

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Chair S. Ferrigno, K. Dilaj, N. McKenney, A. Raggi, V. Souter-Kline, L. Watson

Members Absent: L. Aldrich

Ex-Officio Members Present: B. Coleman

Ex-Officio Members Absent: A Moran

Staff Present: C. van Zelm, Executive Director, Mansfield Downtown Partnership; J. Stern, Administrative Assistant, Mansfield Downtown Partnership

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Ferrigno called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Souter-Kline MOVED, Watson SECONDED to approve the July 21, 2022 minutes as presented. Motion PASSED unanimously.

4. REPORTS

A. MEMBER UPDATES

No report.

B. Staff Updates

Van Zelm pointed to an August 2022 press release, included in the meeting packet, from the Office of Governor Ned Lamont about grants available to the hospitality industry. She said that because of the effects of COVID, this is the second time funds have been released directly to businesses with certain qualifications without an application process.

Van Zelm said the 4-Town initiative recently hired Josh Hull to serve as its intern until May. Hull worked at the Partnership office last week and will rotate among the four towns. The 4-Town staff is currently working with consultant team DKA on creating logos and branding. They will send out a survey in two weeks to get feedback from the public on the logos, and the top vote-getters will then be brought to the Steering Committee for final decision. The survey will be promoted using social media and press releases.

In response to a question from McKenney, van Zelm said advertising firm DKA is creating the logos and Hull is helping facilitate the process. Ferrigno and van Zelm clarified that the branding effort is for the 4-Town initiative, not to rebrand any particular town.

C. Business Updates (Openings/Closings)

Stern said Jefferson Fry Company opened August 31 in the former location of Husky Pizza and that Chase Bank is scheduled to open in the winter in the former Bruegger's Bagels/Jamba Juice location.

Stern and van Zelm said research and development company Ciencia plans to rent office space at 215 Stafford Road.

Stern said Bagel Zone Café and Grill is moving from Holiday Mall into the former Brother's Deli space in University Plaza. Ferrigno and McKenney think it is expected to re-open there around October 1. Stern said Domino's was approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission to move from Storrs Commons to 650 Middle Turnpike, at Four Corners. Mansfield Academy of Dance is moving from Mellow Road to 1768 Storrs Road, in the former Nature's Medicine space; Commission members noted that its sign is up in the new location. Stern said Weichert Realtors has moved from Holiday Mall to Ledgebrook Drive. He also confirmed that Alex Salustri sold Chiropractic Health Center to Sherri Ericksen.

Dilaj said floral design business Rooted Dreams recently opened at the owner's home. In response to a question from McKenney about the businesses at Holiday Mall, Ferrigno said he had heard that Dick's Auto Care is closing and that accountant Borgita & Co. and attorney Dennis Poitras plan to relocate. McKenney asked whether Central K-9 plans to relocate as well.

D. Housing Updates

Ferrigno said Acting Director of Planning and Development Jennifer Kaufman provided a memo with several housing updates. Van Zelm summarized that several pre-applications for the Middle Turnpike area are expected to come in soon. She also noted from the memo that the Inland Wetlands Agency is continuing a public hearing on the proposed development between Hops 44/TOAST and where The Standard will be. The proposal is for approximately 114 apartments and 12,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space.

Van Zelm said she anticipates some outreach as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Plan for the Goodwin School area starting this fall.

E. EDC Calendar

There are no significant updates.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS AT MEETING

A. Follow-Up on Co-Working Space; Tour of West Hartford Coworking on September 28 at 12:30 pm

Stern said five members of the EDC have RSVP'd to the tour so far. Coleman said he plans to attend as well. Stern noted that the tour will be considered a special meeting of the EDC.

B. Update on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Local Business Relief Fund Program

Van Zelm said a total of 24 applications were received for the program; 19 were approved for funding, 2 were incomplete, and 3 were deemed ineligible per the criteria. The approved funding totals around \$158,000. Van Zelm is currently working with the Town Finance Department on grant agreements, most of which have been turned in. The Town Council recently approved a second round of funding, which will include nonprofits as well as businesses. Van Zelm expects that businesses that received funding during the first round will be allowed to apply again and that the solicitation process will be largely the same. She would like to find a list of nonprofits in Mansfield to ensure they are all notified.

Souter-Kline noted that some daycare facilities had expressed interest during the first round of funding. She and other Commission members think adding a second round and including nonprofits were the right decisions.

C. Promotion of Arts in Mansfield/Update on ARPA Arts Recovery Plan

Ferrigno said he, Coleman, and van Zelm met earlier this week with the Arts Advisory Committee (AAC) to discuss possibilities for an arts event in Downtown Storrs. The AAC suggested the weekend before UConn graduation as a possible time for such an event. They discussed holding a festival including artists selling and showcasing visual art, performances, and art activities for children. The AAC pointed out that live music could detract from artists who wish to speak about their art but thought dance performances could work. Coleman said it would be ideal for the event to be spread throughout the Downtown.

Ferrigno said the topic of installing paintings in the vacant storefronts in the Downtown also came up during the meeting, and the AAC said they would discuss some ideas about how to go about it. Stern outlined a conversation he had with Nicole Powell, Marketing Director for The Promenade Shops at Evergreen Walk in South Windsor, CT, about the recent installation of murals in the vacant storefronts there. These murals follow a loose spring/summer theme and were made in collaboration with the nonprofit art collective RiseUP for Arts, which also created the Martin Luther King, Jr. mural at the Mansfield Community Center. The plan is to leave the murals up for a year in the storefronts that remain vacant and re-evaluate them at that point. Stern said Powell had also mentioned that once the murals were in place, members of the public were encouraged to vote on their favorites, with awards given to the artists who created the top three.

Van Zelm said the Partnership staff has also reached out to the UConn School of Fine Arts to ask about the possibility of showcasing student art inside or outside the storefronts. The property owners have given approval for showcasing art. McKenney also suggested reaching out to art classes at E. O. Smith. Van Zelm said E. O. Smith student art has previously been displayed during Downtown events, with some oversight from the art teachers. Solicitations have also been done through the AAC as well as Open Studios, with little response. Ferrigno suggested that the paintings could be rotated according to the holidays and the Downtown events like Trick-or-Treat and Winter Welcome.

D. Prepare for Business Outreach for Winter Welcome

Van Zelm said Event Coordinator Denise Kegler will begin outreach for Winter Welcome after the Celebrate Mansfield Festival. The staff will ask businesses to provide items such as food and coupons for the event, per usual. Van Zelm and Ferrigno have also discussed building on the swag bags that were used at last year's event, opening them up to all businesses in town, not just the Downtown ones. Dilaj suggested that the businesses sponsor crafts or other interactive activities.

Van Zelm said that in response to feedback from last year's Winter Welcome, the Partnership is looking into a better amplification system for the singers at the event. The Partnership also plans to use some of its funding for a PA system.

E. State of Connecticut Cultural District Discussion

Ferrigno said the State is looking to expand the number of designated cultural districts. There is an application process to be designated as such, and he and the Partnership staff have been looking into whether it would be worthwhile for Downtown Storrs to apply. He said being a cultural district does not currently make an area eligible for more funding, but it may in the future.

Van Zelm said Wendy Bury, Executive Director of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, has offered to attend the October EDC meeting to explain the application process. There are currently four designated cultural districts in Connecticut, with four other towns in Eastern Connecticut working on forming them. The process takes between 6 and 12 months.

McKenney said Diane Nadeau, President and CEO of the Windham Region Chamber of Commerce, also thinks the designation is worth pursuing and has offered to speak with the EDC about the process.

Ferrigno noted that having gone through the cultural district application process could give Downtown Storrs a leg up when applying for other grants as well.

F. Subcommittee Updates

None of the subcommittees had met since the previous EDC meeting. Ferrigno said he sent out an email to the members of the Business Outreach Subcommittee earlier this evening. He added that Stern recently emailed the Development Project Review Subcommittee members to schedule a meeting on the referral application from Acting Director of Planning and Development Jennifer Kaufman for the redevelopment of the Champagne Motor Car Company site. Van Zelm said this application may come to the EDC in October after going through the Subcommittee.

G. Town/UConn Collaboration Update

Ferrigno said the Town/UConn Collaboration Group has not met since the last EDC meeting. The group is planning to meet again in October. He briefly reminded the EDC of the planned autonomous vehicle test track at the Depot Campus and the sewer agreement that was recently signed between UConn and the Town.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

All noted.

Ferrigno mentioned that Forbes recently named Mansfield the best town in Connecticut to retire in.

7. FUTURE MEETINGS

A. Upcoming Meeting Schedule

The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 20, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. It will be an organizational meeting at which the Commission will re-vote on the positions of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

B. Future Meeting Topics

The Commission plans to continue discussing future business networking events. Van Zelm said the preference of the Downtown Partnership Business Owner/Property Owner Engagement Working Group is to keep the next event focused on the Downtown businesses and then discuss the possibility of a Town-wide event.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Dilaj MOVED, Souter-Kline SECONDED to adjourn. Motion PASSED unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:
Joshua Stern
Administrative Assistant
Mansfield Downtown Partnership, Inc.