

Metuchen Downtown Alliance Board of Trustees
Meeting Minutes
Friday, January 12, 2024, 8:30am
Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street

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

Welcome:

Executive Director Mackey called the meeting to order at 8:38.

Chairperson's Report

Ms. Theivakumaran welcomed the Board to the first meeting of 2024.

Secretary's Report

Mr. Delia asked for a motion to approve the minutes of December 2023. Ms. Loftus Suchan moved, Mr. McColley seconded. Motion approved.

Treasurer's Report

No report

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Mackey informed the board that Metuchen was named the Jersey Best magazines Destination of the Year for 2024. We were up against five other towns across the state. We had been told of the nomination earlier in the year and informed that they would be "observing" us all year. Ms. Mackey had invited Jersey's Best to all of our events during 2023 and followed up each event with photos. We plan to make the most of this award and use it throughout the year to promote the downtown. Ms. Mackey had a call with them on ways we can utilize the magazine. They are currently creating branding for us that includes "Destination of the Year". We will be getting window clings, digital logos, etc.

The Annual Meeting is being finalized and will be at the end of January. Holding it at Suite Metuchen again.

ED Mackey informed the Board of her need for a bit of support for office functions. The budget has allocated up to 40 hours a month for this type of support but ED Mackey expects to only need about 20 hours each month. Perhaps more at the beginning. The idea is to keep it fluid depending on need. Linda Levine has been identified as the person who will be filling this role.

Ms. Mackey was excited to announce reinstatement of the Economic Vitality and Organization committee. Mr. Muldoon to serve as chair.

Also, in 2024 we will be reactivating the Design Committee. According to a call Ms. Mackey had with the National Main Street organization, there are new credentials to remain accredited and that includes having active committees for all four pillars. Ms. Theivakumaran gave more details about how this will work with both the Public Art team and Arts Council liaison. A conversation was had about the Arts Council seat on the board changing from a voting seat to an ex-officio liaison role. The old seat would be converted to a resident seat. An official proposal was made for the Board to endorse that change. A motion to that effect was made by Ms. Theivakumaran, seconded by Mr. Cea. Motion passed with unanimous consent.

The MDA budget will be presented to the Council in late January or early February.

Borough Update

Mr. Delia informed the board of the reorganization of the Borough Council. Mr. Delia to remain as Council President and liaison to the MDA. He discussed changes to the informational stickers that will be added to the parking meters to more clearly indicate how to use a credit card and how to use the 10 free minutes. He thanked the “parking elves” for their feedback on using the meters.

Arts Council Report

Ms. Loftus Suchan will be sharing a copy of MACs draft agenda for the year. She is looking to find ways to collaborate with each other when appropriate. Many of the programs will remain the same as last with a few new ones.

Promotion Team

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported that the promotions team had a good December. Every weekend hosted a promotional event for the holidays. Added this year were the parking elves, downtown bucks and Festivus.

The Promotions team met with the Borough to share the MDA’s calendar for the year. We were informed that the Kids Takeover event is a safety concern for the Metuchen Police Department and wouldn’t be able to be done the same way in 2024. The team is looking for ways to save elements of that event in some way as it is popular.

The Lunar New Year celebration is coming up with HRC on February 24th. There will be Lion dancers, Korean drum performers, martial arts, etc. This is a big year as it is the Year of the Dragon.

The team is running a new Valentines Day campaign, “Downtown Candygrams”. A person can purchase a candygram from one of the participating businesses as a gift for another person. That person comes to the business to redeem. There are plans for lots of decorations throughout downtown for Valentines Day including painted windows, a kissing booth, etc.

Plans are coming together for restaurant week. Looking to brand it as “24 in ‘24”. We are asking businesses to assemble \$24 specials for that week. This event is most successful when it is driven by the restaurants. Teddy from The Greek to take lead once again.

Ways to promote more types of businesses. Prof services, dog, for example. Cover less served.

Working on a new promotion, “Game On Metuchen”. Tie in many of our businesses with the opening of Yestercades. Places like Clicks and Bricks, Boba Tea, Genus Boni, and others have games or can easily tie in games for the event.

Communications Team

Mr. Cea updated the Board and expressed his intention to promote some of the less covered businesses throughout the winter. This would include professional services, pets services, and others.

New this year Mr. Cea will be reaching out to “influencers” to encourage them to come to Downtown Metuchen. He has a list of 7 to 8 identified already. Looking for people who focus on or live in NJ. Ms. Cruz inquired about the social media class idea that was floated last year. A discussion was had about the classes that were offered in the past.

Also new this year will be a larger focus on Instagram. In the past the focus has been Facebook and resharing to Instagram This year content will be made with Instagram as the primary outlet and then re-share to Facebook. Also looking to do more Instagram Reels. Mr. Massey began a discussion about other ways to reach people beyond social media.

Public Art Team

Mr. Berger let the Board know that the posters on the Forum have been switched out. There is one more fresh round of art left to put up. We are waiting to find out if we have received the Middlesex County grant for Starbucks mural.

Ribbon Cutting Team

Ms. Lai told the Board that the next ribbon cutting will be for Yestercades. No date yet but hoping for the beginning of February. She will also try to get in touch with the new nail lounge, Aria as well as Be My Guest to schedule cuttings.

Old Business

No old business to report.

New Business

No new business

Meeting was adjourned at 9:49am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, February 9, 2024, at 8:30am at the Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street.

Submitted by Jason Delia