

METUCHEN PARKING AUTHORITY
MARCH 2, 2016 MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING ON SIGNAGE, WAYFINDING AND BRANDING

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Leonard Roseman, John DeFoe, and Rick Dyas
Borough Council Liaison: Jay Muldoon
Chamber Liaison:
Legal Counsel: Daria Venezia
Executive Director: Thomas Crownover

GUESTS:

Chamber of Commerce - Larry McCullough
Historic Preservation Committee - Nancy Zerbe
Borough Improvement League - Tyreen Reuter
Accessibility Committee - Sheri Rose Rubin
Arts Council - Clarissa Sestito, Linda LaStella, Kim Alderman
Borough Planner - Jim Constantine
Development Commission - JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein
Bike Walk Metuchen - Sean Massey and Tom Rockafeller
Traffic & Transportation Committee - Ranjit Walia
Borough Administrator – Jennifer Maier

INTRODUCTION:

Jay Muldoon opened the meeting indicating the wayfinding, signage and branding project was being produced by the Metuchen Parking Authority. The design aspect will be the first part of a multi-part program. The Authority has contracted with Studio L'Image whose president, Sue Labouvie and Nancy Adams were to do an interactive presentation. The uniqueness of Metuchen was discussed. Guests identified themselves with comments on what they thought of Metuchen in a word or two. Ms. Adams and Ms. Labouvie said this wayfinding program will not only help people navigate around Metuchen but create a brand for the town. Everyone then introduced themselves and offered a word or two to describe Metuchen which included: community; framework for a classic traditional town with Main Street running down the middle of it; quiet vibrancy; trees and architectural detail and lots to do; traditional downtown surrounded by older homes; small town; volunteerism; busy close knit community; a green place; welcoming and artistic; comfortable and changing; transition – crossroads; traditional hometown and downtown; hometown; successful diverse community; promising and intelligent; delightful.

PRESENTATION AND FEEDBACK:

Photos of New Rochelle, NY were shown to begin creating a visual representation of Metuchen, past and present. What kind of an impression do we wish to impart on visitors? San Pablo,

California signage was reviewed with gateway signs reflecting that town's character. A directional sign and a pedestrian sign were shown. Priority for transportation was discussed. Should transportation be given emphasis on signage? A map kiosk in the parking lots and piazza areas was mentioned. Helping people walk throughout town is a one possible goal of signage. Sue suggested that New Rochelle's suburban history is similar to Metuchen with creative artists and writers. Historical welcoming signs were used in New Rochelle based on their Huguenot early inhabitants. Event information was provided at the train station to capture rider's interest.

A second example in California was shown to discuss concepts for gateway signs and the process of creating branding. Important aspects of Metuchen were sought from the group to help define a vision of our town. Architectural detail of street lamps and buildings was a jumping off point for this consideration.

Goals and objectives of the signage program were requested. One suggestion was for wayfinding to be installed on the Middlesex Greenway. Economic vitality was offered as a goal and the primary target should be to help visitors. The transit hub features of Metuchen were commented on. The four permanent galleries in Metuchen were said to be important and should be promoted.

Mr. Dyas said sign pollution was a problem. Sue noted that sign clutter should be avoided and corrected. Mr. Muldoon asked if the Victorian lampposts might be used to attach signs. Planner, Jim Constantine said it might be possible. Readability and accessibility were seen as guidelines for signage. Describing Metuchen's essential unique aspects is viewed as a goal. Metuchen's desired color scheme was discussed. Mr. Roseman noted the large population of potential visitors to Metuchen and anticipated new residents must be given a reason to be attracted to our town's products and services. Bus transportation and connecting public transit riders were thought to be an important niche of visitors. It shouldn't be a step child of the train.

Sue asked how we might link both ends of Main Street, north and south. Helping to move people to both ends of Main Street was felt to be significant. What common problems could signage address? Are there obstacles that can be remedied? Sidewalk concerns, ideal and safe walking routes and a vibrant downtown were focused on.

Sue said connecting walking and biking could be important. Helping walkers know how close things actually are was seen as another goal. A list of origins and destinations was suggested. Distributing a .pdf of the Maser borough map was requested.

Mr. Muldoon said we had to reign in the scope of the project. Ms. Rubin spoke for accessibility and what we might advertise as a walkable route. Discussion then moved to how development might be reflected in this branding effort. Nomenclature for various areas of construction was questioned. The Greenway and the train station and the piazza are or will become anchors for downtown.

Mr. Constantine emphasized daily events in the piazza will draw visitors to town. Parking lot names were said to be confusing and should be renamed. The term "piazza" was criticized. Sue said the name should support the brand. "Town Square" was how Mr. Constantine viewed it.

The Greenway could be used by Edison residents to go to Whole Foods. Central Avenue development is progressing but without a brand. The Dismal Swamp was discussed at length for its regrettable name. The bike icon was said to be highly significant.

Mr. Roseman noted the public lot on South Main could be mistaken as a private lot. Should new development be important? Mr. Crownover recommended a branding concept based on the "Transit Village" nature of Metuchen as "Where Manhattan opportunity meets hometown, Jersey".

In the 1980's the street benches and Victorian lamps were used for branding but it is now no longer unique. Elements of the plaza were suggested for branding. Mr. DeFoe rendered a history on the acquisition of the Victorian street lamps. How does Metuchen differ from surrounding communities? Community and how people put down roots here were discussed. It was described as a place where you can walk to any place on earth via rail and Liberty International. The diversity that Metuchen welcomes was noted. Mr. Dyas talked about the leadership in town which volunteers for everything.

Brainy Borough was focused on along with the history of our town. Losing the history behind the nickname was said to be undesirable. Sue asked if there were priorities among the various aspects of Metuchen. Mr. Roseman said the Lincoln Highway running through town and the revolutionary war history ought to be considered. Mr. Dyas said that General Washington traveled from New York and Perth Amboy then down Woodbridge Avenue and dedicated the war cemetery in Metuchen. An official borough logo for branding to define Metuchen to visitors is a desirable goal. All borough materials, Website to brochures should have a unifying image. The borough seal was discussed as not offering quite the right feel for branding. Mr. DeFoe asked if pedestrian and vehicles were to be guided by this signage.

Identification of parking lots and wayfinding were mentioned. The problem of trucks getting stuck in the Main Street northeast corridor overpass was discussed as a signage issue. Mr. Dyas said that it cost \$10,000 to remove vehicles stuck under the bridge. Painting on-street warnings was recommended. Helping visitors come and go from downtown was said to be an important part of their experience in Metuchen. Signage at the train station to promote Metuchen was recommended. Mr. Constantine said train riders were often unfamiliar with reasons to visit Metuchen. Describing destinations to them could be valuable. A messaging board showing daily events could help.

Mr. Muldoon asked if optimizing transportation might also include parking lots. Parking indicators are much larger than other signage in towns like Somerville. Halsey was said to be unused on weekends but was close to downtown.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Dyas moved to adjourn, was seconded by Mr. Defoe and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Thomas Crownover

