Northampton County Townhall Provides Details on COVID-19 Relief (April 2, 2020)

Representatives of the Small Business Administration, who participated in a virtual town hall meeting hosted by Northampton County officials on April 2, informed local businesses of help available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Michael Kane, Deputy Director of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Eastern Pennsylvania Division and Sonia Smith, Economic Development, Specialist, SBA, provided an overview of the loan options available through CASES. Businesses with up to 500 employees may apply for the loans, as well as sole proprietors, independent contractors, and self-employed individuals.

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) offers SBA loans as a direct incentive for small businesses to keep their workers on the payroll. SBA will forgive loans if all employees are kept on the payroll for eight weeks and the money is used for payroll, rent, mortgage interest, or utilities. Forgiveness will be reduced if full-time headcount decline, or if salaries and wages decrease. The PPP loan has a maturity of two years and an interest rate of 1%. Businesses can apply through any existing SBA 7(a) lender or through any federally insured depository institution, federally insured credit union, and Farm Credit System institution that is participating. Other regulated lenders will be available to make these loans once they are approved and enrolled in the program. Businesses may apply for PPP loans through June 30.

The Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Emergency Advance provides up to $10,000 of economic relief to businesses that are currently experiencing loss revenue due to the shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no cost to apply and the application process is extremely easy, Kane said. Businesses may apply for both loans but cannot "double dip" and get funds from both programs to pay for the same purposes. To apply for either loan, visit: www.sba.gov. In addition, the Small Business Development Center at Lehigh University is available to help with loan applications. Businesses involved with lobbying or gambling are ineligible.

Pandemic Unemployment Benefits were also discussed. Under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, eligible individuals who are collecting certain unemployment insurance benefits, including regular unemployment compensation, will receive an additional $600 in federal benefits per week for weeks of unemployment ending on or before July 31. Additionally, the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program allows those who have exhausted benefits under regular unemployment compensation or other programs to receive up to 13 weeks of additional benefits. Benefits are also available to individuals who do not normally qualify under state and federal law, including those who are self-employed.

The virtual call was moderated by County Executive Lamont McClure, who announced that Northampton County has put $250,000 into a COVID-19 Emergency Relief Loan Fund for small businesses. Applicants can apply for a maximum amount of $15,000 per business. The loans will have a 0% interest rate over a 12-month term. Rising Tide will process the loan applications and distribute the money.

In another measure to help both businesses and individuals, Northampton County has extended the 2% discount period for taxpayers who pay county real estate taxes before May 31.

Also on the call was U.S. Representative Susan Wild, who represents the 7th Congressional District. Wild said she was inspired by the devotion of Congress in passing CARES and said the bill will provide a direct infusion of cash to small businesses and expand federal assistance to hospitals. Included in the comprehensive response package is the Combatting Hunger for Older Americans During Coronavirus Crisis Act, Wild's bipartisan legislation to prioritize and improve meal delivery and nutrition services for seniors during the coronavirus outbreak. Wild also sponsored legislation to ensure guaranteed paid sick leave for all affected health care workers.

Easton Mayor Salvadore J. Panto Jr., also participating in the Town Hall, reminded the listeners that the City of Easton is a small business too. The city will suffer from loss revenue including entertainment taxes obtained from the Crayola Factory, the State Theatre and Sigal Museum, as well as income from parking fees.

Alicia Karner of the Bethlehem Department of Community and Economic Development said the city is looking at a million dollar impact from the closure of Wind Creek Casino alone. She also stated that during this time the City of Bethlehem will not cut off water for those who are delinquent in paying their bills or send them to collections. To support businesses offering walk-in services, the city will supplement 15-minute free parking spots, up to two per city block and will suspend booting.

On a positive note, she said that the city of Bethlehem is fortunate to have its own Health Bureau to assist in educating about COVID-19. She encouraged people to visit the city's coronavirus webpage, which is updated daily. (https://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/Health-Bureau/Communicable-Diseases/COVID-19)

Other participants in the call were State Sen. Mario Scavello and State Rep. Robert Freeman.
Lehigh County also held a virtual town hall meeting related to the coronavirus. The event, which was held on April 6, featured Wild, Lehigh County Executive Phillips Armstrong, state Reps. Pete Schweyer and Mike Schlossberg, and Allentown Mayor Ray O'Connell.

60 West Broad St. • Suite 306 • Bethlehem, PA 18018 • P: 610-317-0130

Our affiliation with these national organizations is a value-added benefit for our members.

NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM   National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions   THE LEAPFROG GROUP