

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID

GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD WINNER 2015

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID - BOARD MEETING

May 15, 2024, 7:00 – 8:45 p.m.

In Person at **BID Offices** 26 Lackawanna Plaza or via Zoom

Board members in attendance: Te’Nijja Bussey, Daniel Garcia-Pedrosa, Ernst Goldman, Neil Grabowsky, Rachael Grochowski, Matt Horrigan, Jill Montague, Jacob Nieman, Jaji Packard, Lori Price Abrams, Liz Rich, Brian Silver, Matt Silverman, Nat Testa, Kristen Zachares

Absent: David Cummings, Mary Cumella, Emer Featherstone, Stacey Filé, Natalie Haddad, David Placek

Staff: Jason Gleason, Aysa Gordon, Abhishake Shah

Guest: Lisa Johnson from the Montclair Department of Environmental Affairs

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME (5 MINUTES)

President Packard called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm.

II. ADOPTION OF APRIL MINUTES (*attachments*) (2 MINUTES)

Board member Bussey moved to approve the April minutes, and Board member Grochowski seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS (3 MINUTES PER VISITOR)

Lisa Johnson, former President of the Montclair Center BID Board of Directors and current Environmental Affairs Coordinator for the Township of Montclair, collaborated with the BID office and on a USCA and the US Forest Service grant to plant trees throughout Montclair over five years. The grant includes plans to plant trees, pruning, and GIS mapping. Lisa also works with the Montclair State University Green Team to do analyses, including surveys, public relations, education, and outreach. The first step in the project is education and outreach, so Lisa asked BID board members or BID community members if they wanted to be on a steering committee. Urban areas, where concrete structures are highly concentrated and greenery is limited, become “heat islands” of higher temperatures relative to outlying areas. The primary goal would be to educate people about the importance of canopies and their effects on cooling and corresponding saved energy costs. Other focuses of the project are on replenishing native trees and creating biodiversity. Director Gleason asked about the project and if it would help identify sickly trees that

needed removal due to Ash Borer or other fungi. Lisa responded that some Ash had already been treated and wouldn't be affected.

Another point was that certain trees are being planted as replacements because they have smaller root systems to avoid sidewalk disruption and damage to infrastructure. Which trees will be planted depends on factors such as resiliency, hardiness, and being native to the local ecosystem. If you are interested, please email Lisa Johnson at ljohnson@montclairnjusa.org.

IV. **MAIN STREET CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS.** (30 MINUTES)
(Jason Gleason, Abhishake Shah, & Rachael Grochowski)

Board Member Grochowski noted that the sizes of the communities represented at the Main Street Conference ranged from less than 500 to large metropolises. She participated in classes that included placemaking, gathering spaces, public history, small businesses, uses of art within the cityscape, and economic development through city greening. She shared many questions with the Board: Who are we, and who is Montclair? Montclair is about the arts, but how do we express that aside from murals? She noted that "quilting" - painting on the street at crosswalks- is a way to combine form with function as integrative art. How does Montclair present its history? Board Member Grochowski recommended a social media inquiry into some of these questions to understand what the township and community think. Board Member Grochowski also discussed the activation of empty storefronts, coworking, commercial kitchens, small workspaces, and short-term leases. A commercial kitchen could act as an incubator for new food-based businesses.

Assistant Director Shah discussed the need for coalition building to reform regulations, codes, and permitting. He emphasized the importance of gathering business owners' testimonies on the permitting process for reform. He also highlighted the need for a four-year re-evaluation of outdated regulations and codes to keep them current.

Director Gleason mentioned the Institute of Justice Cities Work and suggested further exploration. He referenced a detailed project information roadmap for Philadelphia and Washington, DC, encompassing 220 steps from leasing to opening a business.

Assistant Director Shah also addressed using smart curbside management to generate data and revenue. He cited a Hoboken project using AI and video cameras for automated curbside management to accommodate the increased demand for pick-up zones.

Lastly, he emphasized the significance of disaster management and the long-term goal of enhancing community resilience through infrastructure development.

Director Gleason addressed two pivotal sessions, the first of which delved into "Code and Zoning Best Practice for Economic Prosperity." Notably, Alabama Main Street conducted an extensive survey encompassing 32 towns and cities, culminating in the evaluation of their zoning and building codes and subsequently heralding the formulation of a comprehensive best practice for code reform. The salient findings from this session included the importance of aligning zoning regulations with the values of the community, the expansion of a high-density buffer encircling downtown

areas, the relaxation of parking regulations, the advocacy for employing stories rather than feet for building regulations, the prioritization of "walkability" as a downtown competitive edge, and the utilization of property vacancy registrations to mitigate vacancies.

Equally noteworthy was the discourse on "Using AI on Main Street," during which the advanced integration of the Urality platform in Montclair Center was highlighted. The session underscored AI's potential to facilitate various aspects of business operations, including the visualization of vacant spaces sans the need for an architect, prognostication of business health and prospects, and optimization of marketing campaigns through strategic social media scheduling and campaign assessment using AI analytics.

Lastly, Director Gleason expounded on the ramifications of the "Federal Resource Hub for Thriving Communities" session, where panel representatives from the Federal government and its diverse agencies detailed the availability of substantial grant resources and technical assistance for townships and BIDs. The realization of millions of dollars in untapped funds underscored the imperative for proactive engagement with these resources.

V. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT (Jason Gleason) (15 MINUTES)

Open/Close: No businesses closed this month. New restaurants include Tasca, an Iberian restaurant, and Dhamaal, an Indian restaurant. A new frozen yogurt place called 16 Handles opened to long lines around the block. Retro Fitness, a new gym on South Park Street, also opened.

Social media: The Dhamaal opening reached 5,189 people, was shared 225 times, and saved 34 times. The Pride Festival highlight reel was shared over 60 times, and The Earth Day Festival was shared over 45 times. The Montclair Center BID's Instagram followers are up to 14,800.

Pride: So far, 44 BID members have taken advantage of special vendor pricing for the Pride Festival.

Summer Sunday: The event takes place on June 23, from 1 pm to 6 pm. It aims to host 70 businesses and a dozen buskers. Around the district, there will be three giant kids' coloring murals. Montclair Film will cap the night off by showing Barbie at Lackawanna Plaza. Other possible additions to Summer Sunday include a dance party by Latinos of Montclair and a performance by Jazz House Kids.

Experience Montclair: The Experience Montclair summer campaign, featuring over 100 outdoor dining options across the six districts, will be featured on NJ Monthly social media boosts and highlighted in The Star-Ledger, Visit NJ, and Edible Jersey. At the Taste of New Jersey Plates Around the World Event in NYC, Montclair represented two of the six presenting businesses: Pasta Ramen and Montclair Brewery.

Placer Stats: Montclair saw a healthy turnout of 23,300 visitors downtown on Valentine's Day. Mother's Day turnout was down this year by 2,400, which can be explained by the weather being twenty degrees colder this year. The Art Walk visitor turnout was up 3,400 people from last year, directly correlating with the 3,200 scans of the event's QR code. Foot traffic overall is up 1.4% over last year.

Montclair Township Elections: Director Gleason thanked President Packard for her tireless work getting to know all the candidates. Before the election, both he and President Packard met with almost all the candidates. He said he has high hopes for this new Council and wants to see everyone working together. He wants to see what issues they will tackle when they start on July 1st. President Packard was heartened that the elected council had some understanding of Montclair Center and what it does. Director Gleason also said that the BID is in a considerably different place than the last election regarding being at the table. He thinks the councilors will likely reach out to discuss the issues discussed before the elections.

VI. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT (*Jaji Packard*) (10 MINUTES)

A. Recruitment, Nominations and Elections Committee

President Packard started the elections process for the Recruitment, Nominations, and Elections Committee. The BID bylaws state that the committee requires two business owners, two property owners, and one town councilor. Board Member Horrigan moved to accept the nomination of Board Members Zachares, Garcia-Pedrosa, and Bussey. Board Member Montague seconded the nomination of Board Members Zachares, Garcia-Pedrosa, and Bussey. When the newly elected officers start, the town councilor will be elected to the committee. The motion to elect the nominees to the committee was carried unanimously.

B. BID Budget 2nd reading and vote by Council, Thursday, May 23

President Packard encouraged our officers or board members to attend to support the process. Board Member Zachares said she would attend.

C. Reactions to BID/UMBA/Montclair Local Candidate Forum

President Packard said she received strong feedback about the Candidate's Forum with agreement from the Board. She encouraged BID to continue doing events that foster community support and advocacy.

VII. TREASURERS REPORT (*Matt Horrigan*) (5 MINUTES)

Treasurer Horrigan has been receiving monthly emails from our accountant. For the year to date, Montclair Center has been in the black. Treasurer Horrigan stated that Montclair Center is running smoothly, and the budget is on track. He will be scheduling a financial affairs committee meeting soon. Information about reallocations to the budget will be available at the June meeting.

VIII. **OLD BUSINESS** (*Jason Gleason, Jaji Packard*) (15 MINUTES)

A. Main Street Grant and associated projects update

Director Gleason spoke about the Mural Project timeline. The public call to artists will go out tomorrow, May 16th, 2024. The press release went out on the day of the board meeting.

Director Gleason said Studio Montclair would email the information to its thousand artists. We should have the artist's signed contract and mural announcement to stay on schedule by June 26, 2024.

IX. **OPEN DISCUSSION** - New Ideas, Comments, Questions (*TIME PERMITTING*)

Board Member Grabowsky spoke about the soft opening of the 6,500-foot Montclair Mezzanine in time for Pride.

Board Member Silverman asked about problems with kitchen oil around the downtown restaurants. Property and business owners should be putting oil in plastic bags as regulated. He mentioned that the problems come from the same six restaurants. It can also be dangerous due to being slippery.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm

NEXT MEETING:

The next full board meeting will be Wednesday, June 19, 2024, at 7 pm at the BID office.