

March 24, 2020

Public Testimony
City of Beaverton

To: Mayor Doyle, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Beaty, Councilor Fagin, Councilor Mitchell and Councilor San Soucie

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for public comment this evening. While I wish I could be with you in person, I am social distancing and am so grateful that we have technology to watch and participate together this evening.

Let me start by saying THANK YOU! I cannot thank you enough, on behalf of our 6,600 members and 635 partner businesses, for the remarkable and expeditious leadership demonstrated by the City of the Beaverton during this uncertain and frankly, scary time.

As President/CEO of the Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce, I have been working with your team in Community Development and Economic Development as a part of what I have termed the "Beaverton Business Response Team" since March 16. Mike Williams has been proactive and responsive – working round the clock with his team (Bill Berg, Rachel Thieme and David Tetric) to ensure we are addressing the immediate needs of our small business community. We were joined by Stephen Smelley, with his 30+ years of expertise in risk management and commercial insurance, and Dianne Danowski Smith of Publix NW and her crisis communication expertise – both part of the Beaverton Chamber's leadership.

Our survey was developed and launched, ultimately garnering 209 responses within 36 hours. Your team in Community Development and Economic Development, however, did not wait for those results because we correctly forecasted that financial assistance would be the top priority of need for our bars and restaurants that were mandated to be closed with Executive Order 20-07 abruptly, with no notice and little clarity. These businesses operate on such small margins that meeting rent and payrolls was and is their immediate fear and need. Your team responded within 48 hours, and to the best of my knowledge, Beaverton was the first city in Oregon to establish the Business Assistance Grant Fund. The application was up within hours of your department heads' sweeping their budgets to provide \$250,000 in grant assistance and get money on the streets. Remarkable! We cannot be more thankful for Cheryl Twete and all of her team.

Yesterday, as a part of our Response Team initiative, we held a virtual panel with experts including the City, Stephen Smelley, Dianne Danowski Smith and Dan Hayes to address additional priorities and questions from our businesses in their survey responses. We will continue these are needed. Seventy-three business owners and managers participate and the feedback has been great. The community is noticing and so appreciates our work together.

As social distancing directives and working remote pleas came from our local and state officials, many of our other small businesses heeded that call. They, too, were calling and emailing desperately scared and concerned about keeping their employees safe, whole and paying rent. As of yesterday, with Executive Order 20-12, they too have officially been mandated by our Governor to close.

We respectfully request additional funding from City Council to grow this emergency assistance fund which is at or near exhausted. We need to expand the categories and qualifications to include these businesses as well. Yes, federal dollars are coming in the form of low-interest loans and that will be helpful. But that is a process and could entail lengthy wait times. Please be aware that we are asking our larger employers to contribute to this immediate fund as well. We need to help all of our small business as best we can, as soon as we can.

You acted swiftly last Tuesday to freeze all residential evictions in the City of Beaverton. Perhaps, this evening you would consider expanding that to commercial tenants as well? Perhaps we can work together to establish a program to help landlords and tenants willing to work together to renegotiate their leases through a grant process?

This is temporary - we know this for sure. However, when we are allowed to return to our offices and resume business as usual, we want our salons, massage therapists, dry cleaners and all other vital businesses to resume service. We need them as much as they need us right now. These businesses are the foundation of our community. They pay the taxes that keep government services going, they sponsor the little leagues and community events that make our vibrant community what it is. They are calling in and making the ask – can we answer that call together?

Thanks to each of you and the amazing City staff and leadership for doing what you have already done. We look forward to continuing our work together as a part of the Beaverton Business Response Team and bringing all resources to bare over the next few months.

Stay healthy and safe! We appreciate you all.

Lorraine Clarno, President/CEO
Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce