

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE OF SYRACUSE, INC.

November 17, 2020

Via Conference Call

3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Members: Messrs. Fiorito, Bianchetti, Bryant, Donnelly, Dunn, Lemp, Nutting, Riley, Tascarella, and Tripoli; Mss. Angrand, Gagliano, Katzoff, and Zell

Staff: Mss. Maggiore, Schroeder, Reed, Sherlock, and Treier; Mr. Campanie, Mr. McFadden, and Mr. Young

Guests: Mr. Joe Convertino, CH Insurance
Mr. Matt Funicello, JF Real Estate
Ms. Dee Klees, FOCUS Greater Syracuse

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Fiorito welcomed members and guests present.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

Chairman Fiorito asked the Board if there were any questions on the Minutes of September 15, 2020, and there were none. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Dunn moved, and Ms. Katzoff seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF OCTOBER 31, 2020

Mr. Dunn reported that the Financial Statement as of October 31, 2020 is a third of the way into the fiscal year and is as expected given the impacts of the pandemic. He noted that the revenue from the Franklin Street parking lot is down significantly. The security cameras that are reported under Miscellaneous Expense will be re-allocated as an expense to the Security line rather than Administration. Ms. Treier added that the decreased revenue at the parking lots is currently the biggest abnormality in the budget. Currently, expenses look higher than revenue, but that is due to a timing issue related to making a drawing down the funds to support previously approved expenses.

Chairman Fiorito asked if there were any questions on the October 31, 2020 Financial Statements and there were none. He asked for a motion to accept the financial report subject to audit. Ms. Zell moved, and Mr. Tripoli seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried.

IV. DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE PROGRAM UPDATES

A. Re-Emergence Fund Update

Ms. Treier was excited to report that to date \$50,630 has been raised through the Downtown Syracuse Foundation for the Re-Emergence Fund. The goal of the fund is to provide support to the downtown community as it re-emerges from the pandemic, and there have been 16 contributors to date including a \$20,000 contribution from M&T Bank. In the next few weeks, the Downtown Committee will be formulating an outline of recommended strategic opportunities to deploy these funds that Ms. Treier will share with the Board members for input.

B. Marketing & Promotions

1. *Put the 'U' Back in Syrac_se Campaign* – Ms. Treier reported that \$15,000 remains unallocated of the initial \$50,000 budget that the Board approved. The Downtown Committee was able to make the dollars go farther because of the significant in-kind donations and services that were provided through Mower's partnership. As the campaign moves into its next phase, Ms. Treier asked the Board for their perspective on the items that should be covered in the campaign not only as property owners, but as business owners and consumers. The Downtown Committee has maintained communication with the County Executive's Office relative to the COVID rates in our community, and with how to responsibly approach the next phase of the *Put the 'U' Back in Syrac_se Campaign* (which will also connect into the Downtown Committee's holiday strategy this year.)

As the information continues to roll out, data shows increased cases associated with bars and restaurants. It was discussed with Mower to promote a community promise (as suggested by Mr. Nutting) or mutual agreement where both the businesses and the public take responsible steps towards maintaining our community's health. From a business perspective this would manifest itself in items like showcasing additional cleaning protocols, commitments from businesses that staff would wear makes, demonstrating social distanced restaurant layouts, and not permitting sick staff at work. From a public perspective, it would be a commitment to wearing a mask, staying home when sick, and to social distance. The Downtown Committee recognizes the purpose of

raising consumer confidence in business operations and the importance of maintaining its reputation as a trusted source. In conversations with Mower, the County, and businesses, the Downtown Committee pivoted to focus more on educating the public on responsible behavior to help keep businesses open as well as demonstrate how people can use Downtown Syracuse. Ms. Treier noted that this week, Mower will provide a new campaign strategy document and the Downtown Committee plans to use *Put the 'U' Back in Syrac_se* as a platform to talk about responsible ways to support the businesses. From a business perspective, this will manifest as asking the businesses to share with the public, through pictures and videos, steps they're taking to promote a healthy experience for their patrons. The Downtown Committee is also looking into a uniform decal that at a high level, shows consumers what the businesses expect of its patrons, for example wearing a mask, or staying home when you are sick. The expectation will be laid out to demonstrate that businesses are serious about taking healthy measures in their establishment. A uniform decal for the community shows that we are unified in this approach and would reinforce the branding. From a Downtown Committee promotions' perspective, a focus will be placed on assembling and curating experiences, then communicating out what visitors can do in downtown. The Downtown Committee will also feature its seasonal elves, Dash and Dot (Elf on a Shelf) on social media during the holiday. Ms. Treier gave a shout-out to Ms. Maggiore on the Marketing and Communications team for bringing the Dash and Dot elves on the scene and shared how Mower raved about the elves being a great social media tool to build awareness and interest in our downtown community. This year Dash and Dot will act as tour guides to highlight the various places to visit in Downtown.

2. Holiday Campaign

Ms. Maggiore presented an update on the Downtown Committee's holiday campaign. She noted that the overall theme for the campaign this year is "*Skate, Shop, Taste, and Discover.*" The Downtown Committee's seasonal staff members Dash and Dot will make their return on social media on Friday, November 27. They are normally used to invite social media followers to guess their location in downtown retailers, museums, and restaurants as a contest, but this year they will serve as tour guides in Downtown Syracuse to show off the holiday activities and shopping opportunities during the holidays. The elves will also be used to promote the Window Wonderland Contest which is now in its fifth year and is a great vehicle to paint the picture of the holiday experiences in Downtown. There are currently 30 places decorating their windows this year. There will also be an online voting option for people who are not yet comfortable visiting the businesses in person. Voting will go live starting Friday, November 27 on the Downtown Committee's website.

Ms. Maggiore also announced that one of the experiences the Downtown Committee is excited to promote is the virtual tree lighting on Friday, November 27. The Clinton Square ice-skating rink will be open, and the City invites folks to reserve appointments online. Clinton Square is always a family destination and “photo op spot” especially with the decorations surrounding it.

Ms. Reed reported on holiday downtown decorations that are being installed. The holiday star will once again be in place at Hanover Square thanks to the PathFinder Bank’s sponsorship. The star serves as a great spot for selfies. The Downtown Committee will also launch a Holiday Page on the website and will begin sending out weekly holiday newsletters starting next Monday, November 23 in hopes of encouraging dining and shopping downtown, including online shopping and take-out dining. Ms. Reed noted that downtown businesses will be asked if they will be offering any specials, evening shopping hours, holiday-themed menu items, or special events. These deals will be posted on the Downtown Committee website and in the newsletter, and highlighted on its social media platforms, broken down by the themes Skate, Shop, Taste, and Discover. Each business will receive a decal to post on their windows that offers some sort of special to help raise awareness among pedestrians. Other in-person holiday events will be promoted such as the Everson’s Festival of Trees, the Erie Canal Museum’s Gingerbread Gallery, plus virtual programs by the OHA, Symphoria, The Redhouse, and the MOST. Ms. Reed also mentioned that in order to get some exposure for Downtown in the suburbs, the Downtown Committee is a sponsor of Lights on the Lake, as well as Skates in the City. Both offer visibility and on-radio advertisements. She noted that downtown businesses were asked to make sure their social media platforms are updated with consistent messaging. They were also encouraged to utilize social media to promote customer service, the safety measures they are implementing, and programs such as Small Business Saturdays. Businesses were also offered the opportunity to engage with the City’s virtual tree lighting by submitting holiday greeting videos. Ms. Reed noted that the Downtown Committee Security Team will be visible throughout the holidays, with coverage on weekends.

Chairman Fiorito thanked the Downtown Committee staff for the effort that was put into the promotion of holiday events in downtown.

Ms. Treier asked the Board their thoughts on the plan for the next phase of the campaign or if there was anything else to be thinking about. Mr. Tripoli asked how the campaign was being gauged for success and Ms. Treier noted that it is being measured through social media in terms of

participation and click-throughs. Because of the tremendous amount of donated airtime, there was funding left over in the campaign budget to help with the next phase efforts. Ms. Treier is working with Mower to see what kind of in-kind support could be available again if the Downtown Committee were able to invest in another commercial. Mr. Tripoli asked if the campaign should wait until it is actually safe to come back downtown given that there is a current spike occurring. Ms. Treier responded this next phase of the campaign will be a lighter push and focus on in-person opportunities but also virtually engaging customers to support downtown businesses if they are not comfortable indoors, such as having take-out or writing positive reviews. There is a desire to keep downtown holiday traditions in mind such as ice skating or Window Wonderland where people can still enjoy downtown and be outdoors. Mr. Riley agreed that it will be important to reinforce the cooperation of the businesses practicing safety measures which will build confidence for people to come back downtown. He suggested running old pictures or ads and comparing them to today to keep the traditions alive.

Ms. Klees asked if businesses that are highlighted mention or provide links to any online shopping opportunities. Ms. Treier confirmed that in addition to the public facing communications (which are weekly newsletters to inform the public about Downtown Syracuse), Business Alerts that are geared to business owners and managers have been going out and in them businesses were also reminded ensure their online presence, information, and shopping capabilities are consistent across all media outlets so customers can find them. She noted that several businesses that might not have had an online presence before the pandemic now have established this.

Chairman Fiorito commented that the Downtown Committee has produced a successful program and will continue to make the necessary adaptations on a weekly basis to promote many events and activities through the holiday season.

C. State of Downtown Report

Ms. Schroeder presented a summary on the state of Downtown Economic Development. She asked for input from the Board on any of the categories covered including retail, housing, development, and office. She commented that the current national retail trend is not very positive as many big box and department stores are closing for good, and there is a concern for small business nationally. She is happy to report that the retail business in Downtown Syracuse shows a different trend. For example, since March 15, 2020, 14 new businesses have opened, nine have closed with a net gain of five businesses for 2020-2021. Ms. Schroeder also shared a category comparison with openings and closings between shopping, dining, and services (salons, shoe repair, optometry, etc.). There has been

an even amount of closings in each category, while with openings, shopping is driving the increase in small business in downtown as well as some dining. Some new business openings include Love Lola on South Warren Street, and Gypsy Freedom on South Salina Street. Ms. Schroeder reported that as of November 1, 87% of downtown retailers, restaurants and services are open for business. Mr. Nutting asked if Ms. Schroeder knew what percentage of the work population that is open downtown to match up with the 87% of the open places to go. She replied that according to a recent survey this summer, that about one-third of the workforce is back which is ahead of national trends and will see how that shakes out as the second wave continues. Workforce is down about 60%. She also noted the following retail businesses opened in the past 30 days: Antique Underground, A Cador optician and eyewear shop, Bee Unique gift shop, and Peace, Love and Cupcakes. Opening this month includes Crave Dessert Studio pop-up (11/21) and The Emerson Salon. Edward's Tailor Shop has closed because the owner retired. There were other long-time business owners who have chosen to move on to the next chapter.

Planned new businesses opening in first quarter 2021 include 11 new restaurants and downtown's first ever full-service grocery store coming into the Salt City Market, plus salons and important retail operator coming to the old Rite Aid location. Ms. Schroeder noted in conversations with developers she recommends offering ready-to-occupy spaces for retail occupancy pop-up shops (less than 1,500 square feet ready.) There is a pop-up retail program and she helped broker Crave Desserts move for the holidays onto Walton Street and would be happy to do that for any other businesses. The other wish list item for 2021 is the need to fill market gaps for local and unique, experience-based shopping: a pet supply store to cater to an estimated 400 dogs living downtown; focus on promoting paired visits to downtown by looking what is nearby and who they can collectively market with. She also reported that this past summer a Downtown Resource email was distributed which is now abbreviated to "Business Alerts." Information such as the city's Winter Dining Guide and SEDCO grant opportunities will be sent out on demand.

For Downtown Syracuse Housing, a record number of 283 units were completed this year, 145 are currently under construction and 362 units have been announced for the future. She noted that Washington Place came on-line with 214 units (that was the headquarters for the Downtown Living Tour this past September); the Addis Building with 18 new units, and Hudson Lofts with 20 units. In the past 10 years Downtown Syracuse housing has grown 88% (she thanked those on the Board doing residential development and noted they should be proud to have contributed to that significant growth.) She noted that it is only downtown residents who are sustaining our retailers and restaurant business at this point.

Ms. Schroeder commented that at this point, downtown population is up to 4,300 (almost an 8% increase over last year). There are over 2,500 housing units, and another 507 units under construction or in the pipeline. Downtown will surpass the 5,000 number by the end of 2022. Downtown Syracuse Housing showed a change in rental rates since 2017 – an increase in the average rent for one-bedrooms from \$1,270 to \$1,420 and a decline in two-bedroom average rent from \$1,950 to \$1,905 due to an increase in supply in the market. She noted there another \$208 million in development underway, (including residential developments such as 415 S. Clinton Street; the Salt City Market project with mixed-income units; the expansion in the Chimes Building to 96 additional units; Common Space, including both residential and built-out office space; Acropolis Center with its ongoing improvements, Landmark Theatre; and a new national brand convenience store on Salina and Fayette.)

Ms. Schroeder highlighted the Office Occupancy Report can be found on the Downtown Committee website. She thanked Mr. Young for compiling the information that reflected changes in occupancy from February 1- October 1, 2020. In total there is about 5,400,000 square feet of office space downtown with varying occupancy. She noted that Costello, Cooney and Fearon moved into Jefferson Clinton Commons, and M&T Bank opened a new branch at 250 S. Clinton preparing for an office move in Q1 2021. She noted that there is a demand for small Class B, and Class A space by tech companies and growing firms. There is interest in individual office spaces (600 square feet) by solo practitioners. The future of offices is about options and choices which offer flexibility during this time of people choosing to either work from home or the office until there is a vaccine. It will be important to promote the benefits of working in the office as opposed to home – for example being able to get lunch or enjoying the sites and places of downtown.

Ms. Angrand inquired about how the new businesses that have opened since the pandemic are faring. Ms. Schroeder noted that it is a mixed bag. There are some that are thriving, found a niche market, and took a risk at the right time. There are others that are struggling and might not make it past first quarter 2021. She looks forward to seeing more experimentation with downtown retail going forward. Ms. Angrand also asked if property owners are advertising the connectivity of their spaces, such as offering free Wi-Fi in the building or high-speed network for people looking for transitional working space. Ms. Schroeder noted that it would be good for property owners to advertise those amenities to prospective tenants, if not already doing so. Ms. Angrand asked what percentage of downtown businesses have a digital sales component, and able to sell online or deliver? She also expressed interest in forecasting what kind of challenges the non-digital companies will come up against. Ms. Schroeder responded that she does not have that number, but there are a particular number of

restaurants and retailers that have created an online presence since the pandemic started. A business alert will be sent out this week that includes free training for “Google My Business this Friday.” Ms. Angrand offered to help get that information out.

Mr. Bianchetti asked for Ms. Schroeder’s thoughts on outdoor dining downtown through the inclement weather period. She noted that the City of Syracuse released its (first-ever) winter dining guide. And that the new county grant program or more recent SEDCO grant program can be used to purchase pods, igloos and heating. Ms. Treier also emphasized that having the City’s outdoor dining guide is a first step for being able to address it. Restaurant owners are looking into indoor enhancements (ventilation system, check-in procedures) rather than limited outdoor seating opportunities on their property. Ms. Schroeder noted that the Downtown Committee will be looking into how it can build off those opportunities and start to encourage restaurants with what other snowy cities have for outdoor dining.

Mr. Fiorito thanked Ms. Schroeder for her fantastic presentation. He noted though there is still a concern about when we will get the employee population back into office spaces. Mr. Convertino of CH Insurance remarked he believes that more businesses need to embrace the campaign to come back to downtown. He noted that it is likely that their employees will still be allowed to work from home two years from now because they are able to manage it. He feels that we collectively need to shift the perception that businesses other than retail and restaurants are open (CPA’s, lawyers, etc.). Ms. Zell added the need for employees to be comfortable, as many have found productive ways to work from home. Ms. Treier agreed it is a tricky balance in being flexible and offering the workspace based on trends we are seeing. Ms. Katzoff suggested that the Downtown Committee could help downtown businesses create and advertise an atmosphere that brings a level of risk tolerance and security to people, (i.e., setting up dining pods or outdoor markets). Mr. Tripoli added that the OHA has focused on creating online options to offer the public. Ms. Angrand asked when the “Put the U Back in Syrac_se” would be relaunched and Ms. Treier responded that they are discussing a strategic approach with Mower. The Downtown Committee is maintaining communication with the County to stay in line with their recommendations and be on the same page.

Ms. Treier asked Mr. Bianchetti what National Grid is planning as far as a return to the office. He noted that because of the renewed sense of caution, a pilot plan that was put in place to reintroduce employees to their hub and market locations on a limited basis was suspended. The upcoming holidays will be prompting gatherings which will be a challenge.

Mr. Convertino asked Ms. Schroeder if the bigger companies located in downtown were opening back up. She responded that there is a continued mixed bag of the level of return and working from home. The daytime downtown population went from about 28,000 to about 8,000, which is the reality right now. Chairman Fiorito added that he has heard that some of the federal and state employees have come back to some degree.

V. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

Mr. Fiorito asked the Board if there was any further business and there was none. Mr. Fiorito noted that this will be the last meeting of the year and Ms. Treier will be reaching out to ask Board members to participate on the budget committee and possibly others. Mr. Tripoli congratulated the Downtown Committee again for raising funds to support downtown revitalization.

With no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20pm

Upcoming Board Meetings

January 26, 2021 – SDODC Meeting