

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
March 6, 2020**

**Members Present:** Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Alan Gold, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Assistant Mayor Splaine, Dana Levenson & Ron Zolla (via teleconference),

**Excused:** Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Katelyn Kwoka; Everett Eaton

**City Staff:** City Manager Karen Conard, Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer

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**Approval of draft meeting minutes of February 7, 2020**

Commissioner Lachance moved, and Commissioner Gold seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of February 7, 2020. The motion carried unanimously.

**Subcommittee Updates**

1. Education /Research Subcommittee (EDC members: Cohen, Watson, Levenson, and Lachance)  
Commissioner Lachance reported that the subcommittee has not met since the last EDC meeting. The group plans to convene before the April EDC meeting to identify how best to use the UNH students for research, to prioritize the deliverables, and to engage the resources of the City's assessing staff and experience of the Deputy City Manager.
2. Transportation Planning (PTS) Subcommittee (EDC members: Watson, Gold, Zolla and Lazenby)  
The PTS Committee identified members Jonathan Sandberg and Mary Lou McElwain to serve on the joint subcommittee with the EDC. The next step is to meet with Planning Director Juliet Walker to frame out goals and deliverables and then convene the PTS members to discuss strategies (survey, etc.).
3. Advocacy (EDC members: Kwoka,, Lazenby)  
Councilor Lazenby reported that other than the items that are currently before the EDC such as a response to Councilor McEachern's motion to establish a City Council/hospitality industry subcommittee (further down on the EDC agenda), work on the McIntyre project and the research work on the economic impact of commercial development on the tax base, there is no other advocacy tasks underway. Staff will reach out to Commissioner Kwoka before the April EDC meeting to see if there is anything new on the workforce housing to report.
4. Small Business Support Subcommittee (Gold)  
Commissioner Gold reported that he met with Chairman Marchewka, Vice-Chairman Cohen and staff to brainstorm ideas on enhancing City activities in support of small business. He distributed a list of ideas discussed for EDC review. The activities are intended to build out a set of desired outcomes and re-visit or leverage the work already undertaken by the economic development department and its economic development resource partners as described in the City's response to Councilor Kennedy's inquiry on small business assistance. Assistant Mayor Splaine suggested that the group focus on small businesses of less than 5 employees and also reach out to Councilor Kennedy to hear her suggestions. He thought that perhaps a report back to City Council or potential work session would be a way to raise City Council awareness of the activities discussed/planned. Chairman Marchewka believes the City can leverage the work started with the Business Retention and Expansion Project and conduct targeted visitations of small businesses to hear from them. An online survey was suggested as an efficient tool in the effort.

**Council Representative Report Out on upcoming business that warrants EDC attention or action**

1. McIntyre Redevelopment  
Assistant Mayor Splaine reported that the City Council is working with the City's partner

Redgate/Kane and the National Park Service (NPS) on how best to move forward and meet the needs of all parties and the community. To that end, the Mayor has established a City Council subcommittee to negotiate with Redgate/Kane and NPS. The Assistant Mayor feels there is a way to find a “win-win” for the site and for returning a post office presence to the development through revisiting the plans with the City’s partner.

Councilor Lazenby added that the subcommittee work involves cooperation and compromise. During discussions with Redgate/Kane, they identified economic neutrality as a key parameter when considering plan modifications. This may trigger community/taxpayer investment if there are significant alterations to the proposed project. He also noted that the January 30<sup>th</sup> deadline to remedy the Redgate/Kane notice of default has passed and he hopes a vote on rescinding the ground lease is possible. He urged people to read the NPS comments that are posted online as he believes they do not constitute the need to radically revise the project but rather to tweak the proposal in order to bring it in line with the program requirements.

City Manager Conard reported that the City Council McIntyre subcommittee is meeting with the City’s financial consultant David Eaton next week. Staff has recommended a schedule of actions going forward so that Redgate/Kane and the NPS understand the City’s commitment and desire to be responsive to moving forward on the project. Commissioner Lachance suggested that the EDC should be considered as a resource for the City Council in analyzing the direct and indirect economic opportunities associated with the project.

2. Councilor McEachern’s request for a City Council Subcommittee on aligning tourism and betterment of Portsmouth

Assistant Mayor Splaine said this action item was in part a response to local hotel developer Jeff Johnston’s letter to the City Council regarding his concern with the proposed room fee legislation. While Mr. Johnston does not disagree with the premise, he feels that if approved, the funds captured should go directly (i.e. marketing/promotion) or indirectly (infrastructure, services) toward promoting the City’s hospitality sector. In response, the City Council voted for the Mayor to establish a subcommittee consisting of members of the hospitality sector, an EDC member and staff to work out potential solutions to the concerns and desires expressed by the hospitality sector.

Ms. Carmer asked if Councilor McEachern’s request for the City Council Subcommittee might be an opportunity to educate the general population on the relationship between the hospitality industry and local economic vitality. She distributed copies of results of an interactive survey that was conducted at the recent Chamber Collaborative’s annual tourism summit attended by 118 hospitality-related businesses. The survey provided insight into how much of the industry’s customers are local and how they collaborate with local groups and non-profits. Commissioner Gold agreed and said he was stuck by the relationships that exists between the industry and the local stakeholders. Assistant Mayor Splaine suggested a work session with the City Council on this broader aspect of the local tourism/hospitality sector.

## **Other Business**

1. Update on the Covid-19 virus

City Health Inspector Kim McNamara provided an update on the COVID-19 virus noting that the situation is evolving daily and will continue to evolve. This is a new virus that deserves serious respect and public health coordination. 81% of the cases are mild and those with underlying medical conditions and the elderly with respiratory problems are most at risk. The virus spreads by droplets released through sneezing and coughing as well as surface contact. She said that the risk in Portsmouth is low and best practices to avoid spread of the disease are warranted. Practices include diligent hand washing, sneezing/coughing into a tissue/sleeve, surface decontamination and social

distancing. She also advised people to consult the National Center for Disease Control (CDC) for updates and best practices and the World Health Organization (WHO) for travel advisories. Lastly, she explained how the State Health Department and local Health Departments work together to address situations such as COVID-19.

A discussion ensued and the Commission conclusion was that this situation is an opportunity to better refine the methods for dealing with these types of viruses in the future and for the City to establish a business continuity plan.

2. Small Business Week May 4-8, 2020 planning efforts  
Ms. Carmer updated the Commission on plans for local activities being planned for Small Business Week May 4-8, 2020 including a kick-off breakfast with Mayor's Proclamation at the Public Library and a series of programs throughout the week to raise awareness of resources available to assist small businesses.
3. She also updated the EDC on an effort underway by the Manufacturing Roundtable collaborators for a panel in April on how to meet the future needs of business, better alignment of education institutions with business workforce needs and the potential role of technological innovation in augmenting workforce. More info to be provided as plans evolve.
4. A registration sheet for the upcoming Economic Outlook 2020 on March 10<sup>th</sup> at the Seacoast Repertory Theatre was distributed for those interested in attending.

### **Public Comment**

Chamber Collaborative President Valerie Rochon said that she appreciated the EDC discussion on the legislation for a local hotel option fee and also on the economic impacts and interface of the tourism industry with the local community. She mentioned there is a Chamber Destination Task Force with representatives of the hospitality industry that could be called on to assist in responding to Councilor McEachern's recent City Council motion on tourism.

City Manager Conard asked the question why there was not a member of the Chamber Board of Directors on the EDC and that it seems a missing link. She would like to propose adding a Chamber Board member to the EDC and sought member feedback. The response from the EDC to this proposal was positive. Ms. Carmer said the City Attorney should be consulted as the City Ordinance addresses EDC membership and the appointment process. Ms. Rochon said the Chamber Board of Directors had also considered inviting an EDC member as a member of its Board, but was unclear what the voting privileges with such an arrangement are.

Commissioner Watson asked what communication methods, if any, are in place in the event of an escalation of the COVID-19 virus given the importance of the hospitality industry to Portsmouth - particularly in summer. Ms. Rochon responded that they engage a PR firm that develops a messaging plan to members depending on what the need is.

**Confirm Next Regular Meeting:** April 3, 2020 7:30 AM

### **Adjourn**

At 9:04 AM Commissioner Lazenby moved and Commissioner Watson seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.