

Devon SSA #43 Commission Meeting
Monday, April 17, 2023 2:30pm
Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87341468102>
call-in: 312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 87341468102



MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Present: Irshad Khan, Maura Levit, Pete Valavanis, Avi Bereliani, Mohammad Rameez, Sanhita Agnihotri

Commissioners Absent: Jay Shewakramani, Mohammed Junaid

Others Present: Sandi Price & Cindy Plante, RPBA; Ellen Doppelt - JNDC
Rob Fojtik - Choose Chicago; Sunanda Rana - Mandala Arts;
Joy Coombes - Almanza & Coombes, LLC

I. Call to order

Meeting was called to order at 2:40pm

II. Public comment

There was no public comment

III. Choose Chicago Food Photography

Cindy introduced Rob from Choose Chicago to talk about the opportunity for businesses to participate in photo shoots with Choose Chicago. We talked about this a little bit at the last meeting.

Rob introduced himself and Choose Chicago, which is providing no-cost photography and marketing assistance for neighborhood businesses. They're also doing influencer marketing - hiring folks to visit area restaurants and post reviews on social media.

Choose Chicago will also be offering a social media marketing 101 workshop in May.

Rob also shared that based on location data, the West Ridge community area, including Devon, had over 3 million visitors during 2022, one of the highest in the city. A link to the full data dashboard was shared in the chat.

Cindy will follow up with businesses and send Rob a list of who's interested in scheduling a photography session with Choose Chicago.

IV. Approval of the minutes from March

Sanhita moved to approve the March meeting minutes. Maura Seconded.
APPROVED.

V. Mandala Arts event funding request

Cindy introduced Sunanda from Mandala Arts - they're requesting funding from the SSA for the Mandala Makers Fest, which is scheduled to be held in the Republic Bank parking lot this year in June - last year's was in Indian Boundary Park.

Sundanda presented the funding request and background info on the event. This will be its fifth year, though several years it was virtual because of covid, and last year's was at Indian Boundary. It's set to be held on 2 Sundays, June 4th and June 11th from 4-8pm and will feature music and dance performances and some indoor workshops which are to be held at Jacques International Language Academy. In addition to the Makers Fest event, Mandala is also seeking a permanent space on Devon where they can offer

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ongoing arts programming in the community.

Irshad asked about the specific dollar amount for the event sponsorship request.

Sunanda shared a budget spreadsheet - the primary expenses they're seeking funding for are equipment rentals and tech, including the tent, stage, chairs, and folks to operate lighting and sound. These expenses are estimated to total \$9,500 for each of the two days, or \$19,000 total. Mandala has secured DCASE funding for the artists and performers, and foundation funding for marketing and admin expenses related to the event.

Irshad asked about the timing of the funding request - it seems late given that the event is scheduled for June.

Sunanda shared that it took longer to secure a venue than originally anticipated.

Cindy and Irshad asked about their needs for permanent space - wasn't there a ribbon cutting for a new space on Devon last spring?

Sunanda replied that the 2nd floor space that Mandala had last year above Joyalukkas didn't work out and that they prefer a ground-level space, especially for dance and music. Cindy will forward a list of broker contacts and available spaces that we're aware of.

Irshad asked why the event is being held on 2 Sundays instead of a single weekend, which should minimize equipment setup and takedown costs.

Sunanda shared that this was based on feedback from last year's event, both to keep momentum going to draw people on multiple weekends, and also to avoid conflict with religious observances on Fridays and Saturdays.

Several commissioners suggested consolidating it to a single weekend if possible.

Cindy asked what other funding sources or grants they're looking at for this event, and what's the latest they would need a decision from the SSA regarding funding?

Sunanda said they would need to know within 2-3 weeks. They're also looking at additional sponsorship opportunities and grants.

Sanhita asked if they're still looking for additional venues or restaurants to partner with.

Sunanda has been in contact with a few area restaurants, including Arya Bhavan, and they do order food from Devon restaurants for events.

Commissioners asked for additional information from Mandala Arts prior to making a decision on a sponsorship amount.

VI. Approval of 2022 annual audit

Cindy introduced Joy Coombes to present the annual audit for 2022.

Joy presented the report via screenshare. It's an unqualified report, meaning there's nothing in the documentation that would mislead the user, so a clean bill of health. The report does note that SSA43 had an excess of carryover at 48% of budget between 2022 and 2023 - if there's a specific project that we're trying to save up for over multiple years it should be noted. The reports will be finalized and ready for submission to the city by the end of the week.

Irshad would like to see more permanent improvements to the streetscape rather than just events. More public art, and additional crosswalk art, or restoration of the existing crosswalk mandalas.

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Pete asked about sign removal requests - we should promote this more. Cindy agreed. There were a couple in the last few years, but there's definitely still old sign infrastructure that can and should be removed.

Irshad has concerns about the size of the Mandala funding request as well as capacity given the funding gap and short timeline.

Sanhita is concerned that commissioners weren't sent the audit report to review in advance. Cindy and Sandi said that this is their first time seeing it too, which isn't unusual - this is a report on last year's finances rather than a proposed budget, which we'll be starting on at the next meeting.

Sanhita proposed postponing the vote on the audit report to the next meeting.

Cindy responded that the audit report has to be submitted to the city by May 1, which would require us to schedule an additional meeting next week - we can't push this to the May agenda.

Pete moved to approve the audit report. Rameez seconded.

Approved with 3 voting yes, 1 no, and 1 abstaining.

VII. Light pole mandalas & landscaping update

Cindy mentioned that several commissioners have asked about putting the decorative mandalas back up on the light poles. We still have them in storage, but they were taken down because of several incidents of them falling down. We're in contact with the vendor about identifying a new mounting system that would allow them to be put back up safely.

We also have a new landscaping vendor for this season - spring cleanup and plantings should be coming in the next couple of weeks. Because this is our first year with a new company, it's especially important for folks to share any feedback with us, good or bad.

In addition to this, Cindy met with Larissa from the West Ridge Chamber last week and wanted to share that they're planning to host the Dance Dine Devon festival again this year in late July, most likely near Devon and Leavitt. They have funding for the event from the City alfresco grant. WRCC is also in the early stages of planning for a food crawl event in late summer - since we were also talking about a restaurant crawl it probably makes more sense to collaborate on this rather than try to host two competing ones.

VIII. Adjournment

Irshad asked commissioners to come up with a list of 3 things or projects you want to focus on for the next meeting.

Rameez would like to do more murals and shared a photo of one at Howard and Sheridan. He'd also like to work on a larger food festival, mela, or sports event at Warren Park.

Cindy and Irshad pointed out that the park isn't in the SSA boundary.

Avi thinks we should still be able to host a festival there even if it's outside the district because it could still benefit the SSA.

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Cindy suggested looking at side streets or parking lots, as WRCC is doing for their festival.

Sanhita suggested using the bank parking lot again. Avi asked about putting grass on the cleaners site at Devon and Whipple to both fix the eyesore and create public gathering space for events.

Cindy asked Sandi if the City is still doing PopCourts grants? We're not sure, but a project like this would require site control, insurance, and probably architectural design services. Irshad mentioned Mark Ahmad owns the property.

Pete moved to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 4:01pm

Next Meeting: Monday, May 15 at 2:30pm