

Middletown Downtown Business District
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 28
Minutes Downtown Business District

Attendees: VIA ZOOM MEETING

Jen Alexander (Chair)	Ann Marie (Button Wood Tree)
Patrick Harding (Commissioner)	Sandra Russo-Driska (DBD Coordinator)
Diane Gervais (Commissioner)	Mary Ellen Schukrow (St. Vin's)
Marc Levin (Commissioner)	Mike Sokolowksi (GDS)
Mike DiPiro (Commissioner)	Roberto Tshudin Lucheme
Matt Lefebvre (Commissioner)	Tom Murano (PCD)
Tom Ford (Commissioner)	Trevor David (363 Main LLC)
Marie Kalita(Commiissioner)	Mike DeSena (MPD)
	Rich Davis (MPD)
	Cassandra Day (Middletown Press)

CALL TO ORDER - Meeting called to order by the Chair at 8:30 AM.

INTRODUCTIONS – Noted above

Police Report

Capt. Davis reported Mike DeSena will be taking over for him in the downtown area. Few break-ins have happened and they have arrested the female in the Tibetan Kitchen incident and are looking for the male party. Amato's incident is active and two arrest warrants going out. Panhandling seems down. Hartford Ave is not as active. Main St, Washington St area seems down in panhandling. Mike stated he was happy to be working with us all.

Jen asked about repeat break-ins such as the front door at Tibetan Kitchen. Rich state they felt it was isolated and did not believe there was anything to worry about. Diane noted more officers stopping in and chatting and thanked the PD.

St. Vincent's Report

Mary Ellen noted short delay due to Norwhich having to clear new employee but expects approval within one week. James Thomas is the sexton at Holy Trinity, wealth of experience dealing with homeless. He will have identifying clothing. Title is Street Outreach Manager. Mary Ellen will walk with him and into him before he begins. Wed-Sun 3:30-8 time frame. Not available Tuesdays. He needs to be connected to foot patrol and mobile crisis. Rich stated he would take the foot patrol contact. He is there to engage and mitigate and assist panhandlers. He will carry company cell phone and she will send out all numbers. Jen reported the DBD will have a committee to meet with Mary Ellen one per month to assist in any way we can.

Planning Report

Tom Murano noted small business grants are left. Riverfront moving forward. Mentioned walk with Sandra around Main Street checking in with businesses.

Parking Report

No Report – Noted they are short handed at this time.

Public Works

Sandra reported walking with Rick Romano and noted several items that were getting addressed and the list was sent to proper dept. Noted they have been very responsive and sidewalk projects will be well underway. Tree wells will also be mulched and addressed. Discussion on trees followed and meeting will be set up with Diane and PW and Jane Harris.

Health Department – No report

Wesleyan

Jen noted Sandra and Rani are working together to bring Wesleyan and DBD working better together.

Sandra reported the main items is how to get the message to students since there is no one form of communication to use. Ideas are being discussed.

Jen noted one idea was having a WESU student handle social media for DBD communication and a more full plan will be presented in the future.

Chamber of Commerce –

Jeff reported very busy. Working on Covid mitigation issues. Arrigoni bridge project continues and Sandra is plugged in. Project is mostly on bridge now and no more major impacts. Working on Middletown Pride and Car Cruise but they are mostly virtual components at this time. Also paying attention to legislative session and deploying the dollars from the Covid Response funding. Jen and he are having great discussions on that.

Michael Roth was keynote speaker at Chamber lunch yesterday and he believes Wesleyan will be back to normal this Fall and it will have a great impact downtown.

Jen noted that the Chamber has been extraordinary through this crisis.

Marc asked when bridge project would wrap up. Jeff said Feb. 2022.

Chair thanked all our community partners for attending and invited them to remain on for the remainder of the meeting, which is DBD business.

Minutes-

- Motion by Marc to approve minutes.
- 2nd by Patrick.
- Minutes accepted.

Treasurer's Report

Patrick noted he is brand new so will be ready for next time.

Mike noted accounts look good. The move expenses not planned, but we have now collected all the monies for taxes -1st and 2nd half- and are in great financial shape.

- Motion to accept made by Marc
- 2nd by Patrick
- All in favor

COMMISSION REPORTS

Jen noted that she is looking at all committees and setting them up to make the most sense and be most productive.

Marketing is now Advertising: Print, Ad, Radio, TV

Marc reported nothing being done due to Covid and Sandra is doing a great job with social media.

Promotion- (Wayfinding/Brochures/Website/Social Media)

Jen reported updating maps on wayfinding signs and next project is downtown brochure.

Sandra noted she is 40 followers from 1,000. Very exciting benchmark. The businesses have been excited about the social media and getting more involved and it keeps DBD in touch with downtown.

Marc asked about social media at Wesleyan. Sandra explained that unless they follow us, we cannot get info to them because they have their own social media pages and that is what we are working on.

Also: we updated the gift card participants insert.

Maintenance-Beautification_ (Planters, Banners)

Planters- Sandra noted new planters are in and waiting on Josh (Buds & Blossoms) to walk Main Street for placement and summer planting plan.

Banners-Diane stated we would like to do banners for Fall and Downtown Decorations president has offered to come walk Main Street and get ideas. Sandra has been discussing with Chamber when flags are up and down so we always have things looking great.

Jen stated the first time we could have banners if Fall and so timing is good.

Gift Cards-

Diane reported they are rolling along. We have over 90 businesses that accept the card. A reprint in the holder was also done. Just waiting on brochure. Gift card are selling, large corporate sale in the works!

SPECIAL PROJECTS- (Short term items)

Matching Grant Program-

Committee of Jen, Marie, and Sandra. Worked with businesses on applications, issues, and we have approved almost \$30,000 to 22 businesses from awnings, planters, flowers, signage, umbrellas, etc.

Written over \$4,000 in checks to date and Sandra will be busy working over the next several weeks gathering receipts and following up on applicants.

Ann Marie from Button Wood asked about additional grants going forward. Jen noted it is for DBD businesses only so we would take it one project at a time but so far everyone looking for monies has benefited from what we can tell. Our philosophy has been "let's make it work".

DBD COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Jen noted that the DBD is a volunteer organization and it only works if everyone participates.

Jen reviewed the following committees and asked for input.

Advertising

Historically been Marc and Diane. They are still interested in handling that. Marie noted she would be happy to join in.

Promotion

Jen is handling. We can ask Katie. Matt also noted to put him where is best used.

Beautification/Maintenance

Asked if anyone wanted to be the contact commissioner-Patrick offered

Jen asked Tom about the street cleaning. Tom noted he could have his guys patrol sidewalk on regular basis if needed depending on funding.

Sandra noted the clean-up crew from Mary Ellen and St. Vin's. Mary Ellen noted she is only doing Tuesdays since things are looking pretty good.

Jen remarked to let that program keep going and then we can pick this up as we go forward, especially with planters.

Mary Ellen told Tom she can work with him and let him know if additional help is needed.

Jen commented this is amazing and welcome news, and reach out to Sandra so she can direct the issue where it need to go.

Marie noted in the past Friday mornings tend to have more clean up needed based on Thursday night bar activity.

Banners

Diane and if anyone other than commissioners want to join, that would be great.

Gift Cards

Diane handles. If anyone would like to join, the can.

Financials

Patrick and Mike

Staff Commission Meeting (2nd Wed of the month)

Jen, Marie, Marc, Diane

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Grants- Jen, Marie

St. Vins Outreach- Matt is a good fit. Also Patrick has agreed to join.

Annual Meeting- Marie

Outreach- Need volunteers

Trees- Diane working with Sandra and City to try to get a plan together to get better trees.

Jen asked for everyone to let her know if there is anything they would like to help serve on.

Marie asked about setting up events like street performers, musicians, etc to add to vibe for summer months.

Jen asked if anyone was interested in helping with that. Matt offered to help with this. Noted he is working with Keisha to do a "Make Music Day". Matt is interested in helping with this.

Jen proposed new committee called Entertainment that will include Matt, Trevor and Ann Marie.

Sandra noted the Downtown Events Committee meeting today that may help with this.

Marie mentioned in the past having crafts people downtown in Riverview Center and perhaps we could have an event like this again. Sandra noted this would be great to work with the Chamber on because we did this for Holiday on Main.

Conversation followed on interest for this event.

Trevor added this will be the year of doing things outside so we need to look at all events from music to crafts and even existing retailers can join in. People will feel safer and want to come downtown to outside events.

Jen noted there are many people discussing these items and so we will figure it all out and report back on progress. It will be a collaboration of many group and needs to happen quickly. Diane noted smaller events that don't overpower and close Main Street.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion followed on the following topics:

The Bob's Building, back on the market.

Sicily planning to open in June.

Lastrina Bridal has expanded and looks great.

Chi Lash is open and taking students.

Former roller rink: Office Space on 1st. Apartments on 2nd. Event space in back.

Artifacts Building in in works, maybe rooftop restaurant

193 Main Street, Tom Ford noted a new 3 bedroom loft apartment going in.

Rear of 363 Main has Library Studio space and as things open it is an event space with Board Room for 14 people sit down dinner space, etc.

OTHER BUSINESS

Jen would like to create the 925 Report.

This would be done at 9:25 am to wrap up the meeting and any other items not mentioned.

Jen noted a sizeable amount of money may be coming to the DBD for a project from the Coved money the state is distributing. More to come!!

ADJOURNMENT

- Motion to adjourn by Marie
- 2nd by Patrick
- All in favor

Meeting Adjourned at 9:30 AM