

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

October 7, 2016

City Hall, Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

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

**Excused:** Stefany Shaheen

**City Staff:** City Manager John Bohenko, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of September 9, 2016

Commissioner Bosen moved, and Commissioner Cyr seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of September 9, 2016. The motion carried unanimously.

Presentations and Discussion:

*Community Broadband*

Nicholas J. Kirsch, Ph.D., UNH Professor of Electrical Engineering and member of the Portsmouth Cable and Telecommunication Commission gave a brief presentation on community broadband. He noted that the US is 14<sup>th</sup> in the world for broadband speed and in many areas of the country residents do not have access to adequate or affordable broadband. This stems from the current system which lacks incentive for providers to expand access or speed for the “last mile” of connectivity to residents and businesses. A community system could be competition to local providers and offer better access to schools, hospitals, municipalities and residents. There are affordable models for municipalities to do this and currently Hanover, NH and Salem, MA have developed community broadband.

The City’s Cable and Telecommunications Commission would like to explore this concept and has proposed an ad hoc committee to explore the need and costs and the benefits of for improving local telecommunication infrastructure. The ad hoc group would consist of 2-3 representatives from each of the Cable and Telecommunications Commission, EDC and School Board. The task would be to look at creating a community broadband system ten years from now that potentially pays for itself.

The Commission briefly discussed the concept and agreed that there are residents that currently cannot afford the cost of private broadband services. This puts school children at a disadvantage as schools increase video and other streaming platforms for education. Councilor Spear feels that it is the government/municipality’s responsibility to serve the disenfranchised in the community. He also noted that the City is in the process of revamping its website and will probably employ video more. The site can be better used by more residents if they have proper access to it. The City may also be more attractive to businesses seeking to relocate here if fast, reliable and affordable broadband service is available.

The Commission thanked Mr. Kirsch for his presentation and will discuss it further to determine if there is interest by EDC members in participating in the ad hoc committee proposed.

*Workforce Housing Project off Spaulding Turnpike*

Commercial Realtor David Choate, local architect Lisa DeStefano and Bill Caselden of Great Bridges Property made a presentation on a proposal for 80 units of workforce housing off Echo Avenue. Mr. Choate began the presentation by providing a history of past attempts in Portsmouth to create workforce housing. He told the EDC that local land values and permitting requirements make it difficult to construct this type of project in the City, yet the need for worker housing is great. Lack of workforce housing can be a deterrent for businesses looking to relocate to the city and for continued economic vitality.

Mr. Choate said that Great Bridges Property has completed many successful projects in the region and has scoured the City for an appropriate site to construct a workforce housing project. He noted that the Echo Avenue site is one of very limited options. The landowner understands the need for workforce housing and has agreed to extend the purchase option on the land so that Great Bridges Property can pursue the needed variances for the proposal. Many of the abutters are opposed to the project and if it is to succeed it will need support from the community.

Mr. Caselden addressed the EDC next saying that Great Bridge Properties (GBP) is a developer and long term owner of affordable housing for families and seniors throughout New Hampshire and Massachusetts. It has successfully developed over 800 housing units in the past 20 years. The proposed Portsmouth project will be funded through New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHFFA) and have a 99 year Land Use Restriction Agreement to preserve the affordability long term. Public tax credits and NHFFA are critical to the ability to develop workforce housing projects.

The written summary of the proposed development states that features of the Residences at Echo Avenue will include:

- 80 quality apartments in two structures; 34 one bedroom units (\$875/mo.), 40 two bedroom units (\$1075/mo.), 6 three bedroom units (\$1,225 per mo).
- Each building will have four floors with an elevator and complete life safety system including sprinklers.
- Laundry facilities will be available in each building.
- The site will be landscaped with all local plantings and most natural buffers will be maintained.
- A minimum of two apartments in each building will be fully handicap equipped and all remaining apartments will be handicap adaptable.
- Other outside spaces include pathways, children's playground, community garden areas, compost stations, sitting areas and more.
- Multiple indoor spaces including community "great room" and fitness room. will be near a local bus service route.
- The building and site improvements will be built to today's "green" standards and incorporate new building technologies and features.
- The building is being designed to accommodate individuals and families whose income is 60% or less of the median Portsmouth-Rochester HMFA income.
- Screenings including criminal checks will be conducted on all residents by an outside company. Each facility they own has "community rules" that are enforced. Noncompliance with the rules could result in tenant removal.
- To alleviate traffic concerns, a second access/egress road has been added to project plans.

Mr. Caselden said that Great Bridges had a meeting with the neighbors and, as with most workforce housing projects, abutters were supportive of the concept of workforce housing but not at the site proposed. The project has a 300-500-foot buffer from the closest house and is sited so that only one or two floors are visible from the neighbors. He said that this is a realistic project, but for the variances that are required and urged EDC support for the proposal at the upcoming Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting.

Counselor Spear is supportive of the project and would make a motion to have the EDC write a letter indicating the need for workforce housing and support for the proposal. In discussing EDC advocacy for the project, Commissioner Levenson expressed his concern that he personally cannot speak to the specific zoning regulations that require a variance. Commissioner Pratt believes that the project is conceptually worthy and it is a good use of the property. City Manager Bohenko said it is not uncommon for municipal boards to be on different sides of a proposal, but that it is not appropriate for staff to advocate for one side or the other. Vice-Chairman Marchewka agreed with Mr. Levenson, but feels it is appropriate as the City Commission concerned with business vitality to speak to the shortage of workforce housing in general. Other members concurred and Councilor Spear moved to write a letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals to that effect, seconded by Commissioner Bosen. The motion passed unanimously. The Chair will work with staff on drafting a letter to circulate to EDC members prior to submittal.

#### Other Business

##### *McIntyre Federal Building Update*

The City Manager Bohenko reported that the GSA has informed the City that due to further reduction in the tenant office space needs, the GSA can no longer pursue the option of partnering with the City to construct a federal building on the Bridge Street parking lot or similar city-owned parcel downtown. The GSA will instead be pursuing leasing space for its tenants in private structures in the CBD. The City will continue discussions with the GSA on the disposal and re-use options for the McIntyre Building.

##### *Action Plan Items*

Ms. Carmer distributed a compilation of initiatives suggested by Commissioners for the 2017 Action Plan. She will work with Chairman Eaton to consolidate the items to a one-page strategy for review at the November EDC meeting.

##### *Seacoast Housing Forum November 3, 2016 at UNH*

Ms. Carmer distributed the flyer on the November 3<sup>rd</sup> Seacoast Housing Forum on workforce housing at the University of New Hampshire. She asked members to contact her if they are interested in attending so she can register them.

##### *Downtown Economic Revitalization Zone map*

The Commission reviewed the map of the proposed Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) downtown that will be submitted to NH Department of Economic Development for approval of the zone. The Zone is an economic development tool for business attraction.

#### Other Business

Chairman Eaton provided an update on the Parking Garage Subcommittee. The recent focus of Subcommittee discussion has been on the pros and cons of activating some of the first floor of the parking garage.

Public Comment

David Choate of Colliers International spoke on the following items:

1. Great Bay Community College is responding to the need for workers trained in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) trade with a 90 day boot camp at the Advanced Manufacturing Center in Rochester, NH. These are well paying jobs with annual salaries in the \$70,000 range.
2. Dover, NH is also working on advanced manufacturing training for Dover based companies.
3. Lastly, he urged members to support the Residences at Echo Road project as residents in addition to any statement made by the EDC.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: November 4, 2016 at 7:30 AM.

With no further business to conduct the EDC meeting adjourned the meeting at 9:05 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Carmer  
Economic Development Program Manager