

Peter O'Leary

Mayor of Chimney Rock Village and Owner of Bubba O'Leary's General Store

I am a small business owner in Chimney Rock Village, NC. I own 3 retail buildings. Two of them I operate as Bubba O'Leary's General Store and one of them I rent to another small business owner.

Hurricane Helene severely damaged two of my buildings and completely destroyed the other one on Friday, September 27, 2024. The buildings were assessed by SBA at some point after we filled out an SBA application for assistance in October 2024. I was not notified when the assessment was done but received a phone call from an SBA staffer on November 6, 2024 with questions about our application. We were approved shortly after that and everything seemed to be going extremely well.

Our application to SBA is for the funding to rebuild the destroyed retail building. My other buildings and contents were also included as we needed financial assistance to do some repairs and replace contents in both of them.

The issues started in February, 2025 when I started reaching out to SBA to answer their questions and try to get my questions answered. Every few weeks I would receive a notification that my case manager had been changed. I would try to reach out with a phone call and/or email to my new case manager with questions but would not hear from them or get a very slow, 2-3 week, response. Then after 5-6 weeks I would be notified that I had a new case manager.

Over several months I was assigned 4 different case managers. During this time there were several requests for information from SBA which raised many questions from me about their procedures, how much I would be allowed to borrow, and other issues. Many times, I would reach out to my case manager and not get the information I needed.

My impression of the process was that many of these case managers were not correctly trained or did not have the experience needed to respond to my questions. I have worked as a bank loan officer and am very familiar with commercial lending. It was frustrating to try and make building plans and business decisions based on information I was told and then be notified that something had changed or was not being allowed. This would require me to attempt to clarify information and/or ask questions but I would not get a timely response or would then have a new case manager assigned.

The whole process has been worked out now but it took about 7-8 months longer than it realistically should have. I have also heard similar stories from other businesses in Chimney Rock Village who have been frustrated with the length of time necessary for SBA applications to be processed and the confusing information being given to them regarding their applications and requests for funding.