

ATTENDANCE:

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

ABSENT:

Mohamed Hemmid
Leola Edelin
Leyla Kiosse

STAFF PRESENT:

Georgette Steffens
Kate Medhus
Rebecca Hughes
Jason Bonafide
Don Wilson

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

Scott Townsend
Jody Smitts-Anderson
(Albany Riverfront Collaborative)

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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 asks for objections to the May 2022 Minutes and hearing none approves them on behalf of the Board.

Mr. O'Connor welcomes new Board members Benn MacDonald, owner of Far Shot at 69 N Pearl St, and Josh Wainman, President of Wainschaf Associates and an owner of the Meginnis Flats at 370 Broadway. The rest of the Board and BID Staff all introduces themselves.

Mr. O'Connor noted that the BID would like to collaborate with CDTA on a bus pass program to provide unlimited monthly bus passes to Downtown employees, which he finds to be a worthwhile endeavor in attracting employees to Downtown Albany as well as keeping them working here. Ms. Steffens will present the program in further detail later in the meeting.

Mr. O'Connor introduces Scott Townsend, co-founder of the Albany Riverfront Collaborative. The ARC is a group of community members who are working to reimagine I-787 and the Albany Riverfront, working on removing the highway and designing the city to be for humans and not cars, as well as reconnecting the South End to Downtown and addressing the systemic injustices of the past. There was recently a \$5 million award from the State to study I-787. It was built in a different time and needs something today then it did back then.

ALBANY RIVERFRONT COLLABORATIVE

Mr. Townsend introduced himself and Ms. Smitts-Anderson and gave an overview of what the ARC has been working on and what they foreshadow going ahead:

- The group originally formed in 2007 but was put on hold once the great recession hit.
- After about 12 years, the Black Lives Matters movement, climate change, and similar movements in sister cities like Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, made it apparent that the time was right to push forward with this effort.
- The magnitude of the size of the project and urban renewal here is much bigger than in other cities.
- The first goal has been to change people's mindsets about this effort being possible.
- The State was awarded \$5 million and it is slated for an engineering, feasibility, and planning study by the Department of Transportation. It will also address walkability and bike paths.
- The push now is to make sure that the voices of the community are still being heard throughout the planning process. The ARC collected over 60 different community members in the beginning before going public.
- Because of 787, Albany is currently a pass-through rather than a destination.
- There is an aspect of mental well-being in addition to the physical aspect of this endeavor.

- 98 acres were lost between the Empire State Plaza and the Hudson River. It was devastating to the former and current South End residents and to the Italian American community that was living there at the time. There is the potential to reclaim 92 of those acres.
- When The highway was built, it was projected that Albany would continue to grow, but instead population has decreased 25%. It also ignored the grid of the city and created fewer connection points. What the ARC is envisioning includes more access points for more flow.
- 787 was designed as a limited-access highway. What the ARC is proposing will disperse the traffic evenly and will allow for pedestrians and cyclists as well. There would be more than twice as many access points which would avoid the choke points we currently experience.
- The railroad tracks would stay where they are for the time being.
- At most, the new set up would add 1-3 minutes to people's commutes.
- Ultimately, the maintenance costs would be less than half of what they currently are.

Mr. Townsend shared a PowerPoint presentation with photos showing what the area of 787 was before, what it currently is and what it could be in the future, as well as some examples from other cities who have completed similar projects. He added that there are links on the ARC's website where people can sign up to get involved, volunteer and/or make donations.

The Board members asked questions. They also had a dialog about the need for engagement with South End residents about their vision for this area.

Mr. Townsend and Ms. Smitts-Anderson left the meeting at 5:06pm.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Pursuit Grant

Ms. Steffens noted that the BID has received a \$10,000 grant from Pursuit. The grant is not restricted but is intended for the continuing of small business assistance programs. We hosted a resources open house at the African American Cultural Center about 2 months ago where non-profits like the Community Loan Fund, The Chamber of Commerce, Albany Law, and Capitalize Albany talked about the programs they have available to assist small businesses. Angelo Maddox spoke of his experience utilizing those services. This grant will help us continue those types of events going forward.

TREASURER'S REPORT

ARPA Grant Awards

Mr. Countermine noted that the BID was awarded or partnered on 3 successful COVID grants through the City of Albany; one for wayfinding, one for small business assistance and one for First Friday.

Restricted Funds Requests

Mr. Countermine added that there are two funding requests from Staff:

- Renewal of the Place.ai subscription. This software helps Staff track cell phone data which provides extensive information about the activity going on in the district. The Budget & Finance Committee is supportive of the renewal of this subscription.
- The other request is for funding for a CDTA bus pass program to provide employees in Downtown Albany with free monthly bus passes.

Mr Countermine gives Ms. Steffens the floor to elaborate further on all three of these topics.

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- When we applied for the wayfinding grant through the ARPA funding, we included a match from the BID of \$125,000. The Parking Authority has also promised a match of \$75,000. If the project goes over the \$838,000, we can either vote to invest more money or we'll have to scale it back. \$200,000 will go to pay for ambassadors on Friday evenings and Saturdays during

the day from May to October. The remaining \$638,000 will go towards wayfinding signs. We are requesting approval from the current Board to keep the \$125,000 matching funds that were previously approved.

- The small business assistance program guidelines are being developed and the process is being discussed, but it will be one single application and will use the Small Business Development Center as the point of entry into the program.
- We have been using the Placer.ai subscription for the past year and it gives us true, real-time, demographic data from the district. It's useful for economic development and marketing in areas such as office attraction, retail attraction, events, etc. Staff doesn't think we will need to have a subscription every year, but that it would be useful to have it for another year as we navigate coming back from COVID. We will also use it on our office attraction one pagers we are developing.
- The last funding request addresses the issue of restaurants and retailers in Downtown having trouble attracting and keeping staff. Business owners are telling us that the extreme poverty of some of their employees make it difficult for them to get to work and/or to call out of work if needed. A monthly unlimited bus pass costs \$65 per month, which is cost prohibitive for many people. We would like to partner with CDTA on a year-long program where Downtown Albany employees in the hospitality industry could receive free monthly unlimited bus passes. Employees will have to prove that they work in Downtown Albany. The BID would be charged a max of \$5,000 for bus passes, even if we distribute passes in numbers that exceed that dollar amount. The exact details of the program still need to be ironed out with CDTA. The program would be offered to restaurants, retail, and retail-related businesses as that seems to be where transportation is a bigger challenge.
- These requests would be an additional \$21,000, leaving \$65,000 in the Restricted Income budget.
- Unrestricted Income has about \$355,000 that's already been approved for use and \$365,000 left for larger projects or grants that Staff and the Board chooses to put forth in the future.

Mr. Countermine asks for a motion to approve the above-mentioned requests | Mr. Shahinfar motions | Mr. McGreevy seconds | All Approve.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Marketing

Mr. Ackley, the newly appointed chair of the Marketing Committee, gave an update:

- The Committee has been collecting proposals for a re-branding initiative. Ms. Hughes and Ms. Steffens reviewed all proposals that came in and selected five to move forward for the committee to review. Some of the companies are local and some are not. The top 5 companies will be interviewed by Staff and members of the Marketing Committee, and one will be selected from there.
- The website updates are ongoing with Upside Collective, and we anticipate the launch of the new site by the end of summer.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Events and Updates

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- Staff are solidifying a meeting to occur on July 21st at 3pm with the District Attorney's office and Joseph's House to discuss safety concerns and how to better serve our increasing homeless population. They are trying to get the APD and LEAD program to confirm their participation as well. The invitation will go out as soon as all participants have been confirmed.
- The BID will offer a new event called Tuesdays where live music will be offered in Tricentennial Park on Tuesdays during lunchtime in July and August. Staff learned from Placer that the largest numbers of employees in Downtown Albany are on Tuesdays.
- Outdoor yoga will take place on the lawn at SUNY Plaza on Saturday mornings at 10am during July and August.
- The outdoor movie series on the first Friday of each month continues with Back to the Future showing this Friday night.
- A new hair salon and spa has opened on Broadway, and we will have a ribbon cutting for them next week.
- Albany Center Gallery opened a new youth art center connected with their space.
- Nani's Iced Tea, currently selling tea at several local eateries, will begin bottling her tea at 99 Pine St in August.

- The Community Loan Fund purchased The Coliseum, and they will be doing a community ownership buy-in opportunity for people who want to own a piece of the building and the project.
- Clinton Market Collective should be under construction in the Spring.
- Modern Body Art will be moving to the Steuben Street Market location. The market closed recently because the owner wanted to focus on her family. 90 State Street is moving all retail stores out of their first floor, and we are doing our best to keep those stores in Downtown Albany.
- Blue 82 has closed and someone has signed a lease for that space. Announcements for that should be coming soon.
- Upper Steuben Street will be renamed for Adam Blake, Jr. and that announcement will be coming shortly.

Ms. Steffens added that there will be no meetings in July or August, but there will most likely need to be a quick Zoom meeting so that the Board can approved the re-branding contract so Staff can make that award. Ms. Medhus will email the ad for the new Marketing and Special Events Coordinator position we have open to the Board and will collect any recommendations the Board has for candidates.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:45pm.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, September 14, 2022, at 4:00 PM

21 Lodge St., Second Floor Conference Room and Zoom