

Minutes – May 24, 2021 BRC

Barbara called the meeting to order at 12:02.

Members in attendance: Barbara Massar, Robin Albert, Courtney Perkins, Tina Sawtelle, Larry Yerdon, Beth Falconer, Sen. Martha Fuller Clark, Renee Giffroy, Jason Goodrich, Nihco Gallo, Jerrienne Boggis, Kathy Somssich.

Also attending: Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer, Public Information Officer Stephanie Seacord, Mayor Rick Becksted, Ass't Mayor Jim Splaine, Health Officer Kim McNamara.

The motion to approve the minutes was made by Courtney and seconded by Robin. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Health Officer Kim McNamara spoke on the status of the mask mandate for the city. The city numbers are improving, but since high school students and children will make up the summer workforce and they are still susceptible, the city will continue to be cautious. The city is at a critical point: events are starting to pick up and we need to give more people a chance to be vaccinated. The city is watching the numbers and the indoors mask mandate will remain until June 30. The majority of citizens, venues and restaurants are pushing back against an early lifting of the mandate.

Strawbery Banke will continue requiring masks in houses until September, when they will review their guidelines.

Renee prefers to err on the side of caution. CDC's latest announcement allows the vaccinated public to be maskless, but it is an honor system.

Stephanie responded that we need to wear a mask inside even if vaccinated because others may not be and we need to continue the mandate, as Kim said, until the infection rate is down to 1%.

Barbara read Russ's draft of a recommendation to the city: "The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Arts and Nonprofits respectfully asks the City Council to consider not ending the mask ordinance on June 30th. If the data shows that mask requirements are not needed at that time, we ask that the Council instead consider suspending the masking requirement in a way that would allow the council to act quickly in the future if Covid cases were to increase and cause concern later in the fall and masks are deemed a necessary safety measure again. The ability for the council to reinstate the mask ordinance quickly, if needed, would provide backing and support to local businesses and arts organizations in the event of a future Covid surge. While we hope this will not happen, there is concern that there could be a variant surge in the near future, and we would like the council to be able to react quickly and nimbly in such a scenario."

A brief discussion followed regarding the possibility of a quick reinstatement of the mandate, if necessary after it is suspended. The City Attorney will have to weigh in.

Renee, Barbara and Martha will meet to formulate a recommendation based on Russ's and get it to the committee members by email to review individually. This committee will vote on it at the next meeting on June 7.

Mayor Becksted: City Council will meet in 2 weeks and he anticipates changes will take place by then. In the absence of a state mandate, the city will discuss modification of the mandate on June 7. The committee's final recommendation will be considered by the City Council.

Both the Mayor and the Ass't Mayor Jim Splaine are in agreement with Russ's initial recommendation and feel this committee's input is important to the planned discussion.

Jason supports a large-scale marketing program to announce that the venues are not only open and safe, but are also offering exciting programs and performances.

Nihco would like this committee to look into funding and grants for individual artists.

Nancy will share with the committee information on the parameters of how to use the available funds and grant money. She will send the parameters to the committee members by email.

Robin suggested we invite Ben VanCamp, new president of the Chamber Collaborative, to the next meeting.

Sen. Martha reported that the Reopen Committee is still working on the possibility of closing Pleasant Street and will share their discussion with this committee. She reports that the planters are going up and she has solicited responses regarding aesthetics from this committee.

Barbara: Pro Portsmouth is presenting Summer in the City on July 10.

Assignments: Renee, Barbara and Martha will formulate a recommendation based on Russ's draft and email it to the committee members. Nancy Carmer will make a presentation about distributing relief funds at our next meeting.

Our next meeting is on June 7 at noon.

Larry made the motion to adjourn the meeting, Jason seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Barbara adjourned the meeting at 12:54.

Submitted by Kathy Somssich

