

**Recap of the East Town Business Partnership Business Forum**  
*Moving from Recovery to Growth in Hospitality*  
**Thursday, November 18, 2021, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.**  
**Hybrid: Finnegans Brew Company, 817 5th Avenue South, and via Zoom**

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

President Julia Lauwagie thanked everyone for joining and extended a special thanks and appreciation to former EPNI Executive Director Vanessa Haight for being a part of the ETBP these past 4 years. Haight has taken another position outside of the district (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/vanessa-haight-36394589/>) and this is her last ETBP Business Forum.

Executive Director Dan Collison first thanked the Elliot Park Hotel (<https://www.elliottparkhotel.com/>) for providing today's incredible lunch served buffet-style, then added he has known three EDs for EPNI: the first was a masters level urban planner back when they were doing a ton of city planning; the next was a neighborhood specialist who could navigate relationships but less experienced in urban planning; and Haight who brought it all together with her masters level urban planning and ability to navigate relationships, digging into sticky and tricky spaces of housing stability and some of the most complex conversations around a particular project that needed to be done well and right and that's probably why she's now working for Minnesota Housing. He has held her in high esteem from the minute he had the privilege to serve on the hiring committee as a guest on the EPNI Board. She, her team, and the EPNI Board did an amazing job and the ETBP just can't thank her enough!

Haight then thanked Collison for all the support over the years; they started their relationship by asking her one of the hardest interview questions she's ever had. It's been a great and challenging 4 years working in downtown Minneapolis. She also thanked everyone for the relationships they've built and advised she's a Minneapolis resident, so she won't be a stranger. As she has mentioned in the past couple years, Elliot Park neighborhood, like many neighborhoods, is going to experience a transition in funding which is coming to the forefront [i.e., Neighborhoods 2020, <https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/departments/ncr/neighborhood-programs/neighborhoods-2020/>]. They've hired an interim administrator and not rehiring for her position, so if you have any ability to support the neighborhood organizations as they figure out how they're going to serve the communities, give them a little bit of grace as they may not be able to serve as we expect them to. Lastly, she thanked the ETBP for having her today.

Collison advised the ETBP has talked about Neighborhoods 2020 and will continue to do so, and as they have been deeply engaged in spotlighting connecting business to neighborhoods, they will take her words as a charge to engage at a deeper level particularly as resources are shifting. Then everyone was asked to introduce themselves.

**Attendees by Zoom**

Martha Archer, Mill City Farmers Market  
Lynn Burn, Cynthia Froid Group  
Megan Freeberg, Sherman Associates  
Vanessa Haight, Minnesota Housing  
Christie Rock Hantge, ETBP Staff  
Chris Johnson, Community-based Transportation Planning  
Alan Kaufman, Interstate Parking  
Brian Maupin, Allied Parking, ETBP Board  
Carletta Sweet, DMNA, ETBP Board  
Leah Wong, Minneapolis Downtown Council

**Attendees at Finnegans**

Jacquie Berglund, Finnegans  
Alexa Bloom, Studio Grey  
Dave Carlson, Watson-Forsberg Company  
Rick Crispino, Bridgewater Lofts  
Lori Dorn, Brin Glass Service  
Cyndy Harrison, Sawatdee Thai Restaurant, ETBP Board  
Julia Lauwagie, Mn Adult & Teen Challenge  
Amanda Maday, Studio Grey  
Mike Noble, Normandy Inn and Suites, Innkeeper (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-noble-66223048/>)

## II. Announcements

Mindful of the memberships that are supportive of the ETBP, Collison advised with himself as the Executive Director and Christie Rock Hantge as the Executive Coordinator, they are lean and tight with almost no overhead, so it's just the memberships that fuel the organizing and programming. They're grateful for every membership whether it's a resident, small business, and especially the platinum sponsors who joined at the \$2,000 level which is less than a used junky car but more than a corporate dinner out. Our 2021-2022 platinum sponsors include:

- American Academy of Neurology
- Catholic Charities
- CenterPoint Energy
- Clear Channel Outdoor
- Hennepin Healthcare
- Kraus-Anderson
- Minnesota Vikings
- Padilla
- People Serving People
- Sherman Associates
- Sherwin-Williams
- Trellis Company
- Thrivent Financial Services
- U.S. Bank
- Wells Fargo

Other important announcements include:

- Monthly business forums are held from September through June (<https://easttownmpls.org/2021-2022-etbp-business-forum-season/>) to find topics that are timely, relevant, and strategic for the 300 to 400 businesses in East Town connecting them to the larger downtown. December's topic will be *21st Century Design Practices for a Safe and Vibrant Downtown* (<https://easttownmpls.org/etbp-mdc-hybrid-business-forum-on-december-16-offered-in-person-at-the-aloft-hotel-and-online-via-zoom/>). Some of his colleagues at the Minneapolis Downtown Council where he is shared staff are incredible and sophisticated thought leaders who execute design practices to make downtown safe. He's downtown 6-7 days a week, and like all parts of the city there are knotty points and it's been a couple of hard years, and he's had a continued positive experience both as a bike commuter and in a car because of leadership like this, so please participate either via Zoom or in person at the Aloft.
- Holidazzle (<https://www.startribune.com/holidazzle-to-return-with-in-person-holiday-fun-in-downtown-minneapolis/600117723/> and <https://www.holidazzle.com/>) is back beginning Friday, November 26th, one of the historic events to drive more and different foot traffic into downtown.
- Gamut Gallery is exhibiting Minnesota-based fine artist and illustrator Barret Lee's work in *Balancing Act* through November 20th (<http://www.gamutgallerympls.com/2021/09/25/balancing-act-by-barret-lee/>).
- Finnegans Drink Like You Care campaign (<https://finnegans.org/dlyc/>) to fund hunger alleviation locally.
- The next Mill City Farmers Market Winter Market will on Saturday, December 4th and will continue through April 23rd on select Saturdays (<https://millcityfarmersmarket.org/>).
- The Chameleon Shoppes is going to have five stores of diverse owned businesses available for the holiday season: one at Gaviidae (<https://www.chameleonconsortium.com/retailers/uniquely-global/>), two at the IDS Center, one at the Baker Center (<https://www.byoutiquestyle.com/>), and one at Young-Quinlin (<https://coconutwhisk.com/>).
- The two neighborhood associations continue to meet via Zoom:

- ❖ Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association conducts Board (next TBD) and Land Use Committee meetings (<https://www.thedmna.org/event/dmna-land-use-committee-meeting-on-december-7-at-6-p-m-via-zoom/>).
- ❖ Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. conducts Building, Land Use and Housing (BLUH) meetings which is this evening. For future events, visit [https://www.elliottpark.org/december2021\\_e\\_news](https://www.elliottpark.org/december2021_e_news).
- Elevate Business Hennepin County (<https://www.elevatebusinesshc.com/home>) offers free advising and other resources to help businesses in Hennepin County recover from the pandemic and build for future growth.
- For help in navigating City Hall with your business questions, visit the Minneapolis Business Portal at <https://business.minneapolismn.gov/> which is designed to connect entrepreneurs and small business owners to the information and resources needed to plan, launch, and grow a business

### III. Minneapolis Downtown Reanimation Update

Leah Wong, Vice President of External Relations at the Minneapolis Downtown Council (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/leahwong/> and <https://www.mplsdowntown.com/about-membership/our-team/>), while using a slide presentation, shared that it's so fun to be and a part of all the vibrancy downtown. If we're not downtown on a regular basis, there are more people downtown every day. Yesterday Holidayz kicked off at the IDS Crystal Court (<https://www.facebook.com/MplsHolidayz/>), and today the Dayton's Project (<https://www.facebook.com/TheDaytonsProject>) officially opened and The Departments are busy.

They launched the downtown Minneapolis reanimation initiative (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/reanimation/>) in February 2021 at their annual meeting and told folks they're on a journey to help shorten the road to recovery, to come together as a community and take part in collective action to help downtown reanimate. As they're doing this work, it's important they're making progress, and they're measuring success by looking at confidence and behavior change signals, and stakeholder collaboration, so they're doing pulse surveys every other month, social listening, traffic coming to the calendar, shifts in traffic/shifts in participation as our collective urban experiences have come back online downtown, use of our collective toolkit, and broader ways in terms of how stakeholders and partners are amplifying shared messages together.

There are about 40% of employees back in downtown offices on a regular basis, some of the larger buildings like the IDS Center report 50-60%, so it's important to highlight that since they've been tracking this they've never seen a backslide, they continue to see incremental growth. Their most recent return to office survey done in end of September, Wave 2, helped them to see that the Delta variant has pushed some of the broader return to 2022, and their research has also shown the return to play experiences – sports, entertainment, music, dining – are the largest drivers to downtown. They're continuing to amplify those to make sure they have a collective calendar they're driving people to so they really understand how they can participate in what's happening. They're making sure everything they do is flexible so that it can be used by everyone.

Wong then gave an overview of what they've done recently and what they continue to do, e.g., What's New Downtown ([https://www.mplsdowntown.com/guides\\_activities/minnevangelist/](https://www.mplsdowntown.com/guides_activities/minnevangelist/)), a Health and Wellness Guide by Ericka Jones, yoga instructor and downtown resident, which will roll out later this month, and three active radio spots that are being refreshed with their winter content. They are doing a lot of Instagram to get this message out and a fair amount of print ads. To see a calendar of everything happening downtown, or if there's anything we'd like to share on this collective and shared calendar, go to <https://www.mplsdowntown.com/>. This is the tip of the iceberg, and if there are specific things we'd like more access to, please reach out to her or Collison.

Lastly, Wong ran a short video currently running in the market to remind people of downtown and then she thanked the ETBP for all the good it is doing.

### IV. Moving from Recovery to Growth in Hospitality

After Collison asked each panelists to give an overview of their background, he explained how they got together to frame today's topic. The East Town area has deeply expanded in hospitality as a core theme. It has more venues on scale than anywhere else in Minnesota, e.g., U.S. Bank Stadium, the Guthrie, The Amory Minneapolis, it's astonishing what's here and what supports all the people who visit is hospitality, i.e., hotels and restaurants. COVID was devastating and brutal to our area, so a year ago we were focusing on survival, then moving from survival to recovery. But now, and this is the pivot point, we know it's a pandemic and will be here for a while, we need to move from recovery to growth. Then he asked each in turn the following questions.

- How do you see this continuum of survival, recovery, and now growth?

*Jacque Berglund*, CEO of Finnegans (<https://finnegans.org/jacque-berglunds-bio/> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jacque-berglund-56072a43/>), said the survival mode was real for them; they furloughed everybody on St. Patrick's Day in 2020, the saddest St. Patrick's Day ever on their biggest day of the year. She ended up hiring only three staff back to barely keep the wheels on the wagon. Sixty percent of their sales was the bar and restaurant, so she lost 60% of their sales on March 17, 2020, and most of their biggest accounts haven't come back, so she didn't know if they were going to make it. Moving through that she was able to restructure the business and bring in new investment partners this last August who are helping them to move from that survival mode to stabilization. Part of that was bringing in a Chief Operating Officer which she was doing both roles and it was killing her. The COO told her she was in survival mode and he was going to give us 3 months and then we're moving to stabilization and here's how we're going to do it. We put together a plan, hired the right people, and strategically looked at phasing the reopen and that's an important piece because every week we don't know what's going to happen, what the pandemic is looking like, are people feeling comfortable going out in crowds, coming back downtown, so they're watching all those things and staying super nimble, and realizing as they're opening the doors they have to do programming to be a destination place, do things different than before, it's not like you open the doors and there's a bunch of people out on the sidewalk, that's not the reality right now when they've got 40% of people back downtown. It's been a very strategic, nimble experience and they involve their whole team, they're very transparent, they're in survival mode and moving into stabilization, and at their last meeting they moved into growth mode which is so exciting. It's their whole team's focused energy going in the same direction and getting feedback from the front house, so everybody is focused on growth mode and how we're going to get there.

*Cyndy Harrison*, Co-Owner and General Manager of Sawatdee Thai Restaurant (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/cyndy-harrison-b1a8b54/>), explained they were able to transition to the takeout model when everything started with COVID, so they were able to sustain, keep all of their staff, and in the beginning were overwhelmed with how much people were ordering and modified their menu but generally had everything they always had, it was more about whether we were able to get items through supply chain issues which are still ongoing especially with imports. They were able to stay open and took those moments when takeout didn't have any seating, especially downtown during shutdowns, to refresh the dining room which is wonderful. When they started welcoming people back and utilized those things they talked about with the Guthrie and U.S. Bank Stadium; that's been their touchpoint in terms of people coming back in. In general, they're still reliant on the takeout/delivery side but have definitely seen a big bump with those events happening around us. We've also done some other fun things, gotten a robot to help on staffing shortages, an extra hand to run food. We call her DeeDee and she's able to do minimal things so we're still trying to find more people. We're really focused on other things, we're getting a food truck which will hopefully arrive next summer to offer catering in other areas, and we're going a lot of weddings so having a food truck has been a option for weddings.

*Mike Noble*, Inkeeper of The Normandy Inn and Suites (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-noble-66223048/>), explained it has been a devastating and spiritual, inward reflection contemplation experience. Their hotel sales in the depth of the pandemic were down by 90% from what they had been from 2020 to the same period in 2019. The darkest times were April through August 2020. What happened was like a perfect storm, there was no business or leisure travel, there were limitations on gatherings, so there couldn't be weddings, funerals or receptions of any kind, there was just zero demand for hotel rooms. The restaurant had to be closed down and the demand for takeout wasn't strong for them. They needed the whole machine to be functioning to economically stay open, however, this year has been much more positive. They've transitioned from survival mode, but for the PPP lending, a line of credit he has at their bank, and forbearance from his bank, it was questionable whether he would still be the Inkeeper or the guy cutting the grass at home. So they've transitioned from survival to recovery mode, and for all hotels in downtown Minneapolis it's still recovery mode. In 2021, their sales team has gone down from 85% to now being down by 50%, they can the pay the bills but just can't afford to have a full staff on hand and are much more sensitive to operating expenses and capital expenditures. Things are rebounding, definitely the leisure segment but half of their business is conventions and business trade which and that's just a trickle. Their business trade had been largely comprised of conventions and ambient business travel and now their business travel is essential workers, e.g., people working on light rail projects, tech upgrades at U.S. Bank Stadium, so they're still in recovery mode. It's great listening to Berglund and hearing about all the programs to get people in because for downtown hotels they're going to have the programming route and generate some demand on our own, and as far as

conventions go, which has been a substantial part of the downtown hotel business, big corporations are presently afraid to get bad PR by having their associates travel and then getting COVID; it's a major headache they don't need so there's a big hurdle to overcome in order to start having their associates travel and the only way that's going to happen is for organizations like the Convention Center, Meet Minneapolis, and Meeting Professionals International to establish a standard for safe meetings that would involve technology (e.g., proof of vaccination, ID for contact tracing, URL code) and this is what we're waiting for. He believes conventions will come back but it's going to take some time for society to transform from the perceptions of a pandemic to an endemic.

- What collective action do you think trade associations can do to move to the growth mode, and what specifically are doing in your company?

*Berglund* stated we need to get people back downtown. Their target market is gone and they're starting over but it was encouraging to hear *Wong* say it's 40% are back downtown. Anybody down here, please support the bars, restaurants, hospitality, it doesn't matter what it is, make the extra effort to support them.

*Harrison* echoed *Berglund* and encouraged everyone, friends and family, to come downtown. She's been in meetings with other restaurateurs where there's been concern about public safe which goes back to what *Wong* was saying about perception versus actuality. Just getting people to come back for an activity, and of course they would love to have office workers back, so they want to encourage that as much as possible.

*Noble* said they're hopeful and things are good. Leisure travel is back, there are games, concerts, and big crowds and they're putting the machine back together and just this week they opened for breakfast 7 days a week and it's encouraging. He would like everyone to be a booster for downtown. We're all good people so let's work together and support each other.

## V. Closing Remarks

*Collison* thanked *Berglund* for hosting, *Wong* for her reanimation update, and panelists *Berglund*, *Harrison*, and *Noble* for sharing their insights into today's forum topic. Lastly, he wished everyone a great day and to join us next month at The Aloft Minneapolis.