

**Minutes of Business Opportunity Breakfast**

**Wednesday, October 10, 2018**

Location: Gateway Media Arts Lab
3311 Rhode Island Avenue
Mount Rainier, MD 20712

**Members present**: Brooke Kidd, President (Joe's Movement Emporium); Izabella Sparrow, Secretary (Glut Food Co-Op), Nisey Baylor (Nisey's Boutique), Larry Solomon, Treasurer (Thrifty Car Rental); Toni Tileva (MRBA Consultant); Neil Dicken (Party Time Liquors), Michelle Darden Lee (Gateway Media Arts Lab), Shawna Barnett-Grizzel (ZZ’s Pizza).

**Also present**: Miranda Braatz (City Manager), Victor Negron (City Dept. of Public Works), Charnette Robinson (Citizen), Meiko Whitlock (Mindful Techie), Glandus Thorne (n vi me Boutique)

The monthly membership meeting was held at 8:30am.

8:45 am the meeting was called to order by Brooke Kidd, President.

 **Introductions**

1st week in November:  Joe’s Movement Emporium, in conjunction with The Dance Place will be presenting “What’s Going On,” a tribute/story about Marvin Gaye.

15 November 2018:  Art Business Breakfast at Joe’s Movement Emporium.

Sew Creative celebrates their year anniversary this Saturday.

**Agenda**

Charnette Robinson, the representative from the Concerned Citizen’s Group, raised questions regarding grants and loans for businesses.  How can businesses and the community work together to let everyone know who has received grants/application process for them?

Miranda introduced Victor Negron, the new Commercial District Ambassador.  Victor is bi-lingual; he will be giving people directions to Mount Rainier businesses.  Victor will also be available for calls of public safety concerns (businesses should document situations/issues/violations, eg. Photos, digital images, videos), and will be handling cleanliness.  Victor’s City cellphone number was provided: 240-832-6559.  Brooke expressed concerns of dead animal carcasses and piles of weekend garbage.  There will be continued visibility of the other mobile Public Works Community District Team Members (Leroy, Pedro [also bi-lingual], and Darren).  Miranda stated that the Community District needs 24/7 cleaning:  painting, blowing leaves, picking up trash, etc. and that public drinking and public urination have decreased significantly.

Nisey voiced concerns over dog waste not being picked up by dog walkers/owners as it has never been addressed.  The matter was discussed at a City Council meeting; more signs may be needed.  Miranda put together a budget proposal for purchasing dog bag stations, but it was turned down.  Larry mentioned that in Montgomery County, dog stations and signs were given to the Home Owners’ Association free for a one-year trial period.

Brooke mentioned that more weeding is needed as well as more trash cans, also a need when the budget allows.  Neil informed us that the drains are still clogged in front of the Police Station and that many rats are present.

Miranda and Shivali were asked about and subsequently addressed concerns about a shooting claim that is said to have taken place last Friday (5 October 2018).  Cameras have not yet verified this took place.

Shivali instructed us to direct all requests for Victor to Miranda and/or Mr. Kourosh Kamali, Director of Public Works.

Miranda spoke regarding the recent resignation of Samantha Olatunji of Economic Development. Miranda stated that she has faith in the Economic Development program and its commitment to Mount Rainier Small Businesses, however, she feels that the position has failed to serve the community in the last 2 years and for this, she apologized.  Asked MRBA how the business community feels about Economic Development and how should it be restructured.

Nisey thanked Miranda for her apology and for her comments and stated that communication is the biggest problem.

Brooke agreed then stated that the chronic issue is how to stay in the know.  Economic Development has to work with us (MRBA) and work hand in hand with the brick and mortar businesses which are the 1st (structures) people see.

Michelle commented that the most effective method is “door to door.”

Miranda:  Business walks are helpful; will restructure the job position; “what is the normal function of Economic Development?”

Shivali: Changes have been made within the infrastructure; has been flummoxed by the lack of communication.  Suggests businesses sign up for updates.  A new Communications position has been approved, person will monitor content, communicate updates, and ensure that information reaches Business Community.

Nisey:  Need to get the best person for the position (Economic Development).  The person will have to *want* to engage with the businesses.

Miranda:  Will hire the best.

Shivali:  Already pays what other cities pay. (re: salary).

Brooke:  We’ve been discussing combining with other cities (eg. Brentwood, etc.)

Shawna:  Help is needed to navigate the permit application process (as well as waiving certain fees).

Neil mentioned that the former funeral home brought tons of business to the area.

Shivali asked for more support from MRBA at Council Meetings.  The next Council Meeting is 16 October 2018 at 7:00 pm (1st & 3rdTuesday of each month City Council meets).

Shawna asked if the new Economic Development person will address empty business buildings.

Concerned Citizens asked about the grant application process, the stipulations, and also asked why funds are not used to improve the city.

Brooke stated that there is no transparency regarding the grant criteria and grant recipients.

Concerned Citizens suggested that the criteria need to be in writing.

Brooke:  The perennial problem(s) with people/businesses not applying for grants:  some of the requirements are time-consuming, numerous; future grants and opportunities need to be publicized well; an award list needs to be published.

Nisey brought up that MRBA needs to revisit our mission and mission statement, and suggested as a grant requirement that MRBA meetings must be attended.

Miranda is happy to have 1 or 2 MRBA members involved in the interview process for Economic Development.  Legislature season is September-June.  There is a nation-wide search for a Police Chief; a recruiter has been hired.

No motions were made.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 am.