

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
DRAFT – MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 6, 2020**

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held a special meeting via Teleconference on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Don Peterson; Kevin Lesko, Jonathan Slavin and Steven Rosato

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 8:34 a.m.

Minutes

On a motion by Mr. Peterson, seconded by Mr. Rosato, the minutes of the March 5, May 7 and June 4, 2020 meetings were unanimously approved.

Update on COVID-19: Response and Reopening Plan

Mr. Barnhart provided a brief overview of the work of the Re-Opening Task Force convened by First Selectwoman Kupchick following the declaration of the public health emergency. Mr. Barnhart stated that the group had worked to waive permitting fees and streamline regulations to assist businesses during the pandemic. Using the expedited permitting process, the group has reviewed and approved 45 locations for outdoor dining, including 26 locations not previously approved for outdoor dining. The office continues to work with the emergency management team and the Chamber of Commerce to provide critical, time-sensitive information to local businesses.

Mr. Barnhart reviewed the Town's micro-enterprise assistance program which provides small business grants of up to \$5K to Fairfield businesses that have five or fewer employees and that have been adversely impacted by the pandemic. The Town is targeting small businesses that have not received assistance to date, especially those owned by or that provide employment opportunities to persons of low to moderate income.

To date the Town has received 61 applications and approved 37 grants under the program. The Town has committed \$136K in funding thus far, with the average grant being roughly \$3500. The Town has roughly \$115K remaining to commit, and is still accepting applications. Mr. Slavin asked about the types of business activities or projects that the program can fund. Mr. Barnhart said that the program is flexible and can help

defray costs associated with rent, utilities, new equipment including PPE, physical alterations to meet re-opening requirements and marketing costs. Mr. Barnhart noted that the best applications were those from businesses looking to make investments to make their business more resilient and successful going forward such as a retailer looking to upgrade her website and provide a platform for e-commerce.

Mr. Peterson asked about recent business closings and non-payment of rent. Mr. Barnhart acknowledged several recent closings and noted that some businesses were struggling financially before the pandemic hit. He noted that the vacancy rate for retail space was rising and that commercial permitting activity was slowing. However, Mr. Barnhart also noted that several new businesses were opening in Town.

Mr. Rosato asked about plans for the two universities. Mr. Barnhart stated that the Planning Team had met with representatives of both universities to review plans for bringing students back to campus. Mr. Barnhart noted that foreign students and those from states with high incidences of COVID will be quarantined for 14 days and that all students and faculty will be tested prior to arrival on campus, and subject to random testing throughout the semester. Mr. Barnhart stated that the universities had a well formulated plan and were taking all reasonable and prudent measures to manage the risk, but that there was still risk.

Mr. Lesko asked if Beverly Balaz would like to update the EDC on what she was hearing from Chamber members. Ms. Balaz provided a quick update on activities including the recently completed sidewalk sale undertaken in partnership with the Town.

Mr. Lesko commented on the amount of traffic downtown and the number of people taking advantage of outdoor dining. He wondered whether there was an opportunity for retailers to adjust their hours and partner with nearby restaurants to take advantage of the foot traffic. Mr. Barnhart said that he would look into this further.

Development Update/Other Business

Mr. Barnhart said that he had invited Lee Forest and/or members of his development team to address the Commission regarding his plans for a proposed mixed use development at 15 Unquowa Road.

Mr. Barnhart said that there will be a presentation to present initial recommendations and concept plans for the Post Road Circle Safety Study on August 19th, and that he would furnish details to the Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 3rd at 8:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Barnhart, Acting Secretary

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