

COVID RELIEF SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, May 14, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.

<https://kentcountymi.zoom.us/j/7625970792>

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Mandy Bolter; Vice-Chair Stan Stek; Commissioners Emily Brieve, Diane Jones, Roger Morgan, Phil Skaggs, Jim Talen, and Robert Womack

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

Chair Bolter called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

I. WELCOME

Chair Bolter welcomed the group and thanked those who joined the meeting.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF MAY 12, 2020

Mr. Womack moved to approve the minutes from May 12, 2020 as presented. Supported by Ms. Brieve. Motion carried.

III. REPORT ON LOCAL BUSINESSES IMPACTED BY COVID – AREA CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Chair Bolter welcomed Rick Baker (Grand Rapids Chamber), Guillermo Cisneros (Hispanic Chamber), Elizabeth Morris (Sparta Chamber), Elizabeth Baker (Lowell Chamber), Renard Johnson (GR Black Chamber), and Jamiel Robinson (Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses). The chambers reported on their activities over the last several weeks related to COVID-19 as well as their current and future needs.

Chair Bolter asked what is being done to communicate with the Latinx community who do not have access to the website which provides many important resources. Mr. Cisneros answered that many individuals are only able to access the internet through their phones. One way they have been able to reach the Latinx community is by connecting with various Latinx media outlets to share the message. Webinars have been taking place on Facebook Live for ease of access, and even mass texts have been sent to help share the information.

Mr. Stek noted a figure that was presented which indicated 45.8% of survey respondents from the business community indicated their businesses cannot survive another 30 days of being shut down. He asked if there are specific changes in policy the Chamber suggests as possibilities to consider. Mr. Baker said that there are segments of the population who have less access to some of the funds available to businesses, and many businesses have to compete on a national level to receive funding. He expressed that with creative thinking about policies, there are several options that are non-cash related that the local government could do in order to make the path forward a little easier.

Mr. Womack mentioned a suggestion that was made to make WiFi easier to access for those without it at home, for example by adding hotspots in parks or public spaces. He also stated that businesses of five employees or fewer may be a place where they can look to help. He also was appreciative of the bipartisan response he has seen to help the citizens of Kent County, and if there are other things that can be done to help small businesses such as by deferring taxes or helping with permits, those options should all be explored.

Mr. Baker agreed with Mr. Womack's comments. The Grand Rapids Chamber had determined that businesses with between five and 25 employees would be where they could have the largest impact. So maybe Kent County can consider investing to make a difference for those businesses with one to five employees.

Mr. Skaggs asked what criteria was used by the Grand Rapids Chamber to determine who received grants and what accountability was required. He also asked if the businesses who were declined did not have a recovery plan. Mr. Baker answered that the criteria could be sent to the subcommittee. Some businesses who were declined did not have a recovery plan or they wanted to use resources that didn't fit.

Ms. Jones asked if, for the restaurants who are open, they are making close to the same amount as before. She also asked why some businesses haven't started that could have. Mr. Baker answered that the businesses have gotten creative to try and sustain themselves, and it is easier for some businesses than others, though it's still not easy for anyone. Restaurants who specialize in high-end dining don't fit the model to accommodate drive-thru or window pick up. Overall, those restaurants who are open are making about 20% their normal revenue. They are just doing all they can to keep their businesses alive.

Mr. Talen asked what will be done for childcare needs for businesses and their employees. Mr. Baker said that they are looking into that from a state policy level. They are working to make sure there is a safe place for children to go while parents go back to work.

Chair Bolter thanked the group for their presentations.

IV. GRAND RAPIDS DDA/DGRI RESPONSE TO COVID & IMPACT ON DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES – GRAND RAPIDS DDA/DGRI

Mr. Tim Kelly from the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority/Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. presented on their response to COVID-19 and the support that will be necessary to reengage downtown area businesses.

Chair Bolter asked for more information about a \$200,000 grant and funding to stay in DBA parameters to help businesses. Mr. Kelly said the \$200,000 was an immediate relief fund the board approved. It didn't have a specific use at first, but they have reviewed the legislation and the needs for safety and sanitizing and also how to support restaurants and retailer's downtown that bring people into the neighborhood.

Mr. Stek asked how the data the DDA used compared to the results from the survey Mr. Baker referenced earlier, specially the figure that noted how many businesses cannot survive another 30 days. Mr. Kelly answered that their feedback was comparable.

Chair Bolter thanked Mr. Kelly for his presentation.

V. UPDATE ON COVID-19 EXPENSES AND OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

Mr. Jeff Dood listed current sources of direct funds Kent County has received so far.

VI. OTHER (SUBCOMITTEE DOCUMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE, HEROES ACT STIMULUS BILL, PHOENIX PLAN)

Mr. Britt presented information about what other parts of the country are doing and what is being done in other counties in Michigan.

Ms. Jones asked when the subcommittee will see a document on which entity is estimated to get what amount of dollars.

Mr. Britt answered they will receive that information in the next week.

Chair Bolter asked what will be covered in Tuesday, May 19's upcoming meeting.

Mr. Britt answered they will be hearing from the remaining Chambers and The Right Place, Inc.

Mr. Talen asked if they could receive an update about 2-1-1 and their workload. It would be helpful for the subcommittee for hear from them.

Chair Bolter asked if that information could be included with an update from the community foundations. While the immediate concern is with the homeless population and sheltering individuals, other areas such as rent assistance and other long-term help will need to be planned.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Betsy Melton stated that some areas have begun to utilize the help of college students to deliver food by bicycle. This could be a possible option for businesses.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for discussion, Chair Bolter adjourned the meeting at 11:11 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL FOR DISTRIBUTION Pam VanKemen