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To: Lawrenceville Main Street Board of Directors

CC: Jef Buehler, State Coordinator Main Street New Jersey

From: Donna Ann Harris

Subject: Observations and Recommendations about SWOT exercise in Lawrenceville NJ

Main Street New Jersey is providing consulting services to Lawrenceville Main Street (LMS) as part of the State's effort to enhance the growth of participating MSNJ organizations. Donna Ann Harris of Heritage Consulting Inc. was asked to facilitate a Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities (SWOT) exercise held on the evening of September 16, 2014.

After review of the raw notes from the SWOT exercise, we are making the following observations and some recommendations to solve some short-term problems discussed during the meeting. Jef Buehler, State Director of Main Street New Jersey and Improvement District Programs has reviewed this memo.

Most of the issues discussed at the SWOT cannot be solved by Lawrenceville Main Street alone. The first part of this memo identifies opportunities where direct action by the LMS Board, committees and volunteers can solve problems in the near term.

At the end of the memo, we offer a summary of the major issues discussed during the SWOT where the LMS Board can expand and strengthen their relationship with Lawrence Township to attempt to make progress towards

solving some of these pressing matters.

We hope these observations and recommendations are useful and feed into the larger effort to identify a handful of strategic priorities for the organization's long-term future as part of the Strategic Planning process.

Organizational issues (internal)

Lawrenceville Main Street Board and Staff

Observations

- Lawrenceville Main Street has 20 years of experience, a great deal of professional talent among the very dedicated Board members and high quality part time staff.
- Several comments were made about the need to increase the number of paid hours for the staff.
- There is a call for more transparency by the Board, including posting budgets and minutes on the web site.

Recommendations

- Board development was requested (training, orientation, what the expectations are, given tools for success) and this should be provided to all existing and new Board members as they are nominated.
- Lindsay puts in far more hours per week than she is paid. This is unfair and ultimately unsustainable for her and the organization itself. The Board must identify how to expand her paid hours.
- We understand there are no written work plans. We encourage you to return to creating work plans for projects to make delegating work to volunteers much more effective. Work plans are excellent volunteer recruitment tools.
- Post the budget, work plans, the IRS 990 tax return, committee lists, bylaws and other basic documents on your web site to promote better accountability and organizational transparency.

LMS Volunteers

Observations

- Lawrenceville Main Street has an excellent group of committed volunteers, everyone seems to get along and work together well
- The Board and volunteers come up with a plan and execute it, despite having no written work plans.
- Volunteer burn out was mentioned several times by several SWOT participants.
- Many of the volunteers are growing older and new volunteers are not being recruited in at the same rate to fill volunteer vacancies.

Recommendations

- While the volunteer corps is strong, the organization would benefit from written work plans, and a stronger committee structure. Part time staff is doing as much as possible in this area, but more time is needed around volunteer recruitment.
- Community service requirements at area schools could be tapped for youth volunteers at events. Organized student groups such as boy/girl scouts are excellent sources for large groups of volunteers.
- Unpaid interns and work study students from local colleges could benefit Lawrenceville Main Street to take on specific projects that might not be completed otherwise.
- Take advantage of new residents as volunteers and possible collaborators.
- Some of the standing committees, like the landscape committee, need more support to improve the logistics of their work, such as regular watering along Main Street.
- Overall, Lawrenceville Main Street needs to expand beyond its core volunteers to area service clubs, groups, college interns, work study students, high school community service students, youth groups/scouts and graduate school classes for assistance on projects.

LMS Fundraising

Observations

- Many of the participants noted the large amount of local financial support from residents rather than corporate sponsors, as being a strength of Lawrenceville Main Street.
- Despite this widespread community support, there is still a feeling that the organization does not raise enough money each year, and that the organization has much financial need.
- Having only part time staff is preventing the organization from reviewing the whole of its fundraising apparatus and making incremental changes to generate more revenue.

Recommendations

- The strong residential membership base is an extraordinary revenue source for Lawrenceville Main Street and it can be increased with some effort. The staff is doing more than can be expected, working on a part time basis.
- The Board understands that more diverse funding streams from new or different sources will help Lawrenceville Main Street to become more sustainable.
- The organization would benefit from a thorough review of their budget and revenue sources to determine how to continue to diversify their revenue sources and expand the revenue sources the organization controls.
- The Board as a whole would benefit from training on fundraising, if for no other reason than to lessen the anxiety about the organization's financial future and provide direction for future fundraising efforts.

LMS Events and Activities

Observations

- The programs, activities, and events are great strengths of Lawrenceville Main Street.
- Events need more manpower and there is a need for volunteers to be given more direction.
- Most events don't exploit Lawrenceville's history.

Recommendations

- The upcoming Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey will help identify who are the current shoppers in the village, and the demographics of those shoppers. This information can be used to sharpen the focus of events and reinforce the marketing to the key groups of shoppers in town.
- Consider integrating local history into existing or new events to reinforce community pride.
- Determine how you might encourage collaborative marketing between the organization and local businesses.
- There were many suggestions for new events, but the organization lacks the staff to implement anything more at this time.

Internal and external LMS Communications and Marketing

Observations

- The Friday e-newsletter was highly praised, and is a great weekly encapsulation of everything going on in town. It has become the de facto downtown newspaper.
- The E-newsletter, Facebook, and website are strong. This online presence has resulted in good marketing for the organization.
- SWOT participants noted that there is some confusion in town about how the organization is funded, if its work is actually done by the Township and how the organization is funded.
- Like many Main Street communities that lack a traditional local newspaper, LMS does not know which advertising medium is most effective to reach their audience.
- There was much talk about branding, but it was unclear whether it was branding of the organization, the downtown or the Village in general that was most desired.

Recommendations

- Lawrenceville Main Street is 20 years old and has achieved considerable success. The organization's work, especially annual events and landscaping, may be taken for granted by some local residents, who may believe that the Township undertakes these activities. Part time staff does not have time to counter these misperceptions.

- Staff does not have the time but would like to provide a more comprehensive social media presence on Twitter and Instagram.
- There is confusion about how to expand marketing opportunities for the organization and merchants in downtown.

Recommendations

- The online Consumer and Stakeholder survey will include questions about where current downtown shoppers get news about downtown. The survey results will be shared with all merchants so they can make better choices about advertising their businesses.
- The online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey will also identify what retail, eateries and entertainment options are most desired by downtown customers. This will be useful for the ER Committee for business recruitment purposes.
- While there is a desire for a social club with a liquor license, most agreed that the Lawrenceville School would not support this.

External issues that LMS can influence, but not control

Merchants, Restaurants, Redevelopment and the Business Climate in Downtown

Observations

- Restaurants are strong in this community and make Lawrenceville a destination for people from neighboring communities. These local businesses appear to be very supportive of one another.
- Only 20 of the 55 businesses within the Main Street footprint are business members.
- The SWOT participants clearly want people to shop local and support their community. However, the majority of business in downtown Lawrenceville are restaurants, there is not a diverse business mix.
- Not every building is well maintained downtown.
- There are also very few vacancies and few places for expansion in the current footprint of downtown.

Recommendations

- Staff does not have the time to visit with each of the business owner's downtown each year and a committee has not taken this on as a business retention project.
- Since one on one visits to business owners downtown are not routine, there has been no feedback about why more than half are not business members of LMS. The online Consumer and Stakeholder survey can get feedback on this issue.
- The organization understands who owns the business downtown, but has not had the time to maximize these relationships.

- The online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey will identify which retail, restaurant and entertainment venues are highly desired for the Village. The ER Committee can use this information for business recruitment purposes when a vacancy occurs.
- Consider raising funds for a small 50/50 matching grant (say \$3,000 for six, \$500 grants) for new awnings, signs and paint for downtown business owners, subject to the design guidelines.

Township Government, Regulation and Ordinances

Observations

- SWOT participants noted that Main Street wants more Township support, more money, interest, and moral support.
- There is a perception that Township is not business friendly, and that the permit process is onerous.
- Downtown planning and zoning may need to be reviewed and updated.
- The Township has signage regulations but there are complaints about cluttered signs and several are not easy to read.

Recommendations

- The work ahead to expand the downtown footprint requires the cooperation and support of the Township's Planning and Zoning staff, Commissions and Township Council members. Begin or expand your relationships with these groups to explain your concerns and needs for the downtown.
- Work with the Township to review the current zoning downtown and identify opportunities to expand the number of commercially zoned parcels.
- Work with the Township to preserve existing historic buildings, and permit redevelopment of underutilized parcels.
- Work with the Township to develop new standards for signage.
- Work with the Township to enforce existing maintenance standards.
- Create design guidelines for downtown if you do not have them already.



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Lawrenceville Main Street
SWOT Results
September 16, 2014

Strengths Green

Weaknesses Red

Opportunities Blue

Threats Orange

Organizational Issues (Internal Issues)

Lawrenceville Main Street Board and Staff

- 20 years of experience as a Main Street organization
- Professional talent at Board and staff level
- Location of Lawrenceville Main Street office, in the heart of the village
- The organization has found new blood
- Lindsay (Lawrenceville Main Street Executive Director) (x2)
- Friendly (The Main Street organization and all of town) (x4)
- Out of the box thinking on board, progressive thought
- Strong commitments, strong board member commitments
- National Main Street Center, Main Street New Jersey affiliation
- Board development (need training, orientation, what the expectations are, given tools for success)
- Relevant mission statement?
- To realize Main Street as a movement, not isolated to Lawrenceville
- Lawrenceville Main Street is biting off more than we can chew

LMS Volunteers

- Volunteers (x2)
- Fabulous volunteers and many of them
- Team, everybody works together (x2)
- Execution and planning, we come up with a plan and we execute it (x2)

- Organizing more volunteers
- Stronger committee culture (Ownership, leadership, work plans)
- There is no Lawrenceville Main Street volunteer on Shade Tree Commission
- Increase community service by younger volunteers (event with the local boy scouts, not just high school students)
- Make good use of volunteers
- Execution and planning, we come up with a plan and we execute it (x2)
- Stronger committee culture (Ownership, leadership, work plans)
- There is no Lawrenceville Main Street volunteer on Shade Tree Commission
- Increase community service by younger volunteers (event with the local boy scouts, not just high school students)
- We don't use any unpaid interns
- Using Lawrenceville Main Street as an opportunity for community service opportunities, tie in with the three schools in town
- Landscape committee needs better access to water for watering
- Going beyond our core to get new volunteers (x4)
- Lack of volunteer incentive or burnout for continuous volunteers
- Lack of, and ageing volunteers. (x2)
- Taking advantage of new residents
- People don't feel like Main Street is curing cancer so it is hard to still get people to commit time to improving their community

LMS Fundraising

- Lot of local financial support, from the community- not corporate (x2)
- Financial sustainability
- Funding for an additional paid staff member
- Organizational Finances
- Fundraising (x3)
- Diversified funding stream
- Viable fundraising plan
- Over-dependence by Main Street on the same businesses
- More corporate support
- Paying Lindsay more (increase in paid hours) (x3)
- More sustained financial support (Annual memberships, corporate sponsorships, current and future customers- not competing with local businesses)
- Lack of funding and support for Lawrenceville Main Street (x3)
- Other nonprofits competing for the same dollars
- Change in ideas of corporate giving, could impact fundraising
- The size of Main Street is small but needs are great

LMS Events and Activities

- Successful programs, activities, events (x7)
- The Main Street activities, the concerts, etc. are family-centered

- Creativity
- Fun
- Attendance at events
- Lack of street fairs and activities on 206 corridor because it is a state highway
- Lack of diversity of events
- Event manpower (there needs to be more volunteers and more specific volunteers) (x2)
- We don't take advantage of our history in developing events
- More to emphasize historic value, maybe Maidenhead Day
- Integrating history into events
- More site-specific activities
- Services that showcase the restaurants (Maybe the financial planners in town could hold events in the restaurants, co-marketing)
- Bike Tour, historical society and merchants could be involved
- Street truck graffiti event
- Adult enrichment program partnering with local education institutions
- Farm tours
- Movies in the park
- Regular entertainment (Music in the park is already successful)
- Book reading or story time in the park (There are a number of authors in town)
- Theme of music in the park

LMS Communications (internal and external) and Marketing

- Lindsay's emails on Friday are highly regarded
- E-news is strong
- Website is strong
- Strong marketing, good online presence
- Strong Facebook presence
- Opportunity or local businesses to work with the Main Street organization to get marketed
- Confusion over Lawrenceville Main Street, what are we? The physical, the organization, the non-profit status, and the funding (x6)
- Budget should be available and accessible to the public (Lawrenceville Main Street)
- Maintaining the website
- More public meetings of Main Street, in addition to annual meeting (which is poorly attended)
- More outreach to Township and various communities
- More transparency by Board
- Student interest, getting more students coming to businesses
- Marketing for businesses, not enough
- The local newspaper is narrow, the regional is big, how to get the right exposure?
- Not enough awareness about the downtown
- Lack of branding
- Better overall branding (x2)

- Better understanding of what Lawrenceville Main Street is
- More group advertising, maybe radio
- Share on social media between businesses and Main Street
- More cohesive social media with local businesses
- More overall community involvement (younger families) (x2)
- Expand to Instagram and Twitter social media platforms
- Marketing to broader regions and other small towns
- Public opinion, what people think of Main Street. Not understanding where the money comes from or what we are capable of
- Not growing support
- Perception that Lawrenceville Main Street is insular and doesn't reach out to community

External Issues

Merchants, Restaurants, Businesses and the Business Climate in Downtown

- Good supply of local restaurants (x5)
- Supportive among local businesses, residents and other merchants (x3)
- Good partnership among merchants (Merchants' Organization is rolled in with Main Street, there used to be a separate group) (x2)
- We want a Book store
- Many of the stores and restaurants use overly dim lighting, it is hard to tell when open
- Business membership by all (55 business in footprint and only 20 have signed up)
- We want a Tavern/bar/social club (x4)
- Expanding the commercial footprint
- More active participation with merchant's group, cleanups, water flowerings
- Dedicated coffee shop that just sells coffee
- We don't have a Farmer's market
- Flea market or community yard sale
- Retail, books, gifts, more diverse mix (x5)
- Want people to shop local
- We need a local Pharmacy
- Bed and breakfast (Inn at Glenn Cairn is just outside boundaries)
- Want a gourmet market
- Need a small town market, similar to convenience store but not a 7-11(x3)
- Nothing to keep you in town, where do you go after dinner?
- Lack of convenience, you can't do multiple things downtown, just come to eat
- Lack of business diversity
- Economic downturn/local economy (x2)
- Increase in national retailers and restaurants on Route 1
- Retail trends changing
- Is there enough economic activity, if so many businesses are closed on Mondays? Is there not enough to stay open seven days?
- If anything happens to larger local businesses

Borough Government, Agencies and Politics

- The town is environmentally conscious, Sustainable Lawrenceville
- Need more Township support (want more money, interest, moral support) (x3)
- A bad reputation for starting businesses here- that they are hard to open in the Township with the permit process
- Not enough diversity in the Township and they don't leverage that

Borough Regulations and Ordinances

- Good zoning for business downtown, no big box stores
- A little bit limited by focusing on historic geographic footprint, downtown mentality not limited by physical (x3)
- No defined zoning for the Village itself (No overlay zone)
- No uniform signage (apparently there are restrictions, maybe Township could lighten up)
- Increase signage but keep it quaint, easier to read, and more uniform (x2)
- More historic standards, to make the older buildings look refreshed and alive
- Explore what spaces are zoned for to see what opportunities are there
- Zoning and township permissions

Image of Downtown and Traffic Safety

- Safe (x2)
- Pretty, quaint, beautiful, attractive (x7)
- Unique
- Downtown is well kept
- Town has historic character (on local and state and national register, has a Preservation Ordinance) (x6)
- Historical prejudices or community misconceptions. Urban myths about the south or the north. About the Lawrenceville School. Being held back by this? (x2)
- Absentee recalcitrant uncooperative landlords, impacts the visual look of downtown, getting sort of serious
- Physical locations for public art, more outside
- Trash receptacles have disappeared, have been purchased and now are gone
- Connect North and South Lawrence with a pedestrian bridge
- Some properties could use more pride in their appearance (Paint your shutters and your door)
- Property upkeep (Clean and attractive, volunteer clean ups, businesses and residences)
- Neglect of investments and maintenance of business properties on Main Street
- Police enforcement, not enough diligence in catching speeders on 206
- The town divide between north and south growing

Pedestrian Conditions, Way finding and Bicycles

- Walkable (x3)

- Bike-able
- Rt. 206, traffic speeds
- Pedestrian safety
- Access with public transportation, more flexibility of how to move people in and out
- Increase safety of 206 (Some towns have built a pedestrian bridge)
- Increase Foot traffic, bring in new people (x2)
- Overall need for traffic calming, more bike lanes, more safety crossings (x4)
- More prominent message board or kiosk or clock (maybe next to bagel shop) (x3)
- Need more bike racks (x5)

Streetscape, the Urban Environment and local transportation

- Sense of community (x4)
- Gas lamps
- Greenery
- Seasonal decorations (x2)
- Improved streetscape (x2)
- The downtown itself is family-friendly
- Have a village identity (The Village of Lawrenceville instead of Lawrenceville Township) (x2)
- Passionate (Residents love this place)
- Small town feel (Concentrated not sprawling) (x2)
- Lack of a community center
- Town identity
- Ageing infrastructure (wiring, telephone poles, utilities) (x2)
- State Highway 206 (too many traffic signs, repetitious) (x2)
- No idea of when entering and leaving Lawrence (there are some signs on 206, make more obvious)
- Multiple and different speed limits, needs to be consistent
- A recycling program or receptacles downtown
- Unified streetscape and unified maintenance
- Decaying infrastructure, poles, and external storm threats
- Not just more traffic but what kind, big trucks if tolls go up again on other byways
- Suburban flight and increasing return to urban areas

Downtown Development, Housing and Parking Issues

- Potential for and support of businesses expansion and growth (x3)
- Physical potential in the buildings
- Has been growth and seems to be growth moving forward, revitalization in downtown (x3)
- Not enough parking (x3)
- No playground, more things for children to do (x2)
- There is no gathering space like town square, green space
- Citifying the suburbs, where you have more density, more mixed-use with a town center

- Better parking and more parking (on street or easier for senior citizens, no meters, limited handicap parking) (x3)
- More rental spaces for businesses (Very low vacancy rate)
- We could use a convertible flex working space, co-working space, like an impact hub (x2)
- Community use buildings (Possible that the church may open their space)
- Arts Space/ Council (Full time arts studio and culture space)
- Market analysis to determine what could come in and prosper
- George Street Apartments are a great opportunity for redevelopment and act as a link
- Limited on space
- Mixed use apartments and businesses
- Building backwards but not on Main Street, side streets

Access, Proximity and Regional Connections

- Destination for those who can't walk here
- Easy to find/accessible (x2)
- Location, location, location
- Proximity to the farms
- Idea of a nexus between this Main Street shopping and the shopping nearby Manors
- 206 as it evolves, if it is ever widened or traffic gets diverted to a bypass and doesn't come near Main Street (x3)
- Competing town centers (Nassau St in Princeton, Pennington, other similar Main Streets, Trenton, and West Windsor, all are places where you can go and get stuff you can't get here) (x4)

External Partnerships with Borough, other Towns, and schools

- Physical assets (University, Lawrenceville School, architecture, Hopewell trail, location) (x3)
- Lawrenceville School (x4)
- Good relationship with Township authorities
- Connected (Related to businesses with each other and to the organization)
- Over-dependence on the Lawrenceville School (x2)
- Involvement by Lawrenceville School faculty
- Partnering more with Ryder College
- More connection with community and Lawrenceville School (x3)
- Partner with other area downtowns, maybe Pennington, draw in other people
- No coordination or cohesiveness in planning on a unified calendar. All parts of the township are doing their own thing
- Losing Lawrenceville School Support (x2)
- Because of the hazard of crossing 206, Lawrenceville School forbids students to make the crossing (if that should happen)

Demographics

- Diversity in terms of town, socioeconomic, racial, religious, cultural
- Large age range in volunteers at LMS
- Suburban psyche of not supporting Main Street
- Ageing population in community, especially within footprint of the village. Younger people live outside the village
- Perception of public school system as declining in quality
- Lawrenceville has a value driven consumer with a high end taste
- Number of tax ratables and appeals for larger taxpayers (loss of large tax payers) (x2)