

Devon SSA #43 Commission Meeting
Monday, January 25, 2021 2:30 pm
Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87341468102>
Dial in: +1 312 626 6799 meeting ID: 873 4146 8102



MINUTES

Commissioners Present: Pete Valavanis, Irshad Khan, Sanhita Agnihotri
Mohammed Junaid, Jay Shewakramani, Rebeca Vasquez
Commissioners Absent: Avi Bereliani, Maura Levit,
Others Present: Cindy Plante & Sandi Price - RPBA
Ald. Debra Silverstein - 50th Ward Alderman
Claire N. - Chicago Food Depository

1. Meeting called to order at 2:40pm

2. Public Comment

Claire from Chicago Food Depository introduced herself - she's attending as an observer to learn more about what the commission does and see if there might be opportunities to work together in the future.

3. Approval of minutes from November 2020

Pete moved approval, Sanhita seconded.
APPROVED

4. Old Business

a. Camera update:

Sandi shared that the camera installation project came in under budget and the SSA is due a refund of about \$5000. We're waiting for the city to issue a check.

b. 2021 marketing efforts

Cindy presented several options from BigBuzz for marketing projects that could be done in 2021 to use up the credit we have from them due to the cancellation of Devon's Got Talent. Options include a direct mail or flyer campaign, e-blast, shopper rebate program, or directory updates.

Sandi encouraged commissioners to pick something so we can get started soon.

Pete said directory updates is something we should be doing anyway.

Cindy agreed and said we've made progress on this in conjunction with the most recent round of PPE distribution.

Sanhita asked that any promotions include retail shops too and shouldn't be limited to just restaurants.

Junaid disagrees, feels that restaurants should be emphasized since they draw the most foot traffic to the street.

Pete agrees but thinks retail can still be incorporated.

Jay shared that retail sales are down about 70% for his businesses - people aren't buying clothes or jewelry because there's no weddings or events to go to.

Sanhita suggested doing a rebate program

Jay is skeptical that a rebate program will be effective; it's been tried before and wasn't very effective. Discount programs are also limited by the need to train staff.

Junaid suggested doing more with social media, particularly videos showing that businesses are open and following safety precautions and guidelines.

Rebecca agreed that promotion is key whether rebates are included or not.

Sandi suggested having BigBuzz work on a social media promotional campaign similar to what they've done in the past around Small Business Saturday, which was mostly videos. This can include both restaurants and retail.

Junaid agrees, would like to focus on facebook ads and promotions.

Ald. Silverstein suggested featuring food from restaurants in videos.

Pete moved to ask BigBuzz to develop and launch a social media campaign for Devon Avenue, including videos featuring area businesses.

Junaid and Sanhita seconded.

Approved.

c. 2021 Sidewalk Maintenance contract

Cindy presented the lone response to our RFP for sidewalk services, which was from Cleanslate. Scope of work includes sidewalk trash removal 6 days a week and 7 days in summer, as well as sidewalk powerwashing and weed abatement 3 times a year. Although they were the only bidder, the price is competitive and will give us a savings over prior years' contracts.

Pete moved approval. Junaid seconded.

APPROVED.

d. Murals

Cindy asked commissioners if anyone had any sites to propose for murals in 2021. The current list includes Croatian Cultural Center and Dollar Tree.

Pete agrees that Croatian Cultural Center should be the top priority. Cindy agrees, but we haven't reached out to them yet. Sandi suggested identifying 2-3 sites and getting owners to sign off before recruiting artists. Pete said priority sites should be the bank building and Croatian Center. Jay said that the temple building would also be willing to host a mural. Pete also suggested the Par Birdie Foods building. Sanhita suggested the Punjab Sweets building on Western, just north of the corner. Irshad has contact info for owners of several of these buildings to assist with outreach. Cindy will assemble the list and gather contact info to start reaching out to landlords.

e. Lights

Cindy shared that we're still waiting on proposals for replacement of the decorative lights on Devon. Our primary vendor is looking into alternatives with the hopes of getting something that will last longer. We were hoping to have some quotes today but they're not ready. Jay supports doing the lights again especially since we're trying to draw more people to the district. Cindy agrees and hopes to have something for the next meeting.

5. New Business

a. Pigeon Abatement

Cindy added this to the agenda based on discussions with several businesses and commissioners about problems with pigeons in the district - large flocks are roosting in and on buildings making a mess of sidewalks and damaging storefront awnings. Two potential models for how to approach this, similar to cameras: 1.) create a rebate program for businesses and building owners to incentivize them to do pigeon abatement for their own properties or 2.) look into bringing in exterminators to treat entire blocks. Jay asked about costs and what exterminators could potentially offer. Pete said he's looked into this and heard estimates of \$4-6,000 per block. They use a sort of bait product that the birds eat and it keeps them away. Alternatively could fund installation of spikes and/or netting. Ald. Silverstein added that part of the problem is that people feed them. Irshad added that some people also intentionally raise them like pets. Suggested installing fake owls as a deterrent.

Jay said rats continue to be a problem as well and asked about doing more to get rid of rats in tree pits.

Cindy said we worked with CDOT last year to get rat burrows in tree pits blocked up with lava rocks, which we could do more of. The City also does bait stations in the alleys.

Pete suggested looking into feral cat colonies - he's had some success with this approach for his property. Treehouse Humane society does it. Also Avitrol is the name of the pigeon bait the exterminators use.

Cindy will look into exterminator services at the block or district level and report back next meeting.

b. Western Avenue Corridor Plan

Cindy shared a link in the chat about the City's upcoming work on the Western Avenue Corridor plan, which includes all of Western from Howard to Addison, so the SSA is part of it. There's a community meeting on Wednesday.

Ald. Silverstein provided some additional background info and encouraged commissioners to attend.

6. Adjournment

Pete moved to adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 3:48 pm