

Devon SSA #43 Commission Meeting

Wednesday, May 7, 2025 12pm

Republic Bank - 2720 W. Devon Ave.



MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Present: Irshad Khan, Pete Valavanis, Sanhita Agnihotri, Robert Taylor, Richard Trumbo

Commissioners Absent: Maura Levitt, Mohammed Junaid

Others Present: Cindy Plante & Hiba Zakai, RPBA;
Marlene Raddatz & Keith Sokolowski, 50th ward
Nana Ahmed, Agents of Hope
Joe Ukonga from Devon Sport

I. **Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 12:03 pm

II. **Public comment**

Cindy shared that Maura has welcomed a new baby girl, which is why she's absent today.

III. **Public way project updates**

Cindy shared that 3 replacement and supplemental benches and street chairs have been installed as of last week; the remaining 3 are being kept in storage for use if and when any additional streetscape furniture is damaged. Sculpture installations sponsored through the Chicago Sculpture Exhibit are also being installed - the one at Devon and Artesian was installed earlier this week and we're awaiting an installation date for the second one at Devon and Bell. Keith added that the 50th ward has sponsored additional sculptures elsewhere in the ward, including on Western Avenue outside the SSA.

Cindy and Keith said that the new citibins trash receptacles have also been installed at the agreed-upon locations. Pete says he's seen them and they look nice. Robert said people are still leaving bags of household garbage on the street next to the new bins. Cindy will pass this along to Cleanslate.

Cindy is still working with CDOT on the intersection stamp project - we've submitted drawings and insurance information and are waiting for the city to send us an agreement for signature; once that's completed we can submit the full permit application. Although replacement components for the decorative rope lights have been ordered and paid for, the installer doesn't know when they will actually arrive from the manufacturer or what the final price will be due to the tariffs. Robert asked if there's any way to shift to a US-based manufacturer? Cindy said that while we're using a local company for the installation and maintenance, they haven't been able to find a US manufacturer for this type of LED lighting and we doubt that there are any.

Richard asked about the tuktuk statues.

Cindy had to have them sent back to the manufacturer for refurbishment of some damage but is hoping to have them back in the next two weeks for installation.

IV. **Approval of meeting minutes from March 2025**

Pete moved approval, Sanhita seconded.

APPROVED 5-0



V. 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. For the next meeting, our accountant is preparing a more detailed spreadsheet comparing budgeted amounts to actual YTD spending in each category. The audit for 2024 is complete and has been submitted.

VI. Rat abatement

Cindy met yesterday with the program manager from Wicker Park/Bucktown SSA33 to learn more about their rat abatement program, which uses baits that dispense rat birth control to reduce rat population rather than poison. This method is meant to be safer for pets and other animals than rat poison that is traditionally used. Their SSA covers about 2.3 miles of streets, similar in size to SSA43. They've installed 97 bait stations in alleys and another 65 in landscape planting areas. Because the product isn't toxic like poison, they don't have to hire an exterminator to manage it; current vendors are tasked with restocking the bait stations weekly - Cleanslate does the alley ones and their landscape contractor does the planting areas. WPB orders the bait by the pallet at a cost of about \$9,700 per pallet and stores it at their own facility.

Richard asked how long this takes to work?

Cindy reported that according to the vendor being used in SSA33, it can take the rats up to 2 weeks to find and start eating the bait, and it has to be refilled regularly so they continue to get dosed.

Irshad is concerned that the other district's program hasn't been going for very long and shares concerns about measuring effectiveness.

Marlene is interested in learning more about this but asked how they're measuring the effectiveness of the program, and if there are other companies selling similar products.

Cindy isn't sure, but will follow up with them on that question.

Pete is interested in pursuing this.

Sanhita is concerned about pigeons as well and asked about pigeon abatement work.

Cindy has been in touch with a building owner at Devon and Richmond that wants to do another round of rooftop bait, and is waiting to hear back from the exterminator about scheduling - are there other buildings we should prioritize for this year?

Sanhita has been having issues with someone feeding pigeons in the parking lot across the street from the bank, which is next to her office. Robert has also seen an increase in pigeon activity at the bank.

Marlene asked Sanhita to follow up with the ward office regarding the person feeding pigeons in the parking lot - they can ask the ward superintendent to talk to them.

Cindy asked about having the superintendent issue tickets for people feeding the pigeons - this also came up in the meeting with SSA33 and they reported some success with having alders and ward superintendents issue warnings and tickets to people feeding pigeons in the SSA.

Keith said the ward superintendent has been issuing tickets for other things, but for people feeding pigeons he needs to see it happening in order to give a ticket or warning. Nana suggested posting additional signage telling people not to feed pigeons or they risk a fine.

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Keith said the city no longer produces or posts these signs, though there are a few existing ones at several intersections on Devon.

Cindy responded that the SSA has funded multilingual posters about this as well as signs posted in landscape areas. The latter disappeared within a few weeks of installation. We still have the design files if folks want to try this again.

Hiba volunteered to distribute posters.

VII. Lit pedestrian crossing signage

Cindy introduced the agenda item and Marlene provided additional background information. We requested cost estimates from CDOT for installation of blinking pedestrian crossing signage at intersections on Devon. They've estimated costs at \$75,000 per intersection and recommended 3: Whipple, Oakley, and Campbell based on accident data, proximity to schools and houses of worship, and a desire to spread these equally around the Devon corridor.

Richard would like to see one of these installed at Richmond because he's witnessed many accidents there and has had cars jump the sidewalk and hit his business.

Robert asked for more information on how they work - are they blinking continuously?

Marlene said no, the lights are activated when someone hits the button to cross. If anybody wants to look at existing ones, there are some further west on Devon near the forest preserve.

Sanhita feels that the installation cost at \$75,000 is too high. Couldn't we find another installer for less?

Cindy reminded the commissioners that this is a project that has to go through CDOT, and they have many restrictions and requirements for the contractors they allow to do this sort of work.

Irshad is also concerned about the installation cost and asked why the 50th ward isn't paying for this with menu money.

Marlene said that their funding already wasn't enough to cover all the street resurfacing that was needed this year.

Pete is in favor of approving this.

Robert asked about improving traffic enforcement on Devon, particularly for double parking, illegal u-turns, and people going the wrong way on 1-way side streets.

Marlene acknowledged that enforcement is a challenge because of limited police resources - only police can ticket for moving violations like illegal u-turns, speeding, and wrong way drivers. Finance can ticket for the parking violations but they're not always here.

Joe shared that he has concerns about semi trucks going to S&C electric blocking traffic and hitting things when turning from Western onto Devon. Marlene & Keith will follow up on this. Devon and Western isn't in need of improved crosswalk signage because it's already a signalized intersection.

Pete moved approval of the lit signage for the three intersections at \$75,000 each.

Robert Seconded.

Approved 3-0-2 with Richard and Irshad abstaining.

VIII. Rebate and sponsorship requests

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a. 2538 & 2551-59 W. Devon Sign removal & camera rebate

Cindy presented the sign removal and camera rebate applications submitted by Bhavesh Patel for his properties at 2538 and 2551-59 W. Devon. The sign being removed is the Air Tours lettering, and the low bid was \$450. The camera bids were over \$4,000 for outdoor camera systems with 4-7 outdoor cameras for each building, making them eligible for the maximum rebate of \$2500.

Richard voted approval and Pete seconded.

Approved 5-0

b. Agents of Hope Event sponsorship request

Cindy introduced Nana from Agents of Hope to present the organizations' event sponsorship request.

Nana founded the organization in 2014 and they currently have two locations on Devon, one for their food pantry program as well as their office and classroom space which is on the block by Ghareeb Nawaz. The organization offers workforce development and integration assistance primarily for immigrant and refugee families with a mission of helping them to get off of welfare. This event is an annual celebration open to the community to bring clients and neighbors together, celebrate accomplishments and raise awareness about the organization. In previous years it's been held in Warren Park but clients expressed interest in moving it to Devon to a location where it could be moved indoors, so this year they're doing it at the Croatian Cultural Center on August 28.

Irshad asked about attendance numbers.

Nana said they had about 600 last year.

Robert asked if the event was being held indoors?

Nana said yes, and capacity at CCC is estimated at 800.

Cindy asked if it's open to the public.

Nana said yes. Hiba said she attended this event last year when it was in Warren Park.

Pete asked what other funding Agents of Hope receives. Are they being impacted by federal funding cuts?

Nana replied that the bulk of her program funding is from the state department of human services, and so far hasn't been impacted by federal restructuring. They run ten different programs for food access, immigrant & refugee assistance, English language learning, and workforce development, with a focus on helping women get jobs and open businesses in childcare, serving an estimated 50-70 clients per day at the main office on Devon. Agents of Hope also has a contract with CPS to provide parent education and support.

Marlene asked if services are open only to refugee and immigrant clients?

Nana said they don't have to be refugees or immigrants and others can be referred there.

Cindy asked for clarification on the amount of sponsorship funding requested.

Agents of Hope is requesting \$2000; the total event budget is \$8,000 to fund rental of the venue, furniture & equipment and food.

Pete moved approval, Robert seconded.

Approved 5-0.



b. Indian Independence Day Parade Sponsorship request

Cindy introduced the agenda item, which was originally on last meeting's agenda but the organization wasn't ready and moved it to this meeting.

Sanhita presented the request, which is from FIA, the Federation of Indian Associations for the Indian Independence Day parade, which has been held annually on Devon since 1980. They're requesting sponsorship funding to assist with the cost of equipment rentals, decorations, food, and performers. They expect about 32 floats this year, which are sponsored by local businesses and organizations, each of which pays \$1000 to sponsor a float.

Robert asked if this was correct because the bank has been paying \$2000 in previous years, and said attendance seemed to be down significantly last year.

Sanhita acknowledged that last year was difficult because the organization was originally told that the City wasn't approving parade permits during August due to the Democratic Convention being in town. Although they did get a permit eventually, the delay limited the ability to promote the event, and the previous year it rained.

Robert asked when is the parade and how long is it?

Sanhita said it's usually 60-90 minutes and the street has to reopen at noon, but they have other events going on during the day. The biggest threat to attendance numbers has been the proliferation of similar parades and festivals in the suburbs, particularly Naperville, which gets \$100,000 from the city for their event.

Cindy asked for clarification on the amount being requested.

Sanhita said they're asking for \$25,000. Cindy noted that this exceeds the \$8,000 maximum specified in the event sponsorship program guidelines, but commissioners have discretion, and this is an event with a long track record in the community.

Irshad asked if this has to be voted on today?

Sanhita said the event date is in August. Cindy said this could come back for a vote on the June agenda, but July might be cutting it close and most of July's agenda will be the annual budget.

Irshad asked where they put the stage that's being rented. Sanhita said they put it on Devon and Fairfield.

Cindy agreed to postpone the vote on this to the June meeting and Sanhita will come back with more information.

c. WRCC event sponsorship

Cindy kept this on the agenda after the last meeting because no vote was taken, though there was lively discussion and general consensus around the desire to host a larger signature festival.

Although he's no longer on the organization's board, Robert is confident in the West Ridge Chamber's capacity to organize and host a larger street festival and had requested \$100,000 in funding to do so.

Irshad feels like this is too much money for a single-day event, especially given the lack of specificity about what the proposed event actually entails.

Cindy shares this concern, pointing out that Chalk Fest was about \$60,000 for a single-day event last year, and the last two years of Devon's Got Talent in 2018 and 2019 were \$28,000 and \$34,000 respectively. All three of these events included an event

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company managing permitting, vendors and vendor licensing, equipment rentals and assisting with day-of staffing and logistics.

Hiba suggested bringing back Devon's Got Talent as an outdoor event on one of the parking lots plus a side street. Cindy agreed that this could be a good start and could scale up from there in the future, and recommended working with an event company that is familiar with organizing street festivals in the city due to permitting and licensing and likely better rates for equipment, security, and EMS than we'd be able to get on our own for a one-off event.

Robert maintains that the West Ridge chamber has done events of this scope previously and should be considered to be paid to organize and run the event, especially since the SSA is already paying RPBA for SSA management.

Cindy said there would probably have to be an RFP, which WRCC would be welcome to submit a proposal for alongside other vendors. In order to issue an RFP we need to know what the event is and define a scope of work.

Richard reminded commissioners that his proposal was to do an arts-focused festival and parade on Devon regardless of whether or not the chamber is involved. He also mentioned that Music House has done smaller street closure events on side streets and would like to do something larger next year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the business.

Irshad is still interested in potentially relocating Chalk Fest from Howard Street since they didn't have the funding to do it this year. Maybe moving forward it alternates locations?

Cindy is still talking with the event company and other partners about trying to find a way to somehow still do a scaled-back version of Chalk Fest on Howard this year but is willing to collect quotes to do an arts-focused event on Devon later this year. Irshad suggested September dates. Cindy agreed about September and has the weekend of 9/13 open currently.

No vote was taken and this agenda item will be back on the June agenda. Cindy will reach out to companies for quotes ahead of that meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 2:02 pm

Next Meeting: June 11, 2025