

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION & NEW HARTFORD BUSINESS COUNCIL
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2020 – 8:30 AM
NEW HARTFORD TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: John Burdick, Donna LaPlante, Shelley Lloyd, Polly Pobuda, Meg Toro, Brian Watson; Alternate and Commission Secretary: Debbie Ventre; First Selectman Dan Jerram

ABSENT: Jack Casey, Alternate Bill Baxter

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Peg Budny, Kim Hanson, Scott Kozlak, Suzie Larson, Deirdre Tindell of New Hartford Business Council

EDC Chairman Meg Toro called the meeting to order at 8:33 am.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.

Ms. Ventre was seated for Jack Casey.

2. EDC / NHBC JOINT DISCUSSION ON SUPPORT FOR THE BUSINESSES OF NEW HARTFORD

After a brief discussion addressing technical issues with the virtual meeting and asking that all speakers identify themselves, Ms. Toro welcomed the Business Council members in attendance and introduced the EDC members present.

Mr. Burdick introduced the Suzie Larson, Kim Hanson, Scott Kozlak, and Peg Budny of the New Hartford Business Council and noted that he and EDC Member Donna LaPlante are also members of the Business Council.

Chairman Toro asked Mr. Burdick to provide a summary of the purpose of this special meeting. Mr. Burdick noted that EDC and the Business Council have discussed holding a joint meeting for several years. He added that the charter of both groups is similar in the need to facilitate and advocate for the businesses. He suggests that participants offer suggestions for near term, future term and long term.

Ms. Lloyd indicated that she is most concerned with supporting our businesses who are not currently open but are preparing to open. She suggests using the town website and social media to highlight each of our businesses.

Suzie Larson asked where the best place aside from social media would be a means of getting out this information. Ms. Lloyd replied that perhaps a local newspaper could write a spotlight announcing the plan. She suggests that social media be more than Facebook, but Instagram as well. Mr. Burdick noted that the Take Out New Hartford Barkhamsted Winsted group is a great example of social media entity that grows exponentially by participation. He suggested that perhaps an additional website

promoting all businesses, not just the restaurants might be appropriate. Mr. Burdick asked Ms. Ventre to comment on what is possible and what isn't. Ms. Ventre responded that she is not clear what the intent of starting an additional website would be. She noted that the Town website offers a business directory which has not been utilized as much as we had hoped but certainly has grown. She noted that Mrs. LaPlante had just asked her whether the number of subscribers on the town website had increased and that is a means for getting the message out. If Mr. Jerram is agreeable, a news item could be posted on the home page, and perhaps changed each week. Mr. Burdick asked Ms. Lloyd if that is what she envisioned and she responded that would be fine, but perhaps a second Facebook group should be created that is not specifically focused on restaurants.

Suzie Larson asked if this group would consider having Barkhamsted join this conversation. She noted that as a Barkhamsted resident, they have such a small business base but due to geographic similarities joining with New Hartford would be advantageous to both. Mr. Burdick interjected that prior to this call he has had conversations with both Don Stein and Ray Peck of Barkhamsted. Mr. Peck is a Selectman who has been charged with chairing the economic focus of surviving the pandemic and supporting the businesses. He agrees that working jointly with them is a great idea. He added that he also spoke with Bob Geiger in Winsted.

Ms. Pobuda asked Ms. Ventre if every business listed in the directory can have a link to their website. Ms. Ventre stated that they can. Ms. Pobuda also asked if businesses do not have a website if they can link to Facebook. Ms. Ventre responded that she has successfully linked to Facebook pages as well.

Mrs. LaPlante commented that this is an opportunity to support our local businesses and we need to focus on that. We have an opportunity for our local businesses to pick up new customers. She noted that often our residents tend to pick up take out or eat out at restaurants outside of New Hartford because they are stopping on their way home from work. With so many people working from home, this is a good opportunity to focus on local businesses and any promotions that we do should focus on that. It could be as simple as Support Local.

Peg Budny noted that in maintaining the Business Council website and Facebook page she has found a lack of participation by the businesses. We need to find a way to encourage the businesses to be proactive for themselves. She tends to share posts that she finds from local businesses which helps them but we need to determine why businesses are apathetic about promoting themselves.

Ms. Lloyd noted that if a business wishes to be featured, they need to write a blurb. She is not writing a blurb for the business because she doesn't know what they want to highlight. Mr. Burdick interrupted to point out that there isn't a need for a blurb if they do not provide one. He cited the success of the Cash Mob which only featured the name of the participating business. He proposed focusing on what can be done versus what cannot. He suggested using the description that business have already posted on Facebook as a starting point if a business expresses interest but does not provide a blurb. He asked Ms. Ventre how many businesses we have on our EDC

email list. She noted that Mrs. LaPlante believes we have about 120. Ms. Budny questioned if that is 120 New Hartford businesses. Ms. Ventre confirmed that the list consists of New Hartford businesses for whom we have contact information. Mr. Burdick proposed promoting 3 businesses per day. Ms. Ventre noted that 3 postings per day is a lot and perhaps 3 businesses could be spotlighted in one News Item, but the town website is really for town news and multiple news items a day would drop the news items about the budget and Brodie park off the home page.

Mr. Watson noted that if there are that many businesses, perhaps we should focus on highlighting marketplaces or a specific type of business such as restaurants, service businesses or retail. Ms. Lloyd noted that we really need confirmation from the business before promoting them. Some businesses just do not want to be on Facebook. Mr. Burdick suggested using the email list to send a blast offering the opportunity to be featured. He asked Ms. Lloyd to serve as the coordinator to ensure that the business who wish to be featured are promoted.

First Selectman Jerram commended Ms. Ventre's work on the town website and noted that any local business who wishes to be featured on the EDC Business Directory has the opportunity to do so, but the burden is on the business to provide their information and sign up. He noted that the email outreach is fine to again offer that opportunity to the businesses. It is incumbent on them to provide the information so that we do not misrepresent anything.

Mr. Burdick brought up the website promoting businesses featured by the NHCOC. Ms. Toro asked if he meant Civiclift. Ms. Budny asked for clarification of what the COG is and Mr. Burdick explained the membership of 21 towns with representation by the First Selectman or Mayor. He noted that they have a tourism initiative, funded the FoodHub in Torrington and are working to bring high speed internet service to the northwest corner.

Chairman Toro noted that meeting time is limited and perhaps we should move on to additional ideas. Mr. Burdick suggested that he and Ms. Budny had discussed having some sort of event for July 4th with a decorate your car parade or provide flags to businesses to be distributed for a donation with the funds donated to the charity of their choice. A discussion ensued regarding the feasibility of obtaining the flags. Ms. Lloyd noted that the flags need to be ordered soon to ensure they are received. Mr. Jerram noted that they town had difficulty obtaining American flags for Memorial Day as they are backordered.

Ms. Pobuda asked the Business Council members what we can do to support them. Deirdre Tindell commented that she had helped to set up the Take Out page and wonders if it makes sense to create another page when the Take Out page has grown organically. Creating a new page will mean starting over. They posted a google doc asking for businesses to provide their information but no one has added to that. Ms. Lloyd noted that Glastonbury has changed the name of their page to Take Out / Patio. She wonders how hard it would be to change the name of the page and retain the followers already recruited. Ms. Lloyd suggested Take Out / Businesses. Ms. Tindell noted that it should be a regional page including neighboring towns. Mr. Watson

suggested “Open for Business” to make the page for all business including restaurants. All agreed to repurpose the page. Ms. Lloyd noted that we also need to remember the businesses that are not currently open but will be reopening. Mr. Watson and Mr. Burdick noted that businesses could use that page to generate buzz as they prepare to open.

Mr. Burdick returned to the flag topic and asked Ms. Budny to research if flags are available. Ms. Toro suggested that a decision be held pending whether the flags will be available. Mr. Burdick asked whether someone or a committee would agree to supervise this project. Mr. Watson asked for clarification of the flags wondering why a business wouldn't purchase the flags for \$1. Mr. Burdick noted that the flags would be purchased and given to the businesses. A list would be published of which businesses have flags where people can purchase the flag for a suggested \$5 donation to be passed along to Neighbor to Neighbor or Hands of Grace. Mrs. LaPlante noted that she believes the flags should not be sold for a donation – they should distribute as they wish to be displayed within the community. If people want to donate to a charity they should do that on their own time.

Ms. Toro noted that there are only a few minutes left. Ms. Lloyd asked Mr. Jerram whether the ski banners had been swapped out for the farm banners. Mr. Jerram noted the staff member who would do that is on vacation this week.

Scott Kozlak of the Business Council commented that helping businesses acquire PPE or disinfecting products as they work to reopen might be an area that could assist. Mr. Burdick asked if that could be included in the email blast. Mr. Kozlak suggested that having businesses contact by email or private message to ask for assistance rather than broadcasting the vendors info might be the best way to handle it. Mr. Jerram noted that the CBIA program for PPE has been successful and masks have been provided to local businesses. Mr. Burdick asked if requests could be forwarded to Mr. Kozlak to assist businesses in obtaining PPE or sanitizing products.

Mr. Jerram noted that Governor's Executive order gave the Town the ability to streamline the approval process to allow outdoor dining for any businesses who wish to reopen. He and Mike Lucas had contacted all the restaurants in town to offer assistance in setting up a temporary patio area if needed. Ms. Toro and Mr. Burdick expressed appreciation to Dan and Mike for doing so.

Mr. Burdick asked for the hours that Town Hall is open. Mr. Jerram noted that Town Hall is open every day. Staff is available by appointment.

Ms. Pobuda asked whether EDC would be authorizing funds for the flags. That would be addressed after Business Council members leave to attend their meeting.

Ms. Toro thanked the Business Council members for attending the session. They left the meeting at approximately 9:35 am.

Ms. Toro asked Mr. Burdick if he had other sources for donation of funds to purchase the flags.

MOTION Ms. Lloyd, second Ms. Pobuda, to allocate up to \$200 for the purchase of flags assuming they are available so they can be distributed for the 4th of July.

Mr. Watson questioned why town funds would be allocated to purchase flags to be given away if local businesses would donate to purchase them. Ms. Lloyd noted that some of the businesses are operating on a shoestring in the current climate and cannot afford to purchase flags.

Ms. Toro noted that we are putting an onus on the business to do something additional when they have other priorities. This sounds like a lot of work with limited reward. She has seen “Litchfield Strong” being handed out, but would rather see us do something along those lines here. Ms. Lloyd asked to Call the Motion and then stated she would withdraw her motion if Ms. Pobuda agrees to withdraw her second. Ms. Pobuda withdrew her second.

Mr. Jerram noted that he was admitting Kathryn Boughton to the meeting.

Ms. Toro will do some additional research on some sort of signs and we can then look into other entities in town to help support that initiative.

Ms. Pobuda suggested “New Hartford Moving Forward”

10. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION Ms. Pobuda, second Ms. Lloyd to adjourn at 9:45 am; *Unanimously approved.*

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Ventre, Commission Secretary