

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

October 8, 2021

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

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

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

There were no additions to the agenda.

Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Numerous social media posts regarding the potential closure of one block of New Street are tearing the community apart. Some people are posting baseless, hateful comments about people and organizations. Hopefully this behavior will not be repeated in the future.
- The tents on New St will be coming down at the end of October to facilitate work to be done by the Gas Company. As per the Mayor's announcement, the tents will not be going back up after the Gas Company work is completed.
- A discussion was held regarding what to do with the tents that have been on New St. It is costly and time consuming to erect the tents. First preference will be given to MDA members who can use the tents. If not, MDA will consider selling the tents. Suggestion made to see if the Red Cross or other organizations might be interested in the tents. Board members can give Isaac any suggestions on what to do with the tents once they are taken down.

Treasurer's Report

No report.

Secretary's Report

No report.

Executive Director's Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- A written report in the meeting package. He also reported the following at the meeting:
- The 2020 990 was shared with the Board before filing it with the IRS.
- The 2021 MDA budget has been submitted to the Borough Clerk. A public hearing will be scheduled.
- The new e-newsletter was sent to the distribution list and is getting a high open rate.
- The Community Thrives grant effort raised \$11,000, but the MDA wasn't awarded one of the national grants.
- Isaac highlighted MDA reinvestment stats, media impressions and volunteer hours for 2020.

Arts Council Report

Lynne Mueller reported:

- Mignolo Dance - 10/10/2021 at 7pm presents "Visitor Parking" at 936 Amboy Ave, Edison. This is an evening length work that explores the nuances of mental health. Tickets are \$20.
- Virtual Jazz Education - 10/17/2021 from 3-4:30pm. Baritone Saxophonist Frank Basile will discuss the six baritone saxophonists who have influenced him. Live Streaming on njjs.org. Event is free, but donations are encouraged.

Parking Authority Report

Aron Mandel reported:

- The New Street lot will be repaved and striped. Job is included in the Borough's road paving bid which are due in late October.
- Two parking kiosks will be installed in the New St. lot to replace the old parking meters.
- A RFP for the sale of the vacant lot on Inn Place will be issued in November.
- Malfunctioning new meter heads will be replaced for free by the vendor.

Team Reports

Public Art Team Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Angie's Café mural project – public virtual meeting held and presentation at Borough Council meeting made. Artist, Raul Ayala, given the go ahead to proceed.

Organization Team

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- Newsletter released on the 1st of the month. People can sign up online to receive it. Suggestion was made to post the newsletter on the website.
- Volunteers are needed to help with the downtown holiday lighting and decorations. Bernie Hetzel will again be leading the effort.

Grant Team

Gary Tilbor reported:

- Team is streaming the grant application process. Guidelines and applications are on the MDA website.
- A marketing campaign is being developed to highlight "before" and "after" photos of businesses who have received storefront grants. Campaign goal is to build positive awareness of what the MDA is doing.
- Team is also looking at narrowing the focus on the types of eligible grant projects vs. the current laundry list of projects.

Promotion Team

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- The scavenger hunt associated with the Raiders of the Lost Ark movie was very popular.

- A modified Haunted Downtown will be held this year without any crowd gathering elements due to COVID. Businesses are encouraged to offer specials rather than giving away candy to attract shoppers.
- Small Business Saturday is 11/27. Suggestion was made to kick it off on Friday night this year.
- A Winter Bazaar is planned for 12/4 and the NYE event is being planned for 12/30 on the Plaza.

Communications Team

Dan Cea reported:

- A video highlighting downtown events, dining, and shopping is being produced to show a "short and punchy" slice of life downtown.
- An updated version of "Metuchen's Got _____" will be made to promote holiday shopping and dining at MDA businesses.
- Jenny Lai talked about her ongoing "Profiles of Metuchen Businesses" project which conveys the "human/personal" side of businesses.

Old Business

- None to report.-

New Business

- A question was raised as to whether the MDA knew about the Chamber's plan to shut down prior to their announcement. The MDA was not made aware prior to the announcement although several MDA Board members are Chamber Board members.
- Following a discussion about what will happen to various Chamber events and programs once they cease operations, a team was formed to evaluate the possibility of transitioning some events or programs to the MDA. The Team is made up of Mo Atzbi, Jenny Lai, Linda Koskoski, Bobbie Theivakumaran, and Eric Berger. They plan to report back to the Board at a future meeting.

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