

**CRANFORD DISTRICT MANAGEMENT CORPORATION  
BOARD MEETING  
MINUTES – APRIL 21, 2023**

**Present:**

Joe Colangelo/Business owner  
Dennis Concha/Business owner  
Tammie Crispino/Business owner  
Anthony Durante/Resident  
Paul Gallo/Resident  
Paul LaCorte/Property owner  
Kristen Mider (Chairwoman)/Resident  
Kathleen Miller Prunty/Commissioner/Liaison  
Kendall O'Brien/Resident  
Steve Oliveira/Property Owner  
Doreen Sayegh/Property Owner

**Absent:**

Caren Demyen/Director  
Michelle Stavrou/Social Media Coordinator

Brooke Filosa/Resident – 418 Cranford Ave.  
Rafi Namroud/Business owner – Old City Café & Grill, 20 North Union Ave.  
Vincent Savinelli/Business owner – Vinny's Pizza & Pasta, 28 Eastman St.  
Ryan Cooper/Township Attorney  
Ryan Greco/Police Chief/Interim Administrator  
Laura Kreiser/Reporter for The Westfield Leader

Ms. Demyen called the meeting to order at 8:30am. Announcement made that the meeting was posted as required by law.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- Motion to approve March 2023 minutes by Ms. Mider. Mr. LaCorte seconded. Minutes were approved.

**TOWNSHIP COMMISSIONER REMARKS** – Commissioner Kathleen Miller Prunty

- Township approved the municipal and DMC budget. Ms. Prunty complimented the Downtown Cranford office and Board, as the DMC budget is basically unchanged since 2008. She stated that she's very impressed how much has been accomplished with the limited budget.

**CHAIRWOMAN REMARKS** – Kristen Mider

- Ms. Mider thanked Ms. Demyen and Ms. Stavrou for their efforts, especially in regards to recent events. The events draw crowds from near and far and bring business to downtown. The office has heard from people who are eager to open their businesses in Downtown Cranford.
- Recent minutes from a DMC Board meeting regarding the parklets were shared on social media. Ms. Mider stated that minutes are only a snippet of the meeting. The DMC Board worked hard to originally put the parklets in place. The role of board members is to weigh all sides, and the decision came down to fairness and safety. It was not made lightly and the DMC Board must listen to people who are both for and against the parklets. Ms. Mider reiterated how much she values the members of the Board for volunteering their time and making tough decisions. Please see Ms. Mider's entire statement below.

**MAYOR REMARKS** – Mayor Brian Andrews

- Mayor Andrews said that there was complete support from the Township Committee for the DMC budget. There was a consensus that it's important to commit resources to the Downtown. A budget item on pedestrian safety was also advanced.

### **STREETSCAPE STUDY** - James Ribaudo and Lexi Smaldone, Arterial

- The goal of Arterial in regards to the Streetscape Study is taking the vision of Downtown Cranford stakeholders and putting it on paper.
- Key findings include:
  - Public spaces are small and segmented and there is also a lack of flexibility
  - Lack of clear wayfinding
  - Downtown is segmented by the train
  - Traffic calming and pedestrian safety
  - Lack of pedestrian amenities and placemaking
- Strategies that came from these findings
  - Enhance pedestrian connections and experiences.
  - Unify and expand public spaces in the heart of Downtown Cranford
- Enhance pedestrian connections and experiences
  - Develop cohesive palette throughout downtown
  - Have a landscape strategy
  - Capture unused space for pedestrians
- Arterial used the historic inspiration from Cranford's history as a river town. This inspiration tied into the different materials that could be used for sidewalks and pedestrian areas (concrete, pavers, etc.).
- Furniture (bike racks, benches, trash receptacles, and planters) would take a more traditional approach.
- Discussed adding in sidewalk extensions at corners where parking is currently prohibited. These extensions would provide space for seating and trees, as well as calming traffic and decreasing pedestrian crossing areas.
- Alleys are an opportunity for information kiosks, signage, murals, and lights.
- Unify and expand public spaces
  - Lower Lot 7 – can move the curb line and use the space for public seating and greenery. The area is currently underutilized.
  - Connect Post Office Plaza to Eastman Plaza and take those public spaces to the next level. Looking at Eastman Street as the way to connect the two plazas, which expands opportunities for outdoor dining, seating, and offers more flexibility.
- Ms. Demyen said the presentation will be shared with the Township Committee in May. Mr. Durante added that the next step will be the actual design.
- Ms. Mider said she appreciates that the plan creates pockets of outdoor space for dining and gathering that will benefit businesses.

### **STREET CLOSURES/PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES**

- Ms. Prunty said there have been multiple conversations on this topic. She loves the idea of parklets, recognizes their value during the pandemic, but understands they're bound by the geography of downtown. Her suggestion is to do a street closure once a month, rotating it throughout the downtown. This way businesses all over downtown could benefit, not just in certain areas.
- Ms. Mider said there are events planned for the next few months that could tie-in with street closures. She said that they need to be thoughtful about planning events and the resources involved.
- Ms. Crispino said inconsistent street closures can be a challenge for businesses and notifying the businesses in advance would be helpful and appreciated.
- Ms. O'Brien said that predictability of street closures may be key. She appreciates that people met and came up with potential solutions.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- Ms. Demyen said a few people emailed her regarding parklets. She handed out printouts of the emails she received.
- Ms. Filosa asked if it's an option to close Eastman. The Board responded that because of North Avenue, restrictions apply to the closure of Eastman.
- Mr. Savinelli thanked the DMC Office for their work on behalf of the businesses. He said that the parklet allowed him to hire more employees and local musicians. Mr. Savinelli also added that his location isn't in a high traffic area. He said that there's a bigger issue with business owners parking in front of their stores, rather than in a lot. According to Mr. Savinelli, closing the parklets will take revenue from businesses and hurt Downtown Cranford.
- Ms. Demyen said the Board recognizes that there is no perfect solution.
- Chief Greco said that he circulated the video to the Board of a drunk driver hitting one of the parklets. He can't sign off on parklets as they are currently constructed due to safety concerns.
- Ms. Mider reiterated that it was a very difficult decision. Everyone appreciates and loves the Downtown businesses and they are not out to hurt anyone. The decision came down to fairness and safety. She thanked Mr. Savinelli for attending the meeting and stating his thoughts.
- Mr. Durante said he views this year as a chance to pause and reassess the parklet program.
- Ms. O'Brien said there are additional events now, compared to pre-Covid and during Covid, which bring more people downtown overall.
- Mr. LaCorte said maintenance is needed by Track 5, and that should be addressed.

***Motion to adjourn at 9:58 am. All in favor.***

Respectively submitted,  
Michelle Stavrou, Social Media Coordinator

### **Statement from Chairwoman Kristen Mider**

First: As always, I first want to thank Caren and Michelle for all of their recent efforts to continue to make downtown Cranford a bustling community hub. Kids in tow, I attended both the Spring Hop and the Super Mario Brothers Stroll and I cannot believe the turn out. I spoke with many business owners and business was booming thanks to these events. And, I spoke with many attendees who came from near and far, all of whom were blown away by our downtown's ingenuity for events.

The economic impact the DMC office is having on our downtown cannot be overstated. These events draw crowds, increasing foot traffic, increasing the number of people eating in our restaurants, and shopping in our stores. It is no wonder that behind these amazing events is the same mind and heart that co-founded FLAG of Cranford—Caren's dedication to our downtown in good times and but also in the hardest of times, is simply unwavering. It's easy to take these things for granted, but we do not and we are all indebted to you.

Not surprisingly, in just this past week, our office heard from 1 retail store and 2 reputable restaurateurs, all of whom were desperate to find a space to open a business here in Cranford. And, excitingly, the popular and delicious restaurant Toast, a favorite of mine, will be coming here soon, and, based on what these businesses have said, the reason they're drawn to Cranford is largely because of what the DMC office does for our downtown—the events, the support. They're eager to come be a part of the vibrant community you have created. So, thank you ladies.

Second: As I am sure many are aware, our minutes regarding parklets were shared on social media, and they certainly garnered a reaction. I just wanted to remind you that the minutes are a tiny snapshot of what has been a year's long conversation and process, where our board considered the many factors that needed to be weighed in our decision whether or not to recommend parklets for another season. We were thoughtful and considerate, as we always are. We discussed safety, fairness, maintenance, resources, and, importantly, we listened to the CPD's opinion on this issue. And, I am appreciative of your time and reflection.

People have suggested that we advised against parklets because we do not like them. Let's remember

that the DMC board spearheaded getting the parklets installed to begin with, knowing how integral they were to the vitality of our restaurants during the height and in the immediate recovery from the pandemic. Despite backlash from people, many of us worked hard and put in hours to ensure the parklets were in place for the last three years. In fact, many of us helped with their actual installation, planting flowers while wearing masks.

I like parklets, I dined in each of them on many occasions. But, our role on this board is not to do what we like. Our role is to weigh all of the many factors that go into these decisions and to advocate for ALL of the stakeholders in our downtown. And, yes, there are those who are vocally asking us to reconsider, but there are also many voices, who have quietly asked us not to reconsider, who have stated the parklets have negative impacts on their businesses.

And, we listen to all of them because that is our job—not to do what we like but to listen to our ALL of our businesses, our fellow departments like the police who know far more about safety than I do, our residents—we listen, we weigh, and we advise. So, I know our decision, which was unanimous, was not made lightly.

Another thought circulating out there is that we voted against the parklets because they're too much work for us. Let me be clear here: Each of you has given countless hours to our downtown—figuring out solutions to trash overflowing or dumpsters or light outages or the next fabulous event, giving up weekends to make cotton candy or smores or dispense hot chocolate, stringing Christmas lights in the freezing cold or planting mums in the rain, attending meeting after meeting-- and, it is sometimes a pretty thankless job, but I am here to say thank you. It's not easy to make hard decisions, and I value each of you for being on a board that has to make them time and again, and which does so with reflection and with integrity. Our community is lucky to have this group of people who put so much time into and care so much for our entire downtown community.

I am excited to see how Arterial has taken the feedback from this Board and from the Streetscape Committee and turned it into a vision for our downtown, which maximizes the use of our public spaces—allowing for more public gatherings, expanded outdoor public dining, and ultimately makes our vibrant downtown, even more appealing to our residents, accessible to visitors, and enhances our entire business community.