

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

December 7, 2007

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Robin McIntosh, Tom Ferrini, William Gladhill, Paul Harvey Sr., Edward Hayes, John P. Bohenko; City Manager

Members Excused: Lisa DeStefano

Members Absent: Ned Raynolds, Michael Murray

Staff present: Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager

Chairman Levenson opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m.

Minutes

Draft meeting minutes of November 9, 2007 were unanimously approved following a motion by Commissioner Eaton and a second by Commissioner Harvey.

Workforce Housing Discussion with NH Speaker of the House Terie Norelli, Housing Partnership Director Dick Ingram, Deputy City Manager Cindy Hayden and Planning Board representatives

Chairman Levenson introduced Deputy City Manager Cindy Hayden who gave a power point presentation on the workforce housing in the city including housing inventory, affordability and local assistance for purchasing homes or staying in one's home. She then introduced Planning Board Chairman John Ricci who made three points regarding the Planning Board's workforce housing efforts: 1) Affordable workforce housing requires reasonably priced land and land is very scarce in Portsmouth, 2) On some proposed workforce housing projects there is "NIMBYism" (not-in-my-backyard) and, 3) Portsmouth does the "heavy lifting" in the region on workforce housing and, because surrounding towns have more land available for development, the city should work with other communities to address the workforce housing deficit.

Planning Board Vice-Chair Jerry Hejtmanek said typical neighborhood responses and concerns to proposed workforce housing projects include traffic, impact on property value and skepticism of new residents. He said that there is a need for workforce housing advocates to attend public meetings to speak in favor of projects because usually most of the people that attend meetings on workforce housing are opposed to projects in their neighborhood.

Housing Partnership Director Dick Ingram commented that the conversation on workforce housing in other communities sounds very similar to what has been stated here with regard to fair share. He said the issue of housing defines who we are as a community and who can and cannot live in the city (such as our children). He said Portsmouth is a progressive community which can be a leader in housing policy and galvanizing other communities. Portsmouth has been successful at generating jobs and as such, has a greater burden for providing housing.

The city needs a plan to holistically increase workforce housing. Step one is a good ordinance that does not target just one neighborhood for workforce housing but rather tweaks zoning for all neighborhoods to share the challenge to create workforce housing. Because land is scarce we need to use and re-use existing structures.

Terie Norelli, Speaker of the NH House of Representatives followed Mr. Ingram. She said that many representatives in Concord share the same concern expressed by the EDC. The topic is on the democratic caucus agenda to ensure there are a full range of options for creation of affordable workforce housing. The topic is also on the agenda of the Business and Industry Association (BIA) as their members are having difficulty attracting workers because of high housing costs.

She explained that since NH is not a home rule state, enabling legislation is required for local and regional action to tackle issues like this. She suggested that a Board like the EDC could be effective in three ways: 1) By having conversations about enabling legislation with local legislators, 2) By showing up to testify at public hearings on legislation in Concord and, 3) By writing letters in support of legislation that supports or creates workforce housing.

She also identified several House Bills that target the issue including HB472, HB1259 and Senate Bills SB2785, SB2786, and SB199.

A general discussion ensued on action items. Some suggestions were: a “reverse study circle” concept around 12 parcels selected for workforce housing, waiving zoning requirements for certain costly off-site improvements, neighborhood dialogue on workforce housing in the pre-planning stage of a project, listening circles focused on previously identified housing sites, and establishment of a regional task force to engage other communities in development of workforce housing opportunities. Chairman Levenson thanked the guests and asked the EDC to consider the ideas that emerged for a continued discussion as the Commission works on its annual Action Plan.

EDC Project Updates

Portwalk Underground Parking Opportunity – Commissioner Eaton summarized recent meetings with Parade Office LLC and City Council and outlined the current opportunity for the city to purchase a second level of parking at Portwalk. He feels that the parking will be key to the continued success of northern tier development and downtown economic vitality. There will be a public hearing on the \$12.5 million bond resolution to purchase the 325 space parking level on December 17th. EDC members are urged to attend.

Islington St. Corridor Action Plan and Arts District Study - On November 14, 2007 Richardson and Associates held a public charrette on street improvement options for Islington Street in which sixty people participated. On display were stakeholders’ photos of likes and dislikes in the corridor. From the input received, the consultants will prepare a draft plan for review at a December 20th in-house meeting. These alternatives will be presented at another public meeting on January 10, 2008.

Exit 7 Gateway Improvement Project Update on kickoff & stakeholder meeting – A kick-off meeting was held in mid- November and the Cecil Group consultants are currently completing a review of existing conditions and interviewing stakeholders in the gateway.

New Project Initiatives

Wayfinding Project – In accordance with the City’s Master Plan and the EDC Action Plan, staff is developing a Request For Proposals (RFP) for a comprehensive city wayfinding project. The project will be phased with the downtown and Central Business District area included in the first phase.

Vintage Christmas Collaboration between The Music Hall/ City/Coast Bus/Strawbery Banke/Sponsors – The City is collaborating with the Music Hall, Strawberry Banke, Coast Bus Lines on a seasonal trolley that will run from noon to 10 p.m. during the month of December.

2008 EDC Action Plan Priorities – Chairman Levenson distributed a review of 2007 accomplishments and 2008 Action Plan considerations. He commended the EDC and staff on accomplishing or beginning action on most of priority action items in the 2007 EDC Action Plan and thinks that the City Council should be advised of this work. He asked members to review the items listed for consideration on the handout (especially item #7 on the structure/organization of the EDC) and bring forward any additional activities for discussion at the January 4, 2008 meeting.

Public Comment Period

On Portwalk -City Councilor Christine Dwyer said that she has pushed for more information from the City Manager and on the revenues and expenditures from the contemplated second level of parking at Portwalk and believes that the opportunity does not have to create a deficit of expenditures over revenues if the parking rates were reviewed. She noted that the current public garage has a positive cash flow. Chairman Levenson responded that even if the new garage level does not pay for itself initially he believes that the project is an investment in downtown vitality. He added that there is a cost to not investing in this goal in the form of reduced quality of experience downtown and lack of adequate parking for business attraction and retention.

On Action Plan - City Councilor Whitehouse said this is his last EDC meeting as a sitting City Councilor since his term expires in 2008. He said he “considers himself a non-voting member” of the Commission and feels this is the best committee in the city and urged members to continue its good work. He urged the EDC to include an eighth item to the 2008 Action Plan on historic preservation and the waterfront. Chairman Levenson responded that he thanked the Councilor on behalf of the entire EDC for his hard work on the City Councilor and his participation in EDC meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM. Next meeting date is January 4, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy M. Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager