Small Business Advocacy Council

Tuesday, September 17, 2013
8:30 – 10:00AM
RI Economic Development Corporation
Narragansett Conference Room
315 Iron Horse Way, Providence, RI

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance
Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth H. Roberts
Marcel Valois
Senator Joshua B. Miller
Senator Erin P. Lynch
Mark Hayward
Lisa D'Agostino
Jerri Moon Cantone
Stephen Boyle
Mark Deion
Gary Ezovski
Leslie Taito
Ron Caniglia
Miriam Ross
Carmen Diaz-Jusino
Terri Martesian
Herb Weiss
Marie Ganim
Robert Kalaskowski
Kelly Carello
Maureen Ewing
Armeather Gibbs
Chris Cannata
Sherri Carrera
Claudia Cardozo
Sue Chomka
Marti Rosenberg
Mark Gray
Nancy Scarduzio
Maria Tocco

Opening Remarks *Lieutenant Governor Roberts*

Lt. Governor Roberts was pleased with the 2013 legislative session and officially thanked Gary Ezovski and Ron Caniglia for their advocacy on the final passage of Biweekly Pay. She commented that ever since she was a state senator there had been hearings on proposals with Bi-weekly Pay related initiatives.
She went on to highlight the passage of the jobs and workforce development related legislation of "Back To Work Rhode Island" sponsored by Senator Lynch and Representative McNamara. As well as several bills dealing with economic development structure and governance such as revamping the RI EDC to the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation as of January 1, 2013 and in 2015 (the agency) will be under the newly created Executive Office of Commerce absorbing the Department of Business Regulations, the Office of Regulatory Reform and functions related to Housing and Community Development.

Lieutenant Governor Roberts stated that since we met in May, the Office participated in the Northeast Business Services Virtual Roundtable as a way to learn from best practices around the region (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut & New Hampshire). One of the deliverables from the event was further business engagement and a survey. It was agreed that three agencies would work towards this collaboration: The Office of the Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State as well as the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training.

Lastly, Lieutenant Governor Roberts discussed her involvement with the HealthSourceRI 39 in 3 campaign to travel the state providing educational presentations on how the Exchange can benefit small businesses - available options, qualification for tax credits, etc. Also, most recently the Office of Lieutenant Governor participated at the "We Mean Business Expo" and outreach to community partners including the Warwick Rotary Club, the Cranston Chamber of Commerce and presentations to Memorial Hospital.

Economic Development Corporation Director Marcel Valois

Director Valois briefly addressed the restructuring as of January 1, 2014 as the first step in dissolution of a corporation and reinstitution of a new entity called the Commerce Corporation and the legal mapping involved in the process.
The director provided a new series of accountability and transparency requirements going forward for documentation as well as increasing membership and expectations from board members. Director Valois will implement a more detail oriented approach to be ready by January 1 and highlighted the role of the new Commerce Corporation as a transitional one as it is not charged with policy, planning, or analysis but transferred to state government to be done by Secretary of Commerce. The director looks forward to working with the Council of Economy Advisors who will start on January 1, 2014 and are charged with creating a four-year plan including data analysis to be ready for the General Assembly to review by October 30, 2014.

He reinstated an emphasis on continuing with the EDC mission of working with public, private, non-profit partners to create the conditions in Rhode Island of all businesses of all sizes to grow, with the result of making it better for Rhode Islanders. The Commerce Corporation will break down silos and improve outreach and customer relations to smaller companies aiming to create a fertile environment to grow and thrive through collaboration.

He then went on to address four areas:

1. **Planning in Rhode Island**-by investing 1.9 million in sustainable communities "Rhode Map": to integrate economic and workforce development, housing, land use, transportation, and infrastructure investment to address challenges in 1) economic competitiveness and revitalization; 2) social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity; 3) energy use and climate change; and 4) public health and environmental impact with a major outcome of developing a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development incorporating all aspects.
2. **Marketing-** a common question among businesses in Rhode Island is why is it so difficult to conduct business in the state? The EDC is working with private sector partners--chamber of commerce, and other stakeholders-- to launch a truly unique marketing campaign to provide data and information for investors to make decisions.
3. **Customer centricity**-addressing customer concerns and providing services to providers to deliver and solve problems. The Small Business Development Center and Bryant University are assessing whether the quality of service provided matches the need of the business community. Also, starting to outline tasks as to how to allow the business community to access those services more easily.
4. **Financial services center** -Beginning discussion with private sector partners on how to broaden array of help and financial services to broader array of business customers, community. Over years, they have continued to disinvest on economic development. Focus on resources we have and do those tasks as best we can.

HealthSourceRI Presentation

Marti Rosenberg explained how HealthSourceRI is a new way that Rhode Islanders and small employers can find and compare health insurance plans, and purchase the coverage that best fits their needs. Rhode Islanders now have the option of enrolling in one of over twenty-five insurance plans from three carriers: Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, United Healthcare, and Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island. Ms. Rosenberg explained how each plan covers essential health benefits such as doctor's visits, prescriptions, and hospital stays.

HealthSourceRI will make healthcare more affordable by fostering competition and providing financial assistance through tax credits. Rhode Island small employers are eligible for tax credits up to 50% of their premium contribution and have the choice of either choosing a single plan for all their employees or taking advantage of the Full Employee Choice Option. Full Employee Choice allows small employers to choose an insurance plan and contribution level that comports with their budget, and gives employees the choice of either opting into the plan their employer prefers or selecting a different plan that suits their particular needs.

Ms. Rosenberg also provided an overview of the Rhode Island Small Employer Taskforce which provides an outlet for small employers to voice their opinions regarding the state of health insurance in Rhode Island. The Taskforce is coordinated by the Providence Plan in conjunction with the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner and it endeavors to keep small employers educated about the factors driving health insurance rate increases and to lobby for the interests of small employers.
For small employers, enrollment is open from October 1st through December 14th. Coverage begins January 1st for small employers and individuals alike.

For further inquiries about the HealthSourceRI presentation please contact Marti Rosenberg at 401.455.8880 or via email at mrosenberg@provplan.org or www.healthsourceri.com.

Legislative Update Senator Erin Lynch

Lieutenant Governor Roberts introduced Senator Lynch who was first elected on November 4, 2008 and serves District 31, Warwick and Cranston.
Senator Lynch Graduated Tollgate High School and Boston College, where she earned a B.A. in History, before earning her J.D. from the Catholic University School of Law. She serves on the Joint Committee on Economic Development and was Chairwoman of the Small Business Task Force.

Senator Lynch discussed some of the challenges affecting small business owners and how strategically the Senate has been focused on cutting red tape and regulatory reform. In fact, in early 2010 the Senate was instrumental in creating the Office of Regulatory Reform and master application system with the Office of Secretary of State. Senator Lynch stated how last session; they took a more multi-faceted approach to being a proponent of economic development and job creation. These were some of the initiatives spearheaded:

1. Long Term economic vision and planning guiding policy and resource decision as a major step forward for the state encompassing a wide range of stakeholders including academia, business, and government agencies.
2. Made in RI manufacturing collaborative of 2013-all Rhode Island products to have coordinated branding strategies. Similar to made in USA promotion.
3. Bioscience assistance in 2014 budget $500,000 innovative small business program grant program consistent with life and health science initiatives for knowledge district.
4. Back to Work Rhode Island – was an initiative modeled after a successful Georgia program to provide individuals collecting unemployment benefits matching with companies for on the job training to get skills and experience.

5. Youth manufacturing pre-apprenticeships. Enormous attempt to tie with education in Rhode Island with resource in higher education, but also with career and vocational schools.
6. Childcare for participants in workforce training, expanding childcare assistance for any Department of Labor and Training approved job-training programs.
7. Enhanced job match system by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training and companies looking for employees.
8. Biweekly pay always a huge fight to finally get it passed and provided relief to the business community. Before the passage of the bill, Rhode Island remained the only state in the country requiring weekly wages for nonexempt, private sector employees, with no waiver process.
9. Environmental regulation standardization with the leadership of Gary Ezovski and Ron Caniglia extremely helpful towards passage.

Senator Joshua Miller stated that the Senate would continue monitoring items that impact business rankings and will create a new set of priorities for 2014. He then went on to highlight some of his efforts as chair of Health and Human Services committee and the monitoring and data collection involved in the legislative process to help understand what the cost impacts of buying insurance in the state will be.

Mark Hayward interjected informing members of the reinstituted Small Business Economic Summit on Nov 15. Some of the changes are the consolidation of healthcare and energy committees into a miscellaneous committee chaired by Miriam Ross and Ralph Coppola. The invitation was sent to the General Assembly and President Paiva Weed and Speaker Fox will be addressing the plenary session. Mr. Hayward stated that there will be six priorities from each committee that are critical, not a laundry list, but incremental.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that the timing of the Summit before the general assembly session makes a lot of sense. Mr. Hayward agreed and stated that assembly members can take up proposals up front and adopt them more easily. Senator Miller mentioned that the Biweekly pay was developed as a priority from the Summit.

Mr. Ezovski wanted to thank the Lieutenant Governor, the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation and the General Assembly for their leadership and support from policy offices.

Next steps

The SBA will host their Economic Summit on November 15th and their legislative priorities will drive the work for the subcommittee workgroups.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, December 3rd. The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 a.m.