

**Economic Development Committee  
Meeting Minutes – April 16, 2020**

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee via remote participation pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order Imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place.

Present from the Committee: Don Bourque, Deb Horan (representing the Webster Dudley Business Alliance), John Milas (representing the Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce), Town Administrator Doug Willardson (ex officio), Director of Community Development Carol Cyr (ex officio), Director of Planning and Economic Development Ann Morgan (ex officio).

Also Present: Carole Marchand

Town Administrator called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. There was no quorum.

**1. Action Items - Meeting Minutes – Tabled.**

**2. New Business**

- a. **Businesses in Need** – Mr. Willardson noted that he had sent out a survey link to small businesses in town from the lists forwarded to him. He had about 20 responses, all stating that assistance is needed and would be welcomed if the Town offered any programs. He said that more outreach needs to be done. Carol Cyr had put together a good list of discussion points when talking to local businesses. Mr. Willardson will distribute lists to staff of local businesses to be contacted along with Ms. Cyr's discussion points. Ms. Cyr stated that there are specific businesses that she wants to contact and would review the list. Ms. Morgan noted that there are some good examples of outreach and relief efforts from other towns which she will forward to Mr. Willardson for consideration.
- b. **COVID Emergency Response Fund** – Mr. Willardson noted that the Attorney General's (AG) office announced that they are launching a small business grant program. Municipalities can apply for funds and then distribute them to local small businesses. He's looked over the application and it isn't too complicated. He'll continue to pursue this avenue. The question arises on how to develop the criteria for eligibility and what types of constraints that comes from funding sources such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money. Mr. Willardson noted that the AG grant application asks if the municipality has small business relief programming in place. Ms. Cyr noted that CDBG monies would satisfy this requirement, that the Town will receive CDBG funds but not in the immediate future, more likely in July. Mr. Willardson said that he could contact some sources at the State to see if our local economic development fund could be used for developing a relief fund.

Ms. Horan noted that the City of Worcester has developed a small business resiliency grant program which was outlined in a recent Worcester Telegram & Gazette article. The fund distributed approximately \$300,000 to 189 businesses. The City is looking to expand the program by another \$300,000. The question of the funding source was discussed. Ms. Cyr pointed out that Worcester is likely using their CDBG funds for this purpose. Worcester is a designated Entitlement city which means they have few restrictions on how they distribute their CDBG funds. Webster doesn't have that designation which will make the process harder. It was agreed that more information about the Worcester program was needed. Ms. Morgan said that she would contact the City of Worcester. Mr. Milas noted that businesses under a year old are not eligible for many of the relief programs. Whatever criteria Webster develops needs to

be sensitive to this fact. Ms. Morgan added that it would be interesting to know what the criteria for "small" was being used and if it included franchisees.

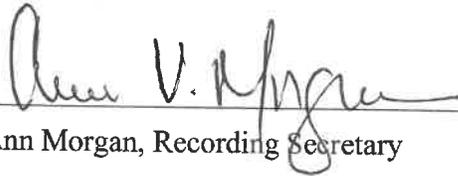
**3. General Discussion**

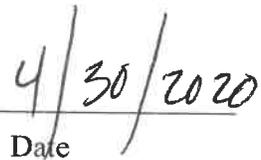
Ms. Horan noted that she has watched the recent Board of Selectmen meeting where they discussed the upcoming tax bills which are due on May 1<sup>st</sup>. She asked if an extension of the due date was considered considering the difficult economic times. Mr. Willardson reviewed the context in which the Town can delay tax payments in light of recent emergency legislation and cash flow issues relating to the Town budget. He noted that the Selectmen have opted to maintain the original deadline but that mechanisms were in place to assist people due to hardship.

**4. Next Meeting** – April 23, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. via remote participation.

**5. Adjournment**

The meeting ended at 2:30 p.m.

  
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Ann Morgan, Recording Secretary

  
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Date