FINANCE AND GROWTH COMMITTEE MEETING
By Teleconference

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2022
4:30 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Chair Toni Moran, Steve Ferrigno, Shamim Patwa
Absent: Ryan Aylesworth, Mario Conjura, Mike Switchenko
Staff: Cynthia van Zelm, Joshua Stern
Guest: Prithvi Satish

1. Call to Order
Shamim Patwa served as chair for this meeting and called the meeting to order at 4:37 p.m.
Prithvi Satish, committee members, and staff introduced themselves.

2. Public Comment
There was no public comment.

3. Approval of Finance and Growth Committee Minutes from May 18, 2022
There was no quorum to approve the minutes.

4. Review of June 30, 2022/End of Fiscal Year Financials
Cynthia van Zelm first outlined the statement of revenues, expenditures, and changes in fund balance. She noted that the membership fees for the fiscal year totaled $16,200, exceeding the amount that had been budgeted for. She briefly explained to Mr. Satish that all committee and Board members are expected to be Partnership members. She also noted that the operating income is at a loss of $4,890 for the year, explaining that the fund balance was used to cover part of the cost of hiring Streetsense to develop the strategic plan.

Toni Moran asked about the increase in professional and technical expenditures. Ms. van Zelm said this amount increased mainly because of Streetsense. Ms. Moran also asked why the total salaries and benefits expenditures for the year were lower than the budgeted amount. Ms. van Zelm explained that the Partnership went several months without an Administrative Assistant between Mary Ollenu leaving and Joshua Stern being hired. Ms. Patwa asked how the
Partnership achieved the growth in membership fees. Ms. van Zelm said some members gave more this year than they had in the past. She added that the Sustainable Funding Working Group has encouraged some businesses to give an annual lump sum rather than sponsoring the events individually.

Ms. van Zelm said Fund 270, the fund for the Partnership’s events, has had a positive balance from all events so far this year. She said fundraising for the Celebrate Mansfield Festival is going well. She said the amount in reserve for the Town Square has remained largely the same, and some of the balance will likely start to be expended soon. The Promotion/Public Spaces Working Group has been looking into possible infrastructure improvements in the Square, such as replacing the tables and chairs, adding games, or adding structures to provide shade.

Ms. van Zelm said the Town has paid itself back for the Storrs Center Project. She explained to Mr. Satish that these cost overruns came from the parking garage and other projects during the development of Storrs Center. Ms. Moran asked if there will be no more tax rebates from the Town. Ms. van Zelm confirmed that the abatement is over and the Storrs Center property owners are paying full taxes.

Ms. van Zelm said LAZ’s net income for the year was $110,000, which is down from previous years, likely because of the decrease in visitors due to the pandemic, as well as business closings. Ms. Moran asked if the Town is still taking a $50,000 yearly contribution to go into a reserve fund. Ms. van Zelm said the yearly contribution is at approximately $58,000. She said the contribution goes into the Town’s repair and replacement fund for capital projects in the parking garage.

The Committee did not take a vote on the end of year financials as there was no quorum.

5. **Update on Partnership Strategic Action Plan and Downtown Storrs**

Ms. van Zelm briefly outlined the three working groups that were formed to implement the strategic plan. She had already given an update on the activities of the Sustainable Funding Working Group under item 4.

Steve Ferrigno said the Business Owner/Property Owner Engagement Working Group held a networking event in June at Hops 44. All of the businesses in Downtown Storrs were invited, with each assigned to a different member of the working group who emailed and called them to invite them. Around 40 people attended the event, and it allowed many attendees to meet people they had not yet met due to the pandemic. The working group considers the event a success and is looking into holding a similar event in late September or early October.

Ms. van Zelm said the Promotion/Public Spaces Working Group is looking into infrastructure to improve Betsy Paterson Square. The group’s other area of focus is the arts, including performances on the Square. Ms. van Zelm said Event Coordinator Denise Kegler is looking into organizing a second Husky Hour Student Showcase, which Mr. Satish said he would be willing to help organize. Ms. Moran suggested that any of the student organizations that performed at Jorgensen’s Asian Night event last spring would be a welcome addition to the Showcase. Mr. Satish said he knows people involved in some of these groups and could reach out to them.

Ms. van Zelm said the Promotion/Public Spaces Working Group’s other main arts-related focus is looking into using art installations to make the vacant storefronts in the Downtown more
inviting. Administrative Assistant Joshua Stern said he recently spoke with Nicole Powell, the Marketing Director for The Promenade Shops at Evergreen Walk in South Windsor, CT, about a similar mural project she helped coordinate there. He said Ms. Powell told him the murals were a collaboration with the nonprofit art collective RiseUP for Arts, which also created the Martin Luther King, Jr. mural at the Mansfield Community Center. About 10 local artists affiliated with RiseUP contributed to the murals, which followed a loose spring/summer theme and were conceptualized and implemented over two consecutive weekends.

Ms. van Zelm said the Partnership has permission from the Downtown Storrs property owners to install art in the empty storefronts. Evergreen Walk’s mural project cost around $7,000, and Ms. van Zelm contacted Ms. Powell to ask where these funds came from. Mr. Stern said Ms. Powell had also mentioned that once the murals were all in place, members of the public were encouraged to vote on their favorites, with awards given to the artists who made the top three.

In response to a question from Ms. Moran, Mr. Stern said the Evergreen Walk murals are temporary. Ms. Moran said she likes the idea of temporary art installations because of the flexibility they provide. Mr. Ferrigno said art installations could also be a way to engage different segments of the population, noting that the storefronts could rotate between displaying art from RiseUP and art by E. O. Smith and UConn students. He thinks showcasing student work will help increase traffic in the Downtown. Ms. van Zelm added that Ms. Kegler has reached out to the UConn School of Fine Arts, and she and Ms. Kegler met with Interim Dean of Fine Arts Alain Frogley to ask about the possibility of UConn classes painting the storefronts.

Ms. Patwa asked if there has been any activity at the former location of Geno’s Grille. Ms. van Zelm said the property owners have been in conversations with some people about leasing the space, but nothing concrete has happened so far. She said Jefferson Fry Company seems to be close to opening, and Chase Bank is expected to open in November. She also said Partnership Senior Communications Manager Kathleen Paterson read in a Facebook post that Bagel Zone Café and Grill plans to re-open in University Plaza, in the former location of Brother’s Deli, once Holiday Mall is demolished to make way for The Standard. Ms. Paterson has contacted University Plaza owner Manny Haidous to confirm.

6. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

*Minutes taken by Joshua Stern*