

**DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.**

**November 19, 2013**

**CenterState CEO Board Room  
572 South Salina Street**

**3:00 p.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance**

- Members:** Chairman Breuer; Ms. Gagliano; Messrs. Carroll, Doucette, Fiorito, Fisher, Koolakian, Maxwell, Nutting, Shapiro, and Tripoli.
- Staff:** Mss. Finch, Hnatko, Holbrook, Reed, Romeo and Treier; Messrs. Campanie and McFadden.
- Guests:** Jim Wefers – General Manager of the new Downtown Marriott Hotel  
Peter Alexander – Merrill Lynch  
Russ Andrews – Property Owner  
Bob Dougherty – Syracuse Common Council  
Elias Everett – Pyramid Brokerage  
Paul Stemkoski – Bivens + Associates Architects

**I. Welcome and Approval of Meeting Minutes of September 17, 2013**

Chairman Breuer welcomed guests and members present.

Chairman Breuer asked for consideration of the minutes of September 17<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Nutting moved and Mr. Doucette seconded a motion to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion was unanimously carried.

**a. Staff Recognition**

Ms. Treier reported that the Downtown Committee of Syracuse has filled the Economic Development and Marketing Assistant position. Bethany Holbrook started with the Downtown Committee on November 4<sup>th</sup> and, with her knowledge and background, is a welcome addition to the staff.

**II. Financial Report**

**a. Financial Report as of October 31, 2013**

Ms. Treier shared October 31<sup>st</sup> financial statement. Ms. Treier reported that income is running ahead of projections, with expenses on budget. Ms. Treier stated that the Franklin

Street Lot is performing lower than last year, but that is as expected. Last year that lot did better than anticipated due to construction projects in that area that led to more people parking in that particular lot. The Franklin Street lot is now tracking more toward the expected income.

Ms. Treier noted that under Administration, Transportation and Travel are currently over budget due to recent conference attendance. Ms. Treier reported that 2 staff members of the Downtown Committee attended the International Downtown Association Conference in New York City last month. Upon their return, Ms. Romeo and Ms. Finch gave a presentation to the other staff members on key points of the conference. Ms. Treier offered to share the presentation with any interested Board Members.

Ms. Treier noted that under Environmental Maintenance, Special Projects is under budget. The reason being that the flowers and tree plantings are expected to start up next spring, so that is when the expenses will be incurred. Ms. Treier also noted that under Marketing, the Salaries and Fringes line is under budget as the Economic Development and Marketing Assistant position was vacant for a period of time this fall.

Ms. Treier asked for a motion to approve the preliminary October 31<sup>st</sup> financial statement, subject to audit. Mr. Koolakian moved and Mr. Maxwell seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried.

### **III. Administration**

#### **a. Conflict of Interest Policy**

Ms. Treier noted that each Board Member will find the Downtown Committee's Conflict of Interest policy under their binder. She asked the members to review the policy and disclose any items that may be considered a conflict of interest. The signed statements will be collected at the end of the meeting.

#### **b. Budget Committee**

Ms. Treier asked the board for volunteers to join the Downtown Committee Budget Committee. The Downtown Committee budget is submitted to the Common Council as part of the Mayor's budget. Ms. Treier anticipates the committee will require two meetings. The committee will submit their budget recommendation to the Board in January, and if approved, the budget will then be forward to the city. Chair Breuer and Mr. Doucette volunteered for the committee. Ms. Treier asked that other interested board members contact her directly.

#### **c. 2014 Board of Directors Meeting Dates**

Ms. Treier reported that the 2014 Board of Directors Meeting Dates have been distributed to all board members.

#### **d. Pike Block Update**

Ms. Treier reported that at the last CenterState CEO staff meeting, the update on the Pike Block suggested that the move would take place towards the end of December. The walls and ceiling are currently going up. Once the Downtown Committee gets an exact move date, the board members will be notified. Ms. Treier noted that all are excited for the move.

#### **IV. Staff Reports**

##### **a. Hanging Flower Basket Expansion**

Ms. Finch reported that the Downtown Committee Hanging Flower Basket Program has become one of the Downtown Committee's most recognizable programs, according to the bi-annual survey. The program was started in 2011 with the Cathedral Square Neighborhood Association utilizing 72 baskets. A partnership was established in which businesses help to pay for the maintenance, watering, and labor costs incurred with the program. Ms. Finch reported that the program expanded to Hanover Square in 2012 and to Armory Square in 2013. In 2013 there were a total of 220 baskets installed. The Community Foundation funded baskets and brackets in Armory, and is also helping to fund the 2014 program expansion.

Ms. Finch stated that this year the plan is to expand into the gateways of downtown, extending to Clinton, Salina, South Warren, Montgomery, South State, East Onondaga Street and Fayette Park. This expansion will bring 112 new baskets. For this program expansion, post cards were created and distributed to businesses, offices, and properties throughout the 2014 proposed area. Ms. Finch noted that this was done to help gain community support for the work associated with the upkeep of the flowers. Additional staff is hired during the summer to water the flowers, and organization's assist with the maintenance by helping with these extra costs. Ms. Finch noted that one of the important parts of this program is the community support, as the partnership has been relied on so heavily for the last 3 years.

Ms. Finch reported it is anticipated that over 300 flower baskets will be part of the program next year. This is an incredibly visible program that the Downtown Committee is excited to bring to new areas of downtown.

##### **b. DEC Grant Application**

Ms. Finch reported the availability of a Community and Urban Forestry Grant that could be used to help fund tree planting throughout the downtown district. The grant could fund \$7,500 – which would cover 20 trees, irrigation bags, and stump removal. The Downtown Committee could match the grant with tree pit gravel-lock purchase, and installation. The Downtown Committee already has this built in as part of the Special Projects line in the environmental maintenance budget. Ms. Finch stated that the application is due December 5<sup>th</sup>, with awards being announced in the spring. Ms. Finch noted that in order to be considered, the grant application needs to include a board resolution to support the grant application and municipal resolution. Ms. Finch asked the Board for a resolution of support to submit the grant application and to provide 50% match that is required.

Chairman Breuer asked for consideration of the following motion:

RESOLVED, that Merike Treier, as Executive Director of the Downtown Committee of Syracuse, Inc., is hereby authorized and directed to file an application for 50% matching funds in an amount not to exceed \$7,500, and upon approval of said request to enter into and execute a project agreement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for such financial assistance to the Downtown Committee of Syracuse for an Urban and Large Community Forestry Grant.

Mr. Nutting moved and Mr. Doucette seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried.

**c. Holiday Program & Jingle Mingle**

Ms. Reed reported that the installation of the downtown decorations will begin today, and will be completed by the weekend. Ms. Reed noted that the Downtown Committee shares the cost of decorating downtown with the City. The contractor installs lights in the trees in Armory Square, and pole decorations in other areas of downtown. This is the last year of a 4-year contract with this vendor, so the Downtown Committee will be bidding out the contract again for the next 4 years. Ms. Reed noted that several board members have agreed to help review the bids and select a contractor. She thanked Ms. Littlejohn, Mr. Tripoli, Mr. Carroll, and Ms. Gagliano for their help with this process.

Ms. Reed reported that the Clinton Square tree lighting will be on November 29<sup>th</sup>, with festivities surrounding the event. Ms. Reed noted that after the lighting, Mr. Shop and the Armory Square Association will feature student musicians from Signature Music. The musicians will perform from the shop windows with the music piped outside. They will also have instruments on display that kids can try out. Ms. Reed noted that this event should be a fun evening downtown for all.

Ms. Reed reported that throughout the month of December, the Armory Square Association has a full schedule of choral performances and Teas at the Jefferson Clinton Hotel. Ms. Reed noted that the Downtown Committee sponsors that program.

Ms. Reed noted that the Everson Festival of Trees is scheduled to run December 6<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>, and is always a great event. The Downtown Committee is supporting it with an ad in the Festival Program.

Ms. Reed reported that The heART of the Holidays, which is another promotion spearheaded by the Everson Museum, is designed to co-promote cultural venues with hotels and restaurants. The Downtown Committee worked with the Convention & Visitors Bureau and CNY Arts, to reach out to downtown businesses, several of which have agreed to offer an incentive to patrons and customers who visit a cultural venue and then dine downtown. The list includes the OHA, the MOST, the Erie Canal Museum, the Landmark Theatre and several downtown restaurants.

Ms. Reed noted that on December 12<sup>th</sup>, the Downtown Committee is presenting a first-time program called Jingle Mingle that was modeled after a very successful program in Schenectady. The program involves pairing restaurants with retail stores for one evening. Ms. Reed reported that shops will stay open late and restaurants will sell samples of their menu items in the shop. The intent is to encourage visitors to stroll from shop to shop, sample the foods, and make a night of it downtown. Ms. Reed noted that the list is still being compiled, but the complete list of the participating shops and restaurants will be posted on the Downtown Committee website. Ms. Reed reported that the Downtown Committee plans to put a lot of effort into promoting this event on social media, main stream media, and advertising.

Ms. Reed reported that to support downtown retailers and restaurants, the Downtown Committee will be advertising downtown shopping and dining on a couple of 690 billboards in December. Ms. Reed noted that the billboards are very creative and the goal is to remind people to consider downtown as an alternative to the mall for holiday shopping.

Ms. Reed noted that to support of all this activity, the Downtown Committee security team will provide extra coverage downtown on the Friday after Thanksgiving, and the 4 Saturdays through December 21<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Shapiro asked if the Downtown Committee Security will be monitoring the Trolley Lot on Friday and Saturday nights as an extra precaution. Mr. Shapiro stated that security is needed to patrol this season to accommodate the upcoming parties. It is his opinion that some form of security presence will be required in downtown. Mr. Koolakian noted that visitors do not want to feel threatened when they visit downtown; it will leave a bad taste in their mouth and they will think twice about returning. Ms. Treier stated that she would look into extra security patrols. Mr. Shapiro inquired if the Downtown Committee will be part of the management decision regarding the Trolley Lot. He stated that part of the contract should have security patrolling until midnight, and that the Downtown Committee needs to play a part in this process. Ms. Treier asked if she could work with Mr. Maxwell to discuss security measures in the lot.

Ms. Reed reported that the County has agreed to maintain the free parking in the Washington Street Garage on Friday night from 4pm to 3am, and Saturday night from 10am to 3am, through December 31<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Reed also noted that the County will open approximately 80-100 free parking spaces in the Trolley Lot. The lot will be fenced and lighted, but the County emphasized that there is no security in place yet. The access will be through the Tunnel on Jefferson St. The County expects this will be accessible by Thanksgiving, but will know more next week.

**d. Quality of Life Task Force**

Ms. Treier reported that following the last board meeting the Downtown Committee had a meeting regarding quality of life and the public realm in downtown Syracuse. Ms. Treier thanked Chair Breuer, Mr. Koolakian, Mr. Doucette, and Mr. Fiorito for their assistance in identifying priorities. Ms. Treier mentioned that in the board member's binders there is a spreadsheet that identifies areas of concern and what was addressed in the month since the meeting. Ms. Treier reported that the Downtown Committee will monitor these items on a monthly basis to ensure progress is being made. Ms. Treier noted that calls will be forwarded to the City as needed. The City launched a new website in 2011 to handle requests for service. Concerns are submitted online, and responses are sent when those concerns are addressed. The program was put in place as a way for the City to keep an eye on the status of requests.

Chair Breuer stated that this is a good start for addressing issues in downtown, and asked that the spreadsheet continue to be updated as a way to keep the Board informed of the progress. Ms. Treier noted that she would keep updating and monitoring progress on the spreadsheet.

Mr. Shapiro asked what the Downtown Committee might be doing to acquire a major grant to fix the bricks on Walton Street. Ms. Treier reported that currently there are no big grants

in the works. She will look into the option of working with a mason and having a discussion with the City on improvements in that area.

**e. Surveillance Camera Update**

Ms. Treier reported that the Downtown Committee has received a proposal from VPN, the camera provider, for a maintenance and technical contract. The Syracuse Police Department helped to review the proposal and based on their experiences to date with the cameras, provided some valuable feedback as it relates to cost structure. Ms. Treier noted that VPN was asked to better define what specifically their Technical Support includes. The SPDs recommendation is to purchase an extra camera rather than the 5 year warranty as they have yet to experience any events that would warrant the cost of the extended warranty plan. This would result in significant cost savings for the program. Ms. Treier reported that a spring installation is anticipated. Ms. Treier also noted that given the upcoming Holiday Season, the Downtown Committee will wait until after the New Year to host any public meetings. Ms. Treier reported that the Downtown Committee will however be releasing the downtown satisfaction survey a few months early, in order to gain feedback on the program, along with other programmatic information.

**f. Downtown Survey**

Ms. Treier reported that in order to provide another mechanism to generate feedback on the proposed surveillance camera system the Downtown Committee will be including camera specific questions as part of the bi-annual survey. The survey itself is a useful tool that is used to help inform Downtown Committee programs and gauge awareness of downtown efforts. Ms. Treier reported that the Downtown Committee plans to distribute the survey via mail and email blast on Monday, December 2nd and people will have until January 3rd to respond. The survey will be available in hard copy as well as digital form through Survey Monkey. Ms. Treier stated that questions relating to the surveillance camera issue includes an individual's sense of safety if cameras are present, their belief as to the value of cameras in assisting with Police work as well as a section to include any other comments they may have on the topic.

Mr. Shapiro agreed that the surveillance camera issue should be addressed after the holiday season. He stated that retailers advertise how great downtown is, and it's a shame that negative items hit the front page before something positive can be done about the situation. Cost is high to combat bad publicity. Mr. Shapiro stated that the Budget Committee needs to ask the Common Council for an increase in money to advertise Syracuse as a wonderful, loving area. Those rare negative situations are awful, and hurt retailers. Mr. Breuer asked that risk assessment be added to the Quality of Life spreadsheet.

Mr. Koolakian stated that bad establishments should not impact retailers. Mr. Doucette noted that different communities have different approaches. People need to take action within their own areas and stand up to say what they want. Chair Breuer suggested putting together an approach or way to find a solution. Councilor Dougherty suggested that the Committee find out information regarding permits. Mr. Carroll noted that downtown needs greater vigilance toward establishments with problems.

## V. **Preserve America Report**

Ms. Romeo reported that this past summer, the Downtown Committee closed out its \$150,000 Preserve America grant. This was a federal grant intended to promote the historic character of Downtown Syracuse. With the funds, the Downtown Committee printed 97,000 brochures, aired 32,000 TV spots (about 10,000 more than the airtime usually bought with Downtown Committee funds) and enhanced several of its economic development programs with the infusion of Preserve America funds. Ms. Romeo stated that the programs and projects funded through Preserve America fell into three primary categories:

1. Efforts to market Downtown Syracuse including:
  - Downtown list of businesses brochure
  - Hanover Square brochure
  - Produce and buy airtime for 2 new Great Business Begins Downtown TV spots
  - Visitor guide ads – ran in the 4 quarterly issues produced by the CVB
  - A new Downtown Syracuse website (launched at the Annual Meeting in June)
2. Cultural/heritage tourism
  - The printed and mobile version of the historic walking tour
  - Support for the Candlelight Series in Armory Square
3. Promoting the reuse of historic buildings for
  - Retail – Be Downtown Syracuse & Meet Downtown Syracuse recruitment brochures and airtime for the Great Business Begins Downtown TV spot
  - Office – Think Downtown marketing brochure and three minute video
  - Housing – Support for the 2011, 2012 & 2013 Downtown Living Tours
  - General Development – Commissioned a Multiple Property Documentation Form & Historic District Nomination and are currently working with SHPO to implement these. The MPDF will be a tool that all property owners will be able to use if they are interested in listing their building on the State and national registers, lining them up for the use of historic preservation tax credits. And due to the level of development interest on S Warren and Jefferson Streets, the Downtown Committee is exploring expansion of the South Salina St Historic District to include these properties, making them eligible for the use of HPTC.

Ms. Romeo reported that to date, the informational brochures have been distributed to all downtown museums, hotels, and many downtown businesses. The brochures are also regularly requested for convention and visitor groups coming into town. The retail and office recruitment materials have been distributed to all downtown leasing agents and property owners for use in their efforts to market their downtown properties. The Downtown Committee has also had requests from companies who are using them to market downtown to potential employees as all of the information to sell the district is in one place. Ms. Romeo stated that the Downtown Committee owns the files for all of the brochures designed during this process and they have the ability to update them for future use and reprinting. The brochures are also available on the Downtown Committee website.

Ms. Romeo reported that some of the Preserve America-funded work was recognized by local and national organizations. The Historic Walking Tour brochure was recognized in 2011 by the CNY and NYS Recreation & Park Society. This past fall, the Be Downtown Syracuse brochure and Great Business Begins Downtown TV campaign were recognized by the International Downtown Association with an award of merit.

Ms. Romeo noted that Preserve America was a great program for the Downtown Committee. The grants administrator was impressed with all that they were able to accomplish with the funds and they think they were able to develop products that have longevity and marketing power for downtown. Ms. Romeo also reported that they have had requests for copies of their materials from Rochester, Buffalo, North Carolina and Seattle, to name just a few, which are looking to model their efforts after the Downtown Committee initiatives. The City has been a great partner in their efforts – assisting them with grants administration and successfully nominating their walking tour brochure for an award.

Ms. Romeo noted that if the Board members would like additional copies of these brochures, or know others who would benefit from them, please let the Downtown Committee know and some will be sent out.

Chair Breuer noted that the Downtown Committee did a great job securing all that valuable information with the money allotted. Ms. Treier stated that this was a 2 year project implemented by the staff, and a lot of work hours were devoted to this. Mr. Breuer asked if the Downtown Committee would be procuring another grant. Ms. Treier stated that they would hope to, and that they will keep their eyes open for more opportunities.

## **VI. Marriott Hotel**

Chairman Breuer introduced Jim Wefers, the General Manager at the New Downtown Marriott Hotel. Chair Breuer noted the hotel had a superb grand opening on July 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. He noted that the hotel has been very well received by businesses and they have made a huge impact in the community. Mr. Wefers thanked the Downtown Committee for inviting him, and stated that he has been in the business for 20 years and has never experienced this before. He stated that in the first 3 months they hit 70% occupancy, charging \$140-160 during the week and on weekends. Mr. Wefers noted that the hotel has done very well with National Grid, the University, hospitals, and consulting firms.

Mr. Wefers noted that the hotel relies heavily on events. If they do not have an event happening, they do feel it. But otherwise, he stated that the hotel is off to a great start with the future looking bright. He noted that the hotel is having an impact on Carrier Circle and in Clay. Mr. Wefers stated that the new location saves companies money from car rentals. He also noted that there are a lot of Canadians that come in to shop at Destiny, and that holds an opportunity for downtown to benefit for when they return.

Chair Breuer noted that the Connective Corridor bus, used on game days, is an added benefit for gamers staying at the hotel. Mr. Doucette inquired if Mr. Wefers had any information about people coming in for the shows downtown, such as War Horse. Mr. Wefers stated that the week of Thanksgiving, and the week after, shows reservations are up and the shows could be the cause of that increase. Mr. Wefers encouraged the board members to come in to the lobby of

the hotel to enjoy a cup of coffee, and listen to the positive comments from the guests as they check out. Chair Breuer thanked Mr. Wefers for coming to the board meeting, and for all the information he was able to provide.

## **VII. Interstate 81 Discussion**

Ms. Treier reported that the first public scoping session on Interstate 81 as part of NYSDOT's and the FHWA process was held at the OnCenter on Wednesday November 13th. She stated that community now has until January 17, 2014 to submit a formal comment to NYSDOT. The meeting was laid out similar to past SMTC meetings in that there were boards of information highlighting various options stationed around the room with NYSDOT staff on hand to help explain the information and answer any questions.

Ms. Treier noted that underneath the board binders they will find the formal comment sheet, as well as a Scoping Initiation Packet which introduces the project, its purpose and need, and goals and objectives. Ms. Treier also reported that the packet provides an overview of preliminary alternatives under consideration and the steps in the environmental review. The packet also describes public involvement opportunities.

Ms. Treier reported that at the meeting, NYSDOT shared that the rehabilitate in place option was off the table, and would not be an option moving forward. The NYSDOT added a goal statement – and the goals are the lenses through which they'll look at the work coming up. The new goal added was: To develop a system to support livability, community, and economic development. Ms. Treier noted that the project has moved away from being only a transportation minded goal. Ms. Treier reported that there were a lot of opinions expressed at the meeting, and not enough facts. The community still needs to have a full set of facts and figures from the DOT.

Ms. Treier stated that the Downtown Committee did make a statement on record that pertained to our goals for 81 alternatives. Ms. Treier thanked Chair Breuer, Ms. Gagliano, Mr. Doucette, Mr. Tripoli, Mr. Fisher, and Mr. Simpson for their participation and input. Ms. Treier noted that in the board binders the members would find the goals identified on behalf of the Downtown Committee and behind that is the statement read based on their goals identified.

Ms. Treier reported that a second scoping meeting to present further details on alternative solutions and environmental issues will occur at a later date – based on NYSDOT's current schedule, this could be March 2014. Ms. Treier noted that the NYSDOT's website is up and running and she encourage all of the board members to go onto the site to register as Stakeholders to be involved in the process.

Chair Breuer stated that there is a message to get through, and he encouraged members to use the goal sheet to get on record. He noted that although there were people who spoke on behalf of the organization at the meeting, these comments sheets are just as effective.

Mr. Nutting noted that it is nice to get behind a plan, but that they need someone to help understand the process, and the best plan going forward. He stated that so far, the process has been backwards. Ms. Gagliano stated that the DOT hired consultants and they have a list of all of our goals and visions. With past projects, this is what options they have. She stated that they are good options and that they can weigh in on them. Ms. Gagliano noted that this can't be a

typical process. Ms. Gagliano noted that she feels comfortable with the findings so far. Mr. Doucette stated that any solution that involves a larger viaduct is not the best solution. Ms. Gagliano stated that the consultants are now fact finding. Mr. Doucette noted that this is a crucial issue, and that we need a greater, more comprehensive urban plan for Syracuse, other than moving the volume of traffic. Ms. Gagliano stated that they have a multi-faceted set of consultants to weigh all options.

Mr. Shapiro stated that the Downtown Committee should take the highest possible position, and that the decision has to be great for neighborhoods, businesses, property owners, etc. He suggested a promotional campaign from the Downtown Committee. Mr. Doucette stated that any discussion regarding a solution should center around the removal of the viaduct as highways should not cut through cities. Mr. Nutting stated that it is hard to agree as there would be too many lanes to accommodate traffic on a boulevard, and it would be too hard to walk across.

Mr. Tripoli noted that the Downtown Committee needs a list of goals, and possibly a discussion with an expert in this field that can offer knowledge and can determine which options best suit our goals. He stated that the Downtown Committee needs to come up with a preferred option to advocate and argue for. Mr. Tripoli asked when the stats from the study would be available, and Mr. Doucette stated in approximately 6 months.

Chair Breuer recommended the board members offer comments to the NYSDOT before January 17<sup>th</sup>. He noted that the Downtown Committee needs a holistic approach, and to define their position. Ms. Treier stated that she would email the goal and comments to the board members.

#### **VIII. Public Comments**

Chairman Breuer opened the floor for public comments. No comments were provided.

#### **IX. Other Business and Adjourn**

With no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Next meeting: **Tuesday, January 21<sup>st</sup> at 3:00 pm**  
**Location: tbd**