



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.  
August 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes  
6:00 PM - Virtual Meeting

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on August 10, 2020. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

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

Absent: Jenn Pearson

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve the last board meeting minutes of July 13, 2020. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks:

Jane Kobuta reported that she has no remarks and is looking forward to the launch of the Downtown Somerville Parklet Project.

Executive Director Report

***Update re: Virtual Arts/ History Walk***

Natalie reported that at the July meeting the board approved a not-to-exceed dollar amount that would cover this entire virtual project. At this point, the DSA is working on moving forward with this project and will be in touch with Civic Eye Collaborative as well as resources such as the Historic Advisory, Arts on Division, etc. to confirm walk locations and get this project into the rotation as quickly as possible.

***Update re: Billboard Windows***

Natalie reported that the billboard windows have now been approved by JSM at the old asian market location. Speedpro large format printing services will be conducting a site visit this week, then these large long-term window coverings will go into production. One side focuses on arts, history & culture of Somerville, and the other side is focused “beyond main street” - highlighting business off of Main Street including Casa Luna, Revive, Project Pub, etc. The next set of billboard window coverings will be focused on Division Street businesses.

### ***Update re: Sanitizer Stands***

Natalie reported that sanitizer stands are now out across the Downtown Somerville district, each filled with sanitizer. Custom stickers will be produced that note "...sponsored by the Downtown Somerville Alliance" including social media information, etc. to be placed on each of these stands. There are 17 stands total throughout the district ranging from Borough Hall to Somerville Homemade Ice Cream. Two ADA compliant sanitizer stands are also present on Division Street.

### ***Report on Meeting With Tim Deluccia/ Vacancies***

Two new vacancies have been reported in the Downtown Somerville district, including Chicali Mexican Grill & Studio Barre. Chicali has already been rented out - Yokohama is moving out of the JSM redevelopment building, and into Chicali's location. Studio Barre is still vacant at this time. Additionally, 7 properties are currently listed with Tim Deluccia and there are other "perceived vacancies" including Candyland Crafts (currently been rented by The Only Game In Town and used as storage). The DSA has attempted to get in touch with The Only Game In Town to use this space for window coverings. The property next to A Votre Events Services LLC is currently being rented and paid for by a vitamin & juice shop, who is planning on coming into the district and has begun working on the space. The old Provident Bank location as well as old Alpine Flooring locations are still on the market at this time.

Natalie also reported that Main Street Gourmet Deli is not closing - they are instead rebranding to Oink and Moo BBQ, a popular BBQ food truck seen throughout the tri-state area. They will be under the same ownership, with a new partnership with Oink and Moo BBQ.

### ***Cancellation of Mood Media***

Natalie reported that the DSA has cancelled their subscription with Mood Media, the company that has provided music for the speaker system throughout Downtown Somerville. This system hasn't been used in 9 months. If power outages occurred throughout the district, the Mood Media system would reset the clock and music would play throughout the district at 2am. This system couldn't be shut off without the police going into Borough Hall to disconnect the system. The DSA is currently looking for a new provider with a remote/ wireless system.

### ***Side Note: Parking Enforcement per Jane Kobuta & Kevin Sluka***

Kevin Sluka reported that Somerville Borough is looking into bringing back a part-time parking enforcement officer by mid-September to begin activating machines in parking lots/ issuing warnings again. The hope is to collect some money without going through a formal enforcement process. Natalie reported that many other districts have already started some level of parking enforcement including Westfield, Metuchen, Summit, etc. Natalie added that the Borough look into creating areas that are 10-15 minute spaces dedicated for Curbside Pickup so that the public may still use this option. Kevin reported that parking enforcement is currently operating under the honor system, so their presence is back but their enforcement is more relaxed than it had been pre-COVID. Additionally, Kevin reported that a notice had been received from JSM (part owner of 1/3 of the Lot 4 spaces) that they will be vacating these spots to use for their development and tenants.

### ***Large Mural - West End***

Natalie also added that the DSA is looking to complete a removable wall mural (produced through Speedpro) to help the disconnect between the central part of Downtown Somerville's district and the West side. The hope is to place a mural at the Verizon building which will help bring people down, and Natalie thanked Kevin Sluka for making the Verizon connection.

### **DOT/ Parklets**

Kevin Sluka has connected the DSA with DOT, who had been communicating with the Borough about Downtown Somerville's first and second request to close down Main Street (both of which have been denied). DOT has presented Somerville with two opportunities. The first is closing Union Street (between Alfonso's and Wolfgang's), however, the Fire Department did not approve this closure. The second opportunity is using parklets throughout the district. An application was submitted by the DSA on Friday, and the hope is to hear back by tomorrow 8/11 or Wednesday 8/12.

Natalie reported that these parklets can be put together and installed throughout the next week once confirmation is received, and a ribbon cutting will be set up with Borough Council, DSA board, and business owners.

Additionally, the DSA is requesting approval for safety fencing to be combined with parklets. Each parklet will have a wooden barrier wall, though it is anticipated that DOT will come back and ask for some type of reflective safety barrier. Natalie has sourced materials from a company called MLR international, product is called Multigate which folds down to a compact size and can be used for other events i.e. Village Brewing Company's Oktoberfest on Division Street.

Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve additional funding to add safety features to the parklets (priced at approximately \$5,500) with any additional safety costs included in this approval. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Tony Brokenborough, Jane Kobuta, Kevin Sluka, Rick St Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Mark Aziz, John Flores, Iris Frank  
Nay: None  
Abstain: None  
Recuse: None

### **Regional Center Partnership Grant: Som-Pop Incubator/ Feeder Program in relation to Business Retention & Recruitment**

Natalie reported that the DSA has been working to help Somerville eliminate and fill vacancies. Current works have been working with a retail consultant to bring brands and niche boutiques into Somerville, and introducing retention programs with current businesses. Natalie added that there currently is not a feeder program for businesses to get introduced to Main Street. Many property owners are weary of taking a chance on brand new businesses going into their spaces, so the DSA has conceived a pop-up/ incubator program that enables 4-6 vendors to get Main Street experience with the help of the DSA, and potentially transition these folks into a permanent brick-and-mortar space. This concept, dubbed "Som-Pop," would entail a \$40K grant provided by the Regional Center Partnership Grant that would go towards rent, marketing and advertising, any fittings for the space, etc. If the businesses transition into Downtown Somerville, the DSA would help provide them with 6 months of support so that they don't turn over. This concept has been submitted today, and the DSA is awaiting next steps for the Regional Center Partnership Grant. Natalie additionally reported that a case study about pop-ups in Toronto listed that in the 5 years they ran the project, 32 pop-up shops launched with 15 permanently leased, 11 participating landlords, and commercial vacancy rates decreased from 17% to 6%.

### **New Commercial Series via Civic Eye for Optimum and Jazz Fest Spot**

Natalie reported that Civic Eye Collaborative is working on new commercial footage to encourage that Somerville is currently open for business featuring outdoor dining, concerts, and other

things as we emerge from COVID-19. This differs from the previous DSA commercial video done by Civic Eye, which sent a message that Somerville was still open for takeout during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. This new professional video will be produced for Optimum as well as Jazzfest. The total budget for each video (including (2) 1 minute spots and (2) :30 second spots) is \$6,325. Natalie mentioned that these spots would focus on merchants that have not been shown in previous videos, and that Somerville is a safe place to go.

Mark Aziz made a motion to approve the budget for these commercials, Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

### ***Off Agenda: Smoking on Division Street***

Natalie reported that it has been brought to the DSA's attention that a group of individuals frequently smokes at the end of Division Street. Due to Division Street being listed as an active road, the DSA is unable to "enforce" no-smoking policies. The board questioned who has the authority to enforce tickets, and may no-smoking rules be enforced during gatherings and events? Natalie added that there are many programs and initiatives that include children and families, and wondered if this group can potentially be moved elsewhere where they wouldn't interfere with families. Kevin Sluka noted that the DSA & Borough Hall will work together to discuss legal parameters that may apply to recreational areas, etc. regarding smoking.

### ***Off Agenda: Somerville Homeless Population***

Natalie reported that the DSA has been working with Somerset County partners, mental health services, and the Somerville Police Department to address this issue. Natalie met with our Somerville Police Chief a few months ago, who insisted that whenever anyone in Somerville witnesses folks sleeping on benches, etc. that dispatch should be called to send someone out to move these folks along. Natalie added that several businesses have complained that "nothing is being done" and petitions have been in discussion to remove benches throughout the district. Natalie reported that the district wants patrons to feel safe and comfortable walking down Main Street, and individuals from the public do not know who is safe and who is not. Natalie and the board mentioned a specific individual, Ricardo, as an ongoing safety issue and members of the board as well as Councilman Rand Pitts discussed their own negative, unsafe experiences with this individual as well as additional aggressive individuals of the homeless population. Some board members also agreed that this population has been sleeping on/hoarding Somerville's benches more frequently, and this has become a safety issue downtown.

Natalie reported that the board should work to agree on an expectation on how to resolve this issue, and activate business owners, merchants, etc. to get involved as well. The board questioned how to handle these situations such as: extra officers on the streets, if the town should continue to call every time they witness a negative interaction, if the police should work on making these individuals feel less comfortable, if the town/ Police Department should add additional mental health services and resources, if there is an overall communication issue, etc. Kevin Sluka added that the Somerville PD is working on being more equipped to do this (i.e. hiring social service members rather than officers) to find these folks the appropriate resources they need. All board members agree that having Somerville turn a "blind eye" to this issue will not benefit the downtown, and certain mental health services may be necessary. Natalie reported that a sub committee will be created to discuss the desired outcome, and this commit-

tee will sit with the Police Department to see how they can help us. Natalie also asked that any members who are interested in getting involved with this committee please email her directly.

***Payment Authorizations/ Finance Report***

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve payment authorizations. Kevin Sluka seconded same.

Yea: Tony Brokenborough, Jane Kobuta, Kevin Sluka, Rick St Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Mark Aziz, John Flores, Iris Frank  
Nay: None  
Abstain: None  
Recuse: None

Jane Kobuta made a motion to approve the finance report, Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Tony Brokenborough, Jane Kobuta, Kevin Sluka, Rick St Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Mark Aziz, John Flores, Iris Frank  
Nay: None  
Abstain: None  
Recuse: None

***Public Comment/ Adjournment***

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for public comment. No members of the public made comments at this time.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to adjourn the August 10, 2020 board meeting. Kevin Sluka seconded same.

Yea: Tony Brokenborough, Jane Kobuta, Kevin Sluka, Rick St Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Mark Aziz, John Flores, Iris Frank  
Nay: None  
Abstain: None  
Recuse: None

Meeting minutes are provided by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator, on September 10, 2020.