

MINUTES OF A REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
OF THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF CLARKSTON, GEORGIA  
HELD BY TELECONFERENCE, ZOOM AUDIO/VIDEO  
IN SAID CITY ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

On Monday, September 8, 2025 at 10:00 AM, the Downtown Development Authority of Clarkston, Georgia met in a Regular Board Meeting in-person and by teleconference, Zoom Audio/Video in said City. Mayor Beverly Burks called the meeting to order. The following members of the City Council were present: Vice Mayor Debra Johnson and Councilmembers Sharifa Adde; Yterenickia Bell; Jamie Carroll; Susan Hood; and Mark Perkins. Absent: None. The following City staff were present: ChaQuias Miller-Thornton (City Manager); Tomika R. Mitchell (City Clerk); Yolanda McGhee (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer); Christine Hudson (Police Chief); Richard Edwards (Planning and Economic Development Director); and Laura Moore (City Attorney).

NOTE: Items appearing in these minutes are in the order they were discussed, not necessarily in the order they appeared on the agenda.

**I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Director Garcia called the meeting to order at 900

**II. ROLL CALL**

The following board members were present: Chairperson Johnny Garcia, Vice chairperson Rezwan Amad, Treasurer Nebiyu Ermiyas, Secretary Adria Marshall, Director Beverly Burks and Director Akbar Lassi.

**III. APPROVAL OF THE 9/8/2025, AGENDA**

Adria M. motioned to add to the Proposal for the Passport to Clarkston Digital Flipbook Presentation to Old Business item B. Motion seconded by Nebiyu E. The aye votes were: 4, with the nay votes: 0. Motion passed unanimously.

Adria M motioned to add a joint work session to discuss city real estate matters with Attorney Kyle Williams to New Business as item 7B. Motion was second by Nebiyu E. The aye votes were: 4, with the nay votes: 0. Motion passed unanimously.

Adria M motioned to add a discussion of Amending the day and meeting time of the DDA Regular Scheduled Meetings to New Business as item 7C. The motion was seconded by Rezwan A. The aye votes were: 4, with nay votes: 0. Motion passed unanimously.

Adria M. motioned to approve the 9/82025 Agenda. The motion was seconded by Nebiyu E. The aye votes were: 4, with the nay votes: 0. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **IV. APPROVAL OF THE 8/11/2025, MEETING MINUTES**

##### **a) 8/11/25 Meeting Minutes**

Motion to approve the 8/11/25 meeting minutes was made by Rezwan A. Motion seconded by Nebiyu E . The aye votes were:4 , with the nay votes: 0. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **V. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Any member of the public may address the Board during the time allotted for public comment. Each attendee will be allowed 3 minutes for comments at the discretion of the Presiding Officer. The public comment period will be limited to 40 minutes, and it is not a time for dialogue. If your public comment contains a series of questions, please submit those to the Planning & Economic Development Director in writing. This will facilitate follow-up by the council or staff. The DDA desires to allow an opportunity for public comment; however, the business of the DDA must proceed in an orderly, timely manner.

Chairperson Garcia opened the floor for public comments. No comments were offered.

#### **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

##### **a) Update on Business Survey Findings**

Staff reported that the number of survey responses had increased from approximately ten at the last meeting to twenty, following additional outreach efforts. With the larger dataset, several themes became clearer.

Some responses highlighted concerns about homelessness and crime. Board members acknowledged that while these may be based on perception, they nevertheless influence public opinion and should be addressed. Staff was directed to coordinate with the Police Department to compile downtown-specific statistics on homelessness and crime for presentation at a future meeting.

Survey responses also pointed to needs in business growth and support, including financial resources, attracting new clients, and improving advertising. Several members noted a disconnect between businesses and institutions such as the local college and encouraged closer partnerships to leverage opportunities.

The permitting and licensing process was discussed extensively. Many respondents marked their experience as “neutral,” which members interpreted as hesitancy to openly critique City operations. Staff explained that while the City has streamlined licensing, delays at DeKalb County Fire plan review remain the primary bottleneck. Members expressed concern that these delays, while not the City’s fault, are often perceived by business owners as City-related.

Staff announced that City Council had recently approved new permitting software, scheduled for launch in November, which will allow online business license applications. The Board welcomed this step but emphasized the importance of maintaining in-person assistance for Clarkston’s diverse community. Staff confirmed that a public computer

and staff support would be provided at City Hall. Members recommended that the DDA and City collaborate to host training sessions in November and December to guide business owners through the new platform.

The Board also discussed improving communication regarding zoning changes. Members suggested creating a system to confirm receipt of official notices. Several members also supported a concierge-style model, in which a designated staff member would help business owners through licensing and permitting. Staff noted that the new software would also reduce duplicative paperwork, such as repeated ID submissions.

The discussion returned several times to the issue of efficiency. Staff shared that the City is considering bringing fire inspections and plan reviews in-house, which could reduce delays and strengthen Clarkston's reputation as business-friendly. Members also acknowledged that while survey respondents valued beautification and events, many placed higher priority on direct support services and funding opportunities.

No motion was made under this item. Staff will return at the next meeting with crime and homelessness data, proposed training session dates, recommendations for improved communication, and updates on the feasibility of in-house inspections.

**b) Presentation: Proposal for the Passport to Clarkston Digital Flipbook**

Melanie of Bespoke Design and Development presented the updated Passport to Clarkston digital coupon book concept. The proposal included the creation of an interactive flipbook to highlight local businesses with free basic listings and optional paid premium upgrades.

The Board agreed that all Clarkston businesses should receive a free basic listing for the first year to maximize participation and engagement. Premium options would allow businesses to feature offers, purchase larger listings, or update promotions more frequently, with revenues collected directly by the DDA.

Key points of discussion included frequency of updates, accessibility, branding, responsibilities, and rollout planning. Bespoke confirmed that while free listings would be updated annually, premium tiers could be structured to allow quarterly or monthly updates, with featured promotions refreshed more frequently as needed. To ensure equitable participation, intake forms will be available in multiple languages, hard copies will be provided, and staff will assist businesses with submission. The Board emphasized that the platform must maintain human assistance for those who struggle with online forms.

The branding of the project was carefully considered. While members appreciated the "Passport" concept as a nod to Clarkston's diversity, several noted it may cause confusion. The Board agreed to retain the creative passport-style imagery but to include the terms "coupon" or "discount" prominently in the final title for clarity.

Responsibilities were clearly assigned. Bespoke will design, set up, and technically

manage the flipbook, host the intake platform, and provide ongoing updates. The DDA will manage business outreach, handle collection of revenues from premium listings, and coordinate marketing. Staff will work with Bespoke to establish intake questions, manage communications, and oversee rollout events. Counsel will prepare a contract or memorandum of understanding specifying scope of work, payment responsibilities, and disclaimers clarifying that businesses are solely responsible for honoring their listed offers.

Rollout strategy: The Board adopted a phased approach. The first phase will pilot the platform using businesses owned by DDA board members, allowing the system to be tested internally. The second phase will launch publicly at the City's Trunk-or-Treat event in October, with a promotional station and QR codes for attendees to access the coupon passport. The strategy will include:

- Testing of intake forms by Board members and staff within one week.
- Creation of multilingual promotional materials.
- Partnership with nonprofits, places of worship, and community groups to distribute the coupon passport.
- Integration with the City's Constant Contact newsletters, website, and social media for announcements.
- A defined update schedule (initially quarterly, with potential monthly premium options).
- A press release to accompany the official launch.

The Board recognized the project as a leading initiative that highlights the DDA's commitment to supporting local businesses. A motion to approve the concept and direct staff and Bespoke to proceed under the framework discussed was made by Beverly Burks, seconded by Nebiyu Ermiyas, and passed unanimously (6-0)

**c) Continued Discussion: Digital Coupon Book Project**

Although the agenda listed this item as a continued discussion, the Board did not hold further discussion. Instead, a presentation was given by Bespoke Design and Development on the proposal for the Passport to Clarkston digital flipbook. The presentation outlined the concept, scope of work, and responsibilities of both Bespoke and the DDA. Following the presentation, the Board deliberated, assigned responsibilities, and approved a motion directing staff and Bespoke to proceed with the rollout strategy as presented.

**d) Continued Discussion: Policy Procedure Manual**

Chairperson Garcia noted that there were no substantive updates since the last meeting. Staff confirmed that draft materials had been provided to the attorney for review. The matter remains ongoing and will be revisited once revisions are complete.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

**a) Evaluation and Adoption of Mission and Vision Statement — Georgia Tech Center for Economic Development Research**

Board reviewed drafts from Georgia Tech's Economic Development Research program.

Discussion focused on ensuring compliance with statutory requirements by explicitly referencing business and economic development. Members also expressed concern with the repetition of the word “opportunities” in the draft mission.

A motion to adopt the draft vision statement was made by Director Rezwan, seconded by Director Beverly, and passed unanimously. (6-0)

Motion to Rescind: Following further discussion, a motion to rescind the prior motion adopting the draft vision statement was made by Director Rezwan, seconded by Director Beverly, and passed unanimously. (6-0)

Staff was directed to work with Georgia Tech and the City Attorney to revise the mission and vision statements for presentation at the next meeting.

**b) Joint work session to discuss city real estate matters**

Attorney Kyle Williams explained the DDA’s powers with respect to City-owned properties, including ownership, leasing, issuing bonds, and development partnerships. The Board discussed the importance of coordination with the City Council.

The Board and staff tentatively agreed to hold a joint work session with City Council on September 30, 2025, at 6:00 p.m., prior to the Council’s regular work session.

**c) Discussion of amending the day and meeting time of the D.D.A Regular Scheduled Meetings**

The Board discussed whether meeting times should be adjusted to encourage greater public participation. Members noted that public attendance is often limited regardless of timing, but agreed that Monday mornings may not be ideal for business owners.

Counsel and staff advised that attendance is usually issue-driven.

After deliberation, the Board agreed to maintain its regular schedule of the second Monday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Open house sessions will be held quarterly rather than monthly. Staff was directed to increase meeting promotion through the City’s website, newsletters, and social media.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Adjourned at 11:00 Motion made by Director Beverly. Motion seconded by Director Rezwan. The motion passed unanimously (6-0)