

**MEETING MINUTES  
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

September 7, 2012

Conference Room A City Hall

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Lisa DeStefano, Vice-Chairman Dana Levenson, Ron Zolla, Robert Marchewka, Christine Dwyer, Eric Gregg, Josh Cyr, Jack Thorsen, John P. Bohenko  
Excused: Philip Cohen  
Absent: Tim Allison

Chairman Eaton opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

**Approval of draft meeting minutes**

Following a motion by Commissioner DeStefano and a second by Commissioner Cyr, the draft meeting minutes of June 1, 2012 were unanimously approved as written.

**Mid-year review of EDC Action Plan**

EDC members reviewed progress on the 2012 EDC Action Plan priorities. After discussing the accomplishments made to date, the following items were highlighted as ones for further EDC involvement as appropriate:

- Support city and Great Bay Municipal Coalition effort to achieve a nitrogen nutrient wastewater level of 8 milligrams/liter.
- Promote land use requirements that create balanced commercial and residential development downtown.
- Project Jump Start and future workforce education initiatives.

**Presentation: Update on Portsmouth Office and Industrial Market**

Laura Nesmith, Research Manager and David Choate of Grubb & Ellis/Northern New England provided an second quarter 2012 overview of the Portsmouth Commercial Office and Industrial real estate for non-medical properties over 10,000 square feet. On the commercial side, there is a total of 2,539,757 square feet available of which 426,247 (or 16.8%) is currently vacant. Current asking lease rates are \$20.25 per square foot for Class A office space and \$13.82 for Class B space.

On the industrial side, there is a total of 3,603,197 square feet available of which 272,790 (or 7.6%) is currently vacant. Current asking lease rates are \$5.52 per square foot for General Industrial, \$7.91 for Warehouse/Distribution and \$7.33 for R&D/Flex.

**Old Business**

*Heritage/Constitution Economic Revitalization Zone Approval and proposed business/real estate tutorial* – In July, the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development approved the City's request for ERZ designation for the Heritage and Constitution Industrial Park.

*Commerce Way Betterment Assessment Update* – This week the City Council approved first reading for a \$1.6 million bond resolution for improvements to Commerce Way under the process for Conditional Road Layout and Betterment Assessment allowed by State statutes. Second reading is scheduled for September 17, 2012 City Council meeting.

*Parking Omnibus update* – City Councilor Dwyer summarized the City Council actions to date on the Parking Omnibus as well as public response to the proposed omnibus. In an effort to promote use of the parking garage and on-street parking turnover in the most heavily used parking spots, she has submitted a parking rate ordinance change. She distributed a memo she sent to the City Council requesting authorization for the City Manager to bring back first reading of an ordinance regarding a high occupancy meter zone in the downtown core. It would set the

parking rate for areas with average utilization above 85% at \$1.50 per hour and \$1.00 per hour for those below 85% utilization. First reading is scheduled for the September 17<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting. The City Manager said in response to the City Council request, that staff will be analyzing the financial impact of the proposal as well as how it might be mitigated by higher parking violation fines.

Commissioner Zolla provided his response to the Parking Omnibus which he feels sends the wrong message to residents and visitors by the proposed strategies. He is most concerned with protecting downtown vitality which he feels is at risk if rates are increased. He recommends maintaining the two hour limit for core parking spaces at the current rate of \$1.00 per hour. He also recommends a resident sticker for the first two hours free in the garage and the opportunity for tourists to purchase a similar sticker.

Chairman Eaton responded that John Burke, the City's parking consultant, has significant local as well as national expertise in parking strategies and believes the City should continue to work with him in implementation of the parking omnibus strategies he and the City Council have developed thus far for Portsmouth.

Commissioner Cyr believes there are two key pieces to the parking omnibus' success. The first is an additional parking structure and the second is better wayfinding which he feels is particularly important if there are variable rates set for downtown.

City Manager Bohenko advised the EDC that the issue of wayfinding has been delayed due to staffing capacity, but is a priority now that he has retained a person under contract to work on transportation planning. He also noted that there may be legal discrimination issues under state law with resident and non-resident parking stickers.

With respect to a second parking garage, Mr. Bohenko noted that the City staff has advocated for a new garage since 1998. Chairman Eaton pointed out that since that time, the EDC has supported that recommendation, and specifically a new garage at the Worth Lot. Council Thorsen said he supports additional structured parking, but not the proposed higher rates.

### **New/Other Business**

*Arts and Economic Prosperity Report findings-* The results of the most recent Arts and Economic Prosperity study will be the topic of several presentations September 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> when the Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research and Policy at Americans for the Arts (AFTA) comes to Portsmouth. AFTA recently completed a national survey- the Arts & Economic Prosperity Survey - which is one of the few studies that quantifies the dollar-and-cents contribution that non-profit arts and culture organizations have on local economies.

### **Public Comment**

David Choate of Grubb & Ellis/Northern New England submitted the following:

- According to what he sees from his client's needs, lack of worker skills is "the new crisis."
- A Request for Proposals for redevelopment has been issued for the former site of the Great Bay Community College in Stratham.
- The former Yoken's site has completed land use permitting and will be the site of a bank, a Rite Aid Pharmacy and a Five Guys Burger restaurant.
- The former MV Car Wash on Lafayette Rd. is under development.
- He urges EDC members to contact the City Council directly to advocate for a new parking garage.

**Confirm Next Meeting:** Friday, October 5, 2012 /Adjourn  
With no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager