

## **METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES**

**September 10, 2021**

**8:30 A.M. – Tent at Lotsa Balls on New St, and GotoMeeting**

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

Eric Berger opened the meeting. Minutes were reviewed and a motion was made to approve the August meeting minutes. Motion passed.

There were no additions to the agenda.

### **Chairman's Report**

Eric Berger reported:

- The New Street tents will need to be taken down to accommodate installation of new gas piping on New Street. At a meeting with New Street businesses, the Mayor announced that the New Street tents can go back up after the gas pipe installation and remain for the balance of the calendar year.
- On September 20 the NJTPA will host a public meeting to discuss different options for New Street including a possible closure between Main Street and Pearl Street.
- The Board determined not to take a position on whether or not New Street should be closed due to lack of consensus among the Full Members. Trustees are free to express their own opinions, but may not speak on behalf of MDA.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Stuart Schooler reported:

- The proposed MDA 2021 budget was shared with the Board and discussed. The highlighted changes included: grant revenue \$25,000 vs \$50,000 in 2020, Storefront grant program increased to \$45,000 vs. \$25,000, Education and Tech \$10,000 vs, \$0 in 2020 and Contract Services up to \$23,000 from \$15,000.
- The other budget lines/categories amounts are very close to 2020. Board discussion was held regarding the Contract Services line item and the various services covered.
- The motion to approve the budget was unanimously approved.

### **Secretary's Report**

No report.

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

No report.

### **Arts Council Report**

Lynne Mueller reported:

- Metuchen will host the Central Jersey Jazz Festival on the Plaza on 9/11.
- Lynne provided a written report enclosed sent in advance and enclosed with the agenda.

### **Public Art Team Report**

Eric Berger reported:

- Angie's Café mural project – there will be a public virtual meeting at 6pm on 9/20 to present the proposed mural for Angie's by artist Raul Ayala.

### **Old Business**

- None to report.

### **New Business**

- None to report.

The regular Board meeting was adjourned at 8:55 am. The Board went into a Closed Session for a Personnel discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, September 8, 2021 at 8:30am in the Lotsa Balls tent.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon



Over the last few weeks, the Borough and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) have sought feedback about potential infrastructure changes to the intersection of Main Street, New Street and Hillside Avenue that were presented to the community during a virtual public meeting on September 20th. Changes to this intersection are being considered as part of the \$9.3 million NJTPA Main Street Safety Improvement Grant awarded to the Borough in 2017 and is designed to improve pedestrian safety along Main Street from Brunswick Avenue to Talmadge Avenue.

Throughout this deliberative process, so many of you provided formal feedback to the Borough because of your dedication to Metuchen and commitment to its future. As your submissions came in, I carefully reviewed every one of them. Many of you expressed varying concerns with one or both alternatives presented by the NJTPA. I am grateful that so many of you provided thoughtful suggestions on ways to make the intersection safer. Most emphasized the importance of, as one resident described, "traffic calming measures along Main Street and in all of Metuchen for that matter." As another resident wrote, many of you are "all for additional safety, better pedestrian lighting, painted streets and other support."

After a thorough and thoughtful review of all public comments, discussions with Council Members, and input from emergency service professionals, we have determined that neither of the alternatives presented by the NJTPA is right for our community at this time. Rather, we have asked the NJTPA's professionals to implement a different solution for the intersection that does not close New Street or result in significant parking loss on Main Street but incorporates some of the most common safety suggestions made throughout this process.

While this portion of the grant process is now complete and many residents engaged productively by weighing potential safety improvements against issues like increased traffic and limited parking, sadly other discussions, especially on social media, devolved into cynical assumptions about the motives of our own neighbors. Constructive disagreement and respectful dissent result in more rigorous decision-making that often requires us, as leaders, to challenge the way we think about our Borough. However, when disagreement turns to acrimony and we resort to claims that every opposing position comes from a place of dishonesty, we chip away at the very fabric of our close knit community.

Metuchen is a special place and it is so much more than one street or one intersection. Metuchenites have a proud tradition of community engagement and supporting one another. Our future is decided in moments like these, and while we may not always agree about what the future looks like, we must remain committed to the ideals of the Borough we call home. This is not the first time there has been disagreement about a policy issue in Metuchen and it likely won't be the last.

As former Mayor Don Wernik once said, "If you do what you feel is right, you'll come out ahead." The right thing to do is to have respectful dialogue about complicated policy issues like this one and move forward after careful consideration. If we all agree to do that, our Borough will come out ahead.

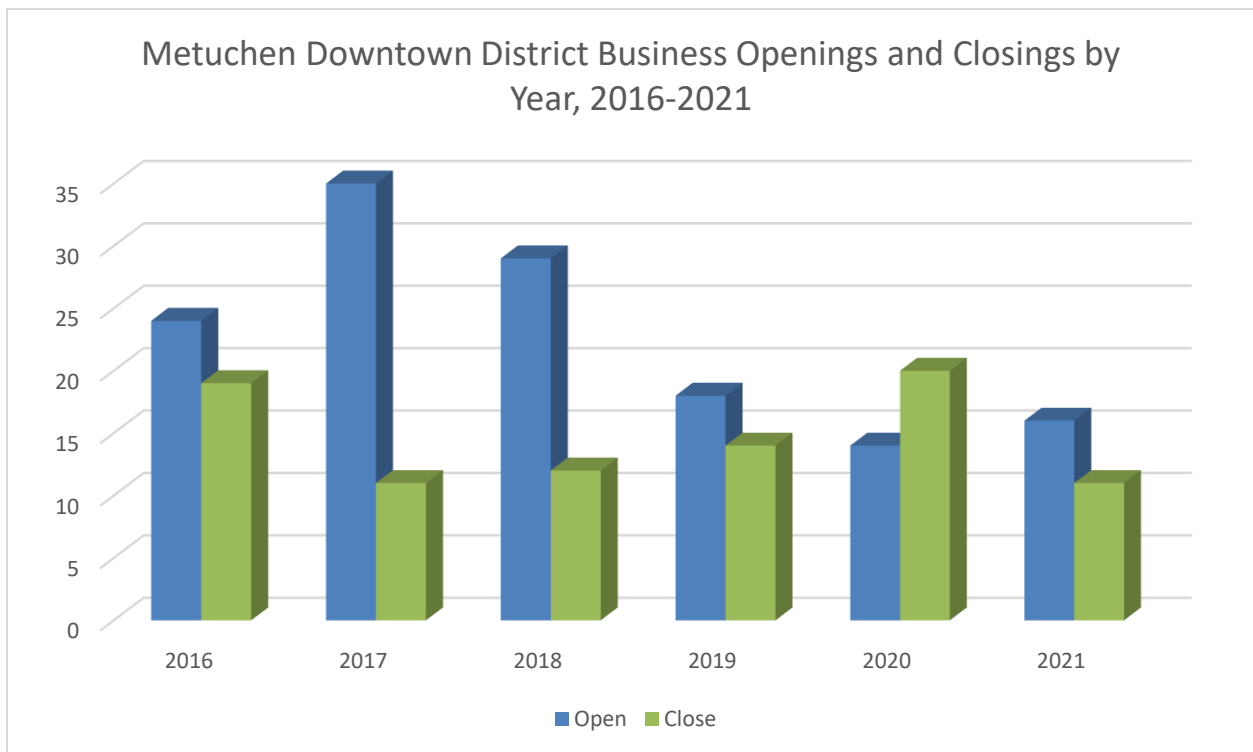
*Jonathan M Busch*

## METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE

### Executive Director Report

**October 8, 2021**

1. Prepared and submitted Great America Main Street Award application.
2. Working with SBDC and JC to reach out and get PPP forgiveness processed.
3. Outreach to local biz on customer service complaint when I was approached.
4. Admin and tech support for Public Art process on Angie’s mural.
5. Submitted charities registration.
6. Working with King Strength Performance and Tribos Peri Peri that are both planning to open.
7. Tent deinstallation plan on New Street – electricians to dismount heaters cost \$.
8. Tracking of reinvestment.



#### Net businesses (12/31)

2016	5
2017	24
2018	17
2019	4
2020	-6
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>+49</b>

#### Net jobs (12/31)

2016	35
2017	214
2018	91
2019	6
2020	-15
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>+337</b>

#### Vacancy by SQFT (12/31)

2016	61,845
2017	48,306
2018	36,174
2019	46,496
2020	56,127
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>58,688</b>
<b>Net Change</b>	<b>-3,157</b>

**Vacancy by unit (12/31)**

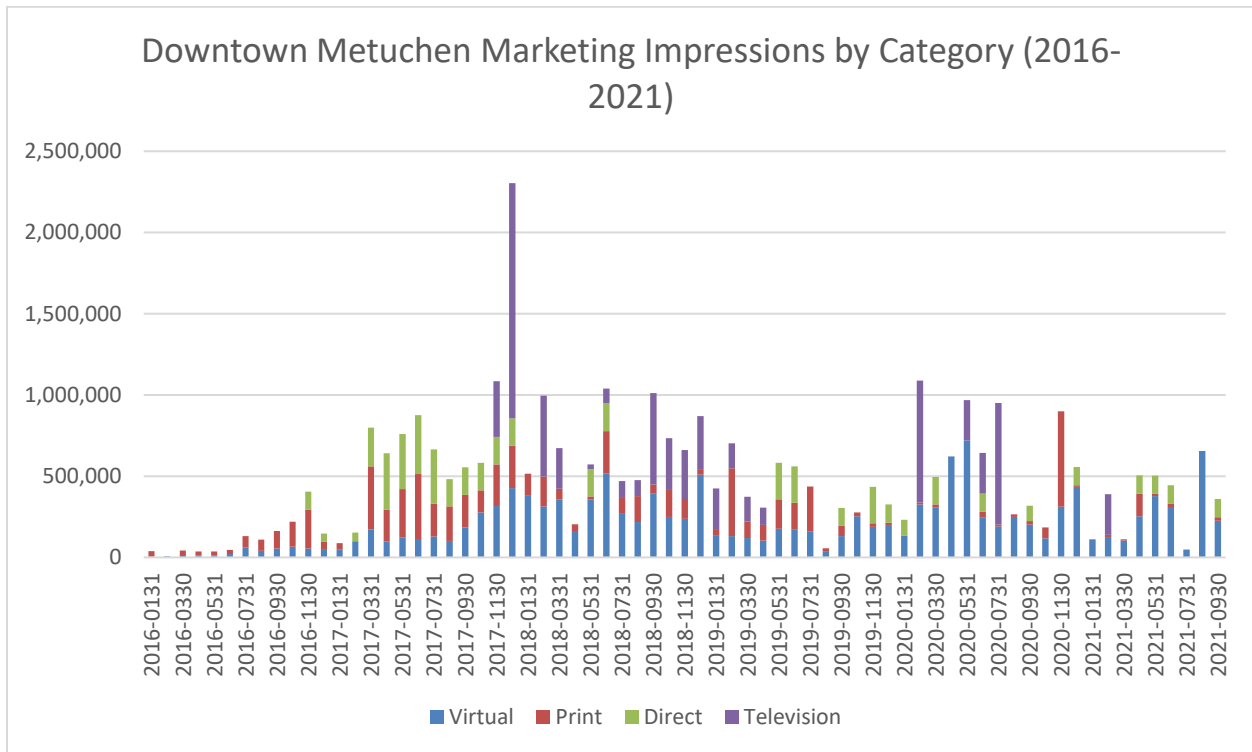
2016	79
2017	55
2018	38
2019	34
2020	41
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>38</b>
Net Change	-41

**Net Gross Leasable Area**

2016 baseline	1,004,247
2017	186,781
2018	143,429
2019	117,706
2020	4,575
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>0</b>
Net Change	+452,491

**Investment**

2016	19,128,800
2017	69,094,159
2018	33,377,216
2019	35,930,505
2020	1,245,450
<b>2021 YTD</b>	<b>1,442,579</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$160,218,708</b>



**Volunteer hours**

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 YTD	Total Hours by cat.	Total Value by category
Standard Hrs	3,197	2,915	4,686	4,219	3,418	3,262	21,696	\$433,920
Professional Hrs	288	556	732	231	262	286	2,354	\$176,513
Total Hours	3,485	3,471	5,417	4,450	3,680	3,548	24,050	\$610,433
<b>Total Value</b>	<b>\$85,503</b>	<b>\$99,990</b>	<b>\$148,573</b>	<b>\$101,705</b>	<b>\$87,973</b>	<b>\$86,690</b>		

# DOWNTOWN METUCHEN

## Downtown Metuchen Monthly

October 2021 Issue

1. Upcoming Promotions
2. Tips for Businesses
3. Coming Soon
4. In the News...

### **Upcoming Promotions**

- **Movie Night:** Indiana Jones Scavenger Hunt Through October 2nd with locations throughout Downtown Metuchen. All clues are hidden outside businesses and please direct anyone looking for information to our Scavenger Hunt Tips page ([link](#)). Then join us Sat, Oct 2 on the Town Plaza for **Raiders of the Lost Ark Movie Night**.
- **Hispanic Heritage Month:** Through the month of September celebrate **Hispanic Heritage Month** at businesses throughout Downtown Metuchen.
- **Small Business Saturday:** Businesses should get their promotions ready. Small Business Saturday will be the Saturday after Thanksgiving on November 27, 2021.

### **Tips for Businesses**

- **Return and Earn:** The new Return and Earn program will provide a \$500 incentive for unemployed workers reentering the workforce and receiving job training from businesses with 100 or fewer employees. Employers can **complete this form** to express interest in this program and receive application information as it becomes available. Job seekers interested in receiving one-on-one virtual career services should complete the service request form [here](#).
- **PPP Forgiveness:** The window is closing to get PPP loans forgiven. The deadline for applications is December 31, 2021, but the SBA will only

process applications as long as funds are available. How do I access the portal? This platform can be accessed by visiting <https://directforgiveness.sba.gov>. How do I contact the SBA? SBA's PPP Direct Forgiveness Hotline is +1 (877) 552-2692 open Monday through Friday 8am-8pm EST.

- **Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL):** Loans are still available for downtown businesses. The limit has been increased from \$150,000 up to \$500,000 for qualifying businesses. Take a look here: [COVID-19 EIDL \(sba.gov\)](https://directforgiveness.sba.gov).

### Coming Soon

- **King Strength Performance**, is opening their second location in Metuchen to make consistent fitness easy through quality strength training combined with great community, opening at 67 Pearl Street. 50 exclusive founding memberships are available on [their website](#).
- **Tribos Peri Peri**, proudly serves Portuguese-inspired, flame-grilled cuisine, opening at 401 Main Street.
- **Rita's Italian Ice**, sells mainly Italian ice, frozen custard, and specialty creations, opening at 640 Middlesex Ave.
- **The Hair Loft**, moving from 401 Main Street to 476 Main Street.
- **Namkeen Hot Chicken + Waffles**, is a Pakistani twist to Nashville hot chicken. They will open a new restaurant at 410 Main Street.
- See all [Available Space in Downtown Metuchen](#). Have a listing? Email details to [isaac@downtownmetuchen.org](mailto:isaac@downtownmetuchen.org).

### In the News...

- [Post-tropical storm, Metuchen conditions better than expected, but damage is still done - centraljersey.com](#) The Criterion Sentinel / centraljersey.com
- [Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration In Metuchen On Saturday | Edison, NJ Patch](#) Patch - Edison Metuchen
- [New Hot Chicken & Waffles Restaurant Opening In Metuchen | Edison, NJ Patch](#) Patch - Edison Metuchen

[See What's Happening Downtown](#)

