

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

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

Welcome:

Meeting was called to order at 8:37.

The meeting began by welcoming Jay Muldoon who spoke about his role as interim Director of the Parking Authority. He shared an FAQ document that he has been developing and discussed and shared a parking information card / handout. A discussion was had about possible need for better signage.

Chairperson's Report

Ms. Theivakumaran informed the Board about the Borough's efforts to have Peterson Park included on NJ's Black Heritage Trail. Chairperson Theivakumaran will be writing a letter of support to be included in the application and asked the Board for its support. A question was asked if this designation would prohibit things like alterations or other park improvements. Ms. Koskoski assured that it would not as this is not being added as a historically preserved place, it is for a list of places to visit.

Secretary's Report

Mr. Delia asked for the minutes of the February meeting to be approved. Moved by Ms. Theivakumaran, seconded by Ms. Loftus Suchan. Motion approved.

Mr. Delia informed the Board that former Chair Eric Berger is still listed on the MDA bank accounts and the bank has requested his name be removed by a motion from the Board. Ms. Theivakumaran made the motion to remove Mr. Berger from the account(s), seconded by Mr. Massey. Motion approved.

Berger - Bobbie sean

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Mackey informed the Board that we are still in need of a volunteer for Treasurer.

Executive Director's Report

ED Mackey presented the proposed 2024 Budget to the Borough Council at the Council meeting the previous Monday. The budget is calling for an increase of \$50k over last year. She has been working with the Borough CFO who has advised that the MDA should make this adjustment. The budget has not needed to be increased over the last few years as the MDA had been successful in securing funds made available for pandemic recovery. Those funds are no longer available and the \$50k increase will supplement the loss of that funding.

This year Ms. Mackey will be reinstating storefront grants program. She will work with the Economic Vitality committee and others to create an application process. ED Mackey's position is that revitalizing storefronts doesn't only benefit the recipient of the grant. Improving storefronts elevates the entire district.

Main St NJ offering 2024 transformation grants for which only accredited Main St organizations can apply. Ms. Mackey worked together with various Board members yesterday to get our application in for \$140k. This group walked the district to identify the best project idea. A decision was made to focus on the New St corridor.

Through a grant, the Borough will be reconstructing many of the sidewalks along New St this spring. With that the various pandemic era sidewalk structures will need to be removed. This grant will provide funding for more permanent, appropriate structures. It would also add electrical infrastructure on the plaza to light trees and to allow for events to utilize the electricity without blowing circuits. Finally, a stamped cobblestone treatment, similar to Roig mural alley, would be added to Imagination Alley.

ED Mackey attended a workshop put on by Middlesex County related to the art grant programs. The County will be creating a website for all communities who've received grants to upload the results and provide descriptions of the work.

Borough Update

Mr. Delia informed the Board that an ordinance was introduced to remove the MDA liaison role from the Human Relations Commission. He also discussed the conversations he had related to updating MDA by-laws. The recommendation of the Borough attorney is to proceed as we have in the past where the by-law change is enacted per MDA guidelines and the Borough ordinance change would follow.

Mr. Delia mentioned the New St sidewalk project date to which Linda Koskoski gave more details. Expected to start April 1st. Ms. Koskoski informed the Board that the Borough is working on a pamphlet that will describe the processes required for new businesses. Expect to have that completed in the coming next weeks. An update was also provided on the Main St grant.

Arts Council Report

Ms. Loftus Suchan told the Board about the Art Council's schedule moving along as planned. She also mentioned the recent workshop put on by the Borough regarding committees and commissions.

Promotion Team

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported that the promotion for Valentine's Day was a fun event. Would look to do something similar next year. Lunar New Year was once again a success. Peterson Park helped circulate people throughout the district and a lot was learned. Restaurant week will begin April 6th. Encouraged restaurants to get their specials in as soon as possible.

Economic Vitality / Organization Team

Mr. Muldoon will be chairing this committee and the first meeting will be happening following the conclusion of the Board meeting.

Communications Team

Mr. Cea was not in attendance but ED Mackey let the Board know that Mr. Cea is working with Brandon Uhlig on a rapid fire style promotional video.

Public Art Team

Work continues on the Starbucks mural project. The Pearl St project is complete and just needs to be installed. The plan is to get that done before the beginning of April if possible. A kickoff celebration is being planned.

Ribbon Cutting Team

Jenny Lai discussed the ribbon cuttings for Yetercasdes, Aria Nail and Be My Guest. Next on the list will be Ram and Rooster, Starbucks, and Everbrook. No dates available yet for any of those.

Old Business

No old business to report.

New Business

No new business

Meeting was adjourned at 9:33am.

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

Submitted by Jason Delia