

City of Delray Beach

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Minutes - Draft

Thursday, January 22, 2026

3:00 PM

Joint Workshop with the City Commission & the Downtown
Development Authority
Vintage Gym at Old School Square, 51 N Swinton Ave or Watch on
YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@cityofdelraybeachfl/streams>

City Commission

Mayor Thomas F. Carney, Jr.
Deputy Vice Mayor Angela Burns
Commissioner Tom Markert
Commissioner Juli Casale

Pursuant to Section 3.12 of the Charter of the City of Delray Beach, the Mayor has instructed me to announce a Workshop Meeting of the City Commission to be held for the following purposes:

WS.1. JOINT DISCUSSION WITH THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY REGARDING ATLANTIC AVENUE AND DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION

Mayor Carney called the joint meeting of the City Commission and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to order at 3:00 p.m.

Present for the DDA at roll call were the following:

Dr. Alan Castello, Jim Knight, Brian Rosen, Cole Devitt , and Jule Guaglardi

Alexis Givings, City Clerk, called the roll and the following were present for the City Commission:

Commissioner Tom Markert, Commissioner Juli Casale, Deputy Vice Mayor Angela Burns, and Mayor Thomas F. Carney, Jr.

Also present were:

Terrence Moore, City Manager
Lynn Gelin, City Attorney,
Alexis Givings, City Clerk

Terrence Moore, City Manager, provided an overview of the workshop agenda, explaining that the first item focused on Atlantic Avenue beautification and the second item concerned the future operational role of the DDA at Old School Square. He stated that the beautification discussion was initiated following Commission interest in collaborating with the DDA and emphasized the importance of understanding jurisdictional responsibilities, including those involving Palm Beach County and Florida Department Of Transportation (FDOT). Regarding Old School Square, he noted that recent discussions at the DDA's January 12, 2026 meeting prompted the need for a joint dialogue about potential transitions in management responsibilities.

Laura Simon, DDA Executive Director, introduced the beautification discussion, noting that downtown improvements have been a major focus over the past three years and that Atlantic Avenue remains central to the City's identity as it enters a milestone year. DDA board member Jule Guaglardi stated that significant private investment in downtown has elevated Delray Beach to a premier destination but that public infrastructure has not kept pace. She identified concerns including cracked sidewalks, tree root damage, faded striping, inconsistent signage, aging

streetscape elements, landscaping challenges, and underutilized spaces. She referenced the Bob Gibbs Shopability Study and proposed forming a collaborative aesthetics and design committee composed of City leadership, design professionals, and stakeholders to develop both short-term improvements and a long-term plan. She emphasized that the DDA seeks partnership and a formal seat at the table.

Jeff Oris, Assistant City Manager, presented a high-level overview of City departmental responsibilities in the downtown district. He explained that Public Works oversees traffic management, roadway maintenance, stormwater systems, seawalls, coordination with FDOT and the County, capital improvement projects, and maintenance of City-owned facilities and parking garages. Neighborhood and Community Services, including the Clean and Safe Division, handles litter and graffiti abatement, pressure cleaning, rodent control, sidewalk café compliance, code enforcement, and community outreach. Jeri Pryor, Director of Neighborhood and Community Services, clarified that sidewalks in the district are pressure cleaned twice per month on a rotating basis. Parks and Recreation maintains downtown parks, landscaping, irrigation systems, and fountains, including Veterans Park, Old School Square, and other public spaces. Development Services administers the Form-Based Code, reviews development applications, enforces streetscape standards, manages permits and inspections, and oversees business and alcohol licensing.

Mayor Carney acknowledged that all parties share a common goal of enhancing Atlantic Avenue and asked specifically about the frequency of sidewalk cleaning, noting public concerns about appearance. Vice Mayor Burns asked about opportunities for broader public input beyond the workshop and inquired whether a written maintenance plan exists. Mr. Moore responded that operational maintenance procedures are in place, and the DDA indicated that future public engagement could include committees, town halls, and charrettes.

Mr. Moore stated that monthly coordination meetings between the City Manager's Office and DDA leadership have resumed and would serve as a mechanism for ongoing collaboration. He also noted that any enhancements would need to be considered during the upcoming budget process.

Commissioner Casale suggested opening the discussion to public comment before continuing Commission deliberation.

WS.2.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Carney opened the discussion for public comment and expressed support for the idea of forming a task force composed of City

representatives, DDA members, and members of the public, noting that good ideas are not limited to government bodies. He emphasized that community users and supporters of Atlantic Avenue should have an opportunity to participate in shaping its future.

Jack Indekeu, 33483 On behalf of the Palm Trail neighborhood Stated that residents are highly engaged and interested in improving Veterans Park, which borders their neighborhood. He explained that neighbors have met with the DDA and other stakeholders to explore how the park could be revitalized and reimagined, as they believe it is underutilized and lacks a clear identity. He shared a vision of transforming Veterans Park into a signature waterfront destination that honors the veterans memorial while serving as a space for relaxation, recreation, and cultural engagement. He encouraged strong collaboration between the City and the DDA, emphasizing that downtown is the City's brand and should be invested in accordingly.

Hal Stern, President - Barrier Island Property Owners Association (BPOA), 33483

Spoke about the association's long-standing role in preserving and enhancing the barrier island and public beach amenities. He acknowledged ongoing discussions about Atlantic Avenue's character, historic preservation, and traffic limitations, noting that differing viewpoints exist regarding economic vitality and development restrictions. He stated that the portion of Atlantic Avenue east of the bridge has not received sufficient attention and expressed support for reimagining that area while protecting its unique character. He raised concerns about narrow sidewalks, lack of shade trees, traffic noise, and potential overdevelopment, and emphasized the importance of maintaining the "Village by the Sea" identity. He requested that the BPOA have representation in future planning discussions.

Anthony Bacchus, 33409

Expressed appreciation to the DDA for supporting the Multicultural Youth Festival at Old School Square and for providing space at the Cornell Art Museum to display student artwork. He stated that the opportunity had a meaningful impact on participating youth and their families.

Nancy Chanin, Pineapple Grove resident, 33444

Suggested adding murals to the Old School Square parking garage, similar to those in West Palm Beach, to enhance aesthetics and deter vandalism. She proposed seeking foundation funding or a fiscal sponsor to support the project and thanked the City for recent maintenance improvements.

Cynthia Ridley, Northwest/S.E.T. Community resident, 33444

Urged the City to ensure representation from her neighborhood on any beautification or planning committee. She stated that her community is often overlooked in planning efforts and emphasized the importance of inclusive participation in decision-making.

Seeing no one else present, Mayor Carney closed public comment.

WS.3.**JOINT DISCUSSION WITH THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY REGARDING THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE OLD SCHOOL SQUARE CAMPUS**

Mayor Carney announced that the Commission would move to Agenda Item WS.3 regarding management and operations of the Old School Square campus, and with agreement from the board, allow public comment to occur first due to time constraints of attendees.

Mr. Moore explained that the item was placed on the agenda following the DDA Board's January 12, 2026 discussion expressing interest in an eventual transition plan, noting that the DDA's role was never intended to be permanent and that the City now needs direction and consensus to evaluate future management options, resources, and timelines to ensure the campus continues operating successfully.

Laura Simon, DDA Executive Director added that since assuming management in 2022, the DDA has consistently discussed long-term solutions for Old School Square and wants to collaborate with the City to develop a plan that ensures the campus thrives year-round as a premier cultural center, stating that the discussion is intended as a starting point before presenting their ideas and hearing stakeholder input.

WS.4.**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mayor Carney invited members of the public to speak, reminding each speaker to state their name and zip code and that they would have three (3) minutes.

Annette Jackson, 33446

A longtime volunteer at Old School Square, stated that she has been involved with the campus for nearly 20 years and believes it has flourished under the DDA's management. She described increased activity at the Vintage Gym, Amphitheater, and Cornell Art Museum, including lectures, community events, art shows, wellness programs, and festivals. As a docent at the Cornell Art Museum, she shared that visitors from across Florida, the country, and internationally are drawn to the vibrancy of downtown and consistently praise the museum's exhibits. She noted that attendance and donations have increased and strongly urged the City not

to change management, stating, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Gary Gillespie and Doreen Gillespie Beats

Spoke in support of the Cornell Art Museum, highlighting a current exhibition featuring their mother's artwork. Gary, who works with museums nationwide, shared that other respected institutions have taken notice of the exhibition, reflecting positively on Delray Beach. Doreen described meaningful cultural and wellness experiences at the museum, including yoga programming, and emphasized the importance of preserving the campuses artistic and cultural value amid broader development pressures. Both encouraged continued support of the DDA's leadership.

Mavis Benson 33445

Read a letter from Glaston Leroy of the Gelareh Collective, praising the DDA and the Cornell Art Museum for their collaboration on projects such as Delray Walls, the Art & Jazz series, and immersive art exhibitions. The letter commended Executive Director, Laura Simon and Cultural Arts Director, Maruska Gatto for their leadership and vision, and emphasized the importance of the staff and volunteers in making the museum a cultural hub. Benson added that beyond attendance numbers and statistics, the greatest accomplishment has been creating a space "where Delray comes together."

George Long 33444

Expressed appreciation for the wide range of educational programming held at Old School Square, including lectures hosted by the Delray Beach Historical Society. He shared personal examples of programs he attended and described the campus as active, enriching, and valuable to the community.

Christina Morrison 33483

Praised the DDA's work but suggested that the campus could return to a public-private partnership model, similar to its structure in the past. She noted that while the previous arrangement was not perfect, it operated for 30 years and relied heavily on private fundraising rather than tax dollars. She expressed concern about the City's financial future and rising budget pressures, stating that Old School Square could potentially be managed by a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization to reduce reliance on municipal funding.

Seeing no one else present, Mayor Carney closed public comments.

The discussion continued for WS.3.

Laura Simon, DDA Executive Director submitted a presentation to provide historical context and highlight progress made since the DDA assumed

management of Old School Square in 2021, after the City and prior nonprofit operator separated, explaining that the museum reopened first under Marusca Gatto, Cultural Arts Director, followed by the amphitheater and campus, while the City handled completion of the Creative Arts School and the Crest Theater was later removed from the DDA's management scope. She emphasized that the DDA initially agreed to a short-term arrangement but is now in the first of two possible five-year terms.

Marusca Gatto, Cultural Arts Director, reported that despite starting with no supplies or infrastructure, the museum has hosted 29 exhibitions featuring 685 artists, attracted over 38,500 visitors, generated more than \$81,000 in donations and \$82,000 in store revenue, rebuilt trust with artists and the community, and established collaborations with major arts organizations through intentional curation.

Suzanne Boyd, Marketing Director, explained that the team rebuilt branding, communications, digital platforms, media outreach, and marketing channels from scratch to counter the perception that the campus was closed, while also creating a permanent brand identity and website that will remain with Old School Square regardless of future management.

Laura Simon added that the campus has drawn over one million visitors, hosted more than 300 events, generated about \$772,000 in supplemental revenue beyond City funding, and delivered major media exposure and economic impact, stressing that investments made by the DDA stay with the campus. She stated that while the DDA is proud of its work, the complex, multi-use cultural campus requires long-term planning, specialized oversight, and possibly a strategic plan and feasibility study, noting that government alone may not be best suited to manage such a venue and that short funding horizons make long-range programming difficult.

Marusca Gatto emphasized that maintaining continuity is critical because the museum has rebuilt credibility and is now positioned to secure major sponsorships and donations.

Dr. Alan Costilo, DDA Board Member, praised staff for operating successfully with limited funding, reduced staff, and significant challenges, including an un repaired Crest Theater that was expected to generate revenue and warned that without stronger City collaboration and resources, continued operation may not be sustainable, though he supports whichever path staff determines is feasible.

Brian Rosen, DDA Board Member, mentioned the DDA has built strong digital infrastructure and visibility for the campus but needs clear direction

and multi-year financial commitments from the City to continue, stressing that the issue is not willingness but operational viability.

Jule Guaglardi, DDA Board Member, argued it would be premature to transition management given the DDA's success under constraints and suggested greater support could allow the campus to reach its full potential.

James Knight, DDA Board Member acknowledged the team's dedication but mentioned either increased funding or a structured transition plan is necessary, noting the campus cannot operate properly without adequate resources.

Mayor Carney clarified that past nonprofit operators received roughly 25-30% of their total budgets from the City, but also generated substantial independent revenue, highlighting the financial context for comparison.

Commissioner Casale noted that the prior nonprofit operator of Old School Square had received about \$950,000 annually and control of the theater.

Mayor Carney acknowledged the DDA did an excellent job reviving the campus after it had gone "dark," criticized the former operator's exit and handling of assets, and reiterated his belief that a public-private partnership (PPP) is the best long-term management model because such entities can raise funds and operate more flexibly than government.

Commissioner Casale praised the DDA's performance despite limited funding and said she would support increasing financial support and extending their role.

Jule Guaglardi, suggested additional funding and a dedicated staff position could address gaps in entertainment-specific expertise.

Vice Mayor Burns agreed the DDA has done outstanding work but emphasized that the key issue is sustainable funding and suggested an entity capable of raising outside revenue may be necessary.

Mr. Moore explained that after the City partnered with the DDA, funding structures shifted to include revenue-sharing (initially 80/20, later 90/10 in the DDA's favor) and said any decision about continuing the arrangement requires evaluating total financial structure and policy direction from the commission.

Commissioner Markert called the DDA's work "heroic," urged an unbiased, fact-driven evaluation of options rather than prematurely favoring a PPP model, and said any transition would likely require at least a year, while

DDA Board Member James Knight emphasized the need to set a clear timeline for decisions.

Brian Rosen clarified that the DDA's goal is cultural programming rather than profit, noting most revenue is reinvested and little net profit exists.

Laura Simon stressed the need for a professional feasibility study and strategic plan to determine the best long-term management structure.

Commissioner Casale asked the City Manager to clarify what direction his office believes the City should pursue.

Mr. Moore stated that his office's goal is to gather feedback from the commission in order to obtain clear direction.

Commissioner Casale proposed initiating a professional feasibility study to ensure Old School Square can reach its full potential regardless of who manages it.

Mr. Moore responded that such a study would likely cost about \$50,000-\$60,000 but said he was comfortable moving forward if directed, explaining that after the study the City could hold another joint workshop to review findings, evaluate options, and determine what role the City itself could play.

Mayor Carney agreed that a feasibility review is necessary to understand what is realistically possible for the campus before deciding on any management model.

Mr. Moore emphasized that the process would be step-by-step, combining analysis, strategic planning, and evaluation of financial and operational feasibility.

Commissioner Casale sought confirmation that nothing would change operationally in the meantime and stressed the importance of maintaining current functionality and funding stability.

Suzanne Boyd, Marketing Director noted that uncertainty in annual funding creates operational anxiety.

Mr. Moore outlined a structured timeline, including a February 3rd commission meeting to discuss Crest Theater options and begin shaping strategic planning elements, followed by additional joint meetings and financial analysis to develop recommendations. He stated that full commission consensus was required before proceeding.

Mr. Moore received consensus to move forward with planning and analysis.

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Carney adjourned the meeting at 6:12 p.m.

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