

ANN ARBOR DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY RETREAT MEETING MINUTES
November 16, 2012

Place: Zingerman's Events on Fourth, Kerrytown Market & Shops, Ann Arbor
Time: DDA Executive Director, Susan Pollay, opened the retreat at 10:35 AM

1. ROLL CALL

Present: Newcombe Clark, Russ Collins, Robert Guenzel, Leah Gunn, Roger Hewitt, Joan Lowenstein, John Mouat, Nader Nassif, Keith Orr, Sandi Smith, John Splitt

Late arriving: John Hieftje

Absent: None

Staff Present: Susan Pollay, Executive Director
Joe Morehouse, Deputy Director
Amber Miller, Planning & Research Specialist
Jada Hahlbrock, Management Assistant
Tom McCormack, DDA Intern

Audience: Mary Morgan, Ann Arbor Chronicle
Dave Askins, Ann Arbor Chronicle
Nancy Shore, getDowntown Program
Will Hathaway, resident
Mary Hathaway, resident
Ray Detter, CAC

Also Present: Kerry Sheldon, Bridgeport Consulting
Steve Powers, City of Ann Arbor
Tim Marshall, Bank of Ann Arbor and SPARK

2. WELCOME

Ms. Pollay welcomed everyone and thanked the DDA members for making time to be part of the day's discussion. Ms. Sheldon reviewed the agenda and discussed the goals of the retreat.

3. INTERNAL COMPASS/ STATE OF THE DDA
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Ms. Pollay gave a presentation that provided an overview of the 2003 DDA Renewal Plan and how the DDA, in working toward its mission, has strongly benefitted downtown. She reminded the board what the State of Michigan enabling legislation authorizes the DDA Board to do and shared some examples of the organizational structures and projects taken on by other Michigan DDA's.

Mr. Hewitt provided a brief review of the DDA's 10 year budget plan and overall financial health.

4.

EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Steve Powers, City of Ann Arbor Administrator and Tim Marshall, SPARK Board Chair and Bank of Ann Arbor President & CEO were asked to share information and give their perspective.

Mr. Powers said that the work of the DDA was important. He gave as an example the importance of a strong public parking system that is well maintained and operated. This benefits the downtown, but it also provides parking revenues to the City so that it can tap into downtown economic activity. Mr. Powers said that he very much appreciates the time and effort that the DDA has put into planning for the Connecting William Street parcels. Mr. Mouat asked about the level of connectivity between the City and the DDA; Mr. Powers said that he feels it is good, noting that he and Ms. Pollay talk and meet regularly. Mr. Clark asked if there is anything that other DDA's are doing that he would like the Ann Arbor DDA to take on; Mr. Powers said that he didn't have anything specific to mention. He said that his role at the City is to advise Council on what is best for the City, not just the City organization, and he is open to determining who or what is best at doing certain activities.

Mr. Marshall said that he also believes that the work of the DDA is important, and he felt the DDA is a well-managed organization that works intently toward its mission. As Chair of the SPARK board and CEO of Bank of Ann Arbor he said that both organizations realize that a vibrant and healthy downtown Ann Arbor translates into a vibrant community and healthy businesses. Ms. Gunn asked about specific things the DDA could do to help SPARK; Mr. Marshall said that quality of life and quality of place are important, and the DDA does a good job with this which helps SPARK attract businesses to downtown. Ms. Pollay thanked Mr. Marshall for the Bank of Ann Arbor's summer Sonic Lunch series in Liberty Plaza Park, and asked if he had ideas for how we could get other businesses to get involved in supporting downtown activities and facilities; Mr. Marshall said that businesses, as well as individual donors and foundations are important. This led to a brief discussion about the identity of downtown Ann Arbor including and separate from the University, and how best to capture alumni attention and dollars.

5.

STRATEGY MATRIX/ PATTERN RECOGNITION

Board members worked in small groups to examine a strategy matrix that had been created using feedback from DDA members and outside stakeholders. As they reported out, the following patterns and concerns were mentioned:

Housing

- Maybe we need to work on definition of "affordable"?
- How does workforce housing fit in?
- Need to consolidate information regarding housing stock. Make it easier for people to look for available space and move downtown.

Identity

- Downtown Ann Arbor is not just UM
- Finding better ways to get credit for the DDA's many efforts to make downtown strong and attractive, including grants which can be easily forgotten.

Infrastructure, including parking

- One of the DDA's strengths – people want the DDA to do more

Leadership

- People see DDA as a leader- how can we use that role?
- What we are vs. what we could do
- What we choose to champion

6. WHATS MISSING? BARRIERS TO ACTION?
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Using the same strategy matrix, board members worked in small groups to discuss what more the DDA could be doing, and the barriers that are keeping the DDA stuck.

Downtown housing- as quantity grows, how do people know what is available and where?

- Database of housing stock with contact information. Important to help encourage more downtown residents

Parking – has a focus on parking prevented the DDA from doing other things?

- If so, what other things are we not doing? How do we strike a better balance?

Is there a connection between the arts/culture, and economic development?

- SPARK & Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation are also looking at this question.
- E.g. South-By-Southwest Festival. Can we create a new signature Ann Arbor event that will have the same economic impact to downtown as the Art Fairs?
- Is there a role for the DDA to support performing arts groups, similar to its program of supporting housing groups, as a way to meet its mission?

Communication- to whom, about what, and how?

- How do we let people know about the DDA's role? E.g. infrastructure improvements.
- How can we better define "Identity" as a strategy? E.g. advancing the identity and brand of downtown.

Clean & Safe

- Don't want to duplicate something the private sector or the City can do/is doing.
- Where is the gap?
- E.g., explore Republic Parking expanding their role? (Feet on the street.)

Where we stuck?/ Barriers?

- Parking takes up time, effort, \$. Does it keep us from other things?
- People see us as leaders, but this came as a surprise to many of us. How can we leverage the perception of the DDA as leaders?
- DDA needs to take on the "but for the DDA..." projects so it's clear what our impact is. Weave leadership into strategies, as well as tactics

7. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

DDA members discussed how existing strategies could be adjusted, combined, expanded or added to help the DDA work toward its mission.

Strategic Implications?

- Planning as a strategy- should we add this or is it woven into all the others?
- Strategies 6,7 & 8 (housing, community services, sustainability) seem more like tactics
- Centralization of information as a strategy?
 - Website communications updates
 - Downtown housing information centralized on the DDA website
 - Convener of info for retail & restaurant/ events throughout the downtown
- Leadership. E.g., Mr. Guenzel/County took leadership to create a more cohesive community strategy around homelessness, including the construction of the Delonis Center
 - Need to pick and choose when we lead, so as to avoid stepping on toes
 - Advocacy for all of downtown (working with Area Associations, Council, SPARK)
 - Balanced approach of inquiry and advocacy
 - Let's be curious all the time about everything
- Housing- we need to redefine the DDA's priorities around housing.
 - Refer to Partnerships Committee. Staff prepare a recommendation on housing, including the DDA's history, role, etc.
 - Is it a strategy or a tactic? Not clear yet.
- Create a framework for our mission and work, then run things through the framework
 - DDA as a granting agency: what are current priorities? How best to leverage this
 - Leadership, identity & info- do they slot into existing strategy?

8. NEW TACTICS TO BE DEVELOPED

Strategy # 1: Identity

Expand efforts under this strategy to include defining/communicating information about downtown, as well as information about the DDA. New tactics should include:

- Leadership (esp. around cultural/performing arts, hospitality, job opportunities)
- DDA as resource for long-range planning expertise about the downtown
- Advocacy for downtown as a holistic entity – DDA as convener of stakeholders
- Communication (with citizens, other organizations, “the world”)
- DDA as the center for information about downtown. E.g. enhanced web portals for leasing/real estate information, downtown sales and events, best practices.

Strategy # 2: Infrastructure and Transportation

Parking is an important element of an overall downtown transportation system, and it connects DDA strategies on infrastructure and transportation. Much sidewalk and other infrastructure work remains to be done. New tactics should include:

- Transit and all transportations become more important. How can we support this?
- Get at small projects still to be done (e.g. alley & sidewalk repairs). Low hanging fruit
- Eventual retirement of above ground structures/ long term capital planning for parking

Strategy # 3: Business Encouragement

Entire spectrum of businesses in the downtown, from large to small, retail/restaurant to high tech and more. SPARK, City, Area Associations, Think Local are all potential partners.

- Does “clean, bright, and safe” belong as a tactic in this strategy? Discuss with the Main Street BIZ what the DDA’s appropriate role may be to encourage this. This strategy may need to be explored neighborhood by neighborhood.
- How directive does the DDA wish to be in terms of “economic gardening?” – being deliberate about recruiting/supporting a certain downtown mix or leave it up to the market? E.g. direct grants/funding to market gaps.

Strategy # 4: Housing

This strategy requires further definition; connect to core purpose of DDA and articulate why housing is important to downtown. Elements to address for new tactics include:

- What data are needed to reveal the true housing demand in downtown that is not being met by the marketplace – e.g. work force housing? Low income housing?
- What is the connection between growing downtown as a job and transportation center and housing
- What 5-10 year plans does the County have regarding affordable housing and how role can the DDA play to support this?
- What are others doing in this arena? Who are all our potential partners?

General group consensus: – strategies 6 (Development Partnerships), 7 (Community Services), and 8 (Sustainability) are more tactical, than overall strategies.

9. SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

- Information gathering is important across all the strategies & tactics. E.g. pedestrian counts & surveys to determine the demographics of who is downtown, when, and where. Also, update the land use economist’s market study on a regular basis.
- Communicate downtown information to the public- help people know about what exists and what is possible. E.g. the market study, residential growth, other benchmarking.
- Be curious - see what is working elsewhere and steal good ideas
- Housing: get more information. What are the partnership opportunities? What data do we need? When is it appropriate for the DDA to play a role, and when is it not.
- Clean/ Bright/ Safe: find a consensus for what is meant - do we all have the same expectations? Identify who can be helping improve downtown attractiveness and cleaning, including Area Associations, City, property owners, etc. Invite a member of the Main Street BIZ to a Partnerships meeting to learn more about the role of the private sector in keeping an area clean - what is working for you and what is not?

- Do we need to redefine “Partnerships”? Reexamine committee structure? At next committee meetings think about key areas and see if we need subcommittees that are short term/project specific- let it happen organically- create a list of work items
- Field Trips- we should take time this coming year to go to other Michigan downtowns to see ideas in action – e.g. Grand Rapids. Visits should include daytime and night time.
- Establish a strategic partnership with SPARK (e.g. ask SPARK to begin attending Partnerships meetings). When they meet with businesses, what do they need in downtown that the DDA can assist with?

10.

ADJOURNMENT

Susan thanked the DDA members and staff for their hard work and good discussion during the retreat. She also thanked Kerry Sheldon for leading the session. With this, the board retreat adjourned at 3:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Pollay, Executive Director