

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

December 4, 2009

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

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

Excused: Jack Blalock, Ken Smith

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

**Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of November 6, 2009**

Following a motion by Ms. DeStefano and a second by Josh Cyr, the draft meeting minutes of November 6, 2009 were unanimously approved as written.

**Old Business**

*City Council Referral on Flag Policy – Subcommittee Report*

Josh Cyr distributed a memorandum summarizing the findings of the EDC subcommittee on flags. He told the EDC that the subcommittee met three times and in addition to the tasks reported last month, the subcommittee reviewed flag policies and regulations of other communities' and gathered input from a representative sample of business owners on the use and effectiveness of flags, signs and sandwich boards. The subcommittee found that flags, sandwich boards and permanent signage are inter-related in how the city administers them, and also in how businesses use them. He said that the findings led to a recommendation that the City Council modify the current flag policy and the current administrative process for approving flags and sandwich boards. The goals of the recommendations are:

1. Speeding up the process for which all forms of signage can be applied and approved.
2. Clarifying the appropriate use of said signage over city property.
3. Providing business owners with options so that they may decide what will work best for their location and needs.
4. Providing control over the amount of potential clutter and intrusiveness that said signage may create.

The proposed recommendation allows a business to select either a flag or a sandwich board and suggests that a flag should not be counted toward the maximum sign area allowed for the property under the Zoning Ordinance. This policy should ultimately be formalized in an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. In addition, the recommendation proposes that permanent signs projecting over City rights-of-way should be authorized through a revocable license from the City Council with administrative review by City staff. Also flags and sandwich board signs should be authorized through an annual permit process, including fees appropriate to represent the administrative cost of reviewing applications and issuing permits.

Approval for flags and sandwich board signs should be an administrative function in which City officials apply standards approved by the City Council to any application for a flag or sandwich

board sign. City officials should have the authority to issue or deny a permit for the flag or sandwich board sign without requiring specific approval by the City Council.

Several points were discussed including the likelihood of a proliferation of flag or sandwich boards, the fee for flags (it must reflect time and effort in the review and approval) and the need for HDC approval of flags (no approval needed). Mr. Bohenko expressed concern that if the process does not include City Council review and approval, then Councilors contacted by businesses owners about their flag or sandwich board requests are at a disadvantage. Mr. Taintor suggested that perhaps the recommended process could be modified to have the City Council delegate initial application approval authority to city officials (with copies of applications to the Council) and thereafter annual renewal requests be brought to the Council for approval. The Commission agreed with this proposed amendment.

On a motion by Everett Eaton and a second by Lisa DeStefano the EDC accepted the flag subcommittee's recommendation as amended by Mr. Taintor and approved bringing it to the January 19, 2010 City Council meeting under presentations.

#### *Islington Street Improvement Action Plan Update*

Ms. Carmer distributed the draft Action Plan and explained that it is intended as a tool for to move from the Islington Street improvement concept plan to the design and implementation phase. She explained its contents and how to use the document which consists of the action matrix and five appendices. Appendix A includes a summary of recommendations for Islington Street from previous studies. Appendix B includes the conceptual plan diagram divided in the east, central and west sections. Appendix C includes the June 24, 2009 powerpoint presentation for the integrated action plan. Appendix D includes suggestions for guidelines and options for developing a façade improvement program and, Appendix E summarizes potential action plan funding sources and information on each.

Ms. Carmer explained that the Action Plan Matrix is organized into the same sections as the conceptual plan (east, central, and west) and also includes a corridor-wide section for improvements proposed throughout the corridor study area. It also identifies timelines for actions to fit into the city's capital improvement planning process. Action items in each section are divided into city actions and public/private partnership actions.

In discussing the plan, Ms. DeStefano noted the timing was excellent given the current discussions of proposed changes to the City's Zoning Ordinance. She asked if the HDC had reviewed the façade improvement program guidelines. Ms. Carmer said they had not because this was the first time it was previewed. She noted that the façade guidelines are for financial assistance as opposed to design review and require applicants to comply with all city regulations including planning, site design and historic review. Chairman Levenson feels the façade improvement opportunity is critical to creating incentives for private property investment and feels the EDC should try to leverage other funds to encourage private improvements to Islington Street properties.

Mr. Bohenko reminded the EDC that it is important to be realistic about how much can be accomplished in any given year and used the example of the process for phased improvements of city sidewalks. The City budgets for sidewalks every other year and for citywide street paving in alternate years. He suggested that perhaps one way to fund the Islington Street improvements is to set aside \$100,000 as an appendix to the budget over time to amass and obligate sufficient funds for the infrastructure work.

Mr. Zolla feels that the plan is a great project from both a public and private perspective. However, he feels that the currently proposed zoning ordinance amendments may be less “development friendly” and perhaps at cross purposes with the Action Plan. Mr. Bohenko said it is premature to assume that the proposed zoning amendments are at cross purposes with the Action Plan since there will likely be changes to the ordinance in the coming months.

Mr. Eaton asked if there is a plan to acquire land for parking to mitigate parking lost for the bus turnouts and crosswalk changes proposed in the plan. Ms. Carmer said that although that was discussed, the plan does not include such an action, rather it focuses on opportunities for structured parking through public/private partnerships at the gateways. Mr. Bohenko said that purchasing land for parking is a City Council decision. Chairman Levenson said that if opportunities arise to increase parking through private property acquisition the EDC could ask the City Council to explore the option.

Ms. Delaney spoke about the safety problems for cyclists associated with bus turnouts and asked that this point be considered when designing the improvements. Mr. Levenson thanked all for their comments and said it will be important for the EDC take the appropriate actions to advocate for moving the plan forward.

#### *Report on November 16<sup>th</sup> City Council/EDC work session on Parking*

Mr. Bohenko said that the work session went well and in order to move forward the next step is to gather public input on an appropriate site. He explained that the city has been slowly moving toward a parking enterprise fund from the current special revenue account. Mr. Levenson highlighted the importance of this point noting that when previous opportunities arose for building a new public parking structure, there was reluctance on the part of the City Council to move ahead because of funding and because of the opportunity to create a public/private partnership for a parking garage on private property. He said that enough time has passed to capture resources to cover some of the debt for a parking structure with enterprise funds. A brief discussion ensued regarding the best sites for a new downtown garage and all agreed that the Worth Lot and Parrott Avenue may be the most promising.

### **New Business**

#### *a) Mayors Blue Ribbon Committee on Downtown Events*

Mr. Levenson reported that Susanne Delaney was named to the event committee. To gather public input a meeting has been scheduled for on January 12<sup>th</sup> in Conference Room A. Members of the public can comment online now.

#### *b) 2010 EDC Action Plan*

Chairman Levenson distributed a compilation of EDC accomplishments in 2009. He also distributed a list of “interesting and informative” presentations given to the Commission over the year which he feels have helped the EDC do its job. The group discussed potential action priorities for 2010. Members articulated several items including tourism, community event planning, parking, economic alliances, zoning, land use advocacy, wayfinding and a finance workshop for small business. Ms. Carmer will compile and circulate the list of suggestion action items for 2010 at the January meeting.

A discussion ensued about an action item that involved the EDC in advocating for land use and zoning changes. A suggestion of having an EDC member on the Planning Board was made.

Chairman Levenson asked the EDC to think more about these items for further discussion next month.

*c) 2010 EDC Officer Nominations*

On a motion by Lisa DeStefano and a second by Everett Eaton, Dana Levenson was nominated and unanimously voted as EDC Chair for 2010. On a motion by William Gladhill and a second by Dana Levenson, Everett Eaton was nominated and unanimously voted as EDC Vice-Chair for 2010.

d) *Maine- NH Bridge Connections Study:* The next public hearing on the fatal flaw analysis of bridge alternatives will be Dec 16, 2009, 5:30-8:00 p.m. at Portsmouth High School.

*e) EDC participation at December 8<sup>th</sup> Seacoast Local Event*

Ms. Carmer reviewed the time and place for the December 8<sup>th</sup> Buy Local Week event. At the event Seacoast Local will host Dan Houston of *Civic Economics*, the firm responsible for economic impact studies of shifting purchasing dollars to local businesses. The EDC is co-sponsor of the event to be held at the Seacoast Rep Theatre at 7 PM. EDC will provide two members to welcome attendees at the reception from 6 to 7 PM.

**Public Comment Period**

City Councilor Chris Dwyer spoke to the suggestion made earlier in the meeting that an EDC member be on the Planning Board. She defined the complexities of the work and the enormous time commitment the Planning Board made to develop the proposed zoning amendments. She thinks that the EDC could serve a better role by identifying for the City Council a set of principles that define ‘What does it mean to be economically friendly?’ She thinks that the EDC could advocate for these principals as programs and projects arise. Mr. Levenson agreed and will start the process of developing the principles so that they can be provided to the City Council with a copy of the EDC accomplishments for 2009.

**Confirm Next Meeting Date:**

The next meeting is January 8, 2010 and will be held at Portsmouth Regional Hospital.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy M. Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager