Random thoughts in a pandemic challenged world.

It has been a while since I wrote an editorial about Economic Development in Sussex County. Like most of you, I have been following the recommendation of our medical experts and avoiding crowds and situations that may expose me and my extended family to dangerous situations. Has it affected my consulting business? ABSOLUTELY! But my experience has taught me that if you follow the advice of the medical experts and first responders in an emergency you live to be able to see your great grandchildren born!

Just a short update on Sussex Economic Development Action Committee’s (SEDAC) activities during these troubled times.

Because of the pandemic, SEDAC had not met since February, but, facing the new normal, we held a Zoom meeting on May 29, 2020. In February, Bobby Horsey of Dave Horsey and Sons, alerted us to a problem that continues to exist with Worker’s Compensation Insurance. His detailed report spoke to these problems which need to be corrected or they will continue to cost businesses in the County thousands of dollars. SEDAC invited Insurance Commissioner Trinidad Navarro to join us in May and he did. An open and frank discussion was held and, with the assistance of other members of SEDAC, including the Associated Builders and Contractors Inc, some steps to solve the problems identified in the discussion were put forward. The Commissioner was more than willing to assist our membership and opened lines of communication with SEDAC that will lead to legislation to correct these concerns. The solution is simple, but forces aligned against it, including the trial lawyers, are formidable. Where we are in these efforts will be made available as they come to fruition.

Congratulations to the Sussex County Council, County Administrator and Planning and Zoning Commission for their efforts to keep business moving while protecting the public and the County workforce from the pandemic. Their efforts have kept business moving forward in these trying times and will avoid major delays when we are finally able to completely reopen in whatever is the new normal.

The Sussex County Council did another good thing in the philosophy behind their recently passed 2021 budget. Rather than spend out their surplus monies, the Administrator proposed and the Council passed, a bare bones budget, holding their reserve funds for any pandemic emergency that they may face and making it clear that they will revisit this budget when the dangers have passed.

One of the areas for which they have provided funds is broadband. The funding, however, is minimal. They need to revisit that funding level in the immediate future. But they are not alone. The State of Delaware needs to step up as well. When the schools shut down, as they should have, it became quickly apparent that the plan to educate our children through the internet was woefully inadequate. Unfortunately, our recent pandemic will not be our last emergency so it is absolutely necessary for ALL levels of government to step up and contribute to correcting this problem. Without an educated and trained workforce, we will not be able to sustain our present business and we sure as hell will not be able to attract new ones. A more than adequate broadband is one of the tools we need to move forward.

The next area of immediate concern, and one that may be more important than broadband, is a program to assist our area hospitals with physician recruitment. More on this topic later.

SEDAC’s meeting in July is still scheduled, time and virus will determine if it is in person or on Zoom. Please everyone, STAY SAFE!!!

Joseph T Conaway

Chairman - SEDAC