

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

January 8, 2016

City Hall, Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

**Members Present:** Everett Eaton, Chairman; Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman; Dana Levenson (via teleconference), Eric Spear, Philip Cohen, Jen Zorn, Josh Cyr, John Pratt, Ron Zolla (via teleconference)

**Unexcused:** John Bosen

**City Staff:** City Manager John P. Bohenko; Planning Director Rick Taintor Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

**Approval of draft meeting minutes of December 4, 2015**

Commissioner Pratt moved, and Commissioner Cohen seconded, a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of December 4, 2015. The motion carried unanimously.

**Semi-Annual Report on Tourism Partnership with Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce**

Valerie Rochon, Tourism Manager and Briggs Buzzell, Business Development Manager for the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce provided a report on Chamber activity for the reporting period April-December 2015. Ms. Rochon, who is acting as interim Chamber President asked for patience during the transition that the Chamber is undergoing since the departure of former President Doug Bates in December.

She then provided the tourism report, a copy of which is posted on the City's website under Economic Development. Highlights of the reporting period include the successful launch of the new tourism-dedicated *GoPortsmouthNH.com* website in July, successful attendance at two consumer and two trade travel shows, effective distribution of marketing collateral, development of new banners for trade show participation and a significant increase in participation at Restaurant Week (April and May), Hit the Decks (May), and Fashion Night Out (September) events. A major blizzard disrupted the success of the Fire and Ice Festival in February 2015, but plans are underway for an event-filled Festival weekend in February 2016.

Ms. Buzzel informed the EDC that as part of the Chamber transition, staff and Board members are concentrating on member retention. The Chamber has "hit a ceiling of 800 members" and wants to grow. As part of this effort the Chamber plans to host a series of focus groups with non-tourism businesses to determine how best to serve that sector of membership. She summarized the activities of the Member Enhancement Committee during the reporting period including the newly reformatted Morning Mixers at La Maison Navarre, the popular Business after Hours, and the quarterly Business Development Seminars at the Sheraton Hotel. She also explained the changes in the works for the eCoast and the partnership with the NH High Tech Council. The plan is to completely reinvent and rebrand the eCoast which has languished and needs a new focus.

During discussion, the EDC discussed the challenges going forward with online hotel booking during phase 2 of the *GoPortsmouthNH.com* website launch. Most hotels have their own booking software so the issue is property managers and staff needing to manage two booking systems. Also discussed were Chamber revenue generation from the new website and the vetting of the individual listing details by the entities listed on the site.

Three suggestions emerged from the discussion including the development of reporting metrics for the Member Enhancement Committee business activities, the exploration of attendance at trade shows for business attraction similar to the attendance at Travel trade shows, and the collaboration with the Chamber on the EDC's upcoming Business Retention and Expansion initiative.

**EDC Focus Areas - Spotlight and discussion. Informational presentation on Route 1 and Woodbury Avenue**

Portsmouth Planning Director Rick Taintor provided a power point presentation of the existing conditions of the City's urban development along the Route 1 and Woodbury corridors and the City's efforts to improve these areas through the implementation of the Gateway Zoning provisions. Included in the presentation were examples of successful redevelopment of similar 1960's urban development areas in other cities such as Mashpee Commons in Massachusetts; Pearl City, Hawaii; Glenview, Illinois; San Jose, California and St. Louis Park, Minnesota. These communities were able to successfully implement mixed uses and multi-family housing into traditional strip mall developments with vast parking lots like those on Route 1 and Woodbury Avenue in Portsmouth.

The goals of Portsmouth's Gateway Zoning district are to:

- Encourage mixed-use development (residential + commercial)
- Enhance character of corridor development
- Expand moderate-cost housing opportunities
- Incorporate pedestrian/bicycle access and circulation
- Use transportation infrastructure efficiently

Incentives are included in the zoning regulations to motivate developers to create mixed uses and bring buildings closer to the street, but to date the effort has been marginally successful. Moving forward, the Planning Board and staff will work with its Master Plan consultant to analyze existing incentives and recommend zoning changes in order to achieve the desired redevelopment goals.

During EDC discussion, Mr. Cyr suggested creating a narrated video of the presentation and posting it online to provide a visual presentation that outlines the City's vision for corridor redevelopment. Mr. Spear suggested making the same presentation to a select group of developers and having a dialogue on the challenges and opportunities within the plan and the zoning provisions. The EDC also discussed the necessary market incentives, financing and critical mass of residential demand needed for this vision to be successful. Multi-family housing, preferably for workforce, was identified as a specific goal in these corridors. Mr. Taintor said the City is applying for a grant for technical assistance with this and other types of incentives.

Note: At this point in the meeting, Chairman Eaton turned the meeting over to Vice-Chairman Marchewka as he had another meeting to attend.

**Other Business**

*Election of Commission Officers*

Election of Chairman: Vice-Chairman Marchewka moved and Commissioner Cohen seconded the nomination of Everett Eaton as EDC Chair for the upcoming year. The EDC voted unanimously to support the nomination. Commissioner Zorn nominated Bob Marchewka for EDC Vice-Chair. Commissioner Pratt seconded the motion which was supported unanimously.

*Business Expansion and Retention Subcommittee Update*

Ms. Carmer reported that the EDC subcommittee on this effort consists of Commissioners Marchewka, Cohen, Cyr and Zorn. The group met December 23, 2015 with the City Manager and Ms. Carmer to start planning for the project. The UNH Program Guidelines were reviewed and potential participants for the project leadership team, task force, community partners and volunteers were discussed. The subcommittee will meet again following adjournment of this meeting.

*Municipal Garage at 165 Deer Street*

In apprising the EDC on the 165 Deer Street project, City Manager Bohenko said there will be an update on the project at the January 11, 2016 City Council meeting. He anticipates bringing the Purchase and Sale Agreement for a vote later in the month. Outstanding items include finalizing the title and title insurance and agreement on the respective party's obligations on removal of urban fill and regular fill.

**Confirm Next Regular Meeting:** Friday, February 5, 2016, 7:30 AM

**Public Comment**

David Choate of Colliers International raised the following items during public comment:

1. Re-use of the Bridge Street parking lot for a new federal building ("It is too narrow.")
2. In order to make workforce housing financially feasible in the City, there needs to be greater density bonuses and fewer required municipal infrastructure improvements.
3. Currently he is seeing a demand for more downtown office space in the 3,000-10,000 square foot range which is extremely difficult to fill. This will be important for the redevelopment of the McIntyre property.

**Adjourn** – The meeting adjourned at 8:48 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager