



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
July 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM - Virtual Meeting

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on July 13, 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, Jenn Pearson

Absent: Iris Frank

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

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

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks:

Jane Kobuta reported that the peaceful protest demonstrations in town are still well received. In response to closing down Main Street, Jane received correspondence from Mayor Sullivan and Senator Kip Bateman stating that the commission has asked that Somerville revisits moving outdoor dining to the curb first, prior to a second full request for closing State Route 28. Additionally, Jane reported that the next Somerville Council Meeting will take place next Monday, July 20.

Executive Director Report

COVID Update/ Presentation on Dining/ Press Conference Discussion

Natalie reported that the DSA is focusing on supporting outdoor dining, as Somerville is considered a dining destination. Extra effort will be put into pushing suitable outdoor dining options, as the National Dining Association suggests that hundreds of millions of dollars will be lost in the restaurant sector which affects recruitment and retention for Downtown Somerville. The initial Somerville Borough request to close off main street State Route 28 was denied. It is estimated that for every table lost, restaurants are losing anywhere from \$600-1000 per table in revenue, a critical hit to restaurants. The intention behind closing main street served two main purposes, one to allow restaurants the opportunity to recoup tables and dollars, and to allow a safer area to shop and dine downtown, giving patrons adequate space to social distance and giving space free of obstacles for those who rely on pedestrian ADA compliance. The option to close off parking spaces and utilize this as additional walking space is deemed by Somerville an unfeasible option with liability, safety, and ADA compliance.

Natalie reported that the DSA has been working with the Borough of Somerville to pilot a parklet program in the outdoor dining areas with the most congestion (i.e. Kyma & Verve strip, Cafe Picasso, and others). The DSA will work with Community Partners, Borough of Somerville, RideWise, and Somerset County to craft a permanent parklet project for submission to DOT/ State of NJ. Benefits of permanent parklets include beautification, expanding footprint, preserving walkability, etc. Parklets are constructed using concrete or wood as permanent yet movable fixtures. Suitable barriers include planters, indestructible materials, jersey walls, and wheel stops. The board expressed a desire to move forward with fast action to preserve Downtown Somerville's dining population and receive approval from DOT.

Natalie reported that the DSA is also working on the following programs to provide additional support to Downtown Somerville businesses:

- DSA Rebound Fund Grant Program
- Outdoor Shop Small/ Dine Small Event
- Community Picnic Event - currently working on permission from Somerset County to use Courthouse Lawn
- Sponsorship of Smart Signage
- Leveraging Somerville At Home Website & Social Platforms - for takeout/ curbside pickup menu options

The DSA & the Borough of Somerville are additionally hoping to request a permanent re-routing of route 28 onto Veterans Memorial Plaza.

Smart Signage

Natalie reported that the DSA can explore the sponsorship of Smart Signage options for restaurants to promote safety and cleanliness. This includes sensors that are affixed to tables for users to access restaurant menus, websites, etc. using a completely touchless method. The cost is approximately \$10 per sensor, as well as an additional cost for a

small circle sticker to use as advertising space. SpeedPro is putting together formal pricing options for the DSA. General feedback is that many restaurants are already using touchless options in the form of QR codes on their tables, which is a no-cost option for the DSA. The idea behind the DSA sponsorship is the use of brand identification, uniformity, and links to the Somerville At Home website.

Business Closures (Actual and Projected as of July 13, 2020)

Actual:

- Lili's Tailor Place

Projected:

- Meadows Frozen Custard
- Jean Ralph Thurin (relocating)
- Main Street Gourmet Deli
- Chicali's Mexican Grill
- Isabelle's Bridal

Update on Strategic Plan

Natalie reported that a link to the strategic planning documents folder (including the previous in-depth strategic plan) has been passed along to the board. The board will receive a doodle poll link to coordinate the second virtual round of strategic planning.

Need for Additional Storage Space

Natalie reported that the DSA garage has been thoroughly cleaned out, though as the DSA purchases new equipment, and with the storage of added holiday equipment (i.e. igloos, Division Street ornament, etc.) there is a need for additional storage space. Anthony of Alfonso's Trattoria has two garages available up for rent, located directly behind the DSA's current garage. One garage contains a loft space above, to maximize storage. The cost for both garages is \$200 per month on top of the current payment of \$2,000 every 6 months for the DSA's current storage location.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the rental of the two additional garages behind Alfonso's Trattoria for DSA storage purposes. Mark Aziz seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Virtual Arts/ History Walk Follow Up

Natalie reported that an update has been given to Civic Eye Collaborative that the DSA is still working on following up with Somerset County to move forward with this project.

Billboard Windows Follow Up

Natalie and Kevin Sluka reported that the DSA still awaits approval for the Billboard Windows project. Rick St. Pierre is willing to take the current graffiti panels. In the meantime, Natalie reported that the DSA will be producing A-frame signage and floor graphics to promote traffic onto the side street businesses (i.e. Doughty, Davenport, Bridge/ High Street, etc.)

Update on Sanitizer Stands

Natalie reported that the sanitizer stands have shipped out last week via freight, and are expected to be in before the end of this week. These sanitation stations will be placed along Main Street, on street corners as well as Division Street.

Payment Authorizations/ Finance Report

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the finance report. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

Yea: Iris Frank (present for this approval), Jane Kobuta, Tony Brokenborough, John Flores, Kevin Sluka, Jenn Pearson, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Mark Aziz

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Public Comment/ Adjournment

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for public comment.

Fred Wied of Somerville Borough Council expressed gratitude for mentioning ADA compliance as well as viable options to promote social distancing on Main Street, as this has been a topic of concern from members of the public. Fred asked if the parklet program would come out of the DSA budget, to which Natalie replied yes. A question was also raised about funding for a picnic event at the Somerset County Courthouse Lawn. Natalie reported that the hope is to increase this into a district wide picnicking event with multiple district partners with lawn space (i.e. Borough Hall, United Reformed Church, etc.) and the DSA would work with businesses on picnic boxed meals, blankets, etc. to help promote outdoor dining options. The DSA would help sponsor and create marketing materials for this event, as the goal is to help bring restaurants more patrons.

Mark Aziz made a motion to adjourn the July 13, 2020 board meeting. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Meeting minutes are provided by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator, on July 13, 2020.