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Continued Questions Regarding CARES Act Funding in Stoddard County

DECEMBER 27TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Bloomfield, MO - Several local business owners and representatives showed up at the Stoddard County Commissioners' meeting on Monday, December 21st to discuss the CARES Act funds as none of the people who attended had received a phone call from Danny Talkington, Presiding Commissioner who did say in the December 14th meeting he would personally contact businesses who had not been funded to let them know the amounts they would be getting since there was only about \$43,000 left in the account.

The state of Missouri gave Stoddard County \$3,405,212 of CARES Act money to distribute to small businesses and government and community entities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jim Thrower, manager of Dexter Queen, and owner Lori Hawkins attended the meeting. Thrower felt the commissioners were not proactive reaching out to small businesses. There was no press release and very little information in the paper.

“I’m talking about how some businesses were allowed to turn in payroll and for mortgages when we were told we couldn’t turn in payroll or full mortgages,” Thrower said. “And then when the extension came in a couple of weeks ago, nobody notified us except for (Dexter Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Alisha Trammell), but it’s your job to let the public know these things. Why have you guys not notified the public, and why did some businesses get multiple checks when some got none. Where were your priorities?”

On December 14th, Dee Loflin, of the ShowMe Times, asked if businesses were funded and approved for payroll. Presiding Commissioner, Danny Talkington, stated "no" they were not. Commissioner, Steve Jordan, also said they were not.

Talkington said last week that originally CARES Act money was not allowed to be used for payroll because of the Paycheck Protection Program handled that. Once the PPP ended, the government said in September that CARES Act funds could be used for payroll reimbursement. "We said we are not going to (do that)," Now a week later it has been confirmed that more than \$23,000 of the CARES Act funds were paid out for payroll according to Talkington.

Commissioner Steve Jordan said the county should attempt to retrieve payroll that was mistakenly paid.

"I'm only one vote, but I'm in the opinion we need to go back and try to claw that back," Jordan said.

The question remains unanswered as to how this happened as there are three county commissioners who are reviewing the applications and the commissioners hired two people to also review and input the information into the State website for approval.

This reporter contacted Frank Killian, EMA Director until December 31st, for specific information on the procedure of how applications were reviewed and approved.

"As for the CARES money the role the Commissioners asked me to fulfill was the following,"

- Collect paperwork which included 4 parts, application which included W-9, invoices for reimbursement request, proof of purchase or payment and a summary sheet with totals as well as grand total requested. (I did not total anything so no one could say I didn't total something correctly)
- Ensure application was signed in all the correct locations
- Fill out submission sheet for Commissioners with the grand total along, list of items being requested and my signature which indicated the folder had a signed application, invoices and proof of purchases. Early on, almost every packet turned in did not have all the information required by the Commissioners and would take several emails or visits with each business/entity to get corrected to a point of being able to be submitted. Alisha Trammel with Chamber of Commerce graciously volunteered her time to help because

each folder would take days. Without Alisha's help getting all the folders in order would have been impossible.

- Submit folder to Commissioners

- Commissioners would return folders to me if certain invoices or bills were not in folder, if Commissioners denied any portion or had any questions about anything in the folder. (I did not approve or deny anything financial, I just ensured all signatures were in place, invoices and cancelled checks or credit statements were in folders.)

- I would contact the business or entity concerning questions or rejection by Commissioners and what possible plan of action they might have which included going and talking with Commissioner's.

- If folder was approved by Commissioners it was passed along to clerk's office so after turning folders in if folders were not returned to me for corrections or rejections I assumed folders were passed along to clerk's office.

Mr. Killian stated that when he would receive a folder it was the following Monday when he would return it to the Commissioners at their regular weekly meeting.

Associated Commissioner Carol Jarrell spoke to why businesses such as Econo Lodge hadn't received any money (application was submitted on November 12th same day as another hotel who received 100% funding) and others who made requests afterward did receive funds.

"I don't know how they got out of whack coming down the line to us. I have no idea," Jarrell said. "Nov. 4 (the day French Market requested funds) should have been (at the) top, and then Nov. 12th (Econo Lodge) should have been right there with the other motels. ... I do not know what happened. And I'm sorry for that. I should have been more observant."

Jarrell said she "failed, big time." "And I know saying I'm sorry and all that's not going to help the French Market, not going to help anybody, but I will take full responsibility for my (part)."

Dee Loflin, owner of the ShowMe Times, voiced concerns about how the payment of these funds was documented. Loflin suggested these items should be included in the minutes to the weekly meetings. To date the reporters have had to ask the County Clerk's office for a list of businesses with the amounts or ask the County Collector's office for a print-out.

“So when you all make these decisions on who gets the money from the CARES Act funding, you all should be making a motion,” Loflin said, “(saying) we will fund ‘x’ businesses for ‘x’ number of dollars. That should be seconded and approved, but I’m not seeing that on any of the minutes that I’ve requested. All the minutes that I have received are basically an attendance record not full minutes.”

Talkington explained that information was available through vouchers the commissioners signed to approve payments.

“But not in your minutes from your commission meetings?” Loflin said. “Why not because you’ve got to make that public? People aren’t going to come up here and ask for the voucher information. People don’t know to do that off the street so it should be in your minutes.”

Talkington told Loflin she made a good point.

“That’s where the transparency is not and the public views it that you are being secretive, and there’s no reason to be secretive with the monies,” Loflin said.

Talkington announced that \$526,431.94 remained in the county’s CARES Act account, and that \$462,468.04 were allotted for public entities and businesses who received pre-approval to purchase items the government deemed acceptable, leaving \$63,963.90 available to small businesses. However last week there was only about \$43,000 left according to Talkington and on December 15th a transfer into the CARES Act fund in the amount of \$53,451.14 was made according to the County Collector's print-out. (The ShowMe Times was not able to obtain a print-out from the County Clerk's office. Another Sunshine Law Request Form was submitted on December 21st asking for just a COVID-19 CARES Act Journal Report).

Loflin also asked about the Lambert Engineering & Surveying funding. "This is a Scott County business and not a Stoddard County business. They were issued a check for \$10,293.40 on December 14th." Upon further discussion it was discovered that L&M Locksmith requested \$4,603.84 CARES Act funds, but received a check for \$14,897.24. The owner returned the check and was issued the proper amount. The remaining money was to go to L&M Enterprise, LLC, but was entered as Lambert Engineering & Surveying. Looking at the journal report print-out there was never a \$14,897.24 check written or voided. There are two checks written for \$10,293.40 and one for \$4,603.84. The matter was brought to the attention of Cecil Weeks and has hopefully been corrected.

According to Talkington as of December 14, 2020 there was \$526,431.94 balance in the CARES Act fund. Monies promised, but receipts have not been submitted to the

commissioners are:

City of Essex \$107,041.00

Bootheel Regional Planning Committee \$76,500 for new HVAC System (I asked if this was a budgeted item or covered under the CARES Act and was told yes by Commissioner Talkington)

Stoddard County Health Dept \$236,849.88 (\$180,000 overtime, \$41,000 for masks including two gators for students at every county school as well as 1 gallon of hand sanitizer for each classroom, \$7,000 new phone system, \$5,000 printer/fax machine

Dexter Police Dept and Park & Rec \$23,222.16

Bootheel Counseling \$18,855.00

Totaling \$462,468.04

The commissioners voted 3-0 to approve guidelines to award funds to small businesses who have applied for CARES Act funds but had not received any money and would not receive their full requests because the county did not have enough funds remaining to pay requests in full.

Here are the "new" guidelines set by the Commissioners since monies have all been exhausted.....

- exclude any requests received after the Nov. 30 deadline; however one business was fully funded and application was submitted on December 3rd.
- exclude any requests from schools;
- exclude any requests from social organizations, private clubs and membership-based organizations;
- exclude insurance companies;
- exclude mortgage payments, interest payments, vehicle payments, insurance, rent and labor; and
- exclude any person or company who has previously received CARES Act funds.

Here is a list of businesses who received partial funding, including amount requested and amount funded. They are listed in the order they were received:

Cape Home Oxygen LLC (A+ Medical), (\$76,431.02), \$5,106.67;

French Market (\$10,917.99), \$2,458.27; Turned in application on November 4th per Mary Ruth Boone

Sadguru LLC (Econo Lodge), (\$103,943.02), \$29,621.52; Turned in application on November 12th per owner Mr. Patel

Law Office of Yewell G. Lawrence Jr., (\$24,687.77), \$2,889.85;

JSR Environmental Services LLC, (\$49,116.62), \$1,104.54;

Carla Moore Jewelry Sales, (\$3,600.05), \$2,081.05;

Wooldridge Construction, (\$12,380.59), \$2,272.91;

Peking Garden Dexter LLC, (\$9,925. 80), \$6,209.92;

Ryson Diesel Repair, (\$3,352.79), \$810.35;

Stefanie Hodges Beauty LLC, (\$8,215.22), \$827.79;

Walker Towing, (\$7,062.40), \$664.22;

Medler's Cleaning, (\$12,867.67), \$5,004.02;

Phelan Company, (\$4,316.38), \$1,329.42;

Lucas Florist (\$17,828.20), \$3,673.37, Lucas Florist was approved for \$7,473.79 but the county only had funds available for \$3,673.37.

The following companies requested funds by the November 30th deadline but money was not available to pay them.

Lucas Florist, \$3,800.42

Tips and Toes, \$2,348.92

Main Street Restaurant, \$22,703.26

Senior Citizens Agency Inc., \$19,438.21

ShowMe Times \$6,061.39

Stoddard County License Office, \$495.51

Sheila LeGrand (Sheila's Shoppe), \$1,679.73

Mulberry Manor, \$10,542.27

Taxes and More, \$8,665.09

Michele Owens Photography, \$1,816.07

Custom Crete Works LLC, \$97,975.88.

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