

ATLANTIC CITY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

Zoom Conference Call

1) REMARKS FROM DCA ACTING CHIEF OF STAFF AND ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KIM HOLMES ON BEHALF OF LT. GOVERNOR SHEILA OLIVER

- a) Unfortunately, Lt. Governor Oliver can't attend today's Zoom call for the Atlantic City Executive Council because she is working with Governor Murphy on the state's coronavirus response. Therefore, I will be providing remarks on her behalf.
- b) We are in the midst of a massive public health emergency and related economic crisis. Many of us know people who are or were sick from COVID-19 and sadly some of us know people who have died from the virus.
- c) It has become a normal part of life to maintain physical distance from family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, which has affected our social support system of people we all rely on for our well-being.
- d) So many of our fellow New Jerseyans and Americans have lost their jobs and their ability to cover housing costs and pay for food.
- e) We are all anxious about the future of our nation, state, and community and we are all thinking about when it will be possible to return to normal daily life and social interaction.
- f) All of these extraordinary challenges make our collective efforts to strengthen and revitalize Atlantic City that much more important.
- g) Governor Murphy, Lt. Governor Oliver, and DCA recognize the extreme financial impact the coronavirus pandemic will have on the city and surrounding region, in particular, because of the casino closings and tourism shutdown and the ripple effect this has on other businesses that are connected with these industries.
- h) We understand the severe impact the pandemic is having on homeowners, landlords, and other property owners and the implication this has for the city's property tax base and, ultimately, its finances.
- i) We also know that renters are struggling to pay their bills and that people of limited financial means and individuals who are homeless are facing dire circumstances, which is straining the resources of local non-profit organizations. The scale of the crisis is breathtaking.
- j) We are already taking action on some fronts.
- k) Starting today, the City is opening two Covid-19 testing sites specifically for Atlantic City residents. There is a walk-up site in the parking lot across from Showboat and a drive-thru site at Bader Field. Mayor Small will have more to say about these testing sites in his remarks, but we believe these testing sites are critical to the health of people who live in the city and critical to the eventual reopening of the community.
- l) The CRDA and City are also leading a "Hot Meals for Seniors" initiative that will provide each senior living within 11 apartment buildings with one hot meal, twice a week for four weeks. The meals will be delivered by personnel from the City's police and fire departments, and public works.
- m) These are great efforts. They show how extremely important it is to continue and even double down on the work of the Atlantic City Executive Council.

- n) While the coronavirus pandemic has created a “we’re all in this together” attitude across our country and the world, the Executive Council’s work of the past 18 months demonstrates that we’ve already successfully adopted this approach.
- o) The Murphy Administration and so many others, including city residents, are incredibly grateful for the work this council has done to date and for the work it will continue to do.
- p) So, Lt. Governor Oliver encourages each of you to stay committed to the work ahead in Atlantic City and to use your expertise and creativity to move the city forward.
- q) When the crisis ends, as it most certainly will, we must be able to act quickly, efficiently, and with authority to get the city back on track.
- r) The Lt. Governor has every confidence that all of us on the Executive Council will not only rise to the challenge but will respond with a boldness that strengthens Atlantic City’s revitalization.

2) REMARKS FROM ATLANTIC CITY INITIATIVES PROJECT OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICHAEL EPPS

- a) Several issues have come to the forefront as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b) Food insecurity is the first. With people out of work, we have seen how real an issue this is. Even when things begin to get better, the Atlantic City Executive Council has to keep its eye on this issue. The Executive Council must work to improve city residents’ access to healthy food choices and information on making sound food decisions.
- c) Health disparity is the second issue. We are seeing that the coronavirus is impacting people in economically disadvantaged communities and people of color more than others because of underlying health disparities. The Executive Council must work to close this health gap so that if this type of thing were to reoccur, it wouldn’t affect these groups as badly as this virus has.
- d) Economic recovery is the third issue. City Council members have been working with the Mayor’s Office to get news and information about economic programs out to small businesses in the city. The city’s Office of Emergency Management has created a policy group to discuss concerns about reopening. The group is trying to collect questions and/or concerns about reopening. If Executive Council members have questions or concerns, they should email them to Mr. Epps by Thursday, April 30 since the policy group is meeting on Friday, May 1.

3) DISCUSSION ABOUT IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ATLANTIC CITY

- a) Steve Perskie, senior policy advisor for Mayor Small, said suggestions would be most welcome from the Atlantic City Executive Council about what Atlantic City’s message to potential visitors should be when the city is ready to reopen.
- b) Rosa Farias, deputy director of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA), reported that CRDA has funded close to \$200,000 worth of feeding initiatives, including the city’s “Hot Meals for Seniors” program and food distributions for city residents and unemployed casino workers.
- c) Steve Callender, president of the Casino Association of New Jersey (CANJ), reported that CANJ has partnered with AtlantiCare about health benchmarks and best practices for casinos to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19. CANJ is putting some protocols in place

- with AtlantiCare's blessing and hopes to have a press release about the best practices and protocols out by May 1.
- d) Michael Chait, president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, said the Chamber is starting to prepare small businesses and restaurants about a toolkit they can use to reopen. The Chamber is trying to determine the real economic impact of the virus via survey and to see if it can track some trends and use that information to direct businesses to assistance and help. He said some businesses are falling through the cracks of various assistance programs.
 - e) Max Slusher, economic development director for the Atlantic County Improvement Authority (ACIA), reported that the ACIA just conducted an economic impact study of the virus on Atlantic County. The study suggests that the county could lose 50% of output for March, April and May and 24 percent for the rest of the year. The impact for businesses at the shore is going to be twice as hard as the rest of the state. He said this is the region's third huge hit in 10 years (the Great Recession and Superstorm Sandy being the other two) and that it must diversify economically to better protect itself against economic downturns.
 - f) Liz Terenik of the Chelsea Economic Development Corporation said that a majority of small businesses in the Chelsea neighborhood of Atlantic City don't qualify for federal loans under the Cares Act or NJEDA loans because they are very small, seasonal, or don't have a relationship with a bank.
 - g) Max Slusher of ACIA said the next tranche of federal stimulus funding is supposed to go to small businesses without a relationship with a bank, but it is unclear how the federal government is going to push this money out.
 - h) Diane Sterner, community strategies director for New Jersey Community Capital (NJCC), said NJCC has a fund for small businesses of 3-50 people and is continually raising more money for it. She said she would send a link with information about the fund to Mike Epps.
 - i) Matt Doherty, executive director of CRDA, found that the NJEDA program for small businesses is extremely restrictive and that businesses in Atlantic City and Atlantic County don't really benefit. He said most city businesses that did apply for the EDA program were denied. He reported that right now the CRDA's task is to focus on food insecurity needs and play whatever role it can to assist small businesses during the pandemic.
 - j) Dr. Barbara Gaba, president of Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC), said ACCC's first summer is all online and most likely the second summer session will also be online. The college may have to even do online education in the fall. She reported that students, for the most part, have transitioned well. The school will have a revised grading system for this spring semester only to pass/fail since some students aren't as adept with technology as others. She said there is a lot of stress among students because many have lost jobs or are financially insecure. Dr. Gaba said that the Cares Act has allocated funds to help college students during this crisis. ACCC received \$2 million in this regard and is using it to help students so they can continue with their studies.
 - k) Brian Jackson, chief operating officer of the Atlantic City campus of Stockton University, said Stockton is also employing a pass/fail grading option for the spring semester. The university is hopeful it will have students come back to campus in the fall. The Atlantic City campus is looking at how to handle housing, classes and other services while incorporating social distancing.

4) ATLANTIC CITY UPDATE FROM MAYOR MARTY SMALL

- a) Thanked CRDA and Atlantic City Housing Authority for making the City of Atlantic City's "Hot Meals for Seniors" feeding program possible. The city's seniors were happy with the hot meals and there were no glitches in delivering the food. Four senior buildings were served yesterday.
- b) Today is the first day of the City of Atlantic City's COVID-19 testing, which took place at the Showboat hotel surface parking lot today. The drive-thru testing site at Bader Field will open tomorrow.
- c) The City hosted a small business webinar earlier this morning for city businesses struggling during the pandemic.
- d) The field hospital at the Atlantic City Convention Center is open.
- e) The Governor said we have to be sensible in reopening and the City of Atlantic City plans to follow that guidance.
- f) Atlantic City as of today has 75 cases of coronavirus and 5 deaths.
- g) Scheduled to meet with a lobbying firm this afternoon to work to get the City more money from the federal government. Right now, cities under 500,000 people are limited in the funding they can get to respond to and recover from the pandemic.

8) GOOD OF THE ORDER

- a) City of Atlantic City Business Administrator Anthony Swan reported that he is working with Bo Kemp, a city consultant, about the Bader Field design competition. Mr. Kemp completed a Gantt chart and sent it to the State for review. The first item on the Gantt chart is to set up a committee of reviewers for proposals submitted in the design competition.
- b) City of Atlantic City Planning Director Barbara Wooley Dillon reported that the planning office will soon be ready to hold public meetings to get public input on the City's master plan. The public meetings will be little different due to social distancing.
- c) Elijah Langford, community outreach manager for the Atlantic City Initiatives Project Office, is looking for any Executive Council members to offer Atlantic City youth opportunities for summer employment and internships. He is especially looking for technical internships for high school and college students.
- d) Stephanie Koch, chief executive officer of the Boys & Girls Club of Atlantic City, reported the organization has distributed 3,400 meals to city residents so far. It has moved its program online and is offering arts/crafts, homework help and cooking instruction for example. The organization is working with skeleton staff and around the clock but engagement is increasing.
- e) Liz Terenik of the Chelsea Economic Development Corporation said the organization is still moving forward with its plan to submit to the State its applications for the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit program. The corporation has found the issues of greatest importance to people in the Chelsea neighborhood are public safety, youth recreation, neighborhood beautification, and economic development.
- f) Bert Lopez of the Hispanic Association of Atlantic County reported on the organization's food distribution efforts in Atlantic City. The line for last Tuesday's food distribution wrapped around three to four blocks and they did have to turn a few people away. The next food distribution is this Saturday.

- g) Tom Hannon, executive director of the Atlantic City Housing Authority, thanked Executive Council members and the City for the efforts to make sure families living in the city's public housing facilities are getting food. He reported a higher level of anxiety among public housing residents and has directed his staff to make themselves seen in the public housing facilities to show that the Authority cares about residents' wellbeing. The challenging part will be keeping young people who live in the public housing communities constructively occupied since school buildings and community centers are closed due to the pandemic.
- h) Matt Doherty, executive director of the CRDA, reported that CRDA will be engaging a marketing firm about how to market Atlantic City in this challenging time.