



**Downtown Albany Business Improvement District
Board of Directors Meeting
March 22, 2023
21 Lodge St and Zoom**

ATTENDANCE:

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

ABSENT:

Mohamed Hemmid
Angelo Maddox
Lucas Rogers
Frank Zeoli

STAFF PRESENT:

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

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

Patrick Curran, Albany County (sitting
in for Lucas Rogers)
Dorcey Applrys, Chief City Auditor
Paul Fahey, Overit
Austin Powers, Overit
Caitlin Nicholson, Overit

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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 4:02 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Albany Waterway

Mr. O'Connor noted that BJ Costello and Len Tantillo from the Friend of the Albany Waterway attended our last Board meeting and held a presentation about their Canal Project. They are now asking for a letter of support from the BID for further exploration of the project. Mr. O'Connor asked if there was any opposition to providing them with a letter of support. Hearing none, it was agreed that Ms. Steffens would provide that letter on behalf of the BID.

Board Elections

Mr. O'Connor noted that the election process for the two property owner positions on the Board has started. Nominations were due Friday, March 17th. Only 1 nomination was received, but that person is the owner of a property that is already represented on the Board and therefore is not eligible. We are not required to fill all Board seats, but the Board President does have the ability to nominate individuals to fill any vacant seats for the Board to approve should we find a property owner that would be a good fit. Mr. Ackley and Mr. Maddox have both agreed to serve a second 3-year term.

Ms. Steffens added that property owners can petition to be put on the ballot by collecting 20 signatures from other property owners. Staff will release that information soon and petitions will be due on May 4th. Suggestions for property owners to fill the vacant seats are welcome.

Mr. O'Connor asked Ms. Hughes to open the discussion on the branding initiative.

BRANDING INITIATIVE

Ms. Hughes introduced Mr. Fahey, Mr. Powers and Ms. Nicholson from Overit. They've been working for a few months on the re-branding of Downtown the district, not the organization. She noted they have held some interviews, town hall meetings and focus groups and she invited Mr. Fahey to present what they've been working on.

Mr. Fahey presented an executive summary to give the Board and idea of what Overit has heard and learned thus far:

- Overit has done a lot of qualitative research and some quantitative. They've sent out surveys, held focus groups, town halls and interviews.

- The branding is for the district itself, not the BID organization.
- They are looking for the brand essence and visuals that will attract and retain tenants and residents, as well as visitors.
- Downtown Albany is building great momentum. Regional pride is different now than it was in the 70s and 80s. New people are moving in and the number of residential units has really increased. There is a lot of pride amongst the Stakeholders. It's built upon the rich history and architecture here. Events are happening and there's a great energy. There's a growing and engaged residential population with over 1,000 units.
- Downtown is the central location of the district itself, both geographically and accessibility-wise.
- There are some misconceptions about parking and safety. The news media doesn't distinguish the District from other parts of "Downtown" or the Center Square area.
- There is limited access to the waterfront and people feel there's very little to do there.
- We are missing some assets of what people think defines what a Downtown ecosystem should be, especially with the drugstore moving out and the lack of grocery store.
- There are some nearby threats in that Schenectady and Troy have good momentum and a lot of investments.
- Office space has been challenged by COVID and organizations are pivoting and focusing on residential.
- Closing of some small businesses due to COVID.
- Thankfully, events have returned and we're up to pre-covid activities.
- Connecting Downtown with other neighborhoods that have equal momentum will be important. Downtown is adjacent to other neighborhoods with great stories to tell.
- Overit will not use "live, work and play" as part of phrasing or branding. 50 different districts or municipalities already use that exact phrase.
- We have a skeptical local audience. New transplants to the region are excited to jump into Downtown. Locals are harder to change perceptions for. It's very easy to convince transplants. We want to hone in on that without excluding others. We don't want to be all things to all people. We're looking into how we can appeal to the audiences who are very easy to convince. People tend to exist in a bubble, going from their home to their car, to their office, back to their car and back home, and it can be hard to break out.
- Downtown pride can be created but the public doesn't care about district delineations. Troy is building up a sense of community, doesn't seem to have as much baggage and has some momentum in the pride aspect. We are trying to learn from their best practices. How do they present themselves? What should we stay away from? What hashtags should we use?
- The audience we're thinking about focusing on is residents, investors for residential and commercial spaces, business owners, (ones who are already here and ones we want to attract to come here), and visitors, (both people from outside the region and folks that live in the region and visit Downtown). It can be difficult to come up with something to really resonate with that core group of people. What's the personality of Downtown and who would be the most attracted to it?

Mr. Fahey invited Ms. Nicholson to present the brand themes the team has been working on. Overit will continue to work with the marketing committee for feedback and will go through a rigorous testing process to make sure the prospective brand is resonating with their audience. They will conduct a process known as "fit and stretch". Ms. Nicholson presented three brand themes:

- Downtown Albany is the CORE of the capital region. Albany is the Capital of NY and Downtown is the core of Albany. It plays on the location. The messaging could be welcome to the core, we're the creative core, take a bite out of the core, Albany is COREgeous, all to the core, Hardcore, etc. It's Little bolder, fun, it creates a sense of local pride, it can reach different audiences and it positions Albany as the center of the region. There's a lot of potential for fun wording and fun visuals. CORE goes with apples and you could logo-fy it with an apple. NYC is the Big Apple, but we're the Capital Apple.
- Find yourself Downtown. It's aspirational messaging and plays on navigation. You can find a home, find a new business venture, find your potential and find entertainment. It can be inspirational, can incorporate wayfinding project and can incorporate CDTA. It could also help to dispel some of the obstacles... You can find parking, you can find things to do, etc.

- It's ALL in Albany. We would emphasize that it's all here and help create that local pride. There's dining, entertainment, work, after-work life, etc. You can find it all in Albany and you can be all in for Albany. The play on words could be fun to logo-fy.

Mr. Fahey opened the discussion up for questions and comments. A discussion was held about which of the three different Board members liked and disliked, the pros and cons, and concerns and opportunities with each option. Mr. Fahey pointed out that the next step will be logo design and that can further change the concepts. It was also discussed that sub-brands can spin off from the main brand as well. Because there was no one concept that rose to top, staff agreed to send out a survey where the Board could provide additional thoughts on the concepts and can give direct feedback to Overit.

With nothing further to discuss, Mr. Fahey, Mr. Powers and Ms. Nicholson left the meeting at 4:47 PM.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Contract Award

Mr. Countermine noted that:

- The BID was awarded and ARPA grant through the City for our wayfinding project.
- Staff released an RFP for architectural firms and received 3 responses. One firm quoted a price that was almost double what the other two quoted, so Staff interviewed the two lowest, qualified bidders. They were KMA Design from Pittsburgh and Corbin Design from Michigan. Corbin is the firm that completed the Wayfinding Master Plan in 2018 that was used to secure the ARPA funds.
- The BID and the Albany Parking Authority staff interviewed the two teams and recommend Corbin Design for the price of \$79,790.

Ms. Steffens added that:

- The \$79,000 will come from the BID's match that was previously approved for \$125,000. Georgette had budgeted \$80,000 for the design firm.
- KMA was lower in price, but the designs looked dated and they didn't offer the ability to update signs if or when things change.
- Corbin's pieces were more modern. They will take the pieces into final design, monitor production and finalization. They recently completed a project in Texas and came in right around the price they estimated for that project, which is also important.
- We will be removing the BID's current wayfinding signs as part of this project. We do not intend to take down any private signs, especially for parking. The BID can only pay for signs that are installed within the District. We can collaborate with places like The Palace to make sure any extra signage looks part of the larger wayfinding signage system.
- The top portion of the signs Corbin has designed could signify the neighborhood the sign is located in.

Mr. Countermine calls for a motion to approve the contract with Corbin Design at a cost of \$79,790 | Mr. Shahinfar motions | Mr. O'Connor seconds | All Approve.

Funding Request

Mr. Countermine presented the following funding requests that have been requested by Staff and are recommended by the Budget & Finance Committee:

\$6,000 to purchase and plant 8 street trees in Downtown as part of the Arbor Day celebration. To date, we have planted 53 trees within the District and several more have been planted by DGS as part of their 2025 campaign.

All of the District maps have been distributed and Staff would like to print a short run to tide us over until the new brand is finalized, which will result in a new design for an updated map. The cost is \$1,488 for 3,000 maps.

Mr. Countermine calls for a motion to approve the above-mentioned funding requests at a total cost of \$7,488 | Mr. Shahinfar motions | Mr. O'Connor seconds | All approve.

Mr. Countermine added that he and Mr. O'Connor approved \$512 for the printing of sandwich board signs that were placed throughout Downtown during the NCAA tournament which included a QR code leading to our website with hours of operation for the restaurants that were open over the weekend.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Clean and Safe

Ms. Hart gave an updated from the Clean and Safe Committee:

- The Committee met on the first Tuesday in March and covered a lot.
- They discussed the BID's preparation for the NCAA tournament, which was incredible. The sandwich boards with QR codes were very successful. Parking went well. The Clean Team did a superb job. DGS did a great job with the snow and clearing parking lots and spaces. Everything flowed well.
- The Committee is working with Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless to set up kiosks with ambassadors May through October on Fridays and Saturdays, to help guide people around Downtown. They also discussed how private businesses in the District could hire through Interfaith and get a crew out front of their businesses if they want. It will be nice to have on-street presence.
- They plan to come up with signage for businesses to display to designate where public restrooms are instead of having signs stating that they don't have a public restroom.
- The street trees will be going in next month.
- The new Capital Walls mural should start in June in the South End.
- The annual Earth Day cleanup is coming up- clean ups will occur both near the South End Grocery and Olde English Dog Park.
- The Clean Team reports uptick in finding needles and syringes around the District. We need to keep an eye on that now that the weather is turning nicer.
- People living outside within the District are reappearing as the weather is getting nicer.

Mr. Wilson added that Staff will come up with graphics for the map to show where the new public restroom is and hopefully have a universal sign for businesses to use.

Mr. Steffens added that the Poop Fairy signs and dog waste bag dispensers will return soon to our green spaces.

Special Events

Ms. Steffens gave an update from the Special Events Committee on behalf of Ms. Kiosse due to technical difficulties making it difficult to hear:

- The Albany County Farmers Market will take place July through October on the 3rd Sunday of the month. 30 vendors will set up in front of MVP Arena. Funding for the market comes from the MVP Innovation fund which is part of sponsorship of the naming rights for the arena. Monday at 10am is the press event to announce the market. Staff will work with the South End Grocery to include those businesses that are being incubated at the grocery as vendors for the market. The goal is to have 30% of vendors be people of color and/or women-owned businesses.
- The Earth Day Cleanup will be in April. Coulson's has a youth group coming down to help. People can come from 10am-12pm at the Olde English Dog Park, 12pm-2pm near the South End Grocery, or for the whole thing.
- The Committee talked about focusing on some family-friendly events. The First Church now owns their parking lot and are interested in using that space to host family-friendly activities. There might be opportunities to collaborate with Castle Island Montessori School.

Mr. Dollard added that there is interest from the Downtown Neighborhood Association to sit on the Special Events Committee and asked the Board to please make a recommendation if they know a resident who might want to join. Mr. Ackley agreed to discuss it with the DNA.

Ms. Steffens added that the City now has Neighborhood Development Specialists assigned to specific neighborhoods. They oversee See, Click, Fix now. Our specialist will be asked to join Clean and Safe Committee and will most likely come and make a presentation to the Board at some point.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Small Business Vitality Grants

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- We held 5 small business resource open houses plus an earlier one in the spring. On average 45 individuals each open house. 5-8 non-profits that serve small businesses were there to give information.
- To apply for the grant, business owners had to fill out an intake form to express interest.
- 11 of 112 applicants have been approved so far for a total of \$110,000. Some are ready to be funded and we're working through how that will happen through the City. Some need additional work. The use of funds will go to a mix of technical and debt assistance. 55% of business owners are people of color. 36% are women-owned.
- 5 people who applied were not eligible to receive these funds.
- There are currently 7 new applications to review.
- 28 applicants never responded or didn't show up for counseling.
- 61 applications are still going through the process.
- We will go back to the people who didn't follow through and try to figure out why. We want to understand what neighborhoods people are located in. We will reassess what can be funding in round two. The SBDC is reporting that these are all new businesses to them.
- We also paid for 5 people to attend the Community Loan Fund's 9-week business course. All were women of color.

Recent & Upcoming Events

Ms. Hughes gave an update on the NCAA tournament:

- Staff did a lot of outreach leading up to the tournament.
- We had a landing page on our website that was an intro to Downtown with individual pages for each day during tournament. That went live Sunday night before the tournament and got 1200 page views, which were primarily from Albany. Web traffic did well.
- We printed sandwich board signs to put out in Downtown with a QR code that led to the landing page. Those got 65 scans. This is the first time we've done this and were surprised the number of scans wasn't higher, but we don't have anything to compare it to.
- The link behind the QR can be changed at any time so the signs can be re-used for other events.
- Traffic to our page was higher for the NCAA tournament than it was for St. Patrick's Day. Compared to last year, page views were up by more than 84%, unique page views were up by over 88% percent. Maybe a flyer would have been useful. There is a learning curve, but we got a lot of useful information.
- Staff sent out a post-tournament survey to get feedback from Stakeholders.

Ms. Steffens added that people may have used the Albany App, (by Discover Albany), as they had window clings out. She will find out what their numbers were. There was a link on the game tickets to their information.

Mr. O'Connor asked if we could check the data on Placer from the tournament and Ms. Steffens said that is the plan and that it should be available within the next day or two.

Ms. Steffens added that:

- The Vandy reported doing double their amount of normal Saturday business during the tournament weekend.
- Fort Orange is expanding their weekend hours.
- On March 31st and April 1st, The Vandy is celebrating their one-year anniversary. The store has raised over \$100,000 and they are going to expand their weekend hours.
- During the NCAA Tournament, 47 places were open Friday, 40 on Saturday and 27 on Sunday.

- The War Room is getting great publicity. The owner is a PR person. The building was recently renamed after Governor Patterson. And he came in for the event. It was reported that the NCAA coaches used the cigar room while they were here.
- Friday at 10:30am is BeAti's ribbon cutting. They expanded and needed a larger space, so they moved to a new location across the street.

With no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 5:35 PM.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, at 4:00 PM

21 Lodge St., Second Floor Conference Room