

MONTAGUE STREET BID ANNUAL REPORT: FISCAL YEAR 2009

Section I. District Background and Review of Fiscal Year 2009 Activities

A. Neighborhood Needs Assessment

Montague Street is home to over 100 retail tenants – a mix of owner-operated, franchise, and national-chain businesses. Even in during the difficult economic climate of 2008-09, the retail vacancy rate was 6%, lower even than the 6.5% typical in Manhattan retail and considerably lower than the Brooklyn average. The district also contains a number of commercial office towers, high-rise residential buildings (rental and co-op), and several dozen mixed-use brownstones with residential units on upper floors. During 2008-09, work continued on the conversion of a 12-story office building into condominiums, with a child-care facility at ground level. Impact from this development is expected to be positive, with residents hopefully providing local retailers with additional evening and weekend sales.

A function of Montague Street's success as a retail corridor is that it appeals to well-established chain and franchise businesses. Therefore, the district's retail mix is more mainstream than most Brooklyn shopping districts. To support the district's unique identity, the BID works to intensify Montague Street's sense of place through public space and development programs, some of which are detailed below.

B. Review of Accomplishments

The BID established five major goals for FY09. Implementation of each goal is described below.

Independence Day Displays

Working to execute our goal of a visual impact on the public realm each quarter, we introduced a program of Independence Day decorations, which included hanging American flags on each of the BID's lampposts and distributing patriotic bunting to BID businesses. Bunting was distributed to nearly half of the BID's businesses¹, and nearly 80% of those locations displayed the decorations.

Pedestrian Plazas

In cooperation with NYC DOT, the BID launched a pilot program of pedestrian street plazas, which were implemented over four Sundays in July 2008. We carried out three different surveys to gauge the impact of the event: pedestrian and vehicle counts, questionnaires asked of random visitors stopped on the street, and a sales survey distributed to merchants. Pedestrian counts showed a major increase in pedestrian usage during Summer Space – up 33% at Montague & Henry, and 15% at Montague & Hicks. More visitors surveyed had favorable impressions of Montague Street during Summer Space than when the street was open to car traffic; 50% of respondents described the environment as "Very Good," compared to just over 20% rating it "Very Good" under normal conditions. We also distributed sales surveys to retailers that were open on Sundays; 23% of shops surveyed provided sales data.

¹ Note that most national retail branches are only allowed to display corporate decorations, so 50% distribution covers nearly every BID business eligible to participate.

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The survey collected data for six dates: a late June Sunday, before Summer Space launched; two Summer Space dates, one sunny, one rainy; and the three equivalent dates in 2007. Overall, the two 2008 Summer Space dates outperformed the equivalent 2007 date by 28% and 24%, respectively. By contrast, the “typical” 2008 Sunday only averaged 10% better sales than its 2007 counterpart.

Halloween Decorations

For fall, the BID created a new Halloween program. Forty large “face” pumpkins, tagged with *Happy Halloween from the Montague Street BID* stickers, were distributed to BID businesses; after a week’s time, more than 90% of the pumpkins remained on display. In addition, the BID held a pumpkin-carving demonstration featuring a world-renowned gourd artisan. The Brooklyn Borough President attended and raffled the spectacular carved pumpkins to BID businesses for display.

Solar Lighting

During the holiday season, we installed garlands of solar-powered lights around the trunks of over half the BID’s street trees. In total, some 5,000 individual lights were hung, to charming effect. However, variable sunlight conditions at each site meant that the lit period of each garland varied considerably; weather conditions also had a significant impact on solar charge, with cloudy days generating a considerably shorter lit period. We remain committed to exploring sustainable lighting solutions in the future, with a deeper appreciation of the challenges posed by solar installations.

Tree-Pit Guards

The BID secured \$90,000 in funding from our councilmember to install pit guards around street trees within the district. During FY09, we worked successfully with the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation to carry out a complete survey of the district’s street trees and to determine appropriate locations for the tree-pit guards. By the end of the fiscal year, 94% of the district’s pits had been enlarged and rejuvenated, and installation of nearly 50 custom-fabricated wrought-iron tree-pit guards was imminent.

Additional Notable Fiscal Year 09 Activities

Spring Window Art

In April 2009, the BID commissioned Emily Krohn, a 2008 graduate of Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute, to create delicate botanical illustrations for the storefront windows of any interested BID merchants. A dozen merchants participated in the program, and some of them became so fond of the artwork that they kept it up for months, long past the intended four-week display period. In addition, one merchant subsequently hired Ms. Krohn to paint the interior of her shop with decorative motifs.

69 Meters Public Art Installation

In May, the BID installed *69 Meters*, a temporary artwork comprising 69 hand-knit yarn ‘cozies’ mounted on each of the parking-meter poles along Montague Street. The installation was a collaboration between the BID, artist Magda Sayeg – the founder of Knitta Please, the guerilla knitting collective – and nearly 50 volunteer knitters. Artworks were created by dozens of Brooklyn residents and were also contributed by knitters as far away as San Francisco and Paris. The installation attracted significant public and press attention for the district, including articles in both the *NY Times* and *NY Post*, as well as local papers and blogs.

C. Review of Activities Data

See Tab 1 in the attached file, *MontagueBID_Impacts_FY09.xls*.

Section II. Looking Ahead: Fiscal Year 2010 Goals

Fiscal Year 2010 Goals

Pedestrian Plazas, Revised and Refined

We will refine our pedestrian plaza program, providing additional event programming, seeking partnerships with community organizations, and creating specific themes that offer our merchants specific marketing opportunities. Impact will be measured by attendance and merchant surveys.

Enhanced Winter Lighting

We will build on our prior winter lighting programs by increasing the number of light strands installed and exploring different light types and installation patterns. Impact will be measured by number of lights installed compared to the prior year.

Tree-Pit Landscaping

We will oversee the final stage of our tree-guard project – installation of the actual iron fencing – and will develop a landscaping program for the newly protected pits. Impact will be measured by percentage of district pits landscaped.

Revamped Print Marketing Materials

We will replace our outdated district map with new print materials that can be distributed to BID merchants, new area tenants, and/or local tourist centers. Impact will be measured by number of print pieces distributed.

New Visitor-Attraction Initiatives

We will explore opportunities to better reach and attract potential shoppers and visitors in the neighborhoods surrounding the district. Possible initiatives include partnerships with major local events, online advertising, and distribution of print materials outside the district. Impact measurement will vary by marketing channel, but may include click-through rate, for example.

Section III. Contracts

See Tab 2 in the attached file, *MontagueBID_Impacts_FY09.xls*.

Section IV. Organizational Information

No staff changes or organizational restructuring occurred during the fiscal year. The BID continues to be staffed by a single part-time employee, as it has been since its inception in 1998. Chelsea Mauldin, Executive Director, has been with the organization since July 2006.