

City of Santa Barbara
COVID-19 Business Advisory Task Force
April 24 Meeting Summary

- All 22 Business Advisory Task Force members were able to join and participate in the kick off meeting with Mayor Cathy Murillo and City staff
- Nancy Anderson with the County provided an overview of the County's efforts to prepare to respond to the Governor's six points to reopening the economy. The County is working with a consultant and business sector stakeholder groups to inform the development of business sector recovery plans for each sector.
- Questions clarifying that the City and County's economies reopening were contingent on the State modifying the stay at home order. Emphasis was made on the need for City/County to have a **business sector reopening plan** prepared in advance of the State modifying the stay at home order. Also discussion on preparing a **County/City communication and marketing plan** to inform the public that the region/City were open for business, highlighted that a professional marketing effort was needed, reference made to Visit Santa Barbara having that experience. **TOPICS TO BE PURSUED.**
- Task Force members all introduced themselves.
- Clare with EDC and Kathy with WEV gave informative updates on the federal financial assistance programs, the small percentage of local businesses who were successful in receiving funding. Concerns were raised about the small "mom and pop" businesses who were unaware of the programs and/or who have not been successful with their applications. Several business owners stated that they had been successful in their PPP applications and were willing to share their experience in applying with others.
- Paul with the City gave summary comments on the City's efforts to protect the critical public safety and city service operators, evaluation of the declining tax revenues and needs to adjust the City's budget and service levels.
- Nina with the City gave a comprehensive overview of the City's communication efforts on business assistance, Spanish language resources and City service handouts as well as social media, newsletter and email blasts.
- Task Force members each contributed ideas, suggestions, recommendations, opinions and personal experiences as outlined below (Ideas/Recommendations/Emphasis in **bold**):
 - Committed to reopening their business but concerned how to operate in the new normal, phased reopening and public concerns.
 - **Idea to ease regulations to allow expansion of dining into parking areas/sidewalks.**

- Concern raised about what level of commercial vacancy will be created by the pandemic and **emphasis on the need for the City to streamline the regulatory permitting process** to help expedite business investment.
- Reference to fundraising efforts made to support laid off employees, advocacy for improving the permitting process and design and development requirements and opportunities to utilize events to help in promotion and business recovery.
- **Recommendation to incorporate messaging about safe to go out with protections in PR/Communication efforts.** Noted that not all business sectors affected the same, they will have different needs and issues to address. **Recommendation to engage ABC about restrictions.**
- College has large population of students and employees eager to reengage in the community, opportunity to pursue. Hopeful for fall on-site classes. Also, SBCC has adult education/carrier rebrand program. **Emphasis of an opportunity to partner with City and County on workforce development.**
- Property owner state their tenants have strong interest to reopen. **Recommendation to allow use of parking lots for commercial retail or restaurant uses,** marketing opportunities. **Emphasis on the need to have collective marketing efforts that are well coordinated.** Stated that this was an opportunity to find efficiency in the development review process.
- **Emphasis that the different hotel classes will have different levels of operating conditions.** **Recommendation that the City consider deferring the TOT obligation or a phased payment of tax.**
- **Emphasis of well thought marketing campaign that is coordinated with reopening and public safety requirement.**
- **Recommendation to reimagine retail spaces/repurpose buildings. Emphasis to diversify the economy, generate confidence of the public to come out.**
- Statement that this is the time for leadership and opportunity to reimage the normal
- **Emphasis that this is the time to be bold, different, entrepreneurial as well as look to new ways of doing things.**
- Concern raised on the service workers, those with no savings or emergency funds, the impact to their lives and future. Local business initiated a philanthropic initiative.
- **Emphasis to focus marketing on telling unique, local stories.**
- Business may need to rework their business models and operations to adjust to the new normal.
- Mutual agreement that we will need to collectively work together to make it through this, like a “no business left behind” collaboration effort.
- Stated reality that the federal loan programs are not going to save businesses. Collective feedback from many that the City needs to reevaluate practices and processes to help businesses get up and running.
- City staff and Mayor expressed gratitude for the task force members thoughtful input, recommendations and ideas.