

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
May 1, 2020**

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Alan Gold, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Katelyn Kwoka; Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine; Dana Levenson & Ron Zolla (via teleconference), Everett Eaton
City Staff: City Manager Karen Conard, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer, Public Health Officer Kim McNamara, Assistant Attorney Jane Ferrini
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.”

Approval of draft meeting minutes of April 3, 2020

Commissioner Gold moved, and Assistant Mayor Splaine seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of April 3, 2020. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

COVID 19 Updates:

1. City Manager Karen Conard encouraged members to subscribe to the city’s daily advisories to get the latest information on the City’s COVID 19 response and other pertinent information. She reported that the Mayor, the Public Health Officer and she continue to participate in daily meetings with the Governor and state and federal representatives on the pandemic. The state is working to boost testing capacity to gather more information on infection rates as it begins to consider the next steps for reopening the economy. Despite the state’s declining infection rate, she expects that the Governor will extend the statewide emergency stay-at-home order for at least a couple weeks at the upcoming press conference. The stay at home extension is in recognition of the NH’s proximity to Massachusetts which currently has much higher infection rates than NH.

Meanwhile, the City’s emergency management staff continue to meet biweekly via teleconference to discuss the local situation and city response. A smaller group of first responders also meets daily. Staff are starting to plan for reopening City Hall and other municipal facilities with a focus on public health. Ms. Conard outlined several of the anticipated procedures and protocols associated with that effort.

The City continues to assist businesses in responding to the impacts of the pandemic. She applauded the Chamber Collaborative for its continuous outreach to the business community and for hosting the weekly Chamber Chat live events.

In response to the question on how the City is assisting the homeless population during this time, she reported that the City is coordinating with local non-profits and businesses on the provision of temporary lodging, food and showers.

2. Public Health Officer Kim McNamara reported that the virus continues to evolve. There is a push for more testing but it needs to be highly accurate and repeatable to yield the best data. She said there are still more “unknowns” than “knowns” about the virus and its impacts on the body and on the population. For instance, we are learning that it is still severe for both old and young individuals. The specter of a lull in infections followed by a resurgence is a major concern when making public health and business reopening decisions.

Ms. McNamara said that the early actions taken by the Governor have appeared to pay off. To date there has not been issues with local nursing homes, congregate care, and public housing facilities. The City is watching the data very carefully as well as the progress on anti-viral and vaccine development. Going forward the City will need to be vigilant as it considers reopening businesses so as not to cause a spike in infections. The CDC guidelines are the best defense against increased infections.

NOTE: McNamara would like to correct a misstatement made during her presentation while providing examples of infectious disease doses. Shigella is a bacterial pathogen, Kim meant to say Ebola, which is a virus. Both can have very small infectious doses. Kim corrected the error immediately following the presentation.

3. Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer summarized ongoing business assistance efforts her office is doing in concert with City staff, the Chamber Collaborative and other economic development groups working on the COVID 19 response. She sent out a survey to Portsmouth to gather information on the pandemic impacts including workforce reductions, remote operations, number of applications for federal and state assistance programs and how the City can best help companies now and when businesses begin to reopen. Feedback from the first 121 companies that responded indicates 86% of businesses have applied for state or federal CARES Act assistance programs, 30% of firms are working at full staff, 29% are operating with partial staffing and 41% have laid off staff. About 52% have experienced supply chain interruptions and 48% have not and, 70% of businesses that are currently closed say they can begin operations immediately when the economy reopens.
4. Assistant City Attorney Jane Ferrini provided an update on the Governor’s Office for Relief and Recovery (GOFERR) work. This group is responsible for recommendations on the distribution of the \$1.25 billion dollars that the state received in CARES Act funding and Flex funds. There are two GOFERR advisory committees: one consists of legislators and the others is made up of stakeholders. They meet daily and are charged with gathering input from communities and businesses to determine the best way to distribute funds, which must be expended by December 31, 2020. All the meetings are live-streamed and can be accessed

online. She also reported on the Economic Reopening Task Force that advises the Governor on a flex plan business reopening.

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.

Looking ahead there will be a need to welcome back visitors to the community when it is safe to do so in order to help local tourism and hospitality companies recover. One suggestion from the Chamber's Destination Marketing Group is a message that sets expectations for a visit to the city. It could take a Dream/Plan/Go approach. Lastly, Ms. Rochon volunteered to participate in the EDC Business Recovery Task Force effort that it has been preliminarily discussed.

Assistant Mayor Splaine said that the task force is a good idea. However, he feels it is important that there be business representation on a reopening task force so that people feel they are not being told what to do without their input. He plans to bring the broader task force idea to the City Council soon and would recommend that the EDC have representation on task force. Mr. Marchewka asked that EDC members wishing to participate in the task force send an email to Ms. Carmer.

Subcommittee Updates – There were no subcommittee updates as subcommittee activity has been suspended and redirected to focusing on a coordinated response to the COVID 19 impact on the business community.

COVID19 pandemic task force for business recovery and future resiliency

Given the discussion on the Assistant Mayor's broader task force idea brought forward earlier in the meeting, the EDC consensus on establishing a separate EDC task force on business recovery/resiliency was to suspend further action on this item pending what transpires at City Council.

City Councilors' report on upcoming business that warrants EDC attention or action

1. McIntyre Redevelopment – Assistant Mayor Splaine reported that the Redgate Kane lawsuit has been stayed and it appears the two parties have reached a path forward. A date for public input has been established.
2. Clipper Strong Fund – The Mayor has announced the development of a small business relief fund aimed at assisting businesses with 20 employees or less confronted with the negative

economic impacts of the pandemic. Staff is assisting in setting up a partnership with a charitable non-profit to administer the fund.

Other Business

1. City Manager Karen Conard – FY 20/21 Municipal Budget – Next week is the first budget public input session. A budget has been submitted to city Council that has 0% tax increase while maintaining city services.
2. Small Business Week postponement – The annual National Small Business Administration small business week has been postponed until later in the year due to the COVID 19 outbreak.
3. Councilor Lazenby briefed the EDC on a fundraiser he established to benefit the local food pantry, Gather.

Public Comment No one was present to provide public comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: 8AM June 5, 2020

Adjourn

At 9:45 AM Commissioner Lachance moved and Commissioner Lazenby seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carner
Economic Development Program Manager