

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

May 2, 2008

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Ken Smith Robin McIntosh, William Gladhill, Jack Blalock, John P. Bohenko; City Manager
Excused: Lisa DeStefano, Edward Hayes
Members Absent: Dr. Paul Harvey, Michael Murray

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

Minutes

Draft meeting minutes of April 4, 2008 were unanimously approved as written.

Presentation of Conceptual Plan for Market Street Gateway Improvements

David O'Connor of The Cecil Group presented the final conceptual plan for improvements to the Market St. Gateway Improvement Project. The plan includes elements that create a transition from I-95 Exit 7 to Deer Street and develops a "sense of arrival at the intersection of Deer and Market Streets." The plan uses traffic calming strategies such as tree plantings adjacent to the street and in the Exit 7 median to create "a parkway" as one travels into town. The right of way (ROW) is then narrowed and the sidewalks widened at the Sheraton Harborside to create a more pedestrian-focused environment. The plan exploits the views of the Piscataqua River by creating a footpath with overlooks and interpretive signs at the large open area east of Michael Succi Drive and at the North Mill Pond near the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. Opportunities for public art are suggested at the accompanying I-95 overpass and the Albacore Museum intersection. Wayfinding suggestions include a complete array of signs scaled for cars as well as for pedestrians. The project will complement the sidewalk, bike lane and the I-95 signal interchange improvements projects that are proposed for the gateway in the city's capital plan. Mr. O'Connor expects that the project will be phased depending on available funding. Next steps are to provide order of magnitude cost estimates for the conceptual plans.

Discussion with William Schuler of Portsmouth Regional Hospital on the Local Health Care Industry

Chairman Levenson introduced William Schuler, CEO of Portsmouth Regional Hospital and thanked him for coming. Mr. Schuler reviewed the hospital's mission of health service to the area and the proposed \$63 million improvement project. The improvements include a 67,600 square foot expansion and 88,000 square feet of renovations. The improvements are focused on the hospital lobby, on privatization and upgrades to existing patient rooms and on the creation of a cardiovascular surgery unit. This new cardiovascular unit creates a "true cardiac hospital within a hospital" with a floor for diagnostics, a floor for surgery and a floor for 40 private monitored medical-surgical beds. Other improvements include expansion of the surgery/endoscopy operating suite, support services expansion and other patient and staff improvements. The new lobby, through which 130,000-150,000 people typically pass each year, will feature display cases highlighting Portsmouth's rich maritime and architectural history for patients, their families and visitors to peruse while awaiting medical tests results, procedures or when visiting patients.

Aside from employing over 1,000 people locally, the hospital creates significant indirect economic impacts from the purchase of local goods and services such a food, landscaping service, marketing materials, construction contracting, engineering and architectural services. The hospital recently hired 27 new physicians. Mr. Schuler said that notable changes in the hospital industry include the employment of hospitalists who work exclusively within the hospital seeing patients, thereby freeing up physicians to focus on their respective medical practices. Other changes include the change to hiring specialists for the emergency room and the ICU. The hospital is striving to meet the needs of the local market, which demographics indicate is shifting toward an older patient. Therefore, the hospital is developing programs and hiring health care providers to serve this older population.

Mr. Schuler said that Portsmouth is a great location for the hospital. The region's high quality of life also helps in recruiting workers. Portsmouth physicians have an excellent reputation which attracts other highly skilled professionals. Some challenging workforce areas include the more technical and specialized positions such as ICU and surgical nurses, and echo-technicians. There are less people becoming MD's so in the future more patients will see physicians' assistants and nurse practitioners. The hospital works with the University of New Hampshire as well as the local technical colleges on workforce development and training, but there are still areas with voids. Job sharing and flex-time are key elements in finding employees.

The proposed improvements to the General Sullivan bridge will help with the commute and recruitment of workforce. Chairman Levenson presented Mr. Schuler with a book on historic Portsmouth and thanked him for the opportunity to learn more about Portsmouth Regional Hospital and for the excellent service it provides the community.

Old Business and EDC Project Updates

Islington Street Corridor Improvements Action Plan

Mr. Bohenko said that city staff is working with the Richardson & Associates on a preferred concept plan for action items as well as on a strategy for exploring the use of Tax Increment Financing as a means to pay for proposed infrastructure changes. Another option is to incorporate the improvements into the city's Capital Improvement Plan. On May 14, 2008 there will be a work session with the Historic District Commission (HDC) to review the three conceptual plans developed for the project. The information will assist the HDC as they undertake design review of proposed projects in the corridor.

Update on PNSY Prison Enhanced Use Lease Program (EUL) – Industry Forum

Ms. Carmer attended the April 16, 2008 forum on the former Naval Prison. Forty attendees spent the day learning about the Navy EUL program and former prison and touring the exterior of the building. The Navy is soliciting proposals that restrict access to the shipyard and that have a synergy with the current mission of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Concept proposals are due in June. Suggested uses for the building include research and development, flexible industry and correctional institutions. A decision on the preferred proposal will be made in spring 2009.

EDC Breakfast for Major Employers

The breakfast forum has been postponed until the fall.

New Business

There are no new items for action under this agenda item.

Public Comment Period

Mr. David Choate addressed the Commission regarding the state of the local real estate market. He said that the medical sector is currently driving the local market with work on the Millennium Buildings on Borthwick Avenue and with potential additions to the Jackson Gray Medical facility. He said there is new demand for space from new dental practices in the area.

According to Mr. Choate, Pease Tradeport continues to draw business and will continue to do so until the business park is completely built out. The benefits of free parking are a big factor for companies that might otherwise locate or remain downtown. Finally, he said that many of the projects proposed in the Northern Tier are on hold. Proposed lease rates of \$35 per square foot are difficult to fill given the current state of the economy.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM. The next meeting is June 6, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager