

Summit Downtown, Inc.
Board of Trustees Meeting
April 26, 2023, 8:00AM
In-Person/Zoom Meeting

Members Present: Karen Schneider, Bob Conway, Beth Welsh, Antonietta LaVecchia on Zoom, Greg Vartan, Mayor Nora Radest, Tony Melchionna, Claire Toth, Leslie Herman, Ray Merritt. Staff: Nancy Adams and Amanda Lynn

Members Absent: Michael Rogers, Lauren Decker, Lisa Allen.

Members of the Public: Elizabeth Fagan, Gil Owren, unknown man, Delia Hamlet, Tiffany Huber of Placer Ai on Zoom

Chair Bob Conway called the meeting to order at 8:05am.

Approval of Minutes – Bob Conway

March minutes were presented for approval. Gil Owren asked about the minutes where it said the money for the Maple St project wasn't paid back. Nancy clarified that the grant was received and over \$41,000 was deposited in the SDI bank account in late March. He asked what the Maple St work was; Nancy explained that it paid for the Colliers Engineering traffic study, the placemaking consultant, the \$20,000 SDI donated to SPA (Summit Public Art) for the promenade fountain, and \$1,000 for the mural on the diner wall. Delia asked what the fountain and the mural have to do with the Maple St project; Nancy responded it was all part of the same grant from the state. Gil asked how much the consultants cost for Maple St, Nancy said \$17,000 (she thinks) for the traffic study and Bob said around \$8500 for the placemaking/planner's work but they did not have the exact numbers in front of them for this meeting. Delia said she thought that was a lot and the city just paid a traffic consultant \$8000; David said the traffic study they did in Morristown was \$82,000; Nancy said it depends on the work they're doing, David said he was just saying it was reasonable. The approval of the minutes was moved by Tony and seconded by Ray and unanimously approved.

Special Presentation – Nancy introduced Tiffany Huber of Placer Ai to describe the company and the work they do in gathering demographic data via cell phone usage. Tiffany began an overview of the company and its work; Placer is a mobile location intelligence platform that provides foot traffic data for any location around the country. Placer is able to harness data from millions of mobile devices and can tell where the people come from, where they go, etc. They provide this information to Real Estate companies, chambers of commerce, downtowns, malls, governments, etc. Placer provides more accuracy than any other company because others purchase information from a third party. Retail recruitment, event analysis, travel and tourism, and support local business are places we could use the data; their data goes all the way back to Jan 2017 and within 3 days of when you're looking at the data.

Delia asked about the goal of the presentation. Nancy clarified that there is no specific goal; it is simply a presentation of something that the Board might find interesting for Summit. Tiffany restated the main points.

Ray explained that Placer tracks mobile phones in civic locations, providing data on people's locations, demographics, and other details. Organizations can use this data to allocate their resources effectively. David added that using actual data for business decisions is more reliable than relying on opinions. Ray agreed, highlighting the benefit of having concrete data on the number of people visiting town rather than relying on observations.

David suggested that SDI could provide this data as a perk to downtown business and property owners, sharing the collected information that would otherwise be costly for individual businesses to obtain themselves.

Tiffany went into more specifics about the data Placer could provide. Delia asked if this is modular based so if we wanted to use it for parking; Tiffany answered that it's subscription based. Leslie asked if there were any practical studies that towns have used and Tiffany said she would send some to Nancy & Amanda. David exemplified how the SID in Morristown used similar information to help with their marketing and how they could change an event based on the demographic data they got and changed some things based on the data to make the event more successful. Nancy added that it would help as to where we advertise and market Summit to. Sharing the data with our businesses, David said, could help them decide based on data what days of the week they would open on. Tiffany explained that the annual subscription is \$15k and multiyear is \$12k. Nancy explained that the reason we showed this to the Board to see if we wanted to get this and Main St NJ is offering another round of grants and she would apply for a grant to pay for this service.

COMMITTEE/PROJECT REPORTS

Financials – Claire

Claire mentioned that the budget was submitted to the Council and will be voted on during the May 16th meeting. Since SDI does not receive city funding, the approval of the self-funded budget is mostly a formality. Nancy added that it is a statutory requirement for a Special Improvement District (SID) in New Jersey to have their budget approved annually by the local governing body. Although the City of Summit does not provide cash to SDI like other municipalities do for their SIDs, it does offer downtown services through the Department of Public Works. The SDI Board represents the business and property owners within the SID and approves the budget, similar to how the Council represents Summit residents and approves the city budget.

Delia inquired about the percentage of businesses contributing to SDI and whether it captures 80% or 100% of businesses. Beth explained that the assessment is included in the property owners' tax bills, just like school and county taxes. It is up to the property owner to determine if and how they pass on their share of the assessment to their tenants.

Delia asked about the budget versus actual grants for 2022, which were not included. Claire clarified that the accounting is based on a cash basis, so grant repayments are recorded once received. In late March, a grant repayment of \$41,800 was received. Beth asked about the \$16,000 expense, and Claire explained that it was a payment to Colliers for the previous year's traffic study.

Claire also mentioned that the following month's financials would include income from farmers market vendor fees, which helps sustain SDI until the assessment checks are received from the city after their budget is approved.

Tony inquired about health insurance, and Claire responded that the company typically subsidizes health insurance for full-time employees. Bob requested a motion to approve the financials, which was moved by Ray and seconded by Karen. The approval was unanimously granted.

New Businesses – Nancy

Nancy reported that two new toy stores are coming in, one is being opened by a Summit resident who came to Nancy to help find a space, Nancy connected her with Matthew Strauss for the space Toy Professor was leaving; it'll be a higher end store than Toy Professor. Toy Division is going into Witch Baby space on Union Place; this is their second location. Four Monkeys opened and is having a ribbon cutting on May 13th; it is receiving rave reviews for its Northern Indian fusion food and is owned by the family who owns the old Verizon store and cell phone fix store. Beth was surprised it took so long to open when going from restaurant use to restaurant, Nancy explained that they had to gut it anyway and they made it a much different and beautiful space. Amanda added that there is a new doors & windows store on Springfield Ave where iVolley store was, it's called Men with Tools and is doing really well already; we've been helping to promote them a lot on social media. Nancy reported that Maison 53 is doing really well too. Claire said there's no Design and Beautification report because there's no applications and Nancy said there will likely be some applications coming for the new businesses. Tony said he thought we talked about stopping the façade grant program, Claire answered that no, that conversation never happened. Tony thought we weren't doing façade grants anymore. Nancy asked how the robot mural of historic downtown Summit that SDI paid for was holding up well on his Pizza Vita building; Tony said it's looking good and looks the same as it did when it was painted on over 4 years ago.

Event Updates & Farmers Market – Amanda & Bob

Bob shared that the Farmers Market had a successful opening on Sunday, April 23rd, despite the rain. Amanda mentioned that preparations for the summer are underway. Street Sounds, scheduled for June and July, will feature live music throughout downtown on Thursdays and Fridays. Amanda expressed disappointment that the Maple St location cannot be used this year, but she plans to accommodate larger bands and encourage people to come to the promenade to enjoy music and food. Amanda acknowledged that historically, the promenade has lacked an audience for musicians due to the absence of outdoor dining tables across the street. The goal is to improve the situation this year.

Design Week is nearing its end, and SDI has been promoting design businesses on social media, particularly the Summit Design District (SDD) Instagram account, which they aim to revitalize. Claire reminded the board members to follow and engage with SDI's social media posts as part of their responsibilities.

Family Fun Night (FFN) is scheduled for Thursday, June 8th, from 4 pm to 8 pm. The event is well organized, and new additions have been incorporated this year. Sponsorships have been secured, which helps with covering expenses. Amanda mentioned coordinating something for dogs in collaboration with Wonder Dog.

Beth inquired about the street closure time, and Amanda explained that it would be closed around noon until approximately 8:30/9:00 pm. DPW's support for the event has been excellent, and Nancy noted that SDI covers the expenses for DPW and the police for both Family Fun Night and Arts + Cars.

DCS/SDI Updates – Tony

Tony mentioned that he, Nancy, Mike Caputo, Aaron Schrager, Lisa Allen, Ray Merritt, and Beth Welsh meet monthly before the board meeting. He reported that the sewers are still functioning properly. Downtown is blown and swept on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and a walking crew is responsible for cleaning up around town.

Nancy had a meeting with DPW and the arborist regarding the lights. It was determined that there is no urgent need to re-string them as they are not causing any harm to the branches. The arborist suggested using ceramic hooks to hold the light strings in place instead of wrapping them around the trees when adjustments are needed. Going forward, this method will be used as necessary.

Tony inquired about lightbulb replacement. Nancy explained that they coordinate with DPW for bulb replacements and keep a supply in their office. The city will begin crosswalk striping this week and next.

Regarding the tree wells, Nancy received an estimate from Castlepoint for this year, which was approximately \$1,000 higher than last year. She, along with the arborist, walked around and explained to the board the limitations they face with the tree wells due to mature tree roots. They are planting catmint and liriopse to enhance the plantings in the wells.

There are plans to install new traffic signals at Beechwood and Maple on Springfield in the future, but it is expected to take 18 months. Nancy clarified that the improvement involves updating the existing signals with newer technology. Delia asked about the delay, questioning if there is only one contractor in the country for traffic signals. Greg and Tony explained that the delay is due to the supply chain for the signals, not the contractor.

Aaron reported at the meeting that PSEG timing is progressing well. The work has been conducted overnight to minimize disruption. They are considering removing the wickets around the tree wells downtown instead of replacing them, as they often get damaged. Tony shared positive feedback on the 30-minute meters on Union Place. Beth asked about the 15-minute meters at SPAC, and Rita confirmed that they are being paid for as they empty the meters twice a week.

Summit Public Arts – Leslie reported that the annual gala will be at the Fortnightly Club on Sept 22nd, and the theme is heavy metal. There's only one public art location downtown, most are in the Green.

Common Council Updates – Greg, Nora

Greg the municipal budget was introduced at the last council meeting, hearing is May 16th, the SDI budget will be up for approval then too. There's concern in the community about Maple St closure last year and how it was done, Michael Rogers will give a report on the process that was gone through last year and that will be helpful to determine how this will be received this year. Tony read into the record emails he received through an OPRA request:

“On May 3rd, the council passes closure for pedestrian mall from 5/3/22 – 11/30-22, this was done for the exact same period that was done to help businesses suffering during Covid, but the ordinance makes no mention of safety requirements for pedestrian mall. On May 4th, city begins its closure through Nov 2022. On July 8, presumed (inaudible) advising city how to close. August 2nd, NJDOT advises city as to what's required to close the street under the pedestrian mall statute, this is from NJDOT, such closures would require the approval of an ordinance by the commissioner pursuant to NJ blah blah blah by submission for approval to the bureau of traffic engineering. Note, to the extent that Schrager thought that he did not need to make a written submission to NJDOT, it was crystal clear as of 8/2/22, August, while this was going on, that we needed such approval. We did nothing to get approval for the 2022 and we acknowledge that the closure was illegal. We let the closure remain illegally for another 3 months.”

Nancy asked who wrote that. Tony said, “I told you so.” Nancy asked who from the city wrote that, Tony responded it was an OPRA request and he would not say who wrote it. Nora said it's a combination of emails.

Greg responded that there are OPRA requests that have been made and there was confusion about the process and that he's asked Michael to give a full report on what happened last year but again the ordinance is now expired, and we've heard from this group, from survey results and we've heard from the community that Maple St is something they want to do and they we'll figure out the process so that moving forward, we will strictly follow the procedure we're told we're supposed to follow. This year is precluded because of PSEG but moving forward we have to take under consideration what has been said by the community and also what our options are. Beth pointed out that it was eye-opening the other day when the accident happened at the Summit Diner and Summit Ave was closed, how glad she was that Maple St was open, if I had an emergency, I'd be concerned that there is only one way to get there. Yes, she added, it's wonderful to have outdoor dining but what happens in an emergency.

During the discussion, David expressed frustration that the SDI meetings often revolve around the topic of Maple St. He suggested that there are other important matters to focus on and encouraged those with concerns about Maple St to address them at the Council meetings. He emphasized the need to invest in the town, support businesses, and generate more revenue for the downtown area. David mentioned a meeting with top officials from Overlook, where they expressed interest in getting more involved with Summit Downtown and possibly providing financial support.

Tony disagreed respectfully, stating that David's opinion doesn't matter since he is on the other side of town. David responded that Tony's perspective is influenced by personal reasons related to his business on Maple St, but Tony denied this claim. The argument continued, with Tony expressing his commitment to holding the city accountable and seeking answers for any mistakes made. He

expressed frustration that at the one meeting he missed, the SDI Board decided to support closing Maple. Karen clarified that the idea of closing Maple St was initially recommended for exploration by the Council, not originating from the SDI board. Ray emphasized that SDI's role is to provide information and suggestions to the Council, but the decisions like closing a street are not made by the board. Beth highlighted that SDI was formed by property owners to take responsibility for the downtown area and work together with the city, rather than simply following directives.

The Mayor chimed in, stating that when discussing the closure of Maple St in 2022, she intended to seek input from SDI to gauge the opinions of business and property owners. She mentioned the use of an outside third party for a traffic study and surveys, which was agreed by SDI's Board to be done and then was fully funded by a grant. Greg acknowledged the importance of collaboration between the city and SDI, as the downtown area is a significant attraction for people moving to Summit.

Gil Owren, a former SDI board member, joined the conversation and directed criticism towards Nancy, claiming that she supported the closure of Maple St. He argued that the traffic study conducted was flawed and did not adequately address the closure. Nancy disagreed with his assessment, stating that the closure of Maple St in Summit was not illegal and that she supports something that successfully draws hundreds of people into the downtown. The discussion continued with various participants expressing their viewpoints, including Delia highlighting the flawed process that put the city at risk.

David reiterated the need to move forward and suggested that anyone with complaints should address them at the city council meetings rather than during SDI discussions. He encouraged unity and focusing on finding solutions. Tony expressed his intention to hold individuals accountable for any mistakes made, stating "heads will roll".

New Business – Nancy reported there's a Stakeholder's Meeting on May 22nd.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:31am.

The next BOT meeting is at 8AM May 31, at City Hall.