

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

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

Welcome:

Meeting called to order at 8:37am.

Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Theivakumaran informed the Board about the latest accolade the Borough received, Money Magazine's 50 Best Places to Live in America. This isn't something the Borough/MDA applied or paid for. Completely organic. We discussed adding an image/logo to the MDA and Borough website.

Secretary's Report

Mr. Delia asked for the minutes of the March meeting to be approved. Moved by Ms. Theivakumaran, seconded by Mr. Massey. Motion approved.

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 spoke about the Summer Concert series that is being planned by the Borough / Mayor. Looking to host two concerts this year with different themes. Some potential performers were discussed as well as potential involvement of the MDA in those events. Concerts tentatively scheduled for July 10th and 30th.

ED Mackey provided an update on the ongoing audit. This year's Main St Conference is coming in May. Both Ms. Mackey and the Borough's Director of Economic Development Ms. Koskoski will attend.

Borough Update

Mr. Delia informed the Board that both the ordinance to remove the MDA liaison role from the Human Relations Commission and the 15 minute parking space enforcement ordinance were passed. Construction on New St sidewalks is underway. He confirmed that the ordinance to allow breweries in the business districts was passed last year along with the change for arcades.

Mr. Delia also provided an update on the Forum Theater including the recent visit by the Governor and the new potential source of funding available through tax credits.

Parking Update

Mr. Muldoon reiterated that the 15 minute parking enforcement is starting and that the enforcement officers will be giving a little leeway at first. The parking handouts he showed the Board at the last meeting have been finalized and will be going to print. Mr. Muldoon along with another consultant are working on ideas for improving parking signage in the downtown. He will be looking for some MDA input as the project moves further along.

Mr. Berger asked about capacity at the surface lots. Both Halsey St and Penn Ave have availability.

Arts Council Report

Ms. Loftus Suchan told the Board that the Arts Council had met with the Mayor to discuss some next steps on the future of the Forum. This group will be helping with messaging and during the public input sessions. She informed the Board that the Council updated their by-laws to be a more sustainable organization. Planning continues for the Jazz Fest and PorchFest (if possible). An a capella group will be performing in Peterson Park on August 2nd at 7pm.

Promotion Team

Chairperson Theivakumaran reported that the Townwide Garage Sale is on April 20th and that the Downtown businesses are encouraged to have a sidewalk sale that day. Good opportunity to move older inventory. Sidewalk sales also give people the opportunity and easy way to experience your store and check out your business.

Downtown Loves Moms event being planned for May 4th which will also feature a Star Wars theme. Should be more low-key than in the past. There will not be a bazaar on the Plaza. Pre-prom will be May 23rd. Working with HS again. This is a good day to showcase “beauty” businesses. Planning is underway for the inaugural “Metuchen Pops” event. This is meant to feature pop art and artists. It is in September and currently scheduled for the same day as the Jazz Fest.

Mr. Delia questioned the reason for that happening on the same day. This led to further discussion on other upcoming events including safety during what used to be Kids Takeover. Mr. Massey suggested creating a “slow zone” in the downtown area could make the area safer and allow the event to move forward.

Economic Vitality / Organization Team

Mr. Muldoon reported that the team has already met twice. The Borough zoning office is working on a “How to open a business” brochure which the team has had input on. It is looking to be finalized this month and can start to be distributed. The team talked about businesses that are looking to come to the downtown but a lack of available space is an issue. A discussion was had about the old Jewel Shop location and the various challenges there.

The storefront grant program is coming together. An application is already out and currently a rubric is being created to score the applications. There is a \$25k in budget for matching grants this year.. The next project for the team is to work on a business recruitment brochure. Looking to create an easy place to find demographics, socioeconomic information, etc. to help with business recruitment.

Communications Team

Mr. Cea spoke about his work using Instagram reels. He feels that he is getting good responses. Taking this on frees up Mr. Uhlig to focus on bigger promotion videos including a “commercial” currently being shot. Promoting restaurant week was again a very big lift. The team was disappointed in the lack of promotion done by the restaurants themselves. The amount of work and lack of enthusiasm should be considered in the future.

Public Art Team

Mr. Berger gave an update on the mural on the wall near Starbucks. An agreement has been signed and they are hoping to have the mural done this month or next. The art project on Pearl St is complete and will have an unveiling today. A discussion was had on the light pole banners as well as the Art Teams idea for lanterns to be hung in Peterson Park for next year's Lunar New Year celebration.

Ribbon Cutting Team

Ms. Lai and Ms. Callinan informed the Board that Rising Heart Studio is interested in a May ribbon cutting. More details to come. Ram and Rooster and Starbucks are still to be determined.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:50am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, May 10, 2024, at 8:30am at the Metuchen Senior Center 15 Center Street.

Submitted by Jason Delia