

CALL TO ORDER

The December 10, 2020 Monroe Economic Development Advisory Board Meeting was called to order at 8:06 a.m.; Zoom Meeting Platform.

ROLL CALL

Members present: Allan Dye, Bridgette Tuttle, Katy Woods, Liz Nugent, and Sally King

Staff present: Deborah Knight, James Palmer, and Rich Huebner

Guests present: Jacob Walker, John Whims

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Board member Bridgette Tuttle made motion to approve the minutes of the October 22 and November 12 meetings. The motion was seconded by Board Member Katy Woods. Motion carried 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Mayor's Advisory Board Membership Appointments

Mr. Huebner introduced Mr. Walker and Mr. Whims, who were appointed by Mayor Geoffrey Thomas as new members of the EDAB, effective January 1, 2021. Mr. Walker is an insurance broker and with PNW Insurance Group, and Mr. Whims is the proprietor of Whims Insurance and Finance Services, an affiliate of Nationwide. Mr. Walker and Mr. Whims introduced themselves, and were welcomed by the Board members.

Mr. Huebner also commented that Liz Nugent has been reappointed by Mayor Thomas to another term. Board Member Nugent was congratulated by her fellow members on her reappointment.

B. CARES Act Grant from Economic Alliance Snohomish County

Ms. Knight provided details on a grant the City received through Economic Alliance Snohomish County. Made available by Snohomish County out of its CARES Act funds, the grants were to assist cities with completion of projects that will enhance local economic resiliency by mitigating the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Knight detailed Monroe's application, which was for a Socioeconomic Baseline and Regional Demand Analysis. This project will create a comprehensive data profile of the City of Monroe and include an online, interactive dashboard for all data captured. This dashboard will allow City staff to seamlessly pull data for reports, and for data trends to be made readily and publicly available. Tourism and service industry businesses in Monroe that have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be provided tutorials on how to use the data to market and promote visitation to Monroe. The Regional Demand Analysis will assess overall projections for our region, economic opportunities tied to tourism, the strengths and specializations of Monroe industries, and

estimated consumer and household demand to inform post-pandemic growth opportunities. Ms. Knight commented that the project will include updates to the City's economic development webpages with timely and useful data to inform the Business Recruitment, Retention, and Expansion (BRRE) strategy.

Mr. Palmer commented that the City has retained High Peak Analytics, LLC, to complete the work, which will provide timely and useful data to assist the City in targeting prospective visitors and attracting dollars to Monroe; a travel spike is anticipated, post-COVID, and we want to capture those visitors and dollars here.

Ms. Drews commented that she is very excited for the outcomes of this project.

Mr. Whims asked if the project will analyze Monroe's capacity for growth. Mr. Palmer commented that will depend on the industry; for example, the City's industrial base has less capacity than the tourism and professional services industries due to lack of readily available industrial land.

Ms. Knight commented that she plans a review of the City's BRRE strategy in January. Board Member Tuttle suggested reviewing the work plans for the EDAB's subcommittees, so they be prepared to support BRRE efforts. Ms. Knight commented she will present suggested subcommittee work plans at the January 14 meeting.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

A. 2020 Monroe Business Survey Results

Mr. Palmer presented the results of the 2020 Monroe Business Survey. Mr. Palmer commented that distribution and response will be a key focus for him in future surveys; in 2020, the response rate was up slightly, while overall distribution was down.

Mr. Palmer commented that it is important for the City to communicate the benefits of the survey in future years, and that the City uses and responds to the data collected.

Mr. Palmer detailed that the largest group of responses came from downtown businesses, with the Frylands Industrial area coming in second. In regards to business categories, Mr. Palmer commented that he would like to reevaluate the categories in 2021 due to the high number of responses selecting "other". Board Member Tuttle asked what category Galaxy Theatres fell under, and Mr. Palmer responded either Retail or Professional Services. Ms. Knight suggested a potential category to consider adding for 2021 would be "Entertainment".

Board Member Nugent commented that she is a business owner with four employees, but that she is the only one that works in Monroe; she asked if there was an opportunity to differentiate in future surveys the total number of employees of the company, and the total number that work in Monroe. Mr. Palmer commented that he will look into that suggestion in defining the questions of future surveys.

Mr. Palmer commented that the highest rated priorities among responses were "Economic support through COVID-19", and "Finish 522".

Discussion ensued regarding ways to improve response rate in future years. Mr. Walker suggested rolling the questions out in phases, as some are considered time sensitive, and to make as many questions a binary response (i.e., yes or no) as possible. Mr. Palmer thanked Mr. Walker for his suggestions, and commented that conducting quarterly surveys, with questions broken up by topic, is under consideration.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS AND UPDATES

Board Member Tuttle commented that she has identified an issue with the grant programs enacted by the City in 2020 through CARES Act funds. Specifically, Board Member Tuttle identified the requirement that businesses have incurred either a 25% decrease in revenue (Small Business Relief Grant), or be actually behind on rent or mortgage payments (Business Rent/Mortgage Assistance Grant). Board Member Tuttle commented that businesses that experience less than a 25% decrease in revenues are still hurting and in need of assistance, and businesses may not be behind on rent due to owner's utilizing personal funds ("robbing Peter to pay Paul"). Board Member Tuttle suggested that if future grant programs are enacted by the City, that consideration be given to having less stringent requirements and allow businesses the opportunity to detail their individual circumstances.

Board Member Woods commented that the state has opened applications for Working Washington grants, and dedicated an additional \$50 million the program on Tuesday, December 8. Grants are available up to \$20,000, and applications are due by Friday, December 11.

Board Member Nugent commented that she concurred with Board Member Tuttle's comments in their entirety. Board Member Nugent also commented that she has heard of businesses experiencing difficulty accessing the state grant website.

Member Drews commented that the Chamber of Commerce has distributed all \$44,000 allocated to the Business Rent/Mortgage Assistance Grant, and is currently receiving and reviewing applications to the Small Business Relief Grant (\$40,000 allocated by the City) and Small Business Relief Supplemental Grant (\$112,696 allocated by Snohomish County). Member Drews commented that she has emailed the grant application to all businesses in Monroe, and has been going door to door to get the word out.

Member Drews also commented that the kiosk went up on Wednesday, December 9. Ms. Knight thanked Member Drews for all her hard work on behalf of the Monroe business community this year.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.



Deborah Knight, City Administrator