

**Downtown Business District
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 26, 2014
330 Main Street, Middletown, CT**

Attendees:

Jennifer Alexander
Val Scribano
Marc Levin
Mike DiPiro
Jeff Pugliese
Peter Harding

Captain Moriarty
Michiel Wackers
Diane Gervais
Steve Kovach
Nicole Castrogiovanni

Minutes

Tabled minutes of January Meeting

Treasurer's Report

Due to guides out and a period of time without an Administrative Assistant or Director, we will have a budget surplus. Motion made to accept, seconded and approved.

Police

There are 6 people in the police academy, of which 3 will graduate in a couple weeks.

There is graffiti at the corner of Liberty Square. When police are informed about graffiti, they notify public works to have it painted over and also report it to Street Crime for tracking to see if it is gang related. There is a significant amount of graffiti behind the Bob's building. Captain Moriarty said that they will have extra patrol in the area. "Off the Wall Graffiti Removal" was suggested for removal. Jen Alexander brought up the fact that when graffiti is on public property, the DBD guides take care of it if they are able and if not, the city takes care of it. When the graffiti is on private property, it is the business owners' responsibility and sometimes they do not know how to proceed. The DBD will circulate information about "Off the Wall" to businesses.

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TOWN CLERK
MIDDLETOWN, CT

Lisa Gibbs was arrested again for panhandling. She has been arrested 25 times since 2012. Police have asked the court to help get her into a program to keep her off the streets and for treatment of alcoholism.

Even though it is well lit, there has been an issue with people urinating in the alley next to the Luce building.

A very thin woman, usually wearing a hood, in her early 30s, has been seen panhandling often in front of subway. Jen Alexander shared an example of how the police intervened in the mental health issue of a man that had caused a public disturbance both at the Inn and at Kidcity. Jen notified the police, who got help for the man. He later found Jen to thank her for doing so. He had been off his medications but got back on track. Jen said that it was great to know that the police understood that this was a mental health issue and they were aggressive in getting him help. Captain Moriarty said that they deal with mental health issues differently than they deal with criminals and that Middletown Police are trained especially for these situations.

Public Works

All agreed that they have done an amazing job on snow removal this season.

Parking

The Parking Commission is considering getting rid of the gates in Melilli Plaza and instead using a system where people would remember their license plate number, then plug it into a machine that tells them how much time they have. Jen Alexander said that she feels this is not a consumer friendly option and she would like to advocate for simply putting meters in the lots, then blocking off 20-30 spaces which would provide two hours of free parking for fast turnover retail and restaurant traffic. We have lost revenue by having to put the gate up and let people come in and out. The question was raised, as to whether a section of the lot could be blocked off for monthly permit holders. Jen Alexander suggested that perhaps instead of blocking off a section of the lot, the monthly permit holders could park in the metered spaces. This would function better on a Saturday, for example, when all spaces can be used and can bring in revenue.

Economic Development

The grand list for Middletown went down, while the grand list for Main Street went up significantly. All the properties on Main Street have a grand list value of \$117,000,000. The list is up from \$98,000,000 in 2007, when values for residential properties were at their highest in the last 20 years. Main Street has not only retained its value, but has increased. An analysis of economic development projects in the downtown is currently underway. In the last 12 years, projects done downtown, in which the city

assisted, returned an increase in value of over 800%. Projects in the downtown, done by property owners, in which the city did not assist, only increased in value by 200%. The analysis proves that the city has a track record of investment and partnership with the downtown and private sector which is beneficial to all.

Friday we are getting submittals from developers for the Metro Square property and the parking lot arcade. Michiel Wackers said that they will come up with a concept that makes sense and then will see if the city can make a project out of it going forward. Discussions are in progress with the owner of Metro Square. He is receptive to the current explorations and understands that his property is not operating at optimal capacity.

11 applications have been received for the Economic Development Specialist Position. A schedule for interviews has not yet been set up.

Michiel Wackers distributed a graph which showed the values of Main Street fronting properties from 1998 to 2013. Since the last evaluation in 2007, Main Street values have gone up by 19%, while the overall grand list has gone down by 9%. Every building on Main Street has generally gone up in value, except for the Bob's building, which went down in value by 2%. The Rite Aid building went up significantly.

A spreadsheet of estimated DBD tax showed the change in property values from 2013 – 2014. Jen Alexander asked if it would be possible to find out about changes in property value of other towns with or without a special services taxing district. She pointed out that Main Street property value has increased by 130% since 1998, which was when the Main Street program got traction. She thought it would be interesting to know the impact of having a special services taxing district.

Budget

Budget Committee: Mike DiPiro, Diane Gervais, Jen Alexander and Marc Levin.

Jen Alexander prepared a notes document that indicated budget allocations. A minor adjustment was seen in "administration" and a significant adjustment was seen in the "guides' salary." The budget proposes 8 guide shifts per week (24 hrs/week) for 6 months of the year (May, June, July, August, September, December) and 4 guide shifts per week (12 hrs/week) for the remaining 6 months of the year. The DBD currently has one working guide and one that could potentially come back. Jen Alexander feels that each guide should not do more than 2 shifts per week so the perspective is always fresh. Therefore, the DBD would need to hire 4 guides. Four guides would give us more flexibility for downtown events. The goal is to have the guides for lunches and dinners scattered throughout the week. All members agreed that guides are important. Diane Gervais suggested that we do need them especially on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but not on a Monday morning, for example. Jen Alexander said that if necessary, this part of the budget could be trimmed down a bit. (It was later decided to trim this down in favor of increasing the budget for "planters.")

There was an increase in "maintenance and beautification". The street sweeping schedule will be changed to twice a week for 4 months, once a week for 6 months and the remaining two months would be on an "as needed" basis.

The topic of sidewalk washing was raised. It was suggested that we could ask Public Works if they would contribute to doing it once a year, in addition to it being done once a year by the DBD. It was also suggested that the DBD could pay for the rental of the sidewalk scrubbing machine and Public Works could supply the man power. Another suggestion was made that it would be done quarterly, skipping winter. The rental company is called Tenant and it costs \$2,500-3,000 for a weekend rental.

"Planters" went down substantially but will be adjusted to go back up to the same budget as last year.

Office supplies went down. The reason was unknown, but was thought possibly to be due to purchase of equipment that did not need to be repeated.

The DBD did not draw down all the taxes from city hall in 2011/2012, so there was an extra \$5,800. The projected surplus by the end of June is \$44,000. (This includes the \$5,800, but does not include \$6,700 in unspent Downtown Dollars.) \$44,000 can be allocated to special projects. Jen Alexander said that the DBD is looking at a banner project, which will cost between \$7-8,000. Other pricing option will be explored. The DBD will inquire as to whether the fire department would assist.

It was noted that the DBD gives \$5,000 to the Chamber per year to support downtown events.

Not all gift card points of sale are functional. The bank affiliated with the cards has changed and the cards are no longer working except at the Chamber. It was pointed out that the list of accepting businesses needs to be updated online. A suggestion was made that businesses should not be allowed to accept gift certificates only. If they want to be part of the program they should join completely and accept the gift cards.

Motion to accept the budget (with changes) by Peter Harding.

2nd by Mike DiPiro.

North End

There will be a healthcare fair on March 20th from 3:00pm -7:00pm at the North End Action Team office. The gun buy-back has been moved to March 29th. Gift cards will be offered in exchange for guns. April 1st is the Mayor's recognition of service at the Ferry Street Garden. Saturday, April 26th is the North End's Pride Day – a day that volunteers get together to clean up the north end. The Farmer's Market starts in mid June. The DBD is a sponsor of the market. Jen Alexander suggested that we make more of that sponsorship.