

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
DIRECTOR'S ROOM
VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
APRIL 9, 2020**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Phillips, Co-Chair; Norm DeLaura, Co-Chair, Jack Sayre, Shelly Koehler, Joy Dorin, Steve Carter,

ALSO PRESENT: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning & Economic Development;
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner
April DiFalco, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Minutes for Approval – February 13, 2020

Mr. Phillips made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. DeLaura seconded and all members voted in favor.

COVID-19- Related Resources for Businesses

Mr. Anderson went through a presentation from the recent Board of Director's meeting covering business resources related to COVID-19. He said the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act is the most significant legislation to date and contains a variety of programs to aid businesses and individuals. He said there are expanded benefits for unemployed workers, including self-employed, freelance and gig workers, and those on Social Security. Provisions for small business include Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL), which provide up to \$2 million for small businesses and nonprofits through the Small Business Administration. EIDL also includes a new provision for a \$10,000 grant to cover payroll, rent, additional sick leave, or other increased costs.

He said the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) is intended to encourage employers to maintain payroll, pay rent, mortgage interest and utilities via federally backed loans and is forgivable for up to 8 weeks of payroll. He said there are other provisions to assist businesses including tax credits, tax deferrals, and additional sick time compensation. At the state level, he said the Department of Community and Economic Development had offered a zero-interest Bridge Loan Program, which is currently paused due to an overwhelming response. He said funding has been added to the program and will likely take future applications once current applications are processed. He mentioned utility and mortgage relief programs negotiated through the governor's office.

In terms of local outreach, Mr. Anderson said staff has consolidated much of this information on the Town website and various social media channels. He said there has been direct outreach to business owners and more will be done going forward. He said Ms. Koehler has been doing a great deal of work with Manchester businesses through her role with the Connecticut Small Business Development Center (CT SBDC).

Mr. Phillips asked if there were intermediaries available to assist business owners with applying for various aid programs. Ms. DiFalco said the Chamber's primary function has been forwarding relevant information to members. Mr. Anderson said that has also been Town staff's primary activity to date, although contact information of relevant staff has been posted for local businesses to contact if they have questions.

Ms. Koehler said she has receiving a constant stream of updates from the leadership at the Small Business Administration. She said she has been averaging roughly twenty-five calls per day from business requesting assistance with applying for the available programs. She anticipates CT SBDC bringing aboard additional staff to help process the large volume of applications.

Mr. Phillips asked what type of feedback Ms. Koehler is receiving from business owners regarding the economic challenges to date. She said it varies by industry, but so far most are hoping to weather the storm until the health emergency passes and business resumes. She said PPP is undergoing significant challenges at the moment due to the sheer scale and speed of the economic situation. Ms. DiFalco said she is hearing from restaurants deeply concerned they will not be able to survive and also from a number of self-employed entrepreneurs. She said the Chamber is working with Manchester High School students to produce a PSA to assist local restaurants.

Ms. Koehler said restaurants are concerned the money from the programs will not be received soon enough to make a difference. She said her colleagues are working on development a way to provide applicants information on their place in the queue so they are better able to plan. She said sole proprietors and the self-employed would be able to apply for assistance starting the following day and they are encourage to apply as early as possible.

Mr. Anderson asked if there were specific banks that have been helpful for non-customers in applying for PPP funds. Ms. Koehler said Ion Bank and New Tech have been processing loans for non-customers. She said Wells Fargo and Bank of America are currently capped out at the moment. Mr. DeLaura said the banks have received permission to lift restrictions on their required capital reserves in response. Mr. Phillips said Congress is considering additional allocations of money. Ms. Koehler said perceptions about the program will likely improve once the initial wave of funds are received by businesses and there are success stories.

Ms. Dorin asked Mr. Anderson how Firestone Art Studio was faring. He said as far as he is aware, they are getting by at the moment. He said he's checked in with several local businesses and they are reporting similar situations. He said the overall picture will be clearer over time. Ms. Koehler encouraged members to forward any businesses with questions to her so she can assist.

Discussion Items (Future Meeting Locations, Business Testimonials, Communication with Other Boards, Future EDC Work Plan):

Mr. Phillips said he and Mr. DeLaura have discussed various potential changes in how the EDC can consider enhancing its role, including hosting more monthly EDC meetings at various Manchester businesses as a form of outreach, gathering testimonials from local businesses with positive experiences with the Town to generate marketing material, working with other Town boards and commissions to collaborate on economic development-related initiatives, and working with staff to draft a yearly or quarterly work plan for the EDC to organize potential

projects. He said these were initial ideas but he and Mr. DeLaura were open to other suggestions. Mr. Anderson added that the General Manager has asked him to head a process dedicated to post-COVID-19 local economic recovery and that the EDC would likely play a significant role. He said he would keep the EDC updated as that subcommittee takes shape but for now said members should be thinking in terms of gaps and how the Town could potentially assist local businesses in their recovery efforts.

Report of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Postponed to future meeting.

Report of the Special Services District

Postponed to future meeting.

Report of the Planning and Economic Development Director

Postponed to future meeting.

Other Business

Mr. DeLaura asked if the Town has changed various due dates to accommodate businesses and residents. Mr. Anderson said property tax payments have been delayed three months, but he would explore whether other permit renewals dates have been extended. Mr. Phillips said members should think about the potential EDC work plan going forward for future discussion. Mr. DeLaura said in relation to Governor Lamont's announcement of mortgage relief, borrowers should be aware of how much would be due after the 90-day moratorium is lifted to make sure they are not saddled with a larger 'balloon'-type payment. He recommended borrowers seeking relief speak to their closing attorney and loan service provider to obtain accurate information.

Mr. Anderson said there would likely be additional information related to COVID-19 resources, as the situation is changing daily. He asked if member would like to meet again in two weeks to discuss additional developments. All members agreed. Mr. Anderson said he would schedule a meeting in another two weeks and would send a notice to members.

Adjournment

Mr. DeLaura made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Sayre seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:13 am.