

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
April 3, 2020**

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Alan Gold, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Katelyn Kwoka; Assistant Mayor Splaine; Dana Levenson & Ron Zolla (via teleconference)

Excused: Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Everett Eaton

City Staff: City Manager Karen Conard, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer, Health Officer Kim McNamara

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.”

Approval of draft meeting minutes of March 6, 2020

Commissioner Gold moved, and Commissioner Watson seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of March 6, 2020. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

COVID 19 Updates:

1. City Manager Karen Conard reported that she is participating in daily meetings with state and/or federal representatives on the pandemic. The City’s emergency management staff also meets via teleconference to assess the local situation and city response. This includes information sharing on the state health department updates including the number of COVID 19 cases, first responder calls, updates on availability of beds at the local hospitals, availability of PPE, and dissemination of information via daily advisories from the City Manager and the city’s website. She suggested that people subscribe to the daily advisories to keep abreast of the evolving situation.
2. Public Health Officer Kim McNamara reported the number of cases in the state (479 cases, 5 deaths, 6,000 negative tests and 1,700 people being monitored). The virus spread has transitioned to community transition with the number of cases expected to increase. More tests are being done to track the virus in communities and various treatment options are being tested nationally including possible vaccines and antibodies testing. Social distancing is currently the best defense. This is particularly important with the amount of “snowbirds” returning from Florida in the next few weeks.

With respect to the business community she suggested working with local businesses to build resiliency, assist in creating business continuity plans. For the future, businesses might consider establishing a closed point of dispensary (PODS) facility for medical countermeasures such as vaccines, antiviral drugs, antibiotics, antitoxins, and chemical antidotes that are used to effectively prevent, mitigate, or treat adverse health effects of an intentional, accidental, or naturally occurring public health emergency. She responded to questions from the Commission relative to consumer safety guidelines for restaurants for take-out meals, the need for face mask use and praised City Manager Conard’s response to the pandemic locally as well as the City staff working on confronting and preventing the spread of the disease.

3. Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer outlined the local/regional economic development response and efforts underway as well as compilation and dissemination of information from the federal CARES Act for local businesses. She is working in partnership with regional economic development partners including the Rockingham Economic Development Center, the Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth, the seacoast municipal and county economic development professionals, UNH, and State Business and Economic Affairs staff to get information out to the greater Portsmouth business community. The Chamber with support from the City will launch a weekly Chamber Chats zoom meeting for businesses to attend and ask questions.
4. EDC members shared their perspective on what is occurring in their respective workplaces and industries. With the exception of the manufacturing industry, most businesses are working remotely, the court system has scaled down, the hospitality industry is experiencing widespread furloughs, the creative economy is suffering due to venue closures, restaurants are closed or surviving on takeout, the real estate industry is experiencing widespread disruption with tenants are requesting concessions and forbearance.

Commissioner Kwoka reported that Pratt and Whitney is still operating as it is a declared “essential operation.” It has implemented special considerations for high risk employees and put in place best practices recommended by the CDC. It is switching production oo industry products that are more in demand than its typical product output. Commissioner Zolla reported that the medical office industry is experiencing decreased volume and the financial industry is experiencing demand for mortgage and loan concessions. Commissioner Levenson said that the banks are the conduit for many of the federal stimulus programs which has the potential to be overwhelming on staff and resources. On a more macro scale, the country is likely in a recession and depending on how long the situation persists, there is concern among those in the finance and investment industry that the overall outlook is grim particularly from an unemployment, GDP and overall financial perspective.

Concern was expressed for the local arts and culture businesses particularly if the stay at home order lasts into the summer and businesses are unable to operate and produce live shows. Concern was also expressed regarding the economic consequences of an extended shutdown and how to best respond when the time comes to re-open.

Subcommittee Discussion

In lieu of updates from respective subcommittees, this portion of the agenda was devoted to a discussion of how the EDC may wish to divert from the respective subcommittees’ work and pivot to a response to the economic outcome of the COVID19 pandemic including recovery and resiliency/continuity planning for the future. The concept of a recovery task force consisting of a few EDC members, along with representatives from local industry, UNH, finance and logistics professionals business was discussed. Suggestions for potential task force business assistance actions include: assessing the local business landscape post-coronavirus, continued assistance with access to federal, state and philanthropic resources, business strategies for recovery, adapting to supply chain, and rebooting restaurants and retail post-coronavirus. The consensus of the Commission was to explore this concept further at the next EDC meeting.

Council Representative Report Out on Upcoming Business that warrants EDC attention or action

On the topic of the McIntyre Building Redevelopment Project, City Manager Conard reported that the City has hired outside counsel to assist the City and is in discussions on a response to the lawsuit from the Redgate/Kane development partner. Councilor Lazenby reported that the City Council Working Group is getting up to speed on these issues which have been the subject of non-public sessions. The Council will continue to address the matter and he will report on progress as appropriate.

Public Comment

Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth thanked the City for its response to the COVID19 pandemic and asked to be considered as a participant in any Business Recovery Task Force that might be developed.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: May 1, 2020 Time to be determined

Adjourn

At 8:50 AM Commissioner Levenson moved and Commissioner Watson seconded a motion to adjourn. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager