

EconomicVitalityMTG 09-02-2020

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
September 2, 2020

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

ABSENT: Cato Anderson

ALSO PRESENT: Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.;

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair John Boynton stated that he would take the lead in today's meeting. He indicated that he would set up a recurring calendar update for Committee meetings. In addition, he reported that Select Board Administrative Asst., Jeremy Romanul will stop hosting the Zoom meeting and that responsibility will be shared by the Co-Chairs. Erin Stevens, the Town Public Information Officer, will begin to participate in meetings to better communicate Committee activities to the Town.

MINUTES

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of August 19, 2020.

John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Abstain, not present
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Abstain, not present
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

TOWN UPDATES

Town Manager Stephen Crane reported that the Select Board has approved, and his Office has implemented rebates of 25% on Alcoholic Beverages Licenses. The Town will permit Licensees to take that rebate for 2020 or 2021. The Town is also moving forward with making outdoor heaters available for dining or shopping queues. The Select Board has voted to suspend parking fees through December 31. The Town will continue to pay for pavement markings and for meter maintenance. While parking fees usually generate between \$300,000--\$400,000 to the General Fund Budget, it is unlikely that such a sum would be generated due to the reduction of shoppers and visitors during the COVID Emergency.

The team working on drive-in movies is hoping to find a sponsor for a third event, however, it is unlikely to occur at the high school. The vendor who is located in Needham will scout potential locations. The Committee suggested the municipal parking lot, Crosby's Market, 300 Baker Ave., Verrill Farms, and Bradford Mills.

Shop Local signs have been distributed to the Visitor Center.

The Town has learned from Ashland, the lead town in the Community Block Grant program, that funds of \$210,000 have been awarded to Concord. Grants of up to \$10,000 will be awarded to eligible businesses. Information, applications, conditions will be posted on the Town website. The turnaround time will be short. Mark Martines suggested that the Town website should list information on the range of grants available. Jennifer Schunemann noted that the information is already posted to the Concord Together and the Chamber of Commerce sites.

CONCORD TOGETHER UPDATE

Jennifer Schunemann reported on the success of the Summer Solstice event. By August 20, more than 200 passports had been submitted, representing 2,000+ shopping occurrences. The next event will be called Fall in Love with Concord. It will have the same rules. This time, citizens are asked to contribute prizes representing their favorite shops. Concord Together is investigating a similar program with a focus on restaurants and a grand prize of one year of fine dining.

Now that the Rasmussen family has fulfilled its wonderful challenge grant, there is \$200,000 in the Business Fund for awards of up to \$2,500. It will be administered by the Community Chest. The criteria for expenditure are very flexible, including bills, renovations, e-commerce.

The next focus will be the holidays, which is where retailers make most of their annual revenues. It will be particularly difficult this year with limitation on hours, staffing, number of shoppers in the store at any one time, and shipping and deliveries. The Committee had a robust discussion on various ideas to get people to come shopping such as late night or early morning hours, "Early Bird" sales, finding seasonal workers from college students at home, attracting parents when children are otherwise engaged, a "tour package" for friends that includes shopping and restaurant food. It was posited that events between 5PM and 8PM are the worst time for families. Starting holiday events before Thanksgiving was a strong suggestion. Turnout for special events such as late-night shopping is better if there are several shops participating. Shipping and delivery are an issue during the holidays. Creating volume is the issue as retailers need to generate sufficient sales to cover staffing. Remon Karian suggested a "reverse" passport, that is, shoppers must come in to pick up a token with the possibility of winning something after the holiday. John Boynton suggested that these were all the germs of good ideas that need further fleshing out. Mark Marines suggested an "adopt a business" program wherein there is a commitment to generate a certain amount of traffic and publicity to friends and colleagues. He agreed to take this idea further for the next meeting.

There was discussion regarding shipping and deliveries that included: taxi service, college students driving, whether this could be funded through grant awards, USPS will pick up, asking the opinion of retailers through the Chamber about their needs and past practices, timing, fulfilling holiday corporate gifts by bundling a number of retail gifts at a variety of price points would benefit local retailers and cultural institutions as well as generate the visibility that corporate gifts look for.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Jennifer Schunemann stated that she has found information online about MA Vacant Store incentive program to occupy vacant storefronts in urban areas and wondered whether Concord might be eligible. Stephen Crane stated that in his experience that is focused on

areas with a critical mass of vacancies. In this case, it would be good news if we did not qualify. Beth Williams agreed to do more research.

Jane Obbagy followed up on an earlier comment regarding late night openings. In her opinion, there needs to be sufficient shops open in the district to attract a critical mass of customers to warrant the staffing costs of late/longer hours.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that Kennebunkport hosts an annual Christmas Prelude on holiday shopping weekends with music, snacks, and holiday ambience. While it is unlikely that such an event meets the governor's guidelines this year, perhaps festivities could be kept within the shop. Dawn Rennert stated that food would not mix well within shops.

Steve Verrill stated that Verrill Farm has been very successful with online reservations for strawberry and sunflower season and has sold out. Perhaps retailers could do something similar and ensure shoppers do not need to queue in the cold and could add a discount.

There was strong agreement that it is too soon to decorate for the holidays.

John Boynton asked whether members thought the meetings were at the correct interval and was the committee of sufficient size to accomplish its goals. This generated a wide discussion on whether recommendations coming out of the Committee were serious and paid attention to, whether something as substantial of Henry Dane's proposal was considered sufficiently, whether survey results have been helpful; whether the Committee should be coordinating/collaborating better with others; can the Committee do a better job of educating the community. Mark Martines stated that in his opinion, the Minutes do not reflect to the Select Board the matters the Committee expects to be executed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment offered.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5:30 PM.

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
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted

Cato Anderson, Clerk

Approved: September 19, 2020