

COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKING GROUP
Friday, 01/15/2021 - 8 a.m., via Zoom Meeting

In Attendance: Council President Jack O'Brien, Council Vice President Noni West, Councilmen Ben Bell, Joe Flood, and Joe Frederick, Mayor Ron Strouse, and Borough Manager John Davis.

Only know anecdotally how our businesses are actually doing. How to reach out to and involve more of the businesses other than through Discover Doylestown was discussed.

There was discussion on how some restaurants adapted and were able to keep going, and how some businesses can't change. Some things done for the businesses/restaurants, like street closings, is not practical now. Possibly when the weather changes back, we could get into more of scheduled rotation of the street blocks. The downside to a schedule is the weather - if rained out, they would have to wait a month for their next turn. Also have the fairness issue, as well as costs involved, for example, overtime. Last year, we did four rotating blocks: East State, West State, North Main, and South Main. A possibility would be doing just Main Street and just State Street, which would give a more frequent opportunity to participate. This would present traffic considerations because of where you're closing the street. Although there would be some challenges, this could continue this after the pandemic because it's good for the entire community.

Whether entertainment would be permitted during the closures was discussed, as was the reopening of the County Theater.

Curbside service spaces, approximately 30, will remain. This means, of course, lost revenue. They do help some, but there are also some that are definitely abused. It's a morale boost more than anything else. In the scheme of things, if it's helping some of the merchants, leave them there.

Real questions, aside from the restaurants: 1) how are the other businesses doing and 2) what can we do, if anything, to help them? There has been structural damage in these other businesses and it's going to take two to three years for them to recover. How can we help, not just in the immediate crisis, but also during the long term revitalization?

Merchants are saying 1) 30-40% of them have benefitted from curbside pickup - not just restaurants; 2) outdoor marketplaces: helped, but they need people back into the brick and mortar locations; 3) need to get message out that it's safe to go in these stores; 4) we've temporarily relaxed our standards regarding signage, tables outside, etc. It can change, but right now, the vacancy rate is not bad.

As suggested by Noni, John will look into National Main Street America, an organization with the mission of looking at the economic development in older and historic down towns and neighborhoods.

Non-profits, like the museums, were discussed. The Mayor said they've had considerable community support, but the museums are 50% off from last year's fund raising.

The County Theater was extremely successful in construction fund raising, however they have a great concern that if they open and have no revenue from people spending, they will actually burn through their reserves faster than if they stayed closed. They have very specific challenges – more challenging manner than the museums. People are, however, renewing their memberships.

Part of the challenge for all of these organizations is that grants that were available to them are expected to be diminished again in the next couple of years. Just one example is that grants funded by the hotel tax will be much thinner. Perhaps could talk in the future about how to get the community to refocus on the non-profits' needs.

Community Focus. It's not only what we can accomplish, but what we can do bring attention to the needs of our community's assets.

Could consider doing a resolution to support the Pennsylvania Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Security Act of 2021, which would maybe make the legislature understand how bad things are here so maybe they can get some money out of it.

How to get local needs included in the next stimulus package was discussed. Do not want municipalities excluded due to size. PML legislative updates are really good and we pay a lot for them. PML is very beneficial to us.

Long Term Recovery and Sustainment. Something to think about for next meeting is what are some long term, bolder initiatives that not only sustain businesses through hard times, but really promote their development in a longer term? What are some funding streams ideas that can be used to fund some of those initiatives. Need to be careful with fund raising as a municipality, and also need to make certain that fund raising does not interfere with any of our 501(3)(c) organizations.

How often should this group meet? The advertisement was for first and third Fridays of the month.

Meeting adjourned 9:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Ament, Executive Assistant
Doylestown Borough