

Downtown Development Authority of Augusta

Board Meeting Minutes

January 16, 2025, at 10 am

DDA Offices, 1101 Greene Street

The Downtown Development Authority held its monthly meeting on January 16, 2025, at 10:03 am at the DDA Offices at 1101 Greene Street.

DDA board members and staff in attendance were Vice-Chairman James Heffner, Commissioner Jordan Johnson, **Secretary-Treasurer Stephen King**, Phuong Nguyen, Executive Director Margaret Woodard, Media Specialist Tara Wood, and Project Coordinator Corbin Freeman. Our special guests in attendance were Clark Stancil and Danny Bivins from UGA's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Other attendees were Chris Higdon from the Georgia Municipal Association and Mattie Sue Stevens from the Augusta City Administrator's office.

Vice-Chairman Heffner called the meeting to order at 10:03 am. He thanked everyone for their attendance and invited each person to introduce themselves. After the introductions, Mr. Heffner asked Mr. King to present the consent agenda, the minutes from December 2024, and the financial reports. Mr. King noted no significant changes and mentioned that the budget would be discussed at our Board Meeting in February. Stephen King then inquired if there were any comments or questions; if not, he would proceed with approving the agenda. Commissioner Jordan Johnson motioned to approve, and Mr. Phoung seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Heffner thanked Margaret for her work with Leadership Augusta and asked Ms. Woodard to present her Director's Report. Ms. Woodard updated the Board on the following:

Economic Development

Accelerate Augusta: SSBCI loans are still waiting for approval. The roof at 600 Broad Street will cost at least \$200,000. Dr. Whirl is working on elevator installation. Accelerate Augusta's logo has been completed. We will reveal the logo and tour the building at the unveiling event on the 28th of this month.

Storm Recovery: The DDA will participate in an SBA Workshop on the 22nd of this month. We will host multiple partners, including the UGA SBDC and the GABC, to help connect small business owners with SBA professionals to help them recover from Hurricane Helene's effects.

Annual Statistics: We have consistently been working on updating our annual business statistics list for the year 2024. It is unlikely that we will have a significant net gain. There are, however, rising numbers despite multiple closures.

Vice Chairman James Heffner motioned to approve/accept the Director's Report as information. Commissioner Jordan Johnson seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed unanimously.

Organization

Under new business, Ms. Woodard presented her concerns and recommendations for the remaining SPLOST 7 funds. Ms. Woodard explained that \$275,000 remaining should be directed towards any expenses/needs for 600 Broad. James Heffner requested a motion to approve leveraging the remaining SPLOST 7 funds for 600 Broad repairs and costs. Stephen King made the motion, with a second by Commissioner Johnson, and the motion passed unanimously.

Under new business, Vice Chairman James Heffner introduced Mr. Stancil and Mr. Bivins to begin their Georgia Renaissance Fellowship Presentation. Their work focuses on improving the downtown streetscape and pedestrian areas, addressing chronic vacancies, and repurposing the Broad Street Confederate Monument. These three initiatives highlight seven historical sites in Downtown Augusta. Clark and Danny presented the following future solutions for each location:

- **Reynolds Street Streetscape**

Created a streetscape plan for Reynolds Street that illustrates enhanced pedestrian connections, on-street parking, and various amenities. These designs could aid decision-making and attract development that links downtown Augusta to the Savannah River permanently.

- **Reynolds Street and 10th Street Intersection**

Created a rendering of intersection improvements that enhance pedestrian access and safety. Parallel parking is indicated on the outer lanes on both sides of Reynolds Street, reducing the corridor to one lane in each direction. The existing chain-link fence in the area fails to convey that the space is safe or vibrant. The proposed chain-link fence suggests that the community values its appearance, allowing local artists to enhance the downtown experience and showcase the community's talent and culture.

- **Augusta Common Extension**

Created three renderings of crosswalk and streetscape improvements that enhance the connection between Augusta Common and the Savannah River. (1) The short-term design features an attractive brick path that links these public spaces. (2) The long-term vision illustrates mixed-use infill development occupying the underutilized properties between Downtown and the Savannah River, along with a midblock crosswalk and multi-use path. (3) Rehabilitate the historic building in the background of the Commons.

- **Historic Train Depot**

Developed a landscape and streetscape plan for Reynolds Street and the historic depot property. One design concept features elements such as traffic calming measures along Reynolds Street, 45 new on-street parallel parking spaces, 41 large canopy trees, 21 medium canopy trees, and 38 small canopy trees planted throughout the property for shading. The 13 proposed pickleball courts near the Riverwalk could create a significant regional recreation destination. The more than two dozen bay openings at the historic depot may become ideal small retail spaces for farmer's market stands, micro-retailers, and specialty shops.

- **Façade Renderings for Downtown Properties**

Created façade renderings for ground-floor retail and upper-story housing design concepts for 1051 Broad Street, 905 Broad Street, and the historic Kress Building at 834 Broad

Street. The proposal for 1051 Broad Street suggests a mixed-use development featuring upper-story housing, with the large retail space divided into smaller storefronts. 905 Broad Street has long been the home of WAGT, and the proposed design includes enhancements to elevate its appearance, such as a new layer of stucco, metallic lettering, and fresh colors. 834 Broad Street houses the historic Kress department store, which has fallen into disrepair. Improvements to the Kress Building façade will help preserve its historic integrity while enhancing its visual appeal. The windows and bricks can be restored, and the tile can be repaired. With a few cosmetic updates, this façade could become an asset to downtown.

- **Augusta University Marketing Concepts**

As part of ongoing efforts to fight chronic vacancy and blight, the DDA and Augusta University partnered to develop creative strategies for raising public awareness about vacant properties. The graphics could revitalize vacant storefronts and encourage visitors to reimagine the potential of underutilized properties.

- **Vacant Property Registry**

This would require property owners to register vacant buildings with the city. They would then be required to pay an annual fee and ensure their property meets basic maintenance and safety standards. These programs would compel owners to develop actionable plans to ensure their property is brought back into productive use.

- **Broad Street Confederate Monument Repurposing**

These proposals offer both short-term and long-term solutions. (1) Removing the bollards and chains surrounding the monument (2) Adding signage that provides context for the monument (3) Removing the individual statues of Confederate leaders and covering the monument's offensive inscriptions (4) Installing plywood to conceal hateful inscriptions without damaging the marble so that local artists can then use the area as a canvas for culturally relevant temporary installations. There is no single correct approach to modifying or contextualizing such a complex symbol, but taking intentional steps demonstrates the city's commitment to addressing the issue with care and sensitivity.

In conclusion, Ms. Woodard discussed our next steps for the Reynolds Street Project. Mr. Heffner then expressed his gratitude to Mr. Stancil and Mr. Bivins for attending our meeting and providing such valuable information to our Board, and he informed everyone that Margaret will continue to keep everyone updated as we move forward.

Mr. Heffner requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jordan Johnson made the motion, which was seconded by Stephen King, and it passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:08 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen King, Secretary-Treasurer

