

Naturally Meramec Consortium Regional Zoom Meeting

November 17, 2020 6:00 p.m.

Meramec Regional Planning Commission – 4 Industrial Drive, St. James, MO

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chrysa Niewald of Missouri Rock Island Trail and Owensville/Rosebud Area Tourism, Merrill Horner of Dairy Isle & Grill, Marilyn Lakaner of Creekside Fudge & Gifts, Jordan Ray of CDR Naturals Health Food Store, and Rockael Stubblefield of Brush Creek Valley Farms.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Samantha Maddison, Anne Freand, Caitlin Jones, Candace Connell

**Minutes**

1. **Call to Order & Introductions:** Samantha Maddison called the meeting to order at 6:13 p.m.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Samantha Maddison presented the October 27, 2020 meeting minutes to the consortium for approval. Jordan Ray moved to approve the minutes and Chrysa Niewald seconded. Motion approved.
3. **Staff Report:** Meramec Regional Planning Commission Staff provided an update to Naturally Meramec Consortium attendees on the upcoming events for Naturally Meramec. Samantha provided a very brief update to the group on the upcoming Speed Date Event to be held at Heartland Farms on December 8, 2020 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Heartland Farms have acquired many sanitation stations and are able to keep all tables a minimum of six feet apart while still having plenty of room for a large number of participants. Registration forms for the event are due November 27, 2020.

Caitlin Jones gave the consortium an update on both website and Facebook statistics for the previous 28 days. While website usage has went down, of the 352 total users on the Naturally Meramec website, 343 were new users to the site. This is a pleasant sight as it means that the advertising push we have been doing for the website has been working properly. Time spent on the website, however, has increased. This means that people are reaching the website purposely rather than just clicking to it and going right on to something different. Caitlin also mentioned that we are in the process of freshening up the look and function of the website. The Naturally Meramec Facebook page has seen an increase of 324 views in the last 28 days. This is a 31% increase from the previous 28 days. We have also seen an increase in likes by 22%, but a decrease in reach by 13%. Staff will investigate why we had a decrease and see if this is something we can fix.

1. **Presentation:** Candace Connell gave a presentation about the new CARES revolving Loan Fund designed to provide financing for small businesses impacted by COVID-19. The fund, open until July 2022, consists of $780,000. This fund will allow small businesses to borrow $5,000 - $200,000 with term options from 5-15 years. The current interest rate is 3.25% for the first three years of the loan. Some of the qualifications include creating/retaining at least one job per $50,000 loaned and be able to show, through a simple narrative, an impact by COVID-19. All of the information including a pre-application and the full application process can be found on the MRPC website. Because each story is different during this pandemic, each case is handled individually and staff is trying to turn around the loans as quickly as possible for the business in the region. At this time, there is approximately $300,000 left in funds to loan, so Candace stressed that if a business was interested in applying for funds, they should not wait.
2. **Announcements:** The Naturally Meramec Consortium attendees were given the opportunity to make any announcements about their business and discuss any upcoming events. No new updates were given as updates we made during introductions.
3. **Next Meeting:** The next Naturally Meramec Consortium Regional Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 15, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.
4. **Networking:** After the meeting, Naturally Meramec Consortium attendees were able to network with other attendees. No members had any new updates for the group.
5. **Adjournment:** Samantha Maddison adjourned the meeting at 7:03 p.m.