

**MEETING MINUTES
BERKLEY DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 8:15 AM
Berkley Public Safety, 2nd Floor, Conference Room**



- I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 8:16 AM with Chair Matteo Passalacqua presiding.

A. Roll Call Taken and Quorum Determined

Present: Desiree Dutcher
Katie Forte
Lucas Gonzalez
Katie Goodwin
Anna Grace
Chris Gross
Shawn Heath-Lee
Uli Laczkovich
Matteo Passalacqua
Ashley Poirier
Todd Schaefer

Absent: Scott Francis – *excused*
Crystal VanVleck – *excused*
Brian Zifkin – *excused*

Also present: Kim Anderson, City of Berkley
Steve Baker, City Council Liaison
Denise Dowren, Berkley Days
Jason Godfrey, Better City
Kristen Kapelanski, Community Development Director
Lesley Robbins, Berkley Days
Jeffrey Tony, Berkley Days
Adam Wozniak, DPW Liaison

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mack noted that on the Agenda the Meeting Minutes for approval date should be corrected to read "January 14, 2026" rather than "2025." Gross moved to approve the Agenda, Forte seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting Minutes of January 14, 2026

Poirier moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2026, Laczkovich seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

IV. TREASURER REPORT

Financial Reports for January 2026

Gross reported the January revenues of @\$0 and expenditures year-to-date of @\$55,000, with revenues available to spend of @\$464,000. The ending fund balance after January 2026 was @\$535,000. Gross noted that pension and health care expenses haven't been allocated yet and will probably hit all at once.

Grace moved to receive and approve the Treasurer's Report for January 2026, Schaefer seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

V. PRESENTATION: Berkley Days 2026

Berkley Days' Chair Denise Dowren, Vice-Chair Leslie Robbins, and Secretary Jeff Tony introduced themselves and asked for the DDA's assistance in spreading the word about fundraising and sponsorship opportunities available supporting the 2026 Berkley Days celebration. The entertainment kicks off on Friday, Sept. 11, at the Berkley Theater, followed by field day activities for families at the Community Center field, with food trucks, a beer tent, and maybe a movie afterwards. Businesses have an opportunity to advertise by buying a "property" square(s) on the Berkleyopoly (play on Monopoly) board game. This year, 2026, is the 100th anniversary celebration of Berkley Days. The group would appreciate volunteers and any assistance with marketing the event to businesses and the public.

VI. FOCUS GROUP SESSION: Better City, City of Berkley Economic Development Strategy

Community Development has engaged the firm Better City to work with them on strategic input for the City of Berkley Economic Development Strategy. Jason Godfrey of Better City (helping communities become the best version of themselves) led the focus group and opened his presentation with short introductions of those attending with their statement about their connection to Berkley.

Board members then responded to eight questions covering economic development priorities, resource allocation, challenges, community character, and long-term vision. Attendees could access the questions with a QR code and submit their responses to each question. Better City's goal is to help the city recognize what Berkley *is*, and what it *can be*.

Question 1: Economic Development Priorities

DDA members ranked six economic development priorities from most to least important. Results show strong consensus around filling vacancies and improving the physical environment:

Ranking Results (1 = Most Important):

- 1. Fill vacant retail/commercial spaces with quality tenants** (Average rank: 2.15)
- 2. Improve streetscape and public gathering spaces** (Average rank: 2.69)
- 3. Attract more downtown housing/residential development** (Average rank: 3.15)
- 4. Recruit specific business types** (Average rank: 4.23)
- 5. Expand restaurant/dining options** (Average rank: 4.31)
- 6. Expand grocery/food retail options** (Average rank: 4.46)

Question 2: Resource Allocation Priorities

Participants allocated 10 investment dots across five resource categories (130 total dots allocated). Results clearly indicate where members believe limited resources should be focused: Nearly one-third of all investment dots went to physical improvements, reinforcing the priority rankings. The combination of physical improvements (32%), business attraction (24%), and public spaces (21%) accounts for 77% of resource allocation, showing strong preference for tangible, visible downtown enhancements over softer programming initiatives.

Question 3: Most Critical Challenges

Participants used 5 priority dots to identify the most critical challenges facing downtown (65 total dots allocated): Two challenges tied for top priority: building conditions/facades (20%) and traffic speeds/pedestrian safety (20%). Together these represent 40% of priority dots, indicating DDA

members see both the physical condition of buildings AND walkability/safety as the most pressing barriers to downtown success. Notably, parking received only 3 dots (4.6%), suggesting parking is not viewed as a critical obstacle.

Question 4: Regional Reputation and Competitive Positioning

DDA members were asked about Berkley's reputation in the region and what would make developers more interested in investing. While responses were brief, they reveal key perceptions:

Berkley's Regional Reputation: Family-friendly - Berkley is seen as a family-oriented community in the regional context; Inviting / Accessible - The community projects a welcoming character; Eclectic / Good vibe - Positive perception of Berkley's character and appeal.

What Would Attract Developers: Members identified financial incentives as a key tool to increase developer interest in Berkley projects

Question 5: Lost Opportunities and Barriers to Growth:

When asked about business prospects or developments that Berkley lost over the past five years, one substantive response highlighted an important challenge:

"PUD development, pocket parks and gathering spaces have been tried but residents and business get in the way of growth"

This comment aligns with the 'Resistance to change among residents' challenge that received 9 priority dots (13.8%) in the challenges question. It suggests that even desirable development types like pocket parks and PUDs face resistance from stakeholders. This internal resistance may be as significant a barrier as external competitive factors. The emphasis on financial incentives for developers indicates recognition that Berkley may need to offer competitive advantages to overcome both market competition from neighboring communities and internal resistance to change.

Question 6: Downtown Success Stories

DDA members identified specific businesses, developments, and projects that represent the kind of success Berkley should replicate. These examples provide insight into what's working and what the community values:

Most Frequently Cited Examples:

- **Coffee & Bark** (10 mentions) - Overwhelmingly the most cited business. Members praised it as a community gathering space that's 'cozy and friendly,' with employees who are 'super polite,' and noted how it has expanded over time. One member highlighted deals for high school kids, showing community engagement across demographics. Another described it as 'warm and inviting' while serving as a gathering space.
- **Berkley Theater** (6 mentions) - Repeatedly identified as a major success story, with members emphasizing that 'the renovation and activation of the theater is big' and stressing that 'the theater sign needs to be preserved.' Multiple members cited it as the model for what success looks like downtown.
- **Ullman's Health and Beauty** (4 mentions) - Praised as 'warm and inviting,' representing established local retail success.

- **The Beverly Restaurant/Chris and Partners** (3 mentions) - Members specifically called out The Beverly and noted Chris and Partners' restaurant group (including Slow's) as quality dining successes.

Additional Notable Businesses:

Casa Amado (2 mentions) - 'great spot' for dining; Reware Vintage (2 mentions) - boutique retail success; Gate Keeper Games - specialty retail; Mongers, Naka, Rind - additional dining options; Time Travelers, Fireflies, Lunch Cafe - other local businesses

Development/Housing Examples:

The Ivy - multifamily residential development; Townhouses on 12 Mile - missing middle housing success

Placemaking Successes:

Pocket parks - cited as successful public space interventions; Restaurants and events - combination creating vibrancy

DDA members value: (1) Community-oriented gathering spaces that serve multiple demographics; (2) Locally-owned businesses with personality and strong customer service; (3) Mixed-use and infill housing that fits the scale and character of downtown; (4) Cultural anchors like the Theater that draw regional attention. Coffee & Bark's overwhelming dominance (10 mentions vs. 6 for the next highest) suggests that authentic, community-focused gathering spaces resonate most strongly with DDA members as the model for success.

Question 7: Berkley's Unique Character

When asked what makes Berkley authentically unique and must be preserved, members emphasized:

- **No big box stores** - Strong preference for supporting independent businesses rather than national chains
- **Approachable and affordable** - Berkley's accessibility and lack of pretension
- **Eclectic character** - Diverse mix that's welcoming to all

Downtown character described as: "Eclectic and approachable to all" and "Small community, big heart"

Question 8: Vision 2030

When asked to envision downtown Berkley in 2030, members painted a remarkably consistent picture:

Mixed-Use Development & Housing; Berkley Theater fully restored with historically appropriate marquee; 3-4 story mixed-use buildings downtown; More townhomes and row houses (missing middle housing); Hartfield Lanes redeveloped

Public Spaces & Gathering Places; Multiple pocket parks throughout downtown; More event road closures for public gathering spaces

The Theater restoration appeared in multiple 2030 visions as a defining downtown catalyst and anchor. Members also emphasized preservation of historic spaces and avoidance of chain retailers.

VII. ACTION ITEMS

A. Mural Program Amendments: Approve/Disprove Proposed Changes

Mack had included in the Board packet a draft of the revised Mural Program, which he noted is the same as previously presented. The maximum award amount is \$7,500.00 and the award can be no more than 50% of the actual mural cost. The DDA will monitor the mural for 10 years and be in control during that period. Parking lot beautification can be added back in to the façade grant section.

Forte moved to approve the revised Mural Program amendments, Dutcher seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the Board.

VIII. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Fiscal Year 2026-27 DDA Budget

Mack had included in the Board packet the draft of the proposed fiscal year 2026-27 budget with line item and category detailed amounts. He would like the Board to approve the budget at the March meeting, after which it will be sent to Council for their final approval, and then back to the Board for their final approval in May.

Mack's draft includes some funding for a part-time position to assist with events/promotions as well as funding for a consultant to assist with updating the DDA Plan/Strategic Plan.

Proposed revenue/TIF capture may be higher/lower than estimated after the Board of Review meets in March.

Passalacqua would appreciate a breakdown of the one-time expenditures (consultant fees/Robina project costs) so as to be able to estimate how much bond the DDA can afford in the future.

If marquee maintenance is necessary, a budget amendment may be needed to cover the cost.

Mack will work on a more precise description of budget items for the budget he'll present to the Board in March.

IX. LIAISON REPORTS

A. City Council – Steve Baker

Absent (left early) – no report.

B. Community Development – Kristen Kapelanski

Kapelanski reported theater developers are getting building permits. She also reported the Planning Commission is discussing data centers, municipal lots around the theater development, residential rezonings, code enforcement, and engineering processes.

C. Planning Commission – Lisa Kempner

Absent – no additional report.

D. Public Works – Adam Wozniak

Wozniak asked when Holiday Lights would be taken down. Mack reported that the cost of upgraded trash receptacles can be as high as @\$3,000.00. Thirty-one are needed. Passalacqua stressed they be rust-proof. Poirier reported that Berkley Pride will need to use the electrical outlets on the poles, and she asked that all be tested.

E. Chamber of Commerce – Jennifer Finney

Finney could not attend but sent a memo that the Chamber is reviewing different options for membership to increase participation.

X. STUDENT BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

Gonzalez reported the marching band performed at LCA and the swim team is doing well. Spirit Week and break are upcoming. Goodwin reported that the Encore Choir and Jazz Band will be having concerts. For Black History month there is a door decorating contest and soul food lunch, Planning for March charity work is ongoing.

XI. BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES

A. Art & Design Committee

Dutcher reported on trash cans, getting quotes for the Robina space, considering glitter concrete. Passalacqua asked about the bollards costs and suggested there may be additional RAP funding available if other Oakland RAP communities don't use all of theirs.

1. Subcommittee West 12 Mile

Absent – no report.

B. Business Development Committee

No report.

C. Events Committee

No report.

Marketing Committee

Grace noted the committee is reviewing the results of the survey sent to Board members and will report back to the Board.

D. Organization Committee

Mack reported there is one vacancy on the Board.

XII. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATES

Mack included his update in the Board packet sent to the Board. He traveled to Orlando, Florida with Main Street Oakland County for a benchmarking visit alongside individuals from Ferndale, Hazel Park, Oak Park, and Madison Heights. The purpose of the trip was to identify strategies that could strengthen cooperation among Oakland County downtown districts while ensuring each maintains a distinct and independent identity.

The annual accreditation assessment for Main Street America was completed on Feb. 5. Berkley successfully passed accreditation as a Select Level Main Street community.

He traveled to Crystal Mountain Resort in late January to attend the Michigan Downtown Association Board of Directors Retreat.

Upcoming MDA events include: MDA Legislative and Advocacy Day – March 3 and MDA Spring Workshop – March 4. He asked Board members interested in attending either event to reach out.

Work continues on expanding the BOSS Social District to encompass the full downtown area. The goal is to complete the district amendment in advance of warmer weather.

The Berkley Chop Shop has expressed interest in pursuing a façade and sign improvement grant.

In the last month, Art & Design met with Erik Nordin of the Detroit Design Center to begin the process of developing a sculpture to be placed in the Robina plaza.

The Berkley Pride event application will go before Council at the February 16 meeting.

Clarification on PA 57 of 2018 and Oakland County Policy: a Downtown Development Authority **is not required** to enter into negotiation or seek approval from Oakland County when extending the duration of its TIF or Development Plan. Opt-out provisions under the law **apply only** when: A DDA is newly established; a DDA is expanding its boundaries; a contractual agreement already exists with the County.

The Berkley DDA meets none of these conditions and therefore is not required to negotiate with Oakland County in this circumstance. This interpretation is supported both in state law and in Oakland County's previous and updated policy language. Additionally, several components of the updated County policy appear to directly conflict with the DDA Act, including provisions that attempt to dictate allowable uses of TIF revenue in ways not aligned with statutory authority.

XIII. BOARD OF DIRECTORS' COMMENTS

None

XIV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The opportunity for public comment was offered. No requests to comment were made at the meeting. Anyone with comments or questions is asked to e-mail them to the DDA to be answered within five business days.

XV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 AM on motion by Forte and second by Grace.