

Approved
May 3, 2002

DRAFT

PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

April 5, 2002

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Scott Pafford, Steve Alie, Everett Eaton, Paul Harvey Sr., Tom Ferrini, John Hynes, Edward Hayes, John Bohenko, City Manager

Members Absent: Mark Simpson (excused), Cliff Taylor (excused)

In Chairman Simpson's absence, Commissioner Ferrini chaired the meeting.

Minutes of March 15, 2001

Commissioner Alie moved and Commissioner Paul Harvey Sr. seconded the motion to approve the March 15, 2002 meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Proposed Sidewalk Improvements – 22 & 28 Deer St.

Mr. Colella, the owner of 22 and 28 Deer Street was present to discuss improvements to his property and to the sidewalk in front of this property. He has contracted with Ambit Engineering Inc., to develop conceptual plans for replacement of the existing concrete sidewalks with brick from the corner of Deer and Market Streets to 22 Deer Street. In conjunction with this concept, John Chagnon of Ambit Engineering and Mr. Colella have been working with the City Public Works Department staff on landscaping improvements at the site of the city's pump station on Market Street. Mr. Colella wishes to participate in the EDC 50:50 matching UDAG fund program for streetscape improvements for this project. The estimated cost for the work would be \$15,500.

Mr. Bohenko asked if Mr. Colella would consider the alternative of cutting out an existing strip of grass between the sidewalk and the curb and replacing it with brick. This would leave the concrete, which is only two years old, in place. Mr. Colella said he would consider that. Mr. Bohenko said the work could be done as a city pilot project if Ambit Engineering would revise the plans and costs estimates for this alternative.

Commissioner Alie said he thinks this is a great idea and although brick sidewalks are beautiful, they are hard to keep clean. He thinks that the sidewalks where the brick laid in concrete is the best method of construction because it is easier to clean and tends not to heave. It was agreed that a meeting between Mr. Colella, Mr. Chagnon and City Engineering staff would be arranged to discuss the alternative and landscaping improvements to the pump station.

Bow Street Riverwalk Update

Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director presented an update on the Bow Street Riverwalk project. In her presentation she made the following points:

- The Piscataqua Riverwalk consists of an 800-foot long, pier-built pedestrian walkway that will parallel Bow Street along the water and connect the existing Harbour Place deck to a City-owned pocket park located adjacent to three waterfront restaurant decks and the Ceres Street docks of local tour boats.
- The proposed pedestrian way varies in width from 12 feet to 20 feet and can accommodate the berthing of tall ships or cruise ships up to 350 feet in length.
- Significant engineering and design work, as well as extensive public participation efforts, have already been conducted in support of this project. In fact, the concept of constructing the Riverwalk has been discussed by residents and in local planning documents for more than two decades.

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- An initial study was conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing the Riverwalk. This study was followed by the collection of detailed technical data through such means as dive inspections, hydrographic surveys, and pile drive tests.
- Engineering and design plan sets have been developed. Development of these plans by a local marine engineering firm involved extensive input from the City's Legal, Engineering, Planning, Fire, Police, Inspections, and Public Works Departments. Permitting documents as well as estimated construction costs have been completed as well.
- The Riverwalk is a critical link in a mile-long continuous waterfront walkway that connects a multitude of scenic and historic tourist destinations, including the NH State Port Authority (where visiting cruise ships currently dock), downtown Portsmouth, Prescott Park, Strawberry Banke, Four Tree Island and Peirce Island, via existing public sidewalks and paths.
- The proposed Riverwalk will also serve as an important pedestrian link in the City's downtown Harbour Trail system; a walking trail of historic landmarks similar to Boston's "Freedom Trail".
- Total project cost is \$3 million.
- If funded, the project could begin as early as 2005. Construction will be tied into the Memorial Bridge and Scott Avenue land bridge rehabilitation projects scheduled in 2005.
- The Riverwalk project has enjoyed strong and broad support from local officials, downtown business owners, civic groups and the general public.
- Letters of support are on file from Senator Gregg, the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce, the Rockingham Planning Commission, and numerous downtown business owners.
- The Portsmouth City Council, Portsmouth Planning Board, the Board of the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce, and the local newspaper have all endorsed the project.

1895 Building/ Pierce Island

Ms. Hayden also provided an update on a plan to partner with the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) to rehabilitate the structure for 16-20 units of elderly housing on the second and third floors of the building. This use was deemed to be most compatible with the municipal complex. The city will maintain the first floor for additional conference and storage space in the basement. Funding will be a combination of sources including CDBG funds, elderly housing tax credits from New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and PHA funds. The city will structure a long-term lease with the PHA that will provide revenues comparable to local taxes on the improved building.

The last update provided by Ms. Hayden was on improvements to Pierce Island. Included in the project are redevelopment and landscaping of the parking lot with 67 spaces and reorientation of the pool bathhouse entrance to the south side of the building facing the new parking lot. Other pool changes include removal of some of the concrete inside the fenced area and replacement with grass.

The current focus of the project is on the trail system on the east end of the island. The plan includes construction of a trail with scenic views and picnic areas incorporated into the system. Several grants have been submitted to fund these improvements including a Coastal Zone Management grant, A state DES grant, and a Land and Water Conservation grant. In addition to these funds, there is \$75,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for the project.

Improvements to the boat launch will be part of a later phase of improvements. Dr. Harvey asked if the state would assist in that part of the project. The City Manager responded that, if the state participates, the city would have to relinquish rights for control of the launch. This in turn raises concerns with adequacy of parking and traffic generated by a state-run facility.

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UDAG Budget

UDAG Interest -The City Manager circulated a memo describing a new strategy which he and the city's finance director and the city's outside investment advisor developed for increasing the interest earned on the UDAG principal. The strategy is to lend up to \$2 million of the UDAG principal to the City at 4.5%. This effectively enables the City to avoid short-term borrowing for ongoing capital projects. The 4.5% rate is three times the rate the city is currently earning on the investment of the UDAG principal and would be an improvement on what the city is currently paying for short-term borrowing. This proposal should generate roughly \$90,000 annually in UDAG interest revenues. Following the endorsement of the concept by Commissioners Levenson, Alie and Hynes, the EDC instructed the City Manager to move forward with his proposal.

FY 03 Budget - Ms. Carmer distributed copies the draft 2003 budget. The amount of funds available for EDC projects next year net of administration costs is approximately \$72,000. In addition to supporting the Chamber of Commerce's eCoast and tourism initiatives, there are two projects slated for funding from UDAG monies in 2003 from the City's Capital Improvement Plan. They are the Ceres Street improvement project and the Market St. Extension gateway project. Following a review of the boundary between City and private property on Ceres Street, Commissioner Alie moved and Commissioner Harvey seconded a motion to approve the FY 03 UDAG budget as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Downtown Real Estate Market – Vacancy rates in the downtown are increasing and, according to a report issued by the Boulos Company, are about 15%. With the Bottomline Technology moving to Pease tradeport in May, there will be an additional 32,000 square feet of office space available downtown. According to Ms. Carmer, the Bottomline space has not been leased yet and Dan Hughes and his partner are still seeking a single or multiple tenants. Mr. Alie said that he is concerned about the increasing vacancy rates in town. After attending the recent tourism summit and listening to UNH economist Ross Gittell speak about the synergy between the local tourism and entrepreneurial sectors, he thinks that it would be beneficial to invite Professor Gittell to an EDC meeting to learn more about the economic opportunities he envisions for Portsmouth. All agreed to invite Professor Gittell to a future EDC meeting for this discussion.

Subcommittee on Second Parking Garage – A meeting date of May 2, 2002 was established for the next subcommittee meeting. Ms. Carmer will send a reminder notice.

Public Comment Session

No members of the public present wished to comment.

Adjourn Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Community Development Program Manager