

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
DIRECTOR'S ROOM  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MINUTES  
MAY 14, 2020**

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

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

Minutes for Approval – April 23, 2020

Ms. Dorin made a motion to adopt the minutes as written. Mr. Carter seconded and all members voted in favor.

COVID-19- Resources for Businesses Update

*Update on latest guidance for businesses from Governor*

Mr. Anderson said the State's reopening plan calls for a gradual, phased rollout with May 20<sup>th</sup> as the target date for most industries. He walked through the various sector guidelines listed by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). He said the guidelines provide a general blueprint for the sectors looking to reopen.

Mr. Phillips asked how the guidelines will be enforced. Mr. Sayre said he has heard of New York State shutting down non-compliant businesses. Ms. Koehler said the guidelines are better understood as requirements. She said there are procedures in place to report non-compliant businesses, which could potentially lead to investigation and enforcement. Mr. DeLaura asked if whistleblowers are protected. Ms. Koehler said they are able to anonymously call the hotline.

Mr. Phillips said many consumers seem to be self-policing behavior their own behavior and acting responsibly. Mr. Anderson said the Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA) is partnering with the State and other organizations to help distribute donated surgical masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) to eligible small businesses. Mr. Koehler said she is aware of a few local businesses that have partially pivoted to PPE production. Ms. Dorin said Allied Printing is also producing some PPE as well.

*Update on Outdoor Dining Permitting*

Mr. Anderson said Town staff have been working to put together guidelines and procedures to accommodate restaurants seeking outdoor dining permits in accordance with the recent Executive Order. He said most outdoor dining application would otherwise run into zoning issues and procedures and the Executive Order gives towns greater

flexibility to allow for outdoor dining. He said there is a scheduled public hearing with the Planning and Zoning Commission to approve a resolution authorizing the General Manager, through the Director of Planning and Economic Development and Zoning Enforcement Official, to waive zoning regulations that may conflict with the Executive Order. He said the Town's Information Systems department was instrumental in getting an online permitting set up so quickly.

Mr. Anderson briefly walked through the online application. He said he was initially expecting hundreds of requests but to date there have been roughly several dozen. He said many restaurants are currently reporting they are performing reasonably well with take-out only for the time being. Mr. DeLaura asked how the rules might apply to breweries as it appears they need to have a food truck in their parking lot if they plan to serve alcohol outside. Mr. Anderson said the Executive Order does require food to be served if alcohol is served outside, although the Town will try to accommodate businesses as much as reasonably possible, as they realize this is a challenging time to operate.

#### *Update on SBA Loans*

Ms. Koehler said the Economic Injury Disaster Loans seems to be processing applications and distributing funds more efficiently and there is more communication with applicants. She said the Paycheck Protection Program funds are still being distributed and the program remains open for applications. She said she is currently working with clients on proper documentation for the forgiveness portion of the loan, so they qualify for as much forgiveness as possible. Mr. Shiel asked about the safe harbor provisions for applicants who are concerned they may have inadvertently used PPP funds inappropriately. Ms. Koehler said those details are still being worked out at the federal level and the state level Small Business Development Center have not received many updates at this time.

Mr. Phillips asked about the 'Navigator' initiative. Mr. Anderson said the initiative was primarily intended to provide backup support to Ms. Koehler and the CT SBDC in regards to outreach and assistance while they currently deal with a mass of applications for assistance. He said Town staff have been able to answer basic questions and direct people to appropriate sources of information, but much of the direct work of assisting business on their applications will still be performed by CT SBDC staff. Ms. Koehler said the Navigator initiative will likely be more important as the economy recovers and a variety of different stakeholders will need to be involved.

#### *Latest Unemployment Data*

Mr. Shiel provided an overview of the most recent unemployment figures. He said national unemployment is currently at 14.7 percent, the highest since the Great Depression. He said many forecasters are expecting the rate to increase once the extent of the economic damage is realized. He showed a graphic from the New York Times illustrating the extent of the job losses in April, showing 20 million jobs lost due to the economic shutdown. He said both national and state unemployment claims show a historic spike in late March and early April due to these job losses. He pulled up regional data in neighboring towns showing the same trend, including for Manchester, which represented about 1,500 processed initial

unemployment claims as of mid-May. He said the Department of Labor is currently experiencing a backlog of roughly 3-5 weeks, so the claims will likely increase significantly once every application is processed.

In terms of the industries most impacted, Mr. Shiel said the Accommodation and Food Services sectors suffered the most job losses, followed by Health Care & Social Services and Retail Trade. He said while retail was an expected casualty, Health Care was a somewhat surprising sector due to it being perceived as 'recession-proof'. He said the likely cause was the postponement of most elective and non-essential procedures as most of the health care system is focused on COVID-19 treatment. He said the age group most impacted by job losses have been people from ages 20-29 and 30-39 as they represent a large share of workers in the food service and retail industries. In terms of gender, Mr. Shiel said the majority of claimants (56 percent) are female.

Mr. Carter said he believes the official unemployment rate likely does not adequately capture the scale of the economic downturn. Mr. Phillips said other measure of unemployment show higher shares of the labor force struggling. Mr. Shiel agreed and said the official rate would likely increase in the near future.

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

Mr. Anderson said he would be participating in a virtual chamber event on Friday and said anyone interested is able to register.

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

Postponed until subsequent meeting.

#### Report of the Planning and Economic Development Director

Mr. Anderson said one potential bright spot for Manchester in particular is that despite the overall economic downturn, the grocery and logistics sector is still strong and the new tenant at the Winstanley Logistics Center, Ahold Delhaize is likely to be a source of local jobs. He said there may be an opportunity to promote employment opportunities at the warehouse.

#### Other Business

None.

#### Adjournment

Mr. Phillips made a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeLaura seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 am.