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Businesses Address Stoddard County Commission Concerning of Disbursement of Cares Act Funds

DECEMBER 16TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

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The Stoddard County Commission met on Monday, December 14, 2020 in a regularly scheduled meeting in Bloomfield. On the agenda was Dee Loflin who wished to discuss Covid-19 CARES Act funding for businesses.

The state of Missouri provided Stoddard County \$3,405,212 of CARES Act money to distribute to small businesses and government entities.

The application deadline set by the Commission was November 30, 2020; however applications continued to come in during the first week of December. Since that time it was reported that the Commission had depleted the CARES Act monies and there was not enough left in the account to go to those businesses that applied prior to the deadline; however, some businesses were funded while others were not.

Dexter Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Alisha Trammell stated 13 businesses submitted the appropriate paperwork by the November 30th deadline have not received any funds, while other businesses that submitted paperwork on the same day or later have received funds. Also one business that applied on November 12th did not receive any funding while another business that applied on the same day did receive funding.

Stoddard County Presiding Commissioner, Danny Talkington, stated that funding to businesses was a "first come first serve" basis.

Harry Patel, owner of Econo Lodge Hotel, spoke at the meeting. Patel stated he felt discriminated against because two other local hotels had received 100% funding, while his hotel received no funding. He stated he submitted his paperwork on November 12th, which was confirmed by Trammell at the meeting. Several businesses were funded at 100% after his application was submitted.

"By the time his application was processed it is now sitting in this stack (pointing to a large stack of file folders on his desk) we are working on now. We are down to the point that most of the requests in November are still sitting and waiting." according to Talkington.

Patel went on to explain he had applied on the same day as another hotel, Hickory House Inn, and that business received 100% funding along with payroll reimbursement just days later.

"How come I did not receive any money?" Patel asked. Talkington stated his (Patel) was still in this stack to be processed.

"At that point we were taking them in as they were coming in and how they were processed and why yours was not turned in as quickly to us as the other person you are talking about, that I can't tell you. Once it comes to us we process it through and we go ahead do a payment and we were doing a 100% up until November 30th. Now we can not do 100% and the money is not there so we are going to try and figure out what we can do," Talkington answered.

"This is the way it's being done. You may not like it." stated Talkington, "We were processing them as quickly as they came in. EMA Director Frank Killian would review them and we would process them and write a check."

According to a printout received by this reporter by the Commission there were several checks written on December 8th for businesses in the amount of \$327,103.75. They are listed at the conclusion of this article.

Trammell, who helped to inform businesses, both members and non-members, of the Dexter Chamber of Commerce, does not know what to tell businesses who did not receive funds.

"It's just hard when I have two hotels, who submitted basically the exact same application. I mean, they came in together. We went through their documentation together. Their spreadsheets were basically the same. They didn't ask for anything different. I sent them within minutes of each other. And one is fully funded and the other

is not," Trammell said.

Talkington could not explain why he had not seen the paperwork for Econo Lodge.

"As of now we have about \$1.4 million dollars in requests and less than \$50,000 in the account to be funded to businesses," stated Talkington. "Businesses will now only receive pennies on the dollar. We also had service organizations request monies and we may or may not be able to fund them at this point."

Loflin asked if any businesses that applied earlier in the year such as October or early November did not get funding. Talkington said that maybe only one service organization that he knew of would not get funding.

Cecil Weeks, Stoddard County Clerk, is responsible for tracing CARES Act disbursements. At the November 30th meeting, according to Carol Jarrell, County Commissioner, Weeks presented a report showing over one million dollars available for disbursement. During the same meeting the Stoddard County Collector's office made available a report showing only \$750,000 available.

Loflin asked Talkington, "What did you believe you had in the bank on November 30th to disburse to those businesses applying on time?"

He stated that he believed they had a little over \$300,000 available to those businesses. Talkington stated that the Commissioners had pre-approved expenditures for the fire department and the health department; however they had not submitted their expense receipts.

"All those totals have come in now," commented Talkington. "We have \$43,000 left to disperse. Requests that came in on November 30th or after are around 1.4 million. We are trying to work on them now and how to approach that."

When asked did entities who submitted their application after the deadline receive funding before those businesses who applied prior to the deadline, Talkington replied "no". Steve Jordan, County Commissioner, followed with a resounding "no" as well. Loflin asked, "Are you 100% sure on that?" Talkington said "yes." "Those that applied after November 30th will not and have not been funded."

Businesses were given guidelines and instructions including eligible reimbursements and specific qualifying months. The original qualifying months were March, April, May, and June.

CARES Act money was deposited into the Stoddard County account on May 5, 2020. It wasn't until September that businesses were made aware that they could apply for CARES Act money. In the following months those businesses who had already applied were made aware they could appeal and ask for additional funding for months July, August, September, and October.

"New orders or new changes came out from the state (in September) so we extended that and took in businesses that were still being impacted," per Talkington. Loflin asked if that was made public. Talkington said, "We did not know if it was made public." When asked if some businesses were funded for those additional months, Talkington said, "yes". A press release from the Commission was not sent out to the ShowMe Times.

Other businesses were told they could only submit expenditures for the months March - June. While some businesses received a second check and even third check, many had not even received any funding at all.

Loflin stated when she submitted her application for ShowMe Times she was not made aware that she could apply for additional months of funding. Loflin applied through the Chamber of Commerce and stated she was told only March - June were available. Talkington said, "That's not my problem."

Trammell confirmed that she was only made aware of funding for March, April, May and June and it would be on a first come first serve basis.

Loflin asked the Commission, "Did entities who submitted their application for payroll and mortgage payments receive funding for those items?" Talkington stated "no" to payroll because that was covered under the PPP (Payroll Protection Program).

"We chose not to pay for payroll and to my knowledge not one business was paid for payroll out of the CARES Act," commented Talkington. "We would have to go back and look through all the applications to make sure."

Loflin requested a list from the Commissioners of those businesses who had received funding and the amounts. Loflin was told she that information is only available through Cecil Weeks, Stoddard County Clerk and she must submit a Sunshine Law Request form.

Loflin also requested a copy of the check register from January 1, 2020 to the present and again was told to obtain that information from Weeks utilizing a Sunshine Law Request form.

Both forms were submitted on Monday, December 14, 2020. Weeks stated that he would have to consult with the county's attorney in St. Louis prior to fulfilling the requests. By

law Weeks has three days to provide the documentation.

Loflin asked about the August decision made by the Commission to do PSAs (Public Service Announcements) with the local news media outlets, ShowMe Times, KDEX, and the Daily Statesman, Talkington stated that Ben Godwin, Stoddard County Health Dept Administrator had come forward and said he was doing those PSAs. Talkington said Godwin was to rotate with each media outlet. Loflin researched this with Godwin and was told this was not being done.

Loflin asked if they had moved the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to the Health Dept. Talkington said they were in the process, but had not finalized the move yet.

Trammell asked at the end of the meeting how the businesses would know what funding they would receive. Talkington stated he would personally contact businesses to let them know what percentage of the CARES Act requests would be funded.

The County Clerk's office provided a print-out with the following information.

December 8, 2020 Checks for a total of \$327,103.75:

- American Steakhouse, \$46,741.19;
- Bell City R-2 Schools, \$12,520.34;
- Bloomfield Fire Department, \$99,923;
- Blue Mule Cafe, Bernie \$44,703.74;
- City of Dexter, \$7,486.58;
- Dexter Cinema LLC, \$7,117.99;
- Donut Palace, \$15,448.35;
- Dudley Fire Department, \$33,810;
- Paradise Lounge, Bernie \$33,205.94;
- Richland R-1 Schools, \$8,045.09;
- The Vendor Market, Bloomfield \$2,843.53;
- Wethington Tire and Auto, \$15,258.

<https://showmetimes.com/Blogpost/vf02/Businesses-Address-Stoddard-County-Commission-Concerning-of-Disbursement-of-Cares-Act-Funds>

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