



**Blue Ribbon Committee to Reopen Portsmouth 2021
City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Remote meeting via Zoom – February 24, 2021 – 2:00 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER:

Co-Chair James Petersen. Called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and read the following declaration:

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2021-02, and Emergency Order number 12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

ROLL CALL of MEMBERS:

Voting Members Present: Co-Chair James Petersen; Alan Gold, Anne Weidman, Jeff Goss, Jim Lee, John Akar, John Golumb, Karen Bouffard, Kathie Lynch, Sen. Martha Fuller Clark, Valerie Rochon, Karen Conard, Toni McLellan for Health Officer Kim McNamara.

Non-voting Member Present: Councilor Petra Huda.

Voting Members Absent: Ann Birner, Bianca Monteiro, Deborah Anthony and Co-Chair Mark Stebbins.

Other City Staff Present: Jessica Griffin, Marian Steimke, Stephanie Seacord.

Others Present: Andrew Bagley, Windsor.

WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF 2/17/2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Sen. Clark moved to approve the minutes of the 2/17/2021 meeting, seconded by Kathie Lynch. On a roll call vote of 10-0 with 2 abstentions, the minutes were approved.

HEALTH UPDATE

Kathie Lynch shared her screen for the 2/22/2021 dashboard. She highlighted a gradual decline in new infections and positivity rate and said vaccinations continued to be rolled out, with no doses held in reserve. She explained the discrepancy between doses received versus given as being a reporting issue, and added it is not known whether you can transmit the virus after having been vaccinated.

There will be a new FAQ section: “*You have had the vaccine, now what?*” She expressed concern about continuing outbreaks in the Seacoast area in NH. She reminded all to stay vigilant, continue masking and not gathering. She said the goal is to get back to the baseline of the summer and early fall and added they are waiting for the FDA hearing on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

CITY UPDATE

City Manager Conard shared the following updates. Last Monday the Council voted 8-1 to approve \$20,000 for barrier beautification. She said the PopUp request was forwarded to the BRC on Arts and Non-profits. The number of outdoor permits received is 25. Four are new and the rest are renewals. The City will install the barriers as close to April 1st as possible. She thanked the Chamber and others who helped to get the word out. The word is get your license applications in as soon as possible.

Anne showed pictures of the picnic tables that were purchased which are accessible to wheelchairs. People using the tables had takeout on their tables and thanked the City – the tables are wonderful. All tables constantly had new groups coming in; no one left trash behind; 70% had dogs underneath them. Thank you to City Hall staff that made that happen.

Sen. Clark asked if it were possible to add more. Karen said 10 was based on funds, as they are \$800-900 each, so it would be a matter of budget. Maybe businesses would contribute some tables. They weigh 150 lbs.

Councilor Huda said she was blindsided by the Committee request of \$20,000 rather than the \$10,000 budget request she expected, as this was not voted on by the Committee. She would like to ask who made the decision on this and when was that done. She reminded all this is a committee of 16, and her expectation going forward is that decisions should be discussed and voted by the full Committee.

Chair James said he and Mark coordinated right before the Council meeting and agreed he would request \$20,000. The Chair said he takes the Councilor’s comment seriously and will do that going forward.

Valerie said all the picnic tables were packed. She requests that if the City orders more, can they not be metal. Wood is a little easier on the body for warmth, she said.

RESTAURANTS/RETAIL UPDATE

Valerie said the Restaurant Committee did not want to see eye pollution or distractions for drivers – they would like one color on the barriers. However, some people suggested different color barriers to distinguish between restaurants. Action items involved working with the City to determine how many restaurants will request outdoor dining. She talked about alternate barriers and flower boxes. Karen said at this time she does not believe there will be a shortage of barriers. Alan Gold said he confirmed that with DPW.

Sen. Clark suggested if there were to be street closures, the Committee should be thinking about that.

Alan mentioned the SBDC survey, stating they will see the Portsmouth specific results. Word back is that Portsmouth businesses are robust. The Committee will get a solid feel for what needs to be done for the residents. He mentioned that restaurants were checking with surrounding businesses to

make sure they are not interfering with each other. He added they have been working with the Career Tech Education (CTE) folks at the High School about painting barriers. He discussed the window boxes and purchasing of materials and a need to determine how many restaurants would like to have them. He thought the Gardening Club might offer to help. He said there is some interest in working with individual restaurants in a nonstandard, restaurant-specific way that would be borne by the restaurant at a subsidized cost.

Anne said she reached out to some design professionals in town that could help with guidance

Valerie explained the CTE program and described it as a pipeline for the workforce.

Alan expects painting to be done in March, weather permitting, and prior to the barriers going down.

STREETS

Sen. Clark discussed going forward with streets closings. She mentioned Fleet and Ceres and said Penhallow would make a nice pedestrian way. Valerie said understanding the parameters of the streets; coming up with a list of potential streets to close and working with the City to implement would be the way forward. Karen B. said there are implications for businesses when streets are closed, and it must be done judiciously. Delivery becomes a challenge, and many use the 15 minute parking spots.

Councilor Huda said the construction project on the corner of Ceres will affect any closures. Sen. Clark suggested street closures could be flexible. City Manager Karen said she will incorporate construction updates and stressed the maintenance of public safety access. She added that the four new restaurants were Café SOL, the Rosa, Striker and Elephantine for outdoor dining.

Sen. Clark asked about Islington Street, and asked since most focus is on the core downtown, should that area and other areas be focused on. Chair James will put this on the following agenda. City Manager Karen said any area is open for consideration, and said the City welcomes a request from any business no matter where they are and the City will work with them.

Chair James summarized saying the outdoors is still the safest place to be, and that will continue into the summer. This discussion about use of streets and providing as much opportunity as possible to be outdoors and patronize Portsmouth business is critical, and he looked forward to continuing that conversation.

PUBLIC COMMENT – At 2:45 Chair James opened the meeting for public comment.

Andrew Bagley said the Committee has done a great job. The only Councilor to vote against the funding was Councilor Huda, and he said that is troubling. As a taxpayer, he doesn't see any reason why this is bad. Councilor Huda responded by saying the process was not followed. She was blindsided. She was going for \$10,000 but it came out as \$20,000. She knew it would pass anyway, and that was her point.

ADJOURN

Karen Conard moved to adjourn, seconded by Jim Lee. On a roll call vote 13-0, the motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted – by Marian Steimke