

Devon SSA #43 Commission Meeting

Wednesday, March 12, 2025 12pm

Republic Bank - 2720 W. Devon Ave.



MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Present: Irshad Khan, Maura Levitt, Pete Valavanis, Richard Trumbo

Commissioners Absent: Sanhita Agnihotri, Robert Taylor, Mohammed Junaid

Others Present: Sandi Price, Cindy Plante & Hiba Zakai, RPBA;

Keith Sokolowski, 50th ward

Joy Coombes, Almanza & Coombs PLLC

I. **Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 12:03 pm

II. **Public comment**

There was no public comment

III. **Approval of meeting minutes from November 2024**

Pete moved approval, Richard seconded.

APPROVED 4-0

IV. **YTD financials update**

Cindy shared the P&L and balance sheet with commissioners via email and gave an update on YTD spending and balance sheet, which includes January and February 2025.

Sandi added that these figures and the draft 2024 ones won't be final until after the audit is finished.

V. **2024 Annual Audit**

Sandi introduced Joy to present the audit.

Joy introduced herself and provided a summary of the audit report. There aren't any findings. All SSAs in the city have to do this and file it with DPD by May 1. The report shows over \$700,000 in the bank, and a receivable levy of over \$500,000 for this year. There's also a TIF rebate that will be coming in. Joy noted that we exceeded the 25% carryover cap from last year and asked when SSA43 is up for renewal and if there were any large projects that account for this.

Sandi isn't sure on the renewal timeline; Cindy thinks it's 2028 or 2029. Sandi checked and it was last renewed in 2014, which would put renewal in 2029.

Cindy reported that part of the overage is due to projects begun in 2024 that are still in progress, the largest one being intersection stamp restoration, at a cost of \$125,000 - we actually just signed the contract with Gallagher for this last week because we'd been waiting for them to provide us updated drawings. We've also just completed tree trimming, and have ordered upgraded trash cans and custom benches, which have not yet been installed because we're awaiting delivery from the manufacturers. As discussed at the last meeting, we also just finalized a contract for \$26,000 for maintenance and upgrades to the decorative lights.

Joy said that the intersection stamp project explains the overage, and noted that this finding is a finding under the City's rules for SSAs rather than overall accounting

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standards. Similarly there's a finding about intercompany transfers between SSA43 and other SSAs managed by RPBA, which was also in the report last year. Joy advised that these should be resolved at the end of the year so as not to come up on the audit. Joy also noted that SSA43 received 95% of the budgeted levy, or a 5% uncollectibility rate, which is better than most SSA's. Cindy attested to this as well - other SSAs she works with have much higher uncollectibility percentages. Joy advised that we consider reducing the levy for next year given the history of overages and the low uncollectibility rate, and also noted that the SSA43 budget only has 16% in admin/personnel, far below the 30% admin/personnel cap.

Sandi pointed out that this is partly due to the fact that SSA 43's geography means we outsource services that would otherwise be done in-house, so those expenses aren't counted in admin/personnel.

Joy said that we also overspent in the Sustainability & Public Places budget category. Sandi was aware of this but thought it had been fixed. Cindy added that this was due to an increase in monthly costs for dumpster service, but we renegotiated that contract recently to get a lower rate.

Maura moved approval. Pete seconded.

APPROVED 4-0.

VI. Rebate and sponsorship requests

a. 6410 N Campbell camera rebate request

Cindy presented the request - the applicant is seeking to install a total of 17 cameras, 14 of which will be installed on the exterior of the building, one of which includes license plate reading. Both quotes submitted are such that this qualifies for the maximum rebate amount of \$2500. In the interest of transparency, Irshad is the owner of the building, and will be recusing himself on the vote as required. Richard asked why so many cameras, and why the need for license plate recognition.

Cindy pointed out that this particular property takes up the entire block between Campbell and Artesian, with multiple storefronts.

Irshad added that the police often ask about license plate readers when they reach out to ask for camera footage for investigations. They use it to find stolen vehicles, among other things.

Pete moved approval. Maura Seconded.

APPROVED 3-0-1 with Irshad abstaining.

b. Indian Independence Day Parade Sponsorship request

Cindy has had several conversations with the event organizers about their intention to apply for a sponsorship for this event, but still haven't submitted their application despite saying as recently as this week that they intended to do so for consideration at this meeting.

Irshad has talked to them about this too and will follow up - he was told they intend to request \$10,000.



VII. Parade/Event proposal

Richard presented the request, which came about as a result of some discussion at a previous meeting regarding the desire for more community events on Devon. They're calling it the West Ridge Kaleidoscope Festival, and aiming for a September 7 date. The vision is to create a shared space festival to bring the community together and attract more people to the area to support Devon businesses. The event would include music, dance, storytelling, and visual art exhibits and demonstrations. There's a need for events like this because people in the community are polarized, not by animosity but a lack of collaboration and communication. Arts and culture can bring people together and bring in customers for businesses.

He and Robert reached out to Lumin8, the organization that organizes the Arts in the Dark and Upside Down Parades elsewhere in the city; they don't have the capacity to take on another event of that scale but have offered to assist in an advisory capacity. Although getting area merchants to participate is a goal of the project, they recognize that getting people to sign up for things like this has historically been a challenge, but one that working with Lumin8 and the West Ridge Chamber would be able to help alleviate due to their connections with artists and area businesses.

Venue is another challenge because they've been advised that closing Devon Avenue for a festival won't be an option, and the nearest public parks (Warren, 538, and the baseball facility) are all outside the SSA, so they're looking at using the parking lot at Republic Bank or Devon Bank, and potentially closing a portion of side streets.

They're specifically requesting \$100,000 for the event, which the West Ridge Chamber would manage. The amount is based on figures shared by Lumin8, which spends about \$70,000 for each of their two existing parade events. Although the request is for \$100,000, they might be able to work with less.

Irshad is generally supportive of the festival idea but concerned about the feasibility of getting everything ready for a September event since we're already midway through March. It's a great idea but should maybe start smaller.

Maura also likes the idea but has questions about West Ridge Chamber's capacity to manage it with only one part-time staff person.

Sandi also asked for more details on WRCC's role in organizing.

Cindy pointed out that SSA43's total special events budget for FY25 is \$75,000. The other similar event that she works on, Chalk Howard Street is budgeted for about \$70,000, but this includes hiring an event company to handle permitting, logistics, equipment rental and support staff. That said, we haven't finalized the contract yet because the SSA that usually sponsors and hosts the event hasn't been getting their full levy amount. If they're forced to cancel, maybe we could move this event to Devon?

Sandi asked about WRCC's role in organizing if an event company is involved. Is the SSA being asked to pay WRCC or the event company?

Robert reported that it's mainly to utilize connections with area businesses and talent, and pointed out that WRCC does have experience hosting festivals and events in the past, including last year's food tour and previous Dance, Dine, Devon events.

Keith asked when the next chamber meeting is scheduled.

Richard says they're having a separate meeting at the conclusion of this one to discuss this project specifically, but it's an extra meeting that wasn't previously on the chamber's regular meeting calendar.

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Irshad suggested that Music House should be the lead here because of Richard's experience organizing performing arts events, and that a smaller event would be a good start for this.

Joy also recommended starting small and growing the event over time - Ribfest started as a much smaller event in a bank parking lot before expanding to a much larger footprint. Event companies are a good idea because they do a lot of the heavy lifting on permitting and logistics, but it's important to make sure that the event retains community flavor and doesn't start to look like every other festival in town.

Cindy agreed with this. Pete has already had to leave due to a prior commitment and Irshad also needs to leave, so we don't have a quorum to take a vote on this today, and we've already covered most of the public way updates that were on the agenda as part of the audit. Cindy will send around an email with these updates for commissioners that weren't able to be here.

Meeting adjourned at 1:20pm

Next Meeting: April?