



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
March 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM - Virtual Meeting

John Flores called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on February 8, 2021. Natalie Pineiro conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

Present: Kevin Sluka, RanD Pitts, 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.

Public Hearing for 2021 Budget

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to open the meeting for public hearing. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

2021 Budget Presentation

Natalie Pineiro presented the 2021 budget for public hearing. A general summary includes a 2020 budget shift (from digital kiosks and an art plan to district safety, virtual events, infrastructure, and COVID-19 relief). A \$5,000 grant program rebound fund was also launched in 2020 for COVID-19 relief for a handful of Downtown Somerville businesses. 2021 budget planning revisits original 2020 goals, including a refocus on the rebranding process and a public art plan.

Budget allocations are as follows: Infrastructure/ Streetscape/ Support Service 27%, Debt Service 10%, Office Support 8%, Management 23%, Economic Vitality 7%, Marketing and Communication 15%, Events and Event Advertising 10%

Mike K made a motion to adopt the Downtown Somerville Alliance proposed 2021 budget. Tony Brokenborough seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Rick St. Pierre, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, RanD Pitts, Jenn Pearson
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from February 2021. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Rick St. Pierre, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, RanD Pitts, Jenn Pearson
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks

John Flores congratulated the DSA for the success of the recent Black History Month Installation on Division Street. John added that Downtown Somerville is facing a critical and important next few months with reopening the Downtown, given the warm weather approaching and the eligibility for all US adults to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by the end of May 2021. John requested that the Board of Trustees take part in committees and get involved over the next few months, as well as members of the public to bring their energy to the DSA's attention. The focus is to bring people downtown by combining in-person events with virtual events. Members of the public can be involved in the DSA event committee. If individuals are interested, they can email Natalie at npineiro@somervillenj.org

Executive Director Report

Closeout report on Black History Month

Natalie reported that the feedback from the 75-foot Black History Month Installation on Division Street was very positive. Student groups of first and second graders within Somerset County have come to Downtown Somerville to tour the exhibit, and the feedback has been rewarding.

Natalie added that she and Samantha will be working on having this installation switched out to a focus on "shop small" theme until May, and then working with organizers of the Tour of Somerville to do a historic exhibit about the Tour of Somerville throughout the month of May, in lieu of the event taking place Memorial Day Weekend. The DSA will consider completing a Pride month installation in June, with the installation coming down at the end of June to accommodate tables, chairs, and umbrellas.

Final Determination from Council regarding Street & Craft Fairs SBPA

Kevin Sluka reported that the 2021 Craft Fair has not yet been approved. The spring fair will be moved to July, however we are still waiting on approvals for the lawn and Grove Street fairs. Darryl Walker of streetfairs.org will collaborate with Natalie on the procedure for the Fall street fair event, which has been approved by Borough Council. The Spring 2021 Street Fair through Darryl will not be happening. Natalie and the DSA will work to bring in quality vendors that the district would like to see as part of the Fall event.

Update on Public Art Plan

Natalie reported that the Weingarten art group flew out to New Jersey to meet with stakeholders and business owners in Somerville about priorities for art activation areas and public art spaces throughout the district. These locations were then laid out on a map, and each plot on the map has several examples of what can be used to activate those spaces to better visualize the plan. Some spots include the courthouse lawn, the Giardina Walkway, along Main Street, the Verizon building, and Division Street. Not all spaces will be able to be activated all at once, however the goal is to activate each location seasonally so there is a consistent rotating installation in the district. Weingarten will be present during the April 2021 board meeting to present this plan.

Update on Branding/ Logo Selection

Natalie reported that 400+ comments have been made so far on the survey. Instagram & Facebook both received mainly critical and negative comments about the presented logo options. Some comments were suggested improvements, while others were simply negative. John Flores reported that though we may not be able to please everyone, there has been good participation in the survey and we will be soliciting more feedback and take a look at these criticisms for our vision forward. Mike Kerwin added that through this important process, the only current outlet for the public to add comments about the logo options is through Social Media. He suggests adding an option to the survey to allow individuals the ability to make constructive comments on the survey itself, rather than just simply voting on the two options, and encourages this edit to be made as soon as possible to send the right message about community feedback. Jenn Pearson added that the feedback she has received has not been favorable in the choices that were presented.

Natalie reported that this process is not yet complete, adding that negative voices are louder than positive voices. She added the likeliness of individuals that did not care for the two options presented commenting on the IG/ socials over the survey. RanD Pitts added that this focus should be reeled back into the DSA, as this is a branding process for the DSA which, once decided, the town can then get behind. Natalie mentioned that many criticisms were spoken about legibility, colors, etc. and will take this back to oxford to tweak any design that the DSA rolls with.

Mike Kerwin added that the DSA is immersed in this process, which may go over the heads of folks that are not familiar with the direction. He suggests making the logo clear and perhaps less edgy, so the average Somerville community member understands immediately upon seeing the logo the message that we are trying to communicate.

Tony Brokenborough added, in light of internet trolls, there should not be too much weight on what a few individuals are saying. If individuals want to help and be a part of the process, we can bring them forward and allow them to make comments directly to us.

The board discussed adding a focus group for people with legitimate concerns, to make small tweaks to enhance and improve the branding process that has already been complete. The DSA will also be re-sending this survey, with an added option for public comment.

Update from Infrastructure Committee Re: Sidewalks

Natalie reported that the committee is still discussing general sidewalk maintenance, and is hoping to have a meeting in the next week or so to come to a consensus on that area. The committee has spoken to multiple areas of the district and Natalie looks forward to having that infrastructure meeting soon which the DSA can then come up with a policy to present to the planning board.

Update from the Marketing Committee on various pursuable avenues for 2021 Marketing

Natalie reported that the following avenues were presented:

1. Reach out to Podium
2. Complete additional advertising once this branding process is complete
3. Complete website redesign
4. Add partnerships with local social media influencers

Natalie reported that every committee has had a meeting thus far in 2021 with the exception of the retention and recruitment committee, and the events committee.

Discussion of 2021 proposed events (including whether or not to start Cruise Nights and Music Memorial Day Weekend)

Given that other events have been postponed (Tour of Somerville, & Memorial Day Parade, Natalie reported that she would like the board's feedback to see how to proceed with Downtown Somerville's seasonal events with Cruise Nights and Summer Stage beginning Memorial Day Weekend. Kevin Sluka added that the Borough still has an ordinance on the books from two years prior allowing cruisers to park on Main Street every Friday night with free parking. No other action has been taken since then. Bor-

ough Council has stayed consistent with NJ protocols. The board decided the plan is to bring all regular outdoor summer events back in 2021 unless NJ regulations state otherwise, with the exception of Girls Night Out in May. Natalie added that several events will be added including a Taste of Somerville event, Dinner in White, Pride Month Pub Crawl, Juneteenth event, Artisan Markets, Arts & Ideas Festivals, and a Santa Run & PUB Crawl.

Mike Kerwin added the possibility of adding an Asian/ Indian Heritage Celebration, and opening up our diversity events to additional groups aside from the DSA's Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration in September. Natalie and Sam will look into this further.

Natalie also reported that she and Kevin Sluka are discussing the future of Parklets with NJDOT. The hope is to bring them back in May or June, and include a public art project to add a call for public artists to design these parklets.

Payment Authorizations

Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve March 2021 payment authorizations, Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Rick St. Pierre, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, RanD Pitts, Jenn Pearson
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None

Finance reports

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve March 2021 finance reports, Kevin Sluka seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Rick St. Pierre, Tony Brokenborough, Mike Kerwin, John Flores, Mark Aziz, RanD Pitts, Jenn Pearson
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None

Comments from the Public

Mackenzie from Turf Surf and Earth added her comments to extend her thanks for the DSA's work. She added that it may be difficult for business owners to join these meetings, and they are not well known. They are always looking to be informed about how to get involved with the town, and would love more face-to-face contact and information in a timely manner, especially at their end of town. Natalie added that she will check in to make sure Turf Surf and Earth is getting communications from the DSA's email list.

Mackenzie added that the restaurant would love to see a larger focus on events and activations/ installations, rather than marketing, with the perspective that if the town has great things happening, the people will come. She added that bringing in more unique businesses, activity retail (i.e. escape room type businesses), and places to shop would be great for the town. She also added ideas to attract younger generations to come into town for photos and social media marketing opportunities (i.e. string lights down Division Street, activating Giardina with flowers, adding additional photo spots in town, etc) and suggested that the DSA consider updating some outdated materials (i.e. “open up shop” flyer on website).

Natalie and John Flores thanked Mackenzie for attending and added that these are helpful comments, and would like to include her for involvement with the DSA marketing committee. Natalie additionally explained the numbers behind the marketing budget, including the desire to advertise for folks inside and beyond the Downtown Somerville district, and that the DSA is looking into avenues for increased social media marketing to grow our audience.

Executive Session

A separate meeting link will be sent out for the DSA Board of Trustees to enter into an Executive Session meeting. Kevin Sluka will be hosting and creating meeting minutes for this session.

Adjournment

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to adjourn the February 2021 meeting, Kevin Sluka seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Meeting minutes are provided by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator, on March 8 2021.