

## **METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES**

**April 9, 2021**

**8:30 A.M. – The Greek, New Street, and GotoMeeting**

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

Eric Berger opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to our first in-person in quite a while and thanked members for agreeing to meet in-person. Minutes were reviewed and a motion was to approve the March meeting minutes. Motion passed.

### **Chairman's Report**

Eric Berger reported:

- Inquiry was received from a reporter from the Courier News prompted by the recent closing of two businesses on New St. Isaac received written questions from the reporter and with the assistance of the Executive Committee responses were drafted. Copies of the questions and responses were provided to Board members who were asked to provide comments or suggestions by Monday.
- The response will be sent to the reporter early next week. Eric shared that Metuchen's downtown and businesses have fared much better than most downtowns in NJ in part due to the work the MDA has done to support businesses and provide funding through numerous grants the MDA has received during the pandemic.
- Eric also referenced a recent article in NJBIZ which was very positive about the work of the MDA and the Borough to help businesses during the pandemic. Copies of the article were shared with the Board.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Stuart Schooler reported:

- The Borough Council approval of the MDA's budget needed to be rescheduled for the 5/24 meeting due an error by the Borough Clerk in the public hearing notice. The MDA has not received any funding from the Borough this year.

### **Secretary's Report**

No report.

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

Isaac Kremer reported:

- The virtual Main Street America conference is 4/13 – 4/1 and 12 people with the MDA have been registered to participate.
- A grant application is being prepared for the J.M. Kaplan Innovation Prize, which supports initiatives in the following areas: social justice, climate change and heritage conservation. Since

MDA has numerous women and minority owned businesses, our grant will fit with the social justice category. Grant is due 4/21.

- Isaac expects Main Street New Jersey to offer grants in 2021 and he is awaiting information and guidance from DCA.

### **Public Art Team Report**

Eric Berger reported:

- Similar to the Adirondack Chair event held a couple years ago, they are planning a new event where artists will be selected to paint and decorate the three public pianos the MDA owns. The pianos will be placed around the downtown. Application deadline for artists is 4/23/2012.
- The team is also looking into a mural on the building where Angie's Café is.
- The team met with Ed Wetzel regarding completion of the mural at Imagination Alley which is funded by a County grant. Deadline is 12/31/2021.

### **Promotion Team Report**

Dan Cea reported:

- The team is planning the Downtown Goes Green 2021 event in conjunction with the Environmental Commission.
- A Spring bazaar on the Plaza is planned for 5/15/2021. Most of the vendors have been booked.
- The Pre-Prom event on the Plaza is scheduled for 5/27/2021.
- AdMessenger will be used for the upcoming promotion building on the success seen with Small Business Saturday promotion.

### **Parking Team Report**

Aaron Mandel reported:

- Purchase of parking stickers is increasing, but still significantly lower due to the pandemic.
- Parking Authority is looking into possibly increasing rates and other options to increase revenue.
- Eric Berger suggested the Parking Team be reactivated.

### **Communications Team Report**

Dan Cea reported:

- The Public Art video is finished and will be released shortly.
- The team is working with Brandon on two business owner videos. One is the more traditional "meet the merchant" and the other is a version of the "Humans of Metuchen" which tells a more personal story.

### **Innovation Team Report**

No report.

### **Storefront Team Report**

Isaac Kremer reported:

- Bernie Hetzel is leading the project to provide blade signs for five downtown businesses. A vendor has been identified to fabricate the signs and will be meeting with the interested businesses.
- Isaac is providing technical assistance to numerous businesses on various initiatives including outdoor dining, signage, seating and interior painting.
- Isaac is investigating a potential historic preservation tax credit for the former Danford's building at 476 Main Street.

### **Chamber Report**

#### **Jacque Zuvich reported:**

- The new magazine should be released in the next couple weeks.
- The Chamber is working on a new fundraiser effort.
- Cruise Nights are returning this Spring and Summer downtown.

### **Arts Council Report**

#### **Lynne Mueller reported:**

- The Window of Understanding Project continues with an upcoming virtual event on April 7 on Climate Change at 7:30pm.
- The Arts Exchange virtual classes for adults and children are being scheduled. Information is available on the MAC's website.
- The Tiny X project will launch in mid-April where 3D objects representing iconic Metuchen places created by 3 artists will be placed at random, unusual places throughout town. Residents will be encouraged to find the objects by looking for the QR codes.
- The Arts Council is forming a Teen Arts Council with the Edison Metuchen Girls Scouts.
- Judy Lee and Rena Wade have joined the Friends of the Metuchen Arts Council Board.
- A more detailed report is included as an attachment to the minutes.

### **Old Business**

- Square account for MDA will be used for residents to electronically order and pay for the Memorial Day lawn signs created by the Metuchen Parade Committee. Ordering will begin in early May for signs to be picked up May 14 and 15.

### **New Business**

- Mo Atzbi suggested that a survey be conducted to "take the temperature" of people regarding indoor and outdoor dining to help restaurants better plan for the upcoming spring and summer seasons. He will share a survey he has created.
- Gary Tibor asked if the tents on New St will be up through the summer. Yes, they will remain until full occupancy of restaurants is permitted. The tents are owned by the MDA, not the restaurants that are using them.
- Isaac mentioned that the Borough should look into revising the Borough's ordinances that govern outdoor dining to reflect the needs and flexibility of restaurants.

- Isaac discussed the need to provide funding to businesses that did not meet the eligibility requirements of the pandemic relief programs because they weren't open a full year.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, May 14, 2021 at 8:30am in the Station Place lot and also virtually via Gotomeeting.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon