



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.  
Monday June 8, 2020 Meeting Minutes  
6:00 PM - remote (Zoom conference call)

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on June 8, 2020. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

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

Absent: Mark Aziz, Tony Brokenborough

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2020 board meeting. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

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

#### Chairperson Remarks

Jane Kobuta reported that the protest demonstrations in town have been quiet and respectful, which is a great reflection of Somerville. She added that with the reopening of the town approaching on June 15, she is anxious to see which stores will be open.

#### Executive Director Report

#### **Coronavirus Update**

Natalie reported that Governor Murphy has announced that the state of NJ is ready to move into phase 2 of reopening, involving the approval of outdoor dining to begin on Monday June 15 as well as limited indoor retail. On June 22, barbershops and salons will be able to reopen, along with gyms, nail salons and other personal care businesses. At this point in time, the only guidelines that have been released by the NJ health department are guidelines for outdoor dining. Guidelines have not yet been released for retail, salons, or barbershops though the hope is that those will be outlined later this week.

Natalie added that the Downtown Somerville Alliance has been sending business owners up-to-date information through constant contact. The NJEDA has opened up for a second round of funding with applications opening on June 9th at 9:00AM. Businesses that may not have been approved for the initial round of funding will seek to apply for the second round.

Natalie reported that Downtown Somerville was recently featured on NJTV news, News 12 NJ, and the Star Ledger discussing the excitement of reopening safely and the general tone is that businesses are hopeful. This is the first time that Somerville has been featured heavily on 3 different large source media outlets.

### **Summary of DSA Survey Results**

Natalie reported that the DSA Survey provided by the National Main Street Center regarding COVID-19's impact on Downtown Somerville received 1,040 responses. Full details will be passed along to the board. A brief summary includes many responses indicating that people are still willing to call for delivery/ curbside pickup after COVID-19 (just about 100%). Most are willing to attend large indoor and outdoor events so long as social distancing is practiced. The board expressed interest in seeing where national results compare to our results in Somerville. Once that data becomes available, Natalie reported that it will be sent around.

Natalie also reported that she has had conversations with property owners, and for the most part, rent is still being collected at this time. She also added kudos to Samantha for expanding the DSA's social media reach. Our current growth is 6,300+ Instagram followers, which has more than doubled within the last year. The DSA Facebook page totals at 14,000 Facebook followers. Posts on both platforms range from 200-400 likes & gain 3,500+ impressions.

### **Status of Budget**

The Downtown Somerville Alliance 2020 budget was unanimously approved at the borough council meeting on June 1, 2020. Natalie added that the DSA has been actively looking into re-allocating resources to help with COVID-19 relief. The DSA rebound fund grant applications will be launched once the district fully reopens by July or August.

### **PPE**

Pricing for PPE has been distributed to the board, and further discussions shall continue via email, should the DSA decide to sponsor PPE purchases in bulk to benefit the businesses.

### **Banner Poles Estimate from Loumarc**

Natalie reported that a copy of the estimate is located in the board packet. The estimate quoted approximately \$20,000-25,000, similar to the quote received from the DSA's previous banner pole engagement. The desire is to work with Loumarc, given their experience with the DSA and Somerville. Loumarc will handle all engineering and installation.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to move forward with purchasing Loumarc banner poles for Main Street. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

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

### **Proposal for Virtual Arts/History Walk**

The Downtown Somerville Alliance has requested a quote from Civic Eye Collaborative, the same media company who completed COVID-19 commercials for us to create a virtual art and history walk throughout the Downtown Somerville district. Civic Eye would visit each location

and take a 360-degree video of each spot, paired with music and voice over to talk about each location. This will run at an approximately 15 minute video featuring each location for 1-2 minutes, as a comprehensive walk that can be completed virtually. The DSA is hoping to improve their relationship with the Historical Society, looking for other ways to engage the community during this time to take a virtual tour or walking tour of Downtown Somerville. Natalie reported that she met with AC hotels, who are seeking to create packages to help guests explore Somerville. The DSA hopes to include this as well as additional resources as a way to connect with guests.

The total cost for this project, depending on how many bells and whistles are added, can run from \$5,000 to \$7,000.

The DSA board agrees that this would be a great asset for the town. Comments include adding QR codes at each location to learn more about each installation and take you to a video on our website, using Jim Somerville as a narrator, giving the Historical Society credit and ownership, and using old historic photos (i.e. Theodore Roosevelt giving a speech at the Somerset County Courthouse steps) in collaboration with current footage. The board also discusses the importance of highlight Paul Robeson, and the importance of people in addition to architecture.

Natalie reported that herself along with Jenn Pearson and Claudia Morrone met with Jim Somerville and the Historical Society a little while ago to discuss how we may work together, and the DSA intends on maintaining that relationship.

Kevin Sluka reported that he will contact the Somerset County Historic Advisory as well as municipality to see if we can increase funding for this project. The board agrees to move forward with the project, not to exceed \$10,000 provided that the county is able to add funds.

Jane Kobuta made a motion to approve the Somerville Virtual Arts and History Walk project at \$10,000 subject to leveraging funds with Somerset County. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

#### **Quote for Sanitizer Stands:**

A quote has been included in the board packet for a set of 15 double sided sanitizer stands that will be placed on various corners throughout main street, as well as 2 ADA-compliant multi head sanitation stands on Division Street. Total pricing for sanitation stands is \$1,900. This only reflects the stands, as sanitizer is on backorder. The DSA is looking to get the stands installed for the community to see that the town is preparing for the reopen. Once sanitizer becomes available, these stands will be filled. The DSA has been working with ABS to gain access to a high grade foam sanitizer. Additionally, the distributor provided by Jenn Pearson also receives the same sanitizer by the pallet, giving us the ability to store and install.

Board members also expressed seeing ABS representatives on the street without masks, Natalie will reach out to make that request.

Rick SP made a motion to approve moving forward with sanitation stands, Jane Kobuta seconded same.

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

### **Quote for Tax Audit**

Natalie reported that the tax audit organization the Downtown Somerville Alliance has been using has quoted over \$12,000, which has been indicated as a discounted rate. Rick St. Pierre added that in the past the DSA has used a separate organization connected to various non-profit organizations within Somerset County with costs starting much less. Natalie reported that this discussion shall be continued with further investigation on pricing.

### **Update on Pride Flags**

Natalie reported that the Pride flags have arrived, and herself along with Samantha will add these flags to existing poles tomorrow, June 9, 2020 for a June 10, 2020 install. The DSA is moving forward with hosting a virtual Pride event hosted by Pissi Myles on June 28, 2020 and content will also be released for Downtown Somerville Pride Talks hosted by The Pickled Ginger.

Natalie also reported that various Somerville community members have reached out to the DSA to highlight black owned businesses. In light of this, the DSA has created a series of posts that will be going out over the course of the next week to highlight black owned businesses.

### **Road closure update**

As of today, June 8 2020, Somerville does not yet have an update regarding the request to close Main Street. Downtown Morristown's request to close one of their state roads was recently denied, and Natalie reported that at this time the DSA will discuss alternate plans in the event Somerville does not receive approval. The initial request had been submitted approximately 1.5 weeks ago, and Senator Kip Bateman will be following up for a prompt answer.

Iris Frank asked if there have been any limitations for businesses once the reopening begins on June 15. Kevin Sluka reported that the borough is following the exact measures that the state is requesting. The stay at home order is in effect until July 7, meaning businesses at this time should still be closed by 8pm.

### **Payment Authorizations & Finance Report**

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve payment authorizations and the May 2020 Finance Report. Jane Kobuta seconded same.

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

Jane Kobuta made a motion to open the meeting for comments from the public. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Greg Featherman of Boulevard Seafood Company discussed information gathered regarding outdoor dining sidewalk cafes during this time and requested additional information and exclusive answers be provided to the restaurants. Natalie reported that herself along with Iris Frank, Rick St. Pierre and Kevin Sluka will meet on June 9, 2020 to discuss this topic and results will be sent to the businesses via email.

Ken Rommel of Discover Wine asked if the DSA may use funds to donate PPE to business owners. Natalie reported that the board will discuss and work on fitting this into the budget.

Paul Allena of the Borough of Somerville added his appreciation for Natalie and Samantha and for all of the hard work being done at this time.

John Flores made a motion to adjourn the June 8, 2020 board meeting. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

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

Meeting minutes recorded by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator on June 8, 2020.