

**Georgia Downtown Association
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
April 22nd, 2025**

The Georgia Downtown Association (GDA) Board of Directors held its April meeting on Tuesday, April 22nd, 2025, via Zoom. President Aundi Lesley called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM.

The following Board Members were in attendance: Aundi Lesley, Jason Ford, Abigail Strickland, Emily Hopkins, Velinda Hardy, Taylor Smith, Jeffrey Fowler, Abbey McLaren, , Jessica Payne, Bethany Strickland, Tonya Parker, Lequrica Gaskins, Qaijuan Willis, and April Norton.

The following GMA/GDA Staff Members and Partners were in attendance: Renée Coakley, Cindy Eidson, Cherie Bennett, Scott Purvis, and Jon McBrayer

Review and Approval of Minutes: The board reviewed the minutes from the February 25th and March 25th meeting. Jason Ford made a motion to approve the February meeting minutes. Qaijuan Willis seconded the motion. The motion carried. Lequrica Gaskins made a motion to approve the March meeting minutes. Abbey McLaren seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Review and Approval of Financial Report:

Renée provided a detailed update on the organization's financials, focusing primarily on the updated spreadsheet that now breaks down expenses and revenues by month from January through April. She highlighted April additions, including her mileage reimbursement for the Avondale State meetup and a renewal of the Directors and Officers (D&O) insurance policy, which auto-renewed with a slight cost increase. Renée explained the payment breakdown for the policy, noting a 25% upfront payment followed by monthly installments of \$60.75 through February 2026.

Additional April expenses included a reimbursement for the first awarded scholarship of the year for National Main Street, baby shower gift for Cassidi and meal expenses from the March board meeting. Renée mentioned another scholarship reimbursement had just been processed and would appear on the next report.

Renée moved on to discuss the December 2024 financial report. She mentioned collaboration with a new GMA staff person who is helping to clean up financial reports. Key December items included charges for new board member name tags, lingering conference-related expenses such as meals, tour payments, and workshop fees, which had been corrected and properly categorized. A discrepancy in the CDP revenue was addressed, clarifying that some 2023 payments were misattributed due to timing but are now being correctly coded moving forward.

Emily asked for clarification on how class registration fees, such as for HPC and Main Street 101, are handled. Renée explained these are captured under the registration line item and broken

out in notes, with a portion retained by GDA and the rest reimbursed to the hosting organizations. Jason suggested clearly coding these on the expense report for transparency.

April expressed concern about the delayed availability of financial information, noting that December reports being reviewed in April—months after the August conference—hinder planning. She praised Renée and Sharon’s work on the spreadsheet, which has helped significantly in tracking and budgeting, especially with the newly implemented monthly format.

Jeffrey asked about Sharon’s absence, and Cindy explained that Sharon’s management responsibilities no longer include GDA, though her team will continue supporting conference planning. Jason reiterated the need for more timely financial updates, particularly with the conference approaching, and suggested extra effort be made before the June meeting to get caught up. Aundi inquired about updates from GMA regarding previous audit requests, to which Cindy replied that no information had been received yet, but GMA had recently brought someone new on board, which they hoped would help improve response time and financial management. Aundi closed the discussion on a positive note, acknowledging the hiring as a step forward.

Jeffrey Fowler motioned to approve the financial report as presented, which was seconded by Taylor Smith. The motion carried.

Discussion Items:

- **GMA Contract.**

The Executive Committee has received the new contract proposal from GMA. However, due to many members being unavailable because of spring break and the recent Philadelphia conference, there has not yet been an opportunity for the committee to discuss it in detail. Aundi mentioned the intention to review the contract internally, incorporate any suggested changes previously discussed, and engage an attorney to review the proposal on behalf of the GDA. Once the Executive Committee completes its review, the full board will be given a chance to review the final draft, provide feedback, and vote on it.

- **Staff Spending Policy**

The staff spending policy, discussed in the previous month’s meeting, was revisited. Aundi apologized for sending the updated version right before the meeting but confirmed that the policy had been cleaned up based on earlier discussions. The focus of the revised policy is on non-conference related staff spending. It maintains the \$1,000 threshold agreed upon previously and clarifies that the Treasurer is the primary approver, with the President serving as an alternate when necessary. The goal of the policy is to allow Renée the flexibility to make necessary purchases without needing to seek frequent board approvals. Jason Ford made a motion to accept the staff spending policy. Tonya seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Committee Reports:

- **Executive - Aundi Lesley**

Aundi also shared that Larry Hansen has agreed to deliver the welcome address at the upcoming GMA conference, which the team is excited about. She plans to meet with him as part of their annual work plan, possibly over coffee or lunch during the conference, schedule permitting.

Aundi provided an update from the Awards Committee. Aundi noted that although the team made solid progress, the original timeline might be a bit ambitious. Renée reminded the group that nominations are currently scheduled to open on May 5 with a deadline of June 4, though these dates may need to shift slightly depending on formatting timelines managed by GMA staff, who are also preparing for the convention. Renée also noted that once the content is finalized, it must be submitted for formatting in a specific system, which can take a few days.

Aundi suggested that the deadline may need to be moved back by a week to allow for these adjustments. Renée will include this topic in the agenda for the next Conference Committee meeting. April added that registration opens June 2, and they hope to time the award announcements so that members can see available opportunities when they register. Renée clarified that while the awards themselves do not impact registration, it is important to finalize everything in time to allow for review, selection, and ordering of the physical awards.

- **Education & Training – Jeffrey Fowler**

Jeffrey Fowler provided an update on the Education and Training Committee. He noted the committee is currently working on two items for conference including the brunch and roundtable sessions. The capstone project is still being finalized, and the June CDP classes will open for registration soon.

- **Marketing and Membership – Velinda Hardy**

Velinda Hardy provided an update on social media performance, sharing details about views, interactions, and the number of new followers. The committee has received two proposals for social media management services and plans to review and compare them in order to make a recommendation. Additionally, the membership survey has received 20 responses so far, prompting the committee to discuss strategies for increasing participation. The quarterly newsletter is scheduled to be distributed in July, and the committee also plans to finalize the list of conference swag items in the coming weeks.

- **Legislative – Taylor Smith**

Taylor Smith provided an update from the Legislative Committee and requested that the report be shared with the full membership. He announced that the legislative session has officially ended and noted that he will be attending the Legislative Policy Board retreat in Madison next week. Among the bills discussed, HB 531 (Municipal Liability & Court Reform) and HB 244

(Audit Assistance for Smaller Cities) did not pass, while HB 164 (Truck Weights) and HB 137 (Public Works Bidding) were passed. Looking ahead, the Committee is planning to host a GDA Legislative Class at the upcoming conference, which will cover topics such as how to advocate, where to advocate, and what to advocate for. Additionally, during their most recent meeting, the Committee met with Michael from Main Street America to review their policy agenda and explore opportunities for collaboration.

- **Governance - Abbey McLaren**

Abbey McLaren provided an update from the Governance Committee. Upcoming opportunities for GDA Ambassador participation were shared, and a request was made for the Membership & Marketing team to highlight the Ambassadors on social media platforms. Aundi suggested it would be a good idea to purchase an item—such as a t-shirt—for the Ambassadors as a token of appreciation and recognition. Abbey will coordinate with the Membership & Marketing team to organize and finalize this effort.

- **Conference - April Norton**

The Conference Committee is making steady progress. Mary Helmer Wirth has been confirmed as the keynote speaker, and Nicole, along with the Gainesville Team and the GMA Conference Team, has secured all necessary venues. It was also noted that the 2026 Conference location has already been selected and will be officially announced at the 2025 Conference. The RFP for the 2027 Conference location is scheduled to be released in early May. While only a limited number of education session proposals have been submitted so far, more are expected before next week's deadline. The conference mobile app will be launched approximately three weeks prior to the event. Renée shared that the exhibit and sponsor applications are now live, and a few submissions have already been received.

Business Manager Report (Renée Coakley):

Renée has secured an exhibit booth space for GDA at the upcoming GMA Convention, and Aundi has set aside time on her calendar to attend. Renée also met with Ashley from GMA's Communications team to review the various forms of support GMA provides to GDA, including social media posts, magazine coverage, and more. The recent regional meetup in Avondale Estates was well attended, with upcoming meetups scheduled for Griffin and then Macon.

Partner Updates

- **Cherie Bennett (DCA)** –She reminded the board about the upcoming training in May at the Fox Theatre: "Unlock the Power of Generational Diversity with Gen-ergy", led by Kristen Scroggin of genWHY Communications. Mobilize Main Street training registration has opened October 7-9 featuring Americus, Thomaston, & Perry.
- **Cindy Eidson (GCF)** – The Small Cities Conference will take place in Tifton from May 7–9. She is also scheduled to speak at the Community Planning Institute with DCA on May 15 and 16 in Columbus. Tara Bradshaw joined the team last week, and they are excited to have her on board; she will attend the next GDA board meeting. The Georgia

Cities Foundation has been awarded \$2.5 million from the Woodruff Foundation for the Revolving Loan Fund, though the funds have not yet been deposited. Once the funds are received, the RLF application process will reopen. Additional funding sources are also being explored.

- **Jon McBrayer (ECG)** – No update. A big shoutout to Cindy for her efforts at yesterday's Georgia Placemaking Collaborative event. Renée also did a fantastic job representing GDA. We're looking forward to seeing Aundi tomorrow at the Young Gamechangers event in Athens.
- **Scott Purvis (Georgia Power)** – Had to leave the call early but shared in the chat that the CREATE program is currently being updated. Please save the date for the Statewide Summit on August 13th at Middle Georgia State University in Macon, focused on CREATE Entrepreneurship.

Other Business: Nothing to report

Jason Ford made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Jeffrey Fowler. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:04 PM.