

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
DIRECTOR'S ROOM
VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
APRIL 23, 2020**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Phillips, Co-Chair; Norm DeLaura, Co-Chair, Jack Sayre, Shelly Koehler, Steve Carter, Tom Deffenbaugh, Sean Lindsey

ALSO PRESENT: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning & Economic Development;
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner;
Stacey Zackin, WORK_SPACE Manager;
Tana Parseliti, Downtown Development Specialist

Minutes for Approval – April 9, 2020

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

COVID-19- Resources for Businesses Update

Ms. Koehler said the Connecticut Small Business Development (CT SBDC) has been continuing to work with small business owners to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) through the CARES Act. She said the second round of funding is likely to be approved by Congress soon, but there are currently administrative details yet to be clarified. She said she is unsure if applicants from the first round will have to re-apply for the second round or if they will maintain their position in the queue. She said she hopes more funds will make their way towards smaller businesses during the next round. She said CT SBDC has hired six new advisors in order to assist with the increased volume of applications and inquiries from businesses. She said CT SBDC is looking to build upon existing partnerships and collaborations in order to better assist local business. She mentioned the Verge Consulting Program, where graduate business student assist startups and small businesses to start and grow their companies. She said the program will likely focus on assisting with post COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Mr. Anderson asked if there was a way to get a breakdown of PPP and EIDL loan received by Manchester businesses. Ms. Koehler said the numbers are typically aggregated at the state level, but she would explore getting local data for Manchester. Mr. Shiel asked if the second round of PPP funding would allow smaller banks, credit unions and some online financial companies to process the loan applications. Ms. Koehler said the second round will likely make it easier to use smaller banks but she was unsure if or how using a different bank from the original identified lenders would impact someone's position in a queue. She added that she is not sure how using an online application like PayPal would be beneficial versus using a traditional financial institution for those with that option.

Potential Role for EDC/WORK_SPACE in Recovery Plans

Mr. DeLaura asked how the EDC may be of assistance to these recovery efforts. Ms. Koehler said she is currently working with staff from WORK_SPACE to host weekly updates on the PPP, EIDL and other business recovery resources and is working to produce a 4-part webinar series on business resiliency. Mr. Anderson said in addition to the initiative previously mentioned, members should think about what role the EDC and Town can play in recovery efforts. Ms. Koehler said such efforts would likely evolve as everyone learns more about the public health and economic situation. Mr. Phillips said assisting businesses with navigating the various aid programs would be beneficial. Mr. Anderson agreed, saying Town staff is working to get up to speed in order to assist businesses with basic frequently asked questions, although it is currently challenging as the information is often changing daily. Ms. Koehler said each bank has slightly different procedures for processing PPP applications and Small Business Administration staff have limited input after an application is submitted, so they are often unable to provide much clarity to applicants in terms of when or if funds will be received.

Mr. Anderson said some sort of marketing and branding campaign may be necessary for recovery efforts, especially as businesses may need to adopt social distancing measures and altering their operations. He asked members to think about whether revising some of the criteria for the Downtown Loan Program may make sense in order to assist with recovery efforts. Mr. Shiel asked about the recent press release highlight a mini tech hub downtown. Ms. Parseliti said Arsome Technology, LESA (Live Event Stream Automotive), and Quast Media are three downtown companies with a common focus of technology and experience of working virtually, making them natural candidates to promote during the current crisis and how it positions the companies and downtown favorably in the future. Mr. Anderson added there have been ongoing discussions about how to transform WORK_SPACE into a virtual meeting space.

Mr. DeLaura suggested the Town begin taking a look at what other states that are currently ahead of the curve are doing regarding easing social distancing guidelines. Mr. Anderson said a recent Cushman & Wakefield report contained a number of promising suggestions for future implementation. Mr. DeLaura asked how the Town plans to enforce social distancing going forward. Mr. Anderson said it is currently unclear and would likely evolve depending on recommendations from other authorities. Ms. Zackin said there is discussion regarding using existing apps to both call in complaints and highlight admirable efforts. She added that WORK_SPACE will likely be changing some of its operations and procedures going forward to promote social distancing, including spacing out opening events over two days instead of the customary single evening.

Report of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Postponed until subsequent meeting.

Report of the Special Services District (SSD)

Mr. Anderson said there were no formal updates from the SSD at this time. He mentioned there had been a pop-up chalk art event and that parking enforcement in the district is more lenient at the moment due to a lack of traffic and the need to accommodate residents dealing with unpredictable schedules and routines.

Report of the Planning and Economic Development Director

Mr. Anderson said Elicit Brewing submitted an application for an outdoor entertainment permit, although it is likely it will be some time before such activities are allowed by health officials. He said the Planning and Zoning Commission recently approved a change in the parking regulations for the industrial zone to allow shared parking between tenants if their parking demand differs in the of peak use. He said this change is beneficial in general due to the flexibility provided and it also accommodates a proposed axe-throwing bar planning for a property in the industrial district. Mr. Anderson said the negotiations for the Broad Street redevelopment project are ongoing and currently proceeding in the right direction. Mr. DeLaura asked about the recent sales listing of the Bob's Discount Furniture headquarters building. Mr. Anderson said it would most likely be a change of ownership, as Bob's would still remain as a tenant. He said the status of the tax abatement granted to the property was an unresolved question, but attorneys for both Bob's and the Town have likely begun researching the matter.

Other Business

Ms. Zackin said some local businesses are making personal protective equipment (PPE), and if EDC members had additional information on other companies undertaking similar initiatives she would like to promote their efforts. Mr. Anderson said AdChem and Flex were two local manufacturing companies he knew of that were transitioning at least in part to PPE production of some sort. Mr. Lindsey said his oil change business has dramatically slowed down since the social distancing measures were implemented, but operations are continuing with some modifications to prevent contamination of customers and staff. He said three of his stores have applied for PPP funds and two have already received the funds, while the third is still waiting. Mr. Philips asked if there were local unemployment figures available. Mr. Anderson said the DOL publishes such data and staff would see if recent Manchester figures were available.

Adjournment

Mr. DeLaura made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lindsey seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:04am.