

SWISS BEAR

# *Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report*



Photo by: Bear City Impact

*Mission: Swiss Bear, Inc. facilitates development of the greater downtown area through leadership and planning that empowers community stakeholders to promote and enhance New Bern's unique cultural and natural resources.*

## *2020 – A Year we will Always Remember*

We entered into 2020 with much optimism. Although there were many challenges remaining city-wide from Hurricane Florence, much of Downtown New Bern was returning to 'normal'. Swiss Bear Inc. (SBI) was preparing for New Bern's first major conference since Florence, the NC Main Street Conference which was held March 10-12 at the New Bern Riverfront Convention Center. Improvement projects for the inner core were continuing to be developed and implemented, and a full work plan for 2020 was in place. Then everything changed immediately following the conference .....

### *NC Main Street Conference*

2020 was the 40th anniversary of the Main Street program and the 40th anniversary of SBI as the administrator for the City of New Bern's Main Street program. In 2019, New Bern was selected as the location for the 2020 NC Main Street Conference, a great honor especially during a landmark anniversary year. Downtown New Bern businesses were relieved to finally have a large conference and they were looking forward to the influx of 700+ visitors and business.

Much preparation was involved in funding and planning the conference on the local level. Craven County Tourism and Development Authority (TDA), corporate and local business sponsors, Swiss Bear, and the City of New Bern provided funding and in-kind services. Tours and volunteers were coordinated for conference-goers that highlighted many of the achievements in greater downtown, including recovery efforts from Florence, innovative businesses, building revitalizations, mixed use properties, and downtown parks. Swiss Bear also coordinated both the in-conference experience - décor, break-out sessions, snacks, beverages, swag bags, and cocktail party and banquet - as well as the off-conference experience - street banners, shuttle transportation, parking, directional maps, and merchant/restaurant discounts.



Four hours after the conference ended, Governor Cooper announced that large gatherings should be postponed or cancelled and, on March 14, the State announced the beginning of the shutdown that led to Phase 1 being implemented until 5 pm on May 22 when North Carolina moved into Phase 2.

### *Spring 2020*

SBI staff continued to work both from home and the office. SBI navigated through many of the difficulties affecting Greater Downtown and city-wide businesses due to the pandemic. NC Main Street and the NC Department of Commerce provided a wealth of information that SBI communicated frequently with Greater Downtown businesses and the Board of Aldermen for distribution to their constituents. It became clear that additional measures were needed for business survival and in an effort to meet some of those needs SBI led the effort with corporations, local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, City, and County to create a zero-interest Covid-19 Revolving Loan Fund. This fund was established for brick-and-mortar for-profit businesses located within the City limits of New Bern. SBI raised \$210,000 in less than two months. Eligibility guidelines were established along with an agreement with BEFCOR, a licensed non-profit lender providing funding for small businesses primarily through SBA 504 loans, to process and facilitate the loans. The loan fund launched in June 2020 and to date two-thirds of the zero-interest fund has been loaned to local businesses and BEFCOR continues to receive new applications. SBI and BEFCOR anticipate that the fund will be exhausted in 2021.



When the Governor announced that North Carolina would be moving into Phase 2 of reopening on May 22, 2020, SBI approached downtown restaurants, ALE, and City staff about weekend evening street closures to provide on-street restaurant dining to help offset indoor restaurant capacity restrictions of 50%. Working collaboratively with the City and businesses, ordinances were rewritten, street café permits developed, approval by the Board of Alderman was obtained, and procedures for street closure notifications and street closures were established. On May 22 at 5pm, when the State moved into Phase 2, New Bern began weekend on-street restaurant dining that continued through the end of November. This service became a much-loved visitor and local amenity and will continue in 2021.

## ***MumFeast!***

As the pandemic rolled into summer, it became clear that a traditional MumFest was not “in the cards”. During the spring, SBI worked on several versions of MumFest including one that was focused on on-street dining. MumFest was reimagined and reimagined into a month-long weekend only on-street restaurant dining event with traditional festival elements that included limited musical entertainment and limited artisan and food vendors. This reimagined event was titled MumFeast! and was held in October. With the support of the City and sponsors including Title Sponsor, CarolinaEast Health System, we were able to provide a safe, family-friendly event that supported Downtown New Bern businesses. Most of our downtown businesses outperformed their sales from October 2019 during MumFeast! month.

MumFeast! was received so well by the community that it is becoming a part of our annual MumFest. In 2021, MumFest is the second weekend of October on the 9th and 10th. The following weekend, October 15-17, MumFeast! will return to Downtown for a weekend of on-street dining, entertainment and artisans.



## *ShopDowntownNewBern.com*

In spring 2020, Main Street America, announced a nationwide grant opportunity for innovative Covid-19 solutions. If funded, the proposed project would have to be completed by December 31, 2020. After talking with downtown merchants, SBI applied for the grant to develop [www.shopdowntownnewbern.com](http://www.shopdowntownnewbern.com), an “Amazon-style” website that allows shoppers to purchase merchandise from multiple downtown businesses through a single site in a single transaction. SBI was awarded this highly competitive grant (one of only eight grants nationwide) in May 2020 and immediately began meeting with businesses and New Bern Web Design to create this new shopping platform. The site has 23 business participants and offers several methods for receiving purchased goods. There is 7-day a week pickup available at the Galley Stores and Marina on E. Front St., local concierge delivery, and shipping within the contiguous 48 states.

## *Other Projects and Improvements*

Since the inception of the Greater Downtown Property Enhancement Grant in 2017, SBI has self-funded this grant program to encourage exterior commercial property improvements in Greater Downtown. The grant covers three types of improvements (primary and secondary façade, signage, and landscaping) with a maximum individual award of \$3750. In 2020, Property Enhancement Grants were awarded to two businesses, one in Downtown and one in Five Points.

Swiss Bear has been working with businesses and residents bordering Downtown’s ‘inner core’, the area between Middle and Craven and Pollock and South Front, to complete trash and recycling consolidation. 2020 marked the first year that trash was successfully consolidated across the entire inner core. Trash dumpsters were reduced to three from seven, cardboard recycling dumpsters were reduced to one from three, glass recycling was reduced to four rollout carts from fourteen, and dozens of residential rollout carts were consolidated into the trash dumpsters. GFL Industries increased servicing to offset volumes. The consolidation was successfully completed due to businesses, residents, the City, GFL Industries, and Swiss Bear working collaboratively to improve the inner core for the benefit of our community and visitors.

Despite the pandemic, The Main Street footprint saw continued improvements. One painting project as well as two larger construction projects were completed on Broad between Queen and First, and several renovations are underway in Downtown. Three new businesses opened in Downtown and two in Five Points.

## *2021 – Looking to the Future*

Greater Downtown New Bern has a lot to be proud of and SBI has been an important part of that story for 41 years. While recognizing the importance of our legacy, SBI continues to focus on future opportunities. There are many projects remaining in Downtown, the Five Points area, and the corridors that connect Downtown to Five Points that require Swiss Bear’s attention and leadership. SBI will continue to help drive those projects forward working collaboratively with our many partners.

Our work plan is full for 2021 and we look forward to executing that plan as we move out of the pandemic. The plan is posted on [www.downtownnewbern.com](http://www.downtownnewbern.com). If there is a project that is of interest to you, please contact Lynne Harakal, 252-288-9825, [director@swissbear.org](mailto:director@swissbear.org).

### **CURRENT ASSETS**

Property Enhancement Grant (PEG) Fund	\$32,576
Restricted Cash	\$69,986
General Checking Account	\$182,674
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$285,236</b>

### **CURRENT LIABILITIES**

PEG Grant Obligations	\$3,700
Grant Obligations	\$22,726
Payroll Tax Withholding	\$2,166
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$28,592</b>



## *A Note of Thanks*

I'd like to offer a special thank you to my outgoing Chair, Chris McCutcheon. Chris has been a strong supporter of the work accomplished by SBI and ever present throughout his tenure. I'd also like to thank the three Board Members who rotated off the Board at the end of 2020: Danny Batten, Buddy Bengel, and Immediate Past Chair John Bircher. These Board Members and Chair McCutcheon worked by my side throughout the last first five years and I am forever grateful for their dedication to Greater Downtown and Swiss Bear.

I would also like to thank my incoming Chair Cindy Turco, Vice-Chair John Haroldson, Treasurer Kelli Billingsley, Secretary Tharesa Lee, as well as incoming Board Members Michelle Lynn, Johnny Robinson, and Adam Simmons for their willingness to serve our Greater Downtown community.

Lynne Harakal, Executive Director  
Swiss Bear, Inc.



## ***Thank you to our 2020 SBI Board of Directors***

### ***Officers***

Chris McCutcheon, Chair  
Cindy Turco, Vice-Chair  
John Haroldson, Treasurer  
Open, Secretary

### ***Directors***

Danny Batten  
Ross Beebe  
Buddy Bengel  
Sabrina Bengel  
John Bircher,  
IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR  
Kelli Billingsley  
Jim Bisbee  
Tom Braaten  
Darlene Brown  
Denny Bucher  
Gary Curry  
Dante Genua  
Joe Hunt  
Theresa Lee  
Corey Purdie  
Ernie Richardson  
Kevin Roberts  
Ray Staats  
Mark Stephens  
Tim Thompson  
Jamara Wallace  
Jeff Wood

### ***Emeritus Directors***

Bill Faulkenberry  
Joe Mansfield  
Bob Mattocks  
Ken McCotter  
Mary Peterkin  
Bill Rust  
John Ward

## ***Welcome to our 2021 SBI Board of Directors***

### ***Officers***

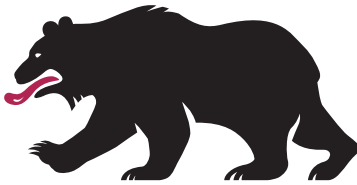
Cindy Turco, Chair  
John Haroldson, Vice-Chair  
Kelli Billingsley, Treasurer  
Theresa Lee, Secretary

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Ross Beebe  
Sabrina Bengel  
Jim Bisbee  
Tom Braaten  
Darlene Brown  
Denny Bucher  
Gary Curry  
Nancy Figiel  
Dante Genua  
Joe Hunt  
Michelle Lynn  
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[mumfest.com](http://mumfest.com)  
[shopdowntownnewbern.com](http://shopdowntownnewbern.com)