

Downtown Business District
Meeting Minutes
January 27, 2021
330 Main Street, Suite 200 Middletown, CT.

Attendees: VIA ZOOM MEETING WITH COMISSIONERS

Marie Kalita (Chair)	Sandra Russo-Driska, DBD Coordinator
Diane Gervais (Commissioner)	Mayor Ben Florsheim
Jennifer Alexander (Commissioner)	Capt. Rich Davis, MPD
Marc Levin (Commissioner)	Larry McHugh, President Chamber of Comm
Mike DiPiro (Commissioner)	Kevin Elak, Acting Health Director
Tom Ford (Commissioner)	Cathy Duncan, Chamber
Patrick Harding (Commissioner)	Chris Holden, Public Works
	Tom Marano, PCD
	Matt Lefebvre, Middlesex Music Academy
	Cassandra Day, Reporter
	Trevor Davis, 363 Main LLC

Mayor's Report

Thanked commission for opportunity to speak, especially on panhandling issue in the downtown area. Amato's setting model for our times. Noted new DBD website is a great tool for our City. Panhandling vs. aggressive behavior discussed at great length. Just asking for money vs. taking it a step further. All on same page, no tolerance for that behavior. Increasing foot patrols of police officers during outdoor dining went a very long way and we can discuss further ideas for how to work on this issue. Mayor will work with Police, DBD, Chamber to come up with ways to combat the issue further and report back to the DBD.

Police Report – Capt. Davis noted many discussions with Sandra and we continue to check in with businesses. We need to come up with a plan. Hartford Avenue coming into Middletown from Rte. 9 is not a good look with the trash in the woods and panhandlers standing on island. With respect to panhandling downtown and at restaurants and retail stores, visitors to our downtown do not want to wait for officer to take statement when they are approached aggressively. Noted having the warming shelter up on Washington St has kept some of the homeless off Main St.

Discussion followed with commission and attendees.

Marc noted that when you think of Middletown you think of Main St. and that we need to get a handle on this now to keep our downtown moving forward and this seems to go back to the court system and how long things are taking.

Jen noted how complicated this is and we have handled before but we have been in much better situations. Need to define aggressive behavior better. Would like to see us agree that aggressive also includes approaching someone that cannot easily leave where they are. (Ex: dining at a table, taking baby out of car) Also, we can be compassionate but what happens if they refuse services? Suggested collaborative partnerships and funding to move forward using social services, Gilead, etc.

Diane noted that another problem is many of the panhandlers are not aggressive until they receive money and then can drink, etc. It is still a problem and we need to continue to address it.

Marie asked the Mayor to look into coming up with a plan with social services, police, court system, and try to address before the spring when restaurants need to open with outdoor dining.

Mayor noted that he fully realized this problem is an impediment to our downtown businesses and he would take all the suggestions today including getting info on services available and working with police and city departments and the court try to devise a plan and report back next month at the DBD meeting.

Marie stated we did better years ago with Middletown Cares program and working with agencies to assist with the issues.

Larry McHugh noted the panhandlers stand out this time of year with less people on the street. He also noted the guides or having people on Main St to approach the panhandlers to move along may get them to stop. He noted the Mayor has been upfront with us and attended many meeting to discuss this ongoing issue. He stated that Marc was correct in the Main Street is the heart of downtown, and how the heart goes, so goes Middletown.

Suggestion from Trevor to have a palm card with phone numbers of agencies that can help people.

Police agree with Jen on defining aggressive behavior. Believes card hand out can be a good resource.

Marie and the Mayor to let us know the plan of action and timeline.

Public Works – Chris Holden noted sidewalk repairs are on hold until better weather. Brush pick ups complete around the City. More illegal dumping happening. Sandra asked about graffiti on containers from Washington St to St. John's and he noted he would follow up.

Parking Report – Mayor reported the City is underway with arcade site RFP's for development. In process of securing financing. Tom Marano noted that parking has been the topic of several meetings,

PCD- Tom reported 11 businesses applied for the \$5,000 business grants, and 10-11 more are available.

Health Department – Kevin was reporting from a live vaccine clinic. Noted distribution is going very well. Individuals 75 & over are receiving vaccine as of now along with front line workers, etc. He stated the Senior Center is doing a great job helping seniors call in and register for appointments and helping them to the appointments when needed. Next phase: 65 and over.

Chamber of Commerce – Larry reported the Chamber's Legislative Lunch was this Friday and over 150 people were signed up. PPP Workshops were held and there is over 30 pages of information on the Chamber's website. Development is extremely active in northern Middlesex county. Restaurants are struggling and having a really difficult time so we need to try to support them. Main thing is to stay positive, as positive as we can during these difficult times. He gave a shout out to Mark Masselli and the CHC for their incredible work at the vaccination clinics, as well as Kevin Elak and the Health Dept.

Minutes Dec. 2020 –

- Motion made by Mike
- 2nd by Marc
- Minutes accepted

Treasurer's Report

Mike noted first installment from City. Budget is under budget except for small items for the move. In good shape financially. A little over \$200,000 in all accounts.

- Motion to approve by Marc
- 2nd by Mike
- Financials accepted

Board Member Update –

Marketing- Marc noted they gave Sandra authorization to spend up the \$1,000 for social media and only \$500 was spent. All other marketing has been mostly on hold.

Chair- Marie stated we were in process of getting ready for the Annual Meeting. The Year In Review is being worked on asked for volunteers for the Budget Committee. Jen, Mike and Diane said they would serve.

Mike noted next Tuesday Feb. 2 is 10 year anniversary of his building collapse.

New Business –

Mike suggested to try to help landlords somehow if possible because they are having a hard time. Larry noted this was a legitimate point. No rents, but they must pay bills.

Sandra asked that everyone get family and friends to like the social media for downtown to generate activity.

Marc thanked the Mayor for attending and responding to our remarks.

Adjournment-

- Motion to adjourn at 9:35 am by Marc
- 2nd by Mike
- Meeting Adjourned