

GEORGIA DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
GMA Office, Atlanta
October 26, 2021

Present

Board Members: In-Person – Abigail Strickland, Aundi Lesley, Christopher Pike, Ellen Hill, Emily Hopkins, Jeffrey Fowler, Mathew Hill, Ricky Clark & Sadie Krawczyk, Virtual – April Norton, Christian Hamilton, & Qaijuan Willis

Partners: In-Person – John VanBrunt & Steve Foster, Virtual – Cindy Eidson

Staff: In-Person – Chris Higdon, Elizabeth Elliott, Emily Davenport, Mark Elliott, Sharon Collins & Tara Bradshaw

Call to Order

President Mathew Hill called the meeting to order at 11:04 am.

Review & Approval of Minutes

President Hill asked if anyone had any changes or additions to the September 28th meeting minutes. Abigail Strickland made a motion to approve the minutes as prepared and Jeffrey Fowler made the second. The motion was approved.

Review & Approval of Financial Report

President Hill asked Emily Davenport to provide the report. Emily shared that we are still a little behind on the financial reports, but do have the August 31st report that was included in their packet & in the meeting invite. No major changes, but should see more activity in September due to the conference income & expenses. Abigail Strickland made a motion to approve the financial report and Ellen Hill made the second. The motion was approved.

Committee Reports

- Internal
 - o *Vacant Board Member Position (District 9) & 2022 Elections*: President Hill directed the board to a sheet in their packet that includes information on officer positions, the board seats that will be expiring at the end of 2021 that need to be renewed, as well as the vacant seat for District 9. Prior to meeting, the Board & Partners were each sent a list of paid GDA members for District 9 and provided their recommendation to Mrs. Davenport, who then totaled them and provided a summary in the meeting packet. Ms. Davenport shared that one of the candidates recently left the city they worked for, so they could no longer be considered. No one has been contacted yet and the Board agreed to contact the person with the most recommendations and President Mathew Hill will contact her. Since this position will be filling a term that expires at the end of this year, even if the candidate agrees, they will still have to be voted in for 2022-2023 term, along with the other board positions that expire at the end of the year, which includes Jeffrey Fowler, Qaijuan Willis, April Norton, Ellen Hill and Mathew Hill.
 - o *2022 Budget*: President Hill asked Emily Davenport to go over the 2022 budget. Emily shared some general background information that included looking at the past 5-year budgets & actual expenditures, as well as the breakdown between the Board's budget and the Conference budget. The starting point for the estimated amounts for 2022 is based on the average expenditures over the past 5 years and actual expenditures for 2021. Emily went over each line item and provided some general background information. There are a few categories that currently have placeholders since

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additional information is needed for certain categories such as Commercial Printing Costs (e.g. marketing materials / brochures), Professional Services (e.g. additional expenses with CVIOG for revamping the GDDP), and Facility Rental (e.g. this may or may not be needed in 2022). In addition, there was some discussion about options on ways to help increase revenues for categories that have seen some decreases over the years (e.g. sponsorship & exhibitors). The board discussed at length several items in regards to shortfalls, expenditures, membership, Silent Auction/Scholarships, GDDP fees & changes to the program, conference meal expenses, etc. The information provided was not intended for a vote, but instead to begin the discussions for the upcoming budget and Mrs. Davenport will provide additional information to the board prior to the next meeting, with the end goal of providing a balanced budget.

- Education

- *Mentoring Program – New Contact*: Ellen Hill shared that with Lynn Brinson changing jobs and no longer being able to serve on the GDA board that opened up the opportunity for another board member to assist with managing that program. At the last meeting, she asked if anyone was interested in taking on that role to let her know. Christopher Pike has offered to take on this program and Ellen will make sure that he is provided the information that he needs to manage the program. Elizabeth Elliott with DCA also shared that as new downtown professional come on board with them that she will make sure he is notified.
- *GDDP*: Ellen Hill asked if anyone is interested in serving on that separate committee to help guide CVIOG to let her know. She anticipates it consisting of board members and one person from the previous review group to have some historical knowledge for reference as they move forward. As of right now, Ellen is waiting for a proposal from CVIOG as to what it will look like in the future and we will know more in January 2022 at the retreat since that will be discussed at length there. Steve Foster stressed the importance of promoting and educating our membership & partners. This program is extremely important and we need to be thinking of alternative ways to help support it financially, promoting it, and engaging our partners so that we can provide a successful & beneficial program for our downtown professionals. Sadie Krawczyk mentioned how the Georgia Economic Developers Association (GEDA) utilizes their partners for sponsorships and this could be a model that we look at as we consider options for the GDDP program. There was some discussion from a legislative standpoint on required training for downtown professionals as well as the current GDDP program that includes 3 levels and requires a certain number of years of actual time in the field prior to moving on to the next level. Based on the discussion with CVIOG in Macon, the 3 levels would no longer be the same structure and GDA wants to be sure to develop a program that is beneficial to the community, their needs, flexible, affordable, etc. to meet the needs across the state and if the product is good enough then there is no need to mandate.

- Membership / Marketing

- *Website* – April Norton provided an update on the website efforts that are underway & a recent meeting that occurred with Aundi Lesley, Emily Davenport & Mark Elliott with GMA earlier this month. Mark went over the elements of the design and shared his screen to go over the template that was selected & how he has started to incorporate the existing information that is on the GDA website. The home screen will use new

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imagery that will rotate each time someone goes to the website on the home screen, included the #gadowntowns top left, "Join Today" button top right, mission / branding statement, services / benefits of membership and use of icons, and incorporated social media. There was discussion on better ways to incorporate social media feed, which some are free while others have a small monthly fee. Overall the website is already looking better than the current and heading in the right direction. There was some discussion on the GDA logo & if we want to look at rebranding. If we do rebrand, then we will need to wait on printing new brochures, etc. Rebranding is a separate task and could take some time, so the recommendation is to continue to move forward with the website & April will also reach out to Danny & Kaitlyn with CVIOG to see what our options are with the existing logo & rebranding options. The recommendation was also made to include the name of the city on the pictures so that people know where it is. Based on the positive response to GDAs social media efforts on Facebook & Instagram, we believe this will be a way to continue to grow our followers & increase membership. Emily Davenport will email the Board to find out what social media supplements they use and costs. April shared that currently the GDA Facebook page has 1,283 likes which is up from conference where we reached 1,000. Aundi shared that when we looked at the analytics for the current website, people were primarily coming to look for information on the conference and we want to help increase the traffic to membership, programs, etc. April went into more detail including that 43% of the traffic is going to the conference information, 20% goes to our homepage, 5% contacts and then our board of directors & members. In addition, we are looking at pre-conference and post-conference to help expand that in 2022. If there are any suggestions, please send to April or Aundi and they will make sure that they are provided to Emily and Mark to incorporate. Additional comments included promoting the Mentoring Program throughout the year as well as utilizing the district officers to help from a regional perspective, trainings / resources, and job postings. Consideration for a calendar that includes trainings offered by our partners. The suggestion to offer regional mixers to help get people connected was also discussed and several shared that they had just started this prior to the pandemic, so no additional efforts have been made, but now could be the time since people are feeling more comfortable being in person.

- *Membership:* April shared that there are 537 cities in Georgia and of those cities, 95 are represented within GDA with a total membership of 147. Of the 95 cities, 76 have been highlighted through our social media campaign. April shared that you do not have to be an accredited Main Street Program to be a GDA member; however, when you break down the 95 cities represented, there are 9 affiliates, 44 classics, 17 GEMS, and 25 with no Georgia Main Street affiliation. There is definitely opportunity to increase membership and this is something that we are considering as we update the website. A draft letter is being prepared to send out on behalf of the GDA President for 2022 membership as well as a draft letter that can be used by the district officers to follow up with those who have not joined or renewed by January or February 2022. Aundi thanked Emily Davenport for her efforts over these last few months and the positive changes that have been occurring. As a new board member, Aundi has challenged herself to reach out more to others in her district to share the great things that GDA has to have to offer and to be more action oriented with helping make things happen and

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encouraged the other board members to do the same. A board member asked if they could get a list of all those who are GDA members and Emily Davenport shared that it is available on the GDA website in ABC order by last name and she will send the link to the board. In addition, Emily is working on an excel spreadsheet that shows a complete list of all cities, which ones are GDA members, and by which district and she will send that out to the board as well. There was discussion of other ways to display the members on the website (e.g. by district, interactive map, etc.) as well as trying to figure out a way to address membership (e.g. membership is tied to an individual instead of the city). Lots of great discussion and ideas on ways to clarify and improve membership.

- Legislative: Ricky Clark did not have an official update, but did share that he agreed with Steve's comments about the value of legislation to help support downtowns (e.g. architecture / design, etc.) and wanted to know if there was anything we should be considering and/or looking for or entertaining in 2022. He also asked for clarification on his role during the legislative session. It was shared that his role includes updating GDA about any pending legislation that could impact downtowns positive or negatively. He currently receives the email / update from Kenyetta Williams with GMA as part of the LPC and may want to consider reaching out to the GMA legislative team to see if anything else can be done to help further support downtown. Tara Bradshaw did share that there was a change made during the general assembly last year that will be sunsetting the Georgia historic preservation rehabilitation tax credit at the end of next year. This tax credit has been extremely beneficial to a number of cities and will be a huge loss to those rehabilitating downtowns when it ends. There was discussion from the board on whether or not DCA / State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) or Georgia Cities Foundation could provide some information to help highlight the significant impact this resource tool has provided to Georgia cities. Chris Higdon suggested reaching out to Pam Sessions to see if she could assist.

Before moving on to the next agenda item, President Hill shared that he received a letter from GMA Executive Director Larry Hanson that Emily Davenport is now officially the permanent Business Manager for GDA.

Staff Updates

The only item Emily Davenport had was to confirm with the board if they wanted the DDA training at the beginning or end of the 2022 Annual Conference (Macon). Based on the survey following the 2021 Annual Conference (Brasstown Valley) the attendees would prefer to have the DDA classes at the beginning of the conference instead of at the end. It was agreed that the DDA training would be held on Monday, August 22, 2022 and Emily will send a confirmation email to Aileen Harris who will coordinate with CVIOG.

Partner Updates

- John VanBrunt, Electric Cities of Georgia: John had no official update, but shared he was to be able to meet in person and at the new GMA building.
- Steve Foster, Georgia Power: Steve shared that they are now under contract with Placer AI and implementing training. An example of this partnership with Smyrna included some recent work on the Fulton Industrial Boulevard where there currently are no restaurants and the number of people in the study area. This type of tool will be able to assist communities, especially small /

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rural ones, better understand the market, leakage, etc. Training will be key as well as having someone dedicated in the community to work with to have beneficial results. Several board members were interested in learning more and discussion will continue to understand in more detail the tools available. Steve also shared that they have rebates available for downtown buildings as well for HVAC, lighting and reflective roofing for Georgia Power customers.

- Chris Higdon, Georgia Cities Foundation: Chris shared that Stephanie Russell and Brenda Belcher are no longer with GMA and that they will be advertising for this combined position if anyone knows of someone who may be interested. They will also be creating a new position at the beginning of the year that will be a program manager to work with all the programs they work with so be on the lookout. Quick program updates – thanks to a \$1.9 million grant they have raised their lending limit from \$200,000 to \$250,000 for their loan program. Energy Rebate Program, funding has been limited and they have recently increased the maximum rebate to \$50,000 for energy improvements and can be flexible if a property is on the edge of downtown and/or within the city. This rebate program can be combined with Georgia Power as well.
- Tara Bradshaw, DCA Downtown Development: Tara shared that they will be advertising for the position previously held by Carmine; however, they will not be offering inhouse design services. If anyone does need design services, just let them know and they can provide several contacts. DCA is also looking to fill their region 10 representative position that is the Thomasville / Bainbridge area, which was previously held by Gina Webb who is now the One Georgia representative. Training updates – mobilized main street is coming back in 2022 and will be held in Rome & Acworth March 29th and 30th. This will be a 2-day training that will include networking, public-private partnerships, etc. Registration will open on December 1st. Also bringing back their Leadership Summit in June 2022. They have updated their services on their website which includes facilitating, project coaching, historic preservation planning, main street accreditation, etc. Annual assessments will be held in January and February in regions 3 & 4 this year for deep dives.

Other Business

No other business

Adjourn

With no further business, President Hill reminded the board that the next meeting will be virtual on November 30th and we will meet in person in Macon in January at the retreat and the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 pm.