

DOWNTOWN
METUCHEN

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STRATEGIC PLAN

2017-2022



METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE 2017-2018 BOARD & VOLUNTEER TEAMS

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BOROUGH OF METUCHEN

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

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October 2, 2017

As a lifelong Metuchen resident, and now as the Mayor of the Borough, I couldn't be more excited about how far our Downtown has come and the momentum, excitement, and opportunity here today.

The start of the Metuchen Downtown Alliance is the result of collaborative efforts of Borough officials, Alliance volunteers, and dedicated business and property owners. Due to this collaboration our Downtown has reached the highest occupancy rate in decades. Metuchen is quickly becoming a destination for visitors, a gathering place for families, and a location where innovative businesses and entrepreneurs choose to locate.

In recent years over \$100 million of investment by Woodmont Properties, the Renaissance development anchored by Whole Foods, and several other projects have sparked a retail revival downtown. Over 50 businesses have opened or expanded since January 2016.

Metuchen has a rich history of being a place where innovative, creative, and artistic people gather. We look forward to welcoming new residents and businesses to our community that will write the next chapter in our unique story of innovation. Today we must recognize and build upon the successes to date and guide our downtown and Borough on a path to further success. This strategic plan and the vision and goals it lays out provide a road map of how we may achieve results.

I want to thank the Metuchen Downtown Alliance, downtown business and property owners, countless volunteers, my colleagues on the Borough Council, and the community of Metuchen who have helped us to achieve the successes we see already. Working together we can and will lead our Borough to a better and brighter future.

Thank you,


Peter Cammarano
Mayor



WELCOME!

September 26, 2017

Dear Members, Volunteers, Stakeholders, and Partners:

Since our founding the Metuchen Downtown Alliance has achieved some major milestones. In 2017 we were recognized as an Affiliate Program by the National Main Street Center. That connects us with over 1,600 communities nationally doing similar work. Several of our volunteers attended the Main Street Now conference and took away valuable insights about how to put economic vitality at the center of our work. That thinking is reflected in this plan, the strategies and goals we've laid out, and the action we are taking to achieve them.

This Strategic Plan represents nearly a year of hard-work and effort on your part - our Members, Volunteers, Stakeholders, and Partners. In particular, we would like to thank:

- Donna Ann Harris of Heritage Consulting who facilitated and drafted the Strategic Plan;
- The NJ Department of Community Affairs which provided a grant to fund Mrs. Harris's work;
- Over 400 community members who responded to surveys and provided their input;
- Kennedy Smith of CLUE Group who performed a market analysis which provided vital data used in this Strategic Plan;
- Metuchen Borough Council and the Metuchen Parking Authority which had the foresight to bring MDA into existence and fund it;
- Metuchen Chamber of Commerce and Metuchen Arts Council which have contributed to this plan and who will help achieve our goals for the downtown;
- and the MDA Board of Trustees and our volunteers who led and guided this effort as well as so many others over the past year.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, this Strategic Plan is not the end of MDA's work, it is not even the beginning of the end of MDA's work, but rather is merely the end of the beginning. This Strategic Plan is a road map of where MDA seeks to go, but now the hard work must be undertaken to fulfill the District's potential.

You are the key to the District's future success – our Members, Stakeholders, Volunteers, and Partners. Through shared efforts over the coming years we can and will position Metuchen as one of the leading downtowns in New Jersey and America.

Thank you,

Eric Berger
Chairman

Isaac D. Kremer
Executive Director





6 Photographs (upper left, center right and bottom) by Lauren Beischler.

INTRODUCTION

This 2017-2022 Strategic Plan is the Metuchen Downtown Alliance’s expansive vision and preferred future for the downtown over the next five years. Since the Borough of Metuchen established a Special Improvement District for the downtown in 2015 and adopted the Main Street Four-Point Approach^{®1} to organize their work, the Metuchen Downtown Alliance Board of Trustees, volunteers, and staff have worked hard to enhance the downtown district. As a start-up downtown revitalization organization, in the last fifteen months they have promoted the downtown’s variety of retail shops, restaurants, and service businesses, hosted retail events, filled vacancies, and marketed both the downtown and the organization.

Metuchen’s downtown is the historic heart of this central New Jersey community. Downtown Metuchen defines the community’s “sense of place” and reflects the borough’s heritage. The Main Street Approach stresses historic preservation as the underlying design principle for the revitalization effort. Main Street efforts nationwide aim to maximize the economic potential of each historic downtown while preserving its authentic character.

For Metuchen, the volunteer led teams are critical to the success of the

program and involve a wide variety of stakeholders including residents, business owners, partners, and property owners who make decisions about the future of the downtown. These stakeholders participated in all facets of the research leading up to the creation of the MDA’s first 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. This plan represents the next phase in the MDA organizational growth and development.

Donna Ann Harris, principal of Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based consulting firm, worked with the Metuchen Downtown Alliance as they began their first efforts at commercial district revitalization. Ms. Harris worked closely with Isaac Kremer, the MDA Executive Director, and board members to develop this Strategic Plan.

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The Strategic Plan research was conducted over nine months and included four activities, which are outlined below.

1. A SWOT Analysis Workshop was held on Monday, November 14, 2016. This three-hour evening meeting gathered input from 65 participants including MDA Trustees, organizational members, merchants, property owners, residents, and borough elected and appointed officials. During the meeting, we discussed the current conditions of both the downtown district and MDA organization. A summary memo was prepared that offered observations and recommendations for solving several specific short and medium-term problems. The SWOT Workshop Report is posted on the MDA website.
2. An Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey was conducted for four weeks from December 6, 2016 to January 2, 2017. This survey had 426 responses making it a statistically valid survey, representative of the entire population of the Borough of Metuchen. The survey provided critical demographic and market data about current downtown shoppers. A 162-page report was prepared and circulated to the MDA Trustees on January 20, 2017. The Executive Summary for the Shopper Survey Report is posted on the MDA website. A Visioning and Goal Setting Workshop was held on June 21, 2017. This two-and-a-half-hour-long session included eighteen MDA Board members, property owners, business owners, and key volunteers. Prior to the workshop, all participants received copies of the Metuchen Shopper Survey executive summary and the SWOT Analysis Workshop memo. The Visioning and Goal Setting workshop began with a presentation by Elaine Edgcomb, Economic Vitality Team member, who reviewed the two Transformation Strategies and the proposed vision statement prepared by the Economic Vitality Team.
3. This presentation compiled information from the Shopper Survey Report as well as the first phase of research from the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis* and Business Development Strategy for Downtown Metuchen study undertaken by Kennedy Smith of the CLUE Group. During the workshop, participants

¹ When we use “Main Street Approach” this refers to the Main Street Four-Point Approach[®]. Similarly when “Refresh” is used this refers to the Main Street Four-Point Approach[®] Refresh.

reviewed the current mission statement and reviewed lists of possible projects for the Transformation Strategies. By refining specific projects within the two Transformation Strategies, and team goals, the assembled group helped to further refine the organization’s preferred future.

4. A Visioning and Goal Setting Workshop was held on June 21, 2017. This two-and-a-half-hour-long session included eighteen MDA Board members, property owners, business owners, and key volunteers. Prior to the workshop, all participants received copies of the Metuchen Shopper Survey executive summary and the SWOT Analysis Workshop memo. The Visioning and Goal Setting workshop began with a presentation by Elaine Edgcomb, Economic Vitality Team member, who reviewed the two Transformation Strategies and the proposed vision statement prepared by the Economic Vitality Team. This presentation compiled information from the Shopper Survey Report as well as the first phase of research from the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis and Business Development Strategy for Downtown Metuchen* study undertaken by Kennedy Smith of the CLUE Group. During the workshop, participants reviewed the current mission statement and reviewed lists of possible projects for the Transformation Strategies. By refining specific projects within the two Transformation Strategies, and team goals, the assembled group helped to further refine the organization’s preferred future.
5. A MDA Board of Trustees meeting was held on July 14, 2017 when this Strategic Plan was reviewed by the Board of Trustees. The draft of the Strategic Plan was updated to reflect the recommendations of the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis and Business Development Strategy for Downtown Metuchen* completed after the Board meeting. This version of the Strategic Plan was reviewed by the Board of Trustees on August 11, 2017.

WHAT IS A STRATEGIC PLAN?

Board Source™, a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the public good by building exceptional nonprofit boards and inspiring board service, defines a Strategic Plan as a written document that defines an organization’s overarching strategies and major areas of work for the next five years to achieve the organization’s mission.

Strategic Plans for nonprofit organizations are created through a process that builds on research to accumulate wisdom about the organization, its environment, and its economic potential. This process involves stakeholders to ensure that the resulting Strategic Plan contains a comprehensive understanding of the organization’s preferred future.



Strategic Plans review or create common organizational planning elements such as the organization’s mission, vision, goals and projects. We have added to these planning elements, the Transformation Strategies as recommended by the National Main Street Center. We define and review each of these planning elements below.

MDA PLANNING HIERARCHY

WHAT IS A MISSION STATEMENT?

A mission statement articulates where the organization is now, not where it will be at some desired point in the future. An ideal mission statement identifies why the organization exists, who benefits from it, what the organization does, and, finally, how it does what it does. A good mission statement conveys how the organization relates to its public and communities, why and how it enhances the well-being of others and improves quality of life, and, finally, what service it provides. A mission statement should be easily memorized, as it becomes a part of the “elevator speech” about the organization.

CURRENT MDA MISSION STATEMENT

The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a volunteer-based, nonprofit downtown management corporation dedicated to the promotion and revitalization of the designated Metuchen business district (the District) in partnership with stakeholders, residents, municipal government, and other organizations.

The Metuchen Downtown Alliance’s mission is three-fold:

1. To support a healthy, diverse business climate through promoting and marketing existing businesses and attracting new complementary business.
2. To effect visible, tangible improvements to the District through streetscape beautification, cleanliness, and public art.
3. To create experiences to draw more customers to the District by coordinating, sponsoring, and promoting programs and events.

NEW MISSION STATEMENT FOR MDA

We are suggesting that the “ways and means” of fulfilling the mission be eliminated from the mission statement as superfluous.

The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a volunteer-based, nonprofit downtown management corporation dedicated to the management and revitalization of the designated Metuchen business district (the District) in partnership with stakeholders, residents, municipal government, and other partners.

WHAT IS A VISION STATEMENT?

A vision statement describes the preferred future of both the organization and commercial corridor after five years of work towards fulfilling the dreams of stakeholders. The vision statement should focus on the community impact and the power of the organization to transform downtown. A good vision statement is ambitious enough to force people out of comfortable routines and is conceptual but practical, taking advantage of fundamental trends from consumer research. A vision statement should be clear enough to articulate the visual changes in downtown.

NEW VISION STATEMENT FOR MDA

This vision statement below was written by the Economic Vitality Team.

We envision a welcoming, walkable, and inclusive downtown. Engaging public art, entertainment, and recreation abound throughout our historic and vibrant downtown. All residents and visitors will be brought together by daily and special downtown experiences at destinations, independent businesses, restaurants featuring personalized customer service.

2017-2022 TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

The National Main Street Center is encouraging Main Street communities to identify one or two Transformation Strategies to articulate “a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing or strengthening a downtown or commercial district’s economy.”² Each Transformation Strategy is “grounded by both an understanding of the underlying drivers of the local and regional economy, as well as community feedback and engagement. A Transformation Strategy should describe a market position that the commercial district can successfully fulfill. Each Transformation Strategy is implemented through activities in the four broad areas of work represented by the Four Points.”³

After a thorough review of economic and demographic data compiled by Kennedy Smith of the CLUE Group and Donna Harris of Heritage Consulting, the Economic Vitality Team recommended the following two Transformation Strategies. They focus on specific consumer clusters to organize the work of the Board of Trustees and volunteer-led teams over the next several years.

INNOVATION TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

We will build on Metuchen’s heritage of independent, creative people to cultivate innovative and unique small businesses, entrepreneurs, and artists.

FAMILY FRIENDLY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Metuchen will be a convenient regional destination for families and kids where something fun, new, and exciting is always happening. Downtown will be a place where families can find all the opportunities, products, activities, and experiences that today’s family needs and wants.

The Town Plaza and Pearl and New Streets will be activated with programmed and unprogrammed events throughout the year. It will become a place for people to gather daily and for extraordinary events.

GOALS

Goals are the ends towards which the actions are directed and coordinated. Goals are broad outcome statements with an expiration date that deal with the “what” not necessarily “how.” The Transformation Strategies each have specific desired outcomes to achieve by the end of this five-year strategic plan.

PROJECTS

Projects are specific activities designed to achieve a goal. For Main Street organizations, projects are implemented by Teams and volunteers.

¹ National Main Street Center, *The Main Street Approach: A Comprehensive Guide to Community Transformation*, Chicago IL: National Main Street Center, 2017, 8.

² *Ibid.*

ALIGNMENT WITH THE MAIN STREET FOUR-POINT APPROACH® REFRESH

Timing of preparation of this strategic plan was fortunate. The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a new downtown revitalization program, and thus not encumbered by past practices. Our start-up also coincided with unveiling of the Main Street Four-Point Approach® Refresh. Several people involved with preparing this strategic plan were present at the 2017 Main Street Now Conference held in Pittsburgh and heard presentations on this topic.

Metuchen was positioned well as a young program with only a brief experience with the traditional Main Street Approach. Without the baggage of prior experience, we were prepared to be among the first to apply the Refresh to our planning efforts.

Some of the key takeaways about the Refresh learned at the conference were as follows:

- The Main Street Center found that many programs were internally ‘siloe’d.’ Boards were not connected to committees, and some committees were not connected to one another.
- External siloes often happened as well, when Main Street programs lacked strong connections with partners in the community. Communication and community engagement strategies are needed to help overcome external siloes.
- Many programs have become focused primarily on promotions and events, missing out on opportunities to achieve economic vitality downtown.
- Some activities combine multiple points in the Main Street Approach, and, as such, need new ways to organize people and resources across the organization.
- The Main Street Approach needed a refresh to focus on economic impact.
- All actions we undertake need to be aligned with transformation strategies.
- The strategies tell us what we are to focus on, though also give us the cover to say no when an activity does not align with our strategies.
- At times, the committee-driven process was overly prescriptive and often got in the way of results.
- The focus on the four points of the Main Street Approach will continue, though we don’t necessarily need a team for each one.
- Communities need to define for themselves what organizational structure is best to achieve the Transformation Strategies they have laid out.
- Finally, increased attention needs to be provided on measurement of outcomes and impact beyond the traditional reinvestment statistics that programs are required to collect. Outcome measurements show success implementing Transformation Strategies.

Based on these observations the Main Street Four-Point Approach® Refresh calls for three tightly-integrated components:

1. Community visioning and market understanding
2. Transformation Strategies - Implemented through the Four-Point framework
3. Impact and measurement



The Main Street Approach showing how the Four Points correspond with the four elements of real estate value - Physical, Economic, Social, and Civic.

The structure of the MDA organization and how we describe groupings of people is changing. The traditional Main Street Approach had Committees coinciding with each of the four points. The Main Street New Jersey program substituted “Committee” with “Team” to create a sense of shared purpose. We have chosen the “Team” nomenclature to describe how we choose to organize people around our work. Moving forward every Team and Project will tie back to a Transformation Strategy and ultimately to the new Mission and Vision of the organization.

| MAIN STREET APPROACH | MAIN STREET NEW JERSEY | MAIN STREET REFRESH |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Committee | Team | Team |
| Sub-Committee | Task Force | Project Team |

From this point forward whenever the MDA uses the word “Team” it will indicate a designated Team that supports goals tied to specific transformation strategies. The name of the team will be **CAPITALIZED AND HIGHLIGHTED IN BOLD** to help it stand out. Additionally, whenever one of the four-points are mentioned it will be in **ALL CAPS** and highlighted in bold. This is to recognize that the Four-Points continue to be an effective method to organize information, even though they don’t necessarily represent four committees or teams that regularly meet.

MDA Teams and Project Teams as they stand now and moving forward are illustrated on the following page. The likelihood of additional Project Teams being created is strong, given the ever-changing nature of downtown revitalization work. Having a structure like this clearly laid out helps to ensure that we keep ourselves accountable and so every Team and Project ties back to a Transformation Strategy and ultimately to the Mission and Vision of the organization that the Board of Trustees must uphold as part of its fiduciary duties.



Just as the Transformation Strategies are helping us organize our work differently, the way we run our meetings will change. A few examples follow:

- Board meetings are to be organized around transformation strategies. At Board meetings, we have an opportunity to report on progress towards goals outlined for each strategy and to coordinate work across the organization.
- Teams may meet in large groups for a short time and then break out into smaller groups to discuss progress towards specific projects. This allows better coordination of resources and ensures only the key people are in the room at the appropriate times.
- Chairs of the three primary teams – **Innovation, Family Friendly, and Getting it Done** – may meet to coordinate work across their separate teams to make sure that it is well integrated.

Metuchen is poised to be among the first communities to apply the principles of the Refresh to achieve greater vitality downtown. Benefits we see from adopting the Refresh are increased focus on economic impact; broader community engagement; tangible, quantifiable outcomes; greater organizational flexibility; and greater relevancy.



STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This strategic plan represents the Metuchen Downtown Alliance Board of Director's best ideas towards creating a bright future for Metuchen's downtown. This new Strategic Plan however requires the organization to make hard choices about how it spends its limited staff, volunteer, and financial resources.

ALLOCATING SCARCE RESOURCES

All the projects that the MDA will implement over the next five years, through the combination of board, staff, teams, partners, and individual volunteers, must be aligned to achieve at least one of the Transformation Strategies or one of the Goals. If a project does not clearly meet any of the Goals or Transformation Strategies, the project should neither be staffed nor funded, as the organization has a finite number of volunteers and financial resources. This Strategic Plan permits the organization to gracefully say "no" to many worthy projects that volunteers, local government, and property owners bring to the MDA.

STAFFING AND VOLUNTEERS

This Strategic Plan sets out a very ambitious improvement agenda for the MDA over the next five (5) years. These activities are important and worthy, but the MDA Board must reach an agreement about how it will staff them.

While there are already some volunteers involved with the organization, there are not enough to implement even a small portion of these activities. The current staff cannot take on any more duties, as it is already significantly overstretched. The organization will need to hire one or more additional full or part time staff or consultants during the next five years to assure the continued success of the organization's ambitious agenda. As the MDA organization develops over the next five years, the Board and Teams will identify when additional help is needed and how these staff/consultant positions will be funded.

If the MDA Board, along with teams of volunteers, is to be responsible for implementing these tasks, then the Trustees must continue to invest substantially in volunteer infrastructure. Leadership for any new volunteer effort must come from the board members themselves, primarily in the form of promoting volunteer recruitment throughout the Teams and Board of Trustees.

ROLE OF WORK PLANS

Work plans for each project are reviewed and approved by the MDA Board of Trustees. The work plan provides detail on how to implement an effective project. Every work plan contains the following elements: Who (person or partner organization), What, When, How Much Expense, How Much Revenue, Volunteer Hours, Staff Hours, and of course, the Strategic Goal(s) or Transformation Strategy met. Collectively, these work plans are submitted to the Borough along with the proposed MDA budget each year. Work plans can be used to sell sponsorships, or to market the volunteer and collaborative opportunities available to individuals and groups of current or potential stakeholders. Work plans designate funders and show how the strategic plan is being implemented from year to year.

CONCLUSION

This 2017-2022 Strategic Plan for the Metuchen Downtown Alliance illustrates the Board of Trustees' broad vision and hope for the future for downtown Metuchen. This Strategic Plan contains new mission and vision statements. The two Transformation Strategies and other Goals mentioned above organize the rest of the document. This Strategic Plan should be used to guide all the organization's work over the next five (5) years, which is the useful life of this planning document.

INNOVATION TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Goal: We will build on Metuchen's heritage of independent, creative people to cultivate innovative and unique small businesses, entrepreneurs, and artists.

Anticipated Work Plans:

ECONOMIC VITALITY

BUSINESS RETENTION

- Market the MDA as the 'go to' resource for business attraction and business mix management, especially within the real estate brokerage and entrepreneurial community.
- Continue to host meet ups for existing businesses.
- Manage prospects who call, email, or visit.
- Strengthen relationships with current property owners and with new ones when properties change hands.
- Shop owners should be encouraged to coordinate one night each week when they are all open past 6 p.m. to meet the needs of customers.
- Form a **Tech Team** to work directly with existing merchants who want to expand their online commercial presence and add online sales channels.
- Form a **Creative Team** to bring new ideas and innovations to existing businesses that help their businesses and revenues grow.

SMALL BUSINESS EDUCATION

- Partner with the United Counties Economic Development Corporation, Community Capital, Small Business Development Center, New Jersey Business & Industry Association, and SCORE to offer classes, workshops, and one-on-one consulting for downtown business owners.
- Provide a written summary of the Transformation Strategies, and host group meetings and/or one-on-one conversations with stakeholders.
- Create a short summary of the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis* report and follow up with individual property owners to discuss opportunities.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

- Create recruitment packages, recruit team members, actively recruit new businesses to open here based on the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis and Business Development Strategy for Downtown Metuchen*, and coordinate with the **Family Friendly Team**.
- Recruit businesses in the Specialty Apparel and Furniture and Home Furnishings clusters.
- Additional recruitment targets include: arts and crafts supply; specialty food stores; games and toys; gift stores and sporting goods.
- **Innovation Team** should agree on priority business, product and service lines to actively recruit to downtown.
- Work with property owners and brokers to help ensure that, over time, the district develops compatible business clusters.
- Encourage each business to incorporate innovation and creativity into its business concept and operations

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- Recruit priority businesses through regional colleges, specialized trade schools (e.g. Culinary schools), and other economic development partners.
 - “Recruit from within”. Encourage successful downtown business to expand their stores, or open new businesses.
 - Have the **Tech Team** work with any new businesses to ensure a strong online presence and a variety of retail distribution channels.
 - With partners, create a maker space that is curated or crowd funded for artisans, artists, and other makers, such as tech/other.
 - Work with partners to create an incubator center that provides shared services that will attract these types of businesses: digital graphic designer, architects, medical technology, or new product development.
 - Create a rotating pop-up shop that results in five new permanent retail businesses by 2020 established because of MDA pop-up programs.
 - Encourage businesses to incubate other businesses within their store in partnership with property owners.

BUSINESS INCENTIVES

- The 2017 *Retail Market Analysis and Business Development Strategies* report suggested a variety of tools and incentives. Conduct research to identify which tools make sense for Metuchen, and implement incentive programs.

PROMOTION

- Complete an MDA business brochure/shopping guide with a parking map in 2017.
- Produce co-op marketing TV and interactive ads.
- Continue to offer retail events such as Love Metuchen; Small Business Saturday;
- New Year, New You; and Earth Day Reusable Bags and Community Cleanup in partnership with the Environmental Commission.
- Continue to produce Meet the Merchant videos through a partnership with downtown merchants.

CULTURAL PLAN

- Study other communities and determine how cooperation would enhance the artistic and cultural environment downtown through the Cultural Plan Team. Create a work plan and investigate funding opportunities for the Cultural Plan.

DESIGN

FAÇADE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- Complete downtown design guidelines in 2017 through the **Façade and Historic Preservation Team**.
- Present workshops with property owners and merchants about how the design guidelines work in 2018.
- Work with the borough to implement a Storefront Improvement Matching Grant Program in 2018. Create a **Storefront and Visual Merchandising Team** to create applications, and begin to accept applications in 2018.
- Provide superior design advice to any property owner or merchant that wants to make improvements to their storefront, signs or upper story building façade. Identify a local preservation architect to serve on the **Storefront and Visual Merchandising Team**.
- Continue to gather historic photos of downtown buildings, and use them to provide design assistance in 2017.
- Complete taking record photos of all downtown buildings to show “before” conditions in 2017.
- Work with the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee to determine if all or some of Metuchen’s downtown is eligible for listing on the National Register. If the whole downtown is not eligible, determine which individual buildings are eligible for listing so property owners can take advantage of the 20% Investment Tax Credit for Historic Preservation in 2018.
- Submit a grant application to the New Jersey Historic Trust for funding for National Register nominations in 2018.
- Work with any group that proposes to enact a local historic preservation ordinance that meets Certified Local Government criteria.
- Host links on MDA website for all borough incentive programs, and collaborate with the **Façade and Historic Preservation Team** and the **Storefront and Visual Merchandising Team** to promote incentives in 2018.

ORGANIZATION

- Host regular briefings about downtown to borough, state, and federal elected officials.
- Host openings and celebrations of new tangible projects when completed.
- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories about **Innovation Team** projects, events, and activities. Post these stories and photos to Facebook and pitch these stories to local media.
- Continue to gather reinvestment statistics for the National Main Street Center and promote these tangible evidences of success through storytelling, graphics, and numbers.



FAMILY FRIENDLY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Goal: Metuchen will be a convenient regional destination for families and kids where something fun, new, and exciting is always happening. Downtown will be a place where families can find all the opportunities, products, activities, and experiences that today's family needs and wants.

The Town Plaza will be activated with programmed and unprogrammed events throughout the year. It will become a place for people to gather daily and for extraordinary events.

Anticipated Work Plans:

FORUM THEATER



- Create a **Forum Theater Team** to work on feasibility studies and a business plan for the restoration of the Forum Theater into an active multi-functional theater. Follow the programming recommendations in the 2017 Retail Market Analysis. Partner with the owner to create such plans.
- Work with the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee and the **Façade and Historic Preservation Team** to place this property on the National Register of Historic Places, so it is eligible to use the 20% Federal Investment Tax Credit for Historic Preservation.

TOWN PLAZA

- Create a **Town Plaza Team** to manage and program the plaza year-round.
- Raise funds to equip and activate the new Town Plaza with amenities including theatrical lighting, sound equipment, projection capability, and a portable dance stage to support year-round programming such as concerts, movie screenings, theater events, live performances and dance as well as unprogrammed activities.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

- Create recruitment packages, recruit team members, find new businesses to open here based on the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis* recommendations, and coordinate with **Innovation Team**.
- Encourage new and existing businesses to adopt and promote family friendly characteristics as suggested in the recommendations of the 2017 *Retail Market Analysis*.
- Encourage business to add in store workshops, classes, product demonstration or other experiences as additional revenue sources for the business owner.
- Learn more about the shopping preferences, habits, and patterns of Millennials and Generation Z through survey and focus groups. Use this information for promotion and recruitment activities.
- Conduct a downtown intercept survey to learn about customers who visit downtown Metuchen within the year, and every three years thereafter to detect changes in consumer patterns.

DESIGN

- Encourage all business owners to animate their window and in-store displays to attract pedestrians based on recommendations in 2017 *Retail Market Analysis* report.

PROMOTION

- Continue to expand family friendly retail events such as Kids Downtown Takeover, Ladies Night Out, Live Fit Metuchen, Dine Metuchen, and other retail promotions.
- Create new family friendly retail promotions such as Parents Night Out, *Diner en Blanc*, Hunger Games themed event, school supply event, or family cooking classes at a local restaurant.
- Partner with the Metuchen Area Chamber on special events such as Metuchen Junebug ArtsFest and the Farmers Market.

ORGANIZATION

- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories about **Family Friendly Team** events and activities. Post these stories and photos to Facebook and pitch these stories to local media.
- Continue to gather reinvestment statistics for the National Main Street Center and promote these tangible evidences of success through storytelling, graphics, and numbers.



GETTING IT DONE

Recognizing how work we must do extends beyond the two Transformation Strategies we have designated, we are creating a **Getting It Done Team** to help cover everything else that needs to happen for the MDA to achieve success.

GOAL #1: Grow the MDA budget to \$500,000 by 2020 by winning grants, seeking sponsorships, and asking for individual and corporate donations. Continue to seek appropriations from the Borough of Metuchen and Metuchen Parking Authority to augment the special improvement district assessment. Cultivate and strengthen the MDA Board, add more staff, and enlarge the already well-trained volunteer ranks to manage our events and programs. Use traditional and new media to tell our story in the region, state, and nation.

Anticipated Work Plans:

ORGANIZATION

FUNDRAISING

- Build a diverse budget yearly to create an annual operating budget of \$500,000 by 2022.
- Seek 100% participation from all MDA Board members for the annual board giving campaign with a goal of raising \$1500 yearly. The Board Chair should report on the collection of these donations at each board meeting.
- By 2022, the Special Improvement District assessment will contribute \$250,000 to the MDA operating budget.
- By 2022 the Borough of Metuchen and the Metuchen Parking Authority will provide \$75,000 annually to support the operating budget of the MDA.
- Seek \$25,000 in grants from Middlesex County for arts programming by 2022.
- Raise \$25,000 from MDA programming revenue through sponsorship and vendor fees.
- Pursue foundation and government grants for specific projects in the downtown district and grow the number and size of the grants until they reach \$100,000 by 2022.
- Begin a residential investor campaign in 2017. Seek financial support from families and business and property owners in Metuchen to provide ongoing financial support for our work. Form an **Investor Campaign Team**, recruit members, and create a work plan to raise \$10,000 in 2018. Grow the sum yearly so that individual donations top \$25,000 by 2022.
- Begin planning for the reauthorization of the Special Improvement District in 2021.

STAFFING AND ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Staffing by 2022 will include one full time Executive Director, other part time staff as determined by need, consultants, and graduate school interns throughout the year. Manage and support staff with yearly reviews and encourage staff to take advantage of appropriate training.
- Continue to manage the MDA finances and provide monthly financial statements for board review. File required documents on time, such as IRS 990, New Jersey charities registration. Conduct audit at the end of the year, and file results with NJ Dept. of Community Affairs and the Borough. Post the documents to MDA website, and maintain annual membership in the National Main Street Center.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

- Establish a robust volunteer program to recruit, retain, and recognize even more volunteers to help in our work. Offer quarterly volunteer orientation/training.
- Host an annual volunteer appreciation event or activity, and invite all volunteers to attend and be recognized.

BOARD AND MEMBER MEETINGS

- Host quarterly meetings for members and the Annual Meeting of the MDA to honor businesses and individuals for their achievements.
- Maintain the MDA office, make technology upgrades as needed.
- Offer board training twice yearly as new board members are recruited, and provide orientation.
- The Nominating Team will identify likely board candidates each year for nomination and maintain a waiting list for board and officer positions. Add board, committee, and task force members with strong interest in and good ideas about one or both Transformation Strategies.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Establish a Communications Team to coordinate with Getting It Done Team, Innovation Team, and Family Friendly Team to pursue integrated media strategy.
- Communications Team will develop monthly newsletter, send out e-blasts, coordinate social media, and raise exposure of the organization and our work in media platforms.
- Continue to expand the MDA email list and traditional media list. Expand followers and friends on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media outlets.
- Maintain the www.downtownmetuchen.org website to promote the organization and the downtown district. Update and add to the website as needed.
- Continue to host regular briefings for borough, state, and federal elected officials on MDA progress.
- Invite all elected representatives to all major MDA announcements, storefront rehabilitations, or events and provide an opportunity for them to speak.
- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories about team events and activities. Post these stories and photos to Facebook and pitch these stories to local media.
- Gather reinvestment statistics for the National Main Street Center and promote these tangible evidences of success through storytelling, graphics, and numbers.

GOAL #2: Clean, Safe, Green and Attractive

In five years, downtown Metuchen will be beautiful. Our storefronts and historic buildings will gleam. Parking will be easy and plentiful, our sidewalks spotless, and pedestrian safety paramount. Downtown's public spaces and plazas will offer residents and visitors handsome places to sit or play year-round, and our award-winning streetscape, plantings, and placemaking activities will be the envy of towns in the region.

Anticipated Work Plans:

CLEAN

- Continue to clean and beautify downtown. Work with the Metuchen Department of Public Works on trash can emptying, additional sidewalk sweeping three days a week, and regular power washing of downtown sidewalks.
- Work with the Borough Department of Public Works to improve garbage and recycling collection downtown.

SAFE

- Work with the borough to identify grant funds to make sidewalk and pedestrian safety improvements throughout the downtown. Partner with NJ Department of Transportation Transit Village program and Borough Livability Committee and submit grant applications
- Identify grant funding to place additional wayfinding, directional signage, and interpretive panels throughout downtown.

GREEN

- Partner with the Department of Public Works and the Garden Club to install and maintain new planters in 2017 and maintain other landscape features downtown.
- Create a new, well-lit and well- designed Main Street pedestrian alley connecting Pearl Street to Main Street. Partner with borough to plan this improvement.

ATTRACTIVE

- Continue to add to existing holiday decorations downtown, and partner each year with the Metuchen Departmental Public Works to install and make upgrades.
- Undertake placemaking activities each year, especially in alley ways, along side streets, and exposed blank walls. Create work plans and partner with the Metuchen Arts Council to implement placemaking activities.
- Focus design work on the primary entranceways to the downtown.

ZONING

- Continue the work of the **Zoning Team** to review current downtown zoning, create a work plan, and establish yearly goals.
- **Zoning Team** will partner with the Planning Board, code compliance officer, and Town Planner to assure the downtown has the proper zoning to permit quality businesses to locate in it.
- **Zoning Team** will review how specific uses are encouraged/discouraged at various locations throughout the downtown.

PARKING

- The **Parking Team** will continue to work with the Metuchen Parking Authority, Nexus Garage, and borough to assure that parking rules are enforced.
- **Parking Team** will work with the borough to ensure there is adequate and convenient parking available for shoppers, commuters, and downtown workers.
- Continue to collaborate with the borough to obtain grants for new parking meters, handicapped parking, traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and other parking/circulation related needs. Complete work plans and implement projects.
- Continue merchant validation parking program at the Nexus garage, adjust as needed.
- **Parking Team** to identify location for reduced rate or free employee parking lot(s).

FAÇADE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- Have the **Façade and Historic Preservation Team** investigate grants from Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission for tour brochures or other heritage related downtown projects.
- Work with local preservationists and other partners on any educational workshop, tour, or activity that promotes and explains historic preservation goals.

PUBLIC ART TEAM

- The **Public Art Team** will develop a public art policy for the district based on the recommendations of the public art consultant's report, and partner with the Metuchen Arts Council, the Borough and private property owners to implement proposed public art projects.

ORGANIZATION

- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories about **Getting it Done Team** activities. Post these stories and photos to Facebook and pitch these stories to local media.
- Gather reinvestment statistics for the National Main Street Center and promote these tangible evidences of success through storytelling, graphics, and numbers.



Metuchen



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE SHORT, MEDIUM, AND LONG-TERM PROJECTS 2017-2022

This list includes all projects identified and assigned to one Team to implement over the next five years. Collaboration among Teams is highly encouraged and will result in more successful projects that are of higher quality and will create more satisfying volunteer experiences.

ORGANIZATION

WITHIN ONE OR TWO YEARS

- 100% of MDA Board members give a total of \$1500 yearly.
- Begin a residential investor campaign in 2017 and raise \$10,000 in 2018.
- Establish a robust volunteer program, provide quarterly volunteer orientation/training.
- Host an annual volunteer appreciation event or activity.
- Host quarterly and annual meetings and plan awards for members.
- Add part time staff to assist Executive Director.
- Maintain the MDA office, make technology upgrades.
- Offer board training twice yearly.
- **Nominating Team** to identify likely board candidates yearly.
- Create a **Communications Team** to coordinate across the organization.
- Continue to expand the MDA email list and traditional media list.
- Maintain the www.downtownmetuchen.org website.
- Host regular briefings about downtown to Borough, State, and Federal elected officials.
- Host openings and celebrations of new tangible projects completed.
- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories about projects, events and activities.
- Manage the MDA finances, be transparent, send in documents on time.
- Continue to gather reinvestment statistics, send to National Main Street Center.
- **Communications Team** will develop monthly newsletter, send out e-blasts, coordinate social media, and raise exposure of the organization and our work in media platforms.

WITHIN THREE YEARS

- Raise \$25,000 from MDA programming revenue through sponsorship and vendor fees.
- Continue Borough of Metuchen and the Metuchen Parking Authority budget support.

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- Seek grants from Middlesex County for arts programming.
 - Pursue foundation and government grants for specific projects.
 - Invite all elected representatives to all major MDA announcements.

WITHIN FIVE YEARS

- Build a diverse budget yearly to create annual operating budget of \$500,000 by 2022.
- Special Improvement District assessment will be \$250,000 in 2022.
- Grow individual donations to \$25,000 by 2022.
- Seek \$25,000 in grants from Middlesex County for arts programming.
- Begin planning for the reauthorization of the SID in 2022.
- Employ an Executive Director, other part time staff, consultants, and interns by 2022.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

WITHIN ONE OR TWO YEARS

- Market the MDA as the 'go to' resource for business mix management.
- Partner with the **Family Friendly Team** to identify specific businesses to recruit.
- Partner with the Innovation Team to identify specific businesses to recruit
- Create recruitment packages, recruit team members, and actively recruit new businesses
- Solidify the list of priority product lines, service lines, and businesses to actively recruit.
- Recruit businesses from Specialty Apparel and Furniture/ Home Furnishing clusters.
- Other business to recruit are: arts and crafts supply; specialty food stores; games and toys; gift stores and sporting goods.
- Continue to host meet ups for existing businesses.
- Manage prospects who call, email, or visit.
- Strengthen relationships with current property owners.
- Provide a brief written summary of the Transformation Strategies.
- Provide a summary of business development priorities.
- Partner with area economic development partners for classes, workshops, education.
- Form a **Tech Team** to work directly with merchants to encourage online sales channels.
- Adopt and promote family friendly characteristics in new and existing businesses.
- Survey Millennials and Generation Z on shopping preferences, habits, and patterns.
- Conduct a downtown intercept survey to learn about customers.
- Form a **Creative Team** to bring new ideas and innovations to existing businesses.

WITHIN THREE YEARS

- Have **Tech Team** work with any new businesses to ensure multi-channel sales platform.
- Recruit priority businesses through a variety of partner organizations.
- “Recruit from within” encourage successful business to expand or open new stores,
- Create tools/ incentives for business development, expansion, and improvement
- Encourage businesses to include innovation and creativity in their business operations.
- Add in store workshops, classes, product demonstration or other experiences
- Conduct another downtown intercept survey to learn about customers.
- Encourage shop owners to be open one night each week.
- Encourage businesses to incubate new stores within their stores.

WITHIN FIVE YEARS

- Create a maker space for artisans, artists, and other makers, such as tech/other.
- Create a business incubator that provides shared services for businesses that the incubator serves.
- Create a pop-up shop that results in five new retail businesses by 2020.

DESIGN

WITHIN ONE OR TWO YEARS

- Continue to clean and beautify downtown.
- Work with DPW to improve garbage and recycling collection.
- Work with the borough to plan sidewalk and pedestrian safety improvements.
- Work with DPW to install new planters, and work with the Garden Club to maintain them.
- Continue to add to existing holiday decorations downtown.
- Undertake placemaking activities along side streets, and exposed blank walls.
- Complete taking record photos of all downtown buildings.
- Continue to gather historic photos of downtown buildings.
- Complete downtown design guidelines.
- Present workshops about how the design guidelines work in 2018.
- Start a Storefront Improvement Matching Grant Program, accept applications in 2018.
- Provide superior design advice. Identify a local preservation architect for Team.
- Submit a grant application to the New Jersey Historic Trust for National Register nominations in 2018.
- Study other communities to create Cultural Plan, create work plan.
- Zoning Team to review current downtown zoning.
- Create a **Forum Theater Team** to work on feasibility studies and a business plan.

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- Create a **Town Plaza Team** to manage the plaza year-round.
 - Raise funds to equip and activate the Town Plaza.
 - **Public Art Team** will identify projects and develop work plans.
 - **Parking Team** will assure that parking rules are enforced.
 - Continue merchant validation parking program at the Nexus garage.

WITHIN THREE YEARS

- Identify grant funding for wayfinding and other signage.
- Determine if downtown is eligible for listing on the National Register, pursue listing.
- Host links on MDA website for all borough incentive programs.
- Place the Forum Theater on the National Register.
- Seek grants from MCCHC for heritage related projects.
- Work with local preservationists on any educational workshop, tour, or activity.
- **Parking Team** to collaborate with borough on adequate and convenient parking.
- **Parking Team** to collaborate with borough on grants for parking related needs.
- **Zoning Team** to assure the downtown has the proper zoning.
- Create a new, well-lit, and well- designed Main Street/Pearl Street pedestrian alley.
- Encourage shop owners to animate their windows and in-store displays.

WITHIN FIVE YEARS

- Work with any group to establish a CLG local historic preservation ordinance.
- **Parking Team** to identify location for reduced rate or free employee parking lot(s).
- Create well designed entranceways to downtown.

PROMOTION

WITHIN ONE OR TWO YEARS

- Complete an MDA business brochure/shopping guide with parking map.
- Continue to offer retail events.
- Continue to expand family friendly retail events.
- Partner with the Metuchen Chamber on special events.
- Promote retail shops/restaurants that host experiences for shoppers.
- Produce co-op marketing TV and interactive ads.

WITHIN THREE YEARS

- Continue to produce Downtown Metuchen Videos.

CREDITS

Donna Ann Harris wrote this 2017-2022 Strategic Plan for Metuchen Downtown Alliance. Isaac Kremer, Executive Director of the MDA wrote the section “Alignment with Main Street Four-Point Approach® Refresh” and provided the graphics used in this document. The Economic Vitality Team wrote the Transformation Strategies and the new vision statement.

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based Women’s Business Enterprise (WBE) boutique consulting firm that aids non-profit organizations and government agencies nationwide in the following practice areas: downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation, tourism product development, and non-profit organizational development. Jef Buehler, formerly state coordinator for Main Street New Jersey, worked with Ms. Harris on aspects of this Strategic Plan and read a draft version. Main Street New Jersey paid for the consulting work that created this Strategic Plan for Metuchen.

Prior to starting her firm thirteen years ago, Ms. Harris was the state coordinator for the Illinois Main Street program for two years and the manager of the Illinois suburban Main Street program for four years. Prior to her Main Street career, Ms. Harris spent 15 years as an executive director of three start-ups and two mature preservation organizations, each with its own organizational and fundraising challenges.

Since starting her firm, Ms. Harris has worked with state, regional, and local Main Street programs in 23 states. She has written six feature articles in the National Main Street Center’s quarterly publication *Main Street Now* and is a regular contributor to their *Main Street Week* blog. She has also spoken at the Main Street Center’s annual conference for the last dozen years and has conducted webinars for the Center on fundraising and organizational development topics. Ms. Harris has authored scholarly articles in the *American Association for State and Local History’s History News* and the *National Trust’s Forum Journal*. Ms. Harris’s book *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America’s Historic Houses* was published by AltaMira Press in 2007. Ms. Harris is a Certified Main Street Manager.

For more information, please visit heritageconsultinginc.com.

Isaac Kremer is a nationally recognized leader in the Main Street Approach®, tactical urbanism, placemaking and grant writing. His work has been highlighted in numerous national conferences and articles by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Appalachian Regional Commission, Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, The Conservation Fund, Environmental Protection Agency, International Downtown Association, National Main Street Center, and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

From 2008-2012 as Executive Director of the Oyster Bay Main Street Association on Long Island he led the restoration of President Theodore Roosevelt’s home town. While there, he organized one of the first Better Block projects in the US. As Executive Director of Discover Downtown Middlesboro from 2012-2016, Kremer mobilized hundreds of volunteers to build trails, encourage entrepreneurship, and bring incremental change through three more Better Block projects. His education and training includes an M.A. in Historic Preservation Planning from Cornell University, and a B.A. in Economics and Management from Albion College in Albion, Michigan.



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