

MINUTES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
COMMITTEE MEMBERS PARTICIPATED REMOTELY VIA ZOOM VIDEO
CONFERENCE
CITY STAFF PARTICIPATED FROM THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
August 10, 2020 @ 5:30 p.m.

Committee Members present: Councilor Martin P. Dumont, Sr., Chair
 Councilor Donald Austin
 Councilor Crystal Paradis

Administration/Staff present: Bob Belmore, City Manager
 Scott Smith, Deputy Manager/Finance Director
 Robin Comstock, Economic Development Manager
 Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk

Other:

Chairman Dumont called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Dumont stated due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order#12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. This meeting will be held via Zoom online platform. The public is asked to submit comments via email to jslaven@somersworth.com or bbelmore@somersworth.com. Comments must be received by Monday, August 10, 2020 at 12 noon. The public can access the meeting and listen live by telephoning any of the numbers posted on the agenda.

Chairman Dumont stated that all votes will be taken by a roll call vote.

Roll call attendance was taken. Councilors Dumont, Austin and Paradis were present and by themselves. Councilor Michaud was excused.

City Manager Belmore stated who was present in Council Chambers which is noted above.

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion made by Councilor Paradis, seconded by Councilor Austin, to accept the minutes of the May 13, 2020 meeting as presented, Motion passed 3-0 by roll call vote.

UPDATES FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ROBIN COMSTOCK

Ms. Comstock let the committee know she has been keeping in contact with other development professionals and participating in weekly zoom meetings with Commissioner Taylor of the Department of Business and Economic affairs. She informed them of a virtual job fair the state is holding on August 12th where employers and applicants can meet remotely. There is a healthcare relief system for businesses that closes August 13th, but does not apply to 501c6 organizations such as our chamber of commerce. Ms. Comstock and other development professionals are working to allow these organizations to receive this grant.

Councilor Paradis inquired about what could be done to better support our businesses at this time. Ms. Comstock replied that a heightened attention to our restaurant community is needed. She went on further to explain that our process has been helping so far and as the weather grows colder, we need to continue so business owners can serve their customers and our residents. They have been appreciative, but are unnerved about what the winter means for them. Ms. Comstock is thinking about ways to best serve the local businesses and has been talking about sharing a compilation of classes/webinars from other economic development leaders.

Councilor Paradis said a constituent asked about public art and murals in the City as a way to improve vitality, and asked if this is something on our economic development radar. Ms. Comstock replied that she has deliberately stepped back to allow the schools to sort through the demand for this type of project, but does see its potential for economic development and vitality.

Councilor Austin expressed concern about taking a step backwards if we cannot jointly figure out a way through the colder months. He wonders how much is based on actual discussions or if we are seeing the issue statewide. Ms. Comstock does believe others share our concerns. She has had discussions with a lot of restaurateurs on a number of occasions. She noted that the summer season is slow here, while other seacoast towns and cities dominate it. Our peak is September, October, and November. To cope with the downturn in business due to Covid-19, some restaurants have adapted to include catering and delivery options. Other restaurant owners are trying to modify their models by bringing in music etc. At this point the best we can do is to just be here and be supportive. We are small and sometimes this can lend itself better to adapting to the needs of our small business community.

Councilor Dumont spoke about discussions he had with people in the medical community who are concerned about coronavirus and flu at the same time. He said Rochester gave a loan (5k) to get through this time, and then later forgave the loan. He asked if we are in a position to doing something like this?

Manager Belmore said that cities like Rochester, Dover, Portsmouth, and Nashua receive community development block grant (CDBG) allocations every year. This allows those cities much greater flexibility in how they use these funds. Somersworth, as well as all Cities and Towns cannot use taxpayer dollars to fund private businesses.

FORMER POLICE STATION PURCHASE PROPOSAL

Manager Belmore informed the committee that the City has been contacted by someone who has expressed wanting to reopen discussions on purchasing the old Police Department building. He explained there is a call scheduled to renew interests etc. and staff have been seeking grants to remove some hazardous waste in the building to make it more marketable. Stafford Regional Planning Commission members have been looking into a cleanup grant for the rehabilitation of the building. Manager Belmore stated he will move forward on an application for the grant if the committee so wishes.

MISC

Manager Belmore explained the non-conforming use for the old BP Gas Station has expired and notice has been sent to inform the owners they have lost the ability to reopen.

Late last week, the City received a proposal in regard to the purchase and redevelopment of Lucky's Supermarket. Providing site improvements and dedicating a certain number of parking spaces in the

parking lot could potentially be necessary for this development to happen. Councilor Dumont asked if the assumption is to bring back to committee, to which Manager Belmore replied in the affirmative.

ADJOURNMENT

*Motion made by Councilor Austin, seconded by Councilor Paradis to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 pm.
Motion passed, 3-0.*

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk