

# Economic Development Committee of the Fitchburg City Council

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

## Meeting Minutes

### Members Present:

Councilor Andrew Van Hazinga, *Chair*  
Councilor Marcus DiNatale  
Councilor Bernard Schultz  
Councilor Samantha Squailia

### Members Absent:

Councilor Marisa Fleming

### Others Present:

Councilor Michael Kushmerek, *Council President*  
Tom Skwierawski, *Executive Director of Planning & Community Development*  
Mary Jo Bohart, *Economic Development Director*  
Glenn Fossa, petitioner

Chairman Van Hazinga brought the meeting to order at 5:31pm. He read the one Agenda item (Petition 127-20) into the record. He then asked for public comment.

In his public comment, Councilor Kushmerek stated that the City of Fitchburg should be applauded for the municipality's immediate response actions thus far to the COVID-19 crisis, working closely with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor as well as local and regional leaders. Councilor Kushmerek noted that he has appointed Councilor Van Hazinga to serve as the Council's representative to a new reopening advisory task force being formed by the Mayor's office.

Councilor Van Hazinga read a communication he received from local resident Kent Bourgault, who was a longtime manager of Shack's Clothing and is the current interim president of Fitchburg PRIDE. Mr. Bourgault suggested that any taskforce such as the one being discussed also include Fitchburg businesses not located on Main Street.

Tom Skwierawski provided background information on an advisory task force presently being formed by the City of Fitchburg regarding the economic reopening following the pandemic quarantine efforts. The task force will be comprised of a mix of city staff and officials, private business representatives, and several key nonprofit organizations that work closely with the business community. Business representatives serving on the task force will be drawn from several different sectors of Fitchburg's economy, including banking, real estate, retail, services, personal services, and the city's largest employers FSU and Great Wolf Lodge. The composition of the task force is expected to be announced on Friday, May 29 with the initial meeting held the following week.

Mr. Skwierawski stated that the intent of the reopening advisory task force is multi-fold, including:

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- Providing information and assistance to businesses in meeting requirements of the Commonwealth's reopening plan, including clarification regarding the phased reopening, technical assistance toward development and implementation of required COVID-19 Control Plans, best practices in operating during the pandemic, and help obtaining necessary protective equipment and cleaning supplies.
- Gathering information from businesses as to how City ordinances and procedures can be changed to be more effective in supporting businesses as they reopen and reduce policy barriers.
- A subcommittee will also be formed to focus on how to reopen Fitchburg's municipal offices to the public.

Mr. Glenn Fossa joined the meeting at approximately 5:40 pm and was given the opportunity to provide public comment regarding the petition. Mr. Fossa explained that his petition was intended to encourage participation by local businesses in the city's reopening planning following COVID-19. He added that Fitchburg should be bold and innovative in its approach to helping small businesses during this very challenging time.

Councilor DiNatale expressed support regarding the intent of the petition, but concern at the use of a petition to govern a solely executive function of the government, noting that it is at the sole discretion of the Mayor's office to determine who would serve on an advisory reopening committee. He stated that, as a result, a petition would have to be non-binding.

Councilor Schultz suggested that the general intent of the petition may be something the Mayor could take under advisement when forming the reopening committee. He also recommended that the proposed task force currently being formed possibly include manufacturing and tradesman representatives.

Councilor Squailia stated she would be fine voting for the petition and recommended that it may be revised to reference that it is non-binding and advisory.

Mr. Fossa said that he spoke with Councilor Beth Walsh prior to bringing forward his petition, and he used the petition because it was the best way for his ideas on reopening advisement to be brought before the full City Council, including the associated documentation that accompanies a petition. Mr. Fossa added that he would not be upset if his ideas were reduced from a petition to a resolution instead. His aim is to see local involvement formalized for the reopening planning.

Councilor DiNatale stated that, procedurally, since the item was submitted in petition format, a vote would need to occur to either accept or reject that petition. He added that accepted petitions lead to the drafting of an ordinance, whereas a resolution would be non-binding.

Councilor DiNatale expressed concern with the petition because the reopening committee that is presently being formed will be created and already operational prior to the next City Council meeting. He expressed support for the intent of the petition, but feels that this issue should not be decided by a vote of the City Council.

Councilor Van Hazinga expressed support for the intent of the petition, but noted that business representatives from different sectors of the Fitchburg economy were already being incorporated into the reopening task force being formed by the Mayor's office. The timing of the petition also limits its relevancy as the composition of the reopening task force will be announced prior to this petition being heard by the City Council.

Councilor Schulz asked if a motion could be made to consider Mr. Fossa's petition instead as a resolution. A discussion followed as to what freedom the committee has to change the form of the petition. Councilor Schultz suggested holding this petition since the reopening advisory is already being formed and the Mayor will be announcing it on Friday (May 29).

After the discussion, Mr. Fossa recommended that it would be best for his Petition 127-20 to be given leave to withdraw.

**Vote:**

A motion was made by Councilor DiNatale and seconded by Councilor Schultz for Petition 127-20 to be given leave to withdraw. The motion passed unanimously (4:0) by roll call vote.

Chairman Van Hazinga asked for a motion to adjourn. Councilor Schultz so moved with Councilor DiNatale seconding the motion. It passed unanimously (4:0), and the Economic Development Committee of the City Council adjourned at approximately 5:15 pm.