

**Metuchen Downtown Alliance Board of Trustees**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Friday, February 10, 2023, 8:30am**  
**Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street**

**In attendance:** Diana Callinan, Dan Cea, Joanne Cruz, Jason Delia, Jenny Lai, Sean Massey, Jace McColley, Jay Muldoon, Angie Quinonez, Stuart Schooler, Amar Singh, Meg Loftus Suchan, Gary Tilbor, Bobbie Theivakumaran. Not attending: none. Staff: Dawn Mackey. Public: Eric Berger.

**Welcome:** Chairperson Bobbie Theivakumaran called the meeting to order at 8:34am. Ms. Theivakumaran welcomed Mr. Berger as well as new Arts Council liaison Ms. Suchan. Ms. Suchan introduced herself to the group and gave some information about her background and how it relates to the arts. The Board welcomed Ms. Suchan and they look forward to working with her.

Minutes from the January Board meeting were reviewed, and a motion was made to approve the minutes by Mr. Massey, seconded by Ms. Callinan. Motion passed.

**Chairperson's Report**

Ms. Theivakumaran reported that she and the Executive board have been working with ED Mackey on closing out items from 2022 including the annual report, the strategic plan refresh and the 2023 budget. All of those items have been provided to the Board of Trustee and Ms. Theivakumaran asked if there were any further questions.

Ms. Mackey provided highlights of the 2023 budget.

Ms. Theivakumaran and Ms. Mackey gave highlights of the strategic plan refresh.

A motion was made to approve the budget, Mr. Massey, seconded by Mr. Cea. Motion passed.

**Secretary's Report**

No report

**Executive Director's Report**

Ms. Mackey gave an update on the AARP grant project, "Conversation Corner". The mosaic table has been completed and will be installed soon.

The budget and annual report will be presented to the Borough Council on Monday, February 13th. Ms. Mackey thanked everyone for their help assembling the annual report and budget.

News 12 NJ visited Metuchen on Friday the 3rd to highlight Metuchen businesses. They visited Beans and Bread, Cai's, Brewed Awakening, Terrace Plants, Tiny Town and Awesomeyo's Kitchen. Subsequently, Awesomeyo was commissioned to create a custom cake which she presented on air to the New 12 weatherman later in the week.

Ms. Mackey reported on several new businesses coming soon including Beans and Bread's soft open March 1st, Latin Port should be a few months away, Rita's which opened on February 9th and Hummus Republic whose opening is TBD.

**Treasurer's Report**

Mr. Schooler had no formal report other than what was already discussed regarding the budget.

### **Borough Update**

Mr. Delia shared information about a new mobile app that the Borough will be trying called Simplicity. Both Ms. Mackey and Mr. Cea attended an introduction meeting as the Borough would like the MDA and its events to be included in this app.

Mr. Delia also shared details about an upcoming "Parking Summit" that Mr. Muldoon is leading on behalf of the Borough to find ways to encourage further use of the deck, rethink demand based pricing for parking, and investigate technology solutions to help with parking issues in the downtown. Mr. Delia and Mr. Muldoon asked the Board to send any thoughts or ideas related to this before the 23rd.

### **Arts Council Report**

Ms. Suchan informed the Board of the upcoming Valentine's Day jazz promotion at The Parlor.

She also informed the Board about the "Windows of Understanding" art exhibit currently running in Metuchen and in neighboring towns. She invited all to a gallery reception on March 11th from 1-3 and the Berkshire Hathaway offices.

### **Organization Team**

No Report.

### **Storefront Team**

A discussion was had about winding down the store front grant program as part of the 2023 budget. Many storefronts have been improved and there is a desire to focus attention on the general downtown areas. One idea to help improve the overall downtown was to use sandwich boards that could be customized by a local artist for businesses who would like one. This would create a cohesive look throughout the downtown but be customized to each business. This idea was well received.

### **Promotion Team**

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported on the success of the Lunar New Year celebration. Winter restaurant week will be February 20th - 26th. The team has already collected and posted many of the menus. The MDA has partnered with the Human Relations Commission for a Black History Month exhibit. Posters have been added to many of the downtown business windows with a theme of "Black History Trailblazers".

### **Communications Team**

Mr. Cea reported on his efforts to increase follower count on the MDA social media platforms. He engaged with NJ.com to get ads for our restaurant week campaign on their homepage and has received 50k impressions so far. The Lunar New Year video that was produced is performing well on Instagram and Facebook.

Mr. Cea let the board know about plans in May for some contests the first of which will be for a Weber grill provided by See More. Finally, Mr. Cea was able to get the "Metuchen Town Plaza" added to Google maps as an official location. This is important because now people looking to attend events can use that as an address when they are looking for directions rather than a nearby business as had to be done in the past.

### **Public Art Team**

As mentioned earlier the mosaic table is complete and we will look to have a ribbon cutting for Conversation Corner in next two weeks. The Art Team is looking to find a focus project for 2023. They are also thinking about

how the arts can be involved in a celebration of the semi finalist nomination for Great American Main Street and a potential win. One area of interest is art work under the Main Street train trestle.

### **Ribbon Cutting Team**

Ms. Lai and Ms. Callinan gave an update on ribbon cuttings as follows:

- Rita's Italian Ice opened but is waiting until warmer months for a ribbon cutting
- DiCosmos Italian Ice is also looking to do a ribbon cutting in the spring
- Meximodo has been contacted but no date is set yet for opening
- Hair Loft will have a 10-year anniversary ribbon cutting in August
- Attempts to contact Essie's Cuts have been unsuccessful so far. Ms. Cruz to help.
- Stretch Lab ribbon cutting scheduled for March 11th at 2

Mr. McColley mentioned the new business Classic Tattoo Parlor and will help put the team in contact.

Mr. Schooler expects Starbucks to be open some time in September.

Ms. Mackey thinks Atlantic Health will be open in April.

Mr. Muldoon presumes Manasquan Bank will want to do a ribbon cutting for their new building.

Ms. Theivakumaran believes Beans and Bread will want a ribbon cutting a few weeks after their soft opening on March 1st.

### **Old Business**

No old business to report.

### **New Business**

No new business to report.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:34am.

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

Submitted by Jason Delia