CITY OF WIXOM
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
49045 PONTIAC TRAIL
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025

This meeting of the Wixom Downtown Development Authority came to order at 6:00 p.m. with the following individuals in attendance:

DDA MEMBERS:	Chairperson Jessica Buck; Board Members: Darby Hoppenstadt; Russ Meredith; Vanessa Willett
ABSENT:	Excused: Carissa Osburn; Mayor Beagle; Mark Garmo; Kaitie Guzowski; Leslie Payment;
STAFF:	DDA Staff: Laura Cloutier, DDA Executive Director City Staff: Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager & Director of Economic Development

Determination of Quorum:

Quorum was not met. Quorum was not needed; no voting or action to be taken on items.

Reading of Vision and Mission Statement:

Mission Statement: The Mission of the Wixom DDA is to coordinate the efforts of businesses and residents to promote the growth of the downtown area for the community's benefit.

Vision Statement: The Wixom Downtown Development Authority is to provide a friendly, welcoming downtown which will enhance and honor our history while promoting cultural, business and recreational opportunity that attract businesses and residents.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda:

None

Public Comments:

None

Correspondence:

None

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New Business:

1. FY 25/26 Budget Session

Memorandum from Laura Cloutier, Executive Director; and Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager/Economic Development Director dated March 19, 2025 to Wixom Downtown Development Authority regarding an expanded overview of the proposed DDA budget for fiscal year 2025/2026, with projected budgets for future years; along with the proposed budget, as well as a copy of the project prioritization document from the DDA November 20th, 2024 Strategic Planning Meeting, is included in the packet.

Board Member Willett emphasized the need for quarterly financial reports to be provided at quarterly meetings, noting that despite previous assurances from City Manager Brown, they haven't been shared. Executive Director Cloutier responded that the first quarter's financials might be ready by next Tuesday, though more realistically they'd be available by the April meeting. Board Member Willett acknowledged that closing out the books typically takes a week to ten days. Assistant City Manager Benson was unsure about the exact timing, referencing Marilyn's recent work. Board Member Willett also asked that, since the team doesn't meet in July, the financials be sent in advance of the August meeting to allow for proper discussion.

Executive Director Cloutier clarified that part of the DDA's revenue comes from a special millage and some City support, with Assistant City Manager Benson adding that DDA properties pay slightly more due to an additional levy. Executive Director Cloutier also noted income from interest, delinquent properties, donations, sponsorships, and grants. Board Member Willett questioned a sharp decline in sponsorship income—from $17,000 previously to only $555—highlighting a substantial decrease over time. Executive Director Cloutier responded that the sponsorship intake is now similar to what Parks and Rec receives, and Assistant City Manager Benson indicated that the $17K might have included one-time contributions or grants.

Chairperson Buck asked about the West End Commons grant, which Assistant City Manager Benson clarified is part of the City's capital budget, not the DDA's. Although the DDA contributes, such grants are technically City revenue. Executive Director Cloutier added that 75% of the Main Street Oakland County grant has been received, and like others, it's held by the City.

Assistant City Manager Benson elaborated on how donations are distributed, pointing out that even if the funds don't appear directly in the DDA's budget, they still support downtown initiatives. There was a discussion about not separating sponsorship packets, since all checks are processed the same way—whether addressed to the City or DDA. Chairperson Buck and Board Member Willett brought up the challenge of accurately tracking sponsorships for KPIs, especially since some funds, like concert donations, go to Parks and Rec. Laura clarified that the DDA does receive its own portion and emphasized recent improvements in reporting. Chairperson Buck appreciated that the updated reporting now reflects DDA contributions more accurately, no longer placing them at the bottom.

The discussion focused on the differences in sponsorship strategies between the DDA and Parks and Recreation, with Assistant City Manager Benson giving credit to Executive Director Cloutier

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for introducing more flexible sponsorship tiers. While Parks and Rec avoids donations under $500 due to administrative burden, the DDA offers lower tiers, allowing more community members and small businesses to participate. Executive Director Cloutier noted receiving several $100–$250 donations, emphasizing that smaller contributions still matter and help foster local support.

Board Member Willett highlighted the importance of making community event donations accessible to everyone, even those unable to give $100. Chairperson Buck supported this approach, noting that while the DDA should still pursue sponsorships—especially from larger corporations—they're mindful not to pressure struggling local businesses. Instead of asking for donated items like gift baskets, the DDA now purchases them, shifting focus away from relying heavily on sponsorships as a KPI. She appreciated the improvements in the updated sponsorship packet, especially the inclusion of event metrics and flexibility for supporting different event types, which helps the DDA feel more visible and valued.

Executive Director Cloutier added that the introduction of lower donation tiers has brought in new contributors—businesses who had never donated before but now feel empowered to give what they can. Board Member Willett echoed the sentiment that people who can't volunteer might prefer to contribute financially instead. Chairperson Buck prompted a check on any other income sources, to which Executive Director Cloutier replied that apart from some contributions like Main Street grants, there's little miscellaneous income. Merchandise sales were mentioned as a minor source, typically covering costs after production.

Executive Director Cloutier also mentioned a small budget increase for the recording secretary, Mona's, role due to additional responsibilities, and noted an adjustment in case of emergencies, despite never having reached the maximum spending cap.

The discussion revolved around budget allocations, adjustments, and future spending strategies for the DDA. Executive Director Cloutier mentioned a slight increase in the office supplies budget for flexibility and noted she had not yet updated the DDA Director's salary. Previously, community programming was grouped under one line item with minimal funding, but they've now broken it into specific events. Finance keeps old line items in the budget in case they want to reuse them in the future.

The "Downtown Development Expenses" line is used for miscellaneous needs, such as maintaining American flags on light posts. Executive Director Cloutier explained that the marketing and branding budget remains at $15,000, which has never been fully used. Board Member Willett commented that signage should fall under Economic Vitality rather than marketing, as it's more about attracting people downtown. Assistant City Manager Benson responded that while categorization can vary, consistency and transparency are what matter most.

There was a proposal to add $50,000 to the marketing budget specifically for digital signage and billboard advertising. Board Member Willett advocated for this addition, emphasizing that signs with high visibility, particularly those targeting people on their way home, could draw more visitors. She shared a detailed analysis on sign types and costs and said this effort could be a short-term experiment to increase revenue and visibility. Executive Director Cloutier asked if any vendors had been contacted, and Board Member Willett confirmed she spoke with one. Assistant City Manager Benson asked if there was general agreement on adding the $50,000, given it's a large

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number. Chairperson Buck questioned where the funds would come from, and Board Member Willett pointed out that they had a significant budget surplus—over $845,000 in eight months.

Assistant City Manager Benson advised that although the current budget forecasts a $557,000 deficit, they have enough in their fund balance and unspent site readiness funds to shift $50,000 from that category to support signage. Site readiness, created to help with downtown development incentives like utility hookups, has rarely been used. Board Member Willett and others agreed that this underused line item could be better utilized, and Chairperson Buck stressed the importance of starting to spend it effectively.

The group also touched on frustrations with delays in development projects, like the Chambers to Wixom Road sidewalk, citing DTE as a bottleneck. Executive Director Cloutier expressed ongoing frustration with repeated unproductive conversations with utility representatives. Board Member Meredith concluded by acknowledging that if they don't spend the expected $250,000 on the Renton project this year, they would need to determine where else in the budget that money could be used or reallocated.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that the $250K allocated annually for Downtown Site Readiness was intended to support potential development projects, particularly one they hope to bring to City Council soon. If negotiations proceed, this budget will cover incentives like tax abatements and public project contributions. For example, the City could gain legal rights to shared parking lots or stormwater systems that benefit both developers and the public. Streetscaping elements, usually developer-funded, might also be city-funded in public areas.

Board Member Willett noted that even if the Renton project moves forward, spending the full $250K may not happen this fiscal year. Assistant City Manager Benson said the intent was to allocate funds in a way that aligns with potential project timelines, such as providing a portion upfront and the rest upon project completion.

The conversation shifted to where $50K for a proposed digital marketing campaign should be categorized. Board Member Willett advocated for a distinct line item to reflect visible promotional efforts downtown, while Executive Director Cloutier and Chairperson Buck agreed it should fall under marketing/branding, which currently includes $15K for website and poster expenses. Assistant City Manager Benson emphasized that where it's categorized isn't critical, as long as it's clear.

Executive Director Cloutier explained how existing budgets were used—for example, Downtown Enhancements funded art installations and shared costs with other communities. Board Member Willett questioned why that budget jumped to $45K when only about $4K was spent so far this year. Executive Director Cloutier said the increase was a rough estimate based on potential projects like alleyway upgrades but admitted there were no concrete proposals yet. Board Member Willett suggested lowering the number to be more realistic and avoid large unspent overages, settling on reducing it to $20K.

Board Member Willett clarified that unless a transfer exceeds $10K, they wouldn't need City Council approval to shift funds within categories, providing more flexibility. Finally, Executive Director Cloutier confirmed that the Wednesdays in Wixom budget would stay steady, as actual spending typically comes in just under $1,000 per event.

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The Board reviewed event funding and potential adjustments due to rising costs and future planning. Derby Day's budget was increased slightly to account for vendor price hikes and new tariffs on medals. Despite these added costs, it remains a revenue-generating event, typically producing a net gain of $2,500 to $3,500 and supporting Camp Casey through race registration donations.

The Sip N Stroll event was kept in the budget primarily as a placeholder, with the possibility of reimagining it into a new holiday-themed event called the Crazy Christmas Costume Cocktail Crawl. Although previous Sip N Stroll events suffered from low attendance, there's hope it can be revitalized once new downtown developments, like Renton and West End Commons, bring in more retail and foot traffic. Activities-driven events have shown more success in the past, such as couples trivia nights.

Candy Cane Lane received a small increase to accommodate hiring performers like Santa and Buddy the Elf. It was agreed the new $2,500 budget should suffice for now, with plans to reassess next year if needed.

The "Get Fit Here" program, which offered free outdoor fitness classes before the pandemic, was discussed as something that could be revived. Since it previously operated on partnerships and word-of-mouth without a formal budget, it may not require significant funding if brought back.

The Block Party budget was increased to $25,000 to address inflation and in preparation for the ten-year anniversary celebration in 2026. This event typically benefits from sponsorships and vendor fees, which help offset costs. There was also discussion about adding more live music or attractions in new areas of the city to further enhance the event experience.

Downtown Dazzle's holiday lighting contract was discussed. While the current vendor is responsive and reliable, concerns were raised about the visual quality of the lights, which some felt looked sloppy. The budget for lights was raised to $20,000, and though many residents enjoy the display, the group agreed to consider seeking a new vendor once the existing contract ends. Additional lighting may be necessary as trees mature and more areas, such as the southeast corner of Wixom and Pontiac Trail, are incorporated into the holiday display.

Executive Director Cloutier discussed the Promotion and Organization Committees, noting their budgets remained unchanged due to minimal spending. The downtown flowers budget was also left the same, as the city is currently in a one-year contract with a new vendor, which will be reevaluated at the end of the season.

The Spooktacular event budget was increased due to growing participation. The Promotions Committee is considering more activities, like bringing back a magician or adding character artists, to enhance the event and encourage attendees to stay in town and dine locally. Discussion followed on how businesses could participate by selling items from the front of their establishments, a method already used during the Block Party by several venues like Wixom Station and El Camino.

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Executive Director Cloutier also raised the budget for Promotion Development Conferences due to rising travel and event costs. This increase was supported by the group, especially since more Board Members have shown interest in attending.

Assistant City Manager Benson then transitioned to the capital portion of the budget. He confirmed that downtown site readiness is in good shape and moved on to special studies and services. Some unspent sidewalk engineering funds are rolling over, and $15,000 is being budgeted for Loop Activation design, a key DDA priority. This design work is intended for the upcoming fiscal year, with $200,000 set aside for the actual park and pathway construction in fiscal year 2026/27. Benson explained that this phase will allow for input and cost estimation, much like the library playground project, which was funded by multiple departments.

Chairperson Buck asked if departments like the library or Parks and Recreation would be contributing again. While the library is not expected to contribute directly, Parks and Recreation is planning to set aside CDBG funds, potentially contributing $75,000 to $100,000 depending on the final design. Board Member Willett emphasized that if the project is going to become more of a full park expansion, a higher contribution from parks and recreation would be appropriate.

Assistant City Manager Benson noted that City Council has expressed interest in expanding the loop further, especially around a retention pond area in the back. Chairperson Buck and Executive Director Cloutier mentioned the current high use of the loop, highlighting its popularity.

Board Member Willett brought up concerns about jumping between projects, suggesting the DDA focus on completing existing ones before launching new efforts. Assistant City Manager Benson explained that the budget is structured to allow for a new project each year with advance design planning. In addition to the Loop Activation design, $10,000 is budgeted for engineering pedestrian refuges on Pontiac Trail. These installations, including bollards and signage, aim to improve pedestrian safety and slow traffic, particularly near Union Street and new developments.

Chairperson Buck asked for clarification on what a pedestrian refuge is, and the team explained it as a protected island in the middle of the road that makes it safer for pedestrians to cross, often surrounded by bollards. Executive Director Cloutier and Board Member Meredith pointed out similar examples in Novi, Northville, and along Pontiac Trail toward Ann Arbor.

The discussion focused on several infrastructure and safety improvements being planned or considered for downtown Wixom, especially around pedestrian safety and traffic calming. A road safety audit recommended pedestrian refuge islands, and while traffic volumes aren't excessively high, the goal is to slow vehicles and improve crossings. The City has $100,000 set aside for two refuges in fiscal year 2026/27, with design work beginning in the previous year. One refuge is being considered near the barn and post office.

There was also a suggestion to add a crosswalk near Wixom Station to address safety during events, as people frequently jaywalk in that area. However, misaligned driveways and the need for turn lanes present design challenges that may make such a project difficult.

Concerns were raised about the area between Wixom Road and Old Wixom Road, which has seen several serious accidents, including vehicles crashing through a brick wall. Potential

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solutions such as guardrails or concrete planters were mentioned, though both have visual and practical limitations. The City is considering ways to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety there.

For downtown bollards, $15,000 is budgeted this year to install them at the northwest corner of Wixom Road and Pontiac Trail. However, because that location falls within the county's right of way, the county is hesitant to allow permanent structures. They prefer flexible delineators, but the city is advocating for more robust, stylized steel bollards. Additional bollards are also being considered to prevent cars from mistakenly driving onto the trail, particularly near Drafting Table and the coffee shop.

The City also maintains a $20,000 annual budget line for miscellaneous studies, which provides flexibility for small or unanticipated projects. It may be adjusted in future budgets if needed. Sidewalk projects are generally funded through the city's sidewalk fund, with the DDA reimbursing expenses for DDA-related work. The final repayment on the Klebba sidewalk is scheduled for this coming fiscal year.

Looking ahead, $50,000 is allocated in fiscal year 2026/27 for design work related to Old Wixom Road streetscape, with construction anticipated in 2028/29 at a projected cost of $1.2 million. This project may be coordinated with DTE to install conduit for future utility burial. There is also potential for bond funding, especially as the current DDA bond will be paid off in 2026/27, freeing up capacity for new financing aligned with the DDA plan renewal.

The City continues planning for a sidewalk connection from Chambers to Pontiac Trail, likely in fiscal year 2027/28. The estimated cost is over $800,000, with the final design and easement requirements still pending. The project will involve utility burial and some landscaping impacts but is expected to preserve parking.

The discussion covered several aspects of the downtown Wixom development and budget planning, focusing on West End Commons, landscaping bids, restroom facilities, and broader infrastructure improvements.

Board Member Meredith asked if the $1.2 million in the budget related to West End Commons, and Assistant City Manager Benson clarified it was instead tied to potential improvements on Old Wixom Road. While current plans for West End Commons include minimal streetscaping—mainly some trees and poles—there's interest in burying utility lines and adding on-street parking, especially if the developer contributes financially.

Board Member Willett and Assistant City Manager Benson discussed an additional potential $1 million for amenities behind West End Commons, referencing an area possibly to be built out as "Imagination Station" with trails and lighting. Board Member Willett emphasized making use of available space around the retention pond, while Benson noted no design has been finalized yet.

Chairperson Buck pointed out that West End Commons had no current budget allocation, but Assistant City Manager Benson clarified it's listed under capital contributions at $360K, which includes expanded restroom plans. Assistant City Manager Benson also explained that although bathroom costs can reach $500K per stall, this project benefits from shared infrastructure already in place, reducing the effective cost.

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On the topic of landscaping along Wixom Road, bids came in ranging from $42K to $107K. While the lowest bid was significantly below the others, it was supported by their landscape architect, who confirmed its value. Board Member Willett stressed the importance of confirming details to ensure apples-to-apples comparisons, especially since future landscaping will reflect heavily on downtown's appearance.

Discussion also touched on rethinking downtown restrooms. There was some support for reusing the barn structure for bathroom facilities to reduce eyesores and avoid duplicative utility work. Chairperson Buck suggested ensuring leftover funds from downtown enhancements be reallocated to readiness projects.

Board Member Meredith and Board Member Willett also asked for better formatting of landscape documents for review. Chairperson Buck brought up the recurring funding for an extra employee, which is renewed yearly. Assistant City Manager Benson confirmed it's included in the budget under general fund transfers and is typically voted on in May.

The discussion ended with agreement that most of the priorities had been addressed in the budget. The group plans to revisit lower-priority items and potential future projects in upcoming meetings.

2. Wixom DDA & City Memorandum of Understanding Discussion

Memorandum of Understanding, Fiscal Year 2024/25, Cooperative Services Agreement between the City of Wixom and the Wixom Downtown Development Authority dated May 28, 2024 is included in the packet.

The discussion focused on improving accountability and communication around maintenance services provided by the DPW for the downtown area, with strong consensus on implementing a monthly checklist to track tasks. Executive Director Cloutier will oversee the checklist, which will include both DPW responsibilities and those handled by third-party vendors, like landscaping and basket removal. While everyone supported the idea, there were questions about who would verify that tasks are completed and concerns about inconsistent service levels, especially when DPW staff are on medical leave.

There was significant discussion about specific services. Trash collection was identified as needing more attention in the spring and summer, possibly twice per week, and the Air Line Trail mowing schedule was considered insufficient. The Board Members pushed for more frequent mowing during peak growth months and emphasized the need for proactive inspections. Street sweeping expectations were also clarified, with the group agreeing it should be completed by May to remove winter debris and continue into the fall as weather allows.

The Board Members noted a gap in understanding regarding the 40-hour workweek expectation for downtown services. While the DDA funds a full-time position, it became clear that DPW hours fluctuate and are not necessarily dedicated exclusively to downtown every week. Some felt the funding was intended to supplement existing service, not replace it, leading to concerns about transparency in how labor is allocated.

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Staffing issues within DPW, particularly long-term leaves and limited capacity, were acknowledged as challenges. Board Members agreed that future planning should include the possibility of hiring a dedicated project manager or engineer to oversee the growing number of DDA projects. While the City has used outside consultants like HRC, their costs are high, and having in-house support may be more efficient long-term.

Ultimately, the conversation reflected a shared commitment to improving service delivery and accountability. The goal is to better document responsibilities, adjust service frequencies where needed, and bring staffing concerns to City Council to help support the growing demands on downtown infrastructure.

Information:

1) Committee Reports - None

2) Downtown Business News/Events

- 2025: March 20th: Lakes Area chamber of Commerce (LACC) 3rd Thursday Coffee @ Wixom Senior Center, 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
- 2025: March 20th: MSOC Summit 2025 @ the OC Executive Office Building, 2100 Pontiac Lake Road, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- 2025: May 3rd: Derby Day Races
- 2025: June 5th – August 21st: Family Fun Nights/Summer Concert Series
- 2025: June 12th: Main Event 25 Years of Main Street Oakland County
- 2025: June 12th: City of Wixom Employee & Boards/Commissions Picnic
- 2025: September 20th: Wixom Block Party

Public Comments:

None

Executive Director's Comments:

None

Board Members' Comments:

Board Member Willett commented she hoped there will be more Board Members in attendance next year. The DDA has a fiduciary responsibility with the budget and all monies spent.

Chairperson Buck indicated she was impressed with the attendance at the Strategic Planning meeting, which is an important meeting, as well.

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Adjournment:

This meeting of the Wixom Downtown Development Authority, Special Meeting, Budget Session was adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Mona Freiburger
Recording Secretary

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