

CITY COUNCIL E-MAILS

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October 16, 2023 Council Meeting

ADDENDUM

Submitted on Mon, 10/16/2023 - 16:08

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Subject

Idea For A Seacoast Development & Economic Summit for 2024

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Message

I am forwarding my weekly seacoastonline / Portsmouth Herald / Foster's Daily Democrat column to you and other Council candidates. It's a good summary of The Greater Seacoast Economic Summit of 1991 and offers a proposal toward the bottom of the column that could lead to an area-wide discussion, and some solutions, to the development and housing problems that we mutually face with our neighboring towns and cities. Please give it some thought -- it just takes a couple of leaders to create a summit, and there is a lot of talent out there of people who could offer great ideas. Each of you has enough to do right now so no response to me is needed, and if anyone adopts this concept -- it's yours. - Jim Splaine

The Seacoast Compact of 1991

Portsmouth and the entire New Hampshire and Maine seacoast area were in economic doldrums in 1991. Things were going badly. The nation's economy was in malaise, and locally the news was especially bleak.

Pease was in transition from having been a large military base to a vast area mostly of vacant buildings and empty parking lots. The potential closure of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard would have created a double hit.

Early that year as Assistant Mayor I proposed including area communities in a regional discussion to consider our future. After a dozen planning meetings, leaders stepped forward, and a blueprint was set into motion that eventually became what we called "The Greater Seacoast Economic Summit."

It consisted of several interactive panel discussions and research projects that included business people and activists from neighboring cities and towns as well as talent from the University of New Hampshire.

Well-known Portsmouth attorney Bob Shaines chaired the group. His ability to bring excitement, purpose, unity and vision was remarkable. Working with him was Paul McEachern and dozens of organizers.

On April 16 and 17, a two-day summit was held at the New England Center in Durham and at Yoken's Conference Center in Portsmouth involving over 150 people. Several initiatives were proposed, which along with other efforts and follow-up began action projects that helped our area in its eventual economic recovery.

The summit also led to another event, "The Portsmouth 2020 Vision Project" held on May 22, 1991 that included Mayor Eileen Foley predicting that in 2020 people would carry computers in their pockets. Remember, those were the days of radio telephones and cassette tapes. <https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/news/local/portsmouth-herald/2012/06/10/portsmouth-2020-vision-project-revisited/49600990007/>

One group at the summit was called the "Unified Action Panel" which I chaired. We had a two hour discussion attended by about 40 participants. An organizing committee of five had earlier worked on what we called "The Seacoast Compact" with 12 principles. I asked Portsmouth resident and attorney Steven Parker Feld to be primary draftsman. He fashioned a powerful document.

I will mention more of the Compact in coming weeks as election season arrives locally, statewide, and nationally since many of the principles define the need for unity and cooperation amongst ourselves to work toward solutions for the problems we face. Its advice is timely, and timeless.

The following introductory principle sets forth some of that definition:

"Principle #1 -- The Unique Purpose of Our Community Compact: In our mutual effort to achieve excellence in our individual endeavors and for our entire community, it is recognized that our freedom as Americans is fundamentally founded upon the essential principles that discrimination and favoritism on the basis of ancestry, status, age, or relationship is unacceptable and that all men and women are truly considered as having equal opportunity in our society and under our laws."

The closing principle sums up the optimism of the document:

"Principle #12 -- We Should Celebrate Our Community and Our Unbounded Future: Our expectations and prospects are unlimited, but only when we work together. Our mutual partnership represents the continued strength of the community. Our future prosperity will not be valued by the sum of our financial accounts, but by the combined general welfare of each of our fellow citizens."

One outgrowth of that effort was a "League of Seacoast Towns and Cities" with the vision of bringing together people from our coast between Newburyport, Massachusetts to Ogunquit, Maine, and the Tri-City area of Dover, Rochester and Somersworth to envision our future and share in serving mutual needs. We held meetings in several communities, generating much interest.

The idea for regional cooperation and summitry in addressing the problems of the next few decades awaits a re-visit by today's energetic visionaries among us.

Thought for today: The Greater Seacoast Economic Summit served a positive purpose in 1991, and contributed to renewed energy as we pulled together to make Pease Tradeport the economic engine it has become, and prevented closing of a shipyard that America needs now and forever.

Is there value to having a Greater Seacoast Development & Housing Summit for 2024, bringing together talent in neighboring towns and cities to discuss mutual problems and needs of our current day?

Another thought: Perhaps the question above needs a leader or two. Anyone. Anyone?

Next time: Revisiting The 2015 Portsmouth-Provincetown Ferry Proposal.

Jim Splaine has served variously since 1969 as Portsmouth Assistant Mayor for 12 years, Police Commissioner and School Board member, as well as 6 years as State Senator and 24 years as State Representative. He can be reached at jimsplaineportsmouth@gmail.com

Please indicate if you would like your comment to be part of the public record for the upcoming City Council meeting. Yes