

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL REMOTE MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2020 – 4:30 PM**

PRESENT: Chair Steve Thomson, Vice Chair Randy Mitchell; Members Kim Gossage, Tim Jones, Marcie Kelso*, Brett Kiker, Erin Schackman*, Cindy Sikorski, Commissioner John Urban (appointed member), Assistant Town Manager Becky Hawke; Town Clerk Lori Canapinno

This special meeting was held remotely due to the social distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Mecklenburg County Stay at Home Order. Committee members and staff participated in the meeting using the Zoom remote meeting platform, which allows participants to connect via audio and video for live, simultaneous communication and the public was able to view the meeting in real time.

This special meeting was called to discuss committee activities and the current business climate in the midst of the pandemic. The Board of Commissioners had tasked the Town's advisory committees to explore what each committee's focus was going to be in 2020 and beyond. After a discussion between EDAC and the Board, it was decided that EDAC would add some questions to the citizen survey that related to the business environment; consider how to attract jobs to Matthews, with a particular interest in the multiple small business incubators located near Matthews to show those small businesses graduating from the incubators that Matthews could be a good home for them; and for EDAC to work on adding new language to existing small area plans, to describe what the Town should consider having from a business type/economic perspective within the small area plan areas. Mr. Mitchell noted another item that EDAC was working on at the directive of the Board: the possibility of a convention center/hotel in Matthews. A subcommittee had been discussing the issue; Ms. Sikorski noted that before the pandemic, the group had planned to meet with a local hotelier. Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority CEO Tom Murray had offered to meet with the subcommittee and the hotel owner, Mr. Patel, and she suggested having someone contact Mr. Patel to see how things are at this time amidst all the uncertainty. Mr. Mitchell said it would be insensitive to even have conversations about the subject now when hotels are trying to survive. He suggested instead discussing what role EDAC can play in supporting economic recovery in the area, especially small businesses.

Discussion ensued. The Matthews Chamber of Commerce has offered free information webinars on subjects relating to COVID-19 and businesses. Ms. Gossage noted that they were well-attended and the feedback has been fantastic. Most of the attendees were not Chamber members and came from outside Matthews. Mr. Urban explained that there are property owners and developers still moving forward, just slower than usual. A discussion of planning and development-related strategies could help approaching developers. Mr. Mitchell suggested seeing what could be done to celebrate Matthews businesses as they start to reopen.

Ms. Hawke explained that Mecklenburg County will be receiving federal CARES Act funding and the County Board of Commissioners is looking for ways to distribute funds across Mecklenburg County. Town and County staff are discussing options. A marketing initiative to get people to support local businesses could be very effective. EDAC could be the driving force behind the proposal for the use of funds and show how EDAC is actively supporting Matthews' businesses.

Mr. Thomson discussed a Go 2 Matthews program from the Chamber from 2009 or so. It encouraged people to do business with Chamber members using two-dollar bills to show support and shop locally. That mainly supported retail businesses but perhaps some elements could be reused. He asked if the Red Brick Partnership has looked at doing any kind of program and Mr. Urban said no – the group does more on the special event side of things, and most of the members are bearing the brunt of the pandemic-related problems right now so Red Brick Partnership activities have idled. Mr. Mitchell said it would be great to target a back-to-business celebration once it's safe to do. It would be nice to have an in-person event done safely and would allow Chamber, non-Chamber businesses

coming together in celebration of their business and each other's. Ms. Sikorski suggested collecting things like masks and hand sanitizer and passing them out. She also suggested distributing information on restaurants that people could go into and properly social distance from others. Ms. Gossage described a program that the Chamber briefly investigated: a gift card program that would be used at businesses that signed up to be part of the program.

Mr. Thomson noted that it's been difficult for some businesses to acquire PPE (personal protective equipment) and suggested having EDAC come together with a consortium of business owners as a source of protective equipment. Discussion ensued regarding masks and hand sanitizer. Mr. Thomson suggested purchasing equipment in bulk for redistribution. Masks could be printed with a Matthews logo and sanitizer could be repackaged into small bottles with a marketing message on them.

**Ms. Kelso departed*

Discussion ensued regarding options for business support initiatives. Staff will continue to work with County staff and leaders to get more information about next steps. At some point a proposal will need to be submitted to the County. The proposal will have to include the plan for the use of CARES Act funding to benefit the business community and a budget. The funds will have to be spent this calendar year.

**Ms. Schackman departed.*

Discussion will continue at the next remote special meeting on Wednesday, June 10 at 4:30 pm.

Motion by Mr. Jones to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thomson and unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 5:57.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Canapinno
Town Clerk