

BLUFFTON TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

ELECTRONIC MEETING

April 23, 2020

Mayor Sulka called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Council members present were Mayor Pro Tempore Fred Hamilton, Larry Toomer, Bridgette Frazier, and Dan Wood. Town Manager Marc Orlando, Deputy Town Manager Scott Marshall, Town Clerk Kimberly Chapman, Chris Forster Director of Finance and Administration, Chief of Police Chris Chapmond, Emergency Manager Captain Scott Chandler, Mike Levine, Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Don Ryan Center for Innovation, and Town Attorney Terry Finger were also present.

Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation were given by Mayor Sulka.

Adoption of Agenda:

Wood made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Toomer seconded. Mayor Sulka took roll call and all were in favor – the motion carried unanimously.

Formal Items:

Consideration of a Resolution to Establish and Affirm its Full Support of the Town of Bluffton Small Business Economic Resiliency Plan to Mitigate the COVID-19 Global Pandemic Financial Impact to Small Businesses- Marc Orlando, Town Manager

Orlando stated that on March 13, 2020, the Governor of South Carolina, issued Executive Order No. 2020-08 related to COVID-19 and declared that a State of Emergency exists in South Carolina. On March 16, 2020 the Mayor of the Town of Bluffton, Lisa Sulka issued a proclamation declaring a state of emergency throughout the Town to protect public health and safety of individuals within the Town of Bluffton. The extent of the long-term impact on small businesses within Bluffton is still uncertain but recent weekly unemployment claims have spiked higher than we have seen in recent history. The Federal CARES Act was passed on March 27th with \$562 million for Small Business Association (SBA) Loans and \$10 billion for grants. An additional \$350 billion of funding was allocated to SBA for a payroll protection program and \$17 billion for debt relief on existing SBA loans. This is a limited amount of funding and additional funding is currently uncertain.

The Bluffton Small Business Support Plan is as follows:

1. Promotion of the Beaufort County Economic Development Corp. Business Survey: Help provide support for making informed decisions rather than decisions based on assumptions.
2. DRCI Small Business Concierge: Leverage DRCI resources and partnerships to serve as a resource guide that connects small businesses with available financial resources.

- a. Town of Bluffton Partners: Establish MOU defining roles and expectations.
 1. Don Ryan Center for Innovation
 2. Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation
 3. University of South Carolina Beaufort (SBDC)
 4. Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce
 5. HHI-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce
 6. Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce
 7. Others as determined by Town Manager

 - b. Lowcountry Resource Guide (Appendix A): Outline all available resources with contact information and reference links to applicable websites within a comprehensive document made publicly available to local small businesses. Identify and define all the following:
 1. Federal Assistance
 2. South Carolina Assistance
 3. Regional Nonprofit Fund/Program Assistance
 4. Regional Private Fund/Program Assistance
 5. Municipal Assistance

 - c. Referral and Advisement Program: Establish an administrative structure to assist with connecting businesses with appropriate programs and financial support.

 - d. Complementary DRCI Resources: Waive DRCI membership fees for 12 months and waive the cost of rent for The Hub for 12 months.

 - e. Legal Assistance: Establish a MOU with local legal resources to provide small businesses with pro bono legal assistance to navigate through legal questions and concerns of potential negative economic impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

 - f. Develop New Growth Program: To address the needs of Bluffton's existing businesses to manage cash flow and business deficiencies, program and manage stimulus funds (SBA and similar) and to sustain and grow during economic uncertainty.
3. Small Business Advocate: The Town of Bluffton and local leaders can serve as an advocate for small businesses as they face unusual challenges and financial pressures as a result of government actions to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- a. Establish communication with local utilities to strongly encourage them to follow local actions in delaying payment due dates and waiving late fees.

- b. Communicate with property owners, publicly or individually, to strongly encourage them to be lenient on tenants regarding late payments and to defer eviction actions.
4. Tax Relief: Defer license and tax deadlines to reduce financial burdens on businesses in the short term until economic activity can return to normal.
 - a. Defer the February, March, and April, Local Hospitality Tax and Local Accommodations Tax payments until June 14, 2020 (Item is complete).
 - b. Defer the Business License renewal deadline from April 30, 2020 until August 7, 2020.
5. Potential Future Actions: Apply for appropriate stimulus grant funds (SCDOC, CDBG, etc.) to directly assist businesses through Town programs including but not limited to a revolving loan program, business assistance, and other related initiatives with a priority for resources that support most at risk businesses as a result of the impacts of COVID-19.

Toomer made a motion to approve a Resolution to Establish and Affirm its Full Support of the Town of Bluffton Small Business Economic Resiliency Plan to Mitigate the COVID-19 Global Pandemic Financial Impact to Small Businesses. Hamilton seconded. Roll call was taken, and the vote was unanimous.

Communications from Mayor and Council:

Toomer suggested the opening of the floating dock due to public safety concerns for families getting in and out of the boats. Toomer asked that the remainder of Town Council visit the dock so that they can see what is going on.

Wood stated that he is proud of the great things that local charities are doing in our community and included Councilwoman Frazier's work that she is doing.

Councilwoman Frazier stated that the announcement that Beaufort County schools will be closed for the remainder of the school year and the remainder of all learning will be virtual was made.

Mayor Sulka stated that she feels that we should expect businesses and employers to wear masks.

Chief Chapmond stated that businesses are opening slowly and that he encourages the use of face masks. Hamilton concurred. Orlando stated that he will look at other resolutions and how they are being implemented by other municipalities.

Adjournment:

Wood made a motion to adjourn at 11:15 a.m. Frazier seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Lisa Sulka, Mayor

Kimberly Chapman, Town Clerk

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