

**To:** Melrose City Council

**From:** Lauren Grymek, Executive Director, Melrose Chamber of Commerce

**Date:** April 27, 2020

**Re:** Statement on ORDER-2020-84: An Order Requesting Information Relative to Resources Available to Local Business Impacted by the Novel Coronavirus

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My name is Lauren Grymek and I am privately employed as the Executive Director of the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, a position I have held for the past four years. I report to a 17-member, volunteer board of directors consisting of local business owners. In addition to myself, there is one other part-time employee at the Chamber, Jennifer Manning.

The Melrose Chamber of Commerce is a private, registered 501©6, nonprofit, membership organization. The Chamber is funded through membership dues, event fees, sponsorship and marketing opportunities, all of which are paid for by the nearly 300 members we serve. The Chamber does not receive direct funding from the City of Melrose, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the Federal Government.

The Chamber has always enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the City of Melrose and our elected officials. We partner annually with the City to hold four signature “community building” events. While the Chamber manages, markets and executes these events and programs, the City provides support in the form of Police, Fire and Public Works resources. The Chamber also makes possible two annual beautification projects: the purchase and hanging of flower baskets and holiday wreaths which are hung and maintained by members of the Public Works. The Chamber is extremely grateful for this private-public partnership that spans several decades and which works to the benefit of all who live in, work in or visit our community.

The additional work performed by the Chamber staff is for the direct benefit of local business community members and includes, but is not limited to, facilitating networking and professional development opportunities, business to business marketing and advertising opportunities, advocating to local government and assisting businesses with a variety of individualized needs. The Melrose Chamber of Commerce is a strong and vibrant organization and our members are universally committed to supporting the city of Melrose through sponsorships of organizations, youth sports, schools, volunteerism, beautification projects, charitable donations, etc. The small businesses that comprise the Melrose Chamber of Commerce are, by in large, the lifeblood of our wonderful city.

I believe that it is important that city officials recognize the significant impact that this global pandemic has wreaked upon our small business community and I believe that most do. In fact there is likely no one that is listening to my voice that isn't aware of the passage of the Federal CARES Act and implementation of Federal loans / grants being administered through the Small Business Administration. Understandably, there has been frustration with the implementation of those programs which seek to provide tremendous financial support to small businesses. We, at the Chamber of Commerce have been working diligently since the announcement of the so-called stimulus package to provide our members with the most up to date, useful information available. Our members know what has been done and what continues to be done on their behalf. In addition, we at the Chamber are always open and available to discuss any matter pertaining to our members and the Melrose Chamber of Commerce provides all available information and resource links to members and non-members alike.

It is for those reasons that I was particularly disheartened to learn about an article published by The Melrose Patch on April 22, entitled “City Councilor Calls On Answers For Melrose Business Community. The lack of facts in the article as well as the inflammatory quotes could very easily lead readers to believe that the Chamber has

not been working on behalf of our members during the last few months of the COVID-19 pandemic and worse that we have turned a deaf ear to those members of the business community who are in dire straits and are in jeopardy of foreclosure. While I have no doubt that this economic devastation is impacting our business community, I can state unequivocally that I have not been contacted by any business owner who is facing foreclosure. It should be noted that it was only after I was alerted to the online article by a reader was I then able to contact the reporter directly and afforded the opportunity to comment.

While the members of the Chamber of Commerce are fully aware of the following and while any other person is also able to view this information on the chamber web site, social media accounts, etc., please allow me to highlight just some of the efforts undertaken in support of the small businesses in Melrose:

- Researched and vetted pertinent information that was included in twelve newsletters related to small business loans, grants and other financial assistance opportunities.
- Assisted Chamber members with the SBA loan process.
- Hosted an online webinar with the Massachusetts SBA and SCORE about the Paycheck Protection Program. This free event was open to members and nonmembers of the Chamber.
- Participated in conference calls with the offices of Mayor Brodeur, State Senator Jason Lewis and State Representative Kate Lipper-Garabedian to share information and questions pertaining to the business community.
- Marketed and promoted our members through emails and social media.
- Worked one on one with nearly half of our 300 members on individual concerns, questions and challenges they are facing.
  - These needs vary greatly from member to member depending on the industry, size of business and more.
- This week, we are rolling out a temporary signage program to help identify which businesses are open online, for takeout and via phone, as well as a new fundraiser that will support both local restaurants and the neediest members of our community.

I regret that an online article was essentially my invitation to provide information and apparent notification that there were some questions regarding the work being done by the Chamber in support of our members. I am confident that an accurate assessment of all that is being done by the Chamber of Commerce will conclude that our membership is being well-served. As stated previously, the Chamber is a private organization comprised of businesses that pay membership dues. We are an open and welcoming to all organizations and businesses, even those who are not members of the Chamber are welcome to contact me directly.

In conclusion, I hope this provides those members of the City Council who are seeking information about the Chamber's efforts to help our small business, nonprofit and sole proprietor members at this time while simultaneously working with the City to help the business community at large. I look forward to working with all our elected officials to continue to provide support to the business community now, and at the time when Melrose can reopen for business.