

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

**September 14, 2022
8 AM**

Meeting held at Work_Space, 903 Main Street

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sophia Dzialo, Chair
 Daniel Mulligan, Vice-Chair
 Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary
 Ryan Fagan

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

ALSO PRESENT: Stephen Ristau

STAFF PRESENT: Bernie LeBel, Downtown Manager

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tarek Ambia
 Joseph Lipiner

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS
ABSENT: Alex Lehofer, GMCC Representative

Call to Order:

- Ms. Dzialo calls the meeting to order at 8:03 AM

Roll Call:

- Ms. Dzialo noted those present and absent.

Minutes:

- A motion to approve the minutes of August 17, 2022 is made by Mr. Mulligan, seconded by Mr. Fagan, all approve.

Public Comment:

- Mr. Ristau is a community resident passionate about the new community library. To his knowledge, the last time Manchester did anything to add to the footprint of Mary Cheney was around 60 years ago. For the past two and a half years, his group has looked deeply into possible new locations for the Mary Cheney Library. A taskforce report about the library came out in 2021 and encouraged the Town Board of Directors to do a deeper analysis of locations and costs which they did. One of his group's primary recommendations was to have a main or branch library remain Downtown; they want the catalyst effect of the library to remain here. Mr. Ristau notes that Webster Bank is an enthusiastic partner with the Town and is in active conversations with the Town about how to remain here. This November,

there will be have a bond referendum to borrow up to \$39 million for a 75,000 sq ft library with site acquisition, demolition, construction. Approximately 36 million of that is for the project, the remaining 3 million to update and bring to code what would be the former library. The Town sees the building as a historic building and would like to have public programs and services there. He mentions that there is a PAC to show support for the library. The Town cannot support any particular plan, it is up to the taxpayers to vote for or against the current proposal come November. (Mr. Ristau gives out an FAQ sheet about the library proposal). He acknowledges that there are some people who are not in favor of the library project, he feels it is usually a location issue; however this particular location has a willing seller and ample parking available. He states that there is rarely money available for state library construction but that State legislators were able to allocate \$5.5 million for this project, Federal ARPA money has been targeted as a candidate for this project, and there are also grant funds available which could be tapped. He estimates that \$25 million might be the total bonded amount which would be on-par for the typical two-year \$20 million on street updates/upgrades like road paving. He makes note that the Town has an excellent bond rating which enables a low cost of borrowing and that the largest city east of the River in Connecticut deserves a fantastic library; our current library doesn't even have the ability to run more than one program at a time there, staff has to program from the basement, the roof leaks, and the current bathroom is very much like a prison cell.

- Ms. Lynn Sottile submitted a letter of support for Constable Johnson via e-mail (attached)

Commissioner Reports:

- Chair – Ms. Dzialo notes that updates will pertain primarily to the Marketing section
- Vice-Chair – Not at this time
- Secretary – Not at this time
- Finance – Not present

GMCC Report:

- Not present

Manager's Report:

- Ms. LeBel reports that she emailed the police about people parking in non-parking areas and they reiterated that our ambassadors have the ability to ticket those individuals. She has not received any updates on the

Bicentennial Celebration. Additionally, she is currently updating and collecting the minutes from previous meetings and am awaiting guidance from the Town on ensuring proper access for those. She also received a phone call from Ken Burkamp about his opposition to the library moving and his concerns about parking.

Finance:

- YTD Budget Update – Ms. LeBel reports that the Town has not posted revenue from the parking permits due to the funds being run across more than one fiscal year. An auditor has told her that we could take an estimate of past deferred amounts or simply count all the revenue in the year received. Bernie will contact the Finance Department to see if they can provide more insight on the options and if there is a method the Town would prefer.
- Ms. LeBel mentions that we have two fund allocations, one for “Full-Time” \$40,000 and “Temporary” for \$30,000. There was an issue with the former manager transitioning to “temporary” and the Board will need to decide how to allocate appropriate salary funds. A motion to allocate funds from 6110 to 6120 and rename it "salaries" is made by Mr. Mulligan, seconded by Mr. Fagan. All approve.

Downtown Development Specialist Report:

- Mr. Anderson mentions that he felt that Mr. Ristau had an accurate presentation of the library project and reiterates that Webster Bank is still active in wanting to remain Downtown. People have asked "why not 942 Main?" and there is a report detailing why the Tong Building is not the preferred property. He mentions that there is no one right now to fill the Business Development Specialist position, but that job description needs to be re-written (maybe end-of-year). In development news, there is a new Jamaican restaurant in the former Sol del Boroquin bakery, Windowbox Farm will move to the former Northeast Brokerage, and The Main Course will be opening shortly. He notes that there is progress at 2-4 Pearl. On the upcoming Board Agenda should be the sale of some property on Purnell Place to enable DuBaldo Construction to perform the updates to their property.

Parking:

- Ms. LeBel notes that not much has changed. She went to Main Nail & Head Spa to deliver the printed material about the parking program and it seemed that they understood the new parking rules; they asked for a larger map of the parking locations which they could place in their window to educate their clients. Ms. Dzialo mentions that we need to source the actual original high-resolution graphic otherwise we need to recreate it as the resolution on the smaller map is not high enough. Once the signage is up, it can be dispensed

to more constituents.

Business Actions and Reports:

- Ms. LeBel informs the Board that Mr. Pete Theriault from the Manchester Mall wondered if there was a way for seniors to purchase parking at a lower rate. He currently purchases permits at 90 days for \$70. Ms. Dzialo feels that would be a slippery slope to entertain a discount for single individuals or specific groups of individuals. Ms. LeBel will recommend the free St. James lot to Mr. Theriault.

Marketing:

- Ms. Dzialo reports the committee met yesterday about Holiday on Main and decided to try fundraising to allocate new money for events like Holiday on Main and Scarecrows. November 1-5 we are considering a series of fundraisers at local businesses to generate those funds. She also mentions that scarecrow signups are past 30 registrations now.
- Ms. LeBel notes there was an e-mail sent out to set up a meeting with Chief Darby about the permitting process revisions and several subsequent meeting requests were likewise sent with no response. Ms. Dzialo asks if Mr. Anderson could assist with this process. Mr. Fagan asks if there is a physical write-up yet and Ms. LeBel believes that there is.
- Ms. Press had asked to find a way to track Center Park activities. She would like to be able to promote the events at Center Memorial Park and Dept. of Family and Leisure.
- Ms. Dzialo mentions that Work_Space has asked for the District to take over the trolley idea and feels that Work_Space should maintain their idea. Ms. LeBel feels that Work_Space was looking more for assistance publicizing the events rather than planning them.
- Ms. Dzialo reports that we have businesses with significant milestones in 2023 and the District is looking for a someone to set up anniversary celebrations and the bicentennial event.

Maintenance & Beautification:

- Ms. LeBel reports that the bottle of motor oil has been removed. Also, someone drove over the handicap sign at Key Bank, this week the sign was repaired. Ms. Press and Ms. LeBel discussed the condition of the bus shelters and sent an e-mail to Department of Public Works and that Tim Bockus, Colbie McPhail, Rob Topliff, Colleen Munzo would be the appropriate parties to contact. Our current landscaper, Chris Spafford, is not willing to renew his contract for the upcoming year based on rising costs. Ms. LeBel will prepare a posting to put it out to bid.

Other Business:

- Ms. LeBel received an invoice from Passport for services and licensing fees for \$21,800. She felt we would have a review prior to them sending an invoice. Mr. Fagan notes that we have had many issues with implementing and running the system and we need to open the discussion about what we should do. The issues we experienced prevented us from fully operating the system for several months. Ms. LeBel will contact Passport.

New Business:

- None at this time

Old Business:

- None at this time

Public Comment:

- None present

Constituent Report:

- None at this time

Adjourn

- There being no further business a motion to adjourn is made by Mr. Fagan at 9:08 AM, seconded by Mr. Mulligan. All approve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary DMSSD

Recorder

To the Commissioners:

This is a statement in support of Rick Johnson's request for an increase in salary, and also regarding the decision to hire an outside HR consultant to help negotiate this (per July 27 minutes).

I have known Rick since he became an employee 7 years ago and he has had an excellent work report for the past 6 years, being the District's eyes and ears on the street. He has always been well-respected for doing his job, and for reporting any issues that required the District's attention.

In the past year, when the new parking enforcement system was being proposed, **never once** was Rick included in any discussion regarding this new procedure, or asked for his feedback or insight. Any questions he asked of management at that time went unanswered. He would have been able to provide valuable insight as he was- and is- the only person with any parking enforcement knowledge within the downtown. Sharing of information was non-existent. I am aware, from meetings I attended, that what was promised is not what was delivered. The change to a hand-held system, where typing plate numbers is required, wasn't as smooth as anticipated and led to frustration and criticism on both sides. It was stated that Passport would provide training, but there was none. Also, the equipment has had its share of quirks. Passport was also emphatic that for this to work cost-effectively, two full-time enforcement officers were necessary, something the District does not have.

Rick's review is why I've written this statement, as I was made aware that my name came up several times during that session. I alone was unfairly singled out as someone he "talks too much to" and it raised a flag that the actions taken at that time were personal and punitive compared to past professional reviews. From time to time, he did ask me questions when he couldn't get answers, and I responded honestly based on what I knew from meetings and minutes.

I feel strongly that this is not- and never was- a personnel issue, but instead, a management issue. Good management would have provided proper training, and spoken to an employee privately about any perceived problems before going behind his or her back, especially in advance of a review. Great management would have had an honest dialogue and been upfront about how it plans to monitor employees now and in the future. There was no such discussion then or now.

Seeds of mistrust were planted weeks ago and grew into this roadblock you now face. Good communication, transparency, respect, and trust would have prevented this. If there was better communication between everyone involved, I wouldn't be writing this statement. I stand behind Rick 100%. Giving a long-time employee a raise is fair, especially since he is the senior and experienced employee, and his knowledge alone is worth more than a new hire's salary.

As a final thought, parking revenues will never be what they once were, due to the number of free lots, fewer employees working downtown, and the new system doing its job. How can productivity be measured? You have a loyal, attentive employee who, besides issuing tickets, tends to people in distress, gives directions, answers questions from the public, and is, in general, a good representative for the District. Before John stepped away from his Chair commitment, he agreed that a raise in "the 20's" was fair (this was said in the April 13 meeting where I was present and was to be discussed again in June). He also had great respect for the work done on District's behalf. I hope you feel the same. I challenge any one of you to shadow the constables for a day (pick a really hot or really cold one to appreciate their hard-working efforts) and realize it's not just issuing tickets... Rick has been one of the best parking ambassadors all along.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Sottile

Long-time Business Owner in the Downtown