

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

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

Welcome:

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

Chairperson's Report

Ms. Theivakumaran provided the board with an update on ED Mackey's annual review which took place over the last month. The Board discussed salary adjustments to be made for Ms. Mackey in the new year.

Secretary's Report

Mr. Delia asked for a motion to approve minutes from November. Ms. Loftus Suchan moved, Mr. McColley seconded. Motion approved

Treasurer's Report

No report

Executive Director's Report

ED Mackey provided the Board with a brief review of the past year which was by all accounts wildly successful for the organization. Discussion was had about looking towards 2024 and how to set up the Board to be sustainable. Mr. Schooler commented about the history of the Board's accounting practices and the status of the EIDL loan. The Board is looking to have more regular monthly reports on the budget in 2024. Mr. Berger commented how budget updates would help the various teams as they plan their projects. Ms. Theivakumaran agreed.

ED Mackey brought up that some of the older art projects around town are beginning to deteriorate and there is no budget built in for these projects for upkeep and maintenance. She suggested that in the future a budget should be included for ongoing maintenance or removal (ex. piano disposal). Mr. Schooler suggested a general maintenance budget could be created.

Ms. Mackey gave an update on several incidents that have occurred including a break in at Metuchen News, vandalism at Accupunk and the Seward Johnson statues being toppled and damaged. She reminded everyone to be vigilant and consider increased lighting and security cameras.

The Executive Board will be meeting to discuss restarting the organization and economic committees. ED Mackey met with her fellow panelist from the most recent Downtown NJ conference who is from the NJ EDA. There are many small grants available and other small business resources that the EDA has available. Ms. Mackey is considering hosting a resource fair with the EDA in Metuchen. The Board liked the idea.

Borough Update

Mr. Delia informed the Board that the Borough introduced an ordinance that would give the Borough the authority to pursue condemnation of the property at the former gas station property on the corner of Main Street and Amboy Avenue which is within the district. Brief discussion was had about the property including the

environmental issues. It was mentioned that the EDA has programs that can assist with environmental cleanup.

Arts Council Report

Ms. Loftus Suchan gave a brief update that the Arts Council is still planning events for 2024.

Promotion Team

Ms. Theivakumaran reported on the various winter promotions that are ongoing. "Gingerbread Takeover" will be on December 9th which includes a gingerbread house competition, a life-sized gingerbread man running around downtown, and other gingerbread related activities. The following weekend will feature carolers throughout the downtown from the Hub City Quartet. And finally look to for "T'was the Weekend Before Christmas" where it is too late for online shopping and local businesses can take advantage. On the 23rd gift wrapping will be available inside of Suite Metuchen. Simply show your receipt to get free wrapping. Lastly, planning is underway for the annual "Eve of the Eve" celebration on the 30th.

Communications Team

Mr. Cea informed the Board that our ad was once again on the front page of the Star Ledger for small business Saturday. The communications team had to move to a paid version of Evenbrite because we have gone over their event limit. It comes with some good reporting and other features that could be useful.

Mr. Cea is in the middle of planning the marketing for all of the current and upcoming events. In the new year he is looking to do more "instagram" style posts which have been successful. These would be more visual in nature. Also looking to take advantage of "stories". Also for 2024, he is thinking about trying to bring in social media "influencers". Mr. Uhlig produced a small business Saturday video. Mr. Delia helped put together a video compilation of all of our ribbon cuttings from this year. The plan is to play the video on the Atlantic Health billboard truck at Eve of the Eve. Mr. Muldoon suggested sending the video to the National Main Street Center.

Public Art Team

Mr. Berger told the Board the we have applied for and made it to the second round for a Middlesex County art grant. Should learn more in February. This grant is to be used for the mural on the side of the Starbucks building. Part of this grant required the organization to attend an ADA compliance workshop. Both Ms. Mackey and Mr. Berger attended and recommended that others take it as well. Now that we are in the second round the art team is working with the artist for a proper rendering of the potential mural.

The art project at 16 Pearl St is continuing. The artist and building owner have met and have a concept. The concept includes two panels in front of the building and will use recycled materials creating a 3D effect. This is also a Middlesex County grant.

The Roig mural opening took place. There was a good turnout despite the weather and the Mayor was in attendance. ED Mackey will need to finish the project by completing a report for the grantee now that the project is closed.

Ribbon Cutting Team

Ms. Lai and Ms. Callinan let us know that we are all caught up on ribbon cuttings for 2023. The first cutting in 2024 will likely be at Yestercades. They asked Mr. Schooler about the daycare facility on his property. The building is finished but a childcare license will not be issued for some time. Be My Guest has opened recently and the team will look to schedule a ribbon cutting in the new year.

Old Business

No old business to report.

New Business

A discussion was had on the parking changes. ED Mackey thanked all of the volunteers who helped so much this year with decorations, setting up and breaking down events, and everything else to make our downtown special.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:32am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, January 12, 2024, at 8:30am at the Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street.

Submitted by Jason Delia