

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
December 6, 2019**

Members Present: Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Alan Gold, Ron Zolla, and Dana Levenson, Assistant Mayor Cliff Lazenby; City Councilor Nancy Pearson, Everett Eaton

Excused: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Katelyn Kwoka

City Staff: Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

Vice-Chairman Cohen chaired the meeting in Chairman Marchewka's absence. He opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m. by noting that this is City Manager Bohenko's final EDC meeting before his retirement. On behalf of the EDC, he thanked him for his many accomplishments and specifically for the fiscal and infrastructure improvements he achieved during his 22 years of service to the City.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of October 4, 2019

Commissioner Watson moved and Assistant Mayor Lazenby seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of October 4, 2019. The motion carried unanimously.

Presentation

Valerie Rochon, President and Tourism Manager Cecelia Smith of the Chamber Collaborative Greater Portsmouth provided the annual report on Tourism and Business Development for the period January 1 – November 30, 2019. Included in the report were metrics on marketing, visitor originations, website traffic, hotel occupancies, Rooms and Meals taxes, travel show attendance, Portsmouth Harbour Trail and bus tours, public relations and media coverage. Information was also provided on small business development initiatives and support such the manufacturing roundtable, PHS career pathways, Trend Talks and finally, networking opportunities and meet-ups for local businesses.

Discussion ensued on how the EDC might be proactive in collaborating with the Chamber and hospitality properties to develop a marketing plan focused on Portsmouth as a small event/conference destination. This would be a way to assure that occupancy rates remain high particularly with several new hotels coming online. To start, the EDC would like to research the overall conference capacity of the hospitality industry and to what degree demand for conference space is beyond current capacity. Ms. Rochon said the State does not currently have a conference facility clearinghouse that meeting planners can access, but it is working on that goal and the Chamber is assisting with the effort.

Old Business

Follow-up to November 8, 2019 Joint Meeting of PTS and EDC on Microtransit

Ms. Carmer stated that the next steps following the November 8th meeting is to establish a joint committee consisting of a few EDC members and a few members of the Parking, Traffic and Safety Committee. The Committee charge would be to determine what the City wants to accomplish and get feedback from residents and businesses on the demand for the service as well as to explore potential funding sources such as business sponsorships, grants, and user fees. Commissioner Gold feels that based on VIA's presentation there is potential for such a service and that it is worth exploring. If the costs were spread over various sources it might be affordable. Vice-Chairman Cohen asked who might be interested in serving on a joint subcommittee and Commissioners Watson, Gold, Zolla and Assistant Mayor Lazenby (pending reappointment to the EDC) volunteered. No actions would be taken on this effort under the sitting City Council, but would be taken up by the incoming City Council starting in 2020.

New/Other Business

Expansion of Central Business District ERZ

Ms. Carmer distributed copies of the proposed expansion of the Central Business Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ). She explained that the ERZ is one of the economic development tools that the state offers to attract/retain

business and to promote investment in the state. The impetus for the proposal came from an international business looking to locate in a downtown building that is outside of the current ERZ boundaries. In addition to that request, proposed development projects in the downtown could be eligible for the ERZ business tax credits.

Expansion of an existing zone requires state approval including eligibility determination and a vote of the EDC. Commissioner Levenson suggested that the boundary be modified to include the parking area of the Temple Israel off Court Street as there may be some future development activity there. Commissioner Levenson moved and Commissioner Pearson seconded the motion to expand the district as modified. The motion carried unanimously.

EDC retreat

The Commission discussed the actionable goals identified as priorities at the EDC retreat including: 1) research, 2) advocacy, and, 3) being a resource for the City Council on economic impacts of projects and policies. The new City Council may have a perspective on economic development that diverges from the current sitting City Council and; it will be important to understand what that perspective is and how the EDC can best be a resource for both the Council and the residents. The Council representative on the EDC can also assist in the maintaining a dialogue between the Commission and the City Council on economic development matters at regular City Council meetings. Related to this, Assistant Mayor Lazenby said he was told by Mayor-elect Becksted that he will continue as the Council representative to the EDC.

It was agreed that, in keeping with the retreat goals, the EDC should extend an invitation to the Mayor to attend an EDC meeting early in 2020 to discuss economic development. Also, early in 2020 the EDC could ask that the EDC Chair attend a City Council meeting to present the work the EDC anticipates undertaking during the year and to suggest a City Council/EDC work session to discuss mutual economic development goals.

Potential research topics – there was keen interest in researching the tax impact and value of local development over a set period of time such as ten or twenty years. Specific focus would be on the direct and indirect economic impact of development projects including tax revenue, jobs, etc. Assistance from UNH in conducting the research was suggested. Commissioners willing to serve on a subcommittee related to this topic are: Cohen, Watson, Levenson, and Lachance.

The McIntyre redevelopment (as proposed or modified) was also discussed in the context of projects that will have direct/indirect economic impacts for the City. Regardless of what happens at the McIntyre site, the EDC could be a resource to help convey what it means to the community from an economic development perspective.

There was also interest in researching conference center activity to determine the inventory of Portsmouth's conference market and what is the demand that cannot be fulfilled? What are we doing well and what aren't we doing well? Commissioner Levenson suggested meeting with local hoteliers to find out if we should be advocating for a larger conference center, not necessarily in the downtown but somewhere in the city. Are local conference hotels willing to collaborate on and cooperate on a larger facility if it drives greater room occupancy for all? Councilor Pearson suggested reaching out to Presidential campaign staff to learn about their assembly needs and where the local deficiencies exist as well.

2020 meeting dates and meeting structure

The EDC reviewed the proposed 2020 meeting dates and discussed departing from the norm and meeting in July and August. Members agreed to meet in July and hold August as a possible meeting option if needed. It was also agreed that one option for meetings is to reserve the proposed dates and on occasion have the subcommittees use those dates for meetings on retreat goals as opposed to convening the entire Commission if warranted.

Other thoughts on EDC meetings is to use the presentation time for information related to the retreat topics. It was also suggested that the EDC do more on-site business visits/tours if possible. One idea related to the conference center topic was to schedule a tour to the local conference facilities and speak with the respective meeting planners.

Nominations for EDC Chair and Vice-Chair for 2020

Per Commission rules and procedures, election of officers occurs in January and nominations are on the table for a vote in January 2020. Ms. Carmer noted that Chairman Marchewka and Vice Chairman Cohen have expressed interest in remaining in their respective roles. Vice-Chairman Cohen asked if there are other members wishing to serve as officers. Hearing none, Assistant Mayor Lazenby nominated Mr. Marchewka for the position of Chairman and Commissioner Levenson nominated Mr. Cohen for Vice-Chairman. A vote on officers will occur at the January 10, 2020 EDC meeting.

Other Business

- 1) Ms. Carmer distributed copies of recent media articles featuring Portsmouth including an article on the UNH partnership for the Business Retention and Expansion Study and the promotional ad and related article in *Business Expansion* magazine. She also noted that there has been a plethora of recent travel media accolades for Portsmouth's Vintage Christmas event.
- 2) Commissioner Levenson thanked Councilor Pearson for her hard work and service on the City Council and as a City Council representative to the EDC.

Public Comment – No public was present to provide public comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: January 10, 2019 7:30 a.m.

Adjourn The meeting adjourned at 9:07 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager