



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
November 9, 2020 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM - Virtual Meeting

Jane Kobuta called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on November 9, 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, Iris Frank (late)

Absent: None

The assembly joined in a virtual salute to the flag.

Rick St. Pierre made a motion to approve the last board meeting minutes of October 12, 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 she was satisfied with the success of the parklets that had been recently deconstructed for the winter months.

Executive Director Report

Natalie reported that a new DOT update was received at the end of October requiring all parklets within NJ state roads to be removed effective immediately, in anticipation of inclement weather. Parklets had been already been scheduled for removal upon the approach of November, per prior guidelines by DOT.

The Downtown Somerville Alliance has launched a small business grant program, dividing \$50,000 to Downtown Somerville businesses in need. This application is available now and feedback regarding this program has been positive.

Natalie reported that she is currently working with SSP architects on handling construction permits for businesses once November 30 approaches, to handle the mandate on the use of tents within the Downtown district. This information will be sent out to business owners later in the week.

Downtown Somerville's Small Business Saturday and Holiday Jubilee ceremonies will be separated into two days due to the volume of traffic that they bring downtown. Small Business Saturday will remain an in-person event with social distancing and masks required. Natalie and Sam are working on hosting promotions, raffles and events to increase foot traffic downtown for that day. Holiday Jubilee will be streamed virtually for individuals to tune in online rather than hosting an in-person event. The Downtown Somerville Alliance is working with Creative Media Group (through Elegant Music Group) to air this event through Vimeo, available on Downtown Somerville's social media pages and website.

Natalie reported that the holiday tree will be delivered on November 18, and holiday decorations (wreaths, large ornamentt, etc.) will all be up throughout the district by November 28.

Natalie introduced Richard Cohan, Downtown Somerville's retail consultant, to address any questions in regard to the retail report from October's meeting and answer any questions about retail during these times. The board discussed seeking after brand-style businesses, such as Surf Taco, SoCal, etc., lifestyle and wellness businesses such as Lululemon, Fableta, etc., and changing permitted uses of first floor units on main street to include more professional businesses like urgent care or co-working facilities to fill in vacancies during this time. Natalie reported that the Downtown Somerville Alliance will consider setting up a meeting with the planning board to discuss first floor business uses in 2021 after the planning board reorganization occurs. The thought is to use larger spaces that are not being rented as professional spaces (i.e. old Provident Bank, Melting Pot).

John Flores presented the public facing Strategic Plan for the Downtown Somerville Alliance. The new mission statement is as follows: **The Downtown Somerville Alliance's (DSA) mission is to support, connect, maintain, and spread the word about its unique community and the *Downtown Somerville Experience*.**

Strategic objectives include: Enhance every aspect of the *Downtown Somerville Experience* within the Downtown Somerville Special Improvement District, including its beauty, infrastructure and mobility, and fantastic variety of dining, arts, culture, historic, and shopping options. Deliver strategic business development and recruitment services to build on the community's economic vitality. Continue to build on the diversity that makes the community a welcoming place for all. Brand and market the *Downtown Somerville Experience* to visitors, residents, employees, investors and entrepreneurs to discover the magic.

The Downtown Somerville Alliance board of trustees agree that the mission statement should focus about the Downtown Somerville Experience. Mike Kerwin made a motion to approve the new public facing Strategic Plan, Iris Frank seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

John Flores presented the Downtown Somerville Alliance branding options created by Oxford Communications, including new Downtown Somerville Alliance Logo options as of November 2020. The first option is a minimal logo design, second option is geometric and the third option is more artistic. The board agrees to remove option two. During the next meeting, Oxford Communications will present colors and logos on different venues such as windows, flags, etc.

The Downtown Somerville Alliance board of trustees discussed amending bylaws to expand the board size to up to 12 members total, including a corporate representative in hopes to add board members from community partner organizations such as RWJ University Hospital Somerset. The DSA's current bylaws specify the board of trustees should not exceed 9 members and must include one Borough administrator, one Council member, and 5 individuals who either work or live within the Special Improvement District. The board agrees that any individuals who are added to the board must have some sort of direct connection to the community. This amendment will be produced in writing and voted upon during the next board meeting, going into effect 2021.

Natalie reported that the Downtown Somerville Alliance will also be sending a letter to the Borough to move the state with a proposal to re-route State Route 28 to Veterans Memorial Drive in efforts to help Downtown Somerville's Main Street district. Mike Kerwin made a motion to support this proposal, Jane Kobuta seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

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

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None
Recuse: None

Jane Kobuta made a motion to approve the finance report. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Jane Kobuta opened the meeting for public comment.

Gary Frank, CEO of Village Brewing Company stressed the urgency that the DSA board looks into rolling out tent guidelines ASAP as it is almost impossible to proceed without any specific guidelines. Gary Frank expressed the desire for exemptions from snow load requirements, with a contingency that tents cannot be used during inclement weather. Natalie reported that the board will get something out to the business owners no later than Friday, November 13. As of now, the Borough has been told that relief will be coming from the state to ease parameters round tents and heaters. The Borough additionally expressed that they are waiting for max restrictions by the state to understand what is needed by business owners. Current regulations are state code.

The Downtown Somerville Alliance board of trustees will create language to reach out to the state to allow tents to be used throughout winter, unless inclement weather rises. Mike Kerwin made a motion to support that, Jane Kobuta seconded same.

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

Mark Aziz made a motion to adjourn the November 9, 2020 board meeting. Rick St. Pierre seconded same.

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

Meeting minutes are provided by Samantha Shaw, Program Coordinator, on November 9, 2020.