



**ADA TOWNSHIP DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA)
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MINUTES OF MAY 19, 2025, REGULAR MEETING, 8:00 A.M.**

A regular meeting of the Ada Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was held on Monday, May 19, 2025, at 8:00 a.m. at the Ada Township Hall, Assembly Room, 7330 Thornapple River Drive, Ada MI.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. by Chair Knapp.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Cloutier, Coe, Harrison, Idema, Knapp, Korth, Vogl

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Frost, Turan

STAFF AND OFFICIALS PRESENT: DDA Director Austin, Planning Director Said, Township Manager Suchy, Administrative Assistant Buckley, Farmers Market Coordinator Valverde

PUBLIC PRESENT: 5

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Harrison, supported by Coe, to approve agenda as presented. Motion carried.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF APRIL 16, 2025, SPECIAL WORK SESSION

Cloutier referenced a statement she made in the Work Session Minutes on page 2 of 3. Cloutier restated that her comment was based on feedback received and the statement will be adjusted in the minutes.

Moved by Harrison, supported by Coe, to amend the April 16, 2025, minutes to include Cloutier's comment that she received feedback that the downtown area has very few activities for families to do in the winter. Motion carried.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF APRIL 21, 2025, SEMI-ANNUAL INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Moved by Korth, supported by Harrison, to approve the April 21, 2025, Semi-Informational Meeting minutes. Motion carried.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF APRIL 21, 2025, REGULAR MEETING

Moved by Vogl, supported by Harrison, to approve the April 21, 2025, Regular Meeting minutes. Motion carried.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - none

VII. NEW BUSINESS

a. Contract Review and Approval for Farmer's Market Manager

DDA Director Austin explained that on April 28th CEDAM AmeriCorps informed me that the funding for Raquel Valverde's service position with us had been terminated by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). There was no assurance given that this program would be permitted to commence again and the lack of predictability necessitated evaluating other options.

Austin said to ensure good operational continuity and to minimize negative effects on the current farmer's market season, he had discussions with Township Manager Suchy and the DDA Chairman Knapp about a potential contract for Raquel as Farmer's Market Manager. Following those discussions, Austin extended a contract to Raquel Valverde, effective through August 31, 2025. Austin said that will allow them the opportunity to continue discussion on a future farmers market manager position.

Austin went over details of Valverde's contract and budgetary implications and requested DDA's approval of the contract for a Farmers Market Manager.

Moved by Korth, supported by Idema, to approve the Ada Township Professional Service Agreement as presented and authorize the DDA Director to execute the contract with Raquel Valverde as the Market Manager until August 31, 2025. Motion carried.

b. Parking Plan Proposal Review: Fishbeck

i. Director John Said

ii. Director Kevin Austin

iii. Jon Forster: Fishbeck

Planning Director Said referred to the Strategic Parking Plan received from consulting firm, Fishbeck. Said stated that Staff is requesting DDA approval to move forward with this project and noted this is a joint parking plan project between the Township Board and DDA Board.

Said stated that Staff received a very dynamic proposal from Fishbeck in response to the RFP and Staff is very comfortable with moving forward on this. Fishbeck addressed several important points that we were looking for; primarily to develop a strategy around parking in the downtown area and help Ada with our future policy.

Austin pointed out yellow highlighted areas of the proposal that he found to be particularly relevant for the DDA and the Township and noted he was especially encouraged by the case studies from other communities similar in size to Ada.

John Forster, Fishbeck, explained their process for a strategic plan; determine Ada goals, data collection, perceptions, observations, gather the information and understand the process, put together the strategic plan/implementation matrix. He said he looks forward to dig-in and help Ada find the solution that fits for the community.

There was DDA member discussion regarding the importance of the community engagement portion (optional service for additional price), special events parking review, Fishbeck partnering with McKenna (a Planning Firm) for services for zoning review, initial budgeted amounts for the plan, and whether the quoted amount of \$50,000 is negotiable (Mr. Forster confirmed that Fishbeck is flexible and willing to negotiate to be sure that Ada gets what they need).

Moved by Harrison, supported by Coe, to recommend to the Township Board, to approve the contract for Fishbeck as the selected consultant for the Strategic Parking Plan, and to authorize the Township Manager to execute the contract on behalf of the Township for this project with Fishbeck in an amount not to exceed \$50,000 and to include a community involvement component. Motion carried.

c. Strategic Planning: Key Objectives Update Review and Approval

Austin presented the final draft of the 2025 Update to the Key Objectives and Goals with all the proposed changes from the DDA input received throughout the strategic planning process. Austin went over details of the changes made. He requested the DDA review and discuss the final draft and recommend any final revisions.

Knapp stated that Austin has done an excellent job organizing the DDA sessions, getting the DDA to collaborate, and his continued follow up process. Coe mentioned adding an additional comment on the Shop Local Campaign. There was additional DDA discussion regarding revisiting the strategic plan annually or every six months (include in agenda items).

Moved by Vogl, supported by Idema, to approve and adopt the Ada Township DDA Key Objectives Update – Spring 2025. Motion carried.

d. Cascade Community Foundation Funding Request: Enterprise Workshop Series
i. Justin Swan CCF

Knapp informed that he serves on the Cascade Community Foundation and have a conflict of interest, so he recused himself from any conversation and voting.

Austin explained that there was no representation from the Cascade Community Foundation at the meeting and informed the DDA that they may discuss, decline or table, this item.

Moved by Korth, supported by Harrison, to table item until a Cascade Community Foundation representative is at the DDA meeting to represent. Motion carried.

e. Love your Local Branding Review

Austin noted that during the strategic planning session, the DDA endorsed a Support Local campaign. He has worked with Liz Haan and Kim Rantala (DiscoverAda and ABA) and have established a brand development process to ensure effective and timely implementation throughout this year.

Austin said the materials for review have been prepared for DDA consideration and is seeking their input.

- Mission and Vision Statement for the *Love Your Local* campaign
- Defined Campaign Goals
- Core Messaging Framework
- Three (3) Visual Branding Concepts

Austin went over the information on Love Your Local campaign explaining details of why use “Love Your Local” name (raise awareness of benefits of shopping local and support economic growth in Ada), campaign goals, mission and vision statements, and the core message (supporting local business is vital for a thriving community). He went over the campaign timeline and said with the DDA approval of the campaign development schedule it will allow us to maintain the vibrancy in our local economy and improve it as Ada continues to grow.

There was extended DDA discussion on the overall slogan “Love your Local” (clarified the meaning of the red symbol/drop pin in option #2), and the DDA members concurred with the desire to incorporate Ada language into the slogan.

The DDA shared opinions on the branding options #1, #2 or #3 – Austin said he is partial to option #2, Cloutier liked option #1 and said the slogan idea is playful and light-hearted and the color scheme is friendly and family oriented, Vogl and Coe commented that they liked option #2 but maybe adjust the color schemes.

Kim Rantala, ABA, noted that the Ada logo can be added, however, the business owners were asked their opinions about incorporating Ada language into the branding, and they did not want it to feel exclusive to Ada. She requested the DDA consider the business owners opinions.

Moved by Korth, supported by Coe, to approve the brand content as presented, selecting option 2, with the modifications to incorporate Ada language within the branding materials, and authorize the DDA Director and campaign partners to proceed with the campaign development schedule. Motion carried.

f. Emergency Irrigation Repair

Austin notified the DDA of an emergency irrigation repair that took place. He explained the failure of the system would prevent proper irrigation to most of the streetscape locations in the DDA district. Township Manager Suchy authorized the repair (\$6,953.92), and Austin said that a formal budget amendment will be presented in a future meeting to account for the additional expenditure.

g. Tara Heerspink Contract Extension Proposal

i. Tara Heerspink

ii. Director Austin

Austin referred to his memo regarding the proposal to extend the professional services contract with Tara Heerspink, Strategic Community Engagement Consultant, to continue support through July 1, 2025. The four-week extension is proposed to help to integrate the community outreach initiatives developed for the farmers market. The outreach work has generated strong commitments from multiple stakeholders, including school administrators and local business owners, with the goal of fostering mutually beneficial partnerships to support the Farmers Market and its associated programming.

Austin went over the summary of work and justification for Tara's extension and the budget impact (the extension to be fully funded within existing budget), and noted the proposal aligns with DDA objectives #2, Align and Optimize Promotional Activities.

Moved by Korth, supported by Vogl, to approve the extension of the contract for professional Strategic Community Engagement services for the Ada Farmers Market with Tara Heerspink for the period of June 7, 2025, to July 1, 2025, for an amount not to exceed \$500, and to authorize the DDA Director to execute the contract extension with Tara Heerspink. Motion carried.

h. Economic Survey Discussion

Austin said this economic survey is in the works to be produced by the Township and partners (Baton Collective & ABA) and Staff previously provided a copy to the DDA for their input, given that it does concern the DDA district area.

Austin summarized the survey presentation at the Township Board meeting on April 14, 2025, and said that the Board reviewed a proposal to begin collaboration with Baton Collective on a public-facing economic survey. As part of this process, Manager Suchy presented a formal memo outlining the Township's proposed role in the initiative. The memo included information about the intended partnership, goals of the survey, and anticipated outcomes.

Austin informed that the firm selected by Baton Collective to conduct the survey is the Chesapeake Group, which previously supported the Township in 2016 during the Envision Ada planning process. This project is currently in progress and is intended to gather critical insights into community perceptions, priorities, and economic development opportunities through the survey.

Manager Suchy updated that the survey came back to the Township Board at the April 28th meeting after some questions were clarified by the Chesapeake Group and the Township Board felt comfortable moving forward with it as it was proposed via social media. Suchy expects the survey to go live on social media in the next couple weeks in collaboration with Baton Collective and ABA.

Idema inquired about people who are not on social media. Suchy responded that Chesapeake Group has indicated that for statistically accurate representation of the community they do not need individuals who do not respond on social media. Suchy noted that Baton Collective are the ones initiating the survey and collecting information and the Township will make it public on the website. Suchy said the Chesapeake Group feels very confident about going about it this way.

Supervisor Korth shared the concern about the Township participation level and requesting hard copy survey distribution, but after a couple rounds of conversation amongst Township Board members, the conclusion was that the information received will be used broadly and the Township will be in participation throughout the process.

Vogl left the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

VIII. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

a. Financial Report 4/30/25 – No additional comments

b. DDA Director Report

Austin summarized his report with updates on: 4th of July event and BATB (Beers at the Bridge) event, upcoming events, farmers market, streetscape walk through (thank you Idema and Cloutier for contributing), support local campaign, pedestrian island program, banner installation, Ada Drive irrigation, and introduced DDA Event Intern Rowan Armour.

DDA Event Intern, Rowan Armour, introduced herself and said she is a graduate student at GVSU studying public administration with an emphasis on local government.

c. Farmers Market Manager Report – Raquel Valverde

Valverde summarized her Farmers Market April Report. She reported that April marked a major turning point in preparation for the upcoming season. She finalized both vendor and map layout and the full vendor list for 2025 market and currently has 44 vendors confirmed. She said they received approval of the SNAP application and are awaiting arrival of the EBT machine, on track for implementation opening day.

Valverde updated on: signage (different types of signs in bright and inviting colors), market infrastructure (vendor menu board, market tokens and new wooden archway at entrance), entertainment (bought a seasonal music license) and volunteers.

Valverde spoke about the closure of the AmeriCorps Program. She said she is grateful to Ada Staff for coordinating the part-time position for her, allowing her to keep farmers market plans on track. She also thanked the DDA Board for letting her stay and continue with the market.

Valverde informed that she and Austin interviewed and hired a Communications Intern, Lauren Hallas, and shared history of Lauren's background. Valverde said Lauren will work with Tara Heerspink on market strategies.

Cloutier inquired about the Seed to Market campaign at Ada Elementary. Valverde explained that she (and/or Dean) will present to two first grade classrooms about the importance of shopping local and how the process goes from farming all the way to the families table.

d. Township Department Head Staff Report – no additional comments

IX. BOARD MEMBER COMMENT - none

Idema shared concern about the tall grass and weeds growing at some of the establishments, specifically Garage Bar. Coe shared the same point while driving, the grass and weeds are a distraction and causes safety concerns. Harrison mentioned concern about the number of signs at Garage Bar. Following brief DDA discussion, Austin informed there is no zoning violation for the grass height, but he has agreed to tactfully approach the General Manager to discuss.

Austin mentioned that Chip Clark of the Ada Arts Council reached out for volunteers on their Arts Council Board. If any DDA members are interested in volunteering, please reach out.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT - none

XI. ADJOURN MEETING

Moved by Knapp, supported by Harrison, to adjourn the meeting at 9:53 a.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted:

Dawn Marie Coe, DDA Secretary

rs:eb