



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
April 12, 2021 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM – Virtual via Zoom

John Flores called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on April 12, 2021. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

Present: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre, Iris Frank (late)

Absent: Jenn Pearson

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from March, with an amendment adding Iris Frank into the votes. Iris was late to the March meeting, however was present for the second half of the votes. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks

John Flores reported that as of today, 2.2 million NJ adults are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, with hopes that all 4.7 million will be vaccinated by June 30. On April 19, anyone 16+ can sign up to get vaccinated. John reported that as he traveled down Main Street recently, he noted that the Downtown Somerville's buzz is coming back, we just have to do it safely. He noted that the DSA has to continue to be diligent with social distancing, mask wearing, etc. and continue to present itself as a model for how to get through this difficult time and how to re-open safely and responsibly. As a board, John suggests members should be involved in the community assuring the public that the DSA is making decisions with public health and public safety in mind. Some criticism was received about bringing back cruise night, and as members of the DSA board, John noted the responsibility to communicate to the public that Downtown Somerville is taking public health very seriously. The DSA is modifying the event calendar with safety as a top priority (i.e. nearly all social media messaging talks about

social distancing and being safe downtown). John Flores additionally reported that the town is working to bring back the use of parklets this year.

Executive Director Report

Update on Public Art Plan

Natalie reported that she received a draft of the public art plan last week and worked with WAG (Weingarten Art Group) to make some changes and update information. The DSA should be getting a pre-final version of the plan included with priority sites and areas for activation within the coming weeks before the next meeting. Natalie hopes to have WAG join the May DSA meeting, or put together a special meeting to have WAG present their plan then discuss how we can work with community partners to put together that plan. Natalie added that she will send the art plan draft to the entire board for review before submission.

Update on Branding/ Logo Selection

The DSA held a community survey in regards to the new DSA logo that lasted approximately one month, with an edit to allow additional feedback and comments. Natalie presented the results to the board. Survey results are as follows: a vast majority of respondents favored logo #1 “DS swirl” over logo #2 “SoMe”. Out of all feedback questions, including questions about visual aesthetic, diversity and inclusion, merchandise, etc. logo #1 “DS swirl” came out on top. Additional comments (81 responses) included feedback ranging from “we love option 1” to “I don't care for either one”. Natalie will take this feedback to the Marketing Committee who will then pull comments that will be most useful and implement them. Natalie also reported that the marketing committee plans to engage in 1-2 focus groups with community members to work with oxford to create the final version. The DSA board agreed this is a good process to move forward. The next Marketing Committee meeting will be held on April 15 2021.

Update on DOT/ Parklets

Kevin Sluka reported that the DOT is currently not allowing parklets this year. Kevin added that he put together a group of 12 municipalities with similar needs and sent an email earlier today to gauge each district’s situation. Two municipalities mentioned they were going to approve some sort of efforts to approve outdoor dining within the DOT right of way (i.e. using sidewalks, etc.) - Kevin will report back with more details. The DSA hopes to be able to use these parklets this year as expanded dining and art installations. There is a possibility that these parklets can be used on side streets if they are not blocking traffic (i.e. Davenport Street, South Bridge, etc.).

Update on Budget

Natalie reported that the budget was approved by Borough Council at a public hearing separate from the presentation. No questions from the public were asked.

Update on Virtual Arts and History Tour

Natalie reported that the DSA is currently moving forward with efforts on the virtual arts and history tour with a list of approximately 15 arts and history locations. Samantha is working with videographer Civic Eye Collaborative to tour each of these sites and receive any necessary footage so that once the planters are in place downtown, we can complete the project. This project has a few phases including videotaping each site, recording voice over with descriptions, and creating an interactive YouTube experience where people may tour these sites virtually. This project will be completed this season and will allow community members to experience Downtown Somerville safe and virtually. Mike Kerwin thanked the DSA for their efforts and for including the historic Somerville Fire Museum.

Update on May Events

Natalie reported that the DSA is looking into hosting a restaurant weekend in May, along with bringing back original annual summer events such as cruise nights, summer stage concerts, and starlit cinema movie series. The DSA is in the process of creating some marketing materials for these events. Natalie also reported that Khai Nguyen from Maintain Bespoke Barbering and Samantha Shaw, DSA Program Coordinator, are working to start up an Asian-American Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration on May 22, 2021. Samantha is working on creating community partnerships with Ken Lee of the Somerset County Asian Heritage Celebration Committee. Various Asian performance groups will take place on Division Street from 1pm-4pm to align with the DSA's goals of celebrating diversity in Downtown Somerville.

Update on Intern Search

Natalie reported that the deadline for DSA internship applications is April 30, 2021. 6 resumes have already been submitted. Natalie added that if anyone knows individuals that are interested in an internship with the DSA, Natalie will send them the information that is needed. The DSA is excited to have an intern start mid-May, and the DSA has already received great candidates.

Update on Placemaking Initiatives

Natalie reported that the Black History Month installation on Division Street has come down, and a new Shop Small installation has been put up. The Black History installation was designed by Natalie, and the Shop Small installation was designed by Samantha. Many community members and small business owners have been taking selfies and photos with this installation. Natalie reported that in May, the DSA will be working with representatives of the Tour of Somerville to collaborate on a collage-style installation about the Tour of Somerville. Natalie additionally reported that community partners at the Robert Wood Johnson Proud Center are looking to partner with the DSA for an installation in June to celebrate Pride Month. After June, this installation will come down to make way for additional tables, chairs, and umbrellas on Division Street.

Natalie additionally reported that one more placemaking project is in the works at the Giardina walkway. Natalie is waiting on pricing from AVS florals in Somerville, and is working with other groups to bring this project to life. The vision is to have the arches

at the Giardina covered with faux flowers, lighting, and signs along each arch that say “shop, dine, enjoy Downtown Somerville.”

Discussion: District Safety Initiatives/ LiveView Technology

Natalie reported that the DSA is working with mental health services as well as Somerville PD to work together to address any issues regarding individuals causing trouble within the SID. The board agreed that issues on Division Street and other areas of the district have grown significantly with folks misusing the street for drug and alcohol usage, etc. Initial strategies last year included communicating to business owners that issues should be reported to Somerville PD directly. The DSA is also looking into a customized ambassador program with a hospitality element, and the presence of uniformed Downtown Somerville employees to manage the district.

Natalie presented new OMNI-surveillance camera technology to the board with a few different model options for mobile security to be used for Division Street and special events within the district. The DSA is looking into a few different models including strobe lights, speaker systems, and mobile systems that are available on a 12 month rental program. The hope is that the presence of surveillance cameras will not only curb bad behavior, but also become an asset for the Somerville PD for witnessing visual evidence of events and issues. Natalie reported that these systems record 24 hours a day, and the data records directly to the camera itself which can then be transferred to cloud based storage to back up data. This unit also provides the ability to have footage viewed as a live stream. The board discussed hosting a trial for one mobile unit to understand a public response, and then proceed with that information. The mobility will provide the ability to use this unit in additional locations and at additional events than those on Division Street.

Mike Kerwin suggested making a motion to authorize the DSA to move forward with a D3 mobile surveillance unit on a trial basis, and based on the experience of that trial, delegate a screening committee consisting of John Flores, Tony Brokenborough, Kevin Sluka, and Natalie Pineiro to execute a contract for that unit. The board agreed that after the trial is complete, a motion will be made to approve the 12 month contract.

Discussion: Amendment to Arts On Division (AOD) Resolution Designating them as “Curators of Art”

Natalie reported that a memo was provided for how the DSA should engage with Arts on Division, specifically in regards to sponsoring events and what that relationship would look like for partnerships. Currently, a borough resolution states that AOD has the sole jurisdiction to make decisions regarding arts in the district, and the DSA does not have to be involved in the process. Natalie advised requesting that this resolution be amended by Borough Council with language pertaining to projects happening within the special improvement district (SID). The DSA values AOD as curators of art in Somerville, and wishes them to continue their efforts. The DSA is looking to be be

involved in this process, given the DSA's investment in dollars towards strategic planning and public art plans. The DSA suggests this process should be done together, to dismiss conflict of interest. Rick St. Pierre supports this as a prior Arts on Division Chair, stating this partnership is long overdue as Arts on Division recognizes the DSA as an advisor role. Rick St. Pierre added the importance of making sure each organization feels supported by one another. Natalie reported that she will work with Kevin to draft language to update this resolution.

For Approval: Yoga on Division Street by Pureflo Yoga

Natalie reported that Pureflo Yoga at 8 W Main Street is looking to host an event on Division Street Sunday May 16 at 3:00PM for their Spring Fling Mashup Yoga, as well as Sunday June 20 at 8:00am for their Sun Salutations for Summer Solstice.

Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve this event, Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre, Iris Frank

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

For Approval: Somerset County Business Partnership Sponsorship of Outdoor Venue Guide

Natalie reported that the DSA is looking to provide a \$2,000 sponsorship of the Somerset County Business Partnership Outdoor Venue Guide.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve this sponsorship, Mark Aziz seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre, Iris Frank

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Payment Authorizations

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve March 2021 payment authorizations. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre, Iris Frank

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Finance reports

Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve March 2021 finance reports. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, Rick St. Pierre, Iris Frank

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Rick St. Pierre asked if the DSA has any updates on the treescape program. Natalie reported that the DSA is looking to address the Kyma tree grate location next, due to the large issue of walkability at that sidewalk.

Kevin Sluka reported that a new DOT crosswalk has been installed at the intersection of Union and Main, near Alfonso's Trattoria. This project has been in the making on Main Street's state highway, with 3/4 of the project funded by DOT and the remainder covered by the Borough through the regional center partnership grant (2018 grant). The hope is to help with pedestrian issues in that location, and the borough will evaluate other locations moving forward to help with walkability and safety.

Kevin also reported that the governing body will be discussing marijuana legislation at the next Borough Council meeting. This could impact land use and economics. If the governing body takes no action by August, legislation is fully enacted in Somerville and the Borough would be unable to limit transactions, cultivation, etc. which may have an impact on the SID. The governing body will look at each of those areas along with a retail component. A cultivation component may be available indoors, and retail is an area that the governing body is looking to explore. A discussion at the next Borough Council meeting will be held on April 19, 2021.

Public Comment

John Flores opened up the meeting for comments from the Public. No comments from the public were made.

Adjournment

John Flores adjourned the meeting.

Meeting minutes recorded by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator on April 12, 2021.