

**MEETING MINUTES
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

December 7, 2012

Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital

7:30 a.m.

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

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

Welcome by Sue Champagne of Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital

Sue Champagne and Marie Sullivan welcomed the EDC and made a short presentation on Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital. The \$11 million facility is the third in-patient, acute care property owned and operated by Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital Network. Local architects and engineers designed and built the 46,000 sq. ft., 33-bed facility which has been open for 18 months and treats patients from southern Maine to Boston. Patient referrals are made by local seacoast hospitals as well as by Maine Medical, Mercy and the Boston hospitals.

The hospital employs 170 people and hires locally. Many employees are graduates of Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, Occupational and Physical Therapy and the nursing programs of the University of New Hampshire and from Great Bay Community College health and nursing programs. The facility selected Pease because there was a niche market for the service and because of the location near the referring hospitals and health networks.

The hospital usually has 31 beds occupied and the average stay is 12 days. The facility is licensed and accredited for a variety of modalities such as surgical recovery, stroke and brain injuries. Hospital management is pleased with the location as it is easy to hire qualified staff and it is taking advantage of the tax advantages of the Pease ERZ and the corporate support of the Pease Tenants Association. One challenge for the employees is transportation. A Coast Transportation bus stop closer to the facility would be helpful.

Welcome to new EDC member John Bosen

Chairman Eaton welcomed new EDC member John Bosen. John has been practicing real estate and business law for 23 years. He recently moved to Portsmouth and relocated his law practice to downtown Portsmouth as well. The firm employs ten people including three attorneys.

Approval of draft meeting minutes

Following a motion by Councilor Dwyer and a second by Commissioner Cohen, the draft meeting minutes of November 2, 2012 were unanimously approved as written.

Recognition of outgoing EDC member Tim Allison

On behalf of the entire EDC, Chairman Eaton presented Commissioner Allison with a plaque of appreciation for his four years of service on the Commission. He thanked him for his contributions and wished him well. The Commission will recognize outgoing member Lisa Destefano in January 2013.

Other Business

Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce request to extend tourism partnership

The Chamber has requested an extension of the City/Chamber tourism partnership. This is the 13th year of the partnership which has evolved from a partnership for funds to support tourism collateral, the eCoast, and tourism programming to primarily tourism marketing and promotion. This year, the Chamber has requested an additional \$5,000 in support from the \$40,000 it currently receives.

In discussing the request, EDC members suggested that the EDC have a refresher on the EDC budget and more details on the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce \$45,000 tourism request as a percentage of the overall Chamber of Commerce Tourism budget at the January EDC meeting. The development status of the new Chamber tourism website was also discussed in the context of overall City support to the Chamber. Commissioner Zolla informed the Commission that the effort is moving forward and a September 2013 launch is planned. The Tourism Manager is soliciting local website sponsorships and hoping not to have to draw on the \$30,000 City loan commitment.

After reviewing the metrics that the City uses to evaluate the partnership success, Councilor Dwyer suggested that in return for the additional funds, it would perhaps be useful to explore putting “something more on the table that is mutually beneficial” such as support of a downtown conference center or a second parking garage. Commissioner Marchewka suggested that might be difficult for the Chamber as all members may not be supportive of that work. Commissioner Cyr suggested that any additional dollars should be tied to specific deliverables. Commissioner Levenson responded that the partnership funds support the operations of the tourism program and that the EDC has identified the deliverables through the comprehensive metrics and leveraged funds that the Chamber reports semi-annually.

In order to move the agenda forward, Chairman Eaton asked Commissioners Levenson and Cyr to meet prior to the January meeting to discuss the request come back with a recommendation on the Chamber’s request.

2013 EDC Action Plan – solicitation of EDC input

Chairman Eaton reviewed the input that staff has received to date for the 2012 Action Plan including:

- Less focus on downtown and parking
- More off site meetings at large employers
- More focus on Pease and industrial parks

Commissioner Zolla countered that there should be more focus on downtown as he feels it is the key to the City’s vitality. He added that he would like to see the EDC be more of an advocate on issues related to economic vitality.

Councilor Dwyer would like development of a conference center to be on the priority list and the EDC to play more of a role in educating the City Council and public on the City’s economic/demographic assets and performance. This could be presented quarterly at the City Council meeting. Ms. Carmer suggested the EDC review the annual Economic Conditions Report prepared for the budget book and annual reports. She also suggested the EDC consider doing a brief handout similar to the *Economic Action* quarterly publication that the City of Dover distributes. She will send the EDC a recent example of the publication.

Ms. Carmer referenced the EDC 2012 priorities and suggested that members give thought to the categories such as business retention, workforce development, parking etc. and she will contact members in the next month for their thoughts and compile them for a broader discussion at the January meeting.

Parking Garage Site Selection Committee Update

Members discussed the failed City Council December 3rd vote on a second parking garage at the Worth Parking Lot. Chairman expressed his discouragement and the lack of Council leadership to move the Worth Lot forward despite the EDC consistently “beating the drum” on the need for additional parking downtown.

Councilor Dwyer acknowledged Chairman Eaton’s concern but expressed hopefulness that there are the votes on the City Council to bond a second garage somewhere downtown. She feels the decision may still come back to the Worth Lot and suggested that the EDC attend the meetings of the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee which is charged with moving ahead on a second garage site. Commissioner Levenson concurred and suggested the EDC request to be on a future agenda of the Committee to relate the economic vitality consequences if the City does not move ahead on a second garage now.

Commissioner Zolla concurred. He gave the example of several EDC members speaking individually at the City Council meeting on the need for a second parking garage. He would like the EDC to develop a position and speak or advocate publicly as one voice on such matters. Commissioner Levenson suggested the EDC prepare a position statement to take to the PTS Committee when they meet.

Public Comment

David Choate provided comment on the Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital site location search and some of the challenges overcome to develop the Pease site. He encouraged the EDC to review the website of the City of Rochester Economic Development as a good example of progressive economic development. Ms. Carmer noted that the EDC included funds in the budget to update its website early 2013 and will be soliciting EDC input on the task.

Confirm Next Meeting: Friday, January 4, 2012

Tour of Rehabilitation Hospital

With no further business the EDC adjourned the business portion of the meeting and accompanied Ms. Champagne and Ms. Sullivan on a tour of the hospital.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager