



CITY OF BLAINE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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Memorandum: Economic Development & Tourism Program and COVID-19 Response

Date: July 22, 2020
To: The Blaine City Council
From: Stacie Pratschner, AICP, RPA: Community Development Services Director
Re: **Economic Development Updated: COVID-19 Responses**

Background/Summary

This memorandum is being provided in advance of the July 27, 2020 City Council meeting at the request of the City Manager. The purpose of this memo is to describe the economic development efforts of the City since March 2020 to provide post-pandemic financial and material support to local Blaine businesses. The City's objective is to receive the Council's feedback on the proposed programs, and determine if there is majority support for continued efforts on the below-described economic development initiatives.

The Economic Development and Tourism program was created in 2019¹, and the yearly work program for the Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator was presented to Council in early 2020.² This Work Plan has been amended subsequent to City's Declaration of Local Emergency in response to COVID19 in early March 2020.³ The four programs described in the next section of this memo constitute those amendments. Already-scheduled programs, such as the Blaine-by-the-Sea website development, are still in progress and will augment the COVID-responsive proposals described below.

COVID-Responsive Economic Development Initiatives

Whatcom County entered into Phase 2 of Washington's Safe Start Plan on June 5, 2020. The continued requirements for social distancing, in combination with the partial re-opening of the economy, have resulted in local businesses needing to adjust their service models in order to remain open.

The following economic development initiatives demonstrate partnerships within different Departments in the City; Whatcom County; the Blaine Chamber of Commerce; and local stakeholders to assist Blaine businesses:

¹ Mr. Alex Wenger accepted the position of Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator in late Fall of 2019. Staffing levels were such that he continued in his role as the Planner II for CDS until January 2020.

² City Council Retreat: March 2, 2020

³ Resolution 1800-20 and Governor's Proclamation 20-25.

G Street Plaza Dining Experience

This program will provide an outdoor dining experience in a public space while meeting the social distancing standards of the Governor's Safe Reopening Plan. Tables, chairs, umbrellas, lighting and flower pots will be installed with a perimeter demarcation meeting Washington State Liquor Cannabis Control Board (LCCB) special event permit requirements. Menus of local restaurants will be posted in the windows of the adjacent building; the property owner has issued their written consent. The menus will be installed with signage for the public and backed with black felt paper to block out the entire window. There may be opportunities for local retailers to sell their products on the Plaza.

Peace Portal Drive Parking Lane Outdoor Dining

The City is submitting application materials to WSDOT (Peace Portal is a state highway) to demarcate a select number of parking spaces adjacent to Peace Portal Drive. The City has received requests from a number of businesses adjacent to Peace Portal Drive whom would like to expand their dining operations outside. Subsequent to WSDOT's approval, the City will bring forward an Inter-agency agreement between Blaine and WSDOT for Council's consideration.

Whatcom ReStart Business Assistance Grant Program⁴

This program being implemented through the Regional Economic Partnership provides grants to eligible local businesses. The City will form a grant-ranking committee to review applications within Blaine. Staff recommends that the committee be comprised of the current Rural Economic Development (RED) Loan Committee members plus staff, or the members of the Council Finance Committee plus staff. Staff needs Council direction on organizing the ReStart grant group.

City Rural Economic Development (RED) Loan Program

The RED Revolving Loan Board (the Board) was reconvened by Resolution 1810-20. The Board received, reviewed and approved 4 RED Loan applications. Notice of loan approvals was issued June 10th. City legal counsel provided a draft loan agreement July 9th.

Next Steps

CDS requests that the Council consider if they support the City continuing to apply resources to the described economic development initiatives. Specifically, we request direction to continue pursuing the Peace Portal Drive parking lane closure or not, and a choice on the makeup of the ReStart grant committee.

⁴ <https://www.portofbellingham.com/935/Business-Assistance-Grant>