



Tony Fiorito, Chairman
Merike L. Treier, Executive Director

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.

May 21, 2024

The Post (101 N. Salina Street, Syracuse NY)

3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

- Members:** Chairman Tony Fiorito, Joseph Bryant, Brian Donnelly, Susan Katzoff, Nicole Samolis, Meg Tidd, Melissa Zell
- Staff:** Anthony Pham, Conor Rockhill, Heather Schroeder, Kristine Sherlock, Vanessa Szwejbka, Merike Treier
- Guests:** Sabrina Betts, NYS Department of Transportation
Scott Butler, NYS Department of Transportation
Matt Funicello, JF Real Estate
Steven Koegel, Centro
TeNesha Murphy, NYS Department of Transportation
Betsy Parmley, NYS Department of Transportation
Mike Ryan, NYS Department of Transportation

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Fiorito called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests present.

Chairman Fiorito announced that Heather Schroeder, Deputy Director and Director of Economic Development, will be moving on from her role at the Downtown Committee in July; and Conor Rockhill, Economic Development Specialist will be leaving the Downtown Committee in June. Chairman Fiorito thanked them for their tremendous contributions and congratulated them on their next chapters. The Downtown Committee has posted the open positions on its website.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 19, 2024

Chairman Fiorito noted that due to lack of quorum, Merike Treier will forward the March 19, 2024 Minutes to the Board via email for approval.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF APRIL 30, 2024

Chairman Fiorito noted that due to lack of quorum, Merike Treier will email the Financial Report as of April 30, 2024 to the Board for approval.

IV. AUTHORIZATION TO EXECUTE ANNUAL CONTRACT WITH CITY OF SYRACUSE

Chairman Fiorito noted that due to lack of quorum, Merike Treier will email a written motion request to the Board to approve the executive director of the Downtown Committee to execute the annual contract with the City of Syracuse.

V. INTERSTATE 81: NYSDOT UPDATE

Members of the NYSDOT team joined the board meeting to give an update of the Interstate 81 Viaduct project. Interstate 481 will be redesignated as I-81 and a new 81 Business Loop will take the place of the current I-81 viaduct that runs through downtown over Almond Street. Construction has already begun in 2023 and is anticipated to last through 2028 for all phases:

Phase 1:

- Contract 1 – Updates to Northern Interchange on I-81 (Cicero area)
- Contract 2 – Updates to Southern Interchange on I-81 (at 481) and parts of East Syracuse underway
- Contract 3 – Inner Harbor area
- Contract 4 – I-690 and Crouse/Irving Avenue as new gateway to University Hill. (McBride and Townsend ramps will close after the new ramps are operational)
- Contract 5 – Southern end updates near Colvin Street, and Van Buren up to the Dome (to be awarded this summer with construction starting this fall.)

Phase 2:

- Contract 6 – Reconstruction on I-690
- Contract 7 – Business Loop buildout in the southern suburbs
- Contract 8 – The viaduct removal

Heather Schroeder asked if the Business Loop points of interest signs (e.g. for downtown museums) will remain downtown or will other signs be installed to precede the new overhead signs. Betsy Parmley confirmed the points of interest signs would remain in their current locations, and noted she would be willing to look at other signs people would like to include as they travel on the Business Loop into the city.

Melissa Zell inquired if the signage will be clear between the regular I-81 highway and Business Loop 81 for those who want to go downtown and Betsy Parmely noted the community grid will create access points for people who are intending to go downtown.

Matt Funicello asked if there was a list of contractors and TeNesha Murphy confirmed they can find more information about each contract on the NYSDOT website: <https://webapps.dot.ny.gov/i-81-viaduct-project>

Nicole Samolis asked if any of the changes will affect the Thruway on/off ramps and it was noted that the lanes will be widened to three lanes from I-690 east to the Thruway and south. NYSDOT also confirmed that the Onondaga Lake Parkway Bridge is not a part of any of the reconstruction around Bear/Solar Streets. They will also make provisions in their plans to accommodate any NYS Fair traffic on the highways.

Heather Schroeder asked where hospital employees who currently park under the viaduct and take shuttles will park their vehicles once the viaduct is taken down. NYSDOT will work with Upstate to find alternative parking for the employees. Heather Schroeder also asked if there will be any dedicated lanes or accommodations for bus or public transportation on the new I-81 outbuild going north or south. Betsy Parmley said that it is not part of the plan.

Chairman Fiorito commented that a pedestrian safety issue concern around the new Crouse/Irving roadways to The Hill will need to be addressed once traffic increases, especially for EMTs and ambulance traffic. Betsy Parmley recognizes the impact of the closure of Van Buren Street to the University and hospitals and NYSDOT is looking at temporary alternatives to put in place around the hospitals and ease any safety concerns.

Brian Donnelly commented that it will be important for the county to continue to remain competitive and attract convention business during major road construction. Betsy Parmley noted that NYSDOT is aware of that concern and they are looking at how to overlap some of Phase 1 and Phase 2 so the duration of the project will not be extended. Brian Donnelly also asked who at NYSDOT to reach out to and get regular construction alert updates to share with businesses who want to come into the community. TeNesha Murphy noted that NYSDOT will be sharing weekly updates from the contractors through virtual meetings, and will also relay those updates or any street closures to the Downtown Committee to share with its constituents. Betsy Parmley added NYSDOT will use a mobile app (WAZE) for notifications of traffic construction alerts.

Merike Treier thanked the NYSDOT team for the I-81 Viaduct project plans update and for their commitment to keep communication lines open, not only for downtown but for other business districts that will be directly affected by the construction.

VI. CENTRO: SMART BRT PLAN

Steven Koegel gave the board an overview of Centro's proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) plan. He noted that funding for the new system is in place, but now they are focusing on hiring people. The BRT buses will look and be branded differently than their regular buses and stations will have more amenities. The proposed route will be faster and have a limited stop express service compared to traditional service. The user will have a different experience using BRT, for example the buses will be equipped with Transit Signal Prioritization (TSP) that will activate a traffic signal light to extend the green light length at intersections for the buses to pass through more quickly. He noted there will be a noticeable shift in the transportation system in Syracuse with the I-81 reconstruction, and when Micron comes here. The anticipated increase in traffic will hopefully encourage people to use more public transportation. The BRT corridor includes routes from downtown (South Avenue) to Onondaga Community College; James Street to Shop City to Teall Avenue turnaround. There will be a BRT route planned for the University area from College Place on the S.U. Campus to downtown/downtown hub connecting and to DestiNY USA/Solar Street area. The transportation center near the regional market was not considered as a BRT destination because of its inconsistent flow of users, but will be served by its other regular bus service. The BRT stations in downtown are planned for locations on Willow/Salina, Washington/Clinton Square, Jefferson Street, and the downtown hub on Salina. Centro will ask the Arts Community to participate in the creation of artwork in the stations. Steven Koegel clarified Melissa Zell's inquiry that the new BRT stations will service both BRT and regular service.

Heather Schroeder asked if there will be an opportunity to incorporate downtown information and business listings into the dynamic of Centro's kiosks. Steven Koegel noted that Centro is presently assessing the best right-of-way locations for the kiosks that will be different sizes for different purposes, so they will not have an answer for that right now. They hope to start construction in Fall 2025 when funding is in place. Centro plans to hold stakeholder and public outreach meetings over the next 12-18 months to obtain feedback on their preliminary plans. Once Centro receives environmental clearances, they hope to have the BRT system on the road in 2026.

Heather Schroeder asked how the BRT will be connected to suburban job opportunities. Steven Koegel noted suburban travel will also be part of Centro's system redesign. Express highway service will be available from the hub to Micron; and an on-demand service may be used. Heather Schroeder also asked what kind of amenities/business opportunities there will be in the transportation hubs. Steven Koegel responded that Centro prefers not to have commercial activity at the hub. Melissa Zell asked if a commercial kiosk would work, and Steven Koegel noted he would be open to hearing about that opportunity, however there most likely will not be enough room to accommodate one.

Anthony Pham asked if the free circulator bus service will come back downtown. Steven Koegel noted it is not a priority at this time but could look at re-instating it in the future.

Merike Treier thanked Steven Koegel for the overview and noted that she will pass along information to other businesses on how they can provide feedback to Centro.

VII. PROGRAM REPORTS

Vanessa Szwejbka announced the following Downtown Committee summer programs:

A. Beautification

The hanging flower baskets will be installed throughout downtown on May 28 and 29. This is the time that all downtown businesses look forward to and it makes the neighborhood more inviting every year.

B. Farmers Market Season

The Annual Farmers Market season will begin on Tuesday, June 11 and run through October 8 in Clinton Square with more than a dozen vendors on board. Pathfinder Bank is the 2024 presenting sponsor.

C. Annual Meeting & Awards

The Downtown Committee Annual Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 20, 12-1:15pm at The Oncenter. Vanessa Szwejbka thanked presenting sponsor, Community Bank, and Awards of Excellence sponsor, National Grid.

D. Art Show

The 2024 Arts and Crafts Festival will take place July 26, 27, and 28 in and around Columbus Circle, and is presented by M&T Bank.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

With no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Next Meeting

**Tuesday, September 17, 2024
3:00 p.m.**