

**MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

May 1, 2015

City Hall Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman; Dana Levenson, Eric Spear, Jen Zorn, Josh Cyr, Ron Zolla, John Pratt

Excused: John Bosen

Absent: Stefany Shaheen, Philip Cohen

City Staff: City Manager John P. Bohenko, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carner

Approval of draft meeting minutes of April 3, 2015

Councilor Spear moved, and Commissioner Levenson seconded, a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of April 3, 2015. The motion carried unanimously.

Report on Tourism Partnership with Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce

Valerie Rochon, Tourism Manager of the Chamber provided a report on activities related to destination travel to Portsmouth and the Seacoast during winter 2014 and spring 2015. In March, local eateries experienced a successful Restaurant Week. The number of diners taking part in the event continues to grow with the March 2015 event showing similar attendance to the November 2014 event. Historically, the fall event is typically more popular than the spring restaurant week. The Annual Greater Chamber of Commerce Tourism Summit was also held in March and focused on moving forward and setting priorities in the face of reductions in state grant funding levels as well as overall tourism promotion dollars.

The Chamber continues to represent the City and the Seacoast at travel trade events. A recent trip to New York garnered interest from tour operators from the United Kingdom, France and Italy. Chamber representatives were joined in New York at the trade event by two Portsmouth-based restaurant chefs and one North Conway chef to provide tasteful snacks and demonstrate the area's culinary offerings.

This spring, the Chamber undertook research and outreach to the local hospitality community regarding the impact of the proposed State Senate and House bills to change the current Meals and Rooms tax. The bills, which are now in study, proposed a more equitable distribution of revenues back to the communities that contribute a higher percentage of revenues. She noted that despite the County contributing 33% of Meals tax and 23 % of Rooms tax, the County and the City receive a disproportionately low redistribution of the statewide tax revenue, because the funds are allocated based on population rather than Meals and Rooms tax revenues sent to the State.

Upcoming Chamber activities include the Hit the Decks event on May 8th and front line training for the local hospitality workforce will take place on May 18th with assistance from Portsmouth Public TV providing video coverage for workers that cannot attend.

Discussion turned to the Chamber's request to extend the partnership with the City. When first established, the City/Chamber partnership was for preparation and distribution of the Guide to the Seacoast, the eCoast technology initiative and destination marketing for Portsmouth. It later was modified to support marketing collateral and destination travel outreach. The EDC wishes to see more focus on business development and support. Ms. Rochon distributed copies of the Chamber's member benefits for review. She asked for EDC input on how best to modify the partnership's focus from primarily tourism to more business support and development. The EDC will provide feedback to the Chamber on how best to structure and analyze a focus on this work. Ms. Rochon will prepare the tourism metrics for the November 2014-April 2015 period for future

reporting to EDC.

In response to a question regarding the status of the *Go Portsmouth* website launch, Ms. Rochon reported that it is anticipated in the next thirty days. Members are editing their individual pages and the Chamber is working with website developer Genius Switch to work out bugs related to the online calendar. A limited launch just to tourism members is anticipated in the next 1½ weeks to allow members' privileged access in order to work on the features such as online booking.

Updates/ New Business – This item was taken out of order on the original agenda.

Analysis of Direct and External Economic Impacts of a Downtown Parking Garage at 165 Deer St.
Brian Gottlob of PolEcon Research gave a PowerPoint presentation on his research and analysis of the direct and external impacts of the proposed parking garage. Using standard economic impact models and econometric and environmental analysis, he evaluated the impacts of the project on jobs, property tax base, traffic congestion and parking availability. Overall, the project will have positive impacts on the tax base, parking supply, travel congestion, air quality and downtown walkability and vibrancy. The City's balance of residential and commercial industrial property is a large factor in the City's relatively low tax rates compared to similar-sized and larger NH cities and noted that this project should continue that trend. Research shows that the addition of municipal public parking supply will have a disproportionately higher property tax benefit to nearby property values than does a private facility. It also contributes to significantly less miles traveled searching for parking in the Central Business District and associated carbon dioxide emissions.

Preparation for Second reading and public hearing on bond at May 4th City Council Meeting

Chairman Eaton reminded the Commission how important the upcoming bond hearing is in order to move the garage project forward and to realize the impacts covered in Mr. Gottlob's analysis. He encouraged members to attend the meeting on May 4th and educate others on the project and seek support.

Old Business

Discussion of Response to City Councilor's Request regarding Small Business

The EDC reviewed the draft response. The consensus was to report back with the report as revised. City Manager Bohenko will put it on the May 18, 2015 City Council agenda for a report back.

Decision on UNH Extension Retention/Expansion Program

This item was deferred until the June EDC meeting.

Vision Plan for Islington Street Corridor

The EDC reviewed the response and authorized sending it to the Planning Department.

Other Business

Commissioner Zolla complimented Alpha Loft on the good work and programs it is offering at its three locations. A brief discussion ensued about the City exploring the potential of becoming a member/ sponsor of the organization. It will be discussed further.

Public Comment – No members of the public were present to make public comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: Friday, June 5, 2015, 7:30 AM.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager