

**MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

March 15, 2013

Conference Room A Portsmouth City Hall

7:30 a.m.

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

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of February 1, 2013

Following a motion by Commissioner Pratt and a second by Commissioner Dwyer, the draft meeting minutes of February 1, 2013 were unanimously approved as written.

Overview of Capital Improvement Program Activities to Enhance Economic Development - Steve Parkinson, Public Works Director

Mr. Parkinson distributed a map and summary of twenty-five projects included in the City's 2014-2019 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). He explained the locations, costs and timeline for the various projects and the impact of the program on overall citywide infrastructure. The activities described have a value of \$28 million. With regard to the long-term project to separate the City's sewer and storm drainage systems, Mr. Bohenko said that the project is part of a consent decree by the US Environmental Protection Agency and that over the past 10 years the City has invested ~ \$70 million into the improvements which have resulted in lower sewer treatment operating costs. He told the Commission that inclusive of debt service, 10%-15% of the overall City budget is constituted by CIP activities. He added that the City aggressively seeks matching grants to reduce overall municipal expenditures on CIP projects. Mr. Cyr asked how much of the sewer separation project is complete and added that he has seen a marked reduction in street flooding in his neighborhood as a result of the effort. Mr. Bohenko responded that the project is about 80% complete.

Presentation on NH Small Business Development Center Program and Services by Warren Daniel, Regional Manager

Using a power point presentation, Mr. Daniel described the mission and services of the NH Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The organization is an outreach program of the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics, and a cooperative venture with the US Small Business Administration, the State of NH (DRED), the University of NH (UNH), and the private sector. It provides professional, one-on-one business management advice and educational programs, at no cost, to new and existing businesses. It provides 27 free, online classes for business owners to learn at their convenience about finance, marketing and business management. The SBDC also provides help with capital formation, linkages to angel investors, banks and economic development groups statewide. The agency can also assist businesses wishing to explore export opportunities or improve their sustainability practices. They regularly provide internship referrals through the organization's affiliation with the University of NH.

The seacoast SBDC office is located in Dover, NH where it provides one on one business counseling. The majority of businesses served from this office are Portsmouth-based businesses. In the past year, 36 Portsmouth businesses were assisted. And, 30% of the statewide capital raised by businesses through the SBDC went to Portsmouth-based businesses.

In response to a question regarding how the EDC can assist in program success, Mr. Daniel indicated that

funding is always a struggle as the state program budget has been reduced by the legislature over several program years. Assistance with a satellite office in Portsmouth is needed also as the current location at the NH-ICC will be changing when that office moves from Pease. Alternative locations include the Idea Greenhouse or space at UNH in Durham.

Other Business

Chamber Board of Director's letter re: Worth Lot Parking Garage

The EDC discussed the recent letter from the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors expressing dismay at the City Council's action to discontinue discussion of the Worth Parking Lot as a potential site for a second public parking garage downtown. Chairman Eaton expressed his frustration with the amount of time it is taking to take action on a second parking facility and he noted the number of times the current garage has been full despite it not being the busy tourism or holiday season.

Mr. Marchewka expressed disappointment with the way the City Council handled the matter and also the manner in which the abutters "high jacked" the deliberative approach by the Council subcommittee tasked with finding a location. He believes the EDC should solicit business concerns with the lack of adequate parking downtown and inform the City Council. Councilor Dwyer said she has heard from a number of businesses who felt intimidated by the abutter group that launched the pre-emptive action to discontinue further discussion on the Worth Lot. Mr. Bosen feels the City Council action is a disservice to business owners and employers as well as continued private investment downtown. Mr. Bohenko agreed noting the loss of opportunity costs each time the garage fills. In response to a question about the ability to bring back the Worth Lot for discussion, Councilor Dwyer explained that it requires one of the dissenting voters to bring it back via six votes.

In discussing how the EDC can assist in educating the public about the acute need for additional parking downtown several actions were suggested including a letters to the City Council from the EDC and individuals, an op-ed letter to local newspapers, a meeting with newspaper editorial Board, public outreach, and input from businesses negatively impacted by the lack of adequate parking.

When asked if his thoughts have changed on the topic, Councilor Thorsen said no and explained his concern is not so much with those of the abutters, but the balance of development in the downtown. He feels that the Worth Lot is not the optimal location for long term development downtown. The City needs multiple sites for parking for future development. His personal favorite is the Court St. lot adjacent to the fire station. Councilor Dwyer pointed out that this site was determined by the City Council subcommittee to be insufficient because it is not large enough and the City does not own the abutting property to enable a garage to be built there. She also noted that the City Council subcommittee acknowledged the need for more than one garage going forward. City Manager Bohenko reminded the EDC that those charged with vetting a potential site have to deal with the reality that the City does not own significant parcels downtown, which is why the City has attempted to partner with local developers whenever possible in creating additional parking.

With regard to potential EDC action on the matter, Mr. Bohenko said that the EDC has a good reputation with City Councilors for making sound recommendations on matters concerning economic development. He thinks it should continue this practice when taking action on the need for a second garage. He said that at the last Council meeting, the City Council tasked him with developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for redevelopment opportunities for the Worth Lot. One way the EDC can provide assistance going forward is in vetting the RFP. It will require inclusion of the current parameters in the agreement the City has with the Worth Development Corporation which requires at least 110 parking spaces to remain at that location. He asked for EDC members willing to assist with the RFP. Commissioners Bosen, Cohen,

Levenson and Marchewka volunteered to assist.

Report on January 30th Workforce Housing Coalition Charrette for Rock St. Garage Area –This agenda item was deferred to the April meeting.

Report on February 13, 2013 Wayfinding Project Public presentation.

A bulleted handout of progress on this project was distributed. Juliet Walker, the City's Transportation Planner and Wayfinding Project Manager will be invited to a future EDC to update the EDC on this project. Josh Cyr, the EDC representative on the Wayfinding Advisory Committee said he is impressed with the project consultant and is looking forward to the wayfinding programming opportunities to be proposed.

Upcoming Tech Crawl Event

Josh Cyr reported that the March 14th event was a success and he will be happy to provide an update on the eCoast activities at a future meeting.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present to provide comment.

Confirm Next Meeting: The next meeting will be Friday, April 5, 2013.

Adjourn – the meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager