

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

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

Welcome:

Executive Director Mackey called the meeting to order at 8:33.

Secretary's Report

Mr. Delia asked for a motion to approve minutes from September. Ms. Theivakumaran moved, Ms. Loftus Suchan seconded. Motion approved. Mr. Delia relayed to the Board that he has worked with Ian Fawcett to get all of this year's minutes up onto our website.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Schooler provided an update on the EIDL loan. The SBA has been very cooperative and we've been given information on the balance that is due and payoff amount. A more in depth conversation on how to proceed regarding repayment will be on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr. Schooler reminded the board that his term on the Board will be ending at the end of the year.

Executive Director's Report

ED Mackey attended a community transformation workshop this month. This is part of her continuing education as she works towards her Main St. certification. Ms. Mackey has also been asked to speak on a panel at the upcoming Downtown NJ conference on October 19th in Red Bank. The panel is titled "Big Events, Big Opportunities". Finally, Ms. Mackey spoke about her desire to find opportunities to "professionalize" our work moving forward where appropriate.

Borough Update

The Borough began rolling out the parking changes that have been worked on for the better part of this year. These include 15 minute free parking spaces, a new parking map, changes to street meters, addition of two new short term parking lots, and promotion of the parking deck. Mr. Delia thanked Ms. Mackey and Mr. Muldoon for all of their help putting together these parking changes. Also, last month Manasquan bank officially dedicated the former drive through to the Borough and a ceremony took place at Thomas Peterson Park. The first iteration of the park includes lighting, tables, a decorative wall, and updated landscaping. He thanked the DPW, BA Melissa Perilstein, and ED Mackey for their work.

Arts Council Report

Ms. Loftus Suchan informed the board that the Jazz fest that took place in the Halsey Lot went well. The organizers learned a lot about the logistics of utilizing that space.

Promotion Team

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported on the most recent promotional events that took place. The townwide tea party with American Girl author Varsha Bajaj. In addition to a well attended panel on "Why Representation Matters", Ms. Bajaj also visited the public schools and gave three presentations. The tea party took advantage of the newly opened Peterson Park and the Board thanked board member Joanne Cruz for her work decorating the park for that event.

In coordination with the High School, the MDA hosted Murr Comedy Night with nationally recognized personality James "Murr" Murray from the TV Show Impractical Jokers. Businesses ran specials that night and Murr promoted the event, and Metuchen downtown, to his 1.6m social media followers. He also shot two promotional videos for the MDA including one for the upcoming wrestling event.

Wrestling once again took place on the Plaza. Despite the fact that the event needed to be moved to Sunday at the last minute due to weather, it was still very well attended.

The very popular Haunted Downtown event is coming on Saturday 10/28 from 11-4. This is always one of our biggest events of the year. Like last year New St will be closed between Main and Pearl. Many of the same characters will be back including Crunchy the Dinosaur. New this year the Metuchen Recreation Department will be having their pumpkin carving contest at the Senior Center. Also, NYC based a cappella group The Scarolers will be downtown for zombie caroling.

Next month will be small business Saturday which kicks off a month long activities for the holidays. Peterson Park will be activated with a holiday popup and we are looking to have mulled wine and or hot cider that day. The intention is to drive more shopping to our downtown by providing a festive atmosphere. The big push for the holiday this year is to push for people to shop local first. This will include professionally created reels (Instagram) and graphics.

Communications Team

Mr. Cea submitted his report prior to the meeting. The downtown will be featured in a two page spread of the Middlesex County magazine. Social media posts were created for the tea party, Murr and Downtown rumble events. Promotion has begun for Haunted Downtown. The NJT "See what all the fuss is about" signs are still up at various train stations throughout the state. This was only meant to be run for a month or two but they continue to keep them. Mr. Tilbor asked if it might be possible to work with them to switch them out for a new poster promoting "shop small". ED Mackey to look into that.

Mr. Cea also helped produce the video that announced the various parking changes alongside Mr. Uhlig.

Public Art Team

Mr. Berger reported that the MDA is working with a Middlesex County funded artist to add a new piece of public art in front of Peter Klein's building on Pearl St. There is a meeting scheduled for next week to discuss and he will have more to report at the next meeting.

Ribbon Cutting Team

Ms. Lai does not have any ribbon cutting scheduled at the moment but will be reaching out to the new bubble tea location as well as FK Living. Mr. Schooler informed the Board that the new daycare facility will be ready within 60 days and Mr. Berger let the Board know about Be My Guest which will be moving to Station PI and will be looking for a ribbon cutting sometime next month.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:39am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, November 16, 2023, at 8:30am at the Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street.

Submitted by Jason Delia