



**Blue Ribbon Committee to Reopen Portsmouth 2021
City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Remote meeting via Zoom – March 3, 2021 – 2:00 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER:

Co-Chair James Petersen. Called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. and read the following declaration:

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the 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, as extended by Executive Order 2021-02, and Emergency Order number 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.

ROLL CALL of MEMBERS:

Voting Members Present: Co-Chair James Petersen and Co-Chair Mark Stebbins; Alan Gold, Anne Weidman, Deborah Anthony, Jim Lee, John Akar, John Golumb, Karen Bouffard, Kathie Lynch, Sen. Martha Fuller Clark, Valerie Rochon, City Manager Karen Conard, Toni McLellan for Health Officer Kim McNamara.

Non-voting Member Present: Councilor Petra Huda.

Voting Members Absent: Ann Birner, Bianca Monteiro, and Jeff Goss.

Other City Staff Present: Jessica Griffin, Marian Steimke, and Stephanie Seacord.

Others Present: Andrew Bagley, Barbara Massar, Courtney Perkins, Debra Holloway, Pro Portsmouth, Russ Grazier, Tina Sawtelle; Nihco Gallo, Laura Brown.

WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF 2/24/2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Approval of the 2/24/2021 minutes was tabled.

HEALTH UPDATE

Kathie shared the 2/22/21 COVID dashboard, which showed excellent parameters, but a bump-up in Portsmouth. New Hampshire is up to 17-18% of those getting their 1st dose. COVID infections are gradually slowing. She stressed frequent handwashing, masking and distancing. The highest infection rates are the counties where UNH and Dartmouth are, and the biggest concern is the variants. She discussed New Hampshire in comparison to Maine and Massachusetts.

CITY UPDATE

The City Manager said there were 30 applications for café approvals, including five new: Sol, Rosa, Elephantine and Dolphin Striker and TJs. She also listed the sidewalk café applications.

RESTAURANTS/RETAIL UPDATE

Valerie discussed tourism, with hotels seeing a small uptick in occupancy. She discussed implications of Massachusetts opening up restrictions having an impact on New Hampshire hotels. The restaurants are feeling positive and are looking forward to getting the barriers. However, staffing is a concern.

STREETS

Sen. Clark discussed street closures and asked all to consider if certain streets were to be closed. She reached out to Matt Lewis about closing Penhallow to allow for pedestrians from Daniel to Bow. She asked about Ceres Street. Closures would not have to be all day. The streets need to always be available for emergency and delivery. She mentioned closings from last year and asked those present for their thoughts.

John Akar said it is a great idea in the broad spectrum. He expressed concern about deliveries, especially on Penhallow and said trucks are constantly in the alleyway. He mentioned parking in the McIntyre Lot, because he foresees a lot more business coming into downtown this summer. Sen. Clark suggested 5-10 pm potentially as a closing.

Karen Conard discussed use of the McIntyre lot and the eventual GSA Agreement with the City. Those present discussed the closing of Ceres and a reminder that one end is private. They discussed potential sawhorse placement, challenges of that and the implications. In the past, the only option was to put out the tables by Black Trumpet.

Russ said last year the closing of Bridge Street at 3:00 worked well, and earlier on Sundays worked.

John Akar said most deliveries are done by 5:00 and cautioned there is also food being delivered on Sundays.

Russ Grazier recalled shutting Ceres years ago for Jazz fest, and he suggested working with the City and Moran to test a closure for a mini festival.

Karen B. reminded all there are also retail shops and a restaurant that is takeout only – so closing the street would be killer for them.

Chair James said to continue the conversation the following week.

Mark brought up timing, painting and location of where barriers would be painted.

Collaboration with Arts and Non-profits: Russ Grazier (PMAC) has been gathering data from the arts community to determine expectations. He said there will be an appointment that will create a link between this BRC and the Arts BRC, and he wants to get Pro Portsmouth back on the streets.

Barbara Massar (Pro Portsmouth) said there will not be a Children's Day. They are looking at Market Square Day in September, and Summer in the Street to start in July. She gave a history of a previous request for closing Pleasant and how it worked. It would close at 4 on a Saturday, and they never had an issue with delivery. The commitment with the City was to be done by 9:00 and picked up by 9:30. She discussed closing Market Street. Sen Clark discussed potential parking at McIntyre.

Barrier update: Alan said the High School is enthusiastic. He will meet with Peter Rice to discuss logistics and should have a full report by the next week. Anne W said they have three design professionals on board. She discussed street scape view, planter boxes, sourcing of materials and the CTE program at the High School.

NON PROFIT – BASIC NEEDS: Debra Holloway, Exec Director of Arts in Reach (AIR) discussed the programs for teenage girls from Seacoast area – girls 11-22 years old. She said teens have multiple situations, including isolation, anxiety, and food insecurity. AIR has shifted to online programs and has increased their programs. She stressed the importance of having arts available.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nihco Gallo serves on the BRC for Arts and Nonprofits and he is a working jazz musician. Since the pandemic he has shifted to strictly busking, which is street performing, and he and his ensemble have performed approximately 50 performances in the downtown area since June. He speaks on behalf of that contingent. He spoke strongly in favor of closing streets to vehicle traffic whenever possible. It makes a huge difference to close streets for safe distancing.

Andrew Bagley supports street closures but has spoken to residents and businesses downtown, and they are concerned. It would be helpful if there were more traditional shops on this committee and maybe a resident that lives in the core downtown area as well

ADJOURN

John Golumb moved to adjourn, seconded by Karen Conard. On a roll call vote 13-0, the motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 3:000 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted – by Marian Steimke