



**DOWNTOWN ALBANY**  
Business Improvement District

**Downtown Albany Business Improvement District  
Board of Directors' Meeting  
April 22, 2020  
Zoom Video Conference**

21 Lodge Street  
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**Georgette Steffens**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Daniel Fariello**  
PRESIDENT

**Pamela Nichols**  
VICE-PRESIDENT

**Frank O'Connor, III**  
TREASURER

**David Sarraf**  
SECRETARY

ATTENDANCE:

Daniel Fariello  
Frank O'Connor  
David Sarraf  
Leola Edelin  
Lena Hart  
Elizabeth Young Jojo  
Tracy Metzger  
Lucas Rogers  
Hon. Darius Shahinfar

ABSENT:

Pamela Nichols  
Lisa Reddy Farrell  
Louis Bannister  
Mohamed Hemmid  
Chris Pratt  
Tyler Wrightson

STAFF PRESENT:

Georgette Steffens  
Kate Medhus  
Rebecca Hughes  
Jason Bonafide  
Don Wilson

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Board President Daniel Fariello at 4:38 PM.

Mr. Fariello calls for a motion to approve the March 2020 Board Minutes | Mr. Shahinfar motions | Ms. Edelin seconds | All approve.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

New Board Member

Mr. Fariello welcomes Lucas Rogers from the County Executive's office to the Board.

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Fariello noted that Staff has pivoted quickly to meet the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Ms. Steffens added that:

- Staff is all working from home and have been meeting daily on Zoom in order to compile information on all Executive Orders, available loans, job openings, parking rules etc. and communicating said information to all Stakeholders and Residents.
- The number one priority that Staff heard from business owners is that they are concerned for the welfare of their employees, so we have been providing as much information and support to them as we can.
- Ms. Steffens has been participating in the Mayor's Small Business Working Recovery Group in conjunction with Capitalize Albany, the other BIDs, the Chamber, the Community Loan Fund and the County to address the needs of the City's small businesses to ensure resiliency. This group created a website called Support Smallbany where all the most recent, up-to-date information can be found, including grants, loans, webinars and other resources that are available.
- Staff worked with the Parking Authority and the City to create temporary take-out zones for people to easier utilize curbside pickup from our restaurants during their forced closure.
- Staff is also looking at what recovery will look like and are developing different stages of re-opening to ease into it and find out how we can best help our businesses to open and function under new state guidelines.

Elections

Mr. Fariello noted that the Board of Directors' elections have been postponed as they are tied to the Annual Meeting which has been postponed as well. We are hoping to start the process at the end of summer and have the

election at the Annual Meeting in the fall. This means that those members who are due to roll off the Board will serve for a few extra months until the election process and Annual Meeting are able to happen.

#### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

##### **First Quarter Financials**

Mr. O'Connor noted that the first quarter financials are included in the packet and are relatively on budget. Some slight variances appear due to timing issues such as payroll or the submission of clean team invoices, but those will be resolved by the second quarter. The audit process will begin in June and will be presented to the Board for approval at the September Board meeting.

##### **Payroll Protection Program**

Mr. O'Connor noted that Staff applied for and received a \$65,100 loan under the Payroll Protection Program. 75% of the loan must be used for payroll and the remaining 25% must be used for things like rent, utilities, health insurance and pension contributions in order for it to be fully forgiven.

Ms. Steffens added that she expects to receive the PPP documentation next week and will review everything to make certain we will meet the forgivability component. This loan will give Staff the ability to shift funds previously set aside for payroll and use them to support initiatives for small businesses and property owners as well as new marketing efforts in the District since we do not anticipate receiving any sponsorship dollars for the remainder of the year.

##### **Revised 2020 Budget**

Mr. O'Connor noted that the coronavirus pandemic took everyone by surprise and Staff has worked to revise the 2020 budget with the anticipation that there will be limited sponsorship and potential impacts lasting well into 2021.

Ms. Steffens outlined the revised 2020 Budget:

- Staff anticipates that there will not be any revenue from events or sponsorships for the rest of the year as Corporate priorities will be on small businesses recovery. Events such as the Annual Meeting, PearlPalooza or Sculpture in the Streets will need to be either cancelled or postponed. Other income and Sculpture in the Streets funds have been decreased in an anticipated loss of approximately \$30,000 which would have come in the form of sponsorship revenues.
- The National Grid Grant had been awarded to us in the amount of \$250,000, but with construction being deemed non-essential and therefore put on pause, Staff anticipates only being able to complete the Williams Street portion of the project this year once New York State is un-paused. Additional funds had been slated for Lodge Street and the intersection of Lodge and Howard and is expected to be spent in 2021.
- The New York State Main Street Grant remaining amount is \$90,000. \$15,000 of those monies will be paid to the BID for Administrative costs associated with administering the grant. Staff are finalizing the reimbursement request for those funds.
- In January the Board approved bringing Ms. Medhus on staff full-time and the payroll numbers have therefore been adjusted accordingly.
- Staff presumes that conferences and travel will most likely be eliminated and replaced by webinars which would lead to additional cost savings.
- Our Clean Team, which usually consists of 2 full-time, year-round employees, 1 full-time, seasonal employee and 1 part-time, year-round, weekend employee, has been reduced to just the 2 full-time employees. They are currently working 6 days per week, Sunday through Friday, and in addition to cleaning are serving as eyes and ears on the street as well as keeping watch over the safety and security of Downtown. We have not seen an uptick in break-ins and there has been a decrease in homeless



individuals and panhandling thus far. Staff anticipates the Clean Team operating this way throughout the month of May and will consider increasing the team whenever offices and businesses start to re-open. This creates a savings for at least the months of April and May, possibly longer.

- There will not be an annual Downtown t-shirt this year.
- No further newsletters will be printed this year.
- The Annual Meeting has been postponed. It may happen in October and Staff is looking at ways to make it about supporting the businesses Downtown.
- Restaurant week has been postponed. It could possibly happen in the fall but will depend on when restaurants are able to open back up at full capacity.
- Staff is hoping to still be able to hold outdoor movies in August or September, but these would need to be paid for out of pocket as opposed to through sponsorship dollars.
- PearlPalooza is still very uncertain depending on when large crowds are able to gather again.
- The Residential Open House has been removed, in part due to construction being halted and the uncertainty of when we will be able to host an event with large numbers of people.
- Staff has moved to holding only virtual events and almost \$3,700 has been used on those in April. Those events will continue through May. Staff may come back and ask for additional funding depending on how long quarantine lasts.
- An additional \$2,500 was added into Small Business Saturday as Staff looks to make it a really big event this year. Staff is looking into collaborating with the Chamber of Commerce on this event.
- Juneteenth is an event put on by the African American Cultural Center that we have supported in the past and while no decision has been made yet, Staff anticipates that the event will need to be postponed or go virtual this year so the amount of our monetary support in that event remains to be seen.
- All dog-related events have been cancelled except for Hound of Halloween in October. This may be one of our first events when things re-open.
- At the moment we have left all of the holiday events the same as they usually are.
- Due to the above-mentioned changes there is an increase of approximately \$4,000 in the Special Events budget. This could go up or down based on when events are allowed again. The safety of the public is our number one priority. The marketing budget dropped by roughly \$5,500 due to the changes in events, so these two areas almost balance each other out.
- The Executive Committee, Budget and Finance Committee and Staff all agree that we should keep the flowering program in order to enhance Downtown's aesthetics for those people who are currently Downtown, particularly the residents, and for when we welcome folks back into Downtown.
- A budget deficit was approved due to Ms. Medhus going full-time and Staff has been able to close that a bit to about \$7,000. This deficit can be balanced by moving non-assessment revenue, lowering the 2020 Budget to \$36,777. This deficit could change again however, depending on how things progress with the current pandemic.

Mr. O'Connor stated that as things change with the pandemic our budget will need to be flexible.

#### **Funding Requests**

Ms. Steffens described the Support Now, Savor Later gift card program:

- The District has about 160 businesses including restaurants, retail and retail-related businesses. In recent talks with the business owners Staff realized that only 12 of these businesses, that's less than 10%, have the ability to sell products or gift cards online. Staff felt that the majority of our businesses were missing an opportunity for people to support them during the current situation, so they created a gift card program modeled after one that Corning, New York did which was seeing great success.
- Staff intends to set up a website through the BID Square account where patrons can go to purchase gift cards online from any of the participating businesses. This way the BID absorbs all of the credit card fees.

Staff would compile all gift card orders, mail out the gift cards to the patrons and send a check for the full amount of purchases to each business owner weekly.

- Ms. Medhus will be administering the program.
- If \$50,000 worth of gift cards were sold, the cost to the BID would be \$2,500.
- Language will be included to state that the gift cards will be non-refundable even in the event that a business does not re-open after the shutdown.
- The cost to market this gift card program will be \$2,200. Upside Collective has given us a proposal to do the majority work and a video featuring some of the business owners is in the works to give the program a more personal feel.

Ms. Metzger motions to approve the Support Now, Savor Later Gift Card Program | Ms. Jojo seconds | All approve.

Ms. Steffens noted that Staff had the idea to collaborate with the other 2 Albany BIDs to purchase and send gift cards to all first responders in the area, such as APD, AFD, local EMTs, etc. as an expression of gratitude. Central Avenue has expressed interest in participating and Staff is waiting to hear back from Lark Street to see if they have the funds to participate as well. The cost for said gift cards would be about \$2,500.

Ms. Metzger motions to approve up to \$2,500 in gift cards to be sent to area first responders | Mr. Shahinfar seconds | All approve.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **Events**

Mr. Bonafide described the virtual events Staff has been currently putting on in order to support the businesses in our district and keep the public engaged in Downtown:

- Move Mondays are featuring one of three different Downtown fitness studios conducting different online fitness classes each week.
- Takeout Tuesdays encourage people to post a photo of takeout that they've purchased from a Downtown restaurant in order to be entered to win a gift card to a Downtown restaurant of their choice.
- Wednesdays feature Quarantine Cuisine where people post photos of ingredients they have in their homes. The photos are then passed on to two different Downtown chefs who then each create a recipe using the pictured ingredients. The chefs each receive a stipend for creating the recipe and the owner of the chosen photo receives a gift card to a Downtown restaurant of their choice.
- Thursdays have been a rotating array of socially distanced virtual happy hours. We've had a live DJ, trivia with Excelsior Pub and an outdoor walking art tour with Albany Center Gallery. The idea is to keep mixing it up with different events featuring different businesses each week to keep people connected to Downtown while they are isolated at home.
- Fashion Friday asks people to post photos of what they are wearing while working from home for a chance to win a gift card from a Downtown retailer.
- As we move into May Staff is planning to change the events up a bit to keep things fresh.

Ms. Steffens added that based on numbers of views and clicks, Move Monday has been the most popular virtual event thus far, but our live DJ event got about 1,500 views showing that it was a very popular event as well, both while it was live and after the fact.

### **Re-opening Funding Assistance**

Ms. Steffens discussed a Re-opening Grant Program that Staff has been developing:

- The Board had previously approved \$150,000 for an Office Attraction Program, as well as \$100,000 for a Pop-up Retail Program. Given the current situation, Staff believes it is critical to support the existing businesses that are already in Downtown to ensure their survival.
- Staff would like to re-direct these monies to assist businesses with re-opening, particularly those businesses that sell perishable items such as restaurants or florists. This would give businesses a head start and help them to purchase the items they need in order to re-open.
- Each business in the District could apply for a grant of up to \$5,000 (based on their size and revenue) and the money would come from our Unrestricted money which has come from previous sponsorships and sales. With 70 businesses in the District that could potentially receive up to \$5,000 in grant money, the total cost would be \$350,000. There is approximately \$480,000 available in the Unrestricted account.

Mr. Shahinfar motions to approve the Re-opening Grant Program for up to \$350,000 | Ms. Edelin seconds | All Approve.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Ms. Steffens noted that:

- The Special Projects Income Sheet has been included in the Board packet for everyone's reference.
- Staff is not sure that the SUNY movie night will be able to happen at this point.
- The trees we had anticipated on planting are not deemed essential and have been tabled for the time being. Staff is unsure if they will be able to be planted at a later date or not.
- \$125,000 was committed to a Wayfinding project as part of the DRI and Staff needs to find out from the Mayor if and when that project is still moving forward.
- There is still \$96,000 in our account to be used on public infrastructure and/or service projects.
- Staff would like to explore using Sculpture in the Streets to create a grant where artists would apply to do some type of public art Downtown whether that's murals, sculptures or performance art in order to support the arts community. This is something that could be tied to First Friday for some pieces or it could be a way to utilize vacant windows or spaces Downtown. 50% could be paid up front to commission artists with the rest being paid out upon completion of their work. Guidelines and parameters still need to be built. There is \$20,000 in the Sculpture in the Streets budget that could be used on this so if the Board agrees Staff will continue to develop this idea.

Mr. Shahinfar and Ms. Metzger agreed that this would be a good direction to take with Sculpture in the Streets.

Mr. Shahinfar noted that property crime has declined in the City of Albany, but bodily crime has unfortunately gone up due to domestic issues stemming from people being in such close quarter with one another at home. A parking ticket late fee amnesty has gone into effect so now is a good time to encourage people with overdue parking tickets to address those. The City is currently still in good shape financially for the immediate term, but it remains to be seen how that will hold up for the medium and long terms.

With no further business to be discussed Mr. Fariello motions to adjourn the meeting at 5:43pm | Mr. Shahinfar seconds | All approve.

#### **Next Meeting**

**Wednesday, June 17th, 2020 at 4:30PM.**

**Zoom Video Conference**