

Charles County Launches COVID-19 Relief Fund for Businesses

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La Plata, MD - Charles County-based businesses that have suffered economic setbacks due to the current COVID-19 crisis have a new source of financial assistance. Charles County has launched its COVID-19 Business Relief Fund to provide microloans to local businesses to help with expenses during this time. The fund was created through a \$200,000 allocation by the Board of County Commissioners. The county's Economic Development Department will administer the loan program.

"It's important to get this funding to the business community quickly to help our businesses in any and every way possible," said Commissioner President Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq. "Protecting the health of our residents is our top priority, but we cannot forget that this is an economic crisis, too."

The COVID-19 Business Relief Fund was created to provide financial assistance to Charles County small businesses affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Proceeds can be used to provide capital for operating expenses, payroll, suppliers, rent, and other business-critical cash operating costs.

"Getting this program up and running has been a team effort, with involvement from a number of departments," said Chief of Business Development Lucretia Freeman-Buster, who will oversee the loan program. "Our County Government fiscal and IT teams worked with us to streamline the process and deploy technology resources so that businesses can download applications, fill them out, and submit their loan packages online. We will also be able to do online closings once loans are approved."

Businesses can apply for up to \$5,000 from the COVID-19 Business Relief Fund. Payments—principal and interest—will be deferred for the first year, after which borrowers will have two payback options. They can pay back half the loan in six months and have the remainder forgiven, or they can opt to take up to five years to pay back the loan in full. The Board of Charles County Commissioners voted to have the repaid funds go to the Charles County Charitable Trust when borrowers use the first option.

The Board of Commissioners also approved alterations to the Economic Development Department existing revolving loan funds to provide additional financial assistance to Charles County businesses during the COVID-19 crisis. The existing programs are the Business Development Loan Fund, which is targeted to minority-, woman-, and veteran-owned businesses and the Target Industry Incentive Loan Fund, which is for any business in the county's target industries, including professional services, healthcare, federal contracting, innovative entrepreneurial activity, technology, research and development, and value added agri-business. Under those programs, businesses may apply for loans up to \$10,000 with principal deferred and interest only payments for the first eight months. Applicants must fit the loan criteria and be able to demonstrate economic hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Loan information and criteria are available online at www.MeetCharlesCounty.com/charles-county-covid-19-business-loans/. Applicants can request a loan application and instructions for submitting loan application packages.

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