

SoHo Broadway District Management Association, Inc.

Community Roundtable – April 22, 2021

## **Meeting Minutes**

Pursuant to a written notice via email, website, and social media, members of the public attended an information session (Community Roundtable) organized by the SoHo Broadway District Management Association, Inc. (dba SoHo Broadway Initiative) on Thursday, April 22, 2021 remotely via Zoom at 8:30 a.m.

Executive Director Mark Dicus welcomed attendees, acknowledged staff (Brandon Zwagerman) and Board Members (Gaston Silva, DJ Williams, Sharon Ermilio, Emily Hellstrom, Ronnie Wolf, Andrew Chang)

Mark offered a brief update on the District:

- In reaction to Derek Chauvin verdict, visible police presence but no incidents observed/reported in District.
- What's going in the district: Spring is in the air: planters have been planted, spring cleaning, graffiti clean up
- Re-openings: Balthazar re-opened at the end of March, Citibank branch has fully re-opened.
- Vacancy: Remains relatively unchanged and we expect to see leasing activity to start to pick up if we are able to continue to put the pandemic behind us.

Mark introduced participating panelists in a discussion about the return to office in SoHo:

- Annette Stover, Partner at You and Mr. Jones, The world's first brand tech firm that has its NY HQ at 568 Broadway.
- Jonathan Feldberg, Director of Real Estate at Scholastic with its long time HQ on Broadway b/w Prince and Spring;
- DJ Williams, Executive Vice President at Boxed which is HQ'd at 28 Mercer Street. Boxed in a digital platform that allows people to buy in bulk.

Annette: Global HQ at 568 Broadway, moved in 4 months before pandemic started. Had 140 people in HQ. Thought shutdown was going to be short. Citi e-bikes great. A few people back to office--some who don't have enough space at home with family or roommates, or enough wifi signal. 10-12 in office. Have had to contact trace one COVID case, nobody else got sick. Hope to be more formally reopening around September. Many of our employees just became eligible, not seeing a lot of hesitancy. Hybrid model 2-3 days in office, start 25% capacity and increase it. We can essentially work from home relatively easy. People miss being in office and neighborhood.

DJ: unique situation. E-commerce biz but run fulfillment centers. 2 offices in SoHo with around 100 employees. Office in CA. 3 fulfillment centers throughout country. Fulfillment centers didn't shut down, had to put in safety protocols. Didn't have anyone test positive. Made decision to close office in SoHo out of abundance of caution. Although I know some have been coming in for reasons of bad work situation at home. In process of having a voluntary go back to work strategy. Requiring them to be vaccinated if they want to go back early. Planning full reopen for September, having vax discussion internally. Not everyone wants to get vaccinated... and need to set up office. Employees moved all over world. Trying to get people to come back. For some people: current situation is great, don't have to interact with people. Others miss the social interaction. want to get to place office is open. Now that we learned people can work from home, probably only 2-3 days in office, more flexibility. Pent up demand for people wanting to find new jobs... likely people coming and going. Before pandemic BtoB was 20% of business, really dropped off. We expect to return and become more robust in future. We were going to set up vaccination day with former massage company that was doing in office vaccinations, but had to put on pause due to J&J issue.

Jonathan: 800 employees located in SoHo, kept building open throughout. A few senior people in every day, we average 15-30 people in office any given day. Set up a sign up for certain days of week. Our target plan is Labor Day. Sent email with subtext encouraging people to come in, but won't require it. Hard to get people to come in during summer... hoping when kids go back to school will help. We hope w vaccines people more comfortable with subway commuting. We've modeled solution that 25% will want to be fully remote, 50% at least 3 days a week, 25% full time on site. Consultant has told us that this is likely based on other companies. Going to cap occupancy 50%, assume State will keep that way during fall. We can handle 50% w/o needing to remodel. People can sit 6' apart. We know warehouses need to chain and spending capital there. People need mentors and modeling, collaborative environment. Jonathan losing ability to be as productive as should be, clarity of working in group environment. I'm an introvert so am thrilled not to go out, but missing much. Vaccines, HR talks about it. You can require someone to have vaccine to do their job but needs to be consistent for role across entire company. We deliver things to schools. Hope right now is to avoid divisiveness of asking people to do that.

Discussion about other employee concerns about returning such as fear of crime on subway and streets.

SBI staff to join upcoming Boxed all-staff meeting to give update on district conditions to employees.

Mark gave update on SoHo Broadway Public Realm Vision Plan. Launched the planning process this January. Goal is to develop a public realm vision plan SoHo Broadway that reimagines the sidewalks and roadway to address long stand issues such as congestion, lack of open and green space and improve the fit of business operations to create a public space that is welcoming and comfortable for residents, businesses and visitors.

We've formed a task force made up of elected officials, residents, businesses and

property owners. Hired Street Plans and Karp Strategies to develop the plan that will include robust opportunities for community to provide feedback on the vision plan. Anticipate this initial phase to take approximately 6 months.

Mike Lydon of Street Plans and Michaela Kramer of Karp Strategies gave brief presentation on SoHo Broadway Public Realm Vision Plan process, including findings on existing conditions and community engagement feedback.

What is the public realm? Space between all the buildings we share.

Project Overview:

1. Assess existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities
2. Establish a vision statement
3. Develop a menu of priority projects as measured against criteria
4. Develop Draft and Final Vision and Framework Plan to improve SoHo's Public Realm

Existing conditions: street space allocation, public life survey, noise survey, tree canopy, sittable surfaces.

Engagement strategy:

- December Streetside Engagement
- Public Realm Task Force Meetings x 4
- Focus Groups (residents, commercial tenants, property owners)
- March Digital Survey

Findings about priorities from all engagements:

1. Expand sidewalk space
2. Reduce vehicular congestion
3. Better manage trash/waste
4. Celebrate SoHo's history + architecture
5. Off Broadway: Activate the side streets
6. Provide space for community gathering
7. Pedestrianize streets
8. Create bike-friendly environment
9. Create a greener corridor
10. Provide more dining options

Draft Vision Statement:

“SoHo Broadway is the beating heart of one of New York City's most engaging and beautiful neighborhoods. The streets and sidewalks prioritize people first, creating comfortable, safe and compelling public space that supports businesses, meets the needs of residents, and is welcoming to visitors from around the world.”

Q&A

Concerns about improving lighting. Not making it brighter in windows, making it more pedestrian scale/quality. Some is like highway lighting now.

Question about sidewalk expansion, vendors. Would be similar to existing curb extensions on Broadway in an interim phase. Vending is enforcement challenge. Comment about data collected during pandemic—like Disneyland on weekends in normal times.

Comment that more benches would be welcome, and if there could be more bike lanes. Looking at bike network.