

Salinas Valley Chamber Journal

Local Government Supporting Small Business Facing COVID-19

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Like so many reading this, COVID-19 has broken the back of my small business. We shut our doors under the County Order March 17th and I've had (6) employees on unemployment ever since. I continue to show up to work in an effort to keep customers engaged and address A/P outpacing A/R. We need assistance and real solutions immediately or there will not be any small business.

As one of the few small business owner / elected leaders in our community, I want to report on both the City of Salinas business community response and my own actions as a small business owner. Here's the timeline for the City's response to COVID-19:

- March 10 - City Manager of Salinas declared a state of emergency & activates the City Emergency Operations Center
- March 17 - City Council ratifies state of emergency & County of Monterey declares Shelter in Place Order.
- April 3 – County of Monterey issues revised, more restrictive Shelter in Place order.

These actions represent one of the greatest challenges to business in our region's history. The way I see it, the same local government that shuttered small businesses is responsible for engaging as much local assistance to small business as possible. With the help of City Councilwoman, Christie Cromeenes, and Mayor Joe Gunter, the City launched a website featuring state, federal & business assistance at www.cityofsalinas.org/node/6044. Within days, the City Manager appointed a team to sponsor informational sessions on emergency loans. With the help of City Councilwoman Cromeenes and the Salinas Valley Chamber, we began to draft COVID-19 small business assistance legislation.

At the April 14th meeting of the City Council we passed small business assistance legislation. This included a vote to defer business license payments due during April and May. We also affirmed additional resources to the Monterey County Business Council, the Pajaro Community Development Corporation (CDC) and Cal Coast Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) for training, counseling and assistance with business support services.

More must be done to protect local small business in the wake of COVID-19. I am working closely with the Mayor to expand emergency loan guarantees to save small business. We believe this can be made possible utilizing special federal funds we have been assigned. I have also been in touch with the Police Chief to look after property crimes, scams, hoarding and price gouging.

On April 8th, I hosted an insightful ZOOM Call on small business facing COVID-19 that can be viewed on Youtube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU_8ok-Su_A. The call featured

Supervisor Chris Lopez, representatives from the Peninsula and Salinas Valley Chambers of Commerce, Monterey County Business Council and several impacted businesses. Here are the (5) take aways from that call:

1. We need the County to grow and engage the Small Business Recovery Loan Fund.
2. We need a way to ultimate vet workers that have recovered from COVID-19 so they can return to work without risk.
3. Cut expenses quickly. Many businesses have found that vendors / fixed expenses can be put on hold, renegotiated or addressed with terms for payment.
4. Do not bury your head in the sand! Stay engaged in your business and job. Lessons like this were learned in the great recession and those that were first to jump on resources and ideas to get through this, survived.
5. Look out for scams in all of this. There are lending scams and there will be scams to set you back even further than COVID-19.

Now more than ever it's important to shop small and shop local. Consider take-out from your favorite local restaurant and ordering gift cards wherever possible. Local government is also here to help local business. It is important we hear from you and we work together. The City of Salinas contact for economic development is Andy Myrick and he can be reached at andym@ci.salinas.ca.us or (831) 758-7362. I'd love to hear from you at steve@mcshaneslandscape.com or (831) 970-4141