



Tony Fiorito, Chairman  
Merike L. Treier, Executive Director

**DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.**

**March 19, 2024**

**Zoom Video Conference**

**3:00 p.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance**

- Members:** Chairman Tony Fiorito, Ruthnie Angrand, Charlie Breuer, Joseph Bryant, Brian Donnelly, Jo Anne Gagliano, Susan Katzoff, Karyn Korteling, Ed Riley, Nicole Samolis, Ron Tascarella, Jr., Meg Tidd, Melissa Zell
- Staff:** Tom Campanie, Anthony Pham, Laurie Reed, Conor Rockhill, Heather Schroeder, Kristine Sherlock, Kevin Stanard, Vanessa Szwejbka, Merike Treier
- Guests:** Joe Driscoll, City of Syracuse  
Matt Funicello, JF Real Estate  
Josephine Galdemez, City of Syracuse  
Cory LaDuke, CBRE  
Greg Loh, City of Syracuse  
Mr. Nader Maroun, City of Syracuse  
Debbie Ruthven, Money Federal Credit Union

**I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Chairman Fiorito called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests present.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 23, 2024**

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of January 23, 2024, and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Susan Katzoff moved and Jo Anne Gagliano seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

**III. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF FEBRUARY 29, 2024**

Ron Tascarella presented the financial report as of February 29, 2024. He noted that the financial report is tracking as expected and shows a strong cash position in the Downtown Committee's projected future investment. Expenses are in line with the budget. He noted items under the Administrative expense line have been allocated to their respective programs. Revenue is on track and reflects positive changes with the special assessment from last

year. Net surplus YTD is \$80,000, or \$190,000, which includes the special assessment draws to purchase the new pickup truck and minivan approved earlier this fiscal year.

Ron Tascarella asked if there were any questions and there were none.

Chairman Fiorito asked for a motion to accept the Financial Report as of February 29, 2024 subject to audit.

Brian Donnelly moved and Meg Tidd seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

#### **IV. INTERSTATE 81: CITY OF SYRACUSE VISION PLAN**

Merike Treier provided the Board with a brief update on the previous year's progress of the project that included the dismissal of the environmental impact review lawsuit by the appellate division court that held up one of the contract elements, and will now enable the project to move forward in total. In 2022, NYSDOT was able to move forward on different elements of the project around the region. Work on the viaduct portion is expected to begin in 2026. Merike Treier sent the Board a timeline graphic of the projects from NYSDOT prior to the meeting as a reference. She noted that there have been no other changes to the design plan since the final EIS was issued. Members of NYSDOT are scheduled to attend the May Board meeting and will have more information to share at that time. This will also give the Board an opportunity to provide feedback on different considerations for business impact.

Greg Loh shared that Dover Kohl & Partners were hired by the City to design the Vision Plan to help assure that benefits are achieved equally in different neighborhoods affected by the project. The State is planning the roads and right-of-way for vehicles, and the City is planning the surrounding vision for the neighborhoods. The City of Syracuse achieved two significant federal grant wins – a Reconnecting Communities Planning Grant (\$500,000), to help develop specific plans for an east-west neighborhood connection of the 81 project; and the Reconnecting Communities Construction Grant (\$180 million), where the City is a sub-recipient with the State DOT (\$30 million to the City, \$150 million to the DOT.) The construction grant will be used for Almond Street ped/bike corridor designs, upgrades to amenities in Wilson Park, and the building of a new linear park in the East Adams new 15<sup>th</sup> ward neighborhood. The City received a HUD Thriving Communities technical assistance grant for consultants to help plan for best outcomes for housing adjacent to 81 construction project. The City is also a finalist for the Thriving Communities Transportation Technical Assistance Grant. The City is working with Strategic Development to identify any funding sources that will support more infrastructure work in areas adjacent to the project (i.e. water pipes under Burnet Avenue, which will be a significant construction road for the 81 project.)

Joe Driscoll presented Dover Kohl & Partners Community Grid Vision Plan, which outlines potential design recommendations for the community grid and surrounding neighborhoods that can stimulate economic

development. The plan summarized new opportunities such as: routes for neighborhood connections; identifying and creating walking (trail) bike/ped routes and bus rapid transit routes; increasing/adjusting existing streets; public art; historic preservation; installing new public parks; infill strategies; neighborhood commercial; community benefit agreements; investing in new parks; maintaining diversity of building types and sizes; improved access to services and strategies for aging in place; maximizing newly developed land potential with more density; incentivizing more community benefit (i.e. affordable housing) with transit-oriented development strategies; and converting Warren Street from one way to two-way beginning at Erie Boulevard.

Greg Loh noted that the Community Grid Vision Plan can be found on the City's website -

<https://www.syr.gov/Projects/Infrastructure/Community-Grid-Vision-Plan>

Joe Driscoll noted that the Board members are welcome to contact him with any questions: [jdriscoll@syr.gov](mailto:jdriscoll@syr.gov)

Joe Bryant asked what was the likelihood of these plans being incorporated into NYSDOT's plans for the adjacent streets, and is the grant funding awarded enough to make it a reality? Joe Driscoll responded that Dover Kohl will be releasing a strategic action plan that will inform the City which plans should be the highest priority, and who to partner with to make some of them happen. Greg Loh added that there is a lot of opportunity to implement the ideas in the vision plan with most of it being city/community directed. Some plans can be done quickly that DOT is on board with, while other vision plans could possibly take a decade and beyond. Micron's investment in the area could also potentially draw its employees to live downtown.

Joe Driscoll thanked the NYSDOT team and the various City and DPW Departments who are involved in helping with the progress of the project.

Merike Treier encouraged the Board to look at and comment on the Vision Plan on the City's website. The input will be taken to help build upon what the future of Downtown Syracuse will look like.

Chairman Fiorito thanked Joe Driscoll and Greg Loh for the presentation and discussion.

## **V. PROGRAM REPORTS**

Vanessa Szwejbka reported on the following Downtown Committee programs:

### **A. Dining Weeks Report**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dining Weeks that ran from March 1-14 was a success with over 45 restaurants participating. Dining Weeks received coverage in almost two dozen TV, radio and digital stories

throughout Central New York. The marketing campaign led by Laurie Reed covered many platforms such as Billboard, newspaper and social media advertising. The promotion of Dining Weeks also featured an Instagram photo contest that offered a \$100 gift card prize to a downtown restaurant to three recipients. She noted that Downtownsyracuse.com web traffic achieved a record of 223,000 visitors and website interactions topped 450,000.

#### **B. Progress Breakfast Event**

The Spring Progress Breakfast is scheduled for April 10 at the Marriott Syracuse Downtown and is close to being sold out. The program will focus on Downtown Syracuse as a dining destination and will highlight the following speakers: Michayla McCandless, Co-owner and General Manager of Inka's, Cheryl Chaif, Owner of the Hops Spot, Tallman Cocktail Club and the Whiskey Coop; and Don Cazentre, Reporter for Syracuse.com.

#### **C. Earth Day Cleanup**

Downtown Committee's annual Earth Day Cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, April 20 and registration is underway on the website.

### **VI. BOARD DISCUSSION: SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN DURING 81 CONSTRUCTION**

Merike Treier asked the Board for feedback on what the role of Downtown Committee will be during the I-81 construction, what partnerships to form, and what strategies to devise that will continue to drive people into downtown Syracuse. She prepared a preliminary list of challenges, objectives, and potential action items for the Board to consider and prioritize. TeNesha Murphy of NYSDOT will be the primary interface between the community and project contractors to communicate any road work announcements and how to access different destinations.

Nicole Samolis noticed that Downtown may not be fully impacted by the I-81 project until 2025.

Melissa Zell noted that the Downtown Committee should be prepared to be as flexible as possible as daily changes occur during construction and have contingency plans for traffic.

Meg Tidd stressed the importance of the implementation of a planned communication mechanism during construction. The Downtown Committee should also examine what it could be doing differently to keep the downtown business community engaged.

Joe Bryant commented that as the construction activity increases downtown, the Downtown Committee can play a role in providing commentary to the City as to how they should actually break down streets or create closures to keep activity downtown for businesses.

Joe Driscoll noted that NYSDOT communicates work zone traffic control plans through WAZE. NYSDOT has given the City a two-week notice of their work timeline and he will make sure that is also coordinated with DPW and National Grid.

Ruthnie Angrand stated the City will be coordinating with DOT on public information for street closures during construction.

Karyn Korteling commented that she would like information on how regular road maintenance around downtown will be coordinated with the NYSDOT. She also asked how far out of the county travelers will be alerted with alternate routes and how well it will still be perceived to go downtown. Joe Driscoll noted the City is working with a county team that will be coordinating alternate routes with all the towns and villages. Karyn Korteling also asked if there are any promotional ideas to help make downtown more attractive and bring people down, and encourage people to give it a try during high construction times.

Joe Driscoll noted that it will be a priority of the City to make sure downtown is thriving during the challenges of the construction disruptions. He asked the Board if there were any ideas to pass along to let him know and he would be happy to champion that with the City to develop. He agreed with Karyn Korteling that a promotional marketing campaign would be a good idea.

Merike Treier thanked the Board for the items they shared that will help the Downtown Committee prioritize. She noted that the Downtown Committee has also been coordinating efforts with Visit Syracuse and CenterState CEO to encourage people to come to Syracuse and Downtown Syracuse during the I-81 project construction time period.

## **VII. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN**

With no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

### **Next Meeting**

**Tuesday, May 21, 2024  
3:00 p.m.**