



THE ART OF WINNING MEETS THE HEART OF WINNING

It wasn't the biggest by footprint nor by attendance as far as tourism events go. Its competitor, the Iowa State Fair, can make that claim hands down. But in this head-to-head, between art and ag, Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience came out on top, winning the outstanding event of the year award at the 2023 Iowa Tourism Conference. Beyond Van Gogh took place at the Mid-America Center, June 23-September 9, 2022, making Council Bluffs one of the smallest cities to host such a sought-after pop culture event and the first one in Iowa. (So, take that, Des Moines!)

In addition to the event of the year, the Council Bluffs CVB also brought home the Iowa Tourism Award recognizing Council Bluffs as the outstanding community of the year. This marks the third time CB has received the community accolade since 2017. In total, the bureau has been the recipient of ten Iowa Tourism Awards in less than ten years.

During the iTIP (Iowa Travel Industry Partners) annual summer celebration, Emma Schwaller received the Rising Star Award. The honor recognizes someone that's been in the industry for less than five years and has shown a passion for their work. During this occasion, Emma also celebrated the completion of the year-long iTIP mentorship program with her mentor, Nick Pfeiffer, of Think Iowa City.

Finally, the Council Bluffs CVB was one of 25 businesses and organizations named as a 2023 UNbelievable Workplace by the Council Bluffs Area Chamber of Commerce. Not bad for a small but mighty team of four.



PARTNERSHIPS LEAD TO AWARD-WINNING WORK...

During fiscal year 2023, the Council Bluffs CVB brought home two more Iowa Tourism Awards, recognizing Council Bluffs as the outstanding community of the year and Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience as the outstanding event of the year. The community award is a credit to tourism efforts across the city, and the event recognition speaks to the Mid-America Center's savvy in booking such a marquee "experience."

The honors didn't end there. Emma Schwaller, CBCVB director of marketing, accepted the Rising Star Award from the Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP) Foundation for her extraordinary accomplishments as a tourism newcomer. Furthermore, Emma nominated the CBCVB and secured its recognition as an UNbelievable Workplace through the Council Bluffs Chamber.

The path to the aforementioned awards began with the day-to-day partnerships that shape our approach to promoting Council Bluffs. Speaking of the chamber, the bureau worked extensively with it to develop a landing page on UNleashCB.com to persuade visitors to consider relocating here to expand the area's workforce.

When the future of Railroad Days appeared to be in doubt, the CBCVB stepped forward to assist and executed its marketing. Not only did the event successfully transition from July to September, but two more CB partners joined to expand the event's footprint and ensure its sustainability.

A new sports partnership was forged with the Omaha Sports Commission that has already delivered results. Utilizing both its expertise and connections, the commission landed the 2023 Yonex US Open Badminton Championships, an event that draws athletes and spectators from around the world. It also secured the 2024 USA Boccia National Championships.

Closer to my world, the Council Bluffs CVB launched its first winter marketing initiative following Pottawattamie County's purchase of Mt Crescent Ski Area. The \$15,000 digital advertising campaign used the ski area as an effective call to action that also promoted CB's other attractions and amenities. The online ads created 1.4 million impressions over three months.

The fiscal year ended on a high note for the second consecutive year. CB properties generated more than \$3.4 million in hotel/motel taxes, a new city record! The CBCVB Board of Directors and staff strive every day to deliver value to the City of Council Bluffs that exceeds, many times over, the dollars invested in us. Thank you for that investment.



Mark Shoemaker
Board President

OUR MISSION

The Council Bluffs Convention & Visitors Bureau (CBCVB) serves as a catalyst to grow Pottawattamie County's visitor economy through collaborative sales and marketing, destination advocacy, and sustainable placemaking activities in order to enhance the region's quality of life.

The CBCVB is funded by the City of Council Bluffs from a portion of the hotel/motel taxes generated by travelers. This support is much appreciated and allows the bureau to promote CB as a destination for visitors to enjoy the city's hotels, restaurants, attractions, venues, and events. Visitors serve as new customers for local businesses and new taxpayers for local government benefiting all local residents.

LEADERSHIP

- Board President - Mark Shoemaker: Pottawattamie Conservation
- Board Vice President - Ashley Kruse: City of Council Bluffs
- Board Past President - Patricia LaBounty: Union Pacific Museum
- Bryan Biederman: First National Bank
- Len Friedenbach: Country Inn & Suites / My Place Hotel
- Matt Johnson: Barley's Bar & Grill / Railway Inn
- Bill Vanderpool: Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites @ Ameristar

TEAM

- Mark Eckman: Executive Director
 - Scott Hoffman: Director of Hospitality + Community Engagement
 - Emma Schwaller: Director of Marketing
 - Kathy Rosene: Director of Sales
- 509 23rd Avenue | Council Bluffs, Iowa
(712) 256.2577
UNLEASHCB.COM

DIGITAL MARKETING SIZZLES

In 2023, the CBCVB continued to further its marketing reach through organic and paid media. The year saw a first-ever winter travel marketing initiative, a celebration of 26 local restaurants during Foodie February, and a return of Railroad Days.

MESSAGE PILLARS

1. Unmatched railroad history
2. Singular outdoor experiences + natural landscapes
3. Exceptional live music performances
4. One-of-a-kind public, visual, and performing arts
5. Superior sports facilities + fields
6. Unique nightlife, entertainment districts + historic neighborhoods



FOODIE FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS 26 CB RESTAURANTS

In February 2023, the CBCVB celebrated “Foodie February” by posting digital content celebrating our local dining establishments. Each week of the month had a special foodie theme, which allowed 26 restaurants to be highlighted through blog and social media posts. This month-long celebration resulted in over 320,000 impressions and spurred over 6,000 engagements.



SOCIAL MEDIA: JUMPS BY DOUBLE DIGITS

FY 2023 was a strong year on social media. The Unleash Council Bluffs pages gained 2,682 new followers and reached over 1.7 million users through 1,060 engaging posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and YouTube.

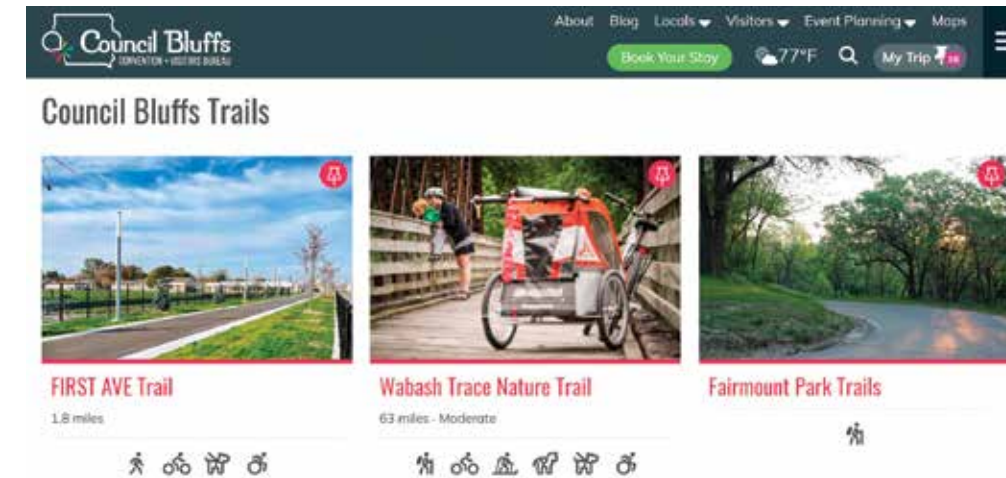


UNLEASHCB.COM SUSTAINS RECORD HIGHS

After a record-breaking year in 2022, UNleashCB.com analytics remained stable throughout the year, seeing small increases in every metric. 150 blogs kept the site fresh, and 1,174 events populated the widely popular community calendar. Top pages included Weekend Getaways, Events, and the Railroad Days event landing page.



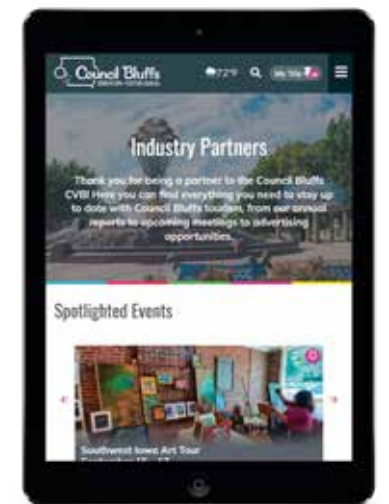
WEBSITE FEATURES FIRST AVE IN NEW TRAILS SECTION



To keep up with current trends, our widely popular website underwent another round of exciting developments this year. These upgrades make travel planning easier, better connects us with our industry partners, and improves the site’s overall function.

A new recreational trail module was added to the site, allowing visitors to access important trail information and maps. The trail’s use, surface, length, and parking information have been added to make the user’s route planning seamless.

To better stay connected and provide resources to our partners, an industry partners landing page was created on UNleashCB.com. Now, partners of the CBCVB can easily access partner blogs, annual reports, spotlighted events, and the CVB team’s information.



SEASONAL TRAVEL MARKETING INITIATIVES: CB BECOMES 4 SEASON DESTINATION

The CBCVB continued its seasonal travel marketing initiatives to help bring overnight business back to Council Bluffs hotels. The landing page was updated each season with new weather-appropriate blogs, web stories, and hotel options. From December through February, a first-ever winter marketing campaign ran to promote Pottawattamie Conservation's acquisition of Mt. Crescent Ski Area.

SUMMER INITIATIVE JULY 5 - SEPTEMBER 5, 2022

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Investment | \$25,000 |
| Impressions | 1,946,948 |
| Clicks | 31,324 |
| Page Views | 48,251 |

Participating Hotels:
Ameristar Casino Hotel, Country Inn & Suites, Harrah's Hotel & Casino, Microtel Inn & Suites, Red Roof Inn & Suites

FALL INITIATIVE SEPTEMBER 6 - NOVEMBER 20, 2022

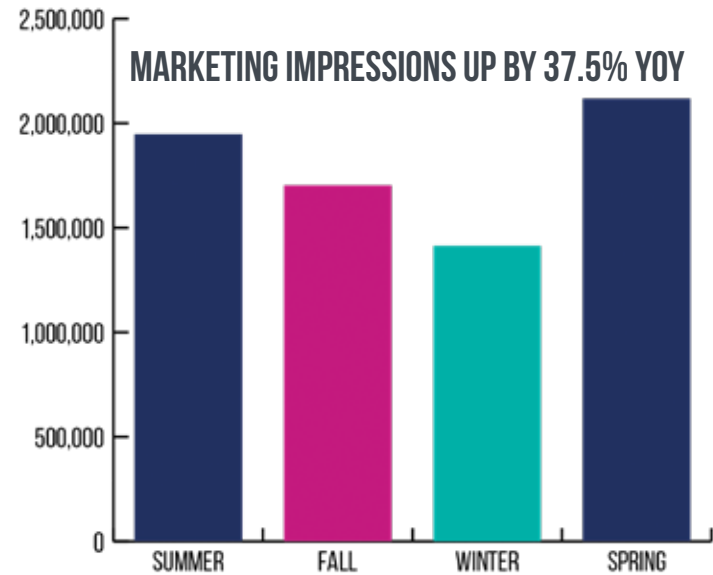
| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Investment | \$25,000 |
| Impressions | 1,703,166 |
| Clicks | 18,548 |
| Page Views | 39,968 |

Participating Hotels:
Ameristar Casino Hotel, Country Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn @ Ameristar, Harrah's Hotel & Casino, Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites @ Ameristar, Microtel Inn & Suites, Red Roof Inn & Suites

WINTER INITIATIVE DECEMBER 1, 2022 - FEBRUARY 28, 2023

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Investment | \$15,000 |
| Impressions | 1,413,436 |
| Clicks | 14,678 |
| Page Views | 26,762 |

Participating Hotels:
Country Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn @ Ameristar, Harrah's Hotel & Casino, Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites @ Ameristar, My Place Hotel, Red Roof Inn & Suites



TARGET MARKETS:



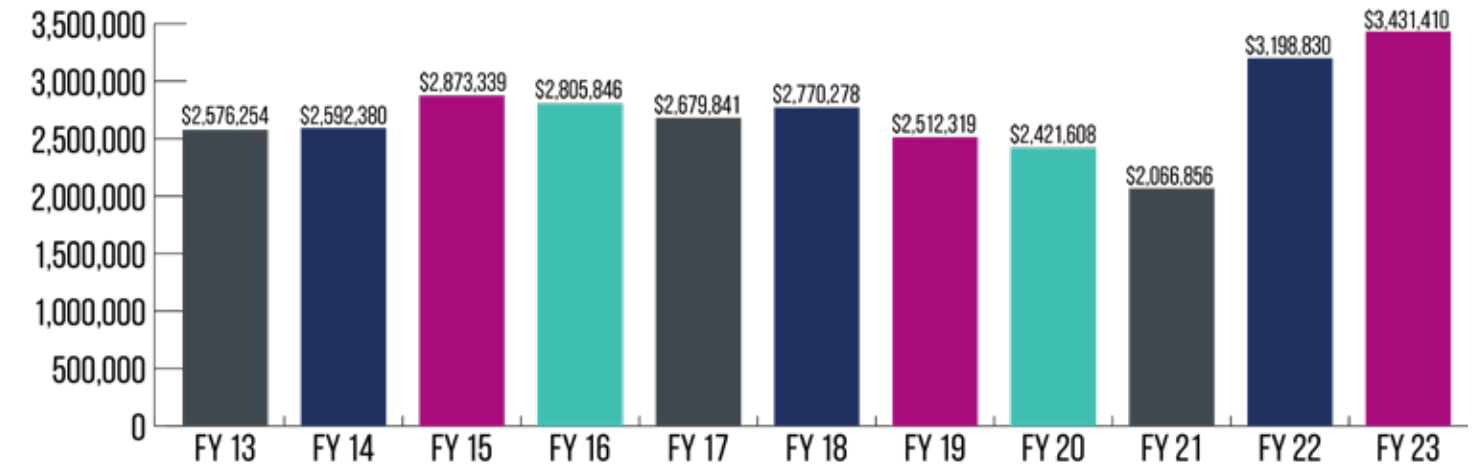
DES MOINES, IA
SIOUX CITY, IA
ST. JOSEPH, MO
SIOUX FALLS/MITCHELL/YANKTON, SD
HASTINGS/KEARNEY/GRAND ISLAND, NE

SPRING INITIATIVE MARCH 13 - JUNE 11, 2023

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Investment | \$25,000 |
| Impressions | 2,118,483 |
| Clicks | 22,294 |
| Page Views | 40,472 |

Participating Hotels:
Country Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn @ Ameristar, Harrah's Hotel & Casino, Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites @ Ameristar

HOTEL / MOTEL TAXES + GRANTS + COUNTY COLLABORATION



FY 23 HOTEL / MOTEL TAXES REACH NEW HIGH FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

The City of Council Bluffs hit a new record high in hotel/motel tax collections for the second consecutive year with \$3,431,410. Fiscal year 2023 generated \$232,500 more in taxes or grew by seven percent compared to the year prior.

LEVERAGING GRANTS + OTHER FUNDING SOURCES: NEARLY \$100K

The CBCVB received \$95,975 in grants and other non-traditional funding during FY 23. The Regional Sports Authority District grant program awarded another \$50,000 to support ten tournaments. That represents the 16th consecutive sports grant received from the State of Iowa. In addition, the Iowa Tourism Office underwrote the CBCVB's 2022 fall travel marketing initiative with \$5,000 in funding. Working with the Pottawattamie Countywide Tourism Promotion Committee resulted in \$20,975 going toward shared full-page ads, spring marketing, and the annual inspirational guide. Finally, the bureau invested \$20,000 from Union Pacific Railroad to promote Railroad Days on its new September date and in its new configuration.



PROMOTING POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY PARTNERS

CBCVB staff members have served on the Pottawattamie Countywide Tourism Promotion Committee for more than ten years, assisting with WattaWayIA.com, social media management, museum videos, and other projects.

In FY 23, the CBCVB implemented its very first winter travel marketing initiative promoting Mt Crescent Ski Area following the county's purchase of it. The county committee also designed a new rack card to be distributed by CTM Media Group promoting the ski area and the county's recreational trails. Like the previous four editions, the committee and bureau published the Council Bluffs + Pottawattamie County Inspirational Guide. The two groups collaborated on the spring travel marketing initiative and obtained an Iowa Tourism Grant to supplement those efforts. As the fiscal year concluded, the committee supported the development of the first annual Pottawattamie County Museum Crawl held on July 16, 2023.

SALES + SERVICES: MEETINGS + SPORTING EVENTS

Kathy Rosene completed her first year leading sales, and Scott Hoffman worked with her on site visits, room blocks, and follow-up reporting, among other responsibilities. Their accomplishments can be seen in the lists provided. The bureau initiated a partnership with the Omaha Sports Commission to identify tournament prospects and secure new events to grow the impact of sports on CB's local economy. In both meetings and sports, the CBCVB achieved some notable wins with the Yonex US Open Badminton Championships, USA Boccia National Championships, and Iowa Association of Business & Industry Convention. These are described on the next two pages.



ADIDAS 3SSB CHAMPIONSHIPS | IOWA WEST FIELD HOUSE



ABI CONVENTION

CBCVB, MAC + CB PARTNERS SCORE BIG WIN WITH 2025 IA ABI CONVENTION

Iowa's oldest and largest business network will hold its annual convention in Council Bluffs on June 10-12, 2025. The Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) revealed its decision to bring its gathering of business leaders to CB three weeks after conducting a site visit here. ABI represents 1,500 businesses throughout the state. Its annual convention generates as many as 540 hotel room nights over its Monday through Wednesday dates. After bidding on the event two previous times, the third attempt was a charm as the Council Bluffs CVB worked with the Mid-America Center, nearby hotels, Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center, and Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo to clinch the win. Even though ABI has been in existence since 1903, this is the first time Council Bluffs will host the annual convention.

CBCVB + OMAHA SPORTS COMMISSION: COLLABORATION VS COMPETITION

One might think that the Council Bluffs CVB and Omaha Sports Commission collaboration is an example of the classic adage that if you can't beat them, join them. That suggests a friction that never existed. This relationship was born out of mutual interests that could accomplish more together than separately. In less than a year, the partnership has delivered the 2023 Yonex US Open Badminton Championships with its promise to draw athletes and spectators from across the globe generating more than 1,000 hotel room nights. Even before that win, OSC landed the 2024 USA Boccia National Championships. The commission was created in 2003 and is best known for hosting the 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 US Olympic Swim Trials. Stay tuned. More prospects are on the horizon for CB in year two.



FISCAL YEAR 2023 EVENTS

| DATES | EVENTS |
|--------------------------|--|
| July 7-9, 2022 | Rotary District 5650 Convention |
| July 18-20, 2022 | NJCAA Rising All-Stars |
| July 28-31, 2022 | 5th Annual Great Plains PVA/AWBA Invitation |
| September 11-13, 2022 | Iowa District West Pastors Conference |
| October 21-23, 2022 | Anime Nebraskon |
| October 21-23, 2022 | Halloween Havoc Soccer Tournament |
| October 26-28, 2022 | IA Ass'n of Student Financial Aid Admin Conference |
| October 27-29, 2022 | National Homeschool Volleyball Tournament |
| December 9-10, 2022 | Council Bluffs Wrestling Classic |
| December 11, 2022 | King + Queen of the MAC |
| February 24-26, 2023 | Phil Cahoy Sr Cornhusker Classic |
| March 3-4, 2023 | NJCAA Wrestling National Championships |
| March 10-12, 2023 | Council Bluffs + Omaha Pickleball Showcase |
| March 20 - April 1, 2023 | CREATE US Open Robotics Championship |
| March 23-25, 2023 | Heartland USA Wrestling National Duals |
| April 14-16, 2023 | Rumble on the River Soccer Tournament |
| April 21-23, 2023 | Adidas 3SSB Championships - Boys |
| May 20, 2023 | Omaha Corgi Races |
| June 14-26, 2023 | Triple Crown SlumpBuster |



GREAT PLAINS PVA/AWBA INVITATION



CB + OMAHA PICKLEBALL SHOWCASE

NEW EVENTS WON IN FISCAL YEAR 2023

| DATES | EVENTS |
|-----------------------|--|
| July 9-11, 2023 | Adidas 3SSB Championships - Girls |
| July 11-16, 2023 | Yonex US Open Badminton Championships |
| September 15, 2023 | Beyond Horizon Bus Tour |
| October 13-15, 2023 | Iowa Red Hat FunVention |
| April 3-5, 2024 | Nat'l Ass'n for Interpretation Heartland Regional Conf |
| June 8-12, 2024 | Iowa Rural Letter Carrier's Association State Convention |
| June 17 + 23, 2024 | Jane's Journeys/South Dakota Tour |
| August 6-11, 2024 | USA Boccia National Championships |
| September 17-18, 2024 | Heartland Product + Equipment Show |
| September 19-21, 2024 | MIDTESOL Conference |
| October 6-8, 2024 | Iowa Museum Association Conference |
| June 10-12, 2025 | Iowa Association of Business + Industry Convention |

MORE COLLABORATIONS

TRAVEL IOWA ELEVATES CB BRAND

The CBCVB has worked closely with the Iowa Tourism Office for many years to promote Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County, and the entire state. In FY 23, the partnership was further developed in several ways. In September, the Iowa Tourism Office asked Emma Schwaller to be a beta tester for their new partner tool, Localhood. After completing the testing, Emma was asked to be a panelist at the Iowa Tourism Conference to speak about the evolution of visual storytelling for modern destination marketers. Since then, Emma has periodically spoken during the Localhood partner calls to share her expertise with other industry partners.

In January, the CBCVB learned that the Iowa Tourism Office accepted their Soul of Iowa 2.0 application at the "hero" partner level. This campaign continues the widely successful Soul of Iowa 1.0 campaign from 2021 and will result in a drone flythrough, itineraries, social campaigns, and digital advertising. The content will be captured in 2023, and the campaign will be promoted in 2024. The drone footage will truly elevate CB.

Tourism liaison Stephanie Neppl joined the CBCVB in May to host an industry partner meeting in Council Bluffs. Stephanie shared Iowa Tourism resources and information with the CBCVB partners during the meeting.



LOCALHOOD WEB STORIES



542,564
GOOGLE
IMPRESSIONS



14,872
STORY VIEWS



CONVERTING VISITORS TO RESIDENTS

The CBCVB partnered with the Council Bluffs Area Chamber of Commerce to provide relocation information to visitors on UNleashCB.com. The new webpage, UNleashCB.com/relocate, offers valuable information on area school districts, employment opportunities, hospitals and healthcare facilities, veteran resources, and cost of living statistics. Several individuals who have moved to Council Bluffs talk about their successes through a "Relocation Stories" blog series.



2023 OMA TOURISM AWARDS: LOCAL PRIDE

The Omaha Metropolitan Area (OMA) Tourism Awards recognize the best tourism businesses in Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties. The public nominated and voted for their favorites for the best hotel, restaurant, attraction, and retail business. The winners were Best Hotel: Ameristar Casino Hotel; Best Restaurant: The Back Forty Bar & Grill; Best Attraction: Dreamland Theatre; Best Retail Shop: The Occasional Collective. The CBCVB presents the awards in collaboration with Visit Omaha and Sarpy County Tourism.



GETTING THE WORD OUT

The CBCVB works with CTM Media Group to distribute visitor guides and brochures in the Omaha and Council Bluffs metro hotels and attractions, throughout the Des Moines metro, and along I-29.

Omaha Magazine is the publisher of the CBCVB Inspirational Guide. They also sell ads, produce the digital flip book, and have cohosted partner meetings with the CBCVB.



PRAIRIE RESTORATION GROWS

Last year, the CBCVB began transforming the properties' lawn with native Iowa prairie plants and grasses. The work continued this year, with prairie plugs installed in the property's front and side. It will take a couple of years to see the plants fully take root and bloom, but this transformation will minimize mowing and better sustain bees, butterflies, and other native pollinators.



The FY 2023 Council Bluffs CVB Annual Report was originally presented to the Council Bluffs City Council on August 28, 2023.