

EconomicVitalityMTG 01-19-2021

Economic Vitality Committee  
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM  
January 19, 2021

**PRESENT:** Cato Anderson, Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jennifer McGonigle, Jane Obbagy, Jennifer Schunemann, Debra Stark, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

**ABSENT:** John Boynton, Dawn Rennert, Jan Turnquist

**ALSO PRESENT:** Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Susan Bates, Select Board Member; John Hinkling, Finance Committee Observer; Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management; Erin Stevens, Public Information Officer

**CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

Co-Chair Jennifer Schunemann announced that she would take the lead today. The meeting of January 14, 2021 did not go forward in the absence of a quorum.

Ms. Schunemann stated that Ruth Lauer who has been handling Minutes intends to retire soon. Anyone who knows of an interested replacement should make that information known to the Chairs or the Select Board Assistant.

**MINUTES**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of December 8, 2020.

Cato Anderson	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

**UPDATE FROM THE TOWN**

Beth Williams stated that criteria for Block Grants have changed such that 2020 Tax Returns will be considered as well as businesses open since October 2019 being qualified for assistance. This should make more local businesses eligible. It is hoped that in the quiet time after the holidays, more merchants can find the time to apply for the \$170,000 available to assist Concord businesses. Information is available on the Town website. Jane Obbagy stated that she would ensure that Chamber members learn this immediately. She further stated that Middlesex Savings Bank has opened a portal to accept applications. Banks elsewhere have similar functions.

Town Manager Stephen Crane announced that the Town had completed the vaccination for First Responders for Concord and five surrounding towns. This occurred at the parking lot at the high school over a period of three days. 500 doses were administered. He indicated that the next phase of vaccination will be focused on older, immune-compromised residents. There is no good timeline known yet, however, vaccine supplies are limited.

Beth Williams stated that the Town's Tourism and Hospitality activities have been greatly impacted by the COVID health emergency. The season typically starts with Patriots Day Observances in April. This year the town of Lexington and the National Park Service have already announced that all activities will be virtually celebrated. Although the Concord Celebrations Committee has not yet made its recommendation to the Select Board, she assumes that Town celebrations will be limited or entirely virtual as well. Jane Obbagy stated that Patriots Day is not only a parade. Simply stating virtual observances is too limiting. A flyer or information sheet should be created to explain that Concord is open for business-- what's open, what's new, and/or capacity changes for tours and lectures. Otherwise, retail shops, restaurants, and hotels will all lose out. Beth Williams stated that reduced capacity is now 10 for public gatherings. She will keep the website updated with the latest information.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that the Spring edition of *Discover Concord* magazine will go to the printer. Information regarding local events and celebrations can be included if known by March 1.

### **UPDATE FROM CONCORD TOGETHER**

Jennifer Schunemann stated that Concord Together meetings will resume. Congratulations go out to the Town and others for their support of the retail community. 2020 has not been a banner year for anyone. Clothing stores are not doing well, and restaurants are barely clinging on. The next focus of Concord Together will be on restaurants.

Ms. Schunemann noted that the Town has permitted outdoor dining during this period of reduced indoor capacity by making use of bylaw waivers. This aspect of dining has been a success in the eyes of diners, but to make it permanent at the end of the emergency would require bylaw changes through Town Meeting approval.

Marcia Rasmussen stated that outdoor dining is dependent upon zoning, permits, waivers and community acceptance. If dining space is simply moved from indoors to outdoors on the restaurant property, then no permit change is required. However, if seats are added to what is permitted, dining is added to public spaces such as a parking lot, or if the restaurant license includes alcohol then different conditions exist. Alcohol service must be separated from public spaces. Historic District issues also ensue. She noted that one of the foremost issues during the health emergency has been the additional trash impact of more people using outdoor spaces. Trash and engine idling are the main reasons that solely take-out restaurants are prohibited in Concord unless the business predates the bylaw. The take-out/curbside pickup aspect for most restaurants will go away when the Gov. COVID Guidelines are no longer in force.

Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that retailers have been enabled to use public spaces during the health emergency due to the Gov. Order. He anticipates that the economic recovery will trail COVID by months or years. In response to a question regarding whether the Committee is right to pursue dining options, he stated that it is important to speak with a unified voice. There needs to be discussion in several aspects of the community regarding whether, where, and if bylaws must change. Foremost is to ensure that there is a connective mutual benefit. It was the consensus of the discussion that the next Economic Vitality Committee meeting should include a synopsis of the many parts of the issue and then to develop a feedback survey. Jennifer Schunemann suggested that a subcommittee was called for, but this has complications, and no action was taken. Mark Martines stated that this might be a better focus for the Chamber or Concord Together to focus retail

members who have a greater perspective on the issue. Jane Obbagy stated that there is an overlap in retail and restaurant impacts and together they might better determine the big challenges and issues. Remon Karian stated that he is highly aware of the impact on restaurants, not so much other retailers. Stephen Crane agreed to ask Jeremy Romanul to gather together the relevant bylaws and their associated committees to present to the EVC in February for consideration.

Jennifer Schunemann asked about who would tackle the relevant bylaw amendments, whether there is tension in governing to allow cultural enhancements. Stephen Crane stated that it would be unexpected for a new committee such as EVC to take on the task. It is assumed that EVC would offer feedback from owners, diners, and residents regarding economic recovery. Remon Karian stated that it will be important to react quickly in the face of antiquated laws to make sure we get through this 25% capacity reduction. Can we start now to attach extensions to the Gov. Orders so as not lose time and investments? Stephen Crane stated that Concord is currently operating on a local emergency order on top of the Gov. Order. It is unknown how long this will last, but it won't be forever. The Town needs to decide what it wants and needs to continue. Mark Martines stated that additional latitude is now given restaurants through the Gov. Order, but the Town needs to determine the process for making these new components of restaurants permanent.

Jennifer Schunemann asked what we could be doing from now until the tourism season begins in April. Steve Verrill suggested that hotels and inns should advertise packages of tours and dinner with hotel reservations. Remon Karian suggested a tourism video along the lines of "What Concord Means to Me" done by youngsters and new and long-term residents from all districts. Erin Stevens stated that there are two shop local videos in existence that can be shown on PEG television, but no advertising is allowed. Remon Karian stated that the videos he envisions are not ads, but involvement and integration into the community. Beth Williams reported that the high school Student Senate volunteers are just getting started with their campaign to grow and expand social media efforts in the local commercial sector. Jane Obbagy stated that the Facebook group Living in Concord taps into good ideas to encourage people to visit, discover, and live in Concord. Cato Anderson reported that the housing market in Concord is robust. We should connect with local realtors to participate in their welcome schemes – providing menus, maps, *Concord Journal* issue, gift cards to introduce our Town. Jennifer Schunemann offered that Concord Together could contact realtors.

Debra Stark stated that short videos of merchants speaking of each other would be inexpensive. Retailers could host Zoom talks weekly to get their name out. She reported her shop has developed contacts of not only new local customers, but from other states due to her videos. Jane Obbagy stated that the Umbrella has also experienced a huge increase in Zoom attention from outside Concord. Jennifer Schunemann noted that someone could create a welcome packet with Taste of Concord and virtual artsy mall materials that monetize outside Concord interests. Debra suggested that the high school Senate volunteers could take photos to pair with 20 second sound bites on Instagram. Beth Williams stated that the Town has recently acquired the assistance of a college student intern to help in such projects.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Jennifer Schunemann asked for input on the Committee meeting schedule given the discussion regarding bylaws, Town Meeting, supporting restaurants, videos, social media. The consensus was to continue meeting every other week.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

John Hinkling stated that he heard a lot of good ideas and wondered if any of the Warrant Article actions would have funding requests that would involve Finance Committee input.

Mark Martines asked if there was a role for the Economic Viability Committee in the consideration of the reuse of 2229 Main St., the former Starmet site, to protect and enlarge the commercial tax base. He agreed to provide a short synopsis of the situation. Erin Stevens reported that the 2229 reuse draft plan is expected to be presented soon; this will provide a period of public input

**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:11 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted

Cato Anderson, Clerk

Approved: February 2, 2021