



Tony Fiorito, Chairman
Merike L. Treier, Executive Director

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.

May 19, 2026

**SUNY Oswego at Syracuse-129 Lecture Hall
2 Clinton Square, Syracuse, NY 13202**

3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

- Members:** Chairman Tony Fiorito, Alberto Bianchetti, Charlie Breuer, Maarten Jacobs, Susan Katzoff, Ed Riley, 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:** Tom Bardenett – SMTC
Bren Daiss – Centro
Matt Funicello – JF Real Estate
David Gross – Syracuse Parking Services
Stephanie Jones – Best Western Hotel
Cory LaDuke – CBRE Upstate NY
Connor Sullivan – Zamir Equities

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Tony Fiorito called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and welcomed Board members and guests present.

II. PRESENTATION: DOWNTOWN MOBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION

A. Better Bus: Onondaga and BRT

Bren Daiss, Vice President of Public Affairs and Planning at Centro, provided an overview of its long-term Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) initiative that is targeted for launch in 2028. The system will feature high-frequency service (every 12-15 minutes) along key corridors with higher ridership demand. Planned routes will connect major destinations such as Eastwood, OCC, DestiNY USA, and University Hill, with a corridor along South Salina Street.

Significant upgrades associated with the BRT include:

- Transit signal priority to improve travel speed
- Consolidated stops spaced farther apart
- Enhanced stations with shelters, solar lighting, and real-time arrival information
- Improved pedestrian infrastructure near stops

The initiative is designed to create faster, more reliable transit while improving overall rider experience.

Daiss then described the system-wide redesign effort scheduled for launch in summer 2027. This initiative seeks to modernize Centro's service network by aligning routes with current travel patterns and future growth trends. The redesign is based on extensive public input, including engagement with over 2,000 residents.

Key goals include:

- More frequent and extended service hours (including nights and weekends)
- Simplified routing to reduce confusion
- More direct connections, reducing reliance on the central hub
- Improved service to suburban employment centers
- Adjustments based on demographic and economic shifts

The redesign reflects changing travel needs, such as reverse commuting patterns and remote work trends.

Centro also introduced its "Move" service, an on-demand microtransit system already operating successfully in Rome. This service uses smaller vehicles and app-based or phone-based scheduling to provide flexible rides within designated zones.

Highlights include:

- Service available within 15 minutes or scheduled up to two weeks ahead
- Expanded coverage in low-density areas
- Integration with fixed-route transit for easier connections
- Base fare of \$1 when connecting to main routes; \$4 for standalone trips

The program aims to provide cost-effective service in areas where traditional fixed routes are underutilized.

Board members and attendees raised several questions including:

- Integration with airport and hotel areas
- Accessibility and affordability for low-income riders
- Real-time communication of service disruptions
- Incentives for business participation through transit pass programs

Centro emphasized its commitment to continued public engagement, communication, and flexibility as plans evolve.

B. Regional Transportation Studies and Downtown Syracuse

Tom Bardenett of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) presented an overview of regional transportation planning, including long-term and downtown-focused studies:

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2050)

Bardenett discussed the long-range transportation plan, highlighting:

- Stable regional population with suburban growth and urban decline
- Projected increases of 43,000 households and 71,000 jobs
- Downtown and University Hill as the region's largest employment center

The plan emphasizes equitable access to transportation and the importance of improving connectivity for all residents, especially those without access to personal vehicles.

Key Planning Themes

- Increasing transit frequency to improve usability
- Addressing pedestrian infrastructure gaps
- Supporting alternative transportation modes (walking, biking, transit)
- Encouraging denser development to support transit viability

Downtown-Specific Studies

Bardenett reviewed several studies completed in recent years:

- Armory Square Mobility Study (pedestrian improvements and traffic calming)
- Residential Parking Permit Study (not feasible for downtown due to state restrictions)
- Downtown Parking Wayfinding Study (focused on signage and visitor navigation)

Center City Parking and Mobility Study

A new study is underway with two phases:

- **Short-term:** Address parking disruption from I-81 construction and garage closures
- **Long-term:** Develop strategies to improve mobility and connectivity among downtown, the lakefront, and University Hill.

The short-term effort includes identifying underutilized parking and improving access through better wayfinding, shuttle options, and enhanced pedestrian connections.

Merike Treier thanked SMTC and Centro for their presentations that captured all the different work going into mobility planning activities in the community. This information will also aid the Downtown Committee with the comprehensive vision planning work for downtown.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 17, 2026

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of March 17, 2026, and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Melissa Zell moved and Susan Katzoff seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF APRIL 30, 2026

Ed Riley presented the Downtown Committee Financial Report as of April 30, 2026, and noted that there were only minor adjustments in revenue and expenses; programs are performing largely as expected. Dining Weeks is showing a slight decrease in anticipated revenue due to one less sponsor being secured. Annual Meeting income and the City 50-50 Program will be reflected in the June report once received.

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board for a motion to accept the Financial Report of April 30, 2026. Melissa Zell moved and Alberto Bianchetti seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

V. AUTHORIZATION TO:

A. Execute Annual Contract

Merike Treier asked the Board for a motion to authorize the executive director to enter into the annual contract with the City of Syracuse for the Downtown Special Assessment dollars, providing the only changes will be the date and the Downtown Special Assessment amount. Ed Riley moved and Cjala Surratt seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried.

B. Purchase New Tractor

Merike Treier asked the Board for approval to purchase a new Environmental Maintenance tractor (\$33,000) using Reserve funds. Susan Katzoff moved, and Melissa Zell seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

VI. PROGRAM REPORTS

A. Downtown Vision Plan

Joe Violette provided a brief update on the Downtown Vision and Strategic Action Plan that is progressing on schedule. He noted that consultants (CZB) have completed initial steering committee and site visit meetings in April. They have begun planning for the stakeholder engagement, including focus groups, and

public outreach. Additional engagement opportunities, including an Open House, will be scheduled for June.

B. Signature Events

Sarah Tietje-Mietz presented the following signature events:

i. Open Up Downtown – May 16

A new event that opened up spaces typically not accessible to the public, such as the iconic National Grid Building, in Downtown for the public to explore. The event attracted over 900 attendees, including visitors outside the region, and Canada. The event also created significant positive spillover for local businesses as Cjala Surratt noted her business saw a lot of traffic. The event exceeded expectations and will likely be repeated next year.

ii. Annual Meeting – June 3

The Downtown Committee Annual Meeting is scheduled for June 3 at the Oncenter Ballroom. Tietje-Mietz thanked Community Bank who is this year's presenting sponsor, and National Grid who is the Awards of Excellence Sponsor.

iii. Downtown Farmers Market – June 9

The Downtown Farmers Market begins Tuesday, June 9 and runs through October 13, from 8:00am – 2:00pm in Clinton Square, presented by Community Bank.

iv. Arts & Crafts Festival -July 24

The 55th Annual Arts & Crafts Festival, presented by M&T Bank, is scheduled for July 24-26 in and around Cathedral Square.

Tietje-Mietz also announced that the Downtown Business Guide has been updated and redesigned with a fresh new look. She thanked Julia Fay for the hard work.

In answer to a question about World Cup viewing events, Tietje-Mietz noted that Visit Syracuse secured a grant from New York State to work on coordinated events around the World Cup and have reached out to the Downtown Committee to coordinate outreach efforts with what is going on downtown regarding any viewing parties.

C. Placemaking Program

Rachael Schaefer, the Downtown Committee's newly appointed Placemaking Programs Manager, presented an overview of programming that she coordinates:

- 300+ Hanging Flower Baskets, which will be installed throughout downtown next week.
- Holiday decorations – 90 wreaths are installed during the holiday season, and the addition of “Candy Cane Lane” in Hanover Square in 2025. Big ornaments are hung in Amory Square Park.
- Recent Streetscape improvements include flexi-paved tree pits, bike racks, trash bins, cigarette urns, and pedestrian crosswalk signs.
- Street Tree Lights Program – has been recently expanded to East Jefferson Street, supported by New York Main Street Grant dollars. There are now a total of 118 trees that are wrapped in lights!
- Arts & Culture activation: Utility Box Program – four new utility boxes have been added for a total of 10 in downtown. The Downtown Committee hopes to continue this program and engage new artists and the community.
- Syracuse Cultural Festival Fund, a \$150,000 grant that the Downtown Syracuse Foundation administers on behalf of the City of Syracuse to help support local cultural festivals.
- Bank Alley improvements, including existing café lights and new banners recently added in the southern section of the alley.

Schaefer noted she recently attended the Place Matters Conference in Madison, WI to see what other placemakers in downtown are doing around the U.S. and Canada, to learn how we can replicate that in Downtown Syracuse. In addition to heading up grants and project management, Schaefer is also working on implementing recommendations from the parking and wayfinding study provided by SMTC by creating new signage and wayfinding to direct visitors to public parking options.

Schaefer asked the Board and guests to contact her if they have any questions regarding placemaking or want to share any inspirations or ideas as they walk around downtown.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

With no other business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:31 p.m.

Next Meeting

**September 15, 2026
3:00 p.m.**