

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE ST. ALBANS CITY DOWNTOWN BOARD
& BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF ST. ALBANS FOR THE FUTURE
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
6:00 PM, TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023

-APPROVED MINUTES-

Members Present: Maureen Brown (chair), Sharon Holcomb, Erik Johnson (Treasurer), Debora Morton, Jackie Hawkins, Ashley Cleare, Mary Pat Larrabee, Shannon Smith, Emily Richards (vice chair)

Members Absent: Donna Howard, Jeremy Read, David Glidden, Valdemar Garibay

City Staff Present: Arleigh Young (Coordinator of Planning and Development), Chip Sawyer (Director of Planning and Development), Quinnlan Steele (Minute-taker)

Members of Public Present: Nicole Cunningham, Jennifer Kostuck, Lieutenant Jason Wetherby (St Albans Police), HL Glazer, Tom Yeamon

Meeting was called to order at 6:01pm

First addition:

C Sawyer began discussing the subject of downtown security by addressing the idea of installing more cameras. He said that while they've proven to be helpful on an individual basis there could be logistical issues with a larger installation throughout the area. He then asked members to clarify what they would want out of a text alert system which they had previously discussed.

- M Brown expressed interest in something similar to how schools send out notifications. Emails and texts over a centralized system that arrive quickly after an incident. Later, S Holcomb made a similar statement emphasizing different ways of alerting people to events downtown.
- There was further discussion of various ways business owners and the police could communicate about suspicious activity in the downtown area and what information that should include.

E Johnson reintroduced the idea of cameras. He explained that cameras in stores can't catch a lot of things that community cameras could (where people go, how often they're there, etc) which would be important information should something happen.

- J Weatherby had previously noted that there are limits on what cameras in public spaces can be used for. He then added that while there are systems and software to help identify criminal activity, they're expensive and he's not sure the city, community, or business owners would want to make that investment.

- C Sawyer followed this up by referencing two recent incidents, an attempted robbery and a break-in that were resolved quickly with the current level of technology in the city. He suggested that that might be considered when evaluating where to put resources.

M Larabee then proposed the idea of a 'low tech' system to share information about people who are regularly causing issues downtown.

- A Cleare wondered if it would be appropriate for business owners to share that kind of information but others felt it would be fine for business owners to be proactive in securing their establishments.
- After much discussion it was determined that this hypothetical system would have to be something akin to a private group chat or online space for business owners to share information about suspicious activity.

It was decided that an ongoing dialogue between business owners, the police, and the community would be important to resolve all of these issues but that these ideas would be carried into future discussions.

Second addition:

S Smith explained that she was having issues with people abusing the rights of service animals and wanted to open a discussion on the issue.

- Many board members expressed similar feelings. The two questions business owners can ask about a service animal: "Is this a service animal?" and "What is it trained for?" were presented to them but due to time constraints A Young agreed to add the discussion to the agenda in the next meeting.

SAFF Financial Report

A Young presented the report. She noted that with the summer concert series coming to a close, all accounts looked as expected.

SACA candidates Nicole Cunningham and Jennifer Kostick - joint presentation

N Cunningham and J Kostick introduced themselves and their goals for SACA (St Albans Community Arts).

They shared their mission statement:

"Supporting local artists and downtown St Albans by fostering opportunities with our community to engage in creativity with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion with special attention to youth, teens, seniors, mentorship, and accessibility."

They then shared their short term and long term goals for growing SACA in alignment with the mission statement. (Short term: establishing SACA's structure and getting SACA projects running in the community. Long term: expanding SACA's reach within the community.)

E Johnson offered to share old SACA resources with them.

C Sawyer asked if their goal was to have SACA take off on its own again

- J Kostuck said that the goal is for SACA to be mostly self sufficient, referencing similar groups that are ~70% self funded. N Cunningham added that artists paying for their membership is one of the ways SACA could help support itself.

The presenters thanked the board for their time and left. People generally liked the ideas and attitudes of the presenters and were excited about the potential for the program.

A Young mentioned making N Cunningham and/or J Kostuck a member of the board at the end of the year to maintain clear communication. Members agreed that this was a good idea.

E Richards made a motion to make N Cunningham and J Kostuck t co-chairs of the SACA program

- J Hawkins seconded
- All were in favor.

State Designated Downtown Funding

C Sawyer explained that the VT downtown network will probably have some funding coming the board's way. There will likely be requirements that come with the funding though but because of the recent flooding, it may be a while before the state can communicate what those are. Until then, he thought it might make sense to pause a previously planned survey so that if there are questions that need to be answered for the state funding, they could be put on that survey to save time and resources.

Discuss events/programs/committees

A Young reported on several downtown events:

- The Church Street Festival was successful and there was lots of engagement around the Chair Affair.
- With that she noted that the Chair Affair was fast approaching and reminded members to advertise it.
- Tattoo convention is gaining traction with 24-25 artists tattooing live as well as vendors.
- Spooky Saturday planning is starting. Witch's Dance on Halloween, Thriller on Spooky Saturday.
- Festival of Trees is still in planning and the funds are being raised.

- Eclipse planning continues as well. Young noted that they're getting many local facilities involved but as the plan is still in development it's difficult to advertise.

Fountain T-Shirt

A Young explained how the shirts are being created, noting that for every online sale the city makes \$9.50 and for retail sales they make \$5.00. She then proposed that \$3.00 of every online sale for a period of time go to flood relief for VT downtowns. The goal would be to give this money to a larger organization that will distribute it as needed throughout impacted areas.

E Johnson made a motion that three dollars of profit from every online t-shirt sale go to help flood relief until the end of November.

- S Holcomb seconded
- All were in favor

Online Silent Auction

E Johnson proposed the idea of asking downtown businesses to donate an item for the city to auction off. This could serve as advertising for the businesses and make money for the city. He proposed that businesses set up displays in stores to advertise their item as well as the auction then have winners pick up items at the store to draw in business.

- Members generally liked the idea, settling around April/May to separate it from other events and help kick off the summer, potentially tying it to another downtown event (Maple fest, Kingman fest, etc). They agreed to discuss it further later on.

City Advertisement

A Young opened the discussion of advertisement in the city, asking members what they were thinking for fall/winter marketing. Ideas varied widely from 7-days to social media advertisement. E Johnson noted that it's difficult to settle on a good marketing strategy because the city doesn't really know its audience. People liked the NW Vermont area guide though and thought it would be great to see in other parts of the state to direct people to the city.

A Young showed the Distrix app to the board. When someone drives into St Albans, the app presents them with a profile set up by the city and local businesses.

E Johnson presented his plan to change the events page and business listings on the city website, asking members to consider what they want added. He would be updating these pages and adding specific keywords to make them more relevant to search engines.

A Young announced that Jeremy Perez had decided to step down, leaving the board with an open seat. There were questions as to if the board should petition for an emergency appointment

to fill his seat with N Cunningham or J Kostuck but nobody was sure what the procedure for that was.

D Morton presented a pamphlet about community service opportunities in St. Albans made by the Juniors in her girl scout troop.

June Minutes

J Hawkins notes that she wasn't listed as absent in the June minutes.

- S Holcomb made a motion to approve June minutes with an edit to include J Hawkins.
- M Larabee seconded.
- All were in favor with two abstentions from members who were absent at the last meeting.

Next meeting is August 22nd at 6:00pm

Meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm