

**Mission: To unite, promote & support downtown Wilmington businesses, merchants & Commercial Property Owners**

Present: Jim Bitto – Network Realty, Mike Loch – Treasurer, Joan Loch - Crescent Moon, Matt Schuler – 9 Bakery & Lounge, Kelsey Gibbs – The Wonder Shop, Jenn Beddoe – Glynne’s Soaps, Gina Allison – Carolina Beads & Gemstones, Doug Erickson – C.W. Worth House, Carl Marshburn – Cape Fear Riverboats, Sandi Bossen – MidWest Accounting, Brian Bossen – MidWest Accounting, Celeste Glass – The Fortunate Glass, Julie Bishop – Riverfront Farmers Market, Tiffany Jackson – Front Street Optometric, Bobby Hamelburg – Finkelsteins, Peggy Mahan—Occasions Just Write, Alan Murphy—Coastal Kicks, Lauren McKenzie—Adam Shay CPA, Valerie Bahena—Groove Jet Salon, Maggie Dowicyan—DBA Intern

Meeting called to order: 6:04 pm

The meeting was held at The Beam Room Event Space at Front Street Brewery.

Group introductions

Read minutes from November meeting at CFCC’s Union Station

19 participants in decorating contest, announced who placed

Update of gang violence forums

**First order of business: initiatives trying to work on as an organization**

Street lighting improvement project, survey done 6 months ago, lighting measurements done at different locations, map of light intensity of blocks, only 5 blocks met good lighting standards, number of the blocks were marginal, many were below. The city is working to change lights to LEDs to give more light for less money, and tested on 200 block of N front. Don Bennett – city retrofitted off MLK onto 3<sup>rd</sup>, contractor replacing lights on 3<sup>rd</sup> south of Front, evaluating scorn shaped lights from Harnett to Front, same contractor installing the Front street modules as well, will happen this week (pending weather). There is concern about light fixtures and lack of fixtures on certain blocks. Discussion on the changes that were supposed to happen in November, is this in the capital budget? Can Duke Energy give a discount since business owners keep their lights on? We will need to come together as a collective voice and press the city for answers. A group needs to go to a city council and emphasize protecting the customers of downtown businesses because the danger is a liability. Preferably this can all get done before tourist season.

Gang violence initiative update, Sterling Cheatham is committed to have 6 meetings with the community as an open forum to talk about the subject, there have been 3 so far, Jim has attended and is impressed by Sterling’s engagement in the process. The next meeting is a week from tonight 1/13 6-7:30 pm at the downtown library, facilitated Chris Coudray, county manager. The topic will be health and behavioral issues of school aged children to aid at risk children. There are at least 2 other meetings planned, and we should encourage everyone to attend before final recommendations are made to the city. There will be one forum on economic development and one on the role that nonprofits play. The CBD has shown a significant decrease in gang violence, but that depends how it is defined. Crime downtown is one of the top issues we’ve been following and trying to fix because it affects business and prevents people from coming downtown.

Valerie, groove jet salon, is organizing an event for business owners to come out and meet each other on 1/22. She will open up the salon from 5-8 pm for a networking event for business owners. She will also make directory of downtown businesses to give to businesses, not necessarily to recruit for DBA, but we can contact our neighbors with owner/manager’s contact info.

Asked if anyone is willing to be secretary, which is especially needed for months when there’s no intern to take minutes, work on newsletters, handling Facebook, updating website, other administrative duties.

There is a potential new intern to work on membership drive with Maggie and Joan, increase membership, and help with event ideas. Maggie talked about the membership drive, and Joan explained how we would communicate with the businesses downtown.

Ideas for upcoming year: committees together (**advocacy** to go out and advocate for changes in community to positively effect businesses, **education** committee to help businesses with their business, **action** for issues like street lighting/safety/etc., **membership** committee)

Kristi mentioned that Justine Roach, the law librarian at NHCL, is holding business banking 101 to learn about checking, loans, insurance, payroll, etc. on Monday @ 6 pm.

Joan is reinstating a program CSCS (common sense customer service) for medium size businesses so employees can learn the importance of customer service.

Parking attendants have become more “aggressive” and/or “nasty.” 2 members of DBA are on parking commission (Jim is Chairman), and these are the kind of issues they want to learn about. RFQ sent out b/c contract with Lanier ending...only 2 bidders (Lanier and the city, 30% more costly) – RFQ developed by the city, a customer service measurement was put into the RFQ. Some questions/concerns were raised:

- Can Lanier do the first hour free with potential validated parking like the city run lots? It can be hard to attract customers to come downtown, need validated parking
- If we're promoting first hour free, why doesn't Water Street deck count?
- There are no discounts for businesses to have employee parking, except Market Street deck at the top, pay per month
- 4 hour meter parking?
- South end has limitations on parking
- Bring it downtown task force is trying to utilize the free trolley and identify stops to help with parking, businesses promote to their customers that it runs every 20 minutes, hopefully in 5-6 weeks
- The WDI App has parking map on the first page.
- Free parking Sundays are only for meters
- Smart meters - Pay by credit card, call the meter # and can renew parking, get message that time is running up, which makes the experience easier
- Deck ticket should say “first hour free” on it to educate people
- Back of parking ticket can say sorry for parking ticket, but businesses can offer 5% off to soften the harsh wording on parking ticket
- More education on using phone to renew parking

One solution can be a paid golf cart service, other cities have, drivers are ambassadors and drivers, educated about city & what to do/where to go, regulated by the city. Such as Cart Man or Pedal Man. Is this something that can be a benefit to downtown businesses?

The Mixto building is for sale, and there has been good interest. Delphina is moving from Bald Head and will have soft opening Saturday/Sunday.

The fence at Wachovia will be straightened up and there will be a green tennis court-like screen hung over it.

Tree beautification was dropped, but we need to follow up.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm

Submitted by: Maggie Dowicyan, Intern