

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

**May 10, 2023**

**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:

ALSO PRESENT: Lynn Sottile, Timothy Becker, Carl Rosa

STAFF PRESENT: Bernie LeBel, Downtown Manager

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tarek Ambia, Finance Chair  
Joseph Lipiner

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

**Call to Order:**

- Ms. Dzialo calls the meeting to order at 8:00 AM

**Roll Call:**

- Ms. Dzialo noted those present and absent.

**Minutes:**

- A motion to approve the minutes of April 19, 2023 is made by Mr. Mulligan, seconded by Mr. Fagan, all approve.

**Public Comment:**

- Ms. Dzialo invites Mr. Rosa (CT Main Street Center) to speak.
  - Mr. Rosa has traveled to the CT Main Street Center member communities and their downtowns, working with them to offer technical services to better manage their districts. Part of one of the methods they developed is a program assessment tool - from that lense, CTMSC creates a datapoint measurement tool which is broken into four segments which compile a score indicating a percentile score for downtown vibrancy. A 65 - 75 is satisfactory range, higher than 75 means you are in a high performing program. Manchester's score was a 73 which is satisfactory.

Economic vitality is the lowest of Downtown Manchester's scores due to housekeeping-type issues like keeping inventory records of current businesses and vacancies. He notes that the design score was the highest which is great. His group believes that the primary things that need attention are: Maintain building stock inventory and commercial space inventory with an easy method for updating those stocks. He notes that it could be as simple as a spreadsheet with all of that information. While it is sometimes a bit of work to get the process set up, maintaining the process should be a simple activity. While each town is different, most of the information should be able to be found through the tax assessor's office. Regarding business inventory, he believes that it is preferable to have a listing of all businesses so there is a better sense of what is needed to have to compliment the existing businesses. Also understanding the resident makeup of the surrounding area and the workforce not only to understand the purchasing power, but to help plan and position the District for the future. He recommends "On The Map" which is a census program that shows demographic statistics for areas the user selects. Going back to the design area (public art), he would like to see the District make those an inventoriable item to drive people to spend time viewing/experiencing them. As part of a "Complete Streets" design he would like to see amenities like bike lanes in the district. Promotion (Branding) would involve developing a positioning statement, "what is different about Downtown Manchester"? He further recommends reviewing the mission and vision statements with input from constituents. Demonstrate the impact of how many people attend events, increased in business, and filled vacancies.

Mr. Rosa's group recommends the following as "Tier 2" priorities:  
Economic Vitality - Develop vacant storefront "wishlist" or develop programming space activation. If vacancies are already noted, programming the space ahead of time or during transitions to keep the space alive while it's not otherwise actively in-use. He reminds the Board to think about how to prevent spaces from becoming a barrier to customer exploration. Even exploring pop-up month-to-month leasing for seasonal shops.

Organization - Strategic Planning & Work Plan - strengthen the strategic plan (3 year) or create an annual work plan. Those plans could even include activation or inventory construction.

Funding - Develop a strategy that aligns with the strategic plan, even if it's selling merchandise or sponsorships.

Volunteers - establish a volunteer program with a recognition program. Track volunteer hours as best as possible. He claims that the average volunteer hours cost in Connecticut is roughly \$29 per hour. Volunteers show that people are invested in Manchester and that having a

"champion" go-to person who can take care of any and all aspects of the goings-on in the downtown can be a huge benefit.

Mr. Mulligan would like Mr. Rosa to provide a few examples of positioning statements to assist the District in the formation of their own. Mr. Rosa agrees to supply some examples but notes that their content may not apply to Manchester's downtown and/or be quite nebulous in scope; he believes a managed process would be the best way to approach the positioning statement.

Ms. Sottile states that when the district was formed, it had full-time management and those managers were responsible for everything in the Downtown. She asks Mr. Rosa if he feels that our current setup with 20 hours for a manager is adequate and asks what can happen now to give our manager the support needed? Mr. Rosa believes that if the manager was handling all aspects of the Downtown it would not be possible with those hourly constraints; things like disaster relief, succession plans for businesses, collectively is a full-time job. While he believes that the District has been able to cobble it together, it would require full-time plus additional support to run optimally. Because the District is established and not brand-new, a fully managed process would make all the processes better. Being able to work with the Town officials to figure out who does what and when will help streamline procedures and policies; he states that in his opinion, this is a heavy load for one individual to handle.

- Mr. Becker has been a tenant at Work\_Space since 2018. He has some concerns about the "road diet" street plan which he believes will be a "starvation diet" and inhibit building owners from getting value out of their properties. He recalls that the west side of the street had their angled parking removed in the 1990s. He further states that generally, people do not like to parallel park. He is also disappointed that in three of the major developments in the Downtown, the District has had no say in. He believes that the Town overpaid on the Tong Building and has been unable get anyone to bid on razing it. It reminds him of the Parkade which was razed in 2011 and is still not developed. He is concerned that the removal of the angled parking and inclusion of a "suicide turn lane" in the middle will be detrimental for the Downtown. He suggests that the Downtown take a position on this plan and inform the Board of Directors. He notes that when the trolley tracks were removed, that process was a long-term disaster. He suggests that a PAC committee could be formed if the District is in opposition and would like to see the Commissioners contact the individual members of the Board of Directors to see what their positions are and to support those who support the District. People who actually run businesses will have a better chance of understanding the issues the new street plan can bring unlike the current board members who are mostly former or current state employees and don't understand the process of running a business. He would like to

emphasize that having customers utilize street prominent and plentiful parking is vital for businesses rather than having people park behind the businesses and find their way to the front. He also is not in favor of the the proposed roundabouts.

- Ms. Sottile says that there's a bit of pushback on this plan as asks if the District can get feedback from the Downtown constituents. She feels that the Town will do this plan regardless of the public opinion, but because the Downtown is the steward of the constituents' money, it is necessary to have an informed decision. While she believes that the end result could be nice, there are many unanswered questions about the proposed plans including the timetables for this plan. Will businesses be able to survive if they do not have rear parking lot access for an extended time?

### **Manager's Report:**

- Ms. LeBel reports she followed up with Clay Bird and Salon 292 about the signage discussed in last meeting. Pam Marvasti is upset about the barriers at Manchester Barber Shop and says that the tables take up three spaces through the week and are typically used only on Saturdays and Sundays. The majority of her customers are unable to access her business due to their limited mobility and the limited number of parking spaces. Mr. DuBaldo notes that the outdoor dining program is run by the Town, perhaps the Town can tweak the arrangement on that block. Ms. LeBel reports that Mr. Anderson has been working on the permitting process and there are a few items of concern especially with the Downtown Event Process Packet. Ms. Dzialo asks the other members to review the packet and propose any changes to the form to Ms. LeBel. Ms. LeBel has obtained a list of the taxpayers within the District to identify the property owners. Most owners are in corporation form, but the principals can be found through the Secretary of State. She also obtained the tax exempt certificate to purchase the embroidery for the constable jacket. She mentions that a schedule of events will be provided to the landscaper so they can adjust their maintenance schedule accordingly. Ms. LeBel has tried following up with the Chamber twice about an ex-officio member, but has not heard back yet. Ms. Dzialo and Ms. LeBel started making visits to businesses (6 so far) to ask them for feedback about contact and comments. As far as decisions and action items Ms. LeBel reports that Jim Meyer forwarded an email about a decorative sign which was removed near Urban Lodge and he would like to know if it should be replaced or stored. The board would like to see a close-up of the sign before making that decision. Last month, Mr. Anderson mentioned that there are signs on businesses in the Downtown which have been installed without zoning approval, Ms. LeBel will acquire that information from Jim Davis.

### **Commissioner Reports:**

- Chair – Not at this time
- Vice-Chair – Not at this time
- Secretary – Not at this time
- Finance – Not present

**Finance:**

- The updated budget is included in the packet.

**Parking:**

- Ms. LeBel reports that Dave Garrison has located three signs which can be updated to replace the incorrect wording on the signage (Oak/Maple, St. James). It was also noted that there is also no sign indicating parking at Oak Street; the Town will revisit installing a parking indicator sign. Mr. Mulligan believes he may have some additional signs if needed. Ms. LeBel reports that the chalking report analysis is still in-process. She notes that there was a request made by Ms. Sottile to block of 50-60 spaces in the Forest Lot for invited guests and dignitaries of a statue dedication for a duration of a few hours.

**Maintenance & Beautification:**

- Ms. Press would like to send out information about next year's banners but we need to know what will happen with the poles we are using. Mr. DuBaldo will ask Peter Conyers for an update on the veterans banners.

**Constituent Support Report:**

- None present

**Downtown Development Specialist Report:**

- Not present

**Old Business:**

- None at this time

**New Business:**

- Ms. Dzialo would like to have a template of questions to ask constituents for their feedback about the streetscap plan. Ms. Sottile inquires if the District will have any input on this process; what about businesses receiving deliveries via Main Street? Ms. LeBel will ask Mr. Anderson for updated plans for further discussion next month or to verify the current online version is up to date.

**Public Comment:**

- Ms. Sottile remarks that it has been a year since the last election and recommends that this would be the time to replace absentee positions and the members who do not attend and show a position of strength. She would like to see a different set of opinions presented whether accountant, lawyer... anything for a different opinion.

### **Adjourn**

- There being no further business a motion to adjourn is made by Mr. Mulligan at 9:37 AM, seconded by Mr. Fagan. All approve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary DMSSD

Recorder