

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
JUNE 10, 2021**

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

ALSO PRESENT: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning & Economic Development
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner
Joe Lipiner, Downtown Special Services District

Adoption of Minutes of March 11, 2020

Mr. DeLaura moved to adopt the minutes as written. Mr. Phillips seconded and all members voted in favor.

Results of Recovery Survey

Mr. Shiel presented the results of the recovery survey sent to local businesses to gauge the level of business activity and identify gaps in resources for targeted business assistance. He said the sample size was relatively small, but the survey still contained some interesting results. He said over 96 percent of respondents utilized the Paycheck Protection Program and 57 percent of respondents utilized the State of Connecticut's CARES Small Business grant program. In terms of specific pandemic-related responses that assistance programs were not able to address, he said the majority of respondents indicated issues such as lack of customer demand or concerns about public health were the primary hurdles. He said 54 percent of respondents indicated that some form of networking or promotional events would be helpful to position their business for success going forward.

Ms. Koehler said people are looking to create opportunities and she has started noticing the service industry starting to bounce back. Mr. Lipner said he was surprised by how many people did not take advantage of programs. He said in his experience, applying for and receiving the available funds was a smooth process.

Discussion of 2021 EDC draft workplan

Mr. Phillips began discussion of a draft 2021 workplan for the Commission. He said some items such as the business recovery survey had already been completed, but there may be others items that member may wish to prioritize. He mentioned items such as business visitation beginning perhaps sometime in the fall, with a potential focus on sectors such as hospitality, restaurants, manufacturing, and retail. He also mentioned the Plan of Conservation and Development update could include a role for the Commission, and also some sort of roundtable event later in the year.

Ms. Koehler said a lack of employees is playing huge factor in workforce development. She said organizations such as Eastern CT Manufacturers Association have programs to train people for manufacturing employment. Mr. Phillips said the warehouse and logistics industry appear to be doing fairly well.

Mr. DeLaura asked how much federal assistance is available for economic development. Mr. Anderson said if there is program that will make a difference, the EDC and staff can advocate for available funds. He agreed with Ms. Koehler that every business seems to be looking for workers right now. Mr. Carter said there is a lack of young people interested in certain professions, such as automotive technicians. He said there needs to be a change in perception among younger workers and available opportunities. Mr. DeLaura said there is often a stigma associated with certain technical jobs, which contributes to a lack of eligible workers. Ms. Dorin said technical educational programs often prepare graduates for well-paying jobs in comparison with many traditional degree programs.

Mr. Phillips said he would forward a presentation on workforce development, which would provide context on how to identify employer need. Mr. Phillips asked if there was consensus to explore doing a possible roundtable at a later date. All members were in agreement.

Report from the CT Small Business Development Center

Ms. Koehler said her work at the CT SBDC is continuing to assistance business with post-pandemic recovery efforts and begin additional educational programming.

Report of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Postponed until next meeting.

Report of the Downtown Special Services District (SSD)

Postponed until the next meeting.

Report of the Planning & Economic Development Director

Mr. Anderson said the Winstanley Logistics center was planning a job fair, to include Ahold Delhaize and Amazon. To help with their outreach, he said the Town will be hosting a job fair in July open to any Manchester resident hoping to apply for work. He said if EDC members have specific suggestions regarding the job fair to get in touch with staff.

Other Business

None.

Adjournment

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