



**Merchants Meeting
January 5, 2017 at 8:30am**

Westin Portland Harborview Hotel, Top of the East

Board members present: Matt Veith

Others present: Denise Beck, Nancy Lawrence, Dan Knight, Jordan Simm, Jeff Burrell, Steve Corman, Melissa Spoerl, Doug Fuss, Gudrun Cobb, Marie Stewart Harmon, Aye Mie Mie, Vanessa Pike

Staff present: Casey Gilbert, Taffy Eaton, Amy Geren

Minute 1. Matt called the meeting to order and asked for introductions. Casey thanked Jeff at the Westin and Doug at Bull Feeney's for hosting our monthly meetings.

Minute 2. Review and approval of December 1, 2016 meeting minutes: Marie Stewart made a motion to approve the minutes.

Minute 3. Holiday events update: Casey & Adam

- All the events went well and we received lots of earned media coverage. The #SFAC and #Elfternoon stickers were very popular.
- Holiday Shop for A Cause Day – this is a valuable event for the community. The merchants selected Milestone Foundation as the recipient for the 2016 holiday event this year. Machias Savings Bank will donate \$2,500 cash and \$2,000 worth of medical scrubs directly to Milestone, above and beyond the donations made by retailers.
- Window Display Contest – we had 55 entries, a panel of judges, social media votes and a community vote by in-store paper ballot.
- Horse and Wagon rides - wonderful sponsor banners were displayed on the wagons. Sponsorships covered the entire cost.
- Merry Madness -
 - The kick-off event was also a fund raiser for the Portland Press Herald Toy Fund, resulting in a \$1,200 donation to the Toy Fund from Portland Downtown.
 - The kick-off event was more streamlined this year and we used many local vendors. The registration process was streamlined and we sold all 1,200 tickets.
 - We had 2 event photographers which resulted in many incredible photographs for future use.
 - Merchant feedback:
 - Jordan reported that Cool as A Moose was very crowded and people were having fun.
 - Gudrun reported that Uncommon Paws was swamped and it was a very successful evening.
 - Marie reported that Lisa-Marie's Made in Maine was very crowded. Marie is wondering how to handle crowds in case of an emergency. A suggestion was made to have the fire department come tell her what her capacity is. Doug told the group that a restaurant needs to allow 1 foot of space around each person.
- Elfternoon Shopping – was very well attended this year. There were 16 participants in 2015 and 35 in 2016. All the events are growing.

Minute 4. Discussion of 2017 goals: Matt reviewed the current goals and welcomed input. Casey told the group that Portland Downtown takes on issues that are brought to us by our constituents, does research, then presents Board approved recommendations to the City.

Goal 1: *To increase Merchant involvement in the committee. Sub-goal: To explore how the Merchant Committee can bring restaurants into the fold – either by including them as part of the committee, possibly through a by-laws change – or by simply reaching out to them to get them involved in Portland Downtown events.*

- Melissa from MHS suggested she would do neighborhood outreach with the cards that Adam distributed earlier this year.
- Amy is working with the City to identify new liquor license holders in order to connect them with NLOC and this committee. Perhaps create an on-line forum or another way to connect without coming to a morning meeting.
- Staff has discussed being more intentional about involving restaurants in our events. One example might be: Shop, Eat & Drink for a Cause.
- Committee co-chairs should start outreach to restaurants.
- Mondays might be a good meeting day. Restaurants might have similar concerns as retailers.
- Retailers can keep a book of restaurants' menus as a way to cross-promote.

Goal 2: *Continue to work alongside the City to draft an ordinance or find a solution to better organize and track street vendors.*

Casey gave some background on concerns around street vendors: The City received many complaints regarding street vendors setting up right in front of brick and mortar businesses and crowding sidewalks, especially on Commercial Street. As a result, the City established a festival zone where street vendors could set up. The festival zone did not include the land side of Commercial Street, so that remains a problem. Merchants are hoping that with the annual festival zone renewal, the City will include the land-side of Commercial St.

Concerns:

- Merchants pay rent, maintain sidewalks, pay taxes on goods sold so why can the vendors set up anywhere they want for free?
- There have been negative interactions between brick and mortar stores and vendors.
- Visitors think the tables are an extension of the store they are in front of, which then causes the consumer to not go into the physical stores. They feel like if they have purchased something from a table, then they have supported the store – but they are not connected in any way.
- It is difficult to enforce “Maine Art” – very subjective.

Goal 3: *Build upon existing Holiday Events to make them streamlined, easy to execute and impactful for attendees, sponsors and business participants. We would like to have Portland become as well known for our holiday events as well as our summer events.*

Minute 5. Other business:

- Snow removal & parking bans: Doug suggested that this is more a NLOC issue. Yellow Parking ban info circulation is important. Perhaps we could send the City information out again. Amy works closely with Steve Early in the Public Works Department and will bring these comments back to him.
- How do retailers feel about sidewalk snow/ice removal? Comments:
 - It seems to be spotty.
 - Clearing the sidewalks in front of buildings seems to be an issue - many retailers do it themselves.
 - There is a responsibility for each property owner to clear the sidewalks in front of their building and there are fines in place if they fail to follow the ordinance.
 - METRO gets complaints about clearing bus stops. It's a challenge to keep up with it. Businesses can adopt bus stop near them – expand that program? Retailers and Metro could get lots of good PR.

Next meeting: February 2nd at 8:30am, Bull Feeneys

Respectfully submitted,
Taffy Eaton, Recorder