



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.

Monday April 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes

6:00 PM - remote (Zoom conference call)

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on April 13, 2020. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

Present: Kevin Sluka, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Mark Aziz, Mike Kerwin, Jenn Pearson, John Flores, Iris Frank, Tony Brokenborough, Natalie Pineiro (Executive Director), Samantha Shaw (Program Coordinator)

Absent: None

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2020 board meeting minutes. John Flores seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Mark Aziz, Mike Kerwin, Jenn Pearson, John Flores, Iris Frank, Tony Brokenborough

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks

Jane Kobuta reported that she is pleased with all of Natalie and Samantha's updates to the community during this time, and thanked them for all of their hard work remotely.

Executive Director Report

Strategic Plan/ Rebrand Update

Natalie has been in conversation with Support Center and reported that we can continue on with the Strategic Planning process remotely (via Zoom). Natalie asked the board if we would like to move forward with this process virtually, or hold until we can gather in person. All agreed we should keep going virtually. This next step will be a 2-3 hour session focused on the DSA vision & mission. Mike Kerwin suggested preparing prior to the meeting, and adding a focus on health & wellness.

Billboard Windows

Natalie reported that we received willingness to update the graffiti panels, per Kevin Sluka reaching out to the appropriate building contacts. She added that the DSA has new designs ready, which have been sent over to a large format printing service (SpeedPro) and we are currently waiting for approval. Installation and production may be on hold, or will take time given the

current climate. Natalie shared samples of what the new billboard windows will look like, which the board greatly approved.

COVID-19 Update

Natalie reported that she and Samantha have been working to keep everyone up to date. The DSA has two main focuses right now: to make sure that messaging is communicated, and businesses are supported.

Natalie and Jane have been in conversation about incorporating a gift card program to support Downtown Somerville businesses by purchasing a gift card from each of the open restaurants/retailers and donating those gift cards to first responders.

The DSA recently became a Grow With Google partner, a resource that can be used as a district management corporation and as a small business. Natalie added the resource provides tutorials, tools and materials to promote webinars, large-scale events, and more. The DSA will provide more information about this resource soon.

The board suggested ensuring that the DSA has a plan so that when Downtown Somerville has the ability to re-open, we are ready.

Marketing Update

Natalie reported that some merchants do not have an e-commerce site set up to continue to do business at this time, and the DSA plans on helping with marketing and providing resources for shop owners to build their business. Natalie added that at-home video content has rolled out for businesses that may not be able to operate right now, but still want to engage their audience. Virtual events, quarantine bingo, additional video promotions for Downtown Somerville, and more will be added to the DSA's new website and social media pages. The DSA has also been sending out frequent emails to business owners about important updates that are coming from state and federal government.

Natalie added that the DSA is keeping social media content fresh, posting daily, and the DSA has launched a new website - www.somervilleathome.com. This website contains the most recent list of businesses and restaurants offering curbside pickup, takeout, delivery, shipping, links to retailers, experiences, online opportunities, and more. The DSA has also been in contact with TapIn to, using those resources for leaderboard ad space, press releases, posting a list of open businesses, and more.

Emergency Crisis Fund

Tony Brokenborough mentioned that we may lose a few businesses due to the closures of coronavirus and asked if funds can be re-allocated to save some of these businesses within our downtown, in addition to marketing efforts. The DSA has become an approved PayPal & GoFundMe charity, and Natalie reported that the DSA is looking at how to move forward and incorporate an emergency crisis fund for Downtown Somerville's businesses. A proposal to start an emergency crisis fund is discussed. Natalie suggested creating an independent committee to discuss funding. Mike Kerwin added that we may follow the same criteria that the federal SBA program is following, in which everyone is eligible for a grant (does not apply to major chains) so that a committee wouldn't be responsible for choosing who receives the grant. Kevin Sluka added that the discussion is still premature, and we are currently waiting on bills to be passed regarding taxation.

Next Steps

Natalie reported that a draft budget will be sent by end of week, which can then be looked at to discuss where funds are currently going and where we can pull from a trust account to fund a project like an emergency crisis fund to help businesses with overhead (i.e. rent). Kevin and Iris Frank added that the DSA can look into removing infrastructure and beautification for this year, and allocate those dollars towards the emergency fund.

Future of Events

Natalie reported that the DSA is cancelling all events through May, and many downtowns throughout the state are cancelling events through June as well. Cruise night will be postponed, new dates TBD. Kevin added that election date has been moved from June until July, and the borough is taking it one week at a time. It is unlikely that school will come back in session. The board agreed that the DSA can look into smaller scale events for the future, broken out throughout multiple locations with multiple businesses hosting rather than holding one large gathering. The board discussed looking at starting in June, so that we may move forward with movie licensing and booking bands.

Review of Block by Block Proposal

Natalie included a proposal using Block by Block, which includes services to the Downtown Somerville business district such as parking lot service, side street service, more visibility, concierge programs, etc. This is just a visual to look into using a company of this sort, when the time is right. For now, we will need to supplement our existing program adding an emphasis on cleanliness and good press once the town is able to reopen.

Meetings

Finance Committee meeting will be held virtually via GoToMeeting on Friday, April 17 at 9am
Infrastructure Committee meeting will be held virtually via GoToMeeting on Monday, April 20 at 9am

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve payment authorizations and the March 2020 Finance Report. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Jenn Pearson, John Flores, Iris Frank, Tony Brokenborough
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None
Absent: Mark Aziz (present for meeting, absent for this approval)

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for comments from the public.

RanD Pitts, owner of Evolve Clothing Gallery, mentioned that he is pleased with what the DSA is doing. He suggested reaching out to landlords to start introductions, lighten the load for some business owners and help open up the conversation. Natalie agreed that this is doable. The board discussed sending out a letter to property owners to encourage them, and send out positive messaging letting them know what the DSA is doing for them and for the business owners during this time.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to adjourn the April 13, 2020 board meeting. Tony Brokenborough seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Tony Brokenborough, Iris Frank, Mike Kerwin, Jenn Pearson, John Flores

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Absent: Mark Aziz

Meeting minutes recorded by Samantha Shaw (Program Coordinator) on April 13, 2020.