

Metuchen Downtown Alliance Board of Trustees
Meeting Minutes
Friday, January 13, 2023, 8:30am
Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street

In attendance: Diana Callinan, Dan Cea, Joanne Cruz, Jason Delia, Jenny Lai, Sean Massey, Lynne Mueller, Jay Muldoon, Angie Quinonez, Gary Tilbor, Bobbie Theivakumaran. Not attending: Jace McColley, Amar Singh, Stuart Schooler. Staff- Dawn Mackey

Welcome: In the absence of a Chairperson, Jason Delia opened the meeting to present the slate of nominees to fill the vacant Executive Board seats of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. The slate presented was Bobbie Theivakumaran - Chair; Gary Tilbor - Vice Chair; Jason Delia - Secretary. No other nominations came forward. A motion was made by Gary Tilbor to approve the slate and was seconded by Lynne Mueller. Motion passed. The Board of Trustees thanked outgoing Secretary Jay Muldoon for his time and is glad that he will continue in his role as the Borough Administrator's designee to the Board. ED Dawn Mackey discussed the importance of the relationship between the MDA and the Borough and the important role Mr. Muldoon has, and will continue to serve.

The meeting was turned over to new Chairperson Bobbie Theivakumaran who welcomed new Trustees Angie Quinonez (business owner) and Sean Massey (property owner). Each provided a short introduction of themselves. Minutes from the December Board meeting were reviewed, and a motion was made to approve the minutes. Motion passed.

Chairperson's Report

Ms. Theivakumaran provided a reminder to all that the MDA Annual Meeting will take place the following Monday at 7:30pm to be held at Suite Metuchen (406 Main St). Information about the structure of the annual meeting was shared.

Secretary's Report

No report

Executive Director's Report

Dawn Mackey thanked everyone who assisted with the creation of the AARP grant project "Conversation Corner". She discussed what the project is meant to achieve and informed the Board that the mosaic table will be installed shortly.

A draft of the strategic plan refresh has been received and is being reviewed by Ms. Mackey and the Executive Board. Once finalized, the plan will be shared with the Board of Trustees. More information will come but one of the big shifts is a move away from "family-friendly" to towards an "inclusive destination". This shift will open up more economic possibilities. Further discussion was had about this potential new strategic direction and it was positively received.

Ms. Mackey provided details about how the American Girl doll Kavi Sharma, whose backstory includes her hometown as Metuchen, came together. She thanked a number of people for helping once the news came out including Chairperson Theivakumaran and the events team for quickly pivoting to turn the New Year party into a Bollywood themed event to celebrate. Volunteer Sue Cea for heading into NY to obtain one of the dolls from the American Girl store. Ms. Theivakumaran and Mr. Delia who appeared with the doll on News 12 the next morning. Ms. Mackey noted how much news this has generated and noted that this is a global brand dropping the "Metuchen" throughout the country. Ms. Mackey is working on bringing the author of the Kavi Sharma book

to town for a reading and panel discussion in the fall. Also organizing a town-wide tea party. The NJ Devils are interested in having Kavi at an upcoming game.

Other notable happenings include Metuchen being a finalist for “NJ Best” destination town of 2024. Actor Kelsey Grammer was recently at Hailey’s to promote his new beer which was picked up by a number of news outlets. With all of this attention Ms. Callinan asked about the possibility of money being available for store refreshes in the spring.

Treasurer’s Report

No report

Borough Update

Jason Delia reported that progress continues to be made towards getting a request for applications out for the three retail cannabis businesses. The hope is to have it out sometime in Q1. The Borough had their reorganization meeting on the 1st, Councilmember Rasmussen and Councilmember Hyman were sworn in for new three year terms. Council President Delia was selected to serve another year as President.

Arts Council Report

Lynne Mueller reported on three upcoming events being put on by the Arts Council.

1. “Windows of Understanding” will feature artwork from four artists and be placed in the windows of the Berkshire Hathaway offices (564 Middlesex Ave). A public reception will be held on March 11th from 1:00 to 3:00pm.
2. The jazz documentary “A Great Day in Harlem” will be held at the library (480 Middlesex Ave) on January 29th at 2:30.
3. Valentine’s Day event will be held on February 14th from 7:00 - 9:00pm in the Parlor (15 Station Pl) featuring the Anderson Brothers Quartet performing love songs.

Organization Team

No Report.

Storefront Team

No report.

Promotion Team

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported on recent and upcoming promotions:

1. The New Year event was a huge success with a packed Plaza. Overall a very successful holiday season.
2. King Strength and Performance (65 Pearl St) are having an event in March for women’s history month. Chairperson Theivakumaran encouraged other businesses to find ways they could participate as well.
3. Lunar New Year celebration will take place on January 28th 1:00 - 2:30pm in the Plaza and along Main St. There will be a lion dancer performance parade, Korean dancers and drummers.
4. Plans for Winter Restaurant Week are coming together for the week of February 20th to 26th and are being led by Teddy Kappas from The Greek on Main

Communications Team

Dan Cea reiterated all of the great media attention that was brought on by the announcement by American Girl of Kavi Sharma. Social media stats were up by 200% due mostly to the announcement. Eventbrite events did well, selling out the Elf on the Shelf event and a number of people registered for the New Year celebration.

Innovation Team

No report.

Public Art Team

No report

Ribbon Cutting Team

Jenny Lai and Diana Callinan visited Essie's Cuts Barbershop (443 Main St) but they have been unable to sync up with the owner to plan a ribbon cutting. They plan to keep trying. Gardenia's has moved to a new location and has become an affiliate member of the Alliance. They are having a grand opening on January 28th with a ribbon cutting with the Mayor set for 2:15pm.

Old Business

No old business to report.

New Business

Jenny Lai is planning an event to coincide with National Love Your Pet Day on February 19

th. Current ideas include photos, a Dog parade down to the Plaza. More details to come and she is working to bring other businesses in on the event as well.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:29am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, February 10, 2023, at 8:30am at the Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street.

Submitted by Jason Delia