

**DOWNTOWN OAK PARK BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES**  
**November 12, 2024 VIA ZOOM**

**Present:** Frank Heitzman, Susie Goldschmidt, Mike Fox, Mike Carney, Cameron Davis, Tina Salerno, Michelle Vanderlaan, Jonathan Kaufman, Ray Ward, Emily Egan, Vanessa Matheny, Jonathan Burch, Brandon Crawford, Cameron Davis, John Harris

**Staff:** Shanon Williams, Amelia Dellos, Jeff Eng, Jayne Furlong

The Downtown Oak Park Board of Directors' meeting was called to order by Board President, Susie Goldschmidt, at 8:35 am via Zoom.

**Motion to Approve October 2023 Minutes:**

Approved: Mike Fox

Seconded: Michelle Vanderlaan

All in favor

- Motion Carried –

**Finance Report – Mike Carney**

1. **OAKTOBERFEST SUMMARY** - Almost all of the dollars have been received and paid out for Oaktobefest. The Oaktobefest Expenses of about \$131,000 were approximately 10% higher than last year. The Oaktobefest Revenue of about \$109,000 was approximately \$15,000 less than last year and contributed significantly to the Net Loss of \$20,000. Had the same number of mugs been sold as last year, Oaktobefest would have been very close to breaking even.

2. **THURSDAY NIGHT OUT SUMMARY** - Merchants have redeemed TNO Coupons with a value of about \$175,000 which is about 96% of the Total Coupons sold. This 96% redemption is higher than the historic 90% redemption in past years.

3. **EXTRA RESERVE AND SNOW RESERVE ACCOUNTS** - The Extra Reserve Account currently totals \$239,924 and the Snow Reserve Account totals \$71,967.

**Motion to Approve October 2023 Financial Statements:**

Approved: Mike Fox

Seconded: Tina Salerno

All in favor

-Motion carried –

**Village Updates - Vanessa Matheny, Emily Egan, Cameron Davis, and Jonathan Burch**

1. VOP Panhandling Campaign - Vanessa Matheny and Jonathan Burch
  - a. "Make Real Change, Not Spare Change" Campaign

- i. Soft launching the campaign on Monday Nov 18
  - ii. Overall goal is to reduce panhandling in the Village
    - 1. Goals to educate the community, find long term solutions, support businesses, improve safety, and coordinate resources
      - a. Hoping to help redirect visitors and community members to avoid handouts and use alternative QR code to donate towards long term goals (food vouchers, hotel vouchers, long term housing)
        - i. The Village understands there are multiple populations involved in this issue, but hopeful this initiative will end up helping both the panhandling and unhoused populations
  - iii. The Village would like DTOPBA to be the fiscal agent of the project
    - 1. When donations are made by residents, funds go to DTOPBA then VOP would help streamline to get resources back into community
- b. Board Feedback:
  - i. Susie - how will public know about campaign?
    - 1. Vanessa - Forum on Monday 11/18 to introduce the campaign, then will use flyers throughout business districts, and set individual meetings with other business districts
  - ii. Susie - will there be signage?
    - 1. Vanessa - yes, intent is to have flyers, posters, etc that can be posted throughout Village
  - iii. Michelle - Was the business community brought in for feedback?
    - 1. Vanessa - not in a formal way, but The Village has spoken informally with members of the business community over the past 3 years around panhandling. Collectively used that feedback to help develop ideas for the campaign.
  - iv. Michelle - Panhandling is one of the most significant issues for the business district, if not the most significant right now. Don't want to just complain, but we want to have solutions that are immediate and impactful short term and long term. Doesn't think a campaign itself is a solution, but maybe a solutions-oriented meeting with business owners would go a long way for buy-in.
  - v. Mike C - Purpose mainly to educate about options to donate money rather than give handouts?
    - 1. Vanessa - It was a missed opportunity to not bring to business districts ahead of time. Plan to do a second phase launch in Spring/Summer and will seek feedback before then. Intent is to provide resources, but also to help the community and visitors recognize not all panhandlers are unhoused and need resources. Not only educate residents but also individuals in need of services and help divert resources to those who have a real need.

- vi. Jonathan - There needs to be a separate meeting with business community that is impacted.
- vii. Michelle - It is important not to do just window dressing with signs and flyers, but actions to actually meet goals. What are the measures of success? How can you have the most effective, engaged business community working towards solutions?
  - 1. Vanessa - Panhandling campaigns have a 50/50 draw on success. Without buy-in, it will not succeed. We want to have a strong message to reduce panhandling so there are fewer individuals panhandling in the community, but this is a community where people are willing to give. Hoping to reframe the conversation to focus on systematic changes through donations to reach the goal of less panhandling.
- viii. Amelia - How long do you see this campaign running? What are stages of communication?
  - 1. Vanessa - Initial kick off with community forum 11/18 then we intend to use social media and communication through the Wednesday Journal to reach residents. Then work with business districts to support and get them what they need. No end date because the goal is to make this a regular part of the community, but initial focus is changing that process of giving and supporting businesses.
- ix. Susie - Village wants DTOP to be the fiscal agent, but the funds would support all districts?
  - 1. Vanessa - Yes. Asking for DTOP to be the fiscal agent, but it will be focused on whole Village. DTOP sees most frequent panhandling, but it will serve the whole community.
- x. Mike C - What is the specific ask? And why can't the Village be the agent?
  - 1. Vanessa - We recognize the perception of residents and visitors giving money to the village. "We already pay taxes, why give more money to the Village?"
  - 2. Vanessa - When funds come in, DTOPBA would be the recipient of those funds then work with VOP and the Homelessness Coalition to distribute funds to specific programs like hotel vouchers and food vouchers. Ideally will have a long-term mitigation fund to work with affordable housing. Housing Forward would be a partner assisting with the housing element.
- xi. Susie - What would it say in the campaign to name DTOPBA as the fiscal agent?
  - 1. Vanessa - Something like "In partnership with DTOPBA"
  - 2. Jonathan - Benefit to separate Village for perception, so it creates a cobranding opportunity for DTOPBA

- a. Mike F - Our bylaws say we have to use our funds for our district specifically. We need to discuss this as the finance committee and talk to our attorney about legality.
- xii. Michelle - Wouldn't Housing forward or homelessness coalition be a better fiscal agent?
  - 1. John Harris - Fiscal agent of Homelessness Coalition is Housing Forward.
  - 2. Vanessa - Not within Housing Forward's mission to address panhandling, just housing.
    - a. Mike F - What about the Chamber of Commerce?
      - i. Vanessa - Certainly something we can consider. Village had reached out to Community Foundation but it did not align with foundation's mission. Could reach out to the Chamber as well.
- xiii. Susie - This program does go beyond our footprint so we would need to look into legality of being the fiscal agent.
  - 1. Vanessa - DTOP is currently impacted the most by panhandling and that was why Village thought it aligned the most. If you compare the difference, 90% would likely be used in DTOP.
- xiv. Brandon - We are looking at all opportunities to improve visitor/resident/owner experience downtown. This is just one part of addressing social issues that are ongoing. Open to having other discussions around these issues as well.
- xv. Susie - Soft launch is planned for next Monday, will that be the same if there is no fiscal agent? What about waiting for Spring?
  - 1. Jonathan - Yes, there are other options if no fiscal agent finalized. Could use linktree style site to help people pick an organization to donate to, but it is not as streamlined. Will move forward now and then double down Spring/Summer with the second round launch. Have discussed pausing and launching in the spring, but think introducing the concept to the community now ahead of the holidays will still be beneficial.
    - a. Vanessa - The Holiday advantage is there are more people out and about in the businesses districts who may see the message.
      - i. Michelle - Capacity to give is more expanded in holiday season so use of QR code isn't going to be impactful
- xvi. Shanon - Will there be suggestions for handling solicitors in the moment? People feel guilty when they say now, so how can they deal with that discomfort?
  - 1. Vanessa - We recognize discomfort in the moment. Monday we intend to give alternative responses to say/do/etc, providing resource cards, what to do if someone is aggressive. We

recognize a QR code doesn't have the instant gratification of giving a person something, but police and panhandler feedback shows people are not necessarily in need but use panhandling for income. Education around that should help alleviate guilt.

- xvii. Shanon - Has heard about a program in another community to give a coin that can be exchanged for food/coffee/etc and gave that instead of money. Would love to see a program like that.
  - 1. Susie - doesn't that still encourage panhandling?
  - 2. Vanessa - Village discussed that, and it had been done here before. Depending on campaign impact, may still consider a program like that for food vouchers, but need to have ways to support local businesses who would have to track a program like that.
- xviii. Susie - Conversation should pause here for now. DTOPBA has lots to consider and it should be discussed by the finance and executive committees, then DTOPBA can come back to the Village with an answer.

#### 1. Economic Vitality Survey - Emily Egan

- a. Plan to go to Board with suggestions from a survey that has been filled out by local stakeholders. Village has heard from a variety of stakeholders and will send info about responses for review. Please fill out the survey if you have a chance.
  - i. Shannon - Attended a feedback session and thought it was well done

#### 2. Village Employee Parking Program Changes - Emily Egan, Cameron Davis

- a. Have received feedback on this program and exploring subsidized parking rates. Making sure garages are being used equitably and looking into making employee parking available in large areas of the garages, as well as looking at income cap.
  - i. Last year increased the income cap to \$20 per hour, now thinking of other ways to make program more appealing to more employees.
  - ii. Have received feedback from large utilizers and would like to now have to go all the way to the top of the garages. Districts and users seemed open to that idea.
  - iii. Annual increase is also being considered as well as potentially making more permits available.

#### b. Board Feedback:

- i. Susie - Does employee parking allow in and out privileges?
  - 1. Cam - They can leave and come back. It is based on a card sold quarterly, not daily punches.
- ii. Tina - Can we make passes available to purchase online? Going to the Village quarterly is time-consuming. Could you refill same card?
  - 1. Cam - Good recommendation. Sean Keane, the parking manager, is looking for ways to improve the program technologically. Not sure timeline, but it is being looked into. Benefits on both sides as this would decrease admin time as well.

- iii. Shannon - Biggest concern is if employee were able to park lower would that disrupt customer parking.
  - 1. Cam - Everything comes down to when people arrive. FFC is by far the biggest user and Jeff Long from FFC gave insight around arrival times of employees. They are staggered and/or they do not park there daily. So more comfortable that not everyone arrives at once so it should allow for flow in and out to continue. The 3rd largest user isn't open Mon/Fri so doesn't impact parking those days. There is so much underutilization of Holley Court anyway, it should not cause huge disruption.
- iv. Susie - How many levels are in Holley Court? Could middle levels be used instead of top?
  - 1. Cam - 5.
  - 2. Cam - It has to be top level or nothing because it is gated not just at the ground level but also before the top level for employees.
    - a. The second gate is damaged a lot as well, so allowing parking throughout would avoid using second gates and the frequent expense of repair.
- v. Shannon - Sean Keane said he would get utilization numbers to help with decision.
  - 1. Cam - Sean Keane will give a report at the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting and will probably send the numbers out then.

### **Marketing - Amelia Dellos**

- 1. Holiday Promotions:
  - a. Shopper Reward envelopes have been printed and distributed.
    - i. Also doing promotion socials and an insert in WJ, plus ads.
  - b. Small Business Saturday (SBS) - "Keep the Cheer Here" in partnership with VOP
    - i. DTOPBA will create a "cheer squad" to go around to businesses on SBS to live stream, host giveaways, and feature promotions.
    - ii. Businesses are encouraged to extended hours and/or offer promotions, sales, etc.
  - c. 2024 Holiday Gift Guide
    - i. Will look like a magazine for social media and eblast
    - ii. Businesses are encouraged to send in special offers or gifts to feature by Nov 16th
  - d. Gift Card Redesign
    - i. creating one sheet for employees and for new members to educate them on program
    - ii. Considering a poster and sticker for in-store to help employees

### **Events - Jayne Furlong**

1. Halloween Recap
  - a. There was a great turnout for the happy hour and free movie
    - i. 156 people attended the film
2. Winterfest
  - a. Tins are on sale
    - i. Price raised to \$30 this year to account for increase in supply costs
  - b. 29 businesses signed up
    - i. Created a tiered system so businesses could select the kind of item they give out
    - ii. Cookies orders are placed
  - c. Signage, posters, and brochures being updated
  - d. Santa, Carolers, and Tent are booked
3. Home for the Holidays
  - a. Carriages booked
  - b. Santa booked
  - c. 4 coffee shops handing out hot cocoa

### **New Business**

1. Finance Committee - will meet next friday
  - a. Report from Village on SSA
  - b. Budget for 2025
  - c. McAdams is up for renewal
  - d. Holiday Gathering - still considering dates
  - e. Holiday Decor
    - i. Scaled back to make up the Oaktobefest deficit but shouldn't notice!
    - ii. Budget back in good shape
2. Unhoused in DTOP - working with the Village to look at blocking off areas where people are congregating
  - a. Village hiring social service workers
    - i. Emily - Will be under Neighborhood Services, Board gave permission for Phase 1 and Village is hiring several social work positions, Phase 2 likely to be presented to the Board early next year
      1. Michelle - Biggest issue right now. Aggression, defecation, theft are creating a large safety risk and creating angst in local businesses.
        - a. Emily - Absolutely agree it is a business issue and economic vitality issue. Economic Vitality will be supporting businesses as well as Neighborhood Services in this work.
      2. Michelle - It is a complex issue with many layers. Village needs multiple solutions to it.
        - a. Jayne - The Oak Park Homelessness Coalition does work to bring the various organizations that are providing services, school districts, local businesses, local

government, etc. together for discussions about the issues they each work on and how they can support each other

3. Shanon - Drug use is also a huge issue. DTOBPA is definitely monitoring the situation and staying in contact with the Village about handling these situations.
  - b. Mike Fox - Was the port-a potty contract extended?
    - i. Emily - Will check and follow up.

**Consent Reports**

- a) Executive Director – Shanon Williams
- b) Marketing – Amelia Dellos
- c) Events/Communication- Jayne Furlong

**Motion to adjourn:** Downtown Oak Park Board of Directors' Meeting at 9:40 am by Susie Goldschmidt, Board President.

Approved: Mike Fox

Seconded: Mike C

All in favor

-Motion Carried –