

MEETING MINUTES OF THE PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

April 9, 2021

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Philip Cohen, Vice Chairman; Sarah Lachance, Tom Watson, Dana Levenson, Alan Gold, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby; Ron Zolla, Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine, Katelyn Kwoka, Everett Eaton

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

Zoom meeting statement

Chairman Marchewka began the meeting by reading the following statement:

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 2021-01, 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.

All members present identified themselves, their location and persons present with them.

Minutes- Approval of draft meeting minutes of March 5, 2021

Commissioner Gold moved, and Commissioner Cohen seconded a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of March 5, 2021. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Presentation on the Portsmouth Business Response to the SBDC Resiliency Survey

Liz Gray Executive Director of SBDC and Sean McKinley, M.A. UNH Survey Center presented the results of the SBDC Resiliency Survey conducted February 2021 for businesses located in Portsmouth. 257 businesses responded to the survey. Key findings of the survey include:

- 40% of businesses reduced hours since pandemic began and 25% closed temporarily.
- Health and safety concerns, government mandate and loss of revenues were the most common reasons for reduced hours or temporary closures.
- Respondents had an average of nine employees. As of February 2021, half of the respondents indicated that they have the same number of workers as pre-COVID.
- 66% reported lower monthly revenue due to the pandemic, down from 84% in June 2020. Causal agents were decline in sales, reduced hours and mandated temporary closure.
- Accounts receivables were slower during last eight months which is slightly better than June 2020.
- 75% of businesses applied for financial relief programs in 2020 and 50% plan to do in 2021. The Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) was the most commonly used federal program with 90% receiving loans, followed closely by the Economic Injury Disaster Advance/Loan program.
- Only one in eight businesses had a resiliency/recovery plan pre-COVID. Twenty percent have since developed a plan.
- Businesses were most likely (50%) to purchase Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for

their operations and 33% changed their layout to combat spread of the virus. About a quarter switched to remote or reduced work hours and provided safety training for their workforce in response to the pandemic.

- 40% were worse off in February 2021 compared to June 2020 and 10% are better off.
- Going forward, businesses are most concerned about maintaining sales, revenues and customers followed by public acceptance of COVID-19 vaccine and employee inoculations. Cyber security and access to COVID-19 testing remain primary concerns as well.
- Most businesses plan to continue the modifications implemented during the pandemic with regards to health and safety, remote work options, e-commerce and take-out where applicable.
- Businesses are more confident than in June 2020 in the continued survival of their business, particularly in the long-term.

Going forward, the SBDC has developed programs to respond to the business' needs identified in the survey. Upcoming programs include the Business Resiliency Academy with UNH Extension and a cyber-security forum with the NH Tech Alliance. Next will be a marketing in the "new normal" webinar series.

Review Potential Actions from EDC Retreat

In order to allocate sufficient time to discuss this item, a separate meeting time will be scheduled for discussion of the retreat goals and actions. Ms. Carmer will send members a meeting poll.

Mayors Blue Ribbon Committee Reports and Other Business

- *Business Re-opening Committee – EDC Member Alan Gold*
Progress continues on installation of the newly painted barricades for on-street dining with 47 applications received for approvals. Businesses are enthusiastic about the upcoming season and the additional revenue opportunities it provides.
- *Arts and Non-profits Committee update- Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer*
The Committee sent out surveys to three arts-related cohorts (1) artists, (2) arts organizations and (3) arts patrons and received a good response, particularly from the audience/patron survey. The responses are being tabulated, but from initial responses it appears that audiences are especially interested in resuming outdoor event attendance this summer and indoor performances as vaccination rates increase. When complete, the survey results will be shared with the EDC.
- *Restaurant/retail updates – Chamber Collaborative President Valerie Rochon*
Restaurants are bullish on the upcoming summer season. Retailers are seeing increased business as sidewalk cafés and on-street dining opens. The Governor has signaled Memorial Day as the speculative official "open for summer" date which will help businesses plan for staffing and infrastructure if restrictions are to be relaxed to a 3-foot versus 6-foot social distance for dining. Hotels are booking up, particularly on weekends and events such as weddings and other celebrations are being booked. The Chamber is planning its annual "Hit the Decks" event in May for an extended period with COVID safety precautions incorporated into the program guidelines. Business have expressed concerns with staffing and seasonal workforce housing.
- *American Rescue Plan (ARP) Municipal Funding- eligible economic development uses*

The City is scheduled to receive \$13.29 million from the ARP state funds to be allocated to cities and towns. Final spending eligible and criteria are being developed by the treasury, but economic development is one of the allowable uses.

- *Rapid Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers*

In response to a letter to the City Council from resident Tom Morgan encouraging the City to review its zoning regulations to be more “friendly” to the installation of rapid EV charging stations, the Council referred the matter to the Parking Traffic and Safety Committee, the Sustainability Committee and the Economic Development Commission for discussion and a report back. Mr. Morgan was present to discuss some of the potential direct and indirect economic benefits that might be realized from strategically located installation of the chargers in downtown. Commissioner Zolla asked what the government’s role was in this arena given the major movement in market trends in this area. Mr. Morgan responded that he agrees that the City lacks adequate resources and expertise to take this on and private industry is best suited to move this initiative forward if government “gets out of the way.” It was agreed that it would behoove the city to work with private businesses interested in such installation as part of a broader “smart city” initiative. Staff will reach out to other cities that have rapid EV charger installations to see if there are any quantifiable metrics and the City Manager will follow up with Mr. Morgan to discuss a review of land use regulations related to EV charger installations.

Public Comment – No members of the public wished to comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: May 7, 2021

Adjourn

Commissioner Kwoka moved, and Commissioner Watson seconded a motion to adjourn. Via roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager