



Downtown Somerville Alliance, Inc.
September 11, 2023 Meeting Minutes
6:00 PM - In-Person Office Evolution

Mike Kerwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm on September 11, 2023.

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

Present: Sejal Sharma, Chas. Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Masick, Theresa Bonner

Late: Iris Frank

Excused: RanD Pitts, Ed Rebenack

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Vote to Approve August 2023 Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Kevin Sluka; SECOND: Michael Kerwin

Vote to Accept:

Yea: Sejal Sharma, Chas Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Masick, Theresa Bonner

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

Chairman Remarks

Mike kept his opening remarks brief and indicated that he wanted to go through a year-end review of key meetings and goals that were completed as a board in order to finish the high note and set the stage for next year.

Executive Directors Report

A. Old Business

a. Update on Fall Events:

Spooktacular

We've started the planning for the Spooktacular event that we do in

collaboration with the recreation department. We did that because, you know, we did it on a, I believe Friday last year. And although it was K, it was probably the most foot traffic that I've ever seen downtown for a s Spooktacular. It was a bit overwhelming for the businesses, especially considering that, you know, most businesses have their regular Friday customers that come in to eat to shop.

Jubilee

This coming week we'll be further discussing the Holiday Jubilee.

Robeson

We do have plans underway for the Remembering Robeson event - hoping to do the third week of October.

A small planning committee is being put together and we're hoping to recruit a host committee that can help us drive ticket sales as a fundraiser for the Paul Robeson sculpture.

We are also in the process of reapplying for the LAP grant to bridge the gap with funding. The call to artists for the Robeson sculpture is due on Friday the 15th.

b. Q4 Wrap:

Budget:

Natalie Informed the Board that the org will begin the budget process in October with the intention to present the budget to the DSA board at the November meeting and then get on the agenda for Borough Council at their December meeting so that the DSA can adopt the budget in January.

She summarized that the 2024 Budget would be accepted by the DSA as a preliminary budget after the presentation to the Board in November. Then following the Budget presentation to Council in December there needs to be a 28-day waiting period before the DSA could hold a Public Meeting and then – provided no major changes are to be made – the organization could then formally vote to adopt the budget at the January meeting.

Nomination Committee:

Natalie advised the Board that two board members are vacating their seats and at least two seats expire at the end of 2023.

She stated that in order to get those seats filled, first the Board has to establish a nomination committee. Then there will be notifications sent out to all 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. After which, the nomination committee will make a recommendation to the Board at the

December meeting for a slate of candidates to fill the available seats.

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

Mike Kerwin mentioned that we have some old resumes from interested candidates that we should consider.

Natalie advised that concurrent with sending out the press release and asking new people if they're interested, she also reaches out to individuals that have submitted resumes in the past to see if they're still interested in serving and if they would like to be considered for the coming year.

Annual Meeting:

Natalie summarized that last year's annual meeting was held in January. The choice was made strategically as to not compete with Holiday Parties, other annual meetings and the Holiday shopping season. She asked if the Board would like to keep the meeting in January for this year.

Consensus was reached to keep the meeting in January.

Natalie mentioned that this would be a good time to swear in new Board members, elect executive officers and hold the Public Hearing on the 2024 Budget.

c. Audit Update

Natalie advised that she continues to work with Suppley Clooney to finalize the audit. She stated that she didn't think the auditor properly understood the nature of the organization's grant with Somerset County (for Charm Field Sculpture Project) and how that impacted the 2022 budget. She asked them to go back and reexamine the parameters of the agreement understanding that it wasn't a traditional grant, and more of an RFP. The inability to draw down on funds until 2023 affected the DSA's ability to pay general expenses in real time.

Suppley agreed to take a new look at those numbers and then come back to us with an updated letter and draft of the audit.

d. Marketing Coordinator Update

Natalie summarized the hiring process for the Marketing Coordinator reiterating that an ad was put out in August to fill the position. The ad was live for about three weeks. Several resumes were submitted and out of those resumes Natalie called in five candidates to be interviewed. Out of those five, she locked in on two to call back. Their resumes were included in the meeting packet. Chas Stevens made himself available to join for the interviews.

Chas advised the Board that both candidates were terrific. He went over the

pros and cons of each candidate for the Board noting that they both had a solid handle on content creation tools, social media channels and services, and data analysis.

He mentioned that the 1st candidate was very outgoing and also a creative writing minor. They were also able to see some writing samples that are still live and published online.

His feedback was that, in his opinion, this candidate would be a good fit for the position.

Natalie advised the Board that they would go into further detail in executive session and that a hiring memo was included in the packet for discussion at that time.

B. New Business

a. Proposed Streetscape, Phase 1

Natalie and Mike met with arterial Streets to update them on the adoption of the plan and plan to present the plan to the various stakeholders.

Mike informed the Board that he and Natalie we asked Arterial to help us visualize how we would implement this streetscape plan with the least amount of interference for the businesses and in a way that would make the most impact. So, they came up with the phasing map.

He continued stating that one of the things they discussed was the number of projects that were listed and prioritizing them in a way that made sense. As a result, they decided to focus on Division Street as a primary focal point, continuing east and then circling back to West Main Street.

Natalie reiterated that various phases of the plan are interchangeable based on planned work from DOT, incoming development and other factors.

She further advised that that asked Arterial to also put together a list of grants that the org. can pursue to fund some of these improvements that they can give over to their grant writers to start writing some of these grants.

Further discussion was had among Board members about expanding the Boundaries of the SID.

Natalie advised that before considering formally expanding the SID, she would like to engage the Dept. of community affairs about the Neighborhood Preservation Program. The NPP zone that is eligible is the entirety of Main Street all the way up to and including Gaston Avenue.

b. Proposed Strategy Session with Mercer Planning

Mike Started the conversation on this topic discussing Mercer Planning's

background and connection to other organizations in the Downtown space including Downtown New Jersey, of which the company serves as the defacto executive director.

Natalie explained the proposal including the fact that it would be broken up into two phases (part 1 in 2024 and part two in 2025) and clarified that we would be looking to move on this proposal in 2024 due to the turnover on the Board and to engage incoming Board Members.

The total cost of the initiative was quoted at \$8500.

Vote to approve

MOTION: Theresa Bonner

SECOND: Rick St. Pierre

Vote to Accept:

Yea: Sejal Sharma, Chas. Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Masick, Theresa Bonner

Nay: none **Recuse:** none **Abstain:** none

c. Office Space with SCBP

Natalie met today with Chris Edwards from the Business Partnership. They let her know that they would be moving into 50 Division St on the third floor.

They're having a completely new office space built out and, recognizing the synergy between the business partnership, Somerset County Tourism and the downtown Somerville Alliance, they asked the DSA to move in.

They did not provide formal numbers but on the surface, it seems like the DSA would be saving money by taking advantage of the opportunity. Natalie also mentioned that considering the synergy with Somerset County Tourism/SCBP and Ridewise, it makes sense for us to all be located in the same space.

The buildout will include a conference room similar to additional perks like two offices, 24/7 access to the building and the ability to work with them on additional programming/educational initiatives for our local businesses.

Sejal Sharma mentioned that she believes that this is an organic next step.

Kevin Sluka reiterated that at Office Evolution, the setup is turnkey with furniture/phones etc. he questioned what that would look like in the agreement with the Partnership. He also questioned whether the DSA would lose their identity by moving in with the Partnership.

Natalie advised that she was told that the offices would come furnished and the DSA would just have to bring their technology.

SCBP said they're moving away from having desk set phones and that they're moving towards a solution with teams. So, the DSA may have to find a work around there as well as with having a receptionist, but it seems like everything else would be a shared service including WIFI, copy, printing, etc.

Rick St. Pierre expressed concern with impacting Office Evolution's business by pulling two offices from them to just be in the same building.

A vote on this matter was postponed to a future meeting. Natalie was asked for a rendering and financial information to be presented at the next meeting.

C. Vote to Amend Bylaws

Vote on this matter postponed due to lack of a super-majority.

D. Committee Reports

Natalie Advised that since the last DSA meeting, the marketing committee and the infrastructure committee met.

Marketing Committee

The Committee discussed current marketing efforts and discussed what the fall marketing program will look like. She is excited to onboard a new employee that will be able to work more closely with the marketing committee so that the org. can continue to hone the marketing program and get that to transition to additional foot traffic and patronage to the downtown district.

Infrastructure Committee

The infrastructure committee met to discuss the contract with CDS, which is currently in review by DSA attorneys, and to discuss the timeline for putting out a new RFP for services.

Kevin asked about the Sandwich Board Signs and if there has been any progress with getting businesses to improve compliance.

Natalie advised that stickers have been developed that reiterate what the procedures are for sandwich board signs. Those are going to be affixed to any sandwich board signs that are out of compliance.

Kevin also asked about window clings on vacant windows.

Natalie advised that she has a meeting with Speedpro to discuss the best approach to cover the windows. There is a concern about some of the windows on South Bridge St because of metal mullions that break up the windows into various sections.

E. Finance Reports

Vote to approve

MOTION: Michael Kerwin

SECOND: Theresa Bonner

Vote to Approve:

Yea: Sejal Sharma, Chas. Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Masick, Theresa Bonner

Nay: none **Recuse:** none **Abstain:** none

F. Payment Authorization

Vote to approve

MOTION: Rick St. Pierre

SECOND: Michael Kerwin

Vote to Approve:

Yea: Sejal Sharma, Chas. Stevens, Kevin Sluka, Mike Kerwin, Rick St. Pierre, Alison Masick, Theresa Bonner

Nay: none **Recuse:** none **Abstain:** none

G. Comments from the Public

Marc from Pop's Bike Shop requested information from the Tour of Somerville. Mentioned that somebody did stop by gave a really rough idea of the plan for the 2024 race. The person who stopped by advised that they would bring them in on upcoming meetings but had not heard anything since.

Mike Kerwin offered to do a follow up introduction.

Rick St. Pierre advised that AOD is still running the bike race, not the DSA.

Marc also asked about the development of the corner of Bridge St and asked for a copy of the Streetscape plan.

Mike agreed to chat with him further following the meeting.

H. Executive Session

I. Adjournment

Kevin Sluka made a motion to adjourn the **meeting at 7:28PM.**

