

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

December 5, 2008

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Jack Blalock, William Gladhill, Tim Allison, Dr. Paul Harvey, Lisa DeStefano, Ken Smith, Susanne Delaney, Josh Cyr

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

**Welcome new EDC member Josh Cyr**

Chairman Levenson welcomed newest Economic Development Commissioner Josh Cyr and asked him to say a few words about himself. Josh has been a Portsmouth resident since 1996 and lives on Hanover Street. He is employed by content software company, Savvy Software on Islington Street. Josh has been active in local non-profit organizations in the community including ProPortsmouth. He looks forward to working with the Commission.

**Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of November 7, 2008**

Following a motion by Ken Smith and a second by Everett Eaton, the draft meeting minutes of November 7, 2008 were unanimously approved as written.

**Presentation on LEED**

The city's Building Facility Manager Dan Hartrey used the example of the new Portsmouth Library to explain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). The program is an international building standard in which developers employ the best practices in building design and construction to minimize environmental impact and provide long-term cost savings. The system employs a point system to certify buildings as basic, silver, gold or platinum based on the number of total eligible sustainable measures employed. The City used a common sense approach to the process when building the new library and ultimately received a silver LEED certification. To illustrate the potential costs savings he reported that the heating bills of the new library are 1/3 of the old library costs. Mr. Hartrey feels that one disadvantage of the LEED system is that it is administratively complex and requires extensive record keeping by the builder/developer which adds costs and time to the process. He said that the city is committed to using LEED practices in future city buildings however, it may not seek certifications as it adds the extra costs and administrative burden.

Ms. DeStefano commented on the LEED design process from an architect's perspective. She agreed that the certification process adds costs. To many clients, it is important to achieve LEED certification for marketing reasons, but the same design can be done without certification to realize cost saving and better building design. She noted there is a movement toward a less cumbersome systematic approach to certification and that the costs for LEED design have declined significantly in the past several years as more professionals are trained and more products are available. She said the current challenge is gathering information on "green" product sustainability claims. A third party certification system is assisting in meeting that challenge. The governing board for the process is the US Green Building Council.

A general discussion ensued on how the LEED process is incorporated in local building and planning regulations. With the EDC's approval, City Councilor Chris Dwyer commented that the state and city are adopting new international building codes which incorporate much of the LEED practices. City Councilor Smith stated that the City Council will most likely be pushing for the LEED standard in the City's buildings such as the new water treatment plant, fire station and Middle School. Mr. Allison offered that UNH is a leader in the sustainability movement and was the first higher education institution to create a Sustainability Office. He offered to facilitate a dialog between the university and the city on this topic. Chairman Levenson thanked Ms. Destefano and Mr. Hartrey for their presentation and complimented city leaders and staff on the new library construction.

### **Top Employer Discussion with John Land, Representative of Direct Capital**

John Land, the Director of Human Capital at Direct Capital gave an overview of Direct Capital. The company was established by two UNH graduates in 1997. They chose Portsmouth because it is a great place to work and live. The company headquarters are located at Commerce Way where it operates a call center and sells financing to small businesses through a variety of products. The firm employs 275 people in Portsmouth and 30 more in two branches in Chicago (with 5 employees) and in New York City (with 25 employees).

At the Portsmouth office, associates call thousands of businesses daily to determine their financing needs. The company spends roughly \$5,000 per employee on sales and product training. The typical employee is a college graduate in their early thirties that can work in a fast-paced, high stress work environment. Employees live in a 30 mile radius of the Pease Tradeport. Direct Capital's goal is to achieve one billion dollars in sales in five years. Mr. Land estimates this will require a total of 1,000 employees of which he anticipates adding 100 employees in the next two years. Some of this growth will occur in New York.

The company's challenges include finding and keeping the workforce to reach its targeted growth goals. Many local college graduates leave the area after graduation and it is difficult to retain them in the area. Mr. Land said the city can help Direct Capital reach its goal by keeping Portsmouth an attractive place to live and work. More affordable workforce housing would assist in attracting employees. When asked about the current credit market, Mr. Land agreed it is a challenging time particularly for companies looking for Lines of Credit. Small companies are being hit especially hard as personal credit lines and lending standards are tightening. The company is responding by adding different product lines. Mr. Levenson thanked Mr. Land for attending the meeting and gave him a small book of Portsmouth photographs as a token of the EDC's appreciation.

### **EDC Project Updates**

#### *Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing Update – William Gladhill/David Moore*

Mr. Gladhill distributed copies of the report to the EDC and reported that The Housing Committee presented its Housing Report and Recommendations to the City Council on November 24, 2008. Assistant Community Development Director David Moore outlined the report format and gave a brief summary of the findings. The Committee found that the city "cannot build its way out of" the workforce housing shortfall as the sole solution to the problem. Infill housing and retention of existing affordable housing are key to improving the inventory of affordable workforce housing.

Mr. Moore highlighted two of the many potential City actions listed in the report: 1) Development of a workforce housing trust to assure there is money to acquire land or existing units for workforce housing. 2) Create zoning that encourages workforce housing in mixed-use developments along the city's transit corridors.

A general discussion ensued regarding zoning incentives for workforce housing, the requirements of Senate Bill 342 and the possibility of housing at the Pease Tradeport. Councilor Dwyer reported that PDA representatives addressed the Housing Committee and said that the vacant land available at the Tradeport is largely wetlands. However she reported that there is some interest in a pilot workforce housing program at Pease and agreed with a comment by Councilor Blalock that housing could make the Tradeport more safe and secure in the long term. Mr. Moore said the next step before the Housing Committee sunsets is a work session with the City Council in January 2009.

*November 12, 2008 "Green Jobs" Report presentation at Public Library*

Ms. Carmer summarized the "Green Jobs" presentation by Ross Gittell and Matt Magnusson of UNH. The report was commissioned by the Rockingham Economic Commission as part of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Report required by the for federal EDA grant eligibility. Dr. Gittell reported that the region currently ranks on par with the nation in the number of "green jobs" with 3.2% of total employment in "green jobs". Average annual earnings in NH "green jobs" are \$54,400 or 23% above the annual state average. NH and Rockingham County have the potential to increase employment in green activities by drawing on research and expertise at local universities. Ms. Carmer stated that the report identifies a leadership opportunity for the region by capitalizing on hiring local college graduates and on training others to grow the green business market.

**New Business/upcoming events**

*2009 Action Plan Development*

This agenda item was deferred to the January 9, 2009 EDC meeting.

**Public Comment Period**

No one requested to speak.

**Confirm Next Meeting Date**

In consideration of the holiday season, the January meeting will be delayed a week to January 9, 2009.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager