



***“working collaboratively to bolster the vitality of
Downtown Hudson”***

**Hudson Business Association
September 8, 2008
Harvest Café, Hudson, MA
Minutes**

Present: Anthony Antico, Steve Brune, Michelle Ciccolo, Lee Dinner, Karen Freker, Don Garcia, Kristin Gray-Lembo, Pippa Jollie, Michael Murphy, Chuck Randall, Arthur Redding, Michael Rosenbaum, Bill Ross, Nancy West

Convened: Meeting called to order by Arthur Redding at 4:02 P.M.

Vote to accept minutes from August 4 meeting

VOTE: Murphy made a motion to accept and file the minutes of 8/4 as submitted. Jollie seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Website update

West reported on her meeting with website developer Mary Snow. The developer's immediate tasks, to be completed later this month, include adding new members, a publicity section, a section to post minutes, and a section to list upcoming events and meetings. It was agreed that the Holiday Stroll notice, once posted, will link to the Hudson Holiday Stroll website.

Randall asked how additional available properties could be listed on the site. It was clarified that for those property owners represented by Michael Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum will send photos of properties to the web developer. Property owners represented by other brokers need to take responsibility themselves for submitting photos.

Ross asked how we can get the HBA website to be recognized in a Yahoo search. West will pass on that request to Mary Snow.

Outreach efforts to potential members (existing businesses)

Redding provided an update on the August visits made by HBA officers to businesses in the Downtown. He said that he, Randall and Murphy met last month with four potential members who then signed up. The new members represent Wright's Jewelers, Robinson's Ace Hardware, Victor's 50's Diner, and Larkin Lumber. Redding later received calls from two other businesses who then joined: Chubby's Liquors and Community Financial Group. Therefore, he concluded that the visits were a success, and he hopes to do more visits in the future.

Murphy concurred that the outreach has been very well-received, showing that there is a definite need in the community for a downtown business group. He also raised the point that HBA has now made a commitment to provide something to the community and it is incumbent upon the group to maintain the momentum. Other business leaders likely to join soon include Attorney Chris Yates, Carl Lembo and Laurie Burton.

Redding also stated that Police Chief Braga plans to begin attending monthly HBA meetings.

Murphy asked members to take the time to call other members before each meeting and encourage them to attend -- active participation is critical to our success. It was also agreed that a date and location schedule should be added to the website. West will communicate this to the website developer. A schedule for dates/locations of meetings through January was tentatively constructed.

Promotional pieces

Redding said that the existing promotional piece drafted by Ciccolo and West was useful for the August outreach visits. Ciccolo requested a couple of volunteers to work with her on developing a map detailing downtown highlights and parking. Brune agreed to be on a subcommittee dedicated to mapping. Freker mentioned that Al Morel designed a map for the Holiday Stroll a few years ago, which might be useful. Garcia mentioned that if the town develops a map of public parking, HBA could use that as a framework and add private parking areas to it.

Update on press activity/publicity

West provided copies of the *Hudson Sun* story that ran in late August. Freker mentioned an upcoming story in *Worcester Living*. Redding stated that he was awaiting a copy of an article that ran last month in the national newsletter *Downtown Idea Exchange*. Ciccolo reminded members to forward to her or West any articles mentioning their businesses, as we plan to post all positive press pieces on the website. Gray-Lembo asked about having our URL appear on the local cable channel. Jollie said she would send West contact information for how to do this.

Surveys

Ciccolo reported that we've received approximately 60 surveys so far, and that the survey will be included in the next Chamber of Commerce newsletter. We should probably plan to close off the survey, and tabulate and release the results, at the end of the calendar year. Freker suggested distributing a small insert listing the survey's URL at the Halloween trick-or-treating event. Redding said he would take care of distributing this at his end of the downtown, and Freker and Jollie will distribute it at their end. The idea arose of setting up a focus group area during the Holiday Stroll, at which people could be engaged in conversation and encouraged to take the survey. It was then suggested that survey respondents at this event be entered into a raffle, providing they opt to include their email address. Three HBA members agreed to provide raffle prizes: Harvest Café will donate a \$25 gift certificate, Wright Jewelers will donate a watch, and Redding Appliance will donate a DVD player.

Outreach to new businesses in town

Redding said he had spoken with a prospect who is very interested in opening a bicycle shop in Hudson. Ciccolo suggested that if the bike store opens in town, it might make sense to consider how to collaborate with the Town on a special promotion related to the next municipal bike auction. Redding said the only obstacle for the business owner was confirming that he could access the product lines he wanted. Brune offered to put him in touch with a New England rep for the Specialized brand

Redding stressed that it is crucial for HBA members to reach out to potential new businesses who might consider expanding into Hudson, reminding members that the founding concept of HBA was businesses reaching out to businesses. Jollie reported that she and Freker have occasionally spoken to business owners in other towns who do not want to open their own business here but would be willing to help or mentor a new business owner.

Gray-Lembo discussed the wish for a (commercial) kids' activity venue.

Ciccolo said that it was critical to come up with incentives for businesses to move here, such as rental discounts. Antico suggested giving new tenants several months' free rent. Discussion followed on how to structure an incentive such as that. Ciccolo said it would be important to have something in writing promoting both available space and rental incentives. Redding said that Hudson Savings Bank has a packet of offers for new businesses, including discounted loan rates, credit card options, and more.

Discussion then moved on to the idea that businesses in town would do better with more foot traffic, and that we should find a way to promote the advantages of walking through town, such as the fact that most stores are closer to parking spaces in Hudson than the equivalent at a nearby mall. Ciccolo stressed that there are various ways to promote foot traffic – other ideas that arose included a trolley, street performers and a classic cars cruise – but that the first and most important step is filling vacancies with businesses, which depends on loan incentives and rental incentives.

Redding urged Antico to take the lead in offering a rental incentive, pointing out that if one landlord does this, the others won't want to be left out. Ciccolo pointed out that other incentives could be wrapped with it, such as movers and IT setup crews. Rosenbaum agreed that something could be decided upon and put in writing. Ciccolo asked each HBA member to email her at least one idea in the next week for the new business incentive package: a bookkeeper or website designer willing to help a new business get started, etc. West will procure a copy of Lowell's new business packet for additional ideas.

Redding pointed out that the survey results will help by demonstrating what potential customers want for shopping opportunities; it will be easy to recruit business owners if we can show them surveys saying that their kind of business is in demand.

Holiday Stroll

Bill Ross reported that he is the president of the Downtown Stroll Committee, which consists of him, Karen Freker, Al Morel, and Nancy Frederickson. His committee has had a couple of meetings so far and is planning another one on Thursday, September 18. He said a pressing

concern for his committee is finding a way to fill “gaps” caused by empty storefronts, since participants on the Stroll often stop and turn back when they reach a gap. He said they would like to offer those empty spaces to nonprofits or community service groups, with the belief that not only would this lead participants onward and provide visibility for the groups but would also draw the attention of possible renters to the available space.

Redding commented that the HBA will likely assume responsibility for the Holiday Stroll after this year, but it was decided that the existing committee and the HBA should all join forces this year for optimal transfer of information. Redding agreed to ask his daughter if she would help out.

Ross said that a lot of time is required to visit and recruit merchants. Murphy stated the importance of presenting this to merchants as a way of selling the downtown. Ross said he planned to ask the Police Chief about the possibility of closing Main Street to traffic. Redding asked Ross to compile information on the plans and the needs of his committee, and submit it to the HBA at our October meeting. West will find out about getting the event posted on the MOTT website.

“Taste of Hudson” event

Gray-Lembo reported that she and Nanci Bishop had met to begin planning the “Taste of Hudson.” So far, the plan is to include four stops: Harvest Café, Chloe’s, Sophia’s and Ariba. Ideas generated in the discussion that followed included the possibility of renting a trolley for \$1,000 and using an Evite to invite participants and track RSVPs. After some discussion, it was decided that mid-November was probably the best time for the event.

In further discussion about local restaurants (not necessarily related to this event), Ciccolo suggested that restaurants could market the availability of curbside pickup as a means to attract more customers.

Other business

Anthony Antico reported that Zimman’s has agreed to decorate a vacant storefront in one of his buildings.

Ciccolo reminded HBA members about the upcoming Downtown Roundtable Discussion with the Chamber of Commerce on September 23 at Citizen’s Bank.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50.

Minutes submitted by Nancy West.