

MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

April 4, 2008

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Lisa DeStefano, Michael Murray Robin McIntosh, Paul Harvey Sr., Edward Hayes, William Gladhill, Jack Blalock, , John P. Bohenko; City Manager

Members Absent: Ken Smith

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

Minutes

Draft meeting minutes of March 7, 2008 were unanimously approved as written.

Presentation: Quarterly Reports on Tourism and Business Development

Chamber President Doug Bates introduced Nicki Noble, the new Tourism Manager. He then gave a brief project update of the WiFi expansion project noting that during the fall and winter testing was done at a variety of potential locations for transmittal nodes. He said that the project is on track to roll out phased expansion starting this summer.

Ms. Noble provided the quarterly report to the Commission. The Tourism Summit held on March 12, 2008 was well-attended and was a success. She reported that Portsmouth has recently received two recognitions of note. The first is the Distinctive Destination designation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The second is New Hampshire's "best walking city," and one of the top 100 most walkable cities in the nation according to Prevention magazine and the American Podiatric Medical Association respectively .

During the reporting period, Ms. Noble has represented Portsmouth at several travel trade events and she participated in the New England Sales Mission to Canada. The new *Guide to the Seacoast* is at the printer and is scheduled for delivery April 10th.

Travel trends to look for are trips closer to home such as day trips and weekend getaways due to high fuel prices. The low value of the dollar in the international market means more Canadians and foreign visitors are being enticed and are expected.

Mr. Levenson thanked Mr. Bates and Ms. Noble for the report and asked if they could sit with the city and develop what would be important metrics to define a successful tourism program.

Old Business and EDC Project Updates

March 12, 2008 Tourism Summit

Mr. Levenson reported that he was a participant in one of the panels at the summit and was impressed with the event and with all the tourism based development that is happening in the community.

Islington Street Corridor Action Plan

Ms. Carmer said that about 50 people attended the final public input session held on March 27th at the Public Library. The consultants presented three options for the one-mile corridor and asked participants to demonstrate their preference for a plan by breaking into one of three groups. In the end, the participants were almost equally divided on each plan and expressed interest in a hybrid plan that draws on elements of each plan. Assistant Mayor Blalock attended the meeting and expressed a preference for the "Anchors and Gateways" plan. He said that improvements to the Bartlett Street intersection are critical to making favorable change in the corridor. A

master plan for the Schultz Brewery such as was presented years ago to the Board of Adjustment is also key to enhancing opportunities in the corridor. Chairman Levenson agreed with the Assistant Mayor noting that development of live/work space and cultural enhancements are exciting opportunities for the street and the city. Commissioner Gladhill also attended the meeting and agreed with Mr. Blalock and Mr. Levenson.

Market Street Gateway Project

Ms. Carmer shared conceptual designs and photo renderings developed by the consultants as a sneak preview to an upcoming public meeting on April 14th at 6:30 PM in the Levenson Room in the Public Library.

EDC Breakfast for Major Employers

Work is progressing on securing a speaker for the breakfast forum.

New Business

Prime Buchholz Group Discount Parking Rate Request

The Commission considered a group license rate request for parking in the High Hanover Parking Garage per Section 7.402 of the City Ordinance. Prime, Buchholz & Associates, Inc. is an investment consulting firm with corporate headquarters at 25 Chestnut Street in downtown Portsmouth. Currently, the company leases 88 twenty-four hour passes in the High Hanover Garage at a monthly rate of \$100 each.

Section 7.402 of the City Ordinance states that the City Council may authorize a separate rate for group licenses on a case by case basis for requests where a group consists of twenty-five (25) spaces or more and it is for a company with corporate headquarters in the city. The rate is revisable every two years. The process for group license requests requires a written request to the City Manager, review by city staff and an EDC recommendation to the Manager and City Council with final approval by the City Council at a regularly scheduled meeting.

In reviewing this request with staff, a group rate of \$90 (or a 10% discount) was recommended for each twenty-four hour monthly pass purchased by Prime Buchholz, Inc. The EDC is being asked to approve this request. Vice-Chairman Eaton is in favor of this request and urged the EDC to approve it because the company is exactly the type of firm the city needs in the downtown. Commissioner Hayes agreed and moved to approve the request and the recommended rate of \$90 per twenty-four parking pass. Vice-Chairman Eaton seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Presentation on downtown bicycle parking accommodations

City Councilor Ned Reynolds gave a slide presentation of downtown bicycle accommodations based on models from other cities nationally and internationally. He focused on the city's sustainability efforts and the "if you build it, they will come" theory regarding such improvements. He stressed that in other cities, these types of accommodations have been very successful and that the cities charge for structured bike parking, storage and shower facilities. He cited the unmet parking credit fund as one source of funds for bike accommodations. He said that the new Portwalk garage would be an excellent place to test out such facilities. Assistant mayor Blalock agreed and noted that several of his restaurant employees ride bikes to work and he has had to accommodate their bikes. He expects this trend to continue with rising fuel costs.

Public Comment Period

No members of the public wished to comment. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM. The next meeting is May 2, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager