City of WHITEWATER	Council Agenda Item
Meeting Date:	August 4, 2026
Agenda Item:	Downtown Activation Initiative Program Proposal & Budget Amendment
Staff Contact (name, email, phone):	Mason Becker, mbecker@whitewater-wi.gov

BACKGROUND

(Enter the who, what when, where, why)

This memo provides the Common Council with a high-level overview of the proposed Downtown Activation Initiative, a one-time $135,000 program developed by the Community Development Department. The initiative is designed to respond directly to community feedback and to the direction the Common Council provided during its recent Visioning Session. Funding sources for the program will be addressed separately in a memo from the Finance Director; this memo focuses on the program's purpose, structure, and proposed uses of funds.

Background & Direction

- **Council direction:** The Common Council identified downtown revitalization as a priority during its recent Visioning Session.
- **Community feedback:** Residents, students, and downtown stakeholders have consistently raised concerns about downtown's appearance and the underuse of key public spaces, along with a desire for more regular activity and events.
- **Realistic scope:** Meaningful downtown transformation is realistically a 2- to 3-year effort followed by ongoing programming and maintenance — not a single one-year project — and staff capacity to administer new programming is finite.
- **Complementary, not duplicative:** Existing Community Development Authority (CDA) programs and other resources already address many business and property needs, so this initiative was designed to complement those efforts rather than duplicate them.

Proposed Approach

After reviewing the City Manager's initial draft proposal, the Community Development Department created a revised approach geared toward three outcomes:

- Improving perceptions of downtown immediately.
- Activating key public spaces, particularly First Street.
- Creating recurring programming that drives foot traffic and supports downtown businesses.

Program Overview – Proposed Uses of $135,000

The initiative is organized into five priorities. A summary budget is provided below, followed by a brief description of each priority.

#	Focus Area	Amount
1	Downtown Appearance & Maintenance	$25,000
2	First Street Activation & Tactical Placemaking	$45,000
3	Downtown Programming Series	$35,000
4	Business Participation & Window Activation	$20,000
5	Strategic Reserve	$10,000

	TOTAL	$135,000

Priority 1 – Downtown Appearance & Maintenance ($25,000): Funds a seasonal maintenance worker for sidewalk power washing, sidewalk weed removal, graffiti removal, and general upkeep; adds trash receptacles and other fixtures; and reissues a downtown power-washing RFP for future years. This is expected to be the most immediate and visible improvement residents will notice.

Priority 2 – First Street Activation & Tactical Placemaking ($45,000): Funds a phased approach: inventorying existing public assets, piloting tactical improvements (movable seating, lighting, wayfinding, temporary art, and a possible seasonal street closure), and incorporating recommendations from the UW–Madison Design Studio (pending approval of recently submitted application) and Whitewater Forward. Staff will also explore a limited, temporary Downtown Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) ordinance which would come for separate review and approvals in the future.

Priority 3 – Downtown Programming Series ($35,000): Supports a recurring series of events, such as live music, open mic nights, pop-up markets, and similar activities, concentrated in the summer months and around the academic calendar. City funding would cover production costs, equipment, and marketing, while programming would be delivered primarily through partners organizations, pending their agreement to participate.

Priority 4 – Business Participation & Window Activation ($20,000): Combines a Window Activation Program ($10,000 in small grants for window art, murals, and temporary displays) with a Downtown Event Activation Partner pilot ($10,000 in performance-based grants of up to $500 per event and up to $2,000 per business annually) for businesses that host new downtown activation events.

Priority 5 – Strategic Reserve ($10,000): Preserves flexibility for opportunities that arise during implementation, such as matching funds for private investment, sponsorships, or small placemaking enhancements identified through the First Street process.

Program Administration

- **Roles:** The Community Development Department would administer the program day to day (project management, grant administration, procurement, and coordination), while partner organizations would ideally assist with event production, volunteer recruitment, programming, and business outreach. No new City staff positions are proposed beyond one temporary, seasonal maintenance worker.
- **Budget flexibility:** To allow for adjustments as the program operates, staff propose that the Community Development Department be authorized to administratively reallocate up to 10% of any budget line to another line, provided total expenditures do not exceed $135,000. Any such changes would be communicated to the Common Council and the Community Development Authority through a staff memo.

Success Metrics & Reporting

Staff will report back to the Council after Year 1 on:

- Number of downtown events conducted.
- Estimated event attendance.
- Number of participating businesses.
- Number of activated storefront windows.
- Downtown vacancy rate trend.
- Recommendations for potential Phase II investment.

Program Sunset

Staff propose that the program sunset by December 31, 2027, so that it does not become an ongoing funding obligation for the City. Any unspent funds could be reallocated at that time, and the Common Council may revisit future downtown planning or collaborative initiatives at that point.

Alignment with Council Direction & Community Feedback

This proposal was shaped directly by the Common Council's Visioning Session priorities and by community feedback regarding downtown appearance and level of activity. It intentionally prioritizes visible, achievable outcomes while avoiding new long-term operating obligations or commitments that exceed current staff capacity: positioning the City to test ideas, demonstrate momentum, and inform larger downtown investment decisions over the next 2–3 years.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

(Dates, committees, action taken)

- The Finance Committee reviewed this program proposal at the July 28, 2026 meeting. They recommended the proposed program to the Common Council for approval along with the necessary budget amendment.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

(If none, state N/A)

- As explained in the Finance Director's memo, this program will be a one time re-allocation of already budgeted dollars within the 2026 City budget. No new spending is part of this program plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

- Staff recommend that the Common Council approve the drafted Downtown Activation Initiative and also approve the necessary Budget Amendment.

ATTACHMENT(S) INCLUDED

(If none, state N/A)

- Downtown Activation Initiative program draft
- Memo from Finance Director regarding program funding
- Drafted Budget Amendment