

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

September 11, 2009

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

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

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

Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of June 5, 2009

Following a motion by Mr. Smith and a second by Ms. DeStefano, the draft meeting minutes of June 5, 2009 were unanimously approved as written.

Welcome new EDC member Ron Zolla

Chairman Levenson introduced new member Ron Zolla. In his introductory remarks, he said that he moved to the community two years ago and expressed gratitude for being appointed to the EDC by the Mayor and City Council. He then provided the Commissioners with background information on his educational and professional background and on his current work in the medical field. He looks forward to serving on the EDC.

Update on Economic Development Activities

Economic Revitalization Zones(ERZ) at 1 Highliner Ave. and Pease Tradeport

The Economic Revitalization Zone Tax Credits (EZ Tax Credit) Program is a State of NH incentive program for businesses to create new jobs and expand the tax base. In an effort to encourage revitalization and create jobs, communities and employers may take advantage of New Hampshire's Economic Revitalization Zone Tax Credits (EZ Tax Credit) Program. The program enables eligible businesses in ERZ areas to apply for tax credits up to \$40,000 annually for a period of five years to be used against Business Profit Tax and Business Enterprise Tax.

Ms. Carmer reported that action was taken in accordance with the EDC recommendation to establish an ERZ at Highliner Ave. and to explore other appropriate areas for ERZ designation. In June, the City Council authorized the City Manager to apply to the NH Dept. of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) for ERZ designation at 1 Highliner Ave. The application was submitted and is pending DRED approval. In the meantime, the Manager and staff are working with representatives from Highliner Seafood on the expansion of its operations.

In August, Mr. Bohenko brought to City Council a request for authorization for Pease Tradeport. The request was approved and an application was submitted with the help of Dave Mullen of Pease Development Authority. DRED approval is also pending for this request.

Transportation Enhancement Grant Applications and Support

Ms. Carmer reported that the city is eligible to apply for grants from the NH Dept. of Transportation's (DOT) transportation enhancement grant program. There is \$6 million available for qualified projects throughout the state. The city is applying for grant funds 3 projects. The first is the proposed Market St. Extension Gateway Improvements included in the conceptual plan that the EDC funded. The second is for

the proposed Chestnut Street streetscape improvements. A third grant is being submitted for sidewalks on Peverly Hill Road. The grant requires a 20% local match. Grant funds are very competitive and the state has made changes to the funding process in order to have geographic distribution statewide. Grant awards will be made in February 2010.

State St. Sewer/Water/Streetscape Improvement Project Schedule and Business Interface

Mr. Bohenko stated that the State St. sewer and water separation project is scheduled to begin in late September. This \$3.7 million project is part of the EPA mandate among other things, the city to update and come into compliance with the terms of the Consent Degree. The project received the highest state ranking for distribution of stimulus funds; it will take eighteen months to complete and will be split over two construction seasons. City staff is working with the Historic State St. Business Association to develop measures and contract provisions that assure the street remains open for business, that the job site is buttoned up at the end of the each day and on weekends, and that parking is available throughout construction. The city is going to provide signage that indicates that businesses are open.

The City Manager noted that a similar effort is underway at the Bartlett St./Islington St./Jewell Ct. intersection where a major sewer upgrade project will begin this month. This critical project has been in the works for five years and the city has worked diligently to meet the needs of abutting businesses. Lisa DeStefano attended the public meeting on this project and reported that the public responded positively to city's efforts to minimize disruption and to keep traffic flowing smoothly during construction.

Islington Street Improvement Action Plan Update

The final public input session was held in June. Members of the public had an opportunity to see the integrated plan elements. Residents unable to attend the hearing were able to view the meeting online and submit comments electronically. A final plan and matrix will be available for review at the October EDC meeting.

Other Business

ME-NH Bridge Connections – update on public process

The need to repair the Memorial and Sarah Long Bridges over the Piscataqua River is the impetus for a comprehensive effort to review alternatives to repairing the bridges in place. Ongoing efforts by the states of NH and Maine include submitting a grant for stimulus money for 80% of the cost to repair the Memorial Bridge which is , the structure most in need of repair. It also includes input from the general public, from a steering committee consisting of professional engineers, state officials and planners as well as a stakeholder committee established to provide input needed to comply with regulations governing interstate bridge replacements that receive federal funds. The City is represented by City Public Works Director Steve Parkinson on the Steering Committee and by Nancy Carmer who sits on the Stakeholder Committee. There is a ME-NH Bridge Connection website with information on all aspects of the study data collected, public input, the draft Purpose and Need Statement and the alternatives analysis. Ms. Carmer invited the EDC to attend the Stakeholder meeting immediately following the EDC meeting or to attend the next public input session scheduled for September 24th.

Valet parking

Ken Smith provided an update on the success of the Atlantic Valet Parking services in Market Square this summer. It ran smoothly and the Music Hall is now using the service as are The Common Man and Agave restaurants on State St. This service has the benefit of freeing up public parking as the valet service must park customers' cars in private parking facilities. Currently that is the HarborPlace garage and the Strawberry Banke lot.

Weekend Activities for September 18-20th

There are five events scheduled for the weekend of Sept. 18-20: the Telluride Film Festival, the Fairy Garden Tour, the 1st annual "Fishtival," the Celebrate Pink 5K road race and on Sunday, the Criterium bike race. Mr. Bohenko reported that the city has worked with each organization to assure the safety and efficiency. It has also worked to coordinate signage and public parking for the events. He said that recently there has been some push back on the number of events in the city and he may look to the EDC to assist in suggestions for ways to balance the vitality and the benefits these events bring to the city with the quality of life of residents and businesses. He asked the EDC to report any feedback they hear regarding events. Speaking as a downtown business owner, Assistant Mayor Blalock feels that it is important to remind ourselves that the downtown is now a desirable and vibrant place and that was not always the case. He thinks the benefits of the events outweigh the negative.

As a promoter of the Criterium, Susanne Delaney noted that the organizers try very hard to accommodate businesses and to provide sufficient notice of the potential impacts. She said that most businesses she contacts are delighted to have the event in town.

Other

Lisa Destefano noted that the NH Association of Architects will be hosting a conference in Portsmouth on Oct. 2nd and will be highlighting the city's LEED certified library and other buildings in the city. They expect 175 attendees.

Public Comment Period

Mr. David Choate reported that the Bournival Chevrolet property is under contract for a single purpose use. Bournival will be relocated to the former Goss Lincoln Mercury Motors location. He said that it is difficult to move some of the commercial properties on Lafayette Road and requested that the EDC consider adding the corridor to its Action Plan priority list. Mr. Bohenko responded that unfortunately Mr. Choate was not in attendance in the spring when Rick Taintor made a powerpoint presentation on proposed zoning amendments that create a Gateway Planned Development regulation. The purpose of amendments is to promote sustainable development in the Gateway District by permitting additional uses and density as incentives for developments that meet specified standards. The new development standards are intended to promote economically and environmentally sustainable land use in the Gateway District. Mr. Choate also suggested that it also may be a good idea to have a presentation to the EDC on the Rockingham Planning Commission Route 1 Study.

Mr. Choate stated that activity at Pease is active. Finally he suggested that the EDC consider making a recommendation to the City Council to request an urban core exemption to the Shoreland Protection Act similar to what the City of Dover has done. Mr. Bohenko said the City Council (CC) could do this, but it prefers to handle each property on a case by case basis rather than a blanket exemption. The CC has never denied a request for exemption. It is a policy decision that may have unintended consequences to wholly exempt all urban core property.

Confirm Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting will be October 2, 2009.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager