



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.

March 09, 2020 Meeting Minutes

6:00 PM - Office Evolution

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on March 13, 2020. Kevin Sluka conducted roll call. The following Board Members were present:

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

Absent: Iris Frank, Tony Brokenborough

The assembly joined in a salute to the flag.

#### Chairperson Remarks

Jane Kobuta reported that the grand opening for Bliss Coffee Lounge was a great success, and the new window coverings at the previous Hungry Hound and Electrolux locations are a great addition to the downtown.

#### Executive Director Report

#### Events

Natalie reported that the Valentine's Day free roses received a very positive reaction from the community on Valentine's Day. The board discussed looking into adding additional large format signage for the DSA for the future such as banners on tables and large banners outside of the carriage. The recommendation is to look into all-weather branded gear once the branding process is complete.

Bliss Coffee Lounge held their grand opening ceremony on March 7, 2020 which was a very successful event. The owners and staff at Bliss did a great job with marketing and it was a packed house, which brought a social vibe to this ribbon cutting. Natalie and the board discussed creating welcome packets for new business owners including information about garbage collection, etc. for business owners to be informed and well equipped once they arrive downtown.

#### Focus Groups

The DSA Strategic Plan Focus Group meetings were held at the end of February with Oxford Communication and Support Center, with many attendees including business owners (Penny from The Hungry Hound, Pat Mannion from Mannion's Pub & Restaurant, RanD from Evolve Clothing Gallery, Brittany Burton from Revive Consignment, Dmitriy from Mainly Gadgets, and more), property owners (Greg Storms, Mr. & Mrs. Irwin Vogel), real estate agents (Tim Deluccia, Claudia Morrone), and council members.

The next steps for the rebrand and Strategic Plan will be scheduling DSA vision and mission workshops with DSA board members in the coming weeks, approximately 2-3 hours long, with Oxford & Support Center. This serves to solidify whether the existing vision and mission are working, if there are any changes to be made, discussing further strategic planning and setting goals moving forward. Support Center and Oxford Communication are currently working on finishing up the focus group reports with a few additional phone discussions with Bernie Navatto of the Planning Board and Colin Driver of Economic Development. This one-page breakdown draft should be available by April, along with Oxford Communication's brand refresh based on the insights from the Focus Groups.

Natalie reported that the board will get together towards the end of April to discuss the new website, once the DSA obtains the brand book put together by Oxford (logo, colors, etc.).

#### Billboard Windows

Natalie reported that graffiti panels at 154 W Main Street were approved to come down, and will be replaced with themed coverings similar to the Hungry Hound & Electrolux windows. This theme covers arts, history, and culture in Somerville, as well as advertising businesses on the side streets. Rick St. Pierre added that he will help coordinate removal of a few panels in efforts to connect with Edgewood and save a few panels for the artists.

#### Retail Advisement

Natalie advised that Downtown Somerville should look into utilizing the help of a retail advisement consultant to assist with strategic business recruitment for the downtown. She added Downtown Westfield is currently pursuing this same consulting group. Per discussions, this group mentioned the rate can be brought down to \$2,000 per month with the ability to cancel at anytime if the DSA is dissatisfied with their services. This group will hold biweekly phone calls with the DSA as well as 4 on-site visits per year. The DSA will designate individuals to work on recruitment & retention, and the consultant will reach out & recommend businesses that fit our needs, handling negotiation and seeing deals through to their end. The board discussed adding business recruitment as a focus within the DSA workshop meeting. The hope is to add a few concepts for experiential businesses (i.e. interactive toy stores seen in NYC, yoga apparel, etc.) as well as opening the floor to Fortune 500 companies in addition to retail.

Mark Aziz made a motion to approve the authorization of Natalie to move forward with the retail recruitment consulting company. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

#### Directionals & Floor Graphics

Natalie discussed using SpeedPro for large format graphics & street wraps, in addition/ in place of A frame signs. Large format outdoor floor wraps can be removed and can be changed, which are applied with heat and conform to sidewalk. Rick St. Pierre added that this is not meant to be a long term solution, but will act as a big help to get this movement going. Natalie added that folks walking downtown generally stop at Starbucks because development currently ends there, the DSA's goal is to push people out further with these floor graphics.

#### Parking Video

Natalie mentioned sending a link to the parking video done by Montclair Center BID, which will include drone footage, pop up graphics, costs of parking, walkthrough of parking apps (parks-marter), and different modes of public transportation. The goal is to incorporate the same concept for Downtown Somerville.

#### Uber/ Lyft Fund

The board discussed interest in working an Uber/ Lyft fund into the current DSA budget to encourage the use of ride sharing in Downtown Somerville. Details will be addressed later when the budget is approved.

Uber/ Lyft would create a code for the DSA, which anyone coming in or out of town could use that code to pay for (x) amount of dollars off of their ride. This would promote the DSA (i.e. code DSA 2020), as well as safe driving. Kevin Sluka added the concern for a taxi driving business within the SID, which is already struggling with the growth of Uber/ Lyft. The hope is to engage and promote the taxi business in other ways. RAM Law created a sponsorship for Uber & Lyft during Girls Night Out 2019, and provided \$5 off every ride. This discount would be similar for Downtown Somerville, and would act as a transportation investment addressing a transportation issue.

#### Autism Awareness Event - Gallery on Main

Gallery On Main presented hosting an Autism Awareness event on Division Street on Sunday, April 26, 2020. The idea is to bring in Autism-related vendors into town, give them an opportunity and educate folks about this particular community (i.e. vendors such as Popcorn For The People employing autistic individuals, autistic artists, adding musical components, art components, etc). Time is TBD - there will be no stage, and stanchions will be set up in place of a stage for ADA compliance. The board is in support of this event, celebrating diversity and inclusion.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve payment authorizations and the February 2020 Finance Report. Mark Aziz seconded same.

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

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for comments from the public.

Brittany Burton, owner of Revive Consignment on S Doughty Ave, commented with her gratitude over the support for businesses off of Main Street and excitement for the upcoming billboard windows and added directionals and signage for these businesses. No further comments were made from the public.

Kevin made a motion to adjourn the March 9, 2020 board meeting. Mark Aziz seconded same.

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