

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

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

**ALSO PRESENT:** Gary Anderson, Director of Planning & Economic Development  
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner

Adoption of Minutes of June 11, 2020

Mr. Lindsay made a motion to adopt the minutes. Mr. DeLaura seconded and all members voted in favor.

COVID-19- Resources for Businesses Update

*Manchester business EDIL and PPP data*

Ms. Koehler said the development for the Paycheck Protection Program is that there will be reconsideration for previous denials. There will be a Small Business Administration webinar to help business owners who plan to re-apply for funds and that the deadline to apply for the funds has been extended until August. The revised guidelines are more favorable to businesses and if the loans were used properly, they will likely be forgiven, she said.

Ms. Dorin asked if there were two forms available for applicant, a simplified version and a more comprehensive version for documenting forgiveness. She also asked if applicants should be working through their banks for this process. Ms. Koehler replied in the affirmative for both questions. She said at this point, it appears that the entire program will close in August.

Mr. Phillips asked if Ms. Koehler or staff were familiar with the Main Street lending program through the Federal Reserve. Ms. Koehler said she was not familiar with the details of the program. Mr. Anderson said staff will look into the program and see if it may be appropriate for any Manchester businesses.

Mr. DeLaura asked if there have been anecdotes of businesses not surviving the economic slowdowns. Mr. Anderson said the only one he has personally heard from is Sol De Borinquen Bakery in downtown, who said they are unlikely to continue. Ms. Koehler said she hears from businesses who anticipate struggling to continue if the slowdown continues much longer.

Ms. Dorin asked Mr. Deffenbaugh how his music studio has been operating during the slowdown. Mr. Deffenbaugh said business has been relatively steady due to the ability to teach music lessons remotely, which has actually expanded his client base beyond the typical

geographic boundaries. He said the cancellation of sports has also benefitted the business, as remote music lessons are an extracurricular activity that is able to continue and keep student occupied during social distancing.

Mr. Phillips asked how the Firestone Art Studio has been faring. Mr. Anderson said the shutdowns have significantly impacted their usual operations and they have had to change their business model to temporarily focus more on the café portion. He said they initially had a second expansion phase planned for September which is likely to be postponed. He said September was also when payment for the first downtown loan was due – he said he has been in touch with the owner and encouraged her to reach out to the Town if she was having difficulty. Mr. Phillips asked if the Town was able to restructure the loan if necessary. Mr. Anderson replied in the affirmative.

#### *Update on unemployment data*

Mr. Shiel provided an update on the recently published June jobs report and unemployment numbers. He said the economy gained 4.8 million jobs last month while the unemployment rate fell from 13.3 to 11.1 percent. He said while this was the second month in a row trending in a positive direction, one potential area of concern is the number of permanent job losses, which have been rising since February. He said there needs to be several months of job growth to get back to the baseline trend before the pandemic.

He said the local initial unemployment claims peaked in March, while continued claims where recipient claimed benefits in the prior week have tapered off much more gradually from a peak in late April. He said there were nearly five thousand Manchester residents currently collecting unemployment benefits. He said forty-eight percent of people currently collecting benefits made less than \$20,000 in the previous year, suggesting that many of them have very limited savings. He said the \$600 supplemental unemployment insurance is scheduled to run out at the end of July and the decline in the number of job openings suggests a limited amount of employment opportunities for those who run out of benefits.

He said foot traffic to businesses has declined significantly since March, bottoming out in late April due to social distancing guideline and gradually increasing to a currently twenty percent below the initial baseline. Locally in Connecticut, he said the current foot traffic figure is twenty-seven percent below the initial baseline, with industries like bars and sit-down restaurants seeing the largest declines. He concluded by saying the June jobs report was taken during a survey window in mid-June, just before the surge in coronavirus cases in the latter half of the month. He suggested the economic data over the next two months will be impacted by these coronavirus cases and the resulting likely shutdowns.

Mr. Phillips said highlighting the impacts of the slowdown in low-income people is important. He said ending the \$600 supplemental unemployment insurance combined with a weak job market will likely mean significant hardship for many households. He said he hoped policymakers consider this dynamic.

#### Report of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Postponed until next meeting.

### Report of the Special Services District (SSD)

Mr. Anderson said the current Downtown Manager recently resigned. He said they are currently trying to figure out various downtown issues and are working to figure out new leadership and communications responsibilities for the SSD.

### Report of the Planning and Economic Development Director

Mr. Anderson said Ahold Delhaize is working on filling space in the Winstanley Logistics Center. He said despite the overall challenging economy, industrial space is currently in high demand. He said the mixed-use rehabilitation at 2-4 Pearl Street is moving ahead as planned, although it is a challenging renovation. He said the former Great Harvest bakery site is receiving some interest from potential developers, which would be a significant boost to Downtown if something were to eventually materialize. Regarding the Commission vacancy, Mr. Anderson said two people have expressed interest. He said the General Manager will make appointment at some point in the near future.

Mr. Anderson said he wished to update the Commission on recent negotiations for the Broad Street Redevelopment project. Mr. DeLaura made a motion to go into executive session. Ms. Dorin seconded and all members voted in favor. The Commission came out of executive session at 8:52. No decisions were made.

### Other Business

No other business was discussed.

### Adjournment

Mr. Sayre made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Phillips seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:56 am.