

Memorandum

To: John Weidl, City Manager

From: Community Development Department

Date: November 17, 2025

Subject: Summary Review of 2021 MOU with Downtown Whitewater, Inc. and Recommendations for Updated Agreement

Purpose

City staff reviewed the 2021 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Whitewater and Downtown Whitewater, Inc. (DTWW), along with documented staff comments regarding DTWW's performance and relevance of activities outlined in the original agreement. This memo summarizes findings and presents recommended, updated goals for a new MOU that reflect current community needs, achievable expectations, and contemporary best practices.

Summary of Staff Review Findings

1. Items Completed or Generally Working

- City Market operations (summer and winter) are being successfully managed.
- The events newsletters appear to be occurring, and DTWW continues to host major community events (Parade of Lights, 4th of July activities).
- Some collaboration with UW-Whitewater exists, with university representation on DTWW's board.
- Branding Guide project (USDA RBDG) was completed in 2021.

2. Items No Longer Relevant or Should Be Removed

- All COVID-related expectations (modified markets, public information distribution).
- Outdoor public eating areas, as the need was pandemic-driven and no longer a priority.
- Any outdated programs for which no substantive activity has occurred (e.g., "Heart and Soul" engagement initiative, AARP grant submission, downtown covenants).

3. Items Not Completed or Lacking Evidence of Progress

- Dementia Friendly Community Initiative partnership: currently handled by Parks & Recreation Department
- Historic district investigation: no movement reported.
- Downtown façade rendering or historic preservation support: no clear evidence.
- City cleanup events: only a portion of expected events occurring (closer to five per year instead of 10–12).
- Quarterly reports to Council: not occurring.

- Annual financial and Main Street reporting: not submitted as required.
- Public posting of Board of Directors meetings: not happening; no agendas/minutes filed with City Clerk.
- Fundraising requirement (matching City contribution): no indication this is being met.

4. Items That Are Valuable but Need Clearer Expectations

- Communications with businesses on grants and resources: should be better aligned with City/CDA programs to avoid duplication.
- Collaboration with partner organizations: needs definition to reduce role confusion (Chamber, Discover Whitewater, UW-Whitewater, CDA).
- Beautification efforts: activity appears limited, but the community still expects visible downtown improvements.

Recommended Goals for Updated MOU (2025–2026)

The following goals reflect realistic, measurable, and mission-appropriate expectations based on staff review and the current capacity of DTWW. These can be incorporated directly into a revised MOU.

A. Core Program & Event Management

- 1. Operate the Whitewater City Market (summer)**
 - Deliver 20–26 weekly markets annually.
 - Provide vendor management, site logistics, and marketing.
- 2. Operate the Winter Indoor Market**
 - November–April season, consistent branding and promotion.
- 3. Coordinate Key Downtown Events**
 - Parade of Lights.
 - July 4th events
 - Additional promotional events may be added by agreement.

B. Communications & Business Support

- 4. Maintain Regular Communication Channels**
 - Weekly or bi-weekly events newsletter.
 - Bi-weekly or monthly business update to downtown businesses.
- 5. Serve as a First-Point Connector for Business Resources**
 - Provide basic guidance and direct referrals to CDA/City for loans, grants, and technical assistance...realistically, DTWW should not originate new programs at this time.
- 6. Promote Downtown Businesses Through Coordinated Marketing**
 - Use consistent branding and social media strategy aligned with the 2021 Brand Guide.

C. Downtown Cleanliness & Beautification

- 7. Organize at Least Six (6) Annual Downtown Cleanup Days**

- Align with major city events (graduations, move-in day, July 4th).
- Maintain partnerships with volunteer groups and local employers.
- Work on items like weed removal, ensure downtown landscaping meets basic standards.

8. Seasonal Beautification Activities

- Holiday/winter decorations: expand beyond just snowflakes at wintertime and ensure that process is communicated with city's Public Works Department on a timely basis (this was an issue this season).
- Targeted small-scale beautification (planters, banners) based on capacity and funding.

D. Strategic Collaboration & Community Engagement

9. Participate in Formalized Collaboration with Key Partners

- Chamber, Tourism Council, UWW, CDA.
- Clarify roles in shared initiatives (e.g., event support, marketing coordination).

10. City Projects & Infrastructure Communication Support

- Provide at least one DTWW representative to City-led planning committees as requested (e.g., Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee).
- Assist in distributing City communications about downtown construction timelines when provided with content by staff.

E. Transparency, Reporting & Accountability

11. Quarterly Reports to Council

- Provide measurable activity summaries including:
 - Event attendance, City Market metrics
 - Business outreach contacts
 - Downtown occupancy/vacancy counts
 - Volunteer engagement and cleanup events
 - Progress on annual goals
 - Any paid-for or earned media, which could include news articles, interviews, etc

12. Annual Financial Report and Wisconsin Main Street Report

- Submit annually to the City as required.

13. Public Meeting Compliance

- File Board agendas and minutes with City Clerk monthly.
- Ensure meetings comply with Wisconsin Open Meetings Law.

14. Fundraising & Financial Sustainability Plan

- Develop and submit an annual fundraising plan.

- Target a clear (even if modest) level of non-City revenue growth year-over-year, recognizing that matching the full City contribution may not be immediately achievable but progress should be measurable.

F. Special Initiatives (Optional / Capacity-Dependent)

15. Historic Preservation Support (if prioritized)

- Collaborate with the City on exploring façade assistance promotion, historic district interest, or educational materials.

16. Small-Scale Placemaking Projects

- Low-cost, high-impact features aligned with downtown branding (e.g., pole banners, public art projects).
- With enough momentum, larger scale beautification efforts could be considered.

Conclusion

The 2021 MOU contained several outdated or unrealistic expectations, many linked to COVID and initiatives that never materialized. The updated list above provides a practical, accountable, and capacity-aligned framework for DTWW's role in downtown vitality and community engagement. These goals give both the City and DTWW clearer expectations and measurable benchmarks for performance, weighed against the city's annual investment in DTWW.