

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

January 5, 2007

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Thomas Ferrini, Cliff Taylor, Robin McIntosh, Edward Hayes, William Gladhill, Paul Harvey Sr., John P. Bohenko; City Manager
Members Excused: Ned Reynolds, Michael Murray, Lisa DeStefano
Staff present: Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager, David Holden Planning Director

Chairman Levenson opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m.

Minutes

Commissioner Taylor made a motion to accept the minutes of December 1, 2006. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hayes and passed unanimously.

Presentation: Quarterly Reports on Tourism and Business Development for the period October 1, 2006 - December 31, 2006

Marge Hubbard, Tourism Manager and Ginny Griffith, Business Development Manager of the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce distributed quarterly reports and presented the activities under the respective Chamber programs for the final quarter of 2006.

Ms. Hubbard noted the following: There has been flat participation in the Portsmouth Harbor Trail tours for 2006. This is attributed to a trend by visitors for more active travel experiences such as kayaking and biking vacations. Advertising sales for the Guide to the Seacoast have exceeded the goal by \$5,000. Fundraising is underway for the \$24,600 Joint Promotion Program grant match. The new online reservation system for local hotels on the Chamber website is underway. This program is in conjunction with Yankee Magazine. The 6th Annual Tourism Summit is scheduled for March 14th and planning for the event is underway. EDC members are invited and encouraged to attend.

Ms. Griffith discussed the following: There was a successful and very well attended joint NH Tech Council and eCoast Technology Roundtable on Oct. 16th at Red Hook at Pease Tradeport. WiFi final figures were presented for the season. Business development support activity included international documentation assistance for establishment of a US office for a company from the UK and work through the Business Education Collaborative to establish an expanded Business Course at the Portsmouth High School.

City Manager Bohenko congratulated Ms. Hubbard on her new position of Vice-President of the Chamber and Chairman Levenson thanked the Chamber representatives for the comprehensive reports.

Old Business and Updates

- *HarborCorp LLC Hotel and Conference Facility* – City Manager Bohenko reported that HarborCorp continues to pursue local permits for the hotel/conference/parking garage project. There is a public hearing before the Historic District Commission on January 31, 2006.

- *Presentation on Zoning Amendment Referrals from City Council affecting central business district.* – Planning Director David Holden presented a summary of the following proposed zoning amendments :
 1. Height dimensional restriction in the Central Business A District (reduce height from 50 to 40 feet)
 2. Regulations for formula-based businesses in the historic district (limits on size and signage for businesses in Central Business District with five or more franchises).
 3. Non-Residential Planned Unit Development Overlay (buffers between two zones).
 4. Residential Density Incentives for provision of affordable units (1.5 times the normal density allowance in General Residence A & B zoning districts).

In follow-up discussion on the proposed amendments Mr. Gladhill said that he believes that the formula-based business topic is an economic development issue and feels it is appropriate for the EDC to discuss the proposal and potentially speak to it if there is EDC consensus. Ms. McIntosh agreed and stated that she has been following a similar issue in Portland, Maine and can provide a news article on the same as background on the issues associated with regulating formula-based businesses. Mr. Eaton viewed the Planning Board meeting on the topic the previous evening and found it informative. He feels that the regulating formula businesses could have a significant impact on the central business district (CBD). Mr. Levenson suggested that the EDC further discuss the issue under the Action Plan agenda item.

- *Islington Street Corridor Study* - Ms. Carmer noted that copies of a revised draft outline are available for a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Islington Street Corridor Study. The draft is still a work-in-progress but the goal is to issue the RFP in late January after final comments from the city's planning consultant Taintor and Associates, Art-Speak and the Planning Director.

Other Business

- *2007 Action Plan Discussion* - The draft Action Plan priority was distributed and discussion ensued on the several items in the plan. Mr. Levenson summarized the discussion by noting that the Islington Street Corridor Study is a priority and that several items in the plan such as the proposed zoning amendments regulating height and formula businesses in the historic district and CBD, the Nonresidential Planned Unit Development (PUD) and the Residential Density Incentive PUD all have economic development implications that may be appropriate for EDC public comment and advocacy. There is also a desire to attend meetings of other city boards and commissions that have regulatory authority over these ordinances. Further, there is interest in occasionally attending and participating in meetings of the Downtown Business Association, West Business Association, and Chamber of Commerce Tourism and Government Affairs Committees.

The City Manager said that when attending these meetings it is important to weigh in as a body and follow protocol for advocacy by the Commission. This does not preclude Commissioners from attending meetings and speaking as residents as opposed to EDC members. It was agreed that an item will be put on the February agenda to authorize the EDC Chairman to speak before the appropriate Board or Commission on behalf of the EDC regarding the EDC position on the items discussed. The EDC will be kept apprised of upcoming meetings and public hearings on the items discussed earlier. Members interested in attending meetings of non-city business groups should coordinate with Ms. Carmer.

- *Nomination/Election of Commission Officers*
Commissioner Taylor assumed the chair position to nominate Dana Levenson for another one-year term as EDC Chairman and Everett Eaton for another one-year term as Vice-Chairman and noting the exceptional job each have done in their respective roles. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hayes. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment Period

David Choate said that the “word on the street” is that the owners of the Green Monkey plan to operate a restaurant out of the former Metro Restaurant location. He also informed the EDC that there is activity at the Schultz Brewery Fermentation Building for a mixed-use condominium development. He also stated that the recent slump in the local residential market does not apply to the commercial market as he is seeing an upsurge in commercial leasing locally. Finally, he suggested that, given the discussion on the rental market in the CBD and the impact that property tax may have on the lease rates, perhaps the EDC may want to hear more about the revaluation from the Tax Assessor or from a commercial appraiser at a future meeting.

Next Meeting Date

February 2, 2007 is the next scheduled meeting date.

It was agreed that the March 2, 2007 meeting be changed to March 9, 2007 to accommodate school vacation week.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Taylor seconded by Commissioner Harvey passed unanimously at 9:15 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager