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Stoddard County Commission Continues to Answer CARES Act Questions in First Meeting of 2021

JANUARY 18TH 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Bloomfield, MO - The Stoddard County Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Monday morning meeting on January 4, 2021 at 9 a.m. The first meeting of the new year.

Businesses continued to question the Commission about the process used to determine who received the CARES Act funding.

Owner of Bernie Fitness Center, Waylon Owens, asked the commissioners what happened to his application. It was submitted before the deadline.

“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 November 30th at 12:17 p.m. I did talk to Mr. Killian that day, and he said he would call me back to me. We did not hear back from him. I didn’t hear anything else.”

Once Owens started noticing the amounts businesses were receiving in CARES Act funds he began calling again.

“I started calling Mrs. Jarrell. That was the week before Christmas,” Owens said. “Mrs 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.”

The normal procedure in a case where someone failed to sign one of the documents was that Mr. Killian would call the business owner and let them know as soon as possible that they needed to sign a document. This according to Danny Talkington, Presiding Commissioner.

Talkington said the paperwork was not lost and the commissioners received it December 7th. He said because there was no signature or date and the deadline to submit CARES Act requests had passed, he considered it an invalid request and “there’s no need to go any further with it and we set it aside.”

Owens said, “I understand we may have missed the signature. I mean, I understand that it is entirely possible. But how did people - 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?”

Owens reiterated that Killian did not return his call as he said he would.

“So, in my thinking, even if I was missing a signature, we could have started the process of remedying that 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.”

Talkington said no funds remained in the COVID-19 funding account, and the \$3,405,212 has been paid out.

Another local business owner, Chris Huggins, owner of Main Street Restaurant in Bernie, stated he learned about the CARES Act funds only days before the deadline.

“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, (and) 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?”

“Sometimes it went through the (Dexter Chamber of Commerce) and Frank would pick it up there. Sometimes it was sent directly to Frank. Sometimes he picked them up here,” Talkington stated. “He takes it and goes through the paperwork, looks at the receipts, makes sure documentation is there, and he calculates the total amount. Most of the time

people have a recap sheet (spreadsheet) in there. And he fills out a request and brings it to us and we go through it to make sure to see if we (don't have) questions and then we would process the payment."

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.

"We have about \$7.1 million in requests for \$3.4 million," Talkington said. "So not everybody got everything they asked for and some didn't get anything." (This reporter has viewed all the numbers and will be asking how the Commission came to that conclusion of \$7.1 million)

Shane Taylor, owner of Farm First Crop Insurance LLC of Essex also voiced his concerns. He said, "who makes the rules?" Rules were changed, exclusions were made on December 14, 2020 by the Commissioners once they determined they were running out of funds.

"For instance, the paperwork I saw, there's no mortgage payments. None of that was allowed. Later that changed. 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?"

From May to August zero funds were distributed by the Commissioners. In September they began distributing funds.

"The grants that were being made to municipalities, police departments and ambulance districts, we had very specific guidelines," commented Talkington. "We finally started getting some guidelines for businesses in September and then again in October," continued Talkington.

The exclusions made on December 14, 2020 were determined by the Commissioners and are listed in a previous article on the ShowMe Times. [Click HERE](#)

In a Special Meeting on Thursday, January 31, 2020 the Commission chose to award CARES Act funds to four businesses.

"We had money we had allocated and they didn't spend all that money, so we had an extra (\$23,143.06)," Talkington said.

Bootheel Counseling Services did not spend as much money as expected. They received \$8,689.97 in CARES Act funds, approximately \$10,000 less than what it asked for earlier

in the year.

- Lucas Florist, \$3,800.42
- Main Street Restaurant, \$13,624.85 (Main Street Restaurant was not aware of the funds until they appeared at the Jan 4th meeting. Commissioners did not notify businesses prior to mailing a check for funds requested nor an explanation of what was excluded, etc.)
- Stoddard County Senior Citizens Agency, \$5,118.87
- Tips and Toes, \$598.92

In other business James Hensley, Stoddard County resident, asked how the Johnsongrass tax began and if it could 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 said. “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 State’s office to learn how to take the tax off the books.

“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.”

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