

Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes - September 21st, 2020 @ 6:30 PM

Attendees: Sue DiPesa (chair), R J Dwyer (vice-chair), Jack McInnis, Matthew Nelson, Geena Savage and Susanne Hofmeister

Members of the Public: Nancy Holt

Discussion: Creation of Room occupancy reimbursement fund

Nancy Hold told us that Karen Canfield was going to reach out to the EDC about an issue affecting businesses related to the rollback of the room occupancy tax from the June annual town meeting. Town Meeting voted to reduce the room occupancy tax from 6% to 4% effective July 1, 2020 as it was having an adverse effect on local businesses as compared to our neighbors. Unfortunately, the DOR refused to honor the Town meeting vote until October 1, 2020 because the vote was held in June though it was originally scheduled in April. The DOR has forwarded to the Town a list of the 79 entities that are subject to room occupancy excise tax.

Would the EDC entertain a program to provide grants to interested entities subject to the room occupancy tax in the amount of the additional 2% for the months of July, August and September? The interested entities would need to apply and prove the tax amount (copy of tax return/filing) so the 2% could be identified. Based on the prior year room occupancy receipts, I estimate the maximum liability for the program would be \$10,000. Nancy believes this is potentially reimbursable from Coronavirus Relief funds. If this would be the case, the EDC budget would not be compromised. We have a total of \$26,000 Dollar in our budget for this fiscal year. There is also an EDC stabilization fund, which the EDC started to fund in 2012 and it has another \$31,000 in it.

Geena made the motion to create a reimbursement fund for the 2% room occupancy tax for the months July, August and September 2020 with the maximum liability of \$10,000. This motion was approved with all in favor.

Nancy will compose a letter with the description of this program, which will go out to the 79 entities, after approval by Sue.

Old/New Business:

- *The meeting minutes from August 2020 were approved.

Discussion: Scituate Loves Local Committee Report - Sue DiPesa

Scituate Loves Local is now in the hands of the Chamber of Commerce and they have to step up to be a bigger part the initiative and that will take some time. The first two meetings with business owners today went very well. There were 18 attendees at the meeting at 9 am and 12 attendees at the meeting at 5 pm today. More meetings are planned for the upcoming weeks, to better understand how we can support and help them for the fall and winter season. But, the first milestone seems to be reached. The business owners finally understand, that we want to help them.

Jack gave a quick update from the harbor. He spoke with almost all business owners and most of them are hurting. Riva is shutting down, but that is not virus related. They had planned to shut down way before the pandemic. The hair salon and Maria's are both doing well. Whereas everybody else is fighting to survive.

Visitor Center: Geena

The EDC built a sub committee to explore the idea of creating a visitor center for Scituate using the old WPA in North Scituate Village. Committee members are Staci Carey, Brenda O'Connor, Susi Hofmeister and Geena Savage. Meetings are every Tuesday at 5 pm. We are at the stage where we have to figure out how to upgrade the old WPA building to make it handicapped accessible. We are trying to use existing funds for this, like the North Scituate rezoning fund, the North Scituate Sewer project, funds from the old Masterplan, the new Masterplan is in the planning phase right now or applying for funds from the CPC. To evaluate all possibilities in this project, Sue is looking into a local architect, who could help us getting an estimate for the cost of the necessary upgrades (10 years ago, the estimate was \$500,000). Geena is looking into a possible application for a CPC fund and what requirements our project need for that. Brenda is looking at other towns who did build a visitor center already and sees how they did this and she will research the council on aging to explore the possibility to staff the visitor center with seniors. Susi is looking at the old Masterplan to see if there were any funds for the WPA building (CPC, historical society, municipal upkeep) and tries to get information from the planning board if there are any funds planned for the WPA in the new Masterplan. Staci will reach out to town ADA head for the town to discuss the scope of compliance required for that building. One of the first steps the sub-committee will take, is to do a monkey survey for the residents of Scituate, to make sure that we will have the support of residents for the general idea of a visitor center and for close neighbors of the WPA building for future use of the building (kid's birthday parties, etc). Any input from the EDC is very appreciated at any time.

North Scituate Sewer: Sue

There is a meeting tonight in Cohasset and Paul is in attendance. We hope to get more information from him later. The general knowledge is, that Cohasset does not want to work with Hull on the regional sewer project, but that Cohasset signaled that they want to work with Scituate together.

Update of North Scituate Village: Susi

The train canopy project is finally making some progress. The ground work is finished. The electrical work is done and the cement is poured. Sean is in the process of ordering the table and benches and the recycling bin. The bids for the canopy work has to be sent out in the next days and Henry has already two contractors which are interested in bidding.

The banners for the victorian lights were 3 inches short. The Friends of NSV have to go back and work with the designer Kim Cooly to make the banners longer and then they will have one banner printed to make sure it fits, before they order the remaining 31 banners. Sue gave the green light, that the TA approved banners being paid for with EDC money.

Vacant Store front Project: RJ

RJ wants to establish a district to initiate the vacant store front project. A Massachusetts state funded project to convert empty storefronts into businesses. The store fronts have to be empty for a year. Not the property owner, but the business owner and town together can apply for funds to establish a new business in the empty store. We first want to establish a list of eligible store fronts before we do anything further to start this project.

RJ will establish a list of eligible store fronts in the next months. We will vote on this project in October.

Next EDC meeting: October, 19th 2020
Meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.

Approved 10.19.20

