

DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

October 1, 2021 7:30 AM

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

Excused: Katelyn Kwoka

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

Chairman Marchewka called the meeting to order at 7:35 AM.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of September 3, 2021

Chairman Marchewka asked for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of September 3, 2021. Motion made by Commissioner Watson, seconded by Commissioner Gold. Commissioner Zolla offered edits which were accepted. Motion to approve as amended passed unanimously.

Recognition of outgoing Commissioners Dana Levenson and Ron Zolla

Mayor Becksted presented Commissioners Dana Levenson and Ron Zolla with certificates of appreciation for their respective 21 years and twelve years of service on the EDC and recognized their selfless and valuable contributions to the city during that time of service. EDC members likewise thanked the Commissioners for their service.

Subcommittee Updates

- Business Retention and Expansion – Chairman Marchewka reported that he is working on editing the original UNH Expansion and Retention survey to make it shorter and easier to complete. The goal is to eventually have an ongoing EDC face-to-face business visitation and survey effort that employs an iPad or other similar device for collecting survey responses.
- Smart Cities - Commissioner Watson reported that Commissioner Lachance, Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer and he met to discuss potential smart city initiatives and develop a framework for policy recommendations around connectivity including access to data, privacy concerns and equitable distribution of assets. Smart cities topics are extremely broad and one approach would be to recommend policies around “smart” opportunities before they arise rather than being reactive on mechanisms to improve quality of life, efficiency of operations/services and economic competitiveness.

Given the breadth of smart city opportunities and the EDC’s limited capacity to tackle expansive projects, one area that seems manageable is to promote preparedness for the imminent demand for fast electric vehicle (EV) chargers. Strategically locating fast EV chargers in commerce areas rather than just off the highway would have both direct and indirect benefits for local business and the city.

The recent \$31 million settlement of the false Volkswagen emissions lawsuit offers an opportunity to have the City access chargers at no cost if located on public property. The concept was well received by the Commission with Councilor Lazenby suggesting the initiative be presented to the Sustainability Committee. Ms. Lachance suggested that, going forward, there are many additional sustainable cities initiatives that might be recommended by the EDC for inclusion in the next revision of the Master Plan.

New/Other Business

- Expansion of the West End Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) – The Commission reviewed a proposal to expand the West End Economic Revitalization Zone to include the commercial component of the West End Yards development as well as commercial properties on Islington Street opposite Plaza 800. The impetus for the expansion came from interest expressed by the West End Yards leasing agents. The Commission discussed the ERZ as a good tool to draw companies to the West End which has developed into a strong anchor at the west end of the Islington St. corridor. Commissioner Lazenby suggested it would good to recommend the expansion to the City Council and have that body vote on it. Others agreed that it would provide an opportunity for the public to be more aware of the program and the benefits of this economic development tool. Motion by Commissioner Zolla, seconded by Commissioner Gold to send memo to the City Council recommending expansion of the Zone with inclusion of direct and indirect benefits of the expansion as well as other areas in the City where businesses have benefitted from the program. Motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote with Assistant Mayor Splaine abstaining.
- SBDC Business Resiliency Survey – The Phase 3 of the Business Resiliency survey has been released and has been sent via e-blast to Portsmouth businesses. The extended deadline for completion is October 8th.
- American Rescue Plan Build Back Better Initiative – A collaboration of regional economic development practitioners, universities and community colleges from York County, Maine, coastal NH and Merrimack County Massachusetts are submitting a proposal to the US Treasury Build Back Better Program for a Blue Economy Catalyst . The project goal to develop a cluster of marine related industries that creates high paying jobs in sectors such as aquaculture, marine renewable energy from wind, tidal and wave power, ocean mapping and other ocean related businesses.
- Other business – Three Portsmouth businesses were included in Business NH magazine’s listing of “top 25 NH Companies to Work For.” They include Novocure, Bangor Savings Bank and Lofware.

Public Comment

David Choate of Colliers International made the following comments on the need for affordable housing:

- Recommendation that the EDC have presentation on use of RSA 79-E as an incentive tool for affordable housing.
- Suggestion that the City’s zoning ordinance be modified because “the current incentives for workforce housing are not working.” He suggested that a specific number of units in new developments with a residential component be mandated. Examples include Rye which has 20% requirement and Exeter which has a 10% requirement for workforce units in residential developments.
- Expressed disappointment that the City Council has not taken any concrete actions toward increasing workforce housing despite much discussion on the topic.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting November 5, 2021

Adjourn

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager