



Progress Report - Making Meriden Business Center

The Making Meriden Business Center (“MMBC”) was born in early 2018, opening its doors at 5 Colony Street on March 1. Since that time the Center has become a much-needed nexus of downtown activity as Meriden continues its impressive efforts to bring new life to a once dormant and maligned city center. The mission of the MMBC is to create a proactive downtown business community engaged in transformation and the economic benefits it can provide.

A tripartite team of stakeholders has teamed up to make the early days a success, and without each of these partners there would be much less progress and enthusiasm toward our rebuilding efforts. The Meriden Economic Development Corporation [501(c)(3)] has provided the early vision and investment, while the Midstate Chamber of Commerce has provided a wide range of support through events, ideas and contacts. The third driving force of the team is the City of Meriden’s Economic Development Department, who has provided guidance, context, manpower, infrastructure support and positive inspiration to help keep the mission on track.

The MMBC is also very grateful for the funding support of generous donors including Liberty Bank, TD Charitable Foundation, Eversource and CT Main Street, all of who appear prominently on the “wall of fame” in the MMBC office.

The MMBC team has focused on providing outreach to property owners and business owners, assisting with joint marketing and event planning efforts. The team has enthusiastically jumped into the fire and have become very knowledgeable about all downtown properties, and serves as “super-connectors” promoting opportunities to potential new businesses.



Now as the MMBC grows from infancy toward its toddler days, we are excited to rise above the challenges the downtown continues to face. Despite all the great feats to beautify and repair its infrastructure, Meriden still has too many non-believers, and those non-believers actually inspire us to do even more to revitalize historic downtown Meriden.

Here is a summary of positive accomplishments over the first five months:

- **Ribbon cutting March 1** attended by local politicians and business leaders helped “put the MMBC on the map”.
- **Established daily office hours for drop ins and meetings.** Office is staffed from 9 AM to 1 PM daily.
- Established successful **Social Media sites** on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (@MakingMeriden – follow us!). Over 350 followers reading positive interactions and promotions of downtown Meriden’s milestones.
- Created an easy link on **Meriden’s economic development website** to view downtown properties available for lease or rent (<http://www.meridenbiz.com/making-meriden/properties-available-for-lease-or-sale/>)



- Developed **marketing card** touting the benefits of establishing a business in downtown Meriden. Designed to be left with new business prospects in and out of Meriden.
- Helping to promote the **“Meriden Match” program** for current businesses and property owners to improve facades, signage, windows and general curb appeal.
- **Revitalized the Downtown Neighborhood Association** and organized several committees including a team to propose and advocate for an economic “entity” to help fund downtown events and improvements, (Business Improvement District). Teams have also been formed to help improve quality of life issues, arts, gardens, social impact, etc.

- Co-sponsored a successful **Job Fair on June 15**, setup as a pop-up event in vacant retail space at 24 Colony Street. Partnering with the Workforce Alliance and the Midstate Chamber of Commerce, the MMBC was able to promote downtown and its new commuter rail services to employers and many others from outside Meriden. Attendance at the event was double what had been projected.



- In coordination with CT DOT, the MMBC organized and successfully held a **“train concert”** on The Meriden Green celebrating the launch of the CT Rail commuter line. On June 22, “CJ West and the Downtown Train” entertained several hundred attendees, and the MMBC team was able to address the crowd with a brief promotion of the upward trajectory of Meriden’s city center. MMBC outreach and relationship building led to contributions from Eversource and Pennrose Properties who made this event possible and cost neutral.

- In coordination with the Twilight Concert Series team, the **MMBC sponsored singer-songwriter Daniel Hardin** (at no cost) as the opening act for Joby Rogers' "Michael Jackson Experience". Over 1,000 were in the audience as the MMBC team again was able to promote the "new Meriden" at the most successful Concert Pop Up Market to date. An informal survey of the crowd showed folks visiting from Boston and Atlanta, as well as Cheshire, Suffield, Durham, Fairfield, etc., and feedback on the venue and the atmosphere was extremely positive.



- The MMBC team provided **workshops and seminars** with young entrepreneurs-to-be, providing training seminars for the Meriden Adult Education's Career Readiness Center and Tri-Town Collaborative.
- The MMBC team provided support and a venue for entrepreneur **"Entrepreneurship Toolkit" training** and focus group.
- The MMBC team provides ongoing **coaching** to new and existing businesses – business plans, marketing, funding resources, incentives, etc.



- The MMBC created a **Digital Assistance Marketing program** that was executed by our summer intern, Shanen Seale, with a focus on helping downtown businesses market their services effectively throughout Social Media (Yelp, Instagram, etc.).
- On June 28, the MMBC **coordinated "The Intersection of Entrepreneurship and Downtown Districts"** – a successful networking event. In addition to the spirited discussion among the panel, this event gave the MMBC the opportunity to promote the "new downtown" to a variety of entrepreneurs, business owners, property owners and funding resources. Following the panel discussion and an update on Meriden provided by Economic Development head, Juliet Burdelski, a walking tour of the downtown opened the eyes of several developers who are looking deeper into downtown opportunities. The event was cost neutral and included MMBC outreach and relationship building to secure generous sponsorship donations from Luchs Engineering Consultants, Regions Commercial and

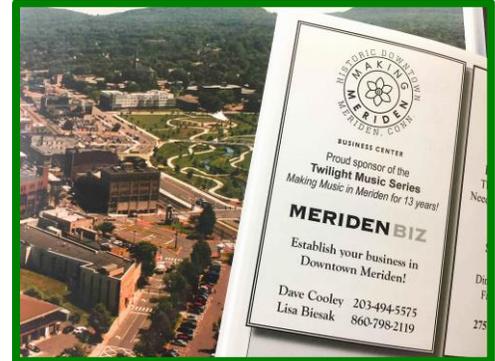


Design Your Monday LLC. A video of the event can be viewed here:

www.tinyurl.com/MMBCEntrepreneurs

- The MMBC office has become the host site for board meetings of the **Meriden Farmers Market**. The team has helped with promotional and marketing ideas and also helped with the selection of Meriden's aquaponics success story, Trifecta Ecosystems, as the new Market Masters of the Meriden Farmers Markets. The **Trifecta Ecosystems team will be testing pilot technology innovations** in Meriden for possible expansion to other markets and, the MMBC and Meriden Farmers Market is exploring the possibility of having the Farmers Market operate on the CTRail itself.

- The MMBC office has also become the host site for leadership meetings of the **Twilight Concert Series team**. In addition to hosting meetings, the MMBC has helped write press releases and become involved with music selection for 2019. The MMBC is also helping explore potential backup indoor locations downtown for those evenings when weather threatens cancellation.



- The MMBC has been **assisting the Meriden Historical Society** in its search for a new home. Both entities believe a downtown location would be ideal to display Meriden's heritage, in particular it's impressive collection of silver products and manufacturing history.
- The MMBC has been working closely with the **Arts and Crafts Association of Meriden (Gallery 53)** to identify arts grants opportunities and plans are being firmed up for a true downtown arts consortium.
- The MMBC has also been networking with the following organizations:
 - **Capital Region of Governments (CROG)** is teaming with the MMBC to demonstrate success stories in economic development along the CT Rail corridor. The CROG team said it views Meriden as a model for others corridor cities to be inspired by.
 - **CT Main Street** has been a key partner in support of Meriden - providing resources, ideas and great support for the Mission of the MMBC.
 - **CEDF, BBA, SAMA, HEDCO, CIL** have all been part of networking meetings as potential funding resources for business for downtown Meriden.
 - The **Meriden Housing Authority** has been a solid partner for creative use of their spaces for events and overall support for downtown.
- The MMBC team continues to **"go outside Meriden"** to market to and network with likeminded professionals who may not have be aware of Meriden's rebirth, central location and its potential. A snapshot of some of the events:
 - **ReSET Hartford** – final entrepreneurship competition
 - **Upward Hartford** – new co-working space, a tour and conversation
 - **Hartford BID** meeting – good ideas and a demonstration of what has worked for Hartford.
 - **Women's Entrepreneur event**, Hartford
 - Manned a booth at **International Council of Shopping Centers** event in Hartford, June 2018
 - **Key Bank dinner** – presentation from Key Bank's macroeconomist and solid networking

- **Hubcap Wallingford** – CT Main Street event with presentations and a walking tour of downtown
- Visited several “**maker spaces**” who are having varying degrees of success – Make Haven (New Haven); Spark Makerspace (New London); Hackerspace (Danbury); and of course NESIT (Meriden)
- The MMBC was well represented at various **Ribbon Cutting ceremonies** including the new CTRail celebration, the opening of Meriden Commons, the planned demolition of the Mills Apartments, etc.
- The MMBC team has met with a **variety of developers, realtors, and architects** in an effort to bring attention to the opportunities in Meriden, just a few are listed here:
 - Diversified Construction, James Keaney
 - C-Z Studios, NYC <http://www.cz-studio.com/>
 - TKSP Studios, Randall Luther; Hartford <http://www.tskp.com/>
 - Landmark Architects, Paul Pizzo
 - JLL Real Estate, Michael Algieri, International Director
 - Tauman Construction, John Raccuia
 - Ryan Abbe – Management Director of Real Estate Investment, JMP Securities
 - BW Retail Real Estate Consulting (Nike, True Religion, Hurleys, Jockey, many others)
- MMBC is meeting with Cox Communications and Verizon to try and develop a comprehensive partnership plan for **state-of-the-art broadband** service in downtown Meriden.
- It should be noted that a number of new businesses have started in downtown Meriden:
 - Academy of Medical Training
 - A&B Homecare Solutions
 - Flavorite Smoothies and Shakes
 - Aura Salon & Curiosities
 - Dukureh Imports
 - Downtown Coffee Shop (formerly Café Dolce)
 - Hair and Nail Art Studio
 - Choice of Style
 - Sista’s Academy
 - Man Cave Vintage
 - NY Deli and Convenience
 - Former “Cassidies ” Diner/Noodles
 - Big Five Innovation LLC
- Business Expansion
 - Legendz
 - A-1 Services
- Pipeline
 - Brothers In Ale Taproom
 - HD Hair Salon
 - 4,000 sq. ft. restaurant Meriden Commons I
 - Adriana Restrepo-Powers – Family Therapy
 - Brunch at Nana’s
 - Fresko’s (Greek Restaurant)
 - New retail/office/restaurant space Pratt St.

In addition to the tireless efforts to attract new businesses, several upcoming events are being planned:

- **“Opportunity Zones Explained” – MMBC and CCIM** co-sponsored event with statewide commercial realtors at Silver City Ballroom, September 24.
- **Eversource Volunteer Day** – October 30, sprucing up neglected downtown gardens and general landscaping
- **WinterFest block party / Pop Up Market** – Nov 24 Colony Street closed for arrival of Santa by train followed by tree lighting and photos for kids.
- **Old Church Concert Series** – discussions are underway to potentially move this ongoing music series from Rocky Hill to Meriden. Features local singer songwriters in an intimate venue during the winter season.
- Helping organize the Twilight Concert Series organize next season’s **“Summer of Tribute Bands”** – very early stages...

MMBC Goals | Year 2

The MMBC is working hard to differentiate Meriden from other cities in similar situations. We need to focus on bringing good jobs to downtown. With effort and focus, Meriden needs to continue to highlight its current “blank canvas” as a potential corporate campus providing the best connectivity to Hartford, New Haven, Boston and NY. This campus could house high tech jobs, a conference center, hotel, and/or educational hub. “Meriden Green” should also mean providing a positive social impact: People/Planet/Profit, which is now becoming big business globally especially among the millennial and up-and-coming professionals. If executed correctly, this positive social impact theme could become one of Meriden’s key differentiators.

In addition to our ongoing efforts (illustrated above) to attract more restaurants and creating a “hip arts vibe” downtown, a primary goal for year two is to make the MMBC a self-funded entity that would not have to rely on grants to survive. The building blocks are coming into place to create that funding mechanism but there is still a long way to go.

Below is a list of Year 2 goals for the MMBC along with an estimated timing for completion:

Funding Goals: Official establishment of a “Business Improvement District” (BID)

Organization

- Objective is identify permanent funding source to support the MMBC and/or a Business Improvement District. t
 - This BID funding would support a downtown non-profit entity with full time staff that would continue to focus just on downtown, including on new business development, safety, beautification, art installations, marketing and event support in an effort promote the economic vitality and quality of life within Meriden’s downtown district
 - Identify staff and Board members: **Jan/Feb 2019**
 - Kick-off date: **March 2019**
- Secondary Objective is to nurture existing sponsorships and secure new ones:
 - Continued outreach to corporate leaders for support of “Placemaking” events that capitalize on Meriden’s local community assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being
 - Estimated completion date: **Ongoing/as needed in 2019**

Branding/Community Engagement Goal: Launch of an Interactive and well-branded Website & Engagement Platform

- Development of a Making Meriden branded online community that becomes the single go-to resource for all upcoming events and happenings, places to go, local business news, etc... all with a focus on social and economic prosperity. The objective is to have a single resource with content created by the community itself that speaks to everything good Meriden has to offer.
- Estimated Launch Date: **Summer 2019 as “Meriden2020” is phased out.**

Vibrant Community Goal:

- Create and promote downtown Meriden as a clean, safe and vibrant community
 - Determine city’s identity/differentiators (i.e: tech hub with green component, vertical gardens, “20-Minute-City”, international food hub, etc...)
- Support all events in the downtown district including the Meriden Green, TOD District and designated business district
- Fund and staff a Making Meriden “Clean & Safe” team within distinct boundaries: hire residents who will be responsible for greeting commuters, providing info and directions, assist with street crossings, enhance safety, cleanliness and street beautification efforts
- Activate and light up streets and alleys with decorative/art lighting, holiday lighting
- Find ways to add art/sculptures, murals, benches and lights to streetscape for function and aesthetical value
- Reboot and give a facelift to the downtown banner program. Explore funding for wayfinding signage to create a sense of place, open arms to commuters and visitors, and well marked access to parking
- Assist property owners with leasing their spaces – keeping available inventory updated on a regular basis
- Promote, educate and capitalize on TOD, Enterprise, and Opportunity Zone designations
- Host monthly BID meet-and-greet sessions
- Increase and support public and private investment in the TOD district
- Become an internship hub, partnering with universities and high schools to facilitate year-round center internships. Interns will gain interaction with local businesses, and assist with day-to-day operations, while providing real world experience
- Estimated Launch Date: **Ongoing year-long activities.**