

METUCHEN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 2011 REGULAR MEETING

A meeting of the Metuchen Development Commission was held on Wednesday, January, 5, 2011 at 8:00 PM at Borough Hall. Present were Jack Altman; Kevin Donahue; Audrey Gatling; Gideon Gelbert; Laura Griffith; Jonathan Rabinowitz; Council Member Dorothy Rasmussen (commission liaison); Joanne Sabatino-Falkenstein and Bonnie Silverman. Not present was Lynn Hendricks Wong.

REORGANIZATION

J. Altman opened the meeting and turned meeting over to D. Rasmussen who informed members that she's the new liaison to the commission replacing P. Cammarano. New members A. Gatling, G. Gelbert and B. Silverman were introduced and they and other members discussed their backgrounds and interests. D. Rasmussen explained the importance of putting meeting minutes on the borough's website and for members to notify the chair if the member cannot attend an upcoming meeting. J. Sabatino-Falkenstein was nominated and selected as chair of the commission. The taking of minutes will rotate among members. There is now a one seat vacancy on the commission.

OLD BUSINESS

Members discussed the ongoing issue of recommending to the Mayor and Council an increase in the maximum allowable height of buildings in the downtown area. Members were informed that the mayor and council were awaiting the commission's decision. After much discussion as to the building heights (in stories), the boundaries of the downtown area, and the recent changes to the building heights allowed by ordinance for the Pearl St. parking lot area, the commission recommended that, as indicated by a map reviewed by members, all buildings in the downtown area (as per a map offered by J. Altman) be allowed to be a maximum of three stories fronting portions of Center St., Highland Ave., Hillside Ave., Lake Ave., Middlesex Ave., New St., Pearl St., Penn. Ave. and Station Pl., and four stories fronting a portion of Main St. from Middlesex Ave. to the train station. Chair J. Sabatino-Falkenstein will notify the Mayor and council of the commission's recommendation.

K. Donahue notified members that he continues to update the commission's business attraction brochure. He intends to wait for the 2010 Census data to be made available for

inclusion in the new brochure and will eventually have the brochure put on the borough's new website when the website becomes available.

Discussions ensued informing new members of past projects of the commission as well as the status of ongoing commercial construction and development in the borough. Past projects included a business attraction brochure, façade improvement program, decorative benches, uniform design standards for downtown sidewalks, and the simplification of the ordinance concerning a building's "change of use" to require fewer approvals. Discussed were the District at Metuchen (Renaissance) project approval status, Pearl St. parking lot development, Central Ave. site redevelopment, Amboy Ave. townhouse construction status, and several buildings/sites owned by MacPherson Builders. Of note, Middlesex Co. is using eminent domain proceedings to purchase a 50' x 10' parcel at the corner of Central and Middlesex Aves. from Weichert Realtors for use in traffic improvements at that intersection related to the District at Metuchen. Further, the borough enacted a new ordinance to facilitate the construction of a parking facility and allow for commercial development on the Pearl St. parking lot. The borough and the parking authority are in discussions with developers for the redevelopment of that site.

Discussions ensued as to the strategies the borough has used or could use to attract businesses to the borough as well as the borough's attractiveness and impediments for businesses. They included establishing a business improvement district, getting businesses to operate longer hours, improving parking in the downtown, encouraging landlords to work closer with tenants to improve buildings,

NEW BUSINESS

D. Rasmussen discussed her idea on having the commission involved in conducting an "open house" whereby those empty stores on Main St. would be open during an evening for inspection by prospective business tenants as a way of showcasing that space and the borough's attractiveness to businesses. The Mayor and Council are supportive of this idea. Members suggested the date(s) of the event coincide with the borough's Junebug festival. D. Rasmussen will provide more details and the extent of commission involvement at future meetings. Also, L. Griffith recommended that the commission consider undertaking a project she called a "Taste of Metuchen" with a flat fee to taste samples of food from Metuchen restaurants or a "Restaurant Week" for a single rate prix fixe dinner offering at local establishments.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned. The next regular

meeting of the Development Commission will take place on Wednesday, February 2, 2011 at 8:00 p.m. in Borough Hall.

Respectfully submitted by Kevin Donahue

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