

Minutes from the December 1, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Charles Coleman, Maura Thomson, Sabra Briere, Mary Jo Callan, Susan Pollay, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Members absent:, Mary Campbell, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh, Jim Kosteva (University of Michigan)

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor corrections.

No representative from the VA was available. We may invite someone later.

Outreach to the University community

Jim Kosteva from the University of Michigan started the discussion with a reminder that any solicitation on campus is prohibited. It's what happens near campus but still affects University staff and students that this committee could change.

Student education regarding panhandling needs to be constantly refreshed. Orientation often occurs months before students actually start living in Ann Arbor; by the time they are confronted with making decisions, many of the things they heard during Orientation have been forgotten. Including information about panhandling as part of the safety handbook could change that; MSA has a Safety Committee; the two committees could work together on this issue to ensure that information becomes institutionalized.

Getting University faculty involvement as well as student support would also help. If a social-work professor is researching panhandling, having some of that research done and discussed locally as part of an educational program could increase University buy-in and community support.

The City has a web page for City/University relations: A2gov.org/goblue. The City could put a section on that page – and keep it current – regarding panhandling. This would serve as another reminder to students about how to handle aggressive requests and about the many services Ann Arbor already provides.

New ideas

Maura Thomson met with Laurel Champion and Tony Dearing at AnnArbor.com to discuss the Street Outreach Committee's work. AnnArbor.com is very interested in working with the committee; they discussed banner ads, editorials and articles. They agreed that the committee needs to craft a message and design a strategy first. It was especially important that the message be one where those in need win and the community wins.

Mary Jo Callan shared a very draft business-card sized hand-out that contained information about the services available and the reasons to support those services rather than giving directly to panhandlers. During the brainstorming session that followed, some changes and additions were offered for the text on the card. Jim Kosteva suggested reformatting it to look like a dollar bill. This idea was accepted with enthusiasm.

Others suggested expanding the campaign to posters that could be placed in business' windows and to see if donations for printing costs could be sought from AATA, United Way, other donors. An outreach campaign would also need a simple slogan that would be memorable and meaningful; each committee members was asked to help think about slogans.

There are a number of ways the materials can be distributed. In addition to printing posters, Community Standards staff can hand out the 'dollars'; so can merchants. However, the more things the committee wants to print, the bigger the budget.

One low-cost idea would be to create an omnibus website with all the services available. Human capital is vital to continuing this work, but so is keeping the information the committee acquires available. How difficult would it be to assemble a list of all the available services? How big a commitment would it be to keep that list current?

Next Steps:

Mary Jo Callan will work with Susan Pollay on the further refinement of a handout. Susan will see if the designer the DDA works with will donate the design. Sabra Briere agreed to work with both refining the text and design.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Brian Durrance offered to invite a panhandler, so we can learn more from those who see this as their job.

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 15, 4th Floor Conference Room.