

**DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

May 6, 2011

Conference Room A City Hall

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Lisa DeStefano, Vice-Chairman; Dana Levenson, Nancy Novelline, Clayburgh, Ron Zolla, Robert Marchewka, Tim Allison, Eric Gregg, Philip Cohen, Christine Dwyer (via telephone)

Excused: Josh Cyr

Chairman Eaton opened the meeting at 7:38 a.m.

Welcome to new EDC member Philip Cohen

Chairman Eaton welcomed new EDC member Philip Cohen who provided background information on his tenure in Portsmouth, his career as a commercial lender and his photography avocation.

Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes of January 7, 2011

Following a motion by Commissioner DeStefano and a second by Commissioner Allison, the draft meeting minutes of April 1, 2011 were unanimously approved as written.

Old Business

Discussion with City Councilor Coviello on use of Bridge Street surface parking lot after construction of Worth Parking Garage

City Councilor Coviello distributed a concept plan (developed by Landscape Architect Terrence Parker) for converting the Bridge St. surface parking lot into a public park in the event the Worth Lot Parking Garage is approved. He said that downtown surface lots are often unattractive, unwelcoming and an inefficient use of space, and offered vertical land uses are preferable to surface parking lots in urban areas. He cited examples of parks in successful downtowns and the economic opportunity that could result from a park at the Bridge St. lot. Included in the concept plan is a new building at the Maplewood/Islington Street intersection which he said would add to the tax base and create a continuum of buildings to entice pedestrians to keep walking further down Islington St. He believes that the current and proposed development on Islington could benefit from a park and that the city would gain tax revenues from increased property values as an offset to loss of parking revenues.

Commissioner Zolla thinks the park idea is interesting but believes that the city should analyze the economic value of the Bridge St. surface parking spaces and the cost of creating the park. He warned against diversion of municipal infrastructure funds and thought a better alternative might be to invest in existing parks that are in high demand such as Prescott Park.

Commissioner Gregg believes that the current and proposed development on Islington St. could benefit from a park and that the city would gain tax revenues from increased property values as an offset to loss of parking revenues. He said that a park in that area could serve as an attractive gateway and could boost sales at nearby businesses as he has witnessed in similar urban park settings in New York City.

There was some discussion about the idea a dual use for the lot as proposed in the Islington Street Action Plan. Councilor Coviello cautioned against an attempt to incorporate to many uses for the space (park, parking and event venue) noting that in the effort to realize all of those uses, the outcome might be none.

When asked if the abutters had been consulted, Councilor Coviello told the EDC that he had spoken with Josh

Cyr who indicated that there is some neighborhood support for a park if the Worth Lot Garage is built. Currently, the neighborhood residents routinely use the Bridge St. Lot during snow bans so there would need to be some replacement for lost parking spaces.

Commissioner Levenson reminded the EDC that significant time and effort was spent on the Islington Street Improvement Action Plan and feels that the gateway concept at the Maplewood/Islington St. intersection with dual uses at Bridge St. lot as suggested in the Action Plan could work. However, he questions whether the whole discussion of converting the lot to a park is premature until the City Council takes action on the Worth Lot Garage. He said that the public comment at the recent City Council on the proposed Worth Garage indicates to him that the effort to educate citizens about the need for additional parking downtown has been ineffective. He agrees with Councilor Dwyer that it is critical for the public to understand the development projects proposed downtown and that the next step is to work with the City Council to do effective education of the economic consequences of failing to provide the necessary parking.

Others agreed that before continuing discussion on the Bridge St. Lot park concept, a decision on the Worth Lot Parking Garage must be made by the City Council. City Manager Bohenko concurred and said that decision on the Worth Lot Parking Garage is predicated on developing an updated design, determining the costs of adding retail to the garage and the net parking spaces gained. He added that the design costs could be paid for from the parking credit fund. Councilor Dwyer agreed resolving design and cost issues for the parking garage as is public education on pending development downtown. Commissioner Levenson suggested a work session to present a professional and compelling case for a new garage as well as potential meetings with editorial boards of local press. The EDC concurred with the work session suggestion.

Update on City Council action on Parking Omnibus

Discussion on Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce request for additional 2011/12 partnership funding

City Manager Bohenko summarized the following City Council actions to date on the Parking Omnibus:

1. Voted to postpone action on metering Parrott Avenue lot until October 17th.
2. Approved to increase on street rate to \$1.00 and kept garage rate at \$.75. Also approved Sunday meter enforcement from noon -7PM.
3. Voted not to approve variable parking rates (\$1.25 in high demand areas, \$.75 in lower demand areas).

Planning Director Rick Taintor summarized the five zoning articles that are a part of the Parking Omnibus. He said that the articles are just one element in a multi-faceted plan to address parking downtown. He said the zoning articles without additional parking such the Worth Lot Garage would result in the city “digging ourselves a bigger hole” in terms of adequate parking capacity. There will be a May 12th Planning Board work session on the zoning articles with a public hearing at a later date.

Commissioner Zolla asked why, if there is to be additional parking created, were the rates increased. City Manager responded that the City Council added the rate increases to the Parking Omnibus in response to the recommendation in the last parking study. Rates have not increased in eight years and the current fiscal environment includes a significant downshifting of state costs to local cities. There are limited measures to increase revenues like there are in other states. In addition the city is hampered by the inequitable distribution of state rooms and meals taxes needed to offset municipal expenditures.

Discussion on Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce request for additional 2011/12 partnership funding

The Chamber has requested \$10,000 in additional partnership funds for redevelopment of the tourism section of the Chamber website. The City Manager has indicated that the request would need to go directly to the City Council in the form of a letter along with a recommendation from the EDC.

Ms. Carmer reported that Mr. Bates had called the previous day to say his schedule has prevented him from

providing the website proposals to the EDC. Several members expressed support for the work the Chamber does but are concerned with the Chamber's delayed response for the budget to improve the website. City Manager Bohenko said that action on the request does not need to occur before June 30th. It was suggested that the EDC delay its recommendation until the website cost is determined and reviewed by Commissioner Cyr, who previously volunteered to review the proposals/costs and report to the EDC before a recommendation is made to City Council.

US Post Office Letter of Intent to conduct area mail processing study

The Commission acknowledged receipt of the letter from the US Postal Service informing the City of a mail processing study to evaluate the best way to realign its current excess equipment, personnel and facilities as a result of the economic downturn and internet diversion of mail. The letter indicated there is an opportunity to provide public input during or after the study. The EDC decided to wait and analyze the study results before providing input.

Potential EDC business visitation meetings in July/August (EDC Action Plan Item)

The Commission discussed conducting business visitations during July and August when the EDC does not typically hold monthly meetings. There was agreement to conduct a visit to a Pease-based company in August.

EDC advocacy letter for CIP projects that enhance economic development (EDC Action Plan Item)

The Commission reviewed the letter sent to the City Council urging support for economic development projects in the 2012 Capital Improvement Plan.

Subcommittee Reports

Film Subcommittee Report

Commissioner Marchewka reported that language has been drafted for a page on the city's website dedicated to film. The subcommittee will be winding down after it creates a local database for film/media professionals for the city's film webpage.

Revolving Loan Subcommittee

Chairman Eaton informed the EDC that he and subcommittee members Clayburgh and Marchewka met to consider instating a sustainable loan program using UDAG funds. The intent is to create a program to assist businesses that have the potential to grow into strong firms that employ skilled workers in Portsmouth. There are options for developing such a program however; there may be restrictions on municipal loan programs. Therefore the City Attorney's office is researching state and federal regulations that apply. Commissioner Gregg cautioned that the EDC must avoid any conflict of interest or perception of same if a loan program is implemented. The City Manager agreed and said that a separate entity may be required to implement the program in order to comply with regulations and avoid conflicts.

Other Business

Mr. Bohenko reported on a recent German business delegation visit to the city and state.

Public Comment Period – No members of the public asked to speak.

Confirm Next Meeting: June 3, 2011/ Adjourn

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer,

Economic Development Program Manager