

**CRANFORD DISTRICT MANAGEMENT CORPORATION
BOARD MEETING
MINUTES – MARCH 18, 2022**

Present:

Brian Andrews/Commissioner/Liaison
Anthony Durante/Resident
Joe Colangelo/Business owner
Dennis Concha/Business owner
Paul Gallo/Resident
Paul LaCorte/Property owner
Kristen Mider/(Chairwoman) Resident
Kendall O'Brien/Resident
Steve Oliveira/Property owner
Doreen Sayegh/Property owner

Caren Demyen/Director
Michelle Stavrou/Social Media Coordinator

Kathleen Miller Prunty/Mayor
Ryan Cooper/Township Attorney

Penny Andrews/Business Owner - The Mane Event, 107 N. Union Ave.
Barry Donovan/Resident – 710 Orange Ave.
Susan Delaney-Choma/Property Owner - 34 N. Ave. East
Rafi Namroud/Business Owner - Old City Café & Grill, 20 North Union Ave.
Alan Valenti/Business Owner - Playa Bowls, 102B North Union Ave.
Kathy Vastola/Business Owner - Breadsmith, 32 North Ave. West
Franco Vitella/Business Owner – Venue 104, 104 North Union Ave.

Absent:

Tammie Crispino/Business Owner

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Motion to approve February 2022 minutes by Ms. Mider. Mr. Colangelo seconded. Minutes were approved. Mr. Durante abstained.

TOWNSHIP MAYOR REMARKS – Mayor Kathleen Miller Prunty

- At the last Township committee meeting, the redevelopment plan for 750 Walnut was adopted. The redevelopment agreement is the next step. There is still more to be done, including traffic and pedestrian safety concerns. The Township has a traffic expert who has information from the traffic study and the concerns from the community.
- Sub-committees have been formed following Ida.

TOWNSHIP COMMISSIONER REMARKS – Commissioner Brian Andrews

- Informed the Board that the Assistant Superintendent of Public Works has resigned so the search has begun for a replacement.
- Repairs on street lights continue.

CHAIRWOMAN REMARKS – Kristen Mider

- Ms. Mider said that the Redevelopment Committee has met twice. She thanked the committee members for their time.
- Ms. Mider thanked the public for coming to today's meeting.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT - Caren Demyen

- Ms. Demyen said that Stefanie Lalor, the owner of The Artist Framer, will be coming to the meeting for feedback on paint colors for her new location.
- The relationship with UCEDC is going very well. The DMC office continues to work with them on one-on-one sessions and training sessions.
- The final draft of the sign ordinance will be done shortly.
- The office would like to feature the DMC Board members while also educating the community on what the Board does and its role.
- Downtown Cranford received \$1,000 donation from a film company which will be put towards October's Ghost Walk Tour.
- Upcoming events include Spring Hop, Downtown Cranford Arts Day, and more.
- Ms. Demyen asked Mr. Andrews if he would like to talk about his ideas for the potential closure of North Union for an event. Ms. Mider said that any event would also need to drive people to those businesses and have a clear objective. Mr. Andrews said that the idea was brought up to him last fall. He believes that we should be reclaiming more space for pedestrians in town, even temporarily. Ms. Mider said that the next step would be speaking with CPD.
- In regards to maintenance, sod will be put down at Eastman Plaza. DPW will be paying for sod and sprinklers as they are responsible for maintaining public spaces.
- Ms. Mider said that she's noticed the dumpster behind Avenue East continues to be a problem, and Ms. Demyen said she'll follow up.
- 50% of the spring planter sponsorships are currently sold.
- As an update on capital budget requests, the office will be going out to bid on new holiday wreaths shortly. Ms. Demyen brought up the parking study, which had been approved pre-pandemic. Mr. Durante said that commuter parking still isn't stable so it would be hard to study now. Ms. Mider said that it would be useful if there was a way to track who is abusing on-street parking, as these spots are meant for customers. Mayor Prunty said that the town doesn't make it easy for downtown residents to park. Mr. Andrews said that most divisive issue in the Capital Budget meeting was the \$50,000 for the streetscape study. He believes people need to recognize the need to invest in downtown.
- Finance: the budget should be passed in April. Ms. Demyen will be working on projections as costs may be going up in some areas. She has also been speaking with the CFO regarding increasing the SID tax.

COMMITTEES

- Redevelopment:
 - Mr. LaCorte said that the group has been tasked with making recommendations to the Township Committee on North Avenue (MDTV side). Two meetings have been held. Mr. LaCorte would like the Township Administrator to attend the redevelopment meetings. Mr. LaCorte said that the town is losing revenue by not yet redeveloping Swan Cleaners and MDTV. The redevelopment committee had a productive meeting this week with Iron Ore regarding architectural design. Recommendations from Connolly & Hickey were given to Iron Ore and were well-received.
 - Mr. LaCorte said that the key is transparency and he wanted to make it clear that the fire house and Parking Lot 1 are not included. Mr. Cooper said that the North Avenue redevelopment has been a part of Cranford's affordable housing obligation and contributes to reducing the units at 750 Walnut. It must total 40 units. He anticipates that the plan will have 3 configurations and that the DMC sub-committee will be vital in saying which configuration makes the most sense. Mr. Cooper also stated that the other side of North Avenue is not part of the plan. This plan refers to the area between Cranford Animal Hospital and MDTV. The redevelopment plan must be adopted by May 11, 2022 to fulfill the town's

affordable housing obligation. Mr. Cooper said it's appropriate to have property owners in that area reach out to the redevelopment committee.

PARKLETS

- Ms. Mider said that the DMC Board is here to listen and then give its opinion to the Township Committee.
- Ms. Demyen said that the parklets, if allowed, would be out from May 1 – October 31. The business owners must pay up front. For the on-street parklets, it is estimated to cost \$1,404 for the parking spaces and \$1,056 for the flowers and maintenance of the space.
- Mr. Namroud said he received good feedback from customers. He had previously been against them because he was unsure of what exactly they were. Mr. Namroud said that the sidewalk by his restaurant is an issue for tables.
- Ms. Vastola said that the Garlic Rose parklet in the back parking lot caused problems for her business. She had to redirect delivery trucks and customers couldn't find parking. It affected tenants and employees. The owner of The Garlic Rose purchased 4 parking permits for the spaces he used. She doesn't believe that a parking lot is a place for parklets.
- Ms. Andrews agrees with Ms. Vastola that as a business owner, the parklets are an issue. In her opinion it made sense during Covid but not anymore. The streets should be for cars, not pedestrians. Ms. Andrews wants to know why the restaurants get special treatment.
- Mr. Vitella said that he feels that for Cranford to get to the next level, it needs to change with the times and adapt. As a catering company, Mr. Vitella has basically been closed for 2 years. Even as events come back, they tend to be smaller and not back to pre-Covid levels. The parklets generate extra income for him, as well as promotion for his business. Mr. Vitella and Mr. Valenti split the parklet so each business receives one spot. In addition to the struggles from Covid, prices are also up across the board.
- Ms. Sayegh said that pre-Covid, there were movies that brought in an older audience. People were able to find parking. If you have something that people want, they will find a way. Cranford is a very resilient town.
- Mr. Valenti said that they couldn't have picked a better town to open in. He's had businesses in multiple towns and believes that parklets drive people downtown. The parklets become a gathering place and make people aware of surrounding businesses as well. People love to be outside and they'll go to towns where that's possible. It's a benefit for the town, not just individual businesses.
- Mr. Donovan said that the objective was to get people walking around town. Other towns have closed off streets and Cranford needs to be proactive and look forward. People have changed their habits.
- Ms. Mider thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.
- Ms. Andrews asked if guidelines are given regarding where the parklets are located. Ms. Demyen said the office works with Cranford Police to make sure the locations are safe and with DOT for approval. Ms. Andrews said some streets are too busy for parklets.
- Ms. Mider asked if the Board felt like it was ready to vote today. Ms. O'Brien asked if on-street and parking lot parklets should be treated differently. The Board agreed to meet at a later date to discuss further and make its recommendation to the Township Committee.
- Mr. Andrews thanked everyone who attended the meeting. He said the final decision lies with the Township Committee.

Motion to adjourn at 10:20 am by Ms. Mider. Seconded by Mr. Colangelo, all in favor.

Respectively submitted,
Michelle Stavrou, Social Media Coordinator