

Howard Street & Jarvis Square Special Service Area #19  
Factory Theater -1623 W. Howard St  
Wednesday, June 18, 2025 at 9 am

Commissioners present: Tim Amos, Dave Skora, Charlotte Walters, Jenni Smith

Others present: Cindy Plante, RPBA

Zach Joseph & Shenicka Hohenkirk, 49th Ward

**1. Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 9:00am

**2. Public Comment**

Zach and Shenicka and commissioners introduced themselves. Shenicka is ward director in the 49th ward office; Zach is the new community engagement & development manager.

Dave raised a concern about maintenance of in-ground planting areas on Howard east of Greenvview. The plants appear to be in good condition but there's weeds and dead plant material that needs to be removed, and the adjacent tree pit on the north side of the street has a lot of weeds in it that need to be cleaned up. Charlotte added that she's been doing her own maintenance on the in-ground bed in front of her store, and that there are rat burrows in the in-ground beds. Cindy will follow up with Patch Landscaping and our in-house maintenance crew about this. The maintenance team isn't usually involved in landscaping but have done some tree pit weeding on Jarvis in the past.

Charlotte has been hearing from customers and neighbors on Howard Street that a lot of people feel that the Chicago Sculpture Exhibit sculpture at Howard and Paulina is racist and offensive. The person depicted with a cloud in place of a head is inappropriate for this location because of the area's reputation for drug activity and she's hearing that people are planning or threatening to vandalize it. She suggests swapping it with the butterfly statue that was placed at the Rogers/Greenvview intersection.

Cindy has seen some of these complaints on neighborhood facebook groups too and will reach out to Chicago Sculpture Exhibit to see if we can swap the two sculptures.

Shenicka said that the date for this year's back-to-school event at Willye White Park will be on August 9, and the ward office is partnering with c247 on the event. They're also still working on the park district about timeline for installation of the splash pad at the park.

### **3. Approve meeting minutes from May 2025**

Tim moved approval, Dave seconded.

Approved 4-0

### **4. 2025 YTD financials update**

Cindy presented YTD financials as of May 31. Year-to-date, SSA19 has taken in about \$143,000. The total levy for the year is \$473,000, so we've only received about 30% of what was in our approved levy. Expenses paid so far this year include regular contracts such as landscaping, snow, lights, banners, and the street cleaning crew, totaling about \$120,000. So although we're not in the red, it's still touch and go. With this in mind, the draft 2026 budget currently calls for a levy increase of about 1%. Based on last year's EAV, the proposed budget would put us at a tax rate of about 0.81%; the tax cap for SSA19 is 0.83, so there's not much room to increase it further, and if the new EAV for this year goes down again, we may have to cut back even more in order to stay under the tax cap. We won't know for sure until we get the new EAV numbers from the City sometime later this summer. The increased number of vacancies may mean a lower EAV; hopefully development of the Howard/Ashland and Howard/Paulina sites will help to stabilize or boost the district's EAV in the future.

Shenicka doesn't have any news regarding the Howard/Paulina development proposal - they're still waiting to hear about their state funding. Neither RPBA nor the 49th ward staff have seen either of the 2 proposals that the city is evaluating for the Howard & Ashland property and we haven't been given any kind of timeline. Development on this parcel would put a large property back on the tax roll that is currently tax exempt.

Shenicka has also had some meetings with developers interested in doing projects on Rogers,

including potentially the Beachview Liquors building. Cindy asked about the status of pending litigation around building code violations at the property. Dave also wants to know what's going on with the code issues, and is concerned about the impact potential redevelopment of the site would have on parking in the neighborhood. Shenicka wasn't sure about the litigation but will look into it. She can't say too much about the proposals she's seen for the site but they do include some on-site resident parking, though not 1:1 because the property is in a TOD zone. Charlotte asked if anything can be done to clean up or beautify the site in the meantime. Shenicka will discuss this with Ald. Hadden and developers.

Tim shared that based on low ticket sales and loss of parking, Factory Theater will most likely not renew the lease for the space on Howard Street, which will mean they'll be leaving in December. Cindy asked how much the landlord was increasing rent. Tim said that they haven't had a rent increase yet, but the organization's finances are currently such that renewing wouldn't be sustainable. The loss of customer parking in the rear lot combined with Howard Street's negative reputation has put a damper on ticket sales for the last several productions despite positive reviews and Jeff Awards and recommendations.

Cindy asked if they're going to be looking for a new space or planning to rent space at other theater facilities. Tim doesn't know yet but will reach out if they start looking for a new storefront - he's also interested in staying on as an SSA commissioner since he's still a resident.

## **5. One Howard Street Updates**

Cindy shared updates on implementation of the One Howard Street plan; work on the two murals at Seven Star and Fish Keg is getting underway soon. She's also met with the team at Muse to develop draft design concepts for intersection art at the Paulina and Rogers/Greenview intersections. There will be a community survey to pick designs once we have some concept drawings, probably sometime this summer, after which we'll start on the permitting process to hopefully install in 2026. Charlotte asked what kind of art is being considered. Cindy is leaning

towards abstract designs that connect to the area's history and incorporate colors in our brand standards.

Dave asked about viaduct lighting. Cindy said Evanston is still working with the consultant they've brought in to work on designing improved viaduct lighting - they're hoping to have some design concepts soon. It sounds like Metra and UP are on board but there's still some friction with CTA.

David asked about the Callan Plaza project on the Evanston side - he'd heard it was no longer happening.

Cindy reported that it is still moving forward but is no longer planned to be a permanent street closure due to concerns from residents (including the new 8th ward alder) about the loss of on-street parking. Rather than permanently close the street, they'll have moveable bollards or barricades to do temporary closures for events or weekends. They are still planning to do the placemaking elements like lighting and murals.

Cindy doesn't have any new updates on the wayfinding kiosks as Evanston is still in talks with the manufacturer about the installation method. Once this gets resolved and we get updated drawings, Cindy can start on the permitting process with CDOT.

Cindy has also been talking to the park district supervisor about sponsoring some outdoor movies at Willye White park with some of the MacArthur funding - we're looking at August 23 and September 20 as of now. We're also looking into doing some sort of larger community event in the park to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the park's construction.

## **6. Jarvis event tents**

Jenni had reached out to RPBA about replacing the 10x10 tents that are used for festivals and markets on the Jarvis alfresco. The initial purchase was funded by the now-defunct Chicago Alfresco Grant. Cindy's records show \$750 spent on the tents when they were purchased in 2021, though like most things, prices have gone up in recent years. Jenni estimates that new tents cost \$100-200 each. RPBA isn't able to fund replacement of tents but Cindy suggested

asking if it's something that the SSA would be willing to fund. Jenni says they're down to only 3 tents that are still usable. They started with 10.

Dave is supportive of getting new tents assuming the budget allows. He asked if we could get branded tents with the SSA logo on them. Cindy knows that RPBA has ordered branded tents in the past but isn't sure how much that would add to the cost and will have to look into it.

Charlotte moved to approve up to 10 tents, up to \$2000. Tim and Dave seconded.

Cindy will collect quotes and place the order soon if it's under \$2000. If it's over that amount, she would like to bring this back to the July meeting.

Tim, Charlotte and Jenni said to go ahead with the purchase anyway if at all possible in order to allow new tents to be used for upcoming summer events.

Approved 4-0.

## **7. Criminal Damage Repair Rebates -**

### **GameStop**

Cindy presented the rebate request from Gamestop and the property manager of the shopping center. The entire facade of the store was destroyed when someone attempted to burglarize the store by driving a vehicle through it. Due to the extensive damage, the rebate requested is for the maximum allowed amount of \$2,000.

Dave moved approval and Charlotte seconded.

Jenni has reservations about approving the expense because it's a large corporate landlord and Gamestop is a chain. Cindy agreed that this is a valid concern, though the program guidelines don't bar chain or franchise businesses like the BIP program does, and it might be worth it to build and maintain goodwill with the property owner and management. She's not sure if the store is corporate owned or a franchise, but will look into it. We have approved criminal damage repair rebates to other businesses in this shopping center in the past.

Jenni asked to move it to next month in order to request additional information and see what kind of financial position we're in.

Cindy & the other commissioners agreed to revisit this in July.

## **8. Preliminary 2026 budget discussion**

Cindy already covered most of this in the financials discussion earlier, but the draft budget she's submitted to the city includes a 1% increase over this year's levy. She'd like to increase it more to get closer to the 5% threshold that requires a community meeting, but is close to maxing out the tax rate based on current EAV. The tax rate is the total SSA levy divided by the district EAV. Cindy is concerned that the EAV might go down when we get the updated figures this summer, in which case we might actually have to reduce the levy in order to stay under the tax cap of 0.83. In Cindy's current draft we're at a tax rate of 0.81.

## **9. Adjournment**

Cindy reminded the group that the next meeting on July 9 is the budget meeting. Shenicka isn't sure if she will be attending or not, but Zach plans to be there. Cindy reminded them that the required budget documentation includes a letter or attestation from the alder's office that they're aware of and approve the SSA budgets. Shenicka said she'd try to make it to the meeting.

Next SSA Commissioners Meeting: July 9, 2025