



After Restaurant Week and ArtPrize donations, Downtown Development Authority questions how they spend money

Published: Wednesday, May 09, 2012, 4:07 PM Updated: Thursday, May 10, 2012, 6:42 AM



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GRAND RAPIDS, MI – The purse-strings were open at the Downtown Development Authority on Wednesday as board members approved a \$25,000 grant to promote Restaurant Week and \$20,000 to curate and coordinate sites for ArtPrize exhibits.

The board also heard a pitch for \$105,000 from the city's Office of Special Events, which coordinates permits and reservations for some 100 public events in the city.

Two months after approving a **\$7,500 donation for LaughFest** and one month after approving **\$7,000 for Cinco de Mayo**, some DDA board

members said they want to establish policies for DDA funding of downtown events.

"I think we need to develop an attitude, a position or perspective of how many years do we support these new enterprises," said DDA chairman Brian Harris. "When do they have legs?"

Harris said he raised the question because he does not want the DDA to provide funding to an activity that otherwise could not stand on its own.

Board member Jane Gietzen said she does not want the DDA to become like some philanthropic foundations which only provide startup money.

Restaurant Week provides a return on the DDA for its members while the ArtPrize money funds the city's payments to a curator that helps find appropriate locales for ArtPrize entries on city property, Gietzen said.

Doug Small, president of Experience Grand Rapids, said the DDA money will help promote the fact that Restaurant Week is moving from November to the third week in August this year.

Small said they decided to move the event to August after the Society of Automotive Engineers booked a large



File photo | Mlive Media Group

This past weekend's Cinco de Mayo festival got a \$7,000 donation from the Downtown Development Authority.

convention for the same week in November.

"Fruits and vegetables are at their best and our restaurants are very excited to be using them," Small said.

Janet Korn of Experience Grand Rapids said last year's Restaurant Week generated between \$500,000 to \$700,000 in revenue for 37 downtown restaurants.

The \$20,000 ArtPrize contribution will be used to hire curators and site coordinators to coordinate the installation of ArtPrize entries in public spaces, said DDA Director Jay Fowler.

Todd Tofferi, director of the city's office of Special Events, said most of the events his department coordinates are in the downtown area. The cost of his office expenses are split between the DDA, the city's Parking Services Department and fees charged to event sponsors.

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