



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
October 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM - In-Person Office Evolution

Mike Kerwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on October 9, 2023.

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

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

Late: Iris Frank

Excused: Alison Masick,

Approval of Meeting Minutes

There were no meeting minutes to approve for this month.

Chairman Remarks

Mike discussed the meeting of the Redevelopment committee that he attended wherein they discussed looking at the east end of Main Street. He gave them a copy of our streetscape plan Part of the discussion was the creation of community spaces that would be a segue to a gateway to downtown and to the green belt area adjacent to the district.

Executive Directors Report

A. Old Business

a. Budget:

Natalie started to prepare the budget. We have a budget meeting on October 27th where She'll be presenting a draft of the budget to the Finance committee. It will be a workshop meeting to discuss each line item in depth.

b. Nomination Committee:

Natalie will be sending out notifications to all of our outgoing board members followed by a press release to solicit resumes. There will then be a nomination committee meeting sometime in November to discuss those resumes that have come in.



The three spots that are up are 2 Business Owners/Property Owners/Residents of the SID and 1 Resident of Somerville

c. Audit Update

Recommendations from the Auditor:

Auditor would like for us to process our bill payments in QuickBooks as we receive them.

Also want us to move from a cash basis to an accrual basis, which was discussed with the bookkeeper. Then there was a comment that was made about spending our funds before we take in our payments. (Specific to the Chiaozza Public Art Installation).

Mike Kerwin Commented: In order for us to avoid this in the future, we either need more cash to reserve or line of credit.

Mike made a motion to accept the audit; Iris second

Vote to Accept 2022 Audit:

MOTION: Mike Kerwin; SECOND: Iris Frank

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

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

d. Events Update

- Last Hispanic Heritage Month event is Saturday the 14th.
- Participating with the County at their diversity festival on Sunday 10/25.
- We are working with Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital to do a wig out for breast cancer dine to donate event. We have several restaurants that are participating in that campaign. And a portion of the proceeds from your meal will be donated to the Steeplechase Cancer Center
- Spooktacular coming up on 10/31.
- We will not be doing the Ghost tours this year.
- Paul Robeson Event: We did not get the buy-in from the local community that we had hoped. Rick connected us to Art Adair and he's putting together a list of names for us for direct outreach.



e. Awards Update

- i. In Receipt of the Muse Creative Silver Award Winner certificate. (this is the award that we won through three Summers Creative for our website)
- ii. Receiving an excellence in the art award for our sculpture project on the courthouse lawn that's taking place October 26th. Create a connected ecosystem via streetscape plan to support the Downtown Somerville experience (opportunity for more proactive and strategic visioning)

f. Update on Streetscape Presentations

Mike updated the Board on the presentation of the Streetscape Plan to the Borough Council. The plan was received well. Natalie and Mike kept the presentation very high level- didn't get into the weeds. Up next is the presentation to the Planning Board, Followed by Regional Center and then the County.

g. Discussion on the office relocation with the business partnership

- i. Natalie Advised that they do not have a C.O. yet. They're looking to move in sometime in either March or April of 2024. We would not be joining them until likely August if we do decide to move forward because our contract with Office Evolution is until August.
- ii. What's being offered: 2 offices, along with the ability for staff to use the shared space at reception/open workstations/ focus rooms. Full use of the 1,150 square foot conference room space for meetings and events. There's also a small conference room and huddle spaces for smaller meetings. We'll also be able to use copy, printing, IT services, but we would have to work with their provider so that we're on two separate systems.

Also through the partnership with the business partnership, we have access to discounted rates from members that the DSA will be able to utilize if needed.

Cost: \$1700/month + a one month deposit.

- iii. Comparison with Office Evolution: we are around the same rate, give or take a hundred dollars or so. Difference is that everything is included at OE - we don't pay for furniture/ phone systems/wifi
- iv. Kevin expressed concerns about losing identity if we move in with SCBP
- v. Mike: doesn't wanna make this kind of long-term strategic decision without some really clear consensus. Sure.
- vi. Board agreed to defer on making the final decision

B. New Business



a. Placer.ai Proposal

- i. Data Platform providing location analytics including visit trends, trade areas, demographics They have over 500 civic clients across the country, including cities, counties, districts, economic development organizations, travel and tourism, dmo, chambers of commerce, downtowns, conference centers, etc

It's powered by high quality mobile location data and proprietary technology.

They observe human movement and report on foot traffic data from tens of millions of mobile devices to form an aggregated view of the commercial activity in a particular area.

- ii. Cost two-year contract - \$14000 per year

Vote to approve 2-year contract with Placer AI:

MOTION: Mike Kerwin; **SECOND:** RanD Pitts

Vote to Accept:

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

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

b. Eventeny Proposal

- i. Event Platform to manage your vendors, volunteers, sponsors, and maps for your event., sponsor management. It creates ticketing and registration and interactive event maps
- ii. Cost: Plus Package \$150/Month

Vote to approve contract with Eventeny

MOTION: Rick St. Pierre; **SECOND:** RanD

Vote to Accept:

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

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

c. Communication with PSEG RE: Roadwork

- i. There is a lack of communication fom PSEG
- ii. Board members expressed that businesses are feeling out of the loop and that the iscommunication is effecting business
- iii. Kevin described ongoing communication with PSEG, suggested that we set up a subcommittee to discuss the rollout of work happening in the



spring. Mentioned that this will be the template for how we work with other utilities like NJAW.

- iv. Board in support of sending NJDOT a letter supporting road work take place during the daytime in 2024.

C. Other New Business

- a. Chas inquired as to the end of Richard Cohan's Contract, Natalie advised that he was coming up Dec. 31, 2023.
- b. Board inquired about the future of the cleaning contract (currently with CDS). Natalie advised that the Contract was up in April. January we will be issuing an RFP for services.

D. Finance Reports/Payment Authorization

- a. Chas inquired about unreconciled items on the finance report. Natalie advised that our bookkeeper has been working closely with the auditor to adjust certain transactions. There were several expenses from 2022 that were booked to 2023 and need to be reconciled back. The Bookkeeper is working with them to get everything current.

Vote to Approve Finance Reports/Payment Authorizations

MOTION: Mike Kerwin; SECOND: Rick St. Pierre

Vote to Accept:

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

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



Comments from the Public

Comments from Councilman Granville Brady:

Received a note from Kevin saying that the Mediterranean restaurant that's going where the melting pot was is having difficulty getting approvals. He investigated it further and it looks like it's been almost 18 months for them to get it. Says this same discussion was held in 2016 when he met with the big developers/ investors. They said it's taking too long to get approvals.

Commented that the Borough has escrow that's being increased by exponentially and have a planner who finds additional variances even after the application has been approved. He says that the planner that the borough uses and the the planning board appoints is Cole and Associates and he has been getting many complaints about their service. Mentioned a larger project manager who is doing a multifamily project. He did an audit of that particular account from the planners and found that there were a number of irregularities.

His concern is that the planner is appointed by the planning board who is not elected by anyone and as a result, the planner is complete control over what is being done, and is responsible only to the planning board.

His hope is that this will start at least some dialogue. Would like for us to advocate for business/property owners to contact the Planning board with their complaints.

Response from Mike Kerwin:

We as a board stand representing the downtown district stand for the proposition of operating within compliance of local municipal law and zoning code and everything else, and create an experience that is business friendly, that is less onerous and more fair, more transparent and more expedient.

What I'd like to be able to do is to have the ability, or collectively speaking as a, as a board stand for that proposition. So for example, we're going up to a board meeting, planning, board meeting to present the streetscape plan probably next month, right?. I would like to be able to take that opportunity to tell the planning board that we are concerned about what we perceive as an issue with getting reasonably prompt efficient approvals process. Again, we're not talking about cutting corners here, just moving and that we press the planning board to address that, take appropriate steps.

I think it's appropriate that we speak out on behalf of principal, that we want a business-friendly approval process that encourages investment in downtown and encourage the planning board and general council to work with everyone to make the process work



better.

Response from Natalie: Would you like for me to draft a letter?

Mike Kerwin:

Yes. Alright, that's even better. So I still want to make a motion though, because I want to speak out together as a group, as a board vote, to speak on behalf of DSA.

Vote to Approve Sending a letter to the Planning Board re: Planning Services

MOTION: Mike Kerwin; **SECOND:** Rand Pitts **Vote to Accept:**

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

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

Adjournment

Mike Kerwin made a motion to adjourn the meeting on Monday, October 9, 2023 at 7:30pm.