

METUCHEN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Borough Hall
March 3, 2011

Attendees: J. Sabatino-Falkenstein—Chairperson; D. Rasmussen—Council Liaison; J. Altman, K. Donahue, A. Gatling, G. Gelber, L. Griffith, J. Rabinowitz, B. Silverman. Additional attendees: Jay Muldoon, Borough Council; David Glasofer, Chamber of Commerce.

Chairperson Sabatino-Falkenstein called the meeting to order at 8 PM, and asked for approval of the February 2, 2011 minutes. K. Donahue moved that the minutes be approved with suggested changes, which was seconded by G. Gelber, and approved by all present.

OLD BUSINESS

Main Street Building Height Recommendations: The Chairperson recapped the Main Street building height recommendations approved at the February 2, 2011 Development Commission meeting, proceeds of which were forward to the mayor by letter for Borough Council consideration. L. Griffith questioned the proposed height maximums (45' for 3 story buildings and 55' for 4 story buildings), which exceeded the standard story height of 10 – 12'. G. Gelber explained that additional feet had been added to the proposed height maximums to give architects and developers more flexibility for ceiling heights and decorative architectural elements.

D. Rasmussen reported that the mayor would like to meet individually with all building owners in Metuchen. Chairperson Sabatino-Falkenstein requested joining him for selected meetings.

Revision of Metuchen Brochure: K. Donahue reported that it will take a few months to get the full updated census data for the brochure. All agreed 2000 demographics would also be useful for comparative purposes. At the February meeting commission members were assigned to gather data on a variety of areas including Community Organizations, Education, History, Opening a Business in Metuchen, Population, Demographics, Support Services, and Useful Contacts. It is anticipated that the material will be used on the website in PDF downloadable form. G. Gelber offered to put the material into an “advertising brochure” on a sub-URL, and L. Griffith suggested that the Chamber of Commerce link to the new brochure on their website.

Open House Metuchen: D. Rasmussen relayed that the mayor wanted to get building owners response to holding an Open House reception for vacant commercial buildings in town. The idea is to showcase vacant properties through an open house format such as is used for residential properties. It would be marketed to people considering Metuchen as a place to open a business. Possibly in May, small receptions would be held in the actual buildings, with building owners and others available with information. J. Muldoon added that the Borough needs to be proactive in attracting new businesses to town, and that it would be helpful to draw attention in a constructive way to vacant properties. Chairperson Sabatino-Falkenstein noted that the Open Houses could be used as an opportunity to highlight not just existing spaces, but other potential properties, as well. Muldoon added that the Metuchen Master Plan could also be shown during

the Open Houses. May is national Open House weekend, so it would be good to try to hold Metuchen's during this time period. Discussion ensued about consideration of a Business Improvement District to sponsor events like the Open House, to considering a retail mix that would make Metuchen a destination place. G. Gelber offered to send J. Muldoon a list of what makes things difficult for developers in Metuchen. The recent building height recommendation directly addresses one of those obstacles.

Chairperson Sabatino-Falkenstein asked whom one would go to in Metuchen if they were opening a business. D. Glasofer replied that it is not clear—currently there is no single entity. J. Muldoon suggested that for this reason, it is urgent that a Guide to Opening a Business in Metuchen brochure be produced. The new zoning clerk can provide information on zoning code requirements for the brochure, and it will be put on the Borough website and made available as a printed version at the Open House.

Taste of Metuchen: Ideas were offered to bring people downtown to patronize the local establishments. J. Rabinowitz reported that the concept of a Taste of Metuchen would be to involve a selected group of local restaurants with a single pay ticketed food-tasting event on Main Street with outdoor tables. Restaurants would be able to show off their offerings, and cover their food and service costs, and the township would get a lively event, and collect the balance. The event would require lots of marketing, and would be most effective if it were coordinated with another activity that included music (i.e., Country Fair, spring street fair, June Bug, Open House) or other entertainment such as fireworks. It would need to be held during a warm weather month (May – September) during the evening, and may require tents. L. Griffith suggested that this be followed by a Restaurant Week that would involve participating restaurants in town to offer a fixed price 3-course menu for the same agreed upon amount (i.e., \$20 lunch; \$30 dinner) during a designated time period. J. Rabinowitz added that another idea would be Breakfast on Main for a Sunday. J. Rabinowitz and L. Griffith will prepare a proposal for this event, which would benefit from Chamber of Commerce participation.

K. Donahue raised other ideas he previously introduced to the Development Commission: consideration of creating ordinances to attract filmmaking, bed and breakfasts, and home offices.

NEW BUSINESS

Downtown Design Conform: Chairperson Sabatino-Falkenstein recommended that the Development Commission submit guidelines for downtown design standards. Two years ago the Commission made sidewalk design specification recommendations based upon the sidewalk in front of the Metuchen Savings Bank, which have not been acted upon. Town Planner Jim Constantine will be contacted regarding the status of this recommendation. Other design standards could be made for signage, windows, fences, awnings, etc. G. Gelber suggested making a list of the “do’s” and “don’ts” in a simple poster format that could be posted in a public place for all to see.

Market Day Metuchen: G. Gelber reported that he and some others are planning a new and improved farmer’s market for Metuchen, to include new vendors with a website. The space will be expanded to include crafts and artists, and will open June 18 and run through the summer and early fall on Saturdays from 9 AM – 2 PM.

D. Rasmussen announced that the mayor would like the Development Commission to discuss parking for residential in-fill building properties.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 6 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.

The Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made by G. Gelber, and seconded by B. Silverman, and unanimously carried by all present.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura S. Griffith