



Town of Natick, Massachusetts
Department of Community and Economic Development
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James Freas
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 22, 2020

TO: Board of Selectmen

FROM: James Freas, Director of Community and Economic Development

SUBJECT: Business Recovery Plan

Meeting Date: May 26, 2020

Arising out of several concurrent conversations occurring with Natick Center Associates, the Economic Development Committee, and other Town staff, the Community and Economic Development Department is working on a Business Recovery Plan. Broadly, the objective of this plan is to find ways to be supportive and responsive as businesses navigate the challenges of reopening during the COVID 19 pandemic. We expect this effort to be iterative – rather than producing one plan that covers everything from now until the theoretical end of the pandemic, this effort is more of an ongoing process of problem identification and solution design. We are beginning our efforts focused primarily on restaurants and the challenge of expanding to outdoor operations.

For restaurants, and many other businesses that might seek outdoor operations, there are two primary challenges, one of regulation and the other of physical space. On the regulatory side, zoning and licensing requirements and processes present a number of barriers. Staff is working to identify the appropriate processes, permits, or policies necessary to allow outdoor operations. The space issue is challenging for different parts of the Town, particularly downtown. In any location, safety is important and so outdoor dining areas must be safe from passing vehicles. Staff is working on designs that might allow public spaces to be made available for outdoor seating.

For all of this work, staff is looking for solutions with two key ideas in mind – safety and flexibility. Safety is a key objective, particularly health safety in the face of the ongoing pandemic and we must be considerate of the safety of workers and customers. Flexibility is also important. The challenges are unprecedented and we must approach solutions with the idea that they are temporary and therefore can lend themselves to experimentation. We can try ideas and, if they don't work, we can tweak them and try again.

Ultimately, finding solutions that help Natick's local businesses stay a part of this community will require collaboration. Community and Economic Development will be working closely with Public Health, Police, Fire, DPW, and other Town staff as well as the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and the Economic Development Commission. We will also be reaching out to the business community and are already working closely with Natick Center Associates. We look forward to coming back to the BoS with more specific solutions at your next meeting.