



701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Department Source: Police

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: March 16, 2026

Re: Approval of Memorandum of Understanding – Downtown Ambassador Program and appropriation of funding.

Impacted Ward: Ward 1

Executive Summary

Staff requests Council approval to authorize the City Manager to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Columbia, the Downtown Community Improvement District (CID), and the University of Missouri (MU) establishing shared governance and cost participation for the Downtown Ambassador Program and appropriation of funds for first year cost.

The Agreement for Supplemental Safety Services between the CID and MYDATT Services Inc., dba Block by Block, is attached as an exhibit for informational purposes only. The City is not a party to that agreement.

Term of Agreement April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027, with up to 4 additional renewal periods (through March 3031), City's cost per year is \$168,130.01.

Discussion

The Downtown Ambassador Program is a supplemental, non-law enforcement public safety initiative intended to enhance the safety, security, and overall visitor experience in downtown Columbia. The program is designed to support and supplement existing law enforcement services, rather than replace the efforts of the Columbia Police Department or University of Missouri Police Department. Representatives from the City, Downtown CID, and University of Missouri discussed the possibility of adopting this program after attending the Columbia Chamber of Commerce Leadership visit in Columbia, South Carolina in October 2025 and hearing about the long-term success the program had in that community.

The program will consist of uniformed Ambassadors employed by Block by Block, who will patrol the downtown area, interact with businesses, residents, and visitors, and serve as additional eyes and ears for public safety concerns. Key functions of the Ambassadors include:

- Conducting walking and bicycle patrols throughout the Service Area to provide a visible presence and deter unwanted activity.
- Performing Public Relations checks at downtown businesses, providing a regular point of contact for safety and community concerns.
- Conducting outreach with homeless individuals in order to connect them with appropriate service providers.

- Addressing quality-of-life issues, including public intoxication/open containers, trespassing, and similar minor offenses, through education and voluntary compliance.
- Providing after-hours safety escorts for downtown employees or visitors as requested.
- Sharing safety and security information with local law enforcement and providing documentation of incidents or concerns.
- Delivering hospitality and visitor assistance, acting as friendly, approachable representatives for the downtown district.
- Documenting items such as non-working lighting, graffiti, trash, or other concerns and forwarding to the appropriate party.

Under the MOU, the CID will serve as the primary program administrator, managing day-to-day operations and providing quarterly reports to the City and MU. The City and MU will each contribute one-third of the program's annual cost, supporting the program financially while CID manages its implementation through the Block by Block contract.

The attached Agreement with Block by Block outlines specific operational and staffing details, including the number of Ambassadors, weekly service hours, training requirements, reporting protocols, and the annual flat fee. While the City is not a party to this contract, it provides important context for the MOU and the City's financial commitment.

In addition to Columbia, SC, and many others, the Block by Block Ambassador program is also utilized by:

- Gainesville, FL
- Iowa City, IA
- Fort Worth, TX
- Little Rock, AR
- Louisville, KY
- Columbus, OH
- Austin, TX
- Pasadena, CA

Cost Share and Fiscal Impact

The Agreement between CID and Block by Block establishes:

- A flat monthly fee of \$42,032.50
- A maximum annual amount of \$504,390.03
- An initial term of one (1) year beginning April 1, 2026, with renewal options

Under the MOU cost-share model:

- The City's annual share will be approximately \$168,130.01 (one-third of the annual contract amount).
- The CID will invoice the City annually.

- Payment will be due within thirty (30) days of invoice.

All obligations remain subject to annual appropriation.

Strategic Impact

Participation in the Ambassador Program will:

- Increase visible presence and proactive engagement in the downtown district
- Improve coordination between the City, CID, and MU
- Provide structured documentation of quality-of-life concerns and fixes
- Support downtown economic vitality and public confidence
- Allow sworn officers to remain focused on higher-priority enforcement needs

If not approved, the City would not participate in the shared funding structure, and the program would not proceed as proposed.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: Cost will be \$168,130.01 per year through life of contract (5 years)

Long-Term Impact: Cost will be \$168,130.01 per year through life of contract (5 years)

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Safe Community, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Inter-Governmental Cooperation, Secondary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
N/A	N/A

Suggested Council Action

Staff recommends Council authorize the City Manager to execute the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Columbia, Downtown Community Improvement District, and the University of Missouri Columbia for the Downtown Ambassador Program, and appropriation of funding for first year cost.