

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes—September 30, 2014
City Council Work Room, 2nd. Floor, City Hall, 7:00 pm.

Members Present: Ray Detter, Marsha Chamberlin, Hugh Sonk, Felicia Flores
Members Absent: John Chamberlin, Jim Kern, Sue Kern, Kathleen Nolan, Joan French
Visitors: Susan Pollay, Steve Kaplan, John Giessler, Christine Crockett, Barb Wood

Last night's CAC meeting was largely devoted to two important topics—our residential perspective of a DDA-sponsored Downtown Ambassador program and the future of low income senior citizen housing at Courthouse Square.

On the issue of an Ambassador program, whether undertaken by the DDA or the Ann Arbor Visitor's Bureau, all of us seemed to agree that the concept is worthwhile pursuing. But discussion of the values, costs, goals, and implementation of the program provoked a lot of discussion, some possible answers, but also many additional questions.

While an increased sense of safety and a variety of welcoming and informative communications from “ambassadors” are desirable, are there ways to achieve those goals at lesser cost and with less dependence on a hired bureaucracy? Could a diverse program be developed and coordinated using local volunteers whether individuals or businesses?

Since I don't have a lot of answers, let me give you a few of the questions. Do we need it all year? CAC members don't think so. What times, days and seasons is it most desirable? On what special occasions? We should always be conscious of the need to preserve our town's image and identity. While the Disneyland of Art Fair and Football weekends needs and does get special treatment, let's concentrate on other times.

Voluntarism was much a part of our discussion. But we recognized the need for recruiting, coordination, ownership—and funds necessary to keep a local program going. The SAVCO community is currently taken an interest in providing opportunities for employees to contribute their time to the community. What about T shirts with “Savas” or “Babos” or “Aventura Ambassador”? Other businesses could have representatives as they desire. Think of an “Adopt a Highway” program? A system of modest public rewards might be set up to compensate businesses for their participation. Perhaps provision of banners on streetlights celebrating participation? “Ambassador of the Week”? While volunteers do not have to be hired, some local coordination agency would be necessary. The Visitors Bureau is thinking of including historical tours as a part of a program. They would have to be a part of a “certified” program--not just restaurants and other businesses, but other downtown organizations and the entire community. What would it take to pay someone to organize and coordinate such a program?

Our other issue last night was Courthouse Square. We continue to get reports of poor maintenance, dangerous hallway situations and a lack of management, administration and security in the building. Mayor Hieftje quietly called for inspections of the building in the past. It's time to do something again. Over 15 years ago this community united in supporting the sale of that building for \$1 based upon a long-term affordability

requirement. Over the years the DDA has given much support to the building. The new owners, we understand, are requesting cancellation of that requirement. That request is now going through a city of Ann Arbor legal process. We all need to know what and where that process is. Last night, CAC members and guests made clear that they want Courthouse Square to remain affordable and remain downtown living space for seniors.