

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Special Meeting of June 4, 2020
Zoom Call

The special meeting of the DDA Board was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: *Mayor Brian Turnbull, Margene Buckhave, John Casey, Aaron Cozart, Ryan McKindles, Shawn Riley, Mary Starring, Greg Presley, Carolann Ayers, DJ Boyd, Jim Long*

Absent:

Also Present: *Patrick Sullivan/City Manager, Lori Ward/DDA Executive Director, Jeri Johnson/Marketing & Communications Director, Marilyn Price/City Council, Peggy Stoe/Pear-aphernalia, Jenn Grochowski/Pear-aphernalia, Paul Gabriel/Browndog*

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None

REOPENING PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN NORTHVILLE

In response to COVID-19 shutdown the DDA staff, working with the business owners and City administration, has developed a Reopening Plan for Downtown that will provide an opportunity for all of the downtown businesses to reopen safely and with the maximum capacity allowed under the latest Governor's Executive Orders. The plan requires the use of several tools including the special event application provided as Attachment B.

Casey said that he has been talking with Ward and Riley about what the reopening of downtown should look like and how to help businesses recover their losses. From those conversations they began to have ZOOM meetings inviting the restaurants and retailers to participate in the conversations. From those conversations it became clear the majority of businesses were in favor of allowing businesses to spill out into the streets for better social distancing. Riley said restaurants in particular will benefit from closing the streets since they are restricted to 50% capacity inside and need more outside space for diners. Both Casey and Riley are concerned if we do not help the businesses make up their COVID-19 losses, we will have a lot of empty storefronts in the downtown. It was clear from listening to the downtown restaurants that we needed to shut the streets for the entire week not just on weekends. Casey pointed out that it is too difficult to move tables and chairs when you have no storage for them during the week.

Ward communicated with colleagues across the state sharing ideas on what they were planning to do as restrictions are lifted. Ward also restated the research and numerous information gathering Zoom calls, emails and phone conversations that were done prior to coming up with the Reopening Plan for Northville.

Ward said there are three initiatives that are part of the DDA Reopening Plan. First is the support of House Bill 5781, which allows for municipalities to designate a “social district”. Ward stated we have set up social districts in the past when we did events in the downtown. This piece of legislation would allow our restaurants and retailers to spill out into the street to maintain the mandated social distancing requirements. It would also allow people to eat and consume alcohol while moving about in the designated social district area. Ward asked the City Council to write a letter of support for House Bill 5781. Ward has also asked the City Council to approve a letter of support for the limited permanent outdoor service area permission (form 204a). This form would be expedited by the MCC and would allow the 13 downtown restaurants to be able to expand their boundaries in order to make up for the seats they are losing because of the reduced capacities and social distancing requirements. Ward said City Council approved this letter and the DDA was able to distribute those letters to all the restaurants. The restaurants will include this letter when they apply for permission from the MLCC to spill out into the public right away. The second initiative was to fill out a Special Event Application for the downtown. This would allow merchandising by retailers outside of their store and also restaurants to expand out into the streets. Finally, the third initiative is to close East Main and North Center streets to allow for more outdoor dining and merchandising. After meeting with Department Heads and the Police/Fire Chiefs it was determined that 18 feet would need to remain open for public safety in the event of an emergency. Ward said the common areas, Old Church Square and Town Square will be maintained for common use. The Seasonal staff will be maintaining the public tables and chairs. Ward mentioned the DDA is looking into having live acoustic music on the streets to create a welcoming atmosphere. The DDA is also putting together a marketing plan creating signs, banners, print material and social media to promote the theme “Welcome Back to Northville”.

Ward initially did a survey of the business owners in the downtown to see if they would like the streets closed on weekends only. Out of 30 responses all 30 said yes. The DDA then did an additional survey to see if businesses would prefer just weekend closures or the full week. The results were 3 voted for no closures, 13 said weekends only and 31 said close for the entire week. Since the Governor has reopened retail and restaurants at 50% capacity, DDA staff are trying to quickly get this done in a safe manner so the businesses can have a larger footprint to recapture their losses. Ward mentioned Cole from Great Harvest did some research of other cities that have done similar closures and have had great success. That information was shared by separated email to the DDA Board members.

Long commented that he was very disappointed that the DDA was initially presenting the full week street closures to City Council without getting DDA Board approval. Long felt it was a very bad precedent to have the Executive Committee and staff make recommendations without DDA Board input. Ward said she takes full responsibility and apologized for not including the full Board in the decision-making process. Ward said it

was a complete oversight on her part because things have been moving so quickly and working from home is so different that she bypassed the normal process. Ward said she would never intentionally leave the Board out and again apologized. Ward is pleased everyone was flexible and able to make this Zoom call so the DDA can collectively make a recommendation.

Long expressed concern that the survey went out to all businesses not just the ones that would be affected by the street closures. Long believes if you take out double votes for the same business and businesses that are not directly affected by the closures the responses that should be counted is only 27 not the full 47. Long feels we are moving too fast and should take more time to talk to the businesses that are directly involved. Long is also concerned about traffic in the neighborhoods if Center Street is closed. Long believes citizens of Northville will be up in arms with the increased traffic because that was a big concern when looking at the Northville Downs Development. Long cautioned the Board to be more diligent when it comes to checks and balances for DDA decisions.

Riley made the point that the emails were sent multiple times to 250 businesses and they were also invited to multiple Zoom calls and if they did not choose to respond they abstained from having an opinion. The DDA has worked hard to set up meetings and get as many opinions as possible to do what's best for reopening the downtown.

Presley asked for clarification about the traffic coming North on Center to the intersection at Main and if cars would then be able to turn left on Main Street. Sullivan said yes, cars would be able to turn left. Sullivan also said the detour being recommended by the police department is to try to get traffic to head east as much as possible by putting up a barricade at Dunlap. There would be a stop sign to turn left so that traffic would go around the east end of town. Sullivan said the police are trying to come up with a plan to keep traffic out of the neighborhoods as much as possible.

Presley drew attention to Orin Jeweler's letter about tents being set up in the streets. Presley agreed that large tents would be unattractive but more importantly structurally unsafe. He brought up the 1988 Victorian festival when a tornado came out of nowhere and blew tents horizontally down Main Street. Ward stated that tents were not a part of the special event application that was developed by DDA staff. Ward agreed with Presley's concerns and added that many of the businesses are concerned that tents would block the visibility of their storefronts. Presley needed to sign off of the zoom call, but voted YES for full week street closures.

Ayers expressed her concern for traffic flow in the neighborhoods. Wing Street has had so much additional traffic because of the post office trucks. Also, Cabbage Town could be negatively affected as well.

Buckhave said that her customers are still being cautious about going into stores and preferring curbside pickup. Buckhave believes it would be too difficult for restaurants to move their outdoor furniture every week if the streets were closed down only on weekends. It will need to be a group effort to keep the streets clean and garbage empty. Buckhave questioned the need for additional bathrooms/porta potties for the increased

pedestrian traffic. She also suggested having art or flower vendors in the street to help with the ambiance. Her opinion is to give this a try and see what happens. Boyd and McKindles echoed Buckhaves comments and agreed this would be a great thing to do for the businesses that have lost so much of their income.

Turnbull reached out to several other surrounding communities to get their input and ideas. He also talked to several of the businesses on Main and Center and they all realize these are unique times and want to give the street closures a try. Turnbull also said there will be increased pedestrian traffic because so many people will continue to work from home through September or later.

Riley mentioned working with JAG Entertainment to provide acoustic music on both Main and Center Streets. This would add to the downtown atmosphere and make Northville a destination town. These would not be big concerts like we've had in the past but more individuals playing the guitar.

Long questioned whether anyone has reached out to restaurants that will not be able to take advantage of the street closures. Ward said yes, the DDA has been reaching out to all downtown and surrounding Northville restaurants working with them to expand their outdoor dining options.

Stoe and Grochowski from Pear-aphernalia wanted to raise attention to the many bike riders and skateboarders that ride through town on the sidewalks. This is a hazard to pedestrians walking on the sidewalks. Also, there are many pedestrians that walk their dogs through town and with the restaurants out in the street this could potentially become a problem. Stoe also suggested valet parking for older customers that may not be able to walk from distant parking. Stoe commented that porta potties are not attractive and restaurants that are serving customers should allow the use of their bathrooms. She recommended retailers should create tasteful outdoor displays to entice customers into the store.

Gabriel from Browndog believes that people will not feel comfortable eating inside a restaurant for some time. If other cities shut down their streets and Northville does not, we will lose a lot of our customer base.

Motion by Casey, seconded by Cozart to approve the ReOpening Downtown Special Event to be held June 4th – October 31st, 2020. **Motion carried unanimously.**

NEW TABLES AND CHAIRS FOR TOWN SQUARE/OLD CHURCH SQUARE

Ward said that Johnson has been looking into getting additional tables and chairs for Old Church Square. The DDA did not get a formal quote in time so it is not in the Board packet. Ward mentioned the Square will remain a public plaza for the next 5 years and the DDA has wanted to put outdoor furniture in that spot for several years. This would be a great location for people to eat carryout food and beverages. Buckhave is in favor of having additional seating as long as the DDA maintains the garbage and keeps the area clean. Buckhave also mentioned having music in the Old Church Square would add ambiance. Johnson reached out to Custom Channels to play lighter acoustic music

through our sound system but that is only audible in Town Square. It would be nice to add additional speakers in the Church Square area depending on the cost. Buckhave also mentioned having signs created for bikers to prevent them from riding their bikes through down. It is a hazard with all the diners in the streets and on the sidewalks. Buckhave was concerned about the number of folks walking dogs in the downtown area. She believes we should have poop bag stations especially with all the outdoor dining.

Sullivan expressed concern about who would be in charge of cleaning the streets and picking up the garbage in the evenings. He said the DPW does not have the manpower to take on additional tasks. Ward said we have hired two full time seasonal employees but hope to hire more. Ward said it has been difficult to find people to apply for the job. If we can add more staff, we will have additional shifts on the weekends to help with garbage. Ward said the DDA would not be able to do that every weekday evening. We will see how much additional staff will be needed as this Downtown Reopening Event unfolds.

BOARD & STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

None

Motion by Casey, seconded by McKindles to close the meeting. **Motion carried unanimously.**

The next Board meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2020.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted, Jeri Johnson, Marketing and Communications Director
Northville DDA