



# City of Madison

City of Madison  
Madison, WI 53703  
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## Meeting Minutes - Approved DOWNTOWN COORDINATING COMMITTEE

*Consider: Who benefits? Who is burdened?  
Who does not have a voice at the table?  
How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?*

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Thursday, September 17, 2020

5:30 PM

Via Virtual Meeting

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### CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

**Present:** 9 - Michael E. Verveer; Patrick W. Heck; Gregory O. Frank; Adam J. Plotkin; Ted Crabb; Davy Mayer; Sandra J. Torkildson; Lori J. Henn and Madison T. Taychert

**Excused:** 2 - Kathy L. Marks and Barbara Harrington-McKinney

### APPROVAL OF August 20, 2020 MINUTES

A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Plotkin, to Approve the August 20, 2020 Minutes. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

1. [61242](#) Public Comment  
None

### DISCLOSURES AND RECUSALS

2. [59936](#) Report of Mall Maintenance and Special Events 2020  

Mark Kiesow, Parks Staff, said that mall staff continues to work on maintenance issues related to both COVID and the civil unrest. He reported that no one is currently camping at Peace Park, so they are over-seeding lawns and replacing damaged plants. Forestry is planting new trees along State Street where ash trees had been removed. Traffic Engineering is having issues with the pedestrian crossing poles that control the banners and lights and they will eventually be replaced. Mall Maintenance team has been understaffed with both full-time and seasonal workers, but during winter they will adjust and put Parks workers into different areas if they need help with snow removal. He said that they had the planters lined up to return to the Capitol Square area, but after the second round of civil unrest, they kept them off the street; he wasn't sure when they would return now that it is so late in the year.

Verveer said that he heard concerns from State Street stakeholders about the rocks used in the tree grates being used as projectiles, and he has been in touch with the Streets Superintendent to make sure any larger rocks are removed. Kiesow explained that they need to use rock in the tree grates rather than gravel or another type of planting material

because of the powerful leaf blowers the Mall Maintenance crew uses to clean the sidewalks.

Henn asked about MPD's current policy on graffiti in the downtown area. Verveer suggested they invite someone from MPD to attend a future committee meeting and provide an update.

A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Henn, to move item #4 up on the agenda. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

3. [61021](#) Downtown Recovery Discussion

*Tiffany Kenney, registered neither in support nor in opposition and available to answer questions.*

*Madison Taychert, registered neither in support nor in opposition and available to answer questions.*

Rebecca Cnare, Planning Staff, provided an update on several different projects and programs that she has been working on that relate to downtown:

- The #MaskupMadison selfie wall, designed by Lilada Gee, has been installed at the top of State.
- Absentee ballot drop off boxes - a staff team has been working to place absentee ballot drop off boxes at or near each fire station, for installation in early October.
- Streatery - staff has been working on a resolution to extend the Streatery program to April 14, 2021, along with cold weather policy guidance for restaurants and taverns.
- Social distancing sidewalk stenciling - starting in early October, City staff will be installing some artist-designed stencils downtown and throughout the city.

Torkildson requested an update from the Greater State Street Business Association (GSSBA) meeting. Kenney said that there was continued unease about taking plywood boards down, especially as the election approaches; there is further concern because window shopping makes a big difference for the holidays. She said the GSSBA discussed safety concerns and were disappointed by the Public Health Madison and Dane County announcement encouraging people not to come downtown. She reported that there was a discussion about exploring permanent metal gates and shields to pull down over businesses, which are currently not allowed in the city, as well as other ways to modify existing boards.

Torkildson said she'd like the City and BID to look ahead and think about what they can do about retention and recruitment for new retailers now rather than waiting until spring. Kenney said that one of her biggest concerns is that the vacancies will be snatched up by large corporate entities from out of town, and she doesn't want to lose the unique nature of State Street because they aren't protecting these small businesses. Crabb requested that Kenney continue to update them on the situation, and asked for information on the locations of the vacant storefronts. Frank said that commercial real estate agents are not getting any inquiries because of concerns for safety and the uncertain future of downtown Madison, as well as a belief that the City of Madison is not committed to a safe and prosperous downtown. He discussed a private-public group run by DMI and sanctioned by the City, which is looking at how to move forward not only with retention and recruitment, but with safety and equity lenses as well. Henn asked how many downtown businesses close in a typical year. Kenney said that they typically have a 5-6% vacancy rate and right now it is 10-11%.

Heck said that the group Frank referred to, run by DMI, has a lot of potential in planning for State Street's comeback and reinvention and is invested in equity issues. He said the group is starting three task forces related to equity, economic development, and activation of

programming. Because it is both private and public, he thinks they can get a lot done and hopes that downtown will be more vibrant and equitable for all.

Frank asked about redevelopment of the parking garage at Lake and State, which could have a positive impact by creating a TIF district and bringing more business and traffic to downtown. Verveer said that there is not a firm timeline on when the City would release a Request for Proposals for a public-private partnership on the land to develop a residential building above a new parking garage, along with a potential intercity bus terminal. The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on Parking Utility's income, and he is interested in pursuing a greater State Street area TID to help fund the project. Crabb urged Verveer to include DCC in that review process. Madison Taychert said that given recent student reactions to high rent developments near campus, she doesn't know if students would welcome that idea for the Lake Street redevelopment. Verveer said that he encouraged City staff to include affordable housing in the RFP for this site.

4. [62249](#)

Consideration to remove or reconfigure three benches in the 500 Block of State Street

*Stephanie Cardinal, registered in support and wishing to speak*

*Colin Smith, registered in support and wishing to speak*

*Tiffany Kenney, registered in support and available to answer questions*

Smith, a representative of the property owner at 506 and 508 State Street and an owner of 7 Iron Social at 508 State Street, said they have had a lot of issues with people living in the vestibule of the property who also gather in crowds around nearby benches from morning until night and leave their belongings there. He said that he has seen people fighting and selling drugs from the benches in front of the convenience store, and his maintenance worker was harassed while removing their boards and did not feel safe there. He said that it is a known drug corner.

Heck said that there was sometimes a reluctance to remove benches because they often are not reinstalled, so there was a suggestion to start by leaving one bench so that it is not such a big place to congregate and see if that helps. Smith said that leaving only one bench might help, but people have also brought their own chairs before. Crabb asked for staff's recommendation, and Cnare said that she was concerned that if the benches are removed, it would be difficult to have them reinstalled later. She said that benches are there for people of all ages and abilities to take a rest; however, during this public health emergency, we don't want people congregating and potentially spreading COVID. She said that she would be supportive of removing some benches during the public health emergency, and then returning and potentially reconfiguring them next summer. Kiesow pointed out that the two benches in an L-shape are for a bus stop, which will play into this decision.

Frank said that he is certainly in favor of trying to eliminate the attractive nuisances like benches, but people will just move to another spot. Crabb suggested that they need to be careful about people who are elderly or need a place to sit. Smith said that no one is using the benches except these groups making encampments there, which makes it scary to walk down the 500 block of State where there is a lot of foot traffic. He said that at 508 State, they have also had issues with people from the benches going to the bathroom in their vestibules. Henn said that she empathized and that hiring private security can help with those issues; she pointed out that removing a bench is a small move for a large problem. Smith agreed and said they saw this as a first step, but they need to figure out larger solutions. Heck asked what feedback they have received from MPD. Smith said MPD has been great, but their hands are tied on what they can legally do in terms of removing people and their property from the vestibules. Frank said he also empathized and it speaks to a larger discussion they've had but never gotten over the hump because of legal limitations

and personnel limitations. He said that he is in favor of looking at how to eliminate some traffic in these locations and removing at least two benches as a test; he said that he thinks they will just move the problem elsewhere.

Smith asked why once benches are removed they are not replaced. Cnare said that over time, because of requests such as this, benches have been removed and some people are reluctant to have benches in front of their business. She said that it is important to leave a bench at the bus stop to indicate that it's a stop, but that staff could be supportive of removing some benches during the pandemic to see if it helps change the dynamic of too many people not maintaining social distance, and then consider putting them back after the pandemic.

Cardinal, representing Earthbound at 508 State, spoke about issues with the bench in front of the store and the two benches across the street. She said she has had to call 911 three times in the past two weeks, and it has been a struggle to deal with the conflict within the homeless population that has established residency on the benches and in the entryways of neighboring stores. She said they are removing the no trespassing signs from her front door in order to establish themselves there. She said that one bench can accommodate up to 16 people, and she is concerned about the conflict she has seen that has led to the police calls. She said that the business is on the edge of closing and would like to see if they could potentially remove the bench in front of the store and two across the street. She said that it becomes a block party every day and her employees have felt scared and threatened.

Crabb said that he believes they should have at least one bench on each side of the street in this area and suggested they ask staff to identify where benches could be removed on a temporary basis due to COVID-19, and then consider re-installing once COVID-19 restrictions are resolved.

Verveer asked Cardinal if Earthbound has merchant vending outside. Cardinal said that they are currently not comfortable having merchandise outside and it isn't realistic for them to have a full-time employee outside right now. She said that it is something the company does at their other stores and if these issues were resolved, it is something they would consider. Verveer asked which benches Cardinal wanted removed, and she said the one in front of her store and the two across the street.

Mayer said that he has no doubt that eliminating seating would change the pattern of behavior at this immediate location; however, it doesn't eliminate bad behavior from the area and people will simply find a different place to go because it is a longer-term problem. He said that he likes the idea of this being a temporary removal rather than permanent, and they need to be aware that this problem is going to go elsewhere on State Street without other systematic change. Henn suggested that instead of taking something away, they consider adding something to the space, such as an art installation, that would alter the current activities. Crabb said that staff has been very creative with solutions, and the intent of his motion was that staff could come up with suggestions that would respond to Henn's point.

Heck said that he contacted Capt. Donahue and she indicated that she is in favor of removing all benches on State Street that are paired or in groups of three in order to make them single benches, as they seemed to be the most problematic and could potentially be addressed. Verveer suggested that staff consider placing bike racks where benches are removed. Kiesow said he would look at their inventory, but that he isn't sure if a bike rack would fit in the locations in question.

**A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Frank, to remove at least one**

bench on each side of the street on a temporary basis due to COVID-19, to be reviewed at the time when Public Health Madison and Dane County COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, and have staff consider other potential solutions for this area. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Torkildson, to Adjourn at 7:38 p.m. The motion passed by voice vote/other.