

**MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

May 9, 2014

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman; Philip Cohen, Dana Levenson, Stefany Shaheen, Ron Zolla, Josh Cyr, John Pratt, Eric Gregg

Excused: Eric Spear, John Bosen

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of April 4, 2014

Councilor Marchewka moved and Commissioner Cyr seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of April 4, 2014. The motion carried unanimously.

Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Semi- Annual Report on tourism for the period 11/1/13 through 4/30/14

Chamber President Doug Bates thanked the EDC for its past support of the Chamber/City tourism partnership. He highlighted many of the initiatives and committee work that the Chamber undertakes to promote and support local business such as Restaurant Week and Shop Friday Nights. He highlighted the Government Affairs Committee and the lobbyist they have cooperatively hired to work on legislative issues germane to seacoast businesses. He reviewed the many events the Chamber does such as Lunch and Learn series, the Seacoast Business Expo, Bank of America Breakfasts and the road race series that supports local charities. He credited Tourism Manager Valerie Rochon for her work with the tourism-based companies in the City and at the State level. Finally, he urged the EDC to support the Chamber's request to renew the partnership and related funding in 2014/2015.

Next, Ms. Rochon reported on tourism activity for the period 11/1/13 through 4/30/14. She provided a handout which summarizes the metrics required as part of the Chamber partnership. She highlighted several initiatives including the Events Committee efforts to generate activity in the "shoulder seasons" including the Fire and Ice Festival, Hit the Decks, and Shop Portsmouth events. She also updated the EDC on collateral production such as the *Harbor Guide to Portsmouth and the Seacoast*, the official map of Portsmouth and the *GoPortsmouth.com* website. The annual Tourism Summit generated a new frontline training for service workers aimed at educating employees on the City, local landmarks and activities so they can better inform and interact with visitors.

Information on outreach efforts, public relations, advertising, grants and visitation statistics were also provided. Several EDC members praised the Chamber for its work. Commissioner Zolla said he is impressed with the organization's focus and measurement of its efforts. The Business to Business programs "raise all ships" and add to the City's vitality. He feels the partnership funds are well spent and he agrees with the policy of not increasing the annual funding, but to review special requests on a case by case basis such the website development request.

Commissioner Levenson views the partnership as leveraging local UDAG funds for the promotion of cultural tourism and the greater seacoast region. He cautioned the EDC not to fall prey to the argument that supporting the Chamber's efforts only brings more visitors. Promotion is critical to leveraging general City exposure and economic development efforts.

Commissioner Pratt supports continuation of the Chamber partnership funding and moved to approve UDAG funding in the amount of \$40,000. Commissioner Zolla seconded the motion which passed

unanimously.

Old Business

Update of Conditional Use Permit and HarborCorp Project

Councilor Shaheen reported that the City Council voted to eliminate the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) in the downtown. A petition was submitted with over 315 people in support of the permit and over 50 people testified at the public hearing. She appreciated the EDC weighing in on the issue and believes that a compromise was reached by the exception which allows a CUP application for the Harborcorp project. She believes that with the City Council approval to extend the form-based zoning study to the entire downtown, the issue will become moot and will be of value when planning another downtown public parking structure.

Update of Market St. Gateway Improvement Project

Ms. Carmer reported that the plans are now 60% complete and staff is working with consultants on refining the plans and proceeding toward final plans and permits needed for project implementation. In response to a question about a “road diet” in the project area, she said that the only area that is planned for a lane reduction is a short stretch between Nobles Island and Russell Street to allow for vehicles to prepare for the Russell Street turnoff.

New Business

Regional advanced manufacturing initiative and event

Ms. Carmer reported that on Monday there will be a ceremonial letter signing by Governor Hassan and seacoast mayors from Portsmouth, Dover, Rochester, Somersworth and the Pease Development Authority Chair. The letter invites Canadian aerospace companies to expand their firms to the seacoast region. The letter touts the advanced manufacturing opportunities and the workforce education programs at Great Bay Community College that graduates work-ready employees for aerospace companies such as Safran and Albany International in Rochester and Sig Sauer at Pease Tradeport. In addition to Mayor Lister, Chairman Eaton, City Manager Bohenko and Ms. Carmer will attend the ceremony. The event is a culmination of a regional recruitment collaboration of the seacoast economic development practitioners and the State Department of Resources and Economic Development.

Public Comment

David Choate from Colliers International made the following points/suggestions:

- The Commission should invite the City Council to a regular EDC meeting to help them better understand the issues and economic impacts of the policies they are deliberating.
- Businesses are concerned about the increasing lack of workforce housing. Can the City play a role in solving this issue of importance to continued economic success?
- The current asking purchase price of \$8.7M for the Frank Jones property is exorbitant. A Tax Increment Financing district is a more appropriate way to approach the matter rather than outright acquisition.

Paul Mannle of 1490 Islington St. thinks the City should consider purchasing or leasing the Frank Jones Center parcels and using some of it for a municipal parking area or transportation hub. He estimates 900 cars could be parked there and revenues would cover the acquisition and occupancy costs. He referenced a prior City neighborhood charrette that included discussion of a connector road to Borthwick Avenue in this location as well as workforce housing and suggested that the City revisit that concept plan.

Confirm Next Meeting: Friday, June 6, 2014

The regular meeting adjourned at 8:50 AM.

EDC Subcommittee on Downtown Parking Garage location

Subcommittee on Downtown Parking Garage location

City Manager Bohenko opened the subcommittee meeting by reviewing the work products suggested at the previous meeting including a listing and preliminary vetting of the 21± potential sites identified for constructing a public parking structure. He turned the discussion over to Planner Nick Cracknell to review the sites and evaluation results. Only three sites emerged as viable for further consideration: 165 Deer St., Raynes Avenue and Vaughan St. The Manager noted that these are all privately held properties and that the owners have not yet been contacted as the subcommittee is bringing them forward for discussion purposes only. If the group concurs, the next step would be to reach out to the property owners to determine interest in partnering with the City on a parking structure. He noted that the City has already had preliminary discussion with the owners of 165 Deer Street and they have expressed interest in exploring the concept of a municipal parking structure as part of mixed-use redevelopment.

In discussing the three sites further, subcommittee members brought up concerns with the distance of these sites from Market Square as well as need for additional handicapped parking spaces in general in the downtown. In response to the location of the sites beyond the 5 minute walk from Market Square, the City Manager explained that the City would be able to work with businesses and pass holders in the High Hanover Parking Garage and provide incentives for parking in the more remote garage location. Commissioner Cyr offered that with respect to the 165 Deer St. site, there may be concern from abutters due to the density and close proximity of the parcel to residences.

When asked about why the City-owned Bridge Street parcel and the Court Street parcel received relatively low rankings, Mr. Cracknell explained that the Bridge Street lot is not large enough for a two-bay garage structure without closing Bridge Street and cutting off the street frontage access to the private property on the existing street. The Court Street parcel has three separate owners which is a contributing factor to its lower eligibility ranking.

In response to an inquiry regarding “next steps,” the City Manager said that the City Council action provided him authorization to negotiate with property owners so he will contact the owners to determine interest in working with the City on the search for a public parking garage site.

The subcommittee meeting ended at 9:35 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager