

NEWSLETTER

No. 1 September 2023

Peaks

Small Business Grant Program

A recent positive development to emerge from the current Town Council is the creation of the Small Business Grant Program. The idea of setting aside American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money to help our local small businesses originated with Councilor Samantha Wilcox. After general discussion at the Town Council level the details of the program were refined by Town Hall staff and the Economic Development Commission. The program received final unanimous approval from the Town Council on September 19. What began as a policy idea generated by the Town Council was then refined and detailed by staff and volunteer commissions. This is a great example of productive collaboration and how town government should function.

The program makes grants of up to \$5,000 available to for-profit businesses located in Richmond. The business must have fewer than 20 paid employees and annual sales or gross receipts of less than \$500,000. The grant must be used for capital expenditures like equipment, computers, or building improvements.



The deadline to apply is November 1, 2023 and grants will be awarded by December 31, 2023. The grant must be spent by the business before December 31, 2024 and receipts for expenditures will have to be submitted.

To get all the details and application form you can email us at rca4richmond@gmail.com or you can contact Town Administrator Karen Pinch 401-539-9000 ext 1.

Valleys

Town Staff Hiring Process

Comments made during discussion of a draft ordinance to clarify the process for hiring employees are a matter of concern. Councilors Colasante and Sheehan have advocated for having Town Council members actively participate in interviewing applicants for employment. While Richmond's Town Charter provides that the Town Council approves the final appointment of Town Hall employees, this does not equate to being involved in the interview process to find qualified candidates. Having council members involved in candidate interviews would be an improper conflict of interest because the presence of a town council member would result in



undue influence over the hiring process. Members of the interview panel, particularly the Town Administrator, could feel compelled to go along with the council member's opinions about applicants because the Town Council is the Administrator's boss. The Administrator or department head is in the best position to evaluate how a candidate's skills match the job requirements and whether the candidate would be a good fit within the department, and make that recommendation to the Town Council, who then has the final say on the hiring..

Even more concerning were Councilor Colasante's comments during the September 19 meeting suggesting that employees who are hired should reflect the political majority of the Town Council, rather than the unbiased evaluation of an interview committee. Evidence of this was Colasante's rejection of a person recommended by town staff to be appointed as electrical inspector in favor of a fellow Republican who ran with him for Town Council, putting politics and personal favor over the town staff's recommendation. This hire has already been brought before the Town Council twice due to citizen complaints about his conduct.

Political patronage jobs are a thing of the past and do not make for good government. The people of Richmond have worked hard to make our government more professional and less political through the Town Charter. Town staff fulfill their duties from an apolitical, neutral standpoint, and for any Town Council members to suggest hiring should be in line with the political majority of the elected Town Council is a strong reason for why they should not be part of the interview process. Such influence is undemocratic and illegal – the town must follow EEO laws and cannot discriminate based on political ideology. Any attempt to bring back political patronage in hiring must be opposed.

Quick Takes

Town Council Meeting: Tuesday September 19

1. Road Repairs – discussed whether to add state grant received of \$450k to previous voter approved \$2.5M bond or whether the grant should reduce the amount of bond. More discussion to come after info received from DPW.
2. Approved ordinance allowing Cannabis retail stores generally in business areas; same areas as Liquor stores. Note: in 2022 voters approved sale of Cannabis in Richmond 58%-42% (YES – Sheehan, Trimmer & Wilcox; NO – Colasante & Nassaney)
3. Approved giving Hopkinton state grant money that Richmond can't use to help with their Community Center project in exchange for use by Richmond residents (Unanimous)
4. Approved agreement with YMCA to use community room for state grant funded Learn 365 education program & senior programs (YES – Trimmer, Nassaney & Wilcox; NO – Sheehan & Colasante)
5. Approved license for Holiday Lights Show at Wawaloam Campground (Unanimous)

Upcoming Meetings

Planning Board Meeting: Tuesday, September 26 at 6:30pm

During the 2023 legislative session, state legislators passed a series of bills to increase and expedite housing development. The article shared below outlines the new laws. The Planning Board will be discussing the revisions Richmond needs to make to our land development and subdivision regulations and zoning ordinances.

Zoom link for the meeting if you can't attend in person:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89569933678>

Complete agenda can be found under Planning Board section:

<https://clerkshq.com/richmond-ri>

Community Calendar

Eco Depot: Saturday, September 30 at 8:00am – Noon

Richmond DPW Buttonwoods Road – **appointments required**

Free disposal of most household hazardous material – paint, chemicals, gasoline, etc.



https://www.rirrc.org/node/1114?fbclid=IwAR23ykTTU1JBd7RNNdNK_i_DKbGjU47-Umm669yIiGn-62LJBarF-u10mnk