

**DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

June 2, 2006

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman, Cliff Taylor, William Gladhill, Robin McIntosh, Paul Harvey Sr., Lisa DeStefano Thomas Ferrini, John P. Bohenko; City Manager

Members Excused: Edward Hayes, Michael Murray, Ned Raynolds

Staff present: Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager
David Moore, Community Development Program Manager

Chairman Levenson opened the meeting at 7:35 am

Minutes

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to accept the minutes of May 5, 2006 as amended. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Taylor and passed unanimously.

Old Business and Updates

• *Tax Increment Financing*

City Manager Bohenko informed the EDC that on May15, 2006 the City Council followed the EDC recommendation to adopt RSA 162:K. The City has taken the first step in the Tax Increment Financing process and can establish Tax Increment Financing Districts in the future if desired for economic development initiatives.

• *Planning Board Meeting on Proposed Northern Tier Zoning Amendments*

City Manager Bohenko told the EDC that the Planning Board held a public hearing May 25, 2006 on amendments proposed to the zoning ordinance by HarborCorp representatives. Chairman Levenson could appeared on behalf of the EDC to speak to the economic development objectives of the City's partnership with HarborCorp for construction of a public parking garage associated with an expanded conference facility. The applicant made a comprehensive presentation on four proposed re-zoning amendments:

- 1) to re-zone the vacant parking lot off of Green Street, Russell Street and Maplewood Avenue from Central Business A (CBA) to Central Business B (CBB). This change would allow a structure of 60' in lieu of 50' in the area described.
- 2) to permit a hotel convention center and related uses with an occupancy of more than 500 people in the CBB District.
- 3) to amend the parking ordinance and allow that parking facilities to be under common ownership with the principal use as long as certain requirements are satisfied; and,
- 4) to provide for intermodal transportation credits for the CBA and CBB Districts for municipally owned, covered parking facilities.

The Planning Board voted to recommend all but number 2 above to the City Council. The City Manager will recommend that the City Council act favorably on all four amendments requested. He said that the adoption of zoning amendment requires three readings inclusive of a public hearing on the changes. In response to a question regarding whether the zone boundary change will set a precedent for

other Northern Tier structures to follow, the Manager said it did not and that the applicant made a comprehensive argument why the parcel in question should be rezoned. Councilor Ferrini said he is glad the process is moving forward and he think the changes are appropriate. The City Manager encouraged the Commission to view the meeting on the city's website archives to gain a full understanding of the requests. Commissioner Taylor said he logged on to the web broadcast and was grateful for the opportunity to review the meeting at a personally convenient time.

- *Subcommittee Reports*

Ms. Carmer informed the EDC that there is nothing new to report on the Public Market subcommittee as the group has not met since the May EDC meeting.

The EDC WiFi subcommittee (Dana, Robin, Scott Campbell, Eric Crago, Ginny Griffith and Alan Brady) met on June 1st. Ms. Carmer presented a report on the subcommittee's activity as well as its recommendation back to the City Council to enlarge the current WiFi zone in the central business district. The enlarged zone is recommended because it demonstrates the following economic benefits:

- Continues a successful public/private partnership.
- Demonstrates that city is technology savvy.
- Enhances tourist/business traveler experience in city year-round as opposed to the current seasonal offering.
- Generates national recognition of city for WiFi activity.
- Has a potential municipal application for police, fire public works use.
- Has potential for establishing community homepage with value added for events, tours, games, etc.

After discussion on the merits of an expanded WiFi area in the city as well as the mechanism for putting it in place it was decided that the subcommittee would reconvene one more time to develop a strategy for implementing the recommendation. It was the consensus of the Commission that city staff will work with the Chamber of Commerce and service providers to implement the plan if the City Council agrees. Commissioner Taylor moved to send the recommendation as amended to the City Council. Councilor Ferrini seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Mr. Bohenko said he would put the item on the June 19, 2006 City Council agenda.

EDC Action Plan Item – Workforce Housing

Presentation by David Moore on City and Regional Initiatives and Partners

The 2006 EDC Action Plan includes the following Workforce Housing goal:

Work with City Planning Staff and Board on zoning ordinance changes necessary to achieve goal of increasing inventory of workforce housing and live/work space.

To provide the EDC background on the topic, Community Development Program Manager David Moore made a presentation on current city efforts in this regard as well as a what is proposed in the City Master Plan. He provided data on the local housing inventory of renters vs. owner-occupied units, the median cost and rent of homes in the community and the income required to rent or own a home in the city. He also discussed the city's regional partners in creating workforce housing opportunities. For many residents the median cost of a home exceeds the standard expenditure 30% of gross income. This impacts the local economy by making it more difficult to recruit and retain businesses and employees. It also decreases household discretionary income for other goods and services.

During discussion following the presentation, Councilor Ferrini said that the City has and is continuing to make strides against this challenging issue. However, he feels that the most recent accomplishments have disproportionately benefited the elderly and disabled residents and he thinks that more needs to be done to assist moderate income working families. He suggests convening others from Massachusetts and other areas where successful projects have been built and which can perhaps serve as models. He would like to see something done by the end of the year in this regard.

Mr. Bohenko noted that one missing link in the workforce housing challenge is a comprehensive state law such as the one Massachusetts has in place. In addition to working on the Master Plan goals of modifying local regulations that could lead to more workforce housing, he suggested that the city work with the legislative delegation on crafting legislation that would result in additional workforce housing.

Public Comment Period

David Choate updated the EDC on recent real estate activity in the Northern Tier. The sale of 111 Maplewood Ave. (former Portsmouth Herald site) means plans will soon be brought before the city for redevelopment of this parcel. The sale of 31 Raynes Ave. will be closing in 30 days. With regard to these and other properties in the Northern Tier, he urged the EDC and staff to create a unified vision for the area.

In the West End, the Fermentation Building at the Schultz Brewery has a restaurant planned for the first floor and the American Maritime Academy will occupy the rest of the building. The Housing Partnership and a developer are exploring live/work space at the Brewhouse building in the complex.

Regarding WiFi, Mr. Choate urged that the zone be expanded to include Nobles Island and the Port where cruise ships dock. Lastly, he suggested that the City look at Exeter's zoning ordinance density criteria as a model for improving Portsmouth's zoning regulations. He also suggested that the EDC meet with The Housing Partnership and use the Atlantic Heights workforce housing proposal as a case study to understand the complex issues in creating a successful project that meets current zoning.

Next Meeting Date

September 8, 2006 is the next scheduled meeting date.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager