



MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING - TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2022
TELECONFERENCE – WITH NO PHYSICAL MEETING LOCATION
10:00 A.M.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Present: Committee members Pamela Baird, Erik Cormier, Raghav Gupta, Maria Lange, Kira Pascoe (joined at 10:08 a.m.), Jamil Shaikh, Vice Chair Mike Kasperzak, and Chair Merry Yen (joined at 10:05 a.m.).

Absent: None.

Staff Present: John Lang, Economic Vitality Manager; Tiffany Chew, Business Development Specialist; and Krisha Penollar, Associate Planner.

3. **MINUTES APPROVAL**

The minutes of the December 7, 2021 meeting were distributed prior to the meeting and approved as distributed.

Motion – M/S Kasperzak/Lange – Carried 8-0 – To approve the minutes of the December 7, 2021 meeting.

4. **UPCOMING AGENDA TOPICS**

- Information on music on Castro Street.
- Joint meeting with the VAC regarding art and downtown.
- Addressing downtown vacant storefronts.

5. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Karen Gamow sent an email regarding downtown on January 31, 2022 at 12:22 p.m. (attached to the meeting minutes).

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6.1 DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Planning Division staff provided an update on downtown development projects.

No action taken.

6.2 CASTRO STREET CLOSURE UPDATE STRATEGY UPDATE

Economic Development Division staff provided an update on the Castro Street Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study being undertaken by Gehl, the City's project consultant. The Committee discussed things for consideration relating to temporarily activating the mall area along with a need to better understand the community engagement schedule.

Public comment: A member of the public asked if there was consideration to close Villa Street as part of the Castro Street Pedestrian Mall closure.

No action taken.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7.1 DOWNTOWN AMBASSADOR PILOT PROGRAM

Economic Development Division staff provided an overview of the pilot program, including the role of the ambassadors, the positive impact on reducing crime, and perceptions in downtown from the program. Committee members Shaikh, Baird, and Lange shared their observations with the rest of the Committee regarding their experience volunteering.

No action taken.

7.2 DOWNTOWN VACANCY UPDATE

Economic Development Division staff provided an update on short-term and long-term efforts associated with the growing building vacancy issues occurring primarily in downtown. Short-term solutions that will be

undertaken include a planned Broker Breakfast, a presentation to the Downtown Committee from Greensfelder Commercial Real Estate, and continued collaboration with the Downtown Association/Mountain View Chamber of Commerce on activating storefront windows. Long-term solutions will be identified through the forthcoming Economic Vitality Strategy as directed by the City Council. Committee members asked about lessons learned from other communities regarding filling vacant storefronts.

No action taken.

7.3 ITEM TAKEN OUT OF ORDER (BEFORE 7.2); ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Chair Yen nominated Vice Chair Kasperzak for role as Chair for 2022.

Motion – M/S Yen/Shaiikh – Carried 8-0 – Approved Mike Kasperzak as new Chair for 2022.

Committee member Yen nominated Pamela Baird for role as Vice Chair for 2022.

Motion – M/S Yen/Kasperzak – Carried 7-0-1; Baird abstained – Approved Pamela Baird as new Vice Chair for 2022.

8. COMMITTEE/STAFF COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee members requested information on recent news pertaining to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) lawsuits. Economic Development Division staff provided information and clarification on ADA lawsuits as well as referenced materials related to the ADA located on the Chamber of Commerce website for small businesses.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

From: [Mora, Sabina](#)
To: [Merry Yen, Chair](#); [Mike Kasperzak](#); [Raghav Gupta](#); [Erik Cormier](#); [Jamil Shaikh](#); [Pam Baird](#); kira@chambermv.org; [Maria Lange](#)
Cc: [Lang, John](#); [Chew, Tiffany](#); [Penollar, Krisha](#)
Subject: Fw: for 2/1 Downtown Committee meeting - from Karen Gamow, East West Bookshop
Date: Monday, January 31, 2022 1:00:06 PM

Downtown Committee, please see below public comment submitted via email prior to tomorrow's Downtown Committee meeting. The email will be saved as part of the meeting files.

-Sabina

From: Karen G <karen.gamow@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2022 12:12 PM
To: Mora, Sabina <Sabina.Mora@mountainview.gov>
Subject: for 2/1 Downtown Committee meeting - from Karen Gamow, East West Bookshop

CAUTION: EXTERNAL EMAIL - Ensure you trust this email before clicking on any links or attachments.

Hi Sabina! Sorry not to be able to attend this meeting in person tomorrow. I'll be working then. Just wanted to drop a short note to the members.

--

for 2/1 Downtown Committee meeting - from Karen Gamow, East West Bookshop

Downtown foot traffic

Just wanted to report how busy and active the downtown has been. We had the best year probably in our store's history in 2021. Very grateful for the street being pedestrian-only. Has created a very festive atmosphere downtown.

In the last couple of months, we're seeing a shift in customer traffic that may be also experienced by others. Weekends are very strong throughout the day and eve, and the street is full of happy people strolling.

Weekdays we are seeing fewer customers in the store than we were seeing last year, until about 3pm when it picks up -- and remains busy till our close around 10 or 10:30. We're not seeing many people out at lunchtime on the street -- seems to be more over dinner. It's possible that the high car traffic you were noticing during the middle of the day is lower again. And it may not resume again until more people are back physically at

work.

re: pending parking fees that may be implemented downtown -- I'm hoping they can be postponed as long as possible. I would guess they are much less needed than last year's study indicated, just from our own experience.

Closures

You'll hear that Boutique 4 has just closed. Opal is also for lease now. So there are about 4-5 empty storefronts along that part of the 200 block - almost all in a row. I haven't counted lately, but it's about 16 empty storefronts in the 100 to 300 blocks of Castro now.

Boutique 4 struggled through covid, but the last straw was an ADA lawsuit, which many, many stores in Mountain View were hit with, including East West. They couldn't afford the cost to settle or make the upgrades. The ADA suits are all by the same plaintiff and lawyer who sues small stores throughout CA. We hear that the lawyer is on trial for tax fraud, but the plaintiff is a lawyer himself, and will find someone else to work with. East West's cost for settling will be \$20,000, plus about \$10,000 in store upgrades. We have many handicapped customers who say they have never had any trouble in our store. No complaints, ever.

But we also learned that the ADA laws are so detailed that everyone is always in violation of them (no kidding!), and it's very easy to win a case. As we walked along the downtown Saturday, I saw that the entrance to every store was in violation of ADA requirements. So someone can easily just sue and potentially close down much of the street. Even for our wide entrance, we are required to install handicapped access front doors (that open with a button), even though 100% of the time we are open, both of our front doors are open and easily accommodate even a very large motorized wheelchair. I don't know if there is anything we can do with state or Congressional reps. I saw the City hired a lobbyist. This would be a great thing for them to mention. I believe hundreds of Mountain View businesses were served with lawsuits in a single day last month. Very few businesses can survive one of these, especially now.

Homelessness increasing on Castro

Partly because there are so many empty storefronts, and perhaps other reasons, we are seeing more homeless people sleeping on the street overnight, and sitting on the street with their belongings during the day. All appear to be mentally unwell. We've been in touch with Mountain View Police about what to do, as homeless activity on the street has increased significantly over last year. There were 3 homeless people sitting on the sidewalk within a block of East West on Saturday at 3pm. Sometimes they

are drinking or on drugs, and disturbing the public with shouting, and if so, the police and come and move them. But we see the same people again; they come back quickly. We have compassion for the homeless people (David often lets a few in to use our bathroom and clean up), but there is the desire also to keep Castro Street visitor-friendly. Appreciate if there are any ideas what can be done.

There is also increasingly begging for money from others who are not homeless, sitting with small children. And there is sometimes music by folks who don't have a permit. All of this is hard for the police to manage. I don't know if the City has a mental health team that comes out to help with these sorts of things, but perhaps that's something that would move the issue off the police's plate, to folks who might have more ways to approach the situation. If so, let us know how to be in touch with them.

I called the Police yesterday and they shared this info, which I'll pass on to the other businesses downtown via the Chamber of Commerce:

Mountain View Police - how to deal with homeless:

- Please always call **(650) 903-6395** and let the City know.
- The City will send police or others out to assess and see if they can move them along, to get them off the street.
- If they are sleeping or not disturbing others, there's not much the City can do, legally, but they can try and get them to relocate away from the downtown. Probably won't last long, as people will gravitate back.
- If they are causing a disturbance at all (noise, drugs, threatening in any way, etc), then the City can do more, legally, to move them out of the area. But we are seeing those people coming back again.
- There is no available shelter right now - long wait list.
- There is a lot of litigation in CA now that has resolved in favor of allowing homeless people to sleep overnight in any public places. People can't be moved, unfortunately, except in the daytime.

We love being part of downtown Mountain View. Thank you guys for working together to help make small improvements along the way. That's the best any of us can do!

Warmly,
Karen Gamow

P.S. I work with East West Bookshop (my husband, David, is the manager), but these comments are also mostly general, from the perspective of a resident who loves strolling the downtown area.