

Minutes for the Saluda Downtown Foundation, Inc. 6/6/23

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Directors of the Saluda Downtown Foundation, Inc. (the "SDF") was held at 6:30 pm, Tuesday, June 6 at the Saluda Visitor Center. In attendance were board Chairman, Marc Blazer, members, Debi Thomas, Susan Casey, Vice- Chair George Sweet, Glenn Franklin, Lynn Cass, SDF executive director, Lynn Casey, and Anne Lee reporting for Mountain Song.

Chair Marc Blazer called the meeting to order.

George Sweet moved the minutes of the March 7, 2023, meeting to be approved as presented. Glenn Franklin seconded the motion, and it was approved.

Lynn Casey gave the treasurers, beginning with the Profit and Loss by Fund for the Five Months Ended May 31, 2023

The Arts Festival Fund had total revenue of \$18,724 of which 53% was from exhibit fees and the remainder from sponsorships and donations. Total expenses through the end of May were \$13,065. Additional expenses of \$2,200 are expected from vendors in the coming weeks for the 2023 festival. Also, the Arts Festival paid \$1,270 in 2022 to secure golf carts for 2023. Net income for the 2023 Arts Festival after all expenses are accounted for is expected to be about \$2,000. The Arts Festival fund cash balance at May 31, 2023 was \$10,867 as compared to \$4,915 at the end of 2022.

There has been no change in the General Fund since the March report. The General Fund cash balance at May 31, 2023, was \$5,650.

The Mountain Song Fund raised \$3,825 in donations during the five months ended May 31, 2023, and had expenses of \$4,405 for the music director, accompanist, and sheet music during the period. The Mountain Song Fund cash balance on May 31, 2023 was \$3,907 compared to \$4,487 at December 31, 2022.

The Sister City Fund raised \$18,737 during the five months ended May 31, 2023, primarily from its gala and auction. Sister City had fundraising expenses of \$7,603 and program expenses of \$13,723. The Sister City Fund cash balance on May 31, 2023 was \$14,680 as compared to \$9,476 at December 31, 2022.

The Top of the Grade Concert Fund reported revenue of \$4,500 from business and individual sponsorships for the concerts for the five months ended May 31, 2023, and \$265 in expenses for banner printing. The Top of the Grade Concert Fund cash balance at May 31, 2023 was \$4,296.

The Visitor Center Fund reported revenue of \$ 8,820 for the five months ended May 31, 2023 and expenses of \$5,278 for rent, telephone and electricity. The Visitor Center Fund cash balance at May 31, 2023 was \$8,369 compared to \$6,334 at December 31, 2022.

The total cash balance for all funds on May 31, 2023 was \$47,950 compared to \$31,489 at December 31, 2022. The accounts receivable balance of \$2,263 consists of outstanding invoices for Visitor Center and Top of the Grade Concert sponsorships.

Lynn Cass moved the Treasurer's report be approved as presented and a second was made by Debi Thomas.

Department reports were presented next. Anne Lee reported on Mountain Song in director, Mark Power's absence. Lee reported that Mountain Song membership continues to grow with more than 43 members under Mark Power's leadership and some members drive as much as 1 ½ hours to sing with

Powers. Mountain Song's estimated annual expenses are \$5000; however the group has decided to try to raise donations from within or seek a grant from the Polk County Community Foundation rather than spend their time and energy on a fundraiser in order to continue to offer free concerts to the community

Lynn Casey continued with the reports reporting first on the 2023 Arts Festival which had a record number of artists and visitors this year. We have gotten a lot of positive feedback from the artists, businesses, volunteers, and residents about the quality of the event and artists.

We had 90 artist booths throughout downtown. Of those 90 booths, we received artist surveys back from 85. Overall results from the artist were very favorable. For example, on the question of "how would you rate the Saluda Arts Festival", on a scale of 1- somewhat good to 10 – excellent festival, the results averaged 9.1 and 72 of the artists signed up for a 2024 festival. Of the artists reporting, the average sales were between \$500 and \$600. We had 19 artists reporting sales of more than \$1,000. The lowest scoring question was "how well do you think the festival was promoted" which averaged 8.1 out of a scale of 1- not enough to 10 – exceeded expectations. The most frequent artists' comments were about how great the volunteers were and how well-organized the event was.

The festival had more than 70 volunteers. The time, talent and dedication of the volunteers made the Arts Festival a success. The volunteer support and commitment are there for the 2024 Arts Festival. We have a strong group of new volunteers interested in being more involved for 2024.

However, there were issues mostly around parking. If infrastructure issues cannot be worked out for 2024 then the Arts Festival as it is currently organized is in jeopardy. Specifically, a line of communication needs to be established with the Fire Department and the Post Office and alternative parking needs to be identified early on. Assistance from the board would be helpful.

Casey followed with the Top of the Grade Concerts Report announcing that the concerts will be held June 16, July 21, and August 18.

The series starts with The Sufi Brothers. These Asheville musicians play an improvised set with a tribute to country roots, blues, gospel, and folk. Dulci Ellenberger follows on July 21. Ellenberger will be playing her originals and classic covers by artists like Aretha Franklin and Carole King with a full band. We wrap up the season with Tryon cover band, The Trophy Husbands on August 18. Get ready for a evening of folk rock and Americana classics.

The 2023 budget for the concerts is \$4,315 and \$4,500 in sponsorships was raised. We need board members to volunteer the evening of the event to help set up a tent for Autumn Care residents and set out signs in the park.

The Visitor Center Report followed, also presented by Lynn Casey. The Visitor Center had 1,144 visitors in May 2023 and 2,900 January through May which compares to 2,798 Jan – May 2022. Currently 25 volunteers keep the Visitor Center open 7 days a week from 11 am to 4:30 pm. Highest traffic continues to be on the weekends.

We have begun the last year of the lease extension. The board will need to act at its December 2023 meeting if it wants to renegotiate the lease and continue its participation in the Visitor Center. The current rent is \$850 a month.

Judy Thompson was out of the country but emailed the board the following report on Sister City.

Sister City sent two teachers from Saluda to Carunchio on April 15. They were in Carunchio for a week and then two days at a lovely hotel in the historic area of Rome. They stayed for a week at the Palazzo at

Massimo's expense and visited the local elementary school. Through them, we were able to learn a lot about the school and its needs. We also learned that the information we had about the level of English proficiency of the students was way off. Those kids get one or two hours a week of English instruction from a traveling English teacher who circulates among all the schools in the mountainous area. Clearly that is not enough. Very good English is required for entry into college.

The teachers identified books and materials that the Carunchio children would like to have and then located the items on Amazon Prime to make purchase easier. A group of 21 Sister City travelers is on its way over to Carunchio on June 9 to catch the flower festival. Each traveler will be bringing some of the requested materials which will be presented to the school. The children particularly wanted books with a lot of pictures relating to soccer, gymnastics and other sports.

As a result of the teachers' visit, our first undertaking is to create an English language immersion program for the summers in Carunchio. Our teachers have already located a curriculum used to teach English to non-English-speaking children who arrive in the Polk school system. A number of teachers at the Saluda school are willing to go over and contribute several weeks of time in the summer so long as they can take their family with them. I will be meeting with Massimo Criscio next week to see if it is possible to house the teachers and their families within the city at the homes of local way residents. The earliest we think this program could be started would be the summer of 2024.

The two Saluda teachers have already started incorporating what they learned into the curriculum at the Saluda school. They have a lot of really good ideas of how to enhance instruction with what they learned, and new ways to connect the teachers and students at the two schools. They prepared an article about their visit which was in the June issue of the Saluda Lifestyles newsletter.

We are now in the process of developing our Sister City brochure and website and expect to have both ready by the time of the next SDF meeting. We also have the design work done for the Sister City announcement sign to go at the edge of town. We will try to get it before the City Commission at an upcoming meeting this summer to get this approved.

All plans and reservations are complete for Claire Thompson's four week trip to Carunchio in July. She is supposed to write an article about the trip for the July 1 newsletter and then another article after she returns.

Several board members expressed enthusiasm and praise for Sister City's teacher exchange program and all of the board agreed the visits had tremendous cultural exchange value.

In old business, director, Lynn Casey reminded the board that September 5 is the annual SDF meeting and election of officers. Board members Susan Casey and Debi Thomas will be completing their final terms on the board in September and new board members will need to be identified prior to the meeting on September 5 for them to attend. Board members suggested possible candidates and agreed to speak with each of them prior to formal nominations to discover their willingness to serve.

In new business, Lynn Casey announced the United Saluda Methodist Church invites all board members and the public to tour the newly renovated home next to the church that will be used by Crossnore-Communities for supportive services for children on Saturday, June 10 from 10 AM until 2 PM at 150 Greenville Street.

Also, Saluda Living in Place invites the public to the kick off party for On Track Saluda, June 22 from 6 – 8 PM in McCreery Park.

George Sweet motioned to adjourn and Debi Thomas made the second. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Casey