

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

December 3, 2021 7:30 AM

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chair; Philip Cohen, Vice-Chair; City Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Alan Gold, Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine, Everett Eaton, Sarah Lachance

Excused: Tom Watson

Absent: Katelyn Kwoka

City Staff: City Manager Karen Conard, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

Chairman Marchewka called the meeting to order at 7:35 AM.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of November 5, 2021

Chairman Marchewka asked for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of November 5, 2021. Motion made by Commissioner Lachance, seconded by Vice-Chair Cohen. Motion to approve passed unanimously.

SBDC Business Resiliency Survey presentation on Portsmouth business response – Sean McKinley of the UNH Survey Center presented the Business Resiliency Survey response from Portsmouth businesses. This is the third survey conducted since the pandemic began and survey response highlights are:

1. Survey respondents were most frequently part of the professional, scientific and technical services industry, retail trade industry and the health care and social services industry.
2. Most businesses reduced hours since pandemic began. Sixty percent of survey respondents are still operating at reduced hours.
3. Over 50% of businesses surveyed that saw reductions in revenues early in the pandemic (June 2020) but most have seen improvements since then. Those businesses that are still experiencing revenue losses point to reduced customers, inability to hire workforce, supply chain disruptions and decline in sales as the primary cause for revenue loss.
4. Over two-thirds of businesses are concerned about finding workers and being able to pay a competitive wage, maintaining a healthy work environment and workers being able to find affordable housing.
5. Three-fourths of businesses applied for business relief in 2020. But in 2021, only half applied for assistance. There has been a slight increase in the number of businesses that have a resiliency plan now compared to at the start of the pandemic, but those with plans lack a continuity or resiliency component.
6. Other business concerns include a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, maintaining revenues, public acceptance of vaccines and maintaining customers. A smaller cohort are concerned about energy costs, cyber security and supply chain disruptions.
7. Despite these concerns, Portsmouth respondents are optimistic about the continued operation of their businesses in the foreseeable future- reflecting a higher percentage than earlier in the pandemic.

Semi-annual Tourism Report by Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth – Chamber Collaborative President Ben Van Camp presented Chamber Collaborative activity on the following topics:

1. Promotional collateral
2. Website traffic including audience demographics
3. COVID-related related interruptions to in-person destination marketing trips, travel prohibition across borders and cancellation of restaurant week
4. Chamber Participation in Portsmouth events
5. Grant funding
6. Office and kiosk visitation metrics

7. Media relations outcomes
8. Meals and Rooms Tax metrics
9. Upcoming events, partnerships and initiatives
10. Chamber partnership with the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Arts and Non-profits on a destination marketing plan to begin after the holidays to highlighting all Portsmouth has to safely offer residents and visitors.

Subcommittee Reports

- Business Retention and Expansion – Chair Marchewka reported that the original survey has been revised, shortened and updated. Commissioner Lachance suggested possibly adding a question about workforce that references the opportunities from the graduating High School CTE students. Next step is to speak with the UNH representatives about their ability to assist in an electronic version of the survey. Goal is to begin surveying in 2022 and continue annually after prioritizing the sectors to survey.
- Sustainable Cities - EV charger initiative - Commissioner Lachance said the subcommittee convened and identified two areas for focus: 1) potential city-owned surface parking lots for EV charger installation as well as potential private surface lots and, 2) Being proactive about educating parties involved in new construction downtown or public infrastructure upgrades on the utility requirements for EV chargers.

New/Other Business

- EDC Officer term limit
At a previous EDC meeting, Chair Marchewka raised the notion of creating a limit to the number of consecutive years an EDC Chair may serve. Such a policy would assure a rotation of leadership. When asked if this action is possible by the EDC, the City Attorney advised that this is. With this in mind, Chair Marchewka made a motion to amend the EDC Policies and Procedures document to limit the number of consecutive years an EDC Chair can serve with a minimum of one year before re-election to the position. Motion was seconded by Alan and passed unanimously. The EDC Rules and Policy Manual will be amended and the policy will take effect in January 2022.
- EDC officer nominations and elections
Election of EDC Chair for 2022:
Chair Marchewka passed the “gavel” to the Vice-Chair and nominated Phil Cohen for incoming EDC Chair in 2022. Hearing no further nominations, Assistant Mayor Splaine seconded the nomination which was unanimously approved. Councilor Lazenby thanked Chair Marchewka for his leadership and good work as Chair.

Election of EDC Vice-Chair for 2022:
Commissioner Eaton nominated Sarah Lachance for Vice-Chair. Nomination was respectfully declined by Ms. Lachance. Hearing no further nominations, Commissioner Lachance nominated Commissioner Gold for Vice-Chair. Mr. Cohen seconded the nomination which was unanimously approved.
- EDC 2021 Retreat Action items/Plan for review at January EDC meeting
Discussion on this item centered around which items from the 2021 EDC retreat are still relevant and what new actions should be added to the plan for presentation to the City Council-elect. EDC will invite City Councilors-elect sometime in early 2022 to a meeting to discuss the EDC's work and initiatives. Two items suggested for inclusion are workforce development advocacy and data modeling on educating the community on the relationship between property tax values and development.

Outgoing City Councilors Lazenby and Assistant Mayor Splaine encouraged the EDC to “embrace its advisory role” and not be “passive” about speaking publicly. They also encouraged the EDC to seek participation in the future planning for the McIntyre Building redevelopment under the new City Council administration. Both members were thanked for their service and input on the EDC during their EDC tenure.

Public Comment - Ben VanCamp from the Chamber Collaborative reported that in a recent call with Commissioner Caswell from the NH Business and Economic Affairs Office he learned that the state will be making grants to the restaurant industry for technology advances. No match will be required. The Chamber will share this opportunity with the local restaurant community. Another workforce attraction program the state is proposing is a student education debt relief program up to \$20,000 per student if a graduate agrees to remain in the state and work for 4 years. Finally, Ben reported that his Chamber Board is amenable to having a member of the EDC or the EDC Program Manager sit on the Board as a non-voting member.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting –January 7, 2022

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager