

ATTENDANCE:

Frank O'Connor, III
Elizabeth Young Jojo (Zoom)
Riley Ackley
Lena Hart
Leyla Kiosse
Angelo Maddox
Lucas Rogers (Zoom)
Hon. Darius Shahinfar

ABSENT:

Ken Countermine
Lisa Reddy Farrell
Leola Edelin
Mohamed Hemmid
Benn MacDonald
Neil McGreevy
Josh Wainman
Frank Zeoli

STAFF PRESENT:

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

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

BJ Costello
Len Tantillo
(Friends of the Albany
Waterway)

21 Lodge Street
Albany, NY 12207
p 518.465.2143
f 518.465.0139
www.downtownalbany.org

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 4:05 PM.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

New Staff Member

Mr. O'Connor welcomed Molly Eadie to the BID team. He noted that Ms. Eadie will be filling the role of Marketing and Events Coordinator. Mr. O'Connor added that Ms. Eadie has previously worked as a reporter for the Troy Record and as a PR Consultant, and that she has hosted several events in the City of Troy. Ms. Eadie will work part-time for the next two weeks and will join the staff full-time at the end of the month. The Board welcomed Ms. Eadie to the team.

Friends of the Albany Waterway

Mr. O'Connor noted that we are joined tonight by members of the Friends of the Albany Waterway. He stated that the project is described as a transformative, collaborative, canal project that re-establishes and re-envision's Albany's rich historic, social, and economic connections to the Hudson River and the Erie Canal. Mr. O'Connor gave the floor to BJ Costello, one of the group's founding members, to tell the Board more about the project and invited the Board to ask questions at the end.

Mr. Costello thanked the Board for having himself and Mr. Tantillo. Mr. Costello noted that:

- The Friends of the Albany Waterway believe that Albany stands on the verge of the greatest possible change in the last 50 years.
- The Hudson River is one of the grandest rivers in the country, if not the world, there are unrivaled historic buildings, there is political will and individuals with a vision which has been confirmed by engineering and landscape architects, to transform the Capital City of the Empire State into a destination for residents and tourists alike.
- Other cities, such as Providence, Buffalo, San Antonio, Oklahoma City and Indianapolis have all undergone similar transformations to the one proposed here and in each case, the economic return has far outweighed the cost of building the canal.
- There is an opportunity to obtain funding for major projects right now. The head of the US Senate is a democratic senator from New York State. Senator Gilibrand grew up in Albany in a family with strong political ties and a strong relationship with the City of Albany. The motto of the Friends of the Albany Waterway is "If not now, when?"
- The Albany Waterway, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that was incorporated in April of 2022. The Board is made up of several community leaders and they've made presentations for a number of elected officials and policy makers throughout the last year. The organization has now acquired 500 friends. It costs nothing to sign up to be a friend of the waterway.
- There are three reasons why the organization came about.
 - Mr. Costello was previously the chair of the USS Slater, which attracts 20,000 visitors a year from all over the world. Those visitors express a desire to walk from the water to be able to get a meal or a cup of coffee, but it's not possible.

- Mr. Costello attended the NCAA women's basketball tournament in San Antonio, Texas, a land-locked city in the middle of the country, where they've built a riverwalk. He observed people walking around, having drinks and dining on the water, going for rides in riverboats, feeling safe while out and about in a city that isn't even on a real river.
- Every year Mr. Costello rides his bike from Buffalo to Albany and several towns which are bypassed by the Thruway, where you can see that the water has revitalized these towns by creating economic development and a feeling of safety. It becomes obvious that water has the magic and power to attract people.
- 200 years ago, immigrants with shovels and picks dug the Erie Canal beginning in Waterford, going across the State, through the Montezuma Swamp, through Lockport, into Buffalo and into Lake Erie ending canal-side of Buffalo. When the Erie Canal was built, New York became the Empire State, and the Port of Albany became the 9th largest city in America.
- This concept would create significant economic impact and permanent jobs, it would prevent the flooding the runs downhill in Albany, it would preserve historic buildings and solve several engineering problems.
- The question has been raised about the National Grid power lines that run down Broadway and an international engineering firm has shown how they've solved the same problem in other cities such as Chicago and Brooklyn, amongst others.
- No buildings would be taken down and 787 would not be impacted if this project were to happen. Assemblymember Pat Fahy has secured \$5 million from the Assembly for the Department of Transportation to study removing, lowering or 787, or turning it into a boulevard. That study will start late this spring.

Mr. Tantillo, a painter of historical subjects who has worked on this subject for over 40 years, presented slides containing maps, renderings, and drawings from Albany in the 17th and 18th centuries, what it looks like today and what it could look like in the future:

- Back in previous centuries, the arc of the shoreline came in very close to Broadway, but the river was filled in during the 20th century as part of all the development that was happening in that area.
- All the approaches to changing the city were trying to bring Albany to the riverfront and we thought about reversing that and bringing the water back into the city.
- We came up with a rough plan to bring the water in under the overpass, have a marina in front of the D&H Building, have water all the way down Broadway with a series of marinas, and back out to the Hudson River by the Central Warehouse where the boat launch is today.
- It has been asked what will happen with the canal in each season. Other cities have shown that you can utilize the canal in every season for things such as ice skating, lights, etc.
- We have developed 4 different concepts for this project:
 - Option 1 is the idea of building the whole thing, which would have the biggest effect and the most transformation on the city. The water would come through, under the underpass, down Broadway and then out the other side of the Livingston Avenue bridge at the boat launch.
 - Option 2 is the North End where Central Warehouse is. That used to be the beginning of the Erie Canal in the 1850s. Barges would come in through there, be weighed in the basin and then they'd proceed through the lumber district. In this option the water would come in under the highway where the boat launch is, the basin would be resurrected, the warehouse would be restored and several facilities would be added around it, changing this derelict area of the city. There would be plenty of space there for pavilions, farmers markets and things like that.
 - Option 3 would be to focus on the South End first. The entrance would come in under the highway and there could be a marina in front of the SUNY Administration building, which is the most iconic piece of architecture in upstate New York. It would be magnificent to have this huge harbor act as a reflecting pool for this piece of architecture. There is so much opportunity in front of that building and would change Albany dramatically.
 - The 4th option, which would be the easiest one to implement, would be to excavate and restore Loch 1 over by Central Warehouse. The loch was buried in the 1900s and could easily be recovered. It would give access to the river and access to a basin and a park could be made there.
- The 200th anniversary is coming in 2025 so this would be an interesting project to get started on.
- The organization wants to have the feasibility study done so that we can know what's possible and present that to the people of Albany.

Mr. Costello added that in 2022 there were 600 boats that sailed the Great American Loop, starting in Key West, come up to New York City, come further up the Hudson River and they stop in Castleton and Troy because there are places there for them to dock and then have dinner. There is no reason for them to stop in Albany because there is nowhere for them to eat dinner on the water. Cossackie is up and coming now because it is on the water. The Capital City is not getting the benefit of all of that commercial traffic.

A brief discussion was held regarding the feasibility study and the Board was informed that Assemblymembers Fahy and McDonald are committed to making sure there are public forums surrounding this subject and as previously mentioned, \$5 million has been committed to the Department of Transportation for studying 787. A company called Sasaki is very interested in being involved in this as they've done thousands of projects like this one.

With nothing further to discuss, Mr. Costello and Mr. Tantillo left the meeting at 4:43PM.

Mr. O'Connor noted that a quorum has not been obtained and therefore no votes will be taken. The Board agreed to move to approve the November 2022 Minutes at the next meeting.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Funding Request

Mr. O'Connor presented the following funding request:

The NCAA Men's Basketball tournament is coming back to Downtown after it was cancelled in 2020 due to COVID. Ms. Steffens serves on the Sports Foundation, which is the local group working on planning for the event. The BID will be providing significant marketing and communications for attendees leading up to and during the tournament, as well as coordinating with our restaurants. In addition, we have been asked to provide branded banners welcoming sports fans to Downtown. This is something that we had done in 2020. Unfortunately, during the chaos of COVID, the original banners were misplaced so we need to order new ones. The cost of the banners should not exceed \$3,500. Confidentially, the economic impact of the tournament is estimated to be over \$3 million.

Ms. Steffens added that part of keeping the NCAA coming back to Albany has to do with how the fans are welcomed and how they're treated while they're here. The banners are one way we can do that. We will be able to re-use the I love New York banners next year when the NCAA women's basketball tournament comes here. The county banners are NCAA generic and can be used for any NCAA sporting event that comes to Albany. The I Love New York banners are basketball specific.

Due to the lack of a quorum, Ms. Steffens agreed to obtain an email vote regarding the banners, which requires a response from every single Board member, whether it's an affirmative or a negative. On January 26, 2023, Ms. Steffens emailed the Board requesting approval to purchase the banners in an amount not to exceed \$3,500. The Board's approval was unanimous with the last affirmative vote being received on February 7, 2023.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Recent Events

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- We have been hosting small business resource open houses as part of the \$750,000 ARPA funding awarded for the Small Business Grant program. The open houses have been getting 35-40 people attending each one. Mr. Maddox has been doing a phenomenal job sharing his experience with using many of the participating resources. People who are interested in the grant program must fill out an online intake form and then the Small Business Development Center follows up and does a financial analysis and helps the applicant figure out what resources best fit their needs. The program is citywide and so far 94 businesses have completed the intake form. 7 businesses have completed the review process and a handful of people have asked for and received tuition assistance for the Community Loan Fund's 9-week small business planning program. Businesses that received the Restaurant Revitalization Funding or businesses that are franchises cannot receive funding from our program. This money is for COVID-related debt, technical assistance and for tuition assistance for entrepreneurial

training programs. 3 of the businesses in the first round of grant requests that were reviewed are located in Downtown, including the first business to be awarded funding.

- The other program we received ARPA funding for is the wayfinding initiative. Ms. Steffens is drafting an RFP to find an architectural firm to design, fabricate and install wayfinding signs around Downtown. Staff is also working on obtaining ambassadors from Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless to help guide people in Downtown on Fridays and Saturdays in the nicer weather.
- The CDTA free bus pass program has been wildly successful. It's available to restaurants, retailers and hotels and we have 31 participating businesses thus far. Over 200 people are currently using free bus passes. Many of the businesses are very appreciative of the program and they've mentioned how it has helped attract and retain employees. The BID paid \$5,000 to CDTA to do this pilot program and after 5 weeks we exceeded that dollar amount in the amount of bus passes that were in use. We agreed to run this program for one year and the hope is that Downtown businesses will see the benefit in offering such amenities going forward. Ms. Steffens and Ms. Medhus are meeting with CDTA this week to discuss a plan for the future.
- During the holiday season, we did not run a BOGO gift card program based on feedback the Board had given. Even so, we sold close to \$5,000 worth of gift cards. Staff are trying to figure out when would be a good time to run another BOGO offer.
- For the past few years, we have done a Shop & Savor program starting on Small Business Saturday where shoppers can submit their receipts from Downtown businesses to be entered to win prizes. The numbers are down slightly from last year, but last year we did include BOGO gift cards as part of this program.
- The Hot Chocolate Stroll took place on Saturday, December 3rd. Last year the event sold out at 300 tickets before the event. We increased the number of tickets to 600 tickets this year and we almost sold out. Mr. Dollard suggested and put together a holiday market inside the Kenmore Ballroom where registration took place. 23 vendors participated in the market, including some live music, and with 15 businesses participating in the stroll, it was a great success. Banh Mi 47 was the winner with the best hot chocolate as voted on by the public. Staff are looking into how to grow this event without overwhelming the participating businesses.
- The Board had earlier approved the purchase of ornaments featuring the popular Downtown Nipper sculptures which were hidden around Downtown and then clues were given to the public so they could go and find them. That initiative was very well-received, and Staff would like to do it again next year.

A brief discussion was held regarding the meeting that was held at the Fuze Box the previous week. The idea of the meeting was to be a conversation with a "panel of movers and shakers in Albany", specifically relating to arts and entertainment in Albany. Ms. Steffens agreed to reach out to Tony Iadicco from Albany Center Gallery for more information as he was one of the panelists.

With no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 5:21PM.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, March 22, 2023, at 4:00 PM
21 Lodge St., Second Floor Conference Room