

Howard Street Special Service Area #19
Factory Theater - 1623 W. Howard

Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 9 am
Meeting Minutes



Members Present: David Skora, Jessie Eisner-Kleyle,
Charlotte Walters, Renee Labrana

Members Absent: Tim Amos

Others Present: Cindy Plante, RPBA; Juliane Allen & John Harris, A5 branding & digital;
Kyle Ryan, 49th ward office

1. Call to order

Meeting called to order at 9:09 am.

2. Public comment

Jessie shared that a tenant abandoned their dog when they moved out of their apartment if anybody knows anything or is looking to adopt a dog.

Charlotte reported that the city has started work to finally finish repaving the Howard/Rogers/Greenview intersection this week, but she was told that they're removing the triangle garden space on Rogers. David likes the triangle and wants it to stay. Cindy will ask Kyle about this later since he's not here yet.

3. Approval of meeting minutes from July 2023

Charlotte moved approval, Jessie seconded.
APPROVED 4-0

4. 2023 financial/budget update

Cindy reported that although we did receive some late collections money from the City, it went straight to pay back RPBA for covering SSA expenses. Second installment property tax bills have been delayed again to November, so we're not likely to see much more money until December, if then. In the meantime, two of our recurring contracts are up for renewal and we need to decide if and how to make cuts given these financial limitations.

a. 2023-24 sidewalk now contract renewal

Cindy reported that SSA19 has historically had a 2" contract for sidewalk snow, at a rate of \$24,900 for the season. SSA24 & 54 stopped doing snow - is it something we want to continue doing in SSA19? Or should we ask for pricing for a 3" contract?

Charlotte feels it's important to keep doing snow cleanup because there are a lot of seniors and people with disabilities in the neighborhood, and commuters need to access the train. David added that because of the increased number of ground floor vacancies it's even more important for the SSA to do it because vacant properties tend not to get snow cleared at all. Others agreed and the consensus was to continue snow service for the upcoming season.

b. 2023-24 holiday lights

Cindy provided updated quotes for the holiday tree lights - to continue the same scope as last year would cost \$35,000. We also got a quote to narrow the scope of included blocks and only do lights from Damen to Greenview. The abbreviated scope would bring

the total down to \$25,000, and was proposed because we were never able to get CDOT to repair the power receptacles on the light poles west of Damen last year, so it doesn't make sense to put lights up where power access is doubtful. We also had some power issues between Greenview and Sheridan, and now that Athena Board Games has moved there aren't any businesses on that block anymore, so this also seemed like an easy area to cut.

David opposes excluding his block and wants an updated quote that includes Greenview to Sheridan.

Renee agreed with David and added that it might be useful to have trees on that block lit so they're visible to passing traffic on Sheridan. Cindy will reach out to the vendor to see what the cost would be to add in this section.

Cindy pointed out that traffic counts are higher on Clark than that block of Sheridan but will ask for a quote to add David's trees back in. Kyle will call CDOT about this Ridge to Damen again but acknowledged that decorative light receptacles aren't a priority for them.

c. Landscaping

Cindy reported that RPBA will be issuing a new landscaping RFP for the 2024 season. We usually do this every other year but got a lot of complaints about the current landscaping company, particularly about lack of watering and maintenance, so we're going to seek additional proposals.

Charlotte is still frustrated about weeds in tree pits and sidewalk cracks on Howard and wants Brandon to weed wack more frequently, including the blocks between Clark and Ridge.

Cindy will relay this to the maintenance crew again and has added this to the scope for landscaping companies in the new RFP for next year.

5. Updates

a. Ambassador program

Cindy got word from the city this morning that the long-awaited ambassador vests have arrived and will be ready for pickup this week. The ambassador team at AJH has continued providing data on hours and activity, including 311 requests about rat abatement and other issues, and have sent representatives to the last 2 in-person CAPS meetings at Willye White.

Commissioners were generally positive about the ambassador program but would like to see them be more visible. David asked about getting photos and doing more content about the ambassadors on social media and the website.

b. Chalk Howard recap

Renee wasn't able to attend Chalk Howard but heard that it went well.

Charlotte reported more foot traffic and sales in her store during and since the event, and customers talked about it and showed her photos of the art.

Cindy reported that there were challenges during load-in and setup the Friday before due to additional street closures for construction at Greenview, and because somebody tore down all the no-parking signs on Thursday night, so setup was delayed on Friday to wait for people to move illegally parked vehicles - interestingly, while watching folks come to move cars throughout the morning and afternoon, we noticed that almost all were CTA employees in uniform coming off shifts. So we want to do more outreach to

CTA about parking next year, but it's still frustrating because they shouldn't be parking there when there's a giant parking garage at the CTA station that nobody uses.

David and Charlotte suggested doing additional no parking flyers in-house and having our maintenance team or ambassadors stick them on people's windshields on these blocks in the days leading up to the fest next time.

Everybody wants to do it again next year. Cindy will include this on the next agenda for further discussion - we're supposed to have a post-event debrief with Star Events later this week, and we don't have a total yet on actual spending since bills are still being processed, but this is another area where we may have to look at cuts next year because of property tax delays and nonpayment.

c. Rise Grant - One Howard corridor plan

Cindy reported that work on the corridor plan is still going - the plan draft is in progress and we're waiting on notes from CDOT. Those on the steering committee should be hearing from us soon on a new date for the final meeting, but we're hoping to wrap up by late October.

One thing we talked about earlier this week with the project team that I wanted to talk about with the SSA commissioners is proactive planning for the building we're currently sitting in. Sol Cafe is empty and we've been hearing from the theater and brewery that they're also looking to move. It sounds like there may be another brewer interested in buying out Chuck's current lease and equipment if he leaves, but that's potentially a lot of vacancies in the one building - is this something the Becovic team is planning for?

Jessie responded that she hasn't been involved with the commercial leasing herself and mostly works with residential tenants, but has heard that there had been issues with some of the terms included in the original leases from the previous building owner, particularly around common area maintenance for these 3 storefronts that share a common bathroom and basement space - the current lease has each tenant responsible for back doors for example, but there's still shared basement access. There's a lot that they plan to address with updates when these leases come up for renewal. They're also looking to form a commercial property team to focus on these things since Becovic is still pretty new to commercial leasing, having mostly focused on apartments until acquiring the Howard Street properties.

Charlotte and David asked if they could just negotiate new leases with the current tenants to fix these things. Cindy said that only works if both parties want to negotiate a new lease - if there's already a lease in place and the tenant doesn't want to change it, a new building owner can't force them to until the lease expires and it's time to renew. Jessie added that the prior owner of sol cafe was actually still on the lease for that space. Becovic wanted to do a new lease with the folks that were trying to take over but they never signed it.

Kyle hasn't heard anything new from the Common Cup ownership team - they had at one point expressed an interest in the coffee shop space and were trying to get financials on the cafe but the prior owner either wasn't willing to provide them or was providing only pre-covid figures.

Kyle added that the Housing for All team has closed on the property across the street and he walked the building with them shortly after - they're already working on cleaning it up and securing the vacant storefronts ahead of redevelopment, though their updated plans now call for redeveloping the post office side on Paulina first now rather than the

single-story frontage on Howard. He'll be meeting with the Department of Housing next week to talk about Howard Street.

d. Website/social media report

Juliane presented website and social media metrics - Chalk Howard content brought a lot of clicks and engagement during the month of August - big bump in traffic.

6. Adjournment

Charlotte moved to adjourn at 10:10.

Meeting adjourned at.

Next Meeting: October 18, 2023, Factory Theater