

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

January 12, 2018

8:30 A.M.

In attendance: Eric Berger, Jay Muldoon, Leon Schwartz, Bobbie Theivakumaran, Gary Tilbor, Chris Flynn, Dianna Callinan, Peg Inglese, Michelle Schutz. Not present: Allison Inserro, Stuart Schooler, Anthony Campisi. Staff: Isaac Kremer. Guest: Elaine Edgcomb, Chair, Innovation Team; Bob Diken, Metuchen Arts Council.

Eric Berger, MDA Board Chair, opened the meeting. Motion was made to approve the December minutes. Motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Eric welcomed Bob Diken is now the Arts Council Chair and MDA Board member, to be effective at our February meeting.
- Eric provided an update on the lease arrangement with CVS which permits the MDA to conduct two Market Days/week on the sidewalk along New St adjacent to the CVS building. CVS has approved the lease, but is waiting for building owner to sign the agreement. Isaac is meeting with Nelson Li to discuss possibility of market vendors participating in the Market Days.
- Eric reminded the Board of their obligation to make a financial donation to the MDA each year. It is important for the MDA to show 100% participation in financially supporting the MDA.
- Eric also reported on a positive Parking Committee meeting where the Parking Authority stated that new parking meters will be ordered and installed as soon as May. The meters will accept coins, credit cards and mobile payment.
- There was a discussion about extending the maximum parking period from 2 hours to 3 hours on Main St. Sentiment was expressed about the Parking Enforcement Officers being less stringent in enforcing regulations and making sure warnings are issued before a ticket is issued.

Executive Director Report

Isaac Kremer reviewed highlights from district reinvestment statistics including:

- Banner year for media impressions driven by special events and retail events being promoted.
- Value of 4384 volunteer hours from 104 volunteers was \$108,497.50.
- 33 businesses opened in 2017, 7 expanded operations or changed ownership in the District.
- District vacancy rate declined even with additional retail space opening in new developments
- Isaac reported that the MDA Annual meeting will take place on 1/25 at 7:30pm at La Rosa's. Guest speaker will be FDU Entrepreneur Studies professor.
- Isaac also shared information and handout from a webinar he participated in regarding impacts on nonprofits from recent federal tax reform changes.

Communication Team

Chris Flynn reported:

- Reviewed 2017 Marketing plan which focused on Downtown ad developed with Altice which ran on cable stations and News 12, as well as individual business spotlighted through Central Jersey in Motion.
- Suggestion was made to look into utilizing the services of Spitball Marketing who has expertise in promoting downtowns, including Red Bank and Somerville.
- Goals for 2018 should be promoted Downtown Metuchen as a destination and promoting our businesses in order to drive sales.
- There was a discussion about the need to help small businesses develop their marketing and social media capabilities. Only 25% of businesses have a website.
- Businesses will be encouraged to attend a social media business workshop at the Metuchen Library on 1/24.

Family Friendly Team

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- The NYE/Plaza opening event was very cold, but a big success. The video of the evening on the MDA website captures the highlights and excitement of the event.
- Upcoming events include:
 - February – “Find Your Love Downtown” 2/9- 2/11 with specials and offers from District businesses
 - May – Downtown Loves Mom, taking place on the Plaza 5/12 from 12noon – 5pm
 - June – 2nd annual Kids Takeover Downtown
 - Other events being considered: Movie Nights, Professional Wrestling, “Supper Clubs’

Innovation Team

Elaine Edgcomb reported:

- Email blast to members about the Library social media workshop on 1/24. Follow-up workshop in February
- Working with Marketing teacher and students from the High School to take photos for businesses to use on their websites, Google maps, and social media sites
- Business recruitment team being formed
- SCORE grant submitted for emerging entrepreneurs. Grant is for \$5K and notification is in February

Getting it Done Team

Isaac shared the report in Allison’s absence:

- Discussion underway to select a contractor for cleaning of the District
- 21 additional planters coming for the Plaza
- Golden Broom contest to be started to recognize the business or building owner who does the best job of keeping their location clean

Old Business

Nothing to report regarding potential lawsuit from planter distributor since Eric's last conversation with their attorney.

Peg mentioned her efforts to fill storefront vacancy in her building and how she emphasizes the role of the MDA when talking to potential tenants

New Business

"The District" retail center was sold by Renaissance Properties to Regency, a large regional shopping center operator based in Florida.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, February 9, 2017 at 8:30am at Hailey's.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon