

**MEETING MINUTES  
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

October 7, 2011

Conference Room A City Hall

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Lisa DeStefano, Vice-Chairman; Dana Levenson, Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Ron Zolla, Robert Marchewka, Tim Allison, Eric Gregg, Philip Cohen, Christine Dwyer, Josh Cyr  
Excused: Everett Eaton, Chairman

Vice-Chairman Lisa DeStefano opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

**Approval of draft meeting minutes of September 9, 2011**

Following a motion by Councilor Dwyer and a second by Commissioner Allison, the draft meeting minutes of September 9, 2011 were unanimously approved as written. Commissioner's Zolla's complimented Ms. Carmer on the accuracy and readability of the minutes.

**Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Reports on Tourism for the period 4/1/11 through 9/30/11 –Valerie Rochon, Chamber of Commerce Tourism Manager**

Copies of the report were distributed. After illustrating the new Harbor Guide and the “lure” piece, Ms. Rochon highlighted some of the more important sections of the report such as progress on a new area map, the conversion study, the success of local events such Restaurant Week, Fashion Night Out, Shop Friday Nights, Hit the Decks, and Shop Portsmouth. She summarized the work of the various committees (Tourism, Retail, Lodging and “Destination Portsmouth”) noting that there is now solid synergy on their efforts. Metrics were summarized for travel and tourism inquiries and hotel occupancies.

Doug Bates, Chamber President, provided information on the current proportion of State Rooms and Meals Tax that are generated in Rockingham County and how disproportionately little of it is distributed back to the cities in the County. The Seacoast Chamber Association is going to re-approach the State to request a more proportionate distribution of the revenues so that cities like Portsmouth get their fair share to allocate to the infrastructure and resources expended on tourism.

He said the Chamber staff is “tapped out” with all that is going on and consequently it is collaborating on projects and events whenever possible. For example, they now have Larry Yerdon involved as a representative of the historic community. The same is occurring with the retail and lodging communities. He said one area that still needs improvement is the website. He said the Portsmouth Chamber is the only Chamber in the state undertaking a broad tourism program through its collaboration with the city and local businesses. The tourism report illustrates the success of efforts. It also shows that most people now access travel information electronically. Presently the Chamber website is more business focused than tourism focused. It needs improvement for users seeking tourism and reservation information. His approach is to try to collaborate with local talent to create an improved tourism website. It needs to be done now and not over a three year period as originally envisioned for fundraising purposes. This is why the Chamber is seeking additional city partnership funding as described in the proposal which he distributed.

The City Manager reminded the EDC that for FY 11/12 the City provided the Chamber level funding in a year when there were serious budget constraints. He noted that since 2000 the City has invested \$450,000 in the partnership and to increase its funding by the amount requested requires additional discussion with input from Commissioner Cyr (who had previously volunteered to review a RFP for the website). Mr.

Zolla asked if this could be a committee function. The Manager feels it needs discussion at the full Commission level. It was decided that the tourism website funding request will be put on the December 2<sup>nd</sup> EDC agenda. Commissioner Cyr will review the proposal provided and provide discussion points.

As an aside to the discussion Commissioner Marchewka observed that there is a change in the people downtown during the day as a result of an influx of visitors staying at the new hotels. He wonders if downtown businesses are focusing too much on this group at the expense of local people as he has witnessed when he greeted like a visitor in stores despite being a long-time resident.

## **Old Business**

### *Update on Parking Supply and Demand Analysis Study RFP and schedule*

City Manager Bohenko stated that the City has hired parking consultants Nelson Nygaard to undertake the Parking Supply and Demand Analysis Study. The consultants will be reviewing the City's historical public parking usage data as well as past parking studies. They will also be inventorying private parking spaces and doing in-field parking surveys during work hours and non-work hours as well as on a weekday and weekend. This information will allow them to determine the areas where there is heavy parking demand. They will generate maps of these areas for public discussion. Mr. Bohenko is considering holding a "Parking 101" session at the Levenson Room for an "informal public conversation" about downtown parking. The consultant would facilitate the meeting and then analyze the input and incorporate it into a presentation to the City Council. The EDC will be kept informed of the date of the input session. Commissioner Zolla commented that he is pleased that the Manager is suggesting a "Parking 101" session as he has concerns the recent increase in parking rates.

### *Discussion with Planning Director Rick Taintor on land use regulations for drive through facilities*

City Manager Bohenko stated that this agenda item was requested by David Choate as a result of inquiries for drive-through lanes at new developments on Lafayette Rd. Since Mr. Choate was in attendance, the Manager suggested that the EDC suspend the rules to allow Mr. Choate to participate in the discussion. The suggestion was moved by City Councilor Dwyer and seconded by Commissioner Cyr. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Choate and Rick Green, a developer interested in the former Yoken's site, joined the discussion. Mr. Choate stated that the current regulation of requiring a minimum of 5,000 square feet of building area for each drive-through lane was a deterrent for banks, pharmacies, cleaners and other retail establishments that need drive-through lanes but typically have less than 5,000 square feet of building area. Mr. Taintor explained that the regulation allows one drive through for each 5,000 square feet of building area. The reason for the regulation is an effort to minimize paved area.

Mr. Choate said that typically banks prefer two to three drive-through lanes plus a bypass lane. A discussion ensued about the history of the Islington Street Dunkin Donuts drive-through and its relation to traffic congestion and safety. Mr. Choate offered that the size of the buildings does not typically increase with an increase in the number of drive-throughs on site. City Manager Bohenko noted that is an example of the healthy tension that often exists between the business community and Planning Board. Both have valid points and it is appropriate to discuss them so each point of view is clear when regulations are established. Vice-Chairman DeStefano thanked Mr. Choate for bringing the matter forward for the EDC to understand and for the Planning staff to contemplate when considering the economic impact of land use regulations.

### *Discussion with Planning Director Rick Taintor on update on joint Planning Board/HDC work session regarding PortWalk and 30 Maplewood Ave.*

The work session was held to discuss how three major developments in the Northern Tier relate to each other. The developments are: 1) Phase 3 of PortWalk, 30 Maplewood Ave., and the Westin Hotel and Conference Center. Mr. Taintor said that concern has been expressed that there is too much focus on the “skin of the buildings” and not on how each impacts the City’s vision of a walkable community and the Northern Tier gateway. He felt that the meeting was successful in that it generated good discussion of the issues and an understanding of the respective boards’ concerns. Related to this discussion is the fact that at a recent Technical Advisory Board meeting on the extension of the Westin Hotel and Conference Center, a traffic circulation study was suggested so that traffic impacts from each project are not considered in a vacuum, but rather as part of the whole. Each of the new developments will contribute their fair share of the study cost.

### **New Business**

#### *EDC Representative Mayors Blue Ribbon Committee on Transportation Policy*

Mr. Bohenko noted that the EDC agenda packet included information on a new Mayors Blue Ribbon Committee on Transportation Policy. There will be seven members and a limited time commitment of 3-6 months as the Committee will sunset when it completes its tasks. Councilor Dwyer added that the Committee is the result of a need to gain consensus around the overarching policies on transportation and planning without getting bogged on in the minutia of stop signs and cross-walks as typically happens with the existing committee structure. The outcome will be a series of principles and policies related to traffic and intermodal transportation in the city such as bicycles, pedestrians and buses. City Manager Bohenko asked any EDC members interested to contact him or Ms. Carmer.

### **Other Business**

#### *Joint EDC/ Planning Board Work Session*

The City Manager said that the City Council has requested a joint EDC/ Planning Board work session potentially in December to discuss recent and future development downtown. Concern has been expressed with the number of hotels proposed in the downtown and the related impacts and transformation of the downtown. Councilor Dwyer said it relates to the earlier discussion of how the hotels and restaurants contribute a disproportionately high percentage of the state’s Rooms and Meals Tax, yet the City bears the burden of the traffic and infrastructure costs of these developments and receives in return a disproportionately low percentage of the state’s Rooms and Meals tax to pay for the impacts. She is interested in the long term consequences of the large number of hotels built in the city in the past ten years on the city’s sense of place, on economic vitality and municipal infrastructure expense.

City Manager Bohenko suggested that the EDC may want to revisit the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) concept for the Northern Tier as a means of paying for infrastructure related to a conference center/parking garage. He said it may be the appropriate incentive for a conference facility by taking the ancillary infrastructure cost out of the development cost. Commissioner Levenson concurred saying that the Northern Tier is now at a “critical inflection point” with many hotels but no place to host conferences over 250-300 people.

Ms. Carmer reminded the EDC that the Northern Tier Study had a twenty-year development window when it was developed and that some of the elements in it have been realized, but other critical components that balance the hotels such as the conference/office/parking uses have not occurred, partly due to the economy. Mr. Bohenko said the TIF may be an incentive for this to occur and will bring put a presentation on TIF on the November agenda.

#### *Market St. /Market Square Receives Great Street Designation by APA*

Mr. Taintor noted that the American Planning Association (APA) selected Market Street and Market Square as one of 10 Great Streets for 2011 under the organization's Great Places in America program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planners and planning play in creating communities of lasting value

*Upcoming Events*

NH Film Festival - October 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>

Halloween Parade - October 31<sup>st</sup>

**Public Comment**

David Choate offered several public comments:

1. He stated that demand for industrial space continues to increase.
2. One challenge for industrial users is finding a qualified workforce of machinists and engineers.
3. He indicated that Sig Sauer has purchased the former Celestica Building at Pease Tradeport and perhaps they might be a sponsor of the Chamber website development.
4. Thermo Fischer is vacating its Newington site and moving some employees to Dover.
5. He suggested the City of Rochester, NH as a good model for creating real estate links for business looking to locate here.

*Confirm Next Meeting:* Friday, November 4, 2011

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer,  
Economic Development Program Manager