DDA 2003 Retreat Minutes
October 14, 2003 12noon-5pm Arbor Brewing Company, 120 E. Washington St

Present: Rob Aldrich, Fred Beal, Gary Boren, Ron Dankert, Dave DeVarti, Bob Gillett, Rene Greff, Leah Gunn, John Hieftje, Lorri Sipes, Dave Solo
Absent: David Fritz
Staff: Susan Pollay, Joe Morehouse, Adrian Iraola
Others: Ray Detter, Citizens Advisory Council

Oh, What A Great Year It's Been
DDA Chair Greff opened the meeting at 12:25 p.m. Each DDA member was asked to report on projects this year, particularly the ones most satisfying and most frustrating.

Frustrating projects included:
First and Washington negotiations
South University study never came together as we had hoped

Satisfying projects included:
Opportunity to work with community artists in process of locating studio space
Working with DDA staff.
The board remains focused on its goals, clear about its objectives, and tremendously committed to its work. Very effective board, that leads well.
DDA Renewal, frustrating that it took so long, but gratifying that the process brought us much closer to City Council.
First & Washington, as we learned a great deal from the process, negotiations were terminated swiftly when we couldn’t come to agreement, and that the subsequent plan to develop three sites was such a better plan
State Street area improvements, including the transition to two-way traffic which went smoothly and dramatically opened the area. Much improved.
Liberty Plaza Park improvements and all the good community benefits they provide
Increased focus on improving access to downtown

30 Year Renewal – What Does This Mean
Opens our scope. Decisions become even more serious, as we’ll be here to experience the impacts. We’ve already shifted our thinking from building parking structures to encouraging downtown residential development, and now we need to think more specifically about workforce housing, as the downtown would benefit. On a practical level, we begin by extending our Ten Year Plan to 2013, but perhaps we should already be thinking toward 2018. Over the next 30 years, transportation will become a huge issue. Taking control of our finances will be even more important; we can’t be hindered by City delays. The UM has already gained 4,000 new positions in the past five years – what will their growth be like in the next 30 years? The UM will be the most important downtown economic driver in the coming decades. Already we need to consider how the Life Sciences initiative will affect downtown. The DDA should consider where Ann Arbor fits within a regional perspective, as we are the downtown for much of the region. It’s a myth that the City Council doesn’t support density, as it recently approved Lower Town and a 900-bed private dorm, which will free up 900 residences for others in our community. Perhaps it may be time to begin thinking about renegotiating the City/DDA parking agreement to extend it thirty years.

DDA Ten Year Plan
Mr. Morehouse outlined the assumptions underlying the Plan, and explained that the spreadsheet can be changed at will by changing the assumptions on the first page. Philosophically the Plan
was developed with revenues calculated conservatively and expenses calculated liberally to protect against unexpected problems.

Mr. DeVarti said that philosophically he opposed parking rate increases that were less than the rate of expenses. Mr. Solo said that no decision on future parking rate increases has been made. There was also a concern that the DDA would unnecessarily amass millions of dollars, and as projects are approved rates can be increased to support them. Mr. Beal supported that. Mr. Solo said that he thought this electronic spread sheet was a valuable tool to assist with setting policy.

Mr. Aldrich asked how the DDA could reflect its recent 15% commitment to housing-related projects over the next 30 years. It was agreed that an annual $450,000 transfer to the Housing Fund wasn’t the answer, as DDA support may come in the form of parking, pedestrian improvements, and housing grants. Mr. Morehouse said that a Housing Fund line item would be set up to help the DDA keep track.

Mr. DeVarti asked about capital improvements. Mr. Beal said that the Committee had estimated the cost for future projects, but had not committed the DDA to these projects, including items like vault or tree pit repairs. Mr. DeVarti asked that the DDA change the line item to $300,000/yr for maintenance items which would encompass different kinds of projects. This was agreeable to all. Mr. Aldrich said that the DDA was in the maintenance business, and special places, such as in Europe, are well maintained, and he hoped we would take this role on even more formally. Mr. Dankert asked if future streetscape repairs were shown in the Plan; Mr. Morehouse said they haven't been detailed to the same level of specificity as the CWI parking repair report.

**DDA Planning Committee**

Ms. Greff said that much Committee work had been focused on Renewal. If it were resolved to continue the Committee she would step down as Chair, as planning was not her strength. Mr. Detter argued in support of such a committee saying that no other City policy board was thinking strategically about such sites as the Library Lot. Mr. Solo said that even if the Committee were disbanded, that planning would continue at DDA retreats and other meetings. Ms. Sipes said that she had originally envisioned an “Urban Design Committee” which would explore ideas such as how to strengthen retail. Mr. Beal said that he understood Committee attendance had been very poor for the past two years which indicated a lack of interest. Ms. Greff said that it may also be due to the fact that most DDA members serve on several committees. Mr. Detter said that the SU study had failed because it hadn’t been followed up on properly; Mr. Solo said that this wasn’t true, that in fact the study’s failure was due to other factors.

Mr. Aldrich said that he would chair this Committee. All thanked him for volunteering. The name of the new committee would need to be established once its mission was clear.

Ms. Sipes clarified the difference between urban planning and urban design: the former deals with zoning ordinances and regulation; the latter takes a broader view and examines issues such as land use, transportation, and how we are positioned as a community. Mr. Beal said that the City needed a strong planning design entity, as the Planning Commission and Department focused on regulatory compliance. Mr. Hieftje said that the Council would like to streamline the approval process, and to get the Planning and Building Departments to work together better. Mr. Beal said that an issue the new committee could address would be the question of AATA expanding Blake Transit Center to the YMCA site, and whether this was good for downtown. Mr. Hieftje said that YMCA site had been discussed at a couple Council meetings and although details on its future redevelopment were unclear, Council members agreed that the housing provided by the YMCA needed to be preserved downtown. If the City opted to use its right of first refusal, he hoped the
DDA and City would work together to determine the best reuse of that site. However, as we develop more of a regional bus system, do we want all buses to come downtown? Mr. Hieftje asked the DDA to approve Mr. Beal being serving on a new Taskforce which would examine ways to increase downtown residential density. The Taskforce would also include himself or his assistant, Jean Carberg and another member of Council, a downtown developer, and Mr. Gillett representing the Housing Policy Board. Mr. Gillett joked that had he known he would be serving with Mr. Beal he might not have been so quick to approve Mr. Beal. All laughed.

What Have We Already Signed Up For and What Projects May Be Coming Our Way?

- State Street Phase III
- First & Washington, including ongoing repairs/maintenance and eventual replacement
- First & William, including addressing Allen Creek issues
- Huron, Division, & Fifth: selecting a study consultant, hiring a designer, and construction
- Deck repairs (ongoing, as called out by CWI report)
- Outskirt parking / ride lots, working with AATA
- Wayfinding?
- Bike study implementation for the State Street Area
- Farmers’ Market?
- Ongoing downtown maintenance/repairs
- Studying ways to find greater efficiencies in our existing parking system to optimize income
- Examining/redoing our overall parking rate structure
- Examining/redoing our hours of operation for on street parking meters
- Financial management
- Alley repairs
- Recycling collection on the sidewalks
- Building height policy discussions
- Benchmarking, including examining changes in our downtown overtime, changes in our downtown versus other communities, and event impacts
- First and Washington redevelopment
- City Hall expansion – public/public project
- Downtown residential taskforce – finding ways to increase downtown density
- Kline Lot redevelopment
- Façade loans
- Private developer projects – e.g. Peter Allen projects
- Artist space
- City decisions about 415 W. Washington and N. Main Street property

Do we need more staff to accomplish our projects? Ms. Pollay said that she believed we have sufficient staff for the projects at hand; however, we are operating at maximum capacity. If we take on more projects or want to emphasize more specialized work, we may need additional staff. She used this summer’s construction as an example, saying that with 4 major projects going on simultaneously Mr. Iraola was needed at several sites at once. Mr. Beal said that this coming year would be very different, as we’ll be spending time planning but not constructing projects. Ms. Greff said that she thought the DDA was really good at projects we control, for instance building parking decks, but things become more difficult when we don’t control the projects, e.g. the YMCA redevelopment and City Hall. Mr. Solo said he shared this concern. Mr. Aldrich said that the DDA can’t be all things to all people; we need to be clear about our goals. Mr. Solo said that we serve a role bringing people to the table.

Mr. Solo asked if staff would assemble a Gant chart indicating when projects might take place and how long they might take. Mr. Iraola indicated his willingness to provide this. Mr. DeVarti asked if
there was no construction this summer, what would the DDA Project Manager work on? Mr. Iraola said that he would assist with planning the big projects, plus there were several recent projects that could be closed out.

Mr. Aldrich said that he saw the committees as interrelated. For instance, Operations runs what Capital Improvements builds, after Partnerships arranges the deal, and it would get its projects from Planning. Mr. Gillett said he didn’t agree with this assessment entirely, however he agreed that the committees had different roles. Mr. Aldrich said that he looked forward to determining the goals of the new committee, which would be complementary those of Partnerships. He said he thought it might explore the “big picture”, and could develop a “vitality index” noting such things as vacancy rate changes, create a promotional role for DDA, retail recruitment, and regional planning.

Mr. Dankert suggested the proposed 2003/04 project list be analyzed to determine which would most benefit the downtown. Responses were as follows:

- First & William – several votes. “A challenge worth our talents” “Opens up other sites”
- Replacing the low income housing at the Y somewhere downtown – several votes
- First & Washington – several votes
- Developing more downtown residential units
- Asking the City to create a clear policy regarding affordable housing and building heights
- Benchmarking
- Replacing the artist studios lost at the Tech Center
- Completing the transition for DDA independent financial operation
- Creating a 30 year vision for downtown
- Access – Fifth/Division/Huron
- Downtown residential taskforce

If the DDA commits itself to researching/analyzing issues, how does it get others to do what we recommend? It was noted that City Council members will be invited to participate on DDA committees and the DDA would participate in a work session with Council following this and future retreats to ensure Council is apprised of the DDA’s projects. Mr. Beal said he hoped we’ll become more proactive and noted that the DDA had been just as slow at preparing for the Y’s eventual sale and redevelopment as the City. The distinction between urban planning and urban design was noted again, and Ms. Sipes said that the DDA had a potential role aligning current zoning with the Downtown Plan, and the new committee would be an excellent vehicle to address this.

Ms. Sipes said she would volunteer to present a “Urban Design 101” workshop for DDA members. Several people indicated their interest in participating.

Ms. Greff said that staff would be available 30 minutes prior to DDA meetings to assist DDA members interested in using their new laptops.

Mr. Detter reminded the board that the DDA would present a follow up workshop the next day at the Michigan Theater to develop recommendations to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and access in the State Street area.

All thanked Ms. Greff for her hospitality hosting the retreat. The meeting was adjourned at 5pm.

Respectfully reported
Susan Pollay, Executive Director