

Minutes – BRC meeting – May 10, 2021

Russ called the meeting to order at 12:02pm

Members in attendance: Russ Grazier, Robin Albert, Courtney Perkins, Beth Falconer, Barbara Massar, Tina Sawtelle, Jason Goodrich, Renee Giffroy, Martha Fuller Clark, Kathy Somssich and Nihco Gallo.

Also attending: Matt Kanner (PortsmouthNH.com), Stephanie Seacord (Public Information Officer), Nancy Carmer (Economic Development), Mayor Rick Becksted.

Robin made the motion to approve the minutes; Courtney seconded; the minutes were approved unanimously.

Bill Humphreys has stepped down from the committee because he is shooting a feature film. We thank him for his work on the committee, will keep him posted and wish him all the best.

Matt Kanner of PortsmouthNH.com gave the committee a tour of his website which has had an events calendar since 1996 and now has a ticketing option too. The website has a Submit tab for organizations to add their event notices, pending Matt's approval. The website also has a Facebook import tool for organizations to submit their notices. Notices are free. Matt also accepts paid advertising in the form of display ads from organizations. The website's coverage goes from Ogunquit, ME to Newburyport, MA. Revenue comes from restaurant ads and arts & cultural listings, however, major arts institutions are already listed on the website for free.

Barbara suggested Matt provide his website's logo to be added to the individual websites in order to promote PortsmouthNH.com. This provides an opportunity for organizations to collaborate by including links that point to other websites.

Russ opened the discussion regarding the committee's recommendation to City Council about the mask mandate and a 30 day update schedule.

Robin would like to see the City's mask mandate extended. It's easier to speak to visitors about masks when backed up by a city ordinance.

Tina: Outdoor ticket sales at TMH are strong now, but there is an issue about moving indoors. The Music Hall will be surveying their patrons to gather their thoughts about indoor events.

Russ is hearing from performing venues that they are aiming for 100% capacity with masks by September and asks if the path to 100% in Portsmouth is helped by a city ordinance to back it up.

Beth: City back-up is important when communicating with artists and agents. 3S Artspace's conundrum is due to their concessions. She supports the mask mandate in the summer, but the issue is complicated by the eating, drinking and standing at that venue. She hopes for a higher vaccination rate in the Fall.

Tina: The need to update new data regarding infections and vaccinations is important. She supports 30 day incremental updates instead of blanket guidelines for the whole summer and is hoping for a relaxation of the mask mandate during the summer.

Barbara suggests contacting the city attorney regarding an approach to the difference between public and private venues. We're in a time of flux and the regulations have to be different, because the organizations are all different.

Renee agrees on the 30-day increments. Her visitors come from out of state and it's important to have the city mandate to fall back on.

Courtney agrees on the 30-day increments. She is hearing from hotels that visitors are pushing back on the mask mandates and are referring to the Governor's latest directive. PPAF wants their young staff to be vaccinated and feels that masks are important because of their young audiences.

Nihco: Concerns from the health department about musicians singing or playing wind instruments outdoors has proven limiting for Seacoast Jazz Society (SJS), as they had been looking into curating musical performances downtown, in particular to coincide with Hit the Decks this Wednesday. They were told this decision would be reconsidered on June 30th.

Russ: The landscape is changing and the Health department will be looking at any trends. PMAC is keeping singing and wind instruments outside under their tent.

Barbara asked the Mayor if any change in the city's ordinance would require 3 readings at 3 meetings.

Mayor Rick: We're seeing changes, cases in Portsmouth are dropping, more people are getting vaccinated. We need to take it one step at a time. The mask ordinance exists and is therefore easy to extend. A change to eliminate the mask mandate would require time and meetings.

Russ: Organizations need lead time to react to any changes in guidelines. Russ suggested that the BRC make a recommendation to the City Council that the mask mandate 30-day increment be in place on June 30 and reviewed every 30 days. Then all data should be taken into consideration to help support organizations in keeping their audiences and staff safe.

Tina recommended that June 30 is seen as the first marker as to whether the mask mandate should be extended or lifted.

Stephanie: The mask mandate is in place until June 30th. Any extensions will happen after that date.

Nancy: City Council meets 8 times in May but will be busy with the budget. May 17th is the next regular city council meeting.

Russ, Kathy & Tina will draft a recommendation for the BRC to address in time for the next city council meeting.

Martha recommends input from the city's health officer including an update from the State's Council and CDC. Participation by the Health department at the BRC's next meeting is recommended.

Russ adjourned the meeting at 1:05.

Submitted by Kathleen Somssich