

**Metuchen Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 7, 2012**

Attendees: Audrey Gatling, Munsamy Govender, Laura Griffith, Jon Rabinowitz, Daniel Topping; **President** JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein, **Council Liaison** Dorothy Rasmussen. **Not in attendance:** Kevin Donahue, Gideon Gelber, Beata Thompson, Jack Altman.

Meeting was called to order at 8:13pm.

J. Rabinowitz moved that the February minutes be approved; it was seconded by L. Griffith.

Business Landlords - JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein

JoAnn still wants the Development Commission to meet with the business landlords in town. Although the Mayor met with some of them a year ago, nothing came of it. We need to know what landlords are looking for in town as we make plans for redevelopment. They can't be happy about the way things are going, especially the business turnover on Main Street. Per prior discussion with Dorothy, although Development Commission planned to meet with landlords at the March meeting, the mayor didn't want to begin that conversation. Development Commission discussed ways to research the underlying issues on Main Street without a formal meeting.

Pearl Street Parking – Dan Topping

Discussion on the handout "Select Committee on Potential Development on the Pearl Street Parking Lot" was led by Dan. There is some momentum with housing. Things are emerging that can take up our attention and assistance. The Borough owns the lot.

-developers currently not interested in the location as condos but for rentals, as this is what the research shows.

-more people want to live close to urban locations, so Metuchen has this asset, this property, and that is why more people want to move to Metuchen.

-they have to consider the people that they are selling to, specifically with generational changes, where many people are young professionals turning 30 as well as empty nesters. They want instead 'Lifestyle Rentals'.

Next steps:

-narrowed to 2 bids.

- a public outreach Information meeting in April

-the condo market is not selling, but the rental market is. This area, within a 10 mile radius, is short 10,000 rental units; the Metuchen-Edison area is short 5,000 units.

-the study and analysis document 'Affordable Downtown Retail Rents' by David Milder of DANTH, Inc. was distributed. It encourages downtown retail landlords to offer affordable rents to small independent retailers rather than return to unaffordable rent levels that existed before the Great Recession, else they will likely produce vacancies and affect the resale value of their property.

Pop-Up Galleries for Vacant Storefronts – Audrey

Pop-up galleries take advantage of the recessionary real-estate market to strike up partnerships between artists and property owners, creating temporary galleries, and exhibition and interactive space at no cost to the artist in a prime location:

Artist-to-Landlord - transforms empty storefronts into art attractions. Pop-ups have gained traction recently in NYC and across the country, and can be a way to cover vacant storefront properties as well as address longstanding problems of property upkeep and maintenance in the Metuchen business district.

Artist-to-Business Owner - Artists' work is displayed for sale inside retail businesses. Artists get new exposure; business owners get a new stream of potential customers; Metuchen extends its Brainy Borough reputation while also promoting itself as an after work destination.

Artist-to-Community – also works well when public art is combined with community events like Restaurant Week. An art in the park project worked very successfully in a Montclair park, getting approx 10,000 visitors from around the metropolitan area. Their organizer had previously offered to help Metuchen.

In each of these scenarios, the artist gets a gallery or studio, and the Borough gets vibrant attractions that may deter potential crime and draw the next wave of paying tenants. Follow-up: Audrey to check with Linda LaStella to see how they coordinated Junebug.

Announcements

“Metuchen Cash Mob” - JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein

On March 24th Metuchen will have its 1st "Cash Mob", a large gathering to spend about \$20 each in one store to support the local economy. Launch site is at What's the Scoop, from 2pm – 5pm, longer if needed. A sample printout was given out.

Info: Metuchen Cash Mob Facebook page; Website – www.metuchencashmob.com.

Contact: Lynn Kodila.

“Metuchen Event Calendar” JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein

An online events community calendar ‘Metuchen Events: What's Happening in the Brainy Borough, a Collaborative Community Calendar hosted by the Borough Improvement League’ is being put together by Tyreen Reuter of the Borough Improvement League(BIL), which centralizes all Metuchen events in one place. A sample printout was given out for the month of March.

Documents distributed

-Development Commissioner Roster, ‘2012 Metuchen Development Commission’, a listing of Development Commissioner’s names, addresses, phone #s and email addresses.

-2012 Meeting Dates of this year’s meetings.

-Letter to Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft Stores by JoAnn Sabatino-Falkenstein, dated February 26, encouraging them of using Metuchen as a potential location and customer base.

Opening a New Business in Metuchen – a minor change to the brochure was requested.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on May 2nd at 8 PM in Borough Hall. No meeting in April.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35pm called by Kevin Donahue, and seconded by Laura Griffith.

Respectfully submitted,

Audrey Gatling