

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
May 13, 2020

PRESENT: John Boynton, Mark Martines, Jane Obbagy, Marcia Rasmussen, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Jan Turnquist, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

ABSENT: Cato Anderson, Debra Stark

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Bates, Select Board; Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Linda Escobedo, Select Board; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Cynthia Rainey, Karlen Reed, June Rzepczynski

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair Jennifer Schunemann called the meeting to order and noted that the previous meeting of the committee on May 6 had had to be cancelled due to concerns about adherence to the parameters of Open Meeting Law in a virtual meeting. Those having been clarified, the committee is trying again.

MINUTES

Upon a Motion duly made and Seconded, it was UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of February 26, 2020.

John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Upon a Motion duly made and Seconded, it was UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of April 15, 2020.

John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

URGENT BUSINESS

Ms. Schunemann noted that the Economic Vitality Committee (EVC) had been created recently as a recommendation of the Long Range Plan to study economic vitality of the four retail districts and their connections to the resources that both bring tourists and are enjoyed by the residents of the Town. Shortly thereafter, the nation became engulfed in the health emergency of COVID-19 and local government responded by curtailing its activities. The Select Board made a decision to grant a dispensation to the EVC so that it could continue to meet to grapple with the four phases of impacts of the emergency on the community economic health. The immediate mission of the committee will be to make recommendations to the Select Board regarding actions to support local businesses, then to prepare

for recovery under the rubric mandated by the Governor, supporting maximum efforts, and finally to return to the core mandate of the EVC.

TOWN FACILITATED SUPPORT

Beth Williams, Town Visitor and Tourism Manager, reported that she and members of the Finance Department have been able to work with sixteen local businesses to assist with federal and state resources, loan questions and application help. To access more information, businesses, non-profits, and other providers should go to the Town website and select COVID-19 response.

Ms. Williams stated that she is engaged in a Concord to Concord virtual enterprise to connect residents and visitors to both Concord MA and Concord NH with promotions, prizes and sales. The timing is good as the regions are close and share many visitors. Locally, Ms. Williams reported that retailers are pulling together with very well received non-contact events such as Friday dinners with entrées, flowers, desserts, from different cooperating vendors. Others are making an effort to reach out to first responders and Emerson Hospital staff with treats and meals.

CONCORD TOGETHER

John Boynton stated that Concord Together, a collaborative of local non-profits and business interests such as the Concord Chamber and the Concord Business Partnership, have followed through with the proposed survey of local retail and commercial interests discussed at the previous meeting. 79 responses from 21 industries have been received and the baseline data gathered will be shared. Ms. Schunemann presented a series of slides regarding the information learned. Half of the businesses have been in Concord a decade or more with 12% being new to Concord. The majority of the respondents are renters. 500—1000 part time and fulltime employees have been affected. Primary “pain points” stated are the suddenness of the closure, interruption of lives caused by layoffs and furloughs; projects delayed with inventory already purchased, and the overwhelming lack of business interruption insurance carried by businesses. In addition, most local businesses have a limited web/social media presence, 26% do no ecommerce; 85% accept orders by email or phone; 16% do online sales; and 45% do not accept gift cards to capture deferred income. Half of respondents have seen revenue decrease by 75% compared to the same period last year and many are fearful that they may go out of business.

Discussion included individual reports from committee members: well-being of employees is a concern; how to pay the rent while dealing with the availability of federal programs is difficult; declaring the state open for business does not mean it is safe enough for both employees and customers and worthwhile to open; if schools remain closed after re-opening the economy, employee childcare is a limiting factor; businesses have regular vendors, but often not those that are able to suddenly provide PPE; help with the financial aspects such as loans, grants is urgent; steady customers have gotten into the habit of ordering online and it will probably be a transition to shopping locally.

Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that unfortunately the Town cannot become the supplier for PPE and sanitizing supplies in short supply. However, to the extent possible, the Town is shopping locally. Neither can the Town make grants of funds to local businesses. Mr. Boynton described a seasonal community in Maine with a small local retail base that may be unable to survive if there is no visitor season. A private fundraising campaign was initiated by families able to donate and sufficient funds have been raised to support those businesses. It was suggested that Concord needs a similar resource. Concord Together and the Community Chest are interested in generating such funds, perhaps as interest free loans. One indicator of the local impact is the increased demand on the Open Table food bank.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Karlen Reed stated that the updated webpage looks very good.

June Rep expressed her appreciation for the efforts of Beth Williams and her team at the Finance Department.

Stephen Crane stated that new guidance from the state had allowed virtual public meetings, but as in all things there is a learning curve.

Select Board member Linda Escobedo stated her support for as many people as possible staying in touch with colleagues in other towns to explore and build on ways to help.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:03 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted

Jennifer Schunemann, Clerk pro tem

Approved: May 27, 2020