

EconomicVitalityMTG 03-09-2021

Economic Vitality Committee  
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM  
March 9, 2021

**PRESENT:** Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jennifer McGonigle, Jane Obbagy, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Debra Stark, Jan Turnquist, Beth Williams

**ABSENT:** Steven Verrill

**ALSO PRESENT:** Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Select Board members Susan Bates and Linda Escobedo; Kate Carr, John Hinkley, Karlen Reed, Erin Stevens, Public Information Officer

**CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

Co-Chair John Boynton stated that he would take the lead on the meeting today and announced the meeting was being recorded for later broadcast.

**MINUTES**

John Boynton announced that approval of the Minutes would be deferred to the following meeting. He suggested that Minutes were posted on the committee website and members should check for them there if they did not arrive with the agenda. John announced that the co-chairs had created draft agenda and postings for several meetings going forward so that meetings would not need to be cancelled if postings were late.

**UPDATE REGARDING RECOMMENDATION TO PLANNING BOARD**

John Boynton stated that, in response to a vote by the Committee, he and Co-Chair Jennifer Schunemann drafted and sent an email message to the Planning Board regarding a zoning bylaw amendment to address provisions for seasonal outdoor dining in Concord. He shared a screen shot of the message. In addition, Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen has consulted with the Historic Districts Commission. The primary concern is parking. Liaison Susan Bates will discuss the proposal with the Select Board to gauge their support.

**UPDATE FROM TOWN**

Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that Select Board Assistant Jeremy Romanul is already coordinating with the restaurants that had permission to use outdoor dining last season to clarify that the permit continues into the new season as long as no changes have been made to the conditions. If changes are intended, the restaurant should reach out to update their plans.

Mr. Crane stated that parking meter fees will be re-instituted soon. This is a similar schedule as Concord's peer towns. Free parking has been a meaningful revenue loss for the Town as fees pay to maintain the meters, stripe spaces, and pay for collections and appeals. Street parking and commuter lot parking usually generates \$400,000. Revenues have not been generated this year, but fees have been expended from the General Fund for maintenance of the meters and striping roads and spaces. This is a similar program to other towns.

Mr. Crane stated that the Town continues to investigate provisions for a cell tower in the Center. He has put a placeholder in the draft capital plan for design and construction.

There is a recognition that businesses as well as public safety would benefit from access to high-speed internet. Revenue could be generated by leasing to vendors, however, visual impact on the community is an issue.

Beth Williams, Tourism and Visitors Services Manager, stated that the Visitor Center is ready to open for the new season. Although formal Patriots Day events are planned to be celebrated virtually, many visitors could find their way to investigate Concord and its historic and cultural institutions.

In addition, she is alerting businesses to a webinar about PPP loans program. It will occur Thursday from 5PM -7PM. Stephen Crane stated that the federal stimulus recovery program CARES 2.0 begins this week. Although funds are tight, FY22 budget is very similar to FY20, the Economic Vitality Division continues to a budget line item even in a period of lesser revenues. He stated that he does not intend to use Town CARES funds to simply fill budget holes but will consult with the Committee for ideas and recommendations. Jennifer Schunemann responded that the Committee is sensitive to the need for the Town to get ahead of the barriers to new businesses coming to Town. It would not be ideal for banks and real estate offices to comprise the entire face of Main Street. Robust discussion included: perhaps a sub-committee or task force could focus on the data gathering that a recommendation would require; the focus could be reducing barriers that could discourage new businesses; it could consult with major stakeholders like Planning, Historic Districts, and Public Works to learn the rationale for the regulations and then landlords, and new tenants to learn their perceptions of the issues and financial impacts; the timing is great, this issue has been on the agenda of the Concord Business Partnership for years; this should not only be a look back, but also a look ahead in the context of current and future needs.

Susan Bates stated the bonus of a sub-committee is the ability to bring in non-members with a specific passion and expertise for the topic; the drawback of a sub-committee is that it must meet the same Open Meeting Law Rules regarding posting and recording its activities. If the Committee decides to go forward with this, it should encourage volunteers to submit Green Cards. Cato Anderson stated that he is interested in serving on such a sub-committee as he has worked with potential tenants who have faced exclusionary bylaws. Mark Martines asked how wide a net the data gathering should go—regulatory, economic, traffic, transportation, fees, and bylaws. John Boynton stated that the first step is to draft a Charge that would define the parameters of the task. In his opinion, we should not insert artificial boundaries of number, timing and deliverables about which the Town has no control; for instance, we cannot eliminate traffic. Jennifer Schunemann suggested that this work could result in a welcome packet to potential new businesses outlining any credits, access information, permitting schedules, useful phone contacts. Stephen Crane stated the sub-committee should be prepared for the conclusions that result from the analysis of the data gathered.

John Boynton stated that rather than a sub-committee, perhaps the entire committee should get back to the economic issues that are the centerpiece of its Charge. The Committee will want a voice in describing the task. It has an ongoing relationship with Concord Together for a survey of businesses to do some of the data gathering. There was a consensus to support John's proposal. Cato Anderson asked whether the Economic Vitality Officer continues to be in the FY22 budget. Stephen Crane stated that that is

dependent upon a Town Meeting vote. At this time, the Select Board supports a budget that includes that function.

### **UPDATE FROM CONCORD TOGETHER**

Jennifer Schunemann stated that Concord Together has been busy. They extended the Take Out 10 program throughout March with potential rewards being \$200 gift cards. Wacky Wednesday has been added to the repertoire with businesses urged to highlight any offering on its menu or gift package for special attention. This is advertised on social media. There has been a correlation noted with surges in the businesses that have participated. Concord Together has a new spirit-promoting partnership with the Public Ceremonies and Celebrations Committee. The goal is to encourage businesses and residents to decorate and have fun with the upcoming holidays.

Remon Karian stated that restaurants are creating interactive programs for clients to create their own dessert or to build on their favorite restaurant dining feature or menu item. Posting it to the restaurant website and other social media site creates “buzz” or gamifies participation. It is something that can be woven through the seasons.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that Concord Together has met 52 times. Anyone is welcome to participate and share the work.

John Boynton asked that everyone spread the word about grant funding still available. He knows of one West Concord retailer that has been hit hard and was successful reaching out for funding.

### **UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Jennifer Schunemann stated that *Discover Concord* is ready to go to press for its spring issue. Anyone with Patriots’ Day ideas should submit now. The magazine reaches 30,000 people.

John Boynton stated that the Town is seeking input regarding potential reuses of 2229 Main St., the former Nuclear Metals site that is currently a Superfund site being cleaned to a residential standard. Should the Town acquire this site; to what uses should it be directed; what are the liability issues involved; should the Committee be invited to make a presentation to EVC? Mark Marines stated that EVC could probably identify several uses, like why it would be beneficial to Concord. Kate Carr stated that she could share the slide deck that was used in the presentation to the Concord Business Partnership. The consensus of the meeting was that the Committee was interested in learning more. Stephen Crane stated that the committee study and recommendations were driven by the recommendations of the Long-Range Plan. The remediation strategy to be used in the clean up depends upon the future uses. He also stated that liability for the pollution and remediation costs remains that of the responsible partners who created the problem. In addition, the EPA would indemnify future owners.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To recommend that the Select Board establish a budget to support economic vitality going forward; and to launch an EVC project or subcommittee to identify

opportunities to reduce barriers that may discourage new businesses from coming to Concord.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Karlen Reed of Whit's End Rd. stated that she was glad to hear that the Town was not abandoning the cell tower issue for Town Center. It is needed by both businesses and public safety. She asked what the EVC Budget would be for FY22. The Select Board will be considering this at its next meeting.

Linda Escobedo stated that the 2229 Main St, Reuse Committee will be making a presentation to the Select Board in April. There will also be a public forum. She stated that the Warrant for the 2022 Annual Town Meeting would close at 4PM on March 26.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:10 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted

Cato Anderson, Clerk

Approved: March 23, 2021