



**Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
November 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM – Virtual Via Zoom**

Mike Kerwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on November 13, 2023.

Kevin Sluka conducted roll call the following Board Members were present:

Present: Iris Frank, Ed Rebenack, RanD Pitts, Sejal Sharma, Chas. Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Massick

Excused: Sejal Sharma

Approval of Meeting Minutes

There were no meeting minutes to approve for this month.

Chairman Remarks

Mike discussed the results of the local elections. Recapped that Mayor Sullivan was not reelected and that Brian Gallagher will be returning as Mayor.

Mike took the occasion when we presented the streetscape plan to the planning board to thank Mayor Sullivan for his years of service to our community and specifically thanking him for his support of downtown Somerville.

Theresa Bonner, formally on the DSA Board was elected to the Borough Council as well as her running mate. Mike reiterated that we continue to have support on the local level and looks forward to working with everybody in 2024.

Executive Directors Report

A. Old Business

a. CDS Weekly Reports

- i. CDS weekly reports were included in the packet describing the things that CDS has been working on around the district since the last meeting. Since last meeting fall decor went up. We are preparing for holiday decor that's going up soon and to preparing for the



holiday jubilee. CDS has been blowing leaves daily but Natalie brought in a 3rd party landscaper to supplement services and do leaf removal.

b. Nomination Committee:

- i. DSA has received three resumes for consideration for the upcoming vacancies. Nom Committee meeting is scheduled for November 30th to discuss those resumes
The deadline for taking in resumes is November 27th.
DSA is currently seeking to fill three positions, two positions that are business owners, property owners, or residents within the special improvement district. And the other one just needs to be a general resident in the borough of Somerville. The committee is looking forward to reviewing those resumes and making recommendations at the December meeting.
- ii. Alison Massick announced that she will not be seeking a second term on the Board of Trustees because of professional obligations. Natalie and Mike thanked her for her services and advised that we look forward to honoring her and other outgoing Board members at the annual meeting in January.

B. New Business

a. Digital Kiosk with SCBP

- i. We will be receiving our digital kiosk from the Somerset County Business Partnership Wednesday, 11/15.
- ii. The county, along with the business partnership, are going to be coordinating a ribbon cutting ceremony, either sometime during the holiday season or in early 2024.
- iii. The kiosk is not set to go automatically into operation when it comes in. It does have to be programmed, but they will be bringing it onto the corner of Division St and Main ST, close to the Army building to capture Main Street traffic as well as Division Street traffic.
- iv. Natalie mentioned that this will serve as a test case for the DSA to potentially seek out grant funding to put in some additional kiosks around the district.

b. PSEG Roadwork Update –

- i. Kevin gave an update on PSEG Roadwork: Mentioned that we had talked about potentially putting forth a resolution to support PSE and G doing daytime work for spring 2024.
At their previous meeting with Kevin they talked about minimal work that's



going to come over the next two months. PSEG will not do their service lines but are pushing that into 2024. Their goal is to do most of the work between January and March on Main Street and include the laterals as well. The governing body did pass a resolution requesting that PSEG do their work during the day.

c. Update on the East Main Street redevelopment plan meeting

- i. Mike Kerwin explained that the borough, following in the DSA's footsteps did a visioning process -an outreach to get public input. Similar to the public input we got on our treescape plan as to how to redevelop, the East Main Street area downtown, which includes three key pieces of property: the historic bank on the corner of Bridge and Main; the old police station and the post office.
- ii. The public was pretty clear on two points: One was that there was a lot of resistance to more apartments. The Second was the express need for a performing arts center
- iii. The Board sees the need to formally support/bolster the Borough's efforts to collect data and public feedback in the process. Natalie Mentioned: continuing to advocate, being part of the conversation once RFPs are being evaluated, offering to collect supplemental feedback from district businesses and property owners through a survey or other data collections and working with our grant writer to help apply for grants that could help fund the development or sustainability of a project like that.
- iv. Mike Suggested we look into conducting a feasibility study to support an Arts Center.
- v. The Board discussed two potential locations for the Arts Center:
 1. Far E. Main Street (suggested by RanD – speak to the developer there to discuss possibly incorporating there with complimentary retail as a gateway project)
 2. The Somerville Post Office – Kevin noted that while the location is completely underutilized, USPS probably would not give up a county seat location.

d. Update on the Board of Adjustment Meeting Re: the Granetz Building

- i. Mike explained that there's the subject of a use variance, for which he



appeared at the meeting. The BOA adjourned the actual hearing. Mike explained that it is an important building for the district (gateway). The proposal is to put apartments on the upper floors and put an adult daycare use on the first floor.

- ii. Kevin mentioned that a couple of days after that meeting. The building was put back up for sale on the market for approx.. \$5 million
- iii. Natalie mentioned that allowing for this type of variance in the B-1 Zone is a slippery slope. She mentioned that the DSA's obligation is to make sure that we're not opening the floodgates and setting a precedent where we would allow medical use in the B one zone.

e. Update on Streetscape presentation to Planning Board

- i. Natalie mentioned that the DSA was grateful to the planning board for giving us the opportunity to make the presentation. Present at the meeting were also members of the zoning board. There were a lot of really great questions at the end but the response was overwhelmingly positive.

C. 2024 Budget Presentation

a. Continue to enhance the Downtown Somerville experience by focusing on seven principles:

- i. ROOM: Enhancing Places where people can feel comfortable. This encompasses things like sidewalk walkability, and safety i.e. implementing elements of our streetscape plan.
- ii. RICHNESS: or stimulating, rich environments. Richness in Diversity, landscape, and creativity in place. Enhancing our strategies for business recruitment/retention, investment in storefront design.
- iii. Ability to provide EXPLORATION – finding things that we find stimulating, fulfilling and useful. i.e. continuing the momentum of our public art program.
- iv. PROGRAMMING WITH PURPOSE – meaning programs/events that connect people to the streets/environments.
- v. DIVERSITY - investing in concepts that help people see themselves in our district.
- vi. FINALLY, BREADCRUMBS – the idea that we create a trail of experiences on our streets that connect our major anchors/transportation hubs to each other.

b. 2024 Opportunities:



- i. Create a connected ecosystem via streetscape plan to support the downtown Somerville experience (Opportunity for more proactive and strategic visioning)
- ii. Support East Main St Redevelopment Plan to ensure complementary/supportive redevelopment
- iii. Continue to enact our Public Art Plan by completing a historic/legacy project in the district (Paul Robeson Sculpture)
- iv. Continue to develop the DSA's organizational value by enhancing its economic development capacity

c. **Budget Breakdown:**

i. **Total Operating Funds: \$930,000**

Income:

SID Assessment: \$780,000

Projected Sponsorships: \$40,000

Grants: \$15,000

Fund Development: \$30,000

Crowdfunding: \$15,000

Carry-over:

Operating: \$40,000

TRUST: \$10,000

d. **Landscape Support & Service:**

\$291,000.00

- i. Clean & Safe Program
- ii. Snow Removal
- iii. Seasonal Plantings
- iv. Holiday Décor/Flags/Banners
- v. Division Street Maintenance etc.

Iris mentioned working with the Borough for savings in this area and to lower spend for third party cleaning services. Board agreed to meet with Council Liaison to DPW and Rodney Hadley to further discuss

e. **Events & Event Advertising**

\$129,500

- i. 35+ Annual Events

f. **Marketing & Communication:**

Extending the Experience to the Digital World

\$66,000

- i. Digital
- ii. Radio
- iii. Billboards
- iv. TV Commercials



- v. Website
- vi. Social Media Management
- vii. Constant Contact/Email Marketing

g. Economic Vitality:

Planning/Business Support

\$90,500.00

- i. DSA Annual meeting
- ii. Merchant events/Grand Openings
- iii. Data Collection
- iv. Strategic planning
- v. Direct Business Support
- vi. Professional Services
- vii. Public Art Programming

Chas commented on the line item for Grant writing services. Wants us to be mindful of making sure we are seeing a return on the investment.

h. Management: More than just staffing

\$232,000

- i. Salaries
- ii. Federal Insurance Contributions
- iii. Health Insurance
- iv. 401K Match
- v. Professional Insurances

i. Office Support & Contingency:

\$81,000

- i. Dues/Subscriptions
- ii. Accounting
- iii. Office Supplies
- iv. Professional Development
- v. Rent
- vi. Contingency

Kevin asked Natalie to clarify that the accounting fees include our, our yearly audit.

Kevin also mentioned that because the municipality is going to have an inventory of property, whether it be temporary or, or long term, we should try to see if we can look at moving the DSA garage rental into one of the firehouses (a savings of apprx. \$10k to the budget)



Mike Reiterated the budget process: He and Natalie will present to Borough Council in Dec. Borough Council must accept the budget. A Public Hearing must follow after which the budget can be adopted or amended

Vote to Accept the Temporary Budget

MOTION: Rick St. Pierre; SECOND: Alison Massick

Vote to Accept:

Yea: Iris Frank, Alison Massick, RanD Pitts, Sejal Sharma, Kevin Sluka, Chas Stevens, Rick St. Pierre, Mike Kerwin,

Nay: None **Recuse:** None **Abstain:** None

D. Finance Reports

Vote to Approve Finance Reports

MOTION: RanD Pitts SECOND: Mike Kerwin

Vote to Accept:

Yea: Iris Frank, Alison Massick, RanD Pitts, Sejal Sharma, Kevin Sluka, Chas Stevens, Rick St. Pierre, Mike Kerwin,

Nay: None **Recuse:** None **Abstain:** None

E. Payment Authorizations

- a. Natalie pointed out that this month's bills list had a rather high number for jobs4blue. They had not been billing us for any of the jobs that they did over the summer. They were sending the DSA \$0 invoices and they corrected the error and billed us for all outstanding invoices at once.

Vote to Approve Payment Authorizations

MOTION: RanD Pitts SECOND: Chas Stevens

Vote to Accept:

Yea: Iris Frank, Alison Massick, RanD Pitts, Sejal Sharma, Kevin Sluka, Chas Stevens, Rick St. Pierre, Mike Kerwin,

Nay: None **Recuse:** None **Abstain:** None



F. Comments from the Public

No Comments from the Public

G. Adjournment

Mike Kerwin made a motion to adjourn the public meeting and enter into executive session meeting on at 7:30pm.

H. Executive Session