

**Georgia Downtown Association
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
February 25th, 2025**

The Georgia Downtown Association (GDA) Board of Directors held its February meeting on Wednesday, February 25, 2025, via Zoom. President Aundi Lesley called the meeting to order at 11:01 AM.

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

The following GMA/GDA Staff Members and Partners were in attendance: Renée Coakley, Sharon Collins, Cherie Bennett, Scott Purvis, Clark Stancil, Jon McBrayer

Review and Approval of Minutes: The board reviewed the minutes from the January 15th meeting. Jason Ford made a motion to approve the minutes. Taylor Smith seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Review and Approval of Financial Report: The financial reports from GMA were not yet available. Renée provided an update based on the working spreadsheet, noting that membership dues for 2025 are at a total of \$31,250. Renée highlighted an increase in office supply expenses due to the CDP courses in Tybee. There was effort in securing all items needed so it was suggested that the board may want to have a set of supplies on hand to coincide with the items supplied by CVIOG. A screen, projector, and surge protector were purchased for future use. Additional travel expenses were added for Renée's CDP attendance in Tybee. Jason Ford suggested purchasing all necessary equipment for future needs. Jeffrey Fowler noted that CVOIG provides one set of equipment for CDP courses.

Discussion Items:

- **GMA Contract Increase**

Aundi reiterated that the contract increase has been discussed multiple times. GDA is working with GMA to align the contract with other managed organizations. Renée stated that a draft contract with an increase is expected by the end of the month. Renée stated that the board already voted to increase the contract amount. Aundi clarified that while the board previously voted to approve the budget, there has not been a vote on a new contract or management fee. Jason Ford suggested the board had considered an increase in exchange for additional services such as legislative services. Emily Hopkins expressed concerns about increasing the contracted amount without receiving financial reports in a timely manner. Aundi proposed that the executive committee meet with Larry to discuss further. Aundi wanted to reiterate that we are appreciative

that all GMA does for GDA but the financials are a concern as it is one of the baseline services outlined in the current contract.

- **GMA Convention Booth**

Aundi announced plans for a GDA booth at the GMA Convention on June 21-22. She asked if any board members planned to attend, noting the need to cover gaps if necessary. Discussions included funding board members' travel expenses for event representation. Jason Ford made a motion to approve travel expenses (hotel and mileage) for a board member dedicated to managing the booth, seconded by Abbey McLaren. The motion carried. Bethany Strickland volunteered to manage the booth on June 22. Renée confirmed that there is no fee for the booth, as it is compliments of GMA

Action Items:

a. Edge Scholarship Applications -

1. Brittney Buttrey from the community of Washington applied for the Georgia Downtown Conference in Gainesville. April Norton made a motion to approve the application. Lequrica Gaskins seconded the motion. The motion carried.
2. Sandy Daniels from the community of Monroe applied for the National Main Street Conference in Philadelphia. Tonya Parker motioned to approve the application. April Norton seconded the application. The motion carried.
3. Velinda Hardy from the community of Canton applied for the National Main Street Conference in Philadelphia. Velinda Hardy remained on the call to answer questions regarding her application, but recused of the vote as she is a board member. Abigail Strickland noted that her application was not received within the 60 day requirement. Velinda Hardy noted that she put off submitting her application closer to the anniversary of her last granted scholarship. Aundi Lesly requested a motion on Velinda's application. The motion failed.
4. Nicole Parham from the community of Gainesville applied for the National Main Street Conference in Philadelphia. Taylor Smith motioned to approve the application. Jeffrey Fowler seconded the motion. The motion carried.
5. Mandy Underwood from the community of Millen applied for the Georgia Downtown Conference in Gainesville. Lequrica Gaskins motioned to approve the application. Abbey McLaren seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Committee Reports:

- Executive - Aundi Lesley
 - The 2025 Work Plan has been distributed to the board, each committee should review the plan and ensure it is correct.
 - Aundi & Qaijuan attended the Georgia Tourism Conference and noted that GDA was represented however, they wish to see if we could host a session or provide better support as downtowns are extremely important tourism products. We need to keep on radar for 2026.
- **Education & Training – Jeffrey Fowler**

- CDP Classes in Tybee
 - Funding and Resources II
 - 25 Registered
 - 22 Attended, 1 reschedule for June
 - Community Partners & Engagement
 - 31 Registered
 - 28 Attended, 2 rescheduled for June
 - Real Estate and Finance
 - 28 Registered
 - 27 Attended
 - Strategic & Master Planning
 - 23 Registered
 - 21 Attended, 1 rescheduled for June

Jeffrey stated there were some concerns about one class, it was the first time it was taught, he is actively working on some tweaks. Education Committee is working on the Capstone project going through similar programs and reviewing. There was discussion about Level 1 vs Level 2 courses and if there were prerequisites. Jeffrey Fowler reiterated that they are stand-alone classes and not prerequisites. The courses need to be consistent so that they can be taken by anyone. Jeffrey is working with Jennifer from CVOIG and will ensure that changes are made to make sure the course is digestible for all. Renée shared a testimony from one of the course attendees. Aundi shouted out Cassidi for being a great host in Tybee!

- **Marketing and Membership – Velinda Hardy**
 - 3151 Facebook Followers, up 34 from last report
 - 1033 Instagram Followers, up 14 from last report
 - 371 Linked In Followers, up 44 from last report
 - Membership Survey: 17 responses
 - The first newsletter went out with survey. The next newsletter will go out April 1st, send any updates/news to include to Tonya.
 - Swag - several ideas from survey!
 - Sent out Regional Meet Ups registration!
 - Avondale Estates
 - Griffin

- Macon

All from 10am-2pm.

- Aundi recommended to GDA having a dedicated Canva account, instead of all using our own for consistency, continuity, and brand recognition. Tonya made a motion to purchase a GDA Canva. Emily Hopkins noted there is a complimentary Canva accounts for non-profits. Tonya will work on setting up the account. Abigail mentioned she would assist in uploading all the brand details so it is already built in.

Legislative – Taylor Smith

It is a busy time as legislative session is in. Taylor will send out specific bill updates before each meeting.

- **Recapitalizing DCA/GCF Downtown Development Programs Letter**
 - GMA has operated the non-profit Georgia Cities Foundation for 25 years for the purpose of supporting economic development in downtowns all across Georgia. In fact, with 9 million dollars in funding from the Woodruff Foundation, a low-interest loan program has made nearly 200 loans to 65 different cities for downtown development projects. These loans have resulted in nearly 250 million dollars of private investment in the downtowns of Georgia, creating nearly 400 new businesses, and redeveloping or adding new construction of over 2 million square feet of space. The program has been so successful, it is in need of being recapitalized, so it can continue to revitalize downtowns, creating private investment and jobs for the next 20 years.
- **HB 132- TORT Reform (Support)**
 - Municipalities currently have no limit to their liabilities for most claims. This legislation would provide parity by limiting municipal liabilities to \$1 million per person and \$3 million per occurrence, the same as the state.
- **HB 164- Truck Weights (Oppose, UNLESS carve out for specific downtown infrastructure repair.**
 - This legislation removes the sunset (expiration) on the Truck Weight Increase Legislation that was passed in 2023 (HB 189) (88,000 Lb. Agricultural Commodity)
- **HB 137- Public Works Bidding (Support)**
 - This bill seeks to raise the threshold for public works bidding from \$100,000 to \$250,000. Projects under \$250,000 will be exempt from specific bidding and procedural obligations, while requiring that contracts over \$250,000 be subject to competitive bidding and public disclosure
- **HB387- Growth Boundaries for SDS (Support IF carve out for unexpected project)**
 - This legislation would require service delivery strategy agreements to include a "growth boundary agreement" unless the county and each affected municipality agree in the service delivery strategy to exclude such growth boundary agreement from the strategy. A growth boundary agreement would be defined as an agreement between a county and all municipalities within the county which outlines and defines future potential growth through annexation for such municipalities.
- **HB 374- Housing Management Database (Support)**

- A Housing Management Database is a tool local governments would be able to use to procure information about the ownership, management, tax information, and deed status of residential rental properties. As introduced, this database would only apply to property owners who own, or control at least five dwelling units within a jurisdiction.
- **MOST – Discussions have begun.**
- **HB 560 - LOST Negotiations related to population.**
- **GDA Legislative Class-** Discussions with Noah on Legislative class for Conference specific to downtowns.
- **HB 376**
 - Georgia Trust reached out to GDA for a letter of support for increasing tax credit amounts.

Governance - Abbey McLaren

- Ambassador Kickoff Call was held on February 13. Commitment forms are due by March 1.

Conference - April Norton

- No conference theme this year except for a special milestone.
- Send off Brunch, if board desires to host, we need to program it.
- Sponsor will have space outside of the Sponsor Showcase Mixer.
- Education session submissions: April 1-30; notifications sent by May 16.
- The conference registration starts on June 2.
- Five hotels secured for room blocks, working on a sixth.

Business Manager Report (Renée Coakley): Aundi came to GMA last week and spoke at the GMA Trade Association Meeting and completed a new recording for 2025 conference. 30 attendees registered for regional meetups so far.

Partner Updates:

- **Clark Stancil (CVOIG)** - Working on new projects in St. Mary's, Hartwell, and Albany.
- **Sharon Collins (GMA)** - GMA Annual Convention registration opens March 26.
- **Jon McBrayer (ECG)** - ECG Economic Development Summit next month. He announced he is the 2025 Class of Georgia Forward's Young Gamechangers with Aundi Lesley.
- **Leigh Burns (Fox Theatre)** – Not on call, sent information on the Fox in a Box program.
- **Cindy Eidson (GCF)** – not on call, GCF is accepting nominations for the 2025 Renaissance and Starr Awards.

Other Business: Nothing to report

Emily Hopkins made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tonya Parker. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:21 PM.