

Economic Advisory Commission Meeting Summary October 13, 2020

The October 13 Economic Advisory Commission was held virtually via Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Supervisor Foust began the meeting explaining that as such the meeting had to follow certain procedures due to FOIA and Fairfax County's Emergency Ordinance. The first requirement was that all EAC members could hear the proceedings from their individual locations. Those who could not were asked to raise hands or send a message through the chat box. EAC members were also requested to send their general location through the chat feature or send a message to Vance Zavela at Vance.Zavela@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Supervisor Foust then handed over the gavel to Supervisor Storck to preside over the following motions that address the need for an electronic meeting and dispensing with normal FOIA procedures for continuity of operations during the pandemic:

- 1) Moved that "the State of Emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it unsafe for the Economic Advisory Commission to physically assemble and unsafe for the public to physically attend any such meeting, and that as such, FOIA's usual procedures, which require the physical assembly of the Economic Advisory Commission and the physical presence of the public, cannot be implemented safely or practically. I further move that the Economic Advisory Commission may conduct this meeting electronically through a dedicated video and audio conferencing line, and that the public may access this meeting by calling 602 333 0032 and entering access code 167352." It was approved unanimously.
- 2) Moved that "all of the matters addressed on today's agenda must address the Emergency itself, are necessary for continuity in Fairfax County government, and/or are statutorily required or necessary to continue operations and the discharge of the Economic Advisory Commission's lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities." It was approved unanimously.

In his introductory remarks, Supervisor Foust thanked all County agencies for their work during the pandemic. He also thanked the Board of Supervisors for leading the way in aiding our vulnerable populations and small business community, highlighting the tremendous success in the RISE Grant program and how it specifically targeted support to the small, women, minority and veteran-owned businesses with fewer than 50 employees. He was followed by BOS Chairman McKay, who emphasized that the economic recovery will not be swift but will be a long process with the implementation of a solid economic recovery framework.

Economic Recovery Framework Presentation by Jeff Hebert and Olivia Moss – HR&A

HR&A was hired by the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority to develop an economic recovery framework for the current COVID-19 pandemic. Their first step has been to engage various stakeholders (County officials, civic leaders, health service providers, major employers, small business, minority chambers of commerce, and higher education) in a series of small focus groups to identify needs. The key takeaways so far have been: 1) to address inequities that existed prior to the pandemic; to take a targeted approach based on specific sectors impacted (e.g. food services, personal care and service, office/administrative, sales and retail); to address services that transcend all sectors (childcare, critical resources); to look to the County to streamline processes for businesses to recover and to build consumer confidence; and create a new normal that brings opportunities equally to all businesses to thrive. Some

examples around the United States were presented for Fairfax County to consider. Here are the important **next steps** in the work:

- 1. Complete stakeholder outreach and engagement**
- 2. Develop Working Recovery Framework**
- 3. Conduct impact analysis and identify recovery scenarios**
- 4. Develop final report, including strategy and program recommendations**

During the discussion DPD Director Barbara Byron reported on the success of the outdoor seating the Board of Supervisors allowed at its July 14 meeting. No permits have been required for tents used for outdoor dining that are under 900 square feet. There have been no complaints filed by any establishments of the new ordinance, which will be amended to allow for sides during the colder winter months. Deputy County Executive Rachel Flynn added that a total of 5 permits have been issued for tents exceeding 900 square feet. (This topic was not addressed later in the meeting.)

HR&A will seek input from the Board of Supervisors at the November 10 Economic Initiatives Committee meeting.

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Fairfax County Hospitality Sector Presentation by Mark Carrier and Barry Biggar, Visit Fairfax

Mark Carrier's presentation was done via video. (His written comments will be available to all EAC members.) He noted that the pandemic has affected all types of travel: business, government, and leisure. Four out of ten hotel workers are currently unemployed, with six out of ten out of work in the BF Saul company. Over 66% of hotels operating below 50% in revenue which does not cover fixed costs. In Fairfax County, occupancy is down to 32% during the six months of the crisis compared with 76% for the same period a year ago. He had four recommendations for Fairfax County in the recovery: **1) implement policies to get business centers like Tysons back to work; 2) advocate to federal elected officials to pursue policies helpful to the industry; 3) support Visit Fairfax with additional funding; and 4) formulate a regulatory environment that is flexible.**

Visit Fairfax CEO Barry Biggar followed with a PowerPoint presentation focused on the hotel industry. He discussed occupancy and rates charged. He stated that Fairfax County hit a record for tourism in 2019, generating \$3.5 billion in revenue. Most of the downturn happened in March and April as occupancy declined from 71% to 19%. Hotel revenue (generated by rooms only) dropped a total of \$279 million since March. From March through August Fairfax County has lost a total of \$16.7 million in tax revenue from occupancy tax. Visit Fairfax has started a 3-phase strategy: market locally, inspire travel, and then ramp up marketing beyond Fairfax County. Currently, most travelers do not feel safe traveling so consumer confidence needs to improve. Most travel, except leisure, will not see improvement until 2021 or 2022 if consumer confidence improves. The Mount Vernon Tourism Task Force has been working on a hyper-local travel focus that involves local travel packages for residents involving safe, outdoor activities.

The CAV update did not happen due to lack of time. All EAC members have the written update. Meeting was adjourned.