Northwest Colorado Council of Governments eNews
SPECIAL EDITION #1 COVID-19 2020

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SPECIAL EDITIONS

News is developing as fast as the speed of the spread of the virus. For the next few weeks - hopefully not months -- we'll publish more frequently as needed to get the most current information to our members. If you have information you think should be shared on this newsletter, please send suggested content to jstavney@nwccog.org.

From the Director's Desk:
May Town contact your Landlord? Towns get creative in helping businesses during COVID

Some small things are a big deal. Nancy Kerry and the Town of Frisco are doing something outstanding for businesses amid the COVID-19 crisis-providing a source of information and doing some listening. It is not lost on many municipalities that the bulk of their operating revenues come from sales tax collected through local businesses, but many outsource the community relationship to a local chamber. At least in this case, the Town of Frisco has stepped into the vacuum created by the crisis. Frisco is not alone in connecting with businesses while many local governments are primarily focused on community response. Just up the road, Eric Mamula, Mayor of Breckenridge and local restaurateur is doing something similar.

The Town of Frisco started hosting one-hour, twice per week Go-To- Meeting calls for local businesses within a week of the first COVID-19 cases in the County. The business community outreach in Frisco is led by Town Manager Nancy Kerry. The video conference calls have been well attended as is evident while listening, greatly appreciated.

The message in these calls is overt-she says, "government only succeeds when businesses succeed," and implicit-stay calm, we are in this together, we care, we are

here to serve-which is crystal clear to anyone participating business owners, not to mention staff and officials who listen in.

The first topic led by Kerry who had clearly done her homework was getting owners on common ground with relevant information on resources (and restrictions) currently coming down from County, State and Federal governments with insight gathered from the town's D.C. lobbyist.   The relief landscape is a dynamic, changing by the day, and as Kerry points out, worth some coaching and warnings about third party scammers. "Get your information directly from the source of any grant or relief," she warned.

Topic two is listening while callers answer the question, "What would help your business coming from the town in the next 60 to 90 days?"

A lot of good ideas emerged from the discussion that I listened to; such as: the town sending letters to business landlords sharing what town is doing while requesting that landlords work with small local business owners and consider waiving rent temporarily (will share document). Like the town considering deferring utility payments without penalty for a period. Repurposing newly hired Housing Coordinator with three other staffers to act as a Strategic Economic Response Team (SERT) and act as the liaison to employers, residents, and the community at large during the crisis (because of regular conversations between towns in Summit, Breckenridge is also considering that action).   Frisco also gets feedback on some ideas they may have thought were worthwhile and may be told are not very helpful. One example: should Frisco replicate a program the Town of Breckenridge is considering distributing $5K - $10K grants to local businesses that meet certain criteria? Town may still consider the program, but initial input was that business owners need an order of magnitude of $50K to $250K to be meaningful.   The landlord letters were an idea that seemed to be embraced.

Kerry's father was an inventor and business owner. When she went into public management her "dad said I went to the dark side" when as she says, she "entered the world I saw was impeding business success." She notes that "businesses sell and buy and collect from customers revenue that feeds the government who then, in turn, provide those services private sector doesn't typically cover due to a low ROI, so... I don't know why people don't see that."

In one of Mayor Mamulas' calls which have a similar form as Friscos, he said that the town does not have authority to prevent evictions of businesses but that he would personally work with any business having trouble with their landlords. That is a promise easier made by an elected official than town administrator. Mamula also struck an upbeat note suggesting that when the town is "open for business again" there would be a lot of "pent up demand for those looking to recreate in the mountains... and the town will be ready." Providing hope that there is light on the other end of this situation is important.

These are just two examples of municipal active engagement with the small business community. From NWCCOG's perspective right now, these calls are best practices during Small Town Business in the time of COVID. They are probably worth carrying on quarterly even after to leverage the relationships an efficiency of a conference call format. Many area towns are actively working on similar efforts according to Summit Daily.

The calls take tremendous preparation, so it is worth noting that the Town of Frisco is already talking of shifting this liaison role to the Summit (County) Chamber so this information sharing can happen on a more regional level without "duplication." That makes sense, but kudos on the front end of this for leaders in these two communities to lean-in to a relationship that is often outsourced to a chamber, and often and easily

neglected. Perhaps it goes without saying that those communities that can retain their talent and sales tax base will be better positioned to rebound when this is over. Who thought that might only take a phone call?

Jon Stavney

Executive Director

jstavney@nwccog.org