



**Mansfield Downtown Partnership
Board of Directors
February 3, 2022
By Teleconference**

4:30 PM

Minutes

Present: Ryan Aylesworth, Brian Coleman, Mario Conjura, Steve Ferrigno, Frank Gifford, Prabhas KC, Toni Moran, Kyle Muncy, Sean Vasington, Emily Wicks, and Cara Workman

Guest: Ron Schurin

Staff: Cynthia van Zelm, Executive Director

1. Call to Order – Welcome new Board member

President Kyle Muncy called the meeting to order at 4:31 pm.

New Board member Brian Coleman, Board members, and Ron Schurin introduced themselves.

2. Opportunity for Public to Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Approval of Minutes of January 6, 2022

Cara Workman made a motion to approve the January 6, 2022 minutes. Steve Ferrigno seconded the motion. Mr. Coleman abstained. The motion was approved with one abstention.

4. Executive Director Report

Cynthia van Zelm said she has been working with Partnership Senior Communications Manager Kathleen Paterson and a team from Thread City Development on a Mansfield-Willimantic Restaurant Week scheduled for February 21 to March 6. Ms. van Zelm noted the food establishments who are participating thus far as well as the business sponsors from Mansfield.

Ms. van Zelm said she is recruiting for the part-time Administrative Assistant position. In response to a question from Toni Moran about whether it should be a full-time position, Ms. van Zelm said that there is enough work to do and she will be looking for a student intern this summer.

5. Next Steps for Implementation of Downtown Storrs Strategic Action Plan

The Board worked through reviewing next steps to implement the Tier 1 strategies in the Downtown Storrs Strategic Action Plan.

- 1) Develop Mansfield wayfinding plan and

2) Design “gateway” or “landmark” signs for Downtown Storrs (Storrs Road):

Ms. van Zelm said the Merje Design consulting team was in Mansfield this week to kick off work on the wayfinding plan including tours of Mansfield, UConn, and Downtown Storrs, and initial meetings with stakeholders. Additional meetings will be held next week.

She suggested combining strategies 1) and 2) for implementation which is underway.

Ryan Aylesworth noted that the Merje team reported that the Storrs/Mansfield name dilemma is a challenge.

3) Create a new series of UConn focused program/events in Downtown Storrs – align themes with athletics, alumni events, major campus celebrations, etc.

Ms. van Zelm said some work has begun on this strategy including a planning meeting with Board members Ms. Workman, Prabhas KC, Emily Wicks, and Partnership Event Coordinator Denise Kegler. A showcase of UConn student talent hosted by the Partnership is tentatively scheduled for the spring on Betsy Paterson Square.

Ms. Workman noted the need for more events/activities on the Square in general, not just UConn students.

Toni Moran said there is a lot of local talent in the community. Brian Coleman echoed the goal of providing opportunities for townspeople on the Square. Ms. Workman encouraged Ms. Moran to send any performers to Ms. Kegler.

Ms. Workman noted that insurance requirements continue to be an issue and several meetings have been held with Town, Partnership, and UConn staff on this issue. Ms. van Zelm said she hopes this issue can be resolved before event season is in full swing. Ryan Aylesworth noted the issues and will continue to work with Ms. van Zelm and others.

Ms. Wicks said busking is allowed on the Square in response to a question from Mr. Schurin.

4) Establish a temporary storefront activation program

Ms. van Zelm said she received approval from the commercial property owners in the new part of Downtown Storrs to paint outdoor windows. Ms. Kegler has reached out to artists and received some initial interest but most wanted a stipend. Work continues on this promotion.

Mr. KC asked if property owners would contribute to the cost and Ms. van Zelm said this would be part of a larger discussion of property owner contributions.

5) Assign dedicated Board members to lead quarterly property owner engagement efforts

Mr. Muncy suggested coming back to this strategy after level of commitment is discussed with some of the commercial property owners.

6) Recruit year-round part-time student staff to support events and marketing activities

Ms. Workman said she has made the introduction to Ms. van Zelm with Career Services staff at UConn. Ms. van Zelm said she will focus on an intern once an Administrative Assistant is brought on board.

7) Expand Betsy Paterson Square through flex open street

Ryan Aylesworth suggested that piloting the closure of the section of Dog Lane between Dog Lane Café and Mooyah provides an opportunity for a more pedestrian atmosphere with additional open space for events, and it extends the space for outdoor seating. Mr. Aylesworth said Dog Lane has been closed for events in the past where it has received support from the Traffic Authority. He suggested pursuing the closing lower of part of Dog Lane as a pilot project could be a good experiment to see if the benefits result.

Ron Schurin suggested that a traffic study be done and the neighbors in the area be brought into the discussion.

Sean Vasington said the strategies have not been sorted by cost. The partial closure of Dog Lane should be evaluated in that vein as well as vetted with Mansfield emergency personnel and the CT Department of Transportation. He agreed that a pilot with temporary closures as has been done in the past would be a good place to start.

Ms. Moran asked for further explanation of the benefits of closing part of Dog Lane. Steve Ferrigno said one of the key benefits is making the area more pedestrian friendly. Betsy Paterson Square is completely surrounded by roads. If Dog Lane was partially closed, people would not have to cross the street to get to the Square. He suggested leaving barricades up for a longer time period to test the concept.

Mr. Schurin and Mr. Coleman agreed that the project should be evaluated closely and as a pilot.

- 8) Develop a marketing campaign promoting all-day regional itineraries for target customer profiles – overnight visitor, game day visitor, day trip visitor, new student, returning student, alumni, faculty/staff

Ms. van Zelm said this is a top priority and Ms. Paterson has been working on regional itineraries.

Ms. Workman noted that this was one of the projects in the Partnership's Marketing and Development Plan from a few years ago. She said the information is in place; it is a matter of execution.

Ms. Workman wondered if the Advertising and Promotion Committee/Task Force could be resurrected for this purpose. Ms. van Zelm suggested a working group, which involves less logistics for Partnership staff.

Steve Ferrigno said he would be interested in working on this project.

In response to a question from Ms. Moran, Ms. Workman said there would be overlap with the work of the Four-Town (Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, Tolland) steering committee and staff in terms of putting together regional itineraries.

- 9) Create Downtown Storrs tenancing strategy in partnership with property owners



Mr. Muncy said there is a cost to a formal tenancing strategy. The discussion of a tenancing strategy is a part of the on-going conversation with the two main commercial property owners.

- 10) Develop Partnership's financial plan to determine new levels of donations required of property owners to sustain Partnership's efforts

Mr. Muncy said this strategy is related to the discussion with the property owners. There has been discussion about regular contributions.

- 11) Re-evaluate downtown business owner communication

Mr. Muncy said Mr. Gifford has suggested more regular social events with the Board and property owners. He said the December social was an example of a time when he could talk to a business owner one on one.

Mr. KC agreed that it's helpful to approach businesses in a more engaged way rather than businesses only hearing from the Board about events or donations.

Mr. Conjura suggested an after-hours event.

Mr. Gifford said the marketing and promoting the Partnership does generates the most enthusiasm among business owners.

Mr. Muncy suggested a social event at a UConn baseball game to make more connections.

Mr. Muncy noted that additional funding will be needed to accomplish all the strategies.

In the essence of time, the Board did not review the Tier 2 strategies at this time.

The Board reviewed the proposed next steps with the two main commercial property owners including endorsement of the Strategic Action Plan, a financial commitment, a follow-up one on one meeting, a seat on the Board vis a vis financial commitment, and a meeting with both property owners.

Mr. Ferrigno said the tenancing strategy might be something best left to the property owners and their respective leasing agents since this is what they do.

Mr. Muncy said the discussion thus far with property owners has been favorable including the reception to the Strategic Action Plan.

Mr. Muncy said the goal is for the Partnership and the property owners to think of each other as partners.

Mr. Gifford said the Governance Committee discussed the recruitment of future Board members. One of the strategies in the Strategic Action Plan is to create a micro influencer campaign – what groups is the Partnership trying to influence? He would like to see further discussion on this question and encouraged Board members to think about future Board members.

Ms. van Zelm said she would draft some proposed working groups with proposed members for the next Board meeting.

6. Review of “New Business of the Year” Award

Ms. van Zelm reviewed the proposed New Business of the Year Award as previously discussed with a small group and the Board.

Ms. Workman encouraged further evaluation of the criteria per previous conversations. Ms. van Zelm will bring back a revised outline to the Board at its March meeting.

Ms. KC asked why a new business was picked vs. just a business of the year. Mr. Ferrigno said the Partnership is also planning a member business/individual spotlight quarterly on its website. It currently exists but the goal is to change out members spotlighted quarterly.

7. Report from Committees/Working Groups

Celebrate Mansfield Festival

Interim Chair Kyle Muncy said the Festival is planned for September 24. He asked Board members to start thinking about volunteering.

Two new Committee members have joined the team.

The Committee is reviewing a possible edit to the CMF mission to include a reference the event’s commitment to sustainability (and also the Town’s commitment).

The Committee hopes to expand the number of Craft Booths at the event, with the possible addition of craft demonstrations.

Finance and Growth

Chair Toni Moran said the Committee made some changes to Ms. van Zelm’s draft FY22-23 budget - higher proposed staff increases, and deleting the cost of parking for two employees in the parking garage.

Ms. van Zelm said the budget will come to the Board at its April meeting for review.

Governance Committee

Mr. Gifford said the Committee briefly reviewed any changes to the Partnership’s bylaws, and discussed Board recruitment.

8. Executive Director Evaluation

Mr. Muncy encouraged Board members to return their Executive Director evaluations. Ms. van Zelm said she would have her self-evaluation/work plan completed by Monday.

9. Correspondence and Communications

Mr. Muncy noted Sam Bruder’s letter of resignation in the packet.

10. Adjourn

Mr. KC made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Moran seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:23 pm.

Minutes prepared by Cynthia van Zelm.