

**Meeting of the Niles DDA Main Street Board of Director  
IN PERSON Special Board Meeting at City Hall  
333 N 2nd Street, 3rd Floor Conference room behind DDA offices Niles, MI 49120  
Friday, March 22, 2024 10:00am**

**MISSION: STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND  
ENCOURAGE HISTORIC PRESERVATION TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC GROWTH  
www.uncoverniles.com**

**DATE/TIME:**

March 22, 2024 at 10:00am

**LOCATION:** City Hall, Third Floor Conference Room

**PRESENT:** Justin Flagel, Nick Shelton, Tracy Waggoner, Fredda Zeiter, Cindy Ray, Mark Weber

**EXCUSED ABSENCE:** Jessica Nelson, Linda Casperson

**ABSENT:**

**VISITORS:** Suzannah Deneau/Wightman, Tim Rogers, Bruce Vosburgh, Vikki Jurgonski, Ruth Slater, Harry Thibault, Melissa Smith, Chance Smith

**STAFF:** Lisa Croteau – DDA / Main Street Manager

**COPIES:** All members

**SPECIAL BOARD MEETING 10:00AM**

**CALL TO ORDER:** JUSTIN FLAGEL

**ROLL CALL:** THERE IS QUORUM

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA:**

Shelton motioned and Waggoner seconded to accept the agenda. Motioned carried unanimously

**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (PUBLIC COMMENT):**

Bruce Vosburgh asked: Why a special meeting, how much did Wightman spend to redo plans, why is the parking lot by pine tree on Main not being repaved.

Harry Thibault Owner 211 N 2<sup>nd</sup> Street stated he was here to listen and asked to reserve time to speak later.

Joe Ray added a housekeeping item letting the board know that downtown Parking Lot repaving will start next week starting with Curb Removal and replacement, then move to mill and fill when asphalt plants open. Expect the project to move quickly.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

**Introduction of Items for Discussion**

**Item for Board Action**

Introduced Suzannah Deneau from Wightman to present estimates on 3 plans to move forward with the FORGE. Suzannah stated that any underground work for now or future amenities should be planned for and done now.

Mark asked what funds we have for this project - \$650,000 RAP/ARPA plus \$20,000 Vibrancy Grant(furnishings) \$10,000 Firepit installation= \$680,000 TOTAL.

Streetscape Features: ALL plans have Columns at the Stage area and at the Firepit area, as well as the Entry Gates.

#1: Keep the road as planned with 2 lanes of traffic open, but moved to the west, keeping some features of the original design.

Road Utility Work	\$343,560.30
Streetscape Features	\$258,547.20
Furniture Budget	\$100,000.00
Engineering	\$105,316.13
<b>TOTAL Estimate:</b>	<b>\$807,423.63.</b>

Realignment of the road, as well as removing sidewalk to place underground supports for features, are expensive.

#2: Close the road. Move underground features from sidewalk to road to maintain current sidewalk.

Road Utility Work	\$208,652.80
Streetscape Features	\$258,547.20
Furniture Budget	\$100,000.00
Engineering	\$ 85,080.00
<b>TOTAL Estimate:</b>	<b>\$652,280.00.</b>

Suzannah and Joe both feel this is the option that will keep people the safest. Suzannah added this is the plan that gives the “biggest bang for the buck”. Plan to push firepit west away from current sidewalk. New curb on north and south ends. The area would still be accessible to emergency vehicles.

#3: Extend current sidewalk to bump outs creating appx 20' sidewalks on both sides of 2<sup>nd</sup> and leaving current traffic lanes as they are.

Estimate: \$728,401.03

Road Utility Work \$274,845.00

Streetscape Features \$258,547.20

Furniture Budget \$100,000.00

Engineering \$ 95,008.83

TOTAL Estimate: \$728,401.03.

Justin asked Board and Joe for their thoughts:

Fredda: Option 2 is most cost effective, but does revisit the issue of closing that section of the road.

Nick: Responded to two of the citizen questions: why a special meeting- because time is of the essence if this project is to go to bid and be completed in 2024, and added that the parking lot by the pine tree is a privately-owned lot, not a City lot.

Mark: Was not in original planning group and believes there needs to be community input. He also said there may be options for additional funding.

Tracy: Option 2 is the best option and does not need for amenities to be crammed.

Cindy: Does not understand why so much attention is being given to this given that The Rage, Front Street Pizza Pub and soon The Underground Laugh Lounge will all have patios. She feels we should go after other things that were in the grant, like the Market building and skating rink. She stated she likes Social District but does not know how often this space will be used, and has questioned how long volunteers will be on board to maintain the space.

Lisa responded to her question about pursuing a Market building & Skating rink that there was not enough money from the grant for the market building as the construction figure used for the grant ask was \$2.1M and was based off 2017 costs from a similar building in Cadillac, MI and our total RAP award was \$1.3M.

Joe: Feels the safest option 2. He would suggest an 8"-10" curb making it difficult to hop and feels he and Suzannah can work on motifs that will fit and be crash worthy acceptable.

Nick: Option #1 has lots of the original design removed and is still out of our budget. He added that the first complaint about the original NODE was about aesthetics, not the closed road, but that as complaints were addressed, new ones would arise, landing on the road being closed. He said that the business owner when the NODE was there has moved their business and, for a while, was an investor in the new business at that location. He asked Lisa how the current owner of the business at that location feels and she said that he is all in for closing the road and had a previous appointment so was unable to attend this meeting but will be at the Meeting of the Whole with Council Monday evening.

Justin: Agreed with Nick about the evolution of the arguments about the NODE adding that he had personally been the brunt of a lot of complaints, adding that community feedback matters, but other factors need to be taken into account as well.

Fredda: it is just one half of one block. Lisa had it marked in neon green on 3 area maps to show the footprint.

Nick: ARPA could be used elsewhere, but RAP cannot, and he does not like leaving money on the table. HE stated that the original goal was to create an area that would bring people downtown to be an economic engine. This location was chosen because it is central in the downtown and had been used for decades when a street needed to be closed 3for events. Downtown Professionals Network did a study and the data showed that this was the best location.

Tim Rogers: Has followed the process since the beginning. Agrees that Option 2 is the best for safety, but feels there is no clear choice from the public and that there will be “vocal involvements throwing shots from the cheap seats.” He does not know if there will be a clear mandate from Council, but restated that the safe way is to close the road.

Joe: added that with any portion of the road left open, snow removal becomes a concern as the road will not be wide enough to remove snow as the city does on other roads.

It was stated and agreed that snow removal at the space will need to be managed either by volunteers or be hired out.

Justin asked for comments from the visitors, limiting each to 1 minute due to the time:

Vikki: stated concerns about the condition of the building facades on the east side of the road when so such is being done to make this a beautiful area.

Harry: If the road is closed, it needs to be done right, and not just with bollards. He felt it was great when it was active before, but not during most of the time when the space was dead. He has some concern about increased use of the alley and people hitting his building with their vehicles. He likes the timer for the firepit, and does not see that as the problem that it was with the NODE.

Ruth: Agrees with everything Vikki and Harry have said, adding that she heard from homeless while she was painting the mural at Riverfront park that they enjoyed the node and would sleep on the benches there.

Melissa: Agreed with Cindy and the fact that it was a dead zone when there were no events and felt it would be active 6mo of the year at most, adding that the businesses on that street need the drive by traffic because people are lazy and does not want another business to shut down, and also feels this is a slam to the other restaurants.

Chance had no additional comments.

**Zeiter** motioned and **Waggoner** seconded to recommend to Council to pursue Option 2. Motion carried unanimously.

**Discussion:** There will be a Meeting of the Whole Monday 3/23/24 after the Council meeting for open discussion.

Cindy: wants to be sure that Option 2 can be done within our budget.

Justin: agrees with safety concerns. We don't have enough for the grand dream, but Option 2 gives the best option for crating a place to grow from with more flexibility. He would like to keep a healthy furniture budget so there is funding for nice build out.

Nick: This space will not always be busy, but something good was happening with the NODE until all the controversy.

Downtown doesn't feel the same since it was closed. It feels like something is missing.

**Adjourn 11:05 am**