



**November 10, 2023 Meeting  
MINUTES**

**Decatur City Hall  
City Commission Meeting Room  
509 North McDonough Street**

Members Present: Conor McNally (Chair), Noah Peeters (Vice Chair), David Harry, Lisa Turner, Linda Curry

Members Absent: Tony Leung, Darren Comer

**Call to Order.** Mr. McNally called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

**Unfinished Business.**

Approval of Minutes of October 13, 2023 meeting.

*On a motion by Ms. Curry, and seconded by Mr. Harry, the minutes were approved as presented; Mr. McNally abstained.*

**Agenda Action Items.**

**Commercial Buildout Grant Program.** Recommend approval of a resolution establishing the Commercial Buildout Improvement Grant and appointing the same members to its Grant Review Committee as are on the Commercial Façade Grant.

Ms. Baylis presented the revised framework for the program based on prior comments provided to staff. Revisions include adding ADA-accessible bathrooms and structural work added to the scope of work.

Ms. Baylis stated the Commercial Buildout Improvement Grant (CBIG) was designed to prioritize scope of work that enhances the internal and structural aspects of commercial business properties. The CBIG Program aims to enhance commercial retail spaces in the City of Decatur. This program benefits various business types, such as retail services, food and beverage establishments, micro-manufacturing spaces, through reimbursement grants for internal building improvements. The program would complement the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant (CFIG) Program, which provides grants for external building improvements. The maximum CBIG grant amount is \$10,000, and the minimum participation is \$2,500. The program would provide a 75/25 matching grant, with 75% of the project expenses reimbursed through the CBIG program, up to \$10,000, and 25% of expenses incurred by the applicant. The DDA would issue the grant upon satisfactory completion of the qualified project, and after all necessary project expense documents have been submitted and approved by the program review committee. Project must be started within six (6) months of grant approval and completed within eighteen (18) months of grant approval.

Ms. Baylis stated the eligibility requirements. The business or commercial property must be located in the City of Decatur, such as: the business or commercial property owner has paid all appropriate

taxes, fees and other assessments; there are no outstanding judgements against the business or commercial property owner; there are no current proceedings in bankruptcy instituted by or against the business or property owner and no current assignment by the business or commercial property for the benefit of creditors; there are no state or federal tax liens presently pending against the business or the commercial property; financial ability to commit matching grants; prior property owner authorization, if small business owner is a lessee; and for the purpose of receiving the grant, a small business is a business that does not operate more than three stores in the state of Georgia nor has more than 25 employees, and annual receipts do not exceed \$3.5 million

Ms. Baylis stated the eligible scope of work: Wall improvement/repair; floor improvement/repair; ceiling improvement/repair; HVAC installation; ADA-accessibility improvement; sprinkler system; installation/improvement; fire alarm system improvement; plumbing repair/replacement; and grease trap replacement/installation.

Mr. McNally stated that there should be a priority for new businesses, and the review committee should consider.

In response to a question by Mr. Peeters, Mr. Austin Thomas, Economic Development Intern, stated that based on his research of Clermont, FL, Clermont had an average building age that was over 100 years old and some of their HVAC systems were not safe to use.

Mr. McNally, stated that the term "installation" be changed to "upgrades" for the HVAC scope of work, and that the term grease trap include repair, replacement and new installation.

In response to a question by Ms. Curry, Mr. Kyle Williams, DDA Counsel, stated that a title search would uncover any judgement against a business. He also stated that barring a full title search, the business owner could sign an attestation that verifies that the business is not subject to a judgement against the business.

Ms. Turner stated that in her role as a review committee member of the commercial façade improvement program, she noted requested scope of work were a better fit for an interior build-out grant. Therefore, she is in support of the new grant program.

In response to a question by Mr. Peeters, Ms. Baylis confirmed that the HVAC scope would be for upgrades and installation, and grease trap scope would be for replacement and installation.

*On a motion by Ms. Turner and seconded by Mr. Peeters, the grant program was approved unanimously.*

**Marketing and Digital Connectivity Grant Program.** Ms. Baylis stated that Mr. Thomas gave a presentation on the recommendation of this program during the October meeting. She recommended that the Decatur Downtown Development Authority approve a budget of \$25,000 for this program and consider adding two new members to the decision committee.

Ms. Baylis stated that the MDCG Program aimed to improve the digital marketing presence of Decatur businesses by supporting the design and production of marketing materials and content for digital platforms. The program would offer the opportunity for approved business owners to receive a reimbursement, in the form of a grant. The maximum MDCG grant is \$2,500, and the minimum grant is \$250. The program will provide a 75/25 matching grant, with 75% of the project expenses reimbursed through the MDCG program, up to \$2,500, and 25% of expenses incurred by the applicant. The DDA would reimburse back to the applicant after all necessary project expense documents have been submitted and approved by the program review committee. Projects must be started within six (6) months of grant

approval and completed within twelve (12) months of grant approval. The grant awardees and their proposed projects would need to meet certain eligibility criteria and commit to specific funding requirements as a result of the award.

Ms. Baylis stated the scope of work would provide brand and logo design, website design, video shoots/photoshoots, ad campaigns (e.g. Instagram, Facebook ads). The project should improve brand awareness, identify target audience, create better online marketing materials and content to attract more digital interactions and potentially bring more customers to City of Decatur businesses. The project must be specific, realistic, relevant, measurable and timely.

Ms. Baylis stated the Development Authority needs to appoint a Grant Review Committee to include the following members: two (2) representative of the Authority's Board, the Business Development Manager of the City of Decatur, and the Communications Manager or staff representative of the City of Decatur. The Grant Review Committee would establish qualifying criteria and standards for grant applicants, establish requirements for applications and documentation submissions, make recommendations to the Authority's Board for final action of grant applications, and establish oversight and on-going submission obligations for each grantee.

Mr. McNally stated that he appreciates the program because it enhances the online presence of businesses. He also expressed his approval of the project scope, emphasizing that it effectively keeps potential projects aligned with the goal of improving the online presence of these businesses.

Mr. Peeters expressed his willingness to participate in the review committee, as did Ms. Turner.

*On a motion by Mr. Harry, seconded by Ms. Curry, and the grant program was approved unanimously.*

**Contract for Professional Services.** Ms. Threadgill presented a new proposal to continue a partnership with Retail Strategies to provide services in business recruitment to the city of Decatur.

Ms. Threadgill explained that the DDA first partnered with Retail Strategies in 2022 for an all-day training on developing a recruitment plan, conducting research, and reaching out to various retailers.

Ms. Threadgill stated that there are specific areas requiring additional assistance, particularly in recruiting a new downtown grocery. She added that an extended partnership with Retail Strategies would focus on limited recruitment to assist in finding and recruiting a downtown grocer.

Ms. Threadgill explained that the scope of work that Retail Strategies is willing to undertake involves examining five different sites within downtown Decatur and East Decatur Station. Additionally, they plan to reach out to up to ten prospects and a minimum of twenty retailers to gather feedback and understand their site selection criteria.

Ms. Threadgill stated that staff was in conversation with the ownership of 720 Commerce Drive, who intended to have a comprehensive plan for both the office building and the vacated grocery site. She stated that the Downtown Master Plan identified 720-750 Commerce Drive as an opportunity site for redevelopment and new retail.

Ms. Threadgill encouraged the board to review Exhibit A in the agreement to ensure alignment with the proposal and to ask questions.

In response to a question by Mr. McNally Ms. Threadgill stated the proposal does designate recruiting a grocer as one of the main priorities.

Mr. McNally stated his concerns about the DDA spending \$25,000 to attract a grocery store when there wouldn't be any redevelopment for an extended period and specifically about recruiting at the "Baby Kroger" site.

Mr. Harry emphasized that the project was intended to explore several sites, highlighting the benefits of undertaking the project if it genuinely considered multiple locations.

Mr. Peeters mentioned that there was a deep focus on the downtown area and encouraged the board to take a step back. He further mentioned the presence of a new Publix on the edge of downtown, along with Lidl, Sprouts, Whole Foods, and Walmart. He agreed with Mr. McNally, expressing concerns about other vacant spaces in downtown. He believed that support from Retail Strategies would aid in finding a grocery and filling the gaps.

Mr. McNally agreed with Mr. Peeters, acknowledging plenty of reasons to move forward. However, he voiced concerns about recruiting a grocer and the priority of the project, particularly filling the 720 Commerce site.

Ms. Turner stated concerns about whether this was something that should be pursued and was unsure if the Baby Kroger site qualified for a grocery and whether the DDA should stop looking. Ms. Threadgill iterated that this project would provide feedback from grocery prospects on whether the DDA should stop recruiting a downtown grocer.

Mr. McNally responded by emphasizing that grocery should not be the primary focus of recruitment, especially when there are other vacant spots.

Mr. Peeters suggested that the DDA could perform its analysis of recent grocery developments, noting that national groceries typically seek large formats. Ms. Threadgill agreed and clarified that Retail Strategies was not looking for a large format grocery considering the site constraints of available land in downtown Decatur.

Mr. McNally expressed a desire to shift the primary focus from a potential grocer to the other types of retail. Mr. Harry agreed with Mr. McNally, stating that the feedback would be helpful in gaining a broader scope of what retailers are looking for.

*On a motion by Ms. Turner, and seconded by Mr. Harry, and the contract was approved with the condition that the scope be modified to de-emphasize grocery recruitment.*

## **Reports and Other Business.**

**FY23-24 Q1 Financial Report.** Ms. Threadgill presented the report and that the revenue and operating expenses to date meet expectations.

In response to a question by Mr. McNally, Ms. Threadgill stated that the "Contract Labor" budget line had the biggest change from the approved budget to the revised budget due to the extension of the Square Security Program. She stated that the DDA had approved an increase to \$75,400, with the City covering half of the cost through a reduction in the end of year management fees.

Mr. McNally stated that there has been good work done and that there would be further discussion at the DDA Retreat to talk about the Downtown Master Plan, figuring out what is going to happen in the future from a funding perspective, in addition to the priorities for the next year.

**Unhoused Community Partners Meeting in November 14, 2023 at 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.** Ms. Threadgill informed the board that there have been discussions regarding the unhoused population. Nonprofit, private, and public sector community partners have been coming together, meeting on a monthly basis at

Legacy Park, with the next meeting scheduled for November 14, 2023, from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. at Legacy Park. She invited board members to participate in the meeting.

Ms. Threadgill stated that the partnered collective has recognized that the unhoused population does not see boundaries, emphasizing that this is a county-wide issue. She further stated that discussions have been productive, and as a collective, they are trying to find solutions and put the right resources in place. Ms. Threadgill added that several members of the unhoused community will be at the upcoming meeting to share some of their challenges.

**Downtown Place Management.** Ms. Threadgill stated that the Downtown Master Plan recommended that a place management strategy be implemented to ensure a positive downtown experience for businesses, visitors and residents. She stated that over the last three years, the City, the DDA and the Tourism Bureau have invested in different initiatives to address the downtown experience, including the Downtown "clean team," consisting of Public Works staff dedicated to keeping the downtown area clean. She also stated the start of and the extension of the temporary Square Security Program, which involves Police Department staff and other POST-certified officers working Thursday through Sunday to ensure downtown safety. Contracts for beautification, pressure washing, and other services, have also been implemented. All initiatives together, the total cost has reached over \$500,000 and that it is a good time to assess if the current strategy is meeting the needs while also be the most cost effective to the entities that pay for the services.

Ms. Threadgill stated that staff have researched other communities, business improvement districts and commercial improvement districts to seek successful strategies. The most impactful program was found to be an ambassador program. From there, staff researched how ambassador programs were implemented and operated, whether through internal staffing or contracted with an outside company that specializes in the scope of work. Staff found that small to medium size contracted with an outside company. Staff continued to research and seek references for companies that provide ambassador and place management services. Staff narrowed the field to a national company, Block by Block, and noted they presently conduct contractual services for Macon, GA and other Georgia cities.

Ms. Threadgill presented an informational proposal prepared by Block by Block, which contained an overview of the company and its offerings. She informed the board that no action was requested at this meeting, and she would provide a cost comparison between the current expenditures and the proposed fees of Block by Block at a future meeting when the topic was back before them. This would include a comparison of staffing levels and hours, illustrating how they compare to the proposal from Block by Block.

Ms. Threadgill expressed the potential benefits for the Tourism Bureau, the DDA, the business community, and the City of Decatur from the services provided by Block by Block. She added that there could be a potential three-way contribution to cover the costs of a contractual fee.

In response to a question by Ms. Turner, Ms. Threadgill confirmed the contractual services would replace the services already in place. Ms. Threadgill noted that the Square Security Program would end at the end of December, emphasizing that the cost for the program is substantial, and the DDA can't sustain the current spending level. Ms. Threadgill added that the ambassador program would not employ officers, but be trained to identify issues and involve law enforcement when appropriate.

Ms. Threadgill encouraged the board to review the table of recommended service examples, which included cleaning-related services such as litter removal, power washing, and graffiti abatement, along with special projects. The table also outlined reporting and safety-related services, as well as

hospitality and public engagement. Ms. Threadgill replied that these members would be branded and identified as City of Decatur.

Ms. Sherry Jackman, Tourism Bureau Manager, stated that the exploration of this option started six months ago. She noted that Block by Block was initially representing only two cities in the state of Georgia, Macon and Augusta. She explained that Block by Block is a nationwide company offering services to large cities, small communities, sports arenas, and college campuses. Ms. Jackman emphasized that while there might be slightly cheaper options, Block by Block has the best reputation and the most clientele. She explained that Block by Block's reputation speaks for itself and highlighted that having a complete service managed by them would alleviate the burden on the city's employees. Ms. Jackman further added that Block by Block provides all the necessary equipment for these tasks.

Ms. Jackman stated current proposal could be modified, such that the work hours would start at 7 a.m. and end at 11:30 p.m. The plan would consist of five full-time employees, with two members on the early shift, two on the later shift, and a working manager.

Ms. Jackman explained that each Block by Block staff member would receive a phone with an app that tracks their movement throughout the city, allowing city staff to monitor their activity at any time. The staff members would use the app to report on the amount of trash they pick up, graffiti removal, and cleanups with the pressure washer. Ms. Jackman stated that Block by Block could also maintain plantings that are around the Square.

Mr. Harry stated his support to keep exploring this option to consolidate all the efforts into a more concise format, to which Mr. Peeters agreed that it would help with consistency of services.

In response to a question by Mr. Peeters, Ms. Threadgill stated that the Downtown Development Authority would most likely maintain the contract and that the Tourism Bureau would assist in the day-to-day oversight of operations.

In response to a question by Ms. Turner, Ms. Threadgill replied that the board is not financially committed at this time, and that this presentation is to be informational and encourage dialogue for early feedback.

Mr. McNally reiterated that the Square Security program would be discontinued and the level of service would not be replicated in the ambassador program. Ms. Jackman replied that the staff members will not be police officers and that they will be trained and will have a relationship with the Police Department, along with the business community.

Mr. Peeters then stated that bringing the Police Department into the discussion and seeing how Block by Block can work together would be beneficial.

Mr. McNally stated that it would be interesting to hear Block by Block's experiences in other cities and how they handled their experiences with the unhoused population.

Ms. Turner requested that Block by Block representatives be available for a presentation and to answer questions.

Ms. Jackman stated that it takes 90 days from the day of commitment for Block by Block to operationalize the program for a new client. Ms. Jackman stated this will create five full-time positions with benefits, allowing them to be more involved in the community.

**Appointment of Shirley Baylis to Decatur Business Association Board of Directors.** Ms. Threadgill informed the DDA board that the Decatur Business Association Board of Directors is made up of officers, one of whom is a representative of the DDA. She stated that she has served as a board member for the past four years and has leant her skillsets in the strategic planning phases. She stated that now a plan was adopted and implementation would begin, she recommends that Ms. Baylis be appointed to the Decatur Business Association as the DDA representative and that it become effective January 1st, 2024.

*On a motion by Ms. Turner, and seconded by Ms. Curry, the appointment of Ms. Baylis as a Board member of the Decatur Business Association was approved unanimously.*

**DDA Annual Retreat in February 9, 2024 at 8:00 a.m. – Noon.** Ms. Threadgill stated that the retreat will take place at Hawkins Dining Hall at Legacy Park, and that Linda Harris, Assistant City Manager, will be the facilitator. Ms. Threadgill also mentioned that by that time, the City Commission Retreat will have occurred. They can consider the City Commission work plan as they establish their own annual work plan and budget needs.

**Next regular scheduled meeting is December 8, 2023 at 8:00 a.m.** The final meeting of the year.

**Holiday Ornament.** Ms. Jackman presented the board with the 2023 holiday ornament, which was produced by Meredith Bradley. She then stated that the ornaments can be purchased at Wild Oats and Billy Goats, Sq. Ft., and Little Shop of Stories. Ms. Jackman presented each board member with an ornament.

**Adjourn.**

*On a motion by Mr. Harry, seconded by Ms. Turner, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 a.m.*

Consistent with the requirements of O.C.G.A. §50-14-1(e)(2)(B) these minutes were approved at the next scheduled meeting on January 12, 2024 and made part of the record.

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Angela Threadgill, Executive Director