

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

**October 11, 2023**

**8 AM**

Meeting held at Work\_Space, 903 Main Street

MEMBERS PRESENT: Daniel Mulligan, Acting Chair  
Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary  
Tarek Ambia, Finance Chair  
Ryan Fagan  
Esther Jeffery

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Kathy Hatch, Tom Tomko, Cece Ndlovu, Lynn Sottile, Richard Dabate, David Krinjak, Peter Miller, John Voghel, Lena Voghel, Corey Marvasti, Pamela Marvasti, Joe Datta, William Barry, Jay Roberts, Brandon Farr, Mark Matheney, Glenn Gerhard, Tamara Gerhard, Beth Ringo, Robert Mahoney, Thomas Mitchell

STAFF PRESENT: Bernie LeBel, Downtown Manager

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sophia Dzialo  
Joseph Lipiner

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS  
ABSENT: Millie Texidor – GMCC Representative  
Gary Anderson, Director Planning and Development

**Call to Order:**

- Mr. Mulligan calls the meeting to order at 8:08 AM

**Roll Call:**

- Mr. Mulligan noted those present and absent.

**Minutes:**

- A motion to approve the minutes of September 09, 2023 is made by Mr. Fagan, seconded by Ms. Jeffery. All approve.

**Public Comment:**

- Mr. Tomko states that the library requires 225 parking spaces; there are only 50 planned for installation at the library site and there are currently 115 stalls in the Forest Street parking lot. He feels that the current proposed designs do not meet the parking requirements for the capacity of the library let alone other businesses on Main Street. He believes that if parallel is

made, there will be at least a 60% reduction in on-street spacing compared with angled parking spaces. He feels that making parking down at South Methodist Church or CVS doesn't make sense; people aren't going to walk that far to get to the core of Main Street. He states that in his research with parallel parking it's well-known and documented that 50% of people will not use parallel parking (and take 3-4 attempts to park successfully). It takes roughly three angled spaces to fill one parallel space. This calculation affects his property as there are only 8 stalls in front of that property and the number will be reduced to three spaces under the proposed plan. He notes that rotaries are not recommended for urban areas due to entering and exiting at higher speed combined with pedestrian traffic. There are soccer groups and school children who utilize the fields and park; there are also church services which have lots of pedestrian traffic. It may also impact the Manchester Road Race. Mr. Krinjak states that he has used the rotaries in Glastonbury many times and is aware of many accidents or near accidents in those rotaries. Mr. Tomko feels that this proposed plan is restaurant-centric and that the plan cannot be centered around only restaurants. He believes that snow removal will be a large issue with this plan. He further states that the Johnson Block only has parking in front of their business - they don't even have a rear access lot. Mr. Tomko recites a list of individuals who are not in support of this proposed plan. Mr. Tomko spoke with Attorney Steve Penney about the old updates to Main Street circa 1989 and his successful attempt to get angled parking. Mr. Tomko is not for this concept plan getting off the ground if the Downtown taxpayers aren't for it. Mr. Mulligan informs Mr. Tomko that the Town did not include the DMSSD in any aspect of this proposed plan and that the Commission doesn't have an active role in this plan. Mr. Tomko would like to see a vote from the board about the support or lack thereof for the proposed streetscape plan. Ms. Ndlovu states that this proposed plan is funded so far through grants not taxes. Mr. Tomko feels that the \$7 million in grants could be used to fix the drainage or increase the parking.

- Mr. Farr states that he could kayak from the Elks' Club to his business whenever there is significant rainfall. He mentions that there was a car totalled due to that flooding.
- Ms. Gerhard – states that her son is one of many employees Silk City Coffee pays the parking permit fees for. She feels that the flooding has gotten worse over the years. She has been told repeatedly by the Town that the Town doesn't have the money to fix the problem, but she believes the the Town is not able to maintain the current property/infrastructure that they have Downtown and that they should not create a new property without fixing what is already broken.
- Mr. Gerhard recalls that there have been at least 3 major flooding events in the past year. He would like to advocate for a reallocation of the grant funds to fix that problem.

- Mr. Farr says that Mr. Stephanou told him that it would cost roughly 3 million dollars to fix the issue. Mr. Farr also states that there was a house that had their driveway sink in as a result of water damage.
- Mr. Matheney does not approve of the proposal. He asks that the Town not spend the money and notes that grant money all comes from some place (taxes).
- Mr. Mitchell inquires why we are having this meeting if the flooding and parking issues have been existing for decades?
- Mr. Tomko states that Mr. Datta's business would go from having 12 parking spaces near him to possibly 2; he feels the Town needs to consider the economics of this proposal.
- Mr. Farr says that he is not in support of the proposal; there aren't going to be enough spaces with parallel parking. He does not mind updates which make Main Street pretty, but does not want parallel parking.
- Mr. Mitchell states that he is not super-familiar with the plan, but taking any accessible parking would be horrible for his business. His business requires 10-15 spaces on the hour for clients. Thank fully, the Salvation Army has been willing to allow our barbers to park in their lot which alleviates some of the burden.
- Ms. Ringo believes that parallel parking would ruin her business; you cannot load or unload antiques parallel. When she expressed her concerns about that at a previous meeting, she was told that people could park across the street which likewise isn't feasible.
- Mr. Roberts says that his business is already affected by the extra seating outdoors for restaurants which he feels are not well-used.
- Mr. Barry feels that we need to be able to vote on the matter; the Town needs to do what its constituents want them to do, not do what it wants to do without our support or permission.
- Ms. Marvasti is not in favor at all, with the outdoor seating, they favor the restaurants more than other businesses. The restaurant next to her business used their seating 3 times this season. She feels that if any more parking is lost, it's going to ruin her business. Additionally, she does not like any of the other portions of the proposed plan.
- Mr. Datta feels that simply existing as a business here is very hard. He spent his savings to improve his building and business. Downtown being alive helps us all; we are all a Downtown community. He feels that parallel parking will kill his business. His customers are only in the store for roughly 6 minutes. He wonders what good pretty trees or streets do if there are no customers?

- Mr. Marvasti is glad to see the half-hour parking spots because with those, he feels, there is hope that if you have them you have access to the store.
- Ms. Marvasti also notes that there is no handicap-accessible parking on her block.
- Mr. Ambia states that he has reviewed this plan, and he has complained to the Town about the parallel parking at his block for years, yet here they are wanting to make the problematic spaces proliferate throughout the Downtown.
- Mr. Mahoney states that there are 5 retail spaces on his block and they are all against making the spaces around us shift to parallel; we need parking! He feels that when the old Catsup & Mustard space opens up, that will soak up even more spaces.
- Ms. Voghel states that she is mostly here at the meeting to listen, but is concerned with traffic being bad. She has heard about pedestrian deaths and we know there are frequent accidents. She hopes that making pedestrian traffic more safe is possible.
- Mr. Farr believes that the new crosswalks are horrible; he has seen people attempt to cross and some lanes of traffic will stop while others keep going.
- Ms. Gerhard says that when she looks at all of our needs Downtown and the risk of starting a project and not finishing it adequately; there should be other things to address first.
- Mr. Tomko would like to go down to two lanes on Main Street without the center turn lane. He feels that the Town should be able to take a few feet of excess lawns to shift to angled parking and by doing that, increase the number of spaces available.
- Mr. Miller informs the Board that the Army & Navy Club was formed in 1919 to welcome troops from World War I and that Mr. Miller was not a member of the club at that time. The club is a social organization funded by events and bar traffic. If the Army & Navy loses use of the Forest Street lot and Main Street for its members, it will end the organization. Using the proposed side of the library of the club parking (as we were suggested) puts a burden on the library. Additionally, expecting individuals who are elderly and/or handicapped to cross the street is simple it's not feasible.
- Mr. Dabate states that the Town told the Army & Navy clubs that there would be sufficient parking "behind the library." He feels that does us and others no good.
- Ms. Hatch also disagrees with the parallel parking proposal because we aren't able to load or unload for our businesses. If people can't pull in to the

front to load in and out, they can't make it up the steep back stairs or walk all the way around the block and up the hill.

- Ms. Sottile would like to say to please look at the plans to make sure you know exactly what you are fighting for or against. She notes that some haven't looked at the plans and are only concerned about the parallel parking but there's more to the plan than that.
- Ms. Ndlovu says that the final plan will be coming out soon and does address some of the issues discussed here. It's important to see what the draft has evolved to.
- Ms. Gerhard still feels that her concerns are still valid - the plan is beautiful, but if the Town is willing to spend that amount of money on it but aren't willing to spend the money on the longstanding issues like drainage...
- Ms. Ndlovu replies that the money is coming from grants so they are limited to what projects it can be used for.
- Ms. Tomko says if spending the money causes businesses to go out of businesses he cannot support it.
- Mr. Barry says that the Town is welcome to spend the Federal Government's money somewhere else, they don't speak for our needs.
- Mr. Ambia reiterates that we have complained for years about parallel parking for years but it's still on the table.
- Mr. Barry asks what can we do to get this to referendum?
- Ms. Ndlovu is unable to speak for that.
- Ms. Hatch insists that residents need to have a voice on this.
- Mr. Mulligan says that the Board has many of the same concerns raised today.
- Ms. Sottile believes that communication is the key - some people were invited to see the plan, but as you dissect the plan, you see the problems. Someone from this commission should have sat in on the planning sessions of this; the District should have had representation. Every individual should have access to this plan.
- Ms. Ndlovu says that when the updated plan comes out, there will be an opportunity for more comment; concepts can be changed.
- Mr. Miller is concerned about the copies of the proposed plan which show a proposed three-story office building on the corner of Main and Forest which he believes would cripple the Army & Navy.
- (most public exits at 8:57)

- Ms. Sottile wonders that other independent businesses have done surveys - would the District likewise perform its own survey about the new plan? If we are going to be a "One Downtown" to go with the "One Manchester", we need to reach out - we need a commissioner on those boards related to this project; it's unfair to not be directly included in this plan. Living through the last reconstruction, she feels it's not a pretty or fun project to endure.

#### **District Chair Report:**

- Nothing at this time

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

- Ms. LeBel reports that she received an email from Bob Sulick in late September about strongly discouraged types of signage; he noted that there was a light out and weeds growing at the south end entrance. Ms. LeBel researched and found that there are no rules prohibiting specific signs and he was advised accordingly. Ms. LeBel received a complaint from 599 Main inquiring about when the temporary fencing would come down in the Brown Lot among other concerns about parking spaces being allotted to tenants. She also notes that Constable Rick has had contact with a resident who claimed they did not need a parking pass because they are a tenant. Ms. LeBel has not heard if the Cronin canvassers have begun their research project yet. She notes that Tom Topping is attempting to hold a tree-lighting ceremony at Center Congregational and is looking for a mobile stage sponsor. Dzen Farms has reached out to her stating that the pumpkins are available for the Halloween Happenings.

#### **Finance:**

- Ms. LeBel will start to work on the upcoming budget this month.

#### **Parking:**

- Ms. LeBel reports there was a car towed at the end of August, the individual inquired as she needed to know where her car was - Manchester Police were able to furnish that information. Ms. LeBel states that we received our annual licensing fee for Passport which would be due at the end of the month. Passport invited us to participate in a new performance dashboard but there were numerous issues with the attachment and the data wasn't readable due to font sizing. Regarding the constable position: the job posting was posted on Indeed; we hit our limit of 20 applications by the next day. The posting was re-sent and we have received 22 resumes; pre-interview calls will be started this week. She also notes that there was a question presented to her by a realtor about whether we had the capacity to add seven residential spaces to the resident parking spaces. It was noted that they should have sufficient space available in the existing spaces. There was

a request to be added to the Tong permanent parker list – Ms. LeBel is going to cross-reference the list once Passport frees up that data.

### **Marketing:**

- Ms. LeBel reports that she did not receive an official report from Ms. Press but there is a lot of buzz about the Scarecrow Festival. Ms. Jeffery is pleased that there are a lot of scarecrows out there (46). Ms. LeBel states that there is a new less-expensive vendor for the bags and that things are looking good for the events. Mr. Fagan installed the scarecrow poles which saved the District a bit of money.

### **Maintenance & Beautification:**

- Ms. LeBel reports that we received two bids for the decorations, but one of the bids was incorrect (corrected through a direct mailing prior to opening the bids). Also, the other bidder does not offer the decorations; however purchasing said that we could merge the decorations bid with the banners. Ms. LeBel notes that we need to have the specifics of the decorations laid out in the bid. Currently, the current contract runs through January of 2024.

Ms. Jeffery believes it might be a productive idea to contract Ms. Parseliti to assist Ms. LeBel with tasks like the bids and contracts to teach her the correct way and provide better insight to the processes. Ms. LeBel says that she would be open to the assistance. Ms. Jeffery also believes that there seems to be a lot of confusion about what Ms. LeBel and Ms. Press do, that Downtown e-mails show up as an e-mail from Ms. Press, but sometimes responses are through Ms. LeBel. Mr. Mulligan believes part of that confusion could be because Ms. Press was the previous manager and individuals may not know there was a change. He also states that there may also be rules about the ability to hire a former Town employee for consulting purposes; it may not be allowed and we may need to check with the Town.

Ms. LeBel says that Mr. Fagan has offered to help with the hiring process for the constable. Constable Rick is willing and able to train the new hire. Ms. LeBel will also explore getting a demo for the license scanners from Passport so their efficacy can be tested.

### **Constituent Support Report:**

- Not at this time

### **Downtown Development Specialist Report:**

- Ms. Ndlovu reports that the Beahive was granted a \$125,000 grant by the EDC and they will be moving to Lenox Plaza. There will be many more chairs available for rent as well as space available for their own stylists. They are also going to expand their offerings beyond hair styling. She notes that the next version of the Downtown Improvement Plan will be coming out shortly.

The library plans will have several public comment sessions coming up. The Town would also like to clear up signage issues about what is acceptable and what is not.

Ms. LeBel thinks it would be a good idea to send e-mails regarding news of the streetscape project and requests Ms. Ndlovu keep her informed.

#### **Old Business:**

- None at this time

#### **New Business:**

- Mr. DuBaldo mentions that Tom Topping is looking for Downtown support for Center Congregational Church to host a tree lighting this year. They are looking to acquire a tree and have a ceremony similar to the event previously held at St. James. The Board would like to see the tree lighting resume and will support this year's ceremony if it is able to happen. Though, because Center Congregational Church is not within the District, the Board would like to see it resume in the Downtown again.

#### **Public Comment:**

- Ms. Sottile would like to say that Ms. LeBel is not an admin, she is the manager and should be treated as such. Ms. Sottile would like to have more information about the Cronin canvassing Downtown. Ms. LeBel says that they are Educating businesses about the Small Business Boost Fund; they are independent of us but are also working alongside the Town. Ms. Sottile states that the architectural guidelines do specify certain sign restrictions especially within the Downtown. She feels that Ms. Parseliti would be a great asset to Ms. LeBel and perhaps she would be able to assist. Ms. Sottile would like to have a more in-depth view of the lines within the budget. With the tickets written but are not yet paid should be noted as expected income but missing revenue. Ms. LeBel will inquire with the police to see if they can furnish that information.

#### **Other Business:**

- A motion to express disapproval of the current Downtown Manchester Streetscape project as presented on June 21, 2023 is made by Ms. Jeffery, seconded by Mr. Ambia with all in favor.

#### **Adjourn**

- There being no further business a motion to adjourn is made by Ms. Jeffery at 10:24 AM, seconded by Mr. Ambia. All approve.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nicholas DuBaldo, Secretary DMSSD

Recorder