

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Portsmouth Citizen Response Task Force
Remote meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, October 7, 2020, 2:00 P.M.

Call to Order

Co-Chair Mark Stebbins called the meeting to order at 2:00. City Manager Karen Conard represented staff. Russ Grazier was the moderator. Patience Horton took minutes. This 19th general Citizen Response Task Force meeting lasted one hour. Votes were taken with all in favor saying aye.

Task Force present:

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

Task Force absent:

14. James Petersen, Petersen Engineering, Co-Chair
15. Alan Gold, Economic Development Commission (City)
16. Karen Bouffard, The Real Estate Market, Inc. (Real Estate)
17. Marylyn Morin, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (Health Care Professional)
18. Jeffrey Goss, The Clipper Tavern (Restaurant)
19. Joe Scarlotto (Restaurant)

City Staff present:

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

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: Russ Grazier moved to approve the Minutes of September 30, 2020 as written. Jim Lee seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Health Subcommittee Report

CRTF HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE (HSC)

October 7, 2020

By Ann Birner

“Regarding the activity rating chart discussed with the Task Force last week: based on that discussion, the concept was returned to the HSC. The members did not feel comfortable creating a Portsmouth-centric activity guide nor adapting one developed elsewhere. This decision was based on members’ level of expertise and the highly variable and diverse nature of Portsmouth businesses, organizations, buildings, etc. Focus will remain on basic rules for risk reduction such as mask usage, hand washing etc. etc.

“A question was raised regarding the value of the mask ordinance. The HSC was pleased by the passage of the ordinance. Anecdotally, mask usage does seem to be up downtown, along with appropriate social distancing.

“There was a comment about the low number of cases in Portsmouth, providing a segue to the weekly dashboard review. It is true that the rate of infection in Portsmouth has been relatively low, and that despite recently rising case numbers, hospitalizations and deaths have not as of this time risen proportionately. Meanwhile it is important to recognize the effort and care taken by city residents, workers, and others to keep our city safe. We do not live in a bubble but have visitors from many other areas, so while we are fortunate to have few cases, we should not let our guard down. It is apparent that some Task Force members may want more of a focus on local status in our weekly report. The subcommittee is discussing possible changes to the dashboard to include more local data and how to provide this in the limited space on the dashboard. This week, the dashboard shows increasing number of cases in NH but testing is also up and percent positivity remains low. It is possible that the recently increased availability of rapid testing in NH may have contributed to increased case numbers in the state – will continue to follow.

“MA has recently changed its methodology regarding reporting of percent positivity, which likely contributed to a misalignment with JHU data last week. We will continue to show JHU data for the sake of continuity.

“There was a question about a CNN news report identifying NH as one of 5 “red” states based on increasing case numbers; is NH necessarily at risk comparably to the other 4

states? Kim McNamara replied that all of those states are not equally at risk but NH numbers are rising proportionately from a relatively low level. Daily reported cases have been higher lately, and it may be that changes to testing account for some of that but we don't know for sure.

“The subcommittee continues work on FAQ documents. Ventilation has been posted and a ‘live’ google doc remains for TF-suggested revisions. A ‘Daily Lives’ FAQ is under consideration. The subcommittee is organizing a list of questions to be addressed in this FAQ and will bring that to the CRTF for its opinion before working on the FAQ document itself.” *Submitted by Ann Birner.*

Bridge St. Lot Subcommittee Report

Mark Stebbins: I talked to the chief operating officer for the Kane Company. We are going to boat-plastic-wrap the sheds and put them in back of one of the Kane parking lots.

Russ Grazier: The end date for the Bridge Street lot is Sunday, October 18. The next day, the DPW begins getting the lot open for parking. The direct benefit to the Portsmouth businesses has exceeded \$250,000 for the short season starting in August. In the future we should improve the retail component.

Martha Fuller Clark: Can the PopUp go in the Vaughan Mall parking lot? People feel that right now, it is not very attractive from the outside. In the Vaughan Mall, you have a more natural place for the stage to go. The four-way intersection is a better and more direct entrance.

Kim McNamara: Hopefully, next spring will look different than it does right now, but we have to prepare that it may not. New Hampshire numbers are lower than New York's, so the vaccine is going to New York first. Putting the Bridge St lot together was hard at times because a lot of work was done that didn't work out for the City, but it was too late.

Patrick Howe: I don't think we should lose sight that the PopUp also served as a guide to how we can safely and responsibly deliver access to outside dining in the city. Operational procedures that were done include social distancing and the ordering of food and beverages through apps, which eliminated lines at the sheds. The delivery of food to the tables, wearing of masks, and hand-cleaning stations provided good examples of how we can carry on in a safe, responsible manner. The cooperation and collaboration of the people who ran the PopUp organization and the City staff was really positive.

Streets/Fall/Winter Subcommittee Report

Mark Stebbins: There really isn't much to talk about because we didn't put any more barriers out, and nobody else has asked for them. We are discussing about going forward.

Karen Conard: The State Liquor Commission recognizes that the extension of serving alcohol outside is tied with permitting and with the Governor's emergency order, which

goes through November 15. The City Council has tabled discussion of extending permitting beyond November 1.

Kristin Shaw: Seven or eight restaurants have closed. New restaurants have been permitted. Several new owners are looking at properties currently.

Valerie Rochon: Outdoor dining made all the difference in whether or not restaurants could stay open or not. Because of it, many were able to cover a lot of their costs. Some actually generated some revenue. They are incredibly thankful for being able to be outside on the streets, in their parking lots, or wherever they were. The general consensus is that future permitting allows them to be flexible.

There are 4 different types of permitting, Valerie continued.

- 1) Owner-operated places that have their own decks like the River House. Kim McNamara: They don't need any kind of permits because they are on their own property.
- 2) Owner-operated places that are using their own parking lots like the Roundabout and the Cantina. Kim McNamara: I don't know what safety issues there are with using your own parking lot, but that is not something the health department deals with.
- 3) Where there are sidewalk cafes where they are not on their own property, like Popovers. Those permits have an end date.
- 4) Restaurants that use the public realm streets and sidewalks for their tables, like Row 34.

Valerie Rochon: Restaurants need specific guidelines before they invest in plexiglass dividers. Kim McNamara: There are no studies that this is a safe thing to do.

Kim McNamara: As people are moving indoors, there is a lot of crowding in bar sections of restaurants. If anything, that is what is going to do us in. People may not understand clearly that every patron needs to be in a seat at a table and not standing shoulder to shoulder and mingling. It is a simple message we are trying to get across.

Adjourn

- Motion: Jim Lee moved to adjourned. Russ Grazier seconded, and the group agreed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Patience Gifford Horton