

City of South Lyon
Downtown Development Authority Special Meeting
May 7, 2009

The meeting began at 9:08 a.m.

Present: Jan Eldon, Gary Fagin, Joe Repanshek, Susan Stowe and City Manager David Murphy.

Absent: Don Beck, Barb Herzog, Gretchen Phillips and Gary Childs.

Also present: Bob Donohue and Julie Courtney of Oakland County Main Street, Kelly Reutter of Co. Reutter Salon, Cheryl Wickham of Divine Yoga and Massage, Marilyn Smith of the South Lyon Resale Shoppe, Holly and Tom Gerdorn of the Lyon Theater, Glenn Kivell of the City Council, and Kristen Delaney, Director of Community and Economic Development for the City of South Lyon.

Donohue began the meeting by introducing himself and giving the group a brief overview of his professional experience and how he came to Oakland County Main Street. Courtney did the same, explaining that she had worked with Ortonville's Main Street program before coming to the county.

Donohue gave the group an overview of the four tenets of the Main Street Program: design, organization, promotion and economic restructuring and explained the work of each of these four committees. He went on to explain how these committees use work plans to determine what will be done as well as to budget and delegate the work that they want to accomplish in a year.

Courtney noted that the Main Street program forces DDAs to think strategically about what they want to accomplish. She cautioned that many communities are very enthusiastic in the beginning of the program and try to accomplish too much, too quickly. She stated that it was better to start off with 2-3 goals for the coming year, and work to achieve those so the board and its volunteers would not experience burn out.

Donohue praised South Lyon for the work that the DDA had done in the past and pointed to other communities in Oakland County that had implemented the Main Street program and experienced a tremendous amount of improvement. He pointed to Rochester and Holly among others and noted that the City of Ferndale had experienced the most drastic turn around in the past 10 years. Courtney stated that Holly might be a good fit for the community that could mentor South Lyon.

Donohue went over the benefits that are available to certified Main Street communities: visits from National Main Street staff, assistance from a county architect who specializes in historic preservation, as well as more time and assistance from county staff. To reach this level, he noted that the City would need to dedicate a full-time staff person to

running the program which may be an issue for South Lyon but that they could spend 2 or 3 years as a mentor community and make the decision to go to the next level of membership.

As a mentor community, Donohue stated that South Lyon is eligible for a number of benefits, including one registration to the annual national Main Street conference, as well as access to training and workshops put on by the county.

Donohue asked the group where the City was in terms of downtown planning. He asked if the City had done a market study or a strategic plan. Murphy responded that as far as he knew, they had not. Delaney confirmed that she had not come across anything like this. Donohue and Courtney stated that this is where the City and the DDA would want to start. He encouraged them to engage in a visioning process that included citizens, business and property owners about what they wanted the downtown to look like. He stressed that the board needed to get a wide variety of input on the visioning so that the community would buy into both the process and the outcome of a strategic plan for downtown.

Donohue stated that the visioning process was relatively simple and would take just a couple of days. The outcome of this process would be a vision for the next 10 – 15 years, in other words, what everyone would like South Lyon to be if they were walking down the street 15 years from now. With a vision established, Courtney stated that the DDA could come up with a mission: a statement on how the DDA would achieve the vision.

With a vision and a mission, the DDA could begin to form a strategic plan: a list of two or three projects to accomplish this year. Some of this work would then be delegated to the four committees: design, organization, promotion and economic restructuring.

Councilman Kivell asked how the Main Street program could address absentee landlords, blighted property and other problem buildings in a downtown. Donohue stated that one important factor is for the DDA to understand the powers of a DDA, meaning that at some point in the future, the DDA may want to consider buying trouble properties and either rehabbing or selling them to someone interested in developing them if there is the money for something like that. Donohue also pointed to the usefulness of façade grants to improve the look of buildings in the downtown.

Some discussion was held about the current location of the Post Office and the possibility that the lease may currently be under negotiation. Courtney stated that a post office can be an important draw downtown, but that having it in such a central location may not be the best use of prime real estate. Donohue pointed to the location of the Howell Post Office as a nice compromise.

Susan Stowe mentioned that her son had recently been in a class at school where the project was to re-imagine downtown South Lyon and make a model of your vision. Everyone agreed that it would be great to incorporate this into a visioning session and include school age children in the process.

Delaney asked Bob how the work place process was carried out. Donohue explained that it was an ongoing process that needed to be recommitted to every year. In January or February, everyone should bring their ideas to the table and then the board should pick and chose which things to accomplish, commit them to the work plan and include them in the budget.

The group also talked about who constituted a key stakeholder in the process and Courtney passed out a handout to give the group an idea of who should be targeted in the visioning process.

Donohue talked about how this process involved building up momentum and that success would generate even more success. He stated that it was crucial to have buy-in from merchants as well, and that a regular meeting over coffee could be essential in building a coalition of people who would support the vision for downtown. He pointed to a few communities that have a regular meeting where merchants give a brief introduction, and then there is a 15-20 presentation as a way for everyone to keep in touch and share information.

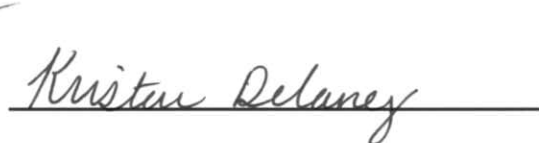
Kivell asked how the group was supposed to motivate volunteers in this process. Both Donohue and Courtney stressed the importance of having jobs for volunteers. No one likes to offer to help and then not be given something to do. Donohue said that now was a good time to think about people's strengths and interests and try to place them on a committee. Courtney suggested a tactic for volunteer recruitment that had worked in other communities. It required each volunteer to recruit one volunteer each year and bring them to a meeting.

Donohue explained the elements that went into a work plan and drew one on the dry erase board: task, person responsible, date of completion, number of volunteers needed and cost must be taken into consideration in a work plan.

To wrap up the meeting, Donohue and Courtney stressed that South Lyon must engage in a visioning process first.



Gary Fagin, Chairperson



Kristen Delaney, Recording Secretary