

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

November 12, 2021

8:30 A.M. – Dining Pavilion at Mangia Toscano

In attendance: Eric Berger, Jace McColley, Lynne Mueller, Jay Muldoon, Jenny Lai, Moshe Atzbi, Gary Tilbor, Aron Mandel, and Bobbie Theivakumaran on the phone. Not present: Diana Callinan, Jacquie Zuvich, Linda Koskoski, 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 October meeting minutes. Motion passed.

There were no additions to the agenda.

Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Eric Berger discussed the recent adoption of the Borough's Historic Preservation Element in the Master Plan by the Planning Board. It is unclear whether the buildings in the downtown district have historic integrity and significance since so many of them have been modified from their original design and construction, so it would be more appropriate for the Historic Preservation Element and any future Historic Preservation Ordinance to focus on only residential properties.
- MDA assisted the owner of Danford's Corner at 476 Middlesex Ave on the corner of Main Street and Middlesex Avenue to apply for historic preservation designation. This was denied due to the lack of historic integrity, though can still be challenged.
- There was then a discussion on whether Winter, 2021/2022 Board meetings should be held remotely or indoors. After discussing the options, the Board decided to hold Winter, 2021/2022 Board meetings at Hailey's Parlor at 15 Station Place.

Treasurer's Report

Stuart Schooler was not present. Isaac Kremer reported:

- MDA was awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Gannett Foundation. That is in addition to the \$11,250 of funds raised from the crowdfunding effort earlier this year.
- Despite having a small deficit on the financial statement, he also said the MDA 2021 budget should again be balanced when the MDA receives the 4th quarter assessment payment from the Borough.

Secretary's Report

No report.

Executive Director's Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- The dining tents on New St. have been removed and are in storage at the Sportsplex. He thanked the Borough DPW for their help in taking down the tents. We continue to look for recipients who might want the tents.

- No update or details on grant funding for 2021 from the Main Street New Jersey. Isaac continues to check with DCA on this.
- The new e-newsletter continues to be well received. The email distribution list has grown to 3,382 addresses.

Arts Council Report

Lynne Mueller reported:

- Virtual Jazz Education: Sunday, November 21, 2021 from 3-4:30 pm. Ellington/Strayhorn Scholar and Author David Hajdu will present "Ellington and Strayhorn: Alone and Together" livestream at njjs.org. Free, donations encouraged.
- Winter Art Sale - Saturday, December 4, 2021 from 12noon - 4pm. Borough Hall Plaza. Regional artists, unique and one of kind gifts.
- Windows of Understanding Art Project - Economic Justice, Climate Change and Protest to Policy will be explored by 4 artists whose works will be sponsored by Berkshire Hathaway. Works will be displayed in the windows of Berkshire Hathaway's office on Middlesex Ave starting on January 17, 2022 (MLK's Birthday) through the end of February 2022.

Parking Authority Report

Aron Mandel reported:

- The New Street lot will be repaved and striped probably in the Spring.
- RFP for the sale of the vacant lot on Inn Place will be issued in November.

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

Dan Cea 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.
- Need team to review downtown cleaning and maintenance proposal for 2022. We expect cost/rates to increase.

Grant Team

Gary Tilbor reported:

- Team is streamlining the grant application process. Guidelines and applications are on the MDA website. www.downtownmetuchen.org/guidelines/

- 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.

Promotion Team

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- Debrief held on Haunted Downtown which focused on business specials.
- Small Business Saturday is November 27, 2021.
- A Winter Market on the Plaza is planned for December 4, 2021.
- Twas the Weekend Before Christmas retail event, December 18, 2021.
- New Year's Party is being planned for December 30, 2021 on the Town Plaza.

Communications Team

Dan Cea reported:

- Google profile update – 1,500 views.
- Video to launch for Small Business Saturday featuring retail businesses.
- Ad messenger campaign to support Small Business Saturday and Winter Market.

Old Business

- The team working on Chamber transition issues provided a recommendation for updated MDA Affiliate Membership costs and benefits for Metuchen businesses that are not located within the MDA Improvement District. The cost would be \$250 per annum.
- There was a discussion of doing a restaurant week each July with Affiliate Members being able to participate. Consensus was to not do a July Restaurant Week.
- There was also discussion of whether to have an MDA gift card program and which businesses would be permitted to accept those gift certificates. Further discussion and consideration was needed prior to proceeding.

New Business

- A staging area is needed for the holiday decorations to be put up by Bernie Hetzel and volunteers. Jace McColley offered space at his building on Middlesex Ave.
- The dates/schedule for the downtown decorating needs to be shared with the volunteers. Lights to be ready for SBS weekend.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, December 10, 2021 at 8:30am in the Porch at Hailey's, 15 Station Place.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon