

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

January 7, 2022 7:30 AM

Members Present: Philip Cohen, Chair; Alan Gold, Vice-Chair; Bob Marchewka, Everett Eaton, Sarah Lachance; Tom Watson; Katelyn Kwoka, Andrew Ward, Jacob Lehoux

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

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

Welcome New EDC members Andy Ward and Jacob Lehoux

Minutes - Approval of draft meeting minutes of December 3, 2021

Chairman Cohen asked for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of December 3, 2021. Motion made by Vice-Chair Gold, seconded by Commissioner Marchewka. Motion to approve passed unanimously.

Seacoast Region Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Report on Business Advisory Activity

Edward Miles Regional Director and Amy Sterndale, Seacoast SBDC Business Advisor gave a presentation on the role of the SBDC, the partnership with the City of Portsmouth and a summary of recent business advisory activity and trends. SBDC has ten business advisors around the state, many with expertise in certain sectors. They serve state businesses with 1-499 employees in the various stages of growth including pre-venture, start-up, transitional and growth phases. Typically, start-ups have comprised 23% of activity with the balance being existing businesses. Ms. Sterndale reported that in the past year she counseled 77 clients over 302 sessions with cumulative employment of 670 workers. Outcomes were as follows:

- 138 jobs were created
- \$3 million in new capital was generated (exclusive of COVID relief funding)
- \$177 million in total sales were generated.

The organization spent much time during the past two years assisting clients in navigating federal, state and local COVID relief funding and in implementing modified business practices in response to the challenges created by the pandemic. A resiliency survey was performed to inform how businesses were impacted by COVID and what strategies were employed to combat the negative impacts. Other programs initiated were cyber security, business planning and business succession training. Finally, SBDC has produced a series of webinars on a variety of business planning topics including import/export strategies.

Year-End Report from Blue Ribbon Committee on Arts and Non-Profits

This agenda item was postponed until the February 11, 2022 EDC meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

Business Retention and Expansion

Commissioner Marchewka said the next step for this subcommittee is to speak with the UNH representatives about the ability to assist in an electronic version of the survey. Goal is to begin in-person surveys of upper management in 2022 and continue annually after prioritizing the sectors to survey. He invited the new members to join the subcommittee and Commissioner Ward agreed to participate.

Sustainable Cities - EV charger initiative

Commissioner Watson reported that the subcommittee did not meet over the holidays so there is nothing new

to report. However, he did elaborate on the challenges to installing rapid EV chargers which requires a faced Ms. Carmer reported that, in response to the Committee's desire to seek a public surface parking lot(s) for installation of a rapid charger, DPW is considering the lower east end of the Bridge St. lot as it is scheduled for maintenance soon.

Property Valuation and Data Modeling

The Chair reported that, with the holidays past and a new City Council in place, he wants to pick up the initiative as discussed at the last EDC retreat. Commissioner Watson suggested that the EDC review the Urban 3 presentation and analysis of local tax revenues, land use and value in Seacoast communities by Joe Minicozzi at last winter's PS21 event on YouTube and then discuss how best to drive the message.

New/Other Business

Ms. Carmer said that the EDC may be asked in February to respond to a request by Novocure for assistance with employee parking passes. The company recently announced the location of its regional headquarters in downtown at the site of the former Cabot House Furniture store. The medical device firm projects about 250 employees when construction is complete in 2023. This is in addition to the staff at the facility it currently occupies and will continue to occupy at the Portsmouth Business Park on Commerce Way.

EDC priorities from past retreat

Commissioner Lachance told the Commission that going forward, she believes the EDC can be most effective in serving local business through collaboration rather than through individual subcommittee work. Examples are the partnerships with the Chamber Collaborative and Small Business Development Center. She was particularly impressed with the initiatives included in the Chamber semi-annual report by President Ben Van Camp last month. The EDC can support and amplify this type of work.

This spawned the discussion of having Ben sit on the EDC as a non-voting member as previously discussed. To determine feasibility of this action, Acting City Manager Woodland reviewed the City Ordinance on the EDC membership and advised that this suggestion is possible if it is an informal role for collaboration versus an appointed role which would require an ordinance change. Ben will be invited to the February meeting.

Commissioner Watson referenced newly elected Mayor McEachern's inaugural address and the initiatives he hopes to accomplish in the first 100 days. The Mayor spoke of ordinances changes relative for more affordable housing. Commissioner Watson posed the question: "How can the EDC play a role in this?" It was decided that Chairman Cohen will reach out to the Mayor and invite him to the February meeting to discuss this and other EDC work. He also noted that the Novocure parking discussion raises the ride share initiative that was instigated before the pandemic arrived. He suggested revisiting this opportunity with a new systems perspective and potential ARPA or Infrastructure Bill funding.

Public Comment – No members of the public were present to provide comment.

Confirm Next Regular Meeting: – February 11, 2022

Adjourn

Commissioner Marchewka moved and Commissioner Watson seconded a motion to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Carmer
Economic Development Program Manager