

Economic Vitality Committee  
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM  
June 24, 2020

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

**ABSENT:** John Boynton, Jan Turnquist, Steven Verrill

**ALSO PRESENT:** Linda Escobedo, Select Board; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Jerry Wedge, Emerson Umbrella Executive Director

**CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

Co-chair Ms. Schunemann announced that she would be chairing the meeting. She noted that Mr. Karian had been appointed to the committee by the Select Board, but until the Town reopens, he will not be sworn in or able to vote. In addition, she has been in discussion with other shop owners to gauge their interest in serving on the committee.

**MINUTES**

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of June 10, 2020 as amended.

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

**UPDATES FROM THE TOWN**

Beth Williams reported that the Visitor Information Center has reopened for the season. Restrooms are available there and at the Rideout Playground. Minuteman National Historical Park, Great Meadows trails, and Walden Pond have reopened as well. The Concord Recreation Center is open for summer camp for Kindergarten through Grade 6 at the Recreation Center, Alcott School and the High School. The Hunt Recreation Center is staffed. The Town has posted signage throughout Town about masks and social distancing requirements for safety. The Town website continues to highlight COVID information and guidelines. A new COVID Administrative Policy and Procedure was approved for employees returning to work. The Select Board and Town Manager's Office have completed a plan and application for local restaurants to offer outdoor dining. In general, applications are being approved within 48 hours of submitting the completed forms. As of the meeting, the following restaurants had applied: 80 Thoreau, Papa Razzi, Trail's End Café, Main Streets, Colonial Inn, Woods Hill Table, Adelita, and the 99 Restaurant & Pub. The Town welcomes additional applications.

Regarding Community Block Grant status, Ms. Williams reported the next round of applications is due Friday. This time the region is seeking \$250,000 for a "Shared Streets" grant that supports the beautification of outdoor dining and public gathering places. Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen and Public Works Engineering Division are working

together to identify likely spaces in the three village centers, and to determine the requirements for outdoor dining facilities such as tables, umbrellas and benches and hopes the funds will renew annually.

Massachusetts Municipal Association, the State Agency taking the lead on the \$300,000 grant application to support micro-businesses, anticipates notification of the decisions by early July. Those funds will be available for rent and mortgages. A non-profit grant became available through Mass Development which offers unmatched grants up to \$10,000 and matching grants for funds raised by non-profits from \$10,000 to \$25,000. The Town is also alerting small businesses about a new grant program called "Small Business Stabilization Fund" which offers technical advice. More information at [www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org](http://www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org) All grant information is also on the Town's Visitor Center website or through contacting Beth Williams.

The Town has received a donation of 1,000 masks. They have been stored at the Visitor Center, which is distributing them to local businesses.

There was no further information on the status of Henry Dane's proposal for General Fund support for local businesses, as the Town Manager and the Select Board representative were not able to attend this meeting.

#### **UPDATE FROM CONCORD TOGETHER**

Jennifer Schunemann reported on the results of the latest Concord Together survey of Concord businesses. She stated that Concord Together intends to follow up every few weeks as conditions change. The initial survey yielded 79 responses. This time, 55 responses were received from a wide range of businesses. 35% reported that they employed 1-5 full time employees. 60% of respondents indicated that their business generated less than 10% of sales from online transactions. 43% of respondents reported that they had 0% online sales pre-COVID-19. Four businesses have closed during the COVID-19 crisis; of those remaining, 8, or 14%, report being very close to having to close. Another 35, or 63% report being okay for now but worried for the future. Help with rent and utilities, renovations needed for reopening, marketing their business, and access to grants were the primary responses to a query regarding urgent needs. 79% of respondents supported the notion of closing Walden St. and Commonwealth Ave. one night per week to enable outside dining. As of now, none of the eateries on Walden Street have expressed interest in outdoor dining.

The Summer Solstice Passport event is being sponsored by Concord Together to bring out shoppers and visitors to local businesses. Prizes and events will be available throughout the summer.

Concord Together has partnered with the Concord Community Chest on fundraising to benefit local businesses. It kicked off with founding matching grants of \$115,000 from local families. As of the date of this meeting, just over \$30,000 in local donations had been made. Applications to businesses to apply for funding were set to open that week.

Umbrella Executive Director Jerry Wedge stated that the Umbrella is collaborating with the Concord Cultural District to encourage more foot traffic by introducing a cultural component. They would like to develop a common identifier for outdoor dining locations, such as introducing outdoor films and performance locations. The vision is that the Town

might pay for supplies and the Umbrella facilitate activities in outdoor spaces. West Concord options are also included. It was noted that this fits within grant opportunities. One idea that was discussed was to create a community event where families could assemble/paint picnic tables and those tables would then be installed in different outdoor spaces to encourage use of parks, the library lawn, etc. It was noted that Board of Health requirements would need to be explored as this idea develops.

Discussion noted that as businesses reopen it is difficult to get the message out. Visual cues at the site are important. This is true for retailers, non-profits, hospitality and cultural institutions. Perhaps the proper agency would consider voiding the limitations on signage and banners. The committee voted unanimously to recommend that the Select Board explore a temporary relief of signage bylaws to support the businesses as they reopen. It was suggested that a letter from the Committee and Concord Together could be transmitted to the Historic Districts Commission and the Select Board regarding this temporary situation.

### **UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Mr. Anderson reported that he has hired two additional sales staff. He has been able to hold off on increases to premiums, but his clients' gross sales reductions will affect future premiums.

Mark Martines stated that property in and around Concord and New Hampshire is a mixed bag. Those that were in weak circumstances are now struggling. Costs continue high with traffic low. Many businesses need help. The urgent need is to sustain and grow. The irony is that just as businesses are reopening, local residents are leaving for summer homes.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that the Town-owned broadband enterprise might offer a contact-free payment option for retail customers if the Town could waive / reduce / abate fees for using. For many businesses, this extra bill is one more obstacle – utility relief would be both practical AND a very visual demonstration of the Town's support for businesses. Ironically, the Town could end up with more customers for its utility services after the crisis has passed by attracting businesses to adopt its services through this relief incentive.

Mark Martines suggested that there are a number of local landlords who could be a source of information regarding those who could benefit from such deferrals and reductions. These are not problems that will go away. In his opinion, although the percentage of taxes contributed to Town revenues by the commercial section may be small, it is an important component. This should be an agenda item soon. Jane Obbagy agreed that this is an important component of retail viability in Concord and an important component of the committee charge.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that *Discover Concord* will focus its first anniversary summer edition on a time capsule of the current moment rather than the cultural literary and historical focus it has presented to Concord's millions of visitors. The exposure provided by the magazine can be helpful to small businesses. The magazine will be direct mailed to every Concord household, rather than the normal distribution model via local shops.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER**

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

To ask the Select Board to consider temporarily waiving signage restrictions in the commercial districts, and to look into utility abatements and the possibility of reduced fees for Broadband for local businesses.

Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Select Board member Linda Escobedo recommended that the Committee send its recommendation to the Select Board immediately.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:03 PM.

Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Marcia Rasmussen	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted

Cato Anderson, Clerk

Approved: July 8, 2020