

**MEETING MINUTES
BERKLEY DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 8:15 AM
Berkley Public Safety, 2nd Floor, Conference Room**



I. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 8:16 AM with Chair Matteo Passalacqua presiding.

A. Roll Call Taken and Quorum Determined

Present: Desiree Dutcher
Katie Forte
Scott Francis
Anna Grace
Chris Gross
Shawn Heath-Lee
Uli Laczkovich
Matteo Passalacqua
Ashley Poirier
Todd Schaefer
Crystal VanVleck
Brian Zifkin

Absent: Donna Dirkse – *excused*
Justin Findling – *excused*
Talia Wittenberg – *excused*

Also present: Steve Baker, City Council Liaison
Janine Braun, The Artsy Umbrella
Alex Brown, City of Berkley Facilities Director
Jennifer Finney, Interim DDA Director
Mike McGuinness, DDA Executive Director
Tim Murad, Chamber of Commerce Liaison
Shawn Young, Berkley DPW Director

B. Welcoming Interim Executive Director Jennifer Finney

Passalacqua introduced Jennifer Finney, who had been Executive Director just before McGuinness, as the new DDA Interim Director to serve until a permanent Executive Director is hired. He thanked her for being willing to serve, and she said she was happy to be there.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Zifkin moved to approve the agenda, Grace seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting of January 8, 2025

On motion by Dutcher and second by Gross, the minutes of the regular meeting of January 8, 2025 were unanimously approved by the Board.

B. Special Meeting of January 27, 2025

On motion by Gross and second by Grace, the minutes of the special meeting of January 27, 2025 were unanimously approved by the Board.

IV. TREASURER'S REPORT:

A. Financial Reports for through January 2025

Gross reported the beginning fund balance had changed again after adjustments, so the new beginning fund balance as of July 1, 2024 was @\$209,000. McGuinness said that the audit had been filed, so that balance can be considered final. Year-to-date figures through January 2025 show that tax revenues haven't yet been allocated to the DDA. Revenues received were @\$85,000, expenses @\$316,000 (no unexpected/unusual expenses), and the ending fund balance as of January 2025 was -@\$21,000. Health care benefits have not been recorded, so adjustment there is expected.

Dutcher moved to receive and approve the Treasurer's Report, Schaefer seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

V. ACTION ITEMS

A. Berkley Theater Marquee Structural Stabilization Request, Marquee Short-Term Path Forward

The Board is being asked whether or not to fund structural reinforcement of the historic Berkley Theater Marquee. Alex Brown, the City of Berkley's Facilities Director, detailed the repairs needed on the interior girders that support the marquee (photographs were included in the Board packet). DDA funds are available in the current budget to pay for the repairs (@\$18,000). VanVleck noted that the discussion of short- and long-term plans for the Marquee would be on the City Council's agenda as well.

Brown said he didn't think the marquee would survive being pulled off the building if the girders aren't repaired. He also believes it is a safety hazard; the repair work could start as soon as the next three to four weeks if the Board approved the expense at this meeting.

VanVleck reported that the current owner of the building advised the City that the Marquee portion of the Rite Aid building is not metered separately, and the electric bill for it runs @\$1,500-1,700 per month. The City offered \$1,000 per month, and the owner accepted that. Council will have to approve that amount, and the Marquee issues are on the Council agenda for their meeting on 2/24, a work session.

VanVleck also noted there has been and will continue to be discussion about turning the Marquee lights off, either completely until all repairs are completed or intermittently, with notification to the public about why lights aren't lit. She noted the City and building owner have discussed a short-term lease agreement of the Marquee portion (one year) with the building owner. Passalacqua asked the Board first to discuss approving the amount needed for structural interior repair.

One concern is that the City/DDA currently has no ownership interest in the structure, and a new owner may not be at all interested in selling. A Board member suggested that the City/DDA could include in the lease a "right of first refusal," so the Marquee could become City property if the new owner doesn't want it.

Forte moved to support the investment in the Marquee to make the interior structural repairs outlined by Alex Brown in the approximate amount of \$18,000, Poirier seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

VanVleck noted that in March, Council will be considering the lease agreement previously discussed, and so the special meeting/work session on 2/24 will hash out details about timing the marquee lights, anticipated long-term expenditures, lease terms and details, and other options, as well as affirming the DDA's commitment to financially support maintaining the Marquee.

B. Frank’s Landscaping Contract One-year Renewal, Soliciting Bids Ahead of 226 Season

McGuinness reported that the Board could approve a 1-year “bridge” contract with Frank’s, the contractor that has been supplying landscape services to the DDA for several years and that for upcoming years, solicit bids from other landscapers and find out what their price points are. He suggested that was reasonable considering that a new Executive Director should be in place for 2026 and beyond.

Frank’s would extend their current contract price for the 2025 season, that being @\$63,000 including, if the Board chooses to continue, winter barrel decorations (\$8,000+). Zifkin said the addition of winter barrel decorations on the west end of 12 Mile was a nice touch.

McGuinness noted that performance issues with Frank’s were often communication issues, with fault on both sides. Schaefer proposed considering more environmentally-friendly landscaping choices for hanging baskets that wouldn’t require daily watering. Regarding 12-Mile winter barrel decorations, that commitment would be firm if they’re included in the current contract under consideration, and it’s approved by the Board, but they could be added towards the end of the summer if the Board decides to continue with them

Zifkin moved to approve continuing with Frank’s Landscaping for the 2025 season at a cost of @\$55,000 with optional winter barrel decorations for @\$8,000, VanVleck seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

C. 2024-25 Annual Budget Proposal Reading, Spending Priorities

McGuinness had sent a copy of the 2025/26 draft DDA budget including spending priorities, but Passalacqua proposed that the Board not vote on them at this meeting but review the numbers and be prepared to vote on the budget at the March meeting. He asked McGuinness to review the changes from the prior year, noting how reductions will affect the optics of the programs when spending is cut. The DDA budget should be presented to City Council for their approval by April.

McGuinness used what he described as “conservative” revenue estimates as he put together the budget. He also noted that tax capture figures for the 2024 fiscal year haven’t yet been allocated to the DDA, so the actual fund balance isn’t yet finalized.

Grant funding from Oakland County should be @63,000 added to the projected tax capture and result in revenues of @\$528,000 to start. The purpose of reducing spending by @\$55,000 is to prepare for any bonding opportunities that present themselves. Categories proposed for dialing back spending include advertising and marketing, administration and operations, special events, streetscape and design (mural funding, seasonal window painting, and winter barrel decorations). Oakland County grant funding must be used by the end of 2026.

The amount of special event sponsorships is unknown and can’t be factored into budget considerations.

VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Permanent Executive Director Search Process, Progress Update

Passalacqua reported that the first round of interviews is almost completed via Zoom.

B. Leadership Transition, Transition Projects Documents, and Prioritizing 2025 Projects

McGuinness noted that Finney’s prior experience as Director is making the transition much more successful than it would be for someone without that knowledge of Berkley and the DDA and that it was a wise move to hire her.

C. Robina Placemaking Oakland County Grant Funding Status Update

Berkley has submitted the invoice to Oakland County for the initial grant payment. Berkley has submitted its first quarterly report to the County.

D. Dorothea Placemaking Conceptual Design, Pilot Working Group Status Update

VanVleck is putting together a working group to refine plans for a pilot short-term closure of Dorothea, and she hopes that the stakeholders and the community will be involved. The group is now in the process of confirming a meeting schedule. VanVleck would like to see as many stakeholders as she can get to take part in the planning.

VII. LIAISON REPORTS

A. City Council

Baker reported the February 3 meeting was cancelled. In January U.S. Representative Haley Stephens gave an update about what's happening in Washington. The City has a new Human Resources Director that they all met. Council received the fiscal year audit. Council also approved their Strategic Framework, which will guide their preparation of a revised Strategic Plan.

B. Community Development

In Kapelanski's absence, VanVleck reported that the Marquee (previously discussed) and the concept of a workforce pilot ordinance (an economic development tool) will be on their proposed agenda for the Feb. 24 work session.

C. Planning Commission

Absent – no report.

Public Works

Young had nothing additional to report.

Chamber of Commerce

Murad reported they've started planning upcoming events and revamping their sponsorships (to have a package of events that a sponsor could choose at a single time).

VIII. STUDENT BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

Absent. Francis reported that Findling and Wittenberg are both graduating in the spring, and he will be identifying two new student Board members.

IX. BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES:

A. Art & Design Committee

The committee will meet that day.

B. Business Development

No report.

C. Downtown Events Committee

The first Pride planning meeting is scheduled for 2/13. The tentative event schedule was included in the Board packet. At the meeting was the coordinator of the Farmer's Market, the Artsy Umbrella owner Janine Braun, who will continue that role in 2025.

D. Marketing Strategies Committee

McGuinness reported the Web site redesign is progressing.

Organization Committee

No additional report.

E. West Twelve Mile Committee

McGuinness reported that the seasonal displays in the barrel planters can be removed.

X. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATES

A. Main Street America Annual Evaluation Successfully Concluded, Thank You to Participants

The evaluation was completed and the Berkley DDA was again accredited.

B. Thank you for the Opportunity to Work with You, Help You Advance Downtown Berkley

McGuinness thanked Board members, past and present, for the opportunity to serve the community.

XI. BOARD OF DIRECTORS' COMMENTS:

On behalf of all the Board members, Passalacqua said the DDA owes a thank you to McGuinness for his friendship and outstanding work.

XII. PUBLIC COMMENTS: The opportunity for public comment was offered, and no requests to comment were made at the meeting. Anyone with comments or questions is asked to e-mail them to the DDA to be answered within five business days.

XIII. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:39 AM on motion by Schaefer and second by Poirier.