

DULUTH TRANSIT AUTHORITY

2402 West Michigan Street * Duluth, MN * (218) 722-4426

Board of Directors Strategic Planning Retreat

October 24, 2018

Zeitgeist Center for Arts & Community

2:30 – 6:30 p.m.

MINUTES

Directors Present: Aaron Bransky, President Rondi Watson, Vice President Henry Banks, Secretary/Treasurer Krystal Brandstatter Julie Zaruba Fountaine	Mike Casey Ed Gleeson Tom Szukis	Directors Excused: Joshua Smerdon	Directors Absent:
DTA Staff Present: Phil Pumphrey, General Manager Carla Montgomery, Director of Finance Rod Fournier, Director of Operations Chris Belden, Director of Planning & Grants	Lisa Paczynski, Administrative Assistant Heath Hickok, Director of Marketing Jim Caywood Jim Heilig, Consultant		
Others Present: Barb Caskey, Retreat Facilitator			

Call to Order: President Bransky called the Retreat to order at 2:30 p.m.

Introductions

Participants introduced themselves and provided a summary of what brought them to the DTA Responses demonstrated that all clearly value and support the mission of the DTA and take pride in the organization. The group was asked to self-identify where they fit along the continuum of longest to shortest tenure and physically stand in line by order. Participants were encouraged to observe and value the depth of experience and wisdom provided by those with long tenures as well as the fresh perspective and new energy brought to the organization by those who are relatively new. All perspectives bring value.

Celebration

Participants were asked to identify what's working well now and what they are proud of. Responses include the following:

- * Breadth and extent of experience and commitment (board and staff) is extraordinary
- * Brand new multi-modal facility
- * Existing partnerships
- * Creativity, innovative thinking and willingness to experiment (i.e. electric buses, early adopters of bike racks on buses, one of the first adopters of Google Transit)
- * Personable service/interaction with riders is crazy cool
- * Good blend of new ideas with experience and "been there/learned from that" wisdom to avoid unnecessary challenges
- * High quality staff and management, low turnover, longevity of staff
- * Strong political support
- * Commitment to the mission across all (board, staff, general manager)
- * Strong safety record reflects well despite the challenges of the climate and the hilly terrain
- * Diversity and inclusion throughout the DTA

- * Organization is currently well funded – the ground work has been done on legislation and city levies to support steady, dedicated funding
- * Commitment of drivers from the time they begin training through the beginning of their career and beyond – strong support by all who drive
- * High caliber skills of new general manager (+ pleased he wants to be in Duluth despite the weather)
- * Longstanding relationships with colleges enhances ridership and extends federal transit funds
- * Knowledgeable staff and active board continually brings the rider perspective to the forefront
- * We know our customers/know our clientele and seek to meet their needs
- * Solid funding on MN, ability to extend service to Wisconsin where the funding outlook is different

Meeting Goals

Guiding principles for the discussion were provided and reviewed. Healthy tension vs. apathy was discussed. While today's retreat is intended to enhance communication and reduce unproductive tension, tension as a reflection of passion and commitment can be beneficial. The chaotic theory was also highlighted, which proposes that the most effective working space for organizations is where chaos and control intersect. While this can be uncomfortable for individuals who prefer one aspect over the other, both bring value and are synergistic when combined.

This retreat is intended to provide an opportunity for structured dialogue to increase communication and understanding of roles and responsibilities, clarify expectations and identify opportunities to adjust processes and communication to enhance the effectiveness of board meetings and strengthen relationships between board, staff and general manager.

Vision: What could be different in April (6 months)?

Participants were asked to identify areas where changes in process, communication, understanding or expectations were needed or could bring about positive changes within six months (April 2019). An array of comments was provided during the discussion, which were summarized into broad topic areas and combined with the results of the pre-retreat survey for continued discussion and strategy development.

Communication:

- Communication is better now than a few months ago but still some uncertainty about how/when to ask questions of staff. Clarifying discussion about board respect for staff and questioning to learn, not to challenge.
- What level of orientation and background is needed for new board members beyond the organizational chart? Interest expressed in learning more about the roles and responsibilities of departments. Department heads very willing to provide information but want clarification regarding the level of detail that would be most helpful and appropriate.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Board's role is to provide big picture vision and policy (vs. day to day service/operations) but how and when should this be done?
- Clarify the Board's role in TDP update and determine how to more actively involve the Board
- Relative importance and shared understanding of Board's role. The most important role may be related to fiduciary responsibilities and policy, but is that perceived as the most important role by Board members?

- What is the Board's role in advocacy and providing input on behalf of customers/riders?
- What is the Board's role as ambassadors and representatives of the DTA and how can this be enhanced and supported? Can we feature the Board at the DTC?
- Informal visioning is happening throughout the organization; how to enhance, support and recognize this informal process while also engaging in a more formal process (benefit of both approaches)
- How can the Board identify current gaps in expertise on the Board and make recommendations to the City on future Board appointments to ensure gaps are filled?

Meetings:

- Current structure of subcommittee meetings prior to actual Board meeting is not effective
- No time available at meetings for visioning or big picture thinking
- Not enough lead time to review information before discussion at meetings
- Opportunities to ask questions and receive clarifying responses before board meetings to improve efficiency of board meetings

Public Input:

- Is there a need for a Citizen's Advisory Committee?
- How is public input currently received?
- What is the Board's role in representing customers?
- Is there a need to increase public access to the Board meetings?

Potential changes to implement during the next 6 months were identified (see attached matrix). Facilitator suggested a check-in meeting in a few months to assess progress and identify challenges.

Adjournment

With there being no further discussion, a motion was made by Director Gleeson and seconded by Director Casey to adjourn the October 24, 2018 Board of Directors Strategic Planning Retreat. The motion was unanimously carried – meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Paczynski

Aaron Bransky, President

Date