

## **METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES**

**June 12, 2020**

**8:30 A.M. – held via teleconference**

In attendance: Eric Berger, Jay Muldoon, Stuart Schooler, Bobbie Theivakumaran, Leon Schwartz, Mark Harris, Gary Tilbor, Diana Callinan, Mo Atzbi, Linda Koskoski, Sheri-Rose Rubin, Jenny Lai and Gary Wade.  
Staff: Isaac Kremer.

Eric Berger opened the meeting. Motion was made to approve the May, 2020 board meeting minutes. Motion passed.

### **OPRA Discussion**

Prior to this discussion Mark Harris excused himself from the call due to a conflict of interest and rejoined the meeting afterwards. A recent article and editorial in the Metuchen Mirror that was critical of the MDA Public Art Team, of the ongoing mural project on Middlesex Avenue and of Executive Director Isaac Kramer. The article omitted important details that made the article misleading such as that numerous building owners were approached to have Stephen Powers and Jonathan Horowitz paint a mural on their buildings, but only one agreed to permit it in each case. Likewise, the brutal and unwarranted attacks on Isaac's personality who had worked closely with the Mirror for the benefit of the MDA members. The Middlesex Avenue mural project is funded by a Middlesex County grant and by See-More. The MDA Public Art Team chairwoman decided not to have that team involved in the Middlesex Avenue mural project and was grateful that others within the MDA would carry this project forward. The Metuchen Mirror has now sent an OPRA request to the MDA for all emails, correspondence, etc. related to the mural project as well as prior Public Art Team projects and the planters which were installed years ago. OPRA compliance would be onerous and would take resources away from helping the businesses during the pandemic and thereafter. After a lengthy discussion of legal and operational aspects of the request, the Board unanimously passed a motion to respond to the Mirror that the MDA is not bound by OPRA, but that the MDA minutes and annual reports are publicly available.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Stuart Schooler provided an updated balance sheet and income statement. He indicated that the money from the PPE grant would be offset as a long-term liability on the balance sheet.

### **Secretary's Report**

Jay Muldoon provided a report on the Outdoor Dining and Retail program which is a joint effort with the Chamber and Borough to support restaurants and retailers re-opening. He reviewed the plans that had been developed including the application process and the closing of New St for dining in the street on weekends. In addition to restaurants participating in the program, many fitness businesses are seeking to use Borough outdoor space – parks, parking lots, etc. for outdoor classes. The outdoor dining programs begins on 6/15.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Isaac Kremer provided a written report which was distributed to the Board.

### **Public Art Team Report**

No report

### **Promotion Team Report**

Bobbie reported that the new "Curbside Pickup" signs are being installed downtown to support the takeout business of restaurants.

### **Parking Team Report**

No report

### **Communications Team Report**

Diana Callinan reported:

- Video being launched to support the "re-opening" of Downtown highlighting outdoor dining
- A banner ad on the frontpage of the Sentinel will run re. re-opening" of Downtown.
- Committee is looking into how to advertise on various websites that promote events in NJ.

### **Chamber Report**

No report

### **Arts Council Report**

Mark Harris reported: The Council is developing a plan for artists to sell art in a local Metuchen store.

### **Old Business**

None

### **New Business**

Isaac reviewed the Metuchen Downtown Reopening Grant Program.

- \$50,000 is being reallocated from the budget for this program
- Applicants can receive up to \$1,250 for expenses associated with reopening their business
- A draft of the application and program was distributed to the Board
- A three-person review team will be created to review, process and approve applications. The 3 members are Jenny Lai, Mark Harris, and Bernie Hetzel

Motion was made to approve the program and motion passed unanimously

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25am.

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The next Board meeting will be Friday, 7/10/2020 at 8:30am via teleconference.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon