



SSA Commissioners Meeting  
Tropical Smoothie Cafe, 6448 N. Sheridan  
Tuesday, July 8, 2025

Commissioners Present: Jennifer Clark, Sara Lukens, Cesar Coronado,  
Others Present: Zach Joseph, 49th Ward  
Cindy Plante, RPBA  
Stefanie Roti, Wintrust Bank (prospective commissioner)

**1. Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 2:08

**2. Public comment**

Zach introduced himself to the commissioners - he has taken over Kyle's former role at the 49th ward alder's office.

**3. Approve minutes from previous meeting**

Sara moved approval, Jennifer seconded.

Approved 3-0

**4. 2025 YTD financials**

Cindy shared a summary of financials, which were shared with commissioners via email.

Sarah asked about landscape company billing and contract scope, as she has not seen any work being done on the raised planter beds in front of her store and the plantings around the signs in the "porkchop" have been completely cleared. Cindy reported that the contract for SSA54 includes weekly watering and installation and maintenance of plants in the raised beds in the 6400 block of Sheridan as well as seasonal plantings in the porkchop; most recently they had spring bulbs that came up near the sign. Cindy was notified by our landscaping company, Patch, that the porkchop landscaping work

had been completely cleared when they went to do scheduled maintenance and watering. We've since gotten other calls about this from neighbors and residents, as has Ald. Hadden's office, because it is now an eyesore.

Jennifer acknowledged that the University did have the porkchop cleared after consultation with CDOT about current conditions and having the university execute a maintenance agreement for the space. She was not aware that the SSA landscaping contract included plantings on the porkchop, and said that even if it did, no planting was done. Cindy reported that she's seen photos of the spring bulbs, and has receipts for the landscaping work and plantings that were done there. The sign area on the porkchop was included in the most recent RFP's for landscaping services and resulting contracts. If Loyola is taking it over we will remove it going forward, but we have already paid for at least some plantings and work that was done there this year which was destroyed.

Jennifer reported that university officials had CDOT come out to inspect the porkchop earlier this year, and CDOT informed them that none of the existing plant material could be salvaged and recommended starting over with new landscaping because the irrigation system was damaged and the site had extensive rat burrows and debris from a pandemic-era homeless encampment. The university is finalizing a maintenance agreement for the area with CDOT and is awaiting signatures from the city and Ald. Hadden. They can't start planting until the agreement is fully executed, but there are preliminary designs for the area, which Jennifer shared with the commissioners.

Cindy will follow up with Patch Landscaping after this meeting regarding the porkchop updates and the need for more attention to the planter boxes near Sara's storefront.

Hopefully we can either update this year's contract to reflect the porkchop being removed from the scope of maintenance and planting work, or seek reimbursement for the work already done.

Cesar suggested asking Patch for a schedule as to when weekly watering is being done.

Cindy will request this.

## 5. **2026 SSA budget & service provider agreement**

Cindy presented a summary of the proposed annual budget for SSA 54. Each commissioner has a copy of the summary sheet and executive summary, which shows the proposed levy increasing by 8% compared to the current year, which will require us to designate the next scheduled meeting as a community meeting to discuss the increase, and post appropriate public notice. The Executive Summary sheet details all the budget items that are increasing or decreasing 20% or more compared to the current year. These include:

- an increase in the budgeted amount for the annual Live Love Shop holiday rebate due to increased marketing costs and increased participation
- dumpster costs - each SSA pays for a dumpster for the maintenance crew to dispose of trash from daily litter cleanups. Despite getting new bids for this in December, prices still increased.
- bank fees is a new budget item this year. We've had to implement Positive Pay for all four SSA bank accounts due to the increasing frequency of mail fraud involving checks we've had to mail to vendors, even though our policy for mailings is to hand them to the clerk in person at the post office and avoid blue mailboxes. This additional layer of fraud protection on the accounts does include a fee. We are encouraging all of our regular vendors to implement online payment options and many have done so, but there are often fees for using this payment method, and many smaller companies and independent contractors aren't able to offer it. Whenever possible these checks are hand delivered or picked up in person at the office.
- Storage fees have increased - we have a storage space for equipment and supplies used by the maintenance crew, as well as the maintenance truck.

- Personnel costs for two staff positions have increased; these positions have been and are still spread between multiple SSAs as well as other funding sources like grants and city contracts. One of our city contracts was reduced this year, so a greater portion of the expense has shifted to SSA budgets.

Jennifer asked which RPBA staff are paid out of the SSA besides Cindy. Cindy checked the full personnel spreadsheet to confirm that it includes a share of salary for both Cindy and Sandi as well as Ana for the work she does for coordinating website and marketing, and Carolina for her work managing commissioner recruitment, onboarding, and compliance. Even though we had to make these changes, state statute and city rules require that admin and personnel expenses can't exceed 30% of any SSA budget, and we remain below the statutory cap at 29%. If this SSA decided to move to a different service provider with fewer SSAs than RPBA has, this would be harder to do because the admin and staffing costs wouldn't be able to be spread among multiple districts. Jennifer acknowledges that RPBA is a good steward of SSA funding and that SSA 54 benefits from the economies of scale that come from having a service provider that manages multiple SSA's, but she remains frustrated that the SSA's are being asked to take on expenses that used to be paid for by the city.

Cesar would like to see more business outreach events and more marketing of Sheridan Road businesses to immediate neighbors. Cindy agreed and reminded the group that this is the purpose of the shared holiday rebate program and events like First Fridays and the Loyola Student Dinner Crawl, which is usually scheduled for early October. We also rotate annual events like the Small Business Saturday welcome station, business attraction open houses, networking events, and the annual SSA breakfast to locations in each SSA. The SSA breakfast was held in SSA54 last year at the Hampton; there was also a Business Attraction Open House at Great Wall. Small Business Saturday was held at the New 400 a few years back - she will look into when it's coming back to Sheridan Road again.

Cesar moved to approve the proposed budget for 2026. Sara seconded.

Approved 4-0.

Cesar moved to approve retention of RPBA as SSA service provider for 2026. Jennifer seconded.

#### **6. First Friday music series updates**

Cindy reminded commissioners that the next two First Friday dates of the season are coming up on August 1 and September 5, both from 6-8pm. All but two of the performer slots are filled and we expect to start putting out flyers and marketing for them soon.

There was no First Friday for July because the first Friday of the month fell on July 4.

#### **7. 2025 key dates**

Cindy reminded commissioners that the next scheduled meeting for this group is in October, and the agenda will include public art, specifically participation in the Chicago Sculpture Exhibit since people had expressed an interest and signups usually start in November or December. The all-SSA annual meeting is on December 11, and will be hosted at a location in SSA43 this year.

#### **8. Adjournment**

Jennifer shared that construction is expected to begin soon on Loyola's new building for science and nursing - it's scheduled to be approved at the Chicago Plan Commission meeting on July 17. The plan commission approval is necessary due to requirements in the Lakefront Protection ordinance.

Meeting adjourned at 3:27pm.

Next meeting: Budget meeting July 8, 2025 at Wintrust