**CITY OF WIXOM**
**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**
**SPECIAL MEETING – BUDGET SESSION**
**49045 PONTIAC TRAIL**
**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**

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 Hoppenstedt; Cara McLauchlin; Russ Meredith; Patrick Beagle, Mayor

**ABSENT:** Excused: Carissa Osburn; Mark Garmo; Leslie Payment; Unexcused: Vanessa Willett

**STAFF:** DDA Staff: Laura Cloutier, DDA Executive Director
City Staff: Steve Brown, City Manager
City Staff: Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager & Director of Economic Development
Mona Freiburger, Recording Secretary

**Determination of Quorum:**

Quorum was met.

**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:**

No public comments.

**Approval of Minutes:**

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None

**Correspondence:**

None

**Executive Director's Report:**

None

**Old Business:**

None

**New Business:**

1. FY 26/27 Budget Session

Memorandum to the Wixom Downtown Development Authority from Laura Cloutier, Executive Director; Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager/Economic Development Director dated March 18, 2026 regarding Special Meeting – Budget Session is included in the packet.

Assistant City Manager Benson began by introducing revenues before moving into expenditures. A map was presented showing the properties included within the DDA's tax increment financing district, noting that property taxes from these properties are captured by the DDA. The proposed budget estimates approximately $1.67 million in DDA property tax revenue, which represents taxes that would otherwise go to other jurisdictions such as the City, Library, and Oakland County entities. It was explained that the DDA operates under a tax increment financing plan established with these jurisdictions, typically outlining revenue collection over a 25-year period and how funds will be allocated. The Board of Directors is responsible for overseeing this process, managing day-to-day activities, recommending budgets to City Council, and overseeing projects.

It was noted that an important consideration in DDA budgeting is the plan's sunset date, after which it must either be renewed, or it will expire. The current DDA plan for the City of Wixom was adopted in 2003 and is set to expire at the end of fiscal year 2028–29. The presented budget includes a three-year projection and indicates a cutoff point reflecting the plan's current expiration, meaning that without action by City Council or agreements with the affected taxing jurisdictions to extend the plan, future activities would be limited. It was emphasized that discussions about a potential extension will take place later in the budgeting process, and that the revenue figures presented are preliminary and subject to revision.

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Executive Director Cloutier explained that the revenue category includes smaller income sources such as merchandise sales at events and sponsorship donations, which are currently being collected. Chairperson Buck added that Derby Day generates revenue as well, noting that the event is on track to perform well with increased participation compared to last year, despite costs such as a $625 racing company fee. Executive Director Cloutier noted that last year's Derby Day brought in close to $14,000, which was returned to the general fund. Assistant City Manager Benson clarified that donations and similar income sources are less restricted than TIF funds and can provide flexibility for initiatives not outlined in the DDA plan, though this is less relevant for activities already permitted under the plan. Chairperson Buck asked whether Derby Day proceeds could be allocated to this flexible funding category to offset budget overruns or support other events, and Assistant City Manager Benson responded that while TIF funds can already be used for many planned expenses, donation-based funds would be useful for programs not currently allowed under the plan, such as a façade grant program, provided spending does not exceed the donated amounts. Executive Director Cloutier agreed that Derby Day revenue could be directed into that category if the Board prefers. Chairperson Buck supported the idea, suggesting it could help fund future initiatives like business support programs, and noted that Derby Day participation is projected to exceed 500 runners, about 50 more than the previous year. Assistant City Manager Benson suggested a review of past donation revenues to better understand potential funding levels.

Assistant City Manager Benson referenced the agenda packet, which included a memo outlining the various line items. He explained that, due to time constraints, not all items would be reviewed in detail, but participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout the discussion. The memo also highlighted key discussion points from the staff's perspective regarding their proposal. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated that the purpose of the meeting was not only to present this information but also to gather input and feedback from Board members to make potential modifications.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated they would proceed in the order of the memo and introduced a major proposed change related to DDA director wages and fringe benefits. The current DDA director position, held by Laura Cloutier, is structured as a contract role for 30 hours per week at $59,000 annually, paid via biweekly invoices. He explained that, based on earlier discussions, Chairperson Buck had raised observations from conferences, and the finance director had identified potential IRS concerns regarding the contractor arrangement. It is being recommended that the position be converted to a part-time employee role, as the duties and working relationship with the City more closely align with that structure. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that discussions had taken place with City Manager Brown and Mayor Beagle and invited their input.

The proposed budget includes an additional $5,000 to cover fringe benefits, including the City's share of taxes and required sick time under state law. No other changes are proposed in the

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budget, and the details of the conversion process are still to be determined, with the transition likely occurring near the start of the fiscal year.

City Manager Brown noted that if the position is converted to part-time, the scheduled hours should likely be slightly reduced, typically to around 29 hours per week, to avoid the risk of exceeding limits. He explained that while an employee may occasionally work more than 30 hours in each week, the average must remain at or below 30 hours, with an annual cap of 1,500 hours. Assistant City Manager Benson asked for clarification on the 1,500-hour limit and acknowledged that while some weeks, such as those with events, could require up to 40 hours, the total must be carefully monitored to remain within the allowable threshold. City Manager Brown confirmed this understanding. Board Member Meredith added that the position had already been reduced from 32 hours to a 30-hour contract under the current arrangement.

Chairperson Buck stated that she and Vice Chair Osburn had discussed the issue and were in full agreement that the DDA Director position should be converted from an independent contractor role to an employee position, noting there was no opposition to making that change. She explained that there were differing opinions on whether the role should be part-time or full-time, but both she and Vice Chair Osburn personally supported moving it to a full-time position, as they believe the responsibilities have grown to justify it. She added that converting to an employee role would help address past challenges related to performance reviews, oversight, and accountability, as well as concerns raised by the finance director regarding tax implications.

Chairperson Buck also noted that the position was originally posted as an employment role before being changed to a contractor arrangement, and that the scope of the job has expanded significantly since then, particularly since just before the COVID period. She encouraged further discussion and input from others on whether the position should be part-time or full-time, acknowledging that a part-time designation might be easier to gain approval for from City Council and other decision-makers, even though the workload often exceeds 30 hours per week.

Board Member Meredith expressed support for making the position full-time, stating that based on his observation of Executive Director Cloutier's workload, the number of hours worked would justify a full-time role.

City Manager Brown commented that the current understanding of hours is tied to earlier transitions, noting that the City has historically operated with 9.375-hour workdays.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that while City Council generally supports changes like this, administratively every City position must be classified as either union or non-union, and how the DDA Director position fits into that structure is an important consideration. He noted that the DDA is part of the City, so this classification matters in the broader administrative context, using library employees as an example of a technically separate entity whose employees are still accounted for within the City's non-union wage schedules.

Board Member Hoppenstedt asked whether the position would be non-affiliated, and Assistant City Manager Benson confirmed it would likely be a non-union, at-will employment. He explained that part-time positions offer more flexibility with terms and hours, but regardless of full- or part-

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time status, an employment agreement is necessary to establish expectations and a review structure. He emphasized that the DDA Board must consider how it intends to oversee the position and set performance expectations.

Board Member Meredith asked how often Executive Director Cloutier exceeds 30 hours per week under the current contract, and Executive Director Cloutier confirmed that she works more than 30 hours almost every week, citing evening and morning meetings as contributing factors. Board Member Meredith suggested that a full-time position of 37 hours per week would better reflect the workload and time demands.

City Manager Brown responded that if Executive Director Cloutier becomes a city employee, her hours would be managed through reporting time adjustments to ensure the average does not exceed 30 hours per week, with flexible start and end times to account for after-hours work. Board Member Meredith expressed concern that this could result in lost hours for both Executive Director and the DDA, given the current minimum of 30 hours under the contract and frequent overages.

Assistant City Manager Benson indicated that the issue is the DDA Board's expectations for the position, including responsibilities, time allocation, and oversight. He emphasized that these considerations should guide whether the role is designated part-time or full-time and recommended aligning expectations with KPIs to ensure clarity on required tasks and the time needed to complete them.

Chairperson Buck emphasized that the current and upcoming workload for the DDA Director justifies a full-time role. She cited several projects, including the Renton property, West End Commons property, and the DDA plan revision, along with event responsibilities such as the Block Party, where Chairperson Cloutier works 12-hour days. She noted challenges with volunteer availability, highlighting that certain volunteers already carry a heavier load, and stressed that the DDA Executive Director plays a critical role on multiple committees, including serving as Design Committee Chair, a member of the Organization Committee, and part of the Promotions Committee. Chairperson Buck argued that the workload will likely increase over the next year or two, making a reduction in hours inappropriate. She estimated that Executive Director Cloutier is already working around 37 hours per week and stated that she would rather advocate for full-time approval from City Council, even at the risk of being denied, than avoid requesting it. She also noted that everyone she had spoken with on the DDA supports converting the position to an employee role.

Board Member Hoppenstedt asked whether there was concern that supporting an employee role might require compromising to part-time to make it more acceptable to City Council, suggesting that Council might not approve a full-time position.

Mayor Beagle prefaced his comments by noting that his remarks were about the position, not Executive Director Cloutier personally. He stated that it would be difficult to justify a part-time DDA Director position at $59,000 per year when some full-time City employees earn less. He emphasized that if the position is approved, it would need to be full-time, as selling a part-time role at that salary to City Council would be untenable.

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Board Member Hoppenstedt noted that having the Executive Director as a City employee would provide protections for both the City and the employee.

Mayor Beagle raised the question of reporting and performance reviews, suggesting that if the DDA Director is a City employee, the DDA Board would not conduct her reviews. Executive Director Cloutier mentioned that in other cities, DDA Directors employed by the city are still hired, directed, and reviewed by their boards. Assistant City Manager Benson responded that an agreement would need to be worked out to clarify oversight responsibilities.

Chairperson Buck discussed the current Executive Committee structure, including herself, Vice Chair Osburn, Assistant City Manager Benson, Mayor Beagle, and City Manager Brown, and asked how that would change under a City employment model. Assistant City Manager Benson clarified that certain administrative duties, such as timecard approvals, would not be handled by the Board, and noted that considerations such as aligning the wage with other non-union City positions and reconciling benefits would need to be addressed. He also explained that the independent contractor arrangement does not meet IRS standards in the context of Executive Director Cloutier's current role.

Mayor Beagle expressed confusion, stating that he has personally served as an independent contractor without IRS issues and questioned why the DDA Director position now poses a problem. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that the concern had been raised multiple times by the DDA Board and the new finance director, emphasizing that the budget and role transition need to be resolved before the upcoming budget session to avoid questions that cannot be answered.

Chairperson Buck stressed that the DDA Director position is unique to the DDA and should not be compared directly to other non-union City employees, noting that if the DDA ceases to exist in four years, the position would no longer exist. She suggested consulting with other cities, potentially bringing in an expert such as Christina from Main Street, to understand how other DDAs structure full-time Director positions. Chairperson Buck noted that most DDAs employ full-time Directors, with very few as independent contractors, and argued that comparisons should be made with other DDA Directors rather than with other City of Wixom employees.

Mayor Beagle noted that each DDA Director position is different and pointed out that the size and scope of DDAs vary widely—for example, some cities have 35 businesses while others have 70 or 80—so direct comparisons are not appropriate. He suggested that the Board take the time to study the issue thoroughly rather than rushing it into the budget, proposing that any necessary changes could be addressed later through budget amendments once a fully developed plan is ready.

City Manager Brown agreed that the timeline is driven by the budget process but emphasized that there have been no urgent issues regarding the contractor status to date. He noted that while the budget work session is approaching on April 21, there are multiple questions that require careful consideration and that it might be prudent to take additional time to develop answers.

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Executive Director Cloutier expressed support for taking the time to properly research and structure the position, including consulting with other cities and DDAs, to ensure that the plan is sound and sustainable for her or any future employee.

Board Member Meredith agreed, stating that attempting to present a part-time position at a relatively high salary without clear definitions of reporting structure and responsibilities could create problems. He suggested that conducting a thorough study and preparing a complete proposal before presenting it to City Council would put the Board in a stronger position.

Chairperson Buck stated that she strongly disagreed with the idea of focusing on part-time versus full-time and emphasized that the critical issue is converting the DDA Director position from an independent contractor to an employment agreement. She expressed concern that the current contractor arrangement has been taken advantage of, receiving a minimum of 30 hours while working more, and suggested that adding $5,000 to the budget for fringe benefits should not be a major obstacle. He proposed that the employment conversion should happen first, while discussions about part-time versus full-time could follow.

Mayor Beagle responded that the position has not been taken advantage of, noting that historically the Board has adjusted compensation annually to reflect increased hours and the responsibility of paying taxes as a contractor. She stressed that presenting an incomplete proposal to City Council now could jeopardize approval, and emphasized the need to have all details, including compensation and benefits, fully developed before submission. She noted that Council has been historically resistant and that a rushed proposal might be rejected.

Chairperson Buck asked whether an employment lawyer would be needed to draft the agreement. Benson explained that there are existing employment agreements and examples from other communities that could guide the process, and that Laura Cloutier could also help identify models. She outlined that the Board would need to provide clear direction regarding policy and expectations before research and drafting of the employment agreement could proceed. This would include determining whether the position is part-time or full-time, setting parameters, and calculating costs associated with benefits.

City Manager Brown added that the benefits structure and pay level need careful consideration, noting that part-time pay would differ from other City positions, and a transition to full-time would require justification and education for Council. He agreed that moving too quickly without clear information could be detrimental and emphasized that careful planning is necessary for a successful transition.

Chairperson Buck asked what the next action item should be, noting that the topic had been discussed in December and that research was needed. She inquired whether the Board needed approval to have Christina present on the employment contract or to hire someone to draft it.

Board Member Meredith responded that the next step should be to bring the question of whether the DDA Director position should be full-time or part-time to the next Board meeting. He suggested directing staff to conduct the necessary research, including examining how other cities handle similar positions, and to return with a recommendation. Board Member Meredith noted that converting the position from independent contractor to City employee without reducing pay would

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effectively be a significant pay increase, so research is needed to support the proposal. He agreed with Mayor Beagle that attempting to present the position as part-time could face strong opposition from City Council, based on his observations from prior budget sessions, and emphasized the importance of having a solid case to justify the role. He added that the DDA must maintain a Director to continue functioning, and without a strong proposal, Council might question funding or consider dissolving the DDA at the end of its term.

Board Member Hoppenstedt stated that it should be officially on record that the Board present tonight supports converting the DDA Director position to a City employee.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that while consensus is helpful, formal motions and directions are important to guide staff. She suggested placing the item on the next DDA agenda to provide clear direction and noted that the upcoming budget presentation to City Council in April would also allow for preliminary feedback on the proposal.

Chairperson Buck proposed including the budget item for a full-time employee in the budget, comparing it to previous additions such as a full-time DPW employee at $86,000 and other smaller expenditures that were approved without issue. She noted that including it in the budget does not obligate the Board to spend the money immediately but ensures the line item is visible to Council.

Mayor Beagle responded that Council might approve the budget while excluding specific line items. He referenced past instances where requests for additional staff, such as an assistant for the overworked DPW Director, were rejected, highlighting Council's tendency to deny new positions even when workload justifies them.

Board Member Meredith added context, agreeing that prior approvals, such as the DPW position, depended on clear justification. Assistant City Manager Benson reiterated that City staff needs clear direction from the Board to structure the position appropriately within the budget, and that Council's response would ultimately determine its approval.

Chairperson Buck asked whether including $5,000 in fringe benefits for converting the DDA Director to an employment position might be rejected by Council. City Manager Brown acknowledged that it was possible, indicating there is some risk the item could be redlined or not approved.

Chairperson Buck stated that while she is not on City Council, she sees broad support for converting the DDA Director position to an employment role, viewing the employment conversion and the part-time versus full-time decision as two separate steps.

Board Member Hoppenstedt asked whether any City Council members had been consulted on this issue, noting that it would otherwise come as a surprise. Mayor Beagle responded that he had discussed it personally, but no other Council members had been involved.

Board Member Meredith emphasized the need for the full Board to discuss and formally record their support and then direct staff to conduct a study on the position, evaluating full-time versus part-time. He expressed support for a full-time position based on the hours already being worked

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and stressed the importance of justifying the role and expectations. He also asked what would happen to the DDA Director if the DDA were dissolved.

City Manager Brown explained that if the DDA were dissolved, the employee would be released and clarified that the DDA's funding comes from tax increment financing, which is based on the difference between taxes at the DDA's establishment and current growth. He noted that if the DDA ceases, the $1.7 million budget would no longer be available.

Executive Director Cloutier noted that the DDA has a comparatively large budget, which is unusual given the mix of residential and commercial development, and added that the upcoming DDA plan renewal will likely change significantly due to new County policies and restrictions on funding.

Assistant City Manager Benson stressed the need for Board consensus and proposed adding a line item for DDA fringes in the budget with a value of zero as a placeholder, allowing the conversation to continue while providing a framework for budget discussions. Board Member Meredith and Executive Director Cloutier agreed, noting that the issue would be further addressed during the budget session. City Manager Brown and Assistant City Manager Benson highlighted that changes in County capture or residential restrictions could significantly affect the DDA's revenue, and that tax increment financing rules have become more restrictive over the last decade.

Next Line Item is Site Readiness.

Executive Director Cloutier addressed the Economic Vitality billboard, noting that last year a $50,000 line item was allocated for a billboard on I-96 westbound before Wixom Road. She explained that the Economic Vitality Committee initially wanted a static billboard, but the current tri-vision billboard rotates among three businesses, including the DDA. She stated that the committee has requested to continue the billboard and is waiting on pricing from the current company and other vendors, but the committee chairperson was not present to provide updates. Executive Director Cloutier asked for the Board's input and noted that internal coordination with the company regarding design and scheduling has been positive, though reaching consensus on content has been challenging.

Board Member Meredith shared his perspective, saying he has observed the billboard only occasionally and conducted an informal check with downtown businesses, where only two employees mentioned noticing it. He noted that current metrics are limited to traffic data and suggested conducting a survey of the business community, such as including a QR code on the billboard to track whether it drives visitors downtown. He questioned whether the $50,000 investment is justified given the limited visibility and uncertain impact on downtown traffic.

Executive Director Cloutier acknowledged that measuring the billboard's effectiveness has always been challenging.

Chairperson Buck expressed strong opposition to any future billboard, stating she was surprised City Council approved the current one. She criticized its cost and effectiveness, suggesting funds could be better spent elsewhere, such as on employee initiatives. She noted challenges for the

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Promotions Committee in coordinating content and expressed disappointment that some businesses were promised free exposure, which could not be fulfilled fairly for all 35 businesses. She mentioned rarely noticing the billboard herself and emphasized that money should be allocated in other ways to promote the DDA.

Board Member Meredith asked about the actual spending from the $50,000 budget line for the billboard last year. Executive Director Cloutier responded that approximately $32,000 was spent.

Board Member Hoppenstadt inquired about the membership of the Economic Vitality Committee, and Executive Director Cloutier stated that Vanessa Willett, Will, and herself attend those meetings, periodically.

Mayor Beagle emphasized the need for measurable results in promoting downtown Wixom. He suggested that any promotion should include a way to track effectiveness, such as coupons, QR codes, or other methods, and noted that the downtown Wixom sign itself is not very clear, limiting visibility.

Executive Director Cloutier explained that print advertising is no longer feasible since publications like the Spinal Column have closed. Previously, full-page ads in such publications allowed businesses to see measurable traction, but now digital and social media options are more practical and cost-effective.

Chairperson Buck suggested alternative promotion strategies, including working with local hotels and TOCA, investing in updated photography, improving event visuals, and enhancing the website. She emphasized that social media campaigns could be more impactful than static billboards.

Executive Director Cloutier also mentioned the Oakland Times as an example of an online publication that many DDAs use, which charges about $1,500 a year and provides articles and ad placement opportunities. She noted that digital or event-specific billboards could work for major events like Block Party, Derby Day, or Tree Lighting, but she felt that the current billboard campaign had not been effective.

Board Member Hoppenstadt pointed out that the current billboard still advertised “Wednesdays in Wixom” with a free meal giveaway. Executive Director Cloutier responded that the new plan involves a Junction billboard, and the Economic Vitality Committee preferred a permanent display rather than event-specific campaigns.

Board Member Meredith raised timing concerns, noting that billboard contracts run for three months while events often end sooner, which could result in outdated messaging being displayed.

Board Member McLauchlin said she had not seen the billboard, while City Manager Brown and Executive Director Cloutier confirmed that they had, with Executive Director Cloutier noting that the new billboard installation was expected that week.

The overall discussion indicated that while billboards have been challenging to implement and measure, alternative strategies such as digital marketing, social media, and event-focused

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promotion may be more cost-effective. If billboards are used, they should align closely with specific events, and some form of tracking should be considered to evaluate their effectiveness.

Assistant City Manager Benson began by clarifying the Economic Vitality line item, noting there are two questions: whether the Board wants to do the billboard and how to handle the budget in the meantime. He suggested that leaving $50,000 in the budget would give room for future discussions or allow the committee to propose ideas, which would still need board approval.

Chairperson Buck disagreed, feeling $50,000 is too much for one committee, especially one with only two board members that rarely meets. She suggested reallocating the funds to a more general category, like marketing or downtown enhancements.

Executive Director Cloutier asked what Chairperson Buck would like to see in the Economic Vitality line item. Chairperson Buck noted that last year the amount was $50,000, but the committee only spent a small fraction, and he believed the line item should mirror what other committees have, focusing on marketing and branding rather than leaving it entirely to the committee.

Benson proposed reducing the line item to $2,000 and increasing marketing and branding from $15,000 to $25,000 or $30,000. Board Member Meredith noted that any new initiatives would cost money and could come from marketing. Buck suggested at least $2,500 for Economic Vitality, in line with the allocations for Promotions and Design Committees. Mayor Beagle proposed $4,000 or $5,000 so the committee still has a meaningful budget. Chairperson Buck clarified she was okay with returning the committee's budget to pre-billboard levels and reallocating the remainder to marketing and branding.

Board Member Hoppenstadt agreed, noting the committee could still recommend using funds for a billboard from the marketing and branding allocation. Board Member Meredith suggested moving the balance to marketing and branding and possibly increasing other committees' budgets slightly. Executive Director Cloutier asked for clarification on the committee allocation. Chairperson Buck confirmed she was fine with $5,000 for Economic Vitality, with the remaining $45,000 going to marketing and branding.

Downtown Flowers and Maintenance.

Executive Director Cloutier explained the downtown flowers and maintenance budget. The hanging baskets are part of a three-year contract that has already been approved. An additional $5,000 was added for a third-party landscaping contract from Parks and Recreation, which she helped coordinate. This contract includes maintenance for the Wixom Road streetscape trees and beds near the railroad, as well as weeding the raised beds along Pontiac Trail in front of the Vet and down to Auto One. The contract is scheduled for City Council review at the upcoming Tuesday meeting. The extra $5,000 provides a buffer in case additional services are needed.

Board Member Meredith noted that the downtown flowers and maintenance line increased from $55,000 last year to $65,000 for 2026/27, a $10,000 difference. Executive Director Cloutier explained that the actual flowers cost $8,300 per month for five months, plus roughly $6,000 for the flowers themselves.

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Assistant City Manager Benson clarified that the $5,000 addition on top of the estimated $60,000 provides a buffer for potential annual increases in basket maintenance. The increase is likely slightly less than $10,000, and actual spending may be under budget.

Board Member McLauchlin commented that the flowers were well-received and worth the expense. Executive Director Cloutier added that she had received calls from residents praising the hanging baskets.

Assistant City Manager Benson reminded the group that there had previously been a discussion about using plastic baskets. Chairperson Buck asked if more flowers would be needed for the Renton property. Assistant City Manager Benson said not this year, and that lighting would be a separate consideration.

Executive Director Cloutier noted that increasing the baskets would change the terms of the contract. The new three-year contract followed a one-year trial with a new company last year, which was very successful and well-received.

Downtown Site Readiness.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained the Downtown Site Readiness line item, which was created by the DDA to incentivize new construction downtown by helping cover public portion costs of projects, such as streetscaping, lamp posts, stormwater management, and sidewalks. Normally, these costs would fall to the developer, but the DDA can contribute funds within the TIF plan to encourage development. In past years, the Board set aside $225,000 annually. This year, $250,000 is proposed, with an additional $250,000 next year, for a total of $500,000.

The process would involve a developer submitting a draft agreement detailing the scope and estimated costs of public improvements. The agreement would include an upfront portion with conditions, and the balance would be paid upon completion of the improvements. The Board would review and approve the agreement at that time.

Currently, there is a developer for the Renton Redevelopment area. A purchase agreement is expected to come to City Council in the next couple of weeks, following conceptual review by the Planning Commission and authorization from City Council to negotiate. Groundbreaking could occur next spring if everything proceeds as planned. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that the developer has not yet provided a detailed estimate for the public improvements, but the $500,000 total is considered a reasonable amount within the budget.

Board Member Meredith asked if the $220,000 set aside for 2025/26 had been spent. Assistant City Manager Benson confirmed that none of it had been used, so it would carry over into the fund balance. He added that the projected fund balance is much higher than expected this year because many planned expenditures, especially for downtown site readiness, have not occurred.

Executive Director Cloutier asked if everyone was comfortable with the $500,000 total. Chairperson Buck confirmed that she was comfortable with this amount.

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Assistant City Manager Benson explained that they are trying to get the Renton property developer to present to the Board, ideally at the April 9th meeting, so the Board can hear directly about the project. If that date doesn't work, the developer would still be available at the later April meeting. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that the Board will see the project at least twice, including when the City Council considers the purchase agreement, and he then displayed drawings from the developer.

Board Member Meredith asked if these were the same drawings as before, and Executive Director Cloutier clarified they were similar but slightly updated. Assistant City Manager Benson highlighted that the DDA could potentially fund specific improvements, such as on-street parking, which the developer strongly prefers.

City Manager Brown added that the developers are cautious about retail development, emphasizing that retail is challenging. They want a smaller-scale retail component but need every possible advantage, including on-street parking, to make the project viable. Without it, they feel a retail project would not work.

Chairperson Buck raised concerns about using on-street parking near the Wixom Elementary site, noting potential issues, although there is already parking on Pontiac Trail. City Manager Brown mentioned that Woodward Avenue has on-street parking and manages higher traffic, suggesting it could be feasible. Executive Director Cloutier added that slowing down traffic in the area could also help support the project.

Assistant City Manager Benson outlined potential elements that the DDA could fund to support the Renton property project. These include installing on-street parking and relocating the Air Line Trail to run along the frontage of the property, similar to Country Corners, but wider at about 12 feet. This would provide more usable space without changes to the knee walls and would include landscaping and street lamps. The development also abuts Mack Park, creating opportunities to improve park landscaping and activate the space, particularly the bottom units intended to interact with the park.

Additional options include purchasing easements for some private parking spaces along the side, giving public access, and structuring the stormwater detention pond to provide public benefit while supporting other downtown developments. The project itself is planned as a 75-unit residential building with a 10,000-square-foot multi-tenant retail space over two stories.

Board Member Meredith asked if the bike path would be located on the sidewalk between the buildings and the on-street parking, expressing safety concerns due to car and bike interactions. Assistant City Manager Benson acknowledged that the design must be done correctly and clarified that these plans are preliminary for discussion purposes. He emphasized that the project would undergo full site plan approval, giving the City and DDA opportunities for input, and that the additional right-of-way—about 27 feet—will provide adequate space if properly designed.

Board Member Meredith asked if, with the elementary school closing, the DDA could acquire some of that property to maintain open space or expand the project footprint. Assistant City Manager Benson explained that the school district's plans aren't finalized—originally, the land was expected to be sold when the new elementary school opens in 2027, but there are rumors it

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might instead become a preschool. He noted that if the DDA's current four-acre deal doesn't fully meet needs, the school property could be part of a contingency plan in the future.

Assistant City Manager Benson described the project layout: parking would be underneath the residential structure, with retail space above. The open area on the north side is planned for potential expansion—if the first 10,000 square feet leases successfully, an additional 5,000 square feet could be added gradually.

Chairperson Buck asked about the benches near Mack Park in the project renderings, wondering if the DDA would be paying for them. Assistant City Manager Benson clarified that any public integration, like benches or outdoor spaces connected to a restaurant, would be the kind of public-related improvements the DDA could support. He emphasized that under the current plan, funds cannot be used for direct subsidies to the developer.

Executive Director Cloutier asked about the apartment mix, and Assistant City Manager Benson confirmed that most units are one-bedroom, with some studios and a few two-bedroom apartments.

Special Studies, Capital Contributions and Special Projects. Safety paths are highlighted and further outlined in the working model of the budget, which gives more detail of what projects are included.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that for 2026/27, the focus will primarily be on construction of previously authorized projects rather than initiating new studies or designs. This includes work on Loop Phase 2, the barn, and downtown pedestrian refuge design engineering. He noted that the budget includes a $25,000 buffer under Special Studies to accommodate unexpected needs, amendments, or additional design costs if necessary.

Assistant City Manager Benson highlighted the district-wide streetscaping plan, which builds on previous efforts such as the Chambers to Wixom Road sidewalk. Some past projects faced delays, like DTE's promised improvements, and other areas like Old Wixom Road require attention with proposed townhouses and the earlier bollard discussion. Assistant City Manager Benson emphasized that consolidating these efforts into a comprehensive plan could help support the next DDA plan when presented to City Council or the County for tax jurisdiction approvals.

Assistant City Manager Benson pointed out that fiscal year 2026/27 will be the last payment on the 2003 bond at $468,000. The following year, 2027/28, will be free of that payment, creating an opportunity to plan and fund the next DDA initiatives. The final cost of the streetscape plan is still unknown and will depend on the Board's decisions. In 2027/28, the Board will define a scope of work, issue a bid, and move forward with implementation.

Executive Director Cloutier added that the DDA must present planned projects to taxing jurisdictions to secure plan renewal.

Chairperson Buck raised the issue of the water fountain, noting its poor condition and questioning whether it needs to be addressed in the budget.

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Assistant City Manager Benson responded that it's a valid question, but they don't yet have an answer. The original direction from the DDA was that the pond seemed fine and should simply be fixed to keep it functioning. DPW has been working on obtaining quotes, but there's no new information yet. Repairing the existing structure is far less expensive than doing a completely new design.

Chairperson Buck acknowledged that the Board hadn't had enough information to make a decision previously.

Executive Director Cloutier added that if the Board wants to explore options for the fountain, they could direct staff to include it in design or engineering work as part of a future DDA plan.

Assistant City Manager Benson noted that City Council has short-term goals regarding the Air Line Trail and bollards, and the DDA's current approach—essentially delaying major changes—is consistent with those discussions. When the Council reviews the recommendation, there may be additional discussion, or they may agree that the approach makes sense.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that under Special Studies, the DDA already has draft work from 2021 on a new DDA plan. At that time, it didn't make sense to extend or modify the plan because stakeholders were focused on reclaiming funds. The draft gives the Board a starting point, and money is being set aside to work with a consultant in 2027/28 to update the plan. The goal is to be ready for decisions in 2028/29, in preparation for the next TIF plan.

Executive Director Cloutier asked about the library, noting that Andrea mentioned a potential millage on the August ballot. She was concerned that if the library goes forward, it could pull out of the TIF plan, and they have already indicated they would not contribute the $60,000. Mayor Beagle and City Manager Brown were unsure of the specifics, but Assistant City Manager Benson said it wouldn't be catastrophic if that happens.

Chairperson Buck brought up TOCA and the possibility of adding a sidewalk, noting the high traffic in that area. Assistant City Manager Benson agreed, mentioning finishing the knee wall circle as well. Executive Director Cloutier clarified the location of the knee wall circle near the pine trees and in front of Enterprise, with potential extension over to TOCA. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that the City does not currently own the triangle of land, so discussions about ownership or potential purchase would be needed.

Assistant City Manager Benson also highlighted that the future of TOCA is under review. A He indicated that parts of the property, including the domes, may be sold or downsized to allow for potential residential uses, which could influence the DDA's planning and TIF funding allocations.

Chairperson Buck added that the road near TOCA needs repair, pointing out potholes as a safety concern. Assistant City Manager Benson emphasized that these discussions are part of broader planning considerations for DDA TIF boundaries, redevelopment, and potential funding to support future projects.

Transfer to the Safety Path Line Item.

Approved 4/15/26

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that this fiscal year marks the final repayment to the City Safety Path fund for the public sidewalk. For the next couple of years, the only project budgeted under that line item is $120,000 for the downtown pedestrian refuges. The amount is rounded for simplicity, and he noted that the actual expenditures will likely be less once bids are finalized.

Contributions to Special Projects.

Assistant City Manager Benson explained that the downtown signage project has already been approved and should be fully expended this fiscal year. The West End Commons project has not yet been approved, but bids will be presented for recommendation on April 9, 2026. If approved, the cost is roughly estimated to be split evenly across the two fiscal years.

Looking at future fiscal years, the budget includes previously planned projects for Loop activation and Barn restoration. The current budget allocates $250,000 for Loop activation and $250,000 for barn renovations. These figures can be adjusted during the budget process next week, and the work is expected to occur around summer 2027.

Executive Director Cloutier added that a firm is preparing a proposal for the Loop around City Hall, including an extension along the back corner of the property and enhancements such as lighting and other activations. The proposal also includes a study of the barn on the eastern edge of the property, with input from a barn expert who will provide a range of options from basic to premium.

Assistant City Manager Benson summarized the overall budget: assuming all planned expenses are spent, the budget would spend into fund balance by about $283,000, leaving a year-end fund balance of approximately $400,000, around 20% of annual revenues. In future fiscal years, spending into fund balance is not anticipated, and by the end of fiscal year 2028/29, the projected fund balance is about $1.8 million.

Board Member Meredith questioned whether the $250,000 for the barn was based on the barn expert's initial estimate. City Manager Brown clarified that the numbers are not finalized. The barn itself is salvageable, with a sound internal structure, though it requires a new roof, exterior modifications, and new floors. One side of the barn has a concrete floor while the other side is dirt. Assistant City Manager Benson noted that the barn remains a contentious topic with City Council, which postponed any decision last year to allow time for study and planning.

Assistant City Manager Brown noted that tearing the barn down is still on City Council's mind.

Assistant City Manager Benson emphasized that the $250,000 budgeted for Loop activation and the barn renovation requires careful decision-making. The Board and City will need to decide whether to split the funds or prioritize one project over the other. He mentioned that a steering committee will be formed, with public engagement over the next few months, and that the budget presented allows the possibility of doing both projects, but tough choices may be required. He recommended communicating to City Council that both projects remain a DDA priority.

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Board Member Meredith shared his preference to reduce spending on the barn and allocate more toward the Loop, noting he sees limited use for the barn interior beyond safety and exterior fixes, suggesting it could be boarded up and used as a photo spot. City Manager Brown agreed, suggesting minimal exterior and roof fixes, then converting it to storage.

Executive Director Cloutier added that the library contributed to the first phase of the Loop by purchasing some musical instrument equipment, but she does not expect their contribution to the second phase.

Chairperson Buck raised concern about the Chambers sidewalk, a longstanding problem in downtown. Executive Director Cloutier explained that SEMCOG denied the grant due to DTE's lack of commitment, leaving outstanding issues. Assistant City Manager Benson clarified that while there is flexibility in the budget for design work, aligning with DTE's schedule remains necessary. Completing the sidewalk independently would cost about $1.2 million, whereas waiting for DTE's conduit work would save roughly $200,000. Chairperson Buck confirmed that widening the sidewalk isn't possible without relocating the powerlines, which Assistant City Manager Benson affirmed.

Board Member Meredith suggested increasing the $8,500 allocation, noting that with all the activity happening, it might be worth raising it a bit more.

Executive Director Cloutier noted that last year only $4,616 was spent and left the decision up to the Board.

Board Member Meredith recommended raising it to $9,000, especially since $45,000 was being removed from Economic Vitality, ensuring there would be enough funds to support the businesses.

Regarding the Block Party, Board Member Meredith felt $32,000 was sufficient. Executive Director Cloutier explained that she had increased it from $25,000 to $32,000 to account for the 10-year anniversary and additional entertainment.

Chairperson Buck expressed concern that the increase of $6,000 might only cover one band and that attendance could be larger due to the anniversary. Executive Director Cloutier responded that negotiations go well and that they plan to have an extra band, and the only additional cost would be the $550 for the Oakland County stage if West End Commons isn't ready in time.

Board Member Meredith added that even with West End Commons, the stage is needed since most people face Pontiac Trail, making it a good location for eating and gathering. Executive Director Cloutier asked if the Board wanted to raise the budget to $35,000 or $40,000. Board Member Meredith proposed $35,000, which would cover more bands and other planned activities. Chairperson Buck emphasized that additional activities beyond just one more band also need to be accounted for within the timeframe.

Assistant City Manager Benson emphasized that the Board has flexibility to modify events or create new ones and shouldn't feel locked into existing plans, encouraging ongoing conversations about promotions.

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Chairperson Buck asked about the Promotions Committee award from Main Street, and Executive Director confirmed it was $600, which goes into Main Street contributions.

Executive Director Cloutier then reviewed Derby Day, noting the current budget is $18,000, with some sponsorships already secured ($3,000 and $400) and in-kind contributions. Medals cost under $1,500 last year, but with 100 more this year, they expect $2,100 in medal costs. For future years, she had only bumped the budget by $2,000, asking if the Board wanted to raise it further.

Chairperson Buck clarified this was for the next fiscal year, and Assistant City Manager Benson confirmed the fiscal year ends June 30. Executive Director Cloutier suggested increasing it to $20,000, but Board Member Meredith recommended $23,000 to account for the event's growth.

Mayor Beagle added that it could either be adjusted now or handled later via a budget amendment. Chairperson Buck asked if excess funds from donations could cover extra costs without an amendment, and Assistant City Manager Benson explained that while cash flow is flexible, formally adjusting the budget would require City Council approval.

Board Member Meredith and Executive Director Cloutier agreed to set the Derby Day budget at $23,000 for planning purposes.

**Information:**

1) Committee Reports

None

2) Downtown Business News/Events

   a. 2026: May 2nd Derby Day Races
   b. 2026: June 4th Summer Concert Series Begin
   c. 2026: June 4th City of Wixom Employee & Boards/Commissions Picnic
   d. 2026: The Main Event – Downtown Rochester @ the Roxy
   e. 2026: June 25th Lite the Night Fireworks & Summer Concert Series
   f. 2026: September 19th Wixom Block Party

**Public Comments:**

None

**Executive Director's Comments:**

None

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**Board Members' Comments:**

None

**Adjournment:**

This meeting of the Wixom Downtown Development Authority was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Mona Freiburger
Recording Secretary

Approved 4/9/2026