

# CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

## RiverWalk Project Update

September 15, 2008 – 6:30 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

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City Council Present: Mayor Ferrini, Assistant Mayor Blalock, Councilors Novelline Clayburgh, Dwyer, Smith, Kennedy, Spear, Pantelakos and Hejtmanek

Officials Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager; Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager, Robert Sullivan, City Attorney and Dianne M. Kirby, Deputy City Clerk

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### **I. Call to Order**

At 6:35 p.m., Mayor Ferrini called the work session to order.

### **II. Introduction**

City Manager Bohenko turned the meeting over to Deputy City Manager Hayden for an update on the RiverWalk Project.

Deputy City Manager Hayden reviewed the history of the project. She spoke of the problems that have arisen with regards to the restaurant deck, trash compactor and handicap ramps. She stated that there are six property owners which will require easements. She said the challenge has been to find a plan that is agreeable to all parties. She further stated that at this time we have not been successful.

Deputy City Manager Hayden stated that the grant source from HUD must be expended in its entirety 18 months from now. She said the DOT Grant has a longer time frame, but they do not want their funds spent on the project unless the RiverWalk goes all the way through.

Deputy City Manager Hayden stated that given all these issues, we have taken a look at this and have come up with a process to move forward that will accomplish some of our goals. She talked to using the non federal money to upgrade the City owned lot on the river front creating a City Park area.

City Manager Bohenko stated that we may want to get the City Park completed and then work with the property owners to complete the RiverWalk project in the future. He said this would be a way to get the project moving and incorporate a public/private partnership of sorts that does not force on any one property owner something that they do not want. He stated that we could reprogram the HUD money to another project within the City. He said that we have an opportunity to do something really positive and we would like to keep this project rolling.

Councilor Spear asked if the improvement would include the relocation of the Poco deck. City Attorney Sullivan stated that all the approvals are in place for the land swap to occur. He said that the deeds have not been exchanged yet and this has to be completed first. City Manager Bohenko said that because it will be local dollars, we would be on our own timeline. He further stated that we would be able to accommodate all the needs of the property owners. Councilor Spear asked what the time frame was. Deputy City Manager Hayden stated that November 1, 2008 the lease on the Poco deck was up. City Manager Bohenko stated he wanted to get this new concept out first and that it would be unfair to get too far into this project without meeting with the property owners.

Councilor Smith said we can move the HUD money to another project, but what about the State DOT money. Deputy City Manager Hayden stated that we could move that money to another project that was acceptable to them. She stated that DOT funds are not as flexible as HUD funds. Councilor Smith stated that if we do this the RiverWalk concept would be gone and basically we would have a City Park. He said that this sounds like a great plan. City Manager Bohenko stated that what he would like to do would be to sit down with the property owners and discuss these ideas and see if there were any objections.

Mayor Ferrini stated that he does have an objection. He stated that a lot of work has gone into this project and he is not ready to throw in the towel yet. He stated that he would like to engage in the discussion of the new concept, but he would like to hear it from all concerned, including the City that we just do not think we can get this done or maybe there is a way to do it with the Federal money and on a slightly broader model. Councilor Dwyer stated that the time line is very short and if we do as you wish, we would have to have this decision within a month. Mayor Ferrini stated that he is still not ready to give up. He said he thinks both plans should be on the table and we should discuss each. He said if we rule it out the RiverWalk project we rule it out as a City, property owners and everyone together or we stay with it together. Councilor Pantelakos stated that she is ready to give up. She said the new plan is great. She said she does not want to disrupt the business the way the RiverWalk project would. Councilor Smith stated that he agrees with Councilor Pantelakos. He said we have not gotten anywhere in over a year and he thinks we have waited long enough. He agreed that we should spent the money and go with the new project. He further stated that the sooner we get this area cleaned up the better. Assistant Mayor Blalock stated that he would like to see the River front cleaned up. Councilor Kennedy asked Assistant Mayor Blalock if as a business owner himself, if he feels that should we stop this project now and continue with the City Park plan and look at the RiverWalk as a futuristic thing if he thought the other business owners would be in line with that or does he feel they would want to continue with the original RiverWalk project. Assistant Mayor Blalock stated that he is ready to be done with the RiverWalk project and he agrees we should move forward with the City Park plan. Councilor Hejtmanek stated that we have run out of time and he supports the City Park plan. Councilor Spear stated that the general concept of a RiverWalk is good and we can always do a RiverWalk somewhere else within the City. He stated that Portsmouth has a lot of water front and another area might lend itself to this project better. Mayor Ferrini stated that it is the consensus of the Council to move in the direction of a City Park plan and set a meeting. City Manager Bohenko stated that he would work with the property owners and report back to the Council.

**V. Adjournment**

At 7:05 p.m. Mayor Ferrini closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dianne M. Kirby, Deputy City Clerk