

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

May 14, 2021

8:30 A.M. – Station Place Parking Lot, and GotoMeeting

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

Eric Berger opened the meeting and thanked members for attending. Minutes were reviewed and a motion was made to approve the amended April meeting minutes. Motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Need for all Board members to become actively involved in the MDA committees. It is important for the work of the MDA to be "spread across the organization." Those who are running the teams also need to be open and receptive to others being involved.
- Eric encouraged those Board members who are not serving on a team to choose one that interests them.
- 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.

Treasurer's Report

Stuart Schooler reported:

- The Borough Council approval of the MDA's 2020 budget has been rescheduled for the May 14, 2021 meeting. Work on the 2021 MDA budget will begin and presentation of the draft budget is expected at the September meeting.

Secretary's Report

No report.

Executive Director's Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- Updated stats on reinvestment, submitted quarterly report to MSNJ - increased by \$50M from prior year to \$158M.
- Grant updates:
 - J.M. Kaplan Innovation Prize, submitted, decision by 6/30, \$175,000. Focus of the application is on connecting businesses with area wide residents and consumers.
 - Main Street New Jersey funding, expecting \$1M allocated statewide, awaiting application and guidelines from DCA.
 - T-mobile Hometown Grant Program, \$25M over next 5 years - identifying additional outdoor initiatives to be included in grant application.

Public Art Team Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Edward Wetzel's mural in Imagination Alley to be completed by year's end.
- Piano project – three artists selected from nine submissions. The painted pianos and locations will be unveiled on 6/25.
- Angie's Café project – the first meeting with the mural artist was held.

Promotion Team Report

Dan Cea reported:

- The Spring Bazaar will be held on the Plaza on 5/15. Volunteers are needed to help with setup and tear down.
- The Downtown Rumble wrestling event is scheduled for 9/18 on the Plaza.
- The Pre-Prom event on the Plaza is scheduled for 5/27.

Parking Team Report

Aaron Mandel reported:

- MDA Parking Team met on May 13, 2021 for the first time this year and discussed several issues including continued use of bagged meters downtown, increasing short term meter parking in the New Street lot. Dan Cea mentioned that the Traffic and Transportation Committee had looked into creating 15-minute spaces for quick turnover.
- Parking Authority granted Hailey's request to continue using Station Place Lot for a tent for outdoor dining for as long as conditions require and/or permit.

Communications Team Report

Dan Cea reported:

- AdMessenger being trialed for Spring Bazaar - ads placed on multiple sites targeting Edison and Metuchen residents. Ads generated 80,000 impressions and 3% click through rate.
- Pre-prom video has been released to promote member businesses that offer products and services for prom goers.
- Eric Berger encouraged Board members to reach out to Dan if interested in being part of the Communications Team.

Innovation Team Report

No report.

Storefront Team Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- Blade sign project - led by Bernie Hetzel, the following businesses are considering a blade sign: Nauti Cajun Crab, 7 New St; Metuchen Liquor & Wine, 431 Main St; Pastry Lu, 397 Main St; Tribos Peri Peri, 401 Main St; What's the Scoop

- Storefront projects - in addition to completed projects at Metuchen Nail Spa. Menya and Pastry Lu, the following are being worked on:
 - Torino 2, 12 New St – outdoor dining structure
 - DiCosmo Italian Ice, 20 New St – paint, sign, retractable awning, and outdoor dining
 - Angie’s Café, 275 Amboy Ave – sign permit submitted, outdoor dining
 - Tribos Peri Peri, 401 Main St – waiting for details to submit permit
 - Biggby Coffee, 660 Middlesex Ave – outdoor seating
 - Metuchen Diner, 338 Lake Ave – outdoor dining structure
 - Kabab Factory, 567 Middlesex Ave – interior painting
- Potential tax credit project - historic restoration of former Danford’s Corner, 476 Main St.

Chamber Report

Jacque Zuvich reported:

- The new magazine should be completed, all materials have been submitted to the publisher. Awaiting release date.
- The Chamber is working on a new recipe book fundraiser highlighting recipes from Metuchen's restaurants.
- Cruise Nights have returned and the first one was well attended. The 6/2 Cruise Night will include a tribute to Ed Eckert who recently passed away. Ed was very involved in the Chamber and the Cruise Night committee. A discussion was held regarding the possibility of Cruise Nights returning to Main St from New & Center Streets since COVID restrictions are being lifted. Jacque will discuss with the Committee.

Arts Council Report

Lynne Mueller reported:

- On May 8 the Kamoinge Workshop Photography Exhibit at Papillon & Company began featuring 8 Harlem based photographers. Other events include a Zoom session with some of the artists and a workshop to be held on 5/22. Lynne encouraged everyone to stop by Papillon to see the exhibit that runs through 6/30.
- The Tiny X project launched and features 3D objects representing iconic Metuchen places created by three artists placed at random, unusual places throughout town. Residents will be encouraged to find the objects by looking for the QR codes. Lynne provided some hints - Library, Borough Hall and the train station.
- The Metuchen Jazz Education series continues on June 13 featuring Richard Ricardi who will be discussing Louis Armstrong.
- The MAC is planning a summer concert for August at Tommy's Pond.
- Representing the Metuchen Parade Committee, Lynne discussed the Memorial Day celebration being planned including the Rolling Parade led by the Fire Department. Lynne was selling the lawn signs that honor the fallen service members. The signs are \$10 and support the Parade Committee's activities.

Old Business

- Businesses like Evnia on Pearl St did not qualify for PPP and other pandemic relief grants due to not being in business for a year, but are in need of funds to help their business to recover. What can the MDA do for them? A discussion was held regarding MDA's sources of funding including grants from various sources.
- Need to identify relationships Board members may have with foundations and corporations (ex. Ameriprise). Isaac will share a list of targeted foundations and corporations where Board members may have relationships with.

New Business

- Isaac shared copies of Edible New Jersey magazine that had an article on DiCosmo's Italian Ice. The dining centric magazine may be a good advertising platform for the MDA since we have so many restaurants. The Communications Committee will evaluate the opportunity.
- Isaac also mentioned the recent positive article in the Criterion Sentinel about the Spring Bazaar.
- Data analysis shows that local businesses are increasingly attracting customers from beyond Metuchen as well as a younger demographic. Isaac has been looking into Placer.ai who tracks this type of data.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, June 11, 2021 at 8:30am in the Station Place lot and also virtually via Gotomeeting.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon