Minutes
Cascade Charter Township
Downtown Development Authority Board of Directors
March 30, 2021 9:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting

SPECIAL MEETING

ARTICLE 1. Chairwoman Puplava called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
Members Present: Stephan, Growney, Puplava, DeWitt, Vogel, Kleyla, and Lesperance
Members Absent: Makkar, Siegle
Others Present: DDA Director Sandra Korhorn, Assistant Township Manager Stephanie Fast, and Township Manager Ben Swayze

ARTICLE 2. Approve the Current Agenda.

Motion was made by Member Stephan to approve the current Agenda. Supported by Member DeWitt. Motion carried 7 to 0.

ARTICLE 3. Approve the Minutes of the February 16, 2021 meeting.

Motion was made by Member DeWitt to approve the Minutes of the February 16, 2021 meeting. Supported by Member Stephan. Motion carried 7 to 0.

ARTICLE 4. Acknowledge visitors and those wishing to speak to non-agenda items.
(Comments are limited to five minutes per speaker)

There were no visitors that wished to speak.

ARTICLE 5. Discuss and Consider The Rapid Bus Funding

Chairwoman Puplava stated that this meeting was called to discuss the recent decision by the Township Board to extend The Rapid contract through September with the condition that the DDA cover 100% of the contract cost. Chairwoman Puplava asked Manager Swayze to review the Staff Report that he provided to the Township Board for their meeting. Manager Swayze sated that this report included three years of ridership data, a rider survey, and business survey.

Manager Swayze stated that The Rapid contracts run October 1st – September 30th, and before signing the 2020/2021 contract, The Rapid asked to extend the current contract by three months to help them identify state and federal funding, which would in turn effect the rates charged to Townships. Manager Swayze stated that at that time the

Township Board did agree to extend the contract through the end of December 2020. Manager Swayze stated that in December of 2020 the Township received the proposed contracts for The Rapid, and at that time they contract included a 12.08% increase, which would increase the hourly rate from $68.48 to $76.75. Manager Swayze stated that the Township asked for alternatives to consider, which included physically altering the route, altering the route frequency, or altering the funding model. Manager Swayze stated that The Rapid offered an altered funding model, which would only charge the Township for the time a bus in physically in Cascade Township, and not for the "full bus" being in service on other parts of 28th Street. Manager Swayze states that this results in a savings of $57,943 for the rest of this year (May 15 – Sept. 30), which is a 37.2% decrease.

Manager Swayze stated that The Rapids leadership has decide that bus service will continue in Cascade Township through the end of September regardless of any decision the Township makes. If the Township decides to end the contract, The Rapid will use this time to notify businesses and riders that the route will end at that time.

Chairwoman Puplava asked if the Township is current with payment to The Rapid, or if there will be any back payment the DDA will need to consider in making this decision. Manager Swayze stated that the payment is current.

Chairwoman Puplava asked if a new contract will be required in order to receive the new funding model, or if the new funding model will be given regardless. Manager Swayze stated he will have to double check, but assumes a new contract will be needed.

Member Lesperance stated the prior full bus model was Cascade Township being charged the cost to bring a bus from the garage to the Cascade Route, when it was actually an extension of the 28th St. line from Kentwood. Chairwoman Puplava asked when that payment change became effective. Member Lesperance stated that she believes that to be undetermined yet, as the current contract ends in May; Manager Swayze stated that the contract is already expired, and the payments being made are based on the 2019/2020 contract.

Member Lesperance stated that she does not believe this decision to be an emergency, and that the Township/DDA should not pay anything until September. At that time Member Lesperance thinks the DDA should evaluate if The Rapid service is needed.

Chairwoman Puplava stated that she believes this decision to be urgent as the current contract could be cancelled with short notice. Chairwoman Puplava stated that the DDA has decided several times that the bus service provides value to business owners, and will need to decide if the money is available to continue to support these business and local economic development. Chairwoman Puplava is concerned about the possibility of a sudden stop of service, and stated that the Bus Committee that met periodically should be reconstituted with Members of the DDA and Township Board so that options

can be determined. Chairwoman Puplava reiterated that she is not comfortable with the Township Board making this decision as they have made it clear this decision is not a priority.

Member Lesperance states that she believes the circumstances of the last month regarding discussions with The Rapid have been confusing. Chairwoman Puplava agrees, and stated that any offer of continuing service through September by The Rapid needs to be documented.

Member Lesperance asked Manager Swayze get the offer made by The Rapid in writing. Manager Swayze clarified that The Rapid only offered to continue service for free through September if the Township indicates that they will no longer be funding the service. If a decision is *not* made, the month-to-month rate will need to be continued to be paid. Manager Swayze stated that he will get this in writing.

Chairwoman Puplava stated that she would like to hear from fellow Board Members about their thoughts on continuing this bus service.

Member Vogel stated that without having engaged business with a statement such as "We are looking to potentially discontinue the bus service, what is the impact to your business?", it is hard to determine specific/future needs, especially during a pandemic. Member Vogel also states that riders of this bus route should be notified and given the chance to voice their opinion. Member Vogel states that although he wasn't part of the formation or introduction of this bus route, it was deemed to be important and should be methodically unwound if that is the decision. Member Vogel states that open dialogue is very important in this decision as it can have an effect on the future of the DDA, and a decision to stop the bus service would be hard to get back if wanted in the future.

Chairwoman Puplava stated that she has reviewed the budget, and asked Director Korhorn and/or Manager Swayze to confirm that there is room in the budget to cover 100% of the cost of bus service, even at full price. Manager Swayze stated that is correct, however a budget amendment would need to be made as there isn't enough money in the expenditure line item right now. Manager Swayze stated that he can provide those calculations before the next meeting.

Chairwoman Puplava asked if funding the bus service would be taking away from any other projects. Director Korhorn stated there are no current projects that need to be budgeted for at this time.

Member Vogel asked what the cost per month for the bus service is. Manager Swayze stated that he can provide that calculation before the next meeting.

Member Vogel asked if any of the larger businesses (Meijer, for example) have been engaged/notified that the bus service may go away, and if this decision will impact any relationships within the community. Director Korhorn stated that they have not been engaged at this time.

Chairwoman Puplava asked about YMCA, and if they had provided any monetary contribution. Director Korhorn stated that they did install a shelter for the bus stop at their location, but no monetary contribution.

Member Stephan stated that he did call some local businesses (15 businesses within the Township), and was told that 13 employees that work at hotels use the bus service, and 12 employees of quick stop restaurants use the bus service. Member Stephan stated that the data provided by Manager Swayze indicated that ridership significantly decreases after Walmart, and wonders if Walmart can be the "end point" of the service. Member Stephan stated that one of the hotels he talked to mentioned that the bus service availability is often used while looking for and hiring employees. Member Stephan stated that bus service availability has been inquired about by business owners in the DDA district in the past as well, and echoes Member Vogel in his statement that the bus service will be hard to get back if it is discontinued.

Member Lesperance asked about the process of continuing or discontinuing the service and what kind of decision needs to be made first. Chairwoman Puplava suggests that a vote be taken today to determine whether the DDA should take over the responsibility of negotiating and funding the bus service during the remainder of the term, although the specific term and cost is still unknown. Chairwoman Puplava believes that an initial decision of whether or not the DDA wants to pursue a relationship with The Rapid in the future needs to be made before anything else.

Member Stephan asked Manger Swayze to clarify that the only way the bus service will be no cost to the Township until September 2021 is if the Township decides "now" that they will not continue with service in the future. Manager Swayze states that he will need to get that in writing from The Rapid, but that is how he understood the conversation as The Rapid did not want to suddenly discontinue the route regardless of the Township decision.

Chairwoman Puplava suggested the following proposal; Move that the DDA continues supporting negotiations regarding continued bus service. Chairwoman Puplava suggests that a more concrete plan be added to the April agenda to be considered.

Member Lesperance suggests that the proposal also state that the DDA will get detailed statistics and information on local businesses and the community.

Member Vogel stated that a later decision can be made about what information is needed, and believes that a vague proposal is ok now as there is so much information

missing. Member Vogel also believes that the DDA should let The Rapid know which way they are leaning with their decision as soon as possible.
Chairwoman Puplava states that the DDA should also inform the Township Board about how they are leaning, and believes that a committee needs to form in order to evaluate cost, ridership, need, gather public comment, etc.

Member Lesperance states that all of that information is needed as this conversation comes up frequently.

Chairwoman Puplava stated that this information has been gathered in the past, and believes it has not changed much with the exception of the impact of the pandemic in 2020.

Motion was made by Member Lesperance that the DDA consider extending its relationship with The Rapid rather than an immediate termination at the close of contract. Supported by Member DeWitt.

Motion was made by Chairwoman Puplava to amend Member Lesperances motion to remove the word "immediate" and replace it with "termination before September".

The amended motion reads as follows:

Motion was made by Member Lesperance that the DDA will consider extending service instead of terminating before September. *Amended* Motion Supported by Member Kleyla. Motion carried 7 to 0.

Motion was made by Member Lesperance that the DDA will consider extending service instead of terminating before September. Motion Supported by Member Kleyla. Motion carried 7 to 0.

Manager Swayze asked if he should set up a meeting with The Rapid and a representative of the DDA for the purpose of gaining clarity and/or negotiation. Member Lesperance stated that she will volunteer to be part of this, Chairwoman Puplava also volunteered to attend this meeting. Members Stephan and Vogel volunteered to be part of the future bus committee; Member Vogel also stated that he is willing to attend a meeting with The Rapid if needed.

ARTICLE 6. Any Other Business

Chairwoman Puplava stated since there was no earlier public comment, she would allow it at this time.

Assistant Manager Fast stated that there were no members of the public wanting to make a comment.

ARTICLE 7. Adjournment

Motion was made by Member Stephan to adjourn the meeting. Supported by Member DeWitt. Motion carried 7 to 0. The meeting adjourned at 9:59 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rene Growney, Secretary