

# Downtown Development Authority

## Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 3, 2016  
Noon, Council Chambers



City of South Haven

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is to be a leader in helping to fulfill the City of South Haven Municipal Plan; through planning, funding, and development of projects within the DDA District which promote, encourage and contribute to the overall economic growth and development of the community.

**1. Call to Order by Burr at noon.**

**2. Roll Call**

Present: John Braun (12:20 p.m.), Chris Campbell, Sue Frederick, Jim Marcoux, Sally Newton (12:03 p.m.), Kevin Whiteford, Bob Burr  
Absent: Scott Maxwell, Andrea Olson

**3. Approval of Agenda**

Motion by Marcoux, second by Frederick to approve the August 3, 2016 regular meeting agenda as presented.

All in favor. Motion carried.

**4. Approval of Minutes – March 2, 2016 Regular Meeting Minutes and March 15, 2016 Special Meeting Minutes**

Motion by Whiteford, second by Marcoux to approve the March 2, 2016 Regular Meeting minutes and March 15, 2016 Special Meeting minutes as written.

All in favor. Motion carried.

**5. Interested Citizens in the Audience Will be Heard on Items Not on the Agenda**

There were none.

**6. Update of downtown sculpture project – SHCA Executive Director Thea**

Thea Grigsby, South Haven Center for the Arts (SHCA) Director, explained that the Art on the Town Committee was formed to support the empty plinths in the downtown. Introduced Lynn Winkel, who is on the board at SHCA and SHOUT. Listed the committee members and noted they are all volunteers.

Grigsby noted that South Haven has been considered an art town in the past; in 1994 S.H. were ranked in 100 best art towns but dropped off that in 1997. Explaining that art and cultural travel is a big thing now, Grigsby stated that the SHCA would like to help get the city back in the ratings again.

Grigsby explained that the committee chose a theme; South Haven - people, places and things - noting that an entry can be representational or non-representational. The committee did their homework; did research, did interviews, visited other cities and towns and learned that you can buy or rent an entire project. Noted that the size of South Haven limits the scope of things we can do but does not limit the creativity. The committee's methodology took two threads: 1.) Buy ready-made (SHOUT has volunteered but want to have input on the art piece chosen) and 2.) Grow our own with emerging sculptors and local talent. Grigsby noted it would be a shame if someone didn't have a piece available that fit the theme or couldn't compete because they do not have the material. The hope is to launch a contest/competition.

Grigsby added that the SHCA comes to the DDA with issues of funding; the committee can't do it alone. Grigsby spoke of a couple of funding possibilities; the NEA town grants and the Musser grants, which are for small rural community art development. Noted that grants are difficult to get unless we have something really unique and wonderful, which is how the Grow Our Own part of the program came to be.

Grigsby noted, "We are asking the DDA to invest \$5,000 for us to seed five artists, chosen through an RFP (Request for Proposal) which we will send out to as many artists locally we can find; we hope to reach 500 artists in a 60 mile radius, to award \$1,000 to each artist for supplies and then to find sponsors for them, such as SHOUT, Rotary or downtown businesses. Grigsby explained the SHCA also has a conflict of interest because SHCA constantly has to do our own fundraising. Grigsby has agreed to do all the grant writing for the project. The committee is very strong and thoughtful in thinking beyond just the sculptures this project entails, considering murals, art bike racks and art benches. Grigsby's hope is that the DDA can support the committee to help get it started.

Marcoux asked for clarification of how the \$5,000 being requested will be used to which Grigsby responded, "We received money from the Community Foundation to use to start the project. We will use the \$5,000 as seed stipends for 5 artists so they can use it to fund the start of the project. We are then going to match the artist that is chosen with a sponsor to help complete the project. We don't want the artist to have a free-for-all, we're mindful of decorum, but want to have a level of creativity and uniqueness to South Haven, so we're proud of it and to push us back into the art culture."

Burr commented that he thinks there are twelve designated sites for art to eventually be placed in the downtown, noting, "The infrastructure is in place and we are waiting for a sculpture to come forward."

In response, Newton noted that the plinths are round and the seating plinths are square. Discussion ensued regarding where the designated sites are and whether there are just two that will support sculptures. Newton said the plinths are small, diameter wise which limits entries to small based sculptures. It was noted that the SHCA is trying to keep it open to where sculptures could be placed, noting, "in the downtown, and certainly down the road, maybe we could use other locations around the community."

Burr asked if there is a timeline for when they will have the first sculpture. Grigsby stated that the hope is to have one to unveil at Harvest Fest, but also noted that she thinks that will be a little tight. Burr asked when Harvest Fest is, to which Grigsby noted it is in October but added, "We think we have one or two people who are ready to go, but we're behind, because we had hoped to meet with you in July."

Marcoux asked, "You are going to get an RFP out, bids back and a sculpture by Harvest Fest?" Grigsby explained that the committee will not put something forth unless we find something perfect, adding, "We hope to launch one in October, so people don't think we're not doing it. We want to go slow and be right and inclusive; there are so many issues that are really important."

Campbell asked about scheduling and how long artists will have to complete projects, to which Grigsby responded that there is a schedule, but we did not meet in July as planned, adding, "If things aren't ready by this fall they will definitely be in place next spring. It's not going to drag on."

Whiteford asked whether there will be five people; what if you only find two qualified sculptors.

Burr asked if the committee plans to have five sculptures by next tourist season to which Thea responded, "That's the goal." Winkel added, "Without money it has been difficult. The competition will have judges; if none of the entries work we won't choose them. We've been in cities around the country and all do it a different way. In a lot of cases, businesses end up purchasing them. Some can be done as memorials. We have to get started, and that's what we are looking for. It will be an ongoing thing and we will be adding to it."

Whiteford stated that the DDA is here, according to our mission statement, to promote the overall economic growth and development of the community and added that the types of things being promoted here would be beneficial for economic growth, but timing and scheduling are good questions.

Newton explained that the local piece has been important to us. "Literally, we could, as a committee, have a fundraiser and buy a bunch of art. We could have that done in six months, but it's important to us to have local involvement in this. We want to use local/regional sculptors to do the pieces. From the beginning we weren't ready to give that up. The whole mentoring program, trying to give some 17-year old student at South Haven schools a place to explore this thing they are interested in, takes a lot more work than just going sculpture shopping."

Grigsby noted that this committee is all volunteers; they have worked really hard on it and added that when the RFPs come in, the art center will show all the pieces that come in, so everything is open.

Davidson asked if this will have to go before City Council, whether the design of the sculptures will have to be approved by council. Burr responded that he does not think council is qualified to judge sculptures.

Burr asked if there were any other questions or comments and hearing none called for a motion.

Motion by Marcoux that the DDA contribute \$5,000 toward the South Haven Center for the Arts downtown art project. Second by Frederick.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Braun noted he is abstaining because he was late coming into the discussion.

## **7. Update of *SoHoliday Lights* - James Leppa, Committee Co-Chair**

Davidson introduced James Leppa, to update the board regarding efforts toward lighting the downtown.

Starting in January, he began devising a plan to do downtown lights, determining the number of light poles, number of trees to decorate to attract more people and create a more viable economy in the winter months. "I am a downtown merchant so that is very important to me."

Leppa noted that the city requires LED and provides the electricity.

Leppa noted that he is co-chairing with Sara VanAshe, a local interior designer; that they connected in April and have been working on this together. She is handling corporate donations and Leppa has been working with downtown merchants and residents. Leppa explained that an initial goal of raising \$20,000; as of today, in the light fund, there is \$4,100, from private donations from local merchants and residents, and donation jars around town.

Leppa stated he is asking the DDA to allocate \$5,000 to the holiday light fund and wants to stress it is not just the holiday lights; it would include a year-round installation, like St. Joe and Saugatuck have. Trees would be wrapped downtown and would be maintained and taken care of every two years. Light poles would be wrapped in November and taken down in February. Leppa is asking that the DDA allocate the money to purchase the lights needed.

In response to a question, Leppa noted that the lights would go downtown. There are 138 light poles to wrap with lights for the holiday season and 80 viable trees that could be wrapped downtown that have electric nearby. This includes Huron to Water Street and Kalamazoo to Broadway. Leppa noted that some merchants felt left out in years past because lights were not placed in certain areas; Leppa's plan is to include all of the central business district and in sequential years, continue to grow, develop areas into the parks, city hall's tree and any other trees that come into the downtown through future development.

Leppa proposes to purchase lights through Wintergreen Corp; they provide lights to communities that are rated for 100,000 hours of lights. Even at twenty-four hours a day that is at least 10 years of use with proper installation and maintenance. Planning three light strands per pole and sixteen to twenty-four strands per tree, Leppa noted the lights he proposes have a co-axial plug so one can put them together and still maintain the brightness. Leppa spoke about the cost of light strands and power cords and explained the way they work. Leppa said in speaking with Brian Dissette, he said the city would look into

supplying a utility truck so that would not have to be part of the cost. He and his partner volunteer their time and work with a crew of volunteers – free labor, so all of the money can be used for lights. They will be deemed city property and treated as such.

Marcoux asked Leppa what he meant about permanent lights and ones you are going to put up and take down; Leppa responded the light poles would be wrapped with lights for holidays and the lights would remain in the trees year round. Due to the cost, next year the group wants to add garlands for the poles.

Marcoux asked if the city will accommodate storing the lights. Davidson said the city has in the past.

Marcoux said regarding the last lighting program, it went from regular lights to LED lights and asked if there are no supplies that can be re-used from previous years. Leppa responded, “We have LED snowflakes; I do not know where the lights are from last year, or what they are.” Marcoux noted he does not know of the quality, whether they are the same quality Leppa has been talking about to which Leppa responded that some of them were duct taped together and he did not like the way that looked; last year zip ties were used and will continue to do so.

Braun commented that the lights that were purchased were not wired for U.S. power so they had to be cut and jerry-rigged. Leppa pointed out that the lights he is talking about do fit the electrical requirements of the city and added that the previous lights were from overseas; he was looking for a wholesale commercial grade lighting company from whom replacements in case of a problem could be readily available without a time lag.

Campbell asked whether Leppa had a sample and Leppa responded that he has ordered samples and will have samples at their booth at Blueberry Festival.

Burr pointed out that the city abandoned the tree lighting due to problems with the trees growing around the lights; the new downtown streetscape was designed to have lights on poles only; this would be a change in policy that Burr does not think will be accepted readily.

Leppa agreed it is a shift and that Davidson had told him about no lights in trees. He noted one concern was whether or not, with the wind tunnel of Phoenix, lights could be secured, as the majority of the problem with lights in the trees was with that. Leppa has looked into how the trees can be securely done, explaining that there is an adaptor, a co-axial arm that has eight different adaptors so lights can be secured more securely to the tree, which is why maintenance would be done on tree lights every two years. Leppa noted that a lot of the businesses around Phoenix that he spoke to did like the lights in trees.

Marcoux commented that he liked everything Leppa has said, noting, “You’ve done your homework. If other cities are doing it, and you have a plan to accommodate the pruning of the trees, let this guy go, what that’s going to do to the town is huge, if it can be accommodated. You have worked very hard and have all the answers and I commend you for what you’ve done.”

Leppa said he started looking into this in December; how other cities were doing it and the way to make sure the lights are secure. “If this is the one project I take care of every year, I

will happily do that. I am at enough planning and council meetings, if I see things come up that will necessitate maintenance, I will be ready to do the maintenance.”

Davidson noted that the city had the most problems with maintenance in the past. Marcoux said technologically there are vehicles for making that more accommodating for tree maintenance. Leppa pointed out that if a LED lights goes out it does not affect the other lights in the strand; they are screwed together. Also, lights would not be in small branches, where they could break, but on heavier branches of the tree; if they need to be pruned, unscrew the strand and accommodate the tree maintenance.

Burr said another issue is that city crews were not to be used to put up the lights; the city was paying journeyman electrician rates to get the lights hung. Leppa noted that he has not requested using city workers, only that it was a possibility that city trucks could be used. If it has to be done using a ladder, Leppa is willing to do that. “If the city cannot donate a truck, we’ll allocate money for it.”

Whiteford said he googled and in the last ten minutes he can see that there are some companies in Michigan, but stated Leppa has done his homework; if it is Georgia that is the best quality that’s fine. Some of these companies are installers. Whiteford did not know what that would cost, but it’s something to get a quote on; maybe corporate sponsors can help with that. Leppa noted they are reaching out to Albemarle; if their employees donate, Albemarle will match it. “We do need to concentrate,” Whiteford said, “The downtown businesses should be most involved . . . but it will benefit the whole community.” Leppa added there are a lot of different emotions with the downtown merchants – they want to see it improved and there are questions due to problems in the past. That’s why we ordered samples so people can see what they are getting.” Leppa said he has been in every single store on Phoenix at least three times.

Braun noted that this needs to be a community-wide initiative; the downtown benefits, but as a community we have a center and for the whole community needs to support it.

Marcoux feels this is set apart from what was done before; first of all, we have a “godfather.” “What Leppa is talking about is what I’d consider a solution, a long-term solution. Something the community can take pride in on an ongoing basis. We won’t have to wonder what they’re doing this year.”

Braun said the price Leppa got was crazy good; most other wholesalers are looking at \$20 plus for strands.

Whiteford noted that out of the sites he has seen in the last ten minutes, Wintergreen seems to be one of the better ones.

Motion by Marcoux that the DDA board grant SoHaliday Lighting and James Leppa and his group \$5,000 to allocate for a downtown lighting program. Second by Newton.

All in favor. Motion carried.

## **8. General Comments**

There were none.

**9. Adjourn**

Motion by Newton, second by Whiteford to adjourn at 12:57 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom  
Recording Secretary