

EconomicVitalityMTG 07 08-2020

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
July 8, 2020

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

ABSENT: Cato Anderson, Mark Martines, Debra Stark

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Bates, Select Board; Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Terri Ackerman, Select Board; Jennifer McGonigle; Jennifer Ubaldino, Concord Community Chest

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-chair Mr. Boynton announced that he would be chairing the meeting. He noted that Jennifer McGonigle, owner of Joy Street in West Concord and present today has accepted appointment to the committee by the Select Board, but until sworn in by the Town Clerk, she will not be able to vote. Remon Karian, another appointed committee member, also still needs to be sworn in by the Town Clerk as soon as this becomes possible.

MINUTES

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of June 24, 2020 as amended.

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

UPDATES FROM THE TOWN

Town Manager Stephen Crane stated that 1) further outdoor events would be permitted in light of the Governor's revised guidelines; 2) Town Moderator Carmin Reiss has scheduled the delayed Town Meeting on September 13; 3) the Town recently issued a reverse 911 call to all households about which some complaints were received. Mr. Crane reiterated that the content of the calls solely related to the Town's response to the COVID-19 emergency and highlighted the economic crisis local businesses are experiencing. It is the perception of the Town that local businesses are an essential component of the Town and need to be supported.

Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen stated that the Town has not received further notifications on the grants submitted, but she and others are pursuing funding for outdoor dining. Regarding the temporary signage issue, she has learned that MA statute creating the Historic Districts has a provision allowing waivers. She is in the process of drafting a letter to the HDC seeking waivers on certain signage, flags, and banners until year's end and will attend the meeting to make the case.

Mr. Crane had no further update on suggested utility relief for local businesses and is not optimistic.

Following up on the proposal from Umbrella Director Jerry Wedge, there have been further conversations regarding large-gathering outdoor events such as drive-in movies and street fairs. Under discussion is location, timing, vendors, and ties to local retailers and institutions. Limitations on the size of gatherings makes the event more difficult to undertake, but what is crucial is creating something that causes people to want to return.

Orchard House Director Jan Turnquist stated that she has been in conversation with Trail's End Café to explore holding an outdoor/drive-in movie as a fundraiser for Orchard House. She would be open to expanding on the idea or to its being another event similar to a larger one elsewhere. Discussion included: there is always room for one more!; A volunteer group has formed to explore a drive-in movie event at a larger venue such as the high school parking lot, which could appeal to a larger community; box dinners by Trail's End Café or other area could be provided; a larger venue could include a variety of sponsors and donors and attract more interest; on the other hand, a smaller niche event is fine as well. Neither would be in competition with the other. All options will be explored.

Marcia Rasmussen stated that the Concord Cultural Committee has expressed interest in collaborating with the Umbrella or others on a film festival. They have made a connection with a vendor that is ready to go with screen, projector, and transmitters for cars in July or August. A variety of film titles are available, in addition to *Little Women*. Steve Verrill noted that he has fields available for use as well.

Discussion will continue next week for others who might want to join the planning.

UPDATE FROM CONCORD TOGETHER

Jennifer Schunemann reported that the Summer Solstice event is up and running to great enthusiasm. Shops are beginning to display window cards announcing participation; Marie Foley of Revolutionary Concord designed and printed mini passports to make it easier for shoppers. She has been very helpful and is a great spokesperson for local small business. Ms. Schunemann stated that a dozen volunteers canvassed the town to meet with as many of the businesses as possible in three retail districts (Concord Center, Thoreau Depot, and West Concord) to introduce the program that has had its first winners. It is being highlighted on Facebook and Town social media as well as in a prominent article in the *Concord Journal*. Foot traffic in the districts has improved and shops have been busy. Ms. McGonigle stated that her shop Joy Street had a terrific week, doing twice the business as the same period a year ago. Her challenge remains that she cannot be open every day – child care constraints, and limitation on sales to accommodate social distancing make it logistically and economically difficult. So while she is doing well on the days she is open, when she factors in how many days she is closed – she is still behind last year. Ms. McGonigle stated that her customers were generally not tourists, but people who live in Concord and surrounding towns.

Steve Verrill reported that his farmstand distributed 1,000 Summer Solstice passports to CSAs and customers. He also noted that AG Day was potentially coming up in September and that the Chair could be invited to a future EVC meeting to inform the group of their plans.

Jennifer Ubaldino stated that that grant applications for the Chamber of Commerce-Community Chest grant program are being considered for award. Twenty-five applications have been received to date. \$50,000 is available for awards of up to \$2,500 for a range of

purposes. Applications continue to be accepted. John Boynton stated that some large matching grant offers are in the works, but the need is now. He and others hope to approach the potential grantors and urge them make their awards sooner. In his opinion, the Chest is the perfect vehicle to administer the program as it has grant experience.

Mr. Boynton asked about renewing the Concord Together survey – is it needed now, what information should be sought, how would it be helpful? Discussion included: what are sales and traffic trends being seen; what opening days and hours are in effect and how does this differ from year past; who is shopping – local, regional, broader. Mr. Crane stated that studies indicate that money spent in town circulates six times, thereby enriching the larger community.

Are local businesses being successful and spending locally as well? For instance, are sales better, thereby allowing the owner a dinner out or enabling more hiring. Both have an impact on the local economy. Ms. Schunemann noted that Kristin Canty reported that with her restaurant sales up she has been able to – in turn - support local food vendors such as farmers, cheese mongers, and seafood specialists. Ms. McGonigle stated that the survey could address plans as they refer to staffing and the impact of whether children return to school.

She stated that most of her business inventory is holiday related and she does 50% of her business in November and December. Before the COVID emergency she took delivery of thousands of dollars of inventory that is being stored. She needs to sell that but is limited by guidelines for staffing and social distancing. She used the downtime to develop her online presence and can now do most activities online and provide curbside delivery. This turned into a robust discussion of preparing for holiday sales and e-commerce that could continue to benefit retailers after the emergency has passed. Ms. Schunemann noted that a slowdown is anticipated in the fall. This would be perfect timing for a virtual shopping mall in Concord with delivery service options. A local delivery service option would be phenomenal. Something like this is a chance for Concord businesses to be sustainable beyond Concord and after the COVID emergency concludes. Jan Turnquist noted that some local businesses and cultural institutions already have a web presence; they could link to others and enable customers to shop at both. Ms. McGonigle stated that there is an incentive to have a page of all retailers. Perhaps the Concord Together site could be extended to all. Mr. Boynton suggested creating an e-commerce subcommittee.

UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr. Verrill noted that the farmstand sees fall traffic increasing from corn and tomato harvests and then Thanksgiving. He will not be able to move the typical traffic through the farmstand under current health and safety guidelines, so he anticipates setting up registers in the green houses and in tents. He noted that the pick your own strawberry season was very successful with shoppers signing up for appointments. The system worked so well, he will likely use it again next year.

Dawn Rennert suggested that a retailer roundtable to enable both supporting one another and brainstorming would be very much appreciated. Stephen Crane stated that an old-fashioned electronic bulletin board meets that need. Discussion could be wide ranging from support to logistical challenges and staffing issues.

Ms. Turnquist stated that most cultural institutions have been limited by the health emergency and have lost money as well. However, they generally have a small web

presence and can keep going online. An alliance would be smart as it shows the variety in Concord and keeps our identity before all.

Beth Williams stated that she is in conversation with Enterprise Center regarding e-commerce workshops that could help local businesses work through the crisis and prepare for the future. They could bring in speakers, help form partnerships and share resources.

Select Liaison Susan Bates reported that the Agriculture Committee intends to host Ag Day on the Mill Dam on September 12. Nine farms and garden clubs will participate. This could be a test for the new normal for a Town-wide event – how to attract and handle the numbers of people who attend. Jane Obbagy stated that retailers are not wild about street closures but are becoming interested in tapping into the event. They could support the broader idea of increasing traffic overall to Concord’s retail districts. Ms. Turnquist noted that one local shop participated in the event with a craft table to add interest to her shop. Mr. Boynton stated that attracting traffic to Concord could be an upcoming agenda item.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was offered.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was
UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:
To adjourn the meeting at 5:12 PM.

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

Respectfully submitted
Jennifer Schunemann, Clerk pro tem
Approved: July 22, 2020