



PORTSMOUTH CITYWIDE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 2023

Portsmouth City Hall, Conference room A

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Co-chair Peter Somssich. Present: Co-chairs Elaine Apatang and Peter Somssich, Members Larry Cataldo, William Gatchell and Lori Soloway. Absent: John Tabor and Kathleen Boduch (excused). Neighborhood residents were present.

PORTSMOUTH CULTURAL PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE - TOM KAUFHOLD

Mr. Kaufhold presented information regarding the ongoing review of Portsmouth's cultural plan by the 15-member Cultural Plan subcommittee. They have created 5 work groups to review: the current and future plan, the work/standing of Artspeak, community engagements, and the existing art/culture ordinances, which include where art may be displayed, who must maintain art pieces and places, who owns/is responsible for the art, etc. They are working to identify the requirements behind grants and different funding as well. They will work for just this year to update the current cultural plan, and will present their findings and plans in November for inclusion in the Master Plan of 2024. They have spoken with residents, met with city council members and hired a consulting group (ACG) to help outline their work. They are currently surveying all levels of the population, including children, adults, artists, business owners. City councilors have already responded to the survey and this group is hoping the CNC will help encourage neighborhoods to participate. They are hopeful that they are hitting all aspects of the population. CNC will make the survey available to neighborhood leaders for distribution and share the online information for completion there as well. The current deadline for the surveys is August 29th, but if the committee feels they have not heard from significant parts of the citizenry, they will extend the date. Their goal is to answer the questions: What is Portsmouth going to become? How important are the arts to the city? How can the city prepare for anyone who would like to participate in the arts? Peter Somssich remarked about the costs that might incur with expanded arts.

CSX IDLING AND NOISE—LARRY CATALDO

A group from the Islington Creek neighborhood, city officials and two city councilors met with CSX executives to address the continuing idling and whistle noises; exhaust; coupling sounds, especially late at night and over extended hours (3-4 hours generally); and unsightly container cars on the side rails that attract youth and are not safe. Additionally, it has been found that CSX is using pesticides/chemicals along the rails and those substances are running into the North Mill Pond. Larry and several members of the neighborhood group are investigating those uses and where the responsibility for cleanup lies. Several weeks after the meeting, he measured the distance between the defoliation and the North Mill Pond and found it to be less than 50 feet. Who "owns" the water? Is it a state or federal responsibility?

The CSX reps replied that many of the problems will improve when new engines replace the antique cars that are currently used. CSX said there are no tracking devices on the engines or cars and does not even know where the cars are sitting. The CSX reps provided responses to the neighborhood group's questions written by its public relations department, thus not being specific about any changes to its policies. If nothing positive is forthcoming, the group would likely file a complaint with the Surface Transportation Board. A copy of the minutes is included.

SPINNAKER POINT RECREATION CENTER—PETER SOMSSICH AND LARRY CATALDO

Peter and Larry have made a presentation to the Portsmouth Recreation Board (4/7) and recently to the City Council (8/7), about major repairs needed at the recreation center: heating/air conditioning equipment needs replacement, the roof needs repairs, the pool has periodic leaks, etc. They asked the mayor that they be included in an upcoming agenda and given 10 minutes to address the possibility of the city purchasing the recreation center so that it can be properly maintained.

The property is being rented and maintained by the city but is owned by the property owners of Spinnaker Point residences. The property is included in the mortgages of the owners. If it is sold it will change the property values of those owners. The Spinnaker board has yet to comment on this.

In support of the idea of the city buying the property, a study has shown that a city of this size should have two pools. The city currently owns one (near the high school) and rents this property from the Spinnaker Point owners' association. No solution has been reached yet.

TIME CAPSULE—LARRY CATALDO

Larry, Peter and Elaine met with former city councilor, Jim Splaine to discuss organizing a Time Capsule project within the neighborhoods. It would involve pulling the neighborhood residents together, gathering materials, creating a capsule and burying the capsule in a site that is identified to the city. Larry made a motion for the CNC to take on this project. After extensive discussion, Larry amended his motion to continue with this project "if and when a to-be-organized city committee is formed" and take direction from them. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Peter Somssich moved that the meeting be adjourned. Will Gatchell seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:51.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Boduch, Secretary