

Gardiner Economic & Community Development Meeting
Zoom
07/08/21

Present: Tracy Desjardins (City of Gardiner Director of Development), Debbie Willis (chair), Melissa Lindley, Dennis Doiron, Colin Frey, Tamara Whitmore Guest: Renee Page of HCCA

Guest: Renee Page - Healthy Communities of the Capital Area

- Planning and preparation is important when wanting to spend funding in the best way
- Emphasize prevention - what Renee does in her job
- Childcare issues
- Wifi/Internet Access:
 - Schools - gap for families who did not have access to internet or computers
 - Promoting funding (from another state)
<https://www.digitalwish.com/dw/digitalwish/home>
 - Provide computers
 - Not income eligible
 - Promote resources
 - Reimbursing families for those expenses
- Lack of access to food
- Schools - gap for families who did not have access to internet or laptops
- Mental Health
 - Returning to work - how will our work lives look in the future?
 - Thinking about hybrid models and having flexibility for kids and other responsibilities in their lives
 - Childcare access
- HGCC does nutrition and physical activity education with early childhood caretakers - and they are noticing that some centers have closed and some have reduced how many children they will register
- Food access is now universal in Maine, regardless of income
 - But participation rates in food programs dropped considerably
 - Different models were tried throughout the state
 - Food banks and Food pantries
- Renee encourages that using funding to figure out systems to prevent the situation in the future could be a better investment than giving funding to individual groups.

Question from Tamara: What is one thing you would fix if you had unlimited funding? Access to food and nutrition. It's such a basic thing.

Renee's Response:

- Covid presented a huge disruption in the food system.
- Food systems - hospitals, schools, larger facilities - sourcing, aggregating, storing, distribution, etc.

- How can we work to be more self-sufficient? Where are the barriers? We can produce a lot of food in Maine....but figuring out the systems is difficult.
- Difficulties in communication, exposure.

Question from Dennis: What if we focus on getting a public information campaign, or providing some actual assistance to low income families. To help them know what assistance is out there long term. Example: Knowing how to complete applications for tax income credits, other assistance programs.

Response from Renee:

- Getting the information out there does not necessarily mean that they will take advantage of it.
- Example: free food program at schools demand went down, not up during Covid
- Yankee Pride can get in the way

Debby: Maine Municipal Association is asking the municipalities to rank certain issues, via a survey, such as: BroadBand, Government Services, Public Services, Infrastructure, Health, etc. (I could not catch all of them!)

Melissa (Gardiner Main Street)

- Has not heard anything from other Main Streets regarding this funding issue; thinks that most communities are waiting for someone to figure out something amazing on how to best use the funding

Debby: When Debby and Tracey met earlier today, they discussed housing availability. Not enough lower income housing available. It is a potential that this funding could be used to financially assist the developer if they need it.

Colin: Work Life is really going to be changed and how people meet is going to change. A lot of people do not want to meet in person or go back to the office. Part of that could be wanting to work from home to be with their kids as a personal choice, in addition to those who have no choice.

Tracey:

- She is following the National League of Cities. She also attended a workshop that covered reporting on the grant usage.
- Suggests that we start narrowing the areas of where we want to focus the funding. Work to set up a priority.
- When we first started meeting, this committee had thought that it would be difficult to determine who was essential, so removed that from the options.
- Infrastructure - we already know that the state is going to be taking that on. So do we put our funding there?

- Qualified Census Tract - we have one little area by Highland Avenue - north side of Cobbossee Stream up to the High School and over to Farmingdale is a "Qualified Census Tract".
- Reminder that we have to track all of the funds and for what purpose.
- Reach out to your national representation to ask about infrastructure - we need help with roads.

Dennis: Anything we can do to promote meeting spaces...such as City Hall, Johnson Hall? Or service clubs, function halls? To use for a ventilation system that is appropriate for Covid and other diseases.

Tracey: Our city buildings are not conducive for public health in general. From ventilation to mold!

Melissa: Idea of polling the people that show up at the Heart of Gardiner Visionary session event next week - to see where their priorities lie? Great idea!

Assignment:

Go back and look at the priorities, be prepared to discuss at the next meeting what your priorities are. Debby will share the list with the group.

Tracey will send out a survey to snapshot what committee members are thinking the priorities are for us. Tamara will compile them.

Adjourned at 7:03

Respectfully submitted,
Tamara Whitmore