

Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.

May 10, 2021 Meeting Minutes

6:00 PM - Virtual/ GoToMeeting

Natalie Pineiro called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on May 10, 2021. Kevin Sluka conducted a roll call. The following Board Members were present:

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

Absent: Jane Kobuta

The assembly joined the dais in a salute to the flag.

Chairman Remarks

John Flores reported that there are signs of life in Downtown Somerville, leaving the DSA well-positioned for reopening as COVID numbers continue to decrease. No tour of Somerville this Spring but optimistic about the art plan.

Executive Director Report

Update on Public Art Plan and Intern Search.

Natalie reported a full presentation from the Weingarten Art Group. A draft of the art plan was included in everyone's packet to review.

Update on Intern Search

It was narrowed down to three candidates. It was reported that one could start at the end of May and one that can start in June and end early August. Samantha Shaw, the DSA Program Coordinator's last day was that past Friday.

Update on Events

Natalie reported that event season is starting earlier this year. Samantha Shaw, DSA Program Coordinator, put together an Asian-American Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration on May 22, 2021. The DSA has been promoting the event on social media. Samantha is working on creating community partnerships with Ken Lee of the Somerset County Asian Heritage Celebration Committee. Various Asian performance groups will take place on Division Street from 1pm-4pm to align with the DSA's goals of celebrating diversity in Downtown Somerville. Summer events such as cruise nights, summer stage concerts, and starlit cinema movie series will continue as they have in previous years. Natalie ordered plaques for Michelle and Shaun and wanted to invite them into the next meeting. Live View set up at the end of Division Street and will be back to provide a bird's eye view of the happenings on Division Street. There is a talk down feature and alert system that can be triggered which will help shoppers feel safer.

Update on Program Coordinator Search

Samantha Shaw's last date was Friday. We acknowledge yet support her future endeavors in regard to opening her spotted leaf company. Resumes are currently coming in and being under review.

Update on Spring Planters

Currently in the progress of putting them together and should be up before Memorial Day. There will be 35 planters on Main Street and 55 planters on Division Street and Veterans Memorial Highway.

Update on Committees

There were great marketing options discussed including contracts for advertising, engaging with NJ.com for their promotions, engaging with Somerset County partnership for their promotions, and gaining help from influencers.

Update on Branding/ Logo Selection

Natalie presented the results to the board. Survey results are as follows: a vast majority of respondents favored logo #1 "DS swirl" over logo #2 "SoMe" because it has more staying power. Out of all feedback questions, including questions about visual aesthetic, diversity and inclusion, merchandise, etc. logo #1 "DS swirl" came out on top. Additional comments (81 responses) included feedback ranging from "we love option 1" to "I don't care for either one". Natalie will take this feedback to the Marketing Committee who will then pull comments that will be most useful and implement them. Natalie also reported that the marketing committee plans to engage in 1-2 focus groups with community members to work with oxford to create the final version. The DSA board agreed this is a good process to move forward. The next Marketing Committee meeting will be held on April 15 2021.

Update from Recruitment and Retention Committee

Natalie reported that they have not been as active due to the pandemic. DSA reached Richard Cohan who is a research consultant and since then has talked to representatives of Urban Outfitters and Anthropology about terrain. DSA is working with 50+ stores to encourage them to come to Somerville and see what Downtown Somerville has to offer. There has also been a recruitment and retention refresh to encourage other businesses to come to Somerville (especially Three Summers Creative). There is a destination boot camp issued to help Downtown Somerville Businesses and Natalie requested approval from the board. This will help businesses stay on current trends and it is something that can be shown quarterly. It is a recruitment and retention vehicle. The cost for the two hour town hall is \$4,500.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Update on Loyalty Program

Natalie said that they heard from Saltwater Loyalty at the recruitment and retention meeting. Saltwater- completely digital. Natalie then turned it over to Steve Jappi for his presentation. It is developed for the business of commerce and real estate. It is a marketing platform that allows customers to be rewarded for shopping in the neighborhood. Merchants participate

through publishing a promotional offer through a merchant portal. There is no hardware and little staff training. Shoppers register one or more credit cards and shop how they normally would and earn their points in the background. Saltwater Loyalty does the majority of the “heavy work” in recruiting the businesses for the program.

Update from Infrastructure Committee

Introduction to Sidewalk Policy

Natalie gave an update regarding the sidewalk policy. The executive committee as well as the infrastructure committee developed a structure for each of the different types of programs that involve our sidewalks and trees. Mike introduced the new sidewalk policy which divides the sidewalk projects into four different parts.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Update on Parklets/DOT Initiative

Kevin Sluka gave an update on conversation with DOT. DOT is not allowing parklets in the street instead they are allowing municipalities to provide outdoor seating that you can pull at the end of the day.

For Approval: New American Flags for District

Natalie reported that the DSA is looking to purchase 105 new American Flags for the district costing \$4,530.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

For Approval: Tulip Seats - Alternative Seating Option for Division Street and District

Natalie reported that the DSA is looking for an alternative seating option for Division Street and District. Oxford Communications is currently working with an outdoor outlet, the seating they use is called Tulip seating. Total expense for 10 Tulip seats is going to be \$17,000.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

For Approval: Larkspur Botanicals - Artificial Floral Installation / Giardina Walkway

Natalie reported on a proposal from Larkspur Botanicals to provide an artificial floral installation in the Giardina Walkway. Although a great marketable / instagramable aspect to Downtown Somerville, the installation can also help deter any bad behavior that occurs in the walkway by producing more foot traffic. Total expense \$14,000.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Discussion: Outside Events on Division Street

Natalie reported that the DSA has received applications from outside organizations for events on Division Street. Division Street is a highly valued public meeting space, current climate with COVID-19 pandemic might not allow for outside organizations to have events. Option for outside organizations should remain open for the future - only events that grow / pertain to the mission of the DSA.

Payment Authorizations

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve April 2021 payment authorizations. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Finance Reports

Kevin Sluka made a motion to approve April 2021 finance reports. Mike Kerwin seconded same.

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

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Public Comment

John Flores opened up the meeting for comments from the public. Fred from 225 East High Street asked if pride flags would be going up as they did last year. Natalie responded and

confirmed that pride flags will be going up this year. Council asked that the American Flag stay up, so pride flags will go up with the American Flag for the month of June. Consensus of the council is that the American Flag is to remain up at all times, sharing flags / banners with each holiday.

Fred proceeded to ask Natalie when the pride month installation would be up on Division Street. Natalie responded letting Fred know the approximate date / time frame of the first week of June. Kevin commented that the pride ribbons had been approved by council to be put on the trees in the district. Natalie reported that the DSA would be partnering with RWJBH Pride Center again, to hopefully boost participation among the businesses and residents of Somerville to decorate for Pride month. Fred proceeded with a question regarding whether or not the pride flag would be raised in Somerville. Natalie reported that RWJBH had requested Borough Hall in Somerville as well as Somerset County have a Pride Flag raising.

Adjournment

John Flores adjourned the meeting.

Meeting minutes recorded by Nicole Zaliwski, Program Coordinator on August 25, 2021.