

**MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

January 4, 2013

Conference Room A City Hall

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Dana Levenson, Ron Zolla, Robert Marchewka, Christine Dwyer, Philip Cohen, Josh Cyr, John Bosen, John Pratt, John P. Bohenko
Absent: Jack Thorsen, Eric Gregg

Chairman Eaton opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

Approval of draft meeting minutes

Following a motion by Commissioner Dwyer and a second by Commissioner Bosen, the draft meeting minutes of December 7, 2012 were unanimously approved as written.

Recognition of outgoing EDC member Lisa Destefano

Chairman Eaton presented outgoing Commissioner DeStefano with a plaque inscribed with appreciation from the EDC and thanked her for her service on the EDC since 2006. Ms. DeStefano expressed appreciation and said she enjoyed her tenure on the EDC and will make herself available to help out on initiatives if needed. She also expressed her hope that the Mayor will continue to hold joint quarterly meetings between the City Council, land use boards and the EDC.

Welcome incoming EDC member John Pratt

Chairman Eaton welcomed incoming Commissioner John Pratt who provided a summary of his work in the finance industry in the state. He said he is anxious to participate on the Commission.

Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Partnership Renewal Request

Commissioners Levenson and Cyr were charged with reviewing the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Partnership renewal request and making a recommendation to the full committee. Commissioner Levenson reported that he and Commissioner Cyr reviewed the request letter and the Chamber tourism budget provided and, although the projected budget exhibits a shortfall, they felt that the letter did not make a compelling case for additional funds or explain how the additional funds would be used. Both reviewers agreed that the partnership is important to the City's overall economic development and business vitality efforts and should be continued. However, their recommendation is to keep funding at the current level of \$40,000.

Commissioner Pratt asked if other cities contribute to the Tourism program. City Manager said not to his knowledge and provided the history of the city's funding which has included support for the Guide to the Seacoast, tourism and eCoast support. Commissioner Cyr added that, although most of the EDC funds support tourism, the eCoast group is still active and just celebrated its 14th year. He said there is a core group working together to stimulate more activity in the technology sector.

The EDC discussed the importance of the Chamber partnership, other program funding sources and trends in Chamber membership. Councilor Dwyer suggested that additional funding be tied to a "well-defined" effort in which the EDC plays a key role in advancing its goals such as development of a conference center and additional structured parking downtown. She feels that the Chamber can play an important role in convening and educating local businesses and hotels on the importance of these projects to local economic vitality.

Commissioner Zolla offered that perhaps the process of evaluating the Chamber's request for increased funding could involve a broader discussion with the Chamber while tying it to Chamber efforts to increase its tourism program efficiencies through the new website that is currently in development. As the EDC representative to the Chamber website development subcommittee, he stated that the Chamber's goal is to fund the website project via sponsorships and revenues generated through hotel bookings and to hold off on drawing on the City's website loan. As an incentive for not drawing on the loan, he suggested that the EDC consider a one-time grant of \$5,000 to be granted and applied to an effort such as the ones suggested by Councilor Dwyer.

Commissioner Levenson stated that "the City has a vested interest in a strong collaboration with the Chamber so that it

remains a strong organization,” adding that the City needs to do whatever is necessary to make the Chamber resilient and meaningful. However, he believes that the City needs a better-defined strategy for the City/Chamber collaboration before increasing partnership funding. Commissioner Cyr agreed stating that until such time he would not recommend additional funding. It was decided that Chairman Eaton would meet with the Chamber President to discuss the request and the EDC’s thoughts and report back in February.

Other Business

2012 EDC Year in Review

Ms. Carmer distributed copies of the EDC 2012 Year in Review and provided highlights of presentations, business visitations, subcommittee work and accomplishments included in the Review.

2013 EDC Action Plan discussion

Ms. Carmer distributed drafts of the EDC Action Plan priorities for discussion. In discussing the priorities, the EDC expressed interest in having the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) subcommittee reconvene and select one or two potential TIF districts. The subcommittee will consist of Commissioners Dwyer, Cohen, Levenson and Marchewka.

In discussing the priority of developing a conference center in the city, the EDC also asked the Chair to add to the conversation with the Chamber President the topic of jointly convening a meeting of business leaders to discuss the impact of a city conference center on economic vitality. The Commission also agreed to add to the priority list the development of a parking garage.

Parking Garage Site Selection

Following the City Council decision to discontinue discussion on the Worth Lot as a potential site for a second downtown parking garage, the Council referred the task to the Parking Traffic Safety Committee (PTSC). The Committee will hold a work session on January 8th at 9am in Conference Room A in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers at City Hall. The purpose of the meeting will be to present the work and findings done by the City Council subcommittee on the topic. The EDC discussed a strategy for providing input/participating and decided to allow the PTSC to conduct its work session and when the opportunity arises to provide input on the importance of a second public garage to downtown economic vitality, then the Commission can develop talking points to share.

Business NH Magazine article on “Best Companies to Work For”

Five out of the ten businesses showcased in the *Business NH Magazine* article entitled “Best Businesses to Work For” are Portsmouth-based companies including Lonza Biologics, Newmarket International, Bottomline Technologies, NHAPP and Pixel Media. Letters of congratulations will be sent to these companies.

2013 EDC Officer Nominations

Commissioner Dana Levenson nominated Everett Eaton to continue as Chair of the EDC. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bosen and motion carried unanimously. Commissioner Cyr nominated Commissioner Marchewka as Vice-Chair position. The motion was seconded by Chairman Eaton and carried unanimously.

Public Comment

David Choate of Grubb & Ellis/Northern New England submitted the following comments/suggestions:

- Review the Think Rochester.biz website as consider it as a model for Portsmouth.
- Consider bringing in a consultant to develop a conference center in the city via the RFP process
- Consider a private developer for a second structured parking facility downtown.

Confirm Next Meeting: Next meeting is Friday, February 1, 2013

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Carmer

Economic Development Program Manager