

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

April 9, 2010

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Dana Levenson, Chairman; Everett Eaton, Vice-Chairman; Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Christine Dwyer; Dr. Paul Harvey, Lisa DeStefano, Tim Allison, Ron Zolla  
Excused: Josh Cyr, Susanne Delaney

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

**Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of March 5, 2010**

Following a motion by Commissioner DeStefano and a second by Commissioner Eaton, the draft meeting minutes of March 5, 2010 were unanimously approved as written.

**Welcome to new Commissioner Robert Marchewka**

Mr. Levenson publicly welcomed new EDC member Mr. Robert Marchewka who has lived in Portsmouth for 18 years and previously served on the City's Board of Adjustment for 10 years. He has worked in the commercial real estate business for over 20 years and is anxious to work with the EDC on enhancing the local business climate.

**Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Report**

Doug Bates, President of the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce introduced new Tourism Manager Valerie Rochon. Ms. Rochon brings 20 years of experience to the job as she previously worked in Stowe, Vermont in destination marketing. She distributed copies of the quarterly tourism report for the period January 1- March 31, 2010 and updated the EDC on the success of restaurant week, the local hospitality industry business climate (business has picked up since March), Chamber website traffic, visitation materials and upcoming trade shows and the Governor's Tourism Conference scheduled to be held in Portsmouth May 5-7.

**Update on Commercial/Industrial Real Estate Market – Kent White, Vice President, CB Richard Ellis/New England | Brokerage Services**

Kent White distributed copies of his company's 2009 Commercial Real Estate Market Survey. He said that in general, "the market is not good." However, he said that the Seacoast and Portsmouth markets are somewhat unique and are doing better than the rest of the State, New England and the US. Portsmouth is one of the most desirable locations regionally and as such, prices are 10%-30% higher than other seacoast communities.

He said that the parking credit regulations create a challenge for downtown developers/realtors and, on average add \$4.80 per square foot to the rental costs. This is a deterrent for large companies that often provide parking passes to employees. The local retail sector has been impacted negatively by the recession. However, "big box" discount chains have taken advantage of the situation locally as was the case when Circuit City vacated its Market St. extension location.

Looking forward, he said that the Portsmouth market tends to reflect and lag behind the Boston market which is currently struggling. He is hoping that Portsmouth bucks the trend and retains its superior position relative to other regional real estate markets. One issue with the situation is the inability of the smaller local financing institutions to meet the needs of the larger businesses which are in the range of \$6M-\$8M. The investors/developers with cash such as the purchaser of the Celestica building are in a unique position to purchase and develop property. Another issue is the lack of developable land remaining in the city and at Pease Tradeport. The Tradeport has been a boost to the local technology sector as it is centrally located for workforce attraction from Maine, Mass. and the seacoast. Following a brief discussion about how the EDC can impact the type of businesses that relocate to the city and the need to balance development with quality of life, Chairman

Levenson thanked Mr. White for attending and for his report.

### **Old Business**

*Maine - NH Bridge Connections Study Update-* Ms. Carmer gave a status report of the progress of the ongoing Maine – NH Bridge Connection study. The consultants are finalizing the fatal flaw analysis of bridge improvement alternatives as well as the results of the customer destination intercept surveys conducted at 15 businesses on each side of the Piscataqua River.

Maine and NH are planning to submit an application for round two of TIGER grants. To date, no criteria have been released for the new fall 2010 application round. All that is known is that it will be for a smaller pool of funds (\$600 million). The project is on schedule to complete these analyses by mid-April and to issue a draft report with recommendations by mid- May. The next stakeholder meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2010 and the next public meeting is scheduled for May 5, 2010.

*Report on April 2, 2010 Rockingham County Economic Development Commission Planning for the Future Sessions* – EDC members present at the April 2<sup>nd</sup> session provided feedback on the meeting which included a presentation by demographer Peter Francese and a SWOT analysis of the region and economy. A major topic of discussion was the region’s aging demographics and the challenges this will present to adequate future workforce and health costs. A second major topic was the need to explore opportunities for communities to share cooperative services for cost reductions.

*Update on the Downtown Parking Focus Group* – Commissioner Eaton provided an update on the recent Downtown Parking Focus Group and the upcoming report. The topic of the responsibility for the cost of providing adequate downtown parking and its impact on economic vitality dominated the discussion. Many Focus Group members feel that the city should eliminate the per space parking credit fee required for businesses that are unable to provide parking on-site. Mr. Eaton is not sure this is representative of the EDC view. He and Chairman Levenson will meet with the focus group chairman to present findings made by the EDC in earlier analysis of the parking credit and report back to the Commission.

*Report on meeting with representatives of the Green Launching Pad and UNH* – Last month Commissioners Levenson, Eaton, Cyr, Delaney and Ms. Carmer met with representatives of the Green Launching Pad initiative which is a renewable energy business competition established through a partnership between UNH and NH DRED. The launching pad concept provides business consulting and financial assistance to winning businesses that create renewable energy. The EDC representatives were curious to learn if there is role for the city in attracting and creating incubator office space for the emerging businesses. Although it is early in the process to determine if this is possible some opportunities were discussed as well as the opportunity to assist small film enterprises which is establishing a small business niche locally.

### **New /Other Business**

*Discussion on topic for May EDC speaker from UNH – Commissioner Allison*  
Members provided suggestions for the upcoming presentation by Dr. Pennock. Ideas expressed centered on the current marine program activity and the potential for business and job creation from the research and work associated with the program.

**Public Comment Period** -No members of the public were present to speak.

**Confirm Next Meeting Date: May 7, 2010 /Adjourn**

Respectfully submitted,  
*Nancy M. Carmer*  
*Economic Development Program Manager*