



NEWS AND NOTES

Downtown Neighborhood Association of Savannah, GA Inc.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH 19

Membership Meeting

MARCH 15

Grant Application Deadline

APRIL 16

Membership Meeting

APRIL

Board Nominations and Election

MAY

Annual Meeting/Spring Picnic

50 DNA CELEBRATES 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Amy Brock, Communications Chair / Print Newsletter Editor

2024 marks the Downtown Neighborhood Association's (DNA) 50th anniversary! Formally established in 1974, the DNA is the only group in the National Historic Landmark District looking out for the best interests of its residents. This collective effort is essential to preserve our unique heritage and ensure a thriving community for generations to come.

Throughout this year, we will be sharing photos and memories from the past 50 years on our Facebook, Instagram and website. If you have a piece of DNA nostalgia, we invite you to send it to communications@savannahdna.org.

Are you interested in getting involved with the DNA Board of Directors? Elections will take place in the Spring with several seats opening up. Watch your email newsletter and our website for details on running for one of the open positions.

There has never been a better time to be involved with the DNA!



2023-24 DNA Board of Directors

L-R Row 1: Joyce McDonald, David McDonald, Steve Edwards; Row 2: Amy Brock, Debbie Dyke, Marysue McCarthy, Paul Cobet; Row 3: Tim Nichols, Sabrina Nagel, Erika Snayd, Kelly Holmes, Kacy Cosentini-Plotycia; Not pictured: Denise Flojo

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Downtown Neighborhood Association of Savannah, GA Inc. is to promote the quality of life in Savannah's National Historic Landmark District, protect Savannah's unique downtown environment, and advocate for public policies which support these objectives.



facebook.com/savannahdna



instagram.com/savannahdna



SavannahDNA.org



HOLIDAY TOUR OF HOMES AND INNS BRINGS THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

By Joyce McDonald, 2023 Holiday Tour of Homes Chair

We did it again! For the 48th year, we hosted the Holiday Tour of Homes and Inns and shared the beauty and hospitality of Savannah with hundreds of guests. With success comes the need to thank people who contributed to the achievement. First, the tour would not have been possible without the gracious home and inn owners. Oh so much work went into the outstanding decor, sparkle of holiday decorations, and historic descriptions. Their generosity is at the heart of the tour's success.

It also would not have been possible without our dedicated community. More than 200 docents were stationed at the homes and inns to provide the details that entertain and enlighten. Other volunteers were at tour headquarters, on the trolleys and in the squares to guide people to the tour destinations. It was incredible teamwork. A special thanks goes to the head docents and the tour committee—who gave so much of their time and energy for months to ensure the homes and inns were represented in the very best way.

I wanted to pass along what one homeowner said after the tour: "Everything was great. The docents at my house were fantastic and engaged and charming and I'm really happy to have participated and helped." That is exactly what we hope to achieve and it's only possible because of Savannah's volunteer spirit.

But the real reason for all the joy is that we were able to raise money to support our Neighborhood Initiatives and Community Partners Grant Program. There will be a call for applications in late February and recipients will be announced at the May picnic.

In the meantime, let's bask in the joy of a job well done thanks to many of you. The saying goes "it takes a village" to achieve success. I think it takes a lovely, protected historic district with caring, generous volunteers.



HOLIDAY TOUR OF HOMES PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY DNA TREASURER TIM NICHOLS



NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVES & COMMUNITY PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

Community organizations seeking funds will select one of the following categories as the primary basis for the proposal:

Beautification / Preservation in the Historic District

Arts and Cultural Life

Youth Development

Humanitarian Causes

TO APPLY, VISIT
SAVANNAHDNA.ORG/GRANT-PROGRAM
 DEADLINE IS MARCH 15, 2024.



QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT

By Marysue McCarthy, Tourism and Quality of Life Chair

"When Savannah becomes a better place to visit than a better place to live, we have a problem," said Mayor Van Johnson when speaking to the DNA membership meeting in November. An ad hoc committee of resolute members, comprised of downtown residents both directly and indirectly affected by the enormous growth of tourist intrusion into our daily lives, is working extremely hard to keep that from happening. The tipping point of overtourism has increasingly threatened our quality of life and "We're not going to take it anymore."

Our concentrated call to action came with our March membership meeting when the committee presented its findings on the almost unbelievable number of trolley tours flowing through certain residential and commercial areas. The blaring narratives intrude on every aspect of living and working in our beautiful city. A six-point list of changes the city can implement now were enumerated:

- 1. Enforce ordinances currently on the books concerning tourism.*
- 2. Require all tours to use "in-ear" technology.*
- 3. Forbid ALL tours (including slow rides and carriages) from using amplified speakers.*
- 4. Reduce all walking tours to no more than 15 people.*
- 5. Implement the new bicycle ordinance.*
- 6. Require ALL tours to end at 8PM on weeknights and 9PM on weekends.*

Additionally, trolley tour companies are asked to reduce the actual number of tours, daily, weekly, monthly, and annually; and require all new tour buses to be electric or LNG with a deadline for conversion of the entire fleet within 5 years.



The March presentation got everyone's attention, including businesses and professionals who are also negatively impacted by the noise and disruption caused by so many tours and air-polluting vehicles on our streets. DNA president, David McDonald requested a meeting with City Manager Jay Melder to hear our concerns for residents' ever-diminishing quality of life. The City Manager tasked the city's Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) - comprised of five business representatives, four neighborhood reps and one historical preservation rep - to dedicate its monthly meeting in October to hear our concerns. There, we again stated our six-point list of changes.

In the intervening months, the DNA committee continued to press for changes and encouraged media coverage which resulted in not only several articles in our local newspaper and other media outlets, but an article in the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

At the December TAC meeting, and as a result of our two well-documented presentations, the trolley companies spoke to both the DNA and the public, introducing a possible solution to amplified speakers in trolleys without going to in-ear technology. They proposed the use of directional speakers which are still being developed. An actual demonstration of the speakers is anticipated in early 2024. DNA input into future trolley routes, frequency, noise pollution, etc., has been promised by the companies.

Noise intrusion into our daily lives is just a small part of the changes that must be made to preserve our neighborhood's quality and character. These noise issues are just not related to tour groups and trolleys, we are also hearing increased noise from rooftop bars and hotels. Ongoing analysis of tourism impact, as well as continued pressure on city officials and tour companies to listen and act to improve are uppermost in our purpose.

As our mayor has also said, "Everyone wants to visit Disneyworld, but no one wants to live in Disneyworld." The Downtown Neighborhood Association is working extremely hard to keep that from happening.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

David McDonald, President

Welcome to 2024 and our 50th Year!

This year the Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) will celebrate its **50th anniversary**. While the DNA has been around longer, as evidenced by the 1967 document found by member Tru Helms last year, it was not truly incorporated until 1974.

The Board has accepted 1974 as our "official" start as a formal organization.

If 2023 was any indication then this year is going to be filled with both challenges and achievements. Last year it became apparent that the tourist industry is determined to diminish the reasons we love and enjoy our community.

WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT EACH OF THESE PROBLEMS:

- The 40,000 noisy trolleys roaming our streets
- A "community" pool under construction in the heart of the National Historic Landmark District
- Ever growing walking tours (more than 35,000 annually)
- Loud rooftop bars playing music late into the night, and
- The sub-dividing of lots to build "McMansions"

AS A RESULT OF OUR INVOLVEMENT TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF OUR COMMUNITY, WE WERE ABLE TO:

- Push the city to enforce existing ordinances restricting trolleys from entering Washington and Warren Squares before 10 am. Increased enforcement has almost eliminated these infractions.
- Develop recommendations—after meeting with the city and trolley industry—that we will push this year to reduce the number of trolleys and walking tours city wide.
- Help coordinate a stop work order on the construction of the pool on West Perry St for the use of STVR renters; DNA also provided financial support for the lawsuit to prevent its completion.
- Ask that the city issue a citation to a business that refuses to reduce, or eliminate its loud, live, music from its rooftop bar. The owner has yet to comply with the citation and the city is attempting to serve a court summons on the owner as a result. (Residents should be able to quietly watch TV in their homes without competing with loud music from 2-4 blocks away!)
- Request the city implement an ordinance to eliminate the sub-dividing and recombination of lots without a public hearing. (Prior approvals were done by staff without public input.) This law has already had an impact as the first request for recombining multiple lots, on East Bay Street, has gone to the Planning Commission for a public hearing. The DNA opposed this request.

WE ARE NOT RESTING ON THESE ACHIEVEMENTS.

In 2024 we will continue to work with the city and the tourism industry to achieve a better quality of life and balance between residents and visitors. As we progress on these efforts, we will provide updates to each of you.

CONTINUED

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

Plans for 2024: Celebrating DNA'S 50th Year

200th Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade

DNA is excited to announce we will have a float in the 2024 Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 16. Information on how you can participate will be communicated via email soon.

Annual Meeting and Spring Picnic

In May we will have our annual meeting and picnic that will commemorate our anniversary. At the picnic we will announce the grant recipients from this year's community grants program that is funded by the Holiday Tour of Homes and Inns. More than \$55,000 was awarded to community non-profits in 2023.

The Return of Camp Spooky

In the Fall, the Board hopes to bring back Camp Spooky, a beloved annual family-friendly Halloween event that was put on hiatus due to the pandemic.

Future of the Holiday Tour of Homes and Inns

In December we will **hopefully** have the 49th Holiday Tour of Homes and Inns.

As you can see it is going to be an exciting year for the DNA, but we need your help.

If I may do a short sales pitch now: **we need financial sponsors for these upcoming events.** Support from you and/or your business will be recognized prominently to show our appreciation and your commitment to the DNA. Please contact me at president@savannahdna.org for more details if you are interested in helping.

When I say, above, that the Holiday Tour of Homes will hopefully occur this year, it is because it is getting more difficult to find homeowners willing to participate and the leadership to organize the event. For the past two years no one has run for election to serve as the head of the tour committee. As a result, Joyce McDonald stepped up as the Chair so that the tour would continue. Our volunteers on the committee have done a terrific job—the tour this year was a huge success because of their hard work. But we must find people willing to serve and with experience in key areas in order to continue putting on the tour. The new Board in May will make the ultimate decision on its fate.

I want to end on a positive note. The Board is excited about 2024 and appreciate the support that we have received from each of you. We will continue to work to defend and improve our quality of life and historic preservation in our community.

Without your support we would not be successful in petitioning the city to make changes or listen to our concerns. When city, or county, officials attend our monthly meetings they are both surprised and impressed with the level of involvement by residents. This level of participation is what makes them listen. So, thanks each of you for joining and supporting the Downtown Neighborhood Association. And please encourage your neighbors to join us as we continue to protect and preserve our community.

THANK YOU TO OUR DNA SPONSORS

Lillian and Kerry Breitbart



BOOKS ABOUT THE SOUTH
THE BEEHIVE FOUNDATION



STACI DONEGAN
SEABOLT | CHRISTIE'S
REAL ESTATE | INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE

*Are you interested in supporting the Downtown Neighborhood Association?
Visit SavannahDNA.org to learn about sponsorship opportunities or email info@savannahdna.org*

PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

By Sabrina Nagel, Public Safety Chair

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) has consistently been dedicated to ensuring that our community remains informed about public safety matters. This commitment involves active collaboration with the Savannah Police Department (SPD), fostering open communication lines to address members' concerns effectively. Chief Gunther has been attentive to Downtown's unique needs and concerns, as has Captain Nowinski, our Northwest Precinct Captain who has been responsive and very helpful in keeping us informed.

DNA hosted a very informative membership meeting with the Savannah Chief of Police, Lenny Gunther and officers of the NW precinct where they shared updates on crime stats, SPD vacancies, the positives and the areas that need improvement. In the fall, members of the DNA along with several other neighborhoods celebrated our first responders with National Night out in Pulaski Square. It was a fun filled event where neighbors got to meet and thank many of our first responders and SPD officers. This annual event serves to strengthen neighborhood alliances and reinforces police-community partnership.

DNA Annual Ride Along with SPD



Ward captains have done a phenomenal job this year of disseminating information in a timely manner. In late January the DNA had a successful annual ride-along with the SPD, code enforcement officers and members of our community discussing issues and sharing concerns from each individual ward. New technologies being implemented this year to battle illegal STVR's and a collaborative site for residents to share camera footage of public areas, among others are strong efforts that will aid in fighting crime and disruptive tourism downtown.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the SPD, Code Enforcement officers, our diligent Ward Captains, and our proactive neighbors. Their collective efforts are pivotal in ensuring the safety and well-being of our city, making it a more secure and enjoyable place for everyone.

INTERACTIVE CRIME MAP
communitycrimemap.com

SPD LAUNCHES NEW INITIATIVE

KEEPSAVANNAHSAFE.ORG

The Savannah Police Department (SPD) is deploying a new technology to assist with real-time criminal investigations and is asking for our assistance. The SPD would like residents with cameras that are focused on public spaces and streets, in front of their homes or in their lanes, to consider signing up and registering their addresses and cameras here.

The SPD asks that residents not include cameras focused on private property.

This website alerts the SPD investigators that a resident has a camera that could assist them when a criminal event occurs nearby.

Questions or concerns should be directed to
Corporal Joshua Flynn: JFlynn@savannahga.gov
Learn more and register at **KeepSavannahSafe.org**

WARD CAPTAIN UPDATE

By Kacy Cosentini-Plotycia, Ward Captain Chair

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) is actively expanding, with new Ward Captains like Vance Peacock for Pulaski Ward and Stephen Morton overseeing Beach Wards (Bartow, Davis, Mercer). Sue Gorecki joins as the Lamar Ward Captain, covering the Eastern Wharf. Our Ward Captains convene quarterly to address common concerns.

This year, we bid farewell to long-serving Ward Captains Mike DeCook (Brown Ward) and Mark Hill (Jackson Ward), who've contributed significantly since the late 1980s.

Our established Wards host regular social events, fostering a strong community spirit. In 2024, we aim to establish Western Wards, including Currie Town, Berrien, O'Neil, Walton, Choctaw, Minis, Gaston, and Garden Ward.

Newcomers to downtown or DNA are encouraged to join Ward happy hours and events!

Unsure of your Ward? Email dnawarden@gmail.com with your address for Ward assignment. We thank our Ward Captains for another successful year.



Longtime DNA Ward Captains
Mike DeCook and Mark Hill



Forsyth Park area neighbors gather to
decorate for the holidays

HISTORIC DISTRICT BOARD OF REVIEW AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION UPDATE

By Steve Edwards, HDBR/MPC Liaison

Two of the most important goals of the DNA is the protection of the historical integrity of the Landmark Historic District and the preservation of the residential character of the District. There are always challenges to each of these goals, and this year was no exception.

In our effort to monitor and address these objectives, we regularly attended the public hearings of the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR), the Metropolitan Planning Commission, and (in one case), Savannah-Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission. Where we saw proposed projects that we considered to be detrimental to our members and other residents of the District, we advocated that approval of the projects be denied or that the proposal be modified.

Some of these projects are well known to many of our members. These included proposals for short-term vacation rentals to be constructed at 501 East Bay Street, the "SAV" sign at City Market, and the large pool on West Perry Street. The first two were denied, and the pool is now the subject of litigation, which the DNA is supporting. The DNA was also closely involved in the recently enacted restrictions on the subdivision of lots, which we believe should be an obstacle to some of the more troubling projects in the District.

Members are encouraged to review proposed projects and to contact the DNA with any questions or concerns about whether individual projects comply with the City's zoning ordinance. Members should also be aware that most exterior changes to buildings in the District that are visible from the public right-of-way require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HDBR.

MEMBERSHIP MUSINGS

By Erika Snayd, Membership Chair

A new year means it's time to reflect on the past and plan for what's to come. For me, I listen to an assortment of podcasts to help me with perspective, keep me grounded and reframe what is important. One of the most resounding themes for 2024 seems to be how to break the cycle of action vs. inaction. This could be avoidance of something, due to fear or feeling uncomfortable. It could also be getting caught up in continuous loop of complaining about things that seem out of your control. Little do we realize that sometimes the smallest actions can make the biggest changes, especially when multiplied by other like-minded people. I have come to see this first hand over the time spent with DNA and other organizations, even though my part seems so insignificant.

So much of our lives are impacted by where we live, places we frequent and those with whom we associate. Coming together with neighbors, frequenting local businesses and supporting initiatives to protect downtown is so crucial to maintain what makes Savannah so unique.

There is so much to accomplish this year with our City as we continue to build, grow and attract visitors from all over the world. Membership in the DNA not only provides you with updated information and a social outlet but also a voice to ask the hard questions, share your opinion and help maintain what we all love so much about our Historic District.

Although our membership is growing, active members equate to only 2% of our downtown residents. Could you imagine the impact we would have if we could add even one more percent each year. You may think you are too busy to attend meetings or prefer to remain on the periphery, and that is ok, but your membership and financial support is still critical to our success. Please consider renewing or joining and referring others to support an organization that continues to care, thrive and work to ensure the fabric of our City is preserved.

