Downtown Development Authority of Augusta

Board Meeting Minutes

August 21, 2025, at 1:00 pm

600 Broad Street

The Downtown Development Authority held its monthly meeting on August 21, 2025, at 1:00 pm at 600 Broad Street.

DDA Board members in attendance included Chairman Jack Evans, Vice-Chairman James Heffner, Secretary-Treasurer Stephen King, Phuong Nguyen, and Pastor Anthony Booker. Also in attendance were Margaret Woodard, Executive Director of DDA, Jeb Murray, legal counsel, Director of Community Development, Tara Wood, and Retail Coordinator, Corbin Freeman. The guest in attendance was Mr. Dave Barbee from the Augusta-Richmond County Historic Preservation Commission.

Chairman Evans called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and asked Mr. King to present the Consent agenda and the financial reports. Mr. King introduced the Consent agenda, which included the May 2025 meeting minutes and financial reports for May, June, and July 2025. There were no questions or comments. Mr. Evans made a motion to approve the financials. Mr. Heffner seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Woodard then presented the Director's Report, highlighting the following:

Lamar Building: Investment has been secured, contracts expected to be executed by the end of September, with construction starting in January 2026.

Ramada Hotel Project: Breakwater Development in Charleston has purchased the Ramada Hotel on Broad Street. The construction timeline is January 2026-January 2027.

Curtis Baptist Church Project: The Project has been delayed until Q2 2026, with the developer opting for simultaneous project completion.

Embassy Suites: Demolition permit has expired, with the developer refiling paperwork and plans to go before the HPC during their September meeting. Should the demolition be approved, the property owner intends to work with the city to create a temporary parking lot for general public use during the TIA streetscape project, providing approximately 200 spaces.

New Businesses: 27 new businesses have opened, along with two expansions year-to-date, and we are positioned to meet annual growth targets.

Interest & Potential Projects: A breakfast restaurant from Austin, Texas, has expressed interest in opening in downtown Augusta, and DDA has submitted possible sites to them. Firethorn Film Studio is actively working on an SSBCI loan. Brunch House is still looking for other locations. DDA has met with a site selector several times who is very interested in student housing, specifically in the medical district. She has also met with Mr. Jack Evans and met with Paine College President, Dr. Lester McCorn, on July 31st, 2025.

Marion Building: The Marion Building project is still on track. They are filing for housing credits.

Bradley's BBQ: Bradley's BBQ is finishing up construction and should be completed and open on Broad Street sometime this Fall. We have also received a facade grant application once the building is complete.

Accelerate Augusta: Exterior lit signage is scheduled to be installed in early September. The project is complete and came in $593.32 under budget. The roof was also replaced with the help of $100,000 in additional SPLOST funds, approved by the DDA Board. Shawn Andrews, from Charlotte, NC, has been hired as the Executive Director, along with Ashley Harris as Program Director. Accelerate Augusta is now officially a 501(c)3 with an established Board of Directors.

The Forge and Activity on Lower Broad: The Army Corps of Engineers is reviewing plans for the upcoming construction of the Forge outdoor adventure center. They hope to have approval within 30 days. Construction is expected to start soon after the plans are approved and should be completed by the Spring of 2026. Several great things are happening on Lower Broad, especially on the 500 and 600 blocks. Accelerate Augusta is complete and will soon be operational. Jay Klugo's new restaurant, Fifth & Fire, has proven to be wildly popular, and with the outdoor adventure center opening, many exciting things are happening on Lower Broad.

TIA Project Update: In May, the DDA Board approved writing a letter in support of enforcing two-hour public parking during the streetscape project. DDA composed the letter with the Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce and CVB also signing in support, and the letter has been submitted to the Mayor and the Commission. A public meeting was held on May 21st, which was very well attended. The James Brown Linear Park is now under construction, and the James Brown statue has been moved to the Augusta History Museum for storage until that section of the project is complete. One lane of traffic continues to be open during the streetscape project. Construction is slated to start at 13th Street and Broad Street in late October 2025.

Jones Street Alley Update: DDA has signed off on the preliminary design for Jones Street Alley, and construction documents are underway.

Soofa Kiosks: We have had several issues with vandalism of the Soofa kiosk at Augusta Common. We had a call with Soofa last week to discuss a resolution, which may lead to the relocation of that particular kiosk.

Building Security and Mothballing Initiative: Major vandalism issues were identified due to the "Urbex" trend, with significant damage to the Lamar building and surrounding buildings. Security measures, including FLOCK cameras streaming to RCSO, resulted in 14 arrests in three weeks. The day after the new owner of the Ramada Hotel closed on the property, vandalism of the original construction fencing and theft of security cameras occurred. He has since hired Sizemore security to monitor the property in the evenings, installed new security cameras, and new construction fencing, as the hotel is now closed. There was also a fire incident reported at the Embassy Suites site requiring an emergency response. Mothballing standards and enforcement are needed. A meeting will be scheduled to explore RCSO and city support of potentially seeking an ordinance to enforce proper mothballing and securing chronically vacant buildings. We are working with the RCSO to determine which buildings pose the most risk and plan to set up a meeting with John Manton in city legal to see if DDA can pursue corrective action, after a 30-day notice, on properties that are not secured or properly mothballed, and add the cost of proper mothballing to the property owner's yearly property tax bill. There is $275,000 earmarked for addressing blight and chronic vacancy, which the DDA could utilize to tackle the issue.

Partnering with the RCSO: There has been an issue with teens not obeying the curfew times the RCSO has put in place for downtown on weekends. The DDA has partnered with RCSO to allow them to use the DDA conference room as a holding area on Friday and Saturday nights for teens who violate curfew. The teens are brought to DDA, and their parents are notified and pick their children up from our office.

Budget & Finance: Our 2026 budget request has been submitted, and a Budget Hearing is scheduled for September 12th at 2:00 pm, with quarterly performance reviews now required. There is a $70,000 budget shortfall projected for 2026, with no additional admin fees available.

Mr Evans made a motion to accept Ms. Woodard's Director's report as information, Mr. Heffner seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Mr. Dave Barbee then presented information on SB141, which allows extending historic property tax abatement from 9 years to 20 years for investors. The tax freeze mechanism

was explained, requiring commission approval to adopt. Mr. Barbee requested a letter of support from DDA and Historic Augusta to present a unified front to the Commission. It was determined that additional research is needed on cost projections and case studies before a formal presentation is made.

Mr. Evans thanked Mr. Barbee for speaking and bringing the issue to the DDA Board and said that DDA would need to do some homework on the matter, as we have some blight initiatives of our own.

Upon the conclusion of Mr. Barbee's presentation, Mr. Evans made a motion to go into Executive Session for a real estate matter. Pastor Anthony Booker seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Upon conclusion of the Executive Session, Mr. Evans thanked everyone for their attendance and made a motion to adjourn; the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen King

Secretary- Treasurer