



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.  
December 14, 2020 Meeting Minutes  
6:00 PM - Virtual/ GoToMeeting

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on December 14, 2020. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

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

Absent: Mark Aziz

The assembly joined the dais in a salute to the flag.

Jenn Pearson made a motion to approve the November 2020 Meeting Minutes. Kevin Sluka seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

#### Chairwoman Remarks

Jane Kobuta reported that she will not continue on as chair of the Downtown Somerville Alliance Board of Trustees in 2021. She added that she has enjoyed every minute of her time on the DSA Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees thanked Jane for her fantastic service and for her commitment to Downtown Somerville.

#### Executive Director Report

##### **Update on Small Business Saturday and Holiday Jubilee**

Natalie reported that Small Business Saturday, despite the pandemic was a great success. Sidewalk sales and raffles were held which encouraged community members to support multiple businesses to receive grand prizes.

The Downtown Somerville annual Holiday Jubilee was held virtually this season with a professionally produced hour-long program produced by Creatif Media Group. 30 short Holiday commercial messages were also recorded for Downtown Somerville's businesses which were featured during the program. Very positive feedback was received from the community about the program and keeping Somerville safe. Natalie extended her thanks to the Board of Trustees for lending their support to host this program virtually.

##### **Update on Branding Process**

Natalie reiterated logo feedback from last month's meeting to Oxford, who is working on a second iteration of the versions chosen. Various versions will be presented and displayed on items such as t-shirts, floor graphics, etc. This presentation of logos with color should occur by January 2021. Once approved, Oxford will complete a social media audit for the DSA as well as compile a brand booklet, which the DSA can then turn over to create a new website. The goal is to have all items complete by February 2021.

### **Update on Smoking Ordinance**

A new Division Street smoking ordinance was introduced at the last Somerville Borough Council meeting. The Borough of Somerville took the recommendations of DSA & Environmental Committee to put together an ordinance that met the needs of all. Kevin Sluka reported that the updated ordinance removed the banning of smoking on Division Street, replacing it with verbiage similar to "smoking to be allowed unless district events occur." Signage will be created that specifies smoking is prohibited during events which will be placed during the time of the event. This ordinance also allows for the Borough of Somerville to create a smoking designation, if deemed necessary. This will go up for public hearing and adoption next Monday, December 21, 2020. One objection has been heard which suggests that this ordinance should reflect Division Street as a non-smoking area, similar to parks.

### **Update on letter to Council re: Rerouting of Route 28**

Natalie reported that a letter has been drafted with the approval of the DSA Executive Committee addressing the desire to reroute State Route 28 from Main Street to Veterans Memorial Drive. The DSA will meet with members of Borough Council to discuss this matter further in hopes to join forces with community partners that can assist if Borough Council decides to move forward in engaging the state to reroute State Route 28.

### **Update on Annual Audit**

Natalie reported that the DSA Audit was conducted has been conducted and reported that no major errors were found. A few recommendations were given as to listing categories in Quick-Books and how the DSA may present its budget. Those two items were taken into consideration moving into 2021.

### **2020 Year In Review**

Natalie reported that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Somerville was traveling uphill with the primary concern of the DSA involving increasing marketing and foot traffic. The DSA original 2020 goals included completing a strategic plan for Downtown Somerville, completing rebrand and website design, drafting a comprehensive maintenance program to include cleaning, landscaping, and handyman services, completing a walkability study during the 2nd quarter of 2020, installing digital kiosks throughout the downtown and creating a public art plan.

The spread of COVID-19 after March 2020 caused the DSA to shift priorities to jump into conservation mode in order to help businesses survive mandatory shutdowns and quarantines throughout the last 9 months. COVID-19 related priority shifts included infrastructure (beautification, cleaning and sanitizing), marketing and advertising support for businesses, retention and recruitment, and virtual events.

The DSA increased outputs of communications to the businesses throughout the year. This included additional constant contact emails regarding COVID-19 updates from the state, funding programs for small businesses, as well as messages to the public with increased marketing on social media. Natalie reported that a new news/ blog website for Downtown Somerville was also

created to keep the community up-to-date with Somerville happenings during COVID-19 - [www.somervilleathome.com](http://www.somervilleathome.com).

Natalie reported that the DSA infrastructure budget shifted to an enhanced maintenance program through ABS (Affordable Building Services) to include items such as additional days of services, sidewalk sweeping, disinfecting high touch point places such as benches and parking meters, adding additional landscape services, purchasing hand sanitizing stations throughout the district, and lastly launching the Downtown Somerville Parklet Program - installing street parklet structures to extend sidewalks throughout the district to accommodate increased outdoor dining efforts.

Natalie additionally reported that increased marketing and advertising dollars were spent this year to directly benefit Downtown Somerville's business community. In addition to social media and physical signs, the DSA had entered a year-long advertising contract with TAPinto and Edible Jersey, displayed advertisements on two billboards (RTE 287 and RTE 28) advertising shop small, took out 3 rounds of commercials on Optimum (reiterating that Somerville is open, COVID-safe, and encouraging folks to shop small), leveraged digital advertising join [nj.com](http://nj.com), TAPinto, and launched a billboard windows initiative to create large scale infographics for the district on vacant storefront windows.

At the present time, total district vacancies are at 21 total. Five are under construction/ renovation, two have temporary occupancy, and Downtown Somerville currently has six incoming businesses projected.

The Downtown Somerville Alliance rolled out the Downtown Somerville Small Business Rebound Fund amounting to \$55,000 for business owners, as well as hosted 2 rounds of gift card donations to RWJ. \$3,000 worth of gift cards were purchased from Downtown Somerville restaurants which were then donated to RWJ frontline workers. Additionally, the DSA is currently running a Holiday Meal/ Gift Program for 16 families through Empower Somerset. The DSA also applied for and was selected for the Regional Center Partnership Challenge Grant (\$40,000 for Som-Pop/ Ville-Pop Program), hoping to open by Memorial Day 2021.

Additionally, the Downtown Somerville Alliance hired a retail consultant to help strategically present the district to higher-end brands for the purpose of recruiting anchor stores and additional retail as the district emerges from COVID-19.

Natalie reported that 2020 virtual and socially distanced events included socially distanced Summer Stage concerts, a new socially distanced Artisan Market, virtual Pride month celebrations, a virtual Wine and Chocolate tasting, a socially distanced Local Love event, a socially distanced Hispanic Heritage Month celebration, a socially distanced Small Business Saturday event, and a virtual Holiday Jubilee celebration. Cancelled events included St. Patrick's Day parade, Girls Night Out, Starlit Cinema, Cruise Nights, Holiday Market and a live in-person Holiday Jubilee.

2020 key community partners include the Borough of Somerville, Somerset County, RideWise, and RWJ Somerset, with RWJ Somerset including a \$10,000 sponsorship, as well as inviting Natalie to be a part of the RWJ Latino Council.

Projects in transition for 2021 include a public art plan to be completed in January of 2021, a Downtown Somerville rebrand and website design to be complete before the end of the first quarter in 2021, a virtual arts and history walk to be complete before the end of the second

quarter in 2021, and a walkability study to be complete before the end of the third quarter in 2021.

The Board of Trustees, as well as Eric Alvarez (6-year Somerville resident), expressed gratitude for DSA members Natalie and Samantha for doing a fantastic job holding together the town in 2020.

### **Board Vacancy Appointments**

Natalie reported that it was the recommendation of the Nomination Committee to reappoint Iris Frank and John Flores to the Downtown Somerville Alliance Board of Trustees for a second term of 3 years.

Mike Kerwin made a motion to reappoint Iris Frank and John Flores. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

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

### **Resolution to update bylaws to reflect flexibility in Board size (no more than 12)**

Natalie reported that during the November 9, 2020 meeting, the Board of Trustees agreed to create a resolution to amend all sections of the bylaws to increase total membership of the Board of Trustees to up to 12 members instead of 9.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve this resolution as of December 14, 2020. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

Yea: Iris Frank, Jenn Pearson, Tony Brokenborough, Jane Kobuta, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, John Flores  
Nay: None  
Abstain: None  
Recuse: None

### **Discussion on presenting Strategic Plan to Council**

John Flores will present the Downtown Somerville Strategic Plan plan to Borough Council. Mike Kerwin will be present on the call. This will take place on Monday, December 21, 2020.

### **Discussion about DSA representation to Architectural Review Board**

Mike Kerwin reported that he attended the previous two ARB meetings as a DSA representative. Responsibilities of the DSA include ARB sending the DSA all signage that would be placed within the district including lettering on windows, facade improvements, signage, etc. The representative from the DSA would review those plans to ensure harmony with the vision of the district. This signage then gets voted on and approved by ARB. Moving forward, Natalie Pineiro will serve as the DSA ARB representative with Rick St. Pierre as backup.

### **Payment Authorizations and Finance Reports**

Rick made a motion to approve the November 2020 payment authorizations. Tony Brokenborough seconded same.

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

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve the November 2020 finance reports, Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Jane Kobuta made a motion to open the meeting to the public. No comments were made from the public.

Kevin Sluak made a motion to adjourn the December 2020 Board of Trustees meeting.

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

Meeting minutes recorded by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator on January 4, 2021.