

COVID-19 ECONOMIC STABILIZATION TEAM

Meeting Minutes

Date: August 20, 2020 **Location:** Online ZOOM **Time:** 7:00 – 8:15 pm

Participants: 6 Total (Meeting open to the public)

City Council Members:

Susan Warner, Joe Clark

General Participants:

Leah Okin, Jane Olney, Whitney Rapp, Aimee Youmans,

Introduction: This was the fifth and last in a series of informal conversations among Gustavus Community members on stabilizing our local economy and providing for a long-term recovery from the financial impacts of the COVID-19 virus.

Agenda: The CARES Act Federal subsidies to address the public health and negative financial impacts of the COVID 19 virus expire on December 31st, 2020. So, what then? There might be another round, continuing to inflate our record levels of National debt. Or, there might not. We're fine for this year, not to panic, but what about next year? And the year after that?

How can the community inspire and energize the City Government to pivot away from dependence on Federal and State handouts (with any gaps to be deficit-funded from previous year savings) and move toward a more sustainable and well balanced operating budget which *"shall take a measured approach to expand City services only when population growth and revenue growth, or other savings, can sustain these services in the long term"*, as asserted in the City Resolution CY19-16, passed last September.

Let's discuss any ideas you might have for a future path.

Discussion:

The Gustavus Visitors Association recently hired Cedar Group Marketing consultants of Juneau to work up a strategic plan "Blueprint" for their next marketing efforts for tourism recovery. *(The report is available in the packet for the City Council General Meeting of August 10th page 53 or see the "View Details" link for this August 20th Task Force meeting on the City's "Meetings" page).* A key finding of that report was that Gustavus should focus marketing efforts on independent travelers, specifically 4 audiences: return travelers, the independent family, independent artists, and independent adventure travelers.

Leah said her big take-away from Cedar Group was that Gustavus needed to clarify a "Gustavus Story", unique from Glacier Bay National Park, and replicate that story across

multiple web sites, different Gustavus business approaches to how they advertise their services, and multiple channels of appeal to the target audiences.

Council member Clark offered various content suggestions for building that “Gustavus Story”:

- Developing and distributing packets of reasons to visit and stay (longer) in Gustavus
- Producing a video of things to do, places to go, places to see, stories from history (such as plane crash, WWII), famous people who have visited, etc. and then offer local screenings as an activity

Leah stated that a short (5 minute) Gustavus promotional video was currently in production

Jane Olney re-mentioned festivals as an attraction for travelers, recalled the “Year of the Bear” event of a previous year. Jane also mentioned an idea that was considered in the past for a fish hatchery at Falls Creek or Good River.

There was quite a bit of interest in working up a proposal for Council consideration of dedicating some to the current CARES Act funding to support local businesses to providing assistance for individual business owners to get a discount for purchasing web developer assistance to re-align their present web sites to incorporate elements of this “Gustavus Story” and fine tune their social media and site’s appeal to the four targeted audiences. Council members Warner and Clark will work on developing this idea for Council consideration.

Council member Warner then mentioned a large scale, privately funded project to create a world-class experiential science exhibit out at the Park was just getting organized to start up. Stay tuned for future developments on that.

That project will require next generation Internet Broadband (a globally deployed service) to be available in Gustavus as well, so connecting to that will constitute a parallel project for the next few years. Stay tuned on that as well.

Council member Warner mentioned a current USDA grant opportunity to gain planning and technical assistance that could help build capacity for rural broadband expansion, with a 15% match. Very short timeline, with applications due by Sept 15th (*see the “View Details” link for this August 20th meeting on the City “Meetings” page*). It’s likely that Gustavus is not ready to take advantage of this particular opportunity at this time.

This concludes the efforts of the COVID-19 Economic Stabilization Task Force work group, at least in this configuration of Council members. The new Council, elected in six weeks, may decide to re-charge and continue such an informal and conversational work group, create a formal Finance Special Committee of the Council, or take some other approach to reckoning the future funding for City Government of Gustavus, particularly in recovering from negative financial impacts of the virus.