

**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**  
**Joint Town Hall Meeting of the DDA Board of Directors and City Council**  
**May 9, 2022**

The May special joint meeting of the DDA Board and City Council was called to order at 7:00 pm by Mayor Brian Turnbull.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** *Mayor Brian Turnbull, DJ Boyd, Margene Buckhave, Mike Jaafar, Ryan McKindles, Greg Presley, Shawn Riley, Marilyn Price/City Council, Barbara Morowski-Brown/City Council, Andrew Krenz/City Council, John Carter/City Council*

**Absent:** *Aaron Cozart, Jim Long, Greg Richards, Mary Starring*

**Also Present:** *Lori Ward/DDA Executive Director, Jeri Johnson/DDA Marketing & Communications Director, Jessica Howlin/DDA Marketing & Administrative Assistant, 30 Citizens, 41 Citizens via Zoom*

**WELCOME – MAYOR BRIAN TURNBULL**

Mayor Turnbull welcomed all attendees and said tonight is a forum for any comments on the street closures.

**INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTS – SHAWN RILEY, DDA CHAIR**

Riley began by thanking all for attending the co-sponsored Town Hall meeting with the DDA and City Council. The meeting was scheduled to share results of the Street Closure Survey and provide business owners and residents a chance to express any additional feedback and opinions on the closures. There will be no action taken at the Town Hall meeting this evening. Tuesday, May 17, at 8:00 am, is the next DDA Board meeting to discuss a DDA recommendation to City Council. The meeting is open to the public and will be held in Meeting Room A of City Hall.

Riley said that over the past two years, many changes have taken place due to the pandemic. In March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Governor's Executive Order closed all retail, restaurants, service and nonessential businesses. In June 2020 restrictions loosened and City Council approved street closures on E. Main Street from Hutton to Center Streets, and N. Center from Main to Dunlap Streets to vehicular traffic. Restaurants were allowed to expand outdoor dining areas and retailers were allowed to expand onto the sidewalk and streets. In August 2020, the DDA and City Council created a social district called The Twist, that allowed patrons the ability to purchase alcoholic beverages from participating businesses to be consumed throughout the downtown in designated commons areas.

In October 2020, the downtown street closures were extended to March 2021. In November 2020, businesses were closed again by the State of Michigan. Businesses placed heated outdoor structures to serve patrons outdoors during colder temperatures. The DDA, with support of the local business community, established Heat in the Street and added vending stands and dining pods.

In January 2021, the DDA and City of Northville sponsored a Town Hall meeting to discuss street closures. The following month, City Council voted to keep the streets closed through April 2022. In October 2021, City Council extended the street closures further until November 2022. This past winter with restaurants fully opened, the outdoor structures did not get used as much. This prompted the discussion on whether to continue to keep the streets closed or open them to vehicular traffic. Working together with City Planners at Carlisle Wortman, the DDA developed a survey to address whether to keep the streets closed or reopen them. The survey closed on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Over 4,000 surveys were completed and roughly 2,000 comments were received on the issue.

### **REVIEW OF STREET CLOSURE SURVEY RESULTS – JOE BLAIR, CARLISLE WORTMAN**

Joe Blair of Carlisle Wortman presented the results of the survey to members of the City Council and DDA as well as the business and residential community. Joe provided information on how the survey was conducted and reviewed the results. The written comments that were provided are available on both the City and DDA websites. The link was provided at the conclusion of the meeting.

Blair said he was part of the team that put together the survey and analysis of the data. The streets were closed to help downtown business and restaurants during Covid. The closures are currently set to expire on November 7, 2022. The survey opened on April 11, 2022 and closed on May 2, 2022 and received over 4,000 responses. Approximately 1,500 participants identified as City residents (37%) and about 400 were residents of Downtown Northville (10%). The largest response group was Northville Township with 1,563 responses (39%). The “other” category included residents of nearby communities, people in the Northville school district and nearby businesses. Of the 4,000 respondents, 52% identified as frequenting the downtown weekly. In terms of visiting the downtown during Covid, 37% said their visits increased, 30% decreased and 33% stayed the same.

Additionally, there were 137 business owners that self-identified as the following: 23 restaurants, 56 service providers, 30 retailers and 28 office sectors. There were 67 responses from Downtown property owners. Of the survey respondents, 80% were in favor of continuing the social district and 53% wanted to expand the social district. Also, 56% of participants were in favor of continuing street closures and of those respondents, 84% believed that if street closures were maintained, they would be in favor of keeping the outdoor dining structures.

A member of the audience asked if survey questions were weighted. Turnbull said this will be recorded as a public comment that can be answered but the meeting is not

designed to be a Q & A session. Blair said the data is strictly raw numbers pulled from the survey and was not weighted in any way.

Blair said that overall, 52% of City of Northville respondents are from Wayne County and 48% are from Oakland County. Downtown property owners accounted for 61 responses, with 31% being outside the main areas, 30% on E. Main St., 16% on W. Main St., 18% on N. Center St., and 5% on S. Center St.

Regarding the question on whether street closures should continue, 74% are in favor of streets remaining closed with 56% responding yes on both streets, 17% only want Main St. closed, 1% would like only Center St. closed and 26% want to reopen the streets. The question on when streets should be closed, which was only asked to respondents that wanted to maintain street closures, 60% said continuously until further action is taken by City Council and approximately 40% wanted to see seasonal closures. Of the respondents that wanted the streets reopened, 85% wanted streets reopened immediately and 15% wanted to reopen when the current agreement expires on November 7, 2022.

Jaafar asked for clarification on the survey question, “how respondents get downtown”, because the response rate was over 100%. Blair said people were able to select more than one option on that question which created the over 100% response rate. McKindles asked if the survey could be broken down by business owners for closures in the four areas, East and West Main and North and South Center Streets. Blair said the business owner responses are sorted with 67% of the 57 business owners on E. Main Street responding yes, 60% of the 15 owners from W. Main Street responding yes, 86% of the 35 business owners on N. Center replied yes, 60% of the 10 S. Center business owners replied yes and 56% of the 16 respondents in the “Other” category replied yes.

Prescott asked if there was a further breakdown on type of business. Blair said of the 23 restaurant owners that replied, 78% are in favor of street closures. Of the 30 retailers that replied, 70% are in favor of continuing closures. Of the 55 service industry responses, 62% are in favor of continuing closures and of the 27 offices that replied, 78% are in favor of closures. McKindles asked if there was a similar breakdown for residential. Blair shared an added slide that outlined that over 70% of City residents, Downtown residents, Business (Manager, Employee, Owners), Township and Other are in were in favor of the street closures. The “Other” category includes people in the Northville School District, worship in Northville, shop and dine in Northville and so on. Responses can be broken down further if needed.

Riley opened the floor to audience comments and noted that comments are limited to 3 minutes to allow as many people to participate as possible. Turnbull reminded attendees that by speaking, their comments will be rebroadcasted.

#### **AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

Dean Parasakis, 278 Cherry Lane – Carlisle Wortman did an excellent job breaking down the survey and categorizing the results. The Township and City’s combined population is about 35,000 – 40,000 people. Unfortunately, this means the DDA/City

only surveyed about 15% of the Northville community. Many thanks for the report and to all that are making the decision going forward. Perhaps the DDA/City needs to find another way to reach a greater number of citizens.

Dennis Engerer, 999 Coldspring – Engerer works and lives downtown. Closing the downtown served its purpose at one time and helped, but now it is time to reopen. Restaurants are doing well and downtown looks beautiful. Engerer loves when people come downtown and is proud to live in this community. The rerouted traffic has caused congestion through residential areas and is a real problem. The town is doing well now and it looks unsightly with roadblocks. The road closures were a great initiative during the pandemic but is now unattractive and not used. Restaurant customers are able to sit inside again and its time to get back to normal.

Sara Prescott, 441 Depot Circle – Prescott stated she is not here to speak on behalf of anyone else but herself. Businesses and property owners rely on the DDA and Council to make the right decision. Prescott is concerned for the livelihood and vibrancy long term. Prescott hopes the decision City Council makes will be in the context of what it would look like to be failing as a city and what would indicate a problem, such as losing foot traffic and vibrancy downtown. One of the most visible things Prescott misses is the parades going through downtown. The thought of the restaurant/retail structures out permanently and never seeing a parade on Main Street is really sad. Are these structures fully being used and it at what cost to the community? If it was really packed all the time, Prescott would support the structures. If they are not being used, how does the DDA assess what people say they are going to do and what is actually done?

Jim Neild, 18324 Arselot – Neild has been a resident for 51 years. Neild thinks the survey is totally missing something. It never surveyed returning to 2018/2019 when outdoor dining platforms were used by the restaurants and the streets were opened. Neild thinks the DDA/City should return to outdoor platform dining. Keep the streets open and offer the platforms again. It was a success and the DDA/City had a lot of compliments. Everybody is concerned about traffic when the Downs project starts. To have both streets closed would create traffic congestion. Neild is not sure anyone in this room has had five meals outdoors this year, outdoor dining is very seasonal.

Steven Penn, Secretary/Treasurer at the Masonic, 106 E. Main – The Masons started opening more the past few months because the covid restrictions have been lifted. The Masons have a lot of older members that can't walk very far. It would be good to reopen the streets so members could easily access the building. Penn has been downtown several times over the past few months and it is dead during the week. Penn thinks it would help the Masons and help Genitti's too.

Paul Sklut, 512 Dunlap – Sklut is astounded on what he's hearing tonight given what was shown on the slides. It doesn't seem like businesses are upset about the streets being closed. Sklut likes it and feels safer having dinner outside with the streets closed. It feels European but agree it could look a little nicer if it becomes permanent.

Susan Haifleigh, 308 S. Wing St. - Haifleigh filled out the survey. Haifleigh was one of the early supporters of street closures, especially as it affects residents directly just

south of the post office. Haifleigh was a clear no for continuing closures. First, Haifleigh thinks it's time to look at future solutions for Northville, and agrees with a couple people that already spoke. The 'respondents' category is problematic; the DDA not getting a lot of respondents in the City. The DDA aren't city planners and street closures do not typically work. It's easy to love the beauty of what it looks like now, but Haifleigh doesn't think it's a solution for the future of Northville. Haifleigh is concerned about the Downs and Foundry Flask. The City is going to have closures on Cady and North/South Center and will take place for 5-6 years. If the DDA continues closures, there will be problems in the community. Haifleigh wants to thank the DDA for their work, but caution them to stay open minded with the survey and what is right for the community.

Michelle Pratt, 19015 Denali Circle – Pratt hears some businesses have a hard time with commuting and getting to work. Perhaps keeping one side of the street closed where there is live music would be a solution. It's a lot safer knowing we can bring our families downtown without worrying about traffic.

Janine Bauchat, 220 Hill St. – Bauchat works in Northville and is downtown every day and also raised her children in Northville. Bauchat sees young families enjoying downtown taking full advantage of the street closures daily. The survey is not meant to have everyone in the community answer. It should show a portion of the community and information can be extrapolated from that. The survey has been well thought out and executed. Bauchat's experience is it has been a really positive thing for business. Bauchat appreciates the work the DDA has done to make it successful. Bauchat also appreciates the support of the social district and City.

Aleya Pieniadz, 1072 Horton – Pieniadz and her family moved here a year ago. One reason the family moved here was walkability. Pieniadz walks into downtown with her young kids 2-3 times a week, even more in summer. Even in January, Pieniadz comes downtown 2-3 times per week. Pieniadz has eaten downtown at least once a week since January. Pieniadz has friends that come from Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Northville Township, and they all walk in together from her home. It's a safe walk and when the group gets downtown, they breathe a sigh of relief because they don't have to be on top of everyone all the time. Right now, Pieniadz's kids are too young to eat inside even without Covid. The family really enjoys having the option to dine outdoors. Pieniadz thinks the DDA should continue to keep the streets closed.

Lauren Johnson, 47234 Dunson Rd. – Johnson's family and extended family all have homes in the City of Northville. Johnson's son and wife also have a business in Northville. They have all enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere in the downtown. The Johnson's really love the walkability of downtown. It's a calmer atmosphere. It's quieter, calmer and nicer without traffic and exhaust fumes. Johnson noticed people downtown feel more comfortable.

John Watkins, 326 Debra Ln. – First, Watkins is concerned with the results of the survey. To do a test, Watkins was able to take the survey twice. As far as results, he questions them. Also, the City already has a Town Square, it's been there for years, concerts are there, events are there, his family has gone several times. A large reason the Watkins family moved here is the quaint downtown/small town America feel. Now it

feels more like Europe. They don't want to live in Europe, they want to live in America. Watkins has parents that are in their mid-70's and are not too tech savvy. A lot of that population has been skipped because the survey was only online. Perhaps to get more citizens involved the surveys should have been mailed or delivered door-to-door. Maybe it should be a ballot issue, Watkins thinks it is that important. As others said, it feels like a ghost town during the week and the weekend is like a carnival atmosphere. As others mentioned, how will this affect traffic flow when the Downs project begins.

Blair said in response to the duplicate survey taking that some people have multiple people in a household. As a control, Carlisle Wortman looked for surveys that were taken more than 5 times on the same IP Address. It happened a total of 7 times, representing 1.8% of the total number of surveys handed out. Those surveys were kept in the since many places have multiple residents living at one IP address. Carlisle Wortman and DDA did not want to disenfranchise anyone that uses public internet or has varied replies from the same household. Of 75 responses from 7 IP Addresses, there was one address that answered 24 times and one 15 times. They overall reflected the same percentages as the overall percentages. IP Addresses are linked to a specific computer – if users are in the same house on different devices, they are different IP address but if multiple respondents use the same computer, it links to the same IP address. Ward said that Carlisle Wortman also filtered for common phrases. Blair said of the 75 responses, no more than 50% had answers in common, they were all unique.

Nancy Kerry, 661 E. Main – Kerry liked the streets closed in summer months but in the winter months the streets were empty. They weren't plowed a lot of the time. Once the construction starts on the Downs, the City is going to need the streets open to accommodate traffic downtown.

Kathy Spillane, 487 W. Cady – Spillane agrees with Nancy Kerry and what she said about construction with the Downs project. It would increase northbound traffic on Wing Street. River Street would have to take some traffic too. Spillane knows navigating Wing St. takes a lot of patience with all the stop signs. By the time frustrated drivers get past that, they ignore pedestrians and drive recklessly. Spillane is concerned about safety. Spillane generally does not support the street closures.

Paul Gabriel, Owner of Browndog – Gabriel knows a big issue has been the dining structures not being used all winter. As a business owner they did not know if they were allowed to completely close the structures and if people were going to want to sit outside or inside. There were issues on how to heat the structures. Browndog had challenges and weren't able to effectively keep people warm and didn't properly use them. If Gabriel/Browndog knew the streets were going to be closed long term, they would be able to justify an investment into structures and outdoor dining.

Riley noted the restaurants cannot use propane with structures having 4 sides.

Mark Pastula, 227 N. Rogers – Pastula is not going to speak on behalf of the entire Historic District Commission but the increase in traffic on High Street has been unwarranted. The folks that have purchased homes did not buy it with anticipation that

Center would be closed. Pastula gets a general impression of folks in and around his neighborhood, that Center should be reopened and Main Street as well.

John Roby, 511 W. Dunlap – Roby believes the DDA/City should come to something stable in the downtown that everyone can do well. Main Street seems to work better and Roby can visualize traffic solutions that could work. Center is harder with trucks and traffic. Please consider carefully, if you choose to open Center and/or Main, keep the neighborhood speed, consider proper use of One-Way streets to integrate it well with Mary Alexander Court and Hutton. Roby would make sure Center does not return to a commuter clogged spot two times a day. There are better commuter options in the works. Roby asks for a fully thoughtful and balanced solution for whatever the DDA/City chooses to open. Use traffic engineering expertise to keep speeds down.

Mishelle Lussier, 548 W. Dunlap, also owner at 126 E. Main, and business owner at 102 E. Main – Lussier appreciates the survey. John Roby was dead on, whatever the DDA/City does, do it right this time. This is Lussier's 3<sup>rd</sup> time trying outdoor seating. Lussier feels leaving Main St. closed has made Northville more of a destination. People feel safe and want to come down. Lussier is not sure she agrees to go back to platform dining. Getting out to the platforms to feed people was difficult. And her business gets less people seated with platforms. If the DDA/City stays consistent and allows the overhangs now, Lussier agrees there should be a better job with how things look and is willing to help in any way she can with that. Lussier thinks if the DDA/City goes back to sporadic closings, she found that it got more complaints from people in town and customers because of the readjustment of traffic patterns, people didn't know when it would be closed. Lussier disagrees with the statement that town was dead in January. Anyone in town can agree, it is always dead in January. Comparing it with prior years her January numbers were the same as when streets were open.

Andrew Krenz, 541 Linden Ct. – Krenz thanked everyone all for their comments. Krenz is curious when a decision is made, will the DDA consider additional data. Will the DDA bring in financial numbers from businesses downtown? Krenz has heard that some businesses have done quite well with closures and some have not. It would be helpful to have more metrics on whether the closures have been successful.

Barbara Morowski-Brown said she will be looking for a further breakdown of the survey data to understand the types of respondents and connections in the City, which includes distribution of responses to help with decision making.

Riley said that one purpose of the DDA is to attract business to downtown and retain business as well. In the last two years, only one business was lost on Main St. – a juice shop that was connected to the Marquis. The DDA has done everything needed to help businesses survive. Next step is a DDA board meeting at 8:00 am on Tuesday May 17, 2022. It is open to the public and there will be more time for comments.

Ward said the agenda is on the City and DDA website. The DDA website has a pop up with the survey documentation results for anyone interested.

**Motion by Turnbull, seconded by Boyd to adjourn the DDA Board meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Meeting adjourned at 8:19 pm.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Jessica Howlin, Marketing & Administrative Assistant  
Northville DDA