

MINUTES

Members Present: Chair S. Ferrigno, K. Dilaj, V. Souter-Kline, L. Watson

Members Absent: C. Chukwuogor, A. Raggi, N. McKenney

Ex-Officio Members Present: B. Coleman, A. Moran

Staff Present: R. Aylesworth, Town Manager; C. van Zelm, Executive Director, Mansfield Downtown Partnership; J. Stern, Administrative Assistant, Mansfield Downtown Partnership

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Ferrigno called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

New Administrative Assistant Joshua Stern introduced himself.

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There was no quorum to approve the minutes.

4. REPORTS

A. MEMBER UPDATES

No report.

B. Staff Updates

Van Zelm said she, Downtown Partnership Senior Communications Manager Kathleen Paterson, Town Communications Specialist Margaret Chatey, and the Thread City Development team held a debrief on Mansfield-Willi Restaurant Week. There was a consensus that the event should continue, and a survey was sent to the participating restaurants to help form a plan for next year. Meetings for next year's Restaurant Week will likely begin in October 2022. The Downtown Partnership office also sent thank-you letters to the sponsors and participating restaurants in Mansfield.

Van Zelm also reminded the Commission of the upcoming UConn webinar series, which will begin Wednesday, March 23. The first webinar will focus on how small businesses can bring in interns, and one in April will focus on attracting UConn students and recent graduates for jobs.

Moran said she thinks the number of restaurants involved in Restaurant Week should be expanded. The Downtown Partnership did not contact chain restaurants for this year's event, but Moran feels local chains like Oriental Cafe with a limited number of locations should participate. Coleman said he thinks Mansfield was short-changed by WFSB's coverage of Restaurant Week, which focused mostly on Willimantic's participating restaurants.

C. Business Updates (Closings/Opening)

Ferrigno said Brooklyn Dumpling Shop has had their soft opening since the Commission's last meeting. Van Zelm said no other businesses have opened or closed in that time.

D. Housing Updates

Van Zelm relayed the following update from Linda Painter, Town Director of Planning and Development:

The special permit for The Standard at Four Corners (392 units, approximately 15,000 square feet of commercial space) was approved February 22 by the PZC. Staff has met with the applicant subsequent to that approval to answer questions regarding next steps in the permitting process. There continues to be unabated interest in multi-family residential development.

E. EDC Calendar

There are no significant updates.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS AT MEETING**A. Overview of Presentation to Town Council on FY22-23 Work Plan and Budget Priorities**

Ferrigno said he, Van Zelm, and Dilaj met to discuss the presentation, which is scheduled for the end of March. It will contain a brief overview of the Commission's mission, a summary of their activities over the last 12 months, and a preview of their plans for the next 12 months.

B. Update on Nominations for Taste of Mansfield Champion Award

Van Zelm said four nominations – two individuals and two businesses – have been made, and Coleman volunteered to serve as the EDC delegate to review applications. There will be a Taste of Mansfield meeting on Monday, April 4 to discuss with the staff team. Senior Planner Jennifer Kaufman is still looking for a representative from the Agriculture Committee.

C. Update on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding Proposals

Aylesworth said the Town Council held a public hearing on ARPA funding proposals during their regular meeting on Monday, March 14. The Council has been discussing proposals for a few months now, and staff have been revising them based on feedback from stakeholders going back to the fall.

Aylesworth said Mansfield is receiving just over \$7.5 million in ARPA funding. Some proposals have been fully greenlighted, some have been given conditional approvals for funding but need additional work on their implementation plans, and others require further deliberation. Aylesworth highlighted the following proposals:

- A \$370,000 assistance program for local businesses impacted by COVID has been given conditional approval but still needs an implementation plan, including eligibility criteria.
- A \$30,000 plan to market Downtown Storrs and implement the 4 Town Economic Vitality Plan.
- An arts relief fund to help local artists, with a focus on public art to enhance the attractiveness of Downtown Storrs, Mansfield Four Corners, and other areas.

Ferrigno said the local business assistance program should be thought of as an investment in the Town. Aylesworth agreed and said van Zelm found out that Mansfield does not qualify as disproportionately impacted by COVID, which limits the amount of funding that could go toward new starts, enhancements, and expansion efforts including façade/storefront improvements.

D. EDC and Subcommittee Assignments

Van Zelm said Coleman, Raggi, and McKenney are not currently assigned to subcommittees. Ferrigno said he and van Zelm will reach out to them about the three subcommittees.

Ferrigno added that the Development Project Review Subcommittee's next steps will focus on UConn's new housing project at the Mansfield Apartments site. The Business Support and Outreach Subcommittee will put together a list of questions to interview businesses, and the Governance Subcommittee will focus on looking for new Commission members. He noted that there will be no EDC meeting in April, which should allow the subcommittees to focus more on their work.

E. Discussion of In-Person Meetings

Ferrigno said the Town Council has transitioned back to in-person meetings. Moran said the Commission can choose whether to hold in-person or hybrid meetings.

Aylesworth confirmed that the executive order allowing completely remote meetings will expire at the end of April and that barring any legislative changes, meetings will return to being in person then. Hybrid meetings would still be an option, but would require a quorum of the members present in person. However, he noted that there are significant advocacy efforts to make remote meetings a permanent option, and many expect the legislation to be changed accordingly. Ferrigno said the next EDC meeting will be in May and will likely be hybrid.

Aylesworth clarified that if there is no legislative change, hybrid meetings would require a quorum in person, but a minority of members could participate remotely. He emphasized again that the legislation is likely to change.

F. Town/UConn Collaboration Update

Ferrigno said he and Moran will meet with the framework committee on Friday, March 18 and will update the Commission afterwards.

Aylesworth said he was invited by the Board of Trustees to serve on the subcommittee for the next UConn President.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

All noted.

7. FUTURE MEETINGS

A. Upcoming Meeting Schedule

Ferrigno noted that the meeting scheduled for April 21 will be canceled and replaced with subcommittee work. The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2022.

B. Future Meeting Topics

Coleman expressed interest in holding an artists week to give artists an opportunity to have an open studio, possibly using an empty storefront. Moran said there is a regional open studio that takes place in late November and early December, but this event is not downtown. She said the Downtown Partnership used to hold a craft fair on Betsy Paterson Square, but the artists did not sell enough to make it worthwhile.

Van Zelm said the fair was held every Friday in the summer for about two years, which may have been too often. She said Coleman's idea to create or support more events is in the Downtown Storrs Strategic Action Plan, and UConn and the Ballard Institute have expressed interest in participating. She also mentioned that the event could be at the East Brook Mall, which has previously provided showcases for artists.

Coleman added that the artists week should be held during the warm part of the year but while UConn is still in session. Dilaj said giving schools an opportunity to showcase student work would help attract

an audience to the event. Moran said it would be helpful to talk with the organizers of the East Brook Mall's art gallery, which showcased work from children and photography by UConn biologists and also held a craft show. Coleman said some artists he has contacted have expressed significant interest in the opportunity.

Ferrigno said the ARPA arts relief funding could go toward the event.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Coleman MOVED, Dilaj SECONDED to adjourn. Motion PASSED unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:
Joshua Stern
Administrative Assistant
Mansfield Downtown Partnership, Inc.