

Approved March 5,  
2004

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

January 9, 2004

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; John Hynes, Scott Pafford, Cliff Taylor, Mark Simpson, Steve Alie, Everett Eaton, Paul Harvey Sr., John Bohenko, City Manager

Members Absent: Edward Hayes (excused)

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**Minutes of December 5, 2003**

Commissioner Taylor moved and Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion to approve the December 5, 2003 meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

**Quarterly Report from Chamber Of Commerce**

Chairman Levenson welcomed Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce President Peter Hamelin who was present to introduce Ginny Griffith, the new Business Development Manager. He told the Commissioner that Ms. Griffith was selected to replace Jennifer Quinlan based on her experience working Prexar technology company as well as her experience working with a Chamber of Commerce in another community.

Tourism Manager Hubbard reported on a variety of tourism promotional activities for the period October 1- December 31, 2003. In addition to an overview of the tourism climate, she noted that the Chamber's website has been upgraded, that the Chamber Tourism Committee received a joint promotional grant of \$17,500, and that advertising sales for the *Guide to the Seacoast* exceeded goals by \$5,000. Ms. Hubbard distributed copies travel writers' articles on the Portsmouth area, a recent tourism ad placed in *Yankee Magazine* and a summary of Chamber tourism activities for the past quarter.

Ms. Griffith reported on e-Coast activities for the quarter including an October retreat to establish eCoast initiatives for the upcoming year, data on the WIFI user survey, the Future Forward conference hosted by Portsmouth and fundraising activities. Following her report, Commissioner Alie said he was impressed with the activities described. He feels that the funds spent on the Chamber partnership are a good economic development investment.

In anticipation of the upcoming budget season, Mr. Bohenko asked that the Chamber quantify the grants received by the Chamber for tourism and eCoast activities in the past two years, and that a value for the travel writers' article be researched (perhaps with help from the Portsmouth Herald staff).

**Overview of Local Housing Demographics**

As a follow-up to recent EDC discussions on workforce housing, Ms. Carmer compiled local housing data and demographics as well as program descriptions of the City's Community Development Department initiatives to assist homeowners and homebuyers. The information was presented in a powerpoint handout format.

### **Discussion of 2004 Action Plan**

Ms. Carmer distributed copies of the draft FY 2004 EDC Action Plan and noted that additions to the 2203 plan were underscored for ease of review. In the interest of time, it was suggested that Commissioners forego discussion on the Action Plan at this meeting and review the document for discussion and adoption at the February meeting.

### **Parking Utilization Study**

John Burke, City Transportation Director presented usage trends of High/Hanover parking Garage utilization and parking impact fee data for the past three years. Annual cash paying customers at the garage have steadily increased to an annual value of \$400,000 in 2003. The number of monthly leaseholders has followed a similar incline after the technology economic downturn when Bottomline Technology and Bow Street Software relocated outside of the downtown. Parking garage fills have trended up as well with a total of 29 fills in 2003. This figure is almost double the 15 fills recorded in 2001. The fills in 2003 were not exclusive to the summer months with five fills occurring in December.

There has been a commensurate increase in unmet parking demand as illustrated by parking impact fee assessments. The area with the highest unmet demand is the lower Congress St./Islington St. with the restaurant businesses the leading contributor (115 out of 238 spaces). In addition, there has been an increase in commuters parking in the residential neighborhoods surrounding the urban core. These figures are reminiscent of the trends that preceded the 1997-parking crisis in Portsmouth. They illustrate increased change of use in the lower Congress Street area and they support the need for additional parking at the Worth Lot area.

Mr. Burke said that, since the comprehensive parking study was completed seven years ago, the City has made major improvements to accommodate parking demands. The city has expanded the High/Hanover garage by 240 spaces, it has expanded the trolley service and doubled ridership (exceeds 100,000 annually), it has increased the use of surface lot parking and finally, it has increased parking turnover at metered spaces. The next improvement suggested in the 1997 study is a second parking garage.

Mr. Bohenko said that if the City Council elects not to move forward with a second public garage at the Worth Lot, the Council will need to look at making policy changes in other areas of the overall parking scheme. It will have to revisit the parking impact fee that is now set at \$500 instead of the \$1,500 recommended.

Commissioner Alie stated that turnover is very important and that "convenience is key" to the retail shopper. Commissioner Hynes stated that he believes that the city needs to further study how the city can best use the parking it already has and where the true parking demand is. He is concerned that existing roads cannot handle traffic from a second parking garage at the Worth Lot. He also feels that it will have a negative impact on the historic district.

The City Manager said that the matter of a second garage is clearly a policy matter for the City Council and that it is the job of staff to present other parking enhancement options in lieu of a second garage at the Worth Lot.

Commissioner Alie said he feels that Portsmouth is the envy of many communities and two of the keys to its success were the revitalization of Market Square in the late 1970's and the construction of the High/Hanover garage.

Commissioner Hynes said, if possible, the city should look into partnering with a private business on a structure to help meet parking demand. Mr. Bohenko agreed, but said it would be best if the city were able to control the parking facility associated with a public/private partnership. He envisions a parking system in which the city operates several parking structures using its parking management tools. Commissioner Hynes said the city should aim to accommodate parking for tourists that frequent downtown businesses and who do not have children in the schools and thus put a low burden on the city services.

Other points discussed were increased parking in peripheral residential neighborhoods causing an increase in residential parking permit requests and the concept of a reduced rate in the public parking overnight. Finally, Commissioner Eaton said that the EDC needs to show the City Council the future demand for parking as well as the fact that it can be paid for with parking revenues and not from the tax base.

### **Public Comment**

David Choate spoke to the topic of a second parking garage. He estimates that there are roughly 75,000 to 100,000 square feet of vacant office space downtown. When the economy improves and this space fills, there will be a need for an additional 350-500 parking spaces downtown. Given the timing it takes to permit and construct a garage it is critical to get general support from the residents and businesses for a second garage now.

Stuart Shaines said he was active in the urban renewal process thirty years ago in downtown Portsmouth and at that time no construction was allowed for projects that did not provide parking. He feels this requirement was a key element to the success of downtown. He very much supports the notion of a second parking garage at the Worth Lot as a catalyst for increased investment downtown.

### **Other Business**

There is a work session on the final report of the Worth Lot Parking Garage Feasibility Study at 6:30 PM on January 12<sup>th</sup>. The EDC subcommittee will meet directly after the EDC meeting to discuss the presentation to the City Council.

Commissioner Taylor moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 AM. Seconded by Commissioner Harvey. Vote to adjourn is unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy M. Carmer  
Community Development Program Manager