MINUTES
DDA BOARD MEETING - SPECIAL MEETING
9:00 AM - Monday, October 5, 2026
SPARK East - 215 W. Michigan, Ypsilanti MI 48197

**1. CALL TO ORDER (9:04 am)**

**2. ROLL CALL**

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| LIZ WARREN | **(P) (9:08am)** | ANDY FRENCH (C) | **(P)** |
| DIETER OTTO | **(P)** | PAUL AJLOUNY | **(A)** |
| VALORY BROWN | **(P)** | KRISTINE NASH-WONG | **(P)** |
| NICOLE BROWN | **(A)** | BRYAN FOLEY | **(A)** |
| BRIAN JONES-CHANCE (V) | **(P)** | EMMY MAURER | **(P)** |
| MEGAN FOLDENAUER | **(A)** | COLLEEN KENNEDY | **(P)** |
| JULIUS BUZZARD | **(A)** | | |

**Staff Present: DDA: Elize Jekabson and Danya Youssef-Agha**

**3. AGENDA APPROVAL**

***Dieter Otto motioned to approve the agenda. Brian Jones-Chance supported the motion. Motion passed - unanimous. Liz Warren absent for vote***

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. 8-17-26 Meeting Minutes

***Dieter Otto motioned to approve the 8-17-26 minutes. Brian Jones-Chance supported the motion. Motion passed - unanimous. Liz Warren absent for vote.***

**5. PUBLIC COMMENT - (3 MINUTES/EACH SPEAKER)**

**6. New Business**

a. Renewal of the Maple Lot Maintenance Contract with DJs Landscaping

Ahead of the winter season, we are on schedule to renew the contract with DJs for the Maple Street Lot. THis involves maintenance for the full year. $12,130 is the total cost. The quote came in lower than we had planned for. Andy French is wondering if when we bid out for our landscaping, hypothetically if we choose a different provider, does this affect the Maple Lot contract? Elize said it does not.

***Colleen Kennedy motioned to approve the Maple Lot maintenance contract with DJs Landscaping for $12,130 for the next year, Valory Brown supported the motion.***

**YES: 7 (Otto, V. Brown, Maurer, Nash-Wong, Kennedy, French, Jones-Chance, Kennedy)**
**NO: 0**
**ABSTAINED: 1 (Warren)**
**VOTE: Motion passed**

b. 2026 Strategic Planning Session with POW! Strategies

Cristina Sheppard-Decius started off the meeting by introducing herself. We will be going over Strategic Plan 2026 review & analysis, 2027 prioritization, tasks, timelines, and assignments. Cristina went over the value of strategic planning. Cristina went over the role of the DDA in our community, our vision statement, mission, core values, 2026 successes and KPIs. Andy French asked about how we track safety for our KPI since foot traffic is listed. Andy French mentioned tying in calls for service and areas where the calls are coming from. Liz Warren mentioned tying the safety KPI into where we have given Security Camera Grants. Valory Brown mentioned that identifying foot traffic is not clear. Elize mentioned tying in calls to service to the foot traffic that the farmers market brings in on Saturday mornings and if it is less with the foot traffic. Andy French would like to identify locations that are driving the calls to service. Liz Warren asked if we have KPIs from the police department. Elize mentioned that they don't break it down for the DDA area specifically.

Cristina asked if we had partnered with the police department in the past, and Elize mentioned we had paid for a cop to be in the DDA district, but they never actually placed a police offer in the DDA area. Andy French mentioned he wouldn't be opposed to trying this again. Elize mentioned we would get community push-back unless it was an unarmed officer for events. Cristina asked if we had a committee to champion this. Elize mentioned the committee was created by the city, but nothing has come out of it. Colleen Kennedy asked how many cameras we have paid out for the security camera grant, and Elize mentioned 3 to 4, but there is continued interest in the program. Andy French asked if we need to find a new leader for the group with the City for the collaborative task force for safety in downtown.

Cristina brought up occupancy KPI and asked where we are at with our vacancy rate. Elize mentioned we are at 17%, and tracking this should be easier with new initiatives. Colleen Kennedy mentioned an issue with vacancy is that our buildings are very old so getting them up to code is difficult on a new business. Cristina asked what grants we have available. We have facade grant and ADA rehab grants for W. Cross and Downtown district. Elize mentioned we have $40,000 to recircle back into our grants with a project falling through due to state funding. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned finding buildings that are vacant the longest, and approaching the owners on getting it up to code. Elize mentioned that our rents are low so we see people jump into starting a business and leaving after a year. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned using the grants to put into one building at a time, and activating the streets to make the area viable for people coming in. Cristina asked if we are proactive to vacant buildings and pass our online resources,

and we don't. Sometimes we reshare on social media, but no real plan. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned having regular business hours. Cristina mentioned including hours in the market analysis.

Cristina put together the 2027 desired KPIs. Andy French wants to add two KPIs to the list - Property Reinvestment, and increase in property values. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned we can track from our TIF values, and Cristina mentioned getting it from the county to track ahead of time. For our 2027 desired KPIs Cristina listed:

- Economic vitality & storefront occupancy
- Foot traffic & engagement
- Community & institutional partnerships
- Performance tracking.

Cristina went over the dashboard metrics of success, and mentioned this needs to go back to committees to work on as an action item because we don't have any data points to track. Kristine Nash-Wong mentioned she would like the objectives to inform the metrics, and maybe there should be an action plan for each committee. Cristina went over the 2026 Planning Session Summary Goals:

- Transform the DDA districts into a robust hub for investment and business success
- Create a clean, safe, and accessible urban environment
- Build a high-performing board with clear processes and communication
- Strengthen the connection between the DDA, residents, and local institutions

Brian Jones-Chance thinks we need to keep the goals the same since we haven't crossed anything off the list. Liz Warren mentioned incorporating marketing within the last goal. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned the first goal is the result/vision

Cristina went over the key strategies, including connectivity, business vitality , and organizational depth. Cristina went over the projects we listed last year to execute our key strategies. Cristina then went over the action plan by district. We agreed to shift river street gateway makeover to enhancement and activating Depot Town during the bridge closure.

***Liz Warren motioned to recess for 10 minutes and Kristine Nash Wong supported the motion. Motion passed unanimously***

***Liz Warren motioned to resume the meeting. Valory Brown supported the motion. The motion passed unanimously.***

Cristina continued the meeting talking about an action plan for walkability in downtown. Elize mentioned we are doing a complete reconstruction for the N. Huron lot, and downtown median repairs and updated landscaping. Elize mentioned we are also in talks for updating landscaping in the W. Cross district. Cristina continued to event support, and Elize mentioned our event support looks like event sponsorships, and businesses-centered events like Sammie Slam.

Cristina went over the 2026 reflection SWOT (strengths weakness opportunities and threats) and PESO analysis. Cristina went over incorporating arts and culture tourism into activation. Elize mentioned the Business Portrait Series videos. Cristina went over updating the SWOT analysis, needs assessment, and needs by district and the small changes she made from the survey. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned adding foot traffic to Depot Town. Cristina asked what is causing the decrease. Andy mentioned there is growth in lunch and happy hour, but their late night hours are seeing a decrease. Elize mentioned the decrease in enrollment to EMU is adding to that. Cristina asked about EMU students coming out and incentivizing them, Andy mentioned EMU had a block party a few weeks ago in Depot Town with great turnout. Liz Warren asked if there has ever been a partnership with EMU and DDA to get interns to work with the businesses. Cristina mentioned utilizing interns for the work gaps missing within the DDA. Danya mentioned using interns for event creation. Andy French asked about addressing issues of traffic on Michigan Ave since Cristina worked in Dearborn and faced similar issues. She mentioned she always struggled with MDOT. Cristina mentioned Kalamazoo took over their MDOT road to operate through the city. Elize mentioned being more interested in that for W. Cross. Cristina mentioned landscaping, and cross walk improvements go a long way like adding count down cross walk signs. Cristina mentioned getting a traffic analysis done. Cristina mentioned starting block by block to break it down. Brian Jones-Chance updating the S. Huron lot for a pedestrian friendly attraction to the lot like Dearborn did with one of their lots. Andy French mentioned that Destination Ann Arbor is working on a county-wide tourism plan, and would like to see the DDA involved in it.

Cristina moved onto prioritizing the community needs list. Andy mentioned emphasizing the market analysis and recruitment & retention strategy. She then went onto prioritizing training and education. Andy French mentioned implementing the main street approach.

Cristina moved onto organizational structure. Elize mentioned we are currently updating our bylaws. Elize is looking into what committees are subject to OMA. Brian Jones-Chance mentioned he wishes that the committee for equitable investment to focus more on equity. Cristina mentioned combining committees together to tackle projects. Kristine Nash-Wong mentioned we have had some huge wins this year with CRM implementation. Kristine would like to see us write down focuses and revisit them in two weeks instead of agreeing on them right now.

Biggest needs for:
Downtown:

- Safety
- Foot traffic (daytime/nightlife quality and quantity)
- Occupancy

Depot Town:

- Foot traffic (daytime/nightlife quality and quantity)
- Managing bridge closure
- Business engagement

W. Cross

- Safety
- EMU engagement
- Business mix/Occupancy
- One way of W. Cross
- Foot traffic (daytime/nightlife quality and quantity)

Andy French mentioned including foot traffic as a focus for Operations and Finance. Continued to talk about events downtown. Restaurant week in the month of Feb. Washington St Activation.

**7. Proposed Business**

**8. Public Comment - 60 minutes total (3 minutes/each speaker)**

**9. Adjournment (1:09 pm)**