



**March 8, 2024 Meeting
MINUTES**

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

Members Present: Noah Peeters (Acting Chair), Darren Comer, David Harry, and Lisa Turner
Members Absent: Linda Curry, Tony Leung and Conor McNally

Call to Order. Mr. Peeters called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

Unfinished Business.

Approval of Minutes of January 12, 2024, meeting.

On a motion by Mr. Harry, and seconded by Mr. Comer, the minutes were approved as presented.

Approval of Report of Retreat of February 9, 2024 board retreat.

On a motion by Ms. Turner, and seconded by Mr. Harry, the report was approved as presented.

Agenda Action Items.

Contract for Professional Services. Ms. Threadgill stated that staff is recommending recommendation of approval of a Resolution to establish a Downtown Ambassador Program, enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Decatur and the Decatur Tourism Bureau to share in the cost of the program, and award a contract for services to Mydatt Services, Inc. d/b/a Block by Block to administer the program in the amount of \$495,614.50.

Ms. Threadgill stated the Authority, the city of Decatur, and the Tourism Bureau will share in the cost of the agreement. The Authority will be responsible to make monthly payments to Block by Block for all costs due under the Agreement. However, the City and Tourism Bureau will each reimburse and pay to the Authority a monetary amount equal to one-third in the amount of \$165,204.84, which partnership is reflected in the draft Memorandum of Understanding.

Ms. Threadgill stated The Downtown Ambassador Program is an action item within the newly adopted Town Center Plan 2.0 to address cleanliness, safety issues, and visitor services. Many cities and downtown organizations have “ambassadors” who are personnel trained to help visitors with directions and recommendations, perform tasks related to keeping downtown clean, and act as safety personnel to interface with local police to help make downtown more welcoming and safer. They are also trained to offer outreach services to connect unhoused persons in need of assistance and resources.

Ms. Threadgill stated the DDA, the City and the Tourism Bureau pulled their resources together to start the downtown-focused services, all while research was undertaken to discover other approaches that business and commercial improvement districts have used to address similar needs. The goal of the research was to find a cost effective, efficient and financially sustainable model for a downtown ambassador program that encompasses a suite of services. The research uncovered a couple of companies

that provide ambassador, cleaning, safety, and special project related services. Upon further discussions, references, and a multi-day visit, Block by Block is recommended to carry out the services desired to achieve several of the goals of the Town Center Plan 2.0.

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has paid for a Square Security Team with POST-certified officers from local law enforcement agencies to provide downtown square security part time Thursday through Sunday, to the tune of \$212,500.00 for part time. Additionally, a Clean Team made up of off-duty staff of the City's Public Works Department have been hired by the DDA as contract workers, which is costing \$144,000.00 annually. Additionally, the DDA in partnership with the Tourism Bureau has paid for quarterly pressure washings of sidewalks and amenities and currently the annual cost is \$101,000.00. The Tourism Bureau has further paid for beautification efforts through seasonal plantings and hanging baskets, which is about \$60,000.00 per year. Most all of these services were immediate stop-gap responses to address the quality and experience of downtown Decatur.

Ms. Threadgill stated that in thinking about financial sustainability and efficiency, and the effectiveness of all the services that are needed and looking at additional services. She stated yes, litter removal and emptying overflowing trash cans, but in the contract are weed removal, graffiti abatement, and having a street sweeper for more consistent removal of fall leaves in downtown to keep it looking fresh and fairly new. Then having the hospitality related services, something that is not currently happening, she stated that Block by Block would be providing an information cart, and they would be providing a bit of public engagement, such as directions, recommendations for restaurants, and business outreach, and that is something we really don't have on a day-to-day basis.

Ms. Threadgill stated Block by Block will be supporting the Decatur Police Department with safety related services, but they should not be recognized as security guards. There is a police officer dedicated to the Decatur Square, and Block by Block staff would support them by observing, and reporting incidents directly to the Square officer. Block by Block staff will provide safety escorts for visitors and employees late at night. They would also provide support to the unhoused population. Block by Block has experience with providing such services and trains their personnel accordingly. They will also work in conjunction with community partners already providing services to the unhoused, such as Frontline.

Ms. Threadgill stated that a cost comparison was difficult, as the services are not apples to apples. The services that are provided currently are limited and in some instances, part time, and the expenses amount to \$517,550.00 annually. With Block by Block, the cost of about \$495,000.00 is coming in a little bit less, but with more services. She stated that the DDA is coming out ahead, especially in consideration of the cost-sharing partnership with the Tourism Bureau and the City.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Threadgill stated that the employees will be hired, trained and paid by Block by Block. They will be employees of Block by Block, not the DDA. She referenced page 15, exhibit C of the draft agreement, that shows the weekly service hours, and the staffing schedule showing presence in the downtown among the different employees listed.

Mr. Peeters added these dedicated employees will have a focus on downtown, will build relationships with business owners and City staff, and that will make a big difference in how the services are delivered.

In response to a question by Mr. Harry, Ms. Threadgill agreed that the service map on page 11 of the contract is geographically smaller than what is considered downtown. The areas of services are based on greatest areas of need and where foot traffic and activities are most frequent. There was consideration of a larger geographical area, however it became a balance of cost effectiveness and level of service. Different scenarios were explored, which either increased number of staff at a great cost, or same amount of staff but less efficient services due to staff being spread too thin across a greater area. She stated that the contract

renews on an annual basis and there is an opportunity to adjust the service area if the need arises. Referring to the map, Ms. Threadgill stated that the areas outside zone A are largely areas being taken care of by property management and City Public Works staff. The trashcans in areas outside zone A are more manageable and not overflowing like what is seen on the Square or along Ponce de Leon Avenue. Zone A is the core of where the services provided by Block by Block will be most effective.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Threadgill stated that Block by Block is contracted to focus on Zones A and B, and issues outside the contracted zones should fall to the Police Department, or Public Works as needed.

In response to a question by Ms. Turner, Ms. Threadgill replied that Block by Block will post the part time and full time job opportunities and those interested may apply, including current employees of the City of Decatur. Ms. Threadgill stated they will be employees of Block by Block eligible for benefits through Block by Block, and they will be personnel who are hired, trained, and paid by Block by Block. The City nor the DDA would play a role in the hiring process.

In response to a questions by Mr. Comer, Ms. Threadgill stated that the uniforms and equipment will be branded and highly visible as part of the ambassador program. The Tourism Bureau is presently working on the graphics and colors pulled from the Visit Decatur tourism colors. Ms. Threadgill stated that Block by Block employees will receive additional training related to standard operating procedures of the Police Department and Frontline Response. She added that Block by Block is coming in with a wealth of experience working in other business improvement districts and commercial improvement districts, and college campuses.

Mr. Peeters stated that he was happy to hear about the hiring of the officer and additional resources for security, and this is a good bridge from where things were and what will be provided. He also stated that he knows the city has done a lot of work in terms of the unhoused issues and offering the necessary resources, and he wants to make sure that Block by Block will be connecting them to those resources like with police and getting the benefit of those relationships. To which Ms. Threadgill agreed, and added the Police Department is also well aware of the program and welcomes the support that additional staff on the Square will provide.

In response to a questions by Mr. Comer, Ms. Threadgill responded the largest cost is personnel, but the next largest line item is the equipment. She stated though the contract is for one year, the equipment will be paid over the course of three years, and the equipment will be purchased. She stated that if the contract with Block by Block ends after one year, there is the opportunity to pay off the balance and own the equipment. Ms. Threadgill stated that the service equipment will be kept in a fenced area of the lower part of the conference center parking deck.

In response to a question by Mr. Harry, Ms. Threadgill confirmed that the DDA, after reimbursements from the Tourism Bureau and the City, would be responsible for one-third of the annual cost.

In response to a questions by Ms. Turner, Ms. Threadgill responded, each entity will be paying \$165,204.84 annually, or less than \$14,000.00 per month. Ms. Threadgill stated that an office space is still needed for Block by Block operations and that it would be an additional cost to the DDA to lease the space on behalf of Block by Block. Ms. Threadgill stated that staff will be looking for a small workspace to lease in the downtown area she will bring that forward to the Board for consideration.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Sherry Jackman, Director of the Tourism Bureau, stated that the information cart is part of the ambassador services to welcome visitors to Downtown Decatur and promote tourism within Decatur. Ms. Jackman stated that information cart is used in other

cities during events, answering questions and being of assistance to people needing information. The information cart is an extension of the Visitor's Center and meeting people where they are during downtown events.

Ms. Threadgill stated that the next steps will be for the Tourism Board to review and pass a resolution approving the MOU. The MOU will also be presented to the City Commission on March 18th for their consideration.

In response to a question by Ms. Turner, Ms. Threadgill stated it takes 60 days for Block by Block to bring the operations fully functional. The hiring process, training and ordering the equipment, etc., would place boots on the ground mid to late May.

Mr. Peeters asked if there were any further questions.

On a motion by Ms. Turner, and seconded by Mr. Harry, the Board unanimously approved the resolution authorizing the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Block by Block for professional services and enter into a memorandum of understanding with the City of Decatur and Decatur Tourism Bureau for shared costs to establish and implement an ambassador.

Commercial Façade Grant Program. Ms. Baylis presented a recommendation of approval from the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Review Committee of six grant applications and to authorize the Executive Director to execute grant contracts with approved applicants.

Ms. Baylis stated the approval is specifically for five grant requests and one micro grant request totaling \$37,938.74. The DDA allocated \$100,000.00 of its FY 2023-2024 budget in support of City of Decatur retail small business owners and commercial property owners in renovations and repairs focused on improvements and beautification of storefronts and facades. The grants cover 75% of the cost of any approved project, with a minimum contribution from the DDA of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$10,000. Additionally, a limited number of \$1,000 microgrants will be made available for simple tasks. All projects must start within 6 months and be completed within 18 months consistent with the City of Decatur permitting process.

Ms. Baylis described the six recommended grant recipients: (1) Kelly's Market, 308 East Howard Avenue, is recommended for a grant amount not to exceed \$10,000.00 for front aluminum and glass store front double doors with transom and new doors will also be more secure; (2) Pichulik Properties, 114 East Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite C, is recommended for a grant amount not to exceed \$7,494.99 for painting, wood repair, deferred maintenance of Watkins Building; (3) Swem School, 114 East Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite B, is recommended for a grant not to exceed \$6,832.00 for repainting and refreshing of façade and signage; (4) The Reading Room, 429 Church Street, is recommended for a grant not to exceed \$5,000 for a façade mural project; (5) Hell Yeah Gluten Free, 308 West Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite G, is recommended for a grant not to exceed \$7,311.75, for new signage for retail space; (6) Kelly's Market, 308 West Howard Avenue, is recommend for a micro grant not to exceed \$1,000.00, for repairing and painting existing steel awning black.

In response to a question by Mr. Peeters, Ms. Baylis responded the grant program runs through July and the remaining funds would be just under \$63,000.00.

Ms. Baylis stated that there is a large difference in the number applications versus the number approved, and the reason is that the review committee made sure scope of work and quotes were included with the applications upfront. She stated that now the application has been set to not allow and applicant to move forward with the application without the information. Mr. Peeters added that he sits on the committee for one of the grant programs and saw that many did not provide the required information and

advised staff to encourage denied applicants to reapply in the next round when they had all the documentation.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Baylis responded that they had previous recipients of the CFGI grant apply for the Commercial Buildout Improvement Grant, and met all the requirements, but because they received the full amount of the CFGI grant previously, the review committee wanted to give preference to new applicants and roll any previous applicants to the next round if there is remaining funds to cover their grant requests.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Baylis stated that Kelly's Market has received both the CFGI and CFGI micro grants. Ms. Baylis responded that since there had been a number of burglaries in the Old Depot District that have impacted Kelly's Market, the committee agreed that it was important to help support repairs and installations for businesses as preventative measure as it related to break-ins. Ms. Turner, a member of the review committee, added that it is something the review committee saw as important to do.

In response to a question by Mr. Comer, Ms. Baylis responded that the application period opens for the next round on April 1.

Mr. Peeters ask that Ms. Baylis to present all three grant resolutions at the same time and then the Board will vote.

Commercial Buildout Improvement Grant Program. Ms. Baylis presented a recommendation from the Commercial Buildout Grant Review Committee for the approval of three grant requests totaling \$13,150.00. The Decatur Development Authority allocated \$75,000 for the program in its FY2023-2024 budget in support of City of Decatur retail small business owners and commercial property owners for renovations and repairs to commercial interiors. All projects must start within 6 months and be completed within 18 months consistent with the City of Decatur permitting process.

Ms. Baylis described the three recommended grant recipients: (1) Cereal Lab, 335 W. Ponce de Leon Avenue, grant amount not to exceed \$6,900.00, for bathroom painting and design, including a new toilet and sink; and replacing kitchen entry swing doors and new epoxy on floors; (2) Montessori Academy of Decatur, 189A Sams Street, grant amount not to exceed \$2,250.00, for increasing the size of the restroom in the toddler classroom and add an additional toilet to the student restroom; (3) Bleu Hanger, 303 East College Avenue, grant amount not to exceed \$4,000.00, for replacing flooring.

Marketing and Digital Connectivity Grant Program. Ms. Baylis presented a recommendation from the Marketing and Digital Connectivity Grant Review Committee for the approval of two grant requests totaling \$3,250.00. The Decatur Development Authority allocated \$25,000 for the program in its FY 2023-2024 budget in support of City of Decatur small business owners for the purpose of design and production of marketing materials and content for digital platforms. All projects must be started within six months of grant approval and completed within 12 months of grant approval.

Ms. Baylis described the two recommended grant recipients: (1) Lubell Consulting, 141 Ridley Lane, grant amount not to exceed \$2,500.00, for a.) Content Audit: collect and evaluate existing web and other digital marketing assets. b.) Content Strategy: Prioritize and implement new content toward marketing funnel/call to action. c.) Site redesign: choose and build a hosting platform, visual theme and populate with the content strategy. d.) SEO: optimize the site for target audience; (2) Maylan Group d/b/a Montessori Academy of Decatur, 189A Sams Street, grant amount not to exceed \$750.00, for weekly ad campaign on Facebook and Instagram. These ongoing ad campaigns would assist in enhancing brand recognition and connect with prospective families to increase school enrollment.

On a motion by Mr. Harry, seconded by Mr. Comer, the Board unanimously approved the applications recommended for approval as presented by the respective review committees for the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant, Commercial Buildout Improvement Grant and Marketing and Digital Connectivity Grant programs..

Reports and Other Business

The next regular meeting is April 12, 2024 at 8:00am.

Adjourn.

On a motion by Ms. Turner, seconded by Mr. Comer, the meeting was adjourned at 8:47 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 April 12, 2024, and made part of the record.

Angela Threadgill, Executive Director