

Southbury planning for long-term recovery

By Dan Nowak



Bielmeier

SOUTHBURY — While Southbury officials continue to assess the overall impact of tropical storm Isaias on their town, the recent storm hasn't stopped officials from moving forward to help local businesses survive and recover from the pandemic.

On Monday the South-bury Long Term Recovery Committee, using FEMA recovery guidelines, kicked off in an effort to bring local leaders together to assess the needs of the town. This includes help for local businesses and researching for ways to help them financially.

“When it comes to last week’s storm, we are still assessing the impact on local businesses,” said Southbury Economic Development director Kevin Bielmeier, co-chairman of the Southbury Long Term Recovery Committee. “As of Sunday we still had 23.52 percent of people without power. People who run businesses are a self-sufficient group. They are resilient and self-reliant. But they also need help from the impact of COVID-19.”

Recovery committee members include local farmers, health officials, education and youth administrators, members of the business sector and members of the worshipping community. They are expected to meet regularly with virtual web meetings.

“The Long Term Recovery Committee is less about producing a plan and more about producing a road map to follow, something that can evolve as the pandemic evolves,” Bielmeier said. “It’s about what can be done to make the town safer. It’s about going after resources and finding state and federal funding that can help our businesses.”

“Federal and state funds are out there. It’s important for you to identify your town’s needs and make an ask. You don’t want to leave any stone unturned and that will be the focus of the committee. My hope for this committee is to ultimately find long-term economic recovery.”

Bielmeier expects results from the committee around Labor Day.

Another effort to help local businesses is a proposal by Bielmeier for a Southbury Business Recovery Fund. Town funds would be used to create a lifeline for local businesses when needed down the road. The plan would have to be approved by approved by various departments, including the Board of Finance and the town selectmen.

“There appears to be a reversal of urbanism and a return to rural and suburban communities,” Bielmeier said. “Southbury is well-positioned, long-term, to emerge stronger after this crisis. ... I am actively pursuing elements that will make Southbury attractive to start-ups and young entrepreneurs. This includes a co-working space, a brewery, a micro-distillery, a film festival, eventually more restaurants, unique boutiques and services, an industrial park and more entertainment options. We will make this even more attractive to young families looking to settle down and maybe start a business.”