



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc. Monday
May 11, 2020 Meeting Minutes 6:00 PM -
remote (GoToMeeting conference call)

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on April 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, Iris Frank, Tony Brokenborough, Natalie Pineiro (Executive Director), Samantha Shaw (Program Coordinator)

Absent: None

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 13, 2020 board meeting minutes. Mark Aziz seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Chairperson Remarks

Jane Kobuta reported that times have been difficult for Somerville businesses, however most are up to the challenge. The DSA should keep moving, and begin looking into ways we can eliminate certain funding areas from the DSA budget to instead shift towards other relief efforts or businesses that need help.

Executive Director Report

Coronavirus Update

Governor Murphy extended the New Jersey state of emergency for another 30 days, bringing the next phase of reopening sometime between June 5 and June 9. Coronavirus numbers are showing progress, but there is not yet a firm commitment for when businesses are able to reopen.

Natalie reported that the Downtown Somerville Alliance is continuing to do everything possible to support businesses virtually. \$1,400 worth of Downtown Somerville restaurant gift cards were donated to Robert Wood Johnson staff to support first responders while also supporting Somerville's businesses. Downtown Somerville BINGO was released, encouraging folks to support local businesses with bingo tiles like order takeout meals, order a meal for a frontline hero, shop retail online, etc. A second round of BINGO will be released this week. The DSA has also

rolled out a new video series supporting bars and restaurants called Pass The Shaker. More marketing emails are being sent out, and social media presence has been increasing daily. Virtual events are up next.

Businesses have had trouble, specifically non-essential retail. Natalie reported that there is worry for how some businesses will be able to survive another 30 days, and there is a potential for added vacancies. Natalie has been working with property owners and real estate agents to check in on rent, and how businesses can be supported during this time.

Natalie met with Beyond Main Street, a company similar to Amazon Marketplace to discuss an online space where users have the ability to shop all Downtown Somerville businesses in one place, and create one cart that shapes all of the stores online together. The DSA is working with Beyond Main Street to try to get a group rate for our businesses downtown. Downtown Summit and Downtown Westfield are currently using this platform. This provides an e-commerce capability for businesses that do not currently have one. In the meantime, Samantha has created a separate website for Downtown Somerville's businesses and events to get all of the marketing and messaging out, and the site has been gaining increased traffic daily.

The board discussed advocating for reopening Downtown Somerville prior to June 6. The consensus is that Natalie will draft a letter to local legislators and the Governor about safely reopening Somerville sooner. Kevin Sluka added that restrictions will likely be in place well after June 6, and that June 6 is not an anticipated day of reopening, rather a timeline of when restrictions will be discussed. Tony Brokenborough also added that the DSA should look into safety measures and PPE procedures for reopening, as well as speaking with RWJ and other health professionals to put together a safe guide for the town to reopen safely.

Tony Brokenborough made a motion for creating a policy statement, as well as moving forward joining with the Healthier Somerset Coalition to push forward our agenda and message to become a healthier and cleaner downtown. Jane Kobuta seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Future of Events

Virtual events will be coming up including chocolate & wine tastings, Kyma Greek tastings, DIY classes, and more. A poll had been sent out looking forward to Starlit Cinema movie nights, with over 3,000 responses on the choices of movies. Top picks were Grease, Sandlot, Moana, Toy Story 4, Mulan, Frozen 2, Aladdin & JAWS. The hope is to bring back Starlit Cinema safely, with a drive-in concept, or booths for families to social distance. Natalie reported that general feedback is that the community is very excited and anxiously awaiting when they are able to come back out and enjoy Somerville.

Because of the nature of Cruise Nights and the volume they bring to the downtown, Cruise Night will be cancelled for the 2020 season. If current events change and large crowds are once again allowed, the DSA will reconsider a future Cruise Night event. The DSA also hopes to recreate Girls Night Out in the Fall of 2020.

Downtown Somerville Rebound Fund (formerly Emergency Crisis Fund)

Natalie reported that treescape and sidewalk programs for 2020 will be set aside, freeing up \$50,000 to use towards the Downtown Somerville Rebound Fund to help small businesses during this time. The application process will begin around July to understand which businesses need the most help emerging from COVID-19. The idea is to create an application process which meets specific criteria for non-essential businesses for the first round of funding, and then further opening a GoFundMe charity account for contributors to raise additional funds to support the business community. Natalie reported that a SID attorney has approved our bylaws and nothing precludes us from using DSA tax dollars to support businesses during this time.

Rick St. Pierre suggested focusing on using funds for a Beyond Main Street virtual program, which would be inclusive for all businesses. Natalie added that business feedback is that they need the most assistance with funds to help with items such as overhead, supply chain, etc. There is concern over being selective towards certain businesses over others, however the consensus is to create this program as inclusively as possible. The DSA board also discussed setting up the program as a loan which would then turn into a grant, with set parameters and guidelines.

Infrastructure Committee Report

Natalie reported that planters will be reset to include a small pine tree in the center, so that they may be kept out all year long. The planters currently consist of entirely vegetation, however with an additional centered pine, vegetation will only need to be changed surrounding the pine. Large planters will be reserved for Main Street, and small planters will be used for Division Street. Natalie added that she is working with WaterWell Planters to come up with a solution for a self watering system. Sal Scalora Landscaping will also be providing a quote for cleaning and weeding Main Street for the season.

Additionally, Natalie reported that she has been meeting virtually with ABS to discuss current hours. ABS will continue to operate under winter hours at 3 days a week, rather than summer hours at 5 days a week, due to the lack of foot traffic in town. Once there is a clear schedule for reopening, ABS hours will shift back to 5 days a week.

Natalie added that the DSA is looking into replacing decorative benches for backless benches, which will provide a more temporary seating option and encourage users to use benches for less time. Natalie reported that she is working on having renderings as well as more details for new planters, benches, etc. by next month.

2020 Budget Presentation

Natalie presented the 2020 budget, with goals including reinforcing the DSA's commitment to business community and aiding rebound for interruptions caused by COVID-19 to create a healthier & cleaner Downtown Somerville.

Events and event advertising budgets have the ability to become smaller, and certain events such as Girls Night Out will cut its budget in half if the event is able to take place later in the season. The presented 2020 budget also includes added landscape support and service line items, such as uniformed employees, information services for Downtown Somerville, etc. Budget funds will also be used towards reopening Downtown Somerville, including marketing, PPE and safe practice procedures.

Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve the proposed budget with minimal tweaks suggested, (i.e. cutting GNO budget, and a heavy focus on safely reopening Downtown Somerville). Mark Aziz seconded same.

Yea: Kevin Sluka, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Mike Kerwin, Jenn Pearson, John Flores, Tony Brokenborough
Nay: None
Abstain: None
Recuse: None
Absent: Iris Frank (present for meeting, absent for this approval)

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve payment authorizations and the April 2020 Finance Report. Jenn Pearson seconded same.

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

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for comments from the public.

RanD Pitts, councilman and owner of Evolve Clothing Gallery, mentioned that we have an official living in our town that is part of that advisory committee to the Governor. The DSA can speak with this individual directly regarding any issues, who will then take them forward to the Governor.

RanD also advised that the DSA consider adding a business recruitment line item to the budget, and that property owners would be happy to hear that business recruitment is also a priority at this time. Natalie reported that we have been working with a retail consultant to assist the DSA with recruitment, which will go to contract within the next month or so dependent on the budget.

Kevin Sluka made a motion to adjourn the May 11, 2020 board meeting. Tony Brokenborough seconded same.

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

Meeting minutes recorded by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator on May 11, 2020.