

Meeting Summary of August 13th, 2014: Roles, Responsibilities, and Near Term Actions for Downtown Manchester

The Downtown Manchester Special Services District (SSD) Board of Commissioners held a special meeting to discuss roles and responsibilities with the Town of Manchester Board of Directors (BOD), Imagine Main Street and Town staff. The following is a summary of that meeting.

Review of the Vision Statement

The group first reviewed the following vision for Downtown Manchester excerpted from the SSD's 2006-2009 Strategic Plan:

Downtown Manchester will be a vital commercial center, the focal point of community activity and the social, cultural, and physical symbol of Manchester's self-image and quality of life.

Attendees agreed the vision was inclusive to a wide variety of stakeholders and broadly articulated the original mission of the SSD.

Roles & Responsibilities

Representatives from each group were then asked to identify what they believed were their respective roles and responsibilities regarding downtown Manchester, summarized as follows:

SSD:

1. Manage staff and a \$300k budget.
2. Maintain a clean, inviting and aesthetically attractive downtown environment.
3. Marketing, advertising and business recruitment for downtown.

4. Assist in filling property vacancies.
5. Event planning/administration, including approving events in parking lots and making sure insurance and liability issues are addressed.
6. Parking enforcement, operations and maintenance.
7. Foster economic development in downtown.
8. **Future role:** Funding for infrastructure investments (facade improvements, ADA compliance, etc.).
9. **Future role:** Enhance relationships with the BOD and Imagine Main St.

Board of Directors:

1. The primary responsibility is governing and policymaking for the Town of Manchester. Major responsibilities related to downtown include: overseeing town staff; public safety; snow removal in public rights-of-way and activity in public rights-of-way.
2. Works as a conduit to connect various non-governmental organizations/non-profits when working on projects that benefit Manchester.
3. Provide financial incentives for economic development including the information technology personal property incentive, real property tax incentive, and a demolition tipping fee waiver.

Imagine Main Street:

1. Advocate for a viable arts and culture district in the downtown.
2. Empower and connect Manchester's creative community.
3. Develop cultural events and happenings – 1st Thursdays is the initial effort and has been able to consistently program events.
4. Commission community arts projects (art in public spaces).
5. Donor relations, fundraising, and cultivating strong relationships with local businesses.
6. Communications and public relations.

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce:

1. Foster economic development and business opportunities in the area.

General Discussion and Key Issues

There was a general discussion among participants on some of the recent examples of activities or issues which highlighted the sometimes conflicting or blurred roles and responsibilities between and among the Board of Directors, the SSD, Imagine Main Street, and in some cases their respective staffs. This is often the result of assumptions that one group made about another group's role, or miscommunication. The discussion also touched on some of the more critical issues, weaknesses or opportunities facing the downtown, and how the stakeholders could better cooperate to improve the downtown overall.

Out of that discussion, the participants identified several matters that should be addressed in the next one or two months. Working groups will be formed around each of these topic areas with the goal, unless otherwise noted, of convening the working groups, working the issues or problems, and coming up with proposals or recommendations in four to six weeks. Participants also agreed to form working groups with representatives of all stakeholders with a role or responsibility in each respective topic area.

The following is a summary of the main topics to be addressed for each of the working groups, as well as who should be represented on each group. The topics and the stakeholders should be considered a starting point, and either the topic or the representative of the stakeholder groups can be expanded upon if the working group so desires.

Economic Development

- How can we help fill vacant and underutilized properties?
- Do we need new or revised financial development incentives?
- How can we help market properties to prospective businesses or recruit prospective businesses to available properties?

- What role should the SSD, BOD, EDC, Imagine Main Street, and Town staff play in business recruiting and property marketing?

Stakeholder Team: SSD, EDC, Chamber of Commerce, Town Staff.

Convener: Town (Mark Pellegrini)

Parking and Snow Removal

- Are the current parking rules and regulations, and enforcement resources, adequate and effective?
- Should the rules and regulations be advised to reflect new policies or to enhance enforcement?
- Can snow removal on Main Street be improved to provide greater accessibility between on-street parking and sidewalks throughout the winter?
- Can parking fines be increased, and can the increased revenue (if any) be shared between the SSD and the Town?
- Will the Town's parking lot improvement plan and its wayfinding sign program increase parking utilization off of Main Street?

Working Group: SSD, Town staff

Convener: SSD (Tana Parseliti)

Events Management

- We need to establish a protocol for processing event requests including application information; a listing of all possible required permits; sequence of actions or reviews; and establishing who the decision makers are for various types of events (i.e. in parking lots vs. in the public right of way).
- It was suggested that the SSD be the first stop and the Board of Directors the last stop in the events review and approval process, with appropriate SSD and Town staff involved in application review and recommendations.

- Criteria should be established as to how to decide on events and street closings, especially the impact of the event on downtown businesses.
- Establish criteria and protocol for the approval of public art in public spaces.

Working Group: SSD, Town Staff, Imagine Main Street.

Convener: Town (Scott Shanley)

Cruisin' On Main Street

- Reevaluate the roles and responsibilities of the SSD, the Town, and the Cruisin' Committee in the planning, execution, and staffing of Cruisin' on Main.
- Should the SSD relinquish or reduce its current staffing commitment and role? If so, who could step into that role for Cruisin' on Main?
- Working Group: SSD, Town Staff, Cruisin' Committee.

Convener: SSD

This working group should convene and make its recommendations by the end of 2014.

Improved Collaboration

The SSD and Imagine Main Street need to be more interactive and collaborative on projects and activities. Attending each other's meetings or perhaps creating ex-officio seats on each other's committees are possible near-term options to improve communication and collaboration.

Working Group: SSD and Imagine Main Street.

Convener: Imagine Main Street (Steve Gates).

Attendees

BOD:

- Jay Moran, Mayor
- Cheri Eckbreth
- Steve Gates (also representing *Imagine Main Street*)
- Rudy Kissman
- Lisa O'Neil

SSD:

- Don DuBaldo, Chair
- Steve Carter, Vice Chair
- Nick DuBaldo, Secretary
- Bill Bayer
- Bob Dorin
- Ed Firestone
- Rob Mahoney

Staff:

- Scott Shanley, Town Manager
- Tana Parseliti, Downtown Manager
- Mark Pellegrini, Director of Planning & Economic Development
- Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce:

- April DiFalco, President

Moderator:

- John Shemo, MetroHartford Alliance

LiveWorkLearnPlay:

- Max Reim
- Kiran Marok