

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Portsmouth Citizen Response Task Force
Remote meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, August 26, 2020, 2:00 P.M.

Call to Order

Co-Chair James Petersen and called the meeting to order at 2:00. Karen Conard, City Manager, represented Staff and was the moderator. Patience Horton took minutes. This meeting, the 14th general Task Force meeting, lasted one hour. Agenda items were taken out of order. Votes were assessed with a show of hands.

Task Force present:

1. James Petersen, Petersen Engineering, Co-Chair
2. Mark Stebbins, ProCon Construction, Co-Chair
3. Karen Conard, City Manager
4. Kim McNamara, Health Officer (City)
5. Senator Martha Fuller Clark, NH State Senate District 21
6. Russ Grazier, PMAC (Non-profit)
7. Ann Birner, PharmD (Health Care Professional)
8. Kathryn Lynch, (Non-profit Health-care Organization)
9. Karen Bouffard, The Real Estate Market, Inc. (Real Estate)
10. Valerie Rochon, President, Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth
11. Deborah Anthony, Gather Pantry Market (Non-profit)
12. Alan Gold, Economic Development Commission (City)
13. Bianca Monteiro, York Pulmonary Associates (Health Care Professional)
14. Sarah Lachance, Economic Development Commission (City)
15. Jim Lee, REMAX Shoreline (Real Estate)
16. Samantha Finigan, Gus & Ruby Letterpress (Retail Business)

Task Force absent:

17. Marylyn Morin, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (Health Care Professional)
18. Jeffrey Goss, The Clipper Tavern (Restaurant)
19. Joe Scarlotto (Restaurant)
20. Nathan Moss, Citizen-at-large
21. John Golumb, Poco's Bow Street Cantina (Restaurant)

City Staff present:

1. Peter Rice, Director of Public Works
2. Todd Germain, Fire Chief
3. Stephanie Seacord, Public Information Officer
4. Joe Almeida, Facilities Manager
5. Kristin Shaw, Deputy Health Officer
6. Robert Merner, Police Chief
7. Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Commission Manager

Also present:

- 1) Petra Huda, City Councilor
- 2) Anne Weidman, Portsmouth Professional Alliance/JSA Architects
- 3) Andrew Bagley, Board member, PopUpNH
- 4) Laura Brown, Board member, PopUpNH

Welcome and Approval of Minutes

- Motion: Martha Fuller Clark moved to approve the Minutes of August 19, 2020. Kathryn Lynch seconded. It was made clear for the Minutes that 30-minute parking in the Worth lot is limited to six spaces. The motion passed unanimously with a show of hands.

Bridge St Lot Subcommittee Discussion

Russ Grazier: The PopUp is up and running and going strong, bringing in \$25,000 this second weekend. It is proving to be safe space with mask-wearing and social-distancing. The big issue is how to incorporate retail into it for the remaining weeks through October. There is space on Bridge Street for pop-up tents. River Run's Tom Holbrook is organizing brick-and-mortar businesses that are interested in having booths there. The approval of the Health Department for Bridge Street merchants is being tied in as a factor.

There is an email address for the Task Force: hotline@cityofportsmouth.com. We got community feedback about loud volume during the first weekend, he said. By the second weekend, it was all smoothed out. Signage around the city has guided people to the Foundry garage very well, and more signage is planned.

Alan Gold: This might be a good fit for some of our local artists—sculptors, potters, painters, and others. They have limited space where they can sell their wares with most craft fairs having been cancelled, and this might help.

Streets Subcommittee Update

Peter Rice: We are looking at closing Penhallow between State and Daniel at night to allow pedestrian traffic. We are hoping for a consensus and agreement from the Task Force.

Mark Stebbins: The Penhallow opportunity and other potential pedestrian ways will be discussed at the Streets Subcommittee meeting following this one.

- Motion: Valerie Rochon moved for Task Force approval of closing Penhallow in the evenings to make a pedestrian way. Martha Fuller Clark seconded. In

discussion, Alan Gold commented that we are jumping the gun by approving it before it is set up. The motion passed unanimously.

Health Subcommittee Report

For her weekly report, Ann Birner writes: Notes were provided describing yesterday, Tuesday, August 25th's Health Subcommittee meeting. An effort led by James Petersen to draft a "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) document is just getting underway. The document will describe viral transmission and the role of air quality and exchange in public health, particularly relevant as the weather changes and more activities move indoors. Task Force members are encouraged to send questions to the subcommittee (ann.birner@gmail.com) for consideration.

The subcommittee, as part of autumn/winter planning, is developing a list of experts who might help understand certain aspects of the pandemic. Christine Burke, Wellness Coordinator for Portsmouth Public Schools, will join our next meeting. The subcommittee is considering development of a flow chart that will provide guidance in the event of a resurgence in COVID-19 cases.

Portsmouth's proposed City Mask Ordinance underwent multiple amendments during the second reading on August 18. The Health Subcommittee members wish to express concern to the City Council in two areas:

- 1) Section 3.1101 now reads "All persons are hereby required to wear face coverings whenever they are in indoor or outdoor places which are accessible to the public, in which a physical distancing of six feet (6') between people who are not members of the same household is not maintained". The Health Subcommittee membership believes that face coverings should be required indoors regardless of the perceived ability to maintain the 6' physical distance.
- 2) Section 3.1102 now reads "A required face covering pursuant to this ordinance shall be any product that covers the nose and mouth of the person wearing it. The face covering may be commercially manufactured or personally created". The Health Subcommittee members are concerned that this definition does not exclude face coverings which are known to allow the virus to disperse and therefore are believed to lack efficacy in protecting the public health (compared to those constructed of tightly woven fabric or other soft materials, for example). Examples of these less protective face coverings include plastic face shields that are open at the bottom, and masks that are externally vented.

Many comments ensued, all in agreement with the subcommittee's perspective on these two points. A motion was made, seconded, and passed (with one "nay") that authorizes the Health Subcommittee to write a memo to the City Council expressing these concerns. The memo will be circulated tonight, Wednesday August 26, to all Task Force members

for their votes, which must be received by EOB tomorrow, Thursday, August 27, to be counted. Simple majority in favor will result in the memo being sent to the Council on Task Force letterhead.

The weekly COVID-19 dashboard was reviewed. Massachusetts numbers look high compared to last week but are for an approximately 3-day period rather than a daily total. Maine cases are up two weeks in a row. The Johns Hopkins data show percent positivity down since last week in ME/MA/NH. The subcommittee will continue to follow these data.

The testing FAQ document was distributed to the Task Force. A motion to ratify the document was made, seconded, and passed unanimously. *The Health Committee report was submitted by Ann Birner for the Minutes.*

There was a general discussion during which Chamber President Valerie Rochon revealed the local merchants' earnest backing of a mask ordinance. Valerie accepted Health Officer Kim McNamara's request for a letter from the Chamber to the City Council about the merchants' appeal.

Ann Birner reiterated the Health Subcommittee's key recommendations for the Memo that has been prepared to send to the City Council.

- 1) § 3.1101: "All persons are required to wear face covering whenever they are in indoor or outdoor places that are accessible to the public in which a physical distancing of six feet between people who are not members of the same house is not maintained."

Ann explained: So, if you conceivably have a six-foot distance, whether you're indoors or outdoors, you would not be required to wear a mask. Previously, the six-foot rule did not apply in the indoor setting.

- 2) § 3.1102: "A required face covering pursuant to this ordinance shall be any product that covers the nose and mouth of the person wearing it. It can be commercially manufactured or personally created."

Ann explained: Plastic face shields are not included as acceptable face coverings. In addition, we have asked the City Council to exclude vented face masks. Virus can be exhaled through the vent.

In order for everyone to read the final memo to the City Council, James proposed emailing a copy of it, with the two recommendations, to all the members of the Task Force for their approval. Approval or disapproval and the success of the final draft would be assessed in a return email vote by a simple majority.

Stephanie Seacord had created a Task Force letterhead listing, along the left margin, every member of the Task Force by name. She had prepared a signature block for the two co-chairs and a place for the City Manager to sign (at her discretion, Stephanie said). The mission statement of the Task Force was included at the bottom of the masthead:

“The Citizen Response Task Force was created by the Portsmouth NH City Council in June 2020 ‘to help the City quickly and safely respond to the Governor’s guidelines for reopening in Portsmouth.’”

- Motion: Martha Fuller Clark moved that the Citizen Response Task Force endorse and support the two recommendations on behalf of the Health Subcommittee. Mark Grazier seconded. In discussion, Ann Birner asked for confirmation that the draft would be circulated via email and voted on. James Peterson said he would like everyone to see it in writing for everyone to vote on. The motion carried. Jim Lee voted against.

Adjourn

- Motion: Bianca Monteiro moved to adjourn. Kathryn Lynch seconded. The motion passed unanimously. It was 3:00.

Respectfully submitted,
Patience Gifford Horton
Task Force Recorder