

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE





Mission




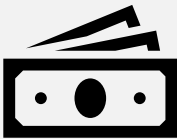








The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a volunteer-based, nonprofit downtown management corporation dedicated to the management and revitalization of the designated Metuchen business district (the District) in partnership with stakeholders, residents, municipal government, and other partners.

Vision

We envision a welcoming, walkable, and inclusive downtown. Engaging public art, entertainment, and recreation abound throughout our historic and vibrant downtown. All residents and visitors will be brought together by daily and special downtown experiences at destinations, independent businesses, and restaurants featuring personalized customer service.

As adopted by the Board of Trustees, August 11, 2017.

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

 <p>563.2 Hours of cleaning, watering, and maintenance</p>	 <p>2,938,782 Views on social media channels (15,037,313 since 2016)</p>
 <p>9 Storefront improvement grants (52 since 2016)</p>	 <p>\$59,037 Outside revenue brought in (\$905,802 since 2016)</p>
 <p>4 New blade signs installed (16 since 2016)</p>	 <p>4,884 Volunteer hours contributed (25,338 since 2016)</p>
 <p>7 Referrals to SBDC (66 since 2018) -</p>	 <p>\$640,007 Private investment in District (\$164,817,671 since 2016)</p>
 <p>11 New business openings (95 since 2016)</p>	 <p>\$751,500 Public investment in District (\$3,510,776 since 2016)</p>
 <p>19 Retail promotions (98 since 2016)</p>	 <p>1 Public art project (8 since 2016)</p>

Cleaning, watering and maintenance



Dare Commercial Services provided cleaning, watering and maintenance services downtown. Since 2019 they have been the designated contractor for these services.

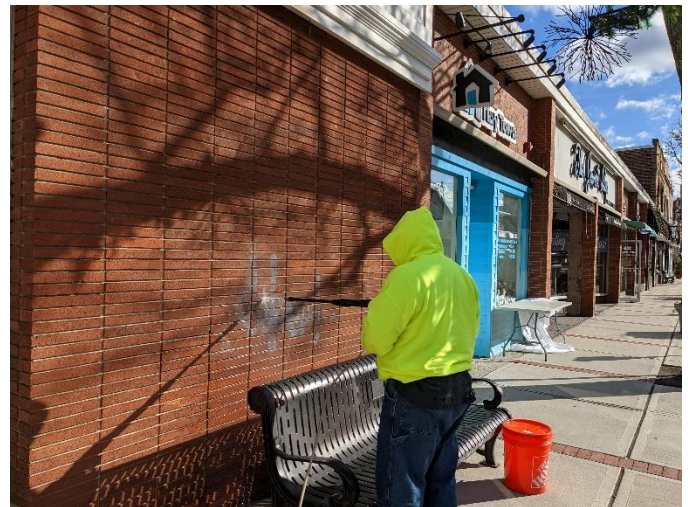
Every Saturday they are a visible presence in the district. This helps to provide these services on a day and time that previously could not be covered by the Borough because it is outside of their weekly working hours.

Over 50 planters are located along Main Street and on the Town Plaza. Supplemental watering of the 50 planters was also conducted by Dare. Over half received a new irrigation method of expanding crystals added to the soil so these retain water. That is an improvement over the vacuum powered reservoirs we had before that took up significant space in the planter.

Volunteers from the Metuchen Garden Club and others in the community have continued to help with seasonal turnover of the planters. We're always looking for new volunteers!



MDA contractor working on Pennsylvania Ave.



Working on graffiti removal.

Storefront Improvement Grants



Storefront consultations and continued to be carried out in 2021. Grants were provided to businesses that followed MDA guidelines.

Guidelines were developed to assist businesses considering making improvements. These were placed online along with an online application that businesses can fill out to be considered for a Storefront Improvement Grant.

<http://downtownmetuchen.org/guidelines>

Private support for improvements was strong with \$11,250 raised through a crowdfunding campaign. An additional \$5,000 operating grant from the Gannett Foundation was awarded to help woman and minority owned businesses to expand outdoor dining. We are now in the process of allocating these funds to businesses.

Testimonial – Amarpreet Singh, Owner, Metuchen News

“I would like to thank Metuchen Downtown Alliance (MDA) for all the support they have given me ever since they came into existence, and especially during the last couple of years. Be it a matching grant for uplifting the front of the store, helping during the beginning of the pandemic, or providing their support marketing on social media. I also want to thank them for inviting Metuchen News to be a vendor at the plaza during their Movie Night.”



Metuchen Deli received a hands-on consultation in May 2021 when excessive postings on windows were removed.



Angie's Café received a storefront grant that helped them replace their awning sign with attractive illuminated letters.

Blade Signs



A pilot project in 2021 had the goal to increase the number of blade signs downtown. These signs make businesses more visible to pedestrians walking on the sidewalk from a greater distance. The typical mid-block storefront with flush mounted signs can be seen from 20 feet away by people walking on the sidewalk past the business. A blade sign gives a landmark for people to walk towards and also makes the walking experience more interesting by breaking it up.



MDA's Design Guidelines encourage illumination of blade signs. Lighting fixtures are mounted as part of the hardware holding the sign up. This helps customers navigate the downtown better even at night, and makes people feel safer and welcome when public spaces are lit up.

The Borough Construction Official and Zoning Officer were quite helpful in streamlining the approval process by accepting a standard bracket that MDA proposed for the pilot project. We hope for more blade signs to get installed soon.



Installation of blade signs at Pastry Lu, What's the Scoop, Nauti Cajun Crab, and Metuchen Liquor & Wine.

Referrals to Small Business Development Center



Since 2018 there have been 66 businesses referred to the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Rutgers University. The SBDC provides consultation services to

businesses often at low cost or no cost. Additionally, they also provide training throughout the year. Of the businesses that have been referred to SBDC, 59.1% completed the intake form which is the required step before meeting with a counselor. In 2021 the intake completion rate increased to 85.7% with only one business referred not taking that next step.

Businesses including blue parachute and Creative Twist Events took advantage of training opportunities in 2021. They also attended the SBDC Annual Success Awards at Forsgate Country Club in December 2021.



SBDC Annual Success Awards with keynote speaker Brian Moran, December 2021.

New Businesses



Downtown continued to see strong growth in business openings with 11 non-office business openings in 2021.

These businesses included:

1. AutoTeam Car Rental, 331 Amboy Ave
2. Terrace Plant Shop, 416 Main St
3. Origins, 463 Main St
4. Pastry Lu, 397 Main St
5. DiCosmo Italian Ice, 20 New St
6. East Hana Sushi & Ramen, 660 Middlesex Ave, H
7. Isolation Fitness, 333 Main St
8. Newmarket, 19 New St
9. Metuchen Beauty Spa, 640 Middlesex Ave
10. Fire & Flavor, 640 Middlesex Ave
11. Tribos Peri Peri, 401 Main St

We were sorry to see seven non-office businesses close in 2021, for a net business increase of four for the year.

Another key to our success in Metuchen is the strong retention rate of businesses that opened, with over 83% of businesses that opened since 2016 still open today.



Owner Luisania Moronta of Pastry by Lu and DiCosmo's Italian Ice are two of the businesses that opened in 2021.

Retail Promotions



Since the Metuchen Downtown Alliance was started in 2016, a hallmark of our work has been retail promotions. By design these are activities that make cash registers ring. The leading retail promotion each year has been Small Business Saturday that has been held every year since 2016.

In 2021 almost half of retail promotions were held for the first time and highlighted in bold below.

1. **Black History Month (Feb)**
2. **Spring Bazaar (May)**
3. Downtown Pre-Prom (May)
4. Movies Under the Stars – Ferris Bueller’s Day Off (Jun)
5. **Downtown Breakdance Competition (Jun)**
6. **Juneteenth Celebration (Jun)**
7. **Father’s Day with the Fuccile Foundation (Jun)**
8. Movies Under the Stars – Crazy Rich Asians (Aug)
9. **Downtown Block Party (Aug)**
10. Downtown Rumble (Sep)
11. **Downtown Hispanic Heritage Celebration (Sep)**
12. **Indiana Jones Scavenger Hunt (Sep-Oct)**
13. Movies Under the Stars – Raiders of the Lost Ark (Oct)
14. Small Business Saturday (Nov)
15. Winter Market (Dec)
16. Downtown Caroling (Dec)
17. ‘Twas the Weekend Before Christmas (Dec)
18. Movies Under the Stars – Home Alone (Dec)
19. New Year’s Party (Dec)



Photos from top to bottom: Breakdancing Competition, June 12, Downtown Rumble, September 18; New Year’s Party, December 30.

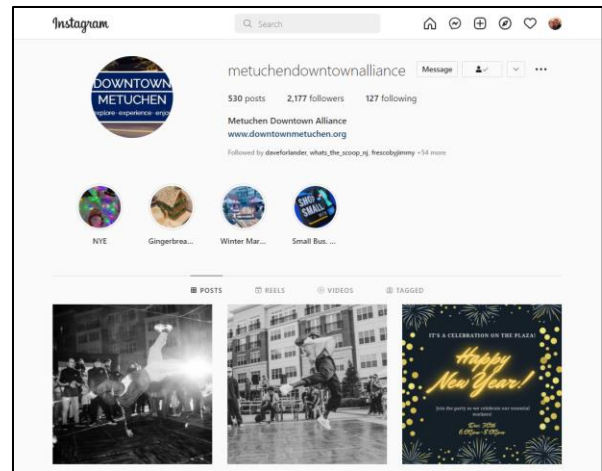
Media Impressions



Earned and unearned media impressions have been strong throughout 2021. These are not as high as in 2017 and 2018 when our media spending was significantly

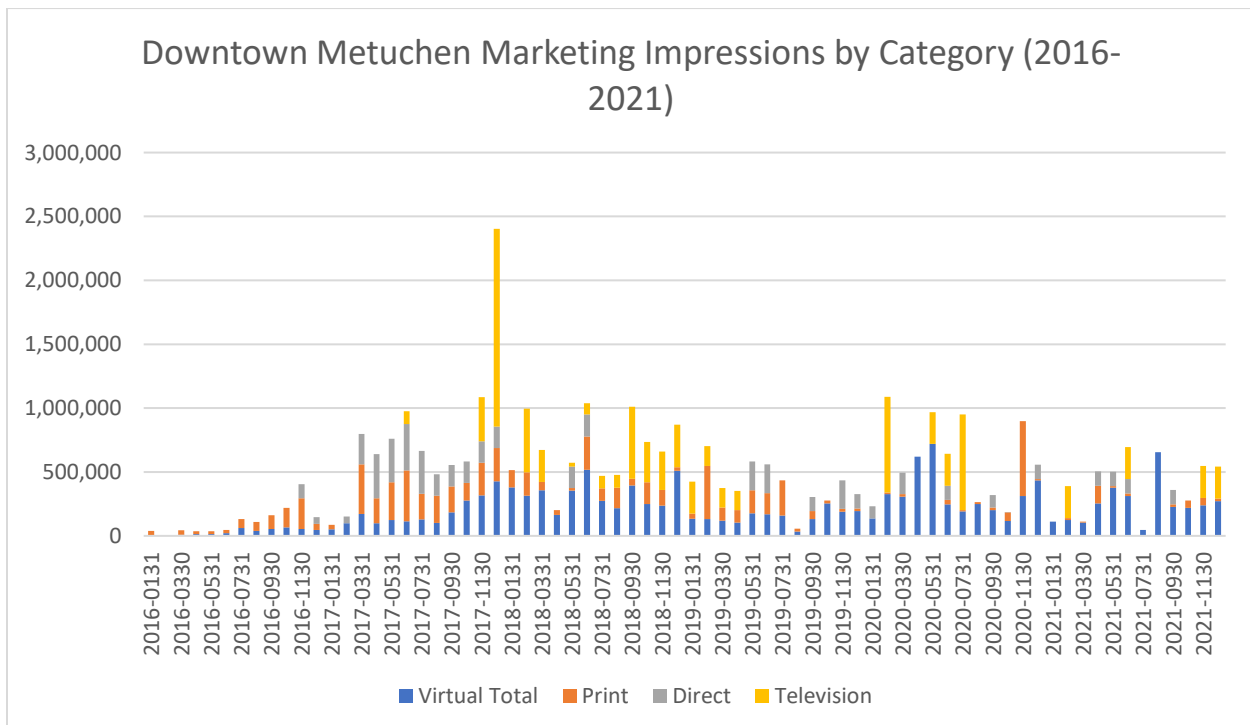
greater. Earned media impressions were 4,026,902 total. For these we spent \$4,488 for an average of \$0.02 per impression.

As audience increasingly moves to virtual platforms we have altered our mix to capture attention for the downtown.



MDA Instagram page.

Source	Follows 2021 (and in 2020)	% Increase
Facebook	4,336 follows (4,011 last year)	↑ 8.1%
Instagram	2,176 followers (1,747 last year)	↑ 24.6%
Twitter	778 followers (657 last year)	↑ 18.4%
Constant Contact	3,249 contacts (3,111 prior year)	↑ 4.4%



MDA Funding, 2016-2021



Since MDA was founded in 2016 over 35% of funding for MDA has come from sources other than the SID Assessment or the Borough Contribution. MDA has found

varied funding sources to support our work. We've also served as fiscal agent for different projects such as the Memorial Day yard signs and the Light up the Holidays.



Light up the Holidays, December 2021.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
SID Assessment	\$0	\$108,137	\$165,200	\$220,175	\$225,000	\$225,000	\$943,512
Borough Contribution	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$125,000	\$100,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$675,000
Sub-total	\$150,000	\$258,137	\$290,200	\$320,175	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$1,618,512
Other Revenue	\$250	\$30,134	\$21,348	\$39,952	\$755,081	\$59,037	\$905,802
Total Revenue	\$150,250	\$288,271¹	\$311,548	\$360,127	\$1,055,081	\$359,037	\$2,524,314

MDA Volunteer Hours, 2016-2021



A volunteer orientation was held in July 2021. We saw an increase in volunteer participation on all of our teams. Entire groups volunteered at different

times including the Peace Corps volunteers from the NJ Expo Center, Metuchen High School Student Council, and others. We had a unique situation in 2021 at some events when there were too many volunteers at times. That's a good problem that we're happy to have.



Volunteers working on New St, January 2021.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total Hours by Type	Total Value by Type
Standard Hours	3,197	2,915	4,686	4,219	3,418	4,519	22,954	\$459,080
Professional Hours	288	556	732	231	262	365	2,434	\$182,550
Total Hours	3,485	3,471	5,418	4,450	3,680	4,884	25,388	\$641,630
Total Value	\$85,540	\$100,000	\$148,620	\$101,705	\$88,010	\$117,755		

¹ Note listed as \$288,272 in audit because of use of rounded numbers.

Private Investment, 2016-2021



A total of \$614,851 of private investment was made in 2021. While several new developments are in the planning and design phase they have not yet been

constructed. Investment is only counted when a certificate of occupancy is issued once work is completed. So there will likely be a significant increase of private investment in 2022. A total of \$164,817,671 of private funds have been invested downtown since 2016.

Notable as the number of vacancies has gone down the pace of new business openings has slowed, also reducing the amount of private investment into storefronts.



Downtown Metro on Hillside Ave brought eighteen new housing units a block off Main Street.

Public Investment, 2016-2021



Metuchen has benefited from public investment from local, county, state, regional, and US government sources. This investment has gone to support businesses, make

physical improvements, and improve the overall business environment downtown. Many streets have been repaved, including Main Street, Middlesex Avenue, Pearl Street, and portions of New Street. A total of \$3,510,776 of public funds have been invested downtown since 2016.

On average Main Street programs generated \$32.56 of reinvestment for every \$1 dollar of public funds put into the program. In Metuchen the ROI is \$104.39 for every \$1 of Borough funding.



Pearl Street repaving project in 2018 brought attractive stamped asphalt.

PUBLIC ART

Metuchen has seen an impressive increase in the amount of public art commissions downtown since 2016. These may be viewed in detail on the Public Art page of the [MDA website](#). In 2021 the MDA Piano Project selected three New Jersey artists to paint pianos which were then placed outside during the summer. Performers were selected to play. The Metuchen Arts Council arranged booking of musicians and promoted the performances. In 2021 plans were initiated for a new mural to be installed on the east wall of Angie's Café at 275 Amboy Ave.

Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners through a grant award from the Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund" in 2021.



The Piano Project brought three colorful painted pianos downtown in 2021.

A New Mural in 2022 by Raul Ayala

Raul Ayala received public input through virtual meetings. Angie's Cafe at 275 Amboy Ave is a restaurant and bakery opened in 2016 by Angie and Edgar Quinonez, both from the Dominican Republic. They have been working with the MDA on plans for a mural to go on the east wall as part of other building improvements planned for the site. Artist and educator Raúl Ayala and his students from the Rutgers Mason Gross School of Fine Arts have been commissioned to design and install a mural for the café wall. Ayala is an experienced mural artist from Ecuador whose work features themes related to social justice, memory, immigration, and resilience. The MDA Public Art Policy guided the process, including seeking public input. The mural is now completed and ready to install as weather permits.

Childhood Memories is about remembering the joy and innocence of youth, and is intended to bring a sense of playfulness and a welcoming experience to the space where it will be installed. The central Flamboyant Tree image symbolizes the Dominican Republic and the universal themes of life, growth, strength, connection and support. The approximate 210 square foot mural will be executed on parachute cloth with acrylic paints off site with the Mason Gross students, and installed in spring 2022 with NovaGel (strong polymer gel)—a mural-making technique widely used in other cities. The mural will harmonize with a future outdoor dining space created in a portion of the parking lot facing Amboy Avenue.



Childhood Memories by Raul Ayala as approved for installation at Angie's Café, 275 Amboy Ave in 2022.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Business Champion Award – Joanne Cruz, Creative Twist Events

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Angela Piniero, Blue Parachute
- 2019 – Jimmy Katims and Jason Penedos, Lotsa Balls
- 2018 – Jenny Lai, Picture Perfect Studios
- 2017 – Jim and Olivia Keane, La Rosa Pizzeria and Restaurant
- 2016 – Colleen Hansen, Cai's Cafe

Creative Twist Events and founder Joanne Cruz have been active with Alliance initiatives from the start. From Pre-Prom, to Haunted Downtown, to Small Business Saturday – Creative Twist brings balloon arches, photo backdrops, red carpet rollouts, and their special contributions that bring a spirit of celebration to MDA promotions. This business had a successful spin-off in 2022 with Newmarket located on New Street.

District Owner Award – Edgar and Angie Quinonez, Angie's Cafe

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Fred Schmitt and Reidun Anderson, Schmitt Anderson Architects
- 2019 – Rich Mongelli, Mongelli LLC
- 2018 – Michael Ciesielka, Nexus Parking Systems
- 2017 – Jeff Jossell, Suburban Square, LLC

In February 2021 Edgar and Angela purchased the building their business has been located in since 2016. They also completed major interior renovations to make the dining area more welcoming for customers. In August 2021 the waterfall awnings were removed and replaced with attractive illuminated letters. Angie's Café has been working with the Public Art Team on a mural that will be installed in Spring 2022.

Promotion Award – Amarpreet Singh, Metuchen News

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Edna Epelu, Papillon & Company
- 2019 – Ian Fawcett
- 2018 – Linda Levine
- 2017 – Joanne Cruz
- 2016 – Bobbie Theivakumaran

After a major storefront renovation in 2019, Metuchen News has seen business grow significantly. Metuchen News frequently collaborates with MDA promotions including Movies Under the Stars, New Year's Party, and many other promotions. They have been active promoting their business on social media and provide variety for customers of all ages. They are the first to raise their hand and get involved.

Innovation Award – Alberto Buglione and Ivan Guarducci, Mangia Toscano

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Rob DeFillipis, Runner's High
- 2019 – John Manzo, BMG Meals and Joanne Cruz, A Creative Twist
- 2018 – Bernie Hetzel
- 2017 – Edward Wetzel
- 2016 – Elaine Edgcomb

The current owners of Mangia Toscano have committed themselves to continuous improvement since taking over the business in 2018. Interior renovations were followed by expansion of outdoor dining space that is beloved by all in town. During the pandemic in 2020 an awning was added, and then an attractive outdoor dining area. At the start of 2022 another interior and kitchen renovation will help Mangia Toscano better serve patrons. They've helped to strengthen the downtown with their cool and innovative ideas.

Storefront Improvement Award – Luisania Moronta, Pastry Lu

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Ryan Park, Menya Ramen House
- 2019 – Amarpreet Singh, Metuchen News
- 2018 – Mansi Khandelwal, The Kabab Factory
- 2017 – Rob DeFillipis, Runner's High

Pastry Lu opened a new business at 397 Main Street. Since opening in April 2021 they have become a much beloved destination downtown with their baked goods, desserts, cakes, and more. MDA grants assisted with interior renovations, a new sign, a new blade sign, and infrared heaters for outdoor dining.

Public Service Award – Linda Koskoski, Council Member

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Melissa Perilstein, Borough Administrator
- 2019 – Building and Zoning Department
- 2018 – Brandon Uhlig, Metuchen Media
- 2017 – Allison Inserro, Council Member
- 2016 – Fred Hall, DPW Director

Linda has been a strong champion of downtown since having her own business – Marafiki - downtown several years ago. For the past four years Linda Koskoski has served as Borough President. In that role she helped to revive the Human Relations Commission. She also has served on the MDA Board since 2018 and has been involved in all aspects of the organization and the work that we do.

Board Service Award – Jacquie Zuvich, Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce

Past awardees:

- 2020 – Mark Harris, Metuchen Arts Council
- 2019 – Jay Muldoon, Borough Administrator
- 2018 – Grace Shackney, Metuchen Arts Council

Jacquie has been an absolute and enthusiastic supporter of downtown, the work of MDA, the work of the Borough, and all of our businesses. And while the work of the Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce has ended, Jacquie will surely continue to be a vocal advocate for businesses in Metuchen.

Volunteer of the Year – Jay Muldoon

Past awardees

- 2020 – Linda Levine
- 2019 – Bernie Hetzel
- 2018 – Elaine Edgcomb
- 2017 – Dan Cea
- 2016 – Bobbie Theivakumaran

Jay while serving on Borough Council helped to identify the need for a Main Street program with stable funding for a Special Improvement District in Metuchen. Since formation of the Alliance he has served on the Executive Committee and as Secretary. Other teams he has volunteered with include the Planting Team, Communications Team, and the Grant Team. Jay is often a hidden unknown in all he does and all he commits to from getting his hands dirty planting, to holding down tents on the plaza, to all he does.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR CY 2021 (Unaudited)

Revenue

SID Contribution	225,000
Borough Contribution	75,000
Contributions	59,037
Total Revenue	\$359,037

*Expenses

Program Services

Education and Tech	195
Feeding the Front Line	88
Placemaking	17,928
MSNJ and Reopening Grants	58,766
Storefront Grant Fund	33,135
Merchant Videos	10,500
Street Improvement and Maintenance	80,131
Promotions and Advertising	40,243
Communications	6,143
Total Program Expenses	\$247,129

General and Administrative

Salary	78,000
Salary related expenses	11,758
Contract Services	23,188
Office	2,573
Rent	10,800
Utilities	2,347
Facility and Equipment	479
Travel and Meetings	2,233
Insurance	3,685
Dues and Membership	1,375
Volunteer Training	3,817
Miscellaneous	653
Total General and Administrative	\$140,908

Total Expenses **\$388,037**

Increase (Decrease in Net Assets) **(\$20,500)**

Net Assets at Beginning of Period **\$83,811**

Net Assets at End of Period **\$63,311**