

**DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.**

**March 17, 2026**

**INSPYRE Innovation Hub  
235 Harrison Street, Syracuse NY 13202**

**3:00 p.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance**

- Members:** Chairman Tony Fiorito, Alberto Bianchetti, Jo Anne Gagliano, Maarten Jacobs, Susan Katzoff, Karyn Korteling, Sarah Pelligrini, Nicole Samolis, Cjala Surratt, Meg Tidd, Melissa Zell
- Staff:** Liza Bernard, Julia Fay, Becca Flint, Rachael Schaefer, Kristine Sherlock, Merike Treier, Sarah Tietje-Mietz, Joe Violette
- Guests:** Mayor Sharon Owens, City of Syracuse  
Matt Funicello, JF Real Estate  
Cory LaDuke, CBRE Upstate NY

**I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Chair Tony Fiorito welcomed board members and guests present. Fiorito and the Board congratulated newly elected City of Syracuse Mayor, Sharon Owens.

**II. DISCUSSION WITH MAYOR SHARON OWENS**

Chair Fiorito invited the Mayor to share her vision for Syracuse, with an emphasis on downtown's role in the city's future.

Mayor Owens emphasized that a thriving city depends on a thriving downtown, describing it as the "beating heart" of Syracuse's economic and cultural vitality. She highlighted active and emerging initiatives, including:

- **Downtown East development**, new housing progress, and upcoming work on the Chimes building.
- **Parking challenges**, especially in the eastern section of downtown, as well as planned shuttle expansions and temporary surface lots during garage demolition.
- **Support for the unhoused community**, including upcoming coordination with county agencies and funding concerns tied to mental-health and opioid-settlement resources.

- **Security and environmental design improvements**, including reimagining the Clinton–Dickerson area, lighting enhancements, and activation of underutilized spaces.
  - **Major infrastructure timelines**, including phases of the I-81 and street reconstructions expected to affect Clinton Square, Franklin Square, Almond Street, Harrison Street, and Adams Street.
  - A citywide push for **better marketing**, ensuring the public understands that downtown remains open throughout construction.
  - **Upcoming BRT implementation**, ADA improvements, and expanded bike/pedestrian infrastructure.
- The mayor also encouraged collaboration with businesses on identifying vacant storefronts, strengthening arts and culture initiatives, and partnering in solutions for construction-related disruptions. An extended Q&A followed, covering parking affordability, safety perceptions, festival impacts during construction, communication gaps, and the need for a business-focused mitigation strategy. The Mayor underscored her commitment to improved coordination and transparency as major projects unfold.

Maarten Jacobs asked about how public art will be playing a role in the next few years. Mayor Owens responded that she is a strong proponent of the arts (including lights and sound) as a part of the city’s vibrancy. Cjala Surratt expressed a desire for an Arts and Cultural District. Merike Treier added that it would be a good time to revisit the City Ordinance that created a Cultural District in Downtown. Susan Katzoff added it will be important to seek community partners to help fund any of these initiatives that may not be supported by the city’s budget.

Merike Treier added that the Downtown Committee Economic Development and Placemaking teams have been looking at the International Downtown Association and talking with other communities of how they have managed construction projects and how we can develop ideas to bring people down during the construction. The Downtown Committee requested funding from Assemblyman Magnarelli and Senator May’s offices for a two-year commitment to support a marketing campaign during the I-81 construction. Treier noted that alternate space for downtown festivals that will be affected by the construction are being explored, such as the Trolley Lot.

Mayor Owens noted that City staff will be attending a conference in April to learn more about what “nightlife” coordinators do.

Chair Fiorito and the Board thanked Mayor Owens for her time and participation.

### **III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 20, 2026**

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of January 20, 2026, and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Susan Kaztoff moved and Jo Anne Gagliano seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

#### **IV. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF JANUARY 31, 2026**

Merike Treier reported that overall, the Financial Statement as of January 31, 2026, is on target as expected this time of year. Treier highlighted that the Environmental Maintenance Operations line is trending slightly higher than budgeted at \$30,701, due to the need of equipment repairs this year. Special Projects is starting to incur more expenses, such as the purchase of flower baskets. Under Marketing, funds were allocated to additional advertising/marketing campaigns due to a vacant staff position. Other lines, such as Security, Economic Development and Transportation, are running at or slightly below budget.

Merike Treier asked if there were any questions on the financial report, and there were none.

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board for a motion to accept the Financial Report of January 31, 2026. Melissa Zell moved and Cjala Surratt seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

#### **V. PROGRAM REPORTS**

Sarah Tietje-Mietz and Becca Flint provided updates on Downtown Committee's signature events:

##### **A. Signature Events**

##### **i. Dining Weeks**

Dining Weeks 2026 concluded with strong participation from over 50 locations, expanded marketing efforts, and increased social interaction across platforms, i.e. the Dining Weeks page on the Downtown Committee website had almost 20,000 views and paid social ads reached over 35,000 accounts. Additional data and a restaurant survey will follow to help with any opportunities for improvement next year.

##### **ii. Spotlight Series – March 18**

The Downtown Spotlight Series (formerly Progress Breakfast Series) is scheduled for March 18 at the Marriott Syracuse Downtown, starting at 8:00 a.m. and will focus on arts, culture, and economic impact, with Mayor Sharon Owens scheduled to speak. Speakers include Michael Greene, Managing Partner of The Mizpah, Franklin Fry, Executive Director of Redhouse Arts Center, and Duyen Nguyen, Owner of Cake Bar and Tea House.

##### **iii. Earth Day Cleanup – April 25**

Preparations are underway for Spring Cleanup Day that will engage up to 250 volunteers and focus on areas such as Armory Square, Clinton Square and Downtown East as meeting points.

##### **iv. Open Up Downtown – May 16**

The Open Up Downtown event (a reimagined Downtown Living Tour) will happen on Saturday, May 16, a ticketed event featuring access to Downtown buildings and historic stops, such as the

State Tower Building, Treasury Building, and the Redhouse Arts Center. A highlight of the tour includes Bob Searing from Onondaga Historical Association, who will be in Clinton Square speaking about the history of Syracuse and the buildings. More information can be found on the Downtown Committee website starting April 1.

## **B. Economic Development**

### **i. Retail Presentation**

Liza Bernard presented the retail assessment report of Downtown Syracuse. Some of the highlights noted were:

- Over 9 million annual visitors, strong regional demographics, and growing Gen-Z residency.
- 82% retail occupancy, the highest in years, with notable business stability in Clinton Square.
- Strong weekend visitation driven by food, nightlife, and events.
- Continued growth from local business expansions and new entrants to the district.
- Opportunities within Salina Street and Downtown East due to recent vacancies and development potential.

Bernard noted that the data in this report (supported by Placer.ai) is in the early stages of becoming a retail attraction toolkit that brokers can share with potential tenants.

## **C. Downtown Vision & Strategic Action Plan**

Joe Violette announced that the RFP review committee has selected CZB, (out of 19 proposals) as lead consultant for the Downtown Vision & Strategic Action Plan. CZB specializes in planning and design, neighborhood revitalization, analysis and strategy, and group facilitation. They work nationally, and locally and are currently working with the City as a sub-consultant on their comprehensive plan, and with the county on a variety of different projects. The full team includes Progressive Urban Management Association (PUMA), Dover Kohl and Partners – providing design and illustration plans, and Prospect Hill Consultants that specializes in geospatial analysis, GIS mapping and visualization. A Project Steering Committee meeting will kick off in late April, and several public engagement sessions will be arranged late spring through early fall, with final product anticipated in late 2026.

Chair Fiorito thanked Joe Violette, and the members of the Board who served on the RFP review committee.

**VI. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN**

With no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:37 p.m.

**Next Meeting**

**Tuesday, May 19, 2026  
3:00 p.m.**