

Montpelier Alive - Testimony 1/3/23

There has been a lot to process since the July floods! But, it's actively how we are spending our time at Montpelier Alive, so we can improve upon the systems and response for the next time.

General take-aways in immediate response activity during the aftermath of the July flood:

- Not enough financial support and accessible resources for businesses to recover quickly. When losses exceed \$100,000 and in some cases 1Million, a couple \$5000-10,000 checks don't go far enough.
- Complicated systems with no prior training: All applications were difficult to navigate. Dept. of Labor system was broken, it took (in some cases) over a month, or months, to get unemployment checks.
- Municipal and State communications and connection were lacking. Businesses felt very alone in their recovery, and Montpelier Alive was seemingly the only thing that brought them together with trusted resources in their recovery. Montpelier Alive felt untrained and unprepared as well, but worked very hard to stay on top of everything and find trusted resources.
- Flood insurance is prohibitively expensive, and difficult to navigate even for agents! Lots of uncertainty around future coverage, and the coverage offered is never enough. Many are going back into business without it.

Moving through Recovery - Montpelier is not OK!

- 5 months later - 80% of businesses are open in downtown Montpelier, primarily because of hard work and dedication. But, it's clear the previous flood may be the LAST risk they are willing to take to do business here. I emphasize LAST risk.
- The businesses that remain shuttered include BIPOC owned businesses, those who had more difficulty accessing financial resources or navigating systems, and businesses that had trouble with landlords and leases, or are waiting for landlords to complete their work.
- Montpelier Alive has worked hard to draw tourists and visitors back, especially during the holiday shopping period. The businesses that are open did well, but there is NO way that their recent revenues could cover the inventory and economic losses they endured in the past 5 months!
- Businesses are very concerned about the first quarter revenues. Can we sustain the energy it takes to market Montpelier this aggressively, can we continue to uplift town with events and decor? So much investment is necessary for this path forward. We (small non-profits, or municipalities) don't have endless resources. If small businesses can't make it through the first quarter, there is risk they will close.
- There is fear that employees will not be working downtown during this slower time of year, when we are more dependent on the regular crowds. Lunch and dinner establishments may need to close for the season if they don't see an uptick in foot traffic.
- There is anxiety about future flooding and the Dec. 18th event was a good reminder of the frequency of these disasters. Businesses had to close for 2 days to move inventory and then move it back. During the height of holiday season! There wasn't a revised

municipal emergency plan, there was a lot of 'flying by the seat of our pants' again. This is very worrisome as another flood could hit at apparently any time.

- If mitigation efforts are not addressed, people will not want to live and work in Montpelier. Many businesses are worried that property owners are not taking all the measures to protect their buildings or those who inhabit them. There are a lot of differing approaches, and property owners are seemingly lost when it comes to what the best way forward for their building is.

Post office:

- The lack of a post office posed immense difficulty this holiday season. Online shops are at risk of closing (and for some it's the only business they have until they can reopen), it takes \$30/day for staff to take packages to the post office and return to work. Loss of revenue, poor use of employee time, challenging hours all make it difficult to make it through this time without a post office.

In summary: There is urgent need to find assistance in Montpelier's recovery. With the risk associated in doing business here, it is hard to convince anybody to live or work in the Capital City! Montpelier, or any given town in Vermont for that matter, cannot pull through this alone - we need State support to keep our people and buildings safe, and to create more resilient communities.

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