



From the Mayor's Desk

November 2020

Financial help is coming to small business owners in Peachtree Corners. While we can't relieve all the pressure, we hope the funds will help our valued businesses stay afloat.

The City of Peachtree Corners launched a small business assistance grant program this fall. A notice was published on social media, the city website, and sent directly to businesses via email. The city received 122 requests for assistance.

Stemming from the federal CARES Act, the grants are for small businesses that have experienced business interruption as result of COVID-19. Priority was given to qualified small businesses with fewer than 100 full-time employees who operate in industries like clothing and retail, restaurants, hotels and motels, fitness centers, amusement centers, dry cleaners, hair salons, barber shops, nail salons, and other personal services.

We have all seen the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our local businesses. But I don't know how many of us really grasp how some businesses have been affected. I sat down and reviewed some of these applications that are currently under review by a committee at City Hall. The losses are staggering. When you combine extreme losses in sales, ongoing rent payments that are due, and utilities, it adds up to astonishing amounts.

Although a few property owners have cut some businesses a break on rents, it hasn't been much and the vast majority of these businesses have past-due balances with their landlords. I have even heard of one landlord that increased rental rates due to late payments and some who are charging late fees.

The obvious victims are hotels and restaurants, but look at the trickle-down effect. A couple of drycleaners in town will tell you their business has dropped by half, and even with assistance from a county grant, they are still in the hole. No one working in the office means no shirts to dry clean. No formal events means no gowns or tuxedos to dry clean. Speaking of formal events, consider shops that provide decorations and flowers to events. We had one such shop lose \$81,000 in sales in three months, but they still must pay monthly rent of more than \$4,000.

It is our plan that these grant funds will first be awarded to eligible businesses to reimburse lease or mortgage payments for the business location. If funds are available, other uses may be

considered, including utility bills, payroll, insurance for the business location, inventory expenses or loss, or facility improvements made to comply with federal, state, or local COVID-19 guidelines.

It was recently announced that Pfizer and Moderna have vaccines that appear to be at least 90 percent effective in preventing COVID-19. This is outstanding news. However, last week also showed a record number of new COVID cases, a record number of hospitalizations and daily death counts rising to levels not seen since the spring. Nurses in Iowa are working 12-16 hour days on five hours of sleep. This is far from over.

Fortunately, Atlanta's office market has held up better than most major markets through this pandemic, according to CoStar, which tracks real estate transactions. We still have more buildings being occupied than vacated. Other cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco haven't kept up.

We have more reason to be optimistic about the future today than we've had in many months, with the announcement of the vaccines. We can now see the other side of the ravine we have been in for almost nine months. But the ravine is very deep and not every business will make it across without help.

We hope our merchants can pay some bills with these local grants, but the grants won't solve all the problems. Please continue to patronize our local businesses. And as we enter the holiday season, wear masks and please abide by the CDC's guidelines. With Covid numbers climbing, we cannot afford not to.

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