

## METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

February 12, 2021

8:30 A.M. – held via teleconference

In attendance: Eric Berger, Stuart Schooler, Bobbie Theivakumaran, Gary Tilbor, Diana Callinan, Jenny Lai, Lynne Mueller, Moshe Atzbi, Jacquie Zuvich, Linda Koskoski, and Mansi Khandelwal. Not present: Jay Muldoon, Jace McColley, Gary Wade. Guest: Dan Cea. Staff: Isaac Kremer.

Eric Berger opened the meeting. Motion was made to approve the January 2021 board meeting minutes. Motion passed.

### Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Urged all trustees to join at least one other team.
- Eric, Bobbie and Mo discussed a proposal for the \$150,000 EIDL loan proceeds based upon a suggestion from Isaac. A lending institution or government entity would match the \$150,000 to create a \$300,000 fund and administer \$20,000 loans to attract new businesses and allow existing businesses to start a new line of business. There was a concern raised that MDA is not equipped to administer loans so that the lending institution would need to fully take that role with MDA having a passive roll to supply half the funding. Another concern is to make monthly distributions to cover MDA's EIDL loan payments. Lending institutions will be approached to see if there is an appetite to participate after which specifics will be brought back to the Board for further discussion.
- Eric received an email from Randy Splaingard, Publisher of *The Mirror* demanding information on housing payments made on behalf of Isaac based upon OPRA. This is a non-salary benefit in Isaac's contract to allow him to pay housing expenses with pre-tax dollars. Response was sent that there are no responsive documents, that MDA disputes that it is subject to OPRA, and that OPRA requests are unnecessary as MDA cooperates with press inquiries including from *The Mirror*.
- The 2020 Annual Report has been circulated to the Board. It is comprehensive and all Board trustees were urged to review it and provide any comments, questions and/or concerns to Isaac. Jacquie complimented MDA on its excellent work.

### Treasurer's Report

Stuart Schooler reported:

- The 2021 budget was submitted to the Borough and a hearing is tentatively set for the February 22 Council meeting which will be via Zoom.
- The MDA Ordinance requires an annual audit. The retention letter for the auditor was provided in advance to the Board. A motion was made to retain the auditor. Motion approved.

### Secretary's Report

No report.

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

Isaac Kremer reported:

- How significant efforts were made resulting in the proposed Annual Report. One section that stands out are the large number of retail promotions over the past 5 years.
- The 19 inches of snow required significant effort on the part of MDA and the Borough, though the sidewalks including New Street were opened promptly.
- There are 3 new businesses that will be opening, and which MDA has been giving support: a bakery in the former Buttery Bakery space on Main Street that will bake on-premises; DiCosmo's Italian Ice at 20 New Street; and Terra a plant store in the former ArteVino on Main Street. MDA is also assisting Angie's Café which will be reopening at its location at the corner of Amboy Avenue and Main Street.
- After having been retained by MDA to successfully help numerous businesses to get Middlesex County grants last year, MDA has again retained JC Gomez to assist businesses to get PPP loans. JC is currently working with 14 businesses. Already \$110 billion out of \$284 billion of PPP money has been committed so time is of the essence to get PPP applications in as soon as possible.

### **Public Art Team Report**

Eric Berger reported:

- There will be a call with the Metuchen Arts Council on February 18 to meet and greet with new co-chair, and seek areas to cooperate.
- There is a March 11 Public Art Team meeting to review plans for 2021.

### **Promotion Team Report**

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- The Valentine's Day promotion resulted in many businesses selling out of merchandises and offers early.
- There is a new MDA program in partnership with the Metuchen Environmental Commission to urge restaurant patrons not to take plastic utensils, ketchup packets, soy sauce packets and the like which generally are not used when take-out food is brought home and which end up in landfills.
- An inquiry was made about biodegradable food containers, but the cost is prohibitive to restaurants and patrons prefer disposable containers to reusable ones due to Covid.

### **Parking Team Report**

No report.

### **Communications Team Report**

Dan Cea reported:

- Brandon produced a video in just two days for Valentines Day.

- The Team will be looking to make quick videos going forward including “Meet the Merchant” and “Behind the Counter” themes.

### **Innovation Team Report**

No report.

### **Storefront Team Report**

No report.

### **Chamber Report**

Jacquie Zuvich reported:

- There will be a February 25 Chamber meeting focused on Covid vaccines.
- There is a mobile Covid testing truck in the Station Place parking lot adjacent to Friends of the Family.
- Wine Chateau, which is in the MDA District, has a new owner and there will be a ribbon cutting. Wine Chateau will be expanding its business to carry cheese and other food items as well as to host corporate events. Wine Chateau is looking for partnerships with other businesses.
- Dan Slobodien is compiling a Metuchen restaurant recipe book that will be for sale.
- The Chamber expects to release its Metuchen Magazine in April and there remain advertising opportunities.

### **Arts Council Report**

Lynne Mueller reported:

- The Window of Understanding Project is upcoming. February 24 – Public Health and Trauma/Recovery will be the topic. The link to the video with the artists’ work is at [www.metuchenartscouncil.com](http://www.metuchenartscouncil.com).
- July Lee is the new Co-Chair of the Arts Council with Bob Diken. She is an accomplished musician who has performed at many venues including Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall.
- Friends of Metuchen Arts Council (FOMAC) has formed and is a 501 C3 tax exempt non-profit as of January 2021 making it possible for people to become members and support the programs of the Metuchen Arts Council which is part of the Metuchen Borough. Bob Diken is President, Lynne Mueller is Vice President, Secretary and Kathleen (Kat) Davis is Treasurer. Judy Lee will also be joining the FOMAC.

### **Old Business**

None to report.

### **New Business**

None to report.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, March 12, 2021 at 8:30am virtually via Gotomeeting.

Submitted by Eric Berger