

Devon SSA #43 Commission Meeting

Monday, April 22, 2024 10am

Republic Bank - 2720 W. Devon Ave.



MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Present: Irshad Khan, Mohammed Junaid, Pete Valavanis, Robert Taylor

Commissioners Absent: Maura Levit, Sanhita Agnihotri

Others Present: Cindy Plante, Hiba Iqbal & Sandi Price, RPBA;
Joy Coombes, Almanza & Coombes CPA PLLC

I. **Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 10:07 am

II. **Public comment**

Pete asked about CPD parking an empty police car in front of his business every night for the last few weeks - apartment tenants upstairs have complained about the lights and it's scaring customers away from the bar. Sandi suggested reaching out to the 24th district CAPS team and asking that it be moved. Cindy agreed and gave him the email address to contact them.

Hiba introduced herself - she is working with RPBA as a part-time outreach coordinator for Devon Avenue businesses. She's a PhD student at Depaul and is excited to be working with South Asian businesses in the area. Recently she's been promoting the camera rebate program for businesses and letting restaurants know about signups for Taste of Chicago.

Pete asked when the tuk-tuk statues will be back. Cindy says Cleanslate will be out installing them this week - they were supposed to do it last week but were delayed by weather and a power outage at their facility. Pete asked about having his repainted - Cindy and Sandi don't object assuming he's working with the same artist again, but noted that the statues have been clearcoated to protect the painted surface from weather, so they may need to sand it and then clearcoat it again.

Irshad asked if the locations will be the same, particularly as Sign America moved and the space is now vacant. Cindy says they are being put back in the same spots because these are the locations we have Public Way Use permits for - if we were to move them we'd need to do new PWU permits, and they take a long time to get approved.

III. **Approval of meeting minutes from November 2023**

Pete moved approval, Junaid seconded.

Approved 4-0.

IV. **YTD financials update**

Cindy and Sandi gave an update on SSA financials from the beginning of the year to April 15. The balance sheet and profit/loss statement was emailed to commissioners. Sandi pointed out that SSA43 currently has about a million dollars in the bank between unspent money from prior years and property tax revenue received this year. This is

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partly due to property taxes being delayed last year until December, and partly due to the SSA commission not having a quorum to vote on things. In any case, the SSA should be making plans to spend this money on projects in the neighborhood.

2023 Annual Audit Report

Cindy introduced Joy to present the annual audit report, which was emailed to commissioners.

Joy introduced herself and presented the report - much of the content is standard language required by the City. SSA43 ended last year with half a million dollars in the bank, about \$30,000 of which was uncommitted. The delay of the property tax deadline meant that much of the money came late in the year, so caution in spending was warranted. Joy noted that while actual expenditures fell short of budgeted expenditures in 2023, the uncollectible percentage of property tax also increased.

Joy asked if there were any large projects in the works, and when SSA43 is up for reconstitution, as that is usually a pretty expensive process.

Cindy reported that reconstitution will be in 2027 because the current SSA expires in 2028 - reconstitution involves hiring consultants, which was around \$50,000 last time we did one. Joy added that there's fewer firms bidding these types of projects now, so that may also increase costs. Cindy added that one large project that we have been talking about is restoration of the existing intersection stamps on Devon, which is on the agenda for discussion later on in the meeting, but costs for each one are expected to exceed \$120,000.

Sandi praised Ron, our regular accountant - his contract is one of our larger admin expenses, but it's worth it because of his ability to handle audits for 5 different business units with the same City audit deadline, and all our audits are clean with no major findings.

Joy noted that audit reports are due to the City on May 1, and they don't technically need to be voted on by commissioners, they just need to be presented to ssa commissioners.

Pete moved to approve it anyway; Robert seconded.

Approved 4-0.

V. Event Sponsorship Requests

a. Mandala Makers Fest

Cindy gave a summary of the application submitted by Mandala Arts, which was shared with commissioners. This is a repeat of last year's event in the Republic Bank parking lot in June; they're also adding several pop-up performances around Devon, including Shree Ganesh Temple, Devon Bank, and a barbershop. They're also installing a mural at Republic Bank and will be doing a ribbon cutting for that in June as part of Makers Fest. The request is for \$8,000 and the project



budget is \$60,000.

Junaid moved approval, Pete seconded.
Approved 4-0.

b. Agents of Hope Parade & festival of nations

Cindy gave a summary of the application, which has also been shared with commissioners. They're planning the event for August, but there are some questions about inconsistencies in the application that we weren't able to get straightened out ahead of today's meeting. They're only requesting \$1,600.

Irshad mentioned that the organization is one of his commercial tenants, so he's somewhat familiar with the organization.

Pete and Robert proposed pushing this to the June meeting in order to request more clarification on event specifics.

c. West Ridge Summer Lot Party

Cindy reported that this event is also being planned for August by Jewish Neighborhood Development Council at the Republic Bank lot. They asked to push this item to June to allow them to firm up the program budget.

VI. Intersection stamp restoration & additions

Cindy has spoken to officials at CDOT about the existing intersection stamps on Devon. The material that was used when they were originally installed is no longer the standard for projects like this because it doesn't last. CDOT now recommends a different material that is more durable, but requires milling down the asphalt as part of installation, making it more costly to install. At a previous meeting we were told that the cost for a new installation starts at \$120,000 depending on the design and size of the intersection. We'd be looking at replacing the existing ones and potentially adding more.

Several commissioners suggested adding an intersection stamp at Devon and California. Cindy will follow up with CDOT about getting the ball rolling on these since we have funding available.

VII. Murals

Cindy proposed shifting to a sponsorship program in which building owners could connect directly with artists and apply for funding. This is in response to the difficulties we've had trying to coordinate mural projects in the past - we'll find a property owner with a wall that's interested, then have an artist prepare a design, then the property owner doesn't like the design and backs out. Mandala Arts mentioned having the same issue finding a wall for a mural they've been trying to do, so it's not unique to us. The Croatian Cultural Center mural that was installed last year was able to move forward because the building owner (in this case the CCC) had their own artist that they wanted to work with and developed a design that they presented to the SSA for funding approval.



Robert added that Mandala is actually doing their mural now on the side of the Republic Bank building.

Irshad was skeptical that building owners will put in the effort to find and coordinate with artists on these projects.

Pete expressed interest in trying to do a mural on the side of Par Birdie foods.

VIII. **West Ridge Chamber membership**

Cindy asked commissioners to vote on whether to renew West Ridge Chamber membership, which is \$1,000.

Junaid asked what we get for that membership. Cindy reported that it gets the SSA listed as a sponsor on their email newsletter.

Robert added that WRCC is working on a samosa eating contest and will be doing another Dance, Dine, Devon event this summer. He is still on the WRCC board and is a past president.

Pete moved approval, Junaid seconded.
Approved 3-0-1 (Robert abstained).

IX. **Adjournment**

Irshad & Junaid asked about funding for security lights on buildings. Cindy replied that this is an eligible expense under the existing BIP rebate for anybody interested. Pete asked for info on camera rebates - he'd like to add outdoor cameras facing Devon. Cindy will follow up and send him the paperwork in an email - it's been shared in the whatsapp group previously.

Junaid asked about increasing the frequency of sidewalk power washing. Cindy reports that we've been doing it quarterly but will look into pricing to expand and do it monthly. Several commissioners asked about the snow contract - there's interest in shifting to a per-occurrence contract due to low snowfall the last few years.

Hiba asked about expanding landscaping. Sandi suggested adding additional plantings to in-ground beds and asked Cindy to set up a meeting with Patch to walk the area and get pricing. Pete and Irshad are also interested in rat abatement in and around tree pits. Sandi asked Cindy to follow up with CDOT about adding more lava rocks to tree pits to block rats. Several people also asked about adding additional benches and seating in the district. Sandi asked Hiba to put together a list of corners that have space for more benches. Cindy will follow up with CDOT about getting additional benches to match the ones currently in place.

Cindy asked commissioners about scheduling for future meetings - even shifting to every other month, we've continued to struggle to get quorum. Mondays are tough because of overlap with holidays. Is there another time that would work better?

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Pete hasn't been available Monday afternoons because he's been working at the bar himself - it's hard to get someone to work on Mondays because it's a slower day, which limits tips and sales. He would prefer mornings, or earlier in the afternoon. Irshad said 10am is too early and proposed noon as an alternative. There was interest in Wednesday as a meeting date. Junaid proposed shifting the June meeting to 6/19. Sandi and Robert pointed out that this date also falls on a holiday and suggested June 12 instead.

Commissioners agreed to June 12 - Cindy will send around an updated calendar invite with the new time.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 12 at Republic Bank at noon.