

Avondale Estates DDA 2017 Annual Report

Organization and Background

The Avondale Estates Downtown Development Authority (DDA) consists of a seven-member Board of Directors, as defined by Georgia statute, with the mission of ‘revitalization and redevelopment of the Central Business District’ of respective communities. The Avondale Estates BOMC activated the AE DDA in 2001. Each director is appointed via a vote of approval from the BOMC, for terms of varying length as defined by state law. The BOMC also defines, by resolution, the boundaries in which the DDA legally operates – our Central Business District.

Sam Collier is the Chair of AE’s DDA Board, which consists of Sam, Allen Kim, Jennifer Joyner, Rachel Herzog, Matt Delicata and Dave Deiters. There is at present one open position. In 2017, the Board of Directors created several committees to facilitate its actions:

- The Real Estate Committee consists of Sam Collier, Dave Deiters, and Matt Delicata;
- Board Member Jennifer Joyner manages the Promotions Committee, working with Rachel Herzog and Allen Kim;
- Rachel Herzog oversees the Events Committee; and,
- DDA Consultant David Burt works with each of these committees to coordinate efforts.

DDA Consultant David Burt led the Board in a strategic planning session in July, the goal being to discuss the current strengths and weaknesses of Avondale’s downtown, craft a vision for the future, and create a list of short-term and long-term strategic initiatives to realize this vision. At the August DDA meeting, Mr. Burt provided a list of short-term strategic initiatives based on discussions from the Strategic Planning Session. Responsibility for further research of each initiative was assigned to various board members. Some of the action items resulting from this meeting included plans for new downtown landscaping, new downtown street furniture, new parking directional signs, little free art boxes, a series of downtown Art Walks, new downtown banners, and a new logo and marketing campaign.

2017 Overview

2017 was a productive year of activity and accomplishment for the Avondale Estates DDA. Specific projects aimed at downtown beautification, marketing and branding, increased visitor traffic and development of under-utilized/blighted areas were all completed with visible results – outlined below. Additionally, the DDA provided the City with facilitation services and planning assistance relative to helping realize its vision for the City-owned 4 acre tract in the central business district. This tract will ultimately serve as a key component in achieving the City’s Downtown Master Plan (DMP) vision, including a significant public realm element – but outside developer involvement will be key to achieving this vision, and the DDA is well positioned to actively help the City in this area.

New DDA Board members brought significant expertise and talent to the organization, and the DDA hired a consultant to coordinate efforts to improve the downtown. In September of 2017,

the DDA approved an ambitious set of strategic initiatives to improve the aesthetics of downtown Avondale and immediately began implementation of these plans. The Avondale DDA also continued to manage its largest asset, a 98,250 square foot office building currently occupied by the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Throughout 2017, the DDA continued to manage the City's participation in the Main Street Program. This program, outlined below, specifies elements which guide Georgia's participating cities in promoting and improving their downtown areas. These elements, and the program in general, provide a clear template with which the DDA can report many of its more involved activities.

MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Avondale Estates Main Street program is a City-sponsored program for downtown revitalization operating under a contract with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. In 2017, the Avondale Estates DDA managed the Main Street program for the City of Avondale Estates as part the intergovernmental agreement between the City and the DDA.

In 2017, Keri Stevens, Avondale Estates' City Planner, continued in her role as Main Street Manager. Her duties include overseeing compliance with all State of Georgia requirements for participation in the Main Street program. In late spring 2017, the DDA hired economic development consultant David Burt to assist the Board in identifying strategic initiatives to move the downtown forward and to coordinate implementation of those initiatives.

In order to maintain its certification from the State of Georgia, the Main Street program must undertake initiatives and show measurable progress under the four points of the national "Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization." These four points are: Design, Promotion, Economic Vitality, and Organization.

Design

Landscaping - In November and December of 2017, the DDA undertook the first phase of a plan to refresh and replace landscaping in the public rights-of-way along North Avondale Road. Overgrown and dying plants were removed, and new plants and pine straw were added. Plans call for additional plantings of annual and perennial flowers in spring 2018.

Street furniture – In late 2017, the DDA completed the planning process for the purchase and installation of street furniture in the downtown area. The first phase of this project will include new benches, trash cans, recycling cans, free parking signage and bicycle racks. As part of this effort, new concrete pads will be poured for the placement of benches and trash cans.

New downtown banners – The DDA worked with local branding firm Son and Sons to create a series of banners for placement on downtown light poles. The DDA budgeted funds to purchase new hardware so that banners can be placed on every light pole along North Avondale Road from Pine Street to City Hall. In December 2017, the DDA purchased the first banners featuring the new downtown branding and logo. Plans are being finalized for a coordinated banner program that will rotate a series of banners throughout the year.

Promotion

New branding and logo – DDA Board Member Jennifer Joyner worked with local resident Wade Thompson and his firm, Son and Sons, to create a branding package for downtown Avondale. Work completed in 2017 includes a new logo for the DDA and downtown Avondale.

Promotional materials – The new logo was used on a variety of products given away by the DDA at downtown events in 2017. Items produced and distributed include stickers, cups, and magnets.

New website – In late 2017, the DDA went live with its new website www.exploreavondale.org with information on the specific activities of the DDA and downtown Avondale Estates in general.

New social media - In 2017, the DDA began a much more intense use of social media, including the creation of a new “Explore Avondale” Facebook page.

Economic Vitality

Downtown Events – The DDA provided funds for a variety of downtown events sponsored by local organizations. Board member Rachel Herzog led these efforts for the DDA. Prior to 2017, this partnership was managed by the City of Avondale Estates.

In 2017, the DDA provided support for the following four new events:

- Art Walks – one per month from September to November-over 600 attendees total;
- Sip ‘N’ Stroll - over 300 attendees;
- Avondale Shakespeare Festival - 225 attendees; and,
- ElvisFest - 250 attendees.

In addition, the DDA continued to provide financial support for ongoing festivals and events including Mayham (3,500 attendees), Southern Surf Stomp Fest (600 attendees), RAD, a Tudor Christmas (200 attendees), and the Farmer’s Market. The DDA doubled the funding for these downtown events. The DDA also funded the installation of holiday lights for the Christmas season, adding to the festive atmosphere of our downtown area during this important retail season.

Avondale Art Walk – In 2017, the DDA began a series of Art Walks as a first phase of downtown “programming” with the goal to attract people to downtown Avondale on a consistent basis. Art Walks were held in September, October, and November. These events included art displayed in local businesses, a variety of live music, and a pop-up “parklet” on the parking spaces in front of the Tudor Village. Several items were purchased by the DDA for shared use at the Art Walks and other downtown events. Items purchased include bistro tables and chairs, benches, patio umbrellas, and directional signage. We hope to extend future Art Walks to include more business participation.

Art Lot – Through its intergovernmental agreement with the City of Avondale Estates, the DDA managed the pop-up “Art Lot” located on City-owned property through October 2017. The

DDA partnered with the Avondale Arts Alliance for the upkeep and programming of this venue through the length of the agreement. The Art Lot was the site of various arts-related programming including music and dance. Local artists created temporary public art in this space on a revolving basis. Through the Art Lot and events occurring there has been positive attention and momentum to the area.

Low interest loan program – The DDA worked with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Cities Foundation to provide low interest loans for the development of a new local brewery, the Lost Druid Brewing Company, scheduled to open in 2018.

Tax Incentive (Bonds for Title) Transaction – The DDA entered into a bond for title agreement with South City Partners (SCP) to help secure the city’s first major new development in many years. The project, located at the western border of the downtown area, is an exciting ‘momentum builder’ for the city and will generate an immediate property tax increase for the city of \$44,000 per year. Based on a prescribed schedule, the property tax paid will subsequently increase approximately \$11,000 per year for 10 years resulting in further benefit to the city.

Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Building

Through DDA Director Matt Delicata’s expertise and leadership, the DDA manages the lease of this 4 story building located near the intersection of US278 and Memorial Drive. This building, on roughly 4½ acres of land, was constructed in 2002-3 with funds the DDA generated with revenue bonds issued in those same years, totaling \$14.5m. The bond payments and operating expense of this building are covered precisely by the rent payments from the DJJ (Approx. \$1.8m/year). The city owes a great debt to our volunteer leaders on the BOMC and DDA during that time frame for this bold initiative. At present, Director Delicata works with the tenant, the state leasing office and the property manager to ensure the tenant remains happy with the building and the building remains in appropriately good repair – requiring a significant amount of time, energy and expertise on his behalf.

2018 will be a critical year for our city relative to this asset. The bonds described above will be retired mid-year, and the lease with the DJJ expires at roughly the same time. Under Director Delicata’s leadership, the DDA’s real estate committee is working with all relevant parties to maximize and realize the value of this asset for the city.

City-Owned Four Acres

Chairman Sam Collier and DDA Consultant David Burt worked with the City of Avondale Estates BOMC to design and facilitate a planning and design process for the development of the City-owned four acres in downtown Avondale. This process included a “call for designs” from local architects, engineers, and land planners which resulted in ten design proposals. Five public open houses were held to solicit public input on these designs, along with an online survey that resulted in 120 responses. Based on the results of this process, the BOMC chose to follow the general principals of the design submitted by Avondale resident Sheri Locke, which calls for commercial development along North Avondale Road and an approximately 2-acre park on the remainder of the property. One of the DDA’s charges in 2018 will be to assist the city as it

pursues the development of this strategic tract of land toward achieving the selected design principals.

INSPIRED DONATIONS

Whenever possible, the DDA sought pro bono services to meet its goals in the most cost effective manner possible. In 2017, the DDA received an estimated \$192,000 in donated services including the following:

- Marketing and Branding Campaign by Son & Sons, led by Avondale resident Wade Thompson: \$125,000;
- Design services from local residents resulting in ten schemes for city stakeholders to consider: \$60,000 in the aggregate; and,
- Facilitation services donated: \$7,000.

The above figures do not include the many hours donated by DDA Board members through their work on various committees and time spent on managing events and implementing strategic initiatives. Additionally, these figures do not include ‘in kind’ donations from DDA board member Allen Kim, in providing discounted shared work locations at Edwin Jarvis for DDA consultant David Burt. This arrangement has provided a work location for our consultant and many meetings at a fraction of what it would have normally cost.

Summary

Few of the accomplishments outlined in this report would be possible without the support the DDA receives from Avondale’s BOMC. The DDA also enjoys an active and engaged group of our neighbors who regularly attend its monthly meetings (Second Tuesday of each month) and offer ideas, suggestions and other thoughts. All parties spend their time and energy dedicated to the improved vitality and livelihood of our Central Business District.

This is a remarkably exciting time for our city’s downtown area. Great momentum towards improved property use and development has been created. A richly enhanced brand has been created and is growing in the broader community. With the city’s Downtown Master Plan as our guide, we on the DDA are committed to working towards a Central Business District that achieves the same level of community, vibrancy and excellence that George Willis envisioned for our residential area.