

# Memo

**To:** Downtown Development Authority Board  
**From:** Bryan Myrkle, Director of Community Development  
**Date:** August 11, 2015  
**Re:** August meeting agenda

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There are a number of very interesting agenda topics for the August DDA meeting and I hope you can all attend. I know it's common for our meetings to last only an hour, but I would expect this month's meeting could take a bit longer.

- Parking Lot Snow Removal – At your last meeting, Ken Wirt suggested that the city obtain a proposal for private snow removal services in the parking lot. He expressed some dissatisfaction with the job being done by the City, and said the downtown needs to consider some alternatives. He proposed that funds the city currently pays for downtown parking lot snow removal (equipment, labor, overtime, etc.) could possibly be allocated instead to pay a private contractor for this work.

I obtained a basic cost proposal for clearing and salting parking lots from Eric Rogers, LLC, who does the sidewalk work for the DDA. (See attached)

I also met with the DPW Director and City Manager to talk about Mr. Wirt's concerns, the general comments I hear from business owners, and to explain the proposal from Eric Rogers.

I have invited both Eric Rogers and representatives of the DPW to our meeting this week to talk about the issue and whether this is a practical and appropriate alternative for the city to consider.

As this was an issue raised at a DDA meeting, and affects downtown business owners, it's very important to have your perspective represented in this discussion.

Furthermore, just for your information, I would like to add that Mr. Wirt has been appointed to the DDA Board replacing Doug Buck.

- Sign Ordinance – The City of Charlotte Planning Commission has a sub-committee working to update the city's sign ordinance. In most every respect, the committee will be recommending relaxing standards on signs.

Earlier this year, a group of people working on business recruiting here in Charlotte met with Lansing developer Patrick Gillespie, of the Gillespie Group. During that discussion, he mentioned that strict signage standards are a bit turn-off to developers and business owners. He suggested that in an area of special focus for redevelopment and recruitment like the downtown, a community might best be served by not restricting signage at all – by effectively deregulating it.

Since giving this suggestion to the Planning Commission sign committee, they have indicated their willingness to accept this proposal for downtown. I very much appreciate the committee's willingness to try something new, and give downtown business owners the freedom to be creative, but I also want to be sure and give the DDA a chance to weigh-in.

Some urban settings almost become defined by their distinctive and vibrant signage. Think of Times Square, or certain parts Tokyo. And the same is true of historic locales, such as the (attached) famous photo of Woodward Avenue in Detroit.

The same is true locally. When you look at historic photos of downtown Charlotte, you will see an abundance of signage – window signs, awning signs, projecting signage, wall signage – that helps give the district a sense of vitality and activity.

I would like the DDA to discuss the idea of giving downtown business and property owners, as well as potential re-developers, the freedom to place and use signage as they see fit.

- Conditional Use requirements for upper story apartments – Two years ago, I was given the responsibility for most of the zoning administration in the city. During those two years, I have had the opportunity to really learn our city's zoning code, including the good and the bad.

One element of the code that I find to be at odds with our goals for downtown is its treatment of upper story residential areas as conditional uses.

It is clear that, when adopted, the intention of the code was to preserve the downtown area as a business district. Therefore, it treats most commercial business uses as permitted uses, and residential uses as conditional. Today, however, creating a mix of uses in the district with apartments in the upper stories of downtown buildings is recognized as a best practice of downtown development. And, the City of Charlotte itself has been actively promoting the development of upper-story apartments.

In practice, the Planning Commission has blessed the development of apartments downtown and has not imposed conditions. It's become a routine, business-as-usual decision for them. So, practically speaking, the only effect the conditional use process is having on downtown apartment development is to make it slower and more expensive.

I would like the DDA to consider requesting a change in the city's zoning code to make upper-story residential development a permitted, rather than conditional use, in the downtown area.

- Downtown Public Art – I wanted to discuss with the DDA several opportunities the city has to seek installation of public art in the downtown area and give DDA members the chance to comment or get involved directly.
- Main Street/M-50 – I also wanted give the DDA an update on a couple other downtown-related initiatives including the Michigan Main Street program and the M-50 committee.