

EconomicVitalityMTG 06-10-2020

Economic Vitality Committee  
Virtual Meeting, 4PM  
June 10, 2020

**PRESENT:** Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Mark Martines, Jane Obbagy, Marcia Rasmussen, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Debra Stark, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

**ABSENT:** Jan Turnquist

**ALSO PRESENT:** Susan Bates, Select Board; Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Kate Hodges, Deputy Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Kate Carr, Concord Business Partnership; Henry Dane, Brigitte Sanchez, Jennifer Ubaldino, Concord Community Chest; Leslie, Nick, Ralph, Sheridan, Remon Karian,

**CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS – JENNIFER SCHUNEMANN**

Jennifer Schunemann announced that she would chair the meeting and that some items on the agenda would be rearranged to allow the Town Manager to participate.

**MINUTES**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of May 27, 2020 as amended.

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

John Boynton and Jennifer Schunemann mentioned names of potential members and asked that other suggestions be forwarded to Select Board Liaison Susan Bates

**MA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT – BETH WILLIAMS**

Ms. Williams noted that the Regional Public Hearing on the allocation has occurred. \$300,000 is being sought for award to eligible microenterprises in the region. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is taking the lead on this. Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen has learned that the State has records of 800 businesses in Concord. Ms. Williams stated that she will be marketing the grant opportunity widely. The application is very simple, and awards will be on the merits of the request. She stated that the funds are likely to be provided by August.

**CONCORD-CARLISLE COMMUNITY CHEST – CONCORD TOGETHER GRANT PROGRAM – JENNIFER UBALDINO**

Ms. Schunemann reported that private fund raising to benefit local businesses is also being undertaken. She introduced Jennifer Ubaldino who stated that the Chest and Concord Together are collaborating with lots of local support and a goal of \$300,000 (striving to match the amount the Town has applied for under the HUD grant program). The grants of up to \$5,000 from the fund will be available for a broad range of uses and variety and type of business. She is publicizing broadly.

Mr. Boynton stated that we need to move quickly and that the potential fund-raising goal should be up to \$500,000.

### **TOWN OF CONCORD OPTIONS FOR SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES – DISCUSS HENRY DANE’S PROPOSAL**

Ms. Schunemann stated that there are 45 food related businesses in Concord. She noted that three retail businesses have decided to discontinue business in Concord – Gordon’s Optical, Winston Flowers, and Colonial Stores. Perhaps they would have benefitted from community assistance such as Henry Dane’s thoughtful proposal. This program could only be instituted during the emergency. Mr. Boynton stated that to make an impact during the crisis and avoid further shutdowns, funds are needed at the municipal level and it is worth exploring this and other options.

Henry Dane stated that his proposal based on the authority of the Civil Defense Act is unusual, creative, and has great potential. Town Counsel should research and opine to advise the Select Board. Once there is a vacancy in the retail district it makes business more difficult for all remaining businesses.

Discussion included: Ms. Rennert stated that she sees no downside to seeking further information on this opportunity; Ms. Stark stated that she knows of some tenants who may not be able to reopen, her tenant for one; she stated that we will be strengthened by partnership; Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that Bond Counsel has stated that Henry Dane’s proposal is not lawful; he stated that the Board just voted to allow outdoor dining under the State guidelines; Mr. Crane indicated that it is difficult to get consensus on changes as what benefits one may disadvantage another. It is difficult to help those who do not indicate that they need help.

Ms. Schunemann stated that she could hear the pressure in the Town Manager’s voice, and no one is criticizing his efforts. It is a stressful time and the Committee wants to explore all options.

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED by roll call:

To recommend that the Select Board investigate further the proposal to use emergency powers under the Civil Defense Act – or explore other funding options - to establish a low interest/no interest revolving fund program to help local businesses survive the current emergency.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	No

### **REOPENING CONCORD – STEPHEN CRANE**

Stephen Crane stated that the Town is learning about businesses not reopening like everyone else has. Businesses may have not known to turn to the Town for support. He stated that the Select Board has approved a proposal to allow outdoor seating for restaurants under the Governor’s guidelines- the space must be contiguous to the

restaurant and meet COVID -19 mandates. The Town is ready to block Main St. and Commonwealth Ave. one day per week for outdoor dining as long as businesses want it. Ms. Schunemann reported that Concord Together could assist by reaching out to the businesses in the geographic area to gather their support. Concord Together would include questions in their next survey to further explore this point.

## **UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Debra Stark stated that her business has remained open during the emergency with reduced staffing and saw panic buying at the beginning; that has now dropped off sharply. She had been providing 'hazard' pay' and other benefits for staff who remained on duty. The shop also launched online shopping that with the official reopening has continued. Ironically, now that full staffing has resumed, there has been a reduction in sales.

Steve Verrill stated that the farm has seen something similar. After a period of larger orders by the limited number of customers allowed in the store, things are back to normal with the official reopening. He foresees problems with the 'pick your own' component of the business as it will be difficult to manage the limit of 114 people per acre in the fields.

Beth Williams noted that the Visitor Center will also have a learning curve. While a new brochure has been created, the message of 'touch one, take one' is awkward.

Dawn Rennert stated that the Bookstore is not yet open to the public although it has been providing curbside service since Memorial Day. She foresees difficulties with cleaning and sanitizing and welcomed input from Debra Stark on vendor and supply prospects. Both the Town Manager and Beth Williams offered help identifying vendors and materials to use.

John Boynton stated that more data is needed, from businesses about their needs. Concord Together could tackle this.

Remon Karian stated that Fiorello's has been closed one month and upon reopening has seen lowered volume. He stated that he has some experience in different towns and finds responses varied. In his opinion, Concord is way behind and doesn't know what it doesn't know. Businesses need access to the application for assistance as soon as possible. It does not need to be reinvented by each town.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ralph, Chef at Fiorello's, stated that Waltham has already closed off Moody St. for outdoor dining.

Remon Karian stated that every bit of help is appreciated; perhaps the 0.75% of meals tax that comes to the Town could over the short time, be given back to the restaurant instead go to the General Fund. There are 45 businesses generating this tax. In addition, restaurants paid licensing fees based on a year of operation; could there be adjustments or credits?

Stephen Crane stated that 80 Thoreau has completed its application and has been approved for outdoor dining and Papparazzi has started the application. This is happening by word of mouth.

Dawn Rennert stated that she has just learned that the Town is not collecting parking fees during the emergency. Perhaps others could also benefit from learning this.

Cato Anderson stated that he had to complete forms for police and fire as a requirement for operating, perhaps we could turn to them for a full accounting of businesses in town.

Mark Martines stated that the committee and various entities working on the problem need to reach out for more data –ask about reopening challenges and needs; then channel to the Town and Chamber. Neighbors need to coordinate to face common challenges, even though it is difficult to reach consensus.

John Boynton stated that dialogue on these matters is vital, but not easy as it includes issues of livelihood. He thanked Beth Williams and the Town Manager for their continued participation and two-way feedback.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was  
UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:  
To adjourn the meeting at 5:30 PM.

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

Respectfully submitted  
Cato Anderson, Clerk  
Approved: June 24, 2020