

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID

GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD WINNER 2015

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID - BOARD MEETING

June 19, 2024 7:00 – 8:45 p.m.

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

Board Members in attendance: Te’Nijah Bussey, Mary Cumella, Emer Featherstone, Daniel Garcia-Pedrosa, Rachael Grochowski, Natalie Haddad, Matt Horrigan, Jill Montague, Jacob Nieman, Jaji Packard, Lori Price Abrams, Brian Silver, Matt Silverman, Kristen Zachares

Staff in Attendance: Executive Director: Jason Gleason, Assistant Director: Abhishake Shah, DMO & Marketing Director Jackie Apicella, Administrative Assistant: Aysa Gordon.

Absent: David Cummings, Stacey Filé, Ernst Goldman, Neil Grabowsky, David Placek, Liz Rich, Nat Testa

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME

President Packard called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

As a reminder, this is our last full board meeting of the spring term. The next scheduled meeting will be on Wednesday, September 18, 2024.

II. ADOPTION OF THE MAY MINUTES

Board member Silverman moved to approve the May minutes, and the board voted to approve them. The motion passed unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments made.

IV. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT (*Jaji Packard*)

A. BID Budget's second reading and vote by the Council are still ahead.

Director Gleason spoke about his frustration with the Town Clerk, Angelese Bermudez Nieves, for holding up the BID's budget approval process.

On March 18th, 2024, he emailed a PDF copy of Montclair Center's preapproved budget, audit, 990 tax form, and Annual Report to Town Manager Michael Lapolla and Town CFO Padmaja Rao. On or about April 5th, he heard back from Ms. Nieves asking for a copy of the budget in Excel format, which Director Gleason resent to her within hours. Ms. Nieves reached back out on April 16th to ask for the budget in an unlocked Excel format, stating, "It must be in an

editable format to advertise the Public Hearing.” Director Gleason took some time to confer with President Packard, the Newspaper, Legal, and others as he hesitated to share sensitive information in an open format with unknown sources since errors had been made in the past.

Director Gleason called the Clerk’s office On May 1st to discuss and left a VM. The Clerk attempted her “[2nd Attempt]” on May 29th, eight days after the 2nd Reading was supposed to take place by resolution and 20 days after the budget was supposed to be published by resolution. Ultimately, Director Gleason acquiesced at this point to move the process along and ultimately get the budget approved in the tight window in that was left with the former council, and the final meeting was June 11th, and there would be only one day to publish.

On May 29th, he sent the unlocked file along with a harsh email in which he explained how to convert the PDF she’d had since early April to an unlocked Excel format and asked her why she was holding up the budget process. The Clerk responded with a thank you for sending the file in the requested format. Unfortunately, the budget was not submitted to the newspaper in time for publication for the ten days required. Director Gleason stated: “Our town clerk is and has been openly hostile to this organization and will continue to be so.” He went on to say that he had no idea why, as we had started a relationship with their office attempting to be nothing but pleasant, including offering assistance and help on vendor permits and all kinds of other matters downtown. Director Gleason concluded that the budgetary hold-up between March and mid-June is “unreasonable, disrespectful, and has no bearing in any reality whatsoever.”

B. Welcomes and Goodbyes

1. The exciting news for our Board’s Vice President is that Ernst and Gladys welcomed a baby girl named Gianna! We are extremely excited for them and sending our best wishes!
2. President Packard thanked Board Member and departing Town Councillor Lori Price Abrams. She described her as a “great advocate and great friend to Montclair Center”. Director Gleason said that in his nine years of involvement in the BID, he had not seen a councilor as dedicated. He went on to say that Board member Price Abrams had made a solid commitment to the Montclair Center BID, showed up to meetings, and that “her active voice has been a game changer for Montclair Center.” He thanked her for being a friend, advisor, and overall gracious person.

Board member Price Abrams said that being a part of Montclair Center has been exciting and enlivening. She added that the participation of property owners, business owners, and staff on the Montclair Center BID Board contribute so much. She also said that while she wasn’t tied into the BID initially, she saw that Montclair Center has “walked through the doors that it has because it has leveraged state dollars.” She concluded by expressing her thanks and saying: “you are just a really smart, dynamic group of people and it has been a pleasure working with the you all.”

3. Executive Director Jason Gleason has tendered his resignation effective August 1st. President Packard said: “Jason’s passion, creativity, everpresent integrity, and broad skill set have steered the BID ably through tricky waters and developed great opportunities

for us. Through his tenure as Executive Director and four years on the board, Jason will leave the organization and the board better than ever. You'll be much missed."

Director Gleason read a few words from his resignation letter:

"No words put to paper could ever truly effectuate an understanding of the immense joy and profound enrichment in my life that having the privilege of serving Montclair Center for the last five years has been. I'm deeply grateful for the support and opportunities provided me during my tenure and I look forward to seeing Montclair Center BID's continued growth and success well into the future. While I've decided to pursue new opportunities that align more closely with my personal and professional goals, I'm confident that the Montclair Center BID will thrive under new leadership. I'm committed to ensuring a smooth transition over the coming months and will work closely with the board and my successor to provide any necessary support and share any insights that may assist in the ongoing success of our projects and initiatives."

V. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT (*Jason Gleason*)

New and noteworthy in Montclair Center:

- Director Gleason thanked the new Mayor-Elect and Town Council-Elect for attending the new ribbon cutting for The Juice House on Willow Street.
- The Wellmont will host an outdoor concert series in collaboration with Montclair Center, Latinos of Montclair, and Jazz House Kids.
- Montclair Center has sponsored Latinos of Montclair for three outdoor dance/movement events.
- The township has hired Daniel White as its economic development coordinator. This is a new position underwritten by a grant, and the objectives of the job are still being fully developed. According to Director Gleason, we should continue developing strong partnerships and ties with the township, as everyone will be stronger for it.
- *Openings and Closings* - Since the board last met, three businesses have closed: 908, The Tea Company, and Ascend. New openings have been numerous: Houss Freya, Tasca, Dhamaal, 16 Handles, Retro Fitness, Montclair Convenience, Milk and Cookies, The Juice House, Keep Creating Art Wellness Center, Soul Spirit Yoga and Wellness, Montclair Mezzanine, and Izzy's Boxing.
- *Vacancies* - Our current ground-floor vacancy rate is an impressively low 4.9%, with only twenty-two leasable spaces (excluding Lackawanna Plaza and between Valley Road and the police station).
- *Placer Statistics* - Visitation in May '24 is up slightly from May '23. During the same year-to-year period, downtown Montclair saw 15,000 more visits. As of May 2024, the total number of year-to-date visits was 200,000. Wednesdays are showing a significant uptick. Visitation dwell time has dropped slightly, while overall visit frequency numbers have gone up.
- *Marketing* - Director Apicella shared the marketing report. Montclair Center BID's Instagram is experiencing significant growth passing a milestone of 15,000 followers. Our impressions have increased by 74%. The top post featured the ribbon cutting at

Houss Freya. The reel for Houss Freya has been played 15,000 times and replayed 6,000 times with over 1,000 shares. Other notable posts include the Summer Sunday announcement, the Forbes feature about Robbie Felice of Pasta Ramen, and the Pride recap.

- Experience Montclair:
 - Director Apicella and Administrative Assistant Gordon represented Montclair at NJTIA's Advocacy Day.
 - Experience Montclair was a special guest at Plates Around the World in New York City with Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way. Plates Around the World showcased Pasta Ramen and Montclair Brewery.
 - Experience Montclair launched its summer campaign featuring al fresco dining options across the six districts directing everyone to The Experience Montclair website for the full list. The campaign was featured for 90 days in New Jersey Monthly's digital ads as well as Visit NJ. In print, Experience Montclair will be in Edible New Jersey and The Star Ledger.
 - Experience Montclair sponsored the Montclair African American Heritage Foundation Parade and Festival with advertising.
 - The Pride radio campaign with WXPB garnered 600,000 impressions over a four week on-air period. Visit New Jersey gave our DMO the only dedicated Pride post out of all of the Pride events within New Jersey. These marketing efforts contributed to Experience Montclair's Instagram being up 62% from last month. Highlights included Pride, Rose Squared Art Show, and summer dining.

VI. TREASURERS REPORT (*Matt Horrigan*)

Director Gleason and Treasurer Horrigan met with our accountant, Tesha Kelley. The Montclair Center BID is underbudget by \$1,200. Treasurer Horrigan stated that "all in all we are on budget". The Financial Affairs Committee meeting will be meeting in July and anyone from the Board is welcome to attend.

VII. EXPERIENCE MONTCLAIR (DMO) OVERVIEW (*Jackie Apicella, Jason Gleason*)

The DMO Committee held a detailed discussion about the current state of Experience Montclair, its destination marketing organization. The conversation included an assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. It was determined that the local business membership does not provide significant value to the DMO and that the membership model is not sustainable in the long term. The membership model also closely resembles a BID that already exists, which requires considerable attention to managing more members and demands expensive time and resources. Each marketing initiative involves meticulous planning, design, execution, and management of social media calendars, blogs, websites, and other related tasks.

Unlike the DMO in places like Atlantic City, which benefits from multiple hotels and numerous attractions, our DMO operates under a different framework. Therefore, moving forward, we will focus on partnerships with our two hotels, historic sites, the town's parks and recreation centers, museums, and other entities. The BID will continue marketing for our stakeholders, while the DMO will implement targeted marketing campaigns. Experience Montclair will continue to educate travelers about Montclair's

attractions and offerings and oversee coordinated tourism initiatives to attract visitors, boost tourism, growth, and ensure the destination's overall success and sustainability.

Due to budget constraints, our DMO can only support one employee to the BID match, but that grant remains beneficial, providing additional marketing support for this in-house role. We will prioritize significant ad purchases in out-of-state tourism. By adhering to the DMO grant guidelines, we will continue to allocate funds to attract out-of-state visitors to Montclair through day trips and overnight stays. This includes all six districts and surrounding areas, attracting tourists not only to Montclair, but right back to Montclair Center.

Board President Packard added that the board should ensure that Director Apicella has all the support she needs in her multiple roles.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

A. *Mural Project Update*

Director Gleason contacted artist Christine Kwan to inform her that she had been chosen to create the mural for the Pilgrim Medical Center. Board Member Bussey shared her experience as one of the judges who reviewed 59 artists. The judging process involved narrowing down the candidates to the top ten, and then to the top three, with significant discussion. The property and business owners were presented with the top three options and immediately favored the chosen design.

The mural contains symbolic imagery such as the state bird, the Goldfinch, and the sassafras plant, which holds deep significance to the Lenape people in terms of healing and hope. The mural also features irises, symbolizing feminine energy, magic, rebirth, and transcendence.

Director Gleason described the project as transformative for our downtown, noting that his first major project as an interim director was also a mural. This project marks the completion of his tenure.

Board Member Silverman inquired about the buffer zone area at Pilgrim. Director Gleason mentioned that a recent Supreme Court ruling validated a buffer zone, stipulating that no more than six people are allowed to congregate at a time. If there are more than six people, half the group must stand across the street.

B. *Pride Festival Update*

We are waiting for the full attendance numbers from Placer regarding Pride. Director Gleason discussed Pride's impact on local businesses and mentioned that four businesses had complaints about the festival. Director Apicella noted that due to the lack of a headliner on the stage for a period of time, there were fewer people present at the stage, resulting in more interaction with vendors and businesses. Board Member Zachares mentioned that this year was definitely better for her booth. Different businesses had different experiences. For example, Hair 491 experienced a significant increase in bookings following Pride as a result of offering fairy hair at the festival. Director Gleason emphasized the significance of these festivals for the township, explaining that Montclair Center's involvement in such events and cultural organizations fosters a sense of connection and

community among the residents. Board President Packard inquired about any incidents related to bias, which, fortunately, were none. However, there were a couple of heat-related incidents.

C. *Summer Sunday Update – June 23.*

It will be a big day on Sunday, with 64 businesses spilling out onto the sidewalk. Three community murals will be at three different points downtown. Ten buskers will be present. The Latinos of Montclair will have a DJ with dance lessons at the Wellmont. In the evening, Barbie will be screened at Lackawanna Plaza. Montclair Film screening of Barbie at Lackawanna. It will be an awesome day!

D. *Main Street Grant and associated projects update*

We have started every initiative for the 2024 Main Street Grant, including street planters, the mural and associated awning, initiating the conversation with Vibemaps, and the EDS payment. According to Director Gleason, we have completed three-quarters of the Main Street Grant.

E. *Jazz Festival Update*

The Jazz Festival contract will be on Director Gleason's desk shortly. The Jazz Festival staff is very strong this year, and overall, they are months ahead of where they were last year in terms of organization and planning. They have assets and press releases ready. According to Director Gleason, this year's Jazz Festival should be a "home run." This year, they have three lead sponsors.

IX. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. Summer Projects

Planters - The new planters should arrive in a couple of weeks. Director Gleason has offered the old planters to the Vision Zero Taskforce for their demonstration projects, or they could go into storage.

Vision Zero pilot projects - Board Member Nieman gave a brief update on Vision Zero. He said the committee was waiting for the Town Council to adopt the Complete Streets Ordinance. Board Member Price Abrams asked about the roundabout at Church Street, and Director Gleason responded that we will be planning many wildflowers there for the summer.

NJ BPU Grant, Chargers - We are working on the grant with PSE&G. PSE&G will pay for the most costly portion of it. It is another grant that is currently in progress.

Parking and PR project - Assistant Director Shah spoke about the parking signs. He asked if using a sticker was the best format or if having a card at the registers might be better. Everything is designed. It's just a matter of what format we use for the businesses.

Finding a new Executive Director - Board Member Horrigan spoke on behalf of the Executive Director search team. The Executive Committee met a couple of times and were told about Executive Director Gleason's departure last week. The order of notification for

the announcement is Director Gleason's contacts, the Board of Directors, and the stakeholders, followed by a general press release.

The job description and posting will be shared with the Board on Basecamp. Resumes will be sent to a single email address and phone number, where President Packard will handle the calls and narrow down the list of applicants. Director Apicella will join the search team, and Assistant Director Shah will apply for the position. Treasurer Horrigan asked for ideas on where to post the job, and Assistant Secretary/Treasurer Silverman suggested sending the information through direct networks rather than posting it. Director Gleason suggested advertising through organizations such as the League of Municipalities, LDA, Main Street, and DTNJ. The Search Committee contacted Assistant Director Shah and asked him to be the Interim Executive Director.

President Packard moved to nominate Assistant Director Shah to the position, with Board Member Grochowski seconding the nomination. President Packard moved to enter the Executive Session, with Assistant Secretary/Treasurer Silverman seconding.

Assistant Director Shah was unanimously voted to be Interim Executive Director by the Board.

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

President Packard moved to adjourn the meeting, and Treasurer Horrigan seconded at 9:05 pm.

ADJOURNMENT

*September full board meeting will be **Wednesday, September 18, 2024**, at 7 pm at the BID office.*