

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

April 7, 2017

City Hall, Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Josh Cyr, John Pratt, Eric Spear, Sarah LaChance, John Bosen, Philip Cohen Ron Zolla, and Dana Levenson (via teleconference), Jen Zorn

Excused: Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman,

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

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of March 3, 2017

Commissioner Pratt moved, and Commissioner Cyr seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of March 3, 2017. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion and Request for Approval of Plan for Downtown Retail Promotional Grant by representatives of Local Merchants and the Chamber of Commerce

Chamber Tourism Manager Olivia Briggs and local merchant Cathy Reddington of City Shoes Boutique presented a three-pronged plan and budget for use of the \$20,000 grant that the City Council earmarked for downtown retail promotion. The first plan element is to gather information from merchants and shoppers. To date, a subcommittee of downtown merchants has conducted three retail focus groups as well as an online survey through Survey Monkey to better understand the strengths and challenges of this sector. The focus groups were facilitated by Bruce Jewett, Creative Director at Double-0 Marketing of Portsmouth. The survey garnered 544 responses. Respondents ranked the downtown shopping experience and the quality of merchandise as the top reasons they come to the City to shop. Survey results will be available at the end of April.

The second program element of the marketing plan is education. The group plans to convene event to present the survey report to the retail community and others. At the event, speakers from communities with successful downtown retail sectors such as Burlington, Vermont and Newport, Rhode Island will be invited to share best practices. The third program element is promotional events. The first event is scheduled for June 4th and will incent shopping downtown through special instore and sidewalk sales and an open market on Vaughan Mall with 8' x 8' tents for merchants to sell their products. To date, 43 shops have committed to instore promotions and 28 stores are doing sidewalk sales. Later in the fall the group plans to hold Fashion's Night Out in September and Plaid Friday and Small Business Saturday in November. Finally, in an effort to beautify downtown, merchants will be working with the City to allow retailers to display red flowers in planters outside their establishments or in window boxes.

Members of the EDC discussed the proposed plan and budget and asked for copies of the survey results when available. Mr. Zolla would like to learn the profile of who is shopping downtown and also to discern from the results if the parking rate increases are a deterrent to shopping downtown. Lastly, the EDC discussed the metrics and timing for reporting on the outcomes of marketing program as proposed. In addition to receiving a copy of the survey results, the EDC would like a report on the success of the program. This would also entail surveying the retailers on the marketing program success and whether or not they gained customers. Staff will draft an outline of reporting requirements for review.

Ms. Carmer said that the original City Council action on the downtown marketing grant required the EDC to approve the marketing plan for use of the grant funds and asked for a vote on the plan as proposed. Mr. Pratt moved and Mr. seconded a motion to approve the plan. Motion passed unanimously.

New Business

Strategic Planning Committee for Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Revitalization

In March the City Council authorized formation of a Strategic Planning Committee for Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Revitalization with the charge to develop options for future use of City-owned property in these areas and report back to the City Council with strategic recommendations as to how the City can best use its property in service of the community. Topics to be addressed include land use, urban design, public infrastructure, and timing. The Committee will make semi-annual reports to the Council until it has reached completion of its charge. The Mayor proposed the Committee membership include 2 City Councilors, 1 Planning Board Member, 1 Historic District Commission Member, 1 Economic Development Commission Member, 1 downtown business owner, 1 downtown resident and 1 Ex-officio Member with Appointment by City Manager for staff liaison.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff was present to give a presentation on the City's efforts to date exploring concepts for these areas of town. She explained that the project goals are:

- Use City property optimally in service of City priorities,
- Apply high quality urban design that "fits" Portsmouth,
- Improve connectivity: between neighborhood, new parking garage,
- Connect North End and Downtown to Islington Street Corridor, and
- Reinvigorate Vaughan Mall

Colbert Puff's presentation provided the historic background of development in the subject areas including the impact of the Urban Renewal Program in the North End. She also summarized current developments proposed in the North End and the need to develop connections and open spaces in these areas while maintaining adequate parking.

City Councilors Spear and Cyr expressed enthusiasm for connectivity and open space opportunities associated with these initiatives and for the potential to re-purpose surface parking lots. Chairman Eaton told the Commissioners that the Mayor had contacted him to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee as EDC representative and that he had accepted. Ms. Zorn expressed her belief that green space is very important in these areas and she is interested in participating in the planning process as appropriate. Mr. Cohen raised the issue of project costs and the possibility of selling the city-owned land in the area versus long-term leases.

Other Business

Downtown Portsmouth ERZ – NH DRED approval

Ms. Carmer reported that the State Office of Economic Development has approved the Downtown Economic Revitalization District bringing the number of ERZ's in the City to five.

Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Project - UNH faculty preliminary report

On April 6th the EDC subcommittee and UNH held a "campus retreat" for an initial review of the survey data from the Business Retention and Expansion Project. The results at first review are largely positive relative to Portsmouth as a place to do business. As expected, the major issues were workforce attraction/skills gap and housing challenges for workforce. Subcommittee members identified other issues that emerged such as the perceived disconnect between the Pease International Tradeport and City proper. Opportunities were identified in the areas of existing workforce training grants, recreation, and connectivity to Pease. Chairman Eaton told the EDC that the UNH faculty remarked that in their experience with the BR&E program the results for Portsmouth were significantly more positive than other communities. The next step in the process is for UNH to complete its data analysis and provide a draft report in May.

Citywide Telecommunications Subcommittee Update

The Subcommittee met on April 5, 2017 and hosted Carol Miller, Director of Broadband and Technology from the State Office of Economic Development. Carol is 19-year veteran of the telecommunications industry, covering a wide range of technologies and she shared the experiences of other NH communities' effort to expand broadband. She told the subcommittee that there are very few towns that were able to get town authorization to pay the cost of community broadband partly due to the large expense of providing the "last mile" of infrastructure to residents and to the state legislation that restricts bonding for such efforts only to those residents that are "underserved." Other challenges include maintaining the service, system reliability and customer retention.

Small Business Week Observance/Activities

Ms. Carmer shared a list of activities planned for Small Business Week from April 29th to May 5th which includes a proclamation by the City Council naming that week Small Business Week in Portsmouth.

Other Business

Ms. Carmer distributed copies of the report that was issued this week from the Seacoast Shipyard Association on the annual economic impact of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for 2016. She noted that the Association's regional economic impact report of the PNSY for calendar year 2016 shows an economic impact of \$756,068,941. The Shipyard employs a total of 6,329 employees with a payroll of \$496 million up from 6,099 employees with a payroll of \$482 million in calendar year 2015. The shipyard purchased \$77 million of goods and services in 2016; an increase of \$17 million over calendar year 2015. Total contracted facility services purchased was \$140 million in 2016 making it a significant source of direct and indirect expenditures in the region.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: Friday, May 5, 2017 at 7:30 AM.

Public Comment

Adjourn – With no further business to conduct the EDC meeting adjourned at 9:05 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager