

Bristol CORE Socially Distant Business Owner Coffee Hour

August 19, 2020

Businesses Represented: Art on Main, Bristol Cliffs Café, Bristol Suites, EmeraldRose Gifts, Harmonia, Mountain Health Center, Recycled Reading, Simon Says, The Village Creeme Stand, Vermont Marketplace, Vermont Tree Goods, Wallace Realty, Yarn & Yoga, and Your Home (*apologies if I missed anyone with the traffic noise or arrived after introductions!*).

Bristol CORE Board Members: Ian Albinson, Maura Donnelly, Kelly Hamshaw, Meridith McFarland, and Taylor Welch.

Darla Senecal (Bristol Selectboard Member)

Welcome & Overview – Ian welcomed and thanked everyone for coming with an acknowledgment that things have been very difficult to navigate between COVID-19 and the downtown construction projects. Bristol CORE wishes it had the capacity to be more helpful/proactive in the earlier months but looking forward to brainstorming ideas for promoting downtown as a safe destination into the fall and holiday season with construction winding down in the next 3-4 weeks. This gathering is an opportunity to share updates, resources, and ideas between downtown business owners.

Business Roundtable –

- Recycled Reading – reports seeing more local customers who are seeking to avoid online shopping. Foot traffic has been hit or miss. Still offering curbside service for folks who prefer or have concerns about being ill.
- Simon Says – Had an unfortunate incident involving unmasked customers prior to the statewide mandate but no issues since August 1st. Store offers free face masks and has a hand sanitizer station. Feels like there's a new norm of mask-wearing and using hand sanitizer. As a new business, no sales to compare to previous year which has been challenging for the currently available grant/loan programs.
- Vermont Marketplace – Struggling without regular stream of tourists but “each month we're losing less money!”.
- Bristol Suites – With many local events canceled and county-by-county restrictions, things are a “moving target” but some folks are coming to town. People visiting family and staying in Vermont longer. Seeing more Vermont tourists from across the state.
- Yarn & Yoga – No longer hosting yoga classes due to small space limitations and ventilation concerns. Curbside sales were very helpful. “Knitters will always knit and crocheters will always crochet” – July was a normal sales month although August seems slower. Staffing was a major challenge as most group members fall within the high-risk age group. They are seeing lots of out-of-staters so they ask people where they are home and cross-reference with a map and may choose to stay behind the screen if uncomfortable.
- Your Home – New business as of last October so no comparable data to last year. Focus on making the shop a destination sport with increased social media presence to draw folks from away via Facebook and Instagram. Getting more interaction via FB and finding that the more they use it, the better it works to showcase new items. Sharing info about other shops so people stay in town longer.
- Emerald Rose – It's been up and down since re-opening. Things are getting better – June was up and July was down. Difficult with the major events to bring people downtown. Getting worried about winter.

- Wallace Realty – Residential real estate is selling well – best year in a while despite the two months of near shutdown.
- The Village Creeme Stand – Great summer so far with great weather despite opening a month later. Staffing is always a challenge at the end of the season but going to try to stay open into September. People are mostly cooperating with masks.
- Harmonia – Things are going well with offering one-on-one appointments with masks and sanitizing between clients. Seeing fewer clients in a day to enable cleaning. After shutdown, decided to only work from Bristol and most Burlington clients are now coming to Bristol and she's scheduling them on days when other shops are open so people can make a trip of it! Would be helpful to have a one-pager about Bristol businesses to share.
- Vermont Tree Goods – Business was never highly dependent on foot traffic so showroom has been closed since COVID started although have opened by appointment and considering returning to limited hours for the fall. New building in New Haven for workshop which is working well.
- Art on Main – Concerns about loss of events, especially Harvest Festival as Silent Auction was an important fundraiser. New goods are coming in. Reported some success with recovery grants and a loan – lots of work to apply and obtain but very helpful.
- Bristol Recreation Dept/Hub Teen Center – Holley Hall has been closed due to constraints with HVAC in a historic building. BRD has had to cancel most events and many classes – had successful camps with social distancing for kids. Ideas for new classes or programs that can be held outdoors are welcome. Virtual clay studio program is going well with participants picking up clay kits before the Zoom meeting class. Developing in person, one-on-one tutoring opportunities at the Hub to complement the hybrid school schedule along with ideas for outdoor physical activities.

Action Items

- Would like to coordinate a downtown-wide sidewalk sale once sidewalks are completed during what would have been the Harvest Festival weekend. Look into opportunities for hosting music/radio DJ on the green. September 26/27th.
- Carol secured a quote from 92.1 WKBK for a downtown Bristol ad campaign. Rotating spotlights on two Bristol businesses with a call to action to visit Bristol over two months with minimum of 40 ad plays and 80 live air mentions. With 6 businesses, each share would be \$170; with 8 businesses, each share would be \$125. WKBK would help with scripting and provide audio interviews. Bristol CORE would cut one check to WKBK and each participating business would pay Bristol CORE. Interested participants: Art on Main, Simon Says, Harmonia, Simon Says, Your Home, Bristol Suites, VT Marketplace, Emerald Rose ***if you would like to participate or have questions, please contact Carol Wells ASAP at carolvwells@gmail.com or 453-4017***
- ACCD's Designated Downtown Program is seeking data from each community about COVID-19 related expenses that 1) have been spent by businesses and local organizations to date since March and 2) could be spent on improvements for promoting health and safety-related to COVID between now and December 20th. Even rough estimates are welcome!
- Bristol CORE is re-evaluating our Jumpstart Bristol Campaign to encourage more local shopping/eating and will use info from that effort to create a one-pager that can be used to share with visitors and will aim to keep hours as up to date as possible on the CORE website. And will host another gathering in a couple weeks to keep the conversation going.