

EconomicVitalityMTG 08-05-2020

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
August 5, 2020

PRESENT: Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jane Obbagy, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schünemann, Debra Stark, Jan Turnquist, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Marcia Rasmussen, Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Henry Dane, Jennifer McGonigle, Janet Miller

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair John Boynton took the lead in the meeting and thanked everyone for making time in busy schedules to participate. Jennifer McGonigle is arranging to be sworn in by the Town Clerk.

MINUTES

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of July 22, 2020 as amended.

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

CONCORD TOGETHER

Jennifer Schünemann stated that the first round of Concord Together grants have been awarded to 21 businesses. Fundraising is ongoing, and the group is less than \$25,000 away from reaching a grant match threshold of \$100,000. The *Concord Journal* is running an article to encourage further contributions. Concord Together envisions an additional 50 grants being made if they can reach the grant match. Ms. Schünemann stated that the Summer Solstice event has been a resounding success. More than 130 people have turned in their shopping passports, representing 1300 retail shop and restaurant visits. Feedback from merchants indicates that there has been an uptick in foot traffic. The promotion will end on August 20 with a grand prize drawing. Most merchants are participating. The next event in the planning stages will be called "Fall in Love with Concord."

The recent Concord Center sidewalk sale was successful, and another is planned for August 15, this one including approximately ten shops in West Concord as well. COVID cautions will be in force with the Town able to provide social distancing markers. The flyer for the event will not mention the time so that merchants can design something that fits their needs.

John Boynton asked opinions on a reissue of the Concord Together survey. He believes the purpose is to capture merchant feedback on sales trends, foot traffic, responses/input on holiday planning, suggestions on pressure points and how to address it, and staffing. Mark Martines suggested that it would be helpful to include a short blurb on Concord's progress. Ms. Williams suggested questions such as whether respondees would make use of items like propane heaters or barriers if the Town provided them. Another suggestion was to seek information on whether the resposdee had adequate cellular service to enable them to undertake e-commerce. Remon Karian stated that it would be helpful to know specifically what the respondees believed would provide the most benefit and what is the biggest roadblock for their customers. Jane Obbagy suggested that a snapshot analysis of what merchants need in terms of shoppers per hour or per week in order to stay in business. This could help formulate upcoming events for the greatest benefit. Back of the envelope calculations by Jen McGonigle indicate that last year between October and December her shop saw 5,000 customers at 55/day over 7 days. Now she is only able to open 4 days and would need 8-10 shoppers per hour to be able to generate similar business.

Jennifer Schünemann stated that planning is afoot for a fall activity. This would need to fit within the Governor's guidelines that currently prohibit street fairs and festivals. Under consideration is an outdoor holiday market, with food sales, and crafts. Issues include the COVID guidelines, necessary permitting, a design that allows participation without impinging on the regular shopping hours and staffing of participating vendors. Steve Verrill volunteered the use of his fields; other suggestions were Rideout Field and Bradford Mill parking.

TOWN UPDATE

Beth Williams reported that Town Offices are closed to the public but employees are doing business in a reduced way. The Visitor Center is open for business and is getting many questions about other departments that are being referred appropriately. At this time, the Town Clerk is responding by phone to voting, births, deaths, marriages, and permitting issues, but the Town House is about to undergo substantial renovations that will make it unavailable. The Town website will keep updates current.

Beth William stated that the first two Drive-In movies at the high school (sponsored by the Town) were sold out. The next showing will be Shrek on August 13. Attendees must remain in their vehicles, per newly issued guidelines. Summer Solstice passports will be distributed at the August 13th event. There is discussion about a third showing if sponsorship of \$5,000 can be found. Perhaps ties to local businesses can be expanded like a menu item, link e-mail, or restaurant offering from area businesses. With more notice, more participation can be expected.

Beth Williams reported that Concord Schools are planning the format of school reopening, likely a hybrid. It is not permitted to design a social distancing format less than six feet.

COMMITTEE UPDATE

Dawn Rennert stated that most Passport shoppers to the bookstore are people already known. It is not generally bringing in new shoppers, but may be encouraging more shopping from local clients. She asked what information can be garnered from the passports turned in to the Visitor Center. Beth Williams replied that 95% of participants

are Concord-based. Jen McGonigle stated that the passport winner who won the gift certificate she contributed was from Concord.

Jennifer Schünemann stated that *Discover Concord* is prepping its Fall issue. Generally, it would contain a section on things to see and do, but she is hesitant to include that item due to the situation continuing to be in flux. She asked those present to let her know their opinions. She is looking for opinions on Ag Day as well: are there alternate location suggestions or business tie-ins that might fit.

Remon Karian asked whether Concord has a strong social media presence as he has noticed other communities pushing a “shop local” theme and reinforcing the safety of returning to local shops. Beth Williams stated that there are 2,000 residents who tune in to the Town’s social media. However, it is still early days. The Visitor Center usually has 17 staffers, but now there are only 7. Remon Karian mentioned that it is time for Restaurant Week in Boston This is usually geared to the two slower seasons of August and March. He wondered whether, although the discount couldn’t be much, we could tie to that locally so that people could enjoy dining out while avoiding the drive and supporting local restaurants. John Boynton wondered whether Concord Together could do a Restaurant Passport event. Remon Karian stated that he would forward information from the MA Restaurant Association.

Dawn Rennert stated that she would like to see language about investing in Concord used in flyers, posters, events so that we build on the notion that this is not just shopping but the community working together to strengthen the health of our community.

Debra Stark stated that the committee goal is to strengthen the economic vitality of the community, not just the shops. We should look at ways to help those in offices and check with landlords. She noted that she sees real fear in people returning to her shop for the first time after so many weeks of isolation. Can we help with their anxiety and fear?

Mark Martines stated that he would like to see more visibility for Concord Together events: perhaps window and yard signs or buttons. Beth Williams stated that the town of Salem just did a local video on returning to town that she will share for inspiration.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Janet Miller, of the Comprehensive Sustainability and Energy Committee, expressed her thanks to the committee for the work they are doing to improve and maintain the vitality of the community.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:15 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schünemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye

Steven Verrill
Beth Williams

Aye
Aye

Respectfully submitted
Cato Anderson, Clerk
Approved: August 19, 2020