

Town of Chelmsford
Center Village Master Plan Implementation Committee
50 Billerica Rd., Room 205 Chelmsford, Ma 01824
Zoom Meeting
MINUTES
January 14, 2021

Attending: Janet Askenburg (vice-chair), Eileen DeChaves, Brian Milisci, Michael Rigney (chair)

Not Present: Jack Handley, Nancy Araway

Others Present: Evan Belansky (Community Development Director, left at 7:00), Lisa Marrone (Director of Business Development)

Please note that all documents referenced in these minutes are on file at the Town Manager's Office, 50 Billerica Rd., Chelmsford, Mass. This meeting was hand recorded by the chair.

This meeting was called to order at 6:35PM by the chair.

1. Business-friendly initiatives, Lisa Marrone

L. Marrone provided an overview of several initiatives to support Chelmsford small businesses during the COVID-19 epidemic. One was a small covid relief grant, which helped about 35 businesses with unding from the MA AG office. She was pleased with number of submissions. Loans are also a priority for SBA relief because grant money is more scarce than loans. Sector specific grant are open until tomorrow, the town is helping with the application details. The target of these grants are brick and mortar, and emails have been sent to the business community from the town list of 400 active valid emails. L. Marrone is also investigating a CRM solution for outreach like this in the future.

The town is also working to establish better policy and notification of planned/unplanned work being done in town. This is a tough time in the calendar, so she requested DPW cc: her on all abutter emails. That might not be ideal for out of town landlords or PO Boxes but she can help if the email is good. She is working on signage, etc to alert people that businesses are still open and is reviewing neighboring town best practices on minimizing DPW effects on small business.

Additionally, she has talked with Chelmsford Telemedia about doing public service announcements that businesses are open. That policy will continue. The town website is also being used to post NewsFlashes as another means of contact with the public. Additional ideas are welcome.

E. Dechaves asked about doing facebook posts to inform the general public with timelines and extent of work. She is still looking to maintain 30' public parking on street; Roscoe's and Beadles have both expressed concerns on this to her and Jack.

J. Askenberg suggested that facebook and other media are good methods for communicating and pointed out that they can supplement local signage.

B. Milisci reiterated that 30' parking is really important to the local businesses and suggested we may need to push police to help achieve that. He also thought site specific knowledge is important.

M. Rigney asked about other initiatives, such as reducing/eliminating fees. L. Marrone explained many fees are necessary to pay inspectors; food has to be prepared, carried out in a specific way; sanitizing is difficult too. It's a very involved process for outdoor dining to minimize public health risk. Kristina Bruce in the Town Manager's office has emailed license holders; the Town has also tried to reduce or minimize fees (e.g. ABC) in a way that meant the Town didn't absorb too big a loss. They have relaxed temporary signage ordinance to allow window signs and a-frames and have also tried to build e-commerce awareness but this is not easily done by the municipality. The CBA and local Chamber of Commerce may also need to pitch in. In short, the Town has tried to create changes within its limits but the central idea is to relax rules to let businesses help themselves. Since we are not a gateway community we are not eligible for a lot of State grants. In addition, the Town's permitting guide outlines fees from each department and is reviewed annually but basically lower fees means lower revenue. Rooms/meals tax dropped quickly.

Other updates:

L. Marrone provided a number of updates on ongoing project:

1. The Town is (finally) burying power lines in front of Jack's side of the road.

2. Rudy is frustrated that announcement of Press Cafe on 129, reportedly said “I wish I'd known, they could have come to the Center.” L. Marone thought it was a good conversation with him.
 3. Applebee's property is turning over, the plan now is for it to be leveled and replaced by a bank.
 4. Owner of 7 Summer St has been trying to give his tenants reprieves on rent but concerned that some may never recover, possibly looking at losing 3 of them.
 5. Two people looking to purchase restaurants in tough times as a chance to get in. As bad as it is, we are probably not at the bottom yet, with more transitions to come. The good news is there may be opportunities for new players created.
 6. Chelmsford Nutrition replaced Trailside Ice Cream. The Town can be better at creating excitement and projecting good news.
 7. Bike shop opened up. L. Marrone is thinking about ways to resurrect ribbon cutting program, but it's hard to have a crowd 6' apart.
 8. The town is always being reviewed by investors. Looked at for housing. No activity in 129 but lots of examination, some waiting for the right opportunity.
- M. Rigney reported the discussion of the renovation of the Oddfellows property is ongoing.
- J. Askenburg said local businesses need the town more than usual now. Discussion around the fact that the Chelmsford business development facebook page takes a ton of time to post, monitor, clean.
- L. Marrone noted that the Vinyl Square committee has put wayfinding on hold for now to focus on traffic patterns, plantings, etc - there's no point in doing renovations, plantings, etc. and then shift sidewalks, they have a new member of the committee with some planning experience.

Public Input

None tonight.

New business

Members did not bring forward any additional items tonight.

Minutes Approval

Motion: by J. Askenburg to approve the minutes of December 19, 2019, Seconded by MR. Motion carries, 2-0 (E. DeChaves, B. Milisci abstained).

Motion: by J. Askenburg to approve the minutes of January 7, 2020. Seconded by E. DeChaves. Motion carries, 3-0 (B. Milisci abstained).

Motion: by J. Askenburg to approve the minutes of March 12, 2020. Seconded by E. DeChaves. Motion carries, 3-0 (B. Milisci abstained).

Motion: by J. Askenburg to approve the minutes of September 9, 2020, Seconded by E. DeChaves. Motion carries, 3-0 (B. Milisci abstained).

Next meeting

The committee set Feb 11, 2021 as the next meeting date.

Open items:

- L. Marrone will contact police about parking in the Center and respond to committee
- L. Marrone will forward a copy of the permit guide to committee

Adjournment

Motion: by J. Askenburg to adjourn the meeting at 7:23PM. Seconded by Mr. Milisci. Motion carries, unanimous.