

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Transcript

5/5/2021

SPEAKERS

Shelby Schneider, Phil Barrett, Sandra Winney, Tara Gaston, Jonathan Schopf, Joe Grasso, Jennifer McCloskey, Kevin Tollisen, Several Supervisors, Therese Connolly, Tom Wood, Theodore Kusnierz, Todd Shimkus

Phil Barrett

All right, it's three o'clock. So let's get going. Welcome, everybody to the Economic Development Committee meeting of May 5. You've taken attendance Therese?

Therese Connolly

I have.

Phil Barrett

Thank you. I'll entertain a motion to approve minutes of April 7th.

Joe Grasso

So moved.

Tom Wood

Supervisor Wood, I'll make that motion.

Phil Barrett

It was moved by Mr. Grasso. Second by Mr. Wood, discussion. All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Phil Barrett

Opposed? Motion carries. First up today, Jennifer McCloskey, Jennifer, how are you?

Jennifer McCloskey

Hello, everybody. So today, I'm here to accept a small portion of grant funding from the New York State Department of Labor for dislocated workers. The entire grant amount is around \$43,000, and Saratoga County as the grant recipient would retain \$22,000 worth of it, and the remaining monies would be passed down to Warren and Washington Counties.

Phil Barrett

Great, any questions for Jennifer? Moved by Supervisor Tollisen?

Kevin Tollisen

So moved.

Phil Barrett

Do we have a second?

Joe Grasso

I'll second it.

Phil Barrett

Second by Mr. Grasso. Discussion. All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Phil Barrett

Motion carries.

Jennifer McCloskey

Thank you very much.

Phil Barrett

Jennifer, you sent out a link to the summer jobs program this week. Appreciate that.

Jennifer McCloskey

We've got 64 kids signed up so far, and usually we see about 150 applications for those spots. So hopefully we'll get a few more but it's doing good this year.

Phil Barrett

What I wanted to ask was.. Can we mute those phones Matt?

Therese Connolly

Supervisors, we're having a little bit of feedback on the phone.

Phil Barrett

Yea, somebody is working out or something, it's a little difficult to hear. So there's a big heading here, it says pre-application priority deadline is April 23. So I don't know if that was going to confuse anybody, but.

Jenniffer McCloskey

It is a little bit confusing, we do have a priority deadline, which is intended to get the people who are motivated and file early, preferred spots closer to home. But typically, we have always accepted applications even through the start of the program. So it's kind of a rolling application basis.

Jenniffer McCloskey

Okay, so how many spots do you have total? Do you know?

Jenniffer McCloskey

It really depends on the work sites and how many people they need. So usually, we work with the work sites, depending on how many qualified applicants that we have. So we place everyone that we can.

Phil Barrett

Okay, because when you said you had 64, I'm just wondering what percentage of the possible total that might be, is that half for a quarter?

Jenniffer McCloskey

It's usually half at this point by the priority deadline? We're usually at half of our applicants have applied. So we're expecting the other 50% between now and the start of the program at the end of June.

Phil Barrett

So if we send this out, it's not necessarily late.

Jenniffer McCloskey

Oh no, not at all.

Phil Barrett

Okay. It was just a little confusing with the headline. Is there anything we can do at the local level to help you connect with any of these sites? Are you pretty good with that?

Jenniffer McCloskey

I mean, pretty much, it's kind of anecdotal at this point, we're still trying to match the applicants, the student applicants, with job sites that are closest to them. Sometimes when we can't get enough job sites in a certain area, we do have to provide transportation and kind of bridge that gap. As of right now, I think everything is lining up pretty well., but I would, when we get closer to it, if we have areas that we need more job sites, reach out to the Supervisors of those areas to see if they have any openings or need within the Towns for some summer workers.

Phil Barrett

Okay. And the program begins when?

Jenniffer McCloskey

it's at the end of June.

Phil Barrett

Okay. Alright, so if anybody did get that email from Jennifer, just keep that in mind. There is plenty of time still for applicants.

Jennifer McCloskey

Yep. Absolutely.

Phil Barrett

Okay. Great. Any other questions for Jennifer about something else?

Sandra Winney

Yeah, I have a question. This is Supervisor Winney. I emailed Jennifer this morning, and asked her why this wasn't put out before the 23rd. Because this seems like you're filling it without even notifying anybody, and then the other 50% you want in later on? It is deceiving. I don't understand the program. Why don't they put it out before April 23?

Phil Barrett

Well, I'm sure it was out.

Sandra Winney

I didn't get it until yesterday.

Phil Barrett

I'm sure it was out, and I'm sure it had to be if we had 64 applicants?

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah. It's on the County website.

Phil Barrett

Yeah, it's on the County website.

Sandra Winney

Well why didn't the Supervisors get this when it went on the County website? I mean, I got notified today or yesterday about it. But yet, now they're going to get the other 50%. But this kind of ensures they're getting 50% right away for somebody that looks at the website. But I mean this should be all over. And we should be notified before the 23rd.

Phil Barrett

How long as it been on the website?

Jennifer McCloskey

It's been on the website since the end of March.

Phil Barrett

The end of March. Okay, and it's probably sent to other partners of ours?

Jennifer McCloskey

Yes, we send them to all the schools, the guidance counselors, we put it out on our social media and share it that way.

Phil Barrett

So you went directly to the kids?

Jennifer McCloskey

Yes.

Phil Barrett

Good plan.

Sandra Winney

Well, that's good. I don't have any problem with that. But why weren't we notified of it? I mean, so we could post it in our Town Halls and stuff to get kids that come in there. That was my big thing. But I mean, if she's got 64, or if she's filling 64, or whatever the number is, and she's looking for the other 50%. But I would like to be notified when it goes on the website, too.

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah and absolutely I appreciate that feedback. And I think there's definitely room for improvement on getting the word out about some of the opportunities that we have in our Departments. So that's good feedback, thank you.

Sandra Winney

Okay. I'm not criticizing I'd just like to have it early.

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah.

Phil Barrett

The Towns that have work sites would obviously know about it, too, right?

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah. We typically have a lot of the same work sites year after year, and they all get the worksite application every year.

Sandra Winney

Those are the bigger towns. I mean, for our small rural towns here. I mean we have kids too that would like to apply, and a lot of them don't look at the County website. But they do hit the Town Clerk's office, they hit the Town offices at some point. So I'd just like to be notified before.

Phil Barrett

Do you send this information to the small schools as well as the big schools?

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah. Our Youth Counselor is in touch with all of the schools. I mean, last year, we worked really hard to get some kids from Northville, who actually lived in Edinburg onto the program.

Phil Barrett

Good. Obviously, getting into the schools is priority. All right great. Any other questions for Jen at this point? Alrighty, thank you very much.

Jennifer McCloskey

Thank you guys.

Phil Barrett

Todd Shimkus is here with a tourism promotion update.

Tara Gaston

Chairman?

Phil Barrett

Oh, and Jen, if you could stick around because I had one other thing I wanted to ask you about too.

Jonathan Schopf

Mr. Chairman, Jon Schopf here. I came in a few minutes late. Just wanted to let you know that I arrived.

Phil Barrett

All right. We have our Vice Chairman, Mr. Schopf is on the line. Did you get that?

Therese Connolly

I did.

Several Supervisors

(inaudible - several speakers at once)

Tara Gaston

I am here as well.

Phil Barrett

Alright, sounds like Supervisor Gaston is there as well. Jon, did you have something else you wanted to mention?

Jonathan Schopf

I'm dealing with a situation, I may have to jump off, so if I do I'll just quietly exit but I'll be here listening.

Phil Barrett

Okay, great. Thank you. All right. So we have Supervisor Gaston and Schopf that has been noted. Uh, Todd, how you doing?

Todd Shimkus

I'm great. Thank you for the opportunity to give you a quick update. And I'm not going to get into detail on the tourism promotional campaign. But what I wanted to do today was to share details on a survey that we did, collectively along with Discover Saratoga Darryl Leggieri here as well, and then with Mannix Marketing, which runs Saratoga.com. They're a for profit entity, but they're quite a successful generator of visits, and visitors to Saratoga County. They also run a variety of different places like LakeGeorge.com, Albany.com. So for a long time, they've built their business on attracting people. And so we geared up with them about a month ago, and did a visitor survey. So we have databases that all three of our organizations have collected over the years, largely by doing contests. And in order to enter and win those contests, you have to give us a good email. And so we emailed 1,000s of people, we got a few 1,000 returns, you may remember we did a similar thing last year, and we just wanted to sort of get updated and find out what did we need to do differently this year, as we come out of the pandemic, versus last year, while we were trying to come out of being closed, and to get those sort of visitor expectations, and whether they're gonna come back or not. So anyways, we did this survey, and we think the results are interesting. I'm not sharing all of them. We got a lot of detail in here. So the first is it's important on that first page, Saratoga's leading indicators, just in terms of taking a look at visits to our websites, all three of us, the trend is that more people are looking at our sites and looking at Saratoga this year for travel opportunities than last year. So the potential to have more demand is on the rise. And it has been consistently throughout this year. So that's what you take out of the first one. And then in the second one, you can see we had over 2,600 people that filled these out and answered some questions that we had. So we asked them, first of all, did you visit Saratoga in 2020. And you can see that 60% of them did. So clearly, they're energized about being in Saratoga, they came last year as well. And only on the no side it was less than 40%. But that's going to be helpful to us as well, because we wanted to make sure we surveyed both of those folks. The best answer to the question number two, do you plan on visiting? We're up over 90% that say they want to come back to Saratoga this year this summer. So we did a series of questions after that to figure out, alright, what are they really interested in? And it's all of the things you would expect. It's the casinos. It's the golf courses, it's outdoor recreation, it's the Track. It's SPAC. It's Live Nation. It's the museum's, it's the parks, the lakes. It's all of that. And restaurants scored really highly, which I think is interesting. But I think part of that is that everybody that comes to any one of the other amenities, also has to eat out. So restaurants, I think end up on everybody's list because there are great restaurants throughout the County, but also everybody's got to eat. So, but the one that really grabbed our attention was what will deter you? So how do we get the 90% to come? How do we convince the roughly 5% that said no, to come? What's deterring them? And if you look at this, there's the normal ones that you would probably see, they're not traveling due to safety concerns, that's about 22%. 18% they're gonna visit another area in New York. But 44%, this was by far the highest, obviously, twice as high as any other percentage. I am not sure what attractions and activities will be open, i.e. the Track, SPAC, major events. And so we really wanted to share that

with you. Because that's the hesitancy that's out there about visiting Saratoga this summer. And part of our challenge as a community trying to promote Saratoga right now, is we can't answer those questions. We don't know what the protocols are going to be at SPAC, at the Casino, at the Track, at museums, at restaurants. Think about it. We don't know today. And so part of our challenge and what we were hoping, we're certainly being vocal about trying to get those protocols in advance. Today, the Governor announced that the baseball stadiums, at least for the Yankees, and the Mets, can allow 100% if they've been vaccinated, they're gonna have vaccinated sections and non-vaccinated sections, they're getting rid of the testing protocols, that kind of a scenario would be better for us than the percentage. But here's what happened to the Track as one example. So they're racing at Belmont, they started racing a Belmont two weeks ago, the Governor announced a week before that they could have fans at Belmont, but the rules didn't come out. So for the first weekend, Belmont had no fans. My understanding is the current percentage that's being used there, and it's the same thing is happening to SPAC which impacts Live Nation, even the Casino, even restaurants, they're all under this percentage, right? Well, in the Tracks case, and SPAC it isn't just the seats, there's also the lawn area, and the backyard and all of the areas that are out there in both of those venues. And yet, we don't have 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. I know Carrie Woerner has sent a letter asking the Governor's office to look at protocols early. Because here's what we don't want, we don't want what happened at Belmont to happen to Saratoga, we don't want to find out a week before. It won't help us convince these 44% to get here. So in the interim in advance of not having the protocols. It says lodging partners on the back, but it's really everybody. We happened to meet with a variety of the hotels back a few weeks ago, Sarah Mannix did Darryl Leggieri and I, and some others. And so we just wanted you to know these are the things we're doing. So we're sending e-newsletters to our prospects, the same ones that got the survey, are now getting emails anytime we can announce that something is now open. So we did that for the Casino yesterday, because now their Racino is open. And we did it for SPAC last week. And we've got a few others that are teed up. The canal, when it opens, we're going to do that. So anything that opens that is welcoming visitors in, we're going to be promoting through email. We're incredibly active on social media, all three of our organizations. And collectively, we've created a sharing tool online so that as any one of our organizations promote something, all of us can grab that content and share it out through all of our different social media channels. So for the hotels, driving direct bookings is important to them. We're looking at social media channels as well. And we are doing giveaways, that's something we've always done. All of our organizations. So those are all happening. And we've been creating high quality content all along and that's what we're starting to share out in our digital campaign. We've got our Spring campaign underway now. But we're all starting to get those questions about, well, what's open? What's going to happen at the Track? What's going to happen at SPAC. And those are the questions we can't answer. And then if the Canadian border actually opens, that gives us another opportunity to have an audience that wasn't able to come anywhere in the US last year. So we suspect they're itching to get down here and get out of Canada to spend some time in the US. So anyways, we just wanted to share these results, and answer any questions that you might have about the summer. And then if you've got any suggestions or ideas on how we might push to try to get protocols from the State as soon as possible. That's really just immensely essential at this point.

Phil Barrett

Yeah, that would certainly make sense, indecisiveness and the unknown. Plus people know they can go other places where there aren't any restrictions. So they know everything's open. Or at least the States have completely lifted restrictions, there might be some business restrictions, but they know they can go there and visit tourist areas. So, part of the fear, I think, is that people will make plans to go where they know they won't have any issues, as opposed to waiting to hear what the restrictions might be here in New York and Saratoga. Although, I think there's a lot of pent up demand locally, and within a few hour radius that people would be able to visit our County regularly or at least quickly. It wouldn't be something that they would need to plan for weeks, it could be kind of on a whim. And as long as they can get in, as long as they know when they get here, they've got a chance to get in the Track or SPAC whatever it might be then I think they'll still come. Any questions for Todd? Joe?

Joe Grasso

Yeah Todd, Supervisor Grasso. Thanks for the information. In terms of the survey, how was it sent out, and who, do we know anything about the respondents?

Todd Shimkus

Yeah, so in the detail, we have it, it's all mapped out. So we geo targeted, where the people came from that fill that out. It was literally 1,000s of people that were in our databases that had taken part mostly in sweepstakes, and contests that either any one of the three of our organizations had done over the course of the last five years. And as you can see, just even from the answers we gave, these are people that are absolutely interested in Saratoga. But yeah it's predominantly, it goes right down to 87, right down to New York City, Long Island, it hits Connecticut, it hits Massachusetts, it goes a little bit out to the west and Syracuse, and then into New Jersey and a little bit into Pennsylvania. So that's our normal, our normal market is 100 to 300 miles. It's a drive market thankfully. Thankfully, we're not a cruise market, flying still is one of those challenges too, we are a drive market, that's the safest one to be in.

Phil Barrett

You know, the data, you said 44% say they're not sure what attractions might be open and state that's a deterrent. But then you've got 40% that say they won't be traveling at all, because they have safety concerns, and 18% that say they plan to visit or travel outside of New York, as opposed to visiting, I assume, instead of coming to New York or visiting sites within New York. So that's 40% that are basically saying they're off the table.

Todd Shimkus

Yeah, so that's exactly what we're, that's why we got to get that first piece taken care of so that the uncertainty of what you might be able to do here is eliminated. There's nothing we can do about people not necessarily feeling safe, or deciding that they want to travel elsewhere. But we have some impact, we think, on at least tell them what they can do now. And in talking to hotels, here's what's happening differently this year, versus last year. So last year, people made their hotel arrangements in January, February, March. So when the pandemic hit, everybody thought, three weeks, four weeks we'll be okay by the time we get to the summer, and then they cancelled their reservation when they found out that the Casino was staying close, they couldn't go to the Track, that SPAC was essentially closed. This

year, that advanced booking, that did not happen at the same level. So what people are doing now is they're waiting to know if they can do something before they make the booking. And if we don't give them that information sooner, to your point, they're going to go somewhere else where they know.

Todd Shimkus

Yeah, absolutely. And it might be a neighboring state, that would be a shame.

Todd Shimkus

Connecticut's going to be fully open. Massachusetts, I think, said August 1, fully open. Maine. So we're, you know, New Jersey? They're all headed in that direction. And yet our major drivers in this market, we don't know.

Phil Barrett

So what else are you working on the tourism front as the County's designated tourism partner?

Todd Shimkus

So our Spring campaign is out, we're focused right now on outdoor recreation, kinda like, because we know that's available. And dining, those are the two things that are driving it. And just as we've done before, it is targeted by behavior. It's targeted by geography. So that same geography that I just talked about, if you're in that geography, and you fit the behavior of being a tourist that is likely to come to Saratoga, then we're serving up ads to you on whatever website you happen to be on. And then if you click through, we're hoping to grab some information from you as part of our sweepstakes program, so that we can stay in touch. But you also get re-served ads after that, and that steers you to a variety of different websites. And that's been our campaign and our strategy for years now. Because it gets right to the people. It's the same thing you see when you go online, and you search for a trip somewhere, and all of a sudden, you're getting ads from wherever that place is, reminding you that, hey, you should be interested in coming here. What those travel agencies are doing to you, we're doing to all the visitors and people that are interested in Saratoga. So that's sort of the industry standard, the best practice these days. And we've had great success with that driving demand, up until last year.

Phil Barrett

Well, and along with the outdoor parks or activities. I think we should really be highlighting the Zim Smith Trail as one that we just talked about at our two o'clock meeting. There's many outdoor activities that aren't necessarily structured that would I think, be an opportunity to attract at least a portion of the population, considering where they're going to spend their time.

Todd Shimkus

Yeah, the ads are around trails, hiking, biking, boating, golfing, just general exploring, camping. All of that is part of the campaign right now. And we've got great images and video of all of that. For what moves the needle at the end, is going to be whether we can put a ballet dancer and a Live Nation concert and somebody winning at the Casino and somebody at the Track. That's what's really going to push the hotel occupancy. And perhaps more importantly for occupancy taxes, the rate up. So we had a okay occupancy last summer, but the rate plummeted, which is why the occupancy tax was down 70-75%. We still had people that stayed here, we still have a lot of people that came here, but our hotels

just couldn't capture the same rate. And we want to avoid that, because that doesn't help you at the County level, and it doesn't help any of our businesses either.

Phil Barrett

Any other questions for Todd at this point? We appreciate you and Darryl, in your efforts. Darryl, was there anything that you wanted to say or? Okay. All right. Well, thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate it. And we'll continue to follow protocols and guidelines that'll be coming down, I'm sure on a regular basis. And please keep us updated on any new information that you uncover that you think would be of use to us as a County and also in our individual localities. Thanks. Shelby Schneider, Partnership. How are we doing today?

Shelby Schneider

Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for having me, Chairman. We're here to kick off the County Economic Development Fund for 2021. What I have here is the paper copy of the 2021 application, as well as the drawdown for 2020. We do have some communities throughout Saratoga County, that their projects might not have been completed. So they their drawdown has lagged, or their project might need to be tweaked or altered a little bit. So I've included both hardcopy, and I'm emailing everyone individually so that they have it electronically, and it will also be in your mailbox. But we have our first application from the Town of Clifton Park, it is to update the solar ordinance and land use restrictions. Actually, the grant request just needs to be tweaked. Every grant is going to be \$7,100, as it was last year, so you can use up to \$7,100. This is a Community Solar ordinance. And it helps, its infrastructure, its energy, it helps residents, it also helps businesses. And so this project is obviously in keeping with Community and Economic Development, so it's something that I'd recommend that the Economic Development Committee approve. And I'd also be welcome to talk to any Town or City in Saratoga County for ideas for their grant applications for this year. As I had mentioned to you, Chairman, I just heard that New York State will be opening up the CFA application process in the coming weeks. And my understanding is that, CFA I apologize, Consolidated Funding Application through Empire State Development, it was not open last year, and what they are looking for are projects that they can kick off that can be completed within a year or two. So if you have something partially done, if you have applied in the past, whether it's infrastructure, a community project, planning, etc. I would strongly recommend going after those funds, and Saratoga County really has not been a big beneficiary of the Statewide CFA applications.

Kevin Tollisen

Do you have something for us to look at with those?

Shelby Schneider

Not yet, because I was just told, at the end of last week, that we should be seeing something in the coming weeks. So we don't have anything yet, but as soon as we do, I'll make sure it does get out to the Supervisors, if you don't already get it yourself. So anyway, the grant application could be great leverage to either put together an application for that CFA process, or we see projects from across the board, like the land use planning and community development or community solar ordinance.

Phil Barrett

The CFA process was just really started a few years ago to consolidate all the different programs that the State had, and that they offered annually at different times of the year. So what this did was just bring it all together into a condensed time frame. And there's still monies available for all kinds of different projects. That hasn't changed, but just the timeframes has changed.

Shelby Schneider

Oh, and one more thing to add that is new this year is that they're not just going to have one time per year, because we know that economic and community development does not happen once a year. They're gonna break it down into two separate application processes.

Phil Barrett

Oh, okay. Good.

Shelby Schneider

So I don't know exactly what the timing is. But when we find out, we'll let you know.

Phil Barrett

Okay, good. Maybe that's because they didn't have it last year.

Shelby Schneider

It could be

Phil Barrett

And they're getting a lot of money right? So I'm sure some of that stimulus money's going into the CFA program?

Shelby Schneider

Well, we hope so. And again, Saratoga County has not been a big beneficiary of the CFA grants. We really want to see the money come back home to Saratoga County for everything from infrastructure, community development, etc.

Phil Barrett

Okay, great. Okay. Any questions for Shelby? Okay. I'll entertain a motion to approve the project that she just described.

Joe Grasso

So moved.

Phil Barrett

Moved by Mr. Grasso, second by Mr. Tollisen. The update to the zoning ordinance is something that we're working on in the Town of Clifton Park, because we have received a great deal of applications. And we have several larger ground mounted solar arrays that have been constructed. And we had our code in place, that we completed several years ago, and we were part of a working group, we were

chosen by the State, to be part of a Statewide working group that eventually came up with a unified code for all municipalities. But since that time, these large ground mounted solar arrays have become a viable thing. Because of the I'll say, 10s of millions, it's probably 100s of millions by now, but 10s of millions of dollars that are used to subsidize the projects. All these green energy projects are heavily subsidized. So what they do is they take a large amount of public money to cover a great deal of the cost of the project and make it so the project is basically, it can't help but be successful because of the subsidy. So then there's private money that comes in at that point to fill in the rest of the gap. Obviously, once you have a project, that's a guarantee to be financially feasible, it's a little easier to get private investment money involved to complete the projects. So that's in very basic terms, how the money is moved around to support these large solar projects. So the money is not slowing down. If you look at the SBC charge on your utility bill that's been there for many, many years. That's a fee that has been broken out for years, and it's separated on your bill. But in more recent years, what they've done is they have three separate charges that aren't broken out on your bill, they're within your bill. And the SBC and these three other charges, mainly go to subsidize green energy projects throughout the State. Or, there is a smaller, let's see, there's SBC charge, and there's three other charges. Of the three charges that are in your bill, two go to green energy, one goes to prop up the nuclear industry. And then, like I said, the SBC charge, I think that just goes directly to NYSERDA, for the most part. So that's where the money is coming from, to subsidize all of these green energy projects. So it's basically public money, it's your money that's being used to subsidize these projects, make them viable, and then they bring in these investment dollars to make up the difference. And then the private sector takes over the construction and operations and maintenance of the projects once they're built. So that's basically the process. And with the huge amount of money that's been flowing from the State and now Federally, the these projects will not be slowing down anytime soon. And we had several projects in place. And so now, the thought is, we better take a break here, just what you always want to do after you have some of these projects, take a break, look at your code, make sure it's sustainable and viable for the future. And that's what we're doing. And that's what this money is for. I tell you all that just because it might be something that you want to look at in your locality. There's many people in the Legislature in New York State government that are pushing to eliminate all local regulations regarding green energy. Right now, a solar project of a certain size, and I don't remember, I don't know if you know Jason, what the size threshold is, but once a solar project reaches a certain size, there is no local regulating authority, it all goes through the State. So if you have a huge project, then you're not going to have any say in that siting process as a municipality. And what they want to do is either vastly reduce that threshold, or eliminate it altogether. So that way, there's no local opposition. The thought being that, well we're in a climate emergency, we don't have time to mess around with local regulations. I mean, these projects have to happen, they have to happen now. So that's their thought process behind it. Which I disagree with. I think there should be local regulating authority involved. But that's, that's the trend. So it's something we all need to be prepared for now, and into the future. So anyway, that's a that's a little talk about solar and why we're working on the ordinance. Did we vote yet? All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Kevin Tollisen

I'll move that.

Phil Barrett

Opposed? Motion carries. Thank you very much.

Shelby Schneider

Thank you.

Theodore Kusnierz

Chairman, the threshold is 25 megawatts or greater.

Phil Barrett

25? Okay. The largest one we've had in Town so far is 7, I think it was a little over 7. So 25 is a large project. But I think they are working on lowering that threshold, or eliminating it as I mentioned. Under other business, Jen, I just had another question for you. So at our Tourism meeting, we were talking about the issues that businesses are having with the shortage of people that are looking for jobs, they have jobs that they can't fill. I'm hearing from restaurants, I'm sure others are as well. They're closing their dining room when it would normally be open. They're trying to do whatever they can to protect their weekend hours. So Thursday through Sunday, they want to be open as they normally would, because that's their busiest time. And so what they're doing is other times of the week, they're closing the dining room, because they only have so many workers and they don't want don't want to burn out their staff, quote-unquote, by going to the same people six, seven days a week. More and more we're hearing of, Supervisor Tollisen told me a popular restaurant in the County where the owners are normally doing other tasks and running the restaurant and other sides of the business. Now they're in, they're doing the cooking, they're in the kitchen. So it's something we're hearing more and more, and we received a letter at the meeting today from the Workforce Development Board Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties. It was signed by Gretchen Steffan, Executive Director, Saratoga, Warren, Washington Workforce Development Board. And thankfully, it was sent to State Senators and State Assembly folks from a wide area. Can you tell us a little, can you give us your take on what you're experiencing or hearing and what you're dealing with along these lines? And if there's anything we can do as a County to help other than bring attention to this matter?

Jenniffer McCloskey

I'm very glad you asked. This is a growing problem. And I'm sure that you've heard, even over the past two or three weeks, it's all anyone's really talking about right now, is that there are so many jobs, and the businesses are just struggling so bad to fill their spots. We've been trying to help. We held our 33rd annual job discovery job fair, and we had to do it virtually this year. Typically, we get hundreds of job applicants. This year, we had 110 businesses with a total available positions of 4,700 open positions. We had 40 people show up, and 20 people submit applications for 4,700 jobs.

Phil Barrett

Now this was put on by the joint county forces?

Jenniffer McCloskey

We have a separate committee for job discovery. So it's partnerships with the career centers in Saratoga Warren Washington counties, BOCES, SUNY Adirondack. So it's a partnership with a lot of different workforce entities.

Phil Barrett

So you had 110 businesses 4,700 openings, 40 showed up and 20 submitted an application?

Jenniffer McCloskey

Yes. And some of those submitted applications were the same person submitting for multiple jobs. So it was alarming. So we're really trying to switch our focus. We can't offer job fairs anymore. It's not fair to the businesses to get their hopes up, because we just can't deliver the people. So what we're trying to do now is to switch the narrative, and tell people that now is the time to go back to work. Don't wait for unemployment to run out. Because when it does, everyone's going to enter the workforce at the same time, right now businesses are paying more than they ever have. You can write your own ticket, negotiate better benefits, flexible schedules, now is the time to get back to work. And another part of that is the unemployment insurance issue, which is what I believe that letter addresses. Was to try to fix the system. In Vermont, they've reinstated that the people receiving unemployment benefits have to prove that they're actually looking for work. There's a job search requirement.

Phil Barrett

On May 9, that goes into effect, right?

Jenniffer McCloskey

Correct. We still don't have that in New York. So what I'm hearing from businesses is that people are inquiring about jobs, even applying for jobs, and then either don't show up for the interview, or they'll go through the whole process and not show up for their first day. So people aren't being held to the standards that they usually are through the Department of Labor.

Phil Barrett

Everybody hears different things. What is the standard requirement? Pre-COVID?

Jenniffer McCloskey

For job searching?

Phil Barrett

Yeah, so if you're on unemployment, what are you required to do as far as being in the workforce realm of looking for a job, reporting back on what you're doing to find a job?

Jenniffer McCloskey

Typically people who are on unemployment have to check in with the Department of Labor with the reemployment services. So if they have a scheduled meeting, they have to bring their work search record, to a Labor Services Representative, so that they can prove, they have to keep a log, the job seeker has to keep a log of the positions that they applied for, who they contacted, and the results of

that. And so when they have their meetings, pre-pandemic in person with the Labor Services Representative, they are looking at that information to make sure that people are doing their work searches.

Phil Barrett

And how often do they have to check in like that?

Jennifer McCloskey

It depends on the case. And honestly, they have a lot of rules with the Department of Labor, so they change frequently.

Phil Barrett

So have all those rules basically been pushed to the side now. Right?

Jennifer McCloskey

They have. I mean, the meetings are happening a little more frequently than they were at this time last year. But honestly, a lot of the people who did reemployment services, I mean, I had four of them in my office doing reemployment services and meetings. They've all been pulled to process unemployment claims. So anyone pretty much working for the Department of Labor right now, has had their title changed to just process unemployment claims, deal with fraud issues, things like that. So they're not fully back up to having those one on one meetings with recipients.

Phil Barrett

Have you heard of anything in your discussions with your counterparts, or anybody at the State? Are they looking at following Vermont's lead at some point here and being a little more strict with this process?

Jennifer McCloskey

There has really been no talk of that. Right now, the Department of Labor is so overwhelmed with the number of people kind of flooding the system, and also with the rampant fraud that's happening. That has gotten really, really bad over the past month and a half. So I'm not sure where those conversations are. And that's kind of the advocacy that we need. The Workforce Development Board sent out that letter, and I believe it was started by Mike Bittel with the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce, who kind of started this initiative to ask the State to lift some of these barriers that are incentivizing people to stay home and not go to work.

Phil Barrett

Right. Is it only that or are there other factors? I mean, obviously, people are leaving the State quite frequently apparently.

Jennifer McCloskey

It's barriers. So unemployment, the additional unemployment insurance and you know, de-incentivizing people to go back to work is just one barrier. But we've seen over the past year, problems that we've seen for years just explode, so childcare, access to childcare, and access to like that last mile

transportation where CDTA can't get you. So these are conversations that we've been having for a long time, but they've just been magnified over the past year and a half. So I mean, women have exited the workforce in a crazy number, because a lot of the responsibilities fall on them for childcare, when schools are closed and things like that. So they've actually just left the workforce. And that's where you see a lot of it being affected at the hospitality level, because that's where they were mostly employed. And you don't see that really reflected in the unemployment numbers, because they've stopped looking for work. And they've exited the workforce. So we really need to remove, we can't do much about the unemployment. But we can try to help take away those other barriers with childcare and transportation.

Phil Barrett

I've also been told that with the J1 visas, that places like Great Escape, I know, the hospitality industry in Lake George I guess, have been dependent on receiving assistance through those programs. And that hasn't happened. That's been shut down. I don't know if it's reopened or might be at some point. But that's another factor that was brought up.

Jennifer McCloskey

Yeah, that was closed down completely last year. I believe we might have a trickle right now. But not like the levels that we've seen in the past, that is needed to sustain the tourism industry, especially up there.

Phil Barrett

I mean, we are seeing some changes with the immigration system as far as the system speeding up people's ability to become a citizen and Consulates in other countries are operating again to help with other areas as far as people visiting America for college or jobs, or whatever the case may be. I'm not as familiar with this particular program and what's happening there. Somebody else had a question on the line?

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Gaston. What sort of jobs were at the job fair? Is there a general type that was there? And do you know the rates of pay? Is there like a range?

Jennifer McCloskey

There were jobs from everywhere. Hospitality, manufacturing, warehousing, hospitals, health care, you name it. They were all there. And that's for Saratoga, Warren and Washington. No one's paying minimum wage anymore. If you go out there right now, like I said, you can kind of write your ticket right now. McDonald's is hiring at \$14.50 an hour right now. You can get a warehousing job for \$21 an hour. So it's a different world out there. And the wages will never be higher. There's no better opportunity than right now to get into it. Because like I said, once the market gets flooded, those wages are going to get pushed down again. We'll always have a shortage. But yeah, it's alarming right now.

Phil Barrett

Yeah, we're seeing inflation across the board, whether it's building materials, interest rates will be going up, they finally admitted that yesterday and gas, wages. There's just inflation across the board and of course if you are printing trillions of dollars in just a few months, I guess that might have something to

do with it. Any other questions that anybody has for Jen? Well, thank you, Jen. I appreciate that. Just want to get that on the radar screen for folks that might not be aware. Anything that we can do to advocate, to help the situation, please let the Committee know. Oka? All right. Any other business come before the board today? Okay, hearing none I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

Joe Grasso

So moved.

Phil Barrett

Mr. Grasso, second by? I'll second. I guess everybody wants to stay. I know this has been a riveting meeting. I get it. But we do have to end at some point. As sad as it is because we have a new one. Okay. All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Phil Barrett

Opposed? Okay, Motion passes.