

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Portsmouth Citizen Response Task Force
Remote meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, December 16, 2020, 2:00 P.M.

Call to Order

Co-Chair James Petersen called the meeting to order at 2:00. Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff represented the City staff and was the moderator. Patience Horton took minutes. This 28th 2020 Citizen Response Task Force meeting lasted one full hour. Votes were taken with a show of hands. The agenda items were taken out of order.

Task Force present:

1. James Petersen, Petersen Engineering, Co-Chair
2. Mark Stebbins, ProCon Construction, Co-Chair
3. Kim McNamara, Health Officer
4. Bianca Monteiro, York Pulmonary Associates (Health Care Professional)
5. John Golumb, Poco's Bow Street Cantina (Restaurant)
6. Deborah Anthony, Gather Pantry Market (Non-profit)
7. Alan Gold, Economic Development Commission
8. Ann Birner, PharmD (Health Care Professional)
9. Jim Lee, REMAX Shoreline (Real Estate)
10. Russ Grazier, PMAC (Non-profit)
11. Kathryn Lynch, (Non-profit Health-care Organization)
12. Martha Fuller Clark, NH State Senate District 21
13. Valerie Rochon, President, Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth

Task Force absent:

14. Karen Conard, City Manager
15. Karen Bouffard, The Real Estate Market, Inc. (Real Estate)
16. Sarah Lachance, Economic Development Commission
17. Jeffrey Goss, The Clipper Tavern (Restaurant)
18. Joe Scarlotto (Restaurant)

City Staff present:

1. Nancy Colbert Puff, Deputy City Manager
2. Todd Germain, Fire Chief
3. Stephanie Seacord, Public Information Officer
4. Joe Almeida, Facilities Manager
5. Patrick Howe, Deputy Fire Chief
6. Kristin Shaw, Deputy Health Officer
7. Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Director
8. Mark Newport, Police Chief
9. Peter Rice, DPW Director

Also present were:

1. Anne Weidman
2. Andrew Bagley

I. Welcome & Approval of December 9, 2020 Minutes

James Petersen: We've been renewed. Let's get back to work!

- Motion: Jim Lee moved to approve the December 9, 2020; Minutes as written. Alan Gold seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Changes to CRTF Charge, as summarized by Nancy Colbert Puff

- **Nancy Colbert Puff:** At the December 14 City Council meeting, the Council unanimously voted to have the Task Force continue its work in reopening Portsmouth. Your title will be Reopening Portsmouth 2021.
- Reopening Portsmouth has been reorganized as a Blue-Ribbon Committee. It is bounded by the Mayor and reports back to the Mayor and the City Council. The group will have a non-voting councilor appointed to it. The Mayor will be considering which councilor to appoint.
- [Conard's 12/23 correction] The newly-formed Blue-Ribbon Health Committee is separate from the Blue-Ribbon Committee. It has the same members as the CRTF Health Committee. The Mayor wishes that the Health Committee gives updates to the benefit of Opening Portsmouth 2021 Committee. [12/23 Correction from Huda] The Blue-Ribbon Health Committee is part of Reopening Portsmouth 2021. They make a weekly report to the general Committee to enable discussion.
- There is a big push among City Councilors to allow restaurants to open on the sidewalks and in the public realm as early as March, weather permitting. There was a lot of approval for the process that went on at that time, and that maybe that process could be mimed going forward in 2021.
- The group is expected to report back to the Council on January 25 with a work plan for the next year.

James Petersen: I request, and Mark Stebbins is in agreement, that the Health Subcommittee continues to provide the general Committee with a report on a weekly basis.

Mark Stebbins: The Mayor wants to take James and my recommendation of who should be resigned from the Committee and who we'd like to replace those people with.

III. Task Force Vacancies

Discussion

James Petersen: We have seven vacancies. There is an arts-person vacancy, a health vacancy, two restaurant vacancies, two retail vacancies, and one at-large vacancy.

Ann Weidman: The Design Professionals have had a strong influence on many of the Streets' decisions. **Mark Stebbins:** Perhaps Anne can come in as an "at-large" member.

Andrew Bagley: I am probably better watching and learning and would rather not

officially join. **James Petersen:** I encourage people who are interested in serving to apply. It is up to the Mayor to decide who joins us. **Valerie Rochon:** I have made a note to have retailers, as well as restaurateurs, apply. **James Petersen:** The specifics of how applications will be made will be finalized this week. We don't want to wait another week.

James Petersen: We don't have a revised Charge. We are under the assumption that our work is the same. We will identify ways we can help, and we will do that.

IV. Health Subcommittee Update

CRTF HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

December 16, 2020

By Ann Birner, Health Subcommittee Chair

"The weekly dashboard continues to reflect a bad situation in our region, with increased positivity and rising cases in the state, county, and city along with rising hospitalizations in NH. Community transmission is categorized as "substantial" statewide. NH, MA and ME are all still categorized as having "uncontrolled spread" with curves continuing upward in NH/ME and possibly showing signs of leveling off in MA (too soon to be certain, and again MA does remain identified as a state with uncontrolled spread). In the bottom left corner, a caption quotes the DHSS to explain the shades of blue on the NH map. The shades were adjusted to better show differences across the state's counties. A short evident drop in the case graph seems to be common on our weekly dashboard and may be attributed to a downturn in testing results not only over the recent long holiday weekend, but over weekends in general. Demand and/or capacity may be reduced on weekends. In addition, increased demand for testing right now may be overwhelming sites and leading to a backlog. A question was raised regarding 10% as a threshold of some sort, given that NH and Rockingham Co. have both just exceeded this datapoint. Various thresholds have been cited by the CDC, WHO and the White House but in reality, exceeding said thresholds has not triggered meaningful action to control spread.

"Members were reminded of the discussion that took place during last week's meeting regarding new evidence on the role of airflow in viral transmission, and follow up email correspondence on December 11th with the subject heading "Small data, big implications regarding indoor dining and other activities". This new evidence was drawn from a series of cases in a South Korean restaurant but the relevance extends to other indoor settings, particularly when masks are not worn. The HSC has further discussed these findings and proposes inclusion into both the Ventilation and the Daily Life FAQ documents.

"James suggested a motion be made to allow (ratify) updates to FAQ documents at the discretion of the HSC. Senator Martha Fuller Clark so moved and was

seconded by Valerie Rochon. [*Note from Patience: Details of the motion and discussion are written below.*] Subsequent discussion modified the motion to indicate that in the case of viral transmission via airflow, the description would be in a relatively broad context that would not single out restaurants. Comments included the need for financial support to enable restaurants to “hibernate” in the interest of health and safety and avoid permanent closures. There was a question as to whether NH plans to institute a curfew but there is no indication that is the case.

“The HSC is currently drafting a Vaccination FAQ.”

*Submitted by Ann Birner
Health Subcommittee Chair*

- Motion: Martha Fuller Clark moved to ratify that the Health Subcommittee continues to update their FAQs as they see fit. Valerie Rochon seconded for the sake of discussion.

In discussion, Valerie Rochon: We want to make sure that in the FAQ we are factual and at the same time that we are not creating fear. There are some restaurants that have gone through a lot to make sure they are as safe as possible. We must not post something that would suggest that a restaurant is unsafe. The wording in the FAQ should be such that it doesn't frighten people not to go to restaurants. [This sentiment was added to the motion.]

John Golumb: Dr. Fauci has been saying for a while that the three places he would not go until June are bars, restaurants, and gyms. People are making decisions on their own not to come out to restaurants. Our December numbers are 50% less than they were in November. We are looking at hibernation.

Mark Stebbins: This is for everything indoors, not just restaurants. It is for office, retail, and any indoor gathering place. What concerns me is that this targets restaurants, and it really should discuss any indoor activity.

Bianca Monteiro: The indoors is always risky. There are moments of higher risk the moment you take your mask off. That is where the problem is.

Kim McNamara: The crux of the problem is that we don't really know what's safe. The guidelines take into account that most respiratory droplets fall out in six feet and so that distance was chosen. We don't really know how safe that is inside. It seems like nothing is 100% safe. People think that because something is allowed, it is safe. We don't have that in COVID. If I were to appeal to people, I would support our restaurants through takeout as much as possible.

- **Amended motion made earlier by Senator Fuller Clark.** Mark Stebbins restated the motion. It is to ratify the Health Subcommittee to use their discretion on what they post when they update their FAQ as long as they put it in relatively broad context that does not single out and raise fear about visits to restaurants. Seconded by Valerie Rochon; approved unanimously.

Ann Birner: We are also starting a FAQ on vaccines.

V. Streets—Winter/Spring/Summer Plan

Mark Stebbins: Our work has been authorized to proceed. We should reconvene Streets. If we could start that next week, it would be great. I will be available during the next two Wednesdays, and I hope members of Streets who will be available agree to attend the next two Wednesday meetings.

VI. Identify New Areas of Focus—Brainstorm

James Petersen: We had listed some other areas of potential focus. A City Councilor brought up microbusinesses that are in Portsmouth but are not restaurants, and they're not retail. These are service businesses, non-profits, arts and entertainment—in general places where people traditionally assemble.

Nancy Carmer: We've been pushing out information about what CARES Act resources are available. The questions I've gotten back are primarily from the smallest businesses. We have the capacity to help. We want to hear from people. We need to send out yet another survey.

VII. Adjourn

- **Motion:** Jim Lee moved to adjourn. Alan Gold seconded. The motion carried unanimously. The time was 2:45.

Respectfully submitted,
Patience G. Horton,
Recording Secretary