

**MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

October 4, 2013

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Christine Dwyer, Jack Thorsen, Dana Levenson, Ron Zolla, Josh Cyr, Bob Marchewka, John Pratt, John Bosen

Excused: Philip Cohen, Eric Gregg,

City Staff: City Manager John P. Bohenko, Nancy Carmer

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of July 23, 2013

Commissioner Bosen moved and City Councilor Dwyer seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of July 23, 2013 as written. The motion carried unanimously.

Presentation and Discussion State of Technology and Entrepreneurship in Seacoast and Economic Development Opportunities – Josh Cyr

EDC member and Alpha Loft proprietor Josh Cyr gave a presentation on technology and entrepreneurial activity in the seacoast. Portsmouth has a cluster of these types of businesses including over 60 technology and creative organizations and over 25 high growth high technology start-ups. These types of firms create above average salaries and attract highly educated and creative individuals. The City has an opportunity to capitalize on and expand this economic sector. Local organizations that support this “ecosystem” of businesses and individuals include the NH-ICC, Alpha Loft, and UNH.

One characteristic of this business sector is the tendency to regularly gather for a series of meet-ups and networking events. One challenge for this activity is finding affordable co-working and gathering locations in the downtown. Currently, the events occur at the Music Hall Loft, Alpha Loft and NH-ICC, but each of these locations has limited space for attendance.

In an effort to provide local visibility to this sector of the economy, a collaboration of tech and local entrepreneurial groups have planned a series of events during the week of October 21st-24th. The event is branded “Seacoast Forward” and each day there will be one event to raise awareness and provide education around topics related to technology and business start-ups.

In addition to this effort, Mr. Cyr suggested other opportunities to support the local tech entrepreneur community including membership in local tech nonprofit organizations, business mentorship, and providing low cost locations for tech meet-up.

Following Mr. Cyr’s presentation, the EDC discussed ways in which the City and EDC can assist in growing the local tech and entrepreneur “ecosystem.” Chairman Eaton said it is an opportunity to focus EDC efforts less on parking and the downtown, and on promoting our larger companies and our tech employers. Ms. Carmer distributed a recent *Boston Globe* article on the topic of growing the local tech ecosystem. It was shared with the City during a recent meeting with representatives of the Community College System, UNH, and NH-ICC and Borealis Ventures on this topic. Some ideas generated by the EDC to foster the tech and start-up sector included potential tech meet up space at the Discover Portsmouth Center, branding the City better through marketing and through hosting tech writers, an EDC sponsored breakfast, and potential development of a tech hub using tax increment financing in the Islington St. area.

Old Business/Updates

BOA re: Agreement with Kearsarge Mill Unit Owners Association RE: Rock St.

The EDC that the Board of Adjustment granted a variance to Kearsarge Mill Unit Owners Association for parking for Heinemann Company employees as part of an expansion of the company. The variance was needed in order to allow the building expansion to go forward with some of the required parking located offsite.

Seacoast Manufacturing Exchange Initiative

Ms. Carmer informed the Commission of a newly formed regional initiative for quarterly seacoast manufacturer roundtable discussions. The first roundtable event was held October 2nd in Rochester and included brief presentations by organizations that serve the needs of local manufacturers including Great Bay Community College, the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development. Going forward, the quarterly roundtables will be held in different seacoast communities.

NH Manufacturing Week- Portsmouth Business Participation

October 7th -11th is NH Manufacturing Week which is a statewide event aimed at highlighting this sector of the state's economy. Throughout the week manufacturers will hold open houses to showcase products and services produced in NH. Technical schools will also host open houses to inform manufacturing companies, high school students and persons seeking vocational training what the schools offer for workforce and career training. Portsmouth manufacturers participating in the events include Medtronics, Thermo Fischer, Red Hook and Sig Sauer. The Portsmouth Career Technical Center at the High School will be hosting an open house on October 9th.

Regional Economic Development Planning: CEDS and regional Master Plan

Ms. Carmer informed the Commission of the recent opportunity to provide public input at the Rockingham Planning Commission's (RPC) regional master plan forum. Just as local municipalities are required by law to develop a Master Plan, Regional Planning Commissions must do the same. City of Portsmouth staff participated in the recent local RPC input session and EDC members may do the same by logging on the Rockingham Planning Commission's website and answering a series of questions on topics such as transportation, economic development housing, cultural assets and more.

Another regional economic development planning tool is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). It is prepared by the Rockingham Economic Development Commission and is a federal requirement in order for municipalities to apply for US Economic Development Administration funds. Ms. Carmer is a member of the CEDS Steering Committee and brought and distributed copies of the 2013 CEDS Executive Summary for the EDC to review.

Other Business

Councilor Dwyer informed the EDC that Restaurant Week is coming up in early November and the organizers have agreed to use the event to fundraise for the African Burying Ground and its capital campaign to raise \$100,000.

Commissioner Zolla commented that the 2013 tourism season seemed particularly successful as evidenced by downtown activity and the number of times the parking garage filled. He feels that there is a lack of adequate, affordable downtown parking which is deterring the locals from going downtown. He feels the omnibus parking effort failed and that we should get more revenues for parking from the tourists. It is his belief that there should be a variety of 30 minute parking spaces versus a 15 minute parking to attract residents downtown. Councilor Dwyer said she feels that, in addition to others, one part of the omnibus that is working is greater parking turnover in the parking garage and on the street. However, she said one cannot expect omnibus to work completely if a major component, namely the recommended second structured parking garage is not built. Commissioner Marchewka noted one consequence of this is greater development in the Gateway Zoning District on the outskirts of town.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present to comment.

Confirm Next Meeting:

The next meeting is Friday, November 1, 2013. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager