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Susan J. Jeanfavre
Assistant Town Clerk

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Linked to: South Farms
From : Ben Paletsky <bpaletsky@southfarms.org>
To : David Wiig <wiig@optonline.net>

Dave,

I won't be able for the meeting, so I would like to share this statement tonight.

In late January, the cloud of COVID drifted over our event industry. The impact was initially predicted as being minimal. I assumed by July after a heavy April quarantine, things should return to some form of normalcy. That never happened and nearly every wedding and party for our 2020 season was removed from the calendar. The restrictions in the State's executive order made it illegal for us to operate our business, and they called for venues to reschedule clients to 2021. Unique to the event industry that books events a year or more in advance, that creates a 2-year gap in revenue. For many in business, this has meant closing doors, giving up, selling, walking-away.

Those who know me though know that I don't give up that easily. I immediately started looking for a way to pivot our business.

While our primary business has been and will continue to be weddings, we have been hosting concerts for many years and have had some success with those events. The concerts began almost a decade ago with our Community Day events. These events were free to the public and we set up a stage in the field for a day of live, amplified music. We continued with live music at our farmers markets, The Morris Marketplace, every Sunday afternoon for three years before transitioning that to the Thursday night social where live bands played weekly throughout the summer. These were all in addition to our numerous standalone concerts, including last year's concert by the Waterbury Symphony.

With the success of these past events in mind, we began to pivot our business for the season. This summer, after finding a top production partner, adhering to state, town, and code guidelines, and working with subject matter experts at Yale's School of Public Health, our team developed a recipe for a socially distanced concert series experience - one of the first of its kind in the nation.

Yes, there are a lot of shows over a short period time. This isn't representative of the initial concept - we didn't expect so many artists would accept contract offers to perform. Response from those who have attended an event thus far has been overwhelmingly positive, proving that the Twilight Series is a bright spot for many people during a pretty bleak time. Many, many residents have reached out to express their delight at having a top notch music venue here in Town.

This effort also employs over 40 people (who would otherwise be out of work) and positively impacts our other local businesses who are about to go into the offseason.

Every permit was obtained for this concert series, which is permitted under the Governor's executive order. The process required that the Zoning Enforcement Office sign off on the application, which he did once he had the necessary site plans. This event is 100% compliant with local and state guidelines.

I'm aware of the townspeople's concerns regarding noise, but I hope that everyone can be supportive, or at least patient, while we work to dial this in. We are continually evaluating every detail, working with our sound team, to ensure that we are doing our best. This is an unprecedented, strange, and sometimes impossible time to operate a business, but I assure you we are taking all efforts to make improvements to mitigate any potential issues.

My family has been a part of the community for 5-generations and care deeply about this town and its future. I have invested significantly in the Town of Morris. I have no intention of disruption the lives of my neighbors but I also and working hard to manage my family land and run a viable business during these difficult times.

Best regards,
Ben Paletsky