

# DDA alleyway plans tabled, but approved

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Plans for improving a downtown Romeo alleyway have been approved, but simultaneously postponed.

The Romeo Downtown Development Authority (DDA) tabled its southwest alleyway improvement project at an Oct. 7 special meeting upon discovering a business wasn't comfortable with the proposed changes.

However, the Village Planning Commission approved of the plans at its Oct. 8 meeting, saying that all the requirements have been met. Village officials will meet with local business owners to see if an agreement can be reached regarding the project.

The DDA also voted to reconvene its Central Business District Trash Removal/Recycle Dumpster Committee to look at plans for constructing a dumpster corral in the northeast quadrant of the village this year.

To begin the alleyway plans before colder weather moved in, special meetings were held by both the DDA and the Planning Commission to expedite the project.

The original plans were modified with elevation changes to improve water drainage in the area, causing the commission to examine it once more.

DDA Chairperson Bob Hart said the modified elevations were made when the DDA's engineers examined the area and determined a new elevation would be needed to drain water away.

"We took their advice," he said. "This was, all things considered, to be the best option on how to deal with what we're trying to accomplish."

The proposed changes would've affected the alley behind businesses such as Romeo Coney Island and Dr. Michael Kehoe's office.

The plans also called for Thee Office Pub and Cookery and Younger's Irish Tavern to modify the elevations in their alley entrances at an estimated cost of \$2,250.

At the DDA's Oct. 7 meeting, Ted Czajka, Thee Office Pub and Cookery owner, said after reviewing the changes he wasn't for the modified plan.

"I don't want my property to be disturbed," he said.

He said it would cost him around \$3,200 to \$3,500 for the cement work to coincide with a plan that he doesn't wish to transpire. He said water has drained fine for the nearly 30 years he has owned it, and supported the initial plans that didn't call for a change.

"With the existing elevation I think it'd be perfect, I don't really see a problem with it," he said.

Nicole Sengstock, manager of Thee Office Pub, echoed his concerns.

"After reviewing everything, sitting down and talking about it and careful consideration, we're just not comfortable with changing everything on the back of our building," she said.

Director Jason Arnott said he was surprised, as he thought the businesses were in support of the plan. When asked, he said there was no way the DDA could still go forward with the plan without affecting the establishments.

"To resolve the grading changes and the foundation settlements around the historic buildings, from my understanding we were kind of on the same page on how to approach everything, and that's what led to

this," he said.

However, at the Oct. 8 Planning Commission meeting, commissioners said the plan met the qualifications they required and unanimously approved of it.

"They still thought it was okay, and had the plan approved anyway," said DDA Vice-chairperson Christine Malzahn. "Now it's shovel-ready in case we get cooperation from the businesses for it."

At that meeting, Village Clerk Marian McLaughlin and Planning Commissioner Dennis Jokinen offered to speak with Thee Office Pub's owners to see if a compromise can be reached.

In the meantime, with the project tabled, the DDA will look at constructing a dumpster corral in the northeast quadrant of the village, where businesses such as the BP gas station are located.

"The northeast is the quickest fix because we talked to the property owner at BP and got clearance from him as to where to locate the corral itself," said Malzahn.