door-knocking, and phone calls. He indicated that additional improvement phases are likely in subsequent years, with the goal of completing work prior to Mayfest.

The intersection at 9th Street and Hwy 2 was raised as a concern. Bain confirmed it would not be addressed in the current scope, but noted that longer-term concepts include

compressing the pedestrian crossing to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflict, and that interim measures such as pedestrian beacons are being explored.

4. Standards for business-owned flower boxes and benches

City Administrator Matthew "Selby" introduced this item, noting that many of the ground-level planters on city right-of-way are privately owned and maintained without any formal agreement or standards. He highlighted several situations—including the Rotary's pollinator garden and the Royal Bavarians' rose garden—where entities maintain landscaping on city property under informal handshake arrangements, sometimes resulting in failed plantings due to lack of coordinated irrigation and watering.

The committee discussed the existing 2009 Downtown Master Plan, which Chamber of Commerce Director Troy Campbell confirmed already contains standards for street furniture including benches, planters, trash cans, and other elements. However, the consensus was that these standards are outdated, largely unknown to newer business owners, and do not address maintenance expectations or ownership accountability.

The committee identified two primary concerns: aesthetic consistency and maintenance accountability, particularly for planters on city right-of-way that have fallen into disrepair, become receptacles for cigarette butts, or are associated with absentee property owners. Committee Member Lindsay Boyd and Committee Member Kirstie Miethe both emphasized that a city-managed program providing uniform, city-owned planters—with participating businesses responsible for planting and maintenance—would be the most effective approach to ensure consistent appearance. Councilmember Rob Eaton cautioned against excessive bureaucratic burden on business owners, advocating instead for education and direct outreach. Committee Member Oliver Brulotte noted that if the issue is primarily one of maintenance management rather than aesthetics, the city must determine its capacity and willingness to oversee such a program.

The committee reached general consensus around the following direction: the city would develop a planter lending program under which the city purchases and owns a stock of approved planters, makes them available to businesses at no cost, and requires participating businesses to plant and maintain them. Planters not being maintained could be reclaimed and reassigned. Councilmember Mike Bedard recommended that funding for such a program—encompassing planters and benches—be included in the upcoming lodging tax budget, with a policy framework developed over the remainder of the year for a spring launch. It was also noted that the existing approved bench standard has proven durable and cost-effective over time and should be carried forward into any updated plan. The need to incorporate bike racks into future streetscape planning was also raised.

Campbell and staff were asked to share the chamber's new business information packet with the committee for review, and staff indicated that a new business orientation document is already in development from the planning and building department. The committee agreed that communicating downtown planting expectations should be framed as a matter of community culture rather than regulatory policy.

5. Other / Future Agenda Items

Campbell raised a concern regarding the declining health of the large signature Christmas tree on the corner of Front Street, noting visible deterioration had worsened significantly since the lights were removed. The committee discussed the matter briefly, and Engineer Bain confirmed that a hazardous limb had already been removed. The status of other dead trees downtown and in the parks was also noted as needing attention.

The committee identified the following items for the next meeting agenda:

- **Bike rack inventory and deployment:** Selby confirmed funds are available in the parking/transportation budget for bike racks. Committee members are to survey downtown and identify locations where racks are needed or missing, to be reported at the next meeting.
- **Dead tree removal in downtown parks,** including the Front Street signature tree and others identified near the Rotary pollinator garden.
- **Downtown walking field trip:** The committee agreed to conduct a tour of downtown at the next meeting to observe completed improvements and identify further needs. Members were asked to submit preferred stops to staff in advance.
- **Parking garage update:** Deferred to a subsequent meeting, as the consultant is preparing a final presentation to the council. The next phase will address site design and scale.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM

Respectfully submitted,
Courtney Porter, Executive Assistant