



Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC) to Reopen Portsmouth 2021
City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Remote meeting via Zoom
January 20, 2021 – 2:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

Co-Chair James Petersen called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. and read the following declaration:

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2020-25, and Emergency Order #12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

ROLL CALL of MEMBERS:

Voting Members Present: Co-Chairs James Petersen and Mark Stebbins, Alan Gold, Ann Birner, Anne Weidman, Deborah Anthony, Jeff Goss, Jim Lee, John Akar, Karen Bouffard, Kathie Lynch, Valerie Rochon, Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff, City Health Officer Kim McNamara.

Non-voting Member Present: Councilor Petra Huda.

Voting Members Absent: Bianca Monteiro, John Golumb and Sen. Martha Fuller Clark.

Others Present: Andrew Bagley, Ben VanCamp, Cliff Lazenby, Gerald Duffy, Ian Lenahan, Richard DiPentima, City Deputy Health Officer Kristin Shaw, Martha Stone, Stephanie Seacord, William Sturtevant, City Legal Secretary Marian Steimke.

WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF 1/13/2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Jim Lee moved to approve the minutes of the 1/13/2021 meeting, seconded by Kathie Lynch. On a roll call vote 12 in favor, 0 against and 1 abstention, the motion passed.

BRC REOPEN 2021 – WORKING PLAN

Co-Chair Petersen included in the agenda a summary of his and Co-Chair Stebbins' distillation of their understanding of how to proceed on this BRC. He read that summary:

“Enhance collaboration with existing resources – EDC, Pro Portsmouth, Chamber, Design Alliance, etc. to:

- gather/distribute information re: economic impact of COVID
- promote Portsmouth
- reach out and help more organizations and businesses to identify new needs, and improve and kick start street use”

HEALTH UPDATE – KATHIE LYNCH

She shared the 1/18/21 Covid-19 Dashboard and said there appears to be a leveling off but at a higher level. Expressed hope they can get the numbers down so as to reopen the economy. She discussed positivity rates. The Heath BRC will create a FAQ and wants to emphasize that getting people vaccinated does not mean we can let up on other measures. She reiterated that all are safer at home. If we leave home we are safer outdoors. She will continue to work with Stephanie to keep the FAQs up to date.

John Akar asked about discrepancy of numbers based on different sources. Kathie answered that the numbers fluctuate daily. Stephanie said their numbers come from John's Hopkins and added that those and the NH numbers are seven day rolling averages. The difference comes to how they get the average. That, she said, is basically the difference. We continue to use the John's Hopkins, she said.

Those present discussed use of city resources, what worked, what did not and having an environment of collaboration. Kathie said hopefully this committee can give everyone a voice. She discussed reaching out to potential business participants.

PROPOSED PLAN FOR BRC – COUNCILOR HUDA

Councilor Huda said her Reopen 2021 BRC Outline that she distributed prior to that day's meeting was her interpretation of what the Mayor's intent was. These were her ideas, she said. She read from the document, discussing Phases 1, 2 and 3. She expressed her idea of trying to contact every business up to three times to invite them to participate. She said Plan B is intended to incorporate an 'unexpected' event. For example, if the Governor removes the emergency order that would change things. She said the City's roll is to step up where needed. She emphasized these are points for discussion and asked for feedback.

Co-Chair Petersen said there is a lot in the two pages and suggested the City can act and respond to the thoughts.

Co-Chair Stebbins said he didn't know how we can do all that, as we all have jobs. If we limit to downtown, to go block by block and ask businesses three times, I think it is an impossibility

unless we put a full staff together on this Committee, he said. He added he did not see how the BRC can be effective by doing that. He would rather have a deeper focus rather than trying to encompass too much. Then when councilors get comments and concerns they be directed to the BRC and we deal as quickly as we can, he suggested.

Kathie Lynch asked where the responsibility of the business owner was in needing to be contacted three times. Alan Gold said that was a good point. He suggested if doing outreach to do so with the understanding not everyone will participate. He pointed out going door to door during COVID is risky. Co-Chair Petersen thanked Councilor Huda.

Karen Bouffard asked about the construction schedule for downtown, how far in advance the City schedules, and if the BRC could be in the loop if a street is going to have parking removed.

CITY UPDATE – DEPUTY CITY MANAGER NANCY COLBERT PUFF

She reported they are looking for sources for picnic tables. Permitting for sidewalk cafes will open online on February 1st to improve and streamline that process. Work is happening behind the scenes. In response to Karen Bouffard's question, the Dep. City Manager said it depends on the type of work going on. If it is a street encumbrance, using the View Permit system, is available to anyone. If a time period goes over 30 days, then a request has to go before the City Council. The other requests come in on a rolling basis.

Co-Chair Stebbins said as we get into the season, we'll maybe get Peter Rice back.

Valerie said we have a lot of discussion to do on the outline that Councilor Huda provided, but agreed it is way outside the scope of what the BRC is able to do.

RESTAURANTS & BUS UPDATE – JOHN AKAR

He appreciates being a part of this group. In speaking about the restaurant scene, he wants to address questions about restaurants closing and hibernating. Restaurants really are hibernating with a plan to really reopen. Seacoast Online and the Herald have done a good job of vocalizing hibernation, but we should also announce when we have come back into business. We don't want to have to be spending the marketing dollars to say we are now open. He thinks many are hibernating. If a restaurant does not have a to-go menu, staying open does not work well. It works well depending on the type of food. Every business has made their decision really individually and to their format. There is not one answer. He applied for the PPP loan for the 2nd time, and it was much quicker this time. He said it's not fully approved yet, but this part of the stimulus package and unemployment will make it so that many restaurants closed now will be able to open back up this spring and get back to where we normally are this time of year.

Co-Chair Stebbins asked if his restaurant was hibernating. John said they are opening on Valentine's Day, will close for a week or two after that and then hopes to open March 1st, but that could change.

Co-Chair Stebbins loved the idea of helping the restaurant community advertise when we reopen. One of the Mayor's points is to promote Portsmouth. Between the EDC, Chamber and the BRC

they could all help to announce when reopening. Co-Chair Petersen thanked John.

BASIC NEEDS OF NON-PROF UPDATE – DEB W/ MARTHA STONE

Executive director of Crossroads Martha Stone has a Crossroads video she will send out a link to. She gave an update on the homeless shelter and said they have adapted during the pandemic. They are being responsive. They have the Lafayette road location and have used a local motel since April 11th to be able to serve more people. They implemented a regular testing regimen, saying she got the funding and is collaborating with UNH to do weekly testing of residents. She is happy they are partnering with the Portsmouth Fire Department to also do testing. She advocates including all in the vaccination program, as their residents don't have health care and transportation to get to sites. Her staff gets hazard pay to work 24/7 in the shelter. They have hundreds of volunteers to serve meals. She and Deb are collaborating with donors and restaurants on a program called "Take Out Hunger" to provide meals to those with food insecurity (restaurant employees get paid to make the meals). She said the bulk of operating revenue is funded by private donations. This year they will do a fundraiser in a virtual setting. The priority is to keep people safe and provide housing. She reported that since January 2020, they helped 136 residents move to permanent housing. The waiting lists are very long to get into public housing.

Kathie applauded Crossroads on behalf of the Health BRC for all the masking and screening work they are doing. Martha will send the link to the video.

STREETS IDEAS – ANNIE WEIDMAN

Co-Chair Petersen said he will put this update on the agenda for next week, due to lack of time.

PUBLIC COMMENT – (60 SECONDS EACH)

Andrew Bagley of 40 Chauncey Street reminded the BRC that the majority of restaurants in town are not hibernating. He said we are sending the wrong message saying we are. He suggested renaming the "Reopen Committee", because we are open.

Gerald Duffy said there has not been enough opportunity for the public to thank the Task Force and this BRC. So thank you. He would like a message taken back to the Council to let this group do what they do best and not to throw things in their way with an impossibly broad scope. We have limited resources, he said.

Jim Lee moved to adjourn, seconded by Alan Gold. On a roll call vote 14-0, the motion passed and meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
By Marian Steimke