



Town of Leesburg Economic Development Commission
Virtual Retreat Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2021
12:00pm - 2:00pm

Commission Members Present: Eric Byrd; James Choi, Marantha Edwards, Britta Neel, Patrick Williams, and Brittany Youkers

Commission Members Absent: Curtis Allred

Staff Liaison Present: Ara Bagdasarian

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 12:10p.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 Commissioner Edwards to adopt the Agenda; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.

4. Welcome Introduction

Chair Byrd welcomed newly elected Commissioners Britta Neel and Patrick Watson, and provided a review of the recent business survey.

5. Business Recovery Plan Discussion

Director Seymour indicated the business survey emailed to 900 businesses included previous CARES Act grant rounds, Economic Development industry visits, and a list from the Town Finance Department. Director Seymour noted there were 94 respondents as of February 10th.

Director Seymour added that a second email went out yesterday which was derived from the Economic Development Monday.com list, the Leesburg Business Directory, and updated information from the Finance Department. Director Seymour mentioned that the Finance Department provided an additional list of 2,631 businesses; 671 for which

email addresses were unavailable. Director Seymour indicated that a total of 2,869 emails had been sent, and as of 11:30a.m the number of responses increased from 94 to 151.

a. Survey Results

Director Seymour provided a detailed review of the survey results, and discussions ensued.

- Greatest number of employees category – 1 to 10.
- 71% had Gross Revenue of up to \$500,000.
- Received CARES Act funding – responses showed focus placed on rent, mortgage, insurance, payroll and medical expenses.
- “Other” responses included:
 - “Need for regulatory flexibility”.
 - Need for more funds/grants.
 - Marketing/advertising assistance

Director Seymour indicated that statistics will be monitored weekly for brainstorming ideas.

Gift Card Program

Manager Scoggins presented the merits of the Visa and Yahtzee programs. Commissioner Edwards inquired as to whether merchants expressed interest in the gift card program. Manager Scoggins indicated her desire to ensure the program is feasible before discussing with merchants. Commissioner Edwards emphasized the importance of the amount of time placed into such a program before focusing on other advertising.

Downtown Map

Manager Scoggins mentioned that downtown retail/restaurant businesses have expressed an interest in making available to customers a printed map to introduce neighboring businesses. Manager Scoggins added that it would be manageable project with a large impact.

Bingo Promotional Program

Manager Scoggins mentioned a successful Bingo Card promotional program recently lead by Integrative Chiropractic. Chair Byrd added that a program of this type is a good illustration of support a potential business association can provide.

Commissioner Edwards mentioned potential customers using Instagram to promote local businesses; and Manager Scoggins noted that Visit Loudoun promotes its use as well. Manager Scoggins added that Hashtags will hopefully catch on, and that she can provide a list of Hashtags to assist with those interested in communicating information on social media. Commissioner Neel is in favor of gift/raffle baskets as a way to enlighten customers on what a business is selling; and is in favor of the idea of using Facebook and Hashtags.

b. Initial Brainstorming Ideas

Chair Byrd suggested the EDC conduct an investigation process, analyze the data, and present to Council data-driven solutions.

- Know businesses are in trouble.
- The future needs of businesses are unknown.
- Time required to gather data.
- Create a simple project plan for Council.
- Place weight on ideas received.
- In favor of social media coverage.
- Question developers as to what industries are being supported (why only doing retail?).
- Agree upon general scope of what we are doing.
- Set basic milestones.

6. Creating a Project Plan/Scope

Chair Byrd asked the EDC for input and discussions ensued:

- Seek data on business segments; analyze trends.
- Status of commercial lease rates.
- Additional Town funds available to assist.
- Ways to help businesses thus resulting in longer term sustainability to Leesburg.

Commissioner Neel inquired as to the availability of data from property management companies for businesses that lease properties, and whether that data may be utilized to determine businesses in need of emergency funds. Commissioner Edwards questioned whether information shared by a developer/property manager may be considered sensitive.

7. Project Process Discussion

The EDC suggested the following guidelines:

- Determine the scope.
- Establish timeline.
- Define required actions.
- Bring order and create actions.
- Long-term sustainable, but flexible, initiatives.

Chair Byrd made the following suggestions regarding the interview of businesses:

- Each commissioner interview a handful of businesses.
- Interview not in survey form, but structured manner.
- Five or six basic, consistent questions.
- Helpful to dive into industry groups (retail/service companies/something else).

Director Seymour noted the importance of including staff in the business interview and consistency of questions.

Councilman Bagdasarian suggested presenting to Council input on things that can be done presently to assist our customers.

Commissioner Edwards indicated that an ambassador program introduced in a previous administration was not well received, and emphasized the need to focus on data rather than visits.

Chair Byrd suggested the commissioners conduct conversations between meetings to establish talking points for the next meeting, and that commissioners regularly interact with their Council appointer.

8. Data Collection and Analysis

General Discussions and Milestones

- Trends from survey responses and from businesses in general – staff visits.
- Input from other data sources, i.e., other business groups (Paige, etc.).
- Identify industry segments being impacted. Who mostly is being impacted?
- What are core challenges currently facing businesses? How can the Town address these?
- Future shifts in how business is done. Impacts to property and business owners.
- Initiatives short lived but with long term impact.
- Two parts – immediate need and future assistance.
- Lottery for businesses (more grants).
- Talk to property management representatives – what are businesses looking for?
- Options must be flexible.
- Current business environment.
- Data from others, not just businesses.
- Business visits.
 - “Industry” segments.
 - In-person and remotely.
 - Consistent questions – data gathering focus.
 - Coordinate meetings through Elaine for scheduling and data tracking.
 - Hold an on-line business forum in March.

Business Segments

- Retail
- Hospitality and Entertainment
 - Restaurants, Bars, Artists, etc.
- Medical Services
- Personal Services
- Business and Professional Services
- Commercial Property Management and Owners
- Child Care, Educational and Activities/Fitness
- Non-Profits

9. Wrap Up

Chair Byrd indicated that areas on which to focus are gathering data on businesses, and scheduling meetings with businesses, and that commissioners choose a focus group.

Director Seymour suggested that commissioners think of general questions for Staff to compile prior to the next meeting. Also, that Webex meetings are available for the purpose of meeting with businesses. Chair Byrd suggested talks to businesses begin before the March meeting.

10. Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Neel to adjourn the meeting at 2:02p.m.; seconded by Commissioner Choi. Motion carried.