

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

December 2, 2005

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman, William Gladhill, John Hynes, Edward Hayes, Robin McIntosh, Everett Eaton, Paul Harvey Sr., John P. Bohenko; City Manager

Members Excused: Cliff Taylor

Members Absent: Mark Simpson

Staff present: Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager

Minutes

John Hynes made a motion to accept the minutes of November 4, 2005 as written. Motion was seconded by Dr. Harvey and passed unanimously.

Presentation: City Gateway Opportunities

Chairman Levenson welcomed members of the Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee to the meeting and specifically thanked Marge Hubbard for her help in getting Dr. Okrant here and Steve Weiler of the Sheraton Hotel for their hospitality. As co-chair of the Tourism Committee, Mr. Weiler introduced members of his committee and the presenter Mark J. Okrant, Professor of Tourism Development at Plymouth State University.

Dr. Okrant provided a power point presentation of what it takes for a community to be welcoming to visitors. Included in his remarks were points on impediments to a welcoming image as well as strategies for enhancing a community's appeal to visitors. He ended with a report card for community self-evaluation.

Members of the audience asked questions about enforcement of upkeep on private property and on the working waterfront in Portsmouth. Others made comments regarding the need for better signage at the City's gateways and better control and management of the state pier operations.

Ms. Hubbard offered the Tourism Committee's assistance in moving forward with a design for improvements to Exit 7 off I-95. She suggested they could help get stakeholders involved. Mr. Bohenko said that funding is always a challenge, but that the City has been working on a project by project basis on Exit 7 initiatives. Improvements have been made to sidewalk and railroad crossings and others are planned the I-95 intersection and the redesigned sewer pump station at Deer Street. In most cases, these projects are linked to state and federal matching grants. He thinks that the EDC and the Chamber Tourism Committee can begin work on the design phase of the project in accordance with funds in the City's Capital Improvement Plan for this project.

Chairman Levenson thanked Dr. Okrant for his presentation and the Tourism subcommittee for attending the meeting and offering their assistance.

Five-minute recess was called by the Chairman.

Old Business

HarborCorp Update

The proposed Bonding Resolution for the public parking garage associated with the HarborCorp project is on the December 5, 2005 City Council agenda for first reading. City Manager Bohenko said that typically the City Council would pass first reading to allow a public hearing at the second reading, which will be scheduled for December 19th. A complete packet of information has been sent to the City Council and includes three proforma scenarios for repayment of the bond. If the City Council approves the bond the next step is for the project to go to the land use boards for permitting.

City Council Referral - Parking Impact Fee

The members of the parking impact fee subcommittee met to develop draft alternatives to the existing fee and to outline a process for gaining stakeholder input on any proposed fee modifications. The plan is to get back to the City Council in late January 2006.

Islington Street Corridor Study

The Schultz Brewery tour in November was insightful and informative to the EDC with respect to the future development potential of the Islington Street corridor. The EDC discussed forging ahead with conducting a phased feasibility study of the area. City Manager Bohenko suggested that the EDC begin with development of a RFP scope of work for the project. The plan would be to hire a consultant and follow a process similar to the Northern Tier Feasibility Study. This would allow for stakeholder input and the discussion of alternative development concepts for this area. The City Manager would like to discuss modifying the UDAG expenditure policy with the City Council to allow funds from the UDAG principal to be used for the study.

Commissioners Eaton and Hayes expressed support for this approach. Mr. Gladhill suggested developing a map of the corridor including photos as a starting point for ideas. The use of information from previous traffic and streetscape studies was encouraged. Chairman Levenson asked the City Manager about where this project fits with respect staffing and priorities. The Manager responded that the EDC can assist in getting the Scope of Work defined. Ms. McIntosh said the neighborhoods groups would welcome a role in the project as well.

New Business

In reference to a recent editorial regarding the airport at Pease Tradeport, Commissioner McIntosh asked if the City responds to editorials. Mr. Bohenko said he would discuss doing an Op Ed response with George Bald of Pease Development Authority.

Public Comment

1. Marge Hubbard thanked the EDC for hosting the gateway presentation and reiterated the offer to assist in the work moving forward.
2. David Choate noted that sealed bids on 31 Raynes Ave. are due in mid-December and 6-7 bids are expected. He said the Portsmouth Herald Building is under contract and will soon go to land use boards for redevelopment permits. He urged the city to keep in mind the greater concept of the northern tier when boards review the project so as to avoid the "wind tunnel" effect that has happened in the financial section of Boston

where the State House is dwarfed by taller structures. He also urged the EDC to think of all the gateways in the city and not just Exit 7. He identified Maplewood Avenue, Route 1 and the traffic circle as other gateways in need of attention. He said the Meadowbrook at the traffic circle would be undergoing significant mixed-use changes under the new ownership of Anthony Delorenzo.

3. Chris Dwyer informed the EDC that Art-Speak has raised funds for an Arts District Study of the Islington Street Corridor and these funds could be folded into a larger feasibility study of the area.
4. Bob Hassold requested that, when making recommendations on the parking impact fee, the Commission not lose sight of the many financial burdens faced by small independent retailers in running a business.
5. With regard to the NH State Marine Terminal, Tom Carroll informed the EDC that a Portland, Maine study has concluded that the scrap business at the Maine port has negative environmental and economic development impacts to the Bayside area of the city.
6. Stu Shaines told the EDC that in working on the Islington Street project they might wish to review old Urban Renewal files for this area.

Next Meeting Date

Next meeting will be January 6, 2006.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager