

**TOWN OF SALEM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2020 – 8:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL – CONFERENCE ROOM 1**

PRESENT

Edward Chmielewski, Jr., Chairman
Paul Robillard
Terri Salas (*via telephone*)

ABSENT

none

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Chmielewski called the meeting to order at 8:11 p.m.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. ADDITIONS/MODIFICATIONS TO THE AGENDA

M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to add the following item to the Agenda:

**5(a) Creation of the Salem Economic Development Commission Business
Advisory Committee**

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: FEBRUARY 18, 2020 REGULAR MEETING

M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of February 18, 2020.

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

Chairman Chmielewski reported that, as the result of recent activity on Facebook regarding the Salem Plaza, Erica Treaster, Co-owner of Wild Earth Studio, LLC, has organized a community cleanup of the Plaza. He added that the First Selectman and the Town Hall Staff are continuing their efforts to work with the Owner(s) of the Plaza to maintain and clean the Plaza.

Ms. Treaster was contacted via telephone and introduced to the Commissioners.

**M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to form the Economic Development Commission Business
Advisory Committee. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor.**

**M/S/C: Salas/Robillard, to nominate and appoint Erica Treaster as a member of the
Economic Development Commission Business Advisory Committee. Discussion:
The Town Charter and/or rules will be reviewed regarding the process. Voice
vote, 3-0, all in favor.**

Chairman Chmielewski congratulated and welcomed Ms. Treaster to the meeting.

Ms. Treaster became a new small business owner in Salem in January 2020 after having originally established her business in Bozrah. In familiarizing herself with the town, she discovered that Salem is a town with many voices filled with much excitement as people search for things to do, things to change, and ways to enrich their community. The bulk of the marketing for her business is conducted via Facebook through the Salem CT Town Group page where several comments regarding the condition of the Plaza were posted. As a result of these comments, she decided to create a community event in which volunteers are invited to help clean up the Plaza and support the businesses. Called the Good Neighbor Project, she hopes that the Project will spread to other communities. Discussion ensued regarding the structure and details of the clean up.

The Commissioners, who are planning to create a New Business Welcome Packet, also expressed their interest in hearing about her experiences as she established her business in the town and any suggestions she might have to help improve the process.

The Commissioners thanked her for her volunteerism, vision, interest, and enthusiasm.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS – *none*

6. SALEM BUSINESS AND COVID-19 IMPACT

a. Update from Senator Paul Formica

b. Update from State Representative Holly Cheeseman

Chairman Chmielewski thanked and welcomed Senator Formica and Representative Cheeseman for joining their meeting and providing the Commission with a brief update.

Senator Formica thanked the Commission for their hard work and the opportunity to join the meeting during this difficult time. He reported that the Governor received emergency powers in late February/early March, at which time he was committed to collaborating with the legislative leaders and general assembly. Unfortunately, the Governor has, rather, been making unilateral decisions without the input from the general assembly and hired a company to develop a plan to re-open Connecticut in phases. They continue to work hard with the Department of Labor and their constituents to help expedite the receipt of any COVID-19-related benefits. They are also getting ready for the November campaign when the issues will revolve around the pandemic, police brutality, and racism. As the fiscal year closes, the State's budget has a significant deficit of \$950 million. The Governor's emergency powers will be in effect until early September, after which they are hoping to organize some special sessions to repair a few items and move forward.

Representative Cheeseman shared the Senator's frustrations regarding the Governor's handling of the pandemic, adding that individuals and businesses, alike, are having difficulties following the ever-changing re-opening rules. They have been in constant communication with the DECD (Department of Economic and Community Development) advocating for their businesses. The original premise of the closing of businesses was to

control the spread of the virus and not overwhelm the hospitals. To date, a total of approximately 200 individuals have been hospitalized throughout the State, approximately 8 of which reside in Eastern Connecticut. In addition, approximately 80% of COVID-19-related deaths derive from nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and prisons, with the vast majority being from nursing homes. She stated the importance of protecting the vulnerable, i.e., the elderly and those with significant underlying health conditions, but added that most healthy, young individuals who catch the virus are only mildly affected. She felt that it is now time for people to go back to work and restore their lives and livelihoods. The effects of the resulting collateral damage, including deferred medical procedures, domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and the like, will be significant and may far outweigh that of the virus. The Eastern Chamber of Commerce has, unofficially, estimated that up to 50% of the businesses are expected to fold. Representative Cheeseman offered her e-mail address and phone number to be shared with the local businesses to discuss their concerns and answer any questions they might have.

Senator Formica, who is also a restaurant owner, added that, due to the virus, they switched to a take-out only restaurant and are re-opening their doors with a 50% in- and outdoor capacity. While his restaurant is large enough to accommodate the social distancing rules, the vast majority of restaurants and businesses are not and will negatively impact those businesses.

Chairman Chmielewski thanked the Senator and Representative for their comments and hard work. In response to Senator Formica who questioned how Salem business owners are navigating the pandemic, he stated that the local businesses have been doing the best they can to survive as the bills continue to come in whether they are open or not. He informed them that the EDC formed a Business Advisory Committee and looks forward to working with them in the near future.

The Commissioners expressed their appreciation to Senator Formica and Representative Cheeseman and, likewise, they thanked them for all of their efforts.

c. Update from Salem First Selectman Kevin Lyden

First Selectman Lyden was not available.

Chairman Chmielewski reported that the First Selectman has been in communication with many of the local businesses. Masks have been distributed and will continue to be distributed to various businesses. While the Town Hall has been closed to the public, the staff has continued to work and conduct business. He commended the Town Hall staff, Resident State Troopers and Fire Companies as well as the town's businesses. Commissioner Salas concurred, adding that the businesses have come up with creative solutions and adapted to the best of their ability.

7. EDC BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY 2021

Commissioner Robillard hopes to begin work on updating the Directory in September, with the help of any new members.

8. SENIOR FRIENDLY / AGE RESTRICTED HOUSING DISCUSSION

Chairman Chmielewski stated that the town continues to be interested in facilitating and encouraging the construction of senior-friendly/age restricted housing for our long-time residents who would like to downsize and continue living in Salem.

9. SALEM BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

The Commissioners agreed to begin working on the New Business Welcome Packet following the pandemic and to establish a process in which the Commission would be informed of any newly established businesses in town.

10. NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Chmielewski reported that, at the Eastern Region Tourism District Board of Directors Annual Meeting, it was communicated that State funds are now available for small businesses.

11. OLD BUSINESS – *none*

12. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Salas/Robillard, to adjourn the meeting at 9:22 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem