

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

September 5, 2008

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

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

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

Recognition of Robin McIntosh for EDC Service

Chairman Levenson presented Robin McIntosh a plaque in recognition and appreciation of her service as an EDC member from 2004-2008. Mr. Bohenko spoke of Robin's many contributions to the community including chairing the Citywide Neighborhood Association and the Atlantic Heights Neighborhood Association as well as her work spearheading the Middle School student FOCUS photography project.

Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of June 6, 2008

Following a motion by Lisa DeStefano and a second by Tim Allison, the draft meeting minutes of June 6, 2008 were unanimously approved as written.

Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Report and Partnership Extension Request

Chamber President Doug Bates and Tourism Manager Nicki Noble gave the quarterly tourism report for the period ending August 30th. Ms. Noble distributed statistics summarizing Chamber tourism visits, Harbour Trail tours, website visits and information requests. Despite a difficult start to the summer season with variable weather and concerns about the economy, local businesses have reported a successful summer season. Summer events such as ProPortsmouth's Market Square Day, the 4th of July celebration, Prescott Park Arts festival and the tall ships and cruise ships were well attended and contributed to strong economic vitality.

Ms. Noble noted the myriad of press articles and recognition the city has recently received such as the Distinctive Destination designation from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the ranking of 4th Best City to Live by *Outside Magazine*, Best Walking City by *Prevention Magazine* and recent TV coverage on *NH Chronicle*, *The Travel Channel* and *The Today Show*. In addition, travel writer visits were and continue to be steady.

Travel trends to look for are trips closer to home ("staycations") such as day trips and weekend getaways due to high fuel prices. The low value of the dollar in the international market means more Canadians and foreign visitors are being enticed and are expected.

Mr. Bates gave a brief project update of the WiFi expansion project noting that the project is on track and the state technology grant has been approximately 53% expended. He also spoke of the upcoming USS NH Submarine Commissioning event scheduled for October 25, 2008. The local Commissioning Committee is working hard to raise \$300,000 for activities and celebrations related to the commissioning. Events planned include a remote viewing of the ceremony in Prescott Park on a Jumbotron followed rotary luncheon at Strawberry Banke, a Captain's reception and citywide neighborhood participation in autumn seasonal decorations ("Scarecrows in the Port") and event banners.

Ms. Noble spoke of the collaborative nature of Chamber tourism work and the \$80,000 Joint Promotional Partnership (JPP) state tourism grant for which the Chamber applied. Last year the Chamber received a \$70,000 JPP grant and had to raise \$35,000 as a match exclusive of the city grant. She expects to hear in 30-60 days if the chamber will be awarded the JPP grant requested. She said this year's grant will enable continued collaboration

between the Chamber and the new Discover Portsmouth Center as well as continued co-op advertising in conjunction with local hotels and tourism businesses.

Ms. Noble and Mr. Bates identified the City/Chamber partnership as another example of successful collaboration and said that included in the materials presented to the EDC is a request to renew the partnership at the \$40,000 level. Mr. Levenson asked if the City grant constituted part of the 50-50 required “match” for the JPP grant and Ms. Noble said it did not.

With regard to the \$40,000 City/Chamber partnership request, Ms. Carmer distributed copies of the FY 09 EDC budget and noted that the amount of funds available for EDC projects/contingency is \$24,588. Mr. Bohenko noted that typically the city receives the partnership request in the spring for the fiscal year beginning July 1. He said that City Council approval is needed for the partnership and asked if the Chamber was asking for the grant to be retroactive to July. Mr. Bates accepted responsibility for the late request and said they would do whatever is appropriate for full grant approval and disbursement.

Mr. Levenson said the city has made a significant commitment to the Chamber in the partnership and that it is key that the community “be ahead of the curve, not behind it” on tourism. He feels that tourism is an important priority and that it is essential for the Chamber to be truly collaborative and work with all organizations such as Prescott Park, Pro Portsmouth, Discover Portsmouth etc., which contribute to the tourism success that Ms. Noble reported. Instead of acting on the request at the meeting, he suggested that Ms. Noble and a couple EDC representatives meet to develop deliverables and define metrics that enable the Commission to evaluate the City/Chamber tourism partnership and report back to the EDC. He asked if Assistant Mayor Jack Blalock and City Councilor Ken Smith would be willing to do this since they are most familiar with tourist related business. They agreed and will meet and report back to the EDC at the October 3rd meeting. Mr. Bohenko said that if the EDC acts on the partnership grant renewal on October 3rd, the EDC recommendation could go to the City Council in late October.

EDC Project Updates

Islington Street Action Plan Project Update

Ms. Carmer reported that in order to move toward a preferred concept plan for the corridor, it was necessary to look at the traffic at specific locations in the project area. This summer the City’s Transportation Engineer requested traffic counts at key intersections. This information is currently being analyzed by a traffic consultant and should provide insight into where traffic is originating and traveling and guide in the selection of a preferred concept alternative for street improvements. Concurrently, Richardson and Associates are working on improvements to the corridor that could occur regardless of which concept plan is selected. Staff will meet next week to discuss these proposals.

Market Street Gateway Project Budget estimates, Project Capital Planning and Phasing

The Cecil Group has divided the project into five phases and provided cost estimates for each phase. Cost estimates are roughly \$400,000-\$450,000 per phase. Staff has reviewed these estimates and in conjunction with the City Manager decided to begin at the Deer Street intersection area due to concerns related to pedestrian safety and the need to slow traffic as the street narrows.

The project funding will be a combination of federal transportation matching funds for the I-95 intersections, sidewalk and bike lane and capital plan bond funding for the streetscape improvements. Mr. Bohenko noted that staff is looking to augment the capital plan funding with other state grants.

Wi-Fi Expansion Project Update

Alan Brady, the city's Communications Supervisor provided an update of the WiFi expansion work during the summer and provided a handout showing the free internet service area resulting from new nodes at City Hall, the Court Street Fire Station and at the High Hanover parking garage. The plan is to continue testing and deploying the phased expansion by replacement of the original WiFi connection in Market Square. Test to date indicate that the Cisco equipment at the new sites achieved much faster internet access speed than that provided through the existing system operating in Market Square.

Unmet Parking Credit Subcommittee

As a result of the master planning process and the subsequent zoning audit, Planning Department staff and consultant Rick Taintor are reviewing the unmet parking credit. Members of the EDC subcommittee met with Planning Board representatives in July to review options for modifying parking requirements in the City's Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Bohenko said that this matter is a policy issue that will be derived from analysis of the type of development the city wishes in the Central Business B (CBB) and Central Business A (CBA) zoning districts. When zoning modifications are drafted they will be reviewed by a group consisting of representatives from the Planning Board, the Economic Development Commission and the City Council. This will ensure that all groups understand the impact of the modifications.

Update on Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing – William Gladhill

Mr. Gladhill reported that the Housing Committee has focused its efforts on several housing opportunities including housing opportunities at Pease Tradeport, along major transit routes, and re-use of city-owned properties. City Councilor and Housing Committee Member Christine Dwyer added that the Committee will be making a report back to the City Council in November. She said that the Committee is looking at other initiatives such as co-housing and modifications to the existing First Time Home Buyers program. City Councilor and Housing Committee Member Smith added that the group is also looking at ways to create housing opportunities that could be applied regionally. A Rockingham Regional Planning Commission event in October will bring members of regional planning boards and elected officials to learn about new state requirements for housing.

New Business

- 1) It was mentioned that Councilor Kennedy may be bringing forward ideas on how to assist local people in the fishing industry.
- 2) William Gladhill asked if there are plans to continue visits to the city's largest employers. Chairman Levenson feels it is important to reach out to businesses in the city and asked members to contact Ms. Carmer with ideas about which businesses to visit. In the meantime, she will continue to contact the city's largest employers to inquire about site visits.

Public Comment Period

Mr. David Choate addressed the Commission regarding the state of the local real estate market noting that Portsmouth Paper Company will be relocating by the end of the year. Prime Buchholz will be moving from downtown and building a 38,000 square foot building at the Tradeport in fall 2009. LabCorp will complete its move from the Parade mall to the city's industrial park. Overall, the office market continues to be down. However, he said that there is still much investment in the seacoast which is not true for cities west of Exeter and in some cases, north of the General Sullivan Bridge. The City Manager noted that there have been no foreclosures in the city and that the city is doing well compared to many other NH cities.

The next meeting date is October 3, 2008. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager