

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
PORTSMOUTH ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
January 3, 2025    7:30 AM- 9:00 AM

**Members Present:** Chair Tom Watson, Vice Chair Sarah Lachance, Anne Weidman, Anna Howard, Andrew Ward, Everett Eaton, Jen Scumaci, Phil Cohen, Jacob Lahoux, Bob Marchewka, City Councilor Vince Lombardi, Ben VanCamp  
**Absent:** Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley  
**City Staff:** City Manager Karen Conard, Assistant City Manager Sean Clancy

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*Chair Watson* called the meeting to order at 7:35 am.

Motion to accept the minutes of the December meeting with one date correction made by *Commissioner Eaton*, seconded by *Commissioner Weidman*. Motion passed unanimously.

The annual EDC Elections of Chair and Vice Chair for calendar year 2025 were held:

- *Commissioner Weidman* nominated *Tom Watson* to serve as EDC Chair for 2025, seconded by *Commissioner Marchewka*. Vote to approve was unanimous.
- *Commissioner Scumaci Sarah Lachance* to serve as EDC Vice Chair for 2025, seconded by *Commissioner Eaton*. Vote to approve was unanimous.

Economic Development Office (EDO) Report: *S. Clancy*

- The EDO database project is fully functional as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.
- The Economic Development internship effort is scheduled to be completed on January 17<sup>th</sup>.
  - The deliverable from this effort will be physical and digital guide for businesses to better understand our new *Rail Trail* and ideas on how to connect with *Rail Trail* users.
- The Market Square Master Plan process continues with a (City Council) working session scheduled for Monday January 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm. This working session is open to the public.
- Parking Utilization Study Group final recommendations will be presented to the City Council at either the January 21<sup>st</sup> City Council meeting or the February 3<sup>rd</sup> City Council meeting.

Business Support Working Group update: *Commissioner Ward*

- No update from December meeting.

Economic Resiliency Working Group update: *Commissioner Weidman*

- No update from December meeting.
- The transportation research and study results will be crafted as a recommendation for distribution to the many groups looking at the transportation issues, challenges, and opportunities across the City.

## Chamber Update – *B. VanCamp*

- General (anecdotal) feedback from downtown businesses for the holiday season is that they were pleased with the activity and sales.
- The Chamber recognized the efforts of City staff to create options for visitors in response to the CSX Railroad decision to block access to Market Street a few days before Christmas. Members were appreciative of DPW's ability to re-open the Maplewood Avenue bridge as a point of relief.
- The State of NH will be spending remaining grant money (\$2M) on Tourism bosting efforts. The Chamber as well as the City will have access to any tourism assets (videos, photos) that are created. Target availability will be late summer / early fall 2025.
- Busy January: Legislative Reception, Local Love, Party at Puddle dock, 2025 Economic Outlook, Tourism Summit (Pease Airport Terminal), CelebrateHer Annual Awards.
  - Dates, locations, and details on Chamber website.

*Councilor Lombardi* asked about the status is empty retail and restaurant spaces.

- A discussion ensued regarding challenges and opportunities for vacant spaces downtown.
- The EDO is working with the Inspections Department and Chamber to create a workshop event to inform property owners, lessees, and potential business owners about options and ideas to work with the City towards filling some stubborn vacancies.

## City Council Update – *Councilor Lombardi*

- Councilor Lombardi provided a general overview of City Council activities since early December.

*City Manager Conard* shared some news regarding City staff efforts:

- 100% of the \$12.88 million ARPA funds have been obligated as per federal stipulations. This was a big effort to ensure that as many citizens and organizations were served, rather than return these funds to the Federal government.
- Th City of Portsmouth was recognized by the State of NH as a “Housing Champion.” This recognition provides for the ability for additional grants to support the City Council’s affordable housing priorities.
- The city-wide master plan RPF process has been completed. The chosen vendor impressed City staff, and this lengthy process will commence in January as the City Council provides guidance.

*Chair Watson* outlined his perspective and desired format for the annual EDC planning workshop.

- A robust discussion ensued, and the group agreed to prepare for the planning workshop according.

Public Comment: N/A

Motion to adjourn by *Commissioner Cohen*, seconded by *Commissioner Marchewka*. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 am.

A full recording of this meeting is available on the City’s EDC webpage.

Submitted by,

*Sean Clancy*

Assistant City Manager for Economic & Community Development