

Economic Development Committee Minutes  
May 5, 2021 – 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chairman Phil Barrett; Supervisors Tara Gaston, Joe Grasso, Jon Schopf, Kevin Tollisen, Sandra Winney, Tom Wood; Supervisor Peck and Chairman of the Board Todd Kusnierz; Steve Bulger, Matt Rose, Audra Hedden, County Administrator; Michael Hartnett, County Attorney; Jason Kemper, Planning; Todd Shimkus, Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce; Darryl Leggieri, Discover Saratoga; Shelby Schneider, Saratoga County Prosperity Partnership

Chairman Barrett called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

**On a motion made by Mr. Grasso, seconded by Mr. Wood, the minutes of the April 7, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Tollisen, seconded by Mr. Grasso, to authorize the acceptance of \$43,701.26 in Employment Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant Funds from the NYS Department of Labor. Unanimous.**

Ms. McCloskey said that the entire grant amount is \$43K. Saratoga County would retain \$22K and the remaining funds would be passed on to Warren and Washington Counties.

Ms. McCloskey said that 64 youth have signed up so far for the Summer Jobs program. They normally see approximately 150 applications for these spots. Ms. McCloskey said that they have a priority deadline of April 23<sup>rd</sup> which is intended to get people who are motivated to file early, however applications are accepted through the beginning of the program, which is the end of June. Total number of placements depends on work site needs. Ms. McCloskey said that the information was sent out to schools, guidance counselors, shared on social media and has been on posted on the County website since the end of March. Ms. Winney expressed frustration on not receiving the information on the program prior to this week, as the information could have been posted in Town Hall sooner.

Mr. Shimkus updated the Committee on a recent visitor survey that was conducted collectively with Discover Saratoga and Mannix Marketing. There were over 2,600 responses to the survey. Questions and responses as follows:

Did you visit Saratoga area in 2020? Yes 60%, No 40%

Do you plan on visiting the Saratoga area this summer? Yes approx. 95%, No approx. 5%

What deters you from vacationing in Saratoga this summer?

44% - I am not sure what attractions and activities will be open – i.e. Track, SPAC, major events, etc.

22% - I will not be traveling this summer due to safety concerns.

18% - I plan to visit an area outside of New York this year.

Mr. Shimkus said that part of the challenge is not having protocols that understand the variation that's available in terms of how to visit and how to experience and be a fan at SPAC, at Live Nation, at the Track. Mr. Shimkus said that Carrie Woerner's office has sent a letter to the Governor's office to look at protocols early. Mr. Shimkus said that the Chamber, Mannix Marketing and Discover Saratoga have created an sharing tool online and they continue to market and promote attractions as they open up for example the Racino and SPAC.

Mr. Barrett said that indecisiveness and the unknown is an issue, also people can choose to visit other places where they know there are less restrictions. Mr. Shimkus said that last year hotel arrangements were made January through March and then cancelled. This year the advanced booking is not happening at the same level, as people are waiting to know if they can partake in activities before they make the booking. Mr. Shimkus said that the Spring campaign is out and is focused on outdoor recreation and dining. Mr. Barrett said that the Zim Smith Trail should be highlighted. Mr. Shimkus agreed and said that advertising is focused on trails, hiking, biking, boating, golfing, exploring and camping. However, what will push hotel occupancy up is the ability to be able to promote SPAC, Casino and the Track. Mr. Shimkus reported that last year hotel occupancy was up however the rates plummeted, which is why occupancy tax was down 70-75%.

Ms. Schneider said that the County Economic Development Fund for 2021 is being kicked off, and will distribute a copy of the 2021 application as well as the drawdown for 2020 to all Supervisors. The grant request is the same as last year, maximum \$7,100 per municipality. Ms. Schneider said that she is available to discuss any ideas from municipalities.

**A motion was made by Mr. Grasso, seconded by Mr. Tollisen, to authorize the Economic Development Fund Application request for the Town of Clifton Park. Unanimous.**

Ms. Schneider said that this the first application for 2021. It is a Community Solar ordinance from the Town of Clifton Park. This project will help infrastructure, energy, residents and businesses. Mr. Barrett said that the zoning ordinance is something that the Town has been working on as they have received a great deal of applications. Several larger ground mounted solar arrays have been constructed. Code has been in place for several years as part of a Statewide working group that came up with a unified code for all municipalities. Mr. Barrett said that green energy projects are heavily subsidized. A large amount of public funds are taken to cover a great deal of the project cost in order to be financially feasible, and this aids in attracting private investments to complete the projects. Mr. Barrett said that SBC charges on utility bills has been in place for years and these charges mainly go to subsidize green energy projects throughout the State. Mr. Barrett said that it is important for municipalities to look at their code to ensure it is sustainable and viable for the future. Once a solar project reaches a certain size, there is no local regulating authority, it all goes through the State. Mr. Kusnierz said that the threshold is 25 megawatts or greater.

Ms. Schneider said that the Consolidated Funding Application process through Empire State Development was not open last year, she has heard that it will be re-opening in the coming weeks and strongly encourages municipalities in Saratoga County to apply. Once it is announced, Ms. Schneider will send the information out to all Supervisors.

Mr. Barrett said that at the Tourism Committee meeting earlier today they discussed the shortage of people looking for jobs, particularly in the service industry. Restaurants are closing their dining rooms on certain days in order to protect their weekend hours and to avoid burnout of their current staff. A letter was recently received from the Workforce Development Board of Saratoga, Warren & Washington Counties that was sent to State Senators and Assembly Members addressing the issue. Ms. McCloskey said that this is a growing problem. Ms. McCloskey reported that the recent annual job discovery fair was held virtually this year. Typically they get hundreds of job applicants. This year they had 110 businesses with a total of 4,700 open positions. Only 40 people showed up, of which 20 applications were submitted. Ms. McCloskey said that at this point, they cannot offer job fairs anymore as it is not fair to get the hopes of businesses up. They are switching their narrative to tell people that now is the time to go back to work, and not wait until unemployment benefits have run out. Those on unemployment are not currently being held to the standards that they usually are through the Department of Labor. Ms. McCloskey said that over the past year, problems such as access to childcare and public transportation to work has magnified. A significant number of women have exited the workforce and this has affected the hospitality industry as this is where they were primarily employed.

**A motion was made by Mr. Tollisen, seconded by Mr. Barrett, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Therese Connolly  
Deputy Clerk of the Board