

## **How Do We Make Portsmouth the Best Place to Live and Work for Everyone?**

**by Kenneth Smith, Chairman, Portsmouth Planning Board**

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*How do we make Portsmouth the best place to live and work for everyone?* Faced as we are throughout this state with a myriad of increasingly complex challenges ranging from disappearing open space, increasing traffic congestion, and the affordable housing shortage, answering this question is no small task. But this question -- *How do we make Portsmouth the best place to live and work for everyone?* -- is one Portsmouth's Planning Board members are fully committed to trying to answer as we initiate a community wide effort to update Portsmouth's Master Plan.

Community master plans, developed under the authority of the Planning Board and outlined by state statute, serve as important policy guides for many NH municipalities. Master Plans describe what the community is today, as well as what it wants to be in the future. In Portsmouth, the Master Plan will be a key policy document for community leaders and residents to use in making well-informed decisions about many vital local issues ranging from future development and natural resource protection, to economic development and transportation needs. In short, it is the blueprint for the future of our City and will serve as the basis for our land use regulations, infrastructure improvements, and future development. As such, it is essential that we have your input in shaping a future for Portsmouth that both maintains our rich history and ensures a vibrant future.

The effort to develop a new City Master Plan will be a two-year process, with many opportunities for you -- Portsmouth's residents, business people, organizations, and property owners -- to be actively engaged. One cornerstone of our efforts to plan the City's future is an initiative called *Portsmouth Listens*. *Portsmouth Listens* consists of a group of committed local citizens working in conjunction with City officials, Portsmouth neighborhoods, and the Chamber of Commerce to develop an effective, inclusive approach to engaging our citizens in the development of the City's Master Plan. The intent is to bring together small working groups of individuals who meet on a regular basis to come to new understandings about local concerns, and hammer out creative solutions to them. This approach is the same one used in the City not long ago to successfully find

a solution to the elementary school redistricting question. This past Thursday, the Planning Board met with Jim Nocas and John Tabor, who have been leading the *Portsmouth Listens* initiative, and I believe we all came away feeling confident that using this approach to develop the City's Master Plan will be a success.

The Planning Board has also begun the task of selecting a professional team of consultants that will bring their expertise and experience in community planning to Portsmouth's Master Planning process. We are in the process of narrowing the search, and intend to have a consultant team on board, and work on the Master Plan underway, by the end of the year.

The City's current Master Plan was developed some ten years ago. Much has changed in our community since then, with both new opportunities and new challenges on the horizon. As we move forward with Portsmouth's new Master Plan, it is my hope that we actively engage as many of you as possible to work side-by-side with us to develop meaningful, inclusive community answers to the difficult question *How do we make Portsmouth the best place to live and work for everyone?*