

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID

GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD WINNER 2015

Montclair Center BID

January 11, 2017 – 7 p.m.

BID Office

Agenda:

Board members in attendance: **Phil Cantor, Jeff Beck, Jenna Davis, Jason Gleason, Lisa Johnson, Eddie Peralta, Sharda Ramharack, Sue Schultz, Nicci Silva, Sean Spiller, Jerry Sweeney, Nat Testa and Robert Weber**

Staff: Israel Cronk, Diane Israel, Ann Marie Sekeres

Absent: Renee Baskerville, Arlene Carrini, Guy Kinley, Kazim Mirza, Steven Plofker, Matt Silverman, Joann Smalls and Elaina Watley

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Phil called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.
- B. Nicci made a motion to accept the December minutes. Jeff seconded.
- C. Phil led the self-introductions of all members around the table.

II. OLD BUSINESS – Executive Director Israel Cronk Reports

A. Israel reported about MSU initiative. He spoke with Melissa Faulkner – organize businesses to go to MSU and have a presence during the events of orientation week. Hoping to have businesses advocate for the students to shop Montclair Center. Faulkner is Director of Admissions and Student Life. Anyone interested in speaking with her let us know and she will make appointment to visit you at your store. Israel asked everyone to tell him after the meeting if members were interested. Jenna and Jason have indicated interest initially. Also if anyone knew if other merchants were interested, to let us know. Lisa mentioned that many fraternities/sororities have community service hours to fulfill.

B. Part of the Montclair Center mission to fill vacancies and make Montclair Center more vibrant. Once a year, Main Street USA – part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has a national conference to learn about different business district issues. Phil mentioned that the Montclair Center BID is also a special improvement district. Ours is called Montclair Center Corporation, part of Main Street NJ. We won the 2015 Great American Main Street Award. This year the Main Street conference will be in Pittsburgh, PA. We are hoping to send some people there.

C. Israel explained that Jef Buehler of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs would be doing a Board Member training. We have sent out a Doodle poll for people to pick the best time. Feb 7, 8, 9 or 10 – either morning, afternoon or evening. Buehler will review what a BID is, what our responsibilities are, what Board Member duties are, etc.

D. Downtown Institute Seminar – Carissa Reiniger – founder of Silver Lining Action Plan will be presenting. It will take place Thursday February 2 from 9-11:30 a.m. and will be held at Slab Supply Co, 544 Bloomfield Ave. Normally these are attended by 50-70 people from around the state. The Kensington will allow us to use their Church Street parking lot for the seminar. Phil reminded everyone to tell their neighbors about the event.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Occupancy workshop. Israel introduced a worksheet about vacancies in town.

Israel asked what don't we like about vacancies? What's not good about vacancies?

Phil – makes the block look bad, no light at night

Jerry - vacancies look economically unviable, we'd like to have a business to attract more people, property owner can get a tax reduction – impacts the town.

Nicci – looks run down and uninviting

Robert – a few in a row becomes a dead zone – creates an artificial boundary

Jason – loss of income to neighboring businesses (taking care of common spaces, more traffic)

Why do entrepreneurs choose Downtown Montclair?

Jeff – It was a cool place to hang out when I was a kid.

Nat – It's a destination town

Jenna - feels that more boutiques bring more women and girls shopping. Jenna always loved the experience here

Jeff - banked on his generation remembering Montclair was a cool town for their kids, and it was strategically located between other comic book stores in the state.

Lisa - decided on Montclair because of the cool quotient – cafes, etc.

Nicci - knew the area from growing up and Montclair was cool and vibrant.

What are the barriers and obstacles of Montclair?

Sharda – shrinking customer base with online shopping.

Jason – parking.

Jerry – High cost of rent.

Lisa – offering products that people can get cheaper online

Nat – location, some places have foot traffic and others do not

Robert - high income town but people spend money in specific ways

Jason – a lot of money is older, savvier money. Perception that there is money here, but also that Montclair is like poetry /theatre kids are in charge.

Phil – mentioned that it's a weak retail landscape and we need to recruit retailers to draw more shoppers.

Jenna spoke to her successes: finding unique pieces and building relationships with customers.

Jeff spoke to the importance of “rockstar” customer service and a terrific shopping experience to differentiate from shopping online. Jerry mentioned Jeff's great events at the shop.

Phil mentioned that enough stores don't have enough capital and then, combined with high rents, not being able to expand customer base, etc.

Israel mentioned that a lot of possible new merchants stop going forward when they have to negotiate with property owners.

Jerry – mentioned there were a number of people looking at Jeff's space. But Jeff was really enthusiastic, had done due diligence, had a plan, incredibly committed to doing it, we got along very well. Important to have longevity, easygoing. Jerry mentioned the contrast between waiting for someone to pay high rents (suffering vacancies) vs. someone who pays less and is steady. Jeff mentioned that he liked the space and the corner space was double the price.

Jenna spoke about being in Nat Testa's building on Glenridge Avenue. Nat's space was move-in ready. Nat mentioned that Jenna had an online store and was coming out of school with the concept. Nat felt he had good rapport with Jenna. It's a leap of faith both parties take.

Nicci mentioned that she had the numbers prepared as she had an existing business – she sold wholesale prior to opening the store.

Jeff said it's important to know your business. Backwards math, he calls it – knowing business, knowing what your customer will spend, etc. How many customers do you need.

Eddie spoke to the location helping his business and a limit to tattoo parlors allowed in town. People come from Bloomfield, Verona, etc.

Jerry spoke that the discussion shifted from vacancies to how business succeeds and he felt those were different issues. That more vacancies were about higher rent, more time commitment, lower quality, etc. Israel mentioned that maybe we can come up with a bulleted list for property owners to pick a renter. Also presented Montclair Center success plan for new merchants. Sean Spiller mentioned you can restrict certain types of businesses but also mentioned landlords that are holding out for perfect tenant. Spiller also mentioned that this kind of success plan for merchants would be helpful, maybe a few pieces the township could help with, and lastly, whatever model the BID develops could impact merchants and landlords. Spiller also mentioned that Montclair is an exciting place and everywhere developers want to build more-, which is what the township mostly deals with and less about vacancies. Jerry mentioned that success plan should also include some kind of Small Business advisory group to help struggling businesses. Some major landlords would rather wait for a perfect, high paying, long term tenant. The third question, for Jerry, is what does the town actually want to recruit to come here? Spiller mentioned that there is little the township can do to influence landlords to rent out vacancies. Jerry mentioned that they tried to get vacancies to look better with art, etc. and short term leases with Montclair Arts Council. Israel mentioned most merchants want less than 1000 sq. ft.

Israel mentioned the BID success kit that will be expanded and presented to everyone for review. Phil felt the Township should be partnering with us on the BID Success Kit to include code enforcement, etc., and streamline the conversation between new business owners for inspections, signage, etc. Spiller mentioned that two council meetings ago, the council is working to streamline permits.

Israel wants to know how to access customer email list. Lisa said merchants could include a link to the BID info in their ongoing customer emails. Jeff mentioned that he produces a calendar to put into shopper's bags. He also mentioned that he would include stuff from the BID into his emails. Phil said that would build buzz for the whole town. Jeff made a parking map for his customers. Israel asked for Jeff's parking map to forward to the rest of the merchants. Phil mentioned that he heard for every 20 minutes of travel should result in an hour of activity.

Israel mentioned that he started a Montclair Center B2B group on Facebook with discussion and deadline for various events/signups.

IV. UPCOMING EVENTS

Israel – mentioned Mayor's Wellness Challenge - it is not the BID event but we are helping where we can.

January 24th – Merchant Meeting at Montclair Art Museum

Women's Empowerment Week – April 1 – 9th. Looking for awesome A list, TED talk women to speak on different topics in locations around town. Wellmont donating space for a panel.

Lisa mentioned that MSU has a women entrepreneur week. Robert mentioned talking to YMCA director Joann Short for ideas.

Valentine's Day – we want to know what all the businesses will do with their Valentine's Day promotion.

Sharda asked if we were getting another rep from MAM. Israel mentioned that we will be, but we didn't know whom yet. Israel mentioned to Sharda that she would be perfect for women's empowerment week to speak about car maintenance.

V. ADJOURNMENT

A. Jerry moved to adjourn and was seconded by Nat. Vote was unanimously in favor of adjournment.

B. The meeting adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

Next Meeting: BID Office
March 1, 2017 –7 p.m.

R2/2/17PC