

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES
Member Meeting
June 23, 2016
7:00 P.M.

In attendance: Eric Berger, Chris Flynn, Margaret Inglese, Jan Margolis, Ruchir Mewawla, Jay Muldoon, Grace Shackney, Bobbie Theivakumaran, Deb Zupan, Joe Cascio, Chris Crane, Allison Inserro, Mirjana Novkovic, Dorothy Winhold. Guests: Daniel LeBar, Ave Malkin, Lois Cataldo, Ro Marinucci, Leon Schwartz, Sherri Schwartz, Greg Trowbridge, Steve Epstein, Linda Epstein, Barry Montalto, Carlo Badalamenti, Nancy Zerbe, Claire McClannahan, Kathy Liseno.

Board President Eric Berger opened the meeting in the Forum Theater.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Chairman Report – Eric Berger

- Notice sent by email to everyone had address for.
- Ordinance passed on May 2.
- Marathon, not a sprint. Not everything will happen in 1.5 month.
- Officers:
 - o Eric Berger, Chairman
 - o Chris Flynn, Vice Chairman
 - o Ruchir Mewawala, Treasurer
 - o Barry Montalto, Secretary
- Rented office space in Forum Theater starting July 1.
- Creating vacancy list for entire district of commercial and parking availability.
- Already direct 3 potential tenants to landlords.
- MDA helped facilitate Hailey's Harp-Cade opening on Station Place.
- Nelson Li has to resign Board seat due to work commitments. Request for nominations sent out.
- Committees being formed to coincide with Main Street Four-Point Approach®
- What's New clothing store moving in on Main Street.
- Chairs
 - o Org Team
 - o Economic Vitality Team
 - o Design Team - Grace Shackney
 - o Promotion Team - Chris Crane, Bobbie Theivakumaran
- Questions to follow formal presentations.
- Encourage people to volunteer for teams through downtownmetuchen.org.
- Thank you to everyone who spoke for and against MDA at public hearing, those who came out tonight, and intern Annabelle Clemont.

Overview of Four-Point Approach® - Deb Zupan

- Economic Vitality Team - Successful communities have balance of businesses
- Design Team make appealing atmosphere, send positive message about town.
- Promotion Team – positive image, renew community pride.
- Organization Team – get working together towards same goal, volunteer recruitment. Coordinate and supported by paid program director.

Nominating Team – Joe Cascio

- Team will oversee Board election. Slots available for District Business Owners, District Real Estate Owners, and Residents.
- Many initial founding Trustees will step down December 31.
- Nominating committee will screen and interview nominees.
- Any Full Member may nominate Trustees, either a District Business or District Owner.
- Three legal duties – care, loyalty, and obedience.
 - o Care: Exercise reasonable care when making decisions for organization.
 - o Loyalty: A standard of faithfulness where agree to abide by decisions of organization.
 - o Obedience: be faithful to organization mission.
- Will present slate at September Board meeting.
- Currently an open Board seat to fill that vacated by Nelson Li. Candidates must be Metuchen Resident but not a Full Member.
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Executive Director Search - Allison Inzerro

- Have job description of DowntownMetuchen.org.
- Advertised on six job listing sites including National Main Street Center, DCA Mailing List, others.
- Received over 75 applicants.
- Began interviews next month, will do second round of interviews in August. Will do walk around Metuchen and meet with businesses.
- Hope to have ED start in September.

Promotion and Marketing Team – Chris Crane, Bobbie Thievakumaran

- Develop Metuchen brand. Make attractive for families.
- Promote Metuchen as a business destination.
- Forming teams that work collaboratively with MDA and Chamber.
- Collaborative events to work on local and regional promotions. Make sure all MDA businesses taking full advantage.
- Business directory on website.
- Can send any pictures or logos want to see on website to info(at)downtownmetuchen.org.
- Goal to get “stickiness” with downtown so people remember what businesses are here, what things to do. Critical to have all info in one place.

- Working on videos to highlight downtown businesses through “Meet the Merchant” series.
- Want to know about businesses doing event or sale.
- Thinking of ideas for future - Healthy New Year, etc.

Economic Vitality Team – Dottie Winhold

- Purpose of team to increase public and private investment.
- Help existing businesses to expand.
- Help new businesses get started.
- Recruit new and complimentary businesses.
- Monitor and report on economic progress and improvements.
- Need more committee members.
- Preparing reports with recommendations.
- Meet with developers of Woodmont and Renaissance so can talk about who they are leasing to.
- Need people with skillset – small business owners, bankers, financial services, business and economic development, hospitality/tourism, accountants, analysts, County economic development reps.

Design Team – Grace Shackney

- Involve in activities like streetscape improvements.
- Towns with a DMO look beautiful. Clean, beautiful design, trash collecting, landscaping, etc. That’s what we want to establish here.
- Design Team will be involve in streetscape improvements, landscape design and maintenance, holiday decorations, façade improvements, and incorporation of public art in the District.
- Looking to establish art walk between Woodmont/Renaissance and Main Street, so people walk from one end to the other.
- Short term goals to develop plan to work with Borough or hire contractor to improve cleanliness.
- Engage with Garden Club to encourage design of planters.
- Research placement of public murals and other public art.
- Seek sponsorships and grants to support public art.
- Looking to engage district and community members with backgrounds in urban planning, architecture, and design.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

Question: How can the MDA influence/work with the Borough government to work better with businesses and property owners?

- Eric – we can recommend district members to serve on planning and zoning boards and work closely with the zoning officer to review submitted plans.

Question: Parking for businesses?

- This is #1 issue – providing enough parking for businesses as well as commuters.
 - o Eric – We will work with Nexus
- Need affordable parking for employees of District businesses:
 - o Can the town subsidize employee parking?
 - o Allison – look at sharing under-utilized business parking that already exists.
 - o Grace – a signage and way finding program is currently under way that will help identify shoppers parking.
 - o In the meantime – can we get Nexus to do pop-up signs for way finding?
 - o Put parking map on our website.

Question: Closing streets for events?

- Ave Malkin (Smoker’s Haven) – this is a terrible idea. He lost Father’s Day sales because Highland was closed. Must take these things into consideration.
- Another business owner – felt just the opposite. The Junebug street closing brought thousands of people to town. Anything that gives people a positive experience downtown is good for business.

Question: Need loading zones for deliveries and handicapped parking on Main Street. Lois (Brass Lantern).

- The Accessibility Committee is working on the handicapped parking issue.

Never do events on Main between Amboy and the train station. Nobody approached her to use her windows for Junebug. Ro (Yoga Studio)

- The MDA office will be in this area. Also, the MDA is working to get the Forum Theatre up and running as a non-profit again. The Theatre will generate lots of activity in this area.

Can more be done with METV to promote the District? Dan LeBar

- Eric – We are working with Borough Administrator to use footage and promotions made by our video team to be aired on METV.

Meeting was adjourned.