

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

October 8, 2004

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Paul Harvey Sr. William Gladhill, Cliff Taylor, Edward Hayes, Everett Eaton, John Bohenko; City Manager

EDC Members

Absent: Mark Simpson (excused), Scott Pafford, John Hynes

Minutes

Commissioner Taylor moved and Commissioner Hayes seconded the motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 10, 2004 as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

Introduction of New Chamber of Commerce President

Chairman Levenson introduced and welcomed the new Chamber of Commerce President, Dick Ingram. Mr. Ingram thanked the Commission for inviting him and said he feels he has the “best job in Portsmouth.” He looks forward to working with the city and strengthening the partnership between his organization and the city.

Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Report on Tourism and eCoast

Marge Hubbard, Tourism Manager and Ginny Griffith, Business Development Manager for the greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce reported on the Tourism and eCoast Programs activities for the period January 1, 2004 to March 30, 2004. Ms. Hubbard provided several examples of seacoast advertisements that ran regionally and which continue to generate many leads and inquiries about travel to Portsmouth. Many of these ads were cooperative ads funded by Joint Promotional Program grants, matching business contributions and the Granite State ambassador program. She also provided examples of travel articles from newspapers around the nation such as the *New York Times*, *Miami Herald* and *Boston Globe* and from magazines such as *Where to Retire*. The Chamber has updated its website and is now able to track unique (i.e. separate log-on) visitors to the site. In the month of August alone, there were 71,000 unique hits to the Chamber’s site.

Ms. Griffith reported on eCoast activities for the two quarters including participation in the upcoming Future Forward Conference at the Sheraton Hotel, Network New Hampshire, Business Education Collaborative, and Save our Shipyard. She also reported on the success of the two Wi-Fi spots in Portsmouth and the publicity the city received as a result. Finally, she updated the EDC on activities of the eCoast Board.

Chairman Levenson thanked the Chamber representatives for their reports and said that he recently heard the Commander of the Shipyard speak at Rotary Club. The

Commander's remarks were a "real wake-up call" for him and he feels that it is very important that the community understand the severe impact to the region if the Shipyard were to close. He asked if it were possible for the Chamber to provide more frequent updates on the Save Our Shipyard Association's efforts. He suggested that an update be provided every two months if appropriate. The Chamber agreed to the Chairman's request.

John Burke – Update on Parking Figures and Transportation Initiatives

City Transportation Director John Burke reported that it was a very busy summer. Although July was a slow month for the parking garage and meters due to the weather and the higher gas prices, August and September were very busy. The parking garage continues to be in demand. It filled to capacity 10 times this year with each event occurring on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday evening. Previous fills had primarily been at noon in the summer months. This year's garage fills occurred year-round.

According to Mr. Burke, people seem to have adjusted to the increase in parking rates. He said that the change has not effected the use of the public parking garage or meters downtown. Also, the violation appeal rate has not increased appreciably. One change that the public would like to see with respect to the new rates is the opportunity to pay for parking in a variety of ways.

This month, the City is soliciting consultant proposals for a parking and transit utilization study to be completed by January or February of next year. There are four study components to the study:

1. A parking rate study.
2. An analysis of improved parking technology such as an analysis of alternate capital upgrades and methods to pay for parking such as pay and display and smart cards
3. Parking program review including parking validation, valet and resident permit parking.
4. Assessment of need and timing for construction of a new downtown parking facility.

With respect to transit, Mr. Burke said that transit use has increased significantly in the past year. There are now three solid Coast bus routes into Market Square. Ridership increased 100% from September 2003 to September 2004. Transit will continue to be an important component of the city's transportation program because it reduces vehicle trips and congestion in downtown. The seasonal trolley also increased with the Pierce Island loop being very popular this year. The trend will be for the transit component of city transportation program to increase. Local hotels have expressed interest in the trolleys servicing their businesses and the express Coast bus route to and from Pease is seeing increased ridership. Soon the federal subsidy of this route will sunset and the fee will become \$1 for the ride.

All of the above suggests that demand for downtown parking is growing. Projects such as the Hilton Garden Inn and the future build out of the Parade Mall and Eagle Photo will continue to add demand for the existing garage. Already the parking leases in the public garage are expected to increase from 448 to 528 in January to accommodate recent

development approvals downtown. And, based on increased use, the City has also extended its Masonic Temple parking lease another three years. Mr. Burke said that these factors make the Worth Parking Lot Feasibility Study and the Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center public private parking opportunity critical for ensuring that there is adequate parking for future growth.

There was a brief discussion on the way the current public garage leasing arrangement is handled. And, Mr. Eaton asked why the Worth Garage was not in the parking study scope of work. City Manager Bohenko responded that it is likely that the empirical data developed in the study will point to future parking facility needs such as the Worth Lot parking garage.

The City Manager said that the EDC will continue to receive parking updates and may be asked for input into the parking study as parking has always been considered integral to successful economic development. He cited the Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center as an example of the type of catalyst that creates economic opportunity for the downtown. Chairman Levenson agreed and thanked Mr. Burke for his report.

Old Business

EDC Action Plan – Priorities for action

In the interest of time, this item was tabled for discussion at the November 5th EDC meeting and a summary of the EDC priorities received to date was distributed. Chairman Levenson asked Commissioners who have not submitted their priorities do so before the next meeting.

City Council Referral: Parking Impact Fee Subcommittee Update

Chairman Levenson reported that the subcommittee has developed a methodology for a revised parking impact fee. The proposal will be discussed with a group of stakeholders before bringing it back to the EDC.

Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center Expansion Subcommittee Update – City Council Work Session

City Manager Bohenko said that a draft Memorandum of Understanding has been sent to the City Council for discussion at a City Council work session on November 15, 2004. Members of the subcommittee will be present, but all members of the EDC are welcome to attend.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

With no further business, Commissioner Taylor moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 AM. Seconded by Commissioner Harvey. Vote to adjourn is unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Community Development Program Manager