

DOWNTOWN
METUCHEN

explore • experience • enjoy

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE

2023 BOARD & VOLUNTEER TEAMS

2023 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Bobbie Theivakumaran, Chair

Stuart Schooler, Treasurer

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Gary Tilbor

VOLUNTEER TEAMS

Organization Team

Promotion Team

Communications Team

Design Team

Public Art Team

Innovation Team

Economic Vitality Team

STAFF

Dawn Mackey, Executive Director

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE

MISSION AND VISION

MISSION STATEMENT

The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a volunteer-based, nonprofit downtown management corporation dedicated to the management and revitalization of the designated Metuchen business district (the District) in partnership with stakeholders, residents, municipal government, and other partners.

Vision Statement

We envision a welcoming, walkable, and inclusive downtown. Engaging public art, entertainment, and recreation abound throughout our historic and vibrant downtown. All residents and visitors will be brought together by daily and special downtown experiences at destinations, independent businesses, and restaurants featuring personalized customer service.

WELCOME!

January 29, 2024

Dear MDA Stakeholders,

It is my privilege to have spent this past year as executive director of the Metuchen Downtown Alliance. And what a year it has been! At our last Annual Meeting, we had been notified that we were contenders for the Great American Main Street Award, and in March we had the distinct honor of bringing that award home. One of only 3 towns in New Jersey to ever have won.

I am thrilled to say we did not waste this opportunity to celebrate the win or use it to elevate Metuchen's Downtown. From a Fun House Celebration in June to billboards that reached commuters from Rutgers to Secaucus to Princeton, we hyped this award big time and, as a result, welcomed many new visitors to the Borough.

2023 was also a year to reevaluate how we do things and consider what needs to happen for a sustainable future. We collaborated with the Borough on many issues, including a more efficient watering system for our planters, holistic parking changes, the Mayor's Concert Series and the Seward Johnson Sculpture Project creating a stronger partnership that yields a better result for residents and visitors alike.

We focused on inclusive events and prioritized movement into businesses. We had the most interactive and robust holiday season that we kicked off with Shop Sip Stroll and we attracted many media outlets. We successfully applied for several grants and transformed a key alleyway that connects to Main Street. And most importantly we attracted a record number of new businesses and have others waiting in the wings for a space.

The trajectory of the Downtown has been nothing short of remarkable. After spending my first full year here, I can confidently state that this is a testament to the extraordinary commitment of volunteers, business owners, property owners, and the Borough all working together, prioritizing the revitalization of the district and making magic happen.

When we ended last year, we wondered how we could possibly top 2023? And then Jersey Best awards us the Destination of 2024! So we have work to do. We will get ready once again to welcome a new flock of visitors that may not have even known we existed, and I know that once they come that first time, they will return again and again.

Congratulations Metuchen - looking forward to what we can do together this year.

Dawn Mackey

Executive Director

Metuchen Downtown Alliance

2023 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD **WINNER!!!**

WHAT IS THE GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD?

Nationwide recognition - it is the Oscars of Downtowns. Main Street American recognizes exceptional Main Street Communities whose successes serve as a model for comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

WHO ELSE HAS WON IN THE PAST?

Only 2 other NJ towns have EVER won.
Westfield in 2004 and Montclair in 2015

WHY SHOULD THIS MATTER TO YOU?

Recognition on the national stage acknowledging that the work the MDA has done is exemplary and successful. Prospective investors, funders and home buyers take notice. We will keep this title forever!



GRANTS

NJ EDA SUSTAIN AND SERVE GRANT

Launched by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) in December 2020, Sustain & Serve NJ has provided eligible entities with grants to purchase meals from New Jersey-based restaurants that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 and distribute the meals for free to the community.

Source: <https://www.njeda.com/sustain-and-serve/>



Building on the success of 2022, in 2023, MDA Volunteers worked with local restaurants as well as the First Presbyterian Food Pantry and together delivered nearly 30k meals to families and students who are facing food insecurity while generating an additional \$150k of revenue.



MSNJ Grant in the amount of \$26,000. helped fund the AlleyWay Project on Main Street complete with a cobblestone driveway, pedestrian signage, building refresh, and the mural 'Metuchen Magic' by renowned contemporary artist Ricardo Roig



Applied for Middlesex Art Grant (decision pending)

PUBLIC ART

The Forum Window Project

A series of rotating art fills the two windows that flank the Forum theater with works from 5 artists.



OUR SHINING BOROUGH (At Conversation Corner) UPDATE- COMPLETE!

A 4 x 4 Mosaic was installed on top of a custom, outdoor concrete table. The piece was started in December 2022 by Glass artist Donna Slevin and installed in February. . The table is the centerpiece of the 'Conversation Corner' located at New Street and Center Street in between 2 new benches and planters. The project was made possible by a generous Community Challenge grant from AARP, the MDA and the Borough.



The Sculpture Project

Working with the Seward Johnson Foundation and in collaboration with the Borough, the MDA curated the first 3 sculptures to the Downtown. Several more will join these in the coming months. We enhanced the project with sidewalk quotes.



PROMOTIONS

In 2023, the MDA hosted over 10 big events. Each tie-in with local businesses as a way for visitors to explore, experience and enjoy Metuchen.

10 LARGE SCALE EVENTS



SCAVANGER HUNT



ONE RESTAURANT WEEK



MULTIPLE IN-STORE PROMOTIONS



2 PANEL DISCUSSIONS



50 "SIMPLY THE BEST" BANNERS THROUGHOUT TOWN



HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE



COLLABORATED WITH BOROUGH ON MAYOR'S SUMMER CONCERT SERIES



BAZAAR



BOOK SIGNING



PLACEMAKING

The MDA offered matching grants for custom sandwich boards, completed heldover Blade Sign projects, expanded Metuchen lights, collaborated with Borough to convert the donated old bank drive-thru into a pocket park and provided multiple photos ops throughout the year.

5 SANDWICH BOARD GRANTS



3 NEW BLADE SIGNS



EXPANDED METUCHEN LIGHTS



PETERSON PARK



PHOTO OPS

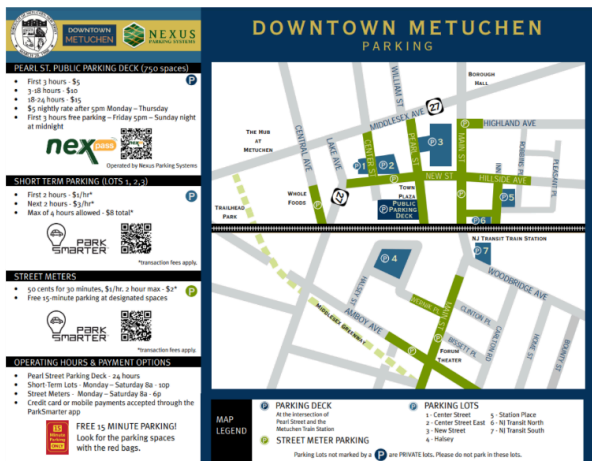


PARKING

In 2023 we worked with the Borough, Parking Authority and Nexus and advocated for changes to better support the business district. A stakeholder survey was sent out and tweaks based on feedback are in progress.

HOLISTIC PARKING CHANGES TO CREATE A HEALTHY DISTRICT

PARKING MAP



15 MINUTE SPOTS



EMPLOYEE PARKING & VALIDATION FOR RESTAURANTS



COMMUNICATIONS



facebook

Followers - 6,600

Page Reach - 344,300 = 76% over 2022

Videos viewed - 38,400MIN = 32%

Content Interaction - 51,800 Clicks = 105%

Posts - 500 6%

Instagram

Followers - 1,922

Page Reach - 82,299 = 119% over 2022

Content Interaction - 15,900 clicks = 100%

Posts - 476 = 66%

video

30 videos of various lengths and styles

Middlesex Chamber

Entry for Metuchen in Middlesex Magazine

Posters for Downtown Metuchen along the NJT NEC line

Billboard in Rutgers Quad

Constant Contact

Members - 3,785



Star Ledger front page for Restaurant Week and Small Business on Saturday.

Google

2,200 interactions

10,000 viewed the profile

3,000 Google searches returned the MDA entry

RIBBON CUTTINGS/NEW BUSINESS OPENINGS

Essie's Cuts Barbershop - 443 Main Street

Stretch Lab 3 1 -New Street

Conversation Corner -15 Center Street

Pita Grille -660 Middlesex Ave

Beans & Bread -660 Middlesex Ave

Gardenia's Floral -182 Main Street

Hatch 44 -25 New St

Latin Port -333- Lake Ave

Classic Tattoo 327 -Main St

Rita's Italian Ice- 640 Middlesex Ave.

DeCosmo's Italian Ice -20 New Street

The Hair Loft -476 Main Street (Grand Re-Opening 10 year Anniversary)

Namkeen Hot Chicken & Waffles - 410 Main Street

Mexi Modo -15 Pearl Street

Atlantic Health -45 Pearl Street

Boba Time - 435 Main Street

FK Living - 450 Main Street

Rose & Root- 398 Main Street

Lux Candle -552 Middlesex Ave

Aria Nail Lounge -287 Main Street New Business

BUDGET

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE, INC. Budget 2023

Contributions	
SID Contribution	\$250,000
Borough Contribution	75,000
Sustain & Serve Administration	23,600
Surplus Funds from Unrestricted Pandemic Era Grants	23,800
Total Revenue	\$ 372,400
Program Services	
Education and Tech	\$ 5,500
Placemaking (Public Art, Planters)	
Public Art	5,300
Plants	7,000
Landscape of Downtown	9,000
Storefront Grant Fund	15,000
Innovation Grants	5,000
Extra 2023 Events	26,500
Street Improvement and Maintenance & holiday lights	
Street Cleaning	10,000
Holiday Decorations	2,500
Promotions and Advertising	
Promotions	45,000
Marketing	23,000
Metuchen Media	10,500
Total Program Expenses	\$ 164,300
General and Administrative	
Salary	\$ 85,000*
EIDL Loan Interest (Est.) ¹	17,500
Payroll tax expense	8,900
Contract Services	10,000
Offices	1,800
Rent	10,800
Utilities	3,000
Accounting and Audit	15,000
Facility and Equipment	3,500
Travel and Meetings	5,500
Insurance	2,900
Dues and Membership & Licenses	1,500
Member Meetings	2,500
Website Costs	2,000
Miscellaneous	1,700
Supplemental Administrative	19,000 *
	*15k to salary adjustment
Total General and Administrative	190,600
Replenishment of Reserve	17,500
Total Expenses + Reserve Addition	\$ 372,400