



TOWN OF OLD SAYBROOK

Office of the Board of Selectmen

302 Main Street • Old Saybrook, Connecticut 06475

Telephone (860) 395-3123 • FAX (860) 395-3125

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) AD HOC COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

HYBRID MEETING

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

5:00 p.m.

Old Saybrook Town Hall – First-floor Conference Room

To access a recording of this meeting: <https://youtu.be/mtPlnuU7TmA>

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. by the chair, Mr. Carlson.

Members Present: Bruce Carlson (Chair), Susan Esty (Vice-chair), Maureen Zavatone (Secretary), Judy Sullivan, Kacie Hand, Elizabeth McEvily and Kristen Roberts.

Absent: Brad Thorpe

Others Present: Carl Fortuna, Matthew Pugliese, Jennifer Donahue, Susan Beckman, Dave Carswell, Elizabeth Steffen, Dennis Tulimieri.

II. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Ms. Steffen advocated for the construction of the outdoor pavilion and walkway to be located at the senior housing complex on Sheffield Street that was introduced by Susan Consoli at the previous meeting. She detailed the plans and the many reasons it would be beneficial to older residents in the community.

III. MINUTES

The minutes from the March 8 meeting were reviewed. A **MOTION** was made by Ms. Esty and seconded by Ms. Zavatone to accept the minutes as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. GUEST SPEAKERS

Mr. Carlson gave a short recap of the committee's work noting that it has been studying the impact of the pandemic on a variety of sectors in town and today's discussion would

focus on the impact on small business. He introduced committee member Judy Sullivan from the Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce who introduced Selectman Matt Pugliese from the Connecticut Small Business Development Center, Susie Beckman, formerly the executive director of the Town of Old Saybrook Economic Development Commission, and Dave Carswell from the Old Saybrook branch of Guilford Savings Bank.

Ms. Sullivan began the presentation noting that many businesses in town had been affected in different ways and to different degrees by the pandemic: some maintained, others struggled, some are still struggling but there is cautious optimism. She noted that the internet has had a tremendous effect on some businesses because people have moved to ordering online instead of shopping locally. Foot traffic has also declined.

Mr. Pugliese then detailed the types of financial aid, mostly federal, that were provided to small businesses throughout the last two years. He gave an overview of each wave of funding, who was eligible, how much was available and whether the money was a loan or a grant. A number of the programs ran out of funding well before all eligible applicants could receive help. Unfortunately, there is no good data to show how much aid went to Old Saybrook businesses to give insight on who might still be in need of aid and how those who received aid fared.

Mr. Carswell noted that the bank was the conduit for many of the funds that were distributed and that it was a difficult time for many. Without the funding, many businesses would have had more adverse effects. He reported that of those who applied for assistance, the bank approved 96.4% of all dollars applied for. People were only denied who did not qualify.

Ms. Beckman reported that she had surveyed a number of other towns about what they are doing for small businesses. Many have started grant programs of some form, including façade and building improvement, while others are hoping to use funds for bigger picture bigger impact programs to help businesses. She noted that one business she spoke with in town was able to pivot to producing other things during the pandemic and then move back into its normal manufacturing. That business owner emphasized that having reliable broadband with backup systems is a key to being able to continue to do business under adverse circumstances.

Extensive discussion followed with many committee members throwing out ideas.

Highlights included:

- Could the town invest in backup or improved telecommunications? What problems are businesses having with broadband that are not being addressed by their current services? Partner with Comcast re: resiliency?
- Produce a marketing and tourism plan to bring people into town.
- Create a program to help businesses with marketing and e-commerce and to make that transition.

- Create a resource hub to help small businesses with the things they aren't good at or experienced with, i.e. website development, e-commerce, marketing, graphic design, etc. One stop shop with various vendors, office with professionals where the first help is free and after that available by subscription, shared workspace, Chamber seminar series, makerspace, childcare.
- Obtain a grant or donation to bring back or create community events, i.e. fireworks, 1st Friday where businesses stay open late and there are additional things going on downtown, etc.
- Do not have a scattershot approach to funding; there should be filters for eligibility. Façade improvement should be used to attract new businesses.
- Survey to ask businesses what they need and need money for. Many are having trouble attracting staff and prices are increasing that they are worried about passing on to their customers.

Several board members asked for some education on broadband. Mr. Carlson thanked the presenters. Mr. Fortuna asked Ms. Sullivan about what she thought could make a broad impact. She noted that having more staff at the Chamber to provide some of the things discussed would be meaningful.

V. OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Carlson suggested that at the next meeting, rather than having more guest presenters, that the committee begin to discuss the information that has been presented to date to digest some of that. Mr. Fortuna pointed out that there are two more groups that have expressed interest in having an audience with the committee.

VII. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

There were no additional comments from committee members.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Zavatone made a **MOTION** to adjourn at 6:15 p.m. Ms. Esty seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Tuesday, April 12, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Hall first-floor conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Donahue