

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

November 5, 2021 7:30 AM

Members Present: Bob Marchewka, Chairman; Philip Cohen, Vice-Chairman; Tom Watson, City Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Alan Gold, Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine, Everett Eaton, Sarah Lachance

Absent: Katelyn Kwoka

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

Chairman Marchewka called the meeting to order at 7:35 AM.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of October 1, 2021

Chairman Marchewka asked for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of October 1, 2021. Motion made by Commissioner Watson, seconded by Commissioner Lachance. Motion to approve passed unanimously.

Subcommittee Updates

- Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) – Chairman Marchewka reported that he and Commissioner Gold met to review and edit the survey used during the previous R&E survey. Their goal is to complete the edits and develop an online survey scheduled to begin in early 2022. Ms. Carmer will contact UNH Extension for assistance with developing the online feature.
- Smart Cities - Commissioner Watson reported that Commissioner Lachance, Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer and he met to discuss using VW settlement funds for strategically locating fast EV chargers in commerce areas. The state has issued an RFP for communities and businesses interested in accessing project funding of 100% (for public) or 80% (for private). The RFP deadline is January 28, 2022 and the process to select a site(s) is complex. Further complicating the effort is the RFP requirement that Eversource be allowed ten weeks to review potential charging sites. For these reasons the subcommittee feels it is best to postpone submitting a proposal until the next round of grant funding.

Commissioner Watson also met with Sustainability Committee Chairman Burt Cohen to make him aware of this effort and he was advised that the Sustainability Committee is not currently working on transportation initiatives and was asked to keep Chairman Cohen apprised of the EDC's progress. Mr. Watson also spoke with Public Works Director Peter Rice about the opportunity and was informed that there is insufficient electric service in the city's central business district and this needs to be taken into consideration when siting potential rapid charger stations.

Next steps are:

- 1) Reach out to the business community (perhaps through the Chamber) to determine interest in charging stations on private property and,
 - 2) Continue to look at what other "smart city" initiatives might be worth recommending to the City Council as 5G service is deployed locally.
- Affordable/Workforce Housing – With Commissioner Kwoka absent there was no report on the legislative aspect of affordable/workforce housing opportunities. However, Assistant Mayor Splaine invited audience member David Choate from Colliers International to comment on the topic. Mr. Choate reiterated the frustration he expressed at a prior EDC public comment session about the lack of action by the City Council on this topic despite much Council discussion. City Manager Conard noted that there is a City Council work session with the Portsmouth Housing Authority scheduled for Monday, November

8, 2021 to which the newly elected City Councilors are invited. She also mentioned there is a housing needs assessment underway which will help quantify the problem.

Mr. Choate suggested that the City look at the creative solutions that are being employed in other communities through zoning amendments such as in Dover and Rye NH and on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket where workforce housing on Land Trust lands is being created through formation of a land bank housing fund. Assistant Mayor Splaine encouraged Mr. Choate to participate in the November 8th City Council work session.

Other suggestions and input from the EDC on workforce housing actions included:

1. Inclusion of a question in the new BR&E survey to collect data on where employees are travelling from to work at Portsmouth businesses.
2. Undertake an effort to better understand workforce housing funding and type of housing products eligible.
3. Consider a land bank fund like Nantucket/Martha's Vineyard has for building housing.
4. Create a task force with broad participation similar the legislative study committees with a deadline for action.
5. Review the actions that have been taken by the City to address the problem including the analysis of publicly owned land for housing development and the gateway zoning and density bonuses for housing in the zoning ordinance.
6. Use ARPA funds to create housing at the Community Campus site.

Challenges identified include:

1. Lack of available land.
2. Poor public understanding of the definition of workforce housing.
3. Past public opposition to workforce housing proposals.
4. Cost of land and construction.

Local Economic Development Updates

- Greater Portsmouth Chamber Collaborative update – Ben Van Camp; President and Chief Collaborator of the Chamber reported that the Chamber is doing well. Memberships have increased, in-person events have resumed (at a reduced capacity) and local businesses reported a very busy summer - especially in the hospitality sector. Outdoor dining was a huge success and most restaurants hope to see it continue in the future. Staffing is an issue for businesses, so much so that the annual fall Restaurant Week event has been cancelled. The Chamber is looking to create other less employee intensive ways to boost restaurant patronage and revenues in the future. More on that later.

The Chamber is partnering with the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Arts and Non-profits on a destination marketing plan to begin after the holidays to highlight all Portsmouth has to safely offer residents and visitors.

The Chamber Board of Directors is very "housing hyper-focused" and has created a subcommittee that has a plan to take the following steps:

1. Undertake a public education campaign in conjunction with the Workforce Housing Coalition and others.
2. Study what efforts to increase workforce housing have been successful in the past.

3. Analyze the Housing Needs Assessment data.
 4. Work with the legislative delegation on enabling legislation to create more workforce housing.
 5. Establish a Housing Advocate Group that will publicly speak in favor of workforce housing projects when presented to City Boards and Commissions.
- McIntyre Federal Building - City Manager Conard reported that the City and the General Services Administration signed paper this month to officially transfer the McIntyre Building to the City effective in the next week. City use is limited to surface parking and some DPW equipment storage in the McIntyre Building lower level. Ms. Conard also stated that the McIntyre Subcommittee is refining the project proposal for the National Park Service's review and ultimate approval. The next subcommittee meeting will be November 15th.

New/Other Business

- SBDC Business Resiliency Survey Upcoming presentation – Ms. Carmer reported that the Phase 3 SBDC Business Resiliency Survey is complete. She attended a webinar earlier in the week in which the findings of over 1,000 business statewide were summarized. Major challenges reported by businesses include fear of a new COVID surge, inability to hire adequate workforce, ability to increase revenues, and supply chain concerns. Ms. Carmer has ordered a report for strictly Portsmouth-based businesses which will be presented to the EDC in December or January.
- EDC Officer term limit and nominations- A task force was established to propose limiting the term of EDC officers (to 3 years) and expanding the overall membership of the EDC. Phil Cohen, Alan Gold and Bob Marchewka volunteered for the task force.
- Other business
Sarah Lachance asked that the EDC's vision plan from the retreat be brought back to the December or January and suggested inviting the new council elect members to that or a future meeting.

Public Comment – There were no members of the public present who wished to provide public comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting – December 3, 2021

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager