

AGENDA



DNN Advisory

Members:

Christopher Billmeier • Daniel Drent • Latesha Lipscomb • Kelli Jo Peltier • Neil Sly • Kathy Steindler • Eddie Tadlock • Jim Talen • Mark Tangen • Celeste McDonald • Paul Skentzos • Emma Suarez Pawlicki • Teresa Haggerty • Hal Froot

April 07, 2022

11:30pm- 1:00pm

29 Pearl Street NW, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.

1. Introductions (5 mins) All Members
2. Approve March 2022 Meeting Minutes
3. Community Norms (3 mins) Kendsie Channing
4. Budget Update (10 mins) Kendsie Channing
5. Dream, Design, Build: small group activity (60 mins)
 - Choose an area of interest:
 - Pedestrian Safety & Walkability
 - Housing & Unhoused Neighbors
 - Retail Engagement
 - Community Events & Service
 - Work together as a group to design a solution.
 - Create **subcommittee** to work toward solution.
6. Public Comment
7. Adjourn

*Our next meeting will be held **in-person** on May 5, 2022, at 11:30 am.*

The DNN exists to foster a community of downtown neighbors that are connected, informed and empowered to improve downtown living.





Downtown Neighbor Network Advisory

March 3, 2022

1. Call to order: Ms. Peltier called the meeting to order at 11:35 am

DNN Members Present: Celeste McDonald, Daniel Drent, Kelli Jo Peltier, Kathy Steindler, Jim Talen, Eddie Tadlock, Latesha Lipscomb, Hal Froot, Teresa Haggerty, Emma Suarez Paul Skentzos, and Neil Sly (remote).

DNN Members Absent: Christopher Billmeier and Mark Tangen.

Others Present: Richard App (GR Chamber), Kendsie Channing, Corey Mathein, Mandy McDaniel, Melvin Eledge, Marion Bonneaux, and Sam Suarez (DGRI Staff).

2. Introductions

3. Community Norms

Mrs. Channing revisited the Downtown Neighbor Network values: to get connected, stay informed, be involved, and build community for *all* neighbors downtown.

4. Approval of February 2022 Meeting Minutes

Emma Suarez supported by Hal Froot, motioned to approve the February 2022 meeting minutes. None opposed. Motion passed.

5. Project Updates

- a. Van Andel Alleyway

Mr. Skentzos stated he recently joined the Van Andel Alleyway steering committee which is a project to renovate the alleyway between the restaurants on Ionia and the arena. Mr. Drent stated with the alleyway in the current conditions, it isn't a pleasant place to walk through. The project would relocate the dumpsters to one central area, and open the space for seating, greenery, and more placemaking opportunities. Mr. Miller, from DGRI, shared renderings of the proposed designs of the new linear plaza.

Ms. Steindler asked if public restrooms would be incorporated. Mr. Miller stated yes, it's just a matter of making some determinations of where that goes.

Mr. Froot asked the best-case scenario on timeline. Mr. Miller stated the construction drawings will be finished towards the end of this year. We will start the bidding process in January or February and potentially start in April.

b. Hill + River Network Connection

Mr. Sly gave an update on the Hill and River project. This project will bridge the gap between the Hill, also known as Lookout Park and Belknap neighborhood, and the river. As of now, there is limited access via the two stairways. One of the stairways is unusable or dangerous. The steering committee met with a variety of design and engineering companies and chose the SmithGroup to begin a feasibility study. Some of the project priorities include stairs and a path to make the connection more accessible.

Mr. Miller thanked Mr. Sly for his work on the steering committee and stated over the last month the group has been meeting and engaging with a variety of stakeholders. Mr. Miller shared renderings and highlighted 3 main areas of work:

1. Hill Side Park – Connect the neighborhood down the steep slope. Disability Advocates of Kent County (DAKC) have been engaged to help vet questions from an accessibility standpoint for access for everyone.
2. Street Connections: Division and Ionia reconfiguration and linear park. Along with streetscape and mobility improvements throughout Monroe North.
3. Rail Tunnel: It has been suggested to use the rail tunnel under the highway which connects to the MSU campus. This will help with a pedestrian connection between Downtown and Monroe North.

Mr. Miller stated this is a sequence of projects and years in the making. An early cost estimate to rebuild 1 set of stairs is about one million dollars. The hill is about a 10-story building from Division Ave and we must consider a variety of commuters.

Ms. Lipscomb asked for a project timeline. Mr. Miller stated right now, the project is only in design phase, and we anticipate hiring the SmithGroup for construction documents as well. Most optimistic timeline is something could be built next year but likely to be pushed to 2024.

6. Retail Strategy for Downtown

Mr. App stated he was hired by the Grand Rapids Chamber, DGRI, and the City of Grand Rapids in January of 2020 as the Retail Attraction Specialist. Not long after he was hired, his job description shifted from focusing on *attraction* to *retention* of downtown businesses.

Compared to other cities, Grand Rapids has bounced back from COVID and continues to build and expand. Back focusing on the *attraction* piece of his job, Mr. App stated while working with national retailers, he asks what kind of data does Grand Rapids need? Mr. App presented to members “Grand Rapids by the Numbers”, a slideshow filled with several statistics and data of Grand Rapids. Some of this data includes, population, age distribution graft, number of people who visit, etc. Overall, Grand Rapids is a growing city with the highest numbers coming from the younger population. There are currently 18 hotels downtown and 400k+ people are projected to visit in 2022. 30-40k of those visitors are coming into town to compete in tournaments and events.

Grand Rapids has always been known as “Beer City”, however, there seems to be a new focus on health and wellness. Keeping the new trend in mind, Mr. App helped secure retailer Gazelle Sports with a new downtown location between Ottawa and Division. In addition, there are at least 10 other new businesses set to open within the next 60 days.

Members are encouraged to provide feedback or suggest other data to add to the presentation. Any questions or concerns, email richard@grandrapids.org.

7. Public Comment

None.

8. Next meeting April 7, 2022

Adjournment: 1:03 pm

*DNN was invited to explore new retail in the area at Periwinkle Fog following the meeting

Minutes taken by:
Mandy McDaniel
Administrative Assistant
Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.