

Saline Main Street | COVID-19 Response and Downtown Organizing

As I write this, we are once again finding ourselves in the grip of a rise in COVID-19 cases. Our restaurants and shops have been grappling with ways to adapt over the past several months, and all of us have made huge changes to support Saline's brick and mortar businesses. **We have made caring and support central to everything we do, and for that, we at Saline Main Street are so grateful.**

Those of us who are part of the downtown community never once stopped working. **At Saline Main Street, we never skipped a beat.** From Day #1, we communicated every bit of news about stimulus packages, loans and grants made available to our small business owners, workers and property management. We worked tirelessly to raise money and find money. We reached out to partners who could help and brought them in touch with our businesses. We listened to everyone about their frustrations and fears. And we sent along words of support laced with concise information several times a week gathered from Rep. Donna Lasinski's office, Michigan Economic Development, the Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Center.

In February –

Before the pandemic took hold, Saline Main Street hosted its annual Fab Feb Button Drive. Folks bought our lapel buttons that, when worn unlock amazing deals throughout Downtown Saline. Normally a dismal time for restaurant and retail businesses, the Fab Feb Drive is popular among locals and regulars who enjoy a whole month of discounts and specials. Rather than businesses facing a steep decline after the holidays wind down, the button drive is successful at bringing people downtown to shop and dine.

In March –

1. We were with the businesses when the order came to shut down. Saline Main Street jumped into action and raised \$1,500 to purchase gift cards from 21 downtown businesses. We hosted our first Facebook event, **The Great Downtown Saline Gift Card Giveaway**. 26 winners received \$50 or more in gift card prizes through snail mail.
2. **Virtual Tip Jar!** Saline Main Street teamed up with local musicians to raise money via Facebook telethons for our tips workers. With the help of fun Sunday night virtual live shows, the Virtual Tip Jar Fund raised \$3,300 that was disbursed in the beginning of April to our hardworking downtown service crew from 11 restaurants and cafes.

In April –

3. Saline Main Street launched the **Shake It Out Saline T-shirt Drive**. We raised \$9,000 in proceeds and disbursed \$450 checks to 21 brick and mortar businesses both in and outside our downtown district. In all, we sold a total of 431 shirts, engaging lots of people in this relief effort.
4. Saline Main Street circulated a **public survey** to hear from people like you how we might begin to plan a reopening strategy for our restaurants and shops. We received 873 incredibly helpful responses within 5 days – bringing even more people in to participate on efforts to support and inform our small biz community.

May through June –

5. Saline Main Street set up the **Reboot Downtown Saline Small Business Relief Fund** through Patronicity, an online fundraising site. Through outreach and collaboration, and as invited participants on the Saline

Post's successful Saline-a-Thon, we were able to raise another \$12K. Checks for \$500 were disbursed to 24 businesses, mostly located downtown.

In June –

6. We at Saline Main Street **proposed Recovery Zones to the City of Saline** after researching and compiling plans and models from other downtowns who had already begun the process to reopen.
7. Saline Main Street raised funding and worked with Saline Leadership Institute, Saline Rotary and many volunteer seamstresses to **create reopen kits for 25 businesses** – each with a gallon of hand sanitizer (made by our Clinton neighbors at Alevri Mills Distillery), enough handmade masks for owners and employees, a guide complete with tips on reopening and signage to help inform the public where to stand in our brick and mortar businesses and how many were allowed inside in order to create a safe, welcoming and comfortable setting to reopen our doors in the wake of the pandemic.
8. Saline Main Street kicked off its **annual Be Bloomin' program**– once again growing beautiful hanging flower baskets to spill from our lamp posts and bring our downtown alive with greening and color.
9. Saline Main Street **honored Memorial Day by working with our Saline DPW to hang veteran tribute banners** from our lamp posts as well.

July through October –

10. Saline Main Street advocated for the S Ann Arbor Street closure that became the highly successful Downtown Recovery Zone, better known as The Umbrella Square.

Recovery Zones in Downtown Saline

Our proposal to close down parts of North and South Ann Arbor Street to create recovery zones on Friday and Saturday was promoted by the City of Saline's Community Planning Director, Mike Greene. With his help and our work as business liaison, we were able to devise a plan to create open air markets and additional outdoor seating for our shops, service industry and restaurants.

The S Ann Arbor Recovery Zone has had a unifying effect on both North and South Ann Arbor Street businesses. The temporary public space has proven to calm traffic, create a pedestrian-friendly environment and provide a safe, outdoor seating option for patrons. This highly visible, colorful Recovery Zone supported restaurants and retail alike, and influenced the opening of a successful retail pop-up shop. It has been used for a variety of creative gatherings – from plein air painting and art projects, to parties, live music, meetings, a film class from University of Michigan and a vintage car rally in front of Salt Springs Brewery. We celebrated Saturdays in Saline and Downtown Days with Saline Youth Council – coordinated window painting and lively scenes of pedestrians, visitors, shoppers and diners.

11. We established our Walk the Walk campaign with wayfinding signage and info cards to encourage thoughtful parking and reserving the best spots for visitors.

12. By the end of October, our fundraising efforts for small business relief reached \$38,575 – which we distributed directly back out to our Saline brick and mortar businesses in grants. We had also helped our small business owners find and apply for grants long after stimulus money ran out. From free website development packages to e-commerce and online ordering – we acted as liaison between the Small Business

Development Center's COVID-19 relief packages (worth up to \$5K) and our entrepreneurs, helping them upgrade their operations to meet stiff competition on the web and in the region.

November through December –

13. For Veterans Day, we brought back our Active Military Duty and Veterans Banners – lining the heart of Downtown Saline with 80 tributes hung on our lamp posts.

14. Winter in the Time of COVID-19 in Downtown Saline

As colder weather descends upon us, we at Saline Main Street recognize the need for our restaurants and shops to provide outdoor safe spaces for events, gathering, shopping and dining. We are currently advocating for our small business community to improve the Recovery Zone and patio seating with affordable, inviting and unique amenities. We are working with the City of Saline to introduce smokeless fire pits to improve outdoor seating and create a festive environment for a safe holiday season – also known as the all critical 4th quarter for small business revenue. We researched appropriate measures, looked at other cities as models for best practices and advocated to pass these initiatives at City Council. We coordinated a great partnership among our businesses, the Saline Area Chamber of Commerce, Saline High School's Capstone Class, Saline Area Historical Society to design and host fun events, games, holiday festivities and decor out of doors.

Saline Main Street is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to guiding Downtown Saline toward its most vibrant future. For more information about Saline Main Street or to learn how you can join our amazing volunteer crew, visit www.salinemainstreet.org or contact Holli Andrews, Executive Director at (734) 717-7406. Check in with us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/salinemainstreet) or Twitter (@DowntownSaline), too!