

MINUTES

Members Present: Chair S. Ferrigno, L. Aldrich, K. Dilaj, N. McKenney, L. Watson

Members Absent: A. Raggi, V. Souter-Kline

Ex-Officio Members Present: B. Coleman (left meeting at 6:45 p.m.)

Ex-Officio Members Absent: A. Moran

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

Others Present: Wendy Bury, Executive Director, Cultural Coalition; Charlene Haukom, Northeast Region Coordinator, Cultural Coalition

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Ferrigno called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

McKenney MOVED, Dilaj SECONDED to approve the September 15, 2022 minutes and the September 28, 2022 special meeting minutes as presented. Motion PASSED unanimously.

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS AT MEETING

A. Presentation from Wendy Bury, Executive Director for The Cultural Coalition (serving southeastern and northeastern CT), on forming Cultural Districts

Bury gave a brief introduction to the Cultural Coalition and its goal of promoting economic development through arts and culture. She then focused on Connecticut's Cultural District program, which began in 2019 and was modeled after a similar program in Massachusetts. She outlined the program's definition of a Cultural District and said that the program is still evolving, so the definitions of terms like "walkable" can vary from one area to another. She explained how forming a Cultural District can be a tool for economic development.

Bury then outlined the three main steps in the process of forming a Cultural District:

- 1) Determining municipal readiness and drawing the boundaries of the district
- 2) Forming a Municipal Cultural District with a resolution passed by the local government
- 3) Applying to become a State-recognized Cultural District

Bury outlined the standards and criteria of a Cultural District. She noted that at least one community input meeting must be held, with three being the recommended number of meetings. She also said a resolution must be passed to form a Cultural District Commission, which has several representation requirements for its membership. If a town or city does not wish to form a new commission from scratch, the Cultural District Commission can be an Advisory Council to an existing board or

commission. Alternatively, the Cultural District can be assigned to an existing board or commission if it meets the representation requirements.

Bury outlined several ways the State invests in Cultural Districts and listed the documents that must be submitted to apply to become a State-recognized Cultural District. She explained the membership requirements, duties, and procedures of the Cultural District Commission. She also briefly explained how a Cultural District can be mapped and said the final step in the application process is a site visit by the State. There are currently five State-designated Cultural Districts in Connecticut, with several more currently in the process of becoming Cultural Districts.

In response to a question from Aldrich, Bury said a Cultural District is not intended to contain multiple towns, but it is possible for a town the size of Mansfield to form more than one Cultural District. She said looking for connectable clusters is key when mapping the boundaries of the district.

Dilaj asked how artists have been involved in Cultural Districts. Bury said the Cultural Coalition had helped establish an Arts Council for New London before a Cultural District was formed there. She noted that artists are required to be represented on the Cultural District Commission. Dilaj asked about creating spaces for artists in a district. Bury mentioned several types of projects that have come up in Cultural Districts that can support the creative economy.

In response to questions from Coleman and McKenney, Bury displayed New London's application document and listed the towns and cities in Eastern Connecticut that are currently working with the Coalition to form Cultural Districts. Ferrigno asked about the benefits of forming a Cultural District. Bury said she expects the State to start investing resources in Cultural Districts soon. She also thinks that once the State has more Cultural Districts, the Office of Tourism will use them as a way to showcase the State.

Bury and Haukom left the meeting at 6:53 p.m. McKenney said she thinks a Cultural District would be worthwhile for the Town to pursue. Ferrigno said he will contact van Zelm to set up a time to meet with Bury to begin the process. He thinks the Arts Advisory Committee and the Parks & Recreation Department should be kept in the loop.

B. Subcommittee on Development Project Review – Special Permit Application of CPH Mansfield, LLC, Applicant/Champagne Toystore, LLC, Owner for commercial redevelopment including new professional office and restaurant uses with drive through facilities

Van Zelm displayed the site plans and architectural renderings of the proposed development. Ferrigno said the Development Project Review Subcommittee met last week with the applicants and their attorney. The applicant is proposing to remove one side of the existing Champagne Motor Car Company building. The car dealership and repair shop would continue to operate in the remaining building, and a separate building would be added on the other side of the site, housing two restaurants and a medical office. One of the restaurants would have a limited-service drive through, for pickup only, which is allowed in this zone per the current regulations. An additional driveway would also be added directly across from the East Brook Mall driveway.

Ferrigno noted that the parking lots behind the Champagne building would be used for car storage and inventory. He said that he and Watson, the two members of the Development Project Review Subcommittee, had asked during the meeting about traffic and potential impacts to the abutting Riverview Road neighborhood. The development is expected to create around 40 - 42 new jobs, most of them part time, and the impact on the Grand List would be approximately \$125,000 per year. Watson and Ferrigno feel the applicant was thorough and responsive to feedback and that the development

would be fitting for the area. Ferrigno noted that the PZC cannot take job creation or the impact on the Grand List into account when making their decision, but he feels these are important considerations.

McKenney asked how smooth the process of pre-ordering and picking up food from the limited-service drive-through would be. Ferrigno said the regulations only allow a limited-service drive-through in this zone because it is designated as a pedestrian-friendly area. McKenney wondered why a full-service drive-through is not allowed given that the McDonald's on the neighboring property has one. The Commission discussed.

McKenney MOVED, Dilaj SECONDED to recommend the Development Project Review Subcommittee draft a letter in support of the proposed development. Motion PASSED unanimously.

C. Updates on Winter Welcome

Denise Kegler, Event Coordinator for the Downtown Partnership, said that in previous years, some of the major elements of Winter Welcome have been community displays, performances on Betsy Paterson Square, and the Trim-a-Tree decorating contest. In addition, the Partnership has asked the Downtown Storrs businesses to provide coupons, treats, and other small promotional handouts, which go into bags that are given out to guests at the event. As recommended previously by the EDC, Kegler said that this year, the Partnership would like to expand this outreach to businesses throughout the Town of Mansfield.

Kegler said she and van Zelm recently met with a representative from the Human Rights Commission. Kegler has begun to reach out to a wider variety of student organizations to represent the diversity of the community. Outreach has also begun to choirs and other musical performers, as well as to businesses that will provide displays. She noted that Winter Welcome is a non-denominational winter event.

Kegler said the EDC had discussed the idea of adding craft sales to Winter Welcome, but the Mansfield Community Center and Parks & Recreation Department will be hosting a Family Fun Run event the same day and will feature craft booths there. She said Dilaj recently put her in contact with a florist who might be able to help with wreath making at Winter Welcome. She will check whether the wreath making could take place in an outdoor space, and, if not, a space in the Nash-Zimmer Transportation Center might be used for this or other hands-on activities. Kegler also said that in place of the window paintings that have been featured in previous years, the Partnership has ordered window clings that will be placed in several of the vacant spaces. These decorations are winter themed and will be kept up into January or February.

Kegler plans to put together a flyer to send out to businesses explaining what materials the Partnership needs for the gift bags. The guidelines and registration form for the displays have been put together.

D. Debrief on Tour of West Hartford Coworking

The Commission plans to debrief on the tour of West Hartford Coworking at the next meeting.

E. Town/UConn Collaboration Update

No updates were given.

5. REPORTS

A. MEMBER UPDATES

No report.

B. Staff Updates

No updates were given.

C. Business Updates (Openings/Closings)

No business openings or closings were discussed.

D. Housing Updates

No updates were given.

E. EDC Calendar

There are no significant updates.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

There was no discussion of the communications.

7. FUTURE MEETINGS

A. Upcoming Meeting Schedule

The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. It will be an organizational meeting at which the Commission will elect the positions of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

B. Future Meeting Topics

No future meeting topics were discussed.

8. ADJOURNMENT

McKenney MOVED, Dilaj SECONDED to adjourn. Motion PASSED unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

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