

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
FINAL – MEETING MINUTES  
MAY 7, 2020**

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held a special meeting via Teleconference on Thursday, May 7, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Lesko; Don Peterson; Steve Rosato; Alethe Fatherly

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Barnhart, Director of Community and Economic Development; Beverly Balaz, Fairfield Chamber of Commerce

**CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

**Minutes:** Approval of the minutes of the March 5, 2020, EDC meeting was deferred.

**Update on COVID-19: Response and Economic Impact**

Mr. Barnhart said that some business establishments will be allowed to open on May 20, 2020. Mr. Barnhart advised that First Selectwoman Kupchick has convened a task force to streamline permitting and to assist businesses in re-opening. The task force is working to expedite permitting to allow restaurants to create or expand outdoor dining options. Mr. Barnhart said that the Town is considering bulk purchases of face coverings and other personal protective equipment for businesses that may have difficulty sourcing or procuring this equipment on their own.

A virtual shopping event will be held on Saturday, May 9. Over two dozen retail establishments are expected to participate.

Mr. Barnhart reviewed findings from a business survey, in which approximately 300 Fairfield businesses responded. He noted that 94% reported some business loss related to COVID-19, with 58% of respondents reported revenue declines of more than 50%. Mr. Barnhart noted high levels of anxiety amongst business owners, with 37% expressing worry that they may be forced to close due to the pandemic. Still, only 1% of businesses reported that they had permanently closed with no expectation of re-opening. Many businesses had applied for government assistance, but only a small number had actually received help as of the survey date (mid-April). By far the biggest issue for most businesses is cash flow, with 70% of respondents.

Ms. Balaz said she is monitoring the activities of other Chambers of Commerce to glean ideas that could help Fairfield businesses. Mr. Lesko asked what requests the Chamber is hearing from members. Ms. Balaz said people are seeking help in applying for funds

from the federal government; how to deliver goods safely; how to prepare for a recovery process.

Mr. Barnhart said that his department had recently updated its inventory of available commercial space for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. Retail vacancy had risen to 16% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. In spite of this, leasing activity continues, and he continues to receive inquiries from persons interested in opening new businesses. Mr. Barnhart reported that the former Magic Beans space has been leased to an apparel store.

Mr. Peterson asked how many of the survey respondents leased their space. Mr. Barnhart said that of 289 respondents, 70% leased their space. Of those, 63% had requested rent concessions from their landlord, and roughly 35% received concessions of some kind.

Mr. Barnhart reported that the Town of Fairfield will receive some additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding under the provisions of the CARES Act. Mr. Barnhart expressed optimism that some of these funds might be used to expand the Town's micro-enterprise program to provide direct financial assistance to small businesses that have not received much federal or state help thus far.

### **Update on Development Sites**

Mr. Barnhart reported that TPZ approved with conditions the plans for the Fairfield Metro Center project. TPZ increased the percentage of affordable units from 10% to 12% within the TOD overlay zone as was recommended by the TOD Planning Study. Mr. Lesko asked if the related sewer project is proceeding on time. Mr. Barnhart said additional funds are being sought to complete the project as designed.

Mr. Barnhart reported that the Exide property was expected to close in early May.

### **Other Business**

Mr. Barnhart reported that the COVID Relief Fund had received more than \$50,000 in donations to date. The Fund is being jointly administered by the Town and Operation Hope.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 8:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gretchen Goethner

You can obtain the audio recording of the meeting here,  
<https://fairfieldct.org/meetingrecordings>.