

ATTENDANCE:

Frank O'Connor, III (Zoom)
Elizabeth Young Jojo (Zoom)
Ken Countermine
Lisa Reddy Farrell
Riley Ackley (Zoom)
Leola Edelin (Zoom)
Lena Hart
Leyla Kiosse (Zoom)
Benn MacDonald (Zoom)
Angelo Maddox
Neil McGreevy
Lucas Rogers
Hon. Darius Shahinfar
Josh Wainman (Zoom)
Frank Zeoli

ABSENT:

Mohamed Hemmid

STAFF PRESENT:

Georgette Steffens
Kate Medhus
Rebecca Hughes (Zoom)
Don Wilson
Jevan Dollard
Molly Eadie

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

Lori Kochanski, Neighborhood
Specialist

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Georgette Steffens
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Frank O'Connor, III
PRESIDENT

Elizabeth Young Jojo
VICE-PRESIDENT

Ken Countermine
TREASURER

Lisa Reddy Farrell
SECRETARY

The meeting was called to order by Board President Frank O'Connor at 4:03 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. O'Connor calls for a motion to approve the March 2023 meeting Minutes | Mr. Countermine motions | Mr. Shahinfar seconds | All approve.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Department of Neighborhood Services

Mr O'Connor noted that a few months ago the City of Albany launched their new Neighborhood and Community Services Department. The new department includes five neighborhood specialist positions who are assigned specific areas of the city to help residents and business owners resolve quality of life issues within those zones. The specialist position is modeled after the police department's neighborhood engagement. Mr. O'Connor introduced Lori Kochanski, the Neighborhood Specialist assigned to Downtown and asked the staff and Board members to introduce themselves.

Ms. Steffens added that Ms. Kochanski will be serving on the BID's Clean and Safe Committee.

Ms. Kochanski introduced herself and noted that:

- She has lived in Albany for 7 years and recently purchased the apartment she lives in.
- She was looking for a career change, saw the opening at this new department and felt a positive energy around what the work is about. She's finding her work to be fun with a lot of layers to develop something new in an old system.
- The job began in February and the first two months were full of robust training where she was introduced to the city departments.
- She was assigned to the area about 5 weeks ago and that includes Arbor Hill, North Albany, the Empire State Plaza, the Warehouse District, Sheridan Hollow, and Downtown, and she's covering Pine Hills and Dunes, and Ten Broek Triangle for now.
- Equity is key and is the filter through which they do their work. Much of the job consists of traveling around and building relationships.
- The 5 specialists that were hired don't fit a specific pattern. They help to connect people with a variety of resources. The City already has so much in place to serve people, but there's a lot of misinformation. The Neighborhood Specialists are making sure that people know these things exist and that they understand the information that is available. They can collect data which will help to figure out different solutions.
- Most of the Issues they deal with are all around quality of life, (trash, housing, questions about trees, environmental issues, etc.).

- The community has questions about how we can be a city after the pandemic, which the Neighborhood Specialists hope to be able to help answer.

A discussion was held regarding Ms. Kochanski's goal in her new position, and she answered that she wants to find a systematic way to measure the work that the Specialists are doing. The hope is to find accountable, measurable ways that they can be in neighborhoods and try to come up with linear ways to track the work they're doing.

There was also a discussion about how Ms. Kochanski plans to restore the neighborly aspect in the neighborhoods that she's been assigned to. Her response was that for now, her plan is to show up and to listen. She will partner with the institutions that are already there, such as the libraries, to be able to meet the residents and be available to them. Building the community members' trust is important to her.

A brief discussion was held regarding what services have been rolled into the Neighborhood and Community Services Department. Ms. Kochanski confirmed that it includes answering phones as the first line of contact, See, Click, Fix, and to be a source and partner for the city's Neighborhood Stabilization Coordinator.

Ms. Kochanski distributed her business card and flyers to the Board.

Board Elections

Mr. O'Connor stated that tomorrow we will announce and open the Board of Directors election for 2023. No nominations were received for the two open property owner positions, but petitions to be placed on the ballot are being accepted through May 4th. Mr. Maddox and Mr. Ackley are both on the ballot for re-election.

Ms. Steffens added that we are not obligated to fill open seats, but that the Board President can appoint people with approval from the Board if someone comes forward and wants to join after the fact.

Jim DiNapoli Award

Mr. O'Connor noted that Staff came up with a comprehensive list of candidates for the Jim DiNapoli award. The Executive Committee discussed it and felt that elected officials are doing their job and don't need to be included on the list for this award. We want to idolize and incentivize private citizens. The top three candidates were Carm Basile, Mark Eagan and Ruth Mahoney. A survey went out to the Board and Carm Basile received the most votes by a significant margin.

Ms. Steffens added that the Governance Committee didn't meet since there were no nominations so the Board can now vote to approve the award recipient.

Mr. O'Connor calls for a motion to approve Carm Basile as the recipient of the 2023 Jim DiNapoli award | Ms. Farrell motions | Mr. Zeoli seconds | All Approve.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Marketing

Ms. Hughes gave an update from the Marketing Committee:

- Overit presented three concepts to the Board at the last meeting. Board members later voted on their favorite concept and votes were evenly split.
- Overit met with the Marketing Committee to discuss the concepts again and the committee decided on "Albany to the core" rather than "Albany is the core".
- Overit is working on visuals that they will first present to the Marketing Committee and then they will present those to the Board at the next meeting as well.

A brief discussion was held regarding whether the line would be “Albany is the core” or “Downtown Albany is the core” and it was pointed out that Albany already has a slogan so Downtown must be specified. Ms. Hughes assured the Board that it would say Downtown and not just Albany.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Small Business Vitality Grants

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- Over 250 individuals in total attended the six Small Business Resource Open Houses.
- 112 businesses/individuals completed the intake form for the grant program.
- To date:
 - 22 businesses have been approved for funding.
 - 6 individuals had entrepreneurial training tuition paid through the grant program.
 - 12 individuals were sent to the state for possible participation in back utilities debt assistance.
 - 1 person received a loan from Pursuit Lending.
 - 3 people are receiving money through CARES Act funding.
 - 50 applicants are still going through the SBDC counseling process.
 - 7 businesses were not eligible (either because they are a chain, are located outside of the City of Albany, or received Restaurant Revitalization Funds)
 - 28 businesses or individuals either did not reply to 2 or more emails from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to schedule a meeting or did not show up for their scheduled appointment.
- 18 businesses have been approved for a total of \$148,100 in funding. \$92,000 of that funding has already been disbursed.
- Grant awards range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for technical and/or debt assistance.
 - 10 businesses are in Downtown, 3 are in Arbor Hill, 2 are in West Hill, 1 is in the South End, and 2 are in Capital Park.
 - 72% of the businesses funded are MWBE-owned businesses.
 - 3 MBE
 - 5 MWBE
 - 5 WBE
 - 1 is Disabled-owned.
- The 6 individuals who received full tuition to attend the Community Loan Fund’s 9-week business plan course were all women of color.

Wayfinding & Ambassadors

Ms. Steffens stated that:

- Last month the Wayfinding contract was awarded to Corbin Design.
- The official kickoff meeting took place two weeks ago.
- Staff are working on gathering information and getting approvals for Corbin so they can get started on designing the signs.
- The signage will include vehicular signs, pedestrian kiosks, and parking trailblazing signs, which may include digital signs that state how many parking spots are available in the garage at that specific time. Some of the signs will have historical and interpretive elements to them. There will most likely be a QR code for people to scan as well. The vehicular signs will be one-sided, but the pedestrian will most likely be two-sided, depending on where they’re located.
- Collectively there will be 60 signs.
- Designs will hopefully be finished by June; fabrication can take place over the summer and then installation can happen in the fall. Installation may be phased.
- We will encourage partners to use similar signage so that there is more uniform design throughout Downtown.
- The ambassador program will kick off on May 5th. The first training for ambassadors will take place next week. Discover Albany will also conduct hospitality training during the following week.
- There will be 6 ambassadors out at a time on Fridays from 4-8pm and Saturdays from 10am-6pm.

- Staff are talking to Downtown businesses to find places where the ambassadors can stop in to use the restroom, get a cup of coffee or some water and rest for a few minutes if needed.
- Ambassadors will have Downtown maps and a one-pager full of information, including a QR code with info people can scan.

A request was made for Staff to work to have the Irish American Heritage Museum's sign from their old location removed.

Recent & Upcoming Events

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- Saturday is Earth Day, and we will be holding our annual clean up at the Olde English Downtown Dog Park from 10am-12pm and the African American Cultural Center from 12pm-2pm. The Mailworks and Coulson's are sponsors and will send volunteers. Coulson's is also donating lunch for all volunteers.
- Overit and Nippertown are collaborating to bring back First Friday. May 5th will be the first one in celebration of the 75th Tulip Festival.
- Bites, Camera, Action will take place on the first Friday of the month during June, July, August, and September. The Lion King will be the first movie in collaboration with Christ's Church. We've hired a producer to provide a live music score to accompany the Iron Giant movie in July. The August movie will be Space Jam as we didn't get to show it last year due to inclement weather. The September movie is yet to be determined.
- Outdoor yoga will return on Saturday mornings at 10am during June, July, and August. The Hot Yoga Spot will provide the instructors for the classes. It has been so popular that we added the month of June, which we haven't done before.
- The Albany County Farmers Market was announced. The market will take place on the third Sunday of the month during July, August, September, and October. Staff are working on securing vendors. It's being funded by the MVP Innovation fund, which was included as part of the naming rights for the MVP arena.
- There will be a groundbreaking ceremony for the Clinton Market Collective on Tuesday at 1pm.

With no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at 4:00 PM
21 Lodge St., Second Floor Conference Room