

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
DOWNTOWN MANCHESTER SPECIAL SERVICES DISTRICT**

**March 11, 2026
8 AM**

Meeting held at Work_Space, 903 Main Street

MEMBERS PRESENT: Daniel Mulligan, Chair
Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary
Sophia Dzialo
Esther Jeffery
Ryan Fagan

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT:
Gary Anderson, Director Planning and Development

ALSO PRESENT: Richard Conner
Adam DeLaura
Constable Patrick
Pastor John Lautenbach
Hannah Garrison
Emma Petersen
Greg Vaca

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Sulick

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tarek Ambia, Finance Chair
Joseph Datta

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS
ABSENT: Millie Texidor - GMCC Representative

STAFF ABSENT: None

Call to Order:

- Mr. Mulligan calls the meeting to order at 8:05 AM.

Roll Call:

- Mr. Mulligan noted those present and absent.

Minutes:

- February 11, 2026. A motion to approve the minutes is made by Ms. Jeffery, seconded by Ms. Dzialo. All approve.

O&G Update:

- None present

Public Comment:

- None at this time

Grava Presentation:

- Mr. Vacca and Mr. Connor from Grava present a brief runthrough of the 942 Main redevelopment. Mr. Anderson notes that there were 5 responses to the RFP for that property. Of those, Grava's proposal was the leading proposal. Mr. Vaca says that Manchester's downtown is already vibrant, and more improved than when he was younger. He states that when Grava approaches developments, they only look at projects of a similar scale and purpose to 942 Main. They look through the history of the towns where construction projects similar to this happens in order to provide a seamless fit and create dynamism. He notes that the nearest major project to this that they have completed was Founders Square in Windsor. Most of the historic center there was developed for an A&P which is long since gone. Grava hand-selected small businesses in town to offer them opportunities to move from their underserved location to this new development at affordable rents. He further notes that the residential over retail design that they implemented in that project used to be the norm before being zoned out in recent history. Grava's second project (which kicked off last week) is a former brownfield site in Enfield/Thompsonville alongside the transit line. The goals of the design at 942 Main include increasing residential and commercial capacity, maintain public parking, minimize gaps in the streetscape, and create destinations and anchors. From Forest Street to Main, they would like to draw people from the Cheney properties/apartments to the Downtown especially by bike by installing a 60 bicycle parking lot. Where Maple and Oak hit the property, they would like to create a public plaza anchored by a restaurant to encourage people to sit outside. He describes the ground floor plan, which has tuck-under parking for the properties that have shallower retail spaces in front of. Arist flats have high, open spaces with galleries in the front; and those spaces should be less expensive than traditional residential. There is also some additional retail space which could face towards St. James. Floors 2 through 4 could have multi-floor apartments which is a style not usually seen around here. He feels that muti-family housing developments typically do not use cars as frequently as people living in other styles of housing. There is a 40 unit public parking lot on the south side of the development. Mr. Anderson says that there would be roughly 60 additional residential spaces in the permitted parking lots. Mr. Vaca says that the concept will be colonial/modern throughout the north/south streetscape. The fascade will be somewhat broken up to fit better with the existing aesthetic and not feel like it's "out of a box". Looking at Evergreen Walk, Mr. Vaca feels that they struggle with vacancy there because they need to keep lease values high; here, retail (lower level) just needs to be successful, not be the driving factor towards building profitability. Constable Patrick asks if they will continue to own the property or sell the property after completion. Mr. Vaca says that they are long-term investors and they believe that this is a catalyst for growth. Mr. Vaca states that when you build in a center, as other development happens around it, it drives up the value of the initial build. Ms.

Zackin asks if there will be public art/mural space and if those would be in the design or after the construction. Additionally, if there would be decorative bike spaces available. Mr. Vaca says that there are places for art, some explicitly set such as in the dining plaza, there will be a fire-rated corridor for art, and there will also be space in the public bike parking area. They would like to have the bike parking lot successful to create a culture of biking into the Downtown. Mr. Conner says they would like to get involved with the town's arts community. Ms. Garrison expresses her excitement about the development and asks about the layout for restaurant spaces. Mr. Vaca explains the proposed layouts and says that there is flexibility in the proposed buildout. Constable Patrick asks about the timeline. Mr. Vaca says in a perfect world, 2029, but there is always uncertainty about large projects like these. Mr. Anderson says that the Town BoD has entered into discussion agreements with the developer, but there are still steps to go through prior to locking in a deal. Ms. Zackin says that many people are concerned about the parking available for the Army/Navy Club. Mr. Anderson says that there are 40 spaces at the Forest Street corner, there is also a planned parking lot development of 68 spaces on the other side of the Bennet Apartments, there are also some other plans in the works for additional parking in a 1/4 mile radius of the public library (currently ~600 spaces). Mr. Mulligan asks how much public parking is required for the development. Mr. Vaca says that it's difficult to say, most of these uses are 10-5 uses, parking in a situation like this is important, but there's no place that people go to that is special that doesn't have limited parking. Considering West Hartford, he feels that Blue Back Square struggles with tenancy because there is too much parking; there are spaces that haven't had tenancy in 15+ years. He feels that if there is a place that is interesting for people, they will find a way to park there. Mr. Vaca says there isn't a current roof-deck plan, but feels that a roof deck could be really cool for events like the Manchester Road Race. Ms. Garrison says that her current place in Willimantic is surrounded by vacancies, and feels that the buildings are underutilized and underdeveloped. Mr. DuBaldo asks about trash management. Mr. Vaca says that there will be recepticals in the rear around the corner from the public lot.

District Chair Report:

- None at this time

GMCC Report:

- None present.

Parking Report:

- Ms. Sulick reports that Passport is being sold. Mr. Fagan says that there isn't

really any movement on discussions with them. Contable Patrick says that the app does die with some frequency. Mr. Anderson says that there will be a meeting between the Town and Downtown about the library parking lot and who will manage it.

Maintenance & Beautification:

- Ms. Sulick says that we will need to start planning the next round of flowers for the planters. Ms. Jeffery says that we received some quotes for painting the existing planters, but between the amount of damage and the porosity of the concrete, it's challenging. Mr. Mulligan suggests that the District assess them all together before they get replaced on the street so we can pick and choose which go back out. Ms. Jeffery notes that there is so much trash on the street likely due to the trash cans not being present on the street.

Planning & EDC Report:

- Mr. Anderson says that he did do a BoD update about future downtown projects, and the other presentation from Grava should be available soon. Ms. Petersen says that the Town is entering year #3 of the 10 year plan from 2023 and she would like to remain in contact with the Downtown about the things that are happening and will be happening. On Monday, March 16, there will be an update presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission. She noticed that on the Grava presentation, much of the language was drawn from the Manchester Next plan; like the walkable downtown and optimizing the Oak and Maple, filling the street wall, connecting different transportation forms to the new library. Mr. DeLaura doesn't have anything additional to add.

Manager's Report:

- Ms. Sulick reports that the District had a great meet and greet coffee session last week with prospective board candidates. Additionally, she's been getting lots of phone calls and inquiries about the proposed Grava project.

Finance Committee:

- Ms. Sulick reports that the updated budget has been sent to the Town.

Marketing Update:

- Ms. Dzialo says that a complete list of events will be sent to businesses and property owners so that people can know and plan ahead of time. The Marketing Committee would like to introduce an "Egg Walk" to the events this year to encourage people to walk the complete street. Outside of event planning, there's been a lot of feedback about the Grava proposal, but there have also been lots of inquiries from businesses asking about opportunities

in Downtown. Four businesses have claimed their Locable listings in the last week and there are two photoshoots scheduled for the coming weeks. Ms. Jeffery says that the banner program wrapped up and banners have gone to print. Ms. Sulick says that the new banners will be up before April. She also notes that they are in discussion with the Veterans about a long-term plan for their banners.

Old Business:

- None

Public Comment:

- None at this time

Executive Session:

- A motion to enter executive session to discuss a board vacancy is made by Ms. Jeffery at 9:12 AM, seconded by Mr. Fagan (non-voting board members, public exit, Ms. Sulick is invited to stay).
- Executive Session ends 9:26 AM with no actions taken.

Other Business:

- A motion to fill the open faith seat with Pastor John Lautenbach is made by Mr. Fagan, seconded by Ms. Jeffery. All approve.

Adjourn

- There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting is made by Ms. Jeffery at 9:32 AM, seconded by Mr. Fagan. All approve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary DMSSD

Recorder