

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
MARCH 11, 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
April DiFalco, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
Emma Peterson, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
Joe Lipiner, Downtown Special Services District
Tim Geary, American Job Center

Adoption of Minutes of February 11, 2020

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

Report from the CT Small Business Development Center

Ms. Koehler said the Shuttered Venue grant program is not yet up and running as the federal government is ironing out the final details. She said the Economic Disaster Injury Loan program is still open and there will also be Community Development Block Grant funds available to assist businesses for eligible applicants.

Mr. Anderson asked if there was a specific relief program for restaurants in the recent stimulus bill. Ms. Koehler replied in the affirmative and said the implementation details are still being worked out. Mr. DeLaura said he noticed that Bank of American has suspended taking new applicants for the Paycheck Protection Program. Ms. Koehler said if applicants are already in the system, the second round of funding is generally a smoother process. She said there will be a forum in April with congressional delegation members focused on lenders.

Discussion of Post-Covid Business Recovery project

Mr. Shiel said he reached out to various officials at the state and regional level to see if there were plans to survey businesses for post-pandemic recovery efforts. He said there were no current plans, so if the EDC wanted to do a business survey it would have to be a local effort. He showed a draft of potential survey questions and asked members if they have suggestions. Mr. Carter said he would like to be clear on the goal of the survey. Mr. Shiel said one primary goal would be determining if there is a gap in federal or state resources that could potentially be filled by the Town. Mr. Phillips said it may be helpful to learn about specific challenges faced by employers such as layoffs, hiring new staff or navigating various assistance programs.

Ms. DiFalco said a business survey would be a helpful component and the Chamber could work with Town staff to disseminate once a final draft is written. Mr. Shiel said he would work with Chamber staff on drafting and distributing a survey. Mr. Anderson said Town staff would forward a copy to EDC members before the next meeting.

Potential Focus Groups

Mr. Anderson said another potentially helpful initiative for the recovery effort could involve meeting with businesses in specific industries. He invited WORK_SPACE manager Stacey Zackin to present on a recent event. Ms. Zackin said WORK_SPACE recently held a Feedback Loop event focused on technology companies in Connecticut and was sponsored by ARSOME Technologies. She said the event was well-attended and feedback has been positive. There are plans to do future events on a monthly basis, as many found the event helpful as a networking opportunity. Mr. Anderson agreed that the event was successful and well-done. He said other industries may find similar events beneficial going forward. Ms. Koehler said she attended the event as well and agreed with Mr. Anderson's assessment.

Workforce Development

Mr. Anderson introduced Tim Geary, Business Service Representative from the American Job Center. Mr. Geary said he is the project coordinator for the Dislocated Workers Grant. The grant is intended to help employers find qualified talent and offset the costs associated with hiring new employees. He said the target industries are healthcare, manufacturing, IT, construction and transportation/logistics. The grant will provide wage reimbursements of 50 to 75 percent for 6 months of on-the-job training up to \$20,000.

Ms. Dorin asked if there is any expectation that employee stay with company for certain amount of time. Mr. Geary said the expectation is that both the employee and employer would make a good faith effort, but there is no formal contract. Ms. DiFalco said she would be interested in sharing information about this program with her members, as did Ms. Koehler. Mr. Geary said he would forward the information to them and said he was available to answer questions.

Report of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

Ms. DiFalco said the Chamber been working with Town staff in the Fire and Health Departments on developing a one-stop resource to answer commonly asked questions for businesses regarding required permits. She said the Chamber's 120th Annual Meeting coming up in April and staff are preparing for the event. She said the Manchester Frontline Feud will be airing on Channel 16 and YouTube, and will essentially be a fundraising event in a gameshow format and will highlight the contributions of first responders.

Report of the Downtown Special Services District (SSD)

Mr. Lipner said the SSD board recently discussed Downtown's experience with outdoor dining over the past year. He said the board is in favor of outdoor dining and expanding it where viable to assist restaurants. He said the board discussed the possibility of food trucks and the general consensus was less favorable. He said the SSD is continuing to work with their consultant on modernizing the downtown parking enforcement system.

Report of the Planning & Economic Development Director

Mr. Anderson said there are several places in town such as the former Armory building on Main Street, the Manchester Mall in downtown and the Hilliard Mills that are serving as flexible office and commercial space for businesses. He suggested it may be beneficial good for the Commission to tour these spaces later in the year once everyone is vaccinated to learn more about the businesses operating in these spaces. He said the Broad Street development project application is officially on the agenda for the Planning and Zoning Commission, which will likely make a decision soon after required hearings. He added that the Town now officially owns Green Manor Boulevard, which had been a complicating factor in finalizing the development agreement. He said officially securing ownership of the road will help assist with the final pieces of redevelopment project. Mr. Phillips asked when construction would likely break ground. Mr. Anderson said the initial phase would likely begin this construction season.

Mr. Anderson pulled up slide illustrating concept plans for Purnell Place recently presented to the Board of Directors. He said the concept is intended to build off recent changes to Purnell Place and encourage more outdoor dining and pedestrian activity. He said one potential option is including the ability to temporarily close Purnell Place to vehicular traffic depending on the time of year and various event calendars. He said the concept is part of a capital plan for Downtown, which is largely focused on creating more public spaces and a stronger identity for the district.

Other Business

Mr. Phillips asked for an update on the job fair for the Winstanley Logistics Center. Mr. Anderson said he is working with the Human Services department to coordinate an event and; will update the Commission when more details are available.

Adjournment

Mr. Phillips made a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeLaura seconded and all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:07 am.