

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
AUGUST 12, 2021**

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

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

Adoption of Minutes of June 10, 2020

Ms. Dorin moved to adopt the minutes as written. Ms. Koehler seconded and all members voted in favor.

Potential uses of ARPA funds

Mr. Phillips said there has been much discussion about how to potential use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for economic development purposes. Mr. Anderson said while not all ARPA funding received by the Town would be dedicated for economic development, there would be some allocated for that purpose and wished to gather feedback from the EDC. He said some items could include expansion of the downtown loan program and filling in any gaps in marketing assistance. He mentioned other possible downtown capital projects such as streetscape reconstruction , sidewalk expansion, improved parking, and street furniture,

Mr. DeLaura asked if there was a time limit to spend the funds. Mr. Anderson said the funds should be appropriated by 2024. Mr. Phillips said in his view the funds should not go towards programs as the money is not meant to be reoccurring. He said capital projects may make more sense and would possible expansion of the downtown loan fund.

Ms. Dorin agreed about carefully selecting projects to consider the sustainability of funds. She said she sees a need for marketing assistance and agrees with expanding loan program to existing businesses. Mr. DeLaura said it may make more sense to use marketing dollars to market the Town as a whole or district rather than individual businesses.

Mr. Carter said he was in favor of expanding the loan program to existing businesses and would not favor marketing efforts where individual businesses are assisted. He agreed with Mr.

DeLaura's suggestion to focus marketing efforts on the entire Town. He said streetscape improvements should also consider focusing on Main Street north of Center Street to Middle Turnpike.

Ms. Dorin said business assistance would go beyond advertising and setting up a website. She said some businesses have good ideas but cannot execute. She said any assistance could focus on helping business better understand their potential clientele and market. Ms. Koehler said she agrees with marketing the entire downtown district. She said there are several options for small business assistance, including marketing and other areas of need. She said she is in favor of brick and mortar capital improvements.

In response to a comment from Mr. Phillips about workforce development Mr. Anderson said the EDC could host a meeting with various groups to discuss workforce development-related issues. He said in terms of expanding the loan program to existing businesses it would be important to consider that the original intent of the program was to help older buildings in need of modernization and any updates to the guidelines should be thoughtfully considered.

Mr. Phillips asked if the Board of Directors was TD waiting for feedback from stakeholders to decide spending on ARPA funds. Mr. Anderson replied in the affirmative, saying the Board will have a future workshop devoted the spending its allocation of ARPA funds. Mr. Phillips said perhaps philanthropic funds could be leveraged as there are considerable funds available depending on the proposed use. Mr. Carter said he believed there should be more participation in the downtown loan program. He said more aggressive marketing could potentially be of benefit. Mr. Anderson said Broad Street business could potentially be another eligible area for the program.

Mr. Anderson said if the EDC wanted to pursue some gathering to discuss workforce development and other related economic development goals, organizations such as the Connecticut Small Business Development Center, Manchester Community College and Cheney Tech among others should be among the participants. He said he would be willing to reach out to discuss with those organizations.

Workforce development discussion

Addressed under previous agenda item.

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 Amazon did a hiring event at WORK_SPACE. He said they filled all open positions within two weeks and are working with the Chamber on a possible future event. He said the closing for the Broad Street redevelopment project is still underway. He said the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) is working on regulations related to the recently passed state cannabis legislation. He said the Board does not have much input and it primarily a PZC matter. He said various businesses have reached out, but licenses are distributed by lottery and would be required before further detailed discussion.

He said he is working to engage consulting assistance to develop a strategy for the Buckland Mall area, which is in receivership. He said the Town should be thinking about co-working and other adaptive reuses, as brick and mortar retail continues to face challenges.

He said the newest member of the EDC is Daryl Thomas of Thomas's Smokey Pit. He said he should be at the next meeting.

Other Business

Mr. DeLaura asked if the Town has contingency plans for handling future public health related restrictions. Mr. Anderson said he will talk with the Health Department about their approach.

Adjournment

Mr. Phillips made a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeLaura seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:02 am.