

Uptown Task Force Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 3, 2020

8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Via Zoom

Present: Dara Braitman (DOMI), Derek Dauphin (City Planning), Gary Desjardins (PPG Arena), Lilly Freedman (URA), Leonard Hammonds (Jake Wheatley's Office), Joan Hilton (Duquesne University), Simona Loberant (SEA), Mike Madden (InnovatePGH), Breen Masciotra (Port Authority), Brittany McDonald (Uptown Partners), Kaylani Singh (InnovatePGH), Mary Ellen Solomon (Duquesne University), Paul Svoboda (Duquesne Light), Alex Toner (University of Pittsburgh), Marlene Williams (Uptown Partners), Caroline Woodward (Bethlehem Haven)

Call to Order/Welcome: Mary Ellen Solomon convened the meeting at 8:06 a.m. with an introduction of all present Task Force members.

Approval of Minutes: Mary Ellen asked for a motion to have the August meeting minutes approved that were previously distributed to all members via email. The motion was approved with no dissent.

Agenda Discussions:

(1) Member Updates re: COVID-19 Pandemic:

- **Avenu:** The Paramount Building is full of tenants for the first time in 2020.
- **Bethlehem Haven:** A contract has been signed for the sale of the Aces & Deuces property to Bethlehem Haven. Construction on the new facility will begin in the spring of 2021. A new Executive Director has been hired and will be attending UTF meetings moving forward.
- **City Planning:** Mayor Peduto announced the beginning of a citywide comprehensive planning process called [ForgingPGH](#). This is the first comprehensive look at land use citywide and will guide future growth and development. The plan will provide an equitable framework for housing, development, mobility, sustainability and land use for the next 20 years. The Eco-Innovation District Neighborhood Plan will be incorporated into ForgingPGH. Due to COVID, [an engagement portal](#) has been created in order for community members to learn more, provide feedback, and ask questions surrounding the plan.
- **DOMI:** DOMI is continuing with the slow streets project. There currently isn't a contract yet for the TDM/parking study.
- **Duquesne Light:** The low-income home energy assistance funding has expired. There are still some hardship funds available, and Duquesne Light is hopeful there will be more state aid available in the future. The recent storms caused a lot of damage around the city, leaving about 40,000 people without power. Most of the power has been restored, but the last 2,000 people or so have been very problematic.
- **Duquesne University:** Move-in has been completed on campus. There are about 1,100 freshmen living on campus as well as a few thousand upperclassmen. Classes are being offered through a HyFlex format, and the academic calendar has been shortened so that students can head home before Thanksgiving. There have been some issues in the Southside with student gatherings, and Duquesne is asking community partners to report any issues they might be having with students.
- **Jake Wheatley's Office:** Mobile COVID testing will be provided shortly. As soon as details are available, they will be shared with the Task Force.
- **Port Authority:** Ridership is at 40% compared to one year ago. There was a loss of 80% ridership in April, so it is up a little bit from the spring. No major adjustments to service have been made. There have been several [press releases](#) related to the 50 COVID cases among Port Authority staff meetings.

It is expected that service will increase in the Downtown/Uptown area in November. It is possible to find out more information about route data [on their website](#).

- **PPG Arena:** The majority of events have been postponed to the summer and fall of 2021. The Globetrotters, which were scheduled for their annual December 26th date, have been cancelled for the first time in 41 years. Monster Jam has also been canceled. TGIFriday's has permanently closed, and Z-Best BBQ is getting ready to move into the space. The NHL is aiming to start the new season on December 1st. The arena is currently waiting on a funding update that will allow for technology upgrades, as well as food and beverage changes, that will allow the facility to become a fully touchless experience for guests. Once the arena knows about the funding, they will make an announcement on their re-opening plans as well as these upgrades.
- **University of Pittsburgh:** Move-in has been completed. The university is currently completing 2,000 randomized COVID tests on asymptomatic students. So far, there have been very few positive cases, even though there have been challenges with off-campus gatherings. The community engagement office has been working to transition programming online. They have just announced Pitt Civic Action Week for the week of October 5 - 10 which will feature week-long virtual service projects and sessions centered around basic human needs, health equity, education equity, and development of resources.
- **Uptown Partners:** There is no current update on the Forbes Fund application. There will be another neighborhood cleanup scheduled soon.
- **URA:** The URA was awarded \$10 million from the PNC Foundation to support equitable economic recovery initiatives citywide. The funds will be dispersed as follows: \$6.5 million to be used for the COVID-19 Recovery Loan Fund; \$1 million to be used for Catapult: Startup to Storefront Program; \$2.5 million to be transferred to Invest PGH, Inc, an emerging community development financing institution (CDFI) being incubated by the URA. 60% of the overall funds will be going towards low to moderate income communities and minority-owned businesses. Currently, the URA is working to either stabilize or demolish two properties along Fifth Avenue in Uptown. There are two different proposals that they are completely due diligence on for both scenarios. The URA will keep the Task Force updated on which one is chosen.

(2) Priority Projects for Funding: At the March meeting, the UTF asked staff to identify near - and medium - term projects in the EID plan that could be accomplished using the remaining City capital budget funds. Derek Dauphin stated that his supervisor said there was a limited timeline on these funds to be spent on projects, so a decision needs to be made shortly. For review purposes, Derek walked through the top five projects that were chosen by the UTF through a Survey Monkey:

1. Use funds to invest in Tustin Smart Block components: park improvements, community garden, streetscape enhancements, affordable housing in adjacent buildings.
2. Increase low-carbon mobility options by investing in infrastructure such as on-/off-street parking and charging for electric vehicles, electric bikes, and/or electric scooters.
3. Establish program that would help connect Uptown and Hill District youth/residents to jobs in the Innovation Economy.
4. Build out slow streets interventions as identified in the plan (mostly in the residential areas east of Dinwiddie Street and south of Fifth Avenue).
5. Work with UTF, Uptown Partners RED Committee, Contextual Design Advisory Panel, and Planning Commission to establish design guidelines for new development in Uptown.

Another project that also had a lot of votes but didn't make the top 5 because of the scoring system was to contract Landforce to work on the Colwell Trail, specifically the Brady Street stretch. Derek and his team have spent the last few months checking the feasibility of all of these projects, as well as potential timelines and overall

budgets, and will continue to do so in the upcoming weeks. As of today, there is not a final decision yet like Derek had hoped, so another update will be provided in October.

Sub-Committee Updates:

- Community: A neighborhood cleanup was conducted two weeks ago with several volunteers. The Hill District Resource list and map in relation to COVID-19 is now live and available [here](#). The group is working on the sub-committee work-plan, hoping to center it more around food insecurity, financial literacy and mental health. It will be presented to the group at the October meeting.
- Development: Kaylani has reached out to all of the committee members and has conducted the majority of her interviews about the current state of inclusive innovation within the community. The group is also working on getting the Fifth Avenue Business Corridor Plan, started by Bill Generett and Duquesne University, off the ground. It will be discussed at the next meeting. Finally, the group is going to re-evaluate the timeline of the work plan due to delays caused by the COVID pandemic.
- Mobility: DOMI was unable to hire an intern this summer, so sidewalk condition inventory was not conducted. Some curbside data was still collected however. The sub-committee was in discussions with PathVue about piloting their technology, but they ended up going through a city department. Finally, they are working on scheduling a construction coordination meeting.

Mary Ellen adjourned the meeting at 9:12am.

Next Uptown Task Force Meeting - 8 a.m. on Thursday, October 1st via Zoom.