



City of Madison

City of Madison
Madison, WI 53703
www.cityofmadison.com

Meeting Minutes - Approved DOWNTOWN COORDINATING COMMITTEE

*Consider: Who benefits? Who is burdened?
Who does not have a voice at the table?
How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?*

Thursday, August 20, 2020

5:30 PM

Via Virtual Meeting

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Present: 9 - Michael E. Verveer; Patrick W. Heck; Kathy L. Marks; Gregory O. Frank;
Adam J. Plotkin; Ted Crabb; Barbara Harrington-McKinney; Davy Mayer and
Sandra J. Torkildson

Excused: 1 - Lori J. Henn

APPROVAL OF June 30, 2020 MINUTES

A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Plotkin, to Approve the June 30, 2020 Minutes. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. [61242](#) Public Comment
None

DISCLOSURES AND RECUSALS

None

2. [59936](#) Report of Mall Maintenance and Special Events 2020

Mark Kiesow provided an update on mall maintenance. Staff is working on continual clean up downtown areas, including Lisa Link Peace Park, and have begun working on is flower maintenance because many planters were tipped over during the civil unrest. He said that they are working to return some planters to the Capitol Square and 100 block of State Street within the next two weeks. He said the mall maintenance crew did a great job with graffiti cleanup this summer and mentioned that Peace Park has turned around after seeing a lot of damage. Cnare and Verveer thanked the mall maintenance team for their hard work under challenging circumstances.

3. [61021](#) Downtown Recovery Discussion

Madison Taychert introduced herself as the new UW ASM student-appointed representative on the DCC beginning in September.

Tiffany Kenney, BID Executive Director, was available to answer questions.

Jason Ilstrup, DMI, was available to answer questions.

Crabb asked Verveer for an update on the Downtown Recovery Program. Verveer said that the Common Council hasn't adopted anything in the way of relief for State Street merchants. He explained that there will be two proposals on the agenda at the next council meeting on 9/1, one related to providing funding to locally-owned small businesses downtown to help cover losses as a result of the civil unrest and the second related to funding recovery and equity efforts citywide with an emphasis on helping entrepreneurs of color.

Tiffany Kenney said that a new fund has been established, the Downtown Madison Fund, in partnership with the Madison Community Foundation and overseen by the BID executive committee, which has a goal of raising money to help businesses who are still in need of financial help. She said that there are conversations underway regarding a long-term endowment fund at the Madison Community Foundation as well.

Crabb asked for an update on the long-range implications of COVID and the civil unrest on downtown businesses. Kenney responded that as of May 31, there were 152 businesses on State Street with a 6% vacancy rate. She said that after the civil unrest in May, 41 businesses felt worried they may not be able to stay open, and of those, 20 have closed and there is an 11% vacancy rate. Frank said that the longer the COVID restrictions are in place, the tougher it will be for small businesses to stay open and if it goes through winter, he thinks that there will be a huge drop off in the number of businesses able to sustain, which will significantly impact downtown.

Crabb said there will likely be assemblages of returning UW students on State Street and asked if there were efforts being made to remind students of social distancing and mask wearing, and asked for thoughts on if they may end up moving to virtual learning as other universities have done. Taychert said that UW has sent out many emails reminding students to follow social distancing guidelines. She said that she knows there is hesitancy about moving back and some are leaving apartments empty under the assumption they'll move to online classes, though she thinks the students who have already moved in will likely stay in Madison. Mayer said that he thinks they need to prepare for everything being shut down through next summer because it won't be until they create a viable vaccine that anything will change. Heck referenced Taychert's statement that even if UW goes online, a lot of students are probably going to stay here, which he said is important to realize. He said that it is a gray area as to whether University Health Services or Public Health Madison and Dane County will address any noncompliance with social distancing guidelines, but it will likely depend on the situation and evolve over time. Taychert said that if students hold mass gatherings or parties, there could be academic consequences as well.

Marks asked if anyone is discussing how to provide short-term help to small businesses in terms of helping them apply for funding or shift to e-commerce in order to make it through this period. Chare said that Jason Ilstrup was attending in order to hear ideas for recovery that could be passed along to the public-private group he heads. She said that the City is working on the small business and equity recovery programs that Verveer discussed, and she is on the staff economic and culture recovery team that is brainstorming and prioritizing policies, programs and ordinance change to Aid in the City's recovery. One example is the potential extension of the Streatery program, as well as efforts to encourage retailers to take opportunities of a free merchant vending license.

Frank said that all of the short-term things they can do involve bringing people downtown, especially for restaurants, which is tough when people may not feel comfortable. He said that some retailers can do shipping, and suggested there could be a way to help them do that more efficiently. Torkildson suggested doing interactive videos in stores on State Street to show people what is available because the holiday season is important for retail. Crabb agreed with Frank that it may be difficult to get people downtown, especially without the normal draws like the Overture Center and football games. In response to Marks, he

suggested doing an online workshop or help center for small businesses on topics such as how to apply for any federal loan programs. Marks said that Madison has a fantastic tech community and while it won't help all businesses, some could do more sales online if they had the resources and knowledge to do it. She asked if any groups had looked into technology as a solution to help small businesses. Kenney said that Goodman's Jewelers is currently looking to set up online sales, so she thinks that is a great idea to consider for a big picture conversation. Jason Ilstrup said they would like to help get resources to as many businesses as possible and thanked the group for their ideas.

Frank suggested they use the Overture Center as a way to safely have people shop with small pop-ups in empty locations, but pointed out that the windows are still boarded up. He said that the International Festival is one of Overture's biggest annual events. Overture Board Director Betty Custer thought there might be a way to hold a similar event many times throughout the year. Crabb said that he was also surprised that Overture hadn't replaced their windows, which he thought was a sign to people not to come downtown because it isn't safe. Frank said that someone in their group had brought up the idea of including different neighborhood retailers beyond downtown in order to help the entire city and introduce people to different areas. Mayer said that using Overture is a great idea as it gets colder because people will feel safer in big, open spaces that are well ventilated, and it could bring in a lot of business.

Torkildson said that Milwaukee does an outdoor Christmas market, which they could look into. Frank said that the tree lighting ceremony in Madison has also been successful and can be done safely. Verveer said that he would like Overture to take down the plywood boards from windows and doors that were not damaged, but they are concerned there could be future unrest and vandalism to the property and they have no plans to open until next year. Additionally, the replacement windows have been custom ordered and will take until November to be fabricated and shipped.

Marks said that she has spoken to some downtown business owners and they are fearful of potential additional unrest. She asked what is happening at the City-level to alleviate that real fear and concern and if they are prepared for additional protests that might get out of hand. Verveer said that he has done everything he can to encourage business and property owners to remove the boards if there are no broken windows. He said that he has also asked MPD to provide visible patrols to State Street because seeing a robust police presence provides business owners with a higher comfort level to try to get back to a sense of normalcy. He said that there have also been difficult conversations with property and business owners who feel that City Hall has not been particularly helpful or shown empathy toward their plight. Frank said that he has also heard from communities of color that City Hall has not been very receptive. He said that a group of downtown business owners has been engaging with one of the protest groups to discuss their concerns and goals to try to work together toward a safe, welcoming environment where everybody feels comfortable, and they have a goal of engaging City Hall in those conversations as well.

Harrington-McKinney said that it is important to note that there are alders on Common Council who are supportive of helping and she doesn't want people to feel as if all alders are against this. She said they will continue to try to get the Common Council to understand that these are minority-owned businesses as well. She said that she was glad that the conversations that Frank described are happening because it will take all of us to move forward.

Cnare said that they heard feedback that the State Street murals from artists of color were welcoming and part of the healing process, so staff wanted to find ways to make downtown more welcoming. She said that the last utility box on State Street was wrapped in artwork by a Ho-Chunk artist and Lalida Gee is working on a mural design for the top of State Street relating to the Mask up Madison campaign. She said that these are small things but could

be impactful as they try to get people downtown to take photos and experience art, and part of making State Street welcoming is about finding the right artists to connect with people.

Torkildson asked how they can help connect tech people with small businesses to create a more sophisticated online presence. Marks said the knowledge is out there, it is just a matter of organizing and inviting people to contribute their ideas and expertise. She suggested Ilstrup and that group could follow up, and Ilstrup agreed. Cnare asked for other ideas for the upcoming holiday season in addition to a winter market. Torkildson said State Street is so wide, perhaps they could have some clever outdoor activities in addition to shopping. Frank suggested having free or reduced parking. Verveer said that City ramps are still \$5 maximum per day, but perhaps in the future the DCC could go on record regarding the critical support that discounted parking provides to downtown businesses and encourage more robust promotions of the work Parking Utility is doing. He asked why Monroe Street and Hilldale merchants were allowed to advertise sidewalk sales, but the State Street and Capitol Square area cannot. Cnare said she would look into it and ask public health, but she thought they were to avoid advertising a sale during specific hours because it could potentially draw a crowd. Cnare said she and Kenney can explore more options as to how they can make State Street welcoming while not creating a mass gathering. Verveer said that he understands the public health order could be a hindrance to some of the committee's ideas.

Harrington-McKinney suggested displaying some of Milele Chikasa Anana's artwork. Torkildson asked if they could put artwork or some of the mural boards inside vacant storefronts along State Street.

Frank asked about the committee's role in this process. Heck said there is fantastic work happening by other groups and wasn't sure how it all fits together; he asked if the DCC should be a clearinghouse. Marks said she had similar questions because there are a lot of thoughtful people getting together to try to solve some of the same problems and duplicating efforts is not a good thing. Cnare said that traditionally, the Common Council refers applicable policies, ordinances and programs to this body for discussion, so they should look to their alder representation for those referrals. She said that things in the private sector are separate, though if someone wants to present an idea to this group and seek input, they are welcome. Crabb said that they not only respond to requests for review by the Common Council, but are a group with unique, valuable representation who can act as a listening board, respond, and offer suggestions and ideas regarding what is happening in the city. He said that they should take advantage of their representation and strengthen their role. Frank agreed and said they will have a potentially critical role going forward in the downtown process as there is money involved and decisions to be made, and he wants to be sure they are part of that discussion to help guide the process.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Crabb, seconded by Frank, to Adjourn at 7:35 pm. The motion passed by voice vote/other.