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Local Businesses Continue to Question CARES Act Funding

JANUARY 07TH 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Bloomfield, MO - The Stoddard County Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Monday morning meeting on December 28, 2020 at 9 a.m.. Three business owners were on hand to ask the Commissioners about the process used to determine who received COVID-19 CARES Act money and why they had not received any funding.

First to speak was Waylon Owens, owner of Bernie Fitness Center. He told the Commission that he had submitted his application in mid-November and was told first his application may have been missing, later found, and now his application is missing a signature.

“We turned in our application in the middle of November. That’s the last I heard of it,” Owens said. “I called Mr. Killian on Nov. 30 at 12:17 p.m. I did talk to Mr. Killian that day, and he said he would call me back. We did not hear back from him. I didn’t hear anything else. I started seeing who all was receiving funds in the newspaper and the huge amounts some businesses were receiving.”

“I called Miss Jarrell. That was the week before Christmas,” Owens said. “Miss Jarrell, after a few days, tried to get to the bottom of it and told me that my application was nowhere to be found. She could not find my application. That went on for about a week or so until this past Friday when I was told my application was missing a signature. So I’m here to see what we can do about getting some of my money back.”

Presiding Commissioner Danny Talkington said the paperwork was not lost and the commissioners received it; however the application was missing a signature and considered it an invalid request.

Owens said, “I understand that and I understand we may have missed the signature. I mean, I understand that it is entirely possible. We turned in our application in mid-November - how did people that turned in their application after us, how did they get paid? And if we did miss a signature, how is it that we weren’t notified that we missed a signature?”

Frank Killian, EMA Director at the time, was paid \$20 per hour to make sure all applications had the proper signatures and receipts on each application that was submitted prior to sending them over to the Commissioners.

“So, in my thinking, even if I was missing a signature, we could have started the process of remedying it that day,” Owens said. “That was still before the deadline and before some people even submitted their applications, and they still got paid. So I guess at this point, I’m just here to air a grievance because I understand there’s no more money, but if there is any more money, I think it’s fair to say that I feel like I should be at the top of the list.”

Chris Huggins, co-owner of Main Street Restaurant in Bernie, also spoke.

“We got everything filled out like we should, made a few phone calls and were able to get it here on time before the deadline,” Huggins said. “But when we hear that other businesses that filled their paperwork out after the deadline, I think, got paid, and then that multiple businesses had received two checks that exceeded our amount that we requested, and what we requested wasn’t even all that we could have requested. ... And so I’m just here to see what’s going on. What’s the process here?”

Huggins learned during the meeting when Dee Loflin, ShowMe Times, stated that during the Thursday, December 31st meeting scheduled for 9 a.m., but did not start until 1 p.m., he was approved for partial funding in the amount of \$13,624.85. No one had called him to let him know. This seems to have been the trend for businesses when receive funds. They would either learn from the newspaper or just receive a check in the mail. (What if that check got lost? Dexter Queen had to have a check issued again because they did not receive it in the mail).

Kristie Whitehead, co-owner of Whitehead Electric, asked about her second request. She is grateful for the amount she has already received, but when others were getting mortgage and other funding she filled out another application. She has learned since that

time that other businesses were not required to fill out a second application, but just submit proof of payment for mortgage, etc.

"Why were some businesses told they had to fill out a whole new application, while others could just submit supporting documentation? Our application now gets buried in the pile and not funded while others got two, three, and even four checks."

"Also are you going to go back and ask those six businesses for the \$23,000 in payroll that you all paid out and have told businesses that you were not going to pay for payroll."

Dee Loflin, ShowMe Times, asked how that would be handled; a personal phone call or via USPS mail? Talkington said he would personally call businesses as well as send a letter by certified mail.

Shane Taylor, an owner of Farm First Crop Insurance LLC in Essex, voiced concerns about the rule changing after the deadline. Certain items became ineligible for reimbursement. (A full story on the exclusions is on the ShowMe Times under News). [Click HERE to read!](#)

"Who makes the rules?" Taylor asked. "For instance, the paperwork I saw, there's no mortgage payments. None of that was allowed. Later that changed, but we were not notified. Then I saw the insurance companies were paid, and I saw you came back and said insurance companies should not be paid. I mean, where does all this come from?"

Talkington said the initial guidelines came from the federal government. The Commissioners received the CARES Act money on May 6, 2020, but did not begin approving funding until September 2020. In September additional information was issued by the federal government.

"The grants that were being made to municipalities, police departments and ambulance districts, we had very specific guidelines, but the businesses we had one short sentence," Talkington said. "We finally started getting some guidelines that came out in September and then again in October with revisions as to what could be included. That's why those things changed."

The businesses fought for the mortgage as defined by the federal government in their guidelines that were issued. Some businesses were aware, but others were not. This also goes to the four months of reimbursement vs the eight or nine months of reimbursement funding that other businesses were allowed to ask for and were funded.

On December 14, 2020 the Commission approved a new exclusion list to businesses as they saw monies were running out. [Click HERE to read more!](#)

On Thursday in a special meeting they approved four more businesses for partial funding.

The following businesses received CARES Act funds:

+ Lucas Florist, \$3,800.42 They had asked for \$17,828.20. Under the new exclusions were eligible for \$7,473.79 They were previously funded \$3,673.37

+ Tips and Toes, \$598.92. Requested a total of \$2,348.92

+ Bootheel Counseling Services \$8,689.97 Were pre-approved for \$18,855.00; however only turned in receipts for \$8,689.97

+ Main Street Restaurant, \$13,624.85 Requested a total of \$22,703.26

+ Stoddard County Senior Citizens Agency, \$5,118.87 Requested a total of \$19,438.21
If any monies are returned in the form of payroll or any monies comes down the pipe from Congress, the Senior Citizens Agency (The Lunch Box) would be first in line to receive additional funding. They are eligible for a total of \$13,704.67.

Total Checks: \$31,833.03

The Dexter Police Department had originally requested and was approved for funding in the amount of \$23,227.16; however turned in receipts for \$20,244.13. That check was issued on December 28, 2020.

The city of Essex was issued a check in the amount of \$107,041.00; however that was an overpayment of \$10,000. The check has been cancelled and a new check was issued in the amount of \$97,041.00.

Bootheel Regional Planning Committee was approved in an October 2020 meeting for a new HVAC system in the amount of \$76,500.00. Check issued December 28, 2020.

Stoddard County Health Department was issued a check in the amount of \$236,849.88. Funding was for overtime (\$180,000), phone system (\$7,000), copy/fax machine (\$5,000) and for masks for the public and facial gators (two for each student in the county for free) (\$41,000). These amounts were given by Ben Godwin, Stoddard County Health Dept. and are rounded figures.

The Stoddard County Ambulance District was approved on October 13, 2020 to purchase Lucus CPR devices for \$146,412.10; four 2011 ventilators for \$67,410.88, and ten digital handheld pulse ox machines for \$5,700.00 for a total of \$219,522.98. Also on the same date SCAD was approved for an additional \$193,657.12. On October 19, 2020 Commissioner Steve Jordan made a motion to approve the reimbursement for the

\$193,657.12 for SCAD. A check was issued on the same day.

Moving forward to late December 2020. Chuck Kasting, SCAD Director, received a call from Commissioner Talkington that at this time there was zero funds left though Kasting had turned in receipts in early December for the pre-approved \$219,522.98 amount. SCAD will not be funded through the CARES Act for that amount. It will not have to come out of the SCAD budget as the products have already been purchased and in use on the ambulances.

In other business, not related to the CARES Act, James Hensley spoke to the commissioners about the Johnsongrass Tax on the Personal Property Tax form. "Could it be discontinued?"

"The way that it was started is there had to be a revenue statute, which 100 people in the county had to request be done, and then it goes to the Secretary of Agriculture, who then appoints a board," Talkington stated. "I didn't see any provision for how to get rid of it at this point. I've only answered part of your question as to how it got started, but I don't know how to get it to stop."

Talkington said he would need to contact the Secretary of Agriculture office to figure out how the tax could be taken off.

Hensley also addressed his concerns about the deer carcasses along the sides of the roads along with beer cans and bottles.

"Coming out here this morning from my driveway to town, there were five dead deer lying on the road," Hensley said. "We as a society drive down the road (and say) 'well look, there's a dead deer.' We just keep going. Nothing's thought about it. ... MoDOT is always broke. They're not going to pick them up. And I'm not gonna pick them up, I don't think. ... It's an eyesore and we as a community should be ashamed of ourselves for letting that happen."

Hensley asked the commissioners if they could draft a letter telling MoDOT people are concerned about it and those animals need to be picked up. Talkington said the commissioners could do that.

Loflin also asked about the EMA Director position again. Frank Kilian resigned his position effective December 31, 2020. Last week this reporter had asked for a job description and a public notice that this position would be open to the public to apply. Talkington said again that he would get that information to the newspapers next week. "This is a part-time job and if anyone wants to apply they can send their resumes to P.O.

Box 110, Bloomfield, MO 63825."

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