

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



- I. CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 8:15 AM with Chair Matteo Passalacqua presiding.
- II. Roll Call Taken and Quorum Determined**
- Present:* Donna Dirkse
Katie Forte
Scott Francis
Anna Grace
Chris Gross
Shawn Heath-Lee
Matteo Passalacqua
Ashley Poirier
Todd Schaefer
Crystal VanVleck
Brian Zifkin
- Absent:* Desiree Dutcher – *excused*
Justin Findling – *excused*
Uli Laczkovich – *excused*
Talia Wittenberg – *excused*
- Also present:* Steve Baker, City Council Liaison
Kristen Kapelanski, Community Development Director
Lisa Kempner, Planning Commission Liaison
Mike McGuinness, DDA Executive Director
Chris Nordstrom, Carlisle Wortman Assoc., Planning
Adam Wozniak, Berkley DPW Liaison
- III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**
Passalacqua asked for a motion to move Discussion Items and Liaison Reports ahead of Action Items, which would probably take up the bulk of this meeting. Gross moved to approve the amended agenda, Dirkse seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
- A. Regular Meeting of December 11, 2024**
On motion by Dirkse and second by Gross, the minutes of the regular meeting of December 11, 2024 were unanimously approved by the Board.
- V. TREASURER'S REPORT:**
- A. Financial Reports for November and December 2024**
Gross had no report because Financial Reports weren't received from the City.
- VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS**
- A. Dorothea Road Reopening Status Update**
McGuinness reported that based on discussions and actions taken at and since the last Board meeting, Dorothea Road had been reopened at Coolidge. Long term plans for the area have not

changed. VanVleck noted her desire to put together an informal work group to work on the long-term plans, the group consisting of herself, City staff, Kapelanski, Recreation Department staff, members of the DDA Board and City Council who would like to be involved, and perhaps some of the area's business owners to create a plan of action for a short-term pilot closure. They need to work around the School District's fieldhouse construction on the adjacent field.

Heath-Lee volunteered, and McGuinness also volunteered Forte and Dutcher, who were not present at the time.

B. Feedback on Long-Term Dorothea Public Space Concepts

Kapelanski recounted this phase is facilitated by a SEMCOG grant awarded to Berkley specifically for planning purposes, and Chris Nordstrom of the planning firm Carlisle Wortman was engaged to assist with design concepts. Kapelanski noted they were soliciting feedback from the Board on the preliminary designs he then presented to the Board.

Nordstrom's renderings presented preliminary overhead drawings as well as street-level examples of materials and features that might be incorporated. He stressed that he was encouraged to make the design welcoming to all ages, flexible, and multi-functional. The design shows areas for seating, performance, play, and is open enough to allow a variety of uses. Landscaped areas with trellises and raised planting beds are also designated on the plans. Nordstrom used string lights rather than light poles to illuminate the space.

Bike racks and the MOGO bike rental installation are included in the space. The surface could be plain concrete, stamped concrete, or pavers of some kind. Two columnar trees he recommended are sweet gum and ginkgo. Nordstrom noted his plans are preliminary and can be scaled back as needed. He solicited suggestions and feedback from the Board and other attendees.

Passalacqua overall supported the general idea, noting ongoing maintenance needs to be feasible and must always be kept in mind. DPW's Wozniak, noting past issues with pavers on the roadway, questioned drainage based on materials used on the road surface. Kempner thought the design needed more shade for the hot months, but Nordstrom noted the trees and trellised plants would provide some shade. Zifkin also contributed an idea he encountered traveling abroad where multiple umbrellas were suspended over a public space. Overall, Board members were in favor of the preliminary plans.

Kapelanski noted the next step is to finalize a design concept and pursue grant funding.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS: A resident attending the meeting noted that ginkgos have offensive smelling seeds, but that is dependent on whether the tree is male (no seeds) or female. The opportunity for public comment was offered, and no additional 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.

VIII. LIAISON REPORTS

A. City Council

Baker reported that Council recognized the 40th anniversary of the Berkley Women's Club and proclaimed February as Black History Month. Representative Natalie Price made a presentation to Council about legislative priorities and Michigan's 2025 budget, including state education funding and tuition-free community college attendance.

B. Community Development

Kapelanski reported final revisions to the Zoning Ordinance were sent to the Planning Commission, and she expects adoption soon.

C. Planning Commission

Kempner reported that the Commission denied approval to an in-home daycare applicant because of concerns about traffic to and from the residence.

D. Public Works

Wozniak reported not much has been happening with the holidays and lack of snow.

Chamber of Commerce

Absent – no report.

IX. STUDENT BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

Absent – no report.

X. ACTION ITEMS

A. DDA Executive Director Job Posting Approval

At this point in the meeting, Passalacqua asked McGuinness to step out of the meeting and invited all others to stay or leave, as they wished. He reported that the Organization Committee had met several times to finalize the job description, deciding on the structure of the position moving forward and setting compensation details.

Francis noted the next steps after posting the position are setting up a subcommittee to review applications and resumes, doing zoom interviews of candidates and then in-person interviews, followed by recommendations to the Board of the best applicant to be offered a position (negotiation with that person on contract details is included in the timeline).

He noted the benefit package is different from that offered to McGuinness because he is a City employee and that package has changed during his tenure, saving @\$20,000 per year. The bulk of the new Director's time will be at City Hall and coordinating with the City Manager, with flexibility expected for those times the Director will be needed to work evenings and weekends. Poirier suggested a social media post announcing McGuinness' departure.

Francis noted that following this process might mean that it could take until as late as April for a new Director to be in place, with someone else serving as Director in the interim.

Forte moved to approve the Executive Director Job Posting, Heath-Lee seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

B. DDA Open Tasks Tracking Matrix

Passalacqua stated that the transition from the current Director to his replacement was not going well, information requested from the director was not being timely received, important deadlines were not being met, and time for follow-up on pressing items was running out. He stated the board needed a commitment from Mr. McGuinness to fully engage for the next six weeks or to move on to his new opportunity now. Passalacqua stated either were acceptable but that the Board needed an answer.

Passalacqua said that the Board wasn't in a position to vote on the matrix, because they had just received it at 8:15 that morning and hadn't had any time to review the documents. Included in that information packet were important documents on the projected DDA budget for the 2025/26 year. Grant reporting requirements also need to be addressed.

McGuinness will be required to begin working out of City Hall the following Monday, 1/11/25 until his last day 2/14/25, and coordinate his transition activities going forward with the City Manager and her staff. The Board also needs to structure the ongoing activities and pare down its most pressing immediate priorities, as well as posing the question, "Do you have a plan of action?" [for the activities listed on the matrix he submitted].

Passalacqua reported that MSOC has provided suggestions of individuals who might be able to serve as Interim Director during the search for a full-time Director. VanVleck also noted that the next Director will be trained to pull Financial Reports from the City's files.

When McGuinness returned, Francis summarized the Board's discussion about the job posting as well as priorities to be addressed in McGuinness's remaining time as Director. He asked for direction for the next steps on the Open Tasks Tracking Matrix. McGuinness said he hoped to leave behind for the incoming Director an outline similar to what his predecessor, Jen Finney, had given to him when he started. McGuinness responded affirmatively when asked if he could commit to devoting his time, over the remaining weeks of his tenure, to fleshing out steps forward on the matrix he had laid out and work primarily from city hall.

McGuinness apologized for his poor communication over the last few weeks but noted he had been quite ill over the holidays and it limited his ability to work on DDA priorities. He was also asked if Board members could assist him in the process of tying up any loose ends. Passalacqua noted that after meeting with VanVleck and her staff, any Board member who needed to be pulled into the conversation could be engaged to take on additional responsibility for following up on those tasks.

XI. BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES:

A. Art & Design Committee

Nothing to report.

B. Business Development

Nothing to report.

C. Downtown Events Committee

McGuinness reported the schedule may be expanded or altered as opportunities arise.

D. Marketing Strategies Committee

Poirier reported that issues with GoDaddy, the domain owner, appear to have been resolved.

E. Organization Committee

No additional report.

F. West Twelve Mile Committee

No additional report.

XII. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATES

McGuinness plans to provide a draft budget to the Board at the February meeting.

McGuinness noted the City's recognition as a city with a Hospitable Business Environment (*Oakland Press article* Jan. 8, 2025).

McGuinness announced that the Yellow Door Art Market on 12 Mile will be closing after 14 years.

XIII. BOARD OF DIRECTORS' COMMENTS:

None.

XIV. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9: 47 AM on motion by Zifkin and second by Poirier.