



Town of Leesburg Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes of Virtual Meeting
February 3, 2021
7:00p.m

Commission Members Present: Curtis Allred, Eric Byrd; James Choi, Marantha Edwards, and Brittany Youkers

Commission Members Absent: Britta Neel and Patrick Williams

Staff Liaison Present: Mayor Kelly Burk

Staff Present: Economic Development Director Russell Seymour; Business Development and Retention Manager Melanie Scoggins

AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:07p.m. by Chair Byrd.

2. Roll Call

Chair Byrd asked for the Calling of the Roll by Director Seymour; Director Seymour stated a quorum was present.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

Motion by Vice Chair Youkers to adopt the Agenda; seconded by Commissioner Edwards. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes – December 2, 2020.

Since two new commissioners have joined the EDC and were not present at the December meeting, Chair Byrd deferred approval of the December minutes to the next scheduled meeting.

5. Petitioners

None.

6. Liaison Comments

Chair Byrd introduced and welcomed Council Liaison Mayor Kelly Burk and Linda McCray, Chair of the Leesburg Diversity Commission. Chair Byrd further indicated that a permanent liaison will begin at the March 2021 meeting. Opening comments were made by Mayor Burk, Ms. McCray, and EDC commissioners present at the meeting.

7. Staff Report

Locally Leesburg Program

Director Seymour indicated that the first of the three minute commercial videos have been implemented for businesses:

- Thursday weekly videos
- Videos will be a tool to reintroduce residents to all Leesburg has to offer
- Day-trippers will be a particular target of the larger program
- A recent email ad resulted in over 30 business requesting videos
- Due to positive response, two or three videos may be run at a time in the future

Business Survey

Manager Scoggins indicated that a survey was sent out today to 890 people, and added that 60 responses have been received thus far. Manager Scoggins urged the commissioners to share the survey socially.

Economic Development Website

Director Seymour reported that an RFP for the new Economic Development website has been issued.

Pandemic Business Assistant Grant

Director Seymour indicated he presented the Pandemic Business Assistance Grant at last week's Council meeting. The Loudoun County Economic Authority is willing to work with the Town on the process of signing and sending out checks. Director Seymour added the process will be similar to the CARES Act, beginning with \$500,000 (\$5,000 and \$10,000 categories based on the business).

Downtown Leesburg Street Closing

Director Seymour mentioned that Council has approved street closing in downtown Leesburg beginning in March. Director Seymour indicated that on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday the block of King Street will be closed. Director Seymour noted that several businesses plan to erect awnings, which added with the recent tent and heater grant program, should enhance the program's previous popularity.

Town of Leesburg Email Addresses

Director Seymour emphasized that staff and commissioners use only their assigned Town of Leesburg email. Chair Byrd added that the need to use Town of Leesburg email is for FOIA purposes, and indicated he would be happy to assist anyone in need of setting up email addresses. Chair Byrd noted that FOIA training will be forthcoming.

Douglas School

Director Seymour indicated that Manager Scoggins is working on several workforce development initiatives, including a school-to-work committee and a monthly newsletter, published by the Douglass School, which will connect businesses and potential employees.

School Business Partnership Council

Manager Scoggins mentioned that she will soon begin reviewing resumes and providing feedback to high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Ribbon Cutting

Manager Scoggins mentioned the upcoming Goosecup Coffee ribbon cutting event on February 6th, and added that Goosecup was overwhelmed with the response they have received since they opened.

8. Leesburg Business Survey

Chair Byrd mentioned that Vice Chair Youkers and Commissioner Choi have been working on a survey to prepare an online business forum. Vice Chair Youkers mentioned the challenges industries are facing throughout with focus being placed upon:

- Who received the previous round of CARES Act funds?
- How the funds helped the business?
- For what would the additional grant funding be used?
- What types of challenges is the business seeing?

Vice Chair Youkers indicated a great way to capture feedback is to personally conduct discussions with businesses. Commissioner Choi suggested the EDC appear as one group to assist the businesses, without requiring much time of the owners.

Commissioner Edwards inquired as to when the 890 surveys were sent, how it related to the number of businesses, and were certain businesses targeted. Manager Scoggins indicated that email addresses and social links were used, and that there were approximately 2,400 or 2,500 total businesses in the Town. Manager Scoggins added that there was an option on the Survey to add contact information, but it was not required.

Vice Chair Youkers indicated the importance of gathering responses from other businesses in addition to downtown, and added it would be beneficial to create a coalition/new business association in Leesburg. Chair Byrd added the significance of sharing the SBDC list to incorporate responses from businesses there were not on the list.

9. Business Recovery

Chair Byrd provided a background on last week's Council meeting which addressed a proposal by Councilman Cummings about a resolution for pandemic relief, and noted approval of three recommendations:

- \$500,000 for small business grants
- Additional money for program/Department of Economic Development website
- Earmarking money for closing of King Street

Chair Byrd indicated that Council has expressed interest in the EDC's suggestions on what might be done with additional funds.

Chair Byrd presented the following items for discussion:

- Explore how the EDC is going to implement a program.
- The process needed to come up with solid, meaningful suggestions to send to Council to enable them to be helpful to businesses.
- Promoting the existing grant program by specifically working with the Diversity Commission to ensure grant opportunities are reaching the communities.
- Explore what businesses are going to require in the longer term.

Chair Byrd recommended the EDC hold a virtual retreat to discuss these issues.

Commissioner Allred mentioned the benefit of including the Diversity Commission, and inquired as to how the message will be distributed. Commissioner Allred inquired as to the number of women-owned small businesses are presently in Leesburg.

Commissioner Allred inquired as to whether any businesses that applied were unable to secure grants in previous rounds; and for what reasons they did not qualify. Director Seymour indicated that the business may have not been in good standing with the Town, and added that the Town is working with them to get them back in good standing to obtain their grants. Director Seymour indicated that there were businesses that had applied for a grant had not held an active license for several years, and that the Town Finance Department worked with many of those businesses to make the correction.

Chair Byrd mentioned the relatively low number of businesses who applied from the Town, and hopes for a better response since presently as there are no other local grants being offered.

Commissioner Edwards inquired whether any particular industry segment received more funding. Director Seymour indicated that grant applications were broken down by business class to better comprehend types and size of businesses. Director Seymour added he will share those statistics with the group. Chair Byrd noted the benefit of instituting a targeted program for specific groups/industries most in need.

Commissioner Edwards mentioned of particular interest are women-owned, African American, and Spanish speaking businesses for which there are limited resources. Ms. Gray mentioned the need to go door-to-door to inform businesses of what is happening.

Director Seymour noted that information on both the CARES Act grant and the Loudoun County grant was sent to email addresses of businesses holding a valid business license in the Town. Director Seymour presented statistics on business classes and the average number of employees:

Commissioner Byrd stated that a mailer be considered, and inquired whether that was a process of any previous grants. Manager Scoggins indicated that a mailer was sent by Loudoun County, but not by the Town.

Ms. Gray suggested the use of Spanish/other language Locally Leesburg videos, and Chair Byrd asked whether Staff could put that together. Ms. Gray indicated her willingness to assist with a Spanish language video. Director Seymour asked for the assistance of Ms. Gray in advertising (two identical videos) for the next round of grants, and added that Staff would communicate via email, Facebook/video placed on Town website. Director Seymour added the Town will solicit Loudoun County to assist in advertising as well.

Chair Byrd mentioned the importance of a sustained effort to identify the future needs of businesses. Chair Byrd added that the SBDC is a great resource with two Spanish speaking coaches available.

Vice Chair Youkers suggested a determination be made of minority businesses that received the first grant before moving forward. Director Seymour indicated that types and sizes of businesses were looked at but not if they were minority owned.

Chair Byrd suggested that the EDC formulate as much data driven, actionable information as possible to take to Council. Chair Byrd suggested discussing the process and action be taken between EDC meetings. Mayor Burk mentioned that Council has come forward with \$500,000 and seeks ideas from the EDC.

Commissioner Allred inquired as to how information may be obtained without offending businesses that are unlikely going to survive, and how to present to Council limiting of any funds for a particular industry.

Ms. Gray inquired as to how businesses directly seek help, and whether there is a particular place to reach out to for assistance. Vice Chair Youkers suggested revitalization of a downtown business association, and that a contact list be created.

Commissioner Edwards inquired as to an available source to pull lease information from a business. Director Seymour indicated that for smaller businesses, that information may be obtained through property owners. Other sources of information include businesses, building owners, brokerage firms, state Economic Development office, and other regional groups.

Vice Chair Youkers suggested discussions on an EDC Retreat.

Chair Byrd indicated multiple data points be captured in talking to businesses over the past 12 months.

- Newer companies struggling and not eligible for assistance.
- Start-ups unable to show economic harm since revenue was not down because they made no money in 2019.

Chair Byrd suggested the creation of an interview format of basic questions to present to businesses. Chair Byrd recommended use of a structured conversation with follow up questions regarding the businesses' greatest struggle.

Commissioner Byrd requested a motion to hold a virtual EDC Retreat on Thursday, February 11th from 12:00pm-2:00pm. Motion by Commissioner Edwards; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion granted.

10. Old Business

Chair Byrd suggested Director Seymour seek trends from businesses as surveys are being returned. Director Seymour indicated that information will be conveyed to the EDC prior to the Retreat. Chair Byrd indicated he will obtain data from the SBDC statewide network and share with the EDC.

11. New Business

Chair Byrd initiated a discussion for recommendations for the election of 2021 EDC Chair and Vice Chair.

Motion by Vice Chair Youkers to nominate Eric Byrd for Chair; seconded by Commissioner Choi; Motion carried.

Motion by Chair Byrd to nominate Brittany Youkers for Vice Chair; seconded by Commissioner Choi; Motion carried.

Commissioner Edwards highlighted the Legacy Leesburg videos, part of the Town Plan update, and suggests the EDC encourage friends and neighbors to view the videos.

12. Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Allred acknowledged the excellent work of Director Seymour and Manager Scoggins, and noted the opportunity for positive cohesion with Town Council moving forward despite the challenges of the next 12 to 18 months.

Commissioner Choi expressed his excitement of the innovative and safe virtual meetings, and he looks forward to getting things running.

Commissioner Edwards echoed Commissioner Allred's comments regarding new trend in collaboration with Council, and the importance of doing as much as possible between those meetings.

Vice Chair Youkers expressed her pleasure in meeting Commissioner Edwards and Linda Gray, and expressed her thanks to Staff for this past year's work. Vice Chair Youkers added that she looks forward to virtual meetings and the work to be accomplished.

13. Chairman's Comments

Chair Byrd expressed his appreciation to the EDC, and noted that, regarding the CARES Grants, Manager Scoggins did an excellent job to ensure all grants were distributed. Chair Byrd stated he was impressed at the seriousness with which Manager Scoggins performed those duties. Manager Scoggins expressed her thanks and readiness to take it on again.

Chair Byrd expressed his thanks for Linda Gray and added that he is looking forward to working with the Diversity Commission; and thanked Mayor Burk for offering to become Council Liaison.

14. Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Edwards to adjourn the meeting at 9:02p.m.; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.