



CSMC Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 15, 2020

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Becky Holt, Linda Magoon, Jeff Nick, Jed Davis, Lorre Tucker, Lara Allen, Mark Bouchette, Buddy Singh, Sarah Beal.

Members of the Public: via Zoom

Staff: Kara Alnasrawi, Executive Director. Julia Chalmers, Marketing Specialist.

INTRODUCTIONS:

- Kara reviews how we will conduct the meeting virtually in accordance with the city regulations
- Jeff presents the agenda and requests approval
- Agenda is approved

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 19, 2020 Motion: Becky Holt, Second: Lara Allen. Unanimously approved.

PUBLIC FORUM:

- Kara shares Deb and Tom Miller of Kens Pizza's thoughts on fees.
 - They suggest a 75% discount on all fees
 - The city should reimburse the marketplace
 - Cafes should be allowed to expand
 - First floor retailers have full access to the street
 - Suggest cart vending would be great if there is room
- David of Sweetwaters shares thoughts on safety, tents, and café fees
 - Safety – David urges the importance of a campaign focusing on safety and following government guidance and national restaurant association guidance
 - Cites Connecticut's "The Promise" campaign to encourage safe practices and business participation
 - Tents – urges the importance of restaurants having tents for outdoor seating to combat inclement weather when restaurants are unable to serve indoors
 - Suggests without tents on the street, it will not be worth it to open
 - Café Fees – shares this is a difficult issue, restaurants will need as many breaks as possible and this cut could help cover this, but acknowledges the need for the marketplace to collect fees
- Paul of Shy Guy Gelato shares his concerns as a cart vendor
 - Concern over the safety of his employees
 - Worries that the events that make cart vending financially viable will not take place
 - Suggests cuts to cart vending fees
 - Suggests leniency on cart vending schedule
- Linda Magoon asks Paul for what he would need to be profitable if events are not possible
 - Paul shares the weekends are the only times he makes profit

- Jeff Nick asks for clarification on cart vending schedule requirement
 - Paul confirms cart vendors are required to be present at least once a week Monday through Thursday, and once a week on the weekend

CHAIRS REPORT:

- Jeff shares that vacancies will continue to grow
 - Shares we currently have 8 vacancies on the street and suspects there will be more
 - Highest number since the 2008 recession
- Addresses the issues surrounding social distancing effectively
- Shares that the BBA/DPW is working on parking issues
 - Free parking will continue at this time and street meters will continue to be unenforced
 - BBA/DPW will be speaking on this in future meetings
- Chair reminds the committee of the downtown improvement tax that will be discussed in the future
- Shares there is conversation over requiring the community to wear masks in stores:
 - Goal is to alleviate retailers from having to enforce this themselves
 - Sarah shares belief it should not be on the retailers to enforce customers to wear masks
 - Mark shares Homeport's safety plan to greet each customer with the reminder to stay 6 ft apart and offer masks to customers and push the importance of safety
 - Mark suggests "no mask no service" signage
 - Linda agrees we should have a mask culture and thinks anything the government or the marketplace can do to encourage this is should be done
 - Linda suggests we need to think long term on all issues and not focus on short-term fixes
- Jeff summarizes that there is support from businesses for a unified message and acknowledges this is a controversial issue as a whole, and final enforcement will land on the retailers in the end

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

- Kara reiterates her efforts to update the commission regularly on her work and projects and encourages any questions
- Kara shares that everything is speculation until the Governor makes final decisions, however Kara she is under the impression events over 100 people will not be allowed and is planning around this number
- Shares that she is confident most economic activity will be outdoors for foreseeable future

BUDGET REPORT

- Kara reviews budget suggestions moving forward following fee abatement:
 - The marketplace lost \$172,000 due to the fee abatement
 - CSM is in breach of contract with advertising due to contingency on festivals and will not be collecting this revenue
 - Marketplace has cut all spending except maintenance
 - The City will cover the cost of salaries for the marketplace team for remainder of FY20 as employees now offer services for the entire city
 - Reviews the regular budget break down prior to covid19
 - Recommends reduction of common area fees by 25% (Q1 of FY21) to provide relief as soon as possible to businesses
 - Recommends waiving outdoor café fees to provide restaurant relief
 - Recommends corporate sponsorship reduction in budget due to lack of festivals and traffic
 - Removes cart vending fees from the budget in abundance of caution as they may not fit on the street given social distancing requirement

- Indicates the city is willing to cover Kara and Julia's salaries if they offer support all businesses in the city
- Strongly recommends maintenance costs should not be cut – the physical beauty and upkeep of the street should remain a priority
- Suggests a cut to external services
- Kara shares this structure must be approved before moving into a more detailed budget
- Buddy asks for clarification on the 25% fee reduction
 - Kara explains that the fee reduction will be waiving the Q1 fees of FY21, which will waive 25% of annual fees
- Linda asks if maintenance salaries can be covered by city budget if they continue to help the city at large
- Lara shares that retail has been hit hard and whatever breaks are given to restaurants should be given to retail equally
- Lara shares concerns that Marketplace won't have enough support if Kara and Julia also support the city
 - Jeff shares that he believes Kara and Julia will be able to provide support to the marketplace
- Jed suggests all fees are waived for the calendar year
 - Jed then proposes fees are waived 50%
 - Jed suggests the city makes more of an effort to charge small businesses as little as possible to keep the lights on and continue employing the staff
 - Buddy agrees fees should be waived for a year, or at least 50%
 - Linda agrees on the importance of giving businesses more time
- Kara shares what would potentially be lost if this cut was made and expresses her hesitation to cut fees so deeply given the important role Church Street plays in the city
 - Jed shares that this cut sends a message to land lords to be flexible with the tenants
 - Sarah agrees
- Discussion is held over the decision to waive fees further or not
- Lara urges the importance of support for small business
 - Sarah and Jed agree
- Kara explains complexities of city budget and that support from city would require a charter change
- Kara also explains why other city project (e.g. construction) continue as they are funded in a different manner
- Motion for approval for Kara to make adjustment to budget with 50% fee waiving: Linda, Second: Sarah, Unanimously approved
- Kara agrees to come back to commission with budget reflecting this desire

VENDOR CART PROGRAM

- Kara shares legally commission cannot permanently suspend cart vendor program
- Kara suggests we discuss if there is enough space for cart vending and if not, we can suspend program monthly
- Jeff suggests we should suspend cart vendor program in the beginning of season
- Motion to have Kara not issue cart licenses through June 15th due to lack of space on the street for ample social distancing and to revisit the issue at that time: Jed, Second: Sarah, Unanimously approved.

STREET PERFORMERS

- Motion that Kara does not issue street entertainment licenses through June 15th due to lack of staffing to run program and lack of space on the street: Jed, Second: Linda, Unanimously approved.

OUTDOOR RETAIL VENDING

- Kara asks if there are any guidelines that should be in place
- Jeff reminds committee of cafés historically expanding past set limits
- Linda shares that if a vacant spot is available, a discussion must be had with Kara before expanding in front of that space
- Linda suggests the importance of safety guidelines with tents
 - Kara explains DPW is working on this now
- Motion that each first floor business will have a right to use the allowable space outside the storefront to vend outside with tents as long as they adhere to the guidelines by DPW and allow maintenance team to make decisions on the installation practices executed to protect the bricks; Jed, second: Sarah, Unanimously approved.

WHIM AND LEUNIGS CAFÉ RENT FEES

- Jeff requests approval for Jeff and Kara to discuss further and bring back a recommendation for the next meeting
 - Commission agrees
- Jed suggests the maximum amount of relief possible should be offered
 - Sarah agrees

NEXT MEETING

- Kara suggests commission meets again in 2 weeks, Wednesday May 27th
 - The main purpose will be to vote on budget
 - DID vote
 - BBA/DPW parking update
 - Assessment of street and pedestrian traffic

Sarah shares a reminder that Church Street is fortunate that we have an incredible outdoor space in a positive and well bound community.

ADJOURN