

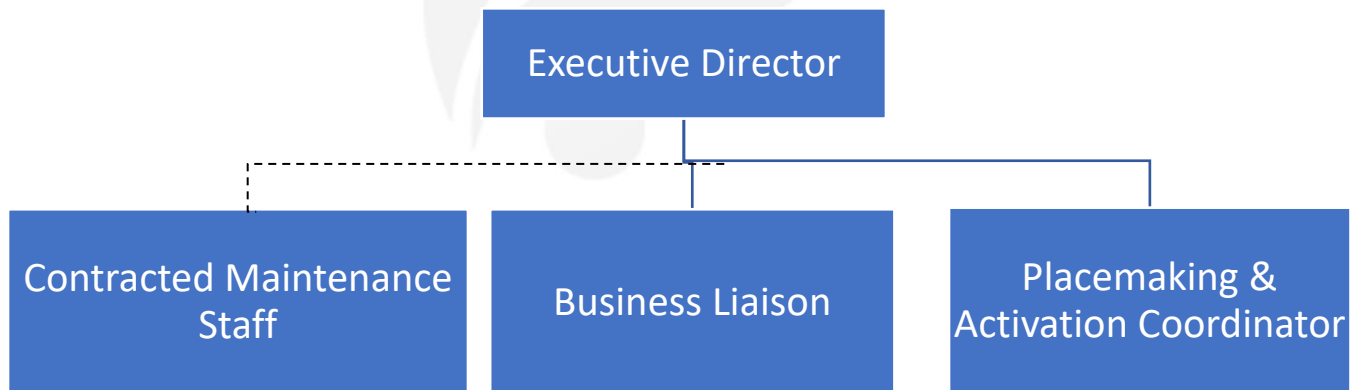
In Attendance: Nicole Berner, Craig Berenstein, Brianna Eaton, Doug Fisher, Jose Garcia, Jeff Hanson, Mark Hinds, Kristie McManamy, Mark Prosser, Stacey Selk, Anne Westra, Ragen Cote, and Tracie Tuttle

The purpose of the retreat was to provide a focused opportunity for the following:

1. Identify strategic staffing needs
2. Develop consensus on role expectations and focal areas
3. Identify projects to prioritize in 2026

Strategic Staffing Plan

The opening exercise highlighted Downtown Partners' areas of strength and also served to recognize that sustaining the level of engagement desired is unsustainable with the current staffing level of two full-time individuals, an unfilled part-time position and one part-time contracted grounds person. The board was fully aligned in seeking to add positions to develop the structure below.



Role Expectations and Focal Areas

Recognizing there will be some growth and transition time needed to fully onboard, acclimate and leverage the staffing structural change, conversation focused on what the board expects for deliverables of each role in the future.

Executive Director – the board members truly see this role as the central community leader liaison focused on value-added tasks and delegating operational tasks. Specific phrases describing the Executive Director role included:

- Master of delegation
- Strategic vision setter- always looking three years ahead

- Engaging with the city, chamber and others in economic development efforts downtown, including targeting specific industries to fill downtown spaces
- Budget management and revenue diversification for sustainability
- Training board to do SSMID work preparing for reauthorization

Business Liaison – the board understands this role as relieving much of the direct business contact work from the Executive Director’s current activity to allow her to focus on strategic growth and engagement. This role focuses on day-to-day engagement of businesses and property owners in SSMID. Some specific tasks expected of this role include:

- Boots on the ground for small business creation
- Engaging current businesses in activities
- Collecting, verifying and correcting data from businesses for promotions and directories
- Concierge-type services for businesses, serving as an expert connector to other resources
- Property owner engagement to encourage occupancy and upgrades
- Maintaining CRM database and business matrix tools

Placemaking and Activation Coordinator – The vision for this role is new for Downtown Partners. The board engaged in vibrant discussion about the need and potential for this role, ultimately landing on consensus of the impact this role will have in raising awareness and visitorship to Downtown. Some specific expectations of this role include:

- Supporting event coordination and hand-off for sustainability
- Supporting event sunsetting if resisting hand-off
- Filling holes in the calendar of events
- Managing social media and event promotion
- Activating unoccupied indoor and outdoor spaces
- Potential to explore revenue generation via events
- Creating ambience of downtown

Maintenance Services – Safety concerns expressed from resident surveys and business owners have been addressed over the last few years through enhanced lighting and engagement in street team efforts to house the transient population in the area. Adding a service for some daytime presence in the downtown area conducting cleaning and maintenance functions will add additional “official” visibility and increase awareness of Downtown Partners efforts. Creating branded carts/trucks and logoed apparel for these staff raises the expectations of the resident and visitor to contribute to a well-maintained downtown. Future opportunities may exist for business or organizations to “Adopt-a-Block” to support this work.

Challenges

A primary challenge to the expansion of staffing is budget sustainability. The role reassignments will result in an additional half-position from what was previously budgeted. The board indicated support for eliminating the trolley budget allocation and possibly reducing the business recruitment budget to support the additional staffing. In addition, redirecting green space budget will cover the expanded maintenance presence. Some use of reserves for the one-time purchase of branded materials to support the efforts is palatable.

Project Prioritization

Four primary areas of focus for 2026 were identified and discussed as a group. These four projects/focal areas represent continuation of large-scale projects and alignment with the espoused 2029 vision developed last year.

1. Expanded social media promotion including additional platforms and regular reporting of key performance indicators of engagement
2. Activating vacant spots through pop-ups and addressing the engagement voids of walkability
3. Explore and/or promote efforts to eliminate paid street parking focusing on lost opportunity cost rather than lost revenue generation
4. Continue Street Team collaboration and update 'adopt-a-street' program

One area of anticipated opportunity is the projected opening of a large senior living apartment complex this year. This property coming to fruition could create more momentum for recruitment of a grocery store and additional engagement in downtown events and visibility. Being attentive to this development is recommended before determining priority engagement efforts.

Part Two: Observations and Recommendations

The facilitators observed several behaviors and undertones throughout the event that are worth noting. These are summarized thematically below along with recommendations for managing or maximizing these sentiments.

Observations

1. This group is extremely passionate about the vitality and growth of downtown Sioux City. There continues to be appreciation for the contributions of the staff balanced with the need to engage the proper “owners” of issues such as events, economic development, and safety. The board supports the Executive Director’s expanded engagement in economic development collaboration with the City of Sioux City, Siouxland Chamber of Commerce and realtors to highlight why downtown may be the best place for expansion or location.
2. There was easy consensus about the need for expanded staffing and reorganization of duties. This demonstrates true appreciation for staff efforts and understanding the limitations for growth without more staff.
3. Board members are engaged and passionate about continuing progress downtown. Positive words were consistently used to express the accomplishments, activity and experiences of the board and staff. There appears to be true appreciation for the contributions of each person.
4. Consistent use of the DISC profile assessment on incoming staff and board members has resulted in an increase in understanding communication styles. Specifically, the Executive Director has learned to leverage the knowledge of “D” traits to solicit input and generate buy-in from stakeholders with this style. The Executive Director understands that board service may need to look different for a “D” by using creative approaches to engagement, and they have brought that viewpoint to the board in alternative ways.

Recommendations:

1. Being a leader in convening resource groups elevates the status of Downtown Partners in economic development discussion as a central stakeholder rather than an afterthought. Continuing participation in the coalitions impacting downtown and educating city officials and business partners on the value and role of Downtown Partners is valuable time investment.
2. Articulate ongoing activities and the engagement level of Downtown Partners stakeholders. Regular (annually suggested) review of activity that is operationalized and those projects in development and the alignment with focal areas of the organization is essential to maintaining focus. Celebrate the accomplishments before moving on to the next project.
3. Develop a timeline for recruitment and onboarding new staff so as not to overwhelm current staff. As task assignments shift, developing a clear transition time will reduce tension and increase clarity and ownership. Allow grace for self and others as the staff goes through the normal cycles of change (forming, storming, norming and performing). If needed, engage Groundswell Diversity in facilitation and/or training efforts to support the cycles.
4. Continue periodic board retreats and DISC assessments. The participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in focused work for a longer than usual time frame. Self-understanding and understanding communication styles of others has supported staff in working with each other and the board. Continuing to have periodic board retreats serve to maintain focus, confirm alignment and fuel passion for involvement.

Conclusion:

The board retreat achieved the communicated expectations and resulted in clearly articulated goals and alignment of board members around those goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you and the board for strategic planning. If Groundswell Diversity, LLC can further support the execution of the work identified, please reach out.

Sincerely

Dr. Cyndi Hanson & Ike Rayford