

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
June 5, 2020**

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Alan Gold, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby; Everett Eaton; Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine; Dana Levenson, Ron Zolla (via teleconference)

City Staff: City Manager Karen Conard, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

Absent: Katelyn Kwoka

Invited Guest: Chamber Collaborative President Valerie Rochon

Zoom meeting statement

Chairman Marchewka began the meeting by reading the following statement:

“Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor’s Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8 and Executive Order #12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

Minutes Approval of draft meeting minutes of May 1, 2020

Commissioner Gold moved, and Commissioner Eaton seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of May 1, 2020. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Other Business Item At the request of Commissioner Eaton who has a scheduling conflict that necessitates leaving the meeting at 8:30 AM, Chairman Marchewka allowed him to pose the question, “What can we do to support downtown during this very challenging time for Portsmouth’s business?” In his opinion, without further action on the part of the City, he fears it will be very difficult for some businesses to see their way through the current situation. He added that the denial of the outdoor dining to Tuscan Market is counter to working with businesses to survive during this time.

In response to the concern, Assistant Mayor Splaine and City Councilor Lazenby spoke to their votes in favor of the outdoor dining and mentioned that the City Council met the night before and came to a resolution to adjust the proposed plan to allow outdoor dining for Tuscan Market. Councilor Lazenby also noted that the City Council voted to allow the City Manager to approve permit requests for outdoor dining through October 2020.

The consensus of the Commission is to make every effort to assist local businesses by adjusting local practices where possible to allow businesses to operate in a creative and safe way within the pandemic restrictions and guidelines as well as to be a voice to encourage local officials to advocate to the state on behalf of local businesses. The establishment of the COVID-19 Citizen Task Force for business reopening was also noted as a City effort to create every opportunity to assist businesses to resume operations within guidelines.

COVID 19 Updates:

1. City Manager Karen Conard provided updated the Commission on weekly calls with the Governor that has continued to create flex business opening. The COVID 19 infection health trend continues to approve with a 3%-5% infection rate. He is expected to loosen the size of large gatherings this week and open state beaches.

To date the City has approved over 50 outdoor dining permits in a streamlining and rapid manner with no rejections, but rather with modifications per codes. Further, the health department is working with the City's GIS staff to create a map of restaurants to assist in reviewing and monitoring requests.

City Hall reopened on June 1st to 50% occupancy for people visiting the offices and with COVID-19 restrictions in place. All is going well. To date building permit applications are up over 2019 at this point as are motor vehicle registrations and both residential and commercial property tax revenues.

2. Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer provided an update on responses to the City's COVID-19 business survey including the State's Main Street Relief Grant Program and federal program assistance accessed such as Paycheck Protection Program, employment, business needs going forward. Current unemployment rate for the City as of May is 18.9% but new weekly claims have been trending downward for several weeks. Despite success at accessing some financial relief through the federal CARES Act, businesses still need cash flow to pay rents/mortgages and other obligations. Other needs include marketing for their business as well as municipal messaging that the City is open for business. Ms. Carmer noted she could use EDC assistance in reaching out to businesses that asked for a call in survey responses.
3. Valerie Rochon – Chamber Collaborative feedback on COVID 19
4. EDC members' perspective of pandemic impact

COVID19 City Council Task Force on Business Reopening

Council Representative Report Out on upcoming business that warrants EDC attention or action

1. McIntyre Redevelopment – Negotiations with the City's partner Redgate/Kane are ongoing. Nothing new to report.

Public Comment

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: July 10th 2020 at 7:30 AM

Adjourn At 9:45 AM Commissioner Lachance moved and Commissioner Lazenby seconded a motion to adjourn. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

5. Chamber Collaborative President Valerie Rochon reported on the restaurant, lodging and retail focus groups that the Chamber Collaborative has convened. Pre-COVID 19 the lodging facilities reported 70% room occupancy. Currently it is 15%-30% with most summer reservations and conferences cancelled. Restaurants continue to do take-out only business with reduced staffing and revenues. Many are concerned about reopening from a safety perspective and have determined that outdoor dining may not be worth the expense required to set up given the restrictions placed on service and seating configurations that will lower customer volume. Lack of adequate PPE is a concern as is the fairness of closing specific streets for outdoor dining.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager