

MONTCLAIR CENTER BID - BOARD MEETING

November 20, 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, David Placek, Emer Featherstone, Stacey File, Daniel Garcia-Pedrosa, Ernst Goldman, Neil Grabowsky, Rachael Grochoswski, Natalie Haddad, Matt Horigan, Jill Montague, Jacob Nieman, Jaji Packard, Brian Silver, Matt Silverman, Nat Testa, Rahum Williams, Kristen Zachares

Staff in Attendance: Interim Executive Director: Abhishake Shah, Director Experience Montclair: Jackie Apicella, Administrative Assistant: Aysa Gordon

Absent: Liz Rich. Aminah Toler

Guests: Pierce Conway, Lamont James, Karen Schloss-Diaz, Inder Singh, Melanie Tomaszewski

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 pm.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were made.

III. ADOPTION OF OCTOBER MINUTES

Assistant Secretary Silverman moved to approve the October Minutes and Board Member Garcia-Pedrosa seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT (*Jaji Packard*)

A. New Executive Director of the MCBID

President Packard announced Abhishake Shah as the new Executive Director of the Montclair Center BID.

B. Introduction of Visitors

The staff, board, and guests introduced themselves.

V. RECRUITMENT, NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (*Daniel Garcia Pedrosa*)

A. Board Elections Process

Board Member Garcia-Pedrosa outlined the board election process. Anyone who expressed an interest is running and on the ballot. The ballot goes out to the stakeholders for the vacant seats. More people are running than there are seats. Being elected is only one way to get involved. There is also the option of being a part of a committee, and the board can match individuals by interest and skill. Board seats occasionally open throughout the year so there are also ways to join the board, off-cycle. All board meetings are open. There are many ways to stay involved in the Montclair Center BID outside of being a board member.

VI. UPDATES FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL

Councilor and Board Member Williams spoke about the various initiatives that the Town Council is working on.

Free Holiday Parking. Some have discussed reducing the free parking time frame to two weeks or some other shorter time frame.

Storm Water Mitigation Committee. Director Shah spoke about getting information from key stakeholders and understanding best practices. He also talked about the Ambassadors' work with clearing the curbs of garbage after storms.

Overnight Parking. There are only fifteen available streets to park on overnight between 2 am – 5 am. There has been some discussion about expanding overnight parking options in Montclair.

Mobility Committee. This committee handles Vision Zero and the Safe Streets initiative to reduce traffic incidents.

VII. EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT (*Abhishake Shah*)

A. New and Noteworthy in Montclair Center

Director Shah thanked everyone for his new role. He said he was happy and proud to be in it and promised to live up to and hopefully exceed expectations.

- Chow Town Food Tour. There was a pilot tour at Walnut Street. A Holiday Sweets Tour is planned in downtown Montclair center.
- News 12 Interviews at Church Street. News 12 will conduct interviews with businesses starting with the lit-up Christmas tree and including spots at Acorn, Francis Henri, Jayce Baudry, Lit café, and Alchemy Scent Bar.
- Winter Wonderland and Lackawanna Station Grand Opening on November 30th. Both are sure to drum up some significant business downtown.
- Annual Meeting location. We are in search of an event space for the annual meeting.
- Downtown New Jersey Conference at the Mezzanine on December 5th. Ten tickets will be available for BID members. It promises to be a great event with interesting speakers and networking opportunities.
- Halloween delivered 2,800 visitors downtown with 98 businesses participating.
- Both the Pride and Jazz festivals had an outstanding turnout. The numbers according to the State Department of Tourism showed that the average amount spent per person at Pride was \$59 and at Jazz was \$47 with a rough estimate of \$2,945,000 spent local in the local economy at just those two festivals alone.

- Open/close. Five businesses opened including Mister, Black Box Franchising, Lit Café, and le French Dad changed hands. Organic Sun Market, By Veronica, Guerriero Gelato, GB Art Gallery, Jiang Nan, and MTS Massage closed. Director Shah estimates that downtown businesses are made up of 33% retail and 42% restaurants.
- Placer Data. Year-over-year, 2023 to 2024, between October 1st and November 15th, visitation to Montclair was up by 100,000 visitors. Visitation time has increased from 117 minutes in 2023 to 134 minutes in 2024. Wednesdays have shown the biggest increase in visitation with an 18% increase in visitation from 2023.
- Ambassadors. The ambassadors are responsible for putting up all the holiday decorations and placing out the tulip bulbs. Between January and November, they have collected 4,507 bags of garbage which is up from 3,600 bags last year. This is a positive point because more trash means more visitors. Melanie Tomaszewski, owner of Montclair Mud Clay, and other board members complimented the ambassadors on their overall demeanor, politeness, neatness and efficiency within the downtown and among the business community.

B. Unhoused Committee Update

Director Shah discussed the Services Fair hosted by the Salvation Army, where various service providers directly assist those in need. He created a flyer detailing whom downtown business workers should contact if they encounter an unhoused individual requiring help. This flyer equips local businesses with the necessary information and resources. Shah emphasized the presence of a dedicated group of police officers trained to handle these situations. He acknowledged that while some members of the unhoused community are open to receiving help, others may not be as receptive.

Furthermore, Shah talked about securing funding for a social worker and the logistics involved in this process. Fortunately, the Community Development Services (CDS) has a program in Jersey City that offers community service ambassadors, who possess the qualifications to support those in the unhoused community. Board Member Grochowski raised concerns that some downtown businesses are facing significant challenges with disruptive individuals from the unhoused community, leading them to consider relocating and feeling uncertain about whom to approach for assistance.

Councilor and Board Member Williams noted that the library has recently received funding for a part-time social worker. Director Shah stated the importance of police involvement when someone is particularly unruly. They discussed the idea of having officers on foot patrol to enhance their ability to respond promptly and engage more with the community within the business district.

Board Member Zachares expressed discomfort with calling the police for individuals experiencing mental health issues, suggesting that an easily accessible, well-trained social worker would be a more suitable alternative to an officer with a gun and badge, which could be intimidating. Board Member Silverman highlighted the need for gathering data and statistics to better understand the dynamics of the local unhoused community and to form a well-rounded perspective on the situation.

VIII. TREASURERS REPORT

A. Review, Discussion, and Vote on the 2025 Budget

Currently we are under budget by \$36,000 through the year. If you add depreciation, we are underbudget by \$10,000. Strategic initiatives for this year include planters, Vibemaps, and the mural. The BID is looking for an increase of 2.5% for the assessment. Four meetings with the finance committee helped to solidify the projected budget. The board examined the 2025 projected budget prior to voting on it.

Board Member Horrigan motioned to adopt the proposed MCBID budget and Board Member Testa seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IX. MARKETING AND EXPERIENCE MONTCLAIR UPDATE (*Jackie Apicella*)

A. Social media

With over 100 fall events lined up, we expected to see notable growth last month. While Montclair Center concentrated on supporting small businesses, Experience Montclair focused heavily on events and tourism, which aligns perfectly with our mission.

Montclair Center's Instagram account has now grown to 15,636 followers, reflecting a 16% increase from last year. Some of our top posts in October featured the announcement of Aura Head Spa, a recap of the Zombie Walk, and behind-the-scenes glimpses of Los Hermanos Mexican Grill.

On Facebook, we highlighted our new mural and the Sustainability Office's planting project near the Crescent Deck. This variety in audience interests across platforms showcases the diverse engagement of our community.

For the BID, our main goal will continue to be supporting small businesses, including retail shops, restaurants, and spas, as we head toward the end of the year. Meanwhile, Experience Montclair will highlight local districts and events to keep the momentum going.

Additionally, our office will serve as the headquarters for Make Music Montclair, hosting live performances and the Unsilent Night meetup. Our staff is gearing up over the weekend to create a festive and welcoming atmosphere.

X. OLD BUSINESS (*Abhishake Shah*)

A. Film Festival Update

Board Member Montague spoke about the great energy and sold-out events for The Montclair Film Festival. The festival boasted over 130 different films, conversations and events throughout the ten days of the festival. There were an estimated 18,000 attendees. Over 180 filmmakers gave Q & As after the films. There were 44 different sponsors and 95 different advertisers. In terms of advertising, there was lots of great media coverage including exclusives in The Hollywood Reporter, Indie Wire and Variety Magazine. Over 160 volunteers worked over 1,300 hours. Some of the films shown are getting a lot of Oscar buzz. Goals were met. Ticket sales were up. The average amount spent on food was \$120 and on retail was \$65 retail and hopefully the businesses felt that.

B. Winter Wonderland Plans

Our annual tradition, Winter Wonderland, will be held on November 30th on Small Business Saturday. Thirteen non-profits will be offering kid-friendly activities and crafts. Buddy The Elf, The Grinch, and other characters will be at the Wellmont Plaza. The event will be held from 12 pm - 4 pm. An accompanying digital gift guide will be available to show discounts and offers at over 70 local businesses.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Downtown New Jersey Conference

Downtown New Jersey, an advocacy organization, focuses on economic development in New Jersey. The conference will be held on December 5th at the Montclair Mezzanine between 8:15 am to 4:30 pm.

B. Holiday Parking Discussion (*Matt Silverman, Clean Safe, and Green & Parking Committee*)

Board Member Silverman spoke about the Free Holiday Parking at the meters downtown. The township approves free parking at the meters from November 26th to Jan 3rd. Visitors can park without paying with an enforced 2-hour time limit. The township must approve this yearly with a resolution. Board Member Williams addressed the board by saying that he questioned the extended free parking because of the cost associated. He mentioned town residents' complaints over tax increases and asked the board their thoughts on the issue to get a more complete picture. He also spoke about wiggle room to use a shorter timeframe- possibly two weeks- for the free parking. Director Apicella said that the MCBID's motto for the holidays has been "avoid the malls, shop small" so the free parking incentivizes visitors to enjoy our downtown. She continued that free holiday parking is seen as a gift to the downtown community and to the businesses and revoking that could be seen as a slap in the face. Board Member Silver asked about the lost revenue. The board surmised it is likely roughly \$100,000 loss. Board Member Horrigan said that it would be a "PR nightmare" to break with tradition and scale free parking

back. Board Member Silverman mentioned that he thought moving the free parking to the decks could be a useful idea to help educate visitors about using the decks. Board Member Williams encouraged more helpful parking signage downtown. Director Shah credited Board Members Testa and Silverman for helping with a project which added such signage in key places near the parking decks.

XII. OPEN DISCUSSION – New Ideas, Comments, Questions

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.

The next full board meeting will be our Annual Meeting on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, at 7 pm at Montclair Mezzanine.