

Introduction

On Monday, September 25, 2023, board members of the city of Blakely Downtown Development Authority (DDA) met at the offices of the DDA in Blakely, Georgia to develop a program of work for downtown Blakely. Scott Purvis, Community and Economic Development Manager, Georgia Power, facilitated the conversation.

Participants

Board Members:

Beau Clenney – Clenney Insurance and Realty and Blakely City Councilman
Brad Clenney – Clenney insurance and Realty
Dave Atkins – One South Bank
Edwin Jones – Pro-Tax
Franklin Ford – Backlight, Inc.
Heather Alred – Funny Girl Deli
Jennifer Mulkey – Mary’s T-shirts and Trophy Shop

Guests:

Susanne Reynolds, Executive Director, Early County Development Authority
Heather Sharpe, Region 10 Representative, Department of Community Affairs (DCA)

The Process

Following welcoming remarks by Susanne Reynolds, the facilitator reviewed the agenda and some ground rules for the session.

Agenda

- ❖ Welcome and Introductions – Scott Purvis, C&ED Manger, Georgia Power
- ❖ Responsibilities of a DDA Board Member – Heather Sharpe, Regional Representative, DCA
- ❖ Organizational Structure and Expectations – Heather Sharpe, Regional Representative, DCA
- ❖ Facilitated Session – Scott Purvis, C&ED Manager, Georgia Power
 - ✓ Mission Statement
 - ✓ S.W.O.T.
 - ✓ Critical Issues Identification
 - ✓ Goal Setting
- ❖ Wrap-Up and Adjourn

Responsibilities of a DDA Board Member

Heather Sharpe led the DDA Board in a presentation on the responsibilities of a DDA Board Member. Highlights of her discussion are as follows:

General Requirements:

- Must be a taxpayer residing in the city of Blakely, Georgia OR must be a taxpayer residing in Early County and an owner/operator of a business located within the Downtown Development area.
- Complete required DDA training
- Attend monthly Board Meetings

Duty of Care:

- Each board member has a legal responsibility to participate actively in making decisions on behalf of the organization and to exercise their best judgment while doing so.

Duty of Loyalty:

- Each board member must put the interests of the organization before their personal and professional interests when acting on behalf of the organization in a decision-making capacity. The organization's needs come first.

Duty of Obedience:

- Board members bear the legal responsibility of ensuring that the organization complies with the applicable federal, state, and local laws and adheres to its mission.

Responsibilities Include:

- Attend all board and committee meetings and functions, such as special events.
- Be informed about the authority's mission and programs.
- Review agenda and supporting materials prior to board and committee meetings.
- Be willing to serve on committees or take on special assignments.
- Inform others about and advocate for the work of the board.
- Keep up-to-date on developments that could impact the area of interest (downtown).
- Follow conflict-of-interest and confidentiality policies.
- Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, such as reviewing the authority's financial statements.
- Participate in training opportunities and be willing to learn from other communities.
- Support Downtown Blakely!

Downtown Development Authority (DDA) vs Main Street Program

DDA:

- ✓ Either constitutional or statutory authorities
- ✓ Entity that plans and manages the downtown business district.
- ✓ Have specific guidelines governing their powers and authority.
- ✓ Overseen by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- ✓ Must submit their annual Authority Registration and Financial (AARF) Report to remain in compliance.
- ✓ May accept grants and apply for loans. Can own, acquire, and improve property. May enter into contracts and intergovernmental agreements. Have authority to issue revenue bonds.

Main Street Program:

- ✓ A community designation
- ✓ Helps communities support revitalization efforts and is designed to grow with them over time.
- ✓ National Main Street Center (Chicago, IL) sets criteria and guidelines for designations.
- ✓ Provides an approach to community based revitalization initiatives with a practical, adaptable framework easily tailored to local conditions.

Organizational Structure and Expectations

Next, Ms. Sharpe led the DDA Board Members in a presentation on the DDA Organizational Structure and Expectations. Highlights of her discussion are as follows:

Organizational Structure:

- Consists of a board of seven directors who are appointed by the municipal governing authority to serve staggered four-year terms.
- At least four of the directors must have or represent a party who has an economic interest in the redevelopment and revitalization of the downtown development area.

- One of the directors can be a member of the municipal governing authority.
- Board members do not receive any compensation for serving on the DDA, except for reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in performing their duties.
- A majority of the board of directors shall constitute a quorum.
- The board directors shall elect one of their members as chairman and another as vice chairman and shall also elect a secretary and a treasurer or a secretary-treasurer, either of whom may but need not be a director.

Chairperson:

- Presides at board meetings.
- Creates agenda in collaboration with the executive director.
- Appoints people to committees and assigns committee chairs.
- Serves as the contact for board issues.
- Sets goals and objectives with the board and ensures they are met.

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect:

- Prepares to assume the office of the board chair.
- Fulfills the board chair's duties when the presiding officer is absent or if that office becomes vacant.
- Assists the board chair in the execution of his or her duties.
- Serves on committees as requested to learn the operations of the board.

Board Secretary:

- Assures that an agenda has been prepared and is distributed prior to the meeting.
- Prepares the official minutes of the meeting and records motions, discussions, votes, and decisions.
- Provides the previous meeting's written minutes to board members before the next meeting and records any changes or corrections.
- Assures that documents are accessible to members.
- Schedules and notifies board members of upcoming meetings.

Treasurer:

- Serves as financial officer.
- Reconciles financial accounts and produces financial statements, which they present at board meetings.
- Ensures financial documents and legal forms are filed on time.
- Assists in preparing the annual budget and presenting it to the board for approval.
- Reviews the annual audit and answers board members' question.

Expectations:

- What do you expect of yourself?
- What do you expect of others?
- What do others expect of you?
- What are the goals of the board?
- What is our decision-making process?
- How will our group resolve conflict?
- How will the group divide responsibilities?

Compose Mission Statement

Mr. Purvis asked the group to formulate the Mission Statement. What is the mission of the City of Blakely DDA? He explained that the importance of a mission statement is that if you are talking to a stranger, you can tell them who you are and what you do. A Mission Statement should be brief and memorable. He also stated that a missions statement should detail how are you going to, “To Create, Develop, Enhance, Expand, Extend, Improve, Maintain, Maximize, Promote, Provide?” (Mission Statement verb examples) After several suggestions, the following was agreed upon as the Mission Statement for the city of Blakely Downtown Development Authority:

“The mission of the city of Blakely Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is to Create Opportunities, Improve Current Businesses, and Promote Downtown Blakely.”

S.W.O.T. - Group Discussion

Mr. Purvis led a discussion with the board on, “What are the Strengths and Weaknesses in downtown Blakely?” and “What are the Opportunities and Threats to downtown Blakely?” Their responses are as follows:

Strengths:

- Beauty – Lights-Flags-Floral-Skyline-Beautification of the Square
- Location – Good location between areas. People drive through Blakely to go to beach. Attract a lot of people from Central Florida to Early County to hunt. People pass through and spend money.
- Layout – Courthouse square – streets converge on square store fronts.
- Availability of downtown space
- Size – people are looking for small unknown, quiet downtowns, but close to a larger community.
- Cost of living
- Historic properties district
- Downtown has internet/ broadband.

Weaknesses:

- Walkability – traffic from state route – no crosswalks
- Blight – Several buildings are run down – Buildings require rehabilitation - There is no motivation from owners to improve their buildings.
- Absentee landowners – physically and mentally
- Accessibility – Stores are not opened when customers want. They don’t get the business or foot traffic.
- Don’t have the workforce – don’t have a trained workforce.
- Suitcase Community – people leave town on weekends or stay home and do not come downtown.
- Politics – Leadership does not pull in the same direction – Question whether some leadership has the best interest of the community at heart.
- Lack of city enforcement of ordinances and buildings codes.

Opportunities:

- New businesses – New Services (Mexican restaurant)
- Incentives
 - Rural Zone Designation
 - Acquiring the Main Street Designation
 - Façade Grants
- Prime real estate – Availability of space
- Thriving social scene on weeknight and weekends with music, open restaurants, tv's, movie screens, and always on the square. Open container
- Opportunity to be involved.
- Downtown Merchant's Association – networking
- Attract food trucks and Pop-ups for Saturdays
- Need a venue – Amphitheatre for live events.
- Arts and Theatre
- Develop partnerships – DDA can be the convenor for the city, county, other stakeholder group for the improvement of the downtown.
- City takeover the streets on the square and get rid of state routes.
- DDA own property in the downtown
- Have a master scheduling of downtown events.
- Better downtown signage

Threats:

- Industry closures – Plant closures influence the downtown.
- Four-lane – Highway 27 – Developed retail/ commercial corridor would take away from the downtown.
- Cooperation – Leadership – city of Blakely, County, DDA, school system, non-profits, and chamber of commerce not working together.
- Internet and e-commerce – people shopping online and not local.
- If the DDA is ineffective
- Safety
- Community perception – nothing to do – have to leave to find something to do.

Critical Issue Identification

Next, the board looked for common themes and issues based on their SWOT analysis. The following is a list of the identified critical issues:

- Beautiful downtown and a good location
- Everyone on the same page – buildings partnerships
- Personal/ political agendas
- Taking ownership of the downtown – Become pro-business. Quit waiting for someone else to do it.
- Blight – increase city's enforcement of ordinances and building codes.
- One stop shopping guide on how to start a business.
- Downtown traffic and walkability
- Event planning and thriving social scene.
- Fund raising

Once the board identified the critical issues, they narrowed them down to four areas to set goals and action steps. The following is a list of the prioritized issues:

- ❖ Partnerships
- ❖ Blight
- ❖ One stop shopping guide
- ❖ Event planning and thriving social scene.

Program of Work for the city of Blakely Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The following is the Program of Work that was developed by the DDA.

Partnerships

- Identify and educate partners on what the DDA is and where there can there be collaboration.

Action Steps:

- ✓ Emphasize the importance of developing and promoting the downtown through community collaboration.
 - ✓ Joint meetings though out the year or at least once a quarter with the city of Blakely, Early County Board of Commissioners, Early County School Board, Chamber of Commerce, and other non-profits.
 - ✓ Individual DDA Board members will meet one-on-one with other leadership.
 - ✓ Hold first meeting with community leadership end of October/ first of November. The DDA Board will be responsible setting up and scheduling this meeting.
- Formation of downtown merchant networking group
- Action Steps:**
- ✓ Invite businesses to downtown business blend on October 30th.
 - ✓ Hold quarterly networking events at different downtown venues through out 2024. The DDA Board will be responsible for setting up and scheduling these networking events.
- Engage partnership with the Early County School System
- Action Steps:**
- ✓ Invite CTAE and DECA to downtown business networking events to address work force gaps. The DDA Board will be responsible for inviting school leadership to the networking events.
 - ✓ DDA Board to work with Early County School System to ensure there is an Entrepreneurship pathway in the high school.
 - ✓ DDA Board to work with the Early County School System to research participation in the Foundational Leadership in Entrepreneurial Experience (FLEX) program.

Blight

- Repurposing downtown buildings and structures

Action Steps:

- ✓ Development of a downtown amphitheater
- Develop downtown housing.
- Action Steps:**
- ✓ DDA Board to work with the city of Blakely to adopt a downtown housing ordinance.
 - ✓ DDA Board to work with the city of Blakely to adopt a short term rental and Airbnb ordinance.
- Increase enforcement of city of Blakely ordinances and building codes.
- Action Steps:**

- ✓ DDA Board to educate city of Blakely on importance of ordinance enforcement and increasing fines.
- ✓ DDA Board to work with the city of Blakely to update ordinances, building codes, and fines pertaining to the downtown.

One Stop Shopping – Guide on How to Start a Business

- Create a document on how to start a business with all steps outlined and detailed.
Actions Steps:
 - ✓ Work with the UGA SBDC office
 - ✓ Contact other communities for examples on guides on how to start a business and website content.
 - ✓ Outline protocols for a bridge to closing a business.
 - ✓ DDA Board to work with the city of Blakely to develop predevelopment meeting guidelines and protocols for prospective new businesses in the downtown area.
- DDA Board to develop a downtown business roster for a mentorship program.

Event Planning and Thriving Social Scene

- Develop a Master List of Downtown Scheduled Events
Action Steps:
 - ✓ Develop a DDA website and list all downtown events.
 - ✓ Ensure that downtown events are on the city, county, and chamber of commerce websites.
- DDA Board to work with downtown businesses to schedule monthly and quarterly events in the downtown.
Actions Steps:
 - ✓ DDA Board gather input from downtown businesses on the type events they would like to have in the downtown and when to have them.
 - ✓ DDA Board to ask for input from downtown businesses at the first downtown business networking event.
 - ✓ DDA Board to market downtown events to entertainers.
 - ✓ Develop a Blakely Grown Program.
- Develop a Downtown Master Plan for a vibrant social scene in downtown Blakely.
Action Steps:
 - ✓ DDA Board to work with UGA Carl Vinson Institute or a private consultant to develop and adopt a downtown master plan.

Wrap-Up and Adjourn

With the discussion being complete and no further business, the facilitator thanked the participants for all of their hard work, time commitment, and dedication. He then closed the meeting by reading two quotes. They are as follows:

“The man who really counts in the world is the doer, not the mere critic--the man who actually does the work, even if roughly and imperfectly, not the man who only talks or writes about how it ought to be done.” ~ *Theodore Roosevelt, 1891*

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” ~*Theodore Roosevelt*

The meeting was then adjourned.