SSA #54 Renewal
July 14, 2020  |  Virtual Meeting via Zoom  |  Community Meeting #2

Attendees:

Business and Public Members
Liz Alejo
Nick Andersen*
Jennifer Clark*
James Laidler
Dennis Marino
Conrad

*Current SSA #54 Commissioner

RPBA, City of Chicago and Consultants
Erin Cigliano, Principal, Teska Associates, Inc.
Scott Goldstein, Principal, Teska Associates, Inc.
Cindy Plante, Economic Development Manager, RPBA
Sandi Price, Executive Director, RPBA
Mark Roschen, DPD, City of Chicago
Francie Sallinger, Associate, Teska Associates, Inc.

On July 14, 2020 the second of two community meetings regarding the reconstitution (renewal) of SSA #54 was held via Zoom from 8:30-9:30 am. The first meeting took place on the evening of July 1st that covered the same information. Two meetings were held to accommodate a wider range of availability for property owners, taxpayers and members of the public interested in attending and learning more about the renewal of SSA #54.

The meeting was advertised in a variety of sources:

- 1st Class Mailing to all taxpayers in SSA #54
- Newsletter
  - 49th Ward Alderman Newsletter
  - RPBA Newsletters
- Project Website – [rpba.org/ssa-54-renewal](http://rpba.org/ssa-54-renewal) (which included a dedicated RSVP with pre-meeting question form)
- Social Media
  - RPBA Facebook Events, Rogers Park Community Facebook Pages
- Email
  - to SSA property owners (6/25/2020)
  - to SSA businesses (various dates)

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Meeting details were provided along with a link to RSVP and submit questions prior to the meeting, although the RSVP was not required to attend. A link to the web site and Needs Assessment survey was also provided.

Introduction
Cindy Plante of Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA), who manages SSA #54, opened the meeting. Cindy gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda, confirmed the meeting was being recorded and stated the presentation was available on the SSA #54 renewal website: www.rpba.org/ssa-54-renewal for anyone calling in. Cindy requested questions be added to the chat in Zoom and stated they would be addressed after the presentation. In addition, questions that had been received via the web site in advance of the meeting would be read into the meeting record and be addressed during the presentation.

What is an SSA?
An SSA is a designated area in which property owners choose to provide additional services for the benefit of residents, merchants, and visitors. A fee is applied to properties within the SSA via the property tax bill and the funds go directly back into the district based on local priorities.

Sheridan Road SSA #54 Renewal
The Sheridan Road SSA #54 was established in 2012. It is set to expire in 2021 unless renewed. The SSA provides a number of services, such as snow and litter removal, holiday decorations and landscaping maintenance; outdoor amenities like bike racks; events such as Summer on the Plaza; and provides direct business support services, such as façade rebate programs and the Live Love Shop shopper rebate program. The SSA also quickly pivoted to provide COVID relief assistance by starting two new rebate programs in March, one to assist businesses creating new e-commerce platforms and the other to help reimburse PPE and take-out materials expenses. Over the course of eight years, SSA #54 has focused on activating the Sheridan Road corridor through business retention, outdoor activities, and streetscape beautification that serves as an amenity for residents and attracts visitors and customers to the area. If the SSA is not renewed, all programs and services currently funded through the SSA will cease.

Cindy reviewed the proposed boundary (see map below) for the Sheridan Road SSA upon renewal, which is the same as existing boundaries.

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Cindy then introduced Scott Goldstein of Teska Associates, Inc., the consulting firm assisting with the SSA renewal process. Scott affirmed that Teska’s role is to support the efforts of RPBA and assist with the SSA renewal process. He reviewed the major steps of the process including the two community meetings, needs assessment, district plan, application to the City of Chicago and a mailing and public hearing that will be held in the Fall.

Scott then introduced Mark Roschen, the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development for the City of Chicago. Mark highlighted the fact the establishment and renewal of SSAs are locally initiated processes. City requirements are there to ensure transparency and oversight. The City requires outreach beyond what the state statute requires for that reason, to ensure that property business owners in an SSA district are part of the SSA process and speak to the priorities for the district, including two community meetings and signatures of support.

**SSA Renewal Process**

Erin Cigiano, also of Teska Associates, then reviewed input gained through the renewal process, which began in early 2020 with the creation of the renewal website and meetings with RPBA and business owners. An Advisory Committee for the renewal process was formed consisting of existing SSA Commissioners and additional interested residents and business owners. The Advisory Committee met three times to discuss service needs, successes/challenges, set the proposed SSA

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boundary upon renewal, and propose the maximum tax rate. These meetings were all open meetings and open to the public.

**Successes of SSA #54**

Erin then spoke about local SSA successes as shared by businesses and stakeholders during outreach. Main highlights include: holiday lights along the corridor, Summer on the Plaza events, and beautification efforts like landscaping and banners on the street poles.

**Needs Assessment Survey**

Next, Erin shared initial results of the SSA #54 Needs Assessment Survey. A critical piece in the renewal process, this survey was distributed to local businesses and property owners, employees, neighborhood residents, customers, and other stakeholders. Results from the survey inform service and program priorities going forward and will be used to determine the budget and areas for improvement for the renewed SSA #54. The survey is currently open and can be completed here: teska.survey.fm/sheridan-road-ssa-54-needs-assessment-survey.

The survey was shared on social media networks, in RPBA newsletters; and via e-mail communication with businesses and SSA Commissioners. Local businesses, property owners, residents, and visitors to the SSA area were all encouraged to take it. The goal of the survey was to understand priorities and opportunities as they relate to SSA services and program. Preliminary takeaways include:

- Respondents were a mix of residents (58%), business and property owners (30%), and other neighborhood stakeholders (10%)
- Respondents included owners (73%) and renters (27%)
- Even split between newer and long-time residents/businesses
- Top Ranked SSA Service Priorities:
  - Litter Removal
  - Community Events
  - Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF)
  - Security / Surveillance
  - Landscape Program
  - Business Improvement Program
- Open Response comments about services and program needs provided more detailed ideas, excerpts included below

> **Maintenance + Beautification**
> "Landscaping on Sheridan is very inconsistent. Some of the anchor businesses on the strip have none (i.e. rocks and gravel, no grass, plants or planters, etc.). I would really like to see this improve."

> "Business attraction, business retention, beautification, litter removal, public art, economic development in general."

> "Snow removal on sidewalks and activities."

> "Security, litter removal, and public art."

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Costs + Service Priorities
Scott Goldstein then explained how the SSA levy and tax rate, which the SSA #54 Advisory Committee discussed in depth over the course of two meetings. Weighing the current challenges that businesses are facing while also recognizing a need to think long-term and plan for the future, the Committee’s recommendation is two-fold: there should be no increase in the tax levy in 2021 due to the current economic challenges. The Committee also recommended that a long-term view is taken considering that the renewal is for the next 15 years. The SSA may, in the future, want to undertake larger projects as the economy gets better. It therefore recommended a maximum tax rate for the SSA to be 0.0075 (0.75%). Each year, a new SSA budget is prepared and reviewed and approved by the SSA Commission and City of Chicago. If the increase is over 5% there must be an additional community meeting.

As an illustrative example of what this maximum rate would cost SSA property owners, Scott shared two examples: a property with a $50,000 EAV would pay $375 per year ($31.50/month) and a property with $100,000 EAV would pay $750 per year ($62.50/month). Again, in the short term, the Advisory Committee has recommended not raising the levy for 2021 due to COVID which means the rate will be lower than the maximum rate (it is currently 0.3798%).

SSA #54, managed by RPBA, has consistently been fiscally prudent, generally coming in below budget and providing the opportunity for carryover funds. The Sheridan Road SSA 2020 budget focused the majority of funds on Customer Attraction and Public Way Aesthetics, which includes events, marketing, holiday décor, rebate programs, snow and litter removal, and landscaping.

Next Steps

1) Continue outreach and gather signatures
The deadline for signatures has been extended to August. SSA #54 needs signatures in support of SSA renewal from at least 26 PINs (20% of 126 total PINs) to be eligible for renewal (PIN stands for property index number). Signatures must be the taxpayer or owners, not the tenant. Electronic signatures are permitted. The signature form is available at www.rpba.org/ssa-54-renewal and must be signed and
emailed or mailed back to RPBA. If a taxpayer owns multiple properties, they must fill out a form for each UNLESS the properties are adjacent.

2) Prepare Application / District Plan
The SSA District Plan, a key component of the Application for renewal, is underway and will be finalized after the community meetings.

3) Legislative Process in the Fall
Despite current challenging circumstances, the goal is to prepare the SSA renewal application and participate in the legislative process in the Fall of 2020. This will include a Public Hearing regarding the renewal of SSA #54 in the Fall, likely September or October prior to the SSA being adopted by City Council.

Q & A
Please explain funding, does it all come from the SSA tax or are additional funds allocated by different means?

SSA funds come entirely from the SSA tax and budget carryover. The SSA cannot accept direct donations. Loyola has contributed to SSA-related services, but it does so through a donation to RPBA. By working with a nonprofit like RPBA, the SSA is able to leverage funds in creative ways.

Are parcels taxed differently depending on their relationship to the SSA?

All properties located within the SSA that are on the tax rolls are taxed exactly the same (equalized assessed value multiplied by the tax rate). One exception is nonprofit tax-exempt properties. Some of Loyola University properties fall into this category, but many of the Loyola-owned properties are not tax-exempt.

Please explain what SSA taxpayers are entitled to.

All SSA #54 services and programs are extended to all properties within the boundaries of the SSA.

How do you see that taxpayers receive equitable services?

Participation in this renewal process provides opportunity to voice your perspective and opinions on what services should be provided. Because the SSA is administering taxpayer funds, the SSA Commission is subject to the state’s Open Meetings Act. Each commission meeting is open to the public and there is always time allotted for public comment/feedback (note: the requirements of the Open Meetings Act has been amended during the pandemic to allow for virtual meetings, which can actually help increase public participation).

The City requires that at least one resident serves as a voting member of the commission. Commissioners are mayoral appointees who have to be a property owner or business owner within the SSA. The list of current commissioners is on the SSA 54 website at rpba.org/ssa-54-renewal/. To help further equity and transparency of services, residents and stakeholders within the SSA are encouraged to get involved, attend meetings, and share opinions with the SSA Commission.

Please describe the range of capital improvements permitted by law—does this include parking and bicycle lanes?

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The SSA is a great tool to leverage investment. While it doesn’t have the funds to make major infrastructure improvements, it can do the planning, design, maintenance and programming. For example, Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) often works with SSAs to plan for improvements such as bike lanes, landscaping, improvement to public plazas, etc. when there is an agreement for the SSA to maintain the improvements.

SSAs can also use the renewal process and other planning processes to gather input and understand what types of improvements relative to parking and bicycles are needed—this helps leverage larger monetary investments from the City.

It is also important to note that Sheridan Road is an Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) road, which can add to the complexity of any planning/infrastructure. It is also within a TIF district. This creates potential for synergy between the SSA, the TIF, and whatever other funding might be available at the city/county level. The SSA has been talking about working on planning for infrastructure improvements which are very much needed in this area. CDOT looks for that community consensus and support from property owners.

Has the total levy (or budget) gone down because of unpaid taxes or because taxes have gone down or because parcels have been removed from the tax roll?

There has been a small decrease over the years due a number of factors, including a maximum tax rate that was established when the SSA was originally formed. The SSA #54 Commission creates a budget each year based on the expenditures it anticipates needing for that year within a certain dollar amount. The amount the SSA actually collects through the tax levy is based off of that estimate—the County calculates what the levy needs to be in order to reach that budget amount. The tax levy must fall underneath the “maximum tax rate” that has been set by the Commission. If SSA #54 renewal is approved, this maximum tax rate will be raised to allow for potential future growth of the budget and, therefore, services that the SSA can provide to taxpayers. Over the course of SSA #54’s existence, the annual budget has remained relatively low due to careful spending by SSA commissioners and RPBA staff.

Landscaping along the SSA is incredibly important, it’s virtually all concrete. A lot of focus is given to the plaza at Loyola station, but the area to the west is very well trafficked and part of the SSA too. It’s currently a barren wasteland, and zero landscaping. What attention can be given to this in the future?

This is certainly something we can take a look at for future budgets. It is currently owned by Loyola and we could look at a partnership effort to make improvements as the western access to the station is a major access point for pedestrians. One of the benefits of renewing SSA #54 is that we can plan for the next 15 years and think long-term about how to partner to improve this area through landscaping and other cooperative efforts.

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