

**Meeting of the Niles DDA Main Street Board of Director
IN PERSON Meeting at City Hall
333 N 2nd Street, 3rd Floor Conference room behind DDA offices Niles, MI 49120
Monday, December 20, 2021 at 6:30pm**

**CALL TO ORDER
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
CHAIR REPORT**

CONSENT AGENDA 6:30-6:35

1. Consideration of approving the minutes from the November 20,2021.
2. Consideration of approving the Manager report.

TREASURER'S REPORT 6:35 -6:45

3. Financials-WILL FORWARD WHEN RECEIVED

STAFF REPORT 6:45-7:00 Items for Board Action Introduction of Items for Discussion

4. Clarify area for Commons Area by Board Motion: *Change Commons Area boundaries on the North from Wayne Street to the North Side of Sycamore Street and on the south from 3rd and Broadway to the South Side of Cedar Street.*

BOARD OPENINGS -3 opening. 3 pending reappointments*

5. Address Stephanie Reno's application to be on the DDA board.

OLD BUSINESS -none

WORKING MEETING -none

DIRECTORS REPORTS

Justin Flagel – Vice Chair, EV Chair
Fredda Zeiter – Secretary, Design Chair
Charlie Spilman- Treasurer, Organization Chair
Elizabeth Keller
Luigi Alberganti
Paul Klimson
Sandy Whitmyer
Melanie Kennedy, Promotions Chair
Travis Timm, Council Liaison
Nick Shelton, Mayor

ADJOURNMENT

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- a. Hunter Ice Festival – January 14 – 16, 2022
- b. EE Meeting Wednesday, January 19, 2022 1:00pm - 2:30pm

**Meeting of the Niles DDA Main Street Board of Director
IN PERSON Meeting at City Hall
333 N 2nd Street, 3rd Floor Conference room behind DDA offices Niles, MI 49120
Monday, November 15, 2021 at 6:30pm**

DATE/TIME: November 15, 2021

ISSUED: November 16, 2021

LOCATION: City Hall, Third Floor Conference Room

PRESENT: Sandy Whitmyer, Melanie Kennedy, Paul Klimson, Charlie Spilman, Fredda Zeiter, Luigi Alberganti
Mayor Nick Shelton

EXCUSED ABSENCE: Justin Flagel, Elizabeth Keller, Bryan Williams, Travis Timm – City Council Rep.

ABSENT:

VISITORS: Laura Preston, Vikki Jurgonski, Caryn Adler. Selina Guevara

STAFF: Lisa Croteau – DDA / Main Street Manager

COPIES: All members

CALL TO ORDER: 6:30 pm by Treasurer Charles Spilman

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: Caryn Adler – President of Niles Music and More, discussed the collaboration to get shoppers in the downtown stores during the holidays. There will be a drawing of a prize of \$100.00 Niles Dollars to the person that visits 12 businesses with the Employee signatures from November 27 – December 18, 2021.

CHAIR REPORT: None

CONSENT AGENDA 6:30-6:43

- 2. Consideration of approving the minutes from the October 18, 2021
- 3. Consideration of approving the Manager reports.

A. MOTION WAS MADE BY SANDY WHITMYER TO ACCEPT THE OCTOBER 18, 2021 DDA BOARD MEETING MINUTES AND MANAGERS REPORT AND WAS SECONDED BY LUIGI ALBERGANTI.

Discussion: None

MOTION CARRIED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

TREASURER’S REPORT – Charlie Spilman

- 4. Financials – The October financials were received today. Charlie will review and report at our next meeting. Lisa noted that our TIF funding was up 3 percent.

STAFF REPORT: 6:35-6:43

- 5. Social District Update – Dec 13 - The boundaries are being revised and then will be presented to the City Council for approval.
- 6. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Discussion – First Zoom Meeting is Dec 2 at 9 am and 3 pm, The Second Zoom Meeting is December 9 at 9 am and 3 pm and the Third Zoom Meeting is December 16 at 9 am and 3 pm. Lisa encouraged us to be part of as many of these as possible.
- 7. Winter Cities Pilot Update– Draft report due Dec 19. They will be at the November 22nd City Council Meeting to report on their findings. There was discussion about a potential ice skating rink using artificial ice. MEDC may have some funding available.
- 8. Hunter 2022 application will be submitted by November 24th
- 9. Junior Main Street Update – Justin is continuing the planning for this with Niles New Tec.
- 10. Second Street Mural Discussion

B. MOTION WAS MADE BY NICK SHELTON TO RECOMMEND THAT THE NILES PUBLIC ART COMMISSION DISCUSS THIS PROJECT AND PASS THEIR RECOMMENDATION OF HOW TO PROCEED TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION FOR THEIR REVIEW AND AFFIRMATION WHICH THEN WOULD GO TO THE CITY COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL, AND WAS SECONDED BY MELANIE KENNEDY.

Discussion: Concern was expressed that this mural may need to be cleaned up and removed. The

artist has been given significant time to give us concrete direction for how he was going to proceed and finish this mural.

MOTION CARRIED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

BOARD APPLICATIONS -3 openings

11. Board needs – Project Chairs / Volunteers.

See if Linda Casperson has any applications showing interest in the DDA Board.

DDA Board Members are recommended to have DDA Committee experience before becoming a Board member.

OLD BUSINESS - None

WORKING MEETING 6:43 – 7:05

12. Discuss NODE presentation to Council after the general meeting.

Lisa is documenting the responses to the survey from the business and public.

There will be input from MEDC Winter City at the presentation

No City Council decision will occur at this meeting

13. December 18 Christmas Parade – Is in planning stage. They are looking for a music event focus to bring the public out to the Amphitheater for prizes. Possibly a short Christmas Movie at the NODE for the kids and another event for adults at the NODE.

Vikki from River Essence noted that the Ready Theater windows will be decorated and the marquee lighted during the holidays.

DIRECTORS REPORTS:

Justin Flagel: Vice Chair – Absent.

Fredda Zeiter: Secretary – None

Charlie Spilman: Treasurer –None

Elizabeth Keller: Absent

Luigi Alberganti: None

Paul Klimson: None

Sandy Whitmyer: None

Melanie Kennedy: None

Travis Timm: Absent

Nick Shelton: None

ADJOURNMENT:

A MOTION WAS MADE TO ADJORN AT 7:35 PM

Next Board meetings will occur Monday, December 20, 2021

We believe these minutes reflect the intent of the events, discussions and decisions made during the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Fredda Zeiter

2nd Mandatory DDA Public Q&A immediately after Board Meeting

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- a. Small Business Saturday – Saturday November 27, 2021
 - b. Hunter Ice Festival – January 14 – 16, 2022
-

(2) Manager Report

Business Update:

New: -115 E Main Sold and Closed to the folks that bought 306 E Main Street. They have not made their plans for redevelopment public yet, though they have submitted a Certificate of Appropriateness with plans to the Historic Commission that shows they are building out Fitness Area on the first floor with 2 apartments upstairs.

-222-226 E Main and 401 Sycamore Street buildings have been purchased by Chad Mitchell. He intends to keep as is, with the possible future addition of apartments over 226. We made a \$4875 loan to Chad Mitchell for a new roof on 226 from the Building Improvement fund.

-The Rage has opened and now have a liquor license. During winter they will be open Wednesday – Saturday.

MEDC/MMS/RRC: MoM: We applied for Match on Main on behalf of Apothica Teas and their expansion. AND GOT THEM THE GRANT! It makes the 5th Match on Main Grant we have received for our businesses. MEDC will put out a Press Release 12/16/22.

RAP Grant: MEDC is releasing a new grant opportunity : Revitalization and Placemaking (RAP) program which utilizes \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan dollars to support investments that will repurpose vacant, underutilized, blighted or historic buildings and place-based infrastructure. The RAP program will allow individual projects to apply for up to \$5 million in support of their efforts to revitalize these now vacant spaces. The program is intended to address a rise in vacancy rates throughout Michigan's downtowns and commercial districts as the number of offices transitioning to remote or hybrid work settings increases, and investment is needed to repurpose or renovate buildings and regain vitality. I would like to apply with a project that put together all of the trainings and services MEDC has invested in Niles to be able to make them more than just plans, specifically EE & Winter Cities. I will be attending a webinar to learn more on December 16th. Initial thoughts are acquiring the Leader building and making it into Arts Entrepreneurial Center, putting a synthetic ice Ice Skating Rink on 3rd Street, and finalizing the build out of The NODE. If we are able to include private projects, there are a few we could add. I will know more on after the 16th.

Optimize Main Street: Here's an amazing new program for 5 of our businesses that we will have happening in February. I do not have all details yet, but in a nutshell, if businesses are willing to train with an Initiate Trainer, at the end of the training the business will receive up to \$2500 for a technology related something that they need! We need to brainstorm a criteria for choosing who to pick in case we get more than 5 applicants AND we need a firm commitment that they will follow through with commitment to work with the trainer bc WE DO NOT want to waste an opportunity on someone that is not committed to take full advantage of it. As soon as they release more, I will share more.

Funds may be used to purchase hardware, software, or third-party contract services that will incorporate or advance the usage of technology within the business to increase efficiency in business operations, improve connectivity to customers and/or increase sales. Examples of eligible expenses include:

- Hardware – computer, laptop, tablet, modem, WiFi equipment, printer, point of sale system, camera, lightbox, or similar equipment to advance technology operations for the business
- Software –website development including domain name, web hosting and/or e-commerce integration, web platform subscriptions including QuickBooks, point of sale, printing, graphic design, content management, email marketing, or similar platforms
- Contract Services from a third party – grantee may work with a small business or third-party contractor that has expertise to help grantee meet technology goals, ex. mobile optimization, social media content calendar creation, SEO, email marketing, etc. *Grant funds may not be used for advertising expenses, lead generation (such as online advertisements, paper advertisements, and/or purchasing customer lists), or other expenses deemed unacceptable to the MEDC. Funds may not be used prior expenses incurred*

NODE/Street Furniture/ Outdoor Dining / Social District/ Common Area:

Survey results: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-ZQSBHZ629/> Password: NODE#1 This is the Business and Building owner survey. You'll notice a few 'double dips' where the same business and/or family replied multiple times. It happened on both for and against sides. After #27, only #33 & 34 are a new business, #33 is out on Wayne Street by the Train Station. #34 is from Sage Smith, daughter of the Smiths and sister to Chance Smith. She does have a salon on Front Street. #4 & #16 are both from Four Flags Antique Mall #24 & #25 are from the same business-Grand LV.

To put it in context there are about 80 different property owners and about 105 business owners from Front to 5th/ Broadway to Cass. We heard from 27, or 15%.

With regards to Steve & Melissa Smith and Flo n' Grow – a Hydroponic Grow Supply Business (*not Flow and Grow*) I do not know what the Batemans told their landlords, the Smiths, about the reason for their move. What I do know is that FACT the Batemans created an LLC in August 2019, which closed on the purchase of the building at 2670 S 11th Street in Niles Township in October of 2019. It was a former Payless Shoe Store on S11th Street across from Rural King, about a mile over the Indiana State line. They purchased the building in October 2019, COVID shutdowns started March 2020, they moved from downtown to the new building in June 2021.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-FDC5TZ629/> Password: NODE#2 This link is to all individual surveys that allowed folks to pick 5 amenities

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-J6BX5Z629/> Password: NODE #3 This link is to all individual surveys that did not allowed folks to pick 5 amenities

Please review and draw your own conclusions. **I also have about a dozen paper surveys, largely in favor of NODE being removed or moved, and all by folks over 64, most whom say they have never been there.

To stop the controversy and be able to move forward, I propose that we revise our ask to extend the time for having The NODE Council with a compromise solution. By in large the complaints are (1) the road is closed (2) it is ugly. At Small Business Saturday, we left one

lane of traffic open for the horse and carriage and found there was plenty of room for tables, firepit and NODE goes with one lane of traffic left open. Fredda had suggested this at an earlier meeting. I propose that we leave one leave ONE LANE of traffic from Main heading North on the West side (yes, *changing the current flow*) using security planters that can be moved with forklift and opened into the whole area on times when larger events are happening as safety barriers.



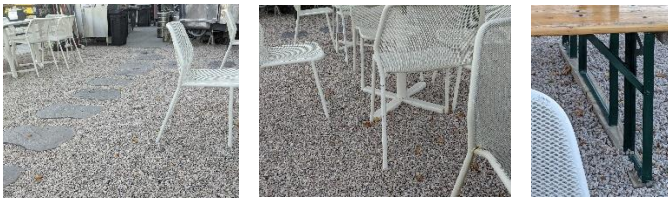
A Cordon Steel planter like the one pictured is made in a multitude of sizes, and it matches the firepit.

With one lane open heading north, angled parking could be put outside 214 & 218 N 2nd Street, adding 4-5 spaces plus one to be handicap and still have a loading zone. I will have a scale mock-up of by Monday night's meeting.

DESIGN IDEAS: I found the design below at a Blue Jacket Brewery in DC. If the NODE area were gridded with steel frames like pictured, we could get clear plastic that is used up north on porches on the lake to put on the sides as transparent windbreaks in the winter & have a waterproof covering to go over them to protect from rain & sun as pictured in the first picture.



Another stolen DC idea is to use gravel as the road cover, using pavers to make walking/sitting "pads". We could even put a heated sidewalk grid under the gravel to manage snow which would also serve as radiant heat once the rocks were warmed.



Last, **please** mark your calendar for **January 10th, 2022**, as that is when MEDC will be attending the Council Meeting. They had planned on December 27th, but MEDC will be closed that week.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Matt from National Main Street has revamped how he will be collecting the necessary information from the Niles Community. Each of you received a packet. Please let me know if you have any questions, and please be available for the next meeting Wednesday, January 19th at 1 pm to 2:30pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89892672186?pwd=VHJsZ1pESngxd1dPT2dZU0JUdURaZz09>

Homeless/Vagrants: Judy Truesdell pull together approximately 20 people that met on December 2nd to learning what each does in order to hopefully have a more cohesive coordinated effort in Niles. Gateway Foundation has agreed to be the "Keeper" of this project.

Hunter Ice Festival: January 14-16, 2022. Aaric will plan the festival as he has in past years unless new restrictions are put in place between now and January. Single/double block sponsorship will be limited to 50 this year, however sponsorship of larger multi block pieces will be made so that anyone wanting recognition for supporting this event can have it. Sponsorship letters went out December 10, and as of 12.15.21 we have a \$10k commitment from Hunter Foundation if we need it, plus 5 sponsorships in totaling \$3650.

Storytime- We will be one of the first to have our Story told. They are hoping to be in town Jan 14 for festival to tell the story. It is a MMS project and they want me as plus 2 businesses-I am thinking Veni's bc of the longevity that business has in Niles (since 1910) and the cool story of how it moved from one family to the next. I was thinking Gabrizio or Iron Shoe for the other because they are the newest and not from Niles, but choose Niles. Thoughts?

Social District: Ric has asked us to hold off asking for the area to be change as approved at the October meeting until he has the ordinance corrected. The Second reading will be December 27th, and after that, we can proceed with marking the Commons Area!

Board Applications: In addition to Stephanie Reno, William Lakeman from Four Flags Antique Mall and Cindy Ray from Front Street Pizza Pub have both submitted applications to be on the board. I have sent them both the list of projects to see what areas they would like to get involved with to learn more, as well as invited them both to start attending meetings about DDA Main Street.

REVENUE: Working on identifying all properties that have been made non-taxable per previous discussion.

OLD Y DEVELOPMENT: no update.

NECI: working to restore hot water to the kitchen to allow some limited use of the space.

Parking: no update

Streetscape: no update other than working with the city to help identify all funds that could be available for this project in order to make the most of what funds are available to Niles.

Christmas Decorating/Lights: River Essence did a lovely job refurbishing the Christmas Decorations. Additionally, they purchased 55 new strings of larger c5 lights for the large tree. MAAC, for the 17th year, volunteered and strung the new led lights on the corner trees, as well as hung the new lights on the big tree. Kudos to everyone involved!

3. FINANCIALS – Charlie is working on them.

4. Commons Area Clarification: At the October meeting the board voted to change the Commons Area boundaries on the North from Wayne Street to the North Side of Sycamore Street and on the south from 3rd and Broadway to the South Side of Cedar Street.

It was not clearly stated in the attached minutes, so I am asking for a revised motion with clearer defined boundaries.

Motion to be: *Change Commons Area boundaries on the North from Wayne Street to the North Side of Sycamore Street and on the south from 3rd and Broadway to the South Side of Cedar Street.*

5. Stephanie Reno. I ask the board to address Ms. Reno's application to be on the board and make a formal recommendation of yes or no to Mayor Shelton as to whether they recommend her to be on the Niles DDA Main Street board.

At the December 13, 2022 Public City Council Meeting, Stephanie Reno addressed Council regarding her application to be on the DDA Board. William (Bill) Lakeman also spoke, as did Melanie and Don Kennedy. The only Council Person to address them was John Dicostanzo. Below is a recap of the conversations that were had. I feel that, since y'all were not there, it is important that you know what happened and what was said because the comments were made by two people that have applied to be on the board and one that is on the board.

STEPHANIE RENO:

- Introduced herself. Said she owns two businesses and is VP of River Essence, "a non-profit"
- Wanted to address council in regards to appointment committee meeting.
- Six seats open, 3 which are up for renewal, 3 which have been empty for some time.
- DDA has quality applicants, yet seats have still not been filled.
- As you recall, I requested 100% transparency from the DDA concerning topics placed in front of the council a couple months back. I believe I was clear that transparency was necessary in all aspects of the DDA moving forward in order for business owners and property owners to put our trust back into this organization.
- I'm asking council and appt committee to postpone any renewals to these positions until the DDA provides a track record per say, evaluation of their performance and their time in these seats. An example being what are the responsibilities of the dda, have these responsibilities all been met per state requirement, what positions have these members held, what fundraising have these members been involved with, what events, projects, etc. have they lead, and what was the outcome and success? Last but certainly not least, what stake to these members hold in downtown Niles? Are they property owners, business owners, experienced entrepreneurs? It is extremely important for the business community to have people in these positions that support us, that have a voice for us, and have the experience behind them to lead downtown in the direction of a thriving business community. These seats require energy, time, passion, not just showing up for a meeting and voting on what is placed in front of them.
- I myself have filled out two applications dating back to march and the second one in September to be considered for one of these seats. I have fulfilled every request, every requirement for the DDA, but have been refused a spot. I am not the first qualified business owner who has run into this, but would like to be the last.
- Placing people in these positions that are agreeable and vote accordingly to a certain agenda is unethical business practice and we need to get away from that immediately.
- We need people with different ideas, different perspectives, outside experience, higher education, etc. to explore endless potential and possibilities of what our community can be.
- I believe it is time to hold leaders accountable.
- If our taxpayers and property owners of downtown Niles fund the DDA, it's time for the dda to fully comprehend that we do have a voice, we will be heard, and we're not going anywhere.
- Again, I ask for you to postpone any appointments to any seats to the DDA this evening without the legwork being done.

BILL LAKEMAN

- I spoke hear a couple months ago as well.
- I would also be available for the downtown DDA.
- We are very much invested in the town.

- We are proud to be in Niles. Happy about the factory getting toward down. Happy things are going in the right direction, EXCEPT the DDA.
- I feel like we are confused on the direction with the people who have invested in downtown. It seems like we're not working together with the people of the town.
- And we personally increased our revenue over 30% at four flags. We have increased our marketing.
- They talk about some of the benefits of the node and the business owners that say they are getting outside zip codes. They believe their marketing is the reason why people are coming to downtown Niles.
- We are very concerned about the DDA as well. We have only had a couple interactions with the DDA. We have invested a lot of money down there. I believe we're one of the biggest businesses down there, but the node specifically splits us and the other main street antique mall.
- We have had people come to us and ask us if they can walk through this area. He tells them yes. For a long time, it has looked like a construction zone. It has looked better the last couple weeks. But it took over 3 months to get that fixed after the apple festival went through there.
- It's so frustrating. Just after we came to town this happened. We want to be part of Niles. We want to benefit from Niles. We want Niles to benefit from us as well. We just feel like right now that's not happening. Thank you.

MELANIE:

- I was aware that there was an appointment committee meeting tonight. I was going to be prepared to request consideration of Stephanie as a DDA board member. As she mentioned she had submitted an application several times. once in march once in September.
- I myself am a new DDA board member and I'm just trying to gain understanding of the reluctance to appoint Stephanie. Because as she mentioned there are seats open. 12 members is the quota. At least 7 being business or property owners in the downtown district. Stephanie does meet those requirements as the owner of SLR and trap house.
- So, in my opinion there's not a better candidate for a DDA membership. The DDA main street bylaws outline that quality candidates would demonstrate interest in the board and the overall goals of downtown which Stephanie absolutely does. It also says they would also attend board meetings, participate in subcommittees and have knowledge of DDA main street policy and Stephanie has demonstrated that interest by submitting applications twice. She has regularly attended meetings over the past year. She was actively involved in the third Thursday committee and additionally she played a major role in the revitalization of the downtown over the summer as VP of river essence group. They did a phenomenal job organizing volunteers, securing funding, and doing the work to overhaul the landscape of the downtown planters. They also maintained those planters and updated them over the fall and winter.
- With all that being said I think those actions speak for themselves and without a doubt Stephanie would be a great asset to the DDA Main Street board and I am personally fathomed by any reason the appointment committee would not be thrilled to have her as an addition and see the benefit of adding her as a member.

DICOSTANZO during report:

- Thanks to business owners.
- We are going to have appt committee meeting. Those three people have been on the DDA for quite some time and have probably been very effective members.
- However, I agree with the business owners that we should probably look at increasing/changing the makeup of the board and get some more participation and leadership n that board from people with skin in the game (business and property owners downtown). This is one of the few opportunities - when there are members whose terms expire - is it better to reappoint or find some new qualified members.
- I agree with the idea of delaying approval of any reappointments or new appointments until the transparency that reno advocated for is satisfied.
- Now, I don't have any authority nor does the appt committee to make appointment recommendations. That falls to the mayor. Mayor Shelton is who is not here would be the one to explain his reluctance to appoint Stephanie, who I agree is imminently qualified for a position on that board. He has given me reasons in the past that I think Stephanie has actually satisfied and fulfilled. So, I would advocate for my colleagues on the council and other three members of appointment committee to hold off on those appointments today.
- Mentioned tabling or a negative vote to delay it.
- We need to really work together to understand what we expect of the DDA. We want continual improvement. We want the downtown to be thriving. And you guys who own businesses, it's part of your tax money that goes to support the DDA so I'm really believe you should have a strong voice on that board. I appreciate you coming. I would be happier to see even more business owners to see that there is an even stronger desire from the rest of the business owners - encourage your fellow business and property owners downtown to make their voices heard here to the council so we know that there is a strong desire.

Don Kennedy addressed the Appointment Committee saying that, as business and property owners, if they do not live in the city the only chance at a voice they have is to be on the DDA board.

Appointment committee voted 2 against (Dicostanzo & Weimer)-2 for (Bertschy & McAfee) to recommend the reappointments.