



Tony Fiorito, Chairman
Merike L. Treier, Executive Director

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.

November 14, 2023

Zoom Video Conference

3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Members:	Chair Fiorito, Mss. Angrand, Gagliano, Katzoff, Korteling, Samolis, Zell, Messrs. Bryant, Donnelly, Nutting, Tascarella, Jr.
Staff:	Mss. Reed, Schroeder, Sherlock, Szwejbka, Treier; Messrs. Campanie, Pham, Rockhill, Stanard
Guests:	Mr. Matt Funicello, JF Real Estate Mr. Cory LaDuke, CBRE Mr. Nader Maroun, City of Syracuse Ms. Riley Nicole Pratt, NCC News – Syracuse University Ms. Debbie Ruthven, Money Federal Credit Union

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

A. Recognize Kevin Stanard

Chairman Fiorito congratulated Mr. Kevin Stanard who has been promoted to Environmental Maintenance Supervisor. He also announced that Mr. David Kneer has been promoted to Fleet Technician. The Downtown Committee is currently interviewing for an open Environmental Maintenance crew position. Mr. Stanard thanked the Board and noted he is looking forward to this new opportunity.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of September 19, 2023 and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Donnelly moved and Ms. Samolis seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

Mr. Tascarella presented the financial report as of September 30, 2023. He noted that the balance sheet remains strong with over \$600,000 in cash available. Year-to-date revenue is on track with the prior year's budget. Expenses are also on track at 24% for the total year-to-date budget. That income was positive at \$132,000, which is impacted by non-operating income. Additional funds were drawn from the City of Syracuse special assessment account for the purchase of the new pick-up truck (not affecting the funds that go toward the operating budget this year.) Under expenses by program cost, there will be some minor adjustments to the allocations going forward. Overall, all expenses are on track as expected.

Mr. Tascarella asked if there were any questions and there were none.

Chairman Fiorito asked for a motion to approve the Financial Report as of September 30, 2023 subject to audit. Ms. Gagliano moved and Ms. Samolis seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

IV. ADMINISTRATION

A. Authorize Purchase of Security Van

Ms. Treier asked the Board for approval to spend up to \$50,000 on the purchase of a new security vehicle when one becomes available to replace the current 2010 Toyota Security Van. They received a couple of quotes for a Honda minivan and a Toyota Sienna and are waiting on availability for either.

Ms. Katzoff recommended contacting dealerships within the city who may be getting incentives, which Ms. Treier will look into.

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board for a motion to approve the executive director to draw down up to \$50,000 to purchase a security van. Mr. Bryant moved and Ms. Katzoff seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

B. Budget Committee Volunteers

Ms. Treier asked the Board for volunteers to serve on the fiscal year budget committee for 2024-2025, and Chairman Fiorito, Mr. Tascarella, and Mr. Bryant offered to sit on the committee. The committee will prepare the Downtown Committee's budget recommendation for the Board's approval at the January Special District Operations and Development Committee (SDODC) meeting, and for the mayor's consideration to be included in the City's budget.

V. HOLIDAY PROGRAM

Ms. Szwejbka thanked everyone for supporting the recent Fall Progress Breakfast, where over 400 people attended on October 18 at the Marriott Syracuse Downtown. She also thanked presenting sponsor National Grid.

Ms. Szwejbka noted the following upcoming Downtown Committee holiday programs:

- ***Downtown Holiday Guide*** will launch November 21 and can be found on downtownsyracuse.com. Promotions for the guide will be featured on media platforms including billboards, kiosks (with QR codes), Syracuse.com, and in the Downtown Committee Newsletter to encourage people to come shop and experience the holidays downtown. The guide also showcases a variety of downtown traditions including Holiday Pop-up Shops, Holiday Experiences, Downtown Deals, and the Window Wonderland Walk and Contest, which many businesses are already signing up for.
- Ms. Szwejbka also shared a sample video of “31 Days of Holidays on Social Media,” which are designed to be a shopping preview on your phones. Last year the videos were viewed 30,000 times and they will begin airing the day after Thanksgiving.
- Decorations and lighting will be going up soon including the annual holiday “I Wish” Star that will be placed in Hanover Square.
- Holiday security patrols start Plaid Friday and continue every Saturday from 8:00am-4:00pm until Christmas.

Ms. Szwejbka will send Ms. Angrand a list of businesses that are being featured in the holiday guide. Ms. Angrand asked if any new businesses would be featured and Ms. Szwejbka explained that retail businesses will be featured categorically, including new businesses.

Chairman Fiorito thanked Ms. Szwejbka for the presentation.

VI. NY Main Street Grant Award

Mr. Rockhill noted that NY Main Street is a program from the NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal that provides grant funding to support historic downtown revitalization. Mr. Rockhill was happy to announce that the State awarded the Downtown Committee \$232,540. This number includes \$15,000 for streetscape enhancement (trashcans, street benches, tree lighting, etc.), \$17,440 for administrative costs, and \$200,100 that will go towards façade improvements, tenant buildouts, and building renovations. The targeted areas include the 100 block of West Jefferson Street, 100-300 blocks of East Jefferson Street, the 300 block of Montgomery Street, and the 400 block of South Salina Street.

Starting in January, the Downtown Committee will be reaching out to all the eligible owners within this target area, which excludes city-owned buildings and churches. Meetings will be set up with businesses and building owners instructing them on how to apply for the funding. Proposals will be due in March and a review committee will be formed to look over the applications. Mr. Rockhill asked the Board for help to serve on the committee. Renovations are expected to begin in July 2024 after the necessary environmental assessments, etc., are completed.

Ms. Treier asked the Board to approve the executive director to execute and administer the NY Main Street grant fund contract. Ms. Katzoff moved and Ms. Korteling seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

VII. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Ms. Treier asked the Board members to share feedback on what current trends are impacting their businesses, what they anticipate for the next 1 – 2 years, and how this influences Downtown Syracuse.

Mr. Ron Tascarella/Pathfinder Bank: Noted that cost of debt and interest rates have increased, which has impacted startup businesses and ability of businesses to scale up. This has affected some businesses' ability to survive because of the cost of debt and increasing wages. Inflation is softening, though he is not sure if people are experiencing the effect in real time.

Mr. Matt Funiciello – Partnership Properties/JF Real Estate: Reported that they see office tenants “reshuffling” and moving from larger office space into smaller ones. The tenants are leaving Class B space and going to Class A space, but also shrinking the amount of space they occupy. Partnership Properties have had some office space leased out in the past couple of months and will continue to invest in downtown.

Mr. Joe Bryant – J.E. Bryant & Associates, LLC: Suggested expanding the Downtown Committee's footprint into the University Hill business district once the I-81 viaduct is removed, opening up the area between the Hill and Downtown. Ms. Treier noted that the Downtown Committee has recently taken over the Crouse-Marshall Business Improvement District (CMBID) operations on the Hill. The East Genesee Regent Association (EGRA) is an adjacent district that is experiencing large residential development. A future board conversation can explore partnership opportunities and common areas of advocacy with these other business districts.

Ms. Nicole Samolis – SKY Armory: Ms. Samolis commented on some negative trends she has seen such as the number of bikes and scooters that are illegally using the sidewalks and are not using the designated bike lanes. SKY Armory is ending their events by 11:00pm. She asked if the Downtown Committee could look at encouraging potential tenants to take over available storefront locations. She noted she loves the number of people living downtown and the uptick of people attending events and Landmark Shows.

Ms. Karyn Korteling – Pastabilities: Reported that she has seen less Syracuse University traffic downtown in general. Delivery is up, but she is unsure if it is making up for the decline in S.U. foot traffic. She noted a concern with delivery access once the I-81 construction begins in the city. She has seen an uptick in business workers downtown compared to last year. There have been fewer hotel shuttle vans, but a large number of out-of-towners are still dining at Pastabilities. She noted she is happy with the response of the Downtown Committee's security team during the day, but is concerned with the slow response of the SPD at night as some of the calls such as loitering are not a priority. She noticed that S.U. students are not engaged with downtown and asked if there was a plan to reach out to them or get The Hill engaged. The Downtown Committee should also be thinking about the impact of the new Shoppingtown development and look at what is being done to attract suburban people to downtown. Ms. Treier commented that despite advances, Downtown development isn't "done." People have choices as new opportunities arise, so we need to look at how to strengthen Downtown as the destination and core of our county.

Ms. Jo Anne Gagliano – EDR: Reported that interest rates and costs are affecting development, as well as some supply chain issues. Despite these obstacles, EDR is still seeing developments being done at the previous rate. She sees a lot of opportunity in the footprint of I-81 project and the Downtown Committee can become a good partner with the development around that area, into which the universities, hospitals or others may move. Ms. Gagliano noted that they don't plan on changing anything in their office and the new hires are primarily hybrid. Employees are utilizing the office one to two days a week so they don't see a need to increase or decrease the office space. She believes there is a great opportunity for more housing downtown. There is a need for middle market and affordable housing to be built to accommodate businesses (such as Micron) coming to the region, and downtown has the building stock to do this. Ms. Gagliano noted she is on the CenterState CEO housing task force, which is talking about strategies for developers to build affordable housing.

Ms. Melissa Zell – Pioneer Companies: Reported that most of their downtown office users are not leaving but are re-organizing and occupying smaller spaces. She noted that Pioneer's property at 500

Plum that historically had vacancies is almost full. There is plenty of activity but everyone is constricting. Certain buildings (Class B, Class C) may suffer as Class A is absorbing office tenants; she believes there is more opportunity for housing in Syracuse given these office vacancies. She observed that Armory Square was bouncing back and feeling better. Many of the storefronts are turning over and there is positive buzz about some of the new places. In terms of development, banks are pausing on commercial lending.

Ms. Ruthnie Angrand – City of Syracuse: Commented she feels it is important to look to neighborhoods beyond downtown to drive foot traffic downtown. With Micron and other fast-growing workforces coming to the area, she recommended the Downtown Committee see what companies are doing well employment-wise and what partnerships can be made to help drive traffic downtown. Creating programming partnerships downtown could also stimulate more entertainment and retail business activity. She suggested the Downtown Committee be more pro-active by asking properties to activate their spaces.

Mr. Bryant added the Downtown Committee could look at more public investment in the public spaces, such as the various parks downtown. He thinks Downtown could do more for entertainment for the younger population.

Ms. Katzoff recognizes we all are facing challenges and the impact is long lasting. Every business is trying to accommodate now what their workforces are demanding. The Downtown Committee needs to think more strategically and creatively given all the changing environment of downtown, such as lighting up more of downtown to promote more activity. The enormous need for more housing will be hindered by the current tight market.

Ms. Treier commented that it will be important to take a deep dive into the community feedback and obtain different perspectives on what the Downtown Committee supports, maintains, and enhances regarding downtown growth. In addition to housing, it will be good for the Downtown Committee to explore other opportunities from a PR perspective and to address businesses, housing, and public space needs.

Ms. Zell suggested asking businesses to keep interior lights of storefronts on at night, that could add a lot to perception of safety.

Chairman Fiorito commented that having a new organization plan in place would be important.

Ms. Treier noted that the Downtown Committee has an application submitted for strategic planning funding and will hear before the start of the new year if awarded.

Ms. Riley Pratt, S.U. Newhouse student and journalist with NCC News, commented she is reporting on the DRI program and the South Salina Street façade improvement program and will connect with Ms. Schroeder and Ms. Szwejbka for further assistance. Ms. Pratt agrees with the board's conversation that there is a problem attracting S.U. students to downtown. Students are not utilizing the bus service as many do not own vehicles and do not know how to take the bus. She sees a need for more education on campus regarding local transportation options. Ms. Pratt also agrees that more lighting and security would encourage students to patronize downtown.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

With no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:08 p.m.

Next Meeting

**Tuesday, January 23, 2024
Special District Operations and Development Committee (SDODC)
3:00 p.m.**