



Finance Committee Agenda Item

Meeting Date:	March 24, 2026
Agenda Item:	Memo re City of Whitewater MOU w/ Downtown Whitewater, Inc
Staff Contact (name, email, phone):	Mason Becker, mbecker@whitewater-wi.gov

BACKGROUND

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

The City of Whitewater and Downtown Whitewater, Inc. (DTWW) have maintained a cooperative relationship focused on downtown revitalization since the creation of DTWW in 2006. The organization was originally established to support downtown development and promotion. Since its formation, the City Manager or designee has served on the DTWW Board of Directors to maintain coordination between the organization and the City.

In January 2021, the City and DTWW entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlined the services DTWW would provide in exchange for City financial support. The agreement identified a range of responsibilities including management of the Whitewater City Market and winter market, promotion of downtown businesses through newsletters and communications, coordination of major community events such as the Parade of Lights and Fourth of July activities, downtown beautification and cleanup efforts, and collaboration with partners such as UW-Whitewater and other local organizations. The MOU also included responsibilities related to assisting with economic development initiatives, historic preservation efforts, and communication with downtown businesses regarding grants and City projects.

The 2021 agreement also included several administrative and reporting expectations. These included quarterly reports to the Common Council, submission of annual financial and Main Street program reports, public posting of DTWW board meetings and minutes in accordance with Wisconsin Open Meetings Law, and a fundraising expectation that DTWW would work toward matching the City's financial contribution.

City staff conducted a review of the 2021 MOU and its implementation to determine which activities remain relevant and which expectations may need adjustment. That review noted that some elements of the agreement have continued to function effectively, particularly the operation of City Market events, ongoing promotional communications, and major downtown events. However, several elements of the 2021 agreement were either tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, have become outdated, or have not seen documented progress. Examples include pandemic-related programming, certain grant initiatives, and some historic preservation and community engagement initiatives. The review also noted that some reporting and administrative requirements identified in the original agreement have not consistently occurred.

Downtown Whitewater, Inc. has recently proposed a revised MOU that would include a more limited set of responsibilities compared to the 2021 agreement. The proposed revisions are intended to focus the organization's work on a smaller number of core activities, such as operating City Market events, coordinating key community events, maintaining communication with downtown businesses, and supporting basic beautification or cleanup efforts. These proposed revisions reflect an effort to align expectations with the organization's current capacity.

In correspondence provided to the city, DTWW leadership indicated that the organization is currently operating with a volunteer board (which was very recently reorganized and began meeting again in early 2026) and does not have a dedicated paid staff member. The city's Economic Development Coordinator is sitting as the city representative on the new board. The Executive Director position is currently being filled in an interim volunteer capacity while also managing responsibilities for the Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Council, and Fourth of July Festival. As a result, DTWW has indicated that the full scope of responsibilities included in the earlier MOU are not feasible under the current organizational structure without additional staffing or financial resources.

The revised MOU proposal therefore reflects an attempt to establish a reduced scope of work that is more consistent with the organization's current volunteer structure while continuing to support downtown activities and engagement with downtown businesses.

The Finance Committee is being asked to review the proposed changes and consider how the revised agreement compares to the scope and expectations outlined in the original 2021 MOU. Ultimately, the Common Council will need to decide if continuing to budget support for DTWW in the current amount will be warranted going forward.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

(Dates, committees, action taken)

- The previous Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2021.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

(If none, state N/A)

In the city's most recent biennial budget, \$25,000.00 was budgeted as the contribution to Downtown Whitewater, Inc in both 2026 and 2027. This matches the amount that was budgeted in 2023 and 2024.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Finance Committee should provide input and guidance as to what items they feel appropriate to include in a revised Memorandum of Understanding with Downtown Whitewater, Inc. Once completed, a revised MOU can either be brought back to the Finance Committee for further review or forwarded to the Common Council. The goal will be to complete this process ahead of budget adjustments for 2027.

ATTACHMENT(S) INCLUDED

(If none, state N/A)

- 2021 Memorandum of Understanding w/ Downtown Whitewater, Inc
 - Summary memo provided to city manager and Downtown Whitewater, Inc
 - Response email from Downtown Whitewater, Inc Executive Director
 - Response proposal MOU (redlined) from Downtown Whitewater, Inc
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