

CITY OF UNION
Economic Development Committee
May 20, 2020 (via Zoom Videoconferencing)

Members in attendance:

Jeremy Ramage, Commissioner

John Cole

James Collett

Steve Harper, BCPC Union Representative

David Plummer, City Administrator

Melissa Hinkle, Communications and Operations Director

Bob Jonas, Boone County Planning Commission

Gene Kirchner, COO of NKY Chamber of Commerce

Mayor Larry Solomon

Meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. by Commissioner Jeremy Ramage.

Transportation Update: Administrator Plummer there were no major updates to the Mt. Zion project from the last meeting and work is continuing.

Boone County Planning Update: Mr. Jonas updated on the Urban Forestry Commission Request for Proposals (RFP) regarding the beautification of the Mt. Zion corridor. He and Kevin Costello of BCPC met with representatives from NKSK design in a planning meeting May 19th, and made some refinements to their initial thoughts and preliminary design ideas. They were instructed to move to more final plan drawings and to provide cost estimates and some phasing suggestions for the corridor project. Those items are due in early June and then they will reconvene stakeholder meetings with key groups, including city representatives, to proceed toward obtaining the final drawings and proposed phasing for the project. Those meetings will take place over the course of the summer and action will continue to move forward.

New Business: Administrator Plummer introduced Mr. Gene Kirchner, COO of the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Kirchner gave a presentation on the Pandemic Recovery Efforts being conducted by the Chamber and a review of the Economic Development efforts in the post-pandemic world. Mr. Kirchner noted that 85% of chamber members are small businesses, and they are a regional chamber, with 20% of members coming from Ohio, and a smaller percentage from Indiana.

He noted that there had been significant decline in production in several areas which are key to Northern Kentucky. Auto sales are down 38% and that travel and tourism has been impacted greatly by the pandemic, affecting city, county and non-profit budgets severely, including the budget of the chamber. He noted that air travel is downsizing and reassigning pilots, and that this could be possibly permanent changes

to the airport at CVG, as those pilots who are reassigned to other hubs may not return. He did note that cargo travel has been sustaining the airport for now, but that CVG will face significant budget issues in the future. He noted that the chamber had been providing a key role as a network for businesses to connect with other business owners during the pandemic to help exchange ideas and create new opportunities for sales and business. He also noted that several businesses, most notably the local breweries and distilleries, shifted production to needed PPE items such as sanitizer during these times.

Mr. Kirchner noted that the Chamber had shifted to an online format, providing a wealth of free programming items to both members and non-members during this time. They are hoping to help stem some of the economic impact of the pandemic, with small businesses suffering the most losses. Many of those small businesses are expected to close permanently, and the Chamber is predicting a 15-20% unemployment rate in the area for the next 12-18 months. He noted the efforts of the NKY Restaurant Relief Fund, which had generated cash grants to several area restaurants to help sustain them through these difficult times, with nearly \$100,000 raised to assist those business owners.

Mr. Kirchner noted three strategic goals for the Chamber: 1. Serving as one voice for the region, with one unified message of growth and opportunity; 2. Community and business engagement and retention and 3. Programs and events, many of which are continuing virtually throughout the summer and fall.

Mr. Cole asked if the Chamber thought that there would be fundamental changes to the way businesses operate in the area, and would we see more remote or tele-commuting work. Mr. Kirchner noted that there had been interest in some manufacturing sites in the NKY area as there is a strong desire for some manufacturing to return to the USA, and that anecdotally, they were hearing of the possibility of some permanent changes to the workplace environment, but that it was too soon to tell if those would actually occur. He noted those changes will come over time and the Chamber is ready to react to those changes.

Wednesday, June 17 at 6 p.m. was set for the next meeting date. The location (either virtual or face-to-face) is to be determined. The public is invited to attend.

The Meeting was formally adjourned at 7:04 pm by Commissioner Ramage.