



Tony Fiorito, Chairman
Merike L. Treier, Executive Director

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.

November 18, 2025

**SKY Armory/Betts on 1
351 South Clinton Street, Syracuse NY 13202**

3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

- Members:** Chairman Tony Fiorito, Ruthnie Angrand, Alberto Bianchetti, Maarten Jacobs, Susan Katzoff, Karyn Korteling, Sarah Pelligrini, Ed Riley, Nicole Samolis, Cjala Surratt, Meg Tidd, Melissa Zell
- Staff:** Liza Bernard, Tom Campanie, Julia Fay, Becca Flint, Rachael Schaefer, Kristine Sherlock, Kevin Stanard, Merike Treier, Sarah Tietje-Mietz
- Guests:** Cory LaDuke, CBRE Upstate NY
Franklin Fry, Redhouse Arts Center
Paige Karaz, Pyramid Brokerage
Alex Korman, CNY Arts
Erica Ravella, Money Federal Credit Union
Debbie Ruthven, Money Federal Credit Union

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

A. Welcome New Board Member – Sarah Pelligrini

Chairman Fiorito announced Sarah Pelligrini, Co-owner of Noble Celler has been appointed to the Board of the Downtown Committee. Pelligrini thanked everyone for the welcome, and expressed her excitement to be a part of the Board.

B. Welcome New Staff Member – Rachael Schaefer

Chairman Fiorito welcomed new Downtown Committee staff member, Rachael Schaefer, Placemaking Programs Manager. Schaefer thanked the Board and noted she is looking forward to being a part of the team.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of September 16, 2025, and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Melissa Zell moved and Susan Katzoff seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

Ed Riley reported that the Financial Report as of September 30, 2025 is on target. He noted that there is income and matching expense reflected under the New York Main Street Southern Downtown line, as funding was provided for the new Redhouse marquee. The non-operating income received was from the sale of Environmental Maintenance's used tractor. Riley also highlighted the staff development investments. He asked the Board if there were any questions, and there were none.

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board for a motion to accept the Financial Report of September 30, 2025. Alberto Bianchetti moved and Nicole Samolis seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

IV. ADMINISTRATION

A. Authorization to Execute Contract – Security Cameras

Merike Treier asked the Board for approval to execute a two-year agreement with the City of Syracuse to maintain downtown surveillance cameras integrated with the SPD infrastructure. Cjala Surratt inquired if any additional cameras will be installed in other areas throughout downtown. Treier answered that the Downtown Committee is in communication with the SPD on a broader camera strategy in downtown, and how to best leverage resources to accommodate surveillance cameras.

Melissa Zell moved, and Cjala Surratt seconded a motion to approve the agreement. Susan Katzoff and Ruthnie Angrand abstained. The motion was unanimously approved.

B. Approval to Purchase Equipment

Merike Treier asked the Board for the approval to purchase a new Kubota tractor for environmental maintenance operations at a cost of \$32,600.88, replacing the 2009 model. Susan Katzoff moved, and Ruthnie Angrand seconded a motion. The motion was unanimously granted.

C. Budget Committee Volunteers

Merike Treier asked the Board for volunteers to serve on the Budget Committee to put together a budget recommendation that will be presented at the January SDODC meeting. Tony Fiorito, Melissa Zell, and Ed Riley volunteered. An initial meeting will be scheduled in mid-December.

V. PRESENTATION: VOICES FOR CREATIVE NEW YORK

Board member Cjala Surratt introduced Alex Korman (CNY Arts) and Franklin Fry (Redhouse Arts Center) who shared compelling data on the economic and social impact of arts and culture in Central New York.

Highlights included:

- The Arts Sector contributes 4% to national GDP and \$150 billion annually in New York State and accounts for a quarter of a million jobs.
- In Onondaga County, the sector generated \$100 million in direct impact (2018 benchmark).
- Cultural vibrancy enhances safety, reduces crime, and attracts talent.
- Syracuse, Auburn and Ithaca were ranked among the 10 most vibrant small and mid-size cities nationwide – and arts and culture play a crucial role in that.
- \$1.6 million of economic impact for downtown comes from this sector, including \$40,000 in local taxes realized when Redhouse hosted a Broadway tour group (93 country-wide artists) during October to stage productions in its facilities.
- Based on recent statistics, neighborhoods that had active participation in the arts, were on average 25% safer than those neighborhoods or municipalities that had a less robust or less vibrant cultural scene.
- A recent Bloomberg Philanthropy report determined that across surveyed cities (including metro areas such as Tampa, Atlanta, and Cincinnati,) that those who support projects like asphalt art and street level ornamentation experienced 17% reduction of incidences of crashes and injuries among vehicles and pedestrians.

Franklin Fry thanked everyone who was instrumental in helping support the installation of the Redhouse marquee.

The presenters urged board members to champion arts as a strategic asset for downtown growth and workforce retention.

Ruthnie Angrand was interested in learning what tactics or strategies are recommended or encouraged to attract talent to the area so that further opportunities can be initiated to create art, and collective opportunities that will activate parts of the county and city. Fry commented that the Redhouse partners with the STEAM School by inviting students to talk with visiting artists and staff about theatre, careers in performing arts and its different components. The Redhouse connects with all the educational programming in the Syracuse School District, including educational and youth programs involved with their mainstage productions. They also work with ARC of Onondaga to look for ways to incorporate performers with a disability into their programs and help them on their career path. Angrand also asked how Syracuse could promote the area to attract students to stay here, work

and see how the opportunities in the region could keep them here, even during the winter. Franklin Fry noted he will connect with Visit Syracuse to see what they could do to share more information about the arts and entertainment attraction statistics and artistic highlights that can be included in city recruitment packages.

VI. PROGRAM REPORT

A. Holiday Program

Sarah Tietje-Mietz and Becca Flint highlighted the following holiday initiatives under the theme “Experience Downtown Syracuse for the Holidays”:

- *Holiday in Hanover Square* – a brand-new event scheduled for Saturday, December 6, from 11:00am – 3:00pm, with horse-drawn carriage rides, holiday cookies, cocoa, and family activities, sponsored by Community Bank. The event also includes vouchers for a free ice skate at Clinton Square or free entry to the Erie Canal Museum Gingerbread Gallery. Restaurants and businesses are encouraged to offer special deals and hand out candy canes. There will also be a “Candy Cane Lane” streetscape activation on Water Street between Salina and Montgomery.
- The 10th Annual Window Wonderland Contest, engaging in over 40 businesses.
- The Holiday Star will be featured in Perseverance Park.
- A new Holiday Shopping Passport to incentivize local spending.
- The Downtown Committee will also be promoting the Annual Clinton Square Tree Lighting on November 28 and the Merry Mingle Market.

Marketing efforts for the holiday program include radio, TV, social media, and a partnership with Lights on the Lake.

Ruthnie Angrand would like to see a compilation of all the holiday events happening in Syracuse and downtown in one place to help attract more people to enjoy the festivities happening in the area. Sarah Tietje-Mietz thanked Angrand for her suggestion.

B. Fall Occupancy Report

Liza Bernard asked the Board to contact her if they had any questions on the Fall Occupancy Report that was distributed. Staff also continues to monitor post-pandemic recovery data of office space trends using Placer.ai software, which uses employees returning to the office as a metric.

C. Executive Director Report

Merike Treier summarized the following 2025 milestones:

- Celebrated the Downtown Committee's 50th Anniversary with multiple honors and proclamations including the Central New York Business Journal with a Collaboration Impact Award; our own mayoral proclamation; one of the Onondaga Historical Association Medal Award honorees; citations from Senator Chris Ryan, Assemblywoman Pam Hunter and Assemblyman Bill Magnarell; a proclamation from the County; and Senator Rachel May who presented a proclamation during the Arts and Crafts Festival. Most recently, CenterState CEO recognized the Downtown Committee as one of its economic champions.
- Onboarded new staff and expanded staff capacity. Also utilized new and digital engagement strategies, achieving significant growth in social media reach, for example, engagement with Facebook alone has increased from approximately 3,500 last year to over 28,000 this year, and the Downtown Committee Newsletter has seen a 5-8% increase in clicks.
- Administered grants for marquee improvements.
- Investment in the expansion of the Street Tree light program as part of the Main Street grant funds to help create additional lights for the theater district down to the Civic Center.
- New informational tools and new studies, such as the recent downtown housing and market analysis, Placer.ai software tool to better understand foot traffic throughout Downtown Syracuse, utilizing a partnership with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council to conduct a parking and wayfinding study completed earlier.
- Partnered with the City of Syracuse with a Proclamation Series to recognize long-standing businesses and their contributions to the downtown community.
- Added a retail spotlight video to social media; increased number of ribbon-cuttings; and reformatted the newsletter.

Merike Treier noted the following successes of the Downtown Syracuse Foundation, a 501c3, to help additional resources for Downtown:

- Supported the addition of more utility box art, and expanding the artists represented in public art throughout Downtown Syracuse.
- Secured funding that supported the music at the Farmers Market throughout the season, and enabled the Arts and Crafts Festival to reach broader markets and expand entertainment.
- The development of a new stand-alone website for the Downtown Syracuse Foundation.
- Administered the Syracuse Cultural Festival Fund on the City's behalf that supports 27 different festivals and events this year.

- Organized Pop-up events to help educate people about Downtown Syracuse and secure additional contributions and donations.

Looking ahead to 2026 priorities include:

- Launching a Downtown Vision and Strategic Action Plan. Goal is to have a consultant in place by the end of January. Merike Treier asked the Board to reach out to her if interested in serving on a project review or steering committee for this effort.
- Preparing for I-81 construction impacts with a “Downtown is Open” campaign.
- Understanding parking supply and utilization.
- Explore Downtown Decorations program and year-round streetscape enhancements, such as investing in year-round lighting to help better connect various downtown districts.
- Strengthening organizational resources and capacity to meet growing demands.

Merike Treier thanked the Board and noted support will be needed to deliver these initiatives presented.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

Chairman Fiorito reminded Board members of the annual holiday party on December 5 at the Atrium.

Debbie Ruthven announced that Money Federal Credit Union moved from the Equitable Towers to Barclay Damon, and invited all to their open house on Thursday, November 18 from 10:00am-2:00pm.

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

Next Meeting

**Tuesday, January 20, 2026 (SDODC)
3:00 p.m.**