

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Meeting of the DDA Board of Directors
May 17, 2022

The May meeting of the DDA Board was called to order at 8:03 am.

ROLL CALL

Present: *Mayor Brian Turnbull, DJ Boyd, Margene Buckhave, Mike Jaafar, Ryan McKindles, Greg Presley, Greg Richards, Shawn Riley, Mary Starring*

Absent: *Aaron Cozart, Jim Long*

Also Present: *Lori Ward/DDA Executive Director, Jessica Howlin/DDA Marketing & Administrative Assistant, Dave Gutman/Resident, Fred Sheill/Resident, Marilyn Price/City Council, Barbara Morowski-Browne/City Council, Nancy Darga/Resident, Paul Gabriel, Brian Scherle. Greg Hannewald/Northville Police Department, Alan Maciag/Northville Police Department, Andrew Krenz/City Council, Jim Nield/Resident, Heather/Resident, John Carter, City Council*

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

Motion by Presley, seconded by Turnbull, to approve the agenda and consent agenda. Motion carries.

DOWNTOWN STREET CLOSURE DISCUSSION

Ward said the survey results are included in the packet. The survey was issued on April 11 and open for three weeks, ending on May 2. The DDA received 4,053 responses from the survey. Of the respondents, 37% were City residents, 10% downtown residents, 39% Northville Township residents and a small amount of business owners, property owners, and adjacent communities. The respondents were split approximately in half between Wayne and Oakland County residents. Half of the business owners that were surveyed were of the service industry category, which was followed by the retail sector. Majority of respondents visited downtown daily or weekly, and likely felt strongly about the survey. The DDA learned that in the category of whether visits increased, decreased or stayed the same during Covid, the results were evenly split between the categories. Of the streets remaining closed, 56% voted to continue street closures on both streets. 17% of the respondents would like to see only Main St. closed and 1% replied in favor of only keeping Center St. closed. Of the respondents that voted to keep streets closed, 60% responded to continuously keep them closed until action is

taken by City Council, with 23% voting to seasonally continue the closures. The percentage that responded to reopen the streets overwhelmingly replied that the streets should reopen immediately. 53% of respondents are also in favor of expanding the social district to include restaurants such as The Garage and Tiramisu.

Ward said that there is a matrix included in the board packet, which will assist with a discussion on the survey results.

Riley said he reached out to each board member after the joint Town Hall meeting and was able to speak with each member except for Cozart. There were about 18 people that spoke at the Town Hall and the feedback offered a roughly 50/50 split on residents in favor of reopening or continuing the street closures. Riley said speaking on behalf of himself, the DDA focus needs to be on who is being affected the most regarding the street closure decisions. As it was mentioned at the Town Hall, the DDA needs to have clear guidelines on what businesses are able to do with the closed areas and how to heat outdoor structures. Riley added that when he spoke with Jim Long, Long said if the outdoor areas can be used and there is activity, there is no reason not to continue the closures.

Boyd said looking at the results, business owners fall in line with the general survey with a significant majority preferring some type of closure and social district. The survey shows property owner responses flipped from this, with only 26% voting to continue some type of closures. Riley said this could be due to property owners not being local and possibly not seeing a benefit of the street closures. McKindles added that there don't seem to be many anomalies and the segments track similar ratios.

Presley said the DDA needs to consider residents and business owners, and the health of the downtown both short- and long-term. There are construction impacts to consider, in particular on Cady St. Surrounding neighborhoods have already been impacted by the added traffic, and will be asking to handle more. Presley said he errs on the side of reopening Center St., and asked if the DDA has spoken with businesses that currently use the streets, like Dancing Eye Gallery, to find different solutions. Presley said he appreciates the many people that enjoy bringing their families downtown and if the DDA keeps Main St. closed through November, it will give some time to plan next steps and still offer a space for people to get together. Presley would like to survey businesses on Main St. and do a deeper dive to see impacts of street closures. Presley said long-term closures create infrastructure and logistic issues but a seasonal closure would avoid some of this. On the social district expansion, Presley would like to see it happen.

Boyd said he also likes the idea of expanding the social district. Boyd noted that the social district does have boundaries, prohibiting bringing alcohol inside retail businesses. Boyd also favors seasonal closures and is sensitive to reopening Center St. as it is a main throughfare. The survey information was good and valuable. Boyd enjoyed the feedback from families that appreciated the freedom to enjoy downtown in a relaxed way. A seasonal closing would allow for that but also prevent the lonely empty building feeling in winter, and means there isn't a heating problem to solve.

Starring said after spending a lot of time downtown, it is obvious that people really have a good time and she likes the whole atmosphere. Starring added that traffic is horrendous in the neighborhoods with Center St. being closed. Starring would seasonally close Main St. and permanently open Center St.

McKindles said the survey results were surprising but respects the responses. McKindles agrees with Boyd and Starring, and is in favor of opening Center St. seasonally but keep it closed at least through this season. Like Boyd, McKindles said the DDA should consider seasonal closings for both. Once a decision is made, the DDA should look at options how to make it look permanent like adding bollards. McKindles would close Main St. permanently and Center St. seasonally.

Turnbull noted the social district is not related to the street closures and can continue whether the closures remain or not. Turnbull said like all, he is downtown almost every night and meets with 3-4 citizens daily. Turnbull said he believes Main St. should remain closed seasonally from May through October and open Center St. permanently.

Richards said the issue of dining structures needs to be addressed by the City if the closures are seasonal. The structures were not designed to be taken up and down constantly. Richards said closures have definitely helped restaurants but the closures also helped make the downtown more appealing overall to anyone that came downtown. The intersection at Center and Cady needs to have a more permanent stop light and the stop signs have helped with traffic flow down there. Richards said he is in favor of including as many restaurants as possible in the social district.

Presley asked Richards if there was a way to efficiently assemble and disassemble the structures seasonally. Richards said when they initially talked with the Building Department, it is not possible to drill into the streets due to water getting into the road and creating a freeze/thaw that can crack the concrete. Richards added that the company they purchased the structures from also installed them, so Browndog would have to figure out logistics of getting them up and down. Boyd said if the DDA does a permanent closure, the Historic District Commission would be involved in the structure design. Ward added that the DDA needs to look at distribution of land going forward if the closures continue.

Buckhave said she would love to see the streets stay closed permanently and seasonally as a second choice. It does open a Pandora's box for items that need to get done and it would be helpful to hire advisors on this step. Buckhave added that the DDA needs to work to get more retail in the downtown and businesses need to help keep the downtown vibrant.

Jaafar said there have been a lot of great points made during the discussion. Jaafar was originally against the street closures and his family car wash business was affected at the beginning, but thanks to the DDA and his daughter, with social media they were able to promote how to get to his business around the detours. Jaafar said he wants Center St. opened now. With Center St. being closed, it is a hazard in many ways. Jaafar added that he would agree with seasonal closures and is also in favor of seeing the social district expanded

to include restaurants like Lava Grille and Sports Den. In terms of safety, it is number one priority and the DDA needs to be proactive, not reactive.

Riley said at the beginning he was 100% in favor of shutting down Main St. forever, it was designed as an emergency stop to save business and it worked. Now, it seems like it should be a seasonal closure.

Maciag said a lot of concerns expressed are valid. When considering traffic detoured off Center St. onto the side streets, the police department has seen an increase in traffic complaints including speed and stop sign complaints. When people are commuting to work, instead of hitting one stop light on Center, people are having to navigate several stop signs. Captain Hannewald added that not only the immediate detour streets are feeling the traffic, but people have now adapted to the closures which has created traffic increases further into neighborhoods.

Audience member, works with many downtown businesses: I know a lot of people are in favor of expanding the social district. By expanding the area, we are bringing a whole new set of customers to the area. The few restaurants that were left out want to be included and engaged in the community.

Heather, lives on Randolph: Heather stated that it took her 10 minutes to get out of her driveway. Randolph is being used as a work around. Trying to get out of her driveway during school time and trying to get to 8 Mile is like a parking lot. Businesses on Center and Main are difficult to remember because no traffic passes by any longer. With 275 under construction, people are trying to get north and south. Haggerty, Beck Rd. and Sheldon are the only options. If Center Street is opened, people will drive through and see the businesses opened. Heather would prefer to have Center St. open to traffic and Main St. being a seasonal closure. Heather suggested that the stop signs be replaced by traffic lights.

Brian Scherle, Browndog Barlor: Scherle stated that investments that restaurants and the DDA are making need time to pay for themselves. To invest the amount of money, structures, blockades, etc., are all going to take time to pay for. Businesses are happy to invest, they just need time and help from city entities to make the improvements happen. Staffing has improved dramatically which is why Browndog's Farmington location has reopened. Moving the structures is a technical challenge and it is probably not feasible to take them up and down seasonally. One thing that needs to be explored is the heating challenges, the structures were flammable and required propane to remain 5 feet away from the structures. As a business owner, Scherle wants a thriving downtown. Browndog has become synonymous with Northville. Scherle stated that this is their home and they want to do what's best. Scherle hopes that the parades can be rerouted if the streets remain closed. Scherle is definitely in favor of expanding the social district and stated that drive by traffic is not their ideal way of getting exposure and not a primary way to create business awareness.

Paul Gabriel, Browndog Barlor: Gabriel stated that they got a lot of flack for not using the structures. However, they didn't have a chance to use the structures because they couldn't keep people warm. Restaurant owners need time to build structures correctly. People were

ready to get out this year and get back to normal. They went into fall thinking they could operate outdoors the same as the prior year. That did not happen because of the fire code. The business owners didn't want to invest more without knowing what would happen going forward.

Jim Neild: Neild stated that he thought the survey was totally wrong. Neild stated that he did not think the survey included a choice to keep streets open and have restaurants outside on sidewalks on platforms. Neild also expressed that he was concerned about the Downs. How can the City say to developers that they are concerned about traffic when two main streets are closed? Neild stated that the City needs to open streets and go back to the platforms and not say "closed" or "open". These are two main streets in Northville. Europe doesn't close their main drags, Ann Arbor didn't close their main street, they close side streets. The community leaders separate from the survey are saying to open the streets. Dr. Demray, the biggest contributor of the parade, wants it open and has a proposal for safe dining with open streets.

Andrew Krenz asked about the Marquis and Exchange being closed this winter in relation to decreased foot traffic. It looked dead this winter with no foot traffic and what is different from last year. Buckhave said there is a new owner for the Marquis. There has been a lot of construction and renovations going on there and the owner is planning to do something different than the old owners, who brought in school groups. Riley said the Exchange is reopening in May. Riley added that December, January and February are always slower. Eating outside in February in Michigan is not the norm. Ward said that the construction likely had an impact, as there have been a record number of construction permits issued this year. Some projects included the Marquis, nail salon and law firm, Center St. façade project, the old Tuscan, and the Exchange. It was encouraging to see people investing during Covid, but it does impact use in the downtown.

John Carter asked if there was updated traffic data on Center St. Another thing to consider is the impact of seasonal closures for businesses, such as how will structures be stored. Additionally, how do design standards get developed and will there be a partnership with HDC. Ward added that the DDA will also need to partner with the fire department to find heating solutions. The DDA wants to be safe but also find an equitable solution.

Boyd said if the DDA creates a design standard and focuses on the development part of the DDA role, a possible solution to create consistency is the DDA purchasing the structures and create some sort of leasing program. It would help with consistency for the businesses and create a uniform approach with the DDA responsible for set up, tear down and heating. Buckhave said she would like to be part of the advisory committee. McKindles said the DDA should come up with a solution over the summer.

Presley added that the Planning Commission is working toward making Cady St. an extension of downtown, and as a consultant already said, if the connections aren't made, the downtown will have two separate shopping experiences. In addition to working on the connections, it seems that people want to have one connected downtown. If there is a permanent closure, is this good or bad for connectivity. This is an issue to consider.

Jaafar said there are big trucks rerouted on side streets with Center being closed. Darga added that with Kroger being on Center, and now with the pandemic creating an e-commerce economy, there is a large amount of truck traffic on Center. Richards said from a safety standpoint, platform dining is extremely unsafe. A lot of people don't like them due to the probability of a distracted driver crashing into the platform. Maciag added that there haven't been any platform dining accidents since he's been on the force but there was an incident on Center St. where the platform was hit, but while the restaurant was closed.

Ward said the DDA needs to consider next steps – make a decision on closures or assemble a design team, then make a decision. Boyd said there is no urgency, as City Council already authorized current use until November 1.

Motion by Presley, seconded by Jaafar, to recommend to City Council to reopen Center St. as efficiently and soon as possible, and keep Main St. closed through November 1, 2022 per the current agreement. **Roll call vote. Yes: Turnbull, Jaafar, McKindles, Presley, Riley. No: Boyd, Buckhave, Richards, Starring. Motion carries.**

Motion by McKindles, seconded by Boyd to create an advisory committee to determine next steps. **Motion carries.**

NORTHVILLE DOWNS PROJECT

Ward said outside of the street closures, the other major project right now is the development of the Downs. It was recommended that the DDA hire outside counsel regarding the project. In addition, Attachment 6.c outlines the formation of a citizen's council, which is required by state statute, if the DDA amends boundaries or changes tax increment financing. The Citizens Advisory Committee is required to be in place for a minimum of 90 days before any action is taken at a meeting. The DDA also needs to set a special meeting date to discuss the Downs project and invite Hunter Pasteur to present their funding strategy to the DDA.

Motion by Boyd, seconded by Richards, for the DDA Chair, Vice-Chair and DDA staff to authorize retention of counsel to review final DPAC document. **Presley abstains; motion carries.**

Motion by Boyd, seconded by Richards, to request City Council to establish a Citizen's Advisory Council, should the DDA need to review boundaries or amend the TIF plan. **Motion carries.**

Nancy Darga of the mobility network requested the DDA to take action on the Old Core area of the downtown, which encompasses Center/Cady St. intersection, Mary Alexander from Hutton to Center, Hutton from Cady to Main, Church from Main to Cady, and the Cady/S. Main intersection. Darga said the DDA needs to focus on a recommendation to the city on how to handle Cady St. as it intersects with Center and S. Main. With regard to Mary Alexander Ct., there are recommendations to possibly change the direction of the one-way street. These are all critical points of the downtown area. Many are concerned with traffic and the increased traffic with the Foundry Flask and Downs development. The mobility team recommendation

would improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety. Mobility also considered Center and/or Main to be closed at some points during the year. Darga said the DDA has the best handle on what decisions need to be made to improve traffic flow and pedestrian connectivity and safety. Darga said the mobility team is asking the DDA to utilize existing committees or set up a new group; mobility can join the committee to advise or assist if requested.

Jaafar said if the roads stay the way they are, the developments will create a traffic nightmare and he would like to be added to this committee. Gutman added that the mobility group strictly wants DDA partnership for the Old Core area. Presley added that right now Hutton is not a good solution and needs to be realigned with the new development. Ward asked about the recent meeting with mobility, developers and the City Planner. Darga said the mobility team asked that the Old Core area be studied and the request was declined.

Ward said the DDA might not have the skillset for road planning. Boyd added that it is an important discussion to connect Cady and Main. Gutman asked that the DDA attend the May 25 meeting with Wayne County, traffic engineers, City Manager and City Planner. Turnbull said that it is important to include Ward/DDA in the meeting on May 25. Darga requested that the DDA make a request to City Council to take action on issues from the mobility study. Darga also asked for the advisory group working on street closures to also look at mobility issues to make a recommendation.

Presley said within the DDA, the EDC might be able to consider core downtown traffic circulation that is impacted by future events. Ward said the best option would be to work with the City to look at Old Core in relation to the rest of the study, and not separate the areas.

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

Meeting adjourned at 10:39 am.

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