

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

October 2, 2009

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

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

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

**Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of September 11, 2009**

Following a motion by Dr. Harvey and a second by Ms. DeStefano, the draft meeting minutes of September 11, 2009 were unanimously approved as written.

Note: Items 1 and 2 on the agenda were reversed to streamline the meeting.

**Parking Report by Parking Manager**

Parking Manager Jon Frederick gave an update on the city's parking program and revenues. He reviewed the current options for on-street parking meter payment including the standard meters, the Pay and Display® system and the soon-to-be implemented option of in-vehicle parking meters. These meters are similar to the Easy Pass® program whereby customers purchase an in-dash meter and prepay for parking.

The pilot program for valet parking in Market Square and on State St. has been successful and has been extended to Chestnut St. for The Music Hall. With the installation of the Pay and Display® system, violations have decreased 25%, but revenues are up in other areas. The parking garage filled 18 times in 2008 versus 62 times in 2007. The projection for 2009 is 40 times. The city continues to maintain 600 spaces for lease in the parking garage which constitute approximately 60% of the spaces.

In response to downtown businesses, the city is proposing to reduce the parking hours by one hour (until 6 PM vs. 7 PM) and in turn raise the meter rates from \$0.75 to \$1.00 per hour on the street. Rates in the parking garage would remain at \$0.75 per hour. Mr. Bohenko said that the increase in on-street meters will compensate for the loss of revenues during the 6-7 PM period. A hearing on this proposed change was held September 30<sup>th</sup>.

A discussion ensued about the proposed change. Mr. Eaton feels that not charging for parking during the busy evening hours is a lost opportunity. Mr. Levenson agrees and feels it unfairly penalizes retail shop owners. Mr. Zolla offered a compromise of leaving the time and rate unchanged and implementing sporadic enforcement.

In response to a discussion about enforcement and rates, Mr. Blalock noted enforcement is key to creating turnover on the street for downtown business patrons. The new rate structure will drive parkers to the parking garage and allow for the on-street turnover. He also noted that the downtown workers benefit from the newly proposed 6 PM rollback because many of them report to work at 4 PM and can pay for the two hour limit and enable them to remain in the space until their shift ends.

Mr. Levenson summarized the discussion by repeating that one role of the EDC is to work toward

consistent economic vitality and that ensuring adequate and affordable parking is an important tool to maintaining downtown vitality.

### **Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Report on Tourism for the period 7/1/09 through 9/30/09**

Chamber Tourism Manager Nicki Noble distributed a handout and reported on the tourism activity and metrics for the period April 1, 2009 to September 30, 2009. She reviewed recent articles on Portsmouth in leading publications including the October 2009 issues of *Gourmet* and *Coastal Living* magazines as well as the selection of The Harbor Trail as the *Yankee Magazine's* Editor's Choice for the best walking tour in New England. The Chamber continues to coordinate media writers' visits to maintain Portsmouth's media exposure.

Ms. Noble reviewed summer hotel and visitor statistics noting that the traffic was down. Hotel stays in September was down, but things are perceived to be leveling off. The Guide to the Seacoast continues to be the major tourist publication distributed by the Chamber. Advertising sales have begun and the 2010 edition is scheduled to go to press by March 2010. The website is being upgraded by Brown and Company with help from Tidal Media and Savvy Software a launch for the more robust site is being planned.

Upcoming initiatives and marketing efforts include Restaurant Week during November 8-15<sup>th</sup>, development and distribution of seasonal rack cards, and attendance at travel regional shows. The Governor's Conference on Tourism will be held May 5-7, 2010 at the Portsmouth Sheraton Hotel and planning for the event is underway.

Program funding during the reporting period include the NH JPP Grants of \$21,208 and \$12,212 (pending) in addition to the city's \$40,000 UDAG grant. At the conclusion of the report Mr. Blalock praised the Chamber's tourism work and Mr. Levenson expressed satisfaction with the metrics reporting criteria instituted this fiscal year.

### **Update on Draft Revised Zoning Ordinance, and the Draft Revised Site Plan Review Regulations-**

Planning Director Rick Taintor provided a handout and summary of proposed modification to the Zoning and Site Review regulations including:

1. New "Gateway" District for Lafayette Rd. from Rye to Rt. One Bypass.
2. Islington St. rezoning to eliminate Central Business District (CBB) from Cabot St. to Klines and to rezone to the area from Parker St. to Cabot St. Mixed Residential Business.
3. New Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) in Office Research District by conditional use permit in response to "Borthwick Village" rezoning request.
4. Changes to off-street parking standards through revised ratios and exemptions.
5. Off-street parking in CBB to address confusion and inequities in current regulation and to remove bias against non-residential uses.
6. Complete overhaul of the current unmet parking credit.
7. Revamped sign regulations that include sign districts and revised standards.
8. Strengthened Environmental Standards with respect to wetlands and to dark sky lighting.
9. Site Review changes pertaining to landscaping with respect to off-street parking, outdoor lighting, and landscaping and screening

Mr. Levenson asked for clarification regarding the parking requirements for residences on Islington St. and the need for on-site parking. Mr. Taintor responded that currently an owner could apply to construct a 60-foot high structure and pay the in-lieu fee instead of creating on-site parking. Mr. Zolla cautioned that some of the suggestions for Islington St. could "stifle Development."

The Planning Department anticipates a temporary increase in applications from the development

community in order to avoid the proposed regulations. The City Council will be determining hearing dates and actions on these proposals at its October 19, 2009 meeting. Mr. Taintor was complimented on the work required to prepare the proposed zoning modifications.

### **City Council Referral on Flag Policy**

Mr. Bohenko said the referral from the City Council to the EDC on development of a flag policy stems from a request from a Market St. business owner and the concern about a proliferation of flags similar to the proliferation of sandwich board signs in the city. Mr. Taintor explained that the Zoning Ordinance definition of a sign currently applies to flags and the ordinance currently regulates the total sign square footage allowed per business.

City Attorney Sullivan validated the City Manager's observation that there has been a proliferation of sandwich boards citywide. He explained that signs and flags which project over city property (i.e. the sidewalk) require a one-year renewable license agreement with the city. He also reviewed the constitutional considerations involved in regulating signs (i.e. only time, place and manner can be regulated). Staff discussions on the matter have included considerations of aesthetics, sight issues and safety. One idea has been to approve flags only in a "district" or on a street by street basis depending on how remote a street is for commerce.

Chairman Levenson said he has spoken with EDC members willing to serve on a subcommittee to discuss the City Council referral and appointed Josh Cyr to chair an EDC subcommittee that includes members Will Gladhill and Tim Allison and city staffers Planning Director Rick Taintor, City Attorney Bob Sullivan, Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer, and City Clerk Kelli Barnaby. Mr. Zolla suggested that the subcommittee consider a softer policy that would allow for a temporary sign or flag until pedestrian and a customer following is established for new businesses. Ms. Carmer will coordinate the first subcommittee meeting.

### **Update on Economic Development Activities**

This item was deferred to the November 6, 2009 meeting

### **Other Business**

None

### **Public Comment Period**

David Choate commented that the proposed in lieu parking fee as proposed in the zoning ordinance modifications penalizes residential occupants of upper floors and could make it harder to lease these spaces. It could also have the unintended consequence of reducing economic vitality downtown. Regarding the setbacks on Lafayette Rd., he fears that the proposed setbacks will make the area look like Seabrook. Finally, he encouraged the EDC to formally comment on the proposed zoning changes.

### **Confirm Next Meeting Date:**

The next meeting will be November 6, 2009

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

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager