

DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

November 4, 2016

City Hall, Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; John Bosen, Eric Spear, Ron Zolla, John Pratt, Josh Cyr

Excused: Bob Marchewka, Vice-Chairman, Dana Levenson

Absent: Jen Zorn, Philip Cohen

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

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

Approval of draft meeting minutes of October 7, 2016

Commissioner Spear moved, and Commissioner Cyr seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of October 7, 2016. The motion carried unanimously.

Presentations and Discussion:

Semi-Annual Report on Partnership with Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce for period December 2015-October 2016

Valerie Rochon, President, Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce distributed copies of the report as well as the most recent Seacoast Harbor Guide, Portsmouth Map and event brochures for Shop Portsmouth, Vintage Christmas and Restaurant Week. She summarized the Chamber's attendance and promotion of Portsmouth at travel, trade and consumer shows and highlighted the features of the recently launched GoPortsmouthNH.com new website and recent web analytics. Review of the analytics and visitor traffic at the Visitor Center and downtown kiosk have led to the conclusions that internet research and social media interaction are causing fewer travelers to rely on a Visitor Center destination for information. This is corroborated by low vacancies and increased attendance at local tourist properties and events.

Leisure travelers with overnight stays are increasing, yet much of foot traffic downtown are "day trippers". Massachusetts residents topped the national visitor demographic and Canada dominated international traveler data. Rockingham County hospitality businesses continue to contribute the largest amount of Meals and Rooms taxes collected by a significant margin.

Restaurant Week is coming up November 10-19 with 45 restaurants participating; the largest number of participants since inception. Finally, Ms. Rochon provided an overview of the Chamber's small business initiatives and programs to assist local companies and she updated the EDC on staff changes at the Chamber for the Business Development and Tourism Manager positions.

Update on the NH DOT Spaulding Turnpike Expansion Project

Nickie Hunter, District Construction Engineer, NHDOT presented on the status of contracts completed and underway as part of the Spaulding Turnpike Expansion Project. Most of the work on the Portsmouth side of the General Sullivan Bridge is complete and work will continue on the Dover side for the next three years. Until the work on the Dover side is complete and the additional lanes are open, the NHDOT cannot open all lanes in each direction which will result in continued traffic congestion until. Ms. Hunter ended her presentation with information on new tools the NHDOT is using for real time traffic information for travelers to plan trips or route diversions.

Old Business

Review EDC Letter re: Great Bridges Proposed Housing Project

Following a discussion on the project and the need for additional housing in the city and region to accommodate the expanding workforce, the draft letter on the proposed workforce housing project by Great Bridges was reviewed and edits were suggested. The letter will be updated and circulated to the Commission before sending to the Board of Adjustment.

Review Draft Action Plan

Commissioners reviewed and endorsed the draft EDC Action Plan Initiatives for 2017. Copies of the final draft will be distributed to the Commission.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: Friday, December 2, 2016, 7:30 AM

Public Comment

David Choate of Colliers International spoke on the proposed workforce housing project on Echo Avenue. He attended the Workforce Housing Coalition Forum on Housing at UNH recently and one of the speakers related that the projected age of most new residents moving here will be over 65 years old. This will further exacerbate the shortage of workers that many businesses are experiencing. Commissioner Pratt acknowledged that the Advisory Committee at Granite Bank has noted that the shortage is prevalent in all sectors of the economy and that some businesses are turning away work as a result.

City Manager Bohenko noted that the problem cannot be solved exclusively by the City of Portsmouth and that there is a need for a regional effort to create additional housing. Mr. Choate said that in his experience, a key factor in companies' relocation decision is the availability of workforce and that Portsmouth is the most desirable place for workers to live.

With no further business to conduct the EDC meeting adjourned the meeting at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager