An overview of how the pandemic has impacted the restaurant industry in NH

Nicholas W with the COVID 19 rates and thinking about the “what if another lock down is possible, I invited Mike Somers here to discuss resources for our local restaurant owners and how best we can support them.

Mike S Our hospitality industry has been impacted on March 16 within days our restaurants and hotels lost so much in food they had to throw out & alcohol revenue for St Patrick’s Day and then employees that were sent home. I sit on the Governor’s Reopening Task Force. I am working on the restaurant & hotel safe guidance applications with the state. The addition to add take out for alcohol we wrote, and it became very helpful, then came outdoor dining guidelines, the COVID numbers declined and we saw revenue for restaurants and hotels climb back 100%. The Governor relaxed restrictions and for some restaurants they were allowed inside seating @ 50% or what could handle seating with 6ft social distancing. We have worked with owners for ideas to construct barriers between tables and with that we saw most restaurants get creative and found they can seat up to 80%. Some establishments with cares act money were able to get through the tough time but we saw about 10% of businesses that we have lost. Now over the next few months we are looking at our most difficult time. Without so much of the work we have done to keep them going, which it has helped, now the weather has us moving indoors and with media feeding on infection rate and all the COVID negativity it has added to the population becoming more terrified of this thing and they are staying away even without a shut down. The state is terrified of the numbers after that happened after Halloween and they know the Thanksgiving Holiday will create a spike. Business is down 50 - 60 % in just the last 2 weeks. We have been actively working with NH.gov for businesses in the hospitality industry that are affected, and congress has to take action to support these businesses. Small business needs it!

Nicholas W in the event we go back into a lock down I would like to have something available on the town web site to possibly help point them in the right direction

Mike S I would not take that on, the guidelines are constantly changing and to maintain the updates takes to much time.

Mike S guide them to the states web site and the state is helping there BEA website. We have a page that we try to take all the information for state and federal and drill it down to information that is specifically for this industry. As far as a shut down from the Governor’s office, we have been assured that it is not going to happen again. It did so much damage the first time and we have more knowledge to do more to help them to in ways other than a shut down. If you close then the loss rate will go out the roof.

Alden B what about indoor infiltration systems?
Mike S the restaurant air systems are not like an office system. The hood system is so much more that it replaces the air every 8 mins.

Alden B so it is safer to be in a restaurant

Mike S It is! We are working on how to get this information out that the air is cycled better. We are working on messaging for that important information.

Other air treatments and what is not clear what is that effectiveness no one really knows, not even the CDC. There is some much out there being sold as effective, but it is not proven, and it is very costly to add these systems to clean the air without scientific proof.

Mark C It has affected so many, even the churches that are struggling to raise money.

Mike S the next 3 to 4 months will be interesting. Congress will help, but not right now. Some businesses have capital that they can pull from to get them through the tough times. The small ones through do not have anything in the till to get them through shutting down.

Jim S the restaurant I work at is nowhere near peak business. One thing you touch at, was the outdoor dining that was allowed. I appreciate the town did that for its businesses. From the safety end and the safety protocols we have to move to is important. Get out the word they are putting these measures in place.

Mike S we have tried but it was not picked up by the media they only want the other side of the pandemic. We are struggling to break through the noise.

Matt B Sometimes it is not feasible to only have 50% capacity.

RSA 72:80 – 83 Commercial and Industrial Construction Tax Exemption

Review and revise list of Parcels this exemption applies and motion to recommend to Town Council for approval

David Scarpetti and Paul Scarpetti have recused themselves from this discussion and action

Matt Barrett acting Chair - we are here to make recommendation to Town Council for application of RSA 72:80-83 and the parcels that have been identified for this exemption.

Nicholas W reviewed the staff report prepared for Town Council - Recommend RSA 72:80. I want to be clear it is a recommendation for Town Council to approve. They can add or remove any recommendations. I have not added or remove any that had been previously recommended.

Mark C does the property owner get this if they just say they are going to do work?

Nicholas W they have to apply for site plan approval to Planning Board and present an application to Town Council. There is a 20% of improvement to the property and the exemption is only for a determined amount of time

Roger Duhaime joined the meeting at 5:33

Jim S these parcels that is on the list were chosen because of certain criteria, if another parcel is not on this list then they could apply if they meet these criteria?

Nicholas W So the only criteria required to be designate is IND or COM use. When we looked at this list with Planning Board, these were chosen because they were underutilized or dilapidated. This is the original list.

Motion by send the Staff Report as presented to Town Council for approval was made by Mark Chagnon, 2nd by Matt Barrett.

All in favor, motion passed

David S we had a TIF update and the sewer department has agreed to work with customers to set up payment plans for connection fees. We have met with several businesses and we need to continue to get together with these businesses. Things are going along well. These discussions have determined some alternative line locations that provide cost savings to the parcel owners.

Nicholas invited Alden to speak on a new topic.

Alden B I am asking for impute from EDAC on a group that wants to develop off Technology Dr, at exit 10. They have an agreement in place with Amazon for additional parking. They have used vacant spaces
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in different locations for necessary parking but now they are looking to flatten a parcel at the end of Technology Dr with blasting. They are in a Mixed Use District and the parking is not an allowed use and I am looking to add remote parking to the allowed use. Nicholas gave me guidance as to help. At the end of the day we want to keep good businesses. We want to keep Amazon and other businesses that need remote parking. In COM districts it is an allowed use, that area of Technology Dr is not zoned COM. The way the rules are written they have to build a building but to justify the construction of a building the size required for that many parking spaces is not realistic. We need to propose remote parking for an accessory use. We don’t want to see an ordinance where we allow parking lots but if we allow accessory parking then a site can be shovel ready. The best use may not be parking but if you have the infrastructure then the property will become more valuable.

Paul S would it be paved? I think it should be required to be paved and have a sunset clause to allow for a 1 yr basis or maybe 2. This may show that we are willing to work with them and we want them to stay and support them.

Roger D when this has happened in other communities that have been granted temporary parking with and expiration clause and at the end of the term they did end up staying and building.

Alden B we have a window right now and possibly propose this to the Planning Board. They have an agreement with Amazon and they are ready to go.

Mark C I was looking over the Ambassador program I would like to tackle bring that back myself with the board approval I think there is a lot we can do with that program.

David S we can bring that discussion to the next meeting

Motion to adjourn made by Mark C 2nd by Paul S @ 5:50, all in favor

Next Scheduled Meeting: December 16th @ 5pm

Minutes Respectfully Submitted by:
Kathy Lawrence

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