



Arlington Economic Development Recovery Task Force Minutes

Date: Tuesday November 24, 2020

Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/j/96211802074>

Meeting ID: 962 1180 2074

Passcode: 776846

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Present: Jennifer Raitt, Dept. of Planning and Community Development; Ali Carter, Dept. of Planning and Community Development; Kylee Sullivan, Department of Health and Human Services; Rachel Zsembery, Arlington Redevelopment Board; Janet O'Riordan, Old Schwamb Mill; Erik Kondo, Broadway Athletics; Sarah Morgan-Wu, The Object of Stories; Beth Locke, Arlington Chamber of Commerce; Tim Haley, Ellenhorn; Tom Formicola, Arlington Center for the Arts; John Hurd, Select Board; Emily Shea, Kickstand Cafe

Guest: Len Diggins

Minutes

1. Public Health Update: Kylee Sullivan reported 542 confirmed cases, 71 probable cases, 381 recoveries, and 57 deaths. Cases are on the rise locally. Quarantine guidelines from the State were updated so that people who had been a direct contact of someone with COVID could test out of quarantine after 10 days if they did not have any symptoms.
Jenny reported that local leaders in Cambridge, Somerville, and Salem were considering local restaurant shutdowns and also calling on the Governor to shutdown restaurants statewide. She will keep this group posted on that effort.
2. Anonymous Business Survey results: Ali provided a summary of results of the Anonymous Business Survey, which was conducted by the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and was open from October 22nd through November 6th. There were 55 responses, which represented a wide range of industries operating in town, but retail sector (26.9%) and food service businesses (17.3%) had the highest response rate. 63.6% of respondents had been in business for 8 years or more,

and another 29.1% had been in business for more than three years, so it is safe to say that these were fairly well established businesses in the community. Almost 90% of respondents only had one business location, and the majority of respondents had 5 or fewer employees. Primary concerns were insufficient revenue (65.8%), insufficient profitability (46.7%), and the overall state of the economy (45.4%). Over 35% of respondents reported decreases in revenue of over 50% from the previous year. Many who fear they are likely to have to close permanently expect that closure to come in the next 3-5 months. Jenny also added that there were some businesses that reported they were doing well in the survey and some who even had increases in revenues and profits. Beth noted that there was a decrease in business outlook as well that changed from positive to neutral. Many of the comments on the survey were complimentary to the Town and the Chamber.

3. Update on CDBG grant and technical assistance: Ali shared that the program will include a \$180,000 of funding toward grants and another \$20,000 dedicated to technical assistance. The program was designed this way based on feedback from businesses gathered in the Anonymous Business Survey, the business district meetings, the Task Force itself, and the Task Force working groups. The program will launch in January 2021.
4. Plans for winter: Ali wanted the business owners in the group to share their plans for winter and for all Task Force member to brainstorm programs that we could initiate to support businesses during the winter months. She began the conversation by sharing some preliminary ideas she had developed or had seen in place in other communities.
 - a. Pick It Up Local: Ali thought a good spin on Cambridge's Pick It Up Local campaign, which encourages ordering take-out direct from restaurants to reduce the cut they take on third-party delivery service processing fees, would be to have a No Plastic Please initiative that was introduced to her by members of Arlington's Recycling Committee earlier this year. For this campaign, consumers would be encouraged to order directly from restaurants and to ask for no plastic utensils with the goal of saving materials costs for the businesses and reduce waste. A restaurant owner on the Task Force said that people will automatically switch to take-out if there is a restaurant shutdown and don't really need to be reminded to order that way. It was also indicated that restaurants are so strained that the cost savings for not including utensils wouldn't be worth the effort they would have to put in to try to remember not including utensils. This restaurant owner is considering going into hibernation mode for the winter, but with so much uncertainty about unemployment insurance or what another federal stimulus package would include or if and when it is even coming, it is hard to make a decision like that at this time.
 - b. Live commerce for retailers and artists: Ali shared that the ACA had a very successful live commerce event with their virtual Open Studios. Tom Formicola explained that the event was a big success for the ACA and the artists involved with 2,500+ participating on the day of the event and the artist online marketplace still open online. Ali said she would work with the

ACA to see if they can share how they organized the event and lessons learned with local retailers and artists. A retailer on the Task Force said she is still working from her store but the “open” sign is not hanging in the window. For their business (art gallery) it is tough to shift to online, and purchasing decisions tend to be a slower process.

- c. Task Force members recommended that Ali reconvene working groups for regular meetings so they can share resources and ideas with peers.
- d. One member reported that many banks are no longer offering indoor service. A Task Force member who owns commercial property said he was having his buildings outfitted with air filtration systems to make them safer for workers and customers.
- e. One member suggested a campaign that helps customers understand operational constraints of businesses would be helpful (e.g. pay cash, be patient, etc.)

Next meeting: Tuesday December 15, 2020 at 2 p.m.