

Walnut Creek Downtown Association
Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, January 11, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

Brian Hirahara, Tracy Dietlein, Jonathan Bartlett, Gary Skrel, Joanna Sibley, Jennifer Perry, Bonnie Waters, Dan Buckshi, Steve Waymire, Lt. Drew Olson, Bob Linscheid, Loella Haskew, Teri Killgore, Kevin Wilk, Peggy White, Kristy Lincoln, Rolla Ghaben, Dan Batlin, Kathy Hemmenway, Donna Labriola, Kelsey Wendt, Cady Marsh, Sue Rainey, Barney Fonzi, Bob Power, Joseph Gorney

- I. Welcome & Introductions – Brian Hirahara, WCD Board President
- II. Public Comment – No public comment.
- III. **Board Action** - Brian Hirahara, WCD Board President
 - A. Approval of October 7, 2022 Board Meeting Minutes; motion moved to accept meeting minutes by Gary Skrel, seconded by Peggy White.
- IV. President's Report – Brian Hirahara, WCD Board President
 - A. Excited that Measure O passed and pleasantly surprised at how quickly the downtown has bounced back from the pandemic. Restaurants are doing well but retail is struggling; unfortunately, two retailers on N. Main St., Ming Quong and 5 Little Monkeys, are closing. Future strategic plan can incorporate focus on elevating retail to match our dining scene. Yet, also looking to elevate dining scene by bringing in Michelin-rated restaurants to the downtown.
 - a. Kathy Hemmenway - Asking for assistance from city for funding, particularly through Measure O. The Executive Committee developed a proposed funding list. Categorized as one-time expenses and annual expenses, with one-time expenses being the top priority; also includes an effort to convert from the 1989 BID Act to the 1994 BID Act (moves BID renewal from once a year to 5-10 year renewal schedule which allows the organization to budget beyond one year). List also includes expanded marketing for the downtown, data and analytics contract to gain metrics regarding our visitors and events. Additional funding for staffing is needed to provide current & expanded programming. Event assistance such as reassessing the current permit fees. Downtown Beautification involves enhancing the Big Belly art program, the Water Light Plaza, holiday decorations (ie., fountain lighting, up-lighting)
 - i. Gary Skrel - What is the timing regarding Measure O discussions?
 - ii. Dan Buckshi – Staff/Council updating 2-year budget and incorporating Measure O into that process, this year (February). Likely more discussions to occur in March-May and final decision will be in June.
 - iii. Loella Haskew - will also be looking at 10-year forecast to look at how Measure O fits into everything else, while recognizing its unique purposes.

- iv. Gary Skrel – Do you need WCD to have the proposed funding request submitted soon or do we have more time to discuss?
 - v. Bob Linscheid – If there are partnership opportunities, the Chamber is interested. Placer AI has reached out to the Chamber and assumes they have done so to other community organizations.
 - vi. Kristy Lincoln – Can we use the funds for marketing to specific businesses? Such as, reaching out to specific retailers that we want to bring to downtown Walnut Creek or have we ever done something like that with specific targeting.
 - 1. Teri – The problem is the source of the money. If the funds are from the BID vs tax money, that may be different. Part of the problem is that lease rates are strong and it is hard for independent retailers to manage those right now.
 - vii. Brian Hirahara – Believer that if we create the right brand, the more hip/funky uses will follow; we need to create the environment that they want to be a part of like Berkeley.
 - viii. Jonathan Bartlett – Something we are lacking is a property owners group and they are the primary stakeholders in that conversation.
 - ix. Brian Hirahara – Part of the problem is with property owners who have the mentality that 'If I'm getting \$5/sf and haven't put \$0.05 in buildings in 5 years, they won't touch their properties. There are a few specific property owners – Plaza Escuela, Broadway Point – would be good to get on involved in their properties and make improvements.
 - x. Gary Skrel – Assuming the Measure O funding plan will be on the agenda for the next few months as the city is deliberating. Is it worth having the Board look at the plan and provide feedback on the funding?
 - xi. Kathy – Absolutely. Send ideas to Kathy and we will make a working document with all suggestions; the second step would be to prioritize the list to identify what's most important to push forward.
 - xii. Bonnie Waters – The timing of the strategic plan will be a factor as to when it takes place.
 - 1. Kathy Hemmenway – hopefully begin before June 2023.
 - 2. Gary Skrel – Would feel more comfortable if the City contributed to the strategic plan, as it is a lot to take on individually. Not sure if that would affect the (Measure O/strategic) plan timeline.
- V. Downtown Construction Update – Steve Waymire, City Engineer, City of Walnut Creek
- A. Construction has begun downtown. Some people look at it as an inconvenience, but it is a \$5-\$6 million investment in our infrastructure. EBMUD needs to replace their main pipeline, and then Central San joined in. The rain has shown the deficit in our infrastructure.
 - B. EBMUD begins their project first from Mt. Diablo Blvd. to N. Civic Dr. and on Bonanza. Allowed to work Monday-Friday, 7-4, and cover up affected area in order to open for dinner rush after 4pm. Began work today and hit a gas line already today. This is why the parklets had to be removed and it was able to be addressed very quickly.
 - a. Gary Skrel – Will Mt. Diablo to N. Civic Dr. be closed every day from 7-4?
 - b. Steve – They plan to block just sections but sometimes it will be the entire roadway. They'll do their best to have a minimal impact and only close sections.
 - C. Work will be block by block, but will have to come back through to do the lateral connections to each store, and then sanitize the line to complete their work. There are

project managers on the street, feel free to go out and have a conversation with them – they are there to help.

- D. Central San comes in after EBMUD is done, around July. The sewer line project is more expansive than the water line project – it will go past N. Civic Dr. to Giammona, up and down Mt. Diablo, down Cypress and Bonanza. Same work schedule, block at a time, and opening after 4pm. Sidewalks will be open the entire time.
- E. Next is sidewalk and roadway work. The entire sidewalk is not being replaced, but sections will be repaved. A few trees will be cut down but work will be done to save most trees. Most work being done (paving) at night from 10pm-7am, Sunday-Thursday.
 - a. Rolla Ghaben – Will the rain delay this?
 - b. Steve – Yes, we already lost 1 week but rain is built into the schedule.
 - c. Bob Power – For restaurants that want to get permits for outdoor dining, is now the time for that?
 - d. Steve – A consultant is helping put the permanent outdoor dining packet together. N. Main Street will come online first because they can be put up as soon as the information is finalized. We are doing something different than other cities which includes a large program with a lot of legwork. This summer would be a good time to start those conversations.
 - e. Teri Killgore – the reason outdoor dining has been limited was because of this work, not wanting to waste the businesses' money/time. N. Main Street can start first and then Locust St. businesses can participate after the construction.
 - f. Gary Skrel – You mentioned that some underground utilities are up to 75 years old – does that mean if Locust St. has all new pipes/materials, is Main St. going to be next?
 - g. Steve – PG&E has investigated already and done necessary repairs. Any additional repairs can be done easier. N. Main St. is not needing repairs, as seen right now and it is not on 5-year plan.
 - h. Kathy – Are parking spaces going to change from being diagonal to parallel like N. Main St.?
 - i. Steve – No, they will all remain the same for now. No plans to change or do any major beautification.
- F. Encouraged businesses to engage with the City & agencies as they are working with deliveries, garbage trucks, ambulances, etc. to make everything go smoothly. There has been a lot of construction on Locust St. for the past 10 years, and it all has been able to be coordinated.
 - a. Gary Skrel – will there be an impact to businesses sewage or water systems?
 - b. Steve – No, not to sewage, but when EBMUD is reconnecting water lines; they may be off for a few hours, however there will be notices sent to the individual businesses that will be affected.
 - c. Peggy White – When you mention how much this is costing and the positive impact this will make – is the City looking for a positive spin to make on this with marketing? There was great communication/messaging during Covid, so we should do that now.
 - d. Steve – We have discussed with Kathy/WCD and will be doing work to get positive messaging out. Any ideas, direct those to Kathy so we can get that messaging out.
 - e. Rolla Ghaben – will the Cypress and Bonanza streets still be open while Locust St. is closed? Yes, but they will be closed at certain times. Commercial Lane will be the main access.
 - f. Jennifer Perry – Encouraged all to discuss it with people as a 'big grand reopening' and need to create a positive buzz through our messaging. As a downtown business, it is already being discussed and that communication is

- g. already there.
 - g. Steve – Exactly. You are all the best people to put that messaging out and that marketing will definitely be needed to create that positive message.
 - h. Kathy – Our team already met to brainstorm on ideas and will definitely be working on this marketing effort. Already discussed the positives – such as 40 reopened parking spaces returned to the downtown after the 11 dining pop-ups were removed. We also have a section on our Home Page with construction information and a link to the EBMUD project webpage, as well as including this information in our newsletters. Also, identifying block captions so communication can be effectively distributed to ensure everyone is informed.

- VI. City Council Report – Loella Haskew, Mayor Pro Tem, Walnut Creek City Council
 - A. Council priorities will look like old priorities – diversity, equity and inclusion, economic development, environmental sustainability, infrastructure, and social wellness. Thank you to Walnut Creek City staff who are working with a small staff. If you see a WC City staff person, give them a shoutout.

- VII. City Staff Report – Dan Buckshi, City Manager, City of Walnut Creek
 - A. Teri Killgore - Staff will be at next week’s Council meeting presenting comprehensive outdoor dining policy. Then will move to next steps of permitting, licenses, etc. N. Main St. will be the first area for the program to be implemented.
 - B. Economic Development – Recently conducted 3 studies of marketplace (general office study, retail study, medical office building study). December 8th hosted an office forum to discuss office study and medical office findings; approximately 42 people in attendance. Great panel discussions. Will be developing an ED action plan with a 2-year horizon. Before that action plan, (February) will be hosting a retail forum.
 - C. Budget – financial reports are coming in the next few months. 2-year budget cycle for the city so staff will be busy building budgets for the next few months.
 - a. Gary Skrel – what is the schedule for building the action plan and is anyone from WCD involved in that?
 - b. Teri Killgore – will have an active draft for review/comments in late March. It is a priority; the challenge is we have started building the business retention plan but there is more to do. Getting outdoor dining launched will be the last step before this.
 - c. Dan Buckshi - update to housing plan, mandated by state. Need to accommodate a 150% increase from the last 8 years. We are well position to accommodate that increase – but vast majority are planned for the downtown. Reasons: to be closer to BART, and the only other option is to densify the single-family neighborhoods. Downtown sounds better than those neighborhoods. This will go to Council and then back to the State for approval.
 - i. Dan Batlin – are there height limitations for these buildings?
 - ii. Dan Buckshi – Yes, but they have changed. Typically capped at a 6-story building.

- VIII. WCD Staff Report – Kathy Hemmenway, WCD Executive Director
 - A. Successful season at WCOI. Rink closes on January 16th. Have had over 20,000 skaters. Added 14 themed days and nights, including a Littles Skate, 55+ adult skate, and homeschool skate programs. Engaged The Marcom Group to carry out marketing for the rink. Recap meeting with Special Ice to discuss the season and begin preparing for the next season. Beginning next season planning around March. Looking to hire a coordinator for WCOI and Arts Around August.
 - B. Have put together events schedule, to be released early February. First event is

February 23rd, a member networking event called 'Passport to Walnut Creek', at the Garden, 5:30-7:30pm. Will have stations for each WCD event/program to learn/sign-up for each event. Event seen as a kickoff for the year ahead. Appreciate your support and attendance.

- C. Member Resources webpage is currently being finalized for downtown business members. Links to past public and member newsletters, downtown surveillance program, website directory form, etc. to make it easy for our members to use our resources – specifically for marketing and events. Will also have a job board and links to business education.
 - D. Annual Report to be submitted in February 3.
 - E. Associate Membership brochure has been updated – including expanded membership levels. BH Development was first to enhance their membership, at the \$5000 level. Encouraged other members to consider enhancing their membership which includes additional benefits.
- IX. WC Chamber of Commerce & Visitor's Bureau Report – Bob Linscheid, CEO WCCCVB
- A. Women's conference brochure has been passed around. Have almost reached the attendance that was obtained in San Ramon in past years. Thank you to Peggy and team for assistance with this event. In addition to three keynotes, there will be a health panel (John Muir, Kaiser, and Stanford), facilitated by Allison Tabor. Buy your tickets now if you haven't.
 - B. Shoutout to Barney Fonzi for assistance with the Walnut Creek Visitors guide. Thank you to all the advertisers, Barney and his team. If anyone would like copies, pickup at the Chamber; a digital version on Chamber's website.
 - a. Jennifer Perry – will this be updated annually?
 - b. Bob Linscheid – Will assess the need after this year. Would love to update annually.
 - c. Barney Fonzi – great project and very proud of what they have created.
- X. Macerich/Broadway Plaza Report – Tracy Dietlein, Senior Marketing Manager, Macerich/WCD Vice-President
- A. Stores opened at end of 2022 – Fabletics, Garage, Selfie World (temporary tenant)
 - B. Closing/Closed – Soft Surroundings, Brighton, Arc'teryx (closing on Sunday), J Crew (closing end of month), Pandora closing (Feb 26th) --- 3 of the 5 already have tenants coming in
 - C. 13 signed leases, Coming in 2023:
 - Louis Vuitton (former Sur la table space – Spring)
 - Chanel Beauty (former Allen Edmunds space - Spring)
 - Swarovski (former bare minerals space – Spring)
 - Brilliant Earth (former Clarks space – Spring)
 - Intimimisy (former Michael Kors, Next to Madewell – Late Spring)
 - Allbirds (1/2 of former Amazon space – Spring/Summer)
 - Reformation (1/2 of former Amazon space – Summer)
 - Alo Yoga (former J Crew space - Summer)
 - State & Liberty (Summer)
 - Blue Nile (former Arc'teryx space – Summer)
 - Lifetime (opening July)
 - Pinstripes (former Crate & Barrel space - Holidays)
 - Original Joes (former Stanfords - 2024)
 - D. Rolla Ghaben – is the Broadway Road opening soon?
 - E. Tracy – Yes, in the next few months, focusing on precautionary measures.
 - Jonathan Bartlett – do you have a leasing department that can attract businesses to go east?
 - Tracy – Yes, we have a leasing department.
 - F. Bonnie Waters– did you know Sur La Table was going to leave?

- Tracy – Yes, their lease was up.
- G. Teri Killgore - as our retail consultant said, you never want 0% vacancy – a lot of long-time retailers have gone through bankruptcy or reorgs. In coming years, imagine there will be businesses returning.
- H. Kristy Lincoln – anything going on in Neiman Marcus space?
 - Tracy – Yes, things are in the works but cannot be disclosed yet.
- XI. DRAA/Lesher Center for the Arts Report – Peggy White, DRAA Executive Director
 - A. Bob Power and Brian H. are Co-Chairs for On Broadway this year, on October 7th.
 - B. Arts district can be made bigger- figure out how to collaborate to bring that energy together.
 - C. Festival Cultural, LatinX with 4 headliners and newsmakers program – hoping this brings a new audience/demographic. Kaiser is presenting sponsor. June 20-24. Huge opportunity for all organizations to communicate/collaborate.
 - D. Bedford Gallery, new exhibit opening Saturday. Stunning new exhibit, come visit.

Meeting adjourned at 5:25pm

Next Meeting:
March 8, 2023