

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

December 2, 2016

City Hall, Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

**Members Present:** Everett Eaton, Chairman; John Bosen, Eric Spear, Ron Zolla, John Pratt, Dana Levenson

**Excused:** Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman, Josh Cyr

**Absent:** Jen Zorn, Philip Cohen

**City Staff:** City Manager John Bohenko, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

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Chairman Eaton opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of November 4, 2016

Commissioner Bosen moved, and Commissioner Pratt seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of November 4, 2016. The motion carried unanimously.

Holiday Shopping - Grant to GPCC for Targeted Promotion of Downtown Merchants

At the request of Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce President Valerie Rochon, the Downtown *Holiday Shopping* agenda item under New Business was taken out of order to accommodate a meeting schedule conflict.

At the November 21, 2016 City Council meeting, the Council voted to approve Holiday Free Parking commencing on Sunday, December 18, 2016 and end Saturday, December 24, 2016. This is a reduction in the number of days there is free parking downtown during the holiday shopping season. To mitigate for any impact this has on downtown merchants, Councilor Spear's offered a Downtown Holiday Parking Proposal that authorizes the City Manager to enter into an agreement with the Chamber of Commerce to spend up to \$20,000 from the Parking and Transportation Fund to allow for special programs that benefit downtown merchants. It was further decided the EDC be tasked with fiduciary program oversight and approval of any disbursement of such funds.

Chamber President Valerie Rochon and incoming Chamber Tourism Manager Olivia Briggs were present to provide feedback on options for potential activities slated for reimbursement. It was agreed that the goal of the project is to promote all downtown merchants and enhance the shopper experience in the Central Business District during the shoulder season through targeted programs, incentives and/or actions. Promotion efforts should target both residents and visitors to the City. Things such as vouchers, parking incentives, media advertising, incentives for stores staying open later, and better signage were discussed.

The outcome of the discussion was that the Chamber will meet with local merchants and bring a plan back to the EDC for approval at the January 6<sup>th</sup> EDC meeting. Any plan would have to be broad enough to benefit all downtown merchants (not solely Chamber members) and be accompanied by a Letter of Agreement between the City and Chamber which outlines a set of evaluation metrics which would be reviewed before any disbursement of funds are approved.

Presentations and Discussion: Portsmouth Housing Committee

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff provided an update on the progress of the Housing Committee established by the City Council in March 2016 to accomplish the following three objectives:

1. Identify three new areas in the City for either incentive zoning or village centers, with the goal of building new, authentic neighborhoods,
2. Identify the components that make a desirable neighborhood, and
3. Make recommendations to Staff on how to implement the components identified in Objective #2 in the areas identified in Objective #1

The Housing Committee met seven times and gathered input from residents and other stakeholders on the objectives. A website has been created that includes a summary of the meetings and the reports issued. The Committee is concentrating on three areas to increase additional multifamily units in quality mixed-use village centers that are attractive, developments outside of the City's core.

The Housing Committee understands the direct relationship between this type of development and sustained economic vitality. Current Portsmouth housing and apartment/multifamily rental prices are the highest in Rockingham County and the City's current zoning allows multifamily developments of only eight units or less. Business growth and upward land costs have created a mismatch between the demand and supply for smaller, more affordable workforce housing for employees of local businesses.

The Housing Committee is reviewing potential zoning amendments and incentives to add additional housing units. Regulations that allow increased density considerations will be a key element in meeting the Committee's objective. Another key element is to align the recommendations with the City's Vision Plan and the CIP projects for infrastructure related to new village centers with pedestrian and bike connections.

The three areas that have been recommended are:

1. The gateway corridors near Kmart Plaza on Woodbury Avenue and the Route 1 corridor,
2. The Mirona Road area which affords views to Sagamore Creek watershed, and,
3. The Exit 7 area near the Community Connect Church

In discussion following the presentation, the EDC expressed support for the Housing Committee's recommendations. It discussed the potential impact of the new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) state legislation scheduled to take effect in 2017. Before enacting local regulations, the City Manager believes that it is important to determine the impact of this law on creation of additional workforce housing and believes it is important to start slow noting that the City can loosen the ADU local regulations once the impact is known.

#### Old Business/Updates

*Business Retention/Expansion Project Update*- Ms. Carmer reported that project surveys are still underway, although the response has been slower than anticipated. She provided the following summary of activity to date:

Total # of surveys sent:	400
# of businesses opting out:	27
# not responsive to calls:	47
# out of business/unreachable:	17
# other (moved away etc.):	9
# of surveys completed:	70±
# of surveys submitted to date:	45

Surveying will be suspended until January 2017 after the holidays.

#### *Community Broadband*

At the October 2016 EDC meeting, Mr. Kirsch of the City's Cable Television and Communication Commission's requested that an EDC representative serve on a joint Cable Commission/EDC subcommittee to explore the concept of Community Broadband. In response, Commissioner John Bosen volunteered to participate. His role as both a member of the EDC and counsel to the Portsmouth Housing Authority will bring valuable insight to the subcommittee discussions.

#### New/Other Business

*Downtown Holiday Shopping* – see discussion summary above

*2016 EDC Year-end Review* – Ms. Carmer distributed a summary of EDC activity for 2016 broken down into

the categories of Project Advocacy, Partnerships, Business Visitations, Subcommittee Participation, General Economic Activity and Presentations. The report will be uploaded to the City's Economic Development webpage.

*2017 EDC Officer Nomination/Election*

Dana Levenson nominated Everett Eaton to serve another one-year term as EDC Chair and for Bob Marchewka to serve another one-year term as EDC Vice-Chair. Seconded by Ron Zolla. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

*Other Business*

Mr. Zolla inquired about the possibility of conducting a downtown parking survey to determine who is currently using the City's garage and on-street parking and at what times. He believes that such information can help inform future parking rates. The City Manager responded that the City will be installing 200 new computerized parking meters that includes analytic software that may be helpful in analyzing public parking use. New mobile device apps are also in the works that could be helpful. He said that a parking survey is also a possibility.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: Friday, January 6, 2017, 7:30 AM.

Public Comment

Barbara Massar, Executive Director of Pro Portsmouth, Inc., was present to speak on to the City Council vote to allocate a \$20K grant to the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce to promote downtown merchants. She is an advocate for funds to be use for infrastructure use such as designation of a remote parking lot and shuttle service specifically for downtown events. This practice has been successful for events that Pro Portsmouth has such as Market Square Day and First Night. She also thinks it would have been better to have had a broader stakeholder discussion on the concept prior to the Council action.

David Choate of Colliers International spoke on the recent Board of Adjustment hearing on the proposed workforce housing project on Echo Avenue. He felt the outcome was unfortunate and did not bode well for the future of similar housing projects in the City. He said that this project was unique because the property owner was a workforce housing advocate and as such, adjusted the land cost downward in order for the proposal to work. He said that much of the City's workforce now lives in Dover and Somersworth, New Hampshire. He stated that the #1 question asked by business looking to relocate here is where the local workforce lives. He fears that shortly the businesses will follow to locations effectively creating workforce housing. He plans to meet with the Deputy City Manager to brainstorm other ideas for the Housing Committee on how to create additional housing units in the City.

Adjourn – With no further business to conduct the EDC meeting adjourned at 8:50 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager