

Downtown Steering Committee

Meeting Notes
September, 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 May 26, 2026 meeting notes

Meeting notes were approved.

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

None.

3. Parking Garage Update

City Administrator Matthew Selby reported that the City's bond underwriter determined it could support a \$25 million revenue bond, but not the previously proposed \$45 million parking garage. Pursuing additional voter-approved debt was considered imprudent given other community priorities.

The Blewett Lot retaining walls are deteriorating and may fail within five to ten years, potentially affecting the adjacent Aasgard lot. Selby and City Engineer Brantley Bain outlined a phased alternative to repair the walls and construct one or two parking levels, potentially adding approximately 100 stalls. The design would aim to accommodate future parking expansion or mixed-use development.

Committee discussion included:

- Future development: Council Members Mike Bedard and Rob Eaton emphasized considering retail, market-rate and workforce housing alongside affordable housing, rather than focusing solely on affordable housing. No mixed-use project has been approved or RFP authorized. Existing bond restrictions limit commercial development, including housing, but could be resolved through bond repayment.
- Financial considerations: The Parking Enterprise Fund could support the initial phase. The architect's scope includes evaluating the cost of one level versus excavating for two levels.

- Private development: Selby acknowledged potential private garages on Commercial Street (Johnson property) and at the former Lodge Hotel (Hospital purchased). The City had requested traffic impact analyses; neither proposal is confirmed.
- Previous design: Committee member Laurie Brennen acknowledged that the original garage was unaffordable. Selby recognized that earlier consultation with the bond underwriter would have been beneficial, while Bedard emphasized that developing the full vision before scaling back was consistent with Council direction.
- Additional amenities: Public restrooms were suggested for consideration but are not currently included in an approved scope.

Committee members generally supported exploring the phased approach to address infrastructure needs while preserving future options. Council was scheduled to consider authorizing further study at its September 22 Council Study Session; no construction decision had been made.

4. Pedestrian Plaza Update

City Engineer Brantley Bain received two proposals from Psomas that he had not yet reviewed:

- Water and sewer utility improvements required before surface reconstruction.
- Additional planning, including community outreach, tree succession, updates to the approximately 2007 master plan (street furniture, planters and related elements), and project phasing.

The proposals were expected to reach Council at its next meeting, October 27.

The overall project was previously estimated at \$50–\$60 million and will require multiple phases. Bain suggested that projects in the \$10 million range may be more manageable to fund and identified the Front Street park area as his preferred starting point. No first-phase location, scope or budget has been established.

Committee discussion emphasized developing a visual timeline, determining project priorities and funding strategies, and coordinating the City's messaging for downtown improvements, parking and community center projects ahead of the January legislative session. Members also stressed communicating realistic costs, funding restrictions and timelines to the public. The Chamber suggested add this the City's existing online project tracker with visual timelines and project milestones. Selby agreed and noted that a project dashboard could be incorporated into the City's planned website redesign.

Several members favored beginning in the downtown core for its visibility and community benefit. Elevation changes and ADA accessibility near 9th Street remain design considerations.

5. Downtown Walking Tour – Observation & Follow-Up

Timing of Future Walks

Bain suggested scheduling future walking tours as early as March, weather permitting, to identify and address maintenance needs before Maifest and the busy summer season.

Maintenance and Cleanliness Standards

Eaton advocated establishing a formal "state of good repair" standard for downtown, addressing weeds, uneven sidewalks, graffiti, damaged infrastructure and general upkeep. Selby explained that the City lacks defined maintenance service levels and enforceable aesthetic maintenance standards for private properties. Existing codes may address safety hazards, but not general appearance.

Committee members favored leading by example through improved City property maintenance and encouraging private property upkeep through relationships and recognition rather than penalties. Campbell confirmed that the Chamber continues to recognize businesses for exterior appearance.

Follow-up: Eaton, as Parks and Public Works Committee Chair, will pursue development of maintenance standards.

Ecology Blocks

Bain identified approximately 45 City-owned ecology blocks and proposed exploring more attractive replacements, including fiberglass or concrete planters. Pricing was uncertain during the discussion, with estimates ranging from approximately \$1,500 to \$4,500 per unit.

Members discussed preserving seating, considering long-term durability, coordinating replacements with future downtown improvements and testing a limited number before committing to widespread replacement.

Follow-up: Bain will research alternatives, pricing and potential bulk purchasing. Further discussion and budget consideration will occur through Parks and Public Works.

Covered Area Near 8th Street Restrooms

Members revisited a covered gathering area near the 8th Street restrooms, incorporating shaded seating and potentially relocated bike parking.

A permanent pavilion could cost several hundred thousand dollars and was not considered an immediate priority. Members favored exploring a temporary seasonal shade sail to evaluate public use and demand before considering permanent construction.

Relocating the nearby horse watering trough was also discussed as a potential component of future plaza planning.

The Hill at Front Street (commonly used for sledding in the winter)

Bedard reported preliminary discussions, undertaken as a private citizen, with the Leavenworth Winter Sports Club about potentially managing downtown sledding and assuming associated liability.

The concept could provide a safer, maintained, potentially fee-based experience. Members discussed safety, liability, equipment, fees and whether future plaza designs should accommodate managed sledding.

The current conceptual design reduces the hill's slope for safety. Existing signage identifies the hill as unmaintained and directs visitors to sledding managed by Leavenworth Winter Sports Club at Ski Hill and the golf course.

Status: Exploratory discussion only; no proposal, agreement or City commitment.

Bear-Wise Waste Management

Selby reported ongoing discussions with Waste Management regarding residential and commercial waste collection:

- Residential: A proposed 10-year contract beginning in 2027 would provide bear-resistant containers at an estimated increase of approximately \$5 per month.
- Commercial: Waste Management is evaluating five-day collection using larger containers to replace the City's current service arrangements, potentially including single-stream recycling.
- City services: The City would retain cardboard collection, which generates revenue and supports staffing, along with servicing public pedestrian waste receptacles.

If both agreements proceed, Leavenworth could substantially expand bear-resistant waste collection as early as 2027.

Status: Council requested additional information; no agreement has been finalized.

5. Other / Future Agenda Items

Continue reviewing outstanding walking-tour observations, identifying completed items and developing follow-up recommendations without overextending meeting time.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:38 AM

Respectfully submitted,
Courtney Porter, Executive Assistant